

Fall 2008

Teaching Science in the Bible Belt of the South

Carole Crosby Gilbert

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TEACHING SCIENCE IN THE BIBLE BELT OF THE SOUTH

by

CAROLE CROSBY GILBERT

(Under the Direction of Ming Fang He)

ABSTRACT

This is an inquiry that utilizes “personal ~ passionate ~ participatory research” (He & Phillion, 2008) to delve into the conflicting experiences encountered by science educators as they teach in the predominantly Christian environment of the rural South. Science standards require teachers to instruct students about scientific concepts that directly contradict theological ideology. Veteran and new teachers alike skate the edges of the chasm that separate science and religion in the performance of their job which is complicated by the homogeneity of the population. Church involvement is an integral part of this community. Christian churches anchor their respective communities providing support and guidance for members throughout all life events. The church family melds with the biological family to perpetuate the life cycle of salvation, hard work, and reward in heaven.

Like many of my colleagues, I graduated from the same high school at which I teach. Returning to the same area or never leaving is a pattern that is often repeated by the students that we teach. It was the writings of Watkins (2001), Freire (2004) and Wink (2005) that began my critical examination of my own education and that which I was imposing upon my students. Issues of class and gender surfaced as I scrutinized my community and reflected on my own life. My world is one that idealizes anti-intellectualism as described by Hofstadter (1964).

The work of He (1998, 2003) and He & Phillion (2008) was instrumental in illustrating the power of the fictionalized narrative in conveying the lived experience. I used a series of narratives to convey the perspectives that are present in the science classrooms and in the individuals of the community. My insider status provided me with the means to conduct this study using autobiographical reflection. Each of the characters in the narratives represents a composite of individuals. The data used to design the composite characters was obtained by observation of the students, teachers, and general population of the community. The voice that you hear is mine as I attempt to depict life in this rural setting.

INDEX WORDS: Critical theory, Gender, Class, Anti-intellectualism, Fictionalized Narrative, Autobiographical, Religion

TEACHING SCIENCE IN THE BIBLE BELT OF THE SOUTH

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

2008

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TEACHING SCIENCE IN THE BIBLE BELT OF THE SOUTH

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Electronic Version Approved:

December, 2008

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my family who reminds me daily why life is important. Don, you have been my best friend and staunchest supporter. Thank you for all the roses that you cut from the garden to brighten my day. To my sons, Clay, Brad and Blake, I thank you for understanding that sometimes I had more homework than you. I am grateful for all the times that you let me join in your ball games even if it was for just a play or two.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I know that I am not receiving a Grammy for this work, but I feel like I could make a speech. None of this work would have been possible without Dr. Ming Fang He. Your support began early when you encouraged our group of graduate students to attend AAACS and AERA in Chicago. It was my first experience attending an educational conference. I was overwhelmed when you volunteered to chair my committee as we jaywalked across Wacker Street; I'm just glad that single speeding car didn't hit me as I tottered, in my elation, across the street, oblivious to my surroundings. It seems like the time has passed as quickly as that speeding car. I appreciate the care and concern that you have for your students. You always look for the best in people and they find a way to give it to you.

To my committee members, Dr. John Weaver, Dr. Daniel Chapman, and Dr. William Ayers, I thank you so much for your patience and participation in this venture. Dr. Weaver, you opened my eyes to a side of science that I had never considered. I applaud your voracious appetite for knowledge that you so willingly share with your students. Dr. Chapman, I am grateful to you for your willingness to take on another responsibility in spite of your busy schedule. Dr. Ayers, you have an uncanny ability to put people at ease. You enriched my life with each conversation that we shared.

This list would not be complete without crediting my academic sister, the other half of my brain, Angie Haynes. I am indebted to you for the jumpstart that began this undertaking and all the sparks of energy in between. We may have been quiet in class, but our conversations never ended until we unbuckled our seatbelts at home.

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PROLOGUE

Early in the school year, students scramble for a definition of science needed to complete a vocabulary assignment. The glossary of one science text book lists science as an “orderly search for answers to questions about nature” (Tropp & Friedl, 1991, p. 604). Science is not presented as a static subject, but one that changes with the application of the scientific method. The scientific method is taught as the basis of science study beginning in primary school and continues through high school. An idea is formulated. Then the idea is tested and revised. Generalizations arise from the observations. The invention of equipment to enhance human observational skills leads to new understandings. As equipment improves, more information ensues and more information leads to better equipment. This cycle of research, application, and technological development contributes to the evolving discipline. The mustiness of an old science book hints at an outdated life, but the pictures of the innovative technology featured on the pages signify the definitive lifespan of that particular volume.

I was at my parents’ country store when I first encountered the inevitable question of what I wanted to be when I grew up. The store acted like a community center. Folks would sit out front on seats salvaged from an old school bus. Conversations usually centered on the weather and the current state of the crops in the field. Children were not included in the adult conversations unless a question was addressed directly to you. Mainly you listened to how it was back in the day. I was surprised when Mr. Sellers, a store front regular, inquired into my future plans. Maybe he figured that I wanted to be a shopkeeper or farmer like my parents or maybe he couldn’t think of anything else to ask a nine year old. I answered “a scientist.”

“You want to be an astronaut?” he questioned.

I knew that he had seen me working on my paper lunar landing module. It was the heyday of the space race, “No sir. I want to study living things like frogs and plants.” We had a thriving frog population that feasted nightly on the insects drawn to the store lights. My escapades with taking frogs to church had gained me some notoriety in the community.

Mr. Sellers hooted, “You gonna gig frogs or work for a seed company. There’s plenty of frogs round here, but no seed companies. Who ever heard of someone making a living studying plants and critters?”

Ten years later my father made almost the same comment, “How is that going to help you get a job?” He questioned when I tried sharing information with him that I had learned in ecology. We talked about the different plants and animals with which we shared land, maybe more accurately from his point of view which poached upon “our land”. “I don’t see the point of you learning all that,” he concluded. Life cycles of the plants and animals were of no interest to him unless it could be turned into or improve a cash crop. He did not see a need to examine the interrelatedness of their existence to our own. Man was the dominant organism, with little respect or concern for the needs of another unless it was a marketable asset.

My second major foray back into higher education led me to the field of curriculum studies. Watkins (2001) challenged me to admit that much of my education had been based upon knowledge that would help me get a job. Through reading Freire (2004), I recognized the issues of power at work in our Southern society. I began to see the influence of those who were the designated as the “A team” (Wink, 2005, p. 100).

Children are trained to take their place in this society that perpetuates a lifestyle dominated by the Christian religion. It is a lifestyle that has little tolerance for the beliefs and viewpoints of others. Reasoning and analytical thought is deferred to those in the pulpit. There is little need for science. As in the natural world, those who stand apart from the norm are easy targets. In this environment as well, some use mimicry in an attempt to blend. A small population of dissenting voices cannot hamper the reproductive capabilities of the Christian religion. This is the life cycle of the South. Man is once again the dominant organism, but it is the Christian man.

CHAPTER 1 - CRITICAL LESSONS IN SPIRITUALITY

I think that I have always been skeptical where the church is involved. I do not ever remember hearing someone in my family speak against the church. Maybe it stemmed from a dislike of donning frilly dresses and too tight black-patent leather shoes.

Momma would call out from the back door of the store, “Let me see how you look, your Aunt Kitty will be here in a minute to get you.” Momma and Daddy kept the store open seven days a week so the responsibility of getting the children to church fell first to my grandfather - Papa - and later to Aunt Kitty. Papa’s pre-church inspections seemed rigorous but always ended with a hug and a dab of Grandma’s perfume. Our ritualistic application of the perfume began early one Sunday morning as I watched Papa finish shaving. I waited for him to splash the “Old Spice” in his hand and smooth it on his cheeks.

“You smell nice, but I just smell like me.”

“We can fix that,” Papa said. He opened door on the medicine cabinet and brought out a beautiful glass bottle. The light reflected off each of the sides where the glass was cut. This must be way that diamonds shine, I thought to myself. I had never seen a diamond with any size to it. Momma’s wedding ring had stars etched into the band with small chips inside. Nothing like the big diamond rings that were in the catalog that came from Chicago each year.

“Papa, does Grandma mind me wearing her perfume now that she is in heaven?” I thought he must have been scared that she would be mad because his eyes looked funny. I thought it might be best to wait till later to ask my other questions. On the way to the

truck, I continued my inquiries. "Can she see me from heaven?" This question was answered patiently.

"I'm sure that she is watching over us just like she did when she was here with us," Papa patted me on the back as he replied.

"Is Grandma walking Princess?" Princess was my collie dog that had been run over by the Coke truck. The reply to the second question was scornful at my silly insinuation that dogs went to heaven with people. When Aunt Kitty took over the church duty, it never failed that I would be sent back to the kitchen to shine my shoes. In the movies, men sat in special chairs while Black men worked the creamy color into the leather and buffed until the shoe was shiny like new. My cleaning kit consisted of a biscuit and a paper towel. "Who ever heard of cleaning shoes with something from dinner? Does Momma just plan extra biscuits, so that I can be sent to do this?"

"Take off your shoes first, remember what happened one time," Momma called.

"Yes, ma'm, I won't get grease on my socks". Inside I fumed. Who makes these rules for church on what you wear and how you look?

Having cleaned my shoes and reported again for inspection, "There," she said. "You look nicer now; here is some money for Sunday school and church. Keep it in your pocketbook until the preacher asks for it." Then with stern, eye-to-eye, contact, final directions were issued "And Liz, NO frogs in your pocketbook. You know your Aunt is scared to death of them."

Part of me wanted to speak up and say that God made frogs too you know, but I figured that would be breaking the "Honour thy father and thy mother" Exodus 20:12 (KJV) rule which would NOT result in a sparing of the rod. With assurances that I would

not upset my Aunt and the congregation by bringing a friend along for the service, I was sent to church.

The cycle continued thirty years later. That same Aunt would visit on Saturday and say to me “Now, Liz, you know those boys need to be in church if you want them to grow up and be somebody.”

My response would be that I was not teaching them to be axe murderers. At this point, church remained a type of club that one could choose to join or not. Tithing was like country club dues with the golf course in heaven. As a parent, you always second guess your decisions. I should have recognized that I was selecting or opting out of those particular social circles for my children. Now as teens I see their exclusion from the church peer groups. I also recognize the political power of the relationships fostered in the church situations. Scholarship applicants list their church involvement and related community service. Instead of considering those having the fore thought to consider those aspects, I focused on what did I get from church and vacation bible school? Activities like making lambs from cotton balls and shellacking burnt-edged pictures on boards. It was an honor to be selected to be a flag bearer singing “Onward Christian soldier marching into battle”. Songs on the radio said “give peace a chance,” but that was not the station that my aunt listened to. The incongruity of church and its teachings grew as my young eyes took notice. Momma’s people came from the other end of the county. Even in this day of the family automobile most folks attended church close to home. It made it easier to be there on an almost every day basis. It was usually a special occasion or a funeral that took our entire family the 40 miles to Granny’s church. Momma’s face

was terse so I asked my sister, “Why are we all at Granny’s church and she is sitting silently with tears rolling down her face and it isn’t a funeral?”

“Shh !!, I’ll tell you later,” said my sister.

Usually Granny would sing the refrains to the hymns in a high voice that made me want to giggle. How did her parents know that she would sing like that when they named her “Birdie”? I got my backside warmed a few times until I learned to stifle my reactions to her singing. Later after the church service I learned that we were there to help oust the preacher. Momma had never moved her membership to the church nearest our house so she still had voting privileges there. Who did that new preacher man think he was to tell my Granny that because she was female that she could not pray or sing or have a say in the business end of church? My lessons on the moral teachings of the church continued at our local church. Our preacher of a few years was about to leave.

“Ride your bike with me to the church,” begged my best friend. I need to speak to the preacher. All of my friends had recently joined the church and had been baptized. I had wanted to join to be like them but Momma said it was something that you should feel in your heart and I reckon she could see right into mine. Rita and I were breathless when we reached the church. We had to ride fast, as we were not supposed to be on the highway with our bikes. Something didn’t seem quite right in the physical greeting between the young teen and this preacher man. I stepped back and watched as Rita hugged the preacher. She told him that she still loved him and she was sure that her sister did too. Karen had been crying in her room for days supposedly about her kinky hair that she couldn’t get straightened. I didn’t buy that story as her hair had always been that way. It wasn’t like she had just gotten a bad perm. I kept telling myself that the hug between

Rita and the preacher was like Daddy hugging me, but it tugged at my brain like a specter of something evil that my naïve mind couldn't quite identify. I slipped into the store hoping to snag a cold Coke undetected by Momma. It didn't work and the Piney Grove Inquisition began. Even with leaving out the details about the physical contact, Momma's eyes narrowed. She offered no counsel, but that wound up my church attendance for awhile.

Public arenas in cities headline upcoming bands and performers, but in our rural area the headliners are gospel sings and church revivals. A church revival provides an opportunity to hear different preachers speak. Sometimes the visiting preachers were retired from neighboring churches.

Aunt Kitty stopped by the store and said, "Brother Dwight will be speaking at the church this week. You know he and Papa are first cousins once removed. You all should go," she added.

"I'd like to go, Momma." I was hoping to get to sit with my friends on the back pew and avoid having to do closing chores at the store. I said this in front of Aunt Kitty knowing that Momma would be more likely to let me with a little pressure from her. I think that her mentioning Papa was a little pressure for me. Papa had been gone for about four years now. He had lived less than two years after Grandma's passing. Momma consented and Wednesday evening Aunt Kitty pulled up in front of the store in her new white Impala with the black vinyl top.

"Hurry up and get in, Sugar. We're just about late." She called from the open window.

We could hear the piano playing when we got out of the car. Aunt Kitty went on up to her usual pew, the second one on the right side, but I took a seat in the back. Even before DNA testing, there was no doubt that Brother Dwight and Papa were closely related. When I looked at Brother Dwight standing in the pulpit, it seemed that I could be looking at Papa. I closed my eyes seemingly in prayer, so I wouldn't have to look at him. But I could not shut out the sound of his voice. Memories are a funny thing. Being at that particular place, I could smell the "Old Spice", the buttermilk bread cooking and the earthy smell of the skins of red potatoes scraped with my new pocket knife which was a gift from Papa. The taste of peaches and plums mingled with brown figs and black berries. I was about to vomit. Sobbing, I tried to run out of the church.

"Come down front child. Bless her with the Holy Spirit. She has seen the light."
Brother Dwight called from the pulpit.

It was not the light that I had seen; it was the darkness, the finality of death. No one could ever take Papa's place in my heart. I could not believe that Papa and I could walk the streets of gold together in heaven if I would accept Jesus Christ as Savior and repent of my sins. Instead of turning towards the altar, I ran out the back door and home. The next day Brother Dwight came by the store to see me. He repeated much of the same sermon from yesterday. Up close I could see the differences between him and Papa. Momma sent me to the back of the store to sort the empty soft drink bottles. Neither the Pepsi nor the Coke man would pick up a case of mixed empty bottles. Most folks wouldn't take the time to place them in the correct case, just the one that was on the top shelf.

“Don’t you think that’s a little low to use someone’s memories of a loved one to drag them to the church altar?” Momma asked. She wasn’t one to mince words.

“The Lord provides a path for Redemption through the Son,” he replied. “You shouldn’t stand between your child and salvation.”

Some other words passed between them that I could not hear. I waited until I saw his truck pull out onto the highway before I came back to the counter. Momma didn’t say anything. I knew that she didn’t approve of what Brother Dwight had done, but she wasn’t one to badmouth another adult, especially a preacher.

Teenagers show their rebelliousness and invest in individuality in different means. My choice in reading morphed from Nancy Drew mysteries to new favorites like *The Last of the Mohicans*, *Silas Marner*, and *Siddhartha*. My interest in American Indians grew as I read paperback novels about their supposed lives of honor. I visited the cemetery with Granny Birdie and Granddaddy Jobie, where my lesson in family history began. As we walked around the chalky marble head stones, the story of our family began to unfold.

“This is where your great-great grandfather John A. is buried. He and his brother, Tom, were orphans in North Carolina. As young boys only about ten or so, they walked together down here. Both of them found work and a place to stay. They raised their families here,” shared my granddaddy. Many of the markers had names showed their relationship to the Stones.

“People would walk for days to meet and pray with John A., as he was a healer. He healed your Granddaddy’s tongue. I think that he had cancer, but folks didn’t call it that back then. He had a sore on his tongue that would not heal. He didn’t want to tell of

his illness as he thought it would look bad for him to be sickly. We were still courting then. Jobie could barely swallow when John A. laid hands on him. Soon his mouth healed. I thought at first it was just my biscuits were bad,” said Granny.

“They have gotten better. I’ve eaten a many of yor biscuits in the last 70 years,” Granddaddy reminded Granny. His blue eyes twinkled beneath his wiry, white eyebrows. They have been married for more years than most folks live. We walked to the edge of the cemetery to pick up some ribbons and silk flowers that the wind had blown off the graves. The lost decorations caught in the fence that kept the cows from grazing on the grass in between the different family plots.

“You can hardly see these old graves,” I said, pointing to some markers and slabs at the very edge of the cemetery. Black moss and grass grew on the tops of some. “The writing is so faint that I can’t tell what it says.” Maybe there had never been any writing on these few stones that were set so far apart from the rest. “Who are these people?”

Granddaddy looked at Grandma and then answered quietly. “That is your great grandmother Mary’s grave,” he said as he pointed at one of the untended ones.

“Why is she over here and not in the family plot?” I had just heard about all of the others.

Granny Birdie answered, “That is my grandmother. It’s my side of the family,” she reiterated as if that explained it all.

“I thought that you said that Papa was buried over there?” I asked, pointing to a densely occupied area of the cemetery.

It wasn't Granny that replied, but Granddaddy. "He is, but you see, Mary was an Indian." Granddaddy explained as if that made any sense as to why she wasn't buried with the rest of the family.

I shouldn't have been surprised. Fourth grade Georgia History had taught that us that there were Indians in the area. Familiar names like Okefenokee and Altamaha came from Indian words. We had also found many arrow heads in the fields by Granny and Granddaddy's home. I immediately thought of Granny's hair. Most of it was gray, but at the nape of her neck it remained as black as a crow's back. Every Sunday afternoon, I would brush out her long hair and then pin it back up for her. I would try to wrap it so that the black would show. No one else in the family had such a distinctive look. She and Granddaddy were quite a contrast, he with the bluest eyes imaginable and Granny with the darkest brown eyes.

"Let's get this trash picked up. I have dinner to cook," Granny said abruptly ending the history lesson.

Public Humiliation – Private Despair

Today's church service in Piney Grove seemed like an amateur production of *The Scarlet Letter*. Rachel played the part of Hester Prynne. It wasn't surprising that the pastor's daughter was up front at the pulpit or opening the service. Rachel was usually so confident. I admired her composure in front of the crowd and wished that I could be so self-assured. Today she acted differently. Maybe it is that ugly dress that she is wearing. I had never seen that one before. It looked like it might have belonged to her mother or grandmother, definitely not a teen fashion.

“I have something that I need to share with you all my church family,” her voice was trembling. Both of her parents were seated in the front row. Their faces looked like they had been painted with school glue. White and grave.

Momma knew what was coming next. “Oh, me,” she exclaimed quietly under her breath. Her hand was covering her mouth. Her chin had begun to quiver. She had recognized the signs of a young girl in trouble. Last week she cautioned me for some unknown reason. “Watch yourself Liz, where have you and Rachel been going?”

“I haven’t been hanging around with Rachel lately. She’s got a job in town.”

“Looks like she got a job alright.”

“What do you mean, Momma?” I questioned, not following her insinuations.

“Nothing, time will tell. Be nice to her. She will need a friend.”

“You just sounded mad and now you sound OK with us hanging out. I don’t get it.”

Rachel took a deep breath and slowly began to speak, “I am pregnant. I have sinned against God and his commandments. I committed adultery and God is making my sin known through the child that I am carrying. I have shamed my family and my church family as well.” Her mother and father remained in their seats and she joined them in the pew.

The church crowd sat stunned. Myself included. Why hadn’t Rachel told me? What could I have done to help her? It would be hard enough to tell your parents, but to be forced to stand before the church and admit your sin would be even worse. There isn’t much women’s liberation here. Where is the daddy? Doesn’t he need to share in this?

Rev. Davis stood and faced the congregation. “Because of our unfortunate circumstances, we will be leaving here as soon as possible.” Out of his suit pocket he produced an envelope, “Here is my letter of resignation.”

In spite of the opening, church services continued pretty much as usual. We sang some hymns. Aunt Kitty gave a report on the status of the missionaries in Brazil. “Sister somebody needs some more money to buy food and clothes with, but all in all she is making do. Brother somebody thanks the church for the *Bibles* and study materials that were sent to him. The new church building is almost finished and they hope to be worshiping there before the rainy season begins.” A special offering dedicated to the missionaries is taken up. The deacons announce that they will begin searching for a replacement for Rev. Davis.

I wonder. Will anyone take a special offering for Rachel? Doesn't she need our help now?

Literature and Life

I had this geeky, but cool, new guy for sophomore English last year. He was different from all of my other high school English teachers. I never liked doing grammar worksheets as much as Math and Science, but I have always liked to read. In his class, you could read what you liked. I had already read most of the books in the school library except for the ones on history. We talked about some of the books like *Siddhartha*. Mr. Rabrey brought me some books from home. One was on Buddhism to help me understand the basis for Hesse's characters. The next book he offered was a translation of the *Tao*. The cover on the book was beautiful. It had Chinese characters and drawings of trees and flowers. I loved the flowing words written on the pages. They gave me

calmness to thwart the torrents of emotion of my teenage years. Mr. Rabrey encouraged us to look at the lyrics of our favorite songs for messages about society. We loved his class. I was upset that Mr. Rabrey did not return this year. English class is back to the routine of worksheets and grammar drills. I have the same teacher for homeroom as English. Mr. Terriman is very effeminate. The kids call him Tinkerbelle. He is very careful to follow all of the school rules. In homeroom, we have devotion every day. Up one row and down the next. Each student is called on to lead the class in prayer. I am on row four, third seat. I have counted the days. My day will be on September 29. I don't know what I am going to pray about. I have thought about Brother Dwight's deception; Granny's situation of being told she couldn't speak in church; Rita and Karen's involvement with the preacher, and Rachel's public humiliation. "Mr. Terriman, I have some favorite poetry that I would like to read when it's my time to do devotion. I'll bring it in if you would like to preview it," I added hoping that would sway him in my direction.

"Oh, no. The rule clearly states that the time will be used for prayer." Mr. Terriman replied. "I am sure that you will think of something to be grateful for."

I thought about asking Aunt Kitty for help, but it wasn't that I couldn't copy a prayer that I had heard at church. They all seemed to start the same way and end the same way. I would just have to find something to go in the middle. What did I want in the middle? I certainly did not agree with much of the teachings of the *Bible*. It seemed to me that people listened to what they wanted to and ignored the rest. I went back to Mr. Terriman, "Could I read something from the Tao?"

"Heavens, no. Haven't you come up with an idea yet? It's just a prayer. You are a good writer just make up something."

“I’ll work on it.” Making up something wasn’t the problem. It was believing and having others believe what you said.

September 29 came. Mr. Terriman looked over the top of his glasses at me. “Today’s devotion will be given by Liz.”

I stood up next to my desk. My heart was pounding. “I do not believe in the *Bible* or the power of Jesus Christ. I am an atheist, so I will not pray or pretend to pray with you.” Everyone in the room turned and stared at me as if I were naked. Baring my body would have brought a lesser response than my exposing my soul.

“Liz, hush your mouth. You know that’s not true.” Mr. Terriman exclaimed. “and if it is, then I am so sorry for you. I hope that you will repent your evil ways.”

A student, I’m not sure who, said “I would have told that I was a whore before I would have told that.”

Another voice added, “Being a druggie is better than being an atheist.”

I didn’t attempt to defend my beliefs or the lack thereof. I knew that they would never understand that questioning is part of reasoning. I kept expecting that a large “A” would be forthcoming for me. The kids all suspected that Mr. Terriman was gay due to his appearance and lack of female companionship. If he was, then he hid his differences from this society as well. He did not bare his soul. Is it better to camouflage one’s beliefs, to hide in the shadows of the accepted or advertise your differences? Mr. Terriman retired from our school system after 30 years of service. Mr. Rabrey was only here one year, but it was a wonderful year for us as students. Thank you, Mr. Rabrey.

Family Expectations

Marriage reacquainted me with the church. It was a requirement by the groom's family that we marry in the church by a real preacher. The eye rolling and audible gasps looked like bad acting when I told my future in-laws that I didn't have a spiritual leader (unless you counted Led Zeppelin) and preferred to be married on the beach. We could recite our favorite poems. I gave my future mother-in-law a book by Kahlil Gibran. She returned the book during the summer of our tenth wedding anniversary. The spine was unbroken. The book seemed untouched other than the page on which I had written an inscription. Each weekend visit with my husband's family meant church attendance. I came to appreciate the sincere love and concern expressed between the members of this congregation. No wonder people find solace and comfort within the confines of the church. It would be so easy to have faith. Faith in your neighbor to provide aide, faith in an omnipotent one who guides and cares for you, and lastly faith in an final reward. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:9). A decorative version of that verse hangs in of all places the bathroom of my in-laws house. As you are taking care of your personal business remember to have faith. Faith, hope and evidence to the scientific mind do not belong in the same category.

I kept expecting someone to say what will you be naming this baby? Unlike our previous jaunts to the hospital for deliveries, this one was for heart surgery. Fellow teachers offered their prayers and support.

"You are anointed in the blood of Jesus, I cover you with his love and protection," offered Valerie.

The faces of my family were terse in anticipation of the procedure. “I have faith that all will go well” said my mother-in-law as she held my face in her hands. Twenty-five years of marriage and two grandchildren have welded a bond of love between us that rivals a mother’s love. The surgery will not be until the next day. She will get the children to school before coming to the hospital. Pre-operative procedures and heart catheterization complete, our party retires to a cheap, dank hotel room to await my early morning admission. Take-out food is spread on the small desk. Joining hands to ask the blessings, Aunt Kitty uses this opportunity to pray for the food, me, the family, the surgeon and the hospital. I think she has covered all of our bases. The surgery goes well and the following day I am moved to a private room.

A friend from work calls to check on me, “I couldn’t come to see you, but I gave your name to my preacher and he will be by. I hope that is OK.”

“Sure, but I don’t think I need last rites,” I joked. A few days pass and I think that I have missed the visit from the preacher. I am alone in my room when he comes in. My husband has just left to take care of some last minute errands before we make the two hour trip home. Did the preacher watch the door to see him leave? Is this another vulnerable moment in my life in which a point can be made for the Christian team? There is no one to run interference for me. He takes a seat next to my bed and begins to talk about our mutual acquaintances. Then the conversation changes to the character faults of those individuals which stem from their lack of church involvement. The preacher then outlined the good deeds that he has done for others while managing to secure a personal profit.

“You teach science at the high school?” he asks.

I know this is a rhetorical question, so why ask it. Confess one thing and it leads to another. He expounds the virtues of medical advancement. He begins to explain to me the ways in which science can be used to bolster the credibility of the *Bible*.

I wondered, “Mr. Preacher, do you doubt the *Bible*?”

He cites examples of geological evidence of underground coal burning that was described in the *Bible* as the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah. Evidence of the flood of Noah can also be verified by the geological evidence. “Considering all the science that supports the *Bible*, who could be blind enough to support the claims of Darwin on evolution?”

What amount of social damage will I do if I speak my mind? Is this man the Leviathan sent to destroy any semblance of order in my social environment? I dare not debate him, for fear of the words that may tumble from my drug-clouded brain. He prays that reconciliation between science and the *Bible* will be forthcoming for me. Finally, he leaves my room.

CHAPTER 2 – SCHOOL BELLS

For teachers and students, fall is the beginning of a new cycle of schooling. The pattern is familiar to those with experience, kindergartener to veteran teacher. Variations are minimal. Each year begins with a meeting for all teachers in the county. Teachers then disseminate to their respective classrooms to prepare for open house and lessons for incoming students. Sporting activities resume for athletes, coaches and the community. Bells sound and trained students and teachers move. Buses are loaded and unloaded. Buildings may now be entered or must be exited. Move now from one room to another. Eat lunch. Now clear trays. Buzzers sound to signify the end of playing periods. We are all trained to respond to the bells and be in our appropriate places. “Take your place, please” is more than a polite request, it is a double entendre of the South.

The First Gathering

Date: August 2, 2005
Time: 7:45 am
Characters: Mrs. Bell – Biology Teacher at Swamp High School
Mrs. Smith – School counselor
Ms. Gina Carter – Novice Science Teacher
Mrs. Valerie McDonald – Veteran Science teacher
Mr. Pete Brown – Veteran Science teacher
Mr. Chris Ellis – Science teacher / minister
Mrs. X – An involved parent
Setting: The new school auditorium is the location for this scene. All of the teachers in county are gathered together for breakfast and then a meeting. This large group session allows for the dissemination of information to all employees at once, rather than having to deliver the same information to all six schools in the county.

Teachers gather in the lobby outside of the new auditorium for the first meeting of the new school year. The fine arts auditorium is just that, a mighty fine auditorium. It is the nicest facility that I have ever seen at a rural school or in any of the local towns. This

will be first year that the building is available for use. It is a far cry from the sticky lunchroom floor and soiled chairs at the elementary school complex. It was not usual to find the dried remains from a last year's lunch adhered to the side of your chair. The three-hour long meeting doesn't seem so dreadful when seated in theatre style chairs rather than stackable plastic seating. Greetings are exchanged as the passing of summer vacation is mourned I watch the encounters as stories of summer adventures are swapped. Some of the exchanges seem quite open while others appear more guarded

“Valerie, look at you. What a tan! You must have spent your summer poolside,” said Mrs. Candy Smith, the school counselor. “What about you Liz, are you still going to school?”

“Yes, afraid so.”

“I thought about going to Boston for the summer and then having my doctorate in about a year, but I decided that would seriously cut into my beach time. I swear every year that this is the year that I'm going to stay at home with my babies.”

“You'd better decide quickly or they'll be grown before you know it.”

“I know. I saw Brent and Sam this summer at Walmart. I couldn't believe how much they had grown. That Brent is such a cutie. I know the girls will be chasing him. You'd better get ready Momma.”

“How 'bout those Braves? I guess Brent is disappointed in them too,” said Pete Brown another science teacher. “Are you girls ready to have another round of this?” referring to another school year.

“Some of us have ages before we are eligible to retire,” I replied.

“And some of us are just going to quit one day,” quipped Mrs. Smith.

“Why DO you work? Your husband makes enough money, you don’t have to work,” laughed Pete.

We all knew the real reason that she worked. Her husband was notorious for his philandering. Despite being an honor graduate, a beauty pageant queen with some additional physical enhancements and a musically talented individual, Candy feared being independent.

“I have a joke.” Pete proffered.

“Pete, be nice please.”

“Why do Indian women have dots on their forehead?” he began. “So the husband can scratch it off on the wedding night to see if he won a motel.”

“Pete, you know that isn’t appropriate.”

“Lighten up Liz. No wonder you had to have heart surgery.”

The Assistant Principal, Debbie Graham, came through the lobby. “Take your seats please.” For many of the teachers it is the first opportunity that they have had to see the new facility. The murmurs of approval are numerous. The drill team of the ROTC program is on hand to display the flag for the pledge of allegiance. Strains from the “Star-Spangled Banner” music fill the auditorium as the flags / arms are presented to the audience. The music teacher, Mrs. Johnson, sings the anthem as the crowd salutes the flag. At the end of the anthem, Mrs. Johnson remains at the microphone. “Let us pray.” Mrs. Johnson is praying dramatically, stressing certain words that I have capitalized, “Our Father, Who art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy Name, Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will be Done, On Earth as it is in Heaven. Thank you so much Lord for giving us this fine facility and bringing us back safely to learn together, but most importantly thank you for

giving us Your Son to cleanse us of our sins. ” During the prayer, I glance around at the hundreds of bowed heads, some bobbing as if in agreement to the words of the music teacher..

At the county wide meeting the principal at each school recognizes or embarrasses new additions to the faculty. Most of the faces are white like mine, but this year a few are Black. There is one new hire Chandra Patel who appears to be Indian. I hope that she didn't hear Pete's joke in the lobby. I know that Pete's jokes could and should be considered harassment. Jan Davis, our math teacher, told him to stop sending her offensive emails, but he continues in spite of her request. He doesn't seem to take harassment laws very seriously. “You can report him, you know,” I said to her.

“It is easier to just delete them. That makes them go away. Besides he will be retiring soon.”

I wonder what Chandra Patel is thinking about this meeting. Is she a Christian? Could she possibly embrace a traditional Indian religion like Hindu or Sikh? Would she have been hired had she admitted to such?

The Superintendent reports that all of the county schools have made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as outlined by the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB). As everyone cheers our past accomplishments, we are challenged to once again push our students to reach this goal by focusing on education that raises test scores. Few in this room consider the possibility of the existence of other goals than test scores. I imagine sneaking in Pinar (2004) as a ringer to proclaim the goal of education for curriculum theorists and us as educators is to develop in students “self-reflexive interdisciplinary intellectuality – the cultivation of ‘original thought’” (Pinar, 2004, p. 20). The cheers are

deafening. I am jostled from my daydream by my colleagues' standing ovation for the teacher of the year. My eyes close again, as the Teacher of the Year begins to pray. I hear that all the glory of our accomplishments should be given to God, the Father. Amen. Only it is not a day dream but reality in the South.

Maintaining a Profession of Faith

Date: August 9, 2005
Time: 11:15 am
Characters: Mrs. Bell – Biology Teacher at Swamp High School
Ms. Gina Carter – Novice Science Teacher
Mrs. Valerie McDonald – Veteran Science teacher
Mr. Pete Brown – Veteran Science teacher
Mr. Chris Ellis – Science teacher / minister
Mrs. X – An involved parent
Setting: Science Hall, Room 116; Members of the science department are required to meet on a routine basis for professional development as part of a Professional Learning Committee (PLC).

“Where is the grand buffet, the snacks, the drinks?? What kind of meeting is this?” exclaimed Chris as he entered the room. Grinning he continued towards the lab table / lunch table, “Woman it is lunch time, where is my meal?”

“Don’t start with me. I didn’t take you to raise.” I retorted.

“Oh, here is my lunch,” said Chris producing his insulated lunch bag from behind his back.”

The other teachers scurried in one by one to take their places. Lunches were quickly spread on the table that was used for dissecting at the end of the year. I hope the janitors did a good job cleaning up. “Thank you all for being here at our first monthly PLC meeting for this school year. How is this semester going?” questioned Liz. “Any problems?”

“My 50 inch plasma TV and new furniture were not installed over the summer. It is a great example of energy conversion and conservation. You did sign my purchase order didn’t you? I was planning on entertaining my students in a comfortable manner whilst we prepare for the EOCT,” quipped Pete.

“Just what I need another comedian. I’ll check on that PO for you. It may have gotten lost on my desk. On a more serious note, I spoke with Debbie about our class numbers and she indicated that no other schedule changes will be made. Our classes should be stable except for transfers into and out of the system. I hope they stand by their decisions.”

“Speaking of Debbie, she said that she would probably drop by today if she could get someone to take her lunch duty.” Valerie added.

That’s one of the disadvantages (or maybe advantages) of having the PLC meeting as a working lunch. All of the administrators are on lunch duty, so we can quickly dispense with our business. If the meetings are held after school, there is no dismissal bell. As if on cue, Debbie comes in the door.

“I don’t mean to interrupt you all, but I only have a few minutes. I corralled one of the coaches to stand on my corner for a few minutes. There is something that I need to touch base with you about. I had a parent contact me about an issue in your classes. Please don’t ask me for their name.” She paused and then added, “If you think about a particular parent who has been very vocal in their child’s education so far and who has connections to the school board, you will be right on target. They asked to remain anonymous so that there wouldn’t be any retaliation against their child.”

“Wow, someone holds us in high esteem!! We are a vindictive bunch. Who would be stupid enough to cross Mrs. X. The board members must be in her fav five or circle of friends depending on which cell phone plan she has,” I added sarcastically.

As a teacher and a parent, I can understand her concern. Not all teachers are reasonable or professional. My personal philosophy has been to keep a hands-off policy with my children’s teachers and intervene only when absolutely necessary. If they have a lottery to see who will get the most dreaded of teachers, Sam has won two of the four years that he has been in school. Maybe that is payback for teaching at the high school. I don’t do such a good job of placating influential parents. A missed assignment is a zero even if your parent is the principal of primary school. Sometimes after I had contact about specific situations in class, it would seem that the teacher was targeting my child. I saw that pattern with Brent in history in elementary school. One particular teacher would assign the students a section in the text to pre-read before the lesson. Then she would give them a three question constructed response quiz. If the students failed which meant only missing one question, they were assigned the entire section of text to copy for punishment. Brent would hide his pages of copied text to avoid a conflict between me and his teacher.

“I would rather write for hours that to have you call her,” said Brent as he defended his actions.

The reprisal must have been intense. Few fifth graders are savvier than a 32 year teaching veteran. Survival until the next grade became the plan of action. Now Sam had that same teacher for history. Parents can be just as unreasonable as teachers. Mrs. X had two children, Kevin who was currently a senior and Andy who had recently graduated.

Andy's teachers would be scheduled for parent conferences several times a semester. She was in the school so often that she began bypassing the front office and the visitor check in log. Teachers would catch her outside their doors watching their classrooms. Other days she would ask the technology specialist to review the videotapes of her sons in the hallway. I suggested to administrators that she be arrested for trespassing after she appeared outside my classroom demanding a conference over a missed assignment. I think that they just reminded her to come through the office. A nobody would have suffered consequences for that act. None of that surprised me as much as her tracking me down at the market hog show to talk with me about Andy's grade. Here I am sitting in the stands at the county fair grounds with Aunt Kitty and Sam waiting for Brent's pig weight class to show. Pansy made it in the heavy weight class with only a half pound to spare, so they will be in the last group. I was surprised to see Mrs. X come in the arena. As far as I know her children have never been involved much with 4-H. I am even more surprised when she sits next to me.

“I need to talk with you about Andy's grade. He doesn't have an A in your class.” Without pausing for confirmation, she continues. “He also says that you gave him a zero for copying someone's homework. You don't understand. He's a good Christian boy. He and Dusty have always shared work. He wouldn't have done that if he had known it was against your rules.” She reiterated as if I had not heard her the first time. “He is a Christian boy. I have raised him to do right.”

I'm caught. I can't leave partly because I know that she will follow me out. “I think it would be better for us to discuss this at school when I have my grade sheets in

front of me.” I hold up my hands as if to show her that I have no school records in my possession.

She continues to plead his case.

I finally say to her, “That is my child in the show ring. I am not here as a teacher but as a parent.” With that, I literally turn my back to her and try to focus on the show. Brent and Pansy won Grand Champion. I guess considering the outcome, Pansy didn’t win. Sam was upset that Pansy didn’t come back home with us.

Sam said, “Let’s stop on the way home and buy Pansy some cheese puffs and vanilla wafers so she can celebrate her championship.” He was the one who really loved the pig. Sam would spend hours with her feeding her treats and brushing her hair.

After the show, Brent picked at him every time that I cooked pork. “Sam, do you reckon this is Pansy.”

They remember the glory of the pig show and the pictures in the local paper whereas my memory is of being stalked by Mrs. X.

Debbie continued, “It’s not just about one class, but several. So this is feedback from several parents. They have started a petition that they say will be taken to the board if their demands aren’t met.”

“Debbie, what is all this uproar about?”

“It isn’t anything catastrophic. It is the safety posters that you have up in your room.”

“The safety posters?”

“Not the ones that illustrate the different lab techniques, it is the one that starts “Thou shalt.... ”

“Oh, The Ten Commandments of Lab Safety poster. I thought those were effective and funny. That’s why I bought one for each class room. They do such a good job with the lab safety rules. Have you seen it? ”

“No, I haven’t.” Debbie admitted.

“It is so cute. It says:

- Remember the Lab Day and Be Present.
- Thou shall not add water to acid.
- Keep thy lab area clean.
- Honor thy body by wearing appropriate safety equipment
- Do not covet your neighbor’s supplies

“Liz,” Debbie interrupted, “I can see that you approve, but several of the parents think that it is offensive. In other words, they think it is sacrilegious and want it removed.”

“I wondered whether anyone would say anything about that,” Gina said. “I didn’t want to mention it. I thought that you all probably knew what was best.” As a novice teacher Gina was reticent about sharing her teaching techniques and opinions.

“Chris, what do you think about this situation? You are probably in the best position to judge this issue.”

“It seemed OK to me, but then you know I have a warped sense of humor. I guess with my industrial background, I realize the importance of lab safety. I thought that the poster would get their attention.”

“It does seem to have gotten someone’s attention,” I added drily.

“I am going to leave you now. I got to get back to my duty station. You all think about it and let me know your decision. I am not going to order you to take them down, but I am definitely recommending it. You have to ask yourselves, ‘Is this a battle I am willing to fight?’ How much is a poster worth to you?”

“I don’t think the battle is just about a poster. I think that it is more who controls what we teach or display in our classes.”

“Keep in mind that our Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), standards list stakeholder involvement as a key component to accreditation. We want to be sure that we are in compliance with those standards. It’s up to you all ultimately.”

But it really isn’t up to us, is it?

