

Amy Foote: Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me today. I'm Amy Foote and it is 8:20 AM on Thursday, March 25th. I'm with Caroline Gaea at Ladybird Johnson Middle school. And I want to clarify that I'm going to record this interview and it will be uploaded to the UD oral history repository. Is that alright?

Caroline Gaea: That is fine. (You can take your mask off.)

Amy Foote: Perfect. So beginning with the first question, what are your areas of study and then how did you find your way into education?

Caroline Gaea: So I played soccer in high school

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: and my goal was to play that in college, blew out my ankle,

Amy Foote Ow.

Caroline Gaea: That fell apart, and so I ended up going to the undergraduate that my older brother went to, and that was Centenary

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: college in Shreveport.

Amy Foote: Okay.

Caroline Gaea: And I was born on third base.

Amy Foote: Hm.

Caroline Gaea: I had everything handed to me; I just had to go to college.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: So I decided I was gonna take, um, the education route and started doing the methods classes and then was in a school and watched two teachers get in a physical altercation,

Amy Foote: Oh, [laughs].

Caroline Gaea: immediately got out of the program, um, then went into liberal arts.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: So it was art education because I had the hours in exercise science, like kinesiology.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Um, at the time was dating a young man from Venezuela.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: After college I didn't know what I wanted to do. Like I have a liberal arts degree,

Amy Foote: [laughs].

Caroline Gaea: I had like a ton of different things I like to do, but nothing that I was crazy passionate about,

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: so I moved to Venezuela and I taught English for Berlitz,

Amy Foote: Okay.

Caroline Gaea: which was kind of like a Rosetta stone before it was....

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: And so we had wealthy clients that would come in to learn English.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: And one of my clients was an oil guy who had kids at an international school

Amy Foote: Okay.

Caroline Gaea: and he said, you should work there, he said "you'd really like it". So I applied and I taught second grade at this international school.

Amy Foote: Oh cool.

Caroline Gaea: And it was unbelievable.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: I mean, you had kids from every country, all very high socioeconomic because of what it was,

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: but I loved it. So when I came home (so Chavez decided to overthrow the government,

Amy Foote: [laughs].

Caroline Gaea: Um, I decided to leave,

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: and when I came home there was a huge need for bilingual teachers in the state of Texas.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: So being that I had learned Spanish in Venezuela, I was like alright. So I did the alternative certification program

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: and, uh, thrown, tossed into a classroom,

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Yeah, I don't know if you have any questions about my first year

Amy Foote: [laughs].

Caroline Gaea: but oof. Then later went and got my masters in reading,

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: and so that's where I am now as an interventionist.

Amy Foote: Okay. Okay Wonderful. So, you said, you mentioned the first year, um, is there anything (you'd like to mention)?

Caroline Gnea: Yeah, I taught fourth grade bilingual.

Amy Foote: Okay.

Caroline Gaea: Um, I was 22

Amy Foote: Okay. Oh wow.

Caroline Gaea: and didn't want them to hate me.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Wanted, you know, I had every subject but history taken from me except history because I didn't know what I was doing.

Amy Foote: Oh, okay.

Caroline Gaea: I was so blessed though on our campus that, this was 20 years ago, 21 years ago,

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: but I had mentors, our principal and our vice-principal, that were so nurturing but tough.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: They would come in and (she said), like you, you've got to get it together. These kids are not. And Patty Ayala, if she ever hears this was my mentor teacher

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: and she was phenomenal. And she said, you've got to get it together.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Like you're not here to be their friend. See all these kids in their seats, that's their friends. They don't need a 22 year old, 23 year old to be their friend

Amy Foote: Mhm

Caroline Gaea: So, they had an opportunity of growing me up or out.

Amy Foote: Okay.

Caroline Gaea: And they never put me on a growth plan, but it was more of like, this is what we see, here's some strategies how to fix it. But then they came in everyday with fidelity to help me fix it.

Amy Foote: Okay.

Caroline Gaea: Um, I wasn't allowed to make excuses for my poor choices. Like: oh, but I, but I, it was like no.

Amy Foote: Mhm

Caroline Gaea: And so, I gradually got my subjects back, um, and had I not had these incredibly strong women (so they were all, you know, admin), being very honest with me and constructive, so very constructive criticism, but it wasn't, they weren't like, Oh, okay, cause I see a lot of it now I see a lot of, "well, you know, it could be." No, like, this is your, your name's on the door. You set the pace, you set the tone, figure it out.

Amy Foote: Yeah

Caroline Gaea: Um, and, it was probably about year four that I hit my stride.

Amy Foote: Okay

Caroline Gaea: You know, you still make, you know, an oh, well should I do that?

Should I do that?

Amy Foote: Yeah

Caroline Gaea: Um, but I just had really great mentors that the whole time,

Amy Foote: Mhm

Caroline Gaea: And I looped with a couple of groups, which was fun. Um, and so you really got to know those kids after two years

Amy Foote: Oh, that is fun, yeah

Caroline Gaea: to figure out yourself and figure it out. But I mean, it's, I think that's, what's always weirded me out in education is most teachers quit between three and five years. I didn't figure it out until like you're four.

Amy Foote: Okay. And I, I think that's normal.

Caroline Gaea: I think it is too.

Amy Foote: That it takes a couple of years to really understand or to really,

Caroline Gaea: To figure out who you are as a teacher.

Amy Foote: Yep, Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Um, I joke in education, they say: find your best and emulate them. I can't be Katie Mining.

Amy Foote: Mhm, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: We're similar, but we're very different.

Amy Foote: Yeah, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: And so, we have new teachers go in and observe and watch, well, if that's not your voice and that's not your true, like inner, it's not gonna work.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Um, I when I first started teaching tickets were a big deal in elementary. And if ch, children make good choices, you pass out tickets that you did like a store every other Friday. I'm, I can barely make sure I have like groceries at home. I was like, I'm not sticking to this. And I realize I'm not gonna do this.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: So, it makes you really realize, like, and I don't have biological children. So it made you realize, like, if you say something, you have to follow through.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Um, but

Amy Foote: yeah,

Caroline Gaea: It took me until about year four.

