

You Rock, Mrs. Ferguson!

By Glenda Ferguson

I greeted my 28 fourth graders on the first day of school. One boy was wearing a sweatshirt with the hood over his head. I found out his name was Jason, and as the hood came off, I noticed glasses. Then, to my surprise, there were neon yellow wires coming out of his ears. I went through my list of students and the accommodations I anticipated. Nope, there was no mention of a student with hearing aids. Jason politely asked for his desk to be moved closer to the front of the room.

After reading over Jason's file, I requested a small loudspeaker and a headset microphone. I showed Jason how the speaker would sit on his desk, plus how I would wear the wireless mic, like a pop star. That began our improved connection and communication.

Each year I held student council elections. Jason expressed his opinion about making the school better and helping out new students. He didn't win, but I was very impressed with his courage and integrity. At the end of the year, Jason finally made the honor roll and accepted his certificate at the awards ceremony with his parents attending.

To make sure Jason had a smooth transition to fifth grade, I introduced him to his new teacher, and he showed her his audio equipment. The following year I saw Jason in the hallway. We spoke frequently in the beginning, but not so much as the days passed. Then all the fifth graders went to middle school, in a separate building down the road.

Five years later, before Christmas break, the entire student body assembled in the gym for the annual concert given by the high school choir. I always enjoyed seeing my former students. From the top of the bleachers, I tried to recognize the singers. One of them was Jason. I practically cheered out loud, "Good for you!"

After the songs, the director asked the singers to introduce themselves. One shy student after another whispered into the microphone, then dashed across the floor. Not Jason. He paused right in front of the mic and said his name clearly. But didn't move on. He scanned the crowd and asked, "Where is Mrs. Ferguson?"

My students pointed at me and yelled, "Here she is!"

Jason moved to the bottom of our bleachers. With both hands, he pointed up at me and said, "You rock, Mrs. Ferguson!"

Afterwards, I just sat alone in my classroom with a box of tissues and cried. From then on, I credited that moment as positive motivation for the rest of my 30-year teaching career.

After graduation, Jason took a job working at a store in my town. We talked a long time out in the parking lot about that school year.

As Jason walked away, I pointed and said, "You rock, Jason."

He pointed at me and said, "You do, too, Mrs. Ferguson!"