The Right to Pray

Date: August 22, 2005
Time: 7:45 am
Characters: Mrs. Bell – Teacher at Swamp High School
Cindy – Student in Mrs. Bell’s homeroom
Chris – Student in Mrs. Bell’s homeroom
Jared Owens – School Alumnus and Athlete
Mr. Reed Medders – Minister and Football Chaplain
Mr. Hal Stone – Local TV and radio commentator
Mr. James Earl Whitehead – Retired faculty member and school sports announcer
Rev. Lee Williams – Minister and Spokesperson for the Ministerial Alliance
Rev. McGee – Minister and husband of a Band Staff Member
Setting: The Monday morning highlights of the first football game are filled with fireworks of the hell fire and brimstone variety. This scene begins in the homeroom of Mrs. Bell and ends with a recap of a called Board of Education Meeting concerning the legality of prayer in schools.

“Good morning Swamp High School. GO!!! Bucs!!! Let me first congratulate the Buccaneer Football Team for a great start at the new season with a 21 to 7 win over the Bacon County Raiders. I would also like to commend the band for a tremendous halftime

show. Let's show our appreciation for their hard work." Mr. Phillips' Monday morning announcements sounded routine as we began week three of school. Maybe, he should be a TV announcer. His calm manner belied the hoard that waited in the office lobby. I went in looking to get a purchase order signed. It looked like a lynch mob: Jared Owens and his father, Mr. Reed Medders, Minister at First Baptist Church, and Mr. Hal Stone, local TV and radio commentator.

"I think I'll just come back later," I said to the secretary. "I'm sure he'd rather see you than," nodding her head toward the mob.

"Did you hear the radio this morning on the way to school Mrs. Bell?" asked a student as we were waiting for the morning bell to ring for homeroom.

"No, you know I don't listen to country." I replied. It was a standing joke for the students who were amazed that I didn't share their appreciation of country music.

Actually that was a lie.

Dan had heard it on his way to work and called me at home. "You better listen to this before you go to school," he added.

Mr. Hal Stone had his own public platform for his private concerns. "This is Mr. Hal Stone and I thought you might like to know" segments showcased whatever Mr. Stone deemed the utmost importance for locals. Today's message was no different. "This is Hal Stone, and I thought you might like to know that the guest speaker and former student of Swamp High School was interrupted and prohibited from praying over the public address system at the football game Friday night. As citizens of this county, I think you have the right to know and to decide what is appropriate in our school system. A

board meeting has been called for Tuesday night. Let's let the board know how we feel about this action."

"You should have heard Hal Stone talking about the football game."

"What was he talking about?" I inquired, not willing to come clean about my prior knowledge.

That was all that Cindy needed to start her rendition of the story. "It seems that at the game Friday night that it wasn't 'technical difficulties' that caused the delay when Jared was speaking. Mr. Whitehead took the microphone from Jared when he realized that Jared was about to pray. He told Jared after the game that public prayer wasn't allowed and he could be in trouble if he allowed him to do that. Why would Mr. Whitehead stop him? We pray all the time at school. Mr. Wilcox prays at band camp and in the classroom. We pray at assemblies, graduation, and baseball games. I don't understand, what's the big deal?"

"You're right. We do have prayers at school." I could have added a few to her list, school faculty meetings, county-wide meetings, faculty prayer meetings, and band concerts came to mind.

Cindy continued adding in her own commentary or maybe that of her parents. "Did you know that Mr. Whitehead is Catholic? I think that is why he tried to stop Jared."

Other students had entered into the classroom. They had heard about all of Mr. Phillips visitors.

Chris, a football player, joined into the roast. “Mr. Whitehead doesn’t like praying. Everyone knows that because last year before a ballgame, he told Rev. Medders that he shouldn’t be praying with the team.”

“I didn’t know all of that. Did Rev. Medders stop?”

“No, the coach just told him to go on. Rev. Medders did announce to the players if anyone didn’t want to pray that they could leave or just close their ears.”

“Did anyone leave?”

“No, you know no one cares if you pray.” Chris started laughing.

“What is so funny?” I was almost scared to ask.

“Not even Charney. That joker, he’d get mad when we told him that the preacher wasn’t praying for him to have a safe game. He could break his leg and it wouldn’t matter because he didn’t believe in Jesus. Have you had him in class yet? I know you got onto us for playing in the hall.”

“No, not yet but I do know him.” I had also worried about the kids teasing him. I had seen them tussling in the hall. I had called them down one day. “What ARE you boys doing?” I asked.

“We’re touching him and stealing his luck,” one boy offered in explanation.

“Give it back to him, go find your own,” I responded. I was unsure of what they meant, but they were all laughing even Charney. Everything must be OK. “You all go on to your classes and I mean now.”

The board meeting turned out to be quite eventful. I didn’t want to attend the meeting personally, so I was happy to be reminded that the local cable TV station carries the board meetings live. I told Dan that I would be working at school tonight. We live out

in the country and cable isn't available in our area, but the school TV does receive the local broadcasts. I could work in my room and still be informed without advertising my interest in the situation.

The Superintendent called the meeting to order and Rev. Mark Baxley gave the invocation in the form of a short prayer. The Chairman of the Board led the Pledge of Allegiance. Jared Owens and his father were first on the agenda.

Jared spoke, "Charlton County Superintendent and Board of Education, I come before you tonight to express my concern and displeasure at how far our community has strayed from its roots. This community is blessed with numerous churches and many faithful people. Our schools are doing a disservice to our young people if we ban prayers at the ballgames. I think that Mr. Whitehead owes me and the public an apology for his actions."

Mr. Hal Stone followed Jared. "Superintendent of Schools and Charlton County Board of Education, I appreciate the expediency with which you arranged this meeting. I thank you for allowing the citizens to have a voice in the education of our young people. I would like to call attention to a document published by the U.S. Department of Education in 2003 titled *Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Schools in Public Elementary and Secondary School*. I quote:

The First Amendment forbids religious activity that is sponsored by the government but protects religious activity that is initiated by private individuals, and the line between government-sponsored and privately initiated religious expression is vital to a proper understanding of the First Amendment's scope. As the Court has explained in several cases, "there is a crucial difference between

government speech endorsing religion, which the Establishment Clause forbids, and private speech endorsing religion, which the Free Speech and Free Exercise Clauses protect.

As this passage indicates, private citizens should be able to conduct prayer at ball games.

I am asking that the Board make a decision to allow prayer.

Rev. Lee Williams was next. It was not a surprise that spoke in favor of prayer being allowed at football games. He was followed by the Rev. McGee who is the husband of dance line assistant, Mrs. Meg McGee. Rev. McGee echoed the same sentiments.

Rev. Mark Baxley spoke on behalf of the ministerial alliance, noting that he as well as the alliance supported allowing prayer at school functions not just football. “The ministerial alliance would also like to take this opportunity to point out that two books on the Literature Reading list for the high school had profane words in them.” He requested that the board investigate his concerns.

Mr. Whitehead addressed the board. “I would like to say that as a retired educator and a member of the school faculty as football announcer, I considered it to be my duty to stop Mr. Owens from breaking the law. My understanding of this ruling is that students are allowed to engage in prayer both publicly and privately, but school officials are not allowed to lead prayer. Mr. Owens is not currently a student of the high school.” Mr. Whitehead had come with more than his hat in his hand; he must have been expecting to be lambasted for his action. “I would also like to include a quote from that same document:

Nor may school officials grant religious speakers preferential access to public audiences, or otherwise select public speakers on a basis that favors religious speech. In *Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe* ^[8], for example, the Court invalidated a school's football game speaker policy on the ground that it was designed by school officials to result in pregame prayer, thus favoring religious expression over secular expression. So you see why I think that I am justified in my action.

Mr. Hal Stone addressed the board again. "On behalf of the citizens of Charlton County I would like to request that the board receive an interpretation from the Board of Education Attorney on this matter. On the behalf of the concerned citizens of Charlton County and the Ministerial Alliance, we would also like to request that the board turn their heads and allow individual citizens to have control of the microphone for a period of time necessary for prayer as allowed by the Free Speech and Free Exercise Clause."

The Board agreed to make no motion until a recommendation was made by the Board Attorney. A motion was made by a board member to be adjourned. Another quickly seconded the motion. I'm not sure what followed as the broadcast ended quickly. Talk about being in the hot seat. I would have deferred to the attorney as well. If the Board members side with Mr. Whitehead, then it appears that they are against their religious upbringing and that of their constituents. It is too bad that we don't have some folks from some other religions on the board. That's hardly possible as Board members are elected officials and the majority of individuals in the county consider themselves as Christian. A Buddhist or a Muslim wouldn't stand a chance in a public election here. Come to think about it, I don't think that I have ever seen anyone's name on the ballot

that isn't active in one church or another. That is usually one of the primary statements in the political ads. There is no doubt that the religious faction of the county has shown their influence. I don't know who was responsible for the selection of the Hallelujah Chorus as the band show for the year, but the show is certainly not secular in nature. If a speaker at the football game can't be chosen who would favor a religious expression, how can an entire season of band performances be based on a religious theme? Maybe Mr. Wilcox needs to read this document. One section states:

For example, teachers and other public school officials may not lead their classes in prayer, devotional readings from the *Bible*, or other religious activities. Nor may school officials attempt to persuade or compel students to participate in prayer or other religious activities.

The selection of this particular program certainly violates this rule. ALL band students are required to participate in this same program which can not be interpreted in any manner other than as a religious activity. As a teacher, how can he justify leading his band in prayer in band camp? Band camp is certainly considered a school function; otherwise Allen and Ryan who were caught with alcohol would not have been suspended from school. Students who are caught with alcohol outside of school are not suspended from school. I know this because one of my students, Cody, was charged with possession of alcohol by a minor and he received no punishment from school for his transgression. He was legitimately charged with a crime and as the notice in the paper stated that he "was released from jail to the custody of his father." The kids in his class teased him relentlessly about being "released to his father."

Contest in the Stands

Date: August 26, 2005
Time: 8:05 pm
Characters: Mrs. Bell – Teacher at Swamp High School
Jared Owens – School Alumnus and Athlete
Mr. Reed Medders – Minister and Football Chaplain
Mr. Hal Stone – Local TV and radio commentator
Mr. James Earl Whitehead – Retired faculty member and school sports announcer
Rev. Lee Williams – Minister and Spokesperson for the Ministerial Alliance
Rev. McGee – Minister and husband of a Band Staff Member
Rev. Mark Baxley – Minister
Setting: This is the second home football. It is the first one following the prayer incident and called board meeting.

It is fitting that tonight's football opponent is the Savannah Christian Academy. That contest is the one that is being held on the football field. There is another contest that is being held in the stands. Savannah Christian Academy and Charlton have a long standing rivalry. Even with the rivalry, the visiting crowd is not usually too large. It is a game that most folks wouldn't mind working in the ticket booth. Tonight's crowd was immense, the line to buy a ticket stretched across the practice field. I saw some individuals passing out flyers and hand fans to the spectators. As I got closer, I recognized Rev. Lee Williams, Rev. McGee, and Rev. Mark Baxley. "Rev. Mark, how are you this evening," I said, greeting him as he handed me the flyer.

"It is a blessed evening isn't it. Just a little warm. Not as warm as it could be." He chuckled a little to himself. "Hope this helps to keep you cool. Enjoy the performance this evening."

"That little laugh was eerie, don't you think. What do you think he meant by that?" All of the ministers seemed to be handing out the same literature. I waited until I was seated to examine the folded flyer. The cover page featured an American flag and the

words “In God We Trust”. It looked like someone had scanned one of the plaques that hang in each classroom. When we first moved into the new school we were told that we couldn’t put anything on the walls yet those plaques appeared in our rooms overnight. We were informed that we would not remove them under any circumstances. The inside pages repeated the portion of the Department of Education’s *Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer* that Mr. Hal Stone had used as his justification to the local school board.

“Join us in singing the lyrics as the band plays the Hallelujah Chorus. Have a blessed day.” The flyer listed the lyrics of the all of the band songs.

The crowd was tense as the opening remarks transitioned between the Pledge of Allegiance. Mr. Whitehead announced, “We will now have a moment of silence to reflect upon the contest about to be held on the field.”

“What about the contest off the field,” I whispered to Dan.

“Hush Liz, before we get into a brawl,” Dan replied.

Rather than a moment of silence, a PA on the field could be heard. It was Rev. Williams speaking over a portable PA from the back of a truck parked in the handicapped parking lot immediately behind the field.

“They can’t stop us from worshiping,” one lady yelled. Her hands were raised toward the sky as she shouted, “Hallelujah! Hallelujah!”

Mr. Whitehead waited for Rev. Williams to finish his prayer before he concluded the moment of silence. I don’t know whether he was being respectful, stunned or scared that the press box would be overrun with determined zealots. If last weeks crowd participated actively with the band, then the crowd this week could only be described as

frenzied. That night no one seemed to be concerned about the score on the field, but the church had definitely won in the stands.

“Do you think the symbolism of the fans was intentional,” I asked Dan in the car.

“What do you mean? You are always looking for something. Don’t you ever just take things at face value?”

“I took everything at face value a little too long. Don’t you get the message, you stick with us and you’ll stay cool. If you don’t then you will go to hell like all of the sinners. Even fans won’t help there.”

“Liz, don’t you think that it was just a way to advertise their churches?”

“Yes and no. I do think that it does advertise for the churches, but I think that it sent an additional message as well. Those fans were like flags in the stands. You could see who all supported their cause. Now I am not saying that there couldn’t have been a few folks who anticipated how hot it would be in the stands, but I bet there were others who thought it best to take their fan so as to not call attention to their lack of participation and support.”

“I don’t know anybody like that, do you?” said Dan shaking his head.

To Pray or Not to Pray

Date: August 30, 2005
Time: 6:30 pm
Characters: Jared Owens – School Alumnus and Athlete
Mr. Reed Medders – Minister and Football Chaplain
Mr. Hal Stone – Local TV and radio commentator
Mr. James Earl Whitehead – Retired faculty member and school sports announcer
Rev. Lee Williams – Minister and Spokesperson for the Ministerial Alliance
Rev. McGee – Minister and husband of a Band Staff Member
Rev. Mark Baxley – Minister
Setting: This is the regularly scheduled board meeting for the month of August. A large crowd has assembled expecting to hear the opinion of the Board Attorney on the subject of prayer at the ballgame.

The crowd present at tonight’s regular board meeting filled the meeting room and spilled out into the lobby area and filtered down into the office hallways. They would have streamed into the parking lot, but the heat was so oppressive. The chairman of the board called the meeting to order. Mr. Baxley gave the invocation / prayer. I am watching from my private viewing room at the high school. I just wish that I had someone to talk too. There is no one to respond to my commentary. So even after last week’s reading of the state DOE document on prayer, we still opened this meeting with one. Did no one understand the words of the document?

Moving on. The Pledge of Allegiance is complete. Mr. Hal Stone addresses the board and demands a ruling on prayer at the ball games. The chairman of the board states that a letter from the attorney indicated that prayer is not allowed unless initiated by a student of their own volition and in an appropriate time.

“So what is your ruling?” Mr. Stone asked.

“What a stupid question, how can you ask that? Of course the Board is going to say that you can’t have prayer. It’s a no brainer. The attorney has spoken.” I am yelling at

the Activ board in my room. This is better than wresting or rasslin' as the old folks would say. Instead of answering the question with a definitive answer, the chairman defers to the Superintendent. What a move. The Superintendent is from out of town. He doesn't have family ties to the people in the county. Neither does he depend upon them for votes. "You have heard the ruling of the attorney." No answer was given to the question as to whether it would be enforced.

Next on the agenda the Ministerial Alliance presented a letter to the Board with the following points:

- Prayer is a duty and responsibility of every Christian
- The American judicial system is trying to deprive our nation of its constitutional right to freedom of religion
- A number of Georgia school systems have found legal ways to allow students to pray at ballgames.
- The Board of Education has been approached by concerned citizens desiring prayer.
- Be it resolved that the Consolation Baptist Association thanks the members of the Board for their commitment to seek out a legal means of public prayer.
- Be it resolved that the Consolation Baptist Association members encourage the Board members to work diligently to provide our students with the right of prayer.

The attorney's letter also addressed the minister's concern about the vulgarity of the language in certain books that were assigned to the high school students. His opinion

and interpretation of the law is that the school does not have the right to ban books based on religious reasons. The Consolation Baptist Association letter to the school board addressed these issues as well.

- Literature in which the Lord's name is taken in vain violates God's commandments.
- Studies by the Congress of the United States and Bill Cosby show that violence and profanity have a negative impact upon the children of America.
- The school board members have shown good faith in supporting God's word by removing these offensive items from the classroom.
- Be it resolved that we support providing a positive, moral learning environment for our student.

Do these people think that we live in Mayberry and Andy gets to enforce the law any way that he chooses? No consideration is given to those who might be of other religious affiliations.

Lesson Gone Awry

Date: September 6, 2005
Time: 6:45 pm
Characters: Mrs. Liz Bell – Biology Teacher at Swamp High School
Mrs. Dubberly – Grandmother / guardian of children in the public school system
Setting: While waiting for her child at practice, Liz has a conversation with a grandparent concerning drug education.

Now that I am middle-aged, finding exercise time is more important than ever and obviously I haven't been finding enough. Since Sam and Brent are both involved in extracurricular activities after school, I thought that the time that I spend waiting for them to practice would be good "me" time. It's already built into our family schedule. I didn't consider the hazards of the parking lot. I had only made it half way around the track when a parent called my name.

"Mrs. Bell, how are you?" called Mrs. Dubberly from her car. She was there waiting on her grandson Jesse who was also at practice.

I had to stop and speak with her or else I would be pegged as uppity. So much for my exercise time.

"Looks like it is going to storm this afternoon. I hope they get to finish their practice."

"I hope so too." My real fear is that the lightning will come before the heavy rain and catch them out on the field.

She asked, "Is Brent going to start this year?"

"I don't know. My job is to get him to practice and back. Sam is playing this year as well. He is at the other school practicing."

"I'm glad that you mentioned Sam. You know Jesse's younger brother Aaron is at the middle school this year."

“I had forgotten about that. Time flies doesn’t it?”

“I do hope he does OK. You know he got sent to STAR at the end of the last school year for hiding a knife for a boy on the bus. The boy who brought the knife to school didn’t get in any trouble Can you believe that?”

“Those situations can be tricky for administrators to handle.”

“Jesse got into trouble for having a bandana on the bus. Why would the bus driver suspend him for that? It is just a piece of cloth.”

“Bandanas can be used to show gang affiliation. The kids know that.”

“Oh! I didn’t know about that. I think that he just likes to dress up. What else can they use? Is it just bandanas?”

“Sometimes they use cartoon characters, or socks and shirtsleeves turned up or down. It just depends upon what they agree on.”

“I wasn’t happy with the way that all of that was handled. And I’ll tell you something else that I didn’t like, drug education. I’m going to go sit through it the next time he has it. I wish you could have heard Aaron telling about learning in school how to snort drugs. He said you hold your nose like this and suck hard on a straw with the other side of your nose. How come you teach kids how to use drugs at school? You all need to teach them good things.”

Trying to be tactful, “Mrs. Dubberly, I don’t think that Aaron was taught to use drugs. The purpose of the drug education is to teach children how to recognize drugs and drug activities so that they don’t innocently participate in it. We teach drug education at the high school in the biology classes as well. I am pretty sure that encouraging drug usage isn’t the point.”

“I’m not lying!” She added defensively, “That is what he said. I would have gone up to school last year and asked about it, but with Jesse getting into trouble too I didn’t think they would listen to me.”

“I am not implying that you are lying or that Aaron is lying. That is an example of kids getting a different lesson than what you are trying to teach,” I added trying to explain the purpose to her.

“How else would he have known that about sniffing drugs up your nose? I don’t teach him that at my house.”

“They see a lot more on TV and the movies that you would think.”

“Not at my house. They only watch cartoons and I watch preaching. Ever since I got taken up by the Lord, I don’t worry much about man’s ways. I just focus on hearing his voice. I wish I could set my computer where bad things didn’t come up when I do a search. I entered in God for a search and pictures of girls came up, God’s babes. It ought to be against the law to put such stuff as that on the Internet. I know there is a lot that I don’t understand. I only finished the 7th grade before I quit school. That’s another reason that I wouldn’t go to school to talk with them. I don’t like to talk to folks because I don’t have an education. I told Jesse and Aaron that is why they need an education. All of this stuff is new to me. Let me show you some pictures that I took with my digital camera. There is a picture of Aaron and this is our family parrot. He is one smart bird. Our kids would be better off if they didn’t know so much either. There’s just too much meanness in the world. The Lord had better come back soon or we are going to be in an even bigger mess. Don’t you agree Miz, Bell?”

“Folks are getting meaner.” I nodded.

“Aren’t you ready for the Lord to come back? I know I am.” Mrs. Dubberly began to sing,

He lives,

He lives

Christ Jesus lives today.

He walks with me and talks with me

Along life’s narrow way.

He lives, He lives,

Salvation to impart!

You ask me how I know He lives?

He lives within my heart (Ackley, 1933).

A bolt of lightning streaked across the sky. “It was nice to meet you, Mrs. Dubberly, but I’m going to head back to my truck. Those ball players can run a lot faster than I can.”

“Come to see me if you will. I live in the second trailer past the airport. It sure was good to talk with you.” I could hear her starting the next stanza.

Woman's Work

Date: September, 6, 2005
Time: 11:15 am
Characters: Mrs. Bell – Biology Teacher at Swamp High School
Mrs. Valerie McDonald – Veteran Science teacher
James – Student in Mrs. Bell's class
Moe – Lab technician
Lem – Lab foreman
Dan – Liz's husband
Mike – Lab technician
Setting: Science Hall, Room 114; The story begins as Liz considers her previous students. It continues as she reflects upon her employment in the nuclear power industry.

“James, I didn’t know Miss Elvira was your Grandma until I saw you all at the grocery store on Labor Day. Are you a good student like she was?” Valerie asked of a young boy entering my room to drop off his books before lunch.

“You taught my grandma? Did she talk all the time in class like she do now? I bet she did,” James laughed at the prospect of his Grandma being in trouble at school. She was the one who always signed his papers.

“Hurry up. I’m ready to go to lunch too. Time’s a wasting. Wait on me Valerie, if these cow tails will just get a move on.”

“We’re going Mrs. Bell, don’t rush us,” replied James.

When all the students had left the room, Valerie and I began our trek to the faculty lounge for lunch. Teachers are not allowed to eat in their classrooms. This rule was instated to encourage camaraderie and discourage ants in the classroom.

“You’ve have been teaching too long when you recognize the grandmas of students as your former students,” said Valerie “It must be time to retire”.

“I went to Walmart yesterday and everywhere I turned there were former students of mine. One working in the deli, another working as the checkout clerk. I met this one

lady in the aisle and she said ‘you don’t remember me do you?’ I felt bad because she was right, I didn’t remember her. ‘I wasn’t your best student,’ she said as if that made up for my forgetting her. I told her that it was good that I forgot her for you only remember the bad ones for that long.” I hated that I couldn’t place her even after she told me her name. Along your career, there are some students who make quite an impression on you, in a positive way. “Then out at the gas pumps a black man in his late 30’s kept staring at me. I was sitting in the car and Brent was pumping the gas. I’m not usually self-conscious about such, but this man just kept looking at me. Turns out he was one of my former students too.”

“Yea, we need to remember that they’ll be the ones tending us to at the nursing home. Think about that the next time you assign someone detention. You’ll be drooling on yourself or wanting a drink of water and they will say remember that day you took up my cell phone in class...Ha, ha, ha. ”

“That is so comforting. Thank you, Liz for pointing that out.” Val made a screwy face at me. “Did you see Katherine working in the front office this morning?”

“Yes, I was surprised to see her there. I would have thought that she would already be off at school.”

“She’s supposed to work for the next three weeks and she is getting married in two weeks.”

“Do you mean in five weeks? I know that the front office isn’t anyplace to spend a honeymoon!”

“No, the wedding is in two weeks. She’s only going to have a honeymoon weekend. She said that the wedding is on Saturday and she would be back to work on Tuesday.”

“I just can’t believe that her plans have changed so much over the last few years. I had Katherine as a freshman and a junior. Throughout her freshman and junior years, she was adamant that she was going to vet school or med school. She could have made it in either one. Very few students possess the wide range of positive attributes that Katherine has. Her organizational skills are tremendous. She is good at math and science. I would always check my class notebook against hers, because I knew that she never forgot to make an entry. She writes well and has great interpersonal skills. Now she has decided to get married and go to nursing school. I certainly know that we need nurses, but that isn’t living up to her potential.”

“Didn’t she work part time with one of the vets in town?”

“Yes, she did. She seemed like she really liked it.”

“Why do you think she changed her mind?”

“All she would tell me is that she didn’t want to be in school that long. Next thing I hear, she is getting married. I don’t think she is pregnant. She doesn’t look it, as far as I can tell.” I don’t have Momma’s eagle eye for discerning the early stages of pregnancy.

“Isn’t her boyfriend several years older than her?”

“He is,” nodded Valerie. “There might be some pressure to settle down coming from that end.”

“I’ve tried to encourage all of my students, male and female, to wait about getting married until they had finished college. If you have a family, you certainly have to have a

job, maybe a full time job rather than part time. Juggling the demands of college, a job, and a family can be overwhelming.”

“You ought to know Liz.”

“Most spouses aren’t going to support you financially or emotionally for you to go back to med or vet school should you decide that you made the wrong choice.”

“Then maybe you made the wrong choice in spouses as well.” Valerie pointed out, “Think about where you would be right now if you had married any one of your high school sweethearts. I remember who they were, so be honest. Would you have outgrown them intellectually and emotionally?”

“They probably wouldn’t have seen the need for me to go back to school or to change jobs.” I admitted.

“That’s right. Would they have ‘let’ you quit a job in the chemistry lab at a nuclear power plant that was bringing in most of the money to the household? Especially a job with benefits like retirement and insurance.”

“I doubt it. Keep in mind that working there wasn’t perfect either. But it’s like Momma said, if work was supposed to be fun you’d be paying them to do it instead of them paying you.”

For most people in Charlton County working at the river is a coveted job. The company heavily recruits locals for entry level positions. Since the 9/11 terrorist attack, the visitor’s center has been closed to the public. The company public education group would bring their presentation to your facility. I inquired about having them come to visit my classes, but declined when I learned that it was not educational about the processes at the plant, but focused instead on the career paths that were available. A beginning wage

of ten dollars per hour for cutting grass sounds might inviting to someone who sees nothing but Burger King and minimum wage in their future. Sadly enough, many of our graduates, meaning they passed the Georgia High School Graduation Test, can't pass the employment test for the parent company of the nuclear plant. They usually obtain work through contract companies who don't require as much intellectually from their workers. You don't have to solve algebra problems to sweep floors and pull trash.

Why did Katherine's choice bother me so? Everyone has the right to choose a career and to change their mind. I think that it reminded me of a conversation that I had with one of my professors in college, Dr. McKeever. Like Katherine, I did not understand the counsel that McKeever was giving me.

"Go on to medical school. Don't be a teacher. If you go to medical school then you can be a teacher of medicine if you want to. Don't limit yourself now." I could hear his words emanating from my mouth as I spoke to Katherine. I was afraid financially and intellectually. I had always excelled, but I was afraid to take that chance.

"I used to have a real job, a man's job, working at the plant." I would tell my students on the first day of class. I never realized how sexist my comments were. They were meant to mount a defense of my current occupation in the female world of teaching.

"So why did you leave?" the students always ask. "Didn't you make more money there?"

"Yes, but money isn't everything. That type of occupation makes it hard to handle a family." The industrial lab still is a man's world. Things have changed somewhat in the industry as far as women are concerned. Sexual harassment and offensive language / actions are not tolerated. Men are no longer allowed to walk naked from a work area back

to the dress out area. It was quite a disconcerting to me as a young female to meet a fellow employee in the hall and he is clothed only in a hard hat and work boots. Those calendars wouldn't be sold except form behind the counter at the convenience store. Training has improved tremendously. At that time the company was experiencing such a high turnover rate that classroom training was delayed until after the six month trial period. In the meantime, workers were assigned a mentor for on-the-job training. My mentor was Moe and Moe was working reactor water. This task required that he collect samples of reactor water and the effluent from reactor water clean up filters at a specified location. This sampling station is hot. Hot in temperature, 110 degrees while wearing a lab coat, double gloves, double booties, and radiation wise.

“Did you get your finger rings?” Moe inquired on the way up to the station.

“No, what are those?” I asked. That sounded like another joke. My hard hat had already been tampered with. Another female, Daisy had finally noticed that my hard hat didn't fit just right and got me a new liner from the warehouse.

“At least they didn't put a rotten banana inside of yours like they did mine,” she revealed. “It took forever to get rid of that smell.”

“Never mind, we don't have time to go back and get them. I have enough dose for this quarter. You do the sampling. I'll tell you what to do. Remember one drop of this stuff on you and you will lose your clothes.” Moe said as we entered the locked, fenced in area. High radiation areas must be fenced and locked to keep people from being accidently over exposed.

“Ok, Let's get started. Use these labeled bottles to collect the samples,” he said pointing to a metal fume hood. Little pipes like the milk spigots in the school lunchroom

had water flowing from them. “Keep the fume hood door down as far as you can. It will shield your eyes from the beta radiation,” Moe cautioned.

Nothing went well. My hands were shaking. I was in primary school again spilling milk all in my tray. I dropped a lid off the sampling bottle and it rolled over in the drain in the back of hood. My arms weren’t long enough to reach the lid, so I had to push the door up and stick my upper torso in the hood. One drop, it only takes one drop.

General Electric was conducting a study on nuclear power water quality. Folks in the industry were just beginning to realize how important water chemistry was in maintaining a power plant. They were experimenting with different sampling devices to determine the best method for sampling for trace metals. Moe pointed to the portable filtering devices that were also inside the hood.

“You have to change out that filter too.” When he looked at the filter I had removed from the assembly, he said, “This is no good, there isn’t any flow through the old filter. Just throw it away.”

And I did. It was the wrong thing to do.

“Liz, I need to see you in my office,” said Lem, my foreman.

“Liz, did you sample reactor water yesterday?”

“Yes, sir, I was with Moe. He was assigned reactor water and I was assigned to Moe.”

“Were you wearing the proper dosimetry, including finger rings?”

“No, sir, I didn’t have on finger rings. I didn’t know that I needed them.”

“It was in the procedure. Did you dispose of the filter that you removed in the trash can?”

“Yes, sir.”

“To make a long story short, that filter was screaming hot, over 20 REM on contact. You violated company policy by not having the proper finger rings and creating an unsafe condition for the individual who would pull the trash from that area. Did you check the filter assembly with your radiation meter?”

“Moe did and said that it was within limits.”

“You need to learn from this situation. I’ll have to move you to a low level radiation job. You’ve used up your dose quota for this quarter. This discipline action letter will be placed in your file. Remember your employment is on a trial basis up until your six month evaluation.”

I had not gotten in trouble since high school when I was almost suspended for bringing hamburgers back from the Chic-King to the teachers. This is my first week, on my first job and I have a discipline letter in my file. “Did you talk with Moe, is he in trouble too?” I asked concerned that Moe, who was my assigned mentor, would hold this whole situation against me.

“No, Moe didn’t violate any procedures. Only you did.”

“Wait a minute. He was the senior technician responsible for training me. I followed his instructions explicitly, and I’m the only one in trouble? That isn’t right.” I did learn from that situation. I learned not to depend on my mentor for guidance. In the power industry everything was controlled by written procedures. If I couldn’t follow the procedure, I would read the equipment manual, which led to many procedural revisions. As a last result, I would ask my foreman for assistance. My new private mantra became “Don’t ask Moe, he won’t know”.

My six month evaluation came, “Liz, you’d better be glad that we are short handed. I have given you an overall rating of 2 out of 5. You just ask too many questions. You need to work more independently.”

I had to learn how to play by their rules. Some positives came out of that job. I met my husband Dan there on my first day at work. He had lost his clothes due to radioactive contamination and was wearing a paper suit. I wondered who the weird guy was standing in the corner. Later I found out that it was a common practical joke to tear the seat out of someone’s paper suit. Dan wasn’t taking any chances. Dating a co-worker isn’t a good situation, but tell love that. Working with your spouse in an industrial situation isn’t ideal. The corporation wasn’t ready for that either. We could have lived together (in sin) without any controversy or consequences at work, but this arrangement was not acceptable to Dan. He couldn’t tell his parents that he had a live-in. In retrospect, I’m glad that he was adamant about marriage.

“I had to ask your daddy if I could marry you,” Dan said. “You ask the chemistry manager.” I think that Dan was gun shy about asking anyone else.

I don’t know what kind of answer he expected Daddy to give, but he didn’t expect “Hadn’t you better ask her?” It wasn’t exactly what he had in mind.

I thought that once the manager gave his approval and we were married, things would get easier. They didn’t. The company was so careful not to allow any preferential treatment that management seemingly went out of their way not to accommodate our requests. We appealed to the union, IBEW, for assistance, but none was provided. When they said the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers that is what they mean, Brotherhood. We were literally told there would be no chance for advancement at the

river, so we left for work at another power plant. No wonder both of our Mommas cried when we told them that we had given up such coveted jobs. We had jumped out of the frying pan and into the fire. If you put my resume, which was identical to my husband's except for the personal information, in a stack for lab managers to select from, he would be their first choice and I would be their last choice. Why? Women are trouble. Just ask any lab manager. They get emotional; have children or the possibility of children meaning that their radiation exposure must be limited on a rolling calendar so as to not expose a developing fetus. They can't move liquid nitrogen dewars or gas cylinders. A few women would be hired by the company to meet the quota outlined by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), but women contractors were rare. When a woman was hired by the company, the managers would justify the hiring by leaking to the lab staff that the person was only hired to meet EEOC quotas.

Eight years of nuclear experience later, I was in the process of repairing and calibrating an ion chromatograph (IC) to support a hideout study for Westinghouse when Mike, a male contractor came into the lab.

"Do you have that fixed yet?" he asked while jumping up to perch on an open section of the lab counter. "That IC drives me crazy, I'm glad that it's your baby."

"I've almost got it. If you want to leave your samples I'll run them after I finish those Westinghouse samples. I need to run duplicates on them and I don't want anything else run until those are complete."

"Sounds good to me. One less thing I have to do. So tell me how did Dan get you this job?"

“It is the one month extra experience and lower college GPA that secured our positions.” I quipped. I should have made him run his own samples. Part of me knew that without Dan, in spite of my experience and expertise, it would have been hard to get a job in that industry.

That’s not true of teaching. Like Momma said, “Teaching is a good job for a woman.”

Rain on the Homecoming Parade

Date: October 21, 2005
Time: 8:45 pm
Characters: Mrs. Liz Bell – Biology Teacher at Swamp High School
Mrs. Johnston – Special Education Paraprofessional
Aunt Kitty – Relative of Liz
Setting: This scene opens at the rain sodden homecoming football game. Liz reflects upon the use of prayer to overcome meteorological events.

Weather is something that man has little control over. We are more aware of the conditions that influence the movements and developments of storms. Improved communications allow for citizens to be warned of impending disasters when systems work as designed. Images from Doppler radars are available 24 /7 even to common citizens who only have television service. Access to weather forecasts has become commonplace to even the most unschooled individuals through radio, newspapers, television, and internet.

Homecoming is the highlight for the fall school social calendar. The football calendar was a mess this year with several away games and an open week scheduled in the stretch that is usually the prime weekend for homecoming. Homecoming was late as was the rain. This year the summer drought had carried over into the fall. Both arrived,

but unfortunately on the same day. Plans for homecoming festivities continued in spite of the looming storms on the radar. The rain was welcomed as it was deemed necessary and a blessing. Not necessary mind you, for the ambience of the homecoming football game, but for the replenishment of wells and water holes that had been drained for the irrigation of crops. Several families had been forced to drill new wells. Mr. Blue, the well man, had been drilling at the Stone's place just down the rode last week. The purchase price of his new deep well equipment would soon be in the black as few customers were choosing shallow wells these dry days.

All this activity prompted Aunt Kitty to stop by to check on us. "We are in trouble, missy," she exclaimed.

I thought she meant that I was in trouble. Had I had been spied upon by one of her friends buying beer at the grocery store again? I knew that I should have taken the back street to the liquor store. You may be pushing 50, over twice the legal drinking age, but that doesn't matter here. Like a wayward teen, I carefully composed my reply trying not to further incriminate myself. "What do you mean?" I questioned her.

"We're running out of water. That's what. Didn't you see them drilling another new well right down the road? Old man Blue, Mr. Tom's father, said that when we run out of water in this frog pond, ALL of Georgia is in trouble. There is a prayer meeting at church tonight. You and Dan need to come. I know that you don't need that farm to feed your children, but that nuclear plant can't run without water either."

Aunt Kitty wasn't the only one who was in a panic. Even the governor was on the steps of the state capitol praying for rain. In the Atlanta newspaper, the governor was chastised for forgetting about the separation of church and state, but not in our town. To

the editor of our paper, he was getting “right with God” as we should all be. That sentiment was shared by many of the school faculty in the mailroom as we signed in for school.

Mrs. Johnston, an elderly paraprofessional, stopped by my room to get some special education paperwork signed. “Can you believe it, Mrs. Bell, the governor in trouble for praying?”

“I was rather surprised about that,” I replied. Not adding that I could not believe that the governor would be stupid enough to use a religious ploy to try to improve his credibility. I know that he had access to a radar screen. It didn’t take a rocket scientist or a meteorologist to see the chance of rain was increasing due to a front passing through the South.

“He is exactly the kind of leader that we need. One who has reverence for God,” Mrs. Johnston volunteered. She often leads the prayers and devotions at faculty meetings. Sometimes we have faculty meetings just so she can share an inspirational message. “You know we need to get back to our roots,” she added.

“Back to our roots?” I queried her hoping for some elaboration.

“We have come to far away from the basics in both society and the school. We need for students to learn right from wrong like the *Bible* teaches us. You take this special education. I am all for running a strict classroom. Yes, we need a “back to the basics” movement with none of these accommodations and modifications. We need to get back to the way our fore fathers learned.”

I stood amazed. Did Mrs. Johnston not realize the implications of her words? Could this be the same woman who had reported at one of our faculty meetings on how

her inventor grandfather was cheated out of the patent for car blinkers, yet here she was proposing that we get back to the “good, ole days.” Oh! By the way, Mrs. Johnston is Black.

“How far back are you willing to go? To when Blacks or women couldn’t vote? Or own land? Or to when slavery was legal?” I asked unable or maybe unwilling to bite my tongue. Mrs. Johnston stood stunned. I probably looked that way myself. Both of us tried to side step out of this awkward moment hurrying back to our busy tasks.

The opening prayer for the homecoming ballgame gave thanks for the rain in spite of the timing. “This deluge should refill some of those ponds, but it isn’t doing much for this school soiree,” I said to myself as I watched the prospective queens pass through the parking lot on the way to the football field for the halftime crowning. They were riding on the back of a flat bed truck rather than on the boots of convertibles loaned by the local car dealers. No one was fool enough to sacrifice the interior of their luxury convertibles for the display of the teen pageant queens especially if it wouldn’t improve their sales. A convertible isn’t very marketable once it has been through a monsoon. The flatbed was the only alternative as the class floats from the parade were out of the question as well. The float decorations made of spray painted tufts of tissue stuffed in the holes of chicken wire had disintegrated into flushable shreds as designed by the paper engineers. That night the marching band took cover in the gym for almost two hours waiting for a break in the weather that never came.

I sat in my car listening to the pelting rain on the sunroof waiting to take my band student home. “At least my roof isn’t leaking. It is time to reapply the silicone lubricant that helps to maintain pliability in the gasket. I had better add that to my to-do list of

preventative maintenance.” I reminded myself. Parents, wearing soaked suit clothes walked past me in my dry refuge. The disappointment was evident on their faces. Thousand dollar gowns against a Goodwill outfit and Goodwill won. This was to be a night that their offspring were to be recognized for their popularity. Homecoming queen is a measure of social-ability. It is the survivor game of high school, but only for the females. And Goodwill won.

Contamination of Society

Date: October 7, 2005
Time: 3:15 pm
Characters: Mrs. Liz Bell – Biology Teacher at Swamp High School
Ms. Gina Carter – Novice Science Teacher
Mr. Pete Brown – Physical Science teacher
Arnold Hall – Student in Mr. Brown’s Physical Science class
Setting: Science Hall, outside Room 118. The afternoon bell for dismissal has rung. Ms. Carter and Mrs. Bell are monitoring student behavior in the hall as the students exit the building. Mr. Brown approaches them from his end of the hall.

“Ladies, we have survived another week,” Mr. Brown greeted Ms. Carter and Mrs. Bell as he wheeled a cart of supplies back to the storeroom.

“I’m not sure about that except that we are standing here breathing.” Ms. Carter replied.

“You are too young to be feeling that way. You should be ready to go out dancing. You need to find you a young eligible bachelor. Sorry I am not currently available. Are you all going to the ballgame in Jeff Davis County tonight?” Pete inquired.

“Pete you know that I will be there since Brent is in the band.” Liz answered. Gina did not respond to Pete. It was the kind of comment that she heard often.

“I’m returning the sealed radioactive sources and the Geiger counters. Is there some place special that you’d like them put?”

“I’ll help you find a place for them. Gina can you watch the hall for another few minutes?”

