

PENNSYLVANIA WRITING PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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From the Director

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS: THE EFFECT ON WRITING INSTRUCTION

At the Spring Conference of the Delaware Valley Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (DV-ASCD), noted demographer Harold Hodgkinson captivated his audience with meaningful statistics based on births, immigration, race, and population counts. The numbers flew fast and furious, tantalizing us to make sense of them all for Pennsylvania, the nation, and the world. Fifteen items struck me as especially interesting to recount, and I offer them to this *Newsletter's* readers. They are not necessarily connected, but they made an impression on me and some of the other educators I spoke with in a job-alike session after the speech. What are we to make of these information bits as educators and, specifically, as teachers of writing? What will our students look like, and how will we teach them to write?

ITEM 1. It is immigration, not childbirth, that keeps the US population growing.

ITEM 2. Even Catholic school enrollment shows this. There are fewer Catholic children.

1962	5.5 million
1972	4.0 "
1982	3.1 "
1992	2.6 "

ITEM 3. In 2010, 4 states (TX, CA, FL, NY) will have 1/3 of all US kids, and 55% of them will be minorities.

ITEM 4. Note how minority growth occurs in some states, not others.

	1990	2000	2010
MD	35.8	40.2	45.7
PA	16	16.7	18.7
TX	49	51.9	56.9

ITEM 5. 52% of all Americans live in the Eastern time zone, most of them in the Bos-Wash corridor.

ITEM 6. In the world, 19% are Caucasians; by 2050, this will be reduced to 9%.

ITEM 7. Populations in non-"Western" countries are growing rapidly. Population doubling times for some countries:

Iraq	20 years
USA	78 years
India	35 years
Japan	87 years
China	56 years
Germany	(doesn't grow)

ITEM 8. Population growth in the US 1980-1990: 9.8%. Percentage growth by race:

White	6.0 %
Black	13.2
Asian	107.8
Native Amer.	37.9
Hispanic	53.6
Other	45.1 (incl. MidEastern)

[Continued on page 3]

FLYING HIGH

The more experienced (read "older") of us remember a song from the '60s called "Up, Up and Away" that was a big hit for The Fifth Dimension. They sang something like "Up, up and away in my beautiful balloon." I always liked those words and then, when the National Air and Space Museum opened, the first short film I saw there was "To Fly," which had a moving sequence where the viewer felt as though she were in a hot air balloon floating over the trees and streams.

The combination of these words and visions hooked me and whenever I saw a hot air balloon fly overhead or in a picture I said to myself, "I'd like to do that some day." In fact, I visit Air and Space frequently and always revisit the hot air exhibit.

It turns out I didn't just think I'd like to take a balloon trip. Friends of mine recently surprised me with a birthday party which included as a present a gift certificate for a hot air balloon ride.

I went for the hour-long trip late in June (see the accompanying pictures) and it was exactly what I thought: smoother than walking, remarkably quiet when the propane isn't firing, very warm when the propane is firing, not scary at all, and very pleasant.

Of course, I took two rolls of pictures and Pam Hertz Hilbert (a 1986 PAWP teacher-consultant) followed the chase car that follows the balloon and took another roll and a half. When I got the pictures back from the developer and started to put together a packet for all the gift-givers to see, I realized that I had just been a risk-taker.

Going up, up and away in a beautiful balloon was possible only because I had the support system that made me comfortable.

I had researched the event both through my visits to the Air and Space Museum and through reading the books we had in the senior high library on the history of ballooning so I knew what to expect.

Many friends had helped me decide to take the ride and one even went right up to the basket for reassurance.

The trip was not completely different from anything I had ever done before; after all, I had flown across the ocean, had been at the top of the Empire State Building, had climbed short ladders.

Even the ride itself was not undertaken alone. There was the pilot, the couple who were celebrating their tenth wedding anniversary, and a young man who never did say if he had a special reason. The couple, the young man, and I were all novices together but we did have expert guidance from the pilot.

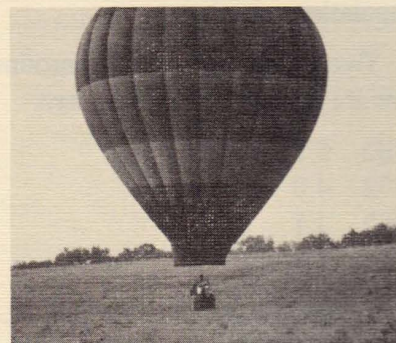
The landing was a little bouncy but the pilot had warned us to spread our legs, bend our knees, and hang on so I wasn't upset--figuratively or literally.

