



# DREAMKEEPERS:

*Awareness, Intention and Balance in the Classroom*

Bette Moore

# *DreamKeepers*

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## PROLOGUE

*The meaning of moments passes us by so gently it barely rustles the leaf of the will.*

*Robert Penn Warren*

When I left the classroom in 1998, I was not even close to wanting to leave education. A good friend suggested that my next steps might be to broaden my horizons and look beyond my own school, even my own district, and begin to learn about what was happening in education “from the 30,000 foot level.” I begin attending state and national educational conferences. And, as it turned out, my journey took me to a place where I could even see education at a global level. But that, of course, didn’t happen right away.

In 1999 I attended my first large national educational convention at the Moscone Center in San Francisco. There were over 11,000 educators in attendance – mostly superintendents, principals, and curriculum directors. These were the people I had always seen as my superiors – and I remember feeling a bit in over my head.

At the end of the weekend, after thousands of the participants had gone home, I attended the closing ceremonies. A group of talented administrators from Calgary, Canada ended their presentation with a song called “Keeper of the Dream.” I bought a tape of their songs because I knew that experience would change my life. Several weeks later I took time to write my story about that day. As I shared the following story with some close friends, it slowly developed into a workshop that was worth offering to others. Years later I am revisiting that story because it’s the basis for *DreamKeepers*.

# CHAPTER ONE

## *DreamKeepers: March 1999*

*When the lights go down on Friday – the crowd has all gone home . . .  
You sit there in your classroom - but you never feel alone.  
You’ve got pictures of the children hanging all along the wall.  
In some there’s smiles, in some there’s tears,  
There’s a little of you in all.*

*And you think of what it could be . . .  
Build on what you’ve seen.  
You’ve got memories and a vision - You’re the Keeper of the Dream.*

*You’ve seen weak ones getting stronger,  
Doubters start to try,  
Quitters lasting longer,  
And the bitter asking “why?”  
There were times when you would give them room – and times that you were hard  
But every time you were there to see so many come so far.*

*And you think of what it could be . . .  
Build on what you’ve seen.  
You’ve got memories and a vision - You’re the Keeper of the Dream.*

*At times the road got steeper - you almost couldn’t try . . .  
But there were kids who need a second chance – Sometimes teachers need to cry.  
It’s not something that just happens – there is no magic way.  
You put together all these years by doing this day by day . . .*

*And you think of what it could be . . .  
Build on what you’ve seen.  
You’ve got memories and a vision - You’re the Keeper of the Dream.*

*John Clarke<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> “Keeper of the Dream” Used with permission.

## ***San Francisco: March 1999***

The first time I ever heard those words was in the cavernous halls of the Moscone Center in San Francisco. It was Sunday afternoon and most of the delegates had left early to return to demanding jobs as superintendents, principals, or curriculum directors. There were probably over a thousand people left, but most were sitting in one section under one of the two large screens near the front of the huge auditorium. I assumed that they were the conference organizers and officials from each state. Others were scattered here and there throughout the hall. I chose a seat at the back of a section that was mostly empty . . . close enough so that I could see the faces of those on stage. . . but far enough away from other people so I could process my thoughts.

It was March 1999, and for the first time in 30 years I was *not* rushing back to my district after the weekend away. The previous year my husband had taken a job at a small radio station on the Oregon coast. Since I had been teaching long enough to consider early retirement, we both saw the offer as an opportunity for us to follow our dreams: His, of a quieter, more fulfilling lifestyle - and mine, of writing and trying to help parents and teachers create a better world for kids. So, less than one year after leaving teaching, I found myself sitting alone, sobbing unabashedly in the darkened hall as I heard the words “You have memories and a vision . . . . You’re the keeper of the dream.”

I felt totally alone.

I knew I had a vision, and after those two days in San Francisco it had become even more vivid. And thirty years of memories were flooding back. Yes, I had memories . . . but not enough! Where were they? And how could so many years have gone by so quickly?

The “Presentainers” continued to sing:

It’s Friday night – The lights are dim  
The crowds have all gone home. . .

