

**February 28, 2007**

Her name was Helen Metz. On my first day in first grade, Miss Metz stood before us and said, “Today, class, you will learn to read.”

Helen Metz was my teacher. She taught me to read and so she was a wonderful gift to me. Others of note have followed: Julie Barnhart (fourth grade and also sixth), Tom Harvey (retired colonel, in eighth grade), Jimmie Markowitz (high school mathematics), and Morris Sider (undergraduate historian who also taught me to write with a fountain pen). I’ve left out many, though I should not have; each taught me to “read.”

When I was of pre-school age as well as during my elementary and middle school years I lived in a small village in Guatemala. With my siblings I attended a small boarding school for “gringos.” Each year we left home for eight months to attend school. Over the course of several years I think I read every book in the academy’s library. But this was a small place—40 students spread over eight grades—so how large could the library have been?

My childhood friends in the small village we lived in also went to school. But their experience was different. They rarely had a teacher; their classroom had very few supplies (not even chalk for the board), and certainly there were no books. Their attendance during the early years was sporadic as often they were needed at home to hoe the family’s corn field, and somewhere around the age of 8 or 9 they stopped attending school altogether. No one taught them to read.

Perhaps it is this stark difference between my experience and that of my friends, which led me into a vocation as an educator. I’m aware each day, as I think back on my childhood, how different life is for those who read and those who have not been taught to read.

Like some readers among us, I buy books. Last week, while I was in Portland, Oregon, I had a chance to visit Powell’s Bookstore for a few hours. Powell’s is legendary in book-land, but I had never before visited. I had a grand time. My suitcase was too small to hold the books I bought, so I asked for a box and my friends at FedEx had the package sitting in my office when I returned home.

A colleague traveling with me asked what I like to read. That’s hard to answer; there’s no simple or single response.

Some years ago Linda taught me to read fiction. I'm quite selective, but there are several authors I gravitate to—Jane Smiley and Gail Godwin are two favorites, along with James Carroll and Jon Hassler. There are others as well. Linda is also encouraging me to read short stories, but for the most part I haven't picked up this habit. (The current issue of *Atlantic Monthly* features the work of Canadian short story writer Alice Munro; perhaps this is the place I should start.)

I've also enjoyed reading personal reflections on life—not autobiographies, but what loosely might be called memoirs. A few stand out: James Carroll's *Requiem*; Gail Godwin's *Dinner at Five* and *A Writer's Life*; Lewis Smedes' *My God and I*; Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird*, and *Traveling Mercies*, and *Plan B*. Others come out of my interest in Guatemala: *I, Rigoberta Menchú*; Victor Montejo's *Testimony: Death of a Guatemalan Village*; Fernando Bermúdez's *Death and Resurrection in Guatemala*; and Jennifer Harbury's *Searching for Everardo*. I'm also taken by much of what Henri Nouwen wrote, and many of his books fit this loosely-defined category of memoir.

These are all contemporary authors; I do read from more classical authors and more literary types, but listing these will wait for another occasion. I also read other types of non-fiction but listing these also will wait for another day.

This same colleague wanted to know what I had picked up in my wandering through the stacks at Powell's in Oregon. This was an eclectic collection I sent home. Included were a few pieces of fiction: a first edition copy of Anne Lamott's *Crooked Little Heart*, and Jane Smiley's new novel, *Ten Days in the Hills*. I also paid for a couple of "memoirs": Calvin Trillin's *About Alice*, Pauline Chen's *Final Exam*, and a collection of personal essays previously heard on NPR's "This I Believe" series. I was curious about *Made to Stick* by Chip Heath and Dan Heath, as well as Susan Eaton's *The Children in Room E4* so they too were in the box. And before moving to Chicago Linda and I read Erik Larson's *Devil in the White City*. This got me started on books about Chicago so my purchases at Powell's included *Portraits of Chicago Sidewalks* by Rick Kogan with photographs by Charles Osgood, a collection of essays edited by Charles Madigan titled *Global Chicago*, Richard Ciccone's *Chicago and the American Century*, Leon Despres' *Challenging the Daley Machine*, and the relatively recent *Encyclopedia of Chicago*. Lest you think these filled the box I should tell you there were a few (Linda says, "many") others.

I've had a few colleagues over the years who enjoy "speed-reading." Some of them have mastered the skill of very quickly covering the content of each page, picking up enough along the way to grasp the line of thought of the author. Others "speed-read" a book by surveying the table of contents and then paying close attention to the introduction and the conclusion.

I'm a slow reader. I spend time with most every word on every page. Often I'll re-read. For me, reading a small number of books slowly is better than reading a larger number of books more quickly. This likely is personal preference; nothing more. My box from Powell's will keep me busy for some time to come, but I doubt this will stop me from

buying a few other books on my next visit to Borders. (I prefer Borders to Barnes and Nobles because they sell Lindt chocolate truffles at the cash register!)

Why am I writing about reading? Because we are educators, and reading is central to our vocation as educators. To read is to learn. Clearly, reading isn't the only means to learning, but it is central to learning. We might also say that, to listen is to learn. Indeed it is, and in reading we are also listening.

