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Saddened, but Proud

By Brian LaSusa (Brinckerhoff)

We, as teachers, model for our students a great deal…particularly with writing; write to inform, to entertain, to describe, to persuade, etc. However, one of the most important reasons for writing is to assist with the healing process from experiencing the loss of loved ones. We at Brinckerhoff have experienced such loss, as have the people of Van Wyck, and ultimately, the entire WCSD. I know that I am writing this as a part of my own healing, but also to show how proud I am during a time of great tragedy.

I have taught for thirteen years and never would I ever, in my wildest nightmares, have imagined the possibility of something so heinous as the loss of our Morey family. The last week has been the hardest time span, for me, in my teaching career, as I am sure it has been for my colleagues as well.

As I sat on the floor, this past Sunday, with my grade book and the NFL playoffs on TV, I was overcome with an overwhelming sense of fear and concern for how my students were handling what had happened. Regardless of the connection each of us had to the Morey children, they were **our** children, and they were loved. I needed to check on twenty more of our children to make sure they knew that they were loved as well.

So, an hour later, upon completion of the phone calls to each of my families, I sat back against the couch, let my shoulders drop, and cried….for the Morey family, for me, for our family of staff at Brinckerhoff, and for a community brought closer together by tragedy. Needless to say, Monday, January 22nd was going to be the hell of all Mondays.

It wasn't going to be a "normal" day by any means. It was as if the first day of school was upon me again. Jitters in my stomach, no appetite for breakfast, and a restless sleep the night before were all feelings I was familiar with, but not for the same reasons. I started off my day by driving past the Morey residence, thinking about how each day on my way home, I was behind the bus that let the two youngest boys off, where every day until now, I would watch them run up to their front door.

Upon arriving at school, colleagues and I exchanged warm, supportive grins and a quiet "Hey" or a gentle nod of the head while we searched and struggled for **some** sense of normalcy.

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The kids came in quietly, unpacked without the typical chatter, and began their morning work, for about ten minutes, before my class discussion began. After ninety minutes of tears, questions, more tears, and memories, more tears, fears, suggestions for healing, and…even more tears, we were able to slowly move along. We understood that it was going to be a difficult day, but before we knew it, the day had ended. We had begun moving forward, and, for that, I was saddened, but proud. And on my ride home that evening, I realized how many other things have given me that same sense of pride.

I am proud to be a teacher at Brinckerhoff and in the WCSD. It is a wonderful feeling to know that the children I/we work with are loved and given great care in our schools. I was so impressed to see all of those children return to school on Monday, while many of them, and their families, felt scared, confused, and just plain sad.

I am proud of our leader and friend, Ursula Platz, for handling this "family tragedy" with such precision. She has shown incredible strength for our school. She demonstrated quick thinking and planning to address what had happened but also has maintained order and structure. Ursula has done everything in her powers to meet the needs of our children, our families, and our staff, and we are truly grateful and feel fortunate to have her with us.

I am proud of our crisis team who met on numerous occasions within a short period of time (before school, during school, and after hours as well). They assured that we had a plan of action in place to handle whatever occurred…and they were beyond successful! (You guys were the best!)

I am proud of all our teachers who kept moving forward, with an extra watchful eye and a shoulder when needed, in order to show our children that they were safe and loved. News helicopters, T.V. crews, reporters, cameras, etc. could not break the focus and professionalism of this staff…especially Elise Siena and John Neevel…who were fortunate enough to have had Ryan and Adam in their classes for the time that they did!

I am, again, proud of our 600+ students, and their families. In the scariest of times, they trusted our staff at Brinckerhoff enough to bring them back to us, to let us be a part of their healing and help maintain the structure they needed. It would have been easier to keep them home, so I applaud and thank them for their efforts! Their courage and strength are unlike any other, and their children keep us going!

