



Teach and Be Taught

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and courage for me. Whenever I encountered a challenging situation while raising my son, my mother would often pull up quotes on life from famous people and authors. I remember fondly one of my mother's quotes by Mark Twain; it says: “When a boy turns fourteen seal him in a barrel and feed him through a knot hole.” This quote, like many of her sayings, would help diffuse a difficult situation and give me cause for a giggle. My mother knew that laughter was good medicine. And she was great at laughter.

A DIFFERENT WAY OF SEEING THINGS

Although I battled cancer while raising a son and caring for my elderly parents, I told my former students during the interview that I would not change a thing about my life. Upon reflection, I recognized that my fight against cancer had given me a renewed sense of empathy, compassion, faith, and hope. With a more understanding, charitable and optimistic mindset, I have been able to help other parents with autistic children, console countless women diagnosed with cancer, and hold the hands of friends who have heard the whisper of death.

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My experience fighting cancer has taught me that my behavior affects not only my own feelings but also the feelings of those around me. When I was “chemo bald” and looking quite gray, I would see fear on the faces of people I would come into contact with. This would continue until I started to smile and laugh at my own circumstances. In response to this anecdote, my two former students asked if I had any advice to share. I told them to walk into every day with a grateful heart and to live each day as if it is the last. I know that it is important to love and sing and dance and laugh, so I advised my students to enjoy laughter and laugh until their sides hurt and tears roll. As my mother would say, “A day without laughter is a wasted one.”

As we ended the interview, I told my students that it might be odd for them to hear me say that cancer was a blessing. But it was. In part because of my adversities, I have been able to touch the lives of over 10,000 children during my teaching career. I am truly privileged to be the mother of a marvelous young man who is now twenty-eight years old. And I am blessed beyond measure to be a cancer survivor and see the miracles that abound each and every day. ■

Lynn has taught all subjects and grades K-8 for 34 years and is currently working with 6th graders.