

*The Texas Community  
College Teachers  
Association*  
*presents*

# TEACHING AND SERVING AUTHENTICALLY

THE TEACHER AT THE  
HEART OF THE COLLEGE

*Participant  
Packet*

*February 18, 2005  
1:00 - 2:00 PM CT*

In association with

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Agenda .....  | 3  |
| Email/Call-In Instructions .....                            | 4  |
| Producer’s Advisory Committee .....                         | 5  |
| Presenter .....   | 7  |
| And Now It’s Time for a Poem... or Two .....                | 8  |
| “The Recovery of Person” by Sanford C. Shugart .....        | 9  |
| “From Turmoil to Transformation” by M. Garrett Bauman ..... | 12 |
| “An Academic Life out of Sync” by Ellen Ostrow .....        | 15 |
| “Made for Each Other” by Mary Sheehy Moe .....              | 18 |
| “Wings on their Wheelchairs” by Margaret Ann Maricle .....  | 24 |
| Upcoming STARLINK Programs .....                            | 29 |
| Evaluation Form .....                                       | 30 |

## AGENDA

Introduction—Master of Ceremonies, Dan A. Porter, Amarillo College, Vice Chair of the Professional Development Committee, Texas Community College Teachers Association

Student testimonials (video)

Teaching and “Good Work”

Poem—Brickwork (video)

What does our work mean? Genuine service to another person with the power and joy of learning

Stakes are very high – first generation of post-modern students

Overview of postmodernism

Song—“Pacing the Cage”

How postmodern students respond to institutions

Liar, Liar (video)

The Tommy story

What does this mean for our work?

Be a Person, Serve a Person

For love of persons and principles, break the rules

Song— “What You Do for Love”

Audience participation

Otesego Autumn (video)

Close—Dan Porter

## EMAIL/CALL-IN INSTRUCTIONS

There are two ways in which you can interact with the panelists:



**E-MAIL:** Before the program, you may email your questions to the panelists at [starlink@dccd.edu](mailto:starlink@dccd.edu).



**CALL:** You are encouraged at any time during the program to call in your questions and comments.

**The toll-free telephone number for call-in questions is:**

**1-866-523-8576**

**HOW IT WORKS:** Your call will be answered by a member of our staff, who will ask for your name and site location. You will then be put on hold. While you are on hold, you will be able to hear the videoconference through the telephone. Stay on the line so we can communicate with you if necessary.

If your call should be accidentally disconnected, call again and tell the operator you were disconnected while waiting to ask a question.

When prompted or introduced by the program host, give your name and site location, and state your questions as clearly and succinctly as you can. Please be aware that while you are asking your question and while it is being answered, you will be “on the air.” Please remain on the line until your question has been answered and your call has been disconnected.

**BETTER AUDIO:** To minimize the possibility of any technical or program difficulties that may be caused by audio feedback, we suggest you locate the telephone away from the audio speaker at your site.

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## PRESENTER:



**Sanford C. "Sandy" Shugart** currently serves as president of Valencia Community College in Orlando, Florida, one of the nation's largest and most celebrated community colleges. Valencia is widely known for its academic excellence, its Learning Centered Initiative, high rates of graduation, and outstanding services to business.

Prior to coming to Valencia, Dr. Shugart served some eight years as president of North Harris College, a large community college in suburban North Houston and a part of the innovative North Harris Montgomery Community College District. There he led efforts in advanced technology, student success, an extensive construction agenda, and aggressive outreach to the inner city.

From 1983 to 1991, Dr. Shugart served as Vice President for Program Services of the North Carolina Community College System. His responsibilities included academic and technical programs, economic development and workforce training, adult education and literacy studies, and continuing education.

Dr. Shugart earned his Bachelors of Science, Master of Arts in Teaching, and Ph.D. all at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is widely known for his speaking and writing on servant leadership and is a published poet and songwriter.

## AND NOW IT'S TIME FOR A POEM... OR TWO...

### Brick Work

It wasn't a work I had chosen, but  
I was young and the job came to hand  
like each new, rasp-edged brick  
and I was taken with the  
challenge of the craft.  
Head-down to lay to a line  
straight and square, feeling the  
grain of baked earth and  
handling the sanded mud with  
quick, smart flicks and jabs,  
a precision boxer working a square ring,  
mastering tools and letting them  
master me: hammer, level and trowel.  
Focusing, focusing until every  
cell is in the rhythm, speed,  
economy of motion, each brick  
leading to the next, no hesitation,  
no space between the notes and  
all notes the same,  
brick to brick, course on course,  
year stacked on  
year until I take on the very  
texture of brick, the grit of mortar  
rigid joints and flat face of the wall  
no view but the brick,  
no plan but the brick,  
no dream but the brick

and then

the walls, at last,  
connect and there is  
nothing to do but to set the  
iron bars in the  
tiny, high window  
and wait for  
the end.

### Otesego Autumn

Out of the blanket of cool air condescending  
to moistened ground  
And the veils of morning mists like  
spirits of yankee farmers still  
rising hours before the sun

Out of the antiphonal intonations of geese  
gathering for the looming journey  
And the low growling of distant tractors  
closing the earth for its long slumber

The ancient trees rise to  
another turning of the great circle they  
alone among the living have  
witnessed for centuries.

Touched by autumn's final flame in their  
ripened readiness for the empty season,  
They collect themselves,  
life's water descending through  
limb and trunk back, back to deep roots  
Where life and wisdom abide.

## THE RECOVERY OF PERSON

by Sanford C. Shugart

"Organization kills spirit" (Robert K. Greenleaf). There's a cheerful thought for the future of our colleges. In the context of Greenleaf's argument, however, this was meant to convey something essential about the behavior of our institutions as they mature.

Greenleaf would argue that our great institutions are both the glory and the bane of the modern era. Until the last century, only the very wealthy could count on access to services we take for granted. Education, health care, social services, and even ordinary access to many consumer goods and services simply wasn't available to the masses until our society began to perfect the great institutions we take for granted. Our colleges, schools, hospitals, and other servant institutions are to be celebrated as, perhaps, the greatest achievements of the twentieth century. On the other hand, they can be dreadful places. They can exploit, use, manipulate, and dehumanize the very souls they were created to serve. They do this because organizations, like organisms, have lives of their own that are more than the sum of the individuals that work in them. They will act in ways that assure their survival, even at the expense of their mission.

It is no wonder that a defining characteristic of the postmodern era is alienation and cynical distrust of institutions. The old industrial model of institutional life depersonalized people by treating them like cattle: nameless, faceless, numbered units. In a myriad of institutional details, efficiency outweighed authenticity in serving those for whom we were created. It seems certain, in hindsight, that if one treats people often enough and authoritatively enough as merely a number, they will ultimately come to behave that way.