Finally, I am proud of all of our teachers/friends in the WCSD. You have sent your love and support in so many ways, and all mean more than you will know. Whether it has been through your thoughts, phone calls, cards, talks, or offers to help in any way, you have reinforced and reminded all of us how incredibly special the teachers and staff truly are in this district and why the WCSD is as successful with its children as it is. A special thank you goes to the Gayhead staff and their PTA for a comforting luncheon, and the Myers Corners staff for a thoughtful breakfast. They were special treats that gave us an extra boost when we needed it. Thank you all, from the bottom of our hearts, for making us feel loved and supported during this time!

In this remarkable and, at times, unforgiving world, loss is unavoidable for each of us in some form. We will never forget the Morey children, and they will be forever in our hearts. Additionally, we can learn from the saddest of times and from our children. By finding a way to simply put one foot in front of the other and surrounding ourselves with people who exemplify much of the "good" in this world, we learn how to move on, while never forgetting what we have lost.

Thank you, to all of you, for being the "good" that this world needs so much more of. This is why I am saddened, but proud.

January 1 – June 30, 2006 $369.60
Sept. 1 – December 31, 2006 $264.00

Total $633.60

On Your Side:

The Teacher Turned 403(b) Crusader - Dan Otter, Albuquerque

By Amanda Gengler
Reprinted from the December 2006 issue of Money Magazine

Over the nine years Dan Otter taught grade school, he grew increasingly concerned about how few of his colleagues participated in their 403(b) plan, a 401(k)-like plan for nonprofit employees, and about the poor investment choices they had. He was particularly outraged by the hard sell they got from insurers peddling the plan's high-fee annuity options. So, in 2000, Otter and a colleague founded 403bwise.com to educate nonprofit workers about 403(b)s and offer unbiased information about their investment choices. More recently Otter helped persuade the IRS to impose new rules, due to take effect in 2008, that should require better disclosure about 403(b) plans. In the meantime, if you have a 403(b), Otter urges you to sign up (only two out of five public school teachers do), steer clear of high-fee options and lobby your employer for low-cost choices if none are available (often the case). "We don't make enough as teachers," Otter says, "to be paying 2.5% for our investments."

WCT Position on Tri-States

- Teachers should do what they are directed to do, but only during their professional day
- Use Professional Development Days/Superintendent's Conference Days
- Use District Release time or compensated time
- Teachers should not spend time outside their professional day gathering Tri-State data unless they are compensated for that time
- Teachers should not be pulled from class at the last minute; sufficient time should be given to teachers for any Tri-State requests

Good News!

• Congratulations to **Krissy Werba** (KR) and her husband Michael, on the birth of their little girl, Janice Halina, born on January 15, 2007. Janice weighed 6lbs., 10oz.

• Congratulations to **Brian LaSusa** (BR) for being named in the National Honor Roll of America's Outstanding Teachers and in Who's Who in America's Teachers.

PR News

It has been a while since we last wrote this column because there has been no news to report. We NEED YOUR HELP! We have a couple of ideas, but we need two people from each of our buildings to volunteer to be on the PR Committee. This will not require hours and hours of painful work, but it will require a commitment of meeting once a month to work on public relations activities.

If you are interested in creating community bonds that will enhance our relationships with our public, do not hesitate for one more minute, and give your name and your home email to your Senior Building Rep. to join our dynamic duo.

WE NEED TWO PEOPLE FROM EACH BUILDING BY **February 15.**

Don't Delay, Sign Up Today!
Your adoring PR Chairs,
Emily Guthoff and *Ellen Korz*

TRS: Don't Listen to Faculty Room Retirement 'Gurus'

New York Teacher - January 18, 2007

Q: I recently attended one of your pre-retirement seminars. I have a question that I am confused about and keep getting different answers from different people. I am going to retire in June and I turn 55 in August. I am a widow and, since my children are 21 and 25, I have decided to take the maximum pension. People have been telling me I should take a lump sum at retirement instead of a monthly payout. Is this an option?

