

## Mission: Washington D.C. 2007 NWP Spring Meeting

Our Nevada legislators came through for us again. After visiting the offices of Rep. Shelley Berkley, Congressman Jon Porter, Congressman Dean Heller, Senator John Ensign and Senator Harry Reid, all of us in the Nevada WP contingent feel sure that we have a grand slam of support for funding the NWP.

Emily Nielson and I joined forces with representatives from the Northern and Southern Nevada Writing Projects to visit each of our legislators to talk with them about the importance of the NWP and the part it plays in the education of our teachers and children. In addition, we attended roundtable discussions on different topics concerning the WP. I selected Reading in the Summer Institute and Beyond and The NWP Workshop Demonstration. I was able to compare our SI activities to a host of other WP calendars and plans.

I must admit that there was some great food thrown in, as well as a cocktail or two. Plus, Emily, Ruth Devlin (SNWP) and I walked to the monuments, around the monuments, and home from the monuments. I must say, I outdid both these youngsters.

As always, it was an honor representing the GBWP and as always, I'm reminded how very fortunate I am to be a TC in such a remarkable organization. - by Vicki Rossolo

Black suits, cherry blossoms, and nine women from Nevada on a mission – this is what you would have seen on Capital Hill, March 29-30 in Washington D.C., as representatives from the three Nevada writing project sites lobbied for continued support from our legislators.

From Elko, Vicki Rossolo, Nancy Remington and I began our quest by meeting Senators Harry Reid and John Ensign at their regularly held breakfast meet & greet. Over coffee and muffins we shook hands and not-so subtly plugged the National Writing Project.

Next, we marched on to the office of Shelley Berkley, long time supporters of our cause. Once again, we were well received and had only to thank them for their support. When we reached Jon Porter he was just on his way out to vote on war funding; to our surprise he invited us to join him and proceeded to give us a limited access tour of the Congressional Building. We spoke to him in depth regarding the impact of the GBWP and what it means to teachers. He seemed thrilled at our enthusiasm and said he would support us as well. The new guy on the block, Dean Heller, also spoke with us in person and was very interested to hear about the GBWP. In addition, he informed us that he would be meeting with the Secretary of Education later that afternoon, and he wanted to hear what we thought about NCLB. What luck!

In all, we returned to our native Elkonian land with our heads held high – mission accomplished! -by Emily Nielson

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### GREAT BASIN WRITING PROJECT

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*A writer is somebody*

*for whom writing is more difficult  
than it is for other people.*

*~ Thomas Mann ~*

*Essays of Three Decades, 1947*

## *A Day in the Life*

The basics of school we used to teach  
All kids, our goal, to challenge and to reach  
Everyone's the same, no differences too great  
Play games with the children, for school they cannot wait  
Slowly we began to take over more and more  
Counsel them, doctor them, feed them they implore  
It doesn't matter if they come prepared to enter your class  
It's your job to bring them where they need to be and get it done fast  
There are those labeled gifted and some who have been paid no mind  
Differentiate each lesson, so no one's left behind  
Correct all those papers, teach to the test  
Spend hours studying the standards, and try to look your best  
Be ready to work the dance, and sign up for each committee  
Don't give out candy, get to all your meetings  
Someone called in sick, can you fill in during prep time  
Don't forget your recess duty, missing it would be a crime  
Inhale your food in 30 minutes, go to the bathroom too  
Call the parents whose kids just don't know what to do

Although it's overwhelming and seems too great a task  
We do it everyday, none looking for glory in which to bask  
Our students come each year with a whole new set of criteria  
We take a deep breath, finding more ways to teach without hysteria  
For when you're born a teacher, it's a calling that is vast  
And complaining changes nothing, the work will always last

Without losing our sense of humor, we have to keep in mind  
We're important people who truly are the hub of mankind

-by Amy Reagan

## *Slaves Journal North*

This is an excerpt from a book in progress, *Slaves Journal North*, about slaves traveling on the Underground Railroad.



