

HONEYBAKED HAM Presents:

A Word to the Wise

Yes, Virginia, there are teachers who set high standards, who give homework on a daily basis, and who hold students accountable for following the rules. Sometimes, the kids believe they are too strict, but eventually, most of them realize how much they have learned in their classes. This is a story about one of those instructors. She teaches Geometry at the TCTC. The HoneyBaked Ham Company didn't exist in your day, Virginia, but they presented this teacher with a \$ 40 gift certificate to recognize professional excellence.



Some of Junett Wise's students consider her to be a taskmaster in the classroom, but on one point there is unanimous agreement. As a math teacher she is equal to the task. More importantly, by the conclusion of the school year, so are they.

Recently several senior students shared their observations about her. Nick Troyer, enrolled in JAFROTC from Champion, said he would come to school early twice a week to receive tutoring from Wise. "She was right there waiting for me. My success in her class was important to her." Lucas Cibella, enrolled in Engineering from LaBrae, said, "She really pushes you to the limit and there are no easy or carefree days, but you learn."

Mike Rentz, enrolled in Welding from Hubbard, said, "Unless you give up and quit, Mrs. Wise won't let you fail. She stays right on top of you. She is a strict teacher and you do homework

almost every day, but everybody knows that she will help them.” Jackie Caroline, enrolled in Restaurant Services, from Newton Falls, remembered the special projects devised by Wise. “We had to create a building associated with our programs. It was fun because we combined the skills we learned in Geometry with our interest in our career/technical area.

Wise is a graduate of Mathews High School. She received her B.S. in Mathematics from Westminster College, and her masters degree in curriculum and instruction from Walden University. She has been married for 24 years and has two daughters. One of them desires to follow in her footsteps and become a math teacher. Wise has been employed at the TCTC for 11 years, and was previously the director of the Sylvan Learning Center.

Wise said that she envisioned a career in education while she was in high school. I always loved mathematics, but I knew that many of my classmates had a fear factor with the subject. You could not improve their skill level until you improved their confidence. I helped them to use logic and reasoning to solve problems.”

Her experiences in the classroom shed importance on making math relevant to the lives of students. She stated, “I provide hands on learning opportunities, use discover centers and include teamwork for students to solve problems collaboratively. She gave several examples of these concepts in action.

During the first semester, her students complete a project called, “Rescue the Princess.” After learning that a fire-breathing dragon has kidnapped the princess, the students must use algebra and geometry skills to create a map that will show the way to find the princess. They also calculate the distances traveled and classify shapes created based on geometric properties.

In the second semester, the students design a building based on their specific career/technical program. For example, Cosmetology students create a salon or Auto Services students design a shop. They submit drawings of the floor plan, a scale model and a cost estimate. Wise often challenges her students to explain a career that does not use math.

Wise believes strongly in the principles of accountability and fairness. “My students know that if a rule is broken, the consequences are the same regardless of who they are. To paraphrase one of my teachers in high school; you become an adult when you are able to make decisions and to accept responsibility for the decisions that you make. I have found that students will perform at a level that the teacher expects from them. If you listen to them, they will listen to you. This is how you create a positive learning environment.”

Larry Crawford, Academic Supervisor, said that Wise is consistent and even handed in the enforcement of rules. “There are no surprises in her classroom. She follows a specific routine that her students are familiar with. She knows how to correct a problem without focusing attention on a negative. She never demeans students or puts them in a situation where they must save face. She is also creative in her approach to subject matter. She does many innovative activities with her students.”

“I have talked with juniors in her class who lament that Mrs. Wise gives too much homework. Almost always, they feel differently as seniors because she provides them with the framework to succeed in higher math courses.”

Jason Gray, the Attendance Supervisor, is responsible for the Extra Help program at the TCTC. He assigns a Wise time during the day to help students who need assistance in math. He stated,

“Junett is very meticulous and thorough. When a kid says, “I don’t understand,” she knows what to do. She develops a remediation plan to improve areas of deficiency. Her door is open to students who need help.”

During her 11-year tenure at the TCTC, Wise has observed significant changes in the mission of the school. She stated, “We have evolved into a complete service high school-not only are students prepared to enter the workforce, they are also prepared to enter college or technical school upon graduation.” She is encouraged with the significantly higher number of students choosing to take higher level math classes.

Students come to school for a variety of reasons, but all of them benefit from a structured climate where the expectations seldom vary. Order, homework, attention to detail and an emphasis on personal responsibility are too often associated with educational practices in the past. In reality, however, these virtues are timeless in nature. When combined with a healthy dose of care and concern, they identify excellent teachers of every generation.

So you see Virginia, although we have smartboards instead of blackboards, computers instead of abucuses and xerox machines instead of mimeographs, the most fundamental aspects of education have not changed. Just as in your day, good teachers continue to make a difference in the lives of their students. It’s too bad you never had Mrs. Junett Wise as an instructor. You would have learned a lot in her classroom. You may even have written a letter to the editor about her.



