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Letter from the Editor

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Letter from the Editor

BY ROBERT L. SMITH



I am feeling extremely grateful today as I join the river riders along the Grand River. I am grateful for such a gentle day—like a friend who's easy to accompany. I feel grateful to the Lansing men and women who worked to make this paved river path such a smooth reality. I can pedal my black and red bicycle up and over the wooden bridges and along the trees and shrubs for miles, meeting many residents and students out enjoying some leisure. Most of all today and lately, I am grateful for the opportunity to improve my communication skills and discover my writing voice as I work at editing the *MR Journal*. And so, almost everything I see seems to relate to literacy as I pedal and coast, pedal and coast.

I must admit that this river looks polluted. I think of Lynne Cherry's latest book, *A River Ran Wild* (HBJ), to remind myself that there is hope for this river. Though no one of us is intelligent enough alone to clean up our rivers, or our economy, or our society, through communication with each other we can make things, including this river, better for whomever follows. So it is wonderful to have Vera Milz on the *Journal* staff sharing her knowledge of new books like Cherry's and providing the type of communication that I am welcoming. Likewise Mark Conley's commentaries on paradigm shifts and Tom Tobias' cartoons on reading trends will be regular *MR Journal* aids to our thinking about teaching literate behavior.

It is a fish jumping that returns me to thinking of the mysterious ways of the

river. I ride along the river, enjoying its peacefulness but wondering Why is it here? What does it tell us? How is it doing these days? In my mind's metaphor, the river is life itself and the path we river riders tour is literacy: the human construction runs parallel to the natural and enables us to move forward seeing sights and constructing theories.

A youngster peers down the river trail and asks his middle-aged companion, "Where will it take you?" We can travel alone or we can go together and share the sense we make of the things we happen upon. Susan Rigney's article is a fresh representation of two companions, mathematics and literacy, traveling along together. In this same vein, Mark Conley's commentary on teachers as researchers can be viewed as an invitation to buck up our spirits and join the travelers. True, we can leave the trail and sometimes that is valuable indeed; but tracing the way that others have laid out makes it more likely that we can actually arrive somewhere without overexerting ourselves and needlessly spinning our spokes.

This line of thinking makes me remember what a fine tradition has been established for us. The *MR Journal*, under **Myrna Webb Woods'** management, was a smooth and interesting route to the future. The issues dealing with the redefinition of reading taught us about interactive approaches to teaching literacy strategies and stand out in my mind as some of the most influential journals I have ever encountered. Others who, like myself, have had the pleasure of working

with Myrna know what validation she could bring to a writer struggling to express ideas. After six years of producing excellent publications, Myrna and her talented assistants, **Marcia Cameron** and **Louis DeIorio**, deserve accolades.

My bike excursion continues. The mysterious house with windows darkened by paint looms around the curve. Painting the windows saves on curtain costs, I suppose. But I am so glad that the occupant has scraped a small eye hole through which he or she can watch us river riders flowing by. It encourages me because when I next meet a student who has almost shut teachers out, I will remember that all one needs is a small lookout in order to learn. If teachers can get students to look at literature or stories or listen to songs, we can teach them all kinds of things. The two articles about music and literacy in this issue, one by Tiyi (named after King Tut's mother) Schippers and one by Marlene Bruno (MRA's elected secretary) impress me because they represent different ways for teachers to establish powerful literacy connections for students.

A women's baseball club belting balls makes me remember that, like sports, publishing was once a masculine domain. I am glad that today's readers have more to choose from than the white male canon of literature. I will be working, as others have in the past, to make the journal a multi-perspective and multicultural publication. I encourage other voices of all timbres and tones to join in this orchestra of sounds about literacy. See the back of this journal for details on how to be heard in an upcoming *MR Journal*. Cheryl Way's story in this issue represents one person's willingness to share words of her own learning: more brave souls and many styles and genres are needed. Strands or themes that I

would like to see this year include "*Content Literacy*" (integrated and thematic teaching within subject areas, especially within music and the other fine arts), "*Classroom Assessment*" (interconnections between instruction and assessment), and "*Ongoing Literacy Events*" (such as reading incentive programs and young authors programs).

Still dwelling on the ballplayers, I reflect on the difference between sports competition and literacy. In games, we usually try to trick each other and/or outdo each other through sheer strength. Literacy, on the other hand, is a collaborative venture. The author and the reader are teammates who don't necessarily strive against anyone or anything. Instead, they strive to work together to erect a monument of meaning. The author has some suggestions about how that monument should look: the reader adds other notions, perhaps rejecting some of the author's suggestions. As I pedal past some actual monuments, I smile about what we can do when put our minds and bodies into motion.

On the top of the river, I see autumn flowing our way. Soon it will be time to store my bike. The summer was great, but we have monuments to build—and our monuments are the living, moving, thinking monuments . . . known as students. It is a huge responsibility, so it is comforting to know about others engaged in the same work, and that we are all riding along the same river. MRA hopes that the articles within this series of journals will not only influence your teaching practice but will also inspire you to write and make your ideas known.

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