

Chicken Soup for

Friendswood ISD

I initially heard about Friendswood on my first date with my now-husband. He told story after story about his experiences growing up in this town. Within the first few months of dating, I learned about his senior English teacher, Renae Simons, who gave her students the freedom to choose a research topic.

I later learned about this AP named Thad who gave my husband a bloody nose during a youth-adult basketball game. Then I learned about Thad's brother, Nathan, who taught my husband at FHS and also mentored him through church, traveling to Costa Rica and Mexico together on mission trips and teaching my husband how to drive a standard. I also heard about a superintendent, Walter Wilson, who knew the name of every student and wrote handwritten letters to them frequently. I found myself wondering, "What is this magical place? What is this place where school, community, service, and mentorship are intertwined? Where adults invest in the lives of young people in tangible and practical ways?"

When we moved to Friendswood after a couple years of marriage, I decided it was time for a career change. I wanted to be a part of the magic of Friendswood ISD. I majored in marketing at Texas A&M and worked in that industry for three years before becoming an English teacher. A huge thank you goes to Susanne Stafford for being an outstanding mentor teacher during this transition and an even better lifelong friend and designated editor for anything I write, including this.

The four years I taught at Friendswood High School are a gift that I will forever cherish. Growing up, I was on Free and Reduced Lunch. The teachers I had in Humble ISD saw me, helped me apply to colleges, fostered my independence and grit, and pushed me to work harder. One teacher, Mary Allison, even gifted me with a laptop and a printer from the inheritance she received after her father passed. I wondered if there were any students like me in Friendswood who needed teachers as I had. Did Friendswood need teachers who looked at students and saw through their put-together tough exterior to see the real hardship that few knew about?

My favorite part of teaching was hosting Socratic seminars every 9-weeks for my freshman and junior students. Each class period felt like its own unique family unit. I saw students who were total opposites, coming together to support and elevate one another. The unfortunate truth is that several students have quite different experiences in Friendswood ISD than my husband did. Many students come into classrooms fighting difficult, heavy, and unseen battles. Socratic seminars helped these students learn the value and power of their voices and of bringing their experiences forward to the table. It was powerful witnessing these young people grow up before my eyes. Now, I am gifted with seeing those same students thriving in adulthood and working hard to make our world a better place. I am so proud of each and every student I had the privilege and honor of teaching.

To all my former students, do you remember our three rules? Remember to be kind, be an instrument of peace, and that your life matters. No excuses.

Turns out that Friendswood really is as magical as I believed. This is the first place I've ever lived and worked that made me want to stay. Friendswood is home, and I believe it can feel like home for every single person in this town. And it's my mission to do just that: to work hard to make Friendswood a safe home for all people.

-Kelly Browning, Director of Community Education