

we had deciding this or that work dispute, this or that misbehavior, whether to take the play to Chimayo — these became our seminar. I grew when I realized, in looking back, that formal teaching is not the only vehicle for learning. My initial despair at not being able to “teach” a seminar was replaced much later by a realization that I had done the right thing in letting go of that form of seminar that year. And, I was able to let go with only a little hurt pride.

This summer has been a summer of persistence, learning from the lessons of the past, tolerating intolerance for the college staff seminar more than I did twelve years ago. Because of this, I’ve also been more willing to keep the three mini-seminars that evolved, going for the small groups who wished to continue: ten in the reading and study seminar, eight in the study of women in religion, twelve in exploring worship and spirituality. I’ve disappointed those who wanted a supermom; I observe the slight backlash against feminism and professional women that’s observable in many quarters these days. There’s a deep yearning for models. It alternates poignantly with an approach-then-retreat pattern in actually discussing the issues. It was one of those days when no one showed up for a seminar that Benjamin and I went out to splint the hollyhock.

Jim Shibley says this is the wettest summer he’s seen since he’s been here. Jim Shibley has been here thirty years. I’ve only seen the staff house hollyhocks blooming two or three times since I’ve been coming to the Ranch. I’ve been coming to the Ranch for twenty-seven years. For whatever reason, they bloomed really big that summer, and they became my symbol of ongoing rebirth and the willingness to be an instrument of rebirth. In splinting the hollyhocks, in not saying, “It doesn’t matter,” or “Why should I?” I celebrated the patience and determination and sense of vision that has kept the college staff program here this long. I hope those hollyhocks are blooming bigger and better than ever in another twenty-five years.

Kathy Swearingen

The Beauty of Bones

When I was twelve I tasted the desert. The Painted Desert. It happened after Ruth Hall drove up beside me with her Jeep and dogs beneath the canopy of cherry trees over by Ghost House.

“Want to hunt dinosaur bones?”

It was a dream come true. As if Dale Evans drove off the black and white television and manifested herself in Ruth Hall right before me, with her boots and bandana and mother-of-pearl snap buttons on the side of her dark blue cowgirl jeans, just like mine.

We flew past the dirt road with the Dead End sign. She parked between two giant loaves of sand. Wind blew. Then silence. Dogs sniffed the air and leaped to the ground. But it felt empty and barren to me, spooky, as I stepped from the back end of her Jeep. With noses down and tails pointed to the sky, the dogs circled and explored. I watch Ruth walk with quiet devotion between the dove and ocher hills.

Then she said the unspeakable: “If you see anything interesting, place it against your tongue. If it sticks, it’s probably fossilized dinosaur bones.”

I was speechless. It had been years of “Don’t put that in your mouth, it’s been on the ground.”

Dinosaur hunting with an open mouth revealed a different relationship with the world. While Ruth stooped only occasionally to pick up a sun-bleached fragment, I threw myself into this new science with abandon. On hands and knees I began to lick everything: rocks, stones, clods, sunbaked twigs, triangles of clay, even tiny round dusty balls. Anything I could pry from the earth was pressed against my outstretched tongue. Some stuck. Especially the round ones.

“Petrified dinosaur dung,” she said.

A woman well acquainted with fossilized refuse was a different woman from the one I saw every summer graciously hosting thousands on her patio or sweeping into the dining hall at sunset wearing a silver edged-western dress and beautiful smile.

Once Upon A Place

Writing from Ghost Ranch

Ed. Anita Skeen

Jane Taylor

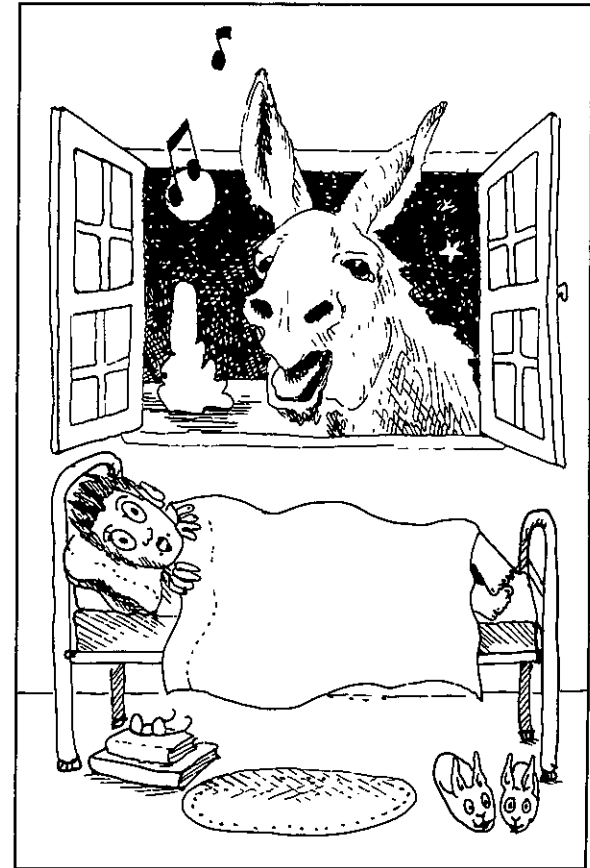
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There are layers to existence. And I was tasting them for the first time. I knelt to feel the dry, fragile remains of other worlds beneath this one. What had once been a sea and a garden was now silt and dust and bone upon a young girl's tongue. I sat back on my haunches in awe: Worlds of creatures existed before. On my hands and knees I discovered stories about creation before we even had stories about God.

