The Pennsylvania Writing & Literature Project

Newsletter



Volume 19, Number 2 Winter, 1999

49 TEACHERS BECOME NEW PAWLP FELLOWS IN 1998

Writing Institutes

Every summer PAWLP runs Writing Institutes at two sites: West Chester University and the Bucks County IU. In 1998, the West Chester site hosted 22 teachers and the Doylestown site 15 teachers-Kindergarten through grade 12-from surrounding school districts and private schools in each area. During the final week of the four-week Institute, participants wrote about their experiences. Here, in their words, is what an Institute is like:

" An environment of supportive peers fuels writing. Here novice and veteran teachers gather to discover within themselves new and exciting ays to make writing come alive in their classrooms. Through the camaraderie of group activities and the sharing of individual free writes a

sharing of individual free writes, a tight-knit community develops and writing thrives." "Our days pass by in a busy frenzy

of activity. We talk, share, listen, present, laugh, eat, read, write, and learn."

"Though the hours are long and the course requirements challenging, one day in the life of the Institute quickly blends into the next, and you find yourself wondering how it could have passed so quickly. But despite the fast pace of the Institute, its effects on my teaching will linger indefinitely."

"There's time to reflect, time to plan, and time to share."

"I came to the Institute looking for ways to become a better dictator. Instead I discovered that I am not the only expert in my classroom. A writing workshop functions with the "idance of the teacher, but students ed freedom and space to write." "Are we insane? Absolutely! And everyone who hopes to touch another's life by the power of writing would do well to join our merry band of inmates."

"If spreading knowledge and inspiring intellectual curiosity is like lighting a candle, the Institute is a bonfire!"

"I can't think of a better way to spend a steamy July."

Linda Coburn, Amy Hicks, Mary McKeown, Jean Shervais, Linda Kirschner, Maria Meade, and Maureen Noonan contributed to this article.

Literature Institute

So much to do in so little time best describes the work ethic of the 1998 Literature Institute. In fact, we arrived the first day having already read a selfselected pedagogy text. After sharing these texts with our grade-level groups, each group produced a visual display based on a metaphor which tied the ideas together.

Our second reading assignment was the classic *Silas Marner*, by George Elliot. This was difficult for many of us who do not read regularly on an adult level, but meeting in response groups brought new meanings to the words. Through writing our choice of journals and per-forming presentations, we demonstrated our unique understandings about *Silas*.

Guest presenters made us aware of the gender issues, aesthetic/efferent responses, and cultural diversity. Then we selected individual multicultural adult novels. Response groups once again discussed the books. In the process of comparing/ contrasting, we discovered universal themes and made personal connections which led to writing twovoice poems and, for some of us,personal essays. These personal reflections led us to a greater awareness of implications/applications of choice and literature circles in our classrooms.

The focus during week three was Young Adu't literature. We did author studies of Virginia Hamilton, Cynthia Voigt, Robert Cormier, Robert Newton Peck, Chris Crutcher, and Madeline L'Engle. Each author-study pair read a common book and two additional self-selected titles. Paired discussions produced graphic organizers representing each text and a projected sequel based on the author's typical style and content. In a final performance, each pair communicated the sequel to the group through a creative dramatization.

Throughout the Institute, we learned that picture books are not just child's play. We explored applications for varying topics at a complete range of grade levels. As adults perusing these books, we discovered that these pages actually hold many lifelong lessons.

The Institute members were inspired by many presenters, some of whom were veteran Fellows. Topics included literature circles, journal writing, gender and literature, notet aking, and children's books. We also participated in the first combined Institute day when all three Institutes came together for an all-day presentation entitled "Picturing the Story: Image Making in Reading & Writing" facilitated by Dr. Claudia Reder, an arts education specialist.

For the first time since 1994, the next summer Literature Institute will be held in West Chester.

All twelve 1998 Literature Institute Fellows contributed to this article.

Plans for 1999 summer Institutes in Writing and Literature underway now. For more information on participating, see page 7.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

It seems that whether we like it or not, large-scale assessment tests not only drive instruction but drive school districts as well. For that reason, this column could have appeared as a help wanted ad:

NEEDED NOW: PAWLP WRITING AND LITERATURE FELLOWS INTERESTED IN COORDINATING NEW ONE-CREDIT COURSES ON PREPARING FOR PSSA WRITING AND READING ASSESSMENT TESTS AND/OR NEW COURSE IN PA STANDARDS AND CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT. TRAINING AND MENTOR SUPPORT AVAILABLE.

