

CHAPTER ONE

BREAKING AWAY



The Sample Gates – Entryway to Indiana University Campus

*I sat down on the ‘spooning wall’ at the edge of campus,
and all the things that the town and the university and
the friends meant flooded through my mind.*

**~Hoagy Carmichael,
Composer of the 1927 hit song “Stardust”**

Professor Jenkinson Was Right

“Be prepared” was his motto, and prepared we were—the entire army of Communication Skills student teachers who descended upon Bloomington High School South in January of 1977. From appearance to lesson plans, Professor Edward B. Jenkinson, my professor for Methods of Teaching High School English and director of IU’s Communication Skills Program, had covered all the bases.

“Dress for success!” That first day I was careful to dress the part. I was scared enough, being only three to four years older than some of the students. I wore a forest green, tweedy-looking pantsuit with a brushed-velvet collar and matching brushed-velvet vest. As a prop I carried the new wine-colored leather briefcase that my husband had given me for Christmas.

Professor Jenkinson had warned us about our appearance. “I once had a student teacher—Cindy—who on her first day wore a miniskirt.” He paused dramatically, indicating the length of her skirt. We giggled and several of the guys in our Methods class whistled. Professor Jenkinson continued acting out the scene. “When she stood in front of the students, she flipped her long hair over her shoulder and said, ‘Hi, my name is Cindy.’ A flurry of note writing ensued, and she had ten propositions before the end of first period.” Professor Jenkinson pressed his lips together in his trademark sly grin.

I did not have trouble finding appropriate outfits for my student-teaching experience. There had been a slight shift in clothing styles during my time at IU that somewhat mirrored the shift in tone itself on the Bloomington campus.

When I first came to IU in the winter of 1974, it was on the tail end of the ‘hippie’ era. There were lots of bell-bottom blue jeans, and Leon Varjian, a long-haired, Mad Hatter-type character in black top hat and tails, was running for mayor in the 1975 Democratic primary. He proposed turning downtown Bloomington into a Monopoly game board and the university into “IU-Land,” a giant amusement park. One of his topsy-turvy ideas was to transform the little Eighth Street guard house in front of the Union Building into a popcorn stand.

“Instead of issuing parking tickets,” Varjian suggested, “why not have the employee on duty give away bags of free popcorn to students?”

But by 1977, Greek life was on the upswing as National Lampoon’s wildly popular 1978 movie, *Animal House*, showed. I began to notice a lot of students wearing pretty sweaters and slacks. “Preppy” was making a comeback. I was even able to find a suitable outfit in the window of a clothing store on funky Kirkwood Avenue: black brushed-corduroy slacks, a V-necked red, yellow, and black-striped sweater vest with a cream-colored turtleneck sweater. Still, it felt a little strange trading in my jeans and backpack for more professional attire.

In my briefcase that first day, I already had file folders filled with lesson plans on English Romanticism, *Gulliver’s Travels*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Rivals*, *Lilies of the Field*, and a freshmen speech unit. As directed by Professor Jenkinson in my Methods class, I had met briefly with Mrs. Virginia Batchelor in September of 1976 to find out what units I would be teaching in January. By December Professor Jenkinson had collected them to grade and give comments.

“You will not set foot in that school until I give the green light on your lesson plans,” he warned our class.

Thanksgiving of 1976 was a nightmare for me. I remember sitting in a sea of behavioral objectives in the middle of our living room floor, taking only a short while to wolf down Thanksgiving dinner at my in-laws’ before getting back to work.

How I *hated* behavioral objectives! These were our educational goals for the students. Before I could even get to my lesson plans, there were *pages* of objectives to type.

- Given a specific passage in *Gulliver’s Travels*, the student will explain why it is satire.
- The student will list social and political events that led to the Romantic Movement.
- The student will identify examples of dramatic irony in *Romeo and Juliet*.
- The student will *infer . . . describe . . . demonstrate . . . relate . . . construct evaluate . . .*

And on and on and on

Professor Jenkinson poured over our units with a watchful eye. On one of my Romantic poets' quizzes, he circled some questions and wrote in the margin, "Remember, Liz, your purpose is to *teach* the students, not '*trick*' them!"

He was emphatic about preparing the student before an assignment—especially writing. "They need to know what you expect of them: 'Who's the audience? What's the purpose? How will I be evaluated?'"

My copies of his books *Writing as a Process of Discovery* and *Teaching Literature in Grades Ten Through Twelve* were dog-eared by the end of student teaching.

What I most admired and tried to emulate about Professor Jenkinson, though, was his creativity. Even on tests he encouraged a sense of fun. "Vary the types of questions. Draw illustrations. Write a joke in the middle of the test. Give a freebie such as: 'What color are Professor Jenkinson's eyes?'"

Trying to live up to Professor Jenkinson's expectations to be creative and hoping to impress Mrs. Batchelor, I worked (with the help of my husband, a political science major at IU) from September through December thinking of unique approaches, gathering supplemental materials and visual aids, putting together bulletin boards, and even painting a canvas backdrop of the Globe Theatre. (My husband built a small wooden stage for it.) All the while I was working on projects and papers for my other IU classes. I sometimes felt on the verge of exhaustion.

Still, I took to heart Professor Jenkinson's advice to *be prepared*. Time and time again he cautioned: "I've seen veteran teachers fall flat on their faces when they tried to 'wing it,' and it wasn't a pretty sight."

He was right.

"Why Am I Doing This?"

