

SCHOOL LIGHT LINES



The Teacher's Tongue | Angela Freed

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue," Solomon says. What kind of life-giving language do effective teachers use?

Economic language

Concise, brief sentences have a hard time becoming background noise that students tune out. Instead, students learn to listen closely whenever the teacher opens his mouth. If a student does ask, "What did you say?" an effective teacher might ask another student, "Lisa, please tell George what I just said." Not only does the student's inattentiveness get him secondhand information, but his classmate's rephrasing can also help the teacher discover if his language has been unclear.

Heard language

A teacher cannot afford to talk when

students are not listening. He may start a sentence, realize he is not being heard, and break it off. "Second grade, take out your—" If this does not arrest attention, the teacher might self-interrupt again. "Second grade, take—" During these self-interruptions, he stands stock-still, demonstrating that nothing can continue until he has everyone's attention.

Body language

An effective teacher shows with his body that he is committed to what he says. He faces the listeners with both feet pointed toward them, with direct eye contact, and with movement toward them. He may strike an even more formal pose—his hands behind his back, showing that he takes his own words seriously.

Authoritative language

An effective teacher never argues with students. If he says, "Susan, feet in front of you and eyes on me" and Susan says, "But Jack's bothering me," he will not discuss with her who is at fault. He will either keep silent or repeat his directions, "Feet in front and eyes on me." This not only establishes his own authority, but it also requires Susan to take responsibility for her actions of turning around and poking Jack. She will get the message that she must obey first instead of blaming someone else.

Quiet language

A worried teacher tends to speak loud and fast, showing that the students are making him anxious. Though it may run against all his instincts, an effective teacher will speak slower and quieter



Communicate Graciously

A challenge to considerate dialogue with parents.



Australia's Mice Plagues

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when he wants greater control. He will drop his voice and exude poise and calm.

Present language

While there is a time for discussing the past, effective teachers talk mostly about what students should do next instead of harping on what they can no longer fix. “Jack, when the opposing team wins, I want to hear you telling them, ‘Good game!’” in contrast to, “Jack, you got grouchy when your team lost.”

Positive language

Effective teachers assume that students are trying to follow directions, instead of assuming that they are deliberately rebelling. “Hold on, everyone. Some of us have forgotten to walk in the hallway. Let’s go back and try that again,” in contrast to, “Hold on, everyone. Some people have decided to run in the hallway. They must want to do it over again.”

Anonymous language

As long as students are trying to meet expectations, effective teachers give them anonymity, correcting them without naming them. “Check yourselves, everyone, to make sure you’re doing it the way I asked.” If students are not trying, a teacher may not be able to maintain anonymity, but using names will not be his first move.

Aspirational language

Effective teachers speak as if everyone is already moving in the right direction. “I see most pencils poised and ready to write; needing three more. Fix it, if it’s you. Waiting on one. That’s it, thank you. And now, off we go!” This language normalizes momentum—things are always getting better. If a teacher speaks of decline instead, it normalizes rebellion. “You don’t seem to remember that you’re supposed to get your pencils

ready. I’m waiting on your cooperation, students! If I have to cancel recess, I will.”

Choose language that gives life! 

Sources: *Tools For Teaching*, Fred Jones.

Frederic H. Jones & Associates, Inc.
Santa Cruz, CA; *Teach Like a Champion*,
Doug Lemov. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
San Francisco, CA.

Angela found her own years of schooling difficult, so a lifework of education was not her dream. It still shocks her that she has taught for thirteen years—eleven in traditional classrooms and two in ESL environments—in addition to working for two curriculum publishers, including Christian Light. She currently lives and teaches in northern Utah. When she is not teaching or writing or editing, she enjoys exploring Utah’s canyons and deserts with her friends.

Communicate Graciously | Lucy Martin

Will Rogers, the American humorist, claimed he never met a man he didn’t like. This time I think he was serious.

Similarly, the Christian teacher should be able to say, “I never met a parent I didn’t like.” Wouldn’t it be wonderful if a teacher could also say, “I never met a parent who didn’t like me”?

Yes, but every teaching career will likely someday stub its toe on the proverbial difficult parent, who thinks he has met the classic difficult teacher,

and in between, almost invariably, stands the problem student. Parents and teachers become problems to each other when they clash over a child whom both have failed.

