

Yorkton Stories

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Gertrude Ingham: the quiet rebel

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Dick DeRyk

In 1995, a longtime Yorkton teacher received the Order of Canada, an event not widely noted locally, but celebrated by her family and her fellow teachers, and parents whose children had been taught by her. To her family and friends, she had always been Gertrude Ingham. To teachers she worked with across Western Canada and who read her book, she was better known as Anna Ingham.

Over the course of a teaching career that started in 1934 in Guernsey, Saskatchewan, east of Saskatoon, Mrs. Ingham developed a revolutionary way to teach reading to grade one students, which culminated in 1967 in the publication of The Blended Sound-Sight Method Program Of Learning, a rather thin textbook for teachers in its first edition, but continually expanded to include more information that teachers asked for over five subsequent editions.

Yorkton has been home to the Ingham family since 1948, two years after husband, Austin established Yorkton Flying Services at the airport. Austin had served in the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan during the war years, which had taken the family to Prince Albert, Regina, and Portage La Prairie. Her oldest child and only daughter, Shirley, spent much of her life and teaching career in Edmonton, while her two sons, Les and Doug, still live here in Yorkton.

We talked to Shirley, her married name is Shirley George, while she was staying at the family cottage at Good Spirit Provincial Park, about her mother's teaching method. In this podcast, you will also hear the voice of Gertrude Ingham, thanks to a community television program about her, produced in 1993 by Deana Armbruster of North Eastern Cablevision, then the cable TV provider in Yorkton and area. The complete program, The Quiet Rebel, is 54 minutes long and is available in full on our website, www.yorktonstories.ca. Feel free to view it there and meet Mrs. Ingham in person.

Shirley, now in her 80, is still as enthusiastic about her mother's program as when she used it herself during her teaching career, and while helping her mother conduct workshops. Before that, she had spent many hours laboriously typing each page of the first edition of the book on a manual typewriter. Shirley spent 31 years as a teacher in Edmonton, the first four years at Alberta College, the United Church Second Chance school, where she had students, many of them adults, who were there to learn, who wanted to learn, as she says. But inspired by her mother, she left to teach grade one in the Edmonton Public School System, retiring in 1997.

She wrote the book, it was first published in 1967. I was a rookie reporter at the Yorkton Enterprise when that book was published. And I remember that story because we did quite a story on it, because there's not a whole lot of published authors in Yorkton at that time. But the development of that program goes way back.

Shirley George

Yes.

Dick DeRyk

It was developed over a number of years. Did it start right when she started teaching? How did the idea evolve?

Shirley George

I would think it would be more as she was into the teaching career a little bit when I was in grade one, some of this was being done. But most of it would likely have happened when she was at Simpson School in Yorkton. And she really began to listen to the children and try to help them with problems. But I know even earlier than that, I do remember one of her basic things was that she did not believe in straight sight program. And when she started teaching, the Dick and Jane readers were the readers, and they were sight readers only. The authors believed that if you said the word long enough, look, Dick, look, look, look, that you'd eventually know that that was the word look. And she just said, No, I have to do more than that. And so she began, you know, even when she was in the rural school in Portage, but mostly developed when she came to Simpson School in Yorkton.

Dick DeRyk

Now you said when she was a child in school, she was doing things differently at the blackboard. And obviously doing things differently or finding other ways to do it was part of her.

Shirley George

Everything that she did, she would look at it and say, Is this good for the student? Is this good for the child? Are they benefiting from this? If not, we throw it out or we adapt. And so just every area, the fact that she brought the phonic idea into what was just sight, and yet she still kept sight because some words are so difficult that you just do learn them. But she brought in the phonics. That's when she brought in that idea of let's look beyond that.

Dick DeRyk

In the television program The Quiet Rebel, Mrs. Ingham explains what prompted her to develop her own program.

