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Laurie Grobman

David Ackerman

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Jeanne Rose

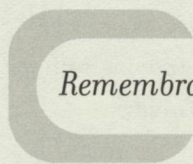
Melissa Nicolas

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Remembrances of Candace Spigelman

by Laurie Grobman, David Ackerman, Jayne Brown, and
Jeanne Rose, Penn State Berks

Melissa Nicolas, The University of Louisiana at Lafayette

On December 12, 2004, Candace Spigelman sent an email to all students in her Peer Tutoring class, thanking them for the Barnes and Noble gift certificate they gave her and explaining that she would use it to buy books to read during her recovery. Candace also thanked them for their hard work as Writing Fellows and told them they were a "wonderful class to teach." The next day, Candace underwent brain surgery for benign tumors; she died four days later from unexpected complications.

Laurie: Back in 1998, as I began my tenure-track job at Penn State Berks, I applied for and received grant money to use a "peer group leader" in my developmental writing classes. Only later that semester did I realize that Candace, who had been at the college for three years, had applied for and received funding for a similar project. It did not take me long to realize that the training of the peer group leader, one of the central weaknesses in my own project, was one of the strengths of Candace's. From that point on, I used Candace's Writing Fellows in my developmental writing courses, and I left the training to her.

So began the Writing Fellows program at Penn State Berks, the program Candace, an associate professor of English and co-coordinator (with me) of the Professional Writing program, developed and nurtured with her infinite wisdom and passion. The Writing Fellows program enabled Candace to focus on her deepest interests: students teaching students, collaboration and sharing, developing personal relationships with students, and nurturing student research potential.

Melissa: By the time I came to Penn State in the fall of 2002, Candace had a solid model for the Writing Fellows program in place on the Berks campus. Students who had completed the equivalent of their first year of undergraduate education could enroll for English 250: Peer Tutoring in Writing. This three credit-hour course met as a traditional class two days a week during which time students would discuss the assigned readings on peer tutoring, collaboration, peer groups, and composition theory. As the semester wore on, writing fellows would often use class time to discuss what happened during the practicum part of the course. The practicum accounted for

the third “class” meeting of the week, and for this hour, the writing fellows would facilitate a writing group comprised of four to five students from a basic writing class. While Candace and the basic writing instructor would be physically present at these peer group meetings, the writing fellows were “in charge” of the writing groups.

During my second semester at the college, Candace was given a sabbatical and she asked me to be the acting director of the program in her absence. Of course, anyone who knew Candace knows that she was never really “absent” as her deep commitment to the program had us in constant contact while she was “off duty.” Fortunately for me, it was during this time that both my professional and personal relationship with Candace deepened, and we hatched a plan to expand the Writing Fellows on the Berks campus (Candace’s home campus) and to bring the program to the Lehigh Valley campus (my home campus). Candace’s vision for the Writing Fellows was to grow the program so that we could put Fellows in writing courses across the curriculum. At the time of her death, Candace was actively pursuing this vision.

I am proud and grateful to have had a chance to be part of the Writing Fellows program during my time at Penn State. It is difficult to find the words to explain what I learned from Candace by working with her on this project. The irony of this situation is that Candace was always referring to me as the “expert,” always soliciting my opinions and suggestions. This, perhaps, is one of the secrets to Candace’s success with the program—she was able to make the Writing Fellows believe in themselves and what they were doing because she was so passionate about it herself.

Dave: What most impressed me about my collaboration with Candace was her commitment to the importance of the English 4 (Basic Writing) students’ work. Her enthusiasm made the students enthusiastic about their own essays throughout the semester, and that, in turn, helped many of them produce strong pieces of writing.

Just this past semester, while tutoring a student who had been in English 4 three semesters ago during the second year of my collaboration with Candace, Maria saw Candace’s photograph with the story of her death in the campus newspaper. She pointed to the picture and said, “That’s Dr. Spigelman who died? She was so nice and helped me so much to think about my writing.” That sentiment was exactly what Candace wanted the Writing Fellows to understand: that the writers they were working with very much wanted to learn strategies that would allow them to think more clearly about their own writing so they could communicate in the most effective manner.

Jayne: The only problem with using the Writing Fellows was the ego adjustment. Candace had trained the WFs so well, and their groups were so focused and animated, I often felt superfluous in “my” classroom. How did the WFs get even the shyest,

sleepiest and most disengaged basic writing students to laugh, talk and offer keen insights and even global revision solutions for each others' essays? Why did more students' reflective letters mention the help of their WF than my suggestions? And how was it Candace sometimes seemed to know "my" students even better than I did?

Under Candace's warmth and tutelage, I've watched the Writing Fellows, some of whom I knew first as students, grow into outstanding group leaders, scholars and future teachers. I've watched them flower to their full potential as Candace's belief in them became a part of how they see themselves. And after standing back and watching the Writing Fellows work, I've learned to see my students better. I respect them more as writers and thinkers. I ask more questions now, am slower to dispense the quick writing wisdom, more willing to step back and get them talking to each other and respecting their own insights. "Student-centered learning" is an easily-mouthed phrase; working with Candace and the Writing Fellows, I've been lucky enough to see what it really can mean.

