

1-1-2003

Lives and Stones: A Remembrance of Wendy

Michael Spooner

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/wcj>

Recommended Citation

Spooner, Michael (2003) "Lives and Stones: A Remembrance of Wendy," *Writing Center Journal*: Vol. 24 : Iss. 1, Article 5.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2832-9414.1541>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries.
Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Lives and Stones: A Remembrance of Wendy

by Michael Spooner

In my favorite Wendy Bishop essay, someone has been leaving stones gently, anonymously, on the roof of her car. Her voice, personal in everything she wrote, is especially present here. Is a student stalking her? Infatuated? The rocks appear, persistent, large and small, but nothing more. She logs the incidents. She leaves a note. She searches every student paper, every face for a clue. At the end of the term comes the answer: a ring of rare stones on the roof of her car. Gently, she tucks them in a coin purse, takes up a pen. "I will keep them waiting with me till the messenger returns from his last, his longest journey."

A photograph, fifteen years old, of Wendy's children on a beach. It is a northern beach, a rocky beach of glacier-polished stones under a low sky. Toddler Tait squats at the water's edge; big sister Morgan stands nearby. Both are engrossed in the idea of stones so smooth. Behind the camera, Wendy is engrossed, as always, in young learners exploring lives. And in composition—not written this time, but photographic: framing the scene, distance to keep, angle of sight, balance and light. Or isn't that writing, too? Isn't that life?

"I ask students to delve into bookbags or purses for talismanic objects. These sometimes trivial looking coins, combs, tickets or toys often have layers of imbedded value for the owners."

We perch on a limestone slab overlooking Anasazi ruins. A hummingbird skims by in the dry silence. Wendy has lived in California, Africa, South America, Arizona, Alaska, but Alligator Point is her refuge now. She needs the ocean, she says, the weight of air, the dolphins. "Still, in my next life," she wishes aloud, "I want to live in a cabin somewhere between Bluff and Dolores. Just live and write."

About the Author

Michael Spooner directs the Utah State University Press and writes occasionally in composition studies.

The mystery of the stones on her car is the simple mystery of teaching, I think. What a gift, to see you have influenced another's life. For Wendy, it was always about lives. Teaching lives. Can you do her syntax? Lives of teachers teaching lives.

There were three things in the box on my desk from Tallahassee: a photo of Wendy and the kids on their summer trip; a bundle of Navajo Tea tied with yarn; and a rock. Broken from the wall of the Grand Canyon, only an inch tall, with rough edges and with eighteen, count them, layers in colors of the canyon. An instant talisman.

Inevitably, I re-read the last few emails. Don't you? The hospital, the treatments, the progress.

There is a stone in my chest when Morgan calls.

To say she was prolific would seem silly. Wendy always worked as if she might be gone tomorrow. And she loved her family, her teachers, colleagues, students, and friends that way, too. She was painfully shy, we know, but was anyone ever so tangibly personal to so many? It was always about composing lives together.

She wrote this poem for you. Tear it out. Keep it. Wrap it around the rock in your purse or pocket till—perhaps at Alligator Point, perhaps somewhere between Bluff and Dolores—we can all return from our long journeys, and share a table and a story once again.

from "Here in the New World" by Wendy Bishop, 1997

Friends have returned to Florida for the solstice. And soon we'll all return,
from eonic darkness, like a carefully hummed song,
the one I've spent years growing used to. I hear it when we
eat together—fish and fowl—sour and spice and sweet—
pass each plate and toss our stories
into the bone-dish of the future.