

Minnesota Writing Project

Spring 2007

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Journey to the Land of Deciders

by Nora Wise

While following Muriel and Kirsten to the Land of Deciders (Washington DC) for the NWP Spring Meeting sounded like a good idea, it turned out to be even better. I was the proverbial frog in a shallow well at first, and ended up with a view of the National Writing Project's deep, wide waters.

The Mood on the Hill

Tensions could have been running high with votes on the national budget and the supplemental war spending bills taking place the same day. But, by all accounts (NWP members and government folks alike), the mood in Washington was upbeat. The climate seems decidedly more favorable toward education than it had been before the last election, and, according to Muriel and Kirsten, more open in general. *Kirsten Jamsen & Nora Wise out and about in Washington, D.C.* Beginning with Senator Amy Klobuchar and ending with Representative James Oberstar, we met with every elected Minnesota official or his/her aide in both houses. Our goal was to educate them about the important work of teaching writing and the big impact of the federal budget's meager allowance for NWP. The efficiency (both in numbers served and in cost) of the staff development model that the NWP has created did not appear to be lost on the delegation from Minnesota. We felt we got our message across quite successfully.

The Personal Is Political

While Muriel and Kirsten had the expertise, experience and credentials, I at least had some stories. Each time we met with a legislator or his/her education aide, we brought a folder of pertinent (and, if I may add, overwhelmingly persuasive) information from the national office. The co-leaders spoke articulately to the purpose and goals of the NWP, and then I threw in a few anecdotes from the field. I had photocopies of some work my students have done this year, ranging from frightful to stunning. One I'd like to share was written by a 6th grader. When asked to produce a quick write about an opinion, he wrote this:

"Writng is just hard nothing is intrsting to me. I just have nothing in mind it's so hard to get an Idea of something to write. I can't think of anything thats well fun to write about. I can't do writng it is just to hard to get deep thoughts from my mind"

Later, he wrote this poem:



"I am from play stations, pocket knives
And a collection of pucks.
I am from cluttered Basements, lively
Living rooms, and unknown attics.
I am from winding streets, colorful parks,
And the unforgiving swamp.
I am from squeaky doors,
Flights of stairs and complex 3-D puzzles.
I am from turkey feasts, board games and Uno,
Flighying with my grandpa,
My awesome family."

Opportunities for Connection

At one point, I wrote a list of all of the amazing opportunities I had taken advantage of in the two days I attended the NWP Spring Meeting. Among others, I learned from and was inspired by these luminaries:

- brilliant K-12 writing teachers who become mentors as soon as they take what they learned in their summer institutes back to school with them.
 - university level educators and researchers who continuously keep the river of best practice flowing.
 - practicing writers who not only believe in the importance of communicating through the written word, but also understand the importance of modeling it.
 - dedicated, activist educators from all over the United States who will not step aside as the funding for the NWP is line-itemed out of the budget every year.
 - predominantly white, middle-class female conferees who agree that our complexion doesn't accurately reflect the populations that we serve through our local sites.
 - our own MWP co-leaders, who bring with them a stellar national reputation, making the MN delegation stand tall.
- our MN legislative delegation, whose commitment to the NWP is more solid each year. Our goal is to have a full contingent signed on to the Dear Colleague letter next year.

As I reread my notes, compile my lists and remember some statistics, the big picture is this: The power of the Minnesota Writing Project- and by extension, its parent organization- is confirmed by the teachers and students who benefit from MWP's 65 programs, 19,859 contact hours, 31 in-service programs reaching over 1,523 educators. This frog thinks that's a pretty deep pond.

Writing in the Wind: Young Writers' Conference

This year's annual Young Writers' Conference was held at the Weisman Art Museum, where sixty students from Saint Paul schools gathered to view various artifacts, song lyrics, and video archives of the current exhibit, "Bob Dylan's American Journey, 1956-1966." In attendance was Aaron Liebo, a future teacher of language arts, who volunteered to work as a group leader. Aaron described his experience working with the young writers as inspiring, not only in terms of becoming a teacher, but also in terms of writing more himself.

