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The Non-Traditional Student

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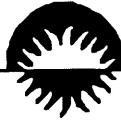


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The Non-Traditional Student

Brenda J. Wickey

She peers through rain-spotted glasses, watching the young students pass, laughing and talking to each other. They brush past her, nearly unaware of her presence. Sometimes they stare, wondering why she's there. She walks alone. Clutching her bag of school possessions, she makes her way to the building, stepping quickly around puddles on the sidewalk. A young man holds the door for his girlfriend and together they walk past her, hand in hand.

As she watches them, her mind returns to a time when she was young, to a young man who held her hand. She married him.

She was thinner then. With long, brown hair and large, brown eyes, she had been reasonably attractive. School had been so easy for her, filled with successes throughout her elementary years. The teachers all had said that she had a lot of "potential." In fact, she dreamed of someday being a teacher herself. However, when she reached high school the classes were divided according to an in-district system of tracking. She was tracked in with the academically lower, non-college bound students. No one had discussed this with her or her parents. Her family was large and poor, her parents drop-outs. College was not considered an option for her by the faculty or advisors. Scholarships were never mentioned.

Tired of the mediocre educational system in which she was trapped and the aimless direction in which it was taking her, she dropped out of school after her junior year, got a

job in a factory, and was married that fall. Two years later she became a mother. The years that followed were happy, busy ones for her husband and her. They had four sons within five years. He began his own business and became quite successful. She was happy with her life, her family, her friends. Yet her husband knew.

She wanted to teach.

He could see it in her eyes when she gathered her sons around to explain things. He could hear it in her voice when she talked to the children in Sunday school. He could feel it in her emotions when she spoke of her former dream of teaching.

He wanted her to make this dream come true.

He pushed her to finish high school. He said her grades were very good. He was enthusiastic about her accepting the college scholarship she had won. He was supportive of her as she began attending college. He was sympathetic of her fears. She wasn't like the other students. But he knew she could do it.

She walks alone. Days pass without another student speaking to her. But she's there for only one purpose. She wants to teach. Determined to succeed, she pushes on. Her chance came late in life, but now that she has it she won't let it slip by. Her grades are excellent, but no one realizes how hard she works. No one but her husband.

She walks through the door and sits down at her desk. No one notices the twinkle in her eyes as she removes her glasses and cleans them in preparation for the beginning of class. She knows her dream is nearly within reach. She's almost there.

At the time this was written, Brenda Wickey was an undergraduate student completing work toward a BA degree and teaching certificate. She now is an elementary school teacher in Lake Area Christian School, Burr Oak Michigan.