

# Ernie's Journey Reflections in Verse

## Volume 1

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and  
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**E**ach of us can take time to **J**oin in  
**R**eflection to pause & disc **O**ver the  
Lear **N**ing that daily occurs in o **U**r  
**L**ives when we search inwa **R**dly. This  
**R**equires a strong commitme **N**t to use  
One 's energy to live each and **E**very day  
Wi **S**ely - throughout all of our **Y**ears.

# Introduction



This volume of poems originates from my reflections when teaching courses and/or leading seminars that encourage participants to develop a positive future for individuals with disabilities. I find this form of feed-back to my students to be the most authentic way I have to convey the values and truths I want to impart.

At times, students have expressed to me that they have enjoyed reading my comments / observations / remarks when composed in this format. Their encouragement has influenced me to share this work with current readers who may not have been students in my courses or participants in my in-service sessions.

This first volume of “Ernie’s Journey” is dedicated to all the students with whom I have interacted as my career path intersected with their learning experiences. My thanks to those students resulted in this current volume - - - more of which will follow.



A name plate I developed at a recent in-service training.

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# **Section 1**

## **Debriefings and Reflections**

## A Community of Learners

Thirty people were enrolled in this winter session;  
 Most were strangers to special education.  
 Thirty friends leave on Wednesday night  
 With friends on the left and friends on the right.

You are the exceptional one each night they were told.  
 Teach to be ethical. Teach to be bold.  
 Teach to be creative, passionate and true.  
 Teach like our mentor whose name is Bob Blue.

Five hours a night can be a very long time,  
 But we got into some rhythm and even some rhyme.  
 We listened to music and looked at some slides  
 And always had food to fill up our insides.

John and Ernie facilitated the learning  
 But the real work happened from each person's yearning  
 To discover some strategies - perhaps a teaching tip  
 To make it worthwhile to endure such a long trip.

Once John made a comment about a class to a friend  
 About how much talent was in the course that did end.  
*Every group has talent, if you know where to look,*  
 Said Pat as he glanced up from reading his book.

I guess our job is to create such a stage  
 Upon which gifts are shared as we engage  
 In meaningful searches for small and large truths  
 In our reading and projects and meetings in groups.

And so - - attitudes need latitude which bring gratitude  
 And education takes dedication toward integration.  
 Labels can be fables that don't really enable  
 Teachers to be reachers and seekers  
 Of gifts to share with everyone there if they care.

*During the winter session of 2004 I had the pleasure of team teaching a course, SPED 501 Exceptional Learners, with John Foshay. I thoroughly enjoyed this experience and the students provided great feedback about how much they appreciated our combined teaching efforts. The feeling was mutual.*

## Another Fine Day in Class

We leave our egos at the door  
As together we explore  
The wonders of some athletes  
And marvel at their awesome feats.

We also witness a slight deception  
In a "Count the Fs" sentence inspection.  
Jaime and David had in store  
Movies, videos, films and more.

Annie went to New Jersey in a car  
To tape a talk on Autism from afar.  
A teacher spoke about a new point system  
Developed from years of practice and wisdom.

I heard good comments and conversation  
As we continued on in our investigation  
To teach all students who are hard to reach  
To be consistent and try not to preach.

We honor difference and diversity  
As we learn together at the university.  
The important part of what we do  
Is to test our values both old and new.

Gifts and talents and strengths of all  
Are the basics of the teacher's call  
To be a model of ethics and light  
With each of the students who come into our sight.

*I was impressed with the attitude of the members of another class of students taking SPED 501. There was an abundance of talent among the students, yet no one appeared to dominate or impose themselves on others. There appeared to be a genuine sense of sharing among participants and a commitment to learn from one another. I was pleased to be a facilitator of this learning process.*

## Satisfaction From the Instructor's Point of View

It's the end of the term and finals week  
I'm reading the projects and continue to seek  
Ways to improve this course that I teach  
As soon new students I'll begin to reach.

The bulletin board was a fantastic activity  
As quotes and pictures promoted our community.  
We gained insight from many of our peers  
As each picture or quote each week appears.

Guest speakers were sought - some relatives and kin  
I expected to learn much as each class did begin.  
Monday nights held a special time for me  
As each class went by the "I" became "We."

The feedback responses on the satisfaction forms  
Talk a lot about ability and talk about norms.  
Talk about attitudes and how views have changed  
As beliefs and values are now rearranged.

I trust in the talents - - I trust in the art  
Of what students did with each of their part  
Of enhancing the quality of what we would cover  
As each class I would lead was like no other.

Words don't express the way that I feel  
At the end of this course that seems so real.  
It's a privilege and honor and joy to say  
What a wonderful class just ended today.

*Each semester ends with a different sense of satisfaction with how the course unfolds. I can't predict the tone of the discussion, the quality of each guest speaker and the uniqueness of the talents among those present. I just know that if I create a learning community that honors the gifts of those present, good things will happen. I need to be ready to incorporate what the students in each course have to offer. We are all richer for the experience.*

## Another Fine Day at Work/Play

Balloons floating in the air  
Added to the festive flair  
Hawaiian Punch and lemonade  
And fluffer nutters were even made.

Mr. Rogers tribute to start  
And illusion tricks next were part  
Of the beginning of Session #10  
Exceeding my expectations once again.

Tim and John instilled in us all  
Humor and fun like a carnival.  
Bubbles and games - so much fun  
A great way to start for everyone.

We looked in the paper and what did we see  
"Donuts with Donna" out in Coventry.  
Mission statement for a Lebanon school  
Defines the norm - becomes the rule  
For teaching, meetings and lesson plan making  
And the atmosphere in the entire school building.

We also reviewed attitude elements  
Of administrators who lead and have to make sense  
Of all the challenges teachers will find  
Often of the unpredictable kind  
In supporting students in their community  
To lead lives of meaning and quality.

The Likert scale for communication to enhance  
And not leave outcomes to be assessed by chance  
But to clearly define what contributes to the dream  
And get input from everyone on the student's team.

A cartoon from the paper - some can relate  
To laugh at ourselves when in a similar state.  
A good time tonight was had be all  
And learning occurred I seem to recall.

*I had the occasion to teach a Leadership in Special Education course and this entry reflects upon one of the sessions.*

## *A Life With Down Syndrome*

*A Life With Down Syndrome* was a film tonight  
 Aimed at parents to help take away their fright  
 At having a baby who is different from most all  
 By an extra chromosome, Trisomy 21, the condition is called.

Every parent has concerns and fears  
 About the future and also what's near.  
 Will she be happy? Will she be a success?  
 Right now it would only be an educated guess.

The parents we heard from said much the same  
 For their children who have this syndrome to claim.  
 Greg is still Greg and Mary is still Mary.  
 Sarah can be Sarah and Gary can still be Gary.

What will be their contributions in life?  
 Will she have a husband? Will he have a wife?  
 Maybe it's how we judge ourselves that's the key  
 As you try to be you and I try to be me.

Life, in fact, goes by too fast  
 I'm already past 50 in the wink of a lash.  
 What have I accomplished? What's been my big goal?  
 What's in my heart? What's in my soul?

What are the attributes I can claim for success?  
 Sometimes my life is fun - at times it's a mess.  
 My life has been enriched by people of all labels  
 Whether they're eating at the restaurant or cleaning the tables.

Life with Down syndrome can be just as satisfying  
 As the life of the one who is doing this writing  
 About thoughts of life and what it can bring  
 As we each live our life to the songs that we sing.

*During one of the classes, I shared a video, *Life with Down Syndrome*, which alerted the viewer to the expectations and realities of being a parent of a child with Down syndrome. I wanted to impress that "quality of life" is a relative concept depending on the individual way in which it is measured by each of us.*

## An Enjoyable Learning Experience

Thank you for making this an enjoyable class  
The hours and days did quickly pass.  
You realized this class was more about you  
And attitudes, values and strategies too.

Students with labels and disabilities  
Just need different opportunities  
In multiple ways that they can show  
And demonstrate just how much they know.

John and Ernie facilitated the sessions  
And organized the content into meaningful lessons.  
But you who discussed the content each night  
Shared with us your own keen insight.

Creativity, innovation, talents and gifts  
Singing and poetry and even guitar riffs  
Were part of each and every evening's fare  
And food and refreshments and coffee to share.

Teaching is a way to be a learner too  
As each student prepared a project to do  
About some aspect of teaching students with a label  
To show them just how much they are smart and are able.

So, continue on in your own career preparation  
And remember this course in special education.  
Thank you for this great opportunity  
To work with you in this learning community.

*This was feedback I provided to the participants in the first course I co-taught with John Foshay. Based on this feedback, we decided to continue co-teaching the following winter session as well. I wanted to emphasize that our role was to facilitate their own learning. We organized the environment in which learning occurred.*

## Concluding Thoughts

In the fall of 2001  
 I met with a group that was second to none  
 Exceptional Learners - I do recall  
 We met Tuesday nights in Willard Hall  
 Speakers and Seekers  
 Reachers and Teachers  
 Music and Rhyme  
 To fill up our time.

*Good Will Hunting - Benny and Joon*  
*Don't Laugh At Me - a pretty good tune.*  
*Forest Gump and A Brief History of Time*  
*Best Boy, Rainman, Kermit and Shine*  
*A New Sense of Place and At First Sight*  
*Searching for Bobby Fischer one night*  
*Elmo's World and Noggin's too*  
*Multiple Intelligence to name just a few*  
*Joey Pigza and Angels in Waiting*  
*Life with Down Syndrome for our media rating.*

Refreshments were brought most every week  
 Hot cider and soda and a Hanukkah treat.  
 Guests arrived to speak their mind  
 Mothers and Fathers - we got both kind.  
 There was Jen and Mark and Minna and Brie  
 Steve and Patrick and MaryLee  
 Audrey and Stephanie told us what they knew  
 And Paul gave a talk about Autism too.  
 We learned about yoga and breathing in air  
 We learned about PECS and Marco's good flair  
 For teaching 'bout reading with all kinds of stuff  
 When teaching gets hard and right down tough.  
 There were themes some explored as I read resources  
 New places to look for all of my courses.

## Concluding Thoughts (continued)

Some looked at boating and fishing and horseback riding  
Movement with students through yoga thought guiding.  
Reading and music and friendships to meet  
Basketball, skiing and new people to greet.  
Walt Disney World's accessible rides  
Touch Therapy – music - martial arts all in stride.

Thank you Susan. Thank you John.  
Thank you Jelena for your song.  
Thank you Katherine for "Being Green"  
Thank you Tracy and Colleen.  
Thank you Becky, Lisa and Sean  
Thank you Sharon, Sarah and Jon  
Thank you Susan for your fine note  
Thank you Steven for the IDEA quote  
Thank you Amy, Marco and Lori  
Thank you Caroline for reading a story  
Thank you Cathy and one more John  
Thank you Laurie for singing your song  
Thank you Linda - your words were kind  
Thank you Sheryl for the video on the blind  
Thank you Laura for books on diversity  
Through the eyes of the young we all can see.  
Thank you Kathy, Susannah and Kris  
This will be one class I surely will miss.  
Thank you Patricia and Kathryn too  
Thanks to you all – through and through.

