

Last New Year's Card

“Place your index finger in between your eye brows and close your eyes. Then put some pressure on your forehead. Then think about your previous field trip. What exciting things did you do there? Do you see anything? What you see is probably the most memorable incident from the field trip. Now, let's put your memories on paper before you forget. Slowly open your eyes...”

Then strangely enough, the rascal boys who only would just stare at their neighbors faces, as soon as they held their pencils in their hands, began to jot things down on the paper. But when the memories started to fade again, they put their index fingers back on their forehead and closed their eyes. They repeated this over and over again until the boxes on the manuscript was filled with black letters.

She was a very beautiful teacher, born during the Taisho era. She was the first teacher to put pencils in the hands of country boys who only carried baseball bats and taught us the joy of writing. She wasn't always nice, but very scary at times. When we lied, she yelled at us and when we were mean to girls, she gave us detention. She was even scarier when we were mean to kids who were weaker than us. But as she disciplined us, there were always tears in her eyes. Strangely, she let us go when we got into fights. I assumed that if she yelled at us for every time we fought, she would have lost her voice from yelling so much.

Around the time I turned 50, I returned home, to the countryside, and visited my former teacher. Her first greeting to me was “your face got chubbier,” and I was surprised that she still remembered how I looked in grade school when I was only skin and bone. So I replied to her jokingly and said that I eased my stress with food after being yelled at so much in my childhood. She gave me a smile and said, “I don't remember yelling at you. But I do remember you boys being so naughty.”

Last year, I sent a New Year's postcard to my teacher. Unlike previous years, I put some time and thought into it, like the times when I placed my index finger on my forehead for the essays I wrote in her class. The letter included some of my current events and goals that I've set for the new year. As I was getting ready to mail the letters, I received an unexpected notice of my teacher's death from my former classmate.

She had unexpectedly passed away in her kitchen at the end of November and didn't hear of her death until after a month had passed. Unlike some of my friends, I kept up with the things that happened at home, so my friends assumed that I also knew about my teacher's death. However, they didn't know that most of the updates came directly from her. Therefore, there was no way that I would have found out about her death. The New Year rolled around and I flipped through all the postcards I received that morning, but I couldn't find one from my teacher that year.

It's that time of year again; writing New Year postcards. Once again, I place my index finger on my forehead in remembrance of my teacher.