

“What Lewis Diuguid found when he followed the fortunes of a high school class from its freshman year to graduation will cheer you, amuse you, break your heart, alarm you, but most of all, will make you want to *do* something to help in your community’s education programs. This fascinating book, now a spur to action, will become a standard reference work for everyone who cares about young people. It gets an ‘A’ plus!”

**Harper Lee**, author,  
*To Kill a Mockingbird*

“I find Lewis Diuguid’s book compelling. The author’s ability to get the students involved really touches me. Lewis Diuguid took a risk and got to know teachers, students and their urban high school. Because he truly listened and reported what he saw and experienced, the reader of this book has a realistic understanding of the complexities of teaching and learning in an urban secondary school. The book requires the reader to seriously question how we can continue to run our secondary schools the way we do. It should be required reading for every lawmaker who serves on any education committee, teacher educator, teacher, and parent.”

**Mary Ann Benner, Ed.D.**  
Director Teacher Education  
Ottawa University

“Up before dawn one day a week for four academic years, Lewis Diuguid followed the Washington High School Class of 1999 from beginning to end. His odyssey of discovery taught him much — about the students, their teachers, their families and the state of public education at the millennium. In this book he shares their stories and a vital message for everyone who cares about an enlightened citizenry.”

**Tom Eblen**  
Editorial consultant, Kansas Press Association  
Retired University of Kansas General Manager and News Adviser to the University *Daily Kansan*

“As Mayor of Kansas City, Kansas, I have been actively involved in Kansas City’s Promise, which focuses on the needs of our children and young adults. One element essential for them is a caring adult. By sharing his time and talent with these young people, Lewis Diuguid shows how one person can make a difference!”

**Carol Marinovich, Mayor**  
Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kansas

“Lewis Diuguid is a courageous journalist who does not shy away from controversial topics in his *Kansas City Star* columns. He has demonstrated a strong commitment to the education of young people and encourages the involvement and support of parents, teachers, and communities in this effort. His insights from visiting an inner city high school class from their freshmen to senior years, as described in many of his columns, provide us with some guidance as to how we can help make our schools more successful.”

**Dr. Renate Mai-Dalton**

Associate Professor of Organization Behavior  
Director, Multicultural Scholars Program  
University of Kansas

“Lewis Diuguid is an outstanding newsman who has gone where few, if any, others have thought to tread: back to high school on a regular basis. As much as possible, he tried to remain invisible as he watched teachers and students over a prolonged period. His columns provided special insight and valuable understanding of the saga of public school.”

**Donald W. Carson**

Emeritus Professor of Journalism  
University of Arizona-Tucson

*A Teacher's Cry:*  
*Expose the Truth about*  
*Education Today*

Lewis W. Diuguid

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## *Prologue*

This huge project would not have been possible if it had not been for a small creature named Mortimer Frog. He is featured in a book by the same name that my youngest daughter, Leslie, had to read for school. I wrote about *Mortimer Frog* and Leslie in a column headlined “**Learning by Leaps and Bounds**”:

Mortimer Frog hopped into our lives about two years ago and left us forever changed.

It started in December 1993 when Leslie’s first-grade teacher, Ellen Donaldson, called me at the Southland Bureau of *The Kansas City Star*. The news was not good.

Leslie, then 7, had failed a test on the book *Mortimer Frog*. The teacher called to tell me that Leslie would be held back in reading to complete the work.

Oh, no! I thought. But I thanked the teacher for calling and then shared what I knew about *Mortimer Frog*. Leslie had brought the book home once, and when I saw it at breakfast I had her read it.

She fumbled through the pages. *Mortimer Frog* then vanished until Leslie’s teacher called.

The teacher made me realize that my wife, Valerie, and I had been bamboozled by Leslie. We had kept up as two parents in high-stress jobs by double-teaming Leslie and her sister, Adrienne, then 10, until Leslie got out of kindergarten.

First grade for Leslie with homework and tests created new challenges. Keeping both girls focused on schoolwork suddenly became like spinning plates on sticks two miles apart.

