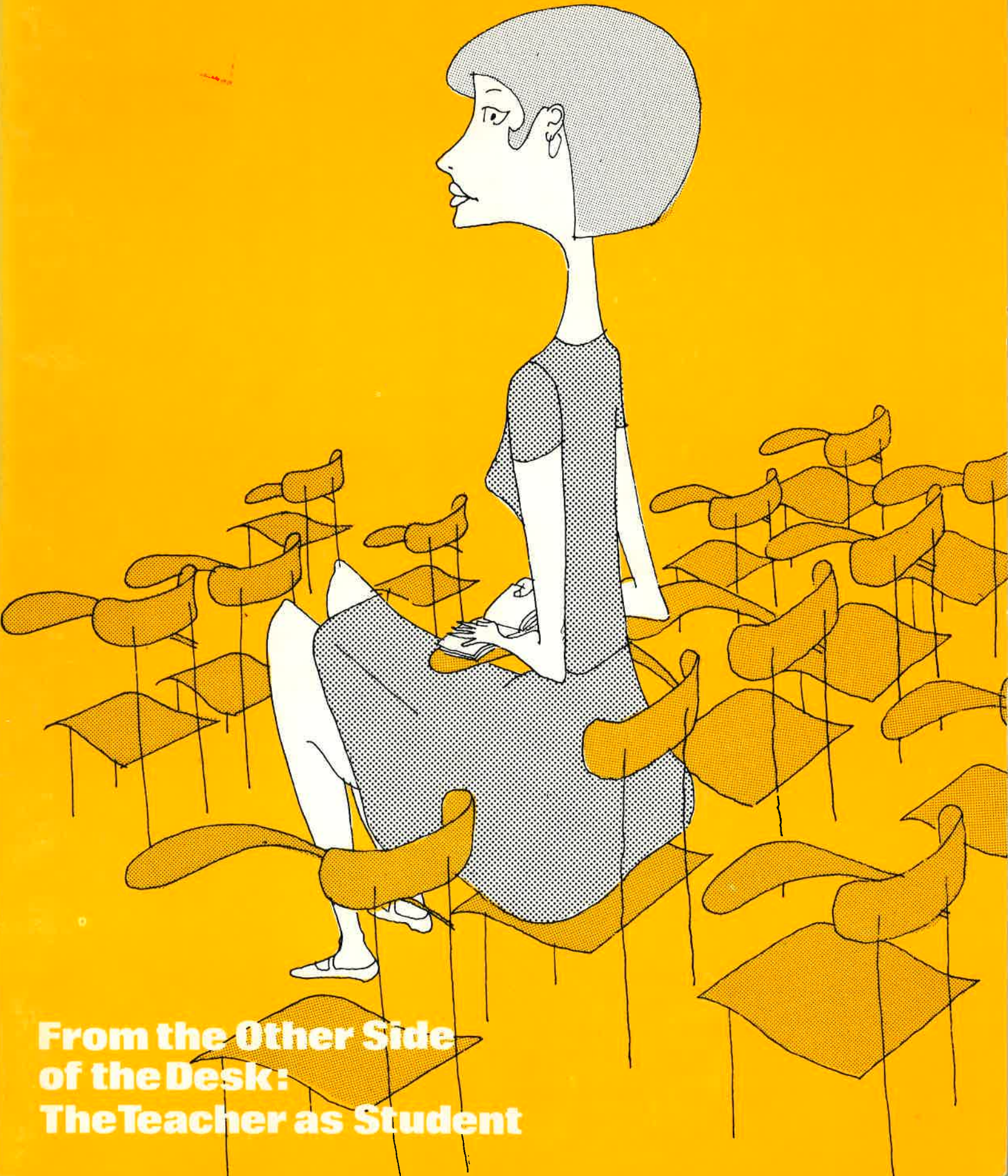


Teachers&Writers

Collaborative Newsletter

Volume 7, Issue 1



**From the Other Side
of the Desk:
The Teacher as Student**

About Teachers and Writers

Teachers & Writers Collaborative brings together writers, teachers, and students for the purpose of creating a curriculum that is relevant to the lives of children today and can therefore make the study of language a living process. Together, writer and teacher can encourage children to create their own literature from their own language, experience and imagination. This new approach to the teaching of language assumes that:

- Children who are allowed to develop their own language naturally, without the imposition of artificial standards of grading, usage, and without arbitrary limits on subject matter, are encouraged to expand the boundaries of their own language;
- Grammar and spelling develop as a result of an attachment to language and literature, not vice versa. Teaching these skills before a child feels they are relevant stifles his interest in language;
- Children who write their own literature and read other children's are more likely to view all literature as an effort to deal with experience in creative ways, whatever that experience may be.

Teachers & Writers Collaborative places professional writers in classrooms to work on a regular basis with teachers who are interested in opening their children to new ways of using language. Teachers & Writers also conducts training workshops for teachers. T & W writers maintain detailed diaries of their work. These diaries, along with the works of the students, are the raw materials for Teachers & Writers publications—newsletters, curriculum materials, anthologies. We hope that other teachers find in our materials some ideas they can use in their classrooms.

Teachers & Writers

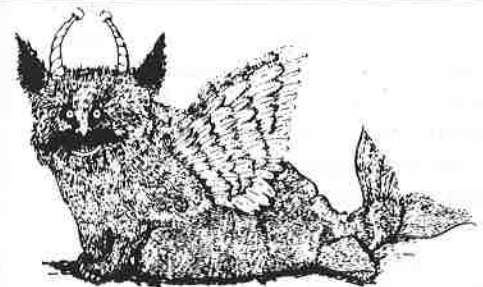
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“Dummy! You’re supposed to give the baby to the mommy!”

Boy, Girl, Boy, Girl

Dan Cheifetz

During a creative dramatics workshop session with fourth graders at P.S. 129 in Harlem last year, a group of boys were pretending to be doctors, delivering a baby. They had planned simply to pretend the mother’s presence, but I intervened. I have always had a special interest in trying to overturn the cultural/psychological barriers that keep pre-adolescent boys and girls apart, and sensed an opportunity here for some natural contact. I suggested it would be more dramatic to actually cast someone as the mother, and put her on the operating table. Somewhat reluctantly, they selected a girl named Jane. Jane was a pretty, rather vague girl, taller than the others but quite docile and unthreatening. My guess was that the boys picked her because they sensed she would not assert herself in any way, but simply do what she was told.

They directed her to lie down on a table and the scene began. Two of the boys placed themselves on either side of her, opposite her stomach region. Another boy stood at her feet. The two boys near her middle pantomimed working over her. They pretended to cut her stomach open, then took out the baby, slapped it, quite hard, and shook it. Casually, they handed the new arrival to the boy standing at the mother’s feet. Because of this po-

sition, I had assumed at first that this boy was another doctor, the chief deliverer in fact, but it turned out he was playing the role of the father.

The father took the baby from the doctors, held it in one arm, looked at it critically, then pantomimed taking it home.

One of the girls watching said, with resentment, “Dummy! You’re supposed to give the baby to the mommy!”

“Shut up!” the doctor who had delivered the baby said to her.

But the father and the other boy looked at me for judgment. I said, yes, that was the common practice, and suggested they try doing it that way.

So they amended the skit somewhat. The father walked back to the hospital and showed the baby, very briefly, to the still recumbent mother. Then he took it back home with him.

“They’re dumb!” the critical girl said under her breath.

I decided against delivering a lecture correcting the players’ obstetrics, but instead, to wait and see what the group would contribute.

I said that they had chosen a good subject for the pantomime, and I praised the seriousness and concentration of the cast. A little warily, I asked for comments, reminding them, as I always did, that I didn’t want anyone to get





personal, but to make statements about the work itself. Not that my admonition did any good.

"They don't even know how a baby gets born!" the girl who had spoken before said in a loud whisper to her friend.

The obstetrician of the skit replied angrily, "What do you know about it, dummy!"

The girl got in a retort about boys being too stupid to talk to before I could intervene. I said that sometimes, when a mother has a very difficult time in childbirth, doctors do cut the mother in the lower abdomen area, and get the baby out that way. It's called a Caesarian section, I said, because people believe the Roman emperor Caesar was delivered that way. However, the normal method is different, etc. I used the word "vagina" in my explanation, but the reaction was less than might be expected. A couple of children looked down at the floor with embarrassed stares, a boy chortled; otherwise, calm acceptance.

The children paid unusually close attention to what I was saying. They were obviously interested and eager for information. And they wanted to contribute what they knew. One girl said she had been born at home, not in a hospital. A boy sitting across the room said that was impossible—on TV, babies were always born in a hospital. Another girl said, no, her mother had been born at home too, and her grandmother had helped deliver her. A boy, usually shy about participating, said his cousin had been born in his uncle's taxicab and everyone laughed.

The whole proceeding had been polarized in the beginning, with the boys doing the skit at first completely ignoring the female role and then giving it only minimum recognition. The discussion following, moreover, had threatened to become a pitched battle between the sexes. But another force was also operating. Not only



were they interested in my clarification of this charged, usually taboo subject, but they also had an opportunity to talk about it openly in a mixed group, to share their knowledge and stories in an area that fascinated them all. Instead of sexual tension and shyness taking over, both boys and girls participated freely. Arguments ceased. Tension eased. An atmosphere of communication based on common interest was established and I believe that, for a brief period, the boys and girls felt closer to one another.

It's my feeling that boys and girls of this age have a definite *wish* to get closer together, at least sometimes, but that peer pressure often prevents them from doing anything about it. I once put this belief to the test:

First, I asked the girls in the group, "Raise your hands if you wouldn't mind doing a pantomime with a boy."

Two out of seven hands went up. The two came down again quickly, however, when their owners realized what the group consensus was.

Same question to the boys:

"Would you mind working with a girl?" No hands went up.

At the next session, I asked them all to close their eyes, and to turn their backs to the rest of the group, so there would be no chance of anyone seeing how anyone else voted.

I asked the questions again. How many of them would mind working with someone of the opposite sex? Every hand but two (one boy, one girl) went up. Such are the advantages of the secret ballot.

There was no way I could think of at the moment to implement the vote, since they worked with eyes open. But it did confirm my belief that the desire was there. My task was to find a way to set aside peer pressure, so the desire could be acted on.

This year, my 17-year-old daughter, Amy, co-led some of my workshops, and was especially helpful in this area. Her own personal ease in male-female relationships seemed to create an atmosphere in which it was more natural for boys and girls to work together. It wasn't an issue with her, so it was more comfortable

for them.

We did an act-out-a-story session together. One of the children told her own version of the Cinderella story. With our support, she cast it, the non-human parts (the mice that become white steeds, the pumpkin that becomes a coach, etc) as well as the human characters.

The girl wanted it to be a movie, so we pretended we were shooting a film of the story. Different sets—stepmother's parlor, chimney corner, throne room, etc—were located in different parts of the room. The story progressed as the "camera" (Amy) moved from scene to scene. As the scene was being shot, the characters would improvise the dialogue. Then, when the story moved on to another scene, the characters in the previous scene would continue action in pantomime. I told them the idea *was* that life goes on even when the camera isn't on you. (My secret motive was to make sure that everyone kept busy while someone else was "on." It didn't work too well.)

When we got to a scene between king, queen and prince, a problem developed. The prince

was a handsome Puerto Rican boy named Jose, with a great mass of wavy, unruly hair. He had wanted the part badly and seemed to fit it physically, so the story-teller/director chose him. But, though he liked being a prince, he turned out to be quite wooden, and resistant to the whole idea of having a princess, let alone a pretender like Cinderella. I set up a scene in which the king and queen questioned him about his ideal princess.

Queen: What girl do you want for a princess?

Prince: I don't want no princess.

King: You're a prince, y'know. You gotta have a princess.

Prince: No, I don't.

Queen: Yes, you do, dummy!

I intervened. "If you did want a princess, Jose, what kind of girl would you want her to be?"

"Well . . . well, she's got to be very pretty. And she's got to cook and bring me a lot of good food."

"OK, but remember, she's also a princess. Do you want her to dance well? Talk well? Be smart?"

"I don't know. She's got to cook good, that's all."

In the interest of the story, we passed over that male chauvinist note and proceeded. But the ball scene came and the obligatory meeting between prince and Cinderella. Again, Jose was resistant:

King: Cinderella's coming. You gotta dance with her.

Prince: I don't know how to dance.

Queen: It's a ball. You gotta get up and dance.

King: Yeah, like this.

He demonstrated, with a boogaloo.

Prince: I want to stay here. I'm the prince.

And he did stay. I knew the story would abort if I didn't think fast.

I said, "Okay, let's everybody be princes and princesses."

I lined them all up, boys facing





girls, about five feet apart. I had Amy opposite a boy and placed myself opposite a girl, to model the activity. I said that we were going to approach each other very slowly, like a slow motion march. Then, when we were a short space apart, we were going to bow to one another. Finally, all at the same moment, each prince would say something to his princess to "break the ice." I didn't care what was said—"nice evening" . . . "nice ball" . . . "you have a nice dress" whatever—to open a conversation. Then the princess would respond. After that, the princess was to take the arm of her prince, and they were to dance.

I demonstrated with my partner; Amy demonstrated with hers. I was hoping to turn it into a kind of ritual, within the story, to ease the awkwardness of this unusual one-to-one confrontation between boy and girl. I wanted them all to speak at the same time, so no one would feel self-conscious about doing it alone, or risk being audited by others.

I felt a lot of tension in the room, reluctance mingled with anticipation. But no one opted to sit it out. They all watched me, awaiting my signal. I gave it. The first approach was not too successful. Several of the boys didn't approach their partners at all, simply standing where they were, watching the others. In these cases the girls had begun to approach, but seeing the boys hang back, stopped themselves. Two other couples did approach one another, but the partners didn't look at each other. Instead the boys looked around for their friends, and giggled. But one couple, a tall, cool, enigmatic girl and a short, brash boy with a magnificent Afro, did make the connection. I didn't hear what they had said to one another but it was clear that they had entered into the spirit of the ritual and had carried it off with style. Stopping the action, I asked the two if they would mind repeating what they had done and said, to show the others. They

didn't mind.

They approached each other gravely and bowed.

Prince: Hello, princess.

Princess: Hi, prince. You look handsome.

Prince: So do you.

"That wasn't so hard, was it?" I said to the others. The children all seemed relieved that two of their number had gone through with it. It seemed to give them permission to do likewise. They were seized with an eagerness to have the experience themselves. I lined them up again and signaled to them to approach each other. I hummed a march tune to help them on their way. And this time they all approached, bowed and said something to each other. Some even continued the contract by making fun of the formal style. I overheard:

"You're handsome, prince. Even if you are stinky."

"Not as stinky as you, princess. And you have bad breath in your hair."

They seemed to be having a good time, forgetting their usual constraint with each other because, I speculated, the pretend activity and its pervading ritualism allowed them to.

"Now," I said, pushing my luck. "It's time for the ball."

I started to hum a waltz tune loudly, and began to waltz around with my small partner, encouraging them all to get the ball scene going.

Most of them did dance with each other, doing rock, or jiggling and some even awkwardly trying to follow my lead. I even got the king and queen to join in. But not the original prince. He sat stonily on his throne and watched us, to the end.

In a later session, my daughter made up and led an exercise that had more significance in the realm of boy-girl contact.

First, she said, "Go be by yourself, in your own place. Don't talk to anyone else, and do anything you want."

After some loitering and asking for the instructions to be repeated, they all found a corner and something to do.

Then Amy said, "Okay, now find a friend and do something together. Talk, play together, have fun—you know."

Of course, boys paired with boys, and girls with girls, in this part of the activity, and enjoyed themselves hugely.

Then Amy said, "Now, have an argument with your friend."

The room came alive with "fussing" as one of the children called it. How they enjoyed being allowed to "fuss" without reprimand!

When the argument had reached a high pitch, Amy asked for calm and quiet. "Now, without touching each other—no touching is allowed, remember—have a pretend fight with each other. Any kind of fight you want."

Of course, bedlam erupted, but they observed the "no touching" rule scrupulously. They understood a pretend fight. Most of them pretended either a boxing match or kung fu, but two boys circled each other holding make-believe spears.

When the fighting had run its course, Amy said, "Now get into a group in which there's at least one boy and one girl, and have a discussion about something."

More girls than boys were attending that day, so boys were chosen by girls. Two girls chased the handsome but reluctant prince of Cinderella and cornered him. A boy and a girl who had been paired at the ball got together. Three girls got together with the boy with the Afro, who had modeled princely behavior for the others.

The conversations between them (with of course our helping them get started) all turned into family conflicts—brother-sister, mother-daughter or mother-son-grandmother. One boy and girl got into an especially interesting brother-sister hassle. With this pair as a nucleus, we formed a total fam-

ily group, with each child deciding what role he or she wanted to play. There was a good scattering of roles. We had a grandmother, a mother, a father, an older brother and two older sisters. We actually had more babies than we could use, but it worked out all right.

