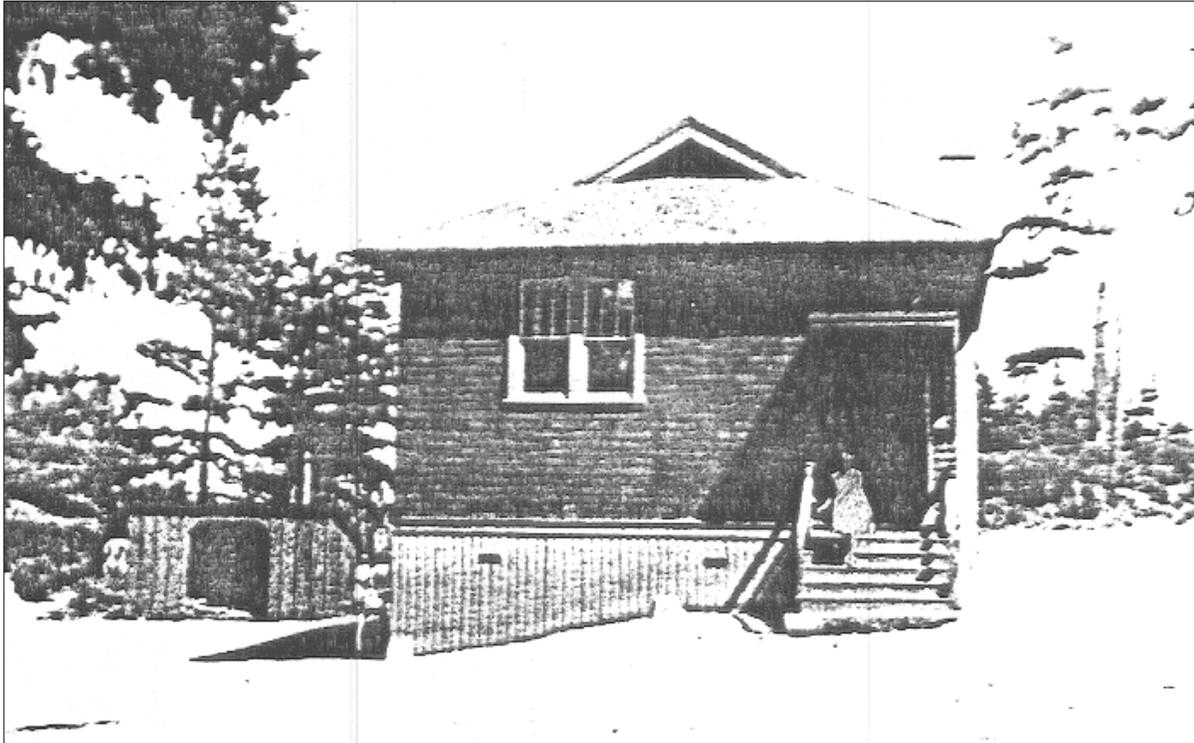


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## Short stories—and tall tales

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The old North End School built in 1928; now the Women's Institute building next to the post office. Author, Hazel, has been involved with the Women's Institute on Gabriola for many years.

### **Memories of a one-room schoolhouse**—by *Hazel Windecker (née Cox)*

When I started school, you had to be six on the first day of September to begin your first year. As my birthday was in October, I was nearly seven when I was allowed to go to school. I have five brothers, and there were no families living close to our farm, so I was very anxious to go to school to meet some girls.

In 1936, which was when this was, most of the population of the island lived either at the North or South ends. As a result, we had two schools. I attended the North End

School, which was about half-a-mile from my home.

On my first day of school, four of my five brothers were also in the classroom. In this one-room schoolhouse, we had all grades with a wide range of ages. My oldest brother was ten years older than me.

On that very first day of my school years, the older students were asked to stand and tell the whole class what they did on their summer holidays. I remember a few of the pupils getting up and saying such things as, “got up in the morning”, “got dressed”, “made the bed”...just ordinary everyday things, until my brother Bill got his turn and

then the stories got very exciting. He travelled to another island to visit an Aunt and Uncle, went fishing, swimming, horseback riding, bike riding, and built a treehouse. His stories, told with great enthusiasm, went on and on. The teacher said they were very good and just the kind she wanted to hear. She said, "Very good, now you can sit down and we'll hear from some of the others". He sat down, but jumped right up again because he had thought of something else. Again she asked him to sit down. A few more told their stories, but none were as exciting as brother Bill's.

One boy, who hadn't offered to speak, was asked to stand and tell about his summer vacation. He just stood there and didn't say a word. The teacher prompted him with, "You must have done something on your holidays". "Nuttin'", he said, "nuttin'". "Come on now, you must have something to say." "Nuttin'." This went on and on, and with every question he was asked, he answered, "Nuttin'". The teacher became very angry. The boy just stared at her. She kept at him and finally said, "Out in the hallway, you're going to get the strap". She strapped him many times, but he still wouldn't say a word or cry out. She shouted at him to get to his desk and sit down.

This exhibition of angry authority and a very stubborn student terrorized all the younger children. We all started to cry. The teacher said to the boy, "See what you have done, you have made the little children cry".

This was so upsetting for me I reached into my pocket for my comfort bag of candy. Grade ones were all sobbing, so I got up out of my seat and gave them each a candy. I thought I was doing a good thing. I was sharing and calming down the little ones. Immediately, all attention was focused on us. My brothers were horrified. No one told

me you couldn't eat candy in class. The teacher, still hot and bothered from the strapping, was upset again. She yelled, "All you children with candy in your mouths, up to the front now!" She opened the big top of the wood stove and made us all spit our candy into the fire. It was very hot. With having so many children in one room she hadn't seen me hand out the candy, so the next disturbing thing for me was to confess. I was distraught. I guess she took pity on me and said in a very gentle voice that we do not eat or drink anything in class. There was no chewing gum in those days.

The teacher wanted our full names, so each one was asked in turn. She asked me to repeat my second name. I said, "It's Jones". She said, "Are you sure it's not Joan?" I said, "I'm sure it's Jones". My mother was very surprised when I brought home my report card with Jones on it instead of Joan.

Having four brothers in class on my first day in a one-room schoolhouse gave me lots to tell when I got home. My brothers were not amused when I started telling our parents what went on at school. A lot of strapping went on that first day of school, although I can't remember what the problems were. Probably very minor things brought on by a frustrated teacher trying to cope with so many different grades.

I often wonder why I was allowed to take candy to school. We didn't get very much candy, so it was a real treat when we got some. My mother must have known we couldn't eat candy in school. Maybe she told me to share it outside and I forgot in a moment of panic. Who knows? I'd hate to think my brothers gave it to me to get me in trouble. But then again, would they really have given up their candy just to do that?

*Hazel is a director of the GHMS and is responsible for the museum's collection. ◇*