

New York City Writing Project NEWSLETTER

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1978 Summer Invitational Institute

Happy 20th Anniversary



1998 Summer Invitational Institute

A Note from the Editors:

This special issue of the New York City Writing Project Newsletter celebrates our 20th anniversary. A year ago, we asked Project members to write and submit brief anecdotes about their association with the Project and its impact on their professional lives. As we began to receive material, we also began to search for a form for this unique edition of the Newsletter. Early on, the editors decided that we did not want this issue to contain formal articles or any of our regular columns. Nor did we want this issue to *look* like any other.

As we talked, a shape and focus emerged. We agreed that we wanted to assemble a kind of "family album." We wanted to put together a collage of memories, brief but telling anecdotes of colleagues and experiences told by a multitude of voices. We hoped there would be some historical perspective reflected in these verbal snapshots as well as individual moments of personal growth.

We waited a long time to acquire material; Project members lead very busy professional and personal lives. And, as you can imagine, we received a range of work: poetry, narratives, testimonials, personal histories, and stories written in summer institutes many years ago. We are grateful for the work that members submitted; all of it was lovely. Regrettably, we were unable to include everything.

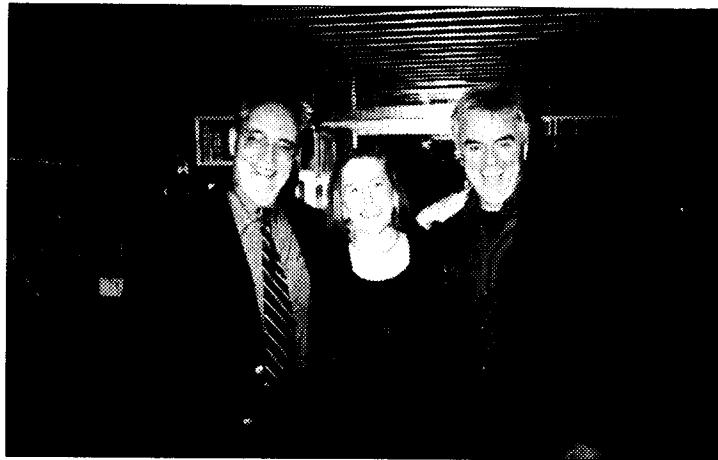
We hope you will enjoy the recollections that are here. We expect that some of these shared memories will resonate for you while others may surprise or amuse you in unexpected ways. Most of all, we hope this issue captures and acknowledges at least a small portion of the rich history of the New York City Writing Project.

What do I remember?

Groups...hundreds of them over the years...groups in which we read and laugh...read and cry...groups where we listen, respond, argue, and challenge each other. Large groups, small groups, writing groups, reading groups, curriculum groups, presentation groups, advanced groups and groups for beginners...and ultimately one large group of readers and writers in what we call the "read around"—a time to celebrate the hard work of a summer institute or an inservice course or a weekend retreat.

But was it always so? Here's a moment from 1978: Richard Sterling, John Brereton and I are sitting around a conference table listening to Jim Gray, the founder and former director of the National Writing Project, as he tells us what he expects to see in our first summer institute. "Teachers must write every day," Jim says, his blue eyes flashing. OK, we nod. "And," he continues, "we expect them to write in different points of view." OK again. "And, of course, every afternoon, you will have writing response groups," he remarks. What? Richard, John, and I roll our eyes and grimace at one another. Response groups? This strikes the three of us as weird. Maybe teachers in California sit around and willingly expose their written work to people they barely know, but teachers in New York? It'll never happen, we say. Who knew???

Sondra Perl
Lehman College



Thanking You

Spring 1998. I'm teaching Autobiography and Memoir in Lehman's Adult Degree Program, and everything is working. Students write and write,

amaze themselves and each other, write more. They love the class. I love it myself. Each time it meets, I leave the classroom excited. Sometimes, the next morning, I call Sondra to thank her.

