

Literacy Link

Fall 2009

From the Editors' Desktops



Chris has a wall quilt hanging in his office. His wife is a fiber artist, and she created this piece from abstract shapes of green, white, and black fabric. This quilt hangs next to Chris's desk, which is filled with papers and books piled haphazardly on its surface. The quilt, however, is very carefully constructed, its individual shapes stitched together in neat, clean lines to form an image that is striking and quite beautiful.



We often sit in Chris's office to discuss Literacy Link: to talk about edits to the essays, the layout and organization of the issue, upcoming deadlines, and, of course, the letter from the editors. In these conversations, it's hard not to see this quilt as a metaphor for this publication. After all, our university is filled with faculty who do many things well: in their research, teaching, and service. However, it is seldom that we are able to see the individual efforts of our faculty in a coherent whole, as part of our collective effort to improve not simply our separate classrooms and disciplines, but the university itself. By putting these essays together, we hope we are able to show you not just singular and separate pieces, but a larger sense of the critical work being done across our campus to improve our students' experiences. In short, we hope Literacy Link is able to present an image of ourselves in a larger context, one that, upon reflection, is quite impressive.

In this issue, we are pleased to feature essays by our two of faculty honored by

the university last spring. You will find an essay by Ken Jolly, winner of the Landee Teaching Excellence Award, who discusses his theory of teaching in "Practicing Praxis" along with "Asking the Right Questions," by David Karpovich, winner of the Earl Warrick Award for Excellence in Research, who explores the benefits of working with students on research projects. We also have Mike Mosher's "Facebook—For Classroom, Community, and Communication," an insightful and timely discussion of Facebook as a pedagogical tool, and Joe Jaks's "The Power of the Pen To Protect and Serve," which argues the importance of strong writing skills for criminal justice majors. Jamie Wendorf, an SVSU junior

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majoring in English and Spanish, gives us the student perspective about a recently developed literacy initiative at SVSU linking SVSU students with Hospice patients.

We hope you enjoy the issue.

Sincerely,

Helen and Chris

Practicing Praxis



Ken Jolly

Associate Professor of History, 2009 Landee Teaching Excellence Award winner

I had a close friend in college who was studying for a degree in engineering as I was studying for my degree in history. When we studied together, he would pore over his equations and tap unsteadily on his elaborate calculator with tiny rubbery keys; each key had a different complicated symbol stamped upon it that always reminded me, somehow, of the symbols for the band Led Zeppelin. Across the table, I would sit hunched over with my highlighter marking “thesis,” “sources,” “historiography,” “social location” in the margins of my own text. We often discussed our very different experiences in our very different classes, which seemed to be preparing and training us to enter very different worlds.

Often after going out together for a drink or burger and receiving our bill, my friend, with pride and a sense of superiority registering on his face, would instantly snatch the bill from the table. He’d close his eyes and, before I had a chance to swallow the last remaining warm inch in my glass, casually proclaim the precise amount we should leave for the tip, sure

to include in a self-assured aside the exact change rather than simply rounding up to the whole dollar. It was during moments like these when my friend would exhale and, with a sympathetic cock of his head, inquire why I would ever want to earn a degree in something as abstract, impractical, and inapplicable to daily survival as history. Surely after witnessing his display over the tip, I would come to my senses and quickly join him in studying for a degree that was practical, productive, and useful.

I very much enjoyed my friend’s company and was usually more amused than annoyed by his displays of mathematical acumen. Nevertheless, I remained unaffected by his displays and nudging because the utility and application of history had already been revealed to me, and I had already been convinced that this application and practice was indeed at the center of my work.

It was in my Africana Studies courses where I met similarly convinced students and professors who operated in the classroom with a purpose and goal of applying and implementing the course material in practice. It was in these classes where I interacted with professors and students who located themselves, personally and professionally, within the tradition of the activist scholar, and where I discovered the challenge of praxis.

