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My first teacher was my mother. She would always find innovative ways to engage my sister, brother and myself in our surroundings. My mother would sacrifice her own dreams so that we could attend schools of excellence, participate in extracurricular activities, and experience cultural events. She planted the seed of knowledge and my plant has thirsted for it ever since.



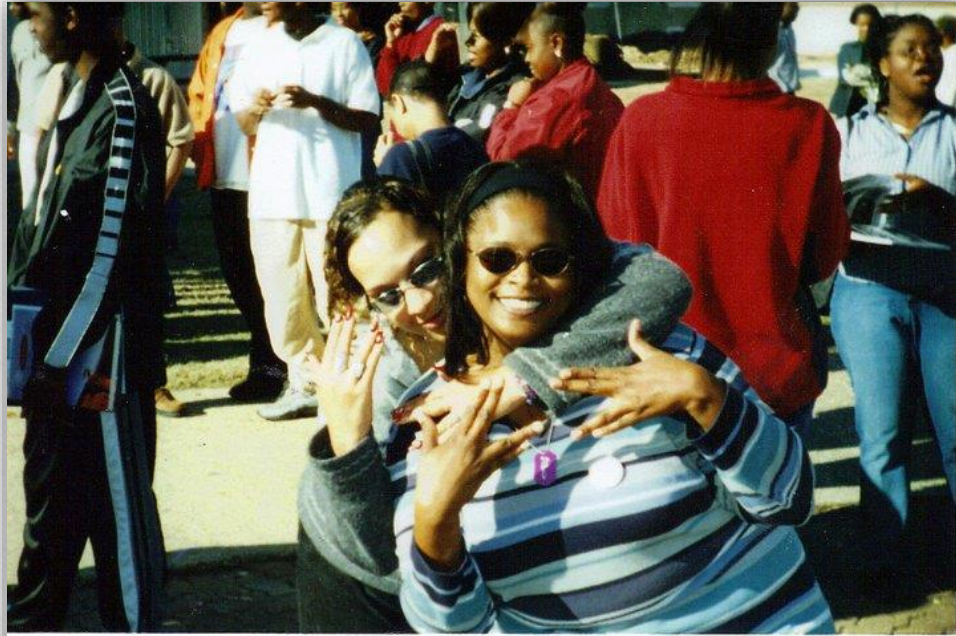


I recall playing school as a child in my grandmother's house with my aunt and cousins. My aunt would be the teacher. She would always tell me how wonderful of a student I was as I wrote my answers on the back of her bedroom door with a piece of chalk. I remember that feeling of success and how great it felt to be recognized by my teacher.

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One summer one of my mother's eight sisters came home from college. I had never known of anyone attending college before. I listened as she shared stories about the campus, her instructors, courses, and social life. I made up my mind that college was where I wanted to be. She became my role model. When she graduated with an education degree, I decided that I would too. From that day forward every move I made had to be so I could go to college and become a teacher.





When I arrived at college, I fell in love. I loved the library, the classes, the professors, the learning. My education professors were so dedicated. I was surrounded by exceptional teachers that taught exceptionally. I soaked it all in. I took note of the best qualities of each one and applied them to my teaching practice.

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I have taught in many environments in various capacities. I have given myself to countless committees, leadership roles, clubs, and other duties. However, my most significant contribution would have to be the time I spend with my students that reach beyond the curriculum. I believe that because I take the time to see them as people, they can find it within themselves to become scholars.



