



Sigma Tau Delta

Spring 2008

REFLECTIONS ON THE 2009 SIGMA TAU DELTA CONVENTION

Contents

PAGE 2

- President's Corner
- Why I Love English Literature and Italian Food

PAGE 3

- Making History: A Sigma Tau Delta Chapter at the University of Montenegro

PAGE 4

- Tornado Damages Union University, But Not Its Spirit

PAGE 5

- Learning to Fly at a Sigma Tau Delta Convention
- 2007 Chapter Anniversaries

PAGE 6

- Convention Spotlight: Deborah Ferguson and Deborah Dessaso
- 2007 Sponsor Anniversaries

PAGE 7

- Save Our Stories Project Launch
- Common Reader: *Population: 485*

PAGE 8

- Publications Editor Retires, Had a Dickens of a Time



Gloria J. Hochstein, Convention Chair, *University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire*

Reflections: The Sigma Tau Delta Convention Minneapolis, Minnesota, March 26-28, 2009. Growing up in the farm country of southwestern Minnesota, I learned early that the "Land of 10,000 Lakes" actually had twice that many lakes (if we counted the little ones), surrounded by millions of trees for Paul Bunyan to cut. I learned that the Great Lakes were made by the hoof prints of Babe, Paul Bunyan's Blue Ox. I also learned that my new saddle shoes could survive the ten inches of water that covered them when my brother pushed me into the stream that becomes the great Mississippi River.

Even in the metropolitan area known as "The Twin Cities," or just "The Cities," where half of Minnesota's over five million people live, the waters dominate. The Mississippi River originates in northern Minnesota at Lake Itasca, but by the time it reaches The Twin Cities, the Mississippi is a wide and magnificent river that both joins and divides Minneapolis, "The City of Lakes," from its twin, St. Paul, the state capital of Minnesota.

Those waters and the worlds reflected in them are the impetus for the 2009 convention theme of *Reflections*. The state of Minnesota takes its name from the word the Dakota gave to the Minnesota River, *minisota*, which means "water that reflects the sky." On a literal level, *Reflections* refers to the relationship between the sky and the sky-blue water, between the natural world and the human-made world. On a figurative level, *Reflections* refers to the contemplative meditations on the individual and on society often experienced in the presence of natural wonder. Furthermore, *Reflections* opens up the theme to ways of seeing how human endeavor and creativity are influenced by the natural world.

Minneapolis may be "The City of Lakes," but it also has a very lively metropolitan life: the Mall of America (the largest enclosed mall and recreational space in the world), the famous Guthrie Theater, the Walker Art Center, the Orpheum Theater, and dynamic artistic, dramatic, and music scenes.

In 2009, we will be staying at the Hyatt Regency Hotel on the Nicollet Mall in downtown Minneapolis. For eleven blocks, wide sidewalks flow on the Nicollet Mall in front of shops and dining establishments, with only taxis and buses allowed down the middle of the street. This is a pedestrian's delight, on the street or in the skyways. For only \$1.50 (\$2 during rush hours), the Hiawatha light-rail line and the Metro Transit buses connect the Nicollet Mall to all parts of the Twin Cities, including the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport and the Mall of America. Even better, the buses cost only 50 cents in the Downtown Zone.

Come to Minneapolis for the 2009 convention and share *your* reflections. As Henry David Thoreau said: "Two men in a skiff, whom we passed hereabouts, floating buoyantly amid the reflections of the trees, like a feather in mid-air, or a leaf which is wafted gently from its twig to the water without turning over, seemed still in their element, and to have very delicately availed themselves of the natural laws. Their floating there was a beautiful and successful experiment in natural philosophy, and it served to ennoble in our eyes the art of navigation; for as birds fly and fishes swim, so these men sailed. It reminded us how much fairer and nobler all the actions of man might be, and that our life in its whole economy might be as beautiful as the fairest works of art or nature." From *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*.

See page 7 for Common Reader Announcement.



President's Corner



CHILDREN OF SIGMA TAU DELTA

Peter Scholl, Luther College, IA

The ΣΤΔ Board often makes writers and notable friends of English honorary members of our society, though I don't believe we confer such honors posthumously. If we did, I would move that we add Abraham Lincoln to our rolls, in recognition of his "high achievement in English language and literature." It's certainly not every president who wrote speeches and letters worthy to be read with attention to their literary excellence!

There is a growing list of books that explore Lincoln's importance and artistry as a writer as well as a leader: Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America*; Ronald C. White, *The Eloquent President: A Portrait of Lincoln Through His Words*; Douglas L. Wilson, *Lincoln's Sword: The Presidency and the Power of Words*, to name a few.

