

TRIBUTE TO MY FIRST GRADE TEACHER, BONNIE HINES

“Connectedness is what’s missing, connectedness brings hope.” Retired West Virginia elementary teacher, Bonnie Hines, shares her wisdom and memories of her 32 years of teaching. Bonnie is 75 years old, with 32 years of teaching experience. She began teaching in 1963, a time when teachers were more connected to each other and to their students. Bonnie’s memories are of sitting and reading to students and planting seeds of hope. “No one is better than you! You can do anything, and you can be anything you want!” Little did Bonnie know her life would make such an impact on six-year-old Diana Ketterman in 1972.

The mother of two and grandmother of three, she compares her teaching experience of having “her kids” in the classroom much to having “her kids” at home. “I simply showed them I cared,” she says. “Back then was a time of no electronics. Things were simple. Teachers did whatever needed to be done without being mandated. They weren’t under the pressure they are today. “I would not want to be a parent or a teacher today.” She continues, “When school and learning are structured, the experience can be a lifeline, but with today’s societal changes, education is becoming less and less valued.”

Bonnie cites some of the issues of today: the increase in disruption and negative classroom behavior and how society has played into “anything is acceptable”, a breakdown of family structure, a fast-pace lifestyle, and the evil of technology. “Life is not for the better. Education is not for the better,” she states in wisdom. “Kids hold their emotions inside. They need someone to talk to. So many children are raised by their grandparents who are not always able to provide what they need. Those who are fortunate to still be living with their parents may be facing hardships including substance abuse, emotional and physical abuse, and many times just busyness.”

A description of how school was in the “good days” seems more like a home environment. Teachers weren’t under so many mandates. They taught kids a “way of life”. There’s a faraway look in Bonnie’s eyes as she remembers teaching students how to cook. “Once for Washington’s birthday students made cherry pies, and took them to the kitchen to be baked.” She paused briefly as if in another world. “Teaching was fun – back then.” She continues on, “Today, teachers need help in the area of mental health. They have to be more than teachers. They are expected to fill in the gap from the home to the future. Students need help to know how to make the right decision. Their lives are being influenced by drugs, the breakup of the family, and poverty.”

Bonnie brings to light the fact student mental health issues existed years ago, and the system was broken then, but today it is more broken than ever. Bonnie recalls having a student with a lot of emotional problems. She sensed something wasn’t quite right with the student, so she catered to him. She took him home, gave him a bike, and she frequently brought him food. Once he came to school with marks on his face. When questioned, he told her the marks came from sleeping on a heater grate in someone else’s trailer. That evening she walked him outside after school to his mother’s car. After peering into the car, she realized that possibly the child was homeless. Bonnie reported her concerns as required to officials. Upon learning of the reporting, the mother took the child and fled to California. Bonnie never saw him again. “I often wonder what might have happened if I wouldn’t have reported the incident. I would have broken the law, but at least he would have had me. I wonder if he ever had another teacher who fed him and cared for him? I wonder where is he, and what ever happened to him?”

“Yes, mental health education is needed today more than ever. Mastering Mental Health curriculum begins the dialogue. We must talk about the issues we face in order to find ways to mitigate them.”



Mrs. Hines, thank you for your service! You will never know the extent to which you have helped shape and mold many futures of the children of Hardy County.