

## What Makes Your School Great?

*Gina Walker, Teacher, Sandy Lake Academy, Bedford, NS*

It began during a simple lunch at a restaurant with a fellow teacher. The conversation started innocently enough. I was recalling my high school experience and the desire I had to provide a similar positive experience for the students at our school. My friend asked me a question that has changed my thinking and I hope my behaviour. "What made your school so great?" It was a simple enough question but the answer was complicated.

Every positive experience I could recall involved the usual: good friends, school activities, choir tours, etc. When I delved deeper, however, I realized that each of these experiences also involved distinct memories of caring, involved teachers who not only loved the Lord, but also loved us. Could this be why my current students seemed to be lacking in school spirit? Was it not their attitudes that needed adjusting but perhaps (gulp) mine? Was I so busy teaching the curriculum that I was neglecting to be involved on a personal level with my students? Could that make a difference?

We sat together right there in that restaurant and began to plan a special banquet for our high school students to end our week of prayer. It was a great success and very rewarding to see the positive attitudes of the students as they anticipated the event. It got even more fun when we told them if they provided the entertainment, they would only have to pay one dollar to attend. Our staff even decided to do a skit for the students, which was quite memorable!

I have since become the co-sponsor of our Student Association and have greatly enjoyed working with the students, fundraising and planning events to make their school experience "great". I want to be one of those caring teachers that I remember, for each of my students. Am I always? Of course not! But I have realized that it is up to each of us to get involved. When we do, the Lord will work miracles in our hearts and in the hearts of our students. I discovered that our school is full of teachers who love the Lord and also each one of our students. I would like to share with you some of the things that have been happening.

One teacher began a "Shoes for the Shoeless" drive. Our local food and furniture bank had had a fire and was in desperate need. Our small school of about 50 students collected over 600 pairs of shoes to donate! The following year we chose to do a "Mitten Tree". Some of our Bible classes offer extra credit for students who are involved with outreach activities. What a joy it was to see so many of our young people directly involved in the Revelation Speaks Peace meetings here in Halifax. We also have a group of students who began a "chat and pray" group that meets at lunchtime.

We have also started after school clubs for the students. Each teacher is directly involved in running a club of their choice. We meet every Wednesday after school. Some clubs we have had are: Newspaper Club, Yearbook, Students Association, Promotions and Witnessing, and this year we are starting a Puppet Club! Our Promotions team has worked very hard putting together programs and traveling around to promote our school. This not only helped our enrolment but also provided lifetime memories for those students involved.

This year, being the only female teacher on our high school staff I was rather reluctantly involved in our annual Secondary Retreat. What an experience! Each fall the students travel to our church camp in

Pugwash for two days of spiritual renewal and fun. Let me just say I will be reluctant no longer. When God calls us to step out of our comfort zones we must follow. He has great things in store!

These are some of the things that are happening at our school which I feel make it great. What is happening at your schools? Are you involved? Can you make a difference? I hope you do.