

# BLACKWATER REFLECTIONS

*Blackwater Writing Project*  
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## Carlyn Maddox: Feature Article

By Donna Cook: Lanier Co. HS

When I first met Carlyn Maddox, I was immediately impressed. Her firm handshake and friendly eyes indicated a person secure in her own skin who realizes that other people have valuable ideas to offer.

For Carlyn, becoming part of the National Writing Project in 1997 led to serving as a co-director in 1999 and 2000. When I asked her why she had stuck with the writing project for the last ten years, Carlyn replied, "The single most important thing I have done in my teaching career is continue to work with and support the writing project. This is the best professional development available for any teacher of any field. The writing project gives teachers confidence to write and strategies to teach writing. What I like about the writing project is that it is always thinking of new ways to utilize its teacher consultants. I spent the last two Aprils in Washington at the spring meeting, and that experience gave me great insight into how our federal system works in terms of funding."

Because Carlyn works and lives in Thomasville, and I work and live in Lakeland, most of our conversations have occurred via e-mail. In one of these e-mails, I asked her to discuss one way that the writing project had enhanced her career. Carlyn explained, "The writing project opened up the world of teaching and instruction to me. It got me out of the mindset that I was simply working a 'job.' I was burning out as a teacher and others around me were doing the same.

The writing project rejuvenated me as a writer, teacher, and author. It made me realize how important writing is to the teacher as well as the student—and that the classroom is a growing community of writers and thinkers. Since my involvement with the writing project, I have gone on to author several stories, magazine articles, and a novel. I could not have done that without the writing project experience."

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## Member Updates

Lindsi and Ben Elliott welcomed Anna Katherine on October 24, 2007

Amanda Gaither and her husband Mark welcomed Madison Claire on October 25, 2007.

Sonya and Jerome Riley welcomed Jonathan Christopher on December 18, 2007

The editorial staff plans to feature teacher-consultants in upcoming issues. If you would like to write a feature, please contact [Diana Chartier](#).

## Writing by the Sea: Georgia Southern Writing Project's Retreat

By Rebecca Elmore: Hahira Middle School

While sitting in Odum Library and waiting for my WebCT class to begin, I decided to check my e-mail. Earlier in the day, Donna Sewell had sent an e-mail stating that due to a conflict with football, Adam Hathaway would not be able to attend the Georgia Southern Writing by the Sea retreat, and if anyone was willing to help write the grant that funds the Project to let her know. Since I would be attending the NWP's Fall Meeting in New York City, I felt like a weekend of work was a small price to pay. I e-mailed her back that although I probably wouldn't be much help, I would go if no one else volunteered. Later, while having dinner at a Japanese restaurant in Tifton, I found out that I would be pinch hitting for Adam.

On Friday, November 2, we arrived at Villas by the Sea a little before 7:00 P.M. When we opened the door to our villa, we were pleasantly surprised to find that ours had three bedrooms with a porch on the first floor and balcony on the second. A quick debate over who would sleep where, and we were on our way to the "Welcome Writers Supper," which was hosted in the villa of one of the facilitators, Neal Saye. After our supper of vegetable and/or potato soup, salad, sandwiches, and cookies, we did introductions in the form of book jackets. Donna and I tried to incorporate our experiences from the previous Institute into ours, and as a result, many of the fellow writers wondered if there was a connection to the other Blackwater.

Next, we all shared our writing goals. I was confused when I heard one young man state that he was there to work on his thesis. Then another young woman stated she was there to do the same thing. *Huh?* I thought. For some reason I thought that all of the people that were going to be there would all be working on the same thing. Two of the women were there to work on a professional piece; another woman was there just to write for pleasure. Come to find out only one other person, Kathy Albertson, the director of Georgia Southern Writing Project, was actually doing grant writing like us. Door prizes were then given away before we headed back to our villa for the night.

For the rest of the weekend, we were in small groups depending on the type of writing that we were doing. Since Donna and I were working on the grant, we were in the same group, as was Kathy and a graduate student, Sabryna. We had three hours of individual writing time on Saturday morning and met with our small group in their villa during lunch so that we would have more individual writing time in the afternoon. By 6:00 P.M., our group of 16 headed out for dinner at Bonefish and did not return until 8:30 P.M. Sunday morning we met briefly for one-sentence read-around, evaluations, and more door prizes before heading back to our respective homes.

On the way home, Donna explained that Writing by the Sea is a retreat that is open to anyone who has gone through a writing project. For \$175 per person, you can go to Jekyll Island and write. It is the perfect opportunity for fellows to reconnect with their inner writers after an ISI or to work on a paper if they are in graduate school. There is a lot of blue and gold represented (Georgia Southern's colors); let's add some red and black next year.

