



God Brings the Unexpected
By Wes Eby, Global Representative

“I just failed that test,” I thought as I left the counselor’s office, my walk and countenance reflecting a bit of disappointment. “I can’t believe it. But . . .” I paused for a moment and then declared, “I will not change my mind.” And with resolve, I proceeded to pursue my dream of being a teacher.

As far back as I can remember, I wanted to be a teacher, a strong desire from childhood. I enjoyed school, made good grades, admired my teachers (well, almost all of them). And in high school, my favorite instructors made the journey through social studies and English a genuine pleasure. Ernestine Nettles and Ethel Davidson were my heroes. Therefore, I entered Trevecca Nazarene College (now University) with no other goal than to be a teacher. I planned to major in history, minor in English and education, and afterward teach high school social studies.

College Years

Early in my freshman year, I was told to meet with a counselor—not my choice but a school requirement. The counselor kindly insisted that I take an aptitude test to determine the careers that best suited me. I hurriedly completed the task and submitted it. On the next visit with the counselor to review the assessment’s results, I learned I had “failed,” at least from my perspective. The profile indicated four career areas I should pursue—music, art, writing, and clerical—four areas that were interests and/or hobbies. But teaching was not at the top; instead, it was buried somewhere in the middle of a list of possible careers. Yet the aptitude results did not alter my plans— not even a tad.

First Teaching Positions

Four years later in June 1958, I joined fellow graduates, including my fiancée, Roberta Griffin, in the long-anticipated graduation ceremony. Two months later, Roberta and I married. Without delay, with diplomas in hand, we left to interview for teaching positions in Mobile, Alabama. That same month, we

moved from Nashville to Mobile, accepting assignments in Bayou la Batre, a fishing village on the gulf coast that required a 50-mile, round-trip daily commute. But instead of fulfilling my goal as a high school social studies teacher, I found myself in a seventh-grade self-contained classroom. While a bit disappointed, I was thankful to have a job. After all, teaching was my chosen dream profession.

That first year tested my long-time “dream.” The school lacked firm discipline, and as a novice, I needed advice and help the administration did not provide. While I struggled through that year, I would have returned if that had been the only option. However, I applied for a transfer, opting for a school with stricter standards of discipline. I accepted another self-contained seventh grade located in Mobile, much closer to our home. This new position shifted my attitude about my chosen profession. Student discipline? No problem. Administration assistance? Lots. Parent support? Unbelievable. Smart kids? Phenomenal. Those two years at this school were I-still-can’t-believe-how-wonderful-they-were years. The district built a junior high next door, moving the seventh grade to the new location. My new assignment was teaching seventh grade social studies and English in block periods to three different classes. I made the adjustment well with the greatest challenge being large class size. The last group of the day consisted of 38 students, 31 boys and 7 girls. Can you imagine? That many early adolescent males in one class? But I survived.

The Lord intervened in my education at this point. With divine direction, we moved to Albertville in north Alabama to teach in a new Christian school started by the Church of the Nazarene. I was assigned a combined fifth-sixth grade, while Roberta took the third-fourth grade group. In my third year at the school, the board added a seventh grade, and I moved up with the students and assumed the role of principal-teacher.

Teaching on the Navajo Reservation

On February 1, 1965, I accepted a teaching position with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) for the federal government on the Navajo Reservation (now often referred to as Navajo Nation) in northeast Arizona. This job became a fulfilling 22-year career as a teacher, administrator, and education specialist that came with several special rewards. My first assignment was a sixth-grade self-contained class of students, ages 12-15, in the isolated community of Lukachukai. One of the surprises was that the students spoke Navajo as their first language and the biggest challenge was helping them become proficient in English, their second language and the language of instruction. A year and half later, I transferred to a large, 1,000-student boarding school in Chinle, where again I taught sixth graders, ages 12-17. (Yes, that is not a misprint. I had two 17-year-old young men in that class, but that is a story for another article.) These years were excellent, and I was tapped as a demonstration teacher to help colleagues in teaching ESL (English as a Second Language.)

Next, I was invited by the school superintendent in the Chinle Agency (District) to fill the role of teacher supervisor at Cottonwood Day School with 400 students. The responsibilities included supervising all academic activities, guiding the teaching staff of 14 teachers in grades K-6 and, when needed, serving as acting principal. One year later, the school superintendent asked me to join his office staff as an education specialist to work with academic instruction in the nine schools in the agency. I remained in this position for over five years until selected for a language arts specialist position at the Navajo Area Office in Window Rock, Arizona.

This education office worked with 60 BIA schools on the Navajo Reservation, an area that is as large as the state of West Virginia. The two primary responsibilities were curriculum development and teacher training. For curriculum, I directed a team of colleagues in developing a meaning-based rather than structure-based ESL program for students in the primary grades. This endeavor allowed me the privilege of teaching courses for the University of Northern Arizona.

After eight years in this job, I accepted a position in a 600-student boarding school, Wingate Elementary, near Gallup, New Mexico. This school's population, grades K-8, consisted of many students who were public school dropouts. As the language arts specialist for the school, I had the joy of assisting the school administrators and teachers to develop and implement curricular programs that enhanced the students' English language competency. In the seven years at this school, I saw significant gains in achievement test scores and received an award on behalf of the school from the federal government for student progress.

God Brings Unexpected Changes

At this point, my career took another major turn—quite unexpected. I was invited to join the staff of Publications International (now Global Nazarene Publications) as an ESL editor at the Church of the Nazarene headquarters in Kansas City. After sensing this was God's will, I resigned from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and took an early retirement from the federal government. Once that decision was made, I never looked back nor regretted that decision. Yet I look upon the 23 years in the BIA as truly ordered by God, a vital part of His plan for my life. Those years prepared me for the next 19 years as an employee of what is now the Global Ministry Center.

But my life as an educator did not stop when I accepted the role of editor. First, I was hired by Nazarene Theological Seminary to teach two courses in the missions department: "Introduction to Linguistics" and "Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language." I consider it a thrill to know that some of the students are still serving as Nazarene missionaries today.

Second, my pastor at the Overland Park Church of the Nazarene asked me about starting an ESL program. I accepted the challenge. After careful planning and recruiting teachers/staff, I directed the program for a total of five years until retiring a second time and moving to Florida. The greatest reward of that program was starting an ESL Sunday school class and teaching a small group of people from Asia. And today, the church has a small core of people from Asia in the congregation with an associate pastor who can speak their language.

Once a Teacher, ...

Now officially retired, I am no longer active in education. But really, I still am. I joined the Nazarene Educators Worldwide Council in 2017 that is endeavoring to connect Nazarene educators, whatever their assignment, to be witnesses for Jesus Christ.

In closing, I am reminded of what Luke, a Christ-follower, wrote about the early church: "*Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they **never stopped teaching** and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah*" (Acts 5:42, emphasis added). I believe my life reflects the well-known axiom, "Once a teacher, always a teacher."

Wes Eby lives in Lake Alfred, Florida. He taught in public and Christian schools, as well as at the university level. He served at the Global Ministry Center in the Publications International Office, the Herald of Holiness Office, and the Global Nazarene Missions International Office. You may contact Wes at weseby@tampabay.rr.com