

A Fresh Look At Nebraska

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By LuAnn Schindler

If you listen to the radio, you probably have heard commercials sponsored by the Nebraska State Education Association asking which Nebraska school teacher made a difference in your life, followed by a current educator offering a sentimental glance at the teacher who guided them toward an education career.

I grew up with two teachers. I spent 20 years instructing teenagers the intricacies of English, journalism and speech. Teaching can be a thankless job, at times, filled with long hours, piles of paperwork, and activities to coach or watch. Combine those conditions with student absences for extracurricular events, and a teacher sometimes wonders when time to teach exists.

My plans never included a teaching career. No, I wanted to be the next great American novelist or a lawyer. I dreamed of attending NYU, living among the literary elite, or traipsing off to Harvard for law school. Hopefully, classmates would not have considered me "legally blonde."

Somewhere along my journey, a dedicated group of speech students urged me to go from volunteer coach to certified teacher.

Which Nebraska educators made an impact on my life? My parents, obviously. From them, I gained an appreciation for literature, writing and acting. They stressed creativity and provided a supportive environment for freedom of expression. They expected me to dig until I discovered the truth, not copy and paste.

My fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Hajny, stands out in my mind. Granted, school was not difficult, but she displayed a calm demeanor, which simplified subjects and constructed a positive learning environment. All students were created and treated equally. It was a masterful plan to gain our trust and respect. It worked.

After lunch, we'd return to our darkened classroom and retreat to our personal space while she read "The Boxcar Children" series aloud. She taught us to visualize the action, entwining ourselves in the storyline.

We traveled to locations we could only dream about, but through her words, we visited the Greek Isles, the cobblestone streets in London, and the largest natural sand dune in the world. She brought history - especially Nebraska's past - to life.

During junior high and high school, Mr. Kubik fed my interest in history and dared me to dream beyond the schoolhouse walls. A decade later, when he was named Nebraska Teacher of the Year, he urged me to finish my teaching certification because quality creative, high-energy teachers were a rare breed. He believed in me.

In college, Dr. Harwick expanded my comprehension of literature and writing and its application to real-world learning. He pushed me to consider how writing is a reflection of society. "Select words carefully," he'd say, knowing a writer's expression forms a lasting bond with readers.

Sure, other teachers played instrumental roles in my life, but these five teachers showed me the qualities a teacher should possess. I can only hope that I inspired confidence in students I have taught.

As National Teacher Appreciation Week celebrations occur this week, I ask you: Which Nebraska teacher made a difference in your life?