

A Seed of Passion, a Path of Perseverance

By Grace Lan

Crossroads Academy

Interviewee: Alison Gorman

“Don’t let anyone turn you off from the
path you want to take, just go for it!”

- Alison Gorman

Imagine a young girl lining up her three younger siblings and talking to them passionately about math. Her excitement causes her words to often run together. She loves this subject and tries to convince others to love it as well. Her name is Alison Gorman. When Alison grew older, her dream to inspire others to love math would come true.

Alison grew up in a suburb of Boston. She was raised in a family that highly valued education. Her grandparents—including both her grandmothers—had attended four-year colleges, and she described her father as “very mathy”. As a young girl, Alison always felt drawn to math; she loved to mess with puzzles and math games.

In high school, Alison met an engaging and fun math teacher who started the school’s accelerated math program. He recognized Alison’s talent in math and encouraged her to pursue her passion. This opened a new world for Alison; for the first time she realized that she not only loved math but was also really good at it. Alison’s enthusiasm led her down a fulfilling and exciting path which became her yellow brick road. Soon afterwards, she was accepted to Amherst College, where she hoped to pursue her mathematical dream.

However, shortly after she arrived, Alison met her first advisor, an old-fashioned math professor. He told Alison that math was “a man’s subject” and advised her to discover other interests. Disillusioned by the news that she could not follow her heart simply because of her gender, Alison was crushed. Sidetracked, she majored in economics and French instead.

During her first two years of college, Alison avoided all math classes. However, she was encouraged by a new advisor in her junior year and had an epiphany; math had always been her true passion. Her dream, which had been buried by narrowmindedness and discouragement, was resurrected. Although her passion had been temporarily extinguished by a splash of cold water, a spark remained that eventually caused this fire to burn even brighter and fiercer than before. This inspired Alison to immediately enroll in as many math courses as she could, to catch up for the two years that she had previously lost. Eventually, she earned a Master’s degree of Liberal Studies with a concentration in mathematics.

Alison’s love for math and her desire to inspire children naturally led to the profession of teaching. Known as Mrs. Gorman, she has devoted herself to math education for more than forty years. Mrs. Gorman learned a crucial lesson from her first advisor which taught her to reject stereotypes. Anyone can become successful and thrive if given a chance and support. Mrs.

Gorman tried to never make students feel discouraged and her methods of encouragement are unique: “When students are stuck, I encourage them to explain their thinking. Most likely, they will solve the problem on their own. If not, I will guide them to move on from the error rather than go back to the very beginning. This way, they recognize that they have at least accomplished something.”

Over the years, Mrs. Gorman’s perseverance and dedication has influenced over four decades of students. She was the winner of the New Hampshire S.T.E.M. Excellence in Teaching Award in 2018 and has also coached the New Hampshire MathCounts team. She has sent her students to various national competitions with outstanding results.

Mrs. Gorman understood that math may not be a student's favorite subject; yet she was hoping to plant a seed of passion that might bloom years later. She knew that when students reflected on what happened in Pre-Algebra class, they would not only remember how to calculate the circumference of a circle, but they would also recall a teacher, a classroom, and a time. She once had a student arrive in middle school hating math. Yet three years later, he was thriving in the subject. In college, he selected mathematics as his major and visited Mrs. Gorman to talk about his thesis passionately. This student eventually became a high school math teacher and passed along his inspiration to the next generation. “It makes you feel worth doing what you do when you see students love and succeed in math,” Mrs. Gorman reflected.

Forty-four years have passed since Mrs. Gorman was turned down by her advisor at Amherst. She learned that achievement often comes with discouragement. If you truly love something, however, you will keep doing it and persevere through all the difficulties. Mrs. Gorman had taught at Crossroads Academy in Lyme, NH for eighteen years and retired four years ago. She remains as enthusiastic about math as ever. Inside, she is still the young girl who enjoys messing with puzzles and math games. She installed an App on her phone that she uses frequently to figure out math competition problems.

Mrs. Gorman is pleased that labeling people by gender, race, religion, or culture is fading. Everyone is unique and has their own strengths. Mrs. Gorman guides young people to see possibilities, not limitations; to think about what can be done, not what cannot be done. Her seed of passion that she had passed down to her own students will continue to inspire people for years to come.

About the author:

My name is Grace Lan, and I am a seventh grader at Crossroads Academy in Lyme, NH. I am currently taking Algebra II and enjoy participating in math competitions. I like math because I find it challenging yet fun and it can get me to think deeply about new situations and problems. I also enjoy history, English and science, and I am currently participating in the New Hampshire Academy of Science after school program. In my free time, I enjoy playing piano, skiing with my family and friends, reading novels, and hanging out with my cats.