

Elementary School Experience

For the majority of my elementary education, I attended Twentynine Palms Elementary School, located in 29 Palms. I attended this school in kindergarten and 2nd-6th grade. I was lucky enough to never have a teacher I didn't like. I loved all of them. In particular, my 5th grade teacher Mrs. Buckles was someone who made me very confident in my skills. It was in 5th grade when I began to really struggle with math and despite working hard I often was behind and took longer to understand the problems. Even if I wasn't confident in myself, she always took time to help me through the problems. Telling me that I was up to the level of the work and that I was capable of solving harder math problems, she helped me succeed in math that year. Outside of that, I was her class librarian and she would often tell me how great of a job I did. As an introverted kid, those words of encouragement really benefited me and pushed me to do my best.

In first grade, I attended Palm Vista Elementary School, located in 29 Palms. At first, I began first grade at my previous school but had to change as my mom was forced to switch schools (due to being on the bottom of the totem pole at her district) and could no longer find a viable way to keep me at the same school. Because of this, I missed the first week or two of my school that year. Despite the late transition, my teacher Mrs. Stacey was someone I quickly bonded with and admired for her kindness and curiosity. One of my favorite memories about her was that she gave each of her students a copy of the magic treehouse books and signed a loving note in it. I cherished it for years after and it still sits on my shelf now. I always could count on her to believe in me.

Despite hating many forms of physical education, one of my favorite activities in school was p.e. My coach whom we all called Coach B, was witty, sarcastic, funny, and supportive. Always pushing us to do our best and knowing when we weren't trying he always found ways to make us laugh. My school was in the desert and in the summertimes some days could get up to 100s. Bottom line, it was hot. Even if the blacktop was burning through my shoes, all I wanted to do was to play some games with the other kids and laugh at Coach Bs jokes. When we had a running campaign for students, he was the number one motivator. Every mile you ran you could receive a mini keychain to add to this special bracelet. The more you wanted to earn the more miles you would have to run. As a kid, I hated running- I would've done anything over it. But with his support and belief in me I would run everyday, pushing myself to go farther and try more. Even if I still don't like to run today, I can enjoy it sometimes and it even helped me become a better softball player later on.

One of my favorite memories of elementary school was my kindergarten experience. I think this is where my love of learning began as I had two kindergarten teachers who loved their job. When I went to kindergarten, it was only a half day, because my mom is a teacher she had to be there for the whole day. There was no one to pick us up as my sister and I came to school with my mom so the solution was for us to attend two different classes. I remember having two water days, different friends, and plenty of craft's and learning ABC's. My primary teacher Mrs. Cooper was one of my favorites, all of our lessons were interactive including some form of movement, music, or creative aspect. Each holiday she would go all out- I still remember dressing up in an elf outfit and elf ears to take a picture. My memories of that year are all warm, I have no negative associations with the people there. I think my positive experience really set me up for success to enjoy the rest of my schooling as I grew up.

While I attended TPES I had a really strong group of friends. Until 4th grade my sister and I had different friend groups but they ended up combining when we had our first class together. I was really lucky to have a solid group of friends who all weren't afraid to be silly and have fun. I remember going to the school dance with my best friend and having the best time drinking root beer floats and eating too much pizza. We all danced without care of who was watching and dressed in the craziest costumes covered in glitter. I learned how to let myself loose with those friends and to not be afraid to show my own self. We had the same classes and grew upon each other. We became mirrors for each other in the best way- reflecting back the parts of ourselves that deserve to shine. Having solid friends in school is an essential part to a good school experience. They are the ones that can turn bad days good and create moments that you'll never forget.

My positive elementary school experience created the person I am today. I have a love for learning and a passion to teach others. The skills I began to develop are skills that I continued to work on and continue to work on now. I learned how to ask questions without fearing that I look silly and how to work together with other people who think differently than me. Beyond skills in the classroom, I learned essential life skill such as how to navigate relationships with friends and how to advocate for myself. Even the small bad experiences I had taught me invaluable skills that I still build upon now. Most significantly. The teachers I had inspired me to want to be the same role models for others. Their investments in me made me realize the impact actions can have on others.

Middle School Experience

For my middle school experience (7th & 8th grade) I attended La Contenta Middle School. Again, overall, I had a really good experience with my teachers. In particular, the art club teacher had the biggest impact on me. I had many opportunities to show off my skills as well as develop them as an artist. I was always extremely excited to walk into that room and be challenged to try something else new. Mr. Borges was a funny teacher who surprisingly taught stem and later introduced me to coding. I was one of the lucky few who was able to go to our local community college to learn in a college class. Once again, I had a teacher who believed in my skills and wanted to help me develop them further.

When I attended middle school, the only person I knew was my twin sister. Because of where we lived, we went to a school closer to where we actually lived because my mother only taught elementary school. So when we transferred, I didn't know anyone. During lunch before I really made any friends, my sister and I would often sit in the library together and play checkers. Luckily, we ended up making friends and created a big friend group so our lonely checkers games ended up becoming lively bonding sessions. It had taken awhile to make some friends and until then I had become fairly close to the school Janitor (Bob) and a lunch lady whose name I was always too nervous to ask about. Bob always had a smile on his face, laughing and joking with every student and even pulling pranks. My favorite lunch lady would greet me every morning and afternoon with a "Hello Elizabeth, How are you?" While these actions seem small, they really affected me. So much to the point I wrote them both letters when I moved onto high school. Often, I felt very alone as I was too shy to really talk to others. But I could always count on the two of them to greet me and treat me as if I was just any other kid. They had made me feel as if I wasn't invisible and that there was hope for me to make friends. They taught me an important lesson on to make sure to care about the way you treat others as you never know what they may be going through.

