

Source: Onaway Outlook  
June 19, 2012

## Former Alpena mayor is Alum of the Year

*by Peg Herring*

*(First of a three part series)*

A small town in the early 1960s might not seem to be a place that would produce a woman destined to be a force in northern Michigan government, social change, and education, but that's exactly what happened here in Onaway.

Carol (Schmidt) Shafto, one of eight children from a well-known area family, might never have heard anyone say, "Young woman, you can become whatever you want to be," but she figured it out against some quite overwhelming odds.

There were people who encouraged her, of course. Although Onaway didn't have much of a window on the world, Carol traveled as a member of Karan Pregitzer's debate team in high school.

Team members got to see larger towns, colleges, and universities, and they acquitted themselves well, winning first debates, then tournaments, and finally state awards for excellence.

It was a big step for little Onaway and perhaps a beginning for Carol as she went on to debate for Alpena Community College. This Onaway-learned skill would come in handy in her future.

There were others from her Onaway days that Carol remembers well.

Ms. Mildred "Maude" Miller was the most influential in her future. Ms. Miller taught English and Carol remembers that she (and everyone else) was terrified of her. But the writing skills learned at OHS were the basis for a long career in technical writing.

Janice McAtee was the Methodist Church choir director where Carol sang as a teen. That and the OHS Choir gave Carol the love of music that led to singing with the ACC Collegiate Singers, numerous church choirs, and the Thunder Bay Arts Council Chorus and learning to play piano (at age 47)!

Little things changed her life.

The Schmidts were economically disadvantaged and their one car only went to town on Friday nights.

It was Harriet Lyon and Donna Buckley who made sure Carol got to church and choir practice, always offering a ride that made participation possible.

Elsie Thoms, known to all of Onaway as "Aunt Elsie," really was Carol's aunt, the sister of her dad Hank. Aunt Elsie was a strong influence and is very fondly remembered, especially in Onaway's Baptist Vacation Bible School.

Of course, who can forget their school chums. Carol had three she remembers so fondly, Linda Claycomb (Perkins), Sharon McAtee (Wendt) and Carol Schwenn (Korf). There are many tales to tell here!

Carol's parents Ruth and Hank are central to her story. Ruth was a County Normal-educated teacher who instilled love of learning.

The Schmidts did not have electricity until Carol was a young teen, but she remembers reading by lamplight, telling stories in the dark, singing songs as her mother taught her to sew and helped with those 4-H projects.

In honoring her mother Carol says "All the good in me, I learned from her. The bad in me is all me! My mother was an optimist against incredible hardship and adversity and always saw the best in everyone and the light at the end of the tunnel. Whenever I want to whine and complain, I think of mother with the wringer washer, hanging clothes for a family of 10 on lines laced through the living room. It left me little to complain about. I have been blessed."

Carol was the seventh of the eighth Schmidt children. Five are now deceased: Dorothy Peters Hawley, Janet Prichard Johnson, Marilyn McCumber Webster, Jim Schmidt, and John Schmidt. Carol still has a brother Harold (Eleanor) Schmidt in Onaway along with nieces and nephews. Her youngest brother Ray (Kate) lives in Manistee.

The Alumni Association is thrilled to have Carol Schmidt Shafto as Alum of the Year for 2012. Please stop by the tent on Maxon Field on the Fourth of July and meet Carol or reconnect with her.

*(Part two in next week's edition)*