



the thank- you files

ATPE members share the stories, artwork
and thank-you notes that inspire them each day

Earlier this school year, Beaumont ATPE member Kirk Brown, a second-grade teacher at Dishman Elementary, received an e-mail with the subject line “Long time since 89-90 (I think) ...” The e-mail was from Ryan Elliot, a former student, and to say Elliot’s words made Brown’s day would be an understatement. The former student had, Brown says, “given the old teach the best gift any student could give.”

Brown, who represents Region 5 on the ATPE Board of Directors, forwarded the letter to the state office with this note: “[I] wish we could get the message to new (and old) frustrated teachers that this is what teaching is about. It is the hope and prayer that you may, in some very small way, have had a positive influence on some little person’s life. As a teacher we only need one of these every 10 years to know we are doing what we are supposed to do.”

ATPE News secured Brown’s and Elliot’s permission to publish the original letter—and let the teacher and student know that their correspondence had inspired ATPE to ask members across the state to share their own treasured notes, artwork and anecdotes. The request resulted in more than 160 submissions—far more than we could include in the eight pages allotted. *ATPE News* plans to include more from the “thank-you files” in future issues, and we encourage you to keep sending submissions for possible publication to comm@atpe.org.

Hey Mr. Brown,

I'm sure you don't remember me—you've taught countless students over the years, but I only had one fifth-grade teacher, so you're hard to forget. Anyway ... I was surfing the Internet, and I happened to run across your photo, so I wanted to say hi. It's been a few years—I guess 19 to be exact. Life was a lot simpler back then. It was the last year we had recess. I think I was in seventh grade before I realized we didn't have it anymore. I miss that.

I was digging through one of my old boxes, and I found my old I.C.M.M. [I Can Manage Myself] card. It was beat up, and all four corners were frayed. But I still have it. In light of the current corporate condition, one might consider giving CEOs and CFOs I.C.M.M. cards—or, rather, taking theirs away.

I remember all the animals you had in your classroom—the gerbils, the hermit crabs, parakeet, etc. That same year a golden retriever showed up at our house, and my mom let me keep him. I named him Kirk. He was brown. It seemed appropriate. I believe there was a day we took a spelling test, and you used my name as the bonus word. Your class was also where I kept a journal for the first time. I found that in my old box also. [The journal] was priceless to me.

In seventh grade I moved to Nederland to live with my dad, so I lost touch with pretty much all of the Beaumont kids I knew. Nederland was great for me; I had friends who lived in the same neighborhood, and I got involved in Boy Scouts. I got straight A's for the first time in my life. In high school, I wrote a lot of poetry—always the friend, never the boyfriend. I had the typical writer's angst, which is probably why I became a writer. I graduated from Nederland High School in 1997 with honors. I ended up with five math credits and five science classes in only four years. I also earned my Eagle Scout after I was 18.

After graduating I joined the Air Force, guaranteed to be EOD (Explosive Ordnance Disposal). Basic training came and went—it was a lot like camp—and the first week of EOD school they showed us videos of EOD "gone wrong," with police and emergency responders finding exploding teddy bears and that sort of thing. The instructors followed the videos with: "If any of you feel like it's not for you, you can let us know in private." My hand shot up like a rocket, and I was promptly reclassified. The \$5 a day wasn't worth getting my hands blown off. But I got sent to Phoenix, worked on some aircraft equipment, finished my bachelor's degree in under a year and a half, and went to officer training school. My mom and my dad, by God's grace, stood in the same room and pinned my second lieutenant bars on my shoulders. My dad said that my commissioning was one of his proudest moments.

Then I spent the next few years chasing an assignment to Los Angeles (since I was 8, I have wanted to be in movies and television). I was in Turkey for a little over a year when I finally got the assignment, and I moved to the Promised Land. My assignment lasted about 20 months before I completed my service commitment and got out, and a few months later I got married. I met my wife online (don't knock it 'til you try it) while I was in Turkey, and we got married about two years after I got to L.A. She and I bonded over screenwriting, and she's basically a female version of me. Since then, I've been doing freelance work, writing a lot and networking like mad. God only knows when the doors are going to open, but I finished the first draft of a script about a month ago, so I'm getting [started] on my second one. I think it's going to be about a teacher.

