WITH ACCENT ON THE POSITIVE
By Nancy Hamilton

Recently I attended a plenary session of the Governor's School for the Humanities and observed seventeen year olds. Granted, a couple of them wore their caps indoors (that's a pet peeve of mine), but on the whole these bright, motivated young people represent the hope of our world. As a high school teacher, I deal with teenagers every day. These are my observations when I look at teenagers.

I don't see intolerance. I see four of the "in" crowd boys at "their" lunch table. I see the mousy, overweight girl, whom everyone makes fun of, sit down at their table. I see four boys try to make her feel comfortable and accepted.

I don't see racial violence. I see one white boy run by and bump the only black boy standing nearby and say, "We're playing basketball at Rives at four-thirty. Be there."

I don't see smart mouth. I hear "yes ma'am" and "no ma'am" in class.

I don't see drugs and alcohol. I see boys who lift weights, drink milk, abhor smoking, boys who want to succeed physically and mentally, with no crutch to lean on.

I don't see disrespect. I see a freshman girl who runs up to me at the ball park in June to say, "Hi, Mrs. H., do you miss us?" and a boy, again at the ball park, who almost failed that freshman A P English class, extend his hand to me and say, "How are you doing this summer? I'm working to buy a car."

I don't see indifference. I see football players who shed tears when a devastating affliction incapacitates their coach. I see youth collecting cleaning supplies for flood victims in Missouri. I see Christian Youth hold hands and pray for teachers and students as well as local and world leaders.

"I see seventeen-year-olds who are willing to give up four weeks of their precious summer to go to Governor's School."

I don't see laziness. I see an eighteen-year-old on a farm raising hogs and cattle to finance his college education. I see high school basketball players who maintain A and B averages and play 30-35 games during the season.

And finally I see an athlete whose goal is to play ball at the Air Force Academy. I see seventeen-year-olds who are willing to give up four weeks of their precious summer to go to Governor's School.

***Continued at the top of the page***

In a time when most publicity concerning young people is negative, I like to focus on the positive. I am the eternal optimist who deals with teenagers.

Nancy Hamilton teaches English at Obion County Central High School.

IF STUDENTS WRITE, THEN I MUST READ
By Michael T. Poore

During my eleventh year to teach, I was teaching at Lake Road Elementary School, just outside of Union City, Tennessee. It was that year that I had a second generation student. Imagine how I felt at 32 years old and here was a child of a child I had taught. It was at that moment that I decided I needed a break from teaching. At the end of the year I applied to be a Career Ladder evaluator and was accepted. Now, I would not have to go back to seventh grade and face yet another second generation student.

What I did was to travel the state and evaluate teachers who elected to participate in Tennessee Career Ladder evaluation for Levels Two and Three. What I received was a wonderful opportunity for professional development. I evaluated both wonderful and horrible teachers. But each was able to give me an idea—whether good or bad—that I could carry back to the classroom. I could adapt the method to fit my personality, make it work for me and my students' needs, and do a different job—if not better.

***Continued on page 2***

West Tennessee Writing Project
1994 Summer Participants

Glenda Arant-Martin Jr. High
Clay Barger-Huntington High
Jill Barnett-Briarwood
Phyllis Brasier-Greenfield
Kathy Cassettty-South Fulton Middle
Penny Childrey-Lara Kendall Elementary
Marcia Coleman-West Carroll Primary
Mary Jo Couch-Sharon Elementary
Athalia Donaldson-Martin Primary
Suzanne Edwards-Dyersburg High
Nancy Hamilton-Obion County Central High
Gloria Howell-Hillcrest Elementary
Jo Kathryn Maddox-Union City Middle
Paula Martin-Secondary Education
Pamela T. Moody-Henry County High
Gale C. Moy-E.A. Harold Elementary
Karen Pendegarss-McKenzie Junior High
Suzanne Powers-East Side Elementary
Beth Walker-English Department at UTM

INSIDE! HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN NEXT YEAR'S PROJECT. PAGE 5
If Students Write......Continued

One common thing in all these classrooms was writing. Many of the English and elementary classrooms that I visited those two years had journals (composition notebooks) on the shelves. During the lesson the teachers would often allow for writing time. Some teachers gave topics that may or may not have related to the lesson; some teachers assigned a number of lines to be written. When I asked the teachers how they managed to read or grade all that writing, every one of those teachers responded, "I don't!" Some admitted to placing a check mark in the journal without reading; others counted the lines to see if the students had done what they were told. I knew there wasn't time to read everything that these students were writing, but I thought at least some of it could be read and responded to.

