

STUDENTS

TODAY'S LIFE LESSON: DON'T GIVE UP!

Jessica Wise leaned on her walking cane and surveyed her students. Seeing that two young men needed redirection and support, she joined them at their workstations and said, "Let's get started, guys. You want to do your best on the upcoming final exam, right?" The students nodded their heads and logged in, but they remained in deep conversation--about everything except mathematics.

Wise returned to their workstations. Smiling, she joked, "This is thrilling conversation, gentlemen, but mathematics is even better."

"It doesn't matter," one student replied. "We're gonna fail anyway."

"You don't know that, so don't give up," Wise replied.

Then, one of the students asked, "When do you give up, Ms. Wise?"

At first, she was unsure how to answer. Wise was seven months away from her own graduation, and there were days when failure seemed more likely than success. Wise earned a bachelor's degree in English at Kennesaw State and a masters in English from the University of West Georgia. The first person in her family to graduate from college, she had dreamed of attending a university since third grade. From 2005 to 2015, Jessica shared her love of Beowulf, Bronte, and Billy Budd with her college students. She also went on to win instructor of the year at the University of West Georgia, to write a book, and to teach English Language Arts in multiple countries.

In 2015, Wise volunteered at her former high school and discovered a new passion for teaching mathematics. Returning to KSU determined to earn certification as a math teacher, she had occasional lows that brought on tears, but she never gave up. She joined the M.A.T. program as a Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellow. She was inspired by KSU faculty Dr. Wendy Sanchez, who taught Wise to see her potential as a mathematics teacher.

Her journey began with exciting courses, talented faculty, and intriguing research; however, four months into the program, she suffered a debilitating automobile accident. Broken bones and a brain injury threatened to derail her program, but her professors, cohort members, collaborating teacher, and even her students helped Wise to continue. Get-well cards, hugs, hospital visits, and warm smiles got her back on her feet and back in a classroom--albeit leaning on a cane.



Returning to her student's question about giving up, Wise replied, "Well, I don't really give up. I came here last week using a walker, right? And now, I have a cane because I'm pretty stubborn."

"No, Ms. Wise, I mean, when do you give up on students?"

Surprised, she hesitated. "I don't ever give up on students," she said. "Everyone can learn more over time, don't you think?" He responded that he had never done well in math and probably never would, but Wise continued to provide encouragement. "Since I don't give up, you can't give up," she said. "We might not become math experts today, but let's become high-level at starting a review."

Although Wise had a long healing process ahead--and although these two students repeated the course--that spring offered real growth. Wise went on to be awarded Outstanding Student Teacher of the Year and Outstanding Education Scholar in her M.A.T. program.

Her students went on to pass algebra. One of them delivered his factoring test to Ms. Wise's desk: his 100% score is on the refrigerator at her home -- evidence of staying the course and not giving up! Both Ms. Wise and her students didn't give up trying, they didn't give up learning, and they reached their goals.