

## **Valuing Our Older Teachers Who Are Miracle Workers**

**By: Dr. Michael McManmon, Founder  
The College Internship Program**

Oftentimes in our society, we seem to disregard the wisdom, understanding, and experience of our elders. Just like Helen Keller had her Anne Sullivan, we have within our midst many miracle workers who have the patience of Job and the knowledge of King Solomon. The following are compelling stories about two such saints that lived among us.

Kimberly Fisher, the mother of Dominic Fisher, shares a story about how she met an iconic educator named Mrs. Virginia Henderson Knight in 2004 when Dominic was in the second grade, Kimberly became gravely concerned about his academic progress. His grades were dropping and bleak letters from his math, English, and resource teachers were marked to her attention, every day of the week. Dominic passing to the third grade or any grade wasn't promising.

Eventually, she scheduled an IEP meeting, in hopes to gain more insight to help her find out root causes and strategize how to make current processes better. Nevertheless, she left the meeting with her head down.

She recalls walking away from the meeting until she heard someone running behind her, shouting her name. It was Dominic's English teacher. She held her hand and looked her in her eyes and said, "Ms. Fisher, your son needs a school as if he were blind, he can't read any of our textbooks or write."

She ran to her car, wept, prayed, and grabbed her phone, and frantically started looking for schools that could teach her son. She called The Wesley School in Memphis, and a cheerful, sweet voice answered. Her name was Virginia Knight. She was the co-founder of the School for special needs children and had taught there for 35 years. She was 81 years old.

Kimberly explains, "I was talking so fast, she asked me to breathe and she helped me to calm down. When I was able to explain myself, Mrs. Knight said, "I want to meet you, and please, bring Dominic with you. I walked into the school holding Dominic's hand. She met us with a smile walking with a cane, coming to greet us in the foyer. She asked a peer teacher to take Dominic to a playroom while we talked. I told her what Dominic's English teacher said. I told her about the dreadful progress reports and negative talking points during the IEP meeting. Mrs. Knight looked at me, she threw her hand up and smiled, her response was, "Oh they just don't know what they're doing, when I'm finished with him, he'll be reading novels. Mrs. Knight went on to tell me that her daughter was born deaf, and she had taught her deaf daughter how to talk."

Dominic graduated from The Wesley School with honors and was reading books like a scholar. When the Wesley School closed its doors, Mrs. Knight homeschooled Dominic from 2007 - 2009. When the beloved Mrs. Virginia Knight passed in 2011, it was one of the saddest days. Her memory, devotion, and phenomenal work for, and with, special needs children lives on.

"Wisdom at the mountain-foot sees farther than intelligence at the mountaintop" -Matshona Dhliwayo



English Teacher Virginia Henderson Knight

In 1984 when the College Internship Program was founded in Lee, Massachusetts, I formed a Community Advisory Board of Parents and Professionals from the Community who had experience with Learning Disabilities and Autism. Mrs. Fran Carty was a special needs teacher in the school district and she later became an academic tutor at CIP with our students.

Mrs. Carty remained teaching into her late 80's. She affected the lives of many students in wonderful ways. Toward the end of her time working with us, she had to be brought to the center in a wheelchair. She loved her work and her students. One semester a student named Jack came to the center (albeit unwillingly). He was a triplet and his two siblings were going directly into college and he had also been accepted to college but his parents thought (and rightly so) that he needed some assistance to be ready to handle a full load. He needed help with his academic executive functioning skills and also some social thinking skills.

Jack felt that he did not need help from anyone. He took two classes at the college and was placed with Fran for his tutorials. By the end of the semester and having passed his classes he was asking for more time with Fran and signed up for more classes that semester.

Jack became very attached to "Mrs. C" and formed a bond. He was able to go to a four-year college and graduate Magna Cum Laude.

Fran had the same effect on many other students who had failed in traditional classes and she was able to inspire them (one paper, one test, one class at a time) to persevere and gain confidence in their abilities.

I also became attached to her and visited her at her home for years before she died. I was holding her hand as she breathed her last breath. We will always remember her generous and loving spirit and her wisdom and ability to see into the hearts and minds of her students.



CIP Instructor Fran Carty

About the author: Dr. Michael McManmon, Ed., is the founder of the College Internship Program, (CIP), a comprehensive transition program specializing in the educational needs of teens and young adults with autism and learning differences. CIP offers year-round and summer transition programs at five locations across the US. For additional information, visit [www.cipworldwide.org](http://www.cipworldwide.org), or call **1-877-Know-CIP**.