Ever since we announced the availability of these new courses, the requests have been many but not varied. "How do we get 'Preparing for the PSSA Writing Assessment' and 'Preparing for the PSSA Reading Assessment' for our district?", administrators want to know. My response and the subsequent dialogue are equally predictable. I ask when they want the course. They say "as soon as possible, preferably before the test is given next." And I must respond that availability is limited because of staffing limitations. I don't like to have to say that.

These two courses are wonderful. Not only do they help teachers understand what counts as good writing and reading on the two PSSA tests, but they make explicit connections between what we know as best instructional practice and what the tests require that students do. These courses are not about scoring the tests, about teaching to the tests, or about strategies for taking the tests - though all those topics are included. These courses are about the best in writing and reading instruction and how that kind of teaching can raise test scores. That's why I wish these courses could run in every school district in our region.

Right now, though, the number of PAWLP teacher-consultants who are specifically prepared to coordinate these courses is limited, and that severely limits the availability of the courses themselves. To increase the number of coordinators available, we will be running coordinatorpreparation meetings for both the PSSA Writing and PSSA Reading course. Fellows do not have to do both; they can do either. IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN BECOMING A PSSA COURSE CO-ORDINATOR, LET ME KNOW. ASAP.

"Help [is] wanted" for another new one-credit course as well. This spring we will begin offering "Pennsylvania Standards and Classroom Assessment." Using the new state Academic Standards for Reading and Writing, the course will help teachers connect the new Standards to portfolio, performance, and other forms of classroom assessment. If you are interested in becoming a coordinator for this course, call and let me know. Coordinator preparation meetings are being planned for this course, too.

One last fact about these courses: they were all written by PAWLP teacherconsultants with a little help from their consultant (me). I want to thank Patty Koller, Kris Garis, Terri Bernecker-Kelly, Carol Schmitt, and Lynne Dorfman, without whom we would not be having this wonderful problem.



The PA Writing & Literature Project will be offering the following new one-credit courses this summer:

-GUIDED READING -PHONICS AND SPELLING -READING WORKSHOP -PA STANDARDS & CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT Our new three-credit course is: -CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM (GRADES K-8) We will also be offering these one-credit assessment courses: -PREPARING FOR THE PSSA WRITING ASSESSMENT and -PREPARING FOR THE PSSA READING ASSESSMENT

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KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

New ACLU Student Rights Project

The ACLU of Pennsylvania is pleased to announce that as part of its continuing efforts to increase and strengthen community education activities, it has recently received two grants in support of "Know Your Rights," a collaborative community outreach program for middle and high school age students in the five county Philadelphia area, intended to clarify the rights andresponsibilities of students in an educational setting. The "Know Your Rights" program is generously funded through grants from the Samuel S. Fels Fund and the Philadelphia Foundation.

The program, the only one of its kind in Pennsylvania, will address the concerns of all students, including minorities and the often disenfranchised, and let them know they have protected rights and avenues of recourse within the law to protest civil liberties viclations they encounter.

In designing, implementing, and maintaining the program, the ACLU of Pennsylvania will be assisted by an advisory committee made up of regional teachers, students, and community representatives who will help develop a Pennsylvania-specific student civil liberties handbook in both English and Spanish, and a corresponding curriculum for classroom presentations. The handbook will be written in an easy-to-read questionand-answer format, and will describe the process students should follow to document and protest civil rights violations. The book will also contain a directory of legal and social service agencies they can contact for support and advice.

It should be noted that, although intended for students, the handbook will also be a valuable resource for teachers and administrators who are also often unclear as to their legal rights and responsibilities. This lack of clarity can result in inappropriate decisions that have serious repercussions for both the students and their school districts. The program will serve as the model for eventual statewide implementation.

Individuals wishing to participate in the planning of the program, the presentations, or the distribution of the handbook should contact Cynthia Stroud at (215) 592-1513, ext. 215.



