

KAT,

7-22-13

I REALLY ENJOYED RECEIVING YOUR.... COMMENT? LETTER? POST? BLOG? WHATEVER THEY WANT TO CALL IT. IT'S GREAT TO HEAR YOUR NAME GET CALLED WHEN THE OFFICER IS HANDING OUT MAIL.

I WAS FACINATED TO SEE THAT YOU LIVE IN EUROPE. IT'S TRULEY AMAZING THE THINGS THAT ARE MADE POSSIBLE BY USE OF THE INTERNET. I WISH EVERYBODY WOULD TELL ME WHAT STATE, COUNTRY OR CONTINENT THEY WERE FROM.

I GUESS WITH YOU BEING A TEACHER, I HAD BETTER PAY ATTENTION TO MY GRAMMAR & SPELLING ON THIS LETTER. IF YOU FIND ANY MISTAKES, I'VE GOT PLENTY OF EXCUSES. FIRST OF ALL, I'M A LEFT BRAIN PERSON. SO NATURALLY MATH IS MY FAVORITE SUBJECT AND IT WAS THIS SUBJECT THAT I WAS ASKED TO TEACH ON MY SECOND DAY IN PRISON. I HAD GONE INTO THE LIBRARY TO CHECK OUT WHAT THEY HAD TO READ. AFTER SPEAKING WITH ONE OF THE LIBRARY CLERKS FOR AWHILE, HE ASKED WHAT I DID OUT ON THE STREETS. AFTER TELLING HIM I WAS A CIVIL ENGINEER, HIS EYES LIT UP AND HE SAID, "THAT MEANS YOU'RE GOOD AT MATH. LISTEN, THE GED DEPARTMENT IN EDUCATION IS IN NEED OF A MATH TEACHER. YOU WOULD BE PERFECT AND YOU'LL LOVE WORKING OVER THERE. COME ON, I'LL GET YOU IN THERE." BEFORE I HAD A CHANCE TO SAY ANYTHING, LIKE: "WELL I DON'T KNOW.", "I'VE NEVER TAUGHT MATH BEFORE." OR "BUT I JUST GOT HERE!" HE CAME AROUND THE COUNTER, SNATCHED ME BY THE ARM AND LED ME OUTSIDE TO THE BUILDING NEXT DOOR. WHEN WE CAME TO THE ADMINISTRATOR'S OFFICE, HE TOLD ME TO JUST LET HIM DO ALL THE TALKING. WE THEN STEPPED

INTO THE OFFICE AND HE INFORMED THE MAN OF HOW HE HAD HEARD THERE WAS A NEED FOR A MATH TEACHER. THEN HE TOLD HIM HOW HE HAD KNOWN ME FOR A FEW YEARS AND WAS SURE THAT I WOULD BE GREAT FOR THE JOB. I'M STANDING THERE THINKING HOW I DON'T EVEN KNOW THIS GUY'S NAME. AND HOW COULD WE HAVE KNOWN EACH OTHER FOR SO LONG, WHEN THIS WAS ONLY MY SECOND DAY IN PRISON? WELL, THE MAN PUNCHED UP MY NAME ON HIS COMPUTER, STARTED NODDING HIS HEAD AND SAID, "YES, YOU DID SCORE VERY HIGH ON YOUR ENTRANCE EXAMINATIONS. SO HOW ABOUT IT? WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE A TEACHER FOR US?" MY FIRST THOUGHT WAS, "OH YEAH, RIGHT. I'M GOING TO GO UP TO SOME CHALK BOARD AND START TELLING THESE CONVICTS WHAT TO DO." BUT FOR SOME REASON I FIGURED THERE OBVIOUSLY MUST NOT BE TOO MUCH OF A HISTORY OF MATH TEACHERS GETTING BEAT UP OR KILLED WHILE ON THE JOB OR THEY WOULDN'T HAVE AN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT. BUT THEN AGAIN, WHAT HAPPENED TO THE GUY WHOSE PLACE I'M TAKING? I FINALLY ANSWERED WITH A HESITANT, "YEAH, I GUESS SO."

