

TAPE #28

JOSEPHINE CARPENTER

Taped: March 1979

Reference: The schools in Amador County

My name is Josephine Carpenter. 125 years ago my grandfather came around Cape Horn and landed in San Francisco. Gradually, he worked his way to the Mother Lode. He worked in the mining camps of Tuolumne, Calaveras and Mariposa Counties. He finally came to Amador County and settled a mile east of Jackson on a ranch along the Clinton road. There he met a young lady from Ireland; her name was Sara McCue; they married and had two children, Annie and Josephine. When Annie, the younger one, was six years old her mother died. The two children were then left with only their father.

(Which one was your mother?)

Annie.

Well, after the children grew up, my Aunt Josephine married Mr. Pierovich. She had two children, and then she died, and one child remained who is Annie Cristovich. That's the only relative we have on my mother's side.

Then my mother married Nicholas Bacich, who came from Austria and worked in the mines as a carpenter. They had nine children, six girls and ~~xxx~~ three boys. I am the second in the family. We lived on this original ranch where my mother was born. We went to school in the Charity(?) District about 3/4 of a mile down the Clinton Road. It was a one room school; there were about 20 children. And eight grades. We'd walk to school in the dust in the summer and the mud in the winter.

The school was on a little hillside, and below it was a ditch of running water. We irrigated out school garden with water from that ditch. We would also carry water from the well that was below the school in a bucket, and we would put the bucket on a porch bench with one dipper and two basins. We all drank and cleaned out of that one bucket of water. We had slate blackboards, little old-fashioned desks and a stove in the center of the room. That was the only furniture in the school.

(Is the school gone now?)

Oh, yes, it's gone. The water ditch is gone too; the road is built right over it. The building is still in existence, but not in the same spot. It is on a ranch right across from where we were born. The children ~~xxxxxxxxxxx~~ all helped one another. We had chores to do; we had horses and we had cattle and we raised an excellent garden. It furnished us with all the vegetables we needed; we also raised beans, so we had our own dried beans. We had potatoes and we canned tomatoes and all the vegetables. And we had a very large vineyard. After school we always had our chores to do. In the fall of the year we would pick grapes, and we would make wine. We would empty the grapes into this large vat, and then we'd turn a wheel to crush the grapes, and the juice would go in this immense tank. We would let it ferment; then we would draw it off, and we'd put it in barrels. We had a large cellar below the house where it was kept. We would also cut our wood in the summer, and we would sell the wood to a man who had a shoe store in Jackson. That way we got our shoes. It was a barter system; we knew very little about money. We would give things, and we would receive something else in exchange.

We would only buy salt, pepper, sugar, macaroni, crackers--- we raised everything else. Spring was the time for planting. Dad would plow; we would go to the barn and hook up the horses and get the plow. We would always go out in the fields and help. In the spring before school, we had to dig around the vineyard, and we weren't allowed to bring any of our school work home. We had to do all of it at school. Mother said we sent you to school to study, and when you get home you have chores to do.

(Did you stay after school?)

No. When the teacher was with one class, the other classes would be doing their school work.

When we started to high school we had to walk. This was from our home out there to our school here. This was in 1912. We walked through the fields, and the grass was real high and wet in the spring and we'd sit in school all day wet from the waist down. But we never even took cold.

(How long did it take to get to school?)

Oh, about 20 minutes.

(That was fast.)

Yes, sometimes we ran! Rain or shine, it didn't bother us. And my mother used to keep boarders. They had to have their lunches, and they didn't take the lunches with them. So we would come home from school a little early, and mother would have the buckets ready. The bottom part of the bucket was for the soup, another for meat and things, and the top was for the desert. Well, we would carry those buckets to the mines, go back home and eat, and then go back to school. Then after school we would go home, and then we had our chores to do. Working in the garden, planting or irrigating.

We would cut the grass and put it in large sacks. Then my dad would carry them up to the pigpen and we would feed the pigs. We had rabbits, and we would have to feed them too. My mother spent a great deal of time working outside. And we also had indoor chores to do; the little ones were around and we had to take care of them. I was the second in the family; my older sister Francis and then myself, and we had five girls before there was a boy. So the girls had to do the boys work on the ranch. But we had a lot of fun too. When we got the horses ready, we would ride them to the fields, and when work was over we'd jump on them again, and we'd take them to the barn. We'd take off the harnesses and water them and feed them. We'd also feed the cattle; in the winter we fed them hay, and we had to go after them back in the fields and bring them home and put them in the ~~xxxxxx~~ corral. That was an every night chore. It was a very full day.

Mother always felt that Sunday was a day for a little rest. We went to Sunday School, and when we were getting ready for Communion we would study during noon and recess at school. Then after Sunday School, we'd walk back home and do our chores. And another chore we had was taking care of the lamps. We bought kerosene in 5 gallon cans, and then we would fill our lamps. We had to clean the globes and trim the wicks. When we ran out of kerosene we had to use candles. And when we went to the barn at night we always had lanterns.