Isn't this the atmosphere we try to create in our classrooms so the kids can become risk-takers? I see us as the pilots, supplying the necessary background and push; the classmates as the friends, encouraging; and the risk-taker as the person going up, up and away. And the product? Why, that's the pictures I have to show anyone who's willing to look and the anecdote I have to tell to anyone who's willing to listen--or read.

Probably, though, the best product is my knowing that you can teach an old (read "experienced") dog new tricks.



Although holding on tightly, Newsletter editor Vicki Steinberg, managed this picture of Lancaster County from one mile up.



Editor Vicki Steinberg and balloon crew practice landing half-way through the one-hour trip.

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS, *Cont.*

ITEM 9. In 1992, the world increased by 93 million people--95% in developing Africa and SE Asia.

ITEM 10. Of 5.4 billion people in the world, 1.5 are Muslim. There are more Muslims than Episcopalians in the United States.

ITEM 11. Back to the US: what will the college class of 2010 be like? Simple to tell. Just examine the birth statistics for 1992:

- 23% born in poverty
- 1/4 born to unmarried mothers (the largest number of these are white)
- 2/3 of those mothers will be teenagers
- half will live with a single parent (average annual income of \$14,000 compared to couples' potential of \$49,000)
- 30% won't get polio vaccine, DPT, etc. (55% will be in California) [Note: 95% of cows and pigs are vaccinated.]
- 5% will be born with *preventable* birth defects (no prenatal care for 16% in 1st trimester)
- 30% will not to graduate from high school

ITEM 12. SAT scores correlate with economic status of household:

Verbal	Math	Income
472	532	\$70,000
449	504	60,000
440	493	50,000
431	483	40,000
418	469	30,000
404	453	20,000
379	434	10,000

ITEM 13. US has 7% of the world's K-12 (basic education) population and 50% of the world's higher education population (14.9 million). [Hodgkinson note: We are No. 1 in what we spend in higher education and are clearly the best. If our higher education is the best in the world, how could that be possible if our college students come from a "bad" K-12 system?]

ITEM 14. The top 20% of US students are world class. The middle 45% are OK. The lowest 35% are terrible and are "inner city." The Purves study that makes US education look good was reported

nationally only once, by *USA Today* on 9/29/1992, and not picked up by the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, or other national sources.

ITEM 15. This is unrelated but interesting. In 1996 there will be a 37% increase in 50-year-olds in the US. Why? The post-World War II baby boom created by returning veterans in 1945. Implications? More "older people stuff" will be sold, and less "younger people stuff." Thus fewer hot dogs will be needed, and less late night TV will be watched.

DV-ASCD, the organization bringing Harold Hodgkinson to this area, serves Philadelphia and four suburban counties with at least two conferences annually and always creates a forum of topics of current interest to teachers and administrators. Several PAWPers are active members, including me. To join, contact Ellen Linky, School District of Philadelphia, 299-7839.

RICHARD STERLING NAMED NWP DIRECTOR

Richard Sterling, director of the New York City Writing Project, has been appointed executive director of the National Writing Project. He will take office in October when Jim Gray resigns.

"I am fortunate indeed to be heading a project," Sterling says, "that has without peer so benefited the teachers and children of our nation. You can be assured that I will work hard to maintain and enhance the reputation and work of the National Writing Project."

Along with being director of the New York City Writing Project, Sterling is also founder and director of the Institute for Literacy Studies at Lehman College, CUNY. In this capacity he oversees staff development work in sixty public schools in New York City.

In 1992, Sterling received a grant of \$2.3 million from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund to develop a national project of teacher research groups in 12 cities across the United States. As national director of the Urban Sites Network, he works with 75 teachers and 12 university faculty from all regions of the country to develop a body of practitioner-based research documenting education practice. A first volume of this work will be published in 1995.

