

BY OUR WTS

The Indiana University Writing Tutorial Services Alumni Newsletter

Writing Tutorial Services
Indiana University
Bloomington, IN 47405
www.indiana.edu/~ByOurWTS

A Reflection

As her first year as WTS Director draws to a close, Jo Ann Vogt reflects on changes made and lessons learned

Jo Ann Vogt

I remember promising tutors at the first meeting last fall that I wouldn't make any sweeping changes right away. I planned to settle in before I started tinkering with things. Now that eight months have passed, I realize I may have broken that vow. I see this article as a chance to reflect on the changes I have made and the lessons I have learned.

Opening Course-Specific Tutoring to Peer Tutors

In fall 2007 and spring 2008, requests for course-specific tutors came in from teachers whose classes

were good matches not for graduate tutors but for peer tutors. In each case, the faculty were amenable, the peer tutors were willing to shoulder this extra burden, and students seem to have been well served. I hope to continue and expand this practice in future semesters because I see it as an opportunity to capitalize upon the diversity of the WTS tutoring staff. The more varied the backgrounds of our tutors, the more disciplines we can serve. Because WTS is charged with supporting students in every IU class, increasing the range of courses we can support is our obligation. I also like this idea because it builds a

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community between graduate tutors and peer tutors, encouraging all of us to rely upon one another for the information and guidance we need to do a good job assisting students.

Teaching the Peer-Tutor Practicum

Taking over the peer-tutor practicum was a frightening prospect when Laura first mentioned the possibility to me. When I arrived at IU, I had had very little experience working with peer tutors, so the idea of training them seemed presumptuous, to say the least. Then I started meeting with peer tutors in working groups, witnessing their commitment to helping their fellow students, and listening to the ways they handled sticky tutoring situations. It turns out that these peer tutors thought about tutoring and approached students and assignments just as all the other tutors

I'd worked with had done. They were eager to learn about writing in various disciplines and enormously empathetic where student foibles were concerned. Armed with that knowledge and Laura's syllabus, I started teaching the practicum this January.

Since then, I have drawn upon the trainees' observations about being tutored at WTS to shape some of the training sessions for all the WTS tutors. For instance, the trainees noted that—although their tutors did an excellent job overall—in some cases the tutors failed to introduce themselves when beginning tutorials. That led to a productive discussion about what to do in the first five minutes of any session. The peer trainees' observations about the various roles tutors can assume in tutorials sprouted a discussion of frequently relied-upon roles and strategies that reminded us all of the myriad of options open to us in any given tutorial. This pleasant

symbiosis between teaching the practicum and working with peer and graduate tutors already employed at WTS reminds me of the relationship that faculty strive for between teaching and research. Each activity is worthy in its own right, but when the planets align and the magic works, each enriches the other.

What I Have Learned

What I have learned in these two semesters would take up several volumes of *By Our WTS*, so I will address instead what I have always known that has been confirmed: Tutors are excellent teachers, and a tutoring staff of 40-50 has much to teach each other and the director. My proudest moments these last eight months have been when peer or graduate tutors took over our working group meetings and shared their expertise with each other and with me. Tutors have taught us about writing in sociology, in history, in English, in journalism, in philosophy; they have demystified the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*; they have assembled non-native English speakers and experts in language acquisition and allowed us to learn first-hand what it is like to study and to seek help in a second language. Another way of saying what has been confirmed for me is this: The secret to being a successful director is to hire excellent tutors, encourage them to give themselves credit for what they know; provide opportunities for them to share that expertise, and simply get out of the way. The rest will happen naturally.

By Our WTS is produced by and for the peer tutor alumni of Writing Tutorial Services, Indiana University's writing center.

Jo Minnich, *Managing Editor, Photographer*

Contributors:

Kelsey Nash, *Designer*

Brandon Haffner, *Feature Writer*

Maggie Grimason, *Feature Writer*

Erin McGuan, *Feature Writer*

Emma Young, *Feature Writer*

Chris Frisz, *Editor*

Josh Robinson, *Editor*

Emma Young, *Editor*

Geoff McGregor, *Web Developer*

Please read, think, and write back to us. Our website is designed to facilitate this communication.

www.indiana.edu/~ByOurWTS

Laura Plummer, *CWP Director*

Jo Ann Vogt, *WTS Director*

Anita Schaad, *WTS Office Manager*

John Peterson, *CWP Office Manager*

Leaving WTS, entering the real world

This May, several seniors will add their names to the WTS alumni roster. In celebration of their graduations and contributions to Writing Tutorial Services, we asked each to provide us with some insight into their future ambitions and reflect on their time as peer tutors.

