

INSIDE THIS  
EDITION:Event Reviews:Conference for  
Secondary WCs 7M. Twain House  
Workshop 8Reading by  
Geraldine Mills 4Opinion:Traditional  
Writing  
Restrictions 5FYI:Saturday  
Seminars 8

T.A.R. 2

WC Updates:

E.O. Smith H.S. 2

Griswold H.S. 4

Vinton E.S. 6

Interviews with:Jon Andersen 10  
&  
Stacy DeKeyser 3Focus:Teacher as  
Journalist 13

## Words from the Director



After last fall's budget crisis, this fall semester has been much more calm. That's not to suggest that things have been quiet in the CWP office. Of the many activities that have been going on, most of them typical from year to year, I am especially excited by two new happenings. One is that I spearheaded an effort in the English Department to offer an undergraduate Concentration in Teaching English, which was adopted in November. It becomes only the third Concentration offered by the department, following Irish Literature and Creative Writing.

Two years ago the department conducted a survey in which forty percent of the more than 800 undergraduate majors indicated Education as their top career choice, but the department has never offered any support or training for these students. This Concentration will be available to any English major who completes four courses, one in the teaching of writing, one in the structure of the language, and one in literature for children or adolescents, with a fourth additional course from one of those three areas, allowing for an emphasis within the Concentration. It would funnel those English majors into courses populated mostly by Education students, and it would give them something tangible and helpful for their applications to graduate school.

The other new thing I am excited about is the expansion of the Summer Institute chapbook into a full-length anthology that includes writing from teachers who won or received honorable mention in the also-expanded Teacher-Consultant Writing Contest. If you haven't seen the publication, you can download it as a PDF from our website. Go to <http://cwp.uconn.edu/publications/writings.php> and select the creative writing volume titled "I've Climbed this Staircase Before."

The quality of the writing is stellar, and truly challenges any false notions that 'those who can't, teach.' This year, the CWP awarded seventeen Aetna Fellowships for teachers to attend the Summer Institute, and our Teacher-Consultant Writing Contest had over eighty submissions from thirty different teachers, kindergarten through college. In the anthology, we published three elementary school teachers, two middle school teachers, fourteen high school teachers, one graduate student at UConn, two community college professors, and one adjunct professor. Five are former or current Teachers of the Year in their schools or districts. Three have published books of poetry. One has published a work of nonfiction. Five are currently writing novels. One received the PEN Discovery Award for Young Adult Literature in 2007. One had her fiction published in *Best New American Voices 2006*. One is a published playwright and poet. One is a Freedom Writer. One is a freelance journalist. One has published a half dozen scholarly articles within the last five years. And one received both a Fulbright Fellowship and a National Endowment for the Humanities Grant in the last five years. An impressive list, to say the least!

Enjoy reading the other articles in the newsletter, and please consider submitting a piece to us for the Spring issue.

Jason Courtmanche, Director, Connecticut Writing Project—Storrs

## E.O. Smith Writing Center Update

Megan Magner (SI '09) and Denise Abercrombie (SI '07), who serve as Co-Directors of the E.O. Smith Writing Center, are honored to have received a \$2,500 E.O. Smith Foundation Grant to support the Writing Center's efforts. So far they have been able to purchase professional-grade signage, writing resource texts, monogrammed shirts for Peer Editors, an enclosed wallboard conference center, and other promotional materials for the Writing Center.

This fall the E.O. Smith Writing Center co-hosted writer and E.O. alumnus, Tim Page, who read from his highly acclaimed memoir *Parallel Play: Growing Up With Undiagnosed Asperger's Syndrome*. Peer Editors held a reception/book signing in Mr. Page's honor, and were thrilled to meet a Pulitzer Prize winning writer who grew up in Storrs. Peer Editors also attended The Second Annual High School Writing Center Conference at UConn, and were inspired by their sessions with students from other schools and the informative panel discussion with UConn Writing Center tutors.

Currently, Megan has successfully launched the first high school course in Connecticut for the training of Writing Center Peer Editors, and Denise continues her work on the Writing Center's outreach and programs. The Writing Center looks forward to hosting UConn's Long River Review Readers and celebrating the National Day of Writing on October 20th!

For more information, please contact Megan Magner (MMagner@eosmith.org), or Denise Abercrombie (dabercrombie@EOSmith.org).



## Teacher as Researcher

The Teacher as Researcher (TAR) program is a CWP program open to all Teacher Consultants who wish to address an educational concern particular to their classrooms or apparent in education in general. Participants assume professional responsibility for documenting, analyzing, and writing about their work over a period of time for other teachers.

The process involves four basic steps. Participants first develop a research question based on thoughtful consideration of their educational situation. Once the question is defined, participants plan the methodology best suited to their approach of the question. Over time, participants gather data from student work, and research their concern, so that they may analyze the information. The research may be qualitative or quantitative, hypothesis-raising, and/or descriptive. Finally, participants write the article and share their learning with other teachers.

During the process, participants meet with other teacher-researchers for progress and sharing sessions, maintain a research log with both anecdotal and factual information, and meet with the group leader for updates. Currently, four TCs are TAR participants.

