



Elliott Children's Learning Center & Library



Thank you,
Albert &
Laverne Elliott

Albert & Laverne's Story



Albert was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1911. His mother was an opera singer who travelled extensively, so Al was left in the care of a nanny. By the time he entered high school, the family had moved to upstate New York.

Laverne was born in the West Texas town of Stamford in 1924 and raised in nearby Abilene. She was the youngest of seven children in the Baker family.

Albert & Laverne's Story



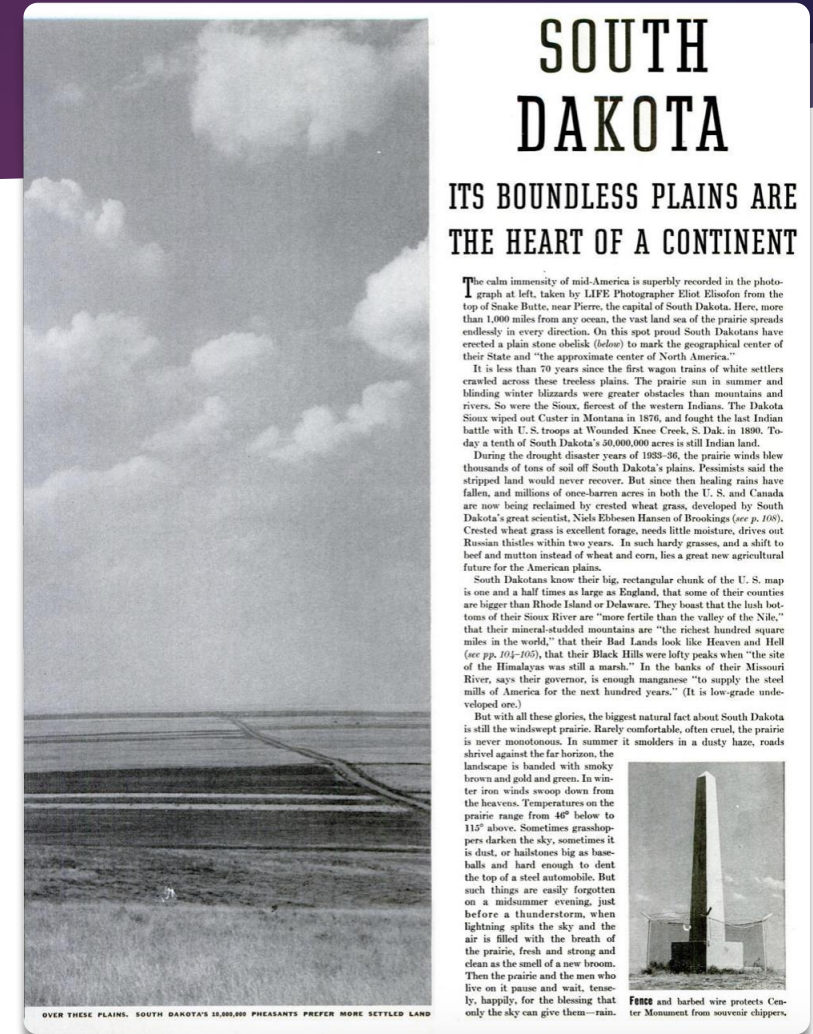
Al served in the United States Army Air Corps during World War II, stationed in the Pacific Theater at a MASH hospital. He was awarded a Purple Heart in 1944 for wounds received in action.

Laverne Baker and Lt. Albert Elliott were married on July 24, 1943. When Al was discharged from the Army in 1946, they settled in a small Texas town where their son, Michael, was born.

Albert & Laverne's Story

The Elliotts moved to Sturgis in 1953. The move to South Dakota came about when they read a story about the Black Hills in Life Magazine. They were so taken with South Dakota that they knew they wanted to live there.

When an opportunity arose for Al to transfer with the V.A. from Houston to Fort Meade, they jumped at the chance. Al was the Chief of Medical Administration at Fort Meade until his retirement in 1980.



Albert & Laverne's Story

Laverne graduated from Black Hills Teachers College to follow in the teaching footsteps of her four older sisters. She began her career teaching kindergarten at Deadwood Public Schools in 1959.

On her first day, with 45 students she was just getting to know, a forest fire surrounded Deadwood. The city had to be evacuated. She later said "There was nothing in my lesson plan for this insanity."



Albert & Laverne's Story

A few years later, she began teaching first grade in Sturgis, first at Badger-Clark Elementary School and later at Sturgis Elementary. She retired in 1988, twenty-nine rewarding years as a teacher.

Teaching young children was her life's work and passion. She believed it was her duty to ensure that every child who passed through her classroom would be able to read . . . and she believed that reading should be **Fun! Fun! Fun!** She strongly believed if children could not read at the end of first grade, their future was bleak.

