



# The Amplifier

Plug into news that informs and encourages

December 2016

*The holiday season is near, a time when thoughts turn to family. It is fitting that this issue of The Amplifier features pieces about family. Angel Pantoja's ode to his immigrant parents, "Mis Heros," is the winner of the LTS Latin Heritage Month essay contest. In "Weeds, Wood, and Words" Eddie Viens of "Eddie's Enigmas" shares his childhood summer with the family member who instilled in him his love of puzzles, puns, and wordplay. And this month's book selection by C.J. Shea, Rosa Lee, examines a more sobering picture of family life that is far too common and too easily overlooked at any season (and perhaps even more so during the next four-to-eight years).*

## Mis Héroes

As I thought about the question of who was the most influential person in our culture, I realized they had to do something that allowed for our culture to survive and thrive. The history books include figures like Emiliano Zapata, Benito Juarez, and Cesar Chavez. And rightly so: these men contributed a lot to better the lives of our people. However, no one has had more of a direct influence than our *jefitos*. These unsung heroes migrated from their homes and fought for their and our survival in a foreign and hostile land. And while nobody is writing biographies for Linda and Serafin Pantoja they deserve as much credit for keeping our culture alive as those historical figures.

Their story began in the dirt poor *ranchito de El Ojo De Agua* in the state of *Guanajuato, Mexico*. The difficulties of poverty only served to unify their families; everybody had to rally around each other and depend on each other for their survival. Those hardships forged the morals and values that came over with them as they immigrated to this country. The very principles they earned through their blood, sweat, and tears, they generously bestowed to their children. The three main values that were instilled in us were the importance of family, the importance of work ethic, and the importance of honesty. These three values have become so ingrained in our culture that most of the world associates Mexicans with them. Our culture is known for always having our entire family tree in one house. We are recognized as hard workers, which is why our services are in high demand for most laborer jobs. And our trustworthiness and honesty are the reasons that other privileged races trust us to

maintain their homes and watch (rear) their kids. I know it sounds like I just promoted stereotypes, but my point is that we are responsible with the opportunities that are available to us. We need to recognize that our generation is benefitting from the groundwork laid out by the generations that came before us.

Linda and Serafin Pantoja are the embodiment of these values. They selflessly shared their home with our aunts, uncles, and cousins. At one point we had eight other family members living with us—twelve people in a small bungalow. And within a few years they all had their own homes; it was that initial help that allowed them to save enough money so that they could purchase their own houses. But we never saw our cramped conditions as a burden; in the summer we would all gather together in the backyard and eat *carne azada*. And even though the entire family got together for holidays, birthdays, *bautizos*, *la primera comunión*, *quinceañeras*, and funerals, we didn't need a specific reason to celebrate being a family.

I can personally attest to Linda and Serafin's work ethic, because I had the opportunity to work with both of them. I worked a summer at Popeye's Chicken on 26<sup>th</sup> and California. My mom was the assistant manager, but she did everything: took the orders, made the orders, made the best biscuits you'll ever eat, cleaned, and had to deal with unruly customers. After her shift she looked like she had run a marathon. Then she would head home and start her other fulltime job of maintaining the house, while dealing with three unruly males who were demanding her time and attention for things they could have done themselves. My father spent years inside a *fabrica* doing dirty and tiring work only to be unceremoniously laid-off. He then started driving a truck, and while that meant more money for the family it also meant that he had to sacrifice his time with us. I used to wonder why the old man was gone twelve to fifteen hours a day. My question was answered when I was expelled from high school and my dad gave me the choice of going to work or leaving the house, and he let me be his copilot for a couple of weeks. You might wonder, "What's so hard about driving a truck?" When you get paid per load there is an anxiety about getting the better-paying loads or even getting enough loads to justify the hours spent in a truck as opposed to being at home with family. And working the night shift wears on you physically and psychologically; it leaves you disoriented and fatigued. But it was this sacrifice that paid for the house that allowed our family to prosper.

*Continued on next page*

**Mis Héroes**—continued

Both of them have an untarnished integrity. Honesty was an inseparable part of their character. They not only spoke the truth but they treated everyone with fairness and generosity. Their actions mirrored their values even through the most difficult times. They refused to take shortcuts in life; they wouldn't even consider accepting government aid. They didn't want to accept a handout, because they were able to work and provide for themselves—they didn't want to cheat the government. If only we all thought that way. My father always told me to give to others without ever expecting anything in return. He can't stand people who attach strings to every favor they do for someone. My mother taught me to share with those who don't have anything, even if I only had a little bit myself. It took me a while to appreciate and apply the lessons they taught me, but they will be the lessons that I pass down to my kids.

