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Marijane Whitfield: The heart of teaching art

and math is important, but it may not be as important to you as what we're doing in here."

"And I believe it," she said.

Not only did Whitfield believe in the importance of art, but also the art program received strong support from school administrators. After several years of her being the only art teacher, the program was expanded to add another teacher.

"Dr. Flowers expanded the art program, and Anthony Thaxton taught there [with me]," Whitfield said. Thaxton, while a student at Mississippi College, had spent time student teaching under Whitfield.

"My first year to teach," recalls Thaxton, "Marijane and I performed a 'Michelangelo and the Pope' skit for stunned CJHS kids, who were thinking, 'Why did I sign up for this art class?!'"

"Marijane Whitfield is one of the finest people I'm ever known. She taught me so much about being a teacher, an artist, a musician and a friend. She is a Clinton treasure," Thaxton said.

"The biggest lesson she taught me," said Thaxton, "was that every student was someone's whole life... and they were trusting that student to our care. I grew as a teacher, for sure, but over time being her friend, I grew even more as a human being."

Marijane's husband, who goes by his last name, Whitfield, his nickname, "Mad Dog," or M.D., has been by Marijane's side since they met, then married, in 1967.

"When people ask me about Marijane, I ask them if they want to know about my wife, my girlfriend, my teacher, my scholar, my best friend," he said. "If you could see the number of children that came back from college and would stop by to see her, talking about what they learned in seventh and eighth grades and then learned in college... tons of kids."

Marijane modestly said it was "a few" students; Whitfield insists it was many, and a lot of them told Marijane they had decided to major in art because of what they learned in Marijane's classes. "She was fortunate enough to have principals like Billy Ray Smith, Danny Pepper, even down through Mr. Goins, and they all respected art," Whitfield said. "They didn't look at it as an alternative sub-



Special to The Clinton Courier
Wedding photo of Whitfield and Marijane from 1967

ject. They really liked the art."

"I married my best friend, and we've had a really great life together," Marijane said. "In a nutshell, I loved what I did. I loved working with those kids," she said. "I feel I had the near-perfect life in that I had a job that I loved that also gave me time to have a whole other life. I had kids, they had kids. I feel I had the best of both worlds."

"I was born and raised in a time for women that there weren't a whole lot of choices. I just stumbled into being a teacher." She was home about ten years with her three babies, then she talked to Mr. Smith at CJHS and got a job at the junior high. "It was a privilege for me to be there."

Now, Marijane spends her retirement time at home, watching her two youngest grandchildren, which she said reminds of her of when she was home raising her children. A gifted pianist, she also plays music at home and in a couple of small bands and ensembles, and does art projects. She volunteers at the Clinton Visitor Center, where she plays music in a group named "Drifting Minds." She also has a little family band that includes her 16-year-old grandson, Josh, who plays saxophone. Clinton residents and good friends of the Whitfields, Roger and Anne Weill, come to the Whitfields' house and make music with them. And Whitfield sings.

Another group of which she is a member is "Slightly Tarnished," an ensemble which features Marijane on keyboards, an electric guitarist, and a lady vocalist. "We do folk-style ballads."

She has taught some painting classes at the Clinton Nature Center, and currently teaches free drawing classes on Facebook. Her lessons, just like her person, are filled with love, talent and kindness.

"I've mostly done what I wanted since retiring," she said.

The Whitfields are long-time members of Northside Baptist Church in Clinton. "I feel like the people have been there [at the church] on that journey with me. I have so much respect for them and so much love and admiration for them... the bottom line for me is the love. You love people, really love them, and think about the good of others. That's how I want to be."

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