

Feather Bricks

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Cover Art by Sketch Vektor

Feather Bricks

The Official Newsletter of North Park Theological Seminary's
School of Restorative Arts



<i>Letter from the Editors</i>	2
<i>Dialogue & Discuss</i>	
<i>DeCedrick Walker</i>	3
<i>Antonio "Slim" Balderas</i>	4
<i>Phoenixx</i>	4
<i>Marshall Stewart</i>	5
<i>Wisdom Blvd with Mishunda Davis</i>	6
<i>Get to Know Your Community</i>	7
<i>Mourning our Losses</i>	
<i>Eulogy by Elton Williams</i>	8
<i>Book Review by Ryan Wendt</i>	9
<i>Poetry Corner!</i>	
<i>Jami Anderson</i>	10
<i>Jamie Thomasson</i>	10
<i>Harlem West</i>	10 & 11
<i>Martin Lyons</i>	11
<i>WA Hannah</i>	11
<i>Wendy Denzler</i>	11
<i>Writing Advisor Corner</i>	
<i>WA Manisha</i>	12
<i>WA Gabriela</i>	14
<i>Karen McCarron</i>	16
<i>The Amplifier with Alex Negrón & WA Elaina</i>	18
<i>Artists' Inspirations!</i>	22
<i>Ameerah "AB" Brown</i>	
<i>Sketch Vetor</i>	
<i>Mike P.'s Grammar Corner:</i>	
<i>Special guest Lydia VanderStelt</i>	23
<i>Closing by John E. Taylor, Jr.</i>	26
<i>Staff Shout Outs</i>	27

Table of Contents



Letter from the Editors

Sketch: What Up!?

Phoenixx: We out here kid!

Sketch: Doing this co-editing thang!

Phoenixx: Who'd of thunk we'd be here this year?

Sketch: Thought I'd be editing a graffiti magazine, but I still get to throw my taggin in so I'm good!

Phoenixx: I had to take a break and put a piece in here as well, but I got a few other things to do!

Sketch: You always got a few other things to do 😊!

Phoenixx: I got no time to waste. There's too much change to make.

Sketch: We'll get it done just CHILL!

Phoenixx: You and I both know "chill" is something I rarely use.

Sketch: Ain't that the truth!

Phoenixx: We been going back and forth about this for years. Continuing to move is how I cope and effect change.

Sketch: You just don't have to make yourself so anxious about it. At the rate you going you gon' have a heart attack.

Phoenixx: My Dude, I got this. I got to be the change I want to see. This is precisely why you're the yang and I'm your yin. You chill, I work!

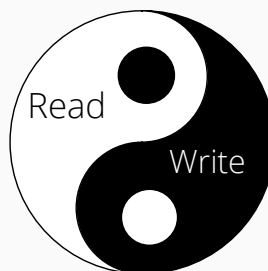
Sketch: I gotta be the change I want to see too, but not in a manic anxious way 😊! I'll get it done chillin.

Dear Feather Bricks Community,

We choose yin and yang as this issue's theme because that's the way we balance life. Work and drive is centered in the yin and chill and relax is centered in the yang. To be honest, that describes the friendship that the two of us share. We've known each other about 12 years, and I (Phoenixx) push him (Sketch) because he teaches me that it's ok to chill and relax.

And I (Sketch) am the self-proclaimed Master of Relaxation and Kickin' It. I am cool under pressure--definitely the person u want to have the ball with seconds left in the game. Phoenixx is driven in a faster pace, and I am driven in a more "chill" pace. Both get the job done. I incorporated the graffiti art style here because I love graffiti. And Phoenixx likes looking at and reading graffiti art. So, I thought this mix would fit us, and maybe a lot of you people, too.

Enjoy,
Phoenixx and Sketch



Dear Readers, Writers, Thinkers,

It is with hope for interconnectedness that we present this 10th volume, under the co-editing yins and yangs of Phoenixx and Sketch. (Having shared space with both of these writers in class and study hall, I attest that as much as they are something special on paper, they are even more so in person.) As SRA students at Stateville yin towards graduation, and those at Logan yang through their 1st year in the program, there is just so much to write about. Read On! -Prof Melissa

Dialogue & Discuss

Feather Bricks apologizes for the error in Ted B. Gray ("Country")'s piece "Stillness and the Bumblebee" in the December/January edition of our newsletter. The phrase on page 14 "3 feet by 18-inch pieces of foundry ready for Iran" should read "3 feet by 18-inch pieces of foundry-ready iron."



Here's a Thought by DeCedrick Walker

Recently a brother and friend of mine, who experienced a sense of legal relief, shared an African proverb with me which says, "In a story, the hunter receives the glory until the lion learns how to write." My brother expressed this powerful thought to me while he and I walked the yard during a cold winter afternoon. Him, having been resentenced and anticipating an updated calculation sheet bearing his outdate, looked relaxed, overjoyed, and vindicated. Having known him for most of the twenty years that he would eventually have to serve, I was fortunate to observe him during different stages of his maturation—of allowing his roar to be heard without the negative effects of the hunter's descriptors as aggressive and dangerous.

Though maturation looks different for everyone, I observed my brother's growth first through his prioritizing of fighting his case by investing and learning the law over against allowing himself to become susceptible to prison politics. The second thing I observed was his entrepreneurial spirit; when he and I had opportunities to talk prior to his resentencing, I was often caught off guard by his ability to monetize things that I generally considered trivial, which indicated to me that illegal means of income would be out of the question if he was released. The third thing I observed was his constant interaction with school. The various college programs here at

Stateville appeared to be confirmation for him with respect to his path of self-actualization; a path to transforming a lion's roar into writing—a legible voice of which he believed belonged to a diverse society.

I share this story because it is a classic example of what slowing down looks like and some of the benefits that come with it. With respect to the benefits, obviously, my friend's legal investment positioned him to be favorably resentenced. His entrepreneurial spirit allows him to envision monetary success beyond the rigid confines of criminality. Lastly, and equally important as the other two, his interaction with education rehabilitated his social credibility to an extent that people will become comfortable with reading and being inspired by the writings of a lion!

Many of the people who are incarcerated have, at some point, slowed down to an extent that they've already incorporated as least one of these three paths to growth and self-actualization. In order for one of these incorporations to be successful, one has to slow down long enough to learn how to start over. To refer back to the African proverb, the lion had to learn how to succeed at something that was fundamentally different to how he was socially viewed and constructed and how he experienced life. So, are there any lions out there?



Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?

by Antonio "Slim" Balderas, NPTS student, Writing Advisor,
and Voice of the Poor and Incarcerated

"We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now..." Martin Luther King Jr. wrote those words in his book *Where do We Go From Here* (1967). We still have a choice today over fifty-five years later: non-violent co-existence or violent co-annihilation. Relatedly today, right now this is still humankind's last chance to choose between chaos or community.

Martin Luther King Jr. spoke out fervently for all the poor, no matter their specific hue or color, for he knew that if color made them different, misery and oppression made them the same. Most black Americans still crave to be accepted by white America, when in reality we as black Americans must accept and forgive white America. In a moving letter to his nephew, James Baldwin wrote about forgiveness on the heels of the 100th anniversary of the emancipation: "The really, really terrible thing, old buddy, is that you must accept them, and I mean that very seriously. You must accept them and accept them with love, for these innocent people have no other hope. They are, in effect, still trapped in a history which they do not understand. They cannot be released from it. White America has had to believe for many years and for innumerable reasons that black men are inferior to white men. Many of them, indeed, know better, but, as you will discover, people find it very difficult to act on what they know. To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger. In this case, the danger is in the minds of most white Americans, in the loss of their identity..." James Baldwin went on to write and explain to his nephew that "These men are your brothers. And if the word integration means anything, this is what it means: that we with love shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and to begin to change it."

Today this title question still remains a most complex concept and thought: the simple facts are the more things appear to change, the more they remain the same. In order to have real equality, white America must come to the reality that they've been living a lie for hundreds of years...we as human beings must demand the change we want to see, live, and breathe. The poor, rich, or middle class can no longer continue to put its head in the sand in hopes that the boogiemer won't see him or her and go away. We must confront racism and bigotry anywhere it exists. The truth about life, world events, and history should need no support, and yet the world's foundation is broken when it comes to Truth or fiction, news or fake news.

One of the ways to help end oppression and systemic racism is by being able to speak truth to power, but the lens and lines are blurred so bad right now that one often doesn't know where the facts and truth begin. We must not continue to be victims of fear, half-truths, or uncertainty. A famous president once opined that the only fear against real change is fear itself. Let's stop leaving the wrong footprints in history. ..Let's stop talking right but walking left like a crooked politician and let's live and operate through the word of God...

The Depths of Me by Phoenixx

Have you ever had so many thoughts running through your head to the point that you barely know where one starts and the other ends?

So many children left to discover on their own how to stop the confusion and chaos that has become their lives.

No one left to guide them left or right, I find myself caught up in my own selfish fight.

Survival of the fittest was the first and only law we were taught, but what do you do once everyone gets knocked?

Slowly others begin to take over as one by one we stumble.

