A Part of Me

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A PART OF ME

Shirley Fleischmann

... and I hope that you will see
that what I'm giving you is a part of me.

I saw this on a Valentine's Day card and thought it had a great application to the
grand profession of teaching, that, despite its sentimentality, it captures the essence
of what we teachers do on a daily basis.

How do I teach my students what it means to be an engineer? I believe that the
most effective method has always been by direct example. We all have the ability to
interpret the world around us, to be enriched by it, and to gather joy from it; but
engineers have an additional way of interpreting the world. For example, to a fluids
engineer, driven snow becomes a means to visualize flow patterns in the wakes of
automobiles. Even my pressure cooker, which I used to make applesauce when
I had time for such things, finds its way into my thermodynamics class. Or I use some
of my children's toys as beautiful and simple illustrations of the principles of fluid
mechanics.

I try to give my students a knowledge of engineering that is motivated by a sense
of curiosity and wonder. I don't try to program them for future performance, but rather
to change their perceptions. Not every student will love the subject as I do, but every
student should be able to see what it is really like to love a subject. If nothing else, I
hope that they will find something in their own lives as enriching to them as teaching
engineering is to me. If some of my students make contributions to their fields in the
future, I will certainly take pride in that. But I will also feel as though I have fulfilled my
mission if they retain only the memory of being associated with an educated adult
who loved her work and who shared that love.