Jeanne: As she did with all aspects of her teaching, scholarship, mentoring, and administration, Candace gave her work with our college's Writing Fellows Program, which I have the privilege of coordinating next fall, her characteristic energy and dedication. Like so much of what Candace contributed to our college, the detail-oriented work that kept the Writing Fellows Program running smoothly took place behind the scenes: submitting abstracts to the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, proposing the annual program budget months in advance, recruiting students to become Writing Fellows, encouraging faculty to use Writing Fellows in their courses, and negotiating the logistical labyrinth of tutors' and clients' schedules, all in addition to teaching the course for incoming Writing Fellows.

While Candace organized and coordinated every last detail, her students are quick to point out that her approach to teaching "English 250: Peer Tutoring in Writing" authorized Writing Fellows to find their own answers. Misty Doane, an experienced Writing Fellow who worked with Candace, took me aside in February to suggest that we have a conversation about "the philosophy of the course," reminding me that it was about facilitating discussion and modeling the behavior Writing Fellows should bring to their work as peer group leaders. In other words, Misty was warning me not to micromanage. I only hope I can do the course and the program justice. And Candace, if you're watching, bless me with your energy and be patient with my mistakes.

Laurie: At my final meeting with Writing Fellows this semester, we talked, as usual, about Candace. Two Fellows, Matt Apsokardu and Emily Sparks, told me about their participation with Candace in an informal faculty development workshop to talk about

the benefits of using Writing Fellows in classes across the disciplines. I remembered hearing about the workshop from Candace, but hearing it from the students reminded me again why I miss her so much. Apparently, many of the faculty at the workshop spent a lot of time criticizing their students' writing. Matt and Emily, who had never been in a meeting with faculty, told me they were at first upset when they heard what faculty were saying about students. But they were also quite impressed with how Candace handled the situation. She would nod her head and smile as if to validate what she was hearing, only to then delicately get back to the topic of the workshop: "What a great reason to use Writing Fellows!"

Taking my cue from my dear friend Candace, I will do what she would have done in such a tribute: let her students' voices take the stage.

Misty Doane: After suffering tremendous personal tragedy last semester, I notified all of my teachers about what was going on with me so they would know why my demeanor in class would be glum for a little while. I came to Peer Tutoring in a happy mood a few weeks later, smiling at my giggling friends who sat next to me. Dr. S., who was sitting on my right, asked what was so funny. I responded, "Nothing." She tilted her head in curiosity and said, "Misty, are you medicated?" The class exploded with laughter at her boldness. Only Dr. S. would have enough guts to ask.

Emily Sparks: Dr. S. could always be counted upon to come to our rescue. The night before we had to give our presentation at the National Conference on Peer Tutoring and Writing, we thought we were prepared...with only a few minor adjustments to make. We'd brought along our powerpoint saved on a floppy and a laptop...without a floppy drive. Ah! Thank God Dr. S. couldn't spend the weekend without her laptop. She loaned us hers and everything turned out just fine.

Bithyah Shaparenko: Dr. Spigelman had an exceptional talent, one that is very important for teachers to possess, but in my experience is actually quite rare. She was always able to encourage and motivate students by her positive comments. I never heard her put anyone down or in the least way imply that someone's writing was bad. Instead, she would somehow let you know how to improve your writing while complimenting you on the good aspects of your paper and helping you understand how to advance from there.

Laura Lawfer: Dr. Spigelman's influence on my life and on my writing has been immense. Not only did she teach me to become a Writing Fellow (a skill that gave me the ability to become a Writing Tutor at Penn State University Park), but she gave up a large amount of her time to guide me in an independent study related to my work with students in Basic Writing. (This project took place in Dr. Grobman's class.) Her

encouragement in this project improved my writing skills, my research skills, and my tutoring knowledge. People say you never really realize what you might lose until it's gone, and I've found that to be true in my relationship with Dr. S. In her passing, I've lost a friend, a mentor, and a professor...and I'm not the only one. Thank you, Dr. Spigelman, for leaving a lasting impression on so many people's lives, including mine.

Jessie Didow: When I was in the Peer Tutoring class, I worked with the same three students every Wednesday. I was having a really hard time with one of the students, and I think the other two were too. He did not come to our last meeting, and everything we did in our group worked beautifully. In my journal, I was hesitant to write anything about the difference I had noticed because I wasn't sure if, as a Writing Fellow, I could express my pure joy of the session because one of the group members wasn't there. Remembering Dr. S had said that the journals were the way we could touch base, I took a chance and wrote about it. At the bottom of my entry, she wrote something to the effect of "What a difference one absence can make." I can't remember exactly what she wrote, but I just remember feeling like she was saying it was okay to be human and be a Writing Fellow.

Laura Hirneisen: Dr. S. transformed the way I think about writing, not only in terms of my own writing, but in the way I think about the writing of others as well. She was so enthusiastic about writing, and she was such a life force in the classroom. At times, she would get so involved in what she was saying that her eyes would actually glow. When I saw that glowing spark in her eyes, I felt motivated to learn, to grow, and to write. She also knew her students, both as writers and as people, caring about them even when she was facing a very difficult time in her own life.

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Penn State Berks is creating and dedicating a Writing Fellows tutoring room in honor of Candace. With your support, this important space for writing tutoring can become a reality. To contribute, please make checks payable to "Candace Spigelman Memorial Fund" and send to Christopher Brittin, Director of Development, Penn State Berks, P.O. Box 7009, Reading, PA 19610.