Thought we had it all figured out, that is until the hustle used all the muscle that we had left.

My mother's a fiend, my father thinks he's the king, the oldest sister's got knocked with 30 years to tell a story that can never be told, brothers crumble one by one, where the last sister has given herself to the streets where they've become her pimp and her addiction.

Nothing left to hold on to but pain and regret.

Here I sit with a million what if's, which at the end of the day leaves me completely empty.

***P.S. This is a tale of where I was before I met God and received His forgiveness and amazing grace!**

Chippewa Tribe/Christian Tribe

by Marshall Stewart



(Author's Note: This art reflects what my reservation is called: Lac du Flambeau (French), waswaaganing (Ojibwe), Lake of the Torches (English) as we, Anishinaabe-Bear Clan, use torch lights in the darkness to spear fish. There's a sermon there: using my light in darkness to be a fisher of men.

“...every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb...”

(Rev 7:9, NIV)

During my life journey, I was blessed from infancy to be raised by my adoptive Mexican-American family while never being totally removed from my Indigenous roots as a Chippewa (“Anishinaabe”) tribal member. Nevertheless, throughout my life a cultural void within me metastasized as I often had Anishinaabe questions and often times access to answers only in Spanish. On another front, I was often an outlier—always labeled as an iconic citizen, (white skin, light hair, blue eyes), all the while being the only person I knew truly connected to any First Nation’s People.

Lately, the Restorative Arts section of our Masters in Christian Ministry degree internally prompted me to dig deeper into my Anishinaabe roots due to multiple class projects and papers. This was a reflection point for me as I pooled information from my family on the Lac du Flambeau (“Waswaaganing”) reservation while simultaneously prodding my children to do more than receive American Indian Center (AIC) and Indian Health Services (IHS) benefits. After a short while of mining for details regarding my Indian Boarding School family history and complex Ojibwe language, I surmised that I exhausted my family so much that they blessed me with my Grandmother’s Ojibwe dictionary to augment my SRA work and personal healing from my individual brokenness.

In combination with being bilingual, (speaking-reading-writing in Spanish), prior to my incarceration I taught Greek and Latin root words in medical terminology classes at a local university which has primed me for my 2022 Spirit of the Lord task: to be the first of my generation to translate Scripture into Ojibwe. This is a daunting task as there are hundreds of Native American languages, and dissonance within the Ojibwe language depending on reservations—even those located within the same state (i.e., Wisconsin tribes). By example, Joseph Tecumseh of the Oneida Potawatomi reservation is currently featured at Chicago’s Field Museum in a digital display speaking his Indigenous language. The “Our Ancestors” display at the museum documents how tribal languages in America cannot be coalesced into one language. Additionally, the Potawatomi (Turtle Clan) language is unrecognizable in Ojibwe (Bear Clan) even though they both reside on Wisconsin reservations. This is quite a predicament for Mr. Tecumseh as he is married to an Anishinaabe tribal member...my mother 😊.

As for my inner-man being led by the Holy Spirit. I am unsure where all this Ojibwe translating is headed or how these seeds will grow within me, among others, or for His Kingdom? It becomes clear that the joy I am having spending over an hour to translate a single verse of Scripture for the Lac du Flambeau Chippewa reservation is a gift from God, I pray this blesses you also.

“In the beginning was the Word

Biindemagad iwedi wayeshkad gii áawedi Ikidowan

Idash áawedi Ikidowan gii niij’ayaaw

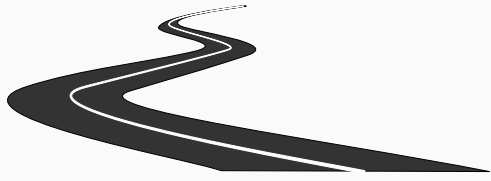
God and the Word

Gizhemanidoo idash áawedi Ikidowan

Was God.” (John 1:1)

Gii Gizhemanidoo. (Ojibwe LDF)

LDF Chippewa Tribal Member &
Always God’s unworthy servant —Marshall Stewart



Wisdom Blvd. *By Mishunda Davis-Brown*

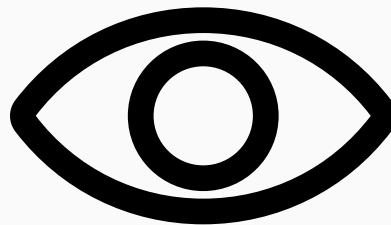
While driving on Wisdom Blvd. to church to share my testimony, the rain begins to pour down. It becomes so bad that I can barely see out of my front windshield. I turn on the windshield wipers but they don't budge. I then slow down to pull over on the side of the road and the approaching car behind me slams into the car which was in front of me. I see both drivers get out to talk, and my wipers begin to work. What? I'm puzzled, but then realize God's divine intervention. I thank Him for His love and infinite knowledge before heading back down Wisdom Blvd.

God tells us that His ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts, which is TRUE. At times, we can't understand why the wipers aren't working or see through the rain, but we know that God is in control and knows why things are or aren't working. Trust in God's understanding through the good and bad in your life and know that he has a plan for our lives, which is better than our plan because as God he has a better view of our lives.

I almost dropped classes a few weeks ago, being swamped in homework. I felt as if I was drowning and couldn't catch up. That night I prayed that God give me a reason to continue and another space where I could concentrate. The next day I received the answers to my prayers: I received a tax refund showing a payment for my tuition, which motivated me to stay in class because I'm blessed to have this opportunity of a scholarship that others don't have. That night, I continued with my homework until I got it down. I also recently moved in a very quiet room. I say learn from me, others, and your life experiences. Also, trust in God no matter how things look and don't give up before the miracle happens. God bless you all, and whenever you feel the need, take a trip down Wisdom Blvd. with me.

Congratulations Benny Rios (who responded to a previous issue's Wisdom Blvd column) and to the rest of your cohort who will soon celebrate a Master's Degree Accomplishment. We are right behind you. Smile.

Jeremiah 29:11 "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with HOPE."



Phoenixx chimes in , "I'd like to include this quote from *The Richest Man Who Ever Lived* by Steven K. Scott":

"Where we have no vision, we lose our direction, our motivation, our joy, our passion, our energy, our creativity, and our commitment. Wherever you introduce a true vision into any area of your life, you gain new energy. You will discover direction, motivation, joy, passion, energy, creativity, and commitment. Defining a vision is an essential component of diligence."

My name is **Jami Anderson** and I am a first-year graduate student in the School of Restorative Arts currently enrolled in Theology, New Testament and the Writing Advisor Tutor Training classes. I am the baby (and only girl) of 5 children. Basically a "tomboy," I wanted a "boy" name like all of my brothers--because, hello, I'm a strong bi-racial woman all about equality, even at 2 years old! Therefore, my friends and family **still** call me James. My birthday just passed (February 8th), and I am a wonderfully young 42. I have 4 sons, 1 step-daughter, 3 granddaughters, and 2 grandsons. Life is a miracle! I love family and the laughter they bring to my life. I spend the majority of my time reading, the rest of the time writing. More than once I've woken up with either a book or a pen in my hand and glasses askew. I read and write to the exclusion of all else. I have to constantly be reminded to eat or leave for appointments. I am also constantly aware of my desire to maintain my walk with God, and in my own imperfect way my relationship with him has grown over the last year. When I am finally allowed to leave these bars behind, I hope to work in some capacity in the legal field. I enjoy music of all kinds and get caught dancing around my cell at least once a week. (Hey! It's aerobic!) Also, I am an alien-enthusiast and also a Star Trek and Star Wars fan!

My name is **Tameka Newson**, but I prefer to go by **Phoenixx**. I love to read a little of everything, and I love to study the Bible and anything medicinal. Both subjects really intrigue me and capture my full attention. I am a first-year SRA student in the graduate program, and my future plan after graduation is to attend to those who most people refuse to converse with. Those who society has thrown away. The characteristics that best describe me are loyal, dedicated, intelligent, daring, altruistic, tenacious, compassionate, and loving. (I cheated--I asked other people.) 😊 I honestly don't know if I come from a big family. My grandparents weren't really part of my life. Most of my life it was me, my four brothers, sisters, mom, aunt, four cousins, and my great-grandmother (R.I.H.)! My passions include God, homeless people, at-risk youth, and kids.

My name is **Sketch Vector**. I am a first-year North Park SRA student, and I like to study history or theology/philosophy and other sciences. I love reading workout or weightlifting books. I'm not happy because I can't go lift weights due to Covid restrictions in here. I also love reading car magazines, especially *Lowrider*, and sports magazines. Unfortunately, they aren't making *Lowrider* in print anymore :-(. I guess you could describe me as someone who is strong in all aspects: a leader, and a person with a great sense of humor. I am also humble and don't like talking about my characteristics--you just have to get to know me :-). My other passion besides weightlifting is art--all kinds of art whether it's drawing, painting, sculpting, writing, and i like using all kinds of mediums, especially spray paint. I am a graffiti artist. My other passion is sports. I am a sports nut. I love EVERY sport. I watch EVERY sport and like knowing players and fighters and statistics and everything. That covers me.
-Sketch

Mourning our Losses: Eulogy by Elton Williams

I don't usually share things like this because I have always felt that my pain was my own; my suffering, my mourning, was my own. And, I wouldn't be sharing this with you all now, except I feel compelled to relate an act of God's grace as displayed after the passing of my uncle, Samuel Lee Ward II, on Christmas evening 2021.

