



*Confessions
of a
Substitute Teacher*

A really good teacher can drive a student to think!

By Sharon Linschoten

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Introduction

A small article in the local newspaper reported that Utah had a critical shortage of substitute teachers. My wonderful mother-in-law carefully tore around the article, leaving a gapping hole in the reverse page of the newspaper. She presented me the article on my next visit to her home.

She knew that I had been looking for a way to serve my community, earn a little extra money and be home when my own children stepped off of the school bus.

I read the article. The corners of my mouth turned up and erupted into a laugh. I attempted to give her back the article but she insisted that I think about it.

I had been in Future Teachers of America when I was in High School, a mere half century ago. I had even attended a U.E.A. conference and was a volunteer in my children's classe. I applied for the position in the large school district that my children were enrolled in.

I filled out the application, was fingerprinted, and a background check was started. I reported back to the district offices for a one-day training. I was charged \$25.00 for an inch-thick manual that explained the rules and policy of the district and a few sample activity lessons for different grades. My picture was taken and within minutes became my photo ID that gave me validation to enter the doors of all the district schools. My education was just beginning.

I decided to limit my work to the seven schools that served the small community that I lived in. I knew how to get to each school, even with detours.

My next challenge, or so I thought, was to protect the identity of my innocent children who were still in school. I was not sure how their classmates would treat them if they figured out that their substitute teacher was related to a member of their school.

I also had a very long, double-dutch sounding name that was difficult for adults to pronounce. I became known to the students in all grades from kindergarten to 12th grade simply as Mrs. L.

My family was my greatest fan club. They presented me with a huge briefcase-size purse that included;

- My favorite books to read to young students.
- An ample supply of pencils for students to borrow.
- A deck of cards with the alphabet and generic questions to use when needed to control the class attention.
- A pair of dice used to teach math.
- History facts of the community or things happening in the world that will raise the students' awareness or their interest.
- Several generously donated 2-for-1 movie passes to a local movie theater.
- The heavy substitute manuscript.

Each assignment brought it's own challenges and rewards. I was able to gain insights to the school system that politicians and parents may never understand. I have a lot of respect for the teachers in our community. Most of the time, I never know what the teacher looks like or their age, but I know them because of the way they arrange their desks and the personal touches they have made in their rooms. I love to teach the students that remind us day after day why we are teachers and substitutes. More times than not THEY (the students) are my greatest teachers. The secretaries, janitors and lunch ladies are the unsung heroes that never get the praise they deserve.



Subfinder

The Granite School District was the first in the valley to have an automatic system that teachers (in need of a break from the day to day battle on the school front) could call and give the needed information to the recording computer. Then, loaded with the latest technology, the computer will begin to dial the telephone numbers of the substitutes.

The phone usually rings;

- During the last three minutes of the made for TV, weeklong mini-series movie that you are holding your breath to see how it will end.
- After a long day, when you just settled down into the relaxing warmth of your bathtub and no one else is home to answer the telephone.
- Snuggled between the covers, you kiss your husband goodnight and turn over to finally close your eyes and remember how inviting it is to sleep.
- The first call of the morning (before the rooster even thinks of crowing) at 5:45 a.m. and on your husband's day off.
- When your hands are covered in tacky bread dough, lotion, dishwater, mud from planting flowers, ...

A faceless voice will inform you that they are the subfinder system for the Granite School District, address you by your name, require you to enter your PIN (identification) number and press pound. If you don't enter your correct social security number, you will be required to repeat trying until you get it right. I have to admit that I have entered my number so many times thru this system that I can say it in my sleep, and often do.

The faceless voice then assumes an attitude and commands that YOU WILL substitute at (school) for (teacher) who teaches

(grade or subject), on (date) and press 5 for detailed instructions. Press 5 and you hear a desperate teacher's voice trying to figure out the computer system from his or her side.

The voice will next give the option of pressing 5 to continue, press 2 to repeat the assignment, press 1 to accept or press 9 to decline the assignment.

If you press 9, the voice demands to know WHY you are declining to accept the invitation to teach:

Press 1 if you are ill.

Press 2 if you have childcare problems.

Press 3 if you have transportation problems.

Press 4 if you are working elsewhere.

The computer does not give you the entire list of reasonable options of declining that is necessary these days. I would recommend the following valid reasons for not being able to teach:

Press 5 if you do not want to deal with defiant 7th graders today.

Press 6 if you are overweight and don't want to teach dance/gym/swimming.

Press 7 if you just want to run away with a friend and forget teaching for a day.

Press 8 if it is too sunny and nice or too cold and stormy to go to work.

Press 9 if you have already taught this class and promised yourself that you would never be put in harms way again.

The voice will then repeat your excuse and demand if that is really why you are not accepting this invitation to be stuck in a classroom and outnumbered by students who are not sure they want to be at school either. Press 1.

Feeling like you had just taken a lie detector test, you then press 1 on the phone in which the Voice will tell you “thank-you for using the subfinder system” and end the call.

Five minutes later, the phone will ring again and the process begins all over again, like a child that wants something from a parent—Can I have it? Can I have it? Can you teach? Can you teach?—until you give in and accept the assignment or you rip the phone cord out of the wall so you can have a little peace and quiet.

The system is flawless—that is why most of my assignments come from teachers, principals and secretaries that personally know me and call me at my home phone in hopes that I am still a substitute teacher and will be able to teach for them. These noble educators have also dared me to step out of my community and teach at their schools.



New Kid Feeling

I paused at the heavy wide doors that guarded the entrance to the elementary school. I had entered the doors hundreds of other times. I was familiar with where the office was and even where the classrooms were for the different grades. These were the same halls that I had walked as a parent to my children's parent teacher conferences. I would sit there as an electoral judge on Election Day every November. Today is different. Today, my children have grown, I am not a visitor or a parent—I am a substitute teacher. My stomach growls at the nervous tension. My hands, even though sweaty, clutch my teaching bag tightly. I enter the office and sign in. I receive the keys and directions to the classroom that I will be teaching in. I open the door and turn on the lights. The students shove and push their way into class and stop and stare at me. Their eyes questioning who I am and what right do I have to be in their classroom.

My knees are knocking, I smooth the front of my blouse and attempt to find the worksheets the teacher (in her instructions over the phone) promised would be on a desk towards the front of the room. I pretend that I know what I am supposed to be doing. I clutch my identification badge for reassurance.

I attempt to call the names on the attendance roll and realize that younger parents have labeled their child with unusual names and spellings that challenges my command of the English language.

Several students at a time will tell me how the class is supposed to run on schedule. I realize that I have forgotten most of the math and what an adjective is. I am amazed that kindergarten students don't take naps anymore. Instead, they have computer time in a room filled with thirty or more computers lined up in rows on long tables.

I wonder what made me think that I could be a teacher. I hope that the students don't smell the fear I feel inside. It is

spelling and with a small amount of relief, I realize that time has not changed much when it comes to spelling.

I realize too that I am able to teach. I may be a little rusty. I have forgotten most of what was taught from schoolbooks. I do remember other lessons—like how much fun it is to learn about the world around us. It is a strange feeling to stand before wide-eyed beautiful children of all ethnic backgrounds and watch as their faces light up when they understand a concept for the first time. It is revealing what they tell me while I am standing in the middle of the playground with the teacher's whistle at recess.

New faces, different schools, years go by, same new kid feeling, but now I know that I can do the job—I can teach.



Are You Our Substitute?

I can count on it happening every time that I am called in to substitute for a teacher. It doesn't matter what grade or school that I am in—the first thing I will hear as the bell rings and 30 plus students pour into their classroom will be “ARE YOU OUR SUBSTITUTE?”

I am in the teacher's chair, at her desk, she is nowhere to be seen, and most likely she told her class as they were about to leave the previous day that she would not be there. Yet they still ask the most obvious question.