I remembered those Friday nights, and I missed them terribly. I also missed the hundreds of Friday nights I *couldn't* remember. Why was it that the easiest times to remember were the bad ones? The days I felt overwhelmed and had to deal with that last “little” thing that put me over the edge and made me wonder why I ever wanted to be a teacher.

It took me several months to figure out why I cried when I first heard that song. . . and why I still cry when I try to sing the line “You have memories and a vision. . . you’re the Keeper of the Dream.

I have seen my vision develop into reality at times, and it continues to drive me on a daily basis. I love that vision and there are no tears there! And I know I have memories . . . even though I wish I could remember more of the details.

The tears come, however, when I get to the part about being the “Keeper of the Dreams.” How many children’s dreams did I have the opportunity to help them keep in thirty years? The children I only kept for a year. . . and they moved on. But in that year was I able to help them learn to keep their *own* dreams? I hope so.

## ***CHAPTER TWO***

### ***Flashback: 1989***

I remember the day I first thought about that question. It was in 1989 and I was teaching an 8th grade honors English class. We were reading Robert Newton Peck's autobiographical, coming-of-age novel *A Day No Pigs Would Die*. The topic for discussion that day was the character of Haven Peck, 13-year-old Robert's father in the story. My students were unusually animated and they all seemed to have something to say. (I did not realize what experts on parenting they were!) They had no trouble pointing out Haven's strengths and weaknesses as a parent and were all eager to share their insights on how parents should behave. It was about the most interesting discussion I had ever had with a class.

At one point I asked what I thought was a pretty profound question – one that would give them cause to *stop and think* before clamoring to answer. I asked: “What is the ONE most important thing a parent should do for a child?”

Surprisingly one hand shot up immediately. Scott was a somewhat morose kid who always sat in the farthest from me and as close to the back of the room as he could. He seldom participated and I'm sure sat there because the seat was closest to the door. I was so surprised to see *his* hand go up so quickly that I totally forgot to use the “wait time” strategy I had been taught in so many teacher training workshops.

There was fire in his eyes when I pointed to him indicating he could talk. He looked directly at me and his words were full of venom:

**“I'd let them keep their dreams!!!”**

Each word was pronounced clearly and separately, almost in a cadence. “I’d Let / Them Keep / Their Dreams.” Perfect iambic trimeter. Emily Dickinson would be proud. And I can still hear his words.

Scott is now grown and may have children of his own. The pain I feel comes from the fact that I don’t remember anything about him except for this one incident. In fact, I don’t even remember his real name. (He just seems like a “Scott” in my memory.) But his face and his words are clear: *“I’d Let Them Keep Their Dreams.”*

Ten years later I finally realized why the song “Keeper of the Dream” brought tears to my eyes that day in San Francisco. My tears were for myself. I was crying because I had never talked to Scott about his dream. Because I never followed up to find out if he was able to keep his dream alive. And because I couldn’t even remember his name to try to follow up.

If I could go back and change one thing about my teaching career, I wouldn’t wait thirty years to consciously reflect. I would do it every day. I would treasure the memories. I would keep a list of “Everyday Miracles”:

- ♥ Scott’s powerful answer. (I learned more about parenting from him that day than from any book or training workshop!)
- ♥ Julie’s band-aid on my potato. (A story I’ll tell another time!)
- ♥ A terrific rehearsal for the holiday program.
- ♥ Cori’s poem.
- ♥ Ben’s discovery.
- ♥ Mike’s question.

And so on and so on. Everyday miracles. Little things that a teacher sees in a classroom and soon forgets because there are always too many other “important” things that must be done.

## ***CHAPTER THREE***

### ***Memories and a Vision***

The drive from San Francisco to my home on the Oregon coast is spectacularly beautiful. After crossing the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway 101 passes through Marin County and California's coastal wine country. North of Santa Rosa traffic becomes lighter and every time I make the trip I am tempted to stop and take pictures around every bend. My mind on that trip, however, was busy processing all that I had heard at the conference. I was aware of how so many experiences I had had as a teacher seemed to come into focus that weekend.

