

to submit, and then graciously provided further feedback. We are also so grateful to the students who submitted work to the contest and who provided us with many hours of engaging reading.

Invaluable too was our panel of judges: Sasha Abramsky, Ken Andersen, Katie Arosteguy, Jillian Azevedo, Jane Beal, Melissa Browne, Marlene Clarke, Sarah Faye, Deborah Kimbrell, Jeff Magnin, Elaine McCollom, Sean McDonell, Katherine Rodger, Danielle Schmidli, Lindsay Snodgrass, Laura Soito, Agnes Stark, Victor Squitieri, and Theresa Walsh.

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Finally *Prized Writing* is grateful for its many friends in the campus community and beyond. Christopher Thaiss of the UWP and the Center for Educational Effectiveness has been a longtime supporter and also a judge; author John Lescroart has generously contributed to our cause; Dean of Humanities, Arts, and Cultural Studies Susan Kasier, Vice Provost and Dean for Undergraduate Education Carolyn Thomas, Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor Ralph Hexter, and Chancellor Linda Katehi are all to be commended and thanked for continuing to support *Prized Writing* through the budgetary challenges the last decade has brought.

And to you, the reader: thank you for taking the time to pick up this book and meet the authors who have left so much of themselves on the page.

Amy M. Clarke, Editor  
Davis, August 2015

## With Love, from Me to (All of) You

SARAH POLLOCK



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*WRITER'S COMMENT: I wrote this essay for my UWP 101 class – one of the first classes I took after transferring to Davis from community college. Prof. Scherr asked us to write a thousand words about just one word, a word that we felt was not properly understood by the general public and needed further definition. I remember feeling overwhelmed and unsure about my new academic environment, but when Prof. Scherr gave us this assignment, it was like I'd rowed my little boat into the eye of the storm. You want me to write about...a word? Now, that I can do!*

*I knew I wanted to write about the word "y'all" within a matter of hours. Moving across the country, then leaving my job to be a full time student, then transferring to a UC had left me feeling disconnected from myself. I felt there could be no better way to reaffirm who I was and what I valued as I began my career at Davis than to reach into my pocket and pull out something that felt so me and wear it on my sleeve like a badge – proudly.*

*My essay is technically about the word "y'all," but I was really writing about a way of connecting with people. I believe that the way we speak has great power, and that having the right words at the right time is priceless. If reading this helps one person make a better connection with someone else one time, I have done something worthwhile.*

*INSTRUCTOR'S COMMENT: Sarah Pollock begins her essay, "With love from me to (all of) you" with a praise of words. "As long as I can remember," she writes, "I've loved words. Long and short, simple and complicated, esoteric and common." As a lover of words myself, I typically assign students to write an essay that asks for a definition of a word or phrase. The assignment teaches students how words can shift their meaning when placed in different contexts, and how words can change a context, amplify it, give it life, and make an abstract word concrete. Sarah does that all to perfection here. Her definition of the phrase "y'all" takes us down a gravel road in the South, where she visits her grandmother whose use of the phrase feels as warm and wonderful as a hug, and to the signs on shop windows in the South where*

*“y’all come back y’hear” speaks of Southern hospitality. Sarah shows us the phrase’s grammatical and etymological inclusivity as well. Y’all, she tells us, is gender neutral. Unlike the “accusatory” and distancing “you,” the phrase is warm and friendly, puts people at ease and speaks to a community of listeners. In this short essay Sarah has written an insightful and delightful encomium both to words and their power, and to y’all, a phrase that speaks of community and the need to communicate clearly and with southern comfort. I hope y’all enjoy the essay as much as I did.*

– Raquel Scherr, University Writing Program

As long as I can remember, I’ve loved words. Long and short, simple and complicated, esoteric and common. If I had to choose a favorite – just one – it would be y’all. When I was a girl, we’d take day-long road trips across rural Texas in December to spend the holidays with my great-grandparents. We’d pull into the gravel driveway in the middle of the night, leaving a dust cloud a mile long behind us. Rubbing sleep from my eyes as I stepped out of our warm van into the chilly air, I’d hear the popping of the screen door springs as my great-grandma stepped out to say, “Well hey, y’all! C’mon in, we got san’wich fixins for y’all’s dinner!” I remember that y’all in my grandma’s voice feeling like a hug. I’ve come to realize that some less fortunate souls see things differently.

As a native Southerner, I’ve learned no more reliable way to lower another’s estimation of my intelligence than by saying y’all. I don’t have an accent, so my use of y’all is typically the first indication anyone gets that I’m from the South. I could be utilizing the most intellectual, the most ostentatious and perspicacious verbiage remotely conceivable and the moment I drop a y’all...I can almost hear the pin prick the balloon. Formerly lifted by expectations suited to my aptitude, it winces as it expels all with a tired wheeze and falls limply to the ground. Y’all is one of the most identifiably-Southern words there is, living one floor above yeehaw and howdy. Although some view a Southern accent and this particular word with disdain, y’all fills an important gap in the modern English language.