Amy Foote: Okay

Caroline Gaea: And so, it's, and I, I felt okay with that.

Amy Foote: Mhm, yeah. Well, this was actually one of the questions at the end, but I think it fits now. What advice might you have for a first year teacher?

Caroline Gaea: I think be honest with yourself. And, um, it's, like I always equate it to like dieting, like I know how to be a size four.

Amy Foote:

Caroline Gaea: I'm not willing to do it.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Um, if you're not willing to do it with fidelity and you're not willing to have that self-reflection, because I see with a lot of new teachers, admin giving them outs, um, Mr. Clark jokes that I'm old school. I am, I don't have a problem with criticism if it's constructive.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: And I want feedback, like my biggest pet peeve is my, I have my, I don't have it now as an interventionist, but you, when you would have your observation and I would ask them, is there anything I need to work on? "This is great. Just great". I was like, wow. Okay. Like I can quit. Like I've hit the pinnacle.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: And about four years ago, when I came back to Texas, um, Ramy Ramsey, who was one of our principals goes, "yeah, actually you need to," and I was like, and it kind of was like, after, cause I'd been teaching 19 years at the time and I was like, whoa. But I was like, "that's right". We're always growing. We're always evolving. I think be kind to yourself, but be honest with yourself.

Amy Foote: Mhm

Caroline Gaea: Um, don't listen to 10 different people.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Find a mentor that you respect, that you respect their feedback, because sometimes we find people that that are, that are like us and they'll tell us what we want to hear. So, in other words: "that kid he's, oh, he's a nightmare. That's why your class was off track.

That's why you can't do this". That, and so then we embed these excuses for why as the adult in the room, our class is not working.

Amy Foote: Mhm

Caroline Gaea: And I see it all the time. Like, we'll have somebody available

Amy Foote: Yeah

Caroline Gaea: I can't, you know, they won't stop talking, "well, it's because so-and-so, so-and-so's in there". I'm like, so you're gonna let a 13 year old run your classroom?

Amy Foote: *\*laughs*

Caroline Gaea: But we tend to gravitate towards people that are going to tell us what we want to hear,

Amy Foote: Yeah

Caroline Gaea: versus what we need to hear.

Amy Foote: Right.

Caroline Gaea: And so, I think, surround yourself with really strong, that you see, because, um, perception and reality in education are very different.

Amy Foote: Mhm

Caroline Gaea: We have teachers on this campus that are perceived to be master teachers. And like, you look at the outside box and you're like, the kids love the class,

Amy Foote: Mhm

Caroline Gaea: You know, they all have A's, like, this has gotta be awesome. But then you open the door and you're like, they run that classroom. They get, uh, gr grades for turning it in. Like, you're like, Oh, wait a minute. You know, cause nobody told them like, you're not here to be their friend.

Amy Foote: Mhm

Caroline Gaea: You're here to be an advisor, a mentor. Um, I always equate it to like an aunt or an uncle. Like I can take care of you from here, but your parents have gotta call the shots. And



so, um, I think for first year teachers it's finding someone that you can truly trust and confide in that will, that will then be honest with you.

Amy Foote: Mhm

Caroline Gaea: Um, and then, you know, being honest and kind to yourself. It's hard. I mean, I used to come home crying the first year and I was at John R. Goode here in Irving, and it's real low socioeconomic. And I was like, you know, dad (and my dad grew up really poor). And he said, Caroline, he said, these kids need someone to just, you know, be a bright spot, but not make excuses for them.

Amy Foote: Mhm

Caroline Gaea: You know? I think one of the things we've done in education and we do it as teachers: "they're homeless. Well, they're a minority. We'll do this". Well, then let's lower the bar. And it's like, okay but life's not gonna lower the bar.

Amy Foote: Mhm

Caroline Gaea: So, give them that big cushion. And that takes a long time to learn as a teacher.

Amy Foote: Yeah

Caroline Gaea: I can have compassion and grace without dumbing it down for you.

Amy Foote Yeah, hm

Caroline Gaea: It's cause, as teachers, I think that's one of the things that drags us into education, is, you wanna save em all and you wanna help everyone. But it, as a first year teacher, it took me. Okay. So, by giving this kid passes on all the homeworks they're not doing, am I helping?

Amy Foote: Right, not at all.

Caroline Gaea: I'm helping in the moment. I'm making my life easier and making their life easier. But, eh?

Amy Foote: Mhm

Caroline Gaea: And so, I think it's, and you, you grow from it, but yeah. I think I answered your question.

Amy Foote: Thank you. Yeah. And then the next question is, well, I guess, where have you taught before teaching at Ladybird? How many years have you been teaching in general, and then at Lady Bird as well?

Caroline Gaea: So, this is my 23rd year in education. I started bilingual fourth grade at John R. Goode, which is an elementary in our district.

Amy Foote: Mhm

Caroline Gaea: Um, I was there seven years and by the sixth year I was a reading intervention, a math interventionist.

Amy Foote: Oh wow, yeah

Caroline Gaea: So, I started out in math, loved math. Um, and then I reconnected with my husband and he was from California and we have a, now 25 year old stepson, but at the time was in middle school.

Amy Foote: Ok

Caroline Gaea: So, I moved out there, and, um, that was right when the housing market fell apart.

Amy Foote: Oh

Caroline Gaea: And so, they have unions out there, which we don't have.

Amy Foote: Mhm

Caroline Gaea: And so, they were laying off teachers left and right and

Amy Foote: Mhm

Caroline Gaea: I, I mean, not to be like, toot toot, but like I had a master's degree, I was bilingual. I was like, oh, this is gonna be a piece of cake finding a job.

Amy Foote: Mhm

Caroline Gaea: Not.

Amy Foote: Ok

Caroline Gaea: So, I went the charter route and it was the biggest gift from God. It was unbelievable. I worked at a phenomenal charter, um, called PS7 and then moved into a charter called Westlake.

Amy Foote: Ok

Caroline Gaea: And I taught, uh, fifth grade math and science at PS7. That was for a year. And then they were financially bankrupt.