Sorry this was so long ... I am a writer after all. I really just wanted to thank you for the memories and for being such a great teacher. I hope all of your students remember you as fondly as I do, and I hope they take the time to tell you. My mom still teases me about my I.C.M.M. card. I hope you still use that, and the journal, in your classroom. Happy New Year, take care and God bless.

Ryan Elliott

Letters from students

Dear Coach McGee:

I just want you to know how much your speech at my signing meant to me. You said some really nice things and made me feel very fortunate to have played for you. It is your influence that helped mold me into the young man you were talking about. If I pursue a coaching career, I want to be a coach to kids just like the coach you were to me. Thanks again for all of your time and effort. Hope you can come see me play. It would really mean a lot.

*Submitted by Rhonda McGee,
wife of Rick McGee, a high school
teacher/coach in Robinson ISD*

Ms. Kim:

Well, it's 9:00 P.M. and I should be asleep, but I can't sleep until I say thank you! Thank you for putting up with my B.S. and forcing me to do what I thought was not possible. Thank you for all of the things you've shared with me and all of the wisdom you left me with. Thank you for teaching me the trade of webmastering and Photoshop. I don't think I could have made it out of AEC [alternative education center] without you. Ms. Kim, keep being an amazing woman!

P.S. Read Psalm 147.

*Submitted by Kim McClanahan,
computer technology teacher,
Garland ISD Alternative
Education Center*

Mrs. Amendola,

There are only a few things I remember about my elementary years.

1. The day you walked into the cafeteria and told us the Challenger tragically exploded.

2. How to spell *sesquicentennial*. It was the bonus word on your spelling tests for several weeks.

3. And the day you saved my life. I was an awkward little girl. I had glasses and was picked on by other children often. The "needs to control talking" box was checked on my report card every six weeks. Needless to say I was not the favorite student of any of my teachers.

I also had problems at home. Twenty-five years ago, my mother was not very nice to me. I adored my father, but he was working 18 hours a day and didn't have a clue what was going on in the house. I recently found my sixth-grade diary. Page after page read things like "Momma said she never wanted to have me. I think killing myself would make her happy" and "Momma said she was ashamed of me and ashamed of being my mother." One day, after getting in

trouble at school again, I decided that would be the day I was going to go home and kill myself.

I was planning everything out in my little sixth-grade mind. I knew when I got home my mother would be outside mowing the lawn and I would be in the house alone. When the final bell rang, instead of going straight home, I sat outside the school and tried to decide if it would be better to swallow pills or drink something from under the kitchen cabinet. I wanted to make sure I did it right because if I only got sick and didn't die I would be in big trouble. Then you walked outside to go home for the day.

I don't know if someone was looking out for me or if I was just lucky. School had only been dismissed for about 10 minutes, and you were obviously in a hurry to get somewhere. Regardless, you stopped to find out why your troublemaking student hadn't gone home yet. I didn't tell you my plans, but I told you about my mother. For the first time I felt like someone





believed me. You suggested I write a letter to my mother and decide if I wanted to give it to her or not afterward. You showed compassion and made me feel like maybe I wasn't such a bad kid after all. That night, instead of killing myself, I wrote a letter. The next few days at school you gave me some extra attention and let me talk about my mother when needed. Even after all these years, I truly believe [that] if you hadn't done what you did, I would have gone home and done something terrible.

Several years later my mother was diagnosed [with] bipolar [disorder] and started medication. Things changed soon after, and we are now very close. I am happily married and have a son who is seven.

I guess I just wanted you to know that you made a difference. Although you probably don't remember me or the day you changed my life, I want to thank you for what you did. Thank you for taking the time to realize something was wrong. Even though I never needed to know how to spell *sesquicentennial*, I pray that my son is fortunate enough to have a teacher like you someday.

*Submitted by Sally Amendola,
principal, Arlington ISD's
Crow Elementary*

Dear Ms. Vandeventer,

I included this extra letter just to show you how appreciative I am to have had you as my teacher. I know that it is not often in one's life that they come into contact with an individual who will make a positive and lasting impression on them, but you were that person for me. When I leave high school, I am sure that I will have many regrets, but I'm positive that meeting you will not be one of them. I must admit that I had my reservations when I saw your name on my list of classes during my sophomore year—and those reservations *were* justified. Having you as my teacher was very difficult because you made me put actual thought into the work that I produced for your class. I've always been good in English, but at times your class made me test my mental boundaries, and for that, I am very thankful. Being in your class allowed me to realize my own potential; I know that sounds corny, but it's true.

