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THE BELT,

I started School at Forth Primary in 1939 & loved it from day 1. I was lucky to know what I wanted to do & never thought of anything other than being a teacher. In those days the accepted form of punishment for misbehaving was the belt, but as I didn’t misbehave I didn’t get the belt, except for once. After intervals it was the custom to line up in twos in the corridor outside the classroom, & normally the teacher would be standing waiting to let us in. One day she wasn’t there when we arrived & as we were not allowed to enter the classroom if she wasn’t there we just stood quietly at first but gradually we started talking, & the noise got louder. When she finally arrived she was furious as we were advertising her absence to the rest of the staff so she fetched her belt & gave us all 1 stroke as we entered the classroom. I think I was in P4 at that time. The School had a Junior Secondary Dept. then & my brother-in-law told me about a teacher he had who would say to him every morning ”Right, Muir, out you come & hold out your hand”. Then he gave him the belt & Archie would respond “What was that for, Sir?” & he replied “It’s not for what you have done, but for what you’re going to do!”

My next experience of the belt was in 1956 when I started teaching at Niddrie Marischal School (now Castlebrae). We had been told at Moray House College that a belt was an essential piece of equipment & we were given the name of the supplier, Mr. Dick from Lochgelly, so I duly sent for one & got it posted. I still have the receipt for 10/6 (52 1/2p) but it was stolen at West Calder High about 1982. I didn’t replace it.

At N.M. one custom was that when it was your week on line duty (you went out & lined the classes up after intervals) all latecomers had to report to you. You took them outside the classroom, administered one stroke of the belt & gave them a timed, signed note for their own teacher to prove that they had reported. I found that I only needed to use the belt for the first week or so of the session & it was relegated to the back of the drawer for the rest of the year. First encounter of each year’s classes was kind of like a bear-baiting by the bold ones, trying to find your limit of endurance, and after they saw that you would use the belt if pushed, teaching & learning could proceed. After the belt was banned, I think in the 1980’s, the usual punishment was an exercise, lines (I must not....) or an essay. I well remember the plea, especially from the boys, “Aw, Miss, can ye no’ jist gi’e me the belt?” I am glad the belt has gone as some teachers could be quite sadistic with it. Some pupils could be monsters too, but the majority are wonderfully rewarding. I suppose I have laid myself open to criticism of my “barbaric” actions, but these were the times I lived in.

Grace.