If we could make him an honorary member, however, I would suggest that we wait until 2009 because next February 12 is Lincoln's two-hundredth birthday. Yes! And everyone is likely to know this pretty soon. Already the plans are well underway.

For example, there is an official Lincoln Bicentennial Website, sponsored by the Library of Congress. On it we learn that the site of our 2008 convention, Louisville, is sponsoring a Lincoln Symposium on February 11, 2009, and the keynoter is Pulitzer Prize winning author, Doris Kearns Goodwin, author of *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*.

Unfortunately, that event is already sold out, but the official website urges us all to be a part of a bicentennial event nearby. Or if you will be teaching, you should realize that the bicentennial year "is a 'teachable moment,'" and thus The Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission has provided "lesson plans, other classroom resources, information about upcoming professional development opportunities, and reading lists, and ideas for civic education and community projects to get their students involved."

Maybe you detect a whiff of levity in the way I'm presenting all this hoopla. Well, there may be just that whiff. But I am solid on Lincoln as literature.

Indeed, this past January I taught a three-week seminar for first-year students titled Abraham Lincoln: Legends, Leadership, Literature. The course description said: "We will read widely in Lincoln's addresses, letters, and other works and we will also look at historical and biographical studies, films, poems and essays. We will examine the range of his representations, early and late—from racist compromiser to heroic liberator, from ape-like buffoon and tyrant to savior and martyr." And so we did,

using an anthology of primary texts and historian Stephen B. Oates's *Abraham Lincoln: The Man Behind the Myths* as an introduction to Lincoln's life and reputation over the years. The highpoint was a weekend road trip to Springfield, which was cold but inspiring.

Though you might not know it from perusing the Library of Congress bicentennial website, Lincoln is still controversial—still worth reading and arguing about, as the significance of his presidency and the issues still reverberate in our lives. For example, one of my students this January proposed focusing a paper on parallels between Lincoln and Barack Obama, trying to determine if Obama, who had also served in the Illinois legislature and who declared his bid for the presidency across the street from Lincoln's former law office at the Old State Capitol in Springfield, was influenced by Lincoln. After a little preliminary research, however, the student backed off when she discovered that Obama put some distance between himself and the sixteenth president because he believes that Lincoln repudiated racial equality and that his celebrated Emancipation Proclamation had a strategic military objective.

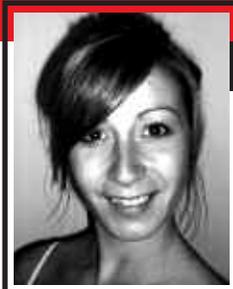
I supported Obama in the Iowa Caucuses, and I'll have to admit that I was disappointed with what he said about Lincoln. But it is a common enough position—to dwell on Lincoln's assertion of white superiority, or his introduction of a constitutional amendment in 1862 to enable "colonization"—sending black people out of the U.S.—and his slowness in outlawing slavery and allowing blacks to serve in the ranks of the Union Army.

But as Stephen Oates and most of the other prominent Lincoln scholars agree, Lincoln was ultimately eloquent, decisive, and effective in destroying slavery: he pushed the Thirteenth Amendment outlawing slavery through the Congress in 1864, though he did not live long enough to see it ratified. And regarding his eloquence in the cause of making this nation live up to the Declaration's words that "all men are created equal," no one has done more to move the nation beyond those, who like the Chief Justice Taney of the Supreme Court, argued that these words were intended to apply to white people only.

And so I say a bit in advance, "Happy birthday, Abe!" and I encourage everyone to pick up one of the many books that have come out (or will be soon) reminding us of his significance.

Why I Love English Literature and Italian Food

Lynzie Biggs, Student Advisor, University of Indiana at Pennsylvania



Lately I've been feeling like a whiny and defiant teenager.

When I *was* a whiny and defiant teenager, I would constantly annoy my mother with various questions that always began with "why." Why do I have to clean my room?

Why should I be home by midnight? Why can't I date the guy that smokes Marlboros, cuts class, and drinks hard liquor? To which she would respond: "Because I'm the mom, and I said so."

Lately these "why" questions have been manifesting themselves as questions about of my future. Bigger, scarier, but no less whiny than before. As an English graduate student on the verge of finishing my Master's degree and preparing for a life in academe, I've been saying things like: Why should I write three 20-page seminar papers at the end of the semester? Why should I turn off *American Idol* to read an 800-page Victorian novel? Why have I spent the better part of my life (so far) sitting in a classroom talking about what the author *really* meant? Why would I, after *continues on page 3...*

Why I Love English Literature, cont.

an obscene amount of education, thrust myself into a nearly impossible job market among thousands of others equally qualified (or more) for the same jobs? While mom's answer was enough before, I couldn't seem to quell my disquiet with a simple "because I said so." Recently, however, I have found an answer to my questions: Italian food.

