

Editor's Notes

Greetings for the last time. Please check out two autobiographies by senior mentors. The articles by our students for this edition are free lance. That is, I gave them no topic and invited poetry if they so chose. Talk about variety? You will find poems deep from the soul and from the heart; poems of longing and despair; of advice and chagrin. There is joy, discovery, and confidence. One article, by a mysterious observer, lectures humans on their foibles. Another writer wakes up to discover he has turned into a tree. There is sincere reflection so mature you'll check to rediscover these are 14-year-old, eighth graders.

Time is spent from the last days of Pompeii to the Civil War to the year 3000 where an egomaniac brags about living forever. One young woman decides to take charge of her life in a fictional drama that is too much like reality. And a thrilling chase finds two young vampires caught between a river and a mob threatening their existence. Plus, there is baseball with reports of Boston's run to the World Series in 2004, and last year's "Rocktober."

Did I mention explosions? There is one and it is horrific, with every detail of its devastation minutely described. Science-fiction? Yikes! *Outsiders* threaten the existence of the human race...by eating it.

There is quite a mix of articles, and beneath these young writers' words is confidence in what they have written and will write. Asked to feed back what they have gained from writing for the online magazine, most students related a new-found confidence and desire to share their work and accept criticism so they could improve. A good number discovered they had lost previous stage fright and could read aloud to an audience, proud of what they had written.

A friend remarked to me that after reading the first two editions he no longer was worried about the future of this generation, and of our country. High praise; deserved. Recently a Pulitzer Prize winning columnist called for a pay raise for both president and congress with the hope that higher pay will attract more intelligent and better educated people. I expect to vote for some in this group of students in the future. The major finding of the 2003 report by the National Commission on writing was this: it is not that our high school graduates can't write, but that they cannot write well. These "critters," as Linda Bartlett lovingly calls them, do write well, exceptionally well, with high school ahead of them still! Amazing.

Working with Linda Bartlett and her “critters” the past two years has been the topper. There may be better times ahead but I can’t visualize them. The students are sponges thirsting to learn and primed to be the best by the best educator I’ve ever met. Linda Bartlett will be retired by the time you read this. She has taught our children for 32 years and has invented a program called Health Quest that teaches students about life. There is no job description for what Linda does, and it’s too bad we can’t bottle her and transport her to every school in the country. But let’s read what the students have to say. The following thank you letter is a composite of key sentences taken from letters to her from her students.

Thank you, Mrs. Bartlett

“I have never had a teacher who is as committed, engaging, and helpful as you. I think you are by far the coolest and most fair teacher I have ever had.

I am amazed and thankful for how you specialize in bringing in guest speakers and programs that I am sure no other teacher could even think about doing. Thank you for your commitment and wonderful teaching. Thank you so much for being such a great teacher. Everybody always tells me ‘There are a few teachers that you will remember all your life.’ Well, you were definitely one of those teachers. One of my favorite things to do in your class was listening for your famous quotes! Some of my friends and I made a sentence from all your quotes. Here it is, ‘Alright gang, now as students of literature and critters whom I love you need to radically shift your paradigm because you are not using more mature formal language.’ I want to personally thank you for having the vision and determination to achieve something close to a miracle. Like a medical doctor who treats any patient crossing his path, you just have to teach any critter who stumbles into your classroom. And that includes an aging writer. You have not just prepared us for ninth grade, but rather for the real world beyond the classroom. But what is most impressive is that you did all of these things simply out of the kindness of your heart. The district didn’t require it; you just wanted to provide us with a better education. Thank you, Mrs. Bartlett, for being a once-in-a-lifetime teacher and mentor. I will never forget you. I think what makes you a great teacher is you are able to bring the best out of everyone. You are the best teacher I have ever had. My paradigm shall be shifted forever along with my writing styles. We all know when Mrs. Bartlett arrives, the learning begins. I have always thought of you as someone who wants to help the Earth and your next generation. I feel bad

for everyone else who doesn't get a wonderful teacher like you. When I'm old, (maybe 150), my great-grandchildren will ask about life before brain intelligence chips, and I'll tell them about teachers, and probably only remember you."

*Love,
Your Critters*

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Bill Ellis