

My name is Tawni Deike; I live in a very sheltered, small Northern Michigan town and have lived in the same 4 mile radius my whole life. I am the youngest of three daughters of my hardworking traditional parents. I was not at all planned; born eleven and thirteen years younger than my sisters, I was called the “caboose” of the family.

My parents met in high school. My mother is one year older than my father and they were married days after his senior year of high school. My father always was and, at sixty-two, still is a workaholic. Throughout my childhood, he was a builder and a farmer. I was raised in the country on a farm with sixty-plus sheep, horses, cows, and more. My mother was a stay at home mom. This was her choice, a result of her own upbringing. She was raised in foster care without a mother of her own and was dedicated to being the best mother she could be to the three of us. As I entered upper elementary and my sisters went off to college, my mother began to work outside the home. It began with subbing in the kitchen and various other para-professional positions at my school and then a substitute librarian at our local, small town library. As I progressed into middle school the substitute librarian position turned into a position as Library Director. It was a perfect fit for her; her love of reading and children had found their match. I can remember as a child sitting on my mother’s lap in a rocking chair while she read me book after book. It was a time for us to relax and snuggle as she taught me much of the world through the beautiful words and illustrations on the pages.

My parents hardworking, penny pinching ways were instilled in me early. They valued every dollar they made and would not spend them unwisely. We rarely took family vacations or went out to dinner. Instead we sat at the table as a family and shared our stories of the day. Due to this nurturing and yet high expectation family dynamic, I

did well in school. I was always a strong student; learning came easy to me. I would complete most of my work in class resulting in very little work to be completed at home. I was an A/B student, but was encouraged to do better. I was always striving to meet their high expectations and be the very best that I could be.

During my impressionable middle school years, I watched my sisters find long-term high school boyfriends. This followed the pattern of my parents and seemed to be the way life was meant to progress. Therefore, I have followed that pattern as well. I met my husband as a freshman in high school. We dated all through my high school years and married the following summer. We have now been married for 12 years (some of which have been extreme struggles) and have a 5 year old daughter. Of the three of us sisters, I am the only one to maintain the high school sweetheart relationship. After watching theirs break apart I knew I wanted to be the “perfect daughter” and follow my parent’s marital example.

Because of the closeness of my family and the value they taught me to have for my community, I have lived in the same area my whole life and am VERY active in what is happening. Civil service and giving back to the community that gave to me is HUGELY important to me. Both of my parents are my role models for this important value system. My mother had a dream to build a new library and with the help of the entire community we have a big, beautiful new library & community room. There were donations of land, labor, and money to make such a dream come true. My father on the other hand is on every board imaginable; they include township, zoning, ambulance, and more. With those shining examples I am an active member of the village council. My husband and I also voluntarily run the band program at our local school after they had to

cut K-12 music due to budget issues. And not to forget, just last week we organized the first ever Block Friday community party for the townspeople. All of these actions and activities I hope will instill in my 5 year old that it is important to give back to the community that gives to you.

I attended the same school K-12 and loved every minute of it. I was a good student and loved being in a small school where everyone knew each other and just about everyone was your friend. I met my husband in high school and have very fond memories of the time spent there. That brings us to today, just days before the first day of school in this, my eighth year of teaching. I received the opportunity I've longed for since I was 18 years old—to teach at the high school I attended K-12. It's a part-time position and a cut in pay. So why would I do such a thing? It's another way I can make a difference in my community with the kids I see in my neighborhood and the families that I call friends. I can have my daughter experience the pleasures that I experienced in my childhood and learn to love our community just as much as I do. After spending just a few days in this new adventure I can see some differences in the cultures of the students today compared to when I was in school. They are a little rougher around the edges but they are kids and I love spending everyday with them.

My experience with communicating with people who are not native speakers of English fall into two distinct categories: my Italian neighbors that I had while growing up or exchange students I have had the pleasure of having as students. My experiences with my neighbor are primarily with the mother of the family. She had three boys and enjoyed the time that I would spend with her. Her English language was pretty strong and we didn't have much problem understanding each other. Her husband on the other had was

very difficult to understand and relied on his wife heavily to interpret for him. Because of this, my father rarely went to visit them; he always wondered if the husband was talking about him. One instance of a cultural difference with this family was their rituals associated with death. As a teenager I remember when the wife's mother died. As part of their culture she wore black for a year after the death. My second category of communicating with people who are not native speakers of English are the many foreign exchange students I've had over the years. In most cases their English ability has been strong and therefore no cause in communication/miscommunication issue. The one exception to that was a foreign exchange student I had in class last year. I teach math (which is supposed to be the universal language); unfortunately, many of the key vocabulary terms were unclear to her. Considering her placement in calculus, terms like slope should have been clear. The result was for her to move down to the less difficult class. To this day, I'm not sure if it was truly a language issue or a desire to not be so challenged.

My only experience with learning a new language was my couple of years of Spanish instruction during my high school years. I had a great teacher and did ok. I did not have a real interest in learning Spanish as I had no intention of leaving Northern Michigan and thus didn't see the necessity of it. I can say however that I have had a couple of experiences with Spanish speaking individuals during my years of retail that has shown me it might be more valuable than I had first believed.

Lastly, and most importantly, when I think about my students with diverse backgrounds and how they might be different, I tend to believe that I can't categorize them based on these diversities. Kids are kids. My job as a teacher is to learn who they

are as individuals, build relationships with them, love them, and recognize that ultimately everyone has the same goal—for them to be successful, regardless of any diversities they may be faced with.