Amy Foote: Ok,

Caroline Gaea: So, there were issues there. But then I went to Westlake and taught. Um, when I went there, it was a first year teacher and he sa, I said, well, what do you wanna teach? And he goes, I would like to teach math and science. I said, okay, I'll teach history and language arts. So, we did like a humanities thing. So, then I helped them create their middle school, came back five years ago.

Amy Foote: Okay.

Caroline Gaea: And, um, got hired. Like I came back to Irving cause it was what I knew. Most of the people left Irving, Irving had issues with their superintendent. And I was like, Oh, that's a devil I know. Um, and so I came back in and taught eighth grade ELAR downstairs, and then, um, was moved to the interventionist position. I've done that for the past four years, but that also taught second grade at, in Venezuela.

Amy Foote: Right.

Caroline Gaea: That was my first foray into it.

Amy Foote: So, you've been at many different, a wide variety of schools.

Caroline Gaea: I have, you know I mean. This has probably been, the, expectation-wise the weirdest expectation. I was really blessed to be at amazing schools with insanely good admin. And the ones that came in that weren't good, like did not last long.

Amy Foote: Okay, Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: It was very, um, Irving changed, I don't know how long ago, but they said anyone after three years could become an administrator.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Well, if you go back to what we said about like, you don't figure it out till like

Amy Foote: Right four or five.

Caroline Gaea: Year four or five. And so, you've seen a big change in in schools and, internet changed,

Amy Foote: Yeah, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: but I've been at Lady Bird for the last five years.

Amy Foote: Okay. Okay. Well that's actually, the internet is, um, so after four years of teaching or five years at Lady Bird Johnson, um, how has the school culture changed? And in what ways has it remained the same throughout those five years?

Caroline Gaea: So, Irving is a really interesting district. Um, it is like, uh, for, when I was growing up, it was like an old boys club. And so, if you were of a different sexual orientation or minority, it was hard to get ahead.

Amy Foote: Hm.

Caroline Gaea: That changed, but it almost changed in the sense of like, it was still an old boys club. We just didn't talk about it, but we would promote our friends.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: And so, from the top down you've seen, I mean, I don't know if you follow these, but we've had so many different superintendents and then we have, they call it the fruit basket turnover.

Amy Foote: Okay.

Caroline Gaea: At the end of the year they took all the principals and go pff and like throw them up in the air. And it's like, so when I came back to Irving, Ramy Ramsey was our principal and she had been moved up from elementary.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: And, um, she was real big on teaming. And she's probably one of the most knowledgeable principals I've ever had.

Amy Foote: Okay.

Caroline Gaea: Um, so she put us in teams. So, you would have two ELAR teachers, two math teachers, a science teacher, and a history teacher. And you would share those same students. So if we were to sit down and talk about Amy Foote, all of us would talk. We would all have an experience. We made decisions as a team. So, if you weren't doing your homework, we would do a contract as, as a team. It wasn't like you did it. They created a culture of accountability with the staff. Cause if, if our team said no cell phones, and I was the one using like letting them use cell phones, it was obvious.

Amy Foote: Okay.

Caroline Gaea: And so, it created that accountability as adults, which then we transferred to the kids and I had a really strong team and I was really lucky.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Um, but it, you were able to see the weak links and not necessarily in a bad way, but like a, hey, like you've got to check uniform in the morning.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Like they'd get to me and they, you know, but it was instead of trying to figure it out among the 70 staff members, was five.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Um, and I think what happened was when our current administration came in and they had a chip on their shoulder about the other administration. So, we got rid of teaming completely. Okay. PLC became, you'll notice an education there's these giant pendulum swings. PLC is it right now.

Amy Foote: Okay.

Caroline Gaea: It's always been there. We just didn't call a PLC,

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: you know, and now we're swinging and it has to be that. And so, we have all these kids that we have all over and it's, I don't know if we have a culture.

Amy Foote: Yeah. Okay.

Caroline Gaea: Um, I keep hearing glimmers of it,

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: but like passing out candy to teachers on Monday morning is a cute thing to do. It's not a culture.

Amy Foote: Yeah. Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: And so, um, every year I've kind of heard an excuse for why we don't have it or what's disrupting it or, um, and I've seen like our stuff. I feel, like, it get a little more clicky, which I think teaming kind of eliminated because you're really forced to be friends with like five people,

Amy Foote: Mhm, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: whether you wanted to or not. Um, but it worked well. And so, I, I struggle with that

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: because I've worked at places where the culture, when you walked on campus and it like slapped you in the face

Amy Foote: Mhm, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: and you're like, I, want this! Like I want to be a part of this. Um, kids knew it. I worked at schools where kids knew our mission statement.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: They knew why we were there. And like, and I only have one other middle school to compare it to,

Amy Foote: Mhm, but its,

Caroline Gaea: but yeah, it's the same comparison. And um, so yeah, I struggle with that on this campus.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: I know our admin has the heart for children.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: I don't know if they have the soul for kids.

Amy Foote: Okay.

Caroline Gaea: Having the hard conversations and almost like what we're talking about on the way in here.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: We were talking about, you know, instead of having this, like we're going to tardy sweeps. And if "you're late" why not say, you know what, nine tenths of our kids are crushing it on, on being on time.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: You show up, you get free dress. Like that to me is culture of positivity

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: culture of, instead we have kids that are always out of uniform. Everyone knows they get to be out of uniform.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Gets em a lunch detention. And I'm like, I get it, but That kids always in uniform! give them free dre, like, you know,

Amy Foote: Yeah, yeah. Turn it into something positive.

Caroline Gaea: I don't think we have a negative culture. I just don't think we have.

Amy Foote: Mhm, yeah. That's a good remark.

Amy Foote: Um, and then, so on that same note, how has COVID changed the use of technology at Ladybird and then have these changes enhanced or diminished the quality of education at Lady Bird?

Caroline Gaea: I think the state of Texas, specifically Lady Bird blew it.

Amy Foote: Okay.