If you are interested in participating in TAR, contact the CWP office or the group's leader, Donna Ozga at donnaol@cox.net.

# Proving Young Adult Writing is NOT ‘Lesser’ Literature: A Conversation with Author Stacy DeKeyser

*Stacy DeKeyser is a Connecticut author, having published two nonfiction books as well as her most recent young adult novel *Jump the Cracks*, which won an award from the CT Press Club and will be published in French in 2011. She is currently working on a new novel with support from an Artist Fellowship Grant from the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism.*

(E-mail interview with Ms. DeKeyser by Benjamin Miller)

BM: Why have you chosen young readers for your audience? Have you ever written adult fiction or nonfiction?

SD: I started out writing short nonfiction for adults: travel pieces, parenting articles, and humor. And that was fun, but I was always switching gears, and I never really knew what I wanted to accomplish with any of it. Then, by chance really, I took a class in writing for kids, and I knew I'd found my niche. Maybe that was my first hint: I'm drawn to the core adolescent themes of figuring out who you are and how you fit in the world. I'm still trying to figure that out for myself. Plus, I love the endless story possibilities those themes provide.

BM: Do you find yourself creating characters that resembled you at a younger age?

SD: In some ways, Victoria in *Jump the Cracks* is the kind of girl I wish I'd been: very sure of herself, opinionated, and brave. In other ways she's not like me at all: impetuous and short-tempered. But all my protagonists struggle with some of the same issues I struggle with myself: Who will speak up for kids when kids can't speak up for themselves? Where does God fit in today's world? Stuff like that.

BM: Is it difficult to weed out adult experiences when trying to capture a teen essence in the characters?

SD: I don't have too much trouble weeding out adult experience, although, that is important when writing for young people. Maybe that's why I feel so comfortable writing for this age group. For me, it's mostly about vocabulary. I might use a word like "miscalculated" when speaking, but my teenage protagonist would say "screwed up."

BM: Congratulations having *Jump the Cracks* translated into French! Has it always been a goal of your books to become international sellers?

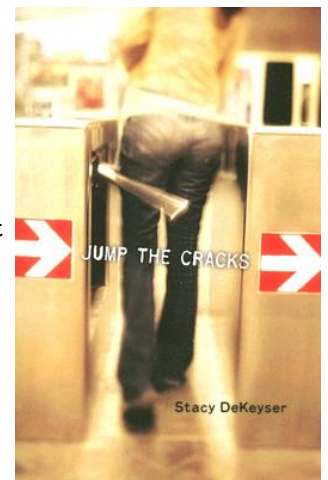
SD: Truthfully, it had never crossed my mind. It's all been a really fun surprise. I can't wait to see what the French edition looks like, and if the title will be different. I think having a book published in another language proves the universality of those adolescent themes I mentioned. I like to daydream that I'll be invited to Paris for a book signing.

BM: How did you go about applying for the grant you received from the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism?

SD: It was important for me to make a case not just for myself, but for all children's writers, and for children's books. I think there's a general feeling that people who write books for kids write "lesser" literature somehow, but that's most definitely not true, especially nowadays. I believe that some of the best books published today are books for young readers. I was hoping that would be recognized by the greater arts community in the state.

BM: Can you give us a snapshot sneak preview into your new book?

SD: I'm working on a fantasy. It's a cross between an old Alpine legend of a witch and the Pied Piper tale. Fantasy is new for me, and so is writing in third person with a boy protagonist. But I'm having a great time!



For more information on Stacy DeKeyser and her books, please visit her site <http://stacydekeyser.com/>.

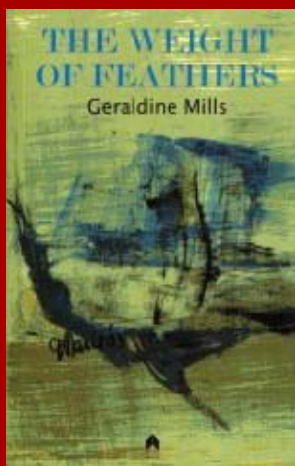
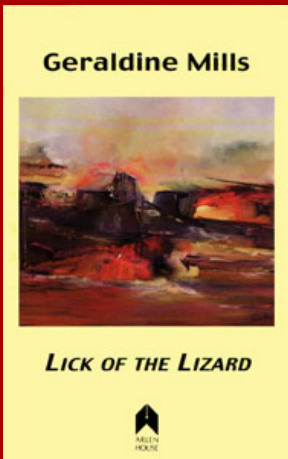
## Irish Author Geraldine Mills Reads at UConn

*Benjamin Miller, Undergraduate Writing Intern, CWP—Storrs*

I have encountered many Irish-Americans in New England who have been so far removed from their heritage that nothing in history books can satisfy their desire and curiosity to visit Ireland. Although our busy lives make it difficult to simply catch the next flight, there is another way to realize this dream: the poetry and prose of award-winning writer Geraldine Mills. UConn had the pleasure of receiving this extraordinary Irish writer for an intimate evening of poetry and short story readings. While listening to Ms. Mills' distinctly Irish accent, I was pulled through her images and references into Ireland itself. Perhaps it was her prose-piece "This is from the Woman who Does" which, drawing from the Celtic-Tiger boom in Ireland, illustrates an inherently Irish persistence and good-will in spite of suffering. Or perhaps it was Ms. Mills' poetry that unearthed the bog turf in a Heaney-esque fashion of unrelenting digging, and exploited the many shades of Irish countryside, Irish history, and the shades of her own Irish identity. Just as the magpie steals bits and pieces from its environment to build its nest, the poet takes inspiration from hers to recreate Ireland in our mind's eye.

