

INTRODUCTION

The day I walked into Sandy Barron's 4th grade classroom at San Rafael Elementary School in Pasadena California, I believed that I had found where wanted to be for the rest of my life. Sandy was going on maternity leave and I had been hired mid-year as a long-term substitute. The year was 1968 and the dream I had held since I was in the 5th grade had finally come true.

That, however, was not how it worked out. Life stepped in and I now look back on a 30-year career and 20 years of retirement as a path that took me to 4 grade levels (not to mention substituting in grades 3-12), in 7 school districts, teaching __#__ subjects plus __#__ self-contained classrooms – and then to an unexpected retirement 15 years before I had planned, which took me to an opportunity to participate in the creation of two amazing educational enterprises – both of which ended in disappointment almost a decade ago.

Since the closing of a charter school that I now realize didn't catch on because it was based on an educational philosophy that was born at least 15 years prematurely, life has let me to the place where I finally have time to reflect and begin to write about that journey.

Through it all I have developed a passion for helping students develop their writing skills in the way the human brain was meant to learn. A neuroscientist I am not – but 50 years of observing children from pre-school through graduate school – has, I think, given me some insights that I believe are worth sharing.

Within a year of that first wonderful day at San Rafael, the draft took my husband and I to Fort Ord in Monterey, California where the only job I could find was as a substitute on an Army base. After discharge, and for the next 30 years, unexpected job openings, overcrowded classrooms, declining enrollments, interesting new job opportunities, downsizing, school closures, grade level reconfiguration (added to my natural tendency to love change and tackling new challenges) took me on a career path that looks like I could never settle down ... but one I dearly loved and have missed since leaving my last classroom in 2006.

That's when I decided I wanted to write this book.

So what happened?

I did start. And started over. And over and over and over.

The problem I had is that Learning to Write / Writing to Learn is not a "curriculum" ... at least not in the usual sense of the word. It is not linear. It's not based on a "Writing Proseses" any more than any two "real" authors produce their books in the same way.

So, I never knew where I should start. Never, that is, until I ran into a short YouTube interview with Elon Musk, the co-founder of PayPal and founder of Tesla and SpaceX.

But once again, I'm getting ahead of myself.

What Musk taught me is HOW to frame my meandering, global way of thinking into a linear format that actually might have a beginning, a middle, and an end. That's when the tag line "First Things First" showed up ... and now I think I may be ready to organize a book that actually might make sense.