My uncle was an amazing man: a role model to me in so many ways. What I admired most about him, more than his strength, more than his courage, was his indefatigable commitment to family and his uncompromising love for his wife, my aunt, Charlotte Ward. They spent 62 years together, coming to be one in their teens. They loved hard, they loved strong, and they loved forever.

In his later years, my uncle developed a form of bone cancer. He put up a long and valiant fight: his wife, ever-dutiful, struggled by his side throughout. At the last, when the struggle reached its climax, there she was, at his bedside, comforting him. And though we all spent many hours in prayer, hoping for some manner of recovery or respite, this was the moment that God chose to step up and step in, for He made a decision to honor my aunt's devotion, and faith, and care, and love.

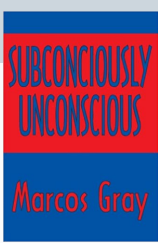
God, who appears to have not only sanctioned, but loved the love that my uncle and aunt shared, moved the heart of attending physician to present her with a copy of my uncle's EKG, a printout showing the moment of his last heartbeat; a symbol of love that, for her lifetime, had been all her own; a tangible reminder of the great gift that God had given them that she might hold in her hand and press to her breast when the flood of memories eventually overcomes what strength remains in her; a final blessing to comfort her through all the days to come.

When she told me of what this Doctor did for her, I cried (I don't cry) and remarked how the story smacked of a Hallmark movie moment. We had a great laugh. Only, this was real life and it happened to real people. Such a love as my uncle and aunt shared, born from the hopes and dreams that reside in the hearts and minds of children from their earliest remembrances, is attainable and, with God at the center, such love can and will endure...



In sympathy, *Feather Bricks* would also like to acknowledge the numerous other losses experienced in our community, including (but not limited to) the passings of parents, siblings, spouses, and peers.





(Available through Amazon, Barnes and Noble and other places where great books are sold.)

MARCOS GRAY'S *SUBCONSCIOUSLY UNCONSCIOUS*

By Ryan Wendt

Throughout *Subconsciously Unconscious*, author and North Park School of Restorative Arts student Marcos Gray explores how African Americans have been historically impacted by racial injustice in this country. From my perspective, Gray offers an accurate telling of this history in his book. His research shows how those Africans who came to the US as slaves and their descendants have been overlooked and mistreated throughout the course of American history. As the reader, I thought that Gray's research and personal reflections were insightful. After reading this book, I wanted to stand up and act out in support for the lives of black and brown people.

Gray's intention for writing this book is to help black and brown people become more consciously aware of how they are impacted by racism in America today. Throughout his book, Gray argues that native Africans and their descendants in this country have been what he calls "subconsciously unconscious" for far too long. They have been impacted by the racist structures that are in place in our country - educational, political, religious, and judicial systems. Gray cites many examples of how African Americans have been affected by the systemic evil of racism in his book. Reading these facts was eye-opening and at times overwhelming for me. Throughout the course of his book, Gray unabashedly speaks up for the racial injustices experienced by African Americans. He shows how racial slavery has played a significant role throughout American history. Marcos Gray reveals how African Americans have been historically mistreated since the inception of this country in 1776, citing some of the documents from our Founding Fathers. He elaborates on how the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution have historically impacted black and brown peoples in our nation.

I thought that *Subconsciously Unconscious* was well-written and revealed many truths. Throughout Gray's book, he conveys his hopes, visions, and desires to see African Americans prosper beyond their economic and sociological positions. Gray offers ideas of how black and brown people can strive to reverse the adversities their communities deal with daily. As Gray tackles the impacts of racism in education, politics, religion, and law, he offers a sound perspective that calls out the systemic evils of these systems. For generations, many African Americans have faced so many racial disparities. They've suffered and been mistreated as a result. In education, for example, many black and brown youth have been mis-educated. Oftentimes, they are overlooked or singled out because of their skin color. This book has taught me that many African Americans have been oppressed and suffered as a result of the racism they've experienced. Americans need to break their silence and repent of our racist history. We've remained complacent for far too long in doing so. When will we confess and truly repent of racism? I believe the time has come.

Doing Time by Jami Anderson

This is not the ideal situation
Choking on waves of frustration.
Everywhere I look are bars.
I may as well be sentenced to Mars.
I wait for darkness to conceal my tears.
I use laughter to ease my fears.
I feel the tightness in my chest
Hoping all this is for the best.

Homesick on Tobin's 10th Birthday by Jami Anderson

This is another layer of my hell.
Tried to call but it didn't go well.
I had too much to say.
I'm sorry for missing another birthday.
I bet he thinks he's won.
Just another moment taken from my son.
I'm hating these tears falling like rain
A new level of this mother's pain.
My thoughts are stormy and gray
Wishing I could be with my sons today.
I'm not trying to pick a fight.
Just want to tuck them in at night.
More things added to the list of things I miss,
A wish. A dream. A good-night kiss.

We are
the forgotten
the mass
of civilization
the forsaken.
We are
all walks of life.
We are
all races.
We are
all human.
We are
not alone
but lonely.
We are
American inmates. -Jami Anderson

Orphans in Uptown by Harlem West

they don't know us
both back alley blues & brick house
let them try and dig us up.
we are prophets
chewing on bullets & the good news
by the green mile we smooch pale grass
& sip sulfur in colored tin cans.
with smiles that swallow sins whole.
we are portraits in etch-a-sketch
loose women living in encore
on the brim of our grandmother's church crowns
between allure & leak and sons
our loved one's rest in fuchsia
& the grills in our teeth.

let them try and dig us up

Behind These Walls by Jamie Thomasson

Behind These Walls visionaries become profound
knowledge may be scarce but creativity is around

Behind These Walls expressions of oneself cannot be
suppressed
although we wish to remain silent, visual expressions
must be confessed

Behind These Walls many skilled artists and Poets emerge
with canvas and brush, paper and pen, desolate Souls
can be heard

Behind These Walls bodies get imprisoned while minds
remain free
mankind learns contentment even blind men can see

Behind These Walls slow death occurs through the
morbid time given
What kills the body cannot kill the mind while we are still
living.

Behind These Walls the prince of darkness kills and
destroys anything he can find
but through God's bestowed strength in me, my light will
continue to shine

Behind These Walls, I may still have to remain
but with God's allocated gift of poetry I can pacify the
pain.

Is this the June We Prayed For?
Harlem West

I have begun to gather that no one may know me this north
of the birdcage under the charmed lense of brick and filth,
this milky fine print
I find no bronzeville bed peace.
here, I am a discounted exhibition
and a sun
many gather around for warmth
free of rent,
or responsibility
for how my walls rot after

Sexuality and Society by WA Hannah

the ebb and flow
the back and forth.
no rest
no true sleep.
seeking validation will get you nowhere.
forging your own path
will only gain you enemies.
some people wonder, "why are people so
hesitant to be themselves?"
they do not consider that being oneself,
expression,
so often results in rejection of one or the other.
express your sexuality freely, and reject society.
or, fall in line and reject your sexuality if it does
not line up with society.
the ultimatum is not always the answer.
within the expression of sexuality, there is
always community, the social aspect.
and,
within society, there will always be a spectrum
of sexuality.

**Sunlight on razor wire atop chainlink
glinting off ice
glittering on steel
a million diamonds 4 my eyes
see Him in it all**

-by Wendy Denzler

Self-Motivation
By: Martin Lyons

Just sitting here brainstorming and doing some
heavy thinking
Looking back to the night my case happened when I
was tweaking
I had many chances and I had multiple opportunities
There were many people in my lifetime who wanted
the best for me

So why would you give that up why wouldn't you
listen
Now you looking real dumb for never paying
attention
This can stain you forever and its not what you
wanted to see
But believe one thing you're not that monster they
painted you out to be

Some of the world will never in life look at you the
same
As long as this is over your head you'll have to
maintain
You have to hope that one day somebody gives you
another chance
That way you can show them who you are when
they glance

Know in this life everything will happen for a reason
You are a good, loyal man that somebody will
believe in
When you have God in your life you can never go
wrong
Even though they claim you got alot of time it won't
be long

Why Should We Collaborate?

by WA Manisha

The word "collaboration" exhibits the means to our very existence. People of all age groups, backgrounds, and environments participate in collaboration, but why? What advantages does collaborating offer to people that working alone can't compare to? Working alone may, at times, lead to feeling unmotivated and limited in creativity, productivity, and our communicative abilities. Since collaboration is used in various environments, it becomes an important skill we carry into the real world. The better we can become at collaborating, the more we will have to offer at our workplaces, to the people around us, and to ourselves. Collaboration is a valuable method of engagement that encourages productivity, proposes the significance of teamwork, and leads to beneficial learning experiences for the future.

