

THE MLWGS Jabberwock

Volume XI, Issue 3

www.mlwgsjabberwock.org

Friday, October 24, 2014

Remembering Mr. Bear O'Bryan

By Parth Kotak

I walked into Señor Quintero's class Monday morning, the thirteenth, expecting a typical class. We were going to discuss the imperfect tense when Mr. Tharp's voice started over the speakers. A teacher at our school had passed away. I paused in disbelief, waiting for the name. Mr. O'Bryan, he said. The news was a shock to me. My eyes widened and mouth hung open. The other sophomore and juniors in my class were visibly distraught as well. After the announcements ceased, the atmosphere in the classroom, and the school, took on a somber aura.

His current sophomores, including myself, have only had him for about five weeks. Although we haven't had him for that long, we felt his loss pretty hard as well. Mr. O'Bryan was a man of few words, but those words inspired students and assisted them only as much as was necessary; he left the majority of the thinking to us.

"He didn't just teach English," says Corinne Burch ('17). "He taught us how to learn, and showed us how to be happy."

When I originally presented my Hamlet essay's thesis to him, he asked me if I believed ghosts were real. This led to a discussion on how unseen forces manipulate our lives, and how we must be wary of them. Mr. O'Bryan's attitude towards writing brought out the best in his students as well.

Robin Schwartzkopf ('17) said, "As soon as I saw that Mr. O'Bryan would be my teacher this year, I was extremely excited. I had seen how influential he had been on my sister's writing and outlook on life. I was eager to impress him with my writing, because it is one of my passions. I never got a chance to hear his feedback, but I know that I have already been changed as a writer and a person,



Mr. Greg "Bear" O'Bryan taught English at MLWGS; his students describe him as an inspiring teacher. Photo courtesy of the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

merely by his incredible compassion and dedication."

Not only did Mr. O'Bryan work countless hours for his students during school, he even sacrificed his own vacation time to help young people interested in writing. "Mr. O'Bryan worked for 30 years at a residential summer program for gifted students," says Frau Dawn Grois. "He always took time with each student to help improve his/her writing. He encouraged them to reflect upon their life and how it connected to the literature that they read."

Looking back at those five weeks, I realize what a great impact Mr. O'Bryan had on his students, and this school, in his own quiet way. He went out of his way to help those in the smallest ways possible. He brought in candy, peanuts, and cookies to share with his fellow teachers in the workroom.

The small things about a person really mattered to him, whether it was a bizarre idiosyncrasy or a curious interest. When I walked into the dimly lit room every class period, my eyes and mind took a moment to adjust to the different

surroundings, and delve into the world of literature with our guide, Mr. Bear O'Bryan. We will miss him.

A memorial service for Mr. O'Bryan will take place at 6pm on the 25th of October, tomorrow, in the Maggie Walker auditorium.



This special commemorative issue of the Jabberwock will feature several of Mr. O'Bryan's pencil sketches of Marilyn Monroe as a way of remembering and honoring his legacy and passion. Photos courtesy of Flickr.

"The Beauty of High School"

By Galen Green

Mr. O'Bryan always told me I should share this entry from my anthology with the Jabberwock, and I never did because I was afraid that it would make people mad or people would disagree with me. But if Mr. O'Bryan thought this was important to share, then I am going to share it. What makes this entry so special is that his classroom, his teaching style, and Bear himself are what I was thinking of when I wrote this. Nothing I can say will convey what this man meant to me, but here is the essay he wanted me to share.

—————
 "I will study the world, and the world will give me truth." —Mr. Houghton

Sometimes, it feels like high school is just about surviving the stress. I don't know if this is what it is like at other high schools, but I definitely feel like the workload is nearly impossible. For instance, last week I had four huge tests, one right after another, in addition to the usual amount of homework. I was lucky if I got five hours of sleep per night that week- I averaged probably 3 and a half.

So, the question is, what is high school about? Is it about taking the words written on a textbook page and searing them onto your brain? Or maybe it is learning for to memorize a geography map in under five minutes. Heck, maybe it is about

learning how to function with under four hours of sleep. Personally, I don't know what high school is supposed to be about, but for me, it is none of the above.

I believe high school is about learning as much as you can, not just in the classroom setting, before you head off into the real world. High school is for becoming an educated young adult who can converse intelligently on a variety of subjects. It should also be about learning how to interact in social situations. While I suppose it does have something to do with dealing with stress, I don't think that should be what it is all about.

I personally love school, but I know a fair amount of people who literally go to high school to get into a good college. They don't *enjoy* their classes; they don't know the feeling of elation upon solving a complex math problem; they are unfamiliar with the tears that come with the death of your favorite character in your favorite book; they can't comprehend the philosophical side of physics; overall, they don't see the beauty in learning.

And if that isn't heartbreaking, I don't know what is.

I just wish that my peers would see what I see, could feel what I feel, when I walk into a classroom at Maggie Walker. I know, Maggie Walker can be stressful, but it can also be beautiful. So yes, there will be weeks where you literally won't speak to anyone because you are so busy studying for the many assessments you have, but that shouldn't define your high school experience.

Have an opinion?

WRITE A LETTER TO
THE EDITOR

newspaper@gsgis.k12.va.us



THE MLWGS Jabberwock

Editorial Policy:

The MLWGS Jabberwock covers the news events related to the school community and provides a forum for students to share their ideas. Statements expressed by columnists or in letters to the editor do not necessarily reflect the views of the staff. However, all editorials are the combined work of both the Editor-in-Chief and her staff.

