July, 2001

Dear Colleagues and Friends:

We have come through a remarkable time for the CLTL program, refreshed and rejuvenated, growing and ready now for the upcoming year, our tenth. The CLTL future looks bright, and I anticipate a wonderful celebration when we all get together at Henderson House on October 26th. Please mark this date on your calendar.

In addition, I hope that we will use this tenth year as a time to expand the conversation about literature and justice, making our CLTL program a significant presence throughout the country. Here in Massachusetts we added four new programs this spring and had 50% more graduates than last fall. Nationwide, over 2000 men and women have now been through a CLTL class.

We clearly have the momentum now and should be able to draw on this energy as we move into a new budget cycle. Several new programs are slated to begin this fall and many other courts have expressed interest in joining us.

Our coordinator, Susan Jennings, has put together another noteworthy newsletter here. Throughout the year, she has been working diligently to strengthen our ability to communicate with each other and we are fortunate to have her with us. During the summer, Susan will help prepare for the October 26th event and continue to develop and update our CLTL website. Please let her know your ideas on these matters.

Thanks also to the hard-working probation officers who were willing to fill out the forms necessary to keep us moving forward. We all appreciate the effort.

Keep thinking and reading over the summer—and keep the vision alive.

We can make a difference,

Bob

Bob Waxler
Spring Programs

Professor Sheryll Hirschberger of Cape Cod Community College facilitated the first Barnstable Women’s Group with help from P.O. Jennifer Delinks. Judge Joseph Reardon also contributed regularly.

Hirschberger says that many of the stories the women read talked about “the female version of the hero’s journey”—that women often have to leave where they are in order to have their own journey.

At the beginning of the session, the women struggled with the reading, but by the end, they were plowing through it, often taking notes.

Midway through the course Hirschberger discovered that most of the students had been trying to read in bed or in the midst of activity.

She talked to them about finding a quiet place for themselves so that they could focus: “They didn’t seem to be receptive to the suggestion, but the next week, they said they had changed how they read, and that it made a difference.”

Burke said: “This is the most enjoyable part of my job. I get a chance to see the probationers grow and to learn myself.”

Last semester’s men’s syllabus included several short stories and two novels. Albert hopes to facilitate four cycles next year.

Reardon said that, in reading, we “can journey with authors to places we may never get a chance to experience ourselves.” He noted the power and success of Changing Lives, and said it proved that “We human beings have an infinite capacity to better ourselves.”

We had walked a mile and a half to catch the Greyhound bus. I was tired, and the sun was very hot. When the bus finally came, I was glad to get on and sat in the first empty seat I came to. My mother snatched me by the collar and dragged me to the back. Of course, I didn’t know why. Later I learned we weren’t allowed to sit up front. The back of the bus was full, and black folks were standing up, even with empty seats up front.

A white man from up North offered me the seat next to him, and I took it—only to give it up to the next white woman to get on. But I always remember that white man who gave me the seat.

Dorchester Men’s Participant

The Concord men’s group graduated 12 probationers this spring. PO. Ed Gaffey reports that, by the last class, the men were ‘a cohesive group.’

Professors Ray and Sandra Albertson-Shea facilitate the class. Probation Officers Gaffey, John Rourke and Randy Ryan and Judge Janet Sanders contribute regularly.

All the participants do the assignments as well as in-class writing, including this term, letters to their fathers.

Ryan says CLTL is her “favorite thing about this job. I believe in it so much.”

Professor Gail Mooney of Middlesex Community College facilitated the new Concord/Woburn women’s program. A graduate of the Iowa Writer’s Workshop, Mooney was aided by Probation Officers Randy Ryan and Sandra Ruiz. Judge Janet Sanders also shared in the class.

The eleven probationers read a variety of fiction, from Tolstoy’s “The Death of Ivan Ilyich” to recent stories from the New Yorker, including Louise Erdrich’s “The Shawl.” They also wrote for a portion of each class.

“All the women were there because of substance abuse issues,” said Mooney. “It was truly a situation where they could be the teacher and I could be them.”

