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Love, Life and Photographs: a Look at Creativity and Community in Adult Literacy

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*love
life and
photographs*

**A LOOK AT CREATIVITY
AND
COMMUNITY IN ADULT
LITERACY**

PLEASE RETURN TO
NONFORMAL EDUCATION
RESOURCE CENTER
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of the requirements for the
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Dr. George Urch, Advisor

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*"Their story, yours, mine – it's what we all carry
with us on this trip we take and we owe it
to each other to respect our stories and
learn from them."*

-William Carlos Williams

Although I am the one writing about the photostory project, the voices and insights of Bill, Eileen, Annette, Jeannine and Carmen resonate throughout. I learned a tremendous amount, not only from their stories but from their actions as well. Although I had believed in the power of sharing and listening to stories before the project began, these five confirmed that belief. The energy they had for the project and telling stories sustained me throughout. These five deserve the most thanks.

All of the learners and participants at the Ware Adult Education Center deserve thanks for listening, for sharing, for giving feedback and for supporting our work.

Thanks to Cathie and Tim who provided motivation and to Tracey who listened and gave support from the beginning to the end, even when she was out of the country. Thanks to Tom who gave me a subscription of "light" reading to take my mind off academic work.

George Urch, my advisor, deserves thanks for allowing me to tell the story my way.

And thanks to Judy, who was my guidepost throughout the project. She is the one who convinced me to become a part of the Ware Adult Education Center and the reason I stayed. She supported all of us throughout the project, listened to our stories and respected them. Without her laughter, energy, vision and friendship the Ware Adult Education Center would not be such a special place.

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(The booklet, *Love, Life and Photographs* follows the last Appendix.)

INTRODUCTION

The Literacy Project (TLP) is a community based adult education program based in Greenfield. It serves four rural areas in Western Massachusetts: Ware, Haydenville, Orange and Greenfield (The Ware Adult Education Center, The Pioneer Valley Adult Education Center, The North Quabbin Adult Education Center and The Charbonneau Learning Center.) It began in 1984 with three sites and a fourth site in Ware was added in 1987. Each site has one director, two of the sites have an additional staff person and all sites are staffed by volunteer tutors.

TLP's philosophy is one of empowering learners to take control of their own lives. When TLP began it endeavored to "create a program in which philosophy, curriculum and environment were as consistently and coherently integrated as possible (Rabinowitz, 1992; 3)." While using a whole language approach in teaching, instructors facilitate learners finding their voices and place in their communities. Through critical inquiry, learners become more aware of the world around them and gain skills which allow them to make informed choices about their lives and realities.

People with varying levels of reading, writing and numeracy skills participate in the activities offered at each site. There are GED classes, pre-GED classes and other activities that meet the needs of people wanting to brush up on reading, writing or math skills.

In addition to these activities, there are creative writing groups, newsletters published by learners, potluck gatherings at

sites, learner run management committees, special projects including quilting, drama, legal advocacy and a "Next Steps" program and students are on TLP's Board of Directors and long range planning committee.¹

When TLP first began it was run primarily as a program where students could come in and work in a one-to-one or small group tutoring situation. While this format still exists, during the past two years the program has moved towards a group learning situation. Classes and groups are now held at all sites.

I began at the Ware Adult Education Center (WAEC) in January, 1992. I volunteered to teach a GED level reading and writing class. My original intent was to stay long enough to do some research for my Master's Degree. However, TLP received a community block grant in March of that year and I became a salaried staff member. I left the WAEC in December, 1993 to begin working as the Project Coordinator for a new health program at TLP.

As the Ware Site Director and I experimented with various configurations of classes, groups, tutoring, including looking at content areas and curriculum, it became clear that learners wanted more than simply learning out of a book. This was in line with TLP's philosophy of literacy being more than learning to read and write, so we decided to find out what people wanted to do and offer more creative group activities.

¹The Next Steps program was modeled after the University of Massachusetts's Workplace Education (WE) program. MaryJo Connelly and Sue Thrasher of WE worked with TLP's Orange site to develop a program where learners would examine their communities and lives and gain skills that would enable them to be more active members of society. TLP received a grant to begin a similar program in Ware, with the help of learners from Orange.

We talked to learners and asked some to fill out surveys at the end of the Fall, 1992 cycle. The results showed that people were interested in a creative writing group and a group that integrated reading and writing with photography. The former was something that had been ongoing in Ware. I decided to develop a class that addressed the latter and "Understanding Through Photostories" was born.

UNDERSTANDING THROUGH PHOTOSTORIES

*"... it is argued that a picture can in fact
be worth more than numerous book pages.
This is doubtlessly the case also for someone
who has difficulty reading or who perhaps
cannot read at all."
-Wolfgang Meidler*

"Understanding Through Photostories" began in January, 1993. I decided to pursue funding to purchase cameras and cover the cost of film and developing. I was awarded a mini-grant in February by the Western Massachusetts branch of SABES (System of Adult Basic Education Support) which enabled the WAEC to produce a booklet of photographs and writing in addition to purchasing materials.

There were ten participants who began in January. By the fourth week the group had settled into five people who came each week. (This attrition rate is normal for adult education programs where life problems often interfere with people attending regularly.) I counted myself as the sixth participant and also operated as a researcher/facilitator.

The grant was written with the following objectives:

- *Participants will develop and/or improve their reading and writing skills through the use of learner-generated materials and popular media.
- *Participants will examine each other's lives and begin discussions about racial and class stereotypes.
- *Participants will examine links between visual and written literacy and reflect on the impact each has on their lives.

*The WAEC will experiment with bringing together learners of varying reading and writing abilities and facilitate their working collaboratively.

*Participants will create a final product and transfer the process of doing so to other TLP sites, staff and learners.

*Participants will have the opportunity to engage in creative activities that will further the skills they came to the WAEC to work on.

(See Appendix A for a summary of project objectives and outcomes.)

These objectives were developed both by me and people who had initially expressed interest in the project during the survey. At the same time the town of Ware was experiencing increasing racial tensions. An article in a local newspaper on the topic highlighted one of our former students. This had generated lively discussion at the site and there appeared to be a need to build upon this. Using photography as a way of examining the participants' environments seemed like one way to get at some of the stereotypes people held. The participants lived in different neighborhoods which were divided both racially and economically. By bringing them together to work on a project, the hope was that they would get to know each other better in a relaxed atmosphere. I also hoped that the understanding and friendships that evolved out of the group would continue outside the walls of the Center. I saw this group as the beginning of possible coalition building where people would start to address community issues which affected them. One reason people don't work together across class, race and age lines is lack of information

about each other's realities (Cohen, 1983). The hope was that this project would start people on a process that would erase those lines.

With these goals in mind, many activities were held (see Appendix B for a list of activities which occurred throughout the project and Appendix C for a project timetable). A summative evaluation occurred at the end in addition to formative evaluations which were done through in-class discussions and dialogue journals.

The main part of the project was completed in April, 1993 although the booklet of our stories and photographs still needed to be printed. Due to various problems this wasn't completed until September, 1993. At the suggestion of our guest speaker, a photojournalist from the local newspaper, a booklet reading and signing was held in October. (See Appendix D for a summary of the project which I used during a workshop about the photostory project that was held for Western Massachusetts adult educators.)

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

"It's like putting a cake together. We're all part of the ingredients. I got something good that I could give that I know. So and so's got something good to know. We all put these together, and before you know, we whip up ourselves a nice cake."

-Annette

The group was made up of six people, including me. Three of the participants had worked together before, one was new and the other was in a group for the first time although she had been at the Center for four years. There were five women and one man. There was one Puerto Rican participant, the others were all Caucasian, United States born. Ages ranged from 22 - 56. Excluding me, everyone was unemployed. Reading and writing skills ranged from a first-grade level to someone who was nearly ready to pass the GED exam. Everyone participated in at least one other learning situation at the Center while also being part of Photostories.

JEANNINE

Jeannine began at the WAEC in January, 1993. In addition to participating in Photostories she also enrolled in creative writing and GED groups. She didn't know any of the other participants prior to coming to the Center that January.

Jeannine lives in Ware with her boyfriend and younger brother, of whom she is the legal guardian. She moved to Ware from Connecticut, hoping to find a better life. At the time of the project

she was unemployed and interested in getting her GED. She is in her early twenties. She receives public assistance and at the time of the project was unemployed.

In the beginning she was quiet and spent much of her time listening. As time went on she became more and more active, both in the group and in general Center activities.

EILEEN

When Eileen first came to the Center in 1989 she hardly spoke to anyone. She is a single mother with two teenaged boys. Eileen is mildly retarded and has severe learning disabilities. She receives public assistance and has never held a job. Her main recreation is watching television and playing Bingo on weekends with her mother.

Prior to joining Photostories, Eileen had made little progress on her numeracy, reading and writing skills. However, change had occurred in her communication and interpersonal skills. She had gradually become an active member of the Center, making coffee when she arrived, attending Center potlucks and staying after class to talk. There had also been a change in her level of responsibility. She used to miss sessions and ignore the rule of calling to let us know. She now calls each time and often will call even if she has told someone in person.

Since beginning at the Center, Eileen had worked with a tutor in a one to one or small group setting. Until Photostories she had always preferred being alone or with one or two other people.

At the January orientation and registration, she signed up for her regular tutoring time. A week later, she approached me and asked if she could be part of the photostory group. My initial reaction was mixed. I was excited that she had asked to be part of a group and saw this as a measure of continued personal growth. However, I wondered how she would fit in. Although one of the goals of the project was to bring together learners of different skill levels, Eileen was reading at a first grade level which was far below the next nearest level. She also had a dislike of writing. After some thought, I decided that her presence would be beneficial for both her and the group and that some of the scheduled activities which required high level reading skills could be modified.

A week into the project, Eileen became a member of "Understanding Through Photostories."

BILL

Bill began at the Center in May, 1991 and re-entered in July, 1992. He is an ABE learner whose goal is to get his GED. He is in his mid-thirties and married with two children, one of whom is severely disabled. The family receives public assistance. Bill also has a speech impediment.

In addition to Photostories, Bill participated in the ABE and creative writing groups during the Spring cycle. He also occasionally came to the Center to find a quiet place to read. He is very motivated and outspoken.

During this period, he was also one of a small number of students from Ware who traveled to TLP's Orange site to view a student drama production. He is one of a few student members on TLP's Long Range Planning Committee, which was formed in February, 1993.

ANNETTE

In September, 1992 Annette joined the Center. She is in her mid-fifties and married with two grown children. She is a lifelong resident of Ware and both she and her husband are retired. She used to work in the mills in Ware before they shut down. She is an ABE learner who came to the Center in order to improve her reading, writing and math skills.

Prior to the photostory group, Annette was part of an ABE group that included Bill and Carmen. In January she participated in another ABE group in addition to Photostories. Again this group included Carmen and Bill.

Annette is outgoing and talkative. She is helpful and actively participates in the Center. She has tried to recruit volunteers for us and is always the first person to offer to help out when something needs to be done. She is also welcoming to new students and has participated in the Orientation and Registration (an activity where new students come in, find out about the WAEC and sign up for classes and groups) as a resource person.

CARMEN

Carmen also has a long history with the WAEC. She returned in September, 1992 after having been at the Center in 1990. She became part of an ABE group. In January she continued with this group in addition to joining Photostories. She is in her mid forties and originally from Puerto Rico. She is a single mother with one teenaged son at home. Due to health problems, Carmen's attendance was sporadic during the course of the project. However, she managed to complete her story for the booklet.

Carmen was a very active member of the Center, health permitting. In September, 1993 she became seriously ill, was unable to attend the booklet signing and has not yet been able to resume activities at the WAEC.

MICHELE

As previously mentioned, I saw myself as a participant/facilitator/researcher. First and foremost, I was a participant although in the eyes of other group members I was the teacher. As much as I tried to take a back seat in the beginning of the project, people still saw me as the authority. TLP's Executive Director would say that at TLP sites it is difficult to tell who is a student and who is a staff member due to how staff dresses and the fact that "everyone seems to be teaching occasionally (Rabinowitz, 1992; 3)." While similar styles of dress and shared teaching do occur, it is extremely difficult to leave the role that people are used to seeing you in. Towards the end I became more of a participant as

I asked for help on my story, as Eileen began to tease me about not finishing my photographs on time and as I often left the group alone for the first few minutes of class. Yet I was always the facilitator/teacher in the eyes of the participants.

