

Elsie  
Erickstad  
Olson  
Memorial Endowment



Simply stated, Elsie Erickstad Olson was a woman before her time. She successfully balanced a family, home, and career at a time when most women did not work outside the home. She “did it all”—farmed, sewed, gardened, nurtured her children and pupils, volunteered, and had a flair for art.

Elsie Henrietta Erickstad was born January 29, 1918, to Ole S. and Anna R. Erickstad. She was a daughter of the prairie, born and raised in rural Ramsey County east of Starkweather, North Dakota.

She enjoyed school immensely and graduated as valedictorian of Starkweather High School class of 1936. Receiving a scholarship from Jamestown College, she registered in the fall of 1936, graduating with an elementary teaching certificate in the spring of 1938.

Throughout her childhood, Elsie knew Mervin Olson, son of Paul and Kristine

Olson. They were confirmed together at Trinity Lutheran Church and graduated in the same class from Starkweather High School. They married on May 14, 1938, and Elsie began her teaching career in Hamar Township country school in the fall.

In the spring of 1939, Elsie and Mervin moved to California where he had had jobs since 1936 after high school graduation. They lived in California for four years. Their first child, Merle Ellen, was born in March 1941. In the spring of 1943, they returned to Mervin's family farm. Their second daughter, Sharon LaVonne, was born in September 1943, followed by a third daughter, Nancy Kaye, in November 1946, and a son, Donald Paul, born in July 1951. They farmed for thirty-five years.

Elsie was asked to substitute for a teacher at Starkweather Public School in the fall of 1956 and continued teaching for the next eleven years. She set aside a certain amount of time in the summers to tutor students who needed additional help. Her positive attitude made her a role model for her family, students, and friends. She always saw the potential in every student who passed through her classroom. Children tried their best to please "Mrs. Olson" because she treated everyone fairly and always made them feel important.

Throughout the years, Elsie volunteered to be a Sunday school teacher and superintendent, worked in the Women's Mission Federation (WMF), the American Lutheran Church Women (ALCW), and the Evangelical Lutheran Church Women

in America (Women of the ELCA). She was always able to adjust to "new ways," even in "sacred places" like the church. She was also a member of the Sons of Norway, Homemakers, and the Odd Fellow Auxiliary (the Rebekahs).

Elsie joined Mervin in obtaining a short wave radio license and enjoyed becoming a member of the Ham Radio Club. The friendships developed in these organizations over the years were cherished until the day she died.

Elsie's appreciation for education came from her mother, Anna, also a teacher. All of Elsie's daughters have continued their mother's passion for teaching and being an advocate for public education. A love of literature, music, and the visual arts has impacted Elsie's children and grandchildren. She shared her love for reading and writing poetry and her love for Biblical stories, especially the Christmas story in Luke. She expressed joy for each family member's musical performances, and encouraged the accomplishment of dance. She tried to engage every child in drawing, sketching, and painting nature. Her youngest child, Donald, reminisced about a daily ritual of painting the sunset in watercolor with "Mom" as it was viewed through the west window in the kitchen. Truly, this woman enriched the lives of everyone she touched.

The Elsie Erickstad Olson Memorial Endowment was established in 2001 by her four children—Merle Freije, Sharon Etemad, Nancy Condit, and Donald Olson. The endowment will fund art initiatives at Lake Region State College. ★