Thank you, I say, for the Guidelines for Composing, for active listening, for process writing, for read-arounds...Thank you, most of all, for the vision embodied in these techniques. Since 1981, when I joined the Writing Project, that vision has nourished my teaching.

Summer 1981. Sondra, Carla and Marcie lead the summer institute. We meet five days a week: four at Lehman, the fifth in a building across from Poe Cottage. We write from the Guidelines, keep process journals, respond to one another's writing, revise our drafts, write more. For much of each day we're in charge of ourselves.

A chunk of the morning is reserved for writing. We spread out over the Lehman campus, into classrooms or the library or onto patches of grass. I'm barely awake in the morning, often spend the time reading and daydreaming. (I know I'll write at night.) When we return to class, no one asks us where we've been.

My writing group meets on its own, without any of the course leaders. I like it that way. Bob, Arlyne, Suzanne and I help each other through. We decide who will read first and when

to move on. We encourage each other to elaborate, to explore new territory, to keep going. When I cry while reading a draft, group members hand me Kleenex. We schedule our time. No one checks up on us. No one needs to.

Process journals — detailed, extensive — are the heart of the course. Writing in mine, I am able, at last, to describe what I do when I write — to see the pattern in what I thought was chaos. We write constantly in our journals. No one collects or reads them.

The course leaders do collect finished pieces, but they don't return them. That's fine with me. Liberating, in fact. I pay attention to what I need to do, write for myself and my group. At night, at home, I write for hours. I revise grandly, cut and paste, experiment. I work much harder than I would if I were writing for a teacher.

Sondra, Carla and Marcie trust us to read what we need to read, write what we need to write, take charge of our learning. We do.

And I still call Sondra to thank her.



Nancy Wilson
Lehman College

Naming Names

The New York City Writing Project (NYCWP), like all National Writing Project sites, has been shaped, informed and nurtured by classroom teachers. Our story is a story of teachers volunteering; volunteering their time and their energy, their experience and their expertise, their kitchens and their living rooms.

Regrettably, it is impossible to mention every person who has played a significant role in our history, but we would like to recognize some of the individuals and groups of teachers who have made important contributions over the years:

- We acknowledge Sondra Perl, Richard Sterling, and John Brereton, our "founding fathers" who took a risk back in 1978.

- We acknowledge Carla Asher and Marcie Wolfe, who are responsible for creating the Writing Teachers Consortium in 1981, our high school inservice program, and whose intellectual rigor framed our work for many years.

- We acknowledge Elaine Avidon of Lehman College, a former director of the NYCWP, whose deep knowledge of teaching and writing and whose careful, thoughtful work has empowered so many classroom teachers to assume leadership roles both within the Project and within our schools.

- We acknowledge Professor Richard Larson of Lehman

College who, from the very beginning, has supported both the vision and the work of the NYCWP, challenging us to think harder and write better.

- We acknowledge Linette Moorman, Linda Vereline, and Denise Levine, all of whom worked so tirelessly and so brilliantly to establish, nurture and solidify our middle school inservice program from its infancy in 1987 as the JHS Writing and Learning Project, funded by the Chase Manhattan Bank.

- We acknowledge Toby Bird and Michael Simon who, many years ago, saw the need for a newsletter that would provide us with a forum for writing about our practice, our students, and the issues and experiences we face as urban teachers. We also salute all those teachers who have served as editors: Paul Allison, Robin Cohen, Benita Daniels, Joan Eurell, Marion Halberg, Melanie Ham-

mer, April Krassner, Ed Osterman, Tracy Peers Pontin, Lisa Rosenberg, Maggie Timmons-Knoessel, Becky Walzer, Marcie Wolfe, and Nancy Wilson.