A few months ago, when money was tight, I decided to take a job as a server in an upscale Italian restaurant in Pittsburgh. Coincidentally, I have also recently found that I am a terrible waitress (my apologies if I've ever waited on you). The hours are long. I come home filthy and stinking, my white button-down covered in grease and spaghetti sauce. My feet throb after regular weekend double shifts. And I have to force a smile while being stiffed by particularly picky guests whose standards not even a five-star gourmet restaurant could meet. Nonetheless, I do it nearly every day and scrape by on the meager few dollars each table (probably begrudgingly) leaves me for my mediocre service.

Truth be told, along the way I have found that I would rather read that 800-page novel, or write an infinite number of seminar papers over having to carry 40-pound trays of pasta to unappreciative guests. I have realized that I do all of this, as I would imagine most of us do, because there is nothing else that I can picture myself doing. And that there is nowhere else I'd rather be than in a literature classroom (either as a student, or a teacher). And the fact that someone will (someday) actually pay me to do this feels like robbery. These days this is all becoming exceptionally apparent every time I tie my floor-length apron around my waist and prepare to take another order.

Now that I've come to this conclusion, I've learned that my job has led me to answer my "why" questions, and so, along with making a few bucks, it has actually been a pretty valuable experience. And from my newfound "wisdom," I leave you with this advice: When in a restaurant, be nice to your server, tip big, and clean up your mess. You never know; she may be your colleague one day. ● ● ●

Making History: A Sigma Tau Delta Chapter at the University of Montenegro

Ginger Jones, Louisiana State University at Alexandria



University English majors earn the respect of their colleagues on campus even as they are stereotyped as bespectacled and quiet. If they are women, they are presumed to be Ugly Bettys; if they are men, people hardly think of Brad Pitt (who majored in journalism at the U of Missouri). Quiet people aren't supposed to make history, just read it. If they major in English, they read it to understand the context of literature.

During my nine-month Fulbright appointment to the University of Montenegro this past year, I met a few students who not only read English and its history, but who also made a little history of their own.

The University of Montenegro has several campuses, each in different major cities of their newly-independent country, which was a part of the former Yugoslavia. Awarded a 2006-07 Fulbright Lectureship in American Literature, I taught courses in African-American literature, American women writers, and American culture at the Philosophy Faculty (similar to an extraordinarily large Humanities department) in the country's second largest city, Niksic, known throughout the Balkans as an industrial town famous for exporting steel and beer. Most of the over 100 students enrolled in each of my courses were curious about how students at Louisiana State University at Alexandria, my home institution, lived, worked, and studied. Though several of my LSUA students agreed to correspond by e-mail with some my U of Montenegro students, I thought there had to be a way to establish a stronger and more permanent support for the Montenegrin students interested in American academics.

As a faculty co-sponsor of the LSUA campus chapter of Sigma Tau Delta in Alexandria, Louisiana, I was intrigued by the word "international" in the description of Sigma Tau Delta. I hoped it meant that English majors at the University of Montenegro could create their own chapter of Sigma Tau. After e-mail correspondence with an enthusiastic Zenia Lee, I learned that it

Membership in an organization like Sigma Tau Delta might make all the difference in the world to the bright, young, English-speaking Montenegrin students I taught who seemed to need external support for their study of the English language and literature. I proposed to my Montenegrin department head that I help her establish a campus chapter. She was enthusiastic, but reminded me there was no money in her budget for a chapter fee (then, about 38 Euros) or the once-only lifetime membership fees (about 336 Euros for twelve students). The US Embassy in Podgorica, Montenegro's capital city, agreed to fund the fledgling chapter; the department head agreed to select twelve students with 3.5 grade point averages or better.

Nearly three months later, we received the package of certificates and pins from the official Sigma Tau Delta organization at the U of Illinois. Two of the faculty (Dr. Marija Knezevic and Ms. Alexandra Batricevic) and twelve students would be the founding members of an international honor society chapter, the first, as far as anyone knew, in the Balkans. Its founding members, every one an English major hoping to eventually teach at a university or work as a translator, are: Nikola Kasalica (president), Mira Grebovic, Mirjana Zivanovic, Sreto Pavicevic, Ana Ponos, Petar Bozovic, Martina Cetkovic, Ana Maslovaric, Predrag Adamovic, Ivana Vavic, Boris Malidzan, and Milida Bozovic.

