

Instant Book

Carnegie Learners Conference
Creative Writing Day
1989



INTRODUCTION

A year ago Sheila Baxter, a volunteer tutor, had the courage to accept a challenge that was made in the Learning Centre. The challenge was to work with learners using only pencil and paper. Using these tools and the experiences, feelings and thoughts of her learners, an informal writing curriculum was developed. The harvest from this approach was self-confidence, trust, open communication and some wonderful writing that was later published in the **Carnegie Newsletter**.

On May 6, 1989 Sheila led a workshop at the Learner's Conference that combined her creative energies with those of the seventy workshop participants. The skit she wrote and then performed with Janice Patchell set the stage for a highly interactive session. The skit portrayed two tutoring sessions: one was negative and a put down of the learner, and the other built up the learner's self image. After the skit, Sheila asked us to think about our own educations, write about one experience, and share it with the group. This writing and sharing was very powerful and became the content of the **Instant Book**. All contributions remain unedited.

Sheila would like to thank those who contributed and also Pat Landrecht for doing the word processing and photocopying.



I feel that learning has a bad reputation, and it gets this reputation from school. Books and schoolwork are seen as uncool. I had a bad time in school. I hated it and I did not do very well. But I was always learning throughout the whole time I was in school and after. I was always interested in a lot of things and I always found out about the things I was interested in. I don't think I learned much in school. All they want you to do is go through the motions. But they don't care about you if you fall behind; they don't help you get ahead; they just let you drown. Now I'm a tutor and I'm helping two young girls in grade 8. They are both smart girls and hard workers, but they aren't doing well in school. Even when they do their homework their teachers merely express surprise. The fact that they are native girls just might have something to do with their teacher's indifference.

Education is something you need to learn in order to live in society. Some of what you learn you always will use and some of what you learn you will always remember.

It's important to be able to ask questions; if you can't, then you have to depend, and hope other people will ask the questions you have, or hope that the answer will be given somewhere along the line.

I enjoyed school and learning things but my relationships weren't that good so learning also became difficult. I gave my teachers problems because I was accident-prone and when they wanted to make things easier, I rebelled because I wanted to be the same as everyone else.

I wanted a complete education so I rebelled when pushed toward a secretarial program in grade 10. I got forced to quit by the principal who gave me a choice of quitting on my own or going over my head to my grandparents.

I quit, as I didn't want to have my grandparents involved.



Just because your a child, doesn't mean you don't have rights. So if someone touches you where you don't want them to, say "No", then tell someone.

What he was doing to me was wrong. But he said it would meke me feel better and told me never to say anything to anyone about what he was doing. So I didn't.

When I was a little girl Granny was my best friend. She was always there when I needed her. But I couldn't tell her about this, because I felt ashamed. So I didn't.

Besides, he told me I would get into trouble if I told my Granny. So I didn't.

But I wish I had because I know now that I wouldn't have been in trouble. He would have been.

SO

T'S ALL RIGHT TO TELL SOMEONE

by Pat Landrecht--an unedited free-write

ON WRITING/WRITERS:

Writing; "How do I love thee; let me count the ways."
Writing; that medium which is not as visual as film, but
which can be more so; that medium with which we can stop
a moment and examine it in depth, like a photograph; or have
a story flow along, scene after scene, as in a movie...;
In writing we can add colors and sounds and smells--all in
black and white on a piece of paper, and yet, they are all
the more vibrant for it--because our real medium is that of
imagination;

With words we can transport ourselves across the room or
across a galaxy; venture into the past, or future, or beyond
time altogether into that which could be, or could never be--
except in fantasy;

With words I can take you with me, or send you off on your
own private journey of interpretation. With writing, I can
edit before I speak to you--using words selected for clarity
or ambiguity--on purpose;

In literature, I can play god and create characters and
determine their fate;

I can safely chop the heads off of my enemies--unless my
name is RUSHDIE!;

I can safely make love to someone I'm too shy to share my
feelings with;

With writing I can inform, inspire, motivate, deflate,
propagandize, expand on, plan, share, or--privately record
my thoughts in a journal.

Writers are masters of procrastination.

The craft they love so well is often avoided, because of
inner fears, or because, once writers jump in, they may not
come up for air for a long time. Any distraction will
do!... And who hasn't experienced the "Blank-paper
syndrome"? Sit at your desk facing your typewriter; take a
crisp clean sheet from the pile; neatly insert it into your
machine; ratchet it just to the right point at the top of the
page; stretch your arms and fingers straight out in front of
you--like a concert pianist about to dive into a masterful
work; place your fingers above the appropriate keys, and....
NOTHING!

