

English Notes

Volume 11, Issue 4
April 2014

Special Points of Interest:

- Top English Sites
- Contest Task Force

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From the President

New Year Wishes for 2014...

I look at the calendar and see the month of April staring back at me, but I have to say that it does not feel like April. I think the crazy weather is partially to blame, but it also seems that time slips away more quickly every school year. Before I know it, my senior homeroom students will be graduating, I will have a new group of freshmen students to greet in the fall, and I will be seeing many of you at the SDCTE conference in Mitchell.

Every year it seems like so much of the same and yet education is evolving at a rapid pace. We face changes to our standards with the shift toward the common core, we face issues related to technology in the classroom, and we face changes to teacher evaluation. As with any change, we generally have to deal with some “growing pains” along the way, but we always seem to adjust.

I read article after article on the growing problems with the common core curriculum, but the common thread amongst most of these articles stems from testing. I think that the concept behind the common core curriculum is spot on: why shouldn't all states be meeting the same standards? Shouldn't a child be able to move from a school in Washington to a school in South Dakota and have some consistency? (I guess I am speaking a bit from experience here as a kid who moved around a lot) In my mind this does not mean that every child in a 12th grade ELA classroom is reading the same books and doing the exact same activities-just that they are learning the same concepts. Isn't that the whole premise behind *standards*? Somewhere in the

mix, I feel like the standards have been given a bad rap.

Technology is probably one of the biggest changes that teachers have experienced over the years. We rely on workshops and other teachers to help us along the way so that we can catch up to many of the kids in our classroom (while at the same time making accommodations for kids who have no computer, tablet, or smart phone). In just my nine short years, I have seen so many changes to technology that I can't imagine what the next twenty years will bring.

This summer we will all learn about new changes being made to teacher evaluation. Maybe it is the optimist in me, but I hope that the changes results in better feedback. I feel as if we can always do better and it helps to get input from others.

As the end of the year approaches, it is a good time to slow down and dig deep with our students-a time where we can challenge their critical thinking skills and get the most out of the end of the school year. As more things are continually piled on our plates, I am sure that I am not the only one with the desire to simply sit back and teach- just me, my students, a great book, and an amazing discussion.

SDCTE President
Cassi Pietz



SDCTE Author of the Year

Marilyn Kratz

Please tell us about your family.

My husband Ernest, who goes by the nickname "Bud," and I will have been married 55 years in June of 2014. He was a barber and then a retail manager and is now retired. Our daughter Lisa is Director of the Student Union on the campus of the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls, Iowa. Our son Greg and his wife Stacey are both journalists living in Salt Lake City, Utah. Greg is managing editor of decision support products at ARUP laboratories. Stacey does free lance writing and is a stay-at-home mom to our four grandchildren - Emma - 16, Grace - 13, Kate - 11, and Max - 8.

Where are you from? Where did you grow up and attend school?

I was born on a farm between Tyndall and Scotland, South Dakota, and attended grade school in a one-room country school. I graduated from Scotland High School. Bud and I have lived in Yankton since our marriage. I received one- and two-year teaching certificates from Southern State Teacher's College, Springfield, SD. I earned my BA in Elementary Education from Yankton College. I received my MA, also in EIEd from the University of South Dakota, Vermillion.

When did you first know that you wanted to be a writer?

Although I'd always loved books and writing, I didn't decide to try writing professionally until I

took a 10 year break in my teaching career while our children were little. I loved it from the start and can't conceive of ever stopping.

What has inspired you to write about the topics that you have covered?

I am inspired by subjects that interest my inner child. For example, I love the *Little House* books of Laura Ingalls Wilder and have always been fascinated by pioneer life, so I've written many history-based stories. I also write many history-based articles these days for general interest markets, and my newest book is about farm life in the middle of the last century. My poetry is inspired by my reactions to life around me.

Who is your favorite author?

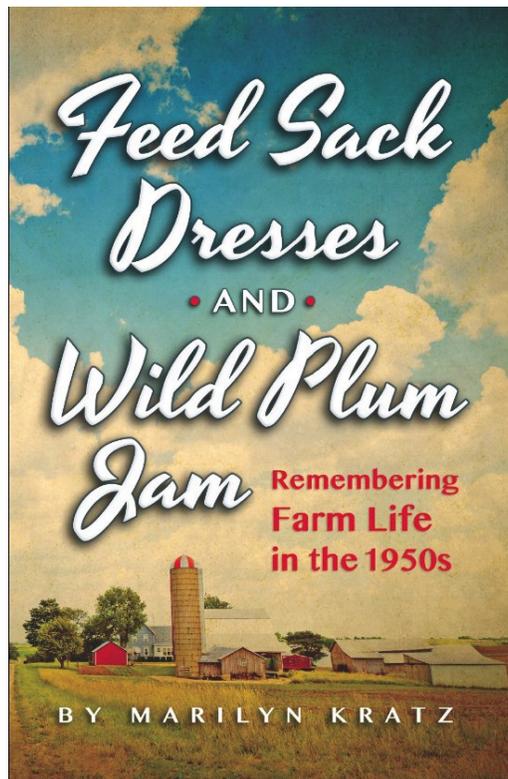
My favorite author has to be Frances Hodgson Burnett because my very favorite book is one she wrote - *The Secret Garden*. I re-read it regularly and always find it as fresh and enjoyable as the first time I read it as a girl.

