



# Sigma Tau Delta

Spring 2006

## Pittsburgh's Bridges: 2007 Sigma Tau Delta Convention

**Kevin Stemmler**, Clarion University, PA

Convention Chair

There's a good reason why visitors to our city refer to Pittsburgh as the city of bridges. Pittsburgh sits at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers where they form the Ohio River. This geographical accident is, in fact, a fitting metaphor for the city that rose on the banks of these waterways and that over a million residents call home today. Like the two rivers which come together at the Point to form the larger, single Ohio, Pittsburgh draws for its energy and vibrancy on a rich tradition of differences melding to form a whole. Culturally rich ethnic neighborhoods are surrounded on all sides by middle class suburbs; a rich tradition of sports teams—the Steelers, the Pirates, the Penguins—are matched by the world class symphony and a host of professional companies in dance, theatre, and opera; a strong working class ethic—our history is in steel—stands along side a commitment to professionalism.

Historically, Pittsburgh was known as “the gateway to the west,” the place where one could begin to dream dreams of becoming whatever one desired. That notion is as true today as ever. The city is proud to recognize those who were fortunate to be born here—including August Wilson, George Benson, Andy Warhol, Gerald Stern, Perry Como, Gene Kelly and Gertrude Stein—and those the city came to adopt, including Mario Lemieux, Roberto Clemente, and Willa Cather. Pittsburgh knows how to honor its own, whether premiering August Wilson's plays or naming the Clemente or Warhol bridges. You will be able to visit our past through a trip to the Heinz History Museum. And you will want to come early, or stay beyond the convention, to check out the holdings at the Henry Clay Frick Art & Historical Center and the Carnegie Museum of Natural History and Art, which hous-

### Potter 101

**Kathleen Turner**, Student Advisor, Northern Illinois University

Imagine teaching a first-year composition class where your students voluntarily read extra novels pertaining to the class and walk into class anxious to discuss the reading. Imagine a class where your students are engaged and interested in considering the aspects of quality writing. Think it's a pipedream? Guess again. This utopian class is one I taught last semester at Northern Illinois University.

One of my best moments in teaching came last semester when a student approached me to say he had never finished a book for a class until he read *Harry Potter*. As a student who came to the U.S. at an early age, he never had the skill or interest to make his way through an entire book.

es the Carnegie Music Hall immortalized in Willa Cather's “Paul's Case.” Just blocks from the convention site is Heinz Hall, home of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, as well as three separate theaters for the performing arts. A short walk across one of the city's many bridges will take you to the

Andy Warhol Museum and the Carnegie Science Center.

Pittsburgh has been termed the “renaissance city” for its ability to transform itself from an industrial center into a corporate center, never losing sight of its heritage. More importantly, it is a city that embraces paradox and contradiction and thrives on the energy that results. Like the rivers merging, Pittsburgh is a confluence of all that is good in a city.

Those coming to Pittsburgh for the first time never forget their first view of the city as they emerge from the Fort Pitt tunnel. It is suddenly, magnificently *there*. Visiting our city, you'll understand why Fred Rogers made Pittsburgh his *Neighborhood*. In March 2007, the members of Sigma Tau Delta will converge and for at least a few days we all can be neighbors.



The Andy Warhol Bridge, named for him after a famous screen print made in the early 1980s.

How did this breakthrough come about?  
*Harry Potter*.

Most first semester freshman composition courses at NIU use common culture as a means to connect students' lives with the world around them. The study of common culture encourages students to analyze the world around them and the way they fit into their world and environment. It encourages them to be conscientious in our consumer-driven society. But one of the main assumptions of this approach to first-year composition is that students have a common starting point, and, perhaps more importantly,

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## SHELF LIFE

Yesterday I phoned a university press to check on the status of a book, *The Balloon Lady* by Jeanne Marie Laskas, which I had ordered for spring term. I was informed that the paperback edition was out of print with no immediate plans for reissuing the book. I commented on how valuable the book was as

a core text for my nonfiction classes and remarked on my students' admiration of the book. I was told that presses rely on such feedback to determine whether or not a book remains in print. In other words, choosing to order a particular book is often enough effort to keep that book alive. Ultimately, a professor has a professional obligation to participate in a book's survival simply by contacting the appropriate press when a title is no longer available. In the 1980s Virago Press reissued a series of books by women who had been ignored by the major presses for most of the twentieth century. Even at the time, as I used my school money to purchase every title possible, I knew it was too good to last. In fact, today, most of those titles are no longer available, in spite of Virago Press' best intentions.

In the past seven years that I have attended our society's conventions, Sigma Tau Delta has been fortunate to have some of the most talented writers in the world as our guest speakers.

Ironically, many of the books by those writers were no longer in print, forcing us to resort to unconventional measures to obtain copies for our members. In fact, for the Cincinnati convention, one of our speakers, Bernard Cooper, agreed to ship us a box of his books from his personal holdings. From a teacher's or reader's point of view, it is easy to assume that great books, whether classic or current, will always be available; however, each year, as we plan speakers for the conventions or as I order books for classes, I'm reminded that books, literally, have a shelf life.

