

**Shannon Sacksteder**  
**Senior**  
**Eastern High School**  
**Hero: Sharon Anne McElroy**  
**Page 1**

### **The Hero of Teaching**

As the dictionary states, “a teacher is a person who teaches in a school or college as a profession” (www.dictionary.reference.com). As vague as this true statement is, many people, including myself, have casted teachers in the role of this insignificant stereotype. However, I have recently learned that teaching involves much more. Through the persistent actions of my Hoosier Hero, Ms. Sharon McElroy, I have grasped what teaching really constitutes: leadership, patience, and passion for what you do and who you influence. Simply “teaching” is not part of Ms. McElroy’s job description. She has motivated, impressed, and influenced me, as well as many other students, in multiple ways.

Sharon McElroy is currently a 6<sup>th</sup> grade science teacher and part of the staff at Eastern High School in Pekin, Indiana. In addition, she is also the coach of the science research team of which I am now a member. Our town of Pekin is rural and often overlooked when compared to larger regions. However, the science research team has put Pekin back on the map, with students of the program winning countless regional, state, and even international awards as well as prestigious scholarships in the midst of our travels. I know quite well that this program would not be what it is without the influential guidance of our determined science fair coach, Ms. Sharon McElroy.

Ever since childhood, Ms. McElroy was fascinated by the world around her. She often asked the question “why?”, and created contraptions or toyed with inventions out of the convenient basement of her home. Her original dream was to become an astronaut, and so she did not hesitate to accept the opportunity to attend the School of the Ozarks (now called College

of the Ozarks) on a full scholarship. Her dreams as a young child were not familiar with the politics of women and space, but her love of science and its process of discovery fueled her passion to teach science. She adored the questions, the seeking, and the discoveries found in experimentation. “I planned to open this world that I intensely loved to students.” She states, “My dreams of space were replaced with dreams for my classrooms.”

Sharon McElroy has taught science for over thirty years at various Indiana schools, and her love for science has carried over to a number of areas. Her dedication to teaching spurred her involvement with gifted and talented elementary students in a continuing education program referred to as Project Ahead at Indiana University Southeast. Sharon has taught at Graceland High School in New Albany, Indiana, and is now touching the lives of our youth at Eastern High School.

Originally, Ms. McElroy created a science research program to give students the experience to thoroughly study the scientific method and to conduct their own research project. Coming into the science research program in the sixth grade, I can honestly admit that I did not have the slightest clue as to what the program could offer me and how much my love of science would progress throughout my years of “experiencing” science research. I have been chosen to compete at several regional and state competitions. With the encouragement and guidance of Ms. McElroy, recognized as one of the best science research teachers in the state, I was able to find a university that would allow me to conduct my own research on cancer cells. With this

experiment, I was awarded a top place at the Southeastern Indiana Regional Science and Engineering Fair and a trip to the 2009 International Science and Engineering Fair hosted in Reno, Nevada! I will never forget this experience that Ms. McElroy so desperately wants her students to understand. I did not comprehend the significance of her lectures until I went.

“It is difficult to define the rewards of teaching.” She says, “They include daily successes or those ‘ah-ha’ moments that happen in the lives of one’s students. But, truthfully, when I think of rewards, I have to ask the question, ‘How has my teaching affected the lives of my students?’”

Ms. McElroy’s achievement can be measured in one of many ways. One is the countless number of awards her young scientists, or as Ms. McElroy calls us, her “kiddos” have gained at competitions including regional science fair, Indiana Junior Academy of Science, Indiana Science and Humanities Symposium, Indiana Science Talent Search, Hoosier Science and Engineering Fair, and International Science and Engineering Fair. Even though these achievements are certainly worthy of praise, nothing compares to the successes we have achieved far beyond the medals and scholarships we have won, all complements of Ms. Sharon McElroy. Through her repeated instruction and talks, I learned time management skills and how to complete the enormous amount of work we put into our projects by certain deadlines. I learned how to present myself and how to represent our school well at competition, and I have obtained writing skills that will carry on and be necessary for the rest of my life. The opportunities resulting from Ms. McElroy’s science fair program will always impact my future.

**Shannon Sacksteder  
Senior  
Eastern High School  
Hero: Sharon Anne McElroy  
Page 4**

I am truly grateful and honored to have such a remarkable teacher. Her dedication to educate us students and run the science fair program reflects her love for science in every aspect of her life. Outside of the classroom, Ms. McElroy has served as co-president of the Mid-level Association of Teachers (IMAST), middle school representative for the Hoosier Association of Science Teachers, Incorporated (HASTI), President and Vice President from 2002 to 2004, and Chairperson for their 2005 Conference, "*Engaging Inquiry*." In addition she has, also, been recognized for numerous state and national science honors. In 2003, she was recognized as the Outstanding Teacher of the Year for her dedication to the young minds of our Science Research program. Above all, Ms. McElroy represented Indiana in Washington D.C. as the 2006 science awardee for the Presidential Award for Excellence in Math and Science Teaching (PAEMST).

It is amazing what one person can do with her life. Knowing Ms. McElroy has been both a blessing and an inspiration in itself. This past spring, we were devastated to hear the news that Ms. McElroy had been diagnosed with a brain tumor. While this announcement took a toll on Ms. McElroy at first, she began to reminisce on the life that God had given her, and she felt truly blessed. As humans, we all want to leave this world knowing that we made a difference in someone's life, and Ms. McElroy has certainly changed the lives of every student she taught, myself included. "I was so thankful that God allowed me to see what part I had played in molding the lives of those young people." She exclaims, "Whatever the outcome of the surgery would be, I was at peace because I knew my life had made a difference." Whether this impact is

**Shannon Sacksteder**  
**Senior**  
**Eastern High School**  
**Hero: Sharon Anne McElroy**  
**Page 5**

one of her catchy inspirational phrases (we call them McIsms!) or a funny song she uses to teach her students rock types, Ms. McElroy's influence on my life will never fade. Her surgery was a success, and we are all so grateful that she may continue her journey and keep impacting lives, one student at a time.