Is it the effluvium of rotting leaves? The nights so interminable that I seldom feel the sunshine on school days? Or is it simply December? Whatever the cause, I'm now at that time of year when I customarily find myself running through an annual repertoire of professional selfdoubt questions.

As the winter holiday break and a new semester grow nearer, I begin once again to wonder whether I was wrong to spend so much time on the Edgar Allen Poe unit simply because the kids loved it. Am I asking too much from my students? Too little? Is the foreign language teacher right that I should be teaching grammar out of context, if only so that he can teach Spanish more effectively? Should I care more about standardized test scores than I do? Have I done everything I can to reach that kid who still hates to read and write even though I've had nearly four months to work my miracles? Are parents correct in their perception that the exclusive purpose of public education is to produce a society of more accurate spellers and nothing alse?

Don't get me wrong. I'm no pessimist. In fact, it's this annual period of reflection, reevaluation, and my sometimes evanescent conclusions that bulldoze me through slush-filled winters toward more blithe May days when a so-much-to-doso-little-time panic finally succeeds. I spend each winter perusing journals, discussing my dilemmas with colleagues, and—whenever I can—attending conferences and workshops. Eventually, some resolutions usually come to me.

Fall of 1998 has been different, though. Unlike the past fifteen years which generally brought a recurring collection of questions and solutions, this fall unveiled a new doubt: Has technology improved the way we bring literacy to our students? I suppose that because October completed my first full year of posing as some kind of quasi-techno-guru for PAWLP, this professional doubt seems a natural consequence of my new duties. Yet, like my classroom reflections, I hope it can drive me through the coming year. To work through these new doubts, however, I reed to learn two things: First, how is technology bringing students to higher degrees of literacy, and second, what skills and information do teachers need and

want to be able to use technology more effectively in the classroom?

Few teachers would deny an increasing presence of technology in schools and homes today. The classroom without even one computer-though it may be little more than an early 80's Apple II handme-down-is becoming increasingly rare. In fact, my own school now boasts four computer labs, three of which are networked to provide complete Internet and school library access. But there is a big difference between having technology and using technology effectively. If a student spends ten minutes composing a memoir and then another fifteen choosing a font style and experimenting with word art to create an impressive presentation for an otherwise weak piece of writing, has technology contributed anything useful?

I know more than a few teachers who take a seeming sense of pride in their refusals to use a computer. I mention this, not as a condemnation—since many of these teachers' success is worthy of envy—but merely as an observation of what seems to be some sort of 1990's paradox. Even writing process icon Nancie Atwell admits that she still does all of her writing with pencil and paper and doesn't even own a typewriter (The second edition of her paradigm-changing book, *In The Middle*, however, is replete with photos of her students writing on computers).

Composing on a computer involves different processes than writing with pencil and paper. I recently read about a Chicago area principal who encourages his students to use computers to write their assignments but insists that students hand in their finished papers in their own handwriting because he doesn't want students to "hand in papers the computer has written for them." Are we adapting our instruction so that computers become more than glorified typewriters?

Do students now revise on-screen before printing their papers, depriving us of any possibility of getting inside the thinking that led to the final and now the only draft of a composition?

Have spell checkers really eased students' anxieties and the resultant writer's block as they were once touted to do? Or have they contributed to the perception that we are becoming a nation of increasingly poor spellers? Since the advent of integrated spell checking programs, I've received more than a few compositions submitted to "Mr. Heftier" a phenomenon that's not been particularly good for my own self-esteem.

Has computer-aided access to informa-

tion on CD-ROMs and on the Internet led to more informed research, or has the computer's cut-and-paste capability made plagiarizing more inviting?

As I wrow earlier, I'm not a pessimist, but I believe that these are all questions we as educators should be asking ourselves. Research on the uses of technology to teach literature is extremely limited because we are the pioneers-the researchers-in this new endeavor. We need to share our successes and questions about uses for computers in our classrooms. In future installments of this "e-literacy" column and on the PAWLP web site (http:// pawp.home.pipeline.com), I would like to feature some of those discoveries and questions, not just to help me, but so that PAWLP can continue to offer support in the teaching of literacy well into the next millennium.

STEVE HEFFNER, WRITING '92, IS THE PAWLP ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR TECHNOLOGY.

