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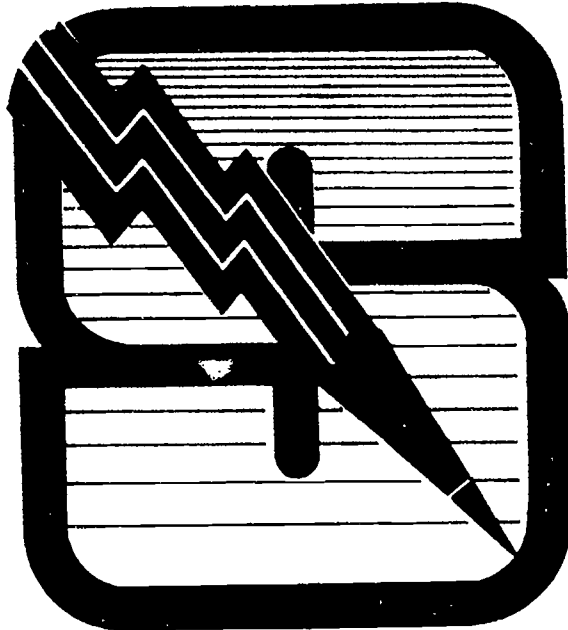
ABSTRACT

This compilation presents materials associated with the 5-week summer session of the Samford University Writing Project, 1994. The compilation begins with curriculum vitae of staff, teacher consultants, and guest speakers. The compilation also presents lists of group and committee members. Summaries of 14 presentations (on such topics as discovering topics through music, exploring nature, writing a children's book, autobiographical timelines, discovering literature through writing, the power of sensory detail, the oral and written story connection, breaking the tie with reference books, Civil War diaries, integrated teaching in an inclusion classroom, prejudice, fairy tales, and the generative rhetoric of the sentence) and samples of participants' writing form the major part of the compilation. (RS)

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The Sanford University Writing Project

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I M P A C T '94

BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF WRITERS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

David H. Roberts, Peggy A. Swoger and
Susan G. Yates, Editors

**A compilation of the teaching demonstrations and the personal
and professional writings of the Samford University
Writing Project, 1994**

July 6 - August 4

Sponsored by

**Samford University
Orlean Bullard Beeson School of Education
National Writing Project**

**David H. Roberts, Director
Peggy A. Swoger, Co-Director
Susan G. Yates, Facilitator
Ruth Holt, Writing Project Secretary**

Samford University Writing Project

Staff

Peggy Swoger (Mountain Brook Junior High)
Public School Co-Director
for Programs and Summer Institute

Susan Yates (Mountain Brook Junior High)
Summer Institute Facilitator

Ruth Holt (Samford University)
Secretary

David Roberts (Samford University)
University Co-Director
for Budget and Administrative Support

Affiliations

National Writing Project
Alabama Writing Project

Financial Support

Orlean Bullard Beeson School of Education
National Writing Project
SUWP Teacher/Consultants

Sponsoring Dean

Ruth Ash, Dean, Orlean Bullard Beeson School of Education



1994 SAMFORD UNIVERSITY WRITING PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

Birmingham City School District

Claire Datnow
Claire Gross
Florence Jackson
Rita Sparks
Madeline Thompson

Fairfield City School District

Veronica Parrish

Hoover City School District

Tricia Collins
Lee Harrell
Carol van Zalingen

Huntsville City School District

Jean Smith

Jefferson County School District

Dana Keck

Mountain Brook City School District

Mary Evelyn Hollaway
Helen Pruet

Lynda O'Neil Powell

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Lee Harrell	Hand-Me-Down Lace A Quitter's Struggle
Mary Evelyn Hollaway.....	The River Within Olga The Burial
Florence Jackson.....	Alabama History Class Four Portraits Dogwood Fruit
Dana Keck	Hong Kong Dad's Dance
Veronica V. Parrish.....	Gone but not Forgotten That Old Watering Hole Mother's Gifts
Lynda O'Neil Powell.....	My River Lady
Helen Pruet	My Tree A Box in the Attic The River Calls My Name
Jean Smith	The Bear
Rita Sparks	Guard Duty The Tree House Reading Room
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Foreword

Since the summer of 1990, the Samford University Writing Project has continued its growth in the greater Birmingham area and surrounding counties. In its five-year history, the Project has trained approximately seventy, carefully selected teachers to conduct professional development workshops for English teachers and teachers in other disciplines. Now that the Alabama Course of Study, current textbooks, and state testing programs have spotlighted the importance of writing instruction in K-12 language arts and across the curriculum, the impact of the Samford Writing Project has even greater potential.

Writing projects across the nation have been recognized as the most effective professional development programs in education. The Congress has strongly supported this effort with a funding line item in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as has the State of Alabama in its educational budget.

The reasons for such success are not mysterious. The fact is that the best teacher of teachers is another teacher. During the Summer Institute, each participating teacher conducts a teaching demonstration on writing which involves all the participants in writing, responding, revision, editing, and publishing throughout the summer. A second fact is that teachers of writing need to be writers themselves, not necessarily published writers, but writers who understand writing as a process from their own experience.

The writing project stresses the professionalism of teaching, offering its participants stipends to attend the Summer Institute and honoraria for conducting workshops during the school year. As professionals, writing project teachers are continual learners who read, discuss, and write for professional journals. They make it their business to know the latest research in literacy growth.

We teachers who have become part of this literacy effort on behalf of the students we teach, extend our profound thanks to Samford University for its sponsorship and financial support and to Dean Ruth Ash of Samford's School of Education who has provided the writing project a home at Samford. Through the combined efforts of public schools and universities, we can have great educational impact on writing instruction and literacy growth.

Peggy Swoger
Public School Co-director

STAFF AND TEACHER CONSULTANTS

David Harrill Roberts
Professor of English
Samford University

Education

- 1982 Ph. D. in Rhetoric and Linguistics, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, Pennsylvania
1973 M. A. in Linguistics, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina
1970 B. A. in English, Lander College, Greenwood, South Carolina

Teaching Experience

- 1988 to present Professor of English, Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama
1985 to 1988 Associate Professor of English, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg
1983 to 1985 Assistant Professor of English, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg
1978 to 1983 Assistant Professor of English, Bluefield State College, Bluefield, West Virginia
1976 to 1978 Instructor in English, Bluefield College, Bluefield, Virginia
1975 to 1976 Instructor in English, John Tyler Community College, Chester, Virginia
1973 to 1975 Seventh-grade English Teacher, Luanshya Boys' School, Luanshya, Zambia
1970 to 1971 English and Journalism Teacher, Wilson Hall High School, Sumter, South Carolina

Publications

Eleven books written or edited, including five anthologies of teacher writings; twenty-two articles and chapters written; twelve papers reproduced by ERIC Document Clearinghouses; over 400 feature and news articles in newspapers, college alumni publications, and on the wire services; three college catalogues and one literary journal edited.

Professional Activities

Forty-three presentations and other roles (chair, etc.) at professional meetings; nine professional board memberships; writing consultant for nine textbook publishers; curriculum consultant for two state departments of education and two literacy training programs; writing workshop leader in dozens of school districts, colleges, and universities; service on three advisory boards; technical manual writer/editor for industry; consulting linguist in seven countries.

Educational Software Published

Eight educational computer programs developed for MS-DOS and Macintosh computers and distributed internationally by Harcourt Brace College Publishers, McGraw-Hill, Inc., St. Martin's Press, and Mind Builders/Research Design, Inc.

External Grants and Contracts Received

Thirty external grants and contracts totaling over \$239,000.

Current Professional Memberships

National Council of Teachers of English; Conference on College Composition and Communication; Alabama Council of Teachers of English; National Council of Writing Program Administrators, Society of Technical Communicators.

Honors and Awards

Who's Who in America, 47th Edition, 1992-93; Men of Achievement, 1992; International Dictionary of Biography, 22nd Edition, 1992; Who's Who in the South and Southwest, 23rd Edition, 1992; Who's Who in American Education, 1991-92; Honorary Alumnus, Baptist Theological Seminary of Richmond, 1992; The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi, 1990 (Life Member); Who's Who in the South and Southwest, 22nd Edition, 1990; Who's Who in American Education, 1989-90; Research Award, National University Continuing Education Association, 1985; fourteen other honors and awards before 1985.

Peggy Bullard Swoger

2071 Montreat Circle
Birmingham, AL 35216
(205)822-5029

Mountain Brook Junior High
205 Overbrook Road
Birmingham, AL 35213
(205)871-3516

9th Grade English Teacher

Teaching Experience:

Mountain Brook Junior High School Birmingham, AL	21 years
Department Head	12 years
Leadership Team	2 years

Academic Background:

University of Alabama in Birmingham	M.English Ed. 1972
Howard College	B.A. 1959
Cal State Long Beach	Linguistics, 1968-69

Professional Organizations and Activities:

- Alabama Education Association
- National Council Teachers of English
 - Standing Committee on National Assessment
 - Standing Committee on Teacher Preparation
 - Standing Committee on Peer-Assessment
 - Chair, Promising Young Writers
 - NCTE Representative to the English Coalition
- Alabama Council of Teachers of English
 - Board of Directors
 - President
 - Chair of state conference "Celebrating Diversity"
 - Chair of state conference "The Renaissance Child"
- National Education Association
 - Task Force for the publication "Children of Promise"
- National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
 - Planning Group for Incorporation (Carnegie Corp.'s Ed. and the Economy)
 - Director (two three-year terms)
 - Chair, Certification Standards Working Group
- Educational Testing Service, Princeton, NJ
 - Board of Trustees
- National Writing Project
 - National Advisory Board
 - Co-Director, Sunbelt Writing Project, Auburn University
 - Co-Director, Samford University Writing Project
 - American/Swedish Writing Project, Gothenburg
 - Coordinator, Writing Inservice, Tarrant System
 - Coordinator, Writing Inservice, Shelby County
 - Presenter, Gulf Coast Conference on Writing

Honors and Awards:

Honoree, Disney Salute to the American Teacher, Disney Channel, 1990-91
Honoree, Gulf Coast Conference on the Teaching of Writing, 1993

Presentations/Publications:

Speaker, NBPTS, Alabama Forum, Birmingham, AL
Speaker, NBPTS, National Forum, St. Louis, MO
Speaker, NBPTS, North Carolina Forum
Speech, "Freedom from Silence," National Writing Project, St. Louis, MO
Presentation, "Faces of Prejudice," Gulf Coast Writing Conference, ACTE, WITT
Presentation, "The Portfolio," Gulf Coast Writing Conference
Presentation, "Writing as Developmental Activity," Gulf Coast Writing Conference
"Scott's Gift," English Journal (March 1989); Reprinted in Rhetoric and Composition (Graves, 1990); and, What Is English? (Elbow, 1991).
"Navigating English Waters: The Value of the Learning Log," Alabama English (Spring 1989).
"The Grim(m) Tale," Alabama English (1992).

Goal Statement:

My classroom is an interactive community of readers and writers in which all of us are teachers and all of us are learners together.

Susan Gleason Yates

616 Stonehaven Road
Birmingham, AL 35226
(205)979-8267

Mountain Brook Junior High
205 Overbrook Road
Birmingham, AL 35213
(205)871-3516

8th Grade English Teacher
Reading Elective - Grades 8,9

Teaching Experience:

Mountain Brook Junior High School Birmingham, AL	7 years
Fifth Ward Junior High School Bush, LA	15 years
University of New Orleans New Orleans, LA	1 year
Covington Junior High School Covington, LA	1 year

Academic Background:

University of New Orleans	M.Ed. 1986
University of New Orleans	B.A. 1971
St. Mary's Dominican College	1965-1967

Professional Organizations and Activities:

Mountain Brook Education Association
Alabama Education Association
National Education Association
Alabama Council Teachers of English
National Council Teachers of English
ALAN(Adolescent Literature Assembly-NCTE
Selection Committee for ALAN Award Winner - 1993
Middle School Assembly - NCTE
Alabama Reading Association
International Reading Association
Samford University Writing Project(Facilitator- Summer Institute 1993, 1994)
Louisiana State Writing Assessment Committee
Teacher Education Film Series - Alabama State Department of Education
ASCD(Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development)
Alabama Emphasis on Reading Committee 1991, 1993, 1994

Honors and Awards:

Phi Delta Kappa	University of New Orleans
Beeson Fellow(Samford Summer Institute for Teaching Excellence)	1988, 1989
Beeson Fellow, Samford University Writing Project	1990
Performance Award(Mountain Brook School System)	1990
Facilitative Awards(Mountain Brook School System)	1991, 1992, 1993

Presentations/Publications:

"Metamorphosis"	<u>Alabama English</u>
Reviews of YA Literature	<u>English Journal</u>
"Workshop Approach to English"	Gulf Coast Conference on the Teaching of Writing Anniston City Schools Samford Summer Institute for Teaching Excellence Brookwood High School
"Revision - Helping Students Re-See Their Writing"	Samford Fall/Winter Workshop Capstone Writing Project
"The Rewards of Patience"	Gulf Coast Conference on the Teaching of Writing
"Creating a Literacy Club in Your Classroom - A Workshop/ Studio Approach"	Mid-South Whole Language Conference

Goal Statement:

I want my classroom to be an interactive community of writers and readers, a community in which my role is one of facilitator and participant. I hope to continue making discoveries that enable me to "teach less so that my students can learn more" and to be allowed opportunities to share these discoveries with other teachers. As I learn with my students, I find that the joy of teaching is constantly renewed.

Patricia Gail Collins

1054 Ivy Hills Circle
Birmingham, AL 35216
(205)823-2301

Simmons Middle School
1575 Patton Chapel Road
Birmingham, AL 35226
(205)978-1593

8th Grade English Teacher

Teaching Experience:

Simmons Middle School
Birmingham, AL 2 years

Academic Background:

University of Auburn B. S. Ed. 1990

Professional Organizations and Activities:

National Council Teachers of English
Samford University Writing Project

Honors and Awards:

Beeson Fellow (Samford University
Writing Project) 1994

Goal Statement:

I want to create a "risk free" environment where my students will feel safe experimenting with new writing styles and revealing personal discoveries through writing.

Claire Louise Datnow

4634 Battery Lane
Birmingham, AL 35213
(205)870-5948

Putnam Middle School
1751 Montevello Road
Birmingham, AL 35213
(205) 599-8730

6-8th Grade Gifted Resource Teacher

Teaching Experience:

Putnam Middle School	1987 to present
Rochester, Minnesota	4 years
Advetures for Gifted and Talented Hill High School,	9 years
Johannesburg, South Africa	4 years

Academic Background:

University of Alabama at Birmingham	M.A. 1987
University of Alabama at Birmingham	M.Ed.1977
University of the Witwatersrand	B.A. 1958-62

Professional Organizations and Activities:

Certified Developer, Apple Computers
President, Apple Core
National Association for Gifted and Talented

Honors and Awards:

Dean's Award, Outstanding Graduate U.A.B	1987
Teacher of the Year Birmingham Public Schools.	1992-93
Nature Educator of the Year Alabama Nature Conservancy	1993-94
Beeson Fellow (Samford University Writing Project)	1994

Presentations/Publications:

Editorials	<u>The Apple Peel</u>
Click D. Mouse: HyperCard for Kids	Adventures for Gifted and
Art: Windows of the World	Birmingham Museum of Art
Downtown--An Outdoor Classroom	Birmingham Historical Society

Goal Statement:

In my classroom I want my students to become confident, competent writers thus enabling them to use writing as a powerful communication tool in the future.

Claire House Gross

3004 Westview Drive
Adamsville, AL 35005
(205)791-3480

Powderly Elementary School
1901 20th Street S.W.
Birmingham, AL 35211
(205)929-8160

2nd Grade Teacher

Teaching Experience:

Powderly Elementary School	Birmingham, AL	22 years
Calloway Elementary School	Birmingham, AL	1 year

Academic Background:

University of Alabama in Birmingham	A. A. Ed. 1992
University of Alabama in Birmingham	M. Ed. 1979
University of Alabama in Birmingham	B. S. 1971
Walker Junior College	1966
Auburn University	1957-58

Professional Organizations and Activities:

Alabama Education Association
Samford University Writing Project

Honors and Awards:

Phi Delta Kappa Distinguished Teacher Award	UAB Powderly Elementary 1993, 1994
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Presentations/Publications:

"My Son-My Friend"	<u>Christian Single</u>
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Goal Statement:

I want my classroom to be an oasis where my children feel secure enough to explore, to stretch, to dream.

Marilyn Lee Harrell

4001 Colony Park Drive
Birmingham, AL 35243
(205)969-3394

Simmons Middle School
1575 Patton Chapel Road
Hoover, AL 35226
(205)987-1593

8th Grade English Teacher

Teaching Experience:

Simmons Middle School
Hoover, AL 1 year

Academic Background:

University of Alabama in Birmingham M.Ed. 1993
University of Alabama in Birmingham B.A. 1987

Professional Organizations and Activities:

Alabama Education Association
Simmons Portfolio Study Group
Samford University Writing Project

Honors and Awards:

Beeson Fellow (Samford University
Writing Project) 1994

Presentations/Publications:

"Big and Tall Men's Coffins Sold Here" The Ohio State Literary Magazine

Goal Statement:

I want my classroom to be a place where students, through reading and writing, experience growth and find a safe place to explore different aspects of themselves and their society.