Maggie Grimason

Major/ Minor: Majors in English, music and Japanese. Minor in medieval studies.

How long have you worked for WTS?
A year and a half.

What is your best memory from WTS?
Dinner at Laura Plummer's after our semester of training had ended.

Most Memorable Tutorial?

A tutee who said he had to get a B on his final W131 paper to pass the class... but he "didn't feel like writing any more." His paper was supposed to be 6 pages, he only had 3, and he refused to add anything.

What will you be doing after graduation?

Grad school... or living in my parents' basement.

How has working at WTS prepared you for the "real" world?

It's taught me how to deal with all sorts of people without wringing their necks.



Rebecca Gabriel

Major/ Minor: Major in English with a concentration in creative writing along with minors in art history, folklore and ethnomusicology.

How long have you worked for WTS?
About a year and a half.

What is your best memory from WTS?
I always have enjoyed working with Robyn and Joe at Briscoe, discussing the philosophical ramifications of the gender neutral bathroom and other nonsense.

Most Memorable Tutorial?

I feel like the most memorable is only so because it was bad. Let's just say that we weren't seeing eye to eye on what Confucius would have to say to Rudy Giuliani...

What will you be doing after graduation?

I have no idea. I suppose only time will tell.

How has working at WTS prepared you for the "real" world?

I think that working as a writing tutor has allowed me to sharpen my editing skills, a field that I may want to enter

into after graduation. Not only that, but it has exposed me to all kinds of people and ways of thinking, which is really priceless. This is probably the best job that I have ever had.

Major/ Minor: Majors in English and Spanish. Minor in linguistics.

How long have you worked for WTS?

2 full years— I've been a tutor since sophomore year, but I spent my Junior year abroad.

What is your best memory from WTS?

Watching movies in the classroom at Forest on especially slow nights.

Most Memorable Tutorial?

I tutored a girl on her overseas study application for the same program I was applying to. We both got accepted and became friends during our year abroad.

What will you be doing after graduation?

Working, I hope. I'll probably apply to graduate schools the year after. I'll be in Bloomington for the next year



Holly Jones



Maggie Grimason

because my husband still has a year of undergraduate school left.

How has working at WTS prepared you for the “real” world?

Working one-on-one with people and discussing work that is personal to them has helped me learn to read people’s moods and body language. I’ve learned to adjust my approach to someone based on how I perceive his or her reaction to me.

Major/ Minor: Major in English with a minor in Spanish.

How long have you worked for WTS?

A year and a half.

What is your best memory from WTS?

Jumping into a bizarre conversation with Joe Roy and Maggie G. about “who are you (am I, is anybody) in the gender neutral bathroom?”

Most Memorable Tutorial?

There was one tutorial where the student came in and was still in the brainstorming stage. He was not the typical passive student who just wanted

the tutor to do all the work for him. He had a hard time responding to my questions and it was hard to keep the conversation flowing. Half way through the tutorial I found out the student had a learning disability. I thought it might be rude to ask [about it] so I worked through the tutorial by changing my line of questioning. By the time we finally started making progress our tutorial was over. I left him with a short list of



Robyn Klingerman

things he could do to better prepare himself for any writing task. I felt like the whole tutorial was a complete failure, but I worked with the student a couple of times after and he actually took some of the advice and had improved tenfold from our first meeting.

What will you be doing after graduation?

Hopefully I will be doing the Teach for America program. I’m also looking into doing volunteer work both within the U.S. and abroad.

How has working at WTS prepared you for the “real” world?

As I plan to go into teaching, I think WTS has helped me learn how to adapt to working with students who come from all different backgrounds who have different learning skills and abilities. I’ve learned that what works for some people doesn’t work for all people, and you have to find out what works for each individual.

Major/ Minor: Majors in Spanish and English.

How long have you worked for WTS?

I started training as a freshman (so about 4 years).

What is your best memory from WTS?

Anita. Ha.

Most Memorable Tutorial?

