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Preparation for Life

Director of Personnel Services

Dear Editor:

One of the unpleasant realities I have faced since I returned to St. George to live is that so many of the people whose lives have had such a distinct impact on mine are passing away. It not only serves as a painful reminder of my own mortality, but serves to remind me that we seldom think to make others aware of our love and respect for them until it is too late. So it is with my thoughts relative to the passing of Clark Hafen this week.

I was one of the fortunate students to attend Clark's English and Journalism classes at Dixie High School. It may have been earlier when I discovered the pleasure of reading and writing, but it wasn't until I was a student of Clark Hafen that I was so heartily encouraged to pursue writing and/or teaching as a career. I suspect there are hundreds of students who discovered the absolute delight in creative writing as a result of Clark's incredible enthusiasm and style in the classroom. When other high school teachers generally viewed the "spirited" thoughts and antics of adolescent students with disdain, Clark exhibited the unique ability to catch the excitement of his students' vitality and show them a constructive/positive means to channel it through writing. Clark reveled in a student's work that reflected the "unique". He taught me the value of thinking for myself and not accepting others' truths as my own without first learning for myself.

He taught me the dangers in narrow-minded acceptance of others by his willingness to enjoy the differences in people rather than the bland "sameness" of so many.

I loved him for never oppressing the unique minds, the questioning minds, the clever and creative, the imaginative and expressive minds. For, although those characteristics are far from negative, there were too many teachers who viewed them as such out of sheer insecurity and an inability to adapt their teaching styles to accommodate the times.

Clark was an unusually gifted teacher. He was, indeed, before his time in his teaching methods. I loved and respected him as an individual, a teacher, and a friend. I am sorry for the hundreds of high school students who missed the joy of learning to think and write through Clark's skillful manner when his teaching career was so unnecessarily cut short.

There are occasions when I am proud of how I think and write, how zany my sense of humor can be, and how I treat students in the classroom. It is at those moments that I think: "Thank you, Clark, for being an important part of my life!"

Michelle Thomas
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