During my sophomore year, a very close friend of mine passed away, and I'm so thankful to you and the other kids in my class because you guys made me smile for the first time in a long time. When I graduate next year, don't forget that you had a student in your class whose life changed for

the better. Thank you; you're one in a million.

P.S. —When I say that you're one in a million, I mean it both metaphorically and truthfully. After all, not many other teachers can share my warped sense of humor.

P.P.S. —If you mention this letter to me ever again, I will blatantly deny writing it; I must maintain my sarcastic image, and this letter would singlehandedly demolish 16 years of insults and wisecracks.

*Submitted by Mary Vandeventer
Franscell, English teacher,
Northside (20) ISD's Louis D.
Brandeis High School*

Dear Mr. Tidwell,

I really like being in your class. Your class is like a room filled with your favorite flavored ice cream.

*Submitted by Clint Tidwell,
second-grade teacher, Round Rock
ISD's Fern Bluff Elementary*

To Mrs. Cherizard,

You are the best American that I've met in the USA and [the] best teacher. I always appreciate your helping and kindness. I'll never forget you, even when I go back to Korea.

*Submitted by Tara Cherizard,
U.S. history teacher, Killeen ISD's
Ellison High School*

TO: Mrs. Payne

God shows his love you make my heart grow

*Submitted by Diane Payne,
first-grade teacher, Bandera ISD's
Alkek Elementary*

Letters from family members

Ms. de Leon,

I just want to thank you for all your devotion you give to the children. I have seen my child take a liking in school this year that I have never seen in him before. You have shown him how fun and interesting school can be, and I know he is going to keep that with him. Thank you for being a wonderful teacher; we truly cherish you, and [my son] has loved your class. Reading is now part of [his] everyday routine; you have shown him that this is important, and he loves it! Thank you—you are one-of-a-kind—a treasure! And thank you for lending your ear sometimes!

*Submitted by Sandra de Leon, science specialist,
Northside (20) ISD's Meadow Village Elementary*

Mrs. Ferris,

Thanks for your help with [my daughter]. Thanks also for the CiCi's coupon in the report card. Sometimes the coupons are how we can go out to eat. You're doing a great job. You have a gift with kids.

*Submitted by Rita Ferris, first-grade teacher,
Mesquite ISD's Gray Elementary*

Dear Ms. Hawes,

Thank you for helping [my brother]. His reading is getting better and better each day. I've been trying to help him with reading, writing and math skills since kindergarten. But he mostly forgets sometimes. He said that he enjoys reading books with you. And he also said that it is the best subject of the day. Even though I try to find as many Web sites or books for him to read, it still isn't enough. With your help, he would pass first grade, and I am sure of it. Thank you very, very much. Sincerely, [his] big sister

P.S. I'm not sure if spelled your name right. I just copied from the tag on [his] blue bag.

Submitted by Shirl Hawes, reading recovery/first-grade teacher, Fort Bend ISD's Rita Drabek Elementary

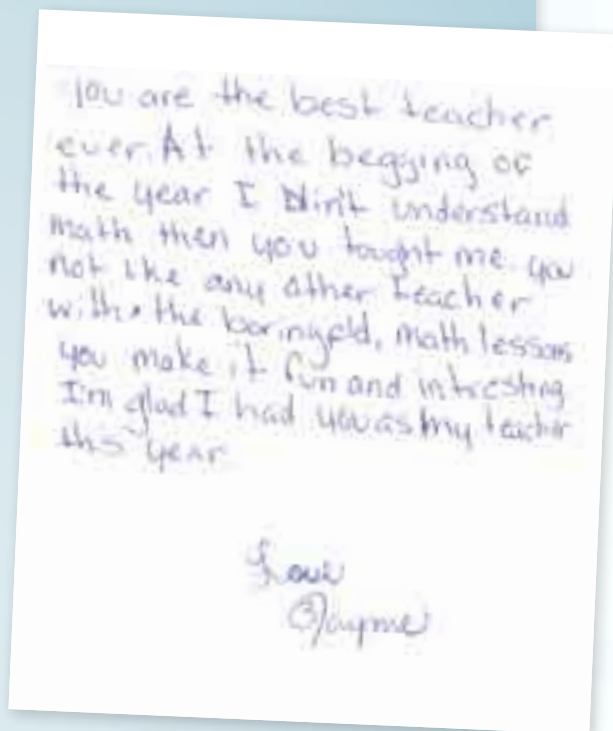
Hats off to Melinda Falk and the [middle school] science team. On Saturday, my sixth-grader decided to do some deep frying while [her father] and I were [away] and my ninth-grader was at competition. Yes, she started a grease fire. After a short panic (her words), she remembered that her dad had a fire extinguisher in his company van. She ran and got it and, having recently been taught about extinguishers in her science class, quickly figured out what to do and put the fire out. She then picked up our dog and went to her coach's house to call us. Everything turned out OK, with the exception of the mess from the extinguisher. Way to go Melinda! We do have a great bunch of teachers in this district.

