

By Lori Pankonin

Co-Publisher

I had the privilege of going to kindergarten Friday and what a day. It was Grandparents Day at the elementary school in Red Cloud and I gladly accepted the invitation from our grandson, Austin.

Can't help but chuckle when I think back to the day he called. His mother had already informed me of the date and when he asked me to come, I said I'd put it on my calendar.

"No, just put it in your GPS and head on down," was his response. Calendar?

Why bother with a calendar? Kids have a different vocabulary these days.

Although many things have changed, the basic principals of what is taught in kindergarten remain strong. Of course, learning to read is key in life but learning to cope is valuable as well.

I found it interesting to hear Mrs. Schulz remind certain students to remember their manners. In more than one situation, she asked a student if he was making good choices. Good manners. Good choices. What valuable practices.

I was very impressed with the teacher's calmness and was reminded what saints teachers are. What a responsibility to develop young minds and remain sane at the same time when dealing with all the extra energy.

You have to maintain a positive learning environment when Johnnie doesn't want to pay attention, Janie whines anytime someone looks at her wrong, Tommy can't quit talking, Susie immediately catches on, Joey doesn't get it, Frank is always sad and Tammy always wants to tell a story that has nothing to do with the topic at hand.

And you'd have to maintain a degree of confidentiality since some youngsters tend to share more than enough information. You just never know what a kindergartner might say. One little girl introduced her grandpa and said he used to run but now he can't run anymore. Grandpa just smiled. He looked perfectly fit to me.

At lunch, we sat next to some grandparents from Hastings. Austin shared that he used to live in Imperial where I live but now he lives in Red Cloud. The gentleman asked if he has brothers and sisters and he said two sisters. When asked if they're older than him, Austin said that Tayvin is 2 and then named the second sister and said she's one, actually she's not out yet.

What a kick. His second sister hasn't been born but is due in December. They already call her by name. And no, she's not out yet. I'm sure kindergarten teachers could write a book of such comments.

Another recess time. Adults would be more likely to forego the outside activity when it's cold and the wind is ferocious, but that's not the direction taken. Just put on a jacket and go play. Austin wanted me to climb this cool wall in order to get to the slides above. When he realized that might be a bit challenging for this grandma, he guided me to the other side of the playground menagerie.

Grandma, I found you some stairs, now come on!! How considerate. So up I climbed and down

I crouched to get through the hole and bravely I took my first experience at climbing down and up this type of bars and down the double slide I went, side-by-side with Austin.

Was I the only adult on the contraption? I think so. Was Austin thrilled? Definitely. Was it time for me to be a spectator. Yes. I then had a chance to visit with other windblown grandparents.

Reading, sharing, recess, music, art, lunch, play, planning. It was fascinating.

I was reminded of Robert Fulghum's philosophy, "All I really need to know I learned in kindergarten." Share everything. Play fair. Don't hit people. Put things back where you found them. Clean up your own mess. Don't take things that aren't yours. Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody. Wash your hands before you eat. And the common sense list goes on.

Wouldn't our world be a better place if EVERYONE learned and used these lessons!!

Thanks, Austin, for giving me more reasons to be proud of you. Thanks teachers and helpers for hanging in there! You're a special breed.