

Verbal Equinox

Weber State University's Writing Center Journal

Spring 2001

WSU's Literary Environment

Creative Writing and the Writing Center

-Elisalyn Gardner

The spring of my freshman year at Weber State University, I went to my first poetry reading: a poetry reading for Weber State's literary magazine *Metaphor*. I was excited to see that not only did I have peers interested in poetry, but that there was a forum to express this interest. I remember wondering how I, as a freshman, could get to know these fellow poets. I applied to work at the Writing Center the following fall and was pleased to see that many of the *Metaphor* poets I had listened to were going to be writing tutors as well.

During my three years of working at the Writing Center, I have become increasingly involved in the literary 'hap-

penings' on campus. Besides being involved with Verbal Equinox, and Writing Center poetry readings, the general enthusiasm for language and communicating I have found in those associated with the Writing Center has reinforced my own creativity and desire for expression. I had expected my fellow Writing Center tutors to be skilled writers, but I have been happily surprised every year to be able to meet so many seriously talented **creative** writers.

This year we had several Writing Center tutors involved with *Metaphor* as has been the case every year I have worked at the Writing Center. On the 2001 *Metaphor* staff: Scott Woodham was poetry editor, Jewell Loveless was fiction editor, Allison Palumbo and Keith Stephenson were fiction reviewers, and Ryan was in charge of the *Metaphor* web page. Also, Angela Satterthwaite published two short stories in *Metaphor*.

Another forum for creative writing in which the Writing Center was well represented was the English Department annual writing contest. Ryan Decaria won second place in the fiction category and Allison Palumbo and Elisalyn Gardner received honorable mentions for poetry.

Every year with pride, Weber State University presents the National Undergraduate Literature Conference, and every year Writing Center tutors are

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The Writing Center: A School for Life

-Karrie Mitchell

Right after I began working at the Writing Center two years ago, I adopted the phrase, "Every paper is a window into someone's soul." Each student who visits the Writing Center has a unique perspective on life, and as I have worked with each student, I have learned lessons and gained many insights that have enriched my life.

I have learned to view every paper that comes into the Writing Center as a mini-lesson. When a student came in with a 40-page capstone paper on the assembly-line production of airbags, instead of inwardly groaning about how boring the topic was (which was very tempting to do), I decided to look upon the paper as an opportunity to learn something. Consequently, I became interested in the paper and learned quite a bit about the subject. While learning about assembly-line production may not have enriched me as a person, the process of learning to become interested in what another human being has to say did. That is a lesson that will always

Ambiguity

The pallid quail
whitewash of fear
exacts rosy cheeked
consummation from obsession,
feeding a greater hunger
of yawning unknowns.
Passion is left unwielded,
and limp,
its color falling
like a fading fever.
Only a fracture remains
behind so many gestures
that hone the fine,
starved shape of question
gripped around the whys,
and nowhere in between
is the plumpness and
lusting flu heel opinion
of an answer.

-Allison Palumbo

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among the participants and audience. This year the featured authors for the conference were Richard Ford, Peter Wiley, and Victor Martinez. The Writing Center tutors who presented their original writing during the conference were Allison Palumbo, who presented poetry and essay, Ryan Decaria, who presented fiction and poetry, and Scott Woodham, who presented poetry. Our own Sylvia Newman acted as moderator for NULC sessions showing her support for creative writing.

There have been too many poetry/creative writing engagements this year in which Writing Center tutors has supported to list them all, so will conclude by saying that though I have *Metaphor*, the honors program, the English department, and the enthusiasm of excellent professors to thank for so many 'literary' and creative writing opportunities, I would like to send out a special thanks to the Writing Center; for though the goal of helping fellow students with **all kinds** of writing has certainly been determinedly pursued by myself and the other tutors, the added support for creative writing pursuits and the community of creative writers I have met through the Writing Center has increased my confidence in my own creative ability and my desire to continue writing poems.

"What we become depends on what we read after all of the professors have finished with us. The greatest universality of all is a collection of books."

