

Tribute to President Mom

by Amanda DeWald

It is always a beautiful thing to touch base with all of the good people who have journeyed with my mother, Maria L. DeWald, during her ongoing commitment to the PTA. This year's annual conference in Rochester to celebrate the turning over of the administration to Susan Lipman was another chance to do that. It also was another chance to witness the PTA's model message: That ordinary citizens cooperating together in friendship and professionalism under a common principle can move the world forward in a positive direction.

For three years I have had a unique view of my mom's term as State PTA president. She worked tirelessly day and night as her desk receded behind heightening stacks of binders, papers, pamphlets, emails and polka-dotted items of all varieties. My father and I joked that many mornings she disappeared into the office and at noontime he would have to remind her she might want to get out of her pajamas. It became normal for her to be up until 3 or 4:00 a.m., sleep for four hours and go to it again. In true fashion, she offered her labor with joy.

The past three years were not an exception. My mother has dedicated many days of her life to the public schools, and part of every day of her life to some form of public service. She has been the exemplary involved parent – not only during the years my brother and I attended public schools, but also in the 15 years since we got out of them. I wasn't always the happiest middle schooler when my mom showed up as our math sub, but now I see and live the deeper impact.

I always have described my mother as the only person I know who works 60-hour weeks for nothing. It is becoming an old-world model, when one parent could hold down the financial obligations of a family so the other could perform the endless emotional and organizational labor that is never fiscally compensated in this life, but which equally consumes time and energy, and which is equally the sustenance of healthy homes and societies.

These past three years, all of New York's children have had the privilege of benefiting from the special labor and leadership my mother pours into her own family. Her model is in her motivations: To give of one's life for others. As my brother has masterfully transitioned, and I have stumbled, into adulthood, she has been able to point this energy toward the interests of others' children, caring equally about building the school, like the home, into the most functional and nurturing place it can be.

Service passed down, one of those long-term byproducts of those days I sat embarrassed in 6th grade math class. My mother's father gave his labor to public service as a NYC firefighter, and my father's father gave his to lifelong service as a Marine. Like genetics, these models trickled into my brother and I, who both base our professional lives in the need to give, too.

The work of the PTA trickles down into America's children, too. All of us are rewarded. School is the place where they inherit the expectations of a society, just as home is where they learn to carry the name of a family. The young want to test the heights and depths, but they also have a way of taking us with them while they do that. They demand transcendent patience, forgiveness, humility and wit. They demand, in other words, the best from the adults around them, the higher form of giving that we aspire for. When they see this type of unrelenting support it is hard for them to go wrong, no matter what pressures are outside. Likewise, without this backbone, they are lost. The young want to see that adults are willing to work for them. When they do, they reward us ten fold with both the workers and the people they become.

What a hopeful force for our young and our future is the model of love and hard work that comes from all of you.