One Man One Guitar by Aaron Liebo A Tribute Poem to Bob Dylan

Small Towns, Big Hearts
Small Songs, Big Dreams
Small Words, Big Effect
One Man One Guitar

Embraces the people's fears
Smooths their voices
Dances their dreams
20 was older than it is today
One Man One Guitar

Living in a changing world
A pauper prances a plead for peace.
The Marches Continue
Gun shots echo thought-out these desolate dreams...
Desert.. dying...deadly...drafts
One Man One Guitar

United we confront the divided
While the anthem of the Earth's dust blows
Elevating us from innocence
Lifting us
Arm in arm
Black and white
Woman and man
We listen...we obey
One Man One Guitar

Singing, we conquer chaos
Singing, we control the cause
Singing, we create compassion
In a detached, distant world
Blood clots the dust
Wind is left only blowing the ashes of the villages burnt
The soldiers left to die
Soldiers of all colors
One Man One Guitar

Floating Ashes
Ashes emulating those of the cigars smoked by fat cats
Profiting over the perished children
Soldiers
Children slain
Soldiers maimed
Their blood is on our hands
One Man One Guitar

Singing their songs
Their dreams will not die
Their dreams dance upon the blowin' wind



St. Paul student works on Bob Dylan book at the Weisman Museum.



A Boy Writers literacy group was formed at the retreat by 2006 TCs (left to right) Laura Cochlin, Kris Martens, Vicki Hubert, Kendrick Davies, Lynn Macal, and Karla Harding.

2006 Summer Institute Follow-Up Retreat

Fellows from the 2006 Summer Institute gathered at the Minnesota Humanities Center for an overnight follow-up retreat on March 9th and 10th. In addition to casual conversations and round-robin poetry over wine, the TCs reflected on their teaching over the past year through journal writing and brief group presentations.

Tea with Auntie Moe

May 17th, 2007
4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
Fireplace Room (135 Nicholson Hall)
RSVP appreciated by May 11 to muel0274@umn.edu

Please join us for tea with Maureen Dabula (a.k.a. Auntie Moe), a retired nurse and educator from East London, South Africa. In 2003, Maureen was selected for an international Writing Project experience through the Ikwehlo Literacy Project. It was during this time that she and MWP teacher-consultant Melissa Borgmann met at Ball State University, under the auspices of a National Writing Project Teacher Exchange Fellowship Program.

During the tea, she'll be sharing her stories and experiences as a Nurse Practitioner, Health Educator and Literacy worker, focused on the well being of her homeland. At 68, Maureen has known and conquered many challenges in a land riddled by the sins of Apartheid, Poverty, Crime, and the devastating effects of HIV and AIDS. She is enthusiastic about her time here, meeting new people, building upon her present relationships, and taking this as an opportunity to reflect and nurture her spirit abroad.

If you would like to receive this newsletter only in digital format, please contact Alex at muel0274@umn.edu.

Upcoming Summer and Fall Events

Summer 2007 Open Days

Join us for one or both days on the University of Minnesota campus!

Writing and the Visual Arts

July 11 – 9:00-12:00

- Gain strategies for using the visual arts as a springboard for writing
- Draw from the strength of the Weisman Museum of Art and write in the gallery

Using the Kerlan Collection

July 18 – 1:00-4:00

- Learn about The Kerlan Collection, one of the world's great children's literature research collections housed at Andersen Library.
- Investigate some of the more than 100,000 children's books, as well as original manuscripts, artwork, galleys, and color proofs for over 12,000 children's books.

Cost (Parking included): \$40 per session for participants NOT sponsored by an MWP Institutional Member District.

\$30 per session for participant from MWP Institutional Member District

\$35 per session for current MWP member

CEU available

Download a registration form online at <http://mwp.cla.umn.edu/open2007.pdf>

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Minnesota Writing Project

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Minnesota Writing Project

WRITING RETREAT

June 21, 2007

Mount Olivet Retreat Center

<http://www.mtolivetretreat.org>

- Write for personal and professional purposes
- Renew acquaintances
- Enjoy the tranquil setting – walk the nature trails

Open to all MWP members, the cost of the Retreat (\$25.00) includes morning and afternoon snacks, lunch and the afternoon presentation of writer Lorna Landvik. She is the author of several bestselling novels, such as *Patty Jane's House of Curl*, *Your Oasis on Flame Lake*, *Welcome to the Great Mysterious*, *The Tall Pine Polka*, and *Angry Housewives Eating Bon Bons*. She is also an actress, playwright, and proud hockey mom.

The retreat will begin with check-in registration/refreshments at 10:00 on Thursday morning, June 21, 2007.

If you are interested, please e-mail Alex Mueller (muel0274@umn.edu) and he will send you a registration form.

Reservations: Due by May 15, 2007

SAVE THE DATE

October 3, 2007

9:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Continuing Education and Conference Center (St. Paul Campus)

MWP Follow-up – Improving Student Writing/Closing the Achievement Gap

Experience a day similar to one from your summer institute – complete with writing groups, reading groups and teacher demonstrations.

Cost: \$50 – includes parking and meals/snacks

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