



They Lit the Way



DISTINGUISHED
EDUCATOR

I was born in Le Sueur County at New Prague Hospital on December 17, 1948. Four days later, my parents, Helen and Emanuel, brought me home to the Village of Veseli, Minnesota. When I was four months old, our family—which then included my sister Patricia—moved to a small farm near New Market, Minnesota.

In 1954, at the age of five, I began first grade at District #47, a one-room schoolhouse with only four students in my grade and 20 in the entire school. That same year, we welcomed my sister Therese into the family. After four years, I transferred to St. Wenceslaus Parochial School in New Prague, where I completed eighth grade.

For the first semester of ninth grade, I enrolled at St. Lawrence Seminary in Mount Calvary, Wisconsin. It was my first time living far from home, and without strong study habits, I struggled. After one semester, I returned to New Prague High School, graduating in 1966. During high school, I participated in football, basketball, wrestling, baseball, FFA, and chorus. In the summers, I played town baseball for St. Patrick's. I was captain of the football team, named all-conference, and received honorable mention all-state.

As my senior year approached, I didn't yet have a clear career plan. I considered joining the Air Force, but shortly after, I was recruited to play football at Mankato State. Inspired by many caring teachers, I began to see myself in education. I even practiced signing hall passes as though I were already a teacher. At first, I planned to become a history teacher, but since there was an oversupply of history teachers, my mother encouraged me to consider elementary education. She reminded me how much I enjoyed working with younger children. Following her advice, I pursued a degree in Elementary Education with a minor in Mathematics.

At Mankato State University, I paid my way through school with a variety of jobs: farming, working at a glass plant, cement construction, and selling sweet corn and melons. In my senior year, I worked as a Resident Advisor at McElroy Dormitory. I also performed in the college productions of Brigadoon, the opera La Bohème, and joined Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity. In 1970, I graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education and a minor in Mathematics.

My first teaching job was at Ramsey Elementary, where I taught sixth grade for ten years until the school closed. While at Ramsey, I introduced several innovative projects, including Aerobics, Puppet Theater, and Small Animals. I also coached fifth- and sixth-grade football, basketball, softball, and track, and served as a building MEA representative.

After Ramsey closed, I taught sixth grade for one year and fifth grade the next at Hawthorne School. Soon after, I became a Media Specialist at Halvorson, Clarks Grove, and Hayward schools. When Clarks Grove and Hayward closed, all district sixth graders transferred to Brookside, where I continued as Media Specialist at Halvorson, Hawthorne, and Brookside. I also coordinated the Science Fair programs at Hawthorne and Brookside.

When a sixth-grade teaching position opened at Brookside, I returned to the classroom, joining an outstanding team of teachers. I served on a district committee that helped develop the middle school concept for sixth and seventh grade classes at Brookside. I first taught on a three-teacher team before moving back into the Media Center as a Media Specialist. Kathy Wilder, my Media Aide, was a tremendous partner in creating a Media Center that was always full of activity. During the summers, I taught remedial math and computer camps for elementary and middle school students. I also served as Technology Coordinator at Brookside, helped develop the district's comprehensive computer plan, and continued to serve on the District Technology Committee.

As schools restructured, I became a Computer Technology teacher at Southwest before transitioning into a full-time Media Specialist at both Southwest Middle School and Brookside ALC. I divided my time between Media Specialist and Computer Technology instruction. I retired in December 2007. Shortly after, I returned to continue in both roles until 2010. During my teaching career, I received several District Letters of Appreciation and was twice named Teacher of the Year finalist.

I also have been certified, through St. Cloud State University, to teach Driver Education. Even after my retirement, I continued teaching Driver's Education, worked as a substitute teacher and taught Computer Technology as an adjunct instructor at Riverland Community College. My final teaching experience in Albert Lea was as a long-term substitute teacher at the Alternative Learning Center on the Riverland campus, where I taught math the first year and chemistry the following fall.

Throughout my career, I coached at every level—elementary, junior high, and high school—in football, wrestling, baseball, softball, track, and basketball. Being part of the technology team that brought new computer technology into Albert Lea Schools was also among my most rewarding accomplishments.

Beyond the classroom, I developed and coordinated programs including Environmental Adventures at Eagle Bluff which brought 4th–6th graders to a week-long environmental education camp, and Project Discovery, a transition program for future 7th graders. I also taught in-service technology classes to district teachers strengthening their computer skills.

In 1971, I married my partner, Colleen. Our marriage was blessed with four children and seven grandchildren. After moving to Big Lake to be closer to my family in Elk River, I've had the opportunity to coach my grandsons' football teams alongside my son. I also drive activity buses for the Monticello schools and sing in the adult choir at Visitation Church in Big Lake.

Looking back, I've had a wonderful career in the Albert Lea area schools, supported by many colleagues who mentored me along the way. I firmly believe that "Education is the key to success." To me the "C" in education stands for caring, and I always cared deeply about my students. There is no greater gratification in teaching than the "Ah Ha moment", seeing the moment a child grasps a new concept.