When I entered the profession by declaring an undergraduate major in English, I understood I had an obligation to participate in the profession in a variety of ways. I knew I was responsible for reading every book I could get my hands on, some whose titles were already familiar to me and, especially, books mentioned by my professors during class lectures. I started to keep a summer reading list, comprised of every title my professors mentioned in class. I posted that list on the back of my bedroom door and carefully checked off each title as I completed another book on my list. I read those books randomly and in isolation, since I did not have an audience with which to share my responses or reactions. I still keep such a list, although I no longer read the titles alone. Each year I share "My Summer Reading List" with interested students, and we email one another responses to various titles. As I prepare

my yearly list I have to keep in mind that the books I hope others will read may not be available to everyone interested in reading them. From one year to the next, many titles I intend to read simply are no longer in print.

When Bernard Cooper came to our Cincinnati convention, several of his books were out of print, in spite of the fact that he had won the PEN/Ernest Hemingway Award and an O. Henry Prize. This January, Bernard's newest memoir, *The Bill from My Father* was released. Due to advance praise for the book, and perhaps helped by his charming appearances on public radio, his last book, *Guess Again*, is being reissued. This is a huge victory for those of us who support great writers and even more important for those of us who hope to see our own work in print. This is evidence that it is possible to revive a lost title.

It is important to understand that reading is often a social act. We can, as in the case of *The Common Reader*, read a book as part of a social group and enjoy shared responses to a text. But reading is, also, often a form of social action. The books we borrow or purchase are monitored by publishers and, in some instances, the government. Choosing to buy or read a book is not simply an individual act. Each time we read a book we are exercising a constitutional right, not only to read that book but to access it. Last summer, when I read Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, I was troubled by the idea that classic texts which any English major might take for granted are forbidden in some countries. From Nafisi's perspective, it occurred to me that if such censorship could happen in her world, it could happen anywhere in the world. I was reminded, for example, of how difficult it is to find copies of Jean Rhys' books in print, or how difficult it is to track down Elizabeth Taylor's novels, texts I have routinely taught in my British literature classes. Remembering books I could no longer purchase or access shaped the way I read Nafisi's book.

It is important to keep in mind that every time we buy a book we are breathing life into that book. In the process of reading for pleasure, we are also contributing to a book's survival. So when it's time for a professor to order books for a class and a text is no longer available, spend a moment to contact the publisher. Students, too, need to express their dismay to bookstores and publishers when titles that are recommended are not available. In an effort to practice what I preach here, in a few minutes I will be writing to the publisher of Kim Edwards' magnificent story collection *The Secrets of a Fire King*, begging them to reissue the book so my students can read stories that will make them better understand how they can write stories of their own.

I like living in a world where books matter. I like making a living in a profession that values books and voices. But I am also aware of the fact that I must frequently use my voice to ensure that books continue to exist, continue to matter.

## Potter 101: continued

that the teacher shares this common ground.

By using *Harry Potter* as the theme for my composition course, I was able to cover all aspects of popular culture by looking at the permeation of this singular phenomenon. My students read the first and third novels, watched the second and third films, read newsletters, watched and read spin-offs and fan fiction, and read criticism on J.K. Rowling's work which ranged from articles based on reader response theory to cultural materialism. While the novels made for accessible reading material, the criticism was a way to challenge students and enable them to make their own determinations about whether *Harry Potter* is a positive influence on our culture and our lives.

Students connected with *Harry Potter* and his experience starting at a new school in a new world. They applied this to

their own experiences starting college. Also, students connected Rowling's writing techniques to their own. They learned about visual analysis and adaptation with the use of the films, analyzed music by listening to Harry and the Potters, and looked at internet culture through fan sites and official web sites devoted to *Harry Potter*.

When determining composition course materials, certain questions come to mind: What is my goal as composition teacher? What is my goal in furthering the profession? For me, one of my goals continues to be having students consider the importance of writing and the importance of writing well in the contemporary world. What better way to illustrate this than to look at a successful writer like J.K. Rowling?

Susan Georgecink, *Columbus State University, GA*



The Alpha Kappa Upsilon chapter of Sigma Tau Delta was organized a mere four years ago in the spring of 2002 when a group of English majors at Columbus State University in Columbus, Georgia, looked for a way to unify through their shared enthusiasm for language and literature. Dr. Dan Ross offered to act as faculty sponsor, and the national office provided a blueprint for organization, enabling the group to begin with a solid foundation.

Seventeen members were inducted that first year, and in the four years since its inception, AKU has inducted a total of almost seventy-five new members. Dr. Susan Georgecink acted as sponsor when Dr. Ross was doing research in Oxford for a year, and became co-sponsor when Dr. Ross returned. They add to the continuity of the chapter with their insight, guidance and encouragement.

Our chapter holds two meetings per month, and we try to keep a balance of activities that encourage the love of language and literature both for our members and also for the community. For our first service project we helped prepare the childhood home of writer Carson McCullers (*The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, A Member of the Wedding*) for its current use as the Carson McCullers Center for Writers

and Musicians.