- We acknowledge all of the NYCWP teacher-consultants who have traveled after school or on weekends to lead workshops and presentations or coordinate seminars for colleagues throughout the city. Of this group, we must recognize, in particular, those teacher-consultants who have worked on-site at different schools, helping teachers of all subject areas and their students to discover new ways to use writing to support learning. These teachers have been the public face of our Project for many years: Barbara Batton, Mickey Bolmer, Julie Conason, Christine Cziko, Nick D'Alessandro, Debi Freeman, Maura Gouck, Claudette Green, Lona Jack, Gail Kleiner, Thomasina LaGuardia, Beverly Marcus, Barbara Martz, Nancy Mintz, Helen Ogden, Ed Osterman, Lydia Page, Lisa Rosenberg, Sharon Rosenberg, Lillian Rossi-Maida, Elaine Spielberg, Alan Stein, Harriet Stein, Rose Steinberg, Martha Sussman, Candy Systra, Arlyne Tessler, and Ronni Tobman-Michelen.

The NYCWP has thrived, in part, because teachers never stop thinking about their practice, and we have continued to meet in small study groups throughout the city to explore the hard pedagogical and theoretical issues that surface in the classroom. From revision to responding to student papers, from assessment to reading instruction, from literacy to issues of equity, language and culture, the Project acknowledges all the teachers — elementary, middle and high school, college and adult educators — who have collaborated both within and across grade levels to try to figure out some answers to these complex questions.

We celebrate all of you!

Ed Osterman
NYCWP

Tributes to Ronni

Ronni, for whom there is no counterfeit
communication is the currency
encouragement, the coin of the realm
every effort has value
her investment in teachers
reaps dividends in instruction
students are the beneficiaries
of all who are enriched
by her golden smile, her gentle heart
gracious ear, practiced reflection
her praise is never inflated
her recommendations are legal tender
her strategies for the classroom pay off
you can put money on it



Dana Willens
Theodore Roosevelt HS

She came into our lives in a most unassuming way—like a quiet storm.

Once a week for three-and-a-half years she listened to us, visited our classrooms, engaged us and validated our effort, but she was determined to show us a better way to teach and an easier way for our students to learn. Her source of ideas seemed like an unending supply of well-needed nourishment for our souls. She had an easy, friendly way that made everyone want to join her class. As if that were not enough, she started a Roosevelt Book Club and initiated Open Mike readings for staff and friends of Roosevelt. She helped raise literacy awareness and reading levels at Roosevelt.

That's how I remember Ronni, as a quiet storm.

Janeth Wynter Bell
Theodore Roosevelt HS

Reflections on Helen

In the spring of 1987, after 22 years of teaching at numerous schools, a master's degree in English education, marriage and two children, I was teaching at Bayside High School. I taught as I had been trained—a lesson, beginning with a motivation, aim, properly phrased questions, medial summary, final summary and homework that was relevant to the classwork. I was rigid, in total control of my classroom and regarded well by my peers. I was also burnt out. Getting up each morning had become a chore. Something was “missing,” but I had no clue what it was.



A flyer was circulated at the school, announcing that Lehman College (the WTC—whatever that was) was coming into our school. A consultant from Lehman came to Bayside, announcing after-school courses, which promised a new way into teaching writing across the curriculum. The consultant also promised to come into our classrooms (as a peer, rather than an administrator) to demonstrate “new” methods and techniques. Moreover, we would be able to take the courses and receive a stipend. It had been almost 20 years since I had taken any courses, most of which bored me, but I decided to enroll.

When I walked into the classroom that first day, several things struck me immediately. First of all, the scent of fresh coffee wafted through the room and a table laden with “goodies” had been set up. The room had been rearranged; 25 chairs were set up in a circle. At the door stood the smiling, pleasant-looking woman whom I had seen at the faculty conference. Her name was Helen Ogden, and she changed my life forever.

Helen was not only beautiful in appearance, she was positively radiant. She was an unbelievable teacher as well. She was filled with the love of teaching, unshakable confidence, enormous knowledge, impossible patience, genuine love of people, and a serenity which permeated the room.

We ate and talked, introduced ourselves, became a “community,” and wrote and wrote and wrote. We were encouraged to share our ideas, knowledge and professional moments. When we wrote, Helen wrote. When we spoke, Helen listened. She was, to me, enablement. Everything Helen taught me went into my classroom the next day, perfected or not. Helen was a regular visitor. She demonstrated, advised, taught, encouraged, praised. She made me a better teacher. Her influence on me extended outside of school as well. Some members of the Consortium met outside of school for reading groups, writing groups, and social occasions. Helen encouraged some of us to try our wings and become Writing Project coordinators.

