

studied the making of mummies. (This was, remember, long before the History Channel caught on to such things.) There it was again, in a different class with a different teacher – excitement, imagination, the joy of reading and discovery, and the eagerness to talk about it all, even to a “grown up.”

I had met the principal, George Albano, when I first came in. We had talked a bit, but it was clear that he didn't want to tell me about the Lincoln School, he wanted me just to walk around and see what was going on for myself. Probably one of the teachers on break showed me around and made the introductions. But, every now and then I'd see George helping a teacher in class, encouraging this class and that, telling students what a good job they were doing, radiating both joy and affection. It was clear that everybody, simply everybody, liked it when he was around.

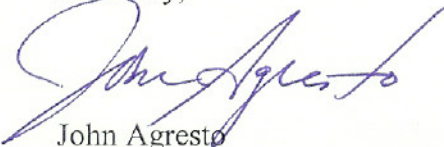
When I went back to his office I saw over the outside door a sign that proclaimed “The Virtue of the Day.” That day it was something like compassion, or maybe courage. George told me that each day they try to encourage each student – and each teacher – to think about how to be compassionate, or courageous, or charitable, in what they were doing in class. This, remember, is years before all the “Character Counts” campaigns of recent times.

To the rest of the world the school must seem like nothing less than a paradox – a place both quiet and exciting; a place where cultivating a student's mind and a student's character happen at the same time; a place of real diversity of every kind where the only competition I could see was to be better; a place with a strong principal who has the affection and respect of his teachers and staff; a school with a principal whose intrusions aren't intrusions at all, but welcome; and a place that was so successful in teaching, learning and character building that the neighboring parochial school has since closed its doors. I'm sure, I'm *sure*, there are things amiss at Lincoln School and limitations to George's leadership, but I'll be hanged if I know what they are.

Over these now nearly twenty years since I first met George, and Mary Anderson the fourth grade teacher, and the kids of Lincoln School, we've not lost touch. Every time the school is in the news, George sends me the clips. Just the other month I was telling a member of the board of a foundation interested in promoting literacy, to go visit Lincoln – he'd learn a lot. George calls me if someone I know on his staff has a death in the family, or gets married. Mary Anderson e-mails me whenever she sees a job that she thinks I'd be good at. (Honestly. I guess she's a teacher who can't stop encouraging.)

I'm sure you didn't want to read a letter this long. Sorry. But, as you can see, I think what's been done under George's leadership is radical and impressive, and I hope he and the school get every honor there is.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Agresto". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "A".

John Agresto
President Emeritus St. John's College, Santa Fe
Senior Research Scholar in the Liberal Arts, Wabash College