



BUILDER

BULLETIN

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE APPRENTICE SCHOOL STUDENT ASSOCIATION

OCTOBER 2009

Remembering B.J. Vereen

On July 20, 2009, The Apprentice School lost one of its greatest treasures; Ms. B.J. Vereen, who was fighting a battle against cancer. Ms. Vereen was known as an enthusiastic and respectful teacher of Business and English. The following articles are from friends, coworkers, and students reflecting on the times that they shared with her.

Dr. James Hughes thoughts on Ms. Vereen

On behalf of the faculty and staff of The Apprentice School, I want to express our appreciation to the Apprentice School Students' Association and its leadership for this special tribute in memory of Ms. B. J. Vereen. The memories and reflections shared at the ASSA-sponsored memorial service on August 17th and reprinted here make all of us aware of how Ms. Vereen touched the lives of her fellow instructors and her apprentices.

During her ten years on the faculty, she brought energy and enthusiasm to her instruction and a genuine concern for her students. There are many apprentices and graduates who write more clearly, spell more correctly, and communicate more effectively because of her. One that I recall specifically is David Jennings, an X18 welder apprentice graduate, who went on to complete his

master's degree in environmental science at Christopher Newport University. I had many conversations with David while he was on educational leave. He told me that it was her who convinced him that "this welder could be a writer" and gave him the skills to do it. David took the opportunity to thank her in January of this year after successfully writing and defending his master's thesis.

When Ms. Vereen passed away this summer, I was reminded of a poem I learned many years ago in high school. It was her love of poetry, her former career in the U. S. Air Force, and her deep faith that brought it to mind. The poem is called High Flight and it was written by a young American pilot officer in the Royal Canadian Air Force during World War II. It seems poignant to me at this time, for she has "slipped the surly bonds of earth....and touched the face of God."

High Flight

Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sun-split clouds, — and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of — wheeled and soared
and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air. . . .

Up, up the long, delirious burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy
grace
Where never lark, or ever eagle flew —
And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.

— John Gillespie Magee, Jr



Individuals have little if any control over their birth and death; however, they do control how they spend the interval. I will always remember BJ Vereen as a beautiful person who by her grace demonstrated how to best use our short but precious time on earth. BJ's optimistic and encouraging approach to life had a tremendous affect on those who were fortunate enough to be in her presence. Her legacy is reflected in the multitude of individuals who are better people because of the time they spent with BJ, me included.

- Bob Leber

Garry Carter Remembering BJ



What she lacked in stature, she made up for in character and personality. She would always greet you with a warm smile and she always had time to ask about your well-being or about your family. She always had some good motherly advice for me like “you should be resting more” and “you should take garlic tablets or folic acid, or some other vitamin, mineral, or herb she had recently read about” She always had people’s best interest at heart.

There are some apprentices who may argue this point because BJ was known in class for her strict adherence to and firm grasp of the English language. She had high expectations of all her students and held them accountable for their actions or in some cases, their

inactions. Some apprentices would complain that she was too tough or that she graded too strictly or that she never cut you any slack. But what they failed to realize in their young age was that BJ knew that what she was doing was preparing them to be successful in their career. She knew the importance of good and proper communication and held her apprentices to high academic standards, because she knew in the long run it would pay off for them. They were the ones who would benefit from her strictness and high expectations. She operated with a “tough-love” approach; a concept many of our young people today have little grasp of. But I can guarantee that one day, those apprentices who were fortunate enough to have had BJ as an instructor, will think back on their time in class with her and apply and be appreciative of the knowledge they gained in her classroom. BJ was acting with the best interest of her students at heart.

