

A Teacher's Influence

by Debby Dever



With the start of a new school year, we adults tend to become very nostalgic. Not only do parents and grandparents love to take photos of our children and grandchildren on that special day, but we reminisce about our own school experiences. With those flashbacks come fond memories of favorite teachers who have positively influenced our lives. And sometimes, the opposite.

I have my own teacher heroes, but there's another teacher who has been a great inspiration to me. His name is Guy Doud. Guy was named National Teacher of the Year 1986–87. I first heard his story on a *Focus on the Family* radio broadcast (WCRF 103.3 FM, Cleveland).

On the broadcast, Guy shared some very personal background of his traumatic childhood, including experiences with various teachers. These ranged from a less-than-kind gym teacher, to a very special male teacher who was a huge influence to Guy's success in life. He also told about a lady teacher who encouraged him to get involved in speech team; because of her, he was elected president of the Future Teachers of America Club at his high school.

So Guy grew up to be a teacher himself, and began teaching college-bound students in advanced classes. But he also taught basic grammar/writing classes for sophomores. The two classes represented a huge range of academic ability—and attitudes. Guy always had a soft spot for struggling kids. His teachers influenced his heart for students.

Mr. Doud kept an eye out for kids who didn't seem to fit in anywhere: the ones who sat alone at lunch, looked at the ground while walking down the halls, and avoided everyone. He made a point to speak to those kids at lunchtime or in the hallways, asking them what they were doing for the weekend, or other general questions to show he cared. With this approach, he learned a lot about their home lives. Guy told about how he would go to school early to sit at the desks of these special kids, praying for them and their issues before the school day began.

He told one story about a young man wearing a football jersey, who approached him during the school day. The boy shyly asked if Mr. Doud would walk out on the field with him for parents' night. The young man explained that

his parents were divorced and both were out of town. Mr. Doud went on to tell how he did that for the boy, and then during the game cheered and yelled "Put #85 in!" like he was his own son. I'm sure that young man never, ever forgot that night.

Guy also encouraged his students to write journals, and through this activity he became keenly aware of situations that called for intervention.

When Mr. Doud went to the White House to accept his award, President Reagan read aloud a special poem (author unknown). He said, "This poem summarizes better than anything I ever read how important teachers are in helping mold the lives of kids. And I'd like to read it for you." *Teachers, You are the molders of their dreams. The gods (little g) who build or crush their young beliefs of right or wrong. You are the spark that sets aflame the poet's hand or lights the flame of some great singer's song. You are the god of the young, the very young. You are the guardian of a million dreams. Your every smile or frown can heal or pierce a heart. Yours are 100 lives, 1,000 lives. Yours the pride of loving them, and the sorrow too. Your patient work, your touch make you the gods of hope who fill their souls with dreams to make those dreams come true.*

When he was finished reading, their eyes met and there were tears coming down Guy's cheeks. The President had big tears in his eyes, too.

So if you're a teacher heading into a new school year, you're going to have good days and challenging days—but take heart. You are making a difference, and many years down the road, you can bet **you will be remembered** by the children who've been entrusted to you.

American historian Henry Brooks Adams (1838–1918) summed up much better what I'm trying to say with this wonderful quote from his book *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907, chapter 20): "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops."

Please share with a teacher! 🍏

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