

# Running the Race So As To Win

## Steve Piontkowski

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Dear Mrs. Estelle,

I am getting very close to an exciting part of my life, graduating from high school and moving on to college. While I am preparing for my commencements, I began thinking of my academic history. Recently I read the book, *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*. Upon completion of the book, I was left with a few points to think about: acts of kindness are not random at all, we are all interconnected, and we do have a purpose here on Earth. While looking back at my past years of education, I put these points to use in reviewing the people I have come in contact with. I tried to think of just one person in particular that had the greatest impact on my life. I can not single just one person out from my academic years. Many of my memories are from Bishop Kelley School, and I can now see how these points from this book are put into action. Bishop Kelley works as a team, like a relay, one person passing onto the next. Therefore, I see you all as one. I would like to take this time to share my thoughts and memories with you.

When I entered Bishop Kelley in Kindergarten, I was scared to death. Mrs. Ruddock greeted us daily at the threshold of our classroom, and would wipe away some tears. It didn't take long before I felt at ease with her. Here I learned the letters of the alphabet, with the help from the Letter People, and the foundation was laid for me, as she prepared me for my next move into first grade. There I was greeted by Mrs. Schrot and Mrs. Mihm. That was an exciting year. I still remember making my pilgrim hat to wear to our Thanksgiving Day luncheon. Mrs. Schrot taught me how to read and instilled other skills to move me along to second grade. Mrs. Tillery was my teacher then. I wasn't nervous, but I bet she was. My class was her first teaching position. Mrs. Tillery prepared me for my First Holy Communion and Reconciliation. That was a fun and busy year for all of us. My next year was with Mss Sullivan. It was this year that I developed my passion for reading and writing. Johnathan Rand visited our school, and I was fascinated by him. We also did the Iditaread, where we were mushers, and every page was another kilometer on our journey. That was also the year I learned my times tables. The next year, fourth grade, I had you as my teacher. We did more reading and writing, which was great for me because this was my new favorite pastime. I still have a clay Liberty Bell I made in your class. You really prepared me for the next year. Fifth grade was great with Mrs. Dickeson. I couldn't believe she rode a motorcycle to school! I quickly learned Mrs. D. had a different grading scale. She had A, B, C, D, and PS (parent signature). She whipped me into shape real quick. I knew I did not want that PS. In this grade, I learned to have a greater appreciation for the Native American people, African Americans and great explorers.

Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth grade posed a new challenge of becoming organized while switching classrooms between the old and the new buildings, and having three teachers. These were fun-filled and exciting years for me. Mrs. Caskey instilled the art of outlining, to the point where it became second nature. That skill certainly came in handy over the last four years. I'll never forget her science class and going to Camp Lael. It was in sixth grade also, that I decided I wanted to be a teacher. Mr. Costello taught and inspired me to be the best that I can be. He

always told us, "Run the race so as to win." I was armed with Shakespeare, Steinbeck, Longfellow, and many more when I entered high school, not to forget, the eight parts of speech. He also reminded us daily to keep our faith and follow our hearts. With Mrs. Dobos, I traveled the globe to learn world history, from ancient hieroglyphics, to the near secession of our country, the hardships along the Oregon Trail and two World Wars. She also introduced algebra and geometry to me. Mrs. Dobos, like her sister nine years earlier, wiped away a few tears too, as we said goodbye to our years at Bishop Kelley.

These nine teachers have had a tremendous impact on my life. I know that seven of you are still there teaching. That speaks volumes for your commitment to teaching, as well as your Catholic Faith. I was completely prepared for high school, and I continued to use the knowledge and skills I learned. It was these skills that allowed me to maintain academic honors for all four years. So, I take with me a little piece of all of you as I move on to the next part of my journey. I will be attending Oakland University in the Fall, to pursue my goal of becoming a secondary teacher in English. I can only hope, that one day, I too can pass along what I learned from all of you. If you, or any of the other teachers, ever questioned your purpose, understand that you all have touched my life, and I am sure many others. I hope now, that you too can see how we are interconnected.

What I learned from all of you will be passed along one day, when I stand before a group of my own students. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, and I ask that you share this with my former teachers. For now, I am running my race, so as to win.

With gratitude,  
Steve Piontkowski