

MIT Inspirational Teacher – 2009

Winner: Nichola Haworth

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Does your nominee still work at the school? Yes

Despite having the unenviable task of juggling her physics teaching load, boarding housemistress duties and family with two children under four, Mrs Haworth has always been accessible to everyone. Her ability to deal with all problems, be they academic or social, has earned widespread admiration.

In 11th and 12th grade, I chose to skip school on Saturdays to attend the Junior Department of the Royal College of Music. As such, I had to catch up on a missed day of school every week. Mrs. Haworth was always there to support me whenever the going got tough. Often, I had Physics on a Saturday and Mrs. Haworth volunteered as much time as I needed to go over the material I had missed to make sure that I understood everything. She believed that I should be able and encouraged to pursue my dual passion of academics and music without one jeopardising the other. When exams and technical interviews for British universities drew near, she would invite me to dinner at her house and we would go through different problems to make sure I was confident before the big day. At other times, when my workload threatened to overwhelm me, she would offer to intercede with my teacher to get me an extended deadline. Mrs. Haworth was a principal catalyst behind my success in high school.

Mrs. Haworth was well-liked and well-respected because she was both an excellent educator and an excellent person. As a teacher, she was a model of professionalism, always well-prepared for classes and available to help outside classes if necessary. Many students benefited from her ready supply of hot chocolate and good physics advice. Yet what endeared her to her students was her kind and firm personality. If you approached her with a legitimate concern, you could be confident that she would be able to find a solution. However, she was not one to stand for nonsense and whenever she felt a gentle rebuke was required, it was often given, with no one begrudging her for doing so. Still, it was her humility that commanded the most respect. With her job, boarding duties and family, it was inevitable that she would occasionally be in a bad mood. However, once she realised that she had been unreasonable, she would always apologise and try to put things right, a trait that I truly admire.

The single most important lesson that I learned from Mrs. Haworth was to take things one at a time and to do everything to the best of my ability. In her everyday life, where she had to cope with pressures and challenges from so many different sources, she coped admirably and always managed to emerge with a smile. I have carried this philosophy with me and applied it to my life at MIT. Whenever I have been faced with a week of seemingly impossible problem sets and innumerable exams, I have always remembered to approach everything with a positive attitude and to tackle things one at a time. Additionally, I have also made a commitment to continue pursuing my music as passionately as ever. Having managed to juggle my classes, MITSO, Chamber Music Society and my Emerson Scholarship duties successfully for one semester, I suppose Mrs. Haworth has once again proven to be a catalyst behind my success, this time at university.

One of my boarding housemates Miriam came to Sevenoaks from a public school with no background in physics. However, as an aspiring medic, she was required to take the GCSE Physics exam in order to apply to Cambridge University and was hoping that Mrs. Haworth would be willing to teach her. However, at the beginning of term, Miriam had made an error of judgement that deeply disappointed Mrs. Haworth and consequently did not feel that she was in a position to ask Mrs. Haworth for help. When Mrs. Haworth found out about Miriam's predicament, she generously offered to teach her physics, pretending nothing had transpired between them. In the end, Mrs. Haworth and Miriam met at 7am every morning and Miriam passed the exam with an A*, the highest possible grade. I believe that the combination of mentorship, forgiveness and sacrifice that Mrs. Haworth displayed in order to help Miriam achieve her dream of reading medicine at Cambridge is the hallmark of an outstanding educator.

I had the privilege of spending two years at the Sevenoaks School. Having helped me achieve my dream of attending MIT, I believe that this award would be a good way for me to give something back to the Sevenoaks community. As one of the first schools in England to adopt the International Baccalaureate, Sevenoaks also has a reputation for innovation. As such, I believe that an award from MIT would encourage the staff and students at Sevenoaks to continue to apply themselves in the same vein. Teachers like Mrs. Haworth are often unsung heroes whose achievements go unnoticed by the school community at large. Additionally, many people are hindered by the belief that true achievement can only be attained by a select few. The presentation of this award to a seemingly ordinary member of the school community would then serve as a reminder that this is simply not true and that we are all capable of achieving something truly outstanding.

Student's Letter to Teacher:

Dear Mrs. Haworth, As you know, it took me a good while to settle down at Sevenoaks and I just wanted you to know how much happier you made my time there. You did miracles with my Physics. When I started, I didn't know whether Higher Level Physics was the right choice but those discussions in your kitchen and study (not to mention that geeky physics documentary) did so much to help my understanding. Equally, you aided my development as a person. I don't quite know how you managed to be a physics teacher, boarding housemistress, wife and mother, but it is something I keep in mind whilst I try to continue balancing academics with music at MIT. Hopefully it will work! Something that I felt really helped our interaction was the extent to which you were prepared to let me into your life. Interacting with Ollie and Josh helped shatter the illusion that you were just an authority figure and all those Liverpool jokes were a really refreshing change. Thanks for everything. Latifah