Gertrude Ingham

I was dissatisfied with the curriculum. First of all, what they would rigidly cut off, so many of the basic skills to be taught in grade one, so many in grade two, so many in grade three. And I said learning is not in pieces. Learning is a blending of bringing many things together. I'm going to have children at the end of grade one capable of grade three. Now I am not going to bore these children, I'm going to challenge them. Therefore, I must give them the whole gamut. So I didn't pressure them, I exposed them. I love that word and I use it a great deal. It's like a sponge. If they need it, they'll soak it up. If they don't need it, they won't even go near it. I felt that these children

must be challenged. At the same time, we must be able to help the child at point of need. So, really, what I was trying to do is say I taught to the class as a whole. Now we'll say I have a grade, one grade here. I teach to everybody, and then I know that the top students are going to grasp it, but the main number will not. Now I will challenge those top students to specific seat work, some work learned by doing, and challenge them. And then I, the professional person, the doctor, let's say, will help the needy.

And so, I set up what I called the grouping system that was not the present system. So be careful, Ingham. You're breaking the rules here. You're not following the curriculum really. You're deviating a little bit, but my heart would not change because I did not believe in children being in fast, average, and slow groups. They were my family. And so, I taught them the class as a whole, as I helped the needy, as I challenged the top, I grouped a few children if they did some work in the classroom and they had a common problem, I grouped. So grouping was there, but I grouped to help them with a common problem. That problem might be something, and maybe you'd be interested to know, the kind of little thing I would do quickly is that children might spell the word T-H-E-R-E wrong, use it in the wrong way. And so I'd show them that the two words THERE both start with THE. But one has I in it. Oh, everything belongs to I. It belongs to me. So T-H E I R is the one that belongs to you. Now, if you know the one boys and girls, easy to get the other one. They'd leave the group and walk away. And oh, isn't that great?

Now instead of feeling I'm a dummy or I'm a slow child, I was a child in need and the teacher met my needs. It's a wonderful feeling. That is a true individualized program. And that's the way you've got to organize. Sometimes you work with a child alone, a little conference. So you see, you use a variety of methods. Now, that was not known. So I just shut my door and did it.

Dick DeRyk

The other thing she did, which was revolutionary and probably frowned upon, she put libraries in the classrooms starting with grade one. People would say to her, a library in grade one? Yes, these kids can't even read.

Shirley George

Yes, it was very different. And because when she started the program, libraries weren't established that much in the schools. I'm not quite sure when libraries became a part of a school, but certainly not in the rural schools or any where she was. And so she had to build up her own library with the help of parents. And this became the heart of the program within her textbook. You'll see that statement quite often. The library is the heart of the program. You have to go beyond the basal readers.

Dick DeRyk

Basal readers being what basic?

Shirley George

Like the Dick and Jane readers. She basically used the three pre-primers, and that's all. And from then on, they were reading books of their own choice.

Dick DeRyk

And at their own level.

Shirley George

At their own level, definitely. That's why her library was divided into sections. And when they first went in, they read within that section.

Dick DeRyk

What was the response from educators within the system and from parents? It's a fairly radical departure from what was common at the time.

Shirley George

Yes, she actually had a great amount of support, certainly from parents. Absolutely. The children were happy, the parents were happy. Her administrators always never had any problem there at all. The Saskatchewan Teachers Federation eventually supported her teaching of the program in the summer, but they are not political, so they would support whatever teachers wanted. So teachers were her greatest supporters. And it was just sometimes, some school boards who didn't understand her program wouldn't support it as much. There was one dramatic criticism at one point from the Department of Education, and I really feel these people had not read the entire book because again she was so often criticized for having a phonic program. And it was phonics, but it was so much more. It was literature-based, and so there was some criticism there, and she had several people respond to the Department of Education with very strong letters supporting her.

Dick DeRyk

Were the parents aware of how different her approach was?

Shirley George

I think quite a bit. Parents would say things like this I wish that my older child could have been in your classroom, Mrs. Ingham. My younger child has learned to read and do these things more quickly. And that was a very, very common comment.

Dick DeRyk

In The Quiet Rebel, Mrs. Lena Panchuk of Yorkton talks about how she and her husband felt about the program that Mrs. Ingham had implemented because their children attended her classes.

Lena Panchuk

What an exciting classroom it was. I remember very vividly a library chart that Mrs. Ingham had in her class. It consisted of a reading road, some magic steps, and then there were airplanes above the chart. Now, as parents, it is very refreshing to see that they were not merely memorizing the words, but they were learning some basic rules step by step. The children they were reading with comprehension and expression very early into grade one. My husband and I were really amazed at just how very quickly our children became fluent in spelling, printing, and creative writing.

