

Who Am I?

I am a teacher and a husband, finding adventure along the way. I do have other interests that seem more adventurous — traveling and scuba diving. These led me to parasailing once, where I fitted a parachute harness to me and a boat nearby tugged the harness until the parachute filled, lifting me into the air. When the boat slowed, my altitude dropped and I dipped my feet into the lake; when it sped, my altitude increased and I rose higher and higher. At another time, we visited a salt mine near Salzburg that had been worked for centuries. We entered the mine by sliding down a smoothly worn wood chute and found ourselves in a dark tunnel with lights spotted along, spilling pools of light to mark our way. The air touched us with a tang, almost oceanic, although we knew that land pressed down on us for hundreds of feet above. We walked from light to light, a surer guide than those generations of miners had had. And in each venture, Nancy was with me, taking pictures of me aloft, holding hands against the salt-mine damp.

The scuba diving began in Canandaigua Lake, with an open water test in the cold and murky waters of early spring. We could see only three feet in those dim waters, so that we had to trust that the figure outlined in front of us was following the guide safely, and throughout one heard the steady sigh of air being drawn through the mouthpiece and exhaled past the mask. In this excursion, Nancy and I were forbidden from swimming together, in order to make us surely independent. But I knew where she was.

Teaching makes another adventure, because you don't know the students until you have worked with them, seen how they read and think and speak. In a way, it is riskier than the other adventures, because in those adventures we have defined guides — the harness, the rail, the dive buddy. In teaching, we have more indefinite guides, and that makes the challenge. But at the end of the day, Nancy is home to greet me. That is the best adventure.

I teach and I love. I have sat on the wind, and breathed under water, wandered underground and spoken with strangers. I have sat into a harness, strapping it about my waist, and letting a boat tug it until the parachute behind me filled with air and hoisted me up and up and up, then let me down and pulled me up again. I have turned my back to an air tank, yanked the straps tight about me, bit the mouthpiece, pulled the face mask over my eyes and nose, found the balance as I stood, fumbled to the edge of the boat, and then just . . . stepped . . . into the void, breathing, breathing, breathing. And each time, Nancy stayed near me.

Once, we slipped down a chute into a salt mine, with tangy air and spots of light under lamps, as the tunnel led down and down into ancient workings, where generations of men had dug and chipped at salt silted millennia before. As we slipped down, we touched the past, our hands brushing the railing slid past by those generations. And Nancy and I touched hands.

I teach, walking with strangers every year, learning about them, about how we speak and about how we think. This makes the most curious adventure, because I cannot place hand on rough textured strap or rest hand on supporting wall. No student's way is certain, and I must guide the way. This is a true adventure. And at the end of the day, Nancy touches my shoulder and she kisses my cheek. This is the truest adventure.