Collaboration encourages productivity in an environment where teammates are all working toward a common goal. In an essay titled "Don't Wait: Collaborate!" student Annie Himpelmann demonstrated how collaboration had positively impacted her and her classmate in a course at North Park. She described the methods they used in order to study, and how because they worked together, they were able to discover their strengths and weaknesses. Given their differences in strengths, they were able to balance each other out in terms of covering material. Their collaboration proved to be effective in helping them achieve good grades, which was their common goal. "Many times it is easy to slip into the idea that there will be time later to finish a task, but since we became accountable to one another, we knew we had to do our share of the work on time" (Himpelmann 95). This idea of accountability pushes teammates to bring more to the table, therefore encouraging productivity.

My learning experiences have been very similar to this student's since my best collaboration occurred during anatomy at North Park as well. I had never utilized a study group prior to this course, but I found the idea of sharing a common goal to be very motivating. We often relied on each other's efforts to continue on in our learning process. With the goal in mind of trying our best to understand all the material, we divided up the work amongst each other and diligently found ways to retain the information. We turned to one another when we didn't understand a question from our worksheets, and most of the time, we were able to answer our own questions!

As a writing advisor, I've experienced how the idea of a common goal can be tricky with students since the goal they have set may not be attainable in the one visit they have with me. There is also the concern that the student may refrain from putting forth effort during the visit, and I won't be able to hold them accountable. With the first situation, I've come to realize that any collaboration, whether it be minor or significant, is getting them closer to the common goal of improvement. As for students who are unproductive during their visits, I focus on finding a goal for their paper and aim to achieve it within our time. Once the goal is apparent to me and the student, we are both able to engage and collaborate more effectively. This method helps me maintain a productive environment during collaboration.

Collaboration emphasizes how teamwork can stimulate problem-solving skills, inspire creativity, and allow for better communication among teammates. In the article "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center" Andrea Lunsford expressed how collaboration "would engage students not only in solving problems set by teachers but in identifying problems for themselves; not only in working as a group- but in monitoring, evaluating, and building a theory of how groups work; not only in understanding and valuing collaboration but in confronting

squarely the issues of control that successful collaboration inevitably raises; not only in reaching consensus but in valuing dissensus and diversity.” As a writing advisor, I realize I tend to turn on this problem solving mode within me when I’m working with advisees, and I really tune in to the issues they are facing when completing a draft. Thus far, the concerns have been with understanding the prompt, getting stuck on how to explain a topic, or citing and grammar issues. However, when I work with these advisees, I do my best to redirect them so they can find answers on their own with my support. I allow them to do the thinking to get to the solution, but as a teammate, I try to help them think outside the box. The prompt in my first round of conferences was related to the JT Leroy scandal, where a famous author, Laura Albert, had faked her identity to gain publicity for her work. The essay was regarding whether or not Laura Albert’s fake persona was ethical. I got students to be engaged with finding evidence for both sides, and by researching more on the topic in my own time, I was able to introduce other approaches they could take in writing their argument. During these brainstorming sessions, not only was I inspiring creativity in other students, but their opinions interested me enough to learn more about the issue. Working with my advisees has stimulated creative thinking and problem-solving skills I wasn’t aware I had!

Collaboration prepares us in dealing with the different roles many of us will take on in professional life. It offers us a learning opportunity in sharing knowledge and perspectives with one another. The authors of the book *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors* state, “this means that students learn the ‘skill and partnership’ of re-externalized conversation not only in a community that fosters the kind of conversation academics most value, but also in a community like most students eventually write for in everyday life- in business, government, and the professions” (Fitzgerald & lanetta 329).

As we grow older, many of our learning experiences through collaboration build a foundation for how we navigate our adult lives. Given the different social approaches we have learned from working at the writing center, we understand how to make a topic comprehensible through various means. To work in the writing center gives the advisor and advisees the gift of purpose. Acknowledging that both parties are present to formulate ideas in a cohesive manner builds our skill set for collaborating. With practice, we become aware of the many different scenarios that may occur and how to deal with those issues. This quote expands on the idea that the experiences we are given from working together will benefit our future endeavors by allowing us access to the skills we need to communicate and understand different perspectives. Learning to collaborate professionally will grant many opportunities for potential career options.

The concept of collaboration is demonstrated all around us, from peers studying together to students brainstorming in the writing center to coworkers working in a workplace. In simplest terms, we are able to gain productivity, insight, experience, knowledge, and much more from working together. With collaboration being utilized in our everyday lives, it is crucial to improve this skill so we can continue to share knowledge and learn more from others!

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"Positive Effects of Collaborative Learning despite Possible Difficulties by WA Gabriela

Working with others, whether it be as a class or with partners, is commonly seen in everyday classrooms. From Socratic seminars to lab groups, collaboration is needed in each of these scenarios and others in between. Equal share in responsibility as well as participation within the group is always a potential problem. At times, some students might be doing more than others, therefore negatively affecting the overall group. At other times, all students might be participating and doing their fair share. Overall, active collaborative learning is difficult to achieve, but when done properly is been the most effective way of learning due to the many positive outcomes.

Active collaboration can sometimes be spoiled by "bad apples" found in groups, as presented in "Bad Apple Behavior" by Will Felps, Terence R. Mitchel, and Eliza Byington. There are three types of bad apple behaviors. First, you have the type who never do what they were assigned to do. If you assign certain responsibilities to be fulfilled by the next meeting time, for example, they always find excuses as to why they didn't do it: "Oh, I was so busy this week I just didn't have time" or "Oh yeah I'm not going to lie, I completely forgot to do what we talked about." This type of behavior "violates the team's sense of fairness and takes advantage of the generosity and trust of other team members" (Felps et al., 2006). The inability to finish one's task takes time away from the overall group and instills a sense of mistrust within members.

The second type of behavior that spoils the overall group would be negativity. Nobody likes being around a pessimistic person. Sometimes as you're brainstorming ideas as a group, all this person does is criticize and suggests no alternative options. How would that benefit the overall group? This type of energy then gets passed around, and by the end of the meeting everyone ends up in a bad mood, therefore spoiling the collaborative learning experience. The final type of behavior that could potentially hurt the group would be the type who makes fun of other people, makes inappropriate statements, acts rudely, and embarrasses others (Felps et al., 2006). Most people don't trust others with these tendencies since they show a lack of caring. They clearly don't care about others and their feelings, let alone equal work in a group.

I personally have experienced these types of bad apples when working in groups, especially in High School. Imagine being 16-year-old Gabi sitting in your fifth period history class during your Junior year of High School. Your teacher just presented the final project due for the class and randomly assigns everyone into groups of six. You have no say in who you're working with and who will take part in your overall grade in the class. As you look at the people you were assigned to work with, you can't help but analyze who will do their fair share and who won't. I personally always dealt with the first type of bad apple we discussed: those who don't do their assigned work. These types of bad apples were the reason as to why I always preferred to work on my own. Whenever I wasn't in control of who I worked with, my group's effectiveness would always be dragged down by the bad apples rather than the group helping improve the bad apple's performance (Felps et al., 2006). Since some wouldn't do their fair share, it was up to the rest of us to do extra work in order to finish our presentation. Overall, when working in groups, I have always experienced some type of difficulty when collaborating with others.

Another possible factor that could negatively affect collaborative learning is sensing one person being in charge, acting as a teacher. Andrea Lunsford warns about possible errors to look out for while in a collaborative space in "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center." We want to move away from the idea that the "tutor is still the seat of all authority but is simply pretending it isn't so" (Lunsford, 1991). While collaborating with others, maintaining the status quo between everyone is of ultimate importance. No single person in a collaborative group is more important than another. Sensing someone with more power could potentially water down ideas and erase differences (Lunsford, 1991).

If one person has more say in what's happening, others could, therefore, shy away and keep their ideas to themselves, which is the opposite of what we want to happen when collaborating with others. New ideas should always be welcomed and even encouraged. These are just a few potential difficulties that could arise while learning collaboratively.

WA Gabriela (cont...)

Despite possible difficulties, the positive outcomes that may derive from effective collaboration outweigh the bad. There seem to be far more benefits to collaborative learning than downsides. Collaboration produces a new way of understanding and learning since it doesn't teach new things, but rather alters the way in which things are taught, as presented by Kenneth A. Bruffee in "Peer Tutoring and the 'Conversation of Mankind'" (Bruffee, 1984). Through this new way of working with others, peer tutoring if you will, all students involved benefit from it. Most students' work improves when they get help from peer tutors while the ones doing the tutoring learn more from the students they help (Bruffee, 1984). The social context that is now provided through this new way of learning allows students to experience writing to peers equally as knowledgeable as them. As adults, any type of writing one writes will be directed to those "within the writer's own community, people whose status and assumptions approximate the writer's own" (Bruffee, 1984). Most people are attracted to readings that mirror their own beliefs or are within their shared knowledge. If it were any other way, most readers would be very confused while reading since they would lack the background knowledge needed to understand another's writing. When collaborating with others, those within your group are equally as knowledgeable as you, therefore, creating an adequate space to share notes and ideas.