After we had played out a few scenes between family members, (with mixed success, since impasses developed quickly) we had them all sit around a table. We gave each child in turn a chance to complain about what he found wrong in this family, and what he or she wanted the others to do for him or her that might make life better. The rule was, no matter what any child complained about or demanded, no one else could interrupt or defend himself at that point, until his turn came around. They were pretty good at that, even though a couple of them felt compelled to defend themselves immediately upon attack.

Then we went around the table again. This time each family member was to say what he or she might be able to do to improve family relationships. It was a surprisingly mature and constructive discussion, with each child bringing in his or her own family experiences. Not everyone could get out of the complaining stage, however. One girl, the cool one who had been the model princess in Cinderella, refused to participate in the "helpful" discussion. She preferred to stay in the original role she had chosen, that of a victimized daughter and sister. She used her turn to continue to rail at the others. There was also some flaring up between fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, when prerogatives were flouted.

The overall tone, however, impressed me. The children were able to relate to each other with relative ease, positively as well as negatively, dropping their usual antagonistic attitudes. Again, given a "pretend" format in which contact was allowable and interest was high, boy-girl relationships could flow easily and naturally. ■

The Other Side: the Teacher as Student

Anne Martin

Recently I participated in a poetry writing workshop for teachers. I found the experience so involving and interesting that I would like to describe it. Some of the insights I gained are directly related to questions raised in the entries of writers in this *Newsletter*; only the articles in the *Newsletter* are all written from the perspective of the writers and teachers, and I want to explore the opposite viewpoint—that of the student who is the object of the writers' efforts. Although the children apparently haven't yet begun to record their experiences with the writers, I've now had the special experience of being on their side of the fence, and maybe my feelings parallel some of theirs.

There is a further reason why I would especially like to present my impressions to the *Newsletter*. After I finished my workshop sessions, I remembered that a few years ago Phillip Lopate wrote an account of a writing course he had given to teachers. I looked it up (*Newsletter* 1971) and re-read it with mixed feelings, but was definitely stung by this sentence in his opening paragraphs: "I was heartened by the fact that most of the teachers were rather bright looking and under thirty-five." I wonder if this age bias is general among the younger writers who teach in the schools. If so, I am all the more eager to chronicle the reactions of a tired-looking teach-

er, over forty, to a writing workshop.

The poetry writing workshop was offered to the teachers in my school system in Massachusetts as one of many subjects in different areas. Most of the other workshops were one-shot deals or very specifically skill-oriented, but this one was a series of six two-hour sessions, and I was looking for a course in depth and free of educational jargon, so I signed up. Later it was joined with an offering by the Greater Boston Teachers Center, which meant that it had participants from all over Boston. Since several people had to travel some distance to get there, the course was given from 4:00 to 6:00 on Thursday afternoons, which sounded like a discouragingly exhausting time to meet on dark winter days. As it turned out, the end of the week late hours didn't make any difference to our enthusiasm, except that I would go home too stimulated to work on my usual school preparation. (I learned to prepare ahead so that I could collapse happily on Thursday evenings, while pulling together my impressions of the day.) So my first discovery was that while after-school meetings are usually a drag, an intensive course which is personally involving can be a reviving experience.

It had been many years since I sat in a class as a student, and at

the first session I re-experienced all those forgotten sensations—the curiosity about my fellow students as I looked at them and listened to them (I knew some of them slightly but none really well), my need to orient myself physically in the space of an unfamiliar room, the slight anxiety about how the teacher would approach the class. The space was a long thin "conference room" with tables joined in a row, so that it was hard to see or hear someone at the other end. On the first day it was stifling hot, and on succeeding days it was either too hot or too cold, with no means of adjusting the temperature except to throw open an outside door and freeze. By the second session, we automatically moved the tables closer together so that we were jammed against the walls, but at least we could maintain some eye and ear contact with each other. It remained a bare, uncomfortably arranged set-up, but maybe its very impersonality was an asset in eliminating distractions when we began to try to write.

Whereas most college courses maintain a physical as well as psychological distance between instructor and students, this writing class was so small (about 15 people) and in such close quarters that when I tried to size up our poet-teacher, Nina Nyhart, I felt more like a child who wants to know what kind of person he will live with in a classroom than an adult who evaluates the competency of an instructor. In the first few minutes I was struck by Nina's odd combination of trimly controlled reserve and articulate honesty about feelings. As the session went on, and in the rest of the course, I admired her increasingly for the way she ran the workshop with quiet warmth and yet a firm idea of what her values were, along with a wry sense of humor that could put things in the perspective of the real world of people and schools. I think I would have been put off by an

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over-enthusiastic bubbling approach to poetry, or a self-important, analytical, therapeutic one. I know I would have resented someone who was a critical authoritarian, or who used facile manipulation to get us to write. Nina's approach was precisely right as far as I was concerned.

Having talked glibly for years about the significance of the relationship between teacher and kids in setting up the conditions for writing, I was hit by the reality of this when I was a student instead of a teacher. I realized in the workshop how important it was to me that Nina was making a continual effort to be openly herself, even with a diverse group of strangers, and that she was gradually sharing some of her own experiences as a writer. In an unobtrusive way, Nina shaped the course into an absorbing, deeply probing experience for all of us.

My awareness of the relationship between teacher and students in the workshop strengthened my feeling that the actual methods of helping children open up in their writing are probably of less importance than what goes on between people in the classroom. For a long time I had noticed the thread of dissatisfaction with bright ideas and gimmicks that has run through the diary entries in the *Teachers & Writers Newsletter*, which was most precisely and eloquently expressed by Norman Weinstein recently in his article about his experiences in West Virginia (*Newsletter* Vol. 6, Issue 1). Kenneth Koch's ideas are great, but ultimately they are what work for *him* with kids, and need not be taken as literal lessons for how to teach writing (as I'm

afraid they are by too many teachers). In our workshop we did start with some of the mechanical devices to get us to write—acrostic poems and word bowl poems—and I guess they succeeded in being non-threatening ways to loosen up adults who may never have tried to express themselves in writing before. I was familiar with these methods (as many of the other participants weren't) and perhaps for that reason found them restricting rather than helpful, though apparently they worked for other people. What did happen to me unexpectedly through the mechanical writing devices was that I started getting quite different poetic ideas from some chance words or phrases that came to me, and then I went home and expanded these into poems of my own. The particular class exercises were just a stepping stone into new means of expression.

When I say I wrote “poems” I must qualify by explaining that while I have done a fair amount of writing, I had never attempted to write poetry and of course never succeeded in writing any during the period of the workshop. What I was beginning to do was to distill some experience or idea or feeling into much more tightly-knit concise prose than I had done before. Thus the class exercises were a means of helping me find what I really wanted to say, or as Norman Weinstein put it in his article, to “emerge with something that must be uttered.” This was a process that I had obviously started before I joined the workshop, but I think it was encouraged not so much by the particular writing assignments but by the excitement, pleasure (and pain) of

writing that was engendered by Nina's attitudes and her reactions to the writing of children, “real” poets, and the workshop members. I can't speak for the other participants, though I think their interest and responsiveness was evident, but I found myself not only involved in working out more writing ideas, but also in going back to reading poetry which I hadn't done for a long time. As a compulsive fiction reader, I think I had forgotten how to read poetry, and the workshop not only revived my interest in this but made me much more sensitive to poetic expression than I had been since college days. As a matter of fact, I couldn't quite understand why I had neglected reading poetry for such a long time, unless it was a kind of protective laziness that caused me to enjoy poems when I came across them accidentally, but prohibited me from seeking out poetry books at the library or bookstores.

During the sessions, I was surprised that when we would be asked to take about twenty minutes of silent time to write something, after a period of preparation and discussion, we all managed to do it. I had thought that I could only write at my typewriter in my room at home, but here I was scribbling in pencil on scraps of paper, on command rather than at my own prompting. There were some times when I ran into difficulties. Once we had a more lengthy and vigorous discussion than usual about teaching. I had wanted to avoid discussion and do more writing, but was unable to refrain from getting drawn into the issues, with the

result that when we were supposed to start writing, I couldn't make the transition, and began to block completely. As the other people dutifully settled down to write, I felt the panic that I have seen on children's faces when all around them people were working and they were unable to get hold of the assignment. By the last few minutes I started to uncork and wrote something I felt was trivial but adequate. On other occasions, I would start to write and then find my thoughts so inchoate or private that I didn't hand them in to be shared. Usually I would work on these at home for myself, or else discard them for the time being. I had always had sympathy for the children who stared at their empty papers for half an hour before they could begin (most of them got to be especially good writers later on), and I usually allow children to keep their writing secret if they want to, but I had never before really known what it felt like to be panicked into immobility or to acknowledge my need for privacy within a classroom setting.

Along with the relationship between teacher and students, I became increasingly conscious of the relationships built up among the participants of the class. Starting with a shy strangeness between us, we gradually relaxed more with each other, got to know each other better, and built up the beginnings of trust. The first time that I had to read my "poem" aloud to the group, I read it at breakneck speed so that it must have been quite incomprehensible to a listener, even with the script in hand. Nina observed gently that this was what kids usually did in embarrassment at reading to the class, and in later sessions she urged people to have the courage of their own writing and read slowly and well. We all learned to do that, and consequently to listen more carefully. At one of our later sessions I finished reading a short poem to

the class, and after a moment of silence a member of the group said firmly, "I wish that if I wanted to say something I could do it so clearly and directly." He said it as though he meant it, and I felt good because I had been aiming at concise clarity, and it had evidently come across. It takes time to build up understanding and appreciation of other people. By the end of the sessions we were just getting to the point where we felt really comfortable with each other and within the class setting. For this reason, and because the workshop was so valuable to us, we are trying to extend it on a more advanced level.

It might be said that O.K., I got quite a bit out of the course, and it was good for me to have to take the role of a student for a change, but what difference will it make to my teaching or my classroom of second graders? Discounting the obvious gain of developing greater sensitivity to language or better understanding the creative process, etc. etc., I think the real benefit was the necessity of re-thinking my relationship to my children at school and my role as a teacher. We throw these terms around so much that they lose meaning, but in every article in the *Newsletter*, in every day in the classroom, this self-questioning is the basis on which we build a working relationship with children. Our screen of educationese often obscures the reality that who we are determines what we do with children. Phillip Lopate was also concerned with this in his course for teachers when he wrote: "In fact, I was suddenly completely bored with talking about the educational system myself. I realized that this course would have to succeed based on what we created by ourselves and between ourselves."

When I say re-thinking my relationship to children, I'm not talking about the platitude of self-discovery (though, by the way, I still think that's a pretty

valid aim too, even if it is a cliché by now). What I mean is experiencing and tolerating the slow complicated process of growth in ourselves and the children. We can't go into the classroom once a week, or even every day for a year, and expect each child to respond to us by learning to write freely, imaginatively, deeply. Some children may very well learn to do that, and maybe we are even able to help them do so, but there are no sure-fire methods, no dynamic qualities of personality which can bring out the best in everyone, no certainty of teaching approaches. Yet there is always the possibility of change and expanding consciousness, for children and for teachers.

I didn't learn to be a poet in six weeks, nor did I write anything of value, but I began to see how poetry might be written and the way I could use it for my purposes. I also strengthened my conviction that the quality of trust between people, of sympathetic relationship, is not merely desirable but the most necessary condition for me in the classroom. And I became aware of changes in my own attitudes towards the writing of the children in my class—much less involvement in the children's products, more interest in what each child was getting at, more toleration for uneven qualities of work, or a child's temporary disinclination to write. In short, I was trying to express more concretely my respect for each child's development, and to have the patience to wait for him and help foster his growth instead of imposing my own ideas on him. I'm afraid that the multiple demands of a school curriculum may frequently deflect these real aims, and often I'm too harried to pursue what I would like to do. But, engulfed as I am by the confusing demands of a classroom, my involvement in the poetry workshop at least helped me to focus my attention at school on what is really important for kids—and adults. ■

Outside I Feel Mad, but Inside I Feel Mad -- a Diary

Vicki Finder
Lillian Moy

The following exchange of letters between teacher and student, at a Manhattan elementary school, resulted from an assignment to keep a diary.

October 15, 1974

Dear Diary,

I feel very loney these days. Donna isn't here anymore and neither is CeCe. I wish they were here. I feel kind of funny staying with 4, 5 and 6 grade class. I remember the time William Wung bothered me. When I think back it was fun. In fourth grade me and my friend (Wai-Ying) were always playing with them. Sometimes I wish we could set the clock back. I really miss them. Sometimes I felt sorry for telling you to make him stop because I think it was fun.

Dear Lillian,

Your letter reminded me of one of the stories from the book *Nobody is Perfick*. Do you remember the boy who kept teasing his girlfriend? It is hard to adjust to a new class—especially when we look back with romantic attachment to the past. I also miss our old class—even though it was a difficult class to teach. I went home many nights feeling depressed and frustrated. But I enjoyed it. *Now* I can say that, because I also miss "the good ole times." Perhaps if we look forward to the future and the things that we hope to do *this* year it would help. Have you thought about some exciting things you hope to accomplish this year? I would appreciate it if you would share these with me.

V.F.

Dear Diary,

I think I would like to have a music section. Like songs we sing and learn how the notes are. I also have music books. I have a statue from William once. It said "I Can't Stop Loving You." My sister said it was

cute and started teasing me. I also have love letters too from him, but I threw it away. What about you? Did you have any of those? I want to know if you could make a list of what we are going to do this year, including trips.

Dear Lillian,

Perhaps I could talk to Ms. Pineiro about using her class piano while they are in gym or on a trip. I will try to get some sheet music and teach you the scales

E very
G ood
B oy
D oes
F ine

This is how I remember it.

I also saw William the other day. Perhaps you and William could begin writing letters. Now you know what the cliché "the grass is always greener on the other side" means. When it is behind us, we always appreciate it more. Next letter I will tell you what we will study this year . . .

V.F.

P.S. Why did you throw the love letters away? Les used to write love letters to me, especially when he was living far away in Paris. Many of those letters were somewhat embarrassing, but I loved getting them.

Dear Diary,

I feel good today. It will be great if we had a

“Shuming and William. They always bother me and everything. It seems that you don’t enjoy it, but a few days later you wish it would happen again. I wish it did.”

piano. Well, in yesterday’s letter you said to write to each other but if I did, how could I give it to him? I don’t get to see him at all. I wish he was still in this school. I threw the love letters away cause they were teared and old and wrinkled and mushy. I hate mushy letters. They make me have goose bumps. Do you get to see him everyday?

Dear Lillian,

Do you know William’s address? William often comes to school to pick up his younger brother. Perhaps you will meet him. You might start writing to him with the excuse that you would like someone’s address or information about the junior high schools.

Can you explain to me more about how you felt when you read those “mushy” letters? Does that mean that you disliked the letters?

V.F.

P.S. You seemed more relaxed today. Do you still feel lonely and uncomfortable?

Dear Diary,

In yesterday’s letter you ask me to write a letter and pretend to ask about junior high school. Well, it won’t work.

1. I don’t like to write to boys.
2. If anyone finds out I’ll be a dead duck.
3. I have a brother to ask him about junior high.

You can’t explain so much about the letter cause it’s hard. It’s kind of I love you or Lillian and William and those stuff. I used to have a big problem. Shuming used to like me and William and everytime I start to talk to Aldo they start to give him warnings and I sometimes felt sorry for him. They used to do this: If you talk to her one more time I’m

going to beat you up. In the beginning of the year he used to watch me whatever I do. Whatever I do he always follows me. I get really embarrassed and cover me with a book. He gave me a valentine. Shuming and William. They always bother me and everything. It seems that you don’t enjoy it, but a few days later you wish it would happen again. I wish it did.

Dear Lillian,

I understand how complicated it can get. At first you hate all the “mushy” attention but later you miss it. Why can’t life be simpler? I guess you would have to take a chance if you wrote to William. You would have to trust that he wouldn’t tell anyone. But if it were important enough you might take the risk.

I was once very shy so I understand how torn you must feel. What would happen if anyone found out you really liked each other and were writing letters? Perhaps you can hope to run into him on the street. What would you say to him then? Would you shy away or take a chance and reach out to him? Perhaps being shy and such is the way our parents taught us to act but will we get what we want if we act that way? You and what you want is important.

V.F.

Dear Diary,

What if I really told you last year everybody knew and made fun of me. I can’t mail a letter to him cause his whole family will know and mine too. So it is very difficult. Do you get to see him everyday? Because if you did I maybe could give the letter to you so you could give it to him. One time I met him on my way back to my house. Well, he was walking down and I was walking up. Well, I didn’t turn away or anything. All I did was say “hi.” He did the same thing. You know, there is something between us like he always

used to do what I do. It sometimes got very embarrassing.