According to activist scholar Manning Marable, “African-American Studies

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is essentially at its core the Black intellectual tradition, the richly diverse body of interdisciplinary scholarly research and creative works by people of African descent" (17). To this end, Marable identifies three elements central to Africana Studies. Firstly, Africana Studies is corrective in that it "challenges and corrects a false historical record deliberately constructed to perpetuate Black oppression and white privilege" (17). Secondly, Africana Studies is descriptive in that it "presents new details and advances greater understanding, knowledge, and appreciation for the lives of Black people" (17). This element, as Marable notes, "starts with the central assumption that people of African descent have been the principal actors in the making of their own history" (18). Additionally, Africana Studies is prescriptive in that it "aims to construct models or paradigms designed to empower Black people in the real world" (18). Put simply, Africana Studies is prescriptive because it produces new ideas and knowledge not merely designed to interpret the world, but to change it. Moreover, Marable asserts, "there is a practical connection between scholarship and struggle, between social analysis and social transformation" (18). Finally, Marable explains, "the purpose of scholarship is more than the restoration of identity and self-esteem; it is to use history and culture as tools through which people interpret their collective experience, but for the purpose of transforming their actual conditions and the totality of the society all around them" (18).

It is in this tradition that I developed myself personally and professionally, and in this tradition that I hope our students develop. Certainly, these three elements shape my pedagogy with particular emphasis on praxis—theory in practice. It was my own mentors, peers, and the models of Imhotep, W.E.B. DuBois, Ida B. Wells, Manning Marable, and many others who demonstrated the power of history, the place of historical knowledge in one's personal and group identity formation, and the use or application of historical study and examination in

the elevation and awakening of one's consciousness to inform, empower, and shape one's actions for the sake of our communities.

My teaching philosophy emphasizes individual and group empowerment through the study of our world, past and present. Just as my mentors demonstrated, teaching and learning is a social process that occurs inside and outside the formal classroom. This dynamic should aim to actively engage students and facilitate their own empowerment. To this end, my teaching emphasizes initiative and experience, self-assertion, and self-determination to ultimately awaken and support our students' consciousness and agency. Maulana Karenga defines agency as "[t]he capacity and will to act ... to make history, create culture and address critical human concerns in a meaningful and successful manner" (4). It is thus my goal as a teacher to awaken the consciousness of those engaged in the Black Studies program at SVSU through critical study and analysis of African American experiences.

This is the "tip" I've calculated to give my friend the next time we go out for a burger and a beer. It is important to recognize how we were both moved as students, inspired to ask questions and seek out knowledge about our world that we both considered critically important and useful. We need our engineers as much as we need our historians. All of us strive to find purpose and application in our work, and translate those ideas into our classroom teaching.

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Teaching and learning is a social process that occurs inside and outside the formal classroom.

Asking the Right Questions—One Key to a Successful Research Project



David Karpovich

Professor of Chemistry, 2009 Earl Warrick Excellence in Research Award winner

One of my favorite activities as a faculty member is working on research with students. This is a time where students learn to search for answers that aren't available from textbooks, the Internet, or their professors. Instead, they search for new knowledge by applying chemistry fundamentals to answer important questions. They find this process to be enlightening, challenging, and even uncomfortable at times—all good things.

There are many reasons why students participate in research. Excitement, challenge, and experience are a few of them, and they often choose a research topic based on their personal interests. For instance, many students from farming communities enjoy working on the chemistry of bio-fuels and finding uses for the by-products. When asked about her research on bio-plastics, for example, student Sarah Lockwood noted that her research provided “a connection to my farm family culture.” Similarly, I've had students with an interest in outdoor activities pursue environmental chemistry research in the local watershed. Indeed, many

researchers like to work on projects that serve a larger purpose.

As a professor of chemistry, I have the responsibility to help students embark on research that is intellectually robust and relevant to the field. And as researchers, my students have the responsibility to perform an unbiased and scientific study. That includes searching the literature for prior work, performing controlled experiments, processing data, and interpreting the results using sound scientific explanations. As important as all of this is to the development of future scientists, it cannot be fully effective for either the students or science unless the right questions are asked.

Consider this example: “How do we show that the lake is contaminated with substance X, and how do we show that company Y is liable?” I've been asked similar questions by many, including scientists, citizens, politicians, and activists. The apparent larger purpose in such questions (protecting the environment in this case) is sometimes used to add a mask of validity. You've

Call for Papers

The editors of Literacy Link invite members of the campus community to submit articles for review and possible inclusion in the Winter 2010 issue.

Articles may address a variety of literacy practices including such topics as teaching strategies, activities, and research; critical thinking; writing across the curriculum; or book reviews. The editors are especially interested in how literacy is defined by different disciplines, how professors use literacy in their various classes, what professors expect of student writing, what professors encounter in student writing, and how students respond to literacy expectations.