Granting the audience access into her artistic core, Ms. Mills prefaced each piece with a story that detailed the inspiration that led to her writing – a poem transposing the "power of story behind [a] work" of art, or a short story suddenly breathing life into bits of conversation heard on Dublin trains. Her writing addresses questions like "how can we try to find our way in life?" and actively seeks the answer. An example of this is the poem "Antipodes," which incites us to "dig a way/ into the core of our selves" to uncover the answers. Moreover, it was through writing that Ms. Mills discovered the father she never had the opportunity to know, who "chose school over poitin time in the bog," and whose voice was "in the cadence of Mayo accent." While her writing may draw from society, mythology, or nature, it is Geraldine Mills' Irishness that conveys Éire to the average New Englander.

Geraldine Mills is the author of two collections of short fiction, *Lick of the Lizard* and *The Weight of Feathers*, as well as three collections of poetry, *Toil the Dark Harvest*, *An Urgency of Stars*, and *Unearthing Your Own*.



## Griswold H.S. Writing Room Rises from the Ashes!

The Griswold High School Writing Room is rising from the ashes! During the 2007-2008 school year, the UConn Writing Center tutors (under the direction of Mary Isbell) visited GHS biweekly to train students in the UConn tutoring method. Despite great enthusiasm from the students, in the 2008-2009 school year, the GHS Writing Room died out due to numerous reasons.

This year faculty advisor Elizabeth Kowal (SI '09) and seven zealous freshmen have joined veteran senior and junior writing advisors and faculty advisor Nadine Keane (SI '01) in revitalizing the program. The group attended the UConn Writing Center

Conference on October 2, and was infused with fresh enthusiasm.

First on our list of goals – find a home for the writing center, and that has been accomplished. We will be located in the GHS Library Media Center. It's not exactly a room, so we may have to change our name, but we are definitely moving in the right direction!

For more information, please visit the Griswold Public Schools website: <http://www.griswold.k12.ct.us/>. Or contact Nadine Keane at [nkeane@griswold.k12.ct.us](mailto:nkeane@griswold.k12.ct.us).

## A Call to “Wean” Students Away from Traditional Writing Restrictions

Steve Straight, (SI '90)

Asked to write a 1,500-word analysis of a job he once had, a student of mine in our top developmental level at Manchester Community College some time ago handed in a curious thing. It was over the word minimum, as I recall, had some very interesting content, and showed some potential for very good work, given a chance to revise. But I could not figure out why the paragraphs were sometimes more than a page long, almost two, with several topics crammed into each one. When I met with the student to discuss the essay, I asked about the paragraphs.

“Well,” he said, “It had to be five paragraphs, right?”

In the past three years, I have been sent out from my college as a roving ambassador to area high schools, explaining our placement process and what students (and teachers) can expect for typical college assignments. (Those of you who have gone through a recent CWP Summer Institute have seen a version of my little presentation to schools.) It's been a wonderful experience, really, meeting dedicated high school teachers with more stamina and good cheer than I could ever hope to muster with sometimes 120 or more sets of hormones to shepherd through some of the most trying days in their lives. This year I am working more closely with teachers and students at East Hartford High School specifically, seeing first hand what teachers are up against when it comes to preparing students for college.

In the process of this work, it dawned on me that I have really been teaching a form of high school for nearly thirty years – just at the college level. I have taught developmental courses of all levels since I was a graduate student at UConn back in the '80s, and these courses really are the rough equivalent of sophomore, junior, and senior year English in high school. I too am trying to prepare my students for college-level English, trying to help them grow into college-ready readers and writers.

One aspect of high school teaching and below that I encounter every semester seems to be the tenacity of the five-paragraph essay. The rubric for the CAPT test, of course, nearly begs for that format of telegraphing thesis sentence with list of section topics, three sections, and then obvious recapitulation of the list in the conclusion. And as I say to teachers and students, the five-paragraph essay has a “benevolent intent.” It wants you to be organized. It wants you to have focused sections. It wants you to have a thesis. It wants you to have structure, and it offers you one. But at our school, we have a placement challenge essay, for those who do not like their placement from the mandatory Accuplacer test (a College-Board style multiple-choice test on sentence skills and reading comprehension). And students who write a fairly straightforward five-paragraph essay with decent grammar and sentence structure are apt to be placed in our top developmental level, not our college-level writing class. That five-paragraph model really shows a lack of sophistication in writing.