It is rough to be in kindergarten when the students push in through the doors. One student will always stop, stare at me, search around the room for their beloved teacher and then back at me with big huge tears flooding down their cheeks. I get THE LOOK—like Little Red Riding Hood gave the wolf when she realized that he had eaten her grandma. I promise the class that their teacher will return to them on the next day and that I will be able to help them for just one day.

In the second and third grades, after the question, “Are you our substitute?” the students adjust and consider you to be an idiot and unable to read the detailed instructions left by their teacher. They will (all students at once) proceed to tell you where everything is and how and when to do everything just the way their teacher does it.

In fifth and sixth grades, after “Are you our substitute?” the students will proceed to tell you that on that day all they do is have gym, recess and lunch followed by recess and gym.

In Junior High school, after “Hey Dude, do we have a substitute?” the students will try to sit by their friends instead of in their assigned seats and tell me their teacher just reassigned them to sit there the day before. They will declare the day a goof-off day and refuse to do their assigned work in class. They tell me that they always take their assignments home to do it

instead of doing it in the time they have in class or their parents will get mad at them.

They will also stare at me and try to figure out where they recognize me from. Was I a substitute teacher at their elementary school? In the middle of the class, one student will stand up and exclaim, “Hey, are you the sub that I had yesterday?” Then another student will ask, “Are you the sub that gives away the movie passes?”

I will call out a straying student’s name, they will shoot back a confused look and ask me “How do you know my name?” It is usually because I have called his name on the roll for the past four teachers in the past four days or I looked on his paper when I passed his/her desk.

High School is something else. I still get the question asked, but only in the upper grades will I find more students sluffing into my class than trying to sluf to get out of the class. They also realize that the substitute has no clue what is being taught and that they have a free day to do what they want to because the substitute has a hard time remembering who is who. They clearly understand that the numbers are on their side and will often try to engage the substitute into conversation to avoid being assigned homework.

When my youngest son was in high school, he played on the varsity football team. At the end of the season, we were treated to a local restaurant for their awards night. My well-intentioned desire of not being recognized as Mom to any of the students was blown as we sat and ate dinner with our son and the whole football team stared at us. When my son went to get seconds, his teammates interrogated him. He came back to the table with a giant grin on his face and announced that his popularity had just increased because he was related to Mrs. L.!!!

Now as I walk down the hall, trying to find the room to which the key will open the assigned door, I will hear a student or two call out to me and ask, “Hey, Mrs. L., who are you subbing for today?” There will be a disappointing sigh if the

missing teacher is not one of their teachers. I smile and open up the door, turn on the lights and wait for the first student to enter the classroom and ask me, “Are you our substitute?”



Hangman

My mother-in-law, Emma, was the first person in my family to encourage me to become a substitute teacher. After a while, she also decided to apply to become a substitute teacher in the elementary schools all over the Salt Lake Valley. We have bonded together as we vent on problems and celebrate when we experience success and insights into the minds of the students that we teach for a short time of their lives. We often compare notes.

Emma is a wonderful mentor. One of the things she has shared with me is to play the game of hangman at the beginning of class.

When the bell to start the new school day rings, elementary students will find me at the chalkboard drawing out the hangman tower and counting out ten blank lines underneath. I find that I have all eyes and minds focus on what I am doing. Then I begin by telling the children that I will be their substitute teacher for that day and that they are going to guess what my last name is. First they need to tell me what their name is and what letter they think is in my name. By the time they have guessed all ten letters, we usually have gone around the room and have the roll marked and they will tell me if they have a pet or how many people are in their family or one thing they like about their absent teacher. As my double-dutch name appears—LINSCHOTEN (pronounced lyn-show-ten)—I don't feel like a stranger in their class. There is a big sigh of relief when I tell them that I go by Mrs. L. and erase all but the first letter of my name. I still have their interest; we can begin the assignments of the day.

In high school when I tell them how to pronounce my name, I caution the students to be careful when they attend their dances because I met my wonderful husband at a dance and the music was so loud that when he told me his name, all I heard was Randy L... I never heard what his last name was and

I was too shy to ask him what it was when the music stopped. We dated for the next several months and even graduated together before I learned that his last name was difficult for outsiders to spell, let alone say. He commented one day that he thought that it was an easy name because he could spell it all by himself by the time he went to kindergarten. My mother still to this day misspells this name by adding an extra l or two.

With each new teaching assignment, the substitute teacher often feels lost and alone like the new kid on the block. Once the room is located, the substitute will hold their breath and hope that the teacher has left well-written instructions (teaching plans for dummies). Most of the time I find a key word or two and hope that I will not confuse the students to the point that they end up in therapy for years. I have learned that I have been taught, tested and forgot most of the subjects that great teachers have tried to implant in my mind. I have also relearned all those subjects as my children brought home their homework and in exasperation asked for help. As a substitute teacher, I may have five to fifteen minutes to review subjects before I need to stand before a classroom of students and convince them that I know what I am talking about. I know now that even if I have forgotten the subject, I have learned how to find the answers again—by reading the book with the students and usually we can figure it out together.

The next thing a substitute learns is the five students' names that cause all the disruptions in the classroom. Those are the students who think that rules apply to everyone but them. I have sadly noticed that today's students have a more selfish outlook on life. I often hear that if they don't like the assignment, they won't do it. They expect to be entertained. The students are trying too hard to grow up too soon.

It takes time and a keen mind to learn the names of those students who are quiet and love to learn or just need a different way to look at their work to understand.

I have a lot of respect for the teachers in our community. One day while teaching spelling in the sixth grade, one student

raised his hand then showed me the front inside cover of his book. There in careful scrawled out ink was the name of one of my sons who had already graduated from high school. Teachers invest a lot of time and their own money to teach students even with old books—at least spelling hasn't changed too much over the last few decades. In almost every classroom in my community, there are several computers and classrooms called computer labs for the students to use. Instead of naptime, five- and six-year-olds are having fun learning to read and to do their math on computers.

I have also noticed a trend to name students with unusual spellings and ethnic names that does not fall off of my lips with any amount of grace. It is difficult to convince students that you are qualified to teach when you fail to say their names at roll call. I have overcome this challenge in several ways:

- Pray there is a Teacher Assistant (a student who helps the teacher) and let them call roll.
- Usually there is someone in the class that loves to be the boss, knows everyone, and will volunteer to mark the roll/pass out the assignments/tattle on the troublemakers/etc.
- Ask the students in their groups if anyone is missing.
- Mark the roll by the seating chart.
- Bribe someone with a candy bar or movie ticket to mark the roll.
- Mark the roll by the papers that should have been handed in to me at the end of class.
- Go up and down the tables and have students tell me their names. This is great for long tables with students on both sides but often goes slow because the students don't listen to the instructions that they are to say their names to you.

Still the best way to call the role and get to know the class is by the good old standby of a simple game of hangman.



All Eyes Up Front

I have learned one thing very quickly and that is to get the students attention as soon as possible and to keep it if you want them to learn and turn in their assignments for the day. Over time I have come up with my own “bag of tricks” that helps me to keep control of the classroom.

Hangman works great for first time classes. I love to get to know the students that I will be working with. Hangman helps to bond with the students and know their likes and dislikes. Hangman is fun.

Before class, I will put on one of my favorite DVDs that I found on PBS one day and ordered for myself. It is called Animusic. It is a computer animation video that boasts a 5.1 surround sound music mix and fully animated 3D instruments and lighting. It is great for Jr. High and High Schools because as soon as those students step into the classroom, their eyes are on the TV monitor and not talking to the other students. When I am ready to take control of the class, all I have to do is to stop the music and I have eye contact. For more information on Animusic and see a preview go to www.animusic.com.

For grades 6 and up, I write on the board in large letters THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. I ask the students, “How many of you think that you are good listeners?” Most hands go up. I tell them that I am going to give them a test to see if they can handle instructions and that the answer that they will arrive at will determine how well they listen.

Copy down THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

Take out all of the E’s.

Take out every fifth letter.

Change the F to an A.