We’d get one girl going, and the other would slow down. We’d get the second one spinning, and the first would start to wobble.

*Mortimer Frog* brought that show to a crashing end. The

teacher called me because Valerie was nearly unreachable at her phone company job.

I couldn't let Leslie flunk *Mortimer Frog*, so I did what most good parents would do—I cut a deal. I told Leslie's teacher that if she sent *Mortimer Frog* home with Leslie over the Christmas holidays that Leslie would return it in the new year able to recite that book forward and backward and pass the test standing on her head and writing with her toes.

The teacher bought it, and that year we had “happy *Mortimer Frog* holidays.” Adrienne laughed. Leslie didn't.

I still remember the book. It was about a frog that a class of kids had named Mortimer. As Mortimer grew he kept hopping out of the bigger containers the children put him in until the students finally set him free in a nearby wetland.

We read the book repeatedly with Leslie, but I made sure that she knew its real lesson. “Don't goof off, and don't leave homework at school,” she said.

Mortimer taught Valerie and me an important lesson, too. As good as we were, we couldn't keep up with our kids' efforts to sidestep schoolwork and outsmart us. Mortimer Frog forced us to change.

Coincidentally, technological and workplace changes had drained the fun from Valerie's job. She wanted to quit. Mortimer Frog just said, “Do it.”

So Valerie quit her job in 1994, causing nearly half of our household income to evaporate. But we manage to get by.

We don't see it as living with less as much as Mortimer Frog just sold us on investing energy that would have gone into a job into our girls' education.

Our kids get only one shot at a good education, and that takes a partnership of school and home. Valerie now is the girls' drill instructor, marching them through studies whether they say they have homework or not.

It's caused each girl's grades to bump up a full notch.

Their self-esteem also has soared just by seeing that they have earned their “A’s” through hard work.

It has been wonderful and heartening to see them make such leaps. We owe it all to Leslie’s first grade teacher and the incredible rebounding legs of Mortimer Frog.

Before this episode and the lessons that it taught us, my job had been to get the girls off to school in the morning. But with Valerie now a stay-at-home mom, I had the mornings free for such things as going to Washington High School. And so thanks to that frog named Mortimer, this project became possible.

## *Foreword*

**A**fter a recent winter storm, during a snow day, I heard a local DJ on a radio station popular among young listeners lament that he was getting a lot of calls from “uncool” kids, the ones who normally never called during the week because they were in school. When school was in session, he said, he only got calls from the “cool” kids, the ones who didn’t go to school.

Listening to this dangerous drivel being beamed over many miles and into many vulnerable ears, I wondered whether kids today truly felt that getting an education was “uncool.” That has long been a nagging problem for many African-American and Hispanic students, and it has become a growing concern among white students. I remember having moments of hating school when I was a student, but I also remember knowing that a good education was something that was highly valued. “Is that no longer the case?” I asked myself. Indeed, is education today just so much mediocre drudgery that it deserves all the bad press it gets? And taking it one step further, should we just write off that great experiment called “public education” as a failure and concentrate—as was done centuries ago—on educating only the elite?

Besides being an editor, I am also an educator and a parent—and, in those latter capacities, a cheerleader for the concept of public education. I had answered those questions long before I asked them: No, we should not dispense with public education. No, education is not all bad. And yes, a good education is still highly valued. But had I not been convinced of those answers before reading and editing this book, I certainly would have been afterward.

Admittedly, public education is in dire straits right now. No one can deny that fact when we know that “[s]ix million students are on the verge of dropping out of high school and a quarter of high-school [sic] students read below the basic level”; when “in urban communities, 50% [of teachers] leave the profession in five years—in part due to low pay and a lack of school system support” (qtd. in Institute). This book acknowledges that there are real and severe problems in today’s schools, and it highlights some of the

more salient and devastating ones that influence the quality of education today. But it also gives us snapshot after snapshot of what is often blurred by our focus on the problems alone: that students and teachers today are battling and resisting those problems in order to make education work.