Dear Lillian,

Is it true that everyone knew you liked each other or is that how you felt? Sometimes it is difficult to tell the difference between what is *really* happening and what we think is happening. If everyone knows that you like each other, why is it necessary for you to hide it? Perhaps you are only fooling yourself.

I see William occasionally, but it might scare him if I were to get directly involved. Do you have any other ideas about how you could approach him? Could your brother, Jimmy, talk to him? Jimmy couldn't tease you if you admitted you liked William. It's no fun to tease someone if they play along. When you act embarrassed he gets the exact reaction he wants. Maybe he could help you.

V.F.

Dear Diary,

In your last letter you said lots of difficult things. I kind of get mixed up. So what do I do? Do I just stop and wait for what he is going to do or what? Jimmy can't help me cause there is no way he could do it for me. Well, it is hard for even him to get in touch with me, too. So, well, what can I do?

Dear Lillian,

Thank you for telling me that you had difficulty understanding me. Sometimes I do that. What I wanted to know was why you are embarrassed that you care for someone? If everyone knows you like William, like you say, what's the difference? Perhaps you are fooling only yourself when you hide your true feelings from Jimmy. Jimmy wants you to feel

bad when he teases you. If he didn't know it was bothering you maybe he would stop teasing. Perhaps you can be more open with yourself and William. I know it is hard, but it might work.

V.F.

Dear Diary,

I think you have solved my problem. I think good names for the hamsters are Bonnie and Clyde. They are kind of like funny names but sound good. I saw this article in this magazine. The title is "Make a Bunny for Someone You Like." Well, I feel like making one for William but I thought of it. I don't think he'll like it, do you? I would like to meet him after school then I could pass him the letter. You think it'll work?

Dear Lillian,

I think *you* have solved your problem! After all, you are the one person who knows what you are really feeling inside. A lot of embarrassment exists only in our minds—like feeling shy. I hope you can feel better about yourself and your feelings. It sounds like you already are.

Bonnie and Clyde sounds great. Perhaps you can suggest it to the class for our vote.

Maybe you could show me the bunny—it sounds like a great Easter present. Perhaps you could give it to William then. I think you can slip William a letter—just be brave.

V.F.

Dear Diary,

I have not much to say about my life. But Thursday I hope you don't have a stomach-ache

Friday. We (my family) are very religious. Like we have these two gods at home, one is a goddess and one is part ape and part man. We sometimes can't wash our hair in a special day or we always can't mention the word monkey at home. It kind of makes fun of the gods. I don't really believe in them. We take some incense and light it up, take something that could hold the incense and then we get down on our knees and pray. Could you tell me how you do it?

Dear Lillian,

I was most interested in your religious ceremonies, particularly because we don't pray together at home. We go to the temple to pray. A rabbi conducts us in prayer. I also have difficulty believing everything that is passed down by my religious ancestors. My people believe in one God who created all. There are many different religious groups. There are the Orthodox (who are extremely religious), the Conservative (who conduct all of their prayers in Hebrew) and the Reformed (who pray mostly in English).

How do you feel when you don't believe everything in your religion? Do you pray in Chinese?

V.F.

Dear Diary,

I think the hamsters are nice. I think the girl would be a good actor for Bonnie and the other could be Clyde cause Bonnie seems mean and everything, but Clyde could make friends and be very friendly. You ask yesterday if I pray in Chinese. Well, I don't pray at all to the Chinese gods. I pray in English to "God" himself. My mother don't know about it, but if I tell her she'll be mad at me. I wish you a very happy birthday.

Dear Lillian,

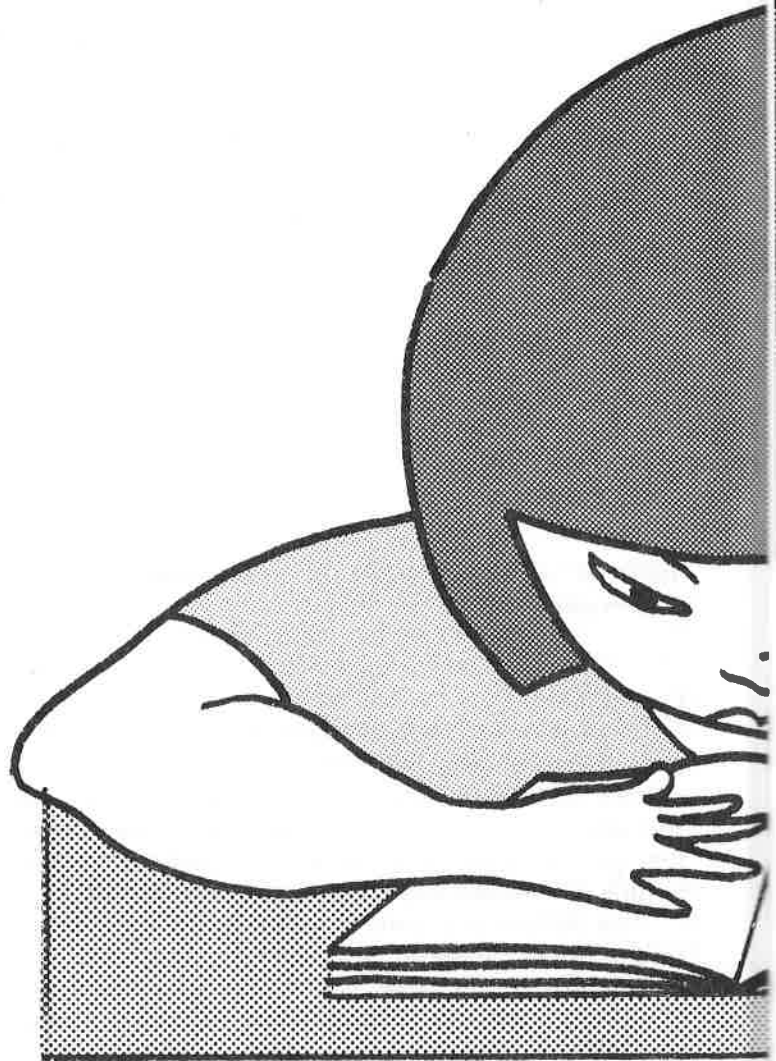
What do you mean by "God" himself? Is this different from the God of the Chinese people? Do you have your own religion? I like to think of my God as a private God. What is the name of your religion? What does religion mean to you? Why do people pray and reach out to Gods?

Thank you for your warm birthday wishes!! Please remind me that we must name the hamsters today.

V.F.

Dear Diary,

Today Miss Silver was our teacher. I think the class behaved well. You might think that I should like *The* teacher. Today I feel different writing to a different teacher. It is alright if you read the other pages. I



don't really mind. Please write back. I hope you have a nice day. So I have to go now so bye.

Dear Lillian,

I feel very privileged and flattered that you not only wrote me a note, but also shared some of your feelings with me by offering to have me read the other pages.

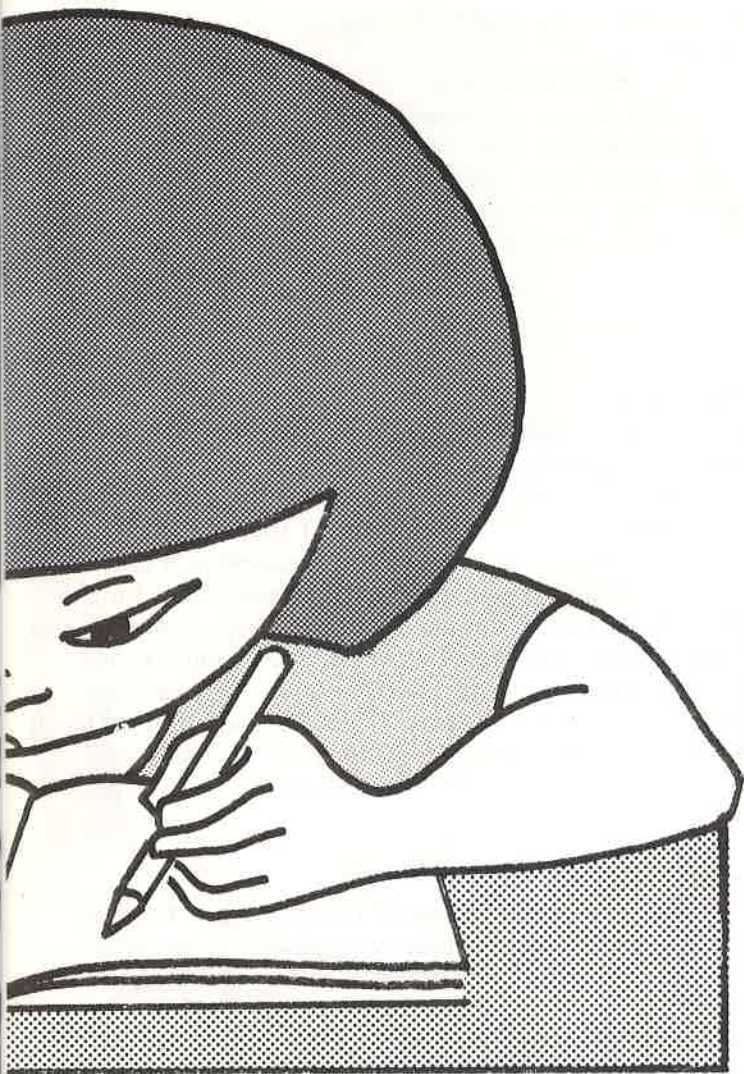
I'm glad that I got to know you a lot better from reading what you wrote. I hope you got to know me a little better from spending today with me in the classroom.

Thank you for your "nice day" wishes. I did have one. Did you? I wish you the same.

M.S.

Dear Diary,

Today I feel bad. Mr. Elliot had to come because Mrs. Silver had to go to game. I liked Mrs. Silver



much, much more better. He kept on interrupting us everytime we start to do our work. I hope Mrs. Finder feels better. He thinks he owns the whole class. I think he is dumb.

P.S. If this letter goes to Miss Silver it is okay. If this letter goes to Mrs. Finder, please read the one before this one.

Dear Lillian,

I guess we all have to learn when to say something and interrupt and when it would just be better to let things go on as they were. Sometimes in an unfamiliar situation I feel unsure of whether I should do or say something that I'm thinking, or whether I should stay quiet. I hope you liked making the feather vest. It turned out well.

M.S.

Dear Diary,

I'm glad you came back! About last Tuesday, my brother told me something that really upset me. He said that he saw William with another girl. Well, I really believed it because he didn't even say anything to me. I am really worried. Shuming and me are really going well. I used to kick and hit him when he make fun of me, but now I just don't do anything and just say something to him. I do believe Jimmy. William is really not my kind of guy. Everytime I'm with my brother and with him he never talks to me. Some people say that sometimes boys are shy when they like you. I don't think that's true, but I believe it. Please help me.

Dear Lillian,

Thank you for your welcome back! You must have felt miserable to hear that William was with another girl. But what does William think when he sees you with Shuming? Perhaps you shouldn't jump to conclusions. Now that you don't see William very often everyday things have changed. Perhaps William was less shy with you before because he was used to being with you and felt more comfortable. Think about this.

V.F.

Dear Diary,

I feel fine today—we had our reading test and spelling test. In yesterday's letter you said, "What does William think when he sees you with Shuming?" Well, he never come to me. After he told me what he saw with William I said why should I be chasing him instead why doesn't he talk to me. It is kind of dumb, isn't it? So what would you do if this happened to you? Would you have done the same thing and wouldn't you be mad? I wish you well.

Dear Lillian,

It is interesting that you ask me that question because frankly I would have probably done the same thing and jumped to the same conclusion. Perhaps that is why I can see the series of events so clearly. But you do seem unhappy, and I believe I would be in the same situation. You certainly have a right to be angry. But who are you angry at and why?

V.F.

Dear Diary,

I am feeling fine. Well, you confuse me in letters sometime. I feel that William is a traitor cause he once liked me but not any more. Outside I feel mad,

but inside I feel mad. How do you think I feel? I still like him, but I don't want me myself to go catch him if he don't want me. What happened the time he stayed after school? Did he mention anything bout me? Well, I'm not sure he was with another girl, but what am I angry about? If he don't want me I won't want him. You think that's right?

Dear Lillian,

But you still can't deny you like William! As much as you fight it, you still like him. What makes it worse is that you think that you shouldn't like him. Therefore, you are fighting two different feelings inside yourself. I think that I understand what is happening inside you because it has happened to me. Sometimes I would like a boy that I knew my parents wouldn't approve of or who would get into a lot of trouble. I knew I was attracted to him, *but I couldn't* like him. There are certain things we believe in and behaviors that we look for in a friend. However, when we meet someone who acts differently, or doesn't fit our ideals for a friend, what do you do then? Perhaps this is what you are fighting, too.

I am sorry that this is sometimes hard to understand. I will try to write more clearly.

V.F.

“I saw William the other day. He just said hi. I think he's ignoring me. I feel that I like him, but I sort of hate him.”

Dear Diary,

I didn't like how the class was the whole day. They fooled around and started to make fun of you. There were people fighting and hitting. I didn't like it. Both the girls and the boys were mad. Most of the times the boys were bad. I try real hard to be good. They don't act like this when Mrs. Finder is here. You should tell them to do homework cause they hardly did anything and in the morning you could tell Mrs. Finder to give them back to you. You may read the diaries I wrote before.

Dear Lillian,

Thank you for your concern. You know, I felt sad and angry that people were fooling around in class today. That's because I know no one really “gets away” with anything. The times I feel good are the times that I know I did a good job and am proud of

it, not the times that I've tried to “get away” with something.

I felt good today that I was able to spend some time with people individually. I know that sometimes getting to know people one by one is more important than making sure that everyone is doing something. Do you know what I mean?

See you soon.

M.S.

Dear Diary,

I am very excited about voting the best pumpkin faces. If somebody wins could they pick somebody to help them? William is really not in my mind anymore but sometimes I think about him. I told my brother how I feel, but he got the wrong idea. He said that I still like William. I get mad and go away from him. Most of the kids in our class act bad. They are always fighting. Last year the boys in our class fought other children not in our class, but the boys this year fight others in their own classes. I feel bad about this. I wrote one letter to William last year. It was about good ol' times. Could you answer back?

Dear Lillian,

I was very proud to see you reaching out to help Ms. Silver like you continually reach out to me. How did you feel about my previous letter. Did some of the things I wrote about make sense? I think you have a point about pulling together as a class and supporting each other. The fights do seem to destroy the unity, just like family quarreling breaks up relationships at home.

We'll vote on the pumpkin in the morning. Do you have a favorite picture? Good luck!

V.F.

Dear Diary,

I feel that you don't write clearly. It's hard to understand. Halloween is such a spooky day. It makes me scared all over. When I think about it. I feel okay these days. I saw William the other day. He just said hi. I think he's ignoring me. I feel that I like him, but I sort of hate him. What do you think I should do?

How would it be if I meet William in eight years from now?

written by
Lillian

If I met William eight years from now, is hard to question. He will probably change his personality. He



might not be skinny or shy. We might not know each other until we knew each other's name. If he wouldn't change his looks, I'll probably know him. Then I would think back when we were at the same school and had a crush on each other. But sometimes when I sit down I think that when I was in first grade he didn't even like me and in second grade too and also in third grade. He knew me since first grade but he don't act like I'm even alive. But he started knowing me in fourth grade. It was just plain "puppy love." And in fifth grade he used a paper and wrote things to me. And near the end of school he gave me a little statue and it was nice how we felt to each other. I could imagine how it will be. We will go on dates and maybe we would talk about the good old times. Well, I really feel he is very nice and it will be great if it happened. I never felt like this in my life.

Ever since I was in first grade to sixth grade I had a crush on William. He looks skinny, had a nice personality. He was always helping my brother. In fourth grade we were always playing tag. I always knew that he was always going after my friend Wai-Ying and I. She lives in Queens now, and a few days after she went to Queens he called her on the phone. I had given him the phone number cause he made up a lie that his sister wanted to have her phone number to ask her something. I believed him, and gave it to him. Later after he called her she phoned me and told me. From then on I didn't trust him. I got mad. I felt very jealous because I knew he'd liked me. I felt he liked her better.

He started writing letters to me, like the mushy kinds: "I love you, from William." On Valentine's Day he gave me a card, one of those mushy kinds. It have a heart in it and a poem and it was pink.

My brother must have told him that I liked him too, but I acted as if I didn't care about him. Most of the people in our last year's class knew about it too. They teased me about it. In the summer my family goes to places like Bear Mountain and always asks William along. There was another boy who was my brother's friend. He liked me too. On my birthday I had a birthday party and my brother told me to invite them. So, I did and they gave me some gifts. In the year when William and Shuming graduated, William gave me a gift. It was a little statue which said, "I can't stop loving you."

I showed it to my parents and all they said was, it was nice. From then on we didn't see each other ever again because he went to junior high school.