-Thomas Carlyle

Conference Presentations

Helping Students with Learning Disabilities

-Angie Satterthwaite

During fall semester, we as Writing Center tutors had the opportunity to listen to a presentation by Fran Butler of the Education Department here at WSU. She discussed the plight of one particular group of students that often goes unrecognized—those with learning disabilities. Writing is a major obstacle for these people, and as many as 20% of the population fits into the category of learning disabled, so the implications for us were obvious. As a prospective English teacher, I wanted to learn more. How could I make writing easier to understand for the learning disabled students I would work with? Jewell Loveless and I decided to look into it further.

After researching diligently (or at least researching), we came up with four basic adaptations we can make to our teaching/tutoring. The first is to use clear and consistent language. know

I have a tendency to use technical jargon. Also, always thought it was helpful to explain things in two or three different ways. This is true to a point—sometimes a confusing concept can be understood if it is just worded a little differently—but once the meaning of the concept is grasped, renaming the terms only re-confuses the whole mess. Find words that work and stick with them.

The second adaptation is based on Howard Gardener's theory of multiple intelligence. It entails working with what the student *can* do. Some people with learning disabilities are good at math; I had one student figure out the four sentence types as equations. Most have no problem with visual-spatial tasks;

have them "build" an essay with all of its components or draw a picture of an "umbrella" thesis covering all the main points. Find out what they are interested in and work with that.

Thirdly, we can help learning dis-

"It is important that students bring a certain ragamuffin, barefoot, irreverence to their studies; they are not here to worship what is known, but to question it."

-Jacob Chanowski

abled students form a plan of action. Giving them an assignment to write a three page comparison/contrast is simply too overwhelming. Problems with organization are a major symptom of learning disabilities, so break writing down into specific, easy to follow steps.

Organizational problems are also the reason for the fourth adaptation—using concrete graphic organizers. These include paragraph charts and outlines. I know Jewell has really had great successes with these. They help clarify the function and order of each section of the paper. Most writers are able to see how the different parts relate to each other, but people with learning disabilities really struggle with this. After identifying the necessary "trees" for the action plan, create the forest.

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I guess technically we let ourselves off the hook with the disclaimer that there are countless other things we can do to help those with learning disabilities. One we came up with was using a tape recorder to record a tutoring session so that the student can review what was said (often they can talk about the ideas in the paper much more clearly than they can write them). We also thought that writing each main point and support of the paper on Post-it notes, spreading them out on a table, and physically arranging them in a logical order would be helpful.

The cool thing is that all these adaptations would help almost any writer. It boils down to the idea that good teaching is good teaching.

APA Know-how

-Jonathan Yates

After receiving some partially negative feedback from writing center users about our APA formatting skills, Dan Sayers and I were asked to address this issue at one of the Writing Center's bi-weekly meetings. This was fine by me considering that I myself was one of those tutors needing a brush-up on my APA skills. So Dan and I both dug in and managed to come up with some information and useful advice to impart to our fellow tutors. Our presentation must have been at least somewhat satisfactory because we were asked by Sylvia to present it at the Rocky Mountain Peer Tutoring Conference. Elsie Hill was also invited to present with us. She had done a presentation on APA format during our tutoring methods class and had prepared both a handout and web page on the subject. She also is a psychology major and has had some practical experience writing in APA style for some of her classes. Lucky for us, she accepted the invitation to help present. So we got together and organized what we would cover.

I introduced our topic by asking if anyone in the audience had experienced frustration trying to explain APA formatting style to tutees, or if they had become frustrated in trying to use the *APA Publication Manual*. Then I explained the purpose of the manual: to format papers for publication, and I argued that it wasn't always the best resource to use for helping students with undergraduate papers. Normal undergraduate papers are intended to be final manuscripts rather than copy manuscripts. A final manuscript is one that reaches its audience in the exact form in which it is prepared. Copy manuscripts are used to aid the publisher in typesetting for printing but are not always the easiest to read.

Quite often, I believe, professors on the undergraduate level modify the APA format to suit the purposes of the students' papers. I, therefore, proposed that the students use their professors as their primary APA resource. I also proposed the use of general writing style manuals, such as Diana Hacker's *A Pocket Style Manual*, as basic reference resources for APA. These manuals contain shortened versions of APA format that are not only easier to read and understand than the official APA publication manual, but they also contain modifications that are better adapted to suit the purposes of undergraduate student writing.

see APA page 6

Estate Sale

*The baseboards are deep-stained and once needed a child to oil the cloth,
to knee-walk tracing room borders] wood becoming lemon in the path.*

*A steep-peaked Saxon provincial built of brick and WOOD and plaster,
its floor squeaks in places familiar to teenagers now grown.*

"Anyone seen the tape?"