In particular I kept thinking about the district staff development committee I had served on several years before. Our goal was to develop a "five-year plan" that would serve the needs of individual teachers as it met the district's plan to bring the staff up to speed with the expanding demands for higher standards and curriculum reform. As a first step toward that goal we developed a needs-assessment survey and asked for feedback from every teacher in the district. We asked them to rate a great number of possible workshops in order of their perceived needs. In addition to choices in all curricular areas, technology, and classroom management, we included Stress Management as one of the choices. We were not at all surprised that the highest percentage of requests went to the need to help teachers cope with stress. I'm not sure what happened to the work we did that year – but if a five-year plan was ever developed, I'm not aware of it. I do know, however, that a stress-management workshop was never offered.

As the words from "Keeper of the Dream" wove themselves into my experience on that staff development committee, my wishful thinking about "going back and changing one thing" had turned into something a bit more practical.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## *Five Minutes at the End of the Day*

*We do not learn from experience – we learn from reflecting on experience.*

*– John Dewey*

Seven hours after leaving San Francisco I had mentally planned out a program that I believed would ensure that other teachers would not have to look back over three decades of teaching wishing they could remember more of the bright spots. Somewhere along the way I stopped and jotted down a somewhat unwieldy title that summarizes the purpose I had in mind:

### ***DreamKeepers: Stress Management for Teachers:***

#### ***Five Minutes a Day for Keeping Your Life Balanced and Realizing Your Full Potential as a Teacher***

When I got home I contacted 13 friends who said they would help by taking just five minutes after the school day was over – but before going home – to “reflect, reframe, regroup and renew.” On December 17, 1999 I sent the following letter to those teachers:

Dear Friends,

First of all I want to thank you for being willing to help me with this project. I am approaching it as an experiment and it will involve 5 minutes of your time each day - preferably just before you walk out of your classroom door to go home. Teachers seem to be *always* on the go. We are constantly planning the next lesson, solving the next problem, averting the next crisis. It never stops. Most of us, of course, are able to “stop and smell the roses” from time to time – but usually, no sooner do we do that, the guilt kicks in and we’re off to put out another fire. Everyone knows that it is important to take time for ourselves, but many of us feel we just can’t, and the “system” doesn’t seem responsive to our needs to be nurtured and affirmed. We know that if we don’t take care of ourselves, no one is

going to. And if we don't take care of ourselves, we are not going to have much to give our students.

None of this is new. Everyone *knows* these things, but very few people know how to change old patterns. Since I have had time to just sit back, observe, and reflect, my first year of retirement has been very interesting. At some point everything seemed to come together and I realized that in my own career there were **five** things that I had not done on a regular basis. From time to time I would focus on one of them for awhile and things would improve. But then I would get busy and forget until things got crazy enough to try a new approach.

So, the experiment I'm proposing is to spend ONE minute each day focusing on each of the following five ideas . . . five days a week . . . for five weeks. At the end of that time I'd like you to reflect on the experience and give me some feedback.

The five ideas:

1. Inward Focus
2. Reflection
3. Gratitude
4. Intention
5. Attention

### **Instructions: The Long Form**

1. Dim the lights and close the door. You might even want to lock it so you won't be disturbed. (They can get along without you for five minutes!)
2. Go to your desk. Open your computer file or have your packet ready if you're doing this by hand (Appendix 1). You may find it helpful to have soft music playing.
3. Check the clock or set a small timer. .

**Minute #1 – Inward Focus:** Close your eyes. For many people this first minute may prove to be the most difficult, but don't skip it. This time is for simply "going inside" or "checking in" with your body. With your eyes closed - simply be *aware*. Close out your surroundings and notice the sensations of your body. Don't think about them - just notice. Shift position if that helps make you more comfortable. For some reason, when I do this, I always become aware of some tingling in my hands and feet. I have a slight but constant ringing in my ears, and I have learned to use that to center myself inside. If your clothes are tight or uncomfortable, just notice and let the thought go. (You'll be home soon and can really relax!) Notice any twinges, tightness, or tingles and just let them go. Then focus on your *breathing*. By the end of the first minute you should be somewhat more relaxed and focused on your breathing – in and out. Now you're ready to enjoy the next part. Don't open your eyes.