Now that we have entered the postmodern era of organizational life, our institutions are adopting the habits, technologies, and perspectives of the postmodern marketplace. The new paradigm is dominated by consumer capitalism that marries the view of *everyone as customer* with *powerful technologies* such as database marketing, virtual commerce, and product branding. These tools can be used to customize our response to meet the needs of those we serve. However, more often than not, they are used simply to stimulate their appetite for something we have to sell. It is hard to imagine a trend more destructive of authentic community and civic virtues.

In our colleges, such technologies are manifested in systems such as enrollment management, direct mail, automated telephone communication systems, and web-portal technologies that seek to gather information on our students and convert it into a strategic market advantage. In the end, students are treated as units of consumption and the educational enterprise reduced to a retail operation. Such culture ultimately creeps into every area of the organization, including the classroom. The potential of this outcome argues persuasively against viewing students as customers.

The question, then, of how we use these new tools and how we shape institutional culture in the service of students and society is of great moment. Since we are serving the first generation of truly postmodern students, the challenge to our colleges is to reclaim the *truly personal* in our work. We must adopt a set of radical notions about authentic service that can transform the use of tools at our disposal. Students deserve a unique response, and it is possible that these new technologies and systems can enable us to render just that. I offer three such principles here, with a limited discussion of each: be a person, serve a person, and love your values more than your systems.

## **Be a Person**

Institutions do not render authentic human service, only persons do. The institution is only a set of tools, an environment that enables persons to do this work better. Here are some ways a community college might assure that it is behaving personally.

Ruthlessly avoid all forms of automation that depersonalize the students and staff. If you have a computer telephoning your students during their dinner hour to deliver a canned message, hand it over to the Luddites and hold a ritual burning! Always provide a name when you are serving, a real name of the real person rendering the service. Create a culture of personal freedom in your staff to do the right thing in service to others fearlessly, regardless of what the rules and procedures may dictate. Enrich the personal dignity of front-line staff. No one can serve persons well if they are burned out, angry, bitter, and feel that they are being manipulated themselves. Value and nurture a deeply respectful culture in the classroom, student to teacher, teacher to student, and student to student. Recognize that this may take many forms, from friendly and informal to rather formal and professional. The style can vary greatly, but the principle of respect should be indelible.

## **Serve a Person**

You cannot serve a group, a class, a population, or even a community. You can only serve persons. Ideally, every interaction at the institution should be marked by a deep commitment to recognize the unique personhood of every student and staff member. Here are some easy examples.

Every communication from the institution should be personalized to the individual receiving it. In other words, no “occupant” or “dear student” mail should be tolerated unless it is absolutely unavoidable. Fortunately, this is where powerful, integrated databases can help us personalize the college. Similarly, the person receiving the communication should be able to respond to the originator directly.

Persons, unlike numbers, exercise choice. So, be sure that they are given real choices to make about how they will engage the college, conduct business with the college, and get the help they need to navigate the organization. Use the tools to understand and capture the preferences students have for being served and try to honor these. This may mean creating systems that allow students to opt out of what may be most efficient to the college if they find it unhelpful or disrespectful.

## **Love Your Values More Than Your Systems**

“Sure, but if I did this for you, I’d have to do it for everybody.” Who hasn’t heard this excuse for a decision that is otherwise unsupportable? It reveals the very bedrock of bureaucratic dysfunction. The college staff has to feel free to do the right thing for each student, even if it means breaking a rule to maintain a value.

Because serving means rendering a unique response, our rules and procedures will always be inadequate. There is no substitute for good judgment based on shared principles. Therefore, the principles that govern your college’s work are in many ways more important than your systems. This is why they should be discussed, written, revisited, and discussed again, not at mission-writing time, but in the midst of the real decisions. Before making a budget or designing a building or starting the recruitment and hiring process, the college should agree on what the actions should

mean when they are completed. We call these design principles in our processes. They are born out of powerful conversations that involve not just articulating values, but challenging the ways the college attempts to serve. Our best value statements come from our *confessions*, not our *professions*. When this kind of attention to values becomes common in your organization, it is easier to trust the people than the procedures.

The recovery of persons at the center of our work is especially vital now because of the sea change in our culture. I have come to believe in the importance of this work for our future out of a particular worldview that the universe is essentially personal. Though not a popular view, especially in academia for the past century, it is a hypothesis worth considering. I can find no other ground on which to build a principle-centered work community, a college worthy of the mission to educate and to serve.

### **At Your Institution Discussion Points**

In what ways does your college inadvertently convey to students that they are numbers?

Do you see signs of institutional alienation among your students? What are they?

Are there programs and places in the college that have excelled in creating a powerful sense of personal community? What are their results, and what lessons can be transferred elsewhere in the college?

### **Resources and References**

Greenleaf, Robert K. (1977). *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*. New York: Paulist Press.

The Leadership Development Center, Bradley University Foster College of Business Administration, "Leadership Development (Selected Bibliography)," August 2001, <[www.bradley.edu/ldc/bibliography.htm](http://www.bradley.edu/ldc/bibliography.htm)>.

## FROM TURMOIL TO TRANSFORMATION

By M. Garrett Bauman (reprinted with permission from the author)

In the faint predawn light, fallen leaves crunched underfoot. Our two-acre pond had shrunk to one-third its normal size in this dry season. I hiked here before sunrise to shake off the stories my students told me, stories that made me thrash at 5 a.m.

From my 74 acres of isolated woods and creeks, I would later that day commute to my community college's inner-city satellite campus in Rochester. I knew how privileged I was to have escaped the ghetto where I grew up, literally across the street from infamous Eastside High School in Paterson, N.J. I had lived amid the senseless gang wars and brutality portrayed in the film about the school, *Lean on Me*. While I now returned to my country retreat daily, there was no such escape for my students. The day before, a 30-year-old man had wept in my office, grieving over the death of his brother, shot by a rival drug dealer. Although his three brothers dealt and used heavy drugs, Jamal had been clean for a year. He wiped his eyes. "They're all going to be dead soon! This is my second brother killed." Jamal had abandoned gang life to attend college. He planned to disappear and reappear as a new person, as many community-college students do. He had sold his expensive stereo, guns, and car to finance his education. He washed his clothes in the kitchen sink, ate at soup kitchens, and feared he would not have enough money to scrape through the semester.

I also thought about Pamela, with her two chronically ill children. Her daughter with sickle-cell anemia required emergency trips to the hospital every few weeks. Her 13-year-old son had had a colostomy and wore a bag to contain his waste. A schoolyard fall or a punch to the stomach could kill him. Yet she sent him out each day because she would not allow him to disappear into institutions. "My boy's going to live as much as anybody in this world," she told me. "If he dies tomorrow, at least he's going to live first." She could have been speaking for herself. Pamela was a superb student, hungry to improve. But her hands shook and her flesh had shrunk in the struggle to obey her hard will. Earlier I had advised her to reduce her volunteer counseling of rape victims, asking her how her husband and children would manage if she became seriously ill from her frenetic pace. "But it's important!" she protested. "These women have no one. They're suicidal."