Last June our English department at Manchester (about twenty full-time professors) met for a half-day retreat to attempt to describe outcomes to determine readiness for our college-level English course (called English 101 at all the state's community colleges). I'll give you the whole description, as it may all be interesting to you, and you'll note the five-paragraph essay mention in the writing outcomes:

“1) Reading Outcomes

“Through the writing of accurate summaries, students will demonstrate the ability to comprehend a variety of readings, including **non-narrative** readings, of varying lengths and complexities. Students should be able to gauge point-of-view; identify contradictory or contrasting statements; and recognize organizing principles.

“2) Writing Outcomes

“Students should be able to write a 5-page (1250 word) essay that is **non-narrative** and **not a personal essay**. The essay should display the ability to accurately summarize and address multiple perspectives, using **texts**, not personal experience, as supporting evidence.

“The essay itself should be thesis-driven and demonstrate logical organization through the correct use of topic sentences and transitions. *It should avoid the “typical” five-paragraph essay model of listing supporting points in the introduction and restating the evidence and thesis in the conclusion, and instead strive for more meaningful ways to begin and end an essay.*

“Within the paragraphs, the essay should demonstrate internal logic through fluencies of language and syntactic competencies. In particular, students should understand how to write compound sentences which logically use coordination and subordination as well as the basic rules of grammar.” (Boldface and italics in original.)

(continued on page 6)

# Perils of the Five-Paragraph Method

(continued from page 5)

Somehow that took about five hours to draft, but eventually our department was all on the same page. These are the minimum qualities we need to see in students leaving our developmental sequence (up to three courses) or entering English 101 for the first time.

What I suggest to high school teachers, then, is to wean students away from the five-paragraph model as soon as they have completed the CAPT test in their sophomore year. That leaves two years for teachers to introduce more sophisticated models to their students. Occasionally, even at MCC, I meet teachers who don't want to let go of it. To them I say, "Show me one." Show me one in print, in a magazine or the New York Times or anywhere. They only exist in school.

Students, of course, having learned the five-paragraph model so well through many years of school, are often loathe to give it up as well. I have taken to calling the telegraphing thesis, really the heart of the model, The List. I always write that on their essays when I see it, and in class I constantly refer to it as the kind of beast that must be slain. (Actually, I just thought of that metaphor, but I'm using it from now on.)

The chief way I get students past, especially, those five-paragraph introductions, is through models, models, and more models. Whenever I find a good introduction in print, I cut it out. When I write a sample essay for my classes (and I trust all CWP-trained teachers do this as well), I make sure to work diligently on crafting a good introduction. And, I generally write two alternate introductions to show students the range of possibilities the non-five-paragraph model offers. Introductions, and in my classes I call them leads, borrowing the journalism term, are one of the places students can be creative. Once they realize that – and even have fun writing a good one – well, you know as well as I that anything can happen.

For more information on Steve Straight and his book of poems *The Water Carrier*, visit his author page at Curbstone Press: <http://www.curbstone.org/authdetail.cfm?AuthID=125>.

## Annie Vinton Publishing Center Update

In the spring edition of Teacher Writer Researcher, an article covered the founding of the Annie Vinton Publishing Center at Annie Vinton Elementary in Mansfield. Since then, we have checked-in with Marcy Rudge, co-founder of the publishing center alongside Lynda Barrow, two CWP TCs.

Marcy has this to say:

Year two is going great. The process of publishing is in place thanks to the volunteer work that assists in typing, binding, and the overall turnaround time from draft to publication. Feedback has been positive. Families are amazed and proud of how capable and creative their children are as writers and illustrators. Celebrating published work is done both in classrooms and at times during school-wide events. Vinton is the only elementary in Mansfield to have a publishing house. The children themselves have been publishing picture books, fiction/non-fiction, fantasy, mystery, and science pieces. Some children have published over 10 books! The children really care about their topics and writing. They see themselves as authentic writers and illustrators, even at such a young age. They workshop, share and discuss ideas, and celebrate publishing.

For more information about Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, please visit <http://www.mansfieldct.org/schools/Vinton/>.

## UConn's Second Annual Conference for Secondary Writing Centers

Kaylee Czajka, UConn Writing Center Graduate Assistant and Outreach Coordinator

The University of Connecticut was happy to host the Second Annual Conference for Secondary Writing Centers on October 2, 2009. The annual conference reflects the continuing affiliation among the Connecticut Writing Project, the University of Connecticut's Writing Center, and the generous support of the Aetna Writing Chair.

The conference organizers invited local schools from across the state to participate in writing center workshops. Griswold High School, E.O. Smith High School, Bolton High School, and Bacon Academy brought approximately sixty students who were learning to tutor in high school Writing Centers. Teacher representatives from Wethersfield High School, Windham Middle School, Ashford Middle School, and East Windsor Elementary School also attended the conference.

The conference began with a warm introduction from Tom Deans, the director of the UConn Writing Center, and Jason Courtmanche, the director of the Connecticut Writing Project at Storrs. Both Professor Deans and Professor Courtmanche encouraged the students and teachers to participate and take an active role in this working conference. Continuing with this theme, each school then had the opportunity to introduce themselves and describe their experiences with writing centers.