One of the students has signed up to attend Middlesex in the fall. Another, who dropped out of college after three years, hopes to return to her old school as a literature student.

Professor Taylor Stoehr, the veteran facilitator of the Dorchester men’s class, says that it’s necessary for teachers to “always be ready to make another choice—you have to be ready to be wrong.”

Stoehr’s syllabus this term included writers Chekov and Gorky, in addition to his usual African American authors. “The Russian material worked pretty well,” says Stoehr. “I felt good about having hard stuff to read.”

Stoehr was joined by PO’s Bobby Spencer, John Christopher, and John Holloran. Bert Stern, a retired English teacher, also came to nearly every class. He’ll be taking over for Stoehr in the fall; the two men hope to alternate semesters.
Professor Edith Shillue was delighted with her first term as facilitator of the Dorchester Women’s program. “The skills of the women were much higher than I assumed, which was a wonderful experience and which also shows how much stereotyping goes on.”

Those skills also improved over the course of the semester. The first night of class Shillue, a ‘writing-intensive’ teacher, asked the students to respond to a question: “They couldn’t write for more than three minutes.” But during a recent exercise “they wrote and wrote. Once they realized I was going to reply and respond to the writing, to listen to them on the page, and not correct or discipline them, they took the writing seriously.”

PO’s Rene Nixon, Angie Lucas, and Yvonne Nelson contributed to the class.

Robert Waxler. The men reflected on the changes they had been through over the course of the session. Judge Kane remarked that their voices had become “very fluent vessels for talking.”

The group was the twenty-second to graduate from the UMass program. Probations Officers Mike Leahy and Wayne St. Pierre, who have aided in most of those 22 sessions, were regular participants.

I thought I was invincible until the day I died a year and a half ago. We drank and drove, did all kinds of drugs and drove and I looked at it as no big deal and no-one would ever get hurt (pulled over, maybe) but never hurt, let alone die! I felt this way because I was very young and naive and pretty much always on some kind of drug. Then the worst happened and the irony is that we weren’t even close to being as messed up as we usually were.

Concord Women’s Participant

Probation Officer Michele Carter says that Changing Lives is a long process for the women who complete it. “It’s something that they have to involve in their lives. They’re still working on staying drug free, alcohol free. They’re going to counseling, maintaining jobs. It can be a real struggle.”

This term for the Lynn/Lowell class was especially a struggle. Carter says that the graduates were true success stories: “It took a lot for them to keep going, we had to keep encouraging them to keep on doing what they needed to be doing.”

The class, facilitated by Professor Jean Trounstine, was joined by PO Bobby Hassett and Judge Joseph Dever. Newscaster Liz Walker also attended many of the classes.

The Roxbury Court men’s group, facilitated by Probation Officers Rochelle Burgos and Pedro Tavares, focused on African-American writers this term. Their twelve sessions included work by Tobias Wolff, John Edgar Wideman, and Martin Luther King.

The group attended James Baldwin’s “the Amen Corner” at the Huntington Theatre in Boston. The trip was a terrific success. Burgos says she recently got a postcard from the theatre thanking her for bringing the men. They also offered the group opening night tickets to any show they produced for less than half price.

Several other probation officers join the class often.

The final story read by the UMass Dartmouth class was “Sonny’s Blue’s,” a “story of hope” according to Dr. the Woburn Court’s inaugural session “the best kind of class.” She was impressed by the students’ insights, participation, and willingness to read and write. The eleven probationers did “as much reading as you do for many 3-credit courses at the college”: five novels and three short stories.

Judge Marie Jackson-Thompson and probation officers Charlie Winchester, Mary Ellen Wisman, and Dan Harrington joined the class often.

Greene says the “runaway favorite novel was The Old Man and the Sea. It’s the most perfect endorsement that literature resonates even when it has no immediate relation to our lives.”

The probationers also read Tobias Wolff’s The Barrack’s Thief and Montana, 1948 by Larry Watson.

