



# the circle

the newsletter of the greater phoenix area writing project  
spring 2003

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

G. Lynn Nelson

Dear Friends in Writing and Teaching,

Last newsletter, I wrote about "keeping the faith." Well, as you know, it ain't getting any easier – what with budget crunches and AIMS advocates and school ratings and bigger classes and (insert any number of your own challenges). And behind all that, the rumblings of war.

More than ever, I believe, we teachers, we believers in the power of language, must come together and support one another and give each other energy and courage for this work we do. If this teaching/language thing we do were just some small subject in the curriculum (as ignorant people believe it is), it would be easy just to say to hell with it and walk away. But you and I know it is much more than that.

We know because in the midst of all the work that seems like just a subject in school – the drills, the worksheets, the grammar lessons, the revisions – ever so often something magic happens. Something that reaches beyond that meager classroom and those tattered textbooks. Something that has to do with

language and our common humanity and our very survival:

- This day in class we have been discussing anger and the power of turning our anger into words. I read to them from nasdijj's *the blood runs like a river through my dreams: A Memoir*. I read these words: "I became a writer to piss on all the many white teachers and white editors out there (everywhere) who insisted it could not be done. Not by the stupid mongrel likes of me" (11). I tell them how nasdijj was born with fetal alcohol syndrome – and how he worked to claim his voice and his words in order to tell his story and to help him to survive. As the students leave at the end of

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class, Eva, who is herself filled with (justifiable) anger, gives me a fleeting smile, the first time she has smiled all semester.

- Jason has a terrible time with grammar and mechanics (his first language is Navajo). "Read aloud to find your mistakes," I tell him over and over. He comes to me for help with the draft of his paper – a memory about his alcoholic father who left the family when Jason was only five years old. "Read it aloud to me," I say. He reads as I follow along, commenting. Then, his voice breaks and he stops for a long while, head down. A small tear splashes on my office floor. My hand touches Jason's shoulder.

- Jennifer chooses to do her I-Search project on her father, who died in a car accident when Jennifer was very young. Sometime later, she comes to me saying that it is too painful and she wants to do her project on something else. Then, a week later, she asks to talk to me again. "I had a dream last night," she says quietly, her voice breaking. "My father came to me in the dream. He told me that I couldn't call him 'father' – because I didn't know him well enough. So I guess I have to do my project on my father, after all."

"Yes," I say to her. "Yes, you do."

And so it goes in this work we do, this work that is so much bigger than a mere "subject" in the curriculum, this work in which we must help each other to "keep the faith."

So to help us keep the faith, please consider the following:

√ The GPAWP summer institute – we still have a few openings left for next summer. Encourage your school/department to send a colleague.

√ The GPAWP Open Enrollment class this summer for those who have been through GPAWP or anyone who wants to enroll. (See enclosed flyer.)

√ The YAWP summer program for teenage writers. (To nominate a student, see enclosed flyer.)

√ "An Evening with Tom Romano." (See enclosed flyer.)

√ The spring Peace-Teachers Gathering. (See announcement on page 5- details forthcoming.)

Blessings upon you for this work you do,



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## peace portal



Teachers writing and sharing toward peace

<http://www.cgc.maricopa.edu/>

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*In his closure letter to the Summer 2002 YAWPers, Dana Francis, YAWP teacher (GPAWP '99, Gilbert HS) writes...*

**M**y hope for is that from here on out—for July and August and September and on, you see things a bit differently. That life is not just about television and cars and rumors and gossip and clothes and trying to be accepted by others who, in a few years, you won't know anyway, but that, on occasion, life is about the need to slow down and breathe deeply, to walk in a rainfall, to take a nap beneath a tree, to read a book by a river, and to wake at dawn with the stillness and the birds and the fleeting coolness. Tell your friends and family how much they mean to you. Walk with a gentle heart and laugh at yourself before you laugh at others.

