

A Teacher's Gift

By: Sally Connolly "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops." (Henry B. Adams)

Kaitlyn began school today. The stunning miracle—who had amazed and amused the Connolly circle, who had introduced the clan to the wonder of new life and fresh beginnings—enthusiastically stepped into her new world.

Only her mother, Kelly, hesitated. The reluctant gift-giver tightened her grip on the tender hand and prayed Papa's wish for Kaitlyn would come true. Now present only in their hearts, Papa wished, as a lifelong educator would, for the ideal first-grade teacher: a nurturing lover of learning whose unconditional acceptance, enthusiasm, and warmth would foster her curiosity and embolden her educational path.

After her second child was born, Kelly had started feeling a bit of cabin fever. A way out, she thought, was to connect again with adults outside the family circle and neighborhood. By returning to food service part-time, she could socialize and at the same time earn extra income for her growing family.

The staff at the restaurant down the street warmly welcomed her, the young woman for whom every childhood day had been the Fourth of July. Soon, Kelly and fellow waitress, Teresa, became friends and confidants. They supported each other through Kelly's loss of a beloved father and the challenges of Teresa's potentially-serious medical condition. They shared the joys and tribulations of balancing, for one, work and young parenthood and, for the other, work and education. Terry, whose dream to become a teacher had started years before at a local community college, was approaching the realization of her goal.

Through a chance encounter at the restaurant, Kelly was introduced to Teresa's dad. Instantly, Kelly caught a glimpse of her own father. Simply serving coffee and exchanging a few words had convinced Kelly: "Here is a good man—a special man—who dearly loves his family. Teresa must meet my own Dad."

The next day Kelly brought into work her father's book, a collection of his writings. She slipped the book into Teresa's locker and waited for her return to work. This was the first and only time Kelly had given away this cherished memento. The handsome face of her father smiling so enigmatically on the cover and his voice so clearly heard in his writings would surely give Teresa an insight into the father she cherished.

Later in the week, Kelly would learn, a gush of tears had greeted her gift. "This is the man who changed my life," Teresa would say. "He was my favorite professor and I didn't want his class to end. He believed in me and my dream when no one else did. Just this week I completed my teaching certificate."

Shortly afterward, the two friends lost touch. A difficult pregnancy requiring extended bed rest forced Kelly to leave work and the companionship of her friend. All energy was devoted to keeping mother-to-be and the first male child healthy. After several hospitalizations and five weeks before the due date, "the miracle baby" Jack arrived. Just in time for the beginning of the new school year.

On the first day of school, Kaitlyn chose her best dress and her shiniest shoes; she grabbed her new schoolbag and decorative lunch pack. Jack, bundled across Kelly's bosom in his sling, slept snugly as Kelly, Kaitlyn, sister Olivia, and David, the proud father, walked into the Bresnahan Elementary School.

As they entered the assigned classroom, once again Teresa burst into tears. The dear friend had returned from Spain only the previous week, her teacher preparation completed and her credentials in hand. She was ready to begin her dream career. The only position open in town was at the Bresnahan school, where one of the five first grades needed an assistant teacher. With kisses, hugs, and tears all around, Teresa gently clasped Kaitlyn's hand in hers, walked her to the table facing the teacher, and handed her the beginner's packet.

About the Author

Sally A. Connolly is editor of *A BOY FROM LAWRENCE: The Collected Writings of Eugene F. Connolly*. A verbal scrapbook, the book is "recommended for those in need of comfort, illumination, redirection, grace, or prayer." (Midwest Book Review) For information: <http://www.freewebs.com/aboyfromlawrence>.

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