

2015 Dorothy Underwood Education Scholarship Award winner - Ms. Marissa Neusch



Marissa with proud parents Joe and Robbin Neusch

I am thrilled to report the award of the initial Dorothy Underwood Education Scholarship to Marissa Neusch of North Union Schools. North Union became a new consolidated district in the summer of 2013 making this year's senior class the 2nd graduating class from the district. There were 41 graduating seniors at the awards night last evening, held in the high school gymnasium in Armstrong. They were a great looking group of young people, as were the seniors the night prior in Emmetsburg.

My day began by visiting the site of the Walnut Grove (4X4) facility in Emmetsburg where Dad was first employed in his Walnut Grove career. The old Quonset hut at the back of the site was there in 1960 when we moved to Emmetsburg. I pulled into what used to be the Redwood Café where Uncle Clarence was practically, heck he just was, a celebrity among the E'Burg folks. I rounded the curve and pulled into Kirk's Café to have breakfast. The place was jam-packed. Patrons were

visiting over coffee and rolls, or reading one of several newspapers. I saw the Des Moines Register, the Omaha World Herald, the Sioux Falls Argus Leader, the Wall Street Journal, and of course, the Emmetsburg Democrat/Reporter. I was the only one who pulled out a laptop to check my newsfeed on-line.

My waitress was a friendly woman, probably at least 80 years old. I ordered and she brought my meal quickly, with a carafe of steaming hot coffee. In a few minutes, she came over to clean the table next to me. I asked, "did you ever work as a waitress at the Redwood?"

"Of course," she said. "When it was open, it was THE PLACE to eat and have coffee!" Naturally, I asked her if she ever served coffee to guy named C.J.

"C.J. Miller?" she inquired. "The one and only," I replied. And naturally this led to a conversation about both June & Clarence and how folks her age won't ever forget them. By the way, the breakfast at Kirk's is very good.

Again, I drove past our house at 7th & Harrison Streets, and on down to West Elementary School. That one block sure seemed a lot longer to me as a kindergarten student. I drove past the corner where Ted's Super Valu was located. Some of you may recall the corn crib Ted used as a bear cage. Every summer he had two black bear cubs for kids to feed, and when "Mom" wasn't looking, stick our hands through the wire to pet them.

Next stop, the newspaper office. I inquired if a news reporter was there for me to visit with. The lady behind the counter went to fetch Dan Voigt. While she was gone, another woman came to the counter to ask if I needed help. She noticed the photograph of June & Clarence I had taken to the office to be included in an article about the C.J. & June Miller Agriculture Scholarship, and picked it up without a word. Soon a tear began to fall from each of her eyes. She looked up and said, "What would you be doing with a photograph of Clarence and June Miller?"

I said, "They were the aunt and uncle of my father and his brothers." To which she replied, "They were the sweetest couple I believe I've ever known."

After reviewing facts with Dan Voigt, I drove to the cemetery. There I visited and photographed the burial plots of Grandma Underwood, Dorothy Helen, Uncle Warren, C.J. & June Miller, John & Bertha (Siegele) Miller, Charles Siegele (Clarence's Uncle) and his wife, Charles Foster & Elizabeth (Sutherland) Underwood and their daughter Aunt Edith, and William Henry & Minnie Mae (Bullamore) Gaylord.

I stopped in Estherville to take an old golfing buddy to lunch, then drove to Ringsted hoping to visit with Wiley & Tom and get a tour of The Underwood Home. Unfortunately, they were not home, so I drove on to Armstrong, where I headed to the newspaper office and shared my information about Dorothy Underwood, along with a photograph, for what I hope will be another nice article for our records. With a couple hours of time to kill, I drove back to Ringsted on the chance Wiley and Tom would be home, AND they were.

The yard is immaculate with fresh growth of daisies, iris, morning glory, peonies, daffodils, and a few things already coming up in the garden. Wiley was mowing and Tom was raking leaves. I approached Tom and he said, "I know who you are, you look just like your Dad." I said, "I'll take that as a compliment." He motioned Wiley over and then took over the lawn mower, saying, "We need to get this grass cut before it starts raining."

Wiley took me on a tour of The Underwood Home. Although I had stood outside the home many times, it was my first time inside my Dad's boyhood home as an adult. To say that Tom & Wiley are collectors would be a gross miscarriage of justice. You should visit them some day. The house is neat as a tack, but is a showcase of vases, plates, dolls, cut glass, purses, paintings, etc. I was amazed. The house is 99 years old this year and is as clean and in good repair as if it was built last year.

I could picture Nana Dot at the stove and the sink. I could picture the entire family at Christmas around the fireplace. And after reading the

account of the memorial that was held for Dorothy Helen, I could imagine Grandma & Grandpa Underwood grieving the loss of their first-born child, greeting friends and family members as they stood by her little casket in the dining room. I imagined Phil Underwood beaming with pride as he & Dorothy hosted Henry Wallace in the Underwood home. I paused to take it all in.

Wiley knows a lot about the Underwood's. They have the Underwood's of Ringsted book and it is obvious he has read it from cover to cover. I stayed about an hour. On the way out of town, I stopped at the Jackie Sue Underwood Memorial...sure do miss her charm and her ear-to-ear smile that never left her face.

Then it was back to Armstrong. I gathered in the gym with the students, families, administration and other presenters. The ceremony was well organized by the guidance counselor and principal. Afterwards, an appreciative Marissa Neusch, along with her parents Joe & Robbin, couldn't thank me enough for her scholarship. Unlike the night before, ours was the only award she received despite a stellar high school record and her leadership as the FFA chapter president this past year.

I was approached after the program by Mark Larson & his wife from Ringsted. They were instrumental in the Jackie Sue Memorial and she also is active at the Ringsted library, particularly with their fund raising programs and reading programs. They knew the 5 Underwood boys well, and were appreciative of our scholarship and who it honors.

A couple of hours later I was home reviewing the two days with Diana. They were memorable and enjoyable. I'm already looking forward to next year.
