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 166 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:

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SOUNDINGS

by

Members of the  
Connecticut Writing Project  
Summer Institute 1988

Edited by Laura Hayden  
and by CWP Staff

Connecticut Writing Project  
Storrs, Connecticut  
1988
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INTRODUCTION

The seventh Connecticut Writing Project Summer Institute was held in Storrs from July 5 to July 28, 1988. The sixteen participants--elementary and secondary teachers--were dynamic, dedicated professionals who joined together to learn more about the teaching of writing and more about themselves as writers. They accomplished these goals by studying and practicing writing intensively every day for four weeks.

During the four weeks of the Summer Institute, most mornings were spent discussing recent research on writing, arguing writing issues, and presenting workshops on aspects of the writing process and classroom applications. Guest speakers also addressed the Institute and focused on particular aspects of teaching and learning. Writing groups met during afternoon sessions. In groups of four the Summer Fellows critiqued and revised compositions in each of four modes of discourse: personal, narrative, analytical, and persuasive--and through the 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 group.

The writings of this outstanding group of teachers demonstrate their creative talents. Many of the participants carried one topic through the four modes of discourse; others changed to new topics during the four weeks. Only by reading all four writings from each author can the depth of their involvement with the writing process be fully appreciated. These writings here, however, indicated the quality of their work and explain in part why we were inspired and enriched by working with the 1988 Summer Fellows. We thank them for these writings and for their participation during the summer.

--Ann Policelli and Ralph Wadsworth
Summer Institute Coordinators
During the cool days last week I tackled the attic: filled bags for the Salvation Army, tossed out scraps of curtains no longer hanging and patterns too small for any of us. The charcoal yarn took more thought. Peg gave it to me eleven years ago. "I know how much you like to knit," she had explained. "Maybe you can use these skeins for mittens for the children--they're all wool. If you can't or even if you decide you don't want them, just give them to the Children's Services Thrift Shop."

I didn't know then what is common knowledge now: the would-be suicide often signals her intentions or cries for help by giving away precious possessions. Eleven years ago I considered the gift of yarn, fabric, and a lovely Lenox dish a sign that she, like most people, was a neater housekeeper than I.

Because of my ignorance, I wasn't prepared for Joyce's phone call that beautiful Friday afternoon. Later, my children noted that it was, after all, Friday the thirteenth, so the superstitions must be true. When the phone rang at three, and Joyce said, "I thought I should call before Kevin came home to make sure you heard what happened," I imagined some unpleasantness at school--a fight, a fire--not her next line. "This morning Peg Milton killed herself, jumped off the Putnam Bridge. I thought you should keep Kevin home so he wouldn't just go running down there to play and find out that way."

We've all wished at times that we had extra hands. Right then I wished I had extra hearts. One heart was breaking for Peg, a beautiful friend who must have masked a torment I never glimpsed. Another heart was breaking for me; I'd lost someone I'd cared about and shared with. ("Let's play piano duets someday. I have 'The Nutcracker Suite' arranged for four hands." "That's fine," she said, "but before we begin, I must tell you something. You've heard of cleaning women who say they don't do windows? Well, I don't do sharps.") I needed another heart for Kevin who always considered Peg his second mother. Her two boys, one seven and the other nine, were constant playmates, fellow bikers, swimmers, cowboys. How do I tell this terrible truth to an eight-year-old? Or to his eleven-year-old sister?

My husband was all for hiding the truth. We had to say something to keep Kevin away from a house filled with police and clergy. We had to indicate that all our lives would from that day be different. We did not, according to Mike, have to tell the whole story. If Peg had taken an overdose of medicine, that might have been a practical possibility, but a dramatic gesture like hers was county-wide news, easily learned at school or on TV if not from us. I was all for total honesty. I believed that trust between parent and child is more potent than pain. And distrust between parent and child more dangerous.
Moving Sentiments
by Bill Evenski

It dawned on me, as I waited to back my car out of my driveway, that Mystic may be the smallest town in the country to experience gridlock. Maybe traffic snarls are habit forming: even on vacation, New Yorkers need their fix. Or maybe the daily breakdown's due to incompatible driving styles or motorists from New York, Massachusetts, and Ontario are really too volatile a mix.

I'd had plenty of time to consider the traffic over the last decade--actually, I could have read Moby Dick while stalled near the Seaport. Increased traffic had become a fact of life, the Mystic version of Murphy's Law: If you're in a hurry, the bridge will go up.

We'd adjusted in the ten years we'd been living in our house just north of the Seaport. In summer, there were certain times of day we just wouldn't, say, bother to go to the store, like afternoon, and certain times we learned not to try to get off the highway to come home, like morning. We left town for especially hectic times, like the Art Festival or the Boat Parade. And August. During the rest of the year we ignored the busy road between our house and the river which had attracted us to it. When Gloria hit, we hoped for oceanfront property.

Everyone admitted the traffic problem. They did what people do when they admit a problem. They formed a committee.

Meanwhile, we noticed an ominous trend. The tourist season was going big-league. Another chilling thing was happening. They weren't going home. I don't mean they checked into the local Ramada or Hilton for life. It was worse. They bought houses I wanted for prices I couldn't afford. And they bought the hundreds of luxury condominiums springing up like mushrooms after a rainstorm.

Condomania was an early warning. Gentrification was the coup de grace. Sandy's, a local food emporium, began to stock fruits I couldn't recognize and cheeses whose names I couldn't pronounce. It became impossible to buy a T-shirt in town, unless it was hand-painted and sold for $42.50, or said something like "Mystic: a whale of a town." Exclusive shops had branches in Mystic, Manhattan, and Palm Beach. Really exclusive shops had branches just in Mystic. The local lumberyard, the kind of place where they'd rip a board for you, was sold for an "undisclosed amount." I knew what that meant: a pot of gold. And I knew what they'd build: more condos.

As a family we suffered through those days. We grew in our knowledge of pain and of healing. Now I think it's time to take Peg's place. It was the one covered with new grass and a stone reflecting the sunlight.

As a family we suffered through those days. We grew in our knowledge of pain and of healing. Now I think it's time to take Peg's place. It was the one covered with new grass and a stone reflecting the sunlight.

We had the luxury of a little time. School, with its gossip, was out for the weekend, and the body had yet to be recovered, so funeral plans were incomplete. Over two days we told the story in stages. First, there was an accident. Later, the accident was intentional. Then, even adults can't understand how someone so special could do something so painful. Finally, what we hoped was the most reassuring message, people who are terribly sad can find help.

It didn't help that we were all terribly sad for many days. Jane and Kevin wondered aloud whether their grieving mother might choose the same end to her misery. It was a time for explaining that it's good to cry for the death of a friend, that tears are healthy, that this grief would pass with time even though our memories would live. It was also a time to talk of hope, of my joy in every new morning, of my unshakeable plans to be there at the next Little League game and French horn recital, the high school graduations, the marriages, at whatever futures they would create.

What could we say and do for Peg's family? Kevin begged to listen to my first phone call, but I could not imagine keeping my composure with him in the room and Tom on the other end of the line. "Grown-ups," I told him, "sometimes find things hard to do, and this is too hard for me to do with you watching." There were, of course, the neighborhood flowers, but no calling hours and no public funeral. The small hilltop cemetery was a bit overgrown. We said our good-byes on another beautiful afternoon. We didn't have to look long for Peg's place. It was the one covered with new grass and a stone reflecting the sunlight.

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As a family we suffered through those days. We grew in our knowledge of pain and of healing. Now I think it's time to take Peg's yarn to the thrift shop. Her gifts to me, and mine to my children, are of stronger stuff than wool.
It was like *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, but more on the scale of the British presence in India. I began to read the history of the Pequots, the original inhabitants of the town. I thought of the state motto, "he who is transplanted sustains." I had never thought of it as a warning before.

Located halfway between Boston and New York and relatively undeveloped, Mystic had become the focal point for a land rush reminiscent of Oklahoma. Describing this orgy of acquisition, the local newspaper declared Mystic the new Gold Coast.

Gold Coast or not, I was still being paid in wampum. Our wigwam, however, was going platinum.

When sociologists write about housing in our century, they'll need to invent a new word. Maybe they'll call us hydrophiles, from the Latin roots for "lovers of water." Only the Great Chicago Fire or marathoning in the Sahara could top our passion for water. Houses which, in inland Preston, would be "starters," by the shore command prices which Midas might mortgage. "Oceanfront," "riverside," "waterfront," or "cove"; "water rights," "island," "harbor," or "beach"; "dock," "point," and "mooring"; or "Fisher's Island Sound" are chanted in real estate incantations of greed. My favorite is "winter water glimpses," which conjures up images of standing on a stool in an upstairs bathroom straining in the December light through high-powered binoculars for a hint of distant blue.

Actually, that might beat fighting this traffic to get a closer look.

I decided we'd use "riveting river and Seaport views" in the ad listing the house.

---

13 Ways of Procrastinating into a Poem  
by Sandra Geres

I  
Arriving home I think once again  
of the writing I must do today  
But the raspberries call through the voice of my son,  
And I help his five-year-old fingers explore the ripe fruit.  
I hold one up to the sun and watch light try to shine through.

II  
Remembering that adage about all work and no play ...  
I glide back and forth on the swing with my daughter.  
Her raspberry smiles and the breeze start me singing  
We create a duet that's happy and quite out of tune.