This book is for students. It gives young people—particularly urban students—a voice, and we should listen. They are telling us—their parents, their teachers, their communities—that they need our support in order to be successful. They are telling us that they still *want* to succeed, and that they *know* that an education is vital to reaching their goals. And they are asking us to *listen* to their concerns and their points of view, because they have many important things to say.

This book is for teachers, future teachers, and colleges of education. It gives educators in classrooms everywhere a long-overdue and well-deserved accolade. It reaches out to them, letting them know that their struggles are not unique, urging them to improve and not give up, recognizing that educating *is* a difficult task, and that that is truly a mammoth understatement. But it also shows them that their triumphs are valued and well worth the effort.

Perhaps most of all, this book is for everyday, average Americans who want schools to be first-rate. It admonishes everyone to get involved, because only if that happens will the schools be exceptional at educating all of our communities' children. We must keep our youngsters on track by giving them the support and attention they need wherever they go, literally and metaphorically. This is not just up to parents, but also a responsibility of other members of the community. We must keep our teachers who stray on track by being a presence in education, taking a seat in the classroom, volunteering to help whenever needed long before being asked, and moving tasks inside and outside the classroom toward high-level achievement and excellence. We must make sure that government officials understand just how important we all know the education of our youth is for the future of our community and this country.

But this book is also for journalists and students of journalism. It demonstrates that more than sound-bite coverage is sometimes needed to get to the meat of an issue, to explore further, to probe deeper, to give the kind of picture the public deserves or wants. It shows a different, long-term, enlightening approach to journalism, an approach that can give important insights that otherwise might go undiscovered.

I have been close to this book for about a year now, becoming intimately familiar with those insights, carrying bits and pieces of information or text around with me in my bag or in my head. Even when I wasn't actively working on it, thoughts or statistics would surface in a conversation, or an article or book written by someone else would suddenly connect with what Lewis Diuguid was talking about. And—as you will read in these chapters—he talks about so very much, all of it important to the well-being of our youngsters, teachers, schools, and society.

Going back to (high) school again is not something many of us have on our list of priorities these days. Our lives are packed with work, family, and whatever “extra-curricular” activities we can manage to make time for. It was not on Lewis’ to-do list either until he unexpectedly heard a cry from a teacher, until he received a dare he could not ignore. Chapter One explains in detail the events that moved him to return to school.

Lewis’ columns have allowed me—as a parent and an educator—to go back vicariously and reacquaint myself with the current situation in our schools, connecting his experiences with whatever (few) tales my own children brought home each day. During the editing process his stories and analyses had me switching hats time and time again—from parent, to teacher, to editor—as he switched topics. I found myself repeatedly nodding my head, one hat morphing into another, as my parent-self saw the desperate need for the involvement that he is advocating, or my teacher-self empathized with the difficult task faced by today’s educators and students. Wearing the hat of the editor, I tried to keep my other selves satisfied by making sure that Lewis’ columns and discussion were presented in a way that did the wealth of work and information justice.

In journalism the same subject often returns again and again over the course of many years. As new insights surface or an old issue once again catches the public's eye, articles and commentary sprout and bloom like previous years' perennials, but with a slightly different look, angle, or patina.

Over the course of four years, Lewis created almost 100 columns about the microcosm of Washington High School and the larger reality it represents. Logically, similar topics and concerns would resurface as those four years progressed. In a microcosm the stages of life continue relentlessly, even though each new stage will vary as outside influences change. So, too, the life of a school remains fundamentally the same even as students and teachers adjust to whatever is going on outside the classroom walls. And the columns that Lewis wrote often present the recurring themes that reflect those issues, though each time with some change—perhaps slight, perhaps massive, but always significant.

