

Over the years many of us remember the impact our teachers have on us. And most all of us have a teacher or two who left a big impact on us.

Last August when we had Mass with the teachers, I shared a short story on one such teacher, written by Adela Anne Bradlee, "You Elevated My Spirit," writing about her first day of school in 1960.

She writes how they sat in their crisp, new school clothes, hands folded in front, fidgeting slightly. They looked at the declarations of true love engraved on their desktops, bequeathed to them from last year's class. As if practicing Braille, they traced the carved initials with their fingertips. Their eyes burned through the large clock on the wall, willing it to speed up. Finally, the 9'o clock bell resounded through the halls and classrooms announcing the beginning of a new school year.

The seconds ticked away as they waited for their new teacher to enter. They dared not speak, expecting to be caught by a hunched-over schoolmarm in a sweater fastened with a gold chain. Adela expected the teacher to peer at the kids through thick classes with pointed frames while

wagging her finger in admonishment. Heavy sighs filled the room, knuckles cracked, eyebrows questioned, shoulders shrugged.

Your grand entrance, Mr. Barlow, she writes, was worth the wait.

They watched him dash in, long wavy hair flowing behind him, leather tassels hanging off each suede sleeve. A white 10-gallon hat crowned him, a relic of an era gone by or maybe yet to come (for this was after all 1960). Removing the cowboy hat in a sweeping motion, he bent at the waist and raised himself upright. With a baritone laugh, he smiled and twirled his handlebar mustache.

“My name is Mr. Barlow,” he enunciated resonantly, then proceeded to write it on the board. Slapping chalkboard dust off his hands, he perched on the corner of his desk.

“Now tell me who you are and your favorite thing in the world,” he said.

One by one, the kids mumbled their answers, not knowing quite what to make of their new teacher. He taught the whole day, never explaining his

get-up. They found themselves smiling through geography, science, math, English and penmanship.

When they walked in the next day, he was in the same outfit and greeted each of the students by name: "Hello Suzy, who loves her Barbie dolls. And aren't you Tommy, who has three GI Joes?" As quickly as Mr. Barlow learned the kids names, he learned their strengths and weaknesses and they always found the positive in the kids.

Even, Adela reflects, Catherine. Adela had known Catherine since the first grade. She would walk into a room with her head down, then slink into her chair to become invisible. The teachers rarely called on her because she broke out in tears when she didn't know the answers. That was usually the case in math. They were studying their times tables when one morning..

"Catherine" Mr. Barlow cried out. All eyes turned to the panicked child, then back to Mr. Barlow. "Would you tell me what your favorite number is?"

After an uncomfortable pause, she whimpered as if being tested, "Nine?"

Excellent! That's my favorite number, too. Ask me why, he said with a sly grin.

"Why" the class all said in unison.

"Because." With a piece of chalk, he quickly wrote a shortcut to learning the multiplication table for the number 9. Catherine's face shone with her newfound knowledge and understanding.

"So Catherine, if nine is your favorite number, what number should you like twice as much?" He pointed to the board helpfully.

"Eighteen?" Catherine answered haltingly.

"Me too! I like 18 as much as 9. Which number do you think I like three times as much?"

And so it went, the kids' heads ping-ponging from Mr. Barlow to Catherine and back again until the lesson was completed.

Match over, Mr. Barlow deferred to the little girl sitting up proudly. "Take a bow Catherine," he said dramatically.

She did, and the class broke out in spontaneous applause. From then on, they rooted for her and all the Catherines in their class. Mr. Barlow elevated them, and then they took the lead from him and elevated one another.

Adela remembered clearly the day Mr. Barlow taught a lesson to Dennis, the class clown and occasional bully. Dennis had mercilessly teased a classmate, unaware Mr. Barlow had witnessed the unacceptable behavior. The kids held their breaths waiting for the teacher to put an end to the cruelty.

"Stand up, Dennis," he said sternly. Startled, Dennis quickly collected himself and laughingly got up. "Repeat after me," he continued. "I am ashamed of myself for making Mary feel bad."

Dennis repeated the sentence with a grin on his face, causing some of the class to giggle uncomfortably.

A few seconds later the bell rang, and the students were astonished to watch the usually unfazed Dennis slump into his seat, put his head in his hands, and sob in loud, gasping heaves. No one was more astonished than Mr. Barlow. He rushed to the side of Dennis while the other kids herded to recess. Mr. Barlow, the frontiersman, Adele writes, held the Huck Finn look-alike in his arms and talked soothingly in his ear. After 15 minutes of free play, the rest of the class had almost forgotten about the scene that had taken place in class. The kids came back in the room wiping their mouths after a hasty drink and looked over at Dennis. He was composed and looking very much like his old rascally self. They got out their old science books and waited for him to teach the days lesson. He did.

He turned to the class "As you know, I embarrassed Dennis earlier today. I want all of you to know that I am very sorry. No one has the right to shame another person. If I had a problem with the way Dennis was acting, I should have spoken to him in private. Anyway," he smiled to lighten the mood, "we've both learned something today, haven't we Dennis?" He winked at Dennis who turned scarlet and covered his face, his eyes shining brightly through his fingers.

All of the kids, Adela notes, seemed to excel at something in his eyes. Often he'd let Dennis tell the class a joke just before 3 o'clock rolled around. Catherine recited the times tables flawlessly by semester's end. And Adele says she got to follow in his footsteps. Not though by becoming a teacher.

