



Growing up in northwest Montana, I was fortunate to have a neighbor who encouraged me on a weekly basis. One morning, when I was six years old, I walked over to Mr. Clawson's garage to see what he was building. Mr. Clawson was always inventing something. That day, he was working on a contraption to clean up oil spills

in the ocean. I was impressed. Mr. Clawson showed me how his device worked, talking to me as an equal. He then asked me to critique his design and offer suggestions for improvement. This genius was asking a six year old for improvements on an invention that would clean up oil spills!

That simple gift of encouragement from Mr. Clawson changed my life forever. I realized that my own thoughts about the world had value. I was on cloud nine for days and felt I could pursue anything and be successful. I sought to use this same approach of genuine encouragement by launching the International Program in 1995. The ITP has served over 19,000 youth from all over the world, helping to maximize their potential through academic mentoring. I'm not sure whether Mr. Clawson knew that the gift he gave me would return in exponential ways.

For more information about the International Telementoring Center, go to <http://www.telementor.org>.