

T&W Blackboard

Spring 2009 (Vol. 40, No. 3)

I enjoyed the excellent latest issue of *Teachers & Writers* magazine, especially Bill Zavatsky's dream writing and David Andrew Stoler's piece on the Alzheimer's Poetry Project. How wonderful teaching is: to welcome students' night-time adventures into their rational daily life—and the remarkable response of people who have lost so much to rhythm, words, the thrill of human emotion. Peter G. Beeson's poem brought tears to my eyes: "A place to become one / With earth and sky."

For all of us, Mr. Beeson, for all of us.

MEREDITH SUE WILLIS
South Orange, NJ

I have been meaning to thank you hugely for the impressive, comprehensive, and perfect article you wrote about Urban Word NYC. You really nailed it. You had our pedagogy, passion, spirit, and community all in there. You got it *soooo* right on the mark! This is a perfect intro to Urban Word for anyone. Thank you for your impeccable work!

MICHAEL CIRELLI
Executive Director
Urban Word NYC
New York, NY

I loved the issue again! "The Floating Basement" was wonderful, and the poem "Here I Am" just broke my heart. I could only think of my dear dear mom, and how she sat with me one morning at her kitchen table and said, "People think I forget things. They don't understand that I hear things but they just don't register." And then she said in a poetic and untranslatable Yiddish, "I feel like a *neshama* (soul or spirit) that has been torn out." (*Ich feel zich vee an oisgerisene neshama...*) "There is a detached / vacant-

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ness / a distant vagueness / an absence / to my being." . . . in Beeson's words.

DEBORAH KRASNOW
White Plains, NY

I was so glad to learn about the Alzheimer's Poetry Project. I have read about similar engagement with Alzheimer's patients through songs and other music: the musical quality of poetry seems to dance in the brain as well.

The article "Speak, Memory" left a bad taste in my mouth, though. Why did the author, David Andrew Stoler, identify a participant by race, "When he gets to one senior, a black woman who hasn't made any sign that she's aware of his presence or what has been going on..."? Race seems irrelevant to this story and singling out one person by her race is distracting and unnecessary. The implication is that the reader should assume everyone is white unless identified otherwise. This reinforces an antiquated and predominant paradigm that I'm pretty sure—as a long-time subscriber to T&W—your organization seeks to undo.

The style guides I have worked with suggest subjects' race be identified only if pertinent to the story and, then, consistently. As teachers and writers we are privileged and tasked with maintaining a vigilant awareness of language.

Keep up the good work! I enjoyed the post from the T&W online discussion group and will make use of the suggestions in my work as a poet-in-the-schools.

ALEXA MERGEN
Sacramento, CA

Thank you for your thoughtful letter. You are right; words do matter, and the reference to the woman's race should have been edited out, given that the race of other members of the group was not mentioned. I hope, however, that this misstep did not detract too much from what I thought was a very well-written piece about a fascinating program. We appreciate your feedback. — Susan Karwoska, editor.