

## Acceptance Speech

### Women's Caucus

#### *Kathy Connors Teaching Award*

The Kathy Connors Teaching Award honors an outstanding art teacher / educator who is recognized by students, colleagues, and supervisors as someone who consistently inspires and mentors students in a cooperative, collegial, collaborative and nurturing manner.

NAEA Conference, April 2009

Sheri R. Klein

Thank you Karen (Keifer-Boyd) for your kind introduction. I also want to thank Read Diket for her continuous friendship, support, and encouragement over the years—Read was my very first friend in art education when I met her while we were both students at the University of Georgia, Athens.

I graciously and humbly accept the *Kathy Connors Teaching Award* and I am honored to receive this award from peers and to be recognized for what I consider to be 'doing my job.' I am also humbled to receive an award that serves as a memory to honor an art educator who embodied a generous spirit.

To introduce myself, I am from Chicago and grew up in a working class family. I am proud to say that I attended and graduated from the Chicago Public Schools. As a child, I drew a lot outside of school, as the elementary school I attended did not have an art teacher; art instruction was the responsibility of the classroom teacher.

In the sixth grade, one of my teachers, Mrs. Bristol, made me get up in front of the class and explain why I had signed my drawing. I explained to her that I signed it because I was an artist—and that's what artists do. I wanted very much to become a fashion designer and in my 7<sup>th</sup> grade essay, I wrote that I wanted to be an artist and a teacher.

So, looking back, I have merged my two loves—art and teaching—in my role as an art educator today.

In high school, I did have art classes, but they were not particularly challenging or satisfying; we mostly created color wheels and astrology symbols—very 1970s!

But, I continued to work outside of school on paintings and drawings on my own (see below) and I taught myself how to paint with oils. My Dole pineapple painting is my only surviving art work from high school.



"Dole" ca. 1973 oil on canvas 18 x 24 in.  
Collection of Carmen Augustin, Chicago, IL

Passionate about pursuing art, I did find my way to study art at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) where I earned a B.F.A. and an M.F.A. in painting and drawing. There I was blessed with having wonderful teachers and mentors who gave me the proper balance of structure and autonomy and critical feedback and support.

I came to advanced study in art education from my work as a practicing and exhibiting

artist and teaching art in a variety of contexts. While pursuing my doctorate in art education at Indiana University, Bloomington, I also was blessed to have wonderful mentors and teachers. It was at IU that I learned what it means to be a part of a professional community, and there I learned the importance of being actively involved and committed to the profession of art education.

I have been higher education for seventeen years now and have taught studio art and art education at the undergraduate level as well as graduate level courses in education. My philosophy of teaching has always been to find out who students are, and to help them become more of who they are.



Teaching art education methods at UW-Stout

And, throughout my academic life, I have been gifted with mentors at the exact times I have needed them. These mentors have guided me personally and professionally through intervening with the right words or actions at precisely the right moments. Some of my mentors have also provided me with a certain amount of obstacles, roadblocks, and resistance for which I had to overcome. These mentors have also been

extremely valuable for my professional growth.

My professional growth is the result of collaborations, mentor/mentee relationships and the generosity of colleagues, teachers, and students who over the years have shared their expertise, wisdom, faith, humor, warmth, encouragement and excitement for teaching, learning, and art. I acknowledge all these individuals with much gratitude.

In both formal and informal ways I have been a mentor to new faculty, graduate students, and pre-service teachers. As an academic, I set a professional priority to collaborate with colleagues and to mentor others as much as possible. In many instances collaboration and mentoring opportunities have found me. I have found much satisfaction, for example, in working with local area art teachers--and classroom teachers in Mexico to explore holistic education applications for their practice.



Sheri and workshop participants at the Holistic Education Conference/Workshop, Guadalajara, MX, 2008

Over the years, I have been more increasingly interested in exploring the spiritual dimensions of teaching with my students with the aim of greater self-awareness, self-knowledge and understanding how matters of the heart (courage, devotion, fortitude, generosity,

humility, justice, kindness, and love) really matter in one's professional and personal life.

