

• • • • • *More Than a Superintendent!*



- *"I've learned to have a lot of confidence in people."*
- *"You have to listen to people - even if you don't agree."*
- *"Over the years I found that people are pretty smart."*
- *"You've got to treat people as people."*

These are statements of philosophy of an educator, but more than that, they are descriptions of a man's success in dealing with people.



***George Sauer at
Hugo, Colorado, 1915***

“I was born in Hugo, Colorado on August 17, 1911 on a ranch and I guess we thought times were fine then. Things were a lot different then, than they are now, but when I was real small they were just starting to get automobiles. Only a few people had automobiles, and I can remember when my uncle got one. We thought it was a great thing. It had a shift on the running board, head lamps, you know the gas lamps that had to be lit with a match. So things have changed an awful lot since then.

“As a child I had some responsibilities. I never did go out for athletics in high school. I went out one day and Dad said that was enough of that, I was needed at home. So I never did go out for athletics. There were three of us boys at home and we all had to go home and work in the evening. We were always kind of glad when school started in the fall 'cause then we didn't have to work in the fields anymore.

“I don't believe I ever ran for any offices in school. I was in a few school plays, but I never ran for any office. I ran for county superintendent a couple times after I got out of high school.

“When I was going to school, the superintendent was the math teacher, and you learned math whether you wanted to or not. He was a little stiff sometimes but we all had a lot of respect for him. He used to go around to all the different little schools and make speeches, and I would drive him in my car and take him around. His name was John Unger. He finally got promoted and he ended up in the State Department of Education. He was a man who could really inspire you. He used to scare the life

out of me in math sometimes. I'd be up at the blackboard doing something, and he'd yell-I'd just erase it all.

“I started teaching when I was 19 years old. See, in those days you could teach almost right out of high school. You just had to have 25 hours of college work. So I got my 25 hours and took a state examination in all the subjects taught in elementary school. You had to pass each of these subjects, and then you got a teaching certificate, and could teach. I taught rural school and the first one was called Amy-a little post office southwest of Hugo. I think it was about 30 miles from town. It was just a country post office. They don't have them anymore. It was kind of like Clark, only there wasn't so much of it as there is Clark. I taught there in Amy for three years.

“Then I moved to another country school like that one except it was larger and closer to my home, called Pattensburg. In that school there were 26 children in all eight grades. I had first graders, you know, beginners, people that had never gone to school. I'm still amazed that I ever taught them anything. In a rural school you get everything from the first to the eighth grade so you have to teach them something-at least so they can read, if nothing else. They ended up pretty well, though. Some were valedictorians in their graduating class from high school, so they must have done pretty well.

“I went to college at Greeley. It was called Colorado State College at that time. It's the University of Northern Colorado now. It's a good place to go to school. I don't know if teaching is a very good profession or not right now. It's kind of hard to get a job. It took from 1930 to 1943 for me to get my first degree.

***“He made people feel good about
what they were doing.”***



Teaching the Ski Band, 1944



George Sauer, Superintendent of Schools, 1966

“I came here as a teacher in 1943. It was during World War II, and there was a shortage of teachers because of the draft. Other teachers went to work in war occupations. I came here as a science teacher, but soon found that I had to teach music, band, and all the science classes. I taught one year and the next year I was acting high school principal. I was also a junior and senior class sponsor lots of times. I enjoyed working with the kids. During the war we had one of those sneak things for the seniors. We had Rusty Baker take us in the cattle truck up to Green Mountain Falls.

“Then once we had a student strike here when I was principal of the high school. This was over a Halloween thing. Somebody put some geese in the office and the superintendent, he really got upset. He said there would be no school activities until we found out who did it. Of course, this was a mistake. About half of the students didn’t come to school for a day or two. We just went ahead and had school and it was over with. I guess the superintendent softened up after a while because we never stopped too many people by trying to solve the problem by punishing everyone for what a few people did. We found out years later some of the people that did it and some of them are prominent citizens of Steamboat now. But it was really quite foolish to make such a fuss. It was bad, but it would have been a lot easier to clean it up and just forget it. It was quite an experience.

“Then in 1949 I became superintendent. It wasn’t like going someplace and applying for a job as superintendent. I had to apply but I had more of an inside track, too, where I was here on the job.