Articles for Literacy Link should run 500 to 1,500 words in length. Authors should follow either MLA or APA format.

Submit articles to

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Submission deadline for the Winter 2010 issue is February 20, 2010.

heard things like “Why wouldn’t you want to protect our environment?” and “Think of your children’s future!” before. Of course, we care about the environment and our children’s future. But the problem with the question about substance X and company Y is that it invokes considerable bias before any research begins. It assumes that the prerequisite event of contamination has occurred and that the guilty party is known, neither of which may be true. Research, however, doesn’t have to be founded in bias, and this fact is where I find many teachable moments for my students.

Let’s look at how to start a project like this properly. For brevity, let’s assume there is a reason to be concerned about the lake, and it is based on valid observations. Perhaps someone witnessed the illegal dumping of hazardous waste, or a water quality parameter was out of the normal range during a routine test, and those observations included some connection with substance X, which has known hazards. Whatever the reason to ask it, a valid and unbiased question would be “Is the lake contaminated with substance X?” Compared to the original question, this one is concise and unbiased. The next step would be to collect samples, perform a chemical analysis for substance X, and compare the results to standard conditions (other lakes, past measurements, regulations, etc.). If the answer is “no,” then further studies on substance X are not necessary. If the answer is “yes,” we ask the next question.

The next question would naturally involve the source of the contamination. A valid and unbiased question would be “What are the possible sources of substance X?” Again, compare that to the original question, which assigned blame. Substance X could occur naturally, be produced by many companies, and/or be used widely near the lake. By considering all possible sources, we eliminate the obvious bias involved in pointing to one party without supporting data. The next step is to make appropriate

measurements, collect data, and interpret the results. All of this could lead to further questions, and the process would need to be repeated.

Because I’ve seen some poorly designed research studies lately, I now emphasize to my students the importance of asking the right questions more than ever before. Although each step of the scientific method is important, an initial testable hypothesis (the question) following an observation can frame the rest of the study. And although our projects have goals that may involve a larger purpose, we can’t let that affect the interpretation of the results. The primary goal is to find the correct answer to our question regardless of its implication to the larger purpose.

This approach is not only beneficial in scientific research, but also in many areas of life. Think of all the important life decisions that students (and all of us) have to make. Rather than wondering about the right thing to do, we should formulate objective and insightful questions that can remove uncertainty. For instance, replace the question “What should I do?” with “If I do X, is Y likely to happen?” There could be a series of questions simply by changing Y, and the answers could be used to help determine a good answer for the larger question of “What should I do?” Just like scientific principles, hard facts and fundamental truths should not be ignored in life. Personal experience and history can be used in the same way scientists use literature to find prior results. And just as controlled experiments are designed to test hypotheses, action may be necessary to find out what may actually happen in each case. Eventually the big picture will take shape, but to be framed properly, it must start with the right question, something from which all our students, no matter their discipline, can learn.

Eventually the big picture will take shape, but to be framed properly, it must start with the right question, something from which all our students, no matter their discipline, can learn.

Facebook—For Classroom, Community, and Communication



Mike Mosher

Associate Professor of Art/Communication & Digital Media

As we all know, MySpace and Facebook are immensely successful social spaces. They make use of participants' own text, graphics, audio, and video, as well as various mini-applications that humorously evaluate, rate, and compare the user and her or his preferences to others. Recently, I've found these social spaces encroaching upon the classroom, and I've realized these sites don't just have to be about socializing.

For example, I taught Art 433: Community Mural Painting, History and Technology for the first time in Winter 2008. On the first day of class, someone asked if there was a VSpace page for this class. Now, I confess that I have been slow in learning how to use that tool effectively. (To this day, I still remain unclear as to what channels and mechanisms there are for its ongoing improvement as user suggestions accumulate; also, much of it seems counter-intuitive, but this may be, in part, because I was schooled in the church of Macintosh.) So when I said there wasn't, student Libby Booth volunteered to build a Facebook page for the class. It was then that I immediately realized this

would be an opportunity to see how Facebook worked as a pedagogical tool. I had created my own page a year before, after I asked an activist student to put me on the mailing list for University Artistry, the SVSU art students' project to get their artwork out into the surrounding

communities. "We don't have a list; we're a Facebook group" she laughed, and told me how to get set up. Doing so, I found it interesting to discover how many of my faculty colleagues were on Facebook, but I still remained somewhat suspicious; I did not even use my full name—I'm Mike M. there. Despite this attempt at anonymity, I soon found myself

"friended" (request to establish a link and gain access to another's personal information) by people I hadn't seen in years, some going back as far as college.