The most memorable tutorial is always the worst, so I feel bad telling this story. I was tutoring a student analyzing the



Erin McGuan

male/female roles in *Beloved*. He was arguing that male slaves had it harder than female slaves since women didn’t have to work in the fields. The best part was that he called women “male’s estrogen filled counterparts.” Yikes.

What will you be doing after graduation?

I’ve been accepted to the Magis Program at Creighton University. I will be teaching high school Spanish and English full-time in Nebraska while taking masters degree courses as well.

How has working at WTS prepared you for the “real” world?

I’ve learned to work with people from all different disciplines with totally different personalities. Since I’m going into teaching it has helped me find a lot of different ways of approaching problems.

Major/ Minor: Major in journalism with a fine arts photography concentration.



Jo Minnich

How long have you worked for WTS?

4 years. I trained my freshman year.

What is your best memory from WTS?

My favorite memories would have to be down time while working—getting to know and joking around with the other tutors.

Most Memorable Tutorial?

My most memorable tutorial would have to be an ASC tutorial when a student brought in a two page letter to her ex-boyfriend ... awkward.

What will you be doing after graduation?

I plan to go back to Fort Wayne, my hometown, to take some classes and start a Transition to Teaching program to be a high school English teacher.

How has working at WTS prepared you for the “real” world?

It has helped me learn that I hate my major! This is the only job that I have loved going to everyday. It has helped me to realize that I want to take these skills and use them for the rest of my life, which is why I chose to go into teaching. I love seeing that “light bulb” pop when helping students.

Major/ Minor: Major in English with a Spanish minor.

How long have you worked for WTS?
4 years: I trained freshman year.

What is your best memory from WTS?

Sitting on the floor in Anita’s “office” and eating all her food.

Most Memorable Tutorial?

Every tutorial was special in its own little way...

What will you be doing after graduation?

I am getting married in June, and then I am doing the IU Transition to Teaching program to become certified to teach secondary school English.

How has working at WTS prepared you for the “real” world?

Since I want to teach English, tutoring students one-on-one has helped me to

understand the kinds of ideas students have and has given me some useful strategies to help them develop these ideas.

Major/ Minor: Majors in religious studies, classical studies/philosophy.

How long have you worked for WTS?

4 semesters as a tutor, plus training (over 2 years in all).

What is your best memory from WTS?

Wednesday night psychoanalysis sessions with my fellow tutors last spring.

Most Memorable Tutorial?

Well, the tutee who told me I wasn’t helpful because I couldn’t tell him what to do after a half dozen failed attempts to get him to stay on topic long enough to explain his idea to me... That was a bad one. But on the other hand, there was the IMP applicant who came in with big ideas and left with solid outlines and notes for a proposal we were both really excited about. That was a good one.

What will you be doing after graduation?

Working in Bloomington, catching up on subpop culture, contemplating chickens and advanced degrees.

How has working at WTS prepared you for the “real” world?

It has given me new communication skills, aided in my earning of editing credentials, added two years of uninterrupted employment to my resume, and given me exposure to the

diverse ways that people use writing, and also tutoring, in their work.

Major/ Minor: Major in Philosophy

How long have you worked for WTS?

I will have worked at WTS for a year. I’m in my second semester of it.

What is your best memory from WTS?

My best memory from WTS is a tutorial I had at Forest with a Korean student who managed to write a hilarious W131 paper. We worked on the play on words the whole time.

Most Memorable Tutorial?

See above... It was a good tutorial.

What will you be doing after graduation?

I will be boarding the luxury bullet train to success city: next stop, the top! Ha ha, yeah right. Seriously though, I will be touring the U.S.A. with my rock band, Prizzy Prizzy Please on the “Babe-O-Rama `08” tour.

How has working at WTS prepared you for the “real” world?

WTS has honed my analytical ability. Diagnosing a paper and actually communicating the diagnosis is a challenge, and as I see it, the fundamental problem of this job. The kind of practice we tutors get with writing by working in the lab is invaluable. It has improved my writing and clarified my thoughts.



Emma Young



Ted Wells



Joe Roy

The scientists of WTS

Three WTS tutors majoring in sciences share thoughts on academic backgrounds and tutoring styles

Erin McGuan

Abstract

This report attempts to explore the lives of three peer writing tutors majoring in the Sciences and to discover the advantages and obstacles they face tutoring in other disciplines.

