RADICAL TEACHER

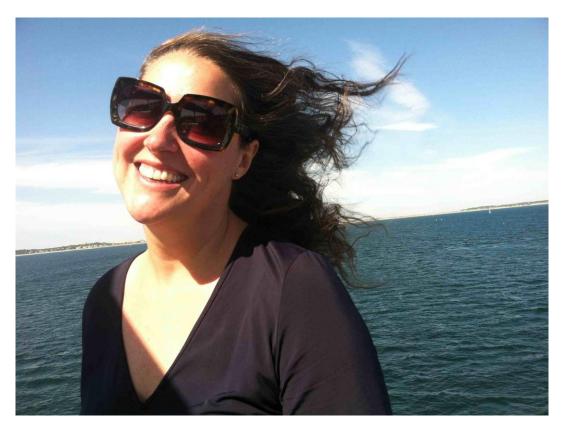## A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Poems

Cindy Comes to Hear Me Read
Gay Freaking Assholes: On Tolerance

by Jill McDonough

JILL MCDONOUGH, PHOTO FROM HER WEBSITE

Cindy Comes to Hear Me Read

Cindy: not her real name. I met her
in prison, and people in prison I give
the fake names. I taught her Shakespeare, remember
her frown, wide eyes, terror of getting
things wrong. Her clear, arguable thesis
on Desdemona's motives, Desdemona's past. The last
days were hard on her, it taking visible work
to see things could be worse. Imagine: I did.
But now she's out! In jewelry and makeup, new
clothes, haircut she chose and paid for. We hugged.
We'd never hugged; it's not allowed. On the outside
you can hug whoever you want. She told me she has
an apartment now, a *window*, an ocean view. She has
a *car*, she told me, and we both cracked up. The thought of it
wild, as far-fetched then as when you're a kid playing
grownup, playing any kind of house. She has
a job. She drives there in traffic. Each day
she sees the angry people. Sweet, silly people,
mad—god bless them—at traffic. At other *cars*.
She laughs, she told me, laughs out loud alone
in her car. People around her angry as toddlers. Whole
highways of traffic, everybody at the work of being free.

Gay Freaking Assholes: On Tolerance
for Skip Horack

When I was teaching writing camp with Skip,

we both pretended that we had the skills

to teach teenagers. Easy enough with smart kids.

Psyched for free lunch—cafeteria-grilled

organic chicken from farms with fancy names

like *The Happy Clucker: Jenny's Farm in the Pines.*

Oh, Jenny. We sat happy with our trays

of tacos, soft serve, teasing. And then one time

we overheard one kid call another *a gay*

freaking asshole. We froze, tried not to laugh.

Real teachers wouldn't tolerate intolerance.   They'd

say *Tolerance*. *Language*. *Bullying*. Or *Shut Your Trap*:

who knows? They'd trade fun lunch for *a talk*, kids' tears.

We call each other *gay freaking asshole* for years.