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The Weber State College Writing Center Newsletter

Volume 1, Number 2

January 1990

From the Editor . . .

-Lib Thatcher, Writing Fellow

I remember registering for Math 100D my freshman year at BYU. It was a refresher algebra course which I was required to take because my ACT score wasn't high enough to fulfill the university's requirement. I felt frustrated. I had always done well in school (except for math); I had never had to struggle for a 'B' (except for math); and I had always loved school (except for--you guessed it--math). Now I felt like a failure. Here I was in "dumbbell" math, my first quarter out of high school, and I knew I was doomed.

Then I learned about the math lab. It was in the basement of one of the oldest buildings on campus, and to get to it, I had to creep down a labyrinthine maze of worn cement stairs, designed to intimidate Math 100D freshmen.

I recall that my first impression of the math assistants (which, by the way, is still my impression of math assistants) was of intellectually superior beings, endowed with God-like ability to calculate how many pineapples it takes to fill a semi-truck. I spent hours in the math lab. On test day, which was every Friday, I would go to the lab at 8:00 in the morning and stay there until 5:00 at night, then run to the testing center to take the exam before all the quotients, variables, and formulae leaked out of my head.

I eventually passed the course (I think I even pulled an 'A'), and decided never to take another math class for the rest of my life. Maybe that is how I came to be an English major. (I'll never know for sure.) In any case, here I am, working as a writing assistant, sitting on the other side of the table. I have learned several things since my 100D days: that tutors are not super-human, but only students who love math, English, psychology, or chemistry, and who want to help other students love it, too; that I wasn't a "dumbbell," but only someone who was

working outside of my area of expertise; and that even math assistants don't care how many pineapples fit into a semi!

As writing assistants, we need to be particularly sensitive to the students who use our center. Writing classes are required of all students, and, while we believe teaching writing is the most important goal of any college, not all students (incredible as it may seem) will agree with us.

Keep in mind the limitations and strengths we each have (lucky for me, chemistry is not required by the college), and let us always make students feel welcome and at ease in our center.

Dr. Seshachari English Dept. W.S.C.

A guru, eclectic, a Homeric simile,
Polishing his earthen vessel
Speaking with ease.

Savoring the Bible, Milton, Shakespeare;
Poe for a stormy night.
Teaching "The Romantic Period
Catches everything just right."

Moving us to inspiration,
Fasting, "Putting low what is high."
Reading far below the surface;
Finding small print, magnify.

One of a mold, unusual perception,
Scholarly language, bright interjection,
With his back to Wyoming.
He breathes a sigh.

A molecule that matters,
Moving perimeters,
Probing limitations;
Space, time, dimensions.
Giving God a B+ for creation
On his best day.

-Marion Pult, Writing Fellow

WANT TO PUBLISH?

Did you know there are several forums open to writing assistants for publication? One of these is the Purdue University "Writing Lab Newsletter," edited by Muriel Harris, author of Teaching One-to-One. Our own JoAnn Holbrook was recently published in the January 1990 issue.

Recommended length for articles is eight to twelve double-spaced typed pages, three to four pages for reviews, and one to two pages for the Tutor's Column, though longer and shorter manuscripts are invited.

Enclose a self-addressed envelope with return postage clipped (not pasted) to the envelope. Send to:

Muriel Harris, editor
Department of English
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907

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In an attempt to get to know one another better, we will be including a personal profile of a different writing assistant each month. This month's profile is reprinted from the November 1988 issue of THROBBING MINDS.

PLAY IT AGAIN, JOE

-Brent Mark, Writing Fellow

See, I was sitting at the bar ignoring Joe complain about his fat ugly wife who couldn't even cook a decent steak and trying to listen to Billie Holliday. It was a rainy Thursday afternoon, and I had just wrapped up a messy case with fallacies and parallelism and a femme fatale.

I was just sitting there slamming whiskey and rye, chain-smoking cigarettes, practicing a disdainful sneer, trying to get a grip on my frayed and frazzled nerves. One foot on the table and a hat pulled low over my eyes. I was a real tough customer then. Yeah, right.

I heard the click of high heels, and she walked in. Jet black long hair swinging down to her waist, eyes of sapphire blue, and a body that curved on and on. She was sobbing and tears ran down her cheeks. Lady Day wasn't helping things, either, singing her melancholy tunes.

I started up with the usual mundane small talk that echoes in every small bar or dive where people are lonely. Where you from? How do you like the weather? Do you live around here? Every stupid question that

gets a conversation going. She needed to talk; she told me about her problems with her family, and school. School was the main factor in her life then.

Apparently some insensitive professor had given her a poor grade on a paper she had worked hard trying to get right. She said she had put time into mechanics and sentence structure when I let it slip that I was a professional writer and a proofreader.

She brightened up. "Could you read this and see ...maybe, help me out?" Flipping her hair over her face, she looked at me out of one eye. That one did the trick, though. Geez. I'm a sucker for blue eyes.

I read her paper over and said, "You need a thesis sentence."

"Oh that is for babies. Professional writers don't use them," she said. "I bet you don't. Mr. Dash."

"I do, too. Every good writer has a way of structuring and organizing. If you don't put it in, it's like telling a detective to solve a crime without a clue. He might be able to, but it takes three times as long."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, I'm sure."

"Will you help me write it?" She leaned forward; her mouth forming into an o.

Looking at her, I started thinking about the last case and the girl and how she shot my partner after he had told her that her deductive logic was all wrong, and I shook my head no. Her memory was still too fresh and the wounds too deep.

I put my feet up on a chair, lit a cigarette, took a swallow and mumbled, "It's something you have to learn for yourself. Besides you have awful prose."

