The Connecticut Writing Project offers opportunities for growth and professional development to teachers of writing in all disciplines who recognize the worth of using writing as a means of learning any subject matter. A program of The University of Connecticut, Department of English, the Connecticut Writing Project is affiliated with the widely-acclaimed National Writing Project, which now has 116 sites in this country and abroad.

In the Project, experienced classroom teachers are trained as Teacher/Consultants in an intensive Summer Institute where they share their expertise and practice writing themselves. Then, during subsequent school years, they present workshops on composition theory and practical strategies for teaching writing to teachers in participating districts.

The approach has proven effective by generating widespread interest in good writing and by upgrading students' abilities as writers and learners. For further information about the Connecticut Writing Project and its programs, please write or call the director:

William E. Sheidley  
Department of English (U-25)  
The University of Connecticut  
Storrs, CT 06268  
(203) 486-2328 or 486-2141

INTRODUCTION

The sixteen participants in the third Connecticut Writing Project Summer Institute, held in Storrs during July 1984, came from schools at all levels in Connecticut - and one came all the way from California. They included several University of Connecticut composition instructors, a specialist in foreign languages, an historian, and a teacher of students with learning disabilities. Their diversity of background lent a special energy to their discussions of the writing process and teaching techniques, and it contributed to the variety and interest of their essays, stories, and poems collected here.

During the four weeks of the Institute, most mornings were spent in sessions exploring recent research on writing, arguing writing issues, presenting workshops on aspects of the writing process and ways to teach it, and hearing lectures about writing by guest speakers. During the afternoon sessions, writing groups met. In groups of four, the Summer Fellows criticized, revised, and edited compositions in each of four modes of discourse - personal, objective, analytical, and persuasive - and through this collaboration improved their understanding of the writing process.

The writings collected in this booklet represent each author's effort in one of these four modes. Pieces were chosen by the authors with the consultation of the other members of their groups. They are arranged by writing group rather than by subject or genre.

The quality of work in this booklet reflects the dedication of this group of writing teachers to the craft they endeavor to teach. Their energy, skill, and professionalism have made working with them a challenge and an inspiration.

William E. Sheidley, Director  
Connecticut Writing Project  
Ann Policelli & Ralph Wadsworth  
Coordinators of the Summer Institute
Freshman composition courses should, I think, be pass-fail. This is a new attitude for me, and to be quite honest, I'm not even entirely certain I'm right — it's more of an intuitive feeling than anything else. This change of heart did not come about as a result of my experiences as a freshman composition teacher, which are limited, nor as a result of studying pedagogical theory. Rather, my change of attitude is a result of playing softball this summer with the English department team which competed in the University's summer softball league.

As a kid I never played much baseball. It was not so much that I completely lacked athletic talent, but I always detested the aggressively masculine, competitive, locker-room atmosphere that surrounds most sports. I was never terribly self-confident, and the merciless ragging I was subjected to whenever I made an error on the field tended to discourage me from trying very hard. I should add that I am not only referring to the sarcastic remarks of the other kids — one expects that sort of behavior, after all, from children — but also that of the adults who supervised the games. One incident in particular stands out in my memory: One summer at camp, when I was perhaps twelve or thirteen years old, I was involved in a softball game on a sultry July afternoon. In recognition of my modest abilities the counselor in charge had placed me in right field, where I quickly ceased paying attention to the game. Of course a hard grounder was soon hit straight at me and rolled between my legs. It took me a moment to remember where I was, and when I finally got my hands on the ball I didn't have the slightest idea of where to throw it. The counselor who had placed me in right field was nearly apoplectic with rage, and bellowed across the field loudly enough for all to hear: "Calvert, you STINK!"

With memories such as this it is understandable that I approached playing softball this summer with some trepidation. To my surprise I found that I enjoyed it very much and was sorry to see the season end. I hadn't played in a good fifteen years, and needless to say when the season began I was pretty awful. While my athletic abilities hadn't deteriorated that much, they certainly hadn't improved, either. I found that I could still hit fairly well — not with much power, but with some control — and I could throw the ball well enough not to embarrass myself. Unfortunately, I completely lacked any sense of strategy in baserunning and
fielding. Baseball is actually quite a complex game, requiring constant attention when on the field. In addition to constantly having to adjust your position in the field depending on what kind of hitter is at bat, you must also be aware of which bases have runners on them and decide in advance where you are going to throw the ball if it is hit to you. During the early part of the season, my lack of fielding savvy was not that much of a problem, because on those occasions when the ball was hit to me, I usually dropped it. That was my chief problem — I couldn't catch, particularly high fly balls.

Catching a pop fly, for those of you who have never done it, is a tricky proposition, involving acute depth perception exercised while sprinting short distances and trying to grab a high-speed projectile out of the air. It is rather unnerving having something traveling that fast in your direction, but my problem was not so much fear of the ball as judging distances. More often than not I underestimated where the ball was going to come down and found myself standing six or eight feet short of where it actually landed. My inability to move very quickly, coupled with my poor vision, didn't help matters much.

It was a discouraging situation, but I didn't allow it to discourage me. You see, between the summers of my childhood and this summer, I gained something far more valuable than speed, strength, or physical co-ordination — I grew up. I had some perspective. I knew that if I practiced I would probably improve, and even if I didn't, I no longer regarded my ability to catch a softball as an indicator of my worth as a human being. So I hung in there, came early to each game for extra practice, asked for pointers from the more experienced players, and ignored any remarks from other players that could in any way be construed as derisive. (To the great credit of the players in this league, such remarks were almost non-existent.)

And I got better. Slowly, painfully, and through repeated mistakes, I got to the point where, by the end of the season, I could catch nearly every ball that was hit to me. By giving myself the chances that I never had as a kid, I allowed myself to improve.

Now, you may well be asking what all this has to do with grades. Simply this — in spite of my great improvement as a softball player, if I had to give myself a grade as a softball player, I would have to give myself a C-, or at best a C. I still can't hit anything besides line-drive singles, I can't run, I can't throw more than thirty feet with any sort of accuracy, and I still drop an occasional fly. "Good" is a highly relative term; I call myself a "good" softball player because I know that I am the best softball player I can be — now. I hope to get better next summer.

After this summer's experiences on the softball field, I have decided that learning to write is a lot like learning to play softball. Both are technical skills acquired over a long period of time and involving many factors. To become a "good" softball player you must learn to hit, throw, catch and field, until you can do all these things smoothly, competently, and above all with an instinctive sense of your next right move. Writing is similarly made up of a variety of components, which, through practice, become internalized and integrated within the student. No single component of writing "is" writing, although each has its importance. But, while reading will make you a better writer, just as watching lots of ball games will make you a better ballplayer, neither is in itself sufficient to accomplish the overall task.

None of this, I'm sure, is news to any writing teacher. So since we know this is the case, why do we insist on judging every individual component of our students' struggles to improve their use of the written language? To return to my softball analogy, I know that while I have largely outgrown my childishly impatient urge to surrender when confronted with adversity, I also know that if someone had been standing beside me all season giving me bad grades each time I made an error, I might very well have grown discouraged. Instead, my teammates were very supportive and encouraging, and I drew emotional sustenance from them.

We teachers should do the same for our students. Beginning writers — and I include in this term most student writers until they are well along in college — need from us encouragement and the freedom to explore, through trial and error, how they may assemble the parts of composition into a competent personal style. The compulsive habit we have of assigning value judgements to each and every aspect of student performance cannot help but be discouraging to most of our students, particularly when faced with something as mysterious (even we don't understand it!) as English composition.

In closing, I would offer one piece of advice to writing teachers: The next time you are starting to teach a course, consider whatever thing you are worst at — it might be some sport, or drawing, or automobile repair — and use your own trouble mastering that skill as a paradigm for judging how well your students perform as writers. How many countless times was Ohm's Law explained to you before it finally sunk in? How many gutterballs did you throw before your first strike? How many pop flies sailed over your head before you finally caught one?
PREMEDITATED TEMPEST
Barbara A. Campbell

Maxine Hairston in COLLEGE COMPOSITION AND COMMUNICATION quotes Thomas Kuhn in THE STRUCTURE OF SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTIONS (it's always best to use prime source material) about the paradigm shift. When the established conceptual model or paradigm cannot explain anomalies, contradictions, and inconsistencies, then a new paradigm is developed and the shift occurs. Key to this shift is that it is disruptive in various ways.

What would it be like to envision a paradigm shift in a particular institution, UConn, for example, within the English Department and specifically in that one course required of every student, English 105? From intense scientific observation this summer, it was seen that two steps into the paradigm shift have already occurred. It is commonplace on campus that many students who pass English 105 still do not know how to write. And teaching assistants, who are themselves student writers, often find the course outline and procedures for writing stifling. Furthermore, two wedges have been driven into the old paradigm. Over one hundred of the teachers of 105 are not on campus. They are high school teachers in the Program. Co-op teachers are called to the Department and specifically in that one course required of every particular institution, UConn, for example, within the English Department and specifically in that one course required of every student, English 105?

To make a paradigm shift, however, requires outward and visible signs, not just inward changes while appearances remain the same. It is these outward signs which I would like to address, particularly because disruption accompanies them. I feel that disruption can be encouraged.

It's always good to come back to the campus where twelve years of my life were spent and be able to feel at home, to know I belong. I knew there was something comfortable about the phrase "English 105." It had more than a familiar ring and then the transcript proved it. Twenty-seven years ago, as a freshman, I had taken English 105 in a classroom on the third floor of the Wilbur Cross Library. Stability is one thing, stagnation is another. While there have no doubt been evolutionary changes in course content and emphasis, methinks for a course to have had the same number for twenty-seven years definitely smells of a dead fish. I propose, therefore, that the course every freshman be required to take be re-numbered.

This re-numbering would get at the heart of the matter. The computer would have to be changed. And the course catalog. And all those little cards on faculty doors. But its real importance goes deeper than just to the heart. It is a change that truly is meaningless. While there may be distinctions of import between 100 and 200 courses, the distinction between 105 and a new number, 106, for example, is a change signifying nothing - and therefore, is perfect. It is the irritant that allows the venom to be vented when there is nothing to kill. Change, by its nature, has to be fought. Those energies have to be expended. It is of the utmost importance that those destructive energies be directed away from the change that matters so it can be allowed to occur.