It is never easy to watch those we love and care for suffer and pass away. The last few weeks BJ was at

work, we could all tell that she was not feeling well and that something seemed wrong. We were relieved when she finally went to the doctor, and we were devastated and scared as we received information about her diagnosis and worsening condition. When I spoke with her on the phone, I would let her know that I was praying for her and she would always respond with “I can use all of the prayer I can get”. As a woman of faith, BJ understood that everything happens in God’s time. For some reason that our human minds cannot comprehend, He saw the need to

“I will remember a woman of faith and a woman of character whose personality made our little part of the world a much better place to be.”

call BJ home. As Christians, we take comfort in knowing that we will one day again be with BJ and other friends and loved ones who have passed before us. Though we will grieve her loss for some time to come,

and it is painful process to endure, we hold tight to God’s promise of a glorious reunion to come.

Seeing BJ sick was not easy for any of us. But that is not how I choose to remember her. In the days and years to come, when I think of BJ, I will envision that bright warm smile coming through the hall and being greeted with a cheerful “good morning”. I will hear her distinct contagious laughter that we all loved. I will remember her coming through the auditorium with her baseball cap on and a fried chicken dinner in her hands she had just bought across the street from Old Town. I will see her energetically walking laps in the auditorium either for exercise or because she needed to get up and get away from those papers she was grading. I will remember a woman of faith and a woman of character whose personality made our little part of the world a much better place to be. I will remember a dear person who graciously put others’ needs and their best interest ahead of her own. I will remember a dear friend.

BJ – you will be missed.

Through the ten years Ms. Vereen spent at the Apprentice School, she taught over 1500 students. While she was an English teacher, she taught us much more than that- she taught us respect, honor & self-discipline. Ms. Vereen was also more than a teacher – she was peer, friend, mother and mentor to all of her students.

I have never known a teacher who cared so much about her students, taking interest in our daily lives and not just as it pertained to her English class. She would ask me how I was doing, but I didn’t really need to answer, as she already knew. Ms. Vereen was attuned to her students, able to read us and decipher our moods – anticipating our needs and making our day brighter.

Ms. Vereen taught me a lot about myself. She opened my eyes to help me see what I couldn’t previously. I now know, whatever I put my mind to, I can achieve. While a lot of people have told me those words, Ms Vereen was able to make me believe it. She inspired me to do things I previously doubted I could, and helped shape me into the leader I am today.

Many people have told me of their own memories of Ms. Vereen and how she impacted their lives. How, she, as an individual helped turn their lives around. The Apprentice School has lost one of their greatest instructors, but through the 1500 students she taught, she will still be alive in the school- through our lives and work; I can say there is a big part of her in me.

- Patrick Nicholson



BJ Vereen's Funeral

A few thoughts from Dr. Gilbert Adams

One thing I will always remember is that BJ loved her Chinese Food hot and spicy. Her General Tso's Chicken, if it was hot enough, made her happy - very happy. BJ was really a good woman, really! She took her faith seriously. She was not a casual Christian - she walked out her faith by getting down into the ditch with people to help lift them out of their situations. She got real close and personal, as the saying goes.

BJ had many talents and gifts! In 1 Corinthians 12:28 the scripture speaks about spiritual gifts. Those are the gifts that come so natural that they are supernatural in nature. I believe BJ demonstrated with her life that she possessed the gifts of helping, of mercy, and of prophecy. This quote describes the giving nature of BJ - "What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us; what we have done for others and the world remains, and is immortal". BJ has left us with many immortal moments to reflect upon and to remember just how special her touch was on the lives of others.

I am sure BJ found it taxing at times dealing with a bunch of geeks, you know the people who are primarily left brain type people. You see BJ was right brain dominated, driven by words, music, and all things creative. She was prophetic in the sense that she saw things in black and white, not all the gray we see today. She was poetic, she loved words, and she would even read the dictionary sometimes at lunch. She was artistic in song and dance. Expressions of the human body that can be deeply 'soulical'! The greatest impact that BJ made on me was her constant reminder that I was more than a "Grumman Gear", or a "System Sprocket" or a "Corporate Cog" - I am a person with human faculties that transcend my material being. Beyond your IQ (intelligence quotient), it is your SQ (spiritual quotient) that counts in life. So on behalf of BJ, I would like to encourage you to nurture your spiritual intelligence and invest in spiritual capital as well.

We make a living
by what we get, but
we make a life by
what we give.