Shirley George

The Catholic schools really appreciated Mom's program, and not to say that the public school teachers don't do it as well, they do. But because the Catholic teachers were so emphasizing character development, they really did appreciate that this program had that, so much emphasis on that. We had some teachers in Humboldt, Saskatchewan, the Ursuline sisters, I think the two

of them moved to Vancouver. They were in Delta and just put it into practice in that school. We were able to visit them and watch them. It was a real joy.

Dick DeRyk

What brought about the book that was published in 1967?

Shirley George

That's when people were asking her to write something out so that they would have a more tangible resource in their hands. It was teachers who encouraged her, I'd say almost forced her, to write a book. She never set out to write a book. That was never her intention. She was happy with her little classroom of kids and enjoying it and doing her own experimenting and researching and changing of things. A few teachers came in, actually Swan River was the first group. And they were so amazed early in the year that these children were reading so quickly and so well, and they were so happy. And then she said, come back in the spring. And in the spring, they saw these children writing stories with wonderful sequence and structure and good mechanics. And again, they were amazed, and they said, Please write it out. So she wrote a little pamphlet, and they wrote back and or phoned and said, This is the icing now, give us the cake, that it was not enough. And so she did that first book, which was quite a thin book, and so that first little thin book came out in 1967.

Dick DeRyk

Chapter one, the overview in the current edition. There's a fairly lengthy quote from the people in Swan River that starts out, what stood out in our minds was that all the pupils were reading with a feeling of joy and accomplishment after only eight weeks of school. This is grade one after eight weeks and they were reading.

Shirley George

Yes. and noticed with joy, but there was not the word forcing and pressure, which she has sometimes been accused of by people who do not really understand. They see all of these things she's teaching them. For example, when she set up her Sound City, there would have been, what would I say, 30, 35 little rules that children would learn, just based on the English language. Al says A in the middle of words, AY says A at the end of words. And looking at that from the outside was that you expect the children to learn all this? Well, they did it because it was done with a play approach, it was done without pressure. But she did incorporate that kind of thing.

Dick DeRyk

She ended up doing literally workshops, if not all over the world, certainly North America and Japan, I understand.

Shirley George

Yeah, once in Japan, and then mainly the prairie provinces, with most of them in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia. She was doing this before the book, and so when people came to the summer class, they again were saying, Can you can you write something out so we can have something? A reference. So that's why she was working on that first book in the 60s, and I was typing pages on my little Oliver Eddy typewriter in Edmonton. And if I made a mistake, I had to do the whole page again until I got a much better typewriter, which with the press of a button could repeat one page. But anyway, I would send it to her here because she never did learn to type. And

she wrote everything out, long hand, just pages and pages and pages, worked so hard on producing that book. And that first one, 67, produced by Modern Press.

Dick DeRyk

Did she self-publish? How was it distributed? Through the workshop?

Shirley George

Well, she had to distribute it pretty well herself. They did try some, but the book itself wouldn't really sell that quickly. But when she would do an in-service at a school, then she'd sell 10 or 12 books right there to the teachers after they heard her. Then we began to do summer classes, and she would, in fact, it was a requirement that teachers buy a book if they took the summer class. So it was just through her own in-servicing and later me helping her. It was never promoted by a publisher as such.

Dick DeRyk

You helping her starts with you typing out the pages of the book, but it went beyond that. Did did you get involved after your teaching career or while you were still teaching?

Shirley George

More after my teaching career. I was then teaching in a in a high school, Alberta College, and that's when I came down and videoed, well, it wouldn't maybe be called that in those days, the super eight camera, silent, no sound, and took pictures of her with the children in the classroom doing their activities and then their discovery and then their shared reading in the library. And I was so excited as I was taking the pictures. And that's when I had such a desire then to go from grade 12, which I was teaching or in the high school grades, and ended up in the elementary myself, and then started to help her with in- services.

Dick DeRyk

That must have taken up a good part of her free time because it would happen in the summer or after school or on weekends. I'm assuming that it would have been fairly time consuming for her.