SUCCESSFUL FIRST SEASON FOR YOUNG WRITERS/YOUNG READERS

Along with the burgeoning Youth Writing Project on the West Chester University campus, the new combined writing-reading program for grades 2-8 had a small but happy beginning at its Upper Moreland site. Thirty youngsters attended the two-week session run by Upper Moreland teacher-consultants Mary O'Gorman ('93), Freda Schopfer ('93), and Neshaminy teacher-consultant Sylvia Pennypacker ('92). Feedback from all concerned was quite favorable. The final publication was mailed to participants in August and will also be circulated to local schools and bookstores.

Typical children's comments:

- *"This program helps you read and write better."*
- *"YW/YR is a course that can be taken over and over again because it provides limitless opportunities and options for young writers and young readers."*
- *"I liked the fact that you could write whatever you wanted to and you were free to read."*
- *"I learned writing skills that I will carry throughout my high school and college years."*
- *"I would change the length--instead of two weeks, one month."*
- *"I learned that there are many styles of writing and that reading and writing can actually be fun."*
- *"At first I didn't want to go because I don't like reading or writing but now I love it, and I love to read and write."*
- *"I learned how to read better. I would change nothing."*
- *"This program got me to read! Now I can't put down a book."*

Typical parent comments:

- *"I feel this project is wonderful! This is what education is about! Reading and writing are ways to express ourselves and it is fun, interesting, and exciting!"*
- *"None of the children seemed bored or uncomfortable spending the time in a school room for this program. Of course, excellent teachers make a fun learning experience."*
- *"My son enjoyed the program. He received more response and individualized criticisms on*

his works than in the regular classroom setting. This program has been very beneficial."

- *"Several days, he came home and read for the rest of the afternoon."*
- *"A very motivating program for the children that participated. The creativity continued after the kids came home. It helped encourage writing at home. Would like to see the program run a little longer."*

Mary, Sylvia, and Freda kept double-entry journals and wrote in their reports that "all of the children were eager, motivated, and anxious to attend--it was a terrific two weeks!" Contributing to the success of the program were Evelyn Clarke Mott, the visiting writer; Ellen Mager of Booktenders in Doylestown; Peggy Cantor of Scholastic, Inc.; and the Upper Moreland School District administrators who invited the program to their territory and gave it a friendly home.

Interestingly, some of the parents were teachers in neighboring districts and commented that they would like to have YW/YR come to them. PAWP is actively soliciting school districts to place new versions of the Young Writers/Young Readers program for the summer of 1995. Newsletter readers who would like to have such a program serving their school districts should immediately contact the PAWP office.



Freda Schopfer surrounded by YW/YR students in the Upper Moreland Middle School.



Sylvia Pennypacker with a small group of her YW/YR students.

PAWP'S YOUTH PROGRAMS EXPANDING PROGRAMS, LOCATIONS, ENROLLMENTS

Over 430 youngsters took part in the summer youth programs offered by the Pennsylvania Writing Project in three locations. Most of these occurred at the campus-based Youth Writing Project for grades 1-12, which saw a substantial increase of almost 50% in registrations and added a fourth two-week session. Writing and Acting ran at the WCU Exton Center with a dozen children ages 11-13, and the new Young Writers/Young Readers totaled 30 in grades 2-8.

These youth programs are taught exclusively by PAWP teacher-consultants and visiting local writers and poets. Staff for the 1994 summer included:

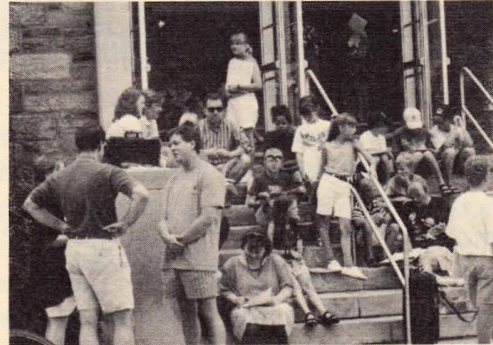
Bruce Seidel	Upper Darby SD
Florence Barnes	Upper Darby SD
Christine Cardamone	Southeast Delco SD
Patricia DiNicola	Archdiocese of Philadelphia
Lynne Dorfman	Upper Moreland SD
J. Craig Fenimore	West Chester Area SD
Linda Geesey	Oxford Area SD
Steven Heffner	Conrad Weiser Area SD
Mary Alice Hoffman	Wallingford-Swarthmore SD
Kathleen Hurst	Hatboro-Horsham SD
Judith Jester	Kennett Consolidated SD
Cynthia Muse	Philadelphia SD
Mary O'Gorman	Upper Moreland SD
Sylvia Pennypacker	Neshaminy SD
Barbara Reznick	Twin Valley SD
Bruce Saybolt	Chester-Upland SD
Freda Schopfer	Upper Moreland SD
Susan Shelton	Southeast Delco SD
Karen Venuto	Rose Tree Media SD
Peggy Walsh	Council Rock SD
Gloria Williams	Chichester SD

