

Great Basin Writing Project
Invitational Summer Institute 2007
Anthology

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Writing Project Acrostic
by Lisa Freeman

Wickedly beautiful
Radiant jewels of ideas
Invitation to believe in yourself
Temptation of dreams
Insightful positions
New friends
Golden lines
Possibilities endless
Ravishing the soul
Opportunity for growth
Jungle of memories
Emotionally charged pieces
Challenging participants beyond their breaking points
Tantalizing morsels of imagination

Trinidad for Principal
By Vicki Rossolo

The head mistresses' office shows dignity and affluence. A new desk with a matching chair sits predominately in the center. Attractive pictures of Trinidad and Tobago hang on the wall behind her desk. I can look out one of three rectangle windows to view the giant bougainvilleas that profligate outside in the garden. A sofa and chair are available for all visitors. There is a neat but simple bathroom next to the office. The book shelves are clean. And bare.

Head Mistress Sana invites my sister and me in. She is thrilled, she says, to have us visit St. Michael's School for Boys. She tells me how fortunate St. Michaels is to have my sister volunteer at the school. Apparently, it is very difficult to get trained teachers for a school such as St. Mikes. Their funding is so poor—so many orphaned and incorrigible boys. What good teacher is willing to work with criminals such as these 10-14 year olds?

My sister volunteers at St. Mikes a couple of days a week when she is in Trinidad. Nancy works with the 12 year old boys. Beautiful children, Nancy says.

Head Mistress Sana tells us that the administration tries very hard to provide a home for the children. She insists that they represent St. Michaels well. They wear crisp white shirts and pressed blue slacks. Their hair is slicked down and short. She tells us their faces are clean.

Finally, the Head Mistress ushers us down the steps to the playground and then comments that it must be time for us to leave. We watch her as she returns to her office. Nancy's face is tense so I suggest we leave the school. But Nancy insists on showing me the classrooms.

I enter one classroom—the classroom she uses for her 12 year old boys.

There are no books, no bulletin boards, not enough desks and only a few chairs. The boys lounge on curled up, ancient carpet remnants watching an old TV set. I see no paper, pencils, crayons. I do see dirt, shoved to the corners and ignored. I see the floor that is half dirt, half cracked concrete. I see the trash strewn around the edges of the classroom.

And I see the children—the look on their faces that I recognize instantly. Nancy introduces me to Jack, one of her favorites. His eyes search my hands—looking for food? Toys? Trinkets? He refuses to look at my face, but extends his hand knowing the risk of snubbing me. His cheekbones protrude and his complexion is gray and waxy. He's very thin and short. His hair is jet black and curly. I resist the urge to fluff it as I would do to my own boys.

We say goodbye. My sister gives Jack a hug and then we leave in our 1960 white Cadillac and our driver. It is then that I hear the rest of the story and it is then that I begin to understand.

The boys sleep in dormitories. Tight rows of narrow beds. No adults to take care of them. The St. Michael's report says there are two adult men on duty on every floor every night. There is one. One man for 100 boys and he sleeps.

Jack is raped every night—by the other students of St. Michaels. And when his turn is done, these desperate boys will find another of their own.

Meanwhile, I am sitting here, in America, writing on my computer that I did not buy myself, waiting to finish out my day of work so I can go home to a steak dinner and spend my evening watching Law and Order. After using all the hot water I want to in the bathroom, I will crawl into a warm, clean bed and sleep without fear except for worrying if my 20 pound cat is going to jump on my stomach.

Jack will have more worries tonight.

The Administer of Education, who happens to be the wife of the Prime Minister, just allocated 1200 Trini dollars to help build and repair schools. That's 200 U.S dollars.

If I gave \$1000 to St. Michaels I could hire five more full-time teachers. If the six people I work with each gave an additional \$1000, we could rebuild the entire school, complete with new plumbing, furniture, and school supplies. We could do that. Except that there is no one to send the money to. There is no one to trust to use the money honorably, including the Administer of Education.

The beautiful island of Trinidad is held hostage to greed, corruption, and sloth. Those beautiful, frightened, incorrigible boys will continue without parents, learning nothing, wasting away. There is no one to protect them. There is no one to protect Jack.

Celia McGinty

Long-Distance Problem Solving

My two children are grown now; in child-development terms my husband and I are empty nesters. I hadn't thought much about what it would be like to be an empty nester, although I did pick up the idea from friends that once the bittersweet pain of having your children leave home is over, it can be a lot of fun. No one warned me about the problem-laden telephone call, or the challenge of solving problems long-distance.

We, the parents, and other parents I know, are, from time to time, presented with problems we are asked to solve or help solve, long distance. The challenge is that these problems cannot actually be solved by us, except in cases involving cash transfers. An additional complicating factor is that anything that we say is likely to be wrong or misinterpreted.

One time a few years ago when our daughter was in college in Iowa, she called on an uneventful Sunday morning to report that she had left the water running in the upstairs sink in the house she was sharing with several other students and it was now, as she put it, "raining" in the living room. "What should I do?" she asked her dad frantically. "Will the ceiling collapse? What about the electrical wiring getting wet?" My husband did his best, and the conversation pretty much proceeded as you can imagine a conversation to proceed when someone in Nevada is trying to diagnose a house problem in Iowa. Is the ceiling bowed? What is the ceiling made of? Now it's raining in the basement? Not good. My husband asked our daughter if she knew anyone with a shopvac. "Are you kidding? We're all in college," she responded in a tone that suggested her father was more than a little dense. At one point in the conversation I heard my husband gently suggest that perhaps one ought to know a little more about one's landlord than the fact that his name is Bill. A phone number, a last name, where he lives—any one of those facts might come in handy someday. Eventually the conversation ended and our daughter set to work mopping up the mess with her clothes and the clothes of all her housemates as there weren't enough towels and there was no one home to help her.