**Minute #2 - Reflection:** The purpose of this part is to reflect on the school day that has just ended. I like to call this "running the movie in your mind." Again, you are not making judgments about your day, you are just reviewing it. I'm amazed how sometimes by 4 o'clock on a busy day I actually have trouble remembering what happened at 8:30! So just go back and re-run the day. Start from when you arrived at school. Was there a parking place for you? Did someone talk to you on the way in? Was your first class unruly? Did you have recess duty? Was there an assembly? Did that math lesson you worried about go well? Did you get your evaluation signed and returned on time? What kids stand out in your mind from today? Did anyone say or do something memorable? Remember: no judgments . . . just let the mental movie run whether it's a drama, a comedy or a tragedy. It's over and tomorrow is another day.

*Note: Years after writing these instructions, and struggling with this step myself, I realized that when I'm under stress it's very difficult to "rewind the movie" to the beginning of the day. I can usually do that the next morning – after a good night's sleep – but at the end of the day it's much easier to start backwards. It's quite*

*easy, however, to recall the last scene of the day – like when you kept one child back to talk to her about that “incident” at recess. That will trigger the previous scene . . . and you can work your way back to pulling into the parking lot quite easily. At first this may take more than a minute . . . but as you become familiar with the next three steps – the process will speed up.*

**Minute #3 - Gratitude:** This is the core of the exercise – and my favorite part. Now that you have reviewed the whole day, it’s time to recall the moments worth remembering and jot them down. This will be harder to do on some days than on others . . . but give it your best shot everyday. These are the little moments that make teaching rewarding and keep us all doing it:

- ♥ The look on a child’s face when she finally “gets it”!
- ♥ The question a student asked that made *you* understand why the class was having difficulty.
- ♥ The colleague who dropped by with just what you needed at exactly the right moment.
- ♥ The sensitive administrator who helped you out of a tight spot.
- ♥ The wise parent who takes responsibility for his role as a partner in his child’s education.
- ♥ The way your class sounded when they were practicing for the holiday program.
- ♥ The child who brought you a little gift when you needed cheering up.
- ♥ The words that came to you when you were trying to solve a problem on the playground . . .
- ♥ . . . and, perhaps, on some days, simply that little “so-and-so” was absent!

You *don’t* have to write much. Short phrases in little codes that only you might understand are perhaps the best way of catching these memories.

*Note: Over the years I've come to like using little personalized bullets – like small hearts for the moments of appreciation that I want to remember. I've used happy faces to give myself a little pat on the back for something accomplished well . . . tiny light bulbs for something learned that I don't want to forget . . . and little arrows pointing forward for an intention for the next day. The important thing is that you don't have to do this my way. You can take whatever liberties you like in order to make it your own.*

*When a defining moment comes along, you define the moment –  
or the moment defines you.*

*Roy McEvoy in "Tin Cup" By Ron Shelton*

Sometimes I think of these memories as “everyday miracles” or perhaps as “defining moments.” When my daughter was 8-years-old she taught me to think of them as “memory pictures.” Now that I am no longer teaching, there is a profound sadness when I think about how many wonderful memories I *don't* have because I didn't take the necessary time to reflect.

Neuroscience tells us that reflection, or active processing of information, is crucial for moving thoughts from our short-term memory to long-term memory. Since that is, of course, what learning is all about, it seems important that we teachers practice using the process ourselves. So, whatever you choose to call them, “Everyday Miracles,” “Defining Moments,” “Memory Pictures,” or a name that works for you . . . catch at least one of them as the movie of your day is running through your mind and jot them down.

**Minute #4 – Intention:** Once you have reviewed the day and perhaps remembered some of the reasons you chose to become a teacher in the first place, you are ready to begin thinking about tomorrow. Anyone who teaches time management or stress reduction will tell you that it is important to prioritize. Again, we all know that . . . but it's pretty hard to do when you are a classroom teacher.

You are always trying to meet the needs of dozens of students, be accountable to all of their parents, fulfill your obligations as a staff member - and be responsive to administrators who may or may not remember what classroom life was like *before* education became the battleground of politicians and the media. It really *isn't* the same for teachers as it was 15 years ago. Pressure from so many sides makes it even more important for you to focus on the *most* important things and let some of the rest go.

