

## When You Say Nothing At All

by Ashley Delph  
Student - Prize Winner  
Meadowview Middle  
Hamblen County

The teacher who affected my life the most was Mr. Ron Coffey. When I walked into his classroom on the first day of school, he said I was shy and stuck in a shell. Because he saw something special in me, I suppose he decided to spend time cracking and removing the hard cover that had the real me trapped within. He began by simply talking with me constantly. This forced me to communicate more. He also told me jokes that helped me learn to laugh out loud more. In addition, he watched me closely and soon discovered how much I appeared to enjoy listening to him play his acoustic guitar during class. Mr. R. Coffey often played his guitar while explaining subject matter for the lessons he created on a wide range of topics. I was so fascinated with and amazed by his musical skill that I thought it might be fun to learn how to play the guitar.



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My Aunt, who owned a guitar, gave it to me when she heard I was interested in learning to play this instrument. After I shared this desire with Mr. R. Coffey, he offered to give me free guitar lessons every Wednesday after school, from three o'clock to five o'clock. Of course, I accepted his offer and on the very day of the first lesson, I managed to play "I'll Fly Away", the well-known and popular spiritual. Mr. Coffey said at the rate I was going, I would be better than he was in no time at all.

Although he was a good guitar teacher, he was an even better guitar player. He offered to play the guitar if I would sing a song during the fall spring talent show at Fairview Marguerite Elementary. Because he believed in me, I reluctantly agreed to do so. For the performance, we selected the song "When You Say Nothing At All" by Allison Tates (also known as the Civil War) and "Underground Railroad," which was about slaves trying to escape to the North in search of freedom. All the songs were very educational and made learning more interesting and meaningful.

For me, Mr. R. Coffey's influence drifted beyond the music and spilled outside the walls of the classroom, too. He repeatedly told me how smart he thought I was after seeing papers posted in the hallway by other teachers. To stress how smart he thought I was once during a summer break he asked me to help him at a professional development meeting. We traveled to Mooresburg Elementary where he shared and explained his teaching method with educators

from schools around the region. I helped him demonstrate how to make and use fold-ables. The teachers were also introduced to school related apps for the iPad. I played the role of the student being taught to use this piece of technology.

Mr. R. Coffey not only chose me to go to this meeting but, with my parents' permission he also took me to the Christmas parade at the Smokies Baseball Stadium. Together, we really enjoyed the music and the lights. At the end of this wonderful day, we went to a petting zoo. We got to touch and feed many animals. The animals weren't the only ones getting fed though. Mr. R. Coffey bought me a bag of kettle corn at the baseball stadium and chicken nuggets at McDonalds.

The next day I went to school, and Mr. R. Coffey was once again playing his guitar. While sitting there my mind began to wonder. I thought about the life-changing journey that I had made with the help with Mr. R. Coffey. Mr. R. Coffey broke through the shell. Because of him I became a more friendly and confident person. I took what he had given to me, and I gave it to others. He inspired me to teach other kids younger than I history and grammar. I taught my neighbors' children using the songs I learned in Mr. R. Coffey's classroom. To this day I still play "Trail of Tears" on my guitar.

In short, through Mr. R. Coffey, I found my voice. For this, I will be forever grateful.