My favorite teacher at La Contenta was my 7th grade math teacher Mrs. Chang. Math was a subject I had a lot of anxiety over and was the only subject my mom refused my sister and I to be in the honors class for. This choice relieved me at the time and greatly benefitted me because I got to have Mrs. Chang as a teacher. Young and extremely caring, the moment you walked into her classroom you could feel the care she put into everything. Never was I more confident when I was in her room. Even when I was struggling to understand the math and work, she guided me in a way that made me feel like I was the one solving my problems. Many of her projects included a creative aspect that made me excited to do math. On top of that, she went above and beyond to motivate us, having donut days as well as insane prices for the tickets we would earn over each semester. She had a powerful gift for creating a special community in her classroom that inspires me to replicate as a teacher one day.

In 7th grade, I decided to make valentines for every student, teacher, and staff on campus. Done completely of my own accord, I expected to have to work alone for 700 different cards. To my surprise, I had many different classmates as well as teachers step in to help me out. What started as a solo project quickly turned into a collective effort. Not only did people in my school stepped in but the leader at the boys and girls club I attended donated money for me to give out lollipops to each of the students. This was a defining moment for me as I realized how quickly our community could come together to benefit everyone. The friends who helped me with the project are some people I still remain friendly with now and I have heard from past teachers that the impact they saw on students is something that still touches them. This helped me realize the impact of visibility on a person, when you show someone you care, it matters much more than were realize.

My middle school experience set me up for success in high school. It have me the room to develop myself further and create a sense of identity. The teachers again, impacted me deeply and their words are once again something I've kept with myself for years. The lessons I learned helped shape how I conduct myself in the world and informing me of how much my words and actions affect others. Waiting for others to take initiative means that something probably will never happen, learning to have the confidence to take initiative is something I try to keep with myself still and use to this day in the roles I work in.

High School Experience

Finally, when I attended high school (9th-12 grade), I went to Yucca Valley High School. My least favorite and most favorite teacher was named Mrs. Zacks. While she seemed cold on the outside, she was one of the most dedicated teachers on that campus. I had met her my freshman year and immediately she did everything in her power to give me more opportunities. She thought I should be in the honors biology class she taught and pushed me to always go towards every opportunity. In elementary school I tested for GATE but didn't make it. As the GATE coordinator at my school she believed that I should be a part of the program. She tested me again and later told me that she had to adjust the scales to make sure I was in. When I was younger, hearing that would've killed me. But because of her and my relationship with her all I had heard was "I believe in your skills, you have more in you than you believe." I have never forgotten her belief in me and still think about how she used to tell me that I would be able to conquer every problem I'll have. I had asked for a letter of recommendation for college and its still something I hold dear, she truly believed that my hardwork and dedication made me a great student.

During my freshman year, I got put into a biology class because I was considered an honors student. The honors biology where most of my classmates attended conflicted with my AVID class so I ended up taking a regular class with upperclassman. I still remember being so nervous walking into that room and that anxiety only raising as she went over her rules and expectations. With a list that felt taller than me, Mrs. Zacks had extremely high expectations for her students with specific qualifications that needed to be checked off to get credit for your work. Our daily assignment was our BILLS, what it stood for exactly is lost to me now. Those journals were specific notes taken on the chapters each week with our own hand drawn pictures and regulated highlights. Often, I think I cried over doing this assignment but looking back on it it set me up for success in multiple of my current college classes. While seemingly cold on the outside, Mrs. Zacks was one of the most caring teachers. Creating an outside garden for us to take care of as well as maintaining expectations for us in our other classes she taught me many skills that I have to use now.

My AVID teacher Ms. Moyer is someone who continued to support me even outside of the classroom. During highschool, I started to develop a lot of family issues, and struggled to keep school and home-issues separate. Her AVID class provided me with an outlet for me to let myself go and always feel free to speak my mind. She was always available to give me support or a listening ear. We had bonded over our love for organization and colored pens, when I left her class she gave me a gift of pens that I still use now. When I graduated high school, she bought my cap and gown because my mom was too much of a mess to fugue it out. She was always in the background of my life cheering me on, pushing me to always do my best and live up to my full potential. She was the one who pushed me to go to University to not be afraid to take a risk and try something new. Once again, she was a teacher whose impact still lives on within me now inspiring me.

Another favorite teacher was another AVID teacher. My senior year Mrs. Jay was hilarious sarcastic and witty. I had some extremely stressful classes my senior year and having her as a teacher really benefited me. Before we started each class we had meditation sessions or different forms of brain breaks. Often she would turn off the lights of the classroom to make sure focus on our breathing and to calm down from the heat. The calming skills as well as the breaks she taught us that year are techniques I still use now. Some of the quiet animal scenes are videos I even use with students I work with now. She had taught me how to remove myself from a stressful situation and how to calm myself down to be able to start again. While the organization I learned was important, the resetting I learned was also a vital skill that I often have to remind myself as a college student. She helped me learn some skills to mitigate the stress I keep in myself daily.

My schooling experiences shaped me into the person I am today. I have a deep passion and love for nature and gardening because of Mrs. Zacks, as well as a love for being organized. I learned that managing stress is just as important as managing my coursework too. These teachers didn't just prepare me for the academic part of college but for my life beyond school. They modeled different aspects of how to be a caring adult and teacher by setting high expectations, providing support and teaching useful stress reducing skills. Its because of them, that I am going to school to become a teacher and I am constantly pushing myself to become the best version of myself. Their impact is why I am in college and why I work with suns and why I believe so deeply in the power of teachers who truly see their students.

