Traveling with the E-Anthology
Arkansas Poem Finds Its Way to South Dakota Literary Magazine

by Michelle Rogge Gannon

In reading Wes Zeigler's poem "7-11," I felt that "aahhh" that readers sometimes experience when something in the gut responds to a piece of writing. Zeigler is a teacher-consultant with the Little Rock Writing Project in Arkansas and wrote the poem while participating in an institute there last summer. I first encountered the poem when he posted it in the National Writing Project's E-Anthology, an exciting online space for sharing original writings and, among other things, for taking part in conversations about teaching writing. In this space, TCs from all over the country post and respond to messages with the frequency of people purchasing lottery tickets and cigarettes at our local convenience store...in other words, too many times to count.

I was one of the co-facilitators of this E-Anthology. For the past two summers, the University of South Dakota (USD) volunteered Web space to host the E-Anthology. USD is home to my writing project site, the Dakota Writing Project, which was one of approximately fifty sites that logged into this online space in the summer of 2000.

When Wes Zeigler posted his poem on July 7, Shirley Brown, a coordinator for the E-Anthology and a member of the Philadelphia Writing Project, and I both responded with brief, supportive comments. In my comments to him, I invited Zeigler to submit his poem to the Vermillion Literary Project, for which I am the faculty advisor, telling him to check out the submission guidelines I had posted in another area of the E-Anthology (see note below). At that time, I heard nothing more. One never knows what a writer will do with an invitation to submit work.

Months passed, school started, and summer turned into autumn. I became involved, as usual, in the day-to-day demands of teaching that absorb us all. The Vermillion Literary Project (VLP) organized itself for the new school year; the project's team consisted of an eclectic group of USD college students from a variety of majors, both undergraduate and graduate, with an interest in all things literary. As the students began sending out the magazine's call for submissions, the submissions started trickling in.

Sometime in November or December, Wes Zeigler's poem arrived in the mail, as startling, crisp, and concise as I remembered it—a neon sign glowing in the darkness. The submissions editor officially recorded its arrival and sent it around to the VLP editorial staff. Each submission had to be evaluated by four members of the editorial staff, and then the editor-in-chief for the magazine would make final decisions. I had no idea what the students would choose, but, from my own experience, I

Message no. 2632: posted by Wes Zeigler (wlzeig1) on Fri Jul 07, 2000 10:05
Subject: 7-11

I have this horror of winding up as a clerk at 7-11 on the 11-7 shift when the drunks stagger in for half a case fumbling their change out of their pockets ash dropping from their cigarettes soft as wet snow The terrible loneliness of time humming like god through the fluorescents as the stickup artists tell me to kneel to leave no witness as the scene plays out in living color on the security monitor They take the tape so their friends can see them on TV

Message no. 2342: posted by Michelle Rogge Gannon (mrogge) Sat Jul 01, 2000 09:27

The Vermillion Literary Project invites you to submit your poems, short stories, creative non-fiction (essays), and black-and-white artwork for its annual literary magazine. Submissions from everywhere are welcome, but we give special preference to works with a South Dakota or Midwestern/Western connection.

All written works should be typed, with the author's name, mailing address, email address (optional), and phone number printed on the first page of EACH work. Works are not returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Works may also be submitted electronically at proflit@usd.edu. The deadline for submissions is December 31, 2000.

Notices of acceptance/rejection are sent out in April/May of each year. The only form of payment is a copy of the magazine.

The Vermillion Literary Project is a student literary organization at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion. We publish an annual literary magazine, maintain a Web site (http://www.usd.edu/~proflit), hold a weekly radio show, and put on literary events such as poetry readings and a three-hour short story contest. For additional information, contact faculty advisor Michelle Rogge Gannon at mrogge@usd.edu.
knew that students best learn how to produce a literary magazine by judging the submissions on their own. Surprisingly—or perhaps not—the results are usually good.

In February, I saw the list of submissions that our editor-in-chief had selected. I was delighted to see that it included Wes Zeigler's poem! Even though our magazine tends to have somewhat of a rural or western emphasis, being located where we are, this poem spoke to them. Certainly, they all knew what a 7-11 was and understood what this kind of crime might be like, even if they had not directly experienced anything like it. Courtney Krugman, this year's editor-in-chief, had carefully thought through the location of each work and placed “7-11” on the very last page of submissions; it was a powerful final statement for our literary magazine.

Upon reflection, I was amazed to think about the path that this poem had traveled, beginning with its conception in an Arkansas teacher's mind. No doubt, Wes then shared his poem with his fellow teachers at the Little Rock Writing Project. At some point, he posted it online in the E-Anthology and, months later, perhaps after a bit of rumination, submitted it to the Vermillion Literary Project in South Dakota for eventual publication in its magazine.

The magic of the National Writing Project's E-Anthology allowed us to make this unexpected connection. In this online space, we were able to come together—TCS from sites all over—to share ideas and writings, to make discoveries about ourselves, and to connect with each other in ways that otherwise might not be possible. Who could have imagined that a TC from the Little Rock Writing Project and a South Dakota university literary magazine, via the Dakota Writing Project, might connect in this way?

I hope that even more sites will participate in NWP's 2001 E-Anthology this summer. It will be in a new online space, but it will work in much the same way as before, with TCS from all over the country posting writings and sharing ideas about the teaching of writing online—and who knows what else? Who knows what kinds of discoveries—what kinds of connections—you and your fellow TCS might make? It is an opportunity that no site should pass up.

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