

### More Than Just Notes and Rhythms

When people hear the word “hero,” they typically think of Superman and Batman, fighting crime in the comic strips and television shows of America’s past. What many people seem to overlook is the simple fact that these superheroes do not exist; the real heroes are living people who are empowered with driven purposes every day of their lives. Heroes are regarded as models for the youth of America to respect, admire, and follow. Mr. David Nearpass is an outstanding example of an everyday hero who students respect and admire on a daily basis.

David Nearpass currently serves as the director of bands at Woodrow Wilson Middle School in Terre Haute, Indiana. Mr. Nearpass is a Terre Haute native; he was born in Terre Haute, raised in Terre Haute, and continues to reside in Terre Haute. He earned a Bachelor of Music and Master of Science degree from Indiana State University, where his principal instrument was trombone. He has taught at Woodrow Wilson for thirty-one years. During his time as an undergraduate student at Indiana State, he was involved with the first Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia sponsored jazz festival. He was a member of the Terre Haute symphony during its 1982 and 1983 seasons. He served on the staff of the Indiana State University Summer Concert Bank Workshop from 1989 through 1995 and as Director of their Junior High School Camp from 1992 through 1995. Mr. Nearpass also served as Director of Bands at Rose Hulman Institute of Technology and conducted the Jazz Ensemble at Indiana State University from 1999 through 2004.

During Mr. Nearpass’s thirty-one years at Woodrow Wilson, he has developed renowned concert and jazz programs. His bands have consistently earned superior ratings at Indiana State School Music Association contests and other organizational contests and festivals. In its eighteen years of existence, the jazz ensemble has been named a Middle School Honor Band ten times at the Purdue Jazz Festival and two times at the Rolling Meadows Jazz Festival in Chicago. The Woodrow Wilson jazz ensemble or jazz combos have been invited to open the night concert at the University of Louisville Jazz Festival five different years. Also, in 1996 Mr. Nearpass was honored with the WTHI Television’s prestigious *Golden Apple Award* as an outstanding Wabash Valley educator, and he was also honored by Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology with their *Outstanding Indiana Secondary Educator Award*.

Personally, I have the utmost admiration and respect for Mr. Nearpass. I had the privilege of being a member of his band program for all three years that I attended Woodrow Wilson Middle School. I remember when I was a timid sixth grader in his band class, playing the flute, and absorbing as much information from this wise man as I could. Throughout my middle school years, I advanced into more difficult bands including his jazz band where a love for jazz music was sown. I switched from playing flute to tenor saxophone, a more traditional jazz instrument, and have loved every moment. Due to Mr. Nearpass's nurturing nature, I mastered the tenor saxophone, played some cool blues licks, and learned a lot about myself. I also became close to Mr. Nearpass, and I still am to this day; his is almost like a second father to me. In middle school if I was worried about something, he would let me vent and just listen to my problems; eventually I would work through them on my own just by venting my frustrations to him. Even as a junior in high school, I still go back for every band concert throughout the school year and make sure his bands are still performing at the highest level possible.

Mr. Nearpass is an excellent inspiration to me and other students as well. He always says that he teaches more than just notes and rhythms; he teaches life lessons. He taught me to be confident in myself whenever I play, speak, or interact with people, which is a valuable tool I will use for the rest of my life. There are countless other examples of students learning life lessons from Mr. Nearpass. Just ask any graduate of Woodrow Wilson's band program and they will tell you at least one non-music lesson Mr. Nearpass has taught them. He motivates his students to be the very best they can be, and it shows in the high caliber of his bands and students. Many of his students have gone on in their education to pursue degrees in music. I personally am planning to be a music education major because of the positive influence Mr. Nearpass has had in my life. He has made such an influence in my life that I feel if I can make that difference in another child's life by teaching them music and life lessons, then it will all be worth it.

Sometimes the biggest heroes in life are not the most apparent. Sometimes the most influential person can be a middle school band director. Without Mr. Nearpass's guiding hand, many students would not be as successful and confident as they are today. Many young men and women would have passed under the radar and would never have had an opportunity to let their true potentials shine through. Mr. Nearpass has helped so many students discover their true colors and their true selves. I am thankful that I am one of those fortunate students that was able to meet Mr. Nearpass and meet myself in the process.

