**Dear Ms. Takano,**

Although I was only in the 6th grade, you made 1966 the most memorable year of my youth. You demanded more of each student than we ever thought possible, but you only did it in small bites, so that we scarcely realized that we were nearing the top of the mountain after following you around on a steep stroll. Our class was trained and operated using Roberts Rules - there were motions and seconds, we put forth ideas and voted on them, we called our class the “Panel Of Experts”, we designed and produced a monthly school paper, “The POE Peeper”. This structure and framework allowed each of us a say in how the group would move forward, what sort of goals we would develop, who would lead each effort. We were giddy with power and potential.

You knew I was an outcast, and kept pulling me into the middle of things, often reluctantly. I had a problem with authority, which is to say, I didn’t like anyone telling me what I should be doing. I remember being Forced to write my first poem. So I balked. I made excuses, I produced delaying tactics, but eventually you told me that I HAD to write the poem that day. I wrote a wretched thing that made no sense and barely rhymed. Still. It was a poem. Huh. I bet I could do better than that…

You saw potential within me even though I was trying my best to hide from the world. You demanded that I stop floundering and start paying attention to life and people, try to determine how to carve a course through this messy life. I still recall with a sting when you pulled me aside. The other kids had warned me - If Ms. T. has ‘a talk’ with you, she will make you cry - so I was a bit intimidated, and you started talking to me, not at me. You bore into the center of me, and pulled out the shiny center. You correctly delineated my fears and hopes, berated me for not using the talents that I clearly had available; it was a painful pep talk and I walked away feeling defeated, but the words hovered and soften as I trudged homeward. Huh. I had potential. I recall that day plain as if it were yesterday, and I wanted to thank you for being so giving, for understanding how tiny minds worked and what to say and do to move them to a better place.

I was enclosed in a small place, where we only knew other military kids on the Naval base, so it was not a broad cross section of America. But your words drove me to pay more attention to the things and people around me. Instead of my reality bubble only extending a few feet from my mind, I stretched it, expanded it, and found myself pondering others, what they felt, how they moved through their life.

As this expanded attention flexed, I began to notice that those young soldiers had a strained, haunted look - all of them - while they laughed, joked and tossed each other in the pool fully clothed. I asked Dad about them and he told me they were here for R&R - Rest and Recuperation - from fighting in a war in Vietnam. The look on their faces when they relaxed or thought no one was watching made my spine tingle in a bad way.

I started paying more attention to the news, to determine what this ‘war’ thing was that would crease such furrows into the foreheads of so many soldiers. I started asking questions. Soon, I found war to be stupid and wasteful, and started my 55+ year rant against killing people and breaking things for a living. And I owe it to you for forcing my eyes opened.

Thank you for awakening my awareness, Ms. T, I’ll never forget you