I didn't graduate from high school, because my family took down with dyptheria. We lost our baby brother during that time; he was four years old. After he passed away the family got typhoid, and we were in quarantine for three months. We couldn't leave the ranch.

We would yell over to our neighbors when we needed anything. And we had a man who came out to keep people from entering our place. So I missed school, and after we were out of quarantine I went to Teachers Normal in Stockton. I took the teacher's exam and graduated that way. When we went out of the 8th grade, we had to take a county exam before we could enter high school. If you didn't pass it you couldn't go to high school. Well, I was in Stockton about eight months; I went to Placer County and took the examination up there. Ten of us took it, and two of us passed it. But I couldn't teach in Amador County, because they wouldn't recognize the Placer County certificate. So I took the exam again here the following week. Dorothy Sargent and I were the only ones who passed it here. Then I could teach in Amador County.

(How old were you?)

I was 18. My first school was the Charlston District. The teacher up there left and didn't complete her term. They didn't have school there in the winter because of the snow. This school was about two miles ~~north~~ north of Volcano, up the Volcano/Charlston Road. I taught there until June the 30th. That was my first school. This was 1917. It was a one room school, and I had nine pupils. It was in March that I boarded with Mrs. Miller; she was the trustee there. California McLaughlin's mother and father lived there, and the brother too. It snowed, and I had high boots to walk to school, and there were two youngsters from the house who walked over with me. There also we had to carry the water from a spring, and, as usual, we had our bench with the water bucket on it. Everybody wiped on the same towel

and drank from the same ladle. And there was nobody to do the janitor work, so some of the children offered to help, and we would stay a little while after school to do that.

(Your first day of teaching must have been exciting.)

It was rather strange, because I had no experience at all. Teachers now have experience with children, but I didn't. But the children were very nice; I had no difficulty with any of them. They respected and looked up to their teacher. And they wanted to learn, and they always liked school. Of course, by the end of the term we were a little tired and thankful that the end of the term was there.

I was next a teacher at Milligan School. That's about five miles east of Jackson on the Clinton Road. There, I had 23 pupils, and I also had all the grades. I taught there one year. We had no lights, and so we had to leave school when the sun went down. And we also carried the water there too.

Going to school in the summer I would ride horseback. And in the winter I had a buggy and a horse. Once I was riding a young horse that was just broken, and a bird fluttered out and scared the horse. The horse threw me; it didn't hurt me, but it hurt my pride. So I walked to a nearby house and borrowed a horse that I rode to school. Later, the man who broke my horse came to school with it, and I took the other horse back. My mother was so frightened.

And whenever we went to town we always had to carry things. Mama would need something, and I'd have to carry those things home with my books. In the spring dad used to cut hay for different people. And we'd run behind the mowing machine, and then it had to be raked and put in piles. Then it would go out in a hay wagon, and we'd have to pitch the hay on the wagon. Then we'd pile on the wagon and ride to the barn.

Well, we'd pitch the hay into the barn, and then we would play there. And this gave mama a chance to get her work done; she wouldn't have the little ones to bother her. And in the summer time we would go down to the creek. We'd wade around, and when we got tired of the creek we'd go out into the garden and eat apples.

(Can you tell us a typical day in school?)

Well, first thing at school we would form a line; the little ones were first, and then the bigger and older ones came next. She had a bell, and she would tap it, and away we'd march into school. Then we would stand beside our seats, and when teacher came in she would hit the bell, and we'd sit down. The first students heard were the 1st graders. They would go to the long bench at the front of the room, and they would sit there. Now, while she was having the 1st graders recite, the others would be studying. The sessions were about 15 minutes; you couldn't hold their attention any longer than that. She also had to limit her time so she could hear all the classes. Anyway, when they were finished they would march to their seats, and one child would be appointed to pass the paper out, and you'd get one piece of paper and your pencil. And when you wanted to go out you always had to raise your hand; if it was for a drink you raised one finger, and if it was for something else you would put up two fingers. It was about 500 feet away, and it was called the privy. The girls was on one side of the grounds, and the boys on the other. And only one person could go out at a time.

Well, the 2nd grade would be the next to be heard. Maybe there were only one or two pupils in the 2nd grade. I know when my sister went to school, she was only 5 years old, the teacher would hold her in her lap. The teacher was just like a mother to us. Then, maybe,

it would be the 3rd grade, and so on up the ladder. And the teacher always took her work home; she didn't have time at school. Then when it was recess time, we'd go out for maybe 20 minutes and play. And the teacher always played with the children.

(What were the basic subjects that you taught?)

One day they would have reading, the next day it might be geography. We had oral reading every day; we had to get up and read to the teacher. Sometimes teacher would ask us the meaning of a word; if we didn't know we would have to look it up in the dictionary. We never went on until we knew what every word meant in every paragraph.

(What were the subjects?)

