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Gevirtz Graduate School of Education, University of California at Santa Barbara

POSTSCWRIP

Gardeners, Teachers, and The Beauty of This Moment

by Maureen Granger ('01)

“Many ideas grow better when transplanted into another mind than the one where they sprang up.” Oliver Wendell Holmes

When a plant’s roots outgrow its container, the roots start to poke out of its drainage holes. In some cases, the roots can encircle the inside of the pot, eventually leading to the death of the plant. After 30 years of teaching EML and English secondary students, I felt like I was no longer growing as an educator, and like a plant that is too big for its pot, I truly needed transplanting.

When a position for an MTSS TOSA (Multi-tiered System of Support Teacher on Special Assignment) opened up, I was both intrigued and terrified. My roots in classroom teaching were deep, as was my mistrust of those who had left the classroom in search of “greener pastures.” Though I knew caring and competent administrators, I also had experience with some who not only failed at the most basic aspects of their jobs, but who had very little sympathy for teachers’ struggles and for the overwhelming, sometimes unreasonable demands on their time and energy.

Transplant shock can cause a plant’s leaves to yellow, scorch, curl, or even die. Although the health and appearance of the plant may suffer, it is rebuilding its root system under the soil, and this process can take many weeks. All of us who became teachers on special assignments did not know exactly what we were doing once we were transplanted out of the classroom, but we knew that there were many unmet needs on our respective school campuses; there were things that just didn’t get done that were crucial to our students’ wellness, but no one had the bandwidth to address those needs.

After returning from remote learning, students were suffering greatly from transplant shock; they were yanked out of the relative safety of their homes and replanted on school campuses, and the shock of that transplant was evident in terms of poor social skills, acute anxiety, and the inability to function within the four walls of a classroom surrounded by other stressed and traumatized students. One day I was having a conversation with our former dean about this issue, and he said to me, “Let’s take a walk.”

We found ourselves outside the fence of the brown, lifeless, weed-choked garden, and he said to me, "This is ours." I immediately had a vision of students reading books under the cherimoya trees, harvesting grapes from the arbor, and transplanting vegetable starts in the lath house.

Fast forward three years to witness the offshoots of new growth that have taken place throughout our school campus. With the support of numerous community partners, our verdant, lush garden has a shaded area we call stump town where students sit on wood rounds and begin their garden lessons with their teacher and the garden educator. The lath house is a home to both garden club students and to the A-Z Cooking School. Fig, pineapple guava, plum, apple, orange, lemon, mulberry, kumquat, pear, cherimoya, pomegranate, and avocado trees provide fresh fruit, jam, and bread to our school community year-round. Farmers markets, harvest festivals, and teacher appreciation events allow us to highlight and share the bounty of vegetables, herbs, and edible wildflowers that the garden provides.



The garden has also been the inspiration for other neglected and underutilized spaces on our campus. Our partnership with the Santa Barbara Museum of Art has resulted in ten new murals that have brought life to the school's drab and colorless cinder blocks. Partnering with the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden has resulted in an explosion of vivid native pollinators which are now the homes to butterflies, bees, and hummingbirds. Rich, nutrient-rich mulch suppresses weeds and is improving the hard-packed, dead soil which once ruled our campus.

Though we are grateful for the multiple community partners that have shared with us our vision of a school that feeds our students' minds, hearts, and bodies, our most important partners have been our students, staff members, and families who pick up trash during homeroom, plant trees, participate in Beautify La Colina and garden work parties, and make financial contributions so that our students can attend a school that values and practices both physical and social wellness. The culmination of all these endeavors resulted in La Colina being awarded a 2024 California Green Ribbon Award. It was an extremely challenging application process, but the experience allowed us to appreciate both the many ways in which we have created a healthy school environment, but also those areas where we can and will do better. However, both gardeners and teachers know that the work is never done, and there is value in taking a pause, sitting in the shade of a cherimoya tree, and breathing in the beauty of the moment

Editor 's Note from Cynthia Ward ('01)



Small Things

It was a tiny drama, but we noticed. A monarch butterfly was caught in a spider's sticky, complex web, suspended between two clusters of bushes and brush, struggling to extricate itself. Its wings were trembling in a muted flutter, and even across the universe of our separate species and intelligences, a frantic message sounded, a message of fear and desperation.

The tiny filaments of the web were tightly wound in a microscopic maze about the butterfly legs and a portion of a hindwing. It all looked very delicate, but in fact it was a tenacious vignette, sticky to the touch. My

husband used my walking stick to untwist things a bit and poke at the web. Finally, the butterfly tumbled onto a leafy branch below, quivering. We wondered if we should splash water on it to wash off some of the sticky residue, but it seemed best to let it recover on its own, if recovery was in the cards. We felt a small sense of accomplishment. We had tried.

I've been having ongoing nightmares about catastrophic climate change, wars without end, and an election in which a bizarre fascist and his creepy extremist enablers stand an even chance of winning. *Help*. I can't seem to wake up from it. The aforementioned election will be over, one way or another, by the time this edition of PostSCWriP appears, but there is comfort in tending to the smaller things right now. Long-neglected potted plants on the deck have been pruned or transplanted, and I have a veritable lupine garden. I've been corresponding with my little neighbor, who is six years old; I find her letters in my mailbox, marked "SPESHIL" delivery. I've learned wonderful new ways to cook beans, and I wonder why I neglected legumes for so long. I'm checking in with friends, finding ways to be of service, and paying close attention to the turtles in the pond and the hummingbirds at the honeysuckle.

There is comfort too in reading the work of friends and colleagues, and the writings herein abound with wisdom and reflections. In "Gardeners, Teachers, and the Beauty of This Moment" Maureen Granger tells how restoring a garden helped restore spirits in her school and community. In "The Cup Stops Here" Annie Hanson muses with humor and poignancy on the challenges of retirement, moving, and having too many things, some freighted with memories. Elise Sotillo also revisits the realm of memory, recalling a telling childhood moment immortalized in a newspaper photo. Alyssa Spanier, in "I Tried Going Point-less" discusses her search for a more meaningful approach to grading, and Tim Dewar presents the pros and cons of technical assistance in cycling and writing, recognizing that achievement often unfolds in ways other than what we envisioned. In the course of a road trip, Camille Despain perceives

significance in the fonts of strip mall signs, and Kelly Keene offers a touching memoir about the bond of reading with her mother. Devon Azzam reports on a wonderful SCWriP program for integrating environmental awareness and sustainability into the schools. There's a group piece by Tim Dewar and six fellows about what we can do *together*. And in her powerful essay, "This Is Not My Covid Story" Erika Cobain reminds us that despite violence, trauma, and challenges, it is possible to learn and grow and push ourselves to be better. "In the end," she writes, "I am not giving up on being a teacher."

Maybe not giving up is the theme of this issue. It shines with teacherly spirit and heart. The poets make an entrance too, of course. Thanks to Perie Longo and Dorothy Jardin for graciously sharing poems, and to Chella Courington, who has journeyed from poet to novelist and presents the first chapter of her novel, *Janet Hall*, here.

