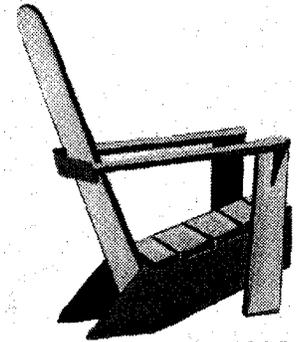


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# BREAD LOAF RURAL TEACHER NETWORK



January 1995

*A Project of the Bread Loaf School of English, Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vermont*

**Alaska—Arizona—Mississippi—New Mexico—South Carolina—Vermont**

## Bread Loaf in Rural Communities

*by James Maddox, Director  
Bread Loaf School of English*

The Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network (BLRTN), supported by the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, is now far along in its second year, and is continuing to enjoy success far greater than any of us at the Bread Loaf School could have foreseen.

The Network recruits rural teachers (mainly middle-school and high-school teachers) from six states—Alaska, Arizona, Mississippi, New Mexico, South Carolina, and Vermont—to come to the Bread Loaf School for up to three summers of study in writing, the teaching of writing, literature, and theater arts. The 30 or more teachers accepted each year as DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fellows receive extraordinarily generous awards, including tuition, room, board, round-trip travel, a book allowance, and a \$1,000 stipend for professional expenses in the subsequent academic year. The Fellows take two courses at Bread Loaf and, in addition, receive training on Bread Loaf's own telecommunications network, BreadNet.

The Bread Loaf School is a unique educational institution in America. Some 400 men and women

each summer—most of them K-12 teachers—choose to give up their summers to pursue further studies at one of Bread Loaf's three campuses: at the Bread Loaf site outside Middlebury, Vermont, at Lincoln College, Oxford, and at St. John's College, Santa Fe, New Mexico. More than forty Bread Loaf faculty members, drawn from colleges and universities across America and from the United Kingdom, teach at the three Bread Loaf sites. The result is a community of great intellectual excitement and commitment to teaching.

BreadNet is a means for BLRTN Fellows—and all other members of the Bread Loaf community—to stay in contact with each other during the academic year between Bread Loaf summers. But not only do they maintain contact on BreadNet; many Bread Loaf teachers link up their classrooms in joint telecommunications projects. For example, in the 1993-94 school year, teachers in Alaska, Mississippi, and Vermont had their classes read *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* together and share responses on BreadNet (see the last issue of this newsletter for a report on that confer-

ence); in the fall semester of 1994, the students of Bread Loaf Professor Susanne Wofford of the University of Wisconsin at Madison corresponded with the high-school students of BLRTN Fellow Michael Atkins in Hampton, South Carolina, on a joint reading project on *Romeo and Juliet*; we hope soon to have a conference going in which BLRTN teachers in Mississippi will have a BreadNet exchange with the students of Lusanda Mayikana, a Bread Loaf teacher in South Africa, on some of the similarities between the struggle for democracy in South Africa in recent years and the civil rights movement in the American South in the 60s and 70s.

Members of the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network stay in touch in more ways than through telecommunications; in fact, there's hardly a means of communication that the Fellows haven't used. The Fellows in Alaska, for example, living at huge distances from each other, have used audio-conference phone calls creatively to remain in touch and devise statewide projects. But even telecommunications, conference calls, and faxes can't replace face-to-face meetings, and there have been many such BLRTN meetings this year—in

*(continued on next page)*

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# Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network

January 1995

**Editor**  
Chris Benson

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## Bread Loaf in Rural Communities

*continued from front page*

Juneau, in Phoenix, in Albuquerque, in Jackson, in Clemson, and at the Bread Loaf campus itself.

Dixie Goswami, Rocky Gooch, and I, the chief administrators of the BLRTN grant—Team Bread Loaf, as we have been dubbed by Alaska BLRTN Fellow Scott Christian—are lucky enough to take part in many of these face-to-face meetings. Just this past fall, the three of us together joined meetings of BLRTN Fellows in Juneau, and then made an extensive swing through northern New Mexico and Arizona. Dixie and Rocky have hosted meetings of the Vermont Fellows on the Bread Loaf campus and the South Carolina Fellows in Clemson. I have joined the Mississippi Fellows at the Mississippi Council of Teachers of English convention in Jackson, and I have also joined Elspeth Stuckey and Ken Alston at the Piney Woods Country Life School in Mississippi, where Bread Loaf held a summer institute in 1993 and a summer symposium in 1994.

Probably the visits that we enjoy making the most are those on which we can actually go into the schools and classrooms of the Fellows, to see them in their native habitats.

We probably learn more from these visits about our Fellows—and about American education—than we do in any of our other activities.

On our recent trip through New Mexico and Arizona, Dixie, Rocky, and I found ourselves—in the long driving distances between stops—discussing a subject we had touched on many times before: the immensely important role that principals have in creating and sustaining a culture of support within their schools. The idea seems self-

evident and even pedestrian—but, having visited many schools, we were vividly aware of just how important this self-evident and pedestrian truth was. We had, over the years, visited some schools in which the principals, decidedly, did not create cultures of support—where, in fact, the teachers either talked in whispers about administrators who seemed actively obstructionist or rolled their eyes at the thought of administrators who were indifferent. We had therefore come to value enormously principals such as Robert Woodruff, whom we met at the Simmons Elementary School in Hollandale, Mississippi, on a trip we took through the Delta in the spring of 1992, or our longtime Bread Loaf friend Tammie Ortega, who has just become principal of the newly opened Edward A. Ortiz Middle School in Santa Fe.

On that recent Southwestern trip, we met more of these wonderful principals. One of them was Nick

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**Principals have an immensely important role in creating and sustaining a culture of support within their schools. We have, over the years, visited some schools in which the principals, decidedly, did not create cultures of support.**

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Cheromiah, principal of Laguna Middle School in Laguna, New Mexico, where BLRTN Fellow Phil Sittnick teaches. Nick Cheromiah began teaching in Albuquerque in 1974, but since 1979 he has been a teacher and principal at schools on the Acoma and Laguna reservations in western New Mexico. Laguna Middle School is run by the Laguna tribe itself, and Nick has, in ways maybe even more complex than most principals, great responsibilities for the health of the community as a

whole, as he directs the education of the community's children.

Like virtually all rural communities, Laguna faces economic challenges. The world's largest open-pit uranium mine used to operate on the Laguna reservation (readers of *Ceremony*, by Leslie Marmon Silko—herself from Laguna—will recall the novel's scenes at the uranium mine), but the uranium mines have closed down in recent years. Because of those shutdowns, Laguna residents—again like residents of other rural communities—can be tempted to move away to the city: Albuquerque is only about 50 miles away, and Interstate 40 runs right by Laguna. So, in short, Nick and his teachers find themselves at the focal point of intense cultural, economic, and demographic pressures.

When Dixie, Rocky and I visited Laguna Middle School, we met with a sizable group of teachers, to talk about various opportunities that Bread Loaf offers. About halfway through the meeting, Nick silently slipped into the back of the room to listen. He began to insert himself into the conversation, at first slowly, but then more actively after another man—who turned out to be Gil Sanchez, the superintendent—also slipped silently into the room. We talked about the bewildering array of telecommunications possibilities open to schools, and the necessity to proceed cautiously in committing a school's precious funding to one or another of those possibilities. All of this talk of equipment, fiber optics, and Internet access, in turn, took place in the large context of the responsibility that a principal—and maybe especially a principal in a complex cultural situation such as that at Laguna Pueblo—must bear in balancing the claims of his students' cultural *groundedness* against the necessity of preparing them for entry into the large American workplace. We were won over: here was another of those principals we had met whose jobs

represented to them the incredible responsibility for either opening up or closing down a lifetime's opportunities for their students. We were happy, before we left, to have agreed with Nick Cheromiah that Dixie Goswami and Rocky Gooch would return to Laguna early in 1995, to work with him, his teachers, and his community, to introduce new ideas about the teaching of writing and to talk about some of the most productive ways that telecommunications can be made to benefit the Laguna students and the entire Laguna community.

We left the school and headed out to Grants, where Phil Sittnick cooked some of his delicious chicken enchiladas for a group of Bread Loaf teachers and friends, including Clayton Rowley, from Grants, and BLRTN Fellow Emily Graeser, who came over from Zuni. It was a very good ending to a very good day.

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**Nick and his teachers find themselves at the focal point of intense cultural, economic, and demographic pressures.**

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This issue of the BLRTN newsletter is about teachers in many rural communities that are both like and unlike the community of Laguna. Many of the communities of other BLRTN Fellows are like Laguna in the problems that they face—isolation, difficult economic conditions—but also in the great opportunities they have: maybe most of all, the sense of community that many rural teachers and their students feel, which is an immense strength when they compare themselves to some of their urban counterparts. But many of the communities of BLRTN Fellows are, of course, drastically different from Laguna as well: indeed, projects that many BLRTN Fellows are having their students carry out involve the students' investigating the uniqueness

of the places they inhabit—the wetlands of South Carolina or the arroyos of Arizona.

One of the most fascinating things I've found in reading the pieces in this issue of the newsletter involves the BLRTN teachers' own relation to the rural communities they now occupy. At least two of them—Renee Moore in Cleveland, Mississippi, and Sondra Porter in Trapper Creek, Alaska—have moved from more urban settings to the small towns they now inhabit, and a great part of their appreciation of the communities they now live in seems to arise out of that conscious choice. A part of the reflection of Susan Miera, on the other hand, comes from her experience of teaching in the same region in which she grew up. Yet another teacher, Sylvia Barlow, has lived on the big Navajo Reservation, not long enough to make it her own, but long enough to

have attempted successfully to become a part of it.

I think you will enjoy these writings by the Bread Loaf Rural Network teachers, reflecting on their communities. I

think you will see, too, why those of us on Team Bread Loaf love nothing so much as getting in the car and heading off to visit these teachers and their students.

\* \* \*

If you are interested in applying to the Bread Loaf School of English—whether as a BLRTN Fellow or not—write to the following address:

James Maddox, Director  
Bread Loaf School of English  
Middlebury College  
Middlebury, Vermont 05753 ☞

# Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network: Emerging Principles and Practices

by Dixie Goswami  
BLRTN Coordinator

In interviews, conversations, and written reflections, members of the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network have consistently identified several critical issues, including the following:

- Fellows describe deep local resistance to change, in spite of powerful evidence that rural communities have themselves changed dramatically over the past decade. Experienced rural teachers report that some restructuring and reform efforts operate as if families provide basic education and as if rural communities are stable and safe places to live. They seem to assume that new techniques combined with top-down support are the answer: many Fellows believe that radical change is needed.
- Some Fellows report the reluctance of district administrators and other local authorities to recognize and work with teachers who are involved in a professional development network that focuses on changing classroom and school practices.

In spite of the surfacing of these troubling but not unexpected issues, Fellows are involved actively—and in many cases as leaders—in local, regional, and national reform and restructuring efforts that range from assisting with the development of local strategic plans and state

curriculum frameworks to participating in regional and national standards and assessment projects. Fellows know their schools and communities well, as articles in this newsletter demonstrate, and they're sensitive to the issue of working as change agents locally. We are trying to nurture the political know-how that is necessary if BLRTN teachers and the network as a whole are to work effectively with principals, school boards, legislatures, and the public.

One of BLRTN's great opportunities is to find a voice as a reform network that shapes national efforts, reaches regional and state administrators, and makes a difference for a significant number of children and young people in rural communities. Work in progress includes involving parents and others in ongoing conversations about change; engaging community members in action research to be shared on BreadNet and elsewhere; figuring out ways to bring diverse groups together regularly (online and in person) to talk

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## One of BLRTN's great opportunities is to find a voice as a reform network that shapes national efforts.

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about practices and concerns; fostering leadership among teachers and students without alienating them from colleagues or positioning them as outsiders.

Because of the vitality of BLRTN even at this early stage of the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund grant, participants are shaping a new kind of teacher development that grows out of rural teachers' questions about the classrooms, practice, and/or students and that is responsive to the

local context in which they work as well as national agendas. The intellectual work that is central to Bread Loaf summer sessions, year-round BreadNet

conversations, and shared inquiries is transforming relationships and creating a permeable boundary between teachers and learners. We believe that the accomplishments of the Fellows are making a difference.

BLRTN has the enormous advantage of conducting its project at the Bread Loaf School of English, which brings Fellows together for six weeks of study for up to three years with a distinguished faculty at three campuses and provides experiences and opportunities made possible by the institutional commitment of Middlebury College. Lucy Maddox, 1993 and 1994 Director of Bread Loaf/Santa Fe and member of the Bread Loaf faculty, characterized the Bread Loaf School of English as follows:

"The Santa Fe and Vermont campuses share their locations at the foot of imposing mountains. More important, they share a common commitment to literature and literacy, to intense intellectual engagement with texts and with people over six weeks, to the combining of rigorous graduate study in English with an awareness of the social implications of literary study, and a faith in the possibility of revitalizing the American educational system. That's an ambitious agenda for a relatively small graduate school that operates only in the summers, but for most people who have attended a Bread Loaf session, it is the agenda that makes Bread Loaf the unflinching energizing place we know it to be."

*Bread Loaf News*  
Spring/Summer 1994

## BLRTN Appoints Two New Consultants

Doug Wood, social studies teacher at Summit Parkway Middle School in Columbia, SC, has accepted an appointment as Technical Consultant to the BLRTN. Doug has a B.A. from Wofford College in history and is pursuing his M.A. at Middlebury College. A specialist in classroom applications of telecommunications, Doug works with various state and national groups interested in the innovative uses of technology in education. His responsibilities as

Technical Consultant to BLRTN will include organizing panel discussions on technology and education at teachers' conferences and troubleshooting for BLRTN BreadNet users.

Bette Ford, Bread Loaf alumna and English instructor at Jones Junior College in Ellisville, MS, has accepted an appointment as Teacher-Researcher Consultant to BLRTN. Bette, a former high-school teacher in Hattiesburg, MS, holds a B.A. from the University of Southern Mississippi

and an M.A. from Middlebury College. She serves as a consultant for various national funding projects and has articles in *English Journal*, *MCTE JOURNAL*, *The Council Chronicle*, and the *South Mississippi Writing Project Newsletter*. She is a frequent presenter at national, state and regional conferences, including NCTE, CCCC, MCTE, and the NWP. As a consultant to BLRTN, Bette will assist Fellows in initiating sustained classroom research projects.

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*DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fellows in front of the Inn at the Bread Loaf School of English, Vermont:*

*Bottom Row: Rocky Gooch (Telecommunications Director), Priscilla Aydelott, Tim Aydelott, John Kelly, Bill Kirby, Rosie Roppel, Scott Christian, Sabra Beck, Sylvia Barlow, Wendy Colby-Beserra, Nancy Jennings, Roseanne Lara, Patsy Pipkin, Nancy Lockhart, Renee Moore; Back Row: Ginny DuBose, Margaret Lima, Vicki Vinck Hunt, Penny Wallin, Barbara Everson, Polly Brown, Carol Zuccaro, Carolyn Pierce, Mary Olsen, Karen Mitchell, Nan Talahongva, Mary Ann Cadwallader, Ned Tompkins, Judy Morrison, Phil Sittnick, Linda Hardin, Lauren Thomas, Pauline Evon, Emily Graeser, Patricia Carlson*

## At Blue Gap, Arizona: An Atypically Typical Sunday

*Sylvia Barlow  
Chinle Junior High School  
Chinle, Arizona  
Navajo Reservation*

Yesterday was Sunday, not a school day but a day spent on school business, and an atypical day becoming very typical. Weekends are not usually devoted to school business, except for the ever-present jobs of preparing lessons and grading papers. But Sundays have taken on a whole new meaning for our faculty. Four staff members from Chinle Junior High, located in the heart of the

truly democratic system where the majority decision rules. The meeting was supposed to have started at 2:00 on that balmy fall afternoon, but by 4:00 their quorum of 25 members still had not yet arrived. We patiently waited. At the Chinle Chapter Meeting three weeks ago, we waited three and a half hours to speak to the people. We would have waited four hours, five hours, perhaps even six hours to speak to them because we had to speak to these people; we needed to invite them into our school.

