



VOLUME 12 NUMBER 1

PENNSYLVANIA WRITING PROJECT NEWSLETTER

FALL 1991

COMING TOGETHER

by Martha Phillips

Don't get me wrong. I had waited all year to do this. Being on a leave of absence to stay home with my three boys had many fulfilling moments, but it lacked any professional communication. I planned to use my summer vacation to attend the PAWP 1991 Summer Institute in Exton, PA. Imagine, I would be able to talk while standing erect; there would be no need to squat to communicate for at least five weeks.

June 24 finally arrived and I woke up early to make sure everything was perfect for my first day. After I was up for only a few minutes, I became very sick and spent the next hour in the bathroom. I managed to pull myself back together enough to take a shower and get ready.

My mom showed up early to watch the kids. I double checked all my supplies and headed out with determination. I adjusted the car mirror, put on my seat belt, and was set to go. I would even be early; I hate to be late. I turned the key--nothing--absolute silence. I ran back inside and gave my mother the news; my battery had passed away in its sleep sometime during the night. She kindly agreed to let me take her car. I told you I was determined.

I raced to Exton. I rushed into the classroom just in time, but to my surprise everyone had already started. I whispered frantically to the person next to me, "What are we supposed to be doing?"

I was told to write in my journal about what I expected to get out of the Summer Institute. Well, first I had to write about my morning; after all, I was wondering if I was even meant to participate in this course.

In a daring move I was the first person to share what I had written. Everyone listened, laughed, offered support and understanding, and helped to ease my anxiety. Instantly I knew that I would have an intense, yet safe, experience.

The next five weeks flew by like a whirlwind. There was never a dull moment. Our fearless leaders, Jim McCall and Andy Fishman, put us through our paces. They instituted a writing workshop for us--what a novel idea--and

we wrote, conferenced, revised, and edited. We pulled together and lived through our individual presentations, book reports, panel discussions, personal pieces and an I-search paper. We drove to Doylestown to see Randy Bomer speak. He was very informative and entertaining, and best of all, he had experience with students. Julia Blumenreich shared her poetry with us and inspired us each to be poets.

Through our entire Institute we also received numerous appearances from Bob Weiss, the director. Every time we saw Bob we were guaranteed physical exertion. Carrying Bob's handouts to the car was equal to a 30-minute workout at the local gym. I know that I will never lack for thought-provoking material to read. Bob kept us all on our toes during his presentations. As he gave us food for thought, he simultaneously shot cartoons and little quips onto the overhead projector. A fellow PAWPer (I don't want to mention Bruce's name) called it Bob's flying overhead show.

We had a lot of fun, made new friends, and worked hard. We learned many things, but, most importantly we learned how frightening it can be to be a student and to take risks. I was rejuvenated and remembered why I became a teacher in the first place.

Lucy Calkins in her 1991 book *Living Between the Lines*, sums up the essence of what the Institute was to me when she states:

Teachers are coming together. We're coming together across districts, across grade levels and disciplines, even within our own staffrooms, and we're coming together in the spirit of an old fashioned barn raising. It's not a barn we're building but a better world for ourselves and our children.

Martha Phillips, a 1991 Fellow, teaches Special Ed in the Rose Tree Media School District.

GENERATIONAL GET-TOGETHERS

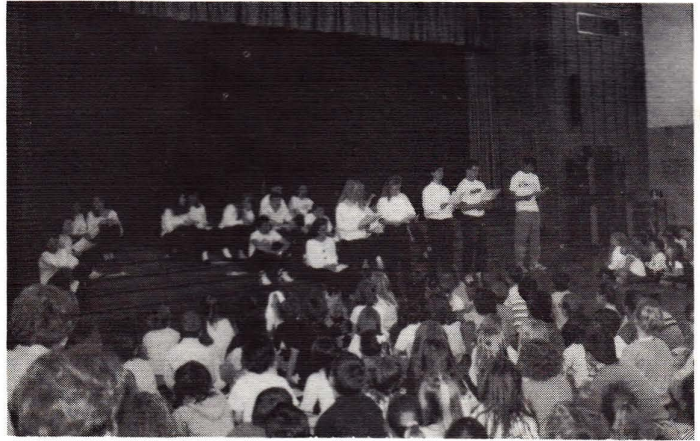
Often, people writing about Whole Language or collaborative work use the metaphor of the one-room school house to explain how the students work together. While I agree with that image, it still suggests only school situations. To my mind, the kind of group work that a Whole Language, collaborative, PA Framework setting calls for is the exact same kind of work that we employ in almost every aspect of life: family decisions, workplace planning, sports teams, even school projects.

Two recent examples in my own experience illustrate my point. During April of 1991, my Advanced Communications Skills class of juniors and seniors put together a two-part program to celebrate reading at one of our district's elementary schools. Each of my students wrote to one of the elementary teachers asking for permission to read to the "little guys" and for advice on an appropriate selection. As a large group, my class also decided on several fairy tales which they practiced in smaller groups to practice in Readers' Theater style for an assembly at the elementary school.

On the day of the performance, my students read first to the individual classes and then the entire elementary school assembled for Readers' Theater. Reports from my students, the elementary students, and the elementary teachers were all extremely positive. Although my students had thought the entire plan foolish, they practiced both their individual readings and their group work diligently because, as they told me, they didn't want to be embarrassed in front of their audiences. They found they loved the adoration they received from the "little guys." The teachers said that their students, usually well-behaved anyway, were angels both in the classroom and in the large assembly where they were absolutely quiet and listened attentively.