Professors William Hosmer and Francis “Tuck” Amory of Worcester State College facilitated the first Worcester class, held in the County Courthouse.

Judge Eliot Zide and four probation officers, Heather Rocheford, Matthew Deveau, Heidi Marshall, and CPO William Mattei, participated regularly.

The men read “The Man Who Killed His Shadow” for the first class. Mattei says “they grasped it well. We had a lot of discussion around the realities of life—trying to be a black man in a white society—and the fears that Saul had.”

The Worcester Sunday Telegram published a lengthy article about the class in June.
As a lover of literature, Changing Lives has been “very exciting for me personally,” says Professor George Albert of Cape Cod Community College. “You read the same piece of literature time and time again, and allow people’s minds to work on it. You get new takes, new perceptions, your understanding of it just keeps deepening.”

Albert’s understanding has been deepening for a long time. A teacher for 35 years, Albert has facilitated 19 sessions of Barnstable’s Changing Lives men’s program. He’s also represented the program at several conferences.

Though Albert reuses standards like To Kill a Mockingbird, his syllabus changes for each session. During his most recent class, students read selections from The Best American Short Stories of the Century including “The Farmer’s Children,” by Elizabeth Bishop.

“One of the most important parts of the program is simply the probationer’s choice to enter the program,” says Albert. “They’re saying they’re ready for something different. In that sense they’re guaranteed to succeed.”

Albert believes his role as facilitator is to fashion “the opportunity for dialogue to take place. My goal is to say as little as possible so that the ideas come from the student. The less I say, the better.”

Albert has dealt with marginalized populations as a Jesuit, with the AIDS Action Committee in Boston, at CCC, and with Changing Lives. “It’s important work,” says Albert, “Extraordinarily valuable.”

“The key of the program is the free flow of ideas. The opening up of individual’s minds and hearts for the first time. For many, it’s the first time that people value and recognize that what they say is significant.”

Those who work with Albert credit his humanity and his empathy for the students. Probation Officer Hank Burke says “he’s worked with street people. He’s worked in soup kitchens. He gets involved. It’s not just talk and he earns respect because of it.”

At the recent Barnstable graduation, Judge Joseph Reardon called Albert “one of my heroes.”

Presiding Lynn Justice Joseph Dever says he will be “ever grateful to Judge Kane” for introducing him to Changing Lives. “It’s the joy of my judging.”

“One of the most fortuitous days in my professional life was attending a seminar on “Law and Literature” at Brandeis in the early 90’s. Bob Kane chatted about Changing Lives and mentioned how interested he was in a women’s group. I thought Lynn would be the perfect place.”

Together with Middlesex Professor Jean Trounstine, Dever began the first women’s group in 1992. Over a hundred probationers from Lynn and Lowell have graduated from the group.

“One of the things that makes Judge Dever unique,” says Trounstine, “is that he is very forceful in his opinions but never imposes them, which makes him a perfect role model for the women. “He’s a realist, but he’s also a romantic.”

A former public defender, Dever finds a common personality trait in the people that appear before him:

“They’re completely absorbed in themselves without an ounce of self worth. Changing Lives frontally attacks that problem. The women begin to look at life objectively for the first time through the characters in the books.”

Dever says that judicial involvement in the program is important: “It does so much for these ladies’ images of themselves that they can have a conversation with a judge. They can agree or disagree and their opinion is just as valuable as mine.” Probation Officers Bobby Hassett and Michele Carter agree that Dever’s participation is crucial to the women’s success. Says Hassett: “I don’t know how many other judges would take a van from Lynn to Lowell every other Tuesday night with a group of probationers.”

Dr. Robert Waxler says “Ever since the first time I met Judge Dever I have been impressed by his love of literature and his sensitive grasp of great stories. He has made an important contribution to the CLTL effort.”
ACPO Rochelle Burgos rejuvenated the dormant Roxbury program in the fall of 2000. A graduate of Suffolk Law School and a lover of reading, Burgos considers *Changing Lives* the best part of her job. “I love coming to work because I know that Wednesday’s class is just around the corner. The idea of affecting someone’s life in such a positive way makes it very gratifying.”