**YAWP** is not just about what you can gain from our three weeks here...it is also about what all those people out there can gain. As my church pastor once said, and as I'm sure many others have said, America desperately needs you—people who care, people who are unlike the millions of other Americans whose lives revolve around trying to get that bigger house or that faster car, that louder stereo or that bigger pool—and that bigger paycheck, always that bigger paycheck. We need you, not to sit in the boardrooms discussing a new toothpaste flavor or how to most effectively package a new deodorant as, sadly, so many spend their lives doing, but instead to do something wonderful—to think, to feel, to create, to help, to heal—to care.

*Dana Francis*

### YAWP NOMINATIONS NOW BEING ACCEPTED

Young Adult Writing Project  
June 9 to June 26  
Summer 2003  
Monday-Thursday  
8:30 am to 12:00 pm

Arizona State University  
Language and Literature Building

Cost: \$150.00  
(some scholarships available)



To request a nomination form and application materials, please call our office (480-965-2568) and materials will be mailed to you

# *Finding Strength Through What is Important*

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By Dina Brulles  
GPAWP 2000

In *The Important Book*, Margaret Wise Brown writes, "The important thing about rain is that it is wet. It falls from the sky, and it sounds like rain, and makes things shiny and it does not taste like anything, and it is the color of air. But the important thing about rain is that it is wet."

The *important* thing about writing is that it is real. It tells us what we otherwise would not know, and opens doors and makes us think, and sometimes, (if we are lucky) it contains wondrous thoughts and ideas. But the *important* thing about writing is that it is real.

So how do we help children get to what is real in their writing? As teachers we see so many layers covering the core, the truth—what really matters, what is important. The layers and levels of instructional objectives structured around the core not only shield us from finding meaning in our students' writing, but also prevents students from searching for what is meaningful to them when they write. They form barriers—the "shoulds" and the "ought to's" that keep us running on the hamster's wheel. As teachers we must understand the various curricular models and be able to implement them in our teaching that does not create impatience for writing in our students. We need to show children how to take a

step back, slow down, "think small," and feel free to write.

Freedom allows us to find real meaning. It allows our voices to emerge, and when the layers are stripped away, we allow what is important to be said. When we finally hear what was hidden, the writing comes together in a way that no systematic approach could bring about.

*Through exploring our thoughts on paper, we become stronger—stronger thinkers, stronger voices, stronger writers and stronger people...*

How can we learn to hear what our students need to say through their writing when we are trained to shield what is important, and cloak ourselves in layers of questionable "shoulds"? When we are faced with district assessments, portfolio requirements, and state standards, sometimes we lose sight of what is important about writing: we write to know our feelings.

When students feel heard, they feel respected. They are then able to critically analyze and improve upon their writing without feeling that we are attacking their message. The layers of "shoulds" can be build around the real core: the truth in writing. But first we

must help our students find what is important to them, and then, we need to respect them enough to listen—we need to show that we care. Through exploring our thoughts on paper we become stronger—stronger thinkers, stronger voices, stronger writers, and stronger people.



Dina Brulles teaches at Horizon Elementary in the Glendale Elementary School District.



*The circle welcomes your contributions of writing. Please send your thoughts, musings, ideas about teaching, or book reviews. We also welcome submission of your students' writing. Please send care of the circle.*



# The Peace Portal

By Pam Davenport (GPAWP 1980)

On November 9, 2002, about thirty teachers and others, a "marvelous mix of gatherers," as one participant called us, converged upon the C.O.D. Ranch outside of Tucson. We met there on 11/9 to reverse the sadness, violence and hate of 9/11. We were there to reflect on ourselves as humans, writers, and teachers.

It was a crisp, fall day in this tranquil place, surrounded by mountains, and we began our morning by gathering around a fire and considering the words of Kelly Cherry, who wrote a "Writer's Pledge of Allegiance," in response to September 11<sup>th</sup>:

I believe one must speak

I believe in the power of language—  
to show, to move, to solve, to heal

I believe nothing is beyond knowing.

