

God bless all the Mrs. Brocketts

By Ken Shrum



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Everyone has one, and mine was Barbara Brockett. She was my public high school history and government teacher. Though I am approaching the end of a second doctorate, Mrs. Brockett impacted my life in monumental ways like no other teacher I've ever had. What was it that made such a difference in my life? How does a teacher do this?

It is time for us to pray for our teachers as they enter another year of trying to make a difference.

Mrs. Brockett taught us to love history, especially American history. She is the reason I know:

- There are three branches of government: legislative, judicial, executive.
 - America was founded on a robust federal system structured as a representative republic.
 - America was founded in liberty and is still delivering that liberty to all her citizens.
 - Given time, the system works for all.
 - Jettisoning the system is fatal to a free society.

She was thoroughly pro-American, but measured and circumspect.

She is the reason I know that every state has two senators, totaling 100, and that the U.S. Senate is supposed to operate as "slow as molasses" through what seem to be tedious rules in order to help the nation avoid making rash political decisions.

She taught us how bills are introduced and laws are passed – introduction, conference/negotiation, then resolution.

Mrs. Brockett taught us that the U.S. House of Representatives has 435 members apportioned by the population of the states. She taught us why the Electoral College exists, namely so that the outcome of any given national election would truly be representative of the entire nation and not just a few highly populated states.

She was an originalist when it came to the Constitution. All of this I learned in my junior and senior years.

Mrs. Brockett suffered no fools. She accepted no excuses. None. If you told her you were dumb, she would firmly say, "No you're not."

She demanded (not requested) excellence and hard work. She was able to get good work out of her students, not by padding grades but by demanding excellence.

If you told her you were poor, she would tell you to quit complaining and get to work. She was raised poor, and she always told us that poverty was no excuse for a lack of hard work and excellence.

Then privately, with no fanfare, she would cover some of the lunch fees of her poorer students. I saw her privately cry over some of her students. A heart of velvet covered by a layer of steel.

She even bravely confronted some parents who thought she was

picking on their little Johnny or Jenny by demanding so much of him/her.

It wouldn't have done those parents any good to ask the other students. We all knew Mrs. Brockett was right and that Little Johnny/Jenny was lazy. We were very protective of our demanding but loving teacher.

Mrs. Brockett taught us that none of us had a right to be prejudiced against another person because all of us were from somewhere else, immigrants to a great land of promise and possibility. In fact, this was the first time I paid any serious attention to my German/Scotch/English heritage.

Mrs. Brockett taught us about the horrors of slavery and the heroism of Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, and those early revolutionaries who sacrificed everything to found a new nation conceived in liberty.

She did not demonize our founders but taught us that "Providence" used men and women with feet of clay to form a union of people and states that could become "a more perfect union" with the passage of time.

She taught us that our rights are few but precious, and they are not granted to us by the state but are unalienable rights granted to us by God and protected and promoted by the state.

She taught us about socialism and communism, but had no tolerance for them as systems of government. She taught us that the free market remained the best system even when it sometimes got out of balance.

Mrs. Brockett demanded things of me other teachers didn't. At the time, I was more interested in being a jock. I was lazy in the application of my God-given faculties, I was told. I was an overall B+ student, but I made an A in Mrs. Brockett's class – the best grade I ever received from any teacher.

I earned it because I met her demands. She gave it because I tried to excel to please her.

She attended my ballgames, and loved and laughed with her students. She was one of a handful of teachers who deeply impacted my life by demanding excellence, suffering no excuses, teaching me to wisely love my country, and loving me enough to make a difference in my life.

She has passed, but the older I get the more often I think of her. I thank God for Mrs. Brockett. As the school year begins, let's pray for our teachers as they embark on what may be one of the most unusual years in their teaching careers.

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