

PROMPTED TO WRITE



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Write To Be: An Introduction

Nancy Eichhorn

I believe in the transformational power of the writing process. Beyond the act of pen to paper, beyond the sensations we experience as we delve beneath the surface of safe stories—the ones we tell to explain ourselves to others—we find the real stories, the tales of who we truly are and how we came to be. Within the writing process itself, there is a sense of discovery and recovery—reclaiming aspects of our core being that were cast off, exiled into archives lodged deep within our bellies. Unearthing our own nature as we consider the human condition creates a powerful energy that is creatively released through the act of writing.

Despite a majority of opinion, I believe that writing alone—isolating our thoughts, feelings and sensations on the pages of a journal—is not transformational. In fact, this process often keeps writers stuck in the same storyline, lockstep in *Déjà vu*, reliving identical details over and over and over again. I think writing transforms writers when they write in relationship. To witness our own inner impact, we need to write in a community of writers, to be part of a productive healthy writing group that supports each person's explorations.

I started this workshop because I believed that when writers gathered and shared their stories in supportive circles,

with clear boundaries and expectations, their writing expanded within their own personal evolution. I called my workshops, Write To Be, because I felt these words identified the process itself—we write to be who we are, to be with ourselves in ways that escape us in our day to day realities. As we discover our “Beingness” we sense how to be the writer we are rather than how to perform the act of writing. I share specific skills—the tools writers need to enact their art. But, the heart of the writing process involves the relationships that form as we share our lives on the page and learn to accept being present (being heard, validated and supported) simply because we exist rather than equating our lives and our presence with what we do or don’t do.

Initially I offered a free four-week workshop at the Exeter Library on memoir writing. Several people from that experience joined me to create the Exeter group. We have met for four years now, with new members joining and old members moving on. The right combination always comes together for each eight-week session, and the experience is always enlightening.

We meet every Tuesday morning and follow the same routine—consistency is part of the process. We start with poetic words to jump start conversations internally and outwardly. I offer a prompt—a few words, a line, a question, a picture, an object to experience—and we write for 15 to 20 minutes. There are no rules in terms of how to respond to the prompt. If a writer senses a story wanting release, he/she learns to trust the internalized story’s voice and lets his/her hand float across the page, more scribe than sage. Writing involves trust—trusting the words surfacing from deep within to tell the story rather than surrendering to the brain’s crafty tales. Each member is then invited to read his/her piece aloud and receive immediate feedback. We treat every story as fiction. We do not assume the

character is the person who wrote the piece. We do not use the word, YOU, which is typically a trigger for defensive tactics—the “You” on the receiving end may feel blamed, shamed, judged, criticized, and/or challenged. We talk about the narrator or the main character. We point out what the writer did in terms of effective strategies—use of dialogue, imagery, metaphor, character, intimate details and so forth. And we talk about how the writing landed on us. We do not turn to our own story; we do not say things like, “I could relate because once my uncle did . . .” Rather, we say things like, “I felt the character’s pain, the grief so palpable I felt tears in my eyes.” We share phrases, words, lines that captured our attention. We talk about what works so we learn to build our skills on a positive foundation. Knowing what we do well motivates us to reach out from this vantage point and see what comes next. If we only know what is wrong, we have nowhere to turn and the foundational support beneath us is faulty—not a solid place to leap from.

And so our writing has grown. We have all rediscovered our voice, nurtured our style, and claimed our way of expressing our stories. The next step in our learning process was to reach out to a larger audience, to share our process with others who are considering being writers. Everyone writes in some form or another, be it letters, emails, shopping lists, technical papers, diary or journal entries; therefore, everyone does writing. For those who want to be writers, we offer our words of connection and encouragement. One trinket of truth that we have learned is that finding the right audience who will appreciate our work is essential. In this circle, we have found the appreciation, validation and support to move forward in our literary lives and experience our first formal publication. This is an exciting time.

Nancy Eichhorn

Life as a California kid was like totally different than adulthood has been living in a small New England town. When I drove east in my Volkswagen Golf in 1990 to earn my Masters in Education as a reading specialist at the University of New Hampshire, it never dawned on me that twenty years later I'd be driving a Subaru Outback out west with three Masters degrees in hand to complete my doctorate in clinical psychology.



Today, I am a writer and an editor, a student and a teacher, a therapist and a patient. My doctoral research is flourishing. My resume includes: 15 years freelance writing during which time I sold thousands of articles for local newspapers and magazines; my position as a student editor/columnist for the United States Association for Body Psychotherapy; personal essays published in anthologies; self-publishing three books with the Somersworth, NH, Write To Be group; and ghost writing/editing several books now in print and two in process. Meanwhile, my own stories are surfacing despite my best attempts to shove them back down. Tales long since banished to bunkers deep inside my belly clamor for airspace. They find their way to the surface whether I write them down or not. So I am trying to honor their intensity and write. I am also blessed with creative writing groups, and the resources to channel our energy into published anthologies honoring our work. It is a pleasure to facilitate books that honor writers' voices as both an editor and as a contributor—experiencing my own voice on

the page beyond that of teacher or guide. I am always amazed by the end result. Today, we are all moving into the limelight as emerging authors who have learned how to be writers.

I've also noticed that as I reached the half a century mark, I carry a truer sense of wisdom within my body. I am grateful. I know every event in my life occurs for a reason and that the Universe provides everything I need as I need it. I am evolving. My focus on mindfulness, intention, and joy is part of my awakening process. I feel gratitude surge through my being each and every day, and in those moments where I used to define, label, and categorize my experiences I now pause, and then accept what is with curiosity. My life is far richer today as I release what was and embrace life's uncertainties and ambiguities.