*Once again, I wanted to thank all the students who helped to make this specific session of SPED 501 such an enjoyable learning process. I tried to include everyone's first name in the poem and relate the key elements that I wanted to remember from this course. Also, I logged in the media that we viewed to enhance particular areas of focus.*

*The following sequence of entries was my attempt to use a poem to debrief each class during a summer session. I began each new class with a summary of the key parts of the previous class. I especially enjoyed reading one of the participant's final debriefing set of comments when she also wrote it as a poem.*

## Debriefing of a Summer Course: Session by Session

### Session One

I think a lot about the words I say  
When I get home at the end of the day.  
Will they understand what I mean  
Or, am I getting a little extreme?  
I speak my mind and to a degree  
I don't expect you to agree with me.  
It's taken me 30 years to think like this  
Sometimes I'm right - Sometimes I'm amiss.  
I can speak my mind  
And please do so in kind.  
The answer lies in the talking  
Amid the chatter and the walking.  
Your path has different turns and bends  
And no one knows where it's all going to end.  
No one's right - No one's wrong.  
We all can sing a different song  
If respect and dignity are key  
In the words you say to me.  
It's an honor to teach this class.  
It's an awesome yet enjoyable task  
To help you teach a student who learns  
Differently from others yet earns  
The right to be with others in school  
Should not be the exception, but the rule.

### Session Two

Tonight is Wednesday and Session 2  
I talked about "Choices" and we met Bob Blue.  
Bob is a mentor - teacher extraordinaire  
With him there is music always in the air.  
He talks about love and respect for the child  
Whether the child is quiet or even a bit wild.  
Bob is gentle in both manner and mood.  
(Also, some students brought in plenty of food.)

## **Debriefing of a Summer Course: (continued)**

### **Session Two (continued)**

**The assignments are becoming a bit more clear  
With more explanations to lessen the fear  
About being overwhelmed to get things done.  
We may even have a little bit of fun.  
Everyone's work will be read with care  
And already I've seen excellent writing with flare.  
I feel quite tired at the end of the day  
As I work on Session 3 and what I will say.**

### **Session Three**

**Inclusion was the topic for session 3  
With a base in the law from which to see  
How students can be with their peers.  
Why has it taken close to 30 years?  
Jonathan Kozol writes in his book  
About finding answers where we don't look.  
The wisest answers we ever can find  
Come from questions of the spontaneous kind.  
In the news is a picture of a little boy  
Whose hair will bring about much joy  
For one whom he will never know  
Who wears his hair as a wig to show  
That kindness happens with gestures of hope  
For children who may find it hard to cope.  
Partial disclosure is a good teaching plan  
To give students credit for what they can  
Show you when they have an additional clue  
They are smarter than they thought they knew.  
We switched rooms for some elbow space  
Across the hall to a larger place.  
We discussed the qualities of a mentor teacher  
And found Bob Blue as a valued seeker  
Of looking at what children do best  
When sharing their gifts just like all the rest.**

## **Debriefing of a Summer Course: (continued)**

### **Session Four**

**There are a lot of thoughts going on in my head  
At 4:48 when I get out of bed  
As I continue on my journey  
I began with a book called "Who Is Ernie?"  
As a profile of pages that talk about me  
A non-confidential file for all to see  
And decide what I will share  
To those who read it - to those who care.  
Richard LaVoie showed us how  
To see the image of a cow.  
He said the image was there to see  
If we only perceived what it could be.  
Rosemary brought us stories to read  
From pages she said that we all should heed  
The lessons other parents have learned  
As they fought their fights and victories earned.  
I mentioned my thoughts for the first exam due  
Of connecting to some of the works of Bob Blue.  
Also, to build upon what you already know best  
About students with disabilities on this first test.**

### **Session Five**

**It seems to me that in lesson five  
The words from the text came alive.  
A label means nothing without a face.  
A child's a child and not a case.  
The highs and lows of manic depression  
Have left on us a lasting impression.  
Each story was told with sensitivity  
As we learned from each one's past history.  
What can we learn from what we hear  
Will we remember this lesson in another year?  
It reminds me to stop, sit and think  
About students who may be near to the brink.  
What can I do? What actions are right?  
No easy answers come into my sight.**

## **Debriefing of a Summer Course: (continued)**

### **Session Five (continued)**

**Some students are torn in the midst of disease  
Living in darkness - then soaring on a breeze.  
What impact can I have in that student's life  
As I sit and I listen to the pains of their strife?  
I don't know if answers are truly there  
But I do know I must continue to teach with care.**

### **Session Six**

**This is the end of week number two  
I thoroughly enjoy everything that we do.  
This class of students has many talents  
To share as we maintain our precarious balance  
In the early days of the month of June  
With hundreds of priorities due too soon.  
I enjoy reading papers and writing my notes.  
It gives me a feeling of confidence and hope  
That each of you will pause and reflect  
And each of you will always select  
To be open to greater diversity  
As you leave this university  
And step into a room of your own  
And take on a challenge to show how you've grown  
Into a teacher creative and true  
Just like our mentor - Mr. Bob Blue.  
After reading some papers I often see  
A mirror reflecting back up to me  
Of values and thoughts I also hold dear  
Held also by others with thoughts put so clear.  
To be by himself meant Freedom to Fred  
After 40 years living in drudgery and dread.  
Humor, friendships, work and fun  
Seem to be part of his usual run  
Of activities in which he feels more in control  
Of when he sits down and when he can stroll  
The streets of Willimantic, a not-so-big city  
People don't look at him with sadness and pity  
But as a person whom they often meet  
Walking along as they go down Main Street.**

## **Debriefing of a Summer Course: (continued)**

### **Session Six (continued)**

**Institutions bring destitution  
Isolation and Incarceration  
Loneliness and sadness  
Helplessness and madness.  
Tear them down  
Into the ground  
Treat with respect  
And try to effect  
Positive supports for folks like Fred  
To live lives of quality - enough now is said.**

### **Session Seven**

**Time to start another week  
And new lessons for to seek  
On a day that's muggy and hot  
When my energy level is all but shot.  
It's very hard to stay awake.  
Go give (you know who) a little shake!  
Jason explored some icebreaker tasks  
To line up in two rows to begin with he asks.  
Team one, of course, was second to none  
As they followed the request to have some fun.  
We brought out our objects to show, of which  
I introduced to all my winged, golden snitch  
And exchanged it for a compass from Al  
Who said, "Don't follow me - Go follow Hal!"  
Developing a community of learners was the key  
By sharing something of importance for all to see.  
Some people brought a similar item of fare  
When they introduced their favorite pen to share.  
We listened to Diane read a story so bold  
Of Christy Brown's story, My Left Foot. He told  
Of growing up with quite a large family  
And finding his place in society  
As a poet and writer and painter of art  
And as a person whose heart has been torn apart**

## **Debriefing of a Summer Course: (continued)**

### **Session Seven (continued)**

**By others who don't think he has feelings to share  
As he sees those around him join families to care  
For one another - in love and connection  
Christy is lost in a world of rejection.  
Attitude is such an important word  
For everybody to have heard.  
It means more than what you know.  
It means your values begin to show.  
Honoring differences - looking beyond the label  
To know that many of your students are able  
To function well in a regular class  
With their peers who don't have to harass  
Nor bully them and call them names  
But treat each other about the same.**

### **Session Eight**

**Mark O'Brien took center stage.  
He got polio at a pretty early age.  
Poet, writer, thinker and friend -  
He played these roles right up to the end.  
Everyone's disabled to a degree  
So treat those who are as you expect to be.  
He had many lessons for us to learn  
If we listen well enough we can discern  
That quality of life is where it's at  
In your own apartment you can have a cat.  
We met Raymond, whose brother did find  
A person who functioned with a different kind  
Of actions, words and deeds  
Judge Wapner at 8:00 if you please.  
He had his set routines each day  
Like Who's On First he would often say.  
I shared some notes about autism's mystery  
A little bit of its rocky history.  
Bettleheim in the 50s once blamed  
Refrigerator Moms were who he named.**

## **Debriefing of a Summer Course: (continued)**

### **Session Eight (continued)**

**We all have quirks and repetitive acts  
Some twirl their hair - others recite unusual facts.  
Make rejection work for you  
Brought some humor from out of the blue.  
Speaking of blue, I read your connections  
To Bob Blue and his incredible reflections.  
About how to best help every one  
Think they're Number #1 under the sun.  
A modification check list to be used by a teacher  
As a way to Mary we might begin to reach her  
And provide some changes in tests and time  
So students make sense of what doesn't rhyme.  
ATTITUDE provided by a gentleman named Chuck  
He says our outlook is better than luck  
As we go about our work each day  
That we may have important things to say  
About students who function a little bit strange  
Can still think of themselves in the normal range.**

### **Session Nine**

**Now, it's time to take a test  
And you have choices - pick the best  
Questions that number ten  
Be sure to come back next week again.  
Kerry talked about a curious condition  
Selective Mutism and its definitions  
And she responded to a parent's plea with grace  
About involving this boy in her classroom space.  
We watched a video about two teenage kids  
Who met when both were on the skids.  
They joined forces and felt as one  
And worked together to get things done.  
"Mighty" was the same of the clip;  
These boys seemed to be joined at the hip.  
We highlighted some of what's in the news  
Things we agree with and some opposing views.  
Funny, shocking, interesting and sad  
Some of the stories made us real mad.**

## **Debriefing of a Summer Course: (continued)**

### **Session Nine (continued)**

**Many readers stated when they wrote to me  
That this assignment really helped them to see  
That often in news we overlook  
People whose labels are in our book  
Who live in our society  
And become part of the community.**

### **Session Ten**

**SPED 501 enters week number four  
As Claudia and Noel took the floor.  
Gifted and talented was their discussion  
And they sadly noted when it comes to instruction.  
For students who learn differently than most  
Either act up in class or seem like a ghost  
Who withdraws and makes no waves  
But stares out the window, a mind in a haze.  
Something can be done -  
Identification is step number one  
Then challenge all students to do their best  
Advocate for changes and don't let things rest.  
Parents must fight for programs and supports  
And read documents, papers and formal reports  
And hear teachers and principals begin to say  
Each child must progress in their own best way.  
Next, Teresa brought her best friend Matt  
To speak to us from where he sat  
As a child identified with talents and gifts  
But he had some rough times - turmoil and rifts.  
It's hard to be told what your future should hold.  
It's hard to be brave - it's hard to be bold  
And venture off with your own song to sing  
And wear your hair long and do your own thing.  
People expect you to carry the flame  
Of their own definition of fortune and fame.  
But, what makes you happy, joyful and true  
Are better questions to explore with you.**

## **Debriefing of a Summer Course: (continued)**

### **Session Ten (continued)**

**A video was presented by John  
Not too short - and not too long.  
About a young boy who's playing chess  
He's quite good and among the best.**

### **Session Eleven**

**Week four has come to an end  
Week five is just 'round the bend  
Jason introduced us to Doug whose cool;  
An accomplished artist who raps at school.  
In his mind he has set his sights  
On being a member of the Acolytes.  
He has a web page with information and facts  
And has been part of some opening acts  
For musicians who see him with a different view  
Instead of judging him by what he can't do.  
Stephanie showed a film about two guys  
Two friends who talked and gave some jive  
About who was better at a video game -  
Seems to me they're just about the same.  
Friendship evolves in its own natural way  
Get out of our way you might hear them say.  
We're teenagers who talk about girls and song.  
We go by the names of Donnell and Bong.  
The food's been good and such a nice treat  
And flowers too just can't be beat.  
People greet each other as friends  
And learn from each other - It depends  
On mutual respect, trust and sincerity  
As we wrap up our class in its entirety.  
We will remember this course for a time  
And maybe even the instructor's rhyme  
As we each continue on our way  
To reflect back upon this day  
And learn to include diversity, I know  
Each of us will continue to grow  
And develop into great teachers - I'll hear  
Some of you will be teachers of the year.**