Submitted by Melinda Falk, sixth-grade science teacher, Lago Vista ISD's Lago Vista Middle School

Ms. Moore,

Well, we got him through that part. Thanks so much for all you have done for and with him, and taking the time to get to know him, in spite of himself. Thanks for not giving up on him.

Submitted by MaryDee Moore, special education teaching assistant, DeLeon ISD's DeLeon Elementary



Stories of thanks

In my last years of teaching I had a young lady from Thailand in my class. Her father had died, and her mother had sent her to live with a distant relative in the United States to study English and to graduate from an American high school. She was basically alone and still grieving about her father's death. She worked hard and learned English quickly. She didn't want me to cut the assignments for her, even though I knew the amount of reading necessary to solve the problems could have been very overwhelming. She flipped through her translation dictionary faster than I've ever seen anyone flip through anything! She was highly successful on the state test, for which she only had two months to learn English and to prepare! Close to the completion of the semester, she came up to me with a small piece of torn paper in her hand, and she asked me if I knew what the word *family* meant. Trying to be cognizant of her recent loss and knowing how much my family meant to me, I tried to describe *family* as best I could. She giggled and stopped me and said, "Look!" As she opened the little piece of torn paper I saw what it read: "FAMILY—Father and Mother, I Love You." I started crying. She comforted me and told me that the scrap of paper was her gift to me! I gladly took the scrap of paper. When it came time for her to graduate, I knew that she would not have anyone there to cheer her as she walked across the stage. I asked if she would like me to be there for her, and she was glad to know that someone would be there. I sat on

the front row at graduation that year. When her name was called, I clapped and gave a bit of a "Woo-hoo!" I was certainly the loudest person there as she made her walk, and I'm sure she heard me! I still have the scrap of paper in my wallet ... in a *very* safe place!

*Submitted by Connie Kilday,
middle school math coordinator,
Irving ISD*

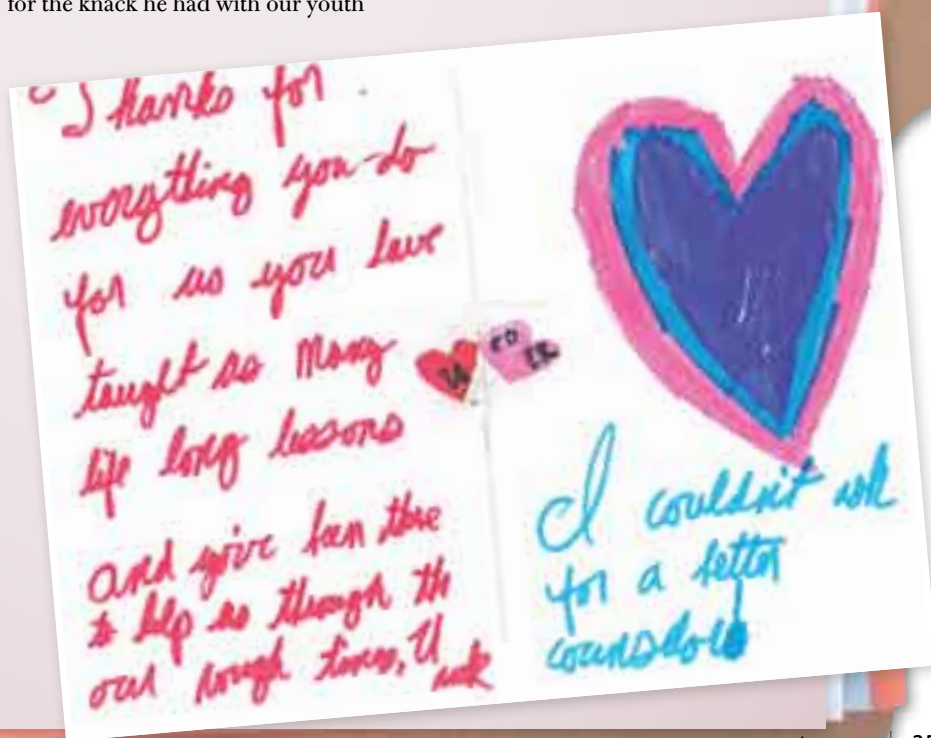
Recently, there was a sealed envelope in my school mail. Inside was a signed thank-you note from both my homebound student and the homebound teacher. They thanked me for sending assignments that the student and the homebound teacher could complete without any difficulties in understanding the assignments and the order in which they needed to be completed. What was amazing was that the homebound teacher was my youth group leader, many years ago, and I admired him then for the knack he had with our youth

