

The lights dim as the eager crowd quiets for the start of the movie. A giddy excitement builds among the crowd as the opening scene is that of "The Godfather" Who would have guessed that you are in history class. What is even more amazing is how the teacher was able to draw parallels between the movie and the subject that you had previously been discussing about in class. This is only another day in the class of the always creative and exciting Randy Roberts.

"Energy is my best teaching quality," says Roberts, and he has plenty of it, considering he teaches History 152 every Tuesday night from 6pm to 9pm. "It's hard having a class so late at night for 3 hours straight, but if any teacher could keep me interested it is Randy Roberts," said freshmen history education major Jordan Heckard. In class Roberts invites you to listen to a story rather than a history lecture. "History is nothing more than a bunch of stories," Roberts says. This ideology is prevalent in Roberts class; if you were to look in at random moments you would question if a history lesson were being taught. "Sometimes you don't know where he is going with his stories but in the end it is always relevant and makes sense," Jordan Heckard says. Through the use of stories Roberts paints a picture of the past that many people can understand and appreciate. As Ben Kolodzinski a former student of Roberts says, "He brings history to life." With his unique ability to keep students enthralled Roberts is considered by many students to be one of the best teachers at Purdue University.

Receiving his Ph.D. in 1978 from Louisiana State, Roberts has written numerous books including "Jack Dempsey The Manassa Mauler"(3). Roberts has written many sports related books. But Roberts is clear to point out that he only writes about sports if it has to do with popular culture. "I'm interested in popular culture and somehow there has

to be an issue that is not just about sports," Roberts says (Jeanguenat) . With popular culture playing an important role in history and being a major focal point of today's society Roberts uses it to both entertain and teach important concepts to his students.

Although Roberts is an accomplished author he too understands the responsibility of being a professor. "I understand some students may not have had a good experience with history in high school. I am just trying to plant a seed. Maybe not today maybe not tomorrow but maybe sometime down the road a person may remember talking about something in history class and want to read up on the subject," says Roberts. In a major university setting it is hard to find teachers that are as committed as Roberts. "I care about teaching," says Roberts and it is most certainly apparent when you see the passion with which he teaches. "You can just tell he enjoys the subject when he is teaching," says Jordan Heckard.

Roberts himself knows that it is very hard to get to know any of his students when his classes are as large as they are. Roberts instead tries to build a rapport with the class as whole rather than each individual student. Believing that building a rapport with his classes are a key part of teaching, Roberts puts himself out there for the class. With his energy and excitement Roberts builds rapport with students that is uncommon in such a large university setting. Roberts talks about how he built a rapport with a group of inmates that he taught when he taught at a prison. "There was one group of inmates I had a great rapport with . The whole group was made up of murders. Well anyways I hate noise while I teach so I had closed the doors to the room to block out the noise. Later I had found out that a reason the inmates had taken to me was because I had closed the door. Most other teachers leave the door open because they were afraid of something

happening and they wanted it open so that they could get out of the room quickly.” By shutting the door, Roberts had trusted the inmates which had created a bond between them. Although he may have not realized it when he had shut the door, Roberts showed a trust that the inmates respected.

Teachers everywhere make a difference in the lives of students they teach. Most teachers have a moment when they know that they have made a difference in the life of one of their students. When Roberts was asked if there was time he felt that he made a difference, he told a story of a former student. “A girl came to me after class asking for help. Firstly, I made sure she was taking notes and reading. The girl had been underlining important things in her book with a perfect outline of the notes in class. I didn’t know what to do, so I told her she may want to go to a place to get checked to make sure she doesn’t have any learning disabilities. I never heard from the girl again until three years later when I got a note from her. She had just graduated and she was thanking me for helping her. Apparently she had gone to the place to get tested and found out that she did have a learning disability.” Roberts did not even know the name of the girl she helped but he knew he had made a difference in her life. Moments like these are when teachers such as Roberts have palpable evidence of their affect on the world. As Henry B. Adams said, “A teacher affects eternity; they can never tell where their influence stops.”

Works Cited

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