

Feel-Good Friday: Kindergarten Teacher Mark Byrd Gives the Gift of Literacy, Companionship to Little Girl With Special Needs

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By [Jennifer Oliver O'Connell](#) | 10:15 PM on May 19, 2023

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If all you see are the horrific examples of teachers presented on [Chaya Raichik's](#) Libs of TikTok site, you would think that every teacher in the public school system is a self-absorbed narcissist with Kool-Aid colored hair, intent on destroying and indoctrinating children. It would be nice if someone created a site where teachers who do the work of educating the next generation could be platformed.

This week's Feel-Good Friday is a good start. Nate Eaton of East Idaho News honored a 16-year kindergarten teacher at Westside Elementary in Idaho Falls named Mark Byrd. According to the letter from the parent, Byrd has a special affinity for young children, and was particularly kind to their five-year-old girl, who suffered from medical issues which

sometimes required hospitalization. Hospitals are no fun as an adult, so imagine having to spend large blocks of time in them as a child. The fact that Byrd took the time out of his schedule to visit with one of his students is huge—but the story gets even better.

From the East Idaho News [site](#):

My daughter, who has special needs, was in Mark Byrd's class. Aside from just being an amazing teacher in general, he goes above and beyond. Our daughter, who has endured two open-heart surgeries and had a tracheostomy, tends to get sick quite easily. She ended up in the hospital for a couple of weeks after getting RSV. Mr. Byrd asked if it was okay for him to come see her in the hospital, which I thought was nice. I expected him to pop his head in for a few minutes and go home and we thought it was amazing that he would do that. But what he actually did was beyond words. He came and brought puppets to color and crayons and scissors and my daughter's favorite book. They made the puppets and read the story and took turns doing the different parts. He probably spent at least an hour there. It was the happiest I had seen her in days.

The moments surrounding this story occurred probably a year ago (2022), but Eaton wasn't able to cover the story at the time. However, he felt the story was compelling and important enough to ensure Byrd was ultimately honored.

As Eaton related the story to Byrd and his classroom, Byrd remembered the name of the book he read to this student: *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus*, a fun, nonsensical, and age-appropriate book that has nothing to do with gender or sexuality.

As it should be.

I thanked him for his visit and was STUNNED when he asked if he could come again the next day. Same thing. He brought more coloring sheets, read stories to her and made her laugh. He told us that he might not be able to come the next day as it was parent-teacher conference. However, there he was the next day on his lunch break with a book for my daughter to take home, apologizing because he couldn't stay longer, but I'm pretty sure he didn't get any lunch.

I love the fact that Byrd encourages this child's literacy and joy of reading, which is so crucial for brain stimulation and building curiosity. When you can read and process what you read, you learn faster, you build a huge lexicon and vocabulary, and you better understand the world around you. Apparently Byrd didn't just do this for this young girl, but for *all* of his students. The dad's letter continued:

When the pandemic prevented the kids in his class from returning to school, he read a story each day and sent the recording so that they could have story time. Then, at the end of the school year he visited every student and gave them a book. He cares about all his kids so much! We will never forget his kindness to our daughter! He is that way with all his students!




Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/k7K5a1V28PU>

When Eaton asked Byrd why he has taught kindergarten for 16 years and remains as exceptional as he is, Byrd was neither boastful nor braggadocious about his impact on his students. He said:

“When you teach, you love all these kids, you want them all to be successful, whether it’s in the classroom or in life. So, I want to be there for them as best as I can.”

We need more teachers who see their role this way. That the child’s education is not about them, but about building successful humans—in the classroom and in life.

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