Shirley George

It was, but she was widowed very young. In fact, she was slated to do a in-service or a summer class in Weyburn that year, 1970, when my dad died. And she felt it was best to keep busy. She was very, very grieved because it was a very sudden death. But she went and continued that summer class that year. But then after that, she didn't have as many responsibilities. She had nobody in the house, so she certainly had more time then to do work with her program.

Dick DeRyk

But that was a lot of traveling. A lot of traveling on her own.

Shirley George

On her own, in her little Datsun and going down the country roads in Saskatchewan. She would sometimes go to home and school and she'd be invited, so she'd be driving down these little roads by herself and talking there, and then she would do institutes on the weekend because, of course, teachers would be teaching, so she would do a Saturday. Sometimes they'd take Friday

off school and she'd do a Friday and Saturday. They would donate their Saturday and they would get Friday off for the in- service, and she began to be called all over Saskatchewan.

Dick DeRyk

And then you were in Alberta, so obviously the program became known in Alberta as well.

Shirley George

Yes, yes. And even before I began to help her, Karen Hesje from Birch Hills became her helper when she did her summer classes, especially. Karen wasn't able to go during the year, but in the summertime when she did the Saskatchewan Teacher Federation in- services, Karen was her helper for many, many years. And they were called. I remember one they did in Delta BC, and very successful there. And then people in that province started to be interested as well, as they heard. And in Alberta, she would have a few calls there, but also, I was beginning to do it in Edmonton. But the big school boards were never the real supporters of this program. It was individual teachers, small school boards, small towns, parents when they saw the results.

Dick DeRyk

Now she passed away at the age of 101, but she was doing these into her 90s.

Shirley George

Oh yes. In fact, she was called to speak also down in the States. A good friend of ours, Andrew Pudewa, went into more working with homeschoolers, but promoting her program and that of my cousin Burton, Dr. Burton Webster, who developed writing for university level, and then developed it also in the lower grades when he was impressed with what mom was doing. But anyway, she was called down there. Andrew called her, I think she was 98, and she was the keynote speaker, not so much to talk about her program, but just to inspire people. And that she did everywhere she went.

Dick DeRyk

At the age of 98.

Shirley George

At 98, and last summer school in Grouard (Alberta) was 2007, and she died in 2013. But by that time I was quite a bit a part of the team. So it started out with me lecturing just once, and then a little bit, and then us co-lecturing, and then she's doing less, and then at the end she's just coming in for a little encouragement here or there, and I'm doing most of the lectures. So there was a there was a natural progression, and it was wonderful to work with my mom. I just enjoyed those years, and I was a help to her because sometimes in the middle of a lecture, she would just say, Shirley, I'm tired. Can you carry on? And I finished her sentence and went on because I I was a great believer in what she had developed to help children.

Dick DeRyk

In Edmonton, you were teaching elementary grades. And I'm assuming you used the system.

Shirley George

Oh, I used it, and I even used Dick and Jane. But I would have to write a letter early in the year so that parents would not be surprised. I would show them how useful that first little pre-primer, so

few words, early success. They can read, they're gonna read and with fluency, it will only be for a short time. They're good little readers to teach the phonics and the sight, and they will soon be reading books at various levels. Then I would show them that later in the year in January, we would pull out that first little pre-primer and start to write stories. So they would write, they would write stories, the same story as the reader, and then eventually write library stories and stories of their own. But they started modeling those first little Dick and Jane readers.

Dick DeRyk

You and a colleague also wrote a series of books to use within the classroom.

Shirley George

Yes, when the Dick and Jane readers seemed to be such a hindrance to the furtherance of the program. We said, could we develop another set of readers? Now they are not nearly as good. The illustrations, my friend did a good job, but that original illustrator was so talented, and those early readers had wonderful illustrations. If anybody picks up a reader from the 1920s, 30s, the illustrations and the color in those readers are spectacular. But we did, we said, let's see, and we chose bears. We thought, could this be a good thing? A little bit of a generic theme, use bears, and so then instead of Dick, we had Zach, because CK says at the end of words in Zach. Instead of Sally, the little one was called Teddy because the rule is at the end of a two-beat word, the Y sounds like E, but you put Y. Same rule. Now Jane had the magic E. Anna didn't have a good little helper, but we had to put Anna in there because of mom. So we had Zach, Anna, and Teddy in the new readers, and we tried to pattern the readers with a setting, a problem, a solution similar to the others, and a low number of words in the first one so they could learn to read quickly.