I believe nothing is beyond saying

We thought about what we might do, simple, tangible acts. Some of us sat and wrote, while others quietly talked. And then Sharon Fagan (GPAWP 1983) called us together, Eddie Webb (GPAWP 2002) sang and played his Native American drum,

bringing the heartbeat of the earth into the barn where we gathered, and Lynn inspired us to be warriors with words. We rose from our chairs and walked along paths through mesquite and Juniper, each of us finding a spot to be peaceful, to find the strength inside of us, to use the power of writing to heal.

Later, over lunch, as another participant said, "stories bubbled to the surface during informal talking, unexpectedly, because this space - physical, mental, heart - was made for just that to occur organically." Another wrote in her evaluation of the day about the "kind, passionate people who were truly interested in exploring how to use the classroom and writing as a way to change the world."

We ended the day back in the barn, telling stories again, and then a circle formed, we passed the feather stick, and each person shared what was in his or her heart. Many read what they had written that morning.

Candace Burton was concerned about a problem we can all relate to. She wrote:  
Am I

Part of the problem...

the Problem,

The problem.

The Problem?

The D.O. requires that I "cover" nouns and verbs and semicolons. . . .

In a world where words may be our salvation,

is it really important that a 13 year old

can identify a dangling participle?

Or is my solution,

my charge,

to impart a joy of writing and creating

provide safety to take risks

use words to make this planet theirs

I had gone off that day into the trees to find what had been making me ill and banish

◆◆◆Cont'd p. 6

it by the power of words. I wrote:

I know it has a name, something like war maybe, or schedule, or student learning outcomes assessment, collateral damage, or homeland security. I will replace it with the love that is required of teaching. That's it, isn't it? War can be waged without love, workers and investors can be cheated, weapons can be created without an ounce of love. But to teach requires oceans of love, universes of love, enough to squeeze every ounce of hate from existence. We can do this. We will do this.

Tricia Webb (GPAWP 2003) wrote "a philosophy of teaching":  
the wind, like language, can destroy  
or it can create-worlds, possibilities, lives, people  
a gift given to humans to create

and yet-

there are still and evermore campaign ads  
and empty university president platitudes  
that never reach the classroom-Lynn says-(God, I hope he's right)-  
phrases that serve no one

and do nothing  
except fill the space we should  
keep empty for

dreams and  
play days and  
new stories and fishing  
quietly  
on an Iowa  
river bank  
and hope  
hope like the warm,  
comforting, earthy smell of a  
camp fire-  
hope that slips in through the

*Hope like the warm,  
comforting, earthy  
smell of a  
campfire...slips in  
through the  
classroom door and  
says yes it can be,  
of course it's  
possible...*

classroom door and says  
yes, it can be, of  
course it's possible  
and absolutely-you-can

these words create movement  
around and toward  
something that serves a larger  
good  
something that extends  
beyond my hand-  
outstretched to you across an  
English 101 paper-

And Margo Tamez wondered:

I don't know if I  
believe anymore that nothing is  
beyond

language. . . which is a  
reckoning with the  
spirit of other humans  
who've been denied  
access to language  
either through  
external forces or  
forces from within  
that have cast shadows  
on their flowers of  
words, and the petals  
that would be their  
poetry or stories fall  
to the floor to  
decompose, and get  
stepped on, not  
recognized as valuable,  
as important, and  
fundamentally  
necessary.

Ah yes, the stories. Lynn's  
words about Darwin inspired  
Sharon Fagan to write:

The knowing that some words  
heal,  
are warm  
steep my spirit so as to release  
their hold and let go of me  
first, to twiddle my toes in  
open air and swirl things in the  
doing so.  
next to plant toes on terra  
firma  
take root, and swirl bigger  
things up -  
like them and me, and them  
and me at once  
in the whirlwind of these new  
words that capture me and  
spin me  
with them

## Welcoming Kristen La Rue

After 17 years as the Administrative Assistant in the English Education Department, Mary Jones retired last August. Mary spent many hours processing paperwork and doing all the "behind the scenes" work that makes the Writing Project all come together each summer. Kristen LaRue, the new Programs Coordinator for the English Department, took over Mary's position in December. So when your schools and districts call in to recommend teachers for the Writing Project, they will hear a new voice on the phone. Please join us in welcoming Kristen to the Writing Project staff.

