EDITOR’S NOTE: REMEMBERING WENDY BISHOP

The news of Wendy Bishop’s death on November 21, 2003 of complications from leukemia came in the form of an email. I remember staring at my computer screen, feeling speechless with grief, unable to move, unable to think, yet knowing that I had to teach class in ten minutes. If ever I needed Wendy it was now: no one could bring someone from silence into words like Wendy could. A few minutes later, I found myself standing in front of my first-year composition class, trying to keep my mind on my students as I introduced the final assignment of the semester—a rhetorical revision—which required students to revise their traditional academic argument into a piece of public discourse: a website, billboard, pamphlet, television commercial. The assignment, I realized at that moment, owed a great debt to Wendy’s own radical revision assignment, where students would revise their narratives into poems written on paper skeletons, or turn their arguments into crushed glass mosaics or country-music songs. Sharing her assignments (and her students’ response to them) was just one way Wendy shared her own incredible creative energy, an energy that suffused her teaching of writing at all levels, her own writing in multiple genres, and her many, many friendships. As a colleague of Wendy’s at Florida State for six years, I felt that energy radiate from her daily.

In preparation for Wendy’s memorial at the 2004 CCCCs in San Antonio, I reread several of the articles she published in CS in the 1990’s. What struck me was the range of her interests, the range of her writing voice. We all know that about Wendy, of course, but many of us tend to think of a journal as rather monovocal—addressing a limited subject matter to a limited audience. As the field of composition has matured, each journal has staked out its own territory. For the journal Composition Studies, that territory might be called “the theory and practice of writing instruction,” with an emphasis on the “and.” As many of you who visited the Composition Studies booth at CCCCs this year told us, you’re grateful for a place where you can still read about what people do in their classrooms, where you can still read thoughtful analyses of student texts.

In rereading Wendy’s contributions to the journal—from an ethnographic study of experienced teachers returning to graduate school, to a co-authored analysis of the journals she kept for a year as Florida State’s WPA, to an exploration of collaboratively authored poems, to an email interview with Winston Weathers on alternate style—I was reminded again of the expansive-
ness of that territory called “the theory and practice of writing instruction.” Wendy’s work certainly exemplified this expansiveness. And it is this legacy of expansiveness that we hope to carry on in CS, with pieces like Shelley Reid’s challenge to privilege inquiry over coverage in TA-training courses, with Kate Ryan’s revisioning of memory as important to students’ invention of ideas, with Mark Panek’s argument that structured reading groups can help culturally diverse students make their own place in the university, and with Lena Ampadu’s exploration of how her Creole/French/African American language heritage informs her use of oral texts to advance her students’ literacy practices.

When I was considering becoming co-author of Composition Studies, I sought Wendy’s advice. Of course she told me to do it, commenting on how much she liked that “funky little journal.” It pleases me to think she’d like this issue as well.

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WORKS CITED