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Jackie Westerfield

Grandview Preparatory School, Boca Raton

In the back of her mind, Jackie Westerfield always knew she should follow her bliss. It just took a few years to see the light, despite the sage advice of a college professor.

"He was my law professor at Loyola University in Chicago, an older gentleman, very famous in his field," Westerfield recalls. "The first day he shuffles slowly into class, a little bit late. It takes him a long time to sit down at his desk, and when he does, there is literally two minutes of dead silence. Finally, he looks up at us and says: 'I'm going to tell you something that will be worth more to you than the tuition you've paid for law school. I'm going to give you words to live by. Listen carefully: Pick the one thing that you would do for free, make it your life, and the rest will follow.'"

With that, the professor stood up and left the room.

"I've never forgotten those words," Westerfield says.

Westerfield graduated from the Chicago law school in 1990 and practiced law for five years before moving to Florida to help her parents open Grandview Preparatory School in Boca Raton in 1997. Today, Westerfield is a teacher and Head of School (principal) – and has never been happier professionally.

"In college I started off as an education major," says Westerfield, who earned a bachelor's degree in English at the University of Iowa. "I kept switching majors because the 1980s mentality was: You need to be a professional, a high-powered attorney, the *L.A. Law* kind of thing. So I went against my early instincts."

She was a successful lawyer, first with the Illinois State's Attorney's Office and then in private practice.

"But the practice of law for me was less about justice and constitutional issues and the things you love in law school and more about: Did you get the retainer? It was disillusioning," she says. "Law is a noble profession, in the right areas, but my exposure to it was not as noble."

When her parents, Carolyn and Gene Ehlers, asked Westerfield to help launch Grandview, she knew she'd written her last brief.

"As an educator, I know that when my head hits the pillow I've made a difference," she says. "The kids are what speak to me. I love the opportunity to be trying to change people's lives. I tell kids that education isn't a thing to acquire it's a tool to build, so that when you get out into the world you can make the world a better place in some way. You can follow your compass for the greater good."

How did Westerfield know for sure – How does anyone? – that following her bliss was the right thing to do?

"The voice within you can't be silenced once you get passionate about a thing."

Somewhere, her old law professor is smiling.