The highlight of the conference was a panel discussion with a group of UConn tutors. Kaylee Czajka, a Writing Center Graduate Assistant and the Outreach Coordinator at UConn, led the panel with the help of five additional undergraduate tutors (Caitlin Garzi, Ralph Riello, Bryan Murphy, Josh Brackett, and Briana Massey). The discussion was composed of a variety of topics, including advice for starting a writing center, clarifications about the differences between high school and college writing centers, training practices, suggestions for advertising, and personal anecdotes about the best and the worst tutoring sessions the tutors experienced at UConn.

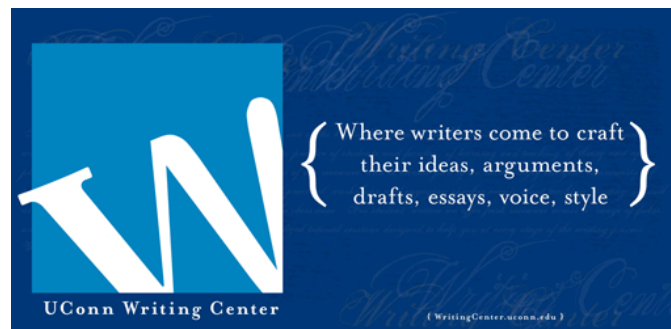
At the conclusion of the panel, the schools divided into workshop sessions. The first workshop allowed the students and teachers to apply the advice and suggestions from the panel to their own writing centers. This brainstorming session focused on solidifying goals to match the individual interests of each school.

During the second workshop session, the teachers were separated from the students for a discussion hosted by Tom Deans and the Associate Director of the UConn Writing Center, Kathleen Tonry. The workshop provided the opportunity for the secondary teachers to ask questions, discuss experiences, and seek advice from other writing center leaders. Meanwhile, the students worked in mixed groups to collaborate on different issues and interest areas related to writing centers. The topics included planning a writing center, tutoring strategies, writing center philosophies, and problem solving in the writing center. During the final portion of the conference, the students took the stage to lead presentations on their topics. The students told jokes, gave advice, and provided examples to supplement the presentations they created.

The UConn Writing Center and the Connecticut Writing Project will continue their involvement with secondary writing centers throughout the year by helping develop two new centers at Bolton High School and Windham Middle School. These are the two newest schools to join the writing center community, following E.O. Smith and East Hartford High School last year, and Griswold High School in 2007. The UConn Writing Center looks forward to continuing the annual conference and hopes to see it grow in the future.

For more information about the UConn Writing Center and upcoming events, please visit their website:

<http://www.writingcenter.uconn.edu/>.



## The National Endowment for the Humanities' Hosts Workshop for Teachers at the Mark Twain House

*Stephanie McKenna, (SI '05)*

In July 2009, the Mark Twain House and Museum hosted the National Endowment for the Humanities' Landmarks of American History and Culture Workshop for Teachers. Composed of two separate one-week sessions, teachers from more than 30 states participated in this workshop entitled *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in Post-Reconstruction America: Mark Twain's Hartford Years, 1871-1891. This workshop was an entertaining and enjoyable experience; I was thrilled to be a part of it.

The workshop began with tours of the Old Stage House, the Mark Twain House, the Harriet Beecher Stowe House,

and a bus tour of historic Hartford. Experts of Mark Twain, professors from throughout the United States, instructed us in the importance of Mark Twain's writings in America. We learned about the Gilded Age in America, the history of Hartford during Twain's residency there, and the society of the American South. Delving into Mark Twain's personal life was very interesting because his personal life seems to have made a direct impact on his writing. We learned how to make Twain's work accessible to students; for example, through exercises in dialect and discussions of racism. Throughout the workshop, we were given access to the museum's Research Library, an

(continued on page 9)

## SATURDAY SEMINARS X 3

*Lynn Hoffman, (SI '91)*

This year, not one, not two, but three Saturday Seminar Series have been designed for CT Writing Project TCs. On Saturday, October 3, Bill Torgerson's Liven Up the Stack: Using Lists & Conversations as a Way Into Meaningful Research Writing will launch the Writing in the Classroom series. Other topics in this series include, differentiating writers' workshop, emergent writers and reading response journals, multigenre papers, writing-across-the curriculum, connecting art and writing, boys as writers, and secondary writing centers. All Writing in the Classroom seminars will be held in the Stern Lounge of the Storrs CLAS Building, and will be offered on the first Saturday of the month.

Jane Cook, CWP Webmaster and technology guru, is the inspiration for the second Saturday Seminar series: Shift Happens: Technology Tools to Prepare Students for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This series is a collaboration of CWP and EastConn, which will host it. Jane will kick-off the series on Saturday, October 10, with her seminar, Podcasting 101. Dave Polachanin and Rebecca Pilver will also present. If you want to know more about Wikis, digital storytelling, blogging and eBoards, Power Point, Web research, Web 2.0 Tools, and Microsoft Word, we recommend the technology series which runs on the second Saturday of the month.