Mary Evelyn Hollaway

4036 Clairmont Avenue
Birmingham, AL 35222
(205) 592-2434

Mountain Brook High School
3650 Bethune Drive
Birmingham, AL 35223
(205) 967-2090

Advanced Placement English
Creative Writing

Teaching Experience:

Mountain Brook High School	1 year
University of Alabama	3 years
Wallace State Community College	2 years
Cullman Middle School	14 years

Academic Background:

University of Alabama (Tuscaloosa)	Ph. D. 1994
University of Alabama at Birmingham	M.A. 1972
Huntingdon College (Montgomery)	B.A. 1965

Professional Organizations and Activities:

Alabama Education Association
National Council Teachers of English
Samford University Writing Project

Honors and Awards:

Alumni Scholarship Award 1992-1993
Adolph B. Crew Teaching Award, 1992
Most Outstanding Doctoral Student in Language Arts, 1992
Graduate Teaching Fellow, 1991-1992 and 1992-1993
Most Outstanding Graduate Student in Secondary Education, 1991
Phi Kappa Phi Academic Honor Society
Kappa Delta Pi Education Honor Society
Chi Delta Phi Writing Honor Society
Gamma Mu Music Honor Society

Presentations/Publications

"Neighbors"	Octoberfest (1987)
"Learning Styles/Teaching Styles and the Implications for TESOL"	Multicultural Symposium Finlay University
"A Call for the Eclectic Foreign Language Classroom"	Arkansas Association Teachers of Foreign Languages
"Learning French in Retrospect"	Southeastern TESO

Goal Statement:

I want my classroom to be a community of learners who continue to discover new things about themselves and each other in our reading, writing, and talking.

Dana McDavid Keck

1200 D West Lakeshore
Birmingham, AL 35209
(205) 941-1810

Shades Valley High School
104 Hermosa Drive
Birmingham, AL 35216
(205) 871-4628

11th Grade English Teacher
Creative Writing Elective

Teaching Experience:

Shades Valley High School Birmingham, AL	2 years
Simmons Middle School Hoover, AL	2 years

Academic Background:

University of Alabama at Birmingham	M.A. in progress
Samford University	B.A. 1990

Professional Organizations and Activities:

Alabama Education Association
National Council Teachers of English
Alabama Scholastic Press Association
Samford University Writing Project

Honors and Awards:

Phi Kappa Phi	Samford University
P.P. Burns Award for Excellence in English	Samford University
Sigma Tau Delta	Samford University
Beeson Fellow (Samford Summer Institute for Teaching Excellence)	1994

Goal Statement:

My goal is for my students as well as myself to become involved in a lifetime of learning. Through the reading and writing processes, learners in my classroom will discover what they have to say and then find ways of saying it.

Veronica Vernell Parrish

400 54th Street
Fairfield, AL 35064
(205)785-2697

Robinson Elementary School
301 61st Street
Fairfield, AL 35064
(205)783-6827

3rd Grade Teacher

Teaching Experience:

Robinson Elementary School
Fairfield, AL

6 1/2 years

Academic Background:

Samford University
Alabama A&M University
Miles College

Currently pursuing M.Ed.
Graduate courses (1989)
B.S. 1987

Professional Organizations and Activities:

National Education Association
Alabama Education Association
Fairfield Education Association (Vice President)

Honors and Awards:

ACHE Technology Scholarship Reciepent	1994
Fairfield City Schools (Elementary Teacher of the Year)	1993-94
Jacksonville State University (Teacher Hall of Fame Nominee)	1993-94
Beeson Fellow (Samford University Writing Project)	1994

Goal Statement:

The one difference that I would like to make in the lives of my students is to become a more effective model writer who gives them each a chance to develop their own "written voice."

Lynda O'Neil Powell

2251 South Sherrlyn Drive
Birmingham, AL 35226
(205) 979-4708

Teaching Experience:

Simmons Middle School	2 years
Gresham Middle School	1 year
Crestline Elementary School	1 year
Brookville Elementary School	1 year
Advent Episcopal Day School	4 years
Thirty-second Avenue Elementary	2 years

Academic Background

University of Alabama in Birmingham	E.C.E. Certification	1983
University of Alabama	M.A. Elementary Ed.	1973
	B.A. Psychology	1969

Professional Organizations and Activities

Alabama Education Association
National Education Association
National Council Teachers of English
Delta Kappa Gamma

Honors and Awards

Beeson Fellow (Samford University Writing Project)	1994
Kappa Delta Pi	

Goal Statement:

I want to help students gain a sense of their own personal worth and to empower them to have a feeling of responsibility and ownership for their learning. I believe this can be accomplished through writing workshop.

Helen Davis Pruet

4012 Autumn Lane
Birmingham, AL 35243
(205)967-0238

Mountain Brook Junior High
205 Overbrook Road
Birmingham, AL 35213
(205)871-3516

8th Grade American History Teacher
9th Grade Alabama History and
Geography Teacher

Teaching Experience:

Mountain Brook Junior High School Birmingham, AL	1 year
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Academic Background:

University of Alabama Birmingham	M.Ed. 1991
Florida State University	B.S. 1982

Professional Organizations and Activities:

Professional Educators of Mountain Brook
National Council of the Social Studies
Samford University Writing Project
National Middle School Association

Honors and Awards:

Beeson Fellow (Samford University Writing Project)	1994
Sallie Mae First Year Teacher Recipient (Mountain Brook City Schools)	1994

Goal Statement:

I want my classroom to be an innovative, student-centered environment filled with historians and writers.

Jean Goff Smith

1203 Briar Hollow Trail
Huntsville, AL 35802
205-883-2835

Chapman Elementary School
2006 Reuben Drive
Huntsville, AL 35811
205-532-4777

Learning Disabled Teacher
Grades 2, 3, and 4

Teaching Experience:

Chapman Elementary, Huntsville, AL	14 years
California Reading Clinic, CA	5 years
Jefferson County Schools, AL	1 year
Los Angeles City Schools, CA	1 year

Academic Background:

University of California at Los Angeles	B.A. 1957
University of Alabama in Huntsville	M.A. 1979

Professional Organizations and Activities:

Samford University Writing Project
Alabama Reading Association

Goa! Statement:

I want my classroom to be a place where children are successful.

Rita Sparks

3424 Altamont Road
Birmingham, AL 35205
(205) 323-4804

Huffman High School
950 Springville Road
Birmingham, AL 35221
(205) 856-4300

12th Grade English Teacher
Advanced, Honors, Regular

Teaching Experience:

Huffman High School	1 year
Wenonah High School	6 years
Banks/South East Lake Middle School	1 year
Green Acres Elementary School	8 years

Academic Background:

University of Montevallo	M.A. 1991
University of Alabama	B.S. 1978

Professional Organizations and Activities:

Alabama Education Association

Honors and Awards:

Beeson Fellow (Samford University Writing Project)	1994
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Presentations/Publications:

"To You, Boy Painter Listening at the Door"	<u>Alabama English</u>
"A Contrast of Achebe's Okonkwo and Obierkia"	<u>The Individual and the World: The Quest for Identity and Values in World Literature</u>
"Starring Them and Us"	<u>The Tower</u>

Goal Statement:

I want my students to want to be in the classroom. I want them to be awake to what I have to say and to the world around them.

Madeline V. Thompson

1833 Old Creek Trail
Vestavia Hills, AL 35216
(205) 979-9591

Gate City Elementary
6910 Georgia Rd.
Birmingham, Al 35212
First Grade

Teaching Experience:

Gate City Elementary School Birmingham, AL	4 years
The Redmont School Birmingham, AL	1 year
Whispering Pines Montessori School Birmingham, AL	3 years
Lamplighter Montessori School Memphis, TN	3 years

Academic Background:

University of Alabama at Birmingham	M.Ed. 1992
Birmingham-Southern College	B.S. 1990

Professional Organizations and Activities:

Educators Forum	
Alabama Reading Council	
Birmingham Area Reading Council	
Whole Language Committee Steering Committee	1991-1994

Honors and Awards:

Beeson Fellow (Samford Summer Institute for Teaching Excellence)	1994
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Presentations/Publications:

"First Grade Children and Fairy Tales"	Mid-South Whole Language Conference
"Collaboration in School"	Gulf Coast Conference on the Teaching of Writing
"Read and Retell With Fairy Tales"	Alabama Reading Association
"High Tech First Grade Writing"	International Reading Association

Goal Statement:

I can only expect that the children in my class will become writers if I perceive myself to be a writer. Its just as Frank Smith points out, "...children learn what is demonstrated."

Carol van Zalingen

57 Hanover Circle #313
Birmingham, AL 35204
(205) 939-1613

Simmons Middle School
1575 Patton Chapel Road
Hoover, AL 35226
(205) 978-1590

8th Grade English Teacher

Teaching Experience:

Simmons Middle School Hoover, AL	2 years
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Academic Background:

University of Montevallo	M.Ed. 1992
Rice University	B.A. 1990

Professional Organizations and Activities:

Association for Curriculum and Development
Simmons Portfolio Study Group

Honors and Awards:

National Merit Scholarship	Rice University
Outstanding Innovative 5th Year Student	University of Montevallo
Beeson Fellow (Samford University Writing Project)	

Goal Statement:

I want my students to know how to read and think critically. I want them to enjoy writing, whatever the purpose, and I want them to write well. But most of all, I want them to be better people for having spent nine months of their lives with me.

DEMONSTRATION SUMMARIES

DISCOVERING TOPICS THROUGH MUSIC

Tricia Collins

RATIONALE:

In my classroom, I often hear students claim, "I don't have anything to write about." As teachers, we know that this is not the case. Students have plenty to say, and according to Dick Graves, it is our role as teachers of writing to help students find their topics and reassure students that what they have to say is important enough to put on paper. In this lesson, I use something most students can identify with, music, to help students discover topics for writing. If there is any question whether students can relate to music, one has only to look at MTV (Music Television), CMT (Country Music Television), and other music programs that have become so popular in the past. During the lesson, students are encouraged to respond to the music and lyrics in several ways, and to discover in their own music topics for writing.

PROCEDURE:

1. Begin by playing a song for students and have students listen without any prior explanation. After they have listened to the entire song, explain that, like poetry, lyrics to songs are meant to be heard, not just read silently.
2. Pass out the lyrics to the song (or use an overhead projector), and let students follow along as the song is played again.
3. Have students discuss what they believe the songwriter is trying to convey in the lyrics of the song.
4. Have students think about how the particular topic of the song you have chosen relates to their lives (their special place, best friend, good times, etc.) and give them a few minutes to respond in writing. While they are writing, you may want to play the song over again.
5. After students have had sufficient time to jot down their ideas, allow them to share some of their own topics that have come from the song. Here the students may benefit from hearing their peers and discover even more of their own topics.

EXTENSIONS

1. Depending upon the level of the student, you may have students interpret lyrics individually without the benefit of class discussion.
2. Allow students to bring in the lyrics of their own favorite song and write about how those lyrics relate to their own lives. You may also allow them to play their songs for their classmates for more topic ideas. (You may want to caution students to be sure lyrics are appropriate for classroom discussion).
3. Play music as background noise while students respond to art, writing prompts, or free write in their journals. Afterwards have students investigate whether different styles of music affect their styles of writing.

4. Sing songs with words written on a chart to help students learn to read.
5. Let students read Peter and the Wolf and then play the accompanying music. Also invite the band teacher to come in and present some of the instruments used in the music.
6. Use music to signal transitions in your classroom activities, instead of verbal directions.
7. Have students analyze musical styles and lyrics from different periods of time to accompany a history unit.
8. Have students analyze musical styles and lyrics from different cultures that reflect the beliefs of that culture.
9. In literature, have students choose a theme song for the protagonist of a story.
10. Have students choose music to accompany a presentation that will reflect the mood of that presentation.
11. Use recordings of poets reading their poetry accompanied by background music (Langston Hughes).
12. Accompany work by black authors such as Frederick Douglas with spirituals.

SOURCES:

- Graves, Richard. Presentation at Samford University Writing Project. July 8, 1994.
- Kirby, Dan and Tom Liner. Inside Out. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton-Cook, 1981.

EXPLORING NATURE: A SPRINGBOARD TO WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

By Claire L. Datnow

RATIONALE:

Traditional school curricula, divided into discrete subjects areas and into separate skills, tend to restrict the teaching of writing across the curriculum. Yet, teachers have seen that learning flourishes in rich environments that regularly challenge students to manipulate ideas through writing. Research supports their observation, finding "a close correlation between verbalizing in speech and writing, and the ability to assimilate perceptions." (Thaiss, Christopher. "Language Across the Curriculum." In Rhetoric and Composition, 1990.)

The purpose of this demonstration is to provide ways of breaking down the artificial barriers between subject areas through writing. I have found that exploring nature provides a springboard for students' writing. Therefore, this unit integrates science (botany and ecology) and literature through the process of writing. Techniques that encourage careful scientific observation and those that encourage "imagination and intuition" are used to promote writing. (Thaiss, Christopher. "Language Across the Curriculum." In Rhetoric and Composition, 1990.) Students are encouraged to use their powers of observation about nature to collect information for writing stories. Donald Murray in Write to Learn says that it is important for writers to move from what is within them to what they see, feel, hear, smell and taste of the world around them.

By encouraging students to use their powers of observation *together* with their feelings and imagination we break down artificial barriers to understanding and appreciation of science, literature and art. Indeed, the arts and sciences derive from the same human faculty: the ability to use our imagination to represent images of the past and the future. Through our imagination we can move images inside our head, project them on a lighted screen, a television set, or set them down on paper. (Jacob Brownowski, The Ascent of Man, 1970.)

PROCEDURE:

The steps listed below closely follow those suggested by Donald Murray in Writing to Learn: Collecting, Focusing, Ordering, Drafting and Clarifying.

1. Read students stories about wild flowers.
2. Discuss the "types" of information used in the story--scientific traditional (folklore) and imaginative (legends and myths).
4. Have students explore the botanical gardens and chose a particular wild flower.
5. Ask students to observe, describe and sketch the plant accurately using all their senses.
6. Have students research their plant using a variety of sources.

7. Brainstorm ideas for a story using all information gathered.
8. Begin writing a story about their special plant.
9. Share stories.

EXTENSIONS:

Science teachers can use this unit to help students develop their powers of observation thereby increasing their understanding and enjoyment of science. Literature and writing teachers can also use nature as an inspiration for storytelling and story writing. Social studies teachers can have students read biographies and diaries of early explorers. Mapping the natural habitats of wild flowers will enhance geography lessons. Painting and drawing wild flowers in art classes will encourage students' appreciation of nature. There are many other ways you can use nature to integrate science and writing, students could:

- * keep a nature journal. The journal would record their personal observations and responses to nature.
- * use the journal to respond to articles concerning environmental issues.
- * write editorials concerning environmental issues.
- * publish their creative writing in school or other appropriate publication.

SOURCES:

Busch, Phyllis. Wildflowers and the Stories Behind Their Names. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977.

Coats, Peter. Flowers in History. New York: Viking Press, 1970.

Dwyer, James (editor). Magic and Medicine of Plants. Readers Digest, 1986.

Hollingsworth, Buckner. Flower Chronicles. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1958.

Kelly, M.A. A Child's Book of Wild Flowers. New York: Four Winds Press, 1992.

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Lippincot Company, 1939.

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1976.

WRITING A CHILDREN'S BOOK

Claire Gross

RATIONALE:

"Writing does not begin with deskwork but lifework" (Calkins, The Art of Teaching Writing, 1994).

Children are delightful authors because they are busy about the business of lifework. When given the opportunity, they are aware of so much beauty in everyday things which we, as adults, often overlook. A roly-poly bug, an inchworm, dew on a spider's web, the sound of the ocean in a seashell or the soft mewing of new born kittens become topics for conversing, writing, and illustrating. Many fascinating books are then written and published. Sharing their books is an exciting celebration. We, as adults, can also write stories children will love. I think we are most successful when we reach into our memory bank and pull out places, people, animals, and mementoes which have enriched our lives.

OBJECTIVES:

1. to be personally involved in writing children's books.
2. to better understand the components of a good children's book
3. to share some children's books by local children as well as famous authors
4. to enable us as teachers to draw rich stories from our varied backgrounds
5. to encourage teachers to provide a risk-free environment where children will write stories from their own experiences.

PROCEDURES:

1. Share Shel Silverstein's poem "Invitation."
2. Read "After the Daffodils Bloom."
3. Discuss awareness. Give example of mountain hike with young children.
4. List components of a good children's book on board:
 - Beginning - introduce main characters and setting
 - Ending - reader feels satisfied
 - Whole book - exciting, interesting plot, predictable
 - Characters - should be described well and have some sort of conflict
 - Illustrations - should add meaning to the story
5. Discuss types of books:
Predictable, Black Culture, Fun Feelings, Instructional, Fairy Tales, Oral Tradition, Poetry, and Illustrators.
6. Explain the significance of dolls, stuffed animals, and mementoes.

7. Predictable - read Hippity Hop, Frog on Top; read A New Home for Charley and Bertha
8. Read a book on Black Culture.
When I Am Old With You, Grandfather
Reader - Veronica Parrish
9. Read a book which began as an oral story.
Flossie and the Fox, Patricia C. McKissack
10. Read a children's poetry book.
Quiet, Please
Reader - Mary Evelyn Holloway
11. Read Deborah's and Willie's stories from my class.
12. Explain the writing process briefly in my class. Then read selected stories form Pegasus and Halloween Stories.
13. Teachers write a children's story, drawing from their memory banks.
14. Share stories in small groups.
15. Have one story selected from each group to read to the whole group.
16. Read Nanies Are for Children - Claire Gross.

EXTENSIONS:

1. Encourage older students to write books for a specific group of children - daycare center, Headstart, or kindergarten.
2. As teachers, draw from your memory bank to write stories or poetry for children.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TIMELINES AS SOURCES FOR WRITING: INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING

Lee Harrell

RATIONALE:

Interdisciplinary learning provides a great support for the students; however, it presents new challenges for the teacher. Trying to tie English to social studies is fairly easy, but trying to tie it to math and science calls for creativity.

I created this unit to be used at the beginning of the year to fit in with social studies and math. I wanted to lead into a unit on nonfiction, but I wanted to get to know my students, too. I was having some difficulty figuring out how I would begin. Julie Clayton, our math teacher, was going to begin by teaching students how to graph. Susan Downs, our social studies teacher, was starting the year by teaching students how to read maps using longitude and latitude. I am not sure whose idea it was to do timelines, probably a collaboration, but they worked very well.

Linda Rief says about graphs such as these, "These charts get the students thinking about themselves and what they know. It starts them out writing from their own point of view. I want that" (*Seeking Diversity*, 1992). I want that, too. Students need to know that they are valued as people. Self-esteem plays such a large part in their learning. I did a timeline for myself as well because I figured the better they knew me, the more they would trust me with their very personal thoughts and writings. By sharing our timelines, we immediately knew something about one another. Linda Rief states, "As teachers of adolescents, we can't avoid our kids' self-esteem. From these charts I have an instant clue as to how each kid feels about himself or herself. I know what their lives have been like. I can talk to them as people" (*Seeking Diversity*, 1992).

