

'He Was The Best'

by Elaine Bowe Johnson



When I was a junior at Mercer Island High School, Val Foubert created a Humanities class. In that class, he taught us to do real research -- not just to copy from encyclopaedias -- and to compose logical, well documented research papers. He showed us the power of words and made sure we learned them -- tons of them -- week in and week out. We studied myriad books and connected them with our own lives.

Val was a great English teacher. He was also a terrific debate coach and speech teacher. Because he made us meticulously prepare and practice speeches and debates, his lessons stuck. To this day, I am mindful of Val's high standards, love of ideas, respect for language, and intellectual curiosity. They still influence my own thinking. Val, thanks for a strong foundation that I've relied on throughout my life!

Val Foubert was a terrific teacher -- funny, calm, patient, sharp, and always willing to explain things and help. I was a university professor and administrator for many years; he prepared me to succeed in an academic world. Now I give speeches, and he taught me how to do that. He was always so patient and good-natured and clear about explaining things and then actually showing one how to attain his objectives. Not many teachers work with students the way he worked with the kids in my class.

As a young student, I considered him to be all the important things: fair, honest, infinitely patient, funny, and kind. Those qualities made all of us feel safe — safe to speak up in class, to say what we really thought the literature expressed, to try something new, like learning to debate. What's more, he was always 'there' for us—at debate tournaments on raining evenings and Saturdays—never acting like he'd rather be somewhere better doing more interesting things. A quiet, calming presence who had the answers, knew his stuff, and never flaunted it: that was Val Foubert as a teacher. He was the best.