III  
Duty calls.  
Supper served, dishes washed,  
Bubbles splashed, stories read, eyelids drowse ...  
Now I'm one of the sleepyheads. Alert! Awake!  
It's time to write!

IV  
Preparations. Wipe the kitchen table.  
Should I scan the horoscope to predict my luck? Hmm, hard to tell.  
Find a pencil near the phone.  
Wait -- a note. Marjorie called. I must call her back!

V  
My stubby pencil needs sharpening.  
After making my way downstairs  
I grab a quick look in the fridge. Oops --  
That 2 1/2 week old rhubarb still sits in there.  
I cut that up and cook it.  
Yes, add strawberries.  
I get them from the freezer, place them on a plate before me  
And watch them thaw.

VI  
I need blank paper.  
Under three books, eight folders, and a week's worth of mail,  
The dining room table ruthlessly yields a whole pack.  
Yawning space for thoughts to spark forth  
But how to cajole them from this 10 p.m. body?
VII
Wash the face -- cold, clear water --
Vigorous towel.
New zest, new verve!
"Are you a good witch or a bad witch?" I irreverently ask
The face in the mirror with the crinkling nose.
Laughter answers.

VIII
Now return to the kitchen and reach for a soda
Maybe now I can start
Maybe now thoughts will flow.
At the table again, I encourage myself.
Just let some words out . . .
For a minute I ponder,
And I think
That there is not another
Original thought in the world.

IX
Should I try cute, clever?
Dull but organized? Maybe a speech --
"Four score and seven years ago . . ."
Wait, that's been done.
Have I ever scribbled anything as wonderful
On the back of an envelope?
I search my pocketbook.
Unearth a grocery list --
Maybe I can construe a "found" poem from this!

X
The TV is on low in the other room.
Remembered fantasy -- teenage beauty queen --
Enough.
Say it on paper.
Make words count.

XI
Read "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird."
Where's the water pistol?
That bird is dead.
I plan to shoot it.

XII
The cat sits decisively in the middle of my pages
Purring and accepting with all four paws
All meager attempts. I scratch her ears and
Smile up at the moon.

XIII
It is rising.
I have no brilliant insights today.
No matter.
I am forgiven by the moon and by me.
I must remember to remember that students too
Have their own busy worlds and imaginings
Which take them far from the pencils in their hands . . .
The sky is clear and quiet.
I look in on my dreaming children --
Smooth the hair from his face,
Give her a kiss in her sleep.
Her eyelids are moving.
The richness of the most ordinary actions
Creates much wonder
And comfort in my life,
That I think
I just must live the poem tonight.
To Maya Who Knows Why The Caged Bird Sings
And To My Daughter Who Doesn't
by Virginia Griggs

"If I had wings no one would ask me, can I fly."
It was a song we sang when we were children,
when we had wings and didn't know it.
And now, when I need my wings,
I can't remember how to fly,
gliding and soaring like the hawks in Stephanie's meadow
that I stopped the car to watch one evening.
I saw the dignity in their freedom flight.
They flew alone and fearless.

Now you, little girl with golden hair
streaming behind you as you run on a summer's day
with slender strong white limbs that
ache to climb trees
and bright brown eyes that speak without fear everything you are,
now you have wings and don't know it.

Have I already opened the door to the cage
where you will spend your grown-up days
admired by those who don't understand
the beauty that was yours in flight?
And they will say, "She sings beautifully. Can she fly?"
How do I teach you
to see in yourself, always,
the intelligence and dignity that is yours right now,
alone and fearless?
Already you move so quickly to please,
and we praise you so seductively.
You don't need the admiration,
not even mine,
of those who stand outside a cage.

Use your wings daughter.
Fly with the hawks in Stephanie's meadow,
and no one will ask if you can fly.
Then I will say,
"Maya, I too know why the caged bird sings,
but not my daughter.
She can fly."

Song of Memory
by Jan Guarino

A flood of feelings came to me as I sat on the phone talking to my sister, Ellen, about the death of a man neither of us ever knew. We were both crying. I was crying for many reasons, not the least of which was the loss of a man's life and fears for my own and my sister's futures . . .

1963. I was born six months before John F. Kennedy was shot and killed, the year the Beatles came to the United States. Ellen was four.

I was five in 1968, the most infamous year of militant unrest in American cities. Ellen was nine. We played together and fought a lot . . . I was learning to read and someone had scrawled F-U-C-K on the street in front of the house. I sounded the letters out phonetically and read it aloud, completely oblivious to its meaning. Ellen turned me in over dinner and I ate a bar of soap for dessert . . . I got a bloody nose while we were playing on Frost's lawn and Ellen was the first person by my side as I sat on the grass and cried . . . At the time, we shared a room and she complained frequently and loudly when I refused to sleep with the light on. My mother's radio played the Beatles' love ballads. "Something" and "Norwegian Wood."

Isn't it good
Norwegian Wood.

For the adults, the turn of a decade ushered in a new type of music and new social and political interests. We were still very young. It was 1976 and I leaned over the railing on the pier to see the tall ships sail into Newport Harbor. We didn't appreciate what my father called history in the making. We had, however, started appreciating music a few years earlier and we particularly liked the Beatles. The Beatles hadn't been The Beatles since 1970 but we were discovering them for the first time. Our favorite was John Lennon. We felt he was the most talented of the four and certainly the brightest.

We were old enough to walk to the Hamden Plaza. We bought all the earlier records: Meet the Beatles, With the Beatles, The Red Album, 1963-1966, at the Music Box. We started buying duplicate copies so that one could always be saved in its pristine, plastic-coated virginal state. There had already been the concert for Bangladesh, John and Yoko had already done their bed-in protest of the war and McCartney already had Wings before we spent our allowances and Saturday afternoons on these "early" albums. We both felt that their earlier music was the best and we secretly had crushes on the baby-faced boys on the album covers; boys who didn't exist anymore. We sat barefooted on the floor with album jackets strewn all around us quizzing each
All the while, George Harrison raced cars, Paul McCartney became the adolescent girls we were.

Well she was just seventeen
And you know what I mean.
And the way she looked was way beyond compare
I'll never dance with another,
Since I saw her standing there.

"That's Paul singing," I'd say.

"It is not. It's John. Can't you tell?" She sounded exasperated and rolled her eyes. We fought constantly about such minutiae. It was very important to us. One fight turned into a brawl and I finished it by locking her out of the house. She stayed outside until my mother came home and rescued her. In the interim, I had written my name all over the albums we had bought together to ensure that she would never get them from me. But we were singing again the following Saturday. I sang the melodies and she sang harmony.

And I'll never dance with another,
Since I saw her standing there.

We started buying later Beatles albums in the late 1970s: Revolution, Abbey Road (with the infamous second side) and The White Album. Meanwhile, George Harrison raced cars, Paul McCartney became one of the richest men in rock and roll, Ringo Starr married, divorced and remarried and our favorite, John Lennon, became a recluse in one of the biggest cities in the world. We two took singing and piano lessons.

Ellen joined the high school marching band. We spent less time together. We shared only our music, family functions and Saturday afternoons. Both of us were beginning to enjoy the late sixties and early seventies albums with their illicit allusions to hallucinogenic drugs and mysterious reports of Paul's death. These lyrics promised much to a confused 14-year-old and an insecure 18-year-old.

You say you want a revolution, well you know,
We all want to change the world.

The marches band went to Florida. Ellen was drum major and Mom decided to chaperone. It was April vacation and I went too. I sat with my mother on the bus and Ellen sat with her friends. I wanted to sit with them too but I wasn't welcome. I knew Ellen resented my intrusions into her life and I resented Ellen because I didn't understand how I could be intruding. On the bus someone's radio was playing the Lennon and McCartney song, "Baby's In Black" and I slipped back to the seat in front of my sister's and we automatically took over our pre-designated parts. I sang melody and she sang harmony.

My sister went off to college the following fall with posters of John, Paul, George and Ringo from every stage of their careers. The Fab Four in pink shirts and skinny ties with red roses in their hands ... the boys in Nehru jackets and dark sunglasses and 8x10s of the long-haired and bearded men as they appeared on the final album. She tried to take the albums too but I fought for those. I defended my rights by arguing that my name was on all of them so they were justly mine. I don't know if she had forgotten the day of her lock-out or if her four years' seniority made her that much more mature, but she didn't bring up the incident and I won the fight. In a moment of guilt I gave her a pen and ink drawing a friend from school had done of John.

We wrote letters to each other once a week that first year she was away. Often, I went into her room the first year she was gone, turned on a record and cried into her pillow. It reminded me of her. It smelled like her shampoo and perfume. She said I wrote the best letters and made me promise to write once a week. Sometimes I wrote twice a week. Her letters to me were carefully bundled and put in a box.

The seventies turned into the eighties and my musical tastes broadened to include hard rock, heavy metal and disco. I was, after all, officially a teenager of the disco era. My sister met a guy named Tom who, in keeping with others who had held the position of my sister's boyfriend, displeased me greatly. He had her listening to electrical noise called fusion music and God knows what else. She came home for Christmas her junior year and we stood in line at Consumer's Distributors waiting to purchase a lamp which was to be a Christmas gift for our parents. Lennon's "Christmas Song" came over the stereo in the store:

And so this is Christmas
And what have you done,
Another year over,
A new one just begun.

