

## Kenbridge lady sowed love in kindergarten



### Door To Memories

The roof is falling in now and weeds are choking the door to the old cottage where MiMi held her kindergarten in Kenbridge over 13 years ago. But time doesn't fade the memories Mrs. Clorann B. Bagley has of the children who passed through these doors for over 20 years.

For most of us the greatest sound in our language is Me, whether we admit it or not. But for an untold number of citizens in Nottoway, Lunenburg, and Mecklenburg Counties MeMe is the sound buried deepest in the heart. And that is spelled MiMi.

At MiMi Bagley's Kindergarten in Kenbridge, which closed in 1974, the sound MiMi meant love and pride. Just listen to her graduating class, dressed in shining cap and gowns, standing tall and proud in St. Matthew Baptist Church as they recited poems and sang songs for their equally proud parents.

Father, mother see us now,  
As we stand and take a bow,  
And we tell you some of what  
We've learned in school;  
We can count and we can write,

And we also can recite,  
And we've learned to hear and  
Heed the teacher's rule.

We've attended kindergarten,  
And we all are doing fine;  
And we feel that we are great,  
For today we graduate.  
We make up the class of Nineteen  
Sixty-Nine.

Although the little cottage behind Mrs. Clorann B. Bagley's house at 441 North Broad Street has not swelled with the singing and recitations of three to five year-olds since 1974 their innocent faces have not really changed with time. Just pick up any picture of her children and you'll see: "That's James Green, Vanice Washington, Alvin Hazelwood.." Her finger moved without hesitation from face to face—and these were the children in her first group over 30 years ago!

Mrs. Bagley, a small woman whose clear brown skin is free of worry lines and able to break into a flashing smile with the smallest excuse, seems ageless. She said she was 74, but if energy were the measure, she'd be much younger.

She and her husband, the late Deacon Horace S. Bagley, who died in 1983, (he was known as "the cooker" in the prayers of the children because he cooked the lunches) began their pre-school to help working parents. There was nothing like this before in Southside Virginia—and maybe there never will be again.

The school grew from five to 40 children a day during its 20 year life. Everyone wanted to go to MiMi's Kindergarten. Parents loved it and teachers could tell when a child came from MiMi's. Somehow they were different.

Mrs. Bagley laughed, almost embarrassed, when asked how much she charged. For a full five days a week from 8:00a.m. until 5:30 the cost was \$10, and that included lunch. When the school started, however, it was only 50 cents a day.

Mrs. Bagley not only taught them to read and count, but she taught them something infinitely more valuable. She made them feel good about themselves. If they didn't know anything else, they knew MiMi loved them. MiMi was the world because for three years she saw them more than anybody else, even parents. And the children didn't want to leave.

Programs given by the children at Christmas and graduation were the stage on which everyone could see the magic of MiMi's Kindergarten. Mrs. Bagley recalled one child who cried because she was not old enough to graduate. "I made her Mistress of Ceremony instead," she said, for all her children got a part in the program, especially the Mistress of Ceremony, who was too young to graduate.

There was no high educational theory behind this. Mrs. Bagley just "taught 'em to recite before they public because they's what they did when I was in school."

One child, who was afraid of the stage, was given this poem, written especially for the occasion.

I tell you its not easy,  
I wonder if you knew it;

To stand up here and speak a piece,  
It takes some nerve to do it.

When I was asked to speak a piece,  
I started once to cry;  
If you don't think that it is hard,  
You come up here and try.

But MiMi's school was not all hugs and applause. "Yes, I spanked 'em," she said, then adding "but I tried always to be fair and not get the wrong one." Children felt it was an honor to be spanked by MiMi.

All the children that MiMi touched still have some of MiMi in them. She got them back before the topsoil of the world was shoveled on. And memories of each child seem to sprout up as fresh as they originally were. Perhaps it is love that keeps these young faces from fading in her mind and heart.