You could tell William was frustrated with Edward. Every time the small boy would cry or whimper, William would tell him, "Hush-up, you gonna get us caught."

Harriet allowed the chastising from the others to go on hoping Edward would get the message and stop whimpering. But on the third night even she couldn't take it anymore.

"Edward," she said, "you knew you's had to be tough. You promised all a us to be a man. You keeps up this whinin' and we all gonna be caught. Some a us gonna die when they gets us, some a us gonna bleed. Bleed so bad we be wishin' for death! Is'n that what you want?"

"No ma'am. It aint." Edward answered back softly, but respectfully.

Harriet looked at each of the other six runaways she knew would perish if she made a poor choice at this very moment. "Then you best be hushed or I's got no choice but to be sendin' you back!" she said with a low, somber voice. "All by yo'self. No help, no food, no shelter. Just the trail, yo' belongin's.... and you."

Edward dropped his head low and wiped his nose with his dirty sleeve, leaving a trail of black across his cheek. Lifting his head to straighten his shoulders he cleared his throat, and said with pleading determination, "I'll be a man, Miz Tubman. I'll be good. I promises I will. Please don't make me go back."

William stepped forward away from the group. "Miz Tubman? I be all alone on this trip and Edward here is like me. What if'n we partner up and watch out for one another?"

Harriet hadn't anticipated this, but was glad the opportunity had presented itself. "Why William, that be a good idea. Edward here would do just fine with a man-size man such as yo'self to help him along." She turned her gaze to Edward. "What you think about it Edward?"

Edward's eyes sparkled and he straightened his shoulders even further. "That be mighty fine with me, ma'am. ....Mighty fine!"

- by Suny Merritt

## FULL MOON

### It's Called Endurance

Glittering, soft, summer light through the window  
Bright enough to see, yet full of dark shadows  
Dogs bark at things they think they must see  
I yell at the dog, "It is only me."

I wake up groggy and grab a jacket  
Stumble out the door carrying the grain packet  
Mix the grain, give electrolytes, fill the water, and feed the hay,  
Listen to my horse's movement and soft neigh

Back inside to dress and eat, soon to leave the camper  
Fill the Camel Back with water, put on sunscreen, things to pamper  
Horses, riders, feeling excitement, outside again, still in shadows  
Brush, clean, saddle, bridle, fill packs, and soon we will all go

In the west, over the tree tops, the moon goes down  
While in the east, mountains appear to make the sun frown  
Horses stomping, nickering, moving restlessly, eager to be gone  
Riders strapping on helmets, jackets, mounting, finally done

Now horses really catch the excitement, some pitch, and rear  
Riders on, some confident and ready, others hang on in fear  
The lead rider takes everyone out at a controlled pace  
Soon each is on their own, perils of the trail to face

Across the creek, up the hill, leaders gone into the mist  
Some horses refusing the creek, riders to the side, list  
Horses left behind, fighting, plunging, and pulling at their bits  
Sweat streaming, riders trying to control these anguished fits

Hours later, horses calm, holding a steady trot  
Through the vet checks, muscles sore, fatigue fought  
Sit up straight and keep yourself balanced for your horse  
Make sure he drinks, give him electrolytes, of course

Getting dark, full moon behind the mountain, coming up bright  
Trail markers hard to find in the silvery, glow stick light  
Frightened, grab your horse up tight, off the trail, a high price to pay  
Must be one with your horse, he knows the way

One hundred miles today, we do not want to accept defeat  
In twenty four hours only, the ride we must complete  
Extreme muscle fatigue, sweat, dirt, dust and blood  
Up and down, heat and cold, maybe rain and mud

Some grow faint, the Rock, Cougar Rock, to climb  
Rocks, bogs, snow drifts we must through them wind  
Steep hills and deep canyons, such terrific heat  
The swinging bridge, river in the dark, the clock we must beat

Each vet check approached with both delight and trepidation  
See that your horse drinks, eats, and rests, one of God's great creations  
Trot that horse out, need to be fast and quick, but can't make my legs work  
Give a little prayer of thanks, we make it through, what a quirk

In the distance, a few more miles, twinkling lights are seen  
As we approach with elation, horse and I both feel keen  
It must be the finish line, ahead a little ways, crew and bed  
We made it; now my wonderful horse must be cared for and fed

Courage and willpower carry us on, care and comfort, await  
Satisfaction bright in the night, glory and acclaim abate  
Solitary and silent, brushing, feeding, walking this great steed  
"You can rest when you die", that is our creed.

