

Michelle Boyd Waters

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June 16, 2015

Andrew W. Griffin
Red Dirt Report
717 NW 17th St.
Oklahoma City, OK 73103

Dear Mr. Griffin:

I am applying for the freelance writing positions you are advertising at RedDirtReport.com.

As a three-decade resident in all four quadrants of Oklahoma and descendent of pioneers from the southwest corner of our state, I have a unique understanding of the people and our culture outside of the Oklahoma City metro area. While I grew up in Moore, I have lived in the Blanchard, Enid, and Tulsa areas, and currently reside in the Noble Public School district, south of Lake Thunderbird.

Additionally, I have spent countless hours serving and getting to know the parents, children and educational needs of several communities in and around the metro area as a public school teacher and substitute for the past six years. I write about and reflect upon these experiences at MrsWatersEnglish.com.

My passion as a writer is telling the stories of interesting, down-to-earth Oklahomans who might not otherwise receive the accolades they deserve for their hard work, ingenuity, and grit. I began telling these stories as a student newspaper reporter for *The Jag Wire* at Westmoore High School, a reporter and editor for *The Bison* at Oklahoma Baptist University, and an award-winning writer for the *Shawnee News-Star*. I've also written for the *Lincoln County News* and *Guthrie News Leader*.

Prior to becoming a teacher, I owned and operated a home-based website design, hosting and content writing company for almost 10 years, which enabled me to work with and listen to clients from all over the world. But my first love is writing, and I would love to use my writing talents to share our tales.

People whose stories I'd love to tell include:

- A fire department chaplain with a rough past who runs a disaster relief distribution center out of a little church in Pink.
- A 2015 District Teacher of the Year recipient who has retired and is now serving as a teacher consultant at the Oklahoma Alliance for Geographic Education.
- The family who owns an amazing barbecue restaurant south of Davis, and another family that has worked in the newspaper industry for decades and now owns a small craft shop in the Bethel area.
- The school teacher whose family plays in a band that performs at a homeless feeding in downtown Oklahoma City once a month. The band has also performed and ministered to people in the Navajo Nation in New Mexico and Arizona, the Fort Belknap and Blackfeet Reservations in Montana, and locations around Oklahoma.

I am looking forward to discussing these ideas and others, and whether or not my work will be a good fit for your publication. Please email me at michelleboydwaters@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Michelle Waters

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OBJECTIVE:

I am a self-motivated, enthusiastic storyteller seeking freelance writing opportunities in Oklahoma publications.

QUALIFICATIONS:

- Won first and second place in Spot News category in the 1999 Carl Rogan Associated Press contest as a Shawnee News-Star reporter.
- Won first place in Feature Writing at the Oklahoma Collegiate Press Association contest while serving as an editor of *The Bison* at Oklahoma Baptist University in 1995.
- Served as editor-in-chief of *The Bison*, which won first place for general excellence at the OCPA contest in 1994 and 1995.
- Won first place in Editorial Writing and third place in News Writing at the OCPA contest in 1994.
- Published poem "Waterfall" in *Moment: OSU Writing Project Retreat Anthology* in 2015.
- Author of "The Power of an Online PLC" and "Oklahoma Educators Media Guide" special reports published at MrsWatersEnglish.com in 2014.
- Self-published "Online Discipleship: Writing Church Website Content To Foster Spiritual And Church Growth In Your Community" in 2013.

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY:

English Language Arts and Journalism Teacher Substitute Teacher

August 2009 – May 2015

Noble, Midwest City, and Bethel, Oklahoma

Taught writing at the high school and middle school levels while maintaining and writing for a teaching website. Produced and led staffs of yearbooks and other student publications.

Owner and Content Writer Watersweb Solutions LLC

February 2002 – August 2011

Noble, Oklahoma

Owned and managed web design, ecommerce and hosting company. Developed technical content for website and knowledgebase serving website design and hosting clients from around the world.

Reporter and Layout Editor Shawnee News-Star, Guthrie News-Leader, Lincoln County News

1993 – 1999

Shawnee, Guthrie, Chandler, Oklahoma

Reported on news and developed feature stories in several Oklahoma counties. Published articles on the Associated Press wire and in the Dallas Morning News. Served as freelance writer for the Edmond Evening Sun.

