

Inspirational Teacher Matthew Schott

A Story by Lindsay Schallon

Eleven years later, I come back to this scene often: me, asleep in Room 139's darkroom during second period. I should have been in AP Calc. Instead, my journalism teacher Mr. Schott had McGyvered a T-shirt into a pillow and draped a coat over me. "I'll wake you up in time for photo journalism," he said. "And don't worry, I'll email Mrs. Spuede."

On the surface it sounds marginally appalling: A teacher let a student skip class to...sleep? But Mr. Schott saw something in me others simply didn't. Despite the fact that I had good grades, plenty would've described me as a "problem child." I'd roll into first period late and was constantly asking for homework extensions. Our vice principal once threatened I couldn't go to prom—despite being on the planning committee—because I had too many overdue detentions (of course, for missing class).

In a world where it felt like no matter how hard I tried, I was never good enough, Mr. Schott's empathy was transformative. To him, I wasn't the tardy kid—I was the kid working 40 hours a week after school because her home life was atrocious; the kid so hungry for independence she filled up her schedule with extracurricular activities. My hour between school and work was always spent in his room. In turn, he'd stay late to brainstorm yearbook ideas or teach me how to take an arresting action shot. (They're no Pulitzer winners, but my photos are still hanging on the wall at the local Applebee's, thanks to his nomination.)

The morning he let me nap, I'd just come off a particularly rough night. I went back to my mom's house after two weeks of staying with friends. I was out of clothes and needed to cram for a big test. Instead, we fought, and I finally started studying around 2 A.M. I went into Room 139 in tears that day. I was fragile, exhausted, and afraid if I bombed the exam, I wouldn't make it into Mizzou to study journalism.

I can't tell you how I did on that test (probably fine), but I can tell you what the impact of having a great teacher can have on a kid who desperately needs a cheerleader.

I ended up going to journalism school, a pursuit inspired by Mr. Schott's encouragement. Today, I'm a senior editor at Glamour. Every so often the exhaustion of a grueling news cycle catches up with me, and I get a flicker back to that morning. His pep talk was simple but profound: "You've got this."

I'm now 30, and Schotty is still my mentor. He's there for me when I need career advice or just to say he's proud of a project I shared on Facebook. I don't always see my family when I visit Missouri, but I do swing by Room 139 to talk to Mr. Schott and his students. They might not know how lucky they are to have him in their lives—but I do.