We four staff members—two teachers, one counselor, and our school-parent liaison—represented a

were nervous, a little scared, not really knowing what to expect from these Navajo adults. I felt very foreign, and yet I have lived on the reservation for 23 years. But, our purpose outweighed our nervousness and fear; we were there for our students, their children, to discover ways that we could develop more parent and community involvement in our school.

Parent involvement in our school is marginal. Many students live a long distance from school, as much as sixty miles away, and the time required simply to get to school makes it difficult for parents to be involved. The language barrier, the culture barrier, and a belief held by many parents that the school should handle all student concerns keep many parents away. Many are probably afraid to come to school, just as we are afraid to go to them. It is not unusual for our students to act as translators between their teachers and parents, and some of our students seem embarrassed because their parents don't speak English.

Home visits are sometimes awkward because strangers do not go to Navajos' homes. If you do so, then etiquette requires you to remain in your vehicle honking the horn until the people in the house acknowledge you. This form of Navajo courtesy is based on the old belief that evil spirits sometimes follow visitors, and enough time has to elapse for the spirits to leave before a visitor is allowed to enter a Navajo home. Notes we send home to parents, written in English, of course, are seldom acknowledged. Some parents do not read English, and they rely on their children to translate. I have sent many letters home, every two weeks to inform parents of how their children are doing, but many parents come in and tell me they got my note but they did not understand what it said and their children would not translate the letter. Writing letters in Navajo is not the answer since most Navajos do not read or write Navajo. But, we have to reach them: our school can no longer help our students without parent help. That is why we traveled those 70 miles and waited



*Barbara Everson of Belton-Honea Path H. S., Anderson, SC, and Sylvia Barlow of Chinle Junior H. S., Chinle, NM, at the Bread Loaf campus in Vermont*

Navajo Reservation, traveled 70 miles round trip to attend a Navajo Chapter Meeting at Blue Gap, Arizona, population 1897. The Chapter House is the seat of regional government, a

school of over 60 employees. We wanted more in attendance, but Sunday afternoon is not a popular time for a school meeting, especially 35 miles away. The four of us who came

three hours to speak to those who finally had gathered for their monthly Chapter meeting.

At the meeting, I spoke in Navajo and they laughed, especially the older Navajos, but their laughter also showed their pleasure at my feeble attempt. *Shi ei ya Sylvia Barlow yinishye.* (My name is Sylvia Barlow). *Chinle Junior Highdi nashnish.* (I

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**Speaking in their language is the highest honor I can show them because it shows that I do not think that English is the be-all, end-all language.**

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work at Chinle Junior High.) *Belaghaana bizaad ba'olt'i nishli.* (I teach English.) In broken Navajo and in English, I told them I had no sheep, no goats, no horses, but I had a lot of children. Their children are my children and I am afraid. We are like two parents working against each other, as when one parent says "No," so the child goes to the other parent who may say "Yes." We are working against each other and not helping the children. *Shika' anilyeed.* (Help me.) *Nika' ishyeed.* (I will help you.) And I thanked them, and they were gracious and polite and acknowledged my concerns with nods of the head and a scattering of "Aoo," the Navajo equivalent of "Yes."

Speaking in their language is the highest honor I can show them. This tells them that I am not just another *Belaghaana* (non-Indian) who comes to the reservation for a few years with a yearning to help the "poor, unfortunate Indians," a sentiment that is too often true of the non-Indians who come to the reservation and stay a couple of years to complete some moral obligation they feel. It also shows them that I respect their language, and as an English teacher this is even more important because it shows that I do not think that English is the *be-all, end-all* language. Navajos seem to be delighted whenever non-Indians take the time to learn their language.

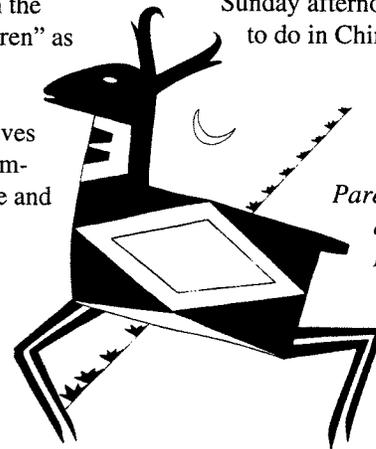
My husband, also an English teacher, spoke to them and invited them to come to our school, telling them they are wanted and needed and hoping they realize how much we need to work with them. We invited them to an upcoming open house, a full day and evening of workshops for parents: sessions in positive parenting, in helping their children to understand and use English, in the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse, and in the risks of gangs and their destruction of young lives.

How courteous they were knowing we had come so far to speak with them! Some we recognized as parents of our former students. Our longevity here has allowed us to develop enduring relationships with our students' families. After 23 years, we are fortunate now to be teaching the children of our former students, and this circumstance creates a bond that enables us to speak with the parents about our "children" as if we were their blood relatives. In the Navajo culture, the role of relatives and extended family members is crucial to the care and raising of the children. Every Navajo child is guided not only by just the parents, but by aunts, uncles, grandparents, older cousins and older siblings. Every child is the responsibility and joy of the entire extended family; to be welcomed and respected as a family member is an honor and obligation that we do not take lightly.

We left feeling uplifted and hopeful, but not naive enough to think that one speech in one assembly is enough to change our school. So, we will travel to other Chapter Houses, and we will invite them to our school and tell them again and again how much we want them in our school as

part of our effort to help their children. Once every three weeks, on a Sunday, we will make a journey that our students travel twice a day during the school year. Sunday is not a typical day for school work, but the problems our students have (high absenteeism, low English proficiency, alcohol and drug abuse, gang problems and problems related to poverty) take atypical measures to solve. At times I feel hopeless and frustrated, feelings I know most teachers share. I can't change the world, but I can change what I do, and that may make a difference. It has taken us too long to make these trips out to every corner of our vast school district. It has taken us too long to reach out personally to ask parents for help.

Our next Chapter House visit is scheduled at Wheatfields, 40 miles East of Chinle, 40 miles in the opposite direction of Blue Gap. Those of us who attended the first two at Chinle and Blue Gap keep talking and reassuring other staff members that the parents want us; they welcome us, and it has become a great way to spend a Sunday afternoon. What else is there to do in Chinle?



A Footnote:

*The Second Annual Parent Open House came and went this fall.*

*Last year we had 47 parents in attendance. This year we had over 400 parents!*

*Special thanks go to Sharon Jones, our parent-school liaison, a Navajo, who believes with many of us that the only way we can make a difference is if we work hand-in-hand with the parents. 🍀*

# Five Days in Alaska

by the Alaskan Rural Teacher Network

Editor's Note: *The following narratives were composed by five members of the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network, all teaching in public schools in Alaska. These stories as they appear in our pages have been excerpted from a longer work entitled Eight Days, written by several members of the BLRTN in Alaska: Scott Christian, Pauline Evon, Allison Holsten, Tom Litecky, Tom McKenna, Karen Mitchell, John Morse, and Sondra Porter. These narratives represent five days in the lives of rural Alaskan school teachers. —CB*

## Reading and Writing on the Edge

by Tom McKenna,  
Unalaska City School,  
Unalaska, Alaska

My waking thoughts—some drifting mixture of a misplaced \$975 million in our state's budget, the feeling of a steel pipe crushing the cartilage of a knee, and another version of the pronunciation of Herzegovina—clue me in that I have already logged two hours of public radio. I scramble down the ladder from my loft. Dog Will, curled up by the oil heater, greets me with heavy thuds of his tail, but I am already in the bathroom by the time I crane my neck around. "Mornin,' buddy."

Clothes on, some peanut butter on toast, the laptop in hand, a pat on Will's head and I'm out the door. I turn back, open the door and Will hasn't moved. Again the thumping of the tail. "Hey, we'll go skiin' tonight. Hang in there." By the time I make it out of my "neighborhood," a densely packed collection of trailers, HUD houses and variously modified World War II barracks, I splash my way through mud puddles on the main road in Unalaska, and begin to focus on the tasks ahead in the hour before my seniors will arrive. I probably put in 70 hours a week. I'm in my fourth year of teaching, and I don't think I have a single "unit" in a file cabinet. We don't really have an established curriculum since I haven't kept up

with my duties as the sole high school teacher on the language arts curriculum committee. It's the old drive-the-car-and-change-the-tire-at-the-same-time syndrome. I wonder how some teachers do it. I think these short walks make up the majority of my planning time.

As I near the school and look across the street in the direction of the hatchery, I notice the moon partially revealed by some cumulus clouds breaking up, and I scan the rim of the valley, looking at the stars. Wind still from the southeast, but cool. Maybe some high pressure winter air on the way.

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It's later in the morning, and my planning period seems way too short to get the bare necessities done. Superintendent sends me a note

asking me to be the district coordinator for the state computer network; another administrator stops me in the hall, worried about grant monies for the hatchery and fisheries programs. Principal calls me into her office to discuss a date for my evaluation and I seize the opportunity to ask her about getting a lifeguard for the kayak class

that I teach on Wednesdays. Back at my desk I find a computer note from one of the secretaries, who responds regularly to *Winter Bay*, the students' weekly literary magazine, which they themselves edit. She informs me that the last issue was "disgusting." I read a few student journals; I scan Act I of *Hamlet* which one of my classes is reading. I login to BreadNet, the electronic computer conference I share with other English teachers around the country, and get some information regarding *The Catcher in the Rye*, which my students will soon be reading.

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Later in my afternoon class:

"Look, before we begin, you need to realize that if we publish our writing, we'll get comments about our work. We have differences of opinion, and we should. Don't take this stuff personally. It's a reaction to what you write, not who you are."

The class discussion is intense, focusing on letters my students received about their writing from one of my colleagues. We read each student piece and discuss the potential problems a reader might have with it. I have trouble responding to some questions:

"Are *damn* and *hell* really obscenities?"

"What should she have said, 'Where the *heck* were you?' 'That *darn* basketball'? Give me a break!" I try to seize the moment to talk about

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**"Look, we have differences of opinion, and we should. Don't take this stuff personally. It's a reaction to what you write, not who you are."**

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the challenges of using language that we define as appropriate to convey sentiment.

"But Mr. McKenna, we've been talking all year about getting truth into writing. This is toned down enough. I thought you said that it was good to write like people speak. If the audience of *Winter Bay* is mature, then

we should be able to use mature language.”

Pete, normally a defiant kid who is reluctant to contribute to any kind of group effort, speaks with conviction. “Yeah, it’s like we have to write two different pieces for two different audiences: one is the truth and one is not.”

I’m impressed with the level of the students’ concern. I’m thrilled that we have the opportunity to roll up our sleeves and discuss the complexity in writing for real audiences. And I’m scared of giving the students the impression that I’m undermining the integrity of their writing, yet I’m

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### **Walking home in driving rain, I wonder what role I had played in escalating this confrontation. My perspective on the day is as muddy as the street.**

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scared also of the possibility of my students’ slandering a colleague whom I have a great deal of respect for. But the kids’ insight amazes me. I observe the group to see how the different personalities are taking this, to look for clues in their body language to determine who may be sharing my discomfort.

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Walking home in driving rain, I remember my hopes for clearing weather that morning and shake my head. I wonder what role I had played in escalating this confrontation, and try to analyze my indignation. My perspective on the day is as muddy as the street. I open my door to an excited retriever and try to talk him into running outside for a minute or two while I scan the table behind him to see if my message machine is blinking. I sit down and impulsively call several of my kids’ parents to warn them about the language in *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Finally, I give in to Will, put on my long underwear and wind pants and shell, and head out into the rain to run. Along the cliffs by the bay, I watch

the wind blow spray off the water in several different directions at once, as Will bounds up 60-degree slopes to chase ravens. On the way home, I watch a gust explode into a waterfall, sending the spray upward at the same time that a gull, phoenix-like, rises from the middle of the blast.

Back at home, I cook dinner while listening on the VHF to the skippers jockeying for position on the docks, and I marvel at how calm their radio voices always seem. After dinner, I sit down and call a guy from Ocean Safety Services, to arrange for a life raft demonstration for my boating class. I call Tom Litecky, a colleague, to discuss an upcoming audio-conference, and I call Sondra Porter, to make plans to collaborate using BreadNet. Then, after I call a friend to sneak a few clues about a rumor of a single woman in town, I grab *Catcher in the Rye*, climb up into my loft, read a few pages, and tell myself I’ll get up early to plan for the next day. ■

## **A Day in the Life**

*Tom Litecky  
Palmer High School  
Palmer, Alaska*

Sometimes I’m not sure where night leaves off and day begins. The five days of the school week often blur into one long day interrupted by periodic episodes of sleep and waking renewal. I do know that my day is filled with education, whether I’m teaching in school or at home with my own children. I seem to have little time for my own formal education. That may be my only regret.

My day begins at 5:30 a.m. The dreams I remember from last night even revolve around education—I vaguely remember a reunion,

but it is a combination of Bread Loaf and writing consortium acquaintances, maybe a result of last night’s audio-conference with the summer institute selection committee. But I drag myself through a shower, tea, and grits (a delicacy I discovered during a trip to Clemson, South Carolina, to visit Bread Loaf colleagues). Then I wake up the rest of the family. Two of the girls and my wife go to school together, and the other two girls go to a neighbor’s for breakfast and to wait for the bus.

My school day begins at 7:15. This morning, because the wind has dropped and it’s only five degrees below zero, I decide to enjoy the freshness of the morning air by running out of gas and walking 10 blocks each way to the gas station to get gas. I am trying to get to school early today because mid-quarter progress reports are due and I’ve left no lesson plans for my substitute, who is taking my classes while I work with a committee that is seeking to resolve some of our school’s recent problems with racial, ethnic, and gender intolerance.

Our group has been charged with developing a school-wide plan for educating our student population and eradicating prejudice. There has been a number of incidents lately that have brought the rest of the world’s problems too close to Palmer High. There was hateful graffiti written on some students’ lockers and racist notes stuffed into others’. There have also been two fights recently related to race and gender intolerance. When the principal asked for volunteers to deal with the problem, I was quick to raise

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### **Our group has been charged with developing a school-wide plan for educating our student population and eradicating prejudice.**

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my hand. My oldest daughter will be attending this school next year.

The results of the meeting are promising: guerrilla plays sprung on the kids without warning during breaks, in-service plans for April,

(continued on next page)

## A Day in the Life *continued*

tee-shirts, posters, etc. are all discussed. I'm pleased to note that our planning group includes not only teachers, but teachers' aides, students, and even a custodian. I feel like we are crafting a unified school plan. We even went out to a restaurant for lunch like real people!

At the start of my classes, I skip out of the meetings to touch base with my substitute and students. I help get some of my world literature students off to the computer lab—they're writing comparison/contrast essays on *Cry, the Beloved Country* and *Things Fall Apart*. Some of my students ask, "What's the big deal with Africa?" Others tell me they never really knew anything about Africa and think these stories are kind of interesting. Overall, I think I'm opening some eyes.

As the school day comes to a close, I feel good about our work. We've been looking today at the school as a community and talking about how we want to have a safe, comfortable place for our students to learn. It's a challenge, though. The diversity among our students, which ought to be a strength of our school, is a threat to some students. One of the teachers talks about a discussion (argument really) that two of his students got into at the end of the day. One child, the granddaughter of original white colonists, has never been further from home than Anchorage, 40 miles away. The other is a black boy who just moved here from Los Angeles, where he was involved in gang culture. These two are having trouble seeing the other's point of view, but their teacher feels they made real progress today. We hope for small individual victories every day. I guess that's our job.

