



NYSEC NEWS

Crutcher Captivates NYSEC Through Humor and Heroes

At the recent NYSEC Conference held in October, YA author Chris Crutcher entertained his large audience of English educators with touching stories and heart-felt encouragement. Crutcher, author of many popular YA novels, including, *Anger Management*, *Deadline*, and *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*, drew upon his own life story to explain the background for his books.

His captivating reveries, however, were mixed with frequent encouragement to his audience of English teachers—teachers who often find themselves beleaguered with draconian testing and nonsensical bureaucracy. For example, during one segment of his talk, he paused to say, “If there’s no you,” (pointing to the teachers in the room), “there’s no us,” (referring to his fellow writers).

Crutcher revealed to his audience that many of his stories come from his background as a sociologist/psychologist. He began his career working with students in an alternative school, as well as in a mental health center. “I was in the heart of good story country,” he admitted. “Every one of my kids had a story, and from them I learned true heroism.”

It surprised no one in the room to learn that one of his favorite characters in fiction is the smart-ass kid. We did learn, however, that this smart-ass behavior is often a response to some enormous problem. For example, his character in *Deadline* is staring down a deadly form of leukemia. In his talk, Crutcher paused for a moment to share one of his many aphorisms: “If you want to make life important . . . shorten it.” For this novel, Crutcher knew he had to harness the power of grief. He felt that because of the challenge faced by his teenage protagonist, “I’ve got to get this right.”

He also admitted that he also has to “go down the comedy avenue, so that you’ll let me go down the tragedy avenue.” And clearly, the frequent outbursts of laughter from the audience demonstrated Crutcher’s mastery of the comedic outlook.

Another favorite for Crutcher is the dweeb character. As an example, Crutcher read from his novel a narrative of a young kid who treasured his glow-in-the-dark Jesus statue. But when his brother broke it, knocking off the “J”, the older brother convinced him that Jesus himself also had an older brother . . . named “ESUS.”

Nearing the end of his time at the podium, Crutcher wrapped up his talk by reminding us of the contract that he has with teachers: “I will tell you the best story I can tell. You bring your students.”

And finally, in solidarity with the plight of teachers in New York State, Crutcher encouraged his audience to “Fight through the testing, and let education happen.”

By: John Harmon



Winter 2015



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President's Message



STRENGTH

NYSEC President, Louisa Kramer-Vida

There is strength in numbers. There is strength in quality. There is strength in purpose.

As the incoming 2015-2016 NYSEC President, my primary goal this year is to strengthen an already strong organization. Our recent convention attested to our strength in numbers as over 450 professionals attended our 65th annual conference. Quality was evident in presentations made by our four keynote speakers, our 105 session presenters, and our 50 award winners. Evaluations from the attendees and materials supplied by the award winners attest to this statement.

But the most important part of the conference was our own personal purpose for being there. Whether it was a desire for up-to-date professional development or that we felt valued when others appreciated the units we had developed for our students, we came to NYSEC with a purpose, and that made us stronger educators when we returned to our classrooms.

This year's theme emphasized building skill and nurturing will through reading, seen by our presenters as a core means of both acquiring knowledge and living vicariously. However, the individual strengths of our presenters also brought to the fore components of skill building and will-nurturing through math, social studies, and even through test-taking! As part of our 21st century existence, we have expanded the concept of reading beyond making meaning from printed text to comprehension of and through such formats as reading structure in an art or architecture class, or on-line engagement with numerous types of electronic text.

Next year, we want to expand the discussion. We see literacy as sitting at the intersection of both story and information, but maybe your strengths lead you to see it in a different way? Or maybe you don't see story and information intersecting at all? We are looking forward to your use of your own unique capabilities to share with the rest of us how you experience literacy. Next years' keynoters - Alice Hoffman, Kylene Beers, Ernest Morrell, and Lester Laminack - may agree or disagree on what literacy means to them considering the strengths of their diverse backgrounds, but I am sure they will present us with good stories that will relay their strong beliefs about the information they have received and given through their own versions of text.



President's Message (Continued)

Pay it forward. Ask a friend to join NYSEC. Our strength in numbers will increase.