In 2003, we held two Poetry Readings in conjunction with appearances by then-Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky and poet Shawn Sturgeon; two years in a row we held a Graduate School Panel with professors from the Department of Language and Literature to provide guidance for students in all disciplines who are planning to attend graduate school. We have taken a group dressed in costume to the local hospital for reading and a puppet show. This year, we partnered with a local shelter to provide a story hour for the children staying there, where we read books and then provide face painting or puppet shows.

We recognize the importance of giving to the community, but we do things just for fun, too. What better way to have fun than to eat? We've had corned beef and cabbage at Dr. Ross' house on St. Patrick's Day in honor of the great Irish writers; for the past two years we have enjoyed a Victorian Christmas Tea, where we dress up and enjoy scones and tea with special jams brought back from England by our members who are studying abroad at the Spencer House in Oxford. We traveled to Atlanta a couple of times to The Shakespeare Tavern, and this year we took a group to the Alabama Shakespeare Festival to see *The Bird Sanctuary* by Irish playwright Frank McGuinness.

We're finally venturing out into the broader community of Sigma Tau Delta as well. Last year, AKU member Melissa McDaniel was awarded the 2005 Study Abroad Scholarship to pursue studies at Greyfriar's Hall in Oxford. We are also excited to send our first ever delegates to

## ΣΤΔ REVIEW & RECTANGLE AWARD WINNERS

**Elizabeth Holtze**  
**Creative Nonfiction Award**  
**Mary Colleen Patterson**, "Crime of the Ancient Mariner: Captain Jimmy's Curse"

Slippery Rock University, PA

**Frederic Fadner**  
**Critical Essay Award**  
**Hannah Meyer**, "The Novel as Edifice: Henry James' *Portrait of a Lady*"

Messiah College, PA

**Herbert L. Hughes**  
**Short Story Award**  
**C.T. LeBlanc**, "Take This Blood"

Hendrix College, AR

**Eleanor B. North**  
**Poetry Award**  
**Jessica Ramsey Golden**, "Salt Shaker"

University of Alaska—Anchorage

**Judson Q. Owen**  
**Award for Best Piece Overall**  
**C.T. LeBlanc**, "Take This Blood"

Hendrix College, AR

the 2006 annual convention in Portland, Oregon.

Thanks to the wealth of information provided by the national office, the faithful encouragement of our beloved sponsors, and a great group of enthusiastic students, the Alpha Kappa Upsilon Chapter is thriving in Columbus.

## SPONSOR AND BENCHMARK ANNIVERSARIES

### 20 years

OT - Arkansas Tech University, AR  
ET - California State University - Bakersfield, CA  
GT - Clemson University, SC  
ΔY - Cumberland College, KY  
MT - Dowling College, NY  
NT - Fairfield University, CT  
IT - Grand Valley State University, MI  
ΣT - Hendrix College, AR  
ET - Huston-Tillotson College, TX  
ΨΣ - James Madison University, VA  
ZT - Liberty University, VA

### 15 years

Gisela Casines, Florida International University, FL  
Shirlee McGuire, Olivet Nazarene University, IL  
Timothy Morris, University of Texas—Arlington, TX  
John Ottenhoff, Alma College, MI  
Dennis Petrie, Tri-State University, IN  
Rita Pollard, Niagara University, NY  
Deborah Robinson, Roger Williams University, RI

ΩΣ - Lycoming College, PA  
BY - Mercyhurst College, PA  
AY - Messiah College, PA  
AT - St. Norbert College, WI  
BT - SUNY College at Brockport, NY  
ΓY - The American University of Paris, FR  
ΔT - University of Alabama, Birmingham, AL  
XT - University of Maryland, College Park, MD  
EY - University of South Carolina - Aiken, SC

Lillian Schanfield, Barry University, FL

William Thierfelder III, Dowling College, NY

Dorena Wright, University of La Verne, CA

John Yozzo, East Central University, OK

### 20 years

James Bednarz, Long Island University, C.W. Post Campus, NY

KT - University of Utah, UT  
ET - University of Virginia, VA  
PT - Utah State University, UT

### 25 years

IO - Christopher Newport University, VA  
EO - Elon University, NC  
NO - Iona College, NY  
KO - Jackson State University, MS  
AO - Southwestern Oklahoma State University, OK  
MO - University of Scranton, PA

Thomas Fish, Cumberland College, KY

Tom Mack, University of South Carolina—Aiken, SC

Paul Nisly, Messiah College, PA

Maria Richey, Georgian Court University, NJ

Sandy Vekasy, Evangel University, MO

### 30 years

Elaine Hughes, University of Montevallo, AL

### 50 years

ΔZ - East Stroudsburg University, PA  
ΓZ - Stetson University, FL  
BZ - University of Louisiana - Monroe, LA

### 75 years

IF - Doane College, NE  
EF - Northwest Missouri State University, MO  
QB - Ouachita Baptist University, AR  
ΨB - University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point, WI

# Former Presidents Reflect on Past, Present, and Future

**Helen Lojek**, Boise State University, ID

In my favorite interpretation of the celtic triple spiral, the design represents the three interlocked ages of woman: maiden, mother, and crone. According to that rubric, I'm a crone and should have wisdom. I like this triple spiral explication because it inspires me to shoot for the thus far elusive wisdom, but also because of its reminder that life has stages—and that those stages intertwine. Writing now, on the cusp of a new year, I anticipate new stages and remain grateful for previous ones.