Dick DeRyk

People are talking about they don't teach the basics anymore, they don't teach you know simple math like we used to. They don't teach cursive writing. What are schools using for teaching reading and writing now? And how different is it from what this system was?

Shirley George

I can't answer that adequately because I am so far removed now from the classroom. Been retired for 25 years. But I do know that I hear of children struggling with the basics, and I often just think, I wish that at least in grade one they could have the strategies presented in this program. I think it would be very helpful.

Dick DeRyk

Even if they don't follow it to the letter.

Shirley George

Even if they don't, and the materials would be different, but the the basics of having that heavy phonic emphasis and giving children something which is easy for them to remember. Mom made up rules of her own. For example, in the word HAVE and GIVE, there's an E on the end. If children just go by sound, they will not put the E there. Have will be H A V. And so Mom said, no English word ends in V, decorate it with an E. Just a little jingle, little something funny the kids could remember. So she added those kinds of things to the basic English rules, AI says A in the middle and A Y says A at the end, and so on. So she did, she did add those things to it. And then she gave children a chance to play games, to learn their phonics and the various things, structure and so

on. From that, they went to discovery, so they had a goal. They discovered words all on their own of a higher level, and then went into the classroom library where they had various levels of books they would read at their own level. That basic structure would be very, very helpful, I think, for teachers today. And of course, she had a very heavy emphasis on written communication as well.

Dick DeRyk

You mentioned your cousin, Burton Webster. But he took this system and went a little further with it, more to the writing side.

Shirley George

That's right. He was a professor of African studies at Dalhousie University, and on a couple of summers when he would come to visit his Aunt Gertrude, he'd sit there in the patio and happened to pick up her stories. And he was amazed. He said, These kids have a short sentence in the middle of the long ones for emphasis. They're starting their sentences in different ways. He saw the elements which he was promoting when his students wrote essays at the university level, and here it was happening at grade one, and so he was so impressed with that, and he sat down and he asked Mom, How did you get this? How did you do it? So mom tried to give him a little bit of an idea and so on. And he went back, he was teaching grade four at that time when he first saw her stories and was impressed, somewhere in Saskatchewan.

He went back and did it with his grade fours and tried to put in some of the same techniques of telling the story orally, putting a few keywords on the board just to keep the sequence of the story, and then sitting down and writing it. And then he went to university, he was in Africa and then at Dalhousie teaching African studies, and he began to write for students at a higher level, incorporating some of these little ideas he had learned from his aunt, adding some of his own. He calls it style, and he suggests different things students can put into their writing to improve it. The use of adverbs, for example. Burton says we use adjectives a lot, and that is good, but he said an adverb carries more power than two or three adjectives.

So he took the idea from his aunt, incorporated it into his elementary teaching, and then developed it more at the university level. And there's an interesting story there because he taught African studies, his very good friend taught English, and his very good friend would say to his students, take one class from Dr. Webster to learn how to write an essay and then come back to me. And then Burton himself wrote his strategies and techniques in a book called Blended Structure and Style, because he said, you can be creative, but you need a structure within which to be creative. So teach children the structure of how to write a story, then let them put in their own ideas.

In the past, when I was teaching, and when mom visited schoolroom, she often saw the opposite being done because there's always such a stress. Oh, let the children write their own stories, let them be creative. And we felt that it was good first to teach a bit about structure before you just give them the pen and say, go to it.

Dick DeRyk

The book is still available.

Shirley George

I have a lot of books because when we stopped our in-services in 2007, that really stopped the advertising of the program. And still many teachers used it. In fact, I met a lady in Saskatoon when I was visiting a friend last week. It was very encouraging. She's now retired, close to my age, said she used the program and just loved it and how successful her students were. So it was very popular in the '70s, '80s, '90s. But then as we stopped doing the in-services, we don't know, maybe there are some people still using it, but it's not being promoted as such. Therefore, I have all of these books sitting there.

