

Sami's Story

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If you have been teaching Reading Recovery for very long, you know how certain children you teach seem to bond with you in a special way, at least while you have them in Reading Recovery. Sami Gross was not one of these. It was as if she could sense from the very beginning that she was there because she was not learning as readily as the other children. Sami came from a wonderful family; both of her parents, Robyn and David, are educators. But for some reason, probably because she was a quiet, passive child, Sami was not catching on to reading on her own—so much so that her parents considered having her retained in kindergarten. But the teacher talked them into letting Sami go on to first grade where she would be able to receive Reading Recovery services. Sami needed a full program in order to discontinue, and in subsequent



Sami Gross, summer before eighth grade.

years she turned into a model student. In fact, in fifth grade Sami was honored as one of the top six fifth graders at Clippard Elementary School.

Imagine my surprise this past spring when I received a phone call from Robyn. She wanted to share an assignment Sami had written as part of her seventh-grade advanced reading class. The class had read the story *The Cay* and had talked about how Timothy was considered a saint on earth for Phillip. Sami had chosen to write about me as her saint on earth. Sami's assignment read: "I would say that Mrs. Robert is my saint on earth. Mrs. Robert was my Reading Recovery teacher in first grade. She spent a lot of extra time with me and gave me lots of attention. She helped me learn to read even though it was harder for me than some of the other students. She never gave up on me. Not only did she help me love to read, she helped me want to do my best. That has influenced me to make good grades today. She helped me to believe anything is possible if I put my mind to it."

Needless to say, by the end of my conversation with Robyn, I was in tears. Who would have ever expected such a tribute from this young lady who had seemingly been so indifferent as a first grader?

Sami's mother had this to say about the Reading Recovery program and its influence on Sami: "David and I will be forever grateful to Linda Robert and the Reading Recovery program. Sami was very quiet in first grade and not real sure of herself. She needed the one-to-one attention and got that with Linda Robert and her first-grade



Sami Gross, first grade.

teacher, Carol Reimann. She was only in Reading Recovery a short period of time, but she learned so much and gained so much confidence that she now loves to read and makes *As*. She is a very outgoing, self-assured young lady now. We are thankful she had this foundation in first grade."

I encountered Sami again this summer on stage. I attended a wonderful musical production entitled "Sing, America, Sing," featuring some of the most talented high school and college students in our area. In addition to the main performance, two 13-year-old young ladies were featured, and one of them was Sami. From a quiet, shy first grader to a composed 13-year-old belting out "You Can't Get a Man with a Gun" from the musical *Annie Get Your Gun*, Sami has come a long way!