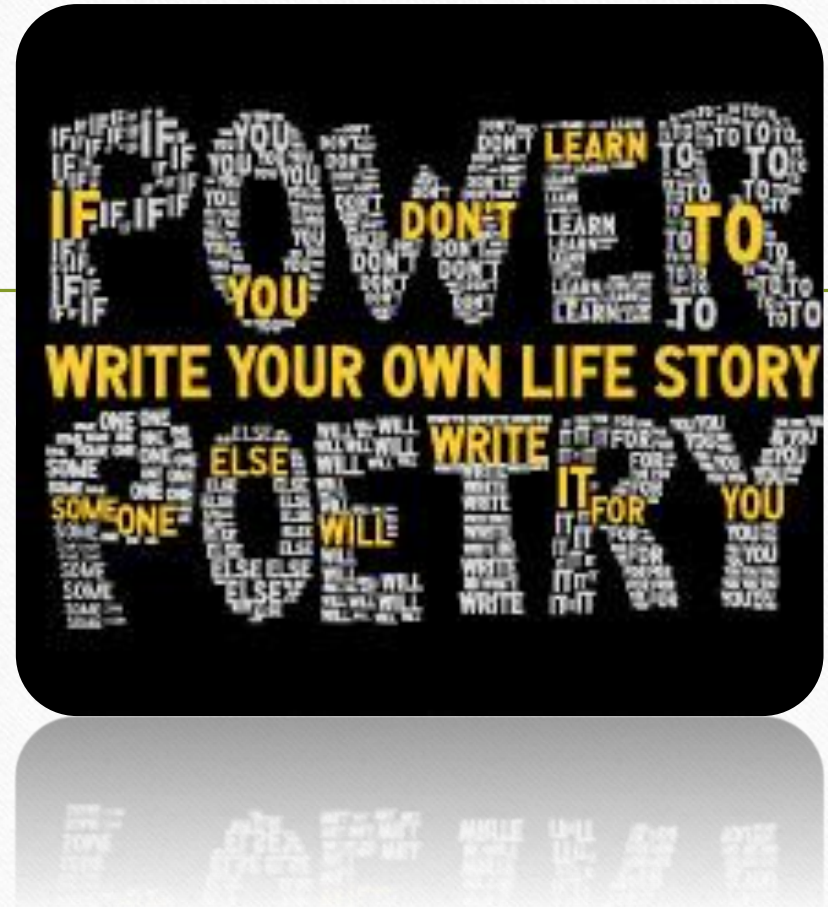
## BIG MIKE FOREVER



When I was teaching at a youth residential treatment facility, I was introduced to Big Mike. Big Mike had been there for four months prior to my arrival. He was a senior. The other teachers shared with me how he would not participate in school and I should just let him sit in the corner. He did not participate in my Literature class for the first three weeks that I was there. He was not responsive to me when I tried to talk to him and let him know I cared for him beyond his issues. I decided to conduct a poetry slam to end our poetry unit. The students had never participated in a poetry slam.

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I decorated a wall in my classroom with my dining room curtains and surrounded them with old Christmas lights. I used my desk lamp as a spotlight, grouped the desks, and covered them with tablecloths. Each table had snacks and drinks for the students. Big Mike was not moved. The students proudly recited their original poems. Big Mike did not respond. I concluded the event and gave each student a final thank you. Big Mike raised his hand. He stood and quietly asked, “Can I say a rap? You said that raps are poems.” I explained to him that he did not submit one for me to approve. He promised me that it was appropriate for school. I agreed to let him recite his poem, his rap.







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It was beautiful! The melody was as rhythmic as raindrops. He was so proud of himself. I was so proud of him. He turned to me and said, "I can write the words down for you if you like." I told him I would like that. For the next three months, Big Mike participated in Literature class. When he was discharged, I gave him a bag of books and he gave me a hug. Big Mike engaging in the learning and reinforcing hope in teaching is my most significant accomplishment. I realize that every child has something within them that can and will ignite the fire of learning. As a teacher, I have to seek it out in my students and nurture it.

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I believe that teachers should teach the whole child. Our students face many obstacles that prevent them from learning or having the desire to learn. It is important that the students gain and sustain the academic knowledge that we are teaching them. But, it is equally important to instill in the child a lifelong craving for learning. The hungry child is more concerned about what time lunch is than the objectives of the day.





I had a fifth grade student that would not be receptive until after lunch. One day I had an orange that had been on my desk from the previous day. During our lesson that morning I noticed that he kept looking over to my desk. He was not paying me any attention, and he was not working on his independent assignment. I walked over to his desk and asked him did he need any help. He said no. I asked him why he kept looking at my desk. He told me that he was wondering why I had not eaten the orange yet. I asked him if he wanted it and he said yes. Then he asked me if he could eat it right now. I asked him if he had breakfast and he told me that he had not eaten since lunch the day before.

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The student that arrived at school knowing that when he returns home there will be no one there to help him with his homework is not focusing on the consequences of not having it completed. I had a sixth grade student of mine ask me if he could stay in from recess and do his homework in the library because the electricity was not on at his home. Now I am more perceptive to the needs of my students.



The most rewarding thing about teaching has been when former students recognize me years later and shares with me.



I was visiting a church one year. This young man came up to me. He went to get his mother. She thanked me for helping him with his reading in sixth grade. He was graduating with honors from high school that month. They mailed me an invitation. Under my name he wrote, “My favorite teacher”. I attended his graduation and was able to see two more of my former students. I never realized how much of an impact I had on my students.

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My teaching style is reflective of me. I am an energetic, caring, nurturing person. I love learning. I have experienced much in my life. I desire for my students to work to their full potential. I expect for them to do their best. The last words I say to my students everyday are,

“Have a great day and make good choices!”