## **Debriefing of a Summer Course: (continued)**

### **Session Twelve**

**Diane introduced us to her friend Michelle  
Who, from a lawyer's perspective, did tell  
About accommodations, modifications and rights  
For people with disabilities who set their sights  
On access, transportation and equality,  
Respect, dignity and advocacy.  
She shared a story from last week's news  
In which a student decided to choose  
To walk with pride on her graduation night  
But to the principal she caused a fright.  
Ralph had come to the class prepared  
With a video clip of something to share  
And it happened to relate to Michelle's tale  
That's how connections and learning prevail  
When people are ready to share what they know  
And the timing is right and they're ready to show  
How single, isolated bits of news  
Become enriched when together they're used.  
One is good but two are better  
Now this story I'm bound to remember.**

### **Session Thirteen**

**Ruth described a heartwarming tale  
About Carlos, a student, whose body was frail  
And he had a condition called Duchenne Dystrophy.  
His life was brief but he left quite a legacy.  
His dream was to go to his senior prom;  
A decision echoed by his mom.  
That's when Ruth got into the picture  
She wouldn't take "No" as an answer to her  
Requests for funds for the ticket and ride.  
He brought his sister by his side  
And at the prom there was a wonderful thing  
When his peers selected Carlos as their prom king.  
A lesson learned from this story from Ruth:  
Anything's possible when you search for the truth  
Of assisting a student to reach his dreams  
He enriched our lives - so it seems.**

At the very end of Session One  
After the main points of this class were done  
We each had an article to read and see  
The wide range of topics that in this course could be.

*Parents Groups* are forming in some towns  
To question the practices that they greet with big frowns.  
Be prepared for advocates to say  
I think we should all try a new, different way.

*Americans with Disability Act* is a law  
ADA for short, looks for a flaw  
In ways that people can't get around  
As they try to access their city or town.

One person tried to use a horse  
In Idaho streets and of course  
She met with obstacles, rules and frustration.  
Was her horse a *reasonable accommodation*?

Some students have an *allergy to peanuts* and such  
Should we be making such an awful fuss?  
What strategies, changes and modifications  
Are right to employ in these situations?

One *comic*, we're told, can be quite funny  
When his humor includes his cerebral palsy.  
Humor, ridicule, sarcasm and irony  
All can be part of a person's disability.

*Dame Glennie* is an artist, one writer wrote  
She plays the drums without hearing a note  
Some call her profoundly deaf as her disability,  
But, she does hear - very well - just differently.

We read of a *wheelchair that can climb stairs*  
And the user gains independence and dares  
To be lifted to the same height as you  
And talk at eye level if he chooses to do.

Session One: 12/30/02 (continued)

Can *ADD* cause a life of crime  
Or is poverty a sign of a different kind  
Of life gone bad, Oh, how sad!  
A child is dead. Shot in the head.

Why do some people *persevere*  
Amid setbacks about which we hear.  
They get back up from being down  
Choose to smile when they could easily frown.  
Spinal muscular atrophy  
Hearing impairment & cerebral palsy.

*Autism* invades some child's life.  
Some days bring joy. Some days bring strife.  
Withdraw within  
Enjoying a spin.  
Starting early with inclusion  
Helps avoid future confusion.

Bully me and bully you  
*Bullies* are cruel - through and through,  
Taunting, pointing and hurtful names  
These are children's dangerous games.

There are teachers who bring some *hope*  
Who use humor each day so students can cope  
With the trials of a learning disability  
To become part of the school community.

One story told of a teenager who found  
A way to make his *church more accessible* bound.  
He saw a need by his piano teacher  
So he took his request right to his preacher.  
He raised the money - He inspired everyone  
To keep on giving till the job was done.

*Athletes* who are visually impaired and blind  
Listen for the bells of a ball to find  
A sport to compete with other teams  
In a game called *goalball* and live out some dreams.

**Session One : 12/30/02 (continued)**

**A parent searches high and low  
For a place where her *preschool child* can go  
To be with others so she can play  
And not let her disability get in the way.  
She has special medical equipment and concerns  
To be with her peers her mother does yearn.**

**A final newspaper article was read  
About our *coworkers* like Sandra and Fred  
Who have talents and gifts and a label too  
But who excel in what they are asked to do.**

**The purpose of this activity  
Is to explore the possibility  
Of *people in community*  
Living with a disability.**

**We are all pretty much the same,  
But, we're all quite different too  
It depends a lot on the attitudes  
Of me, him, her and you.**

*In an effort to connect current events with the content of this class, I distributed different newspaper articles to each person, asked them to read the article and then comment to the class about what the article had to do with special education and students with disabilities. I then summarized the key areas that were covered by writing this poem. I want to keep this activity fresh in future semesters by not distributing the same articles but will only provide articles from the current time during which the course is taught.*

## Leadership Course - Thoughts & Reflections

Every semester - just about this time  
I try to put my thoughts and feelings in rhyme  
To summarize a class in which I just taught  
And reflect about all the truths that I sought  
To share with a group of students each week  
And together to meet - together to seek  
More about ourselves and our own personal style  
To become better leaders in just a short while.

Together we used our emotional intelligence  
To see how we could make just a bit more sense  
Of reflective templates, metaphors and FISH  
And more kinds of food than anyone could wish  
For a party was held most every Monday night  
With music and balloons for a festive sight  
To join with colleagues, friends and peers  
It's been one of the best classes of all my years.

The thing that stands out the most to me  
Was to be in the midst of such great company  
Of learners who learned  
Of yearners who yearned  
To explore their own unique leadership traits  
By completing an activity that strongly relates  
To how each one of us works to better our skills  
That touches our souls and enhances our wills.

Mr. Rogers was a person, I think I recall  
He was a leader to be followed and cherished by all  
For he had the qualities and traits of a man  
Who led his life with a grand master plan  
That involved respect, honor and many a kind word  
He was a leader "extraordinaire" across the land we heard  
About the impact he had on both adult and child.  
Mr. Rogers was a leader though his voice was quite mild.

The thoughts that I have that get stuck in my head  
Are not necessarily what anyone said  
But the atmosphere, attitude and general demeanor  
That helped set the tone - helped make each one a dreamer.

## **Leadership Course - Thoughts & Reflections (continued)**

**I remember the sections of pipe and the ball  
As we worked as a group out in the long hall.  
I remember the popcorn and the baseball theme  
And how we started as many but became one team.  
It was an awesome experience as a community of learners  
As we continue to lead and become like sojourners  
Whose message is loud and one worth repeating  
It's our lives that change with quality and meaning.**

**I know that I could go on and on  
And make this poem into another song.  
As I wind down these words, suffice it to say  
We all can be leaders in our own unique way.**

**During one semester I taught a course titled Leadership in Special Education and used Goleman's book that contained a focus on emotional intelligence: *Primal Leadership*. I had read this book earlier in the year and thought it would provide a great background for discussing issues of leadership as a teacher or team leader in special education. This was an especially enriching class as I was able to elaborate on a topic of interest that students took as an elective.**

## There's A Spirit in the Air

There's a spirit in the air  
Of warmth, fun and care  
Where students meet  
To come and greet  
At the start of day  
With lots and lots to say  
It warms my heart to see.

There's a spirit in the air  
As each one takes a chair  
And sits upon the seat  
Eager to repeat  
A lesson from their notes,  
A song, a poem, some quotes,  
And share their time with me.

There's a spirit in the air.  
Of this we are aware.  
It's in the food we bring.  
It's in the songs we sing.  
I feel it in the room.  
It lifts away the gloom.  
A teacher we each will be.

There's a spirit in the air.  
It hovers 'bout our hair.  
It smiles from up above.  
It showers us with love.  
I feel its glow  
Both high and low  
In everyone I see.

There's a spirit in the air.  
It feels ex-tra-or-di-naire.  
It brings us rays of HOPE  
Like strands of a fine rope.  
It brings us all together  
In sunny and stormy weather  
To build community.

*There's A Spirit in the Air* seemed an apt title to the way I felt about the atmosphere within which I convened a course one summer. We met from 8:00 am - Noon and people were always ready to go after some brief refreshments .... a most enjoyable group.

## Reflections on Completing Another Course

Exceptional Learners was the title of this course  
Learning did not arrive from just one source.  
We had great speakers, each and every one  
Had much to offer and when they were done,  
I reflected back on what they had said  
And bounced their ideas around in my head.  
We met for a while on hot summer mornings.  
Each of us brought our own unique yearnings.  
You want to be a teacher of science or math  
Or maybe reading could be your right path.  
We sat and listened to guests and to each other  
As the mysteries of learning we tried to uncover.

I woke up at five and some days at three  
To think about what was in store for me.  
What new insights would I learn?  
In what directions would my thoughts turn?  
My first cup of coffee began to kick in.  
I'm ready for another new class to begin.  
Muffins, orange juice, donuts and cake  
Helped me gain an additional 5 pounds of weight.  
But the refreshments created a quite pleasant mood  
As we talked to each other and enjoyed the great food.  
Thank you for attending to this great way to start  
As we talked to our peers over a blueberry tart.

Many of the videos had an impact on us all.  
Doug Blevins taught others how to kick the football.  
Bob Blue spoke his wisdom in music and song  
Helping all students to learn and to just get along.  
And Cupid and Arrow were interesting horses  
Who taught valuable lessons in two of my courses.  
We sang some songs and played some games  
Like musical chairs modified to our names.

## Reflections on Completing Another Course (continued)

Web sites and syndromes were found in great mass.  
We'll need this information when we get our own class.  
There's too much out there really to know.  
Our knowledge about things will continue to grow.  
I read through debriefings and assignments each day.  
I wondered what each of the students would say  
About the condition of people with a label  
To find out just how each person was able  
To share one's gifts with classmates and friends  
To build community and inclusive trends.

There's abundant talent in each of our peers  
Some learn with their eyes, some with their ears.  
We have much to offer to each other  
There's so much to know and so much to cover:  
Usher syndrome and Bipolar definitions  
Autism, deafness and ADHD conditions.  
What does it mean? Where do we start?  
Is it more of a science or more of an art?  
Providing assistance, support and aid  
To help each student work toward a grade  
That represents effort, quality and skill.  
It takes determination. It takes great will!

Thank you for making this summer class fun.  
I was sad when it ended - but now that it's done  
I look back and try to explain how it went.  
What made it work? How was the time spent?  
But, the energy happened because you were there.  
No other group would have that same flair.  
The mixture of warmth and receptivity  
Made this a unique learning community.

*This concluding summary was from the same class of students for which "Spirit in the Air" was written. They were, indeed a people of "class". Their enthusiasm for learning and contributing wisdom made it well worthwhile for me to put my energies in making this course uniquely different than others. I never quite know what the flavor of each course will be until I sense the quality of the talent that abounds. It's nice to be able to provide a safe, nurturing place for individuals to come to terms with their own stereotypes and thoughtfulness about welcoming students with disabilities into their future classrooms*

## Thoughts To Myself - Shared With Others

In order to get better at what you do  
Discomfort and doubt will follow you  
Into each experience - into each class  
Into every job in which you pass.

If you are feeling a little unease  
Welcome to the club - but please  
Don't give up - go with the flow  
You'll be surprised at what you will know.