Intro

Most people, students and even at times professors, assume that all WTS tutors are English majors. As most of the tutors know, this is far from the truth. Though we all come from different areas, one discipline that few tutors hail from is the Sciences. At WTS we have a total of three “hard” science tutors, all undergrad, specializing in the areas

of biology, psychology, neuroscience, and biochemistry. This study is being performed in order to analyze the nature of these science tutors and learn their singularities. In this report, it is hypothesized that although science tutors study other fields not normally associated with writing, in fact these tutors are much like the better documented humanities tutors.

Materials and methods

In order to prove my hypothesis, I have conducted a survey of the science tutors to learn about their respective disciplines as well as their personal tutoring styles. Josh Robinson, Lisa Huang and Chris Frisz are the three science majors that

WTS currently employs. These three have kindly donated their time to my research on the fascinating nature of the “Science Tutor.” I have based my results and discussion on the data I received from their completed surveys.

In addition, while it seems every tutor has his or her standard good and bad tutoring examples, these three tutors have had so few science tutorials, no experience can even be taken as paradigmatic. Even the tutorials they have had have been “unremarkable.”

Results

As tutors, we do not see very many science related papers. On average, Josh, Lisa and Chris all said that they have seen about three to four science papers or lab reports per year. Most peer tutors are given some short training on how to tutor lab reports, but not much time is spent on this because there really is little need. When asked why we do not see these types of papers, these three responded differently but basically along the same line.

While Lisa believes we do not have the correct understanding of these papers and thus students do not see us as useful, both Josh and Chris believe that students in the sciences do not think they need the help since lab reports have a fairly standard rubric. “People don’t tend to take science writing seriously, and they don’t think there’s any reason to try to make it good, which is actually a huge problem in science writing, even in graduate papers,” said Chris.

One thing that all three tutors agree on is the fact that tutoring science papers



Peer tutor Chris Frisz helps a student on her English paper at the Teter ASC. Because of his academic training in science, he often breaks down students' papers into sections like a lab report to help the students better understand basic concepts of writing.



Peer tutor Josh Robinson evaluates his biology experiment in the lab. While he is a course-specific tutor in science, he mainly tutors English composition papers.

is fundamentally different than tutoring English papers. Since most science papers tutors see are lab reports, the format is essentially the same. This format is reflected in the design of article you are reading.

This type of writing differs from English papers in that the prose is much more straightforward and direct. Josh explains that the approach is “short and sweet...trying to get the point across in as few words as possible.” Unlike English

papers, which require thinking creatively and analytically in several paragraphs of supporting evidence, science papers, as Lisa explains, have “only a few right answers, and to understand the material requires a straightforward, logical explanation...Science is more ‘hit or miss,’ much like math is.”

Because of their expertise in scientific writing, Josh, Lisa and Chris believe their personal tutoring styles are unlike other tutors’ approaches. All three tutors find

that they are more straightforward in their tutoring styles. To Chris’s advantage, he sections papers he tutors like he would a lab report to organize the parts of the assignment and make more sense of it. As Lisa states, since most papers peer tutors see are basic writing assignments, not having a comprehensive background in writing does not hurt her at all.

But although these tutors are more than qualified for their positions at WTS, all three unanimously agree that students would treat them differently if they knew that they were science majors.

Josh says he can usually recover from the look of “why are you tutoring me in writing?” even though the demeanor of the tutorial might have changed. Usually they all can get around this dilemma by just avoiding the question or explaining to the student that it is unimportant to the tutorial, as they are just as competent as any English major tutor.

Discussion

Since we see so few science papers, the question arises whether or not we even need to emphasize special training for these tutorials. As Josh says “until we see an increase in the amount of science papers at WTS, our tutors’ common sense can get them where they need to go in science tutorials.”

On the other hand, Chris believes that promoting help at WTS for science papers can especially help the students in this discipline: “I think it would be good if we could encourage science majors to see us because if they could write lab reports that were inherently good instead of ‘good enough’ or ‘good for a lab report,’ they would not only get good grades, but contribute to improving writing in science as a whole.”