A: Please do yourself a favor and do NOT listen to the "faculty room gurus" There are no boilerplate solutions for different retirement situations; each individual has separate needs and preferences. You will be eligible for retirement on the day of your 55th birthday, assuming you have the necessary service credit. There is no option affording a lump sum payout! If you have additional questions, please call.

Q: I am thinking about retiring this year, but we do not have a contract yet and my salary is the same as last year. I have heard that if I retire before a contact is settled, my Final Average Salary would not take the new salary into account even though the district gives us a retro check. Is this true?

A: We don't know who is spreading that information, but it is erroneous. If you retire and then the contract is settled, notify the TRS. If retroactive amounts are provided for the years you worked without a contract, your retirement allowance will be adjusted retroactive to your date of retirement.

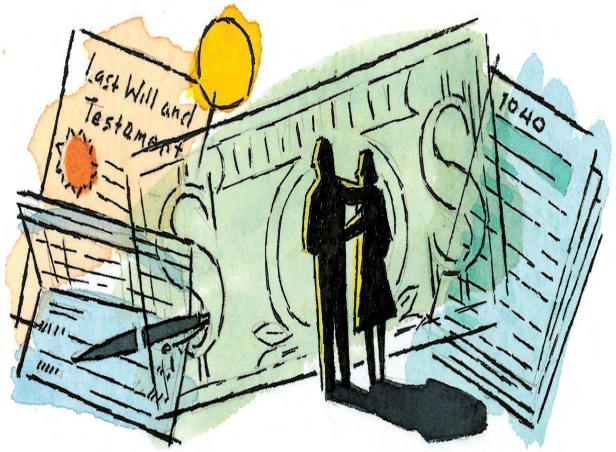
Q: I am an occupational therapist working in the public schools. I am not employed by BOCES. I work directly for the school system and am a member of the teachers union. I receive New York Teacher and read with interest the TRS article about retirement membership but I am a member of the New York State Employees' Retirement System, not the TRS. Am I eligible to be a member of TRS?

A: Certain classifications of positions are enrolled by state law in certain public pension funds. For example, teacher aides, occupational therapists and registered nurses are in the ERS. (This is not a complete list.) Teaching assistants, teachers and administrators are in the TRS. You'll notice New York Teacher periodically runs an ERS column with retirement information.

Q: At what age can I retire and get my maximum Final Average Salary? I am a Tier 4 member. Can I go at the age of 55 with 30 years in? Or is it age 62 with 30 years in? I will be 59 years old when I have 30 years in the system. I keep getting different scenarios from teachers in my district.

A: Tier 4 members are eligible to retire without penalty at minimum age 55 with 30 years of credited service. From your e-mail it seems that when you reach 59 you will have the necessary years, so that is when you can retire with 60 percent of your FAS.

If you no longer have the paper copy if the January 18th issue of *New York Teacher*, visit this web site: http://www.nysut.org/cps/rde/xchg/nysut/hs.xsl/newyorkteacher_6166.htm.



THE MORNING LINE re-visits *THE COMMENTATOR* to IDENTIFY:

THE TOP TEN REASONS WHY YOU KNOW IT'S 2007!

By Bill Green - Retirement Class of 1999

Number 10: Your most important directory is the one for USERS NAMES, PASSWORDS and LOGIN ID'S.

Number 9: When "lost" you now get directions from your cell phone or wrist watch!

Number 8: You keep entering your passwords when using your MICROWAVE!

Number 7: Your baby-sitter, your dog-groomer, your lawn-service guy, and your neighbors' kid's lemonade stand…all have WEB SITES!

Number 6: You're continually attempting to change channels on your flat screen rear projection plasma TV with your "cordless phone!"

