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"A New Lease on Life": A Narrative Case Study of an Older Adult, Participant Design Writing Group

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"A NEW LEASE ON LIFE":
A NARRATIVE CASE STUDY OF AN OLDER ADULT, PARTICIPANT DESIGN
WRITING GROUP

A Dissertation
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Krystia Nora
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
May 2008

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Within the field of composition, older adults are an understudied population. This qualitative project examined a group of older adults from subsidized senior highrise apartments on the North Side of Pittsburgh. Rather than impose a design and a purpose upon the participants, as is usually done in senior writing group studies, I examined a Participant Design writing group, which had each participant contribute to how the group was conducted and decide the kinds of comments s/he received. I, as the researcher, facilitated and studied the group for one year, beginning with its inception in January 2005. I learned each participant's writing history and then examined how, for each of the three participants, the writing group did or did not facilitate additional writing development. The data consisted of four in-depth interviews, journals, field notes, and member-commentary upon chapter drafts. I conducted a narrative analysis of my data and created a narrative case study for each participant's history, writing group experiences, and analysis of experiences. The chief result of the study was that the members reported that they received what they wanted, largely because of the Participant Design. Verne, an 81-year old in remission from cancer who wanted to write polished fiction, received all the critical commentary she desired. As a result, she self-published and said this group gave her "a new lease on life." Hilary, who shared his life-writing journals, received the positive reinforcement he desired and so felt that the group was

therapeutic. Ann, with a history of writing disabilities, had her writing read aloud and was given the intensive feedback she requested. In turn, she wrote multiple drafts and created the basis for a book manuscript. Another noteworthy result was that each member's motivation stemmed from a desire to give to future generations, or as Erik Erikson would state, from generativity. Further study is needed to see if Participant Design would be equally effective in other older adult writing group environments and to determine how extensively generativity plays a role in older adults' writing.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Personal Standpoint

Although I was in my late 20s, I settled into Babtsia's words like a child cuddling into blankets. I was on the phone with my grandmother who was telling me the story about how, while wandering through her grandmother's farm, she took it into her head to try to ride a pig. She savored the story, sometimes punctuating it with a Polish or Ukrainian proverb, which she usually had to translate for me. I loved the warmth of the details and humor that imbued every retelling, and then I froze. I'd never remember these stories. Not as she told them. I was chilled, afraid of losing this treasure completely.

"*Babtsia*, are you writing these down?" I interrupted her.

"Yes, yes, I'm writing them down," she reassured me in Ukrainian. She told me that my aunt had been nagging her to do so. I was sure my grandfather's habit of writing and recording every memory also had reminded her to record her own. In their old age, my grandparents spent much of their time writing, something for which I was very grateful. I wished my other grandparents had done this, for their voices were lost to the ether.

Connecting to Research

My familial connections led me toward a dissertation project grounded in that love of stories and family. Inspired by such work as Caroline Heller's *Until We are Strong Together* (1997), Michael Blitz's and Claude Mark Hurlbert's *Letters for the Living* (1998), and Eve Ensler's *What I Want My Words to Do to You* (Gavin &

Sunshine, 2003), I envisioned a project that would bring older people, like my grandparents, together to write.

As Heller, Blitz, Hurlbert, and Ensler showed us, writing groups can harness the human connection implied when composing a text for another to read. Ann Ruggles Gere (1987) demonstrated that, for over a hundred years, academic articles have been singing the praises of writing groups. Writing groups could facilitate personal and social growth, through both encouragement and critique, as theorists such as Kenneth A. Bruffee (1984) and Candace Spigelman (2000) have stated.

When we write for others, we hope to connect in some way to their thoughts and imaginations. Writing groups bring select readers closer to the author, allowing the writer to experience the reader-writer connection rather than just imagine it. In bringing the two closer, writers and writers-as-readers can share the effects and even power of their composing with each other.