The craft of writing is the focus of the third Saturday Seminar Series. Building on the National Writing Project tenet that the best teachers of writing are teachers who write, this series was designed for TCs who want to deepen their understanding of the craft of writing, to improve their own writing or to help students improve their writing. Lynn Hoffman will lead off with Writing the World: Finding Ideas for All Genres of Writing. She will be followed by Jon Anderson (poetry and fiction), Jenny Shaff Jepson (fiction), Dave Polochanin (non-fiction), Jennifer Cameron (playwriting), Stay DeKeyser (young adult), and Karen Romano Young (young adult and fiction). Most craft of writing seminars will run on the third Saturday of the month. All craft of writing seminars will be held in the Stern Lounge of CLAS.

For a complete listing of and details about all of the Saturday Seminars, go to [www.cwp.uconn.edu](http://www.cwp.uconn.edu) and click on "Calendar." Saturday Seminars are scheduled from 9:00 a.m. – noon. TCs, their colleagues, the UConn community, and the public are welcome. The cost is \$40 per seminar, and .3 CEUs will be awarded.

## Calendar of Events: January, 2010

<b>Jan. 5</b>	<u><a href="#">Special Focus Minigrant Applications Due</a></u>
	<u><a href="#">CWP Leadership Council Meeting</a></u> 5pm - 7pm, Storrs Campus, CLAS, Stern Lounge, Rm. 217
<b>Jan. 8</b>	<u><a href="#">Continued Funding Application Due</a></u>
<b>Jan. 9</b>	<u><a href="#">Blogging and the Use of eBoards in the Classroom</a></u> 9am - 12pm, Windham Mills, Computer Lab, 3rd Floor, Admission Fee: \$40
	<u><a href="#">Multigenre Papers: Connecting Students to Content</a></u> 9am - 12pm, Storrs Campus, CLAS, Stern Lounge, Room 217, Admission Fee: \$40
<b>Jan. 22</b>	<u><a href="#">Connecticut Student Writers (CWS) Submission Deadline</a></u>
<b>Jan. 23</b>	<u><a href="#">Teacher as Writer Workshop</a></u> 9am - 12pm, Storrs Campus, CLAS, 163, Admission Fee: FREE
	<u><a href="#">Playwriting: Surprising Possible Places to Find Your Ideas</a></u> 9am - 12pm, Storrs Campus, CLAS, Stern Lounge, Room 217, Admission Fee: \$40

For additional CWP event information, please visit the [CWP Calendar](#).

## Visiting the Mark Twain House, “an invaluable local resource”

(continued from page 8)

invaluable resource, which assisted us in completing research for our lesson plans. This workshop was energizing and motivating.

The year 2010 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mark Twain’s passing. The Mark Twain House and Museum is encouraging all people to reacquaint themselves with his works. As teachers, we are in the perfect position to encourage students, colleagues, friends, and neighbors to read Twain. The Mark Twain House and Museum is an invaluable local resource. They are willing to work closely with teachers and students. Visit them at <http://www.marktwainhouse.org/>. Hartford also contains a wonderful theater, the Hartford Stage, which is very willing to help organize school trips. *Tom Sawyer* will be there in April of 2010. For more information, visit their website at [www.hartfordstage.org](http://www.hartfordstage.org).

The National Endowment for the Arts has many planning guides to help teach American literature and encourage communities to participate in the Big Read Initiative. Communities that have chosen *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* as their Big Read Initiative can use this resource to assist them in teaching the novel: <http://neabigread.org/books/theadventuresoftomsawyer/>. Furthermore, many other American novels are included on this site making it a great teaching resource.

This was the second National Endowment for the Humanities summer workshop I attended and I highly recommend them. You can search for upcoming National Endowment for the Humanities workshops at <http://www.neh.gov/projects/index.html>.

## On the Road in Britain:

### A Conversation With Jon Andersen about his Publication and Book Tour in the UK

*Jon Andersen (SI '09) is an Assistant Professor of English at Quinebaug Valley Community College, and he is the author of a book of poem Stomp and Sing (Curbstone Press 2005), and the editor of Seeds of Fire: Contemporary Poetry from the Other USA (Smokestack Books – UK, 2008). In the summer of 2008 Jon traveled throughout the UK on a book tour with Martin Espada to promote the publication of Seeds of Fire.*

(E-mail interview with Mr. Andersen by Ben Miller)

BM: How did the anthology *Seeds of Fire: Contemporary Poetry from the Other USA* originate? What inspired you to take on such a project?

JA: Not long after Curbstone Press released *Stomp and Sing*, my first full-length collection of poems, I was made aware of a glowing review of the book in *The British Morning Star*. I emailed the author of the review, Andy Croft, who I didn't know at all, and thanked him for his kind words. Andy Croft, it turns out, is not only a superb poet himself, but runs a terrific small press called Smokestack Books. He asked me if I thought it would be possible to put together a collection of politically committed US poetry. I told him that this would be a great project, and when he asked me to take it on, I didn't waste any time saying yes.

BM: When did you begin work on the anthology? About how long did it take to finish and what type of work goes into a project of this kind?

