

From Rootsweb.com - Message Board Post - 30 Dec 2004:

AUSTIN, TX - Steven Gallaway believes there is a Miss Doss in everyone's life. He never forgot Leona Doss, his first grade teacher at Austin's Mathews Elementary School more than 40 years ago. She offered constant praise, he remembers. Even on his report card, she kept things positive, noting that he talked a lot, but "in a nice, sweet way." Now new kindergarten teachers near Nashville, TN will take a bit of Doss into the classroom with them. Gallaway, 49, director of elementary schools for the Williamson County school district in Tennessee school district, wrote a song for next fall's new teacher orientation called "Miss Ripley's Kindergarten" that recalls his memories of Doss.

Gallaway took some creative license in composing the tune: Ripley is actually his grandmother's name - "Doss doesn't sing well," he said --but other elements of the song are true to life. "One day she held up a flashcard with the word "little" on it and asked who knew this word," he said. "I got it. She made quite a big deal out of it. You would have thought that I had just scaled Mount Everest." He remembers fighting with a boy who later became his friend. And his class read about the adventures of Dick, Jane and Spot. The teacher was a favorite for other reasons, he said, She had a name that was fun for a six-year old to spell and she entered one of his paintings in an art contest. It got an honorable mention. "The song is just a tribute to that teacher that we look back on and get that little lump in our throat over," he said. Gallaway said the teacher helped light the spark that gave him a love of language. "I may owe her a lot more than I realize," he said.

Doss started teaching in Austin in 1926 and continued until her death from cancer in 1967. Doss Elementary was built and named for her in 1970. In addition to self-portraits, she loved painting owls. The owl became Doss Elementary School's mascot. The school's principal, Sharon Raven in Austin, TX was delighted to find out about the song. "I think that many of us treasure memories of a particular teacher but I think it's really neat that

he took the time to put that into words and share it with other people," she said. "We don't say 'Thank you' to those people often enough."

LYRICS TO MISS RIPLEY'S KINDERGARTEN

Somewhere in the green hills of middle Tennessee
Stands a little country schoolhouse and a childhood memory
There's the class room of my first teacher, she's in my Hall of Fame
Kindergarten, Room 16, Miss Ripley was her name
She wasn't much to look at, stood about 5 foot three
She was probably only 30 but she still looked old to me
But she opened up a bright new world as I was only startin'
My trek through education in Miss Ripley's kindergarten

Where we learned to say please and we learned to say thank you
To read and write and say 'I beg your pardon'
there were doctors and teachers and lawyers and preachers
Planted in Miss Ripley's kindergarten
I remember sittin' in a reading group with Dick and Jane and Spot
And the time I spelled "little" how excited she got
And the time that she broke up a fight between me and Eugene Martin
And helped me to make up lifelong friends in Miss Ripley's kindergarten
I was grown and had a family when Miss Ripley died
Standing by her graveside even big old truckers cried
But her lessons keep on living in our minds and in our hearts
That's the mark of a mighty teacher...Miss Ripley's Kindergarten