As the year continued, I realized what a gold mine I had. We started by doing narratives about one event on the time line, and that is all I honestly anticipated, but the students kept going back to their graphs for ideas. These graphs became sources for numerous topics throughout the year.

PROCEDURE:

1. Ask students to list eleven of the best things that ever happened to them.
2. Ask students to list eleven of the worst things that ever happened to them.
3. Hand out graph paper and have students put all 22 events into chronological order to create a graph of their lives.
4. Students present their graphs to the class and pick one event to talk about in limited detail.
5. Ask students to write about either the event they told the class about or another event from their graph. Answer such questions as these:
 - What happened?
 - Why did it happen?
 - Who else was involved?
 - How did it affect you?
6. After students have finished writing they may share with partners or, if time permits, with a larger group.

EXTENSIONS:

1. Allow students to do a creative poster using their life graphs.
2. Allow students to do timelines on the lives of other people, for example, authors.
3. Allow students to do a timeline for a character in a novel or short story.
4. Allow students to do timelines for historic periods of time that might coincide with a novel. For example, my students did timelines for the slave trade when we read The Slave Dancer.

WRITING THROUGH YOUR FEARS

Mary Evelyn Hollaway

RATIONALE:

Part of being human is the experiencing of fears, disappointments, and other assorted adversities. One of the most valuable gifts teachers can share with their students is the concept of writing as an effective tool for dealing with those life challenges. As Rico states, "Healing and creativity are two sides of the same coin. Underlying both is the idea of wholeness" (1991, p. 145).

Because students will be working in areas that tend to make one feel particularly vulnerable, the teacher must establish within the classroom a writing community which students recognize as a place of safety. The preparation of this community for writers begins with respect accorded to the honest efforts of each class member, includes training in the appropriate ways in which to respond to peer work, and moves forward to the teacher's modeling of writing as a healing and/or problem-solving experience. When the teacher becomes vulnerable about his or her own adversities and models writing as a tool for healing them or working through them, he or she is helping to build that safe writing community as well as demonstrating various skills of the process.

PROCEDURE:

1. The teacher leads the class in a brainstorming activity centered around naming some things we dread or fear. The group might start with some rather generic fears, such as being caught in a tornado, starting to a new school, moving to a new town, etc. and then move to work on each student's personal list.
2. The teacher chooses a fear from his or her own list and uses it to demonstrate the concept of clustering. This needs to be done on the board or the overhead so students can see the process. The teacher demonstrates how to make some connections from the words and ideas that are revealed by the initial clustering.
3. Now students are ready to try the process as a group. Each student starts with the word "Moving" and spends a few minutes clustering. Then students are paired for sharing their clusters. While still in pairs, the students are asked to begin to make some connections from their initial clusterings.
4. At this point, the teacher shares some of his or her writings about personal fears, disappointments, or difficulties. The teacher may want to include the works of published writers at this point, but the more of oneself the teacher is willing to share, the greater degree of vulnerability the students will be willing to show.
5. The teacher directs the students back to their original personal list of fears. The students are to pick one and try clustering around it. Then they are asked to continue the modeled process, making connections within their cluster, and using those connections as a bridge for discovering feelings and for discovering imagery that effectively expresses those feelings.
6. Because of the intensely personal nature of this writing, the sharing of student writing should never be presented as an expectation. Students should initiate any sharing they want to do.

EXTENSIONS:

1. Give students several opportunities to apply the techniques of brainstorming and clustering as steps in problem-solving as well as steps in prewriting. (These techniques become more readily recognized as effective tools when they are old friends through practice.)
2. Ask students to find examples from published writers who use their writing as a way of working through their fears or problems.

RESOURCES:

Rico, Gabriele. Pain and Possibility. Los Angeles: Jeremy P Tarcher, Inc., 1991.

Rico, Gabriele, Writing the Natural Way. Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc. 1983.

DISCOVERING LITERATURE THROUGH WRITING

Florence M. Jackson

RATIONALE:

In the context of this presentation, writing is not an end, but a tool used to sharpen the student's reading skills. It is assumed that when a student writes about literature, he focuses his attention and discovers things in the story or poem he might have missed. In subsequent journeys into literature, he will be a more alert reader. It is further assumed that the student himself is capable of responding to literature without the help of experts, including the teacher, and that there is not a perfect reading of any text. Since a piece of literature is an artistic whole, students should read an entire piece before class discussion ensues.

PROCEDURE:

1. Students promise to read the selection at least once and to follow the reading schedule set by the class.
2. Students promise not to read Cliffs Notes or literary criticism and not to talk with literary experts.
3. When the reading is introduced, the teacher makes as few comments as possible so that her ideas do not come between the reader and the text.
4. As students read, they should note things about the book that puzzle them and things they would like to discuss. They can write on a notecard or in the margins if the book is theirs.
5. Reading should be done at home, not in the classroom. While students are reading the book, most class activities will not relate to what students are reading. Journal writing (described below) is an exception.
6. Every day students should have an opportunity to respond in their journals to the piece they are reading. Do not give topics; let students choose what they want to say.
7. When everyone has finished reading, the whole class can discuss the book. However, before discussion begins, ask each student to write one thing he wants to ask and something he wants to point out to the class. That small amount of writing will give every student confidence that he has something to say, and it will keep the quickest student from dominating the discussion.
8. On the first day(s) of discussion, students should be allowed to make observations about any part of the book. The teacher must be careful to facilitate the discussion, but not make comments and not even ask questions, except for clarification.
9. After students have had ample time to talk about the book as a whole, they should focus on certain sections or aspects of the book. At this point writing assignments become longer and more pointed. They can be lists, paragraphs, group writings, but nothing major. Subjects should be tailored

to fit the literature: Show how the setting relates to the character. If you were making a film of the book, what is the very first frame the audience would see? Insofar as possible, students should share what they write. These short writings can be very enjoyable if they are used to reveal the literature and not to improve the students' writing.

10. Eventually you will feel the momentum weakening. Stop the activities before they grind to a halt.
11. At this point, assign students a longer paper, the length determined by what students can reasonably do. The paper can be any appropriate writing: an essay, a story inspired by the reading, or a scene told from the point of view of a minor character, for example. It is probably a good idea to have all the students write on the same topic because it is more companionable to have shared joy or misery. However, if a student is inspired to do a separate piece, he should be encouraged to do that. On the long paper, the focus is still on revealing the literature, but students should be expected to make this writing a finished piece.
12. Remember it is important to encourage students to use their writing as a tool to increase their sensitivity to literature. Students need to know that sometimes it is appropriate to use writing without trying to make it perfect and that they are not always obligated to try to improve their writing.

SOURCES:

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DISCOVERING OLD PLACES: THE POWER OF SENSORY DETAIL

Dana Keck

RATIONALE:

The saying that a picture is worth a thousand words certainly holds true in writing. A brief, vivid picture is an excellent way to set the scene or create a mood. Such use of description is the common denominator in all writing. As John Lannon notes, "Although itself one of the four strategies for development, description often supports these other strategies by helping visualize details. Whether telling a story, explaining something, or arguing a point, writers rely on the showing power of description to enrich their discussions" (The Writing Process, 1989). Teaching students how to use vivid description in their writing is empowering them in all of their writing experiences, not just the narrative. It is giving them a resource for creating real contact with their readers. As a writing teacher, my goal is to help students understand and make meaning out of their experiences and then to be able to *express* those experiences in writing. Donald Murray explains that people "write for power -- to persuade and influence...to entertain...to share" (A Writer Teaches Writing, 1985). No matter how our students choose to express themselves, no matter which form of discourse they choose to use, the use of vivid description will enhance their writing as well as their ability to discover what they have to write about, both of which are part of my goals as a writing teacher.

OBJECTIVES:

1. to be personally involved in one's writing
2. to find meaning in one's own experiences
3. to better understand and express oneself
4. to clearly describe a place using vivid sensory detail
5. to connect and form bonds with others through sharing life experiences

PROCEDURE:

1. Give students a copy of the first draft of "A Special Place" and read it out loud.
2. Ask students to discuss their reactions to this draft. Do they connect with it? Why or why not?
3. Hand out copies of the final draft of "A Special Place." Read aloud.
4. Ask students to make a list of detailed improvements. Discuss with the group what makes the final draft more effective. Be sure to include the writer's use of description -- both objective and subjective.

5. Next have students brainstorm about their own special place. Ask them the following questions:
 - What do you see?
 - What do you smell?
 - What do you taste?
 - What do you hear?
 - What do you physically feel?
 - How do you feel emotionally?
6. After students have brainstormed and have a list of vivid details, they may begin writing about their special place. Ask them to give a clear picture of both the place and their feelings about it. Make sure their audience comes to understand why the place is special to them.
7. Students may share their responses in small groups. If time permits, allow one person from each group to share his/her writing with the class.

EXTENSIONS:

1. Encourage students to respond in a different genre. Poetry is a wonderful way to show a person's experiences through vivid description rather than simply explain them (See attached article from English Journal).
2. The same essay "A Special Place" can be used to illustrate the recurring image. Have each student extend his piece to include a discussion of his special place today. How has it changed? How have his feelings changed? Encourage students to build their discussion around a central image (such as the rope or ladder in "A Special Place").
3. Share with students Annie Dillard's "Cruelty at Tinker Creek." Discuss why this event left such an impression on Annie, noting how her use of sensory detail adds to the impact of this event on the reader. Ask students to recall a memorable scene and write about it. Emphasize the use of objective and subjective details to convey a dominant impression.

SOURCES:

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READ TO WRITE:
THE ORAL AND WRITTEN STORY CONNECTION
Veronica V. Parrish

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly
Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow

-Langston Hughes

Readers are "visionists." "Visionists" are people who are able to see "into" the words of the writer, dream and create visions of their own to share with other readers.

-Veronica Parrish

BACKGROUND:

A key element of any literacy program is the necessity of reading to children every single day. Reading to children is one of the most researched and proven practices for developing literacy. Thorndike's study, Reading in Fifteen Different Countries(1973), showed that children who came from homes that respected reading and who had been read aloud to since an early age were the best readers. Dolores Durkins's two studies reported in Children Who Read Early (1966) found that early readers had the opportunity to do lots of writing. Writing is a key activity in literacy learning. Teachers and parents should encourage children to do more independent reading and real writing and not rely on workbooks and skill sheets. Shared and independent writing experiences help students with their reading experiences.

RATIONALE:

I believe reading aloud provides a time for children to learn to associate reading with pleasure, with love. They also learn the personal strategies they need to use to continue to develop as readers and writers, how to solve their problems, and what a joy books can provide. The experience of writing a story-related piece of writing allows for students to "hold fast to their dreams" while learning and growing with the reading- writing process. Lucy Calkins in The Art of Teaching Writing(1994) advises us that children learn to write when they see us writing for real purposes. By watching us, children learn that writing is not only do-able but worth doing. They need to see us copying favorite lines from a book, pausing to record a fact, or venting our feelings onto a page. They need to know that we write letters, poems, notebook entries, lists, speeches, lesson plans, shopping lists, post-it-notes, postcards, contracts, petitions, recipes. And children need to be invited and expected to join us in all of this purposeful writing.

The purpose of this demonstration is to provide opportunities for students to become interactive readers and writers. A classroom that revolves around the use of reading and writing offers invitations (DeFord 1981: Harste, Short & Burke 1988) for the children to become apprentices with their peers and their teachers. Children who may not have had a wealth of experiences benefit the most from these invitations.

PROCEDURE:

1. Have the students recall at least five of their favorite children's stories, books or fairy tales.
* Ask general questions about the selections. What did you like best about the story? How did you feel while listening to the story? Did the story remind you of any events in your own life? If you could, how would you change the ending of the story?
2. Introduce a children's story. Give background information (author, other books, setting).
3. Read selected book aloud to students.
4. Have each student brainstorm to describe the following:
 - a. feelings about the story
 - b. sounds heard during the reading of the story
 - c. memories of a previous experience they can relate to one of the characters, illustrations or phrases found within the story
5. Write a story or poem about what you discovered from hearing the story aloud.
6. Discuss and share discoveries of listeners.
7. Place students in groups of three or four. Give each group a selected book to share and read aloud within their groups. Have each group apply the above exercises to their reading selection.
8. If possible, have one person from each group read aloud a portion or all of the book.

EXTENSIONS:

The oral and written story connection goes beyond reading aloud and story-related writings. Every opportunity should be given to let students explore and envision beyond the story. Extension activities may include the following activities:

1. Taste the treats of home cooking with stories such as *Green Eggs and Ham*, *Beef Stew*, *Stone Soup*, *George Washington's Breakfast*, and many others.
2. Create illustrations of possible endings to an unfamiliar children's story. Share "predictions" aloud to see how close "you" the illustrator are to the actual ending of the book or story.
3. Visit concrete places that will allow a greater field of experience for the reader and writer. Examples would include an aquarium (*The Rainbow Fish*), the Civil Rights Museum (*Rosa Parks*, *Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*),

the local zoo (*Frog and Toad are Friends*), a magic shop (*Ali Baba Bernstein* and *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*), and others.

4. Construct maps and time lines to show time frames and locations within a story (*Little House in the Big Woods*, *The Stories Julian Tells*, *Jumangi*, *Our Trip to Washington*).
5. Listen to and appreciate music that may have a theme relevant to a selected story ("Take Me Out to the Ball Game"- *The Kid Who Only Hit Homers*, "You Are So Beautiful"- *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughter*, "That's What Friends Are For"- *That's What Friends Are For*, *Maxie*, *Charlotte's Web*, and *Christina Katerina and the Box*).
6. Role play and create original dialogue for the main character(s) in a story. (*Brown Bear, Brown Bear . . . What Do You See*, *Oh The Places You'll Go*).
7. Become an even more creative teacher and take suggestions for extension activities from your students.

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**RESEARCH WITHOUT COPYING:
BREAKING THE TIE WITH REFERENCE BOOKS**
Lynda O'Neil Powell

RATIONALE:

In his article, "Language Across the Curriculum" Christopher Thaiss states that language, thinking and learning are inseparable. He says, "If we do not apply the full range of our language resources to our learning of any subject, then we stifle thought, conscious and unconscious, and so deprive ourselves of more than the most superficial understanding" (Rhetoric and Composition).

Writing is the vehicle by which students communicate their understanding of material in a content area. Allowing time for reflection and opportunities to work with peers helps all students improve their abilities to understand the material, develop critical thinking skills and effectively communicate in writing. In order to communicate, the writer and the reader must share meaning. In the case of teachers and students, a grade or comment is often the feedback or response to the message. It tells the writer that he or she has created a certain amount of shared meaning ("Writing Requires Reflection").

Many students turn in research papers and reports that are spit-backs of dry textbook or reference materials. I believe that students can be encouraged to think critically about what they read and hear by seeking pertinent facts and by using information in a variety of ways. Since written reports usually result in the copying of information we can change the required product by having students write information into another genre.

This lesson asks students to write information into a narrative poem. Writing information into a different genre such as poetry requires them to locate, read, comprehend, analyze and synthesize information.

Language arts teachers can promote the use of this type of product in their own classrooms and work to show teachers of content subjects how the activities can be applied in their classrooms.

PROCEDURE:

1. Introduce and distribute the poem "Mary Harris Jones." Read it aloud.
2. Ask students to brainstorm four to six facts about themselves, a friend or a figure in history.
3. Tell students to think about what they want to communicate about this person and develop the facts into a narrative poem.
4. Share poems.
5. Divide class into groups of three or four and distribute excerpt from social studies textbook. Ask students to scan the entire article and take notes on the first two paragraphs only, focusing their notes on the person, Tecumseh.
6. Ask group members to share the notes they took and develop one narrative poem using only their notes.
7. Share group poems with class.

8. Distribute and comment on "A Duck Tale" and show student samples.
9. Distribute other hand-outs explaining extensions.

EXTENSIONS:

1. Group poems can be springboards for developing a student-written script for a play or video.
2. Groups can develop their poems into visual displays of varying designs.
3. Other required products which could serve as springboards are data interpretation from charts, True/False books, alliterative paragraphs, acrostic poems, letters of advice (ex. Abe Lincoln from Bill Cosby), narrative poems in limerick form, Fact and Fable books, Fact or Fiction pages, the Famous Person Question and Answer Session, or the Hypothesis Minireap.

SOURCES:

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WRITING TO LEARN: CIVIL WAR DIARIES

Helen Pruet

RATIONALE:

William Faulkner writes, "History is not was, history is." I believe a history classroom should be filled with stories of the past that impact the present. This presentation focuses on students personalizing history - finding a voice in the past and connecting it with real events in the form of a diary. "Students reinvent history by writing through a real or imagined character from the past. They live, at least momentarily, the lives of the people they created" suggests Linda Christensen (English Journal, April 1991). An important part of the diary is the creative writing that takes place as students incorporate personal stories with the actual facts of the event being studied. The diary allows students to follow a certain person over an extended period of time and try to determine personal responses to the events that have shaped our country. This is a great opportunity for teachers to see, through student writing, exactly what facts have been learned about any historical time period or event.

PROCEDURES:

1. Introduce the Civil War Unit via overhead notes, the textbook, and/or handouts. I use the PBS Civil War video set to supplement my unit. Make sure to provide plenty of primary source references such as the Civil War Times Illustrated books and The Civil War: A Treasury of Art and Literature.
2. Instruct the students to choose a person, real or imagined, and to decide on his or her role during the war so that the person is involved in the fighting firsthand and can report on it as a primary source. Students are to have five diary entries, one for each year of the war. Battle-specific information and personal information about the character must be included in these entries.
3. Each diary is to have a cover. I encourage the students to make their covers by hand since most people involved in the war were farmers who would not have had a lot of extra money to spend on diaries. The cover and size of the diary should reflect the role chosen.
4. Remind students that in order to have all five entries their character must remain alive through the entire war.
5. Provide resources in the classroom for battle specifics. (Handouts are helpful.)
6. Most of the actual writing is done out of class within a two-week time frame. On the date due, the diaries can be shared in small groups or with the class as a whole.

