

THE SAWPER

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SAWP Snap

*The SAWPER is online! Let us
know what you think.*

In this issue, we focus on a Writing Theme of "Scary Stories and Heebie Jeebies," while the Content Theme focuses on a wrap up of summer SAWP activities.

Also, we introduce ErecToso, our new SAWP Director.

A Snake Bite Severity Score In Four Parts

By Erec Toso, SAWP Director

August

I am walking, lost in thought. As I take a step further into the dark on a night fresh with monsoon sultriness, fang sheaths retract, a jaw unhinges, and fangs thrust forward. Thick muscles in the shape of an "S" contract, straighten the body, driving home a surprise sucker punch, driven by defensive reflex. Twin spears pierce skin. Venom sacs compress, injecting a large dose of poison deep into the side of my foot.

My mind decelerates from supersonic distraction to a standstill of awareness. My world is temporarily suspended outside of time by the surprise waiting for me in the summer heat of my front yard. In that gap of no time, no hurry, no motion, fear took a vacation. There was no time to be afraid. Worry deserted its post. And anxiety fell through the windows that opened as my ship of a life suddenly dropped anchor.

This was something I could not explain when others later asked how it was. When they heard about it, they assumed that I sped up even more, that fear and worry and anxiety somehow redoubled their efforts to keep things moving. It seemed the answer to crisis: to keep moving, to keep accelerating, fueled by catastrophic stories and skin-tingling danger. Yes, the stories we tell about snakes awakened, rearing their hoary heads, jump-started by my front yard abomination.

Some would see in the bite the realization of a nightmare. Others a random, freak, coincidence of nature. A few saw it as an unprovoked attack by a demon. No one was neutral.

For me, the snakebite sent a search party out into the brain. They could not return until they had found some way to tell the tale that gave it context, suitable villains and heroes, a sense of human place in a world still wild to the mind. The bite rendered me silent, and for some reason, vigilant about what story would serve it best.

October

I climb out of sleep into a greater strangeness. I pursue but cannot catch something in the receding dream as I recognize morning light com-



(Snake—Continued on page 2)

(Snake—Continued from page 1)

ing through the blinds. I turn to a sound. Luna, my dog, nuzzles the side of the bed, knocking the slats with her tail – a furry, canine, tail-on-wood, alarm clock. Tock. Swish. Tock. Swish. Tock.

The sepulchral warmth of the bed and my wife’s nakedness cannot keep me under the covers. I have to rise. It is now October, and the mornings feel suddenly and, to me, unnaturally, chilly. It is already time to shut down the evaporative coolers for the night. Soon, we will turn them off completely, sliding the metal damper into the duct before firing up the furnace.

I don’t know how this happened. In some ways, I am still living in August, the hot, monsoon time. The past two and a half months have passed by without me and the gap between then and now disturbs me, puzzles me, waits for some answer that I don’t know how to give.

It is when I swing my legs over the bed and get ready to slide on a T-shirt and shorts, minimal, insulating comforts, a modicum of modesty, that I remember my foot. It is still bandaged, sore, and swollen a full two months after the rattlesnake bite.

I will have to change the dressing this morning. The foot throbs, aches, and stings, something like what I imagine an amputee’s phantom pains to be. I am delighted to have my pains arise from an existing limb. At one point, the surgeons discussed the possibility of having to take my foot, but here it is still, a tired refugee, wrapped in gauze and Ace bandage.

It complains half-heartedly as I walk, first a sting, then an ache, then a burn, as if it can’t make up its mind what to send as a message to my sleepy brain. I wiggle my toes as I sit on the toilet – no standing for a while – and scratch Luna beneath her collar. Her white muzzle rests on my wrist, and she looks straight at me, her dark brown eyes framed by black lines, natural eye-liner. She used to be yellow, but has turned sheet white around her noble lab nose. She is getting old and sleeps next to my wheelchair

when I write or work at my desk.

I feel shell-shocked. I don’t know what to make of my dreams or of the speeding world around me. I have lost my bearings and a sense of my place in time. I should now be half way through a semester teaching, should be coaching a soccer team, should be, should be. But am instead at home, crippled, watching the parade that is the working world from a distant hill. The sounds of the marching waft up on the breeze, and, occasionally, I see a wave from someone in the passing throng, but mainly, it is quiet. And I sit. Like Rip Van Winkle, I’m not sure what day or year it is, only that I am waking after being disconnected and far away from my routines.

I find the wheel chair in the living room, the only place unblocked by doors too narrow for it to pass through. I wheel over to the computer, delighted by the gliding ease of the chair. It wheels in tight circles and coasts straight ahead without effort. Even when I sit in a regular chair now, I catch myself reaching for the wheels, a sudden habit.

Luna is not yet ready to go out. Neither am I. She lies next to the chair as the machine begins to boot up. This time has become a ritual. I must write my way into and through these last two months. I have to find a way to embrace the trauma and to release it. I know there are words that can work magic on this tangled knot in my head.

I’m not even sure who I am or what I value anymore. I love quiet. I want peace. I know that I want to pay more attention to my place and to my life and to those who cross my path or who share their days with mine. I feel very simple and cringe at the prospect of complicating things, of speeding up, of scrambling up the scree slopes of making a living, of going back to work, of the noise of my previous, day-to-day life.

The words will come. This open space with no story to guide it cannot last. I am full of opportunity and urgency. It is time to write these last few

(Snake—Continued on page 3)

“The past two and a half months have passed by without me and the gap between then and now disturbs me, puzzles me, waits for some answer that I don’t know how to give.”

(Snake—Continued from page 2)

months, to find in them the thread that opens, that illuminates.

We will never be free from stories. We need them like we need air and water. Stories tell us who we are, make sense out of a senseless world, blind us, and give us meaning. They come with the territory of being human. Stories can poison and imprison us as much as they can sustain us.

The rattlesnake plucked me from my stream of stories for a brief moment and allowed me to stand apart from them enough to see how they kept me from seeing a sublime reality in front of me. I see I need to get out, to wake up, to un-plug, to slow down, to stop long enough to realize that the old stories no longer work. It is time to re-write, re-think, re-see my stories. It is in that rewriting that the experience of being alive can shift from fear to awe, from subjugation to co-existence, from poison to medicine.

