

FOCUS ON...
KIM MCFETRIDGE

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A woman, maybe about 35 years old, with various “issues” in her life—trouble with relationships, trouble at work, etc.—turns to a psychic she finds on the Internet. Finding what she believes to be an authentic source of guidance for which she is desperate, she begins to get sucked in, turning over progressively more of her money, going deeper into debt, eventually losing her home and her mind to a fraudulent scheme.



No, that is not the plight of this issue’s focus, Kim McFetridge. But it is the plight of the main character of a novel she is writing. Just listening to her describe it made a listener’s heart begin to pound and a feeling of dread arise from some deep abdominal origin. There are no doubt millions of cases of Internet fraud each year, but what makes this story so interesting is the particular way in which the victim’s inner psychic needs become entangled in her own deception.

Writing teachers are, one might assume, supposed to know how to write. But *knowing how* to write is not the same as actually doing it. So it is a testament to Kim’s verve that she is even attempting such a project along with her many other commitments.

As it is, writing teachers have got to have one of the most difficult teaching jobs of all, especially these days: poring over interminable writing assignments, some barely decipherable, and somehow finding at least something positive to say about each one. In Kim’s case, while her personality exudes it, some of that equanimity likely comes from a four-year stint as a ticket agent for Northwest Airlines many years ago. Nothing like an endless stream of anxious and perturbed air travelers to really test one’s composure.

Kim moved with her family to Downingtown and West Chester, PA from Illinois when she was 14. She got her B.A. in English from the University of Tampa, thinking that she wanted to write for a living. An internship with the Tampa Tribune convinced her that journalism was not for her. At was at this time that she went to work for Northwest Airlines, followed by ten years doing photography.

Having returned to the West Chester area and having done some real soul-searching, she fixed upon the idea of teaching English. “I always like the college environment...I knew this was where I really wanted to be,” she said recently. After teaching literature for a period of time at the College of St. Francis (Joliet, IL) satellite campus in Downingtown, Kim found her way to Delaware Tech, where she has been teaching full-time for the past four years.

Kim teaches a variety of courses, including Bridge Reading, Honors Composition, Technical Writing and Communication, Composition, Critical Reading and Thinking, Pre-Tech Reading, and others—Children’s Literature, Black Literature, American Literature among them. She is active in the Writing Center, is facilitator for the Wilmington campus Book Club,

and is a member of the Stanton-Wilmington Diversity Committee.

Asked what special skills, abilities, or perspectives she brings to her work with students, she responded: “Definitely my rapport with the students is good....[I’m] still their teacher, but...[working with them requires] lots of patience.” She believes that effective writing is a skill that one will always have to use—a lab technician, for instance, will find it makes a crucial difference when being considered for promotions. Kim likes to use in-class discussions to stimulate students’ interest in reading and writing. She also likes to use multimedia presentations: “You have to make learning enjoyable.”

Aside from making learning enjoyable, Kim sees her greatest teaching challenge to be getting students who hate to read or write or who have low-level skills to develop into competent readers and writers. The solution, she has found, lies in breaking down the process, guiding the student to the available support services, and helping him/her to develop self-confidence. “Confidence is a real important factor,” she observes. That’s why it’s so important to find *something* that’s strong with every student’s work and emphasize it.

Among her outside interests and hobbies, Kim is very much into yoga, and has in fact been informally instructing a group along with Steve Steinwedel of the Student Development Center. She cites a number of other pastimes, including such rigorous activities as cycling, kickboxing, weight-lifting, and dance, but extending as well to more creative endeavors like painting ceramics and, of course, writing. She also enjoys spending “quality time” with her husband, family, friends, and two cats.

In addition to yoga, which is already ongoing on Tuesday evenings, Kim has expressed a keen interest in facilitating discussions or mini-workshops on topics like ways to encourage students to learn and ways to make classroom material more interesting.