Meade County Times-Tribune • May 25, 1988 • Page 2A

LaVerne Elliott reflects on her 29-year teaching career

By MARIAN EATHERTON

An important part of Laverne Elliott's life is about to end. When she leaves her classroom May 27 it's with the knowledge that she won't be back in the fall for she has chosen to retire. Thus ends a 29-year teaching career spent working with kindergarten classes for four years and the balance as a first grade teacher.

"My husband retired seven years ago and he's been so nice about my continuing to teach. But he's wanted me to retire, also. I had known for a long time that this was to be my last year but I didn't want to be a lame duck teacher so I put off telling anyone until I had notified the office of my decision. Then I hurried around to tell my friends," says the attractive Elliott whose speech still bears traces of her native Texas. "I have mixed feelings about it for I have enjoyed teaching."

HER CLASSROOM ON the south side of the Primary Building is a cheery, inviting place, an ideal atmosphere for learning to take place. The room also is devoid of a teacher's desk, at her request.

"I have high expectations for my students," she says. "I try to teach them that work is fun and I try to make it fun. We have lots of work to do and if I can convince them to like to work, we get it done," says Elliott, who has long been known

as a creative teacher. (Her principal says, "My! she will be missed; she can get more out of those children...").

"Everything I do is a spinoff from others," she says, reluctant to take credit for her skills. "If I see an idea I like, I remember it and adapt it to my uses. I encourage my first graders to do lots of original writing. We have three stages: I spend lots of time in motivation, they do the writing and then we, either the helper for the day or I, listen. These children can spell. I think the Vowac program has made a real difference. But I have always taught phonics."

All things change and school curriculums are no exception. Twenty-nine years ago math was called "Numbers".

"Then we moved into the new math which was formulated too fast and now we have a stronger-than-ever math program. First graders 25 years ago didn't study spelling and now we have weekly tests.

"The children are the same, it's the world that has changed," she says. "Sputnik provided the first impetus for great change and certainly tv has made all of us much more cosmopolitan. Now many children see parts of the world they can never expect to see otherwise," she says.

"THE ENVIRONMENT MAY be different but their curiosity is the same. It takes so little to please

small children if we keep things simple," she says.

As her class of 16 boys and six girls filed back into the classroom from a music class they brightened visibly when they heard her say, "They're the best citizens and the best first grade."

And to her visitor, she added, "We work on being good citizens. We also work on being attentive. They love that word." Given the option, what would she change?

"The guarantee of a good education for all," says Elliott, the youngest of seven children, all holding college degrees. "There were five girls in my family and all of us were teachers. Our parents' belief that education is important was passed on to their children."

Disposing of a 29-year accumulation of teaching materials is no small job. "I can't bear to just throw it away," she says. "If a fellow teacher says, 'I want that,' I reply, 'It's yours.' I ask others if there is something they would like to have. I will put my books in the teachers' lounge where they can be shared. And I plan to give some materials to the church to use in Sunday School classes. The rest will be put out on display for anyone to take.

"I'll miss the children and my friends at school," she says, "but I'll now have time to do the things I've always done only do a better job. I plan to lead a busy, full life."



Albert & Laverne's Story

She became a role model to many of her students who were inspired by her to become elementary teachers . . . and some of them still use her **“Fun-Fun-Fun”** tricks-of-the-trade.

She was publicly recognized for her work in the classroom when she was named Meade 46-1 Teacher of the Year in 1981. She also served on the governor's Education Task Force.

Meade County Times-Tribune • May 27, 1981

Focus / on education

Elliott, Jacobs and Ruebel named Meade 46-1 Teachers of the Year

Three Meade 46-1 School District staff members have been selected as local Teachers of the Year.

They are Laverne Elliott, a first grade teacher at Sturgis Elementary; Marcia Jacobs, sixth grade teacher at Piedmont Elementary; and Frances Ruebel, senior social studies teacher and debate coach at Brown High School.

Each year the superintendent of elementary and secondary education sponsors the South Dakota Teacher of the Year Award. All private and public schools are invited to nominate teachers for that award for 1982.

The South Dakota winner will be nominated for the National Teacher of the Year Award, which is sponsored by Good Housekeeping Magazine in cooperation with the Encyclopedia Britannica and The Council of Chief State School Officers.

Nomination criteria includes that teachers should be exceptionally skillful and dedicated teachers who are planning to continue in an active teaching status. Major purpose of the project is to recognize the contributions of the teachers.

Meade district's school population makes it eligible to submit three nominees. Local Teachers of the Year are selected by a committee consisting of a school board member, administrators, classroom teachers, and the president of the local teacher's association.



Laverne Elliott points out aspects of a theater project to her first-grade pupils. (Staff photos)



Francie Ruebel goes over an assignment with



Albert & Laverne's Story

Throughout her life in Sturgis, Laverne was active in many local organizations, including the Sturgis Area Arts Council, Fort Meade History Museum, St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Delta Kappa Gamma and PEO.