As for me, I don't have any answers. I'm just staying afloat, trying not to add to the problems, hoping to be strong and ready when the time for action comes. It's a tricky story. Sometimes I feel trapped and afraid, and I quiver like that butterfly, and I don't expect rescue, but I still have faith in the saga's abiding-ness, and in humanity's ability to learn, and in the resilience of our souls, and the triumph of reason and love. This is a difficult detour. But it's not the end.

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The Cup Stops Here

by Annie Hansen ('88, '22)

Towards the end of *Passing* by Nella Larsen, Irene drops and breaks a teacup. It's a fraught moment--she's nervous, suspecting her husband of an affair with her friend--and she tries to pretend that she broke the old cup on purpose. But me, I have no excuse. Except that if I unwrap another teapot (my count at the moment is eight) or cup, I might just be tempted to do the same, to let the fine china of my husband's great-aunt slip to the floor, or the stoneware or porcelain or terra cotta of my mother-in-law or godmother or grandmother break into bits. It could happen. Fatigue could be my defense. Physical and mental fatigue. While I started a week ago unpacking boxes with the giddy enthusiasm of a treasure hunter, I am now simply overwhelmed by objects I have no use or place for. But they aren't just objects, of course.



After long careers in teaching English, my husband and I retired in June. A little earlier than we expected, but as with many other teachers, we found it hard to re-energize after the pandemic. The first thing I did was begin piano lessons, putting to use my mother-in-law's grand piano that was gathering dust in our living room. The second thing I did was insist that we clear out the two storage units we were renting

in L.A., one belonging to Nick's family and one to mine. How long had it been? Three years for one, maybe six for the other, paying every month for who-knows-what. We ourselves were now the oldest generation, and those boxes weren't going anywhere until we flew from Denver, rented a truck, and squeezed them all into a shipping pod.

The bright orange U-box arrived on a sunny day. A neighbor walking her dog asked whether we were moving. I thought, "We might have to, just to accommodate the past--an undeniable two-ton child." Our teenaged boys got out of bed to see what might be in it for them, but after realizing the work involved moving boxes into the garage, they quietly slipped away.

With the cars parked on the street, Nick and I began to build towers: trunks on the bottom, plastic bins next, cardboard boxes on top. Big flat things we leaned against the wall. In the first few days we made good progress, but then we slowed down, assigned the boxes as "yours" (your family = your chore) or "mine" (mine to ignore). Like picking the tasty bits out of a salad, we started cannibalizing the boxes rather than unpacking them. Those picked-over boxes got resealed and labeled "Later" (*as if*).

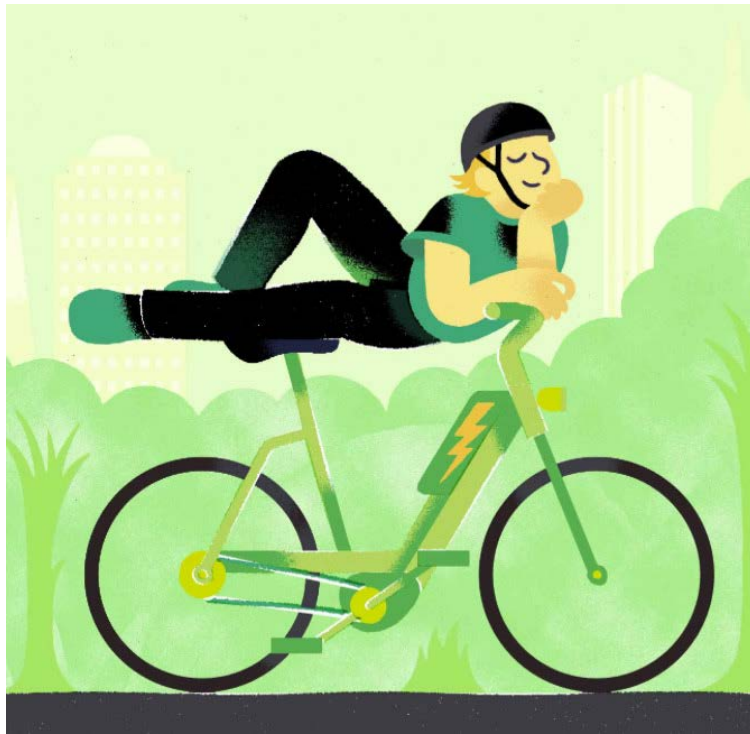
Memory is funny that way--the artifact can become the experience.

Many boxes proved to be filled with picture albums and endless fold-over envelopes of photos with their negatives. "Who is this?" I asked Nick. "Who are they?" Sometimes he knew. Often, he shrugged. "Look at me!" I said, and I handed him a picture of a little girl with choppy bangs feeding a ferocious-looking dog. I felt as though I actually remembered doing that, but it must only have been the memory formed by having seen the picture many times before. Memory is funny that way--the artifact can become the experience. I resealed the box and wrote "Later" with the black sharpie.

And there were books, cards, correspondence, posters, paintings, Christmas decorations, an ironing board, a headboard, art supplies, end tables, family silver, sheets, blankets, pillows, tablecloths, liquor, alarm clocks, a tape recorder, cassettes, VHS tapes (no player), extension cords, a rotary phone, a Monkees lunchbox, plates, platters, pots, tureens, nightstands, lamps, vases, a bowie knife with a deer's foot handle, tin soldiers, jigsaw puzzles, figurines, fans, the collected works of Dickens, suitcases, and still, this was only what was left over after a trip to both the dump and Goodwill in L.A. What will we do with any of these things? Will our children want them? Will we only look at them again the next time we vow to "do something" with the boxes that are STILL in the garage, a year from now, or two years?

I don't know. I return to a box marked Kitchen and unwrap another cup. "Mother" is printed on it--twice--in gold script. I remember my mother's delight with the dime store gift. I put on the kettle. I take down the Lipton tea. I heat the cup. I steep the tea for three minutes. I pour in the milk. I sit down and sip the steaming tea that leaves the roof of my mouth slightly burnt. I'm done for the day.





Thoughts on Technical Assistance

by Tim Dewar

Q: How many bicycles do I need?

A: $N+1$, where N equals the current number of bikes you own.

N: It's an old joke among cyclists, no matter how many bikes one has, one always has their eye on another. Cyclists are not unique in this desire for more. Hobbyists of all stripes seek more gear. I wouldn't be surprised if skiers have the same joke. Or anglers. Each acquisition promises to increase the pleasure and unlock the fun. And it is not just in our recreation where we pursue a better life through better stuff. Clothes, cars, vacuum cleaners. Heck, the history of Western Civilization is more land, more influence, more power. Maybe the same is true for the histories I wasn't taught in school.

