

You Can Do It

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Many people have touched my life and inspired me to be a better person, but if I were asked to specifically name one person, who has inspired me, that person would have to be Mrs. Linda Church.



Samuel J. Long with his fourth grade teacher Linda Church

Mrs. Church, who is presently enjoying a much deserved retirement, was a fourth grade teacher, at the elementary school I attended. I being a third grader at the time, had heard rumors of what a mean and strict teacher Mrs. Church was. Boy was I dreading being in her room, frankly I was scared to death of her! Even when we would just pass her in the hall it worried me that she would fuss at me. I decided to tell my parents what the other kids were saying and how worried I was. My mom and dad told me to go into her class with an open mind and find out for myself what she was like because she might be completely different than the kids were saying. I soon figured out that Mrs. Church was one of the most loving and caring people I had ever met. We quickly became close friends.

About mid October, of that same school year, my legs and feet began aching and throbbing with the worst pain anyone could imagine. My mom or dad took me to the doctor what seemed like two or three times a week to no avail. It seemed like no one could figure out this mystery disease that was tormenting me and my family. It seemed like I was missing school all the time and the more I missed the higher the piles and piles of makeup work got. I can remember very clearly in my mind Mrs. Church sitting down beside me at my desk and telling me "it will be okay, we will make it through this together". Mrs. Church would say "Samuel, you are a smart boy and even though you are hurting YOU CAN DO THIS". That kept me motivated to keep moving, even though at times I thought I might be crazy, because doctors could not

figure out what was wrong with me and even talked like I might be making up the pain to get attention.

All through that year Mrs. Church worked one on one with me and tried to plan her class to be able to spend extra time helping me keep up and also so I could do all the cool stuff the other kids were doing, like growing coal flowers and taking cool test on the computer. She let my mom bring heating pads and pillows, for me to lay my feet and legs on, so I could be as comfortable as possible in class. I remember one time my legs were hurting the worst they ever had so Mrs. Church went to my mom, who also worked at the school, and asked her to please make the doctors do something for me. She even said "Have the doctor call me I will tell them he needs help and he can't hardly sit through class because he is in so much pain".

Finally, after five month of pain, test and doctors visits, my doctor after hearing, how troubled my fourth grade teacher was and how she was willing to tell him how bad I hurt and how hard it was for me to sit in class, decided to send me to a Pediatric Arthritis doctor.

When we went to the arthritis doctor he talked to us for a little while, did some blood work and diagnosed me with Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis. To some people that would have been horrible news but to me it was wonderful news because people were beginning to act like I was crazy or just playing a game for attention, but not Mrs. Church. My arthritis doctor asked me "do you want to stay home and do school at home"? I'm sure my parents thought I would say yes but to everyone's surprise I said "no, I don't want to because I love school and Mrs. Church says I can do it and I can"!

I believe God puts a Guardian Angel on this earth to watch over those that are small, weak or too sick to look out for themselves. I believe for me that person is Mrs. Linda Church! She touched my heart, the heart of my parents, and the heart of God when she did the things she did for me. She will never know how much I love her and how she had inspired me to be the person I am today. I think if she hadn't been there to encourage me I wouldn't have passed fourth grade and most certainly I wouldn't be a straight A student now. If all teachers in the state of Tennessee cared as much as she did we wouldn't have to worry about the future of our state because every child that entered the doors of a school would have the same love and encouragement she planted in my heart when I was in fourth grade. Every child would leave the

doors of the school at the end of the day with her words echoing in their ears “YOU CAN DO IT”!

I am now a 17 year old, who is almost out of high school. I plan to attend college to be a teacher. It is my hope and dream to be able to inspire my students the way Mrs. Church inspired not only me, a sick and hurting little boy, but every child that entered her classroom.



Hawkins Co. Superintendent Charlotte Britton, Linda Church, Samuel Long, Dr. Dan Tollett, Utrust Administrator who presented Samuel with a \$500 check, and Nedra Jackson, Personnel Director of Hawkins Co. Schools.