

Retiring after 31 years brings her mixed emotions

By JOHN SLYKIRIKH

After 31 years of teaching about 1,000 pupils at Bradford public school, Barbara Stewart is retiring at the end of this school year.

It's a thought that brings a mixture of emotions for her.

On one hand is the anticipation of doing the things she has been dreaming of for years: travelling extensively in winter and relaxing at her cottage in Minden in summer.

On the other hand: "I'm going to miss the children," she admits. "And the staff too. I have many good friends here."

SPECIAL

Her last class, she says, is particularly special.

"I'm really enjoying this last class. This is one of the closest classes I've ever taught."

This Grade 4 class, like the one she started with in 1961, is small and close, almost like a family.

She had 18 children to teach in a small one room schoolhouse in Markham Township that first year, and they represented all eight grades.

Five years later, she started at the old Bradford Public School, and she has been here ever since.

There are so many memories here for Miss Stewart that it is difficult for her to pick out any one, but one does stand out in her mind.

Several years ago, the Lions Club of Bradford brought over a crippled girl from India, Vanita Rukeshand, to have an operation at Sick Children's Hospital in Toronto.

While here, she attended Miss Stewart's Grade 7 class.

"She came every morning in an ambulance on a stretcher. She had to lie flat on her back all the time... The children really took to her."

Then the day arrived for her operation.

"The biggest thrill was the day she walked back into the classroom. Oh, the children were so excited. They had a party for her."

WALKING WELL

Miss Stewart still hears from her occasionally and reports that she is walking well and has just finished high school.

There are other memories too: walking through snow banks in the early years only to find out when she arrived that the school was closed; teaching her favorite subject, music; and taking the girls' choir to Newmarket where it won first prize.

She taught a huge 48-pupil Grade 4-8 class a few years ago ("that was the most challenging and the most rewarding"), and watched the growth of children just arrived from other countries ("it was most rewarding to see them learn the language and go on to do well").

And what about the modern school system?

"Well, I approve of the new standard of reporting the progress of a child. But I would far sooner talk to the parents. It's better than any report card. You find out so much more about the child."

She adds however: "I believe in marking. I don't see how you can teach without it."

Home for Miss Stewart is Markham, where she spends every weekend with her family, and until recently she was the organist at the Markham Presbyterian Church.

"I retired as the organist last June. I guess you could say I'm tearing up all my roots... no, routines. I'll tearing up all my old routines."

Although she is leaving Bradford for good at the end of this school year, Miss Stewart has reassured her friends that she will be coming back often to visit.