



TEDDY'S STORY

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There's a story from many years ago that tells of an elementary school teacher whose name was Mrs. Thompson. As she stood in front of her fifth-grade class on the first day of school, she told her children a lie. Like most teachers, she looked at her students and told them that she loved them all the same. But that simply was not true, because there in the front row, slumped in his seat, was a little boy named Teddy Stoddard.

Mrs. Thompson had watched Teddy the year before and noticed that he didn't play well with the other children. His clothes were messy and he constantly needed a bath. Teddy could be unpleasant at times. It got to the point where Mrs. Thompson would take delight in marking his papers with a broad red pen and making bold X's and finally putting a Big "F" on the top of his papers.

At the school where Mrs. Thompson taught she was required to review each child's past records. She put Teddy's off till last. When she finally reviewed his file, she was in for a surprise. Teddys first grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is a bright child with a ready laugh. He does his work neatly and has good manners. He's a joy to be around." His second-grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is an excellent student and well-liked by his classmates. But he's troubled because his mother has a terminal illness and life at home must be a struggle." His third-grade teacher wrote, "His mother's death has been hard on him. He tries to do his best but his father doesn't show much interest. His home life will soon affect him if steps aren't taken." Teddys fourth grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is withdrawn and doesn't show much interest in school. He doesn't have many friends and sometimes he even sleeps in class."

By now, Mrs. Thompson realized the problem and she was ashamed of herself. She felt even worse when her students brought her Christmas presents wrapped in beautiful ribbons and bright paper, except for Teddys. His present was clumsily wrapped in heavy brown paper that he got from a grocery bag. Mrs. Thompson took pains to open it in the middle of the other presents. Some of the children started to laugh when she found a rhinestone bracelet with some of the stones missing and a bottle that was one quarter full of perfume. But she stifled the children's laughter when she explained how pretty the bracelet was while putting it on and then dabbing some of the perfume on her wrist. Teddy Stoddard stayed after school that day just long enough to

say, "Mrs. Thompson, today you smell just like my mom used to." After the children left she cried for at least an hour.

On this very day, she quit teaching reading, writing and arithmetic and instead she began to teach children. Mrs. Thompson began to pay close attention to Teddy as she worked with him. As time went on his mind seemed to come alive. The more she encouraged him, the faster he responded. By the end of the year, Teddy had become one of the smartest children in the class. Despite her lie, he had become one of her teacher's pets. A year later she found a note under the door from Teddy telling her that she was the best teacher he had ever had in his whole life.

Six years passed by and to her surprise, another note came from Teddy. He wrote that he had finished high school third in his class and that she was still the best teacher that he had ever had in his whole life. Four years later, another letter came, saying that while things had been tough at times, he stayed in school and stuck with it and that he had graduated from college with the highest of honors. He assured Mrs. Thompson that she was still the very best and favorite teacher he had ever had in his whole life.

Four more years passed by and yet another letter came. This time he explained that after he got his bachelor's degree, he had decided to go a little further. Again, assuring her that she was still the best and favorite teacher he ever had. The letter was signed Theodore F. Stoddard MD.

The story doesn't end there. There was one final letter that spring. Teddy said that he had met this girl and that he was going to be married. He explained that his father had died a couple years ago and he was wondering if Mrs. Thompson might agree to sit in the place, at his wedding, that was usually reserved for the mother of the groom. Of course, Mrs. Thompson did. She wore that bracelet, the one with the several rhinestones missing. She also made sure she was wearing the perfume that Teddy remembered his mother wearing on their last Christmas together. After the wedding, they hugged each other as Dr. Stoddard whispered in Mrs. Thompson ear, "Thank you so much for making me feel important and showing me that I could make a difference." Mrs. Thompson, with tears in her eyes, whispered back, "Teddy you have it all wrong. You were the one who taught me that I could make a difference. I didn't know how to teach until I met you."

I heard this story while driving home one night as presented by Mr. Wayne Dyer. As I began to reflect over the years of my life,

I quickly realized the countless times I too, like Mrs. Thompson, had judged someone by their appearance. Such as the ones you see standing at the intersections with the signs that read, "Will work for food." How quickly I have judged these souls without ever considering what events in their lives have led them to where they now stand. As we each go through our daily lives, it is inevitable that we are going to run into those who just seem to be in the way or who don't quite live up to our expectations. You've heard the old saying that we should never judge another until you have walked a mile in their shoes. Our joys and our struggles in life come in many different forms, but we all share them. No one person is an island. You never know how one kind word or act of kindness might affect another.

The next time you see that waitress who seems to be having an attitude, or brings you the wrong meal, why not leave her a generous tip. The coworker who never has anything good to say about you, look for the good in them and mention it. The clerk down at the local convenient store who never has a smile on his face, try putting one on them. How about the man in the wheel chair who lost his legs, maybe he lost them fighting for our freedom? We would be wise to learn to rejoice with those who rejoice as well as mourn with those who mourn. No matter your walk in life, your color, race, religion, or background, we are all in this together. We are a universe. Uni meaning one and verse meaning song. As one sailor said to the other, "We all row the same boat." We are one song, now let's make some beautiful music. 💧💧
