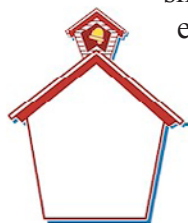


## Dare to Be Different, If the Different Be Right

My seventh and eighth grade teacher was top-notch! One way that she touched my life profoundly was with a message on one of her bulletin boards: “Dare to be Different, if the Different Be

Right.” Luckily for me, she left it up for several months — for it took me quite a long time to begin to understand it.



What does it mean to be different? To be right? What is right? For whom? When?

One of the first times I was challenged to live its truth was at our eighth grade graduation. From what I had been hearing, it seemed like all of the girls in our class were going to wear high-heeled shoes. I did not (*and still don't*) like wearing such shoes. Yet, I didn't want to stick out as the only one not doing so; at that very self-conscious age, I definitely thought that I would. For many weeks before our graduation, I stewed and stewed over what to do.

When I was one of only two girls who wore flat-heeled shoes, I felt like we stuck out like sore

thumbs. At the time, I don't think that I really appreciated my decision. Later, I realized that I had dared to be different, since different was right for me. My wonderful teacher's message had sunk in, albeit unconsciously.

This “aha” moment of understanding — that I needed to be true to myself no matter what — has deepened over the years, as I continue to remember and reflect on that special quotation.

Today, what do I need to dare to do? What is right for me, even if it is different?