In organizing the columns into a book, therefore, we discovered that a strict chronological approach wasn't possible. The reader would quickly become confused and the text would be repetitive. So we decided on the format that you see before you: the columns have been grouped by theme, so that they naturally lead to and support the conclusions Lewis draws from his experiences and observations.\*

The chapters' themes include: the risks and rewards of involvement; myths and stereotypes; students' stresses and triumphs; the role of sports; education standards; and multiple approaches to teaching. Introducing the first four chapters are portraits of the four teachers who allowed Lewis to sit and participate in their classrooms. There are two additional teachers' portraits at the beginning of Chapters 6 and 8. The center of the book, Part III, is graced with 12 columns containing student portraits which reveal how the students see themselves. Most of these students and

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\* A complete list of all the columns mentioned, with their dates and titles, can be found in the Appendix.

teachers—as well as others not highlighted—appear in other parts of the book.

We had hoped to be able to include photographs of the students and teachers, so that names could be connected with faces. Unfortunately, this proved impossible. But in these pages readers will be able to create their own images of these incredible players on the stage of this four-year project.

The original project ended at graduation, but—predictably—the connection to the graduates and teachers did not. Some of the columns included were written about what has transpired during the five years since graduation. So far, then, the entire project has spanned more than nine years and includes well over 100 columns. In September 2000, in part because of this project, Lewis received the Missouri Honor Medal for Distinguished Service in Journalism, the highest lifetime achievement award given by the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Journalism.

It is a deserved tribute for a job well done, a unique approach to journalism, a unique look at education. As editor, parent, and teacher, I hope that the important information contained in this book will inspire communities across the country to not only tackle the undeniable problems from the outside but to also give students and teachers the support they need and deserve from the inside. This book shows us the way and beckons us to follow. It is up to us to take the next step.

*Elsje M. Smit, Editor*

## *Introduction*

Washington High School, Kansas City, Kansas. I can still see the tan brick school building at 7340 Leavenworth Road, the circular drive out front and the school buses, parents, guardians, friends and older siblings with cars dropping off teenagers of all colors for early morning classes.

I learned a lot being there and writing columns on the experience in *The Kansas City Star*. Beyond the books I have read on education, the best lessons I've received came from going back to high school. The project was a re-immersion into a world I had left behind more than 20 years earlier, in 1973, when I graduated from Southwest High School in St. Louis. I have shared some of that knowledge in more than 100 columns and many speeches to groups around the country. But none of what I wrote or presented told the complete story.

This book comes out as the Class of 1999 observes its fifth reunion. On their anniversary, what this book is meant to do is provide a more comprehensive view of the Washington High School learning experiences, so as to give parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, taxpayers, educators, students, business people, and civic and faith leaders a new understanding of public education.

From 1995 to 1999, Washington High School became a second place of work and a home for me. The Class of 1999 started out with 439 students on Sept. 20, 1995. As often happens in urban schools with families moving, changing addresses and transferring children to other schools, the number of students in the Class of 1999 at Washington High School plunged 29 percent to 312 by Sept. 20, 1996, and fell an additional 14 percent to 269 juniors by Sept. 20, 1997. Only about 150 students in the Class of 1999 graduated. But no one records which of the students simply enrolled elsewhere and which dropped out.

Washington High School is an ethnically and racially mixed school. For example, the 1997 fall enrollment of 1,273 students was 17.98 percent white, 64.65 percent black, 11.7 percent His-

panic, 5.49 percent Asian American and 0.16 percent American Indian. As in other urban school districts, the percentage of minority students was a lot higher than the percentage of minorities in the general population.

At the time of this project, Wyandotte County had more than its share of poverty. The odd thing was the area had a lot of high paying jobs. But the people who held those jobs didn't live in that community. The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis data showed that the average annual wage per job in Wyandotte County was \$34,388. But the average personal income of Wyandotte County residents was only \$20,191—the lowest in the Kansas City metropolitan area. The gap between what's made in Wyandotte County and what stays in Wyandotte County also is the highest in the metropolitan area. To the east in Jackson County, Mo., for example, the average worker makes \$35,623 compared with the average personal income of residents of \$30,020. South of Wyandotte County lies Johnson County, Kan. It's where a lot of people making high salaries in Wyandotte County live and where people who live in Wyandotte County get low-paying service jobs. The average worker in Johnson County makes \$36,723 compared with residents' \$43,168 in average annual personal income.

