



To Recognize a Teacher

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I was never a fisherman but I was always fishing. I wasn't fishing for trout. I fished for wild ideas about myself. Maybe I would be a painter or a novelist. Maybe I would become a scientist or art thief. Or maybe I would be a hero. Anything is possible, so why not?

I was never a fisherman, but I was always fishing.

I tried things. I dabbled and wandered. And I landed somewhere between poet and pragmatist because I landed and stayed in public education. I landed there because I was caught up in a net. And before I knew it I was being fished for, and I was already caught. Turns out if you fish for so long, you become the something to fish for.

Teaching isn't what people think it is. It's one of the bad-tempered professions. And it isn't the money, or the funding, or even the workload. It's that people forgive doctors if a patient is lost. It comes with the terrain. But no one can accept if a teacher loses a student. It's unacceptable. And that is how it should be. No child should be forgotten. No young adult should evaporate into ether. But I need to say: I've lost some. And I carry them. I carry them in the space between the back of my neck and spine, my shoulders and my collarbone. When I think about the ones I've lost I feel the crack of my failure in every bone. I feel them snap each time I try to relax. I roll my muscles loose only to find I'm tighter. I feel their weight push my posture down low and unsteady. My body becomes gnarled: one of the bad-tempered professions. I carry them there because I know if I carry them, then I didn't really lose them. At least I know where they are. And they won't be forgotten.

One of my wild ideas for myself was to be a hero. I fished forever on how to be a hero. I read about them in stories. I studied them in epics. They always were pushed through unimaginable feats to be victorious on the other side. But there is a limited job market for such a high idea. Heroes are a dying breed. But on nights when it's hard to sleep, and the ones I lost are holding particularly tight, I wonder what real heroes are. Not the ones in stories, but the ones the stories came from. What do they carry? Is this what a real hero does? Heroes hold fast to lost causes. Heroes are brave when they are still afraid. They push through. And when they do, heroes give hope.

I was never a fisherman, but I was always fishing. I was never a dreamer, but I always had hope. Now, in turn, I give it as much as I can. And when I can't give hope, I carry it. I carry those losses. And I know I am not alone. For those of us who were caught up in the net: we will lose some. But we will always carry them. Ours is a beautiful cargo: it's hope.

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About the Author

Brigette Stevenson is a graduate student in the School of Education at CSU Channel Islands. She received her bachelor's degree from California Lutheran University in English. She currently teaches fourth grade with Las Virgenes Unified School District.