SO THE NEXT MORNING I SHOWED UP FOR WORK, GOT INTRODUCED TO THE INMATES WHO TAUGHT THE OTHER SUBJECTS AND TO THE LADY IN CHARGE OF THE GED DEPARTMENT, I WAS HANDED A STACK OF PAPERS WITH A MATH LESSON ON THEM, A BOOK ON HOW TO PREPARE YOURSELF FOR THE GED TEST AND WAS TOLD THAT MY CLASS WAS TO START IN ABOUT 15 MINUTES. I WAS STANDING THERE THINKING, "WELL GEE, DON'T I AT LEAST GET TO SEE HOW SOMEONE ELSE CONDUCTS THEIR CLASS SO I CAN GET SOME IDEAS ON HOW TO DO THIS?" APPARENTLY NOT. I GUESS THE MAIN THOUGHT ON MY MIND WAS BREAKING THE ICE. HOW DO I JUST START

TALKING TO A BUNCH OF CONVICTS, SOME OF WHICH I WOULD FIND OUT LATER HAD BEEN DOWN FOR OVER 30 YEARS? I FINALLY FIGURED THE BEST THING TO DO WAS TO JUST BE ME. AND SINCE I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A PERSON WHO HAS ENJOYED PUTTING A LITTLE BIT OF HUMOR IN EVERYTHING I TALK ABOUT, I DECIDED TO DO JUST THAT.

WHEN CLASS TIME CAME, I WENT UP TO THE BOARD AND SAID, "GOOD MORNING GENTLEMEN. I'M YOUR NEW MATH TEACHER. THE SUBJECT EVERYBODY SEEMS TO LOVE TO HATE. MY NAME IS ERIC." (I WROTE MY NAME ON THE BOARD, BUT THEN CROSSED IT OUT) "BUT YOU KNOW SOMETHING, I'VE NEVER REALLY LIKED MY NAME TOO MUCH. SO YOU CAN JUST CALL ME... (AND I WROTE)

~~ERIC~~
MAZE

HEY TEACH
YO

OVER HERE

WAVE YOUR HAND FRANTICALLY

"OR YOU CAN JUST CALL ME" MR. WILKES

I WAS ABLE TO GET A GOOD LAUGH FROM THEM, WHICH PRETTY MUCH BROKE THE TENSION IN THE AIR. FROM THERE I HAD NO PROBLEM IN EXPLAINING HOW TO DO THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF MATH THAT I TAUGHT AND TWISTING THINGS AROUND TO MAKE A JOKE ANYTIME I COULD. FOR INSTANCE, LETS SAY I WAS WORKING OUT A PROBLEM ON THE BOARD AND IN DOING SO MADE A MISTAKE SOMEWHERE. WELL, IF ONE OF THE STUDENTS NOTICED IT AND SAID SOMETHING, I CERTAINLY WOULDN'T ADMIT THAT I HAD MADE A MISTAKE. INSTEAD, I WOULD JUST SIMPLY SAY, "AH HA, I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU

NOTICED THAT. I PERIODICALLY DO TESTS LIKE THAT TO SEE IF YOU ARE PAYING ATTENTION." THEN, WHILE THEY'RE GETTING A GOOD LAUGH, I WOULD FIX WHATEVER IT WAS I SCREWED UP ON. AFTER JUST A COUPLE OF CLASSES, I REALLY GOT INTO AND STARTED ENJOYING THE WHOLE ART OF TEACHING. AFTER A FEW WEEKS, I STARTED CATCHING ON TO SOMETHING THAT ANSWERS YOUR QUESTION, "ARE THEY PAYING ATTENTION?" I STARTED REALIZING THAT THE CLASS WAS MADE UP OF 3 DIFFERENT TYPES OF STUDENTS. $\frac{1}{3}$ OF THEM WERE TAKING THIS CLASS AND WERE READY TO DO WHATEVER STUDYING THEY NEEDED TO DO TO PASS THIS GED. ANOTHER $\frac{1}{3}$ OF THEM WERE TAKING IT, BUT WEREN'T WILLING TO LIFT A FINGER TO DO ANY LEARNING EXCEPT DURING CLASS. AND THE FINAL $\frac{1}{3}$ WAS JUST THERE FOR THE AIR CONDITIONING. (THAT'S A QUOTE, BY THE WAY) BY GETTING THE HANG OF KNOWING WHICH GUYS WERE IN WHICH GROUPS, IT HELPED ME TO KNOW WHO TO CALL ON TO COME UP TO THE BOARD TO DO A PROBLEM.

