



## Letter to My Teachers

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Amanda Dalton

**D**EAR MR JAMES, Miss Miller and Mr Holland; Dear Miss Jones, Mr Reed-Aspley and Mrs Dick; Dear Mongoose McAndrew; Dear Mark and Bob...

Some of you are dead. At least three of you are still alive — I know because each Christmas you write a card to me as I write one to you. I haven't seen you, though, for forty years.

Many people can single out a teacher, remembered forever for their inspiration and encouragement. I must be spoilt rotten. There are nine of you! And you are all still bright in my frequently dimmed memory. I sometimes think I can trace my entire journey to adulthood, to my passions, my career, values, priorities — through you. Like landmarks I didn't always notice as I passed through; but now, running my finger back along the map, I see how you shaped my route, how I navigated by you.

I was a mess when they sent me, aged eight, to the 'special' school; a mass of phobias and fears. I was Anxiety Central. Miss Miller — thank you for being the first teacher who knew how to keep me in a classroom; most would not have done. Mr Holland, I still love clay, still have that pot you helped me make — the Jackson Pollock splattering of paint, the black daubs you never mentioned though they probably signified my state of mind. Mr James, was I nine when we went to the Royal Show to see the animals, and I managed to do the trip without my mum? I know I loved the shaggy cows, remember I skipped along beside you and ate ice cream,



and that when you brought me home you stayed for tea. Something shifted in me that day – opened up – made it possible to go to other places, away from home and my mum. Thank you.

Comprehensive school. Falling terribly, wonderfully, heartbreakingly in love with the metalwork teacher who married the coolest music teacher in the world. My passion for music. The all-consuming discovery of romantic love. Then, in the sixth form, Mrs Dick, taking us English pupils to London – not to see Shakespeare or a musical – no: to the Whitechapel Gallery; to an avant-garde concert; a Dutch anarchist troupe at the Roundhouse. Pernod and poetry and parties at her house full of artists and writers and books and books and books... No-one had predicted that I would ever manage school so easily, happily. Mr Reed-Aspley, Miss Jones, Mrs Dick — it was down to you.

An undergraduate. English. Mongoose McAndrew, your quiet inspiration, your kindness the day my dad suddenly died.

Postgrad. Training to teach English and Art, fetching up in the roughest school in Sunderland. My eyes opened wide. Mark — you were an artist in every sense, a gentle sceptic, and you always waited after dark, back at college, with a sherry and a listening ear for me. Bob — your endless wisdom, kindness, radical take on education that shaped my own. Thank you. Always. With love.