As we all know, our culture is so rich, and the best way to experience it is to get a taste of it through our food. Every Sunday my dad would go buy *carnitas* and *chicharrones*, and fresh *tortillas*. Sometimes if I woke up early enough I would go with him and we would have a couple of *tacos* in the car before we even started heading home. But when I didn't wake up I would be gently nudged out of my sleep by the heavenly smell of fried pork the moment he stepped foot in the house. And as we all know *pozole* and *tamales* are a staple at every holiday. I will admit to feeling both sadness and rage whenever our menu says that we are eating "Spanish" rice. I remember my *jefita* used to make the best *arroz mexicano* on the planet. It was colorful, flavorful, and fluffy—and by far a whole lot tastier than the plain white rice other cultures serve. We were not a fast food family; *mi jefita* slaved over the stove serving food and flipping *tortillas* over a *comal*. Yes, we sometimes only got *bistec con frijoles* but we also had *caldo de res*, *espinazo*, *quesadillas*, *barbacoa*, *menudo*, *chiles rellenos*, *tacos de lengua*, *tacos de cabeza*, and all the *salsas* that accompany each meal: *salsa verde*, *pico de gallo*, *salsa de molcajete* and the hundreds of other fiery variations. And every good movie has to have a good soundtrack, and this one does. All through out the day the radio was playing. Because of *los jefitos*, I got to experience the music of Vicente Fernandez, Ramon Ayala, Los Tigres Del Norte, Los Bukis, and hundreds of other artists. And each one of them has a way of speaking to me; if we are honest they have a way of speaking to all of us. I know a lot of us can still remember songs that are 30-40 years old, because they never went out of style and they have attached themselves to our soul. I was 10 years old when I heard Banda El Recodo's "El Niño Perdido" and I fell in love with the trumpet and I ended up learning how to play; it turns out I inherited the Hernandez music gene—*gracias Jefita y abuelo* Ruben. This music still allows me to escape from this place. I can't wait to come home so I can dance some *norteñas* with my wife and I can teach my daughter what good music sounds like.

And if we think about it none of us would have our memories or hopes if it wasn't for the direct influence of our *jefitos*. I never met Zapata and I don't know what Benito Juarez did, but I will never forget what Linda and Serafin did for me or our family. Their efforts and legacy will not be forgotten; I will pass down their lessons, morals, values and love to my future generations—now that's influential.

—Angel Pantoja

*The EJP Critical Climate Initiative seeks to foster more humane and sympathetic social discourse. In past semesters it has introduced students to the concept of microaggressions. As this reprint from the Weekly Standard indicates, there is a greater variety of subtle aggressions we can be mindful of and seek to avoid as we go about our studies and other activities.*

**MICROAGGRESSION:** Social interaction that unintentionally causes harm through the targeting of a Marginalized Person or group.

*Example:* "You don't act like a gay dude."

*Explanation:* Implies that LGBTQ people share certain behavioral traits. Assumes gender identity.

**NANOAGGRESSION:** Social interaction that unintentionally causes harm through cultural appropriation.

*Example:* Setting off fireworks.

*Explanation:* Historians generally agree that gunpowder is a Chinese invention; its use by persons of non-Chinese ancestry is a form of imperialist confiscation.

**PICOAGGRESSION:** Social interaction that may or may not cause harm through an effort to be of service and does not target a Marginalized Person or group.

*Example:* Helping a height-challenged person reach an object on a high shelf.

*Explanation:* Implies that short people can't use stools.

**FEMTOAGGRESSION:** Social interaction that may or may not cause harm and is intended to communicate a positive message.

*Example:* "Wow, love your shirt!"

*Explanation:* Not everyone appreciates social interaction. Of those who do, not all are comfortable with or skilled in receiving compliments. Of those who are, not all place value on personal adornment and may be wearing clothing simply to conform to social conventions and applicable ordinances concerning public nudity. Of those who do place value on personal adornment, not all may feel the particular shirt they are wearing merits being singled out for praise.

**ATTOAGGRESSION:** Social interaction that displays concern for another's well-being.

*Example:* Performing the Heimlich maneuver.

*Explanation:* Denies the agency of the person who is choking to death. Invades personal space. Entails physical contact without explicit verbal consent.