In 1985 Boise State founded a chapter of  $\Sigma\Delta$ . Over the years Zeta Upsilon won four Outstanding Chapter Awards and a satisfying number of scholarship, web site, and writing awards; we hosted a 1998 Western Regional Conference; two of our members served as Student Advisor, and one is now an Associate Student Rep. I served the International Board as Editor (1989-95); Vice-President (1994-1998); President (1998-2000); and Immediate Past President (2000-2002). I had the fun of chairing three conventions: St. Louis (1995), Albuquerque (1996), and Boise (2002). For twenty full and enjoyable years, a major portion of my professional activities centered around the community of student scholars served by this newsletter. It seems odd, then, that I have not been to a convention since I celebrated my retirement from the Board by hosting the Boise convention.

The explanation is simultaneously mundane and revealing: retirement from  $\Sigma\Delta$  allowed me to spiral into scholarly activities involving travel that conflicts with the annual  $\Sigma\Delta$  convention. I published one book on Irish playwright Frank McGuinness, edited another, and am working on a third. I serve as President of the American Conference for Irish Studies/West (whose convention I hosted in Boise in 2003), as Western Representative to the national ACIS, and as a board member for the Center for Irish Studies in the West. I've worked as dramaturge on productions of Irish plays on my home campus, in Sun Valley (ID), at Boston College, and at Berry College (GA). Currently, I look forward to the new challenges of increased administrative duties.

Ties with  $\Sigma\Delta$ , however, remain strong, with dozens of names and faces vividly present in fact as well as memory. Sue Yost

(former Regent), Lillian Schanfield (current Regent) and I spent an only marginally disgraceful two days investigating Idaho. Elizabeth Holtze (current Regent) and Jake York (former Student Advisor) and I consumed generous amounts of Sur la Table-worthy food at Elizabeth's elegant Denver home, and a beautiful broadside of one of Jake's poems hangs on my wall. Former Student Rep Daniel Justice passed along helpful advice about faculty recruitment. Former Student Advisor Scot Gere (who designed the first  $\Sigma\Delta$  web site) sends word that the Anchorage internet company he founded is so successful it has opened a Portland office. Former Student Advisor Laura White sends regular updates on her moves around the country with an expanding family.

Newsletter Editor John Pennington suggested I write this piece because former President Bob Halli (surely the best colleague ever) was writing a similar one and we needed to continue the friendly rivalry that marked convention encounters between our students. Like John, I recognize that the independent intellects and spirits of  $\Sigma\Delta$  colleagues are energizing stimulants. English majors probably use the metaphor of book chapters more than the triple spiral to describe life's phases, but the vehicles have similar tenors. Lives progress. Fortunate lives progress without losing established connections—the last chapter makes no sense without the first (and those between). Watching  $\Sigma\Delta$  students move through educational careers and into increasingly independent lives—facing with energetic skill a future that is unknowable, often frightening, always exciting—has emboldened me to accept challenging new opportunities. I owe Sigma Tau Delta members a debt for that, and for demonstrating that transitions to new chapters have not unbound previous ones. Thank you for, in the words of former President Isabel Sparks, “doing great things for Sigma Tau Delta.”



**Robert W. Halli, Jr.**, University Of Alabama



Since 1985, when I became faculty sponsor of the Phi Xi Chapter at The University of Alabama, Sigma Tau Delta has been the strongest influence in my professional life. I called my first chapter meeting, and two students showed up. Undaunted, we decided who would be president and who would be vice president, found two students sitting on a broken desk near my office who were eligible for membership, initiated them

on the spot, and made them secretary and treasurer. We were off! The next year our sixty-member chapter hosted the first state (rather than regional) convention in  $\Sigma\Delta$  history, and, the year after, Phi Xi won the Outstanding Chapter Award. Since then, chapter members have had great success winning  $\Sigma\Delta$  scholarships and awards (at the 2005 convention, our students won four of the seven scholarships given and two of the four President's Awards for convention presentations). What's the secret? We follow Woody Allen's dictum: “80% of success is showing up.” We apply for everything and make sure the applications are as strong as possible. I urge you to do the same.

I served on the Board of Directors for twelve years, as Southern Regent, Vice President, President, and Immediate Past

President. I was especially lucky to have my presidency fall between those of Helen Lojek and Beth DeMeo, two of the most intelligent, energetic, innovative, and effective individuals I have ever met. Like every Deltan for the past (almost) quarter century, I was blessed to be encouraged, guided, assisted and, especially, befriended by Bil Johnson, in whom there is no better Executive Director of anything in this world. I am spoiled by Sigma Tau Delta conventions. They are more fun, more edifying, more efficient, more friendly, and cheaper than any other professional meeting I have ever attended, including those of the Modern Language Association, South Atlantic Modern Language Association, National Collegiate Honors Council, and Association of College Honor Societies. All you Deltans owe it to yourselves to attend at least one convention, and you should submit your creative and critical writings for spots on the program.

