

Good evening and thank you Kyle for such a fabulous introduction. It means a great deal to have student introductions, for without motivated and intelligent students such as you, where would we be as teachers?

Additionally, I would like to thank the SAD #37 administration of Dr. Stewart, Peter Doak, Lucille Willey, and Nancy Melhorne- your being 100% behind me is greatly appreciated. I cannot say thank you enough to my “out of this world” colleagues at Narraguagus High School in Harrington, Maine and to the entire community for its tremendous support. And most of all I thank my family- my parents – Gary and Paula Ray for being my first and best teachers, my brother Jeremy for being a great listener, my children, Bayley, Thomas, and Joseph, for making me a better and more compassionate teacher, and most of all my husband, Ron Smith, for his incredible friendship and support.

Tonight I feel truly honored to accept the honor and responsibility of Maine Teacher of the Year 2007. To be perfectly honest, I am not one for lots of attention and being in the spotlight, but when speaking with one of my colleagues last evening, she really helped put things in perspective. She said, “Britt – think of this as a chance for all of our hard work as educators

to be celebrated. We all deserve to be in the spotlight.” And you know, she is exactly right.

In addition to having friends and colleagues put things into perspective, I must say that the entire selection process for Maine Teacher of the Year has done just that for me. The portfolio, site visits, oral presentations, and interviews really were tremendous catalysts for the self-reflection and classroom reflection needed in the profession of teaching. Specifically, one question played over and over in my mind and that was the question of who inspired you to become a teacher? Some of my colleagues remember always wanting to be teachers and playing school for hours with friends and siblings. I don't recall such memories, but I do know how much I loved it when the morning air turned cool in late August, and school was about to begin. “Bookworm, teacher's pet, geek” some may think when hearing this, but really the reason I loved school so much can be summed up in three words - **fish and blueberries**. For as long as I can remember every summer was spent working in my father's sardine cannery wearing a stylish hairnet and plastic apron or walking with a sore back and blue hands from raking blueberries. Trust me, school was a relief. I detested this monotonous and tiresome work. The only thing I enjoyed during these long

summers was the sharing of stories and wisdom between the workers in the factory and on the barrens. Perhaps it was in those long summer days that I found my love for being with people, and I always knew I would some day work in an environment that allowed this same sharing of experiences and wisdom. Though difficult to recognize at the time, I was not just filling sardine cans or 5 gallon buckets, but rather they were filling me with a respect for hard work and a love for communicating and sharing ideas and dreams with others. What better preparation could there be for a future teacher?

Now thirteen years after graduating from Colby College and making the decision to stay in Maine and specifically Washington County and Downeast Maine, I am so glad that I did. In 1993, I was eager to begin my career in the classroom. Many of my professors urged me to apply to graduate school, and I did so, but in all honesty, I *just* wanted to teach in a rural Maine classroom, much like the ones I attended. I wanted to give back to a small community area; after all, it was the nurturing environment of a small Maine school and community that gave me the confidence and sense of self I needed to succeed. From day one as a teacher, I have sought to give my students the skills, tools, and experiences that will allow them to go forward with confidence in their abilities to succeed and work effectively in

Washington County, in Maine, in the country, and beyond. Now with this tremendous honor of being Maine Teacher of the Year, I am thrilled to represent all teaching professionals who seek to provide nurturing and enriching opportunities to all students on a daily basis. Moreover, such an opportunity will allow me to represent my students and community in a leadership role. Leading by example is a tremendous gift to my students, who often feel they cannot compete or measure up to students from more affluent or culturally rich environments. This honor allows me to illustrate that truly it is initiative, commitment to others, and a belief in one's self that distinguish leaders from others.

Lastly, I would like to share that my first knowledge of the Maine Teacher of the Year Program came last January when Lucille Willey, my assistant principal, came to me saying that she, my principal Peter Doak, and several colleagues had discussed the matter and wanted to nominate me for this award. Indeed, I was honored and readily accepted such an opportunity. Weeks later as I was coming to learn more about the program my excitement really grew because the Maine Teacher of the Year program clearly stated that the process was not about picking the best teacher in

Maine but about selecting an individual willing and eager to represent all the outstanding and dedicated teachers in our State. Truly, this prospect thrilled me. Daily for the past thirteen years I have been surrounded by individuals full of passion, creativity, perseverance, and genuine concern for students. Whenever I am afforded the privilege to team teach with colleagues like Ken Martin or Helene Hammond or observe in another classroom I always am energized by the commitment to learning and contagious enthusiasm on the part of both teachers and students. For this reason, I am so excited to represent teachers, students, and education in the State of Maine.

Thank you.

Brittany Ray