When I returned to the classroom after two years as an evaluator, I had a change of school systems and assignments. (By choice, I might add.) I was hired to teach eleventh graders English at Union City High School. I decided to have the students buy a sewn journal in which they would write every day and have as a memory of their junior year.

I explained to the students that every day they entered there would be a topic on the board--some days their choice; some days my choice. Each day they would have their journals on their desks as they arrived, and for the first 5 to 10 minutes of class they would write. No one asked why, nor did anyone ask about a grade. I wanted the students to practice, practice, practice. One of the reasons that Union City hired me was to focus on writing. The administration felt that the students were not writing enough and, therefore, were not very effective writers. I had decided that while practice might not make perfect, it would certainly bring about improvement.

The first full day of classes I assigned, "Ain't it a fact! Opportunity merely knocks, but temptation kicks the door in, "as the topic and sat at my desk writing while they wrote. I remember writing about the new opportunity I had and how I could drop into the routine of teaching as my work or teaching as my life. That day, motivated by the newness, I read each student's journal and commented on each one immediately after school.

When the students arrived on Wednesday, they noticed the day's topic, "In education the I will is more important than the IQ." on the board. Again I wrote as they wrote.

After school on Wednesdays, my son Jared came for a mid-week visit with me, my wife Rhonda, and Isaac and Caleb, my other two sons, as well as for mid-week services at church. I have always tried to be at his disposal on those Wednesdays. In other words, I was there for whatever he wanted to do, supper, and then church. All of these activities kept me from reading the students' journals on that Wednesday. Thursday morning was a "snooze" alarm day. I arrived at school at 7:45, the assigned time, yet not enough time to read 146 journals before classes began.

As my students entered, they read, "If you wouldn't write and sign it, don't say it," as the day's topic. Once they were at their seats, they turned to yesterday's writing.

Some of them dropped their shoulders, some of them sighed, and some of them remarked, "Oh, you didn't read yesterday's entry!" I explained about Wednesdays and that today I had slept later than usual. Most of them accepted my answer.

But fifth period, Amanda Emmons entered as usual, full of life, bounded across the room to her seat, flipped open her journal, and exclaimed, "Uhhhhhhhh, you didn't read this! If you think it's important enough for us to write every day, don't you think you ought to read it?" I said nothing. She said nothing more. She sat down, and she wrote hurriedly. She wrote that she knew that what I did for her as far as reading her writing was multiplied times 146, but did I know that she had six other subjects for which to prepare. Furthermore, she was involved in band, her church, the Young Civitans, the Drama Club, the Beta Club, the student council, helped her mother at the photography studio, the list went on and on. She said nothing about what I should do for her. When she was finished, she signed it.

I got the message. My life wasn't so hectic that I could not take one hour and thirty minutes every day to read and comment on my students' writing. She was right. From then on, every day that they wrote in their journals, I read and commented. If I had them hand in some other writing for me to read, then we didn't do journals. I, instead, read that paper, paragraph, or essay. I read and commented about their writing in some shape, form, or fashion every day--whether it was in the composition notebook or whether it was turned in on regular notebook paper. I know that I didn't read everything they wrote, but I read something of theirs every day.

What I accomplished, I believe, was at least two-fold. One, I showed them that I cared enough to give them the effort I wanted in return. Two, by commenting on their writing, I created an excitement in them. Each day the students would flip to the previous day's entry to see what I had written to them. Yes, there was a carrot; a comment from the teacher. That caused a new excitement about writing, and writing did improve.

Michael Poore is an instructor in the School of Education at The University of Tennessee at Martin.

WANTED!!!

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The West TN Council of Teachers of English

DUES ARE JUST $10
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Kenneth Newman
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Teachers have had a profound effect on my life. They have fed a curious mind and instilled within me a love of learning. This curiosity and desire for understanding continues within my innermost being today.

