



St. Rita Graduate Eileen Chambers

It's always nice when St. Rita alumni come back to visit. Many graduates make it back for the reunions, some come back to see younger friends graduate, and a handful stop by on occasion to watch St. Rita sporting events. And although most look forward to the nostalgia and reminiscing that accompanies them when visiting their old stomping ground, there are a chosen few who feel a stronger connection. There are a few who come back to teach what they had been taught, to kids who remind them a little bit of themselves.

Eileen Chambers grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, where she began her education at an oral school for the deaf. A friend of her mother's had a deaf child who attended a school for the deaf in Cincinnati. She spoke very highly about this school on many occasions, sparking Eileen's mother to learn more about it. She gathered more information on the school and after giving it some thought, decided that her daughter would also attend. This school was St. Rita School for the Deaf. Eileen made the switch in the early 1970's. It was a difficult transition for a couple of reasons. It was not only a new school but it was a new way of learning and living. Eileen was used to an oral philosophy, using her voice. She quickly realized that most students at St. Rita used a combination of both sign language and voice. Eileen worked hard to improve her signing skills so she could communicate with her new friends. It was also the first time she had been away from home. A five-hour drive to Cleveland required her to be a residential student. She said learning how to live separately from her family was the hardest part about changing schools.

She has very fond memories of her days at St. Rita and was involved in many activities. Learning three different languages and being mentally challenged in the classroom kept her busy, but she still found the time to get involved after school. She played on the volleyball, basketball, and softball teams. For years she participated in such drama productions as Winnie the Pooh and You're a Good Man Charlie Brown. But when she thinks back, it is the times she spent with good friends while at St. Rita that remain most vivid in her suitcase of memories.

Eileen knew before she graduated from St. Rita in 1979, that she wanted to study education and someday teach deaf students. She is a proud graduate of Galludet University where she got a degree in Elementary Education. Eileen later completed her graduate degree in Deaf Education from Maryland College. It wasn't soon after that she received a phone call. A familiar voice from her past. It was Father Wysong, her religion teacher from St. Rita. He was looking for someone to fill a resident advisor position. She really wanted a teaching position, but took him up on his offer to gain some experience working with deaf children. Five quarters later a position at St. Rita was available and she began her career as an elementary teacher.

For thirteen years St. Rita has been lucky to have Eileen as part of the faculty. She currently teaches the third grade intermediate level and has had a lot of success with her students. Eileen thinks teaching can be a challenging job, but one that is important. She said it takes a lot of patience to help deaf and hard of hearing children to learn. "I love teaching kids and I seem to have a good rapport with them. My students can relate to me because I am deaf just like them." Although her job can be difficult at times, she says it's worth it when she sees her students growing, learning, and gaining self-esteem. Her students like her too. Just a little. At a recent school mass, a couple of her students became very upset. When asked why they were crying, a little voice spoke up softly, "We wanted to sit by Eileen."

