

# Dancing to the beat of her own drum

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An Irish blessing proclaims, "Do not resent growing old. Many are denied the privilege." These words could very well be the personal motto for Dora Wright. Wright just recently celebrated her 89<sup>th</sup> birthday, but she possesses a vitality and zest for life much more akin to that of someone in their early 20s. Her advantage is that she has 89 years of wisdom to go along with her spunky ways.

Wright was born Dora Gronland in Chicago in 1912. Her father and mother had been immigrants, and it was at Ellis Island when they arrived in America that Dora's father, Herman, decided to change the family name from Carlson to Gronland. After Dora was born, the family moved to Rush Lake, where Dora's father bought a farm for \$125 an

acre. Back then, the neighbors talked amongst themselves about how Herman Gronland had paid too much for that land, but over the years, his reputation as a successful farmer became well known. Dora said that eventually people got to saying, "You put Herman Gronland on a rock farm and he'll make it work!"

Dora grew up on the farm, and in 1930 she graduated from school with aspirations of being a nurse. "I wanted to be a nurse, but my dad took me to all the hospitals, and they said you have to be 18," Wright pointed out that she was only 17 when she graduated. Instead of waiting till she turned 18 to try her hand at nursing, Wright decided to pursue a career in teaching. She took teacher training in 1931 and said that she learned more in nine months about teaching eight grades than one can learn today in four years.

It wasn't long after this that Wright married her husband, William. They moved to Nebraska in 1933, where they started their family. In '48, when Wright, along with her husband and children, moved back from Nebraska, they purchased her

and while William farmed, Dora went back into teaching. She said that there was a need for teachers in Jackson County when she returned to the area, so she went back to Mankato to get her teaching degree and later on, when Wright took over teaching the mentally challenged, she had to go back to school again and work towards a master's degree.

Wright noted that at one time, there were roughly 100 country schools, and she taught at a variety of them. Wright named off the Loon Lake, Swanson and Sangl schools as three examples. She said, "I would stay five years. If I could get more wages in some other school, then I would go there." Wright explained that in her day, teachers didn't strike for better wages; they just moved around a lot. Wright also pointed out the difference in pay between then and now. "Before I was married, I got \$70 a month, and that was top wages." Wright said that she locked the door for the last time on a few different country schools, and it was in 1963 that the last 19 remaining country schools were closed for good. It was at this time that Wright went to town to teach at Pleasantview Elementary. By the time Wright was done teaching, she'd put in a total of 27 years (and would've stayed three more to make it 30, but that's another story...).

Wright noted that back in her teaching days, things were a little bit different when it came to religion and patriotism in schools. "I had a prayer book, both Catholics and Protestants said and nobody said 'hee' about it." She



On Dora Wright's recent trip to Ireland, she dramatically kissed the Blarney Stone. Because of the stone's location in the wall, a spotter is required before the kiss can take place.

of Allegiance in class again. "I never quit." Even since she's left the teaching profession, Wright has hung a flag in front of her home so diligently that she's worn out four. After her years teaching, Wright hasn't slowed down one bit. One thing she and William enjoyed doing was traveling. "My husband loved to drive." She backs this statement up by pointing out that every other Christmas, the couple would go out to Seattle to see one of their sons, and they always took a different route to see as much of the country and their family as possible. She mentioned that it was not difficult for them to put on 5,000 miles on those excursions.

In 1973, the Wrights took a trip to Sweden because, as Dora puts it, "I have more relatives there than here." At that time, however, the couple never even thought to also visit Ireland, from which William's ancestors hailed.

Dora did. What's interesting to note, however, is that this latest trip was made in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist bombings in New York, but that didn't hamper Wright's plans one bit. "I had already paid for the trip in May. I felt very safe," she remarked.

Wright's trip lasted from the second to the 10th of October, and she covered a lot of territory while she was there. Wright, along with a tour group that included her daughter and son-in-law, Linea and Craig Rue, took a nonstop flight from Minneapolis to Amsterdam and from Amsterdam they went to Dublin, Ireland, and eventually Cork, Ireland, which is where William Wright's grandfather was from. There were many exciting parts of the trip but Wright was undoubtedly most excited about one part in particular. "We went to Cork, where I kissed the Blarney Stone. I had to walk up 109 steps

had been raining, and the group leader felt that it would be unsafe for anyone to traverse the wet steps leading up to the stone. Wright's disappointment was evident. She remembers saying, "Lord, that's what I came for!" Fortunately, the rain subsided later in the day and Wright was able to get her wish. In addition to kissing the Blarney Stone, Wright said they visited several castles and visited a factory that works with 5 million-year-old marble where she bought herself a marble shamrock pin as a souvenir. They also visited the Fitzgerald's farm home and the Jameson Distillery. "We all got samples of that whiskey," Wright added. Wright mentioned several other places that she visited on the trip, and she said that she thought that the scenery was beautiful and the people were very outgoing. Wright pointed out that the castles they saw were huge, and at some of them



Dora Wright closed the doors on many country schoolhouses. Here she is locking the door of Brewster District #101 in March of 1952.

ploring. "They were younger than I am, but they can't run like I can," Wright chuckled.

In addition to traveling and teaching, Wright has also worked selling encyclopedias, which she was so good at she took the

morning; she's a volunteer driver for "elderly" people; she quilts; she makes lefse; and on and on and on...

Her response when one marvels at her youthful energy and ambition is simply, "I have to be doing something. I'm always



Dora Wright shows off the certificate