

SHARE YOUR SKILL, HELP MOULD SOMEONE'S CAREER

- Cape Argus
- 22 Oct 2020
- BRIAN ISAACS



SOMETIMES we all reminisce about why we followed the career we are in.

This issue is something I pondered about this week. Did I always want to go into teaching? The answer is no. I applied to do medicine, and as a second choice, bachelor of quantity surveying.

I was a mere 16 years-old in matric. When my applications were declined, I opted to do a BSc, majoring in zoology and botany at the UWC. It was here that I met some interesting people who influenced my life and made me make teaching my career.

Already at high school, my biology teacher Fred Coker made the subject so interesting with his wide knowledge, not only in biology but his general knowledge. I tried to emulate him by trying to read all the books in our local library.

Richard Rive, our English teacher, taught us how to tell a good story. Pupils hung onto every word he spoke. WB King, our geography teacher who spoke impeccable English, made us believe that as pupils, we could achieve anything. These teachers inspired. These were in the apartheid years.

At UWC, in the science faculty, Professor Cecil Lenard kept us focused in achieving excellent results despite the appointment of incompetent Afrikaner academics. We had to face apartheid supporters like Professor Gouws who said to us: "Julle is nog nie mens nie." (You are not humans yet). I must say we did have some superb Afrikaner lecturers like Professor Skinner (zoology) and Prof Pienaar (botany) known for his beautiful handwriting and sketches of plants.

When I did my teaching course at UWC, very few of the lecturers present in 1976 made an impact on me, except Professor Harold Herman. Being a former student himself, he understood the oppression students felt. He set a high standard in lecturing and guarded our backs in the struggle for freedom.

It was at my former high school, where I learnt my trade as a teacher. I am forever grateful to my colleagues, who taught me and who became my colleagues.

MN Moerat, himself a wellknown biology teacher, told me: "I have faith in you for you to teach the top grade 12 class biology."

This was my greatest motivation, and I never disappointed him. Here at the school in Cape Town, I met George van der Ross, a physical education teacher. He was an administrator who taught me everything about administration.

The late Razak Ebrahim was a walking encyclopedia and who for many years did the school timetable. There were no computers pre-1984.

In any career, we meet these wonderful people who freely mould us and who believe that if you have a skill, share it freely with others.

Dr Victor Ritchie believed in this dictum. One thing I learnt in teaching is to take criticism so that you can become a better teacher.

This is what all these teachers who assisted me during my career taught me always – listen to the viewpoints of others and learn from them and critique ideas. There are many teachers in South Africa who are doing exactly that. Teaching is a noble profession, and I enjoyed my 39 years in the profession. It still gives me great joy speaking to students when I am invited to do so.

Viva the teachers.