Luna welcomes the nurse who has come to help with the dressing change. For some reason, she likes to hang around when we do the IVs or clean the wound. It is still strange to be at home living a life that revolves around a schedule of IV infusions and wound dressing changes. A Styrofoam cooler full of IV supplies sits in the middle of the living room, where my recliner used to be: Ziplock bags loaded

with syringes pre-loaded with five CCs of saline solution or Heparin, rubber gloves, alcohol wipes, red caps to keep IV connections sterile, IV hoses, sets, shut-off valves, and the first aid stuff..

This morning, doing the dressing change, we could see a tendon. It was a pearlescent color, and was soft, a little giving to the touch. I'm glad I did not try to pull it out last night thinking it was a piece of leftover packing tape. As we pulled back the bandage and dabbed at the bashful skin, it tingled. The gauze revealed the soft, new skin that is growing beneath the old. My foot itched like crazy and skin sloughed off in sheets. Marilyn, the nurse, just scrubbed away with the gauze, almost amused at my surprise that I could lose so much of what used to be me. The old, dead skin just gave up and fell away, like the skin of a king snake I found not long ago.

King snakes eat rattlesnakes. The six-foot long skin was perfect, only recently shed, complete even to the tiny eye scales, and was lying on the ground, a ghost of the living snake, one capable of devouring the snake that bit me. The irony of having to digest that which once digested part of me is not lost.

As I sit here watching the healed skin rise up from beneath the dried outer layers, I know, deep down, that the king snake is somewhere near, hunting, awake, just outside the house, its fresh skin, tight and new, shining in the sun.

The SAWPER Wants You!

The aim of *THE SAWPER* is to provide a vital network for the exchange of ideas within the Southern Arizona Writing Project community. *THE SAWPER* seeks short fiction (100 words or less), poetry, and brief articles on teaching strategies. In addition, stories (up to 300 words) focusing on SAWP projects, in-services, and outreach programs will be considered.

THE SAWPER is also seeking submissions for its "Young Writer's" column. SAWP Fellows often discover that their SAWP experiences have led to dramatic changes in their writing classrooms. Please encourage your students to write about how their writing has progressed during time spent in your classrooms. Short writing samples from students are welcome as well as narratives on their experiences as "authors." You will need to follow your school district's policies (parental permission, releases, etc.) to allow your students to be published. Teachers, let us know (a short blurb) what works in your writing classrooms. As SAWP teachers, your written comments on how you motivate young writers are also encouraged.

The theme for the next newsletter will focus on a content theme of "Reflection Gives Us Direction," and a writing theme of "New Year's Resolutions." Deadline is January 15, 2007. All submissions should be electronically submitted to Lynn Cuffari, Editor, lynncuffari@comcast.net.

NEWS! PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES NEWS!

Fall/Spring 2006-2007
SOUTHERN ARIZONA WRITING PROJECT

WHO: SAWP participants may join Professional Learning Communities. PLCs are a new type of professional development featuring groups of 3-7 teachers who meet regularly outside the school day to improve their practice as educators. If you don't have a group but would like to be in one, send a list of your potential interests, and we'll try to match you with a group.

WHAT: The Southern Arizona Writing Project is offering to support PLCs that engage in professional development to:

- look at and learn from student and teacher work together in a Critical Friends Group
- research best practices in teaching and learning or collaborate on lesson and unit planning
- discuss and develop action plans related to issues in education—for example, standards and individual needs, second language learner writers, writing across the curriculum, authentic assessment, etc.
- write for publication, including professional, personal, or creative writing

WHERE: For information and criteria for the application visit the SAWP website at <http://w3.arizona.edu/~sawp/> or contact Sue Smith, PLC Coordinator at snsmith@u.arizona.edu. You may also contact SAWP directly at sawp@email.arizona.edu. Grant applications are due November 15 for best consideration; if all grants are not given at that time, you may apply until January 5, 2007.

WHEN: Meet for 24 hours during the 2006-2007 school year. Each group is expected to meet for at least 24 hours and report regularly to the PLC coordinator. Stipends are granted to the members of the group when they have completed meetings.

WHY: Groups must attempt to publish their work or a description of their work either in the SAWP newsletter or another publication, so they are **PUBLISHED!!** Professional Learning Communities grants (taxable as income on tax forms) are a \$500 stipend for each facilitator OR a \$500 mini-grant for the entire group.

NOTE: Facilitators *must* be Fellows of the Invitational Summer Institute of the Southern Arizona Writing Project or the Teacher Research and Inquiry Institute. In addition, **preference will be given** to facilitators who have attended a Critical Friends Group coaches' training. SAWP will sponsor up to 5 PLCs in SY 2006-2007.

Important Notice from SAWP Directors on Reimbursements

SAWP's grant does *not* allow reimbursement to members for goods or services needed in connection with SAWP programs or presentations. SAWP may purchase materials or services through the University of Arizona only. Please do not pay for items or services on behalf of the organization; you may not be compensated. If you are working on behalf of SAWP and need copies, materials, or any other expenditure items, see either Erec Toso or Anne-Marie Hall to arrange for a purchase order. Also, for your information, both grants and payment for services are given as taxable income.

Directors' Disk

By Erec Toso & Anne-Marie Hall

ET: At the reunion of the '06 Summer Institute last Saturday, between sips of coffee and nibbles on sweet rolls, Rina Valdez said she felt like her life as a teacher



was "in a bubble." She felt that no one outside of teaching could understand the struggles, the joys, the sorrows, the challenges that accompany teaching in general and the teaching of writing in particular.

I felt her comment was telling for a couple of reasons. One, teachers are not included much in educational policy making. Rina, Dan Spittler, Rick Vail and others at the meeting all agreed that teachers are expected to play the role of coach, judge, counselor, cop, sometimes parent, and full-time role model. Teachers are then held accountable for student achievement on high stakes tests, student behavior, reporting abuse—and all this while trying to teach. Policies are passed through the bubble in ways that feel decidedly one-way, and are then expected to be carried out without question or dialogue.

