

God bless Mrs. Pfeifer

The 2006-2007 kindergarten year started out anxiously, unexpectedly not for the students but for those parents with children beginning a new year taught by the woman who was pre-judged to have the look of someone who most likely would rule with an iron fist. There's nothing like being proven wrong.

My daughter, Aubrey, was beginning her second year at St. John's in Hydes, and since she is our only child, we were very anxiety-ridden about her kindergarten year. Like any new parents, we worried if she would make friends easily, how she would do academically, and if she would be afraid. Yet the one question that weighed heaviest on my mind was how well she would fare with this teacher who seemed, at first glance anyway, to have an abrasive edge to her. I decided to confer with the parents of older siblings whom she had taught to see if my fears were warranted. They told me that they most certainly were not - Mrs. Paula Pfeifer was a wonderful teacher and an even better person. Little did I know that I would learn that these accolades only touched the surface. We would all learn quickly that the assumed look of intimidation would turn to compassion.

Monday was art day and also my afternoon to volunteer and, as it turned out, learn the lessons of a lifetime. This complex lady with a hard shell and a soft soul taught me many things while she held the attention of an entire class of 5 to 6-year-olds, not with threats or intimidation but with love. I watched as she captivated them with a story, song, or just a blessing, and I witnessed her instill in them discipline, respect for oneself and love for others. Though she realized she sometimes exuded an intimidating air to the parents, she recognized, more importantly, that her children (as she fondly referred to her students) loved and respected her. And they were, for a time, her children; my own child would not even acknowledge my existence if I entered the classroom to assist with small tasks if Mrs. Pfeifer was heading the class. Even at home her influence could be felt. Aubrey didn't want to disappoint her beloved teacher by disobeying at bath or bedtime.

Once the children were out of the classroom, it was I who would be taught by Mrs. Pfeifer about the thing that truly mattered in life - children. I sat and listened as she told me wonderful stories about her two sons and all of her children from the past 22

years of teaching at St. John's. I don't know who she was more proud of, her birth sons or the children who were lucky enough to have been taught by her. True to her nature, I should say equally of both. Though I sometimes felt like I was back in kindergarten because I listened to her with a childlike curiosity, I also felt like I was listening to a philosopher speak of life. And like her students I became a sponge, absorbing every word.

I know now I was fortunate to have spent so many Monday afternoons laughing and crying with this most interesting and sensitive woman, and words cannot express the void that I know her retirement will create in so many, myself included. I want her to know that we feel blessed to have known her and wish her the best of luck in any and all of her future endeavors.