Since I hold education and teachers in such high regard, it is ironic that I can remember only small snatches from my elementary and high school years. Even these brief scenes from my early education are inconsistent. I can name my teachers in each grade, what schools I attended, and some of my classmates. Most of the faces are just a blur.

I think back to first grade and remember the "birthday chair." I had to share it with a little boy because the two of us had birthdays over Christmas break. I remember how grownup I felt catching the city bus home and dropping a bus token into the token machine. After all, I was five years old and got to ride the city bus all by myself. Actually there were other children, but my mother was not beside me as she normally was when I rode the city bus. Despite the fact that I was so young and missed twenty-two days of school that year, I accomplished my main goal in first grade. I learned to read although my printing looked lopsided and anemic.

A scene flashes through my mind and I return to second grade. Not only do I see and hear, but I can smell the scene. It was "shot day." In those days the health department would come to our school every year, and I suppose, to all Nashville schools. The pungent smell of alcohol would permeate our nostrils, and all students knew what would soon come to pass. No parental permission required in those days. Nancy, a smart, normally calm girl, was mortified. She panicked, and in second grade we all tried to calm her. This was a brave thing to do since none of us looked forward to lining up for our shots. To add to the terror was the knowledge that they would return for polio, tetanus, tubeyd, but not for terror. I think Nancy got braver over the years or our "bravery" made her feel ashamed. Eventually, Nancy moved to Memphis, and I wonder if their health department descended on her new school like hornets looking for a victim. One thing for sure, "shot day" was much quieter without Nancy.

After all, I was five years old and got to ride the city bus all by myself.

My memories of third, fourth, and fifth grade are like fast forward on a video. Scenes flow by quickly, and I cannot identify the action. My teachers were friendly, and I learned volumes because learning and succeeding were ingrained in me. In third grade we learned cursive, in fourth grade we were introduced to division, and in fifth grade we studied atoms. My fifth grade teacher was a single male, and I imagine all the little girls fell for him. In sixth grade I was in a split fifth and sixth grade class until my family moved. I thought I had moved to the end of the world. No more city bus with bus tokens for I rode a big, yellow school bus. My edge of the county school did have television in the classroom and with this move began an era of public educational television. Subjects such as science, Spanish, Tennessee history, and U.S. history emanated from the talking box. My classmates and I were jubilant when we discovered that the educational TV schedule did not match our class schedule. Thank goodness, we did not have VCRs at that time, or we would not have been able to escape the black and white monotone lecture.

However, in high school I had two very memorable teachers. They were as opposite as could be. One was a large, loud, and chalk-covered math teacher. The other was a sophisticated, quiet, and well-traveled English IV teacher. Their rooms were right across the hall from each other and Miss Sprouse would have to close her door when Mr. Blair erupted into a mathematical tirade. I loved them both, and despite Mr. Blair’s explosive voice, I was never afraid of him. I was afraid of Miss Helen Marie Sprouse although I could listen to her lectures and never grow weary.

Miss Sprouse’s idiosyncrasies would not be tolerated by the public today. We had to write all formal, out-of-class essays with a fountain pen, no cross-outs, no scribbles, and no liquid paper. I doubt that liquid paper had been invented at that time, but if it had, we would have tried it. She would have noticed it and outlawed it. It is possible that one of her students invented it after spending many hours trying to get that perfect page copied. On vocabulary tests if we erased the targeted spelling word, it was wrong. I erased one letter on one test, and she did not catch it! She had courage, and no parent or student questioned her. The first six weeks there was one A and one B out of five senior English classes. The next six weeks there was one A and eight B’s. We wrote that year. Every Monday morning we wrote personal notes to her on 4x6 index cards. We wrote pre’s, topics, book reports, short stories and a research paper. We read and kept up with thoughts from the world around us by reading The New Yorker and The Atlantic Monthly. I basked in it, and I did make at least two A’s on my report card, but they were scattered in with B’s and C’s. She was wonderful, and I admired her courage, intellect, and her desire to make her seniors literate and appreciative of the world of literature.

Those snatches of scenes from my school years seem trite in comparison to their importance. Each year and each impression build to make a total, but it is only a subtotal, because learning continues as I experience life.

