

Director's Report for Spring 2004

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I don't look forward to attending conferences – even Writing Project conferences if I have to fly to get to them. In fact, for years I wouldn't fly at all. In 1998 when I began my term as MWP director, I didn't realize that flying would be part of the job. The NWP holds its annual meeting concurrent with the National Council of Teachers of English convention in November, and as director of a local site, I am supposed to attend. In spite of my fear of flying, I have now flown to annual meetings in Detroit, Nashville, Atlanta, and San Francisco. I had one year's reprieve in 2001, when the meeting was held in Baltimore.

I'm a much better flyer today than I used to be. In 1998, I couldn't even look out the window and had to be distracted during takeoffs and landings. Now on the surface I appear calm, but inside I'm still a nervous wreck. There's a part of me that understands the folly of hurtling through the air at 39,000 feet in a thin metal tube.



Diane Pinkney and Linda Wharton with Dan Boggan, president of the board of NWP

In November 2003, when we were leaving for the NWP Annual Meeting in San Francisco, I was particularly upset. With torrential rain and high winds, I was afraid that the flight *wouldn't be* canceled and we'd be either caught in a wind shear or struck by lightning or both. I was also afraid that the flight *would be* canceled and we wouldn't make our connecting flight.

Since you are now reading about my experience, you know all of my worry – as usual – was for naught. And this year's annual NWP meeting was – as usual – delightful and illuminating. We had a huge contingent from the MWP in attendance: Del Arnold (Teacher Inquiry), Joe Bellino (English Language Learners and Technology), Linda Wharton, Gina Anazco, Jen Goulston, Diane Pinkney, and Cheryl Foreman (New Teacher

Initiative), Maggie Madden (MSDE), Pam Morgan (NWP Monograph series), Susan Helldorfer, Kathy Jenkins, Tina Watts, and Jennifer Morrison (Southern Maryland STI), Kristina Berdan (Social Action), John Barber (Student Writers' Workshop), Sharon Miller (now of the Southern Arizona WP), Joanne Donovan and Beth Porter from the Eastern Shore Writing Project, and Linda De La Ysla and I, and managed to gather most of us together for our annual MWP dinner out on the town on Friday night.

It was fitting that the NWP conference be held in San Francisco this year. It was thirty years ago that Jim Gray put his idea that teachers are the best teachers of other teachers into practice at the first STI at the Bay Area Writing Project. There are now 175 sites, at least one in every state, D.C., Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The NWP has reached 3,500,000 teachers over the last thirty years and has created a cadre of over 60,000 T-Cs, making the NWP, "The longest lasting professional development project in the history of the world," according to Mark St. John of Inverness Research Associates.

We are proud of the work of our site and were able to showcase that work in a variety of venues. The MWP's New Teacher Initiative study group created a splendid poster to illustrate the work they are doing with new teachers in urban settings. Del Arnold and John Barber presented their ideas on the impact of the Student Writers' Workshop on the teachers themselves. Kristina Berdan continued her work with the Center for Social Action. And there were opportunities for learning as well. I found one session on integrating teacher inquiry into the STI demonstration lessons particularly intriguing.

What I treasure most from this year's annual meeting are two moments that I would never had had the opportunity to experience if I hadn't given myself permission to fly. The first is my yearly reunion with my brother who teaches in Tucson, AZ. We always manage to touch base every day in between presentations, talks, and exhibits. The other is my participation in my first Writing Marathon, in which I got to write my way across San Francisco on a perfect West Coast day, from Union Square to Fisherman's Wharf, stopping in coffee bars, parks, and restaurants to taste the local food, write about my experience, and share my writing with friends I had just made

that day. I can't bring my brother to Baltimore several times a year, but we will definitely have a regular Writing Marathon at our site. (See article by Linda De La Ysla for more information on the Writing Marathon.)

Because the NWP meets at NCTE, I was also able to benefit from what both had to offer. Robert MacNeill of the PBS news show the MacNeill-Lehrer Report spoke at NCTE's opening session, sharing his insights on the changing English language, celebrating linguistic differences. "Language," he said, "is the last barrier to be crossed to erase the memory of slavery." There was also the NCTE book exhibit filled with wonderful freebies and bargains and opportunities for meeting authors and reviewing classroom materials. I always come home with extra bags, filled to the brim.



Barbara Bass



Cheryl Foreman, Joe Bellino, Jennifer Goulston, Del Arnold, and Gina Anazco at the NWP annual meeting in San Francisco

Now I seem to be flying several times a year – my husband noted that if I can fly with the MWP, I can fly with him. He's even invested in a huge wall map, and has been happily filling it in with colorful pushpins while I'm getting to experience places such as Venice, Cape Town, and Mexico City with him. I'm told that the more one flies the easier it becomes. I'll let you in on a little secret, though: it's not true. But I'll let you in on another little secret as well: I'm glad I'm now willing to take the risk. I hope you will consider taking the risk, too, and join the MWP at the 2004 NWP Annual Meeting in Indianapolis.