AMH: I, too, hear lots of frustration among teachers who are themselves held accountable for things far beyond their control. Even here at the University of Arizona, "someone" decided to purchase "turnitin.com" for all of us so we can submit our students' papers to check for plagiarism. No faculty member was consulted, that I know of. Yet the implications in a writing classroom are huge, not the least of which it turns the classroom into a police state. Here in the Writing Program, we encourage process and slow development of ideas, multiple drafts, and conferences. Good writing takes time. We usually notice when a paper is suddenly improved or different. But we see that as a teaching moment, time to talk about how to document sources. Not time to bring in the "cheating cops." Also, I wanted to talk about how unfortunate it is that teachers in K-12 are held responsible for so much about a student's life. Many of these students are not treated equitably in

any other aspect of their lives. Still, between eight and three teachers are expected to change everything!

ET: A second way the bubble image worked was that teachers' stories get very little coverage by media. The message wasn't getting out, we all seemed to agree. What experience and research tell us about learning does not always seem to inform curricula aimed at passing a test.

AMH: I am reminded of something that Vermont Writing Project does. They have convinced the local newspaper to have a monthly "teaching writing" section in the paper. A writing project teacher is featured with her/his ideas about teaching writing and then there are samples of student writing, good assignments, good books on teaching writing, etc. It would be nice to do that in Tucson!

ET: In spite of the frustration, we also found strength and insight in working with each other. Teachers working with teachers seemed one way to validate experience and to find direction. Collaboration becomes all the more important in times like these. We need each other as support, as leaders; and as united voices, we will be heard. The bubble may be forcing us to define what we have to say and to organize in ways that will communicate shared values.

AMH: You have captured the beauty of the writing project. Working together on intellectual projects - learning new theories and methods for teaching writing - is what bonds us as a profession. And the personal writing is on top of that!

ET: I hope these next few years working with SAWP and with long-term, committed teacher leaders like yourselves, will reveal the actions we need to take. We may have to write our way out of the bubble.

AMH: I always said "this is work that matters." SAWP is one of the best programs in southern Arizona. Working together to improve the teaching and learning of writing in our schools will lift us all up!

Heebie Jeebies & Awesome Discoveries

...from under the water *by Kate Cusumano*

It was NOT a dark and stormy night, or even a cold and windy autumn one. So how could I have known what danger lurked beneath the calm waters of Hulen's Lake that late August evening? Out to have fun on one of the last free nights of summer, I laughed with my friend, Elaine, blissfully unaware that I was about to be scared out of my wits.

We lay on our backs on the dock behind Elaine's house gazing up at the Missouri night sky. The man in the moon looked down on us, as if in a conspiratorial wink over our teenage confidences. A temporary lull in the conversation was filled in with the sounds of crickets and frogs.

I sat up, tucked my knees under my chin and looked out over the still lake. The water was dark, except where it was kissed by the reflection of the full moon keeping watch over our earthly activities. Not another person could be seen or heard on the small lake, which was surrounded by homes.

"I'm bored. Let's go for a swim," Elaine suggested. Dared?

"You're crazy," the goody-two-shoes in me replied. It was time for me to be getting home. I knew my parents would not approve of us swimming alone so late in the evening, but I had just turned 19 and was testing the bounds.

"Ok, just a quick dip."

We rose and shimmied out of the T-shirts and cutoffs that served as our summer uniforms, revealing bikinis beneath. The glass that was the top of the lake smashed to smithereens as we dove into the water and swam out a way. Our voices and splashing echoed over the otherwise deserted lake.

Suddenly, Elaine screamed. Riveted, I looked in her direction. Interrupted mid-scream, Elaine's head disappeared under the water, looking as though pulled under by some unseen force. Terrified, I waited what seemed like an eternity for her to reappear.

She resurfaced and resumed screaming. "Help! I'm being pulled un-

der!" Again she disappeared.

My brain struggled to comprehend what I was seeing. There was no one else in the lake with us. Or was there? Who or what could be pulling her under? Would I be next? Things blurred for me, slowed down as if happening in slow motion. She gasped and screamed, dragged down how many more times?

Suddenly I felt a hand close over my right ankle.

Whenever I tell this story to someone they always say "Are you sure it was a hand?" or "Maybe it was a fish, or a piece of seaweed." My first grade students always suggest an octopus as the culprit. I tell them I know what a hand feels like.

Reach down right now and wrap your hand around your ankle.

"That's what it felt like," I tell them.

The hand tugged me under. Dread filled me. *I was dead. I knew it.*

The hand let go. *It let me go! Maybe I still had a chance to live!*

Fear powered me the last fifteen yards or so back to the dock. My swim coach would have been proud.

It was then that I noticed Elaine had miraculously been released, too. We reached the dock and flopped out of the water like fresh-caught flounder. Elaine grabbed a nearby broom and brandished it as a weapon. Our eyes searched the dark, now menacing, water for the intruders who had spoiled our swim and threatened our lives. Nothing.

"Who do you think that was?" I asked her, thinking it may have been some teenage boys playing a trick. She didn't know. Silence reigned once more over the water. No one could hold their breath *that* long. If anyone had come up for air we would have heard them.

I looked out over the lake one last time. The moon still looked serenely down and the water now betrayed us. Calm was returning to the dark surface, as if we'd imagined the whole thing.

Shuddering to think what could

have happened to me out there in that dark water, I got up to leave. Looking over my shoulder, half expecting someone to appear out of the dark on the street behind me, I ran up the hill to the safety of my house.

It's doubtful that I'll ever know the answer to the mystery of who, or what, grabbed my ankle that night in the lake. But one thing I *do* know for certain. I will *never* go swimming in a lake after dark again.

Author's Note: For years this terrifying event has remained a mystery. Elaine and I didn't talk much more about it because she left for college out of state a few days later and I began my own sophomore year at the University of Missouri. Elaine said maybe it was some neighborhood boys in scuba gear. I never bought that. Scuba diving in a small lake 1500 miles from the nearest ocean? I have modeled writing this story over and over to students from grades K through 6th when we write about "the scariest thing that ever happened to me," so I have put in many hours mulling over the events of that night. My students always want to solve the case. The youngest ones tend to maintain a steadfast belief in it having been an octopus or some other monster of the deep. No amount of explanation about how octopi don't live in fresh water lakes or how primordial creatures can't live in man-made lakes will change their minds. However, I do think a 6th grader solved the case for me about two years ago. He suggested that it was probably Elaine who grabbed my ankle. She was the only other person out there. So many years have gone by that I can never be sure anymore just how close together in the water we were. Could she have had time to swim over and grab my ankle one of the times she was "pulled under?" Who knows now? But even if the case is solved you won't find me swimming in a lake after dark!