- Winston Churchill

"To do more for
the world than the
world does for you
- that is success."

- Henry Ford





On this journey of life, there are certain people met along the way that leave their mark on everyone. Ms. Vereen was one such as this. One of life's great educator's she was also one of its greatest students, never shying away from a new experience or a chance to learn something new. This was clearly evident in any conversation one had with her, as she questioned and probed, looking for greater detail and meaning. As a teacher, even outside of the classroom, she was more than happy to share her memories and experiences, offering her valuable wisdom to any who asked of it.

Proof that great things come in little packages, her great enthusiasm and the sheer force of her personality made her larger than life, at least in my eyes. As she communicated, she also loved to entertain, enjoying her performances in the classroom much like the performances she did for her church. Because of this youthful exuberance, despite her chronological age, I was often surprised by her piercing insight. In conversation, she would turn a remark I said in passing into something

greater, sometimes teaching me things about myself I wasn't aware of.

Above all, I was always struck by her confidence and her strength.

She has always seemed to me as one who always met life head on, eye to eye, ready for anything, and never willing to back down. This is the Ms. Vereen that will stay with me always. Though she may have parted from us in the physical sense, she will always be with us, in the lessons she taught and in the strength and wisdom that she freely gave. I will miss the possibilities, but I will cherish the memories and the gifts for my lifetime. Thank you, and may you be in peace.

-Frances Maston

“she will always be with us, in the lessons she taught and in the strength and wisdom that she freely gave.”

While our educational institution is remarkably distinguished, our instructors are what set us apart from any other program. Taking a personal interest in the development of each Apprentice and the dedication to our success is a characteristic of all of our instructors, but Ms. Vereen stood out amongst her peers. While we were formally apprentices of scholarship under her direction, we were also apprentices of life. By requirement we were taught English or Business by means of lectures, homework, or discussion, but we were also taught life lessons of optimism, perseverance, dedication and faith. Lessons that no textbook could teach, only someone who has lived life to the fullest could.

Ms. Vereen always strived to be compassionate whenever she ran into an Apprentice. Her confidence and demeanor was that of someone you respected, even when you disagreed with her. That respect was mutual. Not only was she invested in her student's success she was also invested in having a relationship that stretched beyond our educational studies. She took an interest in us, just as much as we took an interest in her. When you needed someone to talk to, she was always willing to listen, and advise if we asked. She understood there was more to her students than just what she saw in her classroom and always searched to find anything she could learn from us.

My own personal experience with Ms. Vereen was that I knew I had someone in my corner. If I even

slightly seemed a bit down, her concern was genuine and the effort she put forth to even make me feel a bit better showed how much she cared for her students; however, I never recognized that I provided her with the same. This was not evident to me until I received an e-mail earlier this year that was prompted by a Christmas card that I had placed in her mailbox. At the end of her letter she said that through everything we had experienced in class ultimately we grew from knowing one another and in the end became cheerleaders of sorts for one another to push through the day.

While I recognize we all impact one another even in ordinary daily transactions, this one instance made me understand another life lesson. Our job title as an Apprentice only lasts as long as our time as students of The Apprentice School, but we truly never lose that title as we are always learning and experiencing as we make our journey through life. There are very few people that you come to recognize as having such an impact on your life and immediately seeing how they have taught you, not only a subject in classroom, but about yourself, who you are, and what you are really made of. Normally those people are not cherished until further in life, but Ms. Vereen was someone who had such a strong impact that the results were immediately shown. We have truly lost a treasure that deeply saddens every Apprentice. The lessons that she taught her students will continue in her memory.

-Darlene Deerfield

To Teach

To take part in the shaping of thousands of lives

To know that education comes not just from a textbook, but from the heart

To carefully balance compassion and discipline

To freely give time, money, life experiences, and wisdom beyond what is expected

To hold all responsibility on one shoulder to leave the other open to cry or lean on

To deal with those who don't even know themselves

To develop one's own style while following strict guidelines

To use one's past to help the future

To do this and come out smiling

Is to truly live.