"We need garbage bags."

"We'll take ten for the lamp."

"Will someone please go get garbage bags?"

*Young grandchildren throwing a ball across the living room are not
scolded with a rule older, than themselves,
an older one makes change from a sewing box
which no longer contains things for joining,
and an unrelated third stands by a rack of suits
tailored to some other unreliable body,
realizing just now
that estate sales begin when people end.*

-Scott Woodham

Writing Center Contest Winners...

1st place poetry

-Andrea Lauritzen

Where are Joshey's Shoes?

"Where are Joshey's shoes?
Where could they be now?"

"Maybe a monster ate them,
or an elephant, or cow."

"Perhaps something's carried them off,
or they've walked away by themselves."

"Could they have floated away,
or hidden atop the shelves?
Are they waiting inside the toy box,
or peeking out from beneath the stairs?
What if we can find only one?"

"But shoes always come in pairs."

"Where are Joshey's shoes?
Where could they be now?"

"We must look everywhere.
We must find them somehow."

"Did a giraffe chew them to pieces?
Did an alligator swallow them whole?
Perhaps, a tiny mischievous fairy
has set them high on a pole."

"Maybe Joshey lost them
when he went out to play.
We must find those shoes!
We must find them today!"

"Did a witch turn them into a pumpkin,
a toadstool, spider, or frog?
Perhaps they have wandered away."

"Or been carried off by a dog."
"Maybe they're lost in the forest
frightened of every sound."

"Wherever those shoes have gone
they certainly must be found."

"Let's look outside in the woodpile,
or indoors beneath the couch."

"Could they have moved to Australia
to live in a kangaroos pouch?"

"They are either in the house
or somewhere very close by."

"Perhaps the reason they're biding
is because they are awfully shy."

"We have searched inside and out."
We have peeked in every nook."

"But our search is not yet ended.
We have one more place to look."

"Let's glance under the bed.
It's the last place we'll look today."

"Oh, here are Joshey's shoes."

"Where he left them yesterday!"

2nd place poetry

-Vanessa Hancey

Doubt

Let me fall off tomorrow,
like the shadow of the moon;
or at least rotate as nimbly.

I am sick of feeling
like broken glass,
I think my lip has cracked.

I throb like a dream
caught in the dark,
and can't put my finger
on who is beside me.

I don't believe the stars
when they tell me to look up.

3rd place poetry

-Charles Williams

Opening the blinds

A slim stream of the sun's light
seeped from between
the thin slats of my blinds.

I awoke feeling a warming sensation
on my cheek
where a single ray struck my face,
and watched particles,
which floated above my bed,
dance
in and out of the stream.

I strained for the string that
controlled amounts of sun
my window could release.
As soon as my hand
slipped its stretching fingers
through the Loops of the cord,
I pulled.

Result:
Particles vanished;
my face grew cold-
the sunspot left its resting-place.
Instead of seeing the lonely ray,
the room lit up
and
took it...

Took it-
all away.

1st place fiction

-Melissa Paul

Somente tudo Forte Sobreviva

That morning I woke up to the smell of rain. Normally I wouldn't mind, but our roof had started leaking. When I greeted my mother she gave me the look I had learned meant that she was tired, so I would have to fend for myself today. I knew she had been out all night, I heard her leave, and then return before the sun this morning. She was lying all curled up towards the wall. It was the way she always slept when she didn't want to deal with my sister or I, with her back to both of us. Everything about her seemed to droop, from her head mounted on her long dark neck, to her round little shoulders, to her stubby legs. She watched me leave with hooded eyes. Her black pupils were the only things about her that moved, and even then it was only to dilate briefly as my body blocked the sunlight that was shining in on her.

It might have been a beautiful day; I don't think about those sorts of things. We lived next to a wide, muddy river. Our only neighbors were crocodiles, a pair of birds that nested upstream, and my aunt and cousins. I generally managed to stay out of the way of all of them. I thought about trying to get some of the bird eggs to eat once, but I was never able to climb the tree. I still watched for the babies to fall out of the nest though.