For as long as I live, I will never forget that *heart-in-my-throat, this-is-it, now-or-never* moment when I pulled into the Bloomington

High School South parking lot that snowy January morning in 1977. Heavy snowfalls and sub-zero temperatures had extended Bloomington High School South's two-week Christmas vacation for several more days. My first day of student teaching had been delayed again and again. The tension inside me was unbearable.

In the 7 a.m. darkness, the three-story Bedford limestone school sitting atop the small, snow-covered hill loomed before me with a touch of mystery. What awaited me inside? Would the kids like me? How would I measure up in Mrs. Batchelor's eyes? Could I cut it? I approached the school with both fear and excitement.

As I climbed the stairs to the second floor and headed for Room 216, my twenty-one-year-old mind was more concerned with practicalities than philosophy: Would I have classroom control? Could I make my lessons fun? How would I handle the grading?

I paused at the classroom door, my heart beating wildly.

"*Why* am I doing this?" I closed my eyes and took a deep breath.

Yes, why *was* I doing this?

For a moment my mind wandered back in time. I smiled as I reflected upon my own school days: the excitement, the activities, the "I-can't-wait-to-get-to-school" feeling, and I remembered the many teachers who made it that way.

On that snowy day in January of 1977, I took a deep breath and opened the door to Room 216 at Bloomington High School South. Subconsciously, I carried with me a little of each of those special teachers who had influenced my life. As I took my place at the front of the classroom that first day, I wanted to make magical memories for my students, too.

Mrs. Batchelor

Virginia Batchelor, "Ginnie" as I would come to call her, might have been a petite lady, but she commanded the respect of her students. And she was the English Department chairwoman at Bloomington High School South.

“Chairwoman?” I remember thinking with dismay when Professor Jenkinson was handing out our student-teaching assignments in Methods class. Now I was really worried. I had wanted to student teach at the junior high level. At first Professor Jenkinson tried to arrange a student-teaching experience divided between the junior and senior high levels for us, but it could not be worked out, so high school it was. I was terrified enough of standing before kids only three or four years younger than I. Now I would have the chairwoman’s schedule to boot? My heart sank.

“I tried to match your personalities to the teachers,” he explained when I went up to him after class and expressed my apprehension. He grinned widely.

“Liz, you and Ginnie will get along great. *Trust me.*”

Professor Jenkinson was right again.

Mrs. Batchelor had high standards, but she also had a quick wit and a throaty laugh. Besides, I found out she also got choked up when she tuned in to see the Kentucky Derby each year and heard them sing “My Old Kentucky Home.” So did I. She was from Bowling Green, Kentucky; I was from New Albany, Indiana, or “Kentuckiana” as the newscasters call it, across the river from Louisville. Our love of the Kentucky Derby was a common bond.

We hit it off.

For the next nine weeks, she observed, advised, guided, and, best of all, chuckled with me over some of the antics of teenagers. Because she set the bar high, I felt she prepared me well, and I am glad she was my supervising teacher.

Teaching

Then it was down to the routine of running a classroom. Mrs. Batchelor took me through the basics: classroom rules, schedules, how to record grades in the gradebook, how to make my own overhead transparencies on the Thermofax machine, and how to use a Ditto machine.

Trying to type perfectly on a Ditto master was frustrating, stressful, and—impossible. I can still see my purple fingers after painstakingly scratching mistakes off the waxy-looking back of a Ditto master with a razor blade. Even worse was the rubbing alcohol-type smell of the ink. As the spirit master spun around on the metal drum of the duplicator, this strong, stinging odor made me nauseous. Then, too, it was hard to talk over the clamor of the machine as it spit out the slightly damp copies. How ancient that all seems now.

But such was my lot in 1977. I felt in a fog those first few days with so many instructions to absorb.

Next came the actual, honest-to-goodness standing in front of the class. It was sink-or-swim time. My heart pounded and, for a while, the faces were a blur. I began to loosen up as I got used to the students and the routine. Still, on occasion, I felt sheer terror, especially when I turned around from putting notes on the board and saw that Professor Jenkinson or Mrs. Batchelor or, worse, *both*, had slipped into the back of the classroom to observe me.

It's funny. I had acted in plays for years, and I loved being on stage. And at times teaching is *like* being on stage. A teacher is definitely part performer. The only problem is, teaching is a one-woman show, and you aren't playing a character. There is no "mask" behind which to hide. You're *you*. You live or die by your own personality. The kids are scrutinizing *you*.

I was fortunate at Bloomington High School South to have, for the most part, well-behaved students. I remember clean-cut kids, mainly middle-class, most from families native to Bloomington with a few professors' children in the mix. There were lots of smiles and laughter and questions. There were no major discipline problems, but I had Mrs. Batchelor to thank for that, really. The kids respected her and knew that there would be trouble to pay if they misbehaved for me. Furthermore, College-Prep seniors and Honors English freshmen were *motivated* kids. But even the students in my one small freshman remedial class often gathered round me before class asking, "What are we going to do today?"

And what *did* we do?

All I can say is, “Thank goodness Mrs. Batchelor was game for anything!” I’m amazed when I think back that she let my husband and me set up the wooden stage with two spotlights and a backdrop of the Globe Theatre in her classroom. I borrowed some velvet and brocade Elizabethan tunics and dresses from the Theatre Department, and I even brought in a couple of antique swords from my husband’s prop collection—kept in their sheaths, of course. This was before the days of zero tolerance on weapons.

“Take that, you Capulet dog!” For the next four weeks, my freshmen alternated between acting out scenes from *Romeo and Juliet* on the little wooden stage and listening to scenes on the record from the Franco Zeffirelli film. Just as with the Ditto machine, it now seems so quaint to say that I used a “record.”

