



Maine Writes

ANTHOLOGY
2015

MAINE WRITING
PROJECT

Maine Writes

Anthology

–2015–

Editor

Emily Morrison

Editorial Board

Emilie Brand Throckmorton and Deborah Rozeboom

Maine Writing Project
Orono, Maine

Published by the Maine Writing Project,
a site of the National Writing Project.
College of Education and Human Development
at the University of Maine.
Orono, Maine 04469



For more information, please contact

Kenneth Martin, PhD, Director
Maine Writing Project
315 Shibles Hall
University of Maine
Orono, Maine 04469

Copyright © 2015 Maine Writing Project
All rights reserved.
ISBN-10: 1514621266
ISBN-13: 9781514621264

Acknowledgements

We thank Executive Director Elyse Eidman-Aadahl and the staff of the National Writing Project for their steadfast support of the Maine Writing Project and for their devotion and tireless work on behalf of teachers and their students throughout the United States.

We appreciate the continuing support of the faculty and staff of the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Maine, including in particular Deans Susan Gardner and Mary Mahoney-O'Neil, James Artesani, Chair of the Teacher and Counselor Education Department, and the Literacy Faculty of Susan Bennett-Armistead, Rich Kent, Jan Kristo, William Nichols, Ken Martin, Jane Wellman-Little, Mary Rosser, Marcia Boody, Lori Taylor and Dawn Jandreau.

We also thank Phyllis Thibodeau, one of our most ardent supporters at the College. Most especially, we wish to thank our Administrative Assistant, Lisa Daniel, without whom the Maine Writing Project simply could not function.

TABLE OF CONTENTS
2015 Volume II – *Maine Writes*

Introduction..... 5

TEACHER REFLECTIONS

First Teaching Job
CLARE CADDELL 6

There For Me
DOUGLAS “WOODY” WOODSUM 7

Cop to Classroom
JAMES RONALD BILANCIA 9

A Tale of Two Teachers
RENEE DOUCETTE and CYNTHIA DEAN 10

The Class To Remember
DEBBIE STEVENS 13

Age Appropriate
SUSAN DEWEY 15

What If?: A Student’s and a Teacher’s Struggle in an Era of Standards
PAUL FROST 16

On Sharing My Writing With My Students
VALERIE KUHN REID 19

Four Letter Words and Other Things I Have Learned in Middle School
JOYCE BUCCIANTINI 21

POETRY

No Fault
PAMELA MCKENNEY 22

The English Teacher Gets a Lesson in Humility
ANNE BRITTING OLESON 22

Writing	
RUSSELL BUKER	23
Infinity	
RUSSELL BUKER	23
Woes of an Alligator	
KATIE DEXTER	23
Reflections in the Snow	
KEN MARTIN	24
Waterlilies	
DEBORAH ROZEBOOM	25
Lupine Blues the Eyes of the Seer	
DEBORAH ROZEBOOM	25
POTPOURRI	
How to Marry the Right Man	
KIMBERLEY MORAN	26
The Secret	
EMILY MORRISON	29
Leaps of Faith: On Parenting Brave Kids	
EMILIE BRAND THROCKMORTON	31
Diary of Violetta Vulpes, 1989	
CATHRYN BONICA	32
The Voyage	
KARLA DeMARIS	35
Author Biographies	38
Call for Submissions	40
About the Maine Writing Project	41

Editor's Note

I once ate a fortune cookie that said, "Look for others strengths not their weaknesses," and I was reminded yet again of the beauty of my profession. The art of teaching revolves around our ability to focus on what students do well, not on where they fall short. The writers in this anthology live out this fortune every day: they look for the strengths in others and they draw strength from them.

In "Reflections," teachers share lessons they have learned from students while celebrating their achievements. As Woody Woodsum writes, "...the achievements of the strugglers, the slackers, and the class disrupters are equal achievements in my mind, if not more than equal." To be a teacher is to be in a symbiotic relationship: Whether behind the desk or in front of it, with young learners or colleagues, we help each other grow when we reflect on life and learning together.