Move the S’s to the front of the word.

Take out all of the T's.

Take out the first vowel and the last consonant.

Move the fourth and fifth letter to the end of the word.

Replace the S's with L's.

Remove the sixth, seventh, and eight letters.

Move the double L's to be the third and fourth letters.

Where did you end up?

I found this exercise in the Granite School District Substitute Teacher Handbook. The students are surprised that they thought they were listening but only a few get the right answer. They usually try it once more and then I know that they are ready to really listen and I can assign them their work for the day. Oh, what is the answer? How well do you follow directions? I will let you figure it out.

Over the years, I have collected bits of wisdom, little thoughts, and quotes that have inspired me to reach within myself and learn something. It might be the story of how "TAPS" came out of the Civil War era. It might be a funny joke from Reader's Digest. It could be something that I held onto like:

The Value Of Time (author unknown)....

"Imagine there is a bank that credits your account each morning with \$86,400.

It carries over no balance from day to day.

Every evening it deletes whatever part of the balance you failed to use during the day.

What would you do?

Draw out every cent, of course!

Each of us has such a bank. It's name is TIME.

Every morning, it credits you with 86,400 seconds.

Every night it writes off, as lost, whatever of this you have failed to invest to good purpose.

It carries over no balance.

It allows no overdraft.

Each day it opens a new account for you. Each night it burns the remains of the day.

If you fail to use the day's deposits, the loss is yours.

There is no going back. There is no drawing against the "tomorrow".

You must live in the present on today's deposits.

Invest it so as to get from it the utmost in health, happiness and success!

The clock is running. Make the most of today.

To realize the value of ONE YEAR, ask a student who failed one grade.

To realize the value of ONE MONTH, ask a mother who gave birth to a pre-mature baby.

To realize the value of ONE WEEK, ask the editor of a weekly newspaper.

To realize the value of ONE DAY, ask a daily wage laborer with kids to feed.

To realize the value of ONE MINUTE, ask a person who missed the train.

To realize the value of ONE SECOND, ask a person who just avoided an accident.

To realize the value of ONE MILLI-SECOND, ask the person who won a silver medal in the Olympics.

Remember that time waits for no one.

Yesterday is history. Tomorrow a mystery. Today is a gift. That's why it's called the present."

Jr. high students are eager to earn money but often because of their age, they don't have a steady income. So I tell them that when they turn in their completed assignments that I will tell them how they can earn \$100.00 legally. After checking their assignment, I will show them in the Reader's Digest how the magazine will pay them to send in their favorite jokes and humorous true stories. If their joke is printed, they get to keep the money. The site to go to is www.RD.com and click on "submit a joke."

Flipping the lights off and then back on is an instant way of getting the class's attention. With younger students and resource students, all I have to do is count backwards from 5 to 1 and they will give me their attention.

When all else fails, I will say nothing but go to the front of the class and start writing on the board a couple of words like, "Hello class, My name is Mrs. L." Then I will erase it. Then write "You have an assignment today," and erase it. By this time the students are telling their neighbors to be quiet so they will be able to see what I will write next. Then I will write their assignment on the board, when it is due, and not erase it.

When a video, worksheets or reading is assigned, I know that I cannot just sit at the desk and relax. If I don't walk around the classroom, the students will do their own things such as write notes, text their friends, listen to their iPods, write on their desks, or go to sleep. Then, before class is over, I will take a couple of facts from the video, book or worksheet and ask who can answer my question. I usually award those students with the right answer with a 'tiger card' (a ticket that a student earns for good behavior that gives them a chance to win a small prize in weekly school drawings), candy (if they are not allergic), new pencils, first in line to leave when the bell rings, 2 for 1 movie passes, movie posters, or Slurpees that businesses donated to me to encourage and reward students with good behavior.

Take masking tape and in a large area, start to tape off a large square on the floor and fill it in until it resembles a calculator. The students will come back around me until I have all the students come back and surround the borders. The first student will jump, hopscotch style, to a chosen number, next to the +, x, or divide spaces on the side, and then to another number. That student next jumps to the = square where they pause to wait for the class to sum up the answer before the student jumps to the correct number. The second student writes on a white board the equation and the remaining students adds up the numbers on their calculators. The first student jumps to the correct answer number on the floor tape calculator. Then

the students rotate for the next math problem. Students love to do math this way.

When I know what the class will be studying about, I usually will bring in my own show and tell. For Utah history classes, I will, with permission from principal and teacher, bring in my husband and sons to lecture on the mountain man era. They bring in what I refer to as their dead thing box (furs, traps, knives, mussel-loading guns, beads and etc.) from that era. Usually word gets around and they end up lecturing to all of the history classes. For science classes we have a ton of objects to share. My family has many hobbies and so it is easy to grab something to show on the way out of my house to the school. Once I was to teach about the earth's crust. My father-in-law had given me several rocks that I keep in a special flowerbed. They consist of a sandstone rock with ancient sea shells embedded in it, a chunk of petrified wood, gems, fools gold, and other samples of rocks collected over the years. It was during the first days of spring but there was still snow on the ground. In a hurry to get to class on time, I knew just where to grab in the snow and thawing mud to get the rocks of my choice. I hurried off to school, paused to get the key to the classroom from the office. While in the office, another science teacher saw the rocks in my muddy fingers and asked me where I had got them. I told her they were from my back yard as I dashed off to open the classroom door. The bell had already rang. Students were crowding around the door. Later I heard from a couple of students that she told all of her students from Magna to go home and dig holes in their backyards to find similar rocks. She encouraged them that they might have to dig five-foot holes but it would be worth it. Who knows—she might be right.

In math classes, I might take out my pair of dice and instruct the students to take out a piece of scratch paper and write the numbers 2–12. Then make 16 x randomly on any of the numbers they want (they can place 0–16 x on one or more numbers). I have one student roll the dice and every time they roll a number of the dice that matches the number that has an x they circle that x. If a number has more than one x, they circle

just the first x and wait for the number to be rolled again. I keep a record of the numbers called on the chalkboard. At the end of the game I talk to the students about percentages and odds. I call the game Vegas.

In younger grades, I use the dice to help the students add or subtract the top number to add up to 7 and to check their answers by looking on the bottom of the dice. Or they can add up the sums on the dice.

I have a deck of cards that I have used at the end of a lesson or let several students use when they have completed their assignment. Half the deck contains the alphabet, the other half contains questions such as name a color or a part of the body. I read the question first and then turn over the letter of the alphabet the students have to think of to answer the question. Students love to compete and I love to make them think.

Bottom line is that if you start the class with something interesting, the students will give you their attention. Keep them on track and engage them in learning. The school day passes by a lot faster.



Guest Teacher

The envelope almost went unnoticed among all the advertisements. I noticed that Granite School District's name was in the return address corner. It wasn't payday. The contents concealed in the ordinary envelope began a new adventure for me. At first I was not sure what the mysterious letter meant. Curiously, I opened the letter. I began to read that I had been chosen as GUEST TEACHER OF THE MONTH. It instructed that if I presented the letter to any of the schools' cafeterias, I would receive a free school lunch.

I called my mother-in-law who also substitutes in the same district. I asked her if she had received such a letter and was informed that she had not and wasn't sure what it was either.

I asked the secretary at the Junior High that I teach at often if she had seen any of these letters for Guest Teacher of the Month but she replied that was the first that she had seen.

I carefully folded the letter and placed it back into the envelope. I wondered if it was some kind of a joke. I carried it in my school bag for several days before the magic began.

I am no longer just a substitute. I am a GUEST TEACHER! I like that distinction. I do not have to feel like "EGG-BEATERS," "COOL WHIP," "SPLENDA" or "SUGAR FREE!"

I felt like someone out in space really appreciated me and that I was someone important because I could step in a teacher's shoes for a day when that teacher needed to be absent. I felt like someone noticed and lifted me up and valued me. I didn't know what I had done to deserve such an honor. My self-esteem skyrocketed.

