

✓ A tribute to teachers

Teachers vs. students: we're all in this together

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As the school year winds down to a close, it seems appropriate to take a look at teachers and the impact they have upon the lives of their students.

My father was a teacher, and he helped instill in me a deep respect for that profession. Joe M. Barr taught in the Estacada School District for almost 30 years and shared the magic of music with literally thousands of children.

Part of the legacy he leaves behind is that if you don't make big things out of little things and if you can work hard and laugh often, you'll make it in this world.

"NO such thing as a tone deaf child..." he'd say, "...the world does a terrible thing to kids. It tells them to be self-conscious and to be afraid of trying." I wonder how many adults feel the same way. Are we ever self-conscious and too afraid of failure to try?

My dad believed every student who happened his was a priceless gift. He believed in the potential of every child who came into his band room, even the ones who tried his patience.

I've had teachers who tried my patience. I can vividly recall the math teacher who spoke in such a low, repetitive monotone that the most interesting elements about this woman's class were the things her students did in order to stay awake.

Me, I just sat there involuntarily snapping pencils in half with my teeth.

I had a 6th grade P.E. teacher whose hair was so big, sprayed and poofed up that it was difficult for her to negotiate her head through most doorways. We always thought that if she ever actually joined in on any of the sports we played, or screamed any louder at us that her coiffed "do" would shatter like glass and she, in her embarrassment would run off screaming and never return. This dream was never realized. I think she just ran off with the science teacher for a little while.

I remember an instructor in high school who always had a strange look of delight on his face when it came time to pith the frogs for biology.

This reminds me of another teacher, Mr. Fuller, who had quite a promising career as a ventriloquist. He could throw his voice into anything he pleased. He'd sneak into our classroom just as squeamish students had scalpels poised to sever arteries and things on little froggies whom we had come to love as pets; and Mr. Fuller would then proceed to make little screams, songs and gurgling sounds come from their little open mouths.

Needless to say, after an episode like this, frogs and scalpels flew about the room like ticker-tape in a Macy's parade.

Then there's Mrs. Linguine. Mrs. Linguine was a substitute with delusions of returning to this planet as Ruler of the Earth. My most vivid memory of Mrs. Scare-you-right-to-death Linguine is the way she grabbed student's hair and shook it like a dog with a dead squirrel. (Shudder).

For the least little infraction, all three-hundred pounds of her would sort of pound her way to the offenders desk and she would either whack them with a sharp-

ened ruler or grab their hair and shake it in that dog-with-a-dead-things kind of way. We got her back, though.

Jimmy Connors put pencil shavings and a hot-pink tack on her chair.

She sat firmly down on the lot of it and thundered around for the rest of the day, unaware of the tack poking her backside, and looking as if she'd sat on a carpenter.

Justice had prevailed.

Teachers can try our patience by giving us huge tests that require us to mentally barf back bits of knowledge that only exist in our short-term memory and call it teaching.

They can try our patience by picking papers apart with a red pencil without once asking "Has this student learned what I have been trying to teach him and if not, why?"

They can put us to sleep, drive us to chew our nails and desk tops, give us nightmares and nervous tics -- but they can also change our lives.

I remember my sixth-grade art teacher, Miss Criever, who took my sister and I to an art museum on a week-end just because we had never seen one before.

I remember my high school algebra teacher, Mr. Guy Moore, who told me that I wasn't "bad at math" as another teacher had inferred before; he encouraged me and told me I could do it, and I did.

Mrs. George challenged seventh graders to read Shakespeare, Hemingway, and Steinbeck and inspired her students toward a lifetime love of reading.

Just as teachers can either inspire or try us, we can try their patience, also.

I tried the patience of Craig Lesley here at Clackamas, with a term paper on "the Elusive Sasquatch."

Mr. Lesley was far too kind

to tell me that this paper didn't even rate as restroom reading material, that it did in fact, bite it.

I tried the patience of Theater Instructor, Jack Shields with fits of tears and anguish during rehearsal with whispering sobs of, "But I don't want to kiss HIM... Can't you put someone else in his role? (Whine, simper) Can't we just shake hands or high five or something? Boo-hoo, boo-hoo..."

Looking back, I imagine that Jack must have mused silently to himself, "My she is certainly professional about this."

Even after episodes like that (and there were several) I always knew that Mr. Jack Shields was there to teach, encourage and gently nudge us forward -- even if he didn't give that role to someone else.

I tried the patience of C.C.C. Instructor Tom Richards with horribly written pieces that would have thrilled a seventh-grade teacher, but did not impress him. In high school, I had always gotten by with "clever-cute" compositions.

Imagine it, Mr. Richards actually wanted correct spelling and punctuation, too.

I also remember the time I was in an art class (with an instructor who shall remain anonymous) and our class was painting a picture of a gentleman in a swimsuit who was seated on a bar stool.

I did my best with the little K-mart Kiddie watercolor set I was using, and much to my instructor's amazement, had actually painted something that looked somewhat humanoid.

He came up to me and said, "Now, that is a nice little figure you have painted there, Linda..."

He then raised his voice and said "Class, class, I would like you all to come here and take a look at Linda's little figure."

The bewildered class looked

back and forth at one another.

Finally they began to laugh, looking at me and my little figure all the while, wondering why our teacher wanted them to view such a thing.

I don't know who was embarrassed most, but the next thing I knew, our teacher had walked out of the room.

So it would seem that we can all be trying at times, students and teachers alike.

But beyond all of the tedium and embarrassment from day to day, there are those teachers who inspire us in this journey called education.

These are usually the instructors who are themselves, inspired and encouraged in their work.

These are the instructors who love to see that light of "I got it!" blink on in a student's eyes, teachers like my Dad, Jack Shields, Tom Richards and many others.

It is possible, that at the opposite side of the spectrum -- those teachers who do not inspire -- are often themselves torn down and uninspired.

Some instructors have been at it for so long without so much as a "thank-you" from a host of ungrateful students, or a pat on the back from their supervisors, they have all but drowned in a violent sea of politics and bureaucracy, and they simply don't have the energy to care anymore.

I suppose that everyone can use a gold star now and then.

It would seem then, that teachers and students are not adversaries -- as hokey as it sounds -- they are members of a team.

While one strives to understand the best methods to get the knowledge across, the other must do his best to receive that information and speak up if something isn't clear; even if that something is a blithering Sasquatch paper, a painting of some guy in swim trunks, or a pithed frog singing "It's Not Easy Being Green."

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