

Grace Gast Laken and Palmer O Laken

Grace Evelyn Gast was born March 4, 1907 the daughter of Paul and Anna Steffen Gast at the family home in March Grove township. Grace married Palmer Laken, born September 13, 1901 on June 26 1928 at the Lutheran parsonage in Warren, Minnesota. Alice Gast and Clarence Gast were witnesses at the marriage. Grace and Palmer had one daughter, Neoma Ann Laken, born June 16, 1934.

Grace always knew what she wanted, to teach school and sew like Tillie Knutson. Tillie was the woman who came to sew for Grace's mother and grandmother. In the spring of 1920, Grace graduated from Fairview School, Ellerth and in the fall enrolled in Argyle High School. The first two years she lived with Bill and Irene Gast, the second two years she lived with Bertha and Hilmer Bergner, working for room and board at both homes. Grace graduated from Argyle High School on May 29, 1924 and entered Moorhead State Teachers College the following fall. She graduated with a two year certificated in 1926. She started teaching at Doran, Minnesota the following fall.

While teaching in Doran, Grace met Palmer O. Laken and they were married taking up residence in Doran. Palmer, originally from North Dakota, was a railroad maintenance worker and played occasionally in a local band. He was very musical, playing piano, drums and violin. Palmer also had an excellent singing voice.

During the ensuing years, Grace took extension courses from Moorhead State Teachers College at off-campus sites and completed her four-year degree. Grace taught 32 years at Doran Public School. She served on the Doran School board and was Doran City Treasurer for 29 years. Palmer served 12 years on the Doran City Council and was president of the Maintenance of Way Employees union at Breckenridge, Minnesota for 25 years. Public and community service was very important to both of them. Grace was a wonderful seamstress and did all kinds of handwork, crocheted and tatted. Her father made her a wood crochet hook as a child and he taught her how to crochet.

Palmer Laken died April 18, 1973 from complications following gall bladder surgery due to asthma and emphysema. He is buried in Riverside Cemetery, Breckenridge, Minnesota.

Grace continued to live in Doran following her husband's death and taught one more year, retiring in 1974 at age 67. In 1980, Grace moved to an apartment in Breckenridge. She had exceptionally good health all her life until age 75 and then went steadily downhill the next three years. Grace Gast Laken died August 21, 1985 at her home in Breckenridge of a heart attack complicated by arteriosclerosis and is buried beside her husband in Riverside Cemetery, Breckenridge, Minnesota.

At Grace's funeral visitation, students from 1926 to 1974 passed by her casket to pay tribute to a loved and respected teacher. One former student, mildly retarded, stood before her casket, crying uncontrollably and then ran out. She later called Grace's daughter, Neoma and apologized saying 'All I could think of, if it wasn't for Mrs. Laken, I would never have learned to write my name'. In the days before Special Education, if

Grace had a retarded student she figured was capable of learning with extra help, she'd spend mornings, noon hours and after school hours teaching that child to read and write. She believed that everyone who could, should be a useful citizen. As a result of the outpouring of respect for Grace, Neoma established the Grace Gast Laken Memorial Scholarship at Breckenridge High School. The scholarship is given each year to a student who plans to enter the teaching profession.