

Lessons Learned

By Sheila A. Johnson

In the barbaric era of Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble, classroom learning took place through trial and error underneath a big rock. And only an era later, before the indelible inventions and use of microwave ovens, computers, the internet, cell phones, digital clocks, calculators, and mini food courts located on or within school grounds, my access *to* and my benefits *from* a good education were not interrupted by anything less than a real emergency! Few, if any, of my friends got food poisoning from their brown bag lunches or cafeteria entrees; learning keyboarding carried us farther than learning skateboarding; social networking was defined by gathering together with family and friends over a meal or sports activity; calling from a cell phone meant you had actually been incarcerated; we were able to truly predict when it was time to go home by navigating the big hand, little hand, and all the marks in between; cursive writing, times tables, and learning to spell using all the letters in a word were customary and mandatory; and drones, robots, and holograms shared space with Star Trek.

From my young perspective, at the time, school was hard work and it seemed as if the day would never end. We began at 8am sharp and the last bell rang at 4:30pm. Most of us were eager to board the school busses or walk home together with two or more friends. We all smelled like the playground, looked like rag dolls, and couldn't wait for the next day of school. We were happy.

I have fond memories of my 5th grade teacher Mrs. Day. She had an amazing way of settling disputes among the students with grace and kindness. She taught us how to get along with the opposite sex and with each other. She was by far the kindest teacher in the school. Mrs. Eden, my ninth *and* tenth grade teacher, expanded my then narrow view of the world; she enthusiastically taught us geography and excitedly shared many stories of her travels around the world. At her insistence, I became active with the YWCA, and took my first of many trips outside of my hometown. To this day, Mr. McConahie, my eighth grade teacher, was the tallest, stockiest, gentlest spirit I have ever met. He was a brilliant math teacher, and taught us how, like the Native Americans from his tribe, to tell time by tracking the shadows cast by the sun and the moon—lessons that I still remember and cherish. And finally, as I recall, Mr. Taboda, one of my ninth grade teachers, instilled a lasting love of biology and science within my very soul. We had the pleasure of dissecting frogs, pigs, and cat brains. I gained a plethora of knowledge about how God intricately melded us together and I learned to respect all organisms—dead or alive!

I've journeyed over many decades of learning, and yet those traveled in my childhood seem to have left the most lasting impressions. Oh how I wish we, as a nation, could imbue the importance of safety, enthusiasm, caring, and love, within our future generations of students and teachers. Lesson learned.