

The Believer

Anonymous

She looked so ordinary and dressed so simply that even professional people-watchers sitting by the roadside didn't look at her twice. She, on the other hand, looked keenly at everything and everyone. Her knowledge about other human beings, especially children, was extraordinary. I was sure that she read my mind every time she looked at me but I didn't mind that at all. Actually, I wanted her to look at me often because every glance from her kind eyes made me feel good.

I don't remember the exact day Miss Parveen entered my life. I just remember being a sad, un-motivated, fifth grader who was not interested in teachers and wished they would leave her alone. My entire life was a mess. At night, my alcoholic father wouldn't let anyone sleep with his loud, vicious behavior. During the day, a mentally deranged nun at my school would turn me into her scapegoat for every problem. That year, I made a serious attempt to blend into the classroom furniture by not moving my eyes or any part of my body during lessons. But somewhere in that turmoil, Miss Parveen's pale, thin face and her twinkling, dark eyes started attracting my attention. I clearly remember the embarrassing incident which made her my friend for life.

One hot day, as she read to our class in her clear, soothing voice, I felt a relentless desire to sleep. I must have dozed off because I opened my eyes to see the whole class giggling and staring at me. Miss Parveen smiled kindly and held my gaze briefly before calmly resuming the reading lesson. She never reproached me or demanded the reason for my lack of attention.

This wonderful teacher treated me, during the worst year of my student life, like a ‘star’ pupil. Sometimes she would say something very nice about the entire class while looking at me. She did not know anything about my dark, family secrets or why that crazy nun was after me. Yet, she made me think that I was a genuinely likable, good human being. Her attitude towards all the students was very respectful and I felt particularly valued because she made me feel as smart and capable as the brightest kid in our class. She wrote encouraging comments on my homework assignments and nodded appreciatively when I joined a classroom discussion. She was a true example of “positive re-inforcement”!

I don’t think that I could have graduated from Class Five, or continued to believe that I was a worthy person, if Miss Parveen had not rescued me emotionally from the malicious people in my life. Physical wounds can heal but emotional scars remain forever. In a world full of cruel humans, she understood why some children stop believing in themselves. She also knew that bearing anger and insults can destroy a child’s self-confidence and belief in one’s self. Maybe she learnt all this from her own experience. One of her students said that Miss Parveen had to work most of her life to support her family after her father’s death. She avoided getting married in order to allow her young siblings to grow up in her care. Her family lived in poverty and suffered unbearable criticism from relatives and ‘friends’ but she and her siblings stayed close and loving towards each other. After many years, a very pleasant widower and successful engineer, asked Ms. Parveen to marry him. Free from her family responsibilities, she accepted his proposal and is now living happily in Canada.

All my life, I’ve carried Miss Parveen’s opinion about myself close to my heart. Scientific studies have shown that just one loving person in a child’s life can be the source of lifelong success. Miss Parveen, my fifth grade teacher, is definitely my source of worldly and

personal success. As a student, doctor, wife, mother, daughter, sister and friend, I've derived my confidence and energy from the memory of Miss Parveen's encouraging smile. Whenever someone has tried to put me down, or whenever I've told myself that I cannot do *anything* right, the image of Miss Parveen has rescued me. I cannot doubt my own capabilities for too long because the happy memories of a caring teacher help me to believe in myself again.

I'm one of the luckiest people on earth. I have seen, and met, "THE BELIEVER", THE ONE WHO BELIEVES IN THE INHERENT GOODNESS OF EVERY CHILD.

The author is currently juggling her roles as a Community Physician, mother and wife. She lives in USA, and spends a lot of time thinking about her family and friends in Pakistan.