Your constipated mind does a few contortions....

NOTHING!

Suddenly, you remember your great aunt Bertha whom you
haven't phoned in thirty years, and surely you must call her
now.

She must be desperately wondering if you're all right.

Or, you've just realized that you're a tad hungry.

You leave your typewriter or computer and launch into a
nine-course banquet for one.

...You try a free-write:

"It was a dark and stormy night..."--and you add,--

"...So I curled up in bed and fell asleep with my favorite book."

Then you get up and walk around the room as your dog rolls his eyes heavenward and thinks, "Here!, I'll type the damn thing for you--if you'll just stop pacing about the room. You're making me nervous."

"I've got it!"--You run back to your typewriter and begin tapping out about the dream you fell into, which took you far off to another crazy world; and--off you go.

A famous writer once said that it's difficult for non-writers to understand that when he stands, staring for hours out of a window, that he's very much at work.

Writing is, after all, 80% incubation, 5% rough-draft, and about 115% editing.....

.....And this piece I bring to you now is a rough-draft--an 'off-the-cuff' thing written just before I came here, so please forgive me.

Writing, and reading writing, are two pleasures all persons should have access to.

The Learning Centre exists to provide that access--access to the joys of literature; access to information, by way of its literacy program.

An informed person is an empowered person; a writer is an empowering person.

Writing and reading are tools for change.
The pen is, "...mightier than the sword."

There is a saying that has stayed with me since adolescence and I think it fitting for the Learning Centre;

"Give a man a fish and you'll feed him for a day; teach him to fish, and you'll feed him for life."

Writing!... What a wonderful medium of expression and communication.

Tell someone across the miles how much you miss them, and what your life is for you.

The pen is a bridge by which I can come into your world, and you can come into mine; it is a bridge to understanding.

The pen truly is mightier than the sword.

xie xie nin

Li Lan Hong

Landrecht

Pat

I was going to write something
about the Learning Front but
unfortunately as I was about
to start, and evil scientist
shot me with a ray
and I have started
to get smaller
soon, I won't
be able
to hold
the
pen

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I have met three adults who are almost completely illiterate--all for the same reason--they were left-handed but were forced to use their right hand when they started school. This meant they lost five to six years of fine motor skill development since switching to the other hand meant starting over again with coordination. But, even worse than this is the trauma these people suffered from having their left hand beaten whenever they attempted to use it. No wonder they quickly dropped out of school and feared and hated anything to do with reading and writing since.

LEARNING

- Getting to know someone
- Building trust
- Sharing experiences
- Growing together
- Touching one another's lives.

I feel that everyone has the right to be able to read and write--a fundamental right that equals the need for food and clothing. Literacy must preclude the need for employment. When I was a child I was a terrible speller but I was great at grammar and reading. I dreaded spelling and the daily dictations. I convinced myself that I would never be able to spell. When I left elementary school I discovered that I could write creatively and I would write all kinds of mini-novels myself and keep daily journals. I also discovered the need to write letters to pen friends. I don't remember ever "becoming" a better speller, but I do know by the time I finished university I was much better. I guess the point I'm making is that I did it myself without honours. I was doing it--through my love of creative writing.

As I sit here thinking about what to write, I feel like I'm back at school having just been given a writing assignment. I don't know what to write. I think it's got to do with the word "assignments"; so I sit here feeling stupid. I know I've got lots to say since I've got lots to think about. But when I'm told, "It's time to write.", my mind draws a blank.

I feel a great nausea. How can we be so cut off from the earth beneath our feet and the sky above us. Earth creatures meet in small, artificially lighted rooms and rationally plot the destruction of the world; my world; my children's world.

Technology, the vast resources of this planet, our greatest minds, conspiring to exterminate all life. And what can I do amongst this madness? Where can I go to escape it? How can I save myself or the ones I love? Madmen have seized control; they won't step aside. They have great and insidious powers of persuasion. They will convince you that I am dangerous or insane. And who will believe me? Who will stand with me. And is there still time?

I go to school 3 days a week at the First United Church. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. I was raised in an Italian foster home where they showed me how to write my name and speak Italian. I was nine years old. Now I am 61 years old and would like to read very much.

I have met three adults who are almost completely illiterate--all for the same reason--they were left-handed but were forced to use their right hand when they started school. This meant they lost five to six years of fine motor skill development since switching to the other hand meant starting over again with coordination. But, even worse than this is the trauma these people suffered from having their left hand beaten whenever they attempted to use it. No wonder they quickly dropped out of school and feared and hated anything to do with reading and writing since.