Ellen called from school in the early Spring of 1980. We talked about school and Mom and Dad. She told me John Lennon came out with a new album.

"Really?" I said. "Is it any good?"

"It's good. It's called Double Fantasy."

A friend bought the album and I discovered I agreed with Ellen about the music. I was also impressed by the John Lennon on the cover who looked like the John Lennon of 1963: clean-shaven, short-haired and healthy. The music on the record betrayed the artist's new interests and the feelings which he had kept hidden during those reclusive years. He sang to his wife in "Woman" and to his son, "beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful boy." Ellen and I had a long talk on her next trip home about how interesting his style had become and how much his music had matured. Neither of us bought the album, because Yoko Ono was allowed to sing on it, but we listened to the songs we liked on the
I liked riding around with Ellen in her newly-acquired, used Toyota. We drove everywhere just for fun. We drove up to UConn and she showed me where she would be living during her last year in school.

Ellen began her senior year in college and I started my last year of high school in September of 1980. I still missed her when she went away so I took to doing my homework in her room.

I went to bed early on the night in December when the Monday night football game was interrupted by the news bulletin that John Lennon was shot outside his home in New York. I didn't find out until the next morning when I read the headlines in the newspaper. He was dead. I felt angry and shocked but, more importantly, I felt panicked over Ellen's reaction. I went to the phone and called her.

"I was going to call you," she said. "I can't believe it."

We talked about the man who shot him. We hypothesized about his motives and we offered our opinions on appropriate justice. We cried.

I saved my copy of Time that week because it had a picture of Lennon on the cover and was full of stories about his life and death. I keep it in the same box where my sister's letters from college are. Neither of us has been to Strawberry Fields in Central Park, although we frequently go to New York together, and neither of us can listen to the song, "Imagine."

Imagine there's no heaven.
It's easy if you try.
No hell below us,
Above us only sky.

Imagine there's no heaven.
It's easy if you try.
No hell below us,
Above us only sky.

We came of age in the era after the Beatles and Vietnam. The embers of the 1970s were all that remained of the white heat of the 1960s. Ellen was a senior in college in the fall of 1980 and I was a senior in high school and John Lennon's life came to a violent and premature close.

Ellen and I still fight over all our old albums. I nearly dropped a box of records when I was helping her and her husband move into their new condominium a few months ago. I reached into the box and adjusted the records so they wouldn't fall and I noticed a copy of Let it Be on the bottom of the pile. It was the last album the Beatles recorded, the last Ellen and I acquired.

"Who said you could take this record" I demanded, in a half-serious voice.

She stepped down to the landing where I was catching my breath. She picked up the record and looked at it.

"That isn't ours; that's Jim's. Our copy is still at home. Don't you remember? You wrote your name all over it."
sporty, new cars, and he kicked rocks at our place or screached rubber at his. He was a fool wasting his money like that. And he was a fool to work in a shoe factory all his life, standing on a cement floor day after day, year after year. Why, as fat as he was, his feet must hurt all the time. Norm talked too loud, he talked too much and he didn't know anything about anything. I used to just listen.

But somewhere in the recesses of my mind, hidden away so that Dad couldn't even see a shadow of it, hidden even from me, I wondered. If Norm's feet hurt so badly, why did he laugh so much? If he wasted so much of his money, why were all of his possessions newer and better than ours? If he didn't know anything about anything, why was Faye always smiling? Mom smiled seldom and wanly. It was years after I told Norman goodbye that I slipped deeply enough into the recesses of my own mind to find that wonderment.

Faye is dead now and Dad is as surly as ever. Mom still can't smile. And Norm? He's still laughing as loudly as ever. I'd love to call him and tell him how he taught me to微笑, but instead I just call him, and we laugh.

Miss Coffee and the New Baltimore Catechism
by Carole Jonaitis

I grew up Catholic. Not hard core, not a heavy user, but socially dependent enough to display a few of the tell-tale perversities and obsessions. The dusty scapular draped over the bedroom mirror, a certain cliannish pride in the black smudge Monsignor Shea annually thumbed onto my forehead each Ash Wednesday morning, and, of course, the usual propensity for rehearsed confession.

On the other hand, I did not believe that Jimmy Morrow was damned to Hell simply because he was a Protestant, nor were the black spots routinely accumulated upon my soul causing actual physical pain. I had been lucky. The Holy Ghost did not accompany me on my dates, nor did I anticipate any future urge to invite him along. In other words, I had chosen to elude, through sixteen formative years of Sunday School and the Baltimore Catechism, the greatest of all Catholic legacies . . . GUILT.

By the time I met Miss Coffee, I was ready for her. She was not a nun. As far as I knew, she wasn't even Catholic. She certainly didn't look Catholic. Her bosom was much too big.

She was, however, white, very very white. She projected an aura of whiteness . . . an impressionistic painting suggesting a matronly slab of pancake make-up. Her very structure was imposing. From neck to knee, she was solid, broad, and tightly corseted. Nothing, save for her triple chin, seemed involuntarily mobile. She was an alabaster statue of majestic proportion. Yet, she was, at the same time and in the same space, oddly flat, one dimensional . . . an artistic illusion created from a cardboard cut-out. She could, perhaps, have been on a stage somewhere doing Shakespeare . . . or opera . . . or fashioning wimples from starched white linen. They were, instead, paying her to teach me the History of Western Civilization. They were not getting their money's worth.

"You will, of course, be reporting to the detention hall at the end of the school day?"

"Yes, Miss Coffee."

"And you were one of those engaged in conversation with your neighbors before I entered the room?"

"Yes, Miss Coffee."

"Very well then."

There it was. It had happened again. Third time that week, umpteenth time that year. A vintage movie played over and over again,

10:20 A.M. Twenty-five sophomores file into classroom #303. No teacher present. Nothing unusual. Books thunk to the floor beside each desk, neatly stacked. We relax uncomfortably in the stiff-backed wooden chairs. We wait. 10:30. A few dutifully hoist their history texts to the wooden desk tops. I don't. Instead, my eyes wander over to Jimmy Morrow, the Hell-bent Protestant. Still here. I smile knowingly to myself, shake my head, and glance up at the clock. 10:32. We wait. The usual conversations begin to form and take shape around the room. My adolescent radar switches on, ready to hone in on the most stimulating. Some begin tonight's algebra homework. 10:37. I'm finding Karen's description of ironing her hair more spellbinding than the prospect of doing quadratic equations. We wait. Many drum their fingers, tap their toes. 10:45. The noise grows louder, an inevitability in a teacherless classroom full of curious sophomores needing to deal with Real Life. 10:47. I need to ask Karen, not how she does it, but WHY?! I choose not to wait. I lean over and join in. 10:52. Everyone is chatting now. It's pleasant, it's informative, it's vital. 10:57. She arrives.

She is late as always from her break, spent each day somewhere between the teacher's room and the land of rapidly-approaching senility. We are all characters in search of an author and she enters, on cue, in all of her glorious majestic whiteness, to play her part.

"Good morning, people. Before we begin today's lesson, I want to know which of my students have been talking. Please stand."

Six of us rise and approach her desk to receive pink detention slips.

Why the other five in the processional? That answer is perhaps lurking somewhere in one of their old Baltimore Catechisms. But for myself... . . .

I was better than she . . . more powerful . . . and I knew it.

The Job Search or What is Your Philosophy of Education?

by Cheryl Kline

The principal and the language arts coordinator waited in the parking lot at the middle school where her interview was scheduled. She jetted into the parking lot at 4:38, praying that those were not the people in charge of her future, but she presumed they were. Fortunately, she had reapplied her make-up at the last stop light. And when she found the right road, she turned down the stereo and dug for her deodorant at the bottom of her knapsack.

She pulled into the parking lot thinking that she wished she had a car different from her own. Her silver sun-roofed sports car seemed inappropriate for a teacher. They must be thinking, "She doesn't need a job here," she imagined. A voice inside said, "Relax. It doesn't matter." But it did, and the butterflies came anyway. Actually, she preferred to say that moths, not butterflies, inhabited her stomach because she thought the imagery of white, colorless, winged bugs belonged in her stomach more than did collectible, graceful butterfly wings. As she pulled into the parking space, she realized that the deodorant, cap off, was still in her hand, and sports sunglasses had left indentations on her nose. "Maybe I should have worn my glasses instead of my contacts," she mused. Again for some reason, it mattered--everything mattered. The moths began beating more wildly now. She nonchalantly dropped her Dentyne from her mouth to the floor. No time to even wrap it; the two people walked toward her car. She knew that if they saw the changes of clothes, melon rinds, and deoderant thrown onto the passenger seat that they would point their fingers accusingly and scold that slobs doth poor teachers make. At 4:39, the day had already been a long one. She glanced quickly at her rear view mirror, contorting her face on the inside, and climbed out of her car to intercept the oncomers before their discovery about the real her.

"Glad you found us," the principal smiled.

Yes, Mr. Principal, your lordship, oh sir. Did I lose the job yet? Did I say this aloud? Thank God, no. She felt like Walter Mitty. Would she throw herself on the ground and pretend the Viet Cong were invading next? The moths slam dancing on her stomach walls brought her back to the parking lot interview where first impressions counted.

"Yes, and you must be Mr. Arico." She shook his hand.

