

Chicken Soup for *Friendswood ISD*

Both of my parents were educators, but since I have always liked to do my own thing, the idea of teaching never occurred to me growing up. When I finished college, equipped with a BA in English, I did the most logical thing and became a restaurant manager. At some point, I realized that I enjoyed reading and writing way more than I enjoyed telling wait staff to "86 the special" or "fill up table eight's water glasses". So, I left that job, earned my teaching certificate, and hoped I had made the right decision.

When I began applying for teaching jobs, I knew I wanted to be a fifth-grade teacher. I loved my fifth-grade teacher, Mrs. Roberts, and I wanted to be somebody else's Mrs. Roberts. Fifth grade was perfect. I taught on a fifth-sixth grade campus, and as the babies on the campus, the fifth graders were still sweet and loved their teachers. I got to feel like Mrs. Roberts every day!

After I had my twins, I had to leave my beloved fifth-graders, but I knew eventually I would be back. I stayed home until my girls were ready to start kindergarten and then began applying to several districts, assuming I would land another fifth-grade job. Instead, I was offered a job as a 7th grade English/Language Arts teacher at FJH. JUNIOR HIGH! These kids were very different from my fifth graders, but I discovered that I really loved their quirkiness, their wacky senses of humor, their hormone-induced emotional swings, all of it. These were my people!

My time at the junior high has certainly been unpredictable. Once, just as my principal walked into the room, I had a student demand I repay my "gambling debt" to her! I have had students who hated reading and those who have read non-stop. I have received wonderful notes of gratitude, and a few not-so-well-wishes, too. I have felt helpless, and I have helped. Through the years, my students have touched my heart and my funny bone.

When the pandemic hit, my seventh graders balked at distance learning. Many of them seemed to just drop off the face of the earth. I became jealous of the stories elementary teachers posted about the cute things their students did on Zoom calls. I just had disgruntled twelve and thirteen-year-olds, irritated at the world for being stuck at home, and I was feeling their pain. I was feeling disgruntled as well. Then one day, a student logged in a little early. Surprised by this apparent show of interest, I assumed he needed some help, so I admitted him to the class. There he was, spinning around in his parents' office chair with a laundry basket in his lap. As he rotated to face the camera, he held that basket up, smiled the most dazzling smile, and proudly stated, "Look, I have ducklings!" This thirteen-year-old boy showed his ELA teacher his baby ducks! My jealousy faded. All of the grumbling and complaining and missed work did not seem to matter as much. I remembered why I was here. Seventh graders are definitely my people.

-Nicole Ferro, FJH English Teacher