

Fern LeMay Patterson, 81, Carpio, died Sunday, September 30, 2007, in a Minot hospital. She was a retired teacher, and spent 38 years of her long career in the school at Carpio—a place that was a major part of her life.

She was born April 23, 1926, in Minot, a daughter of Martin and Barbara (Watne) Sullivan. Her mother's family were pioneers in the Des Lacs Valley, coming there from Norway before statehood was declared in North Dakota. She was raised by an uncle and aunt, Anna and Ole Meland of Carpio, and remained with them until starting school in Kenmare where her family lived.

In the 1930s, the Sullivans moved to Carpio. Fern continued her education there and graduated from Carpio High School in 1944. She attended Minot State College, and in 1946, was awarded a standard teaching certificate. She later returned to the college, and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in 1968. She continued her education over the years, compiling sufficient hours for a master's degree. While she did not earn the degree, she focused on courses she felt would improve her performance in the classroom.

On Oct. 25, 1947, she married Girdell Patterson at Carpio. They made their home on their farm west of Carpio. She moved to Trinity Nursing Home in Minot in May 2003.

After emerging from college in 1946, Fern taught for a year at Underwood and a year at Carpio. She continued to teach in the Carpio school system for the balance of her career except for the year 1952, when she taught at Donnybrook. In the early years of her teaching in Carpio, the school operated out of the old Mueller Hotel in Carpio. The school building had burned down in the fall of 1944, the year she graduated. During her career, she taught students from the third through the eighth grade. She maintained a dual career for many years as both a teacher and elementary principal. She also taught girls junior and senior high physical education for a brief period—long enough for her students to claim two district championships.

After earning a remedial reading credential, she organized and ran a remedial reading clinic in Donnybrook for two summers, serving grade school students from both Carpio and Donnybrook. In 1976, she was named one of the outstanding elementary teachers of America. In 1982, the Carpio Jaycees honored her again as an outstanding educator. She was chosen Woman of the Year in 1985 by the Minot chapter of the American Business Women's Association. She retired from teaching in 1990. Had she taught for one more year, she would have had third generation students from two families whose children attended the Carpio School.

During her career, she discovered that only two students shared her April 23rd birth date.

She was a member of the national, state and local education associations, the American Legion Auxiliary, the Air Force Association, the Minot Elkettes, the National Rifle Association, Royal Neighbors of America and the Carpio Lutheran Church.

She had many colorful moments in her teaching career. One of them involved a pair of identical twin boys, Bob and Joe Berquist, who were her students the year she taught at Underwood and the only twin boys she ever encountered as a teacher. They were so identical, she could not tell one from the other, and the boys capitalized on that, occasionally switching seats in the classroom. But the other students would start to giggle and finally give away the secret as to which twin was which.

When she was first teaching at Carpio, both the girls and boys basketball teams were limited to just one regulation basketball for use in regulation school games. For practice, they were forced to use rubber basketballs that had to be laced up by hand, not stitched to close them up. And the town hall where they practiced had no showers. This was especially distressing to Fern, who was a real lady, dressed in classy fashion, and taught her girl students how to be ladies, paying special attention to things like manicuring their nails properly.

Back on the farm with her beloved Girdell, best known as "G.W.," she helped plant the trees that stand on the hillside behind their home. For years, she maintained a large flower garden until it became infested with garter snakes. That halted her gardening interests.

Survivors: husband of 59 years, Girdell G.W. Patterson; son Dr. Daniel Patterson, Littleton, CO; sisters: Doroles Haaland and Helen Haaland, both of Minot; and numerous nieces, nephews and cousins. She was preceded in death by her parents, the Melands, who helped raise her, brothers-in-law Olaf and Martin A. Haaland, and a cousin, Gordon Sullivan.