-by Jolynn Maynard

## *Writer's Workshop In Action!*

As a second year Writer's Workshop teacher, I can say that things are going better for me this year than they did last year. I have focused on teaching better mini lessons and making my conferences more meaningful. I am still having trouble getting students to apply what they learn, but I am positive, through looking at the data sheets I keep for the writing Traits and other skills, that my students are becoming better writers. Most of them are motivated writers who love the opportunity to get out their portfolios and get the pencil to the paper. I have seen tremendous strides in the use of description in their writing, as well as voice.

The continual hang up is conventions. If I could only get students to remember what I have taught them in the English lessons, and actually apply it in their writing, their stories would be



awesome! They don't make the connection between a lesson and the writing process yet. Many are making improvements, but I guess I just expect more.

As we continue with Writer's Workshop, I hope to intrigue students to love to write, want to write, and even just to write! I have three students this year, in particular, that are wonderful writers and I told them that I will be the first to buy their published books when they get them finished. They are all working on chapter books and have great roads ahead of them. I feel that I have inspired a love for writing in these three students as well as most of my other students. When I asked the question, "How many of you feel like writers?" I got the thumbs up from at least 85%. Isn't that what engagement guidelines say we are striving for?

-by Wendy Wilson

On April 4th and 5th, the Great Basin Writing Project conducted a two-day writing workshop for principals. This workshop was cleverly called The Principals of Writing. The idea came from a session at the annual NWP convention in Nashville this year. The thought was to introduce administrators to the ideals of the Writing Project. Bob McGinty and Vicki Rossolo met Larry Hunt-Southside, Kevin Melcher-Northside, Gwen Anne Thacker-Owyhee, Betty Fobes-Spring Creek High School, Jim Unger-Spring Creek Elementary, and Beth Kern-Central, in the High Tech Central to write and discuss the philosophy of the Writing Project.

The following great pieces are the final writings submitted by the participants.

## My Mother

was the second oldest of a family of eleven children. She grew up during the Depression Era and learned the importance of family and helping out. My mother married at age 16—yes, a high school dropout. She was 16 and my father was an “older” man of 23—scandalous—7 years her senior. She laughingly always told us that she was seeking a “quieter time” for herself. Admittedly she married to escape the demands of her younger siblings hanging on her skirt tails and constantly clamoring for something to eat only to find her so-called quiet time to be short-lived with the birth of my brother one short year after marriage and me to follow in two years. Instead of siblings demanding her time and attention, it became her own family commandeering her every minute from dawn to dusk.

Life was good—Mom was a devoted homemaker and mother, who tilled the soil (we were Southern Indiana farmers) right along side my father. Because farmers work long hours, my parents became very creative with child rearing. The two of them would cart my brother and me off to the fields from the time we were babies to play in the dirt or to sleep on a quilt under the sprawling umbrella-like shade of the towering oak trees at the edge of the fields. As we grew older and could fend for ourselves, my mother and father turned an old grain wagon into a playhouse complete with boxes painted to mimic their uses—a refrigerator, stove, table, chairs. When I reflect on my childhood, I realize now how poor we actually were, and yet my parents brought us up with so much love and creativity that my brother and I never thought of ourselves as doing without anything. Whatever my mother would dream up to fulfill our wants and wishes in the way of toys, my father would craft out of wood or whatever. My brother and I saw ourselves as well to do—rich, if you will.