Then I came back to earth. I was not sure if a free "school lunch" was a good thing or a bad thing. I did supervise the resource students when they served lunch in Jr. High and helped them wipe down tables when I was the guest teacher in

their class. By doing so, I became aquatinted with some awesome ladies behind the scenes who prepare our children's breakfast and lunch, clean up afterwards, and then the next day do it all over again, without even a thank-you from most of the students.

The best school lunch can be found in Matheson Sr. Jr. High. Those in charge of the lunches, fight with the district to feed the students healthier and more food so they can function better in school. They also make the best brownies and they serve better pizza there—the kind that you can actually see the pepperoni.

They had never seen a free lunch for the Guest Teacher of the Month letter but were happy to give me a free lunch anyway.

If I could have any say in this matter, it would be to give that letter to more substitutes so they could feel the magic of self-esteem too. I wish I knew who sent me that letter so I could tell them in person what it has meant to me. Why was I so lucky to receive it when there are countless Guest Teachers that faithfully respond to “subfinder” at the break of any given day and make their way to countless schools in all kinds of weather?

Guest Teachers are a unique type of people. We hope to make a difference in the minds of young students—even if it is only for a day. We love to learn. We make a modest wage for teaching. We are offered no benefits or insurance that the full-time teachers have to help persuade them to stay in their profession. We are not always sure where the school may be located or if the teacher has left instructions for us to follow or if there is enough material to keep students on task and working. We work through the flu season and expose ourselves to sneezes and coughs. We slip and slide through the foot deep snow in freezing cold temperatures when we would rather be home, snuggled under covers. We would rather be sipping a cup of hot chocolate and reading a good book than asking an out of

control class to please listen to the instructions for the day's assignment.

I know that Guest Teacher is just a fancy title—and maybe some would scoff at a free school lunch—but to me, it meant everything that day.



Alarming Days

Enrolling in a C.E.R.T. training course became an essential tool that helped me to become a less frazzled substitute teacher. I remember that it was a cloudy and cold morning with a forecast of snow predicted for that day. I was assigned to teach health at the High School. I picked up the key and attendance rolls. I had even found the room hidden between the girl's dressing room and the gym. I was attempting to decipher the teacher's notes on the class assignments and was relieved to have no class for the first period. Half an hour later, the fire alarms began to shriek and the building lights pulsed on and off. Students were beginning to fill the halls with moans and groans of having to do yet another drill. I filed out of the room and could smell whiffs of burning smoke. Two firemen pressed by me. I could tell this was no fire drill. I asked them if they wanted me to check the girls' dressing room for female stragglers who were unaware that it was in fact a real fire in their school. They affirmed that they would appreciate it and hurried down the stairs towards the counseling offices.

After a hurried tour of the lockers, dressing and bathroom areas, I proceeded to evacuate the building myself. Bellows of smoke were filling the halls. My heart pulsated with the sound of the alarm. I could see the doors just ahead of me. As I pushed through the metal doors, I could feel a blast of cold hit me and snowflakes were swirling around. Students were leaning against the bricks of the building, chatting with their friends and huddled together to keep warm. Upon exiting the building, I informed the students that this was no fire drill and that they needed to move away from the building. This they did—right into the street in front of the school so that when the second fire-truck arrived, the firemen had trouble getting to the fire hydrants around the students that were lined up in the street. The fire was quickly located—the motor in the elevator had seized up and caught on fire. The flames were extinguished but smoke still engulfed the halls. Huge fans were brought inside the building to blow the smoke out of the halls. Students were instructed to take shelter in either the gym or the auditorium on

the far ends of the school until further notice. By lunchtime, the school routine was back on track.

At the Jr. High, they have a black binder filled with information of which door is to be used for each class and where the students are suppose to line up outside. Two laminated colored papers, one red one green, are also inside of the black binder. Upon hearing the fire alarm the panic stricken substitute teacher discovers quickly that the Black Binder is hidden among all the other books and binders in the room (it is like looking for your child's missing shoe—five minutes after you are suppose to be out the door). The substitute tries to calmly instruct the students to move in an orderly way to the door and to line up at the assigned area—NOW...MOVE IT! Students exit the room. The substitute turns off lights and shuts and locks the door. I look up and the class has exited the building along with their friends from other classes. Victoriously I have the class rolls and the Black Binder in hand but I aimlessly wander to where the students were instructed to line up. Holding my breath, I count heads and hope that they will match the number of students that are enrolled in that class for that period because the students all look alike to me. If they seem to be there, I am to hold up the green colored paper. At this point, I feel more like a mother hen trying to gather up her chicks and leading them back to the room when the “all's clear” bell rings. One time when the fire alarm went off in the new Jr. High near where I live, the problem was with the person cooking the fries for first lunch had forgotten to turn on the overhead vent. The heat and smoke from cooking activated the fire alarms.

It would be so nice if the secretaries would tell the substitutes when they sign in that the school would be conducting a drill and give us a chance to find the Black Binder before it is needed. It would also be nice if the students themselves would take the drills a little more seriously.

I was once again teaching in the Jr. High when the alarm went off nearly giving me a heart attack. It was an earthquake drill but the students wanted to continue to watch the video

instead of proceeding with the directions of the drill. I had to stop the video, turn on the lights, instruct the students to take cover under their desk as if it were a real earthquake. Three students took cover under their desk along the rows of glass windows. Two other students took advantage of the moment and found shelter together under the back counter that ran against the wall and proceeded to hug and kiss. One student whipped out her cell phone and made a call. Three girls decided that was a good time to put on their make-up and had to be reminded again to get under their desks—not just beside their desks. Afterwards, instead of turning on the video, we talked about the possibilities of an earthquake and why they should not take cover under windows and to the love-birds—a warning that was not what they should be doing ANYTIME at school.

I have had assignments at elementary schools when we have had lock-down drills. At least one student will panic and ask if they are going to die, several students will begin to cry and all will want to go to the office and call their moms.

It is days like these that I wonder if substitutes should be entitled to hazard pay.



*A Picture is Worth
a Thousand Words*

I had already promised to teach the Teen Living class at the Jr. High for Thursday and Friday—a week before I was informed that I needed to read an essay that I had entered for the Magna Arts Council contest.

I didn't encounter that I would be sick. My throat was hoarse and the classes would be hard to control and convince they needed to work on their assignments, not goof off because their teacher was absent. I had taught these students before.

My head was pounding. My throat was dry and croaky when I tried to speak. It was Thursday morning. In a state of panic, I grabbed my digital camera and some batteries. I had a plan.

I arrived in class before the bell rang, planning to put in fresh batteries into the camera but quickly discovered that I had taken the wrong batteries by mistake. Plan B.

I printed the assignment for the day on the chalkboard as the students were filtering in. The bell rang and the students continued to talk to each other. I used the seating chart to take roll. Then putting down my pencil, I tried to get their attention. First attempt failed. I cleared my throat and asked again for their attention. I explained their assignment and pointed it out to them on the chalkboard. I apologized that my throat was hoarse and that it was hard to hear me. Instead of constantly correcting behavior, I had brought my camera from home and I would just take a picture of those who were breaking the classroom rules. I would then download it to their teacher's email and she would talk to them about how they should behave. She could also save it for when their parents came for parent/teacher conferences.

A lively discussion ensued. Students wanted to know if their constitutional rights were being denied. I reminded them that cameras were rolling when their parents dropped them off at school every day. There are also cameras monitoring the halls of

their school. They are also on camera when they shop at the stores in the mall, at gas stations, banks and even when they are driving down the freeway with their parents.

I also reminded them if they behaved, did their assignments and followed the classroom rules, they had nothing to worry about. I would not take their picture. The camera was a better witness to what was going on than just my word against their word. It would also make sure that no mistaken identity of a student would happen if the teacher had the pictures.

Of course the ones who like to goof off with substitutes were out—raged by the threat of being caught on film.