She had an intense love of gardening, and entertaining her many friends gave her great pleasure.



Albert & Laverne's Story



Members of the Black Hills Macy's Board of Directors are ready to sell tickets for the upcoming season at prices exactly the same as last year. From left are Ralph Macy, Rusty Molstad, Al Elliot, Verne Bierle, Bernie Eveleth and Paul Ross. Season ticket books and box seats can be obtained from these and other board members.

Al was also an active member of the Sturgis community. He was on the Board of Directors of the Sturgis Titans, a minor league baseball team and served as treasurer.

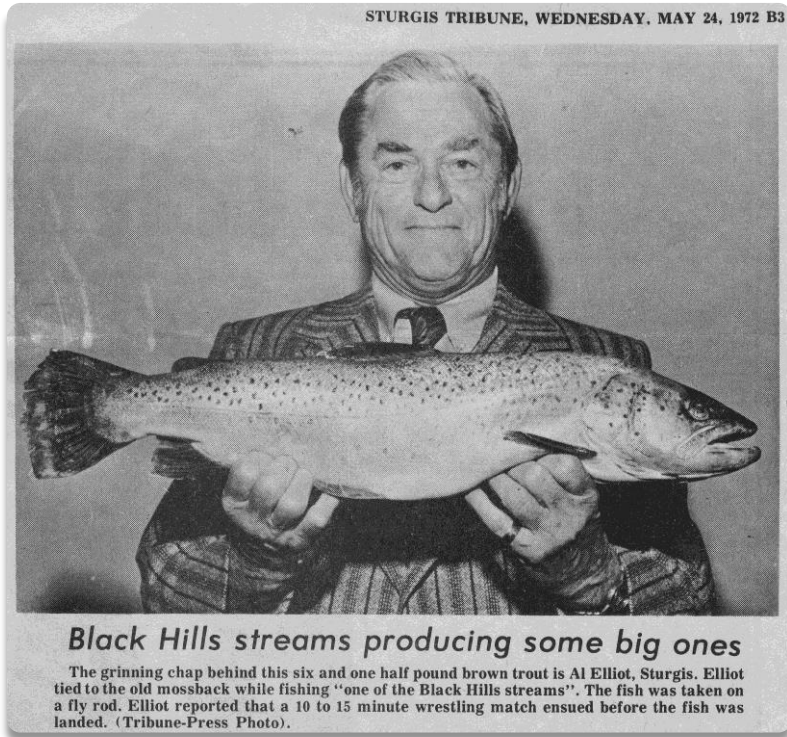
He was involved in the Basin League Baseball Association and supported youth sports in Sturgis.

Albert & Laverne's Story



He was active in Naja Shrine, the Scottish Rite Masons, Rotary, Optimist Club and served on the Vestry at St. Thomas Episcopal Church.

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He also continued to serve his country as an active member of the Air Force reserves from which he retired with the rank of Lt. Colonel.

He continued to serve for many years after his retirement as a volunteer in Retired Affairs at Ellsworth Air Force Base.

Albert & Laverne's Story



And he never lost his passion for South Dakota and the out-of-doors. Al never missed a fishing or hunting season and closely guarded the location of his best fishing holes.

When both Laverne and son Mike took up skiing, Al did too, even though he thought that at 50+, he was too old.

Albert & Laverne's Story



Al died in 1992 at the age of 81. Laverne died in 2018 at the age of 94.

Although they were both born and raised elsewhere, Sturgis was home.

Joan McDowell Soelzer

"Laverne was fun to be around and always enthusiastic about teaching."

"Laverne would be so pleased to see the outcome of the Elliott donation to the Sturgis Library. Many children will enjoy the beautifully decorated new room."



Ruth Smit

“Laverne’s laughter and upbeat personality is truly missed.”

“I feel blessed to have been friends of the Elliotts.”



Harriet Quail

“Laverne wanted the children to always do their best. Her favorite expression was, 'Work is fun'. And she made learning fun.”

“Thank you for your dedication to Sturgis. And Kathy and Mike, thank you for honoring your parents in this wonderful, fitting way.”



Sandi McNenny

“So here we are today accepting another wonderful gift from the Elliotts in the form of a donation, by way of their son Mike and daughter-in-law Kathy, going towards the newly remodeled children’s room in the Sturgis Library.”

“Thank you, Al and Laverne...Mike and Kathy!”



Kathie Flagstad

“Laverne was such a dedicated and caring teacher...”

“What a role model and unforgettable friend. Her legacy will live on and her devotion to all children and friends will be forever cherished memories.”



Kathy Behrens

"There are so many fond memories I have of Laverne and Al."

"I surely do miss all those fun times with Laverne and Al."



Mary Tribby Stewart

"She taught me how to read and taught me how to make friends. And she has remained my favorite teacher through 19 years of schooling."

"I am forever grateful that my education began with such a beautiful, kind, warm woman."

