

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of United Schools Project

Teaching Experience

O. H. 560

ZADA CROSSER

Interviewed

by

John Gecina

on

March 27, 1981

ZADA CROSSER

Zada Crosser was born on February 28, 1922, the daughter of Lloyd and Elsie Farmer, in Fairfield Township, Ohio. Mrs. Crosser attended Fairfield High where she graduated in 1940 and proceeded to further her education by attending Kent State University, graduating from that institution with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1944.

Mrs. Crosser is currently a math teacher at United High School. She is also very active in the Columbiana County Farm Bureau and is a member of the Hanoverton Presbyterian Church.

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INTERVIEWEE: ZADA CROSSER

INTERVIEWER: John Gecina

SUBJECT: discipline, behavior, math changes, facilities,  
principles

DATE: March 27, 1981

G: This is an interview with Mrs. Zada Crosser for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the history of United Schools project, by John Gecina, at United High School, on March 27, 1981, at 2:30 p.m.

Mrs. Crosser, would you give me a short background on yourself, where you were born, where you went to high school, about your parents and other family members?

C: I was born in Fairfield Township. My father was a farmer, and my mother had gone to Kent Normal School and had done some teaching. I have a brother who is four years older than I am. I went to Kent State University in 1940 and graduated in 1944 with a B.S. in Education. I have a math major and physical science, social studies, and biology.

G: Do you remember what high school was like for you?

C: Yes, I was very active in high school. I played in the band, sang in the chorus, was on the girl's basketball team before girl's basketball was no more. I had a lot of fun in school. I always had three subjects that I liked real well, and I always studied hard in those so I got A's. Then I had one that I didn't care so much for usually every year, so I got a B in it.

G: Were there any teachers that prompted you to go into education? Was there anyone in particular?

C: I had a lot of good high school teachers. I thought teaching school was the thing. That was why I decided

to be a schoolteacher.

G: How was discipline handled, or wasn't there much discipline at all?

C: In those days there wasn't much of a discipline problem because if you didn't behave they took care of it pretty well right there. I can remember when I went to school way down in the elementary we had a superintendent by the name of Charlie Haas. All he had to do was step outside the door and let out a war hoop. Everybody--teachers included--got where they belonged and stayed there. You didn't have much discipline only with a few bad eggs which we still have. The rest of the kids pretty well did as they were told and studied. I think the parents were more concerned then than they are now.

G: You would say that the superintendent was right there in your school along with the principal.

C: There was only one at that time, just the superintendent. They might have called him the principal; I don't know, but he was it.

G: You came here to United in 1958, right?

C: Teaching half days, yes.

G: Half a day. In what subject?

C: Math.

G: In 1958 could you tell me a little bit about the facilities here at United?

C: The high school was where the present junior high is. The one wing down there wasn't built yet, I don't think then, but then they built six rooms on at the end that is in the elementary now. The high school wasn't here. We all ate in the same cafeteria, grades one through twelve.

G: Did that pose a problem? Was it crowded?

C: Yes, it was pretty crowded, and the teachers all ate on the stage. There was a stage as that was the auditorium then. All the teachers ate on the stage. I don't think we had as much problem with food throwing and et cetera as we do now.

G: Are you saying that is because of the teachers eating there?

C: I think partly.

- G: Approximately when you came here, how many students were enrolled in United offhand? This would be what--seventh through twelfth?
- C: I would imagine about 600. About 100 in each class from seventh through twelfth.
- G: What was the average class size at the time?
- C: I think I had thirty some in general math classes.
- G: That is the average of every class now.
- C: Some of them like language and some of those maybe didn't have that many. I think as a general rule classes were bigger than they are now.
- G: How many periods did you have back then?
- C: There must have been seven at least.
- G: And they probably didn't last for fifty minutes then, did they?
- C: No, I think they were forty-five.
- G: Did you have a homeroom that you had to take roll in?
- C: I had half a homeroom because I was the homeroom teacher for one section of juniors in the afternoon to give out report cards and so on and help another teacher. We did the homeroom records and so on together.
- G: When you came to United, did you find any major discipline problems?
- C: Some. The kids were ornery, not bad, ornery. There is a difference. I think that they did things just to be funny not to be destructive and so on. We didn't have the destruction then that we do now.
- G: Do you think maybe that there was more discipline at home then than there is now in schools?
- C: I certainly do. That is what I meant when I said I think parents were more concerned then.
- G: This is a rural school. Back then did you have a lot of kids get out early to work, or did they usually finish up at 2:30?
- C: No, nobody left early to any extent then.
- G: It seems like more today that they are getting passes to leave

early.

C: Right. Of course, there wasn't any so-called . . .

G: O.W.E.?

C: O.W.E. or something like that where they went home to work part of the day.

G: So most of them stayed in school then.

C: Right.