I am now in the sixth grade and sometime each day I see him coming back from school. All we just say is "hi" to each other and walk away. ■



Joel Hernandez

Trusting the Imagination

“I found that many of my students distrusted their imaginations and fantasies, and blamed imagination and fantasy for leading them into various forms of trouble.”

David Fletcher

This person, a good friend of mine, has been going through many ordeals. He's at the point where he has to relieve what's within him, it has to come out. Whatever it is that's changing it's for the best, cause once empty, he's able to start out fresh. He knows that this time around, that he's just able to withhold so much because of the amount of space he has to fill. This time he knows what's best, for himself; and how much he is able to withstand.

Joelly Hernandez

From the first day I walked in a classroom in a therapeutic community to teach, I felt that enormous amounts of energy were running rather unchanneled. I felt intuitively my job as a teacher was to set frames that could help guide this energy. The students possessed all the necessary raw materials: passion, real life-experience, motivation, active (if somewhat held in check) imaginations, and a self-taught openness.

I found that many of my students distrusted their imaginations and fantasies, and blamed imagination and fantasy for leading them into various forms of trouble. Many students viewed imagination and fantasy as forces to be suppressed or at least held in check. True, if imagination and fantasy are used as a means to escape reality, they will perpetuate or generate situations that are self-defeating. However, one can learn to use them in positive ways as problem solving tools, reality enhancers, and as levers to increase learning functions. My expectation (and hope) was that slowly and over time my students would learn to relate to the imagination as an ally.

The creative forms presented in this article are examples taken from three separate sessions of a Workshop on the Imagination. The first two writing efforts are from a class titled "No Eyes." Our school is located on a lush island (Hart Island), and I decided to take the class on a blindfold walk around the island. It was an exercise in sense deprivation and trust. Each blindfolded student was led by a classmate. The leader asked questions, handed objects (like leaves, rocks, old egg shells, etc.), and generally guided the blindfolded student around the island. We then switched roles so each student got to both lead and be blindfolded. This blindfold walk was the experience that I utilized, when we got back to the classroom, to focus a creative form around. Experiences or events that become the focus for creative writing or drawing I have taken to calling "lubricators." As the name indicates, "lubricators" loosen the students' creative juices and move their imaginations into flexibility.

The following week our workshop focused on "Full Eyes." This class was based on sense (especially sight) saturation, and hence the opposite of the "No Eyes" lesson. We all sat in a circle and fully concentrated on each others faces. I suggested that they really focus on such things as skin texture, look in the eye, and slant of the nose. We then began making "faces" at each other. I suggested they convey through facial expression such moods as anger, confusion, and joy. After these lubricating activities, I asked each student to draw one other student's face, and then write whatever comes into his or her mind about this drawing. I stressed that the drawing needn't have a photographic quality, but that it could have a very impressionistic and/or surrealistic quality about it. After all, this is a workshop on the imagination!

The third set of examples comes from a workshop titled "Dot Drawing—Dot Writing". We began with a discussion of the words *potential* and *projection*. Since I wanted them to work with potential and projection in their really pure states, I asked everyone to place one dot anywhere he or she wanted on his or her paper. My only instruction after that was draw anything you want beginning from that dot. When the drawing was completed, I requested they make another dot on the same paper, and then write anything they want beginning from this second dot.

The overall objectives of these workshops are to open the students to the power of their own five senses, to stretch their imaginations, and finally to translate the gathered sense information into creative forms. I feel the imagination is similar to the muscles in the body. If it isn't stretched, exercised, and oiled, it will atrophy like an unused arm. The "lubrication" exercises we do in this workshop serve both to limber up the imagination and reduce the student's fear of the imagination.

These workshops also fulfill more "traditional" educational purposes. As my students expand with their imaginations, they also reach for new words to express and explain this new territory. It seems that work with the imagination is one of the most efficient ways to teach vocabulary development. Seen in one way, these workshops are an attempt to give validity to the imagination as an active force in the classroom and in the school curriculum.

Two very creative and energetic student teachers worked with me in these workshops this past semester. I am very grateful to both Vincent D'Jacamo and Nancy Meмона for all their help and numerous creative and sensible suggestions. One workshop I planned on the combination of touch, hearing, and imagination fell completely on its face. No students were interested, and I felt like a complete failure. Vinny and Nancy reminded me the imagination has a life of its own (i.e. it doesn't go just because somebody bends it), that on certain days even good ideas don't take off and that sometimes plans just don't succeed. I hope they student-teach again this semester. ■



He had a very hard time. Look at the kisser. This face that I have drawn has had periods of accidents. Hit by an ugly stick and needs a plastic surgery. This face grew up in pain and agony.

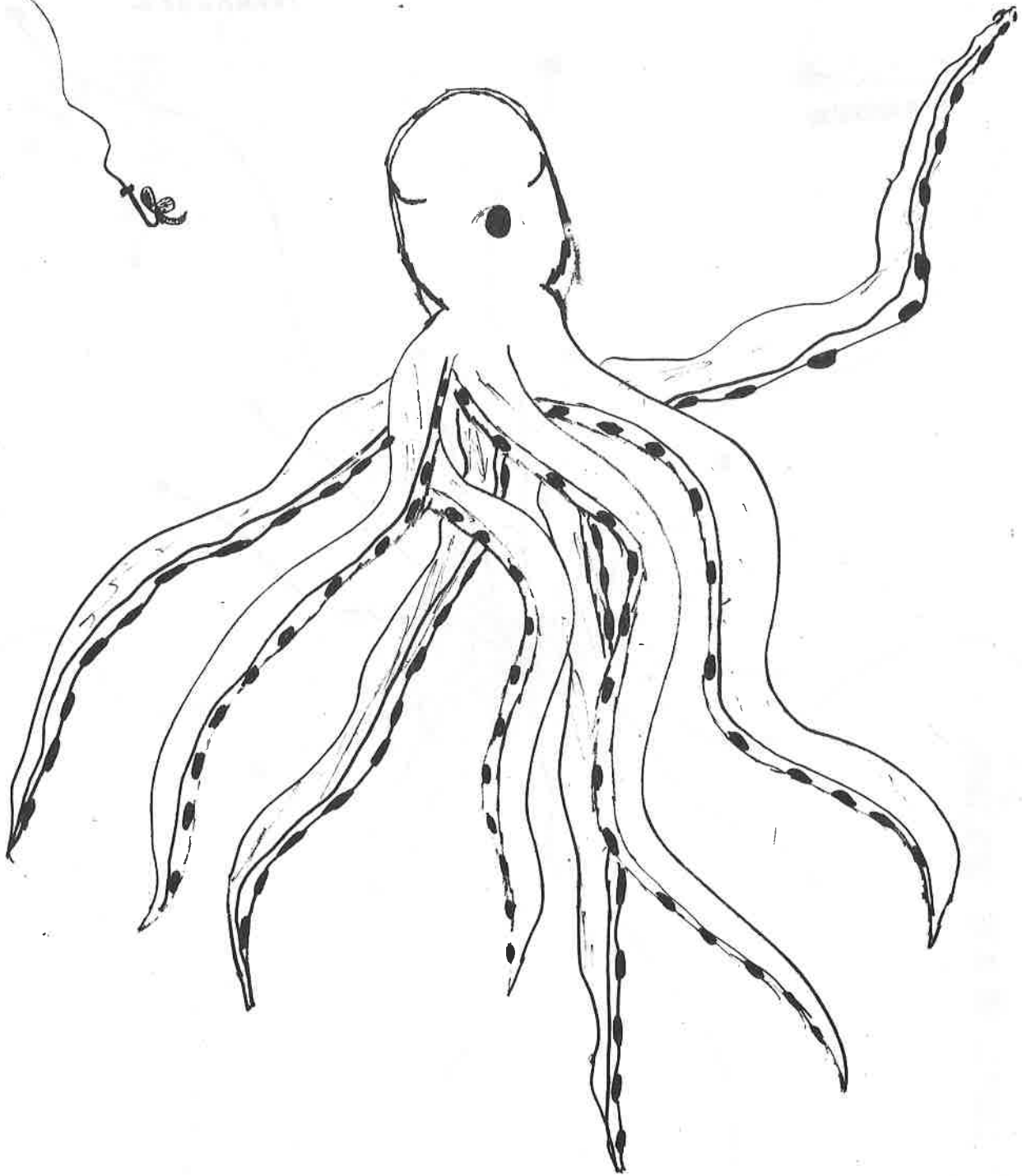
Louis Brown



an ancient Druid. Mystical Satanic conjurer of dark spirits
Anybody tall, lean, with dark or black straw like hair reminds me of witches and evil because that is how I imagine them to be.

Charles Cassidy

David Manners



im Erled Im FREE!

DAVID MANNERS

DOT DRAWING-
DOT WRITING
WORKSHOP

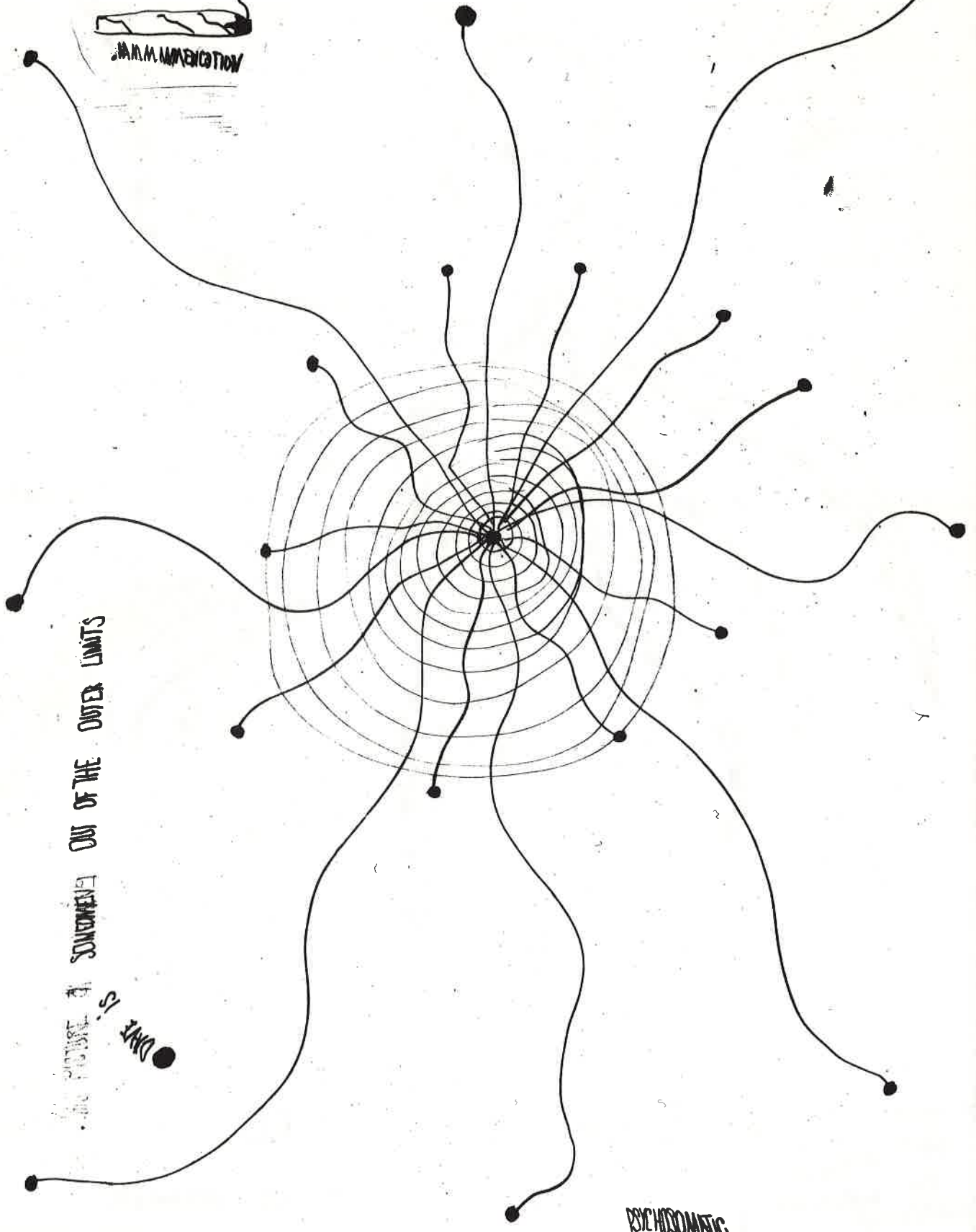
Wilson Fernandez

1982-1983

Wilson
Fernandez



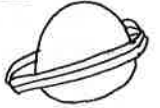
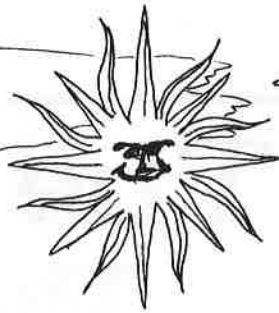
WILSON FERNANDEZ



DATE IS SOURCE OF THE OUTER LIMITS

DATE IS SOURCE OF THE OUTER LIMITS

PSYCHODRAMA



Caterpillars is unique.
you can't change caterpillars into
butterflies. They are one in their
difference. In order to become a butterfly, you
must complete caterpillars. But you can't
finish being a caterpillar, that will always be.
So be a caterpillar, until you become a
butterfly you are a butterfly, as you are a caterpillar.
Its in your soul. It comes only thru suffering.
all you can do is be here now. But remember
that doctors appointment in three weeks, because that is
Now. So you can see it's not hard to be a
caterpillar once you realize that's what you are and that's
what you will always be until you become a
butter fly, which will come after you are here now. Not
then, ~~to~~ not after, not before, not ago, Now.

"No Eyes"

The thought of no eyes frightened me:
trusting another human being with my life
to some degree. The thought of not being
able to see the beauty that life has to offer.
Not being able to do the things I love like
playing sports and enjoying my other
hobbies. I don't think I would be too
happy with life. I would feel very
uncomfortable, and fear all things I take
for granted now. I would feel like an
outcast from society. I would feel society
pity me. Which I hate.

Wilson Fernandez

Without eyes I had to make one
lead me.
Without eyes I had to use my ears.
Without eyes I had to use my nose.
"Nose, try to smell", I keep saying,
but it wouldn't.
So I reply, "Where am I?"
Please tell me; I want to know."
"Don't worry", he kept saying.
He's not going to help me.
Oh, I falling, I falling.
Help—please help me.
I need you.

Melinda Edwards

The Lives of Parents

Phillip Lopate

This project began as an attempt to teach the notion of Character to my fourth, fifth and sixth grade students. I wanted children to deal with the problem of a life story: how a person looks at his life in its entirety, and how his character is reflected in that story, in the choices he made or didn't make.

I read them examples from modern literature: Randall Jarrell's poem about the woman in the supermarket, *Next Day*; Anne Sexton's poems to her father; Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*; Edward Arlington Robinson's *Richard Corey*; along with works by Reznikoff, Pessoa and Auden. But mostly we talked, and the talking kept circling around the lives of their parents, because the model of an adult life most readily available to children is naturally that of their parents.

The stories our parents tell us about their lives have more than a little influence in shaping our own. Some parents are born storytellers and never tire of drawing examples or comparisons from their own experiences. They make of their pasts a rich fairy tale of cruel or loving stepmothers, hard times, golden opportunities, brotherly rivalries, huge snow storms, ration stamps. I was blessed with gabby, remembering parents. My father would also tell stories about outwitting his teachers, dodging homework, tricking train conductors and riding the trains for free. My mother would harken back to the exciting time before she got married, when she worked in a beauty parlor and different men proposed to her (later they all became big successes).

Other parents tell little about their past: an occasional half-story which takes on all the more force for its being so rare. Their silence, too, has a kind of richness, and leaves the imagination room to wonder.

Sometimes it is hard to separate

fact from myth. Were one's parents' childhoods really so wonderful, pastoral, happy—or so gloomy, unloved, bleak? Were the once-in-a-lifetime opportunities they passed up really so golden, or the turning-points so clearly marked? It almost doesn't matter, because the stories have a mythic power even if they are not completely true. There is the myth of the immigrant starting with nothing and making a fortune; the myth of how easy it is now; the myth of regret for the talent allowed to waste away. A parent's stories about the past contain a wish and a warning. And sometimes a hex: "Don't follow in my footsteps whatever you do."

The bringing up of the past almost always involves a certain amount of pain. The sigh, the regret, the coping with disappointment, the slow development of understanding. It is for this reason that we need always to turn to the past and not lock it out. But it also explains why many of the pieces in this collection show an approach toward anecdotal material and then a shying-away or avoidance. Parents who began speaking of a difficult, complex subject would suddenly drop it. Interviews would end with: "Now can you leave me alone, I have to make your dinner!" A few parents felt their children were snooping. It was never my intention to have students spy on their parents' lives or invade their privacy. What I did think was useful was for the

children to know more about their parents' backgrounds, heritages, and aspirations in greater detail and perspective. To be able to look at our parents and our parents' lives with a measure of *objectivity* is to take a crucial first step toward maturity.

