

“Why don’t you become a pharmacist or a doctor or go into engineering? That’s where the real money is.”

Every conversation with my great uncle Charlie would begin that way; he would always ask why I wanted to be a teacher....I dreaded these words every time he said them. Most of the time I would nonchalantly say, “You know I’m undecided right now,” and thankfully my dad or my uncle would change the subject to something else. After months of creatively avoiding his questions, I came to the conclusion that I should just tell him because he’d find out from someone else anyway. It was up to me to tell him and make him understand that I was choosing to do what I wanted to, because I wanted to do it.

At a family barbeque he asked again; and, this time, I was prepared with my answer. I remember it so well; he started out with the same routine, asking me what I wanted to do with myself, a smile from ear to ear. That was the smile of hope, hope that I would answer with something he wanted to hear. I recall sitting straight up in my chair, then pausing for a moment, looking directly into his eyes and taking a deep breath.

“Well?” He asked questioningly.

“Well...” I said, “I will be going to school majoring in early childhood special education.” Satisfied with my answer, I leaned back in my chair and crossed my arms awaiting his response.

“So you’d be a teacher?” he replied slowly while scratching his chin as if in deep thought. He then went on to say everything I expected him to say. I tried to defend myself as much as possible but he wouldn’t hear of it. His main concern was the money.

“What does that matter?” I asked him. “As long as you’re happy, and can support yourself, it shouldn’t matter how much money you make. I’ve always believed money cannot buy you happiness.”

Thinking he was clever he replied with, “Maybe it can’t right now, but if you make enough money, you can spend it on things that do make you happy later.” This was followed by his hollow laugh. He always thought he was funny, no matter what he had to say.

It was no use. I tried to explain myself, but he wouldn’t listen. This conversation left me feeling uneasy about my choice and rethinking my decision. Because of this I started to think about what made me decide teaching was something I wanted to do. I thought of all the little faces in my nursery school class and how good it felt when I could help one of them with a problem. I remembered watching Christopher finally join in during active play and Maggie learn to count. I felt so needed when Kyle wanted help tying his shoe and we practiced until he got it. The look of accomplishment on his face the day he tied them all by himself will be forever etched in my mind.

These small things are the reason I chose to do what I’m doing, and if Uncle Charlie can’t accept that then that is his problem, not mine. I can’t make him understand. I can’t make anyone understand. I can only understand it myself. I reconfirmed then that I love children and that my life will revolve around

children, not how much money I can make. Uncle Charlie may not think this is the greatest job, but to me it couldn't be better.

Before I left for school I left him with this thought: Where would computer programmers, doctors, and pharmacists be without a teacher, even the teachers who taught them to tie their shoes?

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