



# THE GOLDEN SLATE

The official newsletter of the California  
Agricultural Teachers' Association

## Chapters in a Book

*By John Williams, Fresno State University, CATA Past-President*

As you are reading this article, I hope you are having a great semester and can take a moment to reflect on your year, semester, week, or even just this hour. I wanted to share a recent reflection from my own life, and I hope that some part of this message can apply to you as you move forward.

If you know me, you know that I love history—especially the history of our culture, our country, our organization, or anything related to mechanics. I also appreciate all the people who serve or have served our country and what they do every day to protect our freedoms.

When I was 18 years old, I went to the Navy recruiter to join the service. I went through the medical facility to complete the physical so I could enlist and serve my country. Unfortunately, I was denied because of hereditary hearing loss. At that time, I could still hear—just not well enough to be cleared for military service. I do not regret not serving, but I do wish I had been able to. Fast-forward 24 years, and I feel like I have been able to serve people in a different way, and I am proud of that.

Recently, I started listening to a podcast that features interviews with all kinds of people—but mostly those who have served in the military. In the podcast, one guest talked about his experience serving as a special operator in the war against terrorism. His experiences led him to share a story someone once told him about “who you want to be in life.” He explained that our lives are like a book, and the beginning and the end of our book are already written. This means that our first chapter is our birth, and our last chapter is our death. This is important to understand because it’s up to us to fill in the middle chapters and make our lives what we want them to be.

What does this mean? It means that life is short. Our ending—whenever it comes—is already written, so it is up to us to create the chapters in our personal book of life. The reality is, sometimes we do not know how to write our own chapters, but we do—without even thinking about it. Every experience, good or bad; every memory, good or bad; everything we accomplish or fail at—each becomes a paragraph, a page, or even a chapter in our book.

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Reflecting on this, I thought about my own book—what my chapters would look like—and when I do come to the final chapter, will I be disappointed or proud of the book I’ve written? Sure, I have had a lot of success. I have a wall of plaques in my office showcasing some of my best experiences. What I don’t have are plaques that show how many times I have failed. The only record of my failures exists in my memories.

As a society, we display our accomplishments—putting them on the wall, in a trophy case, or somewhere prominent. We should be proud of these things, show them off, and use them as motivation for growth. But to grow, we need to learn, and the best way to learn is by failing. It is okay to fail. That’s when the best learning happens. Failure causes us to push harder, work harder, and find ways to succeed. We can’t overlook the importance of failure in our lives—big or small—because those moments, while uncomfortable, can drive us toward positive outcomes.

Some things in life come easy. Many things are hard and tempt us to quit—but quitting won’t solve our problems. I remember when I had an instructor in my credential program who said, “Teaching is hard. You will face challenges that make you question your career choice. But to be successful, you must adapt, improvise, and overcome.” Our career is hard. We have a high turnover rate, and many teachers in our profession are struggling, trying to find a way to be both successful and happy. It is our job as colleagues to reach out and help those who need it. Friendship and mentorship can go a long way for teachers who feel lost in our profession. Take a moment to check in on others in your section, region, or state. Make it a chapter in your book—one that highlights how you made a positive impact on someone else.

If you take anything from this article, I hope it’s the power of reflection. Reflect on your life. Think about the chapters you have written. Think about your failures, celebrate your accomplishments, and ask yourself: What can I do next as the author of my own story to improve the future chapters?

Now is your time to do remarkable things—both professionally and personally. Be the best version of yourself. Take risks. Use your moments of greatness to overcome moments of failure. We came into this profession to improve the lives of others—but remember, you can also use this profession to improve your own life. Grow. Learn. Be a leader. Know that you are not alone—there are people out there who support you and want to see you succeed.

In conclusion, reflect on what you’ve done, think about your next move, and continue being you. Keep working hard. Your work is appreciated—even if it doesn’t always feel like it. I hope you have a great rest of your semester, continue growing, and I look forward to seeing you later this year.