Another positive outcome derived from collaborative learning would be allowing students to work with others "who are different from them and learn to negotiate power and control" (Lunsford, 1991). Collaboration, as we mentioned before, involves a social component to it. As we work with others, we will eventually run into people who have opinions that we might disagree with. We might also encounter people who do things different from us or learn in a particular way that we had never thought of before. Differences are always good especially in collaborative learning since it could potentially lead to viewing ideas differently and taking a new perspective. Being able to voice your thoughts and take control at times is essential

when working with others and is a skill that will be needed later in life. Contributing to the overall group will benefit every single person involved. Remember that everyone is equal in collaborative learning and everyone's opinion is therefore valid.

When it comes to voicing opinions and giving a different perspective, I personally believe to be good at this. When working with others, listening to their ideas or thoughts is always important. Personally, the more I talk about a certain topic and really think about it, the more ideas I get. As new ideas arise, talking about them with the people I'm working with is something I always do in order to begin building off of each other's thoughts. As we throw ideas around, eventually there's one that we all like and agree with. I try to always be very accepting of others' opinions, whether we agree or disagree. When working with people who are actively collaborating and participating, so much good could be done. There could be so many wonderful ideas in these group settings that could essentially benefit everyone involved.

In conclusion, active collaboration brings about many positive outcomes, despite the difficulties that may come alongside. There are always going to be "bad apples" found in collaborative groups, but learning how to help and work with them could lead to good things. Maintaining the status quo might be difficult at times, but we want to make sure to allow diverse ideas and a safe zone for everyone to speak their mind. Learning to work with others and accepting people's differences is a skill that will forever be needed. All in all, this new way of learning brings about many positive outcomes that are beneficial to all who are involved.

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Response to “Cultivating the Prose Garden”

by Karen McCarron

“Cultivating the Prose Garden” by Elaine P. Maimon made me have a flashback to freshman year in college. My first English Literature class in college was an introductory class in poetry, and my first paper in that class was on a poem on time. I find it somewhat ironic that my 17 year-old self struggled in writing down her thoughts on time, and now I am “doing time”. My teacher for this poetry class was a sophisticated woman working towards her Ph.D. in English Literature. She wore designer clothes, had perfect hair and nails, and was everything that I was not. My first assignment in this class was a typed 5-page paper on this poem on time. I was awkward, nervous, and insecure, so I sought her help during her office hours. On my first visit, I brought my first draft and she “went to town” with her red pen. She “had the tick on her wrist that compelled [her] to mark spelling errors on the first draft.” Her marks were a mixed bag of generative and incisive evaluative comments intermixed with grammar and spelling corrections. I would never call any of these comments “nurturing”, however. I was devastated as I watched her scribble, scratch out, and scar my first page with her red pen. She was brutal in her comments, and I realized then this was bootcamp. Either I would rise to the challenge or I would be rejected. I was completely wiped out when I left her office; I had no interest in writing a second draft. Yet, I forced myself to look at her “suggestions”. By taking each red mark at a time, I was able to create another draft. I returned to her office hours again and again; if she was pleased at my progress, she did not reveal it. Every time she made more red marks; some were slightly contradictory to previous marks. There was still little conversation between us. Sadly, I was used to such cold behavior, as I had a drill sergeant for a mother. My mother’s style left little room for encouraging chit chat, and I was well-trained in the stoic’s way of helping. I never considered going to another individual

for help, and if there was a Writing Center, I did not know about it. My writing improved immensely; however, the process was traumatic. The only positive comments she made to me was in writing on my paper; I did get an “A” on that paper on time.

My background as a biologist and pathologist, as well as my background on how I learned how to write, will influence my approach as a writing advisor (WA). I think more with a scientific, practical mind, and I would like to see the hypothesis quickly. If I do not know what the writer is driving at within two minutes, I can get frustrated. If I am frustrated, I think their professors will be as well. In helping writers on the unit, my main purpose is to help them get a clear thesis statement and to maintain this focus throughout the paper. I agree with Maimon’s view that those with a scientific background have an advantage because they can look beyond the relatively smaller matter of grammar and focus on the greater need of giving advice on how to give the paper movement and a purpose. At the same time, I realize the importance of not stunting creativity that is different than mine. I enjoyed Maimon’s use of gardening metaphors to emphasize the nurturing role advisors play in the process. I have to remember her gentleness and her diplomacy when I feel like getting out my backhoe. There is a drawback to scientific writing in that it is often hyper-focused, lacks dimension and historical background, as well as it is unemotional. In short, scientific writing is dry; directions for hanging wallpaper would be more exciting to read. I have to balance my hyperfocus tendencies with emotion and spontaneity and also to allow my advisees to do the same.

My only difficulty with Maimon’s scenario and her suggestions to her student, Karen, is that it is unrealistic under severe time constraints. Most students come to me the night before with a rough draft that looks very similar to Karen’s.

If I told these students to journal, to explore what key words meant to them and what associations their brains make with these key words, to list, to reread, then to take a position, and finally to reread and sit with that position before writing the body of the paper, I would get the “look”. This “look” conveys that I am either an alien species or have a horn growing out of the middle of my forehead. If I told this to the students that came to me, they would give up and simply not write the paper. I feel the “last minute” students need time management skills, but also need concrete directions to navigate what is a minefield to them. Therefore, I feel Maimon’s technique and advice are “spot on” if there is a lot of time and a lot of interest to spend a lot of time in writing. I feel Maimon gives us little direction when “crunch time” is involved or if the student is “allergic” or refuses to do journaling, list exercises, or needs help in critical thinking. What I do with my “Karens” who come to me the night before is give them concrete hyper focused direction so that the paper can land somewhere in the “C” range within the next eight hours. Does this truly help them learn to write? Maybe not. I have shown them my drafts in all their messiness, my lists, my notes with all their editing marks, and I explain how I “mucked” around with the information. I thought them seeing the process I took would be helpful, and all it created was a look of panic and disgust on their faces. My conclusion is that one must have a desire to learn to write, and implanting that desire in students is difficult.

Finally, I agree with Maimon, writing is messy. Not only are drafts messy, my environment becomes messy with books and papers spewed about. My roommates say I look like I am on crack. Writing is messy mentally, socially, and emotionally. Writing comes in fits and there is always a healthy amount of procrastination which I have learned to embrace. How do we get students to accept this “messiness”? I strongly believe in writing while thinking and overthinking, but how do you get a student with a “lazy” bent to do



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something they view as “extra” work? I am looking forward to learning techniques that will get the student motivated to write, to move beyond tinkering, and start earlier on writing assignments.

I like Maimon’s ideas of a writing folder, doing a self-analysis prior to showing a draft, and giving the reader a question or two to have in their minds while they read the draft. Tasha and I have tried the technique of giving the reader a single question, and I believe it has improved our interactions and deepened our conversations. I think that our papers improved this week with a minimum of psychological damage using this technique. I think the inclusion of ideas for journal writing was interesting, but not entirely necessary. However, I found the “Stages of the Writing Process” by Joyce Gully helpful. Prior to this, I would have never included “sharing” as an important part of the writing process.

The Amplifier with Alex Negrón and WA Elaina



From Alex Negrón:

Elaina makes a great case to expand our goals of being a community that is supportive, diverse, and inclusive considering LGBTQ+ students and their needs in the writing center and on our campuses. They voiced the need to acknowledge their choice of pronouns, creating a space for LGBTQ+ leadership to spearhead the changes needed to be more inclusive and providing a “brave/r” space for LGBTQ+ students to be able to express their experiences that demean their humanity by “perpetrators of discrimination.”

This essay should challenge all members of the North Park community to be better and do better when it comes to seeing the image of God in every person we encounter. It should also challenge us to create the spaces needed to facilitate the healing of those being pushed to the margins of our society. It is then, and only then, we can become the community that was envisioned for us all at the Garden of Eden. Whether we be in Chicago, Stateville, or in Logan, let us use our voices and our writings to challenge each other to be better human beings. Thank you for challenging us, Elaina.

Hear Our Voices: Active LGBTQ+ Leadership in the Writing Center by WA Elaina

A North Park Student’s Story

This semester, Fall 2021 was when I finally made the decision that I would begin sharing that I currently use they, them, theirs pronouns within most of my private circles, at school, and at work. I had even put my pronouns into my professional email signature and next to my name on Zoom. Despite my best effort to be more visible with my pronouns, I was still being misgendered regularly, even in circles where we had all introduced ourselves with our pronouns at the beginning of the year. Most of my professors, and many of my classmates, didn’t refer to me using they, them, and theirs. The possibility of being recognized as a nonbinary person and student seemed to be shrinking rapidly. One of my advisees this semester, however, had noticed that I had written my pronouns on my email signature. Additionally, they expressed appreciation for the optional “Pronouns” question I added to my Calendly form that all of my advisees use for scheduling appointments.

At our very first conference, my advisee shared with me that they were finally relieved to meet another student who was “like them” on campus. It was their freshman year, and I was the first queer person they had met in their time at North Park University. Most of the professors and students they had interacted with up until that point were

outwardly homophobic, and they felt increasingly unsafe being on campus. Hearing that broke my heart. It reminded me of my own experiences as a queer student—particularly the feeling of not being safely visible or seen.

