

work with fairly average or with heterogeneous groups of students. Consequently, when we work with students outside those average groups, we need to do some careful evaluation both before we begin and as we move through the work of the term. Part of that evaluation must be to recognize our own assumptions and to examine their validity.

PROMOTING AND PUBLISHING WRITING FOR OLDER ADULTS

by James Gremmels

The Director of the Adult Learning Center at the University of Minnesota, Morris, presented the English faculty with an idea about conducting writing workshops for older adults. Intrigued by the possibilities, although uncertain about the kinds of writing which might appeal to older people, the English staff wholeheartedly endorsed the idea and agreed to assist with the project.

Our first step in planning was to discover if older adults in our area were interested in a writing workshop, and if so, what would they like to write about? Over 60% of the 48 people in the Glenwood and Ashby Senior Citizen Centers who answered our questionnaire showed an interest in doing some supervised writing. Most of them wanted to write about things past. On the basis of our survey, we tried to develop a writing program that would draw upon their experiences and bring out their best thoughts with as little triteness as possible. We thought of different ways for them to write about themselves, their families, and their local history. If possible, we wanted to keep the four, three-hour afternoon sessions varied, relaxed, and flexible.

Ashby was chosen as the site and 25 people ages 55 to 82 signed up to attend the four sessions. Included in this group were a number of former school teachers, a retired mail carrier, an ex-postmaster, many of them daughters and sons of old settlers.

Not without some apprehension, three of us met for the first time with this group in the Home Economics Room of the Ashby

High School, explained to them what we intended to do, and gave them a folder which contained a tablet of paper, notecards, and a pen. We told them we had enough funds to publish a small booklet of their best pieces.

At the first session we thought oral story telling might serve as a good icebreaker. Later, we would have them write a story about a close friend or relative. Kenneth Koch, an American poet, has written about his experience teaching poetry to older people in a nursing home, and we thought some of his methods would work. For example, we assigned specific topics on which they each wrote a sentence or two: advice they would give to a young person; their earliest remembrance of school; a holiday celebration. We tried to stimulate their imaginations by setting before them objects: such as a World War I campaign hat, a bottle of Lydia Pinkham's tonic, a school bell, a set of fancy garters, a carpenter's wooden plane, a stereoscopic viewer, a cylindrical Edison phonograph record. In order to let them hear and see older persons telling stories, we showed them a short Canadian documentary film of interviews with old settlers talking about the role of the Mounties in winning the West. After the first two sessions we wanted them to write some poetry.

I began the first session by telling them stories about an eccentric Till Eulenspiegel prankster who lived in Glenwood many years ago. When finished, I told them to write about some incident that stood out in their minds - a story about a friend or relative. From this impromptu exercise, we received two short pieces we put in the book, Pages for the Ages (a title selected by them). Here is one:

SPECIAL TREATMENT

A fellow landed in the hospital. He was worried that a good friend who liked to play jokes on him would be the first one to visit. But when this friend came they had such a nice visit that he forgot all about any possible pranks that might be played.

So he was unprepared for any such worries, and then the friend departed.

On the way out the fellow spied a closet with the doctor's gowns inside. He hurriedly slipped into one and put on the mask.

He went back to the friend's room and said, "I'm the new doctor. I just want to check your temperature. Please turn over on your hands and knees with your buttocks up."

The fellow said, "I never heard of taking a fellow's temperature this way."

"That's all right," his friend said. "It'll just take a minute."

And then he left the room. A nurse passing by looked in and said, "Well, that's a funny thing. What are you doing?"

"I'm just waiting for the thermometer to register."

"Register what," she said, "with that chrysanthemum sticking out?"

Sylvia Hanson

Before the coffee break, we had them write on a notecard a piece of wisdom they would like to pass on to a young friend. After coffee, one of us read their statements to the class and made comments about each one. Some of these we put in the book:

ADVICE TO YOUNG PEOPLE

Control your impulse to spend your time watching television. Go outdoors and live your life with fulfillment in living for others and honoring your parents.