While in the Monroe County Public Library researching my memoir, I was thrilled to discover a picture of my stage and two of my students, Kevin and Marshall, engaged in a sword fight in the 1977 Bloomington South yearbook. Seeing their faces made it all come back. I remembered saying, “Boys, be careful with those swords!”

Both my *Gulliver’s Travels* and my English Romanticism units proved the old adage that the teacher is often only one step in front of the student. By that I mean I took only one college class on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English literature. I had the advantage, however, of having had IU professor Dr. Bernhardt for L212, “A Critical and Historical Study of English Literature Since 1700.” Dynamic and passionate, he shared intriguing stories about the poets. I loved his class and took copious notes. All were fresh in my mind so that when I discussed the novel and the poems with my students, I was able to share *his* insights.

I tried to make *Gulliver’s Travels* fun for the students. During “Part I: A Voyage to Lilliput,” we played a review game by dividing into teams and tying down Gulliver with each correct answer. As far as visual aids, all I was able to find was a beautiful children’s pop-up book, *Gulliver’s Travels to Lilliput*. It worked out surprisingly well, though. The students and I laughed about how Jonathan Swift was probably rolling over in his grave to think that his satirical novel had been reduced to a child’s fairy tale. I

also remember the boys fighting over the book so that they could make Gulliver “wave goodbye” to the Lilliputians!

My most successful part of the Gulliver unit was using Mrs. Batchelor’s “Naïve Observer” creative writing assignment. She let me use her recording of an Andy Griffith monologue called “A Football Game.” Just like Gulliver, he observes an event through an “innocent’s eyes.” He is a country bumpkin who comes to a college town and is swept away in a crowd of people going to a football game. To him the football game is just a bunch of guys in tight knee pants and some convicts in striped shirts running up and down a cow pasture fighting over a funny-looking “punkin.” My seniors, especially the football players, were laughing so hard some of them had tears in their eyes. Robin Williams’s *Mork and Mindy*, a TV show about an alien who couldn’t make sense of human ways, was also popular at this time, so the students were able to write some very creative satires. I would use this writing assignment for years to come.

“Tintern Abbey,” “Kubla Khan,” “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” “Ode to the West Wind”. . . How does one make the *Romantic poets* interesting to *high school* students?

Some poems just naturally intrigued the students. The Ancient Mariner and his zombie crew, cursed by the death of the Albatross, caught their attention:

*Water, water everywhere,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink.*

The dreamlike world of “Kubla Khan” and its “sunny pleasure dome with caves of ice” also impressed them:

*In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure dome decree
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.*

With the rest of the unit, I tried different approaches: slides of England's Lake Country, student presentations, lectures spiced up with details about the poets' revolutionary ideas and avant-garde lifestyles. They found the life of Percy Bysshe Shelley ("Mad Shelley") especially fascinating:

"You mean his *wife*, an eighteen-year-old *girl*, wrote *Frankenstein*?"

"Eww . . . She had his body burned on a funeral pyre?"

My freshman speech unit was the one I felt most confident about, thanks to all the speech contests and theatre productions I had participated in during my own school years. Again I followed Professor Jenkinson's advice and gave two sample speeches myself—demonstration and persuasive—for the students. He recommended "modeling."

"*Show*, don't tell," he urged. "Write a sample essay yourself. Let the kids see how *you* do!" he challenged.

And so I began with a demonstration speech, "How to Bake Spritz Cookies." Armed with bowls and cookie sheets and even a red-and-white-checked frilly apron, I gave my speech to my ninth-grade students and handed out sample cookies afterwards. It worked. After seeing my performance, they proclaimed: "I can give a speech like that!"

For the next three weeks, I learned a lot about my freshmen. Demonstration speeches, I found, are a great way to find out about talents and interests. Especially rewarding is to see some quiet student in the back of the room get up and make everyone take notice of him or her for the first time because of an impressive skill or an entertaining speech.

Through the years I've seen it all: how to dribble a basketball, play an instrument, ride a skateboard, style hair, bake (just about anything) . . . But it has always been fun and fulfilling for the students *and* for me. In his book, *The Passionate Teacher: A Practical Guide*, Robert L. Fried paraphrases John Dewey this way: "Nothing much of lasting value happens in a classroom unless students' minds are engaged in ways that connect with their experience."

As Professor Jenkinson had warned, I found teaching English physically exhausting. Sure, I had my lesson plans ready (thanks to his foresight), but that was only a small part of the job.

Each night there were lecture notes to review, transparencies to make, handouts to type, poems or chapters or acts in a play to reread, and most time-consuming of all, papers to grade. Sometimes I continued to research the Elizabethan Era or the backgrounds of the Romantic poets. Other nights I labored over student compositions and essays. “Is this an *A*? or a *B*? or a *C*?” I remember struggling to assign grades to their writing.

Again, following Professor Jenkinson’s advice, I was always careful to first put down something positive on each student’s paper. I probably wrote too much on their papers, but to this day, I have a hard time responding to students’ writing with just a grade slapped on the top of the paper. I pulled a lot of late-nighters. This was the beginning of what would become a familiar routine for me for years to come. In the book, *Small Victories*, author Samuel G. Freedman writes about a condition familiar to all English teachers: “That they are tired is a given. The proof is in their eyes . . . this condition [is called]: The raccoon badge of honor.”

As time went by, I also developed a stronger rapport with the students. Whereas their faces had sometimes been a blur to me those first few panic-stricken days, now personalities began to emerge, and I started enjoying them.

