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So Where Have You Been?

Lil Brannon

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So Where Have You Been?

by Lil Brannon

Minneapolis, November 2005 IWCA

Dear Jeannette,

Having fun. Wish you were here. You wouldn't believe all of the people (peer tutors and writing center directors). One could even get lost in the crowd, even disappear.

Love,
Lil

Dr. Jeannette Harris
Writing Center
Texas Christian University
Forth Worth, TX

February 2006, Southeastern Writing Centers Association, Chapel Hill

Neal: Hey, Lil. You know that column we are doing for *The Writing Center Journal*, the “what-ever-happened-to...” Would you think about writing one of these?

Lil: But Neal, I'm here...

Neal: Yes, but...

About the Author

Lil Brannon is Professor of English and Education and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. In 1980 she and Steve North were the founding editors of The Writing Center Journal. She has directed Writing Centers at Texas A&M, Commerce (with Jeanette Harris), at UNC Wilmington, NYU, and University at Albany, SUNY (following Steve North). Over the last two years she has been working with the UNC Charlotte Writing Resources Center as faculty advisor.

March 2006, Draft 1

The Absence of Presence

I'm here
but I'm not,
not
in the words
speaking here
but here
somewhere
absent but
present
composing myself
in words.

April 3, 2006, entry in daybook

I'm supposed to be, well, flattered to be asked, "where have you been." It all comes down to words, to writing, to being in print. When it came to the *WCJ*, I thought it important to save space for new voices, new ways of thinking. My voice had been very loud, very present. It was time to stop hogging the space. I wanted to listen to others, to hear ways of understanding that I wouldn't have on my own—we needed new identities.

From "Words Become Us" by Ann Imbrie

But there's a catch in the power of other people's words: they may be eloquent, they may be true, they may serve the purpose temporarily, they may speak like our very souls, but they belong to somebody else. Somebody else earned them in the labor of syntax. Identity doesn't come ready-made. You cannot borrow it, from Mick Jagger or from Milton. Identity comes through the encouraging, exasperating, consoling, frightening but finally willful, sense-making, self-making act of writing sentences.

(Vassar Alumni Magazine)

May 5, 2006, entry in daybook

So I've never stopped tutoring. I may have changed venue, but I haven't stopped tutoring. In the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at University at Albany, SUNY, I enlisted every tutor I knew from our Writing Center to work with me in developing living/learning communities for first-year students—RAs became peer tutors, the Writing Center moved into the residence halls. Then the English

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Department fell apart. I left town. Now at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, I'm working in English Education, working with teachers in area schools, using everything I learned in the Writing Center to make classrooms learning communities. Last year our Writing Center Director quit. English needed someone who knew something about Writing Centers to step in. I was the only one, except, perhaps Jennifer, who knew anything. Seems like some things never change.

June 2006, Writing Center, UNC Charlotte

Tutor: OK, Lil, so who is your audience?

Tutee (Lil): Honestly, I can't for the life of me imagine who cares.

Tutor: Kinda like writing one of those 101 essays, huh?

Tutee: No, worse.

Tutor: What do you mean?

Tutee: I'm writing to folks who think I've disappeared.