

Editor's Notes – January 2008

This online magazine is made possible by a grant sponsored by the Longmont Council for the Arts. This is the LCA's second grant to me for this purpose and I thank them for giving me this terrific opportunity to work with the young adults in Mrs. Linda Bartlett's Advanced 8th grade Language Arts Class. Anne Schmid, President, and Gretel Wolniewicz, Vice President and my liaison with the LCA, have been enthusiastic and supportive of our work at Sunset Middle School. Thanks also to Peggy Arnold, coordinator of senior programming for Longmont United Hospital's Prestige Plus Program. Peggy brings her senior volunteers to Sunset once a month to create an amazing intergenerational dialogue. As Linda Bartlett describes it, when her students and Peggy's seniors talk, creating a combination of ages ranging from 13 to 60 and better, magic happens. Plus, in this edition we have a "Senior" link to showcase life stories by three of Peggy's seniors.

We are pleased to welcome back Kit Goncharov, our award-winning web master from 2007. Kit has graciously and enthusiastically volunteered to take time out from his busy high school schedule to coach and tutor our two new web masters. Also, thanks to Lauren Daumler and Anne Gostling, for volunteering to be our new web masters.

Finally, thanks to Principal Dawn Macy and her staff. Everyone in the front office at Sunset Middle School is always welcoming and professional in their support of our work on the magazine.

Our online "reporters" this year are all advanced language arts students; they are all good writers who want to be better. To their teacher, Linda Bartlett, they are "critters" who learn from the first that she is an amazing combination of toughness and love. This year Linda integrated significant portions of her Health Quest program into her strict academic curriculum. So, you may find some differences in the essays and stories for this year's critters compared to the 2007 class. These advanced students will be delving into health and stress management issues later this semester.

This edition of essays and stories emanated from the prompt to write about compassion, empathy, and/or respect. These characteristics are generally recognized by educators as important components for a student's maturity and

advancing scholarship. Writers understand that to deal effectively with any subject, whether fiction or nonfiction, one must “get in the shoes,” or perspective, of the person or subject being written about.

The process these students go through to be published is strenuous. They must write to the prompt in a maximum of 500 words, and meet the deadline. Next, they must read their articles to a peer critique group and incorporate ideas and corrections in a second draft. Finally, those papers come to me for editing. I coach all students, some via email, and advise on presentation, language, variety, and flow, the four main components in my definition of good writing. Once the writers polish and finalize their articles, they email them to me and I create a CD to be downloaded into the site by the web masters.

These young writers amazed me with their creativity and imagination. You will find stories about accident victims and the effect on friends. Several wrote of animal cruelty and the need for kindness for all creatures on earth. In historical perspective, one student related the bittersweet story of a young army officer trying to aid Indians along the “Trail of Tears.” Another student identified with the struggle of African-Americans fleeing slavery via the “Underground Railroad” during the Civil War. Other students covered feelings and emotions ranging from a sidewalk beggar to a young girl rescuing a fox kit. And one gifted writer created an entire planet devoted to empathy. In short, their thinking and writing went far beyond the routine, far beyond any self-centered perspective so commonly ascribed to adolescents.

I feel certain that as you read these articles you will find many others that could have been selected for the “feature level.” Choosing those is subjective on my part; every writer earned an A. As a result of the superlative work by Mrs. Bartlett’s “critters,” I made it clear to them that they had definitely passed the test, at least in my book, to be called young adults. These are mature writings, all worthy of publication.

It is a privilege and honor to work with Linda Bartlett. This is her last year teaching and I wish my children could have been in her class. For most of my life I’ve claimed that my own 8th grade teacher was the absolute best. It is an important transitional year for all students, and let there be no doubt that if Linda Bartlett taught your child, he or she was prepared for advanced life.

Bill Ellis