Of my work for  $\Sigma\Delta$ , I am most proud to have promoted service for literacy as a crucial and most appropriate mission for the international organization and the local chapters. We take for granted the abilities to read and write, and almost unlimited access to books and magazines. It is important to remind ourselves that not all our fellow citizens share in these benefits. Phi Xi chapter members have devoted themselves to tutoring adult new readers and to raising hundreds of dollars for Project Literacy. The student advisors and representatives created the book drive that has become such a worthy part of each conven-

## Former Presidents Reflect: continued

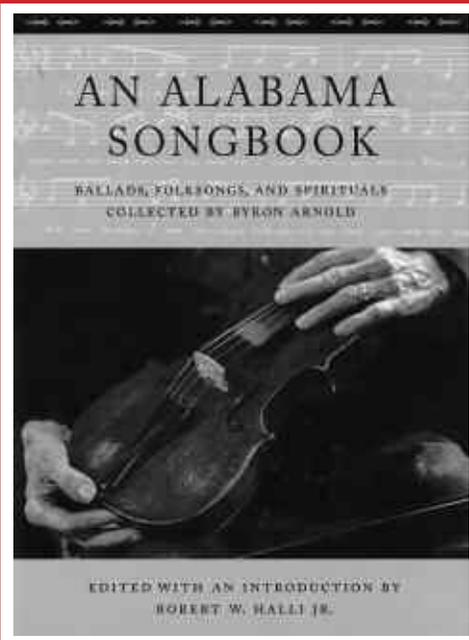
tion. Participating in such endeavors, we act as good citizens should.

My retirement from the Board was followed immediately by my assumption of the Directorship of the University Honors Program, and I am now Dean of the Honors College, over three honors programs, an office of prestige scholarships (Rhodes, Truman, etc.), and a brand-new Honors Academy, which relates the Honors College to high school teachers and students. To direct the Academy I hired Dr. Lesa Carnes Shaul, who won the first ΣΤΔ senior scholarship for Phi Xi, who (as a graduate student at the University of Georgia) won the very first President's Award for an analytical paper, and who had been a tenured associate professor of English and co-sponsor of the ΣΤΔ chapter at the University of West Alabama.

My administrative work has eaten up most time for scholar-

ship, but I recently brought out *An Alabama Songbook*, an edition of ballads, folksongs, and spirituals collected by a UA professor in the 1940s and now, finally, brought to the public in a physically beautiful volume. With that work capping my scholarly career, I was named by the Association of College English Teachers of Alabama the state's Distinguished Literary Scholar for 2005. There's still a Shakespeare article I need to finish and, when I retire, I need to finish a trilogy of detective novels set in Renaissance England, featuring a villain who may, or may not, be Christopher Marlowe, twelve years after he was "assassinated." As I go about my daily business of mentoring students, helping them with scholarship applications, thinking up new service projects for the Honors College, I am happy to remember that all I really need to know I learned in ΣΤΔ.

### "The Old Gray Cat," from *An Alabama Song Book*



The Old Gray Cat

In this game, Mrs. Drisdale tells us, "one child pretends to be the old gray cat and sits in front of the other children who are the little mice. Then he sings the song after everything has become very quiet. He continues to sing as the 'mice' move closer and then looks up and grabs the first child he can grab. That child then becomes the old gray cat."

Sung by Mrs. Martha N. Drisdale, Sheffield, 10 June 1947.

The old gray cat is sleep - ing, sleep - ing, sleep - ing, The  
old gray cat is sleep - ing in the house.

2 The little mice come creeping, creeping, creeping,  
The little mice come creeping through the house.

**\$37.00?** That's ALL it takes to be a member in Sigma Tau Delta!

## FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Expenses, Fiscal Year 2005

<b>Scholarships &amp; Awards</b> (individual and group)	\$28,350
<b>Publications</b> (journals, newsletters, postage)	\$36,706
<b>Operational</b> (postage, printing, phone, accounting)	\$64,211
<b>Convention</b> (speakers, rooms, delegate reimbursement)	\$57,641
<b>Board and Committee Expenses</b>	\$44,835
<b>Central Office</b> (salaries, benefits, honoraria)	\$99,235

<b>National English Honor Society</b> (high school)	\$9,710
<b>Other</b> (association dues, miscellaneous)	\$6,636
<b>Total Expenses</b>	\$347,324
<b>Income Total</b>	\$401,657
<b>Surplus Funds Investment</b>	\$54,333

Complete financial information is available upon request from Sigma Tau Delta.

# What They're Doing with English Majors These Days...

*The Princeton Review* recently ranked the top ten majors at colleges and universities. English ranked number two (behind psychology). The editors write that “you’ll find English majors in countless types of jobs. Many of these jobs are the communications-based careers you’d expect—author, reporter, journalist, editor, radio broadcaster, advertising, and public relations executives—but plenty of them aren’t quite so obvious. English majors also become teachers, lawyers (after law school, of course), film directors, politicians, actors, you name it. Why is an English major so versatile? Probably because English programs focus on the liberal arts, in addition to literature, language, and writing. As a result, they produce well-rounded, well-read individuals who have studied life in words across the globe. Sound good? Be prepared to read, think, write, discuss, and then read a whole lot more.”

