

Last but not Least

You can make a difference

Mrs. Thompson was an elementary school teacher. Standing in front of her 5th grade class on the very first day of school she watched her students. There in the last row, slumped in his seat, was a little boy named Teddy Stoddard. His clothes were messy and his attitude unpleasant. As days passed by Mrs. Thompson took delight in marking his papers with a broad red pen, making bold X's and then putting a big "F" at the top of his papers.

Soon she received from the office the past records of her students for her review and she put Teddy's off until last. However, when she went through his file, she was in for a surprise. Teddy's first grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is a bright child with a ready laugh. He does his work neatly and has good manners."

His second grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is absent minded in the class and misses classes because of his mother who is hospitalized." His third grade teacher wrote, "His mother's death has been hard on Teddy. His father doesn't show much interest." Teddy's fourth grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is withdrawn and doesn't show much interest in anything."

Mrs. Thompson felt ashamed of herself. She felt even worse when her students brought her Christmas presents wrapped in beautiful ribbons and bright paper, except for Teddy's. His present was clumsily wrapped in the heavy, brown paper that he got from a grocery bag. Mrs. Thompson opened it. Some children began laughing as they saw a rhinestone bracelet with some of the stones missing and a bottle that was one quarter full of perfume.

But she stifled the children's laughter by putting on the bracelet and dabbing some of the perfume on her wrist. Teddy Stoddard stayed after school that day just long enough to say, "Mrs. Thompson, those are of my Mom. Today you smelled just like her." Mrs. Thomson could not resist her tears. On that very day, she stopped teaching subjects and started teaching children.

Mrs. Thompson paid special attention to Teddy and he responded positively. By the end of the year, Teddy became one of the smartest children in the class. A year later, she found a note under her door, from Teddy, telling her that she was still the best teacher he ever had in his whole life. Six years went by before she got another note from Teddy. He then wrote that he had finished high school, and she was still the best teacher he ever had in his whole life. Four years after that, she got another letter, informing her that he would soon graduate from college with the highest of honors.

Then four more years passed and yet another letter came telling her that she was still the best and favorite teacher he ever had. But now his name was little longer. The letter was signed, Theodore F. Stoddard, M.D. Yet another letter arrived that spring. Teddy said he was getting married. He asked if she might agree to sit in the place at the wedding that was usually reserved for the mother of the groom. Of course, Mrs. Thompson did. She wore that bracelet, the one with several rhinestones missing. And she made sure she was wearing the perfume that Teddy gave her as his Christmas present. They hugged each other and Dr. Stoddard whispered in Mrs. Thompson's ear, "Thank you, Mrs. Thompson. Thank you so much for teaching me that I could make a difference." Mrs. Thompson, with tears in her eyes, whispered back. She said, "Teddy, you have it all wrong. You were the one who taught me that I could make a difference. I didn't know how to teach until I met you."