

## A Fish Bowl Life?

*Carol Tardif, Former teacher of Deer Lake SDA School, Burnaby, BC*

In our church we discuss Christian education at great lengths. We spend time and money establishing and promoting quality Christian schools for young people. We hear wonderful stories of students whose lives have been changed by their school experience. Yes, Christian education is a valuable resource for today's young people. But how does it affect the teachers?

In Christian schools, not only do teachers need to meet the expectations of students, parents, community, and school administration, but they also are responsible to the church constituency and to the teachings of Christ. Many eyes are focused on their work. The budget is small and the expectations are great. Some may wonder why graduates with an education degree seek jobs where they make less money, work longer hours, and run programs on a small budget. Why do they allow themselves to live in a fish bowl?

As a graduate from CUC's school of education, I examined these questions. I understood that being a teacher in a Christian school would change my life and my outlook on life, but I never anticipated that God would use me in ways that I could not explain or understand. Now, as a former teacher with two years of experience at Deer Lake School (Burnaby, B.C.), I know that teachers are missionaries who are blessed with the freedom of sharing their beliefs, convictions, and faith with their students every day.

With my students, I quickly realized that the best part of my day was between 8:30-9:30 a.m.-our worship time and Bible class. More than half of my students were from non-Christian homes, so worship and Bible study were new experiences for many of them. For many, I was their only Christian example. I took this rewarding responsibility very seriously.

Instead of a "traditional" class worship made up of singing, reading a story, and praying, our times together were more unconventional-more personal and interactive. I told the students stories of my life-stories that had taught me valuable lessons. Although I didn't always look "good" in the stories, my students saw me as a Christian who was also a struggling human being.

But worship really began as I ended the story and asked, "Do you have any questions, comments, or concerns about what was said or anything else?" Nick would ask me, "If I will always be a sinner, how can I ever be "good" enough for God to save me?" Amy wondered why God "allowed" sin into the world in the first place. Rich suggested an answer to her question, but posed one of his own: If Jesus had to do it (Creation) all over again, would He do things differently? And our exciting, wonderful, unpredictable worship continued. During the year we talked about salvation, repentance, and teen issues. We talked and prayed together, but their questions and concerns prompted me to study, read, and pray on my own, asking for insight, for wisdom, for continuing joy, for enthusiasm, for close, personal connections with my students.

The students, although they saw my humanness, respected my role as their teacher. They appreciated my honesty and saw that I continued to grow in my walk with God. The students and I felt very close to each other, which helped at the times when discipline was needed. They learned that mistakes give them an opportunity to make changes, and they realized that obstacles could be overcome.

Our rapport played a pivotal role when I accepted a new position as Recruitment Officer for Canadian University College (Lacombe, A.B.). The students felt free to ask questions, make comments, and express their concerns regarding this career change. Although they were not personally happy with my choice, they could see the service opportunities that this position held. When I learned to surrender control to God, He used me to allow these children to grow closer to Him.

So why do some people choose to teach in Christian schools? For a multitude of reasons, but the greatest of these is the blessings they receive by being God's hands, God's feet, and God's heart to a classroom of students.

Christian teachers don't live in a fishbowl. Their lives are transparent glass which the students look through and see their Saviour.

Who could ask for a better job than that?

Edited by: Dr. Denise Herr

*\*Names of students used have been changed.*