You cannot change the failures a parent has wrought on a child before he turned that child over to you. But you can control your attitude toward that child and how you respond to his parents.

The first law of handling difficult

parents says, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Teachers prevent the difficult parent by averting the problem student. Love that student too much to let him be a problem. Just as a parent ouches at the report of his child’s mischief, the child’s teacher should wince at his misbehavior. From this vantage point, teachers and parents harmonize over the joint focus of their love.

Loving your student serves you in another way. Love reaps love. Love

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A Teacher's Psalm 91 | Katrina Mast

The teacher who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

She will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."

Surely He will give you wisdom to respond to each parent
and each student.

He will cover you with His feathers,
and under His wings you will find refuge;
His faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

You will not fear the concerns that keep you awake at night,
nor the questions that fly by day,
nor the unfinished tasks that stalk in the darkness,
nor the attitudes that destroy at midday.

A thousand may fail to pay attention,
ten thousand disobey instructions,
but it will not disgruntle you.

You will calmly teach them again
And again.

If you say, "The Lord is my refuge,"
and you make the Most High your dwelling,
no depression will overtake you,
no disaster will come near your classroom.

For He will command His angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways;
they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will be able to guide your students well.

You will tread on weariness and on discouragement.

You will trample impatience and worry.

"Because she loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue her;

I will protect her, for she acknowledges My name.

She will call on me, and I will answer her;

I will be with her in transition,

I will strengthen her and honor her.

With long impact I will bless her

and show her My salvation." 

Katrina Mast's teaching journey has included younger siblings, creative writing classes, and a tiny classroom in Tanzania. Each experience deepened her passion for teaching, and she currently teaches fourth grade at Pleasant Valley Mennonite School in Ephrata, Pennsylvania. When she's not teaching, you can usually find her with a good book and a cup of coffee.

your student, and he will love you. He will advertise you to his parents. The respect for you that he communicates to his parents will pave the way to good parent-teacher relations.

But despite all your invested love, there will be mischievous students and unhappy parents, to say nothing of erring teachers. We deal with human nature. The question is, how shall we deal?

Likely you will meet a disgruntled parent at the parent-teacher meeting. Approach each of these meetings with prayer. The agenda you take to this meeting will determine the mindset that parents take *from* it. Remember, the parent is coming to hear you talk about a part of him. Criticizing his child criticizes him.

Every person has some good in him. Find that good in your problem student, smile, and share your discovery with undisguised delight. After that, if you really must criticize, the parent will be more ready to hear you. He likely will even nod sympathetically. He deals with the same child at home.

But what if the parent refuses to believe his student can do any wrong? Suppose he proceeds to explain how you have caused the problem. The worst thing you can do is argue. The best thing you can do is listen. Listen with an open face that says, "I'm interested in what you have to say." Then actually thank him for his help. Even if you think he is totally wrong, no good will come from arguing.

Arguing only maintains your own image in your own eyes, and what good is that if it merely thickens the membrane between your voice and

his brain? Listening dissolves that membrane. Since you have listened to a "sensible" person like him, he may go home thinking that perhaps you are sensible too, and consequently your ideas may seem safe for him to consider, later. I have already talked to parents who seemed deaf to my concerns, only to find later that their child *did* reform. Something *had* happened at home.

Suppose, though, that the parent does more than just talk. What if he actually rants? Again, the worst you can do is rant back. The best you can do is, once again, listen. Listen and apologize for your "mistake" with his child. Promise to do what you can to solve the problem. Even if the parent walks away scowling, you really haven't lost anything. Loss begins when you desert your own composure, your most valuable resource in dealing with problems.

What can you do if the parent never appears at the parent-teacher meeting? Wait till the next one and see if he comes? No. Even if you are having no problem with his child, call him the next day, or meet him at church that

weekend, and say, "We're having no problems. I just wanted to tell you how well Richard is doing in school, and I wanted to let you know that if there are any problems from your end, you should let me know." Rare is the parent that will not echo the same sentiment in return.

But if there *are* problems, arrange a contact, take the "good-news-first" approach, and then graciously talk business.

