Alice Ganz

“I began teaching in 1965. My first position was in a double kindergarten in Long Island City, sharing a classroom with an experienced teacher. She was the lead teacher of the morning class of 48 students with my assistance, while I taught the other 48 students who attended in the afternoon with her assistance. Every afternoon a long, noisy freight train passed within feet of the window, shaking the building. Rather than wasting precious teaching time trying to ignore this disturbance, I taught my students to identify each type of freight car and what it carried. When the last car passed, we all sang ‘The Little Red Caboose.’

The years between 1965 and 2013 were the best years of my life. I taught preschool, then called nursery school. With my husband and two young sons, I moved from Westchester to Suffolk County, where I taught kindergarten and grades one through six in the Longwood Central School District, where I served as a union representative and a member of the negotiating team for the Middle Island Teachers Association.

In 1980, I was selected to participate in the Long Island Writing Project, a branch of the National Writing Project. That summer and during the following few years, I was exposed to the latest research in the writing process and whole language instruction. I went on to share this knowledge with many other teachers through in-service courses and professional conferences. The National Council of Teachers of English published my first journal article in 1983 and later awarded me two teacher-researcher grants.

I retired in 2002 after completing my doctoral dissertation and became a college professor (at St. Joseph’s College and at Touro College) and student teacher supervisor for another eleven years.”

Alice Ganz retired in 2002 after teaching in Long Island City and in the Longwood Central School District. She wanted to be a teacher ever since she started kindergarten.

---

Janice Ogden

“I graduated from SUNY Brockport in 1953. That year they were crying for teachers. I opted for a Long Island school at $3,000 (a year) — an unheard of salary in my upstate rural area. Then my hometown offered me $3,000 to stay in Prattsburgh. I did and ended up with 44 students! It was the age of petticoats and I couldn’t wear mine because they wouldn’t fit between the desks!”

Janice Ogden is a retired teacher from the Prattsburgh Central School District in Steuben County.

---

“Education has greatly changed over the past 100 years from one-room schoolhouses to modern buildings and from slate tablets to Chromebooks. What hasn’t changed is teachers’ devotion to children and their dedication to enhancing the skills and potential of the next generation.

As part of our year-long celebration of NYSTRS’ 100th anniversary, we have been gathering stories, reflections and photos from our members about their teaching careers. We will be publishing several installments of stories in our newsletters and at NYSTRS.org. Here is the first installment for your enjoyment!

Alice Ganz retired in 2002 after teaching in Long Island City and in the Longwood Central School District. She wanted to be a teacher ever since she started kindergarten.

“I became a teacher because a teacher who I had when I was a student made me feel valuable and capable.”

Estelle Sandler retired in 2002 after teaching 31 years in Yonkers public schools.
Richard Siegelman

Richard Siegelman, who taught for 37 years in the Oyster Bay-East Norwich school district, is a huge fan of President Theodore Roosevelt.

Since Roosevelt’s Sagamore Hill home is in the school district, Siegelman devoted many lessons to Roosevelt’s history and frequently took students on field trips to Sagamore and to Roosevelt’s gravesite in Youngs Memorial Cemetery.

Siegelman loved to motivate his students with Roosevelt’s inspirational quotations, such as: “Nothing in this world is worth having or worth doing unless it requires effort.”

His elementary school students launched a letter-writing campaign to Congress and the White House that ultimately secured a U.S. Medal of Honor in 2001 for Roosevelt’s heroics during the Battle of San Juan Hill. Due to their special interest in Roosevelt, Siegelman and 22 students from assorted grades were given small roles in a 2003 History Channel documentary, TR: An American Lion, that was partly filmed in Oyster Bay in 2001.

Siegelman is also a big fan of the Encyclopedia Brown boy detective book series by Donald Sobol. He frequently used the books to encourage his students to read and to think critically by trying to figure out the mysteries.

“I loved the Encyclopedia Brown books because I soon began to realize that thinking, both critical and creative, was an even more basic, more important skill or ability than the classic three R’s of reading, ‘riting and ‘rithmetic,” Siegelman said.

He began writing to Sobol during his first year of teaching and later met him in person. Sobol eventually dedicated one of his books, Encyclopedia Brown and the Case of the Carnival Crime, to Siegelman, his “Number One Fan among school teachers.”

Richard Siegelman retired in 2003 from the Oyster Bay-East Norwich school district after teaching elementary school and programs for gifted children.

“Intelligence is multifaceted and developmental. All children can learn.”

Edward J. Corallo retired in 1998 after 35 years in the Jericho school district where he was a teacher and principal.

“To me, NYSTRS has been a ‘life-saver,’ especially after my husband died. The reliability of it and the fact that the pension system is so stable is wonderful. When one reads about many other public retirement systems, they cannot compare at all to ours.

Those who manage this System, the multiple investments, and continuing value of the System is indeed a blessing!”

Mary E. Coleman retired in 2002 after teaching at several community colleges, including Clinton Community College in Plattsburgh.
Bob Kersch

“After graduating from Buffalo State in June 1956, and a whirlwind tour of the United States that lasted several months, I began my teaching career in the Niagara Falls school system in October 1956.

As a permanent substitute when I started teaching, I taught all levels (K-12) during the first several months. First day I taught was at my old high school (in Niagara Falls).

