

Maxie Jones - Beyond the Call of Duty

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THE MOTH



Maxie Jones:

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In February of 1978, I started the second semester of the 10th grade. That was on February 1st. On February 2nd, which would have been my second day of my second semester of the 10th grade, when I woke up to go to school, my mother didn't wake up that morning. Now that following week I missed school, of course, while we laid my mother to rest. And when I came back to school about a week or two later, it was quite different for me. I remember that when I came back to school, I really didn't care much to be there at all. And it was a new semester and my teachers didn't really know me very well. I had this one English teacher, his name was Mr. Goldberg. And Mr. Goldberg would ask the class a question and he would call on people. And when he called on me, he would say, "Maxie, do you know the answer?"

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And he'd pretty much like wake me up from wherever my mind would be. And I would say, "What, excuse me, what was that?" And he would ask me the question again, and I would always have the correct answer. So one day he asked me to meet him after class. And I met him after class. And he said, he said, "I don't understand what's going on." He said, "You always seem lost. You're always someplace else during the class. But you, you know all the answers, you got all -- you did all your homework." And, you know, I just kind of explained to him what was going on. And I, and I told him that, you know, "The reason I came to school every day was because my mother made me come to school. And now my mother's not here to make me come to school. Then I don't really feel the need to be here anymore."

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So he said, "Well," he said, "well, just do me a favor." He said, "Listen, you know what? A teacher teaches eight -- well, there are eight periods in the day, a teacher teaches five periods in a day and there are three prep periods. Usually the teacher will use one of those prep periods for lunch" and his other prep period, Mr. Goldberg said, "I want you to meet me in my office, sixth period." And so I met him in the office, sixth period just to talk. And then he said, "Meet me tomorrow, sixth period." And this went on and on every single day he had me meet him sixth period during his prep period. And I would help him grade papers and we would talk. We would do whatever.

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When open school night came, I didn't have anyone to come with me. My mother always came with me to open school night. When open school night came, my sister who had just graduated from that same school, came with me to open school night. And my social studies teacher wouldn't talk to her. He said, "I know who you are. You just graduated from the school." So he thought

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we was trying to play some kind of game or something. So when the teacher wouldn't talk to her, Mr. Goldberg was standing outside the room, he came in, he said, "Wait a minute, wait a minute. Talk to her." And he said, "I'll explain later." So the teacher talked to my sister and told her about how I was doing in school and so on. And then Mr. Goldberg, what he did after that was, he went around to all my classes and talked to all my teachers and told them what was going on. And he told them all. He said, "If you have any issue with Maxie Jones, come to me." And so that's what he did.

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And so it went that way for the whole semester. Every day, I met him at sixth period and he checked on my classes and all that stuff. What ended up happening was that the next year when I was a junior, he did the same thing. He had me meet him every single day. And we talked and he talked to all of my teachers about whatever was going on with me. And he kind of let them know, "Listen, if you got any problem with Maxie Jones, come and talk to me." And, and I didn't really realize that by the time I graduated from high school, I never missed a single day of school.

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At my high school graduation, Mr. Goldberg was there and I asked him, I said, "Hey, Mr. Goldberg, how're you doing?" He said, "Just feels funny." He said, "I don't come to graduation." And I said, "Why?" He said, "Because, because I teach seniors," and he said -- no he said, "Because I teach 10th graders." And he said, "I don't teach seniors, so I never come to the graduation." So I said, "Well, why are you here?" And he said, "Because I wouldn't miss seeing you graduate for anything in the world." And I didn't realize then what he had done. It took me years before I finally realized that I graduated from high school with honors. And I was in the top 85 percentile of my class. I had a region scholarship and a full ride to college and all that stuff. The truth is I was really always academically capable of that, but it's one of those situations where all I really needed to do was to show up for it.

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And at 15 years old, having lost my mother, not really seeing the value of an education, I was really in line to be a statistic, a high school dropout, and who knows what would've come of it. But the thing is I showed up to school every single day. And I realized that the reason I showed up was there was somebody there who was expecting to see me. And that was Mr. Goldberg. Thank you very much.