

*Joie de Vivre (from the French 'the joy of living')*  
*music to write by... Don's joy of living evident in every day*

Our mentors: colleagues, treasured friends, voices that guide us, remind us of what we believe.

Don led by listening.

*I edited that line. Don Graves (too formal for the eulogy) but right for the VOICES piece. I can hear the way the line clangs for the audience--Don Graves, that is not what I called him, what those of us gathered to celebrate his life called him. I feel the edit before I can name it.*

I watched Don as we interviewed dozens and dozens of children for our *Inside Writing Project* in 2004 and 2005. "And what are you writing about?" he'd ask, leaning in, eyes focused *only* on that child. Don was ready to be delighted and surprised by joy.

*I'm transcribing from my notebook and I just reached an end point in prose. I can't write a list in a rough draft, so I stop and think about the difference between writing from thinking and writing from notes in a notebook. Different work. My mind spins in metaphor and I reach for words and phrases as I compose, but transcribing is distant. I'm aware of the music, the cries of my cat, the crumbs from my toast that have clogged the 'j' and 'n' on my keyboard.*

He had encouraged folks to keep coming in, to fill the aisles and pile upon the raised platform behind us--always drawing everyone in--arms wide--the Don Graves welcome.

Don's attention to individual teachers--he made us all feel like his best friend, Patrick Allen wrote on a blog remembering Don. Yes, exactly. He took the time at book signings to ask, "What do you teach? Tell me about your work..." signing at the NCTE conference in 2005 until his hands were trembling from fatigue and hunger. He was revived by chocolate-covered macadamia nuts delivered by his cherished Hawaiian friends--only to find that eating and signing resulted in chocolate smears across the title pages.

He loved to shuffle a dance move mid-speech, to imitate the frustrations of a teacher interrupted repeatedly by the school intercom.

He was competitive. Murray would send his daily word count, Don would counter with the hours he'd cleared brush on his 14 acres of land of the miles biked that day. I called Don our lead dog in the profession, and this was figurative, but also literal. Jim Burke and I hiked Black Cap with Don one June afternoon and Don set a competitive pace, striding far ahead of us without a glance back.

He loved the morning light at dawn with the mountains behind the house in Jackson and the surprises and delights of children--what they might say, what they might

write.

Don would sprint through the NCTE convention hall, as well, but was quickly stopped by a teacher who would say, “Mr. Graves, your work changed my teaching life, changed the way I thought about teaching and writing,” and Don would smile and nod, always gracious, but he would quickly turn the conversation to that teacher’s work, listening with interest to what was working and what wasn’t. Don didn’t need the constant praise of his followers, but he certainly loved the show of presenting: the chance to talk and laugh and share. I watched him reach out to hundreds upon hundreds of teachers at once, and he would tell me after that it drained him to present because he always tried to send his energy to each person in the room--to gather them in--and as the crowds got larger, he could feel his limitation. I think of Don the preacher in that moment, always anxious about each member of the flock. There was pastoral care in all of Don’s work.

Yes, *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work* sold 250,000 copies. 250,000. But how many were passed along the halls of schools, purchased by one, but read by many? I first read Don in a borrowed copy of a teacher who mentored me.

Five years ago I showed a clip from the *Inside Writing* work at a conference in Pennsylvania. I stood at the back watching teachers watch Don. A young woman whispered to the teacher next to her, “Who’s that old guy?” and a woman in front of her whirled around in her seat, whispering fiercely, “How did they let you graduate from college without knowing Don Graves?!”

Teachers felt known when they listened to Don--his arms were open wide in greeting as if--it seems naive to say this in the current climate that surrounds education in this country--but as if teachers were worth of a deep respect. Don wanted our stories and to wonder about our students. He made me believe that I could lead *any* child towards facility and joy with words--and I worked to prove him right.

My close proximity to Don’s retirement home gave me treasured memories of Don as a friend and writer, and as a pastor. After he had finished his final presentations to teachers, reluctantly giving up work he had loved so well, he still delivered sermons at the Jackson Community Church with his mesmerizing blend of storytelling, history, and contemplation. He led a bible study on Sunday mornings for a time that coincided with the Sunday after 9/11/2001 when we all arrived profoundly shaken. As Don always did, he leaned in and listened to us, talked with us, then used his habits as a researcher to ask the big question at the heart of our thinking, “What now?” and to attempt to answer it through the lens of faith in people, faith in the importance of our journey in this life, faith in gentleness, kindness, goodness, self-control... (? *I feel I’m veering off into nonsense, repeating words I know from the Bible that don’t connect here, but seem to be almost right for what I’m trying to say.*)

*The music is the perfect choice. The wind blows through a beautiful October morning, scattering leaves and light across my lawn. I feel at peace, joyful, grateful, and able to write. We*

*must set the conditions for writing that an individual writer needs and an individual writing task requires, and trust the writer to know what those are. Give the writer faith in his instincts. Give the writer independence and the knowledge that knowing yourself as a writer is important. How can we do our best writing? By listening to our own process and thinking about how it influences our ability to reach words.*

*I almost did it. I opened up email and almost opened up my Donald mail folder. I need to reread those emails, but I resist. I'd rather keep transcribing from my notebook. Even when I think I'm making progress, I feel procrastination's pull.*

Don, the watcher, the writer, the leader, the elder statesman.

He loved the University of New Hampshire and felt such a deep and lasting respect for his colleagues and students there--many of whom became leaders in the field of literacy.

He was inspiring--he packed conventional halls.

He would call me up--let me read you a poem!  
and like fine chocolate, he savored words, lines of poetry, obscure facts about the Red Sox, the details of the lives of the people he loved, his wife, his children, his grandchildren, his fellow teachers and writers.

Don's ability to help teachers see children.

Murray said, "It's hard to go back and face your copy. It is a mirror. It does not show the person you hoped to be, but the person you are." Oh, exactly. How to risk words when their subject is so precious?

And Don said, "The intensity of engagement actually demands disengagement," which I remembered as I went to make toast right as things got difficult in the writing. I walked away from my notebook, mind spinning the entire time. I walked out the front door to stand among the stars. I felt the chill of the stone walk in front of our house and pulled my robe tighter as I peered into the woods around the house. Above, the stars. Above, the mystery and expansiveness of a world beyond. Where is he now? I know it is somewhere good and he is smiling and laughing and listening. May we carry that legacy into the rest of our lives.

*I'm going to have to practice NOT crying. I'm going to have to create tricks that will keep the tears at bay. One week from now I will be at the church with my notebook preparing to speak. One week. Murray always believed in writing to deadline.*

*And now to those emails. heck, I'm already crying. Might as well.*

(from an introduction to a book he never wrote:) I pulled my chair up to a child and just plain observed the child write. I recorded everything the child did, I drew and labeled the process by numbers; I tried to anticipate what the child would do next (big mistake)

and learned quickly that anticipation was just not quite right. I had to follow the child.