A second instigated disruption which I propose is that the word "Composition" be dropped from the name of the now re-numbered course. Composition evokes memories of booklets from which no page could be torn and in which one wrote only with ink (permanent blue-black). Neither could one make a mistake - ink-erasers, scratchers, and ink-eradicator, each left too much of a mark. Compositions were those pieces of writing that were dutifully copied over in best penmanship which guaranteed that all life had been drained out of them. Never again being able to refer to "Freshman Comp." is a little disruptive, but more of an assist is needed. I therefore propose that the new course be called "The Writing Process". This has the advantage of being the truth, to begin with, but it is already another irritant. It's a phrase that doesn't match the adage of the standard textbooks, and therefore cuts the life source for the old paradigm. A new book would have to be read, and new lecture notes written - or maybe, if the right books were read, the lecturing would cease. A disreputable course title, a change in the colloquialism, a new book order for the bookstore, and the burning of all those plywood lecterns - a glorious disruption but one that needs a final touch.

The sequel to The Writing Process is the Literature course? No way! That provides too much security for all those English majors who wanted to read sexy books and get credit for it. The sequel to The Writing Process is simply The Writing Process II, and literature would be used as a source and inspiration for writing in both courses. Comp. and Lit. are only artificially separated anyway, and time is needed to establish the peer writing groups, to experience pre-writing, and to allow the process to flow. If the fact that we have emotions and that emotional response is both valid and needs to be expressed before other responses can be examined; if the fact that one does not know everything one is going to write when one starts, but content is generated in process; if the fact that writing is not linear, but recursive; if these are facts (as I have just said they are), then two semesters...
are both needed and well spent in the writing process. Recognizing emotions and feelings, acknowledging one doesn't know everything and claiming the messiness of recursiveness are delightfully disruptive factors.

The paradigm shift is complete when the established leadership adapts or changes. Just think what the consequences would be when it is realized that "anyone" can't teach that one required course. What do you mean teaching writing is a speciality? Writing is what you do so you don't perish! Or so it used to be.

Writing isn't the spin-off, it is the substance. It is the organizer of thinking. It is what will have been steadily (although recursively) promoted while the battles have been fought over the course number change, title change, and change in teacher attitudes. This paradigm shift won't be just a revolution contained within one department. As students (and faculty) become involved in the writing process, the right side of the brain becomes engaged and the direction of the "education process" is turned around. Instead of the mastered body of knowledge having to be imparted in diluted fashion to incoming students, those incoming students and faculty members who specialize in the writing process will open their minds, dare to explore, see new relationships, and risk new thoughts. And it is in the resurgence of thinking that the new paradigm lives.
grandmother's address. Suddenly the conductor shouted in my ear to move. The unoiled hinges of the door stuck as they squeaked open in an irritating shrill.

Making my way to my grandmother's apartment, I noticed the surroundings. On both sides of the street are tall oak trees which throw gigantic shadows that cover the building with jagged lines like Egyptian letters, undeciphered. The sides of the streets, the sidewalks, are paved with asphalt, but in the center, the streets are made up of round heavy stones which are simply driven into the dirt beneath. Thinking back, I could visualize centuries of horses and drozhkas, horsecarts, smoothing them out slightly and driving them down farther.

Standing in the courtyard looking at the apartment, I could see a large Russian woman with a huge basket filled with pretzels and small cakes covered with poppy seeds, and bagels, and hot rolls with baked onions sprinkled on top. She rang the bell as I approached the apartment. The meeting was difficult as my grandmother had never seen me and all I had was an old, faded, black and white photo of my father sitting on my grandfather's knee. Moving closer, I saw my grandmother opening her purse: She wasn't dressed. She was wrapped in her terry cloth robe, and she was staring at me. I saw her moving her lips, trying to speak. Tears fell from her eyes, one after another, one at a time, like an army; there was no stopping them.

"Hello, Grandma," I said.

Her lips formed the word "Grandma." She stood as still as the two cement lions on either side of the door. She might have been made of stone. Her whole face seemed covered with a powder of plaster, as if she had just stepped out of a building that had just collapsed around her. She moved her lips again. Her eyes were narrowing as if she couldn't open them. But her lips, they were covered with a thick, white coating, she kept biting them, and little drops of blood began forming on them like red pearls.

"Grandma, Grandma, it's Yna, your granddaughter," I repeated again in Russian.

A tremor went through her whole body, and she moved her lips again forming the words, "I didn't think my son, Nicholas, had preserved the language or the culture." As if she was hypnotized, her arms moved up from her sides and stretched towards me. I rushed into them, and they closed around me. Nothing else was said. She just smiled and held me tighter, and I knew then that distance would never keep us apart.
when my eyes were open. Then I saw a willow tree, even greener
than the one I was sitting under. I realized I could also see, if I so
desired, two willow trees. I opened my eyes and tried with the
house. But this time I imagined a house that looked completely
different from ours, and another house, and still another, till I had
something like a small town by the sea.

I whistled, you whistled; I killed an ant with my left foot;
you started looking for an ant to kill with your left foot. Before, I
would have been angry at such a conspicuous instance of your
persecution. Now, I felt delighted: you had fallen into my trap; I
had led you to believe you could possess me just by wearing my
clothes and moving like me, but it was all a distractive maneuver.
Just by making myself visible, I would hide and get you to do
whatever I wanted. And all I wanted was to play with the things I
saw in my head, and that you could not see.

"Sanja," I called that town by the sea which was going to
grow as the years went by, where so many of my best memories
come from. I wonder where I got such a name, it must have been
entirely arbitrary. But the first recollection I have is not of the
town itself, but instead of that afternoon under the willow trees,
with you behind, and the vertiginous freedom I experienced at
confirming I could create whatever I wanted. And then I could get
a garden and a bower, and a path to the sea.

And the sea had islands, and merchants, and stars. Imperceptibly, you grew to be almost as tall as I was, and Sanja
increased its importance as a string of small towns and trading
posts sprang along the coast. My house, though, was not exactly in
Sanja, but outside on a hill, and the roof and the bower could be
seen from the center of the city. In the meantime, you would come
to borrow my silk stockings (it was already time for us to wear
silk stockings) or try my mascara, or just stare at me from behind
the open door. And I would turn round and tell you to come in and
try my pink blouse, I was sure it would look great on you.

Sanja was by now the flourishing capital of a minute
kingdom; the railroad connected the different settlements along
the coast; two new islands were being colonized. My life was quiet
and peaceful: I took long walks as far as the lighthouse, or went
with friends to the theater. A good novel was always waiting for
me on my night-table, but I was too tired to read, very soon I
would be fast asleep until the next morning, when you came in and
asked me what I wanted for breakfast and then added you also
wanted just one egg, and rye bread.

I must have been nineteen by then (I was a sophomore, and
you were through with high school), when I almost yielded to the
temptation of drawing maps of Sanja and its surroundings. As
economy and society grow in complexity, things tend to get too
complicated to keep them straight in your (I mean, in my) head. Of
course, I did not draw any maps; you would have seen them, or me
drawing them, and the mere idea of you or anyone else penetrating
into Sanja covered me with horror. My world had to be kept
secret, it must have no traces in this world, no maps, no
inscriptions, no evidences.

And then college was over for the two of us. These years
have passed so slowly. Nothing of importance has happened: we
both found jobs with Northeastern, we both have cultivated some
friends (I should say: you have adopted what you think are my
friends), two or three men have briefly passed through our lives.
Mother died two years ago, father is still working, full of physical
vigor, although somewhat sad in his heart. Sanja has grown a lot,
with the recent boom of tourism and industry; my house, which
used to be in the outskirts, is now in the middle of a rather
fashionable neighborhood. I've also bought a summer house in
Dolbey, one of the islands, where I spend my holidays. Here, two
or three men have passed through my life; I almost married one of
them, then I decided a marriage would make the story a bit too
complicated and I refused. It was really amusing to have all these
tings going on in my head, to be so completely absorbed by it
while we were getting ready to go to sleep, or lying in the sun, or
having a cigarette after lunch at the cafeteria of Northeastern. It
was really amusing to think nobody suspected, let alone you, who
were with me all the time, allowed to read my diary, open my
drawers, put your hands into my purse. You would have been most
surprised to find out I had just turned down a marriage proposal.

I was twenty-eight and you twenty-six; somebody had
already made an ironic remark about it. Father also alluded to the
fact when he announced his plan to remodel the house "in case you
don't get married and have to stay here." Personally, it was
nothing of my concern, since I had the comfort of knowing that, if
I ever felt like marrying, it would be sufficient to create someone
in my mind (or to make the one I had just turned down, come back)
and have them at my perfect will and pleasure. As for you, I must
say I was really worried lest you should stay unmarried.

Marcus started at Northeastern on the third of July, exactly
seven months ago. At noon, in the cafeteria, he came straight to
me, sat by me, completely ignoring you. He was from
Massachusetts, where his father was a lawyer; he liked reading
and fishing. "It gives me time to think," he said, and while he was
saying that, I was trying to guess the shape of his arms under his
shirt. "We should get together," he said at the end, "Dorothy is
having a party day after tomorrow. You must come."

I thought about him that afternoon. His skin was so naturally
tanned, his hair so delicately unkempt. It did not take me much to
realize I was, for the first time in my life, in love with someone.
That night, I turned the lights off as soon as I got to bed. I heard
you do the same almost immediately, in the room next door. I
turned against the wall and, in the darkness, tried to concentrate
on the meaning of that expression, to be in love. There he was, his green eyes fixed on mine, smiling. Love, I concluded, rather than an abstract feeling, was an image, pleasurable and almost obsessive: there he was again, fishing and thinking, as he had described himself. Now he was putting his things away, in a basket. The day had not been very productive, but he did not seem to mind. Now he was walking nonchalantly along the edge of the water. I could see him from a distance, stopping at time to gather a handful of pebbles which he would then throw, one by one, to the sea. It was a cold afternoon; a storm was brewing over the islands. He had to struggle against the wind when crossing my gate and walking under the willow trees. Now he was lost in the branches, I could only see his legs advancing. I had been watching him all the time, but I waited until he knocked to come downstairs and feigned to be surprised to see him at the door. His basket had disappeared.

