



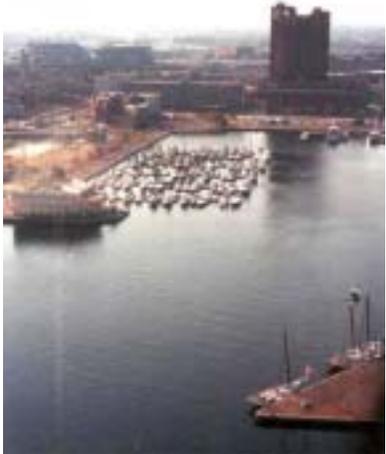
Minnesota Writing Project

December 2001

Vol. 11 No. 2



91st Annual Convention Baltimore, MD – November 15-20, 2001



Although I had some apprehension about traveling to the convention in Baltimore, the experience couldn't have been more enjoyable. The plane rides were "uneventful," the accommodations (29th floor overlooking the harbor) offered a breath-taking view, and the presentations were informative and inspiring. On Thursday Marsha Besch and I attended NWP workshops on several topics of concern. The workshops were presented by writing projects from around the world, and discussing ideas with people from so many different areas was fascinating. I'm always amazed at the similarity of project people – so friendly and willing to share their materials.

At the NWP general session on Friday, Director Richard Sterling shared the exciting news that all 50 states now have NWP sites. We were reminded of the importance of telling our "stories" in securing funding for our projects. Stories from students, parents, and colleagues about the importance of the writing project continue to demonstrate the power of the professional development we are doing.

One of the most interesting speakers was Ann Lieberman, Senior Scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, who has been researching the National Writing Project to document the "secret" of its survival. From 1998 to 2000 she studied the Oklahoma State University and the UCLA writing projects to discover what teachers mean when they say they have been *transformed*. In addition to documenting the summer selective institute, she followed three TCs from each project, seeking answers to the following questions: what did they take back to their classrooms/schools; how did that work find its way into the bigger institutions; how does it make its way to the student. Although it was the most difficult research she had done, she felt it was the most satisfying. When teachers become involved with the writing project, they examine themselves as teachers and grow professionally. They discover a community of fellow teachers and gain a new identity of what it means to be a teacher.

As I listened to these TCs share stories of the students they had followed, I thought of how their experiences could easily have been told by Minnesota Writing Project teachers. They shared how students became more competent, successful writers who were able to experience voice without sacrificing measurement; who were more reflective about their writing; who realized that "learning is taking it with you." They emphasized the importance of creating a "nurturing" environment and buying into their students' passion, but also encouraging them to grow. As one TC shared: "Have faith in all of our students and take them beyond."
(continued on page 2)

Expand Our Writing Community!

MWP is again seeking nominations for its upcoming Summer Selective Institute. We value your input, so please consider nominating a great teacher for the 2002 Selective Institute, which will be held July 8 - 26, 2002 with an opening retreat June 18 - 20. You can use the nomination form on page three. Please feel free to make as many copies as you need; send us your nominations as soon as possible. We will contact these people to make sure they understand what an exciting opportunity the Selective Institute is and to make certain they get an application to submit.

Laura Stokes, Inverness Research Associates, emphasized the importance of the research we are conducting in securing funding and asserting the effectiveness of the program. Inverness conducted a survey in Summer 2000 on the impact of the National Writing Project on teachers. One year later, what was the effect? Among the findings, teachers responded that they

- Possessed concrete teaching strategies
- Utilized up-to-date research
- Were motivated to seek more professional development
- Felt better able to teach students
- Gained more strategies to work with a diverse student population
- Were able to reach standards

and their students

- Knew the qualities of good writing
- Understood the value of writing
- Enjoyed writing more
- Wrote more and longer
- Wrote in other subjects
- Gained editing skills

Laura shared other impressive statistics about the National Writing Project and encouraged us to become more involved in research at our individual sites. In response to this request, we need to tell about OUR site to expand the knowledge base. Please record your personal stories of success and share them with us. Also, remember that legislators are interested in the personal stories from their individual districts - **write them!!** --Muriel Thompson

Baltimore Highlights

by Marsha Besch

Baltimore, site of this year's National Writing Project Annual Convention, has become a major tourist destination. Muriel and I took advantage of our semi-retired status to spend some extra time in the city. Our room on the 29th floor of the Marriott Hotel, headquarters for the conference, provided a magnificent view of the restored inner harbor area. The beautiful late fall weather allowed us the opportunity to enjoy the water taxi rides, strolls along the waterfront, and dining outdoors at the Cheesecake Factory.

One of the city's prime attractions is its aquarium. Coral and fish show off their brilliant colors. A dolphin show delights the audience. But for Muriel and me the most fascinating exhibits were the tanks with the



seahorses and seadragons. They reminded us of creatures right from a fantasy tale.

A paradise for sports fans, Baltimore has combined the Camden Yards baseball stadium, the Ravens' football facility and Babe Ruth's home in one major complex.

St. Paul isn't the only city that claims Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald. The airport displays a mural of famous Baltimore writers including this pair, and our tour drove past the rowhouse where they lived.

Edgar Allen Poe is a cult hero in the city. His grave, a common tourist site, is visited by hundreds on his birthday. Our tour guide told us that each night a man cloaked in black visits the grave, drinks a toast, and leaves behind three roses. And what other city can boast that their NFL team is named with such a poetic reference (the Ravens)?

For Muriel and me, however, a real highlight of the trip was our visit to Fort McHenry. Located on the edge of the city overlooking Chesapeake Bay, it was there that Francis Scott Key was inspired to compose *The Star Spangled Banner*. Especially after the events of this fall, Muriel and I were moved by hearing our national anthem and seeing the flag flying over the fort.

Upper Midwest NWP State Network

On October 5 and 6 MWP hosted the first Upper Midwest NWP State Network Conference at the Minnesota Humanities Center. The primary purpose of this retreat was to discuss the benefits of creating a regional network. Because of our isolated locations, state networks are non-existent in our states. In addition to allowing us to make connections with each other, this retreat gave our sites the opportunity to discuss successful programs, strategize ways to strengthen our sites, identify common problems, and envision future endeavors. The possibility of offering on-the-border workshops between states emerged. Such workshops would increase the visibility of our individual projects and provide opportunities for teachers in these areas to gain the benefits of material presented by TCs from our adjoining states. Representatives from South Dakota, North Dakota, and Minnesota attended.



Site Directors: (left to right) Jane Kurtz, Judy Sheridan (Red River Valley Writing Project), Nancy Zuercher (Dakota Writing Project), Harold Nelson (Great Plains Writing Project) and Muriel Thompson (MWP).

NOMINATION FORM FOR MWP SUMMER INSTITUTE 2002

Please complete and return to:
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207 Church St. S.E.
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, MN 55455

If you have any questions, please contact us at (612) 625-6323.

YOUR NAME: _____

YOUR HOME PHONE: (____) _____

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Comments:

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A Very Big Thank You

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