Kate participated in the 2006 Summer Institute

Heebie Jeebies & Awesome Discoveries

...to out of this world *by David Herring*

Global Context: Using Google Earth In the Classroom

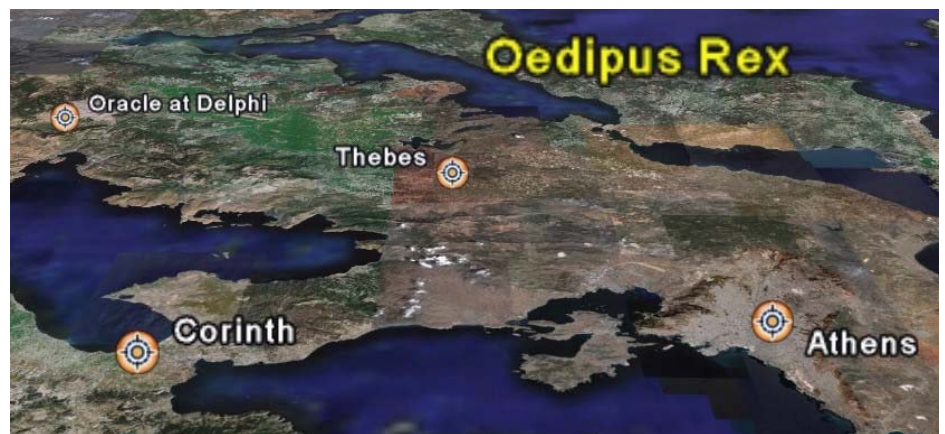
When you read Oedipus Rex, do your students know where the three roads met? When discussing World War II, do they locate important battles along the path of the Allied Forces' movement across Europe? When talking about plate tectonics, do they plot the locations of the largest recorded earthquakes to strike North America to reveal the major fault lines?

For many students geographic references are abstract names that appear in literature or on small maps in textbooks, but with Google Earth software, available as a free download from <http://earth.google.com/>, students can navigate a virtual globe with the ability to zoom in, often to images clear enough to see streets and individual buildings, or tilt their view to see three dimensional representations of the physical geography of a region.

The software can work as an excellent addition to a history or literature unit, allowing students to see and interact with the locations where events took place. With carefully created placesets, images and web links can be added to presentations shown in class, used in the computer lab, or downloaded at home to be perused

at the student's leisure. Why not illustrate geographic relationships in a webquest?

The tool can be used to identify specific locations, such as places where the effects of global warming are already being meas-



ured along with links to related articles, but also can serve as a platform for organizing information in a unique way. If you have ever had an English class write personal stories based on events recalled after students sketched a map of their neighborhoods, imagine how interesting it would be for the students to read each others writing by clicking on the locations of those stories.

In other subjects the tool is just as useful. In history and social studies classes, the possibilities seem endless for identifying and comparing the locations of significant events. With a little practice, users can even add image overlays, making it possible to put a map of Rome at the time of Augustus over the modern city.

Another advantage is that students can create presentations on different subjects, which the teacher can easily save year after year to create a library of interactive placesets that can be used in the classroom or posted on a web-

site for students to download and access from home or in a computer lab.

If you are interested in learning more about Google Earth visit <http://edweb.tusd.k12.az.us/dherring/ge/googleearth.htm>. The site includes directions for downloading and using the software, as well as a collection of samples illustrating the software's abilities. If you become hooked, consider submitting your own creations to be included on the site.

David Herring is a SAWP fellow and participated in the Summer Institute in 1993. He teaches English at University High School.

Two Tenacious Teachers Try Treacherous Terrain of Text Messaging: Traumatic Enough?

By Heather Severson & Amethyst Hinton-Sainz

A: Are you on here?

H: Hey, here I am! What do think of this journey into technology? Maybe we should just have a conversation about what happened today instead of aiming for our original goal. It might inform our peers. That's me talking with my Technology Liaison hat on.

A: Okay, I thought your comment about how our nick-names in our contacts list will be our actual names was right on and really reflects the sense of displacement I've been experiencing for the last half hour as I've tried to figure out what all the actions are in the various menus in this window.

H: It says on my screen that you are writing a message, but I'm going to write one too and see what happens as we type away. I know you are typing away because you are sitting next to me. The irony is palpable. We came here to Ike's coffee house to write a trauma narrative for the upcoming SAWP newsletter and to bring technology into it. We decided to try instant messaging to do this.

H: Ha! I just spoke to you to tell you to write down what you just said aloud because it was so pertinent.

A: I guess we are technically talking over each other as we sit next to each other and type. There might be benefits to linear conversation such as that I just glanced up at your last message and you already mentioned us sitting next to each other. What is a Mee-Go?

A: This is so pathetic. Our students have already mastered the art of this and more.

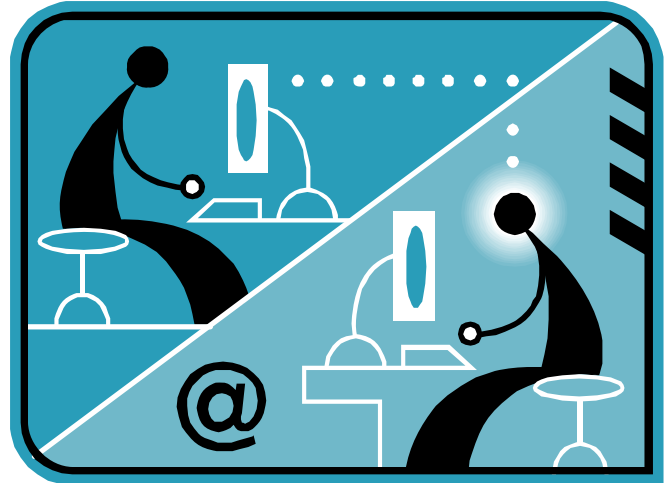
H: Okay, so it's almost 4:30 and we got here just after 3:00, ordered our iced teas and sat down to download software. I just asked you what a Mee-go is verbally but you chortled and wouldn't tell me.