A PERSONAL REVOLUTION

by Suzanne Smythe

When I met you I had high expectations
of you and of me
I had a vision of how our relationship would form
of what you would write and read
of all the revolutionary ideas you would encounter
and take to heart
I think I wanted for you what I want for me--
a tool to change this crazy world--

But after working together a few weeks
I see that revolution can't be imposed
Nor can ideas.
You have your struggle and I mine.

I still have expectations

That we don't give up

That we use the power of words
to love ourselves
whatever those words may be...
And however we decide to use them

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An attempt to communicate a reality
that portrays a scene
that might show Glatant (?)
abnormality in the art of talking
I mean, what is it all about?
We are attempting to communicate
only using the tools of
one of the communicators,
while the other's (a) sea (?)
A-l way dialogue
or failure to communicate
in a multidimensional
world
Someone mentioned "dislexia" (dyslexia?)
how is that supposed to tie in?

Learning is a whole life process. Anybody who would like to come to a new country must learn the new language so that she or he can communicate well with others and certainly find a better job--and have a better life.

Well, going to school was not the best thing that happened to me, as I had a very hard time to learn, so then I quit.

But now I look back and think I could have don it, but I thought being dumb, you just don't fit in. Well now I can say that school is it. That grade 12 means the world to someone. I haven't reached it just yet but in 2 months I will have that feeling to go back to school, as, when times are tough and I want to fall, I will pick myself up when someone talks bad and calls me dumb I will say, "Yah, that's why I have my grade 12."

When someone needs a hand and they want to learn, I will do the best I can to help them.

I see you. I know that you are nervous and scared. So am I.

"What do you expect of me?, both of us are thinking. Perhaps you've brought a lot of pencils and I've brought a lot of books. But we really don't need them to start, do we? There's you and me, and that's a lot already. The rest can come in its own time. The most important parts of this experience are here now.

When I was seventeen, I was pregnant and expecting my first child. During my last month I was furiously and desperately trying to complete my correspondence course before my baby arrived. I was in a home for "unwed" mothers and working in a small classroom with other expectant moms. One day, a student-teacher came to do a week long practicum. Putting aside my correspondence course, I reluctantly did the prospective teacher's bidding. Consequently, we began doing English exercises out of a textbook. The creative aspect came into the scene and I started to like the work. I wrote what I felt was a pretty good paragraph. Then I waited patiently as the student-teacher went around the room commenting on the student's work--knowing that she would be pleased with mine. Finally, she stopoped at my desk and read my work. I'll never forget her words, "You weren't supposed to copy out of a book." as she dropped it on my desk.

Being a very shy person I could only answer, "I didn't." I didn't think she believed me. Today, I am a tutor and I love to teach English-- hopefully better than that student-teacher.

WHAT DO I DO?

- MARY

Nothing came into my mind when a time came to write. What should I put on paper?...a poem, mystery, or story (?) What should I write?...Or maybe my thoughts, my dreams, my anger or my terror, or, should it be a love story, or a friend, or I could write about what I've seen in the last few days; Oh, what should I write today, tomorrow, or even yesterday? What do I do!?

Janice Patchell

May 8, 1989

My name is Janice. I am from St. John New Brunswick. I only have grade one. I want to learn English and math. I want to do everything.

I like the Learning Centre. I learn how to read and write good. I do better than in the other school where I used to go. If you go to the Learning Centre, you'll learn about everything in the Carnegie Centre.

~~(REDACTED)~~ re. ESL TUTORING

Pat Landrecht

I am trying to learn Chinese. This one fact has helped me as an ESL tutor because I realize how difficult it is to learn a language--especially one which is so very different. What I have found that works is patience, repetition, correction and the breaking down of self-conscious barriers which prevent people from trying.

As a teacher, I feel it is my place to first establish trust and rapport. This is the key. Students are often terribly self-conscious about trying to speak a new language. An intelligent person suddenly feels like he or she is in kindergarten again. Suddenly s/he can't express him/herself. People outside treat the student as if s/he is feeble-minded when she/he feebly attempt to communicate. If these attempts are met with understanding, patience, assistance, and respect, the student feels safe to try and can then enjoy her/his little successes. This motivates him/her to go on to bigger successes. I know this as a teacher--because I am also a student, and because I care.

BLACK EAGLE'S EXPERIENCE ON EDUCATION

My name is Stephen Black Eagle. When I was young, many years ago, I was in a foster home, and they put me in school to learn English. Because I was a Plains Indian, I only knew my native tongue--Cree.

In 1976 I was kicked out of school for beating up my teacher.