Ione M. McIlravie

Live your life so you will feel good about yourself. Work hard and be a good friend.

Vernie Alvstad

At the end of class we had them do another notecard assignment. Write something about their first remembrance of school. We put one of these pieces on the back cover.

PROMOTING YOURSELF

Because I had an older brother and sister at home, I was able to read a little when I started school.

The first day of school the teacher wrote such words as "hop"-

"run"--"jump", etc. on the board and asked anyone who could read them to suit the action to the word.

I hopped and jumped all over the room and was promoted to second grade on the spot.

Myrtle Hanson

The first session was a long one, what with the showing and discussion of the Canadian film, as well as their writing exercises. But we wanted to assure them that they had something significant and important to say and that many of them could already express themselves very well indeed. At the close, we told them that next week we wanted them to write a page or two or more about some aspect of their family's history.

At the second session, we returned their impromptu papers with our written comments, and discussed ways of improving them. We stressed opening and closings, strong narrative structure with rising action, climax, and good vivid details. To illustrate what we wanted from them, we called on Ernie Hansen to tell us about his early days as a rural mail carrier. As he talked, we interrupted him to ask for greater specificity. Quickly warming up to the questions, Ernie began to tell about the day February 13, 1923, when he and his team were caught in a blizzard. With delight we listened as he recalled the events of that day. The mild weather, water dripping from the eaves of his barn, the warning from the retired federal weatherman who skill kept his instruments, the thought that the old-timers would make fun of him if he stayed in town--all this was a prelude to that moment when the storm struck him halfway through his mail run. By this time, all of us were on the edges of our seats as he recalled how he could not see the horses which he had given free rein, how he frequently made his way, cautiously holding the harness, to clear the ice from the horses' nostrils, how he thought he could see a faint track they followed, and how suddenly the cutter bumped to a stop next to a woodpile he had not known was there, and between gusts of swirling snow he saw a familiar house in Ashby.

Ernie knew how to spin a tale. We had to encourage him to

apply his oral skill to the writing process. Keep the strong narrative line, work towards a climax, and try to catch the exact tone with some attention to word choice, we urged. The participants were asked to write a sentence or two about themselves to put in the book. Here's Ernie's: "I am a retired mail carrier, not an author. I could tell you of a great many experiences on the route, but to put them in writing is beyond my ability."

And here is a piece Ernie wrote for us:

THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW

When I was a child, there were many old Civil War veterans in our village. One, a close neighbor, had traveled as a young man with a circus. He enjoyed teaching us children to do cartwheels and handsprings and he tried to teach us to walk a slack rope, at which he was a professional.

One Fourth of July, he was to entertain the crowd by walking a rope across main street.

He came uptown so full of celebration juice, the sidewalk was scarcely wide enough, so they took the ladder away and told him to go home; his act was cancelled.

He disappeared from the crowd; a few minutes later he appeared on the rope, and walked safely across.

After Ernie's story, we worked in small groups, but the cramped conditions did not serve very well. So, we finished with another notecard exercise. Before them, we set the objects mentioned above and asked them to choose one or two that stimulated their imaginations.

THE STEREOSCOPIC VIEWER

Seeing the old stereoscopic viewer brought back childhood memories.

I remember how my younger sister and I would squabble about whose turn it was to look at the slides. I enjoyed looking at those pictures as much as any pleasure I can recall about my earliest years.

We had a good supply of slides--views of Niagara Falls, mountain scenery, etc.--but the pictures I liked best were a set

that told a story.

The maid serving the salad without dressing--literally; the wife catching the husband with the imprint of the maid's floury hands on the back of his coat; and more.

And these pictures weren't just flat either, each figure and object stood out in such a life-like fashion.

I wish I had the old viewer and the slides today.