EXTENSIONS:

1. Any war can be used to help students understand the specifics of the war from an individual's perspective.
2. In literature, a diary can follow a character through a story.
3. A diary can be made for time periods like Colonial America or westward expansion, or for historical persons like presidents or reformers.

SOURCES:

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Christensen, Linda. "Writing the Past: Poetry, Memory, and History." English Journal Apr. 1991: 15.

Hickman, Janet. "Put the Story Into History." Instructor Nov/Dec 1990: 22-25.

"Integrating Language Arts and Social Studies." Social Education Nov/Dec 1992.

Kneeshaw, Stephen. "KISSing in the History Classroom: Simple Writing Activities That Work." The Social Studies July/Aug 1992: 176-179.

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Murphy, Jim. The Boy's War. New York: Clarion Books, 1990.

Robertson, James I. Jr. Civil War! America Becomes One Nation. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992.

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Battle at Chickamauga, Georgia

September 19 - 20, 1863

Chickamauga is a Cherokee word meaning "river of death".

Earlier in 1863, the Confederacy had been defeated at Gettysburg and had surrendered Vicksburg, Mississippi. Now, the USA had total control of the Mississippi River and hoped to end the war by splitting the Deep South in two.

The Armies

CSA = Army of Tennessee under the command of Gen. Braxton Bragg
47,500 infantry 14,500 calvary

USA = Army of the Cumberland under the command of Gen. William S. Rosecrans (Old Rosy)
56,000 infantry 9,000 calvary

The Fighting

September 19th Day One:

A day of heavy but indecisive fighting due in part to the thick woods of the area. Neither general knows where his enemy is nor where his own forces are. Two CSA divisions under Gen. James Longstreet arrive during the cover of night to reinforce Bragg.

September 20th Day Two:

CSA Gen. Leonidas Polk attacks USA Gen. George H. Thomas and his two mile front. Thomas calls for reinforcements from Rosecrans using a direct telegraph wire (one of the first of these on any battlefield). One of Rosecrans' aides, confused by the thick woods, mistakenly calls for a gap in the Union line to be sealed, not seeing the division that is holding it. Rosecrans refuses Thomas and sends a division to "close up on and support" the gap, causing a real gap to occur in the right flank. CSA Longstreet has 8 brigades on the right flank ready for attack. John Bell Hood, his right arm still in a sling from Gettysburg, leads the attack at 11:30am. As they crash through the woods into the Union line, to their amazement they find no one there. They do find the end of the USA supporting column headed for the supposed gap and scatter them into a panicky retreat. Rosecrans hastily orders a retreat back to Chattanooga, Tennessee. Gen. George H. Thomas disobeys the order and by mid-afternoon engages Longstreet and his men in some of the day's heaviest fighting. With his ammunition running out Thomas orders a retreat late in the day. CSA officer D.H. Hill wrote of Thomas' stand, "that indomitable Virginia soldier, George H. Thomas, was there and was destined to save the Union army from total rout and ruin, by confronting with invincible pluck the forces of his friend and captain (Bragg) in the Mexican War."
Thomas earned the nickname "Rock of Chickamauga".

The Results

CSA Bragg refused to believe that he had won because of the high casualties. He refused to pursue the union army into Chattanooga and so they escaped to safety.

USA Grant joined the Union army in October transforming the apparent Union disaster into a successful offensive.

John Bell Hood lost his right leg in the battle.

Both sides lost 28% of their forces: CSA 18,454 casualties
 USA 16,170 casualties

INTEGRATED TEACHING IN AN INCLUSION CLASSROOM

Jean Smith

RATIONALE:

Some teachers believe the best place to start to build meaningful thematic units is in a content area. Pappas, Kiefer, and Levstik (1990, p. 331) recommend beginning with the content of social studies or science and expanding it to include reading, writing, math, and art (Invitations: Changing as Teachers and Learners K-12, 1990). Integrating the processes of several content areas as needed within a unit allows the student to learn in a way which has more meaning and relevance; both the acquisition and the application of learning is enhanced.

PROCEDURE:

1. Play recording of "Flight of the Bumblebee" (Rimsky-Korsakov).
2. Show bee equipment and tell about squeezing honey from the comb.
3. Write a Word Web at the chalkboard as students volunteer information they know about bees.
4. Pass out various books for students to use to find pictures to share which illustrate items in the Word Web.
5. Students share one picture each, pass books back.
6. Write a list of student generated questions, "What do I want to know about bees?" using overhead projector.
7. Explain Tasting Fair, to be done later.
8. Tell story of bee sting and read poem about a bee and her day.
9. Students write about an experience with bees/honey, or as an alternative, write an imaginary experience as a bee for the day.
10. Students taste honey, maple syrup, and sorghum, and vote for preferences after they finish their writing, forming a graph.
11. Students share their writing in groups of four, and then pick one from each group to share with the whole class.
12. Students and teacher discuss findings from Tasting Fair.
13. Teacher shares information about how this unit would actually be handled in a real classroom, including examples of integrated lessons in math, spelling, and English.
14. Teacher shares children's writing on overhead projector, comparing work of learning disabled student with other students.

EXTENSIONS:

1. Using the questions generated in the lesson, have students to do research reports.
2. Art: Allow students to depict various aspects of bee life, using different media.
3. Math: Using bees, have students write and work addition and subtraction problems. Graph results of honey/syrup tasting.
4. Oral Language: Help students video-tape interviews of different kinds of bees, puppet or regular play about bee life, choral reading of bee poem.

NOTE: More complete extensions are listed in the lesson packet.

SOURCES:

Graves, Richard L. ed. Rhetoric and Composition. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1990.

Routman, Regie. Invitations, Changing as Teachers and Learners K-12. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1991.

ON PREJUDICE

Rita Sparks

RATIONALE:

In his article, "The Learning Power of Writing," R.D. Walshe quotes Morris West: "Language is a hollow vessel which can be filled with wine, or water, or poison." In my experience in the classroom, I have often heard vessels filling with poison. Language is often used as poison that diminishes the humanity of the speaker as well as the person spoken about so flippantly and ignorantly. "Do you hear what you are saying?" I have asked my students many times.

Students can be taught to hear themselves. Likewise they can see what they say. Encouraging students to write their words and hear their own voices on paper can help students avoid the routine poisoning that has become a part of their everyday lives.

Students can learn about themselves and about others by writing. In writing from the point of view of another, students can gain insight into what it feels like to be another person. In her essay, "Saving the Life That Is Your Own," Alice Walker states: "What is always needed in the appreciation of art, or life, is the larger perspective. Connections made, or at least attempted, where none existed before, the straining to encompass in one's glance at the varied world the common thread, the unifying theme through immense diversity, a fearlessness of growth, of search, of looking, that enlarges the private and public world. And yet, in our particular society, it is the narrowed and narrowing view of life that often wins." Allowing students to step outside themselves in writing can help them become better writers and gain better understanding of each other and the world around them.

PROCEDURE:

1. Students write briefly about an incident of prejudice directed toward them.
2. Give students a copy of "Iceberg" joke and allow time to read and react.
3. View Bill Cosby's "On Prejudice."
4. Break into groups and give group questions for discussion.
5. Write individual point of view papers. Share papers.
6. Invite students to examine display.
7. Read poem, "We Are More Alike Than We Are Different, My Friend."

EXTENSIONS:

1. Encourage students to write poems and journal entries from another point of view.
2. Encourage students to read journals and diaries of people from other groups.
3. Encourage students to do raps and skits from other points of view.
4. Invite people from other groups to serve on a panel for in-depth discussions.

5. Visit the Birmingham Art Museum to see exhibits from different cultures.
6. Visit the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.

SOURCES:

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FINDING THE FAIRY TALE WITHIN YOU

Madeline Thompson

RATIONALE:

Storytelling and fairy tales are as old as language itself and the first form of literary communication. Cultures throughout the world have always told stories to pass on their traditions, history and beliefs to future generations. In western cultures the oral tradition has yielded to the written tradition. Stories have the power to capture the imagination, engage the emotions and open the minds of listeners. (Children Tell Stories, 1990). Great teachers through history have used stories as a way to teach. Frank Smith says that:

...the human brain is essentially a narrative device. It runs on stories. The knowledge that we store in the brain, in our "theory of the world," is largely in the form of stories. Stories are more easily remembered and recalled than sequences of unrelated "facts". The most trivial small episodes and vignettes are intrinsically more interesting than "data" (Understanding Reading, 1988).

In every person exists a treasure trove of imaginative ideas. Reading and telling stories from the past empowers you to speak and then write your own stories. Within everyone exists archetypal figures who are waiting to bring forward the drama of your inner life.

PROCEDURE:

1. Tell students a familiar fairy tale using a few puppets that are the primary characters of the story.
2. Talk to the students about Joseph Campbell's notion of the Hero's Journey.
3. Chart the journey of the main character of the fairy tale that you have chosen to tell, using Campbell's themes of departure, initiation and return.
4. Discuss the basic images or archetypes that exist in fairy tales.
5. Give each student a copy of the Hero's Journey and allow him to brainstorm about a personal journey he has encountered and what image he saw.
6. Allow students to form groups and share ideas. Let each group choose one journey to dramatize with puppets for the entire class.

EXTENSIONS:

1. Introduce numerous fairy tales and other themes such as gaining autonomy, parents not being able to assure safety, overcoming failure, good Vs evil, learning hard lessons and displacement by the new arrival. These themes are great topics for numerous oral and written stories.
2. Students may present puppet plays to other classes or to younger children.
3. Introduce fairy tales and legends from other cultures.
4. Introduce a single story such as "Cinderella" and its variants from other cultures.

SOURCES:

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- Campbell, Joseph Hero With A Thousand Faces. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.
- Favat, Andre F. Child and Tale. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1972.
- Hamilton, Martha. Children Tell Stories. Katonah, NY: Richard C. Owen Publishers, 1990.
- Mellon, Nancy. Storytelling and the Art of Imagination. Rockport, MA: Element, 1966
- Moss, Joy. Focus on Literature. Katonah, NY: Richard C. Owen Publishers, 1990.
- Shedlock, Marie L. The Art of the Story Teller. New York: Dover Publications, 1951.
- Wood, K. and Moss A. Exploring Literature in the Classroom. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 1992.

THE GENERATIVE RHETORIC OF THE SENTENCE

Carol van Zalingen

RATIONALE:

When our students write choppy or dull sentences, we usually suggest that they combine some of them. They then dutifully take their papers back to their desks and create longer sentences such as this: "The small boy on the red bicycle who lives with his happy parents on our shady street often coasts down the steep street until he comes to the city park" (Christensen 1963). In the words of Francis Christensen, "This will never do. It has no rhythm and hence no life; it is tone deaf. It is the seed that will burgeon into gobbledygook." The student has not matured as a writer or a thinker. If we want our students to write better sentences, we must actively teach them how to do it. "We need a rhetoric of the sentence that will do more than combine the ideas of primer sentences. We need one that will generate ideas" (Christensen 1963).

PROCEDURE:

1. Introduce the five types of sentences created with generative rhetoric. Be sure to stress the distinguishing characteristics of each type:
 - Adjective Series (ADJ)** - *Tired, cold, and hungry*, the soldiers crouched behind the rock wall.
 - Prepositional Phrase (PP)** - *With pride, courage, and determination*, the soldiers crouched behind the rock wall.
 - Noun Cluster (NC)** - The soldiers, *tired young men with great courage*, crouched behind the rock wall.
 - Verb Cluster (VC)** - *Looking the sniper*, the soldiers crouched behind the rock wall.
 - Absolute Cluster (ABS)** - *Their rifles pointing towards the road ahead*, the soldiers crouched behind the rock wall.
2. Provide examples from published authors and have students try to identify the different clusters:
 - He dipped his hands in the bichloride solution and shook them, *a quick shake (NC)*, *fingers pointing down (ABS)*, *like the fingers of a pianist above the keys (PP)*. - Sinclair Lewis
 - The Texan turned to the nearest gatepost and climbed to the top of it, *his alternate thighs thick and bulging in the tight-trousers (ABS)*, *the butt of the pistol catching and losing the sun in pearly gleams (ABS)*. - William Faulkner
3. Ask students to create the five types of sentences from the basic sentence (or kernel) that you give them:
 - The child made her way slowly up the mountain. (kernel)
 - The teacher struggled aimlessly through the crowded hallway. (kernel)
4. Ask students to share their sentences with the entire class. Be sure to explain why sentences qualify as either ADJ, PP, NC, VC, or ABS.

5. Then ask students to write sentences independently based on a kernel you have given them.

EXTENSIONS:

1. Encourage students to learn how to use thesauruses by offering bonus points for creative sentences.
2. If you must teach vocabulary words, encourage or require students to include them in their sentences.
3. Eventually, students should be able to create their own kernel sentences and develop the variations for it, even combining different types as modeled by published writers.

SOURCE:

Christensen, Francis. "A Generative Rhetoric of the Sentence." College Composition and Communication Oct. 1963: 155-161.

PARTICIPANTS' WRITING

A Community of Writers
by Carol van Zalingen

Six o'clock Saturday morning dawned sunny and clear. Madeline Thompson's internal alarm clock woke her as usual. She was instantly alert and ready to begin the day. Mornings were her favorite time of day because she was at her best. She showered and dressed quickly with barely a thought as to what she should wear to the orientation at Samford University. The coffee brewed while she picked up odds and ends around the house. Her boyfriend had teased her about the fact that the only person perkier than she in the morning was Katie Couric.

Madeline stepped outside and savored the smell of a new day's dawn. She admired her rock garden. That and the shady oak trees had been the real selling points of this house. When she bought the house in Vestavia four years ago, she bought it with only herself in mind. For the first time in her life, her home needed to please only her, and she had chosen accordingly.

As she relaxed on her patio, enjoying the warmth of the sunshine on her skin and the fresh morning breeze that drifted through her yard, her only worry was trying to solve the conflict between the end of the summer school class she would be teaching and the beginning of the Samford Writing Project. She knew an answer would present itself eventually, and so turned her thoughts to her yard. The big oaks were wonderful shade trees. Unfortunately, the grass beneath them suffered. Noting the puny tufts that were growing sporadically in the yard, Madeline made a mental note to pick up some grass seed after the orientation at Samford this morning.

Driving in her white Mazda with the window down and an audio tape of Pigs in Heaven playing, Madeline headed towards Samford with an open mind. She had no idea what to expect. She knew no one in the program. In fact, she didn't even know anyone who had ever been involved with the program. Although Madeline enjoyed teaching her first graders to write and felt competent about her abilities, what she was really looking forward to this summer was the opportunity to explore her own writing and creativity in an environment that was both accepting and encouraging.

She pulled into a parking space, collected her bag, and headed towards the English building for the orientation. As she crossed the parking lot, she noticed a bumper sticker on one of the cars which read, "Something wonderful is about to happen." She smiled and walked inside.

The Puppet
by Tricia Collins

The puppet waits
for instructions
someone to tell him
where to go
what to do
what to say.
His purpose
is to make others smile
keep them happy, laughing, comfortable.
Does he have
desires
feelings
choices?
Can he manipulate his own strings,
move his own mouth?
And if they don't like what he has to
say?
What will they do,
how will they feel?
Does he have the right to smile
to be happy, laughing, comfortable?
Or is he at the mercy of others,
moving at their whim
where to go,
what to do,
what to say.
Keeping everyone happy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The Chase
by Tricia Collins

Ideas race through my head,
Slipping past me as I try to capture them.
They hide in the corners,
Out of sight.
"Come out, wherever you are."
I search the dusty shelves,
But they have run away.
One step ahead of me.
I tire from the chase,
What's the use?
To stop is to lose my thoughts forever
And with my thoughts my soul.
My soul.
There's the use.
I gain new strength,
The chase resumes.

The Wreck
by Tricia Collins

Somewhere in the dark fog, I heard it. The sound of shattering and splintering shook me to the core. Next were strange voices laced with urgency, shouting undecipherable orders, and the vague realization that all the commotion was focused on me. As my eyes slowly opened, I saw unfamiliar faces drowning me with a sea of questions, "Do you know your name?" "Do you know where you are?" "Have you been drinking?" The only thing that was real was the growing sense of confusion and panic. My rising fear was subdued by years of training that told me to remain calm in an emergency, and the brace around my neck told me that this was definitely an emergency.

The light in the interior of the ambulance glared in my eyes as I squinted to make out the face of the figure hovering over me. His words were the first to penetrate the fog enough for me to understand them, "You have been in an accident. We are calling your parents, and they will meet us at the hospital." *My parents, please, no. Don't put them through this.*

"Tell them I'm okay; tell them I'll be fine!" I sputtered with as much strength as I could muster. Even in the fog I could imagine the look upon my mother's face as she slowly replaced the receiver on its cradle and woke my father. "That was the police," she would tell him. "Tricia is on the way to Brookwood Hospital. They called her Gail." Gail is my middle name. I have never told anyone my name was Gail.

The next thing I remember is the double doors of the emergency room swinging open and my parents walking through them with the calm restraint I have seen them use in various family crises. Suddenly, to me they looked old, tired. My mother's hair was pulled back tightly and she wore no makeup. My father seemed to have more gray hairs than I had remembered.

At their arrival, I began to ramble, perhaps to prove to them (and myself) that I was would be okay. "You know, this is really the first time anything like this has ever happened. I really haven't been a bad kid. I haven't caused you many problems in the past. You know?"

My mother reminded me, "Avoiding telephone poles until you're twenty-five years old doesn't win you any brownie points."