G: The first graduating class from United was in 1962.

C: It must have been 1959.

G: Do you remember how many were in that class?

C: A few less than 100 as I recall, but I'm not sure.

G: How long was the school day? Did it run as long as it is today when we come in at 8:00 and leave at 2:30?

C: I think it was longer. I think it ran from like 8:00 until 3:00 at least or something like that. Of course, everybody came at the same time, grades one through twelve, so they were all on the same length of day.

G: In the early part was there any problems with the busing at United that you can think of?

C: No, I don't think it was any more than it is now as far as that is concerned.

G: I know that United takes in a great area.

C: Yes, it is more than four townships. There are at least four townships involved. There is Salem--a small part of Salem--a small part of Center, Butler, Hanover, and some of West. So it is a rather large area to cover.

G: The principals that you were under . . . I know a few of them like Mr. Carter, Mr. Janek. Were there any other ones before them?

C: Yes. Mr. Gyugo who went to Minerva was here before Mr. Carter, and before that was Frank Solak who now does something about transportation in this area.

G: Mr. Gyugo, how did he treat the teachers here at United?

C: If there was any discipline problem, he upheld his teachers.

I think as a general thing he did a good job. He came here partly to control discipline a little more. As he said he didn't come here to make friends; he came here to run a good school.

G: Was he friendly with the teachers?

C: I think so.

G: How about with the students?

C: He had the idea that the good studnets were the ones that you should really work for. In fact, he had some honor study halls where students who were capable of disciplining themselves and doing what they were supposed to do went to these study halls. There was no teacher there. Also I can remember our daughter was in eighth grade. When it came scheduling time, he took all the upper fourth of the class first and scheduled them so that they were sure that they got what they needed or wanted. Then he did the other kids later.

G: How did the student body react? Were there any problems? Did anybody complain about that?

C: I don't think there were too many complaints.

G: So it worked out pretty good sending those honor students to study hall without any guidance.

C: Yes.

G: Talking about honor students, the National Honor Society that we know is in United now. . . Back in the early 1960's was there a National Honor Society?

C: I think it started as soon as there was a graduating class. See, the high school started here with only freshmen because the kids before that had attended Salem, Lisbon, and I think some of them had gone to Minerva. So they started in with only freshmen the first year. The second year we had high school we only had freshmen and sophomores. Then the next year there were freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. Finally, it was worked up to the four-year high school.

G: So then the first year probably for National Honor Society would have been the first graduating class.

C: The juniors and seniors. Probably the first year there was a graduating class. So that probably would have been in 1959.

G: Did they run the National Honor Society the same way that we do now? In other words, is there approach for leadership,

grade average?

C: I think that has been changed some because I think since Mr. Marty came they put in this new system, the system we are using now.

G: Do you remember how that was used before?

C: I know the teachers voted, but I can't remember what the other things were before. Of course, you had to have a certain point average before you were voted on. We didn't use the point system; I'm pretty sure.

G: How about Mr. Carter as a principal? How was he towards the teachers?

C: He felt that the kids should discipline themselves. He didn't rule with an iron hand as Mr. Gyugo had done which in some ways had worked better in some cases. In other cases it didn't.

G: I just know in talking to some of the other teachers here that he was a well-respected man.

C: Yes.

G: How did he treat the teachers?

C: He was good with his teachers too and very friendly and would help you in any way he could.

G: I think Mr. Janek was next. Was he not?

C: Yes.

G: How about a little bit about Mr. Janek and how he got along with the student body?

C: Well, Mr. Janek once told me that he had gotten into some trouble when he was in high school and somebody came to his rescue. So he felt that everybody should have a second chance at least. I think sometimes he went a little overboard on that.

G: In other words, with his discipline he would maybe let something slide?

C: A little bit, yes. Also I think that the superintendent didn't always back him up on some of his things.

G: Has that been a problem at United all the way through with superintendents and principals?



- C: In some way. Teachers are supposed to go through the chain of command with any of our discipline problems or anything like that, but it has always been--and I think this is true in every school--that the parents will run either right to the superintendent or right to the board. They don't go through the proper channels first. Sometimes I feel that superintendent just put his nose in where he should have said, "Go back and go through this. Talk to the principal and so on and then bring it to the board."
- G: I know that Mr. Westbeld was the superintendent before we had Mr. Muha. Am I correct?
- C: Yes.
- G: How was Mr. Westbeld as a superintendent?
- C: I think as far as that was concerned sometimes he didn't go back through the chain of command either. He was a person who wanted things his way, and he would sort of tell the story so that it came out that way. By that I mean if he didn't want to do something, he would say in a teacher's meeting that the law says so and so and that we have to go by the law. Later on you would find that the law didn't say anything about that.
- G: In other words, he in reality wouldn't really back the teachers to a certain extent.
- C: No, he didn't always back the teachers. He didn't seem to want too much input from teachers either as far as policy and so on was concerned. One of the things he did . . . After we had a two-week vacation at Christmas one time, he came around and said, when we started working on the calendar, that we could never do this again because if we would, we would have to pay unemployment to the bus drivers.
- G: Because they would be off?
- C: Because they would be off two weeks which was not true.
- G: But he got that.
- C: He got that calendar adopted by using this.
- G: Using that tactic?
- C: Yes.
- G: Didn't any of the school board catch that?
- C: School board as a general thing, hire a superintendent.