Myrtle Hanson

Their take-home assignment was to write about some event in local history, interesting, important, or scandalous. We forewarned them that next time we were bringing a poet to class and they would write poetry.

At the beginning of the third meeting, we discussed their papers and we would not conceal our pleasure at how well they responded to our comments. In comparison with our undergraduate students, they were much more clear-headed, enthusiastic, and lively. This is a typical paper:

DIRTY WORK AT THE CROSSROADS

It was not all work and no play for the early settlers. They had horse races, wrestling matches, and other contests of strength and skill. Often a job of drudgery was turned into a celebration. Such an event took place in the life of my great-grandfather, David Burns.

Before the days of harvesters and mowers, all hay and grain was cut by hand with scythes. I have been told that a skilled man with good endurance could harvest up to three acres a day. Such a man was Great-grandfather. He came to be considered one of the best reapers in this part of the state. But, eventually, someone had the audacity to challenge his ability, so a contest was arranged to take place on the Fuglie farm near Ashby. Two similar plots of grain were measured off. A good-sized crowd assembled, and an air of congeniality and good-natured banter prevailed. Several bets were placed on the outcome.

Just before the start, drinks were passed around, but some skullduggery was involved. Someone laced Burns' drink with a dose of croton oil. Croton oil was used in those times as a

swift and violent laxative. So Great-granddad had barely got his momentum going when he had a decision to make.

Should he withdraw and seek a secluded spot and lose by default, or should he take another course? Having met many challenges and crises in his lifetime on the frontier, he spent little time in deciding his course. There were those who were betting on him, and besides he had a few dollars of his own on the line. He was not about to let his friends down, so stopping just long enough to drop his trousers, he soon regained his rhythm and went on to uphold his reputation and win the contest.

Donovan Grover

At this session Iftikar Khan, our poet, talked to them about poetry. He had them read and discuss Emily Dickinson's poem "I'm Nobody Who Are You?". He stressed that good poetry expresses thoughts, feelings, emotions in a carefree, but individual manner. To show them how, he improvised, to their amazement, a poem on the spot. Then he asked them to write a truthful, frank account of a dream.

FALSE ALARM

Approaching in multitudes...

Small ones, large ones, fangs!

White, green and yellowed ones...

Dentures!

I'd run I think...

But they surround me.

Moving toward me--

Leering, sneering

Retreating, advancing--

Grinning, taunting

Oooh! It's me they're haunting.

Moving closer, closer,

Snapping, snarling

Gnashing, grinding

Poised to bite!

HELP!

Oh, no...They got me--

Oh the pain...

pain...

PAIN?

I awake to pain,

The relief of pain

in a tooth undeniably my own!

Elaine H. Nelson

At the last session, Professor Khan read and commented upon their poems, showed them how to add, delete, and rearrange words and lines to give their expressions more force. We finished the last session by handing back their folders and pointing out some of the best pieces in each. The booklet, Pages for the Ages: Ashby Writing Workshop, 1978, contains 45 pieces arranged in three sections: The Early Years--Homestead and Town; The Middle Years--Boom and Bust; and The Later Years--Reflections and Dreams. If you read the book, you will see our students accomplished many things. For people who have not done much writing, they often choose the right word, deftly turn a phrase, and naturally develop strong vivid narratives.

All of us involved in this workshop found the teaching refreshing. We wonder what will happen fifty years from now if someone goes out and tries to get coherent written work from our present generation. Will they find as many literate people, eager to express their recollections and feelings? We hope so.

RECOGNIZING AND HELPING THE DYSLEXIC STUDENT

by Jo Crawford

Because educators have become more adept at early identification of developmental dyslexia, because language therapists have become more skilled in remedial training, and because parents and teachers have more enlightened attitudes about language disability, greater numbers of young adults with dyslexia are completing high school and entering college. There are several characteristics of the college dyslexic that are noteworthy. First of all, the student has learned to read, although he may