Through my union work, I have also been able to help other faculty, particularly women, to become more self-aware, skillful at self-preservation and maintaining a sense of dignity through difficult circumstances. In doing so, I have found great satisfaction in seeing colleagues survive traumatic workplace experiences and evolve personally and professionally. I am proud to say that I proposed and was successful at getting our TAUWP Local 3535 to pass an anti-bullying resolution.

Finally, it has been my collaborative work with K-12 art teachers that has been very rewarding and gives me a sense of pride. For six years, I received multi-year UW-system grants and worked with eight art teachers in two WI districts to find ways to integrate technology into their curriculum and their professional development processes. The outcomes of these multi-year grants included teacher in-service, new equipment and computers, input from art education consultants, the creation of K-12 student and teacher e-portfolios, the creation of a technology plan for one of the districts, and a website for art educators on the subject of e-portfolio development for art educators [www.uwstout.edu/art/artedportfolios](http://www.uwstout.edu/art/artedportfolios)



Presenting on the e-portfolio grant project

My collaboration with art teachers was spurred by not only grant funding opportunities, but by my desire to connect with K-12 art teachers to better understand their professional and pedagogical concerns—so that I could better serve pre-service art teachers. I realized how important partnerships with art teachers are, how much work and trust it takes, and how important it is for art teachers to have a sustained professional and supportive network. Such a community model of professional development that focused on professional and pedagogical concerns offered us all opportunities for growth and creating stronger K-16 art programs.

From all my collaborative and mentoring work, I have learned what it means to live in a web of intricate mutuality—that our work depends on collaboration, mentoring, interdependence, and working together toward common goals.

Since my entry into teaching in higher education, there have been many changes. We live in some interesting and trying times now as educators. Some examples include the changing demographics of the student body in higher education, the corporate

presence and business models within higher education, standards driven teacher education, and increased distance education programs and courses. Furthermore, the longer that I am in higher education, I see more and more new faculty who are not equipped to handle and survive department politics—and more and more documented cases of workplace aggression affecting women academics and that results in the interruption and annihilation of their careers and professional work.

What does this have to do with teaching, mentoring and collaboration? All of these changes have presented both challenges and opportunities for educators in how they teach, mentor, and collaborate.

I think it is relevant to say here in the context of this Women's Caucus event that according to statistics 38% of all faculty are women, women are bullied 57% of the time on the job, that women bully other women in 71% of the cases, and 75% of all the grievance cases in WI in the UW system are with female academics. The point here is that the mentoring of women academics is critical to their longevity and productivity as academics; that intervening on behalf of women colleagues who are experiencing difficulty is a professional obligation and a moral imperative. We are losing and have lost good colleagues who have the potential to be excellent teachers, researchers, mentors and collaborators.

We also need to address within doctoral programs the kinds of tensions and conflicts that permeate within higher education work contexts, and more specifically, within the contexts that art educators teach in. Those seeking positions within higher education need to learn strategies for survival, success, as well as for being agents of change.

These challenging times also present us with numerous opportunities:

- To find ways to adapt to changing times and circumstances without losing our integrity, our sense of purpose, hope, and our shared visions
- To be supportive of colleagues and students (particularly female) in times of transition, trouble, and in times of celebration
- To find ways to stay connected and committed to issues that matter to us and together to work for change that we alone could not attempt or complete
- To use technology in ways that support collaboration in times of shrinking budgets

So, to conclude, I will say that teaching and mentoring is a work-in-progress and an art-full process that depends on us being present, having an open heart, and thinking big. As I reflect on the Medicine Wheel, as a metaphor for this process, for it is a symbol for personal transformation, I look to the East where the sun rises and where new beginnings are born.

I am encouraged by this award to continue in the work I have been doing, to set forth on new paths and beginnings, and to do so with an open heart.

There is a quote above my desk that reads "Well-behaved women rarely make history."

So, I encourage you all to misbehave.

Thank you all very much.



I dedicate this acceptance speech to Ray Yoshida (1930-2009) painting and drawing teacher at the School of the Art Institute who was an extraordinary teacher and artist.