Terry Woodbury, then-president of the United Way of Wyandotte County, said during an interview I had with him in 2002 that five of eight persons who work in Wyandotte County export their earnings to places like Johnson County. Those jobs are at workplaces such as the University of Kansas Medical Center, the General Motors Corp. Fairfax plant, Colgate-Palmolive Co., Procter & Gamble and Owens-Corning Fiberglas Corp. It sets up a reality of wealth being drained from the community where students such as those at Washington High School live.

They also have seen the flight of people from their community. The census shows that Wyandotte County had a population of 185,495 in 1960. It grew to 186,845 in 1970 but has been falling ever since. It was 157,882 in 2000. So this is a community that has suffered many losses. Young people are not oblivious to these types of hardships. Yet teachers have to contend with the trauma this causes as the students bring it into the schools.

Besides administrators, teachers and students, there are few people who know just what goes on in our schools from day to day. Although I frequently give talks to students in area schools I, too, see only the most obvious aspects of everyday school life. So when I received a dare from freshman English teacher Alice Bennett to learn what it's really like to be a teenager and teacher today, I couldn't resist being lured back to high school. The first year I attended six of Ms. Bennett's classes, trying to get to the school at least once a week and going to different classes each week. The second year she helped me get a spot in Beatrice McKindra's sophomore English classes. The third year, Bennett got American history teacher Scott Milkowart to give me a seat in his classes of juniors. Then for my final year, Bennett persuaded American government teacher Dennis Bobbitt to let me study with his seniors. The names of those teachers and of many of their students appear in the chapters that follow.

My goal was to focus at least two of the 12 columns that I then wrote per month for *The Star* on what took place with the students and teachers from day to day. I studied with the students in the classrooms, attended pep assemblies and went to after-school events. I watched the students perform in sports, the arts and music. I visited the teens at their jobs and in their homes. Even though the information and impressions I got made up only about 15 percent of the columns I wrote in those 4 years, the project consumed about 45 percent of my time. Journalism by phone and the Internet may work in many circumstances to relay news and information to readers, but it couldn't get me close enough to tell the students' and teachers' massive story about public education. I had to be there with the teens and teachers to tell of their day-to-day interactions, their lives, the challenges they faced, and their hopes and dreams, to put together a tableau of what public education does for those who work and study in our public schools.

The four-year project was unprecedented, and my columns made up what may have been the longest running series *The Star* has ever printed. But beyond the sheer volume of the project, what stands out most is how different the approach was. In journalism we normally tell people about school board elections and votes. We cover the school administration and all of its faults. We write

about teachers' unions, teacher shortages, teacher incompetence and the problems teachers face in the classroom. We discuss troubled and violent children such as those who carried out the mass shootings on April 20, 1999, at Columbine High School near Littleton, Colorado. We write about low achievement scores, failed desegregation efforts, the poverty-fed sufferings of inner-city children and schools, teen pregnancies, drug and alcohol abuse and the high truancy and dropout rates. We cover the waterfront when it comes to the problems—and that has long been considered good journalism. Occasionally we write about gifted students' successes and education innovations. But we don't tell people what they crave most: what is taking place *day to day* in public schools.

One of the thunderous realities that Washington High School revealed was that the negatives about urban education *are* rooted in facts. But the positives also are starkly real, showing that teachers *do* find a way to get through to children despite the many learning obstacles. Washington High School showed me there is no simplicity in sinners and winners, no black and white—just constantly changing shades of gray.