Gina saucily replied, “I’d be glad to stand here. I’m no good at housekeeping, but I do have a keen eye for trouble. Maybe that’s why I’ve never been married.” Pete had been married several times. His name often showed up in the police blotter for being involved in domestic disputes. I was surprised that he was able to keep his job until retirement age.

Liz and Pete went into the store room and began to store the equipment from Pete’s cart. “I didn’t want to mention this in front of Gina, because I know how easily she gets upset, but I will be surprised if I don’t hear from Arnold Hall’s father. Do you know that family?”

“Yes, in a round about way. I went to school with his mother and his father works at the power plant. They are a good family.” I added wondering what Pete had said to offend them. Sometimes he could be quite uncouth as his comments to Gina demonstrated. “What was the problem?”

“Our unit this week was on radiation. So we were talking about radioactive materials and their uses. We talked about the nuclear plant and the use of fission as an energy source. We talked about the drawbacks of nuclear waste and disposal. No problems. Do you know what Arnold’s father does at the plant?”

“You mean his job classification?”

“Yea, does he sweep the floors or something?”

“No, he is a control room operator. Why?”

“What kind of education would be required to get that job?”

“It’s not that much to get hired, but to maintain and earn a license requires a lot of training. The plant has a complete training facility. Many of their original trainers were from Georgia Tech. The operators have several classes on reactor physics. It isn’t a course on basket weaving. Many of them don’t make it.”

“When we got to the topic of radioactive decay and using that as a means of dating fossils, mummies, and the like, my lesson was challenged by Arnold’s father via Arnold. In the Physical Science text books there is a website link to a webpage that graphically illustrates the different kinds of decay and shows some decay schemes for some of the different elements like carbon and uranium. I was telling the class since carbon -14 has a half life of approximately 5730 years, but you can’t use it to reliably date something that was older than more than five or six times that number. I also indicated to them that radioactivity was random in nature which was why a margin of error existed around a particular figure.”

I was nodding my head in agreement to the information that he had provided to the students. Then I asked “So, where was the challenge?”

“It started rather innocuously with a question about the randomness of decay. Then it progressed to the point where Arnold proclaimed that since the decay rates were not exact, then any data derived from that data was not valid. In all my years of teaching, I have never had anyone turn the rationale of critical thinking and scientific reasoning so succinctly against science. He then challenged me to show the website from the Consolation Baptist Association mentioned in the board meetings to the students. He said there was a link at that website that discussed radioactivity and a young Earth. He gave me the website, “*Creation vs. evolution – Young Earth theory*” (Price, 2005). There was

no way that I was going to put that up on the Activ board without previewing the content. Have you been to that website and what is a young Earth?"

"No, I wouldn't have put that up either. You never know what might pop up. I wouldn't think that would have pornography, but it might have other items that we don't want to deal with in class." I was particularly thinking about items related to evolution.

"Have you got time for us to look at that website?"

"I'm not going to be late for the ballgame. We can have a quick look." The website for the Consolation Baptist Association listed an address close to my house.

"Do you know these people? They are your neighbors evidently." Pete added drily.

"Yes, somewhat. Mr. Williams, who is the chairman of that organization, performed mine and Dan's wedding ceremony. He was the pastor at our community church when we decided to marry 25 years ago. Dan or his parents, insisted that we have a church wedding, like it wouldn't count if you got married by a Justice of the Peace. After the wedding, we lost touch with the pastor. I refused to go back to that church while he was the pastor. He had some crazy rules like he wouldn't marry a couple if either had previously been divorced. He also required that we go to marriage counseling with him before he would agree to perform the ceremony."

"I could have used some of that counseling. It would have saved me some money in lawyer fees."

"No, he would have saved you from marrying wife number 2 and 3. You would have been stuck with Emily all this time. Anyway the last straw was when he was late for our final counseling session, so he incorporated it into the weekly prayer meeting. Here I

am seated at a table next to white-headed Miss Zevita, whose husband died before I was borne, and he is telling me how it is my responsibility to satisfy my husband's sexual needs regardless of my own feelings. Miss Zevita is agreeing with him and reassuring me that it won't be so bad. I don't think that I will ever forget that incident. I could have crawled under the table and out the door. I tried to talk Dan into us getting someone else to do the ceremony, but we finally both agreed that it was too late to make that kind of substitution."

"I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall." Pete slapped his hand against the desk as he thought about seeing me in that predicament. The website had loaded and it was filled with tabs. "Wonder which of these links he was referring to?"

"Let's just type in radioactivity in the search box." No hits with that one. "Let's try 'young Earth.' There we go. This article was listed by the Southern Baptist Convention in one of its newsletters. It supported evolution and a literal 7 day creation of the Earth.

"Try radioactive dating," suggested Pete. Three hits on that search. We clicked on the first one. "The references look credible. This author is a professor at ICR University."

"Maybe that is like Graham U." The kids at school say that to students who have chosen to make their living selling drugs in that rural, poor socioeconomic neighborhood.

"The article cited a study that was conducted on samples collected from a small area in the Grand Canyon. I remember going to that location when we were out there on vacation. It's odd, because the site that they choose as the sample location has some rather elaborate signs that explain the geology of the region including references to dramatic change over a long time period not just 5000 years. As we were leaving the

parking area, a large tour bus from a Christian tour company was unloading. I wanted to stay around to watch their reactions but Sam had spilled hot chocolate all over his clothes and with the temperature about minus 15 degrees Celsius, we had to leave. Geology isn't my strong suit, but the way this guy presents his information makes it seem quite credible. Pete, what do you think about his argument? You're the one with a degree in geology."

"I see a few minor details that I don't agree with but those might be just because he is writing for the public and not for a group of professionals."

"I know that an unschooled person would find this awfully convincing. It is hard for me to argue with him and I'm skeptical. Someone who is readily willing to accept a literal interpretation of Genesis would buy right into this." Liz commented, "I would like to know more information about how the three separate labs came up with such different results."

"I think that the lack of reproducibility of ages of the rocks by the separate labs is the clincher that the science is faulty." Pete finished the conversation, "I sure am glad that I didn't bring this website up in class. That was a good gut instinct."

Whose Law?

Date: December 5, 2005

Time: 11:15 am

*Characters: Mrs. Bell – Teacher at Swamp High School
Christian – Student*

Setting: Science Hall, Room 114; Mrs. Bell is conducting a review prior to the EOCT. The conversation develops into one which attempts to apply scientific principles to a religious ceremony.

The end of the school semester means the End of Course Test (EOCT) for Physical Science. The scores on this state mandated standardized test serve as the

measuring guide for performance for all science teachers. At my school, your pass rate is listed on your yearly evaluation. The failure rate is easily inferred by those who can perform the simple math task of subtraction. I quipped in a seemingly jokingly manner but in reality with great sincerity that perhaps I should be able to include comments about the students whose scores were listed on my evaluation. A concept that was included in our review for the test was the law of conservation of mass. One of my best students in the class, a female named Christian timidly raised her hand. She prefaced her question by stating that it was a little off subject, but she needed to ask. As she was not one to cause class disruptions, I encouraged her to voice her question.

“Does the law of conservation of mass apply to people? And do people give off gold flakes?”

Some of the other students begin to howl with laughter. I tied Christian’s first question to a review of chemical changes and assured her that the law of conservation of mass and energy did apply to humans which is why people gain weight when they consume more calories than they use. I asked for clarification for the second part of her question, “What do you mean about people giving off gold?”

She replied, “We had a healer, Sister Mary, come to our church. Sister Mary’s body and hair gave off gold flecks to show everyone how blessed she was. She told us that God would bless us too if we had faith. I wish you could have been there. She prayed for people and touched them and if they had faith in the Lord Jesus then they would be healed. I prayed for you, but I guess she had to touch you. Maybe it made your recovery time shorter; you had already had your surgery. It’s too bad that you had to go through all of that when she could have just touched you. Anyway, one lady had cataracts but after

she went to the altar and Sister Mary stroked her eye lids she could see. Can you eat gold? Is that where the gold came from or did God give it to her?"

This was not the question I had expected. Part of me wanted to denounce the charlatan and her deceitful ways, but how could I without destroying the beautiful essence of this child – this child who decorates her homework papers with inspirational messages about Jesus and lives the life implied by her name. "I don't know," I replied. It was a cop out. I was not ready to take on the battle that my true answer would have incited. I consoled myself by asking, "Were all the people that she touched healed?"

"No," She shook her head. Her chin dropped and the expression on her faced changed to one of sorrow. "Do you remember Drew who had the bad car wreck and is paralyzed? He wasn't healed. His mama rolled him down three times for Sister Mary to pray for him. Then folks got to thinking that maybe he didn't have as much faith in the Lord as his mother had. Maybe that was why he had the wreck, to bring him down a notch and get him back to church. So where did the gold come from? My cousin, Jean is a hair dresser and she washed Sister Mary's hair the day of the service. Her hair continuously made gold. The more Jean washed and brushed her hair, the more gold appeared. It was like the multiplying of the fish when Jesus fed the multitudes. Sister Mary didn't ask for any money. I guess she didn't need any with all that gold her hair made, but we took up a love offering. The baskets were filled with bills, lots of hundreds. I bet there was over a thousand dollars collected. Everyone talked about how important it is that Sister Mary be able to continue her work. How can someone's hair make gold?"

"I don't know," I repeated. "Let's talk about atomic structure."

CHAPTER 3 – CHURCH BELLS

The holiday season is greatly anticipated by both the faculty and the student body. It is the only large break during the school year. In a community such as this, this holiday also carries with it the considerable religious significance. All ages celebrate the birth of Christ. The town and the churches glisten with decorations. The chimes on The First Baptist Church change to carols. Clubs at the high school organize parties and food drives, but the band has the biggest soiree of all. The Christmas band concert is the initiating event for the holiday season. The concert opens with a traditional hand bell Christmas carol. The symphonic band performs the remainder of the show.

In January, school reconvenes. It is a refreshing beginning for a new calendar year. At the high school, teachers get a new crop of students. For teachers, it is a time of self reflection. You don't have to wait until the next fall to improve your teaching techniques as a new generation of students is occupying your classroom. Test scores on the various domains of the End of Course Tests are scrutinized for patterns of weakness. The goal is to improve test scores for each generation of students.

Christmas Concert

Date: December 11, 2005
Time: 4:00 pm
Characters: Mrs. Liz Bell – Teacher at Swamp High School and band parent
Brent – Bell child and band student
Aunt Kitty – Liz's aunt
Ms. Candy Smith – School counselor
Callie – Student in Ms. Bell's class and band member
Marie – Student in Ms. Bell's class and band member
Setting: Fine Arts Complex; the high school band is presenting their annual Christmas Band concert. This is a mandatory band performance for all band students. This is the first concert to be held in the new auditorium.

“Brent, I just cannot believe that you left your music at the house.” Liz fumed at her son Brent. “Let’s see if we can catch your daddy before he leaves the house,” she said handing him the cell phone. “I think you should be one to tell him.”

“I’m sorry that I left it. Mr. Wilcox will dock me points on my grade if I don’t have that. Love you, Mom,” he added as he wrapped his arms around my shoulder and put his cheek against mine.

It hadn’t taken Brent long to figure out that a hug and a ‘love you’ could get him out of trouble. I knew that I was being suckered, but as a parent of a teenager, I take affection however I can get it. His first few days at the high school as a freshman were gut-wrenching. He and his friends would stroll past me in the hallway without any acknowledgement of my presence. I told myself that this was normal for a teenager. The daughters of another teacher nearby would leave her room and kiss her goodbye. Finally I told Brent, “You don’t have to kiss me, but you had better speak to me.” I was determined that I would not hide my parentage of Brent like Dan and I had hidden our marriage when we worked together in the lab early in our marriage. We didn’t actually hide our relationship, but we were careful not to draw attention to it lest it jeopardize our employment. Most of the time, we were assigned to different job areas within the lab. At first that angered me. “What do they think we are going to do? Have sex on the lab benches, we can do that at home.” I laughed when another couple was caught in a compromising position, but I bet their respective spouses didn’t find it amusing. We accepted that it was easier to conduct ourselves as if we were only co-workers who had the same last name and carpooled to work when possible.

“I guess I was worried about getting here in time to get my tuxedo on. What is a cummerbund anyway? Why do we have to wear these?” Brent asked as he held up the bowtie and button studs.

“It is part of your dress uniform.” Luckily Dan was still at home. I could hear Brent describing his band folder and its possible location to his dad. At least that catastrophe was averted. Marie and Callie dashed past me on their way to the dressing rooms. “You look divine ladies.” I couldn’t help but laugh at the two of them as they took time to twirl around in their black evening gowns. As she spun around, Marie called out

“Mrs. Bell, don’t you think we should wear these in lab?” before disappearing behind the double doors. The lobby area was filling up with family members. Parents, grandparents and siblings meandered around the large lobby area. This was the first time that most of the community had seen the fine new facility. It is a great improvement over having the band concert in the elementary school lunchroom. Most folks were dressed in church clothes. A few like the school counselor Candy Smith had even brought out their fur wraps. Maybe she is a better at reading people than I give her credit.

“Don’t tell me you’re one of those PETA people?” she said as she walked up to me in the lobby.

“No, it isn’t that. I was just thinking that you wouldn’t be wearing that if the concert was still being held in the lunchroom. Mustard stains and gum would be hard to get out of that.” The chairs in the lunchroom often had remnants from school lunches tucked into the crevices of the chairs. One year I was lucky enough to have a hidden stash of ABC gum attached to leg of my good dress slacks. Another parent had procured some mustard during their band session. “Hopefully we won’t have that kind of problem in

here.” Candy sidled off to talk with someone else. The band boosters had tables of refreshments out for the audience. It reminded me of the receptions held during intermission of the few plays that I had attended at the Augusta Opera House but no one was serving wine here. This is definitely a cultural event for this county.

“Liz, this is so nice.” Aunt Kitty exclaimed as she looked around in the lobby. “It was so sweet of you all to invite me. I don’t usually get such chauffeuring service as that,” she smiled up at Dan who had gone by to pick her up and patted him on the arm. I would be worried if she were thirty years younger. “Really honey, this is such a treat. I’m so proud of BOTH boys.” Sam squirmed as she kissed him on the cheek. “Look at this. He is almost tall as me. It doesn’t seem like it has been anytime, since you were at my shoulder.” It didn’t take much to be at Aunt Kitty’s shoulder. She was only five feet tall, but she knew how to get things done in the family. “Let’s go in now. I want to get a good seat.” We all followed her obediently.

“All of the seats in here are good,” I said attempting to reassure her. Sam volunteered to take Brent his music book. He managed to locate some of his friends in the process. At least he did come back and ask us about sitting with them. I had a good view of the group from the seats that Aunt Kitty picked out. I reminded Sam that I was not above going over to him and removing him from the audience should he misbehave. When the lights dimmed for the concert to begin, I was hoping that he didn’t realize that I really couldn’t see him anymore.

The band director Mr. Wilcox addressed the audience. “Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I would like to welcome you to our new fine arts facility. I thank you for the foresight that you all tax paying citizens showed in voting for a 1% SPLOST that funded

the construction of this wonderful facility.” As he paused, the crowd began to applaud. The cushioned theatre style seating was a welcome sight and seat to those in attendance. “I think that it also shows the support and appreciation that the citizens have for our band program. I hope that this will be the first of many school and community events that will be hosted in this venue.” Again the crowd cheered. “Tonight we are here for our annual Christmas concert. It is our first in this building. I am always delighted for the community to have the opportunity to hear our students perform. I hope that you will delight in the selections that we bring to you tonight. Music is one of the best ways for us as believers in Christ to share our faith with others. As many of you know, I am the music director at my church, Mount Zion. I appreciate God giving me the opportunity to share my love of music with the students of this school, the members of my church and the members of this community. Tonight, we will open with a ‘hand picked group’ on the hand bells playing *O Come All Ye Faithful* and then move to selections featuring the entire band with an old gospel favorite *Joy to the World*, followed by *Come Let Us Adore Him*, then we have a medley that includes some popular songs that you will recognize. I give you the High School Band.”

The curtain opened behind him and the band looked stupendous. The young ladies in their flowing black gowns and the gentlemen dressed in tuxedos. Those long dresses were a good choice. I recalled one band performance in which a certain young lady who was wearing a knee length skirt sat very prim for a long time and then as the performance dragged on her sitting position shifted. The audience had more of a show than they had expected. At least that won’t be an issue with those outfits. Callie and Marie were two of the ten playing the hand bells which were on loan from the First Baptist Church. Only a

few students play the hand bells. Small gloved hands deftly reach and ring the correct bell. Those students were discernable in class, because they are the ones playing the imaginary bells. Practice for this event has dominated their consciousness for the past several weeks. I was amazed at their performance. Marie even managed to be quiet for the duration of the song. That in itself was a minor miracle. The girls' black dresses contrasted with the angelic sound of their music. Overall the band gave an excellent performance. Gospel songs were interspersed with secular ones. Mr. Wilcox closed the performance by stating, "Thank you so much for coming to share this evening with our band, our community and our Lord. Tonight we have raised up his name in song. He has already given us the gift of salvation but if there is anyone in the audience who does not know him that you will accept him into your life. We out at Zion would be happy to have you as part of our church family. May he send a special blessing to each one of you that is in attendance tonight."

Aunt Kitty and I got our purses and we all made our way to the lobby. "That was absolutely wonderful. I would like to go out to Zion to hear that Mr. Wilcox. Liz we should go there next Sunday if you have time. I know that you are busy, honey, but I think that it would be well worth taking a few minutes for an outing like that."

"I'll have to get back with you," I answered trying to find a way to decline without offending Aunt Kitty. I felt as if we had just gone to church with Mr. Wilcox. He might have included a medley of secular songs, but this was more like a church concert rather than a holiday concert. Then I took note of the front of the program. "Welcome to the Christmas concert. A performance of songs that will highlight the Christ in Christmas." There had been several letters to the editor of the local paper concerning the

display of a “Happy Holidays” banner in front of City Hall. The sign was finally replaced with one that said “Merry Christmas.” I wondered why the Jewish community didn’t ask for a sign of their own. Maybe they have one in front of their church in Brunswick.

A Good Plan

Date: February 10, 2006
Time: 9:15 am
Characters: Mrs. Bell – Biology Teacher at Swamp High School; Mother of Sam and Brent
Sam Bell – Youngest child in Bell family
Brent Bell – Eldest Bell child
Misty – a female student in Sam’s second grade class
Mark – a male student in Sam’s second grade class
Ms. Smith – School guidance counselor and organist for the First Baptist Church
Blake – A White female student in Mrs. Bell’s Biology class
James – Black male student in Biology class
Alex – White male Biology student whose family owns several businesses in town
Cody – White male student who enjoys hunting and fishing
Setting: Science Hall, Room 114; Setting the stage for teaching the lesson on evolution involves planning. I reflect on my prior experiences of teaching and parenting. There are profound differences in my personal and professional beliefs and those of my society concerning the topic of evolution.

I am hoping that my plan to be proactive and display some fossils in the classroom will set the stage for evolution. Education specialists would call this technique scaffolding but for me it was a ploy that I felt necessary in order to introduce the idea of a species changing over time. Evolution wouldn’t be such a foreign subject to them if only they had ever attended a good museum. I thought about the expressions on my own children’s faces as they looked up at the dominating structure of Sue, the *Tyrannosaurus rex*, at the Field Museum in Chicago.

“He could eat more pizza than you, more pizza than all of us,” Sam exclaimed while managing to get a jab in at his older brother, Brent.

“Forty feet of meat eating machine.” Brent stood in awe of the giant carnivore, despite trying to maintain a teenage cool persona.

“Wow, what if that thing were after you?”

“People weren’t around 65 million years ago. No mammals yet either, so he would have been chasing other dinosaurs for dinner.” Mom, the teacher, had to interject a little lesson here and there.

I love a good T-shirt with a catchy slogan, so I purchased both boys a shirt with a diagram of the skeleton of Sue on it. It had a pleasing color scheme, forest green with crème and red.

On the first day of school that year, I offered the following fashion advice to my children. “Wear your Sue shirt today with your khaki shorts. It will look nice.” Most teachers still ask students to share with the class what they did on vacation.

“It will be a good intro for sharing time in class.”

Returning home from school, Sam stuffed his shirt into the back of his closet. You know the abyss of the planet Earth.

“That is a perfectly good shirt, son. You want to tell me why it’s back there visiting with Digimon (who was last years toy of choice)? I thought you liked seeing the dinosaur, Sue, at the museum?”

“I did, but you don’t understand. First I had to explain where the shirt came from. Nobody else in my class went to a geeky museum on vacation. They all went hunting, fishing or to a theme park. Then after I told them what Sue was, it got worse.”

How could it get worse? Being labeled the class geek is one of his biggest fears.

“Then everybody started laughing at me. Saying that I believed in cartoons. Did you talk to ‘Little Foot, Cera and Petri?’”

“The characters from *Land Before Time*? Why would they ask that?”

I knew immediately why they had asked, but I hoped that I was wrong.

“Then Misty jumped her big nose, bug-eyed self into it ... saying ‘You know there aren’t any dinosaurs on Earth. God didn’t make dinosaurs. They aren’t even listed in the *Bible*.’”

“What did your teacher say?” I asked, hoping for some support from her.

“She said that different people believed different things. Then Mark said I was going to Hell for believing that dinosaurs walked the Earth.”

“OK, OK. I see why you were hiding your shirt. You don’t have to wear it to school. You can just wear it at home, playing in the yard. They just don’t realize that there were all different kinds of dinosaurs. You have to remember that most of your classmates have never been to a museum and most haven’t been out of the state of Georgia. Some only travel as far as the ball team goes. They wouldn’t recognize a fossil if they stubbed their toe on it.” I added jokingly, “Maybe we should have taken all of them with us on vacation.”

“No way! I’m not putting up with them for days. It was bad enough to be cooped up with my brother for that long.”

I chastised myself for putting him in that position. You blew that one Mom. Dark green matches with khaki, but the T-shirt design doesn’t match the society. Maybe my turn at evolution will go a little better.

“Ms. Smith, the counselor, is here to discuss your schedules for next year.” I announced to the class. She met with students individually at a table in the corner as we continued class. Some of the students were asking her about what kinds of classes would best help them to be prepared for college. This was an honors class so a few of the students were aspiring physicians and engineers. The counselor offered the students the following guidance.

“Only three science classes are required, Physical Science, Biology, and Chemistry. You can also take Anatomy as an elective. You all take that nice field trip to the morgue in that class. Physics probably won’t make, but if you sign up for Calculus, you can still go on the NASA field trip.”

The teacher used that field trip out of state to draw students into the physics and calculus classes, but even that ploy had not been successful in the past few years.

Ms. Smith turned to me and said, “I’m praying for the rapture before we have to start building that new master schedule.

“Well, maybe the Physics class will make up there, since we can’t seem to have one here,” I replied.

“I just don’t know how we would fit all those classes together if anyone did sign up for Physics. We are adding another section to the *Bible* class if any of you are interested in that. The parents are thrilled that we have finally begun to teach that class.”

Ms. Smith finished up the registration and left the room.

“OK class, it’s time for business as usual. On a side note, some of you may want to consider some other science electives depending upon your projected careers. You

may find that you are interested in ecology or physics. Talk it over with your parents. Have them make some phone calls,” I said trying to encourage their participation.

Hoping to avoid class work, Blake said, “What was your favorite class in college?”

Weeks ago I had put out fossilized shark teeth, a chunk of rock from a phosphate mine that had recognizable molds and casts of sea shells and a giant oyster. This was the perfect opening. Kids think that there never is a purpose to any of my stories. “One class I took in college was nothing more than one big field trip looking at different kinds of rocks. We went all over the southeastern part of the United States.” Sorry Dr. Fred and Dr. Kelley. I didn’t think this was an appropriate time to discuss the long lectures that preceded those excursions.

“One weekend, we drove up to the mountains of North Georgia. I hammered rubies out of the rock face in a road cut in North Georgia. The next weekend we spent at the beach looking at erosion and beach reclamation. Another weekend we trekked through Augusta up into South Carolina. I didn’t think I would find anything. At the beach, we looked at the natural island building and erosion processes. One of the neat exhibits was of mammoth molars that had been caught in shrimp nets.” I replied to him rather off handedly, “Georgia hasn’t always looked like this you know.”

“You found those shark teeth there didn’t you?” queried James.

No, I didn’t, ” I answered, “those came from the dredge piles of a phosphate mine in the middle of South Carolina. Some people in the class found sharks’ teeth at the beach. My nephew has a collection as well.”

“Did that oyster came from the coast?” he continued.

“No, it came from Shell Bluff on the Savannah River near Waynesboro.” I passed the fossil oyster, *Ostrea gigantissima* around the class. At over a foot in length, it never failed to elicit comments.

“Are these the same oysters that we get at Shellman’s Bluff?” questioned Alex. A few of the affluent families in town have weekend houses at the coast.

“I’d like to roast that oyster, but it sure wouldn’t fit on a saltine. You’d need a big bottle of hot sauce for that one.”

“How ‘bout an axe to bust it open? I could blast it with my shotgun,” offered Cody.

It is a good opening for evolution without calling it the big “E”. I suggested, “Talk to some of your well drillers. They will tell you about finding shells in the dirt brought up when they dig wells in Appling County.” It was an easy way for the students to validate some of the classroom information with the some of the old timers about bored wells. Drilled deep wells have a smaller shaft and the cast offs are not so recognizable. “Call Mr. Blue, he has been the well man for years.”

“Remember the whale that had legs they found at Waynesboro while excavating the foundation for Plant Vogtle, the other nuclear power plant in Georgia?”

“You must be kidding!! It actually had legs?”

“Yes, it was a whale with a pelvic girdle and small legs. There is a replica in Georgia Southern University’s Museum. I am surprised you didn’t hear of that. Don’t you know people who worked construction at Vogtle?” Several students began to tell who all they know that worked construction at both plants, Vogtle and Hatch. “OK, class. Let’s get back on task for the day”. A secret smirk of a smile could be seen on both

my face and that of the students. MISSION ACCOMPLISHED. Only our missions were not the same.

School Days

Date: *February 27, 2006*
Time: *4:30 pm*
Characters: *Mrs. Bell – Biology Teacher at Swamp High School; Mother of Sam and Brent Charity – an outgoing female student who is active in school and community activities*
Jacob – a well-mannered male student with strong family involvement in the church
Brothers James, Mark, Tim – local clergy who focus on youth ministry
Setting: *In the Science Hall, Room 114; Mrs. Bell is preparing her upcoming lesson plans for the week she dreads more than any other. Preparing for this week leads her to reflect on past conflicts with students who are strongly religious.*

It is the end of the month. Almost pay day but it feels like a Sunday night. At least it isn't a weekly torment. I used to hate Sunday nights because I would wait until 9:00 pm to begin writing my lesson plans for the week. OK quit your belly aching Ms. Science teacher, it is time to make the calendar for the month. You know its "E" week. Evolution week means an argument in class. Who will be the one to tell me the age of the Earth is only 5000 years? Whose Momma will call the principal or their board member about evolution? I am betting that this semester it will be Jacob or Charity. Both have made it clear that their *Bible* class is more useful than Biology. Our teacher / student relationship became strained earlier in the semester when the two of them appeared at my door late to first block class.

"Do you have a note from the office?" I asked, reminding them of the school policy on tardies to first block.

Charity spoke up, “Why would I? We were at ‘Make a difference’ with Brother James. Haven’t you heard him, Brother Mark and Brother Tim playing guitars and singing down the hall?”

This group of youth ministers affectionately referred to as the, ‘Righteous Brothers’ by one of our administrators, holds weekly services at the Middle and High Schools. They are effectively allowed free access to the school. No visitor’s passes are required. The middle school service is held during the middle of the day because of the confined structure mandated by the middle school concept. At the high school, students have free movement before school, so services are held in an empty classroom. The soothing sound of guitars lures students with a bent for music into the room to receive the message. I myself have been tempted to step in and ask could they play Eric Clapton’s *Tears in Heaven*. They would probably be willing to play that one but not *Cocaine* or *Lay Down Sally*. It’s not like our school is immune to the problems of drug usage, both legal and illegal and teenage sex. A large percentage of our school population takes attention deficit drugs to improve their concentration which is in effect just a legal form of stimulant. The big bellies being pushed down the halls by the myriad of pregnant teens belies the effectiveness of the sex education program. In the sterile confines of the school building, music is a rare commodity as MP3 players and IPODS are banned. It is akin to the Pied Piper with a religious twist.

“I realize that you were at “Make a Difference” but you are tardy to class. You should have heard the 10 minute bell and you know what time the tardy bell rings.” I said standing firm or at the very least hiding behind the handbook rule. This group is sanctioned by the school board and officials. A former student who has graduated and

moved away wrote a letter to the editor in the local paper which admonished the school for not providing a gathering spot or safe harbor location for Gay and Lesbian students. Community / school members responded with letters of their own that no such place was needed as none of the school population was gay. The letters cited this *Bible* verse as justification for their position:

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:20)

If the school provided a place for gay students, then the school would be responsible for the moral decline and eternal damnation of the students. The same interpretation could be applied to gatherings of students who might choose a different religion other than Christianity.

“We can go back to get a note from Brother James if you’d like,” offered Jacob.

“No, I’m sorry. But that note will have to come from the front office,” I replied. A warning bell sounded in my head. Maybe I had better couch that response, “Brother James is not a member of our staff. He can’t give you permission to be late to class.”

“You mean it will count as a tardy to school?” Charity continued, “That’s not right. We were singing and praising the Lord and you are going to count us tardy!!”

Standards ??

Date: February 28, 2006
Time: 10:00 am
Characters: Mrs. Liz Bell – Biology Teacher at Swamp High School
Ms. Gina Carter – Novice Science Teacher
Mrs. Debbie Graham – Swamp High School Assistant Principal
Setting: Science Hall, Room 114; Ms. Carter comes to her mentor teacher for help with an instructional issue.

“Ms. Bell, Do you have a minute?” asked Gina as she gingerly opened the door to Ms. Bell’s classroom.

Gina was a novice teacher who had a split schedule, teaching both Biology and Physical Science. Mrs. Graham, the school assistant principal and I, felt lucky that we were able to secure her as a member of the faculty. Mrs. Graham was a bit concerned that her inexperience would be a problem. “Don’t resent her youth,” I reminded Debbie. “Not everyone begins teaching as a second career like the two of us. She’ll retire while she can still walk around. You and I will be on segue ways. Maybe the price will have come down enough for us to be able to afford them. We can race down the halls!”

Liz was seated at her computer desk working on purchase orders for the next year.

“Yes and when are you ever going to call me Liz. You have been teaching at this school for months now. What can I help you with? Actually, I am glad that you are here, because I need some help with some purchasing spreadsheets from the Excel guru and that would be you. So you see you have Peeerfect timing. By the way, it is my official duty as your mentor to provide you with guidance.” I added trying to put her at ease. Liz swiveled in her chair and pulled up another one behind her desk. “Sit down here, Gina.” She motioned to the young girl. The look on Gina’s face was one of almost fear, and most certainly dread. I hope that I can answer this question thought Liz. Had there been

an altercation with a student or parent? Or an affair with a student, after all some are almost her age. Whoa, slow down girl; don't let your imagination get the best of you. Just let the girl talk.

Gina took a deep breath. "You know I grew up in Lumber City not here in Charlton County.

I nodded but didn't say anything.

"I went to school at a small school, Ocmulgee Christian Academy, OCA."

"I didn't know that they were still in business." When integration finally came to our town in the mid 70's this academy opened with a promise of continuing quality academic education but mainly the focus was on providing a way that White parents could protect their children from being schooled with Black children. OCA purchased two buses. One ran a route that spanned a semicircle with a 55 mile radius, and the second one ran the other semicircle. Most all of Daddy's friends sent their children there. He and Momma considered sending the three of us girls to OCA until they looked at all of the financial aspects. We wouldn't have to endure the two hour bus trip each way, or pay for the service, as my oldest sister was of driving age, but that would be seven gallons of gas / week at \$0.35 / gallon. To add to that the family car would be tied up five days a week. When the price of tuition was announced, and Daddy multiplied it times three, he decided that we could attend public school.

"You're going to the nigger school," laughed Ann, one of my cousins, as we sat on the grease rack out behind the store. Not too many people brought their cars in to have the oil changed anymore, so the rack sat vacant most all of the time. Ann wouldn't play on my swing set or climb up in the big sycamore tree as she was too old for that. Her

daddy drove a Cadillac and went out to dinner with her mom one day a month without the kids.

“So what if I am?” I retorted. “Don’t you work in the ‘baccar patch just like the rest of us?” All of the kids in the surrounding area, Black and White, worked a circuit of farms to earn money. The tobacco patch didn’t care what color you were when you went in. We were all black and sticky with tar when we came out. “At least my daddy doesn’t make me pay my money to live in his house and expect me to buy my own food.” If times were so hard for them, why would they take on the added expense of private school?

Gina continued, “and then I went to college at Brewton Parker College in Mount Vernon.”

She paused. I still didn’t see what about this info was causing her such distress.

“I am worried about my year end evaluation and whether I will be offered a contract back next year.”

I chuckled at her naivety. Qualified teachers who are willing to come to South Georgia to teach science are hard to find. “I am sure that your yearly evaluation will be OK. Why are you so worried? Have you received any ‘needs improvement’, NI, markings on your previous evaluations?”

“No, all of my classroom evaluations have been positive. It’s just my test scores that have me worried.”

“Trust me we ALL worry. Even those of us who proclaim not to be concerned secretly harbor some concern.”

“My physical science scores were in line with the rest of the department. Didn’t you notice that my biology scores were lower than everyone else?”

“All the biology scores were lower this year. There is a little bit of variation from one class to another and a lot of it depends upon the level of kids that you have. I figured that you probably had a rough class. That’s nothing to feel guilty about. I told Debbie when I signed my evaluation, that I should be able to put some notes in that comment box along with that percent passing figure. Comments like, this class had Joe. You know Joe is the kid who retrieved his gum from the trash to take home to his dog because his dog liked to chew gum as much as the next dog. I’m sure that you had some winners too.”

“Yes, I did have some that I thought should have been served in special education.” She paused again and breathed a heavy sigh before continuing. “I am not sure that I am in the right place. I think my biology scores were low because of my teaching of evolution or more aptly not teaching evolution. The first semester I assigned the definitions to the chapter and that was pretty much it. I didn’t do much more than that the second semester. I’m not trying to make excuses for my poor performance, but evolution wasn’t taught at all in either my high school or college biology classes. I didn’t feel very confident in teaching that topic, so we just went on.”

“You know there are always particular topics that appeal to teachers as individuals while others are more drudgery. For me I don’t like magnetism. I think that is because I am weak in geology. Maybe we could find you some resources to help you feel more comfortable teaching those units.”

“I shouldn’t tell you this and I know that we are not supposed to look at the EOCT but I wanted to know that I had given the students the tools that they needed to

pass the test, so I peeked. I was astounded at the number of questions that related to evolution. I was surprised that any of my kids passed. I thought it since it was only that one standard that it would be OK to not teach it.”

“But there are only five biology content standards for the entire course.”

“I realized that evolution was such a significant topic after looking at the fall EOCT test. I told myself that I had to teach it spring semester. That is why I said that maybe I am in the wrong place. I just couldn’t bring myself to tell those lies to my students.”

“Those lies?” I tried to hide my indignation.

“Evolution lies. I’m sorry. I know that you don’t mean to lie to your students. That lesson stirred up some kind of controversy. Joseph and Sandy, who never get into any trouble, came into homeroom last week arguing about your fossils. Sandy was defending you and the age of the fossils. Joseph was just as adamant. They were looking to me to confirm or refute your claims.”

“Are you talking about those oyster fossils that are dated from the beginning of the Cenozoic or end of the Mesozoic periods which would put them about 65 million years old?”

Gina nodded, “You don’t really believe that do you?”

“I don’t mean that I paid someone to date those for me, but the formation from which they have originated has been studied for years. John Bartram studied this same group in Burke County when he came through here in the 1700’s. I am not good with dates you know. So this is not something that has just been discovered.”

“Many of these kids are in my Sunday school class. So I teach them by one set of standards at school and a totally different set at the church. That makes it hard for me,” explained Gina.

Gina stood up shaking her head as if she had seen a ghost. I was prepared to give some advice on how to handle a parent teacher conference, but I wasn’t sure how confident I was in giving advice on this topic. “Our assistant principal, Debbie, has a science background and is very active in her church. Maybe you could talk with her and she could provide some insight as well. Chris might be able to help you out too.”

“I hadn’t thought of that.”

“You might also want to consider talking with your pastor. I am sure that the science / religion conflict comes up when he visits with people who are receiving medical care. This is something that you will have to find a resolution for and I don’t think that leaving out all that information is fair to the students. The course standards for the state will be same for any public school. There is no room for interpretation about whether or not evolution should be taught. The standard states specifically that it will be taught.”

Execution of the Evolution Lesson

Date: March 3, 2006
Time: 10:00 am
Characters: Mrs. Bell – Biology Teacher at Swamp High School
Shelley – Female Biology student
Joseph – White male Biology student whose career goal is to be a music minister
Sandy – White male Biology student
James – Black male Biology student
Setting: Science Hall, Room 114; Today the actual evolution lesson will be taught. The moment of judgment has arrived. The students must evaluate the plausibility of the lesson and weigh it with their ability to reason. For some it may force them to acknowledge a reality that they have been taught to ignore.

I made myself and Paulo (Freire that is) a promise as I planned for the actual class on evolution. This year, I would have the students engage in dialogue. No banking deposits for me. Should I consider this an infomercial and evolution is my product to sell? I couldn't exactly bring in testimony unless you considered the fossils as witnesses. What about a debate. Students who believe in evolution could debate those who believe that God created the world and all of its creatures in six days. Then he rested on the seventh day. You can't have a debate without having two teams. Nobody would be sitting on the evolution side except me and I didn't want this to be a 'them versus me' class. So in the end, I justified my teaching of evolution based on Georgia Performance Standards. Nobody feels threatened by a giant oyster or a whale with legs unlike the life size poster depicting the fossil hominid Lucy and the artist's recreation. A comparison of Lucy and the modern skeleton that I use to teach Anatomy causes emotional distress for the Christian Fundamentalist students. The morphological differences and similarities between Lucy and the modern human were quite obvious.

"Is that a picture of a skeleton of a child," asked Shelley.

"No," I answered, "It's a photo of an early Hominid, *Australopithecus*, Lucy. Anthropologists think Lucy was an adult female because of the shape of her pelvic bone and the wear on her teeth.

"But, Mrs. Bell, how do they know she walked upright? No one videotaped her."

"It's similar to the work of a forensic investigator, like you want to be Shelley. An anthropologist studies the fossil remains of an organism and tries to recreate their life and living conditions. Using the angle of the bone connections from this fossil, they were able to conclude that she walked upright."

Tension was building in the class. It was most visible in Joseph. His face had flushed to match his red, wavy hair. He looked as if he were about to get in a fight, but his opponent was not another student but the devil incarnate, his science teacher. I noticed that he had slipped his *Bible* from his book bag. The book remained closed, but his fingers stroked the leather bindings in a slow, methodic manner. It reminded me of the actions of a child who is about to fall asleep soothing himself by rubbing a favorite stuffed animal or blanket. As a new parent, my older sister had offered some advice to me on how to get your baby to sleep in their crib rather than in your bed. "Take a piece of your favorite nightgown. Sew it into a small blanket and put some of your perfume on it. The baby will think that you are sleeping with him." Subterfuge begins at an early age. Both children were soothed by the actions. I fooled my child and this child was being fooled also. I could see his attempts to compose his response in a manner that he thought would be acceptable in a science class.

Joseph responded, "Even if we came from monkeys and I'm up in heaven and God whispers in my ear that we came from monkeys, do you think I will really care? I'm up there with my Lord and Savior walking the streets of gold."

Another student Sandy offered, "Joseph, even if you don't want to believe it, evolution really happened. Just look at the fossil evidence. You can't deny it. Evolution isn't just us coming from monkeys."

I guess there would have been one for the 'E' side of debate team. Part of me felt like a coward. I should have been the one to boldly make that statement. But then again, ... if I had made that statement rather than the class clown and favorite, it would have

immediately been discounted by the students. All of the students respect Sandy. Peer pressure can be a good thing.

“What is a theory? Can it be changed or is it static?” I interjected. Finally a safe topic, an easy question, an easy answer. “There were some problems with Darwin’s theory of evolution.”

“Wait a minute, “James said, “If this is ALL just a theory, then why are you asking us to believe it? The *Bible* doesn’t change. It is a constant. If I have to choose between a theory that changes and eternal life based on the *Bible* then I am picking the *Bible*. You would be crazy not to.” Heads in the classroom bobbed in agreement.

“I am not asking you to NOT believe in the *Bible*. I am asking you to consider evolution as a change in all species. Not just humans. One of the requirements of the theory is that all members of a species must look the same. So Darwin thought that all the Galapagos finches were different species because of the differences in their beaks.”

“So if Darwin was correct then Black and White people would be different species.”

Sandy asked, “Well all our DNA and other stuff are the same except for skin color, so would tan people and creamy people be different species?”

“Yea, and some black people have big lips like the finches.”

“Look at James over there, he looks just like a gorilla, I think he came from monkeys ‘cause he’s still a monkey. He’s the missing link.” James glared at him for his comment.

Oh, No. This is headed for a fight for real. I can see the discipline referral, both the students and mine. Student makes racial remarks in class. Teacher handles the

situation poorly. Thankfully, the situation diffused itself as Sandy continued his usual comedic banter.