Carlyn Maddox: Cont. from P1

Carlyn currently shares the position of Professional Development Coordinator with me for Blackwater Writing Project, and she stressed the need for teachers to see themselves on a continuum of professional learning and development. She emphasized that the “curiosity and enthusiasm of the teachers is the NUMBER ONE reason why students learn. Students want and need FUN in their classrooms.” Carlyn elaborated on what I wholeheartedly agree is the biggest problem in the teaching field: “There is too much isolation in teaching—too much territory marking—and not enough sharing. Teachers need help in accessing their own creativity so they can use this when they are teaching the standards.” After reading her e-mail, I shook my head and read this part again because she had put into words exactly what I had gotten out of the writing project—an end to the isolation and direct access to hundreds of great ideas for teaching writing!

Finally, I asked Carlyn, “If you were writing this article about yourself, what information would you be disappointed if I didn't include?”

Thoughtfully, Carlyn replied, “Hmmm . . . Writing, for me, doesn't get any easier. But it does get better. One of my professors once said that he didn't like writing but that he liked the ‘feeling of having written.’ I write for many reasons, and I believe if we can tap into these for our students, we have done our job. Writing is a joy and an irritation for me. It is an outlet and a way to inspire myself. It is a way I heal and help others to heal. It is the music I want to play with words. It is my purpose in life to write and to help others access that special voice inside them.” This response will stick with me forever. Carlyn clearly takes writing seriously, and she is tapped into the good and the bad. This ability to see writing instruction so clearly is probably the reason for her success. Carlyn has an innate ability to put things into eloquent words that hit the heart of what she is addressing.

Carlyn currently serves as the Literacy Coach for MacIntyre Park Middle School in Thomasville, Georgia. They are extremely lucky to have such a dedicated and insightful person on their staff. Her ideas are thoughtful, and she obviously understands what teachers today are dealing with in their classrooms. As a writer herself, Carlyn knows the good and the bad of writing and has a unique and compelling way of getting her ideas across to her peers. I can't wait to read her novel!

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## Calendar

January 20, 2008: Application deadline for Memorial Library Summer Seminar on Holocaust Education in New York (<http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/events/329>)

January 25, 2008: Application deadline for Rural Sites Network Resource Development Retreat (<http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/events/313>)

February 1, 2008: Application deadline for Planning Your Site's Web Presence: A Working Retreat (<http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/events/327>)

GCTE Conference, Callaway Gardens, GA, Feb. 7-9, 2008

March 17, 2008: Application deadline for Professional Writing Retreats (<http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/events/326>)

March 17, 2008: Application deadline for Directors' Retreat (<http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/events/314>)

## New York City? BWP Goes to the Annual Meeting

Adam Hathaway, Fitzgerald High School

On Tuesday November 13, two men left work early to make the long journey to New York. Excited and a little nervous, Joel Futch and I met at the train Gazebo in Jesup, Georgia, and waited for the first of our many trains. Nearly twenty-five hours later, including a layover in Washington, DC, we arrived in New York ready to navigate one of the busiest cities in the world.

Before I left, my five-year-old son asked me where I was going. When I told him New York, he said with a touch of awe in his voice, "You know, they say that place is just like Vegas." Little did he know how right he was. We arrived at historic Penn Station and immediately were swept up in the bustle of the city. We moved to street level to find "bustle" didn't quite capture what was going on; the city was electric. At the taxi stand we attempted to catch a cab to our hotel. It wasn't long before we were in the back of a yellow cab sprinting down the road. The rumors about the cabbies are very true, and I questioned why they even bother to paint lines on the streets. Unfortunately, we only accomplished half of our mission. We caught the cab, but it didn't take us to our hotel. The driver dropped us off at the wrong hotel, and we ended up hoofing it about twelve blocks with luggage in tow.

When we finally arrived, unscathed I might add, to our hotel, we were greeted by another contingent of the Blackwater crew: Donna Sewell, Karen Morris, Rebecca Elmore, Donna Cook, and Diana Chartier. It was nice to see friendly faces. We spent a little time to make plans for the Thursday sessions, and then all the ladies, except Karen who was sharing a room with Narci Drossos in our hotel, were off to their hotel, which was three blocks away.

On Thursday, we all met at the beautiful Javits Convention Center. As usual, the National Writing Project had put together a great spread of food and drinks. There we met up with Jana Williams and her husband, who had also come to the Big Apple to join us in our mission. We all moved to our predetermined sessions and began the work we had come to do. Thursday's sessions were geared toward site leadership and provide participants with tons of great ideas to enrich their sites. We were fortunate to have the largest contingent of TCs the Valdosta site has ever brought to the annual conference. This allowed us to divide and conquer. We were able to have a lot more people in a lot more places to benefit the Blackwater Writing Project, and everyone was pumped about their newfound expertise in a wide variety of subjects.