We had a candlelit ceremony where we reviewed the history of the organization (a married student at Dakota Wesleyan working on his doctorate sponsored an English club that grew to into this honor society), its mission (to promote the mastery of written expression, encourage worthwhile reading, and foster a spirit of fellowship among those specializing in the English language and literature) and its motto (Sincerity, Truth, and Design, elements fundamental to the most effective written expression). Local TV stations came to record the ceremony, attended by parents and friends of the twelve honor students, *continues on page 4...*

Making History, cont.

several of whom were interviewed about the organization on afternoon talk shows for a week after the ceremony. Pirated DVDs of those interviews floated around campus until school ended. The new chapter president wrote an article in his native language



(what we would call Serbo-Croatian, but what is being called Montenegrin since the vote for independence from Serbia) about the privileged experience of being inducted into the society, which was published in the university's annual magazine.

After the ceremony and the interviews, I would see the new members wearing their pins (badges, they called them) with subtle pride. Those members in my American Women Writers class sat just a little straighter, as though life became a shade more serious and delightful for them. When we talked to each other, they told me their dream of attending one of the annual Sigma Tau conventions (they have all visited the website), and perhaps with the help of their energetic faculty sponsors, they one day will. They have, after all, made history. ●

Tornado Damages Union University, But Not Its Spirit

Roger Stanley, Southern Regent, *Union University, TN*



For Sigma Tau Delta Louisville 2008 convention readers Amy Anderson, Nellene Benhardus, Erin Brassart, Bryan Emerson, Renee Emerson, and Andrew Gray, February 5 (almost precisely a month before the Louisville trip) was a kind of 9-11—or the equivalent of my own generation's "where were you when Kennedy was shot?"

"I hate to use a redneck cliché, but it was like a freight train," says Andrew of the tornado which ripped through north Jackson at 7:02 p.m. that Tuesday night. "It was like walking out into a different world," he adds, describing emerging from a downstairs dorm bathroom some thirty seconds after the shaking and roaring. Seven young men from Andrew's dorm had been "cowering" between the toilet and the shower stall during the worst of it.

I myself have lived in Jackson since 1990, when earthquakes and the New Madrid (MO) fault line were the talk of the town's disaster annals. That event never materialized, but four times (January 1999; November 2002; May 2003; February 2008) Jackson/Madison County has taken a direct hit from tornadoes. For two of these I was out of town, once even out of the country. The last two I rode out inside my midtown home, quite lucky compared to the majority of my students this time.

"The scariest thing was not being able to get through [by phone] to friends," according to Bryan, whose marriage to Renee in 2007 at least assured that they would be in an off-campus apartment and thus relatively unscathed by February's event. The couple took in seven freshmen the first night, one of whom stayed for a full week while others returned home temporarily with parents.

As with Andrew, Erin emerged to a completely ruined automobile, comparing her smashed car to a Coke can and noting that it was "fifty to a hundred yards away" from where she had parked it. Wryly she adds that she had just filled the gas tank at approximately 5 p.m. that day.

Indeed it's this survivor mentality, this ability not to joke glibly about the event but to put it into perspective some weeks later, which endears me even more to these students. Amy, a varsity athlete who thought first of her soccer teammates and noted that one had visible cuts and bruises, quickly sought to address

this situation after fleeing the devastated dorm area. "I realized one of my personal dreams that evening: I got to rip the first-aid kit off the wall of Penick (Union's main academic building) and make use of it."

Amazingly, there were zero fatalities among the Union ranks, though two of our students (non-English majors or minors) were hospitalized and in rehab. Fourteen students were "buried" beneath the rubble of collapsed dorm structures for anywhere from thirty minutes to five hours after the tornado, the last brought out just after midnight. Work has recently begun on rebuilding, but between 60 and 80 percent of dormitory housing has now been razed completely, much in effect razed "naturally" that evening, with the fragmented remains bulldozed under in the following days.

"The building was at my feet" is how Amy describes the view at about 7:05 that evening. For Nellene, Sigma Tau Delta student representative, the experience of going to Books a Million a few days later really brought the event home. It was then the tears came most for her, while noting the shelves of books in the store as compared with the many books she had lost.

Along with Nellene, who is headed toward doctoral study, Andrew and Renee hope to pursue grad school next year, MFA degrees in their cases. Renee has been accepted into Boston University and will be studying with Louise Gluck and Robert Pinsky; her collection of her writings and her books have all been accounted for. Andrew lost some of these valued possessions, but notes that he went for his records and record player first when combing the ruins, followed by his Faulkner books and then such items as clothing. "I ranked Bob Dylan above my underwear," he reports.