Classes were really great. A few threatening clicks were all the reminder that I needed to keep students working on task. The classes were quiet and all were in their own seats. Their assignments were turned in on time and no one tried to con me.

Friday morning I decided to repeat the instructions from Thursday to the classes and again all was great, until the class just before lunch. It was the teacher's sport sewing class and she had left a video about a male designer showing how to make wedding dresses. That lost the attention of all the male students. To make matters even tougher, the class was relocated to the foods room because another teacher needed the sewing machines for her 7th grade students.

Three of the four overhead lights were turned off to reduce the glare of the lights upon the TV screen. Ten minutes into the video, one 9th grade male student decided that he was bored and began to roam around the room. He paused in front of the large white refrigerator. Temptation was too much and he chose to open the door, forgetting that the light would come on inside the refrigerator. He realized his mistake and turned quickly to find me behind him with the camera (still without batteries) in my hand. Panic instantly set in as he had had several disciplinary conversations with various teachers concerning his behavior.

His eyes pleaded with me and he asked what a student would have to do to have a picture deleted so his teacher would

not see it. I thought about it for a second or two then informed him that the first period teacher was doing a cooking demo in the room and did not have time to clean up her dishes and area before having to go to the sewing room for her next class. If by some chance, a student who had done something they knew was not wise to do, should wash, dry and put away all of her dishes, then maybe I could be convinced to delete one photo. He went right to work, and before the video was finished had the demo area cleaned and tidy. He did not notice that there was never any flash or any led lights on the digital camera.

The lunch bell rang and the students rushed out of the classroom. The previous teacher came back to the foods room to clean up her demo area instead of eating lunch. Her eyes widen as she entered the demo-kitchen. The counters were cleared and wiped clean. Dishes and pots were washed, dried and put away. The sink was scoured and rinsed and all towels were put into the laundry basket and newly folded hand towels and hot pads neatly placed by the stove. She was surprised that all the area was cleaned and demo pans and dishes were put in their proper place. I told her that the student had wanted to do something nice for her and did it. She was speechless. Her mouth fell open. She regained her senses and asked in an octave higher, "He did this?" I answered with a smile that he did, and that she must be a great teacher. I wished that I did have a camera in hand. I would of taken her picture. The surprised look on her face was...well...worth a thousand words.



Arresting Smiles

My heart softens for the countless school secretaries who are faced with absent teachers and not enough substitute teachers to feel the vacancies. They remind me of magicians who sometimes in a state of panic can magically pull a substitute teacher out of thin air or convince several regular teachers to give up their preparation period to teach for their absent comrade.

All the school's secretaries in my town have my home phone number, address and pin number at the top of their list. They know that if at all possible I will not refuse to help them when they call me at home. They greet me with smiles and the key to the classroom. They are the unsung heroes—the heartbeat of the school.

These charmers have talked me into many situations that have stretched my areas of comfort zones.

Susan, the secretary at Brockbank Jr. High, called me to teach one morning. When I arrived, she was in a state of panic and informed me that four teachers were without substitutes because of district training and she had directed those four classes to go to the auditorium and had the teacher's aids mark the attendance rolls until I could arrive. One teacher had started a black and white video to keep their interest but it had failed to do so. I walked into an auditorium of chaos. I had black bruises on my legs from bumping across the rows of folded seats to keep control of one group of outspoken students and then crossing back to control the other group of students who wanted to start a game of throwing paper wads at some other group of students who were trying to watch the video. The hour and half class period seemed to me to be an eternity. When the bell eventually rang, I noticed that it was first lunch and escaped to my car. I knew that I only had a short time before four more classes of students would be flooding into the auditorium. I rushed to a nearby store that rented videos and rented Disney's "Emperor's New Groove" that had just been released. I raced

back to the school and had it approved by the principal and was feeding the video into the machine as the students began to file into the auditorium. At the end of the day, Susan smiled and informed me that she had called the district office and had successfully convinced them that they had to at least pay me double pay for the day.

My favorite surprise came one morning when I received a call from Georgia, the secretary for Cyprus High School. She was desperate for a math sub and needed me to come in. That morning there was no way for me to get to the high school. I was without transportation. A few minutes passed and she again called and asked if someone from the school could come and pick me up, would I come? I told her that I could be ready by the time they came and would be waiting by the curb in front of my mailbox. It was only a matter of a few minutes standing alone and looking westward towards the direction that they would come. My eyes searched for the stranger that would be turning into my subdivision. They would be driving slow, looking for a substitute teacher, schoolbag in hand, waiting by a mailbox. Maybe Georgia would send another secretary or a teacher who didn't have to teach until 2nd period.

I knew the moment that the white SUV turned onto the street who had been sent to pick me up. The police officer's car cruised down the seven houses to where I was waiting. Hank, the school's deputy from the Salt Lake County Sheriff's office, pulled up in front of me and smiled a big friendly grin and asked if my neighbors were going to start rumors about me being picked up by the Law. I winked and confessed that they were already used to strange things occurring at my house and most likely didn't even think twice about it. I climbed into the front seat and fastened my seat belt. Hank made a u-turn on the street and his patrol car headed back to the high school.

When the sun began to set behind the mountains that evening, radiating pinks and reds across the sky, my family began their treks home. As we gathered together for dinner, I would have an arresting story to capture their attention that evening.



Painting Raindrops

I still believe that school and learning is wasted on the youth. It should be offered to adults who realize that they need more wisdom and value the time to read and learn new information.

Being a guest teacher doesn't offer much in the way of income, doesn't offer health benefits, or is a position that boost one's self esteem or social status.

We often go unnoticed and unappreciated in our attempt to make a difference in the life of the students we come in contact with.

We fill the shoes of countless teachers we may or may not have never seen before or only know through the notes they leave for us. Sometimes we are fortunate to be able to team-teach with other teachers when we substitute as a peer educator aid, and are able to pick up trade secrets, insights and class control tricks from the experts.

I may have forgotten what the formulas for solving $x(a-b)=c$. I have to brush up on what an indirect object is and what an adjective describes. I have noticed that there are more things that I have learned and forgotten than all of the subjects that I feel comfortable to teach.

I don't claim to know everything but I do know how to find the answers in the teacher's book. I can instruct students to go back and read their books until they figure out the answers instead of just giving them the answers or asking others to do their thinking for them.

I learn with the students and try to make new ideas exciting to contemplate. I experiment mixing colors and ideas and listening to what the students themselves tell me about their lives. I marvel how kindergarten students have traded in

naptime for computer time and the knowledge is mind boggling that they are exposed to now.

I re-learn most things, muddled through some things and sometimes learn new things like mixing white Karo syrup with a few drops of blue food coloring and painting on art paper will create beautiful shiny raindrops—if the first graders will stop licking their paintbrushes.

The majority of the teachers put their heart and soul into teaching young minds today. They constantly battle for better learning conditions and respect.

As a substitute teacher, I have days when I wonder why I am even trying to teach. Then there are those days when the students' desires to learn and we paint raindrops that glisten in the light.

I catch a glimmer of hope that what I am doing will make a difference in the life of a student. Sometimes I see the light in their eyes when a concept clicks or they were able to reach the right answer by themselves. Sometimes it is a group of students coming by my classroom just to say Hi or challenge me to play a game of chess. It is difficult sometimes to know the degree a substitute teacher can touch the heart and mind of a student. One thing for sure is that teaching them has made a huge difference in my life.



Driving Students to Think

My family thought it was hysterically funny! I was assigned by subfinder to substitute at the high school. Laughter erupted when I told them that I was going to teach Driver's Education. I could not appreciate their humor—after all I had never had a ticket or been involved in any accident since graduation from high school.

In the classroom, I quickly read the absent teacher's plans for the day and prepared for the bell to ring. A large number of students entered the classroom and took their seats. Roll was taken. I was instructed to show a video to the class about auto safety. The machine was fed the video, and as it began, a cold shiver ran down my back. I think that it was the same old safety video that I had to watch when I was 16 and taking Drivers Ed. (back in the 60's). It was even in black and white and the narrator's voice was monotone.