Karen Pendergrass teaches reading at McKenzie Junior High School.
ELVIS WASN'T
by Robert Cowser

Beginning my career as a teacher forty years ago gave me a degree of anxiety, though the spectacular view from the windows of the English classroom at Big Sandy High School helped me to cope with that anxiety. When the superintendent interviewed me a month before classes started that year, Huey McDaniel, a senior, showed me the classroom on the second floor of the red brick building. However, we stood only for a moment or two in the hallway, peering into the room darkened by closed blinds. Until classes began, on the Tuesday after Labor Day, I had never looked out the windows in the room where I was to spend the next two years. The school was built on the highest point in town. The windows faced the east and looked out on the bottoms of Big Sandy Creek, a mile or two away. Along the creek grew loblolly pines as well as white oak, hickory, and gum trees.

"Until Alvis—Olvis—whatever his name is—gets his certification, I'm afraid you're stuck with me."

On the first day of classes that fall, I arrived early enough to stand for two or three minutes looking at the blue haze vaguely outlined above the pines. The haze lay motionless, like a blanket of indigo gauze. Though at that time I had never travelled east of the Mississippi, I thought I understood why a certain range in Appalachia was called the Blue Ridge Mountains. The view was breathtaking, particularly because I was accustomed to flat landscapes. Until I moved to Big Sandy, I had lived in various towns located on the stretch of prairie that forms a crescent over the map of Texas.

Soon after I arrived on that first day of classes, Huey McDaniel entered the room. Reluctantly, I turned from the window to give him my attention. When I was hired, the principal asked me to sponsor the yearbook. Huey, who was the student editor, asked some questions about the lay-outs on the advertisement pages. He also told me about an exciting experience he and several other seniors had had the night before.

"Six of us went to hear a band from Louisiana that played in Hawkins last night," Huey said. Hawkins was five miles west, on the highway to Dallas. "There was a rock band from Shreveport performing. They had a lead singer with a guitar who we all—especially the girls—liked a lot. His name is Elvis—Elvis Presley. Have you heard of him?"

"No, I'm not acquainted with many of the pop or rock singers. I did not mention to Huey that I did not own a radio or a phonograph.

"Well, if you get a chance, you should go see Elvis perform. I think his band is goin' to be in Tyler next month," Huey said.

"Maybe I will make the effort," I said, "though I expect to be busy, since I'm teaching five levels of English and sponsoring the yearbook and probably directing the one-act play for the interscholastic contest."

Soon after Huey left the room, the students from the tenth grade came for their English class. It was just before eleven o'clock that the senior class came in. There were twenty names on the roll the superintendent's secretary had given me. Several of the boys wore mischievous expressions, and with body language they reminded me that I was the outsider in the group. There was some difficulty bringing the class to order so that I could call the names on the roll and issue the literature anthologies. Not yet knowing any of the seniors by name except Huey McDaniel, I was at a definite disadvantage.

One girl had sat with her back to me as I called the names on the roll and as two of the boys distributed the textbooks. I soon learned that the girl's name was Carol Ann Lawrence and that she was a cheerleader. Just as I picked up my textbook to begin the lesson, Carol Ann interrupted her animated conversation with the dark-haired girl behind her. Turning herself around so that she faced me directly, she said impishly, "I wish Elvis Presley was our English teacher instead of you." Most of the other students burst out laughing; I was wondering whether the principal in his office down the hall had heard the noise. As some of the students began to make an attempt to curb their laughter, they studied my face intently.

Before I responded to Carol Ann's remark, I glanced to my left out the window nearest the front of the room where I was standing. The September sun had burned off the haze over the pines near the creek, and a south wind that had come up since I had looked out the window earlier was fluttering the leaves on the topmost branches of the gums on the slope near the building. It was an odd sensation to be higher than even the tallest of the pines and yet not be in a plane or attached to a hang glider. The setting was unperturbed by human behavior, good or ill.

Turning back to Carol Ann, I said quietly, "Until Alvis—Olvis—whatever his name is—gets his certification, I'm afraid you're stuck with me. Open your books, please, to page seven, the first page of the introduction to Beowulf."