“Big lips are only a subtle difference unlike an elongated beak and tongue designed for sucking the nectar from flowers and a thick stubby beak for cracking seeds. Lips only serve for covering your teeth and kissing.” The class cracked up laughing. That humorous comment relieved some of the tension in the classroom.

CHAPTER 4 – SERVICE BELLS

Service comes in many forms. There is the Easter service which highlights the beginning of spring. Don't plant your spring annuals until after Easter because of the danger of frost. There are services which are performed on or to an individual. Walk up to an empty desk and ring a bell for service. In the movies, well-to-do families rang bells for servants who attended to their needs. The church provides for the needs of others during times of crisis. It helps tend to spiritual and physical needs. Other bells call people into service. Phones ring, emails alarm and texts arrive that demand our attention. It is a new era of service bells.

Sanctuary

Date: March, 5, 2006
Time: 11:15 am
Characters: Mrs. Bell – Teacher at Swamp High School
Dan – Liz's husband
Brent – Liz's son
Katherine – Former student
Rev. Carter – Preacher at Big Oaks Church
Setting: This scene begins at Big Oaks Church. Liz is questioning whether or not she would like to be apart of this church family.

It is a strange thought coming from me. I am standing here grasping on to the back of this pew, thinking that this is exactly the place I need to be. I don't think that I have ever felt this sense of peace before or this sense of acceptance. What a beautiful, simple sanctuary this is, quite unlike the ornate cathedrals seen in larger cities like Savannah, Augusta or Atlanta. Nothing is gilded or ostensible. It is comfortable, welcoming. A second look reveals the many details that contribute to the pleasing interior. Someone with some decorator experience planned this soothing color scheme. The pews are not the hard contoured wood of long ago, but cushioned and upholstered in

a woven green fabric that has some hints of rose and blue. The patterned carpet shares the same shade of green. Alcoves in the walls of each side of the choir area hold vases of silk flowers. All the windows in the sanctuary have the same decorations. Wooden pediments and crosses that are stained a deep mahogany adorn each window. The angle of the pediment draws the eye up to the small cross above the window. The vista is obscured by the stained glass which portrays a *Bible* verse and scene. Each window scene has a name inscribed within the window which pays homage to a family or the memory of a loved one. The window I am sitting next to depicts Jesus in a garden in honor of James and Mary Black. The woven green fabric of the pews is repeated on the large arm chairs that flank the podium. A large picture of the ‘promised land’ completes the choir loft. This “promised land” picture has a wide slow stream flanked by palmettos and cypress trees, quite appropriate for a church near the Okefenokee Swamp. Everyone’s version of the “promised land” must be different as a picture in the choir loft of another church in north Georgia has large rocks and a mountain stream. The only rocks found in South Georgia are small conglomerates not worthy of illustration in paradise.

The subtle coordination of the sanctuary décor stands in contrast to the simplicity of the dress of the congregation. Most of the men are plainly attired wearing denim work pants with pressed plaid shirts. They are clean. No one smells of diesel, lube oil or animal waste. Only the preacher sports a suit. The song leader calls from the front, “Any young people to sing for us today?” Katherine, a recent graduate, encourages a shy girl who is about three to go to the front of the church. “I’ll walk with you, hold my hand.” Together the two of them go to the altar where she along with the rest of the congregation sings “Jesus Loves Me”. The little one turns around and almost skips back to her seat. Her pink

ruffled dress flutters down the main aisle. She is delighted in her performance. Katherine returns to her seat with her new husband.

A glance around at the congregation reveals several members of the school faculty as well as some of my current and former students. It was an invitation from one of the math teachers, Katy, which prompted me to attend this church initially. “We have a good youth group. Bring Brent. He’ll have a good time,” she said. The kids here, all of them, are well behaved. They are role models and leaders in the classroom and in the community. These are the kinds of children that you want your own to be like and associate with. Is it being in church that has taught them such good manners? They sit quietly in church just like they do in class. No interruptions, no sass. There are other factors that play a role in student success. Family involvement is one, and most of these kids are within a pew or two of parents and both sets of grandparents. The message is clear, family is important. Church is a place where relationships are nourished. Young girls who are not old enough to date independently may have a ‘church date’. Tony is a visitor to the church. His draw to the service may be the opportunity to sit next to Mandy. His arm hangs loosely on the back of the pew hinting at his intended protection for her. Under the watchful eye of her family, he begins the courting process.

No other church I have ever attended spent so much time in prayer. On my first visit, I laughed inside at the amount of time devoted to praying. I mimicked the preacher’s intonations over the Sunday meal. “Let us pray for the chicken.... (long pause) and the corn (long pause) and let us also remember the broccoli family in their hour of devour...”

Dan replied, “God will spite you for this, Liz, you had better stop.”

“That sounds like last weeks Sunday school lesson. The focus on this lesson was on showing our faith at all times. Our lives should illustrate our faith and beliefs wherever we are. Rev. Carter quoted:

This then is the message which we have hear of him and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. (1 John 1: 5-7)

As believers we need to come together to show and share our faith.”

One of the key parts of the sermon was his reference to Brother Mark Baxley, who is the one of the “Righteous Brothers” who spends the most time at our school. He mentioned that Brother Mark had met one of the students from that congregation at school. He confided in Rev. Carter that they had shared a God moment in the hall at school. The young lady had confided in him that due to his sermon, preached in a vacant classroom, she had come to the realization that her relationship with God the Father and Jesus the son was not what it was supposed to be. She had made a new commitment to God. All of this witnessing had occurred in the science hall at school.

After the service, Katherine comes to greet me, “I’m so glad that you came to worship with us. We have a nice church family here. Do you remember my mom and dad?”

“Yes, I was reacquainted with them in Sunday school. They told me that you and your new hubby have a trailer in the field next to their house. What are you up to these days? Do you pick up fresh eggs from the range chickens for breakfast” I asked. Their

family farm was like a menagerie. We went to buy hay from them and free range chickens had nested all in the hay, so there were eggs everywhere. Sam collected as many as he could find and put them in a bucket. He took the bucket to the front porch and woke up the Border collie dog that promptly chased him back to the barn. Sam fell and dropped the bucket and the dog ate at least a dozen raw eggs. A baby goat would jump into the hay trailer with every bale that we stacked. A sow was grunting for her baby pigs that had been taken away from her. Sam wanted to take them all home. The sow, the baby goat and the chickens. That is all except the dog.

“I’m still commuting to Coastal College. I’m working part time now at the nursing home. I have chemistry next semester, so I might be coming to you for some help.”

“I know that’s not true. You’ll hold your own, easily. I have faith in your ability.”

“I thought that I would be able to carpool with someone, but it hasn’t worked out.”

“Don’t give up. You have to just keep working at it and it will over before you know it. It was so good to see you again.” I said hoping that my conversation didn’t sound condescending.

On the way home the roles were reversed. “Momma, you sure are quiet. What are thinking about?” asked Brent. Usually I was the one interrogating him.

“I guess I’ve got Katherine on my mind. Now her plans are to be a nurse, not a vet or a medical doctor as her plans were for almost all of the years of her high school career. I see her conforming to the expectations. Marriage, some college, a job nearby and a

family. There isn't anything wrong with that, but it seems like a compromise of convenience. It wasn't like her other plans weren't feasible. Why did she settle for less?"

"Her husband seems like a nice young man." Dan interjected. "He has a responsible job. It's not like he a bum."

"I know that. And then there is all of this witnessing at school. It just doesn't seem right to me. Even here in the South, we have kids of different religions. One of my best students, Charney is a Sikh. Legally he could hold his own meeting, but I can't see that happening. The kids pick at him because they don't understand anything about his religion. Couple that with the fact that he is a vegetarian and the teasing intensifies. They aren't really mean to him as in beating him up; I know kids pick on each other all the time, just look at our boys. I know that Charney gets tired of it, but how do you stop it. I guess it is good that he is a passive person or he would stay suspended for fighting."

"If you follow God's rules then you have to witness everywhere you go. That's what the sermon means. It isn't something that you leave at home when you go to work or school for you."

Seeing More of the World

Date: April 19, 2006
Time: 11:15 am
Characters: Mrs. Bell – Biology Teacher at Swamp High School
Ms. Carter – Novice Science Teacher
Mrs. McDonald – Veteran Science teacher
Science Department teachers
Ben – Student in Ms. Carter’s Physical Science class
Felicity – Student in Ms. Carter’s Physical Science class
Setting: Science Hall, Room 116; Members of the science department are required to meet on a routine basis for professional development as part of a Professional Learning Committee (PLC). This proves to outside agencies and the public that we are concerned with our professional development and that our instructional strategies are driven by research. The focus of these meetings is primarily to share information that will result in an improvement of test scores.

“Thank you for meeting this week on such short notice,” opened Mrs. Bell as the other science teachers hustled into the lab area of the classroom. “Our ‘working lunch’ date was inadvertently omitted from the weekly calendar. Time has gotten by so quickly this semester, in some ways it seems that we just began second semester. I think that it would be a good idea for us to go ahead and schedule a field trip for our Honors classes. It will be a reward for those who brave our challenging curriculum. We went to the aquarium last year. Do you all have any suggestions?” I queried the group.

We listed our previous field trips with the honors classes: Sapelo Island, Jekyll Island 4 H center, and the new Georgia aquarium. Those are nice places, but most of our students have been there multiple times by now. The honors kids are treated to these trips, not the regular education kids. The regular kids rarely get invited on a field trip. Money and student behavior determine who goes on the trips. Nobody wants to chaperone kids who can’t behave in class. Those kids are the ones who really NEED a field trip.

“I’m not taking students to the Okefenokee Swamp. It’s been rainy this spring. The skeeters will eat us up,” declared Mrs. McDonald.

“That or the gators. You know somebody like Ben or Felicity would flip their boat over. Probably on purpose. PAGE doesn’t carry enough liability insurance to cover a claim like student ate by gator,” added Ms. Carter.

“Atlanta is far away.” I waited for input before offering my suggestion, “but what do you think about going to Fernbank Museum of Natural History?”

“Admission isn’t that expensive, but it will cost a lot of money for the driver, bus and fuel.”

“Won’t the school board help pay for it, since its standards based education?” asked our novice teacher, Ms. Gina Carter.

“No, they won’t pay any of it. Now if we could make it into a competition by meeting up with another school and playing “Name that Dinosaur” then the board would fund it.”

“Who ever made that competition rule must have never been to some of our ball games. We got beat so badly that you can’t call that competition.”

“It just goes to show where the priority is. Students will have to pay their own way or we could fund raise to help them out.”

“Do you think the kids will go?”

“I think that most will go just to get out of school. They might learn something as well.”

The novice teacher asked, “What standards will we be meeting for each class?”

“The museum has a list, so I’m sure we can make them fit somewhere. Maybe we should make up one for having some experiences outside of small town South Georgia. I’ll submit the paperwork and make our reservations. It sounds like we’re ready to book.” I am hoping that in the midst of our worry about meeting the standards that this day of respite will “allow however contingently, briefly or momentarily for us to soar vertically like a bird or slither horizontally, silently like a snake weaving our way amid the constant re-configurations, co-optations, and movements of the ruins (Reynolds, 2003, p. 94). My intimation was wasted on this crowd.

A one day vacation on a cheese wagon with 30 students in tow, now that is relaxation.

Prom - Another Night of Blessings

Date: April 22, 2006
Time: 7:00 pm
Characters: Mrs. Liz Bell – Biology Teacher at Swamp High School
Coach Smith- Teacher and Prom chaperone
Michelle – Prom Guest
Breanna – Prom Guest and Michelle’s sister
Setting: Lunch room at Swamp High School.

The weather for prom night was no different than the soggy homecoming. Storm fronts rolled through with downpours of rain that promised high crop yields which would help pay for the financed finery. Downspouts roared with the turbulent flows of water cascading off the roof. Coach Smith teased one of the girls, “Dress ya’ll up and the rain comes. See you all must not have been living right or we wouldn’t be in this predicament. You would have plenty of hay for your cows and your horses.”

Michelle blushed at his comment. She and her sister had been cow-tipping the previous weekend until their horses rustled them from the pasture thinking that it must

have been feeding time. “Instead of an Indian rain dance, we just need to organize a dance for you all. I should have recognized this earlier and I could have rented you all out. I wouldn’t play that kind of music though. I am really surprised with your daddy being a deacon and all that he would let you listen to such as that.”

“You sound just like him, Coach Smith. It’s not his favorite either”. “

He won’t let us even listen to it in his truck,” chimed in her younger sister Breanna before both of them disappeared into the doorway of the dance.

“They use edited music tracks at the dance,” I reminded Coach Smith after the girls had left.

“That music may be edited, but it still tells more than it should.”

“This generation didn’t invent the term ‘sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll’. Ours did.”

“Well, now, (Coach Smith started all profound statements this way) I can see what my parents were so worried about when we got to be that age.” He confided the following information to me, “I am thinking about moving my girls to the Christian Academy. What do you think the administration will say?”

“I imagine they’ll have a few comments as will some of the staff, but I think that is a decision that you and Sherri will have to make together. Why do you think they would be better off there? Do you think they are targeted because you both work here?”

“No, I would like for them to have more Christian influences. So many of the young girls, even freshman, are pregnant and unwed, I don’t want them to think that is acceptable.”

He lowered his voice before continuing, “Do you know that we have some GAY students?”

“I knew that some girls were threatened for Public Display of Affection rule violations in the bathroom this week. I don’t think that the assistant principal wanted to put it in writing. She asked me to keep an eye out on our end of the hall.”

“I walked through the dance floor just a few minutes ago and there must have been ten head of girls in there dancing with each other. It made me sick to my stomach to see them rubbing all over each other like that.”

Liz laughed and said “I’m glad it wasn’t Brent that they were rubbing all over. I saw those girls, and most of them were just dancing for the fun of it. I don’t think you have anything to worry about concerning your girls.”

“Well, now, you might not agree with me on this one, but that just isn’t right. I don’t go around quoting scripture, but it plainly says “Thou shall not lie with mankind, as with womankind” (Leviticus 18: 22).

“Wow, I’m impressed. You can substitute for the *Bible* class next year should the Preacher have to be out.” I would be last person they would call for that.

“Times have changed. It used to be that students came to school to get an education. Now they come for the free lunch and the socializing. I think some of them should be made to stay at home. We don’t need all those trouble-makers here at school.”

“What are they going to do at home? It’s not like they are employable,” I asked.

“I don’t know, but at least we wouldn’t have to put up with them here.”

Party Favors

Date: April 24, 2006
Time: 4:00 pm
Characters: Mrs. Liz Bell – Biology Teacher at Swamp High School and band parent
Sam – Liz’s son
Tiffany – Student in Mrs. Bell’s class.
Mrs. Kendra James – Black counselor
Mrs. Candy Smith – White counselor
Setting: This is the first week of school following Spring Break. Spring Break for the county is determined by the date of Easter. It will either be the week before or the week after that religious holiday. For this year it is the week after Easter Sunday. This scene opens at the Bell family home. Sam is sitting at the kitchen table doing his homework.

“Today seemed like it was five days long,” Sam complained as he pulled his books from his backpack. “I’m starving. Do we have something to eat? Could I have a couple of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches as a snack while you cook supper?”

I wasn’t surprised about the request. It was almost time for Sam to hit one of those growth spurts. I think that some kids were glad to get back to school and not just for the socialization, but for breakfast and lunch. Sitting in my comfortable house with a well stocked larder, it is easy to forget that in our community there are children who don’t eat unless they are at school. As a teacher sometimes you ask questions of students and get answers that you don’t expect. Like the time that I asked Tiffany why did she have cartons of milk in her backpack. She was a student with an “ATT-I-TUDE” and I do mean with the capital letters. Tears welled up in her eyes as she confided in me “I’m taking it home to my little sisters.”

I had anticipated an answer about some kind of prank not one of need. Thank goodness we finally got a Black lady, Mrs. Kendra James as a counselor. I knew that she wouldn’t get any help from Mrs. Candy Smith our White counselor. Candy would spend hours counseling the economically privileged student who was choosing a college, but

had little time or patience for those who were truly needy. Last semester she had placed a student who was math challenged in an honors level science class that required considerable math skills rather than in a conceptual class that required little math skills. “Why did you put her there when an alternative was available?” I demanded. You know that she will not be successful in that class.

“She asked for it and now she has her semester in honors. I am done with that. She can just fail and next time she won’t argue with me and waste my time.” You could envision her washing her hands of the situation. Yes, Rena failed. I don’t know if she bothered Candy again about placing her in other honors classes.

Mrs. James talked with Tiffany and set up some help for her. Tiff’s momma was mentally handicapped as were her other sisters. She had a lot of responsibility, much more than the homework that I assigned in class. “Liz, I am surprised that Tiff told you anything. She is pretty tight lipped in spite of her mouthiness. I called the food bank and cleared it with them so that she could go by when she needed to pick up food. They usually only distribute to adults, but I explained her situation to them.”

“Thanks Kendra, I appreciate you coordinating that. It is one thing to deliver food baskets at Thanksgiving and Christmas, but this is an ongoing need. I knew there had to be some resources available. Some kids just don’t get to be kids do they? When I went off to college and called home, my momma would ask me what I was doing. If I answered studying or working, she would say put that down and go do something fun. You’ll have to work for the rest of your life. That comes early for kids like Tiff doesn’t it.”

“Let’s keep a watch on her. Send her to me if you notice anything out of the ordinary.”

Sam probably wondered why he got a hug to go with his sandwiches. He hasn’t developed that prickly teenage attitude yet, but I am expecting it any day. “Do you have much homework? What about makeup work from the Friday before Spring break?” We had left a day early to go on vacation.

“No, I don’t have any make-up work. They just watched movies and had an Easter party. I do have some math homework from today though.”

“What movies did they watch? You’ll be sorry that you missed that day.”

“I had seen it before. They watched *Gone with the Wind*. We watched it last year too in history class.” The peanut butter sandwiches had disappeared and Sam was rifling through his book bag looking for his math worksheet. “What do you want me to do with this?” He pulled out a small *Bible*.

“Why did you take that one to school? Dan’s father was a Gideon and he often distributed *Bibles* like that. Both boys had ones that he had given them when they were small just in case they had forgotten to pack their own.

“That’s not the *Bible* that Pop gave me.”

“Where did you get that from?”

“Mrs. Downey, my history teacher, gave them out to the class at the Easter Party on Friday. So she gave me mine today.”

“She gave them out to all of the students?” I questioned.

“Yea, I don’t know. I guess so. We got some candy and some dyed eggs, but she didn’t give me any of those because the eggs had been out all week and were rotten.”

“What did the other kids say about it?”

“Nothing really. I asked Mark at recess if that was all the treats they got and he said yes. He said that he already had a big *Bible*, but he took it anyway so as to not make Mrs. Downey mad.”

“That was smart thinking on his part.” Her temper was legendary around the school. Brent had her too when he was in that grade. Her teaching style had not progressed and neither had her ideas about science and social justice.

A Good Community

Date: *April 28, 2006*
Time: *1:15 pm*
Characters: *Mrs. Bell – Biology Teacher at Swamp High School;
Mr. Chris Ellis – Chemistry Teacher at Swamp High School
Brittany – Student in Ms. Bell’s class
Jordan - Student in Ms. Bell’s class
James - Student in Ms. Bell’s class
Elijzh - Student in Ms. Bell’s class
Corey - Student in Ms. Bell’s class*
Setting: *In the Science Hall outside Room 114; Ms. Liz Bell and Mr. Chris Ellis chat in between classes. Later Ms. Bell reviews with her students and the conversation develops.*

“Liz, it’s so good to see you up and around,” exclaimed Chris. “I think you have lost some weight. I mean you just look great,” he said grabbing me for a big bear hug I was up close and personal with his bright yellow smiley face tie. It could have been a Walmart advertisement, but was punctuated with ‘Smile, God loves you’.

“Easy now that sternum is still kind of tender,” I interjected grimacing with the pain, but attempting to keep a smile at Chris’s exuberance. “Thanks. I don’t know about the weight thing, but it is wonderful to be back at school. It is amazing that doctors can cut you up and install some new parts and then hopefully you are better than before. To

hear the hospital staff talk, heart surgery is no big deal. They do it every day. Course, I'm glad they have some experience. I would have hated to have been one of the first few. ”

“Science is a great thing. That's why you and I love it so much. And look it saved your life,” Chris added.

“That's a pretty sobering thought isn't it? Yea, when we lecture to kids about technology and tell them that science may be responsible for you being alive, I can say I really mean it.

“When it comes down to it, we all mean it. Think about vaccinations, food supply, and safety equipment. Here, I'm sorry. I don't have to 'preach' that sermon to you, do I?”

I chuckled, “Do you remember when Bobby said 'he wasn't no test tube baby' when I started my spiel on the importance of science and technology in today's society?”

“What did your students say when you talked with them about your surgery?” asked Chris who is a rare combination; a science teacher and a preacher. He is comfortable with his faith and with scientific knowledge.

“I didn't share too much with them before I went into the hospital. It was hard for me to talk about it without falling apart. Thanks for covering some of my classes while I was gone. I really owe you one. The kids enjoyed having you. The video that you guys made for me was fantastic.”

“That was Holly's idea. They did a good job editing it in the electronics lab didn't they?”

“It was touching to hear that they were praying for me. I just bawled. You think about all the times that you pray for that kid who is having a tough time with his parents

or lack of parents, but then to have them praying for me.” I shook my head at the idea.

“Did you see the video?”

“No, not the finished version.”

“The camera was set up in the hall and most of the kids came out in groups. Each one would say hello and send their love. I don’t think that some of them would make the show choir, but they would chime into together with a ‘We love you, Mrs. Bell. We hope you will be better soon.’ Taylor was by herself in her shot holding her key ring cross. She held it up in her hand and said, ‘I am praying for you to be healed. God will hear our prayers. Have faith. You will be back with us.’ She looked just like an angel.”

“Hearest thou what these say? ... Yea; have ye never read, out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise.” (Matthew 21.16) She is such a sweetheart. I hope that life doesn’t break her kind spirit.”

“I expected such a response from those who are like Taylor, and there were some who chose not to speak on camera. Others shocked me, like Lonzo. Lonzo has always been a bit of a pickle in class, but his camera time was one of the most memorable parts. He hid in one of the large cardboard boxes in the hall that desks came in. When the other students in his group had finished their greetings, out popped Lonzo. ‘I haven’t been your best student in class, but I’m sending my best prayer to heaven for you Ms. B. I’m talking to the man for YOU.’ He seemed so concerned and sincere.”

“I am sure that he was.”

“I was surprised at the number of people who saw me at the ball games and told me that I was on the prayer list at their particular church. I know that teachers often get gifts that say things like ‘To teach is to touch a life forever’, but it amazed me at the

number of students who added my name to the prayer lists at their home churches. At first, I thought it was through the adults at school and some of it was, but much of it was from the students.”

“They can surprise you in good ways, can’t they?”

“You feel very humble and grateful. Several of them cooked entire meals for our family and delivered them to the house. I know that their parents helped, but I couldn’t help but be amazed at their thoughtfulness. Christian and her sister Amanda came knocking on our door, I think it was the second day we got home from the hospital with a baked ham, corn, field peas and cornbread. Emma and Charity brought a dinner of lasagna, salad, and banana pudding.”

“Wow, I should have come to your house for dinner. I bet they didn’t mind visiting with Brent either,” referring to my teen age son.

“Brent has never eaten peas before in his entire life, but he ate those with a smile. We are very fortunate to live in such a caring community. It reminded me of a situation that happened when we were moving from Miami to Chicago when Dan and I were first married. We were towing our car for the first time to the next job site behind a moving van. We had already loaded the car onto the dolly but we didn’t realize that you couldn’t back up the moving truck with the car in tow behind it. Of course we didn’t figure that out until AFTER driving into the dead end street where our apartment was located. We had to push our car off the dolly in order to turn the truck around and then load it again. We could see people standing at the windows in their apartments, but no one would offer to help. After my surgery, people offered to taxi my children around, clean for me and do

my shopping. That's a big difference. Anyway it's good to be back at work. I'm very thankful to be here, literally."

"Have you heard my good news?" asked Chris.

"No, what's up?"

"My mission trip to Mexico has been funded through one of the businesses in town. This mission trip is a cooperative one that includes members from several different churches in the area. I didn't think that I would be able to swing it financially, but Brother Ray helped me work it out. I will be out for entire second week of April."

Brother Ray is a deacon in a nearby church who is also a member of the county board of education. Just to look at him you would never guess that a farmer man could have so much political influence in a small town. "If he can host a dinner party for the republican candidate for governor and collect over \$20,000 in campaign donations then I am not surprised that he can arrange funding for a mission trip. Owning a few thousand acres gives you a little bit of leverage in this town."

"I know that you are from here. Do you know his story? How did a simple man like him get so much land? Farmers have had a tough time for decades now."

"He inherited a lot of it. When his daddy died, the boys of the family got the land and the girls split the cash. There was a lot more land than cash. Then he cut the timber off the land and bought out one of his brother's shares. Being an upstanding member of the church and community, he and his wife 'helped out' a few other family members with loans and ended up with their acreage as well. I know that he helped out his other brother, his brother-in-law and his father-in-law that same way. Each transaction added a few hundred acres to his stash. Funny thing about it was that everyone in the community

commended him for his great service. He was citizen of the year. No one dared to speak against him.”

“I didn’t realize that he had so much influence until the faculty retirement dinner when Mr. Mike, the Superintendent for the county, credited him with his success as an educator. I was surprised that he did so publicly at that particular venue.”

“Ray Jr. and Mike go back a long ways. They come from the same community. Mike was raised up in the same church that Ray Jr.’s family attended. Old man Ray was the song leader for decades and Ray Jr. was a deacon. Their families have continued to be very close. Will Ray Jr. be able to go on the mission trip? I know he is retired from teaching and doesn’t farm much these days, but the board is pretty busy now interviewing principals and teachers to fill all of our open positions.”

“No, I don’t think that he will be going but without his help I wouldn’t be either. I will be acting in his stead. ”

“Man, that is just NOT fair. You get two spring breaks and one of them is in Mexico.”

“I am going to call in my marker that week if my substitute gets in a jam. You know I graded a lot of your papers while you were out.”

“Yea, Yea, I hear you. You will be laying up on the beach somewhere, saying what a mission!”

“That sounds like fun and I wouldn’t mind doing that but the area where we are going is really poverty stricken. We don’t have any idea what it’s like to live someplace like that. I am so glad that we get to go help those people out. They need our assistance and it gives me an opportunity to share the gospel with them.”

Ringggg

“There’s the bell for fourth block. Call me if you need anything.” Chris offered.

“I’ll be fine, but thanks for the offer.”

I was pleased at the way class was going. The kids fell back into our routine of class work easily. We didn’t have much time before the standardized End-of -Course-Test (EOCT) would begin. Electricity and magnetism is the final unit for the semester I was moving around the lab checking their progress on a circuit lab, when I heard Brittany inhale sharply. “What is it?

Did you hurt yourself?” I questioned her.

“Mrs. Bell, ooh yuck! I see your scar. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it like that. But it gives me the creeps. Does it hurt?” asked Brittany.

I had tried to be very careful not to show my scar. “Sometimes, but it is getting much better. Here is my bride of Frankenstein impersonation only I have brown hair and red streaks.” I hold my arms and hands out stiffly in front of my body and zombie walk around the room. “I even have the scars to support the act.”

Jordan chimed in, “I think you have a few screws loose, Mrs. Bell.”

“What do you remember?” asked James.

“Nothing about the actual surgery. Thank goodness.”

“Did they stop your heart from beating while they did the surgery?” asked Elijah.

“I think so, it would be a little difficult for them to be cutting and replacing a valve while the heart was beating,” I replied.

“So, you were dead?” asked Corey

Before I could answer that one, the questions cascaded.

“Did you see God?”

“Were you in heaven?”

“Did you tell him that James said hello?”

“If I could be at heaven, I wouldn’t come back here.”

“I’d be grabbin’ up some of that gold before I came back.”

“Our preacher said that once you see heaven, you won’t want to come back to this Earth, if you have too, then you won’t ever be scared of dying again. Are you scared of dying Ms. Bell?”

Spreading the Word by E-Mail

Date: May 14, 2006

Time: 9:45 am

Characters: Mrs. Bell

Ms. Ellie, adult Sunday school class teacher

Setting: This conversation began prior to the lesson in the adult Sunday school class. The scene progresses to include flashbacks on emails received through the school email. The scene concludes with other ‘lessons’ learned in Sunday school.

“We missed you last week.” Ellie exclaimed as I entered into the Sunday school room. I was hoping to enter quietly without drawing attention to my recent absences.

“Did you get my email at school?” Not waiting for my reply, she continued, “I was hoping that we hadn’t scared you off! I meant to get by your room to visit you on my planning period.”

“Sorry, I didn’t reply because I don’t like to use my school email for personal communications. You never know who is reading your mail.”

“They can just go ahead and read mine. I don’t care if they find out that’s one way that I make my church contacts. I always use that link for everyone in the system to

send out information about benefit suppers. It's cheaper and easier than making fliers. Isn't technology great?"

Yea, you aren't the only one who uses school email to send out their religious messages. I thought about some of the ones that I had received while I was out on sick leave. Most were chain letters which are easily propagated with our cut and paste abilities on Word. The consequences of not complying are implied. All seem to place one's faith and final destination in question should you not comply with the request. Most recipients would question a million dollar prize, but buy into a mansion of gold in the sky.

Email #1

Subject: Prayer

Hello everyone, I was asked by a very special friend to help a teacher who is using an e-mail prayer as part of her religion class. It was difficult for me to decide who I thought would DO this. I hope I chose the right eleven. Please send this back to me. (You'll see why.) There is nothing attached. Just send this to eleven people. Prayer is one of the best gifts we receive.

"May today there be peace within. May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be. May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith. May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you. May you be content knowing you are a child of God. Let His presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love. It is there for each and everyone of us."

Now, send this to 11 people with in the next 5 minutes and remember to send this back. I count as 1... You'll see why. Suggestion: copy and paste, rather than forward.

KNOW THESE FACTS?

Death is certain but the *Bible* speaks about untimely death!

Make a personal reflection about this.....

Very interesting, read until the end..... It is written in the *Bible* (Galatians 6:7):

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked:

for whatsoever a man soweth,

that shall he also reap.

Here are some men and women who mocked God:

- John Lennon (Singer):

Some years before, during his interview with an American Magazine, he said:

"Christianity will end, it will disappear. I do not have to argue about that. I am certain. Jesus was ok, but his subjects were too simple. Today, we are more famous than Him" (1966). Lennon, after saying that the Beatles were more famous than Jesus Christ, was shot six times.

- Tancredo Neves (President of Brazil):

During the Presidential campaign, he said if he got 500,000 votes from his party, not even God would remove him from Presidency. Sure he got the votes, but he got sick a day before being made President, then he died.

- Cazuza (Bi-sexual Brazilian composer, singer and poet):
During A show in Canecio (Rio de Janeiro), while smoking his cigarette, he puffed out some smoke into the air and said: "God, that's for you." He died at the age of 32 of AIDS in a horrible manner.
- The man who built the Titanic
After the construction of Titanic, a reporter asked him how safe the Titanic would be. With an ironic tone he said: "Not even God can sink it"
The result: I think you all know what happened to the Titanic.
- Marilyn Monroe (Actress)
She was visited by Billy Graham during a presentation of a show.
He said the Spirit of God had sent him to preach to her.
After hearing what the Preacher had to say, she said:
"I don't need your Jesus".
A week later, she was found dead in her apartment.
- Bon Scott (Singer)
The ex-vocalist of the AC/DC. On one of his 1979 songs he sang:
"Don't stop me, I'm going down all the way, down the highway to hell".
On the 19th of February 1980, Bon Scott was found dead, he had been choked by his own vomit.
- Campinas (IN 2005)
In Campinas , Brazil a group of friends, drunk, went to pick up a friend.....
The mother accompanied her to the car and was so worried about the drunkenness of her friends and she said to the daughter holding her hand,

who was already seated in the car: "My Daughter, Go With God And May He Protect You." She responded: "Only If He (God) Travels In The Trunk, Cause Inside Here.....It's Already Full " Hours later, news came by that they had been involved in a fatal accident, everyone had died, the car could not be recognized what type of car it had been, but surprisingly, the trunk was intact. The police said there was no way the trunk could have remained intact. To their surprise, inside the trunk was a crate of eggs, none was broken.

- Christine Hewitt (Jamaican Journalist and entertainer) said the *Bible* (Word of God) was the worst book ever written. In June 2006 she was found burnt beyond recognition in her motor vehicle.

Many more important people have forgotten that there is no other name that was given so much authority as the name of Jesus.

Many have died, but only Jesus died and rose again, and he is still alive.

P.S: If it was a joke, you would have sent it to everyone. So are you going to have courage to send this? I have done my part, Jesus said, "If you are embarrassed about me, I will also be embarrassed about you before my father."

This email certainly was not very comforting or inviting. It is nice to know that our English teacher who happens to teach our *Bible* class is using school email to send such communications. I wasn't one of his original 12 disciples who were chosen to disseminate this one. I was one of our secretary's chosen twelve.

Email #2

If you're spiritually alive, you're going to love this! If you're Spiritually dead, you won't want to read it. If you're spiritually Curious, there is still hope!

A Church goer wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper and

Complained that it made no sense to go to church every Sunday. "I've

Gone for 30 years now," he wrote, "and in that time I have heard

Something like 3,000 sermons. But for the life of me, I can't remember

A single one of them. So, I think I'm wasting my time and the pastors

Are wasting theirs by giving sermons at all."

This started a real controversy in the "Letters to the Editor" column,

Much to the delight of the editor. It went on for weeks until someone

Wrote this clincher:

"I've been married for 30 years now. In that time my wife has cooked

Some 32,000 meals. But, for the life of me, I cannot recall the entire

Menu for a single one of those meals. But I do know this. They all

Nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work. If my

Wife had not given me these meals, I would be physically dead today.

Likewise, if I had not gone to church for nourishment, I would be

Spiritually dead today!" When you are DOWN to nothing.... God is UP to

Something! Faith sees the invisible, believes the incredible and

Receives the impossible! Thank God for our physical AND our spiritual

Nourishment!"

All right, now that you're done reading, send it on! I think everyone

Should read this! "When Satan is knocking at your door, simply say,
"Jesus, could you get that for me?"

Email #3

A girl went to her friend's house and she ended up staying longer than planned, and had to walk home alone. She wasn't afraid because it was a small COMMUNITY and she lived only a few blocks away.

As she walked along under the bike trail Diane asked God to keep her safe from harm and danger. When she reached the alley, which was a short cut to her house, she decided to take it. However, halfway down the alley she noticed a man standing at the end as though he were waiting for her. She became uneasy and began to pray, asking for God's protection. Instantly a comforting feeling of quietness and security wrapped round her, she felt as though someone was walking with her.

When she reached the end of the alley, she walked right past the man and arrived home safely.

The following day, she read in the newspaper that a young girl had been raped in the same alley just twenty minutes after she had been there.

Feeling overwhelmed by this tragedy and the fact that it could have been her, she began to weep. Thanking the Lord for her safety and to help

this young woman, she decided to go to the police station. She felt she could recognize the man, so she told them her story. The police asked her if she would be willing to look at a lineup to see if she could identify him.

She agreed and immediately pointed out the man she had seen in the alley the night before.

When the man was told he had been identified, he immediately broke down and confessed.

The officer thanked Diane for her bravery and asked if there was anything they could do for her.

She asked if they would ask the man one question.

Diane was curious as to why he had not attacked her.

When the policeman asked him, he answered, "Because she wasn't alone. She had two tall men walking on either side of her."

Amazingly, whether you believe or not, you're not alone. (people) will not stand up for God.....

Send this and make the subject the name of (your city) if you truly believe in God.....

PS: God is always there in your heart and loves you no matter what

"If you deny me in front of your friends, I shall deny you in front of my Father"

STAND UP FOR HIM

93% of people won't pass this on.... Will you be one of them???

Email #3

In Phoenix , Arizona , a 26-year-old Mother stared down at her 6 year old son, who was dying of terminal leukemia. Although her heart was filled with sadness, she also had a strong feeling of determination. Like any Parent, she wanted her son to grow up and fulfill all his dreams. Now that was no longer possible..

The leukemia would see to that. But she still wanted her son's dreams to come true. She took her son's hand and asked, "Billy, did you ever think about what you wanted to be once you grew up? Did you ever dream and wish what you would do with your life?"

Mommy, "I always wanted to be a fireman when I grew up."
Mom smiled back and said, "Let's see if we can make your wish come true."

Later that day she went to her local fire department in Phoenix, Arizona, where she met Fireman Bob, who had a heart as big as Phoenix. She explained her son's final wish and asked if it might be possible to give her six-year-old son a ride around the block on a fire engine.

Fireman Bob said, "Look, we can do better than that. If you'll have your son ready at seven o'clock Wednesday morning, we'll make him an honorary fireman for the whole day. He can come down to the fire station, eat with us, go out on all the fire calls, the whole nine yards! And if you'll give us his sizes, we'll get a real fire uniform for him, with a real fire hat-not a toy one-with the emblem of the Phoenix Fire Department on it, a yellow slicker like we wear and rubber boots. They're all manufactured right here in Phoenix, so we can get them fast."

Three days later Fireman Bob picked up Billy, dressed him in his fire uniform and escorted him from his hospital bed to the waiting hook and ladder truck. Billy got to sit on the back of the truck and help steer it back to the fire station. He was in Heaven. There were three fire calls in Phoenix that day and Billy got to go out on all three calls. He rode in the different fire engines, the paramedic's van, and even the fire chief's car. He was also videotaped for the local news program. Having his dream come true, with all the

love and attention that was lavished upon him, so deeply touched Billy that he lived three months longer than any doctor thought possible.

One night all of his vital signs began to drop dramatically and the head nurse, who believed in the hospice concept that no one should die alone, began to call the Family members to the hospital.

Then she remembered the day Billy had spent as a fireman, so she called the Fire Chief and asked if it would be possible to send a fireman in uniform to the hospital to be with Billy as he made his transition.

The chief replied, "We can do better than that. We'll be there in five minutes. Will you please do me a favor?"

When you hear the sirens screaming and see the lights flashing, will you announce over the PA system that there is not a fire? It's just the fire department coming to see one of its finest members one more time.

And will you open the window to his room?

About five minutes later a hook and ladder truck arrived at the hospital and extended its ladder up to Billy's third floor open window

16 firefighters climbed up the ladder into Billy's room.

With his Mother's permission, they
hugged him and held him and told him how much
they loved him.

With his dying breath, Billy looked up at the fire chief and said,
"Chief, am I really a fireman now?"

"Billy, you are, and the Head Chief, Jesus, is
holding your hand," the chief said.

With those words, Billy smiled and said,
"I know, He's been holding my hand all day, and the
Angels have been singing."

He closed his eyes one last time.

My instructions were to send this to at least
four people that I wanted God to Bless and I
picked you. Please pass this to at least four
people you want to be Blessed.

This story is powerful and there is nothing attached, please do
not break this pattern; uplifting stories are one
of the best gifts we receive. There is no cost
but a lot of rewards, let's continue to uplift one
another. Stop telling God how big your storm is.
Instead tell your storm how big your GOD is!

While these emails were probably meant to be inspiring, I found them to be threatening.

“I think that everybody who is coming is here now. So let’s begin. Today’s lesson is on being thankful. Are we thankful enough? Do we give credit to God for the things that he has given us. Now I am not talking about being thankful for a new truck or car, or a nice house, or new clothes. I am talking about the things that we take for granted. When I read my lesson, I began to think about Mr. Eston and his oxygen tank. He comes to church almost every Sunday and he always has that tank. Everywhere he goes, he has to take that tank. So you take a minute and think about the air we breathe. What if we all had to take a tank everywhere we went? Some people like to go in the water and since they are not fish they have to take air with them. Isn’t God wonderful that he has provided us with a place on this Earth that we don’t have to carry a tank around to breathe? That is all part of God’s plan. Hasn’t he just thought of everything? They will tell you in school that oxygen comes from plants. I am a teacher of 2nd graders and I don’t really understand all that. I don’t think they do either. It comes from God. God is the one who is responsible.”

No one asks me the science teacher to elaborate any on the process. Ms. Ellie is only a few years younger than me, so we had the same teachers in high school. There is little turn over in the faculty, so you have to wait for someone to die or retire to get a job. Even at Swamp high school back in the day, we knew that Calvin had won the Nobel Prize for Chemistry for working on photosynthesis. Maybe I should have interjected, but I sat stupefied. I have taught science to the offspring of five sets of parents in the room. All of those students received instruction about the details and history of the discovery of the process of photosynthesis. Bonnet’s study in which plant leaves are submerged in

water and exposed to sunlight is recreated as a student lab. Oxygen bubbles can be seen on the edges of the leaves. We study Priestley's experiment that plants used the gas produced by a candle flame (carbon dioxide) to produce a gas that animals require (oxygen) as part of the study of ecosystems. Calvin's use of radioactive carbon -14 to trace the movement of carbon dioxide through the process shows students that the discovery of one material leads to other discoveries. Photosynthesis and cellular respiration basic equations are always used as examples of endothermic and exothermic reactions as well as bond energy in Chemistry classes. It is something that students should be able to relate to. I know that it has been a while since these parents sat in classrooms, but all of this was known when we graduated from high school. The person seated across the table from me is a Sunday school regular who is certified to teach agricultural science. Surely he remembers the connection between photosynthesis and oxygen production. Why doesn't he speak up? So in this Sunday school class, all those discoveries and lab work are reduced to being thankful to God. There is no faith in science and seemingly no understanding of the complexities of life.