The first stage of the writing process entailed students' writing down anything they could remember that their parents had told them about their lives. Many paragraph-long stories in this booklet resulted from that activity.

The second stage contained a more aggressive gathering of information in the form of interviews. The class as a whole discussed the questions they wanted to put to their parents, and arrived at a list. Like anthropologists investigating a primitive tribe, they wanted to know what their parents had eaten, worn and played in that earlier time. But there were also delicately probing questions, like Curtis's: "How did you feel when you were going to have me?"

Some of the children were so much more interested in this period of their own baby years that they never did get around to writing about their parents' lives—a pardonable narcissism, at that age. Besides, infancy stories say as much about a parent's character as they do about a child's. Infancy is that one period in a person's life for which he must accept someone else's version of what happened.

The author of a baby story is always the parent, who has selected what to observe, to stress, and to forget.

The third stage of the writing process went beyond the original questions about parents' lives to a collaboration between the two groups. It seemed to me nicer and fairer to take the interviewing process one step more, and to give both interviewers and interviewees a chance to work together to make a statement. I sent a letter home to the parents asking them if they would cooperate on a voluntary basis with a class project. The support of the classroom teacher, Michael Burns, was very valuable in this business. The letter said in part: "The idea is for you and your child to sit down and think up a story together. Work out the plot, the details, the characters, the setting . . . it needn't be anything lengthy, just so long as it is interesting. First, it may help to agree on a type of story you both like. For example: Adventure, Mystery, Comedy, Horror, Sports, Historical Fiction, Love, Poem, Autobiography or family memoir, Other. You and your child can take turns writing or typing; your child can dictate to you for awhile, or you can speak and your child write it down—whatever way you find

works best for you. There are no set rules in a collaboration like this. The important thing is for both of you to agree on the details of the story."

My hope was that parent and child might put aside some of their traditional role distance and find a way of respecting each other's ideas on a more equal basis through the making of an imaginative work, where there is no right or wrong, no necessarily older or younger. I got the idea in part after reading a very interesting novel written by Erica and Nancy Nilson, a parent-and-child team in another class. Their book convinced me that the writing produced by adult-child collaborations was like no other—a literary unicorn. As a genre it had its own vocabulary, stylistic peculiarities, frailties and charms.

I want to thank those parents, who gave so generously of their time and their selves. I hope that this is only the beginning of a continuous unveiling of child-adult collaborations, a literary field which has been unjustly neglected until now. One of the reasons it has been neglected is that adults (teachers as well as parents) are ashamed to admit that they helped a child with his creative expression. There is a high premium put on the painting or

poem which the child did "all by himself." Often I and other teachers are questioned suspiciously by adults when they see works of art by children which they think are surprisingly mature: "What did you tell them to get them to do this? Did you give them the idea?" And one's instinct is to answer, rather defensively, "No, no, the child thought of it all by himself." We need to be honest now and recognize that there is nothing wrong with adult input in creative areas as well as academic ones. My own style of teaching is to furnish children with plenty of artistic suggestions; and if I think of a good idea which would greatly improve a child's film or story, I'm certainly not going to sit on my tongue for the sake of some ideal of "children's creative purity." I feel there is something very wrong with this guilt or timidity about pooling creative ideas across generational lines. One of the most refreshing aspects of child-adult collaboration stories is that they acknowledge from up-front their mixed, hybrid nature. Adults and children both have things to teach other in the shared activity and the partnership of making art. If the results suggest an impurity, it is the sort of impurity that can be very desirable. ■

Sand Tracks

by Lynn and Carol Waggoner

As our car goes past the tollbooth, the sun seems like a heart pounding on our car. We have been driving for a long time. Henry and Daniel are getting tired, but they're being good. I'm dozing off, when all of a sudden my father slams on the breaks. I look up and all I see are cars. I lean out the window and look as far as I can, but all I can see are cars. It seems we are in a yelling and honking contest, because everybody is cursing and honking.

After about a half an hour, we were parking in the parking lot. After we got out of the car, we headed for the water. I thought that we were jinxed, because when we got near the water it was full. It was unbelievable. All along the oceanside people were

playing in the water. When we finally found a place to lay out our blanket, we did. Then we headed for the water.

After awhile I got hungry, so we went back to the blanket and ate. We laid in the sun for a few minutes. Then my mother got up and said, "Let's go for a walk." We all got up and started walking. Henry and Daniel ran ahead. Then Daniel came and said that there was a dinosaur on the beach. My mother, father, and I knew that there was no dinosaur, but we ran ahead.

Something funny was going on. There were people and cops all around the life guard chair. "Hey, look mom", Henry said. We all looked down. We saw a bunch of weird tracks in the sand. I asked a lady and she said, "It's a creature from the deep."

When the people cleared away we saw that it was only a horseshoe crab.

The Terrarium

by Lisa and Carolyn Ripps

I was taking the dead leaves out of my terrarium, when I noticed something strange. Under one of the leaves of the Sundew, an insect-eating plant, was a peculiar small black object. I didn't think much about it until I was ready to clean up the pile of dead leaves and other junk that I had removed.

There was something vaguely familiar about that little black thing. It didn't look like a bug, or a leaf, or a lump of dirt. It reminded me of a familiar object—in fact if I used my imagination I could almost swear that there were two round spools at one edge of it. I picked up a magnifying glass and examined it. It was a tiny tape recorder—too small to have even come with my daughter's G.I. Joe dolls!

"Could there be a tape on it?", I wondered and if so what was on the tape? I couldn't contain my excitement so I got my coat on and drove to the electronics laboratory where I work.

Even though it was a Saturday, the guard recognized me and let me in. I practically ran to the room in which we worked on the ultraminiature recording devices.

My co-worker was perfecting a tape and film recorder which could read the tiniest microdot or play the smallest tape. Even though the reader wasn't complete, I thought that perhaps enough of the mechanism had been assembled to play the tape—if there was a tape.

For half-an-hour I struggled to remove the spools and there it was—a tape finer than a human hair! Slowly and carefully I placed it in the half-finished machine. Would it work? I pressed the "play" button and waited.

A soft small voice came from the tape recorder. The following are the exact words:

"These may be my last few minutes. I hope that someone will find this record of what happened to me. Early Tuesday morning, I was driving to work with my tape recorder when a detour forced me to drive down a strange street. It was lined by old brick buildings, most of which appeared to be abandoned warehouses. The only other living thing I saw was a man driving a florist's truck ahead of me. He was going so slowly that I started to pass him, but just as I drew even with the middle of the truck my car radio went berserk with static. The next thing I remember was waking up in darkness in a forest of cold and wet plants which I could not identify. The entire earth was trembling, so I clung desperately to the base of a gigantic tree nearby. Eventually the shaking stopped and I and the forest were whished briefly through the sunlight into darkness again. As my eyes became used to the dark, it dawned upon me that I was inside a florist shop of incredible size, filled with huge trees.



Then and only then did I realize what had happened to me. Somehow as I was passing the truck, I had been miniaturized and transported into a pot inside that truck! I yelled as loudly as I could but no one heard my tiny voice. Within a few minutes my pot and I had been bought and carried home by a lady. She hardly looked at the plant—just placed it in a damp terrarium and left for work. I sat under that huge plant for hours before I noticed that the tape recorder I had been wearing around my neck had also been miniaturized. Desperately seeking a way out of the terrarium I began to climb up the tallest plant in the group. The leaves were long and thin and by holding on to the long hairs on the stem and leaf, I slowly edged my way towards the tip of it. The surface of the leaf was moist and sticky and it became harder and harder to climb. I decided to go back down when I made a terrifying discovery—I was stuck! Then, for the first time, I looked closely at the plant I had been climbing. It was a Sundew—the type that traps and eats insects! I do not know how long it will be until the plant senses my presence and lo"

Then the voice ceased and the rest of the tape was blank.

Shuddering, I removed the tape and brought the tiny recorder home. I simply could not bear to open the closed leaf and look inside.

As I sat staring at the terrarium, my daughter walked into the room. "By the way, Mommy, the strangest thing happened at school this week. My teacher promised to record a song we wrote, but he never showed up on Tuesday. His wife called the school, but nobody has seen Mr. Burns since he left home that morning."

My father was born in a house in P.R. A midwife helped his mother. My father says they did not weigh him that they just said he was fat. Then he said too bad he's skinny now. My mother laughed.

One day I asked my mother how was it on Christmas and she told me that when she was small all she got for Christmas was those things that you get from the candy machine! Then she told me that one Christmas they had no tree and her sister Saida which is my mother's sister was angry because they had no tree and they had no money to buy them at that time they was very poor. So my grandmother went out to see if anybody would give her a tree for free. Then my mother told me that her mother found a hook from a Christmas ball and my mother said that was the best Christmas she ever had because from then on she knew how much her mother loved her.

One day when my mother was in her house in P.R. she went to where the animals were. And a cow jumped over my mother's head. And the cow was one of the nicest cows in my grandmother's farm. The cow jumped over my mother's head because she did not know her well.

My mother was very small and my grandmother's farm was ending and she had to get a job so she came here and my mother stayed in Puerto Rico. She stayed with her aunt Carmen. Then one day Carmen told her to make breakfast by herself because she had to go to my mother's school early because that's where she worked. She told her to make boiled eggs. And that she would leave the eggs and water all ready. She just had to turn on the stove. But since my mother had boiled eggs every morning she said to herself that she would rather have fried. And since my mother was only about six she thought it would be no trouble. In these times people bought things like cooking grease by pounds. And her aunt had a *barrel!* of this, it was on a top shelf. Her aunt by the way was the neatest. She had her wooden floor polished and scrubbed!! every 2 days!!! . . . (Not exaggerating) My mother went to get the grease and it collapsed in her hands and obviously the gravity pulled it toward the floor. Then the wooden floor sucked it all and at 5 o'clock in the morning my mother began to clean the floor. 3 hours passed and mother going batty was cleaning the floor. When Carmen noticed that my mother wasn't there she went back to her house wondering about her because she has no idea what was keeping her. *But!! But!! But!!* when she got there she found her floor with the biggest stain that gravity pulled. She went up the ceiling. And mother got such a beating she's been having boiled eggs until yesterday when she left my aunt's house.

—Yolanda Poventud

A Story

by Carlos Reyes and mother

The day that we went to 42nd Street we took the bus on 100th Street and Broadway all the way down to 42nd. We got off of the bus and started towards 49th Street.

We stopped and went into an art gallery, and we saw paintings of nude women. We also saw paintings of birds and other things. We saw a man painting portraits, and he asked me if I would like to have a portrait of myself, and I of course asked my mother if it was alright with her, and she said sure.

As I was going to sit down I kept asking myself how would I look, would I like it, would my mother like it, and of course how much it would cost. I thought that it would take minutes, but forget it. I thought that I would be there for years. When the man was finished, my mother paid him \$4.50 for the beautiful portrait he did of me.

When we came out we went walking a couple of more blocks, and saw a man saying, "Come in and see the magic show." So my mother and I went in. And we saw a ventriloquist, and a lady swallowing four swords at the same time. We also saw a magician and a witch doctor, and he was doing a lot of weird things.

When we came out we went on for a couple of hours, and we stopped at a place where they sold souvenirs. And I bought a ring, a mini mini mini penny, and a mini mini mini mini dollar. After that we went into another souvenir shop and bought a "Bruce Lee" button.

We went to Burger King for dinner (my mother and I). After dinner we took the bus back home, and my mother and I went to our friend's house, Jennie, to show her all the stuff that we bought.

After that my mother and I went to sleep. Good night.

Interview With My Father

How he met my mother and got married

He was invited to Fire Island one summer weekend.

My mother was invited by the same friends that weekend.

They met each other and agreed to meet again in the city.

After dating for a year and a half they became engaged and in about six months they got married.

Stephen Weiss

An Autobiography Of Adam Gelfand

by Adam and Marvin Gelfand

I was born, September 6, 1963, in Poughkeepsie, New York. It was two a.m. I was born there in Vassar Brothers Hospital because that was the best hospital close to Bard College, where my parents were teaching. Bard was in Annadale-on-Hudson, which was about 30 miles north of Poughkeepsie. My family lived in the gardener's cottage of an old estate that was part of the campus.

In 1964 we moved to Amherst, Massachusetts. On the way, we spent the summer at Cornell in Ithaca, New York because my father was doing some research. We lived near the University, where my father taught economics, in a little green house way back off the highway, and on a little stream. I could get lost in the high grass by the side of the house, and play in the stream (once I fell into it while I was fishing), and when it snowed I could sled on the front lawn. The neighbor's children had a swing, and a tire on a tree, and we all played together. There was a pond in the middle of the campus, and many baby ducks, and my father and I would feed them.

In 1967 my mother had another baby, my brother, Jeremy. He stayed downstairs in my mother's study, and I had a room upstairs. Once I rolled down the stairs, from the top to the bottom, and my parents had to put up a fence at the top.

In the summer of 1967 we moved to New York City. While the movers brought our stuff down from Amherst, and my father looked after the moving in, we stayed in Brooklyn with the Monaghans at their house. I was homesick for Amherst for a while. Then I went to Riverside Nursery and started making friends. I went to kindergarten at P.S. 75.

In 1969, on a Sunday, I fell off the Firemen's Monument on my block, and broke my wrist and cracked my head. I spent two weeks in St. Luke's, and later had to have an operation to set my wrist.

School is fun because I have good teachers—when ever you have good teachers school is fun. We go away in the summertime to the beach or to day camp. During the year I see movies, hockey games, baseball games, track meets, and eat out and go on walking tours. We play a lot of sports—baseball, skating, tennis, soccer, basketball. I take judo lessons, and I have an orange belt.

Last summer, at Fire Island, we stayed in Fair Harbor. Out there, there are hardly any cars and very little pollution. You can walk around barefoot and just wear bathing suits. Jumping the waves in the ocean is great fun, and riding the waves on a raft. Getting beachglass and seashells is fun, and playing running bases. The town only has two grocery stores, a liquor store, a restaurant, a post office, and a firehouse. It's nothing like the city.

Right now, I collect comic books and coins. I watch a lot of T.V. fights with my little brother, and complain about homework, and think I'm great.

My mom is always telling me that I'm so lucky that I can go places and do things because when she was young she sat around doing nothing. And she wasn't allowed to go out. But she really doesn't tell me much about her.

Cheap!!!

Greta Hansen

My mother told me that when she was in 6th grade she was the tallest one in class. Her classmates would sit her in the back of the classroom because if she was in the front of the class some of her classmates could not see. So they and the teacher put her in the back of the class. She would slide on her chair when the teacher asked her a question. And now my mother is the tallest one in the family.

Curtis Ortiz

During the war my dad was in the French underground called the Maquis. It all started when the Nazis arrested all the Jews and sent them to concentration camps. My dad and his parents were arrested too but he managed to escape and was hiding for a long time in the woods and in farms. Then after he got to know some people who had contact with the underground and he joined them. The underground got their weapons and supplies from England, they were dropped from planes by parachute. My dad fought with the underground till the Allies landed in France and then joined up with the regular French army.

—Barry Brenig

“... People who are experiencing, and therefore teaching, are the only real teachers and they will create their own technique.”

—Krishnamurti

WRITING AS MEDITATION

Phyllis Tashlik

Several years ago, free schools and universities were created by students and instructors as a protest against the inadequacies of educational institutions throughout the country. At the time, I was living near the New Paltz campus of the State University of New York where students had just launched an Experimental Studies Program. Its purpose was to encourage innovative courses and “experiences,” to help students rediscover the learning process and, in some cases, to free students from the constraints of grades and credits. Intrigued by the possibilities of teaching in a non-coercive, non-authoritarian non-school, I decided to introduce an idea for a writing workshop that was, for me, extremely meaningful and worthwhile. I submitted the following description for the Program’s bulletin, and waited for students to sign up:

Each of us has a unique voice, though it is often muffled by other voices we have absorbed. The other voices represent all the “shoulds”; what we should think, should feel, and how we should express it. This workshop will help students connect with their own voices through the experience of writing. The emphasis will be on writing as a type of meditation, a process that helps the student reach his or her own center and the source of inner knowledge. No previous writing experience is necessary. The student will be exposed to a discipline that can be used outside the classroom. It is

both self-therapy and art; a kind of art form of the soul.

A large group of students did respond, and we met for the first time in one of the college’s dimly lit lounges. The first session was a bit shaky. Everyone was a little shy, including myself. But all was going well until the moment when everyone was to sit down and do some writing. Several people wanted to leave at that point, and gave all kinds of excuses why they weren’t able to spend the time writing—just yet. By the second meeting, there were fewer students, but a solid core group had formed and we were able to really begin.