**ZEPTOAGGRESSION:** Social interaction that produces a marked increase in well-being for a large number of Marginalized Persons.

*Example:* Using military force to stop genocide.

*Explanation:* When performed by a NATO member, reinforces stereotype of Western "saviors" "rescuing" indigenous peoples from oppression.

**YOCTOAGGRESSION:** Social interaction that produces a marked increase in well-being for the entire human race.

*Example:* Eradicating smallpox.

*Explanation:* Epitomizes humanist arrogance; otherizes viruses, reinforces teleological logocentrism, the "scientific method," and other tools of oppression; marginalizes Gaia-centered belief systems.

*--reprinted from Weekly Standard, with a salute from The Amplifier editors*

# Weeds, Wood, and Words

Grampy, an only-child, was born on his father's dairy farm in 1899. He went to school through eighth grade in nearby Orrington, Maine, and married a classmate from the neighboring farm. Grampy's "spread," as my mother called it, contained twenty acres and not many more cows. He lived and worked there for nearly 50 years.

My mother was born in 1927, in the same room as her father had. She was the youngest of three children; all were girls who married and left the farm during World War II. Grampy's parents died in their sleep in 1946, weeks apart. Two years later, his wife was felled by some eerie malady that the country doctor had no chance against. She was buried next to her in-laws, near the tree line.

I guess Grampy couldn't stand the thought of staying on alone, with just the cows, the cats, and the small graveyard for company. He sold the farm and bought a house on one acre in Templeton, Massachusetts. The gentle hills and relative warmth allowed for a longer growing season than did the rugged terrain of central Maine. Grampy came to enjoy his vegetable garden more than he had ever liked his farm. He ate some of the produce and sold the rest to his neighbors. This modest and unreported income, augmented by his social security checks, provided for Grampy's needs.

I was nine years old in 1960, and had lived in Boston since birth. Though Templeton was only two hundred miles away, I had never met my grandfather. Mom had been furious when Grampy sold the farm, because her mother's remains had to be disinterred and relocated. Mom and Grampy never spoke again. It was with some surprise, therefore, that I learned that I would be spending the summer with Grampy. My parents were taking a trip through Europe and—despite the estrangement—Mom trusted her father to take good care of me. But it was Dad, not Mom, who called Grampy with the request, and it was Dad who rode the train with me to Templeton.

The man who met us at the station had the biggest hands I'd ever seen. One held his baseball cap while the other reached down to shake mine. "You must be Eddie," he said. "I'm Tom, but you can call me Grampy." The pleasant voice and friendly brown eyes instantly reassured me. His face was suntanned except for two inches of white skin below a full head of short white hair. He wore thick-soled oxfords with white socks, and faded farmer's jeans over a flannel shirt. Grampy was broad shouldered and perhaps two inches over six feet. Well-corded forearms extended from rolled-back sleeves. Dad put my suitcase down, thanked my grandfather and admonished me, then headed for the opposite platform to await the return train. Grampy and I climbed into his pickup truck for the short ride to his house.

The garden demanded one's admiration at first sight. More shapes and colors than I knew existed formed a patchwork quilt

that swept from the street to the back alley. The house was far less flamboyant, with white siding and yellow shutters, topped by a one-peak roof and a single chimney. Upon entering, I found four rooms—living room, bedroom, bathroom, and kitchen. Above was an attic; below, a full basement which included the guest room.

I learned early in my stay that Grampy had three passions: gardening when the sun shone, woodworking when the rain fell, and always—always—word games and word puzzles. Like a modern-day Tom Sawyer, he effortlessly persuaded me to participate in all three. I never noticed that I was working and thinking all day long.

The garden had already been planted before I arrived, so most of the work was weeding. Grampy and I would start at the front and, three hours later, reach the back. Repeat every two days, or as needed. And after a few rainy days in a row, weeding was badly needed.

Grampy had crafted most of the furniture in the house. He had no power tools, but plenty of skill. Grampy wanted each project to be a new challenge. For example, the four chairs in the kitchen were not a matched set. It was my good fortune that he did not play chess or checkers, or he might not have made the chessboard that I still own. Created from a few strips of maple and walnut, it was and is a thing of beauty.

