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CORRALITOS SCHOOL

By Anna Belle Aldridge Edwards

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ABSTRACT: Anna Belle Aldridge Edwards, ot age 84, recalls her early school days -- from 1918 in the little one-room Redwood School nestled in the Santa Cruz Mountains, then to the somewhat larger Corralitos School, until finally her eighth grade graduation from San Andreas School, just a short walk from Monterey Bay. -----[[[[COMPLETE]]]]-----

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH: Anna Belle Aldridge Edwards was born in Flagstaff, Arizona on 2 July 1912, and lived in Blythe, California until 1915. At that time her parents moved back to their ranch on Redwood Road near Watsonville. She lived the rest of her life in the Pajaro Valley. In the mid-1980s she started recording childhood memories for her children and grandchildren.

CORRALITOS SCHOOL

Corralitos School is the oldest of the rural schools of the Pajaro Valley. It was formed as the Oak Grove School District on May 3, 1859. In 1870 the school was moved to the new property donated by my grandfather, Franklin Aldridge. The new school was to be used for school purposes only. It, the property, is still owned by the school district today and is located on Aldridge Lane. The first building was damaged beyond use by the 1906 earthquake. The second is the one in which I attended school.

In September 1919 my brothers, Creston and Spellman, and I started to Corralitos School. We walked two miles down the mountain to the "mail boxes" to catch the bus to our new school. The bus was actually a wagon and was drawn by two work horses. There was a driver's seat in front and seats along the sides. The door was in the back and there was a roof on it. The

Kirkman children and the Battinich children joined us. Aunt Ranghild, Uncle Lafe's wife, joined us too. She was teaching at Corralitos School. We picked up many more children as we travelled on to Corralitos. Soon all of the seats were full and the older children held the smaller ones on their laps. We were all very excited. It was a new and thrilling experience for all of us.

We got off the bus in the school yard and were shown to our classrooms, a library, and an attic room upstairs used for storage. Mrs. Barrett had the large room and taught seventh and eighth grades. Creston was in the eighth grade and Spellman was in the seventh. Aunt Ranghild taught fourth, fifth and sixth grades. Miss Jenkins taught the first, second and third grades. I was in her room and in second grade. Some of my little friends were Leona Caudill, Fay and Buelah Kirkman, Maxine Moseley (Mrs. Ashcraft's granddaughter), Glen Ashcraft, Elliott Bradley, Hazel Todd, Irene Bongiovanni, Rosie Alciati, Mary Battinich, and Inez Weedon. Many of them I went on through High School with. Many became lifelong friends.

Shortly after school got under way the County Health Nurse, Miss Liles, paid our school a visit. She tested our hearing and our eyes. I passed the hearing test but did poorly on the eye test. She gave me a note to take home to Mama. Well, Mama took me to Watsonville to see Mr. Hare and Mr. Harkins. They had a little shop on the east side of Main Street in the 400 block. Mr. Hare was tall and skinny and Mr. Harkins was short and fat and bald headed. I got my very first pair of glasses. They cost all of \$5.00! They had silver wire frames. Oh, I was so proud of them. Spellman liked to wear them as we walked to the school bus. I have worn glasses ever since. And I still have those first ones.

The Corralitos Farm Center met each month at Ceschi's Hall. The school often put on little programs for the meeting. There were songs, recitations, skits, and now and then a spelling bee.

Then there were Christmas programs and the graduations. Our school had no room large enough for gatherings. We lived so far from the school that the only thing the whole family ever went to was my brother Creston's graduation. Whenever I was in a program, Mama let me stay all night at Ashcraft's and go with them. They lived down the canyon above the water dam. Maxine and I had a great time on these nights.

The three lower grades got out of school earlier than the others. We had an hour to wait for the others to get out so the bus could leave for home. Many days a group of us walked to the store. Now it was very seldom that anyone had a nickel to buy anything. I know I never did. But we walked to the store and sometimes clear to the bridge. Mr. Jenkins, our bus driver, was real nice about stopping anywhere to pick us up.

