



FEATURED TEACHER AUTHOR

As I pondered what to write about, I decided to tell a secret. This is it. I love my work. I love teaching students about language and literature and how to be better writers, thinkers, and speakers. I am passionate about the beauty of the turn of a phrase, about the power that emanates from the beauty of language that empowers students to understand and explain the nuances of the world.

No one can imagine the delight, joy, and pure exhilaration of reading a student's writing and knowing that--that human being is now in your mind, your heart and has brought you to see them as an individual. FIND your passion. Do the things that make you proud to get up each morning, that energize your soul to start anew each day, and that gives you hope for the future. It is that hope that keeps us going no matter what the obstacles or difficulties. It is that hope for the future that we, as teachers, see each August that keeps us working.

Students today must seek that passion for themselves, and he or she must forget fear forever, so as in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize, William Faulkner said, and I paraphrase: they must experience and not be afraid – take on the universal truths of love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice. In this test and in overcoming obstacles, they are ready to leave us in search of their own passion and their own energizing hope.

I could tell many stories about success and near disaster, about perseverance and corazon. Ganas. Many students do not give up and they do not quit. One day in the spring of 2009, a student came to a lunch meeting that I held for sophomores getting ready for junior year. I was handing out a booklist and giving a pep talk about the importance of reading. This young person came to that meeting uninvited and told me – I want to be better. This is the epitome of passion and hope it embodies. He has gone on to a top university, Pomona College, where he was awarded the top writing award for the freshman class and has further volunteered to serve as a summer teacher to students in New Mexico needing math skills. He may have been afraid, but he set that fear aside. Just as most of the students I have met do. They have faced the challenges of the typical adolescent – writing papers, losing a game, or breaking up with the “one.” Students have faced the cold hard facts of life – the loss of a loved one, the imperfections of a parent, the decline or helplessness of a family member or a friend. They do not let fear rule them. Some will falter – and that will not cause them to fail – as they have learned how to start again; some will wander into a path they did not expect – but they will not be lost, as they know how to look for new paths and new roads to travel. Some will grieve the loss of the familiar and even wish to return here to what they know, but they will go on stronger knowing that fear does not rule their hearts. They go to find their passion and they do so with the energy and power of hope. As one of the graduates of the class of 2013 wrote to me:

I have been meaning to do this for some time, but haven't sat down to write it out. I want to take the time to give you an enormous "thank you" for everything you taught me in high school. You always told us that it would pay off in college, and it has! I just presented a linguistic analysis paper in front of several grad students and undergraduate linguistics majors. The professor of the class titled "Language and Culture" used my paper as an example to teach other students what analysis consists of. I cannot take all the credit for doing well so far in college. You always pushed my thinking when writing and gave amazing advice. It was tough sitting there with my 16- and 17-year-old brain, trying to construct and defend an argument in an essay, but I am so glad I had that experience and that you never accepted mediocrity from us.

So that is my secret. I love my work, and I believe in the students that I teach, and that passion and its energizing hope drive every day from August to May each year.

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