

A ROOM WITH A VIEW

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y first words to my sister were “Middle School! I must be crazy.” And I wasn’t sure but what I was. I had left a high school media center where I had lived and worked for 15 years, where I had added family pictures, flowers, and curiosities with swinging dolphins and with curved metal bars that went in circles just missing each other every time they went around. I had spent so much time there that I had wanted to personalize this area to make it seem like home. Then came the feeling that I needed a change—and maybe some windows.

The seeds for change were planted last spring when I learned that a colleague from a middle school media center was retiring. Maybe, I thought, this would be the change I wanted. But, the thought just floated around in my mind for a while. After all, change was scary. I couldn’t leave a media center that had become mine over the years. I checked the job postings in the summer; the job was gone so my decision was made for me. I started back to school in the middle of August, a week earlier than usual this year. I checked the job postings one more time, and there was the job once again dangling before my eyes, tempting me to call the phone number listed on the screen. I gave in and called. What harm could it do to check it out?

The call was made and a time for an interview was set up. Had I really gone this far? After the interview, I waited impatiently to find out whether or not I had gotten the job. I could picture myself in that media center; I wanted the job. The principal called a day later to tell me, “I think that you would be a good match for Lane, and I would like to offer you the job.” The decision was back in my hands. Without hesitation, I accepted.

With the job came the new responsibilities associated with AV. This included setting up TV’s, VCR’s, DVD’s, CD/TC players, modulators, PA systems and all the cables and plugs that went with them. The teachers were very patient and helpful, but I could tell that they wished I could set up all the equipment with the grace of the former media teacher. As the principal had

pointed out to me during the interview, I had big shoes to fill. They stuck with me, and I am improving. I felt pretty much at home with the books and computers; they had names I could understand—not just initials.

What about the dreaded middle school students with their growing bodies that bumped into each other and the walls when they walked down the hallways and who couldn’t sit still or be quiet for more than 15 minutes? I had heard about all this and still said ‘yes’ to a new challenge. After all, I didn’t like to sit still for much more than 15 minutes either. All this middle school mania seemed to translate into enthusiasm and excitement. All of those things I learned about in library classes—reading incentive programs, library contests, library instruction—were meant for the middle school. Those sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students were ready for action.

And I would have windows. So what if the windows faced an athletic field with a small storage shed with a door that often swung open? So what if there was no air conditioning and we had to open those windows in the early fall and late spring? So what if the heater worked overtime and we opened the windows in the winter? I had a room with a view and a renewed sense of enthusiasm.

My first year at Lane Middle School is almost over. I have become almost a master at setting up the AV equipment. The students’ enthusiasm and eagerness have rubbed off on me. The staff at this school is a great group of people, and I have grown to like and respect them. They are beginning to accept the media teacher who brought terror to their hearts by moving computers from a small locked room to the middle of the media center. Something that I am sure was a positive for the staff is that my name slid alphabetically right into the same mailbox slot that had been vacated by the former media teacher; nobody’s mailbox location needed to be changed.

With only a few years until retirement, I was very careful about what change I made, but I felt this was right so I made the leap. And, except for some episodes of homesickness for the people at the high school

where I spent fifteen years, I am very happy that I did. Not until I put myself on the job market again did I realize that there is a shortage of media teachers. For those people who want to go into education, love all subjects, want to help students learn how to learn—to become lifelong learners—and solve information puzzles, and to motivate students to read, read, read, this might be the job for them.

I marvel at those people who work at the same job for 30 or forty years and stay fresh and enthusiastic. But for those of us who need change, I have found that an old dog can learn new tricks—and have fun doing it. Did I mention that I also have a connection to the outside world? I have a room with windows, a room with a view.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sharon Tieben will begin her third year as Media Teacher at Lane Middle School this September (2003). She is still enjoying her “room with a view.”