



“They are Only Going to Steal Your Cars.”

Love, Rage, Caring, and Survival in an African-American Teacher’s Classroom

**Performance in Words and Music
Rose Lawrence & Gene Deerman**

**Written & Directed
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**Friday, May 17th 2013
11:00-12:20 pm
1092 Lincoln**

**9th Annual International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry
University of Illinois**

Rose Lawrence Dedicates this Performance to
Nephews, Nathan Goode (Left) & Phil Yorkman (Right)
Son, Tom Lawrence (Center)
May They, and All Our Children, Be Free to Live Their Dreams

Charles Vanover Dedicates this Performance to
the Teacher He and Johnny Saldaña Nicknamed, Mr. Johnson,
Who Twenty Years Later Still Calls Charles to
Work Harder, Dream Bigger, and Reach Out

All Music Played Comes from
John Coltrane: The Absolutely Essential Collection
<http://www.last.fm/music/John+Coltrane/The+Absolutely+Essential+Collection>

Songs: in order of their first appearance
How Deep is the Ocean, Flamingo Sketches, Chronic Blues, Blue and Green, & Russian Lullaby

Interview 1: The Story of Your Teaching:

To be conducted in June.

Please come to the interview ready to tell the story of your teaching this past school year, from September 03 until June 04. I am interested in learning how the year began, how it ended, and the important incidents that happened in between. I would like to know about the successes that made you proud and the mistakes you learned from. I hope you will share some of the joy of life in the classroom while not forgetting the hard work and difficult moments that are also part of life in school. You are welcome to bring notes, samples of student work and other materials that might help you narrate. As you tell your stories, I would like you to focus on the following questions:

- Please tell a story about a student, or a group of students, for whom your teaching made a difference during the 03-04 school year.
- Describe a unit or a group of lessons where you made a difference in your students' lives.
- Describe moments during the year when you felt you had learned something new about your teaching or your students.
- For beginning teachers:
 - Tell a story about a particular moment when something you learned from your student teaching or teacher education classes helped you become a better teacher, or instances when this knowledge made it more difficult for you to serve your students.
- Tell a story about any obstacles that got in the way of your teaching.
- Tell a story about a particular event that illustrates what you believe teaching is all about.

My goal as interviewer is to ask you to describe specific events and incidents. Throughout the session, I will ask you to expand on your stories by asking you to "Tell me more about that." or to "Walk me through what happened at that moment." or to "Describe a specific incident that illustrates that idea." In order to focus the time we have on your teaching I may also ask you questions such as "Could you tell me specifically how that event or person affected your teaching?" All of these questions are designed to help you tell your story in your own way, and in your own words.

Please don't worry about telling your stories in the specific order that they happened. My goal is for you to feel relaxed enough to speak naturally about the work you've done. Feel free to move forward and backwards in time and to come back to incidents that you've brought up before. I hope you will feel comfortable enough to tell your story to me in the same way you would tell it to teacher you trust.

The pilot interviews for this project ran from between an hour and an hour and a half. I would like you to have 90 minutes free so that you can speak freely without feeling rushed.

Excerpt 1. “They are only going to steal your cars.”

INTERVIEWER: Where was your old school?

OHIO: In the Eastside. Lake Specialty School: 4th through 8th grade. Very abusive environment. Huh, no, it’s a mentally abusive environment. I have lots of stories. It’s one of those schools where, if your heart is not in it, your kids are going to feel it. And, then, she gets awesome teachers, but our principal knows how to make them go away! Like I did. I stayed there for two years and, it was like—You have to believe in your kids. You have to believe. But, if you don’t believe, and if you tell your teachers

“Don’t worry about it, because they are only going to steal your cars.”

Then.

And, I remember. I remember everything.

Excerpt 2. Richard

OHIO: Now, Richard. Richard, same thing. Grandma was the primary caregiver—lived at home. He was the only boy, which makes a big difference. He was built like a football player, and he was retained twice in his history, so he was very older than the other kids. And, he just played

“I’m macho. There’s nothing you can do.”

Academically, he could do the work, because he’s so old, and he’s been retained so many times, he knew the stuff. But, he wouldn’t do it; he wouldn’t do it. I would spend a lot of pulling him to the side

‘What you doing?’

And, there were days where he just couldn’t keep it together, and he took his anger out on me. I would do so many nice things for him, because

‘I know what it is. You just need to want to spend time with you and take care of you.’