“It’s kind of hard to say which age group I enjoyed the most. I enjoyed the junior high kids even though some don’t. I always thought they were kind of refreshing. You have to treat them as adults, but you know that they aren’t going to act like it. But they really respond to you. I really enjoyed the high school kids too, especially here. We had our problems but we had our good times too. The things that made me mad then are pretty important to me now. One day I had this kid that used to be a real scoundrel in high school come into the office. He had been working in the police department, I believe in Los Angeles, and he was going to some Mid-Western city to be chief of police. And a lot of people that went to school a long time ago are still in the community. They were fine people. Couldn’t ask for better people.

“I think the teachers are expected to do more now. They’re expected to be the mother, father, supervisor and teachers to the kids nowadays. That hasn’t always been the case. I think the schools do pretty good considering what’s expected of them. There are still a lot of good teachers. I also think that in a school system like this everyone is trying to do a good job. There are a lot of parents that don’t do much for their kids, they let the school do it all-or expect the school to do it all. It’s a pretty hard assignment really.



Voc. Ag. class taking the Principal for a ride. George Sauer is on the pinto, 1947

“He seems like he’s grouchy, but he isn’t really.”

“The superintendent has to deal with pressures from the faculty as well as the community and the school board. It’s the kind of business where you’re trying to keep everyone happy. When I first came here, it was more of an everybody working together thing-kind of a fun type thing. In the fall before school started, we used to get the whole staff together and go up on Elk River to Seed House. There used to be some buildings up there at the camp ground. We’d all go up there and spend the weekend. We got everybody together and by the time we got back from there we were all pretty well acquainted. We pulled tricks on each other like putting potatoes in exhaust pipes and all kinds of silly things kids do. We got to be kind of one big family. Well, of course by now the system has grown bigger and it’s harder for everyone to get together like that.

“Back when I was first teaching many things were different. We used a truck with benches in the back of it for a school bus. My wages were around \$1,000 per year. We didn’t get paid for summer vacation. I bought a car with the first year’s wages. It was a FORD. When my wife and I were married, my salary was around \$5,000 per school year. I can remember in the 1930’s I was working in a hotel in the morning cleaning up the lobby and then working in the evening at a grocery store stocking shelves and things like that. We had a drought during that time so things were quite a bit different.

“I think education in the year 2000 there will be more private education than there is now. People taking kids out of public schools and putting them into private schools to get some other kind of education because they aren’t satisfied with what they get. I think education will be more individual than it is now. Everyone will be on his own program, instead of all the same. Schools may be financed other than through property tax. There will be more computers. The teachers will have to be more accountable. We talk about all that now, but we don’t do anything about it. Teachers may price themselves out of business like the coal miners.

“I think the youth today are the way they always were. I used to think the youth were going to the dogs. It was kind of the same thing 45 years ago, young kids are always getting in trouble. I can’t see where kids are much different than they ever were. I don’t think there’s that much difference in country and city kids anymore. I do think the country kids have an advantage over the city kids because they can have some cattle of their own and really start thinking how things are. Where just having everything handed to them, they don’t understand where it comes from or care. I’ve always had strong feelings for country kids.

They develop responsibilities that other children don’t have a chance to develop. It’s not the city kid’s fault, it’s just the situation. They have no way of really getting responsibility. Some parents try to come up with something for the kids to do.

“I feel that our country’s leaders are doing the best they can. I think the man who gets elected president has an impossible task. I think we have some real problems but we’ve always had those. The thing that’s different today is the television. The minute anything happens, you know about it. People are so much in the public eye and they can’t do anything without someone knowing about it. We had wars before we were able to overcome them. It’s hard to understand that a few years ago we ran out of gasoline and then we find out that maybe we weren’t out of it. Now we have a lot of people getting cold because they can’t get enough gas to heat their homes. The people in this business are there to make money and they can make it seem like there’s a shortage.

“I think it’s very important to vote. Any kind of an election, city, county, or school district. That’s the only thing that makes this country different than all the rest of the countries in the world. Everybody has a chance to express themselves. The fact that a lot of people don’t is too bad. I don’t feel you’re going to lose the election anyway-I feel it’s important to have your say. Voting is probably the most important thing we do.



