

“Why I Teach”

by Meg Smith

2012 Virginia Teacher of the Year

My path to teaching was an indirect one. When I graduated from the College of William and Mary in 1989, I had a degree in history and a minor in art history. I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do, but I thought I might like to be an educator in an art museum. As I pondered my career options, my husband suggested that I consider earning a teaching certificate. This idea appealed to me, so I went back to school full-time at Lynchburg College to complete the coursework necessary to become certified in high school history. I enjoyed my education courses, and it only took entering a classroom as a student teacher for me to realize that my passion wasn't for teaching about art or teaching about history, but simply for teaching.

As I have learned more about the art and joys of teaching, my passion for educating students has grown. I can't imagine anything more rewarding than helping children acquire the knowledge and skills that enable them to realize their hopes and dreams. I have been teaching long enough that the students I taught early in my career are now adults. When they return to share their successes with me, it reaffirms for me the importance of what we do as educators.

My journey as a teacher has at times been the most challenging undertaking of my life. However, much more frequent than those times have been the joyful moments, large and small, that have made my career so personally and professionally rewarding. I believe that each and every child wants to improve, to advance, to become more than he or she is today. For some students that desire is obvious, and they demonstrate that desire in the classroom day after day. For others, that desire is hidden, sometimes buried beneath the weight of their daily struggles. To reach out with patience, encouragement, and a relentless determination to bring forth that intrinsic desire to improve, that is the challenge.

The children that I've had the honor to teach over the past seventeen years have enriched my life, and

it has been a pleasure and a privilege to watch them grow into young men and women. To be successful with even one child, to know that a meaningful difference has been made in the way a child views learning, views life, views him or herself—that is the goal. And when that goal is reached, it is not only the student that is changed forever. There are many paths that my life could have taken, and I have not regretted for one moment the path that led me to where I am today.



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