

Lost

SS-6

A Future Never Found

By GARY ARMSTRONG

At his celebration of life, I was approached by his mom who told me that I had been the *only* one that allowed him to express himself, even if it meant breaking the rules of conformity.

"His other teachers wanted nothing but perfection, cramming creativity into a box, no breaking of the rules, no topics that might offend, like his Death Row Soliloquy. It was brief, but revealing, you know."

In fact, his endeavors in my writing class were often brief, but were also bloated with nuanced revelations like Hemmingway's famous six word story "For Sale: Baby shoes, never worn."

And they were always unconventional, even uncouth at times, and never followed SOP.

Yet, I accepted them all because of a poem that he placed on my desk on the very first day of school. It read

*I write about
the castoffs in landfills
that others have discarded
and I shall
retrieve each unwanted
and reveal its
true
value*

"His other teachers should have known, too."

The final class assignment at the end of the school year was about how my kids felt about graduating from high school. His read

Item in lost and found: My future

The optimist in me was encouraged at the time. For his cryptic words seemed to imply that he was seeking to reclaim a future that he thought he had lost.

"Thank you again for helping him to find his voice, at least for that one year."

It was also the optimist in me that read the poem he left on my desk as he walked out of my classroom on the last day of school. A parody of Shakespeare. It read

Your quality of mercy was not strain'd.

It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven

upon me.

It is twice blessed.

It blesseth you who gave

and me that received.

We teachers sometimes have to take things to the Lost & Found, which is literally a place for material things that have been lost. But there is also a metaphorical Lost & Found which is a place for those immaterial parts of us that may have been lost. And we should go there every so often to see what's there. Who knows. We may find our lost quality of mercy...or even someone's future.