I picked up my white woolen jacket from upstairs and followed him to his car, which was parked nearby. At this point, you can object he had no car at the beginning, since he had walked his way to my house. But, you see, in Sanja I could do as I pleased: now he did have a car, a green Studebaker, to be more precise. But now it was too late, my imagination became nebulous and disproportionate. I can't remember what happened during that gusty evening; I've kept only glimpses, dim remembrances of colors, isolated images superimposed with images coming from tiredness and slumber, which progressively gained my body.

That night, Marcus became the first person from this world to get through to Sanja. So far, I could not have brought myself to conceive of anyone being there. It was so difficult to imagine real people in Sanja. They would have looked so awkward, so out of place. Whereas with him it was the opposite, he so perfectly fitted in here...That, I thought the day after, was love after all, this insistent image that you can drag behind yourself (behind myself, I mean) wherever you go, at no risk.

Dorothy was a brunette who worked on the second floor, in the insurance section. She lived with a roommate in a small apartment down East State Street. It was Marcus who came to open the door for us: "I'm so happy you came," he said, smiling, and I had the instant feeling, like a jolt within myself, that it was impossible to precise whether he was referring to me alone or that "you" also included you.

I was not mistaken: he danced with you that night. Three days later, he came to pick you up. You went to the movies. Today, seven months afterwards, the wedding has taken place. During the ceremony, in church, you send me a smiling glance, Then, at the dinner table, you called me to your side. Everything went fast and well.

The party was not over yet when Marcus came to tell you everything was ready for the trip. You ran upstairs to change, and very soon were back in black pants and a white jacket.

Father was crying: I am sure he was thinking of mother. Perhaps you just wanted to relieve the tension when you said that I'd been your best friend. As I said, I could not bring myself to contradict you at the moment: It would have been rude and pointless. So I just let you climb into his car, wave to us, and leave, slowly at the beginning, and then faster and faster till the car completely disappeared in the lights of the highway.

Some couples were still dancing. I walked back to them, slowly but with determination, as if possessed by the unexpected realization that now that you are married, I will be completely free, that you will not spy on me anymore, that I can now go on and forget about you and draw maps and think about Sanja.
BASEBALL FAN ABROAD

Mark Altschuler

"Global Perspective." The term had taken hold in my ear but not in my brain. I had heard the term over and over at my orientation session, but I had no idea what it meant. "Global Perspective." That's what the orientation leader told me I'd have to develop in order to live successfully overseas. Well, here I was living overseas, and, despite my orientation, I was feeling disoriented.

I had gone to Bogota', Colombia to teach in a high school, and I felt like my cultural moorings had come undone. I am a baseball fan, or, to be more precise, I am that peculiar breed of fan — a Phillies fan. It was nearly impossible to keep up with my beloved team from a distant continent, but I tried. Still, not knowing how many strikeouts Steve Carlton had last night and not seeing Gary Matthews hustling in the outfield made life seem to be without purpose.

The memory of my first few days in Bogota' is hazy now, but I know that I arrived on the day that Pete Rose broke Stan Musial's record for most hits in the National League. I left for Bogota' on August 10, 1981, the day of the first game after the baseball players' strike. I remember that date in much the same way I remember that I left for Israel on January 1, 1973 — the day after Roberto Clemente died. Of course a fan remembers events in his own life through associations with events in baseball; he measures time through baseball.

I tried to remedy my sense of disorientation in this foreign land by developing global perspective. For instance, I took an apartment downtown, overlooking the bull ring. Every Sunday when the bullfight was on, my apartment was filled with excited spectators. I tried to join in with their revelry, but I just couldn't stand the violence. Instead, while the bullfight was going strong, I'd retreat to my room and listen to the NFL on Armed Forces Radio. I guess I just prefer violence that I understand.

I hired a maid. Everyone in South America has a maid. I thought that hiring a maid would help me develop global perspective by alleviating my strong culturally-induced sense of democracy and aversion to exploitation of workers. Maids in Colombia are notoriously underpaid. Global perspective? No, I guess I just very easily got used to someone washing my dirty socks.

Even though I wasn't growing into global perspective, I was beginning to understand why my Phillies were so important to me. In our secular-corporate-technological culture, it was hard to find anything to really believe in. My father, a rabid Phillies fan, passed on his maniacal commitment to me, much like our forefathers had passed on their trade and religion to their sons. The Phillies rarely won, but they were mine, and they came to represent virtue and honor. My team's long tradition of losing made me appreciate the nobility of suffering. How could I understand global perspective when I don't even have enough imagination to fathom a Yankee fan's perspective?

I grew up realizing that truth was as elusive as Juan Samuel on the basepaths. Within that perspective of skepticism, I knew I'd at least be able to always hold onto the Phillies. They became a winning team; the rise from mediocrity to the dignity of champion was personified by Larry Bowa. Bowa broke in as an underdog, undersized shortstop for the last place Phillies in 1970. He scrambled and hustled his way toward respectability, then stardom and a World Series ring in 1980. When I was homesick in South America, I'd be thinking about cheese steaks, the Liberty Bell, and Larry Bowa. The only certainty in life was that Larry Bowa would always be the shortstop for the Philadelphia Phillies.

The letter arrived and it hit me like an Al Holland fast ball to the ribs. The letter from back home said, "Larry Bowa was traded to the Chicago Cubs." I couldn't even picture it — Bowa in blue pin stripes, playing on grass in daylight? It was like trying to picture Greg Luzinski suddenly covering the outfield like Garry Maddox. Larry Bowa, Chicago Cubs. I felt pain.

I tried to share the horror. I told everyone at school the news. They all looked strangely baffled. I felt too awful to cry, and then it illuminated itself like a Mike Schmidt game winning blast in the bottom of the ninth. Larry Bowa had been traded. No one cared. No one even knew who Larry Bowa was. I think I understand global perspective.
Mostly Shadow

Mark Altschuler

My mind records
Images, not sounds
Images in motion, fast, edited, jerky —
I do not recall your voice
But your face remains
And dances across my mindscreen

Accompanied by
the faint grinding sound of an ancient projector.
Sound intrudes on the sorrow.

Like Chaplin's tramp,
we are forced to sing an aria we do not understand.

The whispers and the shouts
Of lecturing and laughing
Of mumbling and chattering
Of whistling and weeping
Of hooting and howling
The grunts and the groans of the poet reading his own words—

All memory is merely light and shadow
Mostly shadow.

Like Chaplin's tramp,
we are forced to sing an aria we do not understand
With sound,
the tramp becomes
The Great Dictator

All truth is silence and shadow
Mostly shadow.

Prayers is discourse with no response
As love gets lost in the shadowless nights
In pursuit of that which is always and unexpressed because

Only the mute are strong of voice
Only the deaf understand the loneliness of God.

Amid the horrifying clatter of mere human discourse,
We search for voice but
Long for the gentle touch of pantomime.

Reversed Roles

Mary H. Pilch

There was no one factor that precipitated my career change. Indeed, there were many — so many and subtle in their interaction with my life that I did not realize that a change, a fresh start was needed. It was an eight-year old learning disabled boy who became a teacher's teacher. Through him I learned about me, my needs, my goals, and ultimately my achievements.

For fifteen years I was responsible for the educational diagnosis, placement, and development of programs for primary grade learning disabled students. As a teacher of these children, I provided a trusting, secure, structured yet nurturing environment for the student and his family. Little educational or administrative direction was available to provide the skills needed to implement this program. I was on my own, floundering, experimenting, changing, growing, and always being challenged with the task presented by each new student. I was recognized by the faculty, administration, children, and parents as competent, often becoming the delivery agent of success for the child and his family after initial school and social failure. These accomplishments, challenges, the fun, the affection, and the respect given to me by the students and the families, sustained my efforts.

When, then, did the vocation become just a job? When did the challenge lapse into complacency? Why did a secure, mature, nurturing teacher nearly become a basket case?

The transformation was slow. I was not aware of the total picture. I was aware of being bored, apathetic, lethargic, even cranky, sharp, and impatient with friend and foe. I scowled often, looked at frown lines in the mirror, and even found a gray hair or two. Every Monday I'd start a new diet, an exercise plan, sure that my excess weight was the culprit. By Tuesday, my stomach was grumbling, my muscles ache, and the ho-hum days just kept ticking away. My strategies toward coping and correcting my problem were being used up. Nothing was happening, or so I thought. Little did I realize the effect that my wallowing self-pity was having on my students, Joe in particular.

As an eight-year old Joe had serious learning and emotional problems. In the lower primary grades, Joe was not included in my class, his parents objected to the individualized program, and most of the faculty felt that Joe was a spoiled brat. His inclusion in the
class came after an outside agency intervened and recommended an alternate educational setting for Joe.

From September through February of that year, Joe and I battled. I could not get him to read, to write, to compute, or even to talk with me. I often put him out of class. To the dedicated, success-oriented teacher, this was a sign of failure. Truthfully, at this time, Joe's exclusion from class was a period of peace. Joe was a thorn. I had enough problems to keep me occupied without him, too. Besides, I rationalized, no one could handle Joe, not even his parents.

Just before the February vacation our frustrations came to a head. The confrontation occurred after a sharp reprimand by me. Joe responded with a torrent of feelings about me and our relationship. Surfaceily, I dismissed his outburst with a sarcastic, "Thank God, I have a week off from you." Joe responded in kind as he sulked off to the listening center. We both finished the day in a hostile, silent stand-off.

Vacation helped place Joe, the class, the job, my growing anxiety and antagonisms on the back burner. As I happily occupied my time doing all the things I never had time for, Joe's words silently gnawed at me. The effect of Joe's outburst and the impending return to work caused a physical illness that prevented me from attending for three days beyond vacation.

Meanwhile, Joe was poised, ready for my return. However, the Joe I confronted was different. He was pleasant, cooperative, and completing work assigned. I was beside myself with relief, and felt that somehow the flood of emotions, the time away, and my skills had created an impression on Joe. Little did I know that my nemesis had a trick or two up his sleeve.