group. The note made my day because he let me know I was the kind of teacher that he admired. I don't think he knew who I was when the note was written. I do plan to reply to explain to him what the note meant to me.

*Submitted by Margaret George,
special education literature teacher,
Vidor ISD's Vidor Junior
High School*

I taught compensatory reading for 14 years. Our school received a grant, and the grant people came to tour the campus. One of my former students was selected to escort the grant people around the campus. As they were touring, my student asked them if they would like to see his favorite class. He took them to my room and said, "This is where I learned to read."

*Submitted by Kem Fogleman,
second-and third-grade special
education teacher, Snyder ISD's
Central Elementary*



A number of years ago I had a student, Rosie [name has been changed], from a hard-working but very poor family. On the day of the Christmas party, my desk was covered with brightly wrapped gifts from many of my third-grade students. In the midst of the carefully wrapped gifts was something wrapped in old newspaper. I knew it was from Rosie, and she shyly watched as I opened all of the other gifts. The kids oohed and awed as I opened each gift. When I came to Rosie's gift, my students looked confused, but no one said a word. I complimented Rosie on using my favorite newspaper for wrapping paper. The class agreed that [it] was a good way to recycle. Opening the gift I found a small, furry blue stuffed toy. It had been well-loved and was now being given to me to love. I choked back tears and expressed my joy over this gift. I thanked Rosie for thinking of me and told her how much I loved the gift. She just beamed. The other students added their compliments. Rosie held her head a little higher and smiled at everyone! It was, no doubt, one of her few possessions in this world, and she had unselfishly given it to me. No gift has ever been so beautiful.

*Submitted by Donna Limrick,
supplemental education teacher,
Schertz-Cibolo-Universal City ISD's
Rose Garden Elementary*

When my fifth-graders took the Reading TAKS, we had parents or other supportive people write each and every fifth-grader a letter of encouragement. The students got so excited about finally getting to open their letters the morning of the test.

A couple of days after the test, I mentioned to them that I had just

finished my finals for my master's a week or so ago, and I sure could have used some letters of encouragement. Later that day at recess, many of my students surrounded me with my very own letter of encouragement, and they had all signed the note. I have the note in my purse, and when I have to face more tests in the future, such as the licensed professional counselor exam, I will feel loved and encouraged.

*Submitted by Carolyn Moorman,
fifth-grade social studies/writing/
spelling teacher, Carrollton-
Farmers Branch ISD's
Davis Elementary*

I started teaching late in life. I was in my early 40s when I took my first teaching position at a junior high school. I thought I knew most everything and had seen most everything because I had spent 22 years in retail. I knew I was, however, an amateur teacher. I came at mid-semester because a teacher had resigned at Christmas. I remember I was so worried about having something to put on the walls and a discipline contract for the students to sign. I was worried about what I was going to wear ... but my sister had just given me a red bandana skirt for Christmas, and I decided that would be perfect. I had been initiated with the usual new-teacher stories; I think that is a rite of passage. I had been warned about one particular student who was "boisterous" and had a reputation. His name was Robert [name has been changed].