One day last winter this same daughter called from Denver, where she currently lives, to tell us that while attempting to drink tea and drive at the same time she had rear-ended a construction truck. She was only going 10 mph and the construction truck driver didn't even realize he'd been rear-ended, but her car had \$2300 worth of damage to the front end. At times like these an experienced parent will stop to consider that a comment such as, "I certainly hope you learned something about paying attention while driving," is likely to be misunderstood as, "How did I raise such an incompetent idiot?" This is a conversational direction it would be wise to avoid with a person who will be around to resent you for it until the day you die. Besides, the real problem was that she didn't have the \$1,000 deductible her insurance required, so this was one of those problems we actually could solve long distance--by sending money.

Because my husband is easier to reach by phone during the day during the school year than I am, he got to take the call from her two weeks later when she called in tears and near hysteria to report that on the very day she had picked up her car from the auto

body shop she'd been hit by another car while she was attempting to change lanes and her car was totaled. Even the brand new snow tires we had bought for the car as our daughter's Christmas present were ruined. I'm really not sure how the conversation between my husband and my daughter went, but hopefully he was a little calmer with her than he was with me when he gave me the news.

Recently I was the one who answered the phone when she called to say that she couldn't get her car's gearshift to move from park to drive and she was stuck in a strip mall in Aurora, Colorado. Drawing on my experience in fixing computer problems, I suggested she turn her car off and then on again and see if that helped. "I've already tried that," she retorted. "Did you think I just called you the minute I couldn't get it started?" Then she added plaintively, "I was hoping Dad would be home." Her father later told me he wouldn't have been any help. The car she owns now, which she bought with the insurance settlement from the totaled car, is a Volvo, a make about which he knows nothing. (Later she called to say a Volvo mechanic had directed her to a reset button near the engine which rendered the car drivable, which really illustrates our incompetence with Volvos.)

I certainly don't want to suggest that all problems that are presented long-distance are car problems. We've handled many other problems long-distance: the stopped-up toilet problem, the bad-job problem, the no-job problem, the boyfriend break-up problem, the I-overslept-and-missed-my-plane problem, the mouse-in-the-apartment problem, and the bedbugs-in-the-apartment-next door problem.

Some problems are easy. How do you tell if chicken is cooked? How long does it take to cook a turkey? What tool do you use to cut through the bicycle lock when you've forgotten the combination?

I know that there are other problems we've tackled, successfully and unsuccessfully, and I would ask my husband to remind me of some of them except that I can't right now. He's on the phone. There's a car in California that won't start. It doesn't belong to us or anyone we know, and it wouldn't normally concern us except that our son is riding in it.

Bummer!
by Jan Newman

It's annoying to have a monkey on your back. You let one monkey on and then other monkeys want to join in the action. As the monkeys pile up, it becomes a frustrating balancing act which saps all of your energy. Of course, the best way to avoid this dilemma is: never allow a monkey to climb onto your back in the first place.

Through the years, I've tried several methods of discipline with varying effectiveness. To some degree I still ended up being the one expending more time and energy than the disruptive student, asking a set protocol of questions, filling out discipline logs and completing an action plan. But now, thanks to meeting Jim Fay and David Funk, I keep monkeys squarely on my students' shoulders. In their book, *Teaching with Love and Logic: Taking Control of the Classroom*, they empower teachers with positive methods of managing classroom dynamics with less stress and more joy.

The book's first chapter gives an account of a principal who listened and spoke with empathy and concern but never took accountability away from students by making decisions for them. Snippets similar to these were delivered by the principal while going in and out of his office to a boy deposited there by a furious teacher: "Bummer!" "What are you thinking?" "It's a bummer!" "I'll come back later and see how you're doing." "What are you thinking?" and finally, "That sounds like a good idea. I hope it works out for you. Good luck!" The principal's schedule was not held hostage by the misbehaving student, nor were his emotions. By the time the disruptive student realized the principal was not going to solve the problem, he was calm enough to formulate a rational plan of action himself. I was amazed at the simplicity yet wisdom of it all. I practiced saying, "Bummer!" with sincerity.

On the third day of school, during early morning recess, I had an opportunity to practice my newly acquired knowledge. Several boys rushed toward me frantically, "Mrs. Newman, we need to call the fire department! Carson (name has been changed to protect the guilty) kicked his shoe up on the roof!" "Bummer!" I replied without a shred of sarcasm. The boys repeated their seemingly alarming news as if I hadn't heard them correctly. I continued my refrain, "That's a real bummer." I observed Carson, pointing to the roof, laughing, basking in the attention of his predicament. I knew if I didn't pull this "Love and Logic" business off soon, that the school's roof would host a bevy of shoes. It wasn't until *after* the school bell rang that Carson approached me. "Mrs. Newman, my shoe's up on the roof and you need to get it down for me," he said with a mischievous grin on his face. Calmly, I explained, "What a bummer Carson. I don't do ladders. Besides, it's time to line up and start our day." "But Mrs. Newman, I *need* my shoe!" he said with sudden urgency. "I know you need your shoe, Carson. As a matter of fact, we have a school policy that requires students to wear shoes at all times. It will not be safe for you to go to recess with only one shoe, so you'll need to be on the wall during recess times. I know it's a bummer!" (Bummer

was fast becoming my new favorite word.) Consternation creased his brows. "Can't Mr. Pay get my shoe down *before recess?*" he appealed. "I don't know when or if Mr. Pay will be able to retrieve your shoe. Besides, he isn't here now and when he is here later on, he will be very busy cleaning our school but I'll put in a special request for your shoe. Ask me about it when we go to specials this afternoon and I'll check to see if Mr. Pay was able to get your shoe." Carson was no longer smiling. Resigned to his temporary loss, he lined up.