English lacks a convenient one-word second-person plural pronoun (try saying that five times fast). Although technically the word you is both singular and plural, context is often inadequate to distinguish the plural from the singular. People typically solve this problem with two-word phrases like “you guys,” or in Britain, “you lot.” In the South, the words you and all got hitched, forming the perfect union we know as

y’all. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines y’all as “a contraction of you-all; (in the southern US) you, used to refer to more than one person” (2014). As my great-grandma might say, however, that definition is all bones and no meat.

One of the most obvious benefits of y’all is its gender-neutrality. I’m sure everyone can still hear the preadolescent voices of their female classmates, friends or family members railing against being lumped in with the boys by the phrase “you guys.” Y’all is an equal opportunity group identifier that does not require the relinquishing of part of anyone’s identity. Y’all is certainly superior to the accusatory “you people,” the power of which derives from divisiveness – as exemplified by the classic exclamation, “What is wrong with you people!?” Y’all gets the attention of a group without expressing bias, negative or otherwise, toward any individual.

The benefits of using y’all accrue not only to those on the receiving end. Y’all carries a certain friendliness and warmth that allows you, as a speaker, to put listeners at ease. Y’all never sounds abrupt, which gives an audience – whether a group of employees you’re debriefing or a couple of friends you spot at the supermarket – the impression that you’ve really stopped to take your time with whatever you’re saying. “Hey, y’all! Could I have a few minutes before you clock out?” gives a much different impression than, “Would you stop by my office? I need to speak with you before you leave.” Outside of formal settings, y’all has a unique tone that can transform a group of anxious, distracted or defensive individuals into a receptive, attentive and relaxed audience primed for the rest of your message, whatever it may be.

If I had to choose one word to describe y’all, it would be “inclusive.” There are signs posted in the windows of businesses in the South that say, “Y’all come back now, y’hear?” – signs that have become iconic representations of Southern hospitality. You have to stop and take a closer look, though, to comprehend their full meaning. That sign in the window speaks to anyone walking by, regardless of who you are or where you’re from. If you’re already a patron, welcome back! If you’re a new customer, hurry up and get in here – the sooner we know you, the sooner we can welcome you back as a friend rather than greet you as a stranger! Most importantly, y’all identifies every individual as part of a larger whole. When I ask a friend, “What are y’all doing tonight?” she knows I’m asking about her girlfriend, or her family, or her roommates in addition to

herself, even though it's just the two of us talking. I say y'all rather than you because I understand that my friend doesn't exist in a vacuum – indeed, none of us do.

At its simplest, y'all is a contraction of you and all. You – you are you, I am me, and for the sake of this sentence I must distinguish between you and me; and all – even as I separate myself from you, I do not isolate you. I understand that when I speak to you, I must consider more than just the person standing in front of me. I acknowledge that you are part of something bigger, something stronger and more important than the word you alone can hope to convey. You are a sibling, a parent, a friend, a teacher, a student. As one human being to another, and with all the love in my Texas-bred heart, I speak to all of you.

## Slingin' Ink

SAMANTHA BROOKS



*WRITER'S COMMENT: When I met Tony Mercado, he was not the stereotypical tattoo artist I was expecting. I scheduled an interview with Mercado over the phone and envisioned the kind of person I was going to meet – someone probably bald with a scraggly beard, dirty jeans and an oversized T-shirt is what came to mind. And tattoos, obviously. Tony has a lot of tattoos, so I got that part right, but that was pretty much it. He was clean-cut, friendly, and rather charming, if I'm being honest. I showed up to the interview with all my questions written out and expected my finished paper to have an edgy ring to it – which in the end, it sort of did, but not in the way I had anticipated. Within minutes of meeting him I knew that I was going to have to put a totally different spin on this profile than I initially planned. When I left the parlor, I sat down in my car and thought to myself, "How on earth am I going to start this piece?" I then realized that I had to approach this not head-on, but at the proper angle – putting Mercado's background at the forefront. Like tattoos, experiences are permanent, and with a little bit of detail, you can learn a lot about someone from looking at them.*

*Instructor's Comment: For their second major assignment, students in my UWP 104C: Journalism class write a 1,500-word profile piece. This article requires them to find an angle that will interest a general audience and to capture details, both large and small. Samantha immediately understood that Mercado's journey from soldier to tattoo artist could interest a broad audience. That provides the foundation for a great article. Throughout it, she captures her subject's voice in an exemplary way. Readers experience Mercado's sarcastic sense of humor, with voices of his co-workers sprinkled in for additional verisimilitude. Through it all, Samantha demonstrates many of the finest journalistic skills: finding the right subject, noting the important details of that subject's world, and conveying that information in clear prose.*

*– Nathaniel Williams, University Writing Program*