

# A Tribute

Delivered by Eddie D. Robertson

At the funeral of Miss Virginia Wall, July 23, 2016

Please take a minute to look around at those sitting in your area. Note the wide range of ages that you see. Chances are that more than one person seated near you was a student of Virginia Wall, the Chillicothe High School English teacher we all respectfully called "Miss Wall".

Although decades have passed since we sat in her class, that feeling we had when she greeted us back then has not faded from our collective memories. There is no dimming of our recollections when it comes to matters involving this particular teacher. .... memories in her classroom, in the halls, memories of her out and about in our town, and worshipping here in her beloved church. We humans tend to hold on to the best memories of our childhood and Miss Wall was most certainly a big part of our best memories. She was indeed . . . and will always be . . . a timeless icon in our lives. In fact, there probably will never be another teacher at CHS that will teach English for 45 years....in the same classroom!!!

Miss Wall strived relentlessly to guide us toward a special understanding of how much life could be contained in written words . . . and she worked very hard at teaching us how to make sure that our own written words were filled full of that life. To a casual observer visiting her classroom for a brief period, her teaching style may not have seemed much different than that of other teachers in nearby classrooms. But anyone who spent just a few extra class cycles with her could not avoid noticing what the highest level of teaching excellence looked like. She had a delivery that was both gentle and powerful at the same time. She had command of the classroom and had control of every student's attention span. Her ability to accomplish this was not due to the class being populated with perfectly reared and well behaved children, it was rooted in a style she had of making every lesson incredibly interesting and profoundly important

to each and every one of us. Many of us who may have slouched in geography or snoozed in civics classes seemed to acquire an unexpected second wind as soon as we crossed the threshold of her classroom . . . and we absorbed as much as we could from this teacher whom we all respected so very much . . . perhaps because she showed so much respect for each of us.

Words are powerful—written, spoken, or sung. Miss Wall was a master of words. Everyone has thought that Miss Wall loved English and literature more than anything else in life. It certainly appeared that way to all of her students because of the enthusiastic level of energy she put into helping us grasp certain concepts and master important skills. But, I think we were all wrong. What Miss Wall really loved more than anything else in the world is sitting all around you right now. What she treasured most in life was her family, her friends, and her students. Above all, she valued the relationships she had with each and every person that was a part of her life.

She was concerned about her students even after their graduation from high school. She and Bob Fairchild organized the first MAXI-Reunion of all of the CHS classes of the 1950s. This reunion has become a regular event every five years which attracts graduates from many states to return to Chillicothe to refresh their friendships. In fact, the MAXI-VIII Reunion will be held in September this year.

Woven seamlessly into Miss Wall's life were the many friendships she treasured and the interactions she so enjoyed with her students. Watching her leading a class, directing a Cresset Play or Senior Play, guiding the journalism of the Gabbler, and preparing each senior class for the all-important days of baccalaureate and graduation, it was quite clear that she truly loved her students. She did this by keeping up that unmatched level of energy in every class she taught with every student. She knew better than anyone, that if she could succeed at giving us a working knowledge of the language skills she strived to teach, our adult existence would be much easier, more fulfilling, and more successful. She truly believed that the greatest gift she could give these people she cared about—her students—was this huge advantage in their lives during the years following high school graduation.

It's quite easy for me to stand up here and proclaim that every person who ever had Miss Wall as a teacher will tell you that she was their most influential teacher. It's easy for me to make this proclamation because I've heard it consistently from the time I was in school through today, almost six decades later, and I know I'll continue to hear it tomorrow . . . and on into the future. With the advent of the internet, email, and social media, there is a much larger sampling of this unwavering opinion in the past few years than there ever was before. Although Miss Wall decided not to dive into the computer age she did enjoy having comments from social media related to her. Even today she still receives unwavering adoration in social media.

In fact, several years ago, some of her former students established the Virginia Wall Scholarship fund, which grows every year and will be an enduring tribute to her.

To memorialize her lifelong relationships with her students and her family, she asked her very close friend, Bonnie Mitchell, to write her memoirs. Bonnie wrote *The Virginia Wall Story* which was published a few years ago—of course with detailed direction from Miss Wall.

Now look around you one more time....a little further out this time. Note a few more people in your area. There are many very thankful people around you. Some are thankful to have had Miss Wall as a teacher. Some are thankful to have had her as a part of their family. Many are thankful to have had her as a friend or an acquaintance. Many are thankful to have known her as she shared her stories about her travels throughout the United States and many European countries.

So as we say goodbye today we have no difficulty finding a common language, and I am not speaking of English. What we hold in common — what holds us in common — is gratitude, respect, and affection for Miss Virginia Wall.