After school was dismissed later that afternoon, as I turned the windshield wipers on against the pelting rain, I recalled that Carson had forgotten to remember to ask me for his shoe. Images of Carson sloshing home in the rain, a new shoe on one foot and a filthy, soggy sock on the other, flashed in my mind. "It's Friday! What a bummer!" I shouted out loud. I envisioned a monkey clinging desperately to *his* back the entire weekend. I chuckled all the way home.

Frances DeWitt

Sincerely, New Orleans

My deep crimson night sky envelops my locals, shopkeepers, artisans, and you—a tourist. An aura of mist from Lake Pontchartrain and the Mississippi will hover above your rum-clouded head. Tonight, you will not see the moon or stars, but you will see my Vieux Carre (my French Quarters) which are of the Old World.

My balconies above your head embellish palms and ferns and private parties. My wrought iron grape leaves adorn the balconies' posts and rails and veil the building's face like the black lace over the face of a French widow in mourning.

My banquettes (sidewalks) imperatively beckon you to walk cautiously down Pirate Alley, Bourbon Street, and Calle d' Chartres. Yes, check the alcoves with a jaundice eye while you keep your footing on the cumbersomely chiseled cinder-black cobble blocks. Beyond each archway's façade might be a "façade"—a jester from Jackson Square lurking in the shadows to "Laissez les bon temps rouler!" (Let the good times roll!) with *your* money. White stucco open archways are looking glasses into the Old World—carbon copies of the "old country's" lush courtyards and patios of the descendants of the descendants from France and Spain—old Europe. Look down and through each archway and see the living pictures which show you my people's "joie de vivre" (joy of living)—like a photo without a cutline from an article in Southern Living. But you are not invited, tourist—walk on.

I am NOLA—N'awlins--New Orleans. I am walking tours of Catholic cathedrals by candlelight and the home of Dixie Land bands under canvas covered stages. I am sidewalk singers singing acapella while tourists drink café au laits and tip her with their pocket change. I am medieval—I am full of jugglers in bright colored satins, palm readers, mimes, and bards. I am zydeco--with accordions pumping in the pubs of the heart of me. I am modern—and full of jazz. I AM the city with the saxophone silhouettes standing solo and lonely on misty street corners. I am a city of volunteers working and counseling to put me back together after a horrible marriage between Katrina and St. Bernard and the Ninth Parish. I am the Deep South. I am fifteen feet below sea level, leaving you no where to run when the rains come because there ain't no higher ground than the banks of the Mississippi.

I am a city of Gumbo Ya Ya (everybody talking at once). My flavors will seep into your veins and haunt you after you leave my kitchens of Creole, Cajun, and French cuisine. Once you have left me, you will be in search of your own roots in your own lands to find flavors to equivalent to mine—but probably to no avail. I am that—and more. I am Spanish, Indian, Acadian, and African American. My food is fun to the tongue—and it will call you back. I am the mother of crawfish etouffé. I am a vol-au-vent of seasons and spice. I'm the coeur a la crème of chocolate. I'm the princess of pralines and pecans and The King's cake. My air is humid and laden with cayenne, coffees, chili powder, and paprika and weighs heavy in your lungs. My flavors remind you that we are different, tourist. That through all the years of indifference, inequality, and disparity I have taken the simple--the jambalaya of turnip greens, okra, and andouille and made it so profound and so sagacious that tourists flock to me like hungry children flock to their hardworking slavemother. My strange and foreign entrees will work their way into your schema of cravings—and you will want to take my risks and come back

--guar-an-teed!

Canning Watermelon

Sherri Marsh

Memories are those moments suspended in time hanging in one's thoughts to never be forgotten. I wish we could can them like mothers and grandmothers do their prized summer fruits and vegetables. This way it would be to our choosing which ones could stay upon the shelf never to be opened again, just collecting dust. Or, we could delight in the freshness of a memory as we pry the lid open and experience the long forgotten way we felt about it. I have a memory I would can and reopen time and time again.

My grandmother will be my prized memory when the time comes. If I had to choose something from a garden to equate her to, it would be a watermelon. To me a watermelon is something to be enjoyed on a blistering summer day. It brings about quaint thoughts as older folks watch young ones flick seeds at one another. It elicits thoughts of picnic memories and family gatherings. I think there are many parts to a watermelon that depicts the essential ingredients that make up my grandmother.

The pink fleshy part of a watermelon is where you taste the sweetness. My grandmother's "sweetness" for others less fortunate than she always prevailed. Alan Frazier stole her heart with his Down's syndrome eyes and his innocent demeanor. My grandmother, not even twice his senior, stopped by Alan's house every Sunday to give him and his mother a ride to church. Alan was close to my grandmother's age, but mind wise, he had the thoughts of a small toddler child. She gathered him up just like the mother duck did with her ugliest of ducklings. Yes, my grandmother and Alan's mother were friends, but it was his sweet spirit that made her accountable for Sunday come to meeting time. Alan adored going to church with her, even though his mind probably could not comprehend a sermon one, he loved being in the presence of my grandmother. Each and every Sunday he piled in the back seat. Alan, grinning from ear to ear, would hand her a lime sucker every single Sunday. It was the kind you get at doctor's offices that have a loop for a stick. It was a small token of his appreciation for her taking the time to pick him up every week. Come to think of it, I can still envision a massive amount of lime suckers in her candy dish on the hutch. I always thought to myself, "Boy she sure does have to go to the doctor often." She hated lime suckers, but she graciously took them from Alan anyway.

The seeds of a watermelon provide growth. They are what I would consider to be life's little lessons grandmother planted and taught us throughout our lifetime. My dad is her only child, and my two brothers and I are the only grandchildren she has to speak of. Though we are few, she did not lack in planting her seeds in us any time she got a chance to. Grandma planted the seed of believing in God. She always said, "If you have scabs on your knees from all that praying, keep it up, they should never heal." I don't think that seed has sprouted in me completely just yet. I have small abrasions on my knees; I have to work on the scabs. Grandma also planted the seed of a good work ethic. She tells the story of how she had to charge a twenty-five cent loaf of bread in the early stages of her marriage. She vowed from that day forward she would never charge a single item again. She hasn't! I found it simply amazing that my grandparents could pay for their house and

cars in cash, yet be denied a credit card because she did not have any credit to speak of. I definitely want that seed sprouting in me!