Along with PO Pedro Tavares, Burgos has put together syllabi that include classic writers such as James Baldwin and Richard Wright, as well as African-American leaders such as Martin Luther King. Their 12-session class, which meets in the courthouse, also includes videos of King’s speeches, “The Lottery,” and “1984.”

Burgos spends a lot of her free time looking for new material and thinking about the kinds of questions that will provoke discussion.

Coming from a family of teachers, Burgos often heard how much you learn from students. “So far this last class is the best that we’ve had because of the way the students have read. They’ve been more insightful with some of the stories than I have. We had some probationers that came from the south and they filled in a lot of blanks for me this time.”

The class recently attended James Baldwin’s “The Amen Corner” at Huntington Street Theatre. While the men were absorbed in the play, Burgos and Tavares were absorbed in the men: “They were moving forward through the whole play, not sitting back. Some of them were crying because the father dies in the end.”

All the men wanted to go back. One said: “I’ve lived here all my life and I never even knew there was a theatre here.”

Though Burgos passed the bar two years ago, *Changing Lives* keeps her in Roxbury. “It’s something that I don’t think I’ll ever get if I practice law. At the end of the day, no matter what happens to these students, they’re going to have this experience that they’re never going to forget.”

Profile

**ANDRE HODGE**

For Andre Hodge, reading Michael Thompson’s “The Last Time I Seen my Father” in Roxbury’s *Changing Lives* Program, brought up painful memories.

Hodge’s parents were both alcoholic, both drunk every day. He recalls getting in trouble at school and his parents deciding to make an example of him. His father stripped him, tied a rope around his ankles, and hung him upside down from a doorway. He gathered Hodge’s six brothers and sisters to watch and started to beat him. The rope broke once and Hodge fell on his head, but his father lifted him back up and started in on him again.

Hodge has struggled with violence and abuse for almost his whole life. He credits his daughter, now 15, for helping him to win that struggle. “My daughter is responsible for me. If I had to stand alone and learn about myself, it might not happen.”

A transfer from Rhode Island, Hodge’s participation in *Changing Lives* comes toward the end of a lengthy probation. P.O. Rochelle Burgos says that Hodge’s compassion and commitment have made him a favorite student.

Hodge has a security position at Walgreen’s in Roxbury. It’s a job he appreciates because of the connections he’s been able to make with the children of the neighborhood. “I’m known in the street. I want the kids to see that it’s ok to have a job a Walgreen’s. They see guys outside the liquor store begging for money, they see them day in and day out going to school. They’re wondering, ‘is this my fate?’ To be a kid in Roxbury nowadays you have to be strong, you have to have a lot of support from someone.”

Hodge says that living in Roxbury is hard for people who are trying to change “People out there are still picking at you. Like coming up in the ghetto, if a person is getting up, it’s like being in a barrel of rats, they’ll pull you back down.” You have to be very strong or very tired of what you’ve been doing.

Hodge hopes to continue his education in some way. A ninth-grade drop out, he’s passed all but the math portion of his GED. “I really feel this need and I have this hunger to learn more so I can give more, so I can give back more, so I can be more of that good person. I’m on this earth for a purpose. I’m reaching to see where I fit in, and where I fit in the most and the best.”
P.O. Kristen Lewis of the Superior Court of Arizona recently attended a Changing Lives class at Phoenix Community College. Facilitated by Professor Dorie Goldman-Rivera, the coed class was also attended by Judge Colleen McNally.

ARIZONA
After reading Morrison’s Song of Solomon, the judge related how she had always interpreted literature through a white middle-class perspective and that listening to other perspectives had broadened her understanding of the piece.
Lewis carpool with three of the students and relates that their fears about attending college evaporated over the course of the class.
“My opinion is that it’s harder to do something you’ve never done,” says Lewis. “Once you know it’s not that hard, you can keep on going.”