In "Poetry," poets tackle universal topics: death, life, leaving our mark, the eternal bond between parent and child, the temporal nature of youth, and more. These poems speak to the strengths of our writers and their ability to grapple with weighty content in shortened lines. As Dr. Ken Martin writes, "We are all of us temporary artists." These poems reflect the temporariness of life but also the glory of our endeavors.

"Potpourri" combines personal essays and short fiction. The essays speak to lessons learned outside of our classrooms: relationships take work to make work, love should be spoken and shown, and parenting calls for courage in both parent and child. These lessons have come through personal experience with significant others, with parents, and with children. The essays will touch your heart, and the short fiction will surely have you crying. Characters in these stories survive heartbreak and loss. One story has a happy ending, the other an uncertain future, yet both remind us that life itself is a voyage. As Karla DeMaris writes, "There are calms and storms, and the one is no better than the other."

I am so proud of the work assembled here. I'm proud of the work that went into it, the work that the editors and I have done with it, and the work that you will enjoy reading. These are inspiring pieces from inspiring people. It's been a pleasure and a privilege putting this all together. This anthology speaks volumes to the talented abilities, diverse interests, and shared passion of the teachers who make up the Maine Writing Project. Enjoy!

Emily Morrison
Editor

Director's Message

We are very excited to introduce the new *Maine Writes* anthology of writing by teacher-consultants of the Maine Writing Project. We received so many thought-provoking and emotionally-charged submissions! It is safe to say that our tradition of teachers writing is alive and well. We know that teachers who choose to write – who experience its joy and its struggle for themselves – bring something special to our field and to our students. The selection presented here is but a sample of our dedication to this belief.

Along with our contributors, I want to thank our editorial board led by Emily Morrison and including Emilie Brand Throckmorton and Deborah Rozeboom for their hard work on our behalf.

Ken Martin
MWP Site Director

Teacher Reflections

First Teaching Job

~ *Clare Caddell*

It wasn't my idea. At all. Returning home with a rather impractical degree, I'd applied for a school secretarial position. I knew I could answer a phone and type, given enough time and white-out, while I tried to get some poetry published. But I was offered a different job by the same district: an aide position in the remedial reading program. The director had quite a bit more confidence in this English/Art major than I could feel at the time.

Each day I passed culverts, sheep fields and two real country stores as I drove from one rural town to another that seemed more so. In Pawlet, Vermont, my reading groups and I worked in the basement. In West Pawlet, we worked in the tiny upstairs library. Both were old, barely insulated wooden buildings that now sit empty. But in the 80s, these two-room schoolhouses were filled with students who were cheerful despite their surroundings, and teachers who dressed for warmth and comfort. Floors were dark, uneven wood boards. Windows were the originals, many painted shut. Tucked below staircases were claustrophobic bathrooms, obviously not needed in the original plan. Parking and playground were dirt. Or ice. Or mud.

From the director, I learned how to use, find and make materials to implement the program. But mostly I learned from the kids. Courtney wanted to learn about the solar system. As he made the most incredibly synonymous word substitutions, I learned how hard a child will work to make meaning from text. Penny and Michelle worked together to make a brochure about

babysitting. As we researched, Michelle revealed that words can be well spoken but have no meaning for the reader. I knew if Penny could earn some money by babysitting, she'd spend it on nail polish. I learned how important colorful nails are, especially when your clothing and hair are not washed often enough. Keith didn't have too many interests besides growing up and drilling water wells with his dad. But he did share this secret: he couldn't tell time yet, in fourth grade, and could I teach him that, too? When no one else was around? From Clifton, the artist, I learned that when you shear a sheep, you flip it over and start on the belly. He couldn't tell me why, but I knew I could trust his advice if I ever found myself in that situation. During sugaring season, I learned that Andrew just didn't come to school at all. How could his parents keep him out of school when he was already so far behind? This downstate New York girl had a lot to learn. Maple syrup doesn't flow onto grocery shelves effortlessly. And Billy? I learned that one afternoon, the most important thing I could do for him was save and protect his stub of a pencil until we worked together again. He needed to have a promise kept. He needed to know it would be there the next day. And, maybe, that I would be there too.