This hasn't really been a typical day, but it's been an interesting one, the kind that makes me glad I'm a teacher. Now I'm home. I've helped one daughter with her math, helped another build a rocket-ship out of an oatmeal container, and suggested to a third that her essay on Walt Whitman

might discuss his unique brand of patriotism. All this, and I'm still hoping to catch the U.S. hockey team compete against Finland. I wish they held the Winter Olympics in summer!

I go to bed with my book—*Ghost Legion* by Margaret Weis. It's a science fiction book—the fourth in a series—that was given to me by a student doing independent study. He assigned *me* this book. I usually manage to get through about 10 pages before sleep grabs me. It's slow going for reading, but it's nice not to have a deadline.

So, there is my day. One last thing: I remember my father telling me once that his measure of happiness was being able to turn to one you love at the end of the day, before the lights go out, and say "It's been a good day."

It's been a good day. ■

## A Living Curriculum

by Allison Holsten  
*Mat-Su School District  
Palmer, Alaska*

I gaze across the circle of students at Rosie's face, always a valuable barometer of student engagement with class discussion. She's hunched over her desk, shoulders down, for all the world appearing tired and disconnected with our discussion—until you see her face. She raises her head with all the weariness of a washerwoman. Brilliant blue eyes return my gaze with laser-like intensity. (Aha! She's hooked). The discussion continues as the students of this freshman seminar hammer out what they think about *Sir*

*Gawain and the Green Knight*. This is an experimental class developed to meet the accelerated needs of ninth-graders who have already demonstrated ninth-grade abilities. I am truly a guest instructor, as I am not on staff at Palmer High School. I call the unit "From the Vikings to Virtual Reality." I've attempted to focus on aspects of orality, literacy, and the coming "digitality" of language. The kids enjoyed *Beowulf*, and today, as I see them making connections between that earlier work and the poem currently under discussion, I am more than pleased; I am exhilarated. The seminar is finally interrupted by the bell at 9:40 a.m. Students swarm around my desk, asking for further clarification of next week's activities, when I will introduce them to telecommunications, computer conferencing, and the nature of on-line communication. This morning, however, I can't stay long to chat.

The parents of a highly gifted five-year-old are waiting tensely outside the director's office for a ten o'clock meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to define her academic and emotional needs and to determine her placement for the coming school year. The atmosphere is heavy and antagonistic. The parents do not believe school district personnel have the best interests of the child at stake, and the director is convinced that the parents push the child unreasonably. My job is to facilitate the communication process. Terms such as "rapid acceleration" and "asynchronous develop-

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**The atmosphere is heavy and antagonistic. The parents do not believe school district personnel have the best interests of the child at stake, and the director is convinced that the parents push the child unreasonably.**

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ment" require careful definition. By 1:00 p.m. the meeting closes, but only on the understanding that I will act as facilitator for the next six-week period

and present the parents a plan for the child's school program.

I move directly to our monthly ELP Team Meeting. Chaired by the Director of Exceptional Child Services, this meeting brings together five members of a secondary team. Each teacher is responsible for services to approximately 50-90 identified students in both a middle school and a high school in the valley, except for one teacher who manages the entire K-12 case load in Houston, Big Lake, and Willow. Each one of us is required to maintain relations with at least two principals (who often will not talk to each other) and develop planning and program options for kids in grades 6-12. The mood is relaxed, as everybody understands this is a chance to brag, boast and, better yet, complain to sympathetic ears. The director dozes off and we gab for ninety minutes. It is downloading in the purest sense—a chance for each of us to release the tension. We all recognize that what we do is nearly impossible to do well.

I am completing yet another letter of recommendation for a prospective Honors Summer Science program attendee, and stop briefly to put my forehead down on the desk. No message today from Gary, out somewhere on the Yukon River. He reluctantly accepted an in-service request from the state science curriculum specialist, and flew out to Pilot Station four days earlier. Before he left for the airport, we had joked about the stupidity of flying in March. Of course, there were white-out conditions, and he was weathered in and unable to fly back through Bethel. After 17 years in the state, this is no big deal.

Later in the murky afternoon light sifting into my office, I try to gather some energy and gain some perspective. No news from Gary doesn't necessarily mean his plane is in trouble; he may not even be in the air. We can handle more delay. I look at the clock and realize it is time to pick up my own children from school and day care. The evening hours will be busy with swim lessons and homework. I swallow the lump in my throat and begin the task of organizing my briefcase for tomorrow. ■

## The Clockwork of Education

by *Pauline Evon*  
*Kwethluk Community School*  
*Kwethluk, Alaska*

The silent alarm inside me goes off... it is around 7:00 a.m. Time to get up for yet another day. What day is today? Only Tuesday? Test day for my 9th-12th graders. I know who will not be ready. I know who will be eager for the test. I know which students are good at playing the grading game that we all are somehow locked into. Politics have a play in our system, and it is all connected with dollar signs. Oh, but we do not say that. The system does not acknowledge that ownership of thoughts counts for something. I guess it is a lot easier to deal with things that are artificial, such as grades. And so, it goes.

I have students who will not do the busy work that fuels the grading machine. Oh, but there's such a wealth of unmeasured intelligence beyond the busy work. I know that some will fail the test simply because they did not look up the words in the dictionary. Alas, I have to do my job. Assign homework. Set up deadlines. Keep the children busy. Keep them reading. Keep them writing. Very soon we know that "the tests" are coming. There'll be announcements for such things. The whole state of Alaska will be *looking* at our measured abilities.

"Did you want some cereal? No? What? Where's your hat? Where's your gloves?"

My six year old slowly answers these questions, still trying to become alert to the fact that he has to get going. My older son, ready to go because he gets to drive the snow-machine, is impatiently waiting for his

oldest sister who is diligently curling her front bangs.

"Don't forget to unplug the curler."

"Put your hat on."

"Is it cold outside?"

"Where's my backpack?"

"Hurry-up!"

My two-year old knows that we are going to some place called "school." He knows that it is the place that draws his mom and siblings out the door every morning. Whatever it is, it has recently even involved his three-year-old sister Stephanie! Even as he knows, he still asks, "Where you going, Mom? School?"



*Pauline Evon at Bread Loaf, Vermont*

My, oh, my but racing with time is nerve-wracking, isn't it?

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"Now, Pauline," I tell myself, "do not roll your eyes. It's only 8:50 a.m." The system of formal education is the keeper of the clock—not me or my students. This fact is proven as we time ourselves with our fluency writing. Okay... one minute, pen in hand ready to write, eyes alert moving with the long hand. "Start!" Scribble, scribble, scribble... fast thoughts. Today the Olympic games are going to start. Isn't it ironic that competition

*(continued on next page)*

## The Clockwork...

*continued from previous page*

brings the people of the world together? Same desires. Same aspirations. I really love to watch the elegant movements of the skaters. My, oh, my. They are pros making it seem all so easy. "Stop. Count your words and punctuation marks." —a tricky way for a teacher to train the eyes of students to look for punctuation marks.

"I forgot my book in the bathroom."

"Gosh, I am so sleepy today."

"The open house of the store was exciting last night..." on and on, the gregarious Robert can fill up the universe with his thoughts.

"Robert, get busy!"

My struggle as a teacher is knowing what I am supposed to be doing... what I am supposed to be teaching according to the standards of formal education. My questions are so real that they scare me. How will my students live their lives after they are out of school? What is it that I wish for them? I know that it is not my job to look at them as potential adults, but I do know the lives of my students inside and outside of school. I see them as people. Sometimes I would

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**The grading system does not acknowledge that ownership of thoughts counts for something... And so, it goes... Oh, but there's such a wealth of unmeasured intelligence.**

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like to become the All-Knowing Teacher... no questions, no trouble-some worries. Tell me... how is it that we teachers, who have the ability and opportunity to affect the lives of so many students, diminish our potential by allowing such artificial learning to go on, and continue to "measure" it with artificial tools? ■

## Getting the Flow

*by John Morse*

*Brevig Mission School  
Brevig Mission, Alaska*

The chirping of my alarm begins the day, dreams spilling in the purr of wind outside my window. I used to think of myself as a "morning person," but my body has a hard time reconciling this with an 11:00 a.m. sunrise. I try to be out of bed by a quarter after seven so that I can have a big, leisurely breakfast and be in school by eight.

This time before school is very important to me. Breakfast is like a meditation: as I rhythmically spoon heaps of Grape-Nuts with raisins into my mouth, my mind slowly dilates to consider the day ahead of me. I might think of things we'll be reading, problems a student has, tasks I need to take care

of this morning, or the book I was reading last night. This process continues as I make my thirty-second commute to school over the fifteen-foot snowdrifts. When I sit down at my desk, I skim over my lesson plans and do some more focused reflection.

At this stage in my development as a teacher, "plan" seems too formal a word to describe my advance thinking; it might more aptly be termed an angle of approach, with lots of room left open for improvisation. I do my lesson plans religiously, but the number and mood of my students varies so wildly that I'm never quite sure what will work. It seems to me that skills in improvisation, important to every teacher, are even more crucial in a small rural setting. Nonetheless, most of my weekend is spent strug-

gling to reconcile the needs of students and material in my plans. First, I consider how to do justice to the material and the demands of the curriculum; then I consider how to best adapt this to the interests of my students. Had I written this in August, I would have told you about the importance of placing the interests of my students first—but I've since seen how few activities satisfy everyone. I have to make do with the materials I have and the lessons I can think of, along with all their limitations. During my student teaching, I was certain I could get everyone to enjoy poetry if I just went about it in the right way. I've since come to see that I was simply creating lesson plans that I would have enjoyed as a high-school student. Although this might work if I were teaching at the same high school I

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**"Flow" can be defined as that state of maximum absorption when one's abilities are stretched to the limit but one is still in control: it is the figure skater pulling off a triple axel at the close of a performance, the actor immersed in a character, the architect creating a world of angles and curves.**

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went to, it doesn't cut it in a high school of fifteen Eskimo students on the Seward Peninsula. I haven't given up yet, but it seems that despite my best efforts some people just won't enjoy writing or discussing poetry. Is this cultural? Does it have to do with exposure, or is it a matter of personality? I don't know the answers to these questions, but I do know that the students who won't write poetry are usually happy to write stories. Ideally, everybody should expand his or her creative horizon, but I can't find any pressing reasons to force people into a creative act. I'm open to revising this idea, but for the time being I allow students to work in the mediums they feel comfortable with.

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Two or three nights a week I play basketball or volleyball with the high schoolers and people in the community, and this has proven to be an important connection. Not only have I gotten to know a lot of people through basketball, but it also allows me a relationship with the students in a different setting. It's remarkable to

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### **I've often wondered why it's difficult to foster this spirit or "flow" in the classroom.**

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see how much more open and friendly students are in gym; I've often wondered why we can't foster this spirit into the classroom, but some aspect of past history and present habit seems to prevent it.

Perhaps this has to do with a sense of challenge, "flow," and reward. "Flow" has been defined as that state of maximum absorption when one's abilities are stretched to the limit but one is still in control: it is the figure skater pulling off a triple axel at the close of a performance, the actor immersed in a character, the architect creating a world of angles and curves. As English teachers, we most likely feel the flow reading a novel or maybe writing an essay or poem. I suspect that most of my students never feel this intense involvement in school—for them, the rewards of "flow" are found in basketball or other activities, while school remains a series of hurdles to be jumped for other people. One of my primary goals as a teacher is to encourage students' personal fulfillment in intellectual arenas, to allow students to find the intrinsic satisfaction of mastering a difficult process like writing. Amidst all the daily concerns and minutia I've described, the big question is always how to grow—or as Rilke said, how to hold to the laws of one's growth. Thought by thought and day by day, we find the insight to live that balance successfully. ☘

## **Bread Loafers Present Nature and Writing Forum at the Roger Tory Peterson Institute**

*by Bill Rich  
Main St. Middle School  
Montpelier, Vermont*

Arriving last October for "Writing and the Natural World," a forum at the Roger Tory Peterson Institute in Jamestown, NY, we had no idea what a magical weekend awaited us. Joined by writers, publishers, and educators from around the nation, Bread Loafers Garrett Andrews, Pauline Evon, Rocky Gooch, Dixie Goswami, Tom McKenna, Susan Miera, Sondra Porter, Doug Wood, and I discovered how connecting with nature instills a greater appreciation and respect for nature, fosters a deeper understanding of ourselves, and inspires an ardent desire to learn more about the world in which we live.

A highlight of the weekend was the opening remarks by Roger Tory Peterson, now 86 years old, who exuded enthusiasm while telling of a recent outing when he encountered an unprecedentedly large "mass" of migrating swallows that dove from surprising heights and swooped by him as he sat utterly surprised in a canoe. "There's so much we don't know about our homes," he reflected. Roger's vibrance and wisdom paid testimony to the benefits of developing an intimate relationship with nature.

Complementing the forum was the Orion Society's Forgotten Language Tour. The Orion Society sponsored evening readings by writers participating in the forum: Jean Craighead George, Barry Lopez, Scott Russell Sanders, Robert Michael Pyle, Robert Finch, Richard Nelson, and Ann Zwinger. The participation of these writers in our daily discussions gave the nightly readings an added intimacy and power.

The rhythm and tone of the forum were set by three thematic

sequences presented by three different panels, two of which were partly comprised of Bread Loafers. John Elder moderated the first sequence, titled "Paying Attention," in which Pauline Evon, a Yup'ik Indian from Kwethluk, Alaska, told us what it is like to live in a culture where every aspect of life is interwoven with nature's cycles. The third sequence, moderated by BLRTN Coordinator Dixie Goswami and titled "Returning the Gifts," included Susan Miera, Bread Loaf teacher from New Mexico, who described how her students acquire a deeper sense of place and personal voice through the writing of the four-line landmark poem [See article on page 14]. Doug Wood, technical consultant to BLRTN, described a telecommunications project that gave middle school students the opportunity to investigate the proposed development of the last undeveloped barrier island off the coast of South Carolina. Using an audio-visual telecommunications linkup, the students interviewed the developer about the wisdom and environmental feasibility of sustainable development of coastal islands. Doug insisted, "You can't *make* students advocates for nature; but you can give them the opportunity to care in an informed way."

The most moving moments of the forum occurred when people recalled the times and places in nature that created their perceptions of themselves and the world. The most indelible memories and formative experiences of many participants took place in the outdoors, raising the question: What will happen to children who grow up without an authentic relationship with nature? The Roger Tory Peterson Institute and the participants of "Writing and the Natural World" are doing what they can to keep this question from having to be answered. ☘

# On Being in the Landscape: A Reflection

by Susan Miera  
Pojoaque High School  
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Bump... bump... bump. Three speed bumps greet me in the parking lot of my townhouse as I leave for school each morning. I'm not a morning person, and those bumps rudely wake me to an often long day. As I turn right on Cerrillos Road and head towards town, I'm greeted likewise by fast food restaurants, gas stations, motels, and tourist traps. This is not the chic Santa Fe of visitors' brochures. Yet for me, it's home, and I can overlook such "progress" and remember what used to be here before this sprawling expanse of neon signs.

As a child growing up in Santa Fe, I used to bicycle safely along Cerrillos Road or walk in its rain-swollen gutters on hot summer afternoons. Adobe was adobe then as it is now. It sheltered us from the elements through every season, keeping us cool in the summer and warm in the winter. *Vigas*, those round beams that have become the landmarks of Santa Fe architecture, served both as decoration and as useful catchalls. Many a nail or hook was put into those timbers to hold coats or toys or pots and pans. We Latinos found a use for every nook and cranny. Space was precious then, and, in an odd sort of way, still remains so today, perhaps even more so because of the miles of seemingly endless neon clutter.