Plan to communicate. Problems build up when communication breaks down. Purpose to see all issues from the parent's viewpoint, and by whatever means you can, communicate graciously. ■



This year is Lucy's 36th term of teaching eighth graders at Paradise Mennonite School in Hagerstown, Maryland. In addition to eighth-grade subjects, she enjoys teaching high school home economics and art classes.

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“Whatever . . .” | Karen Birt

It is commonly used as slang to show a lack of interest or disagreement. “Whatever,” someone might mutter as he walks away from an argument. “Whatever,” a student might grumble after hearing a decision she does not like. “Whatever,” a worker might say after completing a shoddy job.

But the Bible gives a different view of “whatever.” Colossians 3:17 says, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” The idea continues with verse 23 saying, “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.”

Students can get caught in the negative “whatever” trap. I currently have a writing class where some of the students do not like to write. And that is fine, if they still try to do their best . . . which most of them do. But when I shared the verse above with the class today, it was obvious that a few had said “whatever” and had turned in a subpar rough draft.

Teachers need a proper view of “whatever” as well. For example, most of us would say that grading papers is not our favorite task. I am not usually a procrastinator, but I can wait as long as possible before grading those essays. Or maybe the thought of putting up another bulletin board makes you groan. We all have tasks that we could be tempted to shirk or complete half-heartedly.

So how can I “do it heartily as to the Lord”? Of course, the process begins with asking for God’s guidance and submitting to His will. But the teacher can apply some day-to-day practices and encourage students to do so as well.

Practical Tips for the Teacher to “Do It as to the Lord”

1. I can begin the day by imagining what my daily goals would be if God were the owner of my workplace. Rather than thinking of working to meet the principal’s or school board’s requirements, I am working to glorify God. In that case, I do not let trivial incidents overcome the important issues. Ultimately, each day’s goals are to bring honor to God through my teaching and to help my students grow in Him, not just to receive a paycheck.
2. I can hold myself accountable to high-quality work. One way to do this is by making definite commitments to students and coworkers. For example, since grading is not my favorite task, I promise my students that I will

have essays graded by a specific date—soon. Then I must complete their grades as promised.

3. I can model the proper attitude for my students. Staying positive with what I say and do reminds my students that they can be positive too. Redoing something I did wrong or correcting a mistake shows the class the importance of completing a task fully and correctly.

Practical Tips for Students to “Do It as to the Lord”

1. I can share the verses from above with my classes. The biggest benefit of teaching in a Christian school is having a foundation with which to appeal to students. When Christian teachers remind their students that what they are doing at school matters to God, the students can see that all of life’s tasks are approached from a godly standard.
2. I can encourage students to always do their best and not settle for mediocrity. This may mean that I require them to redo certain assignments or to finish incomplete assignments. While students may not always appreciate the push for excellence now, the patterns established during their school years can help them earnestly follow God’s leading later.
3. I can remind students that their ultimate goal is to glorify God, not to get a certain grade or even to receive a diploma. Having a proper perspective of the end goal makes each daily practice a step in the right direction.

The idea of avoiding “whatever” was not innovative in the New Testament. Ecclesiastes 9:10 says, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.” So whether it is the Apostle Paul or Solomon or today’s student or teacher, we can “do it as to the Lord.” [\[1\]](#)

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Karen Birt taught at Clinton Christian School in Goshen, Indiana, for twenty-five years. She also teaches a few freshman English classes at Grace College and coordinates the Winona History Center there. When not teaching, Karen enjoys reading and traveling. She wants to add many European countries to her travel list. Karen is a part of the Plevna Dunkard Brethren Church.

Outdoor Classroom

Australia's Mice Plagues | Ken Kauffman

Some have called it a plague of Biblical proportions, apparently a reference to the plague of frogs called up by Moses to harass the Egyptians into letting them go.

Maybe your students could vote which they'd rather have—a plague of frogs or a plague of mice? Wouldn't that be a wholesome diversion and a lunchtime conversation starter?

Farmers and people in certain parts of Australia that have endured plagues of mice might prefer the frogs. The frogs probably wouldn't be as likely to destroy their livelihood.

Rodent plagues occur on the average every four years in Australia, especially in grain-growing areas of southern and eastern Australia. We'll look at a few of the more notable plagues.

