

July 21, 2010

To Whom It May Concern:

I'm so delighted to have the opportunity to endorse Lisa Baldwin. I have known Lisa since August of 2001, and I'll never forget the first time I laid eyes on her. She was at Appalachian State University's English Department's annual fall kick-off-the-semester get-together, playing guitar and singing with her husband, Dave Haney, the then-incoming Chair of the Department.

It was pretty clear back then, before I had even met her, that she was extraordinary. Her playing and singing were fabulous, and she had whatever that abstract certain people, in particular artists, sometimes exude – a kind of charisma. But when she so beautifully and plaintively performed the classic Stephen Foster tune, "Hard Times Come Again No More," one of my utter favorites, I nearly fell over – along with the rest of the English Department and miscellaneous guests.

Lisa and I became fast friends and that first glimpse of her has characterized my relationship with her. She is consistently dazzling, and I'm not the only person who will attest to this. I'd wager anyone who spends five minutes with her will come away with a similar impression – even if she's not expertly playing a guitar and singing beautifully. Not incidentally, she's a precocious songwriter as well, and was also a member of the North Carolina Arts Council's Touring Artist Roster (an elite group of artists across the state in various media).

I really got to know Lisa when I began visiting her classrooms. She invited me to West Wilkes Middle School in Wilkesboro, North Carolina to introduce poetry to her sixth graders. Two things were evident when I walked in the door: one, that the children had already been steeped in poetry by Lisa and were ready to go to work with real vigor and attentiveness; and, two, that that band of young students loved Ms. Baldwin. It was a terrific session - not because of what I did, but because of the preparation Lisa had engineered prior to my visit. It was clear that Lisa had built of her classroom a true community where respect, affection and intellectual curiosity were privileged. It is an epic understatement to say that Lisa is a gifted teacher. In the classroom, her warm and gracious personality is infectious. She approaches students as individuals, working doggedly to insure their comfort and scholarship, painstakingly preparing, and nurturing her students with a Spartan work ethic. She also has the pedagogical repertoire and constitution to meet the needs of a widely diverse population, including nontraditional learners, often in rural underserved communities, and often with little in the way of resources.

I also had the pleasure of visiting her classroom at Cove Creek Elementary School. Her same devotion to her students was in ample evidence there. In fact, she also once invited, along with me, Poet Gerald Barrax, ASU's 2004-05 Rachel Rivers Coffey Distinguished Professor of Creative Writing to conduct a poetry workshop. I remember riding back to ASU with Jerry. He vowed that he had never seen a teacher as wonderful as Lisa - he loved her students - and he was especially thunderstruck that Lisa had (literally) cooked her entire class a full breakfast there in her classroom, prior to our arrival, as part of an exercise she was doing with them.

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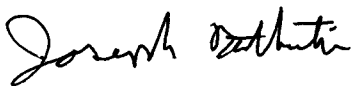
Lisa is a brilliant born teacher. Her rapport with students is unmatched. She allows them to see, in her inimitable exacting, though deferential and playful way, how they can exercise their intellects and their hearts in order to elevate their lives. Above all, she makes students aware of the world around them and the grand adventure that is theirs to harvest. Her students, unprompted, have confided to me on many occasions their love for her. In that same vein, parents have marveled at how Lisa has changed their children's lives, breathed into them a new appreciation of education and, what's more, made them more attuned to their potential as people and scholars.

Lisa is also herself a scholar of considerable mettle. She is widely read across a terrifically diverse swath of literature of various genres and from a wide range of regions. Her acumen, when it comes to music, particularly Blue Grass, is formidable. She is a student of visual art, and an expert in southern folklore. I could go on and on with the documented and anecdotal feats of Lisa Baldwin, but what is ultimately the most impressive thing about her is her humanity. She takes her act, and her social conscience, everywhere: not just into the schools where she has taught; but also, through her music, into colleges, universities, and libraries; and, most importantly and courageously, into the schools, shelters, churches, and storefronts.

You are in the advantageous position of employing an extraordinary artist-teacher-scholar who will more than repay your investment and will reflect honorably on your institution. Lisa is the kind of human being who makes huge differences in the lives of anyone with whom she comes in contact. She embodies a kind of penultimate paradigm of not only industry, but accomplishment as well. Above all, she is modest, a fine friend and companion, blessed with outrageous wit and generosity.

I recommend her with pride, admiration and great professional confidence. I can imagine no worthier candidate.

Yours truly,



Joseph Bathanti
Professor, Creative Writing