I THINK I CAN HONESTLY SAY THAT I ENJOYED BEING A TEACHER, BECAUSE I WAS ALWAYS WILLING TO HELP AND GO OUT OF MY WAY TO HELP THEM LEARN. I CONSTANTLY REMINDED MY STUDENTS THAT IF THERE WERE ANY QUESTIONS DURING CLASS FEEL FREE TO ASK. AND IF THEY WERE JUST TOO EMBARRASSED TO DO SO, THEN COME TO ME AFTER CLASS AND I WOULD GO OVER THE QUESTION PRIVATELY WITH THEM. I REMEMBER MEETING ONE GUY WHO DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THE MULTIPLICATION TABLES UP TO 10. WELL, WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO LEARN THOSE? FLASHCARDS. SO I STARTED FINDING FOLDERS, CUT THE MATERIAL TO FLASH CARD SIZE AND THEN WROTE ALL THE MULTIPLICATION PROBLEMS ON THEM SO HE COULD HAVE A SET AND USE THEM TO CATCH UP. ANY KIND OF WAY I COULD HELP, I WAS GLAD TO DO IT.

WHICH REMINDS ME, I ALSO USE TO TEACH ON WRITING ESSAYS. I HAD BEEN GOING THROUGH SOME GUYS FOLDERS, AND REALIZED THAT MATH AND THE 200 WORD ESSAY WERE WHAT MOST GUYS SCORED THE LOWEST ON. SO I GRABBED A GED BOOK AND STARTED READING ABOUT ESSAYS. THE EASIEST FORM OF ESSAY THAT I CAME ACROSS WAS THE 5 PARAGRAPH ONE. THAT'S WHERE YOU WHY SHOULD I THINK THAT I HAVE TO EXPLAIN IT TO YOU? YOU'RE A TEACHER. THEN I TAUGHT A FEW LESSONS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF HOW TO LAY OUT AN ESSAY, NOT JUST WRITE A BUNCH OF WORDS ABOUT SOMETHING. THEN I LET THEM ALL KNOW THAT IF THEY WANTED TO PRACTICE DOING ONE TO COME TO ME AND I WOULD GIVE THEM A SUBJECT OUT OF THE BOOK AND ONE HOUR. IT WOULD USUALLY ONLY TAKE ME GOING OVER AND POINTING OUT THEIR MISTAKES ON A COUPLE OF PRACTICE ESSAYS BEFORE I COULD FINALLY TELL THEM, "NOW IF YOU WRITE AN ESSAY LIKE THAT FOR THE TEST, YOU'LL DEFINITELY PASS." IT WAS THIS SUBJECT THAT I SEEMED TO RECEIVE ANY REAL FEED BACK ON AFTER A GUY WOULD PASS THE GED.

IT'S TOUGH FOR ME TO UNDERSTAND WHY THE MAJORITY OF THE GUYS IN HERE DON'T TAKE ADVANTAGE OF PROGRAMS LIKE THIS WHILE THEY'RE IN HERE. YOU KNOW THEY'RE NOT GOING TO TAKE THE TIME OR SPEND THE MONEY IN PREPARING FOR AND TAKING THE TEST OUT ON THE STREETS. SO WHY NOT DO IT NOW? I FIGURE IT HAS A LOT TO DO WITH THE DIFFERENCES IN BEING BROUGHT UP, BECAUSE IT'S NOT LIKE THEY'RE ALL STUPID OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT. I HAD A BUNKIE WHO COULD STAND THERE AND WATCH TWO GUYS PLAY A GAME OF SCRABBLE. THEN AFTER THEY WERE DONE AND HAD PUT THE LETTERS BACK IN THE BAG, HE COULD TAKE THE LETTERS AND PUT THEM BACK ON THE BOARD THE EXACT WAY THE WORDS HAD ALL BEEN SPREAD OUT. SO HERE HE HAD THAT

KIND OF PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY, BUT DUE TO HIS SURROUNDINGS AS A CHILD, HE WAS ARRESTED AT 17 (HE'S NOW IN HIS UPPER THIRTIES) AND IT'S A LONG TIME BEFORE HE'S DUE TO GET OUT.