PAWP's youth programs aim to mix education with recreation--making writing fun--and are given high ratings by the student participants and their parents. Typical responses of youngsters this summer:

- *"A chance to let your writing grow and expand in ways you never thought possible."*
- *"The Youth Writing Project is a great opportunity to meet new people and find out new things about yourself while writing work you can be proud of."*

- *"Very positive, enriching experience for perspective authors."*

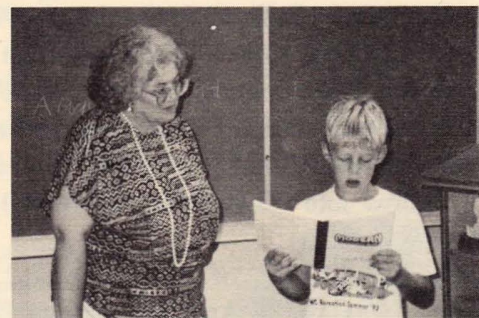
Plans are afoot to expand the Young Writers/Young Readers program throughout the suburban counties in 1995 and to establish scholarships, regional publications, and achievement awards.



Bruce Seidel discusses a participant's writing with a parent as the afternoon session begins.



While making final preparations, Lynne Dorfman jokes with a student.



Barb Reznick listens to one of her students, Keith Pyle, share his story with the class.

CORRECTION: We inadvertently omitted the name of Jerry Hartle, Kutztown Area School District, from our list of Fellows at the Bucks County Intermediate Unit.

SECOND POLAROID DAY PROVIDES IDEAS, CAMERAS

"Visual Literacy, Instant Photography, and Writing: Portfolio Implications" headlined PAWP's second Polaroid day on Friday, July 15, 1994 as Claire Correale, a representative of the Polaroid Education Program and instructor in physical science and geology at a New Jersey community college, led over 50 participants in a three-hour morning session.

Having distributed Polaroid cameras, Claire introduced the teachers from dozens of school districts to some simple rules including where to put the film, how to hold the camera, how to avoid red eye and flash reflections in glass. Then, she sent the teachers outside Lawrence Center on several expeditions to practice picture-taking related to visual literacy.

Just before lunch, Claire distributed film, carrying cases, and more information on Polaroid Education Programs. Following lunch, participants headed to Main Hall for a choice of concurrent sessions presented by several PAWP and/or PennLit teacher-consultants who had participated in last October's Polaroid day and therefore had classroom experience implementing ideas. These sessions were part of the National Writing Project's involvement with Polaroid.

Teachers of grades K-5 were able to go through student-of-the-week exercises with Pam Hertz Hilbert (Exeter Township first grade teacher and 1986 PAWP Fellow) and take *A Walk With Rosie* with Patty Koller (Downingtown reading specialist and 1992 PennLit Fellow), while teachers of grades 4-8 saw slides of work done by Judy Jester (Kennett Middle School English teacher, 1993 PAWP Fellow and 1994 PennLit Fellow) and her students.

For teachers of grades 6-12, Diane Dougherty (Coatesville Area English teacher, 1989 PAWP Fellow and 1994 PennLit Fellow) led an hour on using instant photography to help students understand, and reveal their understanding of, point of view. Finally, Vicki Steinberg (Exeter Township English teacher, 1983 PAWP Fellow, and 1992 PennLit Fellow) worked with some of the instant photography the participants had taken in the morning to write short poems based on

Wordsworth's notion that poetry often concerns emotions recalled in tranquility.