Native rats, then the mice

First there were plagues of native rats. The longest and most intense rat plague occurred in 1940 when it was reported that rats pried open "seven-pound tea tins" on shop shelves, chewed the wool off sheep's backs, and consumed the trousers of a Catholic priest.

House mice arrived in Australia on the heels of plagues of rats in the mid-nineteenth century, probably aboard colonists' ships. When the population of long-haired rats declined, the human-dependent house mouse became Australia's most troublesome plague mammal. Mice are far more grain-driven and human dependent than the long-haired rat, resulting in infestations that concentrate around people, especially farms.

Blame the weather

Mouse plagues are usually preceded by a few years of drought. When rain arrives and the drought is broken, everything sprouts and grows, including the mice, who have the social structure and biology to take advantage of those conditions much faster than any other animal can, and boom, an explosion of

mice occurs. In one summer and

fall, a single pair of

mice can grow rapidly

to over five hundred mice. Their young can have their own litter in nine to ten weeks. The mice concentrate near food sources, grain bins, hay barns, gardens, and populated areas, ruining everything with their feces and urine and eating the commodities.

1917

One of the largest mouse plagues occurred in 1917 when parts of Queensland and Victoria were overrun with mice. They damaged the harvested grain, as well as chewed boots, shoes, tablecloths, carpets, curtains, bedclothes, and books. They bit babies in cradles, chewed through telephone and telegraph wires—wreaking havoc. Mice leaped out when drawers and cupboards were opened, startling the womenfolk. Housewives had to slice fresh-baked bread warily as well-baked specimens were sometimes hidden in the interior.

"The old order of things has been reversed and now the mice not only play when the cats are away, but actually play with the cats," reported a newspaper. "[They] play all over them and around them, chew their ears, and playfully nibble the tender tips of their tails. And the unfortunate cats have become so scared and disgusted that they now, whenever possible, roost in trees..."



© State Library South Australia

Ken is the husband of one, a father of six, a grandfather of twelve, services manager at Christian Light, and the editor of LightLines. Ever since as a lad he was traumatized by waking up and seeing a family of mice playing on the living room floor, he doesn't have a good relationship with mice. He'd rather watch and listen to birds.

Mice were caught and slain by tens of thousands every day. The biggest catch occurred at Lascelles, Victoria, where approximately 200,000 mice, weighing three tons, were caught on a single night. In another incident in Rochester, two women with extraordinary courage, jumped into the midst of scattering mice and slaughtered over a thousand in two hours. The incident was widely reported in several newspapers around Victoria under the heading "Women Massacre Mice."

In one location a raid was made on the mice. "The site was fenced, and two 40-gallon oil drums were sunk in the ground. The dunnage was then cleared and the mice driven into the drums. On the first night the catch . . . weighed one ton, and on two successive nights 8 cwt. and 10 cwt. were caught, the weight for the three nights being nearly two tons," wrote Professor W.A. Osborne, of the University of Melbourne.

By the time the outbreak was finally defeated, over 1,500 tons of mice—about a hundred million individuals—were killed. There were numerous reports of human disease from the mouse plague, and many people

were affected emotionally and mentally.

Other significant mouse plagues

Australia's worst mouse plague occurred in 1993 and resulted in an estimated damage of \$96 million dollars' worth of damage, including crops, livestock, piggeries, and poultry farms.

In 2021, extreme rainfall after a period of drought caused another mouse plague to occur. Farmers begged the government for relief, fearing they would lose over \$700 million in revenue. The government responded by providing a relief package that included broadcasting mouse poison.

When the mice run out of food, they usually turn on the sick and the weak among them and prey on the baby mice and the population crashes quite quickly. Ewww! 🐭

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Sources:

- Australia's Mouse Plagues | Amusing Planet
- A land of flooding plagues: Australia's history of mice and rat irruptions | www.australian geographic.com
- Australia Mouse Plague: Mice Swarms Strike Again on Australian Streets, Farms: www.natureworldnews.com
- Australia plots biological warfare to eradicate rampaging 'mouse plague': www.ft.com
- Mice Plague in Australia | Nature



Pedagogical Meanderings

Write for LightLines!