I walked into the office, and the secretary, Gloria Tonetti, took one look at me and said, ‘What are you doing here?’ As a 20-year-old, I didn't know quite how to respond, but the huge grin on my face spoke volumes.

I knew Mrs. Tonetti reasonably well. As a high school senior, I called in one morning, said I was my dad, and said that I would not be in due to illness. I felt guilty later that morning and figured I should hightail it into school. When I walked into the office to sign in, Mrs. Tonetti looked at me, smiled and simply said, ‘Thanks for the phone call, Bob.’ Nowhere to hide. Yes, I knew Mrs. Tonetti.

My brief stint as a permanent substitute in the district was followed by assignments at 39th Street School, Niagara Street School and then 95th Street School.

I was later elected vice president of the Niagara Falls Education Association. I also served on the Niagara County Republican Executive Committee, where I worked with State Senator Earl W. Brydges, who was then presiding officer of the New York State Senate.

In the early 1960s, teachers could contribute to an annuity in addition to the pension, but they could not borrow from their contributions. I felt this process was unfair and Sen. Brydges agreed. He enlisted the support of another Niagara County legislator, Assemblyman Ernest Curto, and the Brydges/Curto bill was introduced in both houses of the state Legislature. It passed both legislative bodies and was signed into law by then Governor Nelson Rockefeller (in 1963).

I was, and still am, very proud of this accomplishment.”

Bob Kersch retired in 1991 after teaching in Niagara Falls and Lindenhurst and serving as an assistant superintendent in Lindenhurst.

“If a student asks you something and you don’t know the answer, be honest and say so. ‘Gee, I don’t know,’ I used to say. ‘Let’s look it up.’”

Sandy Drahushuk (Miss D) retired in 2011 after teaching art in schools in Albany, Troy and Hudson for 33 years.

Alfred J. Schutté

“Serendipity! Upon returning home, after serving as a medic in the U.S. Army’s occupying force entering Japan at the end of WWII, I returned to the pre-med program at New York University. In my anthropology course, the professor was discussing the development of animals in their pre-birth state. It so happened that I was the only one studying this in my comparative anatomy course. I was required to place a number of cat embryos mounted in a jar of formaldehyde, thereby showing their progressive development. When mentioning this to the professor, he immediately asked me to bring this into the next class session. At this point, I didn’t realize that this effort would change my life.

In the next class, he presented the topic and asked me up to explain these embryos to the class. (It must be noted, that in high school senior English, I could hardly get up and talk about a book review.) After the presentation, it turned out instead of the two minutes, it was over 10 minutes. The professor said that I should consider teaching, since I had a gift and shouldn’t let it go to waste.

My educational career took me in an eclectic path that included: teaching science in high school; adjunct professor at Hofstra University and Adelphi University; co-founder and president of the Nassau County Science Supervisors Association; secondary school administrator; member of the President’s Commission on Schools of Excellence; and researcher for the United Nations Development Program in Egypt, Israel and the Bahamas.

When all is said and done, my greatest title was and is - teacher.”

Miriam Kasenoff

“In the 1950s, when I started teaching kindergarten, a good portion of the time in class was allotted to ‘free play.’ I learned more about the children’s abilities and personality from watching them at ‘free play’ than any tests or other activities I can think of. The children were free to choose what they wanted to do. And there was a lot to choose from: We had shelves of large and small maple wood blocks and many toy trucks and cars. The children could paint at the easels, pound at the clay table, put together wooden puzzle pieces, use scissors and paste and construction paper and crayons, and they could play in the doll house.

I remember one year when three or four little girls almost always chose to play in the doll house. Charlie would ask them on many occasions if he could play there too. They always answered: ‘No. You can’t.’ One day I suggested to the girls that maybe it might be a good idea to let Charlie play with them and that he might have some good ideas. Susan said: ‘OK.’ When Charlie came over to play, Susan told him: ‘All right, Charlie. You can play. You can be the butcher and we don’t want any meat today!’ (A born politician, that little Susan.)

I remember at story time one day I was reading the book The Man Who Didn’t Wash His Dishes to the class. When I came to the part where he had a house full of dirty dishes, dishes on the bed, dishes on the floor and on all of the tables and chairs, I then paused and stopped reading the story. I asked the class: ‘Well, he’s in a terrible fix. What do you think he should do?’

‘He has to get married!’ said Michael.

Well, I could share that one with my fellow teachers at our lunch break. Lunch with my colleagues was another one of my favorite activities.

Music and dancing were another big part of my program too. In order to teach kindergarten in New York City in the 1950s, you had to be able to play the piano. You had to take a piano test! I thought that I’d be teaching in New York City, so I took methods courses for kindergarten teachers. However, I wound up teaching on Long Island instead, where playing the piano was not a requirement.

Of course, there were many indoor and outdoor activities and games. We also used to put on a play every year that the parents would come to. The parents also made the costumes. The play was usually a dramatization of a familiar story which incorporated singing and dancing. It was a gala event for the end of the kindergarten year.

I believed, and still do, that children ought to have a happy childhood. And I tried, while they were in my class, to enrich their lives as much as I could.

I enjoyed my years of teaching. Of course, over the span of 40 years there were bumps along the way and some sadness too. But I look back fondly on those days and I sometimes wonder if any of those thousands of children, who now are elderly too, can recall being so young and happy and having as good a time in kindergarten as I did.”

Miriam Kasenoff was a teacher in the Levittown school district for 40 years.