

I REMEMBER, ISABELLE WAUGH

Isabelle Waugh
21432 Rio Oro Drive
Cornelius, NC 28031
August 28, 1996

Dear Mr. Fuyuumu,

I am delighted to be included in the celebration of the tributes to the Japanese Americans and Estonians. I remember well the day the Japanese Americans arrived at B.H.S. Since it was so close to the end of the war, I did not know how they would be accepted. But the children were so charming, polite, unpretentious and diligent that soon they were highly respected and elected to positions of leadership. (One year all five of my class officers were J.A.'s)

Besides teaching junior college preparatory English to many of them, I grew close to some through Future Teachers of America and the Honor Society both of which I sponsored. I'd love to know how many became teachers). I used to encourage (or demand?) a great deal of original writing. Through their essays, the students revealed many personal details of their earlier lives--many heart-breaking stories of loss and hardship. I also treasure the gifts--a cupboard filled with exotic boxes, tea sets, dishes, pitchers, and dolls. I'll be the donors never realized I'd have them fifty years later.

I also remember well the day the Estonians entered B.H.S. Dr. Loder coached a small group in English, but the rest were assimilated into regular classes. I was so impressed with their educational background, not only were they familiar with three to five languages, but they were far ahead of our American students in math and science. They had a degree of sophistication and pride that overwhelmed us. I remember giving an assignment for a descriptive paragraph and receiving a description of which wines should be served with each course of the meal. (Good heavens, I didn't even know that!)

The Estonians were so physically and socially different from the J.A.'s. They stayed together, speaking Estonian to each other. I had the feeling (not substantiated in the light of the material you sent me.!) that they were with us not by choice, desiring to go back to Estonia again--(very understandable considering their history)

What to me was most interesting (since I admire intelligence and ambition so highly) was the race to excel which developed between the two groups. I used to speak to my American-born students, questioning why they lagged behind in scholarship. They

used to laugh good-naturedly and answer that they wanted to participate in athletics, attend dances, and have a rich social life. But the J.A.'s and Estonian parents did not condone the American "teenager way of life". So it was always a race at graduation between members of the two new groups for valedictorian and salutatorian.

When I left B.H.S. I moved to Endicott, NY, with my husband who was an IBM engineer. I was persuaded to teach a sixth grade-- in an open classroom ranging from grade 4 to grade 9-- keeping all those levels going on at once was a real challenge.

We finally retired to a college community on the shores of a 35 mile long lake, Lake Norman (20 miles north of Charlotte, NC) I love the southern people and their much more relaxed life. I joined a club affiliated with the N.C. Women's Federation. Each year there is an arts and crafts contest, so I would enter the many crafts I've learned, along with an essay, newspaper article, a sonnet, a narrative and a lyric poem. The essay had to be four typed pages no more! It usually took me most of a year to gather information for the topic. The real challenge was cutting the pages to four. After city and county elimination, the best writings were sent to the state contest at Salem College. For ten years I won the state blue ribbon on such varied interests as windmills, manatees, owls and Dutch Art. Then one year I thought of my Bridgeton experience. It Did Happen Here (1987) deals with the Japanese Americans and Those Amazing Estonians with Estonians (1989). Notice the date -- freedom had almost arrived. In the course of research I contacted Mr. & Mrs. Vilms (Jaak and Juri having been two of my favorite students). How you ever found me or that I had written the essays is a real mystery to me!

Those years at B.H.S. will always be some of the happiest and most rewarding of my career. I am proud to be included in your museum. I'll enclose my address and maybe some of my beloved students will write to this "old lady".

Mrs. Gordon (Isabelle) Waugh
21432 Rio Oro Drive
Cornelius, N.C. 28031

P.S. We have a Bounder Motor home--34' and travel a good part of the year, along with our white cat, Fluffy.