H: Where did you even get that term, Mee-go? (You just verbalized, "I don't know what a mee-go is").

A: But I did manage to get the background of my window to display as an animated koi pond. I don't know what a Mee-go is, but if you click on the down arrow in the little frame to the right, you can create or edit one, and your nudges and winks, too!

A: Whatever those are. At least I know what an emoticon is, but I guess that's like almost a ten-year old concept by now.

H: So... it took us about an hour and a half to download MSN Instant Messenger and sign on and get to the point where we can do this thing. And I have to point out that



we are literate, educated professionals who can use our minds.

A: And you can create a Kiwee Muggin. Whatever that is, I want one.

H: Yeah, I just learned about what a Wink is on a social networking site that I am exploring (which shall remain nameless)... Do you know Stephanie Vie? She is doing a dissertation on the topic of social networking and writing. I know I have to get into this stuff now because my English Composition students at the university use sites like My Space and Face Book...

A: Yes. I'll need to leave to pick up the kids soon. So much for a leisurely online chat about our birth stories for the trauma issue of the SAWPer. I wish I could say that this has been truly traumatic, watching MSN invade your hard drive with Rhapsody software and all, but it's actually been pretty comical, though my blood pressure has gone up a couple of times. Have you noticed we're not talking?

H: ...which I thought was Face Bug when we were brainstorming the other day. That cracked them up.

A: Face Bug. Ha! Of course, I can laugh but I don't even know what Face Book is.

A: You just told me that your cell phone alarm is going off to remind you to think about children.

H: I notice that we are tenaciously clinging to our own threads... uh, that's a loaded term... let me use "trains of thought" instead... as we do this. I bet we have to learn to

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suspend or interrupt our attention spans in order to communicate effectively in this forum.

A: You need a reminder to think about children? You mean, multitasking in a completely unfamiliar medium might distract you a little bit?

A: That was sarcasm. Very distasteful in the virtual realm. Sorry.

H: On the other hand, inevitably two old friends who were educated in the same schools and ended up in the same career field will have a pre-established mode of communication that ought to be retained and honored, whatever the method of that communication. We don't have to adopt a fractured, MTV sound bite mentality to make this work, right?

A: So, in suspending or interrupting my attention span, this medium isn't much different than my daily life teaching high school English and being at home with a 7-month -old and 4-year-old for the evening.

H: Hey, good points, which I must address in tandem: Yes, I need to set an alarm for 4:30 each afternoon so that I won't keep writing past daycare pickup time. And yes, the sarcasm is well noted as evidence of my previous point that this mode of communication must submit to OUR will and communication style.

A: I should be pretty good at interrupting my thought processes and working in spiraling recursive waves of insight and cognitive dissonance, but instead I seem to be getting more and more spaced out... today and in life in general. Too much interruption. I don't think I could sustain this during an evening at home when I would hope for some respite, at least a little.

A: Yikes, I'm tired already.

H: And the interruptions of motherhood... yes, mothers have been in training for this kind of thing all along. Go figure.

A: We just had to download the software!

A: We already had the hardware!

A: Except I don't think I was hard-wired for this. It stresses me out.

H: I like that you asked me (verbally), "What is that term..?" That makes me feel a little more companionable.

H: Oh, heck no... I'm hardwired for a sustained attention span and focus. Hence the alarm.

A: ... and thank you for remembering the word "recursive." Of all my friends, you would be the one to pull that one out.

H: This is tiring. But you know what? It

H: oops.... It's great to hear you laugh and mutter, "Hence the alarm." This meta-analysis of a process, side-by-side, is very interesting. I wonder how different it would be if

we were at our respective homes, dealing with our four-year-olds and younger ones and their demands on top of this seemingly fast-paced dialogue.

A: I like the fact that I still have a friend in academia who will take the time for this type of experiment. I was calling our little jaunt into instant messaging "professional development," but it's personal as well, right? Feeling like we live in the now, even as we are living in the virtual.

Who else would be with me while I ditch work to sit in a cafe and have our first virtual real-time conver

A: sation?

H: I think I was going to make a point about the collaborative writing potential for this medium. I THINK what I was going to say is that this provides excellent evidence of our process, which if nothing else can serve as a moment in time that can be available for future analysis. Assuming we can save this entire transcript as it appears. If we can't do that, I'm going to be really peeved.

A: I'm sure we would not be doing this at home. You just asked me if I knew how to save this as a file or something "permanent." I'll try to figure that out right now.

H: So I just asked you (verbally) if you knew how to save this, and you said you'll try in a minute.

A: Wow, you can record a voice clip in here! Anyway, still figuring out how to save.

H: I am pretty darn sure I wouldn't be doing this at home. I think we'd be more likely to use email. I don't really see myself using this much, but Sue Smith encouraged me to try it so maybe I'll continue my experiment with her. Maybe once we get over the initial learning curve, we could actually make use of this.

A: You can send messages in your handwriting, too. Nobody would want to chat with me, then! Still finding a way to save...

H: You said (aloud) that we could write and send messages in our own handwriting. I said, "Holy moly! I'd never do that!" That's why it is so great to be able to let words fly off my fingertips. My handwriting is not good.

H: Okay, you discovered that we can save this little experiment as an RTF doc. Shall we conclude this now and use our last few minutes to actually have a conversation?

A: Sure, see ya soon!



SAWP Becomes Summer's Magical Place

By Kate Cusumano

Did you ever have a magical place? A place where every thing goes right for you? A place where you could be away by yourself and think your thoughts, make your plans, perhaps indulge in your hobby. Perhaps, when you were a child, your special place was a clubhouse, a treehouse, maybe under the lilac bush or up in a crook in the branches of the oak tree out back where you felt like your little brother or sister, or that irritating kid next store couldn't bother you.

Well, for me, this summer it was in the Transitional Office Building on 2nd Street, across from Hillenbrand Stadium. Just inside the front door, on the right there is a big room with a fireplace where 21 of us met for five weeks as part of the Southern Arizona Writing Project (SAWP). In that room I had the privilege - the joy - of spending one, uninterrupted hour of writing each day with fellow writers. Usually the only sounds to be heard were the scratching of pencils and the clicking of laptop computers as participants wrote.

