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TOWN 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.

The lives of our family had drastically changed! We were no longer "mountain folks," but "city folk"! Mama could not stand the heat at our new home in Tulare, California so we returned to Watsonville -- the greatest climate on earth. Dad rented a house and we settled in. He put the Tulare property up for sale. We missed our mountains and the creek but living in town was a new adventure for all of us. The houses were very close to our house -- we were used to being a mile or two from another house -- so we all had a lot of adjusting to do.

Dad took a job temporarily with the City of Watsonville hauling garbage with a team of horses and a wagon. There were just two men picking up garbage for the whole city at that time, 1922. They took the garbage and dumped it along the river bank. At that time there were lots of willow trees and brush along the river, a jungle. Mama went to work in the apple dryer.

Creston, my oldest brother, started his apprenticeship at George Covell's garage as an automobile mechanic. The garage was on the corner of West Third (Beach) Street and Rodriguez Street. It was my job to watch my little brother Frank, age six, and my little sister Marjorie, age four. It was not easy to keep them confined to the small yard. I also had to wash all the dishes.

At last school started! The day before it started Mama walked Frank and me to our schools so we would know the way. Frank was to be in first grade at Rodriguez School and I was to be in the fifth grade at the Lake Avenue Primary School. So Monday morning Mama and Dad left for work, Creston to his work, and Spellman to Watsonville High School. I took Marjorie next door to the baby sitter. Then Frank and I left for school. The neighbor boy, Delmar Bowman, walked with us. Frank left us at West Lake Avenue. Delmar had promised to show me where my room was but as soon as we got to school he left me. But I found it. The primary grades were in the front building. The fifth grade was in the back building. The whole school yard was split in two, the boys on one side and the girls on the other. A teacher appeared on the steps and told all fifth graders to line up. There were four classrooms, two downstairs and two upstairs. There was a high fifth and a low fifth both downstairs and upstairs. Miss Tacy Dempsey taught the low fifth downstairs and Miss Chapin taught the low fifth upstairs. I was sent to Miss Chapin's room. The stairs were steep and narrow and had a turn in them. Miss Chapin was a sweet teacher and all of us grew to love her. I cannot say that Miss Dempsey's pupils ever grew to love her. She was very cross and strict.

"Town School" was far different from any of the country schools I had attended. To begin with we were all the same age and all in the fifth grade. We were always doing everything at the same time. And we had homework! I had never heard of such a thing! It had to be finished and turned in each day or we were given a poor grade. There were fire drills which I had never heard of! Oh, there were so many things to learn! School was so different. I longed for the simple school life of our little schools.

When we went out to recess, that was all different too. The boys all stayed on their side of the playground. So I played with all girls. This, of course, was new to me. (I had three brothers.) And the games they played were new to me. They mostly played baseball. I knew nothing about the game. I always had very poor eyes and could not see the ball in time to hit it. The girls chose sides. After the first day no one wanted me on their side because all I did was make outs. Then I knew I did not like the game. So I told them I did not want to play. Well, the teacher objected to that. She said all of us had to play. So I was unhappy with my new school. Some of the time we could play on the bars. Now they were too high for me to reach so I would jump and get hold of them. I watched the others and gradually learned to do different things on them. We all wore dresses. I soon got over my shyness and embarrassment and hung by my knees and toes like the other girls. One girl had only one leg and a short stub of a leg. There was a big sore on the end of the stub. But that did not stop her from playing on the bars. She would get the stub over the bar and swing and hang from her good leg. The poor thing died the next year with TB of the bone. She walked several blocks to school on crutches.

Sometimes the school nurse, Miss Liles, would come to test us for something. One time she checked for lice. A little friend of mine was found to have lice. We had to go over to the front of the building to the nurse's office. If we were out of school for anything, before we could go back to school we had to see the nurse downtown at her office and be checked. If we were all right then she would give us a slip to get back in school. If not, we went home and came back later. But we never got back in school without a slip from the nurse.

There was no washroom in our building. So, rain or shine, we had to go across the

playground. One day I came down the stairs to go to the wash room. Well, I made more noise than Miss Dempsey thought I should. She came out of her room and scolded me and made me go back upstairs and come down more quietly. After that I was very careful how I came down the stairs. Most all of the children were afraid of her but she was a good teacher. She taught in our Watsonville schools for many years.

