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In memory of Mallie Williams April 8, 1925-June 10, 2004

By Mary L. Wassell

Recently many of us gathered at visitation and the funeral of Mr. Mallie M. Williams and as we mourned his death and celebrated his life. A life that has touched many young people throughout the Quad-Cities and surrounding areas. I'd like to highlight my thoughts and feelings about this tremendous man.

I have known Mr. Williams for 38 years. I started taking clarinet lessons from him in about fifth grade and you could not find a more compassionate, caring and patient man. He truly loved working with young people and watching them shine as he stood in the background, even though without him we could have never accomplished all that we did. He truly was the Wind Beneath our Wings.

I know I caused him plenty of stress during the years that I took lessons from him and was in his band at United Township High School.

You see, I tend to be very tender-hearted and it does not take much for me to cry, and even though most of my lessons went well, whenever Mr. Williams had to correct me, I would cry. Don't get me wrong he never once raised his voice with me. I don't think he really knew what to do with me.

I think he thought I drilled holes in my head to let the water out before every lesson. When I was in sixth grade, we were in line alphabetically (my maiden name is Williams) to get fitted for our city-wide band uniforms, I was right behind his daughter Karla. From that day forward, Karla and I became very good friends and we remain best friends today (we really consider ourselves sisters). We have been through a lot together, including Karla's mom and dad's surgeries, the death of my sister, the birth of my children, the arrival of Nathaniel and the list goes on. I truly believe that God put us together for a reason.

During one of my visits to Mr. Williams at the nursing home when Karla was out of the room, I made sure to not only tell Mr. Williams that I loved him and how very much he meant to me and that he helped make me the person I am today, but assured him that I would always be there for Karla and her mom and not to worry about them.

I had a lot of good times with Mr. Williams, including music lessons, UTHS bands, selling everything from candles, to candy, to seat cushions and

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standing on the street corner by Tri-City foods downtown East Moline selling tags that said ``Help Send the Band to Canada."

Even though my family and neighbors hated to see me coming, we did make it to Canada for band competition and we won third place in Parade competition. Then there was summer band, Fourth of July Parades in East Moline, Memorial Day Parades in Colona, playing at the football and basketball games, the orchestra for Music Guild and the list goes on.

I also remember the UTHS Alumni Band that I helped organize in 1986 when Mr. Williams was the Grand Marshall of the East Moline Fourth of July Parade. I will always remember how happy he was that day. Mr. Williams has always felt like a second Dad to me, and just as my parents taught me, he always taught us to work hard, try our best, care for other people and treat them with respect.

We always knew when someone was out of line and he handled each situation in his own way, but we always felt that he dealt with everyone fairly. He was always a very compassionate person and I believe that everyone who has known him will agree that their life has been better because of his influence on their life.

Mr. Williams has had a very positive impact on thousands of young people. I, too, was a beneficiary of his knowledge, kindness and compassion and I hope he knew that he was a hero to me and many others. The influence that he had on my life helped me become the person I am today. Many of the values that I learned from him and my parents I have tried to pass onto my own children. I also hope that I can touch other young people like he did. It is people like Mallie Williams, a quiet, soft-spoken and admired leader, who make the world a better place in which to live.

We have a lot of memories and the promise of eternal life.

While I will miss him terribly, he will live on in those he left behind and I know he fought hard, suffered a lot and I'm sure he's in a much better place, without pain and suffering and we now have our very own guardian angel. He will live on in our hearts forever and just like the song, ``Wind Beneath My Wings," I thank God for him and I hope he knew he was our hero and he was truly The Wind Beneath many young people's Wings and without his influence they would not have had the opportunity to shine.

Mary L. (Williams) Wassell of Geneseo is a graduate of United Township High School class of 1974.

[back to top](#)