EDUCATION:

Bachelor of Arts in Journalism, Oklahoma Baptist University, 1996

Completed 25 hours in Practical and Effective Writing Skills at Moore Norman Technology Center

Completed 30 hours in Professional Writing – The Novel at Moore Norman

HONORS, AWARDS and MEMBERSHIPS:

Honors

Nominated, Del Crest Middle School Teacher of the Year, 2014
Host, Product Sellers Talk Radio, 2007-2010
Guest Host, DivaTalkRadio.com, May 2010
Guest Speaker, WorkAtHomeSuccess.com, 2010
Guest Speaker, Moore Chamber of Commerce, July 2009
Guest Speaker, Create A Thriving Business, 2008
Guest Speaker, WAHM Talk Radio, 2006
Guest Speaker, HBWTalkRadio.com, 2006

Awards

Third Place, Investigative Reporting Division, Oklahoma Collegiate Press Association, 1996
Second Place, Opinion Writing, High School Writing Contest, Rose State College, 1991

Memberships

Sisters in Crime Mystery Writers Organization
Oklahoma Council for Teachers of English
International Reading Association

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The Dallas Morning News

3 Oklahoma students are toying with hobby of dealing in wheels
Michelle Boyd Shawnee News-Star
Published: November 3, 1994

SHAWNEE, Okla. - When three Oklahoma Baptist University students say they like to buy and sell their toys, they're not talking about stuffed animals. Lori Hendon, Sheri Walden and Karla Buchanon are talking motorcycles, dune buggies and boats.

The women buy their vehicles - toys, as they call them - below resale price, then check the blue book price and sell the vehicles to make a profit. "If the resale is \$890, we sell for \$800," Ms. Buchanon said.

Ms. Hendon started the "hobby" when she first came to the university. She would buy a bike for a good deal, then sell it for more than she paid for it, but less than the resale price.

Later, when Ms. Walden and Ms. Buchanon joined her, they were able to pool their money and make larger profits.

"It's neat to get your money back," Ms. Walden said. "You feel like you're rich."

The women say they did not put much money into the deals.

"People think we're rich," Ms. Hendon said. "We've absolutely put no money into it."

They have bought a boat, a dune buggy and four motorcycles, Ms. Hendon said.

"I do the manipulating to get the deals we want," Ms. Hendon said.

Ms. Walden said that the hobby is a stress reliever.

"It induces my stress," Ms. Hendon said, laughing.

Ms. Walden and Ms. Buchanon said they like to work on the motorcycles, while Ms. Hendon helps by listening to the engines for problems.

"Lori is the wheeler-dealer and we're the fixer-uppers," Ms. Walden said.

Ms. Hendon said she helps pull the carburetor sometimes and that watching the other women work on her bike makes her nervous, though she said Ms. Buchanon and Ms. Walden can "fix anything."

"When her bike threw a starter clutch, the labor would have cost \$200 (at a motorcycle shop)," Ms. Walden said. "We pulled it in one night in the kitchen."

They covered the kitchen floor with cardboard, drained the liquids from the engine outside and then took the engine apart inside.

"The first time we had to label everything," Ms. Hendon said. "We're past that now."

She said they can just take an engine apart and put it back together.

"The Honda we have now - we tore that thing apart, and now it's running again," Ms. Buchanon said.

Ms. Walden said they work well together.

Though the three women share a common interest, each had a different beginning.

Ms. Hendon said her parents wouldn't let her have a motorcycle when she was a child. An uncle was severely injured in a motorcycle accident.

"I always had go-carts and stuff," she said.

When Ms. Hendon first came to the university, she was riding a 70cc moped and promising her friends that she would have a sport bike "before it was all said and done."

Two semesters later, she had a Seca II sport bike, a boat and a Honda Night Hawk she shares with the others. She said her parents do not like it, but she's an adult now.

"I've always loved bikes," Ms. Hendon, who is from South Carolina, said. "I thought I was tough stuff when I had the moped."

Ms. Walden, from Bartlesville, Okla., said when she was a little girl, her father would take her to school on the back of his motorcycle.

"When I turned 14, they gave me a Honda Passport," she said. "Then I got a car and lost my interest (in motorcycles) until I came back to college."

Ms. Buchanon, who is from Salt Lake City, said she had no strong interest in motorcycles until she was a sophomore in college.

"I got hooked at being a passenger," Ms. Buchanon said. "I never had an interest to drive until this year."

She said she is learning how to drive the Honda Night Hawk now.

"I do laps in the Bailey Business Center parking lot when it's empty," she said.

Ms. Buchanon added that Harley Davidsons are becoming her favorite bikes.

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December 24, 1998

Section: Life

Wellston friends bring Christmas to needy family

MICHELLE BOYD WATERS

SNS Staff Writer

Advertisements portray Santa Claus as an aging, bearded, slightly overweight man who delivers toys to good children on Christmas eve with the aid of eight tiny reindeer pulling a sleigh.