Before the photostory group began I had worked with Eileen in a tutoring situation but had never worked with the others. My background in photography was limited to a personal interest and a course I had taken years ago as an undergraduate student. I was interested in facilitating a photostory group so that people could have fun and have the experience of working with a medium they rarely had a chance to use. I also wanted to explore the areas of community and creativity in an adult education program.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY

*"Community makes you feel that you are not alone.
That other people have the same problems."
(Gaber-Katz, 1991; 57)*

At the end of the project one of the participants said, "I never thought we'd actually do it (produce a booklet)." One of the outcomes of the project – perhaps the most valuable one – was the sense of "we" which developed. People began to see themselves not as individuals but as part of a group in which people could get along. They began to see that despite surface dissimilarities they all had things in common and that they could work together. People began the project as individuals and ended as a "we." During the oral summative evaluation one person said, "I did it with your (Michele) help." She quickly corrected her statement and said, "**We** did it with your help."

I'm uncertain as to when or how it all began yet realized early on that some sense of community was being established. The journal I kept throughout the project shows that the community feeling was there in the early stages of the project and it lasted throughout the twelve weeks. (I have also included statements here that are clues as to the formation of community.)

*January 18

"There's a lot of excitement around the idea of actually creating something."

*January 25

"They were all working toward a common goal and there was a feeling of cohesiveness and community as they shared stories about their lives and helped each other with their work."

At first everyone was hesitant to cut up magazines, use glue and create collages. Someone asked if we were going to "play." Yet as soon as the stories began and people cut out the first pictures and pasted them, excitement and laughter ensued."

*February 1

"The community feeling remains strong. I feel that much of what we have been doing so far has been building and reinforcing this. That's fine. The process is as important as the product."

*February 22

(regarding Eileen) "...being part of a group, working with others ... it's important for her and it seems to be important to her as well."

*March 8

(trip to photography exhibit at Smith College)

"Everyone seemed to be so close today. Was it because they felt on the margins at Smith? I definitely felt it in the way people looked at us and the guards followed us around. It was interesting to note that people rarely moved off on their own. They were always with another group member."

*March 23

(I was reflecting on the fact that the project wasn't overtly addressing its goal of examining issues of race and class. I wrote about the need to discuss this with the funders but noted the following.)

"... but there have been many, many positive outcomes

(1) Eileen being in a group, speaking up

(2) People working collaboratively

- (3) *Participants beginning to ask questions about their lives and each other*
- (4) *GROUP! They've really formed a mini-community within the larger community of the Center and of Ware."*

(also from that week)

"We processed the trip from last week. The recurring themes were getting a sense of history and of other countries and sharing the experience with other members of the group.

*April 12

*"What struck me most today is that this is truly a GROUP. They talk about **us** and **we**. The first title that was brainstormed today was All of Us. (For a list of other titles brainstormed, which illustrate the community feeling which had formed, see Appendix E)*

*April 22

"The thing that has been the most satisfying in this project is the strong sense of "we" that developed. When did it all begin? I can't seem to pinpoint an time, a place or an activity. Was it the day we went to Northampton and took a road trip together? I need to explore this more."

On April 20 we also did an informal, oral evaluation.

Participants responded to two questions, "What did you like most about this group?" and "What did you learn?" As illustrated in Appendix F, most people spoke in terms of we, of sharing, of feeling support from other people and of making new friends. I also asked people to write about the class in their dialogue journals that day. Once again the theme of community came up in addition to people mentioning "coming out of our shells" and improving their writing (see Appendix G). From my observations, the latter two issues occurred because there was support for people to share their writing, constructive feedback on each other's work and new

friendships formed. All of these paved the way for people to experiment more and reach out, both personally and academically.

The photostory group stopped meeting in April (although work continued on the production of the booklet through the summer). When one of the participants was asked what class or group she planned to participate in during the subsequent cycle, her response was, "Whatever the group does."

And, that's what happened. All of the photostory group joined the Quabbin Writing Group which met throughout the Spring Cycle.² They continued to still be close and to spend time together but they also welcomed other members into the group.

Summer is a slow time at the WAEC as children are home from school and day care becomes an even larger issue than it is during the school year. Most of the group left in June although a couple still came around from time to time. This fall two of the group members joined the Reading, Writing and Quilting group (along with another person from the Quabbin group) and some were also active in the Next Steps program. (See Postscript for a discussion of the quilting group and its relation to Photostories.)

The booklet signing occurred in October, 1993. Unfortunately, Carmen was ill and unable to attend. The event was publicized as a potluck dinner and booklet signing and reading (see Appendix H). It had the largest turnout of any event ever held at the Center. Past

²The Quabbin Writing Group was made up of learners of mixed abilities. It met twice a week. One day was devoted to exploration of some part of the Quabbin, a man-made reservoir cum nature area with a strong local history. The other day was devoted to writing about the first day as well as working on reading and writing skills. A booklet of learners' writings was the final product.

students, volunteers and current students all were gathered together. While potlucks are always events that bring people together in Ware, this one was more than a simple gathering. People were excited to hear what the photostory group had to say and there was support for their work. Excitement was generated around the possibility of doing similar projects at the Center in the future. Each participant (with the exception of Eileen whose son read her piece) stood and read their story aloud. After the reading, they signed books which were then sold or kept to be distributed to other programs.

This activity was significant in that it added to the group cohesiveness. They were all nervous to read yet each did. Participants supported each other both before and after the reading. It was an incredible high for most of them. As Bill said, "I felt as if I was someone important. Everyone listed to me. I was on cloud nine."

Community happened. It wasn't a stated objective of the project although I would say that all the teaching and group facilitating at the WAEC is structured around community building. TLP staff feels that our program, like other community-based literacy programs, strives "to build supportive communities working from the premise that community is essential for humanity (Gaber-Katz, 1991; 63)." In reflecting on how community occurred, I came up with the following activities and events that potentially had an effect.

Freewrite and sharing. The group began each day with a freewrite. Everyone was asked to share with the group or with one other person. Although people were uncomfortable, they shared. There was discussion about how hard this was. Participants were supportive of each other and occasionally offered to read someone else's work when that person was too shy. Towards the end of the project, participants were suggesting freewrite topics. Even the most reticent people shared as they gained courage from watching others do the same..

Collaborative Learning. Working collaboratively began the first day and this continued each time we met. As seen in my journal notes, as early as our second meeting I noticed that people enjoyed doing this. From February 22 I noted that being part of a group seemed to be important to Eileen. She had begun to identify with being part of a larger whole by asking for help when she needed it. She also began apologizing when she couldn't make class, something that hadn't happened before. I took this to mean that she felt a part of something to which she was responsible.

The power of collaborative work and its role in building community is seen from another journal entry.I made on April 12.

"It's wonderful to see that Bill and Annette are getting along finally. Somehow they came together and were able to reconcile their differences and work together. I can still remember Annette leaning over Bill's shoulder and giving him suggestions on what he should put in his book. I thought he would rebuff her but he listened and took most of what she said. He didn't use it all but at least he didn't refute her words as soon as she said them which had been his habit in the past.

Annette was also one of Bill's strongest supporters in the class towards the end. She gave him an incredible amount of support for having the courage to write and share his story.

Although Annette and Bill had experienced many difficulties in their personal interactions, working together in Photostories helped to smooth over the past. They were never told to work together. Annette saw Bill struggling one day, she was done with her own work and moved over to help him. He welcomed her by making room for her and his story was finished that day.

Collaboration was facilitated by asking people to share, to help each other and to give feedback. This could be called forced collaboration yet people truly enjoyed working together, a skill which carried over into subsequent groups. People began to "share the responsibility for the education of other adults within the same community (Gaber-Katz, 1991; 58)."

Personal stories and Oral Histories. Stories are powerful when shared. Telling stories is like opening up a part of yourself. I noted on January 25 that sharing stories had brought people together. My notes from this date show how collages, based on stories people told, were strong group building activities. This was the first day we did oral histories. As people began to tell details of their lives to others (for some it was the first time they had ever opened up) trust occurred which led to a feeling of safety when that trust was honored. When people began to see the photostory group as a safe space, then it became a community of friends and supporters.

People shared personal experiences, took a risk and this brought them together.

There were tears in some eyes when Bill told the story of his little girl and how people treat him differently not only because of living in poverty, but because of having a disabled child. It was obviously a difficult story to tell and one participant remarked, "That (telling the story) took a lot of courage." Most of the group participants offered verbal support to Bill; others supported him simply by listening.

Discovery of similarities. People found out that they had a lot in common. They discovered they had the same problems by becoming aware of each other's experiences and beginning to perceive common interests. These discoveries led to conversations both in and out of the classroom about shared life problems and experiences.

Talking time. In the beginning we always tried to start on time. Since we would only meet three hours a week for 12 weeks, I wanted to be sure there was adequate time to complete the project. When I entered the room I often interrupted conversations so that we could get started with the day's activities. One day I entered and didn't interrupt. The conversation continued and the following thoughts were voiced. (The participant who said these words later wrote them down at my request.)

"I've seen and heard about many people out in this world.

"There are two kinds of people. The ones that go out and read and write. Have the ability to handle anything that comes their way. Not afraid to do it. They have the confidence they need.

"There are also people that stay back in a closed closet. That can't come out or are afraid to. But sometimes we see a little light in the dark. We are looking for more light. When we do we find it very interesting. We found out that we too have a very good mind and feelings about things. We have more to say on paper than to keep inside.

"I found out there are many intelligent people in the dark closet after all. Have the same confidence. We need to come out of that dark closet. The light we see feels so good. It's like being behind and you can see like other people but not as well as they do. But we keep trying to do so."

Had I interrupted, these words might not have been uttered. What a loss. Not only are her thoughts about what it is like to have difficulty reading and writing clearly articulated, but also the sense of community she has discovered comes through. She identifies with a group and refers to this as a "we".

After that day conversation was free flowing for the first few minutes of class. Prior to this a freewrite had occupied the first fifteen minutes. While we still continued to do freewrites, they usually began about fifteen minutes into the group meeting. Before the freewrite, people talked about whatever issues came up. We all learned a great deal. As a researcher, I gained insight into what issues confronted people daily, information that was often used in structuring future activities not only for the photostory group but for others as well. As participants, we all came together more as

we discovered similarities amongst us and found ways of helping each other problem solve.³

PRODUCT. From the first day of class, we talked about the final product. The end result of our work was always there. As we looked at commercial photographs, people talked about their own pictures, when we read in class it was always about photography or someone's life story and the discussion revolved around the text's relevance to the participants' work.

During the project a sense of wanting it to happen and wanting it to be of a certain quality developed. When one person lagged behind in schedule, others were there to help out, cajole and lend support. There was a product to create that would be made public and carry everyone's name. People held each other accountable to put in their share of the work. I began to feel like a participant the day Eileen asked me why I hadn't finished my story!

In the beginning I thought that having the intent to publish might prohibit people's creativity. Instead, it actually led to a stronger feeling of community which, in turn, furthered the creativity among the participants. The photostory group was evidence that "creativity thrives in community (Cushman, 1992; 52)."

³Around the same time, Joan Dixon of the Literacy Support Initiative at the University of Massachusetts was using The Literacy Project as the site for her doctoral dissertation research. She would come to our staff development meetings with a cassette recorder and turn it on once the day's topic was broached. She never recorded the first half hour or so of "just talk" until she realized that some useful things were being said. From her I learned the importance of "just talk" and not to discount unstructured meeting time.

BOMBS and OH NOs. There were certainly activities that didn't work out yet these served to bring people together. I observed that people would often talk about a "bomb" during a break. These experiences gave the group something to share and commiserate about.

There were also activities which people didn't like. In the beginning, the first day we told stories, people were hesitant to talk to each other and many complained. We talked about it and turned their complaints around into a sense of shared discomfort. Again, knowing that others were uncomfortable led to people coming together.

All of these areas are potential community builders. They all contributed to the group becoming a "we". Sharing stories and personal experiences had the most impact although it's uncertain whether that alone would have resulted in the strong community feeling that occurred.

Very few of the people we work with in TLP have ever experienced being part of a group (Hofer and Larson, 1993). Or it is possible that their prior group experiences have been poor ones. Many of the people who walk through our doors aren't used to asking for help or opening up to other people. They have experienced oppression due to the school system, family situations, the community or the governmental system designed to help them. Somewhere along the line they learned to internalize their problems, finding that silence is often the best defense mechanism. Consequently, it often takes years (as in the case of Eileen) before

someone will actually decide to become part of a community. In some cases people simply have other communities of which they are a part and adding one more is too burdensome. They come to the Center, do what they set out to do, and leave. Although this situation happens occasionally, it is not most of what we see.

