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Full Circle

Summary: Students have grade-school teachers who they remember as their favorites. Later, they might have college professors who leave a lasting impression on their lives. Rarely are they the same people.

(May 16, 2008)-By Tom Larson, [Morris] Sun Tribune -- Students have grade-school teachers who they remember as their favorites. Later, they might have college professors who leave a lasting impression on their lives.

Rarely are they the same people.

But when University of Minnesota, Morris junior Lisa Musielewicz finishes her degree in elementary education and moves into a teaching job, Pam Solvie will have had a significant influence on both the beginning and end of her academic journey.

“I was a part of her learning to read in first grade, and now I get to be a part of helping her learn how to teach young children to read,” Solvie said.

Solvie graduated from St. Cloud State University in 1976 with an elementary education major. She taught a year in the Twin Cities, taught in Cyrus for 11 years and in 1989 began teaching in Morris.

Musielewicz, the daughter of Stanley and GERALYN Musielewicz, spent most her life in the Morris Area School District and in 1993 she was a student in Solvie’s class. In addition, the Musielewicz family was involved in a school program that focused on communications and technology. That extra time together sealed the relationship.

“It’s hard to remember specific things from back then,” Musielewicz said, “but I do remember that Pam was one of my favorite teachers.”

“I love teaching, I love the kids and I love working with the parents,” Solvie said.

Musielewicz recalled the many field trips, to the Scandia Woods Environmental Learning Lab (SWELL) in Stevens County, to the Bell Museum on the University of Minnesota’s Minneapolis campus, even a trip to the then-Dayton’s “Beauty and the Beast” exhibit on the iconic department store’s eighth floor.

Recently, student and teacher relived those days, looking at some of Musielewicz’s drawings and writings from her days in Solvie’s first-grade class. One of the works showed then that reading was one of Musielewicz’s loves.

“She was diligent,” Solvie said. “She always put a lot of effort into it. It was not good enough to do a good job, you had to do the best – nothing mediocre, only excellent work.”

A family career change took the Musielewicz family to Little Falls when Lisa was beginning her junior year in high school. When she graduated, UMM was her only college choice.

“I just knew I had to go here,” she said. “I didn’t even look at any other colleges. I didn’t know if I wanted to major in music education or elementary education, but both are such strong programs here. I could hit two birds with one stone.”

Solvie left Morris Area [School District] for UMM in 2003 and was surprised soon after when she found herself as Musielewicz’s adviser.

“It was a special moment because we have history to share,” Solvie said.

Through the last three years, Musielewicz and Solvie have crossed paths often and that history surfaced.

“We’d be working on something and there’d be knowing glances because it was something we did when she was in first grade,” Solvie said.

Now Musielewicz is beginning to see the end of her college years and her entry into the teaching profession. She’ll be working on a practicum this fall in Chicago and then it’s on to student teaching to begin 2009.

After graduation, there’s no way to know where Musielewicz will end up doing for a new generation of youngsters what Solvie did for her 15 years ago. But you can bet there will be phone calls and e-mails between the two.

And who knows which student might cross paths with Musielewicz 15 years hence.

“I’m so proud of her,” Solvie said. “She’s become such a professional speaker and so knowledgeable on reading issues. I’m glad I got the opportunity to work with her beyond first grade.”

Photo: University of Minnesota, Morris elementary education major Lisa Musielewicz (left) reunited in college with her former first-grade teacher, Pam Solvie (right), an assistant professor in UMM’s elementary education discipline.

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