All summer long, whether we were weeding, varnishing, or eating, Grampy peppered me with questions about anagrams, palindromes, and other quirks of language. Some of the puzzles were easy. Whose name is an anagram of "Heil Rat"? A. Hitler, of course. Others were mind wrenching. What word begins with and ends with "he"? I had a headache before I figured that one out. When I came up with a correct answer, Grampy laughed with delight. When I was baffled, he gave me hints but never the solution. I did more thinking in those two months than during the entire school year.

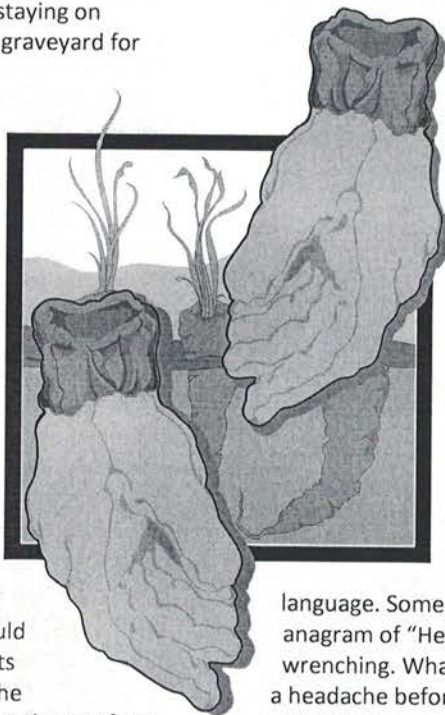
Near the end of August, Dad came to Templeton to retrieve me. At the train station, Grampy handed me a sailboat—complete with mast, sails, and keel—carved from a single block of maple. Neatly lettered on the stern was the name, "Adverse Wind." Somewhere between Templeton and Boston, I realized that the name on the sailboat was an anagram of my own name.

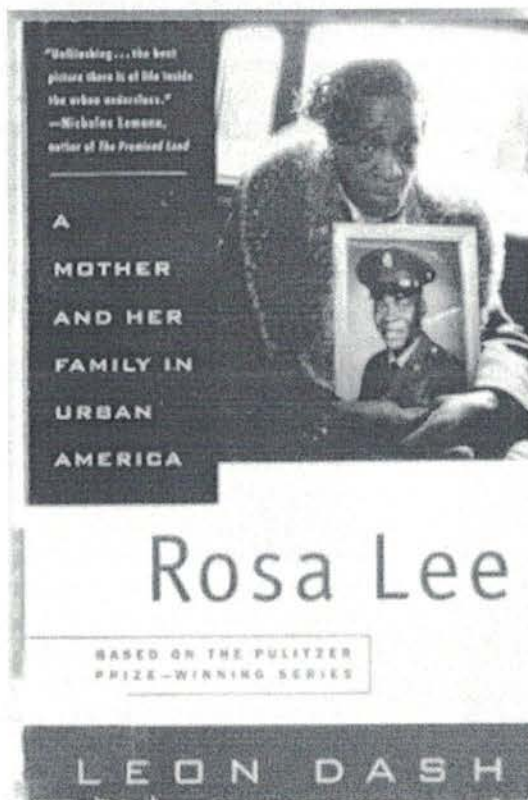
I never saw Grampy again. He died that winter, and I wasn't allowed to skip school for the funeral. My two months with Grampy in his garden and woodshop failed to transfer either of those skills to me. I am still all thumbs, and none of those thumbs are green. But Grampy's infatuation with the strange symmetry of words infected me for life. I thought of him recently when I stumbled across a palindrome in Dutch. I know that Grampy would have loved this one. In fact, he probably knew it:

"Mooi, dit idioom!"

("Beautiful, this language!")

—Edward Viens





Recently at an EJP discussion on politics and political activism, I listened to one of the most fascinating individuals I have ever met. Leon Dash, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, blew us all away. The very next day I rushed to the library to check out his book *Rosa Lee*. It is a poignant look into the lives of a woman and her family surviving in the netherworld of the Washington D.C. slums.

Dash, an emeritus professor of journalism at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, sits on the EJP advisory council where he provides guidance on fundraising, nomination, and other strategic planning. Just this past August, he was inducted into the National Association of Black Journalists Founders Hall of Fame. Dash and 43 other journalists founded the NABJ in 1975, in part to address the absence of a black voice in newspapers and broadcast media.

