

COMMENTARY

A tribute to Mark Christensen upon his retirement from BSU

‘You need to be a writing teacher.” That’s what my English professor, Mark Christensen, said to me one day after I sat down across from him at his neatly organized desk. I didn’t know what on Earth he was talking about.

I had just finished my first year of graduate school and had planned to talk with Dr. Christensen about the writing portfolio of creative nonfiction I had created throughout the semester in his class.

“Reading your work and hearing your comments on your classmate’s work has led me to believe that you need to be teaching asap.”

Admittedly, upon his suggestion, I teared up. I had certainly never thought of myself as someone who could teach a college class, and it was really touching to hear that despite my own insecurities, someone had thought of me that way.

I don’t know if Dr. Christensen realized that in saying this to me, but on that day, he planted a seed that has been growing ever since.

Sometimes, all a person needs to hear is that someone else thinks they are capable for them to believe it themselves. This is what he did for me, and I will always be grateful.

Because of Dr. Christensen and his inspiring advice, I am now teaching Composition and Argument and Exposition in the English department at Bemidji State while finishing my master’s degree in English.

For those of you who have had the

privilege of attending one of Mark Christensen’s writing workshops, you know what I’m referring to.

It’s one of those classes that you wish could go on forever. In a way, it actually does go on, not forever, but continuously all semester long.

Each time our class would meet, it was always a comfortable and relaxing environment, and like two old friends who hadn’t seen each other in a while but could always pick up right where they left off, our class would go on in the same manner.

You feel comfortable in a Mark Christensen class, at home and free to be yourself — in the classroom as well as in your writing. When class is finished and it’s time to leave, you really don’t want to. The last hour has been a safe haven from the harsh realities of the world.

After these writing workshops, I always felt better afterward, no matter how I had felt before — kind of like church. Everything was renewed and I would walk out the door feeling strong and ready for the world again.

I feel so lucky and truly blessed to have been trained in writing by such an accomplished and talented writer and teacher as Mark Christensen.

One of the sincerest qualities of this man is that he is incredibly humble. Not full of himself in the least, he puts everything into his writing, and his teaching. He invests in his students’ lives and futures as if they were his own, and he cares empathetically for each individual he encounters in the classroom.

During a time in my life when I was insecure and unsure of my abilities, he reminded me of my talent and worth. He has done this for me and countless other students throughout the years.

I have one more semester before I graduate with my master’s in English. This journey as a juggler of a graduate student, teacher and mother has been stressful at times, and some days I am so overwhelmed I don’t even know where to begin.

It is during these times that I remember Mark Christensen and his words of advice to me one day when I was flustered and frustrated with everything I have to do before graduation.

“Breathe. Breathe again. This is your time. Wallow in it.”

I realized he was absolutely right. A life of peace and happiness happens when you stop waiting for it and make the most of the moment you are in now. I will always remember this particular piece of advice and plan to apply it to every aspect of my life going forward.

After 32 years, this spring was Mark Christensen’s last semester of teaching at Bemidji State University. He has accomplished so much in his teaching career, and someday, I hope to be as helpful and inspirational to my own students, as he has been to his.

Thank you, Mark, for giving me and so many others the courage to succeed.

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CARTOONIST’S VIEW



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Republicans need courage to dump Trump

Minot, N.D. Many Republicans know that disgraced former President Donald Trump, and the political movement loyal to him, are a threat to our nation.

We know this because many of them have said as much in private.

The most recent example is House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy who, immediately after Trump’s supporters attacked Congress in a thwarted effort

to overturn the 2020 election, was telling other congressional Republicans that he’d call on Trump to resign rather than serve out his dwindling term in office.

McCarthy initially lied about making these comments, but then the tape was released, making them undeniable. Still, in his public comments, McCarthy has gone out of his way to patch things up with the mercurial former president and his cult.

But MAGA world doesn’t forgive. Trump mouthpiece Tucker Carlson called McCarthy a “puppet of the Democratic Party” on his Fox News show. Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida,

another of Trump’s disciples in Congress, disparaged McCarthy’s stark criticisms of Trump as “sniveling.”

Yet, so far, McCarthy, who aspires to be Speaker of the House should Republicans make good on their winning expectations in the midterms, seems to have the support of his caucus. He reportedly got a “standing ovation” from his fellow House Republicans during a recent closed-door meeting.

I’ll leave it to you readers to decide for yourself how resilient McCarthy’s support is among Republicans.

Let’s, instead, talk about this strategy Republicans like McCarthy have embraced of expressing concerns about Trump privately while portraying them as loyal to the man publicly.

I get why they’re doing it.

It’s an act of political expediency aimed at keeping themselves in office. They’re clinging to power for its own sake — this terrible moment in Republican politics is hardly the first time we’ve seen craven politicians do and say whatever it takes to stay in office — but part of the argument, a part said quietly and in private like the criticisms of Trump, is that they want to remain the adults in the room.

People like McCarthy and other elected Republicans are afraid to speak their criticisms of Trump and his movement out loud lest they lose their elections and get replaced by Trump sycophants.

They’re afraid of a Republican caucus in Congress led by people who can’t even muster the modicum of integrity it takes to criticize Trump in private.

These Republicans are hoping to ride out the Trump era. They’re hoping that if they can appease the Trumpkins long enough, they’ll eventually move on, and things will get back to normal.

But this is a mistake. Appeasement doesn’t work, and we aren’t going back to the way things were in the GOP before Trump.

What we need is courage from the Republicans who see the problems with Trump and his movement. We need them to speak out, risks to their re-election campaigns be damned.

Absent that, the GOP, and the conservative movement, will continue its lurching progress toward something that is defined not by loyalty to ideas and principles but to the whims and ambitions of a single man.

Rob Port is a columnist, news reporter and podcast host for Forum News Service. Reach him at rport@forumcomm.com.



ROB PORT
Say Anything

From the Pioneer archives

10 years ago
May 4, 2012 – Bemidji High School senior Brianna Neumann received a special proposal for prom from her boyfriend Nick Gorick, who asked her to the dance on the advertisement board of Uff’s Hometown Take and Bake Pizza. This year’s prom will be the first held at the Sanford Center and over 400 students are expected

to attend.
25 years ago
May 4, 1997 – Bemidji hosted the Rotary 5580 District Conference, which brought together more than 500 Rotarians from Minnesota, North Dakota, Wisconsin and Ontario. Bemidji State University President Jim Bensen was the keynote speaker and he urged Rotarians to take the

lead moving into the 21st century.

50 years ago
May 4, 1972 – The Bemidji Jaycees have been selected best in the district and now the chapter ranks among the top eight clubs in all of Minnesota. The recognition occurred at a special caucus held in Detroit Lakes, where the chapter’s president Garry Anderson received a com-

memorative plaque.

100 years ago
May 4, 1922 – Efforts to form a Tri-county baseball league are underway which will bring together teams from Bemidji, Walker, Cass Lake and Park Rapids. The schools from each city would participate in a total of six games, and the hope is that this arrangement will continue for decades to come.

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