



brother when he started school at M.U. He realized early on, however, that although the benefits were good, engineering was not for him.

"I had always thought about teaching but I thought, 'They don't make anything, I don't want to be a teacher,'" says Mr. Allen, who grew up in Ava, a small town just south of Springfield, Mo. "That was about the time that they were starting to push for excellence in education and they were increasing teachers' salaries and things were looking up. While I was still involved in the College of Education, I added a course where you go into a classroom and observe. That was really what did it for me. After the first day, I really knew what I wanted to do. It was really rewarding to me. You couldn't put a price tag on that."

Mr. Allen grew anxious as the first day of school drew near this fall. His mind was filled with ideas from college and workshops, but there was only so much that school could prepare him for. He was nervous. How

Although the building has grown in size with additions in 1972, 1980, 1984 and 1987, there is still a sense of family here: It is Columbia's most rural elementary school.

experience. She has been assigned to be Mr. Allen's mentor as part of a state-mandated program.

The two work hard and learn from one another. They are constantly comparing notes and trying to coordinate activities between their classes. And Mr. Allen is beginning to love Two-Mile Prairie the way Ms. Glenn already does.

"We have a close-knit family that is harder to keep as a family because we are enlarging the faculty all the time," says Ms. Glenn, who has never worked with another full-time fifth grade teacher in the building. "But everyone out here truly cares. They care about each other, and that means a great deal to me. I think there really is a lot of love and support for each other."

Mr. Allen, who is just beginning to be a part of this family, didn't always want to be a teacher. He wanted to be an engineer like his

would he do as a teacher? This was his first chance at having a class of his own. He was also the first full-time male teacher at Two-Mile Prairie.

As she has been for so many other people, Ms. Glenn was there to help. She loaned him textbooks and lesson plans during the summer to prepare for the first day of school. The two shared project ideas and thoughts on education as the time for classes to begin drew closer. Perhaps most important, Ms. Glenn was always there with a smile and a word of support when Mr. Allen came up with a new idea or difficult problem.

"He didn't come across nervous—just excited," she says, recalling the first days of school. "In fact, I didn't know if I was suitable as a mentor for him. He had so many good ideas and was so enthusiastic. I've really learned a lot from Rob.

"I do remember sticking my head in his

room after the first week and trying to remember 17 years ago when I was first starting out. He looked tired—haggard. That glimmer in his eye was a little less shiny."

It didn't take long for Mr. Allen to experience difficulty. Despite all the enthusiasm and innovation he put into his lessons, there was one student who would not participate. The youngster did his best to distance himself from the rest of the class. Never in all his student teaching or substituting had Mr. Allen experienced a student like this. He wondered how he would ever break through.

"This student from day one was just anti-school," Mr. Allen says. "The student didn't want to turn in papers. The student wouldn't do any assignments. I think the student just wanted summer to go on."

So Mr. Allen turned to Ms. Glenn ... and that is when the Two-Mile Prairie family is at its best. Together Mr. Allen and Ms. Glenn worked with other members of the faculty to figure out ways to help the student. They consulted counselors and contacted the student's parents to find out what was causing the problem.

"We decided to write a contract—an agreement," Mr. Allen says. "The student signed it, and I signed it. There haven't been any miracles, but you can see improvement. What's so scary is the potential of this student is so incredible."

Sh-sh-sh-sh," Ms. Glenn says as she holds up two fingers to try and stop the buzz of conversations that fills the room. The din hushes, and she begins the lunch count; the menu is hamburgers and fries—the students' favorite.

Ms. Glenn is dressed in '50s clothes as part of a language lesson to be given later in the day. A few students in her class and Mr. Allen's change rooms for the first subject of the day—mathematics. Her approach is more basic than Mr. Allen's, so the students are allowed to change rooms for this class.

She clicks on the overhead projector and begins to write out the lesson. Math is not her forte; she moves quickly through 24 problems, stopping only when individuals have questions. Just one more day and the students will have a four-day weekend while the teachers attend workshops on two of the days. Before the long weekend the students find it hard to concentrate. They wiggle impatiently, biding their time, waiting for the final bell and four days of freedom.

Looking around the room for anyone talking, Mr. Allen puts his fingers to his lips. "Sh-sh-sh-sh-sh." The chaos begins to subside.

If he spells out QUIET, the students will have a mark against them. He turns and writes a Q on the board. The class becomes silent. The long weekend is over.

The walls of Mr. Allen's room are decorated with an assortment of artwork.