There are supports and talents available here  
To help make the muddy a little more clear.  
Already, the unexpected happened to me  
An act of kindness - a cup of coffee!

So, bear with me as I plod on anew  
And before you know it - after a few  
Weeks go by - you'll see the light  
As we meet together on Monday night.

\*\*\*\*\*

I was tired as the end of class was in sight.  
The humidity and heat hung heavy in the night.  
We viewed a video about Doug Blevins  
A kicking coach for the Miami Dolphins  
And John Espinoza had his own golf course  
Built by his father from a nationwide source  
Of donations and funds to fulfill a dream.  
Watch out for the hazard that flows as a stream!

Paradox, metaphor and values half my age  
Were discussed as more than mere words on a page.  
The data projector worked fine and then quit.  
I felt like perhaps it just needed a hit.  
But wait, the reason it may not now run  
Might be because of something wrong I had done.

Students asked some of their well-worded questions  
About the assignments and required observations.  
Updates will continue to be found each week  
As I provide responses to the answers you seek.  
Thank you coming to class Monday night.  
It helps start the week in a way that feels right.

## Thoughts To Myself - Shared With Others (continued)

I went out for a walk to clear my head  
But jumbled thoughts were there instead.  
Too much to know - Too much to do  
When my journey today is through.  
Taking time to just sit and listen  
At my table just outside the kitchen  
As I write these words to begin my day.  
What's in store along the way?

\*\*\*\*\*

Mastery is an illusion –  
We must stop teaching to this delusion.  
Connecting with the content matters –  
Let's use our strengths and gifts together  
To gain new insights and ways to grow  
That only we can really know  
How to live a better life  
Amid the joys and amid the strife..

*I found the preceding stanzas in various places in my journal and put them under one title. Hopefully, they have not also been included elsewhere!*

## The Uniqueness In Us All

As we eat our meal today  
The class ends but friendships stay  
So much talent week by week  
As the truth we try and seek.  
I caught a glimpse back on day three  
Someone's words forced me to see -  
*About the uniqueness in us all.*

We learn about ability  
Of people in a category  
Of people who use a chair  
Of people with no hair  
Of people with high intelligence  
Of people who lack confidence -  
*About the uniqueness in us all.*

It's great to be a teacher  
It's great to be a reacher  
I read my notes  
I wrote some quotes  
About what's in the news  
There's lots from which to choose -  
*About the uniqueness in us all.*

We talk about our differences  
It's hard to put in sentences.  
Normal is as Normal does.  
Normal did as Normal was.  
It's nice to spend some time with you.  
It's nice to learn what's old and new -  
*About the uniqueness in us all.*

*I find that in the process of investigating the uniqueness of each student with a disability, we are also discovering the uniqueness in us all - as both teacher and learner. As one philosopher once said - "There is as much difference between me and myself as there is between us and them!"*

We come from different places  
 From all around this land  
 Some by plane and some by train  
 To hear Bob and Pat and Dan.

What will I learn  
 From what I hear today?  
 What will I take back  
 From what I hear them say?

Is this worth my time  
 To sit and learn this stuff?  
 How will it change what I do  
 Or is it just some sort of fluff

That someone sent me here to do?  
 To APSE - A conference in DC  
 A long way from work and home  
 And friends and family!

I will take back with me  
 A little bit of history.  
 Many people paved the way.  
 People who had a lot to say.

Bob Perske and Circles of Friend  
 Lou Brown "Segregation's got to end!"  
 Wehman, Bellamy, Powell and Will  
 Wendy, David, Rob and Bill.

Challenges that we bring with us here  
 The answer will come in the end.  
 All problems can be answered so clear  
 With just two words - "It depends!"

Each of us brings a unique situation  
 From urban and rural sites.  
 What do we do? How do we do it?  
 How do we know wrong from right?

Supported Employment ---- but  
 Get people stuck in deep ruts.  
 Maybe they should be with their kind!  
 That's you and me, if you don't mind!

Some do. Some don't.  
 Some will. Some won't.  
 Some can. Some can't.  
 Some rave. Some rant.

People do things over again.  
 Isn't variety the spice of life?  
 People do things over again.  
 Am I giving them joy or strife?

Marc Gold taught us how to teach.  
 "Try Another Way," he would preach.  
 "If you really want to succeed,  
 Add more power," he would heed.

When we help someone achieve  
 Even for just a short time,  
 We make sense of all the confusion  
 And help each other learn to rhyme.

Pat works with people who struggle.  
 Lou Brown said, "Come in and talk."  
 If you work with people with big needs  
 You've got to learn to walk the walk.

Get him a job, which needs his skill  
 For a person who likes to tear.  
 Find a job that he can rip things up  
 Instead of pulling your hair.

Friend - Respect - Normal Existence  
 Just like me - with a little assistance.  
 It's nothing special - it's life!  
 For Bob, Peter, Cheryl and Dwight.

## APSE ES 101 (continued)

Some of my verses rhyme  
And others don't  
Sometimes life is fine  
And sometimes it isn't.

Values, vision, attitudes and belief  
Normal rhythm of the week.  
Routines and time to take a break  
Maybe in the land of 10,000 Lakes.

Choices for me and choices for you  
Pepsi or Coke or a home with a view.  
SRV is not a van you can buy  
But a valued role that you can try.

Grand plans are made  
When allies are present  
Some plans just stop  
And action is vacant.

It's not easy - our work is hard  
Many people get in the way.  
Myths, buts and It Can't Be Done!  
Are responses some will say.

It Can't Be Done! . . .  
but all won't agree  
Show them your option  
#103.

Anything goes if you've the right team  
People who risk go to the extreme.  
It might take time & it takes hard work  
But "No's" not an option in this report.

How much do we risk  
If we push "them" too far?  
Our job? --- Our ethics?  
Our money? --- Our car?

If you think it can't be done  
You're right - of course!  
Go do something else with your life  
Go buy yourself a horse!

You are the one who'll get things done  
You are the one who matters  
You came here to spend some time  
To be among the chatter.

Ask me what I want  
When I come through the door.  
Treat me with respect and care  
And listen to me some more.

No one knows the answer.  
Creativity is the key.  
There's always a biggest challenge  
That will forever follow me.

Make a decision -- to be the best  
Or -- you'll end up like all the rest  
Who only do what they are told  
Who don't know how to be very bold.

The older I am, the more I know  
My values that have helped me grow  
Into who I want to be  
As I near age fifty.

I'll do my best to do what's right  
Or try again tomorrow night.  
How do you begin to rate -  
The best way to communicate?

Problem solving is a skill  
Helps me think some day I will  
Get better and better every day  
So that I'll never have to say -  
"I can't help you."

## APSE ES 101 (continued)

APSE isn't the place to go  
If you don't plan to grow  
And challenge others when they say  
"We don't do things here that way!"

Life evolves as we resolve  
Not to stray or move away  
From what's right  
As we fight for our own quality of life.

Often when I write my notes  
It changes what I think is true  
I keep on learning in different ways  
Because I hear from you.

Did you see the star?  
It was always there.  
Some need just a little more help  
To see and be aware.

There's always a way to do what's right  
It's hard when the goal is not in sight.  
Don't settle for less. There's little time.  
Thank for listening to my rambling rhyme.

*The preceding stanzas originated while I was listening to an opening session of a pre conference training session at the annual conference of the Association for Persons in Supported Employment (APSE). I was scheduled to deliver the afternoon session on person-centered planning so I decided to capture the morning's key elements in verse. I like the results.*

## Observations at a Student Teaching Seminar

I've got to be prepared  
Don't grab my ideas from the air  
Reliability - - - Confidentiality  
Punctuality - - - Reality

"Where's your lesson plan?"  
"I left it in the van!"  
"Want a better excuse?"  
"It got eaten by a moose!!"

Don't stumble or mumble  
Or jumble or tumble.  
Communication is KEY  
What's expected of me?

Think incrementally  
About your responsibility  
Work out a calendar now  
Of all the Who and What and Why and How.

The conversation goes three ways  
Listen to what each person says  
Reflect on how you grow  
In what you learn and what you know.

Communicate - - - Facilitate  
Delegate - - - Recreate  
Questions come and questions go  
Answers seem to come quite slow.

Community means that people share  
Their gifts among those who care  
About everyone's well being  
To grow and keep on achieving.

To reach our personal goals  
We need each other's help  
Community means including all  
No one gets left on the shelf.

## **Observations at a Student Teaching Seminar (continued)**

**The way we talk and discuss our challenges  
Is more important than the solution  
Everyone needs to help and contribute  
To what may seem like a lot of confusion.**

**The way we talk and discuss our challenges  
Is more important than the solution  
Everyone needs to help and contribute  
To what may seem like a lot of confusion.**

**Sometimes people get left out.  
Children don't mean to be cruel.  
Be more aware of what's not said  
Remind them of the Golden Rule.**

**We are important in each one's life  
As we teach our lesson plans  
Building community is a universal goal  
For Ernie and Mary and Sarah and Dan.**

**Creativity can be learned.  
It's integrity that must be earned.  
I am a model for students to see  
They've got to view the best in me.**

**I may be frightened.  
I may be scared.  
But, I'm always showing  
My ability to care.**

**Can I really make a difference?  
Is this really what I want to do?  
This road I'm on seems rather long.  
When will the journey finally be through?**

**Through! Its just beginning.  
More will happen ahead.  
Expertise takes a lifetime to achieve,  
I've often heard it said.**

## Observations at a Student Teaching Seminar (continued)

Technology can enhance  
The lessons that you do.  
You edit your work.  
You shine through and through.

How can I be a teacher?  
How will I be able to reach her?  
When things don't go well  
How am I going to tell  
Her about what's expected  
Of her today?  
What do I Say?

The Red Sox are through this summer.  
Some say it's been a real bummer.  
Others knew it would happen again  
As predictable as students who challenge us when  
They don't meet all our expectations  
When our lesson plan was carefully written  
Full of HOPE and ANTICIPATION!

It's Friday morning.  
The seminars are almost done.  
This one's about building community  
And how we can help our class be ONE.  
Beyond the Confusion  
Of Diversity and Inclusion.