The rest of the early morning hours were a blur. I remember my father holding a cool cloth on my head to help fight the nausea, the repeated pricks of the IV needle, and the strange tug as the doctor sewed up my lip. When I finally opened my eyes, it was daylight, and there was Ben, sitting at the end of my bed looking worried and worn. *I thought he was in Auburn. What time is it? Did someone get the pool open? What the hell had happened to me?*

My parents came in and told me that I had fallen asleep at the wheel and collided with a telephone pole. The pole had escaped with minor damage, but my car and I had not been so lucky. I had broken my left wrist and my right leg. The doctor had put pins in my wrist and was deciding whether to put a rod in my leg. I also had sustained a possible concussion and was being monitored carefully by my nurses. The doctor projected that I would be in the hospital for the rest of the week. As for my car, it was totaled.

The next days were filled with friends dropping by to bring gifts and smiles while my family and I put together the pieces of what happened that night. According to the ambulance driver (who had assured my parents I would be fine), I was not wearing my seatbelt when I wrecked. This frustrated my parents because they had always taught me to wear my seatbelt, and they felt that because I had not heeded their advice, I was lying in a hospital bed. However, after discovering strange burns and bruises on my hips and chest, my doctor assured us that I had been wearing my seatbelt. Suddenly, frustration turned to realization that their advice might have saved their daughter's life.

The frustration was quick to return when my father arrived at the hospital one afternoon with police report in hand. "Why would you say something like that to a policeman, Tricia?" he asked with strained patience.

"What?" I replied. He tossed the report to my bed. I picked it up and read, "Driver stated she may have fallen asleep and that she had had too much to drink." I had stated that? I don't remember stating anything.

My parents had not asked, but now they needed to know. I had been at a party for several hours and probably had consumed three large glasses of beer from the keg before we left for the bar. At the bar, however, I had not had anything to drink at all because I was tired and wanted to leave. After a couple of hours, a friend drove me back to my car so I could go home.

"There were three other people in that car that would have stopped me from getting in my own car if I had been drunk," I concluded. When I finished my story, my parents sighed. All we could do now was wait to see what trouble would follow.

That trouble did not come until I had been home for several days. My father received a letter in the mail from his insurance company that read, "We are dropping your daughter from our insurance for the following traffic violations:" What followed was a list of speeding tickets that almost reached the floor. Tickets I had conveniently forgotten to mention to my parents. Why should I? I was an independent woman now. All I can say is that I was glad I already had casts covering most of my body.

That summer I lost my job, my apartment, and my independence. I had to use a modified walker to move from one room to another, and rarely had the opportunity to leave the house. I sat home day after day watching television, reading, or just thinking. Yet despite all of this, it was the best summer of my life. In those months I was forced to slow down, catch up with myself, and examine the world around me.

I learned how unconditional my parents' love for me really was, and to what lengths they were willing to go to help me in my time of need. I realized how much I could depend on Ben to be there to support me when things got tough. My friends proved their love and devotion through all the visits, flowers and blessings they brought me. But most of all I discovered that, although I thought I had been making progress in my life, I had in fact been spinning in circles, going nowhere. I had forgotten what was really important in life: family, friends, love, and keeping my eye on my goals and taking full responsibility for reaching them. I could no longer blame unfortunate circumstances for my troubles. It was time to take my life back. Physically, professionally, and spiritually.

The Family Story Teller
by Claire Datnow

Reading provided my mother with her greatest escape from the work-a-day world. She was the family story teller. The well spring for her stories came from the books she read and from stories about her family. I have a vivid memory of my mother taking out my first library card. In those days we did not own a car and so we waited for the traveling library to come to our neighborhood. Every Wednesday the library, housed in a dark green trailer, pulled up on a dusty clearing opposite the bus stop near our home. I loved going with my mother to that little library on wheels and, like my mother, books became my escape. Early morning, before my mother set out for work was the best time for story telling . . .

It is a cold winter morning. Outside the house, a thick icing of frost covers the lawn. Inside, I snuggle in bed next to my mother as she lies propped up on feather pillows engrossed in reading. One of the household cats, an alley cat with spiky black fur, sleeps at our feet. As she reads I watch the cold, bright winter sunlight pierce through the ventilation brick high on the bedroom wall. The sun projects a bright square of light through the first hole in the brick on to the opposite white wall. The minutes tick by while the beams of the rising sun, moving from east to west, penetrate each hole in the brick throwing another prism of light on the wall. When there are six sun squares, I know the maid will bring in hot tea and buttered toast. After tea my mother will rise and get ready for work. I try to read the words on the page, wanting to know the story they tell. I enjoy this quiet time with my mother and feel regret that she must leave me to go to work. Before she goes I beg her to tell me just one more story. Sometimes she tells family stories, especially about my grandmother . . .

One day a young woman we did not know came to the door of our house. She explained that she was the census taker and needed to have us answer a few questions. My mother did not fully understand what a census was and asked for an explanation.

From the census taker she got the idea that she was to be questioned about her family's status. My grandmother, a proud woman, sensed that the questions might not put her family in a favorable light. She drew all five feet of herself up tall, riveted the young woman with her steely grey eyes and said, "Young lady, I want you to know that my family came to South Africa before the Boer War." Then she reluctantly ushered her into the front parlor.

As they seated themselves, Mother's eyes widened in surprise and glued themselves on her purse. Turning to me she said in Yiddish, so that the census taker would not understand, "Gertrude, do you see what I see?" Then she turned to glare at the woman's purse--which looked exactly like the one my mother had lost. I turned hot with embarrassment at the realization that my mother was about to accuse the woman of stealing her purse. Throughout the census taking, I cajoled my mother to restrain herself. I wonder to this day what the census taker thought . . .

My mother's stories transported us into the future as well as the past. Her taste for science fiction took us to a futuristic world where exciting and terrible things happened. She loved to describe the strange inventions of these future worlds she read about. One device that caught my attention was the antigravity belt, which allowed people to fly instead of drive to places. I imagined myself soaring far over the city, safe in my antigravity belt, freed from one of my childhood anxieties, missing the bus. The story about the grass that took over the world haunted my childhood dreams for a long time . . .

A brilliant young scientist invented a formula for growing lush grass. The scientist went from house to house selling his formula. Home owners were delighted to have their lawns grow instantly lush. But the grass would not stop growing. It spread like a violent green cancer. Soon the houses were covered by an impassable growth of grass which sent roots into walls and floor boards. The neighborhood had to be evacuated. Desperately, the young scientist tried to find a formula to kill the grass. The last survivors escaped in ships. The story ends at sea, with one lone survivor watching in horror as a tentacle of grass pierces the deck of the ship

Little wonder that story gave me nightmares, our home was surrounded by tough, fast-growing Kikuyu grass, which needed mowing every week.

And now my mother's love of reading and story telling flows on to my children and to you across these pages.

Vaal River Stories
by Claire Datnow

What is the past? Could it be, the firmness of the past is just an illusion? Could the past be a kaleidoscope, a pattern of images that shift with each disturbance of a sudden breeze, a laugh, a thought? And if the shift is everywhere, how would we know?

Einstein's Dream by Alan Lightman.

My mother delighted in all watery places--ponds, streams, rivers, dams, lakes or oceans. Yet, she was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, a high and dry place. This sprawling city, sits atop a sunny, dry plateau six thousand feet above sea level like a great beached whale. It seems strange that where Johannesburg now stands was once a shallow sea. Drought resistant vegetation attests to the sparse rainfall of the region. It is a vast veld of tall, tough grass dotted with acacia trees covered in a mesh of cruel, bone-white thorns as big as a man's thumb. My mother yearned for the water and so we vacationed by the water. My fondest memories are of those times together . . .

I am on a swaying, rickety suspension bridge over the Vaal River. The bridge rocks like a gigantic hammock throwing me off balance. The sluggish, muddy water flows far below. I want to swim in the river but know I am not supposed to because of the danger of Bilharzia, a parasite from water snails that bores into the skin. I feel a shiver of fear wondering if I already have parasites in me from the times we did swim in the river. I hold tightly on to the bridge railings. I feel exhilarated and afraid swaying like a fledgling bird in a flimsy nest. As I watch the sun flow down the horizon over tangerine clouds, exhilaration swells inside me. I begin to sing. My sister and mother join in

The Vaal River was one of our favorite vacation spots. The river is the natural border between the provinces of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. We vacationed along the Vaal at a little town or "dorp" called Parys. Small, round cottages with conical thatched roofs, "rondavels," around a dusty red courtyard became our holiday home. We brought my grandmother along on these vacations . . .

My grandmother stands outside the rondavel, with her Bible or Sedar open in her hands. She sways back and forth, back and forth as she chants the prayers in a monotone. The bright sunlight streams down onto her grey hair drawn in a tight knot on the back of her head. She wears her Sabbath clothes even in the summer heat: an ankle length black dress, a gold locket on a long, heavy chain and square-heeled black shoes. Though small boned and fine-featured, she still radiates a solid presence. Her expressive grey eyes flash when angry. She seems oblivious to her surroundings. Children laugh and dart through the courtyard. They stop and stare at her but she is engrossed in prayer. My mother, dressed in a bright cotton sun dress, calls to her from the shadow of the doorway, "Ma, please come inside." But it is the sabbath and my grandmother prays as if she were in the synagogue. My mother has promised to take us on a picnic by the river, but we cannot go until grandma finishes her sabbath prayers

My grandmother was an orthodox Jew as most of her generation from Eastern Europe. My mother, born and educated in South Africa, considered herself modern, and though clinging to her Jewish heritage, frowned on public displays of religion. Coming from Lithuania, my grandmother spoke poor English, dressed in old-fashioned clothes and did not fit into the "mainstream." My mother was a dutiful and loving daughter; yet her mother embarrassed her. In later years she told stories about her mother with a mix of humor and sadness.

Many years have passed and I have never revisited the Vaal and don't long to. Yet a river of memories flows on in my mind bringing back happy recollections of my mother and grandmother.

The Family Shop
by Claire L. Datnow

All that remains of childhood. . . is a headful of brilliant frozen moments already dangerously distorted by the wisdom of maturity. Oleandar, Jacaranda by Penelope Lively

Premier Fisheries, known to our family as "the shop," remains an indelible part of my South African childhood. Located in Jeppes Town, Johannesburg, it stood at the center of a busy commercial hub. The commuter train, bus station, and the trolley car ran through the area. People of many ethnic backgrounds flowed through this hub by day, returning always to their segregated neighborhoods at night.

Our shop stood in the center of a block of elaborate Victorian shops owned by recent immigrants to South Africa. The butchery, operated by a German couple, the Kaisers, supplied our household with a variety of fresh meat. George Kakoris, a Greek immigrant, owned the tearoom. The Suzas, a Portuguese couple from Mozambique, ran the fish and chip shop. Mr. and Mrs. Lefsky, a Lithuanian Jewish couple, operated the jewelry store. Mr. Horwitch, a South African Jew, managed the drug store. A covered wrought-iron walkway allowed people to window shop out of the weather. Suspended under the roof of the walkway, signs broadcast the name of each store and its owner. A sign with a brightly painted orange fish and the lettering Cecil Klein, Proprietor, hang outside Premier Fisheries.

When one entered the shop, pungent odors filled the nostrils: the vinegar-garlic smell of pickled cucumbers, the salty smell of herrings floating in a barrel of brine, the rich smell of hoops of cheddar cheese, round and yellow as a moon, and the overpowering smell of fish. Fresh fish--sole, snook, couplejaw, anchovies, herrings, pilchards--were brought up daily from the distant coast by train. Nothing was frozen, but kept fresh on blocks of ice big enough to build an Eskimo igloo.

At the shop's entrance stood a large, three-tiered wire basket filled with eggs. The top tier held large white eggs, the middle one brown eggs and nestled in the bottom were the small eggs. Paddy, the shop's big, black Persian cat, loved those eggs. Paddy stole eggs at night. Somehow, he figured out a way to crawl into the middle basket and with a sharp claw crack a hole in an egg from the tier above. As the egg yolk dripped down, he licked it greedily with his rough, red tongue. Sometimes the egg would break open, plopping a whole yolk onto the top of his head. In the morning my mother would find Paddy coated with a sticky mass of egg--proving his guilt as the thief. Paddy loved to sun himself on a fire-engine red bench, lettered with the message: For Whites Only. This bench on the side walk outside the store, received the full rays of the bright Highveld sun. Here, stretched out contentedly, Paddy thawed himself from the bite of a winter night spent in the shop's storeroom. Every night, locked in the store room where the shop's supplies were kept, Paddy caught mice--his sole responsibility as the shop cat.

There was a rhythm to the work day at the store. In the morning came Jewish customers, afternoon brought in Afrikaans and "Colored" customers, and late afternoon saw a rush of black workers. The food sold in that store was a nice reflection of the complex ethnic mix of people that were its regular customers. The shop was my window onto a world larger than the white neighborhood I grew up in and the white all-girls, school I attended.

In the morning the regular customers phoned in their orders. My mother took on the responsibility for "making up" the orders. Cross and bothered, she checked off the list, selecting each item from the shelf or refrigerator. The Jewish customers always wanted a "good fat chicken" for making soup and rendered fat for frying food. Mrs. Lefsky regularly interrupted my mother in the midst of making up the orders. She was always immaculately groomed in a tight, shiny print dress that slid over her corsets. An elaborate hairdo and makeup completed her costume. She personally inspected the chickens. By pinching the skin of several chickens to see which one was the fattest, she was able to

select just the right one. She usually stayed to chat, and being the local match-maker, always had her antennae out for gossip.

When my mother finally completed the orders, she called Shorty, the Zulu "boy." Shorty, who wore traditional Zulu earrings--brightly painted wooden discs as large as an orange which plugged into the ear lobes--wheeled out his bicycle. He carefully loaded the orders into a large basket in front of the bicycle. Then he pedaled hard down the road chanting a Zulu song.

During the late afternoon, "rush hour," black workers from the surrounding factories crowded into the store to buy groceries on their way home. These workers, who could not live in the white residential areas, rode commuter trains and buses out to the black townships ringing the city. As a child, the workers flooding into the city early in the morning and leaving promptly each evening on crowded trains and buses were like the ocean tides ebbing and flowing over the city each day. Where they came from or where they went, I never knew.

The black workers purchased cans of sweetened condensed milk, and bags of sugar for stirring into strong, black Ceylon tea, apricot preserves to spread on white bread, packets of candles with boxes of matches to light their houses, and sometimes fresh fish. Shorty was at his best during rush hour, selecting and filleting the fish fast and furiously for the jostling customers, who were anxious not to miss the train home. After Shorty pulled the fish from the ice box and held it up for customer inspection, he would fillet it to specifications. Slapping the fish onto the chopping block--a huge tree stump--Shorty brushed off the scales with a wire brush. He then expertly gutted, deboned, and skinned the fish with a sharp cleaver. Shorty's small hands with long, dirty nails deftly and rapidly filleted fish after fish, till he stood in a pile of guts, bones and scales. These rushed proceedings slowed when the customers had to pay. They carefully pulled out the money hidden somewhere in their clothes. Crime was a constant problem in the townships and the "tsotsie" gangs were much feared.

Indian customers usually shopped on Fridays. They bought small, pink prawns for a special curry dish. Over a century ago, they had come to South Africa to work in the sugar cane fields near the coast. They remained a separate community and kept to their old customs. Indian women, graceful as flowers, floated into the shop in bright orange, pink and gold saris. An arranged wedding was once held in the shabby concrete courtyard at the back of the store. A little boy and girl, no more than four years old, slept peacefully through their betrothal ceremony.

Though Indians lived segregated from other ethnic groups, their spicy curries found their way into South African cuisine. My mother learned how to make curried dishes and they were among my favorites. These curries were a sweet variety served with side dishes of rice, chutney (a relish of mangoes), bananas, raisins and coconut.

The Colored customers, descendants of the Dutch and Malay people, bought fresh fish for pickling. From these customers my mother learned how to prepare fish pickled in a fragrant marinade of peppercorns and bay leaves. This dish was a legacy of the Malays who were brought to South Africa from the Dutch East Indies as slaves. Indeed, the food sold in that store mirrored the ethnic mosaic of people that were its customers.

The hours I spent in the shop as a child opened a window onto people of different cultures, races, and ethnic backgrounds. In that segregated society, my family never socialized with these people; yet we got to know them, at least in the limited commercial sphere of Premier Fisheries.

I Am a Cahaba Lily

I am a Cahaba Lily with delicate petals
Born, rooted in the South
Strong stalk, roots strongly anchored
Midst angry currents

I am a Cahaba Lily with delicate petals
Wondrous flower spreading its fragrance
Reaching, drinking deeply in cool waters
Of life, searching, finding, becoming
I am a Cahaba Lily with delicate petals

Claire Gross
August 3, 1994

First Date A.D.
by Claire Gross

1982 was not a banner year. I sarcastically called it A.D. (in the year of our divorce.) After 24 years as a minister's wife, I suddenly found myself with no husband and no ministry. However, I still had our kids, and the dog, the cat, the bird, and a multitude of daily living problems.

I felt ugly and worthless. I knew I would never become involved with another man. All I had left were my kids, so I wrapped my life tightly around them. I existed for them and vice versa, but they tired of the situation before I did.

One morning I overheard them talking:

"Who stays with her Saturday night?" my son asked.

"I did it last week," my middle daughter said.

"I have a date!" my youngest daughter cried.

I did not hear any further arguing, but I believe to this day that they drew straws and the loser got me!

O.K., so I needed to get a life! I knew that. I simply did not know how to do it. Ten months after the divorce, I was still unable to think of myself as single. I continued to wear my wedding ring, not only on my finger, but around my heart.

Several weeks after the 'Who Gets Her Tonight?' incident, I came home from work to discover that I had received a phone call. My daughter said, "Mom, do you know a Bill Simmons?"

"Sure," I replied. "Haven't heard from him since high school. He was my childhood sweetheart - seventh grade. What in the world does he want?"

"He wants to talk to you, Mom. He said he will call back."

"Oh, right," I said skeptically. "Don't hold your breath until that happens."

But he did call, that very night. He had heard from a mutual friend that I was divorced. We reminisced about school days at Norwood. He asked me out. I hesitated, but finally agreed.

The day of the date arrived. When I came home from school, a dozen red roses were in the living room. My kids thought he had class. I thought he was crazy. This man had not seen me in thirty years.