Now it is 1998. Helen Ogden is retired. She is, however, in my classroom every single day. When I look at my room, now in a circle, to form a community of learners, readers and writers; when I watch my students in their reading or writing groups; when I read my students' literature journals; when they come back after graduation to tell me how good and safe it felt to be in my classroom; I see Helen and I thank her for all she has taught me.

Bobbi Matzner
Bayside HS

About Ed

When I first became involved in the Writing Project, I was teaching in the Language and Learning Core (the Writing Project's program for high school students) at Bayside High School. The other Core teachers and I were invited every year to attend a Core breakfast. Here we would share ideas and experiences with other Core teachers from other schools. It was at one of these breakfasts that I met Ed Osterman and the other Writing Project teacher-consultants.

Ed was chairing the talk that accompanied the eating and asked us what we were currently doing with our classes that reflected the input and influence of the Writing Project. I spoke of a project that I was developing with the assistance of my mentor, Helen Ogden, for my American History Advanced Placement class where the students were creating a dinner party in which participants from all eras of American history were invited. Ed suggested that this sounded like a great idea for an article (I think he was thinking about the Newsletter) and encouraged me to keep a process journal on the semester's activity. As luck would have it, the Writing Project offered a summer institute that year entitled "Writing About Our Practice" to be coordinated by Gail Kleiner and Ed. This seemed like a perfect opportunity to gather my thoughts and make some sense of what had happened in the classroom that semester. On the first day of the course, I told Ed that I had him to thank for my presence.

Alan Stein
NYCWP

Beginnings

It was 1978, and I was an English Ed graduate student at Lehman College. I enrolled for a course that seemed somewhat different from the usual uninspired offerings. At the first session, a young energetic woman, who seemed to be on some kind of mission, asked us to "free write" about an early memory we had as writers. Free write... what a great idea! Over the semester, Sondra Perl asked us to do all sorts of novel things as a class and with our own students: process journals, writing groups, revision, writing across the curriculum, and to concentrate on the content first because the mechanics for our students would follow organically. When I brought these "teachings" back to Morris H.S., the most senior teachers smiled politely and said, "Yes Gary, and these ideas will soon pass." I guess we proved them wrong.

Gary Eiferman
U.F.T. Teacher Center

At the start of each semester, teacher-consultants (who agreed to leave their own schools to work with teachers at other sites) have to visit schools and speak at full faculty/staff meetings to recruit participants for the Writing Project in-service

program. This always made me nervous. I remember very early in my career as a TC, I visited University Heights High School where I would be consulting and co-teaching an after-school course with Suzanne Valenza, who was on staff at UHHS. We sat beside one another in what seemed to me to be a huge room with afternoon light streaming in. Despite stage fright, I was passionate about what I had to say. I spoke about the summer course I had taken at Lehman and how it inspired me. "This work has changed my life," I said with enthusiasm and pride. Judy Wechsler, one of the teachers, raised her hand and asked, "Can I take the course even if I don't want to change my life?"

Candy Systra
School for the Physical City

Getting Started

It was the early 1980's. The Writing Teachers Consortium (WTC), the Project's high school inservice program, was still in its infancy and had not been funded for Queens that year. Lillian Rossi and I were teaching at Beach Channel High School at the time and were using writing process techniques in our classrooms, supporting each other in our attempts. Lillian had been a participant in the first summer session in 1978, and encouraged by her enthusiasm and example, I joined the summer session of 1980. Our colleagues were constantly asking us about "the writing process," and we kept ending our explanations with, "but you really have to experience it yourself." "But how can we," they asked, "when it isn't being given in Queens this year?"