Once, while putting notes on the board during my last period senior English class, I thought I heard some singing. I froze. It sounded like “*Murphy’s*.” Immediately I wondered: Are they making fun of me? The singing got louder.

“*Murphy’s . . . Nobody but Murphy’s.*”

Then I knew. They were singing the commercial jingle for Murphy’s Dime Store that had been playing a lot on a Bloomington TV channel. I turned around to see several impish grins. It made me laugh out loud to see their faces. After gauging my reaction, they sang a refrain, this time with more gusto and more students joining in.

“*Murphy’s . . . Nobody but Murphy’s!*”

I relaxed. It was just good-natured ribbing. From that moment on, whenever they wanted to humor me or try to coax me out of a homework assignment, they sang that jingle.

With each day I gained more confidence. I remember coming home and telling my husband: “I *love* this. This is exactly what I want to do with my life.”

Then It Was Over

Before I knew it, my student-teaching experience was coming to an end. During my final period of senior English on my last day, an office worker came to the door with Mrs. Batchelor. They told me there was a phone call for me in the teachers’ lounge . . . something about being interviewed by the newspaper. Mrs. Batchelor told me that she would take over the class.

“I’m being interviewed?” I thought. “How flattering!”

Gullible as always, I headed to the teachers’ lounge and picked up the phone. I remember thinking the voice on the other end sounded awfully young. He said something about being a reporter for *The Bloomington Herald-Times* and asked a few questions:

“How did you like student-teaching? Did you like the kids at Bloomington South?”

When he finished, I was puzzled.

“How strange. That was short.”

When I walked back into the classroom, the kids yelled, “Surprise!” With Mrs. Batchelor’s help, they had set up for a party. On the table was a sheet cake that read, “Good Luck, Mrs. Murphy.”

I was totally shocked and very touched.

“I want to thank all of you for being such a wonderful class . . . I’ve had a great time.” I paused. “You made me certain that I want to teach.” My voice broke a little.

Then, the way I remember it, Greg, a blond, good-natured football star and class cutup, handed me a plastic sack.

“We didn’t have time to wrap it,” he stated. I quickly pulled out a three-volume paperback set of Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*.

I tried to suppress a giggle as I thought to myself: “So this is what kids think English teachers enjoy for ‘light’ reading?”

I held up the books to show the class and thank them.

“*The Divine Comedy*? What’s that about? Is it funny?” asked one of the girls. I tried to explain to the class about Dante’s journey through the levels of Hell in the first book, *Inferno*.

“Sounds boring!” someone blurted out.

“Way to go, Greg,” teased another.

“I was in a hurry,” he said as he turned around in his seat to face them. “All I had time to do was run into the IU Bookstore and grab something off the shelf. I thought the set looked nice.”

He looked back at me, grinned sheepishly, and shrugged his shoulders. Then suddenly his face lit up and digging down into his jean pocket, he pulled out a crumpled dollar bill and some change. He rushed up and put the money on top of my books and patted it.

“Here’s the change,” he announced proudly and then sat back down again. The girl behind him rolled her eyes and shook her head in exasperation.

To this day, when I glimpse that three-volume set of *The Divine Comedy* on my bookshelf, I think of my Bloomington South kids and I smile.

A few minutes remained in the period. Mrs. Batchelor suggested that I tell the students my future plans and a little bit about college life.

“College?” I was surprised.

“Even though they live in a college town, they’re still curious about the campus and about dorm life. Their lives, for the most part, are separate from the college,” she explained. And with that, Mrs. Batchelor left me alone with the class one last time.

I began by telling the students that I would be looking for an English position wherever my husband decided to attend seminary. I further explained how my husband Chuck had been a student minister for the last four years at Simpson Chapel, a small United Methodist Church just north of Bloomington on State Highway 37.

I also shared some of my memorable moments on campus as I tried to paint a picture of college life for them: IU dorms vibrating with music and alive with lights and laughter on Friday and Saturday nights; dodging Frisbees and baseballs as I wound my way through the maze of hallways in Foster Quad's Jenkins Hall where my husband lived his freshman year; laughing about how *my husband*, of all people, lived on the floor voted "Most Partying Floor on Campus" for the 1973-74 school year; the haunting wail of bagpipes on fall evenings outside Ballentine Hall during my astronomy class; the Bible-thumping minister who sometimes stood in front of Ballentine Hall during the day yelling "sinners" at all who passed by; trudging through snow and bone-chilling winds on my way to classes; hundreds of students zigzagging across the foot paths and small wooden bridges; the residents on my academic dorm floor at Ashton opening up their doors too late to see "streakers" run down the hallway one evening; hanging out with friends on a Friday night at Noble Roman's while sharing a deep-dish Sicilian pizza and watching the old-time silent movies . . . Suddenly it occurred to me. Not only was student teaching coming to an end, but so was my time at IU and Bloomington. I felt a little empty.

The bell was about to ring. A few students joined together for a final reprise: "Murphy's . . . Nobody's but Murphy's!" as they filed out the door.

Then it was over.

I remember conflicting emotions: a sense of relief that I had made it, satisfaction, sheer exhaustion—but also sadness. I had anticipated student teaching for so long, and just as my students and I had discussed when reading Keats' poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn," anticipation is sweet.

Now there was a let-down.

Mrs. Batchelor returned. We pushed two student desks together and sat down. She showed me her written evaluation of my performance in the classroom. Again, relief. (Professor Jenkinson had emphasized how important the supervising teacher's critique was in one's IU placement file: "It will follow you the rest of your life!")