Caroline Gaea: Um, online teaching is not new. Like there's, like, Alaska. I mean, there's places that have been doing this there's programs. I think that a lot of teachers have become facilitators and they forget we're not facilitators, we're educators.

Amy Foote: Mhm, Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: And it's not even what we teach is what kids learn. Like I have teachers like, I've been teaching this and they're not picking it up. Then you've got a problem.

Amy Foote: Yeah. Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: I mean, it's, you're right. You need to change how you're teaching it. And so I think what happened in the spring was we just immediately went into freak out mode.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: I get it. What I didn't understand is as we saw what was happening in the spring and the summer, why the district was not taking full advantage of these kids, being at home, staff being at home, finding every online training thing, what it looks like, how to do small groups.

Amy Foote: Mhm

Caroline Gaea: Um, and I'm not the end all, but like I even talked to our administrators and was like, okay, why don't, in fall, if we're starting with these tiny groups, why don't we really push small group?

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Um, any elementary teacher it's standard, it should be standard middle school.

Amy Foote: Yeah. that's what Mrs. Mining always says.

Caroline Gaea: Oh, she and I go around and around. We both came from elementary.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Um, I joke that every teacher, for sure, every administrator should start in elementary

Amy Foote: Mhm.



Caroline Gaea: because you learn protocols, procedures, boom, boom, boom. Technology for this age is hard.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: I mean, it's hard at my age. I'm 45 and in a faculty meeting, I'm like, you know, scrolling Instagram. I mean, it's just human nature. But I think technology has given bad teachers a crutch. Um, and I think it's been difficult for good teachers.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Because you want, and I think the district, Irving has always, um, I love Irving, I feel like I'm bad-mouthing it. But they've always looked to districts to see what to do. We have 33,000 students. Why are we looking at the ISD that has 150,000? They're not gonna make the same decision we are. So, like, look at what you need. What I wish they had really trained teachers. I wish they had taken, um, a stronger approach on what it would look like for in-person versus at-home. I wish they they'd done like an AB schedule where they say, okay, A day is all your in person learners and your at-home learners are gonna do Achieve, and they're going to be on, um, DreamBox or

Amy Foote: Yeah. yeah.

Caroline Gaea: something self paced, with these 10 to 15 kids that I have right here. The next day, all your in-class kids. It would be less lessons, but I feel like Irving did status quo, and we kept these massive plans and we've got gen ed classes doing, "Oh, captain my captain", you know? And they're like, Oh, is it about a ship? And you're like, no it's about Abraham Lincoln.

Amy Foote: [laughs].

Caroline Gaea: So hard on a perfect day!

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: But like why we didn't say okay. And I'm like, I was telling Mr. Clark yesterday, my fear is not the next two, three years. My fear is five years from now, when these kindergarteners and first graders. Like filling a gap is one thing. Rebuilding a foundation? Can you monitor and teach a five-year-old how to read online?

Amy Foote: Hm. No, I can't!

Caroline Gaea: And they will be here in six years.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: I mean, I, I can't fathom that.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: And so, I think technology has made, like with most things in education, good, great teachers frustrated, but innovative. And I think it's made poor teachers, have, its been an excuse.

Amy Foote: Mm.

Caroline Gaea: "I gave it to him 10 times. They didn't do it". Okay. Well.

Amy Foote: Hm, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Okay you gotta fix something then!

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Um, and so I think it could be a lot easier and it could be a lot better,

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: but I don't think, I think a lot of boxes are checked, but we did this, and we locked in,

Amy Foote: Right.

Caroline Gaea: and we did this. So, it may just be human nature and teaching.

Amy Foote: Yeah. Um, and then we kind of already talked about this a little bit, but, or about the school community, but how has COVID affected the community and school atmosphere at Lady Bird?

Caroline Gaea: I think that it has affected in the sense of you, the good teachers are still going to get to know their kids and they're going to find ways to connect with these kids.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: I think it's given an excuse. I mean, we have teachers that even, even in a good year, don't know all their kids' names.

Amy Foote: Hm, huh.

Caroline Gaea: Middle school is this weird. Um, it's almost like it's a stream. So elementary, the stream starts, these kids are shootin down, you know, and then middle school is like a little eddy and it sits in spins. And kids will either continue to shoot forward or they will jump onto the riverbank and get out when they get to high school.

Amy Foote: Okay.

Caroline Gaea: And COVID, I think will make a large gap even worse. Um, I would not have been able to stay home as a child and do my work.

Amy Foote: Yeah, me neither.

Caroline Gaea: Um, when I did my masters, I had to go to class, like

Amy Foote: Yeah,

they were online programs, and I was like, I, there's no way I can do this. I'll procrastinate until it's not done. And then, um. The divide in education already is, and it's not so much even financial. You know, I don't know if you're familiar with Texas politics, but they did Robinhood a long time ago and said, well, let's take money from rich districts and give it to poor districts. We can buy all the iPads in the world. Education is, uh, is like a tricycle and the kids, are the front wheel, the parents are a back wheel and the school's the back wheel. Any of those wheels are not functioning,

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: the bike's not going anywhere.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: If the kid wants it and the school wants it and the parents are worthless, it's gonna to go this way. Same thing, if kids are awesome, schools have, parent, it's going to go this way.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: And so when we talk about a kid is supposed to get a year's growth in a year, or that's so overplayed, that's if they're motivated, the parents are motivated, the school is motivated, the teacher is quality

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: and the teacher is teaching and the child is learning.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: All of those have to come into play. So now add COVID, I wouldn't be motivated. Um, a lot of our parents are not educated in the sense of finding the news, I guess, a problem today. You know, we hear things. So, we freak out. A lot of our kids are second language learners, which school may be the only place you get the English. And now you've been at home for a year,

Amy Foote: Hm.

Caroline Gaea: I think about our newcomers' class. So, you get two years in the newcomer class. Well, they counted last year as one of their years.

Amy Foote: Right. Okay.

Caroline Gaea: And I'm like, no! Like they need to come back and get another like, so I think COVID is just, it's gonna make the divide caused by finance, caused by socio, cause by race, caused by gender even, and family status even wider.

Amy Foote: Mm, okay. Yeah that's sad.