Finally, Lillian and I decided to go to the principal, Arthur Greenberg, to see if by any chance he might be able to get some private grant. We insisted on the WTC model. Teachers must be treated as professionals and be reimbursed for time spent in the after-school workshop. He agreed, and Lillian and I shared the stipend given for instructors. Since we were not bound by Board of Education payroll mandates, we opened the course to the entire school personnel: paras, teachers, secretaries and A.P.'s.

And so we began....

Helen Ogden
Bayside HS (ret.)

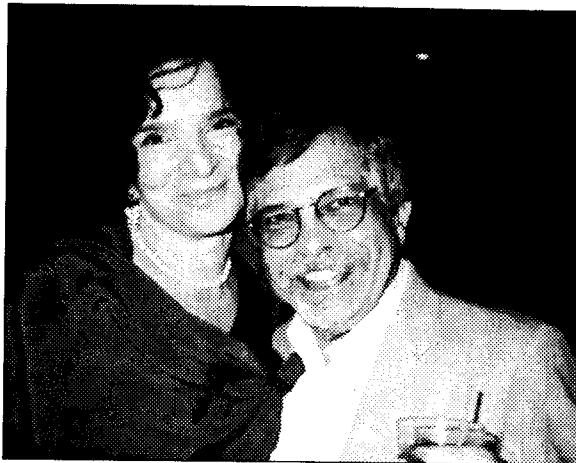
The Work is in My Heart

I want to name names, to acknowledge all the people who are special to me, whose voices are in my head and whose work is in my heart. There's a piece of you in every deed I do. But the list grows long, long and longer. Gail Kleiner, who serves as my writing group these days, says it seems similar to giving an acceptance speech at the Academy Awards. And what if I leave someone out? The teacher I am today is given to the world by the New York City Writing Project, who helped to shape yet

another teacher to be a “reflective practitioner.” It is clear to me that the New York City Writing Project is not an institution but people, people who take care to be intricate in thought, who are committed to understanding how we learn, who ask the larger questions and who are trying to go slowly enough to look carefully. I am proud to be a part of the human history of the Writing Project. Happy anniversary! And many more-- teachers, that is. And newsletters, which also share an interesting history, but that’s another article.

Did I remember to tell you how glad I am we met?

Lisa Rosenberg
Middle College HS



Ask Me

Ask me something hard—ask me to remember what I did yesterday. Ask me to remember moments from my association with the New York City Writing Project? That’s easy. I’ve still got a grip on the past. And my teaching journal from 1982.

Sixteen years ago, I was a newly-minted, TPD-licensed English teacher in Morris High School, commuting by subway and bus from Brooklyn to the Bronx. I was overwhelmed; I carried everything home each night, including my Delaney book, lugging a bookbag as big as a small suitcase because I was never sure just what I needed. My chairman was available and helpful with classroom management techniques, but he used to brag that he had read only one book in his entire life: *Shane*. Into this pedagogical gap stepped the New York City Writing Project in the persons of Carla Asher and Ed Osterman.

Once a week for two hours, I got to sit in a room and talk with experienced teachers. We read articles, talked teaching, and even got to write and work in writing groups. The journal I kept as a new teacher helped ground me and gave me a chance to process what was happening in the classroom. And Ed wrote back. Looking at the journal, I see a lot of what I recognize now as active listening, but I also see comments like “you should write this up with student samples and send it to an educational journal.” I began to believe that I might not be so bad at this teaching thing after all.

Melanie Hammer
Nassau Community College

Voices from Newtown

With the strong underpinnings of the WP, I believe I accomplished my most audacious work as a teacher and as a writer. I was emboldened by working with respected, like-minded colleagues — committed practitioners all — and was encouraged by their inspiring feedback. Classroom read-arounds became the high points of my school year, and hours of audiotaped works, lovingly read by their authors, attest to their power, memorability, and deeply moving nature, even years later. The practice of giving to myself the identical writing assignments as those given to my students, joining them in their—our—creative struggle, made me both humble and authentic in the classroom.

Now, no longer a classroom teacher, I am in the position of helping fledgling teachers find their wings. I hear myself quoting my WP mentors and hope I can be as inspiring to my charges as Ed, Marjorie, Lisa, Helen and Elaine were to me.