She also gave me a silver necklace and her fudge cake recipe, her son's favorite birthday cake. "It's a Mississippi recipe. I don't just share it with anybody," she announced matter-of-factly.

The advice of Professor Jenkinson and Mrs. Batchelor has guided me well through the years.

Hoagy Carmichael, the famous songwriter and composer of "Stardust," wrote that wherever life took him, IU and Bloomington "called out" to him, even decades after he left.

I've heard their call as well.

We Meet Again

How thrilled I was to meet again with Ginnie Batchelor!

"I'll be eighty-nine in two weeks," she laughed when we met at her Bloomington condo on a May afternoon in 2002, twenty-five years after my student-teaching days.

After she led me into her living room, I handed her some mementos from her home state of Kentucky: mint julep chocolates, notecards with pictures of thoroughbreds, and a ceramic Kentucky mug with some red silk roses.

It was like two old friends sitting down together. I felt at ease immediately. She still had the same throaty laugh and sharp wit.

"You're just exactly as I remember you," I told her, meaning every word. "I always had so much fun talking with you."

Situated in a wooded area, her condo had, as my daughter Amy later observed, "a Southern Colonial feel" with flowered prints, a gilt-edged mirror, and cherry furniture with Queen Anne legs.

"She has an aesthetic eye and a romantic soul," Amy mused during the drive home. She and Chuck, my husband, had arrived to pick me up after our visit and heard Mrs. Batchelor's description of meeting her first husband, Roy.

"I was a hostess for the Lions Club convention at Mammoth Cave in Bowling Green. I was in Onyx Cave when I looked up and saw this handsome man in a cinnamon-colored sports jacket and cream-colored flannel slacks. He wore brown-and-white Oxford shoes that matched the jacket. I thought I'd died and gone to heaven."

She was very animated as she described each detail.

“The next night we went dancing. There was a sliver of a moon in the sky with one star. It was perfect. I knew he was the one.” She smiled.

As she was describing this scene to us, I suddenly remembered how she had helped me prepare a lesson plan for John Keats’ poem “The Eve of St. Agnes,” and how she then, too, delighted in the rich sensory description.

“She appreciates fine things,” Amy said later, noting her tradition of getting out her silver mint julep cups at Derby time.

“You can tell she was an English teacher by the way she talks,” Amy concluded.

It was fulfilling to meet with a mentor, someone who had started me on my journey, and tell her what had become of me. I saw her through different eyes. Where I once was her student, I was now a fellow teacher. Now I felt more comfortable calling her “Ginnie.”

We traded “war stories,” laughed, caught up with each other’s lives, and reminisced for three hours. As a student I was in awe of her and a little scared. I don’t think it ever occurred to me that she had once been in my shoes. It was fascinating to hear her story.

“Well, let’s see...I was twenty-two when I started my teaching career in a small town called Beaver Dam, Kentucky.” She gave me that direct gaze of hers and pointed to my journal, “And this should go in there—it was a little *Peyton Place*.”

She chuckled, “After one year at Beaver Dam, that was all I wanted.”

Ginnie described a harrowing experience of having a janitor jump out of a closet, trying to scare “the new young teacher,” and who then continued to make improper advances toward her. Judge Finn, a friend of hers back in Bowling Green, became concerned and advised her to resign immediately. She did, but still finished out the year.

When she returned to Bowling Green, it was during the Depression and the only teaching assignment she could find was a second-grade class in a poor district.

“It was quite an experience. The kids were desperately poor,” she remarked sadly.

She and the other teachers in the school set up a soup kitchen and tried to set up birth-control classes for some of the women on welfare. She taught there for three years.

“And then I got married. At that time in Kentucky, you could not be married and teach, so I had to quit teaching,” she said. We both laughed sarcastically and shook our heads.

Her oldest son was seventeen before she returned to teaching. Then living in Terre Haute, Indiana, she received a phone call from a principal who was a good friend:

“Would you be interested in a job?”

“Well, I don’t know one end of a book from another anymore!” she retorted. (I am amazed that there ever was a time when *principals* called *teachers*, coaxing them to take teaching positions. All I have ever known is a tight job market with a glut of teachers.)

This time Ginnie taught a fifth-grade class in a brand new school building ten minutes from her house. “We even had a little science lab in the back of the room. They were the cutest kids.”

The next year, the school system reorganized, and even though her elementary principal really fought to keep her, she had a dual license and was reassigned to a junior high on a hill on the other side of town. Her husband Roy bought her a new Volkswagen Beetle “that made it up that icy hill.”

“I taught seventh and eighth grade. I got along great with the kids, but the junior high principal would sneak into the cloakroom and hide. He thought I didn’t know, but I could see his reflection in the glass windows of the cloakroom doors,” she grinned mischievously. “This was his idea of how to evaluate teachers. He didn’t approve of me because I smoked.”

Her husband then transferred to Bloomington with his banking job. Her older son Tom was a freshman at IU. “I was fortunate to be offered a job immediately with the school system. This occurred because of the recommendations of my two curriculum directors at Terre Haute.”

“This time the job was at a high school, and I had never taught in high school. I was scared to death. I’ll never forget how frightened I was.” She laughed. “But I *loved* it. I then taught high school for nineteen years.”

I noted with interest and a little irony that she had been just as frightened about teaching high school classes as I had been. I never dreamed in January of 1977 that she was probably empathetic to my situation.

One of Ginnie's parting comments to me twenty-five years ago had been: "It really will be an advantage for you that your husband will move to different places as a minister. Having different teaching experiences keeps you from getting stale." Now I realized that she was speaking from experience.