They don't have time to check into all the things. If he says the law says this, they believe him. You elect good citizens of your community to be board members, and they don't have time to check all this. So if he says this is true, they go along with it usually.

G: We are now in the process of picking another superintendent at United. Mr. Muha has just resigned. Mr. Muha was in for three years. Can you see any major changes in the three years that Mr. Muha was here?

C: He has had some ideas that didn't go through like building onto the high school.

G: For instance, he wanted to build a new gymnasium. Am I correct? Is that what he wanted to do, another gym and some classrooms?

C: That wasn't in this first levy that was defeated. We do need another gym. We voted on that once way back, and we should have passed it then. It would have been a lot cheaper.

G: Three years ago?

C: No.

G: When?

C: Back I guess when Mr. Brautigam was the superintendent we voted on that.

G: What year would that have been?

C: It was when our kids were still in school. Maybe in the late 1960's, probably.

G: So there was one of them that didn't get passed.

C: Yes, there was one there that didn't get passed. One of the reasons it didn't get passed I feel was because there was also a bus garage on the same thing. If they would have been two separate issues, I think we would have gotten the gym, maybe. Since they were in the same bond issue, it wasn't passed.

G: Did they get a bus garage?

C: No, they never got that either.

G: Nothing got passed?

C: No. It was put on together, and it didn't pass. We

didn't get it.

G: I know that Mr. Muha has brought that up. I think it was at the last election.

C: Yes, we had a bond issue up to build a little bit to the elementary and a little bit to the high school and so on. That almost passed. That might have been one reason it didn't pass was because some people didn't like the idea of building a little here and a little there and so forth.

G: So if it was just one major thing, it might have gotten passed?

C: Yes.

G: Another thing I noticed with Mr. Muha is that he has been trying to get the community more involved in other words like the citizen's advisory board that meets. How do you feel on this?

C: I think the community should be involved. I think that in this community or at least I used to feel that way if you tell the people the truth about what you need, you will get the levies and the bond issues passed but don't try to pull anything on them.

G: Are you saying that maybe over the past couple of years that maybe the superintendents have tried to do that and haven't been honest with them?

C: I think the people think they haven't been honest exactly. I'm not saying they haven't. That bond issue last year I think would have passed if there hadn't been so many incorrect things told about it. I'm not saying that he didn't do a good job about going around and trying to tell the story. We had senior citizens here and they toured the school, and he went and talked before various groups. There were a lot of rumors passed around. In fact Mrs. Conrad came in that morning and said that she had stopped down in Hanover to get a cup of coffee on the way up here and that they had been telling about that we were going to put in an elevator for the handicapped kids. That was one of the things, and there were other stories circulating. Of course, maybe they always do. I'm not sure, but that one did anyway.

G: Mr. Muha has tried to introduce some other things only because he has probably been the last one here. How about with the curriculum?

C: He has worked on curriculum ever since he has been here I think. I'm really not sure that there is anything wrong with the curriculum. I sort of think that maybe it is the fact that the kids don't seem to ever learn anything really.

They don't know their multiplication tables. I think part of this is society. It is not just the kids. A lot of kids aren't introduced to books at home. Nobody reads at home; they watch the television. When the youngster comes to kindergarten or first grade and they tell them that they are going to teach them to read, they don't understand why they should learn to read. They don't feel it is a necessity because they aren't exposed to it at home.

G: In lower grades they should be taught this now. Are they just being pushed on now?

C: I think that is part of what is happening. Somewhere along the line they got the idea that it was a bad thing to hold anybody back and get them out of their age group and so on. I think it has been overdone. My feeling is that if a youngster can't read to whatever level he is supposed to read by the time he is through the first grade, he shouldn't be through the first grade. He should just stay there. There is less peer pressure and so on put on them at that level as there is when they get up higher.

G: Right. They can become junior and seniors at times and not be able to read. It poses a big problem, doesn't it?

C: I think so.

G: I know that at United they have a reading specialist come in, do they not?

C: We have got several reading teachers in the elementary and then Mrs. Wilson works with the junior high.

G: Was this brought in by Mr. Muha, or was it here already before he came?