-Frances Maston

A Woman of Words

I will miss BJ Vereen! She was a woman of words and more. As I remember her I think of her as a teacher, a friend, and a great woman of faith. It is her love of others that I think I will miss most.

As I am sure any of her students could attest Ms. Vereen was a teacher. What they might not know is she did not limit her lessons to her students. For her every moment held a possible lesson. William A. Ward once said, "The great teacher inspires." Ms. Vereen did just that; she made us all want to be more than we are at this moment using tough love or a kind word ensuring that her lesson was always taught well.

As any of the staff would tell you, BJ was a good friend. She would move mountains for you if she thought it would help. Many former students later realized how good of a friend they had in Ms. Vereen. Richard Bach once said, "Your friends will know you better in the first minute you meet, than your acquaintances will know you in a thousand years." BJ knew us all and could lift us up with a poem, a song, or a story at just the right time. She was a great friend indeed.

As all of us should know, BJ was a great teacher and a great friend because of her great faith. James 2:26 states, "As the body without spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead." Ms. Vereen lived an active life because of the many acts of kindness she did out of faith in her Lord. I had the wonderful opportunity to attend both memorial services for Ms. Vereen. In both, there were long lines of people giving testimony of how BJ impacted their lives and how she lived out a life of active faith.

Her faith makes missing BJ bearable. I know she inspired many with her life lessons; I know she had a huge impact on others because of her friendship; and I know that because of her faith, this woman of words now rests with the Word made flesh (John 1:14) in paradise. Although I miss her, I know we will meet again, and that makes me smile!

- Stan Best

Little Girl Blonde

Little girl blonde with eyes of green
How much sadness have you seen?
Virginia's mountains rose to produce only depression,
Virginia's coast brought only regression.

Little girl blonde with eyes of green
What would make you once again dream?
What would pull the laughter deep out of the belly?
What would stiffen hope, now a mass of jelly?

Little girl blonde with eyes of green,
Run up the mountainside of tomorrow's scene.
By using today's feet that seem to heavy to lift,
You will run to your destiny and embrace your gift.

*To Cynthia Harrington,
A friend who is teaching me to stretch myself.
Now it is your turn to do the same!!!!*

- B. J. Vereen, July 23, 2008

Ms. Vereen was a breath of fresh air at The Apprentice School. She was witty, charming, and energetic. She touched my life as I'm sure she touched many of yours. Since her death I've heard that Ms. Vereen was well known to be able to walk up to anyone and instinctively know that something was wrong despite how you looked and what you said. She would be willing to sit and talk to you for hours after work if you needed a friend, a teacher, or just some guidance. She helped me through a difficult time in my life without judgment or expecting me to give anything back in return - and I will be eternally blessed because she was in my life.

In my two years as an apprentice, I have noticed that the school has the unusual ability to choose instructors who truly care and want to see us succeed. They stay late to help us and put in the extra effort to help us succeed if we need it and accept it. Ms. Vereen was no exception to that. She gave of herself willingly and lovingly to the school and its students. She challenged me academically, professionally, and personally. She pushed us academically and expected us to succeed because she knew we were capable of it. At times it seemed like she had more faith in us that we did. She expected us to remain professional at all times and to work hard at becoming the leaders of this company that we are striving to be. She stressed the values of integrity and leadership, as well as the other core values of The Apprentice School. Ms. Vereen encouraged us to not only do well in school and at work, but to do just as well in our home lives. She not only led us by her words but by her actions as well. She was a valued friend, co-worker, mother, daughter, sister, aunt, cousin, and instructor. I know that I am one of many people whose life she touched and I find my comfort in knowing that she will live on in our hearts and minds.

My life is better because I was lucky enough to get to know Ms. Vereen, even if it wasn't for as long as I wish it could have been. Her wish was to see each and every one of us to live up to our full potential and do great things with our lives. As we move on with our lives and careers, I hope that we continue to do as Ms. Vereen taught us and strive to improve ourselves daily.

- Amanda Strohmeier

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