Joe's father was the author of one of the tricks. His bribe was - one good report card would be equal to one ten-speed bike in June. To Joe this was a most enticing reward. For a few months of concentrated effort and controlled behavior, he could receive a reward that gave him freedom to explore, to spend time with friends without any adults in his way. With only the awareness of an improved teacher/student relationship, I did not realize that Joe was playing Joe's game. Joe's efforts were minimal and his behavior appropriate occasionally but the change brought such a relief that I eased off, praised him lavishly, and even tempered my usual cause/effect discipline. Who was controlling the learning environment now? Certainly not me, as I was soon to find out.

The second trick was the answer to the puzzle of who was teaching whom. The trick was not played out until June, but was contrived by Joe during those sick days of mine in March. The

time of revelation came during clean-up, those glorious days before summer vacation when paperwork, inventories, repair slips, and other non-essential teaching jobs fill your days. A tape in the tape recorder was part of an inventory that didn't fit anywhere. It wasn't mine, and it wasn't part of the school's supply. Only after close scrutiny of the label did I know who it belonged to. On the label there was scrawled this message - to teach form Joe "What's this all about?" I thought. "When did he do this? I've got to remember to tell Sue to keep her eyes on him at all times next year. Boy, this kid is determined to haunt me."

My initial reaction was to pack the tape away. Ignore the nonsense that was probably recorded. However, my innate curiosity got the best of me and I pushed the play button to hear my student deliver his final lecture to me that year.

"Miss Peters," it said. "There is something real wrong with you. Well, I say to them, you gotta take care of yourself. Can't count on anyone. One day you hate my guts. Next day when you need me to help you, you like me. Just like home. Never know what's gonna happen. Well, thanks for nothing. Maybe you should get help like me. They make me talk, play with dolls and draw creepy pictures. That's how they find out what's going on in my brain. I try to hide it, like you. Hope you do something or the kids are gonna call you the witch."

I was outraged. Who did this boy think he was? I did the best I could. Can't teach someone who doesn't want to learn. Who does he think he is, telling me what to do? Just what I need a child telling me I need professional help. Yet throughout this bitter conversation with myself, I sensed that some of what Joe said was true. Not consciously, not right away. But for some reason, I didn't throw the tape out. In fact, I play it for myself, even now, four years later.

I saw Joe the next year in his new class. As a consultant, I visited his teacher and taught lessons to small groups within the class. Joe was never a part of my group, by his choice. He never spoke to me, but cautiously eyed my movements. Reports from this school mirrored my experiences with Joe. He continued to be unmanageable, unearthing, uneducable. He was still receiving counseling help, but the results of this help were not known by the school personnel. Whenever I looked at Joe, the tape message was playing again.

In retrospect, Joe diagnosed my problem correctly. I did little to help him learn or feel successful. However, his message helped me to learn and create a successful change for myself. I transferred jobs to a middle school class with learning disabled teenagers. I went back to school and finally completed my sixth year degree. I took up oil painting, piano lessons, craft making and
Everything was perfect, except for one thing. A situation I dreaded, feared and resented was developing. Joe was to be a member of my class. After a year of joy and stability, I was facing my past, with its failures. How was I ever going to cope with Joe again? How could I ever help him like he had helped me? There was no excitement as I prepared to start that school year.

Cope, I did. In fact, the past two years with Joe in my class have been as successful and as exciting as it was when I began teaching. Joe was a changed boy or was I the changed person. Joe will tell you quite frankly that we both have changed. He says we've grown up. Maybe, that's so. In March, Joe publicly displayed his growth by attaining honor roll grades. Joe credits his success to me, and I credit his success to his effort and ability. In June, Joe completed another lecture evaluation. This time he drew a picture, 'You're the best teacher I'll ever have. Love, Joe'

"What haunts me," says Van DeVanter, "is that nobody knows of the contribution of these women. The major legacy study of Vietnam veterans does not include one woman. The mother of the boy who lost his face has no idea that somebody was standing and holding her son's hand. Even the ones who were triaged out, the 'expectant ones', were not just shunted over to a corner. Somebody would always go and take their hand and speak to them quietly, just in case they could hear."

—Myra MacPherson, in Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation

For now
let me keep it just a dream
It will be my lover's hand
I hold
Soft breaths rocking
Gently
Us
To and fro
Winding through moon-painted stillness

What evil village
ghost
Comes to frighten
me
He claims this touch
which binds us
close
Is blood
wrapped
Softly over and over
With my fatigue
his pain

Remember when
touch
meant laughing eyes, strong wine,
Singing sweet, your eyes
so dark I could
lose myself, man's spirit
Laughing across the pond
on uncharted map
The tent grows cold  
I wake  
now dawn  
No lover, no stranger  
Just another soldier  
Wounded boy, dead boy  
Our touch only connected  
Bandage, to blood,  
to gaping hole  
to life's fleeting form.  

Standing here  
Looking down  
I feel I could  
stand Forever  

Tell me again  
this is only a dream  
Today is today  
Summer tan, warming rains  
Tell me husband,  
how you love me,  
Won't leave me alone  
It scares me so  
for the hand to ever be  
too young  
too brotherly  
Locked in mine  
Held in war's time

DEAR AUNTIE MABEL

Joan Sereda

My Great Aunt Mabel dearest Auntie Mabel  
still pictured acrobatting roof to tree  
chasing after Daddy with a paper hornets' nest  
bouncing bumpety-bump in a fisherman's net  
buzzing hornets in pursuit laughing  

And in your one-of-a-kind black and white  
lace rubber bathing suit leaping from the  
crazy quilt high dive platform Daddy built  
who held the rope that noosed about your  
waist so when you sank like an anchor  
seeking a home you bubbled and coughed  
hove to shore like a round wet tire  

And packing a surprise-surprise snack  
for a Saturday afternoon's matinee with  
hers two best pals my brother and me  
a fried chicken leg picnic raisin pie  
peanut butter and banana wheels  
buttermilk biscuits with raspberry jam  
Ronald Coleman Random Harvest  

Slipping a fin I mean five dollars to  
a five year old to place my first bet  
on a chestnut filly sharing my birthday  
at the Woodbine racetrack  
and acting as social secretary to invite  
a circle of friends to tea  
Coquetta the French doll courtesan  
the painted lead clockmaker  
the jovial oriental noodle vendor  
Marvellena the lady acrobat on her  
green horse with silver eyes and  
bad BigBoy her nippy Pekingese  
sipping from the see-the-moon-through  
Japanese bluebird teacups on a  
lawn cloth stitched in open work  
by my dearest Auntie Mabel
And appearing unexpected at the cottage only reached at the high risk of broken axle punctured gas tank gasping radiator or incredibly by foot around the whole of lovely lonely Meach Lake deep within the Laurentian woods skirting lac Philippe a brave and feckless marathon for an English speaking middle aged lady in French Canadian territory but Auntie Mabel looked no worse for wear in her Mandarin straw coolie hat striped beach pajamas and high heeled toeless pumps and her big dark sunglasses almost hid two blue black eyes an ugly gift that silent Uncle Norman drunken home late from guarding the Parliament buildings gave her because she was there to receive it protested to us that she bruised just from a glance from Uncle Norman

A LETTER

Barbara Cohen

Dear Superintendent of Schools:

At last night's Board of Education meeting you made a statement that the issues of sexism and stereotyping no longer require much attention. I disagree. The truth is that these prejudices are still pervasive within our educational system and have a negative effect on females and males alike.

The goal of education should be to encourage students to maximize their potential and pursue their unique talents. Studies indicate that truly creative individuals are both sensitive and independent. Unfortunately in our society, females are brought up to be sensitive but not independent; the reverse is true for males. Eleanor Maccoby's work on sex differences concludes that the highest achievers are those individuals who are the least conforming to male/female stereotypes. Furthermore, the highest rate of neuroses, drug abuse, and alcoholism occurs among those who exhibit role rigidity.

Are you aware how early children learn the behaviors and attitudes that are considered appropriate for their gender? By the age of three, most children will categorize activities, toys, clothes, colors, and occupations as male or female. By the time they enter first grade, many boys and girls firmly believe boys are better. In a recent Colorado study, elementary children were asked what their lives would be like if they were the opposite sex. Most of the boys wrote about how awful their lives would be. One replied he would kill himself. The girls' responses indicated that they believed their lives would be better and more exciting. The only disadvantage they noted was not being able to express their feelings openly. When I asked my fourth graders to respond to the same question, one boy described it as a "disability" because he would have to remain in the house while the boys went out to play.

Can we expect our sons to be good fathers when they have been discouraged from overt displays of affection and nurturing experiences? My son's kindergarten teacher was appalled when he brought a male doll to class. I was informed that parents complained. Would they have the same reaction if a girl brought in a truck?

And what is the message this teacher conveys to her students
when she warns them that if they do not cooperate immediately, they will have to line up boy/girl? When a child asks her why she views this as punishment, she replies, "If that's not bad enough, I'll think of something worse." Why is the polarization of the sexes acceptable? Why have we allowed our culture to define our lives according to our gender? If there is a genetic basis for the division of the sexes, why are behaviors that are viewed as male in one culture, considered female in another, and vice versa? For instance, in Liberia, the women thatch roofs and the men do the weaving. We are all unique individuals. A particular child may have more in common with the opposite sex than with a child of like gender. Yet, males and females grow up in separate worlds with different rules and expectations. Male/female work experiences and personal relationships might be more successful if children were encouraged to maintain friendships with both sexes.

Do educators realize the powerful influence they have on their students? When an elementary teacher asks for strong boys to carry tables to the gym, he fails to recognize that many girls at this age are bigger and stronger than their male peers. Consequently, he reinforces the notion of female helplessness.

Helplessness is a liability. The average female lives to her mid seventies. At some point in their lives, women face the prospect of being on their own, either because they remain single, or are divorced or widowed. Our educational system needs to do more to prepare its female students for economic and emotional self-sufficiency. Despite the drastic increase in women's participation in the labor force, the majority of females are employed in the lowest paid, traditional, less upwardly mobile occupations. Even in areas where women predominate, males earn higher salaries. Furthermore, the median income for a female college graduate is less than a male who has only completed eighth grade.

What is the guidance department doing to convince females of the importance of science and mathematics? Are you comfortable with the fact that the verbal SAT scores of your male and female students are comparable while the males' mathematics scores are approximately fifty points higher? Natural ability? If you examine the math scores of males and females who have taken similar courses, the differences in their scores are negligible. This issue must be addressed as many females find their career choices limited because they have neglected to take the necessary math and science courses required for careers that have not been traditionally open to women.