"Are you?" I asked.

That made her grin. "I've got an ulcer. I put my worry there; that way I know where it is."

These days, many students at all colleges deal with drugs, diseases, legal problems, abuse, and family crises that affect their capacity to learn. But there are more of them at community colleges. In one of my classes, all 21 of the women were single mothers. In another, two-thirds of the students had been formally diagnosed with attention-deficit disorder. Such realities give superficial credence to the simplistic stereotype of community-college students as third-rate. Yet many of my students, including ones in these classes, were well read, brilliant, energetic, and highly successful later in life. Many who might appear in statistical studies merely as mediocre achievers or dropouts made heroic efforts to overcome burdens that would crush students with easier lives. A "C" in academics often is the equivalent of an "A+" in life.

Violence is routine among my students. One class was talking about a shooting when I entered the room. A half-dozen had been aboard a city bus as gang gunfire erupted in the street. The bus driver, like some Gabby Hayes stagecoach hand, kicked the diesel horses into high speed and careened around a corner as my students dove to the floor, using book bags for shields. “My math textbook could stop anything,” one boy said. Some laughed nervously; others clenched their jaws and stared grimly.

How can a person achieve enlightenment in such a world? Can a teacher transmit eternal truth, or even mundane truths, to people shaking in terror or exhausted with worry? I was no Buddha, no wise rabbi. I lacked the inner peace that I thought my students needed from me. My monkey mind chattered with scenarios of failure.

That was why I hiked to the pond. Teachers have often come to water to look into themselves and reflect. “Budh,” the root word of the great teacher’s title, means “to awaken” but also “to fathom a depth, penetrate to the bottom.” I hoped to learn from the water, to disappear into it for a while and reappear renewed. Like my nearly emptied pond that filled in spring, like my students who dared to remake themselves, a teacher must be reborn each season too.

As the sun rose, the pond reflected the trees’ reds and golds and the ether-blue sky. The still water captured even the flutters of leaves. I envied the pond’s calm as my own mind rippled with shadowy memories of students who had disappeared from my roster. Latoya, James, Natalie, Ramon. Their ghostly faces seemed to drift beneath the water.

If only my mind, and my students’ lives, could be as calm as the water I contemplated, free of life’s noise and chaos. Imagine what Jamal might accomplish in school if he did not have to deal with former addicts banging on his door to demand bags of cocaine, if he did not dread having perhaps contracted HIV during his years of using needles. Imagine what Pamela might do if she were not distracted by platelet counts and emptying bags of fecal waste. Imagine what I might teach my students if their personal burdens did not distract and haunt me.

Like many professors, I’ve had more than my fair share of peace and quiet, with summers free to think about higher things. Publishing assignments have let me label as “work” kayaking on foggy lakes at dawn and daydreaming in a Caribbean rain forest beside a waterfall with only Arawak ghosts for company. Yet now I was as unsettled as a harried caseworker or stockbroker. I had the traditional ivory-tower life of a professor, but where was the quiet pond inside myself?

I squatted on the hardened mud shore. On the pond bottom, leaves had settled into brown ooze to be absorbed into next year’s weeds. Here was a quiet model of transformation. As I studied the pond bottom, an inch-long mayfly nymph crawled through the silt. It rolled a dead leaf into a tube around itself for winter. In spring, it would emerge, rise to the surface, and live a few glorious weeks in the air. As I peered closer, I saw dozens of leaves rolled in the silt with mayflies inside. I also spotted a dragonfly nymph hunting mayflies under water. When it located one, it unrolled the leaf and seized the twitching mayfly around the middle with powerful jaws. The dragonfly too would grow wings and fly next spring, to hunt the surviving flies in the air.

Was it possible to see the violence of my students’ lives from such a perspective? Their transformations were harried and threatened on all sides; their moment in the air might be brief; some might

never fly. But they dared to complete their metamorphoses. I would remember this when Pamela phoned me from the hospital where she was writing a paper, while her moaning daughter endured an excruciating blood transfusion to treat her anemia. Instead of fretting over the unfairness of her task, I would admire her energy and determination. Her life was anything but peaceful; yet she defied the turmoil, continued to grow and transform herself. I could not tell her or Jamal that peace would come, or that a college degree would protect them from the terrors that stalked them. But I *could* tell them that it was possible to become more than they had been before.

I realized that the pond's stillness, like the removed life of contemplation, is largely illusion, ephemeral at best. Our intellects live inside our messy lives, not apart from them in some Platonic realm. My discomfort arose from reluctance to allow my students' noise and pain into my quiet, country life. I had wanted to continue thinking of myself as one who had escaped the ghetto. But I mistook the cure for the sickness. To seal myself inside the ivory tower of my discipline was not to be safe but perhaps most in danger, most ripe for misery as a teacher. Teachers can't be happy when they are isolated from their students' lives. But when I accepted the messy chaos of Jamal and Pamela's lives as part of their education — and part of my own — I began to find the quiet that had eluded me. This is what I have learned in my 33 years of teaching at a community college — and I have to relearn it each semester.

Postscript: Jamal finished the semester, then dropped out and vanished into the statistics. Pamela later became valedictorian of her four-year college and is now pursuing a law degree.

*M. Garrett Bauman is a professor of English at Monroe Community College and author of Ideas and Details: A Guide to College Writing (Thomson, 2003).*

## AN ACADEMIC LIFE OUT OF SYNC

By Ellen Ostrow (reprinted with permission from the author)

**Harmony and balance derive from a sense of personal control over our work and our lives...**

Stephanie had joined the psychology department as an assistant professor immediately out of graduate school. Now she was up for tenure. She had excellent research skills and a list of publications that exceeded the number she had been told would be required for tenure. Most of her colleagues liked and respected her, although many felt that they didn't really know her well. Her teaching ratings were average or above. Letters from outside reviewers suggested she had the potential to make a significant contribution to her field. All in all, she had reason to be optimistic about her tenure review.

Her outlook changed after meeting with the chairman of her department. He went through her CV item by item. Several of her articles were published in refereed journals but not ones that her department considered sufficiently prestigious. Subtracting these from her list of publications left her numbers below the norm. She had several articles under review by important journals, but unless these were accepted and in press when her case came up for a vote, the outcome seemed uncertain to him. If she could get a couple other articles published in good journals, the chairman told her, she might have a chance.

Stephanie was astounded to discover that her prospects were so bleak. She devised a schedule that would enable her to write up new data she had recently collected into articles and submit them to the journals suggested by her chairman. But there was one significant obstacle: She had no interest in this line of research. She had inherited her research program from her graduate-school adviser. At the time, she'd been flattered to be selected as his protégé, and the opportunity to work with him had offset her basic lack of interest in the research itself.