References

Josh Robinson: biochemistry
 Lisa Huang: psychology, neuroscience
 Chris Frisz: biology, computer science

Calling Indianapolis home

After graduation, many peer tutors find jobs and homes in nearby Indianapolis. Here's an update on a few of those tutors choosing to stay near Bloomington.

Emma Young

Around this time of year, a handful of peer tutors usually begin worrying about post-graduation plans. Hordes of students are waiting to hear from Teach For America or graduate programs, *By Our WTS* is publishing

after leaving the halls of Ballantine. It would seem there is plenty to do even for those who remain in the area. In fact, many past WTS tutors stay very close to Bloomington and find jobs just 45 miles north in Indianapolis.

Kehla West is a graphic designer and copyeditor at the Palladium-Item newspaper in Richmond, Indiana. Her WTS experience comes into play on a daily basis as she spends most of her time “fixing comma errors and trying

to shoehorn long articles into small spaces.” Outside of her copyediting job, West spends time with her family and is also attending a citizen’s police academy.

“We get to do SWAT training and fire a machine gun,” she said. She’s also “trying to find a part-time translating gig somewhere around town.”

Others follow different paths. Jon Zarich leads a double life by talking to legislators about insurance by day and studying law (contracts and property) by night. Somewhere in there he also gets to go home to Katie Zarich, his fellow WTS-alum spouse.

Katie, currently in her last semester of law school, is in Indianapolis working as the PR Manager at the Indianapolis Museum of Art.

“My experiences at WTS help me daily in my work. I have to be very diplomatic at communicating with a



WTS alumnis Jon and Katie Zarich are living in Indianapolis and holding full-time jobs while finishing up law school. (photo donated)

senior profiles, and nagging relatives and hallway acquaintances are asking about future plans.

Whether plans are firm or not, it may be comforting to know that there actually is data on what real people—or, at least, real tutors—do

Many tutors choose jobs that apply their WTS skills. Peggy Larkin functions as “the entire English/Language Arts department” at an Indy charter high school and credits WTS for helping her build a vigorous department.

lot of people," she explained.

But some WTS alumni have taken even more dubious paths. "I've joined the evil empire in West Lafayette as an Assistant Professor and am being inundated daily with clumsy but unceasing propaganda on "Boiling Up!," whatever that is," said Bill Watson.

Kelly Colby enjoys living in a "1930s Sears Kit Home in a historic neighborhood of Indianapolis." Her home was "featured on the annual Meridian Kessler Home & Garden Tour in 2006." She and her husband continue to be involved in the

tour, which "showcases the unique architecture" of their Indianapolis neighborhood. Renovating their home has now become a favorite pastime.

Although Colby and her husband seem to love Indianapolis as a place to live, they love to travel, and have recently visited Denver, San Francisco, the Dominican Republic, and Jamaica.

"This month we are heading to Los Cabos, Mexico for some much needed fun in the sun," she said.

Most exciting of all, WTS alumni not only join existing institutions, but they also channel their powers into

new creations. Larkin is gearing up to expand English classes at her school, while Watson is working to get a video game lab built for his college. While many WTS alums move far away after graduation, many find places close to Bloomington to put their past tutoring skills to work everyday.

(Brandon Haffner also contributed to this article.)



Kelly Colby and her husband stop for a photo at Twin Peaks (photo donated).

WTS Snapshots

Clockwise from top: Peer tutors Robyn Klingerman, Joe Roy, and Maggie Grimason “represent” WTS at Briscoe ASC (*middle-right*). Peer tutor Erin McGuan speaks to tutors-in-training during the Tutor Jamboree (*bottom*). WTS Director JoAnn Vogt, CWP Director Laura Plummer and graduate tutor Laura Stokes answer questions during the Tutor Jamboree (*middle-left*). Peer tutors listen to a panel on ESL tutoring during a working group meeting.



