



How Did I End Up Here?

By Marilyn J. Dominick, Chairperson of Nazarene Educators Worldwide

I was a first-generation college student. Although no one in my family had ever attended college, the influence of educators started quite early in my life.

A Mother's Influence

When my little sister started school full time, my mother took a job as an aide in the nurse's office at the school we attended. Right from the start, my mother supported our success in school, and we had many opportunities to interact with educators beyond our own classroom teachers. Throughout my school career, I was blessed with the example of many great teachers and really felt that joining the ranks of teachers was what I would do. By the time I reached high school, my mom was the principal's secretary, and I would have even more opportunities to interact with teachers who would be good role models.

And, by the way, I also learned who really ran the school! The building secretary and the head custodians were the ones who carried out all the details, and it was wise to treat them well and provide whatever they needed. I know this to be true, even today!

A Counselor's Influence

In middle school, I really loved math. As a junior in high school, I began to ask God for direction, and I felt especially close to Him, feeling His presence and leading. I became an officer in my school's chapter of Future Teachers of America, and I tried to find information about teacher preparation programs in nearby colleges. When I visited my guidance counselor, he said, "You know, if you were a boy, I would recommend that you prepare for a career in architecture or engineering. However, most girls who are good at math become teachers." Imagine saying that to a girl today! But his "guidance" was consistent with my plan, and I began applying to teacher colleges.

A Young Man's Influence

Now, an unusual turn of events occurred during the summer before my senior year in high school. A very handsome young man visited my church on a warm August night, and he totally swept me off my feet. He loves the Lord, and we spent my senior year getting to know each other and seeking God's plan for us. We decided not to wait until I finished college to get married. We married as soon as I completed high school. He was so supportive and vowed to help me complete my college education. He was already working as a state trooper. While money was tight, he never let me give up on my dream of becoming a teacher. With God's help, I beat the odds and finished college in five years, also giving birth to two sons during that time.

When the boys were a little bit older, I became a substitute teacher. Eventually, I accepted a half-time position as a math teacher. Oh, how I loved my classroom! When the boys were in elementary school, I completed my master's degree and was offered a full-time position as a mathematics teacher.

After teaching high school math for 10 years, God led me back to my alma mater to take a new position as a math diagnostician! I worked with some of my own teachers, and I was able to have lunch with my mom every day! It was an administrative position; I found that I really loved coaching other teachers and collaborating to benefit students and their learning. I enrolled in and completed the administrative degree program at State University of New York at Oswego. God guided and protected me, and my sphere of influence for Him grew wider.

The very next year, I applied for and accepted the position of director of special programs at a small rural school. That meant I did all the things the principal did not have time to do. I chaired the committee on special education, planned and supervised all the curriculum and staff development, completed teacher evaluations, and did anything else requested by the superintendent and the principal, or the business office. I learned so much in that year!

God Opens Doors

The following year, I was promoted to elementary principal although I had little experience in that position. I learned a great deal about elementary education and grew to have a new appreciation for the quite challenging work of teaching young children.

Broadening my experience, God opened doors and prepared me for what He had in mind all along.

Since this school district was very tiny and a bit far from home, I applied for other elementary principal positions. I thought it was the best and most fun of the jobs I had experienced. I found myself as a finalist in a district closer to my home. But God had something else in mind for me!

That spring, my little school district saw the resignation of the superintendent, then the Grades 6 - 12 principal, and even the business administrator. I had not resigned, but I did have an offer from a different district. We were leaving, and this little district had a big capital project that the voters had just approved. I had taken the lead to promote the projects with the community, and the voting had gone very well.

Shaken by their impending loss of good administrators, the board of education turned to me to ask if I would consider staying and moving to the position of Grades 6 - 12 principal.

To this day, I feel it was God speaking through me that night as I was too surprised to even have a response to their request. I prayed in the hallway and then went back into the meeting. I told them, "I am so honored that you have the confidence in me to offer me this position. However, I do see that position as a lateral move, and I am so happy working with the younger children and their teachers. If I am to stay, there is only one position that I would consider and be honored to accept. I have learned so much in the many different jobs I have experienced in schools, and I know I have so much to learn. However, I would be honored to lead this district as superintendent, if you will give me the opportunity."

After I finished, I left the room and prayed in the hall. I could not believe that I had said those words, and I felt so unready to fill that role. However, God is faithful, and the president of the board soon came out and shook my hand. I would be the superintendent of schools as of July 1, 1995.

I spent the next two months working with the outgoing leader, and I learned so much. He used his network to put two retired superintendents in place as the Grades 6 - 12 principal and the business administrator. They spent a year teaching me many things. Wow! God is so good! I hired a new elementary principal and supervised the building project. I absolutely loved my time leading that little district of just about 600 students in K -12!

I went on to two more superintendencies, and I have loved every minute, well almost every minute!

Another Opportunity

I retired in 2010 and found that I really missed being part of a school community. So I serve as an administrative coach in the charter schools in Syracuse, New York. God has continued to bless my life! Over four decades of His faithfulness, and if it is His will, there will be many more to come!

Writing this article has allowed God to show me once again how He has been at work throughout my life. His grace, mercy, and leading have led me to pursue and follow what I consider the most influential career anyone can choose. The opportunity for discipleship for educators is huge—not only can we nurture our own students but their families, our colleagues, their families and, of course, our own families and the precious souls in our churches. The potential to reach the lost is enormous!

Proverbs 3:5-6, NIV, says: “Trust in the Lord with ALL your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In ALL your ways, submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” (Emphasis added.)

Marilyn Dominick is chairperson of Nazarene Educators Worldwide. She lives in Syracuse, New York. She served as superintendent of schools for the Jordan-Elbridge School District and retired in 2017 after 34 years of service in public schools. She currently serves as administrative coach for public charter schools in the Syracuse area. You may contact Marilyn at mjdominick77@gmail.com.