My girls attempted to help me get ready. I rejected their flamboyant suggestions. I decided to wear a lovely black dress - long sleeves, high neck, mid-calf length. (After all, I was still in mourning.)

My stomach hurt. I did not want to do this. I received final instructions.

"Smile," my children said. "Ask him about himself; men love that. Do not talk about Daddy, and remember the house rule. Do not sit in the car when the date is over. Bring your date in the house!" (This was the first rule of dating for our teenagers. Anyone who disregarded it was embarrassed by having the porch light flashed on and off. This was the signal to come in NOW!)

He arrived. I looked him over quickly. He still had sparkling blue eyes and blond hair, but not in abundance. All in all, he was well-preserved. I was not ashamed to be seen with him.

We went out to dinner. Both of us were nervous. In the dimly lit restaurant we squinted at the menu. Simultaneously, we reached for our glasses. We laughed. We began to talk, mostly of the past. I broke one of the rules and talked of my former husband - at great length!

He was obviously at a loss as to what to do with me.

"What can you do?" he queried.

"What do you mean?" I responded.

"Do you drink?"

"No!" I emphatically replied.

"Smoke?"

"No!"

"Dance?" (I could tell he was becoming frustrated.)

"I guess I could do that, but I haven't had much practice in my Baptist Church."

We stared at each other.

"I don't know what to do with someone like you. Just what do you want from a man?"

I told him straight out. "I want someone to take me out to dinner and shake hands at the door." He laughed, but he knew it was no joke.

Finally it was nine o'clock and this date had died a natural death. We had nothing in common. This man had lived in the fast lane while I was sitting at the stop sign.

Arriving at my house, we sat in his car and thought how best to end the agony. Suddenly, not only the porch light, but the floodlights too, began to flash on and off.

"What in the devil is that?" he said.

I explained the rule of the house. He laughed and walked me to the door. "Honey, he said, "it would take either a brave or a crazy man to date you and your kids. I'll call you."

He shook my hand and left.

The Minister's Wife and Ms. Reba Mae Jones

by Claire Gross

I wonder if they still ring the bell in that old country church....The bell could be heard for miles calling the faithful. It seemed to say, "Come, come and worship." They came in their Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes, eager to greet the new young preacher and his family. They were proud of their community and didn't mind telling you.

The old town had once been alive with activity. That was the time when the coal mine had been in full swing with three daily shifts at work. On Saturday mornings the miners and their families would go to the company commissary to get groceries, to enjoy a chew of tobacco around the pot-bellied stove, and to buy their kids an R.C. cola and a moon pie. On Sunday they attended the Community Church, an all-day affair.

Then the mine closed and the commissary did, too. The people who stayed then worked in other places and did their shopping at the Piggly Wiggly in Parrish. Only the church remained open, for worship as well as social gatherings.

Now we had been told there were two kinds of people who lived in that town which was no longer a town: the decent, God-fearing working people and those no-good, heathen bootleggers. After our family moved into the parsonage next to the church, we began to visit in the homes--not just the Baptists and the Methodists but , heaven forbid, those heathens' homes.

Some of the people were certainly characters. One whom I will never forget was Ms. Reba Mae Jones. She happened to be my nearest neighbor and lived about half a mile away through the woods. As I recall, Ms. Jones was a divorced woman, about thirty years old, of medium height, with overpermed red hair and rather prominent teeth. She had two small boys who were always neat and mannerly. It was hard to believe, but Ms. Jones had come from England. How she ever came to live at the edge of nowhere remained a mystery. I wondered how she made a living. I soon found out.

"Don't you know?" one of our older ladies told me indignantly. "She bootlegs whiskey--Devil's brew. Don't waste your time on her. We can't have people like that in our church."

It has been said that fools rush in where angels fear to tread. I suppose that described my husband and me to a "T" because we ignored the warning and paid Ms. Jones a call, inviting her and the children to church. Although she did not come at first, she sent those boys with slicked-down hair and spotless, patched overalls.

One Sunday morning Ms. Jones surprised us by walking into the Sunday morning worship service, causing quite a stir. Eventually the congregation accepted her, which was

something of a miracle! Only one problem remained--Ms. Jones continued to make bootleg whiskey.

On sultry summer evenings in our church, the members of the congregation kept time to the music, waving our cardboard fans with the picture of Jesus on one side and an advertisement for the Jasper Funeral Home on the back. The open windows welcomed any breeze which happened to stir. If the wind blew in a certain direction, people sitting by the windows could almost get drunk from the fumes of Ms. Jones' still. The pungent odor mingled with that of sweet shrubs. To this day, I can still smell it.

As time passed, Reba Mae became my friend. What a strange combination--the minister's wife and the bootlegger. She confided to me that she was doing her best to make ends meet. Also she longed to go home to England, and making whiskey would turn her dream into reality. I assured her that God understood, and then I cringed at what I had said. Maybe God would understand, but I doubted seriously if the congregation would agree with me.

One morning I stood by my kitchen washing dishes while keeping an eye on my children playing in the nearby cornfield. Suddenly I saw a big, black sedan stop on the dirt road next to the church. Wiping my hands quickly, I went out on the porch. Four men dressed in suits stepped out of the car. They walked briskly down the road, heading straight for Ms. Jones' house. One of them carried a large, black, metal box. I was concerned for they did not look like Ms. Jones' regular customers who wore overalls and drove pick-up trucks.

I watched anxiously. I had no telephone and no way to warn my friend. Ten minutes went by, twenty minutes. Then I heard it--one tremendous boom which echoed from the bottom of the nearby mine shaft to the woods beyond! Smoke billowed above the scrawny pine trees.

Running into the yard, I gathered my frightened children close to me. A short while later, the men walked calmly back up the road. Finally acknowledging my presence, one tipped his hat to me and casually said, "Morning, ma'am. Have a nice day." They got in their sedan and drove away in a black cloud of coal dust.

Then I knew. They were federal men, "revenooers." They had blown up Ms. Reba Mae Jones' whiskey still, and with it, her dreams of ever going home to England.

Ms. Jones moved after that. She did not even say goodbye. I never knew why. I wonder where Reba Mae Jones is now. I wonder if she ever got home to England. And I wonder if they still ring the church bell.

Hand-Me-Down Lace
by Lee Harrell

I remember playing in my mother's wedding dress when I was a child. I would pore over the pictures of my mother in the candlelight satin and Italian lace. Putting on the "princess" dress, I would pretend that I was saying, "I do" to my Prince Charming. I always assumed the dress would be there when I did it for real. Both of my sisters had worn the dress. They had it altered to fit them, both larger than Momma and me. As my time to marry drew near, I told my momma that I was thinking about buying a dress of my own. Her dress was too yellow and it just wasn't me. Besides, I had grown up in hand-me-downs. Every time one of my sisters got a new dress, I knew in a few years it would be mine and I would be the last to wear it, never first. It was the same with Momma's dress. I wondered if my momma thought that I was rude? In a family with no place for sentiment, I doubt it. I wanted to be different for once. Two daughters had worn the dress. Wasn't that enough?

My mother was not pleased. To make Momma feel better, I took the dress to a bridal salon (where I had already picked out a new dress) to see if the dress could even be altered - after all, it was 40 years old. When I got to the store I had to wait for a room to try the dress on.

As I waited, people began admiring the dress.

"That lace is exquisite."

"You just don't see dresses like that anymore."

The more I talked about the dress, "I know, and my mother only paid \$125.00 for this dress. Can you believe it?" the younger I grew. Suddenly, I was a ten year old child inside and I was playing dressup.

That dress means something to me. It is a part of my mother and my sisters. It is my past. It somehow represents the stability of my parents marriage. It is, in simpler more literal terms, my heritage. It must be my future.

The moment I got the dress on, I knew that the dress was me, exactly me. The decision was made. Momma would be pleased. I spun for my friend and pronounced, "This is it. I'm not looking anymore. Let's go ahead and get the lady that does your alterations and pin it."

I was very pleased with myself, my dress, my choice of men. Everything would be okay. It seems silly to put that much emphasis on a dress I know, but it just made things feel right.

"I can't do anything with it."

I froze. "Why?"

"It's too old. How has it been stored?"

As much as we had moved, I had no idea how it had been stored. "In a plastic bag for the past two years." I knew that much.

"It should have been stored in cedar. Don't you have a cedar chest?"

Yes. We had a cedar chest. Many of my Sunday afternoons had been spent going through the cedar chest for my "new" clothes, but it was reserved for those hand-me-downs not wedding gowns.

"It can't be worn," she repeated. The woman gave me a long list of problems with the dress and I can't remember one of them. I have always prided myself on not being trivial and emotional about silly sentimental things, but her announcement took my breath away.

I have resigned myself to the fact that I will start a new tradition. However, a piece of that Italian lace will be attached to my dress with my mother's initials and wedding date embroidered in. This dress has become for me a symbol of the stable forces in my life and that will not be left behind to disintegrate. I like the image of me taking my past, my family, my heritage into my new life with Tony.

A Quitter's Struggle
Lee Harrell

Smoke wreathing above my head
Calm sensations, soothing thoughts
Rhythmic breathing
inhale exhale

STOP IT

Smoke wreathing in my brain
Nervous jitters, nagging voices in my head
Sleepless nights
toss turn

GET OVER IT

Smoke wreathing in my room
Guilty face, feelings of failure creeping in
Heavy heart
cough cough

LEAVE ME ALONE

The River Within
by Mary Evelyn Hollaway

Sometimes at night
I feel its steady pulse
Sifting, sifting
The silt of the morning,
Georgia-red and heavy,
Pregnant or barren,
Sifted and left behind,
Sifted and taken.

Sometimes at night
I hear its steady voice
Gurgling, gurgling
The questions of the day
Contraltoed and magnolia'd
Child-like or ancient
Gurgling and gathered in
Gurgling and loosened.

Sometimes at night
I watch its steady flow
Moving, moving
The mysteries of the day,
Un-tempered and un-tested
Supple or arthritic
Moving and misunderstood
Moving and treasured.

Olga
by Mary Evelyn Hollaway

I met Olga in those last weeks,
when the cancer had almost won.
I liked her toughness,
the rough, jaundiced hands,
the raspy voice with which she cursed her killer.

The week before Olga died,
she saw them all:
her parents, dead since the twenties,
her oldest son, gassed somewhere in the woods of France.

They came and talked
and left some token of comfort
that made those not dying nervous,
not knowing what to say to one who was.

But our words or the lack of them
didn't matter at all.
Their words were the ones
she held on to.
Their faces were the ones she saw
when she walked into the dark.

The Burial
by Mary Evelyn Hollaway

Last Thursday we buried Mr. Andrews.
Susan played and I sang
All the right notes.
Right or wrong would be okay with him.
His music was the hum
Of saw blades eating wood.
Stranger in his black suit,
I knew him in sawdust
The smell of lumber riding
On his stooped shoulders.

ALABAMA HISTORY CLASS
FOUR PORTRAITS

1. Brilliant half delinquent,
Fourteen-year-old
With heavy gold chain
And high top tennis shoes nearly laced up.
"I'll kill anybody that touches me," you say.
But you'll do anything for someone you like.
Once you gave me a postage stamp of Hugo Black
And a road sign to Echota--
Both stolen it turned out.
You live on the line, between law and outlaw,
Like your ancestors,
North Alabama guerrillas in the Civil War.
They made their own rules
Like you.
2. Your dad and mom came South
From Chicago with your older brother
And a full contingent of East European genes.
You were born the next year,
To the loneliness
Alabama grants to strangers.
You live in an emotional cool
Your face a mask, plodding alone
Without Family to hug you close.
May God send you a Chicago party
Where a tipsy cousin spills cold beer
Down your back and you reply
With a Slovak oath fit to send
Your grandfather reeling to the couch.
3. Yes, you have Native American blood all right.
Wonderful cheekbones and long straight black hair.
But, no matter how much you'd like it to be,
Your blue eyes are not pure New World.
Still, I agree, you're mostly Creek,
Ready to fight the Battle of Holy Ground any day.
Your Self inviolable, you think,
Across your river of defiance.
General Claiborne's out there, though,
Coming closer.
And it's sure you won't retreat.
I only hope you fall wounded
And not dead.

4. Your father in Ft. Payne,
Your mother in Birmingham,
And you, always on a shuttle bus
Between the two.
Short, blond-headed worrier,
Whining when I forget
To extol your maps.
Moving like cold molasses
Until my patience flows into hot anger--
I'd take you to the farm if I could,
Let you see
How much corn grows overnight,
How cows calve,
How the creek freezes over in white ice.
Let you hear
The wind speak through summer trees.
Rain gather in low places in the grass.
Then maybe you'd lose that faraway look
In your light blue eyes.

-Florence Jackson

Dogwood Fruit

Looking down on the dogwoods yesterday,
On the tops of the trees,
Leaves redder than usual,
Branches laden with a million clusters
Of red berries like a child's drawing,
I remembered being seven or eight,
Climbing our wall at the foot
Of the hill in front of our house,
Gathering dogwood fruit,
Stringing berry bracelets,
Berry necklaces if I was patient,
Breaking open the berries sometimes
Exposing the pulp inside, tinted
As if the red had seeped through,
I suppose you could say, had bled
into white.

I wonder if I knew
Breaking and bleeding
Was what it was going to be
About. I doubt it.
I knew I liked being
Scrunched up on that rock wall
My mouth drawn in to help
My fingers trying hard to get
The berries to stay on.

-Florence Jackson

Hong Kong
by Dana Keck

A yacht advertising
conspicuous consumption
creates a nautical throng as it moves
through overcrowded junks where

barefoot children frolic on deck
housewives hang laundry
elderly men watch the sunset with
dogs and cats underfoot and
songbirds in cages overhead.

On land, movement
slows to a crawl amidst
food carts and fortune tellers
bone setters and storytellers
noodle vendors and
bargain hawkers where

jammed flats and rice stalls
tea shops and temples
adorn the narrow streets
like a rich tapestry.

In the market,
tourists find unexpected
treasures: an old Chinese coin
an ancient abacus
an ivory birdcage and
jade, the stone of good luck.

Temples come alive with
incense coils
hanging from the ceiling
golden sedan chairs
carrying god statues
the pall of smoke
from burning joss sticks.

Sounds from the streets
mesmerize passersby:
the chant of the peddler
the clatter of the mah-jong tiles
the clang of the tram.

Outside the city where
fish ponds, duck farms, and
banana plantations
adorn terrain
pastoral as the China
of old water colors,

women in coolie hats
and black pajamas
tend to water buffalo
unaffected by the excitement,
glamour, and mystery
of this enchanted island.

Dad's Dance

by Dana Keck

I never cared much for crowds, and tonight was no exception. I worked my way through the maze of people, and I really wanted to find my family. I faintly recognized faces of friends from high school, and I realized I didn't know them any better now than I did then. After a cursory word of congratulations to the bride and groom, I quickly made my way through the crowd to the outside patio where I knew my parents and fiancé waited for me.

The sky was dark and the band was too loud. I had to lean so close in trying to speak to Danny that my lips brushed his ear, and he still couldn't understand me. Eventually, a slow melody began, and I coaxed my fiancé to the far corner of the dance floor. He was not much of a dancer, and this was our first attempt together. It must have been obvious, too, as we struggled to match each other's steps. I wondered how long it would take us until we finally got it right. As we continued our practice, I noticed Mom and Dad across the patio, gliding gracefully in their own corner of the dance floor, their steps in perfect unison.

Looking at Dad who was on the wake of his seventieth birthday, I still thought he was one of the youngest men I knew. His grey hair didn't move at all as he danced with Mom. I knew this was because he liked to slick it back. Mom always got onto Dad, saying this made his hair look dirty, but I assumed he wore it that way because that's the way men wore their hair in the fifties and Dad had never bothered to change. Secretly, though, I knew it had something to do with that growing bald spot in the center of his crown, and with his water-dampened comb he was able to erase this sign of aging. I smiled and thought his hair looked just fine.

His stomach stuck out a little, too (*just like Winnie-the-Pooh*, I used to teased him), but it had more to do with his age than with his weight. There wasn't an ounce of fat on either his arms or legs, a fact which Dad often explained as the result of years and years of football practice. I believed him, too. At his age he still could belt a tennis ball harder than anyone I knew; it's just that in recent years the ball had to be in his direct line of fire to receive the full force of his blow.

Dad's gray eyes seemed to sparkle from across the dance floor and I knew he was having a good time. And rightly so. He and Mom were naturals on the dance floor. I could tell they had danced this same dance a thousand times before in their nearly forty years of marriage. I even noticed they had their own "special move" as Dad twisted Mom one way and pulled her back flirtatiously in the other. Mom smiled and enjoyed every minute of it.

I was not the only one who noticed their movement; other people began gazing and smiling at them. It wasn't long before my parents were the center of attention, all eyes on their dancing. I worried a moment about the bride and groom; after all, it was their wedding. But, somehow, for this one dance, it was only appropriate that a couple such as they have the spotlight. Theirs was a rhythm, a pattern, that had survived many generations. It deserved appreciation.

After another song, the four of us joined each other from our separate corners of the dance floor and sat down. I was looking forward to this opportunity to talk to Mom and Dad about their dance, but before the band had a chance to begin, Danny went to get us punch, Mom to give her regards to the bride and groom. So Dad and I sat down next to each other. He was deaf in his left ear -- an injury from his war days -- and so I leaned across him and gently yelled in his right ear, asking if he were having a good time. He just smiled and chuckled, "Babe, don't worry about me. I always have a fine time." I knew that he did.

When the band picked up again with a song that only the youngest in attendance could recognize, Dad stood up very naturally and almost subconsciously began the step that I knew as the Birmingham Bop. This Bop had a much livelier rhythm with its "one...two...one, two, three" than the one he and Mom had danced earlier, and I was always amazed at how he could adapt this simple step to fit anything from a waltz to a rock-and-roll song. To Dad, the song didn't matter much. I'm sure he preferred Frank Sinatra and the Ink Spots to my contemporary music, but more importantly, he liked to dance.

Watching Dad dance to this song that I was sure he had never heard before made me want to join him. I always enjoyed doing the Birmingham Bop with Dad because we had so much fun.

