

A Bond beyond the Blackboard



Schools, filled with classrooms of scores of students, can sometimes be lonely. But not when you have a Principal like Daphne Unger. Whose students think of her not just as someone who draws on the blackboard, they think of her as a friend. Because Daphne goes beyond the four walls of the classroom and builds with her “children” a relationship of trust. One that isn’t confined to the world of fractions and integers.

Daphne Unger didn’t plan on becoming a teacher; but fate planned on making her one. On a rainy day in July, Daphne was encouraged to pick up an application and started on the road to becoming a teacher. A path she has walked on with integrity, passion and commitment. One that didn’t just bring

her joy, but brought her children happiness, too. Her journey has been peppered with reassurances, both big and small. But, one instance stands out.

On one of her daily rounds through the sunny corridors of Aditya Birla Public School (ABPS), Karnataka, Daphne met Meera. A young student with a twinkle in her eye, a twinkle that threatened to fade out. Meera's report card didn't speak of her talents. It showed numbers that were below average and said that Meera's father's dream of seeing her with a stethoscope around her neck would not be realized. Meera's 10th standard board exams came and went. Her grades were low, but her father's expectations were high. With a meagre 42% Meera had to switch schools.

It was exam time again. And Meera failed in two papers. A truth she didn't tell her parents. Supplementary exams had to be taken to ensure she was promoted. On the day of the exam, Meera found that the exam had been shifted to the morning, but Meera wasn't informed.

Meera went back to an empty house, her face streaked with tears, needing to speak to someone who would understand. She called Daphne amidst sobs.

Daphne knew Meera since she was a little girl and had consoled her on many occasions, but something about Meera's voice warned her that this time was different. Her heart told her she needed to be by Meera's side, not on the phone. Trusting her instinct, Daphne drove with a sense of urgency to Meera's house with a compassionate colleague as support. And when they broke open the door, they found her hanging from the

ceiling fan. Not wasting a second, they undid the noose, and rushed Meera to a hospital.

At the hospital, the doctors said Meera was in a critical condition and placed her under observation. Daphne sat by Meera's bedside, holding her frail hand in hers. When Meera finally opened her eyes, Daphne's started filling up again.

Knowing that numbers and stethoscopes don't add up to happiness, Daphne spoke to Meera's parents at the hospital. And with the fear of losing their daughter becoming a tangible one, they listened. Daphne then had a long conversation with Meera's Principal and convinced him to allow her to switch to a subject she liked. Finally being able to follow her heart, Meera flourished. Her smile showed what the grades confirmed. Today, Meera works in Bangalore at an I.T firm. She and Daphne still talk. Albeit about happier things.