Thus began the first of approximately one hundred seventy-five meetings with that senior class.

Every morning of that first month at Big Sandy I made sure to arrive early enough to stand at the classroom windows for a few minutes before the first students arrived. Shortly after dawn each day an indigo haze would appear over the tops of the pines, though over the month the leaves on the hickory trees gradually turned to bronze, contrasting differently each morning with the constant evergreen of the pines. Those few moments each day helped prepare me for the unpredictable questions and remarks sure to come from my students.

Robert Cowser teaches English at The University of Tennessee at Martin.
About the West Tennessee Writing Project

The West Tennessee Writing Project is one of 164 affiliate sites of the National Writing Project at the University of California, Berkeley. The goal of the National Writing Project and WTWP is to improve writing and writing instruction in our schools.

The heart of WTWP is the annual intensive writing institute taught as English 700-701 on the campus of the University of Tennessee at Martin each summer. The 1995 summer institute will be conducted June 12–July 7, 1995, four weeks, four days a week, in the Museum of the Holland McCombs Center.

For this summer institute WTWP seeks the best of the best Northwest Tennessee teachers, K-12, all subject-matter areas, to come together to write, to teach each other those pedagogical approaches that lead to good writing among students, to plan for classroom research, and to prepare to become teacher-consultants to colleagues and teachers in area school systems.

Applications for the '95 institute will be available in January. Look for brochures announcing specifics. For more information about the West Tennessee Writing Project, the annual summer writing institute, or consulting in your school system by teacher consultants of WTWP, write or call:

| Margrethe Ahlschwede, Director | Michael Poore, Co-Director |
| Department of English | School of Education |
| 131E Humanities Building | 205B Gooch Hall |
| The University of Tennessee at Martin | The University of Tennessee at Martin |
| Martin, TN 38238 | Martin, TN 38238 |
| (901) 587-7290 or (901) 587-7300 | (901) 587-7126 |

Supporting the West Tennessee Writing Project

The West Tennessee Writing Project welcomes financial contributions to its program. Private giving is coordinated through the UTM Office of Development and the University of Tennessee National Alumni Association Annual Giving Program.

All gifts are acknowledged and gifts of $100 or more qualify contributors for gift recognition club membership.

Checks may be made payable to The University of Tennessee at Martin and designated for the UTM West Tennessee Writing Project. Gifts may be tax deductible for federal income tax purposes.

Mailing address:

UTM Development Office
314 Administration Building
The University of Tennessee at Martin
Martin, Tennessee 38238-5028

WHAT TEACHERS SAY ABOUT THE 1994 WRITING INSTITUTE

"Now I can say, 'I believe in writing...I struggle over my works, changing words and phrases, and even forms, but I still enjoy writing. When I'm riding in the car, I'll see something and think, I need to write about this.' -Penny Childrey, Lara Kendall Elementary

"I want to revolutionize learning in my classroom. I want my students to be in control of their learning. I want them to have literate voices and to write authentically. To accomplish this, I believe that I, too, must develop a literate voice and write authentically. This is my goal for days to come." -Glenda Arant, Martin Junior High School

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The Field Notes of the West Tennessee Writing Project is published twice a year on the campus of the University of Tennessee at Martin. For additional copies, or to add names of educators to the mailing list, please contact WTWP, Department of English, UTM, Martin, TN 38237 (901) 587-7290.

EDITOR OF FIELD NOTES:
LAURA JEANNE CATON
ENGLISH EDUCATION MAJOR AT UTM

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Teaching writing is like putting the pot on to boil:
    have patience, and don't count away the minutes;
    soon their words will rise like steam
    above the heat of their imaginations.

Teaching writing is like watching a child try jumping jacks:
    smile, clap your hands, encourage;
    their words and thoughts will one day sound
    as rhythmic as singing.

Teaching writing is like spilling 64 crayons from the box:
    laugh away the little things, seize the moment;
    sometimes you must get down on the floor
    and color in order to write.

Teaching writing is like playing Hide 'n Seek:
    challenge them, yet be where they can come to you;
    they have a world to explore
    and must find their way with their own voice.

Teaching writing is expecting excellence and giving it in return:
    write with them, share with them;
    because, ready or not,
    here they come.