Benita Daniels
Newtown HS (ret.)

Newtown’s Writing Project was a wonderful discovery for me. For the first time in my professional life, I was meeting with my fellow teachers to explore and examine our lives as educators. Here’s the short list of riches it brought me: learning to write again; sharing the writing; developing friendships because of the writing; reading and sharing that reading; having the help of Ed Osterman in school every day; taking the summer course on essay writing that opened my mind to a world beyond the “in literature as in life” approach; seeing the effect of this thoughtful approach to writing in my classroom; and feeling energized and excited about my job. The WP’s positive impact on my professional life has been immeasurable. It is a gift to be treasured and sustained.

Mary Carter
Newtown HS

One September, an Announcement from the Stage

September 1983, the first day of school, the faculty meeting in the auditorium where we awaited the usual Berating-for-Past-



Slovenly-Treatment-of-Permanent-Records.

A clean-cut young girl in a Shetland sweater and a pleated plaid skirt (what we used to call "collegiate") addressed the faculty, announcing a program for twenty teachers of all subjects-- an after-school graduate course in writing and the teaching of writing as a tool for learning across the curriculum. She hardly needed to say anything past the word "writing" to enlist me, but she continued with more good news. She mentioned beliefs: that all teachers are teachers of writing; that writing is an effective tool for learning in all subjects; that teachers are the best teachers of teachers; and that teachers should be compensated for our time, so that we could elect either three free graduate credits or a stipend. I was delighted. I thought I had never listened to a speaker from that stage who seemed to even have beliefs. I had never taken a course that hadn't cost me or my parents money. And it was balm to hear such respectful language about teachers, such trust in the power of writing to get to the heart of things, and to hear that considerable money had been put behind these beliefs. I had earned a few credits beyond my Masters degree; I might as well accumulate a few more. Free. Convenient. Writing. I couldn't resist. I filled out the brief application and I was in.

It was wonderful to have this lovely young lady, who would later become known to me as Marcie Wolfe, the consultant from the New York City Writing Project, making this offer I could not refuse. I participated in the Writing Teachers Consortium for both semesters and was awed and warmed by Marcie and by the course coordinators Elaine Avidon and Alan Devenish. All my previous practice, with its emphasis on writing for self-expression as well as for learning, was affirmed. However, for the first time, I understood theory. I understood why it was more productive to ask for a second draft before collecting student

work, rather than to offer the writing of a second draft as an "extra credit" option. I understood how my own writing and endless re-drafting had developed in me a distinct discomfort about correcting and grading every sort of work from my students.

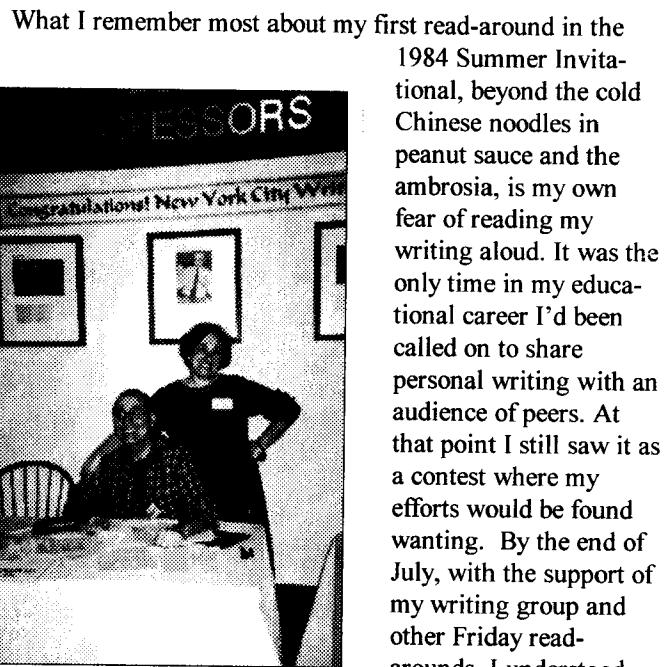
I wished fervently that I could do what Marcie, Alan and Elaine did.