Having endured hard times before, Stephanie had well-honed survival skills. She did what was necessary to avert disaster, and later that year her department, and the university, voted in favor of her tenure.

But the following summer, Stephanie resigned from the university.

In her struggle to earn tenure, she had learned something about herself: She was far more interested in applied research and clinical work. Offered a position at a research-oriented clinic, she took it and gave up her tenure. At the clinic, she'd be able to exercise her nurturing strengths and use her research abilities in the service of goals more meaningful to her than meeting the numerical requirements of a university.

As you might imagine, her colleagues were flummoxed: How could she have managed to grab the brass ring only to trade it in for work they considered far less exalted?

We talk of wanting balance in our lives. And when it comes to balancing work and life, we usually take a time-oriented approach. We think of having enough time to "have a life." We speak of the

“time famine” and the difficulty of fitting all the varied demands on our time into the constraints of a 24-hour day.

But there is an entirely different — and perhaps more useful — way to think about balance. Balance implies harmony. Biologically, you’re in harmony when you are experiencing an optimal amount of stress. Continuous and chronic stress debilitates us. It makes us vulnerable to depression, weakens our immune system, and is associated with early death.

Trying to find balance by juggling the competing demands on our time usually just causes more stress. You may feel bombarded, overwhelmed, unable to focus. Every part of your life is interconnected, so stress in one area bleeds into the others. While the Food and Drug Administration gives us guidelines for a balanced diet, there is no easy formula for a balanced life.

Instead of a time-oriented approach, try to think about balance in terms of what would need to happen for you to feel in harmony — i.e., for you to feel that you’re at your peak, experiencing relatively more positive than negative emotion, feeling in control of your life, focused on meaningful goals of intrinsic importance. There may be considerable juggling going on, but from moment to moment, this is how balance feels.

From this perspective, it’s easy to see why tenure wasn’t a sufficient reward for Stephanie. She had made time for everything, but the motivations for her work were primarily external. The connection with her adviser, although satisfying in and of itself, was not intrinsic to her research interests.

Her chairman’s emphasis on counting publications gave her little satisfaction and provided her little support in the face of meeting the tenure challenge. Instead, it simply created additional pressure — distracting her from her goals rather than helping her accomplish them. When we operate on the assumption that life is about the struggle to survive in a world of limited resources, we’re unlikely to experience much balance.

Fundamentally, harmony and balance derive from a sense of personal control over our work and our lives. By personal control, I mean the sense that you can influence the outcome of significant events. Feeling like you can choose among outcomes and cope with the consequences also defines personal control.

The common perception that academic life grants enormous autonomy often creates public confusion about the difficulty of balancing work and life demands in academe. Yes, academic freedom allows you to study what you choose, but sometimes politics are involved in the choice. Areas of research wax and wane in popularity, and a once-prized research program can fall out of favor with the addition of some new faculty members with very different views about what constitutes worthwhile scholarship.

There is no life without adversity. How, then, does one bounce back and regain balance? Resilience is a fundamental part of balance. Resilient people experience a sense of personal control about their lives and their work. They are engaged and committed to their work. Their focus on self-chosen, intrinsically rewarding goals allows them to persevere and adapt when things go awry.

When we experience negative emotions like fear and anger, our thinking is limited to what is essential for survival. In this “alarm” state, we assume a narrowed and intolerant view. When life in the academy becomes a win-lose battle for tenure, power, money, or allies, then negative emotions are a likely consequence. A department in the throes of such tension is not a good place to experience balance.

Positive emotions, in contrast, broaden our intellectual, physical, and social resources. When you’re feeling positive, you are expansive, creative, tolerant, and open to new ideas and experiences. Students as well as faculty members are likely to absorb, discover, and communicate more knowledge when their emotions lean in the positive direction.

We often think that our emotional state is dependent upon external events. But one way to strive for greater control and balance is to work at generating more positive emotion in yourself. Appreciating and savoring the good events in your life can broaden your thinking and build reserves that you can draw upon during difficult times. Instead of moving on automatically to the next thing on your list, savor the moments of completion and accomplishment. They may not be the kinds of things you can list on your CV, but appreciating the good events in your life will lead to greater balance.

Even tenure wasn’t enough to compensate for the absence of opportunities for Stephanie to use her strengths and talents. Being aware of our strengths and being able to use them every day is an essential component of a balanced life.

The academy will define you according to what it values. In this way, it is no different from most work environments. It’s incumbent upon you to keep in mind that you are much more than the person represented on your CV.

Balance, then, comes from your vital engagement in, and personal striving toward, goals that give your life a sense of meaning and purpose.

When I ask myself what makes my role as a parent meaningful, I think of giving my son opportunities to discover his strengths, to be grateful for the good things in his life, and to be able to form close and loving connections to others. What makes my work meaningful is the opportunity to empower the people I counsel, to balance setbacks with successes and adversity with gratitude, optimism, and engagement.

When I am doing these things, my life is balanced. When I’m distracted by what is ultimately trivial, but seems momentarily urgent, I lose my balance. Fortunately, balance is a process. I can always shift my focus — and thereby regain my balance.

So can you.

*Ellen Ostrow is a clinical psychologist and founder of Lawyers Life Coach, which provides coaching services to female lawyers trying to balance professional success and personal lives. She has served on the psychology faculties of three universities and as a staff psychologist at several university counseling centers.*

## MADE FOR EACH OTHER

by Mary Sheehy Moe, Helena College of Technology (reprinted with permission from the author)

Renae had masses of mahogany-colored hair, three children, and an inordinate affection for chocolate. She once vowed that after high school, she would never again endure an English class, but here she is.

Cindy is afraid of school—and almost everything else. She sits in the back of the room, slumped forward over her table, a veil of fine brown hair covering haunted eyes. She doesn't want to be here.

Dale doesn't want to be anywhere. A year ago, he was an ironworker building a bridge in central Montana. It was Indian summer, and the branches of trees etched gold into a true blue sky. Dale remembers glorying in those etchings just before the truck hit him, pinning him to the guard rail and crushing his right leg. Now he's in my classroom because he has to be...to get the voc-rehab money. Besides, it doesn't really matter where he is. One place is as bad as another.

These are my students—never the carefree coeds of media mythology, sparkling with the kind of brightness assured by parents' money or confirmed by SAT scores. They're usually not teenagers, either, kids fresh out of high school, confident of seizing the world-their-oyster. Most of my students never believed the world was their oyster and don't believe it now. They are here for many reasons, noble and ignoble, but somewhere in the middle of most of them is a hope—faintly flickering, but there—the hope that this time school will make a difference. An associate degree in data processing, auto mechanics, or accounting will give them something to hang onto, a job, security, a future. That's what they want, and that's what Helena College of Technology is for.