Send in a proposal to present a session or a packet to be considered for an award as a program or an educator of excellence. Our quality of content will be strengthened. Apply for a mini-grant and maybe your own dream program will be realized. Your curriculum may become stronger. Write an article for *The English Record* or the *NYSEC News* and strengthen the quality of our publications.

NYSEC's purpose is to strengthen you as an individual ELA educator. Cumulatively, your individual strength makes our organization strong. Get involved. Bring in others. Strengthen all of us.

By: Louisa Kramer-Vida, Ed. D.

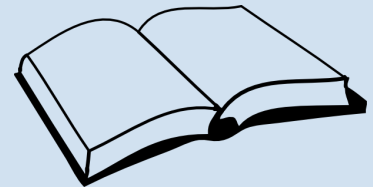
NYSEC 2015-16 President



Literacy:

***At the Intersection of
Story and Information***

October 19 – 21, 2016



The Albany Marriott Hotel

***Click the link below for direct access to the 2016
Conference Proposal Form.***

<http://www.nysecteach.org/workshop-program-proposal.html>



2015 NYSEC Conference Award Photos



Fellow Award Recipient, Janet Matthews



Lori Lebel receives the Ruth Everett Award



Christine Zandstra honored with President's Award



Past Presidents, Larry Butti, John Harmon and Susan Kelly presenting the Fellow Award



Marilyn Norton receives Conference Chair Award



Educators of Excellence, Middle School



Kjersti Van Slyke-Briggs presents The English Record's Article of the Year Award to Julene Waffle

Well Done



More 2015 NYSEC Conference Award Photos!



Educators of Excellence, High School



Excellence in Administration



Educators of Excellence, Elementary



Educators of Excellence, College



Collaborators of Excellence



Program of Excellence



Program of Excellence



Collaborators of Excellence



NYSEC Conference Featured Author: Pam Allyn

Pam Allyn is an expert in the area of literacy, a writer, and the executive director of "LitLife and LitWorld." Her presentation as a featured speaker at the NYSEC conference in October illustrated her skill as a dynamic speaker who can relate to and engage a room full of educators. She began with a discussion of the CCLS and said, "I believe in the writing of standards. They raise us up as teachers." She also addressed the notion that literacy is about everything and that it is the most flexible of disciplines. Allyn's message was that she sees teachers as mentors and coaches who introduce students to text. She believes in the authenticity of student voices and that the world is a personalized journey for all our students. No one can approach a text without bringing that personalized journey along for the ride.



Next, Allyn offered her top ten ways to transform teaching and learning for the new era. Her top ten includes:

1. Make independent reading matter (this year more than ever before).

Allyn discussed the use of a LitWheel with six spokes. The spokes are: Enjoyment/Engagement, Stamina, Fluency/Vocabulary, Comprehension/Critical Thinking, Sense of Self/Identity as a Reader, and Collaborative Conversation/Community.

2. Absorb students in close reading.

She noted that "close reading allows students to savor a text."

3. Hug the text.

Allyn wants students to get close to the text and take time consider point of view. Here she suggested educators use #weneedmorediversebooks to introduce students to different perspectives, and share them with others in the field.

4. Forge Powerful Reading and Writing Connections.

5. Practice writing across text types (narrative, argument, informational).

6. Give writers purpose and an authentic audience.

7. Use literary expertise in the content areas.

"We are all teachers of reading. We need to be a collaborative community." Allyn mentioned Academic Vocabulary as a way to get this collaboration going in other disciplines.

8. Express ideas as speakers and listeners.

Allyn referred to her late father and how he taught her to be a skilled listener. She recalled him talking with people he knew in the grocery store. When she asked why he said so little, her father claimed it was because he asks questions and listens to the answers. He knew that because he asked questions, he walked away from conversations with a wealth of knowledge, while the person he listened to knew nothing.

9. Use technology to access texts.

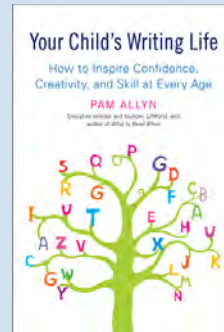
10. Engage ELL students.

Allyn's comment on ELL students was one all those in attendance were still pondering as they left the room. She remarked, "All students are English language learners."