The final part of the watermelon that makes up my grandmother is the rind. When you sit a spell and think about a watermelon rind you may conclude it is the strength that holds it all together. Most people, to my assumption, would consider a watermelon rind something useless, good for nothing, hard, only fit for garbage dwelling. I, on the other hand, in comparison to my grandmother think this is the most important part. Grandmother is the tough outer layer encasing that keeps us all together. No matter what happens, she always takes control and guides us all through lurid times in our lives.

This is why my grandmother reminds me of a watermelon. It takes all of her parts to make each of us a whole. Circumstances have changed due to a stroke two years ago that left her physical body feeble, and a mouth with no words. Though communication, by all accounts ceases to exist, my grandma and me still have an understanding between one another. She knows how I feel about her and I will continue to know her feelings for me. As far as canning this memory, I may be the first to ever can watermelon. I will take this one off the shelf, pry open the lid, deny it the right to collect dust, and bask in the way this memory will always make me feel.

HOME

Jerod Marsh

There is no stronger memory than the view as I approach my Mom and Dad's home, the place that I called home for the first nineteen years of my life. The ascent up the quarter mile drive, what my family referred to as our lane, was always a welcome sight to my eyes as a child. The white house with the red roof? country folks can be a little less specific when it comes to giving driving directions. It wasn't a big house, but it seemed huge as a child. Roughly, the amenities were close to 1200 square feet, three bedrooms, and one bathroom. It housed anywhere from five to ten people at a time and sometimes the holidays upped the tenant count to twelve! Looking at the house now, it seems much smaller than I remember, but in my childhood eyes, it was all the castle a family could ask for. That house, built in 1917, has stood the test of time, a 30 mile move in 1949, hail storms, blizzards, torrential rains, quarrels, deaths and births. That house has witnessed both the happiness and pain of our family. If only those walls could talk, they would have so much to say. Our farm was called View Point Farm. Those were the words inscribed on our mailbox, and those were the words that best described the view from our front porch. To say you could see a "country mile" would be an understatement. On a clear day you could easily see 50 miles or more. As a child, I had over 3000 acres to call my playground, and my mother didn't even break a sweat when I was gone for hours at a time. Every day was a new adventure waiting to happen. My trusty BMX dirt bike was the preferred means of transportation. My BB gun was always strapped to the handlebars, eagerly waiting to make short work of a ground squirrel, mud swallow, prairie dog, or even a rattle snake. Yes, all offensive pests and predators had the potential to become victims to my marksmanship. The country view applied to the sky, as well. They called it Big Sky Country. I sometimes counted the jets that flew over in a day. Guessing which ones would have the loudest sonic booms was also a favorite past time of mine. I never really noticed when we stopped hearing the obnoxious percussion of the sonic booms that all jets seemed to make when we were children in the 1970's. Just a few years ago, I researched sonic booms and discovered that the Federal Aviation Board put a stop to sonic booms in the late 1970's. It was only a matter of pilots adjusting their altitude, airspeed and whatever other factors that created the insanely loud noise of the sound barrier being broken. Anyway, the term Big Sky had never provoked much thought in my childhood mind. It wasn't until I was much older that I gained an appreciation for the vast expanses of sky. I did a little traveling and discovered there were places with so many buildings that you actually couldn't see the sky. Wow, a view of the sky as a commodity! I had it pretty good back there in the Big Sky Country of Montana.

It's amazing what we convince ourselves of as children. I was pretty sure city kids weren't of much use for anything. They didn't have chores...at least none as rugged as the ones I had on my list. On our one or two monthly trips to town it seemed as though every boy my age was just riding his bike up and down the street without a care in the world. The carefree look each of them sported gave me the assumption that they had no chore lists at all. There just seemed to be no end to the work that I had to help out with on our farm. There were days I had to work for hours at a time doing non-rewarding things like picking weeds in the garden and snapping the ends off of beans. In my mind, my parents were just shy of breaking some serious child labor laws. In reality, like all children, my perspective of the clock was slightly skewed from time to time. Four hours of light work sometimes felt like an entire day, but like every other child, play time was always in short supply! As an adult, I'm pretty sure that's just a universal fact. As a boy, my friends and I actually convinced ourselves that we hated all city kids, but like all kids, I think we were just envious of the grass on the other side of the fence. Today, I wouldn't take back a single minute of my childhood time on the family farm. My father was always telling me that the hard jobs were the ones that built character. In fact, now that I think about it, my father referred to all hard jobs, miserable times and most unpleasant circumstances as 'character builders.' At the time, I wasn't sure what 'character' was, but he assured me it was a good thing that I would always need more of. It may have taken me a few decades to decipher my Dad's never-ending wisdom about 'character?', but the important thing is that it finally became relevant knowledge that I use daily and actually repeat to my boy. If the walls of my childhood home could talk, what would they say? It would be interesting to hear their tales, but sadly, those walls will never have the gift of verbalizing the events in time that shaped my life. Those walls can't talk, but those walls were the safe haven that protected a family, helped it grow, and fostered the success of two generations of children. The white house with the red roof, that's where I'm from.

