

# A Tender Teacher: 'If They Know You Love Them, They Will Try'

By Sibyl Myers

World-Herald Staff Writer

More than 2,500 youngsters have passed through the doors of Linda Skinner's classroom during her 40-year teaching career.

Many of her former pupils are now parents whose children she has taught.

Time has not tarnished her memory of the first- and second-graders she taught at Howard Kennedy Elementary School for 23 years or her kindergarten classes at Kellom Elementary School for 13 years.

"I feel like they're all my own," she said. "No day is too long nor night too cold to take one of them to the hospital or to the store."

The same is true of the 15 student teachers she has supervised, she said. "They're all just like my children."

Even today when she runs into former pupils, they thank her "for making them get that spelling," she said.

"I've never been angry with a little child. If they know you love them, they will try."

Mrs. Skinner said she has received letters from former student teachers, now living in Lane Deer, Mont.; Arcata, Calif.; and Marcus, Iowa, who have

thanked her for the "wonderful teaching experience" they had under her supervision.

Wrote Chris Classen, now of Arcata: "You've been one of God's very special gifts to me — thank you!"

Mrs. Skinner said that was worth more to her than money.

She and her husband, Eugene, retired assistant superintendent of the Omaha School District, don't have children. But through the years they have "adopted" many young and old Omahans, including an 87-year-old woman they take care of, she said.

"The young and the old are very dear to me," Mrs. Skinner said. "If I could have one wish, it would be to have a small nursery with about six little ones and elderly persons so they could interact."

She retired from teaching at the end of last semester. Her 65th birthday was Dec. 5.

Mrs. Skinner recently received the School Bell Award from the Omaha Education Association for exceptional service in education. She is the first black and one of a few teachers to receive the award, said OEA staffer Lois Grote.

Usually, the award is presented to individuals or groups outside the school dis-



World-Herald/Phil Johnson  
Mrs. Skinner . . . "They're all just like my children."

trict who have made outstanding contributions to the field of education, Mrs. Grote said.

Mrs. Skinner was cited because "she has done things above and beyond the average teacher," Mrs. Grote said.

"She has done a lot on her own — starting different programs to provide new learning experiences for pupils and getting parents involved," Mrs. Grote said.

"In her work she gave so much of herself beyond the call of duty to enrich the lives of her students and to assist the less fortunate families in her school community," said OEA President Sammie Jackson in presenting the award. "She was so sensitive to students' needs and would on many occasions provide food and clothing to keep them in school."

A native of Eden, N.C., Mrs. Skinner graduated from Knoxville (Tenn.) College in 1937 with majors in English and history and a minor in education.

She taught in a rural school and a high school in North Carolina for several years. That's where she met her husband, who grew up in Omaha and taught in Leaksville, N.C., for a year. The Skinners were married and moved to Omaha in 1941.

At first she did daywork twice a week, she said. Then she tested recipes for a radio station for a year before she began teaching physical education at Howard Kennedy in 1943.

Katherine Fletcher, then-principal of Kellom, saw Mrs. Skinner's work at

Howard Kennedy and requested that she come to work for her, Mrs. Fletcher said.

"She's the most tremendous kindergarten teacher I've ever seen," said Mrs. Fletcher, now principal of Laura Dodge Elementary School. "She lives and breathes teaching. Every experience to her was an experience to use in teaching youngsters. She has boundless energy."

A special project of Mrs. Skinner was to take her pupils home with her in small groups to stay overnight. It was a teaching experience for them. They would go to the grocery store and select foods while learning about nutrition, money and different jobs in a store.

She took pupils home to 5224 Kansas Ave. with her because she had an elementary teacher in North Carolina who did the same, she said. "That was the happiest and most memorable experience in my life."

That same teacher, Miss Emma, told her she could be "anything in the world she wanted," Mrs. Skinner said. "I thought, 'If I could be a teacher, I hope to be one like her.'"

The oldest of 10 children, Mrs. Skinner said she is the only one who went to college. Her father worked in a cotton mill, making

\$9 a week, so she had to work her way through school.

Many of the things Mrs. Skinner did in her teaching career related to her grade school days. When she was 9, she had to stay out of school half the year to help care for her mother. Her teacher was "so nice" she brought her classwork home to her, she said.

As a teacher, Mrs. Skinner also took schoolwork and other educational material to her pupils' homes. The project was called "Homework Homes" and was designed to extend learning into the home and to encourage parents to become part of their children's schooling.

She said the highlight of her teaching career was the Child-Parent Center she developed at Kellom. Kindergartners visited the center before class to work with educational games and materials designed to reinforce their classroom instruction. The project, which lasted a year, was partially funded by the Board of Education.

Other awards Mrs. Skinner has received include the Second Mile Award from the OEA for working with parents to clean up trash around Kellom and planting roses. In 1972, she was nominated as one of the 9,000 best elementary teachers in the United States.