



“I haven’t the heart to tell them that in many cases the thing that they left me with was mild PTSD..”

EVERYONE WANTS TO BE REMEMBERED, SAYS TOM STARKEY – BUT DON’T KID YOURSELF THAT, AS A TEACHER, IT’S ALWAYS GOING TO BE FOR YOUR PEDAGOGICAL BRILLIANCE...

It’s getting to that stage in my career when a lot of the kids I taught as a fresh-faced young’un with hope in my heart and biros in my pocket have themselves reached adulthood.

In fact, it seems like these days, every time I’m out shopping I’m met by the dreaded call of “Sir! Sir!” and turn around to be greeted not by some uniformed pipsqueak, but by a towering monolith whose crushing handshake proceeds to turn every one of my bones into a fine powder, and who excitedly talks to me about all those great times we had in class while I (rapidly, and with ever more panic) try to pluck a name from the dark

and dusty recesses of my memory and hope that I’m not actually getting mugged.

“Do you remember me?” is invariably the question. I’ve had it from angels and tearaways, and nine times out of ten I can pull it out of the bag. That’s no mean feat when you think about it, considering I’ve taught close to a burzillion students or something. Touchingly, they want to know whether they made an impression; whether they might have meant something to me. I haven’t the heart to tell them that in many cases the thing that they left me with was mild PTSD after being in the same room as them

for 45 minutes.

It’s the same with teachers. We too want to make an impression. We want to shape those young minds and get them to where they need to be. We want to give them the knowledge and skills that’ll help them on their journey through life. That’s what we want them to remember us for.

But, you know. Kids.

Instead of being ‘the teacher who never gave up on me’ you’re often ‘that ginger one who only had one jumper’. Instead of ‘an inspiration who helped me become the woman I am today’ you’re ‘Mr Jenkins who fell off his chair in assembly that time.’ We can mould and shape all we want, but we can’t dictate whether it’s our good work that gets remembered or that time we let them go early because we forgot it was a two-hour lesson rather than just one.

I don’t resent the grown-up kids I see for talking more about the way my face went dark red when they told me they’d forgotten their book for the umpteenth time, or how I went completely mental when the class came third at sports day, rather than the way I got them to analyse language to look for deeper meaning or how they can now write a pretty decent paragraph on any subject of their choosing because of the things I did. You don’t get to choose what people ultimately remember and it’s really not up to us to say that within the great tapestry of their time at school it should be this or that which they should cherish the most.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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So when Sophie or Callum or Stephen or Kar-Wai or whoever collars me during my mission to get an extra elbow patch for my corduroy jacket it’s nice really. I see the tiny faces of who they were when they were in my class superimposed onto the faces of who they became once they left it. Sometimes there’s hardly a change but mostly there is; life catches up with us all – the quiet ones and the class clowns alike. I hope that something I did helped them, a lesson opened their eyes to the wonder of poetry, or at the very least I helped them put their capitals in the right place or whatnot. But when I meet these giants who were once in my care, as we catch up and they tell me about their own children (which always knocks me for six and never fails to make me feel so very old) I mostly just hope that they’re happy.

I’ve done my bit. What I wanted them to take with them and what they actually did are sometimes as different as night and day and if my legacy ends up being a memory of ‘that one in the glasses who wouldn’t stop talking’ well, that’s fine too; not everything is remembered or used. It doesn’t really matter.

And they *are* mighty fine glasses.

Thanks for reading.

