Parish youth work to save Louisiana coastline

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From the teachers' desk: 

Diana's Dream

I experienced such a rotten time in grades one through 12 in public school at a small north Louisiana town that I vowed someday to be a teacher. If teachers were monsters, why wouldn't I aspire to be like that? Simply because I knew it did not have to be that like. I thought of Jesus Christ, the greatest teacher ever known.

With teachers calling me "stupid" and never believing in me as a potential success of any kind, I was very close to my daddy, who did believe in me. He taught me the most important lessons in my life. He was always there when I fell down. He never gave me a hand to get up; instead, he never let up until I had got myself up. Then he instructed me to break myself off and to thank Jesus for giving me the next step that I would take on my own. He showed me with praise at that point, and on we went, grade after grade, until, a few short months before my senior graduation, I had to drop out of high school.

The teachers who had given me hell all those years were now sure that they had been right all along: You see, she is stupid.

Shortly after dropping out of high school, I did finish my GED. I asked the administrator whether, since I had almost finished at a particular school, it would be possible to pay my GED debt from that school. He said that although that had never been done before, he was going to try to get it done for me. That June, I received a GED from the school that had not yet seen what stupid could do...

My dream was to be smart and be recognized for being smart.

I wanted to be a teacher and help the students' dreams, and helped them learn how to overcome weaknesses and to help them dream a dream or plan a goal. And if there were no dream, I wanted to plant a seed of permission that it is okay to dream, and that it is okay to take God's hand in everything that dream...

I have found that differ ent people learn in so many different ways and by so many different methods. No one way is right or wrong, but each way is simply for a specific person.

To criticize in a judgmental way someone who can't read, instead of writing books is where the problem lies. Do what you do with great dignity and pride, because your work reflects your character.

I did go on to become a teacher in agriculture, journalism, and special education. This satisfies, I will also finish ele

mentary education before I go on to work on my doctorate. So, am I really stupid?

In June 2005, I realized a very important dream when I got to go canoeing and photographing with C.C. Lockwood and his wife Sue. At that point, C.C.'s love and devotion to our Louisiana coast infused my soul to do something about the coastal needs myself and to involve my school in East Feliciana.

The seed planted at that workshop took a year to germinate, but by October 2006, the dream was alive and taking speed.

Mr. Joseph Jones gave me permission to form the bitters paniscum project centered on the name of the marsh grass that a group of students and I nurtured until this February 23. That day we loaded a parish bus and headed to the Grand Isle State Park where Jackson High School made a significant contribution to our Louisiana coast at the Gulf of Mexico. You have heard me say before, What starts on the coast is literally all over the world.

The bitters paniscum grass has been recognized as reduc ing a storm surge by one foot for every mile of bitters paniscum. As Jefferson Maldon's dad reminded me, the roots filter out of the saltwater into the coastal areas first.

The problem is that saltwater intrusion alters the entire area it affects. Why? When you drive south and see dead cypress tress standing, you can look back on saltwater intrusion as the reason. Saltwater and fresh water have different characteristics and require ments to sustain life. Both have a place in the environment, but please do your part.

So now Diana's Dream — to care for the coast with some of the greatest minds in the world at Jackson High School here in East Feliciana, in another of my dreams come true... what next? It was so much fun, and such a great learning experience for RHS students and me as well as for many parish residents that we have started plans to do the bitters paniscum project all over again.

Dr. Pam Blanchard made arrangements for us to partner with Grand Isle State Park. The students, parents, and retired teachers on our team all made their mark as having the best crop of bitters paniscum every planted at the park.

The grass was dead to the enterised eye, but as Garet Thereseau at the United States Department of Agriculture Plant Materials Center in Golden Meadow, La., pointed out, the grass was only dormant. Mr. Ed, the main responsible for the grounds area at the Grand Isle State Park pointed out that the grass had started sprouting. There were some winter winds firmly fixed in the poto, but he said they would die with the hotter temperatures of the coast.

Normally, an instrument designed to plant in the sand called a dibble is used. This works well for the cell culture technique often employed by LSU cric is and the catchall. But this time we used post-hole diggers to accommodate our one-gallon pots. We used those pots to save money, because that is the size we had, but they worked perfectly on all counts.

Now back to dreaming. Your homework is to dream a dream, and to go figure how you will get there. Know one thing. If you want it badly enough, no person or demon will stop you. It is guaranteed that many dreams may stand in your way, but never stop believing in your-

self. Your court is never empty. There is always one being there and that is God. Just know, if you fall, you have to get yourself up. Brush yourself off... and the next step is easy. Just thank Jesus for that next step and I will thank my daddy forever for the most important lesson for me to learn: To dream and to believe is to achieve!

God made me who I am and not what someone thought I should be. If I can do it, so can you!