The rules were quite simple. Everyone was to write *daily*, no matter what, choosing anything from that particular day to reflect upon in writing. We met twice a week to share what we had written and discuss it, and I then

“The writing which reflects the way the person has experienced and interpreted his or her life, is authentic only if it has been completed voluntarily.”

collected, read, and commented in more depth about the content and “style” of the writing. This was not a course in “Creative Writing.” My hope for the workshop was to introduce students to a process and discipline, based on writing, that could lead to greater insight and self-knowledge. There was no emphasis on correctness of style or artful arrangement of prose or poetry. Whatever drama, fantasy, poetry, letters, or demons emerged were all reflections of the self and of the student’s journey inward. Both style and content led back to the self and helped to explain the self. The themes of their written work were the patterns of their lives.

The value of writing, rather than meditating or utilizing any one of a thousand other methods and devices that have been developed for this purpose, is that months later the student can actually reread what he or she experienced during the moment of search, or discovery, and reexamine it with the objectivity of time. Often, truth reveals itself slowly, and the certainties reached at one writing session are later understood as merely one step of the evolving process. Truth turns out to be fiction. There are layers and layers of noise, homilies, others’ voices, rhetorical and historical voices that must be gotten through before the discovery of the student’s own unique voice is possible. It requires time, patience, and the same quieting of the mind that is required by any

system of meditation. Sometimes you must write and write, only to discover nothingness:

I'm sitting here concentrating, so intently. My mind feels sharp as a bell, clear from any extraneous matters. All my attention seems as if it's centering on something. But what? I have nothing to say; yet I can't walk away from this paper. I just feel like writing and it doesn't seem to matter in the least that I have nothing to say. This never happened to me before. I write when I have to, or when I have something to say, or when I'm depressed and troubled. But I'm writing for none of those reasons now. Why am I writing? What sort of thoughts are trying to creep from my brain, through this pen, onto this page?

(Karen Fleischman, student)

The discipline involves the total being; often, while writing, the person experiences physical changes such as jumpiness, fidgetiness, as during the early stages of meditation. The pen is a burden, the words too difficult to reach. Later on, the process leads to such deep revelations that the person may react with tears or an intense feeling of joy.

There are stages and it takes time and a dedication to the process before the student can begin to sense the difference between the scattered ramblings of thoughts, memories, wishes, and "should-haves" that fill the pages, and the more balanced, clear feel-

ing of having reached close to your core and sense of being. It must be practiced daily, regardless; enacting the discipline on a steady basis supports the person's faith in the process and in himself or herself. Also, avoiding the writing on particular occasions may simply mean trying to avoid knowledge of some aspect of the day that may appear too difficult to deal with. The writing has the potential of making all things, conscious or buried, quite clear. As Karen wrote:

Writing is a way of confronting myself. When I sit down with pen and paper, I can't lazily push all my thoughts to the back of my mind. And once they are there in black and white, I can look at them more objectively. I can understand myself better than if those mixed emotions and thoughts were running haywire through my mind.

Examining what you have written, especially with the distancing of time, helps you to see yourself, your thoughts, your patterns.

As each of the students developed this ability to "see," he or she realized that each day's entry resulted from the choices, conscious or not, that he or she had made during the day. The writing, which reflects the way the person has experienced and interpreted his or her life, is authentic only if it has been completed voluntarily. The individual's own will to write is the energy that sustains the

process and strengthens commitment.

Gradually, patterns make themselves clear; the person may discover that he applies the same pattern of thinking to many different interests and activities, such as forming friendships, self-esteem, sports and physical activities, food intake. Only after these patterns have been seen for what they are can the student begin to change them. One student described the writing as "a purge of the past, helping to flow in the present." And another student wrote:

To solve my "problems" myself is more meaningful and not destructive. I can dive as deep as I want, whenever I feel ready. A purging occurs and I stand up refreshed. I've come to accept change more and every moment in life is just part of the stream, and any event isn't as important as it may seem while it is happening. . . . Writing every day has given me a sense of worth.

(Lucy Nirenberg)

Each student kept his or her papers to reread after several months had passed. With the accumulation of their many entries, each person was actually creating his or her own book. Anaïs Nin, in her journals, has explained that within each person there is a book, a full length story of each unique life, waiting to be written. Each of the students' books was unique and each was "right." There was

“The writing and life must be as intertwined as possible, but with neither substituting for the other.”

no way to grade or consider one book “better than” or “inferior to” another.

My particular role as teacher would have been dishonest if I hadn't already experienced and disciplined myself sufficiently in the process I offered. I had been working on these ideas for several years within a small group of teacher-writers. Ms. Naomi Levinson was responsible for bringing us together and planting the seed in each of us. By the time I had gathered with my own group at New Paltz, I was thoroughly committed to the process; I believed in it and was able to introduce it to others wholeheartedly. Our meetings were valuable experiences, not only for the students, but for myself as well. I hoped to guide, rather than “teach.” As one student wrote, “I can't imagine this ‘course’ being taught in a traditional classroom. It can't be ‘taught’; it can only be experienced.”

I did not approve or disapprove students' work. I read their papers weekly and, after a month, began to comment about the various techniques they could use for seeing themselves through their writing. These methods included an examination of: the choice of content, the language used, the ability to write honestly, the emerging patterns, and the inhibitions of rules they had been trained to follow while in school. Students often wrote *about* letting go, but still couldn't let go in their

use of language or sentence structure. They were encouraged to use free association, to break off in the middle of a sentence if their thoughts raced on, to SCREAM on the page, to examine questions they asked and the neatness and strict logic they sometimes required of themselves.

Specific words sometimes impeded the process, though they pointed the way. For example, students often used “should” and “ought” in describing how the day's activities or feelings should have been experienced. What “should have been” became more important than what “was.” The writing helped them to understand this point of view better.

Eventually, students found certain phrases through their writing which, when repeated over and over, in life or in their writing, helped them to concentrate their thoughts and cope with the changes they were going through in their everyday experiences. These phrases served like mantras, and ranged from such universal concepts concerned with inner peace, love, well-being, life and death, to deeply personal ones created during the process of writing and recognized as a truthful and helpful chant. For example: “All my experiences are mine,” “You can't hold onto life,” or simply “Even if I'm angry at him, I still love him.” Sometimes students used phrases from favorite books like mantras, such as Gurdieff's “When you do a

thing, do it with the whole self. One thing at a time.” Mantras were used both in their writing and in their daily lives. The writing and life must be as intertwined as possible, but with neither substituting for the other.

Students attracted to this writing workshop will most likely have had some writing experience or will have spent much time “wishing” they could write. It is important to point out to them that “I wish I could write” has become “I write.” By committing themselves to the writing, to their own books, they exercise their own will and strengthen their own faith in themselves. “It is a security blanket at the least, but also a stepping stone to greater self and world knowledge” (Lucy Nirenberg).

Before the conclusion of the year, I stopped reading what the students had written. We continued to meet to encourage each other, to discuss various ways of reviewing what had been done so far, to examine the ways in which we had grown; students often shared their books with each other and learned from each other's work. But the writing was now their sole responsibility. The few simple rules continued: write daily, write for yourself, search for the truth, find your centering point, your focus, examine closely what you have written after a lapse of several months.

As one student concluded: The writing is a storm anchor that shifts and moves but helps me keep steady. ■

THE LOVES AND HATES OF



MRS. JONES

Theresa Mack

I wandered into the teachers' room during lunch one day in November. Lois Betts, a fifth-sixth grade teacher, was sitting on the windowsill talking excitedly to the other teachers: "It's all in the eyes, it's all in the looks they give each other. The mother knows the children know because of the way they *look* at her."

She slowed down to explain that her class, which was taking Phillip Lopate's History of Film course, had come up with an idea for a silent movie. The class was steeped in silent movies, every week seeing a great film—*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Battleship Potemkin*, *Nosferatu*. After initial grumblings about the lack of sound, many of the kids had become captivated by the silent film form: the actors' expressive faces and body movements, the atmosphere of the sets, the moods created by light and shadow. The

class had decided to make a silent movie. Not a movie without sound, but a movie whose plot and style were essentially silent. They created a story in which the action—illicit love and vengeful murder—was intertwined with secret discoveries and unspoken accusations:

*THE LOVE AND HATE
OF MRS. JONES*
by Class 5-6-324

The movie is about two lovers. They plan to kill the woman's husband so they can be together, but her children overhear the plot.

One day the husband goes to work at his office. When he goes out to go home, the lover kills him and runs away. The secretary hears the husband struggling. She runs into the hall and finds him lying there. He dies in her arms.

A couple of days later at the husband's funeral, the wife looks at the body and cries. The lover calms her down, and they give each other an evil smile. The children start crying and give their mother a suspicious look. She panics and faints. The plainclothesmen are watching, and they nod knowingly. The lover helps Mrs. Jones walk out. The plainclothesmen follow them. . . .

Lois went on to tell me that, since the idea for the movie had come from the entire class, she wanted everyone, rather than an exclusive little group, to be involved in making it. She had already begun working with her kids on developing the physical expression of emotions by asking them to close their eyes and, as she called out a particular emotion, to try to express it with their faces and bodies without making a sound. She saw this exercise as important preparation for silent film acting.

Suddenly it occurred to me that the school's video equipment might be very helpful to Lois for those acting exercises. "Lois, how about

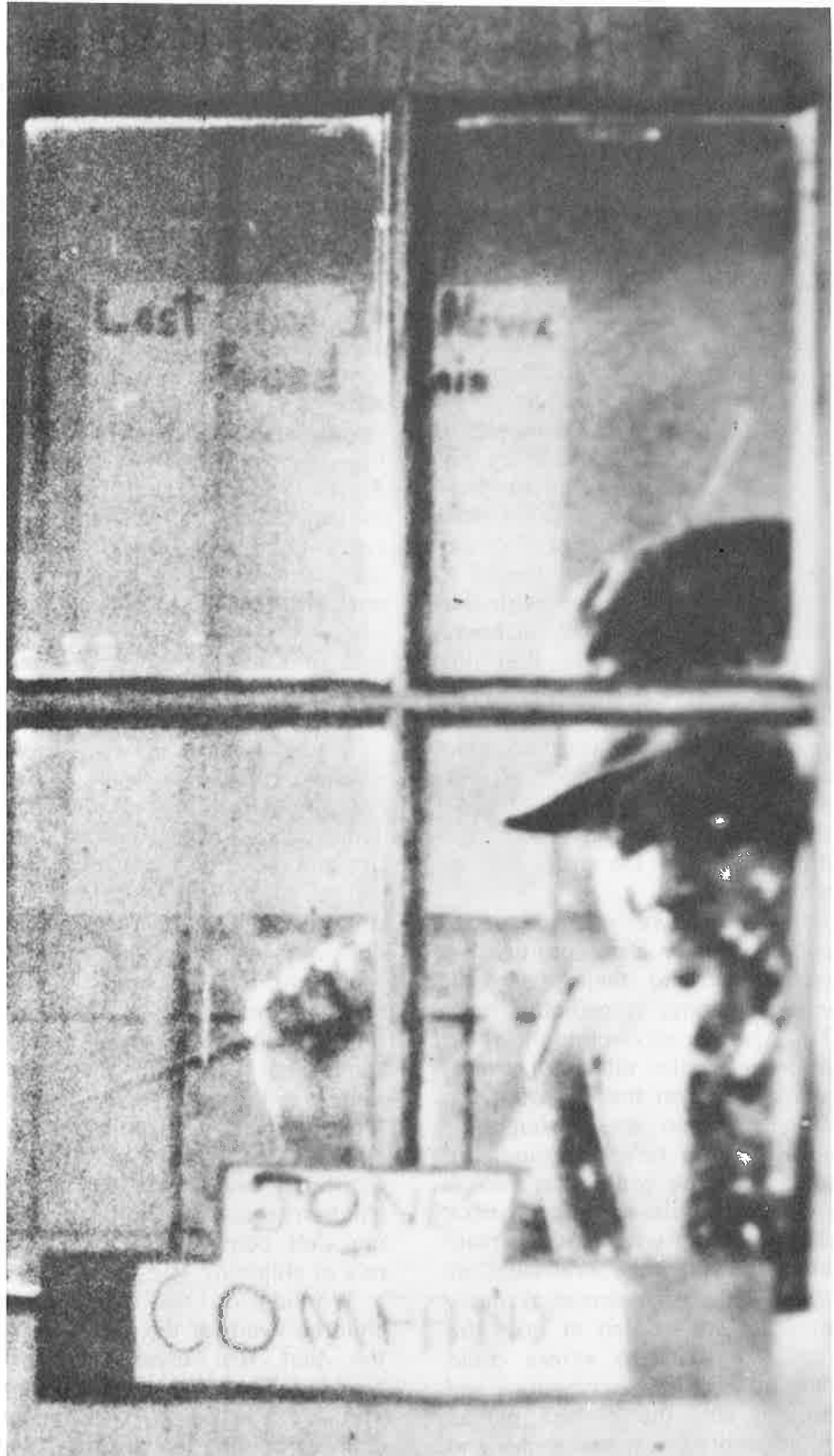
using video?" I suggested. "We could tape the kids' faces as they express different emotions. Then, by playing the tape back, the kids could see how they looked and could discuss which expressions conveyed the strongest feelings." Lois liked the idea, and we decided to try it out later that week.

I came into Lois's class that Thursday and set up the video camera. Most of the kids knew me and many were familiar with video, so they accepted the camera with relative calm. As Lois directed the kids to feel and show different emotions, silently, I panned the camera slowly from child to child, sometimes showing a whole body, other times going in to a close-up on a face. We played back the tape immediately on the TV, and talked about different expressions. Kids began to notice subtle differences between anger, frustration, rage, and jealousy. Then, as Lois repeated the exercise, they struggled to express the emotions more clearly and with more intensity.

After a few sessions of these dramatic exercises with video, Lois and I decided to work together throughout the entire project. I began training kids to operate the video equipment, and she began to select kids for specific roles. Sherrae Givens, one of the most hot-tempered, manipulative, and attractive kids in the school, was cast as Mrs. Jones. James Lucas, low-key, slow-moving and very loving, was cast as lover and murderer. Other kids—some of them extroverts, others quiet and studious—were cast in the remaining roles, which involved at least half of the class.

I was really excited about this project. I was impressed with the kids' movie script, and intrigued by Lois's determination to make this a collective filmmaking experience involving her whole class. Also, I liked the idea of working closely with a teacher. Most of my projects so far had required the support of the teacher, but rarely

"The lover waiting at the door of the office to kill the husband."



her full participation. This project had come from Lois and her class, and she hadn't let concern over technical details hold her back. She had begun immediately to help the kids realize their idea by working on the acting—a good place to begin. Now that I was involved, I could take care of the more technical concerns. This was true collaboration, because none of us—Lois, the kids and I—could do it alone. We needed each other.

We decided to shoot the entire movie in videotape first. From the beginning and throughout the project, *The Love and Hate of Mrs. Jones* felt like a movie to all of us, destined to be projected onto a large screen and shown with the lights out, with the visual richness and subtleties of lighting that film can achieve so much better than video. But Lois and I agreed that video would be a very valuable sketch-pad for us—a good way to develop acting, teach everyone about film techniques, and continue to involve the entire class in the production.

Video allows you to record under ordinary classroom lighting conditions, and then play back your recording immediately on a TV. Also, by connecting the video recorder to the television, everyone can see on the TV what the camera person sees through his viewfinder as he's recording. So, with video, we could tape a scene from the movie and play it back right away for criticism and analysis. Since videotape is reusable, we could redo each scene as many times as we wanted at no extra cost, so that the actors could develop gestures, expressions and timing, and the camera person could improve camera angles and

positions.

These scene developments with video were wonderful filmmaking lessons for the entire class. We'd set up the monitor on "live feed" (whatever the camera sees appears simultaneously on the TV), so the kids who weren't either actors or crew could see what was going on and offer suggestions. We always used several directors for each scene. Anyone who wanted could direct the camera to shoot the scene the way he envisioned it; then we'd play back the scene on the TV and analyze it. Because of the collective nature of this film, kids seemed to feel freer to experiment and to be less sensitive to criticism. Since the class as a whole was struggling to make the best film they could, there were fewer fragile egos than in more individualistic projects.

There were, though, embarrassing and difficult moments. Sherrae and James, who played Mrs. Jones and her lover, had to practice embracing in front of a room full of tittering friends. The first time they ran through the movie's opening scene, they greeted each other with a simple hug. The class watched bug-eyed as they embraced. Sherrae's arm knocked James' hat off, then they separated awkwardly and giggled. There was an unspoken agreement among all of us to leave that scene for later, and move on to the children returning home. Everyone felt comfortable acting the role of children.