As Union continues on target for a mid-May graduation and retains our spring break, even after two full weeks of cancelled classes, these six students—and many others—are a large part of my daily inspiration as a teacher. Some of us have spoken of "survivor's guilt," but all of us—faculty, staff, administration, and students alike—are determined to, with God's grace and the thoughts and prayers of so many of you, press onward. ●

Learning to Fly at a Sigma Tau Delta Convention

Amber Hartl, Editorial Intern, *St. Norbert College, WI*

Whether it's attending a session concerning the late, great Kurt Vonnegut, attending a workshop with Naomi Shihab Nye, or laughing so hard you cry at the Bad Poetry Contest, everyone has a favorite Louisville Convention memory. However, some of the most valuable experiences from the 2008 Convention didn't take place in Louisville—preparing to attend and present at the convention claims the prize for “Best Experience.”

Few other venues exist where undergrads are given such opportunity to shine. The experience of preparing a critical essay, short fiction or creative nonfiction piece, or poetry collection for presentation to one's peers generally falls to scholars with more than four years of collegiate study under their belts. Students coming to present are often nervous, but the experience of sharing one's work with the scholarly community generally imparts confidence. It did in my case.

Amidst the supportive atmosphere of the 2006 Convention in Portland, I found myself in front of a room of people, about to present my essay on Chaucer. I distinctly remember looking around the room for the familiar faces of those I'd traveled across the country with, and then I began. Well, I tried to. My voice didn't work on my first try, but after an audible gulp, I forged ahead. By the time I reached the end of the essay, I could feel the heat in my cheeks and had to concentrate to breathe normally, but I'd done it. The part I had worried about the most, the question and answer part of the session, turned out to be pretty awesome as well. Despite my butchering of Middle English and nervous stumbling over some awkward phrasing, the whole presentation went well.

This year, I realized that having attended the Sigma Tau Delta 2006 Convention in Portland allowed me to enjoy convention preparations, rather than bit my nails to the quick. The weeks leading up to Louisville were filled with anticipation rather than anxiety, excitement in place of nerves.



Amber Hartl, left, presenting paper at the 2008 Convention

As the convention-going members of my chapter gathered around pizza and soda to practice our presentations, it became clear to me just how valuable the experience of presenting work in an academic setting can be. Learning how to revisit and revise work according to how it *sounds* rather than how it works on the page, pronouncing words you only know how to spell, and discussing a topic outside of the classroom setting: these skills are not only fun, they're an important part of English academia.

The best part: the only way to get better at presenting is to present. It's one of those necessary contradictions we all kept talking about. So, if you have never submitted to the conventions, consider it. I guarantee a trip to Minneapolis will be worth the effort. Learn how to fly by jumping out of the nest.

2007 Chapter Anniversaries

Twenty Year Anniversary

Augustana College (IL) (Rock Island, IL), Pi Phi
California State University, Northridge (Northridge, CA), Iota Chi
Campbell University (Buies Creek, NC), Gamma Chi
Canisius College (Buffalo, NY), Xi Chi
College of the Holy Cross (Worcester, MA), Nu Chi
DeSales University (Center Valley, PA), Upsilon Chi
Franklin College (Franklin, IN), Beta Chi
Moravian College (Bethlehem, PA), Sigma Chi
Oklahoma City University (Oklahoma City, OK), Omega Phi
Saint Francis University (Loretto, PA), Pi Chi
Santa Clara University (Santa Clara, CA), Phi Phi
Southern Connecticut State University (New Haven, CT),
Omicron Chi

Spring Arbor University (Spring Arbor, MI), Tau Chi
SUNY, College at Cortland (Cortland, NY), Epsilon Chi
Susquehanna University (Selinsgrove, PA), Theta Chi
Tarleton State University (Stephenville, TX), Kappa Chi
University of Idaho (Moscow, ID), Eta Chi
University of La Verne (La Verne, CA), Chi Phi
University of Maine (Orono, ME), Rho Chi
University of Notre Dame (Notre Dame, IN), Zeta Chi
University of St. Thomas, TX (Houston, TX), Psi Phi
Virginia Wesleyan College (Norfolk, VA), Delta Chi

Twenty-five Year Anniversary

Alabama State University (Montgomery, AL), Iota Rho
Allen University (Columbia, SC), Chi Pi
Coastal Carolina University (Conway, SC), Chi Rho
College of St. Elizabeth (Morristown, NJ), Delta Rho

Drexel University (Philadelphia, PA), Omicron Rho
Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (Daytona Beach, FL),
Gamma Rho

