

It Seemed Like a Bright Idea . . .

Chapter 1 of a Crazy Teacher's Saga

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Several years ago life was good. And it was simple. I was teaching 4th grade in a great little school. My teaching colleagues and 4th grade team members were excellent. I only had to drive 15 minutes on a well-paved road from my house to school and back again. My husband had a great job in a neighboring district. Our daughter was in college and politely visited once a month with her fiancée. So indeed, life was good.

Then it started, that small teacher itch; the one that began with my fingers tapping restlessly. Then it began crawling up my spine, nestling between my shoulder blades and inching its way right up into my brain. It finally lodged right between my eyes, and then the little voice started up too.

“You know there is more for you to do. You keep telling your students if they flat line that means they are a dead learner. Are you flat lining? Don't you want to know if there is more you can do? Are you really content on this plateau? Shouldn't you be looking for another mountain to begin climbing? The view doesn't change much on a plateau.”

That voice just wouldn't let up either once that itch began to fester. I tried to reason it away. I already had three major teaching endorsements. I had a Master's Degree. I liked teaching 4th grade. I liked working with my colleagues and friends. But that voice just kept getting louder and louder. It became more insistent until it was like a steady drum beating out its message relentlessly.

Finally, I succumbed. I looked into a nearby college's administrative degree. It seemed like a bright idea. Wasn't that the next logical step for Master's level teachers who wanted to accomplish more? Since my procrastination wall had already been laid low by the throbbing little voice, I registered for classes and began this new educational endeavor. I would complete the coursework in one year. I was on track to do my administrative internship in the fall. Life was changing, but it was still good.

Then two of my colleagues came to me with a proposition. They were interested in becoming National Board Certified Teachers. One taught 1st grade and the other taught 7th grade Language Arts. They were both dear and trusted friends. However, they really needed a third person to strengthen their National Board Candidate Grant Application. They were just wondering since I was one of their best friends and a good teaching partner would I please join them in this endeavor. I was honored by their request, however I tried to explain to them that I was working on my administrative credential and I would be doing my internship in the fall. They looked like two children who had lost the big game before ever getting a chance to play. I couldn't leave them like that. I joined their group so that their scholarship applications would be stronger.

I was with them in spirit, but really since both my internship grant and the NBCT candidate grants came through the state, who would be crazy enough to give me both at the same time. I learned my first valuable lesson about state educational agencies; they don't talk to each other. No one was more shocked than me when I received both grants; beyond surreal doesn't even begin to describe my ensuing nightmares. And then there was my husband, (Mr. Type A. Do-It-All) telling me, "Oh you are so organized, most people couldn't even dream of doing this, but you, you can." No pressure from that front either.

Then my world began to tilt, not just a little but a great big polar shift. My husband of 24 years, my best friend and confidant learned that an E.S.D. Superintendent position was going to be opening up. I knew that this was one of his big career goals, but the timing could not have possibly been more problematic. If he applied for and was offered this position it would mean relocating once again for his career advancement. Not that I hadn't enjoyed moving around the state while he climbed his career ladder, but now I wanted my turn. And my ladder was firmly positioned in our present city. When he was offered the position we knew we had serious decisions to make. We talked late into the night. We discussed his needs and mine, his commitments and mine, his goals and mine. I kept telling him life was good where we were at, but I could tell from that look in his eyes that he needed to take this next step. However, he also knew that I needed to stay put and at least try to accomplish one of the big professional endeavors that I had signed up for.

To our credit in our 24 years of marriage we honestly believed that we had mastered the fine art of compromise. However, a daily drive of about 160 miles one way for one of us just wasn't realistic. We took the "road less traveled" and decided to establish two homes; one in my city and one in his. Our family and friends just shook their heads and muttered impolite things like "crazy", "too driven", "won't work", "sounds like a divorce", etc. Ignoring the naysayers we forged ahead. We sold our home (it would be too much for me to manage on my own). I lost my in-ground pool, the private peach and cherry orchard, and the breathtaking view of Mt. Adams looming over the valley at dawn and sunset. My huge sun room filled with my plant friends was a particular hard loss. One of the biggest blows was deciding what to do with my quarter horse mare. She was an athlete, a loving doll, and my baby. But I knew in my heart that I wouldn't have the time or place to care for Fergie properly. Even though I sold her to the right people, I still spent many lonely nights crying buckets of tears.

However, undoubtedly the greatest loss was that of my husband by my side, and me at his side. Together since high school, each others one and only, we could only imagine how we would manage without our closest confidant for our dinner discussions. Who would be able to voice our worries and challenges to? Would we be strong enough to continue to confide in each other during those difficult new times or would we hold it in; not wanting to burden the other half of our heart? Still, the die was cast and so we boldly went where neither of us could have every imagined into that great uncharted frontier of separate cities.

We initially found two apartments and split the household goods down the middle literally. He took the recliner end of our wrap around sofa and I kept the sleeper bed end. He took the one of the queen-size guest beds and I took another. We gave away our king-size waterbed, after all it was 22 years old, and it wouldn't fit into either of our postage stamp bedrooms. On July 1st of 2002 we began our big adventure of long distance living.

On July 10th I attended my first national board candidate orientation. I tried to keep from fainting in front of my friends, but it truly was a challenge! On the way home I heard a different big booming voice in my head, "What in the Hades were you thinking woman!" As soon as I got home I went to Office Depot and bought a humongous year-long wall calendar. I began planning (with a pencil and a big eraser nearby).

On August 8th I attended my Principal's Cohort Internship orientation. Life wasn't going to be as quite as simple anymore. Plus the apartment living definitely was not good. Trying to be optimistic I reasoned that it seemed that I would soon be too busy to spend much time there other than to sleep, shower, and occasionally grab a microwave meal. I would deal with it. Besides nothing else could possibly go wrong; right? Wrong!

Our school principal accepted a new job in another district. Our new principal didn't have enough experience to supervise my internship. Fortunately, my school superintendent stepped forward, but only on the condition that if he saw a mental breakdown in my imminent future he would be able to pull the plug on my National Boards or my internship. Mostly he was concerned about how I would find time to teach my regular 4th grade classroom and give my students the attention they would need. I promised to be the best time manager in the history of our school. Efficiency expertise was a goal I hoped to attain while maintaining my sanity during what promised to be a big, long, wild, and wacky year. Still I kept telling myself, I could do this, I would do this. I would take one day at a time. I would do one task at a time. I would use my calendar. (And as I discovered also; my pencil, and my big pink pearl eraser.) It was time or me to gear up and get serious about my career plans.