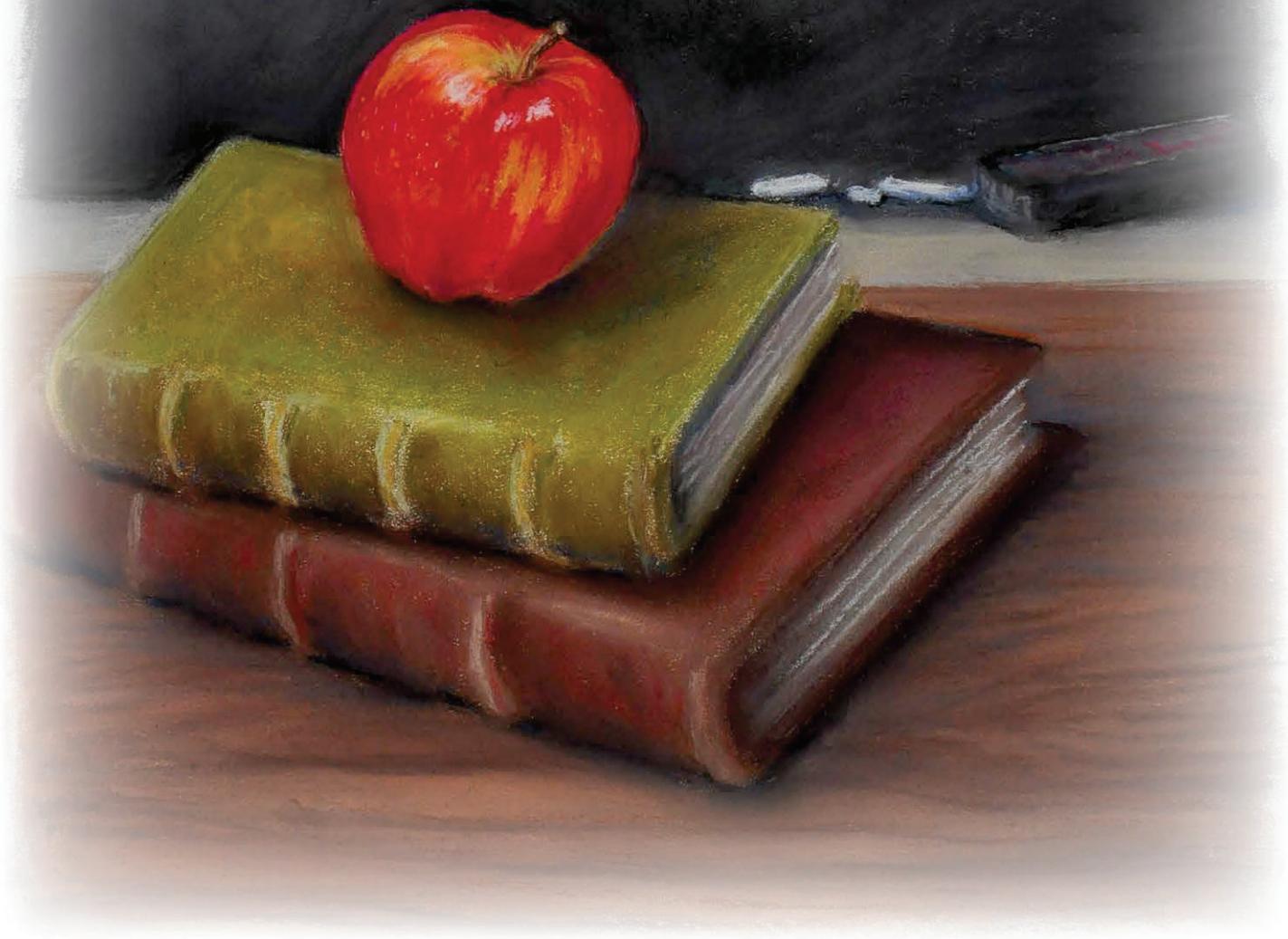


TO SIR/MADAM,
WITH LOVE



By Michael J. Rosen

“How do you thank someone who has taken you from crayons to perfume?”¹

If you’re a baby boomer, this song lyric resonates. But even if you aren’t, chances are your favorite teacher(s) transformed your life. Was it their curriculum? Was it their determination to really see you, understand you, and invest in you?

“To Sir, With Love” (1967) starred Sidney Poitier as a black man teaching undisciplined, troubled white high school students in London’s East End. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are priorities, but he also helps his students begin to see a world of possibilities they had never imagined.

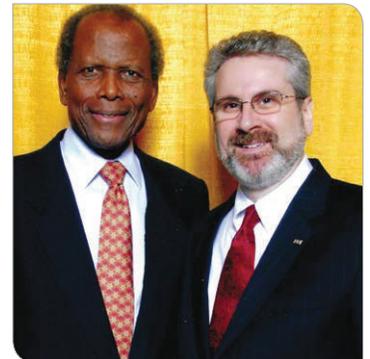
Great teachers move us in ways that shape our entire lives and, for those who choose the path, help make us successful fundraising professionals. They also motivate us to be lifelong learners.

