

## School Subjects

5-20-24

Prompt: Favorite and least favorite school subjects and did you follow your early likes and dislikes into adulthood.

That is an easy prompt. I hated French. We had to choose a language to study in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. My choices were French, Spanish and Latin. My mother encouraged me to take Latin, but did I listen? Oh no. I sooo wish I had, but I picked French. Residing in upstate NY we were relatively close to Canada, so I thought knowing French would have been an asset. This was before the term 'Hispanic' had come into our vocabulary and my only friend who would now fall into that category was JoAnn whose father was from Cuba. I suppose she knew some Spanish but it never occurred to me that someday I would really appreciate knowing it. No. I chose French.

There were several problems with this choice. First, the French teacher, Mr. Redman, was a terrible teacher. That was the first problem. But the real problem was that I'm a phonetic speller. It wasn't until graduate school that I learned that there are several ways people go about spelling: phonetic, visual, or, if you are a good speller, both. With all of those silent letters and unique pronunciations, French is an absolute landmine for a phonetic speller. I struggled through that first year and made the unaccountable decision to do a second year, again with Mr. Redman, who had followed us from Middle School to High School, as my only choice of teacher. I suppose the reason I kept going was a language didn't "count" towards college unless you had two years of it. What a mistake! Needless to say, I failed the class. However, in NY there is a state exam called 'the Regence.' A passing grade in school was 75%, but it was only 65% on the Regence. If you passed the Regence, you passed the course.

My mother earned a gold medal in supportive parenting that year. She helped my cram for that French Regence virtually nightly from February until the exam in June. Talk about frustration! I'm not sure how either of us survived those sessions, which often ended in tears on my part. She was a paragon of patience. When the time came, I didn't feel much better prepared in French than when we started. I did pass however, with a 66%. To this day, hearing or seeing French makes me nervous. Once I broke up with a really nice guy because he was enamored with French. Talk about a mismatch! I went on to German. They can spell!

On the other hand, I loved science in all of its forms, especially biology. I was lucky to have Mr. Tyranny in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. He took us far beyond the standard science curriculum. He was followed by a series of excellent and demanding teachers who just deepened my fascination. I suppose that, being the 'Sputnik' generation didn't hurt, as science was elevated in its importance in the curriculum.

When I looked forward to college, I looked for a major with lots of science and no language requirement. Physical Therapy fit the bill and led me to a very satisfying almost 40 year career. All of that good science teaching really paid off. I realized how lucky I was when I took the required freshman biology course at Boston University. It was one of those classes taught in a large auditorium with separate labs and was considered the freshman "flunk-out" course. For me it was just a review of the

foundations that I received from Mr. Tyranny in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. (NB He was just a teacher for a short time because he was doing it to earn enough money to go back to school to become a vet. How lucky we were to catch him at that moment in his life.) I still read a weekly British science magazine, try to keep up with all the new science discoveries and find books on various scientific topics. It has truly been an area of life-long interest.