It is also not in sync with TLP's philosophy. As a staff member said during a discussion on community within our program, "People hold themselves accountable for not being able to read. It is in community that there's a possibility of seeing that it is not primarily about the individual but about structures." (See Appendix I for a summary of TLP's Staff Week 93 notes on community.)

Not only is community good for participants, but it is also beneficial for staff. There's a quote on the graffiti board at the WAEC that says, "Where do we get our energy?" As Hofer and Larson (1993) said, much of my energy as a practitioner comes from seeing a learner become more involved in her community by registering to vote or by watching someone who wouldn't talk to others at the site come in, make coffee and begin talking to people every day. A learner writes a letter to a local politician and receives a response. Another who has obtained her GED, works full-time and is a single mother with three children still comes back to the Center to vacuum our rugs. What excites me is seeing someone finding their voice and their place within the larger world community. TLP is a safe space to start but connections need to be made to the community outside the four walls since that is where people spend most of their time. We all exist in communities and the learners we work with need to become part of those communities. Literacy acquisition is only a

tool for doing so, it isn't an end in and of itself. Therefore, as literacy practitioners, we need to observe what creates community, capitalize on those activities and facilitate building bridges to communities outside of our programs.

WHAT ROLE DOES CREATIVITY HAVE?

*"Necessity is often the mother of creativity for people facing adversity. The challenge for society is to be creative enough to design social systems that allow people to demonstrate their natural creativity without having to do so as a matter of survival."
(Morris, 1992; 66)*

The people who come to the The Literacy Project are all creative. Anyone who runs a household on a monthly public assistance check, manages to buy birthday presents when there isn't enough money for food or is successful at evading an abusive spouse for three years has creative thinking and planning skills.

Yet the term creative is usually used in reference to art, television shows, theater or craft work. The woman who comes into the WAEC and shows an afghan she just made is said to be creative. The woman sitting next to her who just managed to talk her landlord into waiting one more month for the rent is equally creative, although many would not view her actions as such. Anyone who has to problem solve – and for the people at the Center problem solving is a constant way of life – is creative. People decide to come to the WAEC to improve their reading, writing and math skills often because they see it as a way to a better life. They are creatively going about improving their situations rather than passively waiting for it to occur.

Education that fosters critical thinking skills and encourages people to ask why and then act upon the response they receive,

builds upon the creativity inherent in people. My intent was to have people analyze the reality of their lives as seen through photographs, similar to a project which occurred in Canada with immigrant women. In aiding the literacy process, the process of developing a critical social consciousness would also occur (Barndt, 1982). In addition, I had another, less activist-oriented but no less important goal.

I wanted to give people an opportunity to enjoy themselves and to look at reading and writing as activities that could be fun and interesting. As adults we are not given much of a chance to explore our "other" creativity. This creativity is the one that allows us to take part in activities that seem frivolous and unimportant. As children we experience many activities in both formal and informal situations that allow us to nurture this side of ourselves. As we become older and have more responsibilities there is less time to pursue activities that are in the "other" creative category. The playful, creative piece is wiped out as responsibilities weigh upon us. We are still being creative on a daily basis but do not engage in activities that involve play and are not tangibly related to our daily lives. Creativity is essential for self-esteem, yet when people are trying to exist from day to day creative activities are the last thing they have time for or think of,

One of my unstated goals for the project was to provide an environment in which people could play, have fun and create a product. I also wanted to validate that engaging in activities that may seem frivolous is worthwhile. Hopefully when the project ended people would have this sentiment to take away with them.

Although statistics aren't kept, the staff at The Literacy Project has observed that once people reach their goals and leave the program they tend to resume old negative habits. After the high of obtaining a GED they often face a lack of jobs and transportation difficulties which prohibit them from attending training programs or community college. Validating and furthering people's creativity may give them an option for filling in the time they once spent at the Center. In a study of inmates it was found that participating in artistic activities gave people a positive way to deal with leisure time. They had something to do when faced with free, unstructured time they hadn't had before (Welch, 1991). While inmates and learners at TLP are different groups of people, both must face how to handle time that had been previously filled and structured.⁴ Perhaps realizing that artistic endeavors have value and are permissible would give people the freedom to fill up time with something other than old, negative habits.

Taking part in a creative group at the Center isn't for everyone although we encourage people to do so. Some people don't want to spend time on anything other than passing the GED. They want to be taught the test (Clark, 1988). As staff although we can reiterate the importance of other types of learning, people may come in focused and won't touch anything that will detract from the time that could be focused on GED test preparation.

⁴TLP provides activities which are designed to keep people connected once they achieve their goals. Students are recruited as volunteers and board members. Most sites have creative writing and other creative groups where GED graduates can also participate. All of these activities have met with limited success. It is an issue that TLP staff continues to look at.

However, at the WAEC the staff thinks that the GED test is written by and for the dominant culture, that the questions are value-laden and that the real purpose of adult education is to prepare people to function in the world. While some programs would agree by saying, "we teach critical reading and writing and thinking. So in a real-world way, we prepare people for the test." others would disagree saying that "learners need to pass the GED in order to gain access to the tools of the mainstream culture. We have to teach the test (Clark, 1988; 187 and 188)."

The former is more applicable to the type of education which occurs at TLP. While there are learners at the WAEC who would agree more strongly with the second statement, over time many people have changed their minds and at least tried one of the creative groups. In January 1993, the photostory and creative writing groups generated the most interest, followed by math.

But getting people to sign up for a creative group is only part of the battle. Even if people begin to enjoy being in a creative group, overcoming the editor within themselves is a difficult task. They are afraid of appearing silly and their creativity becomes smothered under self-limiting assumptions about what's good enough (Cushman, 1992). The Editor – the voice that edits our creative acts before they are even out – becomes stronger as we get older (Cushman, 1992; Goldberg, 1986).

In Photostories, there was hesitation as people shared their stories and pictures. The day we did collages, people were hesitant to pick up scissors and glue and "play." Yet as people supported each other and collaborated on work, they also encouraged each other's

creativity. Editors were turned down as people saw that everyone was in the same situation. Because creativity thrives in community and as we have seen, community was a powerful force within this group, people were able to explore without letting the Editor or life's daily problems get in their way. Community allowed creativity to flow.

EFFECTS OF PROJECT ON LEARNERS and REFLECTIONS

"I think the most important thing was not learning. It's getting to know people. I learned that I need to give people more of a chance to get to know them. And I really learned how to like people a lot more. I'm glad about that. I don't care if I never read another word in my life because you have to live with people everyday."
-Jeannine

The global effect that occurred was a shared sense of community. The above quote was taken from a transcript (see Appendix J) that was used for a presentation at a Massachusetts adult education conference. Bill, Annette, Eileen and Jeannine talked for an hour about their experiences at the WAEC and what they had gained. Although we didn't focus on the Photostory group, that was the first time they all worked together and it was the first group for Eileen and Jeannine. Given that it is almost certain that that experience informed much of what they said in the transcript.

In addition to what is recorded in the transcript, the evaluations (see Appendix F) also reflect that people felt connected. They talked of being supported, they spoke using "we." and they talked about how comfortable it was and that people didn't discriminate.

Learning about each other's lives was also a shared outcome. People talked about learning to respect each other, learning that everyone has something to say and the effect of knowing new people. Bill says that he is now more social. Jeannine truly enjoys listening

to what others have to say. Annette has referred to peers as "family."

Being comfortable was also mentioned often. Eileen has said how she likes groups better because she is getting comfortable and "getting the shyness out" (see Appendix J). She also mentioned that she feels more comfortable when she has to talk to people in public. Someone else mentioned that she had learned to trust people.

During the oral evaluation the final product was also brought up. As previously mentioned, this may have been something that brought the group together. It also increased people's self-esteem and gave them confidence in their abilities. People were shocked that they had created a booklet. As Annette said, "We didn't know we had it in us." Pride in their accomplishment was evident as people read their writing at the booklet signing.

The group had the most profound effect on Eileen. It was her first group, one she asked to be part of and since then she has taken part in two other groups and has worked in small groups during Independent Study. She has opened up. She now teases people and speaks up when she feels she has something to say. During a recent meeting at the WAEC where an administrator from the state Department of Education and TLP's Director were present, Eileen made a point of stopping by the table where they were talking and engaging the administrator in conversation. The director of TLP who has known Eileen since she joined the WAEC was astounded that she would actively seek conversation with a stranger! Although she is still hesitant at times (she had her son read her story at the booklet reading and became nervous at the thought of the conversation in

Appendix J being recorded), Photostories was definitely where she began to open up more than she ever had. Being part of a community that cared and supported her opened up a whole new world for her.

Annette is an incredibly talented woman with a gift for expressing herself well. (See Appendix K for a piece of Annette's writing done in the Quabbin Writing Group.) She is also artistically talented. Yet prior to joining the WAEC it doesn't appear as if either one of these talents was ever valued or admired. Seeing tangible proof that her words are worth putting on paper and that she can create something that people will want to see was important for Annette. Since then she has produced pages and pages of writing which she brings in for WAEC staff to read. She also brings in handicrafts to show others and sometimes asks for help on craft projects she is working on. Although Annette had been in groups before, seeing the results of her work and working with people whom she would refer to as smarter than her was a powerful experience. She also emerged as a leader and was active in helping others and in generating ideas.

Carmen once said, "My hand isn't so heavy now. I can write." This was shortly after the photostory booklet was put together. For Carmen, who came to the group as an outgoing, talented and people-oriented person, the effect the project had is more subtle. She was ill throughout most of the project. Telling her story and having discussions about how Puerto Ricans were treated in Ware gave her an opportunity to tell stories and to have those stories well received. That many of the participants felt people in the group were non discriminatory and that one of the positive benefits of

being a member of Photostories was getting to know other people, reflects what people learned from and felt about Carmen. (Due to her illness I was unable to do much follow up with her.)

Bill has always been a strong voice at the Center. At times, it has seemed like he has wanted more of a chance to have discussions. In the group, he had this opportunity. Although he still talks more than he listens, the fact that he said that he "enjoyed finding out that there's more than my own opinion" is a big step for him. Bill has often talked about being oppressed. Not only is he unemployed and on public assistance but he also has a handicapped daughter. He is a dreamer, a creator and someone who thirsts for knowledge and recognition. That he helped to create a booklet, that his story has gone beyond Ware and people have read it and that he has received positive feedback has meant a great deal to him. He was the first to read his story at the booklet signing and there were many watery eyes at the end. The next day he said that for a few minutes he felt like a star and that people cared. Bill is currently a member of TLP's Long Range Planning Committee and continues to show up at all Center social events even if he is not attending a class at the time.

Photostories was Jeannine's first exposure to the Center in addition to writing and GED groups. As with the others, the validation that she could create something and that people would listen to her had a positive effect. However, as her words at the beginning of this section show, her learning went far beyond where to place commas. As someone who had been judged all her life and in turn had judged others, statements like this show a tremendous leap in understanding. Since Photostories Jeannine has been part of the

Quabbin Writing Group, Math classes, was the editor of one the Center's newsletters, participated in a Prejudice Workshop and the Next Steps group and most recently underwent training to be a tutor with TLP. She now has a part-time job and is nearly ready to complete her GED exam. She recently was the sole student on a committee to hire a new staff member for TLP.

Whatever goals I had at the beginning of this project, building a sense of community was not one of them. However, once I saw what occurred in Photostories and thought back to other groups I had facilitated and classes I had taught, I realized I always included activities that encouraged community building. It was also clear through my actions and pursuit of reading materials on the subject of community that developing a sense of "we" was always in my mind. So why hadn't I made this explicit - at least to myself - at the beginning of the project?

Perhaps fear was the main reason. I believe that learning occurs best in community, that creativity is encouraged by community and that empowerment occurs most readily in a supportive community. That belief is so strong that it overlays everything I do in education. Simultaneously, the question of why it happens is always present in my mind. My fear is that it won't and then what?

Not only did the photostory project make me realize my fear it also showed me how to let go of it. As a facilitator I had prided myself on taking an inconspicuous, supporting role. In fact, my unspoken and unacknowledged desire for group cohesiveness often led me to be more controlling than I had planned. Photostories

showed me I could let go with the end result being better than if I hadn't.

As mentioned in the section on community, the conversation at the beginning of each class didn't need to be stopped so that the scheduled freewrite could begin (and the results were more positive when conversation continued). My fears that Annette and Bill would clash and that I needed to keep them separate were laid to rest the day I let them do as they please. That was the day Annette helped Bill to write his story. I had thought about discouraging Eileen from joining the group because of her reading level and wanting her first group experience to be positive, not overwhelming. If I had done that, would she have ever joined a group again or participated in a taped conversation?