Caroline Gaea: It is bad.

Caroline Gaea: Um, it's, we need kids back.

Amy Foote: Yeah. yeah,

Caroline Gaea: And I'm not saying that anyone's getting it in schools.

Amy Foote: Me neither, actually.

Caroline Gaea: If you wear your mask and you're wiping down the desks.

Amy Foote: Mhm, yeah. What Mrs. Mining was telling me, or actually, I don't remember, but maybe Mr. Clark was saying that they had, Ladybird has no known cases at school. It's kids outside of school who don't wear their masks.

Caroline Gaea: Well and I feel like the teachers that are getting it are getting it from, "I went to a wedding," "I, we went to dinner out with friends". We, maybe the coaches, because the kids don't

have to wear masks, which I don't even understand why you're going to do sports. But kids have gotta be in school!

Amy Foote: Yeah, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Yeah. I mean, but I think Texas is ahead of the game. I mean, there's, California just now went back in-person.

Amy Foote: Oh, wow. Okay. Okay. Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: So, I mean I think we see immediate COVID effects now. I think we will see them for the next, seven, eight years until that these, these kids right now that are staying home in the lower grades are up here. Okay. I think that's what is going to be bad.

Amy Foote: Oh, no. Um, well, let's see. So what, so you kind of talked about this a little bit, um, regarding your educational vision, what would you say are the main reasons for a middle school education specifically? And then what, why should students attend middle school? Why do you think middle school is such a critical time?

Caroline Gaea: I think enough people don't understand how important middle school is.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Um, curriculum wise, nothing new is added.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: So, it's that little eddy.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: We just kind of sit and spin. Um, I think we have a lot of teachers that think our kids are older than they are.

Amy FOote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: They're not. These are our minors. These are babies. They're not high schoolers. To me you're considered a high schooler when you're a junior.

Amy Foote: Okay, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: You're still very young as your freshman and sophomore year.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Our kids, especially with the internet, with friends, are faced with things that they wanna be grown. They think that they're, and I don't feel we as a school, as a nation, do enough to explain to kids why you're here.

Amy Foote: Mhm, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Um, we, we don't. We say, well, I mean, education, you're lucky to have it. If you lived in a third world country, you know, kind of like a parent in the eighties telling their kids, like, there are starving children in Africa. If you don't eat dinner, you know.. You don't care.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: You ask most middle schoolers what're you going to do when you grow up? NFL. Okay.

Amy Foote: Hm.

Caroline Gaea: Why do we not have the talks in middle school about, okay, what does it take to get there? Okay. So you're going to have to go to a D1 school. What's your GPA? Because by the time you get to high school, you know this from being an adult, it's too late your junior year to figure it out.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Um, I don't think our kids see, I think a lot of our teachers write middle school kids off as punks. You tell people what you do and you go, "I'm a teacher" and they go: "oh, bless your heart". You know, "I'm a middle school teacher". "Oh my gosh!" You know, when they sing out, God, you're, "you do the God's work!" You know?

Amy Foote: [laughs].

Caroline Gaea: And you're like, that's, you know, but I, I don't know if we do. I feel like, and then like even sixth to eighth grade is such a massive span. Sixth grade, their babies.

Amy Foote: Yeah, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: They're so innocent and so nerdy in the most wonderful way. And like, you know, if you're the fast kid in sixth grade, it's obvious. Cause nobody else is like that. Eighth grade, I

mean, we've got 16 year olds. I was 13 in the eighth grade. I mean, I was young for my grade, but like, and so I don't think we do enough.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: I wish that we would use credits in middle school, starting in seventh and eighth grade, not sixth grade. Let them have that transition year.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: But then showing kids, okay, like you failed ELAR. If this were high school, you would not be graduating.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: I think in middle school, we need to bring in, um, life skills math, for gen ed, offer it to everybody. I'm not trying to lower it down. But to like show our kids. Like you want to own a car and a cell phone? And have an apartment? This is what you have to do. This is how much it costs. Have those conversations now,

Amy Foote: Yeah. Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: because I feel like once they get to middle school, I mean high school, it's kind of too late. Show the kids passions now. Show them like, you don't have to go to college. There's cosmetology, there's this, you should offer it to everybody. But also show, I wish we would bring back trade schools and middle school.

Amy Foote: Yeah, yeah.

Amy Foote: Have classes that that's all we showed kids. Here's all the, do a semester on college, do a semester or six weeks on college trade schools, military, show them all these opportunities because they don't know them. And unless you grew up, like I grew up in a very affluent part of Dallas, college was talked about, you're going.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: It's paid for like, that's cute, you think it's an option? Um, yeah. We don't care what you do. Get a degree in underwater basket weaving, go. These kids most don't even. And like I talked to my husband cause he grew up really poor and he played baseball. That's why he went to college. And so, he is in car sales and he said technically didn't even need a college

degree. And I said, think what college did for you though. You were forced to interact with races, creeds, socioeconomic backgrounds that you never would have experienced.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: That's what makes you good in sales now.

Amy Foote: Hm, yeah, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Like you're right. And I was like, it's not, but I feel like we don't, kids don't know why they come to school. That's sad. They come to school because they have to, their parents make them, uh, the state will call them up on truancy charges if they don't. That's our fault.

Amy Foote: Yeah. um.

Caroline Gaea: Um, I hate when I hear a teacher say, well, it's not my, it is your job! And the taxpayers are paying your job. Their parents are paying your job. So, when I hear teachers say stuff like, well, I've got 95 kids. I don't have to. No, you do have time. This is literally what you're supposed to do. And if our kids cannot see why they're here, we failed them. Not their parents, not society. We should show them every day why they're here.

Amy Foote: Mhm. So that's kind of the underlying, that's what's necessary before you even begin.

Caroline Gaea: I had a kid the first year I came here. I, Amy, if we had 10 hours, I cannot explain what this kid was like. I'd been teaching 19 years at the time. Um, they warned me. These kids have had four administrators, principals, head principals, quit or get pulled or scandalled. Um, most of their teachers quit mid-year cause they were so awful. I was like, ok, I firmly believe, and I know it sounds cliché. I've had two bad kids in 23 years, one's dead and one's in jail.