We'd love to print your story of classroom life; especially stories that inspire or that taught you something. Share your memorable experiences, AHA! moments, how you related to a difficult student, or a lesson you learned (perhaps the hard way). Stories we publish will receive compensation. Submission information is on the back page.

Special assignment: Tell your fellow teachers about a Scripture, poem, song, or quote that has been meaningful to you in your teaching. We'll collect them and publish them as a kind of teacher's scrapbook of inspiration in future issues of *LightLines*. If you can, write a story about it and send it in! If more than 250 words, we'll pay you if we publish it!

Absent attendance: Artificial apologies?

October 2025. (Important—these were university students.) Two professors at University of Illinois, Professor Flanagan and Professor Fagen-Ulmschneider who jointly taught a course, did some sleuthing to uncover a student attendance scam. Of course, the students apologized. Or did they?

The professors track student physical attendance with displaying a QR code, which, after being scanned, takes students to a few multiple-choice questions that they must answer in order to be counted "present."

A few weeks into this fall semester, the professors realized that *far* more students were answering the questions than were actually in the lecture hall. They started checking how many times students refreshed the site and the IP addresses of their devices and began reviewing server logs. They concluded that students in the class were telling students not in class when the questions were going live.

When the professors realized how widespread this was, they contacted the 100-ish students who seemed to be cheating. They reached out to them with a warning and asked them to explain.

Apologies started coming from the students, first in a trickle, then in a flood. The professors were initially moved by this acceptance of responsibility and contrition . . . until they realized that 80 percent of the apologies were almost identically worded and appeared to be generated by AI.

On October 17 the two professors took their class to task, displaying images of the apologies, each bearing the same "sincerely apologize" phrase. No disciplinary action was taken against the students, and the whole situation was treated rather lightly—but the warning was real. *Stop doing this.* Professor Flanagan said she hoped it would be a "life lesson" for the students.

Caught cheating in class, college students "apologized" using AI—and profs called them out - Ars Technica

CASBI

The 19th annual Conservative Anabaptist School Board Institute (CASBI) is planned for March 6 and 7, 2026, at Strasburg Mennonite School in Strasburg, Virginia. Programs and registration material will be available in early January. For more information, contact someone on the planning committee. Victor Ebersole 540-532-0127 · Linford Horst 301-491-0435 · Anthony Hurst 484-512-0780 · Jonas Sauder 717-285-3495 · Matthew Peachey 717-247-6676, go to <https://casbi.info/>, or email casbinstitute@gmail.com.

ParentLines

Associated with this issue of *LightLines* is *ParentLines*. It is intended that *ParentLines* could be freely copied and distributed to parents and patrons, or even to church families. The feature article in this issue was written by a mother of eight. While we're not necessarily wanting to instruct parents how to train their children, we do want to stir their thinking. Some of us are concerned about what seems to be the rise of chronic misbehavior in our classrooms. Does it have something to do with parenting styles? [\[1\]](#)

THE POWER OF



Supervising Play | Jonas Sauder

One of the richest opportunities to influence your students is supervision of their playtime. Many students say their favorite “subject” in school is recess, revealing its importance. They develop personally while growing physically and relationally. Because recess is critically important to character development, teachers must pay close attention during playtimes. Some considerations for supervising students’ playtime:

- Be present at the *beginnings* of play. Good beginnings make good recesses. Adult supervision while children organize what to play can help to avoid confusion, wasted time, and hurt feelings. After students are fully involved in a game, the teacher may be free to focus on something else for a few minutes.
- Decide whether the period is a physical education class or a recess. A class in Phys. Ed. is held like any other class: to develop specific skills and achieve purposeful goals. Recess, on the other hand, serves as an informal, active, refreshing break.
- Have variety. Although recess periods are not classes, they do serve an important purpose. In addition to providing a break from schoolwork, they offer fresh air and exercise, informal interaction with classmates, and opportunity to experience a rich variety of games requiring distinct skills. Students can easily get stuck in a rut of playing only a handful of games. Sometimes they resist playing something new, they don’t know how, it’s too hard, or it is *boring*. Avoid

such resistance by occasionally switching the games children can choose and by introducing new games. Some categories include:

- Traditional sports: softball, kickball, foursquare, basketball, volleyball, soccer, broomball, and street or field hockey.
- Running/base games: tag, prisoner’s base, four-base, and steal sticks.
- Games with simple equipment: such as plastic discs or hoops, jump ropes, and beanbags.
- Field games: sprinting, relay races, distance running, broad jumping, and high jumping.
- An unlimited variety can be achieved by modifying existing games.