These children are long ago and far away, so I haven't changed their names. They were not just struggling readers. They were teachers. Their lesson: that the words they could read became more exciting to me than the words I could write. They changed my plans and gave me a great idea: teach.

Poetry

No Fault

~ *Pamela McKenney*

“Moose,” he said
Over his shoulder
Nodding at the ditch.
And there: a leg,
Sharp curve from hock to hip,
The split hoof
At a curious angle
Pointing skyward,
The swollen sphere of belly
Divided by a dark meridian,
The rest lay hidden
In the brittle grass,
Fading on a gravel embankment.

“Dead,” she said,
But he knew.
Black leather grip
Twists the throttle;
The bike's throaty response shuns
The long line of that leg
Frozen in a languid sprawl,
Exposed, insidious.
Leaning close
His hair stings her face.
Tears trace silky paths
Across the mangled scent of the fast air,
Her jellied spine,
The vibrant motor,
The grasp, the pull, and the lean
Into sudden longing.

The English Teacher Gets a Lesson in Humility

~ *Anne Britting Oleson*

My hands are surprised by the instrument
they discover cradled there, a ukulele—
whose name alone elicits a grin
from the sympathetic, but a snort
from people who take themselves
entirely too seriously.

My left hand especially is clueless,
knuckles contorted in ways
which, were they the whole body,
would resemble yoga positions,
wrists cocked around into impossibility,
fingertips pressed to flat agony.

No sooner does one chord erupt
from the strings, but the song demands
a quick change, and at this point, my first
lesson
snuck in between classes, I'm not an artist.
You could sing along with me if you dared,
open your respectable throat and warble
“He's Got the Whole World in His Hands”
or “Always Look on the Bright Side of Life”
if you could only slow the lyrics to the point
of labor, for look! There's another chord
change
coming up, and my poor hands
are old dogs, and damned if this ukulele
isn't a whole new trick.

The Secret

~ Emily Morrison

I've spent my whole life dreading one phone call. As far back as I can remember, I've always feared my father was going to die of a heart attack.

Six months ago, I received the call I'd spent thirty years anticipating. "There's nothing for you to worry about. Your father and I are in the hospital. He's been having some shortness of breath, and they think he's having heart trouble," my mother said, her voice sounding remarkably normal. To add to the normalcy, my father got on the line and assured me that he was going to be just fine.

"Stay put. I just have an irregular heart beat, that's all. They've got me hooked up to this oxygen tank and the doctors are taking good care of me!" He might as well have said, "The five day forecast is partly cloudy, but hey, blue skies are on their way. Enjoy your day!"

What both my parents were either unaware of or failed to mention at the time was that Dad was in the early stages of cardiac arrest, that he had endured two months of worrisome symptoms, and that he had been coughing up sputum (his lungs were filled with fluid) for weeks.

The next day my mother assured me again that my father would be fine. "The doctors are going to run some tests tomorrow. He just needs to stay here another night because the cardiologist can't see him yet. Don't worry!" She didn't sound as calm this time, and she didn't put my father on.

All was not well, and I knew it. The truth is I had always known it. How could a man with a barrel for a stomach be healthy? As a child, I knew my father loved our family, and I knew he loved his food. We grew up together, his tummy and me. When I was younger, I would purposefully bring my left-overs home for Dad. I'd just give him what I couldn't finish: french fries, hamburgers, grilled cheese, chinese; he didn't discriminate. He loved it all. When friends offered me a piece of candy or gum, I would ask them if I could have an extra piece for my dad. If they weren't feeling generous, I'd just give him mine.

It was unconscious, how I loved him. Nothing big or purposeful. I knew he liked food, and I'm sure my father saw my habitual offerings as one more form of hero worship. And why wouldn't I worship him? A man who sang Elvis Presley songs to his children on his twelve string, who stayed home while we were sick

and made a Christmas tree out of coats in the closet, who took pictures of his kids jumping in the leaves while saying "Abracadabra" to the magical polaroid picture, how could I not idolize him?