My parents were very much in love with one another. I recall as a teenager thinking at times, “Oh, please, Dad—more information than I wanted” whenever he would walk up behind my mother as her hands were immersed in the kitchen sink doing the non-ending stacks of dirty dishes once the day in the fields had concluded and he would hug her and kiss her playfully on her neck. This was a “ticklish” spot that always caused Mom to emit a scream, culminating in her throwing dish suds at my father with the same automatic phrase to erupt from her lips, “Henry, not in front of the children!” I knew she didn’t mean that and was never as angry with my father as she pretended to be. From the loving looks the two of them exchanged every waking minute, I simply knew they loved one another.

Then tragedy struck—one warm March morning (March 18, to be exact)—spring was in the Southern Indiana air and all was right with the world, at least that is what I thought that morning at breakfast. It was a rarity, but my father had come in from the never-ending chores of the farm to sit and have a second cup of coffee while I had breakfast prior to running off to school. My dad told my mother and me (my brother was stationed at Fort Knox completing basic training with the Army at the time) that plans were going well for the spring planting. He outlined the fields ready and waiting for the grain and that this year was going to be a surplus year with crops—he felt it in his bones. I boarded the school bus filled with optimism and hope. It was my Senior year and I was scheduled to graduate in two more months. I was sitting in Senior English class when I was summoned to the Principal’s office. I was beside myself. Not to say that I was a “perfect” child, but in all my years of being in school to this point in time, I had never, ever been summoned to the Principal’s office. My mind raced—what had I done? As it was I hadn’t done anything—I loved school, always had. I enrolled in 1st grade at age 5 and never looked back. My mind continued to race. The Principal, Mr. Skelton, was talking—it wasn’t anything I had done. He was telling me he was very sorry for my loss. He was explaining in a quiet voice that my father had passed away suddenly that morning without any warning. What was he talking about? I had just had a special, rare moment with my father at breakfast. My father was only 45 years of age—that wasn’t that old—I know teenagers always think anyone older than 30 is over the hill but not your parents—your parents are suppose to live forever. Mr. Skelton brought me back to reality by stating that one of my uncles, one of my mother’s brothers, would be coming to pick me up to take me to my mother.

My mother—her world had just turned upside down. My mother—who had never worked a day in her life outside of the home. My mother—who had made her life an integral part of my father’s, my brother’s, and my lives. My mother—what now?

Although I was 17 years old and a senior in high school, I ran into my mother’s arms and I hugged her tighter and harder than ever before. I hugged her as though I had just awakened from a terrible nightmare in the middle of the night. I hugged her now as I did then, not wanting to let go of her, wanting her to stay with me as she had during those traumatic childhood nightmare episodes, wanting her to lull me back to a calmer time, a more peaceful time. The only difference being that this time I wasn’t going to fall back to sleep to awaken to a different scenario. My father was gone

Continued from page 4

at age 45. My mother was a widow at age 38. This time the hug was different; this time the roles were reversed. That day (March 18, 1967), I became the parent consoling the frightened child, my mother. My mother's world changed that day just as it did for my brother and me also. But, I hugged my mother that day with the assurance that together we would survive.

Needless to say, I have over the years become the biggest cheerleader, the biggest admirer of a woman who only wanted the so-called simple, old-fashioned life—to guide her children into adulthood with moral fortitude, to participate as a parent supporter and spectator at her children's school and church events, and to greet us at the door as we disembarked from the school bus with freshly baked, warm to the touch, homemade from scratch chocolate chip cookies.

Sometimes life just has a way of happening, and the best laid plans of mice and men go astray as so brilliantly portrayed in John Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men*. I look at my mother today and realize what a strong woman she has become. Once again the roles have reversed and she is definitely the parent, the matriarch of our family. My mother completed her high school degree and entered the strange world of work outside of the home, only to discover that she enjoyed that world. She continues to work, albeit part-time, when most other 77 year olds would have long since retired. In long distance phone conversations, she complains about her hair growing thin and having only three hairs on the top of her head and that she would like to try Rogaine to see if she could generate new hair growth. I laugh over the phone and tell her she might want to simply try a hair piece rather than looking into Rogaine or worse yet hair plugs. When her vanity takes on a new slant about possible Botox treatments to eliminate the wrinkles on her face, I reassure her by telling her in a gentle voice, "Mom, you don't need Rogaine or Botox treatments. When I look at you, I don't see wrinkles or thinning hair, I see "life-lines" of experience. Don't change a thing. I love you as you are." And, the mother-daughter roles reverse again.