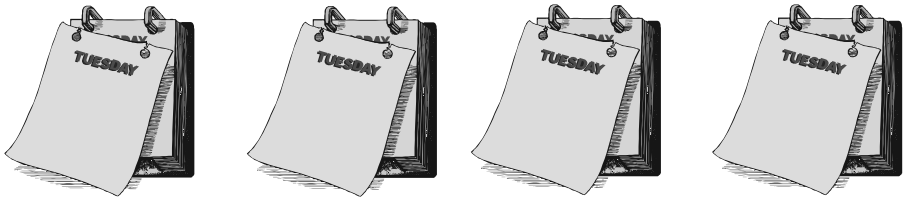
Number 5: You have 14 different phone numbers stored in quick dial for your "two kids!"

Number 4: You now have 875 different cable TV stations!

Number 3: You get more upset when you forget your cell phone at home - than when you forget to pick up your spouse at the mall!

Number 2: You need a personal secretary JUST to delete SPAM!

Number 1: You're more worried this winter about a "COMPUTER VIRUS than the "FLU!"



New Member News

Remember to RSVP by February 15th for the February 23rd WCT Rookie Party. By RSVPing for the party, you will automatically be entered in the raffle to win a WCT shirt. If you need directions, check out the WCT web site or call Linda at 227-5065. See you there!

Dates to Know

February 16-19 - Presidents' Day Recess
February 12 - BOE meeting (MC & FP)
February 22 - BOE meeting (VW & EV)
February 23 - payday
February 27 - R.A. meeting
March 9 - payday
March 12 - BOE meeting (WJH, VR, & OV)
March 23 - payday
March 26 - BOE meeting (KR & BR)
March 27 - Superintendent's Conference Day & R.A. meeting
April 2-9 - Spring Recess
April 6 - payday
April 10 - BOE meeting - (JJ & SR)
April 20 - payday
April 24 - BOE meeting - (RCK, OG, & MC)
April 24 - R.A. meeting
April 26 - 28 - NYSUT's Representative Assembly

the WCT COMMENTATOR

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The deadline for the February 23rd issue is **Monday, February 12th**.

Please send articles to the Meredith Inkeles at the WCT Office or to commentator@wcteachers.org

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Ed McKenna
845-471-7607
Edmundmckenna@optonline.net

FOR SALE: 2005 Hyundai Elantra. Red. 25,500 mi. AT/AC. Excellent condition. Asking $8,500. Contact Mike or Deb 845-896-6722.

FOR SALE: Many Fisher Price Rescue Hero action figures. Some are voice activated. Multiple children's computer CD games in great condition. Very reasonable. Call Steve @ 462-8557.

FOR SALE: Immaculate 2BR home, 1.5BTH, off Cedar Ave, Po'k w/ both deck/patio, fenced back yard $240,000. www.forsalebyowner.com #20736868 - call 702-8146.

FOR SALE: 2001 Toyota Rav4, white, L Package, 4WD, Automatic, 53,000 miles, many extras, excellent condition! Asking $12,500. Please call Ken or Kim for details (845) 297-3485.

FOR SALE: (3) Mount St. Mary College Graduate Level Class Vouchers. Valued at $1800.00 each. Will sell for $1000.00 each obo. Call Nora (845)-546-2825 or Rarie1513@aol.com.

FOR SALE: Used and Excellent Condition-Frigidaire Gallery Professional Series Convection Range. Ceramic Glass cooktop with radiant and dual radiant surface units, electronic oven controls and self-cleaning. $425 OBO. Call 229-5940.

FOR SALE: 2000 Honda Civic EX, champagne beige, 4 door, automatic,many extras,ONLY 41,500 miles,excellent condition! $8,500 Please call 297-5886 .If no answer, leave message and I will call back.

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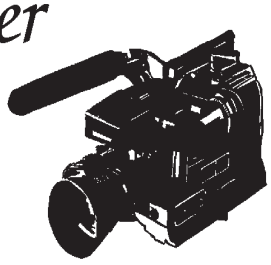
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