

## Teacher and Friend A Story About Mrs. Jennifer Shifflet

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I have many role models in my life. My parents, grandparents, pastor, youth pastor, and teachers are just a few examples. One that has and probably always will inspire me is my old band teacher, Mrs. Shifflet. Her bright, outgoing personality, amazing effort she put in each student, incredible music talent, and her connection between friendship and teaching inspires me to be just like her when I get out of school. I yearn to be just like her.

Mrs. Shifflet was not one of those teachers that just hoped the best for her students. She believed every student – no matter his or her education level or background – could succeed. She backed up her beliefs with words and actions. Looking back on my sixth and seventh grade years, I cannot think of one negative action or phrase she ever uttered to us. Mrs. Shifflet's optimism made me want to go the extra mile. No matter what mood I was in when I walked into band, I knew by the end, I would be in a bright, joyous mood. She helped not only me, but also everyone see the light at the end of the dark and ominous tunnel in which they were trapped. Mrs. Shifflet helped everyone do his or her best, and then more. While we only knew how far we thought we could go, she knew how far we could really go. She pushed us to be our best in everything we tried, whether it be our main instrument we played in her class, or schoolwork, or a secondary instrument we were trying for the first time. Her middle name should have been "support" for all of it that she gave freely. But, like I said, she did not give it without backing her ideas up.

Not only did she support us and have a bright, cheery nature, she helped us reach our goals. Her viewpoints were not just hopes or possibility. She worked to make them realities. No matter what instrument or song you wanted to tackle, Mrs. Shifflet believed you could, no exceptions. She did not just hope or dream you there; she put the effort in it to get you there. Everything she did was to help someone else, it seemed. But she did not just work all the time. Just ask any of the flutes graduating 2017. At P.E. lessons, which were once a week for half a class period, we goofed off quite a bit, but at the same time, we still got our work done. We would tell jokes, talk, and occasionally, just sit together and laugh. Smiles were the only thing that most could do in the band room. At the end of lessons, we would mark the next week's lesson with a picture. During Christmas, we drew Christmas trees and stars. Right before

summer, we sketched sunglasses and suns. On days not around holidays, we would draw any number of things. We even created a new shape! We drew what we called a “squircle”. It was a combination of a circle and square. On our music, we would draw dragons to remind ourselves not to drag, because of the poster that read, “No Dragon!” To remind ourselves not to rush, we wrote, “No Russian!” Another phrase we created during my seventh grade year was “Keep the Beet!” On the poster that depicted it, it showed a picture of a beet. As you can see, Mrs. Shifflet did not just work all the time, she took it farther and let us goof off and play.

That is not the only thing that makes Mrs. Shifflet the perfect role model. She was ready for anything you threw at her. Both years that we had a community-wide Christmas performance at the high school auditorium, she played French horn. Though it was not her main instrument – the flute holds that position – she took the music and worked on it. She would work outside from eight to ten during band camp in the blistering southern Illinois heat, pouncing on anyone who was not rolling their feet, standing up straight or displaying bad posture. She teaches somewhere between fifty and seventy-five twelve-year-olds how to march each year. I still find it a feat worthy of accomplishment, after performing with the high school marching band in my new school district. Though they do not perfect a ten-minute show like high school, they march in two long parades and memorize one song. I think, given their age, that it is an achievement they should be proud of. In the same light, their leader should be put up on a high place for helping them reach their goal. That is, of course, Mrs. Shifflet.

There is one more thing that makes Mrs. Shifflet perfect, though. She was not just a teacher, but she was also a friend. I moved away last summer from the school she worked at to a school almost five hours away. I have not seen her in months. The only reason she is going to read this is because when I finish, I am going to e-mail it to her. She was one of the first people that I told that I was moving. I told her first because she was not just a teacher to me. She was a dear friend that I was now going to lose. Mrs. Shifflet did not crave just a three-year relationship with her students; she wanted to be a friend that you could go back to, even in your high school years. In Mrs. Shifflet, I have found not only an incredible teacher that taught me most things I know about my instrument, the flute, but a friend that I will never forget, no matter how many miles separate us. I believe that teachers should strive for this kind of bond with their students. Not only should they freely give out their extensive knowledge, they should strive to be a friend to each and every one of their students. I yearn to be a band teacher when I graduate high school and college. If I pursue that goal, one of my main role models would be my sixth and seventh grade band teacher, Mrs. Shifflet.

All of these things make Mrs. Shifflet the perfect role model: her bright optimism, the unbelievable effort she gave to each student, her readiness for anything, and her ability to see the connection between teaching and friendship. If I could bring Mrs. Shifflet to my new school to teach, just so I could be with her again, I would. All I can do is pray that one day, I can be with Mrs. Shifflet again.