The fact that I could understand their experiences and affirm their identity without question made a world of difference with the writing work we did together. Their essays were written about topics like LGBTQ+ musicians and artists. They felt safe discussing those topics with me because I recognized and responded to their interests in exploring these aspects of their identity through writing. I didn’t avoid them. However, I carried many questions while writing advising for this student. If I wasn’t queer, would we have had an equally productive writing conference? Would I have known how to talk about LGBTQ+ topics with them? If my viewpoint was not nearly as open, what would have happened? I also had on my mind the story I heard about a professor at North Park who made their students write an essay on “why gay marriage was wrong.” It is part of our Writing Center’s mission to be affirming and inclusive of all students, including LGBTQ+ identities. If a student approached me with that paper asking for help, how should I respond, especially as a queer writing advisor?



To answer some of these questions, I wanted to look for stories by other LGBTQ+ advisors who might have already gone through these experiences. This paper will review two pieces of writing that discuss LGBTQ+ writing advisors' experiences in the Writing Center: "Brave/r Spaces Vs. Safe Spaces for LGBTQ+ in the Writing Center" by Jacob Herrmann, and "Queering the Air: Increasing LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in the Writing Center" by an anonymous author (who will be referred to in this paper as "Anon"). Having absorbed and reflected on topics presented by Herrmann, Anon, and other queer writing advisors, it is clear that there need to be more LGBTQ+ stories, writing, and literature highlighted in the Writing Center in order to create a fully affirming and safe working environment for LGBTQ+ students on our campus. Our Writing Center needs to actively discuss the experiences of LGBTQ+ students, and there must be real action taken to create helpful changes. Most importantly, these changes must be led by LGBTQ+ writing advisors. Actively addressing the needs of LGBTQ+ students and advisors will allow for all students to learn about these experiences and apply them to their work at our Writing Center.

The Omission of LGBTQ+ History, Language, and Literature in Academic Discussions

In "Brave/r Spaces Vs. Safe Spaces for LGBTQ+ in the Writing Center," Jacob Herrmann discusses how "little scholarship has directly addressed issues of sexual identity in the Writing Center." When conversations about LGBTQ+ do occur, they "often contain an unconscious heteronormative bias that excludes trans individuals and others of who may not fit into the stringent male/female binary" (Herrmann). Discussion of LGBTQ+ topics in writing and literature continue to be avoided in academic settings, despite efforts to make improvements. For example, it was only just in 2019 that Illinois passed a law, HB0246, requiring that public schools (but not private) implement LGBTQ+ History into U.S. History curriculum, and that students must learn LGBTQ+ history before graduating 8th grade (Leone). Even though the law being established was a big change, it only addressed elementary education. Discussions of LGBTQ+ topics are not

required at the high school and collegiate level. These topics are also still considered "taboo" particularly at institutions that were historically built on heteronormative and patriarchal systems of education.

Regardless of whether the omission of queer topics is on purpose or simply by lack of awareness, it is also understood that people are genuinely afraid of misunderstanding, offending, and or hurting others. There is a sense of hesitancy when it comes to learning about language (pronouns and identities) used to address those who identify as LGBTQ+. Both Anon and Herrmann acknowledge in their works that the term LGBTQ+ itself can be limiting, particularly because the term isn't always used with the intention of highlighting all non-cisgender and non-heteronormative identities equally. Some people are also overwhelmed by the addition of new vocabulary and changing of how certain identities are described. An example of the changes would be the usage of the word "queer." Within some circles in the LGBTQ+ community, the word "queer" has caused controversy because it was formerly used as a slur against LGBTQ+ individuals (Rocheleau). Now, however, many in the LGBTQ+ community have reclaimed it as an umbrella term to describe an identity that is not heterosexual and/or not cisgender.

The language used to address identity in the LGBTQ+ community continues to change and grow, and it needs to be addressed in academic settings and writing as well. Even major academic sources like Chicago Manual of Style, APA, and MLA have confirmed in their guides that usage of the word "they" as a singular pronoun is correct, and that a person's usage of "they" as a pronoun should always be respected (Spaček). Most importantly, it is acknowledged that the privacy of a person's pronouns and identities need to be prioritized, and a person's decision to use (or not use) certain pronouns in certain settings must be respected. Different circles require different degrees of visibility and recognition for many LGBTQ+ people because of safety concerns.

Queering the Air: Increasing LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in the Writing Center by Anonymous*

*The author had requested that their name and any identifying information be removed from the original journal article.

In order for people to feel more comfortable with LGBTQ+ language, there also needs to be education available on why expanding our language is necessary. This is a topic discussed in “Queering the Air: Increasing LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in the Writing Center” by an anonymous author, “Anon.” Anon shares various resources and actions that their university’s Writing Center have tried to implement into their writing center to attempt to be more inclusive towards LGBTQ+ individuals. Anon’s Writing Center has tried to increase support for LGBTQ+ students by implementing things such as a “pronouns” question into the drop-in form and by providing faculty SafeZone group training. Their Writing Center also opened up a writing contest with LGBTQ+ prompts encouraging students to write about queer stories (Anonymous).

These changes did not come without scrutiny, however. Anon tells the story of a student named Mark, who reacted to the newly added “pronouns” question on their drop-in form in a way that “communicated his belief that it was silly, unnecessary that [the Writing Center] ask such a thing of students” (Anonymous). Instead of focusing on the response, Anon’s Writing Center director “skillfully used Mark’s reaction as a way to begin a conversation” about why the question was included to begin with. The purpose of the question was “to welcome all students into [their] center without feeling the need to pass” (Anonymous). Despite the tension Mark created and the sensitivity of the topic that needed to be addressed, the explanation given was concise and straightforward. It also elaborated on the reason behind LGBTQ+ students’ needs for a “pronouns” question and dug deeper, instead of simply targeting Mark’s reaction. Anon’s director steered the conversation in a more open and inclusive direction.

Even with the changes implemented by Anon’s Writing Center, Anon also states that in order to determine if the Writing Center’s attempts to be inclusive are effective, “they would need to hear

LGBTQ+ student voices” (Anonymous). It is ineffective to talk about and create “inclusivity” when the majority of the people creating and having the conversations are not LGBTQ+, and when queer people are not included in these conversations.

Brave/r Spaces Vs. Safe Space for LGBTQ+ in the Writing Center by Jacob Herrmann

Ultimately, queer students know their own needs best, and they should be given the space and encouragement to lead changes. In “Brave/r Spaces Vs. Safe Space for LGBTQ+ in the Writing Center,” Jacob Herrmann discusses the additional challenges that LGBTQ+ students face in academic settings. The needs of queer students are often unaddressed and omitted from discussion. Herrmann discusses and compares what are called “brave/r spaces” alongside “safe spaces” and analyzes the rhetoric that is used to define both of these environments. He discusses the various ways that safe spaces and brave/r spaces are received by the public eye and reflects on the divide that exists between the two spaces in social discourse.

Safe spaces are environments where “the physical and emotional safety of the marginalized individual is the primary concern.” These safe spaces allow students to “discuss, vent, and share encounters with sexist, racist, homophobic, or other types of discriminatory actions or rhetoric” away from the perpetrators of discrimination (Herrmann). Herrmann also discusses how safe spaces have been criticized for failing to “acknowledge the impossibility of removing risk from difficult encounters.” On the other hand, “brave/r spaces,” are primarily focused on “social justice education” and acknowledge that “higher-risk spaces cannot be separated from the institutional and cultural contexts that define them” (Herrmann). In a sense, brave/r spaces may be more action oriented and responsive to opposing viewpoints, rather than focusing on support alone. Herrmann emphasizes, however, that regardless of the criticism and distinctions, the real purpose of both safe and brave/r spaces are to provide environments to empower and respect the voices of people who experience danger simply by being

present in traditional social systems. For anyone with an identity that is not white, cisgender, and/or heterosexual, simply being present in current educational and societal systems already makes them a target for bias and discrimination.

The concept of a Writing Center as a potential “safe” and/or “brave/r space” exists in a unique position because of the communities served by Writing Centers. Writing itself is a medium that encourages and allows for people to express themselves and develop their voices. Through the lens of writing, Writing Centers naturally function as a central meeting point for all educational and academic subjects. Students from all disciplines and areas of study cross paths with each other. The variety of students and subjects that the Writing Center supports makes the Writing Center an ideal place to create safe and brave/r spaces, especially for LGBTQ+ students.

What can we do in our Writing Center?

Along with hearing the experiences of Anon and Herrmann, there are steps we can take to improve how our own Writing Center addresses the needs of LGBTQ+ students. Luckily, our Writing Center has a strong foundation and is already incredibly supportive. There is an openness within our Writing Center that will allow for us to create more resources for LGBTQ+ writing advisors and students. A few students, including myself, would like to start a sub-committee within the NPU Writing Center led by LGBTQ+ writing advisors. We are interested in creating events that are focused on LGBTQ+ topics in identity, writing, and literature. Examples of events would be LGBTQ+ vocabulary and grammar workshops, writing contests, and writing sessions. Our subcommittee will primarily serve as another place on campus for LGBTQ+ leadership and student support, but it should absolutely be open for allies to participate in as well. Collaboration with NPU Queers & Allies (Q&A) would also be excellent because there are many writing advisors who are also a part of Q&A.

