

The View from the Substitute's Desk

It seems to be the story of my life: I didn't know what I was getting myself into. Winter and early spring are typically a slower time for my photography business. And after discussing options with my husband, Craig, about how to fill that time this season, the idea of substitute teaching came up.

Hmmm. Could I truly keep a classroom under control? Or would I be the substitute who makes the news for being tied to her chair within the first five minutes of the morning bell?

I truly had no idea. But after weighing the pros and cons and learning substitutes are in high demand, I filled out the appropriate paperwork and became an official, licensed substitute teacher.

The start

It began with a few days a week in the various schools within our district — from kindergarten to senior classes. And as the weeks progressed, I realized I was getting the hang of this. Most days were almost, dare I say, fun.

In January, the high school principal approached me and asked me to consider being the full-time substitute for the general science teacher position through the end of the school year, as that teaching role became vacant.

Craig and I talked it over, and we decided it could be a good thing. So here I am, with my own classroom, desk and teacher's edition general science book. Yes, this all escalated very quickly.

Although some weeks have been an absolute whirlwind and a blur of information, decisions and "fish-out-of-water" moments, I'm also realizing that many lessons I'm learning through substitute teaching also carry over into all parts of our lives — including the show mom life.

You never know what baggage a person is carrying. Some children come to school with unimaginable hurts and stresses. The same is true for so many adults we meet each and every day.

A friendly gesture

Take the time to offer a smile. Open the door. Give a compliment.

At a show? Tail that heifer for the kid across the aisle. Grab a pitchfork and clean the stalls for your neighbor who headed to the showring. You just don't know what that gesture may do for someone who is at his or her breaking point that day.

If one approach doesn't work, try again. During my few months of substitute teaching, I've helped 5-year-old kindergarteners learn the sound "sh" makes. I've taught freshmen how to balance chemical equations. I've worked with seniors on writing persuasive essays. And I've learned what works for one student doesn't necessarily work for the next.

When you're working with youth, it can sometimes be frustrating when they don't "get it" right away. And that is ever so true when working with cattle.

As tough as it can be in the moment, it's important to step back during the moments of frustration at the washrack or at the chute. Take a deep breath. And reevaluate how you might explain the situation in a different way.

Yes, it takes time. And no one is perfect. But that simple step of breathing and thinking can lead to much less stress for everyone involved.

Have a little fun. I've subbed in rooms that were colorful and full of life, with creative lessons that made

learning fun. I've subbed in rooms with fairly bare walls, with lesson plans on simple PowerPoint slides. Is information being presented in both circumstances? Yes. Are the students excited about learning in both cases? Well, I'm willing to bet not.

The same could be said for our lifestyles of showing cattle and being on the road. Heaven knows cattle shows are long days, short nights, lots of work, and sore backs and feet.

But the world won't stop spinning if you take an hour or two during a weeklong junior national to check out a local attraction or to make a non-show memory. (Really, it won't.) It's OK to mix in a little fun with all of the work and learning that are taking place. It will become a treasured memory to add to the experience.



I'm amazed at the lessons I'm learning in the classroom — lessons that don't come from a textbook. Let's all try to be a little kinder and to have a little fun in whatever we are doing.

And in the meantime, I'll be here. Balancing chemical equations and doing my best to keep the paper airplanes from being launched in my direction. **HW**

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