It was an easy step to learn, but few people ever seemed to pick up on the various steps and tempos that Dad liked to throw in. I had been able to catch on to these steps fairly easily, and I was proud of the fact that I could always anticipate his next move and match it. This dance, however, seemed special to me as I realized this was the last time I would dance with Dad before I got married, before I had a new partner. Another guest must have realized the significance of this dance, too. She took our picture and mailed it to Dad sometime later. It was not an especially good picture of either one of us, but he still says it's his favorite. It hangs framed on the wall in his study and I can see him smiling and chuckling to himself, "That's the Babe."

Soon after the dance had finished, Danny reappeared with punch in hand and Mom soon followed behind him, asking if anyone had seen her purse. Another song began, and this time Danny took the lead. I realized that in the years to come I would do a lot more dancing with Danny than with Dad. I was sure Danny and I would spend countless hours working out the beat and the rhythm of our own dance just as my parents had done. I had no doubt that we would, in fact, find our own special steps in time. After all, I had had a great teacher.

Gone But Not Forgotten
by Veronica V. Parrish

The echo of her remarks still stings to this day. "Nell will never make it as a teacher because her attitude is too bad." Even though her remarks were cruel and downright mean, I'd give anything to be able to hear one of her bone-cutting, dry remarks today.

Aunt Odell was my mother's older sister. In my earlier years, she served as my surrogate caretaker while my mother worked as a domestic for a family in Homewood. She did everything for me, including plaiting my hair in three big plaits that would make any little neighborhood girl bristle with envy.

"Aunt Dell," as we all called her, was the keeper of the peace for the younger generation. We were that bunch of first cousins who played together gaily during the days of summer and fought like cats and dogs as soon as the sun began to descend into its resting cove.

Any of the cousins who were caught fighting had to answer to the Peacekeeper. She would patiently sit on her front porch waiting for our return from choir rehearsal or from a rare state fair outing to quiz us each about our behavior. To this day I still don't know where she got her information from. She must have had spies who took very accurate notes because she could tell you exactly what your part was in the spat. There was no use lying about not being involved because Aunt Dell knew everything: Who started the fight, what happened when so and so hit the other person and even who won. The first words to part her lips were, "Kin folks don't fight each other. . . you should get together and beat the hell out of anybody that's bothering you or your cousins." Our only response was "Yes ma'am." We knew without any prompts what the next scene in this family discussion would be. The culprits (we all were guilty according to Aunt Dell) would be summoned to pay the Peacekeeper. Our punishment was a maximum of five swats with a plastic fly swatter. The entire swatting episode would be riddled and laced with quotes from the Bible and family history snippets about what our Grandmother Polly would have done to us if she had been alive and possessed only one-fifth of the strength she had when Aunt Dell and my mother and other siblings were coming up as children.

After the swatting to kill all flies and fighting cousins was over, Aunt Dell would release us amidst pleas of "please don't kill me," and promises of "we will never fight our cousins again." Of course we lied throughout our childhood because there were many more family fights and many, many more swattings.

When my high school graduation was near, the one person I wanted in the crowd as much as my own mother was the Peacekeeper. She had made such a difference in my life. After five hard years of college and finally passing that old milestone of becoming a college graduate, I once again wanted the Peacekeeper to be a part of my celebration. However, she had recently been ill and was unable to attend. Upon my return home, I was informed by a family member of my aunt's remarks about my chance of succeeding as a teacher. Her remarks made me angry, sad and determined. I was angry because she didn't believe in me, sad because of my being the chosen target, and more determined than ever to prove her and everyone else wrong.

I had been teaching for almost a year when Aunt Dell asked me how every thing was really going. I told her that I had good days and bad days but, overall, my good days were the best ones. She just bowed her head and said, "Keep the faith and keep pushing." She never admitted that she made the remarks or had any doubts about my abilities.

I've been teaching now for almost seven years and Aunt Dell has been gone for a year. When I look back over the things I've experienced as a teacher, I'm often reminded of her remarks. I don't dwell as much on the negative as I do the positive remarks.

Before she went into the hospital for the last time, she once again encouraged me to "keep the faith and to keep pushing." It has been kind remarks like my aunt's last remarks that give me strength in my everyday life. No one has any idea how much I miss the Peacekeeper and just how much of an inspiration she was and is to me. She's gone from this old world but not from my heart.

"Rest in peace, you grand keeper of the peace."

That Old Watering Hole
by Veronica V. Parrish

My first recollection of anything that resembled a river is the area of water out behind the cow pastures on someone's property down in Marengo County, Alabama.

The one question that ran rampant through my young curious mind was. . . "Why were all these young black children letting some HOLLERING, Praise God preacher dip them over in that COLD, dirty looking water?"

Neighbors or just nosey folks are standing all around. There is a cluster of white that I've never witnessed before or since. This cluster comes from starched, white men's shirts, baptismal gowns, and towels worn on the heads of the poor souls who are waiting to be drowned.

The stark whiteness that surrounded the old watering hole is still vivid in my mind today. It may be that I was just a country child whose only experience with "white wash" came when my momma cloroxed and boiled the wash.

My sister Noney Jean and some others that I know are standing on the banks waiting to be dipped. Members of St. John and Mt. Hebron Baptist churches are there. They begin to sing. . . "Take me to the water, take me to the water, take me to the water to be baptized." The song continues. . . "I love Jesus, I love Jesus, I love Jesus. . . yes, I do."

I'm excited. I've never seen or heard anything like this before in all my FOUR years on earth. Yet, I'm scared at the same time. People are shouting (praises with "The Spirit") and still this preacher is smothering children in this B I G hole of water.

Wait a minute..... that one just came up for air. She's strong! She made it back up. That's my sister.

My momma's crying. I'm scared. I know for some reason that momma's tears are not tears of sadness but joy. Now my sister's crying, too. Looks and sounds like everybody is CRYING. Noney finally comes out of the hole of water.

Everybody's patting and slapping each other on the back, shaking hands and singing. . . "I know I've got religion."

I don't know about all of that. I do know I had SENSE and Reverend was NOT pushing my head down in *no hole of water.*

Mother's Gifts
by Veronica V. Parrish

Mother's

eyes shed many tears
words calm infinite fears
hands give much
heart holds a loving touch

name echoes sweet
strength full and complete
joy lost down in her soul
patience worth more than gold

struggles never keep her down
courage easily found
needs always placed last
concerns richly vast

face encircled in time
words broken, yet sublime
hugs rarely bestowed
prayers reverent bold

My mother's love
simple
pure

My River

A river of lives flows through me
Mothers, grandmothers, aunts
 now gone
Daughters, fathers, sons live on

Lives of wondering, joy and pain
 Who am I?
From where have I come?

Who speaks to the daughters?
Who cares for the sons?
 The river within each
 nurtured ? ignored?

Who helped my mother find her way
Through murky water and distant bay?
 Who heard her feelings
 allowed her word?
Who said, "Your beauty is good enough..."

A river of lives flows through me
 Will I ever find its source?

Lynda O'Neil Powell

Lady
by Lynda Powell

Lady was a big black and white border collie. She had been a member of our family for eight years. When we first brought her home, she was a happy, bouncy puppy with long clumsy legs. She became immediate friends with a smaller puppy, PJ, who also had joined our family recently.

Lady grew and grew. She chewed up almost everything in our garage. By the time she was one year old, Lady was a natural part of our lives, chewing and all.

One Saturday, a strange thing happened to Lady. She acted very sick. Her legs grew stiff and her eyes bulged. She stumbled and fell on the floor. All four of us felt frightened for her. Had she been poisoned? We checked the garage for any signs that she might have chewed her way into a toxic substance. There were none.

PJ growled and paced as her friend lay on the floor, clawing and jerking her stiffened legs. My husband and son hurriedly loaded the big dog into the back of our station wagon and headed for the veterinarian's office. The shot she received soon gave her relief from the seizure. The veterinarian said she had either epilepsy or a tumor on her brain. The medicine seemed to work. Several months passed without any seizures.

More members were added to our family by Lady's fourth year. She thought the two baby boys were little more than interesting critters to sniff since they dropped no tasty morsels the way the big kids did. She gave them an uninterested look and moved to her favorite napping spot. Lady's attention was evidently diverted from her nap by the aroma of delicatessen meat. A tray had been brought over by friends in celebration of the births of the new babies. Lady found the cold cuts on the counter and ate them--all of them.

Four months later, Lady topped her meat-eating accomplishment with an unusual interest in Girl Scouting ventures. Thin Mints, Samoas, and Do Si Dos were in abundance in our daughter's room, ready to be delivered. Lady ate several boxes from my daughter Summer's supply of cookies. We knew because, as my oldest son Hunter, and I were on the way to the Animal Emergency Clinic with yet another seizure, Lady threw up. The station wagon and Hunter's shoes reeked of Thin Mints, especially, for weeks and weeks and weeks.

After a shot of cortisone, a stronger prescription, and an over-night stay at the vet's, Lady was back to her old self again, sniffing, finding dropped morsels and napping.

A few months passed and Lady's naps were interrupted by not-so-gentle tugs at her tail. Lady looked up quickly in surprise, wrinkled her forehead at the two little tuggers, laid down her head again and napped some more. The tuggers began to explore. Lady's nose felt wet. They were intrigued by the hard white bumps in her mouth. Warm breath covered little hands as they tried to trace the bumps and ridges of her slippery teeth. Lady merely looked, moved her head so the little fingers would drop away from her mouth, and moved to the door. "Can't a dog have any peace and quiet around here?"

As the twins grew and began to walk, they tumbled over Lady and even tried unsuccessfully to ride her. Watching cartoons was especially fun for little boys who had a nice soft dog to lean on.

Lady was seizure free for several months at a time. We thought the medicine was the answer, but late one afternoon, the familiar signs returned. Lady stiffened, fell to the floor of the deck and began twitching and jerking. I ran to get towels to try to keep her warm. Butch laid the towels over her and stayed with her to be sure she would come out of the seizure. He gave her an extra dose of medicine. As the twitching subsided, he patted her and noticed she seemed a lot heavier than usual. Some swelling around her stomach made us think back to the Christmas holidays when Josh, a neighbor's golden retriever came to visit. He had been a very bold visitor and dared to climb right over our fence. We felt certain Lady was going to be a mother. She was sure to have big puppies. Josh was even bigger than Lady.

Surprise, excitement and questions filled our house. The children would get to see newborn puppies. Maybe they would even be born when we were all awake. How long does it take for puppies to grow inside the mother? When would Lady's puppies be born? Were the puppies all right? Was Lady all right?

Another trip to the veterinarian assured us that Lady and the puppies were fine. It was hard for him to say whether or not the puppies would have Lady's seizure problem. Usually, that kind of health problem is passed on through the father dog. We were hopeful, but still worried about our gentle eight-year-old pet who had never been a mother before.

Around 2:00 one morning, we heard noises in the garage and PJ barking. We were afraid Lady was having another seizure and was falling into things. Butch was already in the garage when I got there. Lady was pacing around.

"Did she have her puppies?" I asked, looking into the box we had prepared for her.

"Look! On that pile of dirty sheets!" Butch pointed to a small black puppy bobbing its little head in search of security.

"Good girl, Lady, You took care of your puppy. Are there any more?"

No sooner had we both asked the question than Lady headed into the box---the "wrong" box, of course, the one we had made into a playhouse for the twins. Hunter had joined us by then. We all peeked through the cut-out "windows" and saw Lady deliver her second and last puppy. She pulled at the sack, bit off the umbilical cord and gently, but thoroughly licked her baby clean.

"What a good ole mother," I said, as I watched Lady lie down to let her puppies nurse.

The other three children were in awe of the two small black puppies. The twins thought there was one for each of them.

The puppies grew fast and were big enough to romp as their mother had done eight years ago. They also chewed as their mother had done eight years ago.

About eight weeks after the puppies were born, we saw the unwanted signs again. Lady began having seizure after seizure. Butch administered the medicine and she rested. But the medicine could not keep the seizures at bay this time. When we took her in to the vet the next morning, she was exhausted and the seizures could not be stopped. It was hard to explain to the children why Lady couldn't return home.

We kept the puppies until they were almost three months old. Then a family of dog-lovers wanted to take both of them. It was hard to let go of them, but we knew they would be happy together in their new home.

Life was never dull with Lady around. It was often difficult, but never dull. She is a special memory in our family album.

My Tree

Silky, pink petals
dancing on the drive mixed with
the smells of magnolia, gardenia, and honeysuckle
bring me back to an early summer day in my 11th year

The lake is loud with fish jumping and frogs singing to anyone who'll listen
and louder still are the bees feasting on the wealth of flowers that illumine my yard
I hear them all, but do they hear me ? Do they hear my songs sung in carefree days of childhood ?

The crooked branch is just right for swinging as the leaves applaud my show
but my favorite branch is just wide enough to lie on
and look up at the canopy of leaves and branches
that seem to allow the sun
to peek through
and kiss me

I own
that tree
or does
it own
me ?

Helen Pruet
August 4, 1994

A Box in the Attic

New friends from camp
we didn't want to part
so we promised to write
keeping close in our hearts

The month following camp
the letters did flow
but as time moved along
those letters did slow

A box in the attic
houses memories of these friends
I miss all those conversations
wishing they had never come to an end

Helen D. Pruet
August 1, 1994

The River Calls My Name

Laughing,
splashing,
calling my name
It moves quickly by
carrying me on its shoulders
Letting me touch its bed
as it wraps its arms around me
I am accepted
by that huge, old river
The time between my visits
does not count
It is always happy to see me
and I it
And when I am away
I take it with me in my mind
Laughing,
splashing,
calling my name

Helen D. Pruet
July 8, 1994

The Bear
by Jean Smith

Twilight was coming on when we finally pulled into the campground. Friends had said we should be sure not to miss camping at their favorite campsite in the northern California woods. They had told us about the crisp air, the wind in the pines, and, best of all, they said there would not be a lot of people around. Even so, there were several surprises in store for us. First, we drove a very long way on an overgrown dirt road, and then, when we arrived at the campground, we saw that there were no other campers at all. We were not alone, however. In addition to Jim, the children, and me, there were bears.

The chili was beginning to simmer on the Coleman stove when the bear made its presence known by banging on garbage cans somewhere out in the woods. The sound was not near our campsite, however, and even though it made us a little uneasy, we went on with what we needed to do.

The cold afternoon became an even colder evening. Jim lit the lantern so we could see while we were eating. When we finished, we put things away carefully, making very sure that not even a scrap of food was left out anywhere. Needless to say, none of us went to the garbage cans.

We let down the wooden base of the camper, the canvas walls and roof automatically falling into place. Four tired kids unrolled their sleeping bags, two at either end of the sleeping extensions, and quickly scrambled into them. Jim blew out the lantern, and we got into our sleeping bags by the light that hangs in the air briefly, just before the blackness closes in. I would have enjoyed falling asleep to the sounds of the night, if the bear hadn't again begun to bang on the garbage cans. For the first time, I thought about how little protection the canvas sides of our camper would offer if a bear wanted to get in.

I was awakened out of a sound sleep by some noise outside, right next to the camper. Was there really something out there, I wondered, or did I just think I'd heard something? I lay very still and tried to listen carefully. Yes, there was definitely something scuffling around in the dark right next to our camper.

"Jim," I whispered hoarsely, hoping not to wake the children. "Jim," I called again. "Wake up! There's a bear moving around right outside!"

Jim did not move. He too lay still a moment, listening. "Oh no," he groaned softly, "I hear it too. I don't even know if I can find the gun and the shells. I think they're stowed under the cooking stuff."

By now, the bear was bumping into the steps that led into the camper. The hair on the back of my neck was standing up. My heart was pounding loudly in my ears.

"Mo-om!" came the sleepy, little voice of eight-year-old Craig. "Mom, let me in! I rolled over and fell out of the end of the camper. Let me in! It's cold out here!"

Guard Duty
by Rita Sparks

"Whatever you do, keep them coal boys out. Keep them out as long as you can."
John Wesley Sparks, 1985

"One who would not love a father's grave is worse than a wild animal."
Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, 1871

My one and only father,
four years old the year Chief Joseph died,
is dying today, dying of years--
long years, thin years, dreaming years--
shuffling down the aisles
of this cold, crowded drugstore
where we have come for our turn to buy
comfort, hope, and time
in little bottles.

Like a mother shopping with a child,
I watch his uncertain movements.
People quickly step aside,
letting him pass.
The message is set in my face:
"Please, let the old one by.
Excuse me, please, let my old one by."
And they look at him go,
wondering that such a twig
is still walking,
is maybe alive.

I know that in a year, a month, a week
I will carry him and plant him
in Walker County soil.
I know; I am convinced.
By the spotted hands that no longer grip,
by the glaucoma clouds covering the blue,
by the falling apart of every part--
I am utterly convinced.
I would not ask the rivers to run backward:
I do not talk to God at all.

Already in my heart I take my lone position,
sitting behind the weathered, family tombstones--
guarding against grown boys, white men
with papers and plans and machines--
rolling closer, closer, closer,
presuming they can strip mine
within an inch of his bones,
our bones.

The Tree House Reading Room
by Rita Sparks

Once upon a time long, long ago, I lived in a large brick house on Ensley Avenue in an older section of Birmingham. The house, built in 1929 by the vice president of United States Steel during the Depression, was attractive and elegant--full of carefully selected colors; coordinated drapes and wallpaper; and dark, polished antiques brought in from shops in New Orleans. Any normal, healthy, red-blooded American dreamer should have been thrilled to be there, but I wasn't entirely normal and wasn't entirely happy.

I spent most of my time in the smallest room of the house, the upstairs sunroom, which became for me the tree house reading room.

An enormous Empire bookcase with claw feet and glass doors covered one wall completely. The other three sides of the room consisted of large windows that stretched from the floor to the ceiling. Outside the windows, full green limbs from blackjack oaks pushed and swayed against the wavy glass panes. My sunroom gave me the feeling of being safe inside a comfortable tree house. The phone rang, the doorbell buzzed, cars whizzed by on Ensley Avenue, but I was oblivious to the sounds of the world. I could climb into my own world where sound and time had no meaning.