If you have a lesson, insight, or question about the use of technology to teach literacy, please share it with me. You can e-mail me at sheffner@pipeline.com, write to me at Conrad Weiser High School, 347 East Penn Avenue, Robesonia, Pennsylvania, 19551, or even call me toll-free at (877)274-6213 and I'll take dictation as fast as I can. If we all begin working together on plans to use technology more effectively, we will all be able to "bulldoze through another slush-filled winter."

Assessment Framework Opportunity

The Early Childhood Assessment Framework project described in the Summer 1998 issue of the *Newsletter* has been extended through grade 8. Some assessments are being added to the Pre K – Grade 4 Framework and others are being collected and developed for the Grades 4 – 8 Classroom Assessment Framework to be published in September of 1999. The help of teachers is critical. One proposed assessment is for Telling/ Oral Composition.

If you are willing to participate by piloting the Telling Assessments in your classroom, contact Judy Gehman (PAWLP'82) at (717) 354-9651.

EDUCATION ____ MATTERS a column from Michaels Associates

Trusting Ourselves as Teacher Researchers By Regie Routman I recently received an e-mail that told of a longitudinal experiment on pregnant women. Thirty-two mothers were divided into four groups, each spending 30 minutes a day with phonemic awareness activities of varying explicitness and intensity, such as listening to phonemic awareness tapes and manipulating the coordinating plastic letters on the belly, and in another group, hearing big book stories as the books' pages were pressed against the belly. By fifth grade, the children who had phonemic awareness training plus letters were far ahead of any other groups suggesting heavy phonemic training with letter manipulation en utero as a precursor to reading success.

Because the study was called "scientific research" and written in that language, most of us who read it believed it, that is, until we found out it was a hoax concocted by Gerry Coles to make a point about our susceptibility to "research." I love the story because it illustrates that even when the premises are ridiculous, we educators are led down the primrose path when "research" is in the offing.

These are tough times for us as teachers. More and more, "scientific research" is directing what is happening in our classrooms whether or not that research is relevant to our students and "research," many of us have changed our practice when it doesn't make sense to do so. Intimidated by reports in the media that we're not teaching reading, we've overloaded our students on phonics and phonemic awareness activities whether they need it or not.

We must rely and trust our own research based on ongoing, careful observation, reflection and analysis of our own students in the classrooms where we teach. While research that involves control groups and statistical analysis can be useful to our teaching, we must always exercise our best professional judgement and knowledge before we rush to implement new practices. To be a professional teacher also takes courage, outspokenness, and conviction - all needed in abundant supply these days in order to do what's right and best for our students.

Regie Routman is a teacher, writer and learner and the author of the forthcoming book, <u>Conversations:</u> <u>Strategies for Teaching, Learning and</u> <u>Evaluating</u> (Heinemann, 1999). No firm publication date or price for Regie's new book was available when she wrote this column for us. Readers of this newsletter will receive a 20% discount by requesting it when you order through Michaels Associates.

Interested in becoming the kind of teacher-researcher Regie Routman describes? You can do interesting, important research in your own school or your own classroom.

To join the PAWLP Teacher-as-Researcher group, call Andy Fishman at the PAWLP office: (610) 436-2202

New Website: Tolerance Learning Center

The Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles has recently created a website enabling people all over the world to access their information on the Holocaust and related topics. Check it out at motlc.wiesenthal.com

CORPORATE CORNER

The following corporations made generous donations to the Pennsylvania Writing & Literature Project this quarter. It is with deepest appreciation that we recognize their valuable support.

Giunta's Thriftway West Chester, PA

Entemann's Bakery Exton, PA

Friends of PAWLP 20/20 Fund Drive

In the year 2000, PAWLP will be 20 years old. The Project has begun a 20/20 Campaign to celebrate.

The following Fellows, along with three anonymous donors, have contributed to the Friends of PAWLP fund this quarter:

Diane Barrie, '95 Writing

Lillian Chirichella, '95 Literature

Jamie Fiermonte, '95 Writing

Debra Lafferty Fischer,

'95 Writing

Merle Horowitz, '80 Writing

Patty Koller, '92 Literature

Connie McClellan, '97 Writing Valerie Smith, '94 Writing

You can make a tax-deductible charitable contribution in your own name or the name of your Institute class. Donors' names (if they wish) or Institute class donations will be published in the Newsletter. Checks should be made payable to "Friends of PAWLP at WCU."