### **GPAWP 2003 SUMMER INSTITUTE**

Letters went out to your schools and districts in November about this summer's program. If you know of a teacher in your school who would benefit from a chance to attend GPAWP, please make sure your principal or other administrator gets his/her name to us as soon as possible. The summer institute fills up quickly and spaces are limited. If your school or district did not receive a letter, please let us know.

## HOW TO MAKE BASBOSA

We all know that food is one of the things that makes GPAWP what it is. We love to eat, and we love to share those recipes. Here is a recipe shared by Hanan Zorob (GPAWP '02, Desert Garden School). Hanan grew up in Egypt and shared this wonderful treat with us. This is Hanan's recipe for Basbosa—a cake-like bread with a slightly sweet lemony flavor.

Preheat oven to 375

2 cups farina  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  cup sugar  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  cup coconut  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  cup flour  
 2 tsp baking powder  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  cup vegetable oil  
 2 tablespoons yogurt  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup milk

Before preparing basbosa, prepare syrup:

2 cups sugar  
 2 cups water  
 4 drops lemon juice

Bring the water and sugar to a boil. Add lemon juice and remove from heat to cool.

To prepare Basbosa:

Mix Farina, sugar, coconut, flour and baking powder in bowl. Add the oil. Mix well. Add yogurt and mix well again until the mixture becomes dough-like.

Cover the bottom of a shallow baking pan with oil and place the dough in the pan. Cut dough into squares before baking. Press an almond or pistachio into the top of each square. Bake for 20 minutes (or until top begins to turn brown) at 375.

Pour syrup over Basbosa. Note: The syrup should be cold and the Basbosa should be hot.

*Ed. Note: This was sooooo good that Hanan made this for us twice! An extraordinary GPAWP culinary feat!*



twining, growing, yet untangled in their respite  
until standing, upright  
erect,  
stalwart against the pull the others have  
to drag me back down the food chain.

These words and more swirled around us, and I  
think we all left feeling more hopeful. One person  
wrote, "I feel as if I have come alive again." Many  
echoed this comment: "It only lasted one day -  
next time a whole weekend retreat would kick  
ass!" So, we will work toward that goal.

Our web site will hopefully be up by the time you  
receive this. You will find it at the Chandler-  
Gilbert Community College site:  
<http://www.cgc.maricopa.edu/>. We call it the  
Peace Portal. As Margo Tamez wrote: "Through  
the threshold of the peace portal we go as  
sisters and brothers, embarking on a faith  
journey, opening our arms to  
voice, to spirit, to possibility and to infinite  
imaginations."

Our next gathering will be on April 19<sup>th</sup>, at  
Chandler-Gilbert Community College. You will  
receive more information as that date approaches.  
If you would like to be added to the distribution  
list for this Peace Portal, please send an email to  
me at [pam.davenport@cgcmail.maricopa.edu](mailto:pam.davenport@cgcmail.maricopa.edu).



## NOTES AND NEWS

### UPCOMING EVENTS

TOM ROMANO  
"Gush and Craft Toward Authentic Voice"  
Thursday, February 27, 2002  
7:00 pm  
Language and Literature Building  
Room 316



BLENDING VOICE AND PLACE:  
A RURAL SITES NETWORK  
REFLECTION RETREAT  
February 28-March 2, 2003  
Tucson, Arizona

Contact  
Sharon Miller  
Southern Arizona Writing Project  
[sknijgm@earthlink.net](mailto:sknijgm@earthlink.net)



PEACE GATHERING  
TEACHERS TEACHING AND WRITING  
TOWARD PEACE  
April 19, 2003  
Chandler-Gilbert Community College

Contact  
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*The circle* is the newsletter of the  
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