

TRAILBLAZERS!

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To have a great mentor is an honor, but it took me a while to even want one at all.

When I was a high school sophomore, I lived my life from moment to moment, giving little forethought to anything except perhaps what I was wearing to school that day.

Early on, I had made a conscious decision not to care about school. There was turmoil in my family. I lived in a basic state of depression and was cynical and defensive. Teachers tried to connect with me and help me, but I pushed them away. I didn't want anyone's help and had an amazing ability to convince everyone I didn't care.

In my freshman year, I failed the first half of Spanish class and got kicked out for excess cutting. I was placed in a different Spanish class taught by a spitfire named Mrs. Victoirre, who saw through me immediately, and let me know I wasn't about to mess with her. No other teacher had been so straightforward with me, and I wasn't ready for it.

So, I fought her. I acted aloof and sarcastic. One day I reduced her to a yelling match in the middle of class, humiliating her and turning the class against her.

Afterward, she told me how hurt she was. I still remember how terrible I felt, but I had dug my hole so deep that apologizing was out of the question. I was truly a bully, which is just another word for coward.

The following year, I walked into my honors English class, and was overjoyed to find, once again, Mrs. Victoirre. She flashed me a devouring grin — “ready for me this time.”

During the previous summer, I was taking care of junior high/high school members and, for the first time in my life, I was forced to be concerned with something other than my miserable self. For months we struggled to create something that would inspire our peers. While I gathered SGI President Ikeda's guidance, I began to open my heart a tiny bit and let his words sink in. Somewhere, buried inside me, was a desire to become the happy and powerful person he was trying to tell me to be.

My first paper from Mrs. Victoirre's class came back with a big red D. I was ready to give up, but something inside had shifted. I semi-reluctantly went to Mrs. Victoirre for help. She immediately took me under her wing, and worked me harder than I had worked in my entire school career. In a short time, I became the example to the rest of the class. Mrs. Victoirre went from being my fiercest enemy to my fiercest ally. Of course she had never considered herself my enemy at all, but, until I opened my life, I could not learn anything from her. That experience was the visible beginning of my human revolution, but it had really started much earlier. I decided to open my heart to President Ikeda's heart and his encouragement, and instead of one amazing mentor, I found two.