

Fall 2019

Irma Dovey

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Lang 340

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Irma Dovey

Irma Dovey was born in 1908 and lived on a farm in rural Iowa. She went on to get her bachelor's degree at the Iowa State Teachers College (later renamed the University of Northern Iowa) and her masters degree from Colorado College of Education at Greeley, followed by a graduate study at the University of Iowa.



Irma Dovey (1908-2003) was a teacher, principal and writer. She graduated from the Iowa State Teachers College (now known as the University of Northern Iowa) and had many poems published. Here, she is pictured in a 1986 school photograph.

Throughout her life, Irma had two constant passions: education and writing. Irma taught in Iowa and Tennessee schools and was the principal for three different

Cedar Rapids elementary schools over the course of 22 years. She spent most of her life writing, whether it was her poems or letters or being the editor of her high school newspaper. Later on in her life, she taught writing courses at Mt. Mercy Junior College, Coe College and Kirkwood Community College. She was a member of the Nation League of American Pen Women and had many of her works published in various literary magazines.



Irma Dovey is pictured with her high school newspaper staff. She is pictured second from the left in the bottom row. Dovey's love for writing is seen throughout her life from her time as the editor of her school paper, to her teaching and writing.

They Don't Teach the Kids to Spell

"Why don't they teach that stuff in school?
Commas, periods, how to spell,
And not let each grow up a fool?
We learned in our day very well."

"Never mind," ad writers say.
"Pac and pak and pack, all three."
"Lite or light," spelled either way.
How does the child know what's to be?

"Duz" was thought up years ago.
"Does" must look both odd and strange,
A word that students still don't know,
With "Duz" by kitchen sink and range.

Why learn "pictures" when the word
"Pix" saves space, saves work, is neat?
"Prtly cldy" on weather screen.
Simplified spelling is hard to beat.

What can be wrong with teachers today?
Surely they must know full well
That in spite of TV ads like these
They ought to teach the kids to spell.

—Irma Dovey

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In a poem published on September 17th, 1986, titled "They Don't Teach the Kids to Spell," she explains her frustration with ad writers using lazy shortcuts and misspellings to get points across when space or time is limited. As an educator who specialized in English and grammar, she must have found it frustrating to see children misspell because advertisers spell things that way on television.

"'Never mind,' ad writers say. 'Pac, pak, and pack all three.' 'Lite or light,' spelled either way. How does the child know what's to be?" I think as a writer and educator, she finds the value in words and their proper spellings and she sees first hand the damages that shortcut spelling has on young, impressionable minds.

NOT SO FLATTERING

He called me "Dear." It flattered me,
Though it seemed a trifle bold;
Then I perceived the tone reserved
For the very young and very old.

- Irma Dovey

Irma was strong-willed. Many of her poems were told in the first person and depict her personality. In her poem "They Don't Teach the Kids to Spell," she is very up-front about how she believes ad writing and shortcut spellings are bad for kids and don't teach them good spelling habits. In another poem title "Not So Flattering," she writes about being called "dear" and was flattered at first until she thought about the tone in his voice and realized he was being patronizing. In a letter she wrote in 1990, she states that she had lost cartilage in her right knee and went to physical therapy to help with the pain. She had to discontinue going due to having cataract

problems and surgery and was able to drive shortly after. In her poem "Phone Fakers," she talks about how she won't be swindled into buying into whatever telemarketers were selling. This also might be supported by the fact that she never married.

Irma's dedication to writing and education shine through artifacts from her life. Through her words and actions, glimpses of personality can be noticed, even posthumously, along with the help of the UNI Archive Special Collections at Rod Library in Cedar Falls, Iowa.

A link to the Irma Dovey Papers in UNI Special Collections & University Archives is located [here](#).