

from Spring '06

The Long Slide Into Spring
By Patricia Bell

It happens every year. As teachers, we trot through the early days of school, marking off semesters in our heads with check lists and deadlines. Beginning in November, teachers watch as days roll into holidays. Even January slips by unnoticed. By the time we realize things are at a standstill, we are still four months away from the summer air.

Somewhere, on some unappointed day, the early dawn drive seems endless. We are restless and bone weary. The faces of our students look gray and lifeless, and everything is moving in no motion. Our legs feel like bricks. And our sighs are longer and deeper. We reach for the why of the tiredness, and our lists become a source of even more dismay.

Why are these days so long? If I had the answer, I would be at a book signing right now, rather than taking a break from essays and comparative studies. But I place at your mind's feet some musings.

Revisiting August, we approach the new school year with the vigor and joy of a new teacher. We cannot help the feeling. Even if summer has been personally hard, we look to our classrooms and curriculums with enthusiasm. Our classrooms offer us a new beginning, a clean slate, a fresh start, and with that a renewed resolution. We shine and polish our apple paper weight. We use colorful borders to enhance the bulletin boards. We welcome new faces. October flies by with football and Halloween parties. And then the holidays begin. January, we don't mind the lull. We are exhausted.

But in February, we suddenly realize there are still four months ahead of us that in Pennsylvania, are known to be days of bleak rather than days of sun. It is like being on a sliding board with sticky legs. We get stuck. Budgets are due. Administrations begin grumbling about standard scores. Tolerance is low. There are still storms in sight.

And then, as all Pennsylvanians know, there is a morning when we realize the light is already in the sky as we make our way to work. We step out of our homes and the earth has warmed under a nightfall of soft rain. The worm has appeared on the walkway, surprised at his relocation. Birdsong is the music of the early day. And the lightness of our step returns to push us forward.

Everyone notices it. Our students have smiles again. We try a new lesson we had sitting in our imaginations. Our windows open to the breezes. At this writing, not counting days off, there are only 14 Mondays left in my school year. (Go ahead and check your calendar. I'll wait.)

The way is fast and furious. We are rejuvenated. We pack even more into each day. And all the symbolism one would want to make applies, from butterflies and cocoons to fledglings and their new found freedom of flying. Our skin is cool, as we let go, to enjoy the sliding down into summer.