

SARAH (Wendholt) KNEPPER

Lessons in Diversity: The Positive Effects of Cultural Awareness

Graduate: Class of 1996 Occupation: Elementary Teacher
By Logan Wendholt Spring, 2009

“You will find that the more you learn about others, the more you will learn about who you really are,” says Sarah Knepper. Sarah has traveled all over the United States. Some of her travels immersed her in a new culture -- like her student teaching experience on a Navajo reservation. Others have taught her how to take control of a situation -- like when she was a camp counselor in Maine. Using these experiences, Sarah has become a successful teacher and a better person.

After graduating from Forest Park in 1996, Sarah moved on to Indiana University, where she acquired a bachelor's degree in elementary education. Currently living in Denver, Colorado, she works as a third grade teacher at Ponderosa Elementary, a school in the nearby suburb of Aurora.

Ponderosa Elementary has made their mission “to inspire every student to think, to learn, to achieve, to care.” Sarah works every day to accomplish this task by teaching her third graders about reading and writing. She balances many tasks throughout her day: assigning and grading homework, handling problems with student behavior, creating lesson plans, and charting student progress.

Sarah has held many teaching jobs during her lifetime, including two years as a fifth grade teacher and one as a third grade teacher at Kenton Elementary, another school in Aurora. She has also worked as a substitute teacher. However, her jobs haven't always been in education --she also spent time in Lake Tahoe, California, working as a snowboard instructor.

The summer after her sophomore year of college, Sarah worked at a summer camp by Lake Sebago, Maine, where she taught tennis and supervised a group of campers. Personal space was scarce; Sarah shared a cabin with eight children. Nevertheless, she enjoyed herself and gained experience with young people along the way. This summer working with children taught her how to manage her students in the classroom more effectively.

Looking for a more unique student teaching experience during her senior year, Sarah decided to take a position in Arizona. She traveled to Lukachukai --a Navajo reservation -- and began teaching. Lukachukai has remained largely undeveloped; the town consists of a gas station, post office, trading post, and school. Despite its remote location, Sarah enjoyed her time there immensely. The experience opened her eyes to different cultures and taught her how to communicate effectively in a unique school setting.

After college, Sarah moved to Denver, Colorado. Even though Sarah misses living in a small town, she loves living in Denver because she can enjoy snowboarding, camping, hiking, and mountain biking without having to go far from home. Sarah also enjoys the diversity of people and culture found in Denver.

Sarah's extraordinary like experiences helped prepare her for her vocation. She believes meeting people of different religions, races, and cultures can have a positive impact on anyone's life, and she encourages everyone to explore the world and experience as much as possible. After all, life is too short to close your mind to the world around you!