What did we write about? Every day there were upwards of five prompts posted on the whiteboard. But we did not have to write to one of the prompts. We could write about *whatever we wanted to*. This was the draw for me.

I first became aware of SAWP last fall when I had a class at the UA with Flory Simon. She told some of us about it. I listened politely, but without much interest at first. Then I heard her say "You write everyday for one hour on personal writing." That caught my interest.

"What do you have to write about?" I asked.

"Anything you want," came her reply.

"Anything?" I repeated. "You mean I could write the stories in my head?"

Flory replied in the affirmative, explaining that additionally nearly every day we would have the opportunity to meet in a small writing group to read our work aloud and receive feedback on it. From that moment I starting keeping a list of ideas to try when SAWP rolled around.

Most days I never even looked at the prompts on the board every morning, choosing to write down the stories of my life, and my grandmother, Stella's, life, which were residing in my head. Although I didn't understand it yet, I would soon come to discover for myself what Patricia Baquedano-Lopez meant when she wrote, "*We tell our stories for their potency to*

explain, rationalize, and delineate past, present, and possible experience" (Creating Social Identities through Doctrina Narratives, 1997). I found that I had a lot to explain.

Those around me were also free to choose to use one of the prompts or their own topic. Some of the prompts served to tease a creative, entertaining story about current events, politics or past experiences out of one of us. Pat wrote a tongue-in-cheek political piece one day comparing politics to bull farms.

Yes, Virginia, there really is a bull farm. Whatever the topic, the words would come tumbling out of us for the entire hour until either Flory, Roger, or Eric, our fearless leaders, would spread the damper over us.

"Find a good place to stop."

Whew! Who could stop? But obediently we would. Writing wound down and we would eye each other expectantly. Who would share? Who would bare their soul or expose their *baby*, as I sometimes thought of

my pieces? I raised my hand early on and read one of my pieces – discovering first-hand one of the things I have heard over and over in professional development – *audience is important*. Audience reaction was like gassing up my car. It served to propel my writing further. Audience interest or a question such as, "Well, are you going to tell us the rest tomorrow?" usually inspired me to go home and finish a piece begun that morning in our *Magic Room*.

Another lesson about sharing the writing was that *voice* came through so clearly when the piece was read aloud by the author. Students' hearing their peers share out loud would surely help us facilitate good mini-lessons on voice in our classrooms.

Although the personal hour of writing was what mainly drew me to SAWP, there was another significant component. Each of us developed and presented a demonstration lesson modeling best classroom practices on a topic of our choosing. In this we were supported by another small group, our Coaching Group. In the safety of this group we brainstormed ideas, discussed and fleshed out ideas for each other's demo lesson using protocols developed by *Critical Friends* for facilitating discussion. The level of knowledge and competence of those in my group was remarkable. I was in awe of the quality of teaching going on in those teachers' rooms.

(*Magic*—Continued on page 11)



Rina Valdez & Dan Spitzer find their magic place.

(Magic—Continued from page 10)

The resultant remarkable, memorable lessons were presented to us day after day, in keeping with the philosophy of the National Writing Project, which is *teachers teaching teachers*. The promise of walking away from this course with about 20 well-developed lessons to use in our classrooms was the biggest draw for many of those choosing to take part in the SAWP Summer Institute.

Presenters were rewarded with the rapt attention of the audience, especially during the first few demos. After all, we were going to have to go through this ourselves. But I had a sense of us being not unlike a classroom full of our students, especially when the demo involved group work. There was lots of talk both on and off task while we negotiated our learning in that social context. Some presenters gave participants permission to try to act and think like students from elementary school all the way through college freshmen. SAWPERS rose to the challenge and showed talent at acting pretty much like students as young as first grade!

Given the wide range of age groups these demo lessons were designed for it was amazing to find that everyone there was able to take something out of every lesson, from the lesson that recommended a bit of “play” for college freshmen to the first grade poetry demo. Good writing teaching is good writing teaching.

So what were the topics presented this year? Here they are in brief.

- Dan Spitler presented a lesson entitled *Fluffy the Ostrichosaururus: Using Art in the Writing Process to Improve Student Motivation and Learning*. What struck me about this lesson was that the students got to create the art *first* instead of as almost an afterthought or busywork when the writing was complete. In this case, the artwork was a fantastic creature created by cutting out the body parts of at least three different animals from magazines to create a new creature. During the creative process the students are busily engaged in a type of prewriting activity which helps to organize their writing.
- John Skarhus’ interest lie in making vocabulary instruction more explicit with his presentation, *What Does That Mean?* He provides a means of scaffolding learning of new vocabulary words for students which includes the use of drawing a picture to remind you of the meaning of each word next to the explanation of that word on a chart or flashcard. We all had fun drawing and “admiring” each other’s pictures.
- Georgina Reis took us through an exercise in identifying different structures used in expository writing with her lesson, *Identifying and Applying the Structure, Conventions, and Purpose for Expository Writing*. While exploring structure in expository writing with my small group during this lesson I managed to get a recipe for Korean Pancakes from fellow SAWPER Yu-Kyung. Did you know recipes are a form of expository writing?
- Speaking of Yu-Kyung Sung, her lesson impelled me to consider the value of something called a *teacher’s sketch journal*. The lesson, entitled *What Did You See? What Did You*

Think? Reflective Teacher’s Writing for Teacher Research, provided us with multiple opportunities to sketch. As she wrote, “Drawing, paying close attention, leads to writing. Writing helps me think, notice more, and even discover what I know.”

Teachers need to be reflective practitioners and be aware of when note taking makes sense for them in their classrooms.

“Given the wide range of age groups these demo lessons were designed for it was amazing to find that everyone there was able to take something out of every lesson, from the lesson that recommended a bit of “play” for college freshmen to the first grade poetry demo. Good writing teaching is good writing teaching.”