Jenny D. Grappa, director of donor relations and communications at the Food Bank of Alaska, encountered a teacher who opened her eyes to the nonprofit sector when she was studying environmental science at the University of Alaska. Laura Jorgensen inspired Grappa “to pursue a career in the nonprofit sector as one of the professions involved in civic engagement.”

Now pursuing her CFRE, Grappa continues to believe in the value of ongoing education. For example, she learns from her involvement with Feeding America and AFP. She says, “Times are changing. They always have been, but things are changing faster now. It’s important to understand the changes in development and in food bank services. I strive to be better every day.”

In the film “Freedom Writers” (2007), which is based on a true story, Hilary Swank’s character is a teacher who

“You need to understand the environment in which you live in and your donors live in,” she says. Peña believes that having a broad education—one not limited to vocational training—makes one more empathetic. She points out that having a broad perspective helps her see donors and organizations through a different lens than would otherwise have been the case. It helps her understand the positions folks take, murky public policy issues, the economy, and more.



Sidney Poitier and Michael J. Rosen

You’re not just stuffing a letter. **You’re maintaing a relationship.**

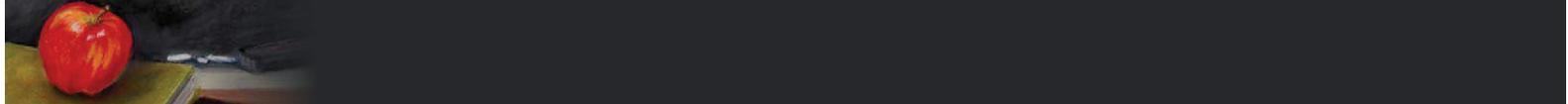
unlocks the imaginations of her students while teaching them literature, history, and how to write effectively. In the process, she inspires them to find connections with one another, their community, and the past.

Ligia Peña, CFRE, MInstF, global legacy manager at Greenpeace International, met a particularly inspiring teacher when she attended Concordia University as an undergraduate. She remembers, “Although the courses [Dr. Daniel Salée] taught had nothing to do with philanthropy, he opened my mind.” He also taught her the value of developing a broad knowledge base and critical thinking skills.

As a fundraising professional for more than 15 years, Peña still strives to develop new skills and learn fresh concepts. She is pursuing a Ph.D. “I love school. I’m a nerd. I love the internal challenge,” she says. In addition, she enjoys attending conferences, where she can explore wide-ranging topics facing philanthropy and existential issues facing the nonprofit sector. She also continues to seek out diverse information to broaden her perspective. For example, she enjoys reading academic journals, including the *Harvard Business Review*, and watching TED Talks.

Not all teaching takes place in a classroom. We learn from our parents, our religious leaders, and the people in

¹ From the theme song to the popular film “To Sir, With Love.” The song, by Lulu and The Mindbenders, reached No. 1 worldwide in 1967.



our communities. In the film “The Karate Kid” (1984), Pat Morita plays a martial arts master who teaches karate to a bullied teenager. Mr. Miyagi doesn’t run a dojo, and he doesn’t operate out of a classroom. Nevertheless, he has a profound effect on his student, teaching him far more than karate. He teaches him patience, confidence, discipline, persistence, compassion, and more.

Melissa Tyler, development director at the New Orleans Women & Children’s Shelter, learned from one of her professors at Louisiana State University (LSU) that “nonprofits do the work government is unable or unwilling to do.” However, it was outside of the classroom that she really began to understand what nonprofit work is all about.

As a student working in the development office at LSU, Tyler reported to Quinn Rainwater. He taught her

the importance of accuracy, well-maintained data, and relationships. He did so in such a way that, even as a student worker, Tyler felt important.

“You’re not just stuffing a letter. You’re maintaining a relationship,” Tyler says. She believed her role truly meant something as LSU developed relationships with its alumni. It wasn’t just that Rainwater taught her the basics; he did so in a manner that helped her understand her vital role and how to appreciate the overall development process. Along the way, Tyler learned some valuable skills as well as a healthy outlook that has continued to serve her well.

Today, Tyler expands her knowledge by reading blogs and articles, watching TED Talks and webinars, and attending conferences. She encourages fundraisers,



Brenda Asare

What She Taught Me: Take an Interest in People

“My fifth grade English teacher, Mrs. Judy Inabinette, brought bags of books for me to read for three summers. There was not a library close to my home, and I would be so excited to see her big green station wagon turning the corner. I had a hunger to learn about the world and other people and to travel vicariously to distant places. I devoured mysteries, history, autobiographies, and science. I would hide books in the clothes hamper so I could read without interruption.”