I am aware that in the present day there is a lot of political, I don't know how to say it, I think mom could be criticized for some politically incorrect language. One of the poems, I think is The Eskimo. And we know that is a term not used anymore. But certainly she wasn't being derogatory when she put that in her book. Never in her life would she be racist.

Dick DeRyk

Tell me about her jail and your variation of that.

Shirley George

She had three little girls come up to her one day and said, Mrs. Ingham, we're having such trouble. U R says er, I R says er, E R says er, and we don't know when to put them in our words, in our spelling, when we're writing stories or whatever. So mom went home, she did some thinking and thought, what can I do to help them to remember which words or which basic words have UR, which ones have ER, which ones have I R. And so she developed little stories, little jingles for UR. She had the basic words grade ones would use. So she said, Mother is a nurse who went to church with her purple purse, and in her purse was a big surprise. Guess what? A turkey and a turtle. And of course, they'd laugh about that. And she'd say, When you're writing a story and you're writing nurse, what will be the er sound? You are. Surprise, what a common word for grade one, you are. And then eventually they could add to that jingle.

I remember in grade three having a pocket chart under the nurse, and grade threes found furnace and curve and curb. And English language is difficult. I don't know really why. There's a UR in curve and there's an IR in bird. But anyway, mom took these little jingles. The IR one was the third girl, was the first to see the birds at the birthday party. And it was only girls invited because boys doesn't have an IR in it. So she made that one up. For the ER, she said, this is the common one at the end of words. And you've got the family, mother, father, sister, brother at school. You've got teacher and a reader, but you have carpenter, baker, and so on. That very common ER at the end. So she showed them that, did little pictures. Well, actually, I had a friend, one of the sisters in one of the Catholic schools, did the pictures for her, and she presented that. So now the children are happy. The weeks, the days, weeks go by, and they're doing this, and they're writing ER at the end of mother and father as they're doing their sentences.

And then one little guy goes to the doctor, and on the door he sees the word doctor. D-O-C-T-O-R. Oh my! I can't wait to get back to school and tell Mrs. Anna that she was wrong. So the next day, in he comes with this story, and mom didn't know what to do. He said, You told me that he er says er at the end of words, and here's O-R saying er at the end of the word, doctor. And so she just gathered the kids around, trying to think quickly in her mind what's she going to say. They all sat on the floor and she said, What should we do, boys and girls? This word has broken the rule. And she

looked around. One little guy, this came from a child, put up his hand and said, Mrs. Ingham, I have a bird cage at home, and we don't have a bird right now. Can I bring that cage to school? And when words break the rule, we can throw them in jail. Came from the children. That's the exciting part. So every blended sounds like classroom had a jail. Some people objected to the idea of jail. Fine, just find something that means exception to the rule.

And I developed the little court session idea. I had a gavel. And so when a child would bring a word to school, I would say, You brought the word trouble. You explain to me, you tell me why you brought the word trouble, and you think it should go to jail. So he had to know the rule. So he'd say, Oh, you usually says ow in the middle of words like loud, sound, proud. And here it's saying ah, it's stealing the sound of the baby, ah, trouble. We don't say trowel. So I'd say, oh, good. And then we'd all stand up and I'd say, okay, now we've got to send this guy to jail. And we'd stamp our feet and wave our hands. You broke the rule. Go to jail. They learned those jail words as well as they did a phonetic word, because they were claiming ownership. They had a part in that learning. And because it was fun. They just they loved it.

And the parents were saying, What is a jail word? My kid, son is coming home and wanting to find a jail word. If you can teach something with intensity, it is going to be remembered better. And that was a part of blended sound sight. Action, dancing, singing, doing things with action all the time. Even some of her little rules, like when a C comes before E, I, or Y, it sounds like S, but you put C. Make sure you put C. So in face, the C is before the E. Sounds like an S, but don't put an S, put a C. And so they'd be up acting these things out. They did poetry, sang songs, did dances. Activities were multi-sensory. Somebody holds up the word jump and they jump on the spot. All that type of thing. Constantly, always interacting, even when they got into the library, they're reading books to each other each day. They're not just sitting alone at a desk. Go and get a partner. Constant action, but very orderly, organized action and quiet when it needed to be quiet.

