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“Maniacal” Suzie Schatz-Benson recalls influence on her life

by Suzie Schatz-Benson, President, Wyoming ACDA



Howard Meharg (Ed. NW-Notes) sent me a letter yesterday. I stared at it for a long time and then slowly opened it. In essence, it said (in a slow, high, taunting voice), “Suzie, it’s time for another ACDA article! This is Tuesday, and it’s due on Friday!”

I bowed my head and gave a low maniacal laugh. “But Howard, (I telepathed through the air to him in a slightly hysterical voice), I have nothing intelligent to say this year!” I know (as the words from “A Girl’s Garden” came to mind) “a little bit of everything, and a great deal of

none.”

Besides that, I am host site chairperson for our All-State Music Convention to be held this weekend, we’re in the middle of rehearsals for “Fiddler on the Roof,” it’s the end of the semester and I have one hundred theory tests to correct, grades to do, a dear friend died yesterday, my son has a science project he needs help with, and it is imperative I make homemade beef noodle soup tonight (from scratch and without a recipe)! Having telepathed all that to him, I heard my grandmother’s voice say, “SO?”

So, I sat down at the computer and started to write.

It’s been exactly a year since my beloved grandmother died at the age of 102. I received news of her death as I was in my motel room getting dressed to attend the Gala Concert at our 1998 All-State Convention. How fitting that she should pick that day to die. Grandmother had been a music teacher for more than sixty years of her life. She loved music and she made other people love music, too. I truly feel my grandmother chose that day to die because she knew it was the only way she would be able to come to our concert and hear all the beautiful music they made that night.

My grandmother lived a very full life. As a young person, she would ride the train from Steele, North Dakota to Bismarck on Saturdays to take piano lessons. That led to her first job as the piano player for the silent movies that played in Steele in 1913. She graduated from McPhail’s Conservatory in



Minneapolis around 1918. (I inherited her diploma.) Her teaching career began in Great Falls, Montana in the 20's and ended around 1975 in New Salem, ND. She spent a total of forty-four years in the classrooms and another sixteen years giving piano lessons and substitute teaching while she raised a family. She taught in a classroom until she was almost eighty years old and

she drove seventy miles roundtrip to do it. Yes, she lied about her age. NO, I do not intend to follow in her footsteps! *(Ed. note: Does that mean you won't lie about your age, Suzie, or do you mean you won't teach until eighty?)*

Grandmother taught in my hometown of New England, ND, before I was born. She taught history as well as music. Oddly enough, my brother is currently the history teacher there.

She started the band program and even wrote the lyrics to the school song...still used to this day.

Although small in stature, she must have been big on "persuasion" for I've seen photos, from her album, of grown men dressed pink tutus performing a dance number in one of her musical reviews.

Her retirement was filled with travel, learning how to paint, and attending all the concerts in Bismarck.

None of you knew my grandmother. She wasn't famous. She inspired a lot of musicians...from the local church organist to her granddaughter. Many lives were touched in her 102 years. Thanks for letting me share her with you.

And, Howard, thanks for the nudge!