

Margery Therkildsen Richardson Distinguished Alumna

By Julianne Couch
Alumnews Editor

Fast Facts:

EDUCATION: BA, '58, Music Education

OCCUPATION: Music educator (retired) and rancher

SELECTED ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Having taught many thousands of students in Wyoming to appreciate music

FAMILY: Late husband Ross Richardson; four children: Bill Richardson, Rod Richardson, Kari Gifford, Thyra Page

HOBBIES: Sharing the history of her home, the historic Overland Trail Ranch southwest of Laramie, and writing a history of it for publication.

Albany Count native Marge Richardson has taken her teaching career on the road. She was the first to teach music in all the rural school in the county, which meant driving 2000 miles a month, visiting more than a dozen rural schools. She also lived for a time in Sheridan County and taught both in the town and county. At Ulm she had four students and taught not just music, but the whole curriculum. It was at a school in Riverton she had her first teaching experience. "I was scared, and oh so lucky to have a wonderful mentor teacher that I taught with. She knew how I felt - she helped me every step of the way." Richardson taught in elementary schools around Albany County for 31 years before she retired. For Richardson, retirement didn't mean she stopped teaching music. Rather, she continued to volunteer as a music educator at schools around Laramie. Furthermore, she came out of retirement for one year when a school in Harrisburg, Neb., was in danger of entering a school year without a music teacher.

Karin Jones was a teacher at Banner County School at the time, and recalls how Richardson came to the children's rescue by volunteering to help out.

"Mrs. Richardson brought style, grace, humility, love, and an amazing knowledge of music to the children and adults in our community. She



Marge (Therkildsen) Richardson, Distinguished Alumna

exposed the students to a wide range of musical styles and instruments over the year, and as her love of music and her profession shone through her eyes it ignited an excitement and appreciation for it in the students."

Richardson recalls those long drives to the school in Nebraska. "It seemed as though every Sunday night or Monday morning and Tuesday it was the worst weather of the week because those were the days I drove. It was fine because I knew it was just a year, and I had a good vehicle," she said nonchalantly.

One of her former students in Laramie, Michele Rose, became a music teacher in part because of Richardson's mentorship. Rose's three children had been Richardson's students, long before Rose herself went back to school to earn her music degree. "As my mentor teacher during student teaching, Marge was gracious to let me take the reins and gave me lots of advice and materials, but plenty of room to make mistakes and grow. She always supported me

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and was there when I was perplexed about what to do next."

Patty Meier, also a music educator in Albany County, recalls Richardson as "compassionate and patient." She believes any student taught by Richardson would "recall her love for Wyoming history and the music of the cowboys and the west." One highlight for these students must have been the annual Fourth Grade Rendezvous. Richardson explained

that the Black Powder Club in Laramie organized this event to help fourth graders with their Wyoming history curriculum. "For several years it was at my ranch, which meant about 300 kids would come. It was fun."

In the 1960s, Richardson and her late husband Ross lived on the UW Experimental Farm in Sheridan. He was the UW seed certification specialist before his retirement. Together they weeded, mowed, and took care of the animals. After his death in 1985, she set up a scholarship in his name to assist students in the College of Agriculture's Department of Plant Science. She has remained involved with the agricultural community in part because she now lives on the historic Overland Trail Ranch, which she operates as a working ranch. She is a member of the Albany County Cow-Belles, which promotes education about beef. She is a member of the Albany County Historical Society and is a volunteer with the Wyoming Territorial Prison state historic park.

At UW, she was a member of Chi Omega sorority and a majorette in the UW marching band. She completed her music education degree but came up four hours short of second degree in business education. Only a typing class stood between Richardson and a double major, she explained.

UW is a family tradition for Richardson. Her father was a native of Laramie, and his older sister graduated UW in 1908. Her daughter, Thyra Lynn Page ('08) is one of many other family members to graduate UW. According to Page, her mother's passions are her family, her ranch, and music. "To this day, she continues to get compliments from students around Laramie. She cannot go into a store where she is not recognized as 'the favorite' music teacher and she is often hailed and praised as the 'best music teacher ever' by her students."

Richardson reflects on her love of music and music education. "I would be so sad to see it go away because it truly does make a well rounded person. Children love it. They love to perform. My favorite times were watching kids put on a musical play. They work so hard and love it so much, it is good for them, and gives them a chance to shine. Music should be part of their lives."

And of being named a Distinguished Alumna, Richardson said, "I'm flabbergasted, I'm humbled, I can't get my mind wrapped around it. I feel like a sheep that snuck into the bull pen." ❧