This situation is illustrated by the many contorting contradictions about education that the following chapters in this book will illuminate. The book started as an attempt to tell the story of the Class of 1999 at Washington High School, which I followed from the students' freshman year until they graduated. But my immersion at Washington High School and the ensuing columns I wrote in *The Kansas City Star* took readers on a four-year journey into the skyscraper of education. This book, however, widens the view of education in America beyond just a compilation of those columns. Washington High School provides much-needed insight into education in America—particularly in urban areas.

The tug of war between the positive and negative experiences in urban schools helped reveal in retrospect how urban education in particular seems to have its own *multiple personality disorder*. In her book *United We Stand: A Book for People with Multiple Personalities*, Eliana Gil, Ph.D., writes that abused children sometimes “create separate and distinct personalities,” or “alters” to

confront difficulties that they themselves can't cope with in their lives (4). These alters have "allowed [them] to protect [themselves] and remain sane in the face of severe abuse . . . to endure the bad times and to keep [their] heart and soul safe from abusers" (21). For children it is a means of survival.

The same might be said for urban schools, which have had to find a way to survive in the face of governmental and societal abuse. Urban education, therefore, seems to have come up with several "alters" of its own. One character that has emerged is an injured personality, with much of the news about inner-city schools only showing problem children, low test scores, substandard materials, deficient teachers and administrators, high turnover, high dropout rates, poor academic performance and a perennial challenge to President George W. Bush's underfunded No Child Left Behind education mandate. Another is one that's angry and belligerent. That shows up in the behavior of too many students, parents, teachers and administrators—each reacting to how they have been bullied and mistreated. A third is one that rolls over and plays dead. This may be the most detrimental of all. Teachers and administrators who should have their doors open inviting in parents, business people and professionals are surrendering to a bunker mentality. They've become less open to having people come in, less likely to take classes on field trips, fearing embarrassment, fearing the repercussions from either misbehavior or the perception that they have nothing dynamic to show. Minimal effort at educating children is the outcome. What educators are missing are the allies they could have in their classrooms, the raised standards for behavior that outsiders import into education and the increasing amount of new material and real world experiences that parents and other adults bring to the process of educating. (See Chapter 7.)

Urban education's multiple personality disorder is created out of trauma, and our country for decades has traumatized urban schools and urban kids with slashed resources, white flight and negative media. Schools have been bullied by governments and communities, made to think that, no matter what they do, it is never enough to meet the high standards needed to become "acceptable." There is always something more that needs to be done to open that door

to success. And school administrators, parents and students—under pressure to perform—have ended up bullying those who are on the front lines of learning: the teachers.

This became clear to me as I was reading a book titled *Bullies, Targets & Witnesses: Helping Children Break the Pain Chain* by SuEllen Fried and her daughter, Paula Fried, Ph.D. SuEllen Fried is a longtime friend, an advocate for nonviolence and founder of the Stop Violence Coalition based in Kansas City, Mo. She conducts seminars nationwide on the prevention of youth violence. Her book takes a head-on look at the causes and prevention of bullying as a way to curtail greater acts of violence such as shootings in our post-Columbine High School society. But contained in the message the Frieds are conveying is the fact that this country, its parents and children for years have increasingly been bullying teachers. The book defines such abuse as “emotional bullying” (58), as opposed to the other three types—physical, verbal and sexual bullying. “The concept of emotional bullying is the most challenging of the four types to transmit,” the Frieds write (61). They go on to explain that

[t]here are two categories of emotional bullying: nonverbal and psychological. Nonverbal emotional bullying is pointing, staring, mugging. Laughing, rolling your eyes, making faces, sticking out your tongue, writing notes, drawing pictures, flicking people off, using the third finger or a number of other hand signals that imply “loser,” “crazy,” or irreverent and sexual innuendos. Psychological emotional bullying comes in the form of indirect abuse such as exclusion, isolation, rejection, turning your back on someone when they try to talk with you, shunning, ostracizing, and ignoring. It may be subtle, or it may be overt.... I often tell children that when someone commits a crime in our society, we send them to prison. Prison officials had to come up with something worse than incarceration for those who break a law while they are jailed, so they created solitary confinement. One of the cruelest forms of punishment that humans can inflict on one

another is total isolation. Prisoners of war who have been physically tortured and isolated state that the isolation is at least as bad, if not worse, than the physical torture.... It appears that the places in our society where isolation is most likely to happen are prisons and playgrounds! (58-59)