Nearly 90% of the participants rated the overall workshop "extremely worthwhile" and many expressed interest in attending future workshops, specifically those involving reading, as well as writing, social studies, math and science. Typical comments by participants include:

- *"The afternoon went quickly. Student of the Week is an idea I have used and for some reason dropped. Now I have some new ideas to inject into an old theme. I always appreciate that!"*
- *"The second presentation also triggered some ways I could use the idea of extending a book's concepts into another area--i.e.. adjectives, verbs, new setting, same character."*
- *"Enjoyed the afternoon--could have used more time in both presentations."*
- *"Very enthusiastic and vibrant presentations. Practical ideas--useful for Student of the Week."*
- *"Afternoon workshop using literature with the Polaroid was too short."*
- *"Diane had some wonderful ideas about how to use the camera as a springboard for writing exercises. In addition, the class added ideas about how to relate pictures to specific literary works."*
- *"Lots of good ideas!"*
- *"All presenters were excellent. It was an exchange of ideas in a friendly atmosphere. We all had a lot to take home, such as material possessions and ideas."*

PAWP is considering another Polaroid event in 1994-95.



Brenda Hurley, a 1984 fellow, prepares a picture that shows her "summer personality" for morning activity.



In Lawrence Center, teachers try out their new cameras.



Several new camera buffs offer to show their stories.



Participants work on different aspects of the Polaroids: close-up, flash, and color.



One exercise requires writing a story to be illustrated with an instant picture.

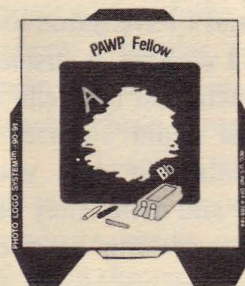
THE CHARM OF PHOTOMAGIC

Polaroid buttons identify and intrigue teachers and students

The special PhotoMagic Kit awarded to PAWP by the Polaroid Education Program has been put to extensive use this summer. The kit enables PAWP teachers to create buttons for recognizing all participants in a variety of programs (PAWP summer institute, PennLit, Youth Writing Project). With another set of buttons, teachers can also reward individual achievement: "Author of the [fill in the blank]," or "I Can Write."

The button-making process is not very complicated. An acetate "form" with the stipulated message is inserted into the film pack before it is placed into the PhotoMagic camera, the photographer focuses on the subject's head, and the end result is an instant photo that puts the head inside the slot set up within the designated message. Another machine permits the photographer to cut a circle out of the photo to be inserted into the two-piece plastic button.

Photomagic also gives PAWP the capability to put instant photos into greeting-card mounts and refrigerator magnets.



A "before" and "after" example of the different types of acetates available for use.

BAND-AIDS

by Eileen Lipski

Each fall if you were to drive past any local high school after regular school hours, you would see groups of very dedicated high school band members marching and playing their hearts out for their alma mater. These kids perform with intricate moves and great precision after many, many hours of practice. Once the show is learned they are able to represent their school and take great pride in their accomplishments. The many months of learning music and practicing intricate drills turn into an eye-catching panorama of sights and sounds. The pride and responsibility the students learn through practicing with one another is striking.

But there's another story, one that isn't all grand and glorious. This, folks, is a look at the people behind the scenes; the people who, when their child joins the high school band, are called upon to lend support and wind up discovering hidden talents they never knew they had. I am one such new band parent and this is my story.

To begin with, let it hereby be known that being a band-aider is not an easy job. It requires countless hours of volunteerism and extreme supplies of energy. I would suggest a complete physical be taken before you step into this role and periodic health checks scheduled as the band season progresses. Since you will not have time for regularly scheduled meals, stock the house with quickie cuisine and have your microwave given an overhaul. Adapt to catching forty winks in the car as you await your son or daughter after practices and be prepared to make an extra 25 mile out-of-your-way run for all of the friends that do not have a parent with the same stamina as you.

Learn to be ready for all types of meteorological events when cheering on the band at its performances. My husband and I have found that carrying a blanket in case of cold weather, a cushion in case the seats are made of metal, an umbrella in case of rain, a thermos of cool liquid in case of extreme heat, a pair of binoculars in case your tickets place you on the top row and completely out of normal visual range, and a bag with assorted goodies to eat when more than ten bands will be performing are the absolute minimum that you need to carry with you to these events. The long, oft times muddy trek from the parking lot to the

performance field builds stamina as well as muscles and can be considered a good form of exercise. Of course, once you are seated it becomes virtually impossible to stand and stretch your legs since everyone in the stands has so much equipment with them there is no room to move. Foot flexes and foot dangles become an acquired skill after one or two band competitions, so don't be too discouraged the first few times your feet lose feeling. Our first band competition was a five-hour sit in the pouring rain with gusty winds up to fifteen miles per hour and we survived to tell the tale. So take heart and simply learn to be prepared for anything.