- Rick Vail came to SAWP all the way from Page, AZ and we can’t imagine what the class would have been like without him. His presentation, *We Know What’s Good, but We Can’t Say Why: Identifying the Criteria for Evaluating Movies and Establishing the Language for Discussion* made us all rethink how we use criteria for evaluating things in our lives. Our prewriting activities led us to see how we pass judgment on nearly everything around us. The goal of this lesson was to develop and defend criteria which could be used to judge a movie. I found out I’m not the only one more likely to go see a film if it was panned by the critics! Wish we’d had the time to all go out to the movies for a test run of our

system.

- Kim O’Hagan took us on an imaginary journey via her lesson, *Road Trip! Taking Characters into New Contexts*. The dramatic and extra-textual elaboration involved in becoming the character we choose from literature and interacting with a couple of other classmates’ characters takes your thinking to a higher level. How would you like to plan a road trip with Anna, of *Notting Hill*, Sydney Carton, of *A Tale of Two Cities*, and, I think it was Paris Hilton and her little dog, too?
- Kitty Reeve took us to a Computer Lab on campus for her lesson, *The Internet, the World, and the Writing Classroom*. I’d have to say what I relished most was being instructed on how to check out the credibility of a website, particularly news media sites. In her lively lesson we visited news sources in foreign countries to get the flavor of their take on the news, especially international news. Some of the participants wrote letters to both local and foreign newspapers and *got published!*
- Sally Hill took us to a first grade classroom with her lesson, “*I’m So Excited! I’m About to Write My Thoughts and I Think I Like It!*” *Developing the Traits of Idea and Organization Through Pre-Writing Activities*. Sally’s lesson invited the use of all five senses when organizing to write. She even got members of her Coaching Group to assist her in performing a song meant to get the little tykes’ creative writing juices flowing! It was sung to the tune of *I’m So Excited*, by the Pointer Sisters. I’m sorry so many of you had to miss this performance

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(Magic—Continued from page 11)

- Kathy Locke tried to make “the light in the attic” go on in all of our heads with her presentation, *Using a Variety of Journal Responses to Increase Critical Thinking and Writing Skills*. Journal writing is an activity necessary for students today, too many of whom “have not learned to ask questions but only to give answers...[who] do not invent, but only repeat.” Cartoons clipped from newspapers and magazines are one source of journal prompts likely to engage students.

- Erec Toso delighted us with a vivid description of a thunder storm breaking out across the desert in a selection by Ed Abbey that fed all of my senses. His lesson, *Tell Me a Good Story: Teaching Active Style and Critical Selection in Context*, demonstrated a strategy for taking one sentence out of a piece of our writing and revising or expanding it, paying attention to strategies such as evocative image, metaphor, etc. He’s trying to demonstrate the role of *choice* in writing to students who are apt to be inordinately pleased with their first attempts and disinclined to engage in revision. This lesson is a way to show, not tell, students the impact careful revision can have.

- Pat Lindberg used sports, and the timely Cats Girls’ Softball team’s success, in her lesson “*I’ve Lost My Voice! Can You Help Me Find It?*” In this lesson we all had a chance to think and write from another person’s perspective, and although there were those (actually only one) who took offense at being asked to write from the perspective of an “elderly person,” for the most part this lesson was just good fun and good teaching!

- Rina Valdez touched each of us in a personal way, bringing some dear treasured memory to consciousness as she presented her demo, *Because Stories Shape Us*. We were all asked to bring some tangible object that held a memory for us to class. Before we got to tell or write about what it was, though, we had to pass it around to those in our group for them to write a description of and questions about our object. What a great way to get the reluctant writer started on a piece, since everyone winds up with a few questions about the object that the people in their group want addressed. Many connections were made during her lesson to the contents of our mothers’ jewelry boxes.

- Suzanne Hall brought us a lesson about *Peer Revision Squares*. Those of us who had not seen the Arizona 6-Trait Rubric were soon acquainted with a version of it modified by Suzanne so that her students can more easily comprehend it. The activities of her lesson force students to use the actual words of the 6-Trait Rubric in assessing peer writing and then give spe-

cific recommendations for improving each piece. Familiarity with the rubric should lead the thoughtful student to success with their own writing.

- Stephanie Merz based her lesson on the theory of Lev Vygotsky, particularly the role of play as it is used by children to both create and solve problems in imaginary situations. What took me, a former pre-K through 2nd grade teacher, by surprise was that Stephanie teaches freshman English at the UA. The role playing we did as part of her demo lesson probably touched a nerve with us all; we had to play the role of a college

freshman who has accumulated too many unexcused absences and write an email to our professor. We were knee deep in it that day!

- Diana Zilius, our resident mermaid, gave us a lesson in *ThINKing: A Lesson in Metaphors for the Mind*. After we settled, more or less, on a definition of thinking we wrote about what it means in metaphor, using a favorite game or sport as the jumping off point. Want to hear one? *Thinking is swinging.*



SAWPER Kate Cusumano processes her writing prompt

. . . up and down I go, retracing at times ground already covered, but then going ever higher.

- Charlene DeWitt asked us to be creative with scientific terminology in her demo *Yo, Ho! Yo, Ho! A Writer’s Life for Me!* After first developing vocabulary about pirates and being given vocabulary about maps and oceans we wrote pirate adventure stories woven around the vocabulary words. Kim’s pirate hailed from Elgin, IL, an unlikely place if I’ve ever heard of one even if the Fox River does run through the town, right past the new gambling casino!

- Kate Cusumano (the author) was born in Elgin but her lesson was about *Playing With Words* by teaching poetry in the primary years. Although many children in the early grades are still struggling with letter formation and writing coherent sentences complete with conventions, this lesson emphasizes why exposing children to poetry and having them compose in that genre is so important. This genre doesn’t even *require* formal conventions for the most part so it’s easier for young children to succeed quickly. Rick Vail was the most successful of the SAWPERS at acting the part of a first grader during the demonstration.

There were many other much-appreciated components of SAWP, like lunches at Bentley’s or Taco Bell and the daily Log reading where participants were really challenged to be creative in relaying what had transpired the previous day. An unofficial contest with no rules and no definitive winner was

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(*Magic—Continued from page 12*)

the daily effort to outdo the previous person in providing the day's snacks. From the distance of three months now, I think my vote still goes to John's homemade salsa with tortillas, scrambled eggs and all the fixings for breakfast burritos! Prepared in a dorm room, no less!

