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REMEMBERING DORIS GATES, A GREAT TEACHER

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Doris Gates (1915-1983) taught Biology at Huntley, NE from 1938-1941, North Platte from 1941-1955, and Chadron State College from 1955-1974. She lived until her death at the foot of "Rush No More Butte" south of Chadron, was a member of the North Platte Tout Bird Club, and served as President of the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union and Editor of *The Nebraska Bird Review*.

Doris included plants and birds in her lectures on Biology, but she taught much more than that because she understood the beauty of life. She believed that beauty was in what you did rather than what you looked like, in what you were rather than what you were not. Maybe that's why she wanted to return as a Turkey Vulture in her next life. Her philosophy, which I try to pass on, allows me to forget the rotting, smelly mass of feathers I am trying to sketch, instead seeing dihedral wings soaring up and over Doris's former home.

Turkey Vultures are the consummate hang gliders. No amount of technical skill, gadgetry, or engineering can match the grace, majestic beauty of flight, and effortless poise these birds possess in the air. Yet they are ugly. They have a small, red, mostly bald head and small "hairs" that dot their skull like three-day-old whiskers on an old man. You can see their ears, which are covered by feathers in other birds. The beak is unusually long with a hardened, cornified tip and a huge nostril opening, which lets one look through it to the other side and is as out-of-place as the beak, which is like a big nose.

As I look at the dead bird, which reminds me of a runny-nosed, watery-eyed, rummy, bald-headed old man who needs a shave, I remember what Doris Gates told me and no longer see the ugly. I see a graceful, winged wonderment of the heavens, a magnificent collection of cytoplasm and tissue, a creature to aspire to in another life, simply because I had Doris Gates as a friend and teacher. I see the creature of beauty and say out loud, "Thank you, Miss Gates!"