+1 Thought: I don't want to drive my car to work every day. I'm a cyclist for Pete's sake. For the past several years, I have been occasionally commuting on my road bike. I would keep track and at the end of the year, pledge to increase the number of times I rode. While it is fun to ride my road bike, it wasn't optimal. I wore funny shoes and would arrive sweaty and hot, necessitating a change of clothes and preferably a day working alone in the office. So, I ended up averaging about once a month.

+2 Thought: I had a problem that a new piece of gear could solve. I didn't want to drive my car to campus, and my current bikes weren't cutting it. I would get an e-bike.

+3 Thought: On my road bike it took about 40 minutes to get to campus, plus another 10-20 minutes to cool off and clean up. If I bought a Class 3 e-bike, maximum boost up to 28 mph, I should be able to get to campus much quicker, like in 20 minutes, with no clean up time.

+4 Thought: I have thoughts on shopping for and riding an e-bike, but those are for another essay.

+5 Thought: After many days of commuting by e-bike, I've learned that it is quicker, but only by five or ten minutes, and I still break a sweat. So instead of saving like 45 minutes, I'm saving more like 15. Better, but not what I hoped for. I am driving less/riding more, so, yeah, a partial success.

+6 Thought: I fibbed - here is a thought about the difference between riding an e-bike and a regular/traditional/acoustic bike: On an e-bike, I have time to look around more. My mind is not as consumed with shifting, pedal cadence, position, with, you know, *riding*. I've noticed new things along my commute route, roads and paths I've ridden hundreds of times. The commute route is fixed, but my mind wanders.

+7 Thought: Because I was riding back and forth to the Summer Institute, I found myself thinking about generative AI. I sensed some parallel. E-bikes are supposed to make cycling more accessible to more people. Generative AI is supposed to do something like the same for writing. But both seemed to overpromise and underdeliver. The N+1 problem.

+8 Thought: What exactly was the promise of AI? To save time? To make writing automatic? To make the blank page disappear at the push of a button? What problem was AI supposed to solve? To make writing happen faster? I can't write faster than I can think. Would AI make me think faster?

+9 Thought: Cycling takes time. I make efforts to ensure that I have time to ride. I get up early, and work late. And every time I ride, I am rewarded. Even if I suffer, or get a flat, or get lost, or just don't have that snappy feeling in my legs. "Every day with a ride is a good day." Writing takes time. I need to make an effort to ensure that I have time to write. And every time I am rewarded. Even if I suffer, or get blocked, or get lost in too many ideas at once, or just don't have any snappy ideas. "Every day I write is a good day."

+10 Thought: What I am trying to say is that the new acquisition usually overpromises, but that we can then find a way to achieve what we wanted even if not in the way we first envisioned. I'm riding more with the e-bike, even if the commute isn't that much faster. I can't say I am writing more because of generative AI, but I am playing with it. Some of these experiments are showing me new ways to help myself (and maybe our students). Mostly, though, the new gadgets reveal why I love to write and ride. Neither riding nor writing are things to avoid, but things I want to make central in my life. They make everyday a good day.

Write (& ride) soon,

Tim



I Tried Going Point-less

by Alyssa Spanier ('17)

Alyssa Spanier wrote this in reply to an invitation from SCWriP Director Tim Dewar for Fellows to write, in a very casual form, about "a thing you tried"—What I Tried, What Worked, What Didn't, and Will I Do It Again? He extends the invitation to all.

What I tried:

As a middle school English teacher, I have always found grading to be one of the most challenging and time-consuming aspects of the job. I would struggle to find the right balance between positive and constructive feedback. Was I marking their writing too much? Not enough? And then there was the frustration and dismay at the fact that students rarely seemed to even look at the feedback let alone apply it to revisions or their next piece of writing. They seemed more interested in what grade they got as opposed to how their writing could be improved.

This inspired me to read *Point-less: An English Teacher's Guide to More Meaningful Grading* by Sarah M. Zerwin. This book was brought to my attention when it was listed as the focus for an upcoming OBPBR (One Beer Professional Book Review) with SCWriP. At the time, I was not ready to take such a leap, but I read the book the following summer. After reading the book, I was inspired! I wanted my grading system to reflect growth and progress toward the standards, and I wanted my grading system to support the students in developing their self-reflection, self-assessment, and hopefully, their motivation to grow as a reader and a writer. It was a big leap, but I had a colleague who was also interested in reevaluating and changing her grading system, and I had the support of my administration.

There were a lot of pieces involved in this process, so for this reflection, I will focus on the changes I made to my gradebook. My district uses Aeries to track student grades. I spent time reviewing Help articles and doing Google searches about how I could tweak the grading system to reflect my new point-less grading system. It was not easy or straightforward, and it's possible that I didn't use the most effective approach. I removed point values from the Final Marks, and I added narrative grades which allowed me to input words/phrases that I planned to use instead of point values. When the school year started, I did my best to explain this new grading system to my students and my reasons for making the switch. I also provided them with a handout to help them interpret the gradebook.

Interpreting Aeries

Weekly Reading Goal:

EXCEEDED	You exceeded your weekly reading goal <u>by 30 minutes or more!</u>
MET	You met your goal of reading 1-2 hours
NEARLY MET	You almost read for 1 hour
NOT MET	You read for 45 minutes or less

Writing:

COMPLETE	Your work has been submitted, and reviewed, there is no more work to do on the task
PARTIAL	Your work has been submitted, and reviewed, you have more work to do on the task
REV INSTR	The work was submitted, but critical elements are missing– Review the instructions
MISSING	The work has not been submitted

Classwork:

YES	The work was completed and submitted
PARTIAL	The work was submitted but is incomplete
NO	The work was not submitted
LATE	The work was submitted late

In addition to the point-less system, I also had students set individual learning goals for the semester based on the 8th-grade standards. At each quarter, students were asked to reflect on the data in the gradebook, as well as several other sources, and to write a letter to me about which letter grade they felt best reflected their work and progress for the quarter. Their argument needed to be based on the evidence in the gradebook and other sources, and their progress toward their goals as evidenced by the work they completed for the class. We then conferred one-on-one to review the data and come to an agreement about what grade would appear on the report card.

At the end of each semester, I also asked students to reflect on their experience with the new system. I wanted their input because I needed the system to work for them. To do this, students completed a digital survey and were asked to share their thoughts during the conference. The reviews were mixed.

What worked?

Some students experienced the desired outcomes. They felt free from the pressure that points, or fear of losing points, often created for them, and they were more comfortable with taking risks and trying new things with their writing. I saw improvement in self-reflection and self-assessment as evidenced by the reflections they were completing along the way and the way that they spoke about their work.

The quarterly conferences were also a great opportunity for me and the students to have a meaningful conversation about their work and growth throughout the quarter. We looked at all the evidence we had accumulated and together we came to an agreement about what grade best represented their growth and progress. I found that most of the time I agreed with students' evaluation of themselves. It was exciting to see them reflecting honestly on their work and overall growth. At Open House, some parents commented that they appreciated the approach, and it even led to meaningful conversations at home about what students were learning and doing at school.

