

# Preface

*The various papers in Stella's desk told her that she was sixty-five. The face in the mirror . . . seemed like some disturbing distortion of her real face. . . . [M]iraculously preserved within this uncompromising prison of flesh and bone were all those other Stellas, all co-existing, all bearing witness, all available for consultation. Tell me how it was, she could say to some vanished Stella, and back would come these accounts of elsewhere and other people.—Penelope Lively, *Spiderweb**

Stella, the main character in Penelope Lively's richly textured British novel *Spiderweb*, is a newly retired social anthropologist who takes a country house and, in the process of sorting through her papers, relives her adventures, looking for her present self in the younger person she once was. Like Stella, we find ourselves gazing in the mirror and no longer seeing the youthful faces that looked back at us when we first set out on our teaching journeys. Yet beyond the outward shell remain vivid images of students we have taught, schools we have worked in, teachers we have been, co-mingling with and shaping our present teaching lives.

We find ourselves, late in our careers, looking back with wonder, curiosity, perhaps even wistfulness, reflecting on what we have learned and how we might share our cumulative learning, our insights, with others, especially younger colleagues. Reflecting on how we might bear witness. How we might make ourselves available for consultation. To past selves, we too say "tell us how it was," so we ourselves may better understand how it is. And so we tell our tales.

The genesis of this book, in itself a tale, dates to 1995, when Barbara Kroll invited several of the present contributors to join her in a reflective conversation about their lives in EFL/ESL composition teaching. They were chosen by virtue of having then 15-plus years of classroom experience and an

expressed willingness to consider how (and perhaps why) their teaching methods and philosophies had changed over time.

At the 1996 TESOL conference in Chicago, Barbara served as ringmaster, opening the conversation publicly, introducing each panelist to tell a story built on the preceding one. Weaving together their stories were Ilona Leki, Joy Reid, Alister Cumming, Melinda Erickson, Ann M. Johns, and Linda Lonon Blanton. For a while after that experience, we discussed via email how to convert our separate talks into a single publishable article. None of the scenarios we came up with, however, seemed likely to preserve our individual voices and individual stories—those very aspects of our accounts that seemed the essence of what we had to say.

Publication plans went into hibernation as such things are wont to do, but we continued to discuss our stories with each other and with other colleagues whenever we met at conferences in the intervening years. Finally, Linda had the inspiration to realize that the fleshed-out versions of our stories would make for a book, and thus this collection was born. Setting out to maintain the uniqueness of each voice, we even at one point played with the metaphor of “chorale” as a frame—separate but joined in song. Although we eventually shifted to “storytelling” as a more workable metaphor, each contributor’s unique style, tone, and sense of balance between personal and public will give readers, we hope, a sense of the varied lives we’ve led and the individuals we are. No two storytellers are alike.

To the original choir, we added Tony Silva, another long-timer in ESL/EFL composition teaching. We also decided to invite two people who represent two generations of younger (newer) scholars to complete our collection by adding book-ends to our tales: Dana Ferris to write an introduction and Paul Kei Matsuda to write an epilogue.

In recounting our stories, some of us speak primarily to

new teachers and some to more seasoned ones, but we all speak in the spirit of promoting a reflective stance. So we say, gather round, colleagues, and we shall summon vanished selves to tell you how it was, share accounts of elsewhere and other people, and remember what it once was like to teach ESL/EFL writing in the days when there were no books like this one.

Linda Lonon Blanton  
Barbara Kroll