Now I watch my own daughter make up stories with her Carnegie Mellon collection of late Crustaceous dinosaurs. They come for tea at Barbie's spa, nestling comfortably on her patio furniture, taking occasional dips in her plastic turquoise pool. At Christmas several late Jurassic carnivores appeared at the manger scene. With gaping jaws and tiny clawed arms, they beheld the sleeping Christ child, a jumble of eras lounging and celebrating together on one flat surface.

I decide I will take her dinosaur hunting at Ghost Ranch someday. I will demonstrate the way we uncovered ancient bones with stainless steel dental probes and baby toothbrushes. I will confess to tasting rocks and stones. I will try to show her the way Ruth roamed across the immense layers of time with patient reverence, walking as if something holy lay hidden just beneath the surface of the ground. I will tell her of the day I learned to kneel before the beauty of bones.



one long wake-up horn

Theatre in 2004, was nominated for the American Theatre Critics Association's Steinberg Award and won a 2005 IRNE Award for Best New Play. As an actor, Kate studied at the London Academy of Music & Dramatic Art and in New York City. She lectures in Playwriting in the Boston University Graduate School, Boston College, Wellesley College, American Repertory Institute for Advanced Theatre Training at Harvard, Brandeis University, and M.I.T. Acknowledged by StageSource in 2001 as a "Theatre Hero," Kate is the National Chair of Playwriting at the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival and a Playwriting Fellow at the Huntington Theatre Company.

Melanie Stafford

Melanie Stafford is the Director of Editorial Production at Paradigm Publishers in Boulder, Colorado. She has been writing poetry since she could hold a pencil or pen. She has made the Ghost Ranch Fall Writers' Festival an annual pilgrimage for the past several years, and recommends it to anyone who will listen!

Carolyn Stupin

Carolyn Stupin writes: "About the stories I sent in: A few years ago, the New Mexican newspaper ran a series of stories about grievances filed by members of the police department against their new chief. It wasn't until a month later that I read another article, in the Sunday paper, about the police chief's wife and how she had learned to cope with their son's suicide that had taken place a year earlier. Then everything fell into place. And the rocks — if you live in New Mexico, rocks are part of your understanding, part of your consciousness. And when you need them, rocks become a metaphor."

Kathy Swearingen

Kathy Swearingen received her Master of Divinity degree from the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, CA. after which she served as an educator and counselor in San Francisco Bay area. Currently residing in Haslett, Michigan, she continues her lifelong interests in writing, literature, social justice, and interfaith dialogue. She writes: "Ghost Ranch has been an integral part of my life. Our family spent at least one week of the summer at the Ranch since it first opened as a Presbyterian Conference Center. This tribute

to Ruth Hall rose out of my gratitude for her generosity of spirit to children. She was the first woman I encountered who moved beyond the lines prescribed for women at that time. Watching Ruth Hall walk across that vast desert one day, I decided I wanted to be just like her when I grew up. I still do."

Jane Taylor

Jane Vincent Taylor lives and writes in Oklahoma City, OK. She holds an M.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Central Oklahoma, a Master of Library & Information Science and a B.A. in Women's Studies from University of Oklahoma. Her poems and essays have appeared in numerous literary journals. A companion book of poems, *By the Grace of Ghosts*, written with the poet Judith Tate O'Brien, was a finalist for the Oklahoma Book Award 2004. A book of poems entitled *When We Say Shelter*, co-authored with poet Anita Skeen, was published by Night Owl Press in 2007. Jane has taught creative writing for several years at Ghost Ranch Conference Center in New Mexico during Creative Arts Week, as well as the Fall Writing Festival. She was a Fellow at Virginia Center for Creative Arts in 2006 where she finished a collection of poems, *Benediction in the Dark*. The full benediction will come when it finds a publisher. Amen.

Lisa Taylor

Lisa Taylor is a writer who was living in Norwich, Vermont at the time she wrote the contribution included here. She currently resides in Taos, New Mexico. She writes: "I smile as I remember writing those two revealing assignments for Ina Hughs, in her Non-Fiction Classes at Ghost Ranch. There was a mood of hilarity in her classroom, as well as serious literary teaching, that brought out in me a 'voice' I enjoyed meeting for the first time - a voice that could reflect kindly on the perils of being a single mother, and simultaneously find all that earnestness terribly funny. I also discovered the euphoric rush of making people laugh, feeling deeply connected through humor in a way that surpassed any other kind of writing I had done in the past. Ina herself brought that out in me, demonstrating in her own style of teaching, and in her own writing, that humor and insight could join together to form a powerful and healing narrative voice."