

Of all the people in my life, the one person who has inspired me the most is...

The person who has been the greatest inspiration to me is my mentor, the director of our church's youth ministry. He led me to rediscover my faith — a wonderful start for our relationship! I later adopted him as a second father and like a father; he has guided, counseled and encouraged me throughout my high school years. He taught me what becoming "a woman of substance" means. I learned that I alone am responsible for my life and am accountable for my actions. I now set high standards for myself and have adopted his conviction as a conservative. Taking charge of my life means accepting my successes and failures as my own; not accepting the former and blaming the latter on society. I strive to do what is right, especially when my standards run counter to societal norms. I will not submit to precepts that ethics and morality are situation dependent.

My favorite childhood story was Dr. Seuss's "Green Eggs and Ham." My mentor reminds me of Seuss's character "Sam". My mentor's persistent, loving, encouragement egged me into testing my limits and discovering many God-given talents. I love playing piano, singing and acting and am a voracious reader who loves journaling. He encouraged me to develop these talents. He "volun-told" me to perform special music and do scripture readings at church where I developed presence and confidence in front of large groups. He encouraged me to join Show Choir. His hearing loss always left me doubting his claims he could distinguish my voice from among the 50 other voices — until he caught me lip-synching when I lost my place during a performance! I learned my contribution is important and I must always be prepared. He encouraged my auditioning for school plays and cheered me on through two starring roles. He encouraged me to expand and diversify my reading interests and tutored me in writing for AP English class. I discovered my talent for critical analysis. I learned to view issues holistically, analyze divergent information and distinguish fact from specious argument. I continue to develop these skills through the journalism class he encouraged me to take. I discovered new strengths and learned to accept my limitations. Of most importance, I also learned to mitigate my weaknesses by having the confidence to ask others for help. I learned sharing my strengths and leveraging the expertise of others moves us closer to success! I am learning that patience, compassion and empathy mitigate frustration when I am pressed to maintain a sound, logical argument in the face of emotional vitriol.

Above all, I learned taking risks offers delights as well as disappointments and that risking nothing, offers nothing. I am grateful for the "Sam" in my life and all the valued lessons I learned as he challenged my insecurities and stubbornness with loving optimism to convince me to take a chance and try something new. I am blessed having a "Sam" of my own and I am committed to being a Sam for others.