Letting go. Two simple words that are so valuable in facilitating. The art is finding the thin line between letting go and still regaining some measure of control. In the quilting group that followed Photostories (and which is described in the Postscript) I gave up a great deal of control. Again, it was with wonderful results as Annette took the lead, everyone participated and came together as another "we".

The importance of stories cannot be emphasized enough. With all participants sharing – including me – everyone was at an equal level. We could all talk and take pictures. If writing levels were different, it didn't prove to be a barrier as talk and photographs were our first means of sharing. Stories broke down stereotypes and barriers. The first time I shared stories about my life was when I felt as if others looked at me as a participant.

Of course, everything didn't work well. Due to time, the mini-grant proposal needed to be written before the final group was formed. Information used in the proposal was gathered from people who later decided not to participate in the project. At that point we were bound to a plan as outlined in the grant. How do you make a project truly participatory when there is an agenda going into it?

In retrospect, it might have been better to bring the group together around a storytelling them, see what issues arose out of their group and then get their input for a proposal. While this might then make the project truly participatory I'm uncertain as to whether or not it would have affected how they came together as a group.

The original intent was to work on reading and writing skills while producing the booklet. This happened to a degree but perhaps not as much as it could have. One participant who later took part in two more creative groups recently complained that she wasn't getting enough help on her reading and writing skills. She nearly left the program because of this.

I had planned to spend time at the beginning of the project talking about photography and cameras. Some of the materials I chose to use in discussions were too technical. The cameras I had purchased were simple to use and required little instruction. Participants did not want to discuss the parts of a camera or how it worked; they wanted to begin taking pictures. However, Helen Guran (1993) of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union/Asian American Civic Association Workplace ESL Program had a different experience in a photo book project she was involved in. This didn't

occur until the third meeting. By then people were tired of reading and discussing. The taking of photographs should have occurred earlier. Perhaps it could have been integrated from the first day.

The timing of the completion of the booklet should have been better. Due to a variety of circumstances, the booklet wasn't finally produced until September. The group had stopped meeting in March. Although most of the group members were still around in the Fall, there would have been more continuity if the booklet were produced by the time the group stopped meeting. In the quilting group the final product was done in the time for the final meeting and it lended closure. The photostory group still seemed to be open and unfinished until the booklet signing and reading in October.

The final celebration occurred in October with a potluck dinner and booklet signing and reading. Despite the time gap from March to October, the celebration was one of the most memorable events in the history of the WAEC. For all of us involved in the project, it was a moving experience to have room full of 40 people listen to our stories, congratulate us and be supportive.

Having a final product and a final celebration to work towards were important factors in both bringing the group together and motivating each other to finish their work. Although people were happy to have a booklet to keep and to show their friends and families, in my opinion the most rewarding part for the participants was the respect they received from both other group members and people at the WAEC. We all learned a tremendous amount about listening to each other and respecting people's stories. Annette summed it up when she said:

"I learned how to listen and feel someone else's life. We just need to take time and have patience. I learned that people have important things to say."

POSTSCRIPT

*"... the process provided more contexts for informal communication and collaboration than did the first... project. Sewing is a familiar activity and ... allowed the participants to be involved in production from beginning to end."
(Cohen, 1983; 102)*

In Fall, 1993 I began a group called Reading, Writing and Quilting. People would read a novel that looked at race, class and gender issues (How to Make an American Quilt by Whitney Otto) and discuss it and how it related to their own realities. In addition there would be writing each group meeting, we would tell stories about our lives, transfer them onto fabric, produce a booklet of stories and make a quilted wall hanging that portrayed the stories. The premise was the same as that of Photostories; people's lives and stories were important and needed to be told and put out into the community.

Annette and Eileen both joined the group. Jeannine expressed interest but there were things occurring in her life that prohibited her from participating. Bill was not interested. Two other women, one of whom was new to the Center, joined the group. I again saw myself as a participant/researcher/facilitator.

There are enough similarities between this project and Photostories to warrant a brief discussion here. It was originally designed as a class, as was Photostories. However, after a few sessions it became apparent that everyone wasn't interested in

reading the novel or spending a lot of time working on writing skills. Participants in this group were also involved in some other group at the Center where they worked on reading and writing skills and seemed to want something where they didn't have to directly work on academic skills.

When asked what they really wanted to do the unanimous response was that they wanted to talk and sew. That's what we did. I thought back to how valuable unstructured time had been during Photostories. While there was still some structure and a common goal the sessions were much more loosely constructed and people wrote or sewed while talking to each other. Again collaborative learning and work, peer editing and informal conversation were all strong group builders. Working towards a final product once again proved to be important as people held each other accountable for finishing on time and worked to help someone complete their task.

I was struck again by the value of people coming together and just talking. A conversation one day, sparked by "Patchwork Quilt" a song about AIDS last an hour and a half. I learned a tremendous amount about people's awareness of AIDS. Out of this conversation came an interest in having a guest speaker come in to talk about AIDS. (Shortly thereafter TLP received a grant to do a health education project and this conversation became even more valuable.)

Other than issues people just seemed to like to talk. I realized that most of the group members rarely had time to sit and talk with friends or peers; they were too often concerned with keeping their daily lives together to have time to have fun and be creative. As Cynthia Cohen found out during an oral history project which

involved putting together a story quilt in Cambridge, Massachusetts, bringing people together around a familiar activity like sewing provided contexts for informal communication and collaboration (Cohen, 1983). In the case of the quilting group, time to share thoughts, ideas and life stories brought people together.

One of my goals of the project was to share the quilt and the accompanying story booklet with other sites of TLP. When this was first mentioned people did not express an interest in doing so. Annette then talked to everyone and got them interested. "I'll do it if you do" became the refrain and all members attended the first trip to TLP's Orange site.

My hope is that the collaboration which began among participants in both groups will continue and the energy they exert on creative activities will someday be transferred to or integrated with community activities. Until then, I will continue to stress the importance of creativity, stories and community in my own work. I will carry with me the memories of people having tears in their eyes as Bill read his story, the smile on Annette's face when she saw the photostory booklet for the first time and Eileen speaking out about how people with AIDS should be treated with respect. My belief in the power of talk and stories was affirmed. People working together and sharing their stories is a powerful way of forming community and collaborating to effect change in their lives and society.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

(These resources are related to using photography and art in adult and nonformal education. In addition, many of them contain valuable information on adult literacy in general.)

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APPENDICES

- A: Objectives and Outcomes of Project
- B: Project Activities
- C: Timetable of Project
- D: Summary of Project (handout from workshop)
- E: Titles
- F: Evaluation
- G: Excerpts from Dialogue Journals
- H: Invitation to Booklet Signing
- I: Notes on Community from TLP Staff Week '93
- J: Transcript on Community from Network 93 Presentation
- K: The Old Oak Tree by Annette Marchiony

APPENDIX A
OBJECTIVES and OUTCOMES of PROJECT

Develop and improve writing skills

Look at and discuss other's lives in the Ware community

Examine links between visual and written literacy

Become involved in creative activities

Create a booklet or final product

Bring together learners of various skills and facilitate collaborative work

OBJECTIVES

Love, life and photographs

The group became a "we"

Writing skills developed and people became more comfortable with writing

Increased self esteem and confidence among the participants

Participants gained "voice"

People began to understand each other's lives

Participants developed trust in teaching methods

OUTCOMES

APPENDIX B
Project Activities

- *Freewrite (15 minutes at or near the beginning of each session,
usually shared with other participants)
 - Materials used include: photographs and pictures (magazines,
personal, calendars, newspapers), topic (ie. "Photography"),
poems, stories, sentence starters (ie. "When I think of my
community I . . .").
- *Dialogue Journals (last 15 minutes of each session, confidential
between each participant and facilitator)
- *Journals (daily, at home; participants keep to themselves)
- *Video on photography (Ansel Adams)
- *Collages of lives (using magazine pictures)
- *Oral History interviews
- *Trip to photography exhibit
- *Guest speaker – local photojournalist
- *Guest artist (to work on cover with participants)
- *Peer writing and editing of stories
- *Final celebration (booklet signing and reading)
- *Trip to other sites to share project and do readings (still to occur)

APPENDIX C
TIMETABLE OF PROJECT

January 18: Introductions, discussion, writing about photographs,
question formation for project

January 25: Collages, project logistics, introduction to Oral
History

February 1: Writing/discussion about newspaper photos, question
formation for guest speaker, Oral History
interviews

February 8: Guest speaker; local photojournalist

February 15: No class; participants continue taking photos on
their own

February 22: Photo poem, guided imagery writing, photos begin
to return from developing

March 1: Ansel Adams film, continued work on photos

March 8: Northampton photo exhibit

March 15: Choosing final photos, writing about each other's
photos

March 22: No class

March 29: Writing stories, introduction to working on the
computer

April 5: Above continued, discussion of format and layout

April 12: Proofing rough draft, work on titles and introduction,
evaluation

April 26: Working on drawings for cover

October 14: Booklet signing, reading and celebration

APPENDIX D
SUMMARY OF PROJECT
(from workshop given for SABES)

LOVE, LIFE AND PHOTOGRAPHS
(or "Understanding Through Photostories")

Understanding Through Photostories began in January, 1993. The project grew out of the expressed wishes of learners at the Ware Adult Education Center as well as my own desire to bring together a group of people around a creative theme.

Ten learners of various skill levels came together at the first meeting. The group soon settled into six regular participants, including me, who came together every week for 3 hour sessions. There were a variety of activities which occurred (see list of activities).

The objectives of the project were:

- To develop/improve writing skills
- To look at and discuss other's lives in the Ware community (in order to break down racial and class stereotypes)
- To examine links between visual and written literacy
- To become involved in creative activities
- To create a final product
- To bring together writers of various skill levels and facilitate their working together collaboratively

There was a booklet signing at the end of the project and the authors will be traveling to other sites of The Literacy Project in order to share what they have done with staff and other learners.

MATERIALS USED

- *3 Vivitar compact 35mm cameras
- *Black and White film
- *Newsprint
- *Photocopy facilities
- *Developing facilities (commercially developed)
- *Cars and travel money (to travel to art exhibit and for visiting other sites of The Literacy Project)
- *Food (for guest speaker and artist, both of whom donated their time and work)

OUTCOMES

While the most obvious outcome is the booklet, *Love, Life and Photographs*, there are many more. These include:

- The group became a "we."
- Writing skills were developed and participants became more comfortable with writing.
- There was an increased feeling of self esteem and self-confidence among the participants.
- Most members of the group gained "voice."
- People began to better understand each other's lives.
- Participants developed trust in teaching methods.

APPENDIX E
BRAINSTORMED TITLES

Titles (from April 5)

(These are titles that the group brainstormed together.)

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| -All of Us | -Our Lives |
| -The Special Ones | -Open Doors |
| -The Dirty Half-Dozen | -The Six That Opened
Their Doors |
| -The Untouchables | |
| -The Unthinkables | -Opening the Door of Light |
| -The Greatest | -Flowers in the Attic |
| -The Incredibles | -Love, Life and Photographs |
| -Our Realities | -Diamonds Out of the Closet |
| -Days of Our Lives | -The Day of the Sun |
| -Our Gift | |

APPENDIX F EVALUATIONS

(From an oral evaluation done April 5).

WHAT DID YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT THIS GROUP?

*We made our own stories. I never thought I'd see the day I'd make a book. I was surprised that we could do it, that with little education we could create a book.

*It was a shock to believe that we could do it.

*I realized that things in our everyday lives could be interesting to others. The things we take for granted are actually interesting.

*I didn't know I had it in me. (Note: This participant then changed her wording and said, "I didn't know we had it in us.")

*We shocked ourselves.

*It was fun, pleasant, enjoyable. We began to understand about each other's lives. We grew with each other during the process.

*I felt unstable in the beginning. I wanted to do it badly but I was afraid to do it.

*It was good to find that others cared enough to get it (the story) out of me. No one here laughed - people were supportive.

*People were indiscriminating.

*It was very comfortable. It felt as if we were in a family. There is a lot of affection.

*We were all working toward a similar goal - that made us feel as if we were a family.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

*I learned not to be afraid to think aloud and to talk about my feelings. I found out that there are others who feel the same way. After keeping it in all these years, I found out that I have a lot to offer others.

*I learned to trust other people.

*We learned a lot about each other's lives.

*We learned how to work together and how to respect one another.

*I learned how to listen and feel someone else's life. We just need to take time and have patience. I learned that people have important things to say.

*We came here as total strangers and now we can no longer pass each other on the street without saying hi! I know these people and am glad that I do.

