

5039 *Fishtrap yanks stories of childhood 'from the heart'*

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Approximately 70 participants from all over the Northwest entered the world of ideas and words at 2005 Winter Fishtrap, which explored the theme "The Tender Age: Remembering Childhood and Nurturing Children" at Wallowa Lake Lodge during its three-day gathering last weekend.

While three days of discussion covered a wide range of issues — including public policy, which most seemed to feel gives short shrift to the children of today — it was the personal stories from participants that promise to leave the most lasting impression.

"Fishtrap elicited stories from people who normally don't write or are too shy to reveal themselves," said presenter Bryan Doyle, editor of the University of Portland's Portland magazine. "It yanked them right out of their hearts."

Other presenters were Tina Kotek, public policy director of the nonprofit Children First of Oregon and Craig Lesley, award-winning novelist who has attended a number of past Fishtrap events.

Approximately 20 people read their

profession, but because he loves writing. He was one of the open mike readers, telling the story of driving his son to college and how hard it was to let go.

Diane Rice, a public librarian from Boise, Idaho, said she came to Fishtrap because she'd heard wonderful things about it and "I needed a winter thing to do to pull me up the other side of the season." She said the event lived up to its reputation, and she hopes to be back.

Nurse Liz Desimone of Seattle, who attended a Fishtrap event rounding up former Peace Corps members a few years ago, told a story about her mother's pizza during the Sunday morning session. "This felt like a safe place to tell the most tragic stories," she said of other readings.

Both Rice and Desimone agreed that Fishtrap writer-in-residence Ellie Waterson, who is currently teaching writing in local high schools, help elicit many half-forgotten stories from participants with such questions as "When was the first time you remember being nurtured."

Jennepher Field of Pasco, Wash., a native New Zealander, wrote and read a humorous story about her first day of school. A retired mental health counselor



Photo by Elane Dickenson

Fishtrap presenters, from left, Tina Kotek, Bryan Doyle and Craig Lesley.

own stories centered on childhood at the open microphone session on the last morning of Fishtrap Sunday. Most were written during the conference.

Fishtrap director Rih Wandschneider said that approximately one-third of the participants were people who worked with children, such as teachers or counselors. He said most were also parents "and of course everyone had a childhood."

"I loved it," Stephen Ledyard of Bend said about his first Fishtrap. "What I loved most of all was the open mike. I was so moved. All the stories were very touching. It made me realize that the most meaningful part of stories is not how it's written. It also drove home much we need stories and that everyone has stories to tell.

Ledyard is a psychoanalyst who said he came to Fishtrap not because of his

who now has a cat and dog boarding kennel, Field said she most enjoyed the people at Fishtrap, "being around writers."

"I think the big thing that came out of this is that, with all the statistics in the world, the way to be advocates for children is to tell the stories of children," Wandschneider said. He said the entire Winter Fishtrap went well, with "powerful readings" Sunday morning capping off the event.

While the goal of Fishtrap is to promote good writing, Wandschneider emphasized that you don't have to be a writer to benefit from Fishtrap events.

Presenter Doyle had never before ventured east beyond Government Camp or out of the Columbia Gorge. "I feel like I've discovered new Oregons," he said.

When asked to describe his reaction to Fishtrap, he came up with a list of adjectives: penetrating, piercing, cheerful and tearful, angry in spots, tribal.

"I'm convinced that sometimes when the right people get together ... something holy happens, in this case, how to shape love for children, especially here," said Doyle. "I thought there was gentle, holy music at play."