As she closed, the audience furiously scribbled in their notebooks Pam Allyn's mention of World Read Aloud Day on March 4th and her website www.litworld.org. Allyn's fresh, optimistic perspective on teaching literacy was the ideal way to end day one of the 2015 NYSEC conference.

By: Jen Mathieson

Olean High School





Keynote Speaker Linda Rief - "Tell Me Your Story."

The recurring motif in Linda Rief's Keynote Address at the NYSEC Conference on Friday, October 16, was the concept of story. Stories, she said, are "what make us human and what connect us to each other." Rief would agree with Tim O'Brien's thought from *The Things They Carried*: "Stories can save our lives."

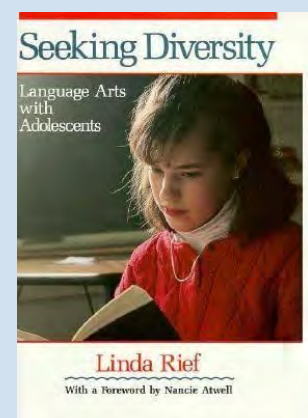
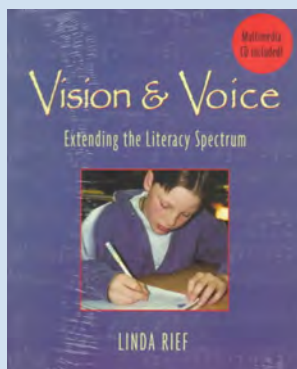
Rief acknowledged surprisingly that she "never wanted to be a teacher." At the University of New Hampshire, she studied engineering, one of two women in the engineering program. There she met her husband and commenced years of travel. Given the opportunity to serve as an aid in a middle school, she realized in one day that "I wanted to become a teacher." Late for her first class in the Master's Program in Education at UNH, she took the seat next to the professor who would become an inspiration: Donald Graves.

Once ignited by the program at UNH and by fellow teachers, she quickly became a proponent of opening up the world of reading and writing to her middle school students. Her students are given their choice of reading material and presented with a range of writing opportunities that fuel a love of writing. She even encourages students to draw in both their response to literature and in their own creations.

As an example of what students can do, she presented the story of Lucas, who created a storyboard and then a film called "The Wonders of Wandering." In this assignment that covered eight months, Lucas traveled and filmed his travels and showed the viewer that traveling "gives you a new perspective, makes your mind more aware of the present moment." In this wonderful short film, Lucas concludes with, "It is the journey that matters, not the destination."

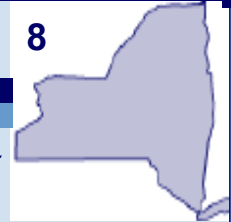
In his Odyssean awareness, Lucas shows what can happen if students have a wise mentor like Linda Rief. When they do, they rise to heights that make us aware of the rich possibilities within each student. They just need the opportunity. Teachers like Linda Rief give them that chance.

By: Paul O'Brien





News From the VP SECONDARY



Today's Classroom

When I was in school, I handed in work written in script, and I learned to type on an electric typewriter and an Apple IIe computer. We read heavy textbooks and libraries and the encyclopedia set my parents bought from a traveling salesman were my only ways to research. There was no such thing as Google and the only kind of board in the classroom was a simple chalk board. Today's students have so much more than I had: so many more opportunities, so much more technology, so much more information at their fingertips, more than I could have ever imagined.

Today, I often have pre-service teachers learn in my room, and even from the time they graduated, the classroom has changed as well. Rebecca from SUNY Oneonta said, "When I was in 10th grade, SMART Boards were only beginning to be utilized . . . All of our written assignments were hand-scripted; I didn't even begin to use the computer lab for formal assignments until I began writing my college admissions essays."

Another SUNY Oneonta student, Kelly, said, "When I was in high school there were only a select few classrooms that had a SMART Board—we relied on white boards and the old-fashioned blackboards. Now, some schools are giving students their own laptops at the beginning of the year; there are [class] sets of iPads, every room has a SMARTboard, and students are utilizing websites such as Padlet, VoiceThread, and Today's Meet to publish their work and easily collaborate with their peers even outside of the classroom."