Florida Atlantic University (Boca Raton, FL), Kappa Rho
Francis Marion University (Florence, SC), Nu Rho
Georgia College & State University (Milledgeville, GA), Sigma Rho
Gustavus Adolphus College (St. Peter, MN), Pi Rho
Lincoln University, Missouri (Jefferson City, MO), Omega Pi
Lock Haven University of PA (Lock Haven, PA), Lambda Rho
Nazareth College of Rochester (Rochester, NY), Psi Rho
Quincy University (Quincy, IL), Rho Rho
Richard Stockton College of New Jersey (Pomona, NJ), Eta Rho
Roanoke College (Salem, VA), Zeta Rho
SUNY, College at Potsdam (Potsdam, NY), Tau Rho
University of Delaware (Newark, DE), Mu Rho
Washburn University (Topeka, KS), Phi Rho

Fifty Year Anniversary

Caldwell College (Caldwell, NJ), Chi Zeta
Long Island University, C. W. Post Campus (Brookville, NY), Beta
Theta

Louisiana State University (Baton Rouge, LA), Omega Zeta
Mississippi College (Clinton, MS), Psi Zeta
Nicholls State University (Thibadoux, LA), Alpha Theta
Tennessee Technological University (Cookeville, TN), Tau Zeta

Seventy-five Year Anniversary

Eastern Illinois University (Charleston, IL), Upsilon Gamma
North Central College (Naperville, IL), Sigma Gamma

Convention Spotlight: Deborah Ferguson and Deborah Dessaso

Rachel Waymel, Editorial Intern, *St. Norbert College, WI*

Louisville, KY, 2008. Nervous and a tad wobbly in my high heels, I checked into the Marriott determined to not butcher my presentations. Writing this article was the last thing on my mind. Indeed, the newsletter muse sent nary a thought in my direction until the Saturday night banquet, when I had the good fortune to sit by two of Sigma Tau Delta's exceptional alumni members, Deborah Ferguson and Deborah Dessaso. Ferguson presented a collection of her poetry, "A Sip of Vintage Pain," at this year's conference, and Dessaso presented her work "Bless You, Mr. Walcott" and won an alumni award.



Deborah Ferguson and Deborah Dessaso

"I'm the Dancing Story Lady," Ferguson told me. A dancing storyteller and African drummer since 1982, Ferguson has toured both nationally and internationally studying and performing African storytelling, dancing, and music techniques. Though she now performs closer to her home in Mobile, Alabama, Ferguson began her international circuit by traveling to Kenya in the 1980's to study traditional African music and dance. In the 1990's she traveled to Senegal, Gambia, and the Cote d'Ivoire to expand her knowledge of different techniques.

In addition to expressing her creative muse onstage, Ferguson is also involved in poetry and screen-writing. She has been writing "since before wanting a bicycle for Christmas" and her writing career took flight when her uncle gave her a typewriter when she was eight or nine. She is an elegist and enjoys experimenting with different types of form poetry. Although she enjoys writing both poetry and screen-writing, she prefers poetry as it allows her to develop her creative ideas and polish her pieces more quickly. She is currently working on three different screenplays, ranging in theme from coming-of-age to science-fiction.

When she isn't writing or performing, Ferguson teaches Freshman

Composition courses at the University of South Alabama, where she received her master's degree. Ferguson has worked with the Mississippi Arts Commission, the Alabama State Council, and the Alabama Institute for the Arts. She has focused her energy on developing ways to teach core subjects (such as English, science, and math) through the arts and is a strong leader in her community. This spring Ferguson will be attending the Vermont Studio Center.

Dessaso, winner of one of this year's alumni awards, is the Director of The Writing Center at the University of the District of Columbia. Her award-winning essay is adapted from a chapter of her master's thesis and discusses the polarization of academic English from everyday English. Her research for her master's degree and her experiences as a professor and Director of the Writing Center revealed to her the need for students to find their own voice before mastering academic language.

Dessaso finds much of today's academic writing far removed from everyday parlance, and, thus, from her beginning students. She commented that as recent as one hundred years ago, critical essays were far more conversational, and read as though the essayist were seated across from you at the dinner table. She fears that as the academic world becomes linguistically less and less approachable, critical thinkers will cease to have an influence in the world.

Dessaso dedicates much of her time to encouraging students to develop their own voice and learn academic language. As a professor, she requires her students to read the online university newspaper and post their responses to an article, hoping they will learn to respond to current issues instead of passively accepting world events. She also encourages students of every age to develop their voice by buying books through a mentoring program at her church. She emphatically advises students to avoid writing to please their professors, and insists that students write what they believe.

