

Tribute written by Paul Jones, Feb. 2017

Christine Jones has had a teaching contract for as long as we've been married. By the time I started my second freshman semester at BYU she was in her first classroom, teaching first grade at Mapleton School under her mentor, Principal Ralph Paulson.

I remember sitting at the kitchen table with her one night in August 1979 in our little cinder block student apartment in Orem. She had been teaching all day and was working her guts out all evening preparing materials for the next day. I sat there watching her and I couldn't believe how strenuous this job was. Later I visited her classroom for the day. I remember giving camel rides to the students at recess. I don't know what I did during class time, but by the time the children had left I was exhausted. I was flat on my back on the floor of that portable out behind the school while she quietly graded papers.

One night her second year I was helping her put up a bulletin board. She was 7 or 8 months pregnant with our first child Christopher. I still remember her clambering up on table tops, on her knees, stapling construction paper to about five miles of surface area. I couldn't believe the physicality of teaching young children.

I have visited each of her 37 classes over the years. I have had time to just watch her work in front of the class when the students' attention wasn't focused on me. As I watch her manage the classroom it doesn't seem hard. Her eyes see wall to wall, but more importantly, they know what they are seeing and what they need to see. She handles turbulence matter-of-factly. She dispatches with interruptions efficiently. She knows when to draw them out, and when to tamp them down. When she snaps her fingers I snap to attention! I've gotten the finger snap at home!

When she stands in front of the class, they all know who is in charge. I can tell that they trust her implicitly.

Researchers say that it takes about 10,000 hours to become an expert at something. By that definition Christine became an expert teacher around 1991, in her eleventh year. She has been very good for a long time. She has taught multiple generations of some families. Her students are now the salt of society, professionals, business people, homemakers, craftsmen. I'll never forget the sensation of hearing that one of her early troublemakers, a kid I heard about every single day, was now living in the area and practicing as an OB/GYN. At least one of her children is a successful author, with books selling on Amazon. One of them ministered to my own mother during the last 18 months of her life--one of the girls I gave camel rides to that first year.

The year Chris started teaching Jimmy Carter was President of the United States and no one had a VCR or video camera. No one owned a personal computer. The internet was a government research project. The USSR still existed and the Cold War was in full swing. Hostages were taken at the US Embassy in Tehran, Iran. Johnny Carson was still at the helm of the tonight show.

The year Chris became an expert teacher, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and set in motion the Gulf War. The next year the Soviet Union dissolved and the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings were being broadcast live on the radio.

During the time Christine has been teaching Jay Leno has joined and departed the Tonight Show twice. Dan Rather, Tom Brokaw, Peter Jennings. and Brian Williams have come and gone. Six different US Presidents have been elected. The Cold War has given way to Islamic extremism, Al Qaeda has given way to ISIS. Microsoft and Apple have ascended to power and then made way for Google. The Internet has transformed life on earth. Michael Jackson has lived his adult life. We've seen a president impeached, the Trial of the Century, the nation attacked, and an international financial meltdown. Reading and math instruction have been re-thought and re-thought again. Accountability testing has risen up to the neck of teachers and now the water level may be subsiding. We've been through three wars and seen the number of genders grow from two to 63 by one count.

In all that ebb and flow and turmoil I know of at least one constant. Christine Jones has stood in front of school children in good times and bad, in health and sickness, and in every kind of weather. She has been there every day with few exceptions, carrying out her mission. Her identity has been molded around the rhythms of the school day, the school week, and the school year. Yes, she's getting older. No it's not quite as much fun as it used to be. Yes, 37 years is a long time to give yourself to one thing and she has a gleam when she thinks about what might lie ahead. But the wing nuts and knot heads still drive her as crazy as they ever did, and the good kids, the majority, still elicit a sigh of pleasure. She still loves them, and she will go out loving them.