After Libby set up the page, my next step was getting the few stragglers in the class to sign up on Facebook and be "friended" into the group. It was then the real learning occurred. Facebook quickly proved a useful and simple way to post images on our class page, an essential feature for an art class. When students did that, however, there was the inevitable sloppiness about attribution. Appropriate images were uploaded, and when they were reminded about attribution, little more than "It's a Siquieros!" was added. From this, I learned the instructor should establish standards of citation early on.

I also learned it was easy to post links to other educational or muralists' sites, and when I did, a tiny image from the site conveniently appeared with the link. I found numerous links to put on the page during the semester, creating a little portal for mural study. We could have put video segments up there too, including a link to an archival film of Diego Rivera painting that now resides on YouTube.

The class also used Facebook as our collective forum and as an additional avenue for person-to-person communication. Early on the morning of our class trip to Detroit, to see Rivera's frescoes in the Detroit Institute of Arts and to view Jon Lockard's murals at Wayne State University, one student posted that he'd missed the bus to SVSU, so regrettably would not be on the van to Detroit with us. In the half hour before our departure, a spate of voicemails and text messages were sent to his cell phone by a classmate who offered to drive into Saginaw and pick up the student. Another student promptly posted messages to Facebook, in case the guy was still online.

Digitization democratizes all content into code and pixels, and literacy becomes a process of shaping and effectively prioritizing.

(Unfortunately, he wasn't; he'd turned off his cell phone and computer and gone back to bed.) This situation also gives food for thought when using Facebook in the classroom. Multiple channels of communication raise the issue of which one gets priority. The students' university email account or their personal one? The land line or the cell phone? Facebook? Which do you, or does the student, privilege? This needs to be established at the beginning of the semester.

There is one unintended drawback to faculty entering this user-generated social network. Facebook is a useful tool, but quickly makes you aware of the world—your students' world—outside of the classroom. Friending has its privileges, as Facebook blurs roles, and gives access to students' private lives, perhaps in ways faculty don't want. When one art student lamented, *ad hominem*, of an STD obtained from another (both of whom I previously knew only as hardworking A students in my class), I sent a terse message: "Perhaps Mike is learning more than he wants to know." What is the role of a professor here? *In loco parentis*? An older, experienced friend, advising they get to a clinic? Or one discreet enough to pretend he didn't read that? Is there a risk of libel or defamation in postings like this?

This is to say nothing of other dangers of Facebook. Yes, technology helps us keep in contact. In my family, relatives out of touch for three decades have been found through Googling. I've also gained from Facebook financially: a British publisher, seeking a cover image for an anthology of readings on multiculturalism, Googled "community mural" and found one I painted in 1980; a check was soon in the mail to me for its use. An online essay published in 2001 has just appeared in a university English 101 textbook, and I'm another few hundred dollars richer. However, and this is a big "however," one of our urbane students keeps a Facebook page of barroom photos entitled *Drunks of Saginaw Valley*, where to be seen with a single light beer

at a local music pub would certainly earn an SVSU faculty member inclusion.

Additionally, as those raised Roman Catholic know, no sin "in thought, word or deed" is ever hidden, so I've always kept in mind (as former Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick didn't) that electronic communication is never entirely private. As any SVSU faculty who has suffered a grade grievance knows, you should keep copies of all email correspondence with students for a year no matter how seemingly mundane. This, too, has implications for those using Facebook in the classroom. Lastly, one disadvantage is that, like photographing one's artwork or updating personal web pages (or a PPC file), keeping one's Facebook page current could be a substantial time-consuming job.

Because, in 2009, we are who we are online, using Facebook for a class proved to me a valuable learning opportunity about identity, presentation and persona, and the intimacy of electronic social spaces. Digitization democratizes all content into code and pixels, and literacy becomes a process of shaping and effectively prioritizing. As a result, we live in a time of new forms of literacy, of changing and evolving (or is it devolving?) standards of discourse.