When, and if, your child becomes a band member and you find yourself a new band-aid as I have, make sure you can sew or make friends with someone who can. It will become a duty of yours to assure that your child's uniform is maintained to military requirements. I know that I was asked to hem my daughter's trousers to fit certain specifications and only had to redo the task four times before I got it right. The pant leg needs to sit just so on the shoe without a "break" occurring in the crease. A break is when the crease bends in or pops out because you haven't hemmed the pants correctly. This is a real no-no and can make you a little paranoid if you're not careful. I find myself inspecting everyone's pants everywhere I go now; I often have to hold myself back and not embarrass myself or the stranger whose pants are "breaking" and he never even knew it by blurting out "Those pants would never pass inspection! Who is your tailor?" Cummerbunds must be secured at the waist and cuffs and neckwear white and glowing. Gloves need frequent washings and your child will never know where they are on laundry day. I've solved this problem by simply purchasing enough gloves for every performance between now and the end of the season. A little expensive maybe, but definitely worth the peace of mind that my child's gloves meet with approval. I've taken lessons from my husband on boot polishing a la armed services and can now buff a pair of shoes well enough to give new meaning to the word "gleam." Yes, this preparation takes endless hours of your time, but when your child steps out on the field in full dress uniform, even the torrential downpour that inevitably begins the minute she steps foot on the field cannot tarnish the feeling of pride you have in your heart.

How are your hairdressing abilities? If your child, like mine, is a band front member, she will be out in the front for all to see and her smiling face needs to be framed by impeccably well-groomed hair. As a matter of fact, it needs to be French braided in a way that might require an octopus with eight well-functioning arms to do it. Invest in a few "How To" books on braiding and you too will possess the skills necessary to make your child's hair look like everyone else's. You and your child will have to get up extra early for you to accomplish this feat, but you don't really need that extra cup of coffee anyway. Consider it a good way to help cut down on your caffeine intake.

The final commitment you will be making once your child joins the band is the one concerning finances. You see, everything they do requires money and it has to come from somewhere. Since you do not want to be the "somewhere," you begin to volunteer your time for fundraisers. Notice the word "fun" hidden in there? I know that there really is some fun hidden away in this whole process, but it hasn't shown its little smiling face yet. First, you can try to sell all your friends and neighbors band shirts, band sweatshirts, band hats, band mugs, band carseat covers, band cook books, and band pins. If that doesn't work, pull the old patriotic number on them and sell them an American flag. After all, they could not get one quite this big for this little money and it even comes with a pole for displaying it on special holidays. What a bargain! If they don't need that, perhaps they would be interested in having their car washed. Our band does a wonderful job of washing cars and we promise not too many missed areas or fingerprints on the windows. Not interested? Then why not begin thinking ahead to the upcoming holidays and order a poinsettia, or more? Bands will sell them to you for a mere pittance and you'll even get delivery. It may be a little early to be thinking of poinsettias, but listen, think of how prepared your friends will be for the holidays having purchased their winter foliage from your child's band.

We all have friends who refuse under all circumstances to support such fund raisers, but band-aiders have something for everyone. We can also appeal to the need for food and sell pizza and hoagies. Yes, your orders will be taken and you won't have to lift a finger to have food delivered right to your door. The band-aid parent thinks of

everything. So the next time you see students selling something, think of all of their paranoid parents sitting at home with fifty boxes of plain and peanut M&Ms and please support your local band.

I've been a band-aider for over two months now. My daughter is proud to be a part of such a wonderful organization. She's made new friends, grown in confidence and self esteem, and learned what commitment is. She's become more organized and self-reliant. And I know that when she marches out in front of the homecoming crowd and her uniform looks terrific, and her hair looks perfect, and her shoes are gleaming that I will be able to smile through the raindrops as the skies open up on her once again.

Eileen Lipski, a 4th grade teacher in the Upper Moreland Township School District, wrote this personal reflection for a Connections course.

CERTIFICATE IN WRITING INSTRUCTION AWARDED TO NINE RECIPIENTS

PAWP continues to offer its special Certificate in Writing Instruction. The latest Fellow recipients are Dorothy Brett ('93), Tulpehocken Area School District; Lynne Dorfman ('89), Upper Moreland School District; Bernadette Fenning ('87), Bishop Carroll High School; Beverly Hanrahan ('93), Souderton Area School District; Myrna Holweger ('93), Neshaminy School District; and Barbara Reznick ('90), Twin Valley School District. The latest non-Fellow recipients are Andrea Fisher, Upper Moreland School District; Galen Guengerich, Souderton Area School District; and Patricia Vroman, Exeter Township School District.