But in Wellston, Santa sometimes turns out to be four women who graduated from the local high school together in 1978.

Debbie Collins, Sheila Danker, Shirley Estes and Casey Rackley get together each Christmas and purchase presents for a family's children at Christmas time.

This year, the women chose a family with three children who attend Luther Public Schools.

"This is one of our better years," Rackley said last week. "We're really excited. The family is needing help with food, so we're making sure they have Christmas dinner."

Rackley said her mother, who teaches at the Luther schools, heard about the family and told her about the 5-year-old and the 3-year-old twins.

"We just try to do a good deed when it needs to be done," said Rackley, an employee at National American Insurance Co. in Chandler.

Rackley said the family needed coats, sweatsuits and food.

"They didn't even ask for toys," Rackley said.

"But we got them a car load of toys," Estes added.

Collins, who works at Lagere and Walkingstick Insurance Co. in Chandler, said that seven years ago, Rackley asked the Wellston school system for the name of a child for whom the group could buy Christmas gifts.

"After Rackley committed us (to the project), she called us and told us," Collins said. "She asked us not to be mad at her."

"I do it all the time," Rackley said, laughing. "They always say yes (after I involve them in a project), too."

Danker, who works with the Oklahoma National Guard, and Estes, child nutrition director at Wellston schools, agreed to help with the project.

Rackley said the school clears the Christmas project with the parents and obtains lists of what the children need, their sizes and other information.

"We try hard to put a buffer between us and the parents," Rackley said. "We don't want the parents to feel obligated to us."

Rackley said Tuesday evening the Luther family only knows that a group of women from Wellston purchased the gifts.

Danker said they select the family in December and then go shopping, usually about the same time each year.

On shopping day, the women wear red and green cross-stitched sweatshirts Danker makes for them each year.

Collins said the women went shopping in Edmond on Dec. 6.

"We left about 10 a.m. and got home about 7 p.m.," Rackley said.

"That's early for us," Danker said. "But we were more organized this time. We knew where we were going first."

"With little kids, it's more fun," Rackley said. "It's easier."

"We know they will like anything," Danker said.

"I might add they got really good coats," Rackley said.

"Yeah, and look how it turned cold," Collins said.

Rackley's mother took the presents to Luther schools last week and the children's father took them home.

"Oh, but they don't have them yet," Rackley exclaimed. "Oh no."

"Well, maybe they opened those," Collins suggested.

Rackley nodded.

Collins added that a friend, Burle Collins, donated food to the family for Christmas dinner.

"When people hear about it (what we do) they like to help," Collins said.

"Oh, when we were shopping, we ran into some Wellston people," Estes added. "They knew what we were doing because they recognized us and our shirts."

"When we go out to Bev's (convenience store), the girl (at the cash register) said it doesn't seem like Christmas until we come in with our shirts on," Estes said.

"She let us cash any amount of checks we wanted to because she knew what we were doing," Rackley said.

The shopping trip is a tradition the women keep each year.

After the women purchase the gifts, they take the gifts and their own children to one of their homes and hold a wrapping party.

"The second part of our tradition is to get our kids involved, but we don't tell them who the gifts are for," Danker said.

"Every year we make them promise that when we die, they will take over this project," Rackley said.

Danker said that usually while the family's children are in school, she or Estes take the presents over to the home so the parents can place them under the Christmas tree.

"I think more people would do this if they'd do it as a group," Danker said. "We have fun doing it. Casey got us started, but it would not be Christmas without doing it now."

Danker added that the project opens their children's eyes to what they have.

"It's about making memories for them and for us," Rackley said. "I encourage people to do this. This is good. This is fun. It makes me feel good to help others."

"There is no down side," Danker said.

Rackley said the first year, they made a huge stocking for a girl with her name on it.

"It was about four feet long and one foot wide," Rackley said. "We stuffed it with gifts."

Danker said that another year they selected a girl who had been hit by a car and was recovering in a wheelchair.

"We bought her toys to play with and clothes she could get into while in the chair," Danker said.

Rackley added they have purchased gifts for children whose fathers had lost jobs or whose fathers were gone and did not support them.

Four Wellston women spend time each year shopping for and wrapping gifts for a needy family in the Wellston area. The women -- Casey Rackley, Debbie Collins, Sheila Danker and Shirley Estes -- graduated together from Wellston High School in 1978. They have been providing Christmas for a family each year for seven years.

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May 13, 1999

Section: Community

Twister fury MICHELLE BOYD WATERS SNS Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the first story of a three-part series describing the experiences of a Shawnee News-Star reporter on May 3. The reporter's families lived in the path of the twister that devastated Moore and other communities.