Our WTS Alumni Directory

1992

Doug Anderson
Chicago, IL
dcanders27@yahoo.com

Angela (Zahn) Tharp
Bloomington, IN
anzahn@indiana.edu

1996

Sarah (Gliemmo) Nichols
Sacramento, CA
curioussjg@yahoo.com

Tracy (Jensen) May
Chicago, IL
gifro75@gmail.com

Elisa (Overholtzer) Maxwell
Rochester, NY
elisa_maxwell@urmc.rochester.edu

Jonathan Purvis
Bloomington, IN
jpurvis@indiana.edu

1997

Jeremy Davies
New York, NY
jdavies@nyc.rr.com

Christy Doherty
Los Angeles, CA
siob.doherty@gmail.com

Alex Kahn
Bamberg, Germany
alaxander_kahn@hotmail.com

Bill Watson
Indianapolis, IN
colts_fan76@hotmail.com

1998

Jamie Aprile
Los Angeles, CA
jamieaprile@yahoo.com

Erin (Elkins) Radcliff
Albuquerque, NM
eradclif@unm.edu

Abby (Hunt) Ghering
Gahanna, OH
abbyandrob@sbcglobal.net

Ebony Utley
Long Beach, CA
utley@hotmail.com

1998

Jennifer (Beyer) Wilkey
Cincinnati, OH
jenniferwilkey@yahoo.com

Dana (Miller) Malkus
St. Louis, MO
danamill@sbcglobal.net

2000

Heather Danielewicz
Chicago, IL
tothequeenuh@yahoo.com

Alison Lefkovitz
Chicago, IL
alefkovi@uchicago.edu

Kelly (McShane) Colby
Indianapolis, IN
kelly@colbyequipment.com

Allison Mikkalo
Brooklyn, NY
acmikkal@hotmail.com

Heather (Murphy) Coddington
Milford, CT
heather.m.coddington@gmail.com

2001

Katie (Beyer) Zarich
Indianapolis, IN
katiezarich@yahoo.com

Geoff McGregor
Bloomington, IN
gmcgrego@indiana.edu

Kyle Springman
Rochester, MN
kspringman@gmail.com

Garth Stahl
London, England
garth_stahl@hotmail.com

Bill Trovinger
Pleasanton, CA
btrovuu@aol.com

2002

Jae Chung
Bloomington, IN
jachung@indiana.edu

Lisa Inks
Brooklyn, NY
lisa.inks@gmail.com

Alexis Pool
Evanston, IL
sixela0307@mac.com

Michael Quilligan
Silver Spring, MD
mquillig@yahoo.com

Chris (Sego) Caldwell
Indianapolis, IN
csego@iupui.edu

Jen (Woodall) Johnston
Bloomington, IN
jenjohnston@mac.com

Theresa Yaecker
Chicago, IL
tyaecker@gmail.com

Jon Zarich
Indianapolis, IN
jzarich@indiana.edu

2003

Emily Ragsdale
Evanston, IL
ecragsdale@gmail.com

Emily Sekine
Brooklyn, NY
elsekine@gmail.com

2004

Adrienne Carroll
Bloomington, IN
adrienne.carroll@gmail.com

Greg Ingram
Bloomington, IN
rgingram@indiana.edu

Michael-Lyn McBride
Lompoc, CA
micha224@yahoo.com

Peggy Larkin
Indianapolis, IN
mslarkin@gmail.com

Cameron Oehler
Carmel, IN
coehler@gmail.com

Kehla West
Indianapolis, IN
kehlawest@gmail.com

2005

Lauren Belles
Arlington, VA
laurenbelles@gmail.com

Martha Hunt
Arlington, VA
marthunt@gmail.com

2006

Gamble Kersey
Ulsan, South Korea
gamblek15@gmail.com

Jason Covert
Bloomington, IN
jmcovert@indiana.edu

“What’s Up” with our WTS alumni?



I am teaching full-time (both English and sociology) at a secondary school in inner-city London. I am also doing my PhD part-time at University of Cambridge, just completing year one of five. In September, I went to Swansea, Wales and did all the Dylan Thomas sites.

-Garth Stahl



This spring I traveled to New York and Anaheim with my students to accept awards for work in scholastic journalism. My husband and I are looking forward to celebrating our daughter Carson's first birthday in late April and our upcoming vacation to Aruba.

-Sarah Nichols

INDIANA UNIVERSITY BLOOMINGTON

Campus Writing Program
Franklin Hall 008, 601 E. Kirkwood Ave.
Bloomington, IN 47405
Phone: (812) 855-4928

Please Visit Our Website:
www.indiana.edu/~ByOurWTS

The *By Our WTS* website, developed by Geoff McGregor, is currently under construction. Our plan is to make it possible for alumni to log in to the site, update contact information via the provided form, and share pictures with others.

We hope you will keep in touch and check back often!