One blessed summer I read Theodore Dreiser--*Sister Carrie, Jennie Gerhart, The Genius*. I sat on the floor on the soft, thick green and white rug my husband had brought home from Africa. Reading Dreiser's marvelous descriptions of elegant rooms in elegant turn-of-the-century houses, I transcended my own elegant museum in which I was not entirely happy. Dreiser walked me through fine rooms with lamps and furniture more impressive than my own. Moreover, his lamps and furniture never had to be dusted.

Dreiser spoke to me of women who were intelligent and beautiful and pulled their stylish, white gloves gracefully over their smooth hands. Fervently, he told me of men and women and class structure and the human condition.

I knew even then that I was in a fleeting state that was as good as it would ever be. "This is it," I thought as I sat rolling on the lush rug, reading and rereading. "This is surely it. This is as good as it will ever be in this imperfect world where I live in an elegant, imperfect house with a man who is good as good as imperfect men are in this imperfect world." And in this imperfect world, the reading room felt just right. Dreiser, with his pretentious spellings, overwritten sentences, and editorializing, was just right.

I planned my life around my tree house time. Once I pretended to be ill so I could stay home and read instead of go to the symphony with my husband and his friends. Another time I passed up a trip to the beach because I preferred to go to the tasteful bar where Hurstwood, Drouet, and Carrie would meet. I wanted to sit in the reflection of the magnificent, huge mirrors; the glittering, patterned glasses; and the shining cherry wood of that bar. Carrie would hold forth and all of us--Dreiser, Hurstwood, Drouet, and I--would hang on her every word. The beach would always be there.

Gradually, I came to an understanding of how religious people must feel. I can identify with elderly women who love to go into candlelit churches full of statues of the Virgin and sit praying hours at a time. Their praying in a special place, my reading in my tree house--we all want and need moments of transcendence. Looking back at the young woman in the tree house, I believe she structured that summer to save her life.

My husband, who often suspected I was involved in an affair, was right. I loved Theodore Dreiser, awkward and passionate author of long, preachy books. I loved him with all my heart, and during the summer of 1978, I couldn't get enough of him. I also loved myself, my consciousness, and my tree house--a sacred, luscious place where I could read, dream, roll around on the rug, reread, think, and create a woman who ached to be.

Glory and the Dragon: An Adventure

by Peggy A. Swoger

Once there were two princesses named Glory and Purity. They had spent many years together learning to be very good princesses, planning dinners and giving great parties for their many friends. They had been on many adventures together and loved each other like sisters. As time passed, Glory found her special prince and they moved away to the neighboring kingdom of Georgia. Purity missed her very much and one day sent her a message that it was time for them to go on another adventure.

So, off they went across a great blue ocean to the mysterious land of Xi'po to see its towering temples and climb its great wall. The great wall had been built many years ago, for you see, the land of Xi'po had asked the sacred Golden Swan to protect its people from the red dragon of the North. The Golden Swan had built a high stone wall that spread from East to West where the sun rose and set. Although the dragon was a great dragon, as dragons go, it was too small to jump the wall. The people of Xi'po said that it often flashed its fiery breath near the highest point of the wall to torment the sacred Golden Swan. The people said that the red dragon is a small dragon until it catches a beautiful young girl and transforms itself within her like a worm in a silk cocoon. There the red dragon will nourish itself and grow in bulk and fierceness.

So, while on their adventure, on a very hot, dry day in June, Glory and Purity set out from Xi'po to climb the great wall and see the sacred swan. "Don't we have the best adventures!" Glory exclaimed as they stood on the wall and looked out over the expanse of undulating mountains. Purity tied on her great round, white hat that stood out against the blue sky like a full moon at noon. She was somewhat older than Glory and wanted to get a head start up the wall to the nest of the Golden Swan. Glory followed, gazing out over the mysterious mountains hung with circles of clouds. "They look like dragon puffs!" she exclaimed. Becoming tired, Glory sat for a moment on the very tip edge of the wall. Purity took this chance to get farther ahead, her moon hat bobbing up and down, climbing higher in the sky.

Suddenly she heard Glory scream, "Help, Help! The dragon's breath! Help! Help! The dragon's teeth!" Purity ran back toward her, but could see nothing--no Glory. No dragon! Glory was nowhere to be seen. Silence swam up from the valleys below. Purity thought and thought and thought what to do. She looked to heaven and there far above her at the top of the wall the Golden Swan stood in her nest and flapped her great wings. Purity ran and ran up and up and up. The Golden Swan could see the whole earth, she thought. The Golden Swan would find Glory.

"Will you help me find my friend?" she asked the swan.

"Yes, yes," said the swan. And off they flew down into the valley. Sure enough they soon spotted Glory standing on the tallest limb of a burned tree. The swan swooped her up and Purity grabbed her with one arm while she held on to her moon hat with the other. Across the great blue ocean the swan sailed, her great long neck pointing straight for the home land of Georgia.

When the girls awoke, they found themselves in their own beds with Glory's prince bringing them breakfast on a golden tray. Glory refused the food and looked very tired. "I feel just like something gobbled me right up," she said. "I don't feel like myself at all." And she wasn't.

Day after day she refused food. The Prince gathered Purity and all her friends together. They sprinkled her bed and her food with golden thoughts and silver prayers, day after day, week after week, and month after month. Finally, one day, the great red dragon that had been growing and growing inside her burst forth. "I can't live on golden thoughts and silver prayers," he screamed at the Prince and Purity and all of Glory's Gang. He jumped out of Glory's body and jumped into the sky, flapping his great red wings and breathing fire into the sky. Then he disappeared.

"He's gone," Glory declared the next morning. She began to eat from the Prince's golden tray. "Oh, what an adventure we had," she said to Purity and all her friends. But on nights when the moon was full, Glory traveled back to the Ocean's edge and looked out across the world. "He could come back," she said to all. But the years passed and he didn't come back. Glory and Purity loved each other like sisters; but they didn't want another adventure for a long, long time.

The End

Flying to Arkansas
by Madeline Thompson

"The lights don't work," Ethan announced.

"Did you remember to pay the bill?" asked Heather.

"I guess not, but think how much fun we will have tonight. It will be just like camping out," I told my children. "We can take care of this tomorrow." I was scarlet inside. This was not fun and it was just another sign to me that I was not capable. I remembered everyone's final words, "You can't do it alone."

This was the first year of my separation from my husband. His increasingly erratic behavior had driven me to Memphis, Tennessee where I had neither friends nor family, just a job off Elvis Presley Boulevard. The school was small and felt like home. My own children who were ages 6 and 9 attended a one-room schoolhouse across the field from where I taught. I was twenty-nine and scared to death. I had met my husband when I was fourteen and he had shaped my beliefs. If he thought it was a good idea, I whole heartedly agreed. However as I began to inch towards thirty, I realized that his brilliance was tinged with madness and I needed a safe haven away from him. I fled to Memphis.

I had heard the song "Beale Street Blues" late one night and read about Memphis. It seemed to me a logical place for anyone experiencing the blues as badly as I was, so I fled there.

I was unaccustomed to life in the South. I had lived in many northern cities and in south Florida, which seemed not to be connected to any place. "Florida is spiritually unclaimed," I once read.

My kids were bewildered. They had always had their daddy and other family close to them and suddenly I had snatched them up and moved them to this alien place. My finances were precarious. We were existing on my meager private school teacher's salary. My daughter made the best of it; she tried to help me and forgave me when I messed up. My son, my younger child, didn't understand why I had ruined everything. His big blue eyes stared hard at me and sensed that I did not have any power over anything.

We settled into a routine. The kids loved their school and made friends, joined leagues, and the pattern of our week was set. We were fine until Sunday. It was the worst day of the week. Weekdays filled up with jobs, chores and the everyday stuff of being alive. Saturdays filled with the things we didn't accomplish the rest of the week.

Sunday however, loomed large and dark on the weekly calendar. "Sunday, gloomy Sunday," sang Billie Holiday, a compatriot of mine in the blues.

I quickly learned that in the South, church is about all that's happening on Sunday. I had never taken my children to church. My own mother had been Catholic and my dad Jewish and this was a constant source of conflict in my life. I just wanted to stay away from it. Then one of my new friends told me about her church. She said it wasn't at all holy and they had craft classes for kids during the service. I signed my daughter up for weaving and my son for heraldry classes and we were off to the Unitarian Church.

The church was lovely. It sat high on the bluffs of the Mississippi River and had enormous windows so the church faithful could watch the barges roll by. The preacher never talked about God - instead he read Emerson and Thoreau. The music was classical rather than churchy and I could reflect on my life. Sundays had become bearable.

One Sunday, my son decided that he wanted to fly his kite. I told him that we would after church. He clenched the kite in his fists as we drove off to church. When church was over, I felt the wind blowing. However, it was noon and I knew the kids were hungry. I remembered Ethan holding his kite and I felt perhaps that this was the most important thing I could do right at that moment. "Lets go fly the kite." I said.

We took the kite to the river and instantly the kite was lapped up by the wind. Higher and higher it flew, dancing in the breeze. Ethan smiled for the first time in ages. "Mommy, we did it! We did it!" he shouted.

The hungry kite demanded more and more string. It reeled and swirled in the sky. The kite tugged out of Ethan's hand but the end was caught on a bush near by. We ran together to grab that string and reclaimed our prize. The two girls in their early twenties, who had come with their own kite, gave us all their string and the kite flew ever higher. "Where is it going?" asked my son as it flew across the river.

"Arkansas," I answered.

We held the string together, charting the sky as my daughter cheered us on. I felt my children's confidence in me growing. Other people from the church came down to watch us. The kite was alive, pulsing and zooming. It flirted with the clouds. I felt alive and whole and sensed that no matter how hard the wind blew, it would never blow me over again. "I think its there!" my son shouted. "Let's cut the string and let it fly all over Arkansas!"

We cut the string and let it fly free. We watched it until it was out of sight. My son hugged me and said, "Mommy, this was the best time I ever had. "

A few weeks later, a girl in church gave me a photograph. It showed a confident woman and her smiling son flying a kite - flying, flying towards Arkansas.

New Girl
by Madeline Thompson

"Tell me your name again," the sharp-nosed teacher demanded of me.

"Madeline Rosen," I replied weakly.

"You are Jewish?" She snipped out the question.

"No Ma'am," I replied, "Catholic."

She raised her eyebrows because in those days, in that part of town, Catholic girls went to Catholic schools, unless there was something weird about them, like having a Jewish father as I did. I had no identity. Jewish name, Catholic girl, child of immigrants, dressed for an Irish boarding school rather than a Chicago Public School, accent from TV rather than any certain place.

Chicago was just another stop on a long string of places I had lived. I used to imagine at night that I really lived on a train and all the stops were just overnights on the journey to somewhere else. I always hoped that the train would stop in a place where I could stay long enough to plant flowers and learn the correct terms for everything. Terms change from place to place, soda becomes tonic in Boston, pop in Toronto, and coke is a generic term in the South. It takes time to learn these things and when you are ten, painfully shy and rootless, these things are doubly difficult.

Chicago was one of the more trying stops on my endless trip. The part of town we had moved to was a Jewish community, and I was one of two Christians in my class. The other was a Cuban refugee who did not speak any English. On Yom Kippur, we were the only ones in class; everyone else was home fasting. The teacher stared down her long thin nose at us the entire long day as the room echoed with the tapping of her high heels on the cold linoleum floor.

However, the first day of school was the worst. I had moved at the end of September, long enough to be lulled into thinking I would spend a second year at the last school. My parents were American but had lived in Canada the last five years. The teacher decided that I, The New Girl, would lead the class in the Pledge of Allegiance. I told her quietly that I didn't know it; after all, I had been singing "God Save the Queen" for the last five years. "My gracious!" The teacher cried. "An American child who cannot pledge allegiance to her flag! And it says on her records that she is gifted!"

That was it. The kiss of death. Now the class knew that I was smart. I never made friends that year. The teacher, perhaps feeling guilty, arranged with my mother to take me on an educational weekend trip. She took only me and Simon Rubin, a fellow misfit. "I have an IQ of 154," he confided to me.

It was as though I had been asked to come to a society that I didn't care to join. The teacher spoke at great length of our experiences at the Chicago Art Institute that next Monday. Tova Konigsberg, who had been on the verge of liking me, decided not to.

My father got restless again that year. By June he was out interviewing and my mother was packing boxes. Before I knew it, it was Mayflower Moving time again. The boxes preceded us to our new home in upstate New York, "God's County" my dad elaborated. As we settled into the family car, I took a last glance at Chicago. We left the city and as the car speeded up, I could almost hear the engine whine, "New girl, new girl."

I closed my eyes and hoped that when I awoke, we would be at our final destination, the place called home.

Rob's Umbrella

by Madeline Thompson

"Take mine, yours is trash," he said.

He threw mine away.

I knew he had another.

We bought it in

New York City;

We were sheltered from the rain beneath it.

Protected,

We kissed underneath

Its gentle cover.

I took Rob's old umbrella.

I wonder

Has he had it long?

Did it shelter him in his old life?

Did he carry it to work?

Was it safe inside his briefcase

Or live inside the trunk?

I know Rob wants me safe and dry.

I pick it up and it blossoms

flower like over my head.

I inspect it closely.

Does he know the top is missing?

Does he know it has a rip?

My old was as good as this.

Perhaps he knew

the old one was my husband's;

I never told him.

Perhaps he wants to be my only shelter.

I walk beneath it;

I feel safe and loved.

I am Debbie Reynolds;

He is Gene Kelly

We are

Singin' in the Rain.

Marching Past Midnight

I lie
poised at the brink of slumber
teetering at the edge of unconsciousness
when the words come marching in

snatches of song
snippets of poem
dashes of dialogue
echoes of argument

relentlessly they push me
lay siege to my sleep
I rise
armed with pen
determined to capture the words
march them out on paper

Susan Yates
July 19, 1994

Spinning in the Doldrums

get up
argue with husband
dash to get dressed
rush with the kids
(argue with husband)
drive 35 miles
teach six periods
watch the halls
stand duty
drive 35 miles
run errands
pick up kids
(argue with husband)
deal with dinner
(argue with husband)
plan lessons
grade papers
fight with husband!
cry myself to sleep . . .

week after week
month after month
year after year
for 13 years

round
and
round
and
round

I spin

I become sick and dizzy
spin so fast
going nowhere
I can't stop
(or don't know how)
briefly sight places
I long to go
back to school
to the art museum
the symphony
Paris
out of my marriage

Can a whirlpool create inertia?
I don't know physics
just my life . . .

Susan Yates
July 18, 1994

My River

*When I forget to listen to the whispers flowing deep inside,
A salty river swells angrily spilling over from my eyes.
Caught unaware by the sudden flood,
I stop what I have been doing and
listen.*

*Deep in the silent woods
I sweat out a solitary walk with my dog at my side.
The river murmurs words like "balance" and "harmony."
I struggle to reconnect the mind,
body,*

heart,

and soul of my Self.

*My dog and I make a pilgrimage to Seagrove
Where the waves of the ocean amplify the whispers
of the river within,
and I listen
carefully
as I pull my
S e l f
back together.*

- Carol van Zalingen

Chairs

Vinyl-coated,
cloth and leather,
plastic or foam-padded,
these are the chairs that wait with us
whether for a doctor or an oil change.

Straight-back chairs are there
for serious endeavors
and recliners for achy feet
too tired to walk to bed.

Car, bus, train, and plane seats transport us
either across town or across our planet
while a shuttle seat lifts our feet
straight up to other worlds.

There is a Thinker who sits upon a seat of reason
while royalty's reason sits upon a throne.
Children sit behind their desks wishing
they were in front of the TV on the couch at home.

Electric chairs end life for some,
dentist's chairs for others.

High chairs give way to wheel chairs
as rocking chairs click like a metronome
counting out the measure of our lives.

But at the end of the day,
dinner chairs bring us together at the table
where we give thanks for the many chairs
we sit on as we wait out our lives.

- Carol van Zalingen

A Circle of Living Women
by Rita Sparks

"And we are put on earth a little space,
That we may learn to bear the beams of love . . ."
-- Mother, "Little Black Boy"
William Blake

Under the fully dressed in stunning green
arms outstretched maternal poplar tree
we sit
a circle of living women
sharing
stories voices sorrows victories
dreams

a malignant dragon is slain
with golden thoughts silver prayers
and invincible princess power

a mother is honored
by her baby daughter
who turns her back on a devil
in a parking lot
and then sings God's praise

a young woman meets a telephone pole
moves back home with her parents
hobbles on a walker
yet catches her soul

a naughty black cat suns himself
on a bright red bench
with a sign that reads
WHITES ONLY
while fish slide on ice
and the Zulu sings

a family of campers survives
a bear attack
by its own sleepy bear

a minister's wife befriends a bootlegger
and stands helplessly by
as federal men
blow England dreams over Alabama

a child bride bops out of childhood
into her husband's open arms
leaving behind a symbolic father

a little French girl with a big hat
scowls at a boy quoting his IQ
all she really wants
is a home of her own

an elegant Lady suffers epilepsy
steals Girl Scout cookies
plays with the twins
runs with angels

there are more voices to be heard
and plenty of mothering shade
but the circle is broken

back to clocks back to schedules
back to separate worlds

as the women walk away
I click their stories on SAVE

also storing other voices
that have spoken before

spoken of Billy the youngest
planning his marriage

of Olga who speaks to the dead
leading her into the next life

of eating Russian bread
knowing that it is reliable food

of Ace of Spades sleek and shining
who sleeps in a queensize bed

of talking to rocks
leaving crayons for Chatty Kathy

of a drunken son-in-law
a granddaughter's abuse

of a daughter burning poetry

of leaving home
the day Dr. King was killed

of dogwood fruit and history students

of pink petals gardenias
magnolias and Edie the moonbeam

of fairy tales beekeepers pink flamingos
magic bracelets antique lace

of a mother's hands
gripping her wheelchair
holding on for dear life

and though I grew weary
of teaching methods writing tips
picnics swimming
conscious bonding
cold air

I hold as a blessing
these living lessons
in which I learn
to bear the beams
of human love