

A great tomorrow

Local 8th graders practice living in real world

I found a poem I wasn't looking for, "The Garment Maker" by Gertrude G. Patterson, Assistant Professor of Education, Oregon College of Education, Monmouth, Oregon. Her poem was published, long ago, in the Grade Teacher magazine. I had cut it out, saved it and forgotten it.

I had a hard time finding the poem I was really looking for, "Why I Teach?" by Glennice L. Harmon. Both poems listed job descriptions and future careers that both writers envisioned for the youth of the 20th century.

Patterson's poem begins, "In teaching, I help to make the garment of character for each child." She recalled educational experiences that produced "the texture of the fabric." And she listed some of the future jobs for the youth "that cut the pattern for the garment."

Those jobs: "The tyro engineer drawing hydraulic joints on a spaceship to land on the moon; the embryo mechanic talking intelligently of 'G' and mach; the neophyte diplomat having faith in a United Nations; the budding missionary loving and beloved by all his brothers."

Patterson knew she might never see the finished "garment of character for each child," might never see "the completed robe." But she concluded her poem with the kind of optimism we all need concerning our younger generations.

"I look about me," Patterson

wrote, "and I find it good." I looked about me – one October morning in the Kokomo Memorial Gym surrounded by hundreds of 8th graders – and I also found it good. Oct. 29, 2003, was that crisp morning those Howard County 8th graders entered the Kokomo Memorial Gym to get a taste of "Living in the Real World!"

Those students came knowing their careers, their age (28 years old) and their monthly salaries. They went to 14 or 15 booths conducting their personal business armed with a calculator and a checkbook register.

As "adults" they paid taxes, rented or bought a home, bought furniture, paid utilities and did other transactions. Some bought a pet or two. Some ran out of money quickly and couldn't even afford a goldfish! "Big spenders" who ran out of money before the month was over could get a loan or a second job.

Dorothy Fisher and Kathy Chisholm and I were assigned to the Community Support Booth. Dorothy and Kathy were experienced volunteers, I was new. They explained to me what I needed to do and what to say to the students. Those ladies taught me well. They were "good teachers."

When students stopped at our booth we told them they could give money to a local charity like We Care, for example. Or, they could give to a national organization like the Red Cross. Or, they could give to their church. There were many choices.

I was impressed with how many students wanted to give money to a charity or church. Some who wanted to give had to go get a loan or a second job. Then they returned with a donation. I was proud of all the "givers."

We asked the students who stopped at our booth, "What's your career?" I made a list of their answers. And when I got home I looked for Glennice L. Harmon's 20th century poem to compare today's jobs with the jobs mentioned in the poem, "Why I Teach?"

Harmon saw the potential of each student and wrote, "There sits a statesman," a doctor, builder, minister, farmers, merchants, teachers and laborers. Harmon believed those students, in adulthood, would make "a great tomorrow."

The job choices of these 21st century 8th graders were: teacher, lawyer, armed forces, physical therapist, choreographer, business attorney, judge, business executive, computer operator, computer programmer, dentist, carpenter, chemist, actor, auto mechanic, orthodontist, minister, hair stylist.

Barber, pilot, cosmetologist, pharmacist, pediatrician, veterinarian, railroad worker, chiropractor, marine biologist, accountant, chef, firefighter, engineer, police officer, athletic trainer.

With such an abundance of job options, Howard County's 8th graders can make "a great tomorrow." Their realistic exposure to the adult world at the Kokomo Memorial Gym last month is a great head start toward that goal of "a great tomorrow."

During this Thanksgiving Season, I hope those 8th graders will pause and count their blessings. I hope they will be thankful for the Altrusa Club, Partners in Education and all the other adults in businesses and organizations (too many to mention) that made possible and welcomed them to "Living in the Real World."

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