Where I'm From
Becky Lisle

I am from horseshoes and pocket-knives
From wildflowers and baby kittens in haystacks
I am from the corral dust I wear
On my skin and in my nose
I am from honeysuckle bushes and sagebrush
And the stunted pine
That never could grow quite right here
I am from pan gravy and rawhide
From cowboys and cattlemen
(They are not the same, you know)
I am from the strength and promise of heritage
From a weed in the garden
Sucking water from the roses
Selling tickets for guilt trips
I am from drunken brawlers and family not-so-secrets
From cactus flowers and velvet foal noses
From hard choices and closed eyes
I am from After All I've Done For You and You Can Do Anything You Set Your Mind
To
From clam chowder and triple-axels
From enlightenment and irreverence
From late night talks about God, sex, weeds, and wicked witches
I am from bad puns and good books
From Get Your College Education so you will have Choices
In the closet, in the safe with the guns
Polaroids and negatives
Of faces now in the ground
Spirits of yesterday embrace me
Reassuring that today's flesh and blood is temporary
That my future lies
In the wind under a bluebird's wing
In my song of the sage

Anna Maderis
Great Basin Writing Project
July 12, 2007

Play

Thomas was an active child, who because of his September birthday started his kindergarten year at age 4. He was an affectionate child, who wanted to please. Yet his immaturity often caused him to cry in frustration when faced with any complex or lengthy task.

But he could play. Blocks, cars, Legos, and especially the sand table. He liked the feel of the sand, both wet and dry. He buried dinosaurs and carefully excavated them. He created racetracks and sand dunes for his pretend motorcycles. He built mountains and volcanoes. But he also spent an equal amount of time at the sand table with the plastic letter forms, at first using them as molds for building sand castles. But as he experimented, he would call me over to ask me to “read” what he had written in the sand with the plastic letters. He delighted in the long guttural sounds I would make as I pointed to each letter. He would then make a point of reading his “words” to his friends.

As the year progressed and he received more formal letter and sound instruction, I noticed a change in his sand writing. He clearly wanted an S to begin Stegosaurus or a TX to stand for Tyrannosaurus Rex. He was no longer content to simply string letters together without a phonetic reasoning behind them.

By midyear, this bright and very young child wanted more letters in order to spell words he had seen in the classroom or in books. He was frustrated by the limited number of letters we had, so he would often position other letters to substitute for the ones he needed – perhaps using a sideways capital E for an M. When he called me over to read, there would be a word or two of completely correct conventional spelling, mixed with words of correct beginning or ending sounds. As often as not, he would read the short sentences to me rather than the other way around.

His delight in cracking the reading/writing code almost equaled mine. His oral language skills grew as he basked in the attention of a short daily conversation with his teacher. His “driting” (a developmental stage combining drawing and writing that young children often use as a stepping stone to conventional writing) during more structured writing time became fluent and detailed, despite difficulty grasping and controlling a pencil. He became a resource for other students to use when they needed help figuring out how to spell a word. Best of all, he became confident of his skills as a writer.

Thomas is grown now, with children of his own. I don’t know how much he remembers of his kindergarten year, but he taught me one of the most valuable lessons of my career. Play is the natural way young children learn.

Larry Renteria

A Soldier's Memoir

Over the past several years I have been dealing with a tragedy that struck down 28 U.S. Army Infantrymen. This tactical mishap killed six people and shattered the lives, dreams and careers of these soldiers. I was lucky enough to live. There are so many emotions wrapped into this one event; I will focus on the tiny decisions made that fateful day, the questions that continue to haunt my dreams and thoughts and pay tribute to the memory of these men. This is how my tragic twist of fate unfolded.

June 18, 1996, twenty-eight members of Charlie Company 3/502 Infantry, 3rd Platoon and Mortar Crew anxiously await the arrival of several Blackhawk helicopters. Rehearsals for the rescue of a downed aircraft had been completed and changes were made. First, the troopers with big bodies and heavy loads would fast rope, the art of quickly deploying from the helicopter. Using a thick rope, the soldiers grab it one after another and slide approximately 100 feet to the ground below. It is fast, and often times very messy at the bottom. More than once I witnessed a pile of men twisted like a giant pretzel at the bottom of the rope. Big guys or troops with heavy loads couldn't stop themselves on the rope and were more likely to have a hard landing, so it was decided they should exit the aircraft first. That decided, all the big men would hook their safety line on the left side, the unloading side of the aircraft for this mission. We are ready. Meanwhile, unknown to us, a new pilot rehearses his approach and departure with his fellow pilots. The new pilot painstakingly struggles through several failed attempts until he finally gets the green light to pick up the troops. Choppers en-route, things are about to get busy.

The aircrafts approach the soldiers, swoop down and the men jump aboard. My troops and I are on the new pilot's chopper. Each man takes his strategic place in the chopper and hooks his safety line. I am facing the rear of the aircraft and on the right hand side; I am not a "big guy" nor do I have a "heavy load." The chalk leader gives the signal appropriately, and then we repeat the command, "10 minutes," then "3 minutes" and finally, "30 seconds."

Safety harnesses unhooked, smiles turn to looks of determination, fear and concern as we approach the objective. We come in on a fast approach and the number one man, Nathan Shirley, quickly kicks out the 150 foot fast rope. Seated facing the rear of the chopper, I look over my left shoulder at the chopper next to us thinking, "That damn thing is way too close." I can see the eyes of each camouflaged face and read the nametapes on each uniform. First Sergeant Harrison, a Somalia warrior and survivor, kicks out the rope on his chopper and looks up. Ranger Harrison and I clearly lock eyes. In a split second we know... looks of disbelief and concern sweep across each of our faces. Neither of us can

believe we are able to look into the eyes of the other. “Thank goodness the other helicopter is at a slightly lower elevation and we still have time.”

“It just isn’t right.” I turn to yell at the pilot as we begin to settle into the proper elevation... A thunderous boom, the collision of fiberglass rotors exploding from contact and I turn to see helicopter parts disintegrating before my very eyes. I can feel the helicopter vibrating, juddering and coming apart at every rivet. I scream to my fellow troops, “ We’re Fucked!” The tail and rotor of the copter next to us completely rips away from the body of the aircraft and I am thrown backward toward the front of my craft. I crash into something, feel my M16 give way and an incredible blow to my head... lights out, nothing.

Camera flashes, frames in time captured with my eyes and burned into my memory...