As part of an on-going series, we look at students who have used their English degrees in a variety of ways. For this series

we focus on two students who graduated from St. Norbert College, WI. They were both members of the Alpha Tau chapter at the college.

If you would like to feature students from your chapter, please contact the editor at [john.pennington@snc.edu](mailto:john.pennington@snc.edu).

By the way, the complete rankings of the most popular majors from *The Princeton Review* are as follows:

- Psychology
- English
- Mathematics
- Business Administration and Management
- Biology
- Chemistry
- History
- Political Science
- Accounting
- Sociology

## **Kristin Alberts**, St. Norbert College, WI



Bee-bee-bee-bee-bee! The pager’s tones blare and a quiet ambulance station springs into action. The other two Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) and I jump into the ambulance and zoom off to the call, this time a two-car collision on the highway. We triage, long-board, and stabilize patients for transport to the hospital. Responding is routine, yet every call—every single patient—is different. Each call is like a poem in itself,

with its own rhythm, structure, and energy.

I currently work full-time as an EMT in Oconto Falls, Wisconsin, where our service, with four ambulances and an off-road vehicle, cover over 300 square miles of both city and rural country. I also occasionally cover weekend time in my hometown of Brussels, Wisconsin, a small operation with one ambulance. In addition, I work with the technical college’s national exams, licensing new EMTs. As a perpetual student, there is always continuing education. I am relatively new to the field, having finished training in December 2004. I have not—yet anyway—written anything with medical influence and perhaps never will; for it is not the traumas themselves, but the people, the emotions, the glimpses of life and everyday moments that drive the writing. I have faced the question and scornful looks many times—“So you’re not even using that English major you went to school for?” These are often the same people who asked five years ago why in the world anyone would ever want to study English and literature. I usually choose to nod in pseudo agreement, declining to explain how my English major and Sigma Tau Delta experiences as editor and president are with me every day as I work and write. I was given the tools and gift of being able to see the poetry in any given moment—the attention to detail, critical eye, creativity, confidence in myself by reading at  $\Sigma\Delta$  conferences.

Why does an English major choose Emergency Medical Service (EMS) as a career? Living and working as an EMT is ideal for a writer—flexible hours with plenty of time-off and long shifts at the station waiting for pages. The quiet time in-between calls leaves ample opportunities for writing, revising, and sending out my work. In addition, the job itself often presents inspiration and experience that cannot be found in a typical office. For instance, I remember an old woman who dialed 911 because she was lonely, but then shared wisdom from her 98 years; and the man who after an accident sang me a musical score, his operatic voice booming from the cot in the back while my driver-partner looked

back bewildered.

I considered graduate school, but chose instead to focus on my writing and gain experience in the world. Besides, EMS pays the bills where, unfortunately, poetry usually does not. A degree in English does not go to waste working in EMS. Strong writing skills are essential, because for every hour of patient care, we spend nearly double that documenting everything that occurs on the call.

Perhaps most importantly, working with patients has helped me become a better poet. When we are called, people are often facing extreme fear, loss, pain—even death. All pretenses are stripped away; life and death are bare before me nearly every day, along with the most raw of human emotions. EMS gives me the chance to see—on a continuous basis—the direct traumas, reactions of loved ones, sorrows, and deepest love—the paradoxes on which all life seems to rest. All of this pain and love beg for a structure or witness to explain; and, though the poems I have been writing do not deal directly with calls I’ve been on, or people I’ve cared for, the underlying concepts come through. A poet and an EMT can both influence the world, simply in different ways—one people’s bodies and one people’s thinking.

When the majority of people think of an EMT’s life, they picture: exciting car accidents, shootings, or traumatic injuries; in reality the majority of calls—especially in a smaller town—are much less dramatic. Patients have difficulty breathing, the flu, or diabetic reactions. There is such a unique cross-section of life in EMS—we visit everybody, rich and poor—sometimes strange, ironic, and humorous. The camaraderie among fellow workers is light in a heavy stress job. It is amazing to witness what the human body can withstand, and how it can be fixed; and sometimes, how it cannot. While we may deal in the difference between life and death, the poetic movements often lie in the simple day-to-day calls. I was moved by a tough man having a heart attack, for when I held his hand, he cried a single tear. In that one rolling tear is the poetry, for in that was every moment of his life. The moments, like the best poems, stick with you. Poetry is born of experience and observation, and what better place to do so than EMS. The man looked up at me and said, “I’m afraid to die.”

Kristin Alberts graduated from St. Norbert College, WI, with a BA in English literature. Her first collection of poems, *Where Water Be Might Blue*, was published by Wm. Caxton Ltd., 2005. Kristin was a  $\Sigma\Delta$  Publications Intern at St. Norbert College. Please read an excerpt from her book on page 8.