The other experience I noticed was in a summer version of the PA Framework course where the participants, as is usually the case, stretched from first grade to twelfth grade teachers. We varied our groupings continually and found once again that first grade teachers have something to say to English teachers planning a sports literature unit for reluctant senior readers just as senior high math teachers working on lessons on reading the math book can gather ideas from fifth grade science teachers.

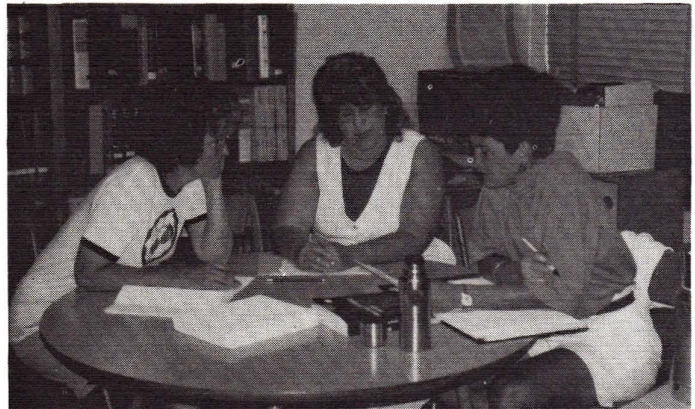
What these and many similar experiences have shown me is that, like a one-room schoolhouse or a family or a business or a faculty, cross-generational (or cross-curriculum) projects benefit from different points of view. More importantly, I re-learned that learning must not always be competitive, judged by a standardized test, but needs to be cooperative, judged by the success of the final product.



Five Advanced Communications Skills juniors do a Readers' Theater interpretation of "The Frog Prince."



A "little guy" asks Amie Kintzer for an autograph after she read "Ricki-Ticki-Tembo" to his class.



A Conrad Weiser first grade teacher and an Exeter Township elementary librarian hold a peer conference with a Conrad Weiser fifth grade teacher on her science implementation project.

JUST DO IT!

by Lois Palio

"Just Do It," the famous Nike ad quote, holds a lot of power for me. As a teacher, I have in the past become complacent in my every day teaching; after 21 years of teaching, I sometimes forget what it means to take a new teaching risk. Yet I am constantly asking my students to "fly" and to take bold steps in their thinking and learning. I recently had an opportunity to test the waters of risk taking in much the same way that I have asked my students to do--I had to facilitate a two hour parent workshop on self esteem with students and parents I did not know.

As part of Dobbins' MAC/ACE (Motivation and Achievement with Computers and Achievement and Commitment to Excellence), the school has a family night. On this night, the head of the ACE program, Stu Semigran, takes parents and students through a whole variety of activities that encourage family relating, communicating, and listening. Often this is one of the few occasions that they actually get to sit down and ask intimate questions of their parents, guardians, and siblings; for many this is the first time they feel as if their family is really listening to and caring about what they have to say. Often, I co-facilitate with Stu. This in itself is a risk for me because I am afraid to talk in front of large groups of people. I stutter, sweat, and forget what I am saying; so, facilitating with Stu and his partner Abbie is quite a 'stretch'.

On this particular night, Stu had to fly back to California, and Abbie had developed laryngitis. Stu was able to work with me in the morning at Dobbins, but he would not be around to lead the workshop. Stu (in front of all my students) asked me if I would please run the parent night at Dobbins and then go to Kensington to help Abbie. All my students waited for my answer. I started to stutter and sweat. I came up with several excuses why I couldn't possibly go. I could see all my students waiting to see what their teacher--the one who always encouraged them to try new things--would do. As often happens to teachers, students became their teacher's teacher. One of the shyest of my students took the microphone and very gently and quietly said, "Ms. P, as you say to us, "If you think you can or can't, you're probably right." Deana continued, "Just do it. You'll be great. Besides, being bold in life is what you have always taught us. It works. So follow your own advice. We'll be at the parents' workshop here to support you."

Armed with the young lady's example (this was the first time she had stood up in front of everyone and spoken) I did do both parents' workshops. To my delight, both were a huge success, and I had stretched and overcome a handicap that would have kept me from moving on in life. I am grateful to my students, and my students are proud of me because I modeled what I teach. I just did it!

Lois Palio is a 9th grade teacher at Dobbins Vo-Tech in the Philadelphia School District. She wrote this while taking the PA Framework Course in Spring '91.

THE WHAT-I-DID-THIS-SUMMER COMPOSITION

by Mary Lou Kuhns

This summer I taught my first Strategies I course. Two years ago Bob Weiss (PAWP Director) and Jolene Borgese (PAWP Co-Director) frequently chanted in unison, "Why don't YOU coordinate a Strategies course?", but that year when I was Associate Director, I kept answering, "I'd like to, BUT you don't give me enough time!" When they gave me another chance this year, I agreed.

Anxious to run a good course, I soon had lined up presentations for the summer Exton Center session. I wanted top-notch teacher-consultants to carry the classes for me. Later, I found I had so much to say that I had to be careful not to give answers to questions that the teachers needed to ponder or research in their own classrooms.

On the first day, I confessed to being a rookie and told them, "You'd better be good." But "good" is an inadequate description for that community of writers. They opened their teaching approaches to each presenter, looking for ways to adapt the new ideas to their levels of instruction. While only eleven registered for the course, they brought variety with them: they traveled from as far as Elverson, PA, and Delaware; they worked with grades K-13. A couple held multiple jobs. One participant is looking for a full-time job but meanwhile is a tutor for foreign-born adults, a secondary substitute, a theme-reader at two schools, and a free-lance writer for the *Daily Local News*. Several practiced new conferencing skills with their children or summer tutees. One concluded that every college freshman should take a PAWP writing workshop! All plan to utilize response groups, conferences, publishing, prewriting techniques, and student choices in new or additional ways this Fall.