This certificate, earned through completion of 15 credits of course work with West Chester University through the Pennsylvania Writing Project, originated with the Upper Moreland School District, where a regular sequence of PAWP courses has been offered for teachers since 1990. Since then, 19 teachers have earned the certificate.

Teachers interested in the certificate should review their record of course work. Previous graduate credit earned through the Pennsylvania Writing Project may be applicable. *Address all questions in writing to the office of the Pennsylvania Writing Project.*

I THOUGHT I'D GO BACK TO COLLEGE... BUT I COULDN'T FIND A PARKING SPACE

by Bridget Wilson

Climbing across the empty side of the bed I instinctively hit the top of the clock. Silence. Reality hits me. Today is late registration at the University. Time is up, I tell myself. Mark's been dead for seven months. I quit my job three weeks after his death. Friends and family were shocked and concerned. *What will you do? You can't sit at home; it's not good for you.* In a flash of brilliance I told them, "I'm going back to school. My childhood dream was to become a teacher."

The truth was I just could not cope. The back-to-school in September routine had kept others at bay until today, my own personal D-Day, August 24, 1990.

Rolling back to my side of the bed I squeeze my eyes shut--*don't think, don't feel.* Mentally I picture myself getting up, getting dressed, but I continue to lay there, last night's trip to the supermarket replaying in my head.

"Mom, can we get these? They're great. You get a superball inside." Jenny studied the box hopefully, "I hope it's a pink one."

I looked into her father's brown eyes, "Okay, Honey, sure."

"You're great, Mom!" Encouraged, she took off, searching for another sugary delight.

Staring at the Gatorade on the third shelf, I suddenly had the clearest vision of Mark. He's leaning up against the kitchen sink in his navy nylon running shorts, gulping down half a bottle of Gatorade, recovering from his daily run, smiling at me.

I don't need Gatorade anymore.

I looked at all the women shopping with a purpose, lists, and coupons. I had no purpose. There was no reason to look. I checked for his favorite ice cream, black cherry. They have it. I don't need it. I walked aimlessly up and down the aisles, the ache in my heart overtaking me. Watching a husband and wife argue over how much tuna is on the shelf at home, I wanted to scream at them.

My husband is dead!

Somehow I got through the line with a cart full of kids' choices. Safe at home again, I piled the bags on the kitchen table and went to bed.

Morning comes too soon. How can I possibly go back out there? When will the pain go away? I was waiting for divine intervention. The belief that God would direct me to my next step in life encased me in a casket of indecision.

My mind continues to rewind. I replay last week's phone conversation with the woman from the Registrar's office. "We will have over a thousand students attempting to register that day. Many did not get courses last Spring. My advice is, get here before 8 a.m. so you can get a parking space. Have plenty of course choices because classes fill quickly."

I get out of bed rehearsing, *don't think, stay calm.* I decide, if I don't get a parking space, or the line is too long, I'm out of there. Its not meant to be.

Into the car we climb; nine-year-old Josh and eight-year-old Jenny are strangely excited. "I can't wait to see your school, Mom; is it gigantic?" Jenny dreams, "Will I ever get to go to your classes?"

"Do you have the map, Mom?" Josh, who is heavily into maps this summer, demands.

"I think so...listen, kids, this might not work out. It's going to be very crowded. You must understand. If I can't get parked, or the lines are real long, I'm not going to register today. We might just turn around and come home."

Incredulous, Josh looks up from the map of the campus he has dug out of my purse. "Mom," he demands, "you have to register today or you can't become a teacher."

Life is simple when you're nine. At least, it's supposed to be. Not Josh's life. Victim of a cancerous tumor in the orbit of his eye at seven years old, Josh survived a year of chemotherapy, surgery, radiation, sickness and pain. In the advent of his recovery he could only watch helplessly as his Dad, his pillar of strength who had literally carried him through his own battle with cancer, succumbed to the same killer disease, just eight months after Josh's treatments ended. No. Josh is no ordinary nine-year-old.