We had reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, spelling, physiology, agriculture, history---everything they teach now. Word analysis and grammar, composition---all of those subjects. I wonder if they teach physiology in the schools today? Of course, you couldn't get all the subjects in in one day, but writing was a must. We had writing and reading every day, and arithmetic too. And in arithmetic we had what was called oral---you just had a paper and pencil, and the teacher would give a problem, and you had to solve it mentally. Then you picked up your pencil and wrote the answer. When the class was over you passed your papers in. Then the teacher corrected them, but she did that at home, because she didn't have the time at school. Then I taught at Etna for 5 years.



(Were their Indians living there, or at the school?)

Yes, there were Indians there. The school was a little below the Indian village. And I had five Indians there. The children were very obedient, but they were not so good at mathematics. But they were very good in art and reading. I did like the Indian children; they were very nice and I made friends there with children who later married and had their own children. Now, I didn't say anything about my mother going to school. As a girl she went to what was called the Washington District. It is no longer in existence. And your father (referring to Azalea Cuneo's father. Azalea was present at the taping.) went to the same school that my mother went to. Your father was living on the Camminetti Ranch at that time. They used to go to school together. It was up around Butte Mountain Road. About a mile east of Jackson. That district consolidated later with the Etna District. I taught there for five years.

When I started to high school we had two teachers: Mr. Goldstein and Miss ~~XXXX~~ Isaac. My sister Clara taught there after I did. Then I taught in Rancheria for two years. It was on the Shake Ridge Road; it was about seven miles east of Sutter Creek. It was on the upper Onetto Ranch. The school burned down after I left there. There is no school left at the Charlston area either. Then I taught in Ione. I was there for fifteen years. I started in 1942;

(How big was the school?)

There were four teachers when I started. When I left there were six. When I started I taught the sixth and seventh grades, then I taught the 5th, 6th and 7th grades. When I taught those three grades I had 42 children; and this was all in one room. It was a two storey ~~building~~ building, and it had an annex. Then as the school got larger, I taught the 5th and 6th. Finally, I just taught the 6th grade; my son was going there when I taught it.

Then I went back to teach the Charity School where I graduated. I had my sister Clara, my brother George, and my brother Matt in school, and I taught them! This was before I went to Ione, of course.

(Where did you go after Ione?)

I retired, but I couldn't take it. You couldn't go back and teach again so I substituted. I did this in Pine Grove, Pioneer, Plymouth, and Jackson. I was about two months in Pioneer, and I drove from Ione on the back roads to Pioneer. I taught kindergarten there. Then I went back to Milligan School and taught there for two years; I taught the children of the children I had taught before. The Milligan was in continual use for 100 years, and when I left I think it kept on for three more years. This was in 1965.

(What is there now?)

A school for retarded children.

(Did you have disciplinary problems?)

I had no problem; I always wanted respect, and when the children came to school, if they were new, I would tell them the rules and regulations that we had, and I expected them to abide by them. But you couldn't give them an inch, because they would take a foot. And we didn't say do this and do that---we said you didn't do this or that, you must respect your teacher and you are here to learn.

You mind your mother and father at home, and at school you mind your teacher. Then they will grow up and know how to obey the laws.

But if they are free to do what they want in school or in the home, how are they going to abide by the laws when they grow up?

It was my policy to visit every home in my district. If I didn't have time before or after school, I would find time on a Saturday. And the children were so happy to have the teacher visit. Also you would get acquainted with the home conditions of the students. When I was in the Etna School there was a little girl who was very sickly. I asked her mother if I could take her to the doctor, and her mother said she couldn't afford it. So I took her to the doctor, and he said she had something wrong with her spine. Well, she needed some medicine so I bought it and then took her home and told her parents what the doctor told me. They couldn't afford any treatment, so I said I'd see what I could do. Well, I went to the Lions Club and they helped out. And in the fall of the year I'd take them grapes, because I knew they needed food. Another lady in the district had some cows, and I told her the condition of this little girl, and she would give the girl a quart of milk every day. So, you know the situation of a family, and as a result you know how to cope with the children when they come to school.

(What happened to the little girl?)

She got better; I think she's still living around San Andreas.

(Have teaching techniques changed over the years?)

Well, new methods were introduced, and when this happened it was very difficult. Especially when they brought in the new math! I didn't go for it, so I finally decided to give up teaching.

(What books did you recommend to the children?)

The classics. Black Beauty was one, and the fairy tales were others. Aesop's Fables--the stories had a moral. Also in those days they would memorize more.

I also would not pass a child if he couldn't do his work. I had some students passed on to me who were in the 4th grade; they couldn't read or spell. I talked to them after school to see what the trouble was, and I called in the nurse. I said there was something wrong, and I had her examine the children. Well, one was hard of hearing, and another needed glasses. These things were corrected, and the children improved. I still have the letter from one of the parents writing to me and thanking me for my help. Anyway, you really have to be interested in the children; if you are not you just better not be a teacher. A teacher should be an example to the pupils---both in and out of the schoolroom.

I enjoyed my teaching experience; I learned a lot---and I still have a lot to learn.