It was important to support the students with their reflections by providing sentence frames, a list of growth moves and obstacles for reading, writing, speaking, and listening, and a list of assignments that they might reference as evidence. I also provided more comments in the gradebook than in previous years so that students could use that feedback to support their reflections. When each quarter came to a close, I printed out STAR test reports, AR goal progress reports, and a copy of the gradebook with comments for them to reference. Students were shown several examples of what a grade letter should look like and sound like before they started writing. The letters that students wrote were very eye-opening for them and me. It was incredibly valuable to have students determine what grade they deserved and why.

What didn't?

While some students experienced the desired outcomes, others felt that this point-less approach was more anxiety-inducing. Without a grade that they could easily monitor in the gradebook, they felt lost and didn't know where they stood in the class until we had our one-on-one conference at the end of the quarter. Although they had feedback they could reference, I understood the issue. I also experienced this challenge when trying to quickly check in on how a student was doing. Without taking the time to carefully consider each assignment and the feedback provided, it was hard to get a quick snapshot.

Another challenge was that this approach was a lot more time-consuming than traditional grading. I was providing a lot more feedback on each assignment than in the past and then had to take the time to transcribe that feedback to the gradebook. It was also a challenge

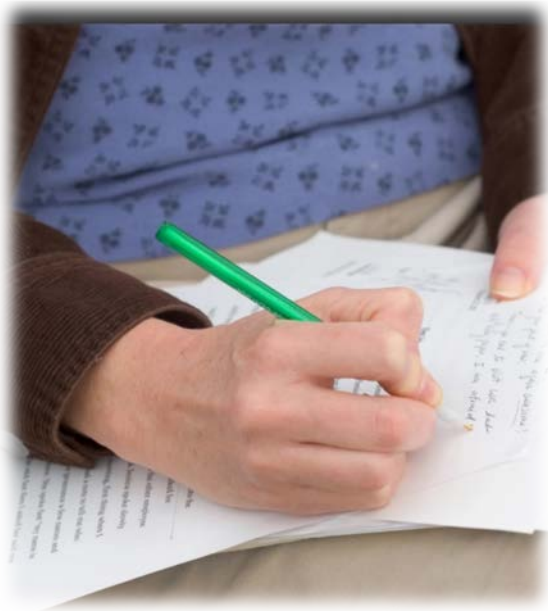
to plan for conference days, as I would be meeting with each student individually and needed the rest of the class to quietly and independently work while they waited their turn. It was a big help when I was able to get a substitute teacher to cover my class while I conferenced with students.

Will I do it again?

I don't think I will go fully point-less again...but I am hesitant to say I would never do it. It was difficult for students and me not to be able to see that quick snapshot of their performance throughout the quarter. However, there were a lot of things about the approach that I appreciated and felt achieved the desired outcomes.

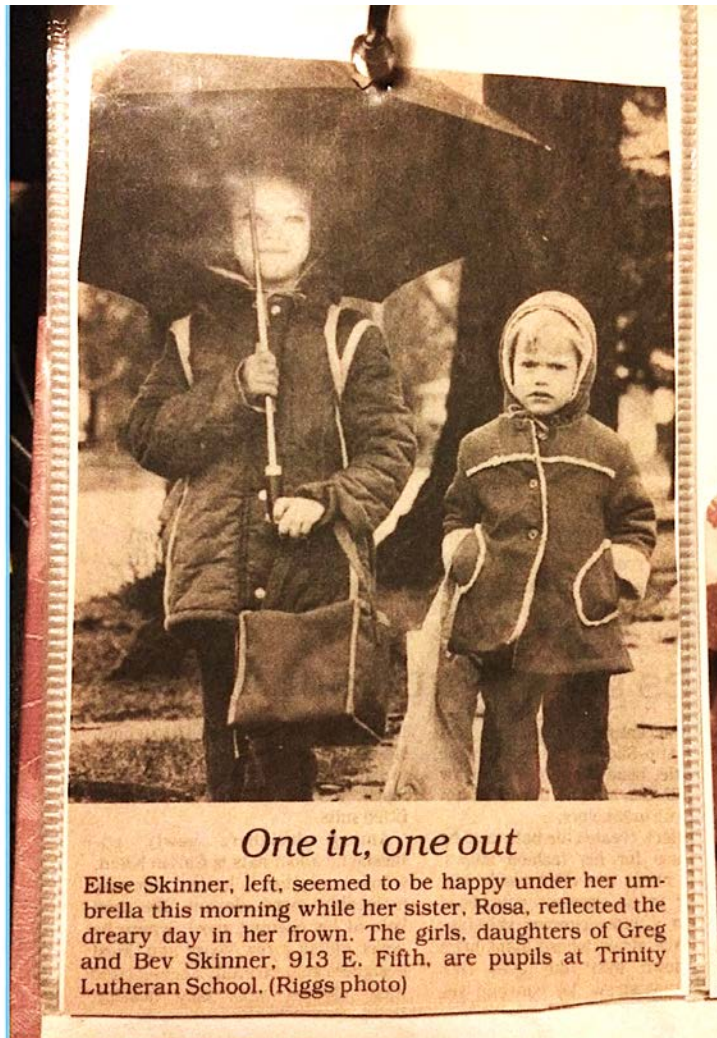
I do plan to continue with some version of this. I will also continue to evaluate and adjust my approach to grading to make it more meaningful to students and me. I have kept the goal setting, letter writing, and conferencing this year, but I have combined it with a slightly more traditional approach to grading individual assignments.

I continue to meet with the colleague mentioned earlier in this reflection to discuss our grading practices, and what is working and what is not. From there, I will continue to adjust my approach to help make grading as meaningful as possible for my students and me.



"The expectations of life depend upon diligence; the mechanic that would perfect his work must first sharpen his tools."
Confucius

One In, One Out by Elise Sotello ('24)



"M-o-m-m-m-m," said my sister Rosa, in that long, drawn-out way so typical of a whiny four-year-old. "Do we HAVE to walk in the rain?"

"Yes," my mom said, in that frazzled Mom-of-four-children-under-the-age-of-seven tone.

"You have to get to school, and you know your dad is at St. John's with the car. Look, Elise will carry the umbrella and make sure you both stay dry."

Rosa looked up at me with a scowl on her face that let me know she had her doubts. But with Baby Simon on her hip and three-year-old Maddy in the highchair preoccupied with her Cheerios, my mom gently pushed the two of us out the front door and onto the porch. She shut the door behind us.

We were wearing our rain boots, and our coats were buttoned all the way up with hoods pulled tight, framing our oval faces. Rosa's hood was pointed at the top, making her look a bit like a garden gnome, albeit a grumpy one.

We briskly walked to the corner and turned right, all the while Rosa stepping on my heels as she tried to stay close enough to me to stay under the faded black umbrella that had seen better days.

"I'm getting wet!" she whined.

