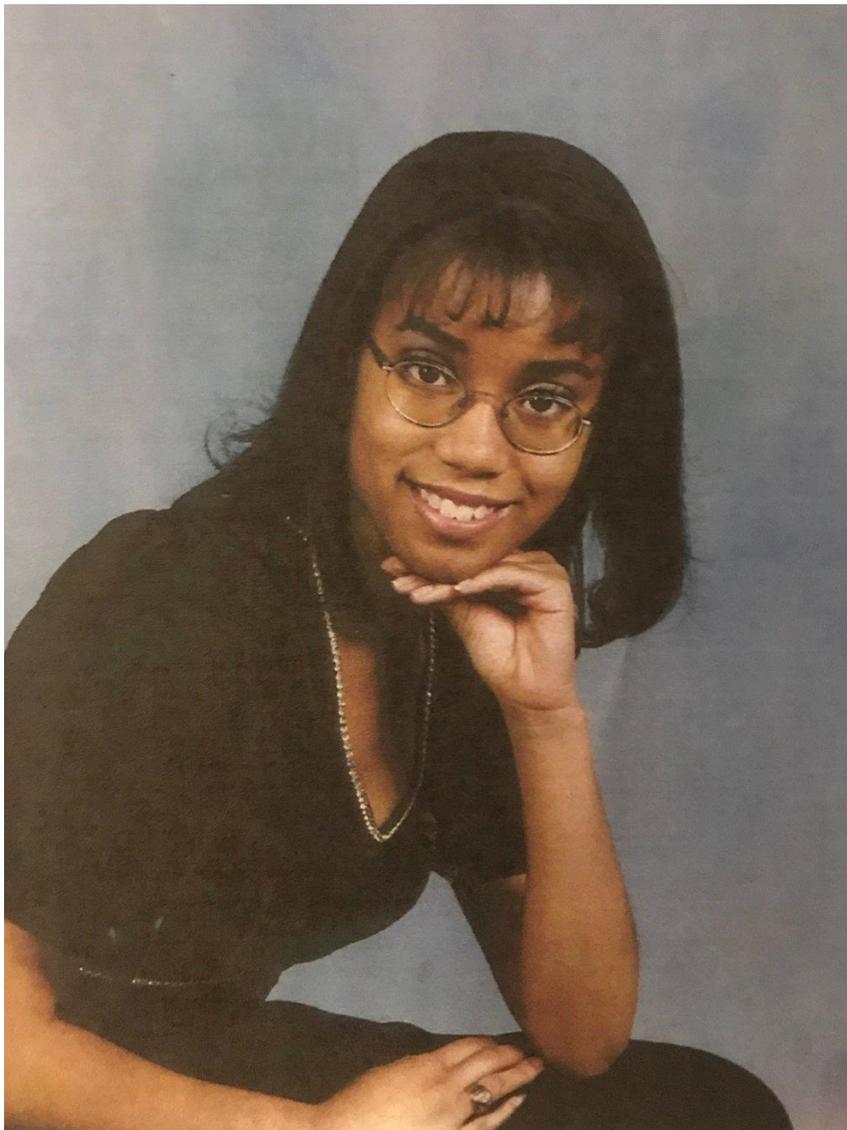


Mrs. Dingman, Thank You for Helping Me Find My Confidence

By Shawnta S. Barnes - May 8, 2018



Shawnta S. Barnes, senior choir picture

Today, Tuesday, May 8, 2018, is National Teacher Day which takes place during Teacher Appreciation Week. This year, I would like to share why I appreciate my high school choir teacher Laura Dingman.

Typically when you read a story about a beloved choir teacher, it comes from a person who has made it big on the music or theatre scene. I only made it big on Broadway in my dreams.



Laura Dingman, Choral Director

At Lawrence North High School, I was in Crystal Harmony, a women's ensemble. Our director was Mrs. Dingman and Mr. Marty was the accompanist. When I entered high school, I had to make a choice for my elective, choir or art. I graduated with the academic honors diploma and this track did not allow room for both. I wasn't sure about this choice. Middle school choir was crazy; the teacher spent more time yelling and slamming the piano lid than teaching us music. In my high school choir portfolio (yes, I still

have it), I wrote, “I was a little skeptical about joining a women’s choir, but now I am glad I did.” Let me tell you why.

She taught us discipline.

Mrs. Dingman took singing seriously. Our voices were our instruments, our gifts. We had to take care of them. She would remind us how to properly take care of our voices to ensure we were ready for our performances. Music wasn’t just about singing the words. We had to understand the music theory too. I didn’t know how involved and intense music was until I joined Crystal Harmony.

She taught me to be confident.

I’m short. I was probably the shortest person in choir which meant I was *always* in the front row. I didn’t like this at all. At times, I was not sure of my sight reading abilities when it came to music. She was diligent in helping all of us learn to read music and to have confidence when we sang. The confidence I learned from performing in choir helped me to be more confident in other classes.

She made the classroom a safe and fun space.

I always looked forward to choir. In high school, I had a few teachers who constantly mispronounced my name even after a semester of class. Some teachers were so strict, you felt like you couldn’t even move an inch. In the choir room, I felt joy, love, and peace. With that many girls in a room, I know we talked a bit more than Mrs. Dingman would have liked. Choir was a break from my rigorous classes and it was a place where I felt comfortable letting my guard down, a place where I had fun.

She always spoke to me.

I was a quiet, keep to myself type of student. Not only does that make you invisible to peers, some teachers don’t see you either, but not Mrs. Dingman. What I remember most is her smile and warm greeting each time she saw me.

I believe my time at Lawrence North would not have been as memorable if I would have chosen art instead of choir; I'm glad I didn't let my skepticism get in the way.

The Lawrence North High School 2001 Commencement Ceremony song was, "You Only Take With You What You Leave Behind" and I wanted to close off this piece with part of the lyrics to this song:

Although I may not have learned it all,

one thing I know for sure

I owe you more than you will know

To my parents and teachers too,

who have given all you can give,

Thank you all for being there and helping me to see

I have so much to be thankful for

and yes, I have learned that from you...

And as I travel down life's path,

I will remember you

And what you always taught me.

You only take with you what you leave behind.

Thank you, Mrs. Dingman, for your kind and compassionate heart. You made me a more confident person and during this Teacher Appreciation Week, I thank you!