A mere five miles from home

heading north on State Road 285, I pass the Sheraton Picacho Hotel and speedily cruise past the Santa Fe Opera. I reach the top of the hill that looks down into the Tesuque Valley.

To the east rise the majestic Sangre de Cristo Mountains, aspen gold in the autumn morning; to the north I can see Wheeler Peak and the Colorado border some ninety miles away; to the west sprawls miles of *llano*, veined with arroyos and sagebrush reaching to the foot of the Jemez Mountains in the distance, where on a clear day I can see the atomic city of Los Alamos, incongruous in all this splendor. To the south I leave behind Santa Fe, which we call "the City Different," and further south, the city of Albuquerque. It

never seems possible that within a half-hour's drive from home I can revisit the past I used to know and paradoxically come face to face with the present all within one sweep of the eye.

I teach in the community of Pojoaque, which is twenty miles from Santa Fe, nestled in the "Y" that

branches one way to Los Alamos and the other way towards Española and Taos. The Pojoaque Valley is situated in a fertile agricultural area next to the Rio Grande. It is home to three Indian pueblos: Pojoaque, Nambe, and San Ildelfonso, which are interspersed

among miles of Spanish land grant acres. It is in this valley that three cultures have survived for centuries, not melting together to form one identity as would please proponents of



Susan Miera with Jane Harvey of Brattleboro Union H. S., Brattleboro, Vermont, and Carlotta Martza of Santa Fe Indian School, Santa Fe, NM

the melting pot myth, but coexisting side by side in harmony. Spanish and Tewa can be heard sprinkled in English spoken by students of Pojoaque Valley schools. They don't consider themselves unique—they don't find it necessary to make the contrast of differences that so often is the case in more urban settings. The natural world to students at Pojoaque is part of their existence. It is not something they study; it is something they are part of.

One ninth-grader, Rachel Roybal, writes, "This place has a lot of trees and is always cool and shady. There is a little stream that trickles by and makes a peaceful little melody."

Jackqueline Atkins, another ninth-grader, writes, "Standing on top of a hill, looking down at the trees—everything is perfectly in



place and there is no movement.”

“There are low plots of land where the old mixes with the new and advanced way of living. The high blue Santa Clara Mountains cast a shadow over the Rio Grande River below,” another student, Glenda Fred, asserts.

Hispanic, Anglo, or Native American, each student writes from his or her point of view. Somehow, though it’s the same story, each casts a different light on the landscape.

Navajo author Rex Jim advocates association with the natural world in all his writings and teachings. Last year, as part of the Four Corners telecommunications conference, an electronic communication medium for Bread Loaf Fellows, Rex Jim loaned us his format for a simple four-lined poem that speaks to that issue. He spoke of

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**Hispanic, Anglo, or Native American, each student writes from his or her own point of view. Each casts a different light on the landscape.**

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each individual having a landmark in his life to call his own—a place into which one could retreat when the pressures of the twentieth century bombard one with confusion. The first two lines of such a poem describe a landmark that is familiar to the writer. The other two lines associate that landmark with the writer’s own history or ideas. In this way, the writer imagines himself as part of the natural world. Rex Jim emphasizes the necessity of repeating these lines to oneself, almost as a mantra, to become centered when stress becomes overwhelming or uncomfortable.

**In a rural community, it is often necessary to ground oneself in the landscape in order to adequately fend off the chaos of the urban world. Using Rex Jim’s format, my students find themselves in landmarks small and large:**

Peace sign painted on a post  
Traveled by every day  
Becomes a meeting place  
For me and them.

—*Nef Roybal, 9th grade*

Jagged fortress peaks  
Surrounded by waves of jutting hills  
Watchtowers of our valley  
Yearly mountains ever faithful.

—*Michelle Salgado, 11th grade*

I hear the wind  
Among the trees  
As it whispers to me  
Secrets of the morning breeze.

—*Angelica Cisneros, 11th grade*

The strange silence of the dark  
Shades on the mesa,  
The cactus- and yucca-filled rolling hills  
Show me the way I must travel  
In order to find happiness—my home.

—*Gabriel Castro, 9th grade*

Sparkling stars within the night  
Lie down and dream  
Say no more—just shut my eyes  
A wish is set free.

—*Nadine Roybal, 11th grade*

Mountains glaring in back of my house  
Dad relates memories of the hill slopes  
I think of them as ordinary hills  
He thinks of them as books.

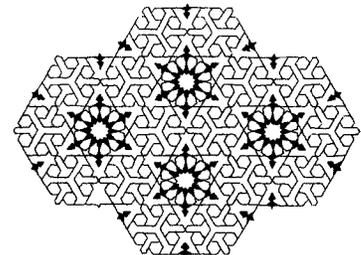
—*Charles Lujan, 9th grade*

It seems appropriate to end with Charles’s poem, for isn’t that how each of us looks at the natural world around us? My view isn’t necessarily yours, nor yours mine. Differences most times only make differences, not wrongs or rights.

Each time I receive from a student a poem or other piece of writing that pays homage to the natural world and his or her rurality, it feels like Christmas. Even after twenty-two years of teaching, I’m still amazed each time a student reimagines himself through poetry: independent, responsible, changing, growing yet grounded in cultures and identities ancient and unchanging. Each time this happens, I ask myself how I can return the gifts. Briefly, I’ll attempt to explain how this becomes possible.

In Spanish we have a saying, “*Mi casa es su casa.*” Literally, it means, “My house is your house.” With each piece of writing, a student invites his reader into himself. My student’s house becomes mine. In all his vulnerability, he entrusts me with a gift of self, and I happily accept. But how do I give it all back? How do I reciprocate? The only way that feels right for me is by allowing each of my students an avenue in which to express his opinion, finding affirmation of himself.

And so on my way home at the end of the day, I peak the hill, glance into the rearview mirror, and take one last look at the expanse behind me before I descend back into town. I forget that the speed bumps lie ahead. ☺



# Letter from South Central Alaska: Profile of a Community

by *Sondra Porter*  
*Susitna Valley High School*  
*Talkeetna, Alaska*

Teaching in a rural Alaskan secondary school was the farthest thing from my mind when I graduated from Colorado State University. I had already been offered a contract in a suburban Denver high school, and I saw my future as an urban teacher working in a department of at least ten other English teachers. Now I consider myself lucky to have ended up in this isolated section of the world where I am the only full time English teacher at my school. Teaching in a remote setting, however, is not without its peculiar frustrations, but I prefer them to the frustrations of the city.

My family believes our south central Alaskan setting is one of our most valuable assets. Nestled at the

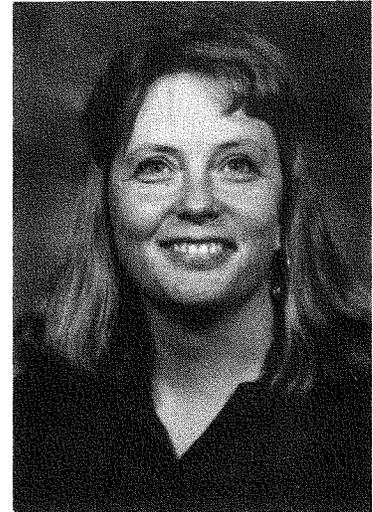
two major population centers, Anchorage and Fairbanks. The high school where I teach lies midway between Trapper Creek and Talkeetna on the highway.

Having just finished my twentieth year teaching here, I easily qualify as an "old-timer" or "sour-dough." Few have lived here longer, and I know of no one my age who was born here. No Native American or Russian village took root in our end of the valley. The first wave of homesteaders hit Trapper Creek in 1959. They settled along an old mining road, where they cleared and claimed 160-acre parcels of land. Farming provided a marginal living, and more money could be made dividing the land. Thirty-nine years later, only one of the original settlers remains, and I believe all the original parcels have been subdivided. We built our log home on the back boundary of a tract divided in the mid 1970s.

The homesteader's son, one of my first students, still lives in the family home. Like so many others I have taught, his four siblings graduated from Susitna Valley High and went

away to college, eventually making their homes where they could earn a comfortable living.

Susitna Valley Junior/Senior High was built the year I arrived on the scene in 1973. Until last year the student population varied year to year by about twenty students. We ended last school year with 142 in grades 7-12. This fall the population explosion finally hit, and we are currently at 194. The halls are crowded, and the rooms are brimming. Even though my classes



*Sondra Porter of Susitna Valley H. S.*

are still small by most standards, I have about ten more students per class. My smallest class consists of fifteen seniors and my biggest, in fact my biggest ever, consists of thirty-two eighth-graders. I teach five classes a day, ranging from electives which include an advanced college prep class, American literature and world literature, to required offerings which include eighth- and tenth-grade language arts. At the end of this semester, my two literature classes will be replaced by a speech/drama offering and a basic composition offering.

The weaknesses of our school are closely related to our strengths. We are too small to offer all we would like to offer, and arranging the schedule is a nightmare. Each year some teachers must teach classes for which they are not prepared. On the other hand, our size and structure allow us to get to know students well, and we are able to work with them off and on during their entire secondary careers. Transfer students are amazed at how difficult it is to fall through the cracks here. Watching the inevitable academic and emotional growth of teenagers over six years is a rewarding process.

Our sports programs such as basketball, track, volleyball, and skiing are a vital component in our

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**Our small size and structure allow us to get to know students well, and we are able to work with them off and on during their entire secondary careers. Watching the inevitable academic and emotional growth of teenagers over six years is a rewarding process.**

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base of Mt. McKinley in the heart of the Susitna Valley, local homes are isolated or clustered on former homesteads. Some of us live with neighbors in sight, but even more have chosen to place our owner-built homes away from the small pockets of population in Trapper Creek and Talkeetna. Here in the Alaskan woods, almost all of us have come from somewhere else to make our lives in an "accessible wilderness" along the corridor of the highway that joins the

school atmosphere. More than two thirds of the kids are involved in at least one extracurricular program. Unfortunately, with so many students traveling to compete, instructional schedules are turned upside down. This year, for instance, the basketball team will be flying to Bristol Bay, which is over 300 miles from here. Their three-to-four day absence will wipe out my college composition class, and only about five students will be left in my American literature class.

The skiers will take to the slopes in Fairbanks, a long seven-hour bus ride one way from the school. Runners have just returned from a sixteen hour round trip excursion to Homer, AK for a cross-country meet. With limited opportunities in our community, we are fortunate to be able to offer these experiences, but teachers, coaches, parents, and athletes alike are stressed by the end of each season.

All teachers are involved in some extra duties. I serve as a class advisor, newspaper advisor, drama coach, and student council advisor. Most weekends are filled with school-related responsibilities such as dances, spaghetti feeds, plays, meetings, and support for sports activities. Some parents are supportive, but the heaviest burden seems to fall on the same parents over and over and on teacher advisors. My youngest son is graduating this year, and I hope more time becomes my own. Those of us who are teacher-parents seem to get extra duty.

Isolation is a major concern for me. While it is romantic to have my home tucked in a corner of the wilderness, it is less romantic to fill the role of a whole department. As a first year teacher, I was shown to a room full of assorted texts and various paperbacks and told to figure out which books to use for each grade. Alone, I planned the curriculum for all the junior and senior high students. When students arrived a few days later, they helped me sort out what had been taught at various levels. Although I appreciated the "academic freedom," I felt totally unprepared for

the task of creating programs while I was teaching five different classes.

Now one other teacher covers several language arts classes. We have borough curriculum guides that teachers have helped develop. We also plan occasional subject area in-services, but like the pioneers who could not adjust to the encroachment of the civilization they had envisioned, I have not entirely lost the habit of working in isolation, even though I crave interaction with others. Keeping abreast of changing ideas, research, and promising practices has been difficult. Some of my colleagues are resistant to change, feeling no desire to continue their own growth. They think I am slightly crazy to go to school during the summers. I, however, cherish my summer writing classes at Bread Loaf and value the collegial relationships I've developed there with other professional teachers.

The staff at our school has been stable throughout the years, giving us a sense of family that extends to the student body as a whole. Over half of the senior class has generally attended elementary school in the area, so the bonds among the students are long-standing. The family atmosphere and unity are particularly evident at graduation which becomes as much a time of sorrow for parting as it is a time of joy of accomplishment. The melancholy is accentuated by the knowledge that students must move elsewhere to find work or continue their educations. As a staff we realize we must prepare our students to leave the area and perhaps even Alaska if they are to be "successful."

Telecommunications are helping to bridge the gap between our remote site and the rest of the world. For the last year and a half, BreadNet has become my direct link with other teachers and classrooms across the nation. I exchange information, ideas, and solutions to teaching problems with a core of teachers from small schools similar to mine. A colleague

in Vermont sends a plan for teaching students to be more tolerant. Another Alaskan informs me of a vacant position on the Alaska Writing Consortium Board. My students learn about the cultural diversity that exists in Hawaii and in their own state. They debate the meaning of gender roles with students in Mississippi. From high schoolers in New Mexico, they inquire about the meaning of landscape to Hispanic and Native American culture. Online they share their ideas about the similarities between *Beowulf* and modern heroes and—Behold!—a college professor from South Carolina responds to them. One student summed up the changes this technology is bringing when he wrote, "Our view of the world is personalized as well as broadened by our computer connections."

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### Telecommunications are helping to bridge the gap between our remote site and the rest of the world.

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With our increasing enrollment, the staff is concerned that the stable nature of our school may be coming to an end. In the past Susitna Valley High has been dubbed "a hold-over from the 50s." The family feeling is already threatened by the ever increasing transient population here. We are dealing with new students on medications and with long histories of behavior problems, juvenile records, and learning disabilities. More students are qualified for special education than ever before. We are uncomfortable with these changes, but the overall feeling at the school is one of optimism. We are still hopeful that we can learn to deal with these students and offer them the personal contact they may have lacked in larger institutions. Next year we may even be able to purchase a few more computers, add courses, and hire much needed staff. I still prefer the challenges of teaching in Susitna Valley to those I read about in cities around the country. ☺

# Living in Nikiski: An Interdisciplinary Study of a Community

by Scott Christian  
Nikiski Middle School  
Nikiski, AK

The eighth-grade students at Nikiski Middle School have produced the first draft of *Living in Nikiski, An Interdisciplinary Study*. The publication is a celebration of the learning that happened during our first project of the school year. Our eighth-grade team of teachers selected our community and our region as the central theme for this study for several reasons: it offered a wide range of real, hands-on learning experiences for our students; the topic naturally lent itself to study across the disciplines; finally, we felt it was important for our students to develop a bridge between the school and the community, and to develop a better understanding of where we live, and the people we live with. The publication *Living in Nikiski* provides examples of a variety of student projects. It is an

ongoing study of our community, a living text that will grow as future students contribute.

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The book begins with a series of writings, some poems and some short expository pieces about the natural world that surrounds Nikiski. The students went to Bishop Creek, about ten miles from the school, to take field notes and to begin to write about their sense of this place. Taken through a process of revision, editing and proofreading, this writing is some of the finest I have seen by eighth-

grade students in my ten years as a teacher. I've chosen five poems to include for readers of the BLRTN newsletter.

Section Two of *Living in Nikiski* includes oral histories of local citizens which are based on interviews. In reading these, one develops a sense of the dramatic changes that shaped our community in a relatively short period of time. It has been less than fifty years since the first homesteaders settled in this part of the peninsula. Yet, because of the abundance of natural resources—petroleum, fish and lumber—the population has grown exponentially. Students were fascinated to learn about the “old days” without running water, electricity and television. For this assignment, the students wrote the first drafts in Social Studies with Mr. Romans and then revised them in Language Arts. Several long-standing residents also visited Mr. Roman's classroom to tell stories and discuss the evolution of Nikiski. Because of space limitations

in the BLRTN newsletter, I regret I'm able to include only one selection of student work here.

