

## **Teacher Keynote Award Recipient, Anna Johnson's speech**

I'm Anna Johnson. I think I'm up here in an "everyman" role or an "every teacher" role because like about 75% of you, this year I've changed buildings. I'm also up here because of the many changes I've been involved in over my teaching career in South Brunswick. I've taught for 27 years in this district and for me I have to say: yet again I'm making a change.

I started in the district in Cambridge School in 1970. I was hired to team in 1<sup>st</sup> grade with 3 first grade classroom teachers. Before that I had taught 4<sup>th</sup> grade in Brooklyn's Bedford Stuyvesant. I've never done 1<sup>st</sup> grade before, but I thought I could try. Midway during that year a Kindergarten teacher in the school took a leave of absence and I was asked to take her class. I had no background at all in Early Childhood, but I decided I could try that too. I asked lots of questions that year, received lots of support, studied lots and lots of information, and I guess I managed well enough to continue teaching Kindergarten for another 3 years. One of those years I taught the Developmental Kindergarten class, which was a class of children whose birthdays fell between September and December of the receiving year. Those children had been previously excluded from their year and had gone to Kindergarten a year later. That worked out too! Actually there's a current high school teacher who was in that class that year – Marc Babich.

My next teaching experience in the district was with the group of teachers who opened Brunswick Acres School in 1975. Speak of change! Many of us were teamed with people we did not know, we worked in an open space with no barriers at all (likened to an airplane hangar), and we faced parent opposition to our program daily. Tumultuous change was a part of that year. Some teachers received termination notices on Friday afternoons, so there was the threat and the reality that staff could change weekly. One afternoon, I was called at home by a colleague. (I worked half day Kindergarten that year so I could go home and be with my young children.) She said when I returned to school the next day we would be working with a new principal. Stacey Holmes, the original principal, had resigned. Okay, I could deal with that too.

It was the close relationship of the remaining staff that got us through that year together. We were supportive of each other and we did it!

There were changes for me as the years went by: I taught straight grade and multi-grade classes. I taught 1<sup>st</sup> grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, 1-2, 2-3, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, 3-4, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, and I was a Resource Teacher. A number of times I teamed...with some excellent teachers! I worked with 7 principals over the years. I taught in open space, closed space, a portable classroom, and once a half of a classroom: as a good number of the elementary teachers here today have done, I set up my 4<sup>th</sup> grade classroom before the start of school in September of that year, working long and hard, but that particular year it was decided that there were so many children in 4<sup>th</sup> grade that a new teacher was hired...the day before school started! And she was to have half of my classroom to work in! Yet another time, I said, "We can do this!"

It turned out to be a temporary measure. Room was found for her classroom midyear and this time during the year we both moved. (She and I are still friends.)

Five years ago, I moved to Greenbrook School where I taught 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. At the end of each year of 4 out of the 5 years there, I packed up my belongings in boxes to move within the building. I had done this many times before in Brunswick Acres as well!

Well here I go again this year – I have moved yet again. I’m now at Monmouth Junction School. What is different about this year for me is that I’m making an even greater change – I’m changing careers. I’m the school librarian in Monmouth Junction School. I’m taking evening classes at Rutgers University for my certification and for a Masters in Library Science. Actually last night I handed in my first paper in 30 years. An aside to the Greenbrook School staff, who made up a song for me when I left in June, to the tune of “The Banana Boat Song”: “Day-o, Day-o. Come September my library a mess.” Well, it is September – and my library – a mess! But I will do this too!

You need to know that during one of the early times in library school at Rutgers, when we went around the room and introduced ourselves, I heard pride in my voice when I said, “I am Anna Johnson and I work in the South Brunswick School System.” The pride I feel is based on the strength of the person sitting next to you. Of course that person is looking at you too and rightly so. Over all these years of change in my professional history in this district, it was the understanding, patience, and support of my colleagues that let me do what I found I could do!

Use the support systems around you in this year of change. Learn from each other. We will do this together. Have a good year!