*I attended an opening session of a series of student teacher seminars and wrote these notes as a way of summarizing what I felt were the key parts of the morning's presentations. These student teachers represented individuals who were studying to be elementary teachers and also students studying to be special education teachers.*

**Section 2**  
**Revised Lyrics**  
**To Tunes That**  
**Connect To My Values**

## The Changin' Truths (to the Dylan tune – The Times They Are A Changin')

Come gather round people and I'll sing you a tale.  
I'll sing you this song and I'll send it e-mail.  
It's a song about learning, teaching and fun.  
It's a song that continues and never is done.  
'Cause you better start lookin' & searchin' some more  
*For the truths - - - they are a changin'.*

We're talkin' 'bout people with labels and names.  
Sometimes we're different & sometimes we're the same.  
We all have gifts and talents and skills.  
We all have minds and souls and wills.  
So look all around you and wonder in awe  
*For the truths - - - they are a changin'.*

Come teachers and students and everyone here.  
Come from your schools and gather all near  
And celebrate our unique diversity  
And welcome us all into your community.  
'Cause we all have ambitions and goals and dreams  
*For the truths - - - they are a changin'.*

The rules and the laws have helped pave the way  
So parents and families can each have a say  
About where, why and when and even ask how  
That all children can learn together and now  
Get ready for due process and advocacy  
*For the truths - - - they are a changin'.*

Come gather round here on a Friday afternoon.  
And know that a teacher we all will be soon  
The students we learned from we all will agree  
Caused the blood, sweat and tears as we get our degree  
'Cause we all have hopes and dreams and fears  
*For the truths - - - they are a changin'.*

We started our journey a long time ago  
A teaching certificate we will have to show  
And work at a school and teach in our room  
Some days will bring sunshine while others bring gloom  
'Cause we come in at 7:00 and leave after 4:00  
*For the truths - - - they are a changin'.*

## **The Changin' Truths (continued)**

**It's time to begin my teaching at last  
And remember the things that I learned in the past  
About gifts and skills and talents and needs  
No matter the label each child can succeed  
'Cause each student is a wonder and no one must fail  
*For the truths - - - they are a changin'.***

**It's time to leave my friends at this school  
And remember the one, most important, best rule  
Trust in yourself and continue to learn  
And honors and success you are sure to earn  
Cause you are a teacher with values and goals  
*For the truths - - - they are a changin'***

**(to be continued)**

*I admire the creative genius of Bob Dylan. Accordingly, I took his tune to The Times, They Are A Changin' and wrote lyrics for one of the student teaching celebrations. I wrote them with the expectations that teachers will undergo a change of "truths" throughout their careers. This song gets that process started.*

*The following entry is one of my favorite set of lyrics set to the tune of Billy Joel's "Piano Man". I was especially pleased with the chorus that I developed based on the newly constructed Krispey Kreme franchise in a local community. The message I wanted to convey is the value of treating all students in whatever way best meets their needs.*

## Lesson Plan Man

It's two o'clock on a Saturday  
 My friends are nowhere in sight  
 All of my lessons in front of me  
 Oh how they give me a fright.

This is the end of my journey  
 I'll be a real teacher quite soon.  
 Just a few more weeks in front of me  
 As I add more words to my tune.

La la la, de de da  
 La la, de de da da da

(chorus)

Give me an "A" for my lesson plan.  
 Give me an "A" for my work.  
 I've stayed up till five  
 On a Krispey Kreme high  
 So I won't have to be a sales clerk!

Now Mary has a label of L.D.  
 Bob has that label too.  
 Nick is so quick to want to be picked  
 ADHD sticks on him like glue.

Do I teach to a label or the child inside?  
 Do I teach to the labels I see?  
 Or is Mary and Bob and Nick and Diane  
 More than labels to you and to me?

La la la, de de da  
 La la, de de da da da

(chorus)

For Monday I wrote my lessons so well  
 I planned every word that I'd say.  
 But Mary was sick  
 And Bob he was picked  
 To go to the office that day.

## Lesson Plan Man

I tried just as hard to teach what I could  
The lessons I made went awry  
Sometimes to try is all you can do  
The students will understand why.

La la la, de de da  
La la, de de da da da

(chorus)

On Tuesday morn at the fire drill  
Bob, he was frightened to death  
I took his hand and helped him to stand  
And go outside with the rest

Later that day Mary got hit  
She cried as I held her tight  
I looked in her eyes and to my surprise  
She smiled as she ran out of sight.

Sometimes the days seem so weary  
A headache - a migraine or two  
But the smiles I see do remind me  
A teacher I still want to be

(chorus)

On Wednesday in the teacher's lounge  
I heard some disparaging words  
About just the kids who had hit the skids  
And some who are just plain bored.

A teacher's job is supposed to be hard  
An easier one I could take  
But because of the challenges I face each day  
An excellent teacher I'll make.

There are days when I am so tired  
Some days when nothing goes right  
Those are the days I'm inspired  
To work twice as hard late that night.

(chorus)

**An Ode to Student Teaching**  
**(to the tune of For the Longest Time by Billy Joel)**

I've been here for just about four years.  
 Seen some laughter - and I've seen some tears  
 Some students come and go  
 Some students help me grow  
 Seems like I have been here for the Longest Time.

Sitting here some hundred miles away  
 Writing words to sing another day  
 When celebration  
 Ends in jubilation  
 Seems like I have been here for the Longest Time.

Road's been rocky with some twists and turns  
 I forgot some things - some others I did learn  
 Spent some nights up till the break of dawn  
 Felt I was a pawn, now I know it's been worth it!

What to do now? What will be in store?  
 What's behind the other open door?  
 When will I be at the end?  
 Is this what I expected when . . . ?  
 Seems like I have been here for the Longest Time.

Got out to a very frightening place  
 Patience was my only saving grace  
 Put to practice what I knew  
 Did the best that I could do  
 Seems like I have been here for the Longest Time.

Crossed my Teas and dotted all my Eyes.  
 Ate my Big Mac burger and my Biggie Fries  
 Watched no TV - Stayed up way past ten  
 Wrote my lesson plans - No sleep since God knows when!

We all came here to learn and then to play  
 Some people gave up and they went away  
 Others stayed right to today  
 They are here to speak and say  
 Seems like I have been here for the Longest Time.



**50 Ways To Learn From One Another  
(with assistance from students in SPED 501)**

There is a question that keeps popping in my head -  
 Why do I have a label - Special Ed?  
 I need some people to be with me in my fight.  
 I need some people who have some good insight.  
 So, if you please --- I think you will agree  
 There must be 50 ways to learn from one another.  
 There must be 50 ways to learn from one another.

We got to listen like Kristen  
 Don't leave 'em in the dark, Mark  
 Read them a story, Lori  
 Love 'em to death, Beth

Get 'em in line, Caroline  
 Don't get fancy, Nancy  
 Go on the journey, Ernie  
 Stay on the job, Bob

Keep on your toes, Rose  
 Don't buy that scam, Tam  
 Climb up that hill, Bill  
 Enjoy that song, John

There is a question that keeps popping in my head.  
 How do I remember all this about Special Ed?  
 And how do I recall all that has been said?  
 There must be 50 ways to learn from one another.

Ben threw the Koosh ball perfectly without sight.  
 Helen reminded us of family with her will and might.  
 Please don't hear these words and get uptight.  
 There must be 50 ways to learn from one another.  
 There must be 50 ways to learn from one another.

*This modification of Paul Simon's "50 Ways to Leave Your Lover" seemed appropriate to my courses as I changed the title to "50 Ways to Learn From One Another". My challenge was to include each person's name in the class and rhyme it with a word or set of words that related to their contribution to the class. I built this into part of the course toward the end of the semester and asked the entire class to brainstorm some options, especially for first names for which it was hard to find words to rhyme.*

**I Just Want To Be Hired**  
**(to the tune of We Didn't Start The Fire – Billy Joel)**

**(Chorus)**

**I Just Want to Be Hired!**  
**Been in School Too Long**  
**Time for Moving On!**  
**I Just Want to Be Hired!**  
**Where is Dr. Moss?**  
**I'm at such a loss!**

**Credentials - Essentials!**  
**Certificates in Duplicate**  
**Wait in line - wait till noon**  
**Praxis II - must take it soon**  
**Mean, median and mode**  
**I just do what I am told**

**Science and Geography**  
**Math and Physics – History**  
**Paid my fees and paid my bill**  
**Walked to class in morning chill**

**Got my grades - not so good**  
**I just feel misunderstood**  
**Want to pass every class**  
**Want an 'A' so I can say ...**

**(Chorus)**

**Worked with children, younger ones**  
**They bit my fingers, broke my thumb**  
**Older ones were just the same**  
**I am going quite insane.**  
**Reading stories - Doing Math**  
**I just want to take a bath**

**Scoring tests, Reports galore**  
**I am heading out the door**  
**Someone quick - give me a clue**  
**My portfolio is due**  
**I just need to get it done.**

## **I Just Want To Be Hired (continued)**

**Don't know how to have some fun.  
Applications due today  
Hope that I can find my way  
Hurry up! Turn in those papers  
Turn us into lesson makers.**

**(Chorus)**

**June, July and August too  
Summer breezes blowing through  
Vacation's coming and no school  
Eight weeks off - what shall I do?  
Looking forward to the fall  
Working with the big and small.**

**Will they like me, will they not?  
I forgot what I was taught!  
The day is here I'm such a wreck  
I'll have a go - oh what the heck.  
First day in my new position  
I just wish the class would listen.**

**(Chorus)**

**Our education's been worthwhile  
Now, we'll just kick back and smile  
Wish us luck and say farewell  
Thanks a lot, it's sure been swell**

**A teacher's what I want to be  
I hope the schools will welcome me.  
I've been waiting for this day  
When finally I can say . . .**

**(Chorus)**

*A third song adaptation of Billy Joel represents another example of developing a set of lyrics related to student teaching and connected to a popular song, at least popular from the college instructor's perspective.*

**Section 3**  
**Person-Centered Planning**  
**and Looking**  
**Toward the Future**

## Choice

Somebody asked me, "What do you choose?"  
How can I answer: Will I win? Will I lose?

"What do you choose?" is loaded with meaning  
Pepsi or Coke or to go out for this evening.

Are you talking about food or a new place to live?  
Are you talking of my life or what you will give?

Are you listening to me tell my dreams that I wish  
Or, are you fooling around with new words on a dish

That you offer to me? It sounds very good.  
But, it's hard to believe you -- I wish that I could.

My dreams for the future are hard to express.  
My dreams and my visions are right now a guess.

I need some more options to be in my life.  
I need some one near me to hear of my strife.

Choices you offer may not be for me.  
And choices I ask for, we all won't agree.

Let's talk about choice and see what it means  
As you sit here and listen to each of my dreams.

*The value of enhanced choices for individuals with disabilities often surfaces in my work. I decided to introduce my talks and conversations with people by including this poem. Choice is often defined by the opportunities available to people. Often, choices are limited by the options offered by those in power, including holders of the public funds to which most people with disabilities have eligibility and/or access.*

## Debriefing from March 26th In-Service on Person-Centered Planning

On March 26th I traveled north to teach  
A "great" group of people at Hampton Beach.  
Person-Centered Planning was the topic of the day.  
I wondered what it was exactly that I'd say.  
I had lots of ideas, material and stuff,  
But I wondered - was it really going to be enough  
To let them know and to have them see  
To share a profile that's all about me.

Every time I cover this topic again  
I sort through my files for another new gem  
Of wisdom to impart but I end up instead  
With wisdom received from what somebody said  
As she connects with something I briefly talked about  
And she makes my thoughts better - of this there's no doubt.  
It's always worthwhile, this person-centered scheming  
To help with a person's aspirations and dreaming.

*Earlier in my career, I maintained a yearly contact with David Hagner from the University of New Hampshire. He had invited me to participate in a 3-day seminar he offered on the career planning process, of which I focus on person-centered planning and decision-making strategies. I valued this time with David and the participants at this yearly event.*

## Person-Centered Planning

You opened this book  
To find a new way to look  
*At the people you support.*

Open with care  
And then you will dare  
*To make a difference in this person's life.*

Thus, begins the person centered plan  
Thus, begins the journey of "I Can"  
*With a team of people to pave the way.*

A person can dream and hope  
As we understand the ropes  
*And remove the obstacles that lie in the path.*

Activities, outcomes, questions to ask  
It all appears to be an overwhelming task  
*And it will take time to do well.*

It is said choices are more important than abilities  
As we search for new opportunities  
*In the communities around our lives.*

The spirit of support is easy to see  
When we listen to each one's dreams that can be  
*Realized when we provide some help.*

Enter on the journey and prepare to stay long.  
There will be stories and there will be song.  
*You are an important part of the process.*

*Prior to delivering a keynote address at an annual meeting of a local ARC, I read this poem that I stated could be placed as the front page of a person-centered planning notebook. I enjoyed working with the Independent Support Coordinators associated with this agency as we developed guidelines for the planning process that contained a focus on person-centeredness.*

## I've Been Dreaming

The *Dreams* of the young,  
The *Dreams* of the bold,  
For people we support  
Their *Dreams* must be told.

