

A Look Back

Description

A year ago today, I started a new job in a completely new environment. Because of that, I was allowed to work remotely in Toronto, until I was able to find a permanent place to stay. But, I first needed to spend five days in the office getting the lay of the land, meeting everyone, etc.

That is not what this post is about.

During those five days, I learned that a beloved High School drama teacher of mine had passed away a few weeks earlier and a memorial was being held that week. However, because I had just started a new job, there was no way I would be able to attend and pay my respects.

Instead, I wrote a little piece in the online Guest Book, which went like this:

“Mr. Graham was one of the greatest teachers I ever had the pleasure of being taught by, through not just his attitude and jovial nature, but because he genuinely cared about his students and his subject.

He was a friend who really helped motivate my life in ways I never knew. I think he would be proud to know that he was the first person to mention that I had a way with words and started me on the path to become a journalist.

He shall be greatly missed.”

I was reminded of his passing recently, and because I could not attend and extol his virtues in person the way I wanted to; I decided to write a letter, included below.

While it is directed to one specific teacher, I believe it can apply to any individual who has touched our lives.

Thank you.

David

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Dear Mr. Graham,

I was driving by our old high school the other day, and was instantly reminded of you and your unfortunate passing. It really says something about the teacher you were that you could leave such an impression on someone after so many years.

You were the drama teacher that everyone wanted to have in every subject: engaging, funny, warm, passionate and smart as a whip (which is helpful in a class where so much is dependent on

memorization and improvisation). Your class was the highlight for me during those early years, and was a mainstay throughout my academic career.

We met in Grade 9, and from that first day of drama class, you were able to spot something in me. Maybe it was that I used to act in plays and musicals as a kid, or that you found a similar-minded individual, I do not know. But I am glad you did.

And why you decided to call both my twin brother and I Mr. Manly, I will never know, but having a Mr. Graham approved nickname was a badge of honour not many students got to wear.

You inspired me to tackle many difficult projects in your class, and here are just a few highlights:

- Giving me a monologue of a wine connoisseur and spending countless times with me going over how to pronounce “Chateauneuf-du-Pape” and the right way to sound like a hipster
- Letting me direct a stage version of the classic “To Serve Man” Twilight Zone episode
- Putting me as the “Doctore” in a group commedia dell’arte production with a girl I had a large crush on (thanks for that, by the way)
- Letting me write a play for my Grade 13 individual project based on the Four Horsemen on the Apocalypse entitled “Death comes to dinner”

But most importantly, I want to thank you for mentioning off-handed one day that I had a way with words and am a great storyteller. The quote, while I took it as the compliment it was, it stuck with me.

And when I had to make that decision about whether to pursue drama (which I adore) or biology (which I love) in university, you were happy to sit down with me and discuss it. I still remember your candor and kind words when you said, “Drama is your passion, but science is your life.”

“Never lose that passion and take it with you,” you said, at the end of the conversation, and I have never forgotten that to this day.

Getting to know you was a highlight of my time in High School, and I am glad that I managed to get to know you before you were taken far too soon. I know that I am not the only student who you influenced, as I am sure you helped everyone just by being the engaging teacher you were.

Wherever you are, I hope you get the best seats in the house: Center-aisle, front row orchestra.

David (AKA Mr. Manly)

Category

1. High School
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