As educators we have a high (even holy) calling. We teach, each one of us; through our work and through our lives. Students "read" us. We teach when we lead a class, counsel a student, coach a team, join a committee, organize a residence hall, recruit students, lead worship, clear snow from the sidewalks, share coffee. The 52 members of our faculty and staff who walk to the Hibbard School once each week also teach when they read to third graders, many of whom do not speak English at home. Like reading, teaching is worth doing slowly; sometimes re-teaching is valuable, just like re-reading.

Students have committed part of their life to us. Some who come to the university are better readers than others. Some are better prepared to learn; others struggle a bit more. We are responsible to each of them. Ours is a sacred obligation.

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**T**RAVELS – Linda and I have been on-the-road for much of this semester. Our purpose has been to visit with alumni/ae and other friends of the University. This works in two directions: they have a chance to meet us, and as we meet them we learn more about the University.

Since January we've traveled to Michigan, Minnesota, Washington, Oregon, California, and Colorado. Of course, we also continue to meet friends in Illinois. This has been a heavy schedule. It isn't yet completed, but the next couple of months will not require us to be away from campus nearly as often as we have been during January and February.

We've coordinated some of these visits with events planned by the Alumni/ae Office. This work is part of the University's plan to be more active in involving graduates in the continuing life of North Park. Our goal is to organize regional and affinity groups of graduates, and to plan with them one or more events each

year which bring them together and support their common interests.

**W**ORKSHOPS – On April 9 the University will sponsor two workshops for faculty and staff on sexual harassment and diversity sensitivity. The workshops will be repeated in multiple sections throughout the day, so participants will be able to attend at convenient times.

The workshops have been organized with support from the University Council and Accountability Council. All members of our faculty and staff are encouraged to attend one or more of these sessions. Later in March, further information will be made available through the Human Resources Office and the Office of Multicultural Development. Please plan to attend.

**T**ASK FORCES – In the Fall Semester I announced the formation of two task forces to care for broad faculty needs and concerns. Membership on the task forces has

been completed, and each group is now proceeding with its assigned work. Membership on the two groups is as follows:

Task Force to Review MAPP (on tenure and promotion)

- Al Bjorkman, co-chair
- Jay Phelan, co-chair
- Linda Duncan
- Trevor James
- Liland Horten
- Sylvia Mojica-Castillo
- Matthew Schau

Task Force on Faculty Hiring, Development, and Tenure

- Liza Ann Acosta, co-chair
- Jay Phelan, co-chair
- Kelly Vanderbrug
- Nnenna Okore
- Diana Hernandez-Azcoitia
- Laura Burt
- Rollo Dilworth
- Neale Murray

If you have suggestions you wish either of these task forces to consider, please put your ideas in writing and send them to the respective co-chairs.

**E**XPLORING NPU@125 – The first set of Roundtables was completed during February. The second set is scheduled for March 19 and 29.

These Roundtable sessions provide opportunity for all members of our faculty and staff to participate in a discussion of questions related to future directions of the University. Input from the Roundtables will help to inform a new strategic plan which will be drafted over the summer months.

Participation in the first Roundtable sessions was very active, though the number of participants was limited. The second series of sessions is open to all faculty and staff members, regardless of whether or not you participated in one of the earlier sessions.

Please plan to attend, and note this by calling or sending an email message to Charlene Sandberg (x5710 and [csandberg@northpark.edu](mailto:csandberg@northpark.edu)).

**C**ELEBRATING ENGAGEMENTS – Some of you have heard that a few weeks ago a group of students revived a tradition from North Park's past; they "tarred and feathered" a fellow student to celebrate his engagement. Nearly a decade ago campus leadership determined that this practice, even as a means to celebrate an engagement, was inappropriate and did not foster the type of relational community we seek to develop within the student body and across all members of the campus.

When this recent event came to her attention, Dean Andrea Nevels discussed it with me and with our senior administrative colleagues. We support the decision made by our colleagues some years ago. To clarify this for students, and to explain briefly why we find the activity inappropriate for this campus, I wrote a short email message to all undergraduate students.

So you are aware of my communication with students and of our position on this type of activity, I am copying the student message below.

Student Message of February 19, 2007:

*One of the great things about studying at college is that we become part of a community of learners--you are a community of peers through which you form friendships which will last for a lifetime. But there is a challenge, also, in being part of a community of this nature. Specifically, we need to learn how to live together in a decent, civil, and mutually supportive manner. This may sound easy to do, but it isn't always the case.*

*As many of you are aware, in the last couple of weeks some students were involved in a "tar and feathering" of a fellow student. This involved a small group of students; some participated directly and others observed. Such activity does not support the kind of*

*community we hope North Park will be. Nor does it support the civil society we expect for all who live in this country. Our common term for this type of activity, and others like it, is "hazing." And at North Park, as well as in our society in general, hazing is not accepted.*

*I'm writing to encourage us to conduct ourselves in a civil, kind, and supportive manner to one another. And I'm writing specifically to note that hazing of any sort is not acceptable at North Park. Any student participating in such activity, whether actively or passively, and whether on-campus or off-campus, will face disciplinary action by the University. This is consistent with our Student Handbook, and it is consistent with the type of community we expect for North Park and the kind of society all who live in our country deserve.*

*Thanks for your attention, and for your cooperation. North Park is, and will continue to be, a good place to learn and to live, because you are part of this community.*