The catch, of course, is that they have to take English—English, which they hate with a child's loathing of spinach. It may be good for you (they're not entirely convinced), but the very thought of it gags. And the minute they see me—or more precisely, the minute I open my mouth—their worst fears are confirmed. Listen to her, they think, with the proper grammar and the mile-a-minute delivery and the words, words, words! Their hearts sink. What are we *doing* here?

People like to think life makes sense. If life makes sense, you can manipulate destiny, make plans and decisions that will ensure a certain outcome. Maybe for some people life does make that kind of sense, and for them, explaining the decision to become a teacher is easy. They can connect attitude to action, or trace the effect to a series of causes, or perhaps show how one stunning event, some single, significant episode, was an epiphany for them. Like Paul struck by lightning on the road to Damascus, the message hit them: by George, I must teach!

I'm not one of those people. I can't make sense of life; I simply live it. For a long time, I pretended to myself that I made logical decisions, that the big events of my life—getting married, having children, becoming a teacher—were planned, deliberate acts. But in all honesty, it isn't so. In each case, it just felt right at the time. Now, *why* teaching felt right—that's the interesting question.

The first day of class is always the worst because on the first day I have to show the students the text we will be using: *Modern Business English*. It's thick, with small print and no pictures. Each chapter is cunningly named after a part of speech and filled with ponderous explanations and wearying worksheets.

This is not the way a course like mine should be done. I have been telling the administrators since I arrived. You can't teach language skills this way. It's demeaning, demoralizing—and futile. But the business department believes that these are the skills students need and bases later courses in the writing sequence on this approach, so I've been playing along and biding my time.

"This is the text for the course," I announce, holding up *Modern Business English* like a set of bad x-rays. As I summarize the contents, Cindy retreats further behind her hair and Dale looks out the window. Renae shifts in her seat and snorts: "English book from hell!"

We all laugh.

I should hate the institution of school because it betrayed me—twice. The first time it made me believe that succeeding in school mattered; the second time it fooled me into thinking that it didn't matter at all.

In grade school, I loved learning, especially English. I devoured the stories in the readers, stories with heroes, people with character who saved the day—or died in the effort. I was particularly taken with a series of "child biographies" of famous historical figures. They were all orange, I remember, and had the same sort of title: *George Washington, Boy Leader; Davy Crockett, Boy Pioneer; Benjamin Franklin, Boy Inventor*. Boy-oh-boy...the message was there, but I didn't get it. I truly believed that my gender difference was just a technicality; I, too, could be a hero, a winner. By dint of effort, my native gifts, and character, I could be anything I wanted to be. Wasn't I already proving it? I was at the top of my class academically, the queen of the spelling bee, a leader on the playground. And—proof positive that I was a winner—I could play baseball.

Right from the start, I loved everything about it. I loved learning what a body could do—the beautiful rhythm of run-catch-throw with feet flying over grass and the glove an extension of the hand. I loved the thinking parts: figuring out where to go and where to throw, when to lead off and when to tag up, how to tighten up a hot box, how to rough a bag. Above all, I loved the shock of *me*, a girl playing a boy's game: the skepticism when I took my stance in the batter's box, the big eyes when I cracked a sizzler down the third base line; the whoop when I nailed a throw from center field to the cut-off man.

"Wow! You sure don't throw like a girl!"

High school threw my lie in my face, rubbed my nose into the real world of 1964, when the rules of the game for boys and girls really were different—and immutable. Girls were required to wear dresses; boys could wear whatever they wanted. Girls were required to take home economics; boys took shop. Athletic girls could play intramurals on Monday nights for diversion, but no team sports offered serious competition. Boys had football in the fall, basketball and wrestling in the winter, and track in the spring.

The coveted place of glory for a girl was on the sidelines, cheering on the boys amid the rustle of pom-poms, or keeping the crowd entertained at halftime with a Vaselined-permanent smile and a dazzling display of sequins and skin. The coveted place of glory for a boy was in the action itself, the main event. Under the lights of packed stadiums and gymnasiums, boys could stomp'em, tromp'em—kill'em, by God—and somehow in the process build Character.

That was the crux of the difference. Boys had characters to build; girls had reputations to preserve. The very phrases sum up the tone of the times: boys had futures they could actively pursue; girls had pasts that they must passively preserve. Boys had choices to make that would shape their lives. Girls knew their lives would be shaped by being chosen.

In this world of homecoming queens, cheerleaders and majorettes, tomboys didn't get chosen for anything. I went from grade-school hot-shot to high-school pariah in one summer. The reading, the spelling bees, the beautiful world of sandlot baseball—all of grade school—had been a cruel hoax. None of it mattered at all.

We are studying pronouns now, in the early stages of our tour through the English book from hell. This book doesn't even pretend to be kind. Instead of easing students slowly, provocatively, into the intricacies of language, it intimidates. The pronoun chapter drones on about number, gender, and person for a page before presenting its usual far-fetched sample sentences, certain to daunt whoever survived the opening palaver. One of the sentences is this one: It is *I* who *am* grateful?

Dale snorts, "It is *I who am grateful*? Give me a break! Who talks this way, Mary?"

"You got me," I tell him.

"And am *I* grateful!" Renae chortles, "Why do we have to study this?"

At bottom, I tell them, insistence on the King's English is mostly just snobbery. People understand you perfectly if you say "It's me" instead of "It is I." In fact, seen from a certain light, "It's me" is preferable, since people get so tripped up by the surprise of "It is I" that they forget your message.

But it's like knowing which fork to use. If you get the food into your mouth without making a mess of yourself, you can use a salad fork, a dinner fork, a spatula or a shovel, for all I care. But the world is full of people who want to dismiss you for a technicality, and unfortunately, bigotry about language can do more than keep you from some snob's dinner table. Some people judge your ability to communicate entirely on the basis of your mastery of "the King's English," and they won't hire you, won't take you seriously, if you can't choose the right fork. Of course, what these people never seem to realize is that the fork they insist on using also keeps them from a lot of *our* tables. You can't say "It is I who am grateful" in Butte, Montana, and expect anyone to want to spend time with you!

Cindy has pulled back her hair for this spiel and at the mention of Butte, her eyes glitter. She spent her early childhood in Butte, a frontier mining town famous for its colorful people, stories and expressions.

"You're right," she says in a quavering voice. "Butte is a *very* exclusive society."

The rest of the class turns to catch a glimpse of this person in hiding, but Cindy veils herself once more.

No society was more exclusive than high school in 1964. The wrong hair style, the wrong shade of lipstick, a hemline an inch too long or too short—that's all it took to be the object of scorn. I could catch a line drive on the run in center field and throw the ball hard and straight enough to put a

man out at third, but I couldn't get pink plastic rollers in my hair in anything approximating a neat row. My make-up looked like a mask. The way I walked and talked and sat revealed all too clearly that for me, heels and girdles and bras were instruments of torture.

