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Hall Pass to Heaven

My sophomore year I moved to a different school for the first time in my life. It was absolutely devastating to leave people whom I had been a playmate, shoulder to cry on, or even a worse enemy with. It was heartbreaking to leave all of my former teachers who had taught me the basics of life as well as the complexities of the human psyche. I was taken out of, better yet, exiled from my comfort zone, and I dreaded the thought of the first day of school in a place so foreign and alien to me. But, as I have learned, there is always a silver lining to every cloud, and mine took the form of 4th period English.

The first day in class we filled out those pointless yet mandatory personal information sheets, and as I jotted down “mashed potatoes and gravy” as my favorite food for the umpteenth time, my teacher started to educate the class about herself. She talked about her love for cats and how her two at home were practically her children. She jokingly explained to us that she had married a complete nerd who played Halo online and trashed talked 8-year-olds with phrases like, “YOU’RE GOING DOWN SUCKER!” or, “BOOYAH!! TAKE THAT!” and then she told us her age. Twenty-eight. It then occurred to me that she is only about twelve years older than I am. Sitting there really looking at her I wondered what exactly could this young woman teach me that I don’t already know? However, in the midst of my observation, nature calls, and she hands me a little orange hall pass. By the time I return, class is over.

Throughout the year we analyzed different pieces of literature and wrote various types of prose. None of which was easy and also quite time consuming. I can’t say

exactly how many students would walk up somberly to her desk and give some sob story of how they didn't finish their work, but she never lost her temper, nor punished them for their incompetence. She would simply say, "Just turn it in in the morning before school and it won't be late." It was bewildering yet endearing to see someone who often dealt with liars and slackers still show compassion, understanding, and sympathy for whatever excuses they gave her. At first I figured she was just naïve and that everyone was taking advantage of her kindness, but I was gladly mistaken when I was the one whose work was incomplete.

I remember inching up to her desk, heart pounding, figuring I would be the straw that broke the camel's back and telling her that my work wasn't finished. I explained how I was having some problems at home and she just looked at me with compassion so strong it was as if she had been there feeling the same hurt and frustration I had felt in my time of peril, when homework and school were the last things on my mind. She extended my due date and even offered her computer for my usage. It was the nicest thing anyone had done for me all year.

My teacher was one in a million. She made learning exciting because she would take the time to connect with every individual even though she was in a much higher position of responsibility and had years of knowledge I couldn't even begin to fathom. She made sense out of the works of Mark Twain, Dr. King, and Shakespeare. Never had I met anyone who could take such a variety of high intellectual literature and be able to explain it all on different levels of comprehension, not to mention the joy she received through teaching and how it showed in everything she did. She made everyone she taught feel like they were her reason for being alive. Even though being so amazingly smart and

scholarly, she always had an interest about how everyone's day was going. Her patience and kindness astounded me. No matter who it was or what they did, she always gave them a chance to fix things. That kind of forgiveness and understanding is hard to find in a world so quick to judge and condemn. Beyond her intelligence and kindness and unfaltering integrity, she could always make me laugh.

I think that with every passing day you get to know someone and let them influence you it's easier to take it personal when they're gone. You only think about how hurt you are and how tragic it is that they aren't coming back to see you through another day. However, in the general scheme of things, the ones we lose never really leave us. Their past memories will always occupy a special place in our hearts, and the absence of their physical presence doesn't imply that we have to stop making memories. We can live out their legend by taking the things they taught us, the love they shared with us, and the friendships they gave us and share them with the world no matter who we are, what we look like, or even how old we are. My teacher died on September 26th, 2008, and she was 28-years-old, only 28-years-old but had wisdom way beyond her years. Her age didn't diminish the impact she had on so many lives. She taught me as well as so many others the values of education, the qualities of compassion, patience, understanding and forgiveness. She helped a seemingly misplaced girl find a home in a hell known as high school.

I still have that hall pass she gave me on the first day of school, and it serves as a constant reminder that no matter where I am in life, there will always be a place to find relief in a world so hectic and that it's not what you take when you leave this world behind you, but it's what you leave behind you when you go.