George Sauer

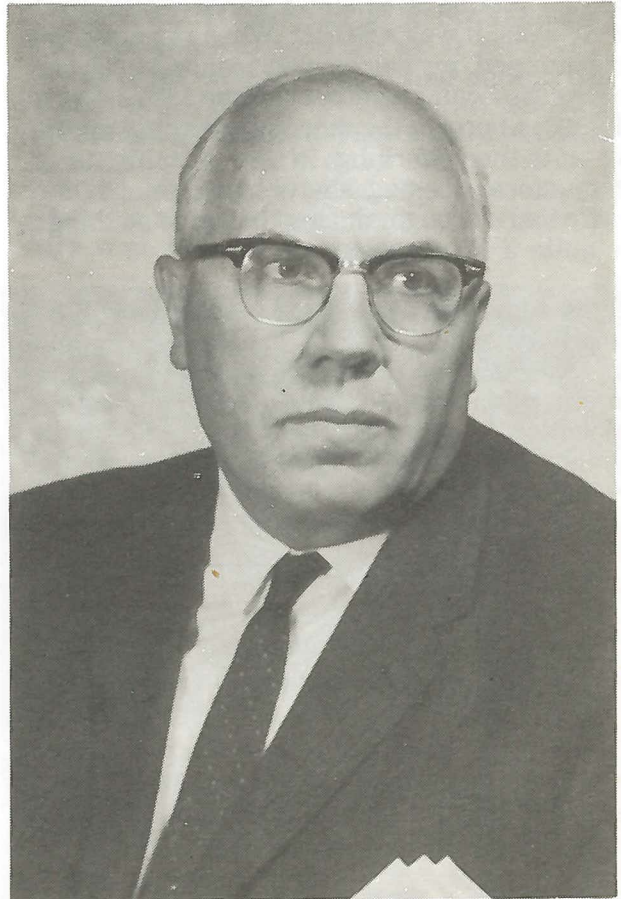
"I don't feel that crooked people are the only ones that get elected. I think we have some people once in a while who are kind of crooked and some people are made crooked. They get elected and find they can't handle it. They become involved in things that are under handed. I still think the system's alright. Oh, I complain about the Legislature, but I think that's what makes the country work. People think about what's going on and try to say what they feel about it. I think that the new president has a tough job. It's just like people coming on the school board-they promise a lot of things-but it remains to be seen. Other people always say if it were them they would do it differently and better, but they would find they would have to work it out.

"He was a top-notch superintendent because he had a good grasp of how to work with people."

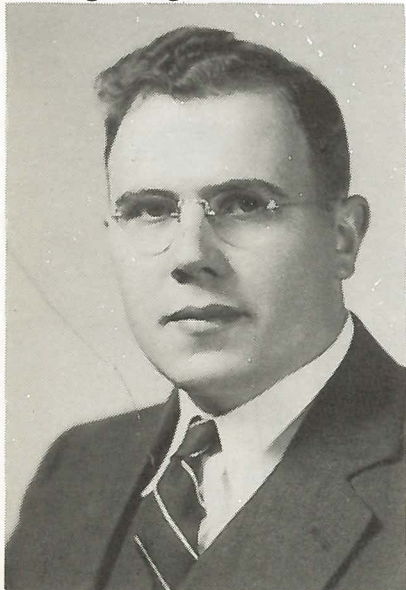


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"I feel that this country is better than any other country in the world. I think all you have to do is read about the other countries and what's going on in the world and you know that in spite of all our problems and crooked politicians, we still have a government that's above any other in existence in the world today. Or that has ever been in existence for that matter. These people who think they want to try Communism or something like that must not know what they're talking about. Because the people that live in those other countries-why would they want to slip out of their country and come to this one? The only thing that worries me, is if we are prepared enough to get ourselves involved.



"He treated teachers with great respect and in turn they had great respect for him."



In 1937, George Sauer was teaching in Bartley, Nebraska



“I spent 46 years in education. My wife taught for 33 years. We still have lots of things we’d like to do because the job of superintendent pretty well had us tied down. We like living in Steamboat. It’s a nice quiet little town. We’ve been able to see it change. I used to be scared to death when we first started the advisory council. I felt we needed the council because we had to have some input from the people. I sure didn’t feel very comfortable at first, but I found out they were generally smart people and actually a lot of them want the same things. Just the same I’ve learned to have a lot of confidence in people. I think you just have to treat people like people. All people are about the same and have the same feelings you do.

We went to see Mr. Root, Junior High principal, and asked him for information on Mr. Sauer. He told us: “I feel he’s one of the finest people I’ve known. He was remarkable as a superintendent. He never lost touch with how a beginning teacher feels for the first week of school. He was very sympathetic and very understanding. I have a tremendous amount of respect and admiration for him. He was a tremendous help in getting books and things for the school. He’s well-known throughout Colorado for his knowledge of school finance. The strongest word I ever heard Mr. Sauer say was ‘Baloney!’ ”

This story is dedicated to all of the people involved in education in this area in hopes that it will bring a new inspiration and an insight towards excellence in education.

By Mike Bettger and Debby Smith

A special thanks to the people who helped us with comments and the story.

“I think he’s wonderful”