As you reviewed your day, you probably found yourself thinking of specific things you need to follow up. That's why this part is called "INTENTION." I like to think of it as "First Things First." Jot down one or two of the *most* important things you need to do tomorrow. This is NOT your "to do" list or tomorrow's lesson plan, but rather some things that might not make it to those lists but are the *real* priorities. You might need to find out why a student asked you a somewhat confusing question. Maybe it's a point you know you need to clear up from today's science lesson, or an apology you need to make to a student. Perhaps a shy student shared with you that tomorrow is his birthday and you don't want to forget to remember to say something to him. Don't take this list home with you. Intention is a very powerful tool . . . especially when you've written it and can glance at it the next day. But never feel guilty about not doing something. If you see it tomorrow and you didn't do it, you can decide if you want to put it on your intention list for the next day.

**Minute #5 – Attention:** Now it is time to refocus and think about the rest of your day. I think of this part as "shifting gears." I know how irritating it is when teachers hear people talk about how "lucky" we are to be "off" at 3:30, and when they use our contract hours as ammunition against us. I know I'm on really shaky ground here because I am not teaching right now . . . but I am among friends, so I am going to share something I have learned since I've been out of the classroom. *Teachers have choices!* We have choices that others in education really don't have. Site administrators have district administrators they must answer to. District

administrators have community members, school boards, and, most difficult of all, state and national legislators they must keep happy. In addition to all of that, they must deal with the media and the legal system when things go wrong! Parents are terrified because their children are growing up in such uncertain times. They feel they have few allies as they try to do the best they can for their kids.

Stuck in the middle of all of that are we teachers. Unfortunately, since we sometimes *forget* that we have choices, we can begin to resent the system or the parents who seem to make things more difficult. Don't get me wrong . . . we certainly don't have *many* choices anymore – and one of my major concerns is the micro-management I see going on in some districts. But in this last minute before you leave your classroom, I want you to focus on the choices you *do* have for how you spend the rest of your day. Take time to *shift gears!* Will you exhaust yourself for tomorrow by staying up until 2 AM correcting papers that you know your kids did poorly on and that you wish you hadn't even assigned? Or will you spend some time thinking about what you really wanted them to learn in that lesson and figure out a better way of teaching it? Maybe a good night's sleep and a fresh outlook are more important. Where does your attention need to be focused now?

Now list a couple of things that you can do tonight to ensure that you will have a great day tomorrow. You might need to remember to stop by the craft store to pick up supplies for an art project. Taking home a reasonable stack of papers to review might be a good idea. Maybe you feel a sore throat coming on so some chicken soup and an early bedtime might save you a few sick days later. Do you have a family member who has been feeling ignored because you've been so busy getting ready for Open House? You might even realize that the best thing you could do is to leave those worksheets you wish you hadn't assigned in the "round file" – and take a bubble bath instead of looking at them again. Take a minute to consider the bigger picture and remember that to be an excellent teacher you need to be a whole person. Again, this doesn't need to be a "To Do" list – although you might want to jot these ideas on a scrap of paper to take with you.

Again, thank you so much for your willingness to help with this project. Please keep in touch and have FUN with this! I would love to hear from you and get your comments as you go along!

Take care,

Bette

## ***CHAPTER FIVE***

### ***Flash Forward – 2013: Outcomes and Feedback***

That letter was written over 13 years ago. Reading it now, I realize that the only thing that has really changed for teachers is that they are under even more stress and have even fewer choices in terms of how they must spend their time in the classroom. Finding time to “reflect, regroup, reframe, and renew” at the end of the day is even harder now than it was in 1998 when I left the classroom. Even so, the importance of taking time to be aware of one’s own emotional state is crucial in order to help students deal with their own stress and find success.

In recent years neuroscientists have discovered the existence of mirror neurons and have begun to speculate about the role that they play in learning. Even without that research to back us up, however, most teachers know that if we are feeling cranky, impatient, overwhelmed, or frustrated, we are not going to be able to create a classroom atmosphere that is calm, responsive, energetic, and peaceful. Optimal learning can only take place when our emotional state is one of *relaxed alertness*. The old adage “Monkey See – Monkey Do” turns out to be more than a cute little saying. Children reflect the best, and the worst, of the adults around them. Our job is to understand that and to first manage our own emotional state before trying to manage theirs.