*Dreams* are uncertain.  
*Dreams* can be vague.  
But all *Dreams* are visions  
From Sue, Bob and Peg.

Stop and Reflect.  
Listen with care.  
Give your support  
And your *Dreams* to share.

Today's a good day  
To sit and to listen  
To share and reflect  
To talk and to vision.

A *Dream* will grow.  
A *Dream* will shine.  
Because of your efforts  
And also of mine

*This poem appears on page 54 of a publication I wrote: Positive Profiles – Building Community Together. It reminds me that the goals and objectives of any formalized planning document must be linked to the dreams of the focus person. Our ability to listen to those dreams does a great service to that individual.*

## Who is Ernie - - - Metaphorically Speaking?

This person called "Ernie" Is on a long journey -  
 A marathon man  
 With a long distance plan -  
*To lead a life of quality*  
*Currently at the university.*

A gentle breeze flows by -  
 75 degrees and a sunlit sky -  
 Refreshing air  
 Blows through his hair.  
*To lead a life a quality,*  
*One needs a bit of tranquility.*

7:00 am is a great time of day.  
 The sun is up as I pave my way  
 To that first cup of coffee -  
 Sets my mind to move free -  
*To lead a life of quality,*  
*A drink to add some clarity.*

Tofu pie is a nutritious snack  
 That represents his vegetarian knack  
 To eat good food  
 For a pleasant mood -  
*To lead of life of quality,*  
*As he eats today most healthily.*

A Path Finder would be an admirable car  
 To search for truths in places afar  
 And venture off the open road  
 And use the 4-wheel driving mode -  
*To lead a life of quality,*  
*In an out-of-the way locality.*

Hot oatmeal warms from inside out.  
 It may even cause a person to shout  
 That there will always be more than one way  
 As I get out and begin a brand new day -  
*To lead a life of quality,*  
*With good food to aid vitality.*

## Who is Ernie - - - Metaphorically Speaking? (continued)

An avocado is a unique type of food:  
A shell on the outside the substance of wood.  
But the nutritious substance that lies within  
Adds richness to salads when sliced pretty thin -  
*To lead a life of quality*  
*With food rich in diversity.*

The willow tree bends but does not break.  
Its leaves reach out to those who ache  
And need shelter from the gathering storm -  
When their behavior fits not the norm -  
*To lead a life of quality,*  
*Bend like a tree most gracefully.*

An abundance of life lies in a small lake  
With enough room for everyone to plan and make  
Their presence known and felt by all  
Whether they be big or whether they be small -  
*To lead a life of quality,*  
*Live within your own ecology.*

Finally, a journal is a constant friend  
That will stay with you right up to the end.  
Pages of words of poems and thought  
And important lessons to me have taught -  
*To lead a life of quality.*  
*Live out your dreams in their entirety.*

*When discussing the development of positive profiles, I use metaphors to represent different attributes and qualities. I then ask each participant to do the same and I record the results using a concentric circles visual. I like the way various images help represent parts of us to others.*

## Conference Introduction On Person-Centered Planning

As I get a little older  
I become a lot bolder -  
Is fifty  
Really that nifty,  
*I ask myself today?*

Helping each other  
Try to discover  
What's out there  
In the air  
*of places in my community.*

Are the places I seek  
At the end of the week  
Nice places to be  
And places to see -  
*friends I like to be with?*

Can you help me  
see a movie  
or, by chance,  
to a dance  
*I might wish to go?*

I depend on you  
to help see me through  
and spend some time  
help make my life rhyme -  
*spend some time with me.*

Everyone's so busy  
all around the big city  
even in small towns  
people wear big frowns  
*and stay inside by themselves.*

Some people like to read  
Others like to plant a seed  
Some like to go out on a boat  
Others like to swim and float  
*There's so much to do each day.*

I rode in my car  
To get me this far  
And talk with you today  
What do I have to say  
*That you don't already know?*

Am I  
the guy  
With advice  
That's concise  
*To influence what you do?*

I appreciate your time  
To hear my rhyme  
And listen to my talk  
Before you go out and walk  
*With the people in their communities.*

*I wrote this poem in the parking lot about half an hour before I was scheduled to deliver a morning keynote presentation on person-centered planning. I wanted to start off fresh with my most immediate thoughts about my own life - - at 50 and what right did I have to come in and talk about how to assist others on achieving quality in their own lives, especially individuals with intellectual disabilities.*

## It's My Planning Meeting!

When you think about where to have your meeting,  
Who is involved in the planning and seating?

"Round up the usual suspects!" I heard him say  
But you want to meet in some other way.  
Invite who you want - be in charge.  
Your meeting can be small - or it can be quite large.

In person-centered plans there needs to be attention  
About who to invite to your planning situation.  
It's up to you - - - choose anyone  
It's your say - - - before the list is done.

There's no one right way to set up your plan.  
There's no special form, in fact you can  
Have one, two or twelve or twenty  
It's up to you to decide what is plenty.

Circle meetings may happen in our life  
Sometimes for joy - sometimes for strife.  
When someone in our life has a special need  
We gather together - - - a challenge to heed.

Burton Blatt was a pioneer of note  
He offered this statement as one day he spoke -  
*Special Education is a unique consideration*  
*It's not very special and it's not education.*

Social networks exist with us all  
But it's not what they are typically called.  
One method to find out about social connections  
Is to look at our life and begin to ask questions.

*Once again, this entry originates from a workshop I co-presented with David Hagner from the University of New Hampshire. In this workshop we emphasized that the planning meeting was for and about a focus person and that person should decide who will be present and how active a role s/he will play before, during and after the actual planning meeting.*

## Reflections on Reaching 50

On my drive to the Great Northwest  
In search of quality of life, I guess,  
I wonder what I'm going to say  
I wonder what's on my mind today.

What do I know about someone on your team  
When I'm trying to figure out my very own dream?  
Do I teach or preach - Do I rant and rave?  
Do I have something important to say today?

My life's been a puzzle - I search now and then.  
Am I close to the beginning or getting near the end?  
What chapter am I on in my own book of life  
Of pages gone by of joy and strife?

Do I have things to offer? Are my words worth giving?  
What do I learn from the folks who are living  
With challenges, obstacles, dead ends and defeats?  
Who am I to know how to give some relief?

Well - I'll continue to learn, continue to try  
As more of my life passes me by ----

*In this case, the Great Northwest refers to Torrington, CT located in the northwest section of the state. I had an opportunity to lead a discussion on ways to listen better to the dreams and aspirations of the individuals we support. I have no answers for this group of dedicated people, but I believe I can facilitate the discussion in ways of mutual benefit to all.*

**Section 4**  
**Miscellaneous Topics of  
Relevance  
to My Personal and/or  
Professional Life**

## Ode to the Red Sox

The Red Sox beat Oakland 3 of 5 games last week  
On come the Yankees, the A. L. Championship they seek.  
The winner of these games will be World Series bound  
And champions of the world they will be crowned.  
I wonder what the outcome will be in the end  
Will the Red Sox break or maybe just bend.

Will they come out on top when all is said and done  
And New Englanders will say, "It's been a great run!"  
I watch the games for fun and even cheer a bit.  
I enjoy the drama; it unfolds after every hit.  
I pick up the score on the highlights next day,  
Win or lose I just go about my own way.

The teams of old did bring much joy.  
Growing up in Maine as a young boy,  
I remember hours by the radio at night  
Listening to Yaz hit a long one to right  
Or Tiant who threw in his own unique style  
Or Scott who could hit a homer for a mile.

But lately, when I watch the million dollar men  
Taunt each other and start a fight once again,  
I lose my love for baseball as a game;  
It just doesn't seem to be much of the same.  
Pedro rears back and throws at someone's head.  
I remember Conigliaro – even though he's now dead.

I'll probably watch the Series until the final out  
But it'll leave a bad taste when I hear the fans shout  
We're Number One and the best team in the land!  
We're better than you and we're bigger than grand!  
But the feeling wears off. It just takes a very short time  
When the football fans pick up the chant and the rhyme.

Sports isn't about being number one, two or three.  
Sports is a game to be enjoyed and to see  
Athletes perform for our recreation and fun  
And for us to return to our work when its done  
Refreshed and relaxed and ready to be  
Better people who live in our own community.

## Ode to the Red Sox (continued)

Moving ahead . . . it's now game seven.  
I'll feel like hell or I'll be in seventh heaven.  
Pedro and Roger are ready for the night.  
Will the curse be reversed and be out of our sight?  
I'll watch the game with wonder and awe  
And know that it can't just end in a draw.

Earlier, the Cubs were defeated in the end  
And Chicago's fans are disappointed once again.  
The Marlins won the final three games in a row  
To add to the curse - to add to the woe  
Of another generation of many a baseball fan  
As "Wait Until Next Year!" rings through the land.

It's now game seven and both teams are still alive  
The score in the ninth is tied at five to five.  
The bewitching hour strikes at midnight  
And brings on an all-too-familiar sight.  
Aaron Boone joins Bucky Dent  
As a winning home run to left field went

There is no joy in Mudville or in my office when  
The Red Sox lost another - the curse is on again.  
I will not watch the Series when it starts tomorrow night.  
I will not watch more baseball. Get it out of sight!  
I do not hate the Yankees. I do not hate de bums  
My ode is finally over - time to get some Tums. .

*This ode was written, as any true Boston Red Sox fan would know, during the baseball playoffs of 2003. The end of the baseball season means a change of focus in my choice of entertainment. Life goes on! Wait until next year echoes throughout New England! Somewhere else, someone is shouting "Next year is finally here!"*

## Ode to A Circle of Friends

Bird on the feeder and squirrel in the air  
Friends stand around to watch the big fanfare.

A body dying - a soul rising  
Bonding, tears - embracing all.

Pain, pain and painful sounds  
Can't do more in my morphine rounds.

Thinking often of how you are -  
As you wonder on that star;

Waiting for what's in store for you -  
After this earthly life is through.

I've been to Pittsburgh. I've been to Maine.  
You've been to hell and back and living through the pain.

Dry lips, crusted tongue,  
Vaseline, suctioning on the run.

Residual and output are words I often hear  
Jevity? I'll take that for \$800 Alex, my dear.

Oxygen tube running in your nose;  
Awake, asleep, and off you doze.

Classical music - Vivaldi I hear  
"What's that, Pat? You want opera near."

Jokes, pain, music, and talk  
Beethoven, Vivaldi, Mozart, and Bach.

The words will come and the tears will flow.  
We make our peace; Todd surely knows.

"How long's that breath been?" A voice calls out  
"It's 6 times per minute and rattles about."

The circle of support has rallied to the call.  
Pat has the schedule taped up on the wall.

"What color's that ceiling?" We ask Sarah's friend, Chris  
"Is it green, yellow, limon or the color of bliss?"

The nurses are grand. The nurses are great.  
The nurses all know that Todd takes the cake.

The atmosphere here is good to behold.  
It's the best in Connecticut Joy has been told.