I began my collegiate journey in search of a teaching certificate in the field of English. Having had excellent English teachers in high school, I declared my major and intentions before I even stepped foot on my college's campus. I fancied myself becoming an enlightening, entertaining, and enthusiastic teacher whose name would be associated with smiles and gratitude. Two years into college, I made a decision to abandon the pursuit of a teaching certificate for a more fulfilling pursuit of earning an English degree and concentrating on literature and the English language. To pursue my teaching certificate, though certainly relevant, did not seem to suit my intellectual wanderings at that time. I still hold teaching as an eventual goal (I do have an English degree), but that decision altered the contours and condition of my life's journey. Three years have passed since I graduated, and I have yet to actually "employ" my degree. I have but one guess as to why I ended up in the pages of the Sigma Tau Delta Newsletter: I suppose it is that my study of literature and language has become a life's vocation. Language, whether it arrives in books or newspapers, in magazines or movies, in song or spoken dialogue between friends, relays the essence of life.

Beginning in high school and continually through college, I found that it was not necessarily the specific poems, short stories, novels, or essays that charged my increasing love of language; rather, it was the people involved with the communal study of such works. The conversations, debates, and mutual criticism of literature we read, and that which we wrote, brought to light a seemingly definitive truth. Each individual not only carries his or her own story, but is his or her own novel or essay or poem, adding to or subtracting from the never-ending play that is this spontaneous life. Literature is a carefully precise and random assortment of events, emotions, truths, and falsehoods that come from ordinary life adapted by different people for different purposes. But the end is to communicate. Language is sociology, it is psychology, it is philosophy and theology.

In a Post-Colonial Novel course, for example, students were not simply asked to evaluate a novel based on its structure or communicative grammar; students were asked to qualify themselves, the system they operate in, the specific pros and cons of its "outreach" to third world countries. An inspection of missionary Catholics to the Philippines in F. Sionil José's *Dusk* draws conflict between tradition and progression. "Pagan" cultures are confronted with Christian paradigms and the question becomes whether or not this is a good thing as other aspects of Western culture and capitalism creep into the Philippines. In this way, classrooms become social forums about the communication of themes and mores that are transferable from one culture to another, about recognizing history as it is made in the present.

When I took Modern Catholic Fiction, I found that the literature reached far beyond the physical page; it actually pressed into my very skin and, dare I say, soul. Reading about a contemplative character's self-mortification could actually influence a reader to feel the pangs of spiritual anxiety and questioning. A character



like Hazel Motes in Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* is not easily forgotten: he lives in pursuit of transcendence while ultimately denying any human love that comes to him, be it friendly, compassionate, or even romantic. Chancing his eyesight for true clarity, his relationship to God is anything but common, pushing the reader to question the terrible significance of God's expectations and love for us. It is in these moments that classrooms cease to be centers for intelligent English discussion of theory and theme; rather, the classroom becomes an arena for discussions about life—and the unknown. Literature is the language of possibility.

There are many languages that speak of human nature. That I might pursue the language of social justice, I volunteered with AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps to work with and for communities of people at odds with the social and economic wealth of this country. During my ten months of service, I helped to build houses with Habitat for Humanity; clear an overrun farm for immigrant farmers; maintain and improve accessible nature trails for the Scenic Hudson Land Trust; mentor thirteen year-old girls at a summer sports camp for "at-risk" youth; fight a wild land fire in Montana; and offer outreach as an American Red Cross Family Services Technician to those affected by Hurricane Isabel. All of this is nothing more than the dialogue of compassion and humanity. Each of our projects was centered on the notion of benefiting a community wherein a problem was identified and our organization responded with an offer of young physical help/labor. But it was not the physical presence that meant the most to these communities. More important, it was the spirit of justice and empowerment that came with our presence. Actions communicating compassion can propel the dialogue of social justice and inspire further change towards healthier communities, and communities, really, are nothing more than the make up the world.

I must admit that my "English degree" did nothing to aid in the practical applications of skills necessary to complete the above work. It did, however, provide me with an awareness of the human fabric that ties people together through daily interaction. I do intend to become the teacher I have always admired, so that I might positively affect the lives of people to come after me to propagate the positive application of language and communication in life. I will seek admittance to graduate programs so I may continue to work towards that goal of becoming such a teacher, or, dare I admit it, a professor. The only obstacle between me and that goal at the moment is the GRE Subject Test in Literature, and my current job teaching children. Nonetheless, I carry with me a strident belief that it is not only in our professions where we use what we have learned—it is everyday, every moment of our lives that we communicate anything, that we employ language.

Kevin Czarnecki studied English at St. Norbert College in De Pere, WI, rounding out his time at the University of Newcastle in Australia where he learned the value of the simplest pleasures in life, such as breathing fresh air. He is currently working as a fourth grade teacher at Guardian Angel School in Denver, CO, through an alternative licensure program. He intends to pursue graduate studies in England, but is not sure when that will happen.