Although she started out at the elementary level, she had actually majored in English and music at Western Kentucky, where she studied two years, and then at Vanderbilt, her alma mater.

"When I was in my senior year of high school, I had an English teacher whose name was Miss Belle Potter. She wore long, black skirts and heels. She was a *fabulous* English teacher. What I learned from her inspired me to teach English. Not only was she a fabulous grammar and composition teacher, but her knowledge of English literature was unsurpassed. She was a no-nonsense teacher. Nobody made a peep in her room! You had better never come to her class unprepared."

Ginnie (she urged me to call her that now) continued: "I was also an avid reader, as were my parents. My father, a Disciples of Christ minister for fifty years, had a fine library."

I finally asked her about memorable moments in the classroom.

Immediately she replied: "On November 22, 1963, while leading my creative writing class to view a film in the AV room, I saw a number of staff members gathered around the TV. It was then I heard that President Kennedy had been shot. I took the students back to the classroom, and told them the tragic news, and then said: 'Get a sheet of paper and write down what you are thinking now.'"

She paused. "They were wonderful papers, and I kept them for many years.

"I tried to bring into teaching current things, both in Bloomington and all over the world, that would hold their interest. For instance, I used the movie *Breaking Away* (a coming-of-age

story centered on IU's Little 500 bicycle race) in my classes. The movie premiere was held here in Bloomington. There was a lot of interest," she observed.

She shook her head, laughing again, and explained she was a little worried about some of the previews on the tape with the reel-to-reel film (and no fast-forward button).

"I thought, 'I could possibly get in trouble for using this.' But there was no problem. The kids, of course, loved it."

This story reminded me of a similar situation my friend and colleague Connie Fleshman encountered in 1968. Connie was concerned she might receive some complaints after taking English classes to see Franco Zeffereilli's movie *Romeo and Juliet*, with its brief PG-13 scene. It seems English teachers are often faced with this dilemma.

Our talk turned to grammar.

"I've been going through some physical therapy recently and this nice young man said to me two or three times, 'Now *lay* down on this table.' Finally I said to him, 'Young man, a chicken *lays* an egg. I'm not going to *lay* a table.' I noticed the next time I went he said, 'Please *lie* down on the table.'"

Eventually, our conversation took a more reflective turn.

"When I retired, I was really tired . . . I didn't want to face the grueling time spent grading papers. I wanted to spend some time doing things I wanted to do. End of story."

About that time my husband and Amy returned. They took several pictures of Ginnie and me together, and then she and I hugged goodbye. I promised to return later in the summer, perhaps when we came back for Amy's IU orientation.

As we left Bloomington to return home, I reflected upon Ginnie Elkin Batchelor's extraordinary journey as a teacher, and I was so grateful that our paths had crossed along the way.

A Day for Remembering

Teachers must inspire as well as instruct. ~Caleb Mills

Education shall forever be encouraged. ~Ordinance of 1787

I paused a moment to read the inscriptions carved into the limestone at the side entrance of what used to be IU's School of Education and is now the library for the Music School. I thought about how many times I passed through those doors on my way to classes without paying any attention to those pronouncements.

"Now I understand," I thought.

On July 26, 2002, two months after my visit with Mrs. Batchelor, my husband and I visited IU and walked the campus as we had done so many times before as students. It was quiet and almost deserted in the late summer afternoon. We walked the shady footpaths and crossed the little rustic wooden bridges below towering Ballentine Hall. Jordan River meandered peacefully through the lush green campus. Flowers dotted the landscape: red geraniums and tulips, pink and white impatiens and petunias, yellow daylilies, lavender wildflowers.

"This is *still* the most beautiful campus I have ever seen," I commented to my husband.

Imposing limestone buildings, some Gothic, some modern, sat half-hidden among the trees. Ivy climbed the sides of many.

Chuck and I circled Showalter Fountain, its *Birth of Venus* sculpture rising up out of the water, and we laughed about the several occasions when sudsy water spewed forth from Venus' mouth. Dumping soap detergent into the fountain was a perennial fraternity prank.

To the right of the fountain was Lilly Library, a museum of rare books. We paused a moment on its steps and lovingly remembered Chuck's Grandma Murphy who worked there for years. So trusted an employee was she that one of her duties included putting the rare Gutenberg Bible in the vault at the end of visiting hours on the weekends she worked as the desk receptionist.

I worked one semester with Grandma Murphy—if you could call it "work." Actually, I sat in the Lincoln Room and worked on homework. My job description? "Guard of the Gutenberg Bible." Chuck still roared at that one.

"Yeah, I can just see you, Liz, trying to tackle someone smuggling that huge book out the door."

As we cut across campus, the Indiana Memorial Union loomed ahead of us. It was an imposing building of 500,000 square feet and an eight-story tower—the largest college union in the United States. In front of it was Dunn Meadow, a place where students often played Frisbee with their bandana-attired dogs or sat on blankets and read.

We followed the winding stone walkway toward the historic Old Crescent buildings (ones built between 1884 and 1908) as plump, bushy-tailed squirrels—some almost tame—scampered back and forth in front of us. In the middle of the wooded park-like setting was Rose Well House, a domed limestone pavilion.

“Tradition holds that a female student is not officially a co-ed until she has been kissed beneath its dome at midnight,” states *The IU Experience: Campus Landmarks*.

Hanging flower baskets adorned black wrought iron lampposts. Chipmunks darted out of the bushes and disappeared into the cracks of Maxwell Hall, one of IU’s oldest buildings in the Old Crescent part of campus. All of these historic limestone buildings had red-tiled roofs and pointy spires.

