As the granddaughter of immigrants who worked in the Manchester mill buildings where she now teaches, Lorraine Doucet knows a good teacher can change lives.

After all, it was a teacher at the Catholic high school Doucet attended who inspired her to enter a statewide science fair.

Doucet still remembers how intimidating it was for a working-class kid to go up against the best and brightest from prestigious schools. But her teacher persisted. “I have more faith in you than you have in yourself,” she told her student.

Doucet took on the challenge, placing third as a sophomore, second as a junior, and winning the competition her senior year—earning a full, four-year college scholarship. “I always remember how much faith that teacher had in me,” says Doucet. “And I started realizing what a privilege it would be to be an educator, to open minds and possibilities for students—just like she did for me.”

Doucet has been that teacher for 35 years, inspiring with creativity, a quick wit, and enthusiasm. As one student wrote in an evaluation: “Who knew that learning about bacteria could be so much fun?”

Doucet has inspired many careers, and former students stay in touch, often seeking her advice about their own work.

“She was instrumental in convincing me, as an older student, to go back to school and to stick with it,” says Cheryl Wood, now lab manager at the Manchester Water Works. Wood also credits Doucet for passing along sound lab practices that help her to keep Manchester’s water supply safe.

Doucet’s in-depth knowledge of bacteria, particularly those that plague breweries and food processors, has earned her a name as a respected consultant. In fact, Doucet, who is also a religious sister in the Order of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, is fondly known as the “Brew Nun” among local brewers.

“I didn’t go into academics to impress anyone, but to make a difference in the lives of my students,” Doucet says. “To give them the passion for science, just like my teachers did for me.”

—Jim Graham