## GREAT ILLUSTRATIONS FROM LITERATURE

Author: Arthur Conan Doyle

Work: "The Adventure of the Final Problem"

Illustrator: Sidney Paget (1893)



"The Adventure of the Final Problem" was supposed to be the final Sherlock Holmes story. Holmes and his arch-enemy, Professor Moriarty, battle on the cliffs of Reichenbach Falls (Switzerland), where they apparently tumble to their deaths. Doyle, however, was

pressured to bring the great detective back to life, which he did. Holmes returns to his residence at 221B Baker Street, London, to solve more crimes with his trusty friend, and narrator of his adventures, Dr. Watson.

# FROM THE HISTORIAN'S FILES...

## HISTORY BY THE NUMBERS



**Christine Hait**, Columbia College, SC

I am not one for numbers. Unless by numbers one means the song and dance portions of an entertainment program, or by numbers one means verse, as in "Tell me not, in mournful numbers, / Life is but an empty dream!" (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "A Psalm of Life"), I am not much interested. No, numbers hold little appeal for me, and memories of an undergraduate accounting class still haunt me.

All the same, I know that numbers matter. In a recent *Newsweek* article, Robert Samuelson celebrates the publication of the millennial edition of *Historical Statistics of the United States*, a five-volume collection of numerical data providing a window into American history and culture. Numbers, Samuelson writes, may be considered "drab," but they also fascinate because they "confirm, qualify or contradict things we think we 'know'" about the past and "raise questions about it."

Do numbers help to tell the Sigma Tau Delta story? Do numbers help to tell the story of your own chapter? And how do these numbers "confirm, qualify or contradict" what we think we know about ourselves? What questions do the numbers raise about our history?

Indeed, our interest in numbers may contradict what we think we know about ourselves.

Our mission and purposes, as stated in our Constitution, emphasize our commitment to language. However, one way Sigma Tau Delta defines itself is by its numbers. Visitors to the Society's web site can click on "About Us" and learn the number of active chapters, faculty sponsors, and members inducted annually. At our annual business meeting at convention, we hear important numbers reported to us from our treasurer. For annual reports, chapters calculate the number of times they held business meetings and officers meetings and the number of students invited to membership and initiated. For folks invested in words, we pay attention to numbers.

Executive Director William Johnson acknowledges the importance of numerical data in the operation of the Society. According to Johnson, data collected from chapters help the Society

identify particularly vibrant chapters, potential student representatives, and board members. The information also alerts the Society to problems that might otherwise be overlooked.

Here are a few numbers from Sigma Tau Delta's history that help to define who we are. Unless otherwise noted, all information is taken from materials available at our web site, including the history of the organization written by Elva Bell McLin.

For 45 years, from 1924 until at least 1968, the initiation fee for membership in Sigma Tau Delta was \$5.00. The organization's current initiation fee is \$37.00.

In 1925, 31 chapters attended the first Sigma Tau Delta convention, adopted a constitution and elected officers, and became charter chapters. By 1966, the number of chapters had grown to 143, and by 1988 that number had grown to over 400. Today, Sigma Tau Delta boasts over 600 active chapters.

In 1968, Sigma Tau Delta recorded a total membership of 18,000. According to Johnson, incomplete records make current total membership impossible to calculate with accuracy. We do know that the Society inducts approximately 7,000 members annually.

Other numbers might point to the growth of our annual budget and the dramatic increase in scholarship money available to students. Certainly we have chapters that experience declining numbers of members and numbers of chapters that move from active to inactive status. In addition, the increase over time of initiation fees is an unfortunate fact, although Sigma Tau Delta's fees are comparable to the fees of many honor societies and very reasonable compared to others.

In general, Sigma Tau Delta's numbers indicate a strong and thriving society that has grown in almost every possible way, including complexity. What Samuelson points out about American history is true for Sigma Tau Delta history: Numbers are part of the story of who we are.



## The International English Honor Society

Sincerity • Truth • Design

Member of the Association of College Honor Societies, Sigma Tau Delta International English Honor Society is chartered in Illinois in accordance with the laws of the United States as a non-profit, educational organization. Founded in 1924, the society serves university and college chapters, providing recognition for academic excellence in the study of English.

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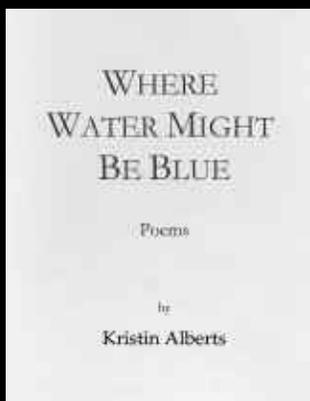
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## Poetry by Kristin Alberts



Where Water Might Be Blue  
(after Van Gogh's *Rhônebarques*, 1888)

Boats float easy in the thick river.  
Ropes are heavy and hand-twisted,  
made by some old man with leather palms,  
half-blind from seeing rising suns  
and braiding frayed string ends  
that bind the floating to the steady,  
boat to shore, man to land.  
Planks lie crossways flat,  
paths to boats and docks, waving walkways  
where sea-legged men stagger  
under their supplies, filling vessels  
with all the land can offer the sea as sacrifice—  
armfuls of wood for fires at night,  
trunks of dried meat, drinking water kegs,  
and heavy loads of dreams and wishes  
for where waves would take them,  
only the ropes holding them back  
from finding days and places  
where water might be blue.