I Want to be Just Like Her

Morrie Schwartz once said, “I give myself a good cry if I need it, but then I concentrate on all good things I still have in my life.” Prior to my Senior year of high school, crying in public was not something I found acceptable, in that I thought it showed a sign of weakness. In my eyes, the tears that flowed told others around me that I was vulnerable and that is the last thing I wanted as a teenage girl. When I entered English IV with Mrs. Coffey, however, that all changed. Not only did crying become something I did in public, it became something I did frequently in the safety of her classroom. She became my inspiration and I want to be just like her as a teacher.

Ms. Coffey was quite an experienced teacher by the time I reached my Senior year of high school, but her skills and abilities as a teacher were as strong as a brand new teacher. While I am confident she taught us the content required by the state, she taught us more that year about loving one another, putting our faith in God and trusting Him, and helped us fall in love with reading and writing. Perhaps those aren’t the things that were on the “test,” but they are life lessons and values that are incorporated deep in the heart of each student that was privileged enough to be in that room.

As a teacher, Mrs. Coffey was a little scattered, in that she would sometimes forget titles of stories she was telling us about and her desk was always stacked up and messy, which we referred to as the Black Hole. The stacks of papers were a compilation of her hard work and our receptiveness of learning and succeeding. Mrs. Coffey never accepted mediocrity, mostly because she knew we could do better, but also because she knew mediocrity was a sign of fear and the failure to take a risk. She encouraged us to take risks, not only as readers and writers in the classroom, but for our future as well. There was no goal we couldn’t achieve and no career choice that we were passionate about that was too difficult. She pushed us far beyond the walls of the classroom.

One of the most difficult, yet rewarding tasks Mrs. Coffey had us complete was reading, analyzing, and reflecting on a story titled, “Tuesday’s with Morrie.” In the story, Morrie is a college professor, who is on his death bed and the author, Mitch Albom, has come to record the wisdom and knowledge from his old professor one more time. In the book, Morrie teaches about life, death, forgiveness, dealing with pain, and a plethora of other items. Each day, upon entering the classroom, we would get our journals out and lay our heads down on the desk. Mrs. Coffey would stand in front of the room and read a chapter to us, in the most rhythmical and melodious way. With our eyes closed and our heads on our desk, we would listen intently and reflect on our own lives. Once the reading was complete for the day, we would sit up and begin writing immediately. We were instructed to write anything that came to our minds, whether it matched the lesson that day or not. For 10 minutes each day we would pour our heart and souls into those journal entries. There was nothing I was afraid or worry to say to her. Each night, she took our journals home, read them, and write us a note in response. Her words were always sweet and kind, yet powerful and honest. She didn’t baby us, yet we were coddled. Each day I longed to read her comments and store them in my heart. She prayed for me and I prayed for her.

While Mrs. Coffey was judged as a teacher by her test scores and failure rate, the things she taught us for real life cannot be and was not tested. She gave us hope, encouragement, and love. She wiped our tears away and calmed our fears for the uncertainty of life after high school. She held my hand when I needed it and prayed for me daily. She gave us all of her! She gave me a passion for English! She gave me a role model and inspiration for the future!