We had an hour for lunch, which proved to be interesting. With only two carts in the Javits Center to feed nearly a thousand people, the Blackwater bunch decided to run in the rain to a local deli. As we made our way down the street toward the rumored location of the deli, a familiar shape materialized out of the mist and rain: the Empire State Building. Yes, we were truly in the Big Apple, and that just increased our excitement level. The food was great, and we rushed back to the convention center for our afternoon sessions.

The afternoon sessions were very informative, and the setting, the city, and the atmosphere sharpened our appetite for everything in front of us. By the end of the day, many of us were about to explode with ideas we could bring back to Valdosta to strengthen Blackwater. As our sessions wrapped up, we met at the predetermined rally point to share ideas and discuss our gaucho steak house dinner plans.

The restaurant was a few blocks away in Hell's Kitchen and was worth the short walk from our hotel. It was a quaint little place tucked away in the tight quarters that made up the city. After supper, we all strolled down Times Square to do a little sight seeing and plan our next adventure.

Joel Futch and I, ever the camera hogs, decided to get up early Friday morning to attempt getting on the *Today* show or *Fox and Friends*. We were shocked to know our hotel was only a few blocks away from both. We did, after much effort and a threatened jail sentence, succeed in getting a cameo on the *Today* show. The highlight of the morning though came while we were trying to get on *Fox and Friends*. I was peering through the studio windows when I turned around to see Brian Kilmeade entering the building. I was shocked to know he got his own coffee! After a lot of mumbling and stumbling over words on my part, he came over, shook my hand, and carried on a short conversation. It wasn't until afterwards I realized we didn't get a picture with him. We also watched the sun rise from the top of 30 Rock that morning.

After our excursion, we met the rest of the Blackwater crew at the General Session, at which Richard Sterling, the Executive Director of the National Writing Project, announced he was stepping down. This news shocked many of the people in attendance while others were already in the know. Despite the truly disappointing

news, this was the best general session I have attended. It was informative, energetic, and comical as we looked back at the gains achieved during Richard's tenure. As always, it was great to be surrounded by the nearly thousand like-minded writing project people. The energy was electric, and it was wonderful to catch up with people from around the country I haven't seen in years.

As the Friday sessions wrapped up and each of us started making our way back to our hotels, we were excited about the evening activities and Saturday's plans of touring the city. We ate supper at a local diner, skated at Rockefeller Center, and planned our Saturday morning attack.

Saturday morning, the crew met at my hotel, and we jumped on the subway to make our way down to Ground Zero. It was one of the most moving experiences of my life. We went through the museum and were inundated with artifacts, letters, stories, and transcripts from the disaster. It took each of us a little time to recover and move on to the next attraction. From there, we went to the Empire State Building and ended our day by splitting up into groups. Several members went on yet another shopping expedition while Joel and I decided to take in some more sights by walking back to the hotel.

Some caught late flights Saturday night or early flights Sunday morning. Meanwhile Joel and I made our way back to Penn Station Sunday afternoon to start our long journey home. After a few minor delays, we arrived back at the Gazebo tired but enlightened, ready to share our newfound knowledge with our colleagues.

### Write Nights

Write Nights will be at Hildegard's 6:30-8:00 p.m.

January 15, 2008  
February 12, 2008  
March 18, 2008  
April 15, 2008  
May 13, 2008

Blog with us from home.

It's easy. Go to <http://www.blogger.com> and log in. Don't have a link to the blog for BWP? Email Donna Sewell (dsewell@valdosta.edu), and ask to be invited.

**Check it out. A good quote may come from you and be included in the next newsletter.**

Send newsletter submissions by the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month.

**Think about what you are doing in your classrooms?  
Can we feature you or your work?  
Let us know what you want included in the newsletter.**

The next newsletter will be published on April 5.



## The Push for ISI Nominations

Donna Sewell, Valdosta State University

Although the summer seems beyond my reach right now, it is time to start picking the people who will participate in the Invitational Summer Institute. Ryan Dixon, BWP's graduate assistant, and I have sent letters to BWP past participants, to faculty in the College of Education, and to principals of every school in our thirteen-county area, asking for nominees. We are beginning to receive nominations, but we love to have a big pool of candidates. Currently, we have about half as many names as we did last year.

Please scrutinize your colleagues to determine who should know about the ISI. Send those nominees to me as soon as possible because applications to the ISI are due February 27, 2008, and we want to send materials to them before that date.

Although we love having language arts teachers apply, remember that we need diversity in the Institute, so seek out those science, social studies, foreign language, and math teachers who use writing in interesting ways or who want to incorporate more writing into their classes. In keeping with the gender disparity in schools, we often have more female than male applicants, so we need your help there too.

Blackwater Writing Project is as good as all of our members, and we need our members now to help with recruiting. I look forward to hearing from you (dsewell@valdosta.edu).

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*We're on the Web!*

*Visit us at:*

<http://www.valdosta.edu/bwp>

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