IU brochures boasted that all the buildings were of Indiana limestone, a lot of it quarried locally. In the 1978 movie *Breaking Away*, the town’s “Little 500” bicycle team was named “The Cutters,” a reference to the region’s stonecutting industry.

And just inside the limestone Sample Gates that marked the entrance to the campus stood Kirkwood Hall and the treasured IU landmark, the Clock Tower. Called “the Midwestern campus with the Ivy League feel,” Indiana University was judged to be one of the five most beautiful campuses in the United States by art critic Thomas Gaines in his book *The Campus as a Work of Art*.

This campus so rich with tradition and history—and memories—remained a constant in my life, linking my past to my present. It had been a day for remembering. The purpose of our visit was to meet with Professor Edward B. Jenkinson, my Methods of Teaching English professor and supervisor of my student-teaching experience.

He had me laughing within one minute of our reunion.

“Well, I’ll tell you, if I can’t laugh at least once every fifteen minutes, I want them to put me up,” he chuckled.

He was the *same* Professor Jenkinson. The only noticeable difference was that he now wore stylishly thin gold frames instead of the thicker black ones he used to wear.

Over lunch I felt like his student once more, learning about his rich and varied teaching experiences and his insights on education. Remembering what an extremely popular professor he was during my years at IU, I began by asking him his philosophy of teaching.

He quickly responded: “I have always cared about my students as individuals.”

I knew that to be true. There was a real sense of community and intimacy in his classes. What astonished all of us is that he memorized our names by the end of the second day.

“Students wanted to know my secret—how I learned their names,” Professor Jenkinson explained. “My answer never satisfied them. I simply walked around the class, asked students to pronounce their names, looked at them carefully, tried to remember something unique about them, and asked them to take the same seat for the next two or three classes.”

He continued, “Student after student wrote on my evaluations that many of their professors did not know their names even if they were in two or more classes with him or her. They hated that attitude of indifference to students.” He shook his head sadly.

“One of the first things that kept appearing on my evaluations was, ‘He cares about us as individuals. We’re not numbers. We’re not nameless faces. We’re people he wants to help make good teachers.’”

Professor Jenkinson recounted a conversation with his mother-in-law after she read his end-of-the-semester evaluations.

“Ed,” she said excitedly, “these are *great*. It must make you feel absolutely wonderful! How *does* it make you feel?”

He replied, “At first I was happy, but now I am *angry*.”

Puzzled, his mother-in-law asked, “*Why in the world* are you angry?”

Professor Jenkinson explained, “At least 90 percent said I was the best teacher they had ever had.”

“Why does that make you angry?” she questioned.

He answered, “First of all, I’m not *that* good. Secondly, if I’m the best they ever had, then they have been cheated for years.”

At about that point the tape on my Dictaphone kept shutting off. Embarrassed, I was frantically trying to figure out what was wrong.

“What’s Plan *B*?” Professor Jenkinson asked me. I looked at him puzzled for a moment. Then I grinned and nodded my head as he continued, “Liz, remember what I used to say in class, ‘When dealing with technology, if Plan *A* fails, always have a Plan *B*!’”

Once the tape was rolling again, I asked him how he made his classes fun.

“I was prepared every day. I did not lecture, but I knew exactly where I was going with the class. I did not believe there was such a thing as a wrong answer, although once in awhile I almost strangled myself to keep from saying to a student, ‘*How can you say something like that?*’ You have to—well, I hesitate to say this—but you have to be enough of a showman to sustain interest. I also moved around, if you will recall, so that you didn’t know where I was going to be next.”

“I do remember that!” I exclaimed.

“And I would say to student teachers, there are several ways to control a class. One is to make it *very* interesting. Two is to get the students involved constantly. And three, move around a lot *because it’s hard to hit a moving target!*” he laughed. “This also allows a teacher to come up behind someone who’s misbehaving and not have to scream at him or call attention to him. You’ll probably remember that one of my favorite techniques was just to come up beside somebody and start rapping my fingers on the desk and lowering my voice.”

I smiled and nodded. It all came back to me. I once more pictured him weaving in and out between our desks. What I remembered most, though, was everyone laughing and enjoying his class.

“Let me tell you a story . . . ”

Professor Jenkinson began this way many times during the interview when illustrating a point. And with that, he entertained my husband and me for the next three hours. While recalling

conversations, he adopted the various personae of people, mimicking their facial expressions, gestures, and voices. He *definitely* was part performer. No wonder CBS correspondent David Culhane called Professor Jenkinson “animated and articulate.” Culhane interviewed Professor Jenkinson in Austin, Texas, during the 1983 Texas Textbook Adoption public hearing.

While listening to the history of his teaching career, I realized why he was able to give such wise advice to students and why his books were so helpful to teachers.

“I have always prided myself on being practical, not theoretical. I wanted to give my students techniques that *really worked* in the classroom,” he emphasized.

He told us he was only twenty when he began teaching in Polk Township in Tyler, Indiana.

“The whole school, first grade on, was in this *old, old* building.

I *was* the English Department! I learned a lot in that little school—mainly, if you have a problem, *you* handle it.”

From there it was on to South Bend’s Riley, a high school with a student population ranging from poverty-level to the very wealthy and elite. His teaching assignment was eighth grade. Three classes included many of the upper-class kids, while two sections were what he termed his ‘juvenile delinquents.’

“I *loved* those classes,” he said, referring to the latter.