A thought-provoking article by Clive Thompson in the September 2009 issue of *WIRED* quotes Andrea Lunsford, professor of writing and rhetoric at Stanford University. She thinks this is a great era of literacy, because all students' tweets (140-character messages on Twitter) and emails, blog posts, and chat sessions are "real," written to be read by their audience, not merely a professor in a classroom. Smart phones like the iPhone and Blackberry are making us aware of this beyond the desktop. Our students' generation might intuitively

Because, in 2009, we are who we are online, using Facebook for a class proved to me a valuable learning opportunity about identity, presentation and persona, and the intimacy of electronic social spaces.

be learning how to edit and that brevity is the soul of wit. I haven't yet begun to tweet, but in the right hands the medium might prove as insightful as the aphorisms of Chamfort, Cioran, or Wilde.

I encourage all faculty to apply the various forms of media that

characterize our students' lives and see what happens in the classroom.

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The Power of the Pen To Protect and Serve



Joe Jaks
Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice

In 1839, dramatist Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton created the idiom "The pen is mightier than the sword" in Act Two of the play *Richelieu* ("Origins of Sayings...," 2009). This phrase could easily become the maxim for criminal justice undergraduate education. If college students are unable to write properly, they may not have a future as professionals in the criminal justice system.

Criminal justice programs often face the stigma that these departments lack the academic rigor needed to properly educate and develop students. Looked upon as "cop shops" or programs that simply teach how to "cuff 'em and stuff 'em," criminal justice curricula, along with their faculty and students, have historically failed to earn the respect of those in higher education. Since the inception of a criminal justice undergraduate curriculum in the early twentieth century, the debate has raged on that these students lack proper academic abilities. In fact, the field of criminal justice education was created in part to offset these educational concerns.

In 1911, August Vollmer, the chief of police in Berkeley, California, collaborated with the University of California Berkeley to create the first undergraduate courses in criminal justice. Vollmer was motivated

by the concern that members of the law enforcement community lacked professionalism, training, and education to serve the public properly. Prior to these actions, criminal justice practitioners were trained under a vocational system. When a new member joined a department or organization, he was teamed up with a veteran employee and learned through instruction and example. Vollmer realized the problems and concerns with this type of an instructional system and forged ahead with the first academic model for the criminal justice system (Morn, 1995).

Fast forward to today's criminal justice undergraduate programs, where student composition skills are becoming one of the focal points of the curriculum. Based upon the original academic concepts of August Vollmer, contemporary criminal justice professors understand that if students cannot write, they may become a detriment to society. Superior composition skills are essential to serving the public properly and thereby avoid becoming a potential liability. If criminal justice practitioners fail to compose articulate and detailed reports, they may find themselves in the office of a higher authority explaining their abysmal composition, sitting in a courtroom getting degraded by a cross-examining attorney, or out of a job. In this career field, the inability to compose

an accurate and articulate report can be costly in time, effort, reputation, and public safety.

Another important factor contributing to the importance of writing is future promotional opportunities for the former undergraduate student. If a criminal justice practitioner aspires to become promoted within an agency, the need for a graduate degree greatly increases the chances for advancement. Without solid composition skills, entrance into a college or university graduate program becomes extremely difficult, if not impossible. The ability to express ideas and information effectively in a written format increases the chance to enter graduate school and can eventually create more opportunities for professional advancement.

At Saginaw Valley State University, the Criminal Justice Department recognizes and understands the importance of developing sound composition skills within our undergraduate student body. Our students not only aspire to become future leaders in the criminal justice system, but also desire to eventually enter the workforce as researchers and members of the legal community. Based on these reasons, the Criminal Justice Department has drastically increased the amount of writing opportunities within its courses and has elevated academic expectations pertaining to the quality of student work. Our majors and minors not only compose traditional formal research papers, but must also create solid compositions for exams and a multitude

of class assignments. This approach also includes an emphasis on research skills, creating paper outlines, submitting rough drafts for evaluation and revision, and engaging in peer-to-peer writing reviews. Through this increased rigor toward writing, we know our students will benefit. The students may not always understand the need to improve their writing abilities or even care for the assignments given to them. However, as a department faculty composed of criminal justice leaders and researchers, we agree that the development of student writing skills will not only serve the student in the future but also society as a whole.

As a department faculty composed of criminal justice leaders and researchers, we agree that the development of student writing skills will not only serve the student in the future but also society as a whole.

So, is the pen mightier than the sword in the field of criminal justice? Each tool has its own time and place within the criminal justice system, and both are equally important when it comes to serving and protecting.