"Keep up! We don't want to be late to school!"

We were about two blocks into our four-block route to Ninth Street, the street our school was on, when an unfamiliar sedan pulled over and parked next to the curb, just a few yards in front of us.

A man I didn't recognize got out of the car, holding a camera, and walked toward us. Rosa stopped and grabbed my arm, standing slightly behind me, as if using my body as a shield.

"Hi, my name is George Stephens," he said. "I'm with the *Winfield Daily Courier*. Could I take your photo for the newspaper?"

Wow, I thought, impressed. Someone wants a photo of us?! I feel like a famous person. How cool!

"Elise," Rosa said quietly through clenched teeth. "We don't know him."

"It's okay," I said in my best reassuring Big Sister voice.

"No, it's not," she hissed, as she stepped forward, standing right next to me, now that she knew I was useless at protecting her from *Stranger Danger*.

The man snapped a couple of photos, pulled out a little spiral-bound notebook from his back pocket, and asked us our names, ages, and addresses. (This was the early 1980s in a small town in Kansas, before there were the privacy concerns that exist today.)

We continued along the last few blocks to school, bickering the entire way. Now Rosa was purposefully stepping on my heels. When we got home from school that day, Rosa told on me, letting my parents know that I let a stranger talk to us and take our photo. They were slightly alarmed, but I told them it was fine because he was from the newspaper.

The next day a stand-alone photo of the two of us was on the front page. We stood side-by-side, me squarely beneath the umbrella and Rosa not. I was beaming, happy to pose, and Rosa was scowling.

"Elise Skinner, left, seemed to be happy under her umbrella this morning while her sister, Rosa, reflected the dreary day in her frown. The girls, daughters of Greg and Bev Skinner, 913 E. Fifth, are pupils at Trinity Lutheran School"

The headline above the photo read, "One in, one out."

This is not my Covid story.



by Erika Cobain ('13)

I'm starting at the end. This is right now, today. I am so grateful for my writing practice (a haiku a day and writing group once a month and occasionally something related to the National Writing Project, the California Global Education project). I am sitting in a workshop spring renewal with the South Coast Writing Project (SCWriP) at UCSB, this is where I recharge myself: plugged into writing.

I have been glitching lately, I signed up for the workshop twice: one sign up for Erika-dad-just-died and the second sign up for Erika-district-just-awarded-a-sabbatical. Two things, terrible and wonderful, are happening to me simultaneously: my father died after a long struggle with throat cancer; and my district gave me a life preserver. I am about to embark on a yearlong sabbatical to do five things:

1. Write
2. Explore art and culture abroad in Spain, France, Luxembourg, Portugal.
3. Understand other perspectives, see how these countries support students, teachers, humans.
4. Make ceramics and learn glazing/ firing techniques in St. Jean Du Fos
5. Learn French, maybe enough to teach a section (since our only French teacher just retired).

How did I get here, you ask? Other questions range from “How can I do that?” and “It will be nice to get away from here for a while, won’t it?” and “What are you going to do with your ____? [fill in the blank with car, plants, etc.]” A sabbatical is something of a unicorn in our district: no one has ever seen or heard of anyone receiving one before, and some folks believe they don’t exist.

My short answer, “it is in our contract.” The longer answer, the middle of this essay, is this:

Teaching is hard. When we first start out all full of joy and energy and optimism, we think we are making a difference, we think / hope we are having an impact. We are, but what I have learned is we don’t always see it until much later. We don’t see how one thing leads to another or realize the mistakes we make.

Perspective: Teaching has changed my perspective, and my perspective has changed my teaching. Certainly, I’ve had the gradual broadening of the lens, gradual increase of knowledge and information; think conferences, like Asilomar, CUE, NCTE; *and* I have had moments of eye-opening surprise and shock. These eye-opening moments are tectonic shifts in how I think about my role as teacher/ learner/ writer/ artist. Here are some, in a bulleted list:

- 2005, I was engaged to be married, this was the first time I came out to my staff and such a wonderful, welcoming celebration from my colleagues made me sad, why did I spend 5 isolating years in the closet?
- My spouse is accepted into grad school in Chicago. I take a 2-year leave and work with faculty contracts- besides seeing how desperately underpaid adjunct faculty are, I take classes and earn tuition remission for myself and my spouse’s program. Lunch is 1 hour.
- My district denies my second-year leave; I am devastated, heartbroken. My vision of earning the 10, 15, 20-year plaques for dedicated service, dashed.
- It turns out to be ok, but not right away, things get much worse before they get better.
- I return to CA to work at a charter school, this, like having a fork stuck in my eyeball: we didn’t have desks, supplies, or even a school building, colleagues taught in hallways.
- I learn what unhealthy work environments look and feel like.
- I work at a Continuation/ Accelerated high school. I learn, not all high school degrees are created equal. What?! Interrobang.
- 2007, we get married again, we call this wedding, “the legal one, not the real one,” We turn the papers into the courthouse the day before prop 8 passes and LGBTQ couples can not marry again, legally in CA until 2013.
- Funding grant ends for that job, I get another temp teaching job, his time in a high performing affluent school district.
- I am teaching 4 different sections of HS English, in 4 different classrooms, from a cart.
- After school one day, as I am waiting for a ride home, a student commits suicide behind me. He jumped off the library building.
- This sends me into a tailspin. I need to re-evaluate this career.
- I apply to SCWriP summer institute, am accepted and resurface, re-inspired.
- Funding grant ends for that job, I get another temp teaching job, this time in another part of the state, I am ready to move to northern CA, my spouse and I both get jobs. Yippee!
- I work in a high performing district, *all* students turn in *all* their homework- *all* the time, I am working *all* weekends grading papers (this is unsustainable).

- The teacher I am covering for returns from maternity leave. I dust off my supplemental multiple subjects teaching credential.
- I work as an elementary teacher, planning seven different subjects per day. There is no prep/planning time during the school day apart from lunch. Recess, morning *and* after school duty is exhausting.
- I take a ceramics class. I dust off my fine art supplemental credential.
- I get a job teaching fine arts; it is all the things I love about creativity and writing, and working with students: without the standardized tests, and hours of grading
- I am on lockdown for 5 hours after school one day.
- In the dark, whispering and nervous, my colleague and I make pinch pots
- One student stabbed another student and is hiding in a locked down classroom
- The victim dies
- Black lives matter
- Covid teaching
- Training a toddler to use the potty (not going well) while we are both at home teaching online.
- I am glitching. Considering going to 80% leave, can't afford to, housing costs increase.
- Partner and two friends leave the teaching profession
- We move into a tiny house (fun for one person, tight for a family of three)
- Dad diagnosed with throat cancer
- First fight in my classroom in 20 years of teaching; it is gang related
- Dad's death
- Presented my proposed itinerary to the board
- Sabbatical granted.

Despite the shit in the world: violence, trauma, challenges- in the end, I am not giving up on being a teacher. Students matter, learning and growing and pushing ourselves to be better matters. The end of this story is another beginning. A chance to resurface, re-inspired.