Teachers feel that isolation as they are bullied by students, bullied by parents, bullied by administrators, and bullied by federal, state and local governments in being required to do more while given no funding or extra help to accomplish each new impossible task. The No Child Left Behind mandate is a perfect example of what's being done to teachers and the budgetary, professional and emotional trauma that it is causing. Then Secretary of Education Rod Paige made matters worse on Feb. 23, 2004, when he told a meeting of the nation's governors in Washington, D.C., that the largest teachers' union was a "terrorist organization" for not supporting the No Child Left Behind Act. Reg Weaver, president of the 2.7 million member National Education Association, denounced Paige for making that remark. Paige later apologized ("Education secretary"). But what he said was unforgivable particularly when the United States is embroiled in an unending war against terrorism after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in which commercial airlines were hijacked and flown like missiles into the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. Paige's off-color remark brands teachers as enemies and makes efforts to educate our children seem like a war in which teachers are the "evil" and "evil-doers," which Bush and others in his administration have labeled terrorists. But teachers aren't evil. They're not evil-doers, and they're not our enemy. Teachers are our children's unsung heroes, and they need to be recognized as such. However, they are publicly damned by people from Paige on down to parents when things go wrong. We have placed teachers in impossible situations and then we blame them for being there.

Incredibly, teachers have been absorbing the punishing emotional bullying. But they can't keep taking it forever. The Frieds write that Americans "need to know that if they inflict pain on someone, it does not evaporate; it does not disappear—most likely

it collects. When enough pain has collected in a person's soul, it can turn to rage" (65). Again, that's about children's anguish over being bullied, but it applies to teachers as well. The Frieds quote Dr. Karl Menninger, a famed Kansas psychiatrist, who "states that children, like adults, develop behavior patterns that allow them to survive" (123).

Keep in mind that teachers are only human, too, and they respond to ill-treatment just as anyone else in any other profession would. As the Frieds point out, "[w]hen a child's basic security is not threatened, he or she is free to pursue higher goals; when he or she is under siege, he or she will resort to life-preserving actions. In his book *The Human Mind*, Dr. Menninger writes: 'When a trout, rising to a fly gets hooked on a line and finds himself unable to swim about freely, he begins a fight which results in struggles and splashes and sometimes an escape. Often, of course, the situation is too tough for him. In the same way, the human being struggles with his environment and with the hooks that catch him. Sometimes he masters his difficulties; sometimes they are too much for him. His struggles are all that the world sees and it usually misunderstands them. It is hard for a free fish to understand what is happening to a hooked one'" (123-124).

Teachers—suffering severe emotional bullying—are those hooked fish. Sometimes they strike out in response to how they've been treated and the lack of support that they receive, and our children pay the price, receiving a poor education or worse, as this book will in some ways describe. Yet, *as caring professionals many struggle against being bullied to try to do a good job teaching kids whom many in our society have cast off as losses.*

A fourth character of urban schools that I've noted from the Washington High School project, then, is the one that illustrates this effort on the teachers' part: it is the *survivor achieving*, though lost in the struggle, with the other personalities getting all the public attention. And in this book I have tried to highlight this "survivor." In pointing out that education in this country is not "all good" or "all bad," but that what happens in the schools slides between those extremes and can therefore be hard to grasp for people on the outside, I have tried to give a multifaceted view of

today's schools showing that, despite the difficulties, they are mostly good.

People I have met over the years have said that this Washington High School project opened a window for them into that skyscraper of public education: they could see what went on inside the superstructure of public schools. The series gave them a better understanding of what educators and children were doing. It helped them to ask more informed questions about schools and to get better answers. For them, Washington High School became a microcosm for education. I hope that the knowledge and impressions collected in this book will open similar windows for many more, showing that teachers still teach and children still learn, even as they contend with the often daunting modern-day challenges of public education.