"And this is our Language Arts Coordinator, Ms. Redding."

She shook Ms. Redding's hand also. "And thank you so much for staying so late to speak to me. I really appreciate it."

She did and she didn't. She had been in writing class since eight
that morning, and had to leave early for her two hour ride that brought her to her interview. It was still about 95 degrees; her car donned no air conditioning. She was sticky and had to go to the bathroom. Thinking that she was grateful the last light had been red, she knew she otherwise would have had smeared mascara smudges under her eyes now, too.

During the two-hour drive down 57 to the small, but growing town, she rehearsed the answer to one question and one question only. What was her philosophy of education? She was ready to answer this first question; she wanted to answer this first and dazzle them immediately. She was thrilled because last year she finally grappled with the definition of "philosophy." So now, at least she understood the question.

The three of them walked into the school, not harried, not strolling, but comfortably together. Or so she hoped. She suddenly wanted this job; therefore, her moths metamorphosized into great winged dragons bullying each other for romping space. She wondered if this is what it felt like to have a baby kicking inside. If so, she pledged to never have one.

The air in the darkened, quiet school met her forehead and cooled it. She wondered if the back of her shirt was wet from the ride. Certainly, her linen skirt was sure to be permanently wrinkled. She graciously accepted the chair the interviewers offered her, but she really wanted to go to the ladies room. "Cross your legs," she thought. "You must seem above human now. Remember, a teaching prerequisite is maintaining a big bladder--not a sports car, you fool. Smile and look poised."

"Let us begin with some items on your cover letter," began the principal. "We are impressed."

Lies, she thought immediately. I wrote lies and he knows it. He's going to call me on them. But she hadn't written lies. All truth, she realized. Why was she panicky?

When were they going to ask her about her philosophy of education? She had now been in the interview for almost two hours. She realized that the dragons weren't in her stomach anymore. They moved; as did she. For the past four hours she had needed to use the facilities. Her interviewers must have suddenly realized her anxiously. They thanked her for her time while she thanked them for theirs. She rushed to her car hurriedly speeding for the nearest gas station.

Two weeks later she was smiling--signing her teaching contract for that small, but growing town. They never asked her about her philosophy of education, but she must have passed the interview test with flying colors. Flying colors and flushed cheeks.

Individualism

by Adrienne Lovell

"Mom, you were right. It was the most meaningful experience of my life. I'm so thankful that you helped me with the natural childbirth." Carol looked so comfortable as she rested with her newborn daughter.

Her mother was too full of emotion to respond in words. Instead she bent down to gently embrace her daughter--her own first-born baby--next to a tiny sleeping infant less than one hour old.

"Grandma, Grandma, can you imagine that tiny little thing like that will call me Grandma?" Alice Hastings proudly whispered.

Only twenty-six years ago Alice had given birth to her first child in that very hospital. At the moment of birth, Alice had so often remembered her immediate thoughts upon knowing that her baby was a girl. "Someday she will go through this." Today her thoughts had become a reality.

"I'm so glad that I've taken an indefinite leave to stay home with my precious baby. You were right about that too, Mom." Carol, who had become an outstanding teacher, disappointed many when she announced that she would not return to school soon.

"She can be as small and shy as she wants . . . or big and noisy if she wishes," added Carol, squeezing her mother's hand tightly. "We will adore her no matter what."

Alice smiled understandingly at her daughter's words. Lately these two women had shared long discussions about Carol's childhood. Alice recalled details with a lingering sense of uneasiness.

"Mrs. Hastings, I'm calling to inform you that Carol has been placed in a shyness therapy group. Her teachers recommend that she can use some help," telephoned the sixth-grade guidance counselor.

"With what does she need help, Mrs. Greko? She's a content honor student. I was also a very quiet student. I've survived," Alice could feel herself becoming defensive.

"Times have changed, Mrs. Hastings. In today's world every individual must learn to make herself known. She must be equipped with proper communication skills to earn a living. Also there may be some underlying problem which causes your daughter to be so reticent. You know her extremely small size is an added burden for her. This group will meet once a week to investigate the possibility of a problem." Mrs. Greko spoke with authority.
Although hesitant to give her approval, Alice did not protest. Immediately after she put down the phone, Alice began thinking. Why did that woman call her small size a burden? Carol had seemed to enjoy the advantages of being small. She could still ride on the children's amusements with her younger sister and brothers. She could still attend movies at the younger price. "Maybe Mrs. Greko is right. Times have changed."

Busy with the house and younger children, Alice forgot about the conversation until Carol arrived home from school. Carol, as usual, was full of information about the events of the school day, such as the 98 on her math test; Mrs. Vance, her English teacher, reading Avon magazines in the back of the classroom while the students wrote compositions; and Mr. Eames, disciplining the disrespectful boys who mimicked him during the lesson.

"Carol, did anything else happen today?" Alice questioned, as she returned the milk to the refrigerator.

"No, not much, Mom. Why?" Carol casually answered as she fingered the last chocolate chip cookie.

Alice reported Mrs. Greko's telephone conversation.

Carol responded, "Oh, that stupid group. It was so embarrassing to be called out of French class like one of the kids who need extra help or discipline. I hated it. She made us answer stupid questions. She asked if our parents were unkind to us or if we ever had nightmares. I felt like making up stories because she kept bugging me for answers. Later all my friends wanted to know why I had to go to the Guidance Office."

Alice Hastings hesitated to show any negative reaction to her daughter. That evening her husband assured her, still doubtful, that maybe the group might actually be a benefit.

Two weeks later, the guidance counselor called again. "Mrs. Hastings, I have taken the liberty to send your daughter to Dr. Kemp, the school psychiatrist. Did you know that your daughter has had nightmares? As soon as Dr. Kemp has made an evaluation, she will call you for a conference."

Alice was so astounded with feelings of fright and anger that she failed to respond for a moment. "You have no right to evaluate my daughter. What are you talking about? Of course I know that my daughter has had nightmares. Haven't you ever had them? What are you doing with this bright, happy, friendly child?"

"Calm down, Mrs. Hastings. Be reasonable. Sometimes parents are the last to suspect the deep-rooted problems of their children. Don't you want the best for your child? We can solve her problems now in order that they do not grow more serious."

Now Alice's reaction was anger only. "Do not speak to my daughter until my husband and I can come in to talk to both you and your psychiatrist! We shall be there tomorrow at 9 a.m.---with Carol."

"We probably will be unable to see you until 10 a.m., and it's best if Carol is not present at the conference." Mrs. Greko answered with confidence in her advice.

"We shall be there with Carol present," demanded Alice.

"Tomorrow at 10, Mrs. Hastings. We shall see you then." Mrs. Greko remained outwardly cheerful.

Alice slammed the phone. She was shaking. She could not remember getting so upset with another person. Calmed down by the end of the school day, Alice questioned Carol about the sessions with the psychiatrist. Carol had been too embarrassed to discuss the conversations.

"I told her anything, just to get out as quickly as possible. She's an old lady with hair on her face. I can't stand her! Also the kids look at me strangely when I tell them where I've been. Mom, why are they picking on me? Did I do anything wrong? My teacher seemed to be very willing to let me out of class. Did you tell them I had to see that lady? Do I have to go again? This is the most awful thing that has ever happened to me!"

Alice soothed her daughter, promising that she would never be forced to answer the questions of the strange woman again.

Alice discussed the situation with Roger that evening. When Alice vowed that no psychiatrist would ever again talk to her daughter, Roger admonished her hastiness. Instead, Roger, logical as usual, suggested that they employ another psychiatrist to ascertain that they were in the right.

"Or possibly in the wrong, you're implying... Roger, I know my child better than some stranger does. I was twice as shy as she is."

"Wait, Alice, how many times have you observed that parents don't know their own children? And besides, we have to provide evidence to the school system where Carol will be for another six years."

The next day Carol went to school as usual. Mr. and Mrs. Hastings kept the 10 a.m. appointment. Carol had been accurate. Dr. Kemp was hairy-faced. The decision to visit a different psychiatrist was approved with hesitation. After three visits, Dr. Ames considered further meetings of no use. His letter contained the following:
Carol Hastings is not in need of any psychiatric help or counseling. She is an intelligent, determined child who does not wish to be outgoing. I have assured Carol that there is no reason for her to change her behavior. She should be as quiet as she chooses to be.

Alice still had the letter.

*I only hope she's exactly like you, Carol," Alice beamed. "You are just perfect as you are."

Now Carol's eyes filled with tears of joy. "Oh, Mom, I love you."

An Uncommon Common Curriculum Day
by Mary Reynolds Luce

Common curriculum days are every bit as exciting as sitting around and watching paint dry. I always dread those days but manage to avoid some of the boredom by going with my friend Nancy.

We were standing in the office beside the freshly posted list of workshop choices and trying to choose one that would be remotely interesting.

"Mary, we've got some real winners this time. We can choose between 'Understanding Legos,' 'Teacher Burnout,' or 'Verbs in Action.' Wait, look at this, how about 'Hands-on Science Experiments for the Elementary Classroom.' That might have possibilities. We might even learn something we could use," Nancy said sarcastically.

"Where is it being held?" I asked. "You know our rule. No workshop is worth more than a thirty minute drive."

"It's in Plainfield, Mary, at the high school. That might be a pretty drive in October. Think of it, a peaceful day in the quiet corner of Connecticut," she laughed.

