

# Lessons Learned: Summer With the Youngest Writers of SWW

By Ann Stone T-C '06, [astone55@verizon.net](mailto:astone55@verizon.net)

The energy filled the room on the fourth floor of Hawkins Hall in anticipation of parent visits the following day. Student writers worked diligently that morning, scurrying around in efforts to assist me and Miss Gloria in preparing the room for our special visitors. Some of the writers were completing revisions and final copies, while others were assembled in chairs within a small circle, a circle that came to be known as “The Writer’s Friendship Circle.” A few of the children assisted with arranging chairs and hanging final writing pieces on the walls. As the morning drew to an end, I remember thinking how truly lucky I was to have spent these last three weeks with eleven very motivated and talented student writers.

During the school year I am a reading specialist at St. Philip Neri School in Linthicum. In July of 2007, I hesitated somewhat before applying as a facilitator for the youngest writers with SWW. Those of us who are educators can probably relate to my concern. I felt that I lacked a sense of “school mode” during the month of July. Consequently, after accepting the position then meeting and working with these children, I realized that my mind set was all wrong. “School mode” is the farthest thing from the minds of these young writers. Lesson learned.

To my surprise, the insightful journal writing and creative pieces that developed as a result of our mini-lessons flowed freely from the busy pens of these soon to be second and third graders. This small and intimate group of, for the most part, strangers quickly grew into a community of writers whose voices grew as the weeks passed. I can’t help but remember how in control they were of their own writing. There was no “telling” them what to do or what to write because they knew what they needed as writers. Lesson learned.

What I did not realize was how quickly those three weeks would pass, nor did I know how these young writers would refresh and renew my spirit. They inspired me to pick up my own pen that

had been sleeping for what seemed like ages. What I soon found out was that writing with these youngest writers made me want more... but isn’t that often how writing goes?

Once the pen starts walking, it is difficult to stop the momentum so the race begins. Hearing my own voice again was like being reunited with a long lost friend. I remember sharing aloud a particular piece. As I finished reading, the group took a short break as we did each morning, so we headed for the restroom. Kendyl, a young writer who was spending her second summer in our group said to me, “Miss Ann, I loved that piece about your granddaughter.” All at once the whole group was chattering about my piece, and showering me with encouraging comments as well as questions about my granddaughter. What I realized was that my voice spoke to this audience of young writers ... priceless and affirming. Lesson learned.

During the final week of SWW, the young writers counted on one another for help in completing final pieces that would be published in *Discovery*, as well as the pieces that they would share with parents during Visitor’s Day. Now, remember that these children may be young writers, however; they are also children with an innate need to PLAY. The volume in the room was sometimes set at max! Lesson learned.

It was the last Monday of SWW. As I was conferencing with one of the writers, out of the corner of my eye I noticed the desks being moved about into a circle. I heard whispering as Lucie McCarthy, one of our youngest writers was gathering the “Friendship Circle” together. Others joined. Lucie was perched in a yellow chair, not a desk like the others, legs criss-crossed and hands folded with



*Ann Stone (author) and her SWW class.*

journal in lap. She waited patiently as the others squeezed into their respective seats within the tight little circle. There was quiet chattering as Lucie glanced around the carefully constructed circle. She seemed satisfied with the arrangement. What followed was her assertive announcement, “Now, let’s take some time to write our stories and poems, then we can share.” After a few heated discussions within the group, compromise had been reached. Order was in place and writing commenced. As I finished with my conference, I made my way over to Miss Gloria who was conferencing across the room with another student writer. I had to share the experience I had just witnessed. Independence! Lesson learned.

Finally, the day had arrived! The big day that all of the writers had been waiting for, Visitor’s Day. Parents and writers began to meander into the room on the fourth floor of Hawkins Hall. Lisa’s mom had coordinated the breakfast and she was busy at work arranging the food table for all of the guests. Miss Gloria was talking to a few of the parents near the breakfast table. I watched as parents and children were drawn to the walls of the room. The walls that held the lovingly penned writing pieces of these talented writers were now transformed like the careful waiting hands of a new mother cradling her young. The eyes of these young writers beamed with pride as they pointed and chattered excitedly, walking around the room from piece to piece. Their excitement was infectious! Lesson learned.

The time had come for the writers to read aloud. The visitors waited patiently to hear the stories and poems that had been gently woven into the journals of these talented and creative student writers. One by one, they approached their final pieces that had been edited, rewritten, then mounted onto white poster board and accompanied by brightly colored illustrations. Each reading was received with quiet attention which was then followed by a huge round of applause. I am sure the pride in the voices of the writers could be heard throughout Hawkins Hall. As the readings drew to an end, the student writers and their parents began to mingle and converse amongst themselves as they carefully retrieved their works from the walls. Suddenly, Lucie approached me and asked if she could read one last poem that she had written about her experience with SWW. I quieted the

**When Writers Workshop Comes to an End**

When Writer's Workshop comes to an end,  
the friendship in it stays.  
The writers' hearts stay with us, although we go.  
We were always together,  
you just don't know it.  
But if you just think back,  
you'll remember the wonderful times we had together.  
The pencils are restless!  
Soon you will have the urge to pick one up and write,  
like you did when we were together.



group and they quickly reassembled into their seats. Lucie proudly read her poem. Lucie McCarthy will be attending the second grade this fall at Roland Park Elementary School. A special thanks to Lucie and the other talented and

creative writers who taught me that there are always important lessons to be learned ... even from the youngest writers.