Working on this scene ("her children overhear the plot") led to the first real breakthrough in teaching filmmaking with video. The kids began by taping the children coming in the door, then

eavesdropping, and finally beginning to cry. We taped the scene as one long shot, then played it back. It was disappointing. It didn't tell us much visually, and so it was uninteresting. "Who are they listening to?" I prompted the class. "Their mother and her boyfriend." "So, how can you show the audience that?" I kept on. "Show a picture of them talking. . . ." "How. . . ?" "Move the camera, pan the camera so it can show them." I kept pushing. . . . "How can you pan to them when they're in another room?" "Oh-h-h," said Matthew, "you can cut! You can cut to them!"

Some of the kids still didn't understand. They couldn't visualize what effect cutting would have, how it could create the illusion of simultaneity of two things happening at the same time in different places. I decided to direct a reshooting of the scene to demonstrate what cutting could do. I gave the actors and crew fast orders. "OK, camera rolling. Kids come on in. All right, Fernando, go over to the door, peek through and listen—hold it right there. OK, camera, cut (stop recording). All you kids, especially you, Fernando, stay right where you are. Now, Cara, turn the camera over here and get a good shot of James and Sherrae discussing the murder. If you get a close up, no one will even notice they're not in another room. We'll take this shot for just a few seconds. Ready actors? Roll it, Cara. . . . OK Cut!"

I was talking very fast and giving sharp orders. Everyone was obeying unquestioningly, trusting that something unusual was happening. I had no time to worry about whether it would work or

not. "All right, Cara, now set up your shot again on the eavesdropping children. Fernando, be listening again. OK, roll it. Fernando, look horrified and tell the other kids." The kids acted out the rest of the scene. Someone suggested we get a close up of the children crying. Cara cut, set up another shot, and let it roll for a few seconds, then cut to end the scene.

We rewound the videotape, and everyone crowded around the TV to watch. There was a gasp as the kids watched the intercut—the shot of the arguing adults in between the shot of Fernando listening—and a spontaneous cheer went up. *The Love and Hate of Mrs. Jones* was beginning to look like a movie! In just a few minutes, using video, I had been able to show kids the illusion that cutting can create. The demonstration was more effective than hundreds of words of explanation.

At this point, everyone began getting impatient to finish the video version and move into the Super 8 film production. The camera crew was becoming more creative with camera angles and shots, and more sophisticated with the use of cutting. For the actors, though, working with video was still very important. Silent acting, which requires expression with the entire body, was very difficult for them to develop and perfect. As Lois remarked, "Too much of their expression is just in their faces. James, for instance, might have a look on his face like he wants to kill from anger, and yet his body will still be loose and relaxed." She pointed this out to the kids as they watched the video playback, and encouraged them to





feel things with their feet as well as their faces.

We finished the last scene on video, and then returned to the opening scene, which had been left undeveloped. First, the class talked about details of action and mood. Everyone had learned a lot about the constraints of the silent movie form, and now offered good ideas for gestures and clues that would make it clear to the audience what was going on. Then it was time for Sherrae and James to confront the scene—to smooch on the couch, as everyone had agreed lovers would do secretly in the afternoon.

They sat down on the classroom couch with a few feet between them, their bodies and faces twisted in agonized embarrassment (though I thought I saw subtle smiles beneath these looks of agony). "Mrs. Betts, do we have to *kiss*?" groaned James. I couldn't tell if he wanted to be ordered to or forbidden. "No, you don't have to actually kiss. Just put your arms around each other and put your heads together so it looks like you're kissing." They inched toward each other. Everyone in the class was sitting on the edge of his seat, watching closely. Impulsively the actors threw their arms around each other and put their heads close for a moment, then quickly drew back. "How's that?" Sherrae asked. "That looks

just fine," Lois encouraged nonchalantly. "OK, let's get on with it. Get ready to start hugging. The camera won't start until you have. Hug for the count of ten, and then continue on with the rest of the scene."

Sherrae and James clasped each other woodenly, and the camera started rolling. "James, move your hand on her back, move it up and down, yeah, like that," Lois prompted from the sidelines. Since we weren't recording sound, she was free to talk the actors through a scene, as silent directors used to do.

They finished their "kiss" abruptly and looked lamely into the camera. We all broke up laughing. "All right," Lois ordered, "let's try it again. Let's get this over. This time after your kiss move right into the rest of the scene. Don't stop as if you're recovering from a painful ordeal."

Sherrae and James each took a deep breath, as if bracing themselves for the intimacy, and clung together again. The camera started rolling. There were muffled giggles from the class. Only Lois spoke, prompting James some more. "That's it, James, move your arm on her back. That's it. . ." Suddenly the door opened and George Kelly, the assistant principal, stood in the doorway. He was stunned for a moment, faced with Sherrae and James making out on

the classroom couch and hearing Lois in the background giving orders on their "style." But within an instant he saw the camera and understood, and joined us in our screams of laughter.

This was our last scene to develop, so now we were ready to prepare for the Super 8 film production. I edited the practice videotape to include only the perfected version of each scene. The class looked at the tape several times, and decided on what subtitles were necessary. Writing the subtitles was more complicated than any of us had expected because just the right amount of information had to be given—enough to make the action clear, but not so much as to make the acting repetitive.

Ironically, the movie was finished now on videotape, and yet it was totally unsatisfactory to us. The flatness of the image and the small size of even our largest TV screen made the movie feel incomplete and insignificant. Shooting it now in Super 8 film and later being able to project it onto a large screen seemed essential for the script, the acting, the camera work, and the sets to have their full impact.

After the class wrote the subtitles, Lois and I divided the pre-production work into committees, and every child in the class joined at least one committee. We

“... we all enjoyed the irony of the love scene being filmed in black-and-white, and the funeral scene in color.”

considered shooting the movie on location, in somebody's house or in a real cemetery. But instead we opted for building sets and filming everything in school. This way we felt the entire class could continue to feel a part of the shooting. More important, the move would retain that feel of early films which were usually shot in studios rather than on location.

The set-building committee took over the back corridor and started hammering and painting flats. An artistic group worked on the graphics. Other groups of kids organized costumes, props, and decided on set decor. Elizabeth, Stephanie, Iris and Sarah viewed the edited videotape and wrote a shooting script based on the tape, so that the camera kids and actors could refer to it once we began the film shooting. (p. 38)

At this point, we had to decide what kind of film to shoot in—color or black-and-white. Having been bound by black and white while working with the video equipment, the temptation was to work with color film (which is actually cheaper and more available than black-and-white). But in spite of their attraction to color, the kids were still committed to making an old-time silent, which meant using black-and-white. Yet there was still that nagging appeal of glorious color. We decided to compromise and to use *both*: to

shoot the entire first part of the movie in black-and-white, then to switch from black-and-white to color at a highpoint—when the secretary discovers the murdered husband. Kids love using plenty of red food coloring to depict gory murders, and they couldn't bear that this dramatic touch be lost in black-and-white. Also, we all enjoyed the irony of the love scene being filmed in black-and-white, and the funeral scene in color.

Within a few weeks, all the pre-production work was done, and we set aside two full days for shooting. Since the class had spent a morning a week for almost four months developing this project, Lois and I felt the shooting itself should go quickly.

Monday morning I came in early and took the crew out of class to set up the equipment. Then the set committee pushed the couch out of Lois's classroom into a corner of the Writing Room, hung up some pictures, found a makeshift coffee table and covered it with magazines and an ashtray. We had a movie set! With the set and equipment ready, I called Lois. She sent the actors in first, then ushered in the rest of the class. Everyone had been so involved in this production that we couldn't exclude them now. So twenty kids squeezed into empty corners of the room to watch the film shooting. Lois threatened

that if they weren't quiet—back to class. Everyone understood.

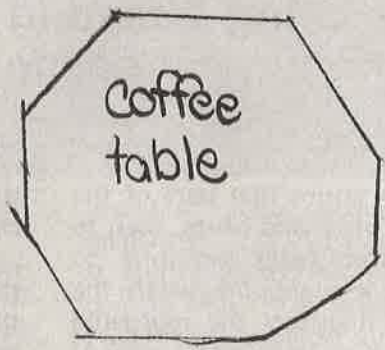
James and Sherrae moved onto the set. They were so familiar with this smooching scene by now that they slipped right into character. Cara set up the first shot, while Jaimie watched the shooting script. I double-checked the focus and the light reading; everything seemed fine.

“Lights . . . camera . . . action!” I shouted. Sherrae and James started making out. Cara bit her lip in concentration and held the tripod steady as she squinted through the camera's tiny viewfinder. She followed James as he stood up and paced around, and then knocked the picture of Mr. Jones off the coffee table. Mrs. Jones and her lover talked feverishly for a few seconds, ending in an intense embrace.

“How did it look, Cara, did you get it all?” I asked excitedly. Suddenly I, too, was excluded from the shooting. With the video camera, the videofinder is large enough so that I could always lean over a kid's shoulder to see the shot myself if I wanted to. But with this tiny movie camera, it was totally between the child and the camera. Only Cara could know how the scene would look to the audience. “Yeah, it was OK,” she said rather noncommittally. “But I think I got too much of the ceiling in when James stood up.” “OK,

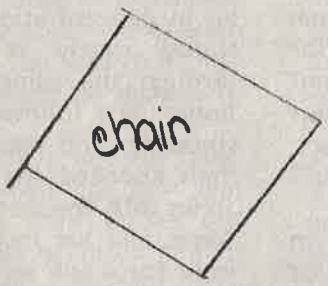
Scene 1 - Living room. Children overhear

couch
Mrs Jones and lover on the couch



TV
set

rug
on
the floor



shelves

Things in living room

- couch
- coffee table
- chair
- rug
- box for TV
- pictures
- coffee
- cups
- cigaretts
- ash tray
- paper weight
- shelves
- books
- plants

door
were children
over hear

THE LOVE AND HATE OF MRS. JONES

Scene 1 - Mrs. Jones living room
one o'clock on Wednesday Afternoon,
subtitle: at 711 Amsterdam ave. Mrs. Jones receives
her lover.

Action lover and wife kissing on sofa.	Camera Angle M.S.
He looks at picture of the wife's husband	M.S.
He stands-up and takes a knife and starts hitting the picture.	zoom out -> wide angle
meanwhile the children eavesdrop on the conversation	W.A.
The wife gets up and they start hugging	W.A. -> M.S.
They hear the plan to kill their Father and start to cry.	C.U.

Scene 2 a - husband's office
Subtitle: The next week at husband's office.

The next week at
Husband's office.

Action	Camera Angle
The lover waiting at the door of the office to kill the husband.	C.U.
He's working and his secretary typing.	Pan M.S. → C.U.
He stands up to leave, says good-bye to secretary.	Pan - M.S.
He goes outside.	M.S. → W.A.
Lover comes and stabs him with emotion of hate.	M.S.
Secretary hears a noise, says it's nothing.	M.S.
Husband struggling.	C.U.
She hears it again, goes out to investigate.	M.S.
She sees husband and runs to him. He dies in her arms. She screams.	Pan → M.S. C.U.

Scene 3- Funeral Scene

Subtitle-

2:00 The Next Day
at St. Johns
Cemetery...

Action

At the Husband's funeral, the priest is praying over his body. Plainclothes men stand behind him.

The wife goes up to her husband and cries on top of him.

The Lover comes up and hugs her and they give each other an evil smile.

They sit down, The children start crying and stare at their mother.

The plainclothes men are watching them.

The wife faints. The lover picks her up and takes her out. The plainclothes men follow them out.

The End

Camera Angle

m.s.

m.s. pan
m.s.

m.s. → c.u.

m.s.

c.u. → w.a.

m.s. → w.a.

OK, let's shoot it again just to be sure." Everyone took his place, and we rolled again. The acting was even better, and Cara seemed more pleased with her camera work.

We worked hard for the rest of the day, and finished everything but the funeral scene. The only scene that gave us any difficulty was the murder in the hallway. Kids wandered out of their classrooms, attracted by the commotion, and crowded around to watch as James "knifed" Michael. Just as we'd get ready to shoot, a class on its way back from gym would ask to be let by, so camera, lights and actors would have to move to let them pass, then move back into position. Otherwise, things went pretty smoothly. The actors had rehearsed so often they knew exactly what to do. The camera kids referred to the shooting script, changing shots slightly or occasionally adding new shots in response to the actual shooting location. The video preparation freed us to concentrate now on subtleties of acting and lighting to create atmosphere.

Wednesday morning I came in early with the developed film and sneaked into our equipment closet to look at it. My hands shook as I threaded the projector; I turned it on; I could see the image, but it was very dim! I groaned, but refused to believe something might be wrong with the film. Lois and the whole class were waiting to see it, so I set up the projector in the Writing Room, and told Lois to bring the kids on in. I murmured some warning to her about its being hard to see, but she took no notice.

The kids crowded in, tense and excited. I had never felt so much pressure from so many expectant kids. I tried weakly to prepare them, apologizing ahead of time for the dim picture, and claiming it was only our projection set-up. We started the projector, and right away kids started complaining. "I can't see it." "It's too dark!" I wanted to strangle them all. Why did they have to be so damn honest, always describing exactly the way things looked? This went on for a few agonizing moments. Suddenly, a small boy standing behind me said, "Hey, you don't have the projector turned on all the way." He turned the handle another notch, and suddenly the screen lit up with a clear sharp image of Sherrae and James locked in an embrace. We all let out a huge cheer, rewind the film, and started from the beginning again. The film looked beautiful!

However, we still had the most difficult scene to film that afternoon. I had hoped that showing what we'd done on Monday would motivate the kids to work hard on this final scene. But perhaps seeing the first scenes on the screen was a premature fulfillment; suddenly the rest of the movie almost didn't seem to matter. After weeks of work, and now with the end in sight, I sensed that energy and interest was waning fast—even Lois's and mine.

After lunch, Lois herded the cast—which for this scene was most of the class—into the Writing Room. Kids started bickering and shoving each other around. There was definitely an ornery atmosphere in the room. James,

the lover—James, who had gone through such a transformation during this project, who was ordinarily so relaxed and yet had developed an energetic acting style—now slumped onto the set, his jaw hanging open, his trench coat sloppily pulled on, his eyes half closed. Lois tried to bully him into shape, but the more she yelled at him, the more passive he became. Meanwhile, the restless "family and friends" were pushing each other out of chairs and beginning to destroy the cardboard "pews." And then Mr. Jones, ensconced in a coffin with satin carefully draped over him, crawled out to go to the bathroom, ripping the satin with his shoe.

"Listen to me," Lois shouted. "You're going to do this right, or you're not going to do it at all. I know you're all tired, but we're almost done. Would everyone *please* give one last push of energy so we can finish?" The kids listened but they didn't hear. Lois began to threaten. "Either we do this right or we don't do it at all!"

"Lois," I muttered, "if we don't finish this today, it'll be even harder another day. We've just *got* to push ahead." Lois nodded. She understood. It was no longer the time for teacher threats and ultimatums. The show had to go on—but she couldn't take it any longer. She was furious with her kids. She worked hard to help them commit themselves to things they cared about, and it enraged her to see them acting self-destructively. She couldn't take it so she walked out of the room, sensing it was time for me to take over as chief motivator

“If there was a curtain, it would have risen. If there were houselights, they would have dimmed. There was a quiet gasp from the audience as Sherrae and James appeared on the screen, larger than life, necking and arguing.”

and disciplinarian.

“Listen to me for a minute please!” It was my turn to try to shout sense into this mob. “This movie is bigger than all of us. No one has the right—or even the ability—to sabotage it now. We’re going to finish it—NOW!” I decided to plunge right into shooting. Better to waste film on several takes than continue this frustrating rehearsal. “OK, places everyone. Lights . . . camera . . . ACTION!”

Not everyone was in position as the camera started rolling, but within a few seconds they were, and the pressure of being “on” shaped everyone up in no time. At this point we were doing the scene by rote, but I was hoping that those weeks of work with the video would pull us through now.

Sherrae wept over her dead husband’s body as he struggled to keep from laughing. Then she fainted carefully into James’s waiting arms. The camera kids worked quickly, knowing their camera work had to be good. They took a few extra shots of “knowing looks” from the children and the plainclothesmen, which completed the scene. I released everyone, and they ran from the room as if the movie was something they wanted to escape from and forget about.

But of course that feeling changed. Later when we got the footage back, it was adequate. Not great, but all right. And we were all glad we’d pushed ahead to finish shooting that afternoon. “When can we show it? Is it finished?” everyone started pestering me. “No,” I explained dozens of times, “now it has to be edited,

so only the good parts are left in, in the order we want them.”