When I first started teaching, I ideally thought that one of my primary jobs as a teacher was to expose my students to life and the world and experiences they had not had before that could shape them in positive ways and mold them into responsible global citizens. Today, our students are being exposed to the world every day in all sorts of ways and almost all of these experiences are happening outside the classroom: There are over one billion Facebook users, over 500 million tweets per day, and 100 million people are on Instagram. In addition there are over 3.5 billion Google searches each day. Our students are connected to the world in more ways than we ever thought possible.

Because of that, it is no wonder 21st Century Skills needed to be defined and emphasized in recent years. Kelly said, "Activities that I see in the ELA classroom [today] now focus a lot more on skills [of] collaboration, and they especially focus on student-centered use of technology." These changes are important and good.

However, one thing that has not changed is the art and the skills that ELA teachers and their students explore every day. The texts we read, "and how they are read . . . [and] close readings, making inferences from the texts, and producing coherent pieces of written work that connect ideas together are exactly what we were always doing in the ELA classroom," Kelly also said.

It is refreshing to know that in spite of all the changes we are seeing in education and in technology and how our students survey the world around them today, our ELA hearts are still the same, and our foundations are still unshaken.

—Julene Waffle, Secondary VP



2016 Slate of Officers



Julene Waffle, VP Secondary, Louisa Kramer-Vida, President, Michelle Peterson, 2016 Conference Chair and VP Elementary, Ella Briand, Secretary, Michelle Kaprinski, President-Elect, Sara Taveniere-VP Middle and Stephanie Del Valle-Treasurer

Not pictured: Patti Rand, VP College and Victor Jaccarino, VP Administration

We are looking forward to a great year!

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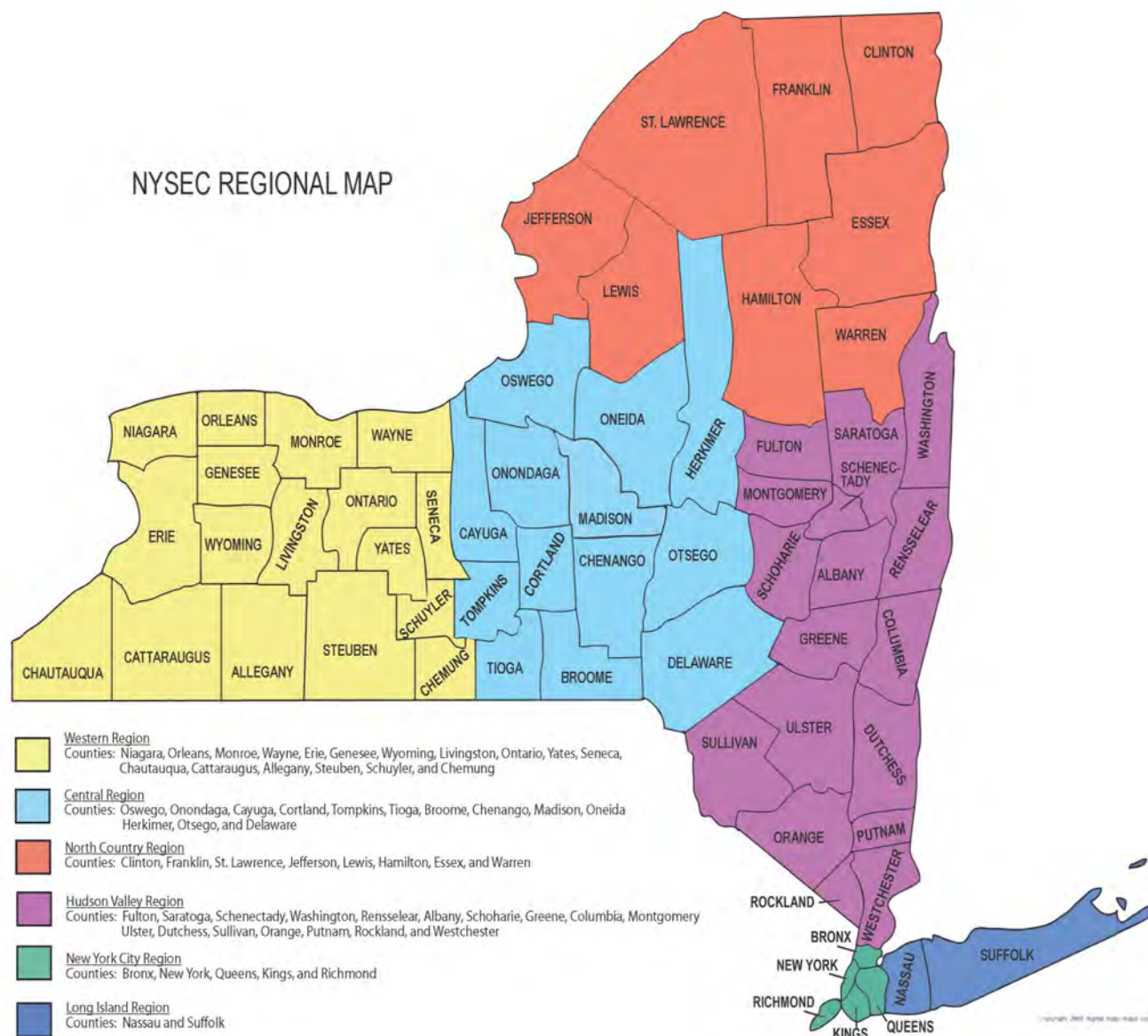