## Ode to A Circle of Friends (continued)

There's a rattle I hear, a long, drawn out sigh.  
When will the next one come from on high?  
Todd does it his way and there's no telling why  
He's been living that way since he was just five.  
Maybe I'll do it. Maybe I'll wait.  
Just do it soon 'cause maybe's too late.  
I want suction. I want love.  
I want a touch without a rubber glove.  
It's cold in the room. Todd's warm to the touch.  
Put on a coat, mittens, a scarf, gloves and such.  
Different reactions, from people who come near.  
Some bring sadness and some bring good cheer.  
We all have our needs, each and every one;  
But Todd's needs come first, he's the one on the run.  
He's not running for Congress, nor running a race.  
He's running to heaven with a smile of his face.  
There's peace in his soul. There's joy in his heart.  
There are tears in our eyes as we watch him depart.  
Maybe it sounds a little bit odd  
But, no one on earth has the spirit of Todd.  
He brings friends together, they're all pretty handy  
From Columbia, Manchester, Bristol, and Granby.  
To be continued ... This isn't the end.  
We'll all be together when the circle meets again.

*I had the honor of being a member of a circle of support for Raymond "Todd" Kilroy at the time of his bout with cancer. I'm not sure this poem does justice to the sights and sounds surrounding that event. I believe I learned some important lessons that have influenced me greatly. I continue to advance toward my own inevitable encounter with the dying process with a keener perspective and peace of mind.*

## Stuff

There's a path through my stuff  
Of piles on the floor.  
There's stuff on the walls  
There's stuff on the door.

I cleaned off a shelf  
And got rid of the dust  
Sorted through more stuff  
And wiped off the rust.

There's stuff in the air.  
There's stuff on the ground.  
There's stuff on the shelves.  
There's stuff all around.

Stuff comes in  
But it doesn't go out.  
Stuff just accumulates  
All about.

I'm not happy.  
I'm not sad.  
All this stuff  
Doesn't make me mad.

There's stuff on my mind  
There's stuff in the air.  
There's stuff in my past.  
There's stuff in my hair.

Some stuff is clutter.  
Some stuff is junk.  
Some stuff is garbage.  
And some stuff is bunk.

But my stuff has meaning.  
My stuff has no measure.  
My stuff is history.  
My stuff is treasure.

There are pictures to see.  
There are words to read.  
There are things to remember.  
There are actions and deeds.

Your life may be in order.  
Your room may be neat.  
But, don't touch my stuff.  
Or my wrath you will meet.

A crossword puzzle  
A name tag or two  
A poem and a picture  
A bottle of glue

Don't touch a thing.  
You leave things alone.  
Go back to your office  
And answer the phone.

I'm comfortable here  
In my room full of stuff  
You won't understand  
If you think it's enough.

More stuff will come in.  
I'll make room for it all.  
There's more space on the floor -  
There's a place on the wall.

There are books and papers  
Resources and files  
Arranged on the floor  
In neat little piles.

So, when you come into  
My office today,  
Leave things alone  
And go on your way!

*I tend to work among an assortment of piles of "stuff." I feel comfortable and appear to be productive amid the chaos of the piles. Every once in a while I clean things up and find some interesting papers buried within a pile, but overall, I tend to know where to get what I need - - - amid the "stuff."*

## My Dining Room Table at Night

When I look through piles - I find some quotes  
 Long lost pages --- forgotten notes  
 Memories linger  
 I move my finger  
 To pick up one more -  
 What's it got in store  
 To teach me anew?  
 It's kind of a stew  
 Of pages and pages  
 Stockpiled from recent ages.

My table's a mess! My mind is clutter!  
 Is that what I thought I heard you mutter?  
 There's a ruler, a clipboard, a briefcase and glass,  
 Tape, and some rubber bands, post-its en masse.  
 Pens and pencils - a poem and some paper.  
 There's even room for a napkin and stapler.

There's comfort in my table tonight  
 Everything I need is in plain sight.  
 Some work tonight will get done  
 Other work must wait for the rising sun.  
 I'll clear off my table before I go to bed -  
 And try to unclutter my mind in my head.  
 But - - tomorrow my table will again take its shape  
 With odds and ends and paper and tape!

*This poem could have been titled "Stuff – 2" or "Stuff (continued)." I looked over the five or so projects spread out on my dining room table, not with dissatisfaction, but with wonder. How can I maintain a focus on each of the projects? I tend to work better with "chunks" of time, each devoted to a different endeavor. I'll read a little from a book, work on a poem or essay, do the dishes and go back to my book, all within the same half hour period of time.*

## My List

I have a list of things to do.  
 The words I write act like a clue  
 Of what to do, one at a time  
 Like write this poem and make it rhyme.

Take out the garbage.  
 Put the dishes away.  
 Prepare for my class  
 Think of something to say.

Cross off an item.  
 Add more below.  
 My list just gets longer  
 With check marks to show

What I've accomplished.  
 What I have done.  
 What I have finished.  
 What I have begun.

Sometimes I use numbers.  
 Sometimes I use a dot.  
 Sometimes I use lines.  
 Sometimes I do not.

When I'm done with one of my jobs  
 I look on my list to see  
 What is next for me to do  
 As I check off number three.

Once in a while I lose my list.  
 And don't know what to do.  
 So, I take a nap and doze awhile  
 And look for it when I'm through.

A list is fine if it works  
 And helps you through the day.  
 A list can be a chore to do  
 If it only gets in your way.

I went to the dump.  
 It was not on my list.  
 So, I spontaneously decided  
 To give my wife a kiss.

*This poem could form the final installment of a trilogy. Lists and stuff go together like hand and glove. I have experimented with at least 20 different methods of developing lists to remind me of the priorities of the next few hours. There is a type of reinforcement to checking off that I did something, even if it may appear like an inconsequential event.*

## Searching for “Bein’ Green”

I went to my downstairs office  
In search of Bein’ Green  
I couldn’t find this tape amid boxes and piles  
It just couldn’t be seen.

Was my search futile?  
Was it to be in vain?  
What did I find  
To ease my pain?

I found a notebook  
Of favorite quotes  
*If It Ain’t Broke . . . Break It*  
Was the title of note.

I found an Acrostic book  
I was down to my last one  
It’s a pastime I enjoy -  
Keeps my mind on the run.

I found information about  
Ladysmith Black Mambazo  
*The Life of the Tortoise*  
Giving Hope to all where we go.

I found some empty name tag holders  
I’d been looking for last week.  
It’s amazing what you can find  
When finding is not what you seek.

The Best of World Music  
Can be played before class.  
To remind us of the cultures  
Of the students who we pass.

A CD of Jazz classics  
And Shel Silverstein too  
Upbeat songs for workshops  
Wait - - I’m almost through.

## Searching for “Bein’ Green” (continued)

A teaching tool  
That I’ll use today  
And a “just in case” case  
Also came by my way.

I went to my downstairs office today  
Looking for one single item on my way.  
I didn’t find it on the floor  
But I found lots of what I wasn’t looking for!

*Searching for Bein’ Green was written after looking through my basement office in search of an audio tape that I wanted to use in one of my courses. I didn’t find the tape, but I found quite a few other items that I could put to immediate use and that I wouldn’t have used if I had not been searching for the tape.*

## Mystery

Mike  
To me  
Is a Mystery  
About Diversity  
Respect & Dignity  
Freedom & Liberty.

I yearn  
To learn  
The message  
Of his passage  
As he comes into my life.  
His mom is confused  
By the latest professional news.  
He creates quite a scene  
To the school's quiet routine.

Mike and Joe and  
Susan and Paul  
I've learned a lot from  
Working with you all.

Where do I go this year?  
That's why I'm here!

*I wanted to capture the frustration that I sensed from a mother of a child whose unusual behavior was a source of immense frustration to school personnel. Special education supports and services seem to be best suited for those students whose challenges are quickly resolved with a minimum of effort. But, what about Mike?*

**David Oman**

Let me be a little showman  
As I introduce to you Dave Oman.  
How do I modify my lessons?  
Is one of his essential questions.  
To teach about a waterspout  
To Kids who'd rather fight and shout.

Creativity is the key  
To help each student see  
That they are valued, they are loved  
Even when they push and shove.  
He adapts, modifies and rearranges  
And reinforces the subtle changes.

Dave is one of many peers  
We've been fortunate these years  
To teach and reach  
And guide by our side.  
In the not too distant – perhaps quite near -  
Dave will be "Teacher of the Year."

*During an awards ceremony on campus, we were told that each person could have about two minutes to introduce the recipient of department honors. I decided to approach this requirement as a challenge to present a more creative way of introducing the recipient from our department – Mr. David Oman.*

## State-of-the-Art Educational Practices

What is the length of time a “state-of-the-art” practice remains so?  
 My profession has a set of practices that seem to come and go.  
 A state-of-the-art car seems to last about two years  
 I have only owned a used one when state-of-the-art disappears.  
 I often wonder how long this quality can last  
 As a new model emerges to replace the past.

I bought a “state-of-the-art” laptop at a computer store  
 I couldn’t possibly want any better one or ask for anything more  
 It had memory and speed and plenty of storage space  
 I thought it was just perfect as I left this selling place.  
 But, I read a great big flier later in that very same year  
 It said a “state-of-the-art” version would soon be coming here.

This works the same in education, I am sad to have to say  
 State-of-the-art curricula appear in much the same way.  
 A product emerges with high, professional acclaim  
 The “best of its kind” is often included within its name.  
 But this product too lasts just about two years  
 When a different publisher’s creation suddenly appears.

I think “state-of-the-art”  
 Loses all its spark  
 When you pay your first bill  
 It’s already over the hill.  
 It was just a marketing ploy  
 To buy that educational toy.

*I have been around long enough to have seen several “state-of-the-art” packages for functional living skills, reading, supported employment, math, etc. It appears that if a “new” approach does not have a copyright from at least 1-2 years ago, it is no longer considered valid. When, in fact, the packaging changes, but the main ingredients often remain the same.*

## The "Wrap" Rap

When we have a meeting  
It has to always include  
A sandwich called a wrap  
As part of all the food.

There could be a nice salad  
Or something good to drink.  
But without a wrap sandwich  
The meal will really stink.

Some wraps have veggies.  
Some wraps have meat.  
But a meal without wraps  
Is a meal that's incomplete.

Some people may object.  
And want more variety  
But give me my wrap  
In all its simplicity.

The next time we meet  
We can all learn to adapt  
And we know that for lunch  
We'll get our very own wrap.

*On a less serious note, there is sometimes disagreement about the choice of luncheon sandwiches when the Council of Chairs meet on a monthly basis. Being vegetarian, I prefer the "wrap" pita sandwiches with an assortment of vegetables. This selection does not always meet with equal enthusiasm among my peers, hence the "wrap" rap.*

## There's a War Going On

There's a war going on inside of my head  
 Looking for the truth in what's being said.  
 I listen to both sides - who's wrong and who's right  
 Contradictions abound to complicate my insight.

What would I do  
 If I now had to choose.  
 I remember 1969  
 As police formed a line  
 Going down Wisconsin Avenue  
 Hitting and striking the activists who  
 Declared the war was wrong and not just  
 And protest they did and protest they must.

We found out much later about all the lies  
 From people in government who weren't on the front lines.  
 They're still alive, many of them you see  
 Their names aren't on the monument in Washington DC.  
 I sit and I wonder - what would I do?  
 As I listen to updates and talk of what's new.

I admire the young who fight for our country  
 With courage and valor and bravery and loyalty  
 And the young who move north to an unknown possibility  
 With courage and valor and bravery and loyalty.