Being better means knowing when we are not breathing. Mask on first. Get some perspective, write, read a book, make some art, talk to a friend, go to the top of the hill every day and look out. Even if it is the same hill, (or not), it may look like the same point of view, but it is not: the vista changes, the sky changes, the trees bloom. You walk solo, or someone walks with you.

This is not my Covid story, and maybe somehow, it is.

“Don't just resist cynicism — fight it actively. Fight it in yourself, for this ungainly beast lies dormant in each of us, and counter it in those you love and engage with, by modeling its opposite.”

Maria Popova

Announcing A New Novel by Chella Courington ('03)



When her high school English teacher read aloud the opening of T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men", the poem's hopelessness and spiritual emptiness spoke to Chella, an angst-ridden seventeen-year-old who sensed life was a collection of shards and shadows. Eliot's words inspired her, and she kept writing consistently through the rest of high school and college.

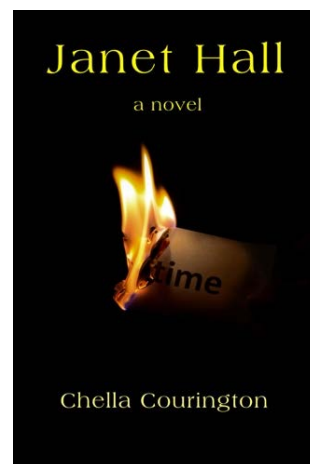
At the University of South Carolina, she studied under James Dickey, Poet Laureate of the United States. "I was a good enough reader to understand that my work was passable, but not great," says Chella, "and I took the academic route, a Ph.D. in Literature and taught at a small college in Montgomery, Alabama. There, I wrote journal articles, book reviews, literary criticism, and pedagogical papers."

Later, Chella moved to California to teach in Santa Barbara, and the following summer participated in the SCWriP Summer Institute.

Inspired by her mentors and colleagues there, she published her first poem. Her poetry and prose have since been published in chapbooks, journals, anthologies, a novella, and now a novel, *Janet Hall*.

On the following page, we are delighted to share Chapter One of *Janet Hall* with our PostSCWriP readers. If it whets your appetite, follow this link, and you can purchase the book on Amazon:

<https://www.amazon.com/Janet-Hall-Chella-Courington/dp/B0DGL869MS/>



JANET HALL

Chapter 1

Trion, Alabama
Saturday, September 7, 2019
12:30 a.m.

My name is Janet Grace Hall with Hall being my married name. Though I've been divorced thirty-five years, I stayed a Hall instead of taking back my maiden name Williams. While not considered a feminist choice by my peers, they obviously don't know the Williamses. Besides, I still love Jacob, my ex.

Born and raised in Trion, Alabama, I escaped and never imagined I'd live here again. Then, three years ago, Aunt Grace, my father's sister, passed away and bequeathed everything to me. A house is a gift hard to refuse, even if it's in Alabama, and that's why I moved back at sixty-one after retiring from teaching in Columbia, South Carolina. I'd planned to sell the house, and over two years later I'm still here.

An Appalachian town of 20,000, Trion lies northeast of Birmingham on Highway 431, atop Sand Mountain, which doesn't resemble a mountain, worn flat and covered by fields, pastures, and Tyson chicken plants. If a breeze is up, you smell the birds. This night, like most nights, the lights shut off around 11 p.m. when the dogs are put out or let in depending on the owner's age and attitude. Either yard dogs or furry family. In the past, folks left their doors unlocked, but Trion has changed.

Older Trion homes are known more by family name than by address, and tonight the Williams house is dark except for the light at the front door. Inside I lie in my aunt's four-poster spool bed with Rhoda, my gray tabby. A book is open on my chest and a hangover slowly blooms. I should get a couple of Tylenol, but Rhoda is next to me, and if I get up, she will desert the bed and leave me alone. These days, I take what warmth is offered.

The phone rings. Rhoda raises her head with distaste and settles back into the folds of the old patchwork quilt. I pick up my iPhone. "Hey, Jacob."

“How did you know it was me?”

“Caller ID. But who else calls me this fucking late?”

“Someone could have died,” he says. This is true. We’ve entered that age when death becomes a more frequent visitor. Musicians and writers and actors are falling with greater commonness. Our friends will follow. Our parents are gone, and someday we will be gone too.

“You still there?” Jacob asks.

“How much have you had to drink?”

“No more than usual.”

“A lot, then.”

I take the phone and go to the bathroom, swallow two Tylenol, and sit on the toilet.

“I worked through all your suggestions and think the story’s done.”

“Fine. Send it out,” I say and cover the phone with my hand to hide the sounds. “I want you to read it again.”

I stand, close the lid, consider flushing, and don’t.

“Why? I made five minor comments.”

“Please. I’ve already emailed it to you.”

I hear the pop and crack of a fire in the background. When we were in grad school, we used to make love, sweat dripping, in front of the fireplace.

“How cold is it there?” I ask.

“Down to 50 tonight.”

“It’s warm here. You wouldn’t need a fire if you moved back to Trion, and you wouldn’t have to phone me in the middle of the night. Just shake me awake.”

Reading With Mom

by Kelly Keene ('21)

The first book I can remember reading with my mom was the classic tear-jerker *I'll Love You Forever*. My mom had to be right next to me, shoulder to shoulder, while we read. After all, snuggling a daughter helps her to really feel the stories and keep them with her as she dreams. Tucked into bed, my mom's soft tears kissing my forehead, we said goodnight to the moon, touched the scales of each rainbow fish, and built a level of trust with each other—and with books—that would last a lifetime.



When I was a bit older, and reading in school with teachers and classmates, my mom took me to the new Platt Library Branch opening. She helped me get my first library card. She gave me a tour of the shelves and children's section, pointing out her old favorites, like *Blueberries for Sal*. Trips to the library became routine after that. My tastes outgrew my bedroom bookshelf, but my mom had opened up a whole new place to feed my appetite.

Over time, we stopped reading side by side. We read adjacent, she with her books, and me with mine. Asking mom to return a book for me on her way to work was perfectly normal, because I knew she would be going to the library anyway to return some of her own. In elementary school, I felt elite, checking out four or five children's books at once compared to her measly two. By middle school, our books weighed the same. She poured over *A Time Traveler's Wife* while I devoured the *Inkheart* series. In high school, while I fell in love with Edward Cullen, she shed some tears over *Marley and Me*, and our family adopted our first dog.

Just because we no longer read in the same spaces did not mean that we didn't still discuss and love some of the same characters. When I read *Harry Potter* for the first time, I did so on my own. I finished each book in turn, before passing it along to my mom afterwards. We followed Harry through Hogwarts from the comfort of our own bedrooms. But sometimes, when I knew she was finishing up a final chapter, I would hover around her opened door just to watch her reaction and be the first to burst in and hear her thoughts when she finished.