On the last day for nearly two hours these authors read their personal essays, reinforcing for all of us the power and poignancy of writing. We had a light-hearted piece about living in cow country, a humorous dinner preparation, and anecdotes of Irish relatives. To counter these was an account of a five-year battle and victory over cancer. In between, we were touched by the adoption of a daughter, an emotional conflict in Equador, New England blackberry picking, and special college friends. We also celebrated the discovery of one teacher's writing voice.

The teachers worked hard, the presenters worked hard, and I worked hard. I believe we all grew in dynamic ways. I know I got my booster shot for the '91-'92 school year.

Mary Lou Kuhns was a 1988 PAWP Fellow. She teaches in the Tredyffrin-Easttown School District.

There's nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and open a vein. -Red Smith

Words are all we have. -Samuel Beckett

FROM THE DIRECTOR

12 GOING ON 16: THE STATE OF THE WRITING PROJECT, 1991

Each year the newsletter editor pushes me to do a piece like this, reflecting on the writing project's present with relation to its past and future. Each year I resist. Probably I feel too busy with the press of the chaotic present to do much reflection. But I know that many people care about our project, and many others care at least that it exists. That knowledge makes me less reluctant about taking the time to report where we are and where we think we are going.

The article's title carries intimations of moving through pre-adolescence. (No coincidence that my daughter turned 15 in September.) As a project, we are 12 years old; and we have conducted 16 summer institutes. Like so many brash kids these days, we may be acting older than we are. But it's in the nature of good programs to grow and to assume responsibilities. Our National Writing Project institutes are a 5-week, 20-day program that is grueling; they steep participants in activities of reading, writing, dialoguing, theorizing, getting, and giving. The 376 teachers who have been through these institutes have colleagues who hear about our work, and we continue to receive applications. The fact that we have been able to run all those institutes means that many Delaware Valley teachers will rise to the occasion, qualify themselves, and perform capably and well in the institute setting.

PAWP AND THE NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT MODEL

Yet a model NWP site is much more than an institute: its two other pillars are school-year continuity programs of two sorts, one for the summer institute fellows, the other for teachers who voluntarily register for an extended course or program in writing instruction. PAWP has maintained both kinds of programs throughout its early years and into pre-adolescence--although we have had many growing pains.

CONTINUITY PROGRAMS AID FELLOWS IN THEIR ROLE AS TEACHER-CONSULTANTS

In our first year, we had Saturday continuity meetings for Fellows every month, and for several years thereafter we maintained that pace. People freely gave their time and energy to our programs and our outreach endeavors. After about six years these schedules began to be less effective in drawing attendance; we developed day-long and after school PAWPDAYS formats during the week.

Our 1991-92 PAWPDAYS, planned jointly by Jolene Borgese and Andrea Fishman, will be a rich resource for our cadre of teacher-consultants. Virginia O'Keefe is the author of *Affecting Critical Thinking Through Speech*. Kenneth

Koch's books on teaching poetry to young people (*Rose, Where Did You Get That Red, Wishes, Lies, and Dreams*), have dominated the market for many years; Koch is internationally known for his workshops and methods. Dan Kirby, co-author of *Inside Out*, is a leading writer in English/language arts education who has frequently visited our site and many other NWP sites.

Over the years, the continuity programs have helped summer fellows maintain their interest and knowledge of the field of writing instruction. I am tremendously proud that four PAWP teachers won cash grants in the first NWP national competition, with only 19 other winners from all 150 other NWP sites! We take our mission very seriously. When one of our courses does not materialize, we are upset that our coordinators and teacher-consultants have not had the chance to show their (very excellent) stuff.

OUTREACH PROGRAMS AND COURSES

Through our history, we have offered uncountable in-services, workshops, and courses--uncountable because we never thought to tally and/or never had the secretarial and administrative help to keep adequate records. Our course in Strategies for Teaching Writing K-12, developed in the 1980 summer and offered now nearly 100 times, continues to be requested in school districts and receives exceptional evaluations. Our PA Framework course in Writing, Reading, Talking across the Curriculum, planned more recently in conjunction with a team of area educators, has been offered over 20 times and is almost as successful.

We have a rich range of extended offerings, each based on the basic principle that the best teacher of teachers is another teacher. Each course is delivered by a team of 7-9 presenters with one coordinator present at every session. As of this writing, we are anticipating enrollment in six Strategies courses, six Framework courses, and several other programs as shown on the next page.

ADMINISTRATION

I mentioned record-keeping above. In our earlier years, we weren't mature enough to do enough of such adult things. We began with a half-time secretary and now have two full-time people: a secretary and an administrative assistant. They maintain the flow of information, do contracts and bookkeeping, manage our resource fund of books and articles, arrange our meetings and PAWPDAYS, and generally keep things organized. We began with just me running the institute and then hired on teams of project teacher-consultants to help me or take my place. And now we not only have two teacher-consultants co-directing each of our summer institutes, we also have a co-director, an associate director, an assistant director, an editor, and a youth writing project director. They're not full-time but keep very busy on project work.

PAWP PROGRAMS, FALL 1991

Strategies for Teaching Writing

Exeter
Phoenixville
Spring-Ford
Twin Valley
Upper Darby
Upper Moreland

Writing, Reading, Talking Across the Curriculum

Bucks Co. IU
Interboro
Manheim Township
Pottsgrove
Upper Darby
West Chester Area

Teachers as Poets

Bucks Co. IU (Quakertown)

In-services

Abington Heights
Antietam
Bristol Township
Conrad Weiser
Interboro
PDE (Adult Basic Ed.)
Phoenixville
Wayne Highlands
West Chester Area

*We are working to schedule our Spring and Summer offerings.