All members of the MLWGS community are invited to submit letters to the editor on any topic, although the publication of all letters is not guaranteed. The newspaper reserves the right to edit letters for grammar, language and length. Please e-mail letters to newspaper@gsgis.k12.va.us.

Jabberwock Staff

Editor-in-Chief: Sharvani Mehta

News: Radhika Srivastava

Features: Sophia McCrimmon

Sports: Claire Mendelson

Opinion: Pranay Vissa

News-In-Brief: Sam Martin

Photo/Website: Srishti Sanya

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Janet Spencer

A Tribute to Mr. Bear O'Bryan



To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.
— William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*

Bear O'Bryan, my colleague and friend, provided for all of us a sacred space in a secular world, a sanctuary of stillness in our otherwise non-stop days.

We keep the best of him alive when we give ourselves permission to enter that silence, when we allow ourselves the time to process our thoughts so that our true voices emerge. This is how we practice *tikkun olam*, a Hebrew belief that each of us can "repair the world" by being present to the vast openness, by listening, by speaking truth to power, by honoring the sacred in ourselves and in the everyday. — Michele Surat

Bear was a gift. His generosity of spirit touched the lives of countless students and teachers who learned to see themselves through his eyes – eyes that looked for and found beauty and possibility in everyone. He taught us we could accomplish anything if we were willing to be our best selves. — Celie Boswell

Details come to mind and an image settles there: the flowing hair, the khaki shorts, the soft voice, the keen eye, the darkened room, the music, the lamps, the quilts, the sketches, and Marilyn. It is a composite that hardly captures the essence of the man. He was unconventional, open and divergent, steadfast, tenacious, tender. Like the Transcendentalists he admired, he found solace in simple things, celebrated free expression, lived deliberately. Listened sincerely. Will be missed dearly. — Lisa Williams

Bear's greatest gift was his intuition, and it was a gift he used wisely. He may have been soft-spoken, but his impact on our lives and the classroom is much more of a roar. He was my mentor, my friend, and my hero. I am so thankful for having had the chance to know him, and my world has become a little darker with his absence. — Kerry Sheppard

Bear knew the difference between the still, quiet essence of things--and people--and the noise and flash of glossy surfaces. Courier is an honest font. It does not conceal a lack of substance; it gives each word space to breathe. Bear gave each of us space to breathe, but he also gave us an example of a man who knew what mattered and lived a life consistent with his values. He had figured it out and trusted us to do the same. — Janet Spencer

My Personal Anthology title my junior year was "Girls: The journey of one boy into the minds of an entire gender." I thought I was funny. Never mind the agreement error (which Mr. O'Bryan kindly let slide), but to be honest, when the anthology assignment was laid out I just didn't quite take it seriously. I was fifteen years old, and figured the best way to spend my year would be to explore something that was constantly on my mind anyway – I thought I was

taking the easy way out.

Little did I know that I was taking precisely the path he had designed the project to take me down. What began as a flippant, juvenile endeavor turned into one of the most transformative experiences of my life, and the anthology, in conjunction with the time I spent in the Bear Cave that year, ended up defining who I was as a young adult navigating his way through the world. To be sure, there was plenty of emo-driven angst in my entries. I can only imagine, for example, what Mr. O'Bryan thought when reading one in which I somehow transitioned from Thoreau into a mushy treatise on the singular experience of looking deeply into my then-girlfriend's eyes...ugh. But at the same time, with his steady guidance and encouragement, I dug deeper and discovered meaning where I never knew it existed. The final product touched on themes of romance, yes, but also family, cultural history, death, spirituality, and ultimately the search for metaphysical truth.

It was the same with the books we read in class, and as I would learn later in life when I became his colleague, it was the same with almost any interaction with Mr. O'Bryan. In such an unassuming way he demanded the best from you, not because of any judgment on his part, but because his mere presence somehow made you aware of trajectories of thought and reflection that hadn't been accessible before. His essence was magical in this way, and if there's anything I've realized over the past two weeks it's that that essence is still very present – in his classroom, in the halls of the school, and in all of us. The challenge for us, as we move forward from this ordeal, is to not forget to continue to tap into it.

— John Piersol

When Do the Tears Run Out?

By Galen Green

Did you know the body is 70% water?
You'd think, then, that only so many tears
can fall
Before you run out
Each teardrop is you, Bear
This one, my personal anthology
This one, Marilyn Monroe
This one, an orange Gatorade.
You'd think the tears would run out.
But they don't
Because I will never run out of memories
Moby Dick means you
Andrea Bocelli means you
Dim rooms mean you.
So do they stop?
Bear, you helped me write essays
You helped me sew a quilt patch
You helped me find myself
Please, Mr. O'Bryan
Lover of literature
Protector of secrets
Traveler of the world
Help me now.
Why now?
Why you?
Don't tell me it'll be ok
Because a world without Bear is not ok
No amount of tears will fill the void,
The space where you belong.
The secret is, the tears don't run out.
Tears aren't water
They are sadness
They are memories
They are emotions
And they are necessary.
Your class was only the beginning
The beginning of what I hope
Was as beautiful a friendship to you
As it was to me
Thank you Bear. For everything.

