

September 1, 2013

I never questioned anything throughout high school. I guess you could have considered me a zombie. I woke up, ate, went to school, slept, went home.... When my parents asked me what I learned that day, i'd shrug my shoulders because I didn't really learn much at all. School was just school and life just sucked. My junior year I had Mr. Wood's government and economics class. I slammed my books on the desk and leaned back in my chair preparing for another year of nonsense. Another year of copying definitions out of a book and taking vocabulary tests on the bill of rights or founding fathers this or that. My attitude of not caring was written all over my face and my body language.

He started off the class with the quote on the board, "The buddha came down from the mountain... The wise man asked, "Are you a God?" "Are you a man?" The buddha said, "I am Awake." It got me thinking..... I soon realized this wasn't an ordinary stick to the book guidelines class it was more than that. This man was born to be a teacher, he was born to make us think. There were posters plastered around his room about social issues all around the world. Issues that I never have even heard about or to be honest I never even cared to know about...

He gave us homework.. but not any ordinary do the 10 questions at the end of the chapter homework... He gave us homework that made us actually use the big fatty mass inside our heads. He would make us read articles on going green, articles on women in third world countries, articles on how to improve your local government. He showed us how to have a voice regardless of being seventeen years old in a little wolf lake town. He showed us all how to become somebody. He gave extra credit to anyone who needed it. He always stayed after school to help anyone.

Failing his class was impossible. You would have to try and fail.

His tests weren't just memorizing pointless historical events out of dusty old textbooks, his tests were made by him and they weren't just easily answered with A, B, C ,D or all of the above. You have to write. You had to sit down in your seat pick up a pen and WRITE what you LEARNED.

He pushed people to become the person he knew they could be! The shy kid, the rebel kid, the jock kid, the handicap kid, they were all treated the same. I know for a fact he changed Nicole Kary's life. He didn't just look at her like someone who went around in an electric wheelchair sitting through a class. He made her talk, he made her laugh, he made her do the assignments like the rest of us. He made her feel like the REAL person who deserves to be treated

like. The assignment wasn't cut in half, she wasn't babied either. She became a social butterfly in his class. She wasn't nervous behind all the rows of teenagers anymore. She would freely talk to us on her computer and ask more questions than we did.

Questions.... that word reminds me of Mr.Wood more than any other word. Questions. Without a doubt I know that I would not be where I am at today in my life without this guy as my teacher. He completely changed my life. I smoked, I partied, I hung out with the wrong people, I didn't care about anybody but myself until he made me QUESTION who I was as a PERSON. He treated us not like another name on the attendance sheet but a real person. I quit partying and started hitting the text books. I was achieving one of the highest grades in the class room because I felt ACCEPTED. For once in my teenage life, I was pushed to be myself and pushed to the limit where my brain wanted to explode. He didn't make it easy and that's what made me love his classes. You had to be physically and emotionally awake in his class. & that's how every teacher should teach.

I left Oakridge the end of my junior year for online school due to stress at home. I felt stupid, I barely passed my online classes and google and yahoo answers was how I got by day by day. I felt so bad that I called up Mrs. Clausen and Mr. Patton and had them reenroll me for my senior year. I picked Mr. Wood's class Senior Current Issues. I never learned so much in my whole entire life then I did out of this one class. We picketed so our school didn't get privatized and so that they wouldn't cut our teacher's salary. We picketed outside in the freezing cold snow.... for what? For a grade? No. For Our school! For once a teacher made us care about SCHOOL. about OUR FUTURE. about our TEACHERS. If one cannot see how amazing that is then their vision and priorities are clouded by nonsense. We went to Western Michigan College on a tour and questioned professors and walked around the campus. I got to meet a sociology professor that I've always wanted to meet. No other teacher gave us that opportunity. I volunteered at the Obama administration for over ten hours and I wasn't even legal to vote but he made us want to be apart of a great movement in history. He made us realize even if we couldn't have a voice on the ballot we could have a voice behind the scenes. I was up there everyday making calls, filling out paper work and helping my community. For what? a grade? No. For myself. I never felt more important in my life. I stayed up all night watching the re election. What kind of teenager does that? One that copies off other peoples papers? No. One that just memorizes vocabulary words? No. Its one who finally found their voice that they never knew they had its one who learned to care about their country. Its one who realized without the voice of our generation our whole country would crumble. Its one who finally began to think on her own. One who wanted to learn because a teacher gave them a chance.

I never thought a Muskegon kid had a chance. We all thought we were just another nobody until Mr. Wood touched our lives in the most amazing but simple way possible. If more teachers were like him more teens would go to school, more teens would care and society wouldn't be as messed up as it is. I care! For once in my life the cold hearted chick who didn't give a damn about anything stopped all the crazy stuff in her life to care about her country, care about her grades, and care about herself. Because of one teacher.

In society, teens aren't even supposed to like their teachers. Probably because they are teaching wrong. & need to sit down and take a word of advice from Mr. Wood. I question the media, I question the president, I question everything. I'm not a brain washed zombie teen who sleeps through every class. I'm a graduate of Oakridge High School who's life has been touched by the best teacher around Muskegon County. Currently, I live in Washington State. I moved across the country because I believed in myself and I believed I could make it. I believe because I had a teacher who believed in me. I think that every teen needs a teacher who can believe in them cause nobody seems to believe in our generation anymore.

Sincerely, Sarah Pennell aka someone who cares about Oakridge High School.

<[sarahmarie.penell@gmail.com](mailto:sarahmarie.penell@gmail.com)>  
Oakridge graduating class of 2013