

**Debriefing and Reflections
After Different Sessions
of Courses I Taught or Attended**

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 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 leaning 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
SPED 501 Debriefing
Session 3**

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 be still be a 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 about life and what it can bring
As we each live our life to the song 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 (Winter Session Course - 2003)

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 SPED 501

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 Noggins 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.

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 Choice 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.)
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 out 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 a child does best
When sharing their gifts just like all the rest.**

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
To 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.
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.
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
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 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.
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 make us real mad.
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.
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 Twelve

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.

Session Thirteen

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 Fourteen

Ruth described a heartwarming tale
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.

I especially like the final debriefing that captured part of a presentation in class by Ruth. She demonstrated how the advocacy of a school nurse can have a profound effect on a student who had difficulty accessing one of the cherished rituals of a school: the senior prom. Ruth informed me that she shared the poem with Carlos' mom. If I am not mistaken, Ruth told me that Carlos passed away shortly after the prom.

Session One 12/30/02

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.

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.

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.

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
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 & Reflection

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.

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 com-mun-i-ty.

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 on 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.

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 people 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. Each group of 20 - 30 individuals contains a synergy unlike any other group. My role is to bring out the talents of each person for the benefit of the entire group. I find this quite an enjoyable undertaking but I am always filled with some trepidation, not knowing quite how the lessons will take shape and who will bring in the unexpected guest or reveals a bit of their own struggles as a parent or person experiencing life with a disability. 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.

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?

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 more difference between me and myself than there is between us and them!"

APSE ES 101
(A pre conference session
Association for Persons in Supported Employment)

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 fam-i-ly!

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 ---- buts
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'd 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
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.

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

Values, vision, attitudes and beliefs
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 to fif--ty.

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 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.
Thanks 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 of a Lecturette
(a beginning of the year seminar for student teachers)

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.

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.

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.

**Lyrics to Songs
That Pertained to
the Content of the Courses
(Zipper Songs)**

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'.

(At a Student Teaching Celebration in May 2003)

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'.

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.

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.

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)

This 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.

In a similar vein, the following lyrics are also geared to student teachers who were nearing the end of their formal undergraduate training.

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?
Beginning or 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
And the other stuff I threw . . .
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 went away
Others stayed right to today
They are here to speak and say
Seems like I have been here for the Longest Time.

Not too long I'll be the leader of . . .
(Stop that pushing! Billy do not shove!)
Children who look up to me
I am "teacher" don't you see
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
for a Student Teacher Celebration)

(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 modes
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
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.

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.

Over the past 4-5 years I have maintained a yearly contact with David Hagner from the University of New Hampshire. He has invited me to participate in a 3-day seminar he offers on the career planning process, of which I focus on person-centered planning and decision-making strategies. I value 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.

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 on a mandala figure. 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 our talk
Before you go out and walk
With 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! **(Notes while working with David Hagner)**

**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 any one
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 emphasize that the planning meeting is 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.

**Miscellaneous
Topics of Relevance
to 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 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.

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 Joyce has been told.

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 to 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 don't go out.
Stuff just accumulates
All about.

I'm not happy.
I'm not sad.
All this stuff
Don'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 upstairs
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 down
To 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. I know there is help out there for people like me; i.e., messies anonymous. Every once in a while I clean things up and find some interesting pages 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 declutter 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 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 of time.

The next 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.

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.

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 a Crostic 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

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 a 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 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 Practice

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.

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 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.

I think “state-of-the-art”
Loses all its spark
When you pay your first bill
It’s 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 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 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 things are calm
Things seem so peaceful - Wait -- was that a bomb?!?

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 100th anniversary 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 was 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 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. Also, John Foshay, Jim Malley and I used this song as a basis for one of our jam sessions in which friends got together to spend some time making music – Jim on cello, John on keyboards and Ernie on vocals.

Purpose

Blisters hurtin' - - Nothin's certain.
Cursed be those who cry and 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
(July 10, 1996)**

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 shaded lines contain the words I heard or the images I took with me while eating breakfast. The remaining lines 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.