

EDITORIAL

The Symphony of Their Lives

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As you can tell by my recent editorial entitled “The Bucket List”¹ that appeared in *Optometry and Vision Development*, I watch a fair amount of television. One night not long ago, I watched a movie I had not seen in a year or so. I had seen this movie numerous times before and could therefore pick up at any point in the story and still find it enjoyable. When you watch movies over and over, you tend to see some of the same aspects and enjoy the same scenes. This time, after not seeing it for some time, I started to see similarity in the lives of two individuals I work with every day.

The movie I am referring to is called *Mr. Holland's Opus*. It stars Richard Dreyfus as a musician turned teacher who takes a job teaching to pay the bills. Teaching eventually becomes his life. He spends his career helping students in many different ways, learning more about himself along the way. He also spends his career fighting against the principal and school board as they attempt to cut the music and arts departments from the curriculum. In the end, (Spoiler Alert), the school board wins and his program is cut. But, in the final scene, just when he thinks his life has been a waste, his pupils, both past and present, perform a piece of music he has been toiling over for almost 30 years. It is a beautiful moment and I am not ashamed to admit that it in fact makes me farklept or choked up.

There is a quote in the movie that I would like to share with you. It is made in this poignant scene and spoken by one of the former students of Mr. Holland.

Mr. Holland had a profound influence on my life and on a lot of lives I know. But I have a feeling that he considers a great part of his own life misspent. Rumor had it he was always working on this symphony of his. And this was going to make him famous, rich, probably both. But Mr. Holland isn't rich and he isn't famous, at least not outside of our little town. So it might be easy for him to think himself a failure. But he would be wrong, because I think that he's achieved a success far beyond riches and fame. Look around you. There is not a life in this room that you have not touched, and each of us is a better person because of you. We are your symphony Mr. Holland. We are the melodies and the notes of your opus. We are the music of your life.

This quote touches my heart every time I watch the movie as I see a part of myself in Mr. Holland. I love being the underdog, fighting for the little person. Unfortunately, reality does not always make a Hollywood ending for everyone, so I am using this editorial to create one for two of the “Mr. Hollands” in my life.

I met both of these doctors when I moved to Southern College of Optometry (SCO) in 2007. One I had heard of but one I had not. They graduated a year apart from each other at SCO over 40 years ago and have been friends ever since. One has been teaching at SCO his entire career and the other just recently found his way back to his alma mater. I am speaking of Drs. Al Fors and W.C. Maples.

I had been at SCO almost 6 months and in that time had little interaction with Al. I am not quite sure if he actually ever spoke to me, but that does not mean that I was not learning from him. I would look over his charts and try to decipher the code that is his vision therapy language. It seemed from another time, to be honest. It got to the point that I had to ask what some techniques were and even what some pieces of equipment that he used were called. He was kind and did not make me feel stupid in any way. After thinking that this man could not possibly teach me anything and that his ways were outdated and obsolete, I was back in school learning from a master.

Al has taught over 5000 optometry students during his career. His didactic responsibilities have included labs and courses in pediatrics, strabismus and amblyopia, and vision therapy. He has taught in the clinic in the pediatrics and vision therapy services. He has personally, by way of the students, helped tens of thousands of children succeed academically and in life. He has accomplished this without much fanfare and has stayed under most people's radar screens. That is simply his way.

I first spied W.C. Maples at my first College of Optometrists in Vision Development (COVD) meeting in Weston, Florida in 2003. I had no clue who he was but he was always talking to someone. Usually, he was being followed around by a throng of women or was surrounded by a similar group of admirers. At the banquet, his table was the loudest and for some reason, the same women who were on his trail throughout the week waited in line to take pictures with him and hug

him way too many times. I wondered silently who the heck this guy was, not knowing that I would get the honor of being taught by him, several years later.

W.C. has been teaching for about 30 years and has taught approximately 1500 optometrists the art of vision therapy. At the Northeastern State University Oklahoma College of Optometry (NSUCO) in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, he was the chief of the pediatrics and vision therapy department, having built the department from the ground up. He also taught the vision therapy course for 25 years. He has authored too many articles, editorials and book chapters to even begin to mention and even has a test named after him. In 2006, he “retired” from NSUCO and joined the faculty at SCO, and the college, including myself, has been lucky to have him.

When you compare the two doctors side by side you will see numerous similarities and differences in style and personality. W.C. is loud, boisterous and is in non-stop high gear. Al is quiet, reserved and is one of the best listeners I have known. The most important commonality is that they have dedicated their lives to the profession of optometry and collectively taught a generation of optometrists, the importance of developmental/behavioral vision.

Look back at the quote made by one of Mr. Holland’s former students, and if you change several words, it can apply

to either of the gentlemen I have discussed in this editorial. While there are too many to mention, the national and international community is littered with optometrists whose lives have been touched in some form by one or both of these men. Many of their students run successful practices that specialize in vision therapy. Some of their students have followed their lead and entered into the world of optometric education. Some sit or have sat on the board of COVD. Simply put, the readers of this journal are the symphonies of their lives.

In the past six months, SCO has lost both of these champions to retirement. While it is impractical to gather all of their students and the lives they have touched in an auditorium as they did in the movie, we can all give thanks to these pioneers in our own private ways. Whether you call, email, write a letter, or choose to donate to the student scholarship funds set up in their names at SCO, take time out of your busy schedules to show your appreciation for all of the good they have done. Let them know that their “symphony” will continue to play on; it will be a force to be reckoned with for generations to come. This is a legacy of which they would be proud.

Good luck and good health always!

Reference

1. Taub MB. The bucket list. *Optom Vis Dev* 2010;41:210-12.



L. Allen Fors, O.D.



W.C. Maples, O.D.

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