

Rock Star Status for a Day

For one day I know what it feels like to be a celebrity. Not the kind that creates a frenzy of thoughtless screaming and reckless behavior. But the kind that stems from sincere appreciation and gratitude. And the fan base is made up of First through Fifth graders at Voyager Elementary School under the guidance of Principal Patty McClelland.

I am now an official member of Watch D.O.G.S. (Dads Of Great Students). My name around campus was affectionately just Watch Dog. My day started with a greeting from Chad Redinbo, Chief DOG who is spearheading the movement for Voyager. As we entered the training grounds of our future leaders, Nora Halsen and Lynn Tachell greeted me and gave me a hero's welcome, other than fingerprinting me.

After my short briefing, Principal McClelland handed over my marching orders (itinerary). My first assignment was to don my Watch D.O.G.S. uniform, a t-shirt that identified me as the campus Watch DOG for the day. Then I had my picture taken with my son and met David Aston at the curb to meet the students. To my utter amazement, David met almost every student by name. Admittedly he struggles with the Kindergartners. Not to be outdone, I wrote down David's name so I wouldn't forget it. I lost my notebook during my activities.

I then entered the gym where the 3rd – 5th Graders were meeting to get their day started. As I walked in dozens of heads started turning and with smiles glowing and then they started waving as a greeting to their Watch DOG. Mrs. McClelland introduced me and they applauded. As the students filed out I was blindsided with hugs and pats, high fives, low fives, and Watch DOG hellos.

After a short visit to my son's class with Rhonda Haug and her student assistant Miss B., I commenced my first round of patrol. A check of the parking lot, verifying no one was sitting in a parked car, then a walk around the circumference of the school grounds. For this I had 20 minutes, so my walk was really a jog. A little exercise on the job was a bonus. Little did I know what was to come?

My next assignment was the library with Sherry Olive where I talked to students who were reading. I'm still wondering about the boy who insisted on checking out Barbie and Ken books. He seemed most fascinated by their story. Amy Neal's 4th Grade class gave me my first opportunity at tutoring. Travis and I did some math, which put me a little behind schedule and I hustled into the lunchroom for the 1st – 3rd grade lunch break.

Again heads turned as I entered the room. Still getting used to that. I got to the first table and asked if they had learned anything. It seemed math was the topic du jour, so I quizzed each table on their math skills. The kids were excited to share their

knowledge with me. As the younger stars filed out to play, the older stars filed in. One of the highlights was eating lunch with my son Samuel. We chatted about stuff and then my day became very challenging.

When I was in elementary school, recess was never long enough. At my age, recess is too long. I was recruited, more like drafted, into a massive capture the flag game. Somehow I ended up on the girl's team and discovered a fascinating difference in the genders approach to the game.

Don't even try to tell me that girls are not competitive. They even had multiple strategies. I've played capture the flag for almost five decades and never witnessed so many strategic huddles and routes to get the boy's flag. It was like a loosely organized football game. I was informed by many a young man about certain rules I violated. These kids were serious; I was looking for the portable oxygen tanks. There were none. I made a note to tell the principal about the health risk.

After lunch, I searched for the locker room so I could shower and get out of my sweaty clothing, but Lynne Johnson's 5th grade class was waiting for me. Tony and I worked on math for the next 20 minutes. Seeing Tony catch on was an intrinsic high point thus far, I made a difference. But I was late again for my patrol of the grounds.

As I commenced surveillance I noticed three suspicious entities lurking in the parking lot. I made a beeline to the administration's office and informed Mrs. Tachell about the intruders. Excitedly, she fumbled through her purse, grabbed her camera and ran outside to take pictures of the mommy deer with her twins.

Finishing my rounds, I glanced at my agenda and my heart sank, oh no, I thought, a double recess. I noticed the swing set at the other end of the play ground and started straight for them when a young crumb-cruncher said "hey Watch DOG, you wanna play soccer with me?" Drafted two times in one day. Then I considered, these are the 1st - 3rd graders, no problem, I'll toy with them and just go easy until the big kids get here.

For the next 20 minutes I ran my head off. Luke and his cronies were formidable in their soccer skills. We had about 20+ kids playing and it seemed like 15 of them were on the other team. The highlight of the game was my young great nephew Carson, a 1st grader, who scored our only goal, but we lost 2 - 1 and I was dripping wet. Thank goodness the bell rang. I caught my breath and then trouble arrived, my son and his buddies.

I promised a young man to swing with him, so we spent 5 minutes on the swings, then 5 minutes playing football with a few athletes before I was again drafted into another capture the flag game. This time I was on the boy's team and those girls were aggressive. One young lady read the riot act to me about all of my rules violations. I asked to see the rules and she informed me they were in her friend's locker. I asked if they were notarized. She scowled at me.

Mrs. Scott's 5th grade class was waiting for me as I arrived exhausted, dripping wet, and wondering what was next. I got to work with Dylan, Damien, and Elena on their math, spelling, and composition. My final classroom was back to Mrs. Haug's class where I practiced spelling with Natalia and her flaming red hair.

After my debriefing with Principal McClelland I bid farewell to the students at the front of the school. I was tired and worn out, my brain was exercised, my gratitude for what teachers do every day was heightened, and my resolve to be a better dad was strengthened.

As I got in my car I read a note that was passed to me during the day. It was from one of the teachers thanking me for being there. I received a warm glow that only comes when you do something for someone else without an expectation of recompense.

Was I really a Rock Star for a day? No, not really. I was among the greatest gifts God gives us, our children. And for a day, I experienced the dedication of our schoolteachers working their magic and trying to make our world a better place. In the end, I was the lucky one for getting to experience the joy and happiness of our children feeling another level of love coming from a volunteer dad.

For more information on the Watch D.O.G.S. go to www.fathers.com