

Remembering Mrs. O'Grady

Mrs. O'Grady was tall with thick white hair. She taught third grade and never raised her voice. The students listened to her every word and raised their hands politely when she asked a question. Mrs. O'Grady lent me cigarettes in the teacher's lounge and said I reminded her of someone out of a Dickens's tale. I am not sure if that was a good thing or not. Nancy O'Grady was near the end of her teaching career and I was awkwardly just starting out.

All of the students liked Mrs. O'Grady except Danny, who never said a word. One day while delivering the morning messages to the office, he just opened the front door and walked home. It was two miles to his house. I was asked to search the grounds for the missing boy. Danny's parents brought him back to school but said that Danny was unhappy with his teacher and that Danny wanted a different one. The principal obliged and all was well except for Mrs. O'Grady. She was devastated; her heart broken by one little boy who wanted out of her classroom.

I am reminded of Mrs. O'Grady when I speak to tutors about students who stop coming to class or those that want a different teacher. What can we do? There are no procedures written down (perhaps there should be), and no formula for solving the dilemma of a broken heart. We all wear our hearts on our sleeves, try our best, and hope for a satisfying conclusion. That is not always possible and I think we have to accept the possibility that losing a student can happen to any one of us.

What do we do when a student stops coming to class? A first step would be to have a coordinator or Board member meet with the student. Tell him/her what fine progress he/she is making and how vital it is not to quit. Life intrudes. Perhaps there are financial issues, no phone, and no transportation. Perhaps a new meeting place can be arranged. Some of the students have quit school before and we have to convince them to keep plugging on. It is not as simple as three strikes and you're out. We have to do our best to keep the student coming to class.

We are going to lose some students and that seems to be a universal truth. It will not be easy and it will hurt some. Althea Jane Lindstrom writes, "Each of us fails from time to time. If we are wise, we accept these failures as a necessary part of the learning process." The best thing one can do is shake it off and start with someone else. It is important work that we do. We open doors even if some close. So I say with the New Year—keep up the good work.

Glenn G. Coats

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