

# My English teacher Muriel Allison taught me that I had 'it'

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SHARON  
O'DONNELL

**She showed her students that it was OK to show their feelings.**

I was relaxing on my couch one day last week, perusing a copy of *The News & Observer*, enjoying some rare free time. When I turned to the obituary page, I saw her picture immediately. Right at the very top of the far left column; I couldn't miss it. I sat up straight, my hands clutching the paper, my heart jumping into my throat.

The photo was from a time in her life before I had known her —

maybe 30 years before I first stepped into her classroom. But her face was unmistakable — her kind eyes, her familiar, encouraging smile. The obituary gave her age as 77, about what I thought she would be by now, though I'll always imagine her the way she was in 1980 when she was my high school English teacher. The paper also said she died after an extended illness, and I felt terrible that I hadn't known she had been sick. Disbelief set in. My eyes darted above the picture to double-check the name: Muriel Waters Allison.

The newspaper collapsed in my

hands, and my tears came suddenly and unexpectedly, emptiness welling up within me. It hurt to know I would never hear her voice again, never be encouraged by her optimism or inspired by her impassioned ranting and raving. During my junior and senior years from 1978 to 1980, I was in Mrs. Allison's English class at Athens Drive High School in Raleigh, but I had kept in touch with her many years after that.

## Genuinely excited

I had never had a teacher quite like Mrs. Allison. I could see in her

face and hear in her voice how genuinely excited she was about teaching. Suddenly English wasn't just grammar and literary terms, though she was the one who made it clear to me how to use semicolons and commas to avoid run-on sentences. English became so much more — philosophy, imagining, caring, believing and sharing. In her class, I discovered I could actually express emotions that others could only feel. It felt good when I began to see that I could touch my parents and my friends with my writing.

SEE O'DONNELL, 5B



Muriel Waters Allison