What about the literature our children read? One would never know that women comprise about fifty-one percent of the population by sampling children's books. Male characters involved in varied and exciting adventures, predominate. The characters in animal stories are most often male as well. Females, when included, generally have passive, insignificant or negative roles. Did you know that Scott O'Dell had great difficulty finding a publisher for his book, Island of the Blue Dolphins, because they did not think it would sell with a female main character.

Is there equality in sports? Consider the undefeated girls junior high soccer team. They were asked by their female coach to return their new uniforms because there was a shortage of uniforms for the boys' team. The girls complied and were then issued the boys' old tattered suits to use for the remainder of the season. Not only does this action violate a law, the message that girls are second class citizens is resoundingly clear.

Traditionally girls have been discouraged from participating in team sports because of the fear of serious injury. Nonetheless, there is no evidence that proves strenuous exercise or contact sports are more harmful for girls than boys. Ironically, gymnastics and softball, the supposed "female" sports, are the two areas where most school injuries occur.

Boys tend to get together in groups. In my neighborhood, boys of all ages frequently gather to play baseball, street hockey or basketball. The spirit of cooperation and lessons in team management they learn through the group process provide an excellent training ground for their assumption of leadership roles in adulthood. Girls generally miss out on this experience. Traditional girls' activities, such as playing with dolls and dress-up, tend to foster passivity. Preparing females for motherhood and domesticity are its major achievements. Yet, not all women are meant to be mothers.

Did you know that Margaret Mead studied a tribe in New Guinea that believes only those born with umbilical cords wrapped around their necks can become great artists. I am certain it is no surprise to you that all recognized artists in this society are born this way. When a culture predetermines the life choices available to people without regard for individual abilities, it is not unusual that they wind up choosing the assigned path. Why should anyone be denied the opportunity to determine his/her own future simply because society has stereotyped the attributes or abilities required to perform certain tasks? How different would your life be if our culture believed that only red-haired females could become superintendent of schools?

I believe that the educational system has an obligation to encourage each student to pursue his/her unique talents without regard to stereotyped expectations. I look forward to working with you to accomplish this goal.
INSIDE-OUT
(A Thank-You Note to Peter Meyer)

Esther Heffernan

I love teaching. But my teaching for the last three years has been different from that of the first eight. I did many things that I call right, and I did many things that today I call wrong.

My students always wrote. They picked their topics. Their writing improved. We read and discussed. Some came back to thank me. But I had to ignore nagging questions. What if a student wanted to change his topic in midstream? What if she wanted her friend to help her? What if he were bored by his writing? What if we only talked about the important writing, like poetry, after school? How come my reading of a text was often received unenthusiastically?

Today my teaching experience is richer and less troublesome. This is not the result of gradual evolution. It represents a radical change wrought by a radical experience. During a writing workshop I was a pupil in the kind of atmosphere I now try to create. I learned that to teach writing remembering those papers in college is not enough: I must write. I learned that when I found answers myself, I didn't sulk or criticize the inadequacies of the teacher. I learned that the teacher's attitude is the whetstone that sharpens students' minds. I did not acquire new tricks, nor have I purchased the ultimate textbook. I underwent what several modern writers call a paradigm shift. Certain underlying assumptions infuse my teaching and allow me to perceive what to do and how to do it in the classroom.

These assumptions are:

(1) Talking to students isn't teaching. Because I was rewarded for my good memory of what my teachers said, I had assumed this constituted learning. I now hold that learning is integrating new material.

(2) This integration is not fed from outside-in but moves from inside-out.

(3) Discussion alone is not always adequate for this integration. Students need diverse tools.

(4) The most effective tool to work with new material is writing.

(5) Writing is learning. Writing teaches writing.

(6) My students and I are writers and teachers and students.

Clearly, writing permeates all my teaching, starting with lesson plans that are born on the page. We do all kinds of writing with less guilt and with more help. I am a coach. I build on strength and often weight. I am slow to evaluate and quick to say, "It just isn't finished yet," or "You had to write that paper. You can do my assignment next time." We read and write before we talk about literature. I exhort. Write what you think the author is saying. Write what you think about what the author is saying. Write a dialogue arguing both sides. Write in a third party and settle the argument. Write a theory.

I acknowledge the power and value of personal writing. Write about what happened to you. Write about what you know. Write persuading someone to see your point. Write what you learned. Write what you feel, and write what you think about what you've done, heard, read. Write a letter.

Classes focus around writing to make meaning in myriad ways. Pass the chalk. Map the eighteenth century on the blackboard. Paper the room with lists, posters, logs, and bumper stickers.

On quiet writing days we don't talk at all, but often we find our souls.

Joy lies in the transfer of learning to students. With this transfer go responsibility and power. No one is on welfare. Students own their work. When this is not appropriate, such as in "You have to do this to write a decent college board essay," I make clear that ownership is now shared. Force-fed wafers of knowledge are soon turned to waste. I can only encourage students to look at what they know, to observe what is new, and then to record their worlds a little larger than before.
Leta Marks

That morning Lisa removed the curlers from her naturally straight brown hair, parted it on the left side a little lower than usual, pulled the grown-out bangs back from her face and tied them, with the grosgrain ribbon she had bought in the dime store the day before. After a quick peek in the mirror, she bounded down the stairs from the bedroom she shared with her sister. She felt a strange stillness in the house. Her breakfast, sitting on the table, waited for her as usual, but her mother had not yet come down. She was used to having her mother there nursing her coffee and reading the morning paper while Lisa ate her breakfast, but this morning her mother was not there. Barbara, her sister, sat quietly finishing her math assignment. Ever the student, she always re-worked everything, even though it was probably perfect from the previous night's work. Lisa always had to have Daddy help her do hers.

"Why are you wearing that stupid blue bow?" her sister jeered.

Lisa's stomach knotted as she felt the bow grow heavy in her hair. She never questioned her sister's judgements and criticisms, just cringed a bit, feeling stupid and clumsy. She didn't say anything and there wasn't time to go back upstairs to change her hair back to the old way. They picked up their books and brown bags smelling deliciously of tuna fish and ran the two blocks to catch the streetcar to school. It was strange that their mother hadn't come down or even called good-bye, but they didn't have time to wonder why.

Lisa and Barbara separated as they entered the school. Barbara hurried ahead. Lisa, familiar with this routine dropped behind, knowing that Barbara didn't want to be seen with her. All of Barbara's friends belonged to the same high school sorority, wore their pins in the same correct spot on their buttoned-in-back cardigan sweaters, were able to wear pleated skirts that stayed in neat rows, and laughed at little sisters. Lisa hurried to her locker in the humid, steel-gray basement of the old brick building. She took one last longing sniff of her lunch before walking reluctantly to her sixth-grade classroom.

The room was already filled with giggling children as Lisa appeared at the door. At her presence, the room suddenly quieted down as if a lid had been placed on a bubbling pot of red beans. Lisa felt eyes staring at her and wished she hadn't worn that blue bow in her hair that morning. Awkwardly, she slid into her seat, put her books in the desk, and the geography lesson began. No one spoke to her. Even the teacher avoided calling on her that morning. None of her friends sat with her at lunch, either, so she sat alone nibbling at her tuna fish sandwich. Somehow, she got through the day at school; but, it was endless! She was aware only of her loneliness that day, wondering why she was born so stupid, so ugly, and why she could have believed that blue bow looked nice in her hair when she tied it carefully that morning.

Lisa usually rode the streetcar home with her friend Patty. It was their ritual to get off the streetcar three blocks before their stop and buy ice cream cones at the corner drug store. They usually shared licks and school talk on the rest of the walk home. That afternoon right after the last bell, Patty had left immediately with Karen. Lisa didn't even see them when she went down to her locker. She hated Patty then, both of them. The heavy clack of the streetcar seemed to mock her, but she held back the sobs that rumbled inside her that had been growling there all day. Even the ice cream didn't console her as she finished the walk home alone. On the way up the walk to her house, she put her books down for a moment, and ripped the blue ribbon from her hair, feeling a sharp pain. She threw the rumpled blue ribbon into the bushes. The tears welled in her eyes as she entered the dark silent hall of her home. She flung her books on the hall table and ran up the long stairs to her room. Alone in their room with her face in the pillow sat her sister with a crumpled newspaper beside her. Lisa heard her sister's barely audible cry: "Everyone knows...it's awful. It's been in the papers. Daddy's gone...he's...he's in jail...What will I do?..."

Lisa stood frozen in the doorway of the room. Slowly she turned, descended the stairs, opened the front door, crawled under the bush, and found the blue ribbon. As she went back upstairs, she tenderly folded the ribbon. Once again in her bedroom, she carefully placed the blue ribbon in her top dresser drawer. She would wear it in her hair tomorrow.
Rain has gotten wetter now that I have a daughter, or maybe it's just that I get wetter while I wait for her to meander to our destination — I should say my destination, which has little to do with where she wants to go.

Just the simple act of checking my campus mailbox can take an hour. First, we have to park in the student lot, which is far enough away to provide aerobic exercise for someone trying to avoid a heart attack, but with a toddler in tow, the journey can seem like crossing the Mississippi River on a raft. After convincing Rosie to get out of her car seat, I let her decide which one of her toys she'd like to bring along: the doll or the horse or the train, but not all and not any combination of two. If we bring two, there'll be two to lose and two to find — which we don't have time for.

Meanwhile, the rain comes down willingly and rapidly. I'm too busy organizing my daughter to bother putting on my raincoat. She has taken off her poncho, so I slip it back over her head and she shrieks as though I'm trying to suffocate her with a plastic bag.

"Shhh," I say. "Do you want to get wet?"

"Yes," she answers.

"Listen," I say, "I've got work to do. Move it."

She refuses my help getting down from her chariot, catches her shoe in the car seat strap, and tumbles toward the wet pavement. As I catch her, my bookbag slides off my shoulder and spills notebooks onto the ground. Never mind, I think, and pick them up. My daughter forgets to choose a toy, as she tries to peel a trampled fig newton off the backseat.

