

“Our whole life was at school”

— Rachel Riegert



Identical twin teachers Rachel and Alison Riegert both wanted to be teachers since they were children. Now the sisters teach at the same elementary school in Milton-Freewater. Staff photo by E.J. Harris

# TEACHER! TEACHER!

Twins Rachel and Alison Riegert have followed teaching careers to Milton-Freewater

By ANTONIO SIERRA  
East Oregonian

Being in two places at once is a long sought-after skill for teachers across the country, but Gib Olinger Elementary School's Miss Riegert has somehow mastered it.

On the afternoon of Oct. 3, Miss Riegert was reading her kindergarten students a story on barnyard animals.

Wearing a floral top and gray slacks, Miss Riegert occasionally paused to field questions on how horses sleep at night while some students clutched plush frogs, the theme of her room.

As she led her students from Room 418 to the playground for recess, Miss Riegert was also in Room 615, drawing a picture of dogs on a porch on a projector as a part of an in-class assignment.

“I will be the first person to say that it's not the best picture, but it looks like a dog,” Miss Riegert, wearing a floral top and gray slacks, told her students.

After the students were ushered out of school for the day, Miss Riegert finally allowed herself to be in one place at the same time in Room 615, which has a bird theme. Whether it's kindergarten teacher Rachel or third grade teacher Alison, all students at Gib Olinger Elementary School in Milton-Freewater know the identical twin teachers as Miss Riegert.

The sisters grew up in Eugene wanting to teach together. Their mother was a teacher, and the original vision involved co-teaching together in a farmhouse.

“Our whole life was at school,”



Alison and Rachel Riegert grew up in Eugene and always wanted to be teachers. Contributed photo

Rachel said.

Allergies prevented them from establishing a farm-based school, but the pair followed through on a career in education.

Attending college at Walla Walla University brought them to the Inland Northwest, and after graduating, the Riegerts took teaching jobs at Colville Valley Junior Academy, a Seventh-day Adventist school in northeastern Washington.

Colville turned out not to be a great fit for the sisters, and after one year, they took jobs at Yakima Adventist Christian School in 2000.

“We are very allergic to the outdoors and that's all [there is] to do in Colville,” Alison said.

Both of them taught elementary

school in Yakima for eight years before a contraction at the school caused by lower enrollment caused them to reconsider their options.

They thought back to their college years, where everyone in the community knew them as “the twins.”

So the Riegerts moved back to College Place and began taking substitute teaching jobs to support themselves.

The sisters soon found themselves attached to the Milton-Freewater Unified School District, where they filled in for jobs across town.

“It just felt like the place we were supposed to be,” Alison said.

In the meantime, the twins waited for full-time positions to open, and they eventually did: Alison started working at

Ferndale Elementary School in 2014 and Rachel got a permanent gig in 2015.

But the Riegerts wouldn't be thrust back into the same school until this year, when Gib Olinger's opening consolidated kindergarten through third grade under one roof.

The twins' photos on the staff page look like a layout error: two pictures of the same woman wearing identical clothes, glasses, lipstick and hairdo.

The Riegerts said they wear the same outfits every day, and that's the lifestyle they're most comfortable with.

They said they have similar tastes and ideas, not out of some sort of supernatural ESP, but just from being very close siblings.

When they were younger, the sisters were taken on separate shopping trips to buy gifts for each other. They ended up buying each other the same things.

The Riegerts live in the same house in College Place, and as evidenced by the interview, they often finish each other's sentences.

The sisters maintain that they have never pranked anyone using their identical status, and people who spend enough time with them can tell the sisters apart.

And their students also have ways of picking them apart.

“Children zero in on the weirdest details,” Rachel said.

For the especially eagle-eyed, Rachel wears a frog pin and Alison a bird pin to match their room decors.

Contact Antonio Sierra at [asierra@eastoregonian.com](mailto:asierra@eastoregonian.com) or 541-966-0836.



Left: Teacher Rachel Riegert leads a reading exercise with her kindergarten class recently at Gib Olinger Elementary School in Milton-Freewater. Right: Teacher Alison Riegert calms her class of third-graders before leading them out of the class at the end of the day recently at Gib Olinger Elementary School in Milton-Freewater. Staff photos by E.J. Harris