**Saved!**

Two people I never thanked for turning my life around are my high school English teachers. Miss LaDore and Mr. Wall should have found me annoying. My stupid jokes about Thoreau, my scorn for Shakespeare, my self-righteousness about all things literary, establishment and conservative would have caused any other teacher to dismiss me as a jerk. And many did. But Wall and LaDore insisted I was worth saving. And they did.

They challenged me to think in class. They wrote long responses to my papers that treated my ideas seriously. They invited me over to their house with my friends Steve and Guy to learn to juggle, to listen to Brahms, to make plaster of Paris masks of our faces, to learn to appreciate fine and silly things.

But their most important challenge was to teach a class to sophomores. I was arrogant and cynical enough to agree. And the experience both humbled me and made me a believer. I'm a teacher today because if it.

The 1970's was a time of experimentation. That's the only explanation for the administration agreeing to give me and my friend Guy our own classroom of sophomores for six weeks and the freedom to create our own curriculum. Guy learned quickly that teaching was not for him; he's a plumber now in Vermont. But I found I was exhilarated by the challenge of motivating the twelve students to discover their interests, their voices, their ability to learn and communicate what they learned. I asked the students to set their own learning goals, to pick their own content to learn, to present their learning or products to the class. And they for the most part they were very successful. I made mistakes – I was learning with them after all – but the students seemed changed for the better by the experience. I certainly was.

On the last day my students presented what they'd learned to the classmates they'd left behind in the traditional classroom. They spoke proudly about what they'd learned. They prodded the other students to think, to challenge the typical high school class experience. Miss LaDore and Mr. Wall laughed at how nervous I was, how proud I was of my students, how invested I had become in learning.