The playing fields were gone. There was no recess in high school, and even a slow learner like me knew better than to try to join the boys in the sandlots after school. I had always had girl friends to play with before, but now the girls scorned play. All they did was gossip and giggle and feel their hair. For two years, I tried to find a niche, someplace where I could shine and be the star that I alone knew I was. There was no place for me.

Then I discovered parties. It was high school's answer to the American dream. Anybody from anywhere, regardless of hair, clothes, or gender, could be noticed. All she had to do to be accepted was "party hearty." To be admired, she could ride a motorcycle at breakneck speed down dusty Montana roads or drive a flat-tired car along the railroad tracks across a river. And at Montana's age-old teen institution, the beer kegger, there were always games: jumping over bonfires, tumbling down hills, running from cops. I didn't need algebra, English or biology. I didn't need cheerleading. I had found a way to win without sports. I was *in*, at last.

It doesn't take much time with the English book from hell to depress my students. Their earliest memories of feeling stupid begin to come back in waves—waves of nouns that look like verbs, prepositions that look like adverbs, and gerunds that look like participles. Too much time with the book thrusts them once again into that sea of words, words with labels but no meaning. They don't want to feel that way again, to drown helplessly under the unrelenting weight of the King's English. I don't blame them.

So we leave the book frequently to consider broader communication skills. Like how to interview for a job. It's real. It matters. It's why they're here. We focus on giving good answers to interview questions, how you can develop an answer with details, how you can organize those details through sequence, enumeration or narration. The students write out their answers and read them to each other.

This is how we learned what happened to Dale. The interview question was, "Tell me about a disappointment you've had." Dale wrote about the day he lost his leg, how he was mesmerized by those golden trees and saw the truck too late. He wrote about the months of recovery, his separation from his family, and his decision to go to school. "At first," he concluded, "I felt bitter about what happened to me. But coming back to school has been a good thing. I never thought of myself as much of a student, but learning about computers has made me realize that if I put my mind to something I can do it. In fact, I enjoy doing it. I think I'll be the same way on the job."

When Dale finished reading his answer, Renae of the Uncontrollable Impulses blurted, "Dale, baby, you are *beautiful*." We all laughed to put clothes on this naked sentiment, but when Dale looked around the room, he knew the truth. Something soft came into the flinty eyes. I knew just how he felt.

By the time I was a senior in high school, my reputation was established: I was wild. School was just a place to plan the next party. The achievements that might have been mine—Honor Society,

scholarships—went to students who still believed that good grades made a difference. My report card was heavy with C's. I flunked chemistry—skipped it 44 out of 45 days one spring quarter so I could cruise with my first boyfriend in his '55 Chevy. It is amazing to me now that, of all the hours I spent in the classroom in high school, practically nothing emerges as a distinct, individual memory. I remember being ridiculed once as I walked down the row in my history class...my mother had cut my hair too short and my attempts to style it in "pageboy" were a complete disaster. I remember a friend in geometry class slumping out of her desk and onto the floor like melted chocolate—we had skipped the pep assembly earlier to conduct some sort of drinking contest in the parking lot. And I remember the day Mr. Nesbit read my story out loud.

Somehow, I had managed to stay in the honors program in English, and Mr. Nesbit taught the senior section. One day, late in the year, he encouraged the class to do some writing for the school's literary magazine. A story began to take shape in my mind immediately, and I scribbled furiously through the rest of my classes. It was a true story about a time I lost my temper with my sister. I gave it to Mr. Nesbit the next day, and the day after that, he walked into class, sat down, pushed aside the day's lesson plan and read my story to the class.

I remember everything about that moment: how I folded my hands and looked down at the play of sunlight and shadow on my interlaced fingers as I listened to my words coming out of someone else's mouth. When it was over, the other students, most of them Honor Society members, looked at me as though they had never seen me before. And for the first time, I could look back at them with pride, not defiance.

More and more, I push the book aside and contrive assignments that give students a chance to tell their stories. We call it "being out of the book." Renae tells us about chocolate and her children. Bruce writes about his car wreck; Chauntelle, about her music. Their stories make them come alive and give them dignity. Because they want to tell them well, they consider their words carefully. . .which happened to be the objective of the course.

Cindy tells what she can. There is a fire in her big story and someone dies in it—her daughter, I think. Her little stories are sad ones, too. In December, Cindy approached me after class, shaking as always.

"I might have to miss sometimes this month, Mary," she says in her quavery voice. "Christmas is hard for me."

"I'm sorry, Cindy. Come when you can."

Cindy pulls her hair back, revealing the frightened eyes. "You remind me of my mother, you know," she says, half-smiling.

"Really? Well, thank you!" I reply

"It's not a compliment." She sees my startled look and adds, "But I like *you*, Mary. . .when we're 'out of the book.'" She laughs and the hair flops back down.

I didn't decide to become a teacher when Mr. Nesbit read my story to the class. I never made that decision. I went on to college and chose English as a major because I had always been "good at English" and figured it would be easy. Nothing I experienced in college changed my mind about the importance of education; after all, I would be getting married, having kids, raising a family. It didn't really matter. Then the world changed again and it turned out that that it really did matter after all. Married or not, I needed to work. My degree was in English, and the job you get with that degree is a teaching job. So I teach.

Sometimes I wonder what I might have been if I had stayed on course. But I suspect that I was on course all along, that perhaps I was destined to go back to school as a teacher and get it right, *make* it right.

In twenty years of teaching, I've had many different kinds of students in many different settings. For years, I taught advanced placement English to those sparkling ones, the high school kids who go on to Harvard, Stanford, MIT. That was fun, too. But Dale and Renae and Cindy need me more and seem to know me better. They understand about losing things and getting lost. It's like we all went to the same high school—or maybe we're just made for each other. At any rate, sometimes I feel like a hero in this job, someone with character who is saving the day. More often, I feel like I'm surrounded by heroes. Either way, it's a pretty good way to feel.

## WINGS ON THEIR WHEELCHAIRS

by Margaret Ann Maricle, Cuesta College (reprinted with permission from the author)

Alan's father was a widely respected attorney who had edited a national law review. Alan struggled his entire life with a learning disability. His father had issued judgments that had made history in legal circles. Alan found C's as difficult to achieve as counting the stars in the heavens. A's were inconceivable, but his father expected them. He refused to admit his son had a learning disability and didn't even realize Alan was taking developmental classes in college. For a lifetime Alan had lived in the shadow of this great man and fought constantly against his resulting self-doubt. Therefore, I wasn't surprised the day that Alan sat in my office and cried, I'd seen him through a number of bouts with discouragement.

"It's the last week before finals and here I am—still totally confused. I spent the last three hours in the library on just this assignment." He stabbed his pencil at the paper. "Anyone else could have done it in half an hour."