PUBLICITY

Project publicity is a responsibility that we share. The main publicity organ, this *Newsletter*, edited for the past year by Vicki Steinberg of the Exeter Township School District, comes out four times a year and contains articles on writing by area teachers, reports on past events, and notices of future events. We have begun to attempt desk-top publishing within our office and are quite happy with our successes thus far.

Three brochures are regularly produced, one for the project as a whole, and two to announce and register for special activities--the workshop on Administering Writing Programs (about 3,000 printed) and the Youth Writing Project (about 60,000 printed).

Other flyers and brochures are also produced: an 8.5" x 17" flyer announcing our summer institute(s) and programs and something either broadside or folded for any conference or PAWPDAY we organize. Then there are regular letters to school administrators, to English/language arts departments, and to special populations. When legislative possibilities arise for state or federal funding,

there are rounds of correspondence to law-makers and to potential supporters of our cause.

EVALUATION

Often in these publicity materials we report on our courses and programs. All of our institutes and courses are rigorously evaluated by participants who comment on every aspect of their experience with PAWP. In addition to evaluating the program itself, our surveys examine teachers' own writing apprehension and their classroom programs "before" and "after."

Over the years, these project assessments have been very helpful when we've re-arranged our offerings. In addition, they have aided us in receiving validation as an exemplary program by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and have been cited by the National Writing Project's handbooks. Our study of the effects of the PA Framework course is much appreciated by PDE. And always we seek comments by the participating teachers, because they are the most eloquent testimony of what the program has accomplished.

Here are the most recent evaluation summaries we have collected from our Strategies and Framework courses:

-students of 165 Strategies participants:

spend a longer time writing (N=146)
do more writing of various kinds (N=134)
do more self-sponsored writing (N=138)
do more pre-writing (N=139) and re-writing (N=118)
do more reading and writing activities in class (N=138)
take more pleasure with the written products (N=144)

-152 teachers participating in Framework courses
increased their practices in each critical experience
(based on mean scores) as follows:

reading practices (9)	from 3 to 4 times/month
writing practices (12)	from 1 to 3 times/month
extending reading/writing (6)	from 2 to 4 times/month
investigating language (5)	from 2 to over 3 times/month
learning to learn (8)	from 2 to over 3 times/month

HOW WE ARE FUNDED

The evaluations come from our courses and programs, and the revenues that pay for those programs come from school district contracts or from tuitions paid by teachers to attend PAWP offerings. West Chester University, which controls all monies paid for Writing Project services, allocates a working budget to us that pays our coordinators and teacher-consultants. This is our major--sometimes our sole--source of funding. Our bills are essentially paid by our program revenues. Seed money grants, such as those we formerly received from the William Penn Foundation, are long gone (we're into adolescence, remember?). A modest amount of state money--\$2,500 this year--is provided for us as part of the network supporting

the Pennsylvania Framework for Reading, Writing, Talking Across the Curriculum. Unlike some states where significant funding comes from the legislature, Pennsylvania has not yet substantially supported its eight NWP sites.

The federal dollars that I wrote about in the last *Newsletter* will be slow in coming and will probably amount to \$10,000 or so--about a quarter of what it takes to run a decent project site for a year. Further, those are matching funds, requiring me to seek a donor to make the match (and us not yet in our teens! tsk, tsk!). We will try to get maximum effect from the infusion of federal funds and from the anticipated matching grant.

THE FUTURE OF PAWP

Somehow we've managed to survive for 16 institutes and 12 years. We are in a populous area and serve over 50 school districts and a large non-public audience. If we do not interest District A's constituency in one year or another, we will interest B, C, and D and thus be able to survive until District A needs our services. The *regional* component of the NWP model thus keeps us going. We're also supported to some extent by auxiliary programs such as our successful Youth Writing Project, currently directed by Craig Fenimore of the West Chester Area School District.

Additional funding may assist us in linking more teachers together and in getting into more buildings and classrooms for long-term demonstration and research. But our basic support comes from the dozen or so courses or programs that we run each summer and each semester--in writing, in writing as related to reading, in computers and writing, in whole language and literacy, in assessment, in teacher research, in cooperative learning, and so on.

We hope that these programs--praised by participants for all of our years--will continue to contain much that interests educators as they strive to improve their work with youngsters. I've been part of the birth, infancy, and growth of our project and have been excited by every phase we've undertaken. I hope to be part of the teenage years and to see continued excitement when ideas are flowing from teacher to teacher and then to students.

PAWP RECOGNIZED IN PDE NEWSLETTER

The PENNLINK Electronic Mail Newsletter that links schools and educational agencies throughout the state has recognized the success of the West Chester University course on the state Framework. In 18 offerings of this course on Writing, Reading, and Talking across the Curriculum held from Spring 1990 through Fall of 1991, 298 teachers significantly increased their implementation of practices associated with the five critical experiences. Since 1990, PAWP presenters have cooperated with area educators in offering this WCU course according to a modified version of the writing project model. Currently, these courses are available for placement in districts and IU's in Spring and Summer of 1992.