Like the changing tides of any mother-daughter relationship, my mom and I didn't always get along. I did not love her festive pumpkin leggings, or when she made me pick weeds in the hot sun. I always liked when she picked out books for me, though. *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* set a high bar and taught me that my mom was someone to trust when she made a recommendation. I still have her original copy of *Black Beauty*, and I remember her smile when she told me about *A Wrinkle in Time*.

Our divergent yet overlapping reading habits made me notice when I began to reach and stretch beyond the confines of YA literature. She had some adult books that I was not yet ready for. I'll never forget the allure of *Lovely Bones* after she'd cautioned me against it. "Maybe when you're older," she'd said.

Reading is never a solitary act. It is time travel, telepathy, and even teleportation. It builds connections between people and fostered a closeness I cherish with my mom to this day.

Growing up, book club was strictly a mom thing. Once a month, the rest of the family hid in their rooms after helping set up. Then, my mom, and every other mom I knew, would descend upon the house. Their gatherings were not the "lock-myself-in-the-bathroom-for-privacy" kind of reading that I was more familiar with as a teenager. They laughed and chatted and had opinions about what they read. Wine fueled their conversations, but friendships lived and died on the fault lines between the merits of *The Ya Ya Sisterhood* and whatever World War Two book Susan

had picked again. Sequestered in my bedroom, eavesdropping through a crack in the door, I rolled my eyes through book reports and reading comprehension questions, but mom still made reading look like a party. Something to look forward to, a treat for adults.

Now that I'm that adult, I'm in a book club of my own. Despite my college textbook tangents, my mom and I are reading together again. "Have you read the new Jodi Picoult book?" she asked me, leaving her copy on my kitchen counter when she last came by for a visit.

"We need a good mystery," I'd say, fishing for a suggestion at the Fourth of July barbeque. I'm not sure when the recommendations started flowing both ways. But when I realized she took my reading just as seriously as her own, I couldn't help but puff out my chest and scroll through Goodreads with a bit more intention.

"What did your book club think of *The Underground Railroad*?" I asked her, when I came home for Thanksgiving.

"What are you reading now?" she asked, when we spoke on the phone last week.

The older I get, the more I see the spaces between my mom and me. We read further and further apart. She's in a tent right now, reading in Yosemite, by headlamp. I'll be abroad next week, listening to *Braiding Sweetgrass* on the plane. The proximity we used to share before bedtime has fallen away, but the conversations we have about our books, and the books we both read, keep me tethered to her. Reading is never a solitary act. It is time travel, telepathy, and even teleportation. It builds connections between people and fostered a closeness I cherish with my mom to this day.

What the Font Reveals

by Camille Despain ('07)



The shimmer on the hot asphalt was hypnotically rising in waves, and I broke my driver's trance to look around. We sat at the traffic lights. An interminable set of lights went from green to yellow to red in a rush, so the cars were slowly trickling through the intersection. Ahead of me, emergency vehicles raced down the street toward Mozart's wall, and behind me, the graveyard that we only visit well before dusk.

On either side, on every corner of the valley, are mini strip malls. And if you pay attention, the malls reveal much about the community and always harbor little surprises. I've found comfort in tiny bookstores, purchased amazing handmade earrings I didn't know I needed, fed my children on carne asada, and never found the mall again. It's almost as if the strip malls come into existence when you need them. A strip mall of requirement, only there when you need it and unplotable on any cell phone map. We start to read shop names aloud, and I pause at *Needles House*.

Tanner, what's the *Needles House*?

Mom, it's a tattoo parlor, pretty sure.

No, that can't be. We both swivel in our seats as much as possible to see the store in question. Hidden behind parked cars and signs, we can't see the storefront and wonder aloud. I disagree.

Tanner, look at the font. It is NOT a tattoo parlor. It has to be a craft shop.

What? Mom, how can you tell from the font?

Tanner, look, the font is thin and delicate, and the space between the letters is narrow. It's an arts and crafts shop, I tell you.

Tanner muttered, always pragmatic. Mom, they had to fit the sign into the space they paid for.

The light changed, and Tanner turned to his phone. He gasped.

Seriously, Mom, how did you know that? It's a shop with curated home decor and gifts. You can paint and sip wine there next week. He turns to look at me. You can tell what something is by the font?

Yes! The font reveals! He laughs out loud and repeats, "The font reveals." He exaggerates the vowels to sound like he's saying *fahhhnt*, elongating the word with an inflection that dips down in emphasis as he reaches the *nt*.

We read store signs as we continue up Topanga. Laughing and sighing, we figure out a few as we see the patterns, and with some, we struggle with the font choice.

That, right there. That is NOT an appropriate font for a garden shop. For heaven's sake, that font is more suitable for a pizza parlor. It was a big mistake; I don't want to shop there. I'm concerned about their choices. It could reflect poorly on their inventory selection. They probably have a large selection of herbs and no flowers. Tanner shakes his head in concern over my rant.

As we read the signs, we realize the lights have been in our favor, and we have breezed through all the corner strip malls in record time.

Not only are the strip malls unplotable, but if you start scrutinizing the fonts, you will move toward the 118 in record time.

No problem: our debate continues. The road work sign fonts reveal a lot.



Together We...



At our Spring Renewal, we composed a group poem from our individual responses to the Tending the Flame invitation from NWP in honor of the 50th anniversary of the first Summer Institute at the Bay Area WP.

Together We...

Together we can release that white-knuckle grip
Together we can see that “fear is an invitation to pay attention.”
This is your invitation to pay attention
Find power in the short, just enough
Not back then, down there, but right here, right now.

Together we ask questions.
Do I work as hard to make the school system fit my students as I work to make my students fit the school system?
How has teaching changed my perspective and
How has my perspective changed my teaching?
Together we rebuild the house from the inside out

Outside world internalized
Perceived and put away
Random mix
Life comes at us.

Some of the eye-openers in a bulleted list

- find a way to show a student their own mind at work
- ignite the bonfire to destroy the walls all around us
- turn toward each other
- marinate in what is unsaid

Together, practice imagination to sustain our hope, our humanity
Together, wonder what it would be like to not “other”
Together, *have* the hard conversations
Together, create sacred space.

Written together by:

Maggie Burke ('21)

Erika Cobain ('13)

Annette Cordero ('94)

Camille Despain ('07)

Tim Dewar

Kelly Keene ('21)

Alexa Levesque ('21)

<https://sparkpoems.com/tend-the-flame/gallery/2578>



Teachers and Students Take Action for a Sustainable Future

by Devon Azzam

I signed in at the front desk of a local elementary school, and nervously made my way down the hall to the kindergarten class that I had been invited to visit. It had been several years since my family had moved to the Central Coast, and I had transitioned from teaching elementary school to working for a university. It took a few moments before the lineup of backpacks in the hall and walls covered in student work filled with bright colors felt familiar again. I turned the corner and peered into room K-2. There was Ms. L and her kindergarten students gathered on the carpet. She waved me inside with a warm smile, and I could tell I was just in time.