Amy Foote: Oh, wow.

Caroline Gaea: I've had lots of kids that make bad choices.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Like a kid is not inherently evil.

Amy Foote: Yeah, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: You know, they figure out how to push your buttons and. So, we have this group of kids and I had a kid that, he came to school to sell drugs. He and I would have talks all the



time about, I said, you know what? I'm not going to say his name is, I said you, you're not going to make it in the drug trade. He was like, "what do you mean miss?" And I was like, "you can't be on time".

Amy Foote: Oh, ha

Caroline Gaea: And he was like, wha. I said, so do you think that when you move up in this empire that you see on Narcos and you're all excited about it, you show up late to a deal somebody's gonna be cool with that? You can't do basic math on money. And you're short a hundred dollars. Somebody's gonna be like, oh, don't worry about it? And he kind of looked at me and I was like, I'm gonna get fired for this. But it was like, even just getting him to understand, like basic things you learn here: being on time, basic math, all this stuff, unfortunately will help you in that position, but take advantage of it.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: And he was like "Miss". And I was like, I'm just being honest with you. Like, you've got to see a benefit in everything you do. And again, if our kids don't see the benefit of a middle school education we failed them

Amy Foote: Mhm, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: And you hear it a lot. Yeah.

Amy Foote: Yeah. Hm, yeah. And then I guess, how do you incorporate your educational vision into your daily teaching practices and classroom atmosphere? So how do you do, how do you give them the sense that what they're doing here is important, just practically how do you do that?

Caroline Gaea: So, grace and compassion are my biggest. Um, after the debacle of my first few years,

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: I realized that I can have grace and compassion and high standards.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Um, teachers sometimes think I'm a marshmallow. Kids that don't know me think I'm Satan. Like they're scared to death of me.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Um, I am very strict. I remember, Mrs. Mining reminds myself a lot of me, but I also can be sarcastic. So, I have to roll it back. But I feel like my classroom was always, um, you want it to be a safe place, but it was also one of those things where we had the give and take conversations, but I held them to high standards.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Um, it was hard. And I had to realize about myself in my classroom. I'm not gonna to ask anything of them that I'm not gonna ask of myself. So, I watched teachers push out a hundred grades, then grade three, I pushed out 10, and graded 10. If I'm going to make you do it. I'm gonna see value in what you're doing. And I'm gonna, um, I believe in restorative justice, I believe in, um, they have to respect me as much as I respect them.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: I don't believe that in today's generation, you will respect me cause I'm older than you. I, it doesn't work anymore. And when you come in with that attitude, so I think it's creating that classroom atmosphere of, I am in charge my name's on the door.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Now, how we work together will depend on how you respond to, to me being respectful.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: I don't raise my voice at children. Um, I realized a long time ago, it takes, you know, one moron to make poor choices. It takes two to make it a conversation. I'm not going to argue with a kid. I'm not gonna chase after a kid. I know where you have to come to school tomorrow.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Um, but it's reading your crowd. Like we talked about standing by a door every day

Amy Foote: Yeah, mhm.

Caroline Gaea: when you come in and teachers are like, oh. There's a reason you do that. So, if Amy walks in and rolls her eyes and is like, okay, so that's where we're going today. Casually walk by. I believe in, um, I will always have the last word. I may not have it right now.

Amy Foote: [laughs].

Caroline Gaea: Um, you know, in education, like the first, the first one that came in that first year here, veteran teacher, considered master teacher. And I was talking to the kids about if they didn't finish work, um, they would have it as homework. And one of the girls said, I ain't doing your F'n homework.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: I had a choice then to be like, get out of my classroom or just keep talking.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Walked over later and was like, so you can feel however you want about my homework. You can't use those words in my room.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Well, I said, "you're not in trouble". I'm just, just letting you know. "Oh", like, and so I feel like, like when we power struggle with these kids, there's an article and if I can find it, I will give it to you.

Amy Foote: Oh, thank you.

Caroline Gaea: The ages 13 to 17 is the only time that children biologically believe that they are older than they are.

Amy Foote: Oh, I think I've heard that.

Caroline Gaea: Like their brain truly thinks "I'm 15, I can live on my own". Like they don't get. And then when you're 25 you're like "oh I'm 25. I'm 30, oh I'm 30". But there's something that happens. And so I watch people in their classrooms carry on a 30 minute argument with a kid and then for a bad teacher, that's easier than teaching.

Amy Foote: Mmm.

Caroline Gaea: The teacher that sits on the hall, talking a kid off the ledge about a boyfriend, that's easier than teaching.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: You know? And so, it's a lot of like, um, I'm not gonna pick the power struggle. I explained to my kids really early on "Amy, I'm gonna ask you to put your phone away. If it becomes a problem, I'm gonna ask you to put it in your backpack. That becomes a problem, I'll hold onto it until the end of the day". "Well, I'm not gonna give you your phone". "Didn't ask you to". "Put it away please".

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: And it's like getting them to understand I'm, I'm doing a job like you are my friend. And I need you to see your job and your purpose that I need you to see mine.

Amy Foote: Mhm, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: I don't know if I answered your question, but it's.

Amy Foote: I think so.

Caroline Gaea: It's, it's creating, it's having compassion and grace without making excuses for yourself or your children.

Amy Foote: Yeah. Yeah. Um, and then, so, after almost two or a little over two centuries of teaching, what have you noticed in the evolution of student behavior and academic performance? I guess that's difficult because you've been in different places, but have you noticed...

Caroline Gaea: I've always worked in title one.

Caroline Gaea: Okay.

Caroline Gaea: So, the charter school is always a really funny, weird, cause they move into low socioeconomic areas.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: And you take, that's your first lottery draw, the local neighborhood.

Amy Foote: Okay.

Caroline Gaea: Then the tiger parents get to come in and they get to fill those spots. But, um, is this technology?

Amy Foote, oh, no, it was,

Caroline Gaea: How is change in general?

Amy Foote: Yeah. And the evolution of student behavior and academic importance, in...