As I round the corner, the parking lot is a sea of blinding reflections, hot August sun bouncing off chrome. Just as I expected, filled. Slowly I maneuver my way up and down the rows, navigating around other latecomers who have courageously burrowed into any makeshift spots. The people who have beaten me out of these spots are inside forming huge lines. I head toward the exit and escape.

"Mom, I think this guy is leaving," Josh rolls his window down, waving to the stranger. "Are you leaving?" Josh screams.

The scantily clad youth salutes, "Sure am, follow me," he gestures. "I have a prime spot in the middle of the last row." Reluctantly I follow. *The First Sign from God*--I am parked.

Proudly, Josh opens the door for us. *This has become his mission*, I think to myself. Upon entering the building I freeze. Along each side of the hall lounge, hairy, half-naked, extremely young children. Were these college students? I do not belong here. I look down at my kids. Both are drinking in their new surroundings with intensity. I am worried they will impede my escape. I bend to their eye level whispering, "Listen, this will never work. These kids are all waiting in line. There won't be any classes left. Let's go."

But Josh's busy eyes lock upon a sign, "Late Registration--Downstairs." "Come on, Mom," he shouts as he leads the way. Kids are sprawled all over the steps and along the long muggy corridor. Numbly, I follow Josh making my way blindly down the hall. He turns pointing proudly, "In here, Mom. This is the place." He disappears through a doorway. Sheepishly, I follow.

It is instantly clear that children are a novelty in this environment. Josh and Jenny are at once the centers of attention. A deeply tan, smiling, silver-maned gentleman with plaid shorts and a starched white short-sleeved shirt approaches. "My goodness." Knowingly, he looks at me saying, "You must be the two prodigies we've been waiting for. Entering college at...how old did you say you were?" he boisterously pats Josh on the back and winks at Jenny.

"I'm nine. It's my Mom." Josh points at me, and before I can speak he innocently blurts out the story of my life! "We're here because my Mom is going to be a teacher. My Dad died. Her job goes too late. Nobody can watch us. She had to quit. So we are looking for the place to sign up for classes. Especially biology--to dissect a frog. We don't know where to go...to sign up that is. Can you help her?"

Now I am the focus of those kindly blue eyes as Plaid Shorts reaches for my hand. "Oh my," he takes my hand, "this is where you go. Let's see here, do you have your registration form, Mom?"

I surrender the form and the list of classes. He walks assuredly to a computer terminal across the room and pecks steadily away, pausing only twice to study the screen. "We are in business," he exclaims as he bounds over to us. "I registered you for your first choices. You got in early, Mom, so they were all open," he winks at me.

"But," I protest, "I came late...the line..." He presses the form and the printout into my hand. "Signed, sealed, and delivered. Up the back steps, last door on your right, pay today or you'll lose your classes. You're on your way. Good luck," he says reassuringly as he steers us toward the door.

There is no line at the Bursar's office. (I was the first to register.) Minutes later, schedule in hand, *The Second Sign from God*, we exit into the bright sunlight. "Let's go get your ID, Mom, the lady we paid said to get it today," Josh reminds me. (I feel like Alice in Wonderland when she fell down the hole. What was going on? Was I dreaming? Could I ever be a teacher?)

Overwhelmed, I stammer, "We'd better just go, Josh. I don't even know where the Student Center is and it's really hot."

Josh looks back at me, map in hand, chin thrust forward. "Listen, Mom, I won't be here with you next week. You'd better pay attention to this map," he chides impatiently.

I stare at him. He looks so healthy, strong and tall, pointing down the street. What an incredible kid.

"It's right down this way, three blocks," he counts looking down at the map. "Let's go. I want to see it; I think we can eat there."

We made it through that day and lots more that followed, together. School yanked me out of my indecision and back into life--over night. I graduated *summa cum laude* Spring 1993 with a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education. Just after Commencement, the highest paying district around hired me to teach fifth grade. So now, finally, I am what I wanted to be. You can imagine the obstacles I faced working to get my degree, but I'm here to tell you none of them was as difficult as finding that parking space.

Bridget Wilson, a fifth-grade teacher at West Chester Area School District, remembered how she became a college student as part of a Strategies for Teaching Writing course.

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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 communications to Vicki Steinberg, Editor, *Pennsylvania Writing Project Newsletter*, West Chester University, West Chester, PA 19383.

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