Dick DeRyk

She also had a system, a chart for showing students' progress in reading, where they were on a road and then they got to a point where they went up the steps, and finally they got onto the airplane to indicate their level of reading. And that was sometimes frowned upon by the educational system as well.

Shirley George

Mom's road and stairway showed the child's progression of reading. The idea was we are not here to beat somebody else. We all have talents, we are different, we have strengths and weaknesses. We do not make fun of somebody who is not as far on the road as we are. Maybe they are good out in the basketball court where I can't even dribble a ball. But I'm on number 20 and he's on number two. So we talked about that and this gave them opportunity to practice that, be happy for the success of others.

But there was a time when the educational people would be saying, oh no, no, don't let anybody see what you're doing. Because some child will feel bad if he's on number two on the road and you're on number 20. We said, no, this is life. This is realistic life. You are good in art, I am good in music. Somebody else is good in being a friend. Whatever it is in life, God created us all with a talent. We would say that. So therefore, when they got into the library and on the road, there was

never any of that. And if there had been, nip it in the bud right there. You stop the class and you deal with it.

So I would often stop the class for good times. When they did the road and we're ready to start on the stairs, I'd say, red light class, got a pleasant interruption. Everybody watch, we're gonna clap for Tammy. She's going on the steps today. Everybody happy for Tammy. Maybe I'm not there, but I'm happy for Tammy. Or maybe I'm on 100. I'm not going to say, oh, she's not as good as I am. Then when they got to the top of the stairs, another celebration, they got onto the airplanes, and what my mom actually did was they got an airplane ride with my dad when they got onto the airplane. I did not have that in my classroom. I just had pictures of the planets and they went into space with their little astronaut.

They were so excited to see, and I remember being delighted the one day when this little guy came up and said, Mrs. George, look, Henry is going on the steps today. And this child himself was on 125 or something. But they were glad for their little friend. And mom used to tell the story to the children and say, Look, everybody's lined up for a race. And they start off, and you've got these fast runners that go and they're actually just about at the end. And then you've got this little guy and he falls in the mud. Who are we going to stop and help? We're going to stop and help that little guy. And we're going to be so glad when he crosses the finish line.

And this is what mom called the intangibles, which was a very important part. We've been talking about the academic. I'd say every bit as important in her program was the intangibles and the organization and teaching children to be independent, take ownership of their own learning, all of those kinds of things. So the intangibles, she would talk about cooperation. When they played activities, one of the big things was watching what your partner is doing, not just your own learning. Is he doing it correct? Oh, then encourage him. If he isn't, help him. Don't make him feel bad because he made a mistake. Don't think you're so much better than they are because you know it and they don't. On the other hand, don't feel bad if you're the one who doesn't know it. We are in this as a family.

And so those intangibles were built in, as they are in every teacher's classroom. I know this wasn't just that mom was the only one who taught, but she gave them the opportunity by setting up these activities where they had to cooperate and they had to help each other. And she set up the library stairs where they had to see what their friend was doing and not hide it. It was made functional. The intangibles were made functional. And they had opportunity to help each other, to share. There were the quiet times in the classroom as well. And I emphasized that in my room too, when people were in their desk doing their seat work. It's only polite to be quiet that everybody can do their thinking.

Dick DeRyk

Mrs. Ingham, as Shirley wrote in her mother's obituary, graduated from the classroom of life in September of 2013 at the age of 101. She was active in teaching other teachers until five years previously. Over the years, she taught grade one, was a reading consultant with the local school district, taught a University of Saskatchewan extension course, and conducted summer short courses, sponsored by the Saskatchewan Teachers Federation.

Eventually, the summer classes also moved to Alberta, where Mrs. Ingham was supported by Shirley and a staff of 10. In Saskatchewan, the courses continued to be taught by passionate blended sound-sight teachers, including Joyce Beek, Charlene Mino, Ina Schwala, Terry Martens, and Bernie Dielschneider. She shared her program at conventions and conferences across Canada, in the United States, and as far away as Japan. The Quiet Rebel, as her obituary noted, was also a small powerhouse of energy.

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