But the schools' multiple personality disorder is a mental health concern that needs constant treatment from the community. People in communities across America need to do more, to get involved and stay active in our schools. The Frieds in their book on bullying say witnesses to such abuse of children have an enormous power to stop such non-verbal violence in its tracks. They do it in the support that they give to the target of the bullying, in challenging the bully and in notifying an adult so the bullying ends. Adults need to be the same sort of advocates for schools and teachers, providing assistance in the classroom, going to bat for teachers against unjust criticism and advocating for more government funding for teachers and education.

My friend, Mahnaz Shabbir, includes in her speeches about Muslim women and the need for a lasting peace this quote from Mohandas Gandhi: "We are the change we wish to see in the world." Parents and adults in neighborhoods surrounding all schools must be the change they wish to see in the education of all children.

Outsiders also need to insist that schools maintain high standards to better serve the community. But all of those many roles need to work together, making the schools and the people in them the centerpiece of the neighborhoods they serve. And government policy

toward public school funding can change if enough people speaking on behalf of teachers and students insist that it happen. Teachers are the best champions our children have and we must give them a fighting chance to do their jobs.

*Part I*  
*Chapter 1*  
*The Challenge*

*Listen to teachers. Listen closely. What they have to say, will affect the education and well-being of our children and our community.*



***PORTRAIT:***  
***Alice Bennett***

Urban schools seemed to hold both an irresistible challenge and a heartache for Alice Bennett. Those conflicting feelings prompted her to send me her emotion-laden letters and to subsequently open her classroom to me. Those feelings for urban school kids also gave her the courage to do what many teachers wouldn't: to risk having a columnist in her classes, taking notes and writing about everyday occurrences at Washington High School. But her courage started long before I got to know her.

Bennett's teaching career began in a most atypical way. She is from Wichita, Kan., where she finished her senior year in high school. Then she and her mother moved to the Kansas City area to join her father who had taken a job in this community. Bennett's route to college and teaching, however, was circuitous. She said she did the traditional white, middle-class thing, going to college immediately after graduating from high school. But Bennett flunked out, not once, but twice—first after her freshman year at Baker University in Baldwin City, Kan., and then the following year as a freshman at Central Missouri State University in Warrensburg, Mo. Afterward, Bennett was hired at WDAF-AM radio and later she moved to WHB-AM, doing secretarial work. She said she had a lot of fun

planning promotions, working with the DJs and other personalities.

“The DJs are crazy people,” Bennett recalled. “At some level it was glamorous. But it wasn’t enough.”

Bennett returned to Central Missouri State University and worked as a secretary at the old Kansas City General Hospital to earn money to help put herself through college. By this time, she knew she wanted to be a teacher. “I felt that I liked working with kids,” Bennett said. “I felt I had something to offer, and because I had such a different route [in completing my education] I felt I had something to relate.”

Although Bennett was working, she found that she still had to depend on the government commodities food program, the precursor to food stamps. She also earned money by doing public relations work for the university museum. “I’d write news releases, take pictures and make sure they’d get in the local papers,” Bennett said.

At Central Missouri State University, Bennett received her bachelor of science degree in education in 1974 and her master of arts in communications in 1981. Her non-traditional path continued from there. When she neared her graduation, she realized that she had a better chance of getting a job at an urban school instead of a suburban school, where most of her classmates did their student teaching. That led her to student-teach in an inner-city school, which dismayed university officials.

She went to Lincoln High School, where the principal said it was the first time in 20 years that a white female teacher out of college had been placed there. Bennett stayed at Lincoln High School two years. She married the physical education teacher at Lincoln High School after she had left the district to take other journalism jobs. They have a son, Brad. Bennett later returned to teaching, taking a job in the Kansas City, Kan., School District.

I never thought her family was any different from other families until one day in her first-hour freshman English class. Her students and I were talking about vacations,