What is the best book that you have read recently?

It's so hard to pick one book, but it would probably be a Young Adult book based on life in the past. I enjoyed *The Book Thief*.

What teacher had a profound impact on your life?

I became a teacher because I adored the teacher I had the first three years of grade school. I especially remember listening to her read aloud to us from the *Bobsey Twins* books. I even remember the dresses she wore. I always tried to imitate her when I became a teacher myself.



SDCTE Author of the Year Continued...

When do you do your best writing?

I do my best writing any time of the day when I'm feeling especially inspired or sure of my topic. Second drafts are always much more fun than first drafts because by then the hardest work is done.

Do you have a favorite place to write?

I have a wonderful office room all to myself, now that we no longer need it as a bedroom. In it, I'm surrounded by all my writing needs and lots of books, all within easy reach. And it's painted yellow, my favorite color.

What advice do you have for teachers who are teaching writing to their students?

Try always to be encouraging by praising what they do that's good and correct and helping them learn how to fix what isn't. Use the "sandwich" method of critiquing, which is to layer the comments about what needs improving between comments about what's working. Let them be

original and innovative. Give them many opportunities and reasons to write, even if it's just a quick response to something. I hate journaling myself, but many students do well with it because they can write freely just for themselves.

What advice do you have for aspiring writers?

It depends upon the type of writing they want to do. If they're writing just for their own pleasure, which is a wonderful thing to do, I have no advice. Anything and any way they want to write is their business. However, if they want to be published, which I always want to be, they need to learn a certain set of skills, depending upon the type of writing they plan to do. Writers need to accept editing and critiquing in order to grow in skill, so they need thick skins. The only way to become published is to submit to publishers and not be discouraged by rejections. But first writers need to produce the best piece of writing they can, and that takes a lot of practice.

Interviewed by Cassi Pietz

2014 Diigo Teaching Tips

Are you a fan of Instagram or Snapchat? This apps are wildly popular with teachers and students alike. Here is Aviary! It combines the best photo editing tools of both apps in one. Creative and easy to use, Aviary will save you time, and it is FUN! <http://www.aviary.com>



Aviary

Been thinking about self publishing? Maybe a photo book, poems, even a recipe book? Well check out Blurb! You can create, publish, and SELL directly on Amazon. Has great book building tools that even an amateur can handle. Amazing for projects and creating a professional looking book, that you can order and keep. No more senior projects ending up in a box somewhere! They will want to show these at graduation parties. <http://www.blurb.com/>



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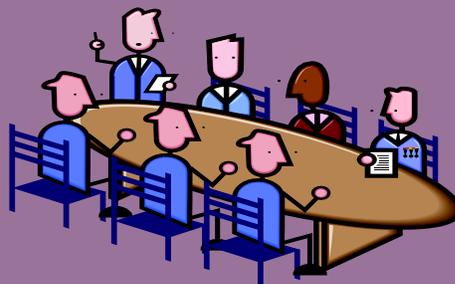
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SDCTE ANNUAL CONFERENCE (Re)Inventing the Future of English



**October 3-4, 2014
Mitchell, South Dakota**

Check your inbox for details!

Conference Highlights will include:

- Anne Moege: Socratic Seminar: The Basics
- Jill Mikkelsen and Cassi Pietz: Grammar Activities
- Jennifer Lacher-Starace: (Re)Imagining the Classics: Motivating Students to Read (Really Read!) Literature
- Jane Healy: State Library Online Resources
- Carla McMurray-Kozac: Connecting Literature
- Karen Harrington: 8 to Great: 8-Step Process for Positive Change Dakota Writing Project
- Lesia Krajewski: Using myoer.org to Fill Gaps in Common Core
- Kim Davidson: Poetry In Motion
- Mary Moeller: Writing Student Learning Objectives (for the new teacher evaluation system)
- Gay Pickner: Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction (as it deals with CCSS and the Smarter Balance test)
- Jason Kurtz: Sites and Apps you (and your class) can REALLY use!

**Friday Luncheon Speaker:
Sue Morrell**

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And our Webpage: SDCTE