Graduation Wishes

Date: May 23, 2005
Time: 10:00 am
Characters: Mrs. Liz Bell – Biology Teacher at Swamp High School and band parent
Carrie Marie – Band student
Dustin – Band student
Ashley- student
Setting: It is the final week of school for graduating seniors. Finals were Monday and Tuesday. They are back on campus practicing the commencement ceremony. As practice concludes for the day, some students take this opportunity to visit with favorite teachers and to flaunt their status to the underclassmen.

“Hey, Mrs. Bell.” Carrie Marie and Ashley call in unison from the door way.

“Can we come in?”

“Yes, this time. This one last time.” It didn’t seem possible that these two were graduating. Really they were good students and had matured considerably since their freshman year. My current students were reviewing for the final. They would welcome the interruption from these two girls.

“We brought you our senior books to sign. Do you have time to do that now? I came by your room last week, but you weren’t in “

“I would be glad to sign it.” Turning to the three students who had not exempted the class, I asked, “Do you all mind if I take a second to do this?” Carrie Marie and Ashley sat down and began to chat with the students in my room. I took the memory books to my desk to sign. I always found myself at a loss when it came to writing in these. Most teachers included a *Bible* verse in theirs. Mrs. Carter wrote, “God has a plan for you. Remember he told you in this verse. ‘For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’ (Jeremiah 19: 11). Keep him always in your sight and he will bless you.” That was similar to the

sentiments expressed by Mr. Wilcox. He chose, “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel and watch over you” (Psalm 32:8). Some teachers only mentioned the verse, as if it were immediately recognizable by the reader: Philippians 4:13, Proverbs 3: 5-6, and Joshua 1:19. For my entry, I tried to think of something funny. I don’t think that I was too successful. “Keep up the good work, don’t --- And fill in the blank with something that had happened in class to that particular person.” I feel like such a fake as I write “I know that you will do well in college and in life.” Sadly many won’t graduate even from the local community college and that degree doesn’t guarantee much.

Graduation

Date: May 26, 2006
Time: 10:00 am
Characters: Mrs. Liz Bell – Biology Teacher at Swamp High School
Mrs. Andrews – Faculty Member
Dustin – Senior; Speaker at graduation
Carrie Marie – Senior; Performer at graduation
Mrs. Owen – Member of the Adult Sunday School class at Oakview Baptist Church
Mr. Jones – Member of the Adult Sunday School class at Oakview Baptist Church
Ms. Gina Carter – Novice Science Teacher
Mrs. Debbie Graham – Swamp High School Assistant Principal
Setting: The scene opens at the graduation ceremony and continues to Sunday School at the Oakview Baptist Church.

Each high school graduating class has its own personality. This personality gets translated into a T-shirt slogan that comes to signify that particular class. These T-shirts are worn to pep rallies and sporting events. In the stands you can see the gamut of shirt designs from the senior class to the freshman. 06 – We Slick; 07 – Almost Heaven; 08 – Don’t Hate. 09- Mighty Fine. For the 06 –class no saying could be more appropriate. Homecoming was doused with rain. Prospective queens traversed a ‘slick’ stage while

football players slipped in knee deep mud. Hundred-dollar hair do's were soaked on the way to the prom. Freshly washed rides looked like they had been mud bogging before that night was over. This class seemingly more so than any other, has been cursed by the rain on a number of important events. If rain on a wedding day blesses a marriage, then this class must be going to win the lottery.

The water is running out of and through my hibiscus / leopard print dress. I have heard of Spring Break – wet T-shirt contests but never Graduation – wet dress contests. I am seated in the front row, but I don't think I am going to win this contest.

I stood in the living room and twirled “Does this dress look OK? Or is the print too wild?” I asked my family before departing for graduation. A better dress rehearsal would have been to dive into the pool, stand on the deck and ask “how naked do I appear to the crowd?”

“Liz, I didn't know we were going to be out in this kind of weather,” whispered Mrs. Andrews who was sharing her umbrella with me. “My black slip will be showing through when I stand up.”

“Black might be better than white.” I replied. Glancing back a row, I just hope that I am not competing with Mrs. Keith in the second row whose off-white pants might as well be off. Bless her heart. She would have a stroke if she could see herself. Holding the graduation ceremony outside on the football field has been a tradition at my high school. The rationale is that seating must be available for most all of the county to attend. The nearest inside facility that would accommodate a crowd of that size is over 100 miles away. For most of these students, this will be the only commencement ceremony that they will participate in. The commencement ceremony this year was plagued with rain.

The students sat with feigned dignity as the water cascaded down their mortar boards. The assistant principal stalked behind the rows of students using proximity control to assure that no students disrupted the miserable ceremony.

As Dustin came to the microphone, the rain intensified. The pages of his speech began to stick together, wadding up into a giant spitball. Recognizing his dilemma, the principal came to the podium and held an umbrella over his head. For a moment he seemed flustered, unsure of what he was to say. The umbrella had arrived too late, his written speech was illegible. His experience performing in show choir was evident as he continued without his props. “On behalf of the class of 2006 I would like to welcome you to this commencement ceremony. This is not only a ceremony for us as graduates, but for you as well. You, our loved ones, parents, grandparents and friends who have strived to keep us on course. You have reminded us that God has a plan for us. If we keep our focus and our commitments to our Lord, we will go far in life. Let us pray. ‘Lord, we thank you for the blessings that you have bestowed on our class. Help us to always remember that if we keep you in our focus that the choices we make will be the right ones. Please give solace to those families whose loved ones, James and Victoria, are represented by the empty desks. Bless us Lord and our families as we move on to a new facet of our lives. Amen’.

Carrie Marie was seated in the last chair of the honor graduates. We smiled at each other as she entered into seating area of the field. Her carefully coiffed hair already hanging in wet clumps. Raindrops, as big as pecan tree leaves, strike against our skin. She looked at me asking for guidance. I had none to offer. In class, when she was forced to work alone, she would burst into song. “What if God was one of us?” Emails with her

mom always included a testimony about her Christian ideals. Her time to perform came and she boldly, but carefully walked barefooted through the giant puddle of the football field.

“Carrie Marie,” I wanted to shout, “don’t you remember any of that lab safety lesson that I taught you on using electrical appliances with wet hands and here you are about to grab an electrical mike standing ankle deep in water.” I waited anxiously as she began to sing. I was impressed that she could sing without an umbrella over her head and the water cascading down her face. I expected that she would strangle on the water that ran in her mouth and up her nose as she tilted her head to sing. No gurgles of drowning, convulsions, or shrieks of electrical shock punctuated her song. She survived and the ceremony continued.

Fire trucks were on standby in case the celebratory fireworks caught anything else on fire. More than likely they remained at the scene in case of automobile accidents or lightning strikes.

The Sunday school lesson on forgiveness had not started yet at Oakview Baptist Church and the conversation had already turned to school gossip.

“Some graduation you all had Friday night wasn’t it?” asked Mrs. Owens a little smugly. “I sure was glad that I didn’t have family graduating. It only sprinkled at the house in Surrency.” Mrs. Owens substituted at the high school when teachers were desperate and couldn’t find anyone else. It was a wonder that she had not had a stroke or heart attack because of the pranks that students would pull on her. They would tell her some story about their escapades with sex and drugs and she would be on her knees

praying for them. And these would be the good kids, not the ones who really had stories to tell.

“Why do you all torment Mrs. Owens so?” I would ask them as they relayed the tales of the day that had forced Mrs. Owens to her knees on their behalf.

“She’s so easy to get going,” was the usual reply.

“You know she means well. You all should have some pity on her.” My comments fell on deaf ears.

I admitted to Mrs. Owens, “It was a little disappointing to be sitting in the rain through what is supposed to be a dignified occasion.”

Mr. Jones, a local farmer, added with a chuckle, “Didn’t hurt those young’uns any to get wet. I bet they won’t soon forget their graduation. Jeff Davis County must be all Methodists because they only got a sprinkle. I believe y’all got baptized.”

Mrs. Owens straightened up in her seat, “I tell you, that was the group who insisted on reading that blasphemous literature. I recognized their pictures in the paper from me substituting at school. The Lord will take his vengeance in his good time. I think that was it. You never know how he will serve justice until it happens and it always matches the crime.”

“Jean, you know that’s not what happened. The weather had been awful all day. It wasn’t like some freak storm hit there and no where else. I was surprised that the school administrators didn’t call it off at noon. The field was underwater then. If it hadn’t been for that little break of sunshine about 5 or 6 pm, nobody would have dreamed of them even having graduation,” interjected another parent from the class.

“God always gets what is due to him,” Mrs. Owens shook her head, “Didn’t you read the scripture before today’s lesson? Ephesians 4:17 says “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind.” Them young’uns have done got too uppity in their education and God brought them down a notch.”

I wondered how many others in the community shared her sentiments. The last item listed on the prayer requests was for RAIN.

CHAPTER 5 - INSIDE THE BELL JAR

Summer in the South is hot and humid like being confined inside a closed container. Children and parents are relieved to be rid of school responsibilities for a short time. Empty schedules quickly become filled with vacation bible school, church camps and sports camps. Parents, who at the beginning of summer are eager for spare time for their children, now lament the perils of free time. Church sporting leagues provide outlets for teen energy that might otherwise be detrimental. Labs use bell jars to isolate materials from their surrounding environments to inhibit contamination and corrosion. Churches in the South do the same.

Religious Alchemy

Date: *June 4, 2006*
Time: *4:30 pm*
Characters: *Mrs. Bell – Biology Teacher at Swamp High School;
Ms. Debbie Graham – Assistant Principal
Jordan – Vacation Bible school coordinator
Samuel Williams – Vacation Bible school worker
Hallie – Dance leader at Bible School
Ashley – Former Science student of Ms. Bell
Tammy – English teacher at the High School*
Setting: *In the Science Hall, Room 114; Mrs. Bell is returning phone messages.
Later in the story the scene changes to a vacation Bible school based on a science theme.*

The message light on my phone is blinking again. Having a phone in my classroom is great for contacting parents, but I don't have an excuse for not checking my voicemail anymore. Message 1 – This is Carl with Holt, Rhinehart and Winston. I would like to touch base with you concerning your text book order. Call me at ___-___-____ ;
Message 2 – Hey Girl, This is Debbie. I have a favor to ask of you. Stop by my office on

your planning block if you don't mind; Message 3 - Ms. Bell, your Activslate is ready to be picked up from the technology center. Have a blessed day. No real bad news or demands. Maybe this will be a blessed day. I wonder if Goths end their conversations with have a "cursed day". Ordering text books has been a challenge. This is the first time I've had this responsibility and it is also the first time our school system will use the same book for all levels of learners from low functioning to gifted students. It will make it easier to ensure that we have adequate books on hand, but picking one book to meet the educational needs for all of those students has been a compromise. The teachers will certainly have to get up off of their duffs and not rely solely on the packaged resource materials. I hope this works. I don't know if George, my teacher neighbor, will be able to function in a classroom without a ready to play Powerpoint on each topic. The new Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) have been a positive influence on our department in that teachers have been forced to collaborate, meaning talk, with each other about labs and methods of instruction. From the student perspective, it has also been an improvement as it has somewhat standardized instruction from one class to the next. Our department has not subscribed to the idea that content should be scripted and every teacher should be on the same page, but we have tried to equalize the resources among all learners. Each teacher edition textbook has suggestions in the margin for labs and class discussions. Maybe we have all come to rely on those "hints" more than we'd like to admit, but at least we have resisted the role of 'professor', the science teacher.

Behind me on the stage is a mock lab, the "Power Lab" of Vacation *Bible* School at the First Baptist Church. A Bohr model of an atom hangs in the center of the stage over a large video screen. Quite appropriate in a town where the majority of the population is

employed at a nuclear power station. The lab area which flanks the video screen on each side has five tall open shelf plastic storage units. Each shelf is filled with cardboard replicas of lab glassware. One storage unit holds beakers. Another shelf displays Erlenmeyer flasks. Next to it is a shelf of Florence flasks, while the remaining shelves contain simulations of lab bottles. Each shelf has a label: Thankfulness, Helpfulness, Bravery, Eternity, and Good News. One of the other props on stage is a one meter tall plastic Erlenmeyer flask. VBS workers wearing disposable lab coats and safety glasses on the top of their heads mill throughout the VBS crowd waiting for their turn to perform.

“Hasn’t Sandy done a great job of simulating a lab,” exclaimed Tammy, an English teacher at the high school. “You know I didn’t pick this kit for VBS.” Tammy vocalized her distaste for science at every honor’s committee meeting. “Doesn’t Samuel look so nerdy in his lab coat carrying that clip board? He even taped the bridge on his safety glasses. I would hate to have to wear these every day,” she added flipping the hem of her lab coat as if it were a flamingo dress.

“He’s really playing the part of the science geek well. I tried to remove the ‘kick me’ sticker from the back of his lab coat and he informed me that he had placed it there. I guess I have a soft spot for lab geeks, since I married one. I’ve seen the ‘kick me’ signs on lab coats before but no one has worn them by choice.”

Those shelving labels are a LITTLE different as well. No corrosives, oxidizers, combustibles, or general storage labels in sight. I am the only one wearing a real lab coat and safety goggles. Probably no one else here owns one or has ever stepped foot in an industrial lab and that my dear is why you are here. Debbie’s little favor.

“I know that you have helped us out before. Everyone was impressed with the water to wine demo that you prepared for us before. Could you please help out our VBS with a science experiment? We have a science theme this year and we want a demo that will illustrate God’s power with some sort of small explosion.”

“A small explosion is a bit more involved than a pH change with an indicator solution in place,” I replied hesitantly.

“They have already bought the kit, but they didn’t realize that the chemicals didn’t come with it. This would be a good community involvement to promote science education through the church program,” prompted Debbie, the assistant principal, coordinator of curriculum instruction and my primary evaluator. “The church is always helping out the school by sponsoring sports banquets and such. It would be a nice way for us to reciprocate.”

I caught the hint that cooperation in this venture was expected. “OK, I’ll find something simple for them to do and get it together for them.”

“Actually, I was hoping that you might be available to do the demo for them. With all those children present, I would hate for something to go wrong. I know that you have a lot of experience handling lab chemicals and responding in case of an emergency. Someone else volunteering might not have your understanding of chemicals and their associated hazards.”

“It’s great that you came to help us out today,” said Jordan who is coordinating the VBS activities. “What can we do to help you set up?” she asked. “Here is the table that you will be using. I taped this red tablecloth to so that it stays in place as we move the table.”

“I think we need this one with a longer drape in front,” countered Samuel. “Let’s switch to this one.”

“Aren’t both of those tablecloths paper?” I queried. “Perhaps we can use a large baking pan underneath the experiment as insurance against a fire.”

“That’s a good idea. I hadn’t considered how flammable the paper might be.”

“I think that I have brought everything else that I need.” A quick check verified my inventory: nitric acid, pipette, well plate, zinc, test tube and a tea candle as a source of ignition. “How much detail would you like for me to provide?”

“Oh you don’t have to tell them anything other than the name of the chemicals that you are mixing. Samuel and I will relate the *Bible* verse to the experiment.”

Honk! Honk! Samuel used a bicycle horn to signal the children. Each group was assigned a particular seating area inside the assembly hall. The colored coded T-shirts made it easy to recognize a child who had strayed from their group. The leader of each group carried a sign and called to their respective groups, “Line up: Beaky Beakers, Chemical Reactions, Atomic Matters, Plasma Pals.

“If I could have everyone’s attention up here,” Samuel began to recite his spiel which was conveniently and discretely available on his clipboard. “We would like to welcome you all back to the fusion finale. I am ‘Professor Samuel’ and this is ‘Professor Jordan’. Each day here at Power lab we will be conducting experiments as the finale of each day to help us remember our *Bible* lessons. Let’s start with a song. Kallie you and your dancers come up on stage now to help us with this song.”

Kallie, a teenage girl led her dance crew up on the stage. “Here are the motions that go along with this song.” As she went through the portions of the song lyrics she

would demonstrate a movement for each of the main phrases. The music on the video was an updated version of old hymns. “Power in the Blood” featured guitar riffs and drums like early versions of MTV. Young people danced on a beach. Members of the audience followed Kallie’s lead as she mimicked the choreography of the video dancers on the screen.

“Dance Ms. Bell,” prompted Ashley as the music played. “This VBS lab is more fun than our labs were at school. You needed to play videos on your Activ board while we were doing labs.”

This isn’t a real lab. Can’t you see that this is make-believe? “The music I wouldn’t mind, but I wouldn’t let you all wear your safety glasses on top of your head like the latest sun glass craze,” I replied careful to temper my comments.

When the song had finished, ‘Professors’ Samuel and Jordan took the stage again. “Today’s experiment will showcase how power can be hidden within. Here to help us today with our experiment is a science teacher from the high school, Ms. Bell.”

Let’s get this scenario straight. I have a decade of industrial lab experience and have almost finished my Ed.D in curriculum and I am introduced as Ms. Bell, not professor as were the other VBS helpers. I explained my procedure to the audience. “In this small well plate I have placed some small chunks of zinc metal.” I held up a small piece for the children to see. “Now I am adding an acid solution. This is not lemon juice but it is like some super duper strong lemon juice. Some of you in the front row may be able to see the bubbles that are being produced. Those bubbles are a gas called hydrogen. It is the simplest kind of pure substance in the world.” As we waited a few minutes for the reaction to occur, Professor Jordan asked the kids to name some things that were

stronger than what they thought: like a bag of candy that you can't get open. One little boy replied, "My mom when she spans me."

"You can't see the hydrogen inside the test tube. How do you know that it is present?" I took an empty test tube out of the test tube rack and inverted the mouth of the test tube over a lit tea light candle. Nothing happened. "Turn the lights out please Professor Samuel. Watch what happens when I place the mouth of this test tube over the tea light." With a resounding whoop the hydrogen inside the test tube ignited. The flame which traveled upward in the test tube was visible in the darkened room for only a split second. Droplets of water that formed from the combustion of the hydrogen clung to the sides of the test tube.

"See what power the invisible can have. You can not see the hydrogen like you can't see God but both have power, this is evidence of God's power," explained 'Professor' Jordan. "God is the king of majesty; he is the ruler of the earth, sky and the galaxy. Kallie come close our service with another song."

The service ended following that song and an additional prayer / blessing for the meal to follow. Professor Jordan made her way over to me as I was collecting my materials.

"Thank you so much for your contribution tonight. It really reinforced our *Bible* verse."

"You're welcome. I was glad to help you out."

"Before you go, let me ask you some questions about the next experiment Sink or Float. Why does a can of diet cola float but a regular one sink?"

"The large amount of sugar in the same volume increases the density of the soda."

“Well, can you also tell me how you get a bowling ball to float?”

“Maybe it is supposed to sink since the activity is SINK or float.”

“Oh, I didn’t think about that. I’d better study up on that activity before tomorrow. I didn’t like science in school; I didn’t know that I would have to be studying it again for VBS. Thanks again for tonight. Stay for supper if you will.”

The commercialization of themes for proms and parties extends to vacation *Bible* school as well. This theme has its own website and hundreds of items available for purchase to ensure that each participant is immersed in the ‘power’ experience. The kit contains copyrighted videos / music for purchase. Each day has an agenda of particular games, crafts and music. Curricular specialists must have designed the program to include activities that appeal to all of the different modalities. Visual learners respond to the brightly colored daily programs. Auditory learners benefit from the oral repetition of the *Bible* verses. The movement associated with the video and the signal –response to the phrases appeals to the kinesthetic learner. Is this science theme an attempt to build a metaphoric bridge between science and religion?

A Patriotic Service

Date: July 2, 2006
Time: 11:00 am
Characters: Mrs. Bell – Teacher at Swamp High School; Mother of Sam and Brent
Sam – Youngest Bell child
Brent – Eldest Bell child
Suzanne – Friend of Brent
Rev. Lee Williams – Minister at Bethlehem Baptist Church
Scarlet Igou – Elementary school counselor
Sarah Sellers – Peoples Community Bank President
Johnny Miller – Building Contractor
Talmadge Hughes – Feed Store Manager
Setting: Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church. Brent has been invited to church by a young girl named Suzanne. Ms. Bell has accompanied her son to this church located in the northwest corner of Charlton County.

We are visiting Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church for the first time. The directions on the Internet were confusing. One set indicated that the church was in the southeast quadrant and another said northwest quadrant of the county. You can't be much farther apart from that and be in the same county.

“Momma, why in the world are we going out here to church today?” whined Sam as we exited the car. “We haven't ever been out here before. I would be surprised if Jesus could find this place since Google maps couldn't. They don't even have a phone. Is this like the church you talked going to as a kid that had an outhouse? I don't see one. Maybe they haven't got one of those either.”

“Hush, Sam before someone hears you. God has already heard you being blasphemous. People out here might not know that you are just joking.”

The sanctuary is a small plain red brick building. Inside simple wooden pews flank a single aisle. The ceiling is a dingy ivory from years of dust collecting. A popcorn finish on sheetrock is near 'bout impossible to clean. It is a stark contrast to the backlit,

vaulted ceiling of the First Baptist Church. No decorations adorn the pulpit other than a small silk flower arrangement on the offering table.

“This place is ugly. Our other church looks way better than this. Why are we here?”

Sam continued his tirade. “We were going to have a cookout and play basketball in town today.”

A cute blonde has captured Brent’s eye. She is not too young to text, but she is too young to date. Daddy can’t exactly prohibit a ‘spontaneous’ church date, but his displeasure shows as Brent slides his lanky frame into the pew next to his daughter, Suzanne.

“Oh, I see. Brent is fishing.” Sam spoke just loud enough to raise Brent’s ire. Sibling rivalry is alive and well in South Georgia.

“Hush, Sam. I really mean it.” I give him a pinch on the elbow to reinforce my demand / request. “I didn’t know I needed to bring duct tape with me this morning.”

I was surprised to be greeted at the door by Mr. Lee Williams. I am familiar with Mr. Williams as he grew up in my Momma’s community of Graham. It was not uncommon for him to stop by Granny’s house on Sunday afternoons for a glass of tea and a piece of cake. Aunt Inez and Granny were known in the county as being some of the most accomplished bakers around. Scents from pound cakes, tea cakes, spice cakes and caramel icing wafted to greet visitors at the door. My Momma pinched me on the elbow one day because I had the audacity to ask if folks came to see Granny because they liked her or did they come because they liked her cakes. Granny didn’t fiddle so much with all of the decorations like Aunt Inez. Aunt Inez even made my wedding cake. I was shocked

to see her pull up in front of my apartment in her Olds 98 and pop the trunk. “Be careful with that one honey, it’s the base,” she said. Out next came a slightly smaller layer and finally a small layer with a plain place for a figurine and a basket of flowers. “Can’t have my girl getting married without a cake” she said humming to herself as she put the layers together with a layer of icing aka “cake repair spackling”. I knew that a groom was required for a wedding, but not a cake. I think we could have fed 100 people with that pink and white perfect confection. I was only expecting 25 guests. Mr. Williams has been involved in education on all levels: as an agriculture teacher, a principal, and as a superintendant of schools for the county public school system. He currently holds the headmaster position at the local Christian Academy. I stood up to greet him as he came across the room speak to us before the service. “Good morning Mr. Williams, how are you?” I asked, taking his proffered hand in mine. He looked at me rather quizzically. I could tell that he didn’t recognize me right off which could be expected, as he is in his early 80’s now. “I am Liz, Jean’s girl.” I offered. Momma has been gone for over 20 years now, but he immediately placed me in my family tree.”

“Liz, Jean’s baby girl, I’m sorry that I didn’t recognize you. Didn’t I see you at your Uncle Robert’s funeral last month?”

“Yes sir, I was there, but I didn’t get a chance to speak to you. You preached a nice funeral for him. That church was packed with folks.”

“He was well thought of in our community. A good man.” He nodded his head as if in affirmation of his statement. “How is your Aunt Inez doing? I need to get out there to visit with her.”

“She has good days and bad days. She is staying with Marcie and her husband.”

“Are these two strapping boys, yours?” he asked pointing at Sam and Brent.

“Yes sir. I claim them on most days.”

“I am glad that you all came to church this here this morning. We would be happy to have you all come back and make this your church home. Enjoy the service.” He moved on to speak with other people in the congregation.

It is the Sunday before the 4th of July. Considering the date I expected the message to be related to the birth of our nation. We sang hymns today like the “*Battle Hymn of the Republic*”, “*God Bless America*” and “*America*”. Look at the lyrics closely.

From *My Country 'Tis of Thee*:

Our fathers' God to Thee,
Author of Liberty,
To thee we sing,
Long may our land be bright
With Freedom's holy light,
Protect us by thy might
Great God, our King.
America! America!
God shed His grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea. (Smith, 1832)

From *America the Beautiful*:

Our glorious Land to-day,
'Neath Education's sway,
Soars upward still.
Its hills of learning fair,
Whose bounties all may share,
Behold them everywhere
On vale and hill!

Thy safeguard, Liberty,
The school shall ever be,
Our Nation's pride!
No tyrant hand shall smite,
While with encircling might
All here are taught the Right
With Truth allied. (Bates, 1913)

The keynote scripture is “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance” (Psalm 33:12). Many of the members of the congregation are employed by the public school system. Taking note of the folks that I recognize from the county wide meetings that happen at the first of the school year, I see an elementary school counselor Scarlet Igou, two middle school teachers, a bus driver and a custodian. From the community I see the bank president, Mrs. Sarah Sellers, a housing contractor, Mr. Johnny Miller, and the manager of the local feed and seed store, Talmadge Hughes. All of them take time to welcome us.

Mrs. Igou greets Sam warmly, "I hear you will be at our school this year. You have grown so and you look just like your Momma." That's not what boys want to hear. Sam's cheeks reddened but he held his tongue like a good boy.

"I have some hay that I need cut. Tell Dan to give me a call. Where is he anyway?" asks Johnny.

"He is on call. They have been having some trouble at the river, so he figured he might as well stay at home on the phone rather than being in the parking lot talking on the phone," explained Liz.

The pianist begins to play and as if on cue those who are still standing take their seats.

"Folks I know that I am much older than most all of you. My generation is the last one that share –cropped and plowed mules. We walked many of the places that we went like school. We didn't have buses to take us there and lunch rooms to provide us with meals. Your meal was carried in a small tin bucket. A sweet potato and a biscuit was a good meal. On a special day, there might be syrup in that biscuit. Folks, I am hear to tell you that we have a decline in the moral character of our society. We have a decline in the moral character of our schools. You can see this in the lack of values and discipline of our students. I would like for us to stand and pledge allegiance to the flag." The congregation stood and recited the pledge as requested. Rev. Williams, turned his head and wiped his eyes, "When I look at this flag, I think of all the men and women who went to war to keep us free. I know that women go to war now, but women did their part in WWII in the bomb factories and making airplanes. I think of all the families who sent loved ones off and they didn't come home alive. I remember train loads of soldiers

leaving from downtown to go to the service induction station. Their families were lined up for one last glimpse of them. Mothers, wives, children. We must ask ourselves do we have the true spirit of America, today? Are we like John Paul Jones, Nathan Hale, and Patrick Henry? Have we just begun to fight? We need to get God back in our lives and in our schools. Our nation was founded as a Godly nation. We have gotten away from that and we need to get it back. I saw a film where the story of Pearl Harbor was told from the perspective of a Japanese pilot. In the movie, the pilot said that America had been defeated. He was wrong; they had only awakened the sleeping giant. Why would we want to think about the viewpoint of the Japanese? John F Kennedy said 'Ask not what your country can do for you, but what can you do for your country.' You need to ask 'what can you do for your church, not what your church can do for you'. We have been blessed with a good government and a good separation of church and state. Look Jimmy Carter was a peanut farmer who became president. God has surely blessed our nation. We have equal support to all kinds of people in this great nation of ours. We need a physical and a spiritual change if we are going to bring Jesus back where we need for him to be. We need Jesus in our homes, businesses and in our schools."

You can't go to church these days without the price of gasoline or diesel coming up as a topic. "God has blessed our nation with ample natural resources. We don't have to be dependent upon foreign oil sources if they would only drill on our own coasts. I would have them do that wouldn't you to get prices down below the four or five dollars / gallon at the pump. It is the environmentalists who don't want the lower gas prices. High gas prices keep the public from using so much. The environmentalists want the price high. Can you believe that? Now, I want beautiful trees and scenery as much as the next man.

God has blessed with land to grow food. Many of us grow our own pork and beef. I doubt that any of you all kill your own chickens anymore. No other nation has as much land to grow crops. Just think of our own home gardens. We all can produce enough food to feed ourselves and probably our neighbors, too.”

You haven’t seen my pitiful attempt at gardening this year I thought. The congregation was seemingly receptive to all of his comments even those about the environmentalists. That might explain the “Keep the EPA off the Farm” bumper stickers on the trucks in the parking lot. I am not surprised by the comments or the acceptance. Talmadge recommended and sold me some atrazine to get rid of some weeds in the yard. The next time I went to the feed store, he said, “Good thing you got that when you did, they are trying to have it banned.” I was glad that I had not put it out yet. Procrastination is a good thing sometimes. The service closed with an invitation to accept Christ.

Casual Greetings

Date: July 11, 2006
Time: 9:00 am
Characters: Mrs. Liz Bell
Mrs. Sarah Sellers – Bank President
Setting: Peoples Community Bank Lobby

Some people my age, which would be middle age, look at young adults with their smooth skin and slim torsos and wish to take their place. Not me. You couldn’t pay me to go back to that age. Not because of the physical attributes, but because of the issues of socialization. As an adult, I can now see that if there is any one aspect of high school that I need “backsies” on it would be developing better social skills. I never learned the art of socialization. I was a loner. It all seemed rather useless to me. Which would I rather do:
a) spend the night at Rita’s house playing with Barbie dolls b) going to a prayer meeting

with Aunt Kitty c) read a new book or reread an old favorite? The book option would get my vote.

I have banked at the same bank for 27 years. The bank moved in 1982 from Main Street to a side street location so that they could add a drive up window. Dan and I started our joint checking account when we got married 23 years ago. Before we married, my account was listed in my name, Liz Harper. When we filled out the signature card for our joint account, Dan signed "Dan Bell" and I signed "Mrs. Dan Bell". Momma always signed her checks as Mrs. C. G. Harper. C. G. was my daddy's initials which he used as a name. When I went to first grade, we didn't have kindergarten unless you paid to go to the First Baptist Church, all the kids laughed at me when I told them my daddy's name was C. G. I had never even heard him called anything else except Daddy, Gator and C. G. Folks slurred the two letters together like it was one word Ceegee. In retrospect, that seems like a strange name but considering the others in the family, Kitty, Birdie, Luna, Lawton, Basil, and Etta, it seemed normal. It was all that I had ever heard.

I was surprised as I entered the bank lobby on Tuesday to deposit a hay check to see Mrs. Sellers jump up from her desk and run toward me as soon as she spied me in the lobby. My mind raced. Was my account overdrawn? One time both Dan and I had both added our pay checks as deposits and Sarah called us rather than returning checks on our account unpaid. That balance looked nice in the checkbook but didn't work out so well with the bank. Had I become a victim of identity theft? Is there a robbery in progress? I can panic and think of disaster scenarios faster than an Olympic sprinter.

“Liz, we were so glad to have you and your family visit with us at our church. We had hoped that you would come back,” she said, noting our missed attendance on Sunday, July 9.

I felt compelled to explain our absence in spite of only going to that church on one occasion. “We were visiting with Dan’s parents last weekend. Since both of my parents have passed away, the boys only have one set of grandparents. We try to get up there as often as possible.”

“Do you have a home church here?”

“No, not here. We used go to church with Dan’s parent a couple of weekends a month. It’s harder now as the boys are getting older and more involved in activities. Brent has band practice and basketball all summer. Sam is playing sports as well.

“We would love for you all to make Bethlehem your church home. Think about it and come back to see us if you can.”

Now I know why I usually use the drive through with the pneumatic tube. You don’t have to be dressed in matching clothes, wear makeup, fix your hair or talk to people.

Lunch time and I’m still here in town running errands. It took forever at the drug store. You’d think that they must really use that mortar and pestle that was on the counter to formulate my prescription. I think I’ll pick up a pizza before heading home. Everyone in town must be here for lunch. People are standing outside the door waiting for a table. As I walk closer, I recognize the school counselor Scarlet Igou, who also attends Bethlehem Church. Here we go again. What is up today? I have to go in that door, it’s the only one. I left a call back number and spoke to Lewis, who is a former student, so I have

to pick up my pizza. I am caught just like when we used to take off tobacco and the preacher, Brother Grady would stop to visit with us. Growing tobacco was the main family livelihood. The tobacco was picked green in the field and tied with string onto sticks. The hundreds of sticks of tobacco would be hung on tier poles in a barn for about a week until it was cured. The brown, dried tobacco, still tied to the sticks, would be stored until the handfuls could be untied and stacked in burlaps sheets for transport to the market. We stored tobacco in an old house that was once the post office for a booming turpentine town called Piney Grove. The old house sat on a curve of the dirt road. It had been moved on runners by mule from its original location next to the train tracks. The house had no electricity or water, just three rooms with crumbling plaster board walls and collapsing ceilings. The tongue and groove wood ceiling sometimes held remnants from the overnight guests like the nests of rats and the skins of snakes. We made work stations on the front porch from old doors laid across stacked up bushel baskets. Each day the underside of the doors had to be checked for wasp nests if you didn't want to risk painful stings. You could count on at least three days of work each week 'taking off tobacco'. Since we worked on the porch, summer thunderstorms often interrupted our work day, but we were not allowed to quit because of unwelcome company. Brother Grady would stay forever preaching to us about our rock music and the sins of youth. We also were not allowed to be rude or argue our side with him. "You will be polite," Momma said. But Momma did not say that we couldn't hide. Lynn's table sat on the western side of the porch which means she got the hot afternoon sun and it gave a good view of the road coming from Brother Grady's house. Luckily Brother Grady had a bright red truck which was easily identifiable especially since very few vehicles traveled down the road anyway.

Lynn would sound the alarm and we would run inside the house and shut the door. I would never admit to my sisters, but I had just as soon talk with Brother Grady as go inside there and shut those doors. The rats, snakes, wasps and spiders were all there in the day time just like the night even if we did pretend that they were not. We would be watching and as soon as he rounded the next curve, we'd go back to work. Most of the time, he took a different route back home, if not we were caught for sure.

Scarlet's face lights up as she sees me approaching. "HELLO," she says dramatically. "You must be psychic. Our visiting committee was coming to see you today. We would like for you all to come back and worship with us."

"Thank you so much for the invitation. I saw Sarah at the bank. You all have been so nice."

"We wanted to tell you that our youth group will be going on an outing to the movies this week if your children would like to join us. Our youth group is very active. We like to keep them involved in Godly activities."

I wondered what movie they going to see. We had been on vacation for two weeks earlier in the summer and none of the movies that we saw could have been considered 'Godly'. "Both boys are tied up with sports practice every week day afternoon, but thank you so much for asking."

"OK, it was good to see you. Think about coming back to join us."

I went on inside to get my pizza. It is time for me to get back home. I'll have to think about the church outings. Maybe it is a way for my children to develop some social skills that I lack.

A Parable for the Vulgar

Date: July 16, 2006
Time: 10:15 am
Characters: Mrs. Bell – Teacher at Swamp High School;
Theresa – Mrs. Bell's niece
Rev. Medders – Minister at First Baptist Church
Mrs. Jan Davis – Teacher and Pianist at First Baptist Church
Mrs. Jordan – Children's church leader
Setting: Church services at the First Baptist Church.

At 9:30 on a Sunday morning there is a rush of traffic in town. Today is no exception. People scurry to be in their pews on time. It used to be that folks attended the church closest to them. With prosperity and availability of the automobile, people began to choose a church based on criteria other than proximity. There is no doubt that this is a church of shakers and movers. I don't mean in the religious sense, I mean the business sense. The SUV's are of the Cadillac, Hummer, and Lincoln varieties. Parked next to them are a few small Mazda's, Fords, Chevies and Toyotas. Parents arrive separately from their children even with gas four dollars per gallon. All of the males of adult age are wearing sport coats or dress suits. No one is wearing blue jeans or work clothes. Actually, I guess that is their work clothes. I came to the First Baptist Church today to support my family, specifically my niece Theresa. I know that the members of the church family will be supportive especially Mrs. Jan Davis, but I think that this is important for me as well. The tones from the speakers outside the church are chiming for the upcoming worship service. This should be a more pleasant service than the one held on Tuesday to honor my sister, Lydia.

Our family has experienced some trying events lately. Theresa, was diagnosed with breast cancer. It was a shock because of her age, she is only 25. To make matters worse, her Mother died last week of breast cancer. Sitting on the pew next to her at the

funeral home, I felt helpless. She wept for the loss of her Mother and for herself. Theresa reached out and took my hand. "I want to look at her again. Come with me, please, Aunt Liz.?" She pleaded, as if I might possibly deny her request. The steps from the front seat to the side of the coffin seem like a marathon. I thought of all the times that I had held her hand as a child when we crossed a street or walked through a busy parking lot. Once on vacation, she declared that she was old enough to walk without my assistance, and she tripped in the cross walk as the light was about to turn. Her skinned knees were badges of independence won to soon. The badge of independence being earned today is not coveted or visible unless you have experienced the emotional trauma of losing a parent or having a life-threatening illness. Theresa was earning both. Seeing her face in the features of her mother she whispered, "Is that going to be me soon? Will Harry be picking out a coffin for me? I hate pink, no pink. Blue is better. I don't remember seeing any florals? Why no florals? I just can't believe this is happening. It is surreal." Her strength left her momentarily and she wilted into my embrace. I could feel her sorrow vibrating through her bones as she sobbed. I wished that I could take her into my lap and comfort her as I had when she was a child.

"Theresa, hush that! You have to stop thinking that way. Today, we are here to say goodbye to your mother. We will deal with the other tomorrow." I chided her, but all the while feeling guilty. I was afraid that she was about to completely lose her composure. Promote a little denial Liz. I chastised myself. It is good for the psyche. It isn't denial. I countered. It is organization and prioritization. Deal with one situation at a time. I sobbed with her in spite of my repeated attempts to maintain my own composure by holding my breath. If you pass out holding your breath to keep from crying, it will be

a spectacle. Everyone will think that you have had a heart attack, so just go ahead and cry. It is your sister who has passed away. This loss coupled with Theresa's own diagnosis was truly overwhelming. The doctors had said that Lydia's cancer was genetic, but we didn't think that it would strike again so soon.

"Liz, you might as well tell me what is on your mind," Jan questioned me as we entered the school last week for a summer workshop. "I have been able to read you like a book since you were in the seventh grade." Attempting to relieve me of the burden of explaining, she asked "Is Lydia not doing well?"

"No, she isn't, but there is something else as well." I hesitated before confiding in her about Theresa.

Jan pressed her cheek against mine. "Sometimes we have to accept that people have to leave us. I know that it is hard. I think that I have just accepted that Ben is gone." Ben, her husband, died within days of having a liver transplant. "Breast cancer is tough especially if it isn't caught soon enough. I am blessed to still be here today." Jan proudly wears her pink ribbon that signifies that she is a breast cancer survivor.

My voice trembles even though I am whispering. "Theresa has breast cancer too. Just like Lydia." It doesn't seem possible or real until those words are spoken aloud.

"Oh, no. Does Lydia know?"

"I don't think that she has told her. Lydia is on so much pain medication now that it is hard to tell how much she comprehends. Theresa thought that it would be too hard on her especially if she made the connection between the cancer being genetic and her own illness. The last thing that Theresa wants is to make her mother feel guilty especially

about faulty genes. You can't do anything about that. Gee, I think that I will order me a new set." I said flippantly.

"None of us know what gifts or burdens that we pass on to our offspring. I'll talk with her. Maybe I can offer her some hope."

"Thanks, Jan. I know that she will appreciate and value your input."

"I can put her name on the prayer list at church if you'd like."

"Not yet, she's not ready for her condition to be known publicly. I'm not sure that she has told Rev. Medders yet either."

"I'll put it on the list as a prayer for a former student of mine. That would apply to both of you." Jan pats me on the shoulder. "Just keep praying."

Jan caught my eye as she made her way to the piano. When Rev. Medders opened the meet/ greet portion of the service, Jan made her way to where Theresa and I were seated even though it was in the back of the sanctuary. Jan hugged us both and hurried back to her place at the piano bench. "We should have set closer to the front. I didn't realize that Jan would have to race back to the piano." She missed the first couple of measures of the first hymn. I almost laughed out loud at that scene. Here is this tiny woman in a choir robe, hurtling through the tangle of folks gabbing in the sanctuary and vaulting back onto the piano bench to catch up with the organists. Her ballet-slipper flats and resilient hairdo belied the determination in her venture.

The music portion of the service ended and Rev. Medders began the sermon. It was appropriate that today's sermon focused on Jesus as a sower of seeds. Rev. Medders explained that "Jesus used parables to teach some of his lessons." He justified the use of the story as a method of teaching with the following verses:

For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear and have not heard them. (Matthew 13: 15-17)

Rev. Medders, "It is time for children's church." The children's lesson began when all of the little children had moved to a small semi circle near the pulpit. Mrs. Jordan had her props ready to the same lesson on a lower cognitive level for the children. She began with seeds that were lost upon the ground. She threw seeds on the carpet. "These seeds would be eaten by birds or squirrels." She continued with seeds sown in different conditions simulated with flower pots containing the appropriate soil. "In the pot of rocky soil, the seeds sprout but die from the heat because they have no roots." She then produced another pot filled with weeds.

