

Kevin Waller

Power Autobiography

My sixth-grade teacher was Mr. Marshall. He was a good teacher and it was nice to have a male teacher for a change since all of my teachers before were all female. He was tall, stern, had a big voice, a little mean and intimidating. There were quite a few boys in his class since he was the only male teacher. Some of the guys were known trouble makers and I did not associate with them much if at all. They were not bullies but they were the group that likes to horse around in class, tease people and disrupt the class. I had a core group of friends in my class with whom I associated. They were primarily my immediate circle of friends who lived on the same street as me. Two events in sixth grade were powerful moments for me in education. One event informed me how to lead with the cooperation of others and the other event informed me how to tell my truth even in the face of disappointment from an adult.

I remember Mr. Marshall had assigned group projects and he made me the leader of one of the groups. The project was to create a bulletin board in the hallway on a specific subject. He assigned most of the trouble makers to my group. This is memorable for me because I wanted to do the project with my friends and not this group of boys. Interestingly enough I could tell from the group composition that Mr. Marshall wanted to get us to associate with peers outside of our immediate circle. As the group leader, I got to choose the subject. I've always liked history so I thought it would be a good idea to create a bulletin board with historical figures like Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King, Jr., Shirley Chisolm, etc. When I informed my group that we were going to do this as our project I was met with opposition. I was pretty adamant that as the leader of the group I get to choose the project. I was disappointed that no one in the group shared the same excitement and enthusiasm I had to do a history project. So I asked the group what they would like to do and they were pretty unanimous in wanting to a sports bulletin board. They threw out ideas and the consensus was to do a bulletin board of football team helmets. I took the idea back to Mr. Marshall and he approved. We drew colored helmet representations of all the football teams and arranged them on the bulletin board. As it turned out, our bulletin board was one of the more popular boards that people like. The experience got me some cool points with the guys and expanded the circle of peers with whom I interacted with. I learned how listening and cooperating with a team was a far better form of leadership rather than dictating, getting my way and not having the full cooperation of the team.

Later in the school year, an incident happened in the class where all of the boys were brought together to tell their side of the story. I don't remember the details of the incident now. I do remember that some guys did not see anything and some guys lied. I remember that when I told the truth of what I witnessed there was a look of disappointment and disapproval from Mr. Marshall, shaking his head. I sensed that my account of what happened was going to get another student in trouble. His reaction was puzzling to me. He never said anything to me and I



did not bother to ask him why he looked the way he did. I was simply assured in knowing that I told the truth of what I saw and that's empowering on its own merit.