Best Practice: *immediate ideas for teachers*

Looking for a way to strengthen the reading/writing connection for your students? Using Barry Lane's strategies for revision as described in After The End in a unit on memoir and short story composition, set your students off on a technique hunt in whatever novel they are reading. After explaining what each of the terms means, ask students to find examples of each. To keep distractions at a minimum, students can use a set of bookmarks with icons representing each of these techniques as they read to note passages and jot them down later. (See below for suggestions.) An example of each device (snapshot, thoughtshot, explode a moment, and shrink a century) is found in Pam Conrad's Prairie Songs, and set off in special type in this excerpt when the two children finally arrive for their first lesson.

"Children!" Mrs. Berryman exclaimed when she saw us. "Oh, my students, I'm so glad you're here!" She put her arm around my shoulders and hugged me to her. I was shocked to feel her hands trembling so, and my head was rocked with the pounding of her heart as she drew me to her.

Doc Berryman climbed up on his wagon, and Mr. Whitfield got up beside him. "I think we're ready," Doc said, taking the reins into his hands.

William, wait! Wait!" <u>Mrs. Berry-</u> man ran around to his side of the wagon and pulled him down to her by the front of his jacket. She pressed her lips to his, long and hard, with all of us standing there looking on. Her hand went up behind his head, and he struggled from her embrace, red-faced and fierce.

"Emmeline, remember yourself, please!" He ran his fingers through his hair, tipping his hat and pushing it back in place. "Take care of things, dear," he said, and she backed off, hugging her arms to herself.

"Hurry back, William. Please." Her eyes filled with tears, and her fingers quickly wiped them away before they

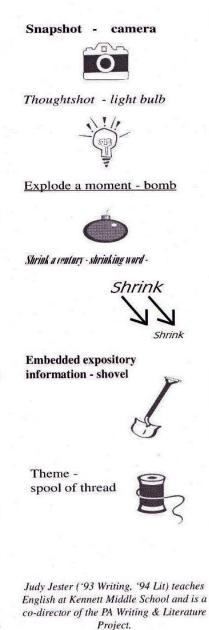
overflowed onto her cheeks. He drove off. never looking back, although Hr. Whitfield turned and waved his hat once in the air.

Never had the prairie seemed so empty to me as it did at that moment. I hadn't realized that a grown person could look so lonely and frightened. Lester whispered to me, "He shouldn't go away like that."

In addition to reviewing this information, students could also learn a few new "tricks" for their writing repertoire. The first is looking for places where historical information is given without the author obviously pointing it out to the reader. Explaining to Emmeline how a soddy house is build and Lester kicking over the empty slop jar under the bed while trying to avoid a return trip to the Berrymans' are good examples of embedding expository information. Students could list any other information they learn (or remember from other classes) in such a manner by using the procedure above with the shovel icon. Science fiction, high fantasy or political intrigue could be handled much the same way.

When finished with the entire text, students should be able to locate quotations they think come from the heart of the book. In Prairie Songs, they could title them "Clara-isms" for the mother's wisdom and be able to explain what lessons they teach about life in general. These could be noted with the spool of thread icon to represent how they are the seams of the story. The fact that these are sprinkled liberally throughout the book should be noted so students understand theme is something more than some moral tacked on to the end of the story. Looking for examples of prairie songs (i.e. water dripping in the soddy) will help students to see the conscious effort required to sustain a theme, something they should emulate in their own work.

Whether looking for ways the author places a story in the correct context or finding examples of interior monologue (what Lane calls a *thought*- *shot*), students can then be guided to make the leap to creating some of these things on their own. Now that they've uncovered some of the secrets of great writers, they are now writers "in the know."



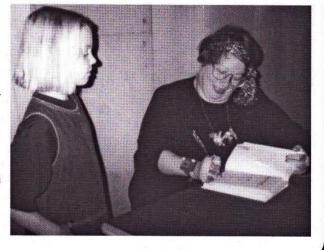
Best Young Writers/Young Readers Honored at Fall Festival

Nearly 500 children, parents, grandparents, and friends attended the 1998 Youth Fall Festival on October 18th at West Chester University.

