

Intern Identity Crisis: Reflections on Our Journey

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Along the way, we found out we could fly and at the same time, encourage others to stretch their wings...

My neighbor Sylvia leaned over the porch railing and called to me—"They're back again - wonder how long they'll stay this time." She was referring to the pair of morning doves that had returned to nest in the wreath hanging on her front porch. A debate ensued as to whether this was the same pair from earlier in the spring, or perhaps offspring of the original pair.

June 23, 2007- Here I was, back again at Walkersville High School, getting ready to embark on my official internship with the Maryland Writing Project. Once again, Amanda Portner and Anita Hairston were there, ready to lead and guide me—this time in my new role as an intern.

June 23, 2007- Super Saturday. It is officially starting. What should I wear? Who cares; it is not about what one wears. But I am an intern and aren't interns supposed to dress a certain way? I suppose not as I have never been in a store that has dedicated an entire section of the store to clothes for interns by erecting a giant buzzing neon sign that indicates: **INTERNS—THIS IS WHERE YOU SHOULD SHOP.** Okay, so it doesn't really matter what I wear, but it does matter that I carry a bag of sorts. Carrying a bag or briefcase signifies importance and competence. Although it does seem rather silly to carry my large black, "professional" bag to house only my journal and a water bottle. My Journal. It's too plain with its royal blue cover. It doesn't look like the journal of a writer. Writers have expensive journals- expensive journals with special paper and beautifully embossed covers. And one final note to self: the cell phone must stay in the car. Don't even bring it into the building. After all, you do not want to be the bungling, preoccupied intern who appears to care more about taking personal phone calls than the serious tasks at hand. Writers and writing project interns must be dignified at all times.

We watched and waited as 2 eggs were laid, hatched, and anxious parents tried to coax 2 reluctant babies from the family nest. This was a stubborn pair, taking their time watching and observing before finally making the leap. Eventually they did leap, as their parents hovered in a nearby tree. Wings flapping awkwardly the pair took flight to a neighboring hedge—not too far, but still away from the nest.

My journey began by observing as Amanda and Anita worked closely with T-C's, offering their suggestions and carefully worded questions; witnessing as they offered their limitless encouragement on personal writing pieces in their unique professional voices. The power of their dynamic is difficult to put in to words. Like parents alternating between praise and

constructive criticism, they are able to provide feedback seamlessly complimenting one another. Along the way, I also ate. I ate because I was uneasy. The two of them had set the bar so high I was afraid I wouldn't be able to jump high enough. Snack in hand; I cautiously began to branch out, meeting with T-C's about their projects and offering my expertise. I took comfort in knowing Amanda and Anita were always close by ready to assist if I was unsure. Anita actually put a pencil in my hand and insisted I write comments on some personal writing pieces. Feeling awkward at first; who was I to make suggestions on someone else's writing? Eventually I found my own guiding voice.

I loved watching a project transition from one of ten ideas to a cohesive presentation. The writing spark the T-C's caught - they couldn't believe they actually became writers -inspirational. My journey this summer was about the process, the growing and taking risks and finding out I am capable.

What an adventure it was! Not only did I have the honor and pleasure of watching this year's group grow and change as writers, professionals, and individuals, I actually facilitated some of that growth and change. The Maryland Writing Project internship afforded me several opportunities that I am not sure I could have had anywhere else. Each morning as I drove to Walkersville High School, I would think to myself: I wonder what I will learn today? Being taken on as an intern gave me with three solid weeks of daily self-discovery.

I discovered a great deal about being a leader. A leader must know when to lead and when to step back and let the group lead themselves. I grew as a teacher and as a professional, and my students will benefit because of it. I learned that constant and honest reflection of a day's work is a requirement for success. But most importantly I learned through this internship that it is not about owning an aesthetically appealing journal, or carrying the right bag; it is about the writing that happens in the journal, the ideas carried around in the bag, and what I was able to do to develop and nurture that writing and those ideas.

The empty nest now waits in anticipation—ready to shelter and nurture and give flight to the next family of doves.



(Standing) Anita Hairston '04 and Amanda Portner '04. (Sitting) Christina McKeever '06 and Amy Watson '06.