KANSAS
From Kansas City, Kansas, Probation Officer Randall Nester reports that the ninth class of male probationers is considering attending a play that resonates with their current reading material: This Boy’s Life by Tobias Wolff. The second female group graduated this spring; a juvenile class is also ongoing.

MAINE
The Maine Corrections Department funded four CLTL classes this winter in Auburn, Biddeford, Bangor, and Hallowell.
Organized by the Maine Humanities Council, the classes met five times each. The Lewiston Sun Journal published a lengthy article about the program in April. It can be read online at:

An Excerpt: Emery was concerned about the snowstorm weeks before. They’d had to cancel one of the short story classes. He mentioned it to the professor because he wanted to be sure there would be two more of these meetings, just as the original plan had called for.

NEW YORK
Thirty attendees read and talked about “The Man Who Killed his Shadow.” Jacino says that the handouts she prepared for the session, which included commonly-used CLTL material as well as helpful literary web sites, were in demand by even those PO’s who did not attend the session.
“I hoped to give them tools that they could use when they got back to their jobs. The hand-outs will ensure that the conference stays with them.”

RHODE ISLAND
Dr. Robert Waxler traveled to Rhode Island several times this spring to meet with URI officials and John Reis of the Rhode Island Attorney General’s Office.

TEXAS
The Texas programs have jointly graduated over five hundred probationers since their ‘revolution in criminal justice’ started.
Jablecki, Judge Randall Hufsteler of Texas, Mark Stodola of Phoenix, Arizona, and Jean Trounstine will all be appearing at the APPA convention in St. Paul in August.

The English Department of the University of Rhode Island recently passed a resolution supporting their involvement in

the incipient Changing Lives program in that state.

The discussion was fantastic,” says Jablecki. They asked good questions about drug laws, the authority of the
Judge Sydney Hanlon recognized the many contributions of Probation Officers John and Theresa Owens at the recent Dorchester graduation. The Owens were instrumental in initiating Changing Lives programs for men and women in Dorchester.

In addition to supervising over a hundred probationers through the program, the Owens were regular participants for several years before taking positions in Stoughton and Taunton.

Professor Taylor Stoehr says: “The program wouldn’t exist without them. They made a marvellous contribution and we are all really grateful to them.”

The Owens hope to start Changing Lives programs in their new districts.

THANKS TO...

...The Probation officers who took the time to fill out reports on probationers who attended our last two sessions. The work that you did enabled us to fulfill our reporting requirements to The Trial Court and also gave us a head start on a long-term study of the program that we hope to conduct next year.

...Facilitators, new and old, whose willingness to experiment and challenge themselves has made this a growing year for all of us.

...All those who have sent in their syllabi, class writings, and other material. Excerpts from these enliven our newsletters and website and help them to truly reflect the reality of the fine work that you do.

...Judges and Probation Officers who have spread the word about Changing Lives to probationers and to other courts.

...President Cheryl Hurley of The Library of America for their donation of over one hundred books to graduates of Massachusetts’ programs this spring. The Library contacted Dr. Waxler after a Christian Science article appeared about the program. Hurley “felt that what we were doing was in the spirit of what they were doing—to foster literacy and an appreciation of the classics,” says Waxler.

The non-profit publisher was founded in 1979 “to help preserve the nation’s cultural heritage by publishing America’s best and most significant writing in durable and authoritative editions.”

Professor Taylor Stoehr reports that the Slave Narratives he ordered for the Dorchester group were ‘perfect’ and arrived at just the right moment. We look forward to continued support from The Library.

CHANGING LIVES THROUGH LITERATURE

PHONE/FAX: (508) 990-2282
Email: umassdcltl@umassd.edu
Visit us on the web at:

https://www.umassd.edu/specialprograms/changing/home.htm
Join Us For Our

10th Year Anniversary Celebration
1991-2001

Friday, October 26th
8:30 am – 4:30 pm

Henderson House
Weston, MA

For more information, call (508) 990-2282

Department of English
University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth
285 Old Westport Road
Dartmouth, MA 02747