Caroline Gaea: So, I can take technology because I think that the academic, with, I think technology has impacted all of it.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Um, kids have changed, but parents have changed.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: And I see it across every socioeconomic background. So my older brothers live in nice areas. They go to dinner, their kids are on their phones.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Um, we didn't grow up that way. A, we didn't have phones, but like we sat and talked. So, I watch our children watch videos of people that didn't get pickles put on their hamburgers, so they'd jump on the McDonald's counter and like start throwing things at, okay, that didn't happen 20 years ago. It may have happened, but you never heard about it because nobody recorded it.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Now we see it. We see these things. Um, kids have changed because society has changed.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Um, when we had a lot of teen parents, that changed a lot. I was lucky enough to have parents that my mom never had to work. Deportation has changed child behavior.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Um, we have kids that don't have both parents. Incarceration has changed childhood, you know, growing up. They always say, you know if you don't like who's raising your kid, look, who's doing it. And the internet is raising a lot of our children.

Amy Foote: Mmmm, mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Internet's fabulous. I can do amazing things. it's changed um, I feel like when we were growing up and we were children, you just were a kid. Now these kids are forced to pick, okay, nine, pick your sexuality,

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: pick who you're going to hang out with, pick your style. Are you emo? Are you, you know, and it's like, what? And it gets pressed on these kids, which does change their behavior.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Um, I wish we were a true uniform school. The other schools I worked for were true uniform school. It changes kids' behavior.

Amy Foote: Yeah. Mrs. Mining also talks about that, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: You know, we don't have a uniform policy.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Everyone's like, "yeah we do". Um, um, And if you do, it's, there's like four choices. It's like communism. It's a white shirt, it's a blue shirt. Boom. It's pants, it's pants. And so, I think like, where I've seen a change is, um, I will have, you'll see parents come in the office and the kid will have gotten in trouble for cussing out a teacher, parent turns around to the kid, you know who, the blank you think you are blankety blank, blank, blank to talk to a teacher. And you're like, "Oh," "Hey, Apple tree". You know, you're like, um, I think more parents have to work either by choice or because they have to.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Um, and I think that she has changed a lot. I think, um, bad teachers have, have changed it. Um, I had a student a couple of years ago, um, who, kid was a hot mess. Not taking anything away from anyone and kept blurting out answers. Teacher kicked the kid out, stopped the kid mid hall. And like, where are you going? I think I told this the other day if you were in that training. And she was like, "I hate Ms. So-and-so. She never calls on me". And I said, "well you can't walk out of her classroom". Why, why I don't ever make children apologize ever. I don't want an apology if it's not, if it's flat.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: So, I said, well, “do you think you can go back in so-and-so’s class?” “I don’t”. I said just, “do you think you can?” “If she don't talk to me,” I'm like, “okay, how are you going to ask to come back in the classroom?” “Ms. so-and-so can I come back in the classroom”. Okay. I said first of all don't roll your eyes. You know, I'll use Mining, “Miss, Ms. Gaea, may I come sit in the back of your classroom and learn math?” “So it's all you've got to say. Tell me it, practice it”. Okay. We go stop at the door. Kid knocks. Teacher walks in, looks at me, he looks kid. Said, “go ahead”. “Miss Gaea I may have come back into your class, sit at the back of the room and learn math?”

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Teacher says, “have you fixed your smart mouth?”

Amy Foote: Oh no.

Caroline Gaea: I said, we're good. Thank you. I said, we're good, I'm sorry. You know? Um, she's she's gonna sit in my office for the rest of the day.

Amy Foote: Mhm, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: All I had to do is say yes. And I don't know why we as adults let our entire day be derailed by a 12 year old by a 13 year old. You know, we get so frustrated and we get so, um, there's a whole study. I'll send it to you on your big amygdala. And we see kids. It was the part of your brain that is fight or flight.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: And you'll see teachers and the minute they see that kid, it fires. And you're like, Whoa,

Amy Foote: Oh.

Caroline Gaea: like yesterday was yesterday. I don't know. I don't know if I can include this, but God gives me compassion and grace every single day. It's my job then to give it to these students.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: I didn't grow up with parents screaming at me. I didn't grew up with parents yelling at me. Did I get in trouble? Yes. Were they strict with me, yea? So that's what I feel I owe

these children. A lot of them don't grow up with that. And when they're screaming at you, they're emulating what they're learning at home. Don't take it personally.

Amy Foote: Yeah, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: That's the hardest. Should have said that as a first year teacher: don't take it personally.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: unless you've done something personally to attack a kid, you will be called names, you will be, they're comin from rough places. And so I think when we see these children acting certain ways, they see it online. They see it with their friends. They see what their parents. And my husband and I grew up very differently. I was always brought up like, don't run your mouth. My husband was brought up. Like, if somebody pushes you down, you get up, push them down and make sure they don't get up. And you're like, Whoa. Like, you know, we live in a society now where that's like aggravated manslaughter.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: It doesn't work that way anymore. And our kids are being taught like these old school, like I don't know, but it's, I do think technology has, technology and the family structure changing have been massive game changers in education.

Amy Foote: Mhm, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: That, and I mean, to answer the last part, again goes back to if we are not showing value to these killed children, why would they see value?

Amy Foote: Mhm, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: If you don't see value in your job? Like, I wish administrators knew, okay, mining needs a gold star. I need to go in there twice a week and put a gold star on her. Caroline wants to be left alone. But like, know your crowd, know you, same way you know your kids. I know pat Amy on the back every morning and tell her how great she is, you know?

Amy Foote: Mhm, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: And so, but yeah it's changed a lot. And you'll hear people go "no, it hasn't". It has.



Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Dramatically.

Amy Foote: Yeah. Hm. Um, and then let's see, I guess to finish up, I have two more questions. Um, this one is kind of a fun one. How do you balance your career and your personal life, which includes a side cookie business?