By creating a space for LGBTQ+ leadership within the Writing Center, there will be more LGBTQ+ stories, writing, and literature for students to access at North Park. We can actively address the needs of LGBTQ+ writing advisors and students together and affirm that queer students do belong on campus. There is still much work that needs to be done with addressing the needs of LGBTQ+ students in Writing Centers as a whole, but we can start the work within our own Writing Center here.

Additional Reading

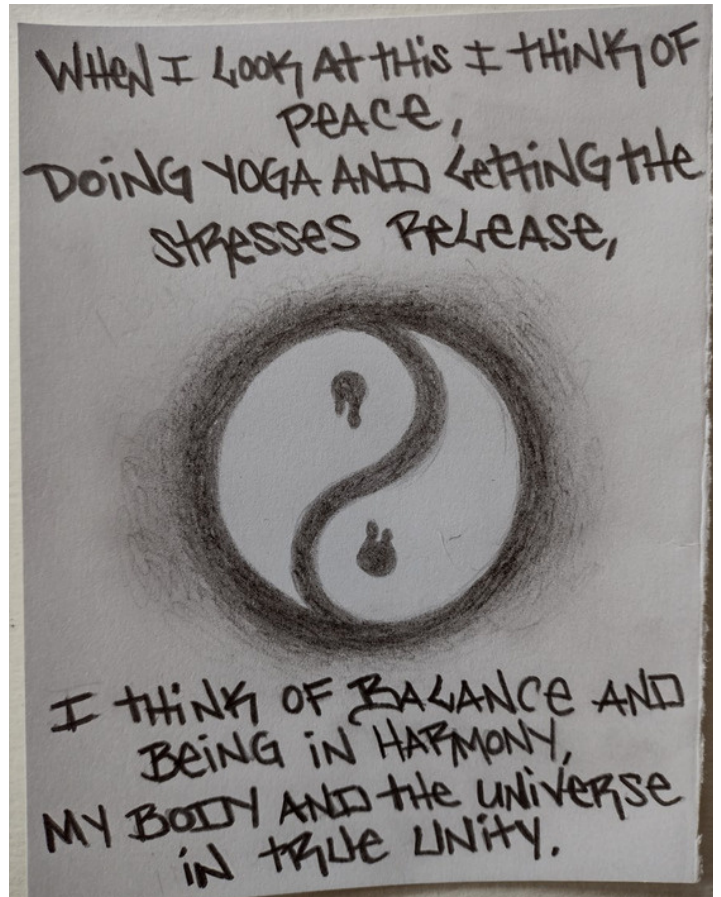
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Ameerah "AB" Brown



Sketch Vector



Ameerah "AB" Brown



Ameerah "AB" Brown

Special Guest & Sermon by Lydia "Lyds" VanderStelt

Ephesians 2:11-22 - As We Remember God, God Remembers Us

I want to invite you to join me in some holy wrestling with the gospel - the good news today out of Ephesians 2 verses 11-22. Before I get to the reading, I want to provide some context prior to the passage to kind of frame what we are wrestling with.

Again, we're reading out of Ephesians which is one of the letters Paul was writing to various churches and communities across Asia Minor while he was incarcerated under Roman rule, and in this book particularly, Paul was writing to the church in Ephesus. Now, Ephesus was kinda popping off. It was a well-developed city with shops and theaters, a giant stadium, temples, and lots to be entertained by. It was set between both a mountain and a sea which meant it was defensible. It was a central hub for both land and maritime trade which meant a lot of money was coming in. Ephesus also was home to a significant Jewish community. The persecution and oppression based on Jewish customs and practices that was experienced in other regions wasn't the case in Ephesus. Both the Jews and Gentiles - were... seemingly comfortable where they were. They were just chilling, comfortable with the walls that were set up or established around and in between them.

But as we know, God often knocks down our walls of comfort to reveal something to us. As we turn to Ephesians 2, I invite you to stand in body or in spirit. And as you are standing, I want you to take a couple of deep breaths inhale.....exhale..... and invite God to knock down any wall of comfort so God might reveal what God has for us today.inhale.....exhale

Again, I'll be reading from Ephesians 2 starting from verse 11:

"So remember that once you were Gentiles by physical descent, who were called "uncircumcised" by Jews who are physically circumcised. At that time you were without Christ. You were aliens rather than citizens of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of God's promise. In this world you had no hope and no God. But now, thanks to Christ Jesus, you who once were so far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Christ is our peace. He made both Jews and Gentiles into one group. With his body, he broke down the barrier of hatred that divided us. He canceled the detailed rules of the law so that he could create one new person out of the two groups, making peace. He reconciled them both as one body to God by the cross, which ended the hostility to God. When he came, he announced the good news of peace to you who were far away from God and to those who were near. We both have access to the Father through Christ by the one Spirit. So now you are no longer strangers and aliens. Rather, you are fellow citizens with God's people and you belong to God's household. As God's household, you are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. The whole building is joined together in him, and it grows up into a temple that is dedicated to the Lord. Christ is building you into a place where God lives through the Spirit." This is the word of God. Let's pray.

God of Peace, you are building us into a place where you reside through the Spirit, so welcome in. We thank you that you see us, you know us, and you love us right where we are. Break down the walls of hostility within our hearts so we may be open to receiving what you have for us today. May it be your love for all that is centered in our hearts and in this space. Amen.

There's this word from the Akhan Twi language in Ghana called Sankofa. And Sankofa means "to go back and get it or retrieve it." Sankofa is often depicted by a bird that is flying forward but looking back as a symbol for going back to the past in order to move - forward - into the future. Sankofa is a practice of remembering.

One of the opportunities that has been offered throughout my undergraduate and graduate education is a 3 day-long bus journey called Sankofa that's focused on learning about and visiting sites key to the Civil Rights Movement. From places like Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma, Alabama to Memphis, Tennessee, pairs of different races and ethnicities reflect together on the deadliness of racism and white supremacy, the pain and trauma that exists as a result, the resiliency of resistance and movements, and our own experience with it all. The goal is to show just how critical of a component racial

Special Guest & Sermon by Lydia "Lyds" VanderStelt, Ephesians 2:11-22 cont...

reconciliation and righteousness through remembering the past is to Christian discipleship as we move forward to pursue biblical justice. Sankofa is a practice of remembering, of going back to go ahead.

I sense that Paul, here, is inviting the believers in Ephesus, in this case, the Gentile believers, into their own Sankofa journey. Paul starts this passage off by saying “remember.” Remember that once you were Gentiles by physical descent. Remember that you were aliens rather than citizens of Israel. Remember that you were strangers to the covenants of God’s promise. Remember how you had no hope and no God.

So why is calling on the Gentile believers to remember? Well, We remember that, all throughout the Old Testament, God had chosen a specific group of people, the Israelites, for a specific purpose. The Israelites were given a set of commandments, also known as the Torah, that they were to keep because this is how they were to live in order to be included in the promises and inheritance made by God. The laws dictated what was considered clean or unclean, what they could eat, where they could go, who they could interact with, as stated in Deuteronomy 26 where it’s written “The Lord has today declared you [The Israelites] to be His people, a treasured possession, as He promised you, and that you should keep all His commandments; and that He will set you high above all nations ... and that you shall be a consecrated people to the Lord your God, as He has spoken.”

This is all what Paul is referring to when he writes about the “detailed rules of Law”. These laws made it so there was a greater barrier, or larger walls, between God’s people and others. The life practices were so different that it would cause frustration and disharmony between the two people groups, the Jews and the Gentiles, because the Jewish people had to follow strict orders while the Gentiles were just chilling. It kind of reminds me of the order of children. The first born child usually has the strictest upbringing and has to follow all these rules and curfews, but by the time the parents get to raising the youngest, they just allow the child to wildin’ out. They couldn’t care less what the baby does or doesn’t do. Both get to participate in the inheritance by being in the blood line, but both their upbringings were different, causing tension between the two.

You see, Paul is inviting the Gentile believers, in this case the “youngest child” to remember that while they were not originally part of the inheritance usually given to the first born, Jesus changes it all. It is through Jesus’ body being broken, innocently suffering the death penalty on the cross, for all believers that the commandments and covenant that was previously made for some believers are no longer applicable.

When we go back to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, we see that the walls of access to the inheritance are now broken down. Those who were, no longer are considered foreigners and strangers. We all have access to citizenship, to this family with God. This is what Paul is urging those in Ephesus to sankofa. This is what he wants them to remember in order to bring ahead.

I’d like to think that, while he was writing this letter to Ephesus, that Paul was doing some remembering of his own. As previously mentioned, Paul was writing this letter from prison. And it wasn’t his first time in prison. In Acts 16, we see Paul and a man named Silas thrown into jail for casting out a woman’s demon. While incarcerated, they sang and praised God in their cells when a violent earthquake came, causing the prison doors to fly open and loosening everyone’s chains. In Paul and Silas’ praising, in their remembering of who God is and what God has done for them despite their current circumstances, God remembered them. God freed them from their captivity. Paul writes this letter to the church in Ephesus with hope that the powers and principalities that established the walls around him will be abolished, because God has already done it before.