During the field trip to Bishop Creek, the students gathered and identified many of the local plants in the area. Before the trip, the students researched the plants of this area in small groups and made presentations to the class about them. A local biologist/naturalist also visited the classroom to discuss the wide range of flora on the peninsula and to present the concept of the classifica-

tion system. Section Four of *Living in Nikiski* includes reports the students wrote about the animals of Alaska for Mrs. Taber's science class. The students learned about the specific plants and animals that they studied through class presentations, cooperative learning activities, and from each other.

In math class, the students designed, implemented and presented complex statistical studies regarding different aspects of our community and region. The topics of these studies were wide-ranging, including an analysis of moose casualties on the road system, a study of average regional temperatures, a report on the salmon fisheries on the peninsula, and a study of the growth of the human population in this region. In Ms. Manion's math class, these projects were carried out in learning groups, where students had clearly identified roles and responsibilities. Perhaps the most exciting aspect of these studies was the direct contact the students had

with all kinds of experts in our region. To gather raw data from a wide variety of sources, analyze it, draw conclusions, write about it, and then teach others is

a highly complex and valuable skill for our students.

This study and this publication are still works in progress. We, like the students, are learning as we go. Our eighth-grade team and our students would appreciate any comments readers may have about this project. You can write to us at Nikiski Middle School, C/O the Eighth-Grade Team, Pouch 10,000, Nikiski, Alaska, 99635. We hope you enjoy the five poems and one essay we include in the next two pages:

## The Lives of Mac and Dolores McGahan

by Alisha Becker

Mac and Dolores McGahan came to Alaska from Curtis, Michigan in 1952 with their children Marie, Merrill, and Dolores when Mac got a job in Cordova building the Cordova airport. They homesteaded in 1953 and were the thirteenth family on the North Road. They were the last homesteaders to get mineral rights included in the patent for their land.

At that time, the only store was a dry goods store owned by Helen Jones. The post office was located on the bluff in Kenai. There were no doctors, banks or dentists on the peninsula in those days. If you needed any of those services, you had to go to Anchorage. Mac and Dolores were also the first McGahan family to arrive on the peninsula. Later came Mac's brothers, Ken, Tony, and Henry, and their families.

Mac and his family lived at Bernice Lake. Most of their neighbors lived in small cabins. In order to homestead in those days, every

### Clouds

You can no longer see the mountains,  
floating along the sea.  
God has closed the blinds.  
All that you can see now  
are misty white clouds,  
as they come nearer to you.  
There is a thin shiver down your spine.

—Danielle Thomson

homesteader was required to clear at least ten acres of land and live on it for a period of time before they were given the patent.

The only cannery then was Libby's, and a lot of people bought their groceries there. If you didn't use the pretty flour sacks to sew your clothes, you ordered from Montgomery Wards or Sears, whose catalogs also came in handy to the homesteaders who had outdoor plumbing!

Mac was a supervisor in the heavy equipment shop at Wildwood Army Base. On their homestead there was no power, telephone, TV, or running water. They used a Delco power generator and lanterns for power and light, and they hauled their water from a creek at Nikishka Beach. On their homestead, they quarried gravel, which was used on building sites all over the peninsula: at the Chevron refinery, the Soldotna Hospital, Unocal, etc. Logs were harvested from their homestead to build the Arness Terminal and dock.

A community club was built in the early days by Mac McGahan, his brother Tony, and another original homesteader, Ray Pucket. This site also served as a fire station after the community was able to get an old fire truck. Mac also built the Nikishka Mall,

### The Beach

The waves barely crashing  
onto the shore, echoing softly  
like gunshot in the distance.  
The air is heavy and wet, the water calm.  
An otter passes by and the clouds leave no hope  
for the sun to come shining through.

All is gray.

—Alana Bute

the Nikishka Laundry, the Chevron station, the community water system, the Pines Bar and Motel, an apartment house, the M & M Grocery, and he even parcelled his homestead into the Aurora Heights Subdivision.

Mac served as the first Civil Defense Director on the peninsula, a very important and demanding job during the big earthquake of 1964. He and Merrill McGahan built two airports in our community, a small strip and a larger one named Merrill Field after Mac's grandson, the pilot in the family.

Mac McGahan practically built Nikiski. There was not much here when he arrived, but he helped to make it a great small town. His goal was to make this place a better home for the homesteaders. He was the kind of person that always finished what he started. Mac died on June 2, 1993. His ashes were scattered over his homestead, the land he loved dearly. His story is part of the history of the Nikiski community.

## More Poems from *Living in Nikiski*

(continued from previous page)

### Tranquility

I sit and watch the ocean,  
hear the trees whistling with the wind,  
see the sparkling water that goes on forever,  
hear the waves flop down, one after another.  
I know that this is peace.

I look up, see an eagle flying low above my head,  
graceful with its wings spread.  
I hear the wind roaring louder.  
I see the sun, peeking out behind a tree.

I look back at the ocean; the tide is going out;  
rocks are appearing from the ocean.  
I touch the sand, damp but still soft.

I can now see the mud flats rising.  
There is no longer an ocean.

The cliffs behind the mist are fading.

—Tatiana Stamer

### No Moon Night

Wind blows the leaves  
making a soft rustling noise,  
like footsteps in soft snow.

Trees are black, silhouetted  
against gray sky; reaching  
for a moon that isn't there.

I hear the gentle purr beside me.

The leaves are scattered all around, a magical  
pathway to some mythical land.

The cat has disappeared,  
a vaporizing ghost.

—Julie Veal

### The Last Days of Life

In the woods I see  
earth damp with rain.  
It calms me as I kneel beside it.

Leaves cling to trees,  
wet and bright with  
autumn hues.  
Soon they will be covered  
with snow.

The trees overhead  
swaying and waiting  
for winter to cover them.

The lake gets colder,  
rough and dark. More  
blasts of cold wind.

It reminds me of  
those waves of  
Kachemak Bay,  
where the dust of my uncle's heart  
lies.

Where he must  
spend the rest of  
eternity.

Watching and waiting.

—Poppi Multz

# Teaching Out in the Middle of Everywhere: Cleveland, MS

Editor's Note—In July at the Bread Loaf School of English in Vermont, I talked with Renee Moore about the rural community where she lives and the school where she teaches. Renee is a ninth-grade English and journalism teacher at East Side High in Cleveland, Mississippi. She is a DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fellow at the Bread Loaf School of English.—CB



Renee Moore of East Side H.S.,  
Cleveland, MS

**CB:** Tell me about the town where you teach.

**RM:** I teach in Cleveland, a little town of about 15,000 in the northwest corner of Mississippi in the rural Delta country, which, except for some superficial changes, hasn't changed much over the years. Cleveland reminds me of the way things were in America thirty years ago. There is a joke that goes "Time moves in the Delta one federal law suit at a time."

I like the rural setting of Cleveland; it's safer, from a parent's point of view. I grew up in the heart of Detroit, and the schools there have deteriorated in some ways. The use of metal detectors to search students as they enter the school is regular procedure in some schools in Detroit.

Fortunately, in Cleveland there is not much violence. My children are safe there; they can walk around the neighborhoods without fear. The people there

are friendly and close knit. I know all my students and their parents; I know what church they belong to; I know what they do after school. So I have a round view of my students; they're not just kids I see for an hour a day.

Another thing I like about Cleveland is that the black community has a strong sense of pride, a healthy feeling about their culture and who they are.

**CB:** How does that pride show itself?

**RM:** It shows in the things the people value, which are traditional Southern values really. I'm talking about love of family and a sense of duty toward one's family. There is a noticeable respect for elders. There is pride in their language and in their institutions such as the schools. The black culture places a lot of emphasis on history, making sure that young people know the roots of the local community as well as the history of the larger national African-American commu-

nity. There are noticeable efforts to push and prepare students to succeed. These are traditional values that used to be practiced everywhere, but they have

deteriorated in some places, like Detroit, because the community has become fragmented.

Race relations are very good between whites and blacks in Cleveland. People are very honest; when

people disagree, they disagree openly and respectfully.

We are rural and we have a rural economy. We don't have a lot of resources to work with in our schools, so we must manage to make do with what we have. And we do. I'm relatively sure, for example, that East Side, where I teach, is the only predominantly black high school in our area that has a full journalism program.

**CB:** Tell me about your school.

**RM:** Though Cleveland is a small town, we have two high schools. Cleveland High is predominantly white, and my school, East Side, is predominantly black. This situation is a historical carryover from pre-Seventies segregation. Despite the insistence of the U.S. Justice Department to integrate the schools, neither the black community nor the white community wanted to give up its school. So the school board worked out a compromise in which during each period in our six-period school day, a bus load of students is transferred from one school to the other to take a class. The faculties are integrated, and there is an open admission policy so parents can choose where they want their children to enroll. This kind of historical carry-over, I think, is not that uncommon, although there are several small towns around Cleveland

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**Race relations are very good between whites and blacks in Cleveland. People are very honest; when people disagree, they disagree openly and respectfully.**

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## Interview: Renee Moore

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that have only one high school, and of course there is more real integration in those places.

**CB:** *What does the average profile of a student from Cleveland look like?*

**RM:** There isn't really an average profile. There is a growing middle class in Cleveland, in part due to the fact that we are a small, college town. The university has attracted a growing number of black and white middle-class people to the community, but the city itself is still visibly segregated. The children of people connected to the university tend to be college bound achievers. However, most of my

students are from families where both parents have to work because wages in Mississippi are so low. And there are very poor families as well; I know

families in which both parents work, yet their income is so low that the family qualifies for government aid.

**CB:** *How do Cleveland students differ from urban students?*

**RM:** For one thing, they are more respectful. They say "Yes, sir" and "Yes, ma'am." My husband and I worked with a lot of youth groups in Detroit, and we didn't hear much "Yes, ma'am" or "No, ma'am." (laughs) Rural students' interests are similar to those of their urban counterparts; they wear the same clothes and listen to the same music. But they seem more relaxed, probably because of the slower pace of life. Rural students seem more innocent. What they know of the world is limited, unless they've traveled. There is a growing group of students who've come from other places, and I can spot them immediately. They're more talkative,

more assertive; their mannerisms are different.

**CB:** *What do you think are specific challenges facing rural teachers?*

**RM:** The sense of being cut off professionally is a big issue for me. I never quite know if I'm in step with the rest of my profession. It's difficult for rural teachers to become active members of professional organizations simply because we don't have the time or resources to travel to state conferences such as the Mississippi Council of Teachers of English, let alone attend national conferences and workshops. I feel sure that Mississippi teachers would be more active professionally if they were encouraged by their administrators to be so.

Another thing that concerns

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### I wish I had more time for reflecting on teaching, for researching and discovering what students need, and for spending time with other teachers to talk about such research issues.

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me is that I've observed very few teachers return to school to work toward a graduate degree in their content area. Most get degrees in administration, curriculum, or counseling, and this kind of training for too many people functions as a ticket out of the classroom. Some people were even surprised to find out I am working toward a master's degree in English. They couldn't understand that I want to be more learned in my content area and pass that learning on to my students. I have no desire to be an administrator, absolutely none. I like being in the classroom, teaching students. I made a career change from journalism to teaching because I love teaching, so it just makes sense that if I plan to stay in the classroom, I should work toward a greater mastery of literature and language.

Another thing that's disturbing is that we have fewer and fewer black teachers coming into our district to

teach. Last year we only had one new black male teacher in our district. That disturbs a lot of people in our community because many of the older generation remember when most of the elementary teachers in the segregated black schools were men. After desegregation, many of these men were promoted to district or state positions and that was good, but now there is a scarcity of young black teachers at the elementary and junior high level, and that is not good.

**CB:** *Is there much collaboration in your district among teachers?*

**RN:** Well, there hasn't been much until recently when we got a new superintendent, and she has encouraged collaboration both inside the classroom and among teachers. This fall with my Tech Prep classes I will be working with a vocational teacher, and we'll actually have the time and resources to do some team teaching. And I expect to be collaborating with my Bread Loaf colleagues in Mississippi. We want to put together a parallel study unit with Lusanda Mayikana, a teacher in South Africa. Bill Kirby suggested we do a study of the lives and writings of Medgar Evers and Steven Biko. We hope our students will do research and exchange information with the South African students. There is potential for some exciting learning as these students research and write about the voters' rights struggle of the Sixties in Mississippi and the more recent struggle for voting rights of blacks in South Africa. We plan to use BreadNet's telecommunications network to enable our students to write to each other, and this writing will be substantive; it will go beyond pen-pal writing.

**CB:** *What research do you plan to conduct this year?*

**RM:** Mississippi has decided to no longer use the Stanford scantron test as a means of assessing students. Instead, we're going to implement a new type of assessment based on student performance. We've also replaced our eleventh grade literacy test, which

students must pass to graduate, with a performance-based assessment. The initiative for this came from Mississippi classroom teachers, and several of us have been training other teachers in how to do performance-based assessment of students. I'm very interested in following the implementation of this new system to see whether or not the state's change in assessment encourages classroom teachers to begin assessing their students by performance.

A specific type of performance assessment that I want to further study is the writing portfolio. In training Mississippi teachers in performance assessment, I've discovered many English teachers are interested in having students keep portfolios of their writing, but not many of them know how to implement portfolios. So I plan to research this method and write an article that will encourage and help teachers who want to use portfolios as a means of assessing students' writing ability.

I also plan to do extended research on the teaching of grammar to students who speak black dialect. I think this issue needs to be reexamined in the light of the recent movement to assess writing by portfolio. I'd like to find out how we best teach grammar to students whose dialect is very different from the standard English dialect.

**CB:** *What do you think is the most important issue in teacher research in Mississippi right now?*

**RM:** Through study at Bread Loaf I have become very interested in the importance of teachers seeing themselves as "ethnographers" of their classrooms. We need to closely examine the "culture" of the classroom and ground our teaching in that culture. You can't simply assume that you can take curricula or methods that work in one classroom and use them successfully in another. The learning culture may vary from classroom to classroom, and we need to study these differences in order to know how best to present material to our students.

**CB:** *You're saying that curricula need to be examined and developed in the light of one's own particular teaching context.*

**RM:** Yes. We need to get to know *our* students, *their* learning styles. Once we know that, we can begin to think about how to teach better. In general, Mississippi is very concerned with keeping teaching lock-stepped, keeping all students on exactly the same schedule. I think there is overemphasis on standardized learning. It's very prescriptive, and it's difficult to persuade higher administrators that you shouldn't lock-step teaching and learning. Learning is a process that can't be neatly prescribed. Administrators tend to like the idea of standardization, of everyone doing the same thing at the same time, because it looks efficient on paper. But I believe that by studying the learning culture in our own classrooms, we can actually develop context-specific curricula and methods that work better. And I think rural teachers are especially situated to do this kind of research because we already know our students so well; we have a head start on this research. Let me give you an example. There's a city just north of my district called Mound Bayou. It was established by former slaves, and it's still an all-black city. It's not an affluent community; they don't have much industry or many businesses or resources, but they have a high school that turns out some of the best students in Mississippi, perhaps some of the best in the country. They can do it because they know those children and each other so well. It's a proud, unified little city with a strong history behind it, and that's very affirming for their young people. Mound Bayou is the kind of place we need to study to discover the characteristics in a community that create good learning environments.

**CB:** *What were your expectations of Bread Loaf before coming here?*

**RM:** Well, I had heard of Bread Loaf years ago and knew it was a place that

was committed to helping teachers improve themselves. I knew I would find some excellent teachers here, and I expected to develop some ongoing professional relationships with people who had similar teaching values and philosophy.

