

What Comes First: Writer or Teacher?

by Margaret D. Bauer, Editor

I can remember the name of just about every teacher I ever had, fondly, for the most part, whether for particular subjects they inspired my interest in, or for the life lesson an experience with them taught me. Indeed, the few I don't remember positively taught me important life lessons, too, even if it was to be more appreciative of having had so many more good than not-so-good teachers.

As a teacher, few unexpected emails are more welcome in my Inbox than one from a former student reaching out to say thank you: "You may not remember me, but I was in your class in 20— (or even 19—) and . . ." (I usually do remember them.) My favorite is still: ". . . and I just wanted to say thank you for kicking my a**."

For twenty-five years now, I have tried to balance my two vocations: professor (and all that entails – teaching, research, service – my fellow academics understand) and editor (and all that entails, which seems to increase annually as we strive to fulfill our mission at NCLR as broadly as possible). Even as they overlap, both are full-time jobs. But not once have I considered changing professions. While the workload can be overwhelming, the absolute joy of accepting someone's first story or poem, working with a new scholar to develop a dissertation chapter or conference paper into a critical essay, recognizing an astute editorial eye in a student staff member, opening up a file to see what one of our incredible graphic designers has done with the materials we sent for layout, and bringing writers and readers together at literary events has inspired so many "love my job" days, which make up for the days I worry, *How am I going to get all this done in time?*

All this is to say that I understand why we had no trouble filling this special feature section with content by Writers Who Teach, Teachers Who Write

(this title showing how we never could figure out which was the priority. It likely changes day to day for others, as it does for me.

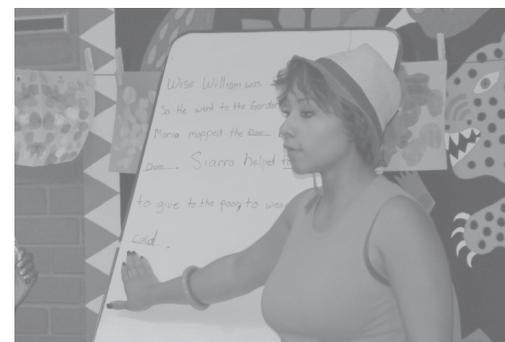
Much of the content here focuses on teaching, at least in part: the essays on Paul Green and Carolyn Kizer and the interviews with Wiley Cash, Leah Hampton, and Khalisa Rae Thompson. Another interview, with Ben Fountain, was conducted by student veterans who read the author's novel *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* during their Veteran to Scholar program here at ECU. We have an examination of letters written by Peter Taylor while he was on the faculty at North Carolina Women's College (now UNCG), inviting other writers to come to Greensboro to speak to his students. And the authors of the creative writing in this section, honorees in our 2021 contests – poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction – are all teachers, who somehow find the time to write around planning and grading for their classes.

The recent disrespect for educators, for education even, reflected in attacks upon what books are taught (or even shelved) in schools, how history is taught, how schools handled COVID, and teachers respecting their students' gender identity, as well as in low salaries and insufficient school funding, might drive anyone away from the classroom – and has driven away many. Who can blame those who decide to step onto another path? All the more reason to recognize the valor of those who stay, to honor and support the teachers who make a positive difference in their students' lives day after day.

For writer (and editor)-teachers, lessons extend beyond the classroom. And maybe we need to take our lessons to the public podium and demand the respect we and our fellow teachers have earned in the classroom and in the countless hours of service beyond the classroom. Let's educate those who still believe teaching is an 8 to 3, five-day a week, summers off job. Dispelling ignorance is, after all, what we do. ■

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