Tree skeletons reach their amputated limbs to the sky above the piles of rubble littering the ground where houses once stood. I had walked, biked and roller-skated these streets for more than a decade, but nothing looks the same the night after a killer twister rages through Moore.

I roll down the window of the car and stare out, past the cars littering Northwest 20th Street to a cluster of walls rising above a mound of debris that stretches into the night. That must be my grandma's house, I think. Then I realize she couldn't have survived. Tears run down my face as I sob uncontrollably. My whole family is gone. They couldn't have survived this massive destruction, I think.

Decision to leave

My husband, Steve, and I are headed to Homeland in Shawnee about 5 p.m. to buy hot dogs and buns when I switch the radio station to KXY and hear meteorologist Gary England instead of music.

England is telling listeners that a tornado warning is in effect for Grady County. He listens to tornado sightings from various storm chasers in the field. We note that the storm is headed northeast and figured it will probably hit Meeker, where we live, later in the evening.

I tell Steve we should hurry home before it starts raining. One of our dogs, Bongo, loves rain and likes to get soaked before running inside and leaving wet paw prints in his wake. Once home, we turn the television to Channel 9 and listen as the storm develops into a massive tornado and sweeps through Chickasha.

"This storm is tracking right up Interstate 44," England says. I hope it will disappear before it gets much further.

We watch video sent by the storm chasers as the 1/2-mile-wide tornado follows the interstate, right into the edge of Moore.

Shortly before it hits, Steve calls my parents, Herb and Judy **Boyd**, who live in the 800 block of Northwest 23rd Street.

"Tell them to get in the closet this time," I tell Steve. Last October, when a tornado swept through Moore, my parents watched it on television from the living room, never entering the closet. They were lucky. That storm didn't touch their home.

Dad tells us Mom is in the closet with their dog, Pepper, and he is headed in that direction. Steve tells Dad to call us as soon as the storm goes by and they hang up.

Then we wait.

"If you can't get underground, get out of the way of this killer tornado," England tells television viewers.

We watch the tornado's radar signature pass through a map of Moore on the television. Still no word. I page my sister, Kim, who I know is working at Wal-Mart in Moore. She is scheduled to work until midnight.

She calls us back in a few minutes. No, she hasn't heard from our parents. She is OK. Kim and the other Wal-Mart deli workers hid in the cooler as the tornado tore through town, but Wal-Mart did not sustain any damage. However, power is out. We tell her we will let her know as soon as we have word from our parents.

We call Mom and Dad, but no one answers. We try calling Grandma, who lives about five blocks away, but still no answer. Then we realize there will be no word. The power lines are down.

The only way to find out if my parents and my grandma are still alive is to go and search for them.

I call work, The Shawnee News-Star, and tell them my parents neighborhood has been hit by the tornado.

"We're going to go see if my parents and my grandma are OK," I tell the editor in charge that night. "If the tornado hits Lincoln County, send (another photographer) out to get pictures." I'm supposed to cover Lincoln County, but I believe family comes first. My husband calls his employer and tells him we might not be back in town Tuesday.

Then we load our dogs, Bongo and Sassy, into the car and head for the city.

We drive out of Meeker on U.S. Highway 62, headed west. Our plan is to take U.S.

Highway 177 to SH 9, to avoid the tornado that is now slashing through Midwest City and Del City, then head north into Moore on Interstate 35.

But as we're heading south on U.S. 177, England reports tornadoes southwest of Shawnee, blocking our planned path. So we head west on Interstate 40 and plan to exit onto Interstate 240.

Rain pummels our windshield as we fly down the interstate, swerving around the slower moving vehicles on the road. My husband is a road warrior, flashing past anyone in his path. We are not hysterical, just determined. We have to know.

Traffic backs up as we enter the east side of Oklahoma City on I-240. As we crawl forward in the traffic snarl, we realize we're driving through the debris path. Tufts of insulation litter the roadside. We wonder if this is what Meeker will look like when we return.

England has reported a tornado heading for Meeker. We hope all our neighbors are in the two storm cellars on our block.

"This is not a good sign," Steve says as we stare out at the debris. We drive over small tree limbs and leaves in the interstate and see large pieces of metal on the side of the road.

All three lanes are nearly at a standstill. We wonder around what could be stopping traffic up ahead. Then we see people driving down the shoulder to get to the Sunnylane exit. I notice people are headed south on the overpass at a fairly swift pace and urge Steve to take the exit. He heads for the shoulder, and I hope we can find our way through the destruction.

Sentry-like walls of the bathroom are all that remain of a home at 613 NW 20. Many of the homes on the north side of that street look the same. **Michelle Waters/SNS**