—*Brenda Asare, president and CEO, The Alford Group*



Simone Joyaux

What He Taught Me: Value the Lives of Others

“The way Georges Jules Joyaux, my dad, lived reminded me that ‘the most important thing is to step out of your linguistic ghetto and become aware that there are other people in the world who live, eat, learn, and make love in a medium that is not English.’ I can’t imagine my dad ever using the term ‘major’ donors because that would mean that there are ‘minor’ donors, and that’s too awful to keep contemplating in fundraising and in life.”

—*Simone Joyaux, leading author, blogger, activist*



Jason Lee

What They Taught Me: Hold Onto Your Core Fundamentals But Leave Room for More Expansive Ideas to Problem-Solve

“Ms. Fay Stengler and Ms. Sarah Kerrigan provided English lesson plans that compelled us to develop strong writing skills, literary analysis, and independent thought. Even more memorable was their willingness to construct creative spaces that added a unique dimension to the learning environment. They asked us to create a different space from which to view the issues and incorporate a novel solution.”

—*Jason Lee, chief strategy and advocacy officer and general counsel for AFP*

See the full interviews by Chris Griffin at AP online <https://advancingphilanthropy.org/>.

particularly those new to the profession, to volunteer, take a writing workshop, attend an etiquette course, and read local publications, particularly the society pages.

Movie audiences seldom think of the film “Avatar” (2009) as a “teacher” movie. Nevertheless, there is a strong teacher element in this science fiction motion picture. In the film, Sam Worthington plays paraplegic marine Jake Sully, who is sent to the moon Pandora, where he eventually befriends Neytiri, played by Zoe Saldana. What Sully learns from Neytiri is so profound that it completely changes his life in ways he never could have imagined.

For Mark Chilutti, CFRE, assistant vice president of development at the Magee Rehabilitation Hospital Foundation, a new friendship dramatically altered his career path in the aftermath of a personal tragedy. Chilutti owned a jewelry business. Then, on a day that all jewelers fear might come, two men entered the store to rob it and, in the process, shot Chilutti in the chest. While he survived the wound, he was left unable to walk and with no feeling from his chest down.

After being hired, Chilutti immediately enrolled in the Fundamentals of Fundraising Course, a continuing education program offered by the AFP Greater Philadelphia Chapter and Villanova University. Chilutti also followed his boss’s example and applied for his CFRE the first year he qualified.

Chilutti notes that a formal educational experience can teach the nuts and bolts. However, in informal settings, there is more room to consider things in a broader context, with more back-and-forth dialogue. For example, he says you have more of a chance to consider things like, “How do you see this happening?” It becomes less about isolated tactics at that point and more about how things fit together in a meaningful, productive way.

“It’s hard to remember all the names of the teachers I’ve had. Almost monthly, there were great educational opportunities and conferences. We’re blessed to have so many educational opportunities,” Chilutti observes.

Siggs certainly provided Chilutti with a great chance to learn in an informal setting. However, Chilutti also remembers other noteworthy teachers he’s had who,

The biggest thing I try to do is remember what caused me to like some of my teachers and not like others. I try not to be that second person.

While he was being treated at Magee, he met Ron Siggs, CFRE, Magee’s senior vice president. Over time, the two became friends, and Chilutti began volunteering with Magee as a speaker, a golf tournament worker, and even a volunteer fundraiser. In the latter capacity, he approached someone he knew for a \$50,000 donation to Magee. He did not get it. Instead, he generated a \$100,000 contribution.

His volunteer experience gave him the confidence to pursue a staff position at the rehab hospital when he learned that one had opened up. He contacted Siggs who, as it turns out, was about to reach out to him. Chilutti got the job. While he did not have a great deal of fundraising how-to knowledge, Siggs recognized that Chilutti possessed complementary skills and great passion.

“It’s a rare thing to have one person as your boss, mentor, and friend,” says Chilutti. Siggs taught Chilutti fundraising techniques and, through example, encouraged him to seek out knowledge. “People who lead by example—not by title but how they live their life—are inspirational. Their willingness to give back with nothing in return is truly remarkable.”

in addition to standing up in the front of a classroom, were happy to engage with him informally as well. Robbe Healey, MBA, NHA, ACFRE, vice president of Simpson Senior Services, is just one of those teachers. Being able to really pick someone’s brain and explore ideas with them has been particularly meaningful to Chilutti.

As a teacher himself, he says, “The biggest thing I try to do is remember what caused me to like some of my teachers and not like others. I try not to be that second person.”

Education can provide us with specific skills. As importantly, teachers can inspire us. Great teachers do both whether in a formal or informal setting. As fundraisers, we have an obligation to continually enhance our skills and expand our knowledge. We owe it to those our organizations serve.

In the film “Limelight” (1952), Charlie Chaplin’s character says, “That’s all any of us are: amateurs. We don’t live long enough to be anything else.” In other words, we will never know everything we need to know. All we can do is continue to learn and, perhaps, share what we know with others, inspiring them as we have been inspired. 