I acknowledged his frustration and noticed that he was having to fight back tears.

"I'm just so tired of having to work harder than everyone else because of my disability," he said. "Will it always be this difficult?"

I didn't know exactly how to respond because I've never been very good at confronting someone with painful reality. I tried to penetrate the dark glasses he had just put on so I could at least tender the truth with a little compassion.

"It will probably always be this hard, yes. At least academically," I added.

"I guess I've always known that. Yet something keeps me going. I'm not sure what, though." He hesitated and then sat up a little straighter. "But I do know one thing—I've gotten this far, and I'll be damned if something as easy as sentence combining is going to stop me now."

He closed his English book and stood up. "Thanks for listening," he said. I'm the one who should have said, "Thank you," for Alan, like so many of my students, had taught me more than I could ever have taught him. Several of my students have learning disabilities and physical challenges which, instead of limiting them, have actually propelled them to greater heights of success. Whether consciously or not, these individuals have regarded their disabilities as opportunities, not limitations. And by example I have learned a great deal from these students who seem to possess a unique strength that allows them to rise above their particular difficulties.

Mack is the student who first made me aware of this ability to surmount challenges. When he rolled into my class the first day, he exuded more confidence than one might expect of a person in a wheelchair. He was such a good-looking young man that many of the female students did a double take, and one admitted later to having a "crush" on him. I, too, was easily taken in by his charm. He came in every day with a smile on his face, contributed freely to class discussions, and joked easily with me and his classmates. He teased me unmercifully about my handwriting being worse than his chicken scratching, which resulted from his misshapen hands.

"At least I have an excuse," he quipped.

He never let me get away with being late, saying that if he could get to class on time in his outdated chair, then he had every right to expect me to be more prompt. He questioned everything but never asked for special treatment. After a while I forgot that he was at a physical disadvantage and one day asked him if he'd walk over to the door and turn off the lights.

"I'd be happy to, but would it be OK if I just rolled over there?" he asked

For a moment I was embarrassed until I saw his amiable grin. And then I felt uplifted. I'd forgotten that he was in a wheelchair. I'd gone beyond his disability, as he had done and expected me to do.

Later I talked to him about the incident. I explained that I just thought of him as able to function like everyone else. He smiled and told me that was exactly what he wanted me to think. He said that he could not only function as well as everyone else, but sometimes even better.

I continued to watch Mack draw people to him with his effusive personality and positive attitude. He didn't know the word "can't," didn't know what it meant to give up.

During a class discussion one day Mack told us of an incident that infuriated me but gave me even greater respect for him. He had gone into a gift store to shop, and the owner came over and asked him to leave. When Mack asked why, the man told him that he didn't want Mack crashing into his merchandise with his chair and breaking things. Mack very politely replied that he was quite skillful in maneuvering himself but would gladly leave if that's what the owner needed. Mack felt no anger, just regret for the man's lack of understanding.

This optimism, remarkable in itself, is even more significant, when one realized that Mack once had normally functioning limbs. He had known the joy of running free on the beach, had felt the satisfaction of building something with his hands, and could trust his capacity for memory and clear thinking, until a motorcycle accident and an ensuing coma denied him physical freedom and caused him to have to relearn how to learn. But Mack got back up from this temporary grounding, and when he couldn't walk any more or ride his motorcycle as fast as he wanted to, he learned instead to fly. Mack found wings for his wheelchair and never touched the ground again unless he chose to. Mack's wings were his positive attitude, his refusal to give up in the face of the darkest storm cloud. I could learn from that. I who spend a lot of time looking down or looking back, but not nearly enough time looking up. Mack taught me the true meaning of optimism.

Shannon's figurative wheelchair was her epileptic disorder, which had plagued her for years, subjecting her to embarrassment and fear of a public seizure and causing her to doubt her ability to learn as easily as others. One day Shannon sat next to my desk and trembled as she described her seizure that morning. She shared her mortification that her male roommate had discovered her nude and convulsing in the shower. Her emotions were so volatile as we talked that she was unable to function without crying; her ability to think clearly was temporarily impaired. On top of everything else, she knew she wouldn't be able to attend her first class. I managed to convince Shannon to go to the health center and made her promise to talk to the nurse about her emotional concerns.

Shannon's greatest concern was the difficulty she faced in meeting all the demands of going to school, working, and supporting herself without becoming overly stressed, for it was often the stress that triggered a seizure. I watched Shannon struggle for the entire semester with these concerns, watched her juggle all her demands, and wanted desperately to help.

But what kept me from intervening was Shannon's zest for living. In spite of these problems, she had an excitement about life that I rarely see. She couldn't wait to come to my class, to attend other classes, to learn as much as she could. She was impatient to try out the things she learned, frequently coming in to tell me of a successful experience with a new reading technique or a time management plan. Shannon loved life, as tenuous as it might seem at times to her. She couldn't wait for the next experience, despite the knowledge that the experience might be a seizure. Many of us take life for granted, failing to see the budding trees in spring or the sunset that paints the sky purple and orange. Shannon lived for those occurrences and shared them with all who would listen. She had an insatiable curiosity that kept her looking forward to that next exciting moment in her life. That love for life gave Shannon wings, allowing her a perspective few of us have. I'm glad she shared this perspective with me, for her passion inspired me and helped me to revitalize my sometimes waning enthusiasm.

Jeff, on the other hand, didn't have that appreciation for life. He often walked around in a self-induced fog, fighting powerful negative messages whose source he didn't at first understand and couldn't articulate. Jeff found it difficult to concentrate, to focus, to understand even basic information at times. Many of his instructors found him annoying. He asked too many questions, he had no commitment; he was inconsistent. Yet I saw in Jeff a yearning to be free of this emotional limitation with which he struggled. I cannot begin to describe or define or even give it a psychological label, but I saw that Jeff was fighting against a terrible emotional foe, which sometimes left him debilitated.

So many times I heard what sounded like excuses from him. "I couldn't come to class...or get my paper done...or study for my test...because I just have these negative voices in my head."

At first I was impatient with him and reminded him that he needed to be responsible for his actions. But I noticed that he continued to strive, continued to get his work done, inconsistent as it was. And I noticed something else—a tiredness that wasn't just physical, an emotional fatigue, if you will. It was almost as if he were fighting against a real assailant who was wearing him down bit by bit.

However, it wasn't a physical opponent Jeff battled, but his own fears, as he finally revealed to me. He stopped me in the hall one afternoon and said, "I want to tell you I went to see a counselor yesterday. I think it was a good decision to see her, and I couldn't have gone without your help."

I was unclear about how I had contributed to his decision.