On these mean streets
Death is casual
Like the token gestures
Of society
Our existence reinforces their middle class
Beliefs
Little they know that a
Life is a life and
Valid as any
But why shop here amongst the derelicts
To make believe all
Is well at the nine
O'clock gun
The fact is you can be shot or raped at any time.
When your time is up
You may rise to heaven
And if God ends the
World
It will be because
You have bored Him to death
With your middle-class
Righteousness
Give me a break
Keep your righteousness
To yourself
So that I may become
Old enough and deaf enough
Not to have to
Listen

To be fair I have had some great experiences in school.
There were some good, fair, human teachers, and some good
friends.
Often though I was attacked verbally by teachers and
punished by the strap, standing in the corner, writing
lines, or other tortures. My self-confidence suffered and
in some ways I still carry the scars.
I am a teacher now. I have a certificate. I am still wary
of schools, though, especially strict, inflexible ones.
There should be talking and laughter and tears. You don't
need a special place for these things. You don't need a
student lounge. There is so much debris in the way of
learning for so many. Let's open some windows. Any
classroom anywhere can have laughter, talking and tears at
all time.



Tom

What do I think about the Leaning Centre

~~(picture)~~

Tom was helpful to me. I start to learn, read and write,
and I start learn to understand people to care about myself.

by Velma Paquette

Education: Is writing about what we have done very educationable. What I think is it is possible. We, or all of us, should have a thought on education, but when the teachers or counsellors give us trouble for the little things we do. We get nervous of what we done and we fall or quit what we are doing. That is no way to get education. What I think is to leave that person right alone-- not to bother him, but to let him get an education. Help him or her get an education--not give him the displeasure of not getting the education he needs.

(edited):

What do I think about Learning Center.
When I was 29 years old I was not nice to people and I didn't care about myself. I was pregnant at the time. I did not know how to read and write. I had to talk to someone and I got introduced to Tom. I was scared of him until I got to know him. He understood what was wrong with me. I understand what the Learning Center is because I learn the hard way and I love what learn in the Learning Center.

(unedited):

What do I think about learning Ceanter.
When I was 29 years old that was not nice to people and did care about myself. I was pregnant at the time. I did not know hao to read and write. I had to talk to someone. until I got introduce, to tom. I was scare at him. he understand what was worng about me. I understand what learning Cearnter is because I learn hard way And I love what learn in learning Cearnter.

Be gentle to those
you teach
You hold their
literacies in your hand
So repeat and repeat
a sound or word
For as long as it takes
a learner to learn
Is how long you must
teach.

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IT DOESN'T COME ON A SILVER PLATTER by Margaret

Some people say "you inspire me", granted,
but you see the things that I do are
because I like to do those things such as
sports where I get to meet ofthe people
and go to other places
I've always wanted to make a difference
in the world, like helping other people.
So you see it's really not me
it's how you feel from the inside
how you feel about yourself
Myself, I want the world.
But in order for me to accomplish this,
I first have to prove to myself that I
deserve the world.
Some poople don't understand that.
They feel that things should come on a
Silver Platter.
But hey, let''s get real here...
nothing comes easy or cheap,
you have to work to get what you want,
build your Empire, but be happy building
this Empire..., but also remember the people
that helped you get there.
You see a lot of peoople forget that they started
from scratch, don't let that person be you.

ON EDUCATION

My personal philosophy is that people will be happier and more content with themselves if they try to fulfil the potential of their abilities.

To do this they must have knowledge of themselves, of their experiences, abilities and limitations; they should seek to test these limitations as often as they can. Yet, to be 'educated', self-knowledge is not enough; one should also seek to learn about others and to communicate with them.

ANITA STEVENS--DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE POET

CREATION

I work very hard as a poet to express my thoughts, feelings, observations and experiences on paper. Much time and thought goes into my writing. Each letter, capitalized or not, each word, the positioning of each word on a page, each space, punctuation; all of these are involved in a decision-making process to give form and substance to each poem. When, after all the time, thought and effort, a poem has been published, to see that body of work, that creation changed without being consulted can be greatly distressing. What would have been the outcome if Einstein's work had been changed without consulting him: What of Madam Currie's work? Beethoven's fifth Symphony? The Declaration of Independence? The Charter of Rights? Henry Moore's magnificent sculptures? A body of work so carefully, lovingly, painstakingly and thoughtfully prepared must be respected.

*(Please note: There are a few drawings to go into the instant book. They are located in the file of originals/manuscript.)--Pat Landrecht

The UBC Library and UBC Learning Exchange would like to thank the following participant for her contributions to digitizing this community-generated document:

Brookes Bayfield

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