MEET OUR NYSEC REGIONAL DIRECTORS!

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NYSEC REGIONAL MAP



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Teach Them So They Want More

Laura Robb: “Did you know I can operate? I will do it for half price. I can do it. Just give me the scalpel. I watch *Grey’s Anatomy*; I see what goes on inside the OR . . . I can do it. We have people making education law and reforms who do not have education backgrounds, who don’t know what it is like to be a teacher.” Laura Robb spoke with feisty spirit in her keynote address at NYSEC’s 2015 annual conference in October. She spoke the sometimes uncomfortable truth about the state of education in America right now. However, instead of doom and gloom and playing the damsel in distress, she spoke of hope and kindness, inspiration and fervor, excitement and passion.

Throughout her keynote, Robb rallied the troops, called for a different kind of reform. Rather than emphasize test scores and glorify the red tape that the state offers as sound educational practice, she encouraged teachers to not forget why they became teachers. She quoted one of her former students, saying teachers, instead of teaching to the tests and concentrating on the State’s very teacher-centered data outcomes, should rather “teach so you touch students’ hearts and make them want more.”

In addition to promoting student-centered classrooms and independent reading, Robb promoted student choice, and allowing students to bring themselves into the learning process because, after all, “when you let kids choose, kids invest.” She also said we cannot ignore who students are when teaching; “we are all sums of our experiences. We are our background experiences. We should not be ignoring students’ backgrounds” when discovering new learning.

Most importantly, Robb encouraged teachers to remember that “we are here for the children! Not the State or Federal Education Departments. Today’s tests are boxing up thinking. We don’t want to be convergent. Be divergent. Be a radical! Do what you must for half a period, but then for the other half, get your students in the flow!” The best we can do for our students is allow them to be active learners alongside us. The best way to do this is to

- *Read extensively*
- *Collaborate much*
- *Create more*
- *Be actively involved and allow students to be actively and intricately involved as well*
- *Be self-evaluatory; find out what is fun for students, what engages them*
- *Make learning relevant. The standards have “diminished poetry and narrative,” but Robb reminded us that “we are stories. We need them.” We can’t possibly be able to learn from the things we read unless we can relate them to and apply them to our own lives.*
- *Promote Relationships because people matter, students matter, not data*

Pointing out that our country spends 36 million annually on average per state on testing, she also pointed toward her hope for a better future for the country where the people in charge of educational law will realize that we “need less money on tests and more money for books.” No one wants more tests, but all students want more engagement, excitement, relationships, collaboration, creativity, activity, relevance, and learning flow. Laura Robb was right on when she said, “Ask yourself this: ‘Would I do it?’ If the answer is no, then don’t ask the kids to do it.” Teachers need to make a difference by being student advocates. Robb’s final charge was for all teachers to remember that children are why teachers become teachers. Students are what matter, not the test scores or the APPR or the mandates forced on us all; it is the children; it has always been the children at the heart of our work and at the core of our passions.

