

*The following letter is an unsolicited note from a former student that I received in December 2018. The version below has been lightly edited and condensed for continuity and relevance, but I am happy to provide the original document upon request.*

Dear Mrs. Smith,

First, sorry for never visiting! College is way harder than I thought it'd be, but I really miss you and hope to come visit soon. I heard you were really looking for another job, so I rushed to write you this letter. I have so many things to thank you for, so I think this will be a long letter.

I want to thank the universe for sending you to Overland [High School] at the perfect time. As you know, a lot of students were going to quit music because of [the previous director]. Thanks for coming and saving violin for me. Although I wasn't good, I'm glad I didn't quit. You've brought so much joy into my life I don't know where to begin.

For one, you were the most amazing teacher I've ever had. You were patient with me even though I sucked. You put in extra time during lunch and after school to help me get into Symphony. I never thought I'd be able to play such amazing music! I grew to love violin even more and more and wow. Making music in a group changed not only my high school experience but my life. You are the best music mom!!

I remember what you said about how you enjoyed high school more than college, and I'm really feeling that. I enjoy my college classes, but I miss the [high school] music hall like no other. If you hadn't come into my life, I never would've been in orchestra, pit, or anything like that. I probably wouldn't even be dating [my boyfriend]!

There are so many things you've done for me and for Overland. You've helped students really fall in love with music, and you put Overland on the musical map! I'm so honored to have been "part of the process," especially being able to see and experience the changes from square one!

Thanks for collaborating with [the middle school orchestra teacher]. One of my fondest memories was sitting with a middle school girl during one of their concerts, and she looked at me like, "Wow! You're in Symphony, I want to be like that!" It was such a full circle moment for me. I was the middle school girl who dreamed about being in Symphony, after my first year of high school [with the previous director] I thought that dream was lost. But with your help, the next thing I knew I was seeing myself in this girl's eyes, but I was the high school senior playing in the symphony! I'd say about 85% of my memories are only possible because of you!

Second, you were more than a teacher. You were definitely one of my best friends. Talking to you was always so much fun. You've been there for me during hard times like [another student's] passing, and you were always willing to help me with my other classes. No matter how much time passes, I'll be 90 years old and you'll still be one of the most influential

people in my life, and a great friend. And your brownies! To die for, I'll keep the memory of that fudgey goodness in my heart forever.

You inspire me every day, your kindness, work ethic, and care about student success. Thank you for helping [one of my friends who didn't speak English feel welcome in orchestra]. And for not giving up on [another student], you're one of the reasons he even graduated. You're going to be successful no matter where you go. What you've done for me and Overland is incredible. You've left such an impact at your first job in just a few years. I think you're going to change the entire world throughout your career!

I wish I had nicer paper for this letter. You deserve the world, Mrs. Smith. You don't get enough recognition and appreciation for all you do and all the unseen hours you put in. You've touched the hearts of all of your students. You've left an amazing print in the world and in the people you've met and inspired. I keep my pirate memento [that you gave me at the senior banquet] on my desk and read your letter whenever I've having a hard time.

Thank you for letting me into your office or piano classes during lunch when I didn't have any friends, you were mine. You even provided me with a space to make new friends. Thank you for inspiring me to be ambitious, pushing me to do well in all avenues of life. Thank you for nurturing my love for music and the relationship that grew from being a part of music. Thanks for never giving up on me, my friends, and your students.

I know I'm leaving something out and I'll surely facepalm later, but for now, thank you for helping me grow as a musician and a better person. You were such a light in my life. I hope you're not getting teary eyed reading this as I am writing this. Thank you for everything, and I hope wherever you go next brings you joy and happiness like you brought to me.