APPENDIX G
Excerpts from Dialogue Journals

COMMENTS FROM DIALOGUE JOURNALS (April 20, 1993)

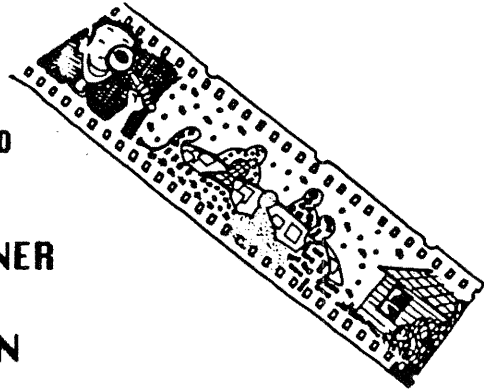
*Well, Michele, I did it with your help. Made a book. I never thought I would make a book of any kind. Anyone told me I was going to write a book, I'd have said they were crazy. You did a great job for the five of us. We came out of our shells.

*I can't believe this class is almost over. I hate to see it end. I've had so much fun. It would be great if you could do a follow-up to this class. Not only has it been fun but I feel as if I have learned new things like it's fun to be social, to go out and do new things. I also like to think my writing has improved. I have my good days and my days but it's okay.

*I am so proud of this book. I feel like I am a part of something good and it feels good. I think everyone feels the same I do about the class. Even if there doesn't end up being a follow-up to this class I am glad I had this chance to meet new people and make new friends. Thanks.

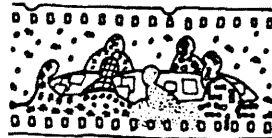
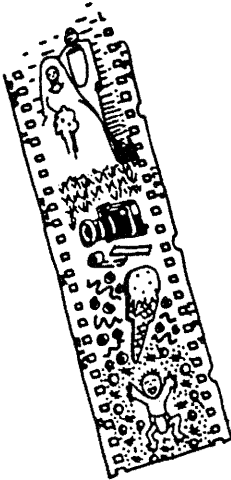
(Missing from above are the voices of Carmen and Eileen).

APPENDIX H
Invitation to Booklet Signing



YOU'RE INVITED
to a
**POTLUCK DINNER
and
CELEBRATION
OF**

"LOVE, LIFE and PHOTOGRAPHS"



Come help us celebrate the beginning of new classes and the printing of "Love, Life and Photographs" (a booklet of photographs and writing done by participants at the Center). The writers will be on hand to read their work and sign booklets. Families and friends are welcome!

WHEN: October 14, 1993 from 6 - 8 p.m.

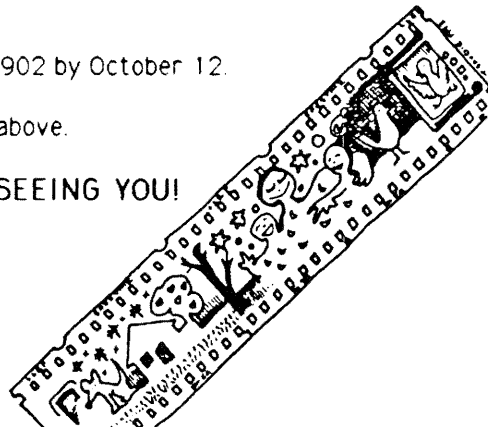
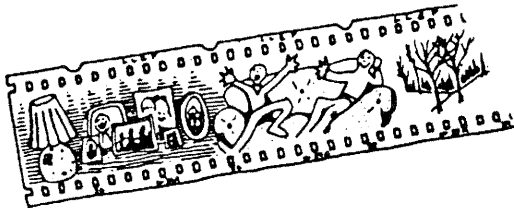
WHERE: The Ware Adult Education Center
(33 Main Street, Ware - next to Wilson's Pharmacy)

BRING: Food to share. Bring something that begins with the first initial of your first or last name. Soda and juice will be provided.

RSVP: IF YOU CAN COME. Call 967-9902 by October 12.

QUESTIONS: Please call the number above.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU!



APPENDIX I
Notes on Community from TLP Staff Week '93

- *Community is a group that has something in common.
- *People join/form communities because there's some sense of support, security and/or sharing.
- *People in a community share a sense of values and/or have common goals.
- *Is community everyone in a class (group)? Can some not be a part? Is that then community?
- *Community offers efficient ways to meet needs. There are practical reasons for being part of a community.
- *Community offers diverse views which can spark other things which further one's own thinking.
- *Addressing societal problems is best done in a community setting. Success is more likely to come with collaboration. In a group individuals learn the skills/knowledge/attributes to interact effectively in society.
- *Both the struggles and successes are important in a community.
- *Community is not good when forced. How do you work so people don't feel pressured?
- *There's a need to build community while still giving folks the space they need.
- *Community is important because:
 - we live in communities (it's a reality)
 - it is a human need to feel connected
 - there's a need to lessen the distrust people have of each other
- *Working in a group gives an individual some of the skills necessary in the "real" world.
- *There's a need to connect our organizational communities with the larger community.
- *A healthy community is supportive of people's individuality and helps them to function both within and without community.
- *Learners' past experiences with groups and community inform their willingness and interest to join or form a community.
- *Are classroom or site communities temporary, in flux or fluid?

APPENDIX J
Transcript on Community from Network 93 presentation

**IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY
TRANSCRIPT**

Ware Adult Education Center/The Literacy Project
October 21, 1993

The following is a transcript of a discussion amongst four students at our Center, Annette, Bill, Eileen, and Jeannine, and two teachers, Michele and Judy, regarding the importance of learning in a group and building community.

Annette: When I first started, I didn't like working with the group. I was kind of shy. I felt as though I were too old for it. I felt I was out of place. I didn't know what was going to happen, if I was gonna like it. But as we went along you get to know the people who come in twice a week. You get to know people so it's like good friends or family. It's like getting to know someone to talk to every day, have a coffee with. You're more friendly with them and you understand where they come from and they understand where you come from. So, it's much easier to talk.

Bill: I enjoyed it 'cause I enjoyed finding out that there's more than my own opinion, and I like debating on different opinions. And I enjoyed it. It's like talking on same level as someone else without no debate.

Annette: No embarrassment. You get to know the people and you get to like them. It's a friendly get-together. There's nobody hurting you. In fact, what little bit I would know, I would try to help somebody. Like today I had help with measuring squares. Everybody helps one another. . Everybody needs people.

Bill: Everybody's doing it together, trying to achieve the same goal. But when I came, I felt the same way Annette does. I didn't want to talk to nobody. And now I'm talking, and I don't mind what anybody else thinks about what I say.

Judy: It seems like almost all of you are saying you were nervous when you first came in or embarrassed and then it was comfortable and it was easier for you. I'm wondering - this is something that Michele and I never get to see - I'm wondering if you feel like because you're working with people here and you're talking a lot with each other here, if you see any change in you when you're not here, when you're out there in your home, in your workplace, with your neighbors or whatever.

Jeannine: I'm a lot nicer here. When I'm home, I'm grouchy. It's true.

Eileen: It is true.

Michele: Why?

Jeannine: Because I'd like to make a good impression. Everybody's nice. You don't come in with a grouchy attitude, or even if you do, when I come in and I'm in a bad mood and see everybody's smiling, it just cheers me up. When I go home, that's another story.

Bill: Well, I have found that I have changed quite a bit. I'm more active. I get into more social living than I did before. Before I came here, I was living like a hermit. I didn't want nothing to do with nobody. Nothing. I went to work, came home, that was it. Just wake me up for supper. That's it. Now I'm meeting other people. I'm having card games with this neighbor of mine. I enjoy it now. I enjoy my new self. I'm having a life.

Annette: It's just like putting a cake together. We're all part of the ingredients. I got something good that I could give that I know. So-and-so's got something good to know. We all put these together, and before you know, we whip up ourselves a nice cake.

Bill: The yoke's on me.

Annette: This is what I mean. We all share and you end up putting it together and you've got something beautiful out of it. I don't know if that makes sense.

Bill: Yeah.

Judy: Eileen, what about you? You've started a group once and then you keep signing up for groups all the time. You say, "OK, I'm going to sign up. What's the next group?" Why are you doing that? What is it about groups for you?

Eileen: I just want to try it and see if I like it and see if it's fun.

Judy: And what has it been like for you?

Annette: Do you like it better in groups or by yourself?

Eileen: Groups.

Annette: See.

Michele: Why?

Eileen: I feel I'm getting comfortable. I'm getting the shyness out.

Michele: Does it make you more comfortable when you have to go to your kids' school to talk to someone?

Eileen: Yeah, when I talk to the teacher.

Annette: It's like therapy. Some people go to psychiatrists and they spend all kinds of money to try to straighten themselves out. And I think half of those doctors or psychiatrists are half quacky themselves. But you get all together and understand her problem. Now I know she's shy. We all know that, so we're not gonna embarrass her; we're gonna help her more than anything. And she just said herself that it helps her out. A lot of her shyness is gone. This is what this is all about. It's really a therapy - a group therapy learning.

We're not children. We're not kindergartners. We're here to learn. We're all grown-ups. We all talk as grown-ups. And we got grown-up ideas. Just that we don't know how to write it down or spell it, doesn't mean we don't know what we're talking about. Am I saying it right?

Everyone: Yes, yeah.

Judy: It happens a lot when people come here that they want to work just with one person. What would you say to that person? If somebody came in and said, "Hey, just give me one person and let me sit over here."

Jeannine: I would tell that person to at least try the group. At least give it a shot. I haven't met anybody here yet that didn't like being in a group.

Eileen: Try it, you might like it.

Jeannine: I think it's helpful to be with people.

Annette: When someone comes in and never's been in a group before and never's been here before, you've got to introduce 'em. You've got to let 'em come in, feel it out, say, "So-and- so's learning how to do this." Then they say, "I'm not by myself. I need help, too, and she does, and he does. Well, I'm not the only one." So let that person know that they're not the only one in the boat. There's a lot of people in the boat.

Eileen: That's true.

Annette: And we're all rowing. And then she can come in and she can start rowing too.

Bill: Yeah, they'll see there's somebody older than me learning the same thing I'm learning and there's somebody younger than me. I tend to forget the age difference between everybody here.

Annette: To tell you the truth I don't even think about age when I'm in here.

Jeannine: I don't either.

Annette: That part hasn't even entered my mind until now. I'm telling you how I felt when I first came in here. Now that I come here all the time, I don't think of myself as 57 years old. I think of myself as one of the groups. It's all the same people, same feelings, same everything. Everything's the same.

Judy: If you were to say what was the most important thing you learned by being in a group, what would you say?

Bill: I would say confidence in my own abilities.

Judy: Eileen, what about you? What was the most important thing you think you learned?

Eileen: I was gonna say helping my son with his homework. Yesterday he had some homework to do...spelling words. And I helped him.

Judy: And do you think part of a group helped you with that? In what way? You know versus having a tutor work with you.

Eileen: I was getting comfortable in a group. And I still am getting the shyness out.

Annette: You're getting all the wrinkles out. We're all getting smooth. Smooth going.

Eileen: Yeah, like now.

Michele: Jeannine, what about you?

Jeannine: I think the most important thing was not learning. It's getting to know people. I learned that I need to give people more of a chance to get to know them. And I really learned how to like people a lot more. I'm glad about that. I don't care if I never read another word in my life because you have to live with people everyday. And I really learned how to really look at a person, and I want to get to know them and that's all that matters.

Eileen: Learn how to get along with each other.

Jeannine: Right. Getting along without judging. I lived with that my whole life. Being here really meant a lot to me that way.

APPENDIX K
The Old Oak Tree
(writing done in The Quabbin Writing Group)

THE OLD OAK TREE

I was walking in the Quabbin and got a feeling for this tall, wise oak. I could see all her limbs and leaves covering her. I tried to put my arms around her, then sat down beside her.

I asked that old oak how it was back then. She told me, "I seen many people cry. It was heart-breaking to see them all feeling so sad, having to leave the homes they was born in and knowing they may not see each other again."

The oak kept on, "They will miss their friends and the still of the night with the sounds of tree toads, frogs, and birds of many kinds. I have many memories of all the family and friends that sat and played around me back then. And seeing them working the farm so hard, planting fruit trees and their vegetables.

I seen Grandma planting her strawberry beds and telling the children to stay out of them. She also had flowers. Her roses was her pride and joy. I miss the smell of her home cooking with those apple pies and home-made bread, home-made sausages and bacon and eggs that filled the air.