Photo 1--Being loaded into a skid-co (a toboggan type of evacuation tool for moving bodies).

Photo 2--Lying here; cannot move, turn my head or feel my left side.

Photo 3-- Scanning, bodies everywhere.

Photo 4-- Merely feet from me under a huge piece of the aircraft, an arm, leg, a shoulder and the first two letters of a nametag, “SH.”

Photo 5—Being drug through the mud.

Nothing... camera off...

Several decisions were made that day, decisions that leave many unanswered questions. Why a new pilot? What happened to the scheduled one? Why did we load big and heavy to the left? Had I or the other smaller, lighter soldiers loaded left would we have been thrown differently, maybe clear? Why was each person placed in the tactical configuration we were? Why was it policy to unhook safety harnesses at 30 seconds? Why us, the platoon? We were supposed to be the best. Why them, the soldiers who died? They were the best of the best, with bright glorious years ahead. Photo 4, my biggest question, why couldn’t I remember the first two letters of my best-friend’s name as he lay there lifeless and crushed beneath the wreckage of one pilot’s screw up?

Gone, but not forgotten.
In loving memory of Nathan Shirley and the American troops.
Rest in Peace.

Sacred Writing, an eloquent dance

By: Heidi Overdorf

Poised Pens-

Waiting for their cue.

8:00 a.m.- Curtains up.

“Let the show begin!”

Center stage-

Dancing across the page.

thoughts, stories, emotions

twirl, prance, perform

In the mind’s eye, on paper, on stage

8:30 a.m.- Curtains down

Concluding the performance.

Relaxed pens.

Deb Smith
Professional Paper

Back in ye old days, when I was in high school, our career center consisted of one book in the school library on railroad engineers. I needed some career guidance, so I asked Mr. Weiland, our economics teacher, how one would go about becoming a school guidance counselor. I had read an article in *Teen Magazine* about guidance counselors in high schools. The job description of a counselor in the article jumped out and grabbed me and that was the moment I knew what I wanted to do with my life. Mr. Weiland told me I needed to earn a Bachelors degree in teacher education followed by a Masters degree in school counseling. Yikes, it seemed like an awful lot of college for someone like me who was perhaps more social than studious.

Five years later I had my Bachelors of Education with majors in English and Physical Education. I was ready to attend graduate school and finish my quest. But much to my chagrin, the graduate school in North Dakota I had applied to informed me that I would need one to two years teaching experience to get into their school counseling program. TEACHING????? I wanted to be a GUIDANCE COUNSELOR!!!!!!!!!!!!!! COME ON!!!!!!!!!! Well, I did my “hard time” and taught high school English and coached girls’ basketball at a small school in North Dakota. I certainly didn’t receive any teaching recognition plaques, but I had the experience I needed and was able to get into graduate school and earn my degree in school counseling. At that time in my life, I considered the two years of school I taught as a necessary evil to reach my true career goal.

I have been a school counselor for nineteen years, and not a day goes by that I don’t rely upon those two years of teaching experience. I have walked in the day to day teaching trenches, and it has given me perspective that I wouldn’t have had without my teaching experience. I really took that added experience for granted until I worked with other counselors who lacked teaching experience in their backgrounds. It was then I fully appreciated some of the qualities I achieved which only came with classroom experience. I felt very confident in my classroom management abilities allowing me to give productive and helpful guidance presentations to the students. Being able to see and understand both the students and teachers perspective in dealing with student problems in the classroom has also been very beneficial to me. My English teaching background has given me a strong foundation to assist students who are struggling with the reading and/or writing state proficiency exam, has helped students meet their four year English requirement to graduate, and has made it considerably easier to write letters of recommendation for high school seniors applying for college and scholarships. I feel like the high school guidance counselor is at the heart of the school system with a 360 degree vision of what goes on with teachers, administrators and students. I believe that some kind of educational teaching experience should be mandatory for guidance counselors working in the educational system. This added experience can only enhance and add credibility to the counselor’s role in the school.

Bob McGinty

Upon Conviction, an Innocent Man Outlines a Brief Treatise on the Nature of Nonsense

I The disappointment of data

After relinquishing his shoes, a condemned man discovers the irrelevancy of the results of a blood panel in arguing for clemency for a condemned man.

II The ironies of infatuation

The wax-encased queen at last relents
to her prison of single-minded devotion.

Under a hive of dead bees
the dustpile of wings
is the color of honey.

III The myths of salvation

Raw spinach, broccoli, sun screen
and a daily regimen of sweat;
the longevity of parents, rosaries
rippling abdominals, vaccinations, vasectomies
and low-fat milk;
meditation, meritocracy, red wine
smoke-free bistros, bars,
traffic lights, antiseptics, anti-coagulants
anti-depressants and mental health.

IV The utility of renewable resources

In the last rights of martyred trees
a condemned man believes
he can distinguish the pulse
of heartwood from the bass throbs of commerce.

A shepherd's tent is briefly illuminated by the sacrifice
of small moths which mistake the mantels
of a Coleman lantern for paradise.

V The wisdom of prophets

A condemned man finds that he is incapable
of unravelling the architecture of certain cultural aphorisms.

The Lives of the Saints provides a rationale
for increased surveillance of known subversives.

VI The lessons of history

The porcelain artifacts from barrack washrooms
are destined to occupy separate
wings at the Smithsonian.

Taking the charisma of poets for granted, a condemned man
composes light verse for his executioners.

Writing Project Treats
By Jill Paull
(*sung to the tune of "My Favorite Things")

Apples and car'mel and wheat chips and Triskets;
Homebaked banana bread, white and orange cheese sticks;
Freshly picked strawberries, sea-salted chips;
These are the things that go straight to my hips.

Humongo fruit salad with all types of berries;
A large basket blessed by a sweet chocolate fairy;
Yogurt on ice, ev'ry flavor you see;
Gulp it all down, ev'ry sweet calorie!