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This issue of Literacy Link is dedicated to our friend and colleague, Edward Noronha (1946-2009). A visiting professor from Mysore, India, Ed specialized in Kannada literature and was proficient in various languages. Ed also had the distinction of having taught at SVSU as a visiting professor more than any other individual. At SVSU, he was a strong supporter of our general education program and our first-year writing program. (To see some of his insights on teaching beginning writers, see his article "Writing Courses in India: A Differing View," which appeared in the Winter 2009 issue of Literacy Link.)

Dr. Basil Clark, Professor of English, offers the following memory:

"During his second visit to SVSU, Professor Noronha and I drove together to Ypsilanti to present at the annual meeting of Michigan Academy. We talked nonstop going down and coming back, and bonded. He was bright, accomplished, and kind. He was a friend; I miss him."



Living Through Literacy: Telling Stories To Touch Lives



Jamie Wendorf
SVSU Junior, English and Spanish Major

After they are gone, we all wish we had more of our loved ones: more memories, more letters, more photographs, more time. And while I've always known this, I never truly understood how precious these things can be until I volunteered with Living Through Literacy. Working with Hospice patients to preserve their voices revealed more to me about the meaning of loss, the value of memory, and the celebration of loved ones than I could ever hope to say in one article.

The Living Through Literacy program started out as a quiet spark of an idea in the winter of 2008.

Working with a Hospice patient on such a personal and meaningful project provides remarkable insights, both into the immense power of words, as well as the deep and quiet strength of ordinary people.

SouthernCare Hospice of Saginaw contacted the SVSU Writing Center for assistance with a few patients who wanted to create final pieces of writing to pass on to their families; a few Writing Center mentors, including myself, were happy to help. The value of working with these patients to preserve their voices quickly became apparent. With hard work and the generous funding of an SVSU Foundation Resource Grant, these initial experiences then blossomed into Living Through Literacy, a volunteer program involving students all across campus.

Living Through Literacy volunteers work with Hospice patients to create written heirlooms to pass on to their families' loved ones. Volunteers can help patients record their life stories, write final letters, create scrapbooks and videos, and work on other projects that leave a written legacy of the patient. Helping patients with their writing serves important purposes. First, it preserves patients' voices and stories, so that the patients' loved ones will always have a piece of them to cherish.

Patients are also able to use writing as a way to deal with a difficult period of life through the expression of their feelings. Finally, Hospice patients are able to gain a sense of self-worth by reflecting on their lives, which can be a great comfort to them as they face death. Diane Boehm, the director of the University Writing Program and the Living Through Literacy faculty adviser, states, "The program allows [patients] to reflect on the story of their life, share with their loved ones many things they might have forgotten or been unable to say, and leave a legacy that will comfort their families when they mourn. It's rare for any writing to be more meaningful than this."

Volunteers receive extraordinary benefits from working with patients as well. They are able to enjoy the profound satisfaction of helping a patient. Working with a Hospice patient on such a personal and meaningful project also provides remarkable insights, both into the immense power of words, as well as the deep and quiet strength of ordinary people. Kelli Fitzpatrick, who is a Writing Center mentor, a senior majoring in secondary English education, and a Living Through Literacy volunteer, reflects, "This volunteer experience is so powerful because I know I am truly making a difference in the lives of people who do not have much life left to live, but who want to live it well and leave their mark on the world and on their family's hearts."

Volunteers are also able to gain a sense of the importance of viewing patients as people, rather than as illnesses. My own experience affirmed this truth for me. The first time I went to see a patient, I was utterly terrified. I was afraid I would walk into a room and feel the weight of death and illness, and be crushed by it. My mother had warned me not to go; she told me I was too sensitive for this sort of work. Despite my overwhelming fear,

I decided to walk into the room and meet my patient. Instead of feeling illness, I felt life. Carl and his family beamed at me. Then he began telling stories: stories of his brothers, his childhood, his work, his wife and daughter. Months of talking followed, cementing this impression for me, such that Carl was never an illness. He was a person with a life and stories to tell, and I no longer worried about walking into that room. For Living Through Literacy volunteers, patients are much more than illnesses or weakness; they are people who have lived, and who can share their love and wisdom through the stories of their lives.

Part of the beauty of the Living Through Literacy experience is that as volunteers help a patient preserve his or her voice, they cannot help but learn more about their own. The time people spend as volunteers not only helps a patient give loved ones a wonderful gift; it allows the volunteer to see beyond daily stresses, to appreciate how much good a few kind words can create.