After two days of hospitalization, I ignored my parents requests to stay put. I drove to the hospital, spoke to his doctors, pushed for tests he still hadn't received, stayed with my mother while she locked every door and window of their home, and cried in the bathroom. Dad was suffering from chronic heart failure and atrial fibrillation or A-Fib. It was unclear which condition preceded the other, but it also didn't matter. His heart was functioning at only twenty percent (one third of its capacity) and without a new battery of medicine and a major lifestyle change, the prognosis didn't look good.

During three months of pulmonologist, cardiologist, and doctor appointments, it became clear that my parents were not the kind of people who asked questions. Also, they were not the kind inclined to read through the reams of paperwork pushed at them. Side effects for medicines that could adversely interact with each other, what foods to avoid, what blood thinner was best, what warning signs to watch out for, when to weigh oneself, how much to increase the diuretic by if retaining fluid, what a low sodium diet really meant; the research was endless and consuming. I volunteered to be another set of eyes and ears and reluctantly, gratefully, finally, my father let me do the worrying with him. I accompanied him to his appointments, I wrote up questions for him to ask if I wasn't there, and I sent him snippets of helpful information I'd found online.

I was his worst nightmare, and I hope, one of the best champions of his cause. I confiscated all sweets, alcohol, and sodium-filled food and replaced them with biscotti, cranberry juice, and low sodium options. I called him every day and asked him if he had walked twenty minutes and blown into his lung machine three times. I asked him if he went to cardiac rehab and talked with the dietician. My sister tacked a menu book of easy, healthy food options on his cork board and I added to the list. There was no escaping our endless concern, but there was also no escaping our undying love. If my father ever had any doubts how much his life meant to us, he didn't have any now.

It's routine for someone diagnosed with heart failure to wait three months before doctors will try a

cardioversion. As Dad liked to say, “They're going to put the paddles to me! Two thousand volts – clear!” Though he seemed excited to be the recipient of electroshock therapy for his heart, the living will sobered him up. It sobered us all up. With any major medical procedure, there is a risk of fatality. The cardiologist could try three times to get his heart back in sinus rhythm. If during that time something went wrong, would he like to be resuscitated? While I sat between my parents that morning before the procedure, I snuck a peak at the forms. Yes, he wanted to be resuscitated, within reasonable measures.

It's hard to say how I felt sitting there, looking at my two hundred plus pound father, naked, hooked up to wires, covered only by a thin sheet and thinner johnny. I wanted to hold his hand and tell him all the things I had never told him. I wanted to say something profound and poetic that he could take with him in case the worst occurred. I also didn't want to upstage my mother, his wife and best friend. Mom's not a big talker, nor is she overly affectionate. I knew when she said, “See you later, Dave” that I really didn't have much leeway for a long speech. Plus, I didn't have much time. The attendant was ready to take him down the hall.

Then it came to me. Our secret. It's the same secret my father has shared with my sister, her children, and my children, so I suppose it's not much of a family secret. During my adult life, through all of the time I've lived away from my parents, every visit I've made back to my childhood home my father has always found a quiet moment to share his secret with me. Though I've heard it many times, he never tires of telling me and I never tire of hearing it.

“Can I tell you a secret?” my father will ask.

“I don't know. Can you?” I will say back to him. We're usually somewhere in the kitchen, drying dishes or putting food away. He pulls me into a bear hug, or has his arm around my shoulders while he leans in close to my ear. Remarkably, each time he asks, his voice contains the same breathless anticipation it held the very first time he came up with the secret.

“I love you, Bean. I'm so glad you're here.”

Beyond coming up with funny nicknames, my father's ability to love unabashedly is what I most admire about him. The secret, of course, is that his love has never been a secret. For two English teachers (my dad retired ten years ago now) the irony is delicious. His best kept secret is actually no secret at all. I've always known how much he loves me because he has never failed to remind me. Above everything my father has taught me, he has taught me this: love should never be a secret.