I never said that to him, but I just felt that way. I would just do things for him, like I would let him take my fish home and stuff like that.

Excerpt 3. The Dawn

OHIO: Four o'clock was me, that was just the way I did things. Not anymore, because I've become a mom. But, before I was a mom, four o'clock. I'm early bed and early riser. And four o'clock, everything's quiet—the streets are quiet. I used to get up at four, That's the way I organize, and that's the way I do everything. The world is at peace at four in the morning. Everything is quiet, but, then, at that five o'clock hour, everything starts waking up, and you start really waking up. That's how I did National Boards, that's how I did everything. I haven't done it this year because I'm—I was a mom. Last year, I was pregnant, but I'm a four o'clock organizer. I'm the type of person who feels like if I wake up at nine, the day is over. I clean my house early in the morning. In the afternoons, I'm just shuts off. I used to be at school by 7:30 in the morning, 'Cause no one's there and school's just coming in. I can focus.

Excerpt 4. Bill

INTERVIEWER: What you—specifically, what would you have him do?

OHIO: When he goes into his tantrums? Okay, first of all I—I see if he can handle it in the classroom, or if he needs to be removed. And, if he needs to be removed, I say,

‘You know, Bill. You’re—’

I don’t say tantrum. I say

‘Bill, we’re having a conflict. Do you want to step outside and talk about this. Or, or other consequences need to be taken, because we can’t interrupt everyone’s learning.’

But, first of all, I don’t attack him in front of everyone. I would actually go up to him and sit next to him and talk to him about it, and it would take him some time to settle down and make the right choice, but, he makes (TAPS TABLE) the right choice. And, then, in the hallway, I asked him to explain what happened—his side of the story. Because if—if you talk to him and say

‘Well, I saw you do ‘A’ and ‘B’.’

“No, I didn’t do it!”

But, if you say

‘Okay, what happened?’

The first thing he will say

“No one ever listens to me.”

‘Okay, Bill. Calm. I’m listening. What happened? What happened?’

And, he’ll go back to the—So I can be angry.

‘No, what happened?’

And, he’ll say what happened.

‘So, what should you have done?’

Always go back to

‘What should you have done?’

“I should have told the teacher, but,”

I would try to stop him there.

‘If you told the teacher, what do you think might have had happened?’

Basically, what I am doing with that is calming him down, and having him think about his actions, and what—what he did. It usually works. It calms him down, but he needs to understand. The biggest thing that he understand, which is the hardest thing

‘You told the truth. But, there is still a consequence for it.’

And, at the beginning, that was the hardest thing for him.

Excerpt 5. Donna

OHIO: Some more students, who else is there? Oh Donna, this one student, she's older than all the kids. Taller. And she is special ed. Her story is that at her old school she was retained two times, and was going to be retained again. She has cognitive delay. She never went to 3rd grade. We placed her into 4th grade. At first, at the beginning of the year—quiet—wouldn't talk to anyone. She was pulled out for the majority of the day because academically she was just 1st grade level. Self esteem was really low—shot. She was in the class for writing and wouldn't talk to anyone. She would always write about [the WNBA, basketball player,] B2K. All her stories were

“Me, me and B2K”

B2K is her wanting to be in the WNBA. Writing was 1st grade level. Her attitude was

“I don't care. I'm done. Whatever. Whatever. Whatever.”

The first month and a half we talked about social stuff.

‘How you going to meet friends?’

“I don't need to meet anybody. I don't need anything.”

And then, when she started meeting friends, she met friends in a negative way. She was the bully of the class.

“I rule this class. I'm strong. I'm cool.”

She expressed all of this through her writing.

“The kids love me, because I am the coolest girl in the class. I can beat up the boys, and the boys don't know anything about me.

She's what, two years older than the kids in the class.

So, she made friends. And, one of the goals was for her to make friends, which was a good thing. But, it was a negative way.

When talking to her mom, [mom said, last year, Donna] wouldn't say anything. She wouldn't do anything. And, [now, after this year]

‘There's a lot of things when she still doesn't do academically. But, her writing, it was amazing. It was—two sentence—Paragraphs! Three pages! That's how the progress was with her. It had grown from B2K basketball, to, “This is what I am thinking about today.” To poetry. It was just amazing.’

Donna. An amazing girl. Amazing in her writing. Maybe it wasn't 4th grade writing, but

‘You came here, this is where you were. And, look at this. You should be proud of that. Wow! Look at you. That's just totally, totally awesome.’