**CB:** *And how do you describe that philosophy?*

**RM:** Simply that all children can learn; that language is the key; that experimentation and collaboration are important; that it's good to rethink our teaching, to try something new and share the results with colleagues.

**CB:** *What's the one thing you as a teacher wish for?*

**RM:** Let's see... Materially, I don't need much. Even with limited resources, I will find a way. But I wish I had more time for reflecting on teaching to find out what works in the classroom and what doesn't. I like to do research and figure out what students need, and I like to spend time with other teachers to talk about such issues. But during the school year I don't have time to do that. I wish I had time specifically to study my classroom and my students' learning processes in order to find out what changes I need to make. I wish that there was time built into the teaching day for this kind of important research. Teachers could have this opportunity if administrators understood how important it is.

**CB:** *You obviously enjoy teaching; what's the best thing about it?*

**RM:** I would think my students' success is the best thing. I feel like I'm getting through to these kids and doing something for them. A lot of students tell me at the beginning of the school year, "English has never been my best subject; I don't understand English; I have a hard time with it." By the end of the year most are saying, "I understood this subject for the first time; I had fun; I feel like I know more than I did." Their progress is the greatest reward for me. ☘

# A Study of Place(s): From Community to Curriculum

by the SC Rural Teacher Network

At Bread Loaf, Vermont, during the summer of 1994, many fellows became interested, through their course work, in writing about the natural world. Various projects were planned around the idea of discovering "a sense of place," with the goal of developing lively communities of nature writers that would join each other on BreadNet and in print before Bread Loaf 1995. One such project was planned by Bread Loafers in South Carolina. Inviting several Bread Loaf associates to join them, this group of twelve teachers met in early October to plan the project. The result is now a work in progress: a study of wetland areas of South Carolina which includes teachers from varied geographical regions of their state.

In the following article we include Michael Atkins' recap on the project from the planning meeting to the present, Janet Atkins' thoughtful speculation about the swamp along the Salkehatchie River near where she grew up, and a sample of student nature writing by Elizabeth Griffin, a seventh-grader in Linda Hardin's class at Blue Ridge Middle School in Greer, SC.

## Study of Natural World Begins at Camp Hope

by Michael Atkins

The members of the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network of South Carolina met October 1-3 at Camp Hope, a forest retreat on Lake Hartwell near Clemson University. Besides enjoying a reunion with Bread Loaf Fellows, we began making specific plans for a collaborative study of nature writing, including shared reading and writing for us, culminating with classroom activities for students in our classrooms.

During our recent summer studies at the Bread Loaf School of English, many of us became interested in nature writing as a means for rediscovering ourselves and the communities in which we live. As teachers of literature we want to introduce our students to works that illuminate humankind's relationship to the natural world; as teachers of writing we want to provide our students with good observational skills. What better way to accomplish these two goals than by reading the best of what has been written about nature and by trying our

the natural world has the potential to transform not only the self but the place as well. Places and people develop identities in relation to each other.

During the course of the weekend retreat, we began to see the connection between nature writing and scientific inquiry. Some of the most gifted prose writers, such as Charles Darwin, Lewis Thomas, and Steven Jay Gould, have been, not coincidentally, great scientists too. Reflecting on the connection between writing and science, we began to see the opportu-



SC teachers at planning meeting for wetlands study: Lauren Thomas, Fairfield Middle School; Ginny DuBose, Waccamaw High School; Doug Wood, Summit Parkway Middle School

own hand at nature writing, an endeavor requiring sophisticated observational and analytical skills?

Middlebury College Professor and member of the Bread Loaf faculty John Elder traveled from Vermont to South Carolina to help us focus on writing and the natural world. John emphasized that our project should be based on field study, journal writing, and reading literature and poetry to deepen and extend the experience imaginatively. He helped us realize that a reflective or meditative experience in

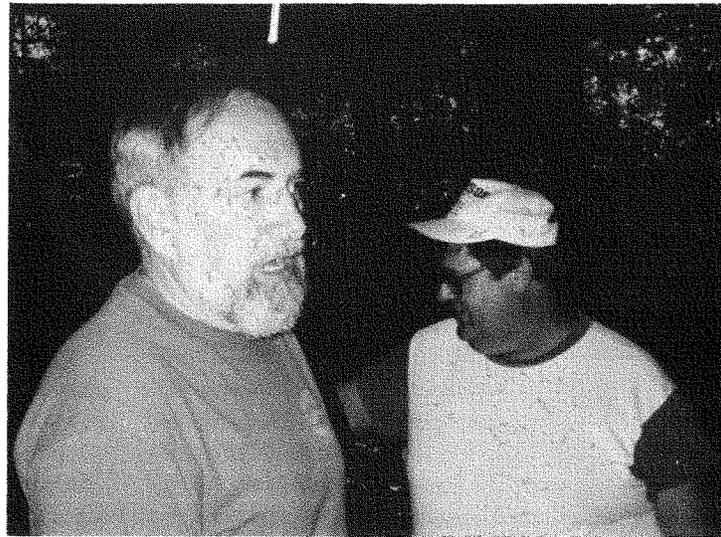
to collaborate on an integrated unit of study with science teachers in our schools.

Dr. George Kessler, Professor of Forestry Management at Clemson University, visited us at the retreat and explained some of the basic methods of scientific observation. An after dark walk in the woods with Dr. Kessler as guide required us to experience and observe the forest environment with all our senses, to "see" the forest for once without our eyes. We returned to the woods the next morning to continue our

guided investigation, using a booklet Dr. Kessler has designed in his Teaching KATE program, Teaching Kids about the Environment. We learned how to identify the various layers of soil, something about the trees on the site, and also a bit of the natural history of the area. On a final walk on Saturday evening, we looked for evidence of animal life and were fascinated by what we were able to see and hear.

Each SCBLRTN member "adopted" a tree for the weekend, and in our journals we recorded our observations about our trees at different times during the day, honing our observation skills.

With the help of these two naturalists, one a humanities professor and the other a science professor, we engaged in a rewarding planning session for our upcoming nature



*Clemson University Professor of Forestry George Kessler and Chuck McDonnell, English Department Head of Piedmont Technical College, doing field study in the forest at Camp Hope*

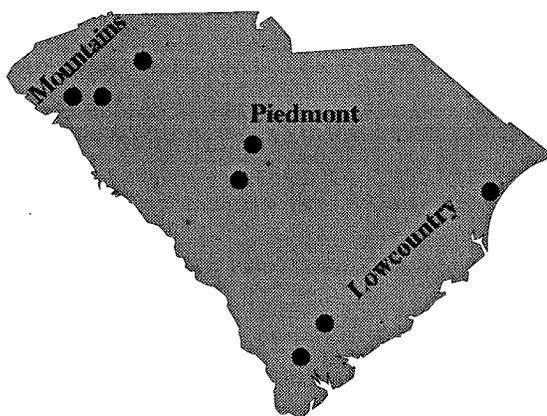
writing project. We decided to focus our study on wetlands because this type of ecological environment exists in all parts of the state (as do members of the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network!). Our common focus on wetlands would make the information collected by teachers and students in varying South Carolina regions (mountains, Piedmont, and Low Country) more relevant to all partici-

pants in the project. Dr. Kessler led us to a scientific understanding of the definition of a wetland. In the course of this proposed project, we hope to work together with colleagues in science to provide students with a scientific knowledge of wetlands and a humanistic knowledge of the importance of place in the lives of individuals and communities.

As this issue of the BLRTN newsletter comes out, each of us is exploring, observing and writing about a specific wetland area, "introducing" other teachers and students to the areas we've chosen, using BreadNet as our means of communication. This exploration consists primarily of firsthand observation and journal writing, in conjunction with reference materials such *Wetlands* in the Audubon Society's Nature Guide Series.

Jack Blodgett, Director of REACH (Rural Education Alliance for Collaborative Humanities), invited the members of the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network to be associates in the Leadership Lab for Humanities and Science Education, a partnership of selected teachers in South Carolina working to initiate and document new methods of professional development aimed at building teachers' capacity to facilitate their students' critical and creative thinking skills. As of this writing Janet Atkins, Michael Atkins, Ginny DuBose, Linda Hardin, Nancy Lockhart, Lauren Thomas and Betty Ann Slesinger have been named as associates, and other Bread Loafers in the Rural Teacher Network will be involved as well. In addition, BLRTN Fellows Barbara Everson and Nancy Lockhart and Dent Middle School

*(continued on next page)*



*South Carolina map shows the locations of teachers using BreadNet to share nature writing and observations about the state's wetland regions.*

## A Study of Place(s)

*continued from previous page*

teachers John Galbary and Sandra Morgan will conduct a panel discussion of the wetland project at the second annual WAC Conference in Charleston, SC, in February.

One SC Fellow, Linda Hardin, has combined her wetlands project with a journal-based natural history project funded by the Orion Society (\$1,000).

On BreadNet, BLRTN Fellows are writing notes about wetlands field study, sharing resources from naturalists and others, entering excerpts from their observation journals, writing meditations and deeply personal reflections on the wetlands they're studying, responding to what others have written, and thinking ahead to January, when students will join the wetlands conference.

\* \* \*

**What is nature writing? Below Janet Atkins introduces readers to a swamp along South Carolina's Salkehatchie River. This piece is excerpted with Janet's permission from the BreadNet telecommunications conference.**

### The Swamp

*by Janet Atkins*

What I remember the most about my father's wetlands property is the strange looks I would always get when I told my friends that we were going to The Swamp. That's what we called the place. I also remember the long, boring rides

from Greenville to Hampton, and later from Summerville to Hampton, when we would just go to the swamp and sit and admire the land. We children got out and explored, but my dad and mom just sat on the hood of the car (an Oldsmobile "Land Yacht"), and shared dreams of a time when they would build a home and live on this land for the rest of their lives.

The water was what we call black water, and this particular river, the Salkehatchie, is the headwaters of the Combahee River, which combines with the Ashepoo River and the Edisto River to form South Carolina's ACE Basin. On a recent visit there I noted how high the water was. It swirled in eddies as it headed toward the ocean. A turtle just under the water's surface snapped at bugs floating above it, and I noted with a certain pleasure that the old cypress tree now reaches at least half way across the run. A patch of small yellow flowers (yellow-eyed grass, I think) was at the water's edge. When I looked up a description of this plant in the Audubon's *Wetlands* guide I was reminded of the "violence" of nature. This plant happens to be carnivorous—but then I really don't mind how many bugs it "eats."

Another memory from childhood is of the many fires one could see along Fisherman's Trail in

the dusk. From the bridge looking down the run, the fires dotted the bank telling the location of each man or woman who was spending quiet time catching a mess of redbreast or catfish. In my teenage years, I spent many quiet moments with my grandfather, cane pole held out over the dark water waiting for something to pull the float under. Even now I can feel the excitement of seeing the first nibble at my bait, knowing that some delicious catch (all too often that old turtle again) was just about to strike.

While reflecting on these memories, I was reminded of a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins. It begins "As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame" and goes on to speak of the calling that each of us has to be true to ourselves. Being true to myself means having an alert attentiveness to whatever is there in the present moment. I kind of like to think of that turtle waiting for just the right moment when the water spider is poised on the surface and then—splash!—he has his dinner. Being attentive like those flowers when a gnat jiggles it enough for the enzymes to start flowing. Being attentive to the bob of the float at the end of the line, and to "see," also, when the "kingfishers catch fire and dragonflies draw flame." Come in person, and I'll

introduce you to the Swamp anytime!

\* \* \*

**As part of the South Carolina wetlands study, one of Linda Hardin's students, Elizabeth Griffin, wrote a piece for the Outdoor Writer's Competition sponsored by South Carolina Wildlife. Her impression of Lake Robinson and its importance begins on the next page:**



*BLRTN Fellow Janet Atkins consults with Bread Loaf Professor Jacqueline Jones Royster.*

## Water: Our Forgotten Gift

by Elizabeth Griffin

7th Grade

Blue Ridge Middle School

Turn on your tap so the cool, refreshing water can flow. Now, take a long swallow of that good old Blue Ridge Mountain water. One taste has the flavor of the mountain streams that wind their way through the gently rolling hills and around the grassy meadows of the Carolina Piedmont. Glassy and Hogback Mountains, the source of our water supply, stand like monuments behind the trees. From a trickling spring, the water flows into a wandering river, then into a man-made lake, surrounded by pines and filled with life invisible to all but the watchful eye.

Yes, it is Lake Robinson, our area watershed, whose rippling waters provide a home for a variety of animal life. Beavers cut down trees around the lake, carefully constructing

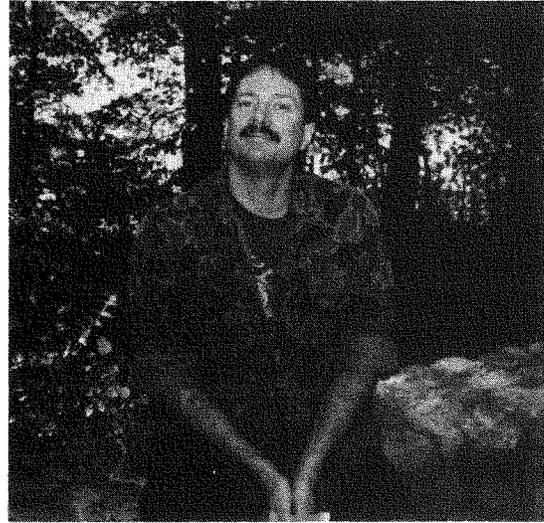
intricate dams. In the marshes, wood ducks, who nest in boxes half-hidden in the reeds, gracefully spread their wings to fly across the muddy trail of a slow moving boat.

The marshes that filled with silt after the river was dammed up, act as a sponge to cleanse the water before it reaches the watershed. Here small islands, patches of land daubed randomly among wide pools, protect muskrats and kingfishers. A blue heron swoops over the water, watching for fish that swim darkly beneath the surface.

His great wings curve over his head as he pushes forward, soaring through the air. Above, dark rain clouds hang low and heavy, ready to replenish the lake below.

The presence of man is here too. Small houses line the shore, hidden from view by trees bright with fall color. Cattle and horses graze the fields that border the lake. The fog rising from the lake moistens the lush green grass and wind-blown leaves that hold the color of the morning sun. Fishermen scan the water hoping for a nibble. Man, the creator of the lake, is its greatest dependent. Like the animals who share his environment, he could not live without this source of pure water.

This watershed is a gift that many take for



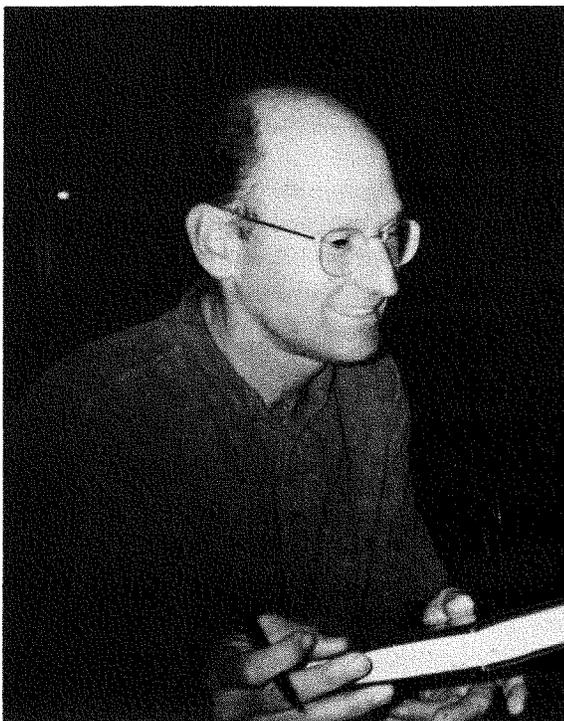
*John Galbary, science teacher at Dent Middle School in Columbia, SC, has joined SC Bread Loafers on line in a collaborative study of their state's wetlands.*

granted. With only the twist of a tap, the lake provides the wet drops that pour down dry throats on hot summer days. But can you imagine turning the faucet only to watch one small drop ooze out and slide down the drain out of sight? Most people consider the Piedmont's plentiful water supply a right. Surely, they think, this watershed is an everlasting resource. They do not realize how precious it is to have pure water at the turn of the tap.

