

## YOUNG WRITERS' DAY FROM THE INSIDE

Sue Looyenga

The hazy sky on July 15 held the promise of yet another sultry summer day as the sun's glow began to lighten the horizon behind the Protestant Reformed School here in South Holland, Illinois. One by one cars with bleary-eyed mothers at their wheels rolled into the school parking lot and discharged bright-eyed children clutching beach towels, bathing suits, and workbooks with bright green covers. The hour was a little before five AM, and some of these were children who howled over rising for school at 7 AM. But no one was complaining today. Today promised an adventure: a trip to the third annual Young Writers' Day activities in Michigan and the opportunity for fun and fellowship with students from the Hope, Heritage, and Adams Street Protestant Reformed Schools there.

At 5:15 two vans, two cars, and a station wagon bearing about twenty fourth-through-eighth graders began the two-and-a-half hour trip to Grand Rapids. In the van I was driving, five fourth and fifth grade girls chattered excitedly about what the day

held in store. Those who were "veterans" of the previous year's writing workshop hinted of pizza lunch and ball games and swimming as the highlight of the day. There was also talk of friends made the previous year and the anticipation that some would return this year. And, of course, the bright green workbooks held a prominent place in the conversation, for they held the key to unlock the writing adventures of the day.

These little workbooks consisted of worksheets with various readings (primarily Scriptural) and questions relating to them. These simple exercises were designed to guide young writers to reveal thoughts and feelings about them-



*Mrs. Looyenga checks  
a student's work*

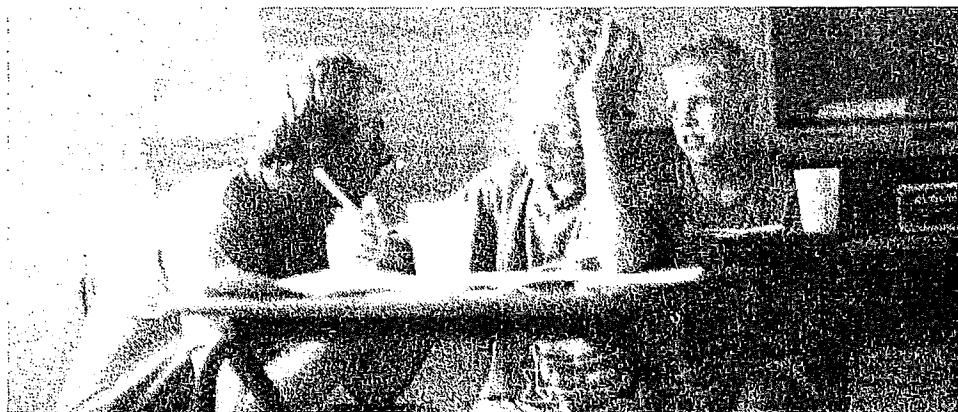


*Giving pointers...*

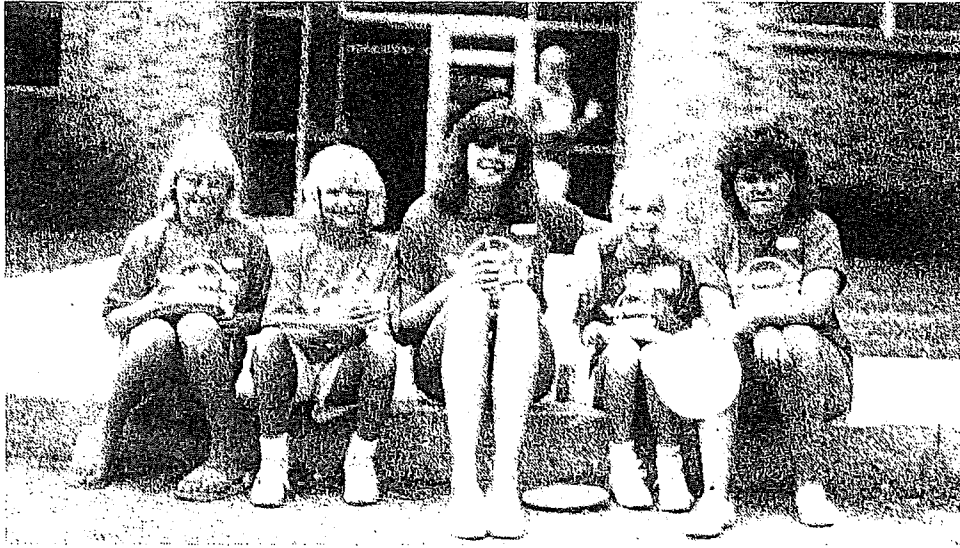
selves, the creation around them, and their fellow saints, all in preparation for the writing activities of this day. The theme for the 1988 Young Writers' Day was "Writing to One Another," and the exercises were to be in the writing of both poetry and personal letters. Handed out to participating students at the end of the school year, the booklets were to be completed on a daily

basis on weekdays preceding July 15. As an added incentive, a prize was offered to every student who had completed the work by this date. (All of my passengers admitted to having finished their booklets and proffered guesses as to what "The Prize" would be.)

Time slipped quickly by as the excitement grew, and soon we were rolling into the parking lot



*... to youthful scholars*



*Noon-time curb-side lunch*

of Hope School. Our watches said nearly 9 AM, the time set for the devotions opening the day, so we hurried inside and joined the crowd of children and adult leaders who were donning bright candy-pink T-shirts proclaiming the day and theme in white. All filed from there into the gym for devotions: singing, Scripture reading, and prayer. Then students entering grades 4 and 5 filed into their assigned classrooms at Hope, and future sixth through eighth graders made a short trek to Covenant Christian High School to use the facilities there.

This was my third year of involvement with Young Writers' Day as a parent, but the first year as a group leader assigned, with a teen-aged assistant, to lead eleven fifth-graders into the finer points of writing poetry and personal

correspondence. As they filed into our assigned classroom, some with light and eager footsteps and a few with a "going-to-Siberia" trudge, I had my first taste of the classroom from the *front* of the room and took a deep breath! They were there to "have a good time writing," most by choice, some because Mom and Dad had made a decision on their behalf. One shuffled a duffle bag between



*Time out for games*

his feet on the floor, perhaps consoling himself that writing was only something that had to be endured before that final bus ride to the swimming pool at 2 PM.

By 10 AM and our first break, however, the atmosphere of the room had changed. Not only were we experimenting with different approaches to expressing ourselves poetically — we were actually having fun doing it. The intensity of trying to find the “right words” was lightened by popsicle and punch breaks, and during the two forty-minute morning sessions everyone found that he or she could really write poetry. Assisted by the notes collected in their workbooks, several even found the task an easy one. It wasn’t long before the call for pizza and pop came.

While lunch was being consumed each classroom group was assigned another as its opponent for the noontime kickball games. The wide expanse of playing fields at Hope School blossomed with pink T-shirts as classmates-for-the-day, previously introduced, now cheered one another on as teammates.

All too soon it seemed, the bell summoned us to the classrooms once again, and we began our third exercise in poetry, the most strenuous one, but attacked this time by much more confident writers. A game intended to stimulate comparison-making started things off with a bit of humor and provided several great ideas for poems as well. By the time the final poetry session had ended, everyone had contributed



*Afternoon popsicle break*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

1. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1997; 277: 1039-1043.

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