Dylan wrote a song a long time ago  
 With God on Our Side the title did go.  
 If I remember the lyrics hung on my door  
*If God's on our side, he'll stop the next war.*

Freedom is a paradox  
 As I look up at my clock  
 It's 10:20 and all is still  
 These words still bring a chill.

*I was in a very somber mood when writing the above poem. The Iraq War was officially over, yet the newspapers chronicled a weekly account of additional deaths. Using the Vietnam War as a backdrop and the lies told to Americans at that time, what assurances do we have that our current administration presents undistorted information feeding off the 9/11 tragedy?*

**Reflections Upon Reading *Days of Grace:*  
*The Memoirs of Arthur Ashe***

**Arthur Ashe was a man of men . . .  
A book I chose from off the shelf -  
An inspirational force up to the end  
To better understand myself.**

**Family is the core of all  
That's meaningful in life.  
Arthur, he received the call  
To live both joy and strife.**

**His wisdom of thoughts and words and deeds  
Continue on today.  
They're worth reflecting in time of need  
A call to action some would say.**

**Few people influence us on our path  
Through troubles, joys and sorrows.  
Arthur Ashe lived by a code  
To live today, to dream tomorrows.**

**People come and people go  
Few listen to heed the call.  
Arthur left his words to sow  
And build connections to us all.**

**Thank you Arthur, your words ring true  
Now more than any other  
As those who read move on to feel  
The memory of their brother.**

*I am an avid reader of biographies and this one is a book of especially high quality. Arthur Ashe was a trailblazer along several fronts and I find many connections to the area of special education. I am inspired, both from a personal and professional perspective, by the manner in which he experienced the events of his life.*

## While Reading a Biography About Dr. Seuss and Mr. Geisel

On my way to Cleveland  
Reading Dr. Seuss  
They'll soon be by with coffee  
Tea and beer and juice.

Heading home on a Friday night  
Tired through and through  
Looking out my airplane window  
At the sky so blue.

Dr. Seuss - a most creative man  
Followed his one true passion  
Wrote about fun things and all  
When they were not in fashion.

This man's a genius some would say  
Others would call him a folly  
I admire his Grit and Wit  
And Hip and Bip and Lolly.

He was free to go outside the lines  
He wasn't too conventional  
In fact, much of what he wrote  
Was not, I think, intentional.

He leaves a legacy for other people  
To celebrate his life  
And maybe - just maybe we will  
Find Mulberry Street - my wife.

Oh, the places you'll go and  
The things you'll see  
Maybe his life  
Was a gift for me!

*I have been a long time admirer of Dr. Seuss and was fascinated by reading his life's story, expertly written about in this book. Also, this year is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary [2004] of his birth and his work is receiving additional coverage during multiple celebrations throughout the country. His wisdom and creativity were channeled in an area of tremendous benefit to children learning to break the reading code.*

**Looking For the Evidence of Community on 5/31/97**

On my walk a bagpipe played  
At the church along the way.  
I walked on by - listened a bit  
On this sunny day.

The bagpipe played a funeral dirge  
As the mourners came out of the church.  
I walked along and heard the sound  
As I continued on my search.

A walk is a walk - An end in itself.  
I choose to be on this journey.  
The goal is not to get to a place,  
But, to build a better Ernie.

Step by step and mile by mile  
I'm off to my destination.  
Day by day - and year by year  
My journey's the celebration.

It's not the dream or the goal or the race,  
It's the journey upon which we have to keep pace  
And look at how much better we feel!  
That's exactly the price it takes to be real.

*I had a "learning moment" as I walked down Main Street, Manchester, CT. I was listening to the sounds from a funeral and thought about someone whose life had ended. What were his family and friends celebrating? What were his/her achievements? As I continued my walk, I wondered about the journey as opposed to the products of one's life. I need to be reminded that relationships and being with loved ones account for success much more deeply than the products of my work/career.*

## In Search of Community

*Where is community?* I asked  
Is it future? Is it past?

*Where is community?* came the reply -  
It is ground. It is sky.

*What is community?* I then wondered.  
Is it up? Is it under?

*What is community?* I heard it cry.  
It is presence. It can never die.

*How is community?* I still proposed.  
Is it poetry? Is it prose?

*How is community?* Came back my quest.  
It is here. A welcome guest.

*Why is community?* again I sighed.  
*Why is community?* it still replied.

The silence is broken by the sound of a bell.  
Community echoes at the bottom of your well.

*This is one of my favorite poems and an interesting story relates to one of its deliveries. I was at a conference in West Virginia when I asked if there was anyone in the audience of about 150 people who could draw an object on a transparency during the next five minutes. One woman raised her hand and I gave her some transparency markers and asked her to draw a wishing well. After just a few minutes she drew a great wishing well and I read my poem after which I placed her drawing on the overhead projector. Her drawing had enriched my presentation. I built this lesson into my presentation. The community is composed of people with a great deal of talent who are ready to support us in our work, but we need to ask! Her skills as an artist were not made known to the entire community of conference participants until I made my request. She offered her gift willingly and also enriched my poem through the fruits of her talent.*

**Community Connections: Day 1**

**I was up at 5:20 today  
To begin and go about my way.  
This is going to be the best day  
Of my life, I heard myself say.**

**The only day better than the best day  
Of your life is when you have memories  
Of the best days of your life.  
Every day is the best day of my life  
Because of my memories.  
Every day builds on the last.  
Every day is a little of the past.**

**Mistakes will come and mistakes will go  
But lasting learning comes real slow.**

**But stay with me as I journey on  
There are many more verses to my song.  
You were part of verse 103.  
Thanks for coming along with me.  
Maybe we'll hook up again  
In verse 1,210.**

**A student came in to talk to me  
And added to the quality  
Of this best day of my life.**

*I need to be reminded of the importance of each day and not take any day for granted. Each student who comes into my office – in fact, a student just left as I'm writing this note – deserves my full attention because they are contributing to the richness of my work. I don't realize this until I step back and look at my career as a progression of student contact, both with teachers-in-training and students with disabilities.*

## Being the Best

There will always be someone better than you.  
It doesn't mean not to try your best.  
There will always be someone better than you.  
You can be different than all the rest.

Champions will not be champions forever.  
A new one takes their place.  
Champions will not be champions forever  
Savor the victory in your race.

Everyone makes mistakes each day.  
Pick yourself up each time.  
Everyone makes mistakes each day.  
Sometimes even my verses don't rhyme.

Being different is really OK  
Even when we want to be normal.  
Being different is really OK  
Like a dog, a cat or even a gerbil.

No one looks the same as you.  
You're as different as different can be.  
No one looks the same as you.  
You are you - - - and I am me.

Be the best that you can be  
And things will turn out in the end.  
Be the best that you can be  
And sing this song once again.

*During one of my classes I decided to try my hand at a children's song inspired by the many songs developed by Bob Blue. One of the students in the class took these lyrics and developed a tune that resulted in a large group activity.*

## Purpose

Blisters hurtin' - - Nothin's certain.  
Life can bring a sigh or scream.  
Blisters turn to callous soon  
Learn from those who live their dream.

Everyone has many talents  
To use - - not throw away  
And we often have to answer to  
Our conscious day-by-day.

No one can tell us exactly how long  
The length of time is along the way  
So live each day to the full extent  
And at life's end you'll have lots to say

About inner feelings of what is right  
And in what direction you did go  
And how you used your talents and gifts  
In a way that only you did know.

The road can be long - The path can be steep.  
It's a journey of wonder and delight  
And the strength you build along the way  
Makes your goals turn out just right.

Wonder, awe, peace and love  
Are the ultimate aspirations  
Of a life well lived and a time well spent  
In our final deliberations.

*The first verse of this poem was written almost 30 years ago. Recently, I discovered it among my earlier, personal journal writings and decided to add some verses. The flavor of its content parallels the themes of several poems in this current collection.*

## Who Put the *Natural* in Natural Supports?

Who put the *natural* in natural supports?  
 Was it something I heard or read in a report  
 About a new way of working - a different approach  
 Other people helping - not just the job coach  
 Necessarily doing each and every piece  
 But inviting others to give their own expertise?

Also, to help in a way that's essential  
 Is to give people our help in a way that is natural.  
 Good people will give of themselves for a task  
 To do just about anything if they are but asked.  
 Before there were services, supports by professionals  
 People were helped in ways that were more natural.  
 Friendships are formed in unusual ways  
 Often not planned in their original days.

Natural supports happen when we adjust  
 Ourselves to the clues around us and trust  
 Our wisdom to learn new things to try  
 For the people we help and their questions about why  
 We do what we do the rest of our time  
 As if to do so differently would be a big crime.

We need to share what we know with those who we don't  
 And give more to those whose talents we won't  
 Know their true value as helpers and friends  
 Till we ask and we ask and we ask once again.

*While in Albuquerque, NM, I presented on the topic of natural supports and wrote this poem as part of the material I distributed to the participants. The main theme of the talk was the facilitation of supports from citizens in one's community who need to be asked to help in whatever way their skills and talents allow. This process is best seen in Habitat for Humanity and the work of the volunteers in renovating or building a house for community members in need.*

## Breakfast at the Original Dotcheros

*Please accept our appreciation and*  
 Man playing solitaire - \$2.11 breakfast

*sincere thanks for letting us*  
 Man in suspenders – the unofficial greeter

*serve you. Sometimes, in the rush*  
 “How are you doing?” “All right!”

*of business life, we fail to say*  
 Writing on the wall – “Great Stuff!”

*“Thanks” loud enough to hear –*  
 First name calling

*But you can be sure your*  
 Thank You – Come Again sign

*patronage is never taken for*  
 “Yesterday was cousin Larry’s birthday.”

*granted. Our aim is to please and*  
 Warm spirit & kind smiles

*satisfy you. To serve you is a real privilege.*  
 Recommended to a friend.

The Ricca Family

*While attending a conference in New Orleans, I ate breakfast at this restaurant that was located 1-2 blocks away from the hotel. The second lines in each stanza contain the words I heard or the images I took with me while eating breakfast. The first lines of each stanza were taken from a sign that was posted in the middle of the restaurant in a prominent location. I felt I captured the spirit of welcoming among the employees and the customers.*

## What's Next?

Have I really run out of anything to say  
As I sit at my computer at the end of the day?  
What's next? What words will come?  
It's 9:08, am I already done?

I stayed at home and worked for awhile  
It seemed productive - sorted through a pile.  
I read some projects from each student's folder  
Took a nap - I must be getting older!

Yesterday the Red Sox lost a game  
I hope tomorrow will not be the same.  
I took a brisk walk for about an hour  
Felt quite refreshed right after my shower.

Not much excitement happened today  
It's 9:17 - oh by the way.  
I heard of an accident on I-84  
I'm alive to write my notes some more.

I need a day - sometimes now and then  
Of doing nothing and nothing again.  
I'll watch the Cubs at half past the hour  
A productive day - out of the ivory tower.

What's next will probably have to wait  
Until tomorrow morning at quarter to eight  
When I'll sit back down at my computer and type  
Words of wisdom - Words of hype.

It seems What's Next? is loaded with meaning  
As I close out my thoughts for another evening.

*I thought this was an appropriate entry to end Volume 1. I am already working on entries for Volume 2 but there are times when I sit in front of the computer or with a pad of paper on my lap and wonder, "What's Next?" Where will my next bit of inspiration come from? Which of my many piles will contain the seeds for my next poem or essay? I'll never know, but I need to be on the lookout for the time when it's right to explore.*

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