My river is deep and full of mysteries. When you swim in it you can't see very far ahead of you. You never know if you are going to run into a rock or the roots of a tree, or the piranha that lurk about like storm clouds; they can never arrive alone, they always have to have a few dozen friends tagging along. The piranhas tend to avoid us, but I saw one of my careless cousins get devoured by them once. She was too small, and they were too many.

In my river there are treasures. In the soft mud that forms the bed are buried uncountable things. Some of them are good to eat; some are good to play with. Some things I don't see any reason for at all, but someone put them there so they must be good for something.

My river is lined with trees so thick you can't walk the length of your own body without getting tangled in something. If my river is mysterious, the trees are unfathomable. The trees are thick and tall and they block out the sun *for* most of the day. They grow in layers and stacks, trees grow upon trees, then vines, then flowers that stretch towards the open spaces where the sun shines through until the heavy rain falls and bludgeons them back to the ground. Sometimes the trees give presents like bird babies or fruit. Sometimes they give death like a jaguar or a python. I do not understand the forest. I fear it. I understand the river. It is my home.

As I left our house I found traces of my father along the river bank. It had been two rainy seasons since my sister was born, and once again he had returned. Snooping around at night, calling to my mother, luring her away with him. She always went, always. I didn't blame her; it seemed that having babies was all that was left to her. She was too old to find someone new. Later, when I understood having babies, and when the father of my children came calling, I knew why she went. There was no other choice. Sometimes he is the only one who comes, and you just have to go.

My father is enormous, over six feet. He is the best swimmer I have ever known. His shoulders are as wide as my sister is tall. His nose is broad and pink from the sun. His eyes are a brown so dark they might as well be called black, and he uses them to pierce through the muddy waters of my river. He is slightly bowlegged from carrying around his weight. My sister and I are not his only children. I know that there are others.

For a while I idly followed my father's tracks, wondering if I might catch a glimpse of him. He never stayed around for long. A week at the most, and then he was gone again; lost in the pursuit of other things. You could tell how large he was by the size of the footprints he left in the rain-softened red clay of the river. Tomorrow the sun would emerge and dry the earth until it cracked and his mark would last longer than his visit.

Following in my father's footsteps soon lost its appeal. My stomach poignantly reminded me that I hadn't eaten yet. I paced the edge of the river; watching carefully for the silver flash that meant the fish were awake. They liked the rain, which meant that I liked it too, at least when it wasn't interrupting my sleep.

The best fish to eat in my river are so lazy. They hide in the bottom near the mud thinking that won't get to them. They spend the whole day staring at nothing, because that deep in the river there is nothing to see. But sometimes the rain wakes them up. The stupid things hear it falling and they swim to the water's edge to see what all the noise is about. Sometimes it blows bugs out of the trees for them to eat, but the silly mud-fish are much too slow to catch them. And they are too slow to get away from me. My father is a good swimmer, and so am I.

At last I saw it, the perfect spot to catch a meal. I waited patiently as my mother had taught, seeking the right moment to strike. I had gotten quite good at fishing by then. You had to learn how to fish to survive. There was other food to be had, but there were also other hunters, bigger, stronger, faster hunters. These kinds of hunters were unforgiving of trespassers. Only my father was brave enough to wander into their territory, and only my father was able to journey there and return without harm. The rest of us stayed where we were. The river was the place for my family and me. We were born to live there; that was just the way things were. I didn't ask questions, I still don't.

I waded into the water until I felt it tickle me beneath the arms. It was as natural as breathing, returning to the water. It was like

Somente continued from page 5

the times my mother would come to me and I would drink her milk until I couldn't hold anymore. It was warm, it was sustaining, and to me it was life itself.

I dined well that day. I ate until my stomach was bulging. It felt good to be full of food, of life. To know that if you died today, at least you didn't die on an empty stomach.

The sun had come out by then, it always came out in the late morning. The sun was almost as lazy as the fish. Sometimes, like it had just done for the last half of my sister's life, the sun let the rain do all the work. Everyday, all day long it rained and rained until the sound of it became a part of you. Sometimes it seemed like the sun would never stop shining. It shone and shone until the whole river was forced to cover itself with a white mist to keep the sun at bay. But every once in awhile there would be a day with a little of both, like today.