"You really helped me when you talked in our class about fear. You mentioned that book *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*, and I read it. I realized that I have to face my fears. I can live my life or I can live in fear. Some days when I've missed class, I'll be lying in bed thinking of all the things I'm afraid of and I remember what you said, 'Feel the fear and do it anyway.' That helps me to get up and come to class."

I reminded Jeff that coming to class, facing his fears as he's done and finally deciding to see a counselor took a lot of courage. I challenged him to look at all the courageous things he'd done instead of focusing on the times his fear had defeated him. He beamed and said very simply, "Thanks."

Again, I'm the one who should have said "Thank you," for Jeff taught me another important lesson. This breakthrough that Jeff had experienced exemplified great tenacity. I've watched other students give up when the pressure became too much, when they got so far behind they couldn't catch up.

But Jeff's tenacity, which often manifested itself in too many questions and seemed to irritate other instructors, kept him going. In his questioning he was seeking the clarity he so desperately needed, and he just wouldn't give up until he understood or until he "got it right." Although Jeff continued to be unclear about who he is or what he can do, I believe that it is his persistence in trying to break through his emotional fog and his determination to face his fears that will give him the wings to fly above these dark clouds of doubt.

If anyone needed a way out of darkness, it was Spencer, a thirty-five-year-old man who could barely read or write a complete sentence. Many would label him illiterate, but he was definitely street smart. His tough demeanor, long ponytail, earrings, and leather jacket gave the initial impression of someone I wouldn't want to meet in a dark alley. He'd been in a motorcycle gang, become involved heavily in the drug culture, and had lost most of his money. His turbulent times had taken their toll, for he now experienced severe bouts of depression, often cried during class for no apparent reason, was dangerously overweight, and suffered from narcolepsy.

It didn't take me long to realize that his toughness was a façade, for Spencer was really a very gentle, kind man. Perhaps because he'd made so many mistakes in life, he charged himself to take the younger students under his wing and encourage them to study and apply themselves. I found his efforts particularly poignant because Spencer was severely learning-disabled. He struggled with every new concept and found the simplest learning tasks formidable.

But he was learning to read and was discovering how to write complete thoughts. His excitement was like that of a small child enthralled by ocean waves lapping over his feet. I once asked him how he'd gotten this far in life with such limited skills. He said, "I faked it."

"How did you ever graduate from high school?" I wondered

He replied, "The school bribed me. They said if I'd behave, they'd graduate me."

I was appalled and asked him if he were in the least bit angry because no one had ever discovered or addressed his disability. Yes, he was angry, but like so many of my students, he persevered.

He persisted in the face of embarrassment over not being able to read. He kept going even though his wife had to support the family, and his two children were excellent students. And he avoided any situation in which he might be asked to write something as simple as a response to a survey question. Instead he made what little money he could selling hand-made crafts and attended classes faithfully no matter how difficult the course material.

I asked him if he ever got discouraged, if he ever wanted to give up. And his answer was so simple. "Why? Things will work out. They always have."

I was suddenly reminded of the old song about the tiny ant who could move the big rubber tree plant because he had "high hopes." Spencer had hope. The last time I saw him he was ecstatic about his latest endeavor—tutoring other adults who could not read and teaching them about hope.

Whenever I've felt discouraged, I've found myself thinking of two very special students, Monique and David. Monique had a badly deformed body but a beautiful spirit. Her hearing loss and unclear speech made communication very difficult. Yet she never failed to communicate her appreciation of the beauty around her. She loved flowers, drew pictures of gardens, sketched floral designs on her

papers, and went into ecstasy when she talked about her visit to Monet's gardens in France. Monique loved nature's splendor and found the plainest tree a thing of beauty. One day she brought me some scarlet and bronze leaves "just because." She may not have learned anything in my class that day, but I did. Monique taught me that beauty is everywhere if you will just look.

Thank goodness for David, the good humor man. He always seemed to be outside my classroom on the very days I needed a good laugh. His sense of humor was subtle, yet powerful. His smile was contagious. He wrote short stories, mysteries mostly, and brought them by for me to read. I could hardly get past the first sentence without laughing out loud. I really looked forward to talking to David, who dismissed his learning disability as "one of those things." He might say that what gets him by is not his philosophy of life, but his philosophy of laugh. It certainly helps me.

I've often wondered why these students I've described fare so well in the face of their special challenges. Why were they able to rise above their difficulties and not be grounded by life's storms? I knew they all worked harder than the average student, learned to compensate for their lack, and practiced the art of filtering out the unimportant. But I felt it was something more that made them exceptional. After observing them for a long time, I concluded that they've done what the old Chinese proverb suggests: "If you can't change your fate, change your attitude."

They simply chose an attitude and went ahead with their lives. Their attitudes—persistence, optimism, excitement, tenacity, humor, appreciation, and hope—helped them soar and find a new perspective. They found freedom in looking down from above. Their problems diminished the higher they rose, so that their predicaments became not weights, but wings.

When I feel weighted down by my own disability—the grind of day-to-day living—I think of Mack or David or Spencer or Shannon and the things they taught me—and my own chair sprouts wings and takes flight.

## UPCOMING PROGRAMS

### LIVE VIA SATELLITE AND THE INTERNET

(all times are 1:30-3:00 PM CT unless otherwise indicated)

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| FEB. 24, 2005 | PEDAGOGY 101 FOR DISTANCE LEARNING*   |
| MAR. 3, 2005  | ANNUAL CARL D. PERKINS RFQ TELECONFERENCE (1:30 - 2:30 PM CT)                         |
| APR. 7, 2005  | KEEPING 'EM ONCE YOU'VE GOT 'EM - II: PROMOTING STUDENT<br>ENGAGEMENT AND PERSISTENCE |
| APR. 7, 2005  | Rx FOR ER: PRESCRIPTIONS FOR EFFECTIVE RETENTION<br>(3:05 - 3:30 PM CT)               |
| APR. 21, 2005 | PEDAGOGY 102 FOR DISTANCE LEARNING*   |
| JUNE 8, 2005  | DISTANCE LEARNING NURSING RE-ENTRY PROJECT, PART 2                                    |

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| APRIL 2005    | EDUCATING THE NETGEN: STRATEGIES THAT WORK                                       |
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On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the highest, rate the videoconference in terms of its value to you.

|                                  | Excellent |   |         | Poor |   |
|----------------------------------|-----------|---|---------|------|---|
| Timeliness of topic              | 5         | 4 | 3       | 2    | 1 |
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| Moderator                        | 5         | 4 | 3       | 2    | 1 |
| Panelists or Instructor          | 5         | 4 | 3       | 2    | 1 |
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| Technical quality                | 5         | 4 | 3       | 2    | 1 |
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1. Institution name: \_\_\_\_\_

2. My current position is: (circle one)

a. Faculty

c. Classified Staff

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3. What did you like most about the videoconference?

4. What could have been done to make it more valuable to you?

5. What topics would you like to see addressed in future videoconferences?

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