Everyone carried a lunch to school. We sat in groups anywhere to eat. Sometimes we'd put our sandwiches out and mix them up and share them. There was very little play equipment on the playground. There were two swings, a teeter-totter, a sandbox, and some balls and bats. Most of the time we small children played together real well. We had no yard teacher like they do now. Sometimes some of the other little girls would decide that another little girl and I were trash because we lived in the mountains. So they would not play with us. I made up my mind that somehow I had to put a stop to it. Now, most all of them were way bigger than I was, even the younger ones. So I waited. One day I went to the wash room and there at the water fountain getting a drink was the ringleader! I quickly walked over and bopped her on the head. She let out a yell and her face came up all bloody. Some bigger girls took us both to the teacher.

Well, I guess it helped to have an aunt for a teacher. I got off with a scolding but I never tried that again.

Mama had gotten me a new pair of shoes when school started. They wore out long before

Dad thought they should. He always bought big sheets of leather and put new soles on them when the soles wore out. But mine got holes in the toes so he ordered a pair from Sears. They had hooks like my brothers' shoes and pretty copper toes. I thought they were very pretty and was very proud of them. I did not know they were boys' shoes. Well, I wore them to school and all the kids made fun of them. I never told Mama or Dad. But the next morning I did not walk down the mountain to the bus with my brothers. I walked down part way, sat down and took those new shoes and long black stockings off, hid them in the brush, and went on to school barefooted. No one said anything but one of my brothers saw my bare feet and told Mama. Well, Mama took me into town to Ford's and bought me a pair of girls' shoes. The boys' shoes were put away for my little brother, Frank, to grow into.

That Fall of 1919 there was a big fire in the mountains above Corralitos and Brown's Valley canyon. It burned all over. Some careless farmer had let the fire get away while burning brush. There were no homes destroyed but much timber and many fences were burned and the mountains were blackened and ugly. Dad and all the other mountain people fought fire day and night. The fire burned for weeks. Dad took cold and it turned into pneumonia. My baby sitter became sick too. Grandma Aldridge came to help Mama. On the weekend she went home to cook up some food for Uncle Bill. She never came back. Uncle Bill found her passed out on the floor. She went into a coma and died on Thursday. The doctor said she had picked up the germ from Dad and was run down. Grandma's death was very hard on Dad. He was very sick at the time and we did not know whether he would make it or not. Grandma was such a part of our lives that it was a great loss to all of us and to the whole community as well.

Our teacher, Miss Jenkins, did not want us to talk during class. She kept telling us over and over that we must be quiet so other could study. But we kept it up. So she made us stand in the corner and hide our faces. Whenever one of us was near the blackboard we pushed some chalk in the corner. That way we always had a supply of chalk available to draw ugly pictures of our "mean old teacher" while standing in the corner. For some things she used a ruler to spank our hands. If a child needed a whipping with a belt, he was taken into the library and the doors locked. Aunt Ranghild was the teacher who gave the whippings. She was a tiny little thing. I don't believe she weighed 100 pounds. Few children were ever whipped but I do remember Floyd Bowen. I always thought the teachers picked on him. His mother had left his father and his father was raising Floyd and his sister, Florence, by himself. When Floyd was beaten he never cried. Then he was beaten harder. One day Hector Ceschi did something and was called up in front to have his hands spanked with a ruler. The teacher told us that if anyone laughed, that person would get the same. Well, I watched his face. I shouldn't have. I tried very hard not to laugh, but I did. When the teacher finished with Hector she called me up front. After she finished spanking my hand, I took my seat and put my head on my desk. I refused to do any more work that day. I did not go out to play or even answer the teacher. I thought I was punishing the teacher.

In the Spring all the small children shed their shoes and long stockings and went barefooted. One little girl had on long-johns. That did not stop her. She just rolled them up as far as she could.

There were two Slavonian children who came to school. They could not speak English. They had no extra attention but after a while they gradually learned English. They were very shy and stayed to themselves. But they did learn English and to read.

June brought graduation and the end of our first year at Corralitos School. My brother,

Creston, was one of the graduates. Mama was so proud of him. But for some reason she wanted him to graduate in short pants so she bought him a suit with short pants, nickers. Now he was badly embarrassed. I do not remember him ever wearing them again. One of the other boys must have worn short pants, also, but the rest all wore long pants. The graduation was held at Ceschi's Hall. It was quite an occasion and the hall was packed.

The Fall of 1920 found Spellman and me going to school alone. Creston did not go on to High School that year. Dad was still not well from the pneumonia he had the Fall before, and needed Creston to help at home.

