

“Why I Teach”

by Jamie Sawartzaky
Region IV Teacher of the Year



My path to the classroom took some of the same roads and had some of the same missteps and follies that many folks experience on their way towards a career in teaching. My undergraduate degree in history certainly fit the bill for a becoming a teacher and I had a lot of people assuming that's where I would eventually end up. But after graduating from college, I started to drift a bit, contemplated living aboard, and no career path had illuminated itself to me.

To keep it simple, the story of how that changed and why I become a teacher all comes down to a clock. You see I had taken at a job at an education association where, after many job descriptions and experiences, I eventually was put in charge of some educational programs that had international reach. While I suppose that I should have been happy to know that my work was eventually making its way into classrooms around the country and globe, I didn't see that impact on a daily basis (if ever) and so I spent much of my work day feeling unfulfilled. When you are spending your days wrapped in a cloak of boredom and you feel that your potential is not being tapped then you tend to look at the clock. A lot. I couldn't wait for five o'clock to roll around so that I could do things that I wanted to do. At some point, the things that I wanted to do included going back to school at night. For what, I wasn't quite sure. Being that my undergraduate degree was in history, it seemed like perhaps a career in teaching might be feasible, so I took a couple of classes to explore that option. While I wasn't overly enthralled with the classes themselves, the prospect of being in a classroom really got me excited. The practice lessons that I had the opportunity to demonstrate in front of my classmates got my adrenaline pumping and my mind racing. This was heightened by the observational experiences in schools that we all get to do as part of our teaching degree. The career path that I had waited to have illuminated in front of me was now illuminated INSIDE of me. I had a taste of the teaching bug and now I was REALLY watching the clock during the day because I getting closer to



the day when I would be able bring the passion into the classroom and actually teach. I just wondered what it would be like to actually be in the classroom in front of a room full of students.

I noticed the change in myself the first time I walked into my classroom. I was no longer “Jamie”. That was the name of the young man who had delivered pizzas or worked at the office. My newfound teaching life had metamorphosed me into “Mr. Sawatzky.” My previous work experiences had taught me a variety of skills, but accepting the title of teacher brings with it responsibilities that do not appear on most job descriptions. Walking through the classroom door has cast me into a world where I am charged with the awesome responsibility of sculpting young minds and preparing students for positive participation in their community.

When asked why they entered the profession, many teachers respond, “I wanted a chance to make a positive change in the world.” In my case, perhaps selfishly, I wanted to be in a profession that would make a positive change in me. With my 12 years of teaching under my belt, I can say that I am happy to be a teacher and happy to be “Mr.” Sawatzky. Oh, and now when I look at the clock it is with