Remembering is not always easy. It’s not always natural, especially when your recollection of events past include deep pain, heartache, frustration, not being seen or heard. James Baldwin writes “To accept one’s past—one’s history—is not the same thing as drowning in it; it is learning how to use it.” One place that I believe is learning to use history well is the Equal Justice Initiative, also known as EJI.

Special Guest & Sermon by Lydia "Lyds" VanderStelt, Ephesians 2:11-22 cont...

EJI is an organization started by a man named Bryan Stevenson that is “committed to ending mass incarceration and excessive punishment in the United States, to challenging racial and economic injustice, and to protecting basic human rights for the most vulnerable people in American society.” Part of their work is dedicated to providing resources and educational opportunities for the public and have recently opened up a Legacy Museum and a National Memorial for Peace and Justice. I was recently able to revisit both of these places on the most recent Sankofa trip in October.

The Legacy Museum is a state of the art museum with compelling visuals and an extensive historical walk through of slavery to share-cropping, Jim Crow era and the new Jim Crow, mass incarceration. It includes a tall wall of large jars filled with dirt from the sites of lynchings. The jars have the names of those lynched written on there, and I found myself drawn to begin to read the names on all the jars (there were probably 300 jars). If you just look at the jars of dirt themselves, all you see is 300 lynchings, 300 sites were blood soaked into the soil of injustice. But if you read the names, you bring humanity to that person. It wasn't just about the death of the person, it was about the life. They had mothers and brothers and sisters and fathers and aunties and cousins. They had gifts, skills, talents, passions, dreams and visions. These jars were more than just a call to remember death, but a call to remember life.

Remembering is not always easy. But it is through remembering that we begin to see how God remembers us.

This Peace and Justice memorial sits atop a hill and is in the shape of a giant square lined with hundreds of 5 foot copper columns hanging from the ceiling. You begin to weave around the columns as they are level with you and start to see that the columns contain the places (about 500 counties) and victims of lynchings. As you move forward, you begin to descend as the columns rise above you, representing an untold number of lynched bodies. It's breathtaking and haunting, beautiful yet disturbing. Many of these names on the columns did not have a proper service or burial. Their family members did not have a chance to grieve without fearing their lives. Those at the museum are invited to remember.

Remembering is not always easy. But it is through remembering that we begin to see how God remembers us. Paul and Silas praised God and the prison doors flew open - God remembered them. The 300+ names of those who were lynched were finally displayed with dignity and respect - God remembered them. The untold stories and names behind the hanging columns were finally out for the world to see and take claim of - to learn and move forward with - God remembered them. All throughout scripture, we see broken, forgotten, marginalized people being seen, heard, and remembered by God.

So we, too, just like Paul, can read this passage with the hope that the powers and principalities that establish the walls around us and around you have already been abolished, because God has already done it before and can do it again. We bring with us this gospel-rooted hope that these walls - the thick, cold walls around us and around you - The walls of hostility, the walls of hatred, the walls of exclusion, the walls of segregation, the walls of religious and ethnic superiority, the walls of discrimination - they _ will _ come _ down.

They are abolished because of a poor, barefoot brown Palestinian man named Jesus. Christ the abolitionist. Christ broke down and abolished the walls through his own death and resurrection so that we may move forward centered in peace with access now to this new, reconciled humanity.

As we remember, God remembers us. God doesn't just leave us in shambles, in ruins, with broken walls - God is building something new. Paul talks about this in verse 20 when he writes that “you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”

Isaiah 61 says “They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated. They will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.” With abolition of walls comes restoration, comes reconciliation. The foundation has been laid by those - the apostles, prophets, our ancestors - who have already gone before us.

Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King Jr., Sojourner Truth, Caesar Chavez, Kiyoshi Kuromiya, Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, Michael Brown, Duante Wright, Brandon Bernard, Atatiana Jefferson, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor. Even Rusty and Big Fella, and the other loved ones we have lost. In remembering their names, we see that they are being built into this foundation with Christ as the cornerstone, a dwelling in which God lives by God's spirit. This is our hope. We not only remember our pain and hardships, but we remember time and time again how God delivered for God's people and for us, and so we carry that with us as we move forward, as we remember, as we sankofa.

Remembering is not always easy. But it is through remembering that we begin to see how God remembers us. So, what do you remember about what God has done in your life? How has God delivered you? Who are the names that are being built into your foundation that you are being invited to remember?

At the base of the lynching memorial, under a hundred of hanging columns, the following quote is written: "For the hanged and beaten. For the shot, drowned and burned. For the tortured, tormented, and terrorized. For those abandoned by the rule of law.

We will remember.

With hope, because hopelessness is the enemy of justice.

With courage because peace requires bravery. With persistence because justice is a constant struggle. With faith because we shall overcome."

I often find myself frustrated with the repetitiveness of my prayers, asking God if God is sick of hearing me ask the same things over and over again. But then I think about what God has already and I hold onto that closely to my heart and pray even harder knowing that God has done it before and God will do it again. Maybe not in the timing we want, but as we remember what God has done, we must remember with hope, with courage, with persistence, and with faith that God remembers us too.

Let's pray

God, thank you for remembering us. We would not be here if you did not remember us. Open our eyes to remember how you have delivered time and time again, so we may move forward knowing that you are with us, you see us, and you remember us. In your name, Amen.

Closing: We Did It! by John E. Taylor, JR.



In February, we were in the midst of Black History Month, and by the time we graduate, Black History will be made to say "They did it." Even though Cohort 1 is in our last semester of the Master of Arts in Christian Ministry, it is merely perfunctory that we will successfully complete the required courses this semester for graduation. I am almost certain, many of you at times were in doubt that we would complete all the courses for graduation in 2022, especially with COVID. However, I know as long as Dean/Director/Professor Michelle has breath in her body, she is going to push us to the finish line. There has been too much invested in us not to complete the degree.

My Undergraduate Church History Professor, Dr. Seals, said to our class in 1981, "There are two types of history. First, the history that already exists, and next, the history that is being made." History is being made by us being the first graduating class earning a Master's degree from North Park Theological Seminary at Stateville Correctional Center. It is up to each one of us, how we want history to be written about us after graduation. I remember attending the Black Southerners Conference at Howard University in 1999, when Dr. James Cone was a guest speakers. Dr. Cone said that when a man or woman is given an opportunity to learn, it is one of the most liberating experiences. I can confess that I have been personally liberated from so many things that held me

Closing: We Did It! by John E. Taylor, JR. (cont.)



in captivity intellectually, spiritually, and mentally as a direct result of my experiences with the North Park community. I feel safe to say many of us have been liberated as well from the things we were once enslaved by.

In order to obtain the Master's degree, we have had to put in the work. Honestly, every semester I looked at each syllabus and said to myself, "Lord, how can I do everything required of me?" I'm sure I'm not alone. Somehow, and some way, God is helping us to get through from one semester to another semester. (Yes, Melissa, I hear you, "Give me your thesis of how 'We Did It.'")

In order to accomplish what we have accomplished, we had to let go of some things.

In letting go, we were able to gain the things we had to learn. Lastly, as a result of letting go, to put us in a position to learn, this letting go allowed us to experience liberation.

We had to let go of extensive time watching television. Many of us have been steeped in fighting our criminal cases to get home, and clemencies. Also, some of us have been involved in civil litigation to make our living conditions better. Between our legal challenges and North Park's courses, we could no longer devote as much time to entertainment. One of our classmates said, "North Park's courses have become my entertainment." And we had to become a community. In the model of learning we experienced, we had to communicate with each other so we had to let go of the isolated way of doing time. We could no longer be loners. We could no longer entertain extensive gallery conversations, unless it was about our North Park courses. There were some who cared a lot about what they looked like on the outside, instead of what they are on the inside. We had to let go of being consumed by the self, which meant sacrificing going to the yards and the gym. At first, I used to hear some complaints about missing "my yard." Then later, those who complained about missing yard was enjoying what they were learning, that their learning became the substitute for their yards.

After we were able to let go of those things that had our attention, we were able to learn. In fact, learning became everything. The more we learned, the more we wanted to learn.

My father never went as far in school as I have. He would always remind me when he was alive, "Once you learn something, no one can take it away from you." Many of the things we learned we have been able to put into practice. It is very inspiring knowing that if it was not for the Professors from North Park, we never would have learned the body of work we've learned. To each of them, I am deeply indebted, and I will be eternally grateful for their sacrifices. I believe our ancestors who were denied of such quality education are looking down from heaven and are joining us by saying "We Did It!."

Editors' Note: Inspired by this piece, *Feather Bricks* invites all to submit any pieces related to the theme "Operation Graduation" to our April/May edition and nominates graduating students Scott Moore, Jason Munoz, and Benny Rios to accept roles as co-editors.

THANK
YOU

Staff Shout Outs

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