

I don't sing solo in public. I hardly sing in the shower. It takes concentration to follow a tune, to stay on key. Yet one day in the early '90s I found myself singing, open-throated, open-hearted. It was a campfire song from childhood summers, "Tell me why, the stars do shine, tell me why, the ivy twines, tell me why, the sky's so blue, and I will tell you, just why I love you."

We were at Prospect in Philadelphia, a five-day institute with Pat flying in from Vermont to lead us in Prospect processes, a chance to focus our attention on our teaching lives. I had prepared a Descriptive Review of a Classroom Activity. I had wanted to look more closely at a project I'd been doing with a 5th grade teacher and his class. We'd start the "I Wonder" sessions in September, with several periods for brainstorming a wide range of questions about the world. Then we'd do research together throughout the year.

Pat was chairing the Review. It felt comfortable. We began with a reflection on the word Question. When my turn came, I responded fully. I was swept back through forty years to open my throat, open my mouth, and sing "Tell me why..."

I wasn't aware of anyone tittering in embarrassment. The reflection continued around the circle. Pat gave one of her magical summaries, a tactful and comprehensive pulling together of themes and particulars that made us feel recognized. We were okay.

The Review of Practice proceeded. I shared the dialogue journals from the fifth-graders. The project became more worthy in my eyes. I was feeling vindicated for all those hours spent reading the journal entries, all those hours spent crafting individual responses, all those trips to the library for 16-millimeter films or videos or armloads of books to line the chalk trays of the room, all that planning for class trips and classroom guests to interview, all those silkworms and monarch caterpillars to nourish through life cycles.

It was hard work teaching at Frederick Douglass Elementary School. In many ways I was never at home there. But I stayed, thirty years, until the school was taken over by a charter company in 2010. I'd found ways to team up with colleagues to do meaningful work. And I had a ready audience for my continuing reports of our North Philadelphia community, its staff, its families, its young people. Our Thursday teacher group stayed interested. Pat stayed interested.

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