

## At Tate High School...

*Luck is a dividend of sweat. The more you sweat, the luckier you get.*

Ray Kroc

I was the oldest of four boys, and my mother had always been a stay-at-home mom. Our family's income was always limited, and with four sons close to the same age, buying back-to-school clothes simply was not in the budget. We always had plenty of clothes, but they were hand-me-downs.

As my brothers and I entered our teenage years, the clothes we had were not ones that we probably would have chosen had we been given a choice. Plus, since we were all close to the same age, we could interchange our clothes. We laugh now about the joke that the best-dressed for school on any given day was the first one up and dressed. Although I was the oldest, I was not the largest of the boys, meaning that I often wore my younger brothers' hand-me-downs.

Little did I realize as I entered high school the impact that my secondary education would have on me for the next decades of my life.

In ninth grade, my first year of high school, my shyness prevented me from being included in the popular social circles. As a student, I respected my school and teachers and was a normal, well-behaved student. I was never singled out by a teacher or the school and asked to do a special project or undertake a leadership task of any kind.

Little did I realize what a transformation I would undergo during the tenth grade. No longer would I be the unassuming timid little boy growing up in Cottage Hill. As a ninth grader at Tate High School, I had remained the shy son of a preacher, wearing hand-me-down clothes and sitting in the back of the classroom. Then one day, at the beginning of my sophomore year, an inspired teacher, Mr. Micky Rigby, recognized that the student in the back of his classroom had potential. And “that has made all the difference.” Because of a teacher, my transformation had begun.

Mr. Rigby encouraged me and inspired me to participate in an Optimist Club speech contest. He even bought and paid for, from his own modest salary, my first brand new suit. It was his inspiration, combined with his teaching skills which eventually empowered me to

be elected Student Government President in my senior year. He saw more in me than I did myself. He encouraged me to join the speech team where I learned to organize my thoughts, deliver effective presentations and become confident in my abilities. I excelled at speaking and won many contests, changing my life forever.

His encouragement was instrumental in my being selected as a Youth Delegate to the Paris Peace Talks to discuss the POW-MIA situation with the North Vietnamese Ambassador. I have never forgotten what Mr. Rigby gave me and have realized first hand how much teachers make a difference!

When I reflect, it was during those days that I learned there are two types of people in the world: "...those who create change, and those who are created by change." I made a conscious decision to join the first group. By creating positive change, you make a difference in the world and leave it a better place than it was before. I realized that with the right attitude and effort, almost anything is possible. Mr. Rigby's belief in me had empowered me to reach higher, to stretch myself and become a better person. When I became the student government

president, I learned to be a leader. Today when I think back, Mr. Rigby was the inspiration for my entering the education field. I wanted to help students overcome difficulties. I believed there were many students like myself; all they needed was a dedicated teacher to encourage them to succeed and accomplish their dreams.