Without having to give it a second thought, my favourite teacher was Miss E. Catherine Barclay. She was my French and English teacher for two years at East Calgary High School, during the last two years that the school functioned as a senior high school.

The English classes must have given her untold hours of work that could only be called drudgery. Every piece of paper we handed in for an assignment was carefully scrutinized. If a comma was out of place, or omitted, that mistake had to be corrected by us and returned to her for approval. To this day I never write a letter that her teaching doesn't come into my mind. She also arranged that we all have opportunities to deliver speeches to our fellow students. Many of us did not welcome this, but in later life came to realize its value. In addition, she initiated exchanges of letters between her students and overseas students; one of these has lasted over fifty years in my case.

My ability in French was minimal, and those classes were not very pleasant for me. She persuaded us to take part in a contest to find a winner who would receive a scholarship to attend a summer school course in the province of Quebec. Her wish was to make French more widespread in Canada.

I think the reason she became such a beacon of light for me was that she became a friend as well as a teacher. She encouraged me to join the Canadian Youth Hostel Association—an association that she brought to North America from its country of origin, Germany. She would take a few of us into the countryside around Calgary to help establish hostels where we could spend the night after hiking all day. This was a very new idea in 1933, when the first hostel in North America was founded at Bragg Creek by Miss Barclay and her sister Mary, along with the help of several of their friends. Our parents also deserve credit for agreeing to let us do this. We were only 14 and 15 years old, but such was Miss Barclay's influence that several of us were on hostel trips that gave us a taste of nature that left us longing for more.

Besides hostelling, she led a drama club at the school, because she felt the theatre was a worthwhile area for developing character. She gave her Friday evenings to lead the club. She had a remarkable ability to spot our strengths, put us in charge of an area where she felt we'd succeed, and then bow out of that particular project. She imparted to us a complete confidence that we would not fail her requests, and consequently we worked, researched, pored over library books, and went for advice to people in the area to get help. I don't think anyone in the club ever did let her down.

When she announced one spring that she was going to be in France during the next school term, the dismay we felt was very near to hysteria, because the drama club meant so much to us. When she saw how emotionally involved we were she helped us organize a play-reading group which would meet in each other’s homes on Friday nights. She gave us lists of plays to read and kept in touch by mail during the year she was away.

This outstanding woman expanded our horizons to cover the world and helped us develop skills and confidence that I, for one, feel would have been unknown were it not for her.