In her spare time, Dessaso meets with friends once every month to exchange articles and poetry that they have written. One of her short stories grew into a book and she is in the process of finding a publisher. She is also finishing up a volume of her poetry for publication. She joined Sigma Tau Delta in 1996 when she was working on her master's degree at the University of the District of Columbia. She attended her first Sigma Tau Delta Convention in 1997 in Savannah, GA, where she presented a panel on politics in the District of Columbia. ● ● ●

2007 Sponsor Anniversaries

Thirty Year Anniversary

Lee Harding, Mississippi College (Clinton, MS)
Barbara Washington, Mississippi Valley State University (Itta Bena, MS)

Twenty-Five Year Anniversary

Jim Wilcox, Southern Nazarene University (Bethany, OK)
J. Rutledge, Western Kentucky University (Bowling Green, KY)

Twenty Year Anniversary

Dale Priest, Lamar University, Beaumont (Beaumont, TX)
Rachel Schaffer, Montana State University, Billings (Billings, MT)
George Diamond, Moravian College (Bethlehem, PA)
Kirk Weixel, Saint Francis University (Loretto, PA)
Simone Billings, Santa Clara University (Santa Clara, CA)

Fifteen Year Anniversary

Alberto Cacicedo, Albright College (Reading, PA)
Daniel Wright, Concordia University, Portland (Portland, OR)
Paul Hesselink, Covenant College (Lookout Mountain, GA)
Sarah Dangelantonio, Franklin Pierce University (Rindge, NH)
Louis Markos, Houston Baptist University (Houston, TX)
Gloria Horton, Jacksonville State University (Jacksonville, AL)
Peter Scholl, Luther College (Decorah, IA)
Judith Makens, Mount Union College (Alliance, OH)
Michael Greene, North Carolina A&T State University (Greensboro, NC)
Mary Klein, Quincy University (Quincy, IL)
George Dorrill, Southeastern Louisiana University (Hammond, LA)
Roger Stanley, Union University (Jackson, TN)

Save Our Stories Project Launch

Carrie Fitzpatrick, Historian, *Alvernia College, PA*



The year 2008 is going to be a momentous time in Sigma Tau Delta history as the organization moves to create a new and dynamic web presence and to establish a new visual identity. Soon, members will be able to purchase merchandise, register for conferences, and pay dues online. Efforts to preserve the history of Sigma Tau Delta will be tapping into this digital revolution too—via the *Save Our Stories Project*.

As Historian, I am starting a new endeavor that will blend student and faculty narratives with historical documents/media to create a multimodal archive collection. The goals of the project are twofold: 1. to create and preserve an accessible archive of cultural and historical data; and 2. to develop awareness and appreciation of the rich cultural identity and intellectual traditions of the Sigma Tau Delta organization.

Why focus on stories? Everyone has a story to tell, but unfortunately, many stories are never recorded and they are lost forever. In *Storycatcher: Making Sense of Our Lives through the Power and Practice of Story*, Christina Baldwin states, “Life hangs on a narrative thread. This thread is a braid of stories that inform us about who we are, where we come from, and where we might go. The thread is slender but strong: we trust it to hold us and allow us to swing over the edge of the known into the future we dream in words.” Essentially, stories are integral to understanding a culture. Stories involve the sharing of experience to pass on accumulated wisdom, beliefs, and values. Although many people view the word *culture* as a descriptor for various ethnic group traditions, culture is far more inclusive than that. Culture is both a process and a product. Culture is learned, and the culture of a society shapes the behaviors and consciousness of its members. Sigma Tau Delta has its own culture, a culture characterized by student-centered philosophies, supportive camaraderie, and vibrant academic achievement. By preserving our stories, we will create snapshots of the culture and identity of Sigma Tau Delta for future generations.

This past year, I spent my time collecting and digitizing a number

of artifacts donated by Sigma Tau Delta members that include a revised version of the written history from 1924-1988, a list of board members up to 1982, boxes of old convention programs, two letters describing the organizational reformation that took place from 1969-1975, and a letter from E. Nelson James documenting details of Sigma Tau Delta’s trials and triumphs from 1969-1982. The scanning and retyping of the materials continues for digital archival, and eventually the documents will be made available online to members.

