

## Good Teachers

*Throughout my school years I couldn't wait to meet my teachers.*

From country elementary schools through several graduate schools, I do not recall a bad teacher. They were different, each teacher like one piece of a great puzzle. And it was up to me to fit the pieces together for learning.

We talked about your teachers, met them, counseled with them through the years, thanked them, and sometimes took them to task. I envied the amount of your lives they spent with you, and the topics and feelings you shared with them—things I never knew about. They represented your parents, and in some ways they represented God to you. They were the guardians of your mind, of your future.

Some challenged you when you threw a square pot on a round potter's wheel, and you learned with them that you were unique, an inventor. Some drove you to practice for perfection; with them you reached your outer limits. Some became a best friend, and you learned to emulate a great mind, a compassionate heart. Some taught you to argue inside yourself and to look at everything from many sides—like Picasso, and your spirit grew. Some were a trial for you; through them, too, you discovered who you are.

You have remembered all of them. Some you have thanked.

Do you remember my stories about the professor who taught me that a word is a world? I was nineteen then, and his course was called "Form Criticism." Thirty-five years later, I read that he'd died. I wrote his widow a letter telling her of my thanks and admiration for this great mentor. I poured out gratitude as to a best friend. I also thanked her for her father, another professor, who that same year had taught me a course on the life of Christ. He was tall and gentle, and he leaned over us with love when he talked about Jesus. He taught as though he were an eyewitness, as though he had walked those ancient Judean roads, Galilean

hillsides and deserts himself. I thanked her for her father's reverent imagination. It felt good to give thanks for these teachers.

Thirty years ago I began teaching courses of Creative Education in seminaries. Students are now writing me, remembering when we sat on teeter-totters and spoke words that balanced, recalling how we walked downtown by twos with eyes closed to learn trust. We loved learning together. Everyone got a passing grade.

You remember teachers by name. I remember Mr. Hertel. He recruited me for college—not to play football or for a scholarship, just to go to Wartburg College in Iowa. He drove 300 miles to our country parsonage and asked me to come to his college. We could not afford college, but he said I could earn my way by washing dishes, waiting tables, raking leaves, washing windows and walls. That is what I did, and I often thanked him. He taught biology; coached basketball, baseball, football; and was our dorm master. His eyes were cast down whenever we met him, but in his shy spirit he knew everything about us. When the band played during basketball games, there was one tune we all loved. To the beat of that tune we sang the word "Hertel!" We sang it with love.

I do not remember ever having a bad teacher. I thought they were supposed to be the way they were. There was always something important to learn from each of them. Sometimes it was just to live through the hours of class. That was something good.

So it will always be with those who are teachers, colleagues, friends. All have things to teach, good things.

When we saw the film *The Crucible*, you told me how you directed the play in Tokyo. For two hours we talked about the meaning of this film for America and for students in Japan. I thanked you then. I thank you again in this letter for being my teacher. I thank God for your mind and spirit.

Years pass, our teachers change. We learn from each of them.

Love, Dad (Herb Brokering)