Most of the time I went home for lunch. The whole family came home for lunch except Marjorie. The baby sitter fed her. Then after school I had all those dishes to wash and Frank and Marjorie to keep track of. It was not easy.

On our way to school we had to pass by the little Watsonville City Jail. It was a tiny little building on Rodriguez Street next to the fire house. Sometimes a man in the jail would holler at us and we would stop and talk. My brother Frank would always try to get him to tell us what he had done to get locked up. But he would never tell us. But the men always enjoyed us talking to them.

Next to the school was an animal hospital. There were all sort of animals there. Of course we could not go inside but there were big cracks in the fence boards. We always knew what animals were in there. One time there was a horse. It really bothered us about the horse being sick.

When it rained we had what they called "rainy day session." We had no recess in the morning and stayed in school until twelve-thirty or one, and completed all our work for the day and then could go home.

The lady that had been Marjorie's baby sitter complained that she ate too much. So Mama put Marjorie in the Day Nursery. Two old lady friends of my parents ran it. It was in a small portion of the Civic Auditorium on Second Street. There was a small play yard with play equipment. Inside there was a kitchen, a room with cots and cribs for naps, and a place for the little ones to eat and play when the weather was bad. On our way home from school we had to pick up Marjorie. We loved stopping there. The ladies would let us play a while. But on rainy days they gave us our lunch. We really enjoyed that. They charged twenty-five cents for a little child all day plus a lunch. It was ten cents for after-school children. I do not think they were in business very long.

We were not supposed to walk down Main Street to school, but many times we did. Our parents did not give us money for candy but our brother Creston gave us pennies. We soon knew the stores where we could get the most candy for our pennies. Spellman worked as a janitor at the high school but he never gave us any pennies.

That Fall Dad started building a small house on some property he had bought on the Beach Road. We were all counting the days when we could move out of town. During December we all had the measles, even Creston. The doctor said we had to stay in bed in a dark room. One day Mama had to go to the store. Frank was up, the rest of us were in bed. As soon as Mama was gone, Creston got up and dressed. He tied a scarf around his face and neck and went up town. He was all broke out real good. He told us we were not to tell but one of us could not keep still. Mama was worried that he would get pneumonia or something else that was bad. But it did not bother him, although he may have given others measles.

After New Years we moved out to our new little house. We had to walk about a half-a-mile to the bus. That old bus picked up all the high school children and grammar school children on the Beach Road and all the high school children on San Andreas Road, Larkin Valley Road, and Whiskey Hill Road. There may have been more. The Beach Road Children were picked up last. Most of the time we stood up -- the seats were all full when they got to us. We

were let out in front of our school.

There were no hot lunches in those days so everyone brought a lunch from home. One morning I was in such a hurry to get off the bus that I left my lunch on the bus. We ate our lunch in the basement of the front building. There were rows and rows of benches, no tables. There was always a teacher in there with us. I had to go in there because no one was allowed on the school ground while we were eating. So I sat and watched the others eat. The teacher kept watching me. Finally I went and told her why I was not eating. She told me to wait until everyone was finished and she would take me home with her to eat lunch. So after everyone finished eating the children were all sent out to play and I went home with the teacher to eat lunch.

The school supplies were not all delivered to the school. When we ran out of ink or some other school item, the teacher made out an order and two of us were sent over to the high school after the items. Each of us was given a turn during the year. We all enjoyed it. I do not remember our teacher ever having favorites.

During the fifth grade I learned to add, subtract, multiply and divide fractions. I learned them thoroughly but I did not get good grades. From birth I had poor sight. I started wearing glasses in the second grade but my glasses were very poor and I could not see tiny fractions well. So many of them I copied out of the book wrong. My answers were right for what I wrote down. But they were not what were in the answer book and were marked wrong.

Most teachers allowed me to walk up to the blackboard and copy the work put on the board. Some gave me a front seat. I had the best glasses that Watsonville had to offer at the time. Later Dr. Bettencourt came to town and from then on I had better glasses, but always had seeing problems.

My fifth grade year came to a close and so did my experience in "Town School." It was great and I enjoyed every bit of it. I am very happy that I had my year in "Town School."

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