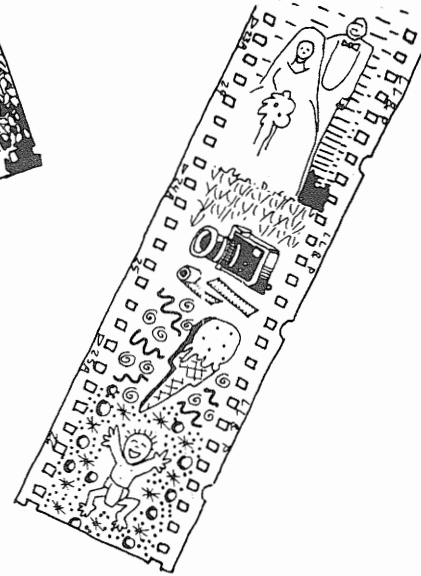
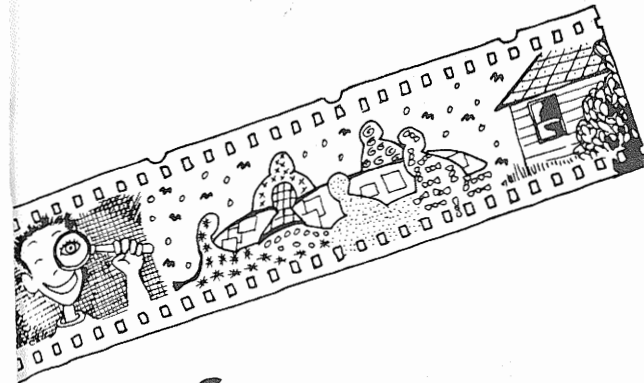
I been missing all the children that played around me. I gave them shelter with my long limbs and leaves and gave them shade on hot summer days. They had their lunch and sat down close beside me. Then they left and go to the pond below me. I could see them swimming and fishing. There was always something exciting going on to pass the day through till the still of the night."

She sighed, "And then to have to see all the old trees being cut down and the homes being flooded away from me. Now I'm dying from being lonely."

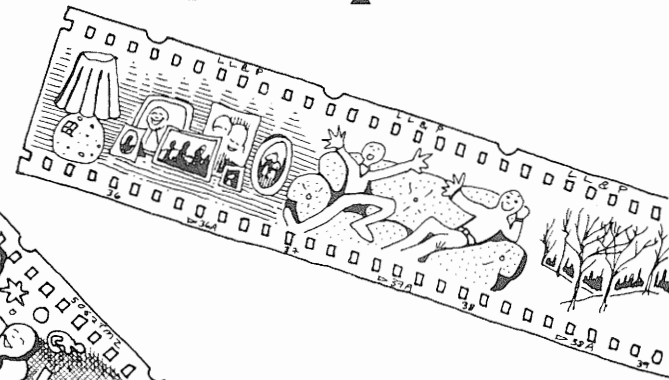
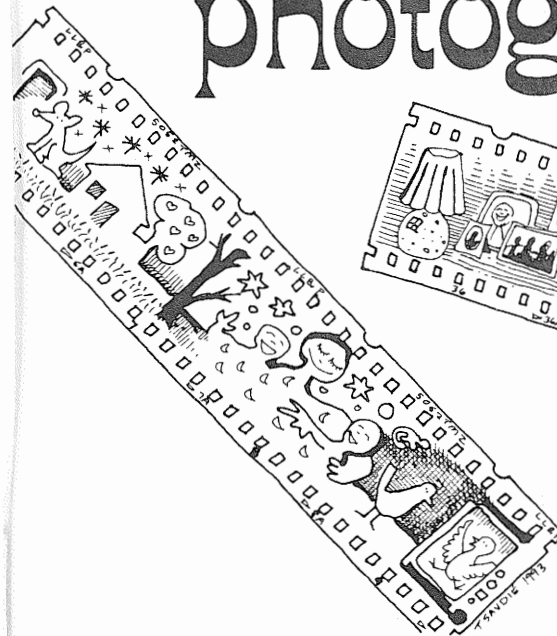
Then came a silence. I stayed there with her, thinking of the things she told me. Then I gave her a soft hug. I left with my respect for her.

Annette Marchiony
July 20, 1993

The Ware Adult Learning Center
33 Main Street
Ware, Massachusetts 01082
413 - 967 9902



love life and photographs



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to all of the people who helped us in creating this booklet.

***Kim Gronberg** of the Ware River News for her sharing, support and interest.

***Judy Hofer** for helping with ideas, sharing our excitement and following the project from start to finish.

***Tony Savdie** for his wonderful artwork.

***Hampden County House of Corrections** for printing the booklet.

***The Literacy Project** which came through with extra support.

***SABES** which awarded us the grant to do this project.

INTRODUCTION

We all stories inside of us yet often they don't get told. We think that they are too boring, no one will listen or we are too shy. In creating this booklet, we discovered that our lives which may seem so ordinary and boring to us, can be interesting to others.

In March 1993 a group of six people came together to work on reading and writing skills by telling stories about our lives.. Photographs were used as a way of showing visually what we were saying in words. Some of us decided on stories first and then took pictures, others created photographs first and then decided what to write and there was one person who felt strongly about old family photographs and used them in creating her story.

Taking pictures was new for most of us. Our focus wasn't on learning the finer skills of photography. Instead, we examined the relationship between words and visual images. Although hesitant to take pictures at first, we discovered how much they enhance the written word and how well they can tell stories on their own.

Most importantly we learned to work together. As one participant said, "We learned how to listen and feel someone else's life." We learned the importance of taking the time to listen to each other so that we could begin to break down stereotypes and understand more about each other's realities . In doing so and in sharing parts of ourselves, we learned new respect for each other.

We all have stories to tell. Thank you for listening to ours. If you have any comments on our booklet, please contact us. We hope our stories have inspired you to tell yours and to take the time to listen to others.

Participants of the "Love Life and
Photographs" project

My Family
by Carmen Roldan



Hey! My name is Carmen and this is my picture collection. It is my pride and joy. Most of the pictures are of my grandchildren and my kids. These pictures bring me happiness even though the people in them are not here with me because they live in New York. I feel them as if they were here. When I feel lonely I look at the pictures and it fills my heart with love and I feel as if they are telling me they love me. These pictures fulfill my life, my soul and my mind. The picture in the middle of the table is my granddaughter whom I love with all my heart. I have two other grandchildren that I also love deeply. This is like having my whole life on the table.



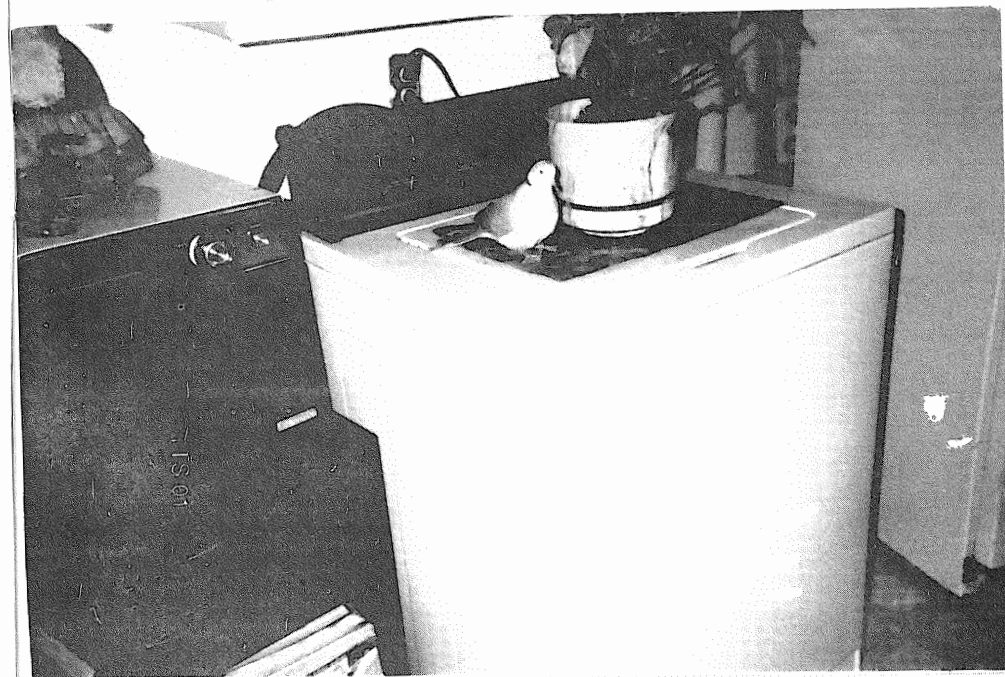
These are my dogs. Their names are Sisi and Popy. Sisi is the white one. She is like a mother to the little ones but she is not their mother. The little one with the white collar is Popy. He is the handicapped one because he is slow and he shakes all the time because of the way he is. The other one is Peter and he is a wild dog. He will face up to any dog no matter how big it is. They are smart dogs; they know that they can't go into the living room so they don't. If I am going to mop, they run and get in the basket.



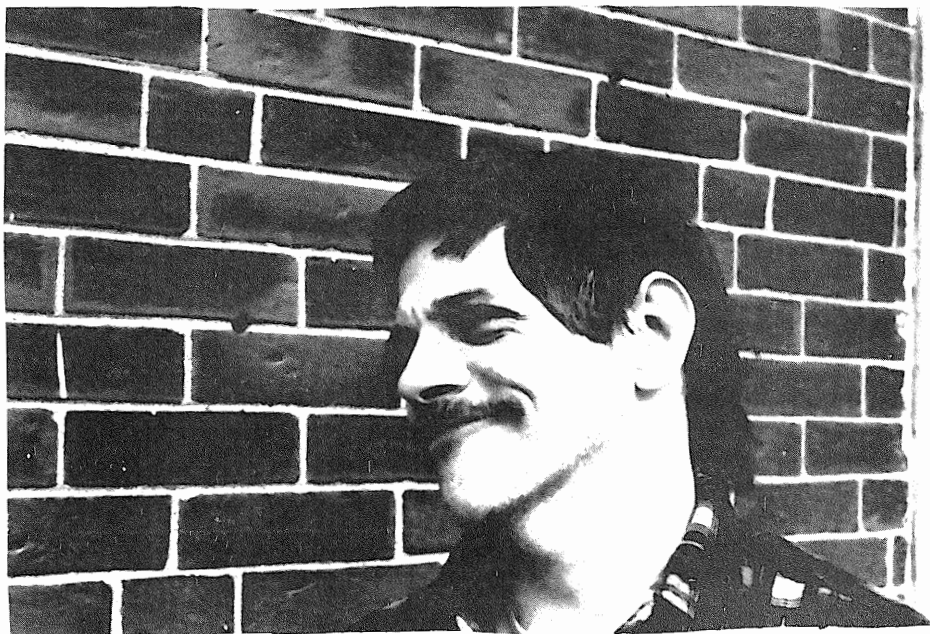


These are my dolls that I made. The male doll is Pancho and the boy doll is Pepito. He has a skateboard. The female doll is Maria, the Cleaning Lady. If you look at the picture closely, you can see that she has a mop in her hand. That is why I call her the Cleaning Lady. The little girl's name is Sindy.

These dolls are my creation so I call them the Rivera Family. Maria is a housewife and Pancho is a farmer. They have two children, Pepito and Sindy.



This is another one of my family members. Her name is Lili. She likes to watch television all day long. She dances when the music is on and makes a funny sound. I have had Lili for about two years and it makes me happy that she is another member of the family. I have a big family because there is Sisi, Popy, Peter, Maria, Pancho, Pepito, Sindy and Lili.