Corn chips with salsa and meat trays with French bread;
Éclair dessert and a garlic rich cheese spread;
Red, white and blue cake cut me a piece please;
All of these treats make me weak in the knees.

When my pen breaks,
When I can't write,
When my stomach growls,
I simply hork down my favorite treats,
And I don't feel so foul.

Something New
Gloria Hutchinson

Rolled in a bit late,
there's a lot on my plate.
Prep's been cancelled, you say?
Well, isn't that great!

So through morning we speed,
learn to do math and read.
Our job is a big one,
on that we've agreed.

Lunch time comes fast,
time for food and some laughs.
On piles of grading,
my glance has been cast.

Now comes the best time –
They write 'til the chime!
Their journals are filling,
but what about mine?

As I sit at the table,
wonder when I'll be able
to write with them too,
A poem, story or fable.

With committees and grading,
I feel like I'm wading
through miles of muck.
My journal sits, waiting.

But today is the day.
For my writing make way!
For inside my journal,
I have lots to say.

So I'll sit down too,
and try a different view,
as an author in class.
I'll share. Something new.

Jeanne Joyce

I Can't Write a Poem

The main reason I can't write a poem
is because I like sentences.

I read a poem and it makes no sense to me,
so why would I want to write something that makes no sense.

They say poems have deep meanings
or many meanings.

Reading and writing a poem—is kind of like eating crab.
Takes forever to fork out that delicious meat-
so instead, I'll order a steak.

By the time I've deciphered a poem
I could have read a book.

But I do like Baxter Black
his poems make sense.

So maybe its not the poetry—it is this poet
that's got no sense.

Stacie Stefka

Goodnight my dear child
Sweet dreams will be coming soon
Goodnight my dear child.

I have dreamt of you
And wished for you to be here
Soon my sweet child, soon.

Sense a Dream

By Kendall Ford

| **see** the black and white ultrasound

| **hear** the soon-to-be laughter fill the room

| **smell** the freshness of baby powder surround me

| **taste** the sweetness of skin after a belly kiss

| **feel** the unconditional love | didn't know | could have

| **know** this is only the beginning

The Gift of Voice
Paper 2 - Practice
By: Jennifer Carson
July 2, 2007

Upon entering Room 13 on the first day of school, I spent countless hours preparing it for twenty-three newly turned fifth graders. I knew this year would be a journey of self discovery but, I wasn't completely prepared to come out of the shadows and into the forefront. First year teachers are always nervous and I was no exception. I wondered if this feeling would ever go away. "I hope not." I felt as if my insides were completely exposed with my voice box running away for safety. On the outside, one would see a calm demeanor, a pleasant smile, and hear a gentle hello. This was one technique I mastered with my students and shared with colleagues. Never let them know you are the one that is really terrified.

More importantly, the lessons I learned from my colleagues in that first year had a profound affect on my professional and personal life. They gave me the gift of voice. It was delivered on a shiny, silver platter just waiting to be served. Unfortunately, I would not grasp the platter until later in the year. I would have been the person to walk into a room and completely disappear. Just sitting there smiling and nodding, not doing much of anything but, people watching and soaking in what was being presented. For who was I to speak out?

Don't get me wrong, taking in information is not a bad thing. However, I would never give my input, thoughts, or ideas on any subject matter. How could I expect to learn anything to the fullest without some type of correspondence? I could not.

My quest to find my voice started with my principal asking, more like telling, me to sit in on the hiring committee. It would be a one time event. Specifically for hiring an aide that I would be working with this year. I expressed my doubts to my colleagues. My thinking was, "Why? I am just a first year." They encouraged me to attend because I was going to be working with this person closely and personality does count. My first reaction was, "I can work with anyone."

Still confused on my place at the round table, I preceded. The principal informed us that we will be interviewing four candidates and making a decision at the end. He wanted to let the candidates know the decision the next day. As I looked around the room I noticed only two of us had any contact with the student the aide was being hired to work with. Wonderment took over. I speculated on the idea of how well they knew the student's needs, weaknesses, strengths, and behaviors. Then like a freight train plowing into another vehicle, it hit me. "Duh!" It wasn't about how well she would work with me. It was about the student. I was the person that knew his strengths, his weakness, and his b-e-h-a-v-i-o-r-s. I knew what personality would make a more suitable match. I needed to be his voice. I needed to speak out, or literally yell, on his behalf. He had no voice in that room. There was only me. It was a necessity that I rip and tear my way to the top for his rights. Now is not the time to be a watcher. I must move on to being a speaker. I grabbed the silver platter, never to be put on the shelf again.

Learning from Mistakes By Emily Nielson

“Brad, why do you even come to school? You never do any of the work!” This quote, I’m sad to say, was spoken through my lips four years ago toward a sophomore student whom I considered MIA – Missing In Attentiveness. He was so inattentive that while the rest of the class would discuss the finer points of “Julius Caesar”, he would staple-hem his jeans; of course, that’s when he wasn’t face-flat on the desk, sleeping. I stereotyped Brad right a way, I’m sure, because of the crowd he hung with. They were notorious skippers and all had failing grades. However, Brad never skipped class. This irritated me even more. Everyday, I was forced to deal with his shortcomings. So, in the last quarter of school, I threw up my arms and asked the aforementioned question: why are you here? I didn’t expect I response, and I didn’t get one. Not that year, anyway.

I had given up on Brad, and he did not seem to mind it one bit. We developed a mutual neglect of one another. As the year ended, I believed I would be able to fail Brad and never deal with him again. Maybe another teacher would be better suited to motivate him, but I doubted it. The next year, I was moved from teaching sophomores to juniors, and guess who showed up on my roster? Brad. He was taking two English classes to make up for the failing grade I gave him the year before. I thought about how I would handle him from a management/behavioral standpoint. Three deep breaths later, I came up with a plan. I decided to keep my sanity by making sure he would never see that he “got to me”. I would treat him with complete respect, as if he were my star student!