Because the situation for each Living Through Literacy participant is unique and delicate, tools and guidelines have been put into place to ensure a positive experience for both volunteer and patient. For example, the SVSU Foundation Resource Grant allowed the program to purchase a laptop, voice recorders, digital cameras, and other tools to make the volunteers' efforts easier. With these tools, we create scrapbooks, videos, and other artifacts that celebrate the life of each patient. Guidelines have also been established for both safety and comfort; for instance, volunteers must attend Hospice volunteer training, and the

patients' families are strongly encouraged to participate (to make the experience a comfortable one for all involved) and to help tell the families' stories.

Of course, the benefits and insights of the program are easy to grasp in concept; feeling and experiencing them is entirely different. For me, one moment in particular defined the value of working with Hospice patients. I was sitting with Vi, my first patient's wife, in her living room. It was a few weeks after Carl, her husband of forty-six years, had died. Vi held the scrapbook on her lap, the blue bow binding the cover. The room felt different with Carl gone; there was no one loudly telling stories, no one to show the scrapbook into which I had been pouring his memories and my time. Then, Vi began telling me about the night that Carl died. For the last few hours of his life, Carl had sat with the scrapbook we had made, reading through it with his wife and daughter and talking with them about his life. I remember sitting there in silent shock. Although I had known what we were doing was meaningful, hearing it affirmed so unexpectedly absolutely stunned me.

It was at this moment that I fully realized that this was about more than mere words,



Jamie Wendorf and her patient and his wife, Carl and Vi Archambault. Jamie began volunteering with Living Through Literacy in the winter of 2008 at SouthernCare Hospice of Saginaw.

letters, or photographs; this was about using the power of language to honor lives, cherish memories, and express love that transcends death.

Editors' Note: Jamie reminds us that "[a] human life is far too beautiful, too complex, to be confined within mere sheets of paper. It is the memories and the love behind these documents, these records, these photographs, that make attempts to capture the human life worthwhile." Below are excerpts from the work that she "collected" in collaboration with Hospice patient, Carl Archambault, for his family. We appreciate the Archambaults' willingness to share these memories in Literacy Link.

If you would like to learn more about Living Through Literacy, or are interested in becoming involved, please contact Jamie Wendorf at jewendorf@svsu.edu.

One of the sweetest memories a daughter holds of her father is dancing with him. When Lisa was young, she would stand on Carl's feet as they danced together. With a kitchen as their ballroom and an a.m. radio as their accompaniment, they would slowly twirl around, while Vi happily looked on.

Tucked quietly in bed, as a toddler Lisa would wait until she heard the freezer door open. When that magical sound was heard, she would call out for her dad, for there could be no sleep until they had their nightly ice cream together.

Toys were rare during the Great Depression, so Carl and his siblings had to get creative. Built from a two-by-four plank and some old roller skates, the scooter they made provided some fun during Carl's childhood. He and his siblings would zip around on the scooter while the cops smiled at them.

During the era of Little House on the Prairie, Carl built Lisa a teepee for her and three of the neighborhood girls to play in. They ran around as the Ingalls girls (plus one), with bicycles for horses and the teepee for their home. Carl built the teepee to last, using trees from the Hemmeter property and wrapping old carpet around it for shelter. After the years had passed and Lisa had married, the teepee was finally taken down, although not without a fight; it was so strong that Carl needed a tractor to deconstruct it.

While perhaps not the typical start to a life together, Vi and Carl's honeymoon was definitely an adventure. From Carl getting frustrated with the boat motor and throwing it in the lake (where it still rests today), to Vi's painful ear boil, to Carl cutting his foot on a beer bottle, the honeymoon seemed to be a test of their relationship. They must have passed because, forty-six years later, Vi and Carl are still laughing together about that motor on the bottom of the lake.

Emile Archambault [Carl's father] had a gift for music. Never actually trained and using a violin his brother made, Emile played beautifully by ear. He passed this talent on to some of his children. While he was a musician by leisure, he was a house-builder by trade.

Carl always says that Donald was "the best of the bunch." He was charming and kind, and was Carl's favorite brother. Carl always laughs about how the girls chased after him. Sadly, Donald's life was cut short. At the age of twenty-five, he was killed while serving his country in the Korean War.