

Spotlight on Thyra Downey

Certainly one of the most interesting, amusing, dynamic, and most beloved women who ever attended the Sale Creek Presbyterian Church was Thyra Downey. Thyra was the daughter of John and Florence Downey. John was a deacon in the church until his death in 1937. He was a brother to elders Addison and Ed Downey and to Florence Coulter, mother of Luther Coulter.

Thyra was a teacher at Sale Creek for many years and was the epitome of the profession. She loved her students and showed it to them with her acts of kindness and her love of knowledge. She loved art and spent lots of time with her students teaching them to draw and color and appreciate art and pictures. She read stories to her students and taught them a love for books. In her spare time after school, she sold World Book Encyclopedias. She did this as much to get good books into children's homes as she did for the commissions on the sales.

Thyra was a regular attendee at church and never missed. Because of her faithfulness and leadership, she was elected as a deaconess at the same time that Gertie List and Stella Patterson served in the same offices in the church.

Thyra was a wonderful storyteller, and some of her best and funniest stories were things that had actually happened to her. One Sunday morning she put on a nylon dress and drove to church. Her car at the time was the type that had the battery mounted under the driver's seat. The battery had leaked acid which had made a small puddle under the seat the tail of her dress got into the acid and began to eat away at the dress. When Thyra arrived at church and got out of her car, she ran her hand down the back of her dress to smooth out wrinkles, and that is when she noticed that a large part of the back of her dress was gone, but not before several parishioners saw petticoat and bare leg. She jumped back into her car and drove home to change clothes.

She also loved to tell the story about how her mother, Florence Downey, became fixated on the question of whether or not there were termites under their floor...this at the age of 90 years. One day Thyra came home from teaching and was unable to find her mother. Eventually she heard a muffled thump under the floor. Walking outside to the access to the underside of the house, she called to her mother and was answered by Aunt Florence who explained that she could not stand it any longer not knowing about the termites and had gotten the flashlight and crawled under the house to look for them.

Whether as a Sunday School teacher, a classroom teacher, a neighbor, or a friend, Thyra continued her life's mission of loving and caring for others in life until 1962 when she was diagnosed with cancer. She retired in June of that year just after having taught the class that Roger Coulter was in, and she died in November shortly after the Cuban Missile Crisis ended. She was sorely missed by all those who knew her, but in her death, Thyra heard the Lord say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."