

The mission of our be the change column is to feature community members from the North State who are actively making a difference in community life. If you would like to nominate someone who is making a difference, please write to pn@northstateparent.com.

BEVERLY BELK

*A teacher who cares —
“What I was put on earth to do”*

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“A teacher who cares would teach under one of those shade trees if that’s all there were,” Beverly Belk remembers her master teacher saying. Over her 60-year teaching career, Beverly has often thought, “Just give me a shade tree and I’ll teach you!”

Born in Corning, CA, Beverly knew she wanted to become a teacher at the age of five. She signed her first teaching contract with Cascade Union Elementary School District (CUESD) in Anderson, CA just before graduating from Chico State University in 1961. She has taught first through fourth grade with CUESD ever since, including the children and grandchildren of former students. “I love when kids come to me and say, ‘My uncle knows you! Do you remember so-and-so?’ It’s so much fun!” Beverly says.

NSP: WAS BECOMING A TEACHER ALL YOU DREAMED IT WOULD BE?
BEVERLY: It was all I dreamed it would be, but it was work! There were none of the things available for teachers like there are now; if you wanted charts, you made the charts, if you wanted work cards, you made the work cards. It was not unusual for us to be there until 8 or 9 at night. The blessing was that a very seasoned teacher, Rachel Billings, took a few of us under her wing during my first year.

NSP: WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT TEACHING?
BEVERLY: I honestly can’t think of anything I don’t like. Even when you teach the same grade, you’re never teaching the same children, so it’s different every year. I have never felt like I should be doing something else; I feel totally like this is what I was put on earth to do.

MODELING READINESS TO LEARN
Not even the pandemic hurling curveballs and confusion at education could shake Beverly’s commitment to her students. Modeling the readiness to learn that she cultivates in her students, she persevered through distance teaching. “There’s a definite learning curve with the technology, no doubt about that,” she acknowledges, but says she had help from her coworkers, and even learned new technology tips from her students.

NSP: WHAT DO YOU MOST WANT CHILDREN TO LEARN FROM THEIR TIME WITH YOU?
BEVERLY: I think academics are so important, and reading is my all-time favorite to teach and for them to learn. But I most want them to learn to be compassionate and caring lifelong learners. I would like to think I haven’t done so much teaching as helping children want to be lifelong learners.

INSPIRING STUDENTS AND FAMILIES
Up until the pandemic, Beverly held family reading nights to help families bond and get a free meal when finances stretch thin at the end of each month. She spearheaded an annual fall carnival so families could enjoy time together. She’s mentored countless student teachers, including Christa Arthur and current CUESD Superintendent Jason Provence. Christa recalls meeting Beverly 25 years ago when she was her daughter’s third-grade teacher: “Mrs. Belk made a huge difference in my life. She inspired me to get my teaching credential.”

Christa fondly describes some of Beverly’s habits with her students:
Holding her classroom spellbound with read-alouds after recess each day, purchasing and distributing daily snacks to make sure no children go without, and motivating children to read by letting them hang an apple on a special reading tree when they finish a book.

Most of all, Christa says, Beverly consistently implements structure and routines that help her students feel safe at school. “I look back and see the little things she does. Sometimes people think it’s this big ol’ huge thing that makes a difference in a child’s life, but it isn’t. Maybe it’s just a moment of kindness each day.”

NSP: HOW CAN PEOPLE MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES?
BEVERLY: For the most part I’ve tried to make a difference through the school—teaching and serving on the PTA, High School Scholarship Association and things like that. Outside of school, I also belong to Delta Kappa Gamma, which is an honor society for women educators that supports children, mothers and families. We have put books in the hands of many Shasta County children. So, I would say just take that step out, get involved in something. It might not seem like a big thing, but I don’t think we ever know what lives we really touch. Just don’t ignore the smallest thing you can do to help.

“MY LIFE HAS BEEN A BLESSING”
Outside of school hours, Beverly treasures time with her husband, Russell. When the couple married in 1963, they invited Beverly’s students, resulting in an adorable feature in the Record Searchlight. Beverly and Russell have two daughters, six grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren. “A lot of people retire to spend time with their grandkids, but I have been very blessed in that my grandchildren were all right here, so teaching hasn’t made me miss family time,” Beverly says. “They say you can’t have your cake and eat it too, but I have! My whole life has been a blessing.”
Thankfully for the North State, Beverly’s life has not only been a blessing to her, but to all who are fortunate enough to know her. ■



Jenna Christophersen is Chico native who loves to write. She also shares Beverly’s love for reading; they both recently enjoyed *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens.