Examples:

- ▶ For prisoner’s base, score points for each person tagged rather than taking him to prison.
 - ▶ For base games, change the number of bases used, allow each team to have more than one base, require or allow people to run in pairs, or introduce “bacon” or sticks that must be protected from being stolen.
 - ▶ For tag, introduce shadow tag, freeze tag, or beanbag tag.
- Provide opportunity for both spontaneous and directed play. Students benefit from the discipline of having someone choose a group activity and then joining that

activity wholeheartedly. Games involving a large group of students from across the grades provide several benefits:

- Cross-age interaction enables beginners to learn from the older; the older can be an example and encouragement to the beginners.
- Individuals reap the additional benefit of entering the spirit of play with the whole group.
- Individuals can enjoy their favorite games on some days while learning to willingly play games they don't particularly enjoy. Engaging in something they don't think they will enjoy and then finding it enjoyable is beneficial preparation for later in life.
- There's something ironic about routinely choosing games for your students: they may lose the ability to play spontaneously. If teachers *always* choose a game that everyone must play, students tend to feel helpless when they are simply free to play. To avoid this, students should frequently have recesses where they are free to use the swings, jungle gym, seesaws, and other playground equipment. Small groups may choose to play tag or start other small group games on their own. Depending on the season, some might gather dandelions to make dandelion chains, collect leaves, make snowmen, fight imaginary fires, play house, or look for bugs.
- Join students in some of their games—they will really enjoy it. The informal interaction builds healthy teacher-student relationships. They will be excited to catch you in a running game, watch you hit a home run, or slip past you when you are guarding a base. Your cheerful example will teach more than your words.

Whenever you join games, however, remember that you are the supervisor. Do not become so involved in the game that you are unaware of what is happening among other children on the playground.

- Monitor the spirit of the play. As the supervisor, you must constantly be alert to the prevailing attitudes on the playground. Students involved in healthy play will engage wholeheartedly, demonstrate cooperation and consideration, take risks and compete cheerfully, encourage

each other, follow rules, and accept losses. They can play hard, compete vigorously, and have a really good time.

- Sometimes problems develop. The spirit of play sometimes turns sour. Play lags. Players don't care. Play becomes unfocused, aimless, or chaotic. A few illustrations include:
 - ▶ The itter in a game of tag chases only one person, running past others whom he could easily tag. Or perhaps the players refuse to run, inviting the itter to catch them.
 - ▶ The volleyball is smacked wildly, with no intention to set it properly or return it over the net.
 - ▶ A student with a strong personality dominates the game.
 - ▶ A few students work together to dominate a four-square game, keeping the rest of the players on the sidelines.
 - ▶ A dodgeball game turns vicious, with players angrily firing the ball at each other.
 - ▶ The game turns lazy, with students standing around inactively.
 - ▶ Because students are children, you should not be shocked at such behavior. But you must act. That's one of the roles of a supervisor. Sometimes a student needs to sit out for a while. Or perhaps you can just call a halt for a moment to give them a pep talk. Sometimes a change of games helps. A few words of encouragement before a recess and a few words of evaluation at the end can help keep recess attitudes healthy.

Remember that in addition to recess being many students' "favorite subject," it can also be one of the most formative, character-building activities of their school days. ¹⁴

Jonas Sauder invested forty years in Christian school teaching and administration. He works part time in curriculum development and service projects for Christian Light. He and his wife Rebecca live near Lancaster. They have five children, four daughters-in-law, and nineteen grandchildren. Jonas enjoys teaching, gardening, and poetry.

The Bouquet | Judith Lehman

Yuli was her own mistress of ceremonies at a small event to celebrate her graduation from nursing school. I was honored to be included in what appeared to be mostly a family affair. The table was tastefully decorated. Elaborate bouquets of white roses tucked in floral foam to keep them fresh sat on slabs of wood. Tasteful, just like everything about Yuli.