Much like his life in journalism, Dash's literary career has been centrally motivated by a commitment to social justice. He immerses himself in the culture of those on the margins of society and gives readers an intimate look into their lives. For his literary debut, *When Children Want Children: The Urban Crisis of Teenage Childbearing*, Dash moved to a cockroach-infested apartment in the Washington Highlands projects where he spent a year absorbed the lives of teen mothers. By gaining this intimate perspective, Dash was able to construct a powerful portrayal of the young women behind the statistics.

*Rosa Lee* is every bit as urgent and authentic as *When Children Want Children*. It stems from "Rosa Lee's Story: Poverty and Survival in Washington," Dash's Pulitzer Prize-winning series of articles that ran on the front page of the *Washington Post* September 18 - 25, 1994. For four intense years he followed Rosa Lee Cunningham, her children, and five of her

suspected 32 grandchildren. The resulting story will shock even those who think they have seen it all.

Dash transports us to the living room of a project apartment where heroin is injected, stolen goods are sold, and a prostitute propositions her customers. Day after day he returns to the scene to ask the players in this drama what led them to this point and what options they feel are available. During one unsettling interview with Rosa Lee's daughter Patty—one of three family members infected with HIV—Dash listened as she described how her mother prostituted her at only eleven years old. "The men was hurting me so bad I could have died." She said "But I seen how hard it was for her to take care of all of us. I love my mother and would do it all over again." This and many other soul-bearing confessions reveal the raw humanity of Rosa Lee and her family and evoke feelings of outrage.

In an inspiring turn, Dash meets two of Rosa Lee's sons who managed to avoid the ever-present lure of drugs and crime and instead forged productive lives in the working middle class. Both resisted their mother's lifestyle at an early age; "Alvin out of shame and humiliation about living on welfare and Eric out of anger and disgust with his mother's shoplifting." They show that it's possible to break the cycle even in the direst of circumstances.

In order to truly comprehend the environment that Rosa Lee was raised in, Dash got in his car and traveled hundreds of miles to the North Carolina plantation where Rosa spent her early childhood. He sought to understand why "many children and grandchildren from migrant families have prospered against insurmountable odds while some, like Rosa Lee, have become mired in lives marked by persistent poverty, drug abuse and periodic imprisonment." Upon his return he was able to convince Rosa to go with him, and together they traveled back to Rich Square, N.C. to talk to the people who knew Rosa Lee's parents and grandparents before they migrated from the area 63 years earlier. The revelations unearthed shed light on the mentality that is the driving force behind so many of Rosa Lee's life choices.

While some praise Dash's commitment to exposing a side of our society that many pretend doesn't exist, others say it gives the growing urban crisis the wrong kind of attention. They would rather see the story of someone who overcame a situation like Rosa Lee's and became a success. "My response to any complaints [is] simple," says Dash, "I wrote about Rosa Lee and her family because I am a black journalist uncomfortable and alarmed by the growing black underclass trapped in urban poverty, filling America's prisons, and shooting each other on the street rather than finishing high school." The revelations he shares are a shot of Narcan to the heart of all who have slipped into a nod due to the steady stream of sound bites and CNN newsbreaks reporting the conditions of our inner cities.

Finding viable solutions to the problems plaguing the underclass will never be simple. Reforming welfare doesn't stop drug trafficking; better policing doesn't end illiteracy; and better job training doesn't teach a young man or woman why it's wrong to steal. Mr. Dash, however, has brought us one step closer to a solution by helping us grasp the severity of the problem

—C.J. Shea.

## Submission Guidelines

Comments and submissions may be addressed to *The Amplifier* and placed in the EJP suggestion box or handed to Ms. Cumpston or a member of *The Amplifier* editorial staff.

Submissions may be in any legible format.

Submissions will be selected for publication according to:

- 1) EJP values and standards as outlined in the EJP handbook
- 2) Editorial needs

Submissions will be edited for clarity, length, and technical issues, using the *Chicago Manual of Style* and AP guidelines as authoritative. When possible, editing will be done in cooperation with the author, and greater latitude will be given to creative/personal pieces.

The deadline for the February issue is December 16.

*The Amplifier* is a publication by the students of the Education Justice Project, a unit of the University of Illinois, at Danville Correctional Center in Illinois.

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Letters to the editor may be submitted within Danville to the Suggestion Box in the EJP library; or submitted by mail to EJP, 403 E. Healey Street, Champaign, IL 61820.