Better to write for yourself and have no public, than write for the public and have no self. -Cyril Connolly

I write slowly because I write badly. I have to rewrite everything many, many times just to achieve mediocrity. -William Gass

POET HONORED

Janet Falon, one of the Youth Writing Project's visiting authors for the past several years, is featured as a faculty member in the University of Pennsylvania fall catalogue of non-credit programs. Janet's articles and essays have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *USA Today*, and other newspapers and magazines. She has taught various courses in creative writing and the creative process to many audiences, including elementary and secondary students. She will be featured in a PAWPDAY program for teachers this coming Spring (date to be announced). As a result of her work with PAWP and its Youth Writing Project, Janet hopes to visit more schools and present workshops on poetry and other forms of imaginative writing.

YOUTH WRITING PROJECT COMPLETES 7TH SUMMER

by Craig Fenimore

The official school year has begun, and the almost 300 students, grades 1-12, who participated in the 1991 summer Youth Writing Project are back in their traditional classrooms. Gone is the privilege of calling one's teacher by his or her first name, and gone are those new-made friends and renewed friendships from summers past. What the 17 teachers of 23 classes hope will never be gone for these students is the desire to write and to express themselves.

The 1991 program, the seventh annual Youth Writing Project, tallied some very impressive statistics. Three visiting authors--Janet Falon, Claudia Reder, and Jim Giuliano--assisted the teachers in motivating the participants to produce approximately 2,500 pieces of writing. In both the general and computer sessions, students used five gross of pencils and 14 reams of paper. The creative mind often requiring nurture by a full stomach, especially for children, the project counted participant consumption of over 6,000 drinks and snacks.

To conclude each of the three sessions, approximately 450 parents, siblings, and friends came to congratulate the writers on their accomplishments during mini-presentations by the teachers and students. Each YWP participant now possesses an official West Chester University t-shirt bearing the logo of the tree and arbor.

Craig Fenimore, a 1981 PAWP Fellow, coordinated the 1991 Youth Writing Project and teaches English in the West Chester Area School District.

DANCING ACROSS THE PAPER

Start to move those syllables
Across the page
And stretch the verbs.
Hear the action words.
Jump into adjectives
And kick those plural nouns.
Start to heat-up the page,
Then heavy up the words.
Now you know how to
Dance a poem.

Megan Elizabeth Schultz, 9

GRAFFITI

Upon a thick brick wall,
the words written tell a tale
of the people who had been there
from the spray paint now turned pale.

Many people turn away,
not to see what others did,
from the layers of different colored paints
under which the words are hid.

Many phrases rated R,
but some are just a part
of what some people like to do.
Their graffiti, their form of art.

Dianne Dougherty, 15

SOLAR ECLIPSE

march 7 of 1970
the moon passed in front of the sun
july 11 of 1991
the moon passes in front of the sun
this is what the experts say
the umbra
the penumbra
path of totality
the northern and southern
the notch in the side of the sun.

the new moon the old sun the indirect viewing
this sounds more like a funeral than fun
experts and astronomers speak of the event
the TOTAL ECLIPSE OF THE SUN.

Sheila Curtin, 13

COLORS

Foolishness is vivid-tangerine paper
that makes you have a paper cut.
Courage is a jungle green lizard
that bites explorers who go into the forest.
Comfort is a tan-white pocketbook
that is looking so fancy.
Delight is a lavender-pink chair
that shines in the sun so brightly.
Frustration is a blue-green desk
that looks so miserable.

Maro Keshishian, 8

WOODS WORDS

I am the oldest tree in this forest, so naturally lots
of animals live in me, and I know all about them. I could
tell you the life stories of thirteen squirrels right now. But
I realize that these animals don't know much about me. A
squirrel once asked me to tell her about my life, so here is
what I said.

When I was a seedling, only a few inches tall, I had
a very narrow escape. One time, a big windstorm hit this
forest. It tore branches off the taller trees but passed over
me. I felt very lucky and thought I would be fine. Then the
old, rotting tree beside me, which had been there as long as
I could remember, started to tilt toward me because of the
wind. I heard a creaking sound, and the tree crashed down,
inches away from me!

One of the other really scary things that happened
to me was not too long ago. It was the worst storm I've
ever seen. The thunder rumbled, and lightning struck the
forest. It caught fire, and soon trees were burning all
around me. The wind swept the fire closer and closer to
me. It was baking hot, and I felt one of my roots a few
yards away start to scorch. I saw a burst of flame at my
base in an old dry vine that wrapped around my trunk. I
watched, petrified, as the flame climbed up the vine and
started to burn my bark. I was frantic! I wished I were an
animal, so I could run away from the fire. All I could do
was wait, so I did. The vine was burning deeper and deeper
into my trunk. The air was shimmering with heat, and I
was afraid I would catch fire.

It was then that I started to hear sizzling sounds.
It was raining! There was steam everywhere! In a little
while, all of the fires were put out. The rain felt wonderful
running down my bark. But for some reason it was
collecting in the place where the vine used to be! I looked
down. I had a big scar around my trunk, and the water was
collecting in it. Look, it's still here!

"I know," the squirrel told me. "It's my hole.
Goodnight!" And she hopped inside me.

Lindsey Newbold, 11

THE WHOLE TRUTH

by Carol Edwards, Janemarie Kelly,
Sylvia Penneyacker, and Tim Yanka

You have been called in to give your account of the accident that occurred on Main Street in Doylestown on the 28th of June, 1991. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help you God?

