Testimonial – Jay Dougherty, English teacher at the JFK High School in Berlin, Germany, 1990–1992 – by Mark Preier (class of 92, currently working as an English-German / German-English freelance translator)

Two Years with Jay at JFK

Germany, Berlin, JFK High School, 1990: It's 10:30 a.m., the bell rings—time for English class. All students have settled in their seats when the door opens and a man wearing a suit and necktie enters the classroom and walks to the desk. Jay Daugherty, our new English teacher. He has a really young-looking face that stands in stark contrast to the formal attire and his receding hairline. I'm not quite sure what to make of this unusual specimen of the teacher caste, but as soon as he addresses the class, introduces himself and gives a brief outline of what and how he is going to teach us, my ears perk up. The way he talks and his bearing carry a certain promise, and I begin to sense, with rising excitement, that this will not be some run-of-the-mill English class…

There are teachers who just do their job, there are those who really want the students to be interested in and understand what they teach, and then there are those who truly inspire. Jay combines the second and third qualities. He managed to pull off incredible feats of teaching wizardry, like making grammar lessons *FUN*, and I thank him up to this day for having taught me the most important punctuation rules that I still rely on in performing my job.

I think what makes Jay such a successful teacher is his likable nature and the fact that he has this gift I would call "natural authority," meaning he never had to get loud or "pull rank" to get our attention. We respected him, and he respected us, including the ones who did not necessarily consider English their most beloved subject. He also tried—and managed—to integrate all students and have all of them participate in and contribute to the lesson. The highlights include Jay bringing and reading to us some of the poetry he wrote himself: highly astute observations of (everyday) life, sometimes a little sad, often funny and always with a message worth remembering.

Reading his work inspired me to start writing again, and it was during those memorable two years that I really learned how to appreciate and "understand" poems and literature. And I learned that language is something you can actually earn your living with; in fact, Jay even hooked me up with my very first paid translation job, which may have well laid the foundation for my later career choice.

In short, Jay was much more than just a teacher—he was, and is, a role-model, mentor and friend.