There was a day when he gathered the kids around and finally revealed the reason for his eccentric appearance. He had been playing Wild Bill Hickock in the ongoing musical "Annie Get Your Gun" at the Palo Alto Community Theater. This elicited muffled "wows" as the kids, eyes wide open and mouths agape, knowing there was more to the story. Then he told them they were going to put on a production for the school. Their excitement couldn't be contained any longer. They wondered what play he had in mind and if parents could come and if there'd be costumes. He listened patiently and showed them the title: Cinderella. He wasted no time getting all the prospective actors to do a reading. When it was Adela's turn, she read with all the confidence he had instilled in her during the past few months.

At the end of the week, he cast the parts. She got the lead. Looking back though she says Mr. Barlow would probably not get the job as a casting director in a Broadway production.

Adela was a vision. White poster board adorned her head, topped with a trailing pink chiffon scarf. Stingy chestnut hair escaped the gold bobby pins entrusted to secure the peaked paper hat. For extra insurance, an elastic restrained went under her chin and encircled her already enormous ears, accentuating them even more. A borrowed taffeta prom dress, three sizes too big, tented over the hoop skirt. In her mother's dress heels, her spindly legs waltzed with each wobbly step. Blue eye shadow, expertly applied by a 9 year old, caked her lids, and ruby lipstick smothered lips frozen in a permanent smile.

For one night, Adela says she was a beautiful princess; but for a lifetime, she would be a self assured woman.

On the outside she looked more like one of Cinderella's nasty stepsisters than Prince Charmings Bride to Be, but on the inside she glowed. A glow



she says that Mr. Barlow ignited and time would never diminish, a glow that Dennis and Catherine and she will pass on forever.

While not all of us teach in a classroom, all of us, through our baptism and confirmation, are indeed teachers. And this week's Gospel invites us to think about the question how exactly do we teach?

The Gospel tells us Jesus teaches with authority. So what does that mean exactly, and how do we approach it and use it if we are truly a priest, prophet and king?

As a starting point, we ask ourselves do we trust God as the authority in our lives, and also the Church He created to help guide us? We are all familiar with the term "fake news" and indeed there is so much to be skeptical of these days. But over the course of our lives, we also learn there are guiding principals that help shape our conscience. We learn that yes we have free will but this can be misused, but when we listen to God and also are open to being guided by the Church, which Jesus created to help us learn faith and morals, we can find true happiness in our lives. Adela makes no mention of Mr. Barlow's faith, but it seems clear he was

guided by having something hard wired in him of loving one another as I have loved you, and of the dignity of the human person. These are the things that God gives us, but to learn more about them, it requires that listening that I've mentioned the past few weeks, and a trust. When we listen to God and the Church, and learn how to say yes to some things and avoid others, and temper our feelings too so we don't act irrationally, or just based on emotion at the moment. Just as a teacher is formed by other teachers at a university and then student teaching, we are formed by listening to God and that guidance He and the Church gives us.

We then take that, and live it out. And here's where Mr. Barlow has a lot in common with Jesus in the Gospel. Note what Jesus does. He speaks with authority to help the man, and restore this man to a fuller life. Mr. Barlow did that for Adela, for Suzy, for Dennis and for all his students. And what struck me with his story is here is a man who cared so deeply about all the kids, but used his authority wisely. He got creative in his teaching. He led by example, showing humility when he made a mistake with Dennis. And he brought out the best in all of the kids. It begs the question for you and me, how do we use the authority God has given us? We can lead by example through our works of love and mercy. We can show compassion

at home in the things parents do for kids; we can show humility like Mr. Barlow for apologizing when we make a mistake to our kids and spouses. We can go the extra mile for others. And we can speak the faith and testify to it even when it may be challenging to do so. In seminary we took retreats each year, and in life we need to do that too - more of the mini-retreat variety for most of us, where we get introspective and ask ourselves how are we doing in our vocations, and do our actions bring people to the faith? We can do that when we use authority in the right way like Jesus shows us.

This week starts Catholic Schools Week across the country, and it's been such a joy to see many "Mr. Barlow" moments here at Saint Joe's. In talking to Mrs. Kelly Roche our school principal, she shared with me how teachers love the students so much, going above and beyond to show it. For instance our 2nd grade teacher (Ms. Grace Milbrandt) and our 4th grade teacher (Mrs. Karianna Frey) both attended a student's hockey game on a Saturday recently. Last year, a group of middle school teachers and Mrs. Roche attended The Nutcracker Ballet at Christmas time to see an 8th grade student perform. And just this week, Mr. Hale attended Mrs. Roche's son Liam's (SJS class of 2020) Varsity basketball game. Visiting

classrooms, it's so great to see teachers who care. They want to make a difference in the lives of these kids, and they are doing just that.

As the vice rector of the seminary put it to our class just before we were ordained, he said you can either be a station manager or an entrepreneur, meaning you can go in and just keep the lights on as a priest or try to help a parish grow. That's the choice for us all. To do as we sing in the song, go and make a difference. Though we might not always recognize it, we have such authority in our lives, and the power to change lives for the better and to be a Mr. Barlow. Inside each human being is such potential for greatness, it just takes a bit of work to bring that to the surface and change hearts and minds. May our actions and words do just that as we live out the faith, learning from the Master how to use the power God has given us to help people find happiness, peace, and sainthood.