I could see students struggling to stay awake. I was losing their attention quickly. These students were not learning about how to avoid accidents out in the real world. I turned off the machine, turned on the classroom's lights and took a chance that I could teach these students something that may help them to survive on hazardous roads.

I asked for a raise of hands of the students who had been involved in an accident. Several hands went up. I asked for volunteers to tell their classmates

- What type of an accident it was.
- What factors such as time of day or weather conditions that occurred that influenced the outcome of the accident.
- If anyone was injured. How they felt when the accident happened.
- If everyone was wearing seatbelts.
- What damages were done to the cars involved.

The class responded by comments on how the accident and/or ticket could have been avoided.

I was pleased that all of the class responded and participated. Together we analyzed each true incident and learned from the mistakes of their classmates. Students were able to teach each other about insurance and laws of nature. They shared their fears and pain and regrets. I knew that the information would be remembered longer than the black and white video facts. The students were interested and were thinking. It was a good day—for we were all driven to think that day.



Nothing

The bell has rung to begin class. Students are still talking to each other and I have taken the roll. I feel like an actor that has just stepped into the spotlight on the stage and waits for my moment to speak.

I clear my throat and look at the students. When I have their attention, I ask them a question. The answer is almost universal. “When you go home after school everyday, does your mother, father or grandparent ask you what you learned in school?” Students will nod their heads or shout out yes they do. “What do you say to them?” Several students will answer in unison—“NOTHING!!!”

I then challenge the students to find out something new to report when they arrive home that day. I usually have a short story or attention getter/object lesson I will share and then begin their teacher’s assignment for the class.

Why is it that a kindergartener after being asked what they did at school, will have to think what they had for snack just 15 minutes before school let out for them? Then they will tell you what letter they learned and what colors they painted their picture with. They are happy to tell you that they learned something. Everything is exciting.

At what grade do our children decide to stop learning? When do teachers tire of teaching? Have we conditioned our children to be entertained instead of being curious about the world around them?

I remember one assignment to a ninth grade science class. The teacher had had a heart attack. I taught his classes for three weeks until a new teacher could be hired. On the first day, I asked the students what they usually did in this class. Their response was just watch videos. The first day I put on the video that the teacher had scheduled. It was about lice and unseen bugs. My head itched for weeks. I don’t have issues about learning via videos, but not as the only medium. After class, I

went to the head of the department and asked if there were microscopes. Even though it was a lot more work, students the rest of the week were able to experience a hands-on scientific approach to the unseen world. Students seemed a little more excited to come to class.

Another extended assignment for ninth grade geography. The teacher had bronchitis and when I asked for his teacher plans, he answered that I could teach anything I wanted that was South of the Sahara Desert in Africa. If I needed more help to ask the other history teachers and that he would be back to teach in six weeks. I found out later that he went to Disneyland where it was warmer to recover before going to Australia. I found out a lot of interesting things about Africa. I discovered that Salt Lake City, Utah even has a market catering to Africa foods. National Geographic and the Internet offered up-to-date photos and interesting articles that enhanced the usual assignments of mapping the different nations. I also learned that the other history teachers were teaching the unit on Australia. I gave out pencils and other treats for students who could find the most interesting fact about Africa each day.

Sometimes it is the students who refuse to allow the teacher to teach, as it was one year. The teacher tried, the students refused to do their assignments. The teacher decided he didn't want to stay in that career and quit in mid-semester. No teacher would be available for a few weeks. I felt very unqualified for the assignment because of an accidental concussion that erased all of my math skills. I only had to teach the one class—geometry each morning and get paid for the full day. I accepted the assignment. I soon realized why the students were not able to complete their assignments. They didn't know their formulas for solving problems. On Monday, the students were informed that they would be having a vocabulary test on Friday for the different formulas. Geometry is like a foreign language—when the students learn the math lingo—then they would find that the answers to their assignments would make more sense and be easier to solve. Along with their books, I would bring in the weekly groceries ads to show practical applications that students could use as examples of the different formulas.

I used my family talents in mountain man hobbies to lecture to Utah history students. Dressed in 1820 deerskin leather pants and fur hats, they made history come alive. The students love to hear “Hornsucker’s” stories, pass around artifacts of the mountain man era and jump when “Crazy Bear” shoots his black-powder muzzle loading rifle.

Schools that I teach in regularly know that I carry in magazines, pioneer artifacts, rocks and DVD’s that I have collected over the years that will enhance whatever I am teaching. One teacher upon seeing the petrified wood and ancient shell embedded sandstone rock asked me where I found them. I replied in my back yard as I rushed to unlock the classroom door to let the students in. The bell had rung and I didn’t have time to explain that my father-in-law had collected them in his lifetime and had donated them to my children and when I am not using them in the classroom, I leave them in my special flowerbed. She was so impressed that she told her science classes to go home and dig in their backyards and they should be able to find similar historic rocks too.

Students erroneously believe that if they are not interested in the subjects that they are enrolled in that they do not have to try to learn what the teachers are required to teach them. I try to explain that they need to learn it even if they think that they will never have to use the information in their lifetime. I assure them they will—when they are parents in about 20 years and their teenagers come home and need their help to explain their homework assignment.

Teachers don’t have to stand on their desk and pretend to be a fly to keep their students attention and inspire them to learn everyday, but they will remember that teacher long after graduation.

Students may have to trick their minds to think that every class has something wonderful to learn and that they need to come to class prepared to learn.

Parents need to stay involved and when their child tells them that the teacher doesn't like them and that is why they are failing—think things thru before making any judgments. Attend the parent teacher conferences. Talk heart to heart with your child. On summer vacations and class breaks, plan adventures where your family can explore and learn new things.

Then at the end of my teaching day, I go home and my family greets me and always ask me what I learned at school that day. I always answer something I learned or relearned. I never have to answer “NOTHING.”



Sex Education 101

One of the teachers that I really admire came up to me at school while I was teaching in another class. She is one of the very few teachers that is certified to teach sex education at the Jr. High. She wanted me to teach her class for a week while she went back East to attend her daughter's wedding. She promised me that it would be an easy week in her health classes because they would be working on worksheet packets and that the Utah National Guard would come in two of the days and talk to the kids on underage drinking and drugs. She knew that I would be able to handle the challenges of keeping the students on task and in their seat so that her valuable health models would still be in one piece when she returned. She had been teaching them about hormones and teen suicides and said that she would finish up the sex education unit when she returned.

Sex education gave me a memory flashback to when my children were the age of the students that I would be teaching. We, as parents, were being pressured on several sides (school, church and our own parents) to talk to our children about sex. My husband, Randy, had his own ideas about teaching our children about the birds and the bees. He waited in the delivery room at the hospital and witnessed their birth. The doctor would hand the newborn to the nurse. She would clean and wrap up the infant and give the little wiggly package to the daddy. He would first count their little fingers and toes. Then he would rock them back and forth and tell them the facts of life. At the conclusion of his lecture, he would smile, kiss the baby on their forehead and tell them that if they had any further questions about sex, they were to ask their mother.

One night, after dinner, I informed him that he was back in the limelight because he was going to give a refresher course to our teenagers. So he invited the children to come and all take a seat on the sofa. He pulled up a chair and looked them all in the eyes and began. "Now each of you will someday be out on a date." Randy took a deep breath and glance towards my

direction. “Your date will snuggle up to you and put their arms around you.”

Now I was holding my breath.

Randy continued, “You will feel things happen inside you that you never felt before. When that happens, you look deep into their eyes and just tell them NO.”

Then he excused them to go back to what they were doing before we called them in for their meeting.

The kids all returned to their play. I looked at my husband who had picked up the TV remote. “Is that all you are going to tell them about sex?” I asked him.

He glance up at me and simply asked me, “What part of NO don’t you understand?”

