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A True Inspiration

 We all have different ways of defining success. When I hear the word success, the first person that comes to mind is my former piano teacher Alison Barr. She is truly an inspiration, and she has changed my life in unimaginable ways. I remember the very first piano lesson I had with Alison. I was in sixth grade, was extremely shy and had not the slightest clue as to who I was. I remember thinking, “this woman is a lunatic,” but here I am today knowing exactly who I am because of her ability to get to the gut, heart, and soul of her students.

 Last week I had the pleasure of talking with Alison. We sat down together in her snug little studio, her gorgeous Steinway grand piano taking up half of the space. The sweet aroma of freshly brewed coffee and cinnamon buns that she had prepared for us filled the entire room. Alison is all about making others feel welcome; she greeted me with her bright smile and sassy, short, chestnut hair. Her turquoise patterned blouse and chunky gold necklace perfectly complemented her energetic personality. Her big brown eyes lit up when I asked her what inspired her to become a teacher. Ever since Alison was in grade school, she had such a love for all of her teachers. She owned a black chalkboard in her home growing up, and

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would pretend to teach for hours on end. In high school, her music director even told her that she could be nothing else but a piano teacher. She knew right from the

start that this was her calling, and to this day she absolutely loves what she does. Alison’s favorite thing about teaching is being able to see the longitude of a student, and how they progress after years of lessons. “ I recognize it again and again” she chuckled, “ It never ceases to amaze me that they become adults right in front of my eyes.” As a former student of Alison’s, it is safe to say that the benefits of music are life changing. The piano has acted as an emotional and creative outlet when I’m unable to express myself using words. “It’s a solitary pursuit,” she paused for a moment; “It gives you the ability to express yourself without the noise of a team.”

 Although Alison loves to express the joys of playing the piano, she also emphasizes the importance of dedication when learning the instrument. “ The biggest struggle I have is the fact that students have so many directions focus wise. Piano is demanding, you can’t just skate along the surface,” she exclaimed. Of course, a lot of students learn in completely different ways, and this is an essential factor in terms of creating lesson plans. “Some kids need a literal picture, some need a sound picture,” she said passionately as she pressed down on the piano keys. “I have a large toolbox for teaching my students.” Alison is infatuated with this instrument; she has the ability to pull out every ounce of passion inside of her students. She knows that learning the piano takes dedication, and that it’s not all fun and games all of the time. “If you’re going to cry, you’re going to cry, “ Alison said as she held her hand to her heart, “there is hardship in learning this instrument.” She believes that

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this generation in particular has removed the struggle of learning in our society, and that in a way, we all expect a smooth road as we go through life and try new things.

 “I put the struggle back in” she laughed. So many students quit because they don’t get that “reward” they’re looking for right away. As a former student of Alison’s, I can confidently say that all of the hard work and devotion you put into learning this instrument pays off in the end.

 Aside from sharing her gift of teaching the piano, Alison keeps busy and is constantly expanding her knowledge of the musical world, and her profession in general. She is a part of the Music Teachers National Association, and is president of the association in the states of Maine and Massachusetts. She is truly dedicated to her profession; since 1975 she has attended the National Conference for the MTNA, which is held somewhere in the United States every single year. She has always done what it takes to be able to go, even when she was in college practically penniless. Alison is also an extreme hobbyist. She loves to garden, write fiction, play tennis, and go to shows almost every week. “People who want to do something creative need time to reflect, look inside themselves and out at the world” she exclaimed. I’ve never met such an inspiring and passionate woman in my entire life until I met Alison. Learning the piano has so many benefits, and I am forever grateful to have had music as a creative outlet when I’m feeling lost at times. She has had such an impact on my life, and I will continue to share her story with anyone that is craving some inspiration.