"Let's go," I say, and grip her hand. We march under my black umbrella until we reach the sidewalk. As she steps onto the curb, she realizes she has nothing to carry and demands the umbrella.

"No," I say, but she starts walking backward and prepares for a sit down strike. "Okay," I grumble and pass her the enormous umbrella. Thrilled, she struts like an animated mushroom down the concrete path, but keeps veering off into the wet grass. She chatters and sings constantly, like an AM radio station. Several people grin at us as they walk by, swiftly and directly to wherever they want to be. "Cute," they say. I nod and smile back. Yeah, cute but disobedient and spoiled.

"My turn," I say to the mysterious force inside the black ribbed tent following me.

"No," she says, then turns and darts for the duck pond.

"Rosanna," I call enticingly, "Would you like some chocolate milk?" She stops short, drops the umbrella, and runs back to me. "Go get the umbrella," I direct.

"Chocolate milk," she insists.

I fetch the umbrella and point to the brick building where my mailbox waits on the third floor. "There's a milk machine up there," I say. She bounds forward and I chase behind to keep her from running into the street and a rambling green delivery truck.

At last, we enter the building. Why is the English department on the third floor? And what deranged architect put so many stairs between floors? We count each step out loud — eight, eleven, nine. At the second floor landing, my daughter announces, "I have to go peepee." I pick her up like a bag of groceries and sprint for the ladies room.

"Mama, water, water," she begs as we pass the drinking fountain.

"Not now," I bargain. My book bag weighs as much as she does. I feel like abandoning both bundles and taking one of the Caribbean vacations advertised on the bulletin boards. No, my daughter is my treasure. But why is she so noisy and obstinate? Why is she so much like me? Sometimes I feel as though we are Siamese twins.

In the bathroom, she pees a few drops. As the journalism secretary enters, Rosie requests to wash hands with soap and a paper towel and warm water, not cold. How can I refuse in front of an audience? I raise my knee so that Rosie can straddle it and reach the sink.

"How old is she?" asks the secretary. Her white dress has no juice stains or hand smears.

"Two and a half," answers Rosie. She's got her feet in the sink so that she can stand and see herself in the mirror. "Mommy cut my bangs," she tells the secretary.
I almost beg, "Will you watch her while I get my mail?" But of course I can't so I brace myself for the last flight.

Why did that architect make these halls so long? Rosie peeks into every open office and gets the attention of every professor who is peacefully reading. I stop in briefly to ask my advisor about my language exam for the PhD. As we talk, my daughter unbuckles her shoe straps. When I look again, she has taken off her shorts and is about to pull her polka dot t-shirt over her head. I reverse the process, like a movie played backwards and say, "I'll call you," to my advisor.

Again, we aim for the mailbox. Our department chairman strides by as Rosie begins to chant, "I want to go home." She reminds me of Dorothy at the end of Wizard of Oz. I wish I had ruby slippers for doing errands on campus. Click, we're there. Click, we're gone.

My office door is locked. As I search my purse for keys, Rosie helps by taking out my red pen, drawing on her arms, then exploring the contents of my wallet. Another graduate student enters our collective office and my daughter bashfully hides under my skirt, so that I look like a horse in a children's play.

"How do you get anything done?" he asks, as he prepares to grade a stack of papers pulled from his briefcase.

"I don't know," I answer, feeling desperate, jealous, and mystified. My mailbox is empty. "Do you plan to have kids some day?" I inquire.

"No way," he vows. "I like my life just as it is."

"Mom, guess what?" Rosie interrupts, "I love your legs."

I carry her back to the car. She falls asleep on the way home and I keep glancing at the rearview mirror because her mouth looks the same way it did when I first held her.

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SHE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING
Phoebe Ho Bock

All the way to Connecticut, Suzhen had been sucking the salted plum seed her mother had given her to keep down the queasy feeling in her stomach. Rolling the seed around in her mouth she thought about her mother's crazy cure—oils from Tiger Balm ointment, effective for everything from colds to sprains, and the herbal medicine she had brewed for Suzhen to pack in case of headaches. Only Mrs. Kee's assurance to her mother that the school's doctor would be readily available had ended the confrontation.

When they reached Lakeville, Suzhen saw what the Times article meant by baronial houses set on acres of land. My goodness, that amount of soil could be tilled to produce enough rice for her whole village. Houses barely seen from the winding road were concealed by stately trees resembling the magnificent Christmas tree she had seen in the Metropolitan. Some kids swore they knew people who had their own Christmas trees in their houses.

"These are what kind of trees, Mrs. Kee?"

"What kind of trees are these? is the usual way to ask a question. Start the question with 'what.' Anyway, I think they're spruce—probably a mixture of Norway and Colorado Blue spruce, the bluish green ones."

"I bet my father never saw so many different trees in the forests of Guangzhou."

"He wouldn't be familiar with what's growing here, but he's an expert on bamboo, and other tropical vegetation."

"How many families live in that house?" Suzhen pointed to a solid-looking English country manor with a facade of fieldstone, which covered even the two chimneys.

"Probably only one."

"Really? Our whole village of 38 families could live in that."

The driver chuckled as she put the gear into third to climb the hill, which Suzhen dreamily compared to heaven, especially.

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since the sun’s radiance made the countryside intensely bright.

Suzhen was a fifteen-year old with straight black hair, which had been worn in pigtails even after her arrival in the United States two years ago. With flat cheekbones she looked typically Cantonese except for her eyes with epithelial folds which accentuated their enormous size. Her manner of dress was preppy, courtesy of Mrs. Kee, who had been her teacher and whose mission was to help Suzhen make the leap from Mott Street, Chinatown, New York to a prestigious prep school. Suzhen wore a cream-colored button-down long-sleeved shirt with a camel corduroy skirt and docksiders. Besides underwear, her parents had insisted on paying for this outfit, which still cost over seventy-five dollars, a lot of money from a man who did odd jobs in the garment factory.

"Ugh." They both laughed.

"Here we are."

As they got out of the car several young people walked over to them.

"Hi, we’re Valery and Emily, your dorm mates. Here, let us carry some of your stuff."

Thinking about her father reminded Suzhen of the woman sitting in front. She stared at the back of her mother’s tightly curled hair—the terrible permanent. Certainly doesn’t look stylish. Why does she have to do everything those women at the garment do? She even dresses like them in the pants suit that was a reject from the quality control room. She didn’t say much to her mother, who, like her daughter, seemed to be perfectly content to take in the scenery.

Now as Mrs. Kee drove between the massive brick pillars which heralded the Georgian-type buildings covering the landscaped land sloping down to the lake and also stretching out to vast playing fields which could probably grow rice enough to feed her whole province, Suzhen sucked the residual saltiness from the seed. She then extracted it with her fingers. Her impulse had been to spit it out the window, but Mrs. Kee’s presence reminded her that she had to be careful about her manners.

Suzhen could still remember the day the acceptance came with an offer of the scholarship. Mrs. Kee, who had worked so hard helping her with the application and letter of recommendation, was as overjoyed as Suzhen and her family. Mrs. Kee had told her, "You can get ahead by studying hard, but you also have to learn how to mix with the other students.

If you want to be part of the school you must act as if you belong there; otherwise, the students will make you miserable. You have to know how to act so you can hold your head up high knowing you’re just as good as the others. "The pep talk wasn’t enough. Mrs. Kee and her friends followed that with a program of self-improvement for Suzhen. When they took her for tea at The Plaza, they critized her table manners, pointing out that she should use the napkin to wipe her mouth. And how could she not forget to sit with her legs together with her skirt covering her knees? Even such a nasty habit as spitting was discussed.

"Everybody spits. Walk around Chinatown... that seems to be a favorite pastime. Yes, I know; I grew up there too. How well I know the sound of someone’s retching and churning up spittle that splatters on the sidewalk."

"Ugh." They both laughed.

"Here we are."

As they got out of the car several young people walked over to them.

"Hi, we’re Valery and Emily, your dorm mates. Here, let us carry some of your stuff."

Suzhen managed a weak smile, conscious that she hadn’t said a word yet. She didn’t know what to say. She carried her bookbag and trailed along behind Mrs. Kee, the girls, and her mother.

The room she entered was larger than the one Sushen had shared with her grandmother and two sisters. Through the twelve-over-twelve window she could see a lovely view of the mountains. This was going to be home. Certainly it was far more luxurious than she had ever had. Yet when her mother and Mrs. Kee started making the bed for her, the realization that she was not returning to Chinatown with them came upon her.

The girls said, "We’ll come by to take you to the dining hall."

Then they were gone. She hadn’t even introduced people. She’d been too ashamed. Her mother didn’t even speak or understand English. Suzhen cringed even now to hear her mother’s harsh nasal qualities as she recited a whole litany of precautions Suzhen should take, including a reminder to "teng wa"—listen, obey.

When the older women got ready to leave, Suzhen wanted to go with them. But she didn’t say anything.
St. Patrick's Day Parade and see me in my sparkling green uniform notifying us that a donor's eye was ready. The transplant willing donor. We received a phone call at 10:45 Christmas Eve, only working eye, had been waiting for a cornea transplant and a my obviously rattled and frightened mother was one of someone who had just become a character in her most secret fairy tale. My mother, who for 77 years pecked an inch of sight from her from the eye specialist at Massachusetts General in Boston, notifying us that a donor's eye was ready. The transplant operation was scheduled for early the next morning, Christmas Day. Claire's two-and-a-half year wait had ended.

The immediate feeling after the phone was handed to me by my obviously rattled and frightened mother was one of someone who had just become a character in her most secret fairy tale. Ever since I was a kid, I had fantasized what it would be like if Mom could see. I remember wanting her to really view the Holyoke St. Patrick's Day Parade and see me in my sparkling green uniform as the baton twirler leading that shamrock hoopla. I wanted her to be able to spot the measles rash or the chicken pox bumps before Frank, our druggist, or Mrs. Carlon, the next-door neighbor.

I remember that harried ride to Boston and subsequent criss-crossing trips on the Massachusetts Turnpike, feeling like my mind was a Fellini camera with an endless roll of pictures. And as each picture of Mom and her blindness would emerge, I found myself emotionally reliving these scrapbook vignettes in all their intensity. I relived times as a kid when I was embarrassed by Mom's attempts to put on rouge and her clown-like appearance. I remembered how guilty I'd felt that I thought she looked funny. I could almost hear the faint kid's prayer, "I'm sorry I laughed at Mommy."

