

February 16, 2006

Dear Normandy Parents,

There's an old saying, "Laughter is the best medicine." I heartily agree. On Valentine's Day, Justin Matott, author of Ol' Lady Grizelda, and a whole bunch of other children's books, spoke to the students at two different assemblies. Within minutes of Mr. Matott's first presentation, he had enthralled his audience. We laughed with him as he described and mimicked his dogs' greetings when he came home. When he encouraged us to write about the things we know, the happenings in our own lives, adult and child alike thought, "I can do that!" Kindergartners, first and second graders (including teachers) left the gym feeling better than when they entered because this wise man had given them the gift of laughter on this special day.

As the third through sixth graders came into the second assembly, I thought Mr. Matott would simply duplicate his first presentation but gear it toward a little older audience. Much to my surprise, he began to describe his childhood and how he had been bullied by his older brother and a big kid at his school. His delivery continued to have everyone in stitches but his message was powerful. He had always been the "weird" kid, the "geek", a target for taunts and beatings. Through his father, he realized he had a gift – he was a great storyteller. Mr. Matott learned to use his gift to ward off his tormentors. After several trials, he decided to tell his stories in print and the rest is history.

Believe me, intermediate students can be a tough audience that quickly become bored. Not so on Tuesday. Laughter and tears swept through the gym as each of us recognized a part of ourselves in his story. Then to my astonishment, they gave Mr. Matott a five minute boisterous ovation. I don't know that I have ever met anyone with such charisma. Signing books for students and parents, Mr. Matott personalized his messages and again touched our hearts and souls. Needless to say, we will bring Justin Matott back next year. Everyone that experienced his interaction with students and staff on Tuesday, came away with a lightness and positive feeling not always present in our daily lives. We received a dose of laughter and it healed some of our wounds.

Enjoy the snow. We sure needed it.

Thankfully,

Elizabeth Costello