

Moments to Cherish **by Drew Mitchell**

Tell me if this has ever happened to you. You wake up one day, go to work and realize that there has to be something better in life than what you see in front of your face. You let the front office know you are leaving (and not just for the day) and you ride into the sunset. When I did this seemingly absurd thing, I felt the weight of the world leave me and I felt free for the first time in ages. But then I had to think long and hard - what's next? I'm not Bill Gates - I can't just snap my fingers every time I need a five spot!

I went back and forth for about a month and a half trying to figure out what I wanted to do now that I'd grown up. Did I really want to work in the same field or not? What was I missing? Where was my niche? I applied for all kinds of jobs - everything from managing a photo store to working in hospice. I even contemplated a paper route if you can believe that! I marketed my few skills to do freelance work and came up with zilch, nada, the big zero for customers. I thought I'd have to shovel snow for a living until something came up. The paper route idea kept looking like my next big thing after all.

An application I sent before I resigned my last position came back to life. The email had gotten filtered into the administrator's spam folder for some reason. He found it and called me and asked if I was still interested in working for him. He said he had some positions that I might be qualified for and interested in. I about jumped through my own skin! Of course, I said that I was interested.

I interviewed with this man and his assistant. At first, I didn't think I made a good impression. This guy was very professional - necktie and all. Very serious look on his face, yet soft spoken with a Texas accent. He started talking about certifications and stuff that I didn't have (yet). I pretty much told him I would mug the Pope to get what he needed me to have. Then his assistant, who had been rather quiet, spoke up. She said, "I have teachers who will be going through training the first two days of December. How about you come back and sub for us those two days and see if you want to work for us?" I about fainted! I thought this thing was going nowhere and then this lady is practically handing me an opportunity on a silver platter! So what did I say? What could I say? I said " I need to talk to my wife - she's the boss." Jeez - why didn't I just stand up and yell "Yes!!!" No - I had to be the good hubby - we run all big decisions by each other. So what did my wife say? Basically she said I was a lunkhead and that I should have jumped up and hugged this lady right then!

So I took the assignment of substitute teacher working with autistic children. I worked with kids ages 7 to about 11 years old. These were some of the cutest kids I have ever seen in my life. They were also some of the toughest kids I have ever worked with. I was hit several times and was kicked in my bad knee. One kid thought it was neat to climb on me like I was Kilimanjaro or something, thus killing my already bad back. This was an adorable little redheaded boy that took to me despite others saying he never takes to anyone. There were several tests of wills, including the same little redheaded boy making me go through my entire keyring to prove to him I did not have the key to open the door to the computer room. I was on my feet constantly, didn't have time for lunch or even a breather break. I felt like a fifth wheel half the time but soon started to catch on as I was able to use my sense of humor to win people over.

You are wrong if you think I ran away screaming. I loved it. I was home. I was back to my roots. I felt like I was doing what I should have been doing over the past 15 years - doing what I love. Being with kids that need me. Being someone who could contribute to the life of a child, even if that child doesn't realize that is what I am there for. Autistic kids rarely show much in the way of feeling for others. But I had two kids hugging on me that the other teachers and staff said never get close to others. I was able to feel a purpose to my work again. I was back where I needed to be. This did not turn into a permanent gig, but I knew that in time I could be happy again.