William Ditto

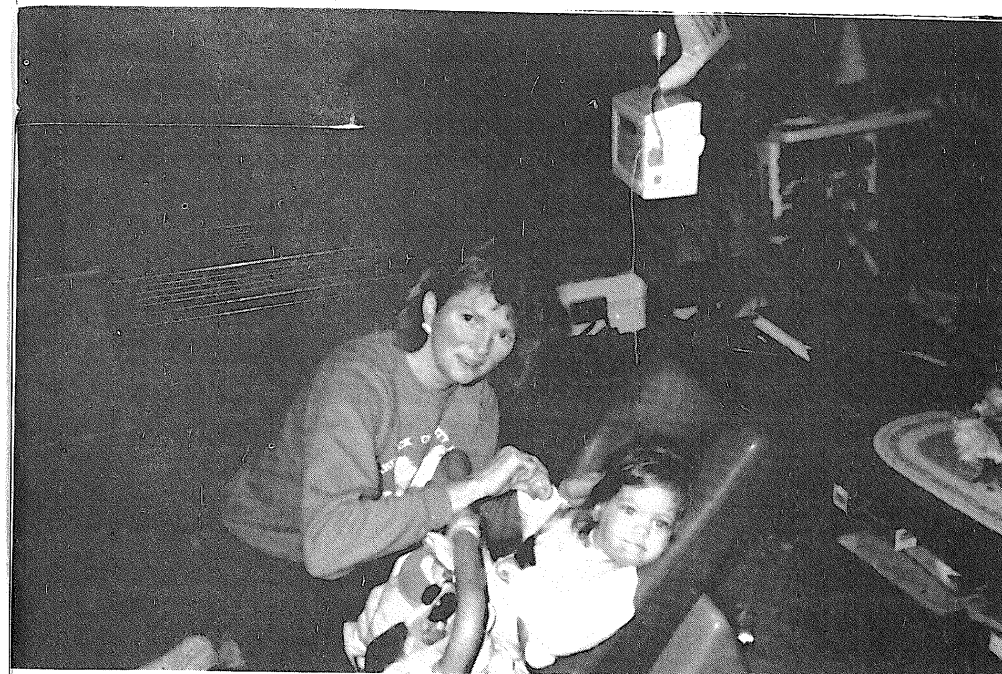
My Special Gift
by Bill Ditto



My daughter's name is Samantha. She was born on August 21, 1990.

She is a bright, intelligent girl.

She is getting ready to eat her potatoes and peas
mashed with applesauce for dessert.



Now she is getting hooked up to a special feeding
machine. Genny, her nurse, is getting ready to clean
her up.

She loves to have her picture taken. If it was up to me I would have her on TV because to me she is a star. I would give almost anything to find a cure because we are family! I love her even if she doesn't talk. I know she loves me and together we are strong.



My daughter got up from her nap. She was happy. She is always happy. She never complains and that is why I love her so much. I can't wait for a cure but it always hurts me to think that there isn't one. I'm blessed by her being a part of me. She gives me life and love! Her name is Samantha, My Special Gift from Heaven.

Eileen Dean

**My Kids
by Eileen Dean**



Ken is playing with Nintendo and he is doing his homework. Then he will pick up his mess.

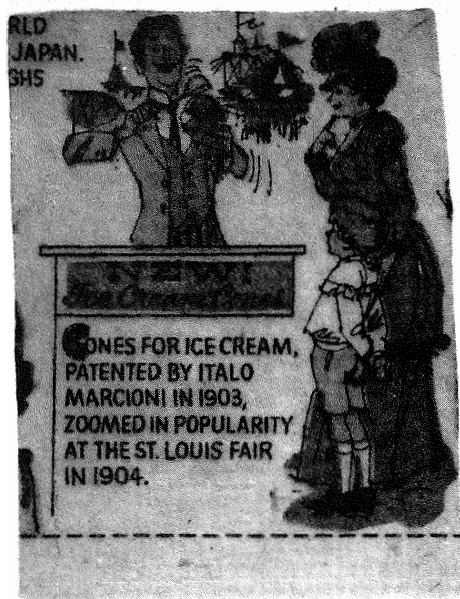


The dog's name is Lady. She is on the couch and Dan is being silly.

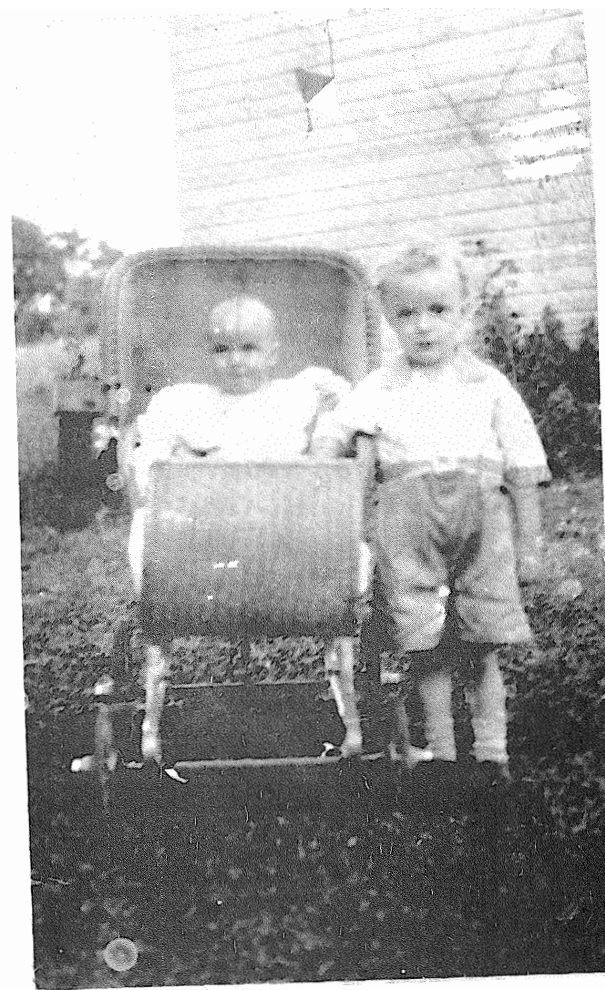


My Best Friend
by Annette Marchiony

Annette Marchiony



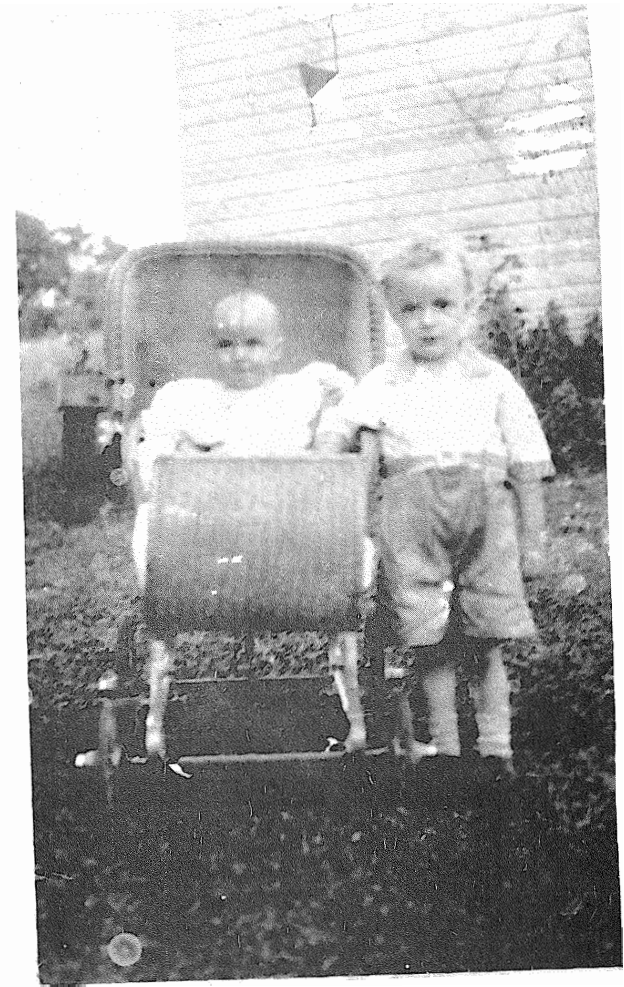
This is about my husband and me. His father was born in Italy in 1884 and his uncle whose name was Italo Marchiony invented the ice cream cone. It was patented in 1903 and zoomed to popularity at the St. Louis fair in 1904.



His mother was born in England in 1889 and they both came to this country at an early age. Later on they got married. Then they had two sons born in Waltham, MA.

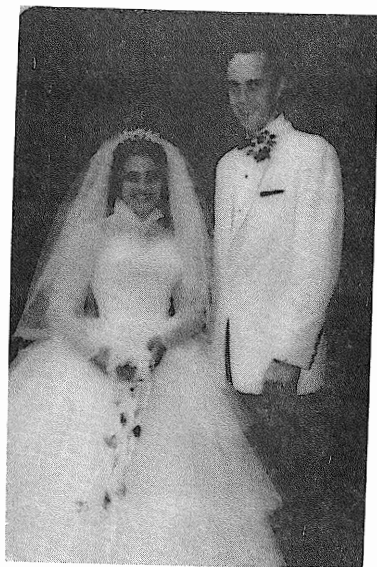


This is about my husband and me. His father was born in Italy in 1884 and his uncle whose name was Italo Marchiony invented the ice cream cone. It was patented in 1903 and zoomed to popularity at the St. Louis fair in 1904.



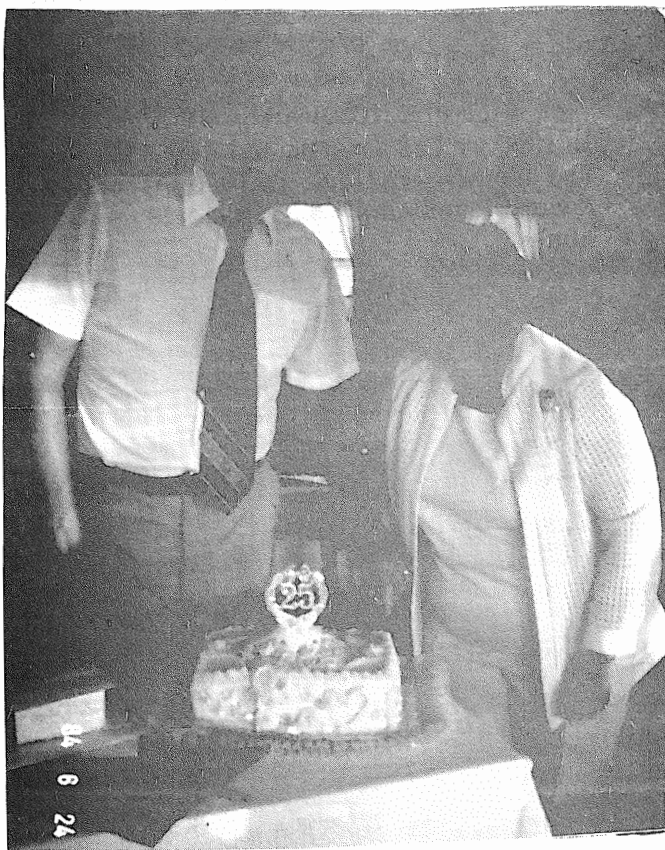
His mother was born in England in 1889 and they both came to this country at an early age. Later on they got married. Then they had two sons born in Waltham, MA.

Then we got married in 1959. The mill we worked in ended up closing so we went to a town called Ware. He worked in the textile mill but I didn't.

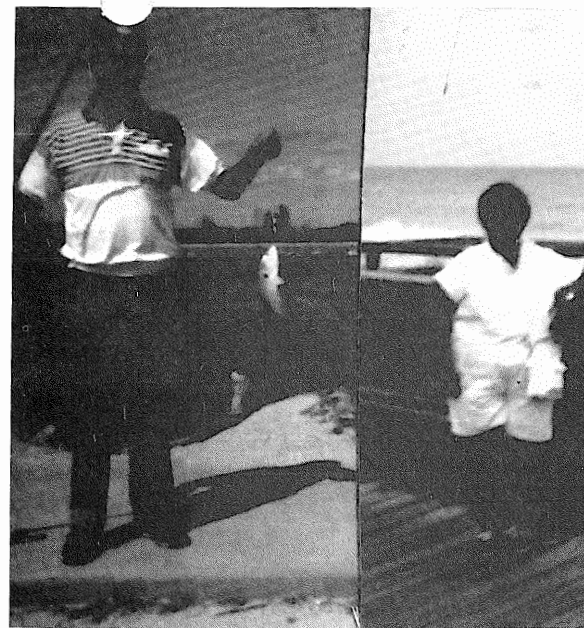


In 1960 we had a son named Alan. Then in 1964 we had another son, Gary. In 1970 I went to work in the textile mill until 1972. It closed up so I stayed home.





My husband left the Ware textile mill in 1964 to work at Pratt & Whitney in East Hartford, CT. In 1984 we had our 25th anniversary.



Then in 1990 my husband retired from Pratt & Whitney. Now we two love birds are having the time of our lives doing things we love to do. We love being close to the ocean and the sea. We are closer than ever and we are soaking it all up. We are looking forward to our 35th anniversary in 1994 and we hope for many more.

Jeannine Brayall

My Friends
by Jeannine Brayall



This is where I live. This is the first apartment that I have shared with my boyfriend, Dennis. We moved up here to Massachusetts far from our friends in Waterbury, CT. We were seeking a better life, away from the crazy city.