Paula Danziger, author of popular young adult books including *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit* and the Amber Brown series, shared many of her strategies for finding stories and characters in the world in which each of us lives. She answered questions from many of the young writers and readers in the audience, and stayed to autograph books for them as well.

The 103 students whose writing was published in *Writing Takes You Everywhere*, the best of Young Writers/Young Readers anthology, received award certificates, journals in which to continue writing, and copies of the anthology at the Festival.

The Fall Festival also included refreshments and a book fair with books provided by Children's Book World of Haverford.



Uncle Sam Needs You - Right Here at Home

PAWLP needs help contacting - and educating - our state and national legislators when they are in their home districts. They need to see the wonderful work PAWLP teachers do with children in their schools and their Youth program sites.

If you want to help in your own county or in several counties, call Andy at the Project office:

(610) 436-2202

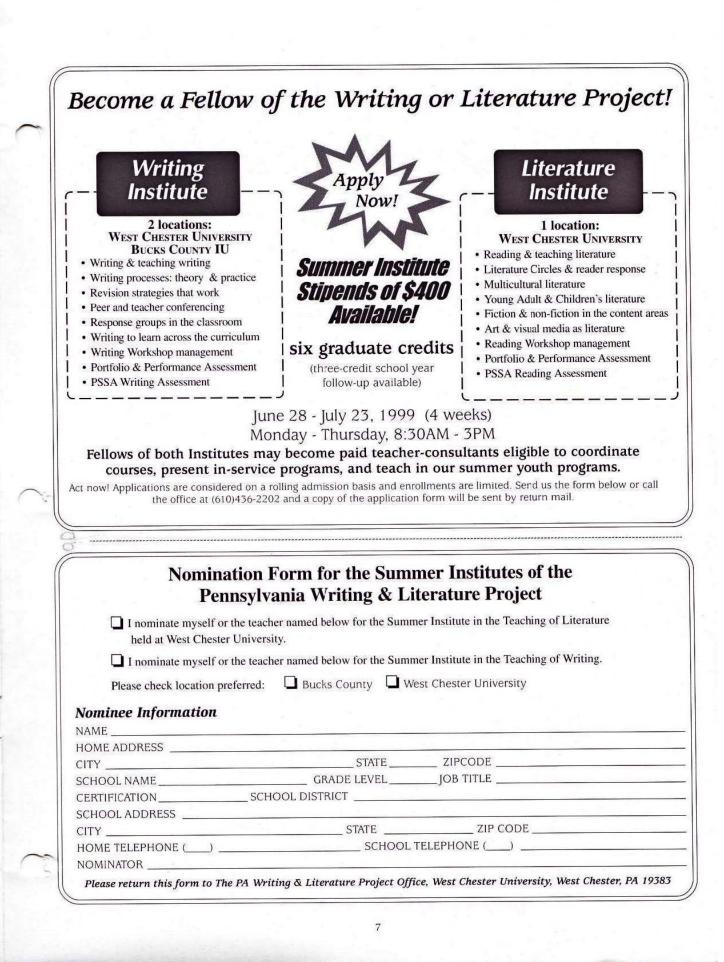
SUSAN CAMPBELL BARTOLETTI FEATURED SPEAKER AT OCTOBER 3 PAWLP DAY

"Find the gap," advised Susan Campbell Bartoletti on Saturday, October 3, at the Fall PAWLP day. Retired after 18 years of teaching, the last ten of which she was also a published author, she found the gap in her own family's past, specifically surrounding her husband's grandfather Massimino, who had immigrated from Italy to Pennsylvania's anthracite coal mining area. Mining the information surrounding her, she has published *Dancing with Dziadzui* and *Growing Up in Coal Country*.

Her suggestion, offered in a 90-minute presentation, is that would-be authors look closely at everything. For instance, *Growing Up* grew out of a close look at a photograph of beaker boys, all of whom were supposed to be at least 12. Although the work was tedious and dangerous, one boy was smiling. Researching what might have made him smile gave Bartoletti her book. Interviewing is an integral part of her research style, too. Adding to the details in *Growing Up* was easy since she had listened to the stories her husband's relatives told around the dinner table for many years.

One last major piece of advice-have a spouse who remains employed and has a good insurance plan.

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