

School Days

Leave It to Cadets

IN THE MID-1950s, my roommate and I were the only two freshmen in Barracks No. 1 at Pennsylvania Military College in Chester, and we were let in on a little secret.

Some of the engineering students built a secret room under the barracks, and it was quite a hideaway. It had a refrigerator, sofa, carpeting and bunks.

Access to this cozy hideaway was through a trapdoor in one of the boys' rooms. If cadets were downstairs and someone came into the boy's room, the boy would step on a buzzer to alert whoever was down there to be quiet.

In the summer, the football team discovered the setup during preseason camp days. Eventually, the administration found out about it and had it filled in. The school is now Widener University.

—Earl Decker, Pottstown, Pennsylvania

Music to Soothe Souls

A MAN named Gall approached me at a wedding reception and introduced himself as a student of my father, Vern Scott. Back in the 1920s, Dad became a prairie schoolteacher at a one-room schoolhouse in Hazelton, North Dakota, where he was born and raised.

Mr. Gall mentioned what a great teacher Dad was and what a challenge it could be to teach all eight grades. He said when the children were restless, Dad would get out his violin and play merry tunes. The children clapped, sang and danced along for 15 to 20 minutes, then were ready to settle down to their studies.

—Lorene Grenz, Mesa, Arizona

Clapboard Schoolhouse

WE LIVED in tents during the Depression in California's Kings

River Canyon and walked a mile to the small clapboard school.

The teacher's desk was a wooden table, and a rickety old piano stood propped up in a corner. It must have played the song America ("My Country, 'Tis of Thee") a million times.

Behind the classroom was the cloakroom for lunches, coats and hats for "Babe," the big bay mare our teacher, Mrs. Neeley, rode to school every day.

There were six girls and four boys to be taught, and the girls took turns spending the night at Mrs. Neeley's ranch. Riding Babe with Mrs. Neeley's arms around you felt so safe. Yelping coyotes in the distance woke you from sleeping in a real bed, but the bacon and eggs Mrs. Neeley served—instead of the beans I was used to—were pure heaven.

Holidays were best of all. Desks were pushed aside and the floor sprinkled with soap, the kids sliding wildly to make it slick.

People then came from all directions. Women were laden with gooseberry jam and wild berry pies, and some men brought jars of amber liquid kept outside, where numerous trips were made. The old walls would vibrate with square dancing until midnight.

—Marjorie Thompson, West Sacramento, California