

My Favorite Math Teacher--Mr. Hanson

1922 - 1982

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It seems like only yesterday--I was a high school student majoring in English with plans someday to become, of all things, a teacher. I attended a small high school--there were only 40 students in my graduating class--so we were "blessed" (usually!) with the same teacher for several consecutive years. It was not until I found myself in college a few years later that I learned how truly blessed I had been in math. Mr. Robert Hanson of Tavares High School was a great math teacher.

As I think back to Mr. Hanson's classroom, I was a good student, but certainly not his best. Mr. Hanson was so good at motivating and encouraging his students, he always had dozens of students that excelled in his classes. These were the students who set the curves and took the top honors. I just worked very hard, trying to keep up.

I was blessed to be in Mr. Hanson's class for 4 years of math. I remember one year, he was out sick for a week, during which time we had a substitute teacher. During that week, the class was so confused, not able to understand or do the homework. When Mr. Hanson returned, he asked in his usual cheery voice, how we were doing. When we told him how confused we were, he stepped to the board and said, "Oh that's not so hard! Just do THIS!" And in a few minutes, he showed us how very simple the entire week's work really was! We learned that day that SOME teachers (but NOT all!!) have a special GIFT of teaching. In later years, I learned that many who claim to be "teachers" are not really teachers at all! Math was SO much easier to learn from a gifted teacher like Mr. Hanson!!

The thing I remember most was homework! Mr. Hanson believed in lots and lots of homework. I must have spent every night of my four years of high school doing math homework. "Practice, practice, practice, . . ." "Math is not a spectator sport!" However, there was something about Mr. Hanson's explanations that made math easy to understand. Not only that, but his classes were fun. He was lively at the board, cracking corny jokes and telling silly stories. But make no mistake about it, when it came to learning math, for Mr. Hanson, it was serious business. He set high

standards for his students, and we met his high standards to the best of our abilities. Most importantly, however, Mr. Hanson was our friend. He always celebrated and shared our success in his classes.

It was not until a few years later, as a student in calculus, that I realized how much math I had learned from his classes. My math skills were better than my English skills. Only recently, am I realizing how much I learned about teaching from his classes. Good teaching, like being a good student, is hard work. It takes years of practice to develop the art of teaching, to develop skills and strategies that will motivate students to do their best.

So, in conclusion, aim high--be a teacher! And if you become a teacher, set your goal each year to be a better teacher than you were the year before!

Note: This article was written by me in my younger days, as a math instructor at Seminole Community College. In retrospect, my goal for all these years has been to try to be a math instructor like Mr. Hanson.

Note (Decades later!): Mr. Hanson's Meterstick! October 7, 2018

Soon after Mr. Hanson's death in the early 1980s, his wife Ivadelle gave me Mr. Hanson's math books. Just this week, among all the yardsticks we have collected over the years, I happened to see on the end of the meterstick in the assortment, the name "HANSON." It was about 35 years ago that Mrs. Hanson gave me that meterstick, and I had forgotten where it came from. I never knew his name was on it. For all these years, I did not know that I had inherited Mr. Hanson's meterstick, the one he used in all his classes to teach measurements and the metric system!!



by **Dr. Robert J. Rapalje**
Central Florida, USA