"A tough guy, hunh." She scribbled her name on a piece of paper and slid it across the table saying, "You'll give me a call some night. It's only a matter of time."

Standing up, she grabbed her purse and books and walked back into the rain into a waiting cab. Lighting a puffer, I stirred up

ashes in an ashtray and looked at her number.

As the rain pelted the awning. Joe started jabbering, but I told him to shut up, fix me another drink, and put Lady Day back on the jukebox.

SPACE ACADEMY

-Ron Peterson, Writing Fellow

About four months ago, a few tutors were milling around in the Writing Center with nothing to do but create conversation. And as with most English tutors, the conversation was creative. Somehow, I guess it was because Diane's husband works for Thiokol, the conversation turned to "Tutors in Space," a spinoff from the Muppet Show's "Pigs in Space."

Diane said it would be great if all of us could go to Space Camp in the summer. Being a science fiction nut and space enthusiast, I gave Diane my undivided attention. "Can we really do that?" I asked. Well, as such things go, we had to first ask around. Diane contacted one of her husband's connections, and it looked like the tutors were going to Space Camp. Well, one of them at least.

After Diane found the information and brochures about Space Camp, she left it to me to recruit the tutors. But as with most exotic places, the cost frightened all but one away (\$450 for Space Camp and \$300 for the plane). I had planned for a long time to go to Seattle and had enough money in the bank, but Space Camp seemed much more interesting--that is if you think being placed in a centrifuge is fascinating.

The centrifuge was the first ride simulation that our group went on. It is a circular room with tall, brown Lazy-Boy-like chairs along the wall. I strapped on the safety belt and looked up at the monitors in the middle of the room. A dry lump formed in my throat when we were told that the spin would create three gravities, exactly what the people on the Space Shuttle feel when they blast off, for eight minutes. "What?" someone yelled. "How come eight minutes? That's three times longer that you get to spend on a ride at Disney World!" The Space Camp employee said the shuttle's main engines burned for eight minutes, and as long as the engines burned, you would feel heavier.

"Oh, by the way," he said, "don't turn your heads. Just keep them straight."

Someone told me a horror story where a girl turned her head to me side and had to stay

that way for the entire ride. According to those who have done it, it is extremely uncomfortable. Suddenly blood rushed from some faces as they nervously stared up at the monitors.

An image of the Space Shuttle resting on the launching pad radiated from the

monitors. As soon as I felt motion, whirling lights buzzed all around the room. Ever so slowly I was pushed back in the chair. My feet were on the floor, so I was still all right. Then the Shuttles' engines roared to life and the image was replaced with numbers showing how many G's (gravities) we were enduring. After two G's, my chair started clicking and moving back. I thought, "My God, I'm in a defective chair!" But other chairs around the room started doing the same thing, and my nerves were somewhat restored. Then my chair thudded against the wall at two-and-one-half G's. Shortly after that, my weight rolled the chair up the sloping wall, and my feet left the floor. My limbs were glued to the chair. The only thing I dared to move were my eyeballs. There was absolutely nothing I could do but stare up at the monitors. The operator said to point up at the dot on the screen and extend my arm. I forced my arm up like a weakling and pointed a crooked finger at the dot. Then the operator said to lift a leg. I couldn't. Swallowing was difficult because the saliva just stuck to the back of my throat. My face felt like slipping off and sliding to the chair. Good grief! Eight minutes of this? But those were the fastest eight minutes I ever experienced.

Between all the simulations, we had two training missions and two "real" ones. One simulator was broken, so I had to be in mission control for both real missions. The training missions were simple. The mission director is responsible for everything that happens to the shuttle from liftoff to touchdown. For reasons unknown to me, I got to be the mission director.

Mission control at Space Camp looks just like a miniature Houston Control. However, the Space Camp's control room seats only ten people. I sat in front of a panel decorated with dozens of green and red lights, an equal amount of switches, and a monitor. I had to know ALL the functions of those lights and switches or else the mission would not fly smoothly. Also, I had to read an one-hundred-page script that told everybody what to do. The script simplified the mission, but it was my job to keep everyone on the time-line.

Our Mission Control also had a projection

television that showed all significant information about the shuttle's flight. Two large-screen TVs to the right and left of the room kept up with the minor details of the mission. I also had to watch the monitor at my console for any emergency information. I wore a clumsy headset that kept me in touch

with the commander and pilot. They told me of anything that went wrong, and many things did. But we were able to keep up with any emergency the Simulation Director threw at us.

After two hours of grueling, intense teamwork, the mission was over. Our team-leader took us to the cafeteria and told us that we took first place. Obviously, that delighted us so much that we all stomped and hollered around the cafeteria.

If you have the time and money, I strongly encourage you to go to Space Camp this summer. There is so much to learn there that they offer different levels of training. You will definitely gain appreciation for all the hard work and detail that goes into a shuttle launch.

The wild ideas, like "Tutors in Space," of the people in the Writing Center sometimes really do come to life. English tutors can go anywhere they want to. Well, almost anywhere.

We will be arranging a time in the time in the next newsletter and plan to come. Meanwhile be making a list of all of your brilliant accomplishments and impressive activities. That's right, take this opportunity to pat yourself on the back, as well as insure your future. If you don't do it, no one will!

Congratulations to Jeanie Weicks for winning the Writing Center slogan contest. She will receive a copy of the book Writing With Power by Peter Elbow for her slogan: **"Good writers use the Writing Center!"**

FYI

--National Undergraduate

Literature Conference

Submission deadline: February 5, 1990

Submit to Dr. Vause

--Creative Writing Contest

Submission deadline: February 16, 1990

--Metaphor

Submission deadline: January 26, 1990

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