The first day of school, Brad walked sheepishly into class. I smiled reassuringly at him and said something I can’t remember – probably “hello”. By the end of the first quarter, Brad had a passing grade. I praised him for it. He beamed! That year, if any one of my other students stepped out of line, Brad was ready to tell them to behave. Not only was he not the behavioral problem he was the year before, but he was actually enforcing the rules *for* me! This was more than I expected, yet Brad continued to surprise me. By the end of the first semester, Brad was passing with a B-... this from a student who received an 18% (F-) his sophomore year. The second semester flew by, and Brad did not lose his focus or drive. He received an A- for the third quarter and finished the year with a B. Last June he gave me a huge bear hug, dressed in cap and gown, at graduation. He did it!

Clearly, my positive attitude forced me to focus on Brad’s positive attributes, too. I believe I must have relayed a feeling of pride toward Brad that may have given him further confidence. But, ultimately his diploma was an accomplishment directly resulting from his own positive choices. The biggest obstacle is continuing to believe that we are not all our own islands... my attitude can change someone else’s. This is the obstacle that set me back during Brad’s sophomore year, when I believed that a student must *want* to learn English to be successful in my class. What I was overlooking is that *everyone* wants to be successful; and it is up to me to create an environment for success by believing in each and every one of my students. As for the response to the infamous question above, I finally figured it out on my own. After all, the question was ultimately directed at myself – I should have said, “Why do I even bother to teach, if I cannot motivate the students who need it most ?” And the answer stood right in front of me. Brad. He stuck with me. He could have switched out of my class, pleading his case to the guidance counselor. In my mind, I think Brad believed in second chances – and for that, I will always be grateful.

On Becoming An Addict

By Karen Ash

While walking in the early morning, a chill still in the spring air, my dog George began his journey into nicotine addiction. George, a hound with a nose reportedly one hundred times more sensitive than the average human, snapped up a discarded cigar along the road near our new neighbor's house. He, being one smart dog (or not) held the stogie in his mouth, lips curled around it reminding me of the famous painting of the poker playing dogs that decorated the cook shack of my childhood. He held the cigar proudly and seemed to enjoy my distaste of this new bad habit much like a rebellious teen. Turning his head and running just out of my reach, he foiled my every attempt to snatch it from his mouth. After spending about fifteen minutes sucking air through the cigar, which hung at a debonair angle from one side of his mouth, he chewed it up and swallowed it relishing the taste and getting maximum benefit. After three mornings George was hopelessly addicted searching frantically in front of the house if the cigar wasn't in its usual spot.

Although I am not positive how the cigar is replaced each night, I imagine my new neighbor slipping away from his wife, supposedly admiring the nighttime sky, and spending just enough time to finish off one half of a noxious cigar before carefully extinguishing and discarding it on the blacktop in front of his home. He has unknowingly become the enabler and supplier for George's new bad habit.

Deborah Becker

I have been a teacher for 11 years, at Mountain View Elementary. I am one of those rare birds who was actually born and raised right here in Elko. I went through the Writing Project a few years ago, and I am still a part of it. It changed my life and the lives of my students. I learned that writing is a vital, essential, and rewarding experience, and it should be part of every school day.

Thunderclouds start to build over the shimmering heat waves of the desert. Soon they tower to great dark heights, ominous in the afternoon sky, precursors not of rain but of crashing thunder and blinding lightening. And fire. Still, sometimes the gods take mercy, and the clouds open and bless the parched earth below.

There is no rain like desert rain. In other places the rain just falls, no excitement, no drama, but in the desert, rain becomes a desperate thing, frantic in its need to reach the ground. Somehow in the desert the drops are bigger, great balls of water, and they hit the dirt with such intensity, such explosive force, the first ones sending up little crowns of dust from their impact. Then they fall harder, faster, drenching this hot, greedy land with the heady scent of sagebrush and dust. Soon rivulets flow, and the dry stream beds gush, and I am compelled to stand, soaked and battered by raindrops, raising my arms to the sky and laughing.

There is no rain like desert rain. Hot. Urgent. Wild. Life is too easy, too tame, and I am never quite right in green places, in places where rain is not an excuse for ecstasy.

The Gift

Wandering lost with no place to go
There was no place that she could call home.
Just wanting someone to love her and keep her.
Tucked in the darkness, left all alone.

The memories of her past are so very few
She was very young when they left her behind.
Unable to give her the life that they dreamed of,
they left her bundled beneath the “Welcome” church sign.

They drove away praying what they couldn't provide
a family somewhere would step in.
Take their little girl into their home and their hearts,
a new life she'd be able to begin.

And so they kept driving, never once looking back
at the baby girl they were leaving behind.
The fate of their daughter, they left on the doorstep
a loving family they prayed she'd find.

Scared and confused she lay down on the ground
snuggling her teddy bear knap sack.
She closed her eyes, drifting off to sleep,
waiting for her mommy and daddy to come back.

Moments later a passing car slammed on its breaks,
a man quickly jumped out from his seat.
Walking slowly at first, not sure what he'd found
he scooped her little body lying cold at his feet.

The thick rolling clouds had covered the sky
shadows hiding her from passerby's sight.
He wondered how long she had been lying there,
but even more so the man wondered, why?

Certainly this little girl's family must be worried,
she must be lost having wandered away
Searching her knap sack for a name or a number
he found a letter addressed, "Our Saddest Day."

He couldn't believe what he was reading
"The life we dreamed for her we're unable to give,
we'll never forget her, we love her so much
but we must leave her so she may live."

Amazed and in shock he walked back to the car
the little girl nestled up close to his wife.
For years they'd been trying, their dream to have children,
but together they were unable to create life.

Tears falling from her eyes, she finished the letter
and looked down at the gift they'd been given.
Unable to bare children had been a curse from the devil,
but this was a true piece of Heaven.

Tamar Haggerty
2007