Her classes were great, even the seventh grade science classes. The students worked on their packets and most of them were able to finish a day early. Thursday and Friday would complete the week. All I would have to do is call roll and introduce the Utah National Guardsman and he would do the rest. Well the first day went great. At the end of the day, he informed me that he was sorry he would not be able to come back on Friday as planned. He would get with the teacher when she returned and reschedule. I was all alone without any teachers plans and all classes would be health on Friday.

Sleep did not come easy, but by morning I was ready. I arrived at school with Walt Disney’s Pixar short films collection DVD. I knew that Disney’s movies were all right to show to the students. At the beginning of class, I asked the students to take out a sheet of paper and put their name and period at the top. Next I would show FOR THE BIRDS short film. The class responded with, “Oh, I love this film.” I stopped the DVD and asked the students to write on their papers if they ever felt like the big goofy bird that no one wanted to let hang out with the gang. How did they handle it?

Then I started the DVD again and played BOUNDIN'. I asked the students to write on their papers an occasion when they felt depressed about something and what they did to bounce back and feel better.

After a few minutes, I began the last short, LIFTED. I instructed the students to write about a time in their life when they felt overwhelmed with life and who helped them get through that time in their life.

The students all participated. They even wanted to do more but the bell was about to ring. I asked the classes if they wanted to hand in their papers for their teacher to read or if they wanted to keep them for their eyes only. They wanted to leave their papers for their teacher to see.

The last bell rang. I straightened up the room, turned in my key to the office. Collected my reward of a small bag of M&M peanuts and headed for home. It was a good day.



Most Unforgettable Student

Over the past decade, I have taught in many schools and for many different teachers. The majority of the students have been the best of America in my opinion. Long after I have taught them for a day or so, they will come up to me in the store, or movie etc, and greet me pleasantly and remind me that I was their substitute in a certain class or at a certain school. My family teases me about not being able to go anywhere without someone recognizing me and coming over to talk to me when we are out in public. I feel honored that the former students would take the time to talk to me. I feel surprised that they would even remember me.

Recently I was called to substitute in the Jr. High for the resource class that I love to work in. As I entered the familiar classroom, the students looked at me. Half the class recognized me, and smiles erupted across their faces. The other half of the class were new students who I would soon come to know. The classroom felt different on this day. Something was different...out of place...no, missing. Then I became aware of something that caught me off guard and a lump formed in my throat.

Front row, next to the teacher's desk, for three years, sat a blond haired, browned eyed student. He was now in High School but not seeing him there made me realize that he had become my Most Important Person student. He had changed my life and the way that I looked at the world around me.

My assignment, three years ago, was to substitute for the peer-educator for two weeks while she went on a cruise with her husband. The school year began with several new students and each student in the resource class had their own needs and reasons to be there. The teacher was a little overwhelmed by trying to assess each student and was involved with writing up the ton of paperwork that is required of him by the school district.

My job was to be at school early and meet the bus that most of the class students would be on and NEVER let John¹ out of my sight. I was to stay with him from the time he stepped off of the bus until he boarded the bus to go home. Whenever he needed to go out of the classroom, I was to be with him. When the students ate their lunch, I was to stay with them too.

This assignment didn't sound too difficult to me. I hadn't met John yet! No one warned me that John loved to run. John loved to go where he was not supposed to go, like in the girls' restroom. John didn't stay in his seat. John was fascinated by the classroom computers and would turn them on and try to go to his favorite site, PBS, but more times than not would crash the computer. John loved to sharpen his pencil until it disappeared and loved to pet the sandy-colored, two foot long, golfer snake. Even though he was a little seventh grader, his legs were faster than mine. I went home after the first day with John and took a four-hour nap.

The second day, I had a new plan. I met the bus with a two foot rope and explained to John that whenever we were out of the classroom that he needed to hold on to the rope on one end and I would hold on to the other end of the rope. John smiled and held on to the rope while he skipped to his locker and then to the classroom, pulling me behind like a kite out of control. I went home that day and took another four-hour nap.

John was tall for his age. He grew faster than his pants. He was all skin stretched tightly over his skeleton. There were several scars testifying of numerous surgeries. John didn't talk a lot at first. Then when he did, it was soft and almost pleading and non stop. "Can I play PBS/KIDS?" At first I didn't understand. The teacher explained that John loved to go on to the classroom computers and that PBS/KIDS was one of the sites that he liked to go to. The computers were only for the students that finished their assignments and that someone would have to stay with John at the computers because he

¹ Name has been changed

would crash them by pushing the wrong keys. For most of the day, John would trace his name over and over and practice buttoning, snapping, and zipping by putting on a set of clothes over his daily outfit. He was reminded over and over that he needed to stay in his seat, not over touching the classroom pet snake. Lunch was his favorite time of the day and he would eat everything and still be hungry. He loved pizza and dill pickles the best. The teacher tried to teach the class that they needed to make healthy choices at lunch. John would fill a small bowl with cubed ham and shredded cheese to add to his daily pizza, fries and pickles. I took a lot of naps in those two weeks.

A month later, I was back in the resource room for their teacher because he was at a three-day training seminar. Then I became a regular substitute for the next three years whenever any of the two adult peer educators or the resource teacher needed me.

John could never remember where his pencil was so the teacher taped a piece of yarn to the desk and tied a pencil to the other end. He knew he had to be in his desk when the bell rang and he also knew just how long it would take for him to beat the bell from anywhere in the room. When the bell stopped ringing, John would be in his seat and there would be a gust of wind blowing papers awry in his path.

Over time and as I worked closely with John, I could tell that in spite of severe learning problems, he was very smart inside. He knew when he ran down the hall which bathroom was the boys and which was the girls, but it was funny to him to see the reaction he got when he went into the girls bathroom. He was bored with repeating the same writing assignments and dressing over and over again. Slowly we were able to give him the changes that he craved so that he could be as normal as possible to the rest of the class.

I don't know if I was able to teach John much from an educational point of view. I would look around my house for things that would interest him, like the newest Gameboy games catalog. I would read to him some of the early readers that my

kids loved the most when they were growing up. I played a game with him where he would take a ruler that had a template for circles, squares, triangles etc., and he would draw a shape and I would make it into a picture (like the circle would become a bowling ball or a balloon, etc.). A few days later, John was showing another student how to make pictures with the stencils. I know that when I saw him at the movie theater during the summer break, he raced across the lobby with his mom trying to catch up to him. He put his rough bony hands together in an excited clap, smiled his wide happy smile, and said Hi to me and told me all about the movie.

I do know that John taught me a lot about life, that it is possible to be happy under most circumstances. I know that he loved to tease but he was never unkind to anyone. John taught me that everyone could be good at something. He loved and even excelled in making baskets with the basketball at lunchtime. On the weekends, he would often go bowling with his aunt. I learned to be persistent. John said yes to every question and unless he was in trouble, would always be smiling and asking if he could go on PBS/KIDS. He knew he had a 50/50 chance of someone answering yes and that the odds went up if he kept asking.

No one picked on John or made fun of him. Not even when he came to school with two different color socks on. I just told the other students that his socks did too match; he had a pair of socks just like them at home. John smiled. The classmates helped him to participate in games. They would help him to stand up dominoes in rows, and if they were almost to the end of the row and another student accidentally started the rush of the dominoes to fall prematurely, John would not throw a fit or become upset. He would just shrug, smile and start to line the dominoes up again. He taught me patience. He inspired me to internally search for new ways to teach so that he could learn. Even a deck of cards or a pair of dice would help him count and do simple math. He helped me to gain an insight of these students who just wanted to be accepted by their peers without judgment. John taught me to enjoy life's smallest pleasures to

the fullest. When he wrote his name without help, he would smile the biggest smile and give me a high five.

I hope that our lives will cross paths often in the future. I would like to know that he is doing all right. For me, in room 111, the desk in front of the teacher will always remind me of John.



