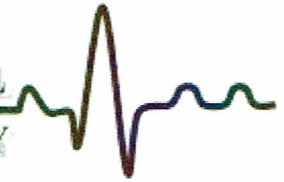




HARTFORD PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL
THE NURSING ACADEMY



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To Whom It May Concern:

The person who has influenced me the most outside of my immediate family is Mr. Richard de Meij, whom I first met in my sophomore year of high school as my Spanish II teacher. He would come into class with the most upbeat attitude and interesting attire, which obviously reflected his mood. "¡Buenos días!" he would say, as every student walked into his classroom. At first, I wondered who this guy was, but little did I know then that he was the person like whom I wanted to be someday.

Throughout my years in middle school leading up to high school, I wasn't interested in the Spanish language. That was until I became a student in Mr. de Meij's class. He used very enticing techniques that not only challenged his students, but that also made learning the language fun. I learned both the proper language and Spanish/Latin American customs as well. I have certainly enjoyed my experiences in his class, which have made me think of Spanish as not only another way of communicating, but also a chance to discover cultures different from my own.

Mr. de Meij's unique approach of teaching is only one of the many things he has accomplished as a person. He was born in Aruba where he natively acquired and spoke Dutch and Papiamentu, thus starting his career in linguistics in his childhood. After high school in Aruba, he attended the University of Florida where he majored in Communication Processes and Disorders (a.k.a. Speech-Language Pathology) and Applied Linguistics. It was during his college years that he became fluent in English, Spanish, French, Portuguese and German. Mr. de Meij also studied Japanese, Italian, Greek, Bulgarian and Tagalog (a.k.a. Filipino). He has also travelled to many countries, including The Netherlands, Germany, Morocco, Spain, The Philippines, Japan and The Czech Republic. In the summer of 2008, Mr. de Meij took 10 students from my then high school (Weaver High School) on a 10-day World Leadership & Service Training & Language Emersion trip to Nicaragua. There, my fellow-students completed a community project while they improved their Spanish language skills. Their accomplishments have been documented on Mr. de Meij's website at: www.celebratelanguages.com/nica2008.

Early in his career, Mr. de Meij worked in the Court of Justice as an interpreter. After a few years of working as an interpreter, and then as activities coordinator in the tourism industry, he then worked for 7 years in West Hartford Schools as a Spanish and French teacher, after which he then decided to work in the urban public schools in Hartford, Connecticut. Mr. de Meij often told me that he wanted to make a difference in the urban community by encouraging students to take advantage of the opportunity of learning other languages. He had noticed the scarcity of urban schools that expose students to rigor in foreign languages, and he wanted to change that. He also often shared with our class the many connections between language-learning and the increase in reasoning skills, critical thinking skills, literacy skills, and overall cognitive flexibility.

Mr. de Meij's admirable talents and passionate desire to make a difference in his urban community, as well as the many stories and life lessons he learned while visiting and living in various parts of the world, has captivated and inspired me to pursue excellence in all that I do in life.

All in all, Mr. de Meij has impacted my life through his outstanding accomplishments in his life. He has, and still continues to positively impact his community and many lives, and inspires me to want to do the same someday. I am inspired and determined to meet and exceed my goals to become a leader in my community. Mr. de Meij has dedicated his life to making differences in the world where differences need to be made, and I am inspired to do the same! Mr. de Meij is worthy of my admiration and respect.

Monique Mason
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