"Quiet, yes," I moaned, "Exciting, no." Little did we know! I'd never actually been to Plainfield. My husband, a whiz with maps, gave me precise instructions on how to get there so we only got lost twice. No matter, the ride was relaxing and the pastoral country roads we traveled, while not shown on his maps, were really beautiful. We arrived at the school refreshed and ready for our workshop.

The high school was larger than I had expected. I had to stop three times and ask for directions to the room. We finally found it and joined the other fifteen people who had chosen this workshop.

Our instructor was a high-school science teacher from Vermont. Somehow I got the impression that he shared my enthusiasm for these days. He was very tall and seemed to be a take-charge type. His energy level was high and he paced as he lectured. The first hands-on experiment looked promising. He gave each of us a bag of M&M candies and told us to sort them by color. I thought we were going to do patterning and graphing. We all had our candies arranged in neat rows on the two big lab tables when I heard a crash in the hall. It sounded like someone had knocked over a trash can.

Suddenly a man wearing khaki workclothes bolted through the rear door of the science lab. His hair was disheveled, and his eyes looked as if they were reflecting fire. "Some bastard's out there with a sawed-off shotgun and he's spraying bullets everywhere!" he whispered. He disappeared through the door as quickly as he had come.
The silence in the room roared. I think we were all replaying this man's words in our minds. Nancy and I looked at each other but neither of us could speak. This couldn't be true, I thought. This was a common curriculum day. I was in Plainfield, Connecticut. This kind of thing doesn't happen in nowhere and it doesn't happen to me! The quiet in the room told me that it did.

Without speaking, the instructor ran to the switch and turned off the lights. He began pacing back and forth across the front of the room. "We'll be fine, we'll all be fine." He kept pacing and he kept repeating those phrases. I hoped he was convincing himself. He wasn't convincing me.

People began to whisper—mostly to themselves. I remember that there was a conversation but I don't remember much of the dialogue. I do recall that one woman wanted to go out in the hall and pull the fire alarm. "I know the guys at the fire station," she whispered. "They'll come and take us home." She put her hand on the doorknob to leave but slowly dropped to the floor in tears.

The instructor raced to her side and kept repeating his assurance that we would all be fine. It was at that point that the group reached a silent agreement not to try to leave the room. Eventually everyone began trying to find something that would shield them from gunfire and bodies and M&Ms began moving randomly on the floor.

I had vacationed in Yellowstone Park with my family in August. I somehow had a vivid memory of the park ranger who described what to do in case of a grizzly bear attack. I quickly got in the prescribed position. I was down on the floor on all fours with my hands wrapped around the back of my neck to protect my major blood vessels when I realized that the immediate danger was not an attack by grizzlies. I sat up and looked around.

People were hiding in every cranny of the room but there weren't many really good places to hide. Most of them were just huddled under the two big lab tables. Some were crying and some were whispering prayers. One young girl was huddled in a fetal position. "I don't want to die! I don't want to die!" she kept moaning.

I wished for tears but the numb feeling just wouldn't go away. I looked up and saw my friend Nancy still sitting in her chair and looking directly at the small window in the door of the lab. "I'm going to look this guy in the eye," she was saying. "I'm going to see the one who kills me." I grabbed her and pulled her to the floor.

"Mary," she whispered, "if he fires a shot in here we're all dead. That guy said he had a sawed-off shotgun and one blast from that thing would spray shot all over the room. We couldn't survive no matter what." Nancy threw a handful of M&Ms at me to demonstrate what the blast would be like. This was a hands-on demonstration that I could have done without.

Again, the back door to the lab burst open. Muffled screams erupted from the group. "The damn principal called the police and then locked himself in the bathroom." The man with the blazing eyes was back. This time he wasn't whispering. There was no need. The gunman was shouting wildly in the halls. I couldn't understand what he was saying but his screams scared me. I remember thinking that he was out of control. That was really stupid, I thought. The first blast of his shotgun made it apparent that he was out of control. The messenger made another quick exit, and eighteen people remained trapped on the floor.

The screaming was scaring me. By this time we had been trapped for forty-five minutes. I began looking in the storage cabinets for a place to hide. Inside the third set of doors I opened was the largest clay flowerpot I had ever seen. It was full of potting soil and the remains of a dead plant. I remember trying to figure out if I could get the flowerpot out of the cabinet and me into the cabinet. Would I fit? Here I was sitting on the floor trying to decide if I was bigger than a flowerpot. Somehow the game "Bigger than a Breadbox" kept running through my mind. It didn't take me long to realize that I was bigger than a breadbox and bigger than a flowerpot, even if it was the largest one I had ever seen.

The blinds over the windows were closed to keep the room dark. I ran to the window and raised the shade. Could the window be my route to safety? Outside the window was a courtyard surrounded on all sides by the school building. If I got out the window, I would be an easy target. One of the biggest problems was that I didn't know where to go, even if I did get out the window, but at least I would be out. With a more careful look at the window, I realized the question of escape was moot. I was bigger than a breadbox, bigger than a flowerpot, and I was bigger than the opening in the window! I ate an M&M.

The back door of the lab opened for what was to be the last time and once again our messenger returned. He quietly whispered, "Follow me." It never occurred to me not to follow. This group of teachers formed a single file line instantaneously and was led outside.

The daylight was bright and it hurt my eyes. I looked up and saw the Channel 3 helicopter circling. I would know later that it had arrived before the police. That was no small feat if you consider that the police station was a mile and a half away. The police were on duty now. I took comfort in knowing that the policeman was on duty until I realized that I was looking down the barrel of his gun. I knew that this was not where I wanted to be, and I ran to the shelter at the far corner of the field. It was then that I realized that my car keys and my coat were inside the school. I was cold.

The marksman was now talking on his radio. He jumped into his car and tried to start it, but there was merely a low grinding noise. Without speaking, the man who had led us to safety, as if responding to
a cue, jumped into his old pickup truck, drove it beside the cruiser, and jump-started the cruiser. The policeman drove away with his siren screaming.

Slowly, conversations began. The past ninety minutes were relived. "I wasn't afraid for a moment. I knew we'd get out fine," one woman said. This was one of the women who had been crying earlier. Now that the ordeal was over, only a few of us would admit that we had been afraid.

One man was incensed. "I'm going to turn in that guy with the dirty mouth. Nobody should talk like that in school!" he shouted. Somehow I couldn't share this man's indignation. This man with the dirty mouth had led us to safety. In truth, I thought his accounts had been quite accurate. He seemed to be the only person in control.

Somehow I couldn't share this man's indignation. This man with the dirty mouth had led us to safety. In truth, I thought his accounts had been quite accurate. He seemed to be the only person in control.

Someone came out of the building and announced that there was hot coffee in the cafeteria. "Is the gunman under arrest yet?" I asked.

"No," the man answered, "but there's a gate that closes off the cafeteria."

Dumbfounded, I watched over half of the group return to the building from which they had just escaped. I checked that gate later. It was the expandable type with the open diamond pattern. It offered no protection from gunfire.

The man who led us out of the building now came to lead us back in. "It's safe now," he said, "They've got the bastard. He's on his way to the slammer."

"Who is that man?" Nancy asked.

Someone responded, "That's just one of the janitors. He lives somewhere here in town. I think he's worked here for years. I don't know his name."

Nancy and I went back to get our coats and other belongings. As we left, we noticed that the principal was out of the bathroom and giving orders. The janitor was cleaning up the glass from the trophy case which had been shattered. Soon there would be no visible reminders of the events of the day.

The next thing I knew a microphone was being thrust in my face by a man wearing a Channel 3 blazer.

"Were you afraid?" he asked.

"We remained calm and in control throughout the ordeal," I replied.

"Does this incident make you think that teaching is a dangerous profession? Are you afraid to return to your classroom tomorrow?" he queried.

I looked at him incredulously and said, "I teach kindergarten."

On the way home the numb feelings left. Nancy and I rode in silence. According to my son, I entered the house babbling gibberish. My husband came home later and asked nonchalantly, "How was the workshop?"

"Oh, fine," I replied, "until the gunman started shooting at us."

Without further explanation, I turned and walked up the stairs.

Later that night we all watched my cameo appearance on the six o'clock news. I appeared to be calm, the gunman appeared to be distraught, the policemen appeared to be in control, the principal appeared to be in charge, and the janitor didn't appear at all.
In the Morning
by Jan Luke

Dad had just backed the U-haul trailer into the driveway. "Open it up, Daddy. Hurry up. Oh, my, it's huge. Can we get inside?" All five of us were squawking as we explored this new object of our curiosity. None of us were dreading this move. In fact, ever since I discovered the letter hidden in Dad's desk telling Granny we were moving to Illinois, we were thrilled. We'd lived at this school where Dad had taught Navajo Indians since I was thirteen months old—which would now make it twelve years. My whole lifetime. And now I'd finally have friends who couldn't shut me out by speaking Navajo.

