One night, a group of us were having dinner, celebrating the return of a friend from England . She had just gotten back from a fabulous trip, and she was going on and on about the hotel she stayed in. I was sitting there, looking around at the others all put together so well. It was hard not to compare and feel sorry for myself. I was feeling pretty pathetic, when she turned to me with a beautifully wrapped package, and said, 'I brought you this.'

It was a book on the great cathedrals of Europe. I wasn't exactly sure why she'd given it to me until I read her inscription: 'With admiration for the greatness of what you are building when no one sees.'

In the days ahead I would read — no, devour — the book. And I would discover what would become for me, four life-changing truths, after which I could pattern my work: 1) No one can say who built the great cathedrals — we have no record of their names. 2) These builders gave their whole lives for a work they would never see finished. 3) They made great sacrifices and expected no credit. 4) The passion of their building was fueled by their faith that the eyes of God saw everything.

A story of legend in the book told of a rich man who came to visit the cathedral while it was being built, and he saw a workman carving a tiny bird on the inside of a beam. He was puzzled and asked the man, 'Why are you spending so much time carving that bird into a beam that will be covered by the roof, no one will ever see it.' And the workman replied, 'Because G-d sees.'

I closed the book, feeling the missing piece fall into place. It was almost as if I heard someone whispering to me, 'I see you. I see the sacrifices you make every day, even when no one around you does. No act of kindness you've done, no shoe you have tied, no tear you have dried, no lesson you have taught is too small for me to notice and smile over. You are building a great cathedral, but you can't see right now what it will become.

I keep the right perspective when I see myself as a great builder. As one of the people who show up at a job that they will never see finished, to work on something that their name will never be on. The writer of the book went so far as to say that no cathedrals could ever be built in our lifetime because there are so few people willing to sacrifice to that degree.

As teachers, you are building great cathedrals. It cannot be seen if you’re doing it right. And one day, it is very possible that the world will marvel, not only at what you have built, but at the beauty that has been added to the world by the sacrifices of invisible teachers.