During those Christmas days and in those post-op months, I often felt juxtaposed between misty eyes and a Felix-the-Cat-like grin. In the hiatus between the operation in December and the removal of bandages and stitches in five-week intervals from January through August, opportunities for reflection were many and childhood memories were unexpected visitors from the past. I often felt a sense of pride and admiration for what Mom had achieved with her microscopic resources. Sitting on her hospital bed the first day after the operation, we questioned her about what she would like to do...if. Claire's first response said so much about the woman who knew more than most about politics, voting records, and international news — all from her teacher — the small transistor radio that was her talking textbook to the secrets of the world. She wanted, she explained, to go to Washington and sit in the Senate and see where John Kennedy's desk was. She wanted to listen to a meeting in session and see what those imaginary figures looked like. As I listened, I felt a keen sense of pride in this woman who never missed a primary or national election or referendum call. I knew she was my teacher for the real meaning of the inalienable right to vote. She let me pull the lever on the voting machine for John F. Kennedy when he ran for President. My first year in high school was her first non-Republican vote besides Roosevelt. Pulling the voting lever was my reward for campaigning for Kennedy and converting her.

Other days and other events caused similar reflections. A year after the operation, as I watched Mom try on new glass frames, I chuckled at her mumblings that "new snazzy fandangled plastic lenses just aren't as good as the ol' sturdy glass kind." I remembered another time, other glasses, and a little girl. Thoughts emerged of a pair of sunglasses ... bright-plastic red and a five-year old girl sitting in a rowboat at Hampton Ponds watching as they fell into the muddy water. I remembered the girl crying and wanting Dad to bring them back. This adult kept focusing her memory ... adjusting to that spot in the murky water where those favorite red sunglasses had disappeared. She remembered wondering where all that water went to anyway and why couldn't Dad have rowed the boat and found where the water emptied. No matter how hard this adult-child concentrated, however, she could only recall faint scenes of that day and the bus ride home to the city... She watched Mom grope her way down the bus stairs, the sunlight an infringement on her almost perfect blindness. Mom often squinted as if she was eating bitter berries, until she gained the security of the last step. Once on her turf, this blind woman became a homing pigeon, gracefully weaving her firm, independent steps through the familiar city streets.

The adult remembered Sundays the most, when she thought of those early years and her mother's influence. Nothing ever since has been as quiet or still as a Sunday in the early '50's. The city seemed to be a painting of a first snowfall in all its hush and simplicity. Peaceful times those long, long Sunday afternoons when you were five. Mom would dress her in shorts and bring her to Aunt Kay's to play with the other back yard kids. She wondered how Mom knew the right colors of those play togs. The firemen would let the water loose from the hydrants and the kids played on and on. The sounds of their giggles seemed to be the only sounds alive. Clocks have no hands when you are five.

...Suppers on those long, long summer nights were another of the memories of those early years. The steaming, teeming, inside heat of the apartment - like stepping on the noonday sidewalk the hottest day of August. She hated to go inside there. Dark, putrid, sticky. Mom standing by that old, beat up stove with her head
almost eyeball to eyeball with the pot. She never recalled Mom using a measuring cup; how could she with windowless eyes?...

Now in the optometrist's office, the adult was brought back to reality, as Mom questioned her about her looks in pair after pair of glasses — her new adventure into the world of sight... Mom had had sunglasses, too, back then, before they weren't needed anymore. Funny, horn-rimmed, silver ones with dark midnight glass, almost the shade of the sky on a stormy November night.... She could tell Mom was nervous about the prospects of whether the glasses would work. In the year since the operation, there were still questions unanswered. Would glasses help what seemed to Mom to be retreating spots of sight? Would the cornea transplant, which the Boston doctors described as "beautiful and clean," be able to mesh with Mom's 79-year old and tattered retina? One Springfield doctor insisted she had nothing to lose by trying the glasses - only two hundred dollars - in reality, pennies, if, IF the opportunity for real sight was in those "plastic-fantangled" glasses. Mom had decided to try the lifeline of hope this doctor believed was potentially there. As I watched her feel the rim of the chosen frames, I could sense her excitement and fear. She decisively handed the windowless frames to the optometrist and questioned how long before the prescription would be filled. I saw familiar lines in Mom's face as she listened to the far-off date announced. I saw that twinkle of excitement that made her still a child, even at 79. It seemed hard to accept that a year had galloped by since that unveiling day in Dr. Boruchoff's office. I remembered the reversal of roles - mother and child turned topsy-turvy. Bandages removed, Mom had been sent back to the waiting room to adjust to the newness of light. I remembered sitting next to her and reading the latest issue of Time and her abrupt nudging and her loud Irish whisper: "What color is that?" Before I had a chance to contemplate and answer, Mom was poised on hands and knees examining the rug colors. She seemed fascinated with the shades of rose in that oriental kaleidoscope at her feet. As I watched her first steps to seeing I thought of Mom as an explorer, a new Magellan in her own right. The tilt of her head as she gracefully returned from floor to chair, alerted me to the impish charting of a new voyage. I remembered the playful smile and tingle in her voice as she asked, "Wonder if Dr. Boruchoff would give me this rug for my new apartment?" Now that I'll be able to see you, you or St. Luke's Home won't find me." I remembered Mom twisted and tilting her lightly peppered hair in the childlike excitement as she came eye to eye with each hue. I chuckled at my own feeble attempts to explain the color of the chairs. How did one explain lime green to anyone, be they seven or seventy-nine?

The strongest image of that unveiling day was of Mom in Dr. Boruchoff's chair as he focused light in the new eye. I became a character again in that scenario. I stepped forward at the doctor's request and fought the mist as he questioned her. "Take a good look. What do you think of her?" An audible giggle emerged as I heard Mom's Irish armor of humor in the quip, "Not bad, not bad. But I want to ask you about that rug in your waiting room. I was wondering if..."

As I thought back on scenes of that day, I realized that humor had been one of Mom's strongest weapons in dealing with the tentacles of disappointments or setbacks. I remembered her mass excitement as the arrival date of the new glasses slowly inched its way closer. I remembered watching the optometrist putting on the new frames and the interminable silence as Mom tilted and squinted. Then the quiet, graceful hand touched and lifted the frames as she said, "I should have known these damn new fandangled things wouldn't be any good. We've got to go looking for my old sunglasses. Those..." I remembered wanting to smash that mirror in the optometrist's office; I wanted to strike back for Mom at those unfair tentacles of fate that made a "beautiful, clean" cornea transplant and a tired, tattered retina incompatible partners, but I knew that she had the better answer as we walked to the parking lot and I listened to her babble... "It wouldn't have been any good if the damn things had worked; I'm too old for such nonsense, besides if I could see I'd need to win the lottery for everywhere I'd want to go and when did the Irish ever have such luck...Let's go buy me a pair of sunglasses until you look for my old ones that's if you weren't such a busy-body and threw them away..."
Growing Up as a Student Mom of 3 Students.... (Or Will Dad Believe the Guinea Pig Had an Immaculate Conception?)

Karen Wright Rohr

The omniscient approach is a term I've coined for one of the most effective ways to keep sane in a household of three teenagers. I'll come home from a hard day in the classroom, mold myself to the furniture, and sit glassy-eyed until something interesting happens. I hear the three of them whispering about what looks like a juicy story. I look up at the ceiling as if for divine guidance, give them a smile that says "I know, I still remember what I did when I was your age, then shake my head. I tsk, "You're so fresh," then look down passively. (Remember I never heard a word they said up to this point.)

Twelfth-grade Ian immediately blurts, "Do you seriously think...?" Today it was, "Do you seriously think Dad wouldn't notice if Jessie (the guinea pig) had babies?" (We have eight already.) What will we tell him? Oh, how about, she's just babysitting for a friend? Opened a daycare center?

How will we take her to Maine this month on vacation? We could set a big cardboard house inside her wooden cage. But, what happens when one piggy goes in the box...and four more crawl out? Dad is kind of absent-minded. But that absent-minded? "Hey, Ma, how 'bout if any crawl out you can yell at us like you always do, something like, 'Why haven't you been feeding them? Look how small they're getting.'"

The subject changes to another area where my UConn behavior modification lessons got plenty of practice...getting them to help out with the chores. Pleading to my son's sense of responsibility will get me nowhere. I think he was born without one. Ordering him to do it will get us into an argument. Sex is the prime motivator. If it's 17-1/2 year old Ian, and the goal is to have him come grocery shopping so he can help with all the bags, I never ask him to come. I wait till he's within hearing distance, then ask Bridgit whether the cute new check-out girl at Stop and Shop is a friend of hers. Luckily, there usually is one.

The same game plan works for haircuts. If I tell him his hair is starting to look like teen singing idol Boy George, what do I get? Another argument...but if I tell him a new group of girls has just started at the hairdressing school, he's on his way.

Our family has never been orthodox. When it was just myself and the kids, I worked my way through 180 credits of a Bachelor's degree, a 36-credit Master's degree in a year, while filling in the rest of the crazy quilt of hours with ways to keep us going financially. Together we created our Mom Away From Home service for college students. The kids and I baked aluminum trays of lasagna, brownies, and chocolate chip cookies. We added to our services as the needs arose. The first to be added was a service that students could not find elsewhere, custom-patching jeans. We would brainstorm together, and no matter how young they were, I'd ask their opinion, maybe what design for the jeans. I started a successful typing business which added resume-writing services, tutoring, newsletters, and much more as the university students graduated, going onto their own businesses, yet still needing "Mom's" support.

One of my student clients became director of a rest home and asked if I would regularly write a reality orientation newsletter. Another opened three restaurants and, the kids and I worked on entree descriptions for the menu.

The service spread to non-students, due to word of mouth advertising. Political candidates from both parties telephoned with impossible deadlines. In the middle of a dancing lesson, an hour before the Governor's Ball, I received an urgent summons to attend ... with my camera and note pad as my escort.

More than once a phone call would start, "I've never heard that you did this before, but would you ...?"

