

SCHEHERAZADE

A Love Poem

Over the years of one life in music,
You will bury students and play violin at their funerals.

You will arrive at school on a Thursday morning
And a colleague will have died the night before,
And her family will ask you to play Massenet at the funeral.

You will conduct the chamber orchestra many times
For the parents and grandparents of your students.

You will comfort a violist whose dad died,
Driving him home from school, in a terrible accident.

You will be a pall bearer for the choir teacher
And go to his home early on Sunday morning
And put your arm around his son, a French Horn player,
And twenty-five years later you will go to his wake
And cry with his mother over his long death from ALS.

You will think about mortality
And know that no class in college prepared you for this,
Because though your professors were important,
They were eighth note passing tones in your life.

You will remain friends with former students,
While they battle cancer, and die too young
But before they die, while sharing coffee,
They will laugh and say their best memory of orchestra
Was the smell of oranges on your fingers, under their nose,
As you tuned their violin, after lunch in the elementary
gym.

You will awake with a start in the middle of the night
And realize you are the only music teacher still living
From your first years of teaching.

You will mount all the still life portraits of students,
parents,
Colleagues, and administrators in the simulacra of your
mind
And watch the memories like movies.

Not once did you quite understand this tapestry of life and
love

Was being woven around you while you taught *Twinkle,
Twinkle*
Go Tell Aunt Rhody, and *Nimrod*, and the seniors
Watched you through a sheen of wet eyes.

You will treasure the friendship of kids, turned adults, who
send you notes,
Saying, orchestra gave them space in the cruel world of high
school
And they knew they were never very good, but they just want
you to know,
How much it meant and in fact, it probably saved their life,
so “thank you.”

You will reflect on it over and over
That you didn’t know what you were doing most of the time –
Just trying to teach this small bit of the world you loved
And share your humanity because, that is what you felt was
most important...

You will think about this now as 400 FB Friends who started as
Shy, hesitant kids who came running down the hall to
orchestra or

On a cold January day jumped from table to table in the
cafeteria after a rehearsal,

Now have kids of their own and however small a role you
played in their lives,

It was remembered:

music,
quietness,
love

And more often than you ever knew,
It was worth it.

And Beethoven still is a mystery of beauty
And you still get tears when you listen to the *Spring Sonata*,
Which is why you started to play in 1958 anyway
And it was such a surprise where your violin took you,
Your own personal Scheherazade
That kept you living,
One more night.

James D. Hainlen

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Jim Hainlen taught in the Stillwater District for 28 years—25 of them at Stillwater High School. He is currently in his final year as director of the Roseville String Ensemble. He writes: “This was one of those wake up in the morning poems with the whole poem clearly written in my head. It was about 4:30 a.m. and I got up as fast as I could so I didn’t lose the poem. I sat down in my office and just looked in my mind and wrote it down on paper. Spooky, good moments in life. Everything in it, is of course real and it astonished me how many mile-post markers were connected with death in remembering my career. I had never put that together in one moment of insight. It might not strike a chord with younger teachers but older teachers will know why it is a love poem.”