

# Inquiring Minds: THANKS-GIVING

Issue #36 Dec. 2015 “ ‘Dear old world,’ she murmured, ‘you are very lovely, and I am glad to be alive in you.’ ” — L.M. Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables* .

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## A SIXTY-TWO YEAR OLD THANK YOU FINALLY DELIVERED

I first met Mr. B. when I was six years old, but then I did not know his name. I was in his office, crying and upset that my glasses were shattered and that I had been run over by a fourth-grade girl as I stood on second base watching a kickball game. Immediately a very kind man knelt by my side and was speaking soft words of comfort and reassuring me that everything was going to be all right. Even then I was amazed how much he could calm me down, and I was mesmerized by his soft and kind demeanor. Moreover, I realized even at this young age that this was an exceptional act of kindness above and beyond the call of duty. The next year there was an opening at the parochial school, and so I changed schools without ever knowing the principal's name.



me at five or six

Sixteen years later, after high school and college, I met Mr. Battistini again. This time it was at the Belmont District Office, where he was the Assistant Superintendent, and I was applying for my first (and only) teaching position. Before I made the connection, he asked me if I was related to Jeff Barile (my younger brother) who had dealings with him as a volunteer tutor. Then, before I could inquire into my past encounter with him years before, he said, "Congratulations, Mr. Barile, local boy makes good," his way of telling me that I was hired.

## IN THE BACKGROUND BUT THERE WHEN NEEDED



Ed Battistini today, 62 years after we first met

For the next 20-25 years Ed's and my paths would cross in many ways, from working together on curriculum development committees to teacher negotiations where I often represented the teachers and he, the

School Board and Administration. During all of this Ed was upbeat, polite and friendly, and always found something funny to say to lighten the moment when times were intense. More importantly, Ed was one of those people who set the standard for me of what it meant to be a compassionate educator. Thinking about him off and on over the years, I finally decided to make contact before it was too late, for, if alive, he would have been close to ninety. I wanted to say hi and thank him for everything.

Google helped me locate Ed. When I phoned, and he was a sharp as ever. We had a short conversation since I caught him going out the door, but we have since corresponded by email, and I told him of our first meeting at Louis Barrett School when I was six. He sent me the affixed picture. I will send him this story of our 20 year reunion.

## GIVING THANKS LEARNED

The Gospel story where Jesus cures the ten lepers and only one returns to thank him has always puzzled me. Giving thanks was such a part of our lives, taught and modeled by our parents. Even our prayers were prayers of thanksgiving rather than petition. The very word Eucharist (communion) comes from the Greek word *eukaristia*, meaning "giving thanks." Our adult children are always thanking us for the little things we do, and visa versa. It gratifying to see our daughter teach Little Lois to be thankful, polite, kind and thoughtful. Her latest inquiry was, "Mommy, does God know more than Google?" Thankfulness is borne out of wonder, awe, and appreciation. Expressing one's thanks stops the action to recognize the good given and received.

So why do people not go out of their way to express their thanks and appreciation more? Too busy, too thoughtless, too self-absorbed, too fearful? I don't know, but so much is learned by the way we were raised, and for that I am very thankful.

## EMPOWERED OR ENSLAVED BY TECHNOLOGY: A CHOICE

As we know, progress has its ups and downs. The advent of writing diminished

the value and skills of memory. The typewriter lessened the need and skills for penmanship. The automobile, the need for exercise. The calculator, the necessity of knowing calculation skills. Antibiotics kill good and bad gut flora and created a host of drug-resistant bacteria, MERSA.

More and more is coming out about the poor quality of social interaction even in the presence of a cell or smart phone without actual interruptions. The very anticipation of interruption prevented both parties from being fully present. This diminished performance has also been measured when taking tests or performing other activities. Texters tend to be more terse (rude?) than even on email. Cursive writing has collapsed. Thumbs are worn out.

I imagine one of the most powerful tools of a smart phone is that it has a camera, making anyone a reporter of witnessed wrongdoing, an agent of change. GPS and map tracking is also pretty incredible. So is the ability to evaluate restaurants as one walks by them. I'm all for technology.

And yet, I am still reluctant to own even a cell phone. I choose to stay connected at home or at wi-fi friendly places with my ipad or ipod when I want to be. And yes, there are times when it would be nice to have one, but "emergencies"

just do not happen that often. If/when they do, I can always borrow a cell phone. I value my solitude, quiet, and plugged into their mobile devices peace of mind,



A family around the dinner table quiet, and plugged into their mobile devices

and resent the intrusion of telemarketers. Of course, I notice that more people are choosing not to answer their phones. People are managing their technology more and more, and not allowing it to manage them. Bravo! Of course, I am retired, and do not need to be open for business interactions. I understand that, and I only know what works for me...at least for the moment.

May your peace, thanksgiving, and mindfulness be hourly. Thanks for letting me share my stories and musings. -Joe