Mom got busy with the packing and the throwing away. Since she usually got into a frenzy doing that kind of stuff, I decided, one day, to take a walk around the school. I wandered all over, somehow knowing that I'd never see the place again. I walked by the haystack where I'd shot my first squirrel. I saw the office where we'd get our mail--Box 870. Miss Dunbar would give us clothes and games someone else had discarded and sent to the mission. We thought they were great. I walked by the grape arbor where every spring we'd go and pick asparagus. Next to that was the school's cemetery. I knew right away what I was looking for and there it was. It had been six years since my brother had drowned:

Kim Joel Norman
July 3, 1952 - June 9, 1954
'Til the Morning

Momma told me we'd see Kimmy again in the morning when Jesus would come back to earth.

Finally the day came when we had every square inch of that U-Haul crammed full of the Norman belongings. All seven of us piled in the car and pulled out into the road. As we passed the gate to the school and the big sign that read "Navajo Methodist Mission School, Farmington, New Mexico," I swallowed the lump in my throat.

"* * * *

"Jan, I want to talk to you."

"OK, Dad, just a minute." I had just gotten back from cheering at a wrestling meet which our high school had won. We were undefeated that season. I couldn't have been happier especially since we couldn't win a basketball game if our lives depended on it. My dad was the basketball coach.

I threw my books and school bag on the bed. I still had my uniform on and the bounce was intact.

"Where have you been?"

"I was cheering at the wrestling meet."

"Did you ask permission?"

"I thought you knew . . ."

"Had you asked permission?"

"No, sir." My bubble began to leak air. I dreaded what was next.

"As a punishment, you will not be allowed to cheer at the next basketball game. Your alternate will substitute for you. I've already spoken to Mrs. Kensington. It's all set."

"Yes, sir." My bubble was flat. I walked back to my room and took off my uniform. I loved that outfit. I belonged when I wore it. And now I couldn't wear it Friday. What had I done wrong? I threw my dirty socks into the laundry basket.

I had to go help Mom fix the spaghetti for dinner. She was unusually quiet, so I figured she was upset with me too. I just got busy browning the hamburger and getting the big pot out and filled with water and salt. It took a lot of spaghetti to feed seven. It was our family's favorite meal, except for the birthday dinners of fried chicken. The kids provided a lot of chatter and distraction and soon we were all slurping up the noodles getting sauce all over our faces. It was good to laugh.

Robin and I spent the evening after the dishes were done doing our chemistry homework together. Even though she was a junior and I was a senior we were together in the same class. It helped having a brain for a sister.

Finally the evening ended and it was time for bed. Robin crawled into the top bunk and I got into the bottom. We began our usual nighttime chatter until we heard Dad's booming voice, "That's enough, girls. I don't want to have to tell you again."

The whole house was quiet. Dad's words were still in my ears. Then I remembered what he had told me earlier in the afternoon. "Why do I always do the wrong thing?"

I tried to go to sleep and actually think I dozed for a while. Sometime later I came to and knew no one else was awake. It was dark and warm under my blankets. Before I was fully conscious, I started to cry--actually sobbing was more like it--into my pillow. I wasn't thinking of what Dad said or of not getting to cheer, but of Kim. How I missed him and wished he wasn't dead. It would be so much better if he was alive.
The next thing I knew it was morning--Friday morning. I had to figure out how to face the kids when they found out I couldn't cheer.

* * * *

"Made a list of all the persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all." I had done the first seven steps and was on number eight. I had been in Overeater's Anonymous for almost a year. And I was only on Step 8. Oh well. I knew somewhere that my obsession with my body image wasn't my real problem. Just an indicator of something else going on underneath. Just like someone who is dating a married man. Her problem is underneath that. Probably an inner-self image problem. Just like mine. So I'm trying these twelve steps hoping that they will help. I'm so tired of being negative all the time.

I had worked through my list of persons I had harmed. I actually sat my kids down and apologized to them for my excessive anger. They didn't know what to think. I wrote a letter-never-meaning-to-send to a friend apologizing for taking away her boyfriend. I even gave back some money I had stolen while in college. And yet I wondered if there was anything else. There seemed to be. But I didn't know. I kept wondering if I was doing this right.

Just before I was married for the first time, I found a beautiful, antique, walnut bedroom set. The double bed had a large headboard and footboard. There was a dresser with a huge mirror and a highboy included in the set. My ex-husband took the highboy when we split, but I kept the dresser and the bed.

It was in that mirror that I saw something I had never seen before. I was standing in front of it--with the double bed behind me--looking at myself. All of a sudden it was so clear. It was my fault that Kim had died. Oh my God! I had harmed my baby brother. It was my fault that he had drowned. I could hardly even stand to think those words. I cried and cried and cried. I thought I'd never stop.

Finally the wave of emotion ebbed and I went to the phone to call Kathleen. I learned not to be alone in the twelve-step program. And Kathleen was someone I knew would listen to me.

"How could I have done this?"

"Jan, you were five years old. How can a five-year-old be responsible?"

"But I'm the one who thought up the idea of taking Robin and Kim to see our dad on the other end of the campus. I'm the one who forgot to tell Mom. I'm the one who left him beside the irrigation ditch while Robin and I ran to tell Mom what we were doing. If it hadn't been for me, Kim would be alive today."

"So, do you see that's how you've been living your whole life--
I didn't hear the page at first. I was sitting on the reading table, singing with my first graders. I was already huge at four months pregnant, and it felt good to just sit for a minute. The song was about Carl's imminent trip to Calcutta, and each child added one item to his packing list. The class sang the chorus with vigor since it was the only part of the song we all knew well. As we stopped to catch our breath, the page was repeated. "Mrs. Wells, you have a telephone call." I was immediately annoyed and then distressed. This particular class was a tough one and everyone knew it. The office screened all calls and would never disturb me except under the most dire circumstances. My three-year-old daughter was at the sitter's and my husband was at work. As I raced down the hall to the small book closet which doubled as a phone booth, I ran through a longer list of possibilities. I knew my grandmother was not well. My brother had been in a plane crash and was recuperating in the hospital. The voice on the phone identified himself as the head of my obstetrics group. I had only met him once. I couldn't even recall what he looked like. He calmly told me that the AFP blood test which I had elected to have done during some routine blood work, showed my baby to have an increased risk of Down's Syndrome. I closed the closet door and sank down on the rickety stepstool that lived in the closet. I noted with some despair that I had neglected to turn on the light, and I knew from experience that I could never find the pull chain. I decided to sit in the dark.

"Wait," I said. "I'm Maggie Wells. My husband's name is Steven. I live in Stafford. Are you sure you have the right Wells?" I was often confused with other Wellses.

The doctor assured me that he had my file in front of him. He said we would need to make some immediate decisions, but first he wanted me to understand all the options.

"Options?" I whispered hoarsely. I could hang up the phone and go back to my class, which was certain was misbehaving at that very moment.

He asked me to imagine I was standing in a room with a hundred pregnant women. He said normally Down's syndrome occurs in about one out of every seven hundred births. He said my AFP test, which measures the amount of alpha-fetoprotein leaked by the fetus into the mother's bloodstream, showed a low protein count. And although the test had questionable accuracy as a predictor of Down's Syndrome, my test showed this baby had a one in one hundred chance of being born with Down's Syndrome.

Sitting in that small dark closet with the ghosts of those ninety-nine other pregnant women, I didn't think those odds sounded too bad. It was hard to imagine seven hundred women in the closet. I got up and opened the closet door and turned on the light. I could hear my class. I closed the door. I cleared my throat.

The doctor went on calmly explaining. He recommended an amniocentesis. He would extract a small amount of amniotic fluid with a needle inserted through my abdomen. It sometimes took several taps to get enough fluid. Fetal cells would be drawn from the fluid and sent to UConn medical center for analysis. He said this test was not without risks. Studies showed it could increase the risk of miscarriage, but he had done this procedure many times and had never had any complications. He didn't want to rush me into this decision, but the fluid analysis took six weeks and legal abortions could only be performed prior to the 24th week. I was well into my fourth month and he was concerned about the time frame. He wanted us to have enough time to make some even tougher decisions if necessary. He recommended that we should schedule the amniocentesis for tomorrow morning at 8:00.

I could hear voices outside. I opened the closet door and peered down the hall. Several of my rowdier boys were gyrating in the hall. I cast my evil eye at them and hissed, "You belong in your seats." They returned to the room. I returned to the closet. I closed the closet door.

The doctor's voice went on calmly reassuring me. I wished he would shut up, but I was afraid not to listen. He asked me to talk to my husband and to call him as soon as possible to schedule the test, if that was what we decided to do.

I whispered, "Today?"

The doctor started to explain the urgency again. My mind was exploring other urgencies. My class was unsupervised. I had a thirty minute lunch period to call my husband before I took 60 first-graders out for recess. Sarah had library books due at the library. We had planned to attend an after school story hour.

I cleared my throat again. "Well," I said dumbly, "I will talk this over with Steve and we'll call you. Thank you for calling me. I appreciate your concern." I didn't want to say that but it was polite. I'd always believed politeness would some day be rewarded. I needed to tip the scales.

The doctor hung up. I turned off the closet light and stood awhile in the darkness, my hands tracing the swell of my belly.

There was a shriek from the hall. I knew the voice well. I cleared my throat again and stepped out of the closet. I closed the door.
Keeping American Schools on Track
by C. A. Boose
(a.k.a. Roy Ogren)

At the recent National Education Association convention in New Orleans, NEA President Mary Hatwood Futrell urged teachers to establish "a nationwide network of innovative school districts." In addition to experimenting with more flexible scheduling and financing schools by means other than property taxes, such districts might do away with the experiment with more flexible scheduling and financing schools by

Scolding at both groups, Assistant U.S. Secretary of Education Chester Finn called their ideas "10% good, 90% bad. That they are willing to admit that things aren't hunky-dory in schools--that much is good. But the bad part is that they seem to suggest that we need to have a vast experiment, as if we didn't know or have the faintest idea of what works in schools.