One evening Carla Asher called me "from Elaine's kitchen." Something about her location suggested informality; I felt uninhibited about saying, "I can't talk right now-- I'm crying." I called her back as soon as I could and learned that she and "the other consultants" were meeting to staff spring courses, and they wanted me to teach an after-school graduate course at Sarah J. Hale High School. I was astonished! I thought about it briefly and accepted the position.

Since 1985 I have been a consultant for the Writing Project. I have worked with the faculties of fifteen schools. I have co-taught with numerous other Writing Project teachers, many of whom were novices when they started to work with me, some of whom are teacher-consultants now. And so it goes. Each September, announcements are made to the faculties in diverse schools in all boroughs of New York City, of a program for teachers.

Thomasina Joan LaGuardia
NYCWP

Making Space for Celebration



a community celebration with as many voices as possible being heard. That's the experience I tried to replicate in my own

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classroom and eventually in Writing Project courses I coordinated. But sometimes I need a reminder.

Last term, with a group of new teachers, we sacrificed a second piece of writing for curriculum project planning time. The last session was packed with sharing curriculum projects and finishing our publication. But once the read-around started, it naturally flowed around the table in spite of my directions to, "Jump in when you're ready." A half-hour after class should have ended, we were still listening to learning stories from grade school, from grad school, from present day classrooms, from the rest of life. We felt the power of the collection of stories and poems, beyond what any of us as individuals could create. I have to remember to hold the space for celebration of writing in classrooms and among teachers.

Barbara Martz
NYCWP

Publishing

Since 1993 I've published about a dozen articles — all on Mideast issues plus my last forthcoming piece on population growth and its ramifications. Of course, I got my start from the Writing Project Summer Institute (1985) and a writing group which I started in 1987 after I got my first computer. Thank you.

Ronald Bleier
George Washington HS

From the Writing Project came my inspiration to take the risk of proposing a bi-monthly column for a new magazine, *Radiance*, espousing self-esteem for large women. I wrote that column, called "Seeds from The Big Apple," for two years! And the magazine paid me! Real money! It grew from the courage I garnered being a member of the New York City Writing Project.

I also want to tell you of the pride I felt when I read my poetry at Barbara Martz's house on Staten Island many years



ago. People listened—for the sheer enjoyment of words, luscious words—and this gave me courage to write poetry, feminist erotica, short stories and sagas that were published in books and magazines. I read to groups of large women who told me that they were inspired. Omigod, INSPIRED!

How has the New York City Writing Project changed and influenced my life? There are too many ways to count.

Maxene Kupperman-Guinal
Monroe Academy for Business and Law

Entry into the Writing Project September 2, 1998

My entrance into a new house;
a sense of belonging, of being in the right place.

I enter a place of thinking and writing, of sharing and teaching,
of growing and learning.

Doors of opportunity open as I touch them lightly
with words dawning this morning of beginnings.

I become true as I walk in and occupy
the space that now belongs to me

feel established,
ordained from far away into the past

manifested in this present for my enjoyment
pleasant and delicate sounds inhabit the air

All experience blends into this moment:
the dust off my little Dominican feet

the adolescence in a new country,
contradictions of an immigrant identity

administration in the Board of Education,
a dissertation about language in a second language

Mami, my children, my English,
mi español, my life *aquí y allá*.

An entry into you.
A reentry into myself.

Jocelyn Santana
Auxiliary Services

The Turning Point

I can remember what for me was one of the turning points in the history and direction of the New York City Writing Project. It was at Sondra Perl's Riverside Drive apartment, and Sondra, Carla Asher, Marcie Wolfe and I were meeting to see how we could get the Board of Education to support the Project. At this time we knew little about potential resources, or the workings of the Board. We weren't having any luck. The initial grant from Jim Gray was running out, and we didn't even have enough money to have a summer institute in 1979. Sondra and I had been asked by the Shoreham-Wading River School District to do a summer institute on Long Island, and New York City was being left high and dry. Sondra and I clearly had something for ourselves, but, unhappily, Carla and Marcie saw the Project coming to a complete halt.

