



### My first day at school

#### **Judith Bell remembers the shock of her first day at school – as a teacher.**

Judith Bell remembers her first day as a teacher, and the surprises it brought.

I arrived early.

There was nobody there.

I shivered.

I wasn't cold, I was terrified.

Eventually the Headmaster arrived.

'Ah. Our new member of staff.'

'Yes.' I nearly added, 'Sir.'

'After assembly I'll introduce you to your class. Here's your timetable. Staff room down the corridor.'

Before I could move a boy was at my side. 'Carry ye bag, Miss?'

I handed over my briefcase. While I taught at that school I never carried my bag again. There was always someone around to ask that same question.

Nor did I ever have to open a door for myself. The kids' manners couldn't be faulted.

'New are ye, Miss?'

'Yes. What's your name?'

'Fowler, Miss.'

'Thank you, Fowler.'

I took my case and entered the staff room.

Assembly over, I looked at the pupils.

Some were wearing uniform, some a sort of half-way and the rest, including Fowler, wearing anything but. But all wore the same colours, blue and white.

'Ah, Miss Lewis,' the head called me over.

'Your register, your chalk and your class – Form 4/8.'

'Your room is out through the main gate, down the street and over the road.'

'Once in the building someone will show you your form room and where you can get coal.'

Now I was thoroughly confused. Cane? Coal? Classroom down the street?

Was this education in the seventies?

Or had I stepped back in time?

My class led me to our form room. It was grim.

But as Fowler said to me the day he left school, it's not the building what counts Miss, it's the people what's in it.

I loved those kids.

And so my career as a teacher in secondary schools started.

All 33 happy years.



[An American teacher remembers her first day]

Mary Arnesen remembers her first day as a teacher at a small high school in Wisconsin.

I arrived early.

The school was already buzzing with experienced teachers who seemed to know what they were doing.

I had goose bumps. I wasn't cold, just excited and somewhat terrified.

I met the Principal in the hallway.

"Good morning, Miss Arnesen. How is our new sophomore English teacher?"

He shook my hand vigorously, making me feel both welcome and quite small.

"There is an all-school assembly in the gym first, after that they'll go to their homerooms. That is where you'll meet your class."

He handed me my teaching schedule and steered me toward the teachers' lounge down the hall.

"Better get yourself a cup of coffee before you meet the students, and remember not to smile before Christmas."

Before I could move a boy bumped into me. His arms were full of books.

"Oh, excuse me. Do you know where the senior lockers are?"

I pointed my briefcase in the general direction of the lockers in the 400s and said, "I think they're that way."

As long as I taught at that school, there would always be a student saying, "excuse me" in the hallway. The halls were narrow and the five-minute breaks between classes meant everyone was in a hurry. Still, they had time to be polite.

"Are you the new teacher?"

"Yes. I'm Miss Arnesen. Are you a senior?"

"That's right, my last year. Name's Shane Adams."

He went off with his books and I went off toward the teachers' lounge, coffee and my first meeting with the students.

My classroom was bright with posters of authors on all walls. As the students came into my room, their homeroom, I noticed who was who. The boys were easy to place, the jocks in sweat-shirts, the rednecks with their Carolinas and the nerds with their pocket protectors.

The girls all looked as if they had spent most of the morning in front of the mirror choosing the right colors, make-up and hairspray.

The Principal followed them in. "Here is your class roster, chalk and your class 10a."

As I took roll call I tried to look strict and demanding, but as I looked at their faces I smiled in spite of myself.

I knew then that I would grow to love those kids, and I did, as I would with all of my classes, even the challenging ones.

And so my career as a high-school English teacher started.

All 35 happy years.