Most people do not consider their water's complex route from mountain stream to river to marsh to lake to filtration plant. They do not realize that the purity of their water depends on maintaining the natural balance of each step on water's route.

Each person is nature's partner. Nature depends on us to work with it when we build homes, enjoy water sports, clean up polluted areas, or simply observe the misty beauty of the lake world.

Whenever we turn on the tap, we release a precious, but forgotten gift. ♡



*Bread Loaf English Professor John Elder attends a meeting at Camp Hope in SC to help Bread Loafers plan for wetlands study.*

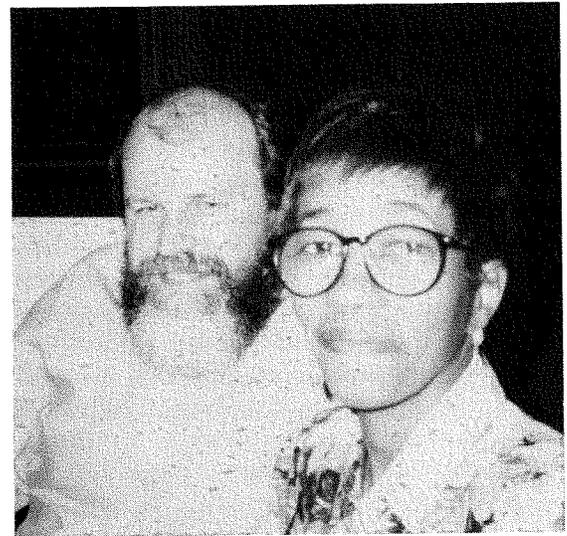
# Creating Classroom Community: The Stories Students Tell

by *Bette Ford*  
Jones Junior College  
Ellisville, MS

The stories students tell about their own experiences can become valuable classroom texts that reflect the intellectual growth of the "storyteller" and the growth of the classroom community. I've reached this conclusion through my own classroom experiences, although the work of language theorists Nancy Martin and James Britton support the view that personal narratives are important tools for examining the complex links among language, learning, and living. Many of my colleagues with whom I collaborate share this view as well, and we are beginning to look at how stories shape the community of the classroom.

My students and I collect our favorite stories in a classbook, an adaptation of an idea I discovered in a writing class at Bread Loaf. This looseleaf binder of narratives from all five of my classes has become an important textbook and community builder. We use the stories there to connect, examine and compare our personal experiences, to analyze and compare elements of literature, and to reflect on both local and global issues.

Duyen Tang's story below is one I will share with my Bread Loaf colleagues. Six years ago Duyen and his brother came to America as refugees from Vietnam. Eventually, they settled in Petal, Mississippi, where Duyen began high school. Unable to speak English upon his arrival, Duyen found assistance at the Help Center, a literacy project in nearby Hattiesburg. Last year Duyen graduated from Petal High School, and today he's a freshman in Jones Junior College in Ellisville, Mississippi. I'm glad that he has agreed to publish his story, which he wrote for my class.



*Rocky Gooch, BLRTN's telecommunications director, and Bette Ford, teacher-researcher consultant to BLRTN*

## How I Found Freedom

by *Duyen Tang*

After the Vietnam War, the Communists took over the government and started to control the economy, turning it against the people who had served in the war against them. The Communist government took all their land and houses and sent them to prison. Their families were sent to a camp or they found some other place to live.

The Communists brought people from the North into the South to hold all the offices. People from the South had a harder time making a living than they used to. The government made a law that said farmers could grow anything they wanted to, but at the end of the year the farmers

had to pay forty percent of their profit to the government. If farmers disagreed with the law, the government took over their land. In some years they couldn't make much profit and still had to pay the forty percent. After a while, the farmers started to give up.

After the war the government took our house and land. They sent my father to prison for seven years, but that is not all they wanted. They still came after us. We couldn't go to college or participate in anything controlled by the government. At that time I was still in high school, so my parents started to plan to get me out of the country, so I could better my life. My parents didn't want me to grow up

like my brothers and sister, not having any opportunities.

On June 17, 1987, my brother and 58 other people planned an escape from Vietnam. We had two captains; my brother was one of them. We left at midnight on the next day, June 18, from Da Nang, which is between Saigon and Hanoi. It took us six hours to get out of Vietnam. Before we crossed into international waters, we saw the Vietnam Coast Guard. They were about 700 meters away from us. Everybody was scared because if we got caught, everyone would get fined and the adults would go to prison for several years. But we were lucky.

The Coast Guard went the other way, and we began to hope we might make it to the Philippines.

On the second day, we began to see a lot of ships. We tried to signal for help, but none stopped. We kept going, and on the fourth day we were running out of food. On the fifth day we ran into a storm. We didn't know what to do, so we prayed. We got out of the storm and I thanked God for saving us, but now we were lost and without any food.

We had to keep going for two more days. Finally, we saw a ship coming toward us, so we signaled for help, and it stopped. The crew asked us what we needed. We needed food, water, and help to find our way. They told us if we kept going the way we were headed, we would get lost in the Pacific Ocean. They told us to go another way and in two days we would get to the Philippines. They gave us food and water enough for two days and left.

On the eighth day, we saw a couple of Filipino fishing boats and at that moment everyone was happy. Later that night in the boat, I couldn't sleep. Every time I closed my eyes, I saw the island in my mind and I couldn't wait till morning. Somehow I fell asleep, and when I woke the sun had risen. I asked my brother where the island was and he pointed to it, but I couldn't believe it: it looked like a cloud on the water, and everyone on the boat said so. After an hour, we got nearer and it seemed more like an island. This moment was the happiest of my life.

We finally made it. I know how much I have to thank God. We stayed in a camp in the Philippines for one year before my brother, eighteen other people, and I were accepted to America. The rest of the group went to different countries such as Canada, Australia and France.

For freedom and a new life the Vietnamese people have paid a big price. About two million people left the country like we did, but six hundred thousand died on the ocean. I feel sorry for their families, but I know that they died striving for the right thing. ☺

## BreadNet: A Friendly Technology

by Rocky Gooch  
Telecommunications Director  
BreadNet

It is especially important for rural teachers who work closely together for six weeks for several summers to be able to stay in touch throughout the year. All of us who are part of the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network need time—and a place—to reflect, read, and write. BreadNet, which is much more than a simple bulletin board or Internet listserv, is helping us overcome restrictions of space and time. In this issue, Sondra Porter's comments on the realities of teaching in an isolated Alaskan community [see article, page 16] demonstrate the importance of BreadNet as a virtual community that links the development of diverse rural teachers and students, creating a learning community inclusive of both.

About 70% of BLRTN Fellows and staff log in at least once a week; about 25% log in every day. Currently, over a hundred "conferences" are active on BreadNet, and more are added as BreadNet users come forward with new interests and ideas. BreadNet is used in nearly all 50 states and in an increasing number of foreign countries—most recently Japan and South Africa.

Two Fellows are now teaching BreadNet courses (credit-bearing networked writing and publishing electives); other BreadNet courses will be offered in rural schools in 1995. Exciting and challenging proposals for online courses that will include teachers, students, and Bread Loaf faculty are being considered.

The impact of emerging technology on schools is an important issue for Bread Loaf rural teachers and their students. We have not solved the problem of rural teachers' lack of access to equipment, phone lines, and

technical support, but Fellows are documenting their very different situations as they seek solutions. The BLRTN continues to raise questions about equity, access to technology, and the myriad uses of technology for democratic education in rural communities. We continue to advocate for free Internet access for teachers and students.

Activities on BreadNet include social interaction; conversations about teaching practice, theory, and research; drafting, writing, and publishing; planning of presentations and workshops; the presentation of online workshops involving teachers who are writing for publication; troubleshooting; providing support for teachers involved in local restructuring efforts; announcing opportunities; and a rich and various group of messages that do not fit into the categories above.

A major theme that runs through BreadNet conversations concerns exchanging cultural knowledge: extended conversations about race, class, gender, and community values are risky to encourage and difficult to sustain. These topics aren't easy online or anywhere else, but they are addressed with some regularity on BreadNet. Along these lines, Fellows from three states have initiated "AdobeNet," a bilingual conference devoted to issues and texts pertinent to Hispanic education and literature.

BreadNet may be accessed by virtually any type of computer, either over the Internet or via a modem. It's very user-friendly, and even the most stubborn technophobe can learn to surf conferences with a minimum of time, trouble, and anxiety. Accounts are given out, free of charge, to any student, graduate or faculty member of the Bread Loaf School of English who makes the request. ☺

# A Juneau School District Literacy "Dig": Students Explore the Ways of Reading and Writing

by Karen Mitchell  
Harborview Elementary School  
Juneau, Alaska

On Friday, December 9, 1994, an historic event occurred in the conference room of the Juneau School District Curriculum Office. Students from five schools in the district, ranging from grades one through ten, met to discuss and share the literacy projects in which their classes had been participating. Students convened in large and small groups to report on their projects and formulate questions to explore in various ways in classes following the winter break.

The following projects were presented. Glacier Valley first-graders presented their family posters. Evidence of reading and writing in families abounds, as seen in the cards, messages, favorite magazines, letters, and awards that surrounded the pictures on the posters. Harborview third-graders Rachel Bernstein and Ryan Walters presented the graphs their class made from the family interviews they did. Particularly interesting was the graph that showed how many languages were spoken: five families speak Filipino at home as well as one that speaks yet another language. Rachel and Ryan also brought their "literacy artifact box" containing a collection of objects from home that the students felt represented their literacy. Ryan exhibited a wooden cube puzzle his father had constructed. This led to a discussion of the particular kind of literacy and critical-thinking skills needed for making and solving the puzzle. After Christmas, the class will use the artifacts to make plays, skits, and songs.

Second-grade students Bianca Carpeneti and Robbie Hickok from Capital brought their personal literacy folders containing postcards, journal writing and other evidence of their

families' literacy. They explained they had acted as reading detectives in their class. They say it has helped them become better readers. They discussed their project with sixth-grade students from Dzantik'i Heeni Middle School, who in turn shared their responses to Scout's first day at school from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Charlotte Soldin, a representative from the high school English class, talked about discussions they had in class after keeping charts of reading and writing experiences throughout the day. She said that while many found it hard to keep up the chart, the discussion that followed helped a lot of them understand the difficulties they each encountered relating to literacy. Her exhibition of the "mind maps" that her class made helped the younger students to understand how literacy expands as one gets older. The class is also reading stories of adults who are just recently literate. Some journaling entries from the class indicated the link between self-esteem and literacy as they detailed the frustration and feelings of inadequacy some students experienced while learning to read.

After the projects were shared,

was reporting from the class to the group, having families participate, using pictures, being a detective, and collecting artifacts. Meaningful discussions of daily reading and writing worked for the high school class but was also the most difficult to prepare for. Other students said the difficult parts so far are understanding what the projects are about and explaining them!

Bernie Sorenson, Supervisor of Title VII and Bilingual programs, attended for awhile, as well as Judith Maier, Community Projects Coordinator for Title VII. Bernie said it was great to see students of such varied age levels sharing projects together. As project coordinator, I must say that the initial nervousness wore off very quickly. One comment I heard several times was that the students thought they hadn't done much so far, but when they came together they realized what they had done and that it was a unique piece of the literacy quilt we are trying to stitch together. Two classes were not represented due to other commitments, and they will share next month. One of these projects will add another dimension as we look at surveys that ask

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## Some journaling entries indicated the link between self-esteem and literacy as they detailed the frustration some students experienced while learning to read.

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the groups reconvened to formulate questions and activities for classes to explore after Christmas. The most popular activity was compiling other people's stories of learning to read and write, the joy and the hardships. Each class will devise a way to do this. Other favorites were compiling lists of favorite books for readers of all levels, developing family activities around reading, and writing in other fields, such as music. In the debriefing, the students said that what has worked best

parents to tell stories of how they communicate differently with different people. These articulate and intelligent young people were all wonderful representatives of their classes. Thanks to all of them for making this project work.

*This project is funded by grants from Bread Loaf/Clemson Writing in the Schools; Alaska ASCD, Title I, and Title VII.* ☘

## BLRTN Fellows Participate at NCTE in Orlando

The meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English in Orlando (Nov. 16-21) was a grand meeting place for many of the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network. Chris Benson, Mary Burnham, Ginny DuBose, Rocky Gooch, Jane Harvey, and Susan Miera conducted a panel/audience discussion entitled "Publishing Student Writing for the Community and the World." Each presenter gave a brief talk about publishing student writing, and several student projects were highlighted.

The audience was interested in BreadNet and the benefits of using computer conferencing as a classroom tool.

Many in the audience expressed an interest in accessing BreadNet and were disappointed to learn that use of the facility is limited to Bread Loaf students, alumni, faculty, and their associates. Discussion then turned to the importance of creating other local



*Members of the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network at the NCTE Conference in Orlando: Susan Miera, Mary Burnham, Ginny DuBose, Jane Harvey, Chris Benson, and Rocky Gooch*

and national computer networks that foster community and collaboration among classrooms. As school districts and state departments acquire computer conferencing technology,

teachers and students must take part in the critical decision-making process that will bring these powerful teaching and learning tools to their classrooms. ☺

\* \* \*

## Vermont Students Continue Collaborative Study of the Holocaust

The successful collaboration last year among Bread Loafers Mary Burnham, Scott Christian, Tom McKenna, Sondra Porter, Peggy Turner and their students on a cooperative reading and study of *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* continues to gain recognition as an exemplary student achievement. **A transcript of the students' writing, compiled by BLRTN's Technical Consultant Caroline Eisner, is now available at the Teacher Center in the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC.** This transcript is a model for other projects.

Mary Burnham's students are continuing their exploration of "the story that must be told." Recently, Barry Spanjaard, a Holocaust survivor of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, came and spoke to students at Waits River Valley School about his experience. This kind of interaction between students and survivors of concentration camps is truly significant as this generation of students will likely be the last to have the opportunity to hear these horrible stories firsthand. Mr. Spanjaard's visit was part of Mary's classes' current

yearlong study titled "Prejudice and Tolerance," in which the students are examining these concepts through literature, history, and their own lives. At present they are reading Howard Frank Moshier's novel *A Stranger in the Kingdom* based on a true incident of prejudice in Vermont in the 1950s. Mary's students are beginning to correspond with Mr. Moshier about questions they have about his book and his sources. Later in the year, the students will read *To Kill a Mockingbird*. ☺

# Good Books for Rural Teachers

Editor's Note: *The following books have been recommended by members of the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network. This selection of books will be especially useful and relevant to teachers and students in rural communities.*—CB

***The Secret of Gumbo Grove***, written by Eleanor Tate, published by Watts, 1987. Set in South Carolina, this historical novel concerns a black girl who discovers that the founder of her city was black, a fact that has been suppressed in the town's acknowledged history. The main character investigates the real facts of the town's founding and makes this information known to the community. The book suggests interesting, practical ways to find historical information through church records and grave markers.