It’s not, however, easy to make that connection in the moment. When we are embroiled in what feels like chaos – it’s almost impossible to shift gears without physically removing ourselves from the situation. That, of course, for a teacher is not usually an option. Sometimes it might be possible to take a moment, a deep breath, and engage in a little “self talk” that will pull us out of the mood we’re in long enough to think about a new approach. But in order for that reaction to become a habit, we need to practice a new response. That’s why it’s so important to take a few minutes at the end of the day to consciously process and set our intentions for the next day. It’s okay to make mistakes – but it’s not okay to continue making the same ones over and over. Brain research tells us that practice does *not* make perfect . . . it makes *permanent*. The more stress we are under, the harder it is to make the shift – but the more important it is. Once a teacher has found

a new way to manage his or her own emotional state it will feel natural to use the same techniques with students.

During the second semester of the 1999-2000 school year, thirteen teachers helped me play around with “DreamKeepers” – and had thirteen different experiences with it. One teacher, a young man who coached after-school sports and had a wife and two kids at home, found that the only way he could find five minutes for himself was to stop the car at a park between school and home. Another teacher in the same position found it completely impossible between after school meetings and picking kids up at daycare – so she got in the habit of taking time the next morning before the rest of the family woke up. Several others politely opted out because they honestly believed that they did not have enough time.

I was not the least bit surprised at their reaction because even *after* I retired I found it almost impossible to quiet my mind at 4:00 each day. Like so many teachers who retire, I began filling my days very quickly and found myself recreating some of the same stresses I felt while teaching. In fact, as I look back, I realize that I was trying to recreate the life I had as a teacher! Even though I have lost contact with several of the teachers who tried *DreamKeepers* – I have never lost sight of the importance of taking time to reflect, regroup, reframe and renew.

Since I left teaching in June 1998, the classroom walls have continued to close in on most of the teachers I know. Instead of being less important, however, that makes it even more important for teachers to learn to manage their own time, stress, and energy. What started out, for me, as a passion for helping teachers deal with the stresses of teaching turned into a structure for learning to stay centered and focused on what’s really important in life.

Taking just a few minutes at the end of each day to focus on the choices we *do* have – will make it possible to hold on to our own dreams - even when we feel our lives are run by bell schedules and other people’s agendas. It doesn’t really take much time to become aware – and to make moment-to-moment decisions that can change everything.

# ***APPENDIX***

## ***The Packet: Short Form and Template***

(Print and make copies of weekly journal page)



# DREAMKEEPERS

MY JOURNAL

## **INSTRUCTIONS: The Short Form**

***Before you write:***

***First Minute – Inward Focus***

Eyes closed - Bring awareness inside.

***Second Minute - Reflection***

Review your day: "Run the movie in your mind."

***When you're ready, jot your thoughts for each idea below:***

***Third Minute – Gratitude:***

Everyday Miracles, Defining Moments, or Memory Pictures

***Fourth Minute – Intention:***

First Things First for Tomorrow "Don't forget . . ."

***Fifth Minute – Attention:***

Considering the "Bigger Picture" - Shifting Gears

What Can I Do to Prepare for Tomorrow?

# Week of \_\_\_\_\_

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Monday</u></b></p> <p><b>Gratitude:</b></p> <p><b>Intention:</b></p> <p><b>Attention:</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Thursday</u></b></p> <p><b>Gratitude:</b></p> <p><b>Intention:</b></p> <p><b>Attention:</b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Tuesday</u></b></p> <p><b>Gratitude:</b></p> <p><b>Intention:</b></p> <p><b>Attention:</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Thursday</u></b></p> <p><b>Gratitude:</b></p> <p><b>Intention:</b></p> <p><b>Attention:</b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Wednesday</u></b></p> <p><b>Gratitude:</b></p> <p><b>Intention:</b></p> <p><b>Attention:</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Notes</u></b></p>