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LES Teacher of the Year vows to never stop having fun

By Sharon K. Sobotta



LES Teacher of the Year Linda Marsden poses with her student, 8-year-old Anya Patath. Photo courtesy of Samantha Patath

wanted to be anything (other than a teacher)."

That inner passion for children and the art of teaching that Marsden exudes is perhaps what's helped her navigate some tough moments in time with creativity and compassion. When Marsden's time with her 2020 cohort of students was cut short by the pandemic, she created flat 'Ms. Marsden's' and invited her class to take her everywhere they went and take pictures along the way. She got into character over Zoom to inspire the budding poets in her class to write their best work and craft at-home poetry nights. "There have been many hard days-the 1989 earthquakes, 9/11, school shootings around the country, emails from parents who forget teachers are human - plus being a working parent with babies, teenagers (and now grown kids with grand kids on the way)," Marsden says. "But underneath it all, it's the kids that make it fabulous every day. When I'm feeling (overwhelmed) for whatever reason, I shut my door and live in the world of Room 15."

Marsden says she could talk about the 'wonderfulness' of second grade for hours. "The students have the first grade under their belt. They've experienced everything from the Halloween parade to Field Day to Leopard Spirit Day and they're ready to go. Academically, they have settled into school and generally enjoy learning," Marsden says. "And, they love their teacher - (me)."

Marsden wants her students to know that even when things seem tough for a day or a week or even a month, things will eventually get better. If she could give advice to her younger self, her own children or even the students she has today, it would be to simply not to forget to have fun. "I'd say get a 'B.' Enjoy life, as it goes by (quickly). You don't have to have an 'A' on every assignment," Marsden says. "You will end up where you're supposed to be and there are many paths to get there."

Anya Patath, age 8, says she was thrilled to learn that Mrs. Marsden was the Teacher of the Year at LES. When asked why that makes her happy, Anya's eyes light up with pride as she says, "Because my teacher is the Teacher of the Year."

Anya loved earning table points from the in-class trivia games that were redeemable for prizes. Marsden's sense of humor along with her stories about her family were another high point for Anya. "Mrs. Marsden's sister had a fish named AJ, but when the fish died she got another fish named BJ and the one after that was CJ," Anya explains through giggles.

Even though Anya will be in a different classroom as a third-grader in just a few weeks, she says she has

Linda Marsden knew in her heart that she was meant to be a second-grade teacher since she was in second grade, around the time she was 8 years old. Marsden made her way to Lafayette Elementary School in 1987 and got hired pretty much on the spot after what she remembers to be a grueling interview with the superintendent. Some 35 years later, Marsden is still going strong in her beloved second-grade classroom at LES - so strong that she was honored as the 2022-23 Teacher of the Year.

Marsden is known by many who've sat in her class or worked alongside her as a classroom comedian of sorts. She's also known for her end of the day trivia games, her wit and her structure. "I have clear (boundaries with my students), but I enjoy being funny and silly," Marsden says. "When my students remember their time in my class, I hope they'll think of it as a time they had fun."

The students from Marsden's first second-grade class are now in their early 40s and many of them (and those who have come after them) are her Facebook friends. "I had my first grand-students this year," Marsden boasts proudly. "That's been so special. I just love that."

Long before Marsden was old enough to make her childhood dream of teaching come true, she was preparing. "I had a classroom in my house. I never

every intention of going to visit Mrs. Marsden and getting some hugs from her as long as she's at LES.

LES fifth-grade teacher Scott Moe is both a friend and a colleague of Marsden. "She's the number one teacher with 35 years under her belt. I'm number two with 30 years. She's a mentor to everyone and a voice of reason," Moe says. "She reminds us that it's important to get to know the families, not just (through the lens of) a teacher, but also as people."

Although Moe and Marsden work with different age groups, they work together at school and maintain a connection that extends beyond their teaching roles. Moe's fifth-graders pair up with Marsden's second-graders as big buddies and little buddies, which give the pair a chance to collaborate. Marsden has also known Moe's children, who are now in high school, since they were born and served as their homeroom teacher when they were in second grade. Moe says it was a long time coming for Marsden to be recognized as Teacher of the Year. "It's about time," Moe says. "She really is the heartbeat of the school."

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