That is the point from which I date the beginning of the true development of the New York City Writing Project. Over the next year, Carla and Marcie designed the program that was to become the Writing Teachers Consortium and the three of us began work on a proposal to the Fund for the Improvement for Postsecondary Education. Before we could submit the proposal, however, there were two significant hurdles to jump. We had to persuade the Superintendent of Bronx High Schools, Bob Folchi, and the then Executive of High Schools, Nathan Quinones, to release Marcie and Carla full-time for three years to do the program. I remember those meetings well. As far as we knew, no one had ever asked for such a consideration, and to this day I don't know why it was so easy. We met, we talked, we shook hands and Bob Folchi said yes. Nathan Quinones, in the presence of Bob Folchi, said yes, too, and that was that. Perhaps, they didn't think we would ever get the funding; we certainly had doubts. The total sum we applied for was about \$100,000 over three years. I think we were as amazed to get that first grant as anyone. It seemed like an enormous sum. I was released from two courses per term, and Carla, Marcie, and I began the program. This program became the cornerstone of the growth of the NYCWP and my own intellectual growth. It was the Writing Teachers Consortium that allowed me to learn about the schools, to learn about teaching writing in high schools and to become immersed in the culture of teachers and teaching.

With the funding from this program, we also held our first retreat at the Chauncey Conference Center in Princeton. We invited the principals from all high schools in the program to the retreat; we met Noel Kriftcher, who was to become one of our first and staunchest allies, and we made our presence known to the schools. We were no longer invisible.

Richard Sterling
National Writing Project

Who are we?

What is the New York City Writing Project and why are we still around? Many Writing Project participants have their own answers to these questions.

We are, first of all, a sustaining, visible, and replenishing network of teachers teaching teachers. Some current members were in our first summer institutes and some are people who joined us just one or two summers ago. We are one of the oldest university/school collaborations in the city. We share an active commitment to the art and craft of teaching, and to the role writing, and literacy more broadly, can play in every teacher's practice. We conduct school-year professional development seminars, work with colleagues in their classrooms and schools,



offer summer institutes, and meet in special interest groups to study our work or to write. We like New York City students. A lot. We bring public school teachers, college teachers, after-school practitioners, and adult educators into the same conversation.

And we have some strong beliefs. We believe that using writing to learn is a key feature of constructivist education and highly supportive of students' cognitive development. We believe that writing, for aesthetic, expressive, and academic purposes, is personally and socially transforming, helping us to understand ourselves better and to act out of that understanding. We believe in professional development that is career-spanning, reflective, and intellectually powerful. And we believe that teacher knowledge is vital to standards and educational reform.

I think we're still around because these ideas sustain us--a large teacher community across the city. And we're still around because the issues facing our students continue to be profound. We need a professional network in which to ask and seek answers to hard questions about literacy development and achievement.

NYCWP NEWSLETTER

So 20 years... We have awarded over 400 summer fellowships since 1978. We've gone from working with 60 teachers a year in 1981 to working with close to 700 in 1998. We've given birth to the Institute for Literacy Studies (now our parent), and to the Elementary Teachers Network (now our sister). We partner in school reform initiatives such as the Students at the Center and the Middle School Initiative. WP teacher-consultants are assistant principals, central Board and district administrators, college professors, teacher-directors, principals, adult literacy educators and school teachers. One now sells crystals in Sedona.

And the future... There are so many teachers new to the profession. I remember myself in 1978, freshly back into teaching from a two year hiatus during NYC's fiscal crisis, entering Lehman College for the first time. I was 26 years old. What did I know? I had delusional self-confidence and some ideas about journals and poetry, electives, *Antigone*. I think of myself when I see some of the passionate young teachers today and wonder, will they stay? Is teaching still a life? For me the Writing Project had been the life next to teaching. I hope it will continue to be for those who come after us as well.

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