“¡Gloria a Dios!” My evangelical friend filled the awkward silence while Yuli swallowed her emotions so she could continue at the mic.

Yuli and I met almost ten years before when she began her studies at our Christian day school. A shy seventh grader, it was hard to know if Yuli was pondering everything or missing everything. Turns out she didn’t miss much. She graduated from our school at ninth grade and continued high school elsewhere. She began nurse’s training during pandemic restrictions, and we didn’t see much of each other. She eventually took an English course or two in the evenings, and suddenly she was coming to church.

This young lady who was raised Seventh-Day Adventist, surrounded by a devout Catholic extended family, chose to drive the five kilometers to attend the Mennonite church. Okay.

Over lunch one Sunday, she said, “Miss Judith, I remember when we studied *Pilgrim’s Progress* in ninth grade, how Christian’s burden rolled off his back . . . and I imagine how wonderful that must be!”

“Yuli! You can experience that!”

“Oh, I have some things I need to get in order before I do that.”

I protested, explaining that if we could clean ourselves up, we wouldn’t need Jesus to do it. She went home that day, over a year ago now, still wearing her wistful look.

At her graduation party, she introduced each person who was to give the next speech. When it was my turn, she said, “And now I want a very special person to come share words. We met in the academic world, but the reason she is special to me is because she is the person who inspired me to love God. Please take the mic, Miss Judy.”

The bouquet of words Yuli had just handed to me befogged my vision with tears and turned the bouquets on the table into a blurry mass of white. ■

Judy grew up in Pennsylvania’s Cumberland Valley where she taught school for four years. She moved to Guatemala in 2004, where most of her years have been dedicated to teaching in Christian day schools or teaching EFL, with Abundant Life English School currently occupying the teaching vein in her life. Aside from teaching she tends chickens, flowers, and neighbor children. You can email her at misslehman@gmail.com or visit her sporadic writings at psalmthirtyfour8blog.wordpress.com.

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Ask Another is a question-answer space for teachers. Teachers are invited to pose questions on school-related subjects, offer responses to questions, or reply to responses. (LightLines will occasionally assign questions to experienced teachers for their qualified response.) Send questions or responses by email to lightlines@christianlight.org or by mail to LightLines Editor, P.O. Box 1212, Harrisonburg, VA 22803. (Try to limit responses to fewer than 400 words.)

I have a significant number of students, even older ones, who hold their pencils wrong. Is it worth trying to correct this? I know some older people hold their pencils in unusual ways and seem to do OK, but it still seems like it would be worth some effort to get it right. Even if it is slower at first, in the long run, would it be better? But the older students too? Any thoughts?

—Submitted

From the experience of an “older student”—yes, it is worth it! I did not learn to hold my pencil correctly until eighth grade, when my teacher set out to retrain his students. He didn’t make it a punishment (although some of my classmates thought it was!) but promised a reward after a certain length of time with no wrongly held pencils. I remember the first couple days I had to manually position my fingers on my pencil. But after that transition time, I have always been thankful for my teacher’s determination!

—teacher from Illinois

Tips for holding a pencil correctly

1. Hold the pencil loosely between your thumb and index finger. Rest the pencil on the ridge of your middle finger, creating a tripod grip. **2.** The index finger should be slightly bent, with the tip resting on the side of the pencil. This finger provides stability and control. **3.** The thumb should be opposite the index finger, also lightly gripping the pencil. **4.** The remaining fingers should gently curl underneath for support, providing stability and balance. **5.** The pencil should be slightly angled, pointing just past the shoulder. **6.** The grip should be light enough so that there are no white squeeze marks on the finger or thumb. An observant teacher should easily be able to jerk it away without the hand rising very far.

—LightLines staff

Next question: 1. How do you deal with feeling overwhelmed? How do you prevent burnout? (I do not have much mental space and have a low social battery.) 2. What are some things you do to keep yourself motivated and inspired?

—submitted at a teacher workshop

Please reply by March 2. Answers will be printed in a future issue of LightLines. Please respond with answers or new questions by email to lightlines@christianlight.org, by fax to 540-433-8896, or by mail to LightLines, P.O. Box 1212, Harrisonburg, VA 22803. [📧](#)



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