

## Inspired by Her Sister, Educator Devotes Nearly 50 Years to Students at Clarke



Anita Diemand, Clarke teacher of the deaf, left, her sister Monica on right.

Already a fierce advocate for the deaf, Anita Diemand left Prince Edward Island (PEI), Canada, in 1970 to enter Clarke's teacher training program in Northampton, Massachusetts. She knew about Clarke because her sister Monica was deaf, and many years earlier, her parents had paid for two women from PEI to attend Clarke's training program. They taught Monica at home when they returned.

"My parents wanted her to be able to live at home and be able to talk," Anita says. "My sister's care and education inspired me to enter the field of teaching for the deaf. I loved her a lot. When I met the other children who were deaf, I found I liked them a lot. That was my favorite part of being here [at Clarke]: the people—the children, my colleagues, the parents. I have amazing respect for parents."

While in her training at Clarke, Anita met and married Richard Diemand, and they stayed in the Massachusetts area, having a son, Dan, in 1971. When Dan was a year old, Anita began her long tenure as a teacher of the deaf at Clarke, starting out in the preschool classroom.

She says from the start, it was meant to be. "It felt very natural," she says. "I wasn't overwhelmed or scared."

### Technology Advances Lead to Mainstream Transitions

When Anita began her teaching career, students who were deaf or hard of hearing wore large headphones that plugged into a sound system, connecting them to the signal coming from a large microphone worn by the teacher. "We had all those wires to walk around," Anita remembers.

In her career spanning nearly 50 years at Clarke, Anita has seen the technology change from cords and cables on the floor to hearing aids and later, cochlear implants. She credits these technology advancements with giving children the additional boost they needed to enhance their listening and spoken language skills so that they could transition into neighborhood classrooms with peers who have typical hearing.

She recognizes and respects Clarke for its emphasis on amplification and for keeping up with advances in technology. "There are good, good people at Clarke school. I'm very fortunate," she says.

From 1975-82, she took time off from teaching to care for her three children—Dan, Shawna and Pat—and returned as Clarke’s mainstream teacher at Hampshire Regional High School in Westhampton, Massachusetts, when Clarke was piloting a program to have students transition there.

“That was the beginning of children going out in the community,” Anita recalls. “What was happening at that time was the beginning of this electronic revolution. Hearing aids were more powerful. Children could hear better. More students could go into the mainstream.”

Anita says it was a time when students and their teachers at Hampshire Regional were anxious about blending students who were deaf with peers who have typical hearing for the first time: “Basically, you’re holding everybody’s hand, saying, ‘It’s going to be fine. We’re going to do this,’ but it all worked out very well.”

## A Legacy Grows Beyond Retirement



Anita Diemand, advocate, educator and Clarke teacher of the deaf for almost 50 years. “I was always trying to find ways to help a child learn,” she recalls.

When Anita retired in 2013, her colleagues gave her a stone for her garden, which reads, “Happy children learn.” Anita always knew how to make learning fun—and still does.

Even though she had technically retired, Anita continued to serve as a substitute teacher in several schools serving Clarke students—until COVID-19 closed many classrooms. The resident of Florence, Massachusetts, turned 73 on June 4, 2021, and says her strengths were her creativity and her ability to teach to each student’s needs.

“I was always trying to find ways to help a child learn,” she says, noting that as her career extended, she loved mentoring young teachers, too. “I wanted [the teachers] to enjoy it and show the children that they cared about them.”

Anita’s advice to new teachers is similar: “Just relax... Be you. Find the ways that inspire students to learn. But do it by being yourself.”