Well, of course I do, Honey! I never can get anyone to fix those brakes right. They don't make cars the way they used to and that mechanic is too young to know what he's doing. My son says that he's the best in town but I think that Sonny Boy is just trying to shut me up. Well anyway, I was dropping Agnes off at the museum. I carefully pulled over to the curb and parked. That mailman's vehicle was irresponsibly parked too close in front of mine. Why he was parked so far away from the box, I don't know! He really could have avoided the whole thing. Don't they usually just pull up next to the box and lean out? He should have seen that my brakes were failing and run out of the way. After all, he can move better than Agnes and I can. Pray that you never get rheumatism, Deary! Where was I now? Oh yes, my brakes must not have been fixed properly for parking on that hill. The hill made my car roll a bit. That truck was improperly parked so I hit it. You wouldn't have seen a mail truck parked that way in my day, I'll tell you that! Then, the truck struck that man. He just didn't move fast enough. Young people these days are so lazy! Things are so different these days. Well, that's what happened.

"What happened? Well . . . Beatrice and I had just finished working at the Senior Citizen's Bun Bake. We had 23 dozen buns in the back seat to deliver. Actually Beatrice, not I, was going to deliver them. But before making the deliveries, she was going to take me over to the Mercer Tile Museum. I work as a museum guide in the clay mixing room.

I've been guiding groups through the clay room every Thursday evening for the last twenty years. I've missed only two Thursdays in all that time. Once I had to take my cat to the veterinarian because she had a furball stuck in her throat. Another time was because my rheumatism was bothering me and I couldn't straighten up. My nephew Archie--sister Martha's second oldest boy--is a doctor. He prescribed this wonderful medicine, and it just works wonders. But it's so expensive. I'm on Social Security, you know, and . . . What's that?

We're being very rude, aren't we? Haven't we any manners? Didn't our mother ever tell us how rude it is to speak when someone else is speaking?

Where was I? Oh, yes! As I was explaining, before I was so rudely interrupted, Beatrice was taking me over to the museum. We weren't able to travel the quickest way

from the senior center. The quickest way is Main Street. We don't use that new-fangled by-pass; too many cars just speeding by. A body is just not safe on that road. But anyway, on Main Street they have all those wooden barricades and orange cones blocking the way. I've lived in Doylestown for 53 years; moved here in 1938 when my husband, Herbert (God rest his soul) got a job with the dairy. I can't remember a summer when Main Street didn't have those things all over. You'd think instead of working during the day, when so many people have to use the road, they'd work on it at night, when it's cooler, and then they don't have to take the time to put up those roadblocks, because no one is using the road in the dark, anyway.

You're doing it again, young man. I'm giving you the important details just as I remember them, and I can't remember them clearly if you keep breaking my chain of thought. You look at me as if I don't know what I'm talking about. I'm not senile, you know. Senility--now that's my niece's friend's cousin's grandmother's sister's problem. If ever anyone was senile, it's Ida.

Speaking of my niece, Shirlee Anne . . . Are you married young man? Hmmmm . . . She has a wonderful personality and is such a help to her parents; 34 years old, and still lives at home with them. How many young people do you know of these days that would be as self-sacrificing as Shirlee Anne? Let me see . . . Today is Thursday, and if you'd like to meet her, she's the special librarian in charge of the rare book room at . . .

Excuse me? Yes, I can answer just the question. Exactly what did I see? Well, why didn't you ask me that in the first place? Why, nothing. I didn't see anything. Because the Bun Bake ran late, I didn't get my afternoon nap and I dozed off--for just a second, mind you, and . . .

Yeah, I saw it. It was really cool. I was skatin' by when I heard this squealin' and when I looked up--BANG! I saw a car with old ladies run into the back of the jeep. The car was smashed pretty good and the back of the jeep was all caved-in. It was great--mail was flyin' everywhere. Then, all of a sudden, this guy--the mail guy--is hoppin' around on one leg screaming at the old ladies. One of the ladies, the driver, started to scream back. They were fightin' pretty good until the other lady got them both to quiet down. Nothin' much was gonna happen so I took off for the 7-Eleven.

Well, sir, I was completing my appointed rounds as a trusted officer of this great country's postal service. It's a sacred honor to me, your honor, like your own job as legal cog in the machinery of justice. Neither rain, nor sleet, nor gloom of night shall keep this American from his appointed rounds... and, by God, a few bounces from some old broad's sedan won't stop this postal employee from delivering the day's mail. Of course, I have to try to round it all up--there are some Burpee's catalogs in the old gal's grillwork that are

gonna be murder to get out...

What? Oh, yes sir, your excellency, the accident. I was at the mailbox on the corner, pulling out the bin-ight on schedule, I might add. The layperson complains about tardy delivery systems in the post office, but, I'll tell you, they ought to try walking a mile or two in these shoes. It was the kind of day that makes me joyful to be a postal carrier and to thank my lucky stars--no humidity, no dogs, no Book of the Month Club deliveries...

But anyway, all of a sudden, out of nowhere, this car comes screaming down the street. I hear the tires screeching and naturally I think of the driver's total disregard for the traffic laws of this great land. Before I can move, this alleged automobile smashes into my government-issue vehicle and careens into the postal box. Mail flew everywhere! Some even fell into the sewer, but I already retrieved that. Yes, you're right; that does explain the smell.

This collaborative piece by Carol Edwards, Janemarie Kelly, Sylvia Penneypacker, and Tim Yanka was written as part of the 1991 Summer Institute in Bucks County.

A GENUINE POET

by Janemarie Kelly

Poetry

Is Possible

Even for kids

Who say they can't

Write it.

With just a slash

The poet discovers

His ability.

-Elise Brand

PAWP 1991

What? Write a poem? Me? Oh, please don't make me!

Even though I'm an English teacher and I'm supposed to like that sort of stuff, I must admit I never cared much for poetry. I didn't mind it as an occasional thing but I found poetry difficult to understand, to teach, and especially to write.