Lois had chosen Nina and Michael as editors, two smart diligent kids. After the excitement, chaos and crowds of the shooting, it was a relief to move into the tiny equipment closet with two kids, developed film, and the little editor/viewer. First the kids viewed all the footage and wrote down descriptions of each take. Then they viewed it again and again until they knew it by heart. I showed them how to use the viewer to mark the exact frame they wanted to cut, and how to cut and splice (tape) the film together. They loved splicing and learned it quickly, doing it with perfection. They matched all their edits carefully, and were ingenious at using unusable shots as intercuts in later scenes. They grasped the principle of intercutting and used it well to build up tension, especially in the murder scene.

When Nina and Michael finished editing, they turned the movie over to the sound crew, who watched it carefully and picked out some jazzy music from their record collections as a sound track. The music added lots of suspense and emotion to the scenes.

The final job was for the lab. I sent in the edited movie to have a print made. That way, whenever we showed it we could show the print, which wouldn’t have any tape splices on it, and we could save the original so it wouldn’t get ripped or scratched.

The class made plans for a gala opening night for *The Love and Hate of Mrs. Jones*, and they all

sent home invitations to their parents. The kids made programs, and organized a refreshment committee. Opening night came, and practically everyone showed up. The Writing Room was packed with dressed up kids and nodding, smiling parents.

If there was a curtain, it would have risen. If there were houselights, they would have dimmed. There was a quiet gasp from the audience as Sherrae and James appeared on the screen, larger than life, necking and arguing. The audience watched intently, then gasped again when the film changed to color as the secretary screamed over the bloody husband. The film’s ending was its weakest point. Many people didn’t understand exactly what had happened until they looked at the synopsis in their programs.

But in spite of this, *The Love and Hate of Mrs. Jones* really felt like a movie. Its acting, lighting and editing, its sets and subtitles worked together to create a world of emotions and actions that held its audience for the nine short minutes that the lights were out. Everyone cheered as the dozens of credits appeared on the screen, so we rewound and showed it once more. ■

(Note: We entered *The Love and Hate of Mrs. Jones* in the WNET New York City Young Filmmakers Festival. It won third prize in the Junior Division.)

The Love and Hate of Mrs. Jones (Super 8, B&W and color. 9 min.) is available from Teachers & Writers Collaborative for rent (\$25) or sale (\$50).

Earlier this year, Teachers & Writers Collaborative published its latest book, *Five Tales of Adventure*, a collection of novels written by children.

It's all something of an experiment. So far our publications have been designed mainly for teachers and others working with children in language arts. *Five Tales of Adventure* is a book for children. We hope that teachers will want to use it as a reader with their classes and that parents will want to have it at home. *

Five Tales had its coming out party in May at historic St. Paul's Chapel in New York City. The authors read excerpts from their novels to an audience of friends, parents, teachers, passersby and the press.

Don Singleton, writing in the *New York Daily News*, said: "If a simple reporter may be permitted a critical judgment, I'd say this about the book: Some of the writing is good enough to make Kurt Vonnegut and Donald Barthelme and other such heavy hitters of fiction writing start looking over their shoulders. And all of it is far better than the tales that involved those boring horrors, Dick, Spot, Jane and Puff."

The stories were written by elementary school children at P.S. 75 in Manhattan, where a team of three writers and a videotape artist have conducted workshops for Teachers & Writers Collaborative over the past four years. Regular *Newsletter* readers are familiar with the articles by Karen Hubert, Phillip Lopate, Theresa Mack and Sue Willis about their work there.

To provide an outlet for the writing by the children, the team established a school magazine, *Spicy Meatball*. Contributions came in, growing in quantity and quality, and by the third year, children were submitting manuscripts twenty to fifty pages long.

* An order blank for *Five Tales of Adventure* is at the end of this *Newsletter*.

Now Johnny Can Read Johnny: a Text Written by Kids

These were collections of stories or novels written in the workshops or at home. They were too long for *Spicy Meatball* and seemed to demand a special kind of publication.

So the team established the Seventy Five Press, with Sue Willis as editor. In its first two years, the press published novels and collections of stories in mimeographed form, with colored, illustrated covers. With each publication a reception was held in The Writing Room at P.S. 75. Friends and relatives of the authors were invited for soda, chips and cake, and the authors read selections from their work and autographed copies of their books.

The very existence of a literary outlet at the school inspired more writing. Manuscripts kept coming in, and because of the vigorous cooperative efforts of the team members, the children, the teachers and the principal, Luis Mercado, the press continued.

Our experience at P.S. 75 and other schools had shown that children read their own works and writing by other children with excitement and attention. Since the response to the Seventy Five Press books was enthusiastic, it occurred to Miguel Ortiz, Publications Director of Teachers & Writ-

ers Collaborative, that several of the stories could be printed and published in regular book form and made available to a wider audience of children as a reading text. And so Steve Schrader, T & W Director, decided to go ahead with *Five Tales of Adventure*. Its publication was made possible with a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

The five stories selected for the book cover a wide range of styles and interests: a family mystery, a sci-fi spoof, an urban satire, an adventure story set in the Himalayas, and a tale of murder and supernatural revenge.

All the stories share a rare characteristic: in terms of children's writing they are long works. They represent sustained focus and involvement in personal vision over long periods in time—eight months in the case of Matthew Goodwin's *Survival*—which contrasts with the regular school world where a child's concentration is split between dozens of subjects, where an hour of spelling leads to an hour of history, which leads to an hour of math and so on. But concentrated writing effort is not possible unless the writer has truly come to grips with his or her inner life. Long visits to fictional worlds mean that children have to view and consider their everyday experience with a meditative and conscious eye. The book is the product of children engrossed in their own experience and expression.

Some of the stories were written by children who have always been writers and turned to writing as a natural way of expressing their thoughts and emotions. They wrote for pleasure at home and brought in their manuscripts to the Teachers & Writers team. Others were written by children for whom writing had always been a chore and held little pleasure. These children worked with the Teachers & Writers team and produced work that was a major breakthrough for them and a source of great pride.

Karen Hubert described some of her workshops in an article she wrote for *Teachers & Writers Collaborative Newsletter*:

I was working with a group, three boys. They were telling me, vividly, about murders, rapes and stabbings they had witnessed in their neighborhood. I listened as they argued with one another over the fine points: So and so's cousin, no, aunt, from such and such street got stabbed on the elevator, no, the stairwell, no, the street, because she was stealing, no, she had been unfaithful . . . and so on.

When I suggested that they might write a story together they grew animated, but then they seemed uncertain about their abilities to write. To make things easier, I offered to take dictation.

At first their story rushed from one event to the next. "A man was walking down the street then another man came up to him and then he ran away. . . ." How much less alive this was from the story they had just been telling me! No real characters, no real surroundings, no real motives. But behind the rushed quality of their prose there seemed to be a strong urge to tell their story, to exorcise themselves of it.

So I decided to ask the questions that any involved, curious reader or listener would. How did the murderer kill the man? Why did he kill him? Where did the murderer go when he ran away? They needed no time to think. I was shocked at how quickly they answered. Each one of them had already considered motive, already pictured where the murder had taken place, and how. Of course they all had different answers, but this was discussed and the "best" weapon, the "best" motive, etc. were chosen.

Their story began to grow. There were many opportunities to explore the horror-mystery together. They wanted to know, for instance, how many murders were too much? How is a mystery continued when the reader already
cont. on next page

Looking Back

Meredith Sue Willis

Early American textbooks and primers had certain clear goals: to teach reading, writing, Calvinism, and, after the war for independence, nationalism and democracy. Noah Webster in his vastly popular *American Speller* (the "blue back"), wanted to instill "the first rudiments of the language, some just ideas of religion, morals, and domestic economy." An 1828 writer boasted that his speller contained "words collected from . . . the nursery, the kitchen, the drawing room, the stable, the bar-room, the gaming table, the seaman's wharf, the apothecary shop, from the subtle pages of the mataphysician and the rhapsodies of the pompous pedant." Reverend Caleb Stetson's 1839 desire was "to see the children of the rich and poor sit down side by side on equal terms, as members of one family."

Practice sentences for new readers were arbitrary but colorful in Bailey's *English and Latin Exercises for Schoolboys*:

Joan is a nasty girl.

Ugly witches are said to have been black cats.

Children drink brimstone and milk for the Itch.

Greedy Gluttons buy many dainty bits for their ungodly Guts.

Cautionary tales, too, were a major source of material. There were stories about five year olds who discover the family liquor supply and get first hand experience of why Rum is called Demon. In "The Listener" a little girl continues to eavesdrop even after her father pours warm beer on her head and she gets a bloody nose. Adding to such intrinsic gory interest are illustrations of "Boy in danger with mad bull," and lots of blessed martyrs burning at the stake.

On the frontiers many young Americans grew up having seen no books but the Bible and Webster's blue back. The religiously oriented texts were uniformly serious, even grim in tone:

I in the burying place may see graves shorter there than I;

From Death's arrest, no age is free, young children too may die.

Another text sought to impress the physical aspects of death: "The body is left without thought, or motion; being thus left, it soon putrefies and becomes loathsome, so that it is necessary to bury it under the ground." While twentieth century text writers (and even many of the nineteenth century) avoid such subjects as unsuitable, those early writers were in fact less morbid than practical. Every family seemed to have a brother or sister who died in infancy; everyone lived with death. Children in country schools were marched as a group to the funerals of prominent members of the community as part of their education.

There is also an attitude in the early primers that children are from the very beginning accountable for the state of their own souls; children are not seen as delicate but as responsible and improvable. There is here an implied acceptance of the child as a participant in the community. The Bible was an important constituent of community and daily life, and Bible study was an activity participated in by adults as well as by school children.

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Today we are less convinced of the righteousness of any one set of values, for all people at all times. One of the great ideas of the twentieth century is that we can respect ourselves for what we are and where we come from without first being melted into the pot. The individual's personal background and experience are the key to his education, and his education is lifelong, a continuing exploration and experimentation. We learn constantly, from a multitude of sources, children from one another, adults from children as well.

The novels in *Five Tales of Adventure* were written as literature, and for that reason make the worthiest texts. They are vivid with real concerns, real problems, terrors and dreams. They are written out of the lives of particular individuals who happen to be children. The world of these stories is variously violent, astounding, and ambiguous, but never boring. Rarely do the authors conclude with a moral or an unmixed triumph. Their novels are above all serious, and engaged in the same world in which we adults are also struggling. ■

JOHNNY CAN READ JOHNNY

knows who the murderer is? Their feeling for "what comes next" ran true to form. After the character commits murder he undergoes the horrors of fear, paranoia, hunger, then flight to hiding place.

This was the workshop that led to "Day of the Dead", included in *Five Tales*.

We believe that children who write their own literature and read other children's are more likely to view all literature as an effort to deal with experience in creative ways, whatever that experience may be.

We are eager to know the reactions of children, and teachers, to the stories. We hope that teachers will see their way clear to tackling the problems consciously and unconsciously presented by the authors, despite the thorniness of these problems. But we also hope that the collection will be read as literature and not just as a pedagogical exercise. Each piece has something to say, each author says it in his own special style.

If the response is good, we hope that *Five Tales* will be the first of a series of books, for children, written by children, published by T & W. ■

PLUGS FROM MANY



The Floating Foundation of Photography announces a nation wide photography competition entitled "E PLURIBUS UNUM/ FROM MANY ONE."

The contest will solicit entries in two categories: Black and White Photographs, 8x10 max., unmounted and unmounted, 5 entry max; Color Slides, 10 entry max. A five dollar entry fee per category will defray costs of exhibition development. Photographs must interpret or reflect a recognition of the national slogan. All entries will be considered donations to the F.F.P.'s National Archives unless accompanied by a stamped self-addressed mailer. Non-exclusive publication rights are reserved for selected entries.

Awards will include publication in a nationally distributed book, a share in its royalties, and travel with the exhibition. Entries will be accepted through January 31, 1976.

Direct inquiries to the Exhibition Coordinator, Bud Mahoney, c/o Floating Foundation of Photography, Box 480 Mossybrook Rd., High Falls, N.Y. 12440

The Women's History Research Center, Inc. publishes microfilms which contain much hard to find material on current history of women. They have collected over a million documents relating to the role of women in our society. For a complete description of available microfilms write to: Women's History Research Center, Inc. 2325 Oak Street, Berkeley, California 94708.

THE WHOLE WORD CATALOGUE (72 pages) is a practical collection of assignments for stimulating student writing, designed for both elementary and secondary students. Activities designed as catalysts for classroom exercises include: personal writing, collective novels, diagram stories, fables, spoof and parodies, and language games. It also contains an annotated bibliography.

IMAGINARY WORLDS (110 pages) originated from Richard Murphy's desire to find themes of sufficient breadth and interest to allow sustained, independent writing by students. Children invented their own Utopias of time and place, invented their own religions, new ways of fighting wars, different schools. They produced a great deal of extraordinary writing, much of it reprinted in the book.

A DAY DREAM I HAD AT NIGHT (120 pages) is a collection of oral literature from children who were not learning to read well or write competently or feel any real sense of satisfaction in school. The author, Roger Landrum, working in collaboration with two elementary school teachers, made class readers out of the children's own work.

FIVE TALES OF ADVENTURE (119 pages) is a new collection of short novels written by children at a Manhattan elementary school. The stories cover a wide range of styles and interests—a family mystery, an urban satire, a Himalayan adventure, a sci-fi spoof, and a tale of murder and retribution.

BEING WITH CHILDREN a book by Phillip Lopate, whose articles have appeared regularly in our magazine, is based on his work as project coordinator for Teachers & Writers Collaborative at P.S. 75 in Manhattan. Herb Kohl writes: "There is no other book that I know that combines the personal and the practical so well. . . ." *Being With Children* is published by Doubleday at \$7.95. It is available through Teachers & Writers Collaborative for \$7.00.

TEACHERS & WRITERS COLLABORATIVE NEWSLETTER, issued three times a year, draws together the experience and ideas of the writers and other artists who conduct T & W workshops in schools and community groups. A typical issue contains excerpts from the detailed work diaries and articles of the artists, along with the works of the students and outside contributions.

Back issues of *The Newsletter* are still available. Items of interest include: Sue Willis on teaching the Middle Ages with a slant on writing and pageantry, Karen Hubert on literary genre in elementary school (Winter '73/'74); Bill Zavatsky on writing from paintings, Kathleen Meagher on the use of dreams in poetry (Spring '74); Jeannine Dobbs on teaching writing to the emotionally disturbed, Bob Sievert on visual arts (Fall '74); Aaron Fogel with notes on a health class, Bill Bernhardt's short course in writing (Winter '74/'75); special issue on film and video with articles by Phillip Lopate, Theresa Mack and Sue Willis (Spring '75).

- Being With Children @ \$7.00
- Five Tales of Adventure @ \$3.00 (10 copies or more @ \$2.00)
- The Whole Word Catalogue @ \$4.00
- Imaginary Worlds @ \$3.00
- A Day Dream I had at Night @ \$3.00
- Subscription(s) to **T&W Newsletter**, three issues \$5.00, six issues \$9.00, nine issues \$12.00
- Back issues:
- Winter '73/'74 @ \$2.00
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Contributors' Notes

DAN CHEIFETZ is the author of a children's picture book, *Washer in the Woods*, and *Theatre in My Head*, about children's workshop theatre. He teaches labs at the City College of New York on the use of improvisatory drama in the classroom.

DAVID FLETCHER graduated from the University of Notre Dame and received a M.A. from C.C.N.Y. in education for the emotionally disturbed. He has worked with drug addicts during the past four years in P.S. 231, and has taught "the social-psychology of drug addiction" at the New School for Social Research.

PHILLIP LOPATE is the author of a volume of poems, *The Eyes Don't Always Want To Stay Open* (SUN Books) and a novella, *In Coyoacan* (Swollen Magpie Press). His works have appeared in the anthologies *A Cinch*, *Equal Time*, and other magazines, including *The Paris Review*. He is co-ordinator of Teachers & Writers Collaborative's special program at P.S. 75 in New York City. A book about his teaching experiences, *Being With Children*, is now available through Teachers & Writers.

THERESA MACK teaches video and film at P.S. 75. She has produced several videotapes and films, run community media centers, and presently teaches video for the Graduate Program Center for Understanding Media.

ANNE MARTIN is now teaching fourth grade at the Lawrence School in Brookline, Mass. This is her first year on that grade level, but she has taught for many years from nursery school through second grade in various places—New York City, London, Amherst, Mass, and Brookline. She is married, has two more-or-less grown up sons, a vegetable garden, a guitar, a banjo, and a typewriter on which she likes to dabble.

ADALBERTO ORTIZ was born in Bayamon, Puerto Rico in 1947. He is a graduate of The City College. He was first-prize winner of the 125th anniversary CCNY art contest and received the James K. Jackett medal for distinction in theatrical design. He is now doing graduate work at NYU.

PHYLLIS TASHLIK has been teaching at Satellite Academy, an alternative public high school in the Bronx, for the past three years. She has led workshops and classes in writing, literature, and art. Some of her curriculum ideas have appeared in the *English Journal*.

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