"Looks like my planters," I whispered to Theresa.

"In a weedy area, too much competition kills the seeds. In well tended soil the seeds grow and prosper. Plants can't survive without soil. You need to provide good soil for God's word to grow within you." Off they went to another room so that the adult church would not be disturbed. When Brent and Sam were little, Aunt Kitty would say, "Don't send them to children's church. How are they ever going to learn to behave if they are sent out to play?"

For the adults, Rev. Medders took a different approach to the parable. “This is one of the great teaching parables of the *Bible*. In much of the *Bible*, God sends his word through prophets to the people. There are seven great parables or teaching moments in which the word of God comes directly to the people in a story form in which they can understand. This parable tells how extravagant God is in his mercy. He spreads the seeds of his gospel all over the world. He is generous with his love. The ministry at the First Baptist Church is the same. We provide services to individuals who will never tithe. There is a drifter that comes by several times a year and stops in the church for a handout. Someone, myself or one of the deacons, gets him clean clothes and arranges for him to have some meals at local restaurants. One church member asked, ‘Preacher why do we keep helping this person who never does any better.’ My reply is that we are being a sower of faith. I read this week in a business magazine that the purchasing power of the salary of a college graduate currently is equal to that of a high school graduate 25 years ago. It is important that our children don’t settle for minimal education. They need to seek professional careers in order to maintain their financial needs. Before we left for our mission trip to Costa Rica, I watched the church treasurer write the check for the trip and was amazed at the financial commitment that was involved in that week long mission. Now those of you who went know that our accommodations were not luxurious. Many of you all paid the church to go and God will bless you for that. Saving souls is not cheap. We are planting seeds and hoping that some will grow. One of the doctors in the group commented that we are treating parasite infections that will be back next month without continued health care. Is it worth it? I think so because we are doing God’s work. It is

part of his plan.” The service closed as is typical of every church service in the South with a hymn of invitation.

As we drove home from church, I asked Theresa, “How are mission trips funded?”

“The church secretary makes the arrangements which are then approved by the group. Then the treasurer of the church makes payments to the tour companies. It’s pretty easy for the travelers.”

“Is it that way for every trip?”

“Not all of them. When the kids go snow skiing they have to pay for a portion of the trip. If someone from another church joins the mission trip, then they have to pay their way or their church has to pick up the tab. Our church only pays for its own members which is only fair to the congregation,” she added.

CHAPTER 6 - THE LIFE CYCLE OF THE SOUTH

“We’ll Work Till Jesus Comes”

O land of rest, for thee I sigh!

When will the moment come

When I shall lay my armor by,

And dwell in peace at home?

We’ll work till Jesus comes,

We’ll work till Jesus comes, we’ll work.

And we’ll be gathered home. (Mills, 1939, p 323)

I love spring time in the South. The weather is a perfect mix of cool mornings and warm days. The weed seeds that sprout in my flower bed must love it too. Seemingly overnight they proliferate, crowding out my reseeding annuals. The winter rain has left the soil soft enough to till. With hoe in hand, I begin the task of reclaiming my flower bed. As I work, I realize that I am singing the refrain from this song. “*We’ll work till Jesus comes, And then be gathered home.*” (Mills, 1939, p. 323) I guess it was the physical act of hoeing that drew that hymn from the crevices of my memory. Grading homework papers has never elicited that unconscious act. Momma used to sing that song and others as she hoed in the field. Working with the soil and plants always reminds me of my parents. Daddy would lay off straight, perfect rows in the field for row crops, but Momma’s love was flowers, especially zinnias. I can still see her sitting on a propped up soft drink crate watering her flowers with a garden hose.

“Look at this one,” she would exclaim as she examined a hot pink bloom or the next one - whatever color it might happen to be.

I miss my parents. They have both passed away now. At both funerals, this hymn consoled me. Their work ethic was incorporated into the eulogy. Brother Ken spoke of our family spending eternity together if we accepted the Lord as our Savior. I remember hearing it at my grandparents' funeral as well. Religion is an integral part of life and death in the South. It permeates the soil and the soul. Tending to one tends to the other. School calendars continue to reflect the usage of child labor to gather crops. Children toil side by side with family and neighbors, both Black and White. Field work. Hot. 100 degree hot. Sun baking your brain hot. Blistering the part of your hair. Better not forget your shoes hot, 'cause the dirt will blister your feet hot. All day. Every day. Hoeing watermelons and tobacco. I hated hoeing.

“Don't dig such holes,” my older sisters hissed at me.

“Be careful or you'll kill the plant,” Momma cautioned. Her voice would fade as she worked farther and farther ahead of me. Faintly, I could still hear “We'll work till Jesus comes, We'll work” (Mills, 1939, p. 323). In a little bit, the sound of her voice would go stronger as she and my sisters would double back to help me catch up.

The construction of a nuclear power plant in the 1970's brought hope of progress, but an influx of industrial jobs has yet to be seen. Agriculture continues to have a large economic impact on the county, but the crops of choice have changed from tobacco and corn to cotton and blueberries. Much of the manual labor jobs that people used to do have been replaced by machines, but the influence of religion in the South has remained strong. Some folks refuse to work at the nuclear power plant. Their concerns are not because of high environmental principles related to nuclear waste, neither are they concerned about personal safety concerning radioactive exposure. Power generation is a

24 / 7 job regardless of the category. Church comes before work. For others, missing services has become a concession made in order to provide a comfortable lifestyle for their families. Who you are as a person can be defined by the church that you attend. There is a church for every sector of population. The dirt parking lots of country churches contrast with the landscaped grounds of the upscale churches. Many of my family memories involve some aspect of church. Church families are members of extended families bonded through a shared religious experience rather than only through blood and marriage. During times of family trials of illness and material losses, needs are taken care of by members of your church family. Cows are fed and milked by neighbors on wedding and funeral days. Donations are made even to those who are outside of the church family. Mission stores collect goods and sell them to those too proud to accept donations. Prayers and attention are focused on those who are in need of spiritual support. Giving to others is a philosophy that is routinely practiced through missionary services. Ladies of the church prepare meals to celebrate the birth of babies and the passing of loved ones. The *Bible* commands worshipers to accept a life of work between birth and death when God said to Adam:

Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, “You must not eat of it”; Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. (Genesis 3:17, New International Version)

Church provides the perfect tranquilizer. Believers accept a life time of work and celebrate it in song. “We’ll work till Jesus comes, we’ll work. Till Jesus comes we’ll work and then be gathered home.” (Mills, 1939, p. 323) Home is not that of the living, an

address, or post office box. It is a place to spend eternity. A piece of pound cake, a hug, and a whispered message of prayer helps eyes seal the tears of loss. We will all be together soon. Important family events such as marriages, births and deaths are recorded in family *Bibles*. One of the gifts that I received upon coming home from the hospital following the birth of my first son was a new *Bible*. The *Bible* was more than a place for record keeping, it was a message. It is time now for you to put your rebellious ways aside and assume the responsible role of parent. As a young adult it was easy for me to dismiss the portions of the preacher's sermon that denounced science, evolution and liberated women. I did not need a preacher's approval for my personal self-esteem. I could read the *Bible* for myself and take from this ancient document that which I deemed applicable to my modern life. As a parent, my view of parental responsibility included teaching my children to value parts of a sermon while pointing out the parts of church sermons with which I didn't agree. The short drive home from church developed into debate time. "Do you really believe that?" I would query my husband on the topic of the sermon such as evolution and family roles as we hurried home to Sunday dinner. "It's what the *Bible* says. You heard the preacher," he added as if that statement explained all the mysteries of the universe. "If church is supposed to make you a better person, then, why I am angry every time we leave?" I questioned, "Take today's lesson. We are told to be forgiving, but because Eve didn't obey God, all woman-kind shall forever be punished." The preacher used that verse today, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you."(Genesis 3:16). "Is that just an archaic way to explain why childbirth is painful? I think that you just like the 'rule over' me part," I countered. He replied, "Every

Sunday, you listen, think and analyze the sermon like it was a science fair project. You need to just go, sing the songs, pray and accept the Lord as Savior. I do want you to be in heaven with me when we die.” This debate ends as we pull into the driveway until the next week. Be sure and tune in next week, same time, same station. It never occurred to me that this type of conversation was not occurring in every car that left the dirt parking lot. I was oblivious to the impact that literal interpretation of the *Bible* has upon our society in the South. I began to see glimpses of the impact as students wrote open ended responses to science articles. Articles selected to elicit application of scientific ideas resulted in recitation of Christian teachings. Amazed at the student responses, I began to note the plethora of Christian doctrine that is promulgated through the public school system. The conflict between the Christian religion and science began to surface in the consciousness of my teaching profession. As I encouraged students to read and analyze magazine and newspaper articles, the impact of their fundamentalist Christian teachings began to surface. The conflict between science and religion did not begin with Galileo and end with intelligent design. It is an ongoing battle for critical literacy and power in our schools today.

“Will the Circle Be Unbroken”

*There are loved ones in the glory,
Whose dear forms you often miss;
When you close your earthly story,
Will you join them in their bliss?
Will the circle be unbroken?
By and by, Lord, by and by?
In a better home awaiting,
In the sky, in the sky?
One by one their seats were emptied,
One by one, they went away,
Now the family is parted,
Will it be complete one day?
Will the circle be unbroken?
By and by, Lord, by and by?
In a better home awaiting,
In the sky, in the sky? (Habershon, 1935, p. 171)*

This study focuses on the ongoing effect of the Christian religion on the teaching of science in the South. It illuminates the conflict between the Christian home culture of the student and the science culture advocated in the school classroom. I also noted the integration of the Christian religion into the hidden and null curricula of the school. The Christian religion uses the love for family and the sorrow of loss to encourage its members to keep traditions, to keep the “circle unbroken” (Haberson, 1935, p. 171). To

break from the traditional teachings is to break the circle and lose loved ones for eternity. Even my college educated husband has chastised me for my 'unsaved' state. "I want you to be with me for eternity when we die. It would make me so sad to be in heaven without you." It is the responsibility of each person in the family to maintain the ethereal connection between family members who have passed on. As in a pyramid scheme, the only way for us all to be together in a "better home" (Habershon, 1935, p. 171) is for all of us to share the same belief. In our Southern society, the loss of a loved one initiates a response from the community to relieve that family of the burden of child care and food preparation. Soft cheeks pressed against your own whisper, "They are in a better place now. The Lord has called them home." The pain of loss is denied because you "know where they are now." The Christian religion delineates specific roles based on gender and class that have changed little over time. The church advocates a traditional family with a male head of household leading the female and children. Church members are chastised to be grateful for what they have achieved and to accept God's plan.

Preacher Herrin said in church, "You don't need gold chains around your neck in this life, if you follow God's plan you can walk the streets of gold in the next life. There is only one God. The Buddhists are wrong. The Islamic are wrong. God made the universe and all that's in it. If the IRS is after you. Don't worry. Be like Brother Joe. Brother Joe, has God taken care of you?"

Joe nods from his pew. "Amen, pastor."

"Sister Virginia, you called me this week and said you needed \$900. Did God provide you with the \$900? Yes, he did. He even gave you an extra 10% to tithe."

I look around at the congregation. Some ladies are standing with their hands held up towards the sky.

The sermon continued as the preacher read from the *Bible*. The *Bible* says, “O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings and oppositions of science falsely so called: Which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace be with thee. Amen” (1 Timothy 6: 20- 21). Then he added his part. “Don’t you go reading all those books that put Satan’s ideas in your head.”

My son is sitting in the front with his best friend, Mark. Two girls who are in both my honors science class and officers in science club are up front as well. I had wondered why Mark never agreed to join science club and both girls ‘missed’ our competitions because of church calendar conflicts. Maybe now I know why. Females are taught to accept subservient roles both as wives and daughters. This past week I witnessed females in school leadership positions, two of which are science teachers deferring to God’s plan. If it is in his plan, then that position will be opened for me. If not that door, he will open another for me. I wanted to shake them and say, “The Board of Education is making that decision, not the Lord” but I knew the response would be that he is working through them. I considered using a documentary method of interviewing members of my community, but decided that few in the community would participate willingly in the study. I have chosen instead to present my study in the form of a fictionalized narrative. The use of fiction is important because it will allow me to portray the degree of integration of religion that occurs within the school while allowing my characters to have some anonymity. My chapters will be arranged like a school year. Each chapter will include stories that elucidate the following categories: 1) School days – lessons and

school administration 2) Melding of church / school functions 3) Integration of church in the Southern society.

“Shall We Gather At the River?”

Shall we gather at the river,

Where bright angel feet have trod;

With its crystal tide forever

Flowing by the throne of God

Yes, we'll gather at the river,

The beautiful, the beautiful river,

Gather with the saints at the river

That flows by the throne of God.

Soon we'll reach the shining river,

Soon our pilgrimage will cease

Soon our happy hearts will quiver

With the melody of peace. (Lowry, 1939, p. 265)

Finding peace in life depends upon one's viewpoint. Some look for peace in exotic, vacation locations. Family ties bring peace to some. Sunday mornings you will find grandparents seated in pews with little ones wedged between them. Smiles and pats still restless bodies clothed in their Sunday best. Grandparents are more tolerant of fidgeting than are parents who know that their reputation for parenting skills is on display. Other individuals focus on job satisfaction. Many look to religious affiliations to provide nirvana. None of my acquaintances have the perfect job or family situation. “Pray for me,” asks our secretary as she trains a new helper. Squabbles and difficulties in

one area carry over to another. “I am asking for your prayers as my husband and I wait for resolution concerning a work conflict at the ‘River’, another co-worker confides. School emails elicit prayers for those in the community who are sick. Conflict can even be found in the church. Spin offs of old churches often hint at their history in their names. Bristol Memorial Freewill was formed by disgruntled members of Memorial Freewill Baptist Church. Harmony Baptist spawned Harmony in Christ. In churches where the preacher is transient, he may be the one to leave. In a church in which the preacher is well received the member and his family may decide to attend a different church. Despite these differences in opinions which lead to changes in church membership and leadership, all who have been baptized expect to “gather at the river” (Lowry, 1939, p. 265). The only promise of peace comes in the afterlife.

United States (U.S.) highways 341 and 1 bisect my county as if it had been laid out in a geometry class at the one high school that serves the entire county. The county court house stands at one corner of this intersection while the First Baptist Church occupies the adjacent corner. The court house sports a fresh coat of paint, new landscaping and the clock tower was recently clad in copper while the church has a newly added steeple to its already rather imposing, for our town, structure. Both buildings are seemingly vying for dominance of the otherwise flat skyline. These renovations could be considered merely as acts of beautification, yet the competition of façades hints at the power conflicts between church and state. The progressive appearance of the downtown sector wanes as you move away from the updated intersection. Empty storefronts line the streets in all directions. Highway 341 has been part of a road project since about 1985 when the state began the process of acquiring land to expand the two lane road into a four

lane. The physical road work has been ongoing for the last 18 or so years, yet miles within the county remain incomplete. Drivers speeding along at 65 mph give little consideration to the personal impact that such a project has on the families who are forced to relocate so that they may trek to the beach more quickly. Mine was one of those families. Our house was not a plantation house worthy of being moved. The state highway department could be considered the ultimate negotiator. Payment for moving a house and restoring it to a level of livability was less than selling the house outright. Make your decision quickly to accept my offer or your property will be condemned. Only a sign and the church remain to mark the location of my neighborhood which was dispersed in the name of progress. On the east side of town, just past the empty industrial park, the road reverts to a narrow two lane. Bare, scraped shoulders show evidence of work begun and abandoned. Signs displaying the name "High Tech Corridor" belie the lack of opportunity available. High school graduates can choose to continue with their fast food careers, become prison guards or work at the 'River'. Two other new industrial parks on the west side of town also stand essentially empty save for the minimum security prison. The nuclear plant situated on the Altamaha River at the north end of the county on U.S. 1 provides the one steady income for many of the citizens of this county and surrounding ones. This gathering at the 'river' does not depend upon religious convictions, but on science and engineering. The majority of students that are in the college preparatory track at school have one or both parents who work at the 'River'. Jobs at the plant are coveted in spite of the dangers of radiation and the stress involved. Just this week, I asked my students what was their dream job. Kasey in first block and Mark in third block both replied that they wanted to work at the river. One wanted to be

an electrician and the other a janitor. At first I thought they were joking. Some of their classmates thought so as well, but then Kasey said “they make \$15 / hour and get overtime. That’s more than someone who works at the school makes.” Actually he was quite accurate. A paraprofessional or a secretary at our school only makes about \$15,000 per year. Service industry jobs at retail stores, restaurants and dry cleaners pay low wages for those who are not lucky enough to get full time employment at the ‘river’. Some people in the community work seasonal jobs in between refueling outages. Even state employees like teachers are beholden to the ‘river’ for the taxes that are paid directly to the board of education and indirectly by the property taxes paid on expensive homes by its employees. A small chemical company that was once based upon the collection of turpentine from local trees hangs on to a limited operation as its products change in response to market demands. Turpentine is now imported. The harvesting of trees for pulp and lumber industries continues to provide jobs and income for land owners. Farming is the mainstay for some families, but many with other employment, treat it as a hobby that ties them to their heritage.

Despite the lack of opportunity, young people usually stay in the area after high school graduation or return after short stints in other regions. High school seniors often voice the desire to live anywhere but here, yet many graduates, like those who have joined the military and have been forced to move, speak fervently of their desires to return home. There is a similarity between the patterns of certain animal life cycles and that of our own. Television programs often display animals returning as adults to their places of origin as part of the reproductive cycle. Salmon are the most often cited example in textbooks of this phenomena. In rural Georgia, salmon can only be seen on

television or at the grocery store, but never in the wild. An example that relates more to this area is that of loggerhead sea turtles. While the population of these animals is limited, I have happened upon them feeding and mating in the shallow coastal waters. The soft sand of the beaches of our local Georgia coastline offers prime nesting sites for the loggerheads. The turtles stay at sea until the urge to lay eggs drives them to the land. The turtles wander on the wide beaches in a disorderly fashion until compelled to dig the meter deep nest. Leathery eggs wait for the treasure inside to be ready for that initial journey to the sea. In the early morning, both tracks of the turtle, the meandering one of the gravid female to the chosen nest site and the straight exit to the sea mark the attempt to procreate before the incoming tide erases the evidence of their family acts. Research has shown that the turtles return to the same beach to lay their own clutch of leathery eggs regardless of the hazards of that home place. Science has not yet identified the specific factors that compel the turtles to return to a particular beach or the method by which it is located. Like the loggerhead turtle and numerous other homing humans, I returned to the sandy soils to start my family.

Physical Manifestations of the Church

Locals unofficially divide the county into regions like Red Oak, Big Oaks, Ten Mile, et cetera named after the church anchoring each area. Churches provide a pivotal role in the framework for their respective communities and the county as a whole. Much of the population of the county could be termed “evangelicals” (Apple, 2001, p. 120) who possess “a belief in moral superiority and following God’s way.... [that] extends well beyond the sphere of private life” (Apple, 2001, p. 133). Church sponsored events dominate the social calendar of the town. If a church is holding a revival, an invitation to

attend will be posted around town and in the teacher sign in area at school. Pictures of local music groups will advertise for sings in different locations. We don't have a movie theatre, but our county has four venues to host gospel music sings and revivals. Locals share a "deeply seated belief that the world would be a much better place if everyone followed 'God's ways'" (Apple, 2001, p. 132). The local newspaper routinely features generic ads admonishing readers to "Attend the church of your choice" as well as listing of churches in the area. For those who lack a church affiliation, the church families welcome single or family new comers into their congregations and nurture their relationship in the community. When we first moved back to my hometown Sunday visits by my in-laws caused great anxiety because we did not have a home church. Even while on vacation, they find a church to attend. Our lack of compliance continues to mark us as disobedient children. The range of services provided by the church covers all age groups and all occasions better than a greeting card company could imagine. Preachers provide marriage counseling to young men and women who express a desire to be married. This counseling may involve only a single session or multiple sessions depending upon the requirements of the individual minister. A statistical analysis of the correlation between hours of counseling and marriage success would be interesting. I am glad that my marriage has been more successful than the counseling. Sitting with my fiancé next to my first grade Sunday school teacher and Aunt Kitty while the preacher discusses the sexual responsibilities of a good wife made me want to dash to the nearest Justice of the Peace. Weddings celebrate the sanctity of marriage as ordained by the church and provide the rationale for numerous parties to honor the couple. Showers of gifts arranged by ladies of the church ensure that the new couples begin married life with the necessary equipment

as well as introduce the new family member to the church family. In the case of two locals, the new family must make a decision about which family church to attend unless of course, both families attend the same church. Additions to the family lead to baby showers to help new parents cope with the expense of the birth of a first child. Following the birth, day care programs and preschool services supplied by the church provide a much needed respite from the daily challenges of childrearing. Summer vacation entails treating school age children with themed vacation *Bible* school programs. Due to the expense of the kits, wealthier churches hand down the supplies to smaller, less affluent ones. After I participated in a program for the First Baptist Church called Power Lab which used science experiments to glorify God, another school employee approached me about doing the same for her church. The response to this program amazed me. One of my children's primary teachers stopped me in the grocery store to thank me for my participation.

“My son just loved your presentation. He came home and told me that he wanted to be a scientist just like you. I told him that I knew you and had taught your son. It was great!”

Older youth participate in mission trips to less fortunate areas to provide services and gain experience spreading the gospel.

“Did you see James' picture in Banner this week,” asked a student.

“Why was it there?” I asked.

“He was witnessing in New Orleans. My parents wouldn't let me go there. It is an evil place.”

Youth use church services as an arena for informal dating before unsupervised dates are allowed. Under the watchful eye of congregation, young ladies and men will court in much the same fashion as their grandparents. In the hallway between classes, I confided in my school neighbor that my oldest son had been making forays out to Bethlehem Baptist Church to visit with a certain young lady. After a few such sessions, he was allowed to drive her home.

Janet laughed, “You had better watch out. That’s the way that Stephen and I began thirty years ago. My daddy said ‘If a young man isn’t willing to meet your family and sit next to you in church, then you had better suspect his character is lacking.’ I still believe that today.”

Church sporting leagues allow members who are no longer eligible for participation in county recreation leagues to continue to participate in activities like softball. On the Sunday that I visited Oakview, the business committee brought a set of plans out for the congregation to review prior to the evening service. The plans were for a gymnasium. At Friendship church the congregation was reminded not to use the basketball gym because the floor had been redone. Several churches in the area participate in Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed (AWANAS), which is an organization that began in the north which supplies curriculum for children from the preschool to high school. Participants are rewarded with currency that can be traded in for prizes. It is the green stamp system for the church. Locally, the Boy Scouts of America have a special affiliation with one of the churches through their involvement in fund raising and providing meeting areas and supervision.

At the other end of the emotional spectrum is the concern for families who have experienced tragedy or a family death. Church members often provide financial support through bake sales and suppers to families who have financial needs stemming from medical expenses. Preachers from different churches take turns providing services at the chapel of the local hospital consoling their own members and others as well as those who are outside of a church family. The hospitality committee of a church plans and serves meals to families who have suffered the loss of a loved one. Ministers often lead the funeral service prior to interment of the body as if it were a time to scare salvation into the unsaved.

“You too will be dead soon. Think about your eternal resting place. We will all be in the situation at some point.”

Some ministers view funerals of their congregation as part of their moral obligation. Standing under the tent to escape the summer heat at the graveside service of a neighbor, I heard her daughter ask the minister what she owed him.

He replied, “Nothing. This was just my last visit until we meet again in heaven.”

I contrasted that to a conversation that I had with a preacher’s wife as we waited for a graduate class to begin.

“My washing machine has torn up and will have to be replaced. I hope that my husband get’s one of those ‘stranger’ funerals soon.”

I looked quizzically at her thinking about a Quaker funeral that I had once attended which was much different than the usual Baptist ones.

She elaborated, “You know someone who doesn’t have a church, but their family wants a preacher to speak at the service. That money would come in handy right now.”

I wondered if her husband shared her sense of moral obligation. These examples illustrate the level of involvement of the church in the lives of people throughout their entire life span. Church cemeteries offer documentation in marble of church membership and marriages by the names on the tombstones. In the middle of the Stone family plot may be the tombstone of a man by the name of Carter indicating a marriage into that family. A discussion of family histories outlines the change in church memberships due to marriages and squabbles within the church community. With 55 predominantly white congregations (County Membership Report, June 25, 2007) within this county, choosing a church or a different one is not difficult. At this time I have not been able to locate published statistics for Black churches but they are numerous in the county as well. Dubois (1965) states that “the Negro church of to-day is the social centre of Negro life in the United States” (p. 340) and that “various organizations meet here, - the church proper, the Sunday-school, two or three insurance societies, women’s societies, secret societies, and mass meetings of various kinds” (p. 340). In his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, King (1992) expressed his disappointment about the lack of support for desegregation by the White churches. “I have longed to hear white ministers say, ‘Follow this decree because integration is morally right and the Negro is your brother’” (King, 1992, p. 96). Not long after King’s assassination in 1968, Whites dismissed his contributions. In 1983, my husband and I were still newly weds celebrating a long weekend in Atlanta. The traffic in Atlanta frightened me, so my husband rented a limo with a driver to drive us around for several hours. When the car picked us up, we had an hour before our dinner reservations, so we asked the driver to show up some locally important sites. The first place that he took us was to the Martin Luther King Memorial. School officials use Black ministers as

liaisons between the Black students and parents and the school officials. Several serve on tribunal counsels who decide the fate of students who have been suspended from school for serious violations such as those involving weapons, drugs, or gangs. Mr. Alfred, a Black minister who serves as a substitute at the school and is on the school tribunal committee, commented that Kasey had gone too far this time. He had repeated drug dealing violations. He had to vote to permanently suspend him, but the church was praying for him. A report made by Alvord (as cited in Anderson, 1988, p. 12) to the Freeman's Bureau in 1866 described the integration of religion with literacy in "Sabbath schools among freedmen have opened throughout the entire South ...reaching thousands who cannot attend the week-day teaching.... Hundreds, dressed in clean Sunday garments, with eyes sparkling, intent upon elementary and Christian instruction."

Reading continued to be important to Blacks in the South as the skill was a requirement to be able to vote in many states as late as the 1950's (Brown, 1999). My son attended vacation *Bible* school with his basketball buddies at the First African Baptist Church over the summer. The majority of one of the services was devoted to stressing the importance of education, staying in school, and staying out of jail. That is not a sermon that one usually hears in a White church. The critical role of the church continues in the more current description by Greene (2006) of the role of the church in organizing the Black community of Crescent. Religion and civil rights are closely tied to each other. When school problems arise that are centered upon Black youth, school officials immediately turn to Black ministers for help due to their cultural capital within their community. Black ministers are able to move within White and Black communities. Being a minister provides them with capital among believers while their race carries epistemic privilege

among Blacks. “We need to bring this to the churches,” responded one administrator to a problem that involved mainly Black students. Then she named a Black teacher to the role of presenting this information to the church. Due to the intricate intertwining of religion and civil rights, questioning the role of religion in school and science brings hesitancy on the part of Blacks.

Educational Footprint of the Community

Education in our rural community has changed little since my graduation almost 30 years ago. Back then the high school focused on vocational education with an emphasis on obtaining a job. Academic classes like calculus, physics and ecology were not offered to students because of the lack of student interest and enrollment. The recent move into a new high school building carried the hope of a progressive education, but the focus is now divided between achieving set goals on standardized tests and readying students for the work place. The clean walls and functional restroom facilities were welcomed by the staff and students alike. No expense was spared in the outfitting of the school with the latest in technological equipment. There is a state- of- the-art printing shop, welding shop, commercial cooking kitchen and canning plant. All of the classrooms have interactive white boards run by a new teacher computer. The financial investment made in the vocational areas contrasts greatly with the funds appropriated to the academic areas. Most classrooms have only the one functional teacher computer. Computer tables stand empty or hold archaic versions of desk top computers scavenged from the old school. Science class / lab rooms were outfitted with lab tables but none originally had fuel lines necessary for work with Bunsen burners. Two classrooms were retrofitted so that labs involving such heat sources could be accommodated. Permanently

installed fume hoods or individual fume removing stations are also missing from the new building. A portable unit with no water or waste disposal capabilities provides the only ventilation. No funds for additional lab equipment were allocated. The least damaged and therefore the most functional desks from the old school were pressure washed and placed in the new science classrooms. Broken desks are carried piecemeal for repair to the welding shop. Two years have passed since we moved; those desks have yet to be replaced. Academically, the outlook for students graduating from this high school has not improved. Few students exceed the state required number of science classes. Electives like Physics depend upon enrollment numbers that often teeter below the required 15 students dooming those students to graduate high school and enter college with little formal instruction of a basic branch of science. Advanced Placement Chemistry, which would require two semesters of chemistry, is never considered as a course offering by the students or the guidance office. An honor's committee composed of faculty and some select community members advocated for requiring more academic classes, but the committee's suggestions were never allowed to be brought before the board. Dissention existed even among the members of the committee whether or not students vying for the honor of valedictorian should be required to take those horrible science classes. Creative writing and Advanced Literary Composition were a given though. The acceptance of elective English and Social Studies illustrates the presence of a commendable work ethic in the student body. Except for the minority of students who express an interest in medically related technical jobs, few graduates pursue higher education in the fields of science. Why do students in this community with an employment market dominated by a nuclear plant, which operates using scientific principles, avoid the subjects of science?

This phenomenon does not seem to be pervasive state wide. Teachers that I met in various training sessions from other more urban areas like Athens and Macon do not report such problems with science elective enrollment. They describe offering Advanced Placement Chemistry, Forensics, Physics and Ecology. Our student population in this ecologically rich location, albeit limited industrial applications, shies away from the various fields of science. What factor in this rural Southern area negates the importance of science in the education of our students? Using a lens of critical theory, I want to look at the school setting for influences from religion. I also want to listen to the sermons in the churches for references to class, gender and anti-intellectualism for factors that contribute to the willingness of people to accept and embrace this scientifically lackadaisical life style.

“When the Roll is Called Up Yonder”

Let us labor for the Master from the dawn till setting sun

Let us talk of all His wondrous love and care;

Then when all of life is over and our work on earth is done,

And the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there. (Black, 1939, p. 138)

A new phase was beginning in my life or more accurately a phase was waning, my reproductive phase. Some of my high school classmates were grandparents and I was still contemplating parenthood. Having a family required stability and a home. With both my husband and I working as contract nuclear workers, we had little stability in our employment, schedule, or location. Obtaining a job with a utility for one of us would not be difficult, but for both of us to accept entry level positions would mean that neither one would advance. Moving back to rural Georgia meant access to family, but limited

employment opportunities. Someone would have to change occupations. We evaluated our situation. Both of us had similar educations, and work experiences. Our resumes were identical except for the personal information. Sex: Male / Female. Height: 6'2" / 5'8". Eye color: Green / Brown. So we wagered. Whoever wins two out of three at rocks, paper, scissors would get first choice. Paper? Scissors? I debated between those two choices. He threw rocks and I threw nothing. "You waited to long," he said. Round Two – I threw scissors, he threw rocks again. I lost. It was no surprise. I should have insisted on a coin flip, at least I would have had a higher probability of winning. So I chose to change occupations to teaching science rather than doing science. The cliché of "those who can't do, teach" echoed in my head, but teaching science was something that I was destined to do. Not because it was my life long dream, but my mother said that teaching "is a good job for a woman". As the youngest of four daughters, it was expected that I, like my other siblings, would attend the local college and major in education to become a teacher. From my parents' viewpoint, the achievement of this goal was quite an accomplishment. Both graduated from high school but neither had ever attended college. They emphatically believed their daughters should graduate from college and become self-sufficient. This was a rarity in their community as many of their neighbors only sent sons to college. For working class parents to completely fund the college education of four daughters was a quite a sacrifice. I chose science by default. I didn't want to teach science; rather I wanted to be a scientist. I resisted by obtaining my four-year degree in Biology, but I appeased my mother by taking education classes as electives. Her dream had been realized. Her fourth and last child had a stable teaching career which provided financial security and allowed for a family.

For years my life revolved around my family and teaching career until, dismayed by the lack of monetary reward, I returned to school to increase my pay. I stepped into a different world of academe, far removed from that of my previous education. Pinar (2004) suggests that the “method of currere” (p. 35) be used “to study the relations between life knowledge and life history in the interest of self-understanding” (p. 35). The incentive of higher pay fell by the way side as I began to question my own education and the one that I was imposing upon my students. I had prided myself on my ability to treat all students equally regardless of their social status. I began to see the inequalities experienced by students by the “hidden curriculum” (Jackson as cited in Schubert, Schubert, Thomas, & Carroll, 2002, p. 199; Wink, 2005, p. 46) and realized that the failure of some students involved more than the comment which was required to be printed on the report card. My standard comments included ‘homework / class work often incomplete’ or most often “student needs to apply more effort”. I went to school with the parents of many of my students, but most of them don’t fall into that failing category. The failing students are usually the ones whose parents are barely double their own age. Some have children of their own. Shequay, mother to Shamika and Errica, cleans the lunch room tables. Neither girl has been doing their homework. I ask Shequay to stop by my room after school. “They aren’t doing their homework so they are getting behind in class,” I explained. Their mother replied, “I want these girls to graduate. I never did. I’ll talk wid them.” Shequay’s concern was evident upon her face. “Maybe they could study together or trade off babysitting for each other.” I suggest. Sisters, both in high school with infant children, their lives are following the pattern of their mother’s life. My own life exhibits a variation of the “reproduction theory” as described by Weis (2004, p. 110).

I identified myself as a propagator of this lifestyle and educational limits as denoted by class. It was ironic that in an educational setting, that I would come to find myself the once again the outsider. In the nuclear power industry, women were not welcomed. I thought that I had left all that behind when I changed jobs. Like most other educators, school was an arena in which I had been successful. I was not shunned for a perceived lack of physical or intellectual ability, but rather because of religious differences. I found myself outside of the circle encasing those who embrace religion, particularly the Christian religion. I responded to the challenges about religion in education in much the same way as I had with gender issues in nuclear power, by denial. I avoided questions about my personal religious beliefs and church affiliations in class and with other members of the faculty. My attempts to steer the class conversation away from church attendance did not dissuade the students from their inquiry. "Name the church that you attend," asked one student as we waited for the bell to ring. I busied myself with the task of taking role. "I'm sure that someone in this class has been there," she prompted. As I murmured something about beginning with our lesson, she quickly and correctly surmised that there isn't one that I attend on a regular basis. I have attended church, but I did not feel that it would be appropriate to comment on the content on those sermons to my students. Dare I share my viewpoints such as (1) the church is used to subjugate the poor, working class by stressing their blessings (2) that women are designated as inferior and chastised from the pulpit for challenging male authority (3) education, especially concerning science issues, is portrayed as blasphemous (4) church continues to colonize other cultures through missionary activities. Immediately, several of the students offered to "raise my name in prayer" at church that (Wednesday) night, as they know that I am

going to burn in Hell “like all of those science teachers who believe in evolution”.

Demarka assured me that she still “loved and respected me” but unless I repented my evil ways, Hell was a certainty. We reciprocated concern for each other. Mine was based upon her science education in this physical life while her concern for me was that of eternity. In her eyes and most others in this community, being on heaven’s role trumps that of the classroom. I dismissed their drama and its significance as students and teachers often have contradictory viewpoints. The power of religion over my reputation as a teacher surfaced through a nomination by a colleague for “Teacher of the Year”. The principal dropped by to talk with me about my nomination and the other nominees. He acknowledged my leadership in the school and classroom and then he mentioned the identities of the other nominees. Realizing that I was not comprehending the nuances of our conversation, he subtly pointed out the other nominees’ benevolent involvement in the church. They were well known church-goers and some used school assemblies to showcase their faith and church involvement. Chagrined by my perceived shortcomings, I asked that my nomination be pulled. I accepted all of this as my price for being different in a society that attempts to impose the Christian religion on everyone.

The impact of religion on the education of the students became more apparent as I asked them to write responses to selected current news articles related to science. The news paper articles were not chosen with an agenda that posited science versus religion. One article relayed information concerning the air quality of churches, particularly Catholic ones, that burn candles and incense. The response of many of the students related that this was one way for science to “get back at” and squelch religion and religious ceremonies. I had expected that they would relate it to the air quality in their

homes and the flourishing candle industry. Many of the school clubs had sold candles as part of their fundraisers. Another article on invasive, non-native species prompted responses that God wanted those animals to “go forth and multiply”. It seemed that for most all of the articles, the students’ views were focused from a religious / anti-science standpoint. A test question that required students to calculate half-lives of isotopes would be successfully completed, but one related to the fossil record would generate a biblical response.

Jackson (as cited in Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, (2000) credits Schubert and Cremin with the idea of the “out of school” (p. 27) curriculum which includes all that is learned away from the school setting. Cremin’s (1961) example of schools in the late 1800 through the early 1900 which were “seeking to transform the immigrant and being inexorably modified in the process” (p.71) illustrates the impact that a culture can have upon the school. The predominance and influence of religion in the society of the rural South inevitably bleeds over into the school. I think that the schools provide a legal illusion to the separation of church and state which belies the authenticity of the situation. As cautioned by Schubert (1986, p. 101), “the personal beliefs of all engaged in the educative process invariably affect the experiences that bring learning in schools.” Teachers and students who are active in the church bring ideals into the classroom which in the case of the science class is often contradictory to the concepts being taught. Using a lens of critical theory, I utilized fictional stories of students to illustrate some of the means through which the dominant Christian dogma resists science education and promotes its agenda through the formal and informal curriculum of the school. I examined the hidden curriculum of schools in the rural South for the propagation of the

ideology of the Christian religion concerning issues of class, gender and anti-intellectualism.

“I Shall Not Be Moved”

Tho all hell assail me, I shall not be moved;

Jesus will not fail me, I shall not be moved,

Just like a tree that's planted by the waters,

I shall not be moved. (Morris, 1939, p. 241)

The rigidity of the Christian religion is illustrated by this hymn. Science is viewed as a type of hell that attacks religious tenets and should be resisted. Even when student believers are confronted with hard evidence such as fossils and carbon dating, they are encouraged to be stalwart in their religious beliefs. Worshipers are admonished for considering other truths:

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who brought them – bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping. (2 Peter 2:1-3)

Teachings of the church encourage docility and obedience to those that are in power. I assert that religion is a major factor of the public school curriculum that limits the teaching of science in the rural South. My stories show how beliefs of the Christian religion have become synonymous with that of the general society in the South and have

impregnated the public schools belying the separation of church and state. Cobb (2005) describes “the history of southern identity is not a story of continuity versus change but continuity within it” (p. 7). Religion continues to be a major factor in the society and schools in the South. “Every child is instructed that it is, at the very least an option, if not a sacred duty to disregard the facts of this world out of deference to the God who lurks in his mother’s and father’s imaginations” (Harris, 2004, p. 65). The school hides behind a veil of progressiveness which “functions to obscure the considerable extent to which the specific history of this region [New South] echoes in the lives of its present inhabitants” (Pinar, 2004, p. 95). No where is this more evident than the newly erected statues of a Confederate soldier with his wife at his side on grounds of the renovated County Courthouse. While landscapes and some occupations have succumbed to the “bulldozer revolution” (Woodward, 1993, p. 10), many Southerners have attempted to reinvent agrarian occupations through the incorporation of technology. Tractors use global positioning satellite (GPS) to steer monstrous machinery in the same path without the aid of a human. Combines gather tobacco and steam it in large sealed sheds. The smell is not the same as was the golden flue cured tobacco. The Christian religion helps to maintain class stratification through the glorification of manual labor and discrediting of formal education. “Be satisfied with what the Lord has given you. You will be rewarded in heaven as you walk the streets of gold.” Pinar (2004) attributes the “denial and flight from reality involve [s]... distortions that undermine the South’s efforts to develop culturally, even economically” (p. 95). Gender roles as designated by the Christian religion are reinforced through the interwoven social networks of church and school. Woodward (1993) portends that the only characteristic in the South that has resisted

conformity with nationalistic ideas is the history of that region. I would amend that list by the addition of religion. Phillips (2006) and Goldberg (2006) contend that this phenomenon of church involvement in education and politics is not limited to the South, but has enveloped most of the nation creating a theocracy in which political groups “emphasize issues with theological importance. Public schools and textbooks would be pressured toward prayer and theological correctness on matters ranging from science and evolution to sex education, family life, and foreign policy” (Phillips, 2006, p. 209). The local banning of books based upon religious objections, the promotion of prayer at school functions and the integration of religious hymns in school programs illustrates the theocracy that is currently in place in the South. Will we be the ones conducting an illicit reading or study group like Nafisi in *Reading Lolita in Tehran*? How dare you expose our children to topics like sex and drug education? At least one parent as described in the story, *Lesson Gone Awry* claimed that her child had been taught the mechanics of snorting cocaine during a drug education program. The focus on educational policies allows for the “nurturing of new generations of creationists” (Goldberg, 2006, p. 94). Goldberg notes that a creationism museum and planetarium is set to open in 2007. A current web search finds the museum to be open promoting a musical that answers questions about the great flood (<http://www.creationmuseum.org/>, September 27, 2008). Another show describes the science behind the museum. Is this the same type of science that was used in the RATE study on the age of the Earth?