"The reason these things don't happen [i.e., that education doesn't improve] is that teacher unions won't let them happen" (Hartford Courant, July 5, 1988, p. 3).

Mr. Finn is, of course, quite right: anything these self-serving organizations propose must be invalid. Their advocacy of mixed-ability classes should in itself clinch the case for grouping. That most teachers in the nation possess a master's degree means not much. For through constant exposure to the mediocrity of today's youth, teacher association members have had their intellects blunted.

Consequently--partly through design and partly through dullness--the NEA and FTA have ignored the compelling arguments in favor of ability grouping, especially for lower level students (LL's). Since these students are tracked in the traditional sense of the word, forced by the system to take general and remedial courses, America is doomed.

First of all, ability grouping lowers the self-esteem and ambition of LL's. A society teeming with high-powered egotists needs to be tempered with the humility and self-denigration experienced by students assigned to lower tracks. Even the Bible tells us, "Before honor is humility" (Proverbs 15:33). Indeed, souls can be saved through the system to take general and remedial courses, America is doomed.

Related to emissions testing is the assertiveness training inherent in LL classes. Medical researchers have discovered that, compared to low-status, grapefruit-sized bladders--especially those of boys--are about the size of thimbles and must be relieved more urgently. By refusing to readily acknowledge LL requests to go to the lav, the teacher can train LL's to plead their case with power and persistence, thereby preparing for "the real world." This strategy also fosters the development of humor. My friend, Roy Ogren, who teaches at Branford High School in Branford, Connecticut, cites the case of a gentleman who begged to go to the lavatory because his eyeballs were starting to turn yellow. His witicisms triggered paroxysms of laughter and a flood of rib-ticklers, thus fueling the creative faculty and relaxing students in preparation for learning.

Tracking also enhances the interpersonal communications skills of LL's, for if there's one thing LL's are uniformly good at, it's talking, especially during class. Their volubility and spontaneity are critical communicative skills, vital to the lively exchange of opinions in a democracy. A study by Adnil Lowlers at Nachos Jr. High in
Dorritos New Mexico demonstrated a 25% decline in the volatility of LL's who were later mixed with UL's. It is significant that these findings also apply to private parochial schools in which tracking is practiced. Research conducted at Holy Mackerel High School in Tabullah, Arkansas, by Lowflers' sister-in-law, Nilda Erflows, confirms this point.

Human relations skills also get fine-tuned as LL's who often move in a pack through the day from LL math to LL social studies to LL science to LL English, learn each other's idiosyncracies and vulnerabilities intimately. The raw tension which often develops by the end furnishes the Period 8 teacher with the richest material for lessons in transactional analysis anywhere.

Strict, traditional tracking also teaches students that they lack control over their own lives, a philosophical point explored in The Myth of Sisyphus by Camus through his discussion of "l'imprevu," the unforeseen event which radically alters our lives, sometimes shattering them. In preparation for life in a bizarre, senseless world of imminent nuclear holocaust, drunken drivers and serial killers, students must understand the concept. Inherent in this lack of control is a deep-seated sense of alienation which school systems can inculcate in LL's. In this respect, tracking is actually better for LL's than for UL's, for while the former come to fully internalize the concept, the latter often merely intellectualize it.

A political value of tracking is that it perpetuates existing economic classes, thereby giving LL's—who, for the most part, are poor and/or minority—a sense of belonging within a world from which they are essentially alienated. This is a tricky maneuver which can best be achieved through our nation's schools. It is vital for America that LL's sense some identity, yet be too alienated to unite effectively. First of all, unless LL's, despite their profound sense of alienation, have some sense of belonging, they become depressed, shiftless and, most importantly—as Virgil Hammerschlager, president of the Greater Council of Greasers of Cleveland, pointed out—unproductive. Secondly, the maintenance of existing social classes is essential to the political stability of the United States. Tracking reinforces this stability by obstructing the mobility of the poor and minority students, who often predominate in LL classes. In Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1985), Jeannie Oakes, following an exhaustive analysis of research data, concludes that "tracking appears to interfere seriously with [the goal of] providing access to economic, political and social opportunity" for such disadvantaged students (191). On p. 92 she explores this point in greater detail:

The knowledge and behaviors taught to low-track students . . . for the most part . . . have little exchange value in a social or economic sense; they have no prestige, nor do they permit special access. Everyone, for example, needs to acquire functional literacy and computation skills, not so much for the benefit of the individual as for the functioning of society as a whole. Students who have access only to this low-prestige knowledge are being denied, by omission, access to both educationally and socially important learnings. Further, the non-subject-related behaviors that teachers expect low-track students to learn are of a similar type. While necessary to keep the social system functioning smoothly, behavior patterns such as following directions, work habits, punctuality, being realistic about goals and so forth are not those attributes we most admire in our leaders. They are, however, those we demand from people in lower-level occupations.

By keeping the poor and minorities locked into place, tracking helps to build a stable America. Just look at what happened in the 60's when Blacks started to get "off track." First the buses, then drinking fountains. Now one even wants to be president.

Finally, tracking insulates the UL's not just from contamination by the riff-raff so often found in LL classes, but also from any threat to their status some upstart LL might pose. Take, for instance, a case my friend Roy once told me about of an LL with the temerity to register for Roy's expository writing class. At the end of the course, the student told Roy that he had been amazed to discover that he measured up well against many supposed UL's. This sort of talk on a large scale could shake the confidence of UL's, who by virtue of having been identified as gifted in kindergarten, have a God-given right to maintain their position unharassed.

Aldous Huxley had the right idea in Brave New World when he created a society organized along strict class lines. Until biotechnology evolves as far in our world as in Huxley's, however, we shall have to content ourselves with tracking systems for producing the Delta Minuses and Epsilons upon which our economy and social stability rest. In the words of our Lord (Luke 16:26), "Between us and you there is a great gulf."
Dear Friends,

by Mary Plummer

Contrary to what you may believe, Bud and I are alive and doing very well. Yes, Bud fled the corporate confusion. No, we're not taking any exotic trips this year.

The pity you've been bestowing on us is ill-founded. We're not unhappy with our new life. Because, you see, with or without changes one thing remains constant: our love for each other.

Bud cooks fish. I wash tables. He works long hours. I work long hours. When you witness this scene at our new restaurant perhaps we look out of character. You look as though you feel uncomfortable. We don't.

Yes, I'm alone more. No, I'm not lonely. I too feel relieved of the corporate circus. Lonely was being in center ring; my act was to be every customer's favorite little hostess: endless hours planning gourmet dinner parties, shopping trips for just the right dress to be worn at the president's dinner, smiling when I wasn't in a smiling mood, laughing when I shouldn't, talking too intelligently, not talking intelligently enough-- all with those I'd never choose for friends.

Many of your marriages have long since gone the route of divorce court. You were so concerned with the right magician or pony for the kid's birthday party, redecorating, buying the Mercedes, planning additions to your already spacious home, trips to Never-Neverland.

As for those of you who chose the single life, we've graciously said hello and good-bye to your many lovers through the years. As our speculative business enterprise unfolds, we expect the same support and understanding.

Please continue to call, but don't offer sympathy for the trip we can no longer afford, the jewels I didn't receive for my birthday. With or without possessions, through all the changes, we still have each other. And, you see, that's all we ever wanted.

Your contented friends,

Mary and Bud

When I think of Mom, I see and feel a warm kitchen. I remember walking home from school, anticipating opening the door and entering our cozy kitchen which smelled of either chicken or vegetable soup, tomato sauce, baked chicken, cookies, stew. What mattered more than the food was that she was there, or had been there. She kept it all together--this place we called home. She made sense out of the chaos, gave us a security, a place to run to.

Mom is like so many of her era. My grandparents were immigrants who valued hard work and family. The Depression meant everyone had to work, if possible. There was no money for school picnics, outings, dresses, events. Mom knew she was the smartest in her class, but was also the most proud. There was an eighth-grade outing where she was to be given an academic award. She didn't go because she couldn't afford the negligible cost. Even when a loving teacher offered to pay for her, she refused. I think she regrets that. I know that always affected her self-confidence or self-worth, yet never did she complain about her lot in life. Furthermore, she never, ever made us feel that she regretted being a homemaker and mother. She had accepted her life and reveled in it. She made us all believe that her job was us, her home and my father, and that was good. Doing a good job meant putting her whole heart and soul into it. That's just what she did. You see, she was, and still is, always there for us.

Never was that more obvious than on August 14, 1984 when my mother was told that I had breast cancer and would need a mastectomy. My husband called her at my home the day of the biopsy. (She was watching my sons.) This poor lady had to face the knowledge that her 37-year-old daughter had a disease that could take her life. I remember feeling so sorry and afraid for her. I had to stay in the hospital a few more hours for further testing, but I made my husband call with the news because I knew she was waiting; I couldn't leave her hanging. My friend happened to be at my house when the call came, thank God. Mom had someone to cry with! What really broke my heart and still wrenches my soul was the look on her face when I got home. She looked so small, so hurt, and so tired. She had done the best she could her whole life to keep her kids safe, and now she was so helpless. The story on her face personified the anguish and pain only a mother can feel for an offspring. We couldn't speak, but just hugged each other tightly.