In this moment with him, I realized that after all of these years listening to my father's secret, it was time I told him mine. If this was the last time I was to see my hero, there was no other way to sum up thirty-six years of unconditional love than to share my own.

“Dad, can I tell you a secret?” I said to him as his attendant started to roll his stretcher down the hall. He looked up at me with that old look, that look that said he already knew the answer to my question. I could see his eyes well up, and I knew he knew.

“What is it?” He asked with a smile. It was now or never, and I chose now and forever.

“I love you, Daddy. I'm so glad you're here.”

Emily Denbow Morrison (MWP 2012) graduated from Dexter High School in 1997 and went on to study English Literature and Secondary Education at Saint Michael's College in Colchester, Vermont. She graduated with honors in 2001. Emily currently teaches A.P. English Literature at Bucksport High School. After her daughter was born, she began writing her first book, *Investigating the Mysteries of Motherhood*. Two children later, she's still investigating. Emily has a Masters in Literacy and writes a weekly column for *The Maine Edge*. She is an editor of *Maine Writes*, the 2013 and 2015 anthology of the Maine Writing Project. Her work has also appeared on *Lifeback* and in *The New Maine Times*.

Emilie Brand Throckmorton (MWP 2012) is co-chair of the English Department at Bangor High School where she teaches 11th and 12th grade English. She earned her BA in English from University of Michigan, a Masters in Secondary Education and a CAS in Writing and the Teaching of Writing from the University of Maine. She lives in Bangor with her husband Tim, and is mom to Skyler and Reed and step-mom to Hillary and Ellis. She loves running, biking, and swimming and loves being outside. Emilie writes the wellness column for *Bangor Metro Magazine* and the blog *One Mom in Maine*.

Cathryn Bonica (MWP 2013) graduated from the University of Southern Maine in 1992 with a BS in Elementary Education. She is a special education technician at Bonny Eagle High School and is currently working toward certification to teach secondary English. Cathryn is an avid reader and writer, wading through a first edit on a second novel in her spare time—whatever that is! Her first novel, *Far From Kansas*, was self-published through Smashwords. Cathryn lives in southern Maine with her husband, three kids, and a Bullmastiff named Bella.

Karla DeMaris (MWP 2014) lives off-grid in the woods of LaGrange with her husband, Roy, and youngest daughter, Colleen. She has a B.S. in Elementary Education and an M.Ed. in Secondary Education, both earned from the University of Maine in Orono where she is also working toward a CAS in literacy. As an English teacher at Penquis Valley High School in Milo, she works to instill in her students the understanding that they are the authors of their own lives.

Call for Submissions

We hope you have enjoyed reading *Maine Writes* in its new, journal-style format. If you are a teacher-consultant of the Maine Writing Project, we hope you will submit your own writing for future publication.

We welcome all kinds of writing - short fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, essays, and teacher reflections. We would also welcome teacher research accounts related to the teaching of writing.

We do not ordinarily publish prose longer than 3,000 words. We kindly ask that prose writers submit one manuscript for review and poets no more than three poems. Please submit work in Times New Roman, 11-point font, double-spaced, as a Microsoft Word document attached to an email with subject line: "Maine Writes Submission" to emily.morrison@rsu25.org.

We review manuscripts on a continuous basis and will let you know our timeline for editing, resubmitting, and publication when your work has been received.

Give us your best... In addition to this anthology, we are working to publish a collection of our members' favorite writing prompts and activities. These may be your original ideas, or they may be favorites taken from another source. We're not looking for lesson plans, just short ideas, prompts, thought-starters, and activities that can jump-start our own writing or that of our students. These ideas will be spread across pages in a writing journal that we hope to make available to teachers and their students at a minimal cost. If your idea is from another source, please include acknowledgement information. You may also include a brief statement of how you use this idea or why it is so successful. Email prompts to kenneth.martin@maine.edu with the subject line "Give us your best."

Thanks so much for reading *Maine Writes* and continuing to make our publication the best collection of teacher writing in the state!