Bemused, he related how the other English teachers listened surreptitiously in on his classroom via the school’s intercom. Impressed, “the ladies”—as he called the department of almost all women— wanted to reassign him the next year to teach seniors, juniors, and one accelerated eighth-grade class.

“Wait a minute. Don’t take my juvenile delinquents away from me,” he implored his principal.

Surprised, the principal countered, “Why do you want to teach *them?*”

“Because if you get anything across to those students, it is a *real* victory. They learned to respect me, and I respected them,” Jenkinson replied.

After three years at South Bend, he became Director of Student Publicity and the official university photographer at Northern Illinois University.

“I didn’t even know where the shutter was on a camera,” he laughed.

Nevertheless, the first picture he took landed on the second page of the *Chicago Tribune*. Ten more of his photos soon appeared in the paper. Jenkinson was told he was a natural photographer.

A stint overseas followed at the American University in Beirut, Lebanon.

“I have nothing but fond memories of my time there,” he reflected.

In 1960 he came to IU.

“My job was to work with teachers in English, speech, and journalism throughout the state.” A grant in 1963 allowed him to develop the English Curriculum Study Center. Frugal (even turning down a National Council of Teachers of English invitation to speak in Hawaii), he stretched the grant out for fifteen years. In retrospect, how glad I am he did this so *I* was able to be part of the Communication Skills Program during the mid-1970s.

During his celebrated career, Professor Jenkinson received numerous awards, including one from the National Council of Teachers of English. A prolific writer, he authored, co-authored, or edited twenty-six books.

Two of his books, *Censors in the Classroom: The Mind Benders* and *The Schoolbook Protest Movement: 40 Questions & Answers*, thrust him into the frenzied national debate over censorship in schools, a hot topic in the ’70s and ’80s.

In the introduction to *Censors in the Classroom*, he stated why fighting censorship was so important to him:

I have written this book as a concerned parent with deep religious convictions who hopes that my children will grow up free to read, free to not believe that all books and films are worthy of study in a classroom; on the other hand, I do not think that a book or film should be thrown out because it offends the sensibilities of a few who may or may not have read the entire work or seen it. I have kept one quotation in mind: “Censorship is the tool of tyrannous societies.”

He was on fifty to sixty radio shows in the U.S., Canada, and Britain. Closer to home, he debated Indiana state senator Joan Gubbins at Ball State University.

Professor Jenkinson also flew to Austin, Texas, in 1983 to speak on behalf of the National Council of Teachers of English before the Texas State Textbook Committee.

“I was one of two non-Texans allowed to testify before that horrible Texas state adoption committee on what was the fiftieth anniversary of the Nazi book burnings,” Jenkinson grimaced.

Texas had long been the center of the censorship controversy. Much of the attention began in 1961 when a Texas couple, Norma and Mel Gablar, began trying to—in their words—“clean up” school textbooks.

His ten national TV appearances included *The Phil Donahue Show*, *The Today Show*, *The MacNeil-Lehrer Show* and *Larry King Live*.

“My interview with Larry King was taped at 1 a.m. over the phone. I was riding my exercise bike to keep myself awake. At one point Larry King said to me, ‘What is that hum I hear?’ To which I replied, ‘Gee, I don’t know. I don’t hear anything.’ I wasn’t about to say, ‘I’m on my exercise bike’ on national TV.” He laughed heartily as he recalled the incident.

Near the end of the interview, Professor Jenkinson and I discussed trends in education—especially those concerning language arts. I was eager to hear his opinions on issues I was now facing in the classroom. I guess in a way I was looking to him to have all the answers and to help guide me as he had twenty-five years earlier.

After we shared thoughts about peer editing, grammar instruction, and writing portfolios, he turned his attention to the cancer of negativity.

“Remember what I told you years ago, Liz? Never go into the teachers’ lounge.”

He lamented the case of a former student teacher so full of potential who soured on teaching after only a couple of years.

“It took me less than five minutes to figure out what was wrong. She had become friends with these negative, negative people . . .

They sat and gossiped about every single student . . . They had not one darn good thing to say about the students or their colleagues . . . and they thought the administration was just awful.”

Professor Jenkinson qualified his warning about teacher’s lounges by saying, “There *are* some that are *great*. I’ve been in teachers’ lounges where the people were talking about their subject matter and things they could do in the classroom.”

Intent on reaching out to kids, he next shared a story to show what happens when a teacher rigidly adheres to a textbook or curriculum list without assessing the students’ needs or abilities.

“One of my first jobs when I came to IU was to go out and watch teachers teach and learn from them. I went into this one class—I think it was eighth grade, maybe it was ninth—and she was teaching Dante’s *Inferno*. There was *one student* paying attention. This was right out of her college notes, and she was *lecturing*.

“She came to me after class and said, ‘Sir, I can’t understand what’s going on here. The kids aren’t interested in this great work of literature.’ I said, ‘Why are you teaching Dante at this level?’ She said, ‘Because they *must* be acquainted with great literature.’ And I said, ‘Do they have to go to Hell so fast?’” After chuckling a couple minutes he quipped, “My wife said to me, ‘You’re *going to pay* for some of your comments someday.’”

Turning serious, Professor Jenkinson left me with this advice: “You have to *love* what you’re doing. You also have to be in love with your subject matter, and you must try everything possible to convey it to help students learn.”

At the end of the interview, I hugged him goodbye.

“Your words have echoed in my ears since 1977,” I told him.

My memory didn’t lie to me. Professor Jenkinson was as funny and charming as I recalled. But more important, he was still passionate about what it took to be an excellent teacher.

He *was* a wonderful mentor and *still is*.