I stretched out on a big rock in the middle of the river and let the sun soak into me until its warmth dried the river from my back. I dozed for awhile, letting my body digest the meal, and once it got too hot for comfort I slipped back in the water and found one of my cousins. We played games for a while, but as always, she grew snappish when she found herself loosing. Before long this grew tiresome, so I climbed onto the bank to find another diversion.

Sometimes I remember that morning, and what happened later. I remember it because I have to, because there is some part of me that knows it was only luck that let me survive. I remember it because I have to teach my children about it. There is a need to protect them, a need I never understood when it was me being protected. It drives me to the point where I would do anything to satisfy the gaping mouth of need.

My mother was too tired, and my sister was too young. They were stupid with sex and youth and it was the death of them both. We had been in the same place for too long; we had forgotten to move away after my sister was born. We should have left; I should have left, a long time ago. The place was full of our smells and our things and our lives. It was so full of us that it overpowered the outside world.

Sometimes, in the scentless world of river water, I forget how important smell really is. I look for fish, I listen for crocodiles, and I feel the clay of the bank. I do not smell enough. Outside the river there are a world of smells, and I never paid much attention to them. I smelled my mother, my father, my sister. I smelled the fish and the drying mud. I smelled the rain and the green of the trees. I smelled the cold-blooded hide of the crocodiles, but I never thought about any of it.

At my home I smelled blood. The blood of my mother. The blood of my sister. I could see it, but it was almost the same color as the red clay, I could feel it, slippery beneath my feet, but mud is slippery too. But the smell was alone. The smell was a taste in my mouth. It terrified me; and every part of me said to run. So I did. I ran to the river and I swam all the way to the opposite shore and I watched from the safety of the far bank. I watched until the men who had killed my mother and my sister came back to our home. I watched them tear it apart. I watched them pick up the dead body of my sister and fling it aside. I watched them follow my tracks to the river and shake their heads. I listened to them grunting to each other, and at last I watched them slip away.

It was a long time before I dared to go back and investigate what had once been my home. There was nothing left but a mound of clay and a few pieces of dead tree. My sister's body was still where they had flung it. It was even smaller than it had been in life. It was being carried away piece by piece by a string of tiny ants. I watched curiously for awhile. I even managed to touch my sister's corpse, but I felt no desire to stay with her. I didn't even bury her. The forest wanted her, and I would let it have her. She was never my concern.

My father came back a little while after me. I watched him poke around the wreckage. He seemed a little confused by it all, but also a bit relieved. He seemed to say, "At least it wasn't me." I know that he saw me. He raised his head and looked with his black eyes

A few days later I found my mother. She had been dead a long time. There was a small ragged hole in her side, but in the end that wasn't what had killed her. It was the jaws of the trap that clamped around her sleek neck that had killed her. He white teeth glared from her face in a startled snarl, and her tail was curled around her flank. She was stiff. She had been dead a long time.

I stayed next to her body all that night. My sister was one thing, but my mother was quite another. She had taught me everything. She had provided for me, and I had never been without her. But it is a big world out there, and everyone's mother has to die sometime. Besides, I was old. Not like my sister. I knew how to survive; I would have left the den soon anyway.

So I found a new river, and a new hole to sleep in. I found a mate and I raised my own children. I was never angry with the men that killed my mother. We were not a threat to them and their two legs that took them crashing through the underbrush. There was only one other reason to kill us then. They must have eaten my mother. After all, why kill if not for food?

Writing Center Writing Contest Staff:

Supervisor:

Allison Palumbo

Assistants:

Scott Woodham and Zane Froerer

"Education is what survives when what
has been learned has been forgotten."

— B.F. Skinner

Good Times, Five Stars at the Provo Tutoring Conference

-Dan Sayers

The Rocky Mountain Peer Tutoring Conference in Provo was well classic. The Weber State tutors all gave excellent presentations, as did the rest of the summit's representatives, and everyone involved in the conference can be proud of their contributions.