- by Betty Fobes

## The Phone Call

starts out, "First of all everything is okay." Within the next two seconds, before the next word is spoken, my world flashes before my eyes. Kelly, Emily, Paul, my children, what has happened? "How can you just say that! What has happened?" Why would you call then? Oh, what if it is my parents! We just visited them and they were great. 77 and 79 are not that old. Dad's going to be having a big celebration for his 80th in the near future. "It's Emily," she says. All right! "Why are you calling then – what happened to the baby?" Becky starts to explain that Emily is in the hospital because she thought she was losing some amniotic fluid. Turns out she was not and that she might stay the night if she felt she had to, but she could go home if she wanted to. Finally I can breathe again, but I think my headache is here to stay – at least for the day. This is still too scary.

Soon my secretary, Dianna, tells me that there is another call. This phone call is the second within 45 minutes from Becky. This time it is for real. Emily has been sent by ambulance to Abbot Northwestern's prenatal unit in the cities—with her baby still in her womb, but for how long? What could have happened in the short period of time since I talked to my wife? Now, was there any way to be able to get home to see my two babies? My mind was scrabbling in no coherent or effective manner that was going to help me answer this question. Then Dianna, Carol and Jill stepped in to help find the solution. They called the airlines and whomever else, I don't remember. (I think this is what it must be like to be in shock.) I know they were asking me questions and fortunately they were pretty simple and could be handled by a somewhat non-functioning mind. Eventually, Dianna had been able to change my reservation without much change in cost to a family medical emergency flight which left Salt Lake City in five hours. This would get me home in time to see Emily and the baby that night.

Now came the drive to the Salt Lake airport. This would be a little quicker than I originally planned. The well thought out plan for my trip home at spring break in three days was out the window. Now speed and timing was of the essence. They kicked me out of school and wished me luck and said that everything would be fine. I drove back into Elko to stop in my apartment to change clothes and get the few things I thought I needed. As I entered, the phone was ringing. I didn't have time to answer but could this be the third in a morning of painful calls. My mind went crazy as I went to answer again not knowing if I really wanted to or not. Here it was Dianna to the rescue again. I had left my wallet on her desk without which I never would have been able to get on my flight. She said she would drive to my apartment to bring it to me. She was there within minutes and within fifteen minutes she was wishing me a safe trip, again. My three hour drive never seemed to take place. It was a blur that I didn't break out of until I neared the airport. Then my sense kicked in. I was able to make my way around the parking process with ease. Fortunately, my trip just a few weeks ago, that I complained about having to make, came in very handy. Twenty minutes later I had passed through everything; parking, transport to the terminal, picking up my ticket and getting through security and making my way to the plane's gate with time to spare. God was definitely helping me along today. The plane got me to Minneapolis with enough time for my wife to pick me up and rush to the hospital where I was able to let Emily know I was there for her and to kiss her goodnight.

- by James Unger

**CLICK** Pssst, pssst, gurgle, sputter, gurgle, sputter, pssst...ahhh, the aroma of fresh Columbian breakfast mix begins to float down the hall into morning like first trickles of moisture heading down-stream during early spring irrigation, quenching thirsts of newly planted fields.

Click. My arm flops in a paralyzed-like thrust towards the clock set to ring at this ungodly hour. Falling short, the awkwardly located switch is missed and music blares for a brief moment as a second pass at “snooze” achieves success. Listening intently in hopes my wife hasn’t been disturbed from her peaceful coma-like sleep, a sigh of relief is released. Eyelids are heavy as temptation for additional shut-eye pounds in my foggy mind. Trepidation of losing valuable dissertation writing minutes beckons inner strength to plant my bare feet firmly on the floor.