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT REASONS AN INMATE WILL GET MOVED. YOU COULD PUT IN FOR A TRANSFER, LIKE I DID AFTER 5 YEARS AT MY FIRST CAMP. IT COULD BE JOB RELATED. SOME OFFICERS WILL HAVE A GUY TRANSFERRED, BECAUSE HE'S ALWAYS CAUSING PROBLEMS. OR THE REASON COULD BE HEALTH RELATED. NOT ALL CAMPS HAVE THE SAME FACILITIES WHEN IT COMES TO HEALTH OR HANDICAP RELATED ISSUES. THE REASON FOR MY TRANSFER WAS HEALTH RELATED. BUT IF THINGS GO IN MY FAVOR, I SHOULD BE BACK AT MY ORIGINAL CAMP WITHIN THE YEAR.

THE FACT THAT I'M IN CLOSE CUSTODY HAS NEVER HAD ANY EFFECT ON WHETHER I COULD TEACH OR NOT. MY TEACHING JOB VARRIED BACK AND FORTH DUE TO THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT CLOSING DOWN AND REOPENING A NUMBER OF TIMES AT MY FIRST CAMP. AFTER ADDING ALL THE TIME TOGETHER, I REALIZE NOW I HAD ONLY TAUGHT FOR ABOUT 2 YEARS. AT ANOTHER CAMP, THEY DIDN'T HAVE AN INTEREST IN HAVING ME TEACH, BECAUSE I HAVE A NATURAL LIFE SENTENCE. YOU SEE, THEY WOULD RATHER TRAIN GUYS WHO ARE GOING TO GET BACK OUT AGAIN, SO THAT WHEN THEY GET RELEASED THEY'VE GOT SOME EXPERIENCE IN A PROFESSION. I GUESS I CAN UNDERSTAND THEIR POINT. BEING IN CLOSE CUSTODY DOESN'T MEAN I'M IN SOME CELL 24 HOURS A DAY, LIKE IT SOUNDS. BUT IT CAN HAVE AN EFFECT ON OTHER JOBS. LIKE I CAN'T WORK OUTSIDE THE FENCES; AT NIGHT TIME; WITH CERTAIN MACHINERY AND IN CERTAIN SECTIONS OF THE CAMP. I'M ALSO SOMETIMES REQUIRED

TO LIVE IN CERTAIN DORMS WITH THE OTHER CLOSE CUSTODY PRISONERS.

OKAY, NOW MY TURN. WHAT SUBJECTS DO YOU TEACH? HOW LONG HAVE YOU TAUGHT? WHAT GRADES HAVE YOU TAUGHT AND WHICH DO YOU LIKE BETTER? WHICH COUNTRY IN EUROPE DO YOU LIVE?

WELL, THE ONLY OTHER THING ON MY MIND IS TO APOLOGIZE FOR HAVING TAKEN SO LONG TO ANSWER YOU. THE SAME DAY I RECEIVED YOUR MESSAGE I ALSO RECEIVED A JOB FROM A FELLOW INMATE TO REWRITE HIS LEGAL WORK FOR HIS CASE. MY HANDWRITING HAS HELPED ME OUT IN HERE IN THE AREA OF EARNING MONEY. WELL, HIS PAPER WORK WAS OVER 30 PAGES AND I NEEDED TO GET THAT DONE FIRST. I'VE GOT SOME OTHER GOOD EXCUSES TOO, BUT FOR RIGHT NOW I'LL SAY GOODBYE AND I HOPE TO HEAR BACK FROM YOU SOON.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to be 'C. J. D.', with a long, wavy underline.