This topic has great importance to me as a science teacher in rural Georgia. Telling this story about “the place that I know ... and love for my own make strange and lovely and enlightening to look into” (Welty as cited in Woodward, 1993, p. 23) the

events that we take for granted on a daily basis. In this place, science is othered. It is used, tolerated and ignored, until conditions call on it for miracles that prayer could not perform.

“Tell Me the Old, Old Story”

Tell me the same old story,

When you have cause to fear

That this world’s empty glory,

Is costing me too dear,

Yes and when that world’s glory is dawning on my soul,

Tell me the old, old story Christ Jesus makes me whole. (Hankey, 1939, p. 153)

The room was full the first night that we met for class as a cohort. Even the word cohort seemed strange. One by one we introduced ourselves, providing name and school. The others in the class seemed so confident. “This can not be worse than being a scab, a nonunion worker in a union covered job, at a nuclear power plant,” I reassured myself silently. “If you thought that you would be here learning to make bulletin boards, you are in the wrong place,” stated the professor. That sounded positive as I never have particularly cared for bulletin boards. As a high school teacher, one bulletin board a year was enough for me. That reopened the question of what we would be studying. The book list seemed never ending. I expected maybe two books for each class, not a book per class per week. I learned to find pockets of time in a schedule filled with job and family responsibilities. “Did I see you sitting in the parking lot during baseball practice reading a book?” asked one student. “Yes, and you will see me there this afternoon, too,” I replied. Read we did. Class meetings elicited discussions on topics that had previously not been

considered. Our cohort numbers dwindled as our discourses became more intense. For me it was a process of evolution. At first I identified with Essentialists like Ravitch (2002). The lists and clear cut rules appealed to my industrial chemistry background. It was orderly and compliance was not a problem. I was not chastised for my allegiance with the group. Eyebrows would be raised; shortly a probing question would be posed. “Keep reading,” said the sage one. One reading list melded into the next. Unlike master’s level courses, no chapter or page number in a book promised a sure fire method of solving education’s woes, this was not a training ground for educational infomercials. I likened my exploration of the seemingly endless reading to students’ responses to uses of the periodic table. Science students find the periodic table to be daunting when they first begin to use it as a resource. The myriad of numbers and the seemingly irregular shape taunt their early usage of the tool. Not all of the information is used from day one. Gradually the students are exposed to the ramifications of each number listed on the data table. Experience allows them to recognize patterns, to use the data represented by the minuscule numbers in the squares and later to make inferences. “Only after a number of such transformations of vision does the student become an inhabitant of the scientist’s world, seeing what the scientist sees and responding as the scientist does.” (Kuhn, 1996, p. 111) All of the reading was necessary for me as a student to come to see the world through the perspective of the critical theorists. The whole of the “old story” (Hankey, 1939, p. 153) unfolded for me as I read about issues of race, class, and gender. I began to see prejudices in situations that I had previously taken for granted. Religious tenets and blind faith could not explain the injustices ironically inspired and executed in the name of Christianity. Critical theory had facilitated a change in my perception.

Southern Schooling - Education in the Rural South

Stepping into my role as a white, female teacher, I failed to recognize the discrimination toward nonwhites within the educational system until my “education” (Greene, 2001, p.5) progressed. I did not have the tools to recognize the presence and power of the dominant class. I had accepted that there existed portions of society that did not succeed at school. Even as a teacher, I did not see this as my problem, but theirs. I came from a poor family and I had succeeded in school. My college degrees were proof that any student from a comprehensive high school could be successful. I took offense at a professor’s comments that indicated that my education had merely been Southern schooling. When Watkins’s (2001) writings in *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America*, pointed out the inadequacy of a vocational education, I became angry. The same theme was repeated in Anderson’s (1988) description of Savannah State College offering some “academic education and training in selected skill trades” (Anderson, 1988, p. 122). Georgia Southern probably would not have much ranked much higher than Savannah State College on Watkins’s scale. What was the problem with vocational education? Everyone needs a plumber, electrician, or auto mechanic at some point. If it was not an adequate education for Blacks then it wasn’t for me either. I was reminded of the taunts from my cousin about me attending the “nigger school”. How had she known that my education was second rate? I seethed in anger at the offending statements then and now. “Well here I am, sitting in a graduate class, so I must have passed the entrance exam. I hope your car doesn’t break down on the way home because I am not going to fix it for you.” I thought about all the medals, especially the one in auto mechanics, which I had received at my high school honors night. It was just a

few weeks ago that I passed out carefully selected medals and engraved trophies for my top science students. The memory of the hugs and smiles of my students as they eagerly accepted the meager tokens acknowledging their effort clouded in my mind as I considered the lack of value of our education. Were all those meaningless since they had come from a comprehensive, meaning vocational, high school? I was top at a second rate high school and attended a second rate college. Schools in this area integrated completely when I was in fifth grade. So for all of middle school and high school, I shared the same space as the Black students. We were all in the same classes, but we didn't ride the same buses to school because of the fear of fights. Boler (as cited in Pinar, 2004) describes progressive education which includes the issues of slavery and lynching in the South as "pedagogy of discomfort" (p. 246). This term aptly described my reaction to the onslaught against my native, albeit flawed, home. I don't even own a rebel flag, but I wanted to wave one.

The hidden curriculum remained just that, hidden from my consciousness. It was not until my introduction to Freire (2004) and Wink (2005) that the hidden curriculum became apparent. In *Critical Pedagogy: Notes from the Real World*, Wink's (2005) description of school "grooming" (p. 53) in which one set of students is taught to be leaders while the other set is conditioned to be followers brought the realization that being in the same school and maybe the same class did not mean that all children had the same schooling experience. I could easily see how the tracking of students into the different levels accomplished this task effectively. The expectations for the "A team and B team" (Wink, p. 100) were much different. While the state department has reverted to offering only one diploma, within the school students continue to be tracked into college

preparatory / honors and vocational classes. Honors classes are predominately White. White parents panic when learning that their child will be in a class with the general meaning Black population. Different teaching styles are used for each team. The “transmission model” (Wink, p. 179) which involves one way transmission of ideas to students from the teacher, as in scripted lessons and lecture only, would not be considered for use with the honors classes but would be pushed for in lower level classes. Wink draws much of her inspiration from Freire. Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2004) succinctly terms the existing model of education as the “banking model” (p. 71-86) in which he describes the student as the receptacle which receives the knowledge from the expert - the teacher. The students are expected to bend and flex under the rigidity of the knowledge presented by the teacher. Freire identifies the necessity of dialogue to start liberation for any oppressed group. “The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. . . In this process, arguments based on authority are no longer valid. . .” (Freire, 2004, p. 80). Freire uses the term “conscientization” (p. 74) to describe the realization that dialogue creates when repressed individuals finally understand that they are humans and possess intrinsic worth. The reality of my education came to me as I wrote for the Curriculum Studies program much as Pinar (2004) incorporated Benstock’s description of the role of fiction writing in the construction of reality by Woolf not as “a shock of recognition in the mirror.... [but] as a linguistic space (‘a scene’) that conceals and simultaneously seals the gap (‘the crack’) of the unconscious” (Pinar, 2004, p. 53). I was finally ready to look “into the eyes of the snake of White dominance.... [and] embark on this sometimes uncomfortable journey into greater understanding that the

‘enemy’ is dominance itself, not White people.” (Howard, 1999, p. 27) I found myself counseling students, Hispanics, Blacks and poor Whites, on playing the game to be able to stay in school. Like Delpit (1995) “I have come to understand that power plays a critical role ...in our educational system.”(p. XV) Parents of the dominant class will speak up for their children but minorities are hesitant to challenge the authority of the school. While Delpit (1995) described the need of Black students to be able to speak Standard English in order to compete within the hegemonic society, I see that students need to learn the skills necessary to discuss their issues with dominant authoritative in a manner that does not exclude them from the conversation. It can be difficult to explain to students and parents the need for tact in discussing an issue. Speaking loudly or in aggressive manners does not draw attention to the problem, but rather to the nonconforming behavior of the parent or student.

Gender Issues – Living the Script

One of the basic premises of science is the use of standards. Standards are used in industry and taught in science class as ideals that are agreed upon for use. Actual physical standards are protected against degradation by placement in bell jars while reproducible standards are defined by fractions of wavelengths and such. The *Bible* specifies gender roles that are prevalent in the South. Men control the household as well as most management positions in corporations. Gender issues were no stranger to me. Working as a female in the male dominated lab gave me epistemic privilege for speaking about gender. I was initially blinded by the myth of meritocracy (Chomsky, 2000; Hinchey, 2004; Kozol, 1975; McLaren, 2005) and convinced that my efforts at “bootstrap-lifting” (Sinclair, 2000, p. 11) would propel me into the ranks of the professionally successful.

My efforts to assimilate into that male culture sacrificed my allegiance to those of my same sex and class. I joined in the ridicule of the women who did not conform to the manly mores. Maintaining an understanding of cultural background is important to hooks (2000). She admonishes those who have success not to attribute it to their superior work ethic and forget the institutional policies that oppress minorities. Working in the male dominated lab, it was easier to join in with the boys who made negative comments about other women and their inadequacies than to confront the boys about their discriminatory attitudes. Their comments initially were couched by statements like “present company excluded of course”. I prided myself on my independence which I developed as a defense after a dangerous training experience conducted by an experienced male co-worker which led to me receiving a large, undocumented dose of radiation and subsequent disciplinary action. After that, I did not turn to males in the lab for physical or mental help. I learned that I could move my own nitrogen dewars, read plant identification blueprints, rebuild pumps, and resolve mechanical problems. In the midst of my plight for female independence, dose rates limits were continually adjusted for me and other females, actually for the possibility of a developing fetus which prohibited work at certain high dose tasks at the end of month. Male co-workers would blatantly question whether or not your period was late as a protest for having to take over an assigned task. Complaints to the shop steward fell on deaf ears. Harding (1986) notes that labor unions are not concerned with the problems of female employees. Few items that are of concern to nuclear workers come up on the agenda at the contract negotiations for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers whose ranks are filled with fossil fuel plant workers and lineman. Even fewer items related to concerns pertaining only to female nuclear

workers cross the table. When they say brotherhood that is exactly what is meant. The dismissal of my concerns by the union sparked the beginning of my mistrust of unions in general. It was the catalyst to becoming a contract worker alias scab or road whore. My spouse and I adapted to this lifestyle as both of us understood the demands of the industry. Having no children and living away from our families, we were in essence insulated from the demands of family life. The plight of individuals who must move from one home culture and function in an employment situation in different culture is highlighted by Wright (2000). The descriptions of Rosalia and Cynthia were familiar to me. I played the part of Rosalia who attempted to assimilate into the male dominated society, yet her male peers did not accept her. I had seen versions of Cynthia who refused to give up their trappings of culture and femaleness in the nuclear industry, but readily dismissed them as women who were looking for a husband, not a career. I had considered myself an example of success as a feminist because I had worked in a male dominated job. I never considered that in order to be accepted, I had acted as Rosalia and given up my female characteristics. My dress was always plain and male-like. I wore no makeup. Hairstyles had to fit under a hard hat. Secretaries could look like women, and dress femininely but lab workers were denied their feminine identity. The juxtaposition of women in the lab is illustrated by the difference in the two personas of Rosalind Franklin, one shown in Watson's (1996) *Double Helix* and the one portrayed by Sayre (2000) in *Rosalind Franklin and DNA*. In the *Double Helix*, Watson's perception of Rosalind Franklin hinged upon her physical appearance. Because she did not adhere to the fashion standards, he dismissed her both socially and intellectually. Watson's slur of her name Rosalind, to Rosy, was a signifier of his dominance. He took her work and her

name. Rosalind Franklin as described by Sayre, was an accomplished researcher whose focus was on her current project. She did not seem to view the conflicts between her and fellow researcher, Wilkins, as important. “The unfortunate truth is that Rosalind did not hold him in high regard, and opinions of this order Rosalind had little skill in concealing” (Sayre, 2000, p. 141). Rosalind was marginalized in the lab for not accepting the feminine role outlined by society of being submissive and superficial. It was not until I left the lab and read the story of Rosy that I reevaluated my stint in that world. Like Rosalind, I did not place much importance upon the conflicts that I would have with my male supervisors considering it to be due to their mental inadequacies. Most of the lab supervisors seemingly paid little attention to the problems and solutions that I brought to their attention. Any resolutions to noted issues would then be presented to the plant managers as their own ideas. As a contractor, I accepted this as the status quo. Tony, a Black supervisor, was different. When he forwarded my suggestions, I received the credit for them. I had always figured that he was covering himself in case my logic was faulty. Maybe he was just giving me my due credit. I am sure that with him being one of the few Black supervisors in the industry, he had experienced his own share of discrimination. There were even fewer women supervisors and workers than Blacks. Women tend to be excluded because of “the informal system of men’s sponsorship and patronage, that both ensure coveted career paths for professional men and isolate women employees thereby circumventing the overt goals of affirmative action programs” (Harding, 1986, p. 86-87). At one of the power plants, the lab supervisor openly told his workers that the Black female who would be reporting for work the next day to fill a position was only chosen under pressure from human resources to meet their diversity quotas. He also added that

his vote had been for the male who had considerable skills and assets, but her hiring met the criteria of two minorities, meaning that the next position could go to a worthy white male. In his short statement, he had managed to air his discriminatory opinions and discredit the female while disparaging her ability to adequately perform the duties of her job. The final comment added “at least she doesn’t have any kids to tend too” was added to end on a positive note. The nuclear power industry has made some concessions concerning accommodations for families. Some may be due to legal mandates such as the Family Leave Act. When students inquire about my change in occupation from the lab to teaching, I usually respond in generic terms that it was time for a change. I know that initially I described it as working at a real job, a man’s job. I was astounded to recognize the sexism of my own statements to my students. I thought that I was encouraging them to take on any job even those considered to be male occupations. It seems that I only confirmed for females the fear that is present concerning long term employment in male dominated fields.

The *Bible (King James Version)* addresses the roles of the spouses in the marriage in Ephesians 5:22 through 5:24. The man is described as the head of the household and women are told to submit themselves to their husbands. Many preachers take the opportunity to reinforce the man as the head of the household during the actual wedding ceremonies. Weddings for women are considered to be the high point of their physical appearance. Much emphasis is placed upon this entrance into what will most likely be an oppressive relationship. Women are silenced in today’s churches much as Granny Birdie was all those years ago. At a recent Father’s Day service, the preacher initiated an activity in which a male on each pew would voice two words to describe their fathers.

This activity did not have anything to do with them relating their father to their own role of parenting. It was as if none of the women had fathers. The women's perceptions of their fathers were not deemed important enough to voice in church.

Class Issues - Tithing for Eternity

The emphasis on vocational education for Blacks and poor Whites has not changed in our area since my days in high school in the 1970's. Gramsci's idea that the public school is a means through which to reproduce the classes present in the society is evident (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993, Giroux, 1992; 1997). The majority of the population of this county would be classified as lower class and middle class. A high school diploma is not a guarantee of middle class any longer. Posters in the hall way at school encourage students to stay in school as a way to increase their lifetime earnings, but the actual motive is to improve the school standings for graduation rates and make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The poster depicts the choice between being a fry cook at a fast food restaurant and a graduate. Sadly one of the few jobs in the area for drop outs and graduates is for fast food workers. A graduate from the local college or technical school may afford some of the luxuries of middle class but rarely escapes the reality of living paycheck to paycheck. The promise of eternal life in a paradise of gold and silver juxtaposes the daily existence of the working class of the South. The threat of eternity in hell serves as an additional deterrent to bad behavior.

I remember seeing old prints ... including hell, purgatory and heaven, the former being placed deep underground, the latter high above in the skies. Such representations were not meant purely allegorically (as they might be in later periods ...)Today no church requests the faithful to interpret its dogma in this

materialistic fashion....This advancement has certainly been aided by our knowledge of the interior of the planet...of the probable history of our solar system and of the structure of the galaxy and the universe.... I will not say that with deeply religious persons such enlightenment had to await the aforesaid findings of science. (Schrödinger, 2006, p. 140)

Science may teach the structure of the Earth and astronomy as outlined by *Benchmarks for Science Literacy* but churches in the South continue to indoctrinate their congregations with the ideas of a physical heaven and hell where one's relatives await their passing. Tithing in church is one way of purchasing a ticket to the promised-land. Hobbes questioned the right of priests to take money in the form of tithes. Common people had to pay "double tribute, one to the state, another to the clergy Hobbes as cited in Shapin & Schaffer, 1985, p. 97). No where are the financial strains of tithing more constraining than in the pocketbooks of the poor who dare not stand against the church for fear of social reproach as well as the risk of eternal damnation. Harding (1986) succinctly describes the class stratification that occurs in the nuclear power industry which drives our local economy. Most upper level management positions are held by white males from more affluent backgrounds. Lower class males and a few females conduct the majority of the manual labor. It must be noted that in our rural economically depressed area that the manual labor jobs at the "River" are considered to be prize occupations. When questioned in class about prospective careers, several students respond with desires to work at the "River". Weis (2004) describes the same type of class stagnation of Whites in *Class Reunion*. Those males who embodied the masculine ideals have faced more economic pressure than the ones who have taken occupations like

teaching and nursing which are considered to be more feminized. Employment opportunities in this county are limited as evidenced by the three largely vacant industrial parks owned by the city / county government. A minimum security prison made the headlines of the local paper for offering employment opportunities to the non-incarcerated public. This headline with its implied celebration of the punishment of others harkens to the public punishment described by Foucault (1977). Two textile mills or sewing factories, one of which is seasonal, provides employment mainly for women in the area. This type of employment for women is viewed as progress as they moved from non-paid care giving to minimal pay jobs (Harding, 2000). As part of the wood industry, logging by individuals and small companies and a saw mill offers stable employment for mainly males. During summer vacation, I was surprised by a knock at my back door. Devon, a black male student who had graduated the previous year, stood at my door. “What brings you to this neck of the woods,” I asked. “I’m pulpwoodin’ down the road,” he said. One of the large paper companies has been liquidating its assets in the United States. “Man, school was easy. Cuttin’ wood is hard work, the heat, the skeeters, the snakes. Daddy, he stay on us all de’ time, so I’d better go fore he skins me for takin’ too long.” Football was to have been his ticket out, but no schools recruited him, leaving him to work the woods with his father. McLaurin (1998) described these families as being some of the most economically deprived. Because they are technically independent contractors, many lack insurance and benefits that would be available to them if they worked directly for the corporation. Devon has traded being pushed to perform in school for being pushed by his father in their small business meaning they have an old truck and some chain saws. He and his father may not see the limitations of his future as more land

owners invest in resetting timber tracts targeting the business of larger timber companies that will pay a higher price per cord. Bigger timber companies will not take the time to cut natural stands of trees. Trees planted in rows can be harvested much faster with large equipment than can be cut and loaded by hand. The move to mechanization in timber harvesting and in agriculture has changed the local economy as men deal with the restructuring of the economic base. This mirrors the situation described by Kenway and Kraack (2004) when “despite... the changed nature of local employment, many fathers cannot unlearn the attitudes associated with regular skilled [or unskilled] manual employment and local hegemonic working class masculinity” (p. 102). The changes in employment base are ignored within the school system as males continue to be encouraged into the areas of agriculture and timber through numerous classes on agriculture and club associations like Future Farmers of America and the Young Farmers Association. Recently the highest paid teacher in the school system taught agriculture and ran the canning plant. His salary was elevated due to years of service but was also subsidized by the Young Farmers Association. The connection to farming is encouraged in the elementary and middle schools through the 4-H program which is sponsored by the University of Georgia and your tax dollars indirectly. Rev. Williams described in a sermon at one country church how many in the congregation remembered the days when folks only ate what was produced on their farms. He expanded that to include the production of enough oil and ethanol to be a self sufficient nation. His description of a self sufficient nation and family reminds me of Orr’s (2004) utopia in which cooperation between farmers and consumer limits the transportation of goods. Orr concedes that farmers should be viewed as “trustees of the land that is to be passed on in health to

future generations” (p.107). Limited monetary initiatives as tax breaks and government funding encourage conservation activities on a few farms, but most farmers fail to look past the black line on the tax return to see the true cost of their current methods of farming. Farmers don’t want the EPA or any other government agency mandating what they can do with their land. It is ironic that they ally themselves with industry against the EPA when they stand to lose so much. It is their land and environment that suffers from poor practices. Mooney (2005) describes the debate over the chemical atrazine which is marketed to farmers and homeowners as an herbicide. Science research showed that it caused hormonal imbalances in frogs. This research was questioned and ultimately disregarded because of the influence of industry and the “Data Quality Act” (Mooney, 2005, p. 75). “With ... the Data Quality Act, conservatives carry forward the misleading legacy of the Gingrich-era regulatory reformers, seeking to throw hurdles in the way of the government’s use of scientific information to support regulatory action” (Mooney, 2005, p. 75). My ability to recently purchase atrazine to control spur weed illustrates the power of the chemical industry and the ignorance of the public to the dangers of the available chemicals on shelves of your local farm supply store. The Hispanic population has carved a niche out of the pine straw market. In class I was discussing college plans with students and one shared his plan for being a straw boss. At first, I thought he was joking. Then he said that he could make a \$1000/ week, so why should he spend four years at college to make less money. The influx of Hispanic immigrants to fill the jobs of this blossoming industry has created a new lower class. One faculty member who is responsible for scheduling students commented recently, “Our taxes are going up this year and it’s all due to the Mexicans. You know that don’t you? They are ruining our

schools and our medical industry.” It wasn’t long ago that she asked me to buy a ticket for a fund raiser which was sponsoring a mission trip to Central America. Helping those who are sanctioned by the church must be different from those who live locally. Locals are isolated from the majority of the White and Black populations socially as many attend a recently constructed Catholic church which conducts services in Spanish rather than traditional Baptist churches. Hispanic students are served by the English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs at all levels of school. In parent teacher conferences with Hispanic families, the student is often placed in the role of translator. This is awkward for the student who must relay their own shortcomings to the parent.

Elementary age children can be seen in stores negotiating the purchase of items from furniture to cell phone contracts. Soto (1997) and Valdez (1996) helped me to realize the complexity of their lives. It is hard enough to comprehend the rules of cell phone usage and billing without a language barrier. My original red neck intolerance for these marginalized students who infiltrated my class has grown into deep respect. Industrial jobs in the area, other than at the nuclear power plant, are limited to relatively unstable businesses. Several small companies, making scissors, packing materials, and boats have attempted to establish in the industrial parks but none have survived leaving mainly low paying service jobs as options for employment.

The role of schooling is described by Kozol (1975) as a means of training for submission, which may ultimately result in the conscription of oppressed people who have few options available to them into military service to protect the rights of those who are their oppressors. As part of the vocational department, the Air Force Junior Reserve Officer Training Corp (AFJROTC) has a high percentage of student participation among

Blacks, Hispanics and poor Whites. All branches of the military actively recruit during school lunches on a regular basis. They set up a table at the rear of the lunchroom. Often they utilize former graduates to help entice other students to join. For some students, the military is the best option. A few students will attend boot camp during the summer of their junior school year. As part of the reserve, they receive a small check that helps them until they can enlist full time. For some students, like Sherese it is the only support that she will receive. She has been evicted from both sets of parent's houses due to conflicts with live-ins. At seventeen, foster care is not an alternative. For her and others like her, the military provides a stable home. The guidance office / graduation committee for 2007 listed seven percent of the graduates as entering the military; so approximately 11 students out of that one graduating class had committed to the military. From the student standpoint, society and the schools push the importance of the high school diploma until graduation. The school pushes graduation to achieve Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). After graduation, the new story is that a high school diploma does not have much value. Not all students make the decision to enlist by graduation. Some decide after graduation, once they realize that the high school diploma does not open many doors.

Talk of "white privilege" (Pinar, 2004, p. 246) meant little to me. Reading the negative descriptions of the South including lynching and slavery, made it seem that every Southern person had been personally involved in a lynching and had owned slaves. To my knowledge, my family has no history of slave ownership, but I have heard the woes of being a share cropper dependent upon the weather and the fairness of a land owner. The ownership of even a small piece of land was a source of intense pride. On my father's farm, my family worked side by side in the fields with black families. Privilege

to me meant being able to show up for work at 7:00 am rather than my 4:00 am wakeup call in order to have everything for the crew to begin work at 7:00 am. Yes, we owned a small farm and country grocery store, but my parents worked six or seven days a week, 12-14 hours per day. There was never a multi-day vacation for the entire family. My father, exerting his male privilege, would accompany his male friends to Florida for extended fishing trips. His excuse for leaving Momma behind was someone had to run the store and see about the girls. An occasional Wednesday, if the weather and tides were just right, we would hang the CLOSED sign on the wooden front door of the store and both parents and I would spend the day fishing in the rivers of the coastal marshes. I would gladly skip school to go fishing. Even the execution of this leisure activity took work. The drive to the coast took two hours with the boat in tow. It must be nice to live in one of those fancy houses with the docks right on the river. You could sleep till 6 am and still be fishing at daylight. Falk (2004) describes Highway 17 as the dividing line between the haves and the have-nots. We would launch our boat and park our truck in a dirt lot with all the other have-nots. The cooler would have ice to keep the fish and sandwiches for lunch fresh. Cans of Vienna sausages and sardines were packed in the side pockets of the boat for emergency rations should we become stranded. I was glad that we were never stranded for more than just a few hours. Sometimes we would go up tidal creeks on high tide and fish the tide out. Then we would have to wait for enough water to come back in before we could leave. I think that Daddy just liked those smelly things, the sardines and sausages. He'd pick out the rustiest can and say "I don't think this one will last much longer, so I had better eat it." At the end of the day, we would trailer the boat and drive home. Most of our fishing was done in the winter, as summer

was a busy time on the farm. We would be cleaning fish past dark. I came to realize that owning a small boat and having the resources to travel to fish was a manifestation of “white privilege” (Pinar, p. 246). Many Blacks would fish from the bridges over small creeks hoping to supplement their supper table. Likewise, McLaurin’s (1998) description of the power yielded by his grandfather in the management of his store made me cognizant of the nuances of power within our small community due to that country store. It was not uncommon for local residents to run tickets at the store. My parents would be aggravated when folks would want to charge another week of groceries when they had not paid for last weeks. In their defense, the supplier did not wait for his money; he expected to be paid when the groceries were delivered. The mission trips of the church are another version of “white privilege” (Pinar, p. 246). These are vacations that are sanctioned by the church unlike the fishing vacations of my family. Mission trips are paid for out of church coffers, meaning that those funds are tax deductible for the individuals making the donations. A tally of the funds for the four hour charter bus trip to and from the Atlanta airport, the air fare, food for seven days and accommodations at a modest hotel for 50 people would equal more than enough money to cover a year’s salary for a nurse or physicians assistant to provide medical care for a group of people. The cost of the trips for the missionaries is divided among the entire congregation. Does anyone debate using that amount of money to fund medical care on a continual basis for the chosen group? Would that not be a better fiscal investment in a community than a week long visit? Would our own community be satisfied with medical care for a week rather than continual care?

Sinclair (2000) noted that properties held by the Catholic church have “no taxes, municipal, state or national; which means, quite obviously that you and I, who do not go to church, but who do pay taxes, furnish the public costs of Catholicism” (p. 146). While Catholic churches are not prominent in the rural South, churches of the Christian faith are numerous. If taxes were levied against their value as structures, their tax bills would be much higher than many single family dwellings. Is the exemption status of church property ever questioned here in the United States? While Sinclair’s reference was to the Catholic church when he challenged people who questioned the “tax-exemption privilege ... Write a letter about it to your daily newspaper; and if the letter is not published , go and see the editor and ask why; so you will learn something about the partnership between Supersition [*sic*] and Big Business!” (Sinclair, 2000, p. 148-149) the same holds true for the Baptist religion in the South. Hardly a week passes that there is not a letter to the editor noting a slight by the school system that has been made to the Christian faction in the community. The sermon at Bethlehem church focused on the school getting back prayer and God back into the school. It sounded like Applebome’s (1997) description of a Promise Keepers meeting in which the leader of the service prayed for “our schools back, God.... Our government back, ... We want the rule of this land to be a godly rule, God.” (Applebome, 1997, p. 54). The minister at Bethlehem is also the principal at the local Christian school, but he made no distinction between what is acceptable policy for a privately funded, Christian school and what is appropriate for a publicly funded school.

Science and Religion in the South – The Great Divide

The rift between religion and modern science reached a climax when Darwin’s claim for evolution clashed with the Genesis creation myth of the Christian *Bible* (King

James Version). The conversion of America to Christianity was described by Hofstadter (1964) as an “evangelical tide” (p. 90) with the three main religious groups, Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians, spreading their version of religion. The influence of religion on intellectualism can be seen by the quote from “the Georgia assemblyman who said: Read the *Bible*. It teaches you how to act...There isn’t another book that it is necessary for anyone to read, and therefore I am opposed to all libraries” (Hofstadter, 1964, p. 125). Our local school board and ministers in community must have been raised with the same ideals, as they recently banned *Of Mice and Men*, *Native Son* and *Brave New World* from the schools due to the use of blasphemous language. No book about the South would be complete without some mention of the complex integration of religion in every fiber of the society of the South. Authors like Greene (2006), Falk (2004) and McLaurin (1998) note the degree of involvement of both the White and Black people in the church. Communities within the county are divided into different locales based upon a physical structure of a church. The country churches are more humble in appearance than the larger churches in town but the power of these organizations lies within the collective consciousness of the congregation. The church is a focal point for the faithful of the community. It serves them from the cradle to the grave. As Falk (2004) notes the constitution may have prohibited prayer in schools, but prayer and people calling on God occurs everywhere in the rural South. Science teachers will be discussing evolution in their classes prior to lunch and before beginning to eat say Grace. Prayer is used to make life decisions so that people don’t have to take responsibility for their decisions or consequences. Everything that happens is part of God’s plan. If it is God’s will for me to get this job then it will be mine. If I don’t get the job then it wasn’t in God’s plan and he

will open another door for me. Attempting to teach students that wearing a seat belt will help protect you during a wreck because it demonstrates Newton's first law of motion is negated by their interpretation of God's will. If it is my time to go then God will bring me home, seat belt or no seat belt. There is such a critical mass of believers, especially in the South, that few dare to speak against the trappings of the church. Like those old school scientists, religious followers are the dominant culture and for those with faith little change can occur.

The danger of religious faith is that it allows otherwise normal human beings to reap the fruits of madness and consider them holy....Each new generation of children is taught that religious propositions need not be justified in the way that all others must. (Harris, 2004, p. 73)

Christian's question concerning the legitimacy of the gold-producing prophet illustrates the quandary of a student who is attempting to apply the concepts that are taught in the science classroom with those that are taught in the Sunday school classroom. Her dilemma is apparent. If she chooses to believe in the religious healing process, then the science laws are not rules of nature but are dependent upon circumstance; upon God's will. Her reasoning ability has raised the question about the validity of the healing. Why were some people healed but Drew was not? The interjection of God's will into all outcomes provides an out for any unexpected conclusions. I thought about the church sermon and the parable of Jesus as the Sower and the incongruities of the children's lesson with that which is taught in school. One of the new agricultural projects at school is the use of hydroponics. Plants can grow without soil through that method. The space shuttle has plant experiments on board. Even Disney World demonstrates this to young

children. Students in fifth grade study geology and learn about pioneer species like grasses which root in rocky areas. Those plants are responsible for weathering and the development of soil. This is known as primary succession. Mrs. Jordan, the leader of children's church, presents herself as a science expert. This is the same person who selected and organized the Power Lab vacation *Bible* school. Telling the science truth doesn't fit in with their parable, so the science truth is ignored. I wanted to ask our county extension agent, who gives advice on agricultural practices to local farmers, what he thought about the lesson, but I didn't get the chance. The use of stories and metaphors to bridge gaps has become commonplace, but it is important for the audience to understand the limitations of the metaphor. "Metaphor, not material exchange ... criss-crossed among these two sets of disciplines, their practitioners, and among their subjects – that provided the principal vector for the dissemination of meaning" (Keller, 1995, p. 104). Just as Keller (1995) describes the gulf between cyberspace and molecular biology being bridged by metaphor, religion and science are being bridged by parable.

Does the type of science presentation used in the vacation bible school and plant demonstration bring into question the validity of facts that are presented as scientific? It all depends upon belief in God as the one who is all powerful. The science is presented as entertaining, but God is glorified as the true source of power. "Belief, however is not a psychological state, not a way of grasping statements but a polemical mode of relation" (Latour, 1999, p. 271). Latour and Woolgar (1986) define fact as "taken to refer to some objectively independent entity which, by reason of its 'out there-ness' cannot be modified at will and is not susceptible to change under any circumstances" (p. 175). If God is responsible for controlling all power on the earth and in the galaxy, then will the assay

results be the same each time an experiment is conducted as is the basis of scientific method or be dependent upon the whim of omnipotent one.

Martusewicz (2001) describes herself as someone who had written about the issues of marginalized people from a safe position. I think that I have been playing it safe in my classroom to avoid conflict with parents and administration. I have avoided taking personal responsibilities for teaching controversial topics of science under the guise of adhering to the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). The political power of the religious right makes nonbelievers, even those who are established scientists, reticent about revealing their lack of faith. As recently as 1998, The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) published a report promoting the teaching of evolution in public schools (Larson, 2007). A disclaimer in the opening validated the report and the teaching of evolution by stating, “‘whether God exists or not is a question about which science is neutral,’ ... The irony is striking: A group of specialists who are nearly all nonbelievers tell the public that ‘science is neutral’ on the God question” (Larson, 2007, p. 52). Given that professional scientists are reticent about revealing their personal beliefs about God that go against the norm, one should not be surprised that lowly science teachers hide behind the same veil of ambiguity. The Scopes trial (1925) highlighted the controversy between science and religion which Hofstadter (1964) cites as a possible rationale for teachers who chose to avoid conflict within their classrooms. In 1935, Russell (1997) first published his book, *Religion and Science*, which was released again in 1997 with an introduction by Ruse. Russell exposed similar concerns about the clash between science and religion. Hofstadter credits the evangelist Billy Sunday for the “emergence of ... the one-hundred percent mentality - a mind totally committed to the full range of the

dominant popular fatuities and determined that no one shall have the right to challenge them” (p. 118). The incongruities of the beliefs of religion with scientific beliefs are outlined by Harris (2004). He describes the ways in which our lives are constructed around competing paradigms that cannot coexist. The impasse faced by Gina, a professional educator and graduate student, of believing in the biblical facts verses the scientific facts was not a new one. Her dilemma differs from that of Christian, in that her role as a teacher places her as the intellectual leader. Her decision on the manner and depth to present or delete the offending concepts morphs the education experience of the student. As a professional in the science field this quandary has plagued the most devout of biologists since scientists began to notice in fossil records that the morphology of organism was not static. John Bartram, royal botanist to the king of England, traveled extensively through the Carolinas, Georgia and North Florida cataloging plants and collecting seeds. The identification of new species raised controversy concerning the biblical interpretation of God creating all organisms that were not changeable. Bartram’s change in theology from Quakerism to deism was explained by Stearns (1970) by “Bartram’s God had become the God of nature, his religion the natural religion: ‘It is through the telescope I see God in his glory’” (p. 578). This raises the question in the minds of those who study science whether their studies will be casual like the student or intense like the paleo-botanist; whether the *Bible* is meant to be interpreted literally or figuratively. While most of the evolutionary data contradicts Creationism, Dawkins (2006) suggests that Creationists would be the first to embrace the scientific research if it promoted their cause. Apparent discrepancies in scientific data are already being used as a means to discredit theory. The student who questioned the authenticity of radioactive

dating referenced a link from a local religious website that used the discrepancies or errors in radioactive dating as proof for a young Earth (Snelling, n.d.). It is ironic that instruments designed for the detection and identification of radioactive isotopes is being used as a weapon for the Creationists in the war between science and religion. During the conversation with the student about the scientific results, it became apparent that the parent of the student had fostered this conversation. The parent works in the nuclear power industry. Here is a man whose career is based upon the predictability of fission and nuclear decay promoting pseudo scientific research to their child. As a nuclear worker, the jargon of the article related to the isotopic information should have been familiar as decay chains and emission spectra are commonly discussed in the nuclear workplace. This technology is not new. Ionization detectors were designed by Rossi and Straub to detect radioactive showers in the mid 1940's as part of programs that arose from war research (Galison, 1997). These were later revised by the Chalk River group to include the identification of particular isotopes based upon energy emission spectrums. Those energy spectrums are fed to computers which in essence "transform pieces of matter into written documents" (Latour & Woolgar, 1986, p. 51). The equipment used by the Southern Baptist Convention writer / researcher or the textbook source is beyond the financial and intellectual means of the ordinary citizen. The use of expensive and specialized equipment precludes an average citizen from challenging the findings (Latour & Woolgar, 1986; Latour, 1987). This cements the author as "spokesperson.... of what is inscribed on the window of the instrument" (Latour, 1987, p. 71). The reader must rely on the interpretation of the author as the actual display is not available. Latour and Woolgar (1986) describe this as a way in which "reality is secreted" (p. 243). This

particular article also incorporates information concerning the geological formation of strata and the implications of positioning of those strata. In order for a reader to question the validity of the data, she must have an understanding of geology, physics and statistics. The article quotes a study “Radioisotopes and the Age of The Earth” (RATE) in which a total of 27 samples were taken. The samples were analyzed by two well-credentialed labs. Samples were analyzed using four pairs of daughter isotopes. The report “incorporates all the analytical errors” (Snelling, n.d.). Reported ages for the rocks ranged from 1060 million years to 2574 million years. The article concludes that due to the lack of agreement between the samples, that the Earth could possibly only be a few thousand years old. An examination of the data presented should lead to a different conclusion. There certainly exists a difference in quality between different pieces of equipment. This influences the sensitivity and reproducibility of results. An instrument, any instrument is only as good as its calibration or reference. My experience in the lab has shown me that despite the use of expensive equipment, good results are not guaranteed, but are dependent upon good technique. The author of the article provided no indication about agreement between labs on samples not related to this topic. Third party standards are routinely analyzed to ensure agreement. If the labs referenced did not have good quality control, then their numbers on this set of samples could be questioned as well. The general public does not consider the implications of a quality control program when they read an article that is related to their religious beliefs; otherwise stories in the *Bible* such as parting of the Red Sea could not be taken seriously. Statistically the number of samples analyzed should be considered as well. A sample number of 27 is very small. The article provided much detail about the size of the sample area to seemingly give

more credibility to the sample selection. The results ranged from 1060 million years to 2574 million years in a lab which they selected. Note, none of the samples returned results close to a few thousand years. The author completely ignores this degree of difference. By focusing on the error between the sample results, the author bypasses this large discrepancy.

The Georgia science standards are specific concerning the impact of evolution on our Earth. The standards leave little room for the interpretations of Creationists. Georgia GPS Biology Standard SB5 states:

Students will evaluate the role of natural selection in the development of evolution. (a) Trace the history of the theory; (b) Explain the history of life in terms of biodiversity, ancestry, and the rates of evolution; (c) Explain how fossil and biochemical evidence support the theory; (d) Relate natural selection to changes in organisms; (e) Recognize the role of evolution to biological resistance (pesticide and antibiotic resistance).

(<http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/DMGetDocument.aspx/Biology%20revised%2006.doc?p=6CC6799F8C1371F6B23531C1CCB3612606E06DE932C568AFFDE530EC253413DC&Type=D>, June 27, 2008)

With only five content standards, students should be spending about 20% of their time studying evolution. Some teachers choose to teach evolution in a begrudging manner and present it as something they are forced to do. Others admit to students that they believe in evolution but also in the *Bible*.

Armstrong (2000) in the *Battle for God* delineates the competition among the different religions for rights to claim the one true God. She chronicles the debate between

Christianity and Darwinism. Armstrong credits the secularists Huxley, Vogt, Buchner, Moeschott and Haeckel with promoting Darwinism and for beginning the battle with what she terms was a “crusade against religion” (Armstrong, 2000, p. 96) as they spread the word about Darwin’s findings. “The nineteenth century is the last time when it was possible for an educated person to admit to believing in miracles like the virgin birth It embarrasses them because their rational minds know it is absurd” (Dawkins, 2006, p. 157). Here in the South in the twenty first century, dedicated church members still believe and advocate the ‘truth’ of those miracles despite the advances that have been made in science.

My fictional narratives, written from the viewpoint of a science teacher, expose the hegemony and cultural capital of the Christian religion in public schools of the South. The narratives illuminate the influence of the church in maintaining the class stratification in the rural society as well as the traditional gender roles. The church’s role in the perception of education and particularly science education as heretical was evaluated. Does the church sermon allow for more than the “old, old story” (Hankey, 1939, p. 153)?

“The Gate Ajar for Me”

There is a gate that stands ajar,

And through its portals gleaming,

A radiance from the cross afar.

The Savior’s love revealing.

O depth of mercy! Can it be That gate was left ajar for me?