Now Spellman was always in a hurry to get to the bus. He would tell me that we were late and going to miss it. Then he would say we would take a real good shortcut. We would go across creeks and down steep banks or through brushy trails. One morning he took a shortcut across the creek. Well, my legs were not as long as his. I jumped to the rock but landed in the water. I cried and wanted to go back home. But he told me Mama would want me to go on to school and he would get into trouble for taking me on shortcuts. We went on to school but no one would sit by me on the bus. When we got to school the teacher had some big girls take me to the wash room, take all of my clothes off, and put someone's coat on me. Then my clothes were hung by the fire to dry. I was so ashamed I felt like hiding but my clothes soon dried. That is one of the things we never told Mama.

One day when we were walking to the bus, Spellman picked up a stick and told me to throw a rock to see if he could hit it.

He hit it alright and it came right back and hit me on the forehead. The skin was broken and it bled and left a bump. He felt real badly and tied his handkerchief around my head. But I think he was pretty concerned about what Mama would say. We were not supposed to play ball with rocks.

That Fall our parents had started making plans to visit our grandparents near Flagstaff, Arizona. Dad had bought a new Maxwell truck through Ford's. He built a framework on the back and covered it with canvas. He bought a sheet iron camp stove and put it in, along with bedding. And we had a 1920 version of a motor home. After buying the truck, Dad decided not to learn to drive it. My brother, Creston, who was just fifteen, drove the truck to Arizona. The folks had planned to send Spellman and me to school in Arizona that Winter, but we did not know that the schools closed for the Winter there. We left home in November and when we arrived in Arizona the schools had just closed. So we did not go to school that Winter. They were just ready to open when we left for home in the Spring. Spellman was real upset. He was in the eighth grade so he had to take it over next year. They allowed me to go on into the fourth grade the next Fall.

In the Fall of 1921 Spellman and I were back in Corralitos School. On the first day we took our little brother, Frank, with us. He was to be six years old in October. But the teacher said he had to be six and would not let him start. He only lacked a month and it seemed a shame he had to wait a whole year. I was now in the middle room. Aunt Ranghild had moved on to teach at Green Valley School. Mrs. Munson was my teacher. She was very nice and I liked her very much. My eyes were poor and she let me walk up close to the blackboard to read the lessons she had written out for us. I had to work harder that year because I had missed so much. Spellman was repeating the eighth grade in Mrs. Barrett's room. He was not happy about it but he was only thirteen.

Mrs. Barrett had a little daughter, Edna. She was a sweet little girl and was a year or two

older than I was. She was stricken with Polio. From then on she could not walk or run or play. Her mother carried her. Her mother also kept Edna in her room with her. We all felt very badly about Edna.

The Ceschi's took their little boys to Italy to visit relatives. When they returned, Mrs. Barrett wanted Hector to tell the school about the trip. So his mother wrote a story about the trip and Hector read it to the school. We gathered in Mrs. Barrett's room. The story told about the big ship and the long days at sea, and the beautiful country they saw and the people they visited. It was very interesting and I'm sure we all dreamed of going off on a big ship some day.

One morning in December Spellman and I missed the bus. We played around for some time. Then some boys came up the canyon in a buggy looking for greens to decorate for Christmas. They

told us the bus had gone. They wanted Spellman to go with them. He told me to walk to school, that Mama would want me to. Well, I walked and I walked and walked some more -- about six miles. But I made it. That was another thing that we did not tell Mama.

Several times I spent the night with Maxine that Fall. We four -- Maxine, Glen, Elliot, and I -- had such a good time together. Maxine liked to spend the night with me, too. Mama let her have Karo syrup at any meal, not just for breakfast.

That Winter ended our school days at Corralitos School. My father sold the mountain ranch and bought a smaller ranch near Tulare, California. We moved there just after Christmas but did not like it. It was all flat! There were no mountains anywhere! Oh, how we missed our mountains! There were not even any hills! Spellman and I walked a mile to a little school called Linden School. We were both in the same room, Spellman in the eighth and I was in the fourth. We had a very sweet teacher. Her name was Mrs. Vithe. Sometimes we would ride an old horse to school. We rode bareback. Spellman always managed to leave late so he ran the horse all the way to school. He would not let me hang onto him and it was not always easy to stay on. At noon hour we swam in the canal in back of the school yard. We only stayed in Tulare until July. Mama could not stand the heat. Dad sold the place and we returned to Watsonville.

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