C: I think some of it was here before he came because there were title programs. We didn't have as much I don't think, but I think we did have some before. I know we did because even way back in 1969 when our daughter was a senior in high school, we had a reading lab. Mrs. Dorr had it. It was up where the teacher's lounge is now. She never went to study hall. She would rather go to the reading lab. They had those machines to teach speed reading and so on. Now what they have done with those since, I don't know. I know she did that and Blaine took some of that when he was in high school too.

G: Do we have that yet here today at United?

C: I thought they were using them at the elementary. I'm not sure. We did get those machines through some title program,

and Mrs. Dorr did teach that.

G: Since we are talking about curriculum, can you remember . . . You taught math at United when you started out. Can you think of any other classes that have been added since you started at United in 1958 until now?

C: They added pre-calculus in the high school. We added a practical math for those kids who really didn't know their math and had decided by the time they were seniors that they did need to know some; it was more or less a review course. We don't have it this year, but we did last year.

G: Was it mainly for seniors?

C: Juniors and seniors, yes.

G: Can you remember when you started teaching what salary you were making at United offhand?

C: I think that I made somewhere between \$2,500 and \$3,000 for teaching half days when I first came back. When I started in 1944, I got \$1,500. Then the governor that year declared a bonus, and after the income taxes were taken out it amounted to something like \$167 more than that. Then when I went back to teaching full-time again in 1949, I got \$2,300. That was at Leetonia. Then I didn't teach any until 1958. I think for a half day I got somewhere around \$2,500 and \$2,700.

G: That is amazing. How many days of school were allowed for when you first started at United? I know it is 180 now that the kids have to go through. Was it the same back then?

C: No, 175.

G: So they added five more. How about the teachers? I think we have to go 183 now. How about back then? Did we have to go about 178?

C: No . . . I think at first the days like you had teacher's meetings like ECOTA and that sort of thing they counted as a day of school. You didn't have to make those up.

G: Back then did you still have the amount of snow days so that you could miss so many and not have to make them up?

C: There was no limit. It if was a real bad winter and you missed, then you just missed that many. Usually we didn't miss as many as we have in the last few years. I can't remember even missing when I was in high school. One year we didn't miss any until March, and then we had it real bad at the first of March and missed about a week of school.

- G: There were no more laws back then as we have now?
- C: No. The first year I taught 1944-1945 the winter was real bad. They didn't have bulldozers and so on as they do now. We missed an awful lot of school. I don't remember how much, but it just seemed like we missed an awful lot.
- G: When you started, Mrs. Crosser, was there a union at United for teachers?
- C: Yes, we always had one like the UEA Local of OEA (Ohio Education Association). The UEA was one.
- G: How strong was it?
- C: It didn't used to do things like it does now. The superintendent and teachers, when they figured it wasn't a management union thing . . . They gave as much as they could, and that was it. After all the board only has so much money to spend. Everybody worked for the good of the kids. There was no management union thing as there is now, but then that is because the times have changed.
- G: Sure. Back then the salary that you quoted you could live pretty comfortably on.
- C: For instance, the first year I got about \$1,500. After World War II was over I ordered a new Pontiac, and it just cost about one year's salary. According to how much cars are now our salaries and the price of cars are just about the same yet.
- G: So at that time they weren't as strong. How about now at United? How strong do you think our union is?
- C: I think it is probably as strong now as it has ever been. I still don't know whether I would ever go on strike though.
- G: You would not vote to go on strike?
- C: I don't think I would.
- G: Is that maybe the consensus of all the women at United?
- C: No, I don't know that it would be all of them.
- G: In this day and age it just seems that the unions and labor have gotten so much power that they kind of control things. I think it is a little bit different with schools. Don't you? Like you said they only have so much that they can offer you. You don't have too much more to bargain with. At United has there ever been any major incident that stuck out while you were teaching here? Was there any major thing?

- C: We had a bomb scare once the day before Thanksgiving vacation. Everybody stood outside in the cold for two or three hours. One of the teachers that night had a heart attack, so I subbed for her from Thanksgiving until Christmas.
- G: Not because of the bomb scare?
- C: No, I think it was a group of things that caused it, but that happened.
- G: Would you remember what year that was?
- C: 1964 or 1965.
- G: Any other interesting incidents that you have had through teaching?
- C: I don't know that. I think our school has done a pretty good job of teaching kids. Both of our kids went to Ohio State University. Both of them made the dean's list several times, and they came from United.
- G: Do you think that maybe they had a little more help from you being a teacher probably prompting them to hit the books a little bit more?
- C: I don't remember what we did. I don't remember what we said, but somehow or another we got it into our kids' heads that when they were going to school that was the most important thing they were doing. You did you schoolwork first. Even though we lived on a farm and sometimes dad and I had to take over their chores that was the way it worked.
- G: Mrs. Crosser, thank you very much for the interview.

END OF INTERVIEW