From the people that I talked to, it seems that most of the other schools' writing centers are appointment based and deal strictly with English courses and papers, which contrasts significantly with our drop-in center both in terms of time spent with a tutee and subjects covered. There are definite pros and cons for both approaches to tutoring, and the differences between the two were discussed in many conversations at the hotel later that night. Tutors from the other schools were impressed with our ability to assist with papers from many disciplines, such as psychology or physics papers, and under diverse circumstances.

The presentations were all excellent. There's no doubt in my mind that all the tutors there took away something from the two-day conference that will improve their tutoring. The greatest advice I received was how to maximize my time with a tutee, and this, in one way or another, was covered by almost every presentation. Time works against us in our writing center. When only thirty to forty minutes can be allotted to a tutee, there is a great need to address higher-scale concerns within a paper, as opposed to micro-editing. By seeing what tutors from appointment-based centers emphasized throughout their many sessions with an individual tutee I saw some areas for improvement that I could make in my own tutoring.

Now on to the non-tutoring stuff! We

A Revelation Smelling of Lakewater

*I lost my mind on Tuesday,
searched half- assed until Friday, and
found it dripping wet in a pocket
of pants last worn by a porcupine.*

*I asked it how it was,
what it had thought without me.*

*It said that a merganser's heartbeat
sounds like metal striking glass
when you swim next to its diving body.*

*I didn't want to know
how it knew that.*

*I left my mind sitting there
next to sweet, lake-blue shells
which it could not
have collected without feet.*

-Scott Woodbam

were treated to an excellent Italian meal at the Brick Oven, and a very informative discussion on the relationship between better writing and keeping a journal by Louise Plummer.

Ah, the hotel. It was a pleasant place to stay, once my group found it. During our night's stay at the Best Inn, tutors occupied themselves by swimming in the swimming pool, watching some booty shakin' on MTV's "The Grind," or frantically preparing for their presentations the next day. Later that night, we hopped into our cars in the hopes of finding adventures and a karaoke bar, but both proved impossible. Instead we had a great midnight snack at the International House of--ooh ooh-Pancakes and returned to the hotel for a good night's rest. I must say here that Ryan will die in his sleep should he ever snore like *that* around me again. After the presentations on Saturday, tutors were able to bust their directors' chops at the Director's Panel meeting, where the heads of the writing centers were able to sing their tutors' praises and boost their egos.

APA continued from page 3

There are times, however, when professors want their students to become familiar with the official publication guidelines for APA. For these instances it becomes necessary to use the *APA Publication Manual* as a reference resource. Basic familiarity with its contents will aid the tutor in providing help for the tutee. Dan presented a simple index he prepared to be put inside the cover of the *Publication Manual*. His index is to be used as an aid for tutors to find information relevant to the needs of tutees. It is much easier to use than searching through the *Publication Manual's* complicated table of contents.

Finally, Elsie presented the handout she'd prepared. It's something tutors can simply grab and give to tutees who want a simple resource guide they can take with them.

After our presentation, I feel more confident with APA formatting, and I'm sure Dan and Elsie do, too. So there's at least three of us who should be more qualified in helping students with those tough APA questions. We hope, because of our efforts, other tutors who

Life continued from page 1

be invaluable to me.

Working at the Writing Center has also helped me to gain insights into my own self. Once, after a student left me with the comment, "I know this paper was awful, so thank you for helping me," I felt as though in a way I had failed. As a tutor, I am supposed to instill confidence in my tutees, not take it away. His paper really wasn't awful, just wordy, and he was skilled enough to be able to condense his sentences perfectly on his own. But I hadn't really told him that I thought he was skilled. I had made him feel as though he was bad writer. After some self-reflection, I realized that I needed to start giving more praise, not just to my tutees, but to all those around me.

Sometimes the insights I have gained about life were painful. Once a young woman came to me with a paper but did

not want to read it out loud. As I read the paper silently to myself, I found myself entering the world of a heavy-hearted girl who was feeling immense pain over her brother's recent death. In her essay, she described how badly she had treated him while he was alive and the guilt that was tormenting her now that he was gone. She just wished that she could hold him again and say she was sorry for everything. I could truly feel her pain. By the time I was done reading her paper, tears were streaming down my face and hers. I just wanted to reach out and give her a hug and say that everything was okay.

I will miss working at the Writing Center, but I know that the lessons and insights I have gained from my experiences there will always stay with me. My hope is that what I have written will leave a little part of me there.

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