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South Bend Tribune

October 2, 2004

This science educator stands on solid rock

NEXT GENERATION: TEACHER SPOTLIGHT

By **BOBBY WILLIAMS**
Riley High School

The first time I met Horrall, I honestly didn't like her. It was the first day of her class and she spent the whole hour telling us not to make fun of any one.

She told us about her multiple surgeries, the plate in her head and how she once grew facial hair as a result of hormones she was taking at the time.

The overall impression the class had of her was that this woman was crazy.

Right before we left, she told us how students from years ago would bring her rocks from time to time. "You'll like rocks by the end of taking this class," she said as we were leaving. "You'll bring me rocks. You'll see."

"Yeah right," I thought getting out of her room as quickly as I could.

The next day was a totally different story. Her science class turned out to actually be very interesting. No only did she show us all these different rocks that looked interesting, but also she actually gave us a rock to taste. She was a totally different person than I met my first day.

"I think you have to have humor, know your material, be honest. You have to be able to relate to kids but still be an adult," Horrall said.



JANUS HORRALL, RILEY HIGH SCHOOL



Not only does this woman know her material, but also she has something that is hard to find these days. She cares about each and every one of her students. She reaches out and is respected pretty much by every student.

"The Wild Boys have my back," Horrall said. She's learned their handshakes, something most students can't even understand. She's actually had them stay the night at her house to have a football party with her kids. "They were well behaved. They had a food fight, but cleaned everything up."

She may not look like it, but Horrall has a mild history with gangs. Horrall ran a youth center and would actually have rival gangs come over and box. What made this even more unique is that the rival gangs would always behave.

"They treat me with respect because of how strong I am with my religion. I don't drink. I don't smoke. I don't cuss. And so they know I don't like those things and don't do them around me," she said.

When her husband and she decided to start a family, there were some problems that couldn't be explained. Their first child was born with multiple deformities. A year later, their second child was born with only a brain stem. She lived for 10 years, but during that time was pretty much a vegetable. At one point she won a medal in the Special Olympics.

Horrall later met a family who encouraged her to adopt. She adopted four children and, with her husband, served as foster parents for three different children, one of whom was a Riley student.

Through all this, she's learned a lot about life and God. And through her class, so did I.

Her class is one of those classes in which as much as you learn about rocks, you learn just as much, if not more, about life.

You never know what situations are going to be thrown your way, or what people have been through. And thanks to Horrall, I think I've become a more accepting person.

Jump to a day:

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