JA: I began working in earnest on the project in early 2006, if I remember correctly, but when I say in earnest, I guess I mean fits of earnest attention, since my family is my first priority, and my teaching is my second priority (although, as any teacher will tell you, our families sometimes suffer for the time and work we put into the profession). At any rate, it took a while – two years, anyway. Jantje Talkien, Bob Smith, and Sandy Taylor at Curbstone were enormously helpful in helping me get in touch with many poets and writers. Also, I knew Martin Espada, and he too was a big help in getting the project off the ground. The process involved a lot of researching, reading, and emails and phone calls. I was reaching out to poets whose work I admired, but also looking for vibrant voices that I knew were out there and hadn't yet come across.

BM: Are there any particular themes in the anthology that were intentionally built-in?

JA: I wanted the anthology to be a broad sampler of various aesthetic approaches and various lived experiences – I wanted to showcase the tremendous technical range and power and approaches to highly charged political topics: war, class oppression, environmental degradation – all of which are, of course, highly charged personal topics since these abstract topics are lived out and through in intimate and physical realities. I guess the theme is one of prioritizing our humanity over our nationality.

BM: It is interesting to note that the anthology is of American authors, yet is published in the UK. Do you think if it was published in the US the reception of the anthology would have been different?

JA: Maybe slightly, but really, England is a parallel universe – close, but turned in slight ways here and there. The poetry establishment in England suffers from some of the same maladies as the poetry establishment in the U.S. – an unthinking tendency to dismiss political poetry out-of-hand, for one, or to accept only that “political” poetry that speaks from an extremely circumscribed set of possible positions. That being said, Martin Espada and I toured England and met very enthusiastic, energized audiences over there. The book also has received favorable reviews on both sides of the pond.

(continued on page 11)

(continued from page 10)

BM: What artists included in the anthology will readers recognize, and who should we be on the lookout for as up and coming talent?

JA: Well, Martin Espada, Grace Paley, Barbara Kingsolver, Adrienne Rich, Sam Hamill, Luis Rodriguez, Joy Harjo— and Pete Seeger wrote a poetic preface for the book. So probably many people recognize those names. As people, not “names,” I found them to be all very accessible and genuine. Then there are the many poets I hope more people will know more about. Rob Whitbeck is a farmer and timber thinner from Oregon who writes very powerfully. Aracelis Girmay is a young poet and teacher from New York City who’s certain to be a rising star. James Scully, Linda McCarriston, F.D. Reeve, and Tim Seibles have all been around for a long time, and are still writing some of the most exciting, unique work I see out there – and they’re all very different. Doug Anderson’s poems are generally breathtaking. I could go on and on.

BM: As a writer yourself, did working closely with the authors included in the anthology change your outlook on writing or influence your writing at all?

JA: The writing is inspiring, and by inspiring I mean compelling, motivating. Poetry can be merely decorative, or introspective, but it can also look, and make us look, outward. Then to take that crazy step to act in a way that makes the world a better place.

BM: Tell me a little about the tour. Where did you go? What were some of the highlights? How was the anthology received?

JA: I went over with my wife Denise Abercrombie – a fellow poet and teacher, and our two sons, Kit and Miles, about a week before the tour started, and visited her aunt and cousins in Scotland. The tour started in Middlesbrough, a depressed working-class city in Northern England, and Martin, Andy, and our family basically caravanned our way south – breaking down at least once along the way – in Andy’s cramped little red Honda and our rental Audi, reading at festivals and libraries. The Ledbury Poetry Festival may have been the highlight of the tour, as it’s the biggest one in England, I think, and we had a spectacular crowd. We finished our tour as guests of the legendary, and just recently deceased, British poet Adrian Mitchell for a reading in London.

BM: It has been over a year now since the book tour. Update me on what has been going on since then with the anthology.

JA: I have been so busy teaching and living, I haven’t been able to promote the book as much as I’d like. A number of contributors came together to do a great benefit reading at the Bowery Poetry Club in New York City for the Middle East Children’s Alliance. I’m hoping to schedule more of those. The book has been picked up by a few classes, and the poets themselves sell the book as they give readings.



BM: Lastly, what are you currently working on?

JA: Right now I’m writing poems, but I don’t see how they might cohere as a book. But most of my writing energy is going into a novel, or series of connected fictions, called *Rage for Me*. The protagonist is a 17 year old working-class kid who has a penchant for writing poems – so it’s mixed genre work. Ken Cormier, Sean Frederick Forbes, and Penelope Pelizzon at UConn, as well as the members of my writing group have been giving me very valuable critiques, as this is sort of new terrain for me. I also received a ton of great feedback from my fellow teachers at the Connecticut Writing Project Summer Institute last summer. I’m tremendously grateful to Jason Courtmanche and everyone at CWP; it was great to have been a part of the institute, and I look forward to many years of working as a teacher consultant.

For more information about Jon Andersen and his publications, please visit:

<http://www.smokestack-books.co.uk/books/andersen.html>,

and

<http://www.curbstone.org/authdetail.cfm?AuthID=151>.