The first day I began to wonder what on earth I had gotten into



and how I could get out of it. Each period came and went, and each one was steadily more disruptive. I had Robert during eighth period and couldn't wait to see what this kid looked like. Eighth period came, and I tried to get everyone in his or her seats, and I started explaining the discipline contract. I could hear someone talking while I was talking. I saw a young man and said, "Robert?" He said, "Yes, how did you know my name?" I said, "Your reputation precedes you." He smiled until he thought about it and then asked who had been talking about him. He didn't give up. Finally, I told him my mentor had said what a good kid he was and how much fun he was. He smiled as only Robert could. And a connection was made then and there. (Of course, my mentor ran interference and persuaded Robert to give me a chance.) He then felt comfortable enough to point at my skirt and asked why I had that rag on. I thought he didn't like my skirt, and I was proud of it. Later, I mentioned this to a colleague, and she had to tell me about gangs and gang symbols. I was so stupid. How could I be so stupid? I had reached the twilight zone, and there were no instructions on how to proceed.

I would like to think that I had a positive influence on the students; however, sometimes I think the reverse is true. The kids laugh at me when I use their slang,

but they know how much I enjoy it. Robert did have a positive influence on me. He took me under his wing and explained things I needed to know and that I didn't know I wanted to know. He was quite a character and held the class in the palm of his hand. Whatever Robert wanted, Robert got (one way or another). Robert was a small boy—short in stature but 6 foot 7 inches in the eyes of his peers.

Robert would get information to me during the day if I needed to know something. He stopped by at lunch one day, and my class was giving me grief. He said, "You don't treat my teacher that way, or you will answer to me." I could not believe the change in that class. It was remarkable! And it lasted the rest of the year!

The last day of school, Robert did not pass dress code, so he was not able to come to my class to take the final. I sent a final to in-school suspension, and when it was returned, I looked at the test. On the last page, Robert had written: "They won't let me come tell you goodbye. I love you Ms. B." I kept that test.

Early the next Monday morning, Robert was killed, and I never got the chance to say, "Robert, this old teacher loves you too." God speed Robert.

Submitted by Doris Beseda, technology and journalism teacher, Lubbock ISD's Dunbar Middle School

I have worked 30 years in the teaching field—six years as a classroom teacher and 24 years as a librarian. As everyone knows, there are days when you don't want to go to work and retirement looks good (yes, even librarians feel this way). But for every child who comes into the library, I try to smile and wish her a good day.

One of those days popped up, and my daughter said it was time for me to retire. I told her: "Well, God wants me here in the library for some reason, and when He tells me to go, I will go. How do I know? He might want me in the library just to smile at a child." Three days later a fourth-grade teacher had some of her students make thank-you cards for school employees. One student made me a card. Inside was written: "Dear Ms. Wilson, Thanks for checking out all the books that I read. You are funny and sweet. I like to see your smiling face."

Submitted by Diane Wilson, librarian, Three Rivers ISD's Three Rivers Elementary School



And one funny poem

There once was a teacher named Whitbeck.
 And algebra was her game.
 The distributive property is really lame.
 Like terms are all the same.
 If you don't use UPAC
 You'll get a smack.
 Absolute value is simple.
 If you can't do it, you must be a cripple.
 $A \cdot 0 = 0$
 Mrs. Whitbeck is our hero.
 If $A = B$, then $B = A$.
 So we listen to everything she has to say.
 $1/a$ such that $a \cdot 1/a = 1$
 Isn't this fun?
 1 term is a monomial
 2 terms is a binomial
 3 terms is a trinomial
 All of these are polynomials.
 Multiplying with FOIL
 Is very dull.
 Multiplying $(A+B)(A-B)$
 Is beyond Jon's ability.
 $(A+B)(A+B) = (A+B)^2 = A^2 + 2AB + B^2$
 $(A-B)(A-B) = (A-B)^2 = A^2 - 2AB + B^2$
 $(A+B)(A-B) = A^2 - B^2$
 When you come to algebra you better be prepared.
 First, outside, inside, last

If you don't know this you surely won't pass.
 Scientific notation will make your head do a complete rotation.
 Problem solving was really rough
 But now it is hardly enough.
 Integers are not tough
 And we know all this stuff.

Submitted by Katherine Whitbeck, sophomore math teacher, Nacogdoches ISD's Nacogdoches High School