Caroline Gaea: Oh, the first, probably seven years I taught, I was at school every Saturday. I think part of that is age. I was young. You're in your twenties, go get 'em, do all these things.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Then as you get older and you get married, you realize like I'm a lot of things before I'm a teacher.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: I'm a wife, I'm a daughter, I'm a mom. Um, but I take pride in what I do,

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: but it is finding that balance. And I don't think people find it early enough.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Um, it's working that, working smarter, not harder.

Amy Foote: Ha, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Um, I'm very tech savvy. So, I love doing things that will grade itself.

Amy Foote: Mmmm

Caroline Gaea: I love, you know, we didn't have that until recently, but little things like that. You have to carve it out though.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: You have to have a life outside of school.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: I think the mistake a lot of teachers make is school friends or their friends. Which is fine. You got to have something else. Um, you've got to have someone that you can vent to that is not on campus. I call my mom every day. I'm like, "Oh God, can you believe she started to..." A she's not going to repeat it to anybody. B she just absorbs it and lets me just, um. Cookie business was the last four years. And it's a total de-stressor for me. I've been lucky. My husband's in the car business, so he's never home. As if I needed to stay at work and do something. You know, I didn't have children. I don't know how parents do it.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: I admire every working parent that is a teacher, because you deal with these yahoos all day,

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: you know, and then you go home. But I think it's also being able to separate it. We had a really experienced teacher that teaches sixth grade here, you know, and had a horrible run-in with a kid last year, and the teacher was ready to quit. And I just asked the teacher, I said, do you think this kid right now is at home contemplating never coming to school again because of your conversation? She looked at me and I said, "no, they're Instagramming and running around. They're finished". Why are you so angry? Like, you've gotta like, did I? In education I always ask myself: can I, at the end of the day, look at the kid, look at the parent, look at myself and look at my administrator and say, I did the best I could? And if any of those are no, fix it. I was a people pleaser when I first started teaching. I would agree to anything. "Oh yeah, we'll do that. Oh yeah. Oh yeah". Other teachers were like, "I'm not signing this book every day". I'd be like, "Oh, sorry". "Yeah. When you say you'll do it now I have to do it". I was like, "Oh, okay". Figuring that out. Um, yeah. But yeah, I don't know. It's it's hard. Um,

Amy Foote: Yeah, especially at the beginning when you're, learning

Caroline Gaea: I, I think it took me a long time to realize, like, if I'm going to give five grades a week, I have to take the time, I have to use my conference time wisely.

Amy Foote: Mhm

Caroline Gaea: Real easy to sit and talk.

Amy Foote: [laughs], yeah.

Caroline Gaea: And you do you chat with your friends and all of a sudden. Use that time wisely. Don't take home tones of stuff but if you do, sit in front of a, sit in front of the TV grading it. Like, still listen to music, do something you enjoy. Because it can be all consuming and I will see teachers that their entire identity is being an educator

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: and that's not always good.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Cause if you fail,

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Or you're having a rough day, it destroys everything.

Amy Foote: Yeah, yeah. Hm. Um, and then is there anything else you'd like to add, or.

Caroline Gaea: Just be kind. Remember that these kids, if my mom taught me the first year I taught it, it stuck with me forever. She goes, "they don't keep the good ones at home" because I would like rail about some kid that was just being so disrespectful. And she would go, Caroline, "they don't keep the good point ones at home. They're sending you the best they have. Make it work". And I was like, "Oh my gosh, you're right". Like, there's a reason that this child whose frontal lobe is not even developed is acting the way they are.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: They've seen it. They've heard it. It's my job to show them another way.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: It's my job. When they start to lose their mind, to have them look at me and be like, "well why isn't she screaming and kicking me out"?

Amy Foote: So, kind of understanding where they're coming from and,

Caroline Gaea: It's that grace and compassion without giving a crutch.

Amy Foote: Mhm, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Um, if you have a kid that comes in and they're having a horrible day, "you can have it today. You can have it tomorrow too".

Amy Foote: Mhm, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Well, you know, we'll, we'll when it becomes, you know, because I always tell teachers are like, you know, "Gaea just, today I gave them an Achieve and she couldn't do it today". "That's fine, just don't make it two days in a row, make it three days in a row". You're going to have a day like that. Totally fine.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Our kids are the same way. You, you let them come in, you understand them, but you cannot give them, that may be their reality. Their reality may be homeless with a drug a drug addicted mom for the rest of their lives. So, if you go, "okay, all right, okay. We'll just give you 70, you're fine". How are you helping them?

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: Instead you go, "you know what? You want to talk to the counselor? Do you need, I have snacks you can take home this weekend." Like you give them that support without enabling.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Um, that, and just be easy on yourself and, and know that it's, it's going to be hard.

Amy Foote: Yeah.

Caroline Gaea: Um, you know, I always joke that education is easier than parenthood because you know, you can't smack these kids. People that teach, parents, it's always like, "I don't know how you deal with those kids". Well because I can't talk disrespectfully and I can't do anything like a parent can do whatever they want, you know, as an adult. And, um, don't take it personally. I joke you kinda have to be like a Four Seasons, like a hotel concierge.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: They get yelled at, they get things thrown at them and you, "okay, I hear where you're coming from. Um, I will do my best". Um, I don't, I pray for these kids all the time.

Amy Foote: Mhm hm hm.

Caroline Gaea: I just, you know, they, they, their parents send the best they have.

Amy Foote: Mhm.

Caroline Gaea: And selfishly, when I am old, these children will be running the world.

Amy Foote: Hm.

Caroline Gaea: So, if I don't do my due diligence, Selfishly I'm sabotaging myself.

Amy Foote: [laughs], yeah.

Caroline Gaea: But the education is it's, it's a mess in this country.

Amy Foote: Mhm, yeah, yeah.

Caroline Gaea: We, we, but we've got a lot of work to do. And I don't think it's, what needs to be done is difficult. It's just stopping and thinking instead of reacting.

Amy Foote: Yeah. Well, thank you so much for agreeing to this interview.

Caroline Gaea: You're so welcome! Absolutely.

Amy Foote: It was wonderful.

Caroline Gaea: If you ever have any other questions feel free to come by.

Amy Foote: Thank you.

Caroline Gaea: Anytime.