## The Connecticut Writing Project

University of Connecticut  
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
215 Glenbrook Road, Unit 4025  
Storrs, CT 06269-4025  
Phone: (860) 486-2328  
Fax: (860) 486-9360  
Website: <http://cwp.uconn.edu>

### CWP Staff:

Jason Courtmanche, Director  
Sharlene Smith, Program Assistant  
Shawna Lesseur, Graduate Assistant  
Benjamin Miller, Undergraduate Writing Intern

### *Teacher, Writer, Researcher* Editor-In-Chief:

Benjamin Miller

### *Additional Teacher, Writer, Researcher* Contributors:

Denise Abercrombie, SI 2007, "E.O. Smith Writing Center Update"  
Donna Ozga, TC since 1996, "Teacher as Researcher"  
Nadine Keane, SI 2001, "Griswold H.S. Writing Room Rises from the Ashes!"  
Marcia Rudge, SI 2007 "Annie Vinton Publishing Center Update"

**NWP**



Connecticut  
Writing Project  
at storrs

NOW ACCEPTING SUBMISSIONS FOR THE SPRING 2010 EDITION OF TWR!  
PLEASE CONTACT BEN MILLER AT [benjamin.miller@uconn.edu](mailto:benjamin.miller@uconn.edu) WITH ARTICLES OR IDEAS!

## Reconnecting with a Passion for Writing

David Polochanin

After working at the *Providence Journal* for two years after earning my BA in Journalism from UConn, I returned to school, and got my masters degree in education from the University of Hartford. I attended a one-year intensive program to get my certification and masters. I didn't write during this time, and it bothered me. I felt as if I was lacking self expression and, in a selfish way, I missed seeing my byline – I had become accustomed to seeing my byline every day as a working journalist.

This void continued through my first year of teaching. And then I saw on a table in the staff room that the CWP sponsored a Summer Institute. I applied with the encouragement of Carol Virostek, then writing coordinator in Berlin, and got in. That summer experience, while challenging to go through after only my first year of teaching, was a turning point for me. It sparked the writer in me again, and later that fall I wrote an essay for the *Courant* about finally abandoning my childhood possessions (basketball hoop in my parents' driveway, weight set, Matchbox cars, LEGOs, baseball cards). The piece was well received, and I ended up writing five more personal essays to the *Courant* in a very short period of time.

I also began contributing occasionally to the *Courant's* op-ed pages, writing about education topics, when the Red Sox traded Nomar Garciaparra, and observations from having a tag sale, among other subjects. I've probably had about 15-20 pieces in the *Courant* in the last 10 years. (At one point in college, I was a news correspondent for the *Courant*, and wrote from the New Britain bureau and Hartford newsroom.)

A bit after I had re-established my connection with the *Courant*, I began writing columns for the *Boston Globe's* Sunday newspaper, after querying an editor there. Between 2001 and 2005, I wrote about a dozen pieces for the BostonWorks section. All of these focused on work and work-related issues. I tried to infuse humor and real anecdotes in them. One piece, for instance, was about my horrendously messy desk and how I'm totally comfortable with it. I wrote about having to convert from a second shift worker to a first shift worker, why I like to work alone (even though it's not necessarily popular), how I dress the same nearly every day (in a blue shirt and khaki pants), returning to school as an adult worker, returning to work as a teacher after having the summer off, and other topics. What was cool was that the *Globe* ran my email address at the end of my article and readers often corresponded with me.

Some of my work was also published from 2005 to 2007 in the *Christian Science Monitor*. One piece was about bird watching, another about the ceramic Christmas village I've set up since I was a kid, using a record player in digital age. More recently, though, I have written for educational publications, including *Education Week* and *Middle Ground*.

I find the publication process to be invigorating in a different way than classroom teaching. It is personally gratifying, and writing, for me, really gives me a sense of accomplishment. I also find it fun! However, it is not easy to find the time to write often as a teacher for enjoyment, especially during the school year. As an English teacher, I write for and with my classes, but it is not the same as writing poetry for myself, sounding off in an opinion piece, or even writing on my blog [www.the30somethingsuburbanguy.blogspot.com](http://www.the30somethingsuburbanguy.blogspot.com). On my blog, I've posted entries that range from being a witness to an armed robbery, why I need to fix my squeaky stairs, and observations about sports, such as when Pedro Martinez, former Red Sox star, returned this fall to pitch in the World Series.

Because I saw the need for an outlet for creative expression among students, I created a summer creative writing class for middle school students in Glastonbury. Next summer will be the 8th year students have attended the program. As the emphasis in education moves toward assessment and accountability, this course is primarily an enrichment opportunity that provides choice of topics and genres for students. Mostly, though, it gives interested students a place and forum to write in ways that are not measured on standardized tests: poetry, personal and fictional narratives, annotated slideshows, and creative writing methods.

I have the writing project to thank in some significant part for my continued writing. After my first year of teaching, I needed an outlet for writing, and the summer institute allowed me to rekindle my zeal toward the writing process. It put me in touch with fellow teacher-writers, and it honored the writing act. Some educators don't understand that.

For more information on David Polochanin, please visit his blog (website listed above).