

105-year-old alumna shares stories of success

by Kristen Manders - Wednesday, November 24, 2010

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There were no dormitories, sororities or parking permits on campus in 1925. Before the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh was added to a system of UW schools, it was Oshkosh Normal School. Margaret Walters '25, received her teaching degree after two years in Oshkosh.

Walters spent the majority of her childhood growing up in Wild Rose. Her mother had gotten her teaching degree from Oshkosh Normal School. Walters' mother had studied under Emily Webster, one of the first mathematics professors on campus.

After graduating high school, Walters decided she would go to Oshkosh Normal School for a teaching degree as well.

“What I knew of Emily Webster was what I had heard from my mother,” Walters said. “I was impressed and intimidated, but she was a math wizard. She treated us like we were in the grade we were teaching — she was thorough and basic with her lessons.”

Webster retired the year that Walters graduated, and Walters remembers the elaborate yearbook dedication there was to honor Webster's many influential years teaching at Oshkosh Normal School.

“There were 15 people in my graduating class, 13 girls and two boys,” Walters said. “Nine of them went on to be teachers.”

Walters became an elementary school teacher. She worked in Wisconsin for four years before being hired by the Des Plaines School District in Illinois, where she taught students for 39 years.

During her time in Illinois, she continued her education at Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill., with professional development courses for teaching. Her summer courses brought her to cities like Boulder, Colo., and Seattle.

“One summer I went to Berkley, Calif., for eight weeks,” Walters said. “We got credit for going to the The World's Fair that summer, but we had a lot of work to do there. We had to study the exhibits.”

Exhibits at The World's Fair were historical and displayed innovations made during the industrialization in the U.S. Students could study history while enjoying the fair.

Although Walters had a love of history and geography and she continued her education beyond her teaching degree, she never changed her career.

“Nobody knows what a joy it is to teach elementary school,” Walters said. “Parents come to conferences, and you get to have a personal connection with the pupil and their parents.”

Talking to parents and getting to know students was extremely important to Walters.

In 1968, Walters retired and moved back to Wild Rose to be near family again. Her former students and parents of the students have kept in contact with her to this day.

“Some of my pupils will get together with me,” Walters said. “For my 100th birthday, a group of them spent the day with me.”

Friends and family planned a birthday party where they shared information about Walters’ 105-year legacy. In a classroom style, they told stories about where she had been and the schooling she went through. At the end of the event, attendees took a quiz as though they had been through a course in school. A website was constructed in honor of the event.

For more information about Margaret Walters, visit

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~bandy/waltersmarg.html>.