Never once did my mom wall or carry on; she'd never do that. She takes little stock in the "poor me" syndrome. Whenever hard times hit, she'd tell us with warm compassion and a loving hug, to start all over again. Harboring old wounds does not accomplish anything, and tomorrow brings new beginnings. Her need to be there for me, however, was stronger than ever. The worse part was yet to come for all of us. I had the operation and had to wait to hear if the cancer had spread. If so, chemotherapy was inevitable. Except for the waiting, believe it
or not, it was sort of a fun time. My hospital stay had many moments of levity. She stayed with the kids, and when she and my sisters would come to visit, there was always something to laugh about. She helped to keep things light, but I know the fear was inside her.

What lay ahead was chemotherapy because the cancer did spread to the lymph nodes. I had to have three injections every two weeks for a year. I had a hard time accepting this; I was afraid. Mom let me cry it out with her, but she held on to the belief that it would save my life. I could get through it, but she wasn't going to let me go through it alone.

"Elaine, on the day of your treatments, I'd like to come up and help out, okay?" she asked gingerly.

"No. Mom, it's okay, I can do it," I said with a fake assertion in my voice.

"I know you can do it, you're strong, but just having someone else there helps sometimes. Besides, the boys are scared too; it will probably make them feel more secure."

"Mom, don't treat me like a baby! I don't need mothering. Judy has to work and Dad doesn't like to drive all this way. You don't drive, remember? You don't have to come!" I shouted testily.

"I know I don't have to," she said quietly. Then I saw her face. It had the same pain and anguish it had the day I returned from the biopsy. Her daughter was in pain and she couldn't help her. This was the only way she knew. I never protested again. The boys and I came home to find Mom in the kitchen, singing "O Sole Mio," or "Pennies from Heaven" as she cooked up the kids' favorite dishes. Unfortunately, the smells of homemade pizza or the once beloved chicken soup would send me flying from the room, hand over my mouth. We were even able to see the irony in that eventually, and laugh about it. Once again Mom was there, the warmth was there, the love was there. And I'm here to tell the story.

To Endure These Blessings
by Donna Tuxbury

"Tedesco! I'll see you in my office...!" The words echoed down the dark school corridor. My stomach filled with butterflies. I worked for the Wicked Witch. Her name was Ruth. She had short, cropped, black hair, a chiselled face, deep brown eyes and a deceptive smile.

I wondered if she'd been watching me through her hazy crystal ball.

Straightening up, I gazed down the corridor. The wooden door leading out of the school was open. Sunlight warmed the front steps, splashing into the shadowy hallway like bleach. Ruth's form, planted there, silhouetted against the light, gained the added air and stance of a short, German general. With her hands cemented to her hips, she completed the edict. .."NOW!" Then she pivoted and left the hallway empty.

I walked down the hall drawn by the magnetic sunlight. The warmth never carried far into this coolness but rested enticingly at the exit. No one left this school without first having to pass the principal's office. I entered it. It was flooded with light, but the repulsion began abruptly.

"Sit down," Ruth commanded. This was the third day of school. My third day in the real profession of actually teaching a class. Chilled, I sat down.

Ruth's voice crackled and cut the distance between us. Her finger kept syllabic beat in front of my nose. "I'm telling you now. If you can't cut it, I will ask for your resignation."

Reminding myself that they never tire of asking you to swallow castor oil in this profession, I caught the breath I had left and replied, "It's a little early to be asking for my resignation. Perhaps an added week or two would be more reasonable." If I'd considered the future more carefully, I might have taken her up on that resignation. I wasn't going to be able to melt this woman with a pail of water.

"You led me to believe you could teach," she fired back. Her eyes moved over my face searching for weakness, looking for the impact. I could almost hear, "I'll get you my little pretty!"

"What I told you was that I hadn't ever taught three reading groups per classroom before yesterday." I attempted to straighten the facts.

Ruth ended the conversation curtly, "Pull it together or you're out." So began my school year, optimism and desire turning into fear.
I spent my days avoiding her but watching her, like a woman walking alone in the night, wary of hidden dangers. By the end of October, I'd lost ten pounds. I was beginning to look witchy. I hadn't resigned. Unexpectedly, on October 30, due to the approach of Halloween, an afternoon faculty meeting was called. Ruth dictated that all faculty members were to dress in Halloween garb for the following school day. I gazed at my fellow teachers. Surely, a comment would be made. Silence. Attempting to judge their reactions, I was at an impasse.

The following day, Ruth circulated the building, arriving in each classroom to appraise the costume designed and donned by each teacher. Separately from, but along with several other teachers, I had disobeyed the dictate.

"Where's your costume?" she growled. "Where's your school spirit? A fine example you are!"

Other teachers were sprinkling into the hallway, drawn by the noise. I suppose I should have thanked Ruth for so clearly and publicly noting my deficiencies. Instead I began with "Ruth..."

"I stared for a moment at the faces of the teachers watching me. Then stepped into my classroom and closed the door.

The door was still closed when Ruth appeared at it later that same afternoon. Without a knock, the door opened and she issued, "You're coming to dinner with me." She marched in and sat on top of a desk. Realizing my personal time and activities were to become part of her domain, I stopped and, fixing my eyes on her, replied firmly, "No. I'm not. I've made other plans."

"You're just saying that because you don't want to go with me," Ruth chided.

"That's your impression. That's not what I said," I returned. I wasn't in the mood to play games.

"Don't you respect what I say as your principal?" Ruth continued with this whining challenge.

All right, I thought, you're going to continue this line of discussion. Then, I'm going to give you the straight answers. I began, "Honestly, Ruth, no I don't. You allow your teachers no independence of thought. You don't ask for their ideas or opinions.

You impose rudely on their personal time without any regard for their plans. And, you have no right to speak to me, and only me, the way you did this morning. The other teachers who were non-costumed were spoken to quite courteously as I found out."

To my surprise, Ruth began to cry. I changed the conversation to the parent presentation I needed to deliver that evening... on the sacrament of reconciliation... ironically.

Later that evening, Ruth sat down next to me as I awaited my turn to address the parents. I received her smile as she patted my shoulder. She wanted at least the appearance of the "Buddy System." My mind wandered. I envisioned her in black robes with a pointed hat, a twisted nose and missing teeth. A poisoned apple was aglow in her gnarled, sinewy fingers. Then, I was introduced. Throughout the presentation, Ruth remained overly determined to project an image of the supportive administrator. She hung intently on my every word. I could see her from the corner of my eye. At the end, she placed her arm around my shoulders in a congratulatory gesture. The watching parents smiled, thinking reassuredly, I'm sure, of the fine faculty interaction they were witness to.

I drove home with the smell of Ruth's perfume wafting from my clothes. A grimace and a shrug couldn't rid me of her ghostlike presence. The day had been only one of the hundred and eighty-three.

The months passed with periodic episodes of Ruth's "affection" for me. In drawing names for exchanging Christmas gifts, I drew hers. Not even halfway through the year in this Catholic school! "God," I beseeched, "give me patience to endure these blessings."

With no respite in sight until April, I set my mind on emotional and mental survival. Ruth devised additional hoops for me to jump through. Beyond the teaching day there was the art club, orchestrating the music assembly, practice and schedules for Reconciliation and the faculty spiritual retreat day. By June, when Ruth scheduled each teacher to discuss the renewal of contract, my decision had been cemented. The concrete had been poured in September I recalled... on that third day at school.

Walking down the corridor now I knew I'd be able to enter the sunlight very soon... for good. I entered the office.

"Sit down," Ruth's command had grown stale. Courteously, I sat.

"Sarah," Ruth began, "you've done a fine job here. I've made you into a good teacher. I am pleased to offer you the third grade position again for next year. Will you accept?"

I rehearsed her words skeptically. Hmmmm. She made me a good teacher. What a major misconception. This was a woman who thought changing all five bulletin boards monthly and using black ink in a Planbook made one a good teacher. Would I accept?
"No," I replied.

"What would it take to get you back?" she asked directly. Games again, I thought. Not only games, but intrigue as well.

"Twelve thousand dollars" I ventured... conscious of two facts. Here, the most experienced teachers barely grossed ten thousand and Ruth couldn't command the financial aspect of employing her teachers.

"What if I got you twelve? What would you say to that?" Ruth toyed still further.

My monetary bluff should have ended it. But it hadn't.

"No, Ruth. I would say no." I wanted this to be over.

"Why?" she queried. "Tell me honestly." She must be sweating, I thought. Her record for returning teachers was going to be low. Three were remaining out of eight. Her hour glass was running out of sand.

"Because, Ruth, you would still be here," I sighed. She must have known that would be my answer. "You don't value me as a professional. I won't work in this environment. I was trained to teach and I'm going to do it, but not here."

"You won't find it any different any place else," Ruth patronized.

I stood to go but turned at the door. "I'll never know until I try."

Ruth never had time to reply. I closed my eyes as she melted into her chair. The heels of my ruby slippers clicked three times of their own accord.

I sit now, writing you this from the warmth of Kansas.

The nightmare in Oz is over.