The students had been writing a class book as part of a project Ms. L was developing through a professional learning program I was facilitating. The goal of the program is to support teams of teachers in implementing a sustainability project alongside their students. Ms. L signed up with her student teacher, and together they had come up with the idea to publish their students' ideas about sustainability in a class book. They began mapping out their plan in January, and over the next few months, they read books, facilitated class discussions, and brainstormed actions individuals can take to reduce human impact on the planet.

Each student wrote and illustrated a page for the *ABC Guide to Save the Earth*, and today was the day that these 5- and 6-year-olds would become published authors. Ms. L had raised money to self-publish the book and purchase a copy for each student. I got to be there for the moment the books were revealed. Each child proudly came up front to receive their copy and read their page to the class. A grand celebration followed, filled with photos and hugs and smiles. I might have been the only one with tears in my eyes.



The following week, I was invited into another classroom to see TK students in action on a project aimed to help their school reduce food waste. As part of the professional learning program, the TK teacher, Ms. M, teamed up with the computer lab instructor and science specialist at her school to develop a schoolwide food waste reduction campaign led by the TK students. The conversation about food waste began at the start of the school year, when the TK students were learning how to get snacks out of their backpacks for morning recess. Ms. M explained that on the first morning, apples and yogurts and pretzels were scattered across the floor. This began many discussions around food waste, and how to be a thoughtful consumer. Ms. M. and her students came up with a system: save it, share it, compost it. If possible, save the extra food for later. Another option is to share it with a family member. If you can't save it or share it, compost it. Once the class had become familiarized with their system, they shared it with the whole school.

Whenever I get discouraged about the state of our world, I think about these teachers and their students who are taking action for a more sustainable future.

In the computer lab, they created posters about food waste reduction to put up around the school. They invited the Banana Slug String band to perform “Dirt Made My Lunch” at a schoolwide assembly, and they demonstrated how to sort food waste into the new composting bins that were now in the school cafeteria.

All this effort aligned with county legislation to begin the following school year, mandating schools to divert food waste from the waste stream. I didn’t have the opportunity to visit all of the schools that participated in the program, but I did get to hear from all participants at our final virtual meeting in May,

during which we celebrated everyone’s progress. A high school science teacher had paired up with the art teacher at her school to work with students on designing a mural for their campus that would reflect both the agricultural roots of their community and the important role of pollinators in food production. At the virtual meeting, this team began their presentation by sharing their frustrations with the long process for getting the mural approved by the administration. They also shared that while their students were patiently persisting through the mural approval process, they had simultaneously advocated for a policy change for school clubs on campus. The proposed policy would require each school club to elect a sustainability officer to serve on a schoolwide sustainability committee. The policy had been approved and would be implemented the following school year. These teachers had successfully supported their students in taking action for sustainability at the policy level.

Another participant in the program joined as an individual due to her unique role in a large school district in the Los Angeles area. She was responsible for providing academic support to students suffering terminal illness. She served her students and their families through home visits. Isolated from a professional support network, and seeking a way to bring joy and hope to the families she served, this teacher worked closely with one of our program facilitators to create and deliver home gardens for her students’ porch or windowsill. The program provides each participating team with a modest budget for materials needed for project implementation. This particular teacher expressed amazement by the tiny seeds that arrived on her doorstep alongside the other materials needed to create the home gardens. The small act of planting tiny seeds, watching them grow, and delivering them to her students brought joy and hope to her and the families she served.

This program has been offered for the last three years, and I am continually inspired by the professionalism, creativity, and collegiality of the participating teachers. Whenever I get discouraged about the state of our world, I think about these teachers and their students who are taking action for a more sustainable future.

This professional learning program will be offered again for the 2024-25 school year, under the umbrella of SCWriP. If you have a general interest in learning more about how to integrate sustainability and environmental justice into your classroom through project-based learning, this program is for you. The program has built-in time for collaboration and planning with your colleagues and provides support for every step of the way, from project ideation to implementation. Keep an eye out for more information in the upcoming months.

In The Middle of It All

Tadpoles in the fountain
new pussy willows in vases
a migration of moths
another new leaf on the pear tree
the tall grass mowed in circles
to walk into to return
peace in the middle

Despair a shadow
uncertainty a widening of eyes
Now what? Answered by an empty road
the dinner dishes stacked in the sink

Hands in hot soapy water
Scrubbing the roasting pan
Hands wiping the sticky counter

Peace in the familiar
In the middle of it all.

by Dorothy Jardin ('84)



Dorothy Jardin has been a beloved teacher, mentor, and poet in the Santa Ynez Valley for many years. Her most recent book of poems, called *Ripples*, is now available for purchase on Amazon.

Just follow this link:

<https://www.amazon.com/Ripples-Dorothy-Jardin/dp/B0C5BMBSMX>

“not sure if
hands in prayer or
cartwheel.”

Head Stand

In Junior High, a flop at sports,
I wanted to be tops at something,
not just good, but tops. I remember
flipping forward for a roly-poly,
my head stuck on the ground,
arms steady, kicking my legs up
instead of over for the turn
and all the gym girls cheered,
Look, she's on her head.
Upside down the world
made even less sense.
I wobbled and toppled,
but later tried a head stand for real
in the park & like that I rose like a pole,
feet straight up touching sky,
little kids from nowhere screaming
teach us, their mothers saying
no, no your brains will fall out
but my mother smiled *well done*
& nothing pleased me more
than pleasing her.

Soon invitations flooded in
for parties to demonstrate
my feat defying gravity, a thrill
to feel legs punctuating the air
like two exclamation marks,
all those birds veering clear.
I mean if you can't fly, why not
be steadfast with whatever comes
by accident or failing something else.
When asked, *don't you have a leg
to stand on?* I reply no, just my head.

To this day, topping eighty,
I still lift when shove comes to push,
those separations between us
only a matter of how
you turn things around.

Perie Longo
(August 2024)



Many thanks to Perie Longo, a Santa Barbara Poet Laureate, poet in the schools, poetry therapist, and dear friend to many for gracing PostSCWriP with her words.

Sometimes A Life

Sometimes the world is too large to fit on a page,
the woods eventually closing us out. I must stop
giving myself these impossible tasks.

Sometimes a life is too much to fit on a page.
I tried today, tried to describe his coming
and going, our laughing and weeping.

Sometimes a day is too complicated to fit on a page,
how it suddenly changes from bursts of red trees
to gray. Best to not talk about love.

Sometimes a love is too grand to fit on a page.
It needs a country to contain its edges and alleys,
not an open woods filled with bears and high peaks.

Let us be dark for a while. Sometimes you need
a whole night to weep. After all, the moon is full
and the world once too large to fit on this page
has become terribly small.

Perie Longo

(from *With Nothing behind but Sky: a journey through grief*.

© Artamo Press, 2006.)



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