

THE EDITOR'S PAGE

Thank you, Mr. Russove

Jack Russove turned my life around. And he did it in his 6th-grade classroom at Benjamin Franklin Elementary School in Manitowoc, Wisconsin.

I entered Mr. Russove's classroom at a tender point in my life. I was — once again — the new girl in a new school in a new town because of yet another job change by my dad.

As she had done before, my mother collected files from the old school and hand carried them to my new school. Together, we sat down to meet the teacher. A *man* teacher. In elementary school. In the 1960s.

With his round face, crew cut, and husky build, Jack Russove looked more like a high school football coach than an elementary teacher. Mr. Russove spent a few minutes quietly reading my school record, which showed rows and rows of A's and good comments every year until 5th grade. That was the year of Mrs. B., who seemed to take an instant dislike for me. She ridiculed me in class, regularly told me in front of other students that I wasn't as smart as I thought I was, and occasionally laughed out loud at my comments, my projects, or my looks. The A's that used to dominate my report card disappeared, re-

placed by C's and D's and comments about my behavior.

After a bit, he glanced at me and asked, "What happened in school last year?"

I shrugged and looked down. "My teacher didn't like me," I said.

"Hmmm. Well, I like you just fine. I think you're going to have a good year here," he replied.

Mr. Russove treated me no differently than any other student. When I raised my hand, he called on me. When I didn't, he still called on me. He visited my home, just as he visited the home of every student in his class every year. He never once told any students that they were stupid. During a year when our beloved president was assassinated, Jack Russove provided a place where we felt protected and safe.

During the Russove year, I blossomed. I wrote a play and convinced other kids to help me produce it. I wanted to start a school newspaper, and he told me what I would have to do. And I did it because he believed I could. I interviewed students and teachers, wrote stories, and made copies of it in the school office. I wrote poetry that I got to read over the school P.A. system. Jack Russove started me down the path that led to a career marked by curiosity and lots and lots of words.

I had many exceptional teachers and a few stinkers. But, Jack Russove was the supernova. He did more than just make me believe in myself. His teaching shaped my lasting belief in the power of great teachers, especially in the upper elementary years when students are old enough to be ready but still young enough to be molded. I wish every kid had the good fortune to benefit from a Mr. Russove and that we could figure out how to fill our schools with more just like him. — JR

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