***New Poems: 1980-88***, written by John Haines, published by Story Press, 1990. The winner of the 1990 Western States Book Award, this book is a stunning collection of poems, including "Little Cosmic Dust Poem." Many people think of Robert Service when they think of Alaskan poetry, yet John Haines may be the one true bard of the North. Although some of this work might be appropriate for secondary students, it is best consumed by teachers during the long dark nights of winter.

***A Republic of Rivers***, edited by John A. Murray, published by Oxford University Press, 1990. Spanning a period from 1741 to the present, this collection of nature writing about Alaska presents a range of writing from journal reflections of travelers and explorers of the Alaskan wilderness to riddles and legends recounted by Eskimos and Native Americans who have inhabited the land for centuries. In their prose and poetry, these writers comment on their particular sense of place—the spectacular beauty of the Alaskan landscape, the harshness of the climate, the difficulty of survival, the tranquility and sublimity of the wilderness—creating an understanding between themselves and the natural world of Alaska.

***The Island Within***, written by Richard Nelson, published by Random House, 1991. ***Always Getting Ready Upterrlainarluta***, written by Richard Nelson, published by University of Washington Press, 1993. Nelson's books are photographic projects including a narrative by Barker and his wife Robin (a teacher) who have lived for twenty years among Yup'ik communities on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. The focus on the importance of children in Yup'ik society and culture, especially from the perspective of elderly women, is important and instructive.

***Southeast Alaska: A Pictorial History***, edited by Patricia Roppel, published by Donning Company, 1983. A beautiful collection of historical essays and pictures dating from the beginning and Russian Years to 1983, this book covers everything from the early explorers, politicians, and settlers to the modern day inhabitants, their work and recreation.

***The Tongass: The Vanishing Forest***, by Robert Ketchum, published by Farrar Straus, & Giroux, 1985. A beautiful collection of photos and essays based on research of the U. S. Forest Service, this book clearly depicts the Tongass, Alaska's rain forest, in all its immense beauty. The author presented this book to a White House committee to demonstrate the devastation of the rain forest in Alaska. *Life* magazine also featured photos from this book in 1987.

***Letters from Alaska***, written by John Muir, published by University of Wisconsin Press, 1993. During the years 1879 and 1880 John Muir traveled the waters of southeastern Alaska in a Tlingit Indian dugout canoe. *Letters from Alaska* follows Muir on these voyages in a series of articles he wrote for the *San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin*.

***Dance Hall of the Dead***, written by Tony Hillerman, published by Harper Collins, 1990. The author offers an interesting study of Zuni and Navajo culture. Tracing the protagonist's journey through the Southwest, students of the Southwest will enjoy recognizing actual reservations and locations mentioned in the book. Hillerman's books are strongly recommended for junior-high and high-school students.

***The Brave***, written by Robert Lipsyte, published by Harper Collins Children's Books, 1991. This novel has been a great success with the type of student who proudly claims "I hate to read and you can't make me." *The Brave* is the story of a young Moscondaga Indian who goes to New York City to escape the reservation. He falls in with bad company, gets caught up in a drug war, and eventually finds himself through boxing. Well written with a lot of action to capture reluctant readers' interest, the novel is mature enough in theme and style to appeal to older students. After being snared by this novel, students happily go on to Lipsyte's more well known short novel *The Contender*, a sequel to *The Brave*.

***Pueblo Nations: Eight Centuries of Pueblo Indian History***, written by Joe S. Sando, published by Clear Light, 1992. Recording the history of the Pueblos from the viewpoint of a Pueblo historian, Sando weaves his personal experiences with the rich history, culture, and traditions of the Pueblo people.

***A Day No Pigs Would Die***, written by Robert Newton Peck, published by Knopf, 1973. Set on a farm in Vermont during the Depression, this book is a coming of age novel about the relationship between a father and son. Appealing to a broad spectrum from sixth-graders to adults, this book is excellent for interdisciplinary work as it deals with a variety of the topics children encounter in school subjects. Though written in simple English giving access to weak readers, this book addresses mature themes.

***A Stranger in the Kingdom***, written by Howard Frank Mosher, published by Doubleday, 1989. This book is based on a true incident involving racial prejudice that surfaces when a black family moves into a rural Vermont town. The reviewers rightly compared this book to *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The strong language in the dialogue of several characters may be offensive to some readers.

## Recent BLRTN Fellows' Activities: A Selection

While continuing her work with the South Carolina English Language Arts Frameworks Writing Team, **Janet Atkins** has seen her first article published in the *Carolina English Teacher*, the journal of the South Carolina Council of Teachers of English. The article, "Communicating with Supervisors," uses an exercise developed by Ann Bertoff, former Bread Loaf teacher. Janet will present her Native American project at the spring meeting of the SCCTE in Myrtle Beach.

**Wendy Beserra** presented a panel discussion with **Alfredo C. Lujan** and **Leslie Walker** at the New Mexico Council of Teachers of English Fall Conference in Albuquerque, Oct. 14.

**Scott Christian** has contributed a chapter to *Whole Learning in the Middle School*, a book edited by Glenellen Pace, and published by Christopher Gordon Publishers, 1994.

In the 1995 spring semester at Waccamaw High School in Pawleys Island, SC, **Ginny DuBose** will be teaching "Writing With Telecommunications," the first such course offered in her district. The course is designed to introduce high school students to telecommunications and provide them with opportunities to write for audiences outside the classroom. Students in this class will also write and produce publications for the school and the community

**Jane Harvey** participated in a panel presentation on publishing student writing at the NCTE conference in Orlando in November, 1994.

**Nancy Jennings** and **Vicki Vinck** presented "Computers and Writing" at the annual convention of Arizona

English Teachers Association in Phoenix, October 22, 1994.

**Bill Kirby** of Hawkins Junior High School, Hattiesburg, MS, was recently voted the new President of the Mississippi Council of Teachers.

**Karen Mitchell, Sondra Porter, and Rosie Roppel** (chairperson) are members of the State Board of Directors for the Alaska State Writing Consortium (ASWC) which sponsored the 1994 Annual State Meeting in Juneau, Alaska.

**Renee Moore** and **Penny Wallin** have been selected as teacher-leaders to train Mississippi teachers and administrators in the new state initiative towards performance based testing.

**Scott Christian, Tom McKenna, and Peggy Turner** presented the uses of telecommunications in the classroom at the 1994 Annual State Meeting in Juneau, Alaska.

As of this writing **Janet Atkins, Michael Atkins, Ginny DuBose, Linda Hardin, Nancy Lockhart, Lauren Thomas and Betty Ann Slesinger** have been named as associates in the Leadership Lab for Humanities and Science Education, a partnership of select teachers in South Carolina working to initiate and document new methods of professional development aimed at building teachers' capacity to facilitate their students' critical and creative thinking skills. Other Bread Loafers in the Rural Teacher Network will be involved as well.

**Tish McGonegal** presented "The New Standards Project" at the Vermont Assessment Conferences, White River Junction and Champlain College, Burlington, October 11;

co-presented "Classroom Applications of Vermont Writing Portfolio Criteria" at the Northeast Assessment Conference in Rutland, VT, November, 1994; presented "The New Standards Project" at the November 1994 Conference of the Vermont Association for Middle Level Education at Camel's Hump Middle School; published the Guest Editorial in fall 1994 issue of *Intervals*, Vermont's newsletter on educational assessment.

**Bill Rich** received the New England Association of Teachers of English 1994 Marian Gleason award for demonstrating outstanding promise as a teacher of language arts.

**Rosie Roppel** was selected by the Alaska Governor's Commission as a member of Alaska's Language Arts/Standards Selection Committee to review proposals for the restructuring process of assessment of student writing.

**James Schmitz** published "Gary Paulsen: A Writer of His Time," a review of several of Paulsen's books for young adults, in the Fall 1994 issue of *The ALAN Review*.

**Doug Wood** was named the 1994 South Carolina Technology Educator of the Year; serves as Coordinator for the Office of Technology Transfer, SC Department of Education; serves as Chief Reviewer and Panel Leader for the Technology Innovation Grants Competition, U. S. Department of Education; presented "Distance Learning and Environmental Action" at the Roger Tory Peterson Institute, Jamestown, NY, October, 1994.

# DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund Fellows

The following teachers from six target rural states have been awarded DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund Fellowships and attended the Bread Loaf School of English. The Fellows and their associates are currently working on collaborative projects to improve students' experiences with literature and writing.

## Alaska

### Fellows

Patricia Carlson  
Scott Christian  
Pauline Evon  
Allison Holsten  
Karen Mitchell  
John Morse  
Mary Olsen  
Sondra Porter  
Rosanne Roppel  
Sheri Skelton

### School

Lathrop High School  
Nikiski High School  
Kwethluk Community School  
Mat-Su School District  
Harborview Elementary School  
Brevig Mission School  
Sand Point High School  
Susitna Valley High School  
Schoenbar Middle School  
Shishmaref School

### School Address

901 Airport Way, Fairbanks AK 99701  
Pouch 10,000 Nikiski AK 99635  
Kwethluk AK 99621  
W. 125 Evergreen St., Palmer AK 99645  
10014 Crazy Horse, Juneau AK 99801  
Brevig Mission AK 99785  
PO Box 269, Sand Point AK 99661  
PO Box 807, Talkeetna AK 99683  
217 Schroenbar Road, Ketchikan AK 99901  
General Delivery, Shishmaref AK 99772

## Arizona

### Fellows

Priscilla Aydelott  
Timothy Aydelott  
Sylvia Barlow  
Sabra Beck  
Chad Graff  
Nancy Jennings  
Janet Olson  
Robin Pete  
Beverly Redhouse  
Jim Schmitz  
Nan Talahongva  
Edward Tompkins  
Vicki L. Vinck

### School

Monument Valley High School  
Monument Valley High School  
Chinle Jr. High School  
Marana High School  
Monument Valley High School  
Ganado Primary School  
Chinle Elementary School  
Kayenta High School  
Globe Junior High School  
Hopi Jr. & Sr. High School  
Hopi Jr. & Sr. High School  
Lake Havasu High School  
Peoria High School

### School Address

PO Box 337, Kayenta AZ 86033  
PO Box 337, Kayenta AZ 86033  
PO Box 587, Chinle AZ 86503  
12000 Emigh Road, Maram AZ 85653  
PO Box 337, Kayenta AZ 86033  
Ganado AZ 86505  
PO Box 587, Chinle AZ 86503  
Kayenta AZ 86033  
501 Ash Street, Globe AZ 85501  
PO Box 337, Keams Canyon AZ 86034  
PO Box 337, Keams Canyon AZ 86034  
2675 Palo Verde Boulevard, Lake Havasu City AZ 86403  
11200 N. 83rd Avenue, Peoria AZ 85345

## Mississippi

### Fellows

Leslie Fortier  
Carolyn Hardy  
William Kirby  
Renee Moore  
Patricia Parrish  
Patsy Pipkin  
Peggy Turner  
Penny Wallin

### School

Stringer Attendance Center  
R. H. Watkins High School  
Hawkins Junior High School  
East Side High School  
Sumrall Attendance Center  
Oxford Junior High School  
Saltillo High School  
Jones Junior High

### School Address

PO Box 68, Stringer MS 39481  
1100 W. 12th St., Laurel MS 39440  
523 Forrest Street, Hattiesburg MS 39401  
601 Wiggins, Cleveland MS 38732  
PO Box 187, Sumrall MS 39482  
409 Washington Avenue, Oxford MS 38655  
Saltillo, MS 38866  
1125 N 5th Avenue, Laurel MS 39440

## New Mexico

### Fellows

Wendy Colby-Beserra  
Ann Eilert  
Emily Graeser  
John Kelly

### School

Deming High School  
Los Alamos High School  
Twin Buttes High School  
Shiprock High School

### School Address

1100 South Nickel, Deming NM 88030  
1300 Diamond Dr., Los Alamos NM 87544  
PO Box 680, Zuni NM 87327  
Box 6003, Shiprock NM 87420

Roseanne Lara	Gadsden Middle School	Route 2, Box 196, Anthony NM 88021
Carlotta Martza	Santa Fe Indian School	1501 Cerrillos Rd. Santa Fe NM 87502
Susan Miera	Pojoaque High School	Pojoaque Station, Santa Fe NM 87501
Stan Renfro	Wingate High School	B.I.A., PO Box 2, Fort Wingate NM 87316
Norma Sheff	Escalante High School	PO Box 157, Tierra Amarilla NM 87575
Philip Sittnick	Laguna Middle School	PO Box 268, Laguna NM 87026

## South Carolina

<u>Fellows</u>	<u>School</u>	<u>School Address</u>
Janet Atkins	Wade Hampton High School	PO Box 338, Hampton SC 29924
Michael Atkins	North District Middle School	PO Box 368, Varnville SC 29944
Polly E. Brown	Belton-Honea Path High School	11000 Belton Highway, Honea Path SC 29654
Ginny DuBose	Waccamaw High School	2688 River Rd., Pawleys Island SC 29585
Barbara Everson	Belton-Honea Path High School	11000 Belton Highway., Honea Path SC 29654
Linda Hardin	Blue Ridge Middle School	2423 Tiger Bridge Road, Greer SC 29651
Nancy Lockhart	Ivena Brown Elementary School	PO Box 305, Greenpond SC 29542
Robin McConnell	Calhoun Falls High School	Edgefield St., Calhoun Falls SC 29628
Carolyn Pierce	Cheraw High School	649 Chesterfield Highway, Cheraw SC 29520
Betty Slesinger	Irmo High School	6051 Wescott Rd., Columbia SC 29212
Joyce Summerlin	Hunter-Kinard-Tyler High School	Box 158, Norway SC 29113
Lauren Thomas	Fairfield Middle School	Route 5, Box 50, Winnsboro SC 29180

## Vermont

<u>Fellows</u>	<u>School</u>	<u>School Address</u>
Mary Burnham	Waits River Valley School	Rt. 25, East Corinth VT 05040
Mary Ann Cadwallader	Mill River Union High School	Middle Road, North Clarendon VT 05773
Jane Harvey	Brattleboro Union High School	50 Fairground Rd., Brattleboro VT 05301
Margaret Lima	Canaan Memorial High School	1 School Street, Canaan VT 05903
Judith Morrison	Hinesburg Elementary/Middle School	Hinesburg VT 05461
Bill Rich	Main St. Middle School	107 Main St., Montpelier VT 05602
Ellen Temple	Camel's Hump Middle School	Brown Trace Rd., Richmond VT 05477
Carol Zuccaro	St. Johnsbury Academy	Main Street, St. Johnsbury VT 05819

## Rural Teacher Network Consultants

*The following teachers are BLRTN associates and have been instrumental in supporting the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network in their home states as well as among the six target states.*

Beverly Busching	University of South Carolina-Columbia	Columbia SC 29208
Bette Ford	Jones Junior College	Ellisville MS 39401
Vicki Holmsten	San Juan Community College	4601 College Blvd., Farmington NM 87402
Tom Litecky	Palmer High School	1170 W. Arctic, Palmer AK 99645
Alfredo Lujan	Pojoaque Middle School	Pojoaque Station, Santa Fe NM 87501
Charles McDonnell	Piedmont Technical College	Greenwood SC 29646
Tish McGonegal	Camel's Hump Middle School	Brown Trace Rd., Richmond VT 05477
Tom McKenna	Unalaska City School	PO Box 260, Unalaska AK 99685
Nancy Olson	Brattleboro Union High School	50 Fairground Rd., Brattleboro VT 05301
Lois Rodgers	Hattiesburg High School	301 Hutchinson Ave. Hattiesburg MS 39401
John Warnock	University of Arizona - Dept. of English	Modern Languages, Rm. 445, Tuscon AZ 85721
Tilly Warnock	University of Arizona - Dept. of English	Modern Languages, Rm. 445, Tuscon AZ 85721

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