Substitute Wish List

It's tough going to different class assignments and not knowing the students. Most of the time the teacher has left a seating chart with the students' names listed. At the sight of the substitute teacher, some students will take advantage and sit by their friends. It would be more efficient for us to have a photo seating chart.

One teacher also added on the seating chart a star by the students' names that would be most helpful and a check by the students names that would require a more watchful eye. It would also help to add a number of what grade level a child can read by to help the substitute know who can be called on to read in class.

When the teacher phones in to subfinder, it would be a great help to know a little about what the class may be studying so that we can bring in extra material on that subject.

Along with our photo ID, we need a computer log on ID and lessons on how to use the school's computers.

District training on computers, DVD players, overhead projectors, and all other technology used in the schools.

Send a vice-principal/school officer by the last period of the day just to see if the substitute is still surviving because the last period in Jr. and Sr. High is always the hardest. Students don't want to be taught any more and just want the bell to ring. Most times, just a Hi from them will remind the students that they need to get back to their lessons and the business of learning.

Maybe for the fifth time that you teach in any school, you could be rewarded with a free lunch. It would be a win/win situation. More substitute teachers would be willing to go back to the more difficult schools with a free lunch incentive.

Digital cameras/web cameras included with the classroom key and instructions to identify problems and then downloaded

to the teacher's computer at the end of the day. Could also highlight the good things that happened in the classroom.

An opportunity to improve skills in basic subjects by attending adult community education classes tuition free.

District recognition for every five years of service we give to the schools. This could be just a note or certificate in the mail.



Final Bell

We live in the greatest nation of the world. Opportunities for success are endless. Our scientists have put astronauts into space and landed on the moon. Technology changes as fast as history. Medical breakthroughs are helping us live healthier and longer lives. With all of these accomplishments, why have we allowed the education of future generations to teeter on shaky ground?

Over the decade that I have been teaching, I have formed my own opinions that may cast some insights to the school system that politicians and parents may never understand.

When I first began to substitute, my first impressions were; learning lessons in school is wasted on our youth, that some teachers have forgotten why they entered the academic field, far too many parents use the schools for free daycare services and that politicians are encouraging all of the above.

If I had the power to make changes, I would:

- Require all politicians to spend two weeks substituting in the schools before approving the funding for the next year. I would like them to understand that No Child Left Behind, sounded like a good law, but there are a lot of gapping holes of responsibility that the noble idea does not address.
- Give incentive to future dropouts—no government programs, food stamps, etc. if they fail to graduate.
- Reduce the size of the classes by having a special class for those students who only come to school to cause distractions. Hire those authors who claim that they can turn around any failing or rebellious student/child by their enlighten programs (plus shipping and handling). I have attempted to teach classes at the Jr. High level that already had 38 students crowded into the room of wall-to-wall desks. It is a good thing that most students are

thin and can step up and over the back of chairs to find a spot to sit in. Students were also lined up along the back counter with folding chairs. I had just finished calling role when out of the corner of my eye, I watched a shy student enter the classroom and hand me her schedule. We were expected to make room and desks and books for another new student. Add a few disruptive/disrespectful students to this overcrowding and nothing is learned nor taught.

- Extend teaching basics and reading skills. My teaching assignments let me teach in classrooms with mixed ethnic groups also with students with special needs. The learning field needs to find balance for these groups. Many student-transfers from foreign lands to Jr. High have not been taught to read English. Many are struggling to learn English, but when they go home, they speak their native tongue. They rarely have reading books in their homes. It takes time to learn to read and write English. I strongly encourage them to learn but wonder would it be so bad to have a classroom set of Spanish books to help them to learn American/Utah history? I have observed 7th grade teachers reading and giving their students all the answers on their assignment because most of the students could not read well enough to complete it on their own.
- Change the value system. We need to inspire students to dream of becoming more than rock stars and sport jocks or the next American Teen Idol. It's great to have hobbies—but not to the point where the student becomes obsessed and fails to make meaningful life careers. In the future, I will require of these students some type of medical attention or business service. To tell the truth, when I try to correct their assignments and they are not able to spell simple words or write a complete sentence, I worry about my future existence.

- Schools are not created equal. Tax dollars need to be fairer. I have seen the schools on the East side and also on the West side. Sometimes the run-down appearance are the results of the students themselves not taking pride in their education. Sometimes the tax dollar goes to the school in the more influential neighborhoods. New textbooks are a big issue. What does make the difference in the schools? School atmosphere can improve just by the principal's attitude. In one elementary school, the principal will come into the class I am substituting in and tell the young students that I am a special person filling in for their teacher that day and if they disrespect me, they disrespect her and will be sent directly to her. The schools that she works in are clean. Students are happy and eager to learn. There are volunteers who help students with computers, reading, playground monitors, singing and other activities.

There are more choices offered to students these days. Class subjects have evolved into real jobs. High school students can learn to build houses, become medical attendants, paint and repair cars, even prepare to fly a helicopter. Students are able to take college credit classes at a fraction of college tuition. Most classes have computers that give up to the moment information to students. With everything positive with the education, why are there still students that cannot read nor write? Students are not prepared as much as they think they are for life's growing challenges. Maybe the solution is to require anger management classes, behavior modification classes, how to communicate or how to succeed in school/life classes. If we can help students set aside their frustrations and concerns, be able to express their feelings, then maybe their education will be more welcomed and embraced.

Both parents are working hard to support their families. They are tired and weary when they return home. Children spend more time watching T.V., playing videos games, learning life from Yahoo! Values have changed. I wish that mothers would return to the home and family. When mothers work, the needed income for the family has to increase too. She needs

clothes, transportation, babysitters just to begin. She puts in her hours at work, returns home where she needs to cook, clean and everything else in the few remaining hours left in the day. The casserole and hot from the oven bread is replaced by fast food or frozen pizza, adding to the cost of living. Mother is guilty of not having the energy to play and interact with her children so she enrolls them in T-ball, dance, pee-wee football, soccer, etc.. Children convince parents that they need to have cell phones, trendy clothes and chauffeured everywhere instead of car pools or walking with their friends. The family income has increased but at what cost to the family unit? When was the last time parents really talked more than five minutes at a time with their children?

We need to invite God back to school. At least the values that are associated with him such as Trust, Honesty, Hard work, Loyalty and Respect. These values began to be lacking by the students when prayers were taken out of the school system and both parents went to work. Students should be able to believe and strive to be better citizens. The pledge of allegiance should mean more to every student, no matter what language they speak at home. By believing in God, we can be more tolerant of our differences and embrace the hope that we can make a difference in the future of our country...in the world.

It takes everyone to do their part to insure the existence of our society and the free world. One student in American History made a comment during a video of how a President is elected. She stated that History would be more interesting if we didn't have to learn about men like Abraham Lincoln who has been dead for centuries. I explained to the class and this student that if we don't remember the past mistakes, we are sure to make them all over again.

We need to all work better together for the success of our children ...from home to educators, from community leaders to politicians from taxpayers to administrators, from students to substitutes. For in the end—what goes around comes around.

About the Author

Sharon Linschoten grew up in Salt Lake City, Utah and graduated from Granite High School. Life has many detours and instead of attending college to earn her degree in teaching, Sharon became a care-giver to her aging grandparents- Harold and Bessie Powell. She volunteered as a teacher's aid at Riley Elementary School. Bessie lost her fight with cancer. With a loan from her parents, David and Georgia Dalton, Sharon was able to buy and manage Cousins (a unique fabric store). Two years later, she married her high school sweetheart, Randy. A detour while Randy served in the Air Force brought them to Cheyenne, Wyo. They eventually moved to Magna, Utah and Sharon became a stay at home mother and together they raised four boys and one girl.

As the demands on her time changed so did the detours. Sharon became a staff reporter for the Magna Times/ West Valley News. Her column, Just In Passing, was well received.

She served on the Magna Area Council for four years.

Served as a leader in The Boy Scouts of America for 25 years, and in various positions in her church.

For the past decade, Sharon has been teaching students of all ages, as a guest teacher and loving it.