Now I need your help. Using the historical documents as a foundation, the launch of the *Save Our Stories Project* this year strives to integrate the individual voices of Sigma Tau Delta members, students and faculty alike, by adding chapter profiles and convention stories. For example, this year students were hired to write convention narratives that share experiences with the dry t-shirt/skit contest, speakers, and bad poetry contest. You’ll have a chance to view these narratives on the website in the near future. Additionally, in the Fall semester each chapter will be asked to fill out an online questionnaire that will include questions about such things as induction ceremony rituals and chapter-sponsored events. Your participation in developing the archives is crucial to the project’s success. Eventually, once the new website is launched, other multimedia may be added to chapter profiles too, such as podcasts, photography, and video clips.

Rudyard Kipling once said, “If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten.” Let’s take the first step in preserving the history of Sigma Tau Delta. If you have any Sigma Tau Delta materials that you believe should be preserved for future generations, or if you would like to contribute your own narratives to the archival database, please contact me or the Central Office. Let’s preserve the rich cultural heritage of the Sigma Tau Delta organization.

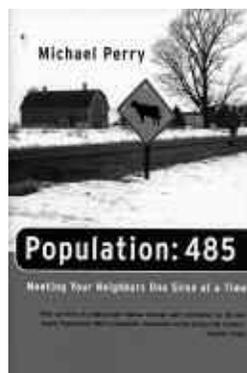
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Common Reader — Meet Your Neighbors One Book at a Time

Gloria J. Hochstein, Convention Chair, *University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire*

The 2009 Convention Common Reader is Michael Perry’s *Population 485: Meeting Your Neighbors One Siren at a Time*. In this beautifully written non-fiction memoir, Mike Perry tells about his returning to his hometown of Colfax, Wisconsin, after 12 years away.

Leslie Graham of A Clean Well-Lighted Place for Books in San Francisco has this to say about *Population 485*: “In sublime prose Mr. Perry has written a uniquely American book about life in a small town. Yet the themes of this terrific book are large—love, death, pain, exultation and family. Mr. Perry is a writer who also happens to be an EMT and a volunteer firefighter. The



stories that he tells are heartbreaking, funny, pure and mesmerizing . . . Every once in a while a book comes along that knocks your socks off and this is the one! This is just the beginning of a great writer's career.”

Perry, a full-time writer and humorist who graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire in 1987 with a nursing degree, will be one of the speakers at the 2009 Convention in Minneapolis. To learn more about Mike Perry, go to his website: <http://www.sneezingcow.com/index.htm>. Then go out and get yourself a copy of *Population 485* so you can write the award-winning paper on the 2009 Convention Common Reader.

Publications Editor Retires, Had a Dickens of a Time

John Pennington, Soon-to-be-retired Editor of Publications, *St. Norbert College, WI*

The newsletter that you are holding in your hands right now, the one that you are reading this very instance, well, this newsletter, which I hope you are still reading, will be my last one as editor of the Sigma Tau Delta publications, a family of publications that include *The Rectangle*, *The Sigma Tau Delta Review*, and, you guessed it, the newsletter that you are probably close to tossing if I don't make a salient point soon!

After eight years, which calculates into eight volumes of *The Rectangle*; five volumes of *The Sigma Tau Review*; and 16 versions of the newsletter (the final issue the very one that you still better be reading and enjoying), I will retire and pass the editorial torch to Karlyn Crowley, also from St. Norbert College. I guess we are keeping the publications in the collegiate family.

Family is an operative word that best describes my experience as editor, for it is the family of Sigma Tau Delta members and sponsors that have made these publications the quality ones that they are. In fact, I don't think *editor* really describes the role I've had—I would call myself a *conductor*, one who orchestrates the articles for the newsletters and sends out the critical essays and creative pieces to the judges, who ultimately select what appears in the journals. My, in retrospect, I didn't do a darned thing to make these publications represent the best of what Sigma Tau Delta has to offer—you actually did all the work.

I've always liked the idea of an editorial conductor. As an undergraduate I learned that Charles Dickens, who edited the popular journals *Household Words* (1850-1859) and the off-shoot *All the Year Round* (1859-until his death in 1870), would place on the front page of each issue: "Conducted by Charles Dickens." What did Dickens conduct? Much of what I conducted for the Sigma Tau Delta publications—fine writing that entertains, that is music to the creative and critical ears.

The household words of Sigma Tau Delta will continue all the year round, this time with a new conductor. What will I do? I guess I'll need to start laboring again, since I won't have you to do all my work.

As you near the end of this article, which is the final one in this newsletter (yep, the very one that you are now reading), you can put the newsletter aside and complete my final work as conductor for ΣΤΔ. As the title to this article, the one that you are nearly done reading, suggests, I've had a dickens of a time. "God bless Us, Every One!"



Illustration: Chris Ayres

Great Illustrations from Editing

John Pennington conducts Dickens to revise *Great Expectations*.



The International English Honor Society

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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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