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## Eddie's Enigmas— SAVED SEVENS

In the long division problem below, all of the digits have been replaced by asterisks except for the sevens and the zero. Reconstruct this mathematically correct problem.

$$\begin{array}{r}
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 0
 \end{array}$$

Rating = ●●●○○

Solutions to EDDIE'S ENIGMAS can be found on the bulletin boards in the Computer Lab and Resource Room 1.

## Attention Rapacious All-Consuming Locusts

I understand you all have unquenchable appetites for *single-sidedly* printing *page after page* of gratuitous nonsense, for devouring every drop of printer toner and every sheet of paper, like so many piglets at the teats of their withering yet ever-benevolent mother. But unfortunately for you, the smorgasbord has come to a close.

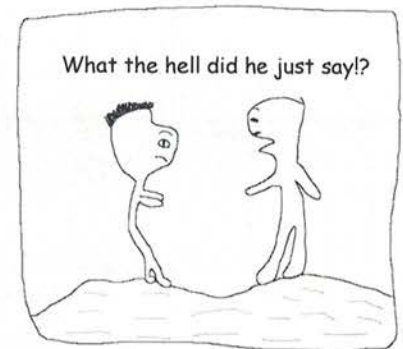
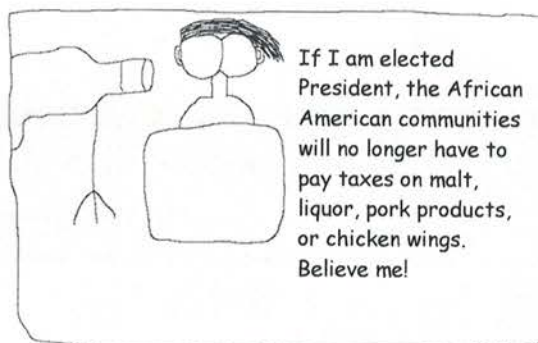
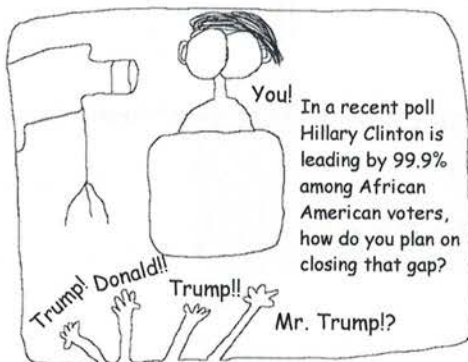
Due to budgetary constraints, the amount of printer toner that will be provided to EJP students will be reduced by half. Previously, two cartridges of printer toner a month were shuffled into your greedy maws. Now you'll have to make do with one. That is, *only one* cartridge of printer toner per month will be provided to EJP students. Additionally, *only one* case of paper per month will be provided.

To stretch the limited amount of toner and paper that we will now be afforded, do the following:

- Think before you print. (Do you really need a hard copy of this?)
- Set your printer to *Economode*
- Always print two-sided
- Use smaller fonts
- Be sure your text is single-spaced
- Make your margins smaller
- Reuse paper whenever possible

Unless you have an assignment that requires you to do otherwise, there is no reason why you shouldn't do these things. We all need to use the printer, and we are all limited now in our ability to do so. Respect that fact. If you don't know how to do any of these things, ask any member of the computer lab pit crew, and they will help you.

## This Was Funny a Month Ago... By Raylan Gilford



Updates to the calendar may be found in the EJP public documents December calendar!

# December

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
			8: 30a Intro to Python 11:30a Networking 5p Language Partners 5p Mindfulness	9a CAVE 9a Newsletter  5p For-credit courses: Finance II 199 Teaching & Learning 446 Ethical Theories 421 Environ Sustainability 370
5p WAMP	11:30a Certificate in Learning 5p Language Partners 5p Last day of instruction 5p WAMP 6p Final Academic Advising	9a CAVE	8:30a What Makes you Tick 12p Python Group 5p Language Partners 5p Mindfulness	9a CAVE 9a Newsletter 5p Funds of Knowledge
	11:30a SRR 5p Language Partners 6p Final Academic Advising	9a-2:30p Newsletter Retreat 5p Bioinformatics	8:30a Illinois Politics 11:30a Intro to Python 5p Language Partners 5p Mindfulness	9a CAVE 9a Newsletter
8:30a Mindfulness Retreat				

**SAVED SEVENS HINT**  
Start by calculating what three-digit numbers ending in 77 are a product of a two-digit number (the divisor) and a single digit (the left digit of the quotient).

Imagination is more important than knowledge.  
Albert Einstein (1879-1955)