

Remembering Moments Shared With Marie Clay

Marie, the Teacher

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In 1999, I thought I was in the “cat-bird” seat. I was in my second year of teaching Reading Recovery... as great a zealot for Marie Clay’s theoretical understandings as there can be. And then that spring I was chosen to train as a teacher leader. This opportunity was like frosting on my little slice of life. All of this could be reason enough for me to be standing here today to give a tribute to Marie Clay, the teacher of teachers, but there is more.

On Memorial Day 8 years ago, Dannie, my wonderful husband of 32 years, died suddenly and I literally came to a standstill.

It is at this point that my tribute to Marie Clay actually begins...with my life in the depths of despair. I went ahead with my teacher leader training. I realized that Marie Clay, through Reading Recovery, was offering me exactly what I needed to begin my life anew.

In Marie’s research and writings I found common sense applications of theory that when I applied them showed me that despite my loss, I was still a teacher of reading and writing.

In her presentations Marie never failed to challenge me to think in new ways about teaching children and to challenge myself and other Reading Recovery teachers to be the best observers of children.

In her warm personal interactions—I remember sitting at a table with her at a conference in San Diego talking about hometowns—she was totally genuine and interested in each person she met; teaching by example even in social settings the importance of connectedness.

But there were two most important ways that Marie Clay helped me go on without my husband, my best friend:

First, Marie offered me a **real reason** for getting up and facing each new day. She offered me the opportunity to change the life of a child in a positive way. Those children were counting on me, and in a sense on Marie Clay and Reading Recovery, to teach them the skills they would need to succeed in life. This opportunity to be a teacher with an impact kept me going and kept me learning and helped me want to be alive.

Second, Marie offered me **real personal connections** when my most important personal connection had been severed by death. Through the interactions that I had with my trainer and mentor Barbara Schubert, with my best friend, mentor and fellow teacher leader Kay Hackbarth, with Reading Recovery teachers trained and in training, I began to build a new network of interpersonal relationships — one that Marie Clay had clearly mapped out as part of the collegial interaction of a special network of teachers around the world.

So it is with heartfelt thanks that I offer my tribute to Marie Clay the teacher, a woman of great vision, of knowledge and intellect, of hard work and dedication, yet full of warmth and understanding of the needs of each individual person. Thank you, Marie, for all you have given me and given the world

Remarks from the tribute to Marie Clay, June 4, 2007, at the 2007 Teacher Leader Institute & North American Leadership Academy in Vienna, Virginia