



A Student You Will Never Forget

By Yolanda McHodgkins, Public School Representative

This has been an exhausting, frustrating, and discouraging year for many teachers. COVID-19 has kept school administrators and educators in all areas guessing as to what will happen next. First, there were the decisions about whether the students would be taught in-school or virtually. Then came the decisions about how to accomplish both methods. There were decisions about safe distancing and safe equipment. Some teachers had to decide whether to continue to teach in a time of pandemic or “hang it up and retire.”

Many teachers were questioning if teaching was worth the effort. At such times, teachers often reflect on the students they have taught. Some students brought a sense of pride, some brought feelings of disappointment or despair, some brought humorous thoughts, and some brought a feeling of sadness.

In Dalene Vickery Parker’s book *Christian Teachers in Public Schools*, she talks about a student whom she will never forget. She said one unforgettable student, Anthony, taught her something she needed to know.

Diagnosed with cancer his senior year, Anthony never once showed any evidence of feeling sorry for himself. He kept his nurses, his family, and his friends laughing with jokes and silly stories. He insisted on wearing his cowboy boots round the clock whenever he had to stay in the hospital. That way, he reasoned, he was ready to leave at the first possible opportunity. After all, Anthony had better things to do than lie around in a hospital bed. He loved to hunt, ride his four-wheeler, play with his nephew, and attend country music concerts.

It was from his hospital bed that Anthony received his graduation diploma. The superintendent, principal, and Anthony's fellow graduates gathered beside him in their graduation robes and conferred Anthony's honors upon him. But the real honor lay in knowing that young man and seeing steel in his backbone and his faith in his Lord hold up even when his body turned traitor.

To me, the most amazing part of Anthony's story is how he never once asked, "Why me?" In fact, when a friend questioned him once about why he was the one who had to suffer, Anthony responded quickly, "Why not me?" After all, I'm ready to go to heaven and somebody else might not be."¹

What memories do you have of your previous students? Do you have some students whom you will never forget? It is OK to admit that teachers sometimes have personality clashes with some students. Teachers are taught to rein in those feelings and overcome bad feelings with good. Some students may make you want to hug them (although that is a no-no), and they reinforce your commitment to teaching. Anthony would be one of those students.

Thank God for the positive students, and seek God's love and compassion for the students who could bring out the worst in you. Keeping yourself physically fit, well-rested, and well-nourished can reduce stress and help think calmly. Sometimes we are shocked when we learn about the background of one of our students. If you knew all the circumstances in the student's life, would you change your attitude and actions? You may be the only one who can love a student with the love of Jesus. What would Jesus do to help that seemingly unlovable student?

Romans 13:8-10 admonishes us, "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not covet,' and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."

If you would like to tell our readers about "A Student You Will Never Forget," write to Beula Postlewait at bpostlewait@kc.rr.com.

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¹ Darlene Vickery Parker, "Why Not Me?" in *Christian Teachers in Public Schools, 13 Essentials for the Classroom* (Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2012), 154-55.