

## TRIBUTE TO ALL THE GREAT TEACHERS I KNEW

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WHEN many of us have time at our disposal, we are prone to browsing through the books we have bought.

Some of the books we have read because they captured the problems of the day. Others are bought and placed on the bookshelf for later reading. One such book, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, by Jack Canfield and others, caught my eye on my bookshelf at home.

In one of the stories, he quotes from the 6th-century Chinese philosopher Lao-Tse. Lao-Tse: "The wise man does not lay up treasure; the more he gives to others, the more he has for his own!"

Such profound words. Please add "woman" and "she" to the saying.

This made me look at the remarkable people I have met during my student and teaching career. Women and men who gave of themselves in service to others, and the utmost respect they earned in the process.

I attended Rosmead Primary School in Claremont from 1960 to 1966. There I met two remarkable teachers, Jean Charles and Jocelyn Parker. Charles was a short person with a great character. She was an excellent pianist and believed that music uplifted one's character.

Parker was a very strict individual but on a one-on-one basis, a great motivator.

The two people had a great impact on my life.

In high school (1967 to 1971) I was exposed to many great teachers. The teachers who impressed me the most were the ones who not only taught well, but embraced the concept that education was political.

In a previous column, I paid tribute to a great scientist, Fred Coker. He was responsible for making his students avid readers.

It is well known that before he completed school at South Peninsula High School, he had read all the books in his local library. I challenge young people to emulate him.

He is responsible for so many South Peninsula High School pupils entering the biological and physical sciences at universities in South Africa.

One of his favourite sayings: "Ask crazy questions; the crazier, the better."

Daphne Wessels laid the basis in grades 8 and 9 in maths and Latin for pupils to go into the mathematical sciences and law. She was a woman who would always hand her pupils political writings of great revolutionary leaders in the world.

She would tell us to read because that opened a person's neurons to ideas. We later learnt that neurons were nerve cells.

Rudolph Murphy, from Port Elizabeth, taught geography at South Peninsula High School. He taught us not only the location of Cuba, but its politics, too and how the Cubans were creating a new way of living that benefited all its citizens.



My mind went out to the Cuban doctors offering their services to people in South Africa (and there have been criticisms from conservative forces in our country against these heroic Cuban doctors) and the rest of the world.

Sadly, when I attended the University of the Western Cape (UWC) there were very few lecturers during the period I was there, 1972 to 1976, who impressed me with their academic ability and political awareness. However, two lecturers stand out – Professor Merlin Mehl (physics) and Professor Cecil Leonard (zoology). Can you believe they were both were former South Peninsula High School pupils!

I also learnt a lot from students at the UWC.

Henry Isaacs was a student leader I admired. I think he was a law student. He spoke impeccable English and was targeted by the Nationalists, who were in charge of UWC at the time.

Mackey Kleinschmidt and Alan Liebenberg were also student activists I admired for their academic ability and political progressiveness.

Then there were teachers at other schools in the Western Cape who made a huge impact on me, academically and politically.

Victor Ritchie, the former principal of Harold Cressy (who will be celebrating his 90th birthday in October), was awarded an honorary doctorate by UCT for his work in education.

Ritchie was one of the teachers who played a sterling role in building the South African Council on Sport that was destroyed by the treacherous National Sports Council. It is because of the NSC that there is no functional school sports body in South Africa that caters for most of the poor schools.

I do not hold inspectors of education in high regard since they believe they are just messengers for their misinformed bosses. But I want to pay tribute to the late Moos Davis who, before becoming an inspector, was principal of Ocean View High.

He was an outstanding academic student in zoology at UWC. He was well respected as an inspector of education. He was sympathetic and on the side of the teachers and the schools. It's a pity more inspectors do not follow his legacy. He did not believe that he was a messenger for the Education Department.

There are so many teachers to mention but I want to end by mentioning the brilliant late RO Dudley of Livingstone High School. This academic could have held the highest position at any university in South Africa. It is said that when he was offered the post of minister of education in 1994 as a "coloured", he replied: "I am a human being".

I owe my growth as a teacher to these great men and women who moulded the lives of teachers and thousands of pupils. As you read this article, I am sure you will reflect on the great teachers who taught you and pay tribute to them.

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