By: Julene Waffle, VP Secondary





The English Record— Call for Manuscripts

Aims

The English Record publishes original peer reviewed contributions that focus on the field of English education. *The English Record* features articles on pedagogy, essays, commentaries, program descriptions, reflective narratives, book reviews and occasional student work. Please check the website, the newsletter and the journal call page for more information regarding upcoming calls for manuscripts.

Submissions

Manuscripts and inquires should be submitted electronically to Dr. Kjersti VanSlyke-Briggs via e-mail at: englishrecord@oneonta.edu

Manuscripts should be prepared using MS Word. All parts of the manuscript should be double spaced. Please number all pages consecutively. Each manuscript should include a cover sheet with the author's name, affiliation, position, a brief two or three line author bio, preferred mailing address, telephone and e-mail address.

Identifying information should not appear elsewhere in the manuscript. Please include an abstract on the cover page of no more than 100 words. Manuscripts must conform to APA standards. Manuscripts that do not utilize APA will be returned.

All images, tables, figures and additional materials should be sent as separate files with a figure heading and notation within the manuscript for preferred placement.

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Proofs and Complimentary Copies

A proof will be sent for accepted manuscripts to the author for review. Each corresponding author will receive a copy of the issue after publication.





MORE 2015 CONFERENCE PHOTOS!



NYSEC 2015

Special thank you to:

Pearson for sponsoring Pam Allyn and the Administrator Networking Session

Scholastic for sponsoring Laura Robb's keynote address, workshop and book signing

Bedford, Freeman and Worth for sponsoring Cocktails and Conversation/Raffle Drawing



Editor's Notes

We always tell our students that they will get more out of a text after the second read or third or more. I have read "Heart of a Teacher" several times, and it resonates differently with me with each attempt. The first time I read it, I thought of 8th Graders and high school students I've taught over the years. The second time I read it with the lens of an administrator and reflected on my work with teachers. The third time I read it from a parent perspective, hoping that I am raising my daughter to be a loving and confident young woman. And most recently, I read the poem as a learner, feeling grateful for the mentors I have today and how they continue to be my biggest cheerleaders as I pursue my own dreams. I challenge you to read this poem more than once and to savor the many ways it applies to your world.

Michelle Kaprinski, Editor



Contributors to this issue include:

**John Harmon, Louisa Kramer-Vida, Jen Mathieson, Paul O'Brien,
Michelle Peterson, Kjersti VanSlyke-Briggs, Julene Waffle**

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Heart of a Teacher by Paula J. Fox

The child arrives like a mystery box...
with puzzle pieces inside
some of the pieces are broken or missing...
and others just seem to hide
But the HEART of a teacher can sort them
out...
and help the child to see
the potential for greatness he has within...
a picture of what he can be
Her goal isn't just to teach knowledge...
by filling the box with more parts
it's putting the pieces together...
to create a work of art.
The process is painfully slow at times...
some need more help than others
each child is a work in progress...
with assorted shapes and colors
First she creates a classroom...
where the child can feel safe in school
where he never feels threatened or afraid to
try...
and kindness is always the rule
She knows that a child can achieve
much more when he feels secure inside
when he's valued and loved...and believes in
himself ...
and he has a sense of pride
She models and teaches good character...
and respect for one another
how to focus on strengths...not weaknesses
and how to encourage each other
She gives the child the freedom he needs...
to make choices on his own
so he learns to become more responsible...
and is able to stand alone
He's taught to be strong and think for himself...
as his soul and spirit heal
and the puzzle that's taking shape inside...
has a much more positive feel
The child discovers the joy that comes...
from learning something new...
and his vision grows as he begins
to see all the things he can do
A picture is formed as more pieces fit...
an image of the child within
with greater strength and confidence...
and a belief that he can win!
All because a hero was there...
in the HEART of a teacher who cared
enabling the child to become much more...
than he ever imagined...or dared
A teacher with a HEART for her children...
knows what teaching is all about
she may not have all the answers...
but on this...she has no doubt
When asked which subjects she loved to teach,
she answered this way and smiled...
"It's not the subjects that matter...
"It's all about teaching the CHILD."