

Ever Wish You Were a Cat?

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I hated school and I envied my cat, Fluffy. Fluffy was a black and white ball of fur who was content to laze around the house all day, sleeping, eating, and doing whatever it is that cats like to do. I, on the other hand, was an active boy expected to attend school, sit quietly at a desk and learn things I had absolutely no interest in. Oh, how I hated school, and oh, how I envied my cat!



There were days I would stare out the window imagining I was Fluffy, curled up in a big armchair, sleeping the day away. On such days, reading, writing, math and other assignments were not completed as they should be, because in my mind I had escaped to somewhere far away. Did I mention I hated school?

I can identify with some of the students I've witnessed my teachers agonizing over. Students with potential, who are not a discipline problem in the classroom, but appear lazy and don't want to work.

In a time before the letter categories became popular, I was not diagnosed with ADD or ADHD or as being oppositionally defiant (OD) or passively non-compliant (PNC) or any of the other exotic letter categories. I was simply categorized as L-A-Z-Y! Did I mention I envied my cat?

I vividly recall a long walk to school one morning in the rain. (I had to start out for school half an hour before I was to arrive at school, when under normal circumstances that trip only took ten minutes.) Standing on the corner of Main Street, waiting for traffic to break so I could cross the street, an adult stood next to me also waiting to cross. The adult looked at me and smiled, I looked up with no real emotion on my face, after all, I was on my way to school, and I hated school. Out of the blue the adult said to me, "My, I envy you, I wish I was your age again and going to school. You don't know how good you've got it!"

Meanwhile, I just stood there gazing at this individual who didn't have to attend school anymore. What do you think was running through my little elementary school mind? "Are you NUTS?!!!!! YOU are an adult. YOU don't have people controlling every moment of your life. YOU don't have teachers forcing YOU to do work you don't want to do – every spare moment of your life filled with uncompleted schoolwork that terrorizes not only your every waking moment but your sleepless nights as well. YOU don't have people telling YOU what to do all the time. YOU ENVY ME?!!!!!" Oh, how I really wanted to be my cat!

And now, years later I am a teacher. Why, I'm even a principal. What happened? Caring teachers are what happened. Teachers who did not label or endeavour to diagnose me. Teachers who observed what I did well and encouraged me. Teachers who saw my weaknesses and didn't make that the focus of our relationship. Teachers who took me by

the hand and guided me in ways to either compensate or overcome my problems. Teachers who cared not only in word but by deed. Teachers who went out of their way to help and develop a personal relationship with me.

I no longer wish I was my cat, Fluffy. I am fulfilled doing what I do. Unlike the adult standing with me in the rain so long ago, I don't find myself envying the children I watch on our school playground, wishing for a simpler time. I am content with the direction God led me in my ministry, and for the insights I bring to my profession because of my childhood experiences. There is nothing in the world I would rather do than share Jesus with my students as I lead them to knowledge.

I minister in a school where I daily witness dedicated teachers serving students who are not always perfect. They may be ADD, or ADHD, or even L-A-Z-Y – but to them it doesn't matter, because they look beyond the label to see the fragile hand of a child in need reaching out to them, and they are there to help. I don't think I can paint a better picture of Jesus than that. Can you?