For me, for me, Was left ajar for me? (Baxter, 1939, p. 265)

In the beginning of this doctoral program, I would have assured you that my dissertation would be a quantitative study in science education comparing some kind of test scores. That type of dissertation would be fairly straight forward with a few calculations. My interest in science remains but my perspective has changed. This study examines the dominance of the Christian religion in the society of the rural South which extends into the school and conflicts with the teaching of science in the classroom. The idea for this study came about as I read stories written by the students. As science teachers with limited time because of the threat of standardized testing, we often neglect the writing skills of students. In an effort to encourage students to write across the curriculum about current science events and to tie the standards of science to daily life, I asked students to write responses to various science articles. This project also evolved from the written responses of students to the open ended science questions posed to them on exams and in reference to the news articles. Their answers did not incorporate the scientific ideas I expected. Instead, their responses reflected their religious teachings from home. During class changes, my neighbor and I would engage in “corridor talk” (Rabinow as cited in Yow, 2006, p.55) about student responses to situations. I became aware of the influence of the dominant Christian religion in the hidden and the informal curriculum for the school.

It was the stories written by students that allowed me to see the extent of the conflict between the home religion of the students and the science I was teaching. A fictionalized version of the stories demonstrates the incongruity of science and religion. I hope that my narratives describe the stories of the people in the South in such a manner that “their familiarity fell away from them. They became strange. They became new”

(Setterfield, 2006, p. 27). Will my readers agree with my version of the events? Did I omit some portion that is integral to their side of the story? Can they recognize the existence of a different point of view? Weekly, the local Ledger lists the police activities. I recognized the sir name of one of my students as there are not too many Patels unlike the name Williams whose family farms encircle the county. Mr. Patel was arrested for selling alcohol, a six pack of beer, on Sunday. The Patel family owns and operates a convenience store which has a license to sell alcohol. Does the Patel family not hold Sundays as sacred? Why would they? Why should our society and thus laws expect non-Christians to keep Sundays as holy? The sheriff does not arrest the owners of Dairy Queen, Wendy's and McDonalds for selling hamburgers despite the Patels' aversion to the consumption of beef. Did anyone else reading this article consider this difference in religious beliefs? Like He (1998, 1999, 2003), I will cloak the characters of my story in anonymity. The stories will be inspired by my personal experiences interacting with students. The story lines will demonstrate the paradox between science and religion. "Persecution, then, gives rise to a peculiar technique of writing ...in which the truth about all crucial things is presented exclusively between the lines" (Strauss, 1952, p. 25). The story of the interaction between the teacher Pete and the student Arnold concerning the topic of radioactive decay is much more than a simple conversational exchange. Pete uses Geiger counters discarded by the Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA) due to the antiquity of that particular model to demonstrate radioactivity to students like Arnold. Pete has never seen the inside of nuclear reactor vessel, while Arnold's father, Gene, has moved fuel bundles in and out of the reactor vessel. He has seen the blue glow of the bremsstrahlung radiation emitted by the used fuel bundles

stored in the spent fuel pool. Gene depends upon portable and fixed position, state of the art radiation monitors to perform his job at the nuclear plant. Radiation levels are routinely monitored by remote readouts in the control room where Gene spends most of his time. He passes through personnel contamination monitors as he exits the building each day to ensure that no radioactive contamination is taken home to his family.

Operation of a nuclear power plant requires that all employees have an understanding of fission and fission products. Daily, Gene utilizes equipment and processes based upon physics to keep him safe and to perform his job monitoring auxiliary systems and controlling the flux field within the reactor vessel. He depends upon the predictability of fission and decay, yet in conversation with his son, he downplays the reliability of radioactive decay as a timekeeper to Earth's age. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) maintains an inspector on site and routinely sends inspection teams to ensure the safe operation of all nuclear power plants by qualified personnel. The inspectors have the right to question any individual on plant site. Florida Power and Light Corporation was heavily fined when a lazy, licensed operator requested that a plant equipment operator, who was non licensed, flip a non-vital pump switch on the main control panel that he was standing next to. This innocuous observation by the NRC inspector of an unlicensed individual operating equipment in the main control room of a nuclear plant led to industry wide restrictions of who was allowed to be within arms reach of such equipment controls. Would Gene be able to keep his license if he answered a NRC inspector's question about radioactivity with his biblical viewpoint? Many of the other plant employees are also members of various churches. Would any of them be able to keep their licenses or positions? Would any of these same individuals be willing to stand up in their respective

churches and admit that radioactive decay and thus dating may have some merit? I think that these stories show “the way of life” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 78) of the students and the community in which the teachings inside the classroom clash with the teachings of their home life and the dominant Christian religion. Marshall and Rossman (1999) contend that “people’s realities are constructed through narrating their stories” (p. 122). Reading the students’ stories gave me a different view of their reality of science. I expected that someone who had a parent involved in a science laden job at the nuclear point would be more open to science. I would also expect these individuals to have embraced the management ideals concerning discrimination. It is as if the parents check their training at the personnel contamination monitors as they exit the plant lest progressiveness leach into their daily lives. As suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), field notes were made of my observations at school in the course of my role as a science teacher. My role as a science teacher complemented that of the researcher by providing me with the opportunity to make first hand observations. These observations served as the basis for my fictionalized stories. This is an innovative form of inquiry which He and Phillion (2008) terms as “personal, passionate & participatory” research. Data was collected through observations made of activities that are planned and allowed at school. These observations allowed for the “taken-for-grantedness” (Clandinin & Connelly, p.78) to become visible. In order to provide a less biased picture about the conflict between science and religion, I attended different churches in the area to hear the sermons that are being delivered to the public. These observations were also kept in a journal. I collected the written work presented in Sunday schools, flyers and on websites relating to religion. It was easy to select different churches in my local area to observe

due to the number and close proximity. Having a teen in tow facilitated the acceptance of my visits as he knew someone at each church we visited. As Hurston (1990) said, “I hurried back to Eatonville because I knew that the town was full of material and that I could get it without hurt, harm or danger” (p.2). Much like Hurston, I found that the material was available; however I am not sure that reporting my findings will be free of danger. The data from all of these observations was analyzed for themes and coded as suggested by Glesne (2006) as to relevance to science, gender and class.

My position as a teacher already present in the science classroom provided me with what Van Maanen (1988) describes as a “native point of view” (p. 49) that will facilitate my ability to accurately describe the common occurrences. Students and faculty members openly discussed their positions in my presence. I am not someone who has entered our school and community wearing a visitor’s pass and toting a clip board to conduct a short questionnaire. Neither have I sent mass mailings to unknown individuals for them to complete honestly as a personal favor to me. “Writing for and about the community in which one has grown up and lived, or at least achieved some degree of insider status, should produce engaged writing centering on the ongoing dialectical political-personal relationship between self and other” (Tedlock, 2003, p. 184).

Hurston (1990) commented on the necessity of fitting in to a situation, “I mentally cursed the \$12.74 dress from Macy’s that I had on among the \$1.98 mail-order dresses.... I did look different and resolved to fix all that” (p. 63). It is important that a researcher blend in to the scene in order to be privy to the goings on. My presence as a visitor in the church services did not seem to change the message. All of the churches warmly welcomed me and my family members. As illustrated in my stories, *Casual Greetings*

and *Spreading the Word by Email*, church members actively pursued our continued attendance. I did not have to concern myself that having an observer in the class room would change the dynamics of the classroom as I am already present in the room. It also gave me access to “found” (Glesne, 2006, p. 67) documents like the journals, notes, and drawings of students. A better source may be my ability to hear the student comments that never make it to paper. As the new Hadron particle accelerator came on line, class begins with this statement.

“The world is going to end this week. The apocalypse is coming just like the *Bible* says. A black hole is going to swallow the Earth just like Jonah was swallowed by the whale, but we aren’t going to be alive when it spits us out,” said Tony who is a junior this year.

Student comments on topics that have been taught since elementary school quickly turn to biblical explanations. I ask the class, “What are protons and neutrons made of?” No one replies. I survey individual students and finally supply the answer, “Quarks.”

Mark, “Why are they made of those?”

“Because God made them that way and that’s all you need to know,” Jake interjects.

Homeroom discussions lean more toward social topics. “Did you know that Brittany is pregnant? Her boyfriend wanted her to have an abortion and she wouldn’t.”

A second student replied, “I wouldn’t either. I don’t think it is right to have abortions. What do you think, Mrs. Bell?” “I think that is a very hard personal decision.”

“I don’t think its right for anyone to have an abortion,” reiterated the second student, “if I were going to be a retarded or handicapped person, I would rather be dead and be in heaven with my Father than live that way.”

Is there logic to this argument?

Another responds, “God put you here for a purpose, even people with problems have a purpose.”

“I’m just like Mr. Charles, you know that man who teaches us English, we can’t vote for a man who supports abortion.”

As an insider, I have access to these conversations as well as school functions that occur during the school day such as assemblies and club meetings. One such assembly featured a group called the “Power Team” who presented a message on self esteem. The show focused on how individuals could make good choices like weight training as a stress reliever rather than bad choices like drugs and alcohol. The men in the show bent pipes and ripped phonebooks to reinforce their message. Students were invited to attend a rally being held at the fairgrounds Wednesday through Saturday night. Sunday, in church, one of the members of the “Power Team” spoke to the congregation. He reported that during the four nights over 150 students had accepted Christ. The church took up a love offering for the team. He also left collection envelopes for the church members to use to commit to a monthly donation. The school paid a large sum of money, nearly \$1000, for the assembly at school and provided a captive audience to listen to the Power Team’s advertisement. How many students who attended the rally were influenced to attend the rally based on the school assembly?

My fictional narratives are written as a collection of stories as told by a science teacher who teaches in a small rural school. Some stories highlight student responses to science questions. Others portray the environment of the school and the community through the interactions of Liz with her colleagues and neighbors. Each narrative writer has the task of contextualizing the characters. “People of color, caseworkers, men, women, the neighbor next door - are portrayed in very disparaging ways. Then we wage the battle of representation” (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2003, p. 190). In a church setting, a member would be praised and admired for making church contacts while in an industrial setting the same action would be considered harassment. Witnessing to students at school about Christ would be a positive action for those who endorse that particular religion, but would be a negative action if the witnessing involved another religion other than Christianity.

You lend me, for a time a character, with the aid of your patience and imagination, travels with me to another place, becomes another actor, then returns to become yourself in your own world again. This method mechanism is called identification by means of which the ‘enunciator’ (I) and the ‘enunciatee’(you) both invest in the shifting delegates of ourselves within other composite frames of reference. (Latour, 1999, p. 188)

Each of my stories has a date much as Flagg’s (1987) stories in *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café*. I included a character list and setting description at the beginning of each story to introduce each particular segment as the narratives lack a continuous storyline. Some stories are told based upon the observations of Liz, the teacher. Other stories hinge upon conversations with other teachers. I included scenarios from other

teachers and classrooms to avoid Liz's character becoming an unrealistic super hero. As my writing evolved, I found it necessary to add more details in order that the reader might make better sense of the story. I incorporated snippets of background using Faulkner's (1990) style of writing with a stream-of-consciousness. As illustrated by Faulkner (1990), history is an integral part of the characters in the South. Issues of race, class, and gender continue to surface in the South today. Writing in a strict time line was a procedure that I adopted while working in a nuclear chemistry laboratory. Log books were used to document the happenings of a shift. That colorless, impersonal, story followed a strict chronological order with specific details. .Phone call from extension xxxx taken at what military time, example 0730 or 1930. Message recorded verbatim. Action to be taken. Sharon, an independent lesbian, was disciplined for writing flippant information into the official log book.

One night shift she wrote in the log book as part of her turnover to the next shift, "It was a splendid night, and all the instruments calibrated with great ease even the ion chromatograph. Rad waste has processed most of their water. You should have a quiet day."

Write in a personal journal on your time, if you want to keep your job. She had relayed all of the necessary information to them, only she had used a narrative style which was different from the customary style. Latour (1999) describes the importance of the lab book or '*Bible*' of the lab. "It is this book that will allow us to return to each data point in order to reconstitute its history" (Latour, 1999, p. 46). Whether a log book describes a clump of soil or a bottle of reactor coolant water, a log conveys the condition of the sample and the reactor at a particular moment in time. It is a literal document. The

state of the reaction vessel is conveyed by “a folded array of successive defence [*sic*] lines” (Latour, 1987, p. 48). I began writing my stories in that strict chronological style of lab writing but found it difficult to maintain. Details and nuances were missing. My style slowly morphed into a series of flashbacks as used by Faulkner (1990) as to add pithiness to the tales of the rural South. This non-chronological style of writing is typical of female writers (Krieger as cited in Tedlock, 2003, p. 186). It was the only way that I could convey the hidden significance of what appeared to be very trivial events. The statement, “I sent you an email because I am concerned about you” does not carry the same meaning as “I sent you a threatening email that outlines what may happen to you if you don’t share my faith.” Neither of these statements is as effective as having you read the email for yourself as part of the narrative. It is the:

mundane rituals of daily living ... [that] are typically left out.... They don’t make good reading, and yet they are the stuff of daily life. We recognize how careful we need to be so that we do not construct life narratives spiked only with the hot spots. (Tedlock, 2003, p. 186-187)

The inclusion of the common details makes readers feel a connection to the subject. A visitor to my house came into my sun room where I write.

“Do you know what year it is?” She asked.

“Of course, why do you ask that?” My sanity had already been in question that day by the ladies at the local gift shop who thought that I had lost my mind because it was tacky day at school. I had on a wrinkled shirt and pants of different colors and mismatched shoes.

“It is your calendars, 2005 and 2006 that you have by your lap top. You do know those years are long gone, don’t you?”

“Why yes I do, but I kept having to use dates in my stories and I wanted them to be accurate, so I printed me some calendars.” This is a small detail, but one that is important to me. As I read McCourt’s (2005) story about his first day teaching, I could not help but reminisce about my own. The details that he provided about the thrown sandwiches made me laugh and recall my own. No one threw sandwiches, but wads of paper instead. I remember my knees literally knocking together and my voice quivering as I spoke. Without the details, the story shows no life.

Telling the story from the vantage point of the different science teachers through conversations with Liz will also allow me to describe the setting of the school, community and church. Including Liz’s viewpoint will allow me to share my version of reality as a person who is outside the circle of religion (He & Phillion, 2008). Smith’s (1972) story set in the 1920’s, depicts the power and influence of the church could have been describing South Georgia today. The pressure to join the church and conform to the cultural demands was illustrated by the actions of the character Tracy in *Strange Fruit* (Smith, 1972). Where Haynes (2007) brought into view the societal bonds of subjugation for women in the South, it was Smith’s tale of forsaken love that made me see the ensnarement of men as well. Had I shared Nonnie’s brown skin, my fate of losing my love might have been same. My Tracy was willing to brave the derision of his family probably because religious affiliations can be fostered, whereas Nonnie’s skin color could not be changed. The vomit rose in my throat as I considered her situation, pregnant and abandoned by a long time love. I recalled standing up at the prospective groom’s church

as our engagement announcement was made. Questions about my church affiliation began to surface publicly almost immediately. Later at the family dinner, one catty female, asked the question, “Well, when is the baby due?” What other possible reason could an eligible young man have for choosing a female outside of the church fold? Our first child was not borne until 10 years later. Nonnie did not have that armor of whiteness and empty uterus for protection. Brown (1988) gave examples of the narrator’s perspective being included along with other family members. I have incorporated the viewpoints of other family members in through the characters of Dan, my husband, and Aunt Kitty. This tactic will allow me to document the interactions among these domains. Writing the stories as fiction provided a means to cloak the identities of the individuals who provided the inspiration and allow for compositing of characters and situations as demonstrated by He (1998) and Nafisi (2004). The complexity of interactions and impact of individual vignettes may not be readily apparent when viewed singly, but together be the “reverse of that set of Chinese boxes that you keep opening only to find a smaller one inside” (Lopate, 1995). Saye’s (2002) use of fiction to illustrate impact of teacher complacency in a school system on an individual and thus society emphasizes the absurdity of school as a business that focuses on test scores. In public schools, we all feel the tremendous pressure of testing and making AYP. Teachers are chastised to push for higher test scores, but don’t forget to be understanding. Fiction “wrenches objects from their ordinary mental settings until at last (it hopes) it unhinges the mind itself” (Dillard, 1998, p. 57). I will never lecture or discipline my students without considering the fate of Kelly (Saye, 2002). Could my skater in the last row be another who chooses to end an educational career or God-forbid a life because of my decisions? Early morning dew or

condensation brings spider webs into plain view by highlighting individual strands. Each individual character in my stories will bring a different perspective to the overall picture. Fiction allows the reader to expand their consciousness by giving them a window into another person's viewpoint. Reading Didion's (2006) *The Year of Magical Thinking* compelled me to consider how the surviving spouse and parent feel when tragedy strikes. Didion's husband dies from a heart malfunction and her daughter suffers medical trauma from Coumadin therapy. I had promised myself a graduation present of a new Harley when I first began this program. "Life does change in an instant" (Didion, 2006, p. 1). Reading this book allowed me to accept that my life had changed in the same timeframe as my viewpoint. Will reading my stories change anyone else viewpoint. I cannot know that much as Didion did know that her book would pass through the hands of a friend to mine.

"Thank you for the book, it put in perspective the danger that I face daily because of my designer rat poison," I confessed to my friend. "You know before I left the hospital the nurse counseled me, 'Don't shave with a razor, or use kitchen knives.' I went home and did both, determined that I wouldn't give in, but now I have finally let go of the motorcycle dream. If a bump on the head can so easily lead to a stroke, then riding a motorcycle is out." Why is like that? I was unwilling to accept the counsel of a person standing in front of me, but receptive to the same idea presented through a story. It might be like that. Someone reads this and passes it on to a friend who will unknowingly begin the questioning process.

In one of the scenes in *Cane River*, the characters show how people can have such different perspectives of the same situation (Tademy, 2002). Orelina is pleading with the

freed slave Philomene to stay the year to help them adjust to farming without slave labor. Orelina reminded Philomene that she was never beaten. The slave had been provided with food, shelter, and clothes and had been nursed through sicknesses. Orelina had planned to care for her “forever” (Tademy, p 265). “Six months, then. You owe me that.” [Philomene replied to her] “And what do you owe me for selling my Clement [Philomene’s husband] to Virginia? (Tademy, p. 266)” The contrast between these two perspectives allows a reader to see the validity of both viewpoints. Orelina considered herself to be a good mistress, an evaluation that Philomene agrees with in a later paragraph. This admission however does not mean that Philomene wants to continue in the faux slavery situation. I think there is a parallel to slavery in the membership and participation in the church. Church membership almost certainly guarantees food, clothing, and shelter eternally; if one is willing to accept the role that is outlined for each individual, God’s plan. God will provide all. Church members owe their blessings in the form of tithes and offerings to the church. They are encouraged to recruit others into service. Martel (2001) demonstrates with the character Pi that each story has more than one version even when told by one person. Science tells one of facts while religion tells one of faith. The investigator shared with Pi that he doesn’t believe his story. Pi responds with, “I know what you want. You won’t a story that won’t surprise you....That won’t make you see higher or further or differently. You want a flat story. An immobile story. You want dry, yeastless factuality” (Martel, 2001, p. 302). My goal is for the stories written to “pull together a multitude of evidence from documents, objects, interviews [student conversations], and other resources, weaving them together to create a narrative that makes sense of all of the often conflicting evidence” (Ritchie, 2003, p. 45) that

students are exposed to by the teachings of both the church and science. The stories highlight the constraints that religion places upon their science education. Religious intolerance is portrayed when Pi is told that he “can’t be a Hindu, a Christian and a Muslim” (Martel, p. 69). Where Pi is told that one individual may not embrace different religions, residents in this area seemingly deny the existence of any other religions. This is evidenced locally in the county official organ, the *Ledger*, by a series of letter to the editor from members of the community. A local radio news commentator begins the fray when he expresses support of prayer by student volunteers before football games.

Another person writes “so what if the student chooses to pray to another God, like Atman, Zeus, or Satan? Would that be allowed as well?”

The reply in the following week’s *Ledger*, nay says the question, “Students would not be so shallow as to mock God.” Does that mean that only Christian students can ‘volunteer’ for this assignment? Or are our teens so well trained that they would not stray from the teachings of their Christian upbringing for fear of social retaliation? Has the news commentator never been in any of the convenience stores to witness people of different ethnic heritages? Perhaps his granddaughter does her own nails rather than go to the nail salon that has a small shrine in the room. Maybe she doesn’t know Buddha when she sees him. In Southern cities like Savannah and Charleston, an open gate represents an invitation to enter a walled garden. Would I have been welcomed back into the different congregations if they knew the purpose of my visits? “That gate ajar stands free for all who seek thru it salvation ... Of ev’ry tribe and nation” (Baxter, 1939, p. 315). What of those who chose to keep their own cultural identity? Are our students told that they must

choose between the cultures of science and religion? As a proponent of science, is “that gate ajar for me?” (Baxter, 1939, p. 315)

“When They Ring the Golden Bells”

When they ring the golden bells for you and me

Don't you hear the bells now ringing?

Don't you hear the angels singing?

Tis the glory hallelujah Jubilee

In that far-off sweet forever,

just beyond the shining river. (De Marbelle, 1967, p.40).

Each section of the last chapter begins with a hymn. The hymn chosen to begin each section incorporates an ideal which demonstrates another dimension of conflict between religion and academe. “Music holds in us the nil island of memory around which the rhythm beats and music vibrates disappears in the flesh, without leaving a trace” (Serres, 1991/1997, p. 23). Hymns bubble to my consciousness as I engage in menial activities that require little mental concentration. The lyrics bind me to a perspective that I do not consciously endorse yet my lips speak them as I work. In *Elmer Gantry* (Lewis, 2007), Art Nichols, the traveling musician of an evangelistic group describes the draw of music in winning of souls. “I always do ‘Jerusalem the Golden’ on the coronet, first meeting. Knocks ‘em cold. They say it’s all this gab that gets ‘em going and drags in the sinners, but don’t you believe it – it’s the music” (Lewis, 2007, p. 174). The melody roots itself in the memory of an individual ready for the opportune moment for the chanting to begin. It is the mantra of a Christian upbringing. Each collection of words carries with it a set of standards or rules that must be adhered. Singers are

admonished to remain true to the teachings in order to receive their rewards. Sinners are encouraged to rejoin the flock, providing the rules are accepted.

“Amazing Grace”

’Twas grace that taught my heart to fear

And grace my fears relieved;

How precious did that grace appear

The hour I first believed.

Thru many dangers, toils and snares,

I have already come;

’Twas grace that bro’t me safe thus far

And grace will lead me home. (Newton, 1939, p. 307)

Students often ask me why I quit my well-paying lab job to become a teacher. I usually reply that it was time to come home. I rarely express the reality that as a female nuclear chemistry contractor, I was unofficially prohibited from beginning a family. Men in the same profession, either contract or house, did not operate under those restrictions. They could go into radiation hot spots, climb scaffolding, move gas cylinders and handle chemicals up till the due date. If I had been house, meaning working directly for the utility, then pregnancy would not have been an issue. Equal opportunity and family leave laws and would have required the utility to find me a position that would accommodate my health condition as long as necessary. Technically those same laws applied to the company that I was employed by, but contractors are hired to solve employment problems for utilities not create problems. As a female determined to succeed in a predominantly male profession, I looked past the sexual innuendo and the discriminatory

practices and focused on the tasks at hand. I learned to laugh at jokes that were prefaced by “you might not want to listen to this one”. Laughing with them made me look more like I belonged, but it didn’t make me feel like I did. You could bet that if there was a cleaning job that was not covered by the union janitorial staff that it would be assigned to me. I was a well paid maid who could also fix their atomic absorption spectrophotometer and train their staff how to use it. I watched the politics of the lab. The pecking order went like this: (a) good ole boys that hunt and fish together and belong to the same country club (b) good ole boys that hunt and fish together (c) all other white men (d) men of color (e) women who worked for the utility (f) road whores like me. Part of me welcomed the change in occupation. In the teaching profession, I expected to be afforded a level of respect that was obviously missing from my previous job. My personal vow was to ensure that all students were treated equally and respectfully. Students who worked hard and demonstrated personal responsibility would be rewarded regardless of social standing, race, and especially gender. I had no idea that I was about to become a part of a conglomeration that maintains class stratification in the United States. The indoctrination of educators with the myth of meritocracy is so complete that merely questioning the goals of education brings accusations of heresy. Like most middle-class Americans, I too, had been duped by the myth of meritocracy (Chomsky, 2000; Hinchey, 2004; Kozol, 1975; McLaren, 2005). Now when I address my students, I find it difficult to spout the same rhetoric about the importance of good test scores and ensuring that all students succeed in school. The state department of education is in the process of adopting new performance standards for all subject areas. Standards for a few areas like science are complete. Some school systems have taken it as far as to say that all teachers

must be on the same page at the same time. Standardization on the surface has the appearance of equality for all students, but as Delpit (1995) describes “when one ‘we’ gets to determine standards for all ‘wes’, then some ‘wes’ are in trouble!” (pp. xv) Until educators realize the existence of the myth and their role in the propagation of the myth, the subjugation and stratification of people by class and socioeconomic status in our society will continue.

My determination to succeed carried over to my new profession. At the end of every teaching day I would reflect on my performance. I would make notes in the margin of the teacher edition of my text book of ideas that I might incorporate next time. In spite of my attempts to perfect my classroom delivery on atomic structure and bonding, some of my students continued to fail. These students often did not complete assignments, such as daily homework or class projects. Their attendance would be poor or perhaps they were suspended from school for being tardy or improperly dressed. I resigned myself to the idea, that if students choose to succeed at school, then the opportunities are available regardless of race, gender, and sexual orientation. I briefly pondered why so many of the failures shared common traits like being poor white or non-white. Rarely were the failures from the comfortable middle class of our society. In the same grain as controlling all the variables except one in a science experiment, I reasoned that if all the students were attending the same school and had access to the same education, then their success or failure had to be due to personal choice. I attributed the failures to lack of personal and parental responsibility. Critical theorists do not employ the same type of critical thinking that is used by scientists. Consider, instead of thinking outside of the box, why is there a box? Who benefits from others being placed in the box? Who decides which people are

in the box? Who is kept from the box? This change in my position has been due to an increased awareness that school does not work for all people and the solution requires more than just diligence in completing homework assignments.

Upon beginning the curriculum studies program, I allied myself with Essentialists like Ravitch (2002) who call for standardization in education. I considered her pitch that a child moving from one state to another should not encounter academic difficulty to have merit (Ravitch). Coming from an industrial science background, this standardization seemed logical. In moving from one lab to another, equipment and processes were similar, as all the corporations operated under similar regulations imposed by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Much as every lab had lists of equipment and tasks, it was acceptable that schools should have lists of information and skills for students. As part of the design template used to unpack the new performance standards we also made a list of things that students should know and be able to do. The End-of-Course Tests (EOCT) for specified classes and the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT) scores would document the educational gains. The standardization of tests did not concern me as long as I was informed concerning the content upon which the test was based. Operating a piece of equipment according to a published procedure is not the equivalent as teaching a child. The use of this type of education which is similar to what Cochran-Smith (2004) terms “outcomes” (p. 103) education which she maintains should imply the questions; “What political and professional agendas lie behind the question and the question-asker? And, What larger purposes of schooling are assumed?” (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 104). Children come to school with personalities and societal baggage. I had considered myself to be a fair disciplinarian. All students were treated equally regardless of social

background. In my zeal to be indisputably fair to all students, I did not consider the inequality of opportunities that are afforded to different classes of students. Not until I read Freire (2004) and Wink (2005) did I begin to question my role in the school and thus my oppression of students. If I were asked to name my occupation, I would have replied with the word teacher, but Freire would have described me as a member of the “banking” (p. 72) profession. I was not a teacher who wasted class time on frivolous games and activities. During my class, students were expected to be on-task and focused on the information that I was presenting. Respect was listed as a key word on my syllabus, but in reality, the courtesy was not reciprocated to the students. My classroom epitomized the acts that Freire listed as oppressing students. I was a ‘good’ teacher who had never received a bad mark on my evaluation, yet if I were evaluated by Freire, I would have received an “NI” (needs improvement). Acts such as following the rules in the school handbook, which I had also previously considered to be the mark of a ‘good’ teacher, were examined in a new light. The rules of our school handbook seem innocuous on the surface, yet hide discriminatory practices. Rules on make-up work from absences specify that it must be completed after school which makes it difficult for those students who must utilize the school transportation system. In our rural area there are no alternate public transportation systems. Students whose parents drive them to school are more able to rearrange pick up times that accommodate after school work. This type situation also favors students who request after school tutoring by teachers, which is not available during the school day, again excluding those who are dependent upon school transportation. In retrospect, these and other rules ensure the dominance of the mainly white, upper-class student with the stay-at-home mom.

In a democratic society that provided equal education, funding for students living in the same region would be expected to be similar. Kozol (1991, 2005) exposed the discrepancies in funding that occurs in urban areas with multiple schools serving an area. This practice continues and is legitimized by the tax codes that by design limit the funding available to schools that happen to be located in industrial and low socioeconomic areas. School districts are outlined so that socioeconomic groups are assigned to particular school facilities. In rural areas such as this which have only one school, the discrepancies in educational opportunities are not so obvious. The differences in educational opportunities may show up through tracking. Tracking is openly practiced through the selection of a course of study. Even though all the high school students enter through the same halls, classes are functionally segregated by class. Honors and college preparatory classes will have a few middle-class black students and poor whites with the majority of students coming from the middle and upper class. Technology preparatory classes can be readily identified by the majority black, Hispanic and low socioeconomic students. Students in the honors / college preparatory class are given assignments that require them to demonstrate responsibility. In the tech prep classes, teachers are often required by student support team (SST) modifications to take up students' work at the end of the day because of the students lack responsibility. As Wink (2005) described, we are "grooming" (p.53) one set of students to be leaders, while the other group is being trained to take subservient roles. Similar sentiments of the roles of schools were expressed by McCarthy (1998) in that "... schools were used to fit white workers and later disenfranchised minorities into economic and social roles defined by the dominant capitalist class" (p. 40). High school counselors sort the incoming freshmen according to

the team assignment of eighth grade. This grouping of students is established as early as the second grade. Middle class parents, who understand the rules of cultural capital and possess the clout, vie for spots for their children in coveted teachers' classrooms – a policy that is common knowledge among this group. Oakes (as cited in Giroux & McLaren, 1988) proposed that school policies be revised to eliminate homogeneous grouping in order to provide democratic education. Some academic classes like biology and physical science have now been divided into two tracks rather than three. Honors classes serve the gifted and selected students while all other students are grouped heterogeneously. The students in these classes run the gamut from low functioning to gifted students who choose not to do the extra work of honors. Oakes suggestion to change educational policies to eliminate tracking was criticized by Giroux and McLaren (1988) as lacking the total perspective of the issue of institutional power. An example of institutional power can be seen in the allocation of funds for the new school facility. More money was earmarked for equipment in the vocational areas than in the academic areas. The canning plant was the first part of the new facility to be completed and released for use by the contractor. A 1918 quote from Dubois (as cited in Watkins, 2001) states, “this board is spending more money today in helping Negroes learn how to can vegetables than in helping them to go through college” (p. 115) fits seamlessly into today's conversation. Watkins attributes “Jones's colonial, socioeducational, and curricular views” (p. 117) as having a profound impact upon Black education and of contributing to the current problems. Thomas Jesse Jones's view of acceptable education differed greatly from that of W.E.B. Dubois's view as interpreted by Watkins. “Jones ...draws from his Hampton experience, whereby he came to believe that education

properly aimed at shaping people for obedience to the social order defines citizenship” (Watkins, p. 112). A casual observation of this scenario would lead to the conclusion that lower socioeconomic students were being favored by this extra funding. A deeper examination reveals this as a way to tie that sector to a life of menial labor by glorifying the options of vocational education. Education has traditionally interacted with religion to maintain class stratification as evidenced by “our work ...is not for Hampton; it is not for white; or negro; it is not for America. Our work is for the Kingdom of God, here and here-after” (Jones as cited in Watkins, p. 114). The deferment of reward to the afterlife continues to be a strong theme in our society.

Critical theory has fostered in me a more critical eye. I think that I finally “saw the light” (Williams, 2005, disk 3, track 1), but it is not that spoken of in the hymn. I have learned to examine the claims of equality that are so often the mantra of each new wave of educational reform and to seek who stands to benefit the most from such an arrangement.. Like the turtle, my offspring and the offspring of others are vulnerable on the beachfront. After the turtle’s eggs are deposited in a carefully constructed nest, instinct compels the turtle to return to the sea. The success of her offspring is out of her realm of control. Predators count on the nest to be left abandoned and eagerly reap benefits from the natural resources. As educators many of us have made the deposit of information with our students, but we have not been aware of the scavengers who wait to pray upon them. With a lens of critical theory and a field guide written by critical theorists, those who would profit from the exploitation of the natural resources of others can be identified and named.

“If the Light Has Gone Out”

When the sun of your life has gone down

And the clouds in the west turn to gold

Endless night then to you will have come,

If the light has gone out in your soul.

O Just think how in death you will feel

With the light growing dim in your soul;

O how lonely twill be! O how still

When the light has gone out of your soul. (Williams, 1917, p. 66)

“O how lonely twill be!” (Williams, 1917, p. 66) I hope this is not an omen of my future life. I am optimistic that those who read this study will have an open mind. Like He (2003) in *A River Forever Flowing*, I fear retaliation in both my personal and professional life for my lack of Christian affiliation. In addition, I worry that the public rejection of the dogma of the Christian religion will alienate me from my family whose beliefs are so strong. Any of these people could be the ‘poster child’ of the Christian religion as they are the perfect role models and embody the ideals of love, compassion and humility. While I have tried to assimilate into their culture, my scientific views and feminist liberation ideas prohibit me from authentic participation. “What became clear was that behind the so-called passive behavior of depressed women was the tremendous cognitive activity required to inhibit both outer actions and inner feelings in order to live up to the ideal of the ‘good’ woman, in particularly the good wife” (Anderson and Jack, 1991, p. 19) Anderson and Jacks statement was made in reference to depressed women, but I think that it applies as aptly to women who stand outside the church. The societal

expectations of what is deemed appropriate behavior as a female exceeds that of what is expected of a male. Couple being female and teacher and the expectations for moral, meaning church involvement, increase again. These societal expectations are reinforced in as banal locations as billboards and church marquees which scream the expectations of the gender roles of the Christian society. The billboard closest to my house reads, "If a father attends a church, then so will his family." It is not father's day, but the local church marquee reads, "Look to your father for guidance, the one in heaven and the one in your house." To be without a church home in this community is to truly be homeless. Most all of the churches have offered me a 'home' as I visited. Walking down a city street, it is easy to spot the people who are homeless. They travel with more of their worldly possessions than someone who has a home. Their personal appearance tends to be more unkempt. What is about my appearance that immediately allows me to be identified as 'unclean'? I laughed as I read of Hazel Motes "Church without Christ" (O'Connor, 1988, p. 69). It reminded me of a blasphemous response that I gave to my husband one Sunday morning when he inquired about my morning plans. "I plan to attend the Church of the Soothing Waters" meaning that I intended to be poolside that morning rather than attend church services with him. Like Motes, I fight against the influence of Christianity but at the same time, find myself drawn to the sanctuary of belief. I don't think that I will be putting glass and stones in my shoes or blinding myself on purpose (O'Connor, 1988). "It is when the individual's faith is weak, not when it is strong, that he will be afraid of an honest fictional representation of life, and when there is a tendency to compartmentalize the spiritual and make it resident in a certain type of life only, the sense of the supernatural is apt gradually to be lost" (O'Connor, 1969, p. 812).

I do not expect that because of this small paper that the dominant population of the Christian religion in the society of the rural South will suddenly have a new revelation. Modes of thinking about science are not ingrained into society as are those of religion. The training for submission begins early and continues throughout all of all life. The cycle of religious indoctrination saturates the sanctity of death itself. Those who survive are chastised to evaluate their personal beliefs and conform to what is considered the norm. Science education in Georgia currently follows the guidelines established by American Association for the Advancement of Science, *Benchmarks for Science Literacy: Project 2061(BSL)*, which includes “thinking skills associated with science, mathematics, and technology that relate directly to a person’s outlook on knowledge and learning and ways of thinking and acting” (American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1993, p.281) As part of the relatively new Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) for science, classroom teachers are expected to incorporate these into classroom lessons beginning in kindergarten. “Few leaders in educational reform efforts represented by *Benchmarks and Standards* want to acknowledge the potentially negative impact of early religious training on later levels of science literacy” (Good, 2005, p. 40). I hope that perhaps this study will stir in some the idea that the teachings of the church should be evaluated for content much as any concerned parent would before renting a movie or video game for their child’s entertainment. It is my goal that people consider what they are teaching their children in being ready for school: colors, ABC’s, counting, nursery rhymes and myths / tenets of faith.

EPILOGUE

The only way in which a human being can make some approach to knowing the whole of a subject is by hearing what can be said about it by persons of every variety of opinion and studying all modes in which it can be looked at by every character of mind. No wise man ever acquired his wisdom in any mode but this. (Mill, 1955, p. 29)

As practitioners in the classroom, educators should consider what kind of educational experience they want to provide for their students. This involves more than the selection of textbooks and the making of seating charts. We should consider the purpose of the education that we provide to our students. Is it all about test scores or do we strive to ready our students for the challenges that they will face as an adult citizen. I do not mean to imply that education should only ready one for a job, a vocation, an hourly wage. Do we want our students to methodically follow in an established pattern based upon the dominant lifestyle of a particular community? We need to prepare our "students [to] grapple with the question 'Where is my place in the world?'" (Ayers, 2004, p. 84)

Science and religion have both been responsible for oppression and uplift in separate realms. Science has masqueraded around educational classrooms and laboratories as value-free relieving scientists of their moral responsibility. Each discovery and subsequent technological development is lauded as the proper application of the new knowledge. The benefits of some are readily apparent. The discovery of radioactivity led to medical processes that saved my life and the nuclear power industry that I use to power this lap top. The cost of that same discovery belies the simplicity of the science behind it,

as that same discovery produced nuclear bombs, the threat of which continues to drive political decisions in our country. “The content of an idea matters a little less than the way it is put into practice, the value of science is esteemed for its performances as its truth – one judgment should temper another” (Serres, 1997 / 1991, p. 122). Religious involvement provides a positive focus in the community encouraging care and concern for the welfare of others. Churches through the benevolence of their members support families with food and sympathy in times of illness and loss. Prayer lists for the church and school keep the individuals and groups in mind that may be experiencing a trying time in their lives. When I came home following my heart surgery, I was amazed and touched by concern shown to me by the churches in the area. My first few trips back into the public sphere were filled with wonder at the outpouring of love and prayers that I received. The moral support of the church is not only relegated to illness and death. Members support each others during joyous times such as births and weddings. A group of individuals comes together usually under the guidance of a pastor who helps them develop a sense of belonging and a moral standard based upon the teachings of the Bible. This development of a collective moral standard leads to the exclusion of others who do not share that same philosophy. Non – Christians are viewed as someone to be converted, someone to be saved. Missionary trips which on the surface appear to be philanthropic are a means to sway cultures to abandon their endemic beliefs in favor of those of Christianity. Women are subjugated to submissive roles in the home based upon the interpretation of biblical scriptures. The nuptial vows at most weddings include a reference to obey. The *Bible* has few direct references to science, but modern believers seem to choose what parts of science and technology that they would like to subscribe to.

Transportation and communication do not cause the problems today that people experienced in biblical times. A trip around the world can be made in two days even accounting for layovers. Computers and the internet provide almost instant access to information. I remember as a child the first time I saw a home video of a tsunami. The water receded from the shore and shortly thereafter it swiftly came back into the bay crushing all the people who had walked out onto the dry land to view the phenomena. It immediately came to my mind that was how Moses led his people to safety.

The two factions, science and religion, rarely meet in productive dialogue. Science claims to be outside the realm of religion much as it has claimed to be value-free, so it does not engage in the whys of religion. Religion ignores the science that disputes the literal interpretation of the *Bible* whilst embracing its technological developments on a personal level. Religious believers utilize medical technology to extend their lives and the quality of their life until God calls them home.

The pursuit of full humanity, however cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism... ; therefore it cannot unfold in the antagonistic relations between oppressors and oppressed. No one can be authentically human while he prevents others from being so. (Freire, 2004, p. 85)

Is there an arena in which these two factions can meet in dialogue? Each side would have to agree to be open to the offerings of the other. There is no room for intolerance. “How can I dialogue if I am closed to- and even offended by – the contribution of others?” (Freire, p. 2004, p. 90) Should school be the place where this conversation can occur? Is there a space in between the two where believers can accept their chosen ideology and become tolerant of the beliefs of others without jeopardizing

their own faith? Can we live between the mores of social justice and Christian moral consciousness without condemning others or imposing our will upon them?

In my classroom and with my family, I encourage tolerance of the lifestyle choices of other individuals by engaging them in conversations about the people foremost as individuals. “Charney is a Sikh. You sit next to him in class and you are lab partners. Should he be damned to hell for his different religion. What about the preacher who commits murder. Does he go to hell as well if he asks for forgiveness? Is the preacher a better person than Charney just because he is a Christian?” It is hard to break those mental bonds of right and wrong that have been taught so diligently to most individuals in the South who see the *Bible* and the church as always right. Is this phenomenon only found within the South or does it occur across the nation in any area that has a homogeneous population of Christian believers? When Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his *I Have a Dream* speech in front of the Lincoln memorial, one of the last lines included “when all God’s children – black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Catholics and Protestants will join hands and sing ... free at last; thank God Almighty, we are free at last” (King, 1992, p. 105-196). My dream would include people of different religions and no religion meeting in dialogue and discussing the latest scientific discoveries without framing it as verification or blasphemy of the *Bible*.

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