



Teaching, Inspiration, and Spring

Every time I read the opening stanzas of *Canterbury Tales*, I imagine Chaucer looking out into his garden in Kent, savoring the springtime. He so vividly describes nature *inspired* to life by the sweet showers and sun of spring, and this image has always captivated me, reminding me that inspiration is not so much an *event* as it is something that happens from within. *Inspiration*, after all, comes from the Latin for *breathing in*. Though it requires a combination of showers and sunshine, inspiration unleashes something that is always already there.

At Century College, spring comes each semester, and we are all caught up in a swirl of inspiration. The reflections in this volume are unique, with some recalling teachers who inspired them by challenging—and even annoying—they, others remembering those who befriended them, and still others who were simply reborn by the transformational power of learning. As far ranging as the stories are, a common spirit animates them all: Teachers change lives.

This volume aspires to celebrate inspirational teachers, but that is only a part of the story. After all, the beauty of a vocation born of inspiration is that you soon enough find yourself inspired by those you are supposed to be inspiring. Teacher–student interactions are not merely transactional, but catalytic in nature—and they magically radiate more energy than they ever take in.

The person who most inspired me as a teacher was a student. It was one of those beautiful spring days when you relent and hold class outside. After class,

I found myself sitting with Amy under a pine tree talking about the research paper she was starting to write. She obliquely referred to another writing project once, and then, later, a second time. And when I asked, Amy took a hopelessly crumpled collection of handwritten papers out of her backpack and shared with me the heartbreaking letter she was writing to the child she gave up for adoption a few years earlier. Her daughter had been conceived in an act of sexual violence, but she humbled and heartened me with her calm, forgiveness, and peace.

It was, for me, a magical moment that I could have easily missed. Had she not lingered after class, had I not taken the time to talk to her about writing, and had she not felt safe, my life would never have been touched by her story.

That day I learned that every one of our students has a story—and that sometimes we inspire most by simply creating a comfortable space for others to tell their stories.

I hope you enjoy these stories of teaching, learning, and inspiration. I hope they remind you of the teachers and students who made a difference in your life. I hope you track them down, call them up, and tell them so.

I hope you are inspired.

—John O'Brien, Vice-President of Academic Affairs, Century College