

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

BORN TO TEACH - EMILY BELCHER, '12



Emily Belcher, '12, graduated from college and began her career as a teacher during a global pandemic. We talked with her last month to find out how she is adapting both in and out of the classroom.

How would you describe your time at Cornerstone?

I thoroughly enjoyed my time at Cornerstone. I spent a good chunk of my life growing up there and being shaped into the person that I am today. My teachers cared about me then and still make an effort to reach out to me today which speaks volumes about the Cornerstone community. I also made memories that will last a lifetime.

Fondest Cornerstone memory?

I have many fond memories of my time at Cornerstone. The ones that stand out the most are the ones that revolve around the things Cornerstone does best, activities that are centered around team building and community involvement such as: Tribes, Field days, Arts Under the Stars, Winter Sing, Thanksgiving Feasts, and the Chili Cook-off. I don't think I will ever forget the lyrics to the song "Snow Pants".

Any advice for recent Cornerstone graduates that you wish you had known when you graduated?

I'm not the best at giving advice, but something I wish I would have been more thoughtful about is making an effort to stay close to my Cornerstone friends. We grew apart over the years but so many of my favorite childhood memories were made at Cornerstone or on Cornerstone field trips with the classmates that had been by my side since I was three years old. I would also recommend stopping by and visiting every once in a while because it is refreshing to see everyone and catch up with some of the sweetest teachers I ever had.

Where did you go to high school?

I attended Forest High School.

Did you attend college? If so, where?

I attended the University of North Florida.

Did you feel that your time at Cornerstone prepared you for your high school/college career? If so, how?

Cornerstone instilled in me the importance of time management and pulling your weight. When I got to high school, a good chunk of my classmates would not complete their assignments and would hassle the teacher to extend their deadlines. I remember being shocked that students didn't do their homework when it was assigned. That wasn't something I really experienced at Cornerstone. Another thing is that group projects and activities were common at Cornerstone and I felt that all of my classmates worked well together and equally did their part. But, when I got to high school and college, I quickly realized this was not always the case. Thankfully, at Cornerstone, I had done many group projects and was well prepared for the countless group projects that were waiting for me in later grades.

What is your current career/where are you working now?

I am currently a 4th Grade Reading Teacher for Nas-sau County Public Schools.

Why did you choose to go into the teaching field?

I have wanted to be a teacher for as long as I can remember. Growing up, I would force my younger siblings to play school with me, I started babysitting in middle school, and then, I taught dance classes in High School and College. I also participated in the Ambassador program during my time at Cornerstone where I was able to spend time in different classrooms, getting to help the teachers and work with students.

How do you balance work and school? What are some of the challenges? The positives?

To be honest, as a first-year teacher, I am struggling with finding the balance of work time and free time. I arrive at school early, stay late every single day, and continue to work when I get home. As the weeks go on, I am settling into a routine and don't bring as much work home. I know it is important to step away from it all and take a break and because of that, I try to find time for myself. On the flip side, I absolutely love my job and the extra hours spent working are worth it.



Belcher in front of her classroom

What is it like being a college student during a pandemic? How have you had to adapt in regard to your education?

I was completing my internship when Covid started creeping in. I was a full-time intern in a 1st Grade classroom and like every other student/teacher I left for spring break and never went back. Since I was interning during the Spring, my experience was different from students who were still taking courses at the University. I started recording video lessons for my students and would join live lessons with my supervising teacher and students. It was hard not getting to interact face to face with the students anymore but we made it work as best as we could. I do wish I would have gotten to experience a "normal" internship, but getting to virtually teach lessons ended being a blessing in disguise because I now teach students virtually for half of the school day.

Do you use anything that you learned at Cornerstone in your life/work?

I'm sure there are many things that I learned at Cornerstone that I use in my life and don't even realize. One thing in particular that I use at work is the Tribes agreements. The Tribes program at Cornerstone began when I was in 3rd grade. The Tribes agreements are something else I will never forget from Cornerstone and something that I knew I wanted to incorporate somehow into my own classroom. While I don't use all of the agreements or necessarily refer to them as Tribes, I established the expectations with my students that they will be attentive listeners and have respect for themselves, their classmates, and their teachers which are things that I learned from Tribes.

What do you do in your spare time?

I enjoy going to the beach, taking my puppy on walks, and spending time with my family and friends.