

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

**EDWIN A. NOLTE:**  
**LUTHERAN TEACHER FOR FIFTY YEARS**



*An Oral History Project*

*by*

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Interview on April 19, 1997*

## Edwin A. Nolte: Lutheran Teacher for Fifty Years

### Interview Summary

This interview was conducted on Saturday, April 19, 1997. My grandpa, Edwin A. Nolte, met me at 9:00 a.m. at St. Paul's Lutheran School in New Ulm, Minnesota. True to form, Grandpa and Grandma made a day of it. They left their Minneapolis suburb early that morning, spent the morning and early afternoon at school for the interview, and attended my Seminary Chorus concert at Bethany College in Mankato, before finally returning to Edina that night.

Although I have had years to come to learn from my grandfather, I hope that in this one interview that the viewers will benefit from some lessons that his life teaches. As we walked through the classrooms where he taught for the last nine years of his ministry, some changes were obvious since his retirement in 1980. His homeroom had been turned into a computer lab, so we kept walking down the hall to a more traditional looking classroom for the first and final segments of our interview. We took a walk down into the gymnasium to talk about the athletic program that he began in 1930 at St. Paul's. Then we took a table in the library which he helped to organize when the new building was completed in 1971. He was very proud to show me the well-equipped library. Even after Grandpa retired in 1980, he still returned periodically to finish installing the wooden shelf dividers which he built specially for the room.

Later in the afternoon my grandma, Emma (nee Loeslin) Nolte, joined us for a while. Although I intended to save this segment for my own family's history apart from this project, some of these comments proved so interesting that I included them too. Although this project focused on Grandpa, I could not help but honor Grandma as well, who has been at his side for sixty-five years now. God has blessed them both with long life and good health.

When comparing the past with the present, the advancing technology always stands out as one begins to note the differences. Grandpa's homeroom from 1971-1980 had been filled with

computers. As I listened to him describe the process of copying pages one by one off of a pan of jelly-like substance, I thought of the color ink jet printer on my desk at home and the elaborate copy machines and color copy machines available today. He used what was available when it became available, whether it was a hectograph, mimeograph, or an overhead projector. The lesson we can learn in this case is that we need to keep our eyes open to the new blessings that God is giving to us. Some of the technology which we use every day didn't exist twenty years ago, let alone in 1930. May we never take for granted the tools that God has provided through advancing technology. Reviewing the past can help us appreciate things such as copiers, computers, audio and video equipment, and even automobiles. We should be wise steward of these tools as we seek to speak the Gospel to the nations and nurture God's people.

By listening to Grandpa's stories about life during World War II, we can begin to put our present peacetime into real perspective. Peace is a gift from God's hand and so it should be regarded. It is difficult for my generation to imagine trying to teach students who not only miss their brothers and fathers, but are not even sure if they will be returning. We can devote ourselves to carrying out Christ's Great Commission without the preoccupations and anxieties of war.

An attitude that seems to be lacking these days is what I might call a "face value" outlook on life. Grandpa seemed to reflect in his conversation a certain attitude of trust in God. He worked hard, prayed, and left the results to God. There were no anxious, fearful moments. There was no urge to give up by "throwing the flint into the corn", if a called worker puts his efforts in God's hands and then does with might whatever his own hands find to do. Grandpa's habit of challenging himself carried over into his dealing with his students. Even if they protested, he did not hesitate to challenge his students in their study, play and music. Expecting little achievement or obedience from children does them no favors.

This "face value" attitude includes the Eighth Commandment when dealing with fellow called workers. Grandpa said that we should "treat each other as fellow Christians until they

definitely prove otherwise”. Instead of assuming the worst motives behind the actions of our Christian brothers and sisters, we should take actions in the best possible way. Judge actions if need be, but do not assume God’s ability to judge hearts and minds. If we exercise love and respect for fellow Christians, we should have a minimum of problems.

My grandfather’s faith is an encouragement to me as an example of the devotion that the love of Christ inspires. The regular dialogue that my grandparents have carried on with Jesus each day through Bible study and prayer provides a good example for any Christian. Their lives have also been an example of God’s grace. When someone ninety years old says, “God never left me in the lurch,” all Christians can praise God’s faithfulness and expect the same promised support in the trials of their own lives. Grandpa’s closing comments provide perhaps the most important advice he could give to someone preparing himself to serve in the preaching or teaching ministry: “Be faithful to the Word. You can’t lose.”

## Video Chronology

<u>Time:</u>	<u>Topic:</u>
0:00	Introduction
1:30	Birth and childhood in Fairmont
2:15	A close call for Edwin
4:50	Early schooldays - a splinter on the first day
7:45	Transportation to the schoolhouse
10:00	German to English transition, bilingual classrooms (Please disregard the brief editing difficulty on the videotape.)
12:00	Different translations of the Bible
13:15	Nourishment from the Lord
16:00	Confessional Lutheran grandparents
17:45	Uncle Paul Beck, pastor
18:30	Encouraging others toward ministry
19:15	Public vs. Lutheran school
21:10	Deciding to become a teacher
22:15	Typical day "on the hill" at D.M.L.C..
23:30	Band and athletics
26:00	The change in athletic programs
27:45	Building an athletic program at St. Paul's
32:30	The elementary school basketball tournament at D.M.L.C.
33:30	The new school library
34:45	Music and especially singing
36:00	<u>The Lutheran Hymnal vs. Christian Worship</u>
38:00	Teaching students to sing
43:15	Conditions during World War II
46:00	State certification
47:30	Discipline in the classroom
49:45	Healthy relationships among teachers and pastors
52:30	Switch to <u>The Lutheran Hymnal</u> , 1941
54:15	Departmentalizing from the start
56:00	Teaching below "the hill"
57:15	Practice teaching program
1:01:45	2713 memorable students
1:04:45	Never "throwing the flint into the corn"
1:06:45	Breakdown of the family - disrespect on both sides
1:09:00	Stress and burnout
1:10:15	Retirement
1:12:00	His own 11 children in class
1:13:00	The Great Depression



1:15:30	Summer jobs, wartime efforts
1:19:00	Snowdays
1:20:45	Changes in technology
1:25:00	Youth camp summers
1:26:45	Devotional life
1:28:30	WELS teachers
1:31:00	Advice to young teachers
1:33:00	Building programs
1:35:00	Tuition and school expenses
1:39:15	70 students
1:41:30	Retirement advice
1:44:00	Blessing of great health
1:44:45	Emma Loeslin (Nolte), first temporary call
1:45:30	Country folk
1:47:45	Living in the city with no fuss
1:49:30	15 cent lunches
1:50:00	D.M.L.C. 1930 graduation
1:51:15	Clarinet, orchestra
1:53:00	Good sermon illustrations
1:56:00	President John Meyer
1:57:30	Parting encouragement to new pastors
1:59:15	Graduation announcement of the Class of 1930