Click. The light switch seems to emit louder than usual sound as it is toggled on and my silent creeping trek proceeds down the Berber carpeted hall. “Destination den” is achieved and the window blind is raised anticipating eastern sun shining newness into the day; fulfillment will be delayed while Earth rotates a few more degrees.

Click. The laptop is ignited accompanied by my prayers that volume control is muted and “DeepFreeze” type monsters have not reset volumes to rock concert decibels. Grating Windows music is not invited to my early morning ritual.

Click. “Meow.” The family cat, lightly clips the den door while entering to greet her early morning partner. A rhythmic purr begins as my hand blindly reaches down finding a pink moist nose sensing my existence. The cat has seized all attention and diverted my mind from insane thoughts of slithering back to bed that would cause daily research and writing to be bagged. My laughter is not restrained as entertaining feline behaviors soften early morning tensions. I thrust the cat onto the window ledge to scout for yard intruders and guard the world as the new day is born.

Click. The coffee pot lightly bumps against my deep blue mug as the eye-opening liquid flows, signaling keys of my computer are about to begin their morning tap dance. Document files open and soft click, click, click-click, click echoes through the room as Pacific Time Zone readies for daybreak. Intent writing focus has blocked surrounding noise and thoughts as minutes turn into hours.

Click, clack, click. “Meow!” Unexpectedly, my feline’s paws suddenly stroll across the keyboard in search of attention, affection, and a playmate. A readily available two-bit string looped around the door knob is quickly snatched in hopes this dual purpose entertainment and exercise facilitator will pacify the beast. Successful distraction has refocused the orange long-hair enough to save valuable work before the disastrous delete key is pawed into submission. My writing companion finds her customary spot on the den bed and curls up for rest after a quick paw cleansing. The familiar click, click, click-click, click returns again to fill my dark and silent confines of the den. Time once again races towards daybreak as focus is laser-beamed back to writing.

Click. The sound of running water in a distant part of the house alerts den occupants to the awakening of my wife and brings attention to the break of dawn. The end of early morning creativity is approaching and preparation for another workday nears. Early morning silence retreats as daybreak peeks over the landscape. The den door creaks as filtered light enters from the hall accompanied by my wife cheerfully announcing, “How are my early morning friends? The shower is all yours!”

Click. My laptop is powered down and it whirls back to silent respite, awaiting another early morning prelude.

- by Kevin Melcher

The two remaining pieces, written by Larry Hunt and Beth Kern, will be in the fall GBWP newsletter.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

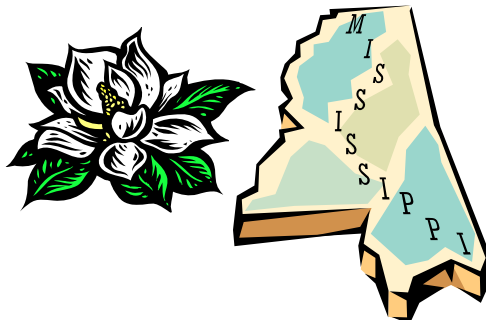
On June 12 and 13, during the Writing Project Summer Institute, Gina Guess will be a guest speaker. All TC’s are invited to attend her presentation on June 13.

Gina, who has presented at past summer institutes, is a classroom teacher and a TC from Mississippi. Members of the GBWP met her at a Rural Sites Network meeting in Alabama.

On June 20, Kim Patterson from Mississippi will be visiting the Writing Project Summer Institute. All TC’s

are also welcome to attend this presentation.

Kim works for the Mississippi Writing/Thinking Institute. It’s an affiliate of the National Writing Project.



In July, Writing Project TC’s Darla Lipparelli and Wendy Wilson will be going to Wellesley, Massachusetts to take part in the Teacher Inquiry Communities Network.

This is a four day summer institute that is designed to give its participants the tools to promote the development of inquiry communities at their writing project sites.

Participants will be reading, writing, and thinking about inquiries, developing inquiry questions, gathering and analyzing data, and thinking about how to go public with the work.