So when I heard that a genuine, real-life honest-to-God poet was coming to conduct a two-day workshop, I was less than thrilled. Actually, I was anxious and afraid (there's a little assonance for you!) and I approached those two days like a dog being dragged to the veterinarian for booster shots (a simile!).

Jane Todd Cooper was our PAWP poet-in-residence. She looked like a poet, with her unusual clothes and exotic jewelry, and she spoke with the soft, melodious voice of a poet. Jane put us at ease by getting to know our names and backgrounds and by telling us her history as a poet and teacher.

Quite gently, Jane led us into some pre-writing activities. We listed all the names we'd ever been known

by, everything from "the baby" to nicknames to our "teacher names." Then we chose several names and combined them purely for their sound and pattern. I chose all of the names people have called me by mistake. Without meaning to, we each created small poems.

Annmarie
Mary Ann
Jean Marie
Mary Jane
Rosemarie
January
Jane

Later in the session, Jane took us through a sense-memory exercise. She asked us to close our eyes and remember a time when we were very small and very hot. She prompted our recollections with questions: Where were we? What were we doing? Who was there? What were we doing? Who was there? Then she had us write down every image that had appeared before our closed eyelids.

After we reviewed our list, Jane asked us to "slash them," to go back over our words and cut out whatever wasn't necessary, leaving the phrases that were the most vivid and vital. Jane instructed us to organize what was left in an order that made sense to us and to copy those slashed phrases onto a clean sheet of paper. She told us to "write it skinny," to keep the phrases short and centered on the page.

We wrote it skinny with the realization that we were really writing poetry. How amazing! We shared our "verses" with one another and we were proud of our poems.

I know I will never see poetry the same way again, and I can't wait to share these ideas with my students. Imagine! Creating a poem without even meaning to our kids will think it's magic!

Janemarie Kelly was a PAWP Fellow in 1991. She teaches 11 and 12th grades in the Morrisville School District.

Scholastic Voice

Seeks National Writing Project

teacher-demonstrators

who have demonstrations

on the following topic: Songwriting

(Object: to commission teachers to write a column for the **Voice** Teachers' Edition April 3, 1992)

Contributors to the column, called "Teachers Teaching Teachers," will be paid \$125.

If interested, contact the PAWP office immediately. Nominations by National Writing Project site directors are due Friday, January 24, 1992.

PS: Student writing in these areas is also very welcome!

PAWP CALENDAR, 1991-92

October 26, 1991	PAWPDAY: teacher Virginia O'Keefe	WCU
November 2	Youth Writing Project Reunion Coordinators' Meeting	WCU "
November 22	NWP Directors' Meeting	Seattle
December 7	Coordinators' Meeting	WCU
January 11, 1992	PAWPDAY: Whole Language Wkshp	Bucks Co IU
January 25	Coordinators' Meeting	WCU
February 29	PAWPDAY: writer Janet Falon	Archbishop Carroll HS
March 7	Coordinators' Meeting	WCU
March 21	Poetry Day: poet Kenneth Koch	Beaver College
March 25	PAWPDAY: writer Dan Kirby	West Chester Area SD
March 26-28	NCTE Spring Conference	Washington DC
May 13	PAWP Institute dinner meeting	WCU
May 17-19	NWP Regional Retreat	Allenbury, PA
May 27	Coordinator's Meeting	WCU
June 22	PAWP Summer programs begin	WCU-Exton
June 29	Summer Institute begins	WCU-Exton

DEATH'S FLOWERS

by Rodney J. Daniels

I was seven years old when my grandmother died. A tall, stern woman when in full health, her measured stare stopped most activities that her sense of propriety deemed inappropriate. A fly swatter was her constant companion when she arbitrated disputes her severe stare did not control between my older brother and me. Her slaps, sharp and precise, always coaxed immediate compliance to her will. For my brothers and me, she personified all our fears. While she never used a fly swatter on adults, I sensed she used a devastating psychological force on my grandfather that probably led him to the infidelity that earned him his empty bed in the back bedroom. For the two years my family lived with my grandmother, enabling my mother to care for her own mother, my brothers and I slept in a converted attic, a cold third-floor room with dark green walls, a bed wide enough for three small boys, a round table used for a desk, and a naked light hanging from the ceiling. To reach the room, my brothers and I had to pass through my grandmother's bedroom, a place that become more menacing as her illness progressed.

As her sickness embraced and consumed her, she become more irascible. Placed in the middle bedroom for the convenience of care, she became a watchful, cantankerous gatekeeper, controlling our access to the world. At first, as she lay in her bed, she stopped our trespasses with abrupt, disturbing questions: Were we

behaving for our mother? We were. Did we scatter our clothing on the attic floor? We did. Did I or my older brother make the bed? We did not. When she asked about our behavior at school, I lied. As usual, her stern stare and cold blue eyes immediately detected the truth. I could not fool her. In time, her sickness began to shrink her. As bottles of medicine began to clutter her night stand, she ended her daily interrogations. Soon arresting odors confronted me in her room. I was too young to know death's odors, those strangely exotic smells that surreptitiously slipped under our the attic door, up the stairs, and into our bedroom.