As I never had much contact with people my own age, you might say I grew up with my kids. I had never held a baby in my life until Ian was born. Together we winged it, dealing with life as a unit. When the kids and I made mistakes, we'd shrug them off together and think of new tactics. We may have been well below the national poverty level in funds, but we were upper class in adventure and spirit.

While the upper class traveler was spending thousands of dollars abroad, staying in American hotels and eating in American restaurants and talking almost exclusively to Americans, the kids were learning more about other cultures ... right in our own apartment in the middle of Hartford. It started with foreign students coming to the apartment to have their papers typed. (Other typing services would not accept their business at that time because their use of English was not very good.) In working with these students the kids and I learned some of their language and much of their culture. From a business standpoint I learned that it is far safer to take a personal check from foreign rather than American students.
The first holiday after my divorce went through, I invited some of the foreign graduate students I tutored for Thanksgiving dinner. The kids asked a sweet old man who would often jump rope with them out in front of our apartment. Some looked at old Mr. P, and saw a bum. My kids saw a friend in him. All three kids and I cooked for days, and baked pies for the old people on our street. When the big day came we had more variety than the first Thanksgiving.

The first to arrive was Mr. P., clean-shaven, in a snowy white shirt and pressed suit. The only alcohol we could smell around him was his after-shave. He became the man of the house, I cooked for days, and baked pies for the old people on our street. P, and saw a bum. My kids saw a friend in him. All three kids and with them out in front of our apartment. Some looked at old Mr. They are friends about. All that was that old, it must be very tough.

Christmases were the same. What began as a university-inspired business enlarged into a rather unusual familial network for the three kids. Though many of our holiday visitors did not exactly know what we Americans did during Christmas, they knew it was important. One Christmas we couldn’t afford a tree. Christmas Eve, we had three, two regular trees and one needle-less refugee of Christmas past from a vegetarian friend who couldn’t bear to cut one down...and couldn’t afford to buy a live tree. Friends from all nations began to arrive with homemade goodies, presents for the kids, and decorations, like the Taiwanese origami swans.

My kids and I had an education you couldn’t buy. We became a clearing house of American culture... We were called at all hours to interpret slang, give advice after car accidents, to recommend lawyers, doctors, and read off symptoms of chicken pox. My group at home made a handout for them, based on a Richard Scarry trip to the grocery store, showing clearly defined pictures of various fruits and vegetables, with their labels. They said this was a big help when grocery shopping.

Expecting to find the friendliest people in the world, what they found was housing discrimination. No Puerto Ricans can live in this neighborhood...But, we’re not Puerto Ricans, we’re Arabs...You look like them and that’s close enough for me...You have no right to deny us housing...or anyone else. We handled their correspondence to slumlords,(with carbon copies to housing authorities). We got action. It’s funny, I’ve never considered myself an activist.

The phone calls did not go one way only, either. When we had a need and one of the students found out about it, the network spread the word. Suddenly a friend would appear, supposedly with a typing job, but in reality with a solution to our problem. When my car had broken down, and I couldn’t afford to have it fixed for a month, Mohammed joked (about "fakroonahs" which is Arabic slang for turtles and that is what they called Volkswagens) as he arranged to travel to school with his cousin and left me his "fakroonah" to drive.

Once, the kids had a hard time connecting the idea of social studies in school with social studies at home. One day my son came home complaining that all those African countries were the same, only the names were changed. How could he tell one from the other? Our friend, Omar, slipped his long robelike djellabia over his head, packed a bagful of 'Sudanese mystique' - ostrich eggs, 'elephant tusk' earrings, ivory statues and more. He loved kids, and thoroughly enjoyed his performance for Ian’s fifth grade class. Omar bought every copy of the newspaper in which my article about his classroom visit appeared,...and sent copies to friends and relatives all around the world.

As the foreign students graduated and returned to their motherlands, almost every one of them offered me his car "as a small token" of our friendship, but, broke as we were, I couldn’t accept the cars - or the airline tickets they sent for us to visit. Damn the Protestant Work Ethic.

Today, as my kids hear reports of foreign affairs, they know firsthand that there is much more to the story. They are friends with almost as many top government officials throughout the world as bedouin in the middle of the Sahara because many received their graduate degrees in Business from the University of hartford, and, when no one else would help them, we would.

Even the street where we lived was a treasure dug out of a tag sale. Mornings we would be awakened by the Puerto Ricans' cockfight cock crowing. Then would come black Norman Wright's operatic bass voice resonating above the clanking and clinking of the grocery cart full of 5-cent beer cans and bottles. He would wait in front of the package store until it opened at 8 a.m. to restock for one more day. "Sit ohown my lap, babeee. I wohri't hurt you," he’d call to any female passerby.

Another early morning character was the man who said he was married to one of the Von Trapp sisters. Daily he would pass by, very well-groomed, weighed down by an expensive briefcase. One day he sat down on our steps with us and showed us the snapshots in his wallet. Sure did look like the Von Trapp sisters,
and that certainly was him in the picture. You never know.

Then we had our local pervert. Youngest daughter Melissa came home from school one day, very indignant. It seems he had told her, "show me yours and I'll give you a quarter."

"Humph. Only a quarter," she said.

Everytime we went outside the door of our apartment, we had a story in the making. A 15-minute roost on our front steps could bring us hot t.v.'s, movie or 35 mm cameras, delivered no extra charge, right to our door.

All I would have to do is wash the curtains in our front window, and immediately one Puerto Rican family after another would be ringing our buzzer, thinking our apartment was for rent.

A walk with our dog, Kelly, was a lesson in Spanish-Made-Easy. One day Bridgit returned from taking Kelly around the block and asked me what 'manana' meant. I told her 'tomorrow,' why? Because a carful made kissing noises at me and yelled 'Manana, Chickee, manana.' (Manana was soon enough for her.)

Sometimes we would be the ones to shock the neighbors. Our dog, a 50-pound male, had been hit by a car while he was romping in the country. When it came time for him to relieve himself, he couldn't stand. I had to carry him down three flights of stairs, going from bush to bush, lifting his leg for him. Where we lived you had to do a lot before you were stared at.

In addition to two buildings full of Hartford Stage actors, with their quirks, the street adjoining ours was called "The Fruit Loop." No matter what your sex was, you were fair game. One blustery winter's eve I was so muffled in jackets, hats and scarves that a driver followed me all around the block, trying to figure out what sex I was, "Hey," he'd shout in his best godfather gravel, "Are you a girl or a guy?" (I'll never tell.)

Over the past 17 years, we saw it all, the murders, muggings, rapes, car thefts and much more. The problem wasn't the neighbors as much as the transients. Nestled between an area of group homes (including a prison halfway house) and a home for wayward girls, our street was increasingly popular. One of the more colorful transient groups was a motorcycle gang, who sat on a fifth floor window ledge bare-ass naked.

I'll never understand it. In spite of the conditions of our ever-changing environment, the "bad" neighborhood, our friends loved to come over, often staying for days at a time. ???

We have left Fraser Place for a more conventional lifestyle
BIRTHING

Lamont Thomas

"The moment I saw..." Saw what, who — the bulging vaginal wall, his crowning head, her wrinkled face? Fran Shaw, author of 30 Ways to Help You Write, leads this afternoon's session of the Connecticut Writing Project. She just suggested four opening words after hearing my initial first timed freewriting product. Colleagues to my left dutifully cite the main idea of their beginnings, then receive Fran’s impressions and instructions for proceeding.

Sixteen perspiring, aspiring writers again try to relax. The soothing, nurturing voice of my writing mentor. Once more, arouses irresistible flashes from another time and place—perspiring, aspiring parents poised before childbirth. Fran's commands replicate mine to my wife years earlier. "Completely relax your body. Release tensions. Concentrate on your forehead... shoulders, hands, and fingers. Breathe deeply." Seconds race by. Any moment Fran will shift us into the writing mode to end this holding pattern, as if we were astronauts poised for lift-off.

Writer's block suddenly vanishes, replaced by the obvious, as though a leviathan parts the waves to assume control. "The moment I saw Fran Shaw..." Of course. Her process of relaxation paves the way to my content — a couple's childbirth experiences. The word "Begin" releases energy. My pen starts moving in order to create a second draft.

The moment I saw Fran Shaw I knew we had a commonality. Her bearded husband and grinning offspring gave the clue; he stood near the door, the child rode serenely on the father's back. The couple, although separately going about their tasks, moved as two bonded in spirit between themselves and with their child. Fran appeared relaxed, happy; her husband focused a video camera to record her presentation. Almost mysteriously, father and child inconspicuously vanished. Fran smiled to us and gestured a welcome.

Her relaxation process produces a flow of recollections, wonderful moments of peace and sharing with my wife during the births of our two children. My mind recalls the exotic, erotic, joyful, loving, caressing times we shared during the coming of Byron, now aged ten, and Angela, just eight. We had discovered the writings of British author Sheila Kitsinger at the time of Byron's birth, then spent hours re-reading, recording, and practicing hers and other related psycho-prophylactic techniques. I visualize our training sessions on a tattered rug within sight of Nantucket harbor. I picture Marge, a tower of strength, breathing deeply and blowing off tension. We worked with child-like excitement.

The pen slips through my perspiring fingers, and I'm angry at the distraction.

Our bond, mine with the presenter - through her process of meditation and relaxation - parallels mine with my wife. Past and present meld into one. Our children's arrival through a loving birth process - not always easy but a bonding, intercommunion between husband and wife - assume renewed meaning. Ironically, joy, peace, the power of exchange between Marge and I humanize this aging brick hospital-like edifice at the University of Connecticut. What a joke that writing, teaching, birthing, bonding, and sweating converge in such an unlikely institutional setting!

Bodies resume their shapes about me. Their presence looms as my concentration wanes. Legs rock from side to side, erasers scratch wrinkled paper, desks creak on the scarred linoleum floor, and, thank God, birds chirp a melodic line through the protruding windows.

Strangely, these diverse images have a unifying message about the beginnings of one family, about beginnings of many kinds. These teachers are yet as unfamiliar to me as they are to each other, but I could sense another process. Could a bonding transpire between us? And, could the birthing of prose possibly approach the birthing of children, both creations restlessly emerging to find life and meaning?

"Please finish the thought you're on..." came the instructions to stop, and yet the seed had been planted. The birthing process was underway.
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