

Lessons From First Grade

In 1986, Robert Fulghum wrote a book entitled "***All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten***" It was on the New York Times best selling list for nearly two years. It simplified lessons for living down to basic principles that most of us learned at an early age but have forgotten now that we are "all grown up."

Some of us slightly older folks, did not have the benefit of receiving these life lessons in kindergarten, and had to wait an extra year until first grade to benefit from these lessons for living.

My first grade teacher was Mrs. Jewel Stephens. Mrs. Jewel, as we politely say in the south, a short "healthy" woman. She had salt and pepper hair (more salt than pepper), she had typical horn-rimmed glasses, and, as was the fashion during that time, wore a dress every day.

Mrs. Jewel was one of the sweetest, most dedicated ladies that I have ever met. Not only did she teach first grade, she also taught second and third grade. She did not teach different grade levels in different years, she taught all three grades, first, second, and third every day. All in the same classroom. All by herself. She was dedicated.

I have to admit that I was a pretty good student in first grade. Modesty prevents me from saying that I was a great student, so we will stick with pretty good. I made good grades. I understood and followed directions pretty well. However, like most young, six year old boys, I was a little restless at times during the school day. Occasionally, Mrs. Jewel had to correct me on this restlessness. OK, it was more than occasionally, it was daily. Every day, day in and day out, I received some type of correction for misbehavior.

I loved Mrs. Jewel. I really did want to please her. I really did not want to make her sad by misbehaving. Despite my desire to do what Mrs. Jewel wanted me to do, I still struggled to make it through the day without messing up.

One day, I decided, "Today, I am not going to misbehave, I am going to make Mrs. Jewel proud of me." The morning went well. I followed directions, completed assigned tasks, my behavior was excellent. My plan was working to perfection. Lunch went well, I took my afternoon nap, still on target. Mrs. Jewel would be so proud of me.

I only had about one hour left in the day, when innocently, I found an empty cardboard Quaker Oats container. I already had my pencil in my hand and before I knew what had happened, I was playing my own composition on the Quaker Oats drum. Mrs. Jewel was a music lover but found it a bit distracting while she was trying to teach.

Jeffrey! Please put your drum away until after class! I was so close. One hour to go and I blew it. I really tried this time. I wanted to make Mrs. Jewel happy and I wanted to make her proud of me. I blew it.

The great thing about Mrs. Jewel was that she loved me. She loved all of her students. At the end of the day, despite how many times she had to correct someone during the day, she would give us a hug and say, "have a good evening, I will see you tomorrow." That hug let us know that we were loved. Her words reminded us that all was forgiven and she looked forward to spending her day with us again tomorrow. Mrs. Jewel knew our hearts. She knew our misbehavior was not malicious, it was that we could not help ourselves. She loved us.

Colossians 3:12-13 tells us, ***"¹²Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."*** In first grade, I learned that because I was loved, I was forgiven. It is a lesson that I still carry with me today. Thank you, Mrs. Jewel!