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Late at Night

by Kevin Davis

Late at night, if we'd been good and done our work, Wendy and I would walk through the summer darkness to hear jazz and drink a Heineken at the Brown Hotel. During these walks, we transformed ourselves: we were no longer grad students struggling with a new discourse community, no longer lonely parents doing summer school away from our families, no longer strangers. In a place without friction, we talked our way through the streets of Indiana, PA, sometimes for hours before and after that single beer.

Nineteen years ago, in our first PhD-level class, Wendy and I were assigned to co-author an annotated bib. Neither of us was at all sure we really wanted a PhD—we shared bad experiences with MA programs—but in an incredible stroke of kismet, we looked around a room of strangers, simultaneously settled our eyes on one another, and somehow KNEW that we were partners. And the assignment became a friendship; we propped each other up and held onto each other through degrees we might never have completed alone. Somehow, I thought my best thoughts with Wendy: she had this electricity about her which brought me out, which (I later learned) brought lots of people out.

From that beginning we spent years sharing stories about the role of emotion in education: how much we came to love certain students, how they came to love us, how that love was essential to the learning. As she became more and more prominent in composition and I became more and more convinced that classrooms were more important than national conferences, we saw each other less and less, relying on e-mail that would rise up in furious activity only to fade into six-month silences. But last year, we finally co-authored that essay we'd been writing for 17 years, on love in the classroom. We thought we were finally wrapping up a conversation; I guess we were wrapping up more than that: no more misbehaving at conferences for this duo. The last time we got together—in Savannah at the IWCA—we walked for hours through the historic district, had one Heineken, and walked some more.

About the Author

Kevin Davis directs the Writing Center at East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma.

Although Wendy never spent a lot of time working in writing centers, she was a writing center person at heart. I sometimes imagine that she saw the whole world as one giant writing center, which is why her work spoke to so many of us. Collaboration, conversation, revision: this was her way of life; this was what we accomplished together in our hundreds of miles of walking.

I just looked on the Web, and it appears they're still playing music at the Brown Hotel. Maybe someone up in Pennsylvania could stop by and have a Heineken for Wendy. She'd like that.