Guest presenters came to share their knowledge, including Anne-Marie Hall, the outgoing Director of SAWP, Edward M. White from the English Department at UA, and Burgess Needle, who advised us on how to get published. That advice included saving and taking some pride in one's rejection notices. Some of them are very well written, you know! Jenise Porter and Aimee Rogers came and presented a lesson on using Critical Friends Protocols in our Coaching Groups.

Although the driving idea behind the National Writing Project is *teachers teaching teachers*, we couldn't have done it without the quiet, competent leadership of Flory Simon, Roger Shanley and Eric Roller, who kept us on task each day as well as providing a model of leadership in running the Writer's, Coaches and Reading Groups which met in some form daily. The opportunities to learn, write, be creative and form lasting friendships abounded during those short weeks.

I am not teaching this year, continuing full-time with work on my MA in LRC at the UA, while also working for that department as a Research Assistant. However, my SAWP experiences surround me like an aura, affecting me in all my literacy activities.

When I read I am noticing more than ever the choices made by the authors in their writing. Beautifully turned phrases seem to feed me. I note passages that remind me of something I want to put into Stella's story, figuring out how to put a dream in a scene or give her a metaphor to frame her thoughts and feelings about her mother and lost childhood. I rejoice in authors who manage to put voice into professional writing which I am required to read for coursework. It makes my homework so much more enjoyable.

I think like a writer now and believe it has increased my memory. Ideas for Stella's story and my memoirs come to me at different times and I am able to really envision their place in the story and hold them in memory until I can write them down. I now keep a pad of paper and a pencil on my nightstand for the ideas that come to me in the night.

Observing the characters and settings of real life which surround me daily, I see not only pieces to be used in my grandmother's story, but whole stories waiting to be told. One example of this is for some reason I am fascinated by the people I see sitting or standing at the bus stops in town. I watch how they communicate verbally and non-verbally and feel certain there is a story there.

Confidence in my own writing ability, which blossomed during SAWP, has remained strong. I *am* a writer. I can say that without feeling like it's a lie, or not quite true – without wanting to qualify the statement. If the conversation turns in that direction I can also now say "I am writing a book" instead of "I am *trying* to write a book," or "I am *going* to write a book." Sometimes I even say I am writing two books, because I am also

still working on my memoirs.

In my professional writing, I think I may try some narrative strategies while writing my big research paper this semester, maybe even dialogue. The old me would never have dared to step outside the box, I was so rule-bound. I guess I just enjoy playing with words more now and trust myself to do so appropriately.

Yes, I visited a magical place this summer. But it's not gone, slipping from my presence like the summer monsoon rains drained out of our washes and rivers in August. This magical place is now inside me and travels with me wherever I go. I have internalized its message and carry it with me, along with the voices of Flory, Roger, Eric and all my new writing friends.

"Flory, what time is it?"

"It's time to write."

What Time Is It Flory? (a month or so later)

By Roger Shanley

After a half an hour of traditional SAWP snacks, last year's summer fellows heard the familiar question from the title. Eager minds and pens, pencils, and keyboards quickly returned to the ritual of personal writing time. The group chose between self-selected subjects or the prompt, "In what ways have the activities and demonstrations last summer influenced your teaching and classroom this year?"

Following "Please find a comfortable place to take a break or finish your last thought," peer response groups formed to discuss results. Mingled with classroom stories and current teaching situations were readings and comments about new class strategies and practices and extensions on the "scholarship" of other teacher demonstrations. We discussed the use of the term *scholarship*, as described by Patti Stock in her work last summer, and each group considered new uses and interrelationships of writing practice.

The morning continued with a large group discussion of these issues as well as current trends and concerns in schools and districts. We encouraged fellows to consider applying for Professional Learning Community grants, writing for this illustrious newsletter, and attending or presenting at other upcoming conferences. As this discussion came to a natural break, lunch was delivered, and once again SAWPers were found gathered around food, talk of current practice and theory, and camaraderie.

SAWP Announces Upcoming Events

Saturday Seminars

- October 14, 2006 - 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in TOB (1731 E. 2nd Street, UA Campus)
Writing to Learn and Writing Across the Curriculum
Featured presenter: Pat Lindberg, Los Ranchitos Elementary on *I've Lost My Voice: Discovering the Writer's Voice Using Real Life Events*
- November 18, 2006 - 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in TOB (1731 E. 2nd St., UA Campus)
Dealing with High Stakes Tests, Standards, and Expectations
Featured Presenter: Kathy Locke, University High School on *Using a Variety of Journal Responses to Increase Critical Thinking and Writing Skills*
Unwilling Passengers: Reluctant/Resistant Writers
Featured Presenter: Rina Valdez, Pistor Middle School
Because Stories Shape Us: Using Artifacts to Elicit Student Writing
- January 20, 2007 - 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in TOB (1731 E. 2nd St., UA Campus)
Where are We Going? Writing to Learn and Writing Across the Curriculum
Featured Presenter: Charlene DeWitt, Utterback Middle School
Yo Ho! A Writer's Life for Me!
Who's Driving the Bus? Working with Gifted Writers
Featured Presenter: Erec Toso, Director – SAWP
Tell Me a Good Story: Teaching Active Style and Critical Selection in Context

Teacher Research – Saturdays from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. in TOB

October 7, November 4, December 2, January 6, February 3, March 3, April 7, April 28 (mini-conference), May 5

Advisory Board – Nov. 8, 2006 – 5:30 to 8 p.m. in ML 451

Recruitment – starts October 1, 2006 for Summer Institute 2007

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Mentoring Groups –

2nd Tuesday of each month - 6 to 9 p.m. in TOB

September 11, October 9, November 13, December 4, January 8, February 13, March 13

Wanted

Enthusiastic, dynamic, retired (or otherwise currently unemployed) SAWP TCs to provide staff development and present inservice programs to schools and districts.

Applicants should

- have completed the Invitational Summer Institute or the Teacher Research and Inquiry Institute;
- have flexibility in their schedules that will allow them to work with schools and districts during school hours;
- have experience as a presenter; and be willing to travel to the far reaches of SAWP's service area.

For more information, contact Sharon Miller, skmiller@email.arizona.edu