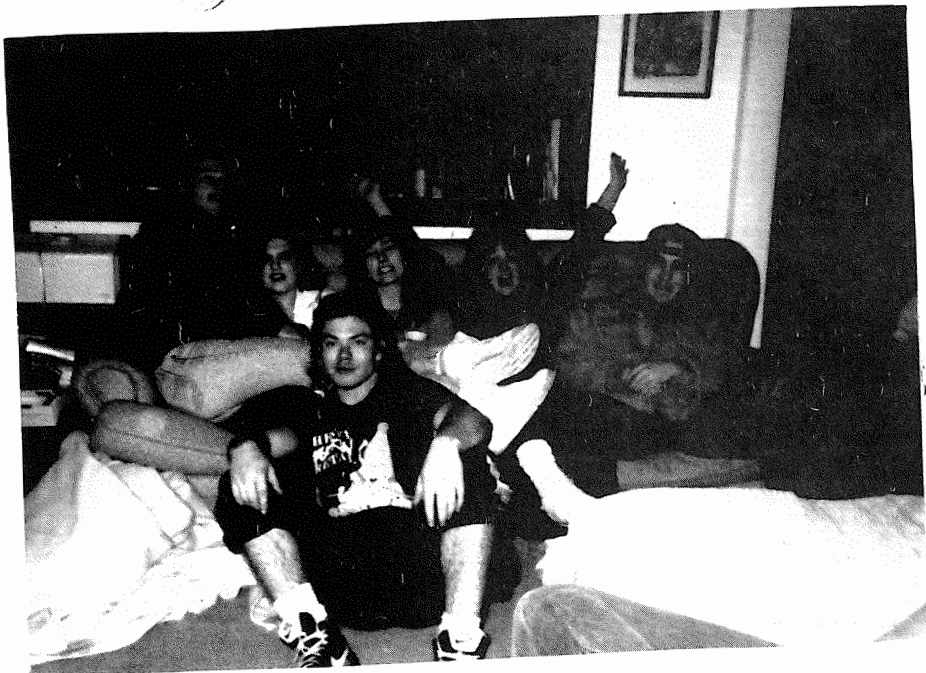
We live at 27 Pulaski Street.



Here we are in Waterbury. Jenn had a weekend Super Bowl party while her parents were away. This is a before shot of Jenn and Kellie, before things started to get crazy.



Here are the guys (oops, sorry Jenn) watching the Super Bowl. They are all looking a bit anxious to see who's going to win. Don't you think?



It looks like things are starting to liven up a bit. We love group pictures because we are just one big, happy family.



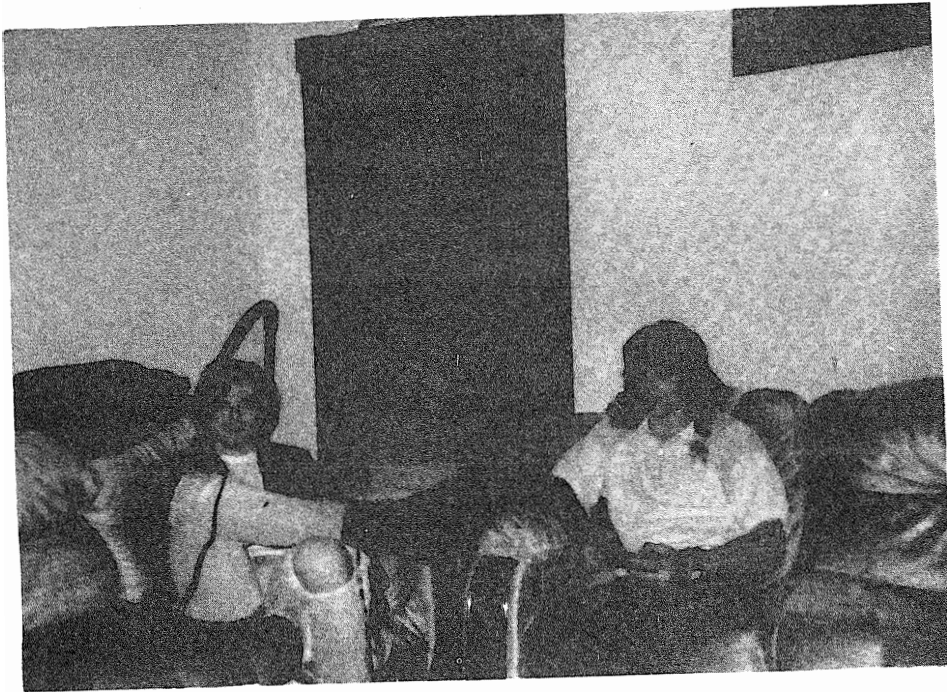
This is Kellie the next morning. It looks like she had a good time last night. You have to love her; she's such a kook. This picture really describes her zany personality. She wore those ski glasses for most of the day.



This is everyone hanging around the day after the Super Bowl; Jenn with her bass, Kellie with her ski glasses on and the guys playing Super Nintendo. This picture tells something about each person.



We're back in Massachusetts. Here's Garrett with my cat, Kit. Garrett is a close friend of ours. Dennis and I met him here in Ware. What can I say? We have a blast together.



I feel I have been lucky in life. Lucky enough to have made all these wonderful friends. In this story are my best friends who are all a part of a family. Our family.

I have made so many friends in my life through the years. They come and go, they move away or get married. Whatever the case, sometimes we lose touch. But they will never lost a place in my heart. I carry a special memory for each one of them.

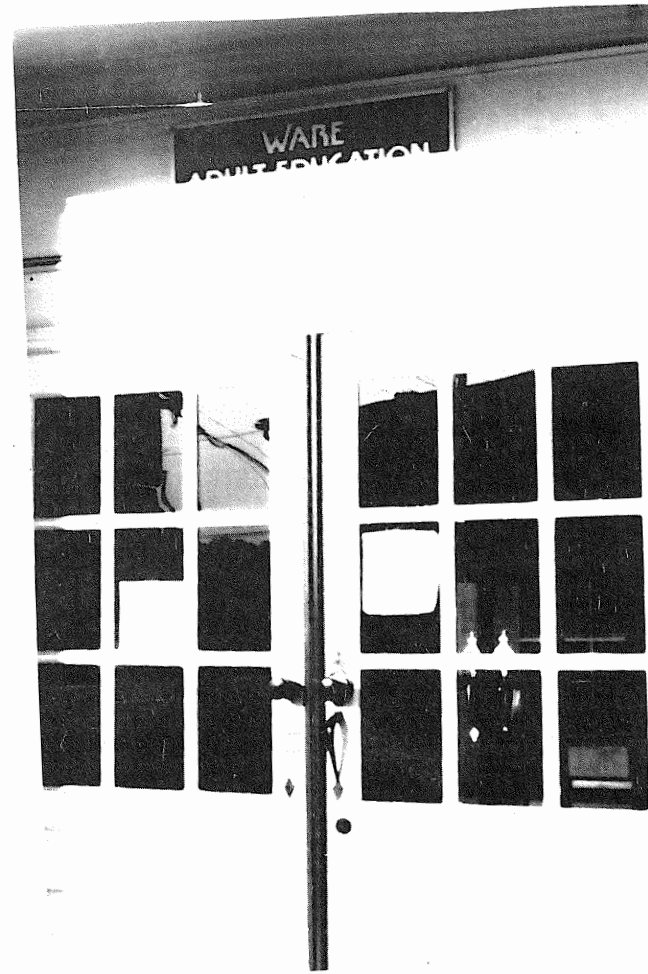
I won't forget you.

Here's Paul and Dennis playing Saga in Linda's apartment. Paul has a beautiful girlfriend. Her name is Jenn. They are engaged. He doesn't wear the red spandex anymore.

Inside and Outside
by Michele Sedor



Michele Sedor



Buildings rule my life, causing an internal struggle.
Their doors open, the air sucks me in and work
begins.

I try not to look out the windows once I'm inside.
The struggle becomes more intense as my feet want
to take me back through the doors
and . . .

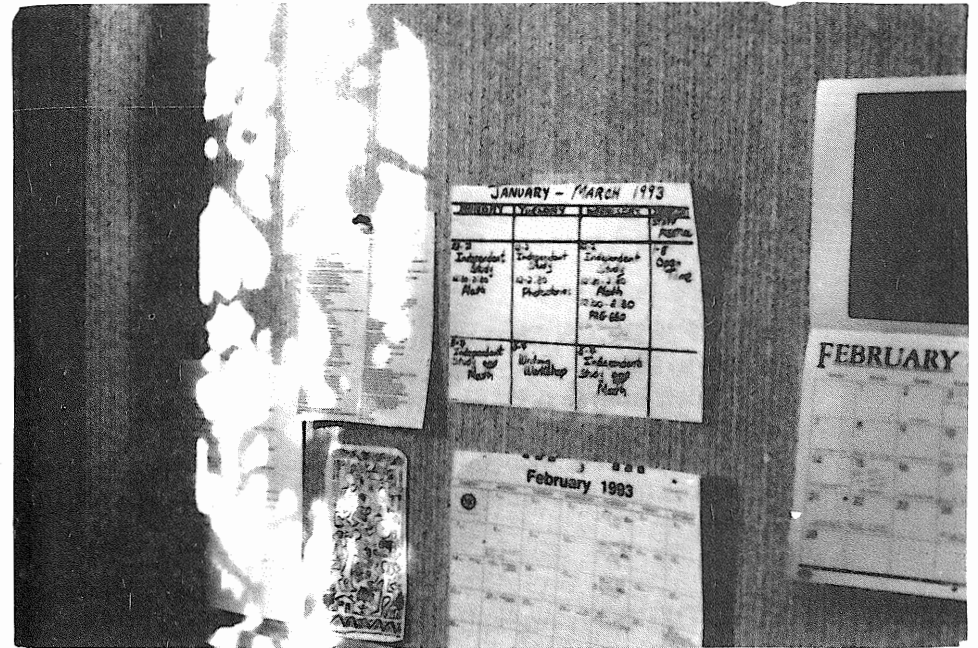


OUTSIDE! Snow, rain, humidity or sun, it doesn't
matter. As long as I am outside breathing fresh air,
walking in the woods and listening to nature, I'm
happy.





Trails in the woods are invitations to adventure. Buildings are usually cold, impersonal and boring. Bricks and steel don't change every day but nature does.



The struggle continues. Shall I work or play?



Dan is talking on the telephone in his mother's bedroom. He is talking to his grandmother.



Ken is sucking his thumb on the couch and the dog is in the middle of him and Dan. Ken and Dan are brothers. They play together and they fight together, too.

A NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHORS **and PHOTOGRAPHERS . . .**

JEANNINE BRAYALL is 22 years old and is originally from Waterbury, CT. She lives with her boyfriend and her younger brother. She has been living in Massachusetts for 3 years. Her hopes are for a better future for all her family and friends.

EILEEN DEAN likes to go to school because she wants to learn things so that she can help her kids with their homework. She lives in Gilbertville with her two boys and their dog. She likes to visit her family and friends on holidays and weekends. She also likes to spend time with her nephew and his kids.

BILL DITTO is originally from Palmer. He likes cars, coffee, soup, classics and dislikes anything loud. He likes people who like him for what he is and that he can talk to about anything. He likes to hike, have cookouts and go horseback riding. He wants love and happiness.

ANNETTE MARCHIONY dedicates her story to her husband and family. She is originally from Worcester, which is where she met her husband. She now lives in Ware with a wonderful family that she loves.

CARMEN ROLDAN is a teenager in a middle aged body. She says this because that's how she feels. She says, "I am surrounded by many young people all the time, my children, my sisters and brothers and their friends. They all make me feel young."

MICHELE SEDOR is originally from New York State. When she isn't in Ware, she can be found playing outdoors (look for her in the Quabbin). One of her favorite hobbies is drinking coffee.

PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING CORRECTIONS.

***The following statement was left out of the original printing:**

*This project was funded by SABES
through The Adult Education Act (S.353)
administered by the Bureau of Adult Education,
Massachusetts Department of Education.*

***In the Introduction the first line should read, "We all have stories inside of us . . ."**

***On page 1 of Carmen Roldan's story, line 7 should read, "feel lonely ..."**

***On page 10 of Jeannine Brayall's story, line 5 should read, "come into work
with these shiny red and black tiger..."**



This is the inside of my apartment. It's nothing great but it's home. I have pictures everywhere to give it a homey feeling. I have a lot of pictures of my friends, but there's nothing like getting a visit or visiting our friends in Waterbury.



Oh, look! It's Jenn, up from Waterbury. Jenn, Garrett and Dennis go' together for this picture to show their excitement for the concert we were going to see that night. It's always a special day when Jenn visits.