She died during the night in late November. When I saw her the morning after her death, she was a stranger. Her usually combed light gray hair, seemingly ruffled by some unseen hand, partly concealed her now stone-gray face that lay tilted on her pillow with closed eyes and slack jaw. When they returned her to the house in her coffin, they brought with her death's flowers. I watched as basket after basket of roses, carnations, chrysanthemums, and lilies filled the living room and nearly concealed the object of their adoration. I watched as they opened her casket, offering the bereaved and the curious their last glimpses of a woman who used to be my grandmother. While I vaguely remember my grandmother's appearance in her coffin, I remember more the profusion of her flowers, the vivid colors, the sweet suffocating odors that permeated every room in the house, including our third-floor bedroom. That evening after the viewing, an event my brothers and I

escaped, we boys walked cautiously through my grandmother's eerily empty and still room, climbed the stairs, and crawled into our cold bed. All night I smelled the flowers and visualized my grandmother's gray face and slack jaw on her pillow. The presence of the flowers with their intruding odors became my grandmother's final stern kiss, one that stayed with me for more than forty years. Throughout those years, the memory of her last kiss linked the odors of flowers with death's offerings of coldness, darkness, and emptiness.

My father's abrupt death, when I was a senior in high school, was a cruel incongruity. When my older brother and I carried him to his bed after finding him lying on the front lawn, I saw my grandmother's gray visitation on him and knew immediately he was dead. Calls to the doctor and frantic resuscitation attempts were futile. When we visited him in the funeral home's "slumber room," I experienced the mortician's magic and expected my father to rise Lazarus-like to greet us with his usual smile and warm comments. On the day of the viewing, when I saw a handsome man in a blue suit, death's flowers with their sweet, suffocating odors mocked the mortician's art and told two terrible truths: My father was dead; I would never see him again. Before leaving the cemetery, I visualized his grave being smothered by flowers, a terrible declaration to all passing his grave, even in haste, that here is their own grim fate. Following my mother's action, I took three roses from my father's funeral and gave them to a friend. I saw no purpose in allowing an enormous display of flowers go to waste in the cold of a February night. I took no flowers for myself.

Two years ago in the spring of the year, I watched my mother slowly die entangled in technology. Like her own mother, she was stern and independent in health. Her sure sense of propriety was as solid as her mother's; her sharp tongue as incisive. She was her mother's daughter in all ways but one: She successfully expressed her love without confessing it. Now, claimed in part by emphysema and cancer, her keen blue eyes reflected her sure knowledge of her impending death. On one occasion, when she refused medication, she told a startled nurse, "I'm dead." In the end, she struggled simply to breathe with flooded lungs machines could not save. On the Sunday of her death, I left her at the hospital with her head strangely tilted to the side of her pillow, touching the metal bars guarding her movement. I saw my grandmother's jaw and its ominous meaning.

I did not go to the hospital with my older brother to view her body and to claim her possessions. When I did see her again, she had that curious youthfulness morticians often simulate in the dead. We buried her in her favorite pink suit, shunning the morbid gowns the brides of death wear. When my eyes moved from her still face and immobile hands, I was attracted to the flowers sent with love and respect for her. For the first time in my life, flowers brought me a feeling of comfort both for my mother

and for me. While dying is a solitary experience leading to a terrible separation and confinement, I felt the flowers, objects of love and respect, somehow made my mother's separation and confinement less threatening, enabling her to escape, for a time, the oblivion worn tombstones quietly try to impede. Unlike my grandmother or my father, she seemed not a victim of death's insensitive pillage that brings fear to those still in life. For her, death was a kind release.

Unlike my grandmother, who became to me a stranger in death, my mother in her coffin remained my mother, not a stranger created to fool mourners. Death could neither steal her love from me nor destroy my memories of her. She remained a person I and others now grieved for. Our flowers spoke eloquently for us, saving us from making those customarily clumsy statements that death provokes and grief condones. The odors from the flowers surely were the same, possessing an almost cloying sweetness, but their purpose was not to suffocate. Slowly, as I looked at the flowers, I began to see death's flowers differently. No longer terrible reminders of death, I saw they belong as much to life as to death. Simultaneously, they comforted my grief and offered me the promise of life. Seeing flowers no longer as mere superficial trappings, prompted by pretentiousness or advocated by avarice, and realizing their significance during a time of loss, I realized they are signs of love, life, and hope. Laying a person to rest in a profusion of flowers is not a waste of fragile flowers easily wilted by inclement weather. The flowers offer a paradoxical truth: We must experience death's presence before we can appreciate life's gifts. By commemorating the dead with flowers, we honor both the dead and the living.

On arriving at the cemetery, I walked before my mother's casket and found her grave less ominous than my father's grave more than thirty years before. When the last words were spoken at her grave, I put a rose on her casket, offering her my last kiss. When I returned later in the day to stand by her grave now covered completely with flowers, I received my mother's final kiss. No longer did her mound of flowers merely represent another loss to death. The flowers spoke of a successful life that loved and touched other human beings in genuine ways they will never forget. Strangely, my mother's kiss of love to me as she lay in her grave directed me to embrace life with all its memories and to live it without regret or despair. Now, when an acquaintance or a loved one dies, I ignore the occasional wish by the family for mourners to send money to a worthy institution or organization. As in that earlier expression of extravagant love, there are times when showing love is more important than being dutifully obedient or predictably prudent, for medical institutions and charitable organizations will be with us always. When a death occurs, I send flowers.

Rodney J. Daniels is English Chairman and a 11th grade English teacher in the Governor Mifflin School District, Shellington, PA.

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The purpose of the Pennsylvania Writing Project Newsletter is to link together all teachers of writing in our geographical area of southeastern Pennsylvania. The Newsletter features, but is not limited to, articles that deal with writing and the teaching of writing. We seek manuscripts from all teachers of writing at all grade levels and in all subject areas, and from anyone else interested in writing. All articles and submissions will be considered for publication. Comments, questions, etc. are also welcomed. Please send all communication to Vicki Steinberg, Editor, Pennsylvania Writing Project Newsletter, West Chester University, West Chester, PA 19383.

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