Compositionists have not often studied older adults. Exceptions to this include Marilyn Smith's "The Time of Their Lives: Teaching Autobiography to Senior Adults" (1982), Myrna Harrienger's "Writing a Life: The Composing of Grace" (1995), Ruth E. Ray's *Beyond Nostalgia: Aging and Life-Story Writing* (2000), Angela Crow's *Aging Literacies: Training and Development Challenges for Faculty* (2006), and C. Ross Winterowd's *Senior Citizens Writing* (2007). Smith's (1982) article in *College English* provided a discussion about older adult autobiographical classes. Also, it talked about the importance of shared personal, historically-situated stories through matured viewpoints. Harrienger (1995) examined Grace, an eighty-year old woman, and her sixty-two years of adult writing, including the writing done after two strokes. This

study showed how everyday writing could be a "life defining practice" (137). Ray (2000) looked at eight Detroit senior center life-writing groups, guided by social constructionist and feminist principles. She analyzed, in particular, how these groups fostered older adult, female writers' narrative development through writing and sharing texts about their lives. Ray's complex and insightful research created the first book-length link between composition studies and educational gerontology. Crow (2006) inspected the effects of aging on older adult faculty's ability to learn new technological literacies. Crow wrote her book because she felt that the composition field had not yet "explicitly addressed or examined how our own aging bodies (and others' perceptions of our aging bodies) affect our ability to learn and accumulate shifting literacies" (5). Winterowd (2007), from his experiences working with senior citizens after his retirement, created a workshop manual and anthology of senior writing.

Two relatively recent English composition dissertations also exemplified a growing interest in older adults: Sarah W. Chandler's *Theorizing Interpretation in Context: A Feminist Ethnographic Study of a Women's Writing Group* (2001) and Beth Ann Counihan's *Mousepads and Memoirs: Learning the Internet and Writing Memoir at the Peter Cooper Village/Stuyvesant Town Senior Lounge* (2005). Chandler's dissertation studied the interactions between members of an older adult women's creative writing group. Counihan's dissertation examined her relatively unsuccessful senior life-story writing group in comparison with a more successful computer class with the same population. Both these dissertations asserted, as Nikolas Coupland, Justine Coupland, and Howard Giles did, that "elderly people are underrepresented in every social area of language research" (Coupland, Coupland, & Giles, 1991: 191).

Frank E. Kazemek, a literacy specialist, pointed out that a small, though "not extensive," body of research "explores the ways that elders use reading and writing" in groups (1997: 518). Experts have examined older adult writing groups in gerontology studies, (Campbell, 1985; Birren & Deutchman, 1991; Schuster, 1995; Schuster, 1998; Schuster, 1999), in literacy studies (Kazemek, 1997), and in composition studies (Ray, 2000; Chandler, 2001; Counihan, 2005; Winterowd, 2007). All of the publications in gerontology, literacy, and composition studies pointed to the need for more extensive examination of senior writing groups and older adult composition. In fact, Crow (2006), a compositionist, stated that "[t]he possibilities for research regarding aging are numerous. Almost every subdiscipline in our field could create studies that integrate aging issues into research designs" (136). All publications agreed that because of the great diversity of the senior population, even several dozen research projects would not be sufficient. An analysis of senior writers from one small area of a country, from one small social or economic group, could not be representative of all, or even most, elders. All people from the various communities in our world eventually have grown old if death did not come first. Scholars agreed that we need many more studies to explore the diversity of each generation's senior writers. This knowledge solidified my choice to do a dissertation project in 2005 that examined an older adult writing group from Pittsburgh.

What Does It Mean to Be an Older Adult?

Before discussing my study, I must define what I mean by the term "older adult" or "senior citizen" or "aged person" or "elder" and briefly mention highlights of what gerontologists understand about this population. Traditionally, authors have defined old

age as the third phase of life, "formally defined by retirement and supported by pension systems" (Cole, Achenbaum, Jakobi, & Kastenbaum, 1993: xx). According to The President's Council of Bioethics' *Ethical Caregiving in Our Aging Society*, "In America, we still look to age 65 as the cut-off between middle and old age" (President's Council, 2005: 5). The United States Social Security System adopted this retirement age in 1935 "with little expectation of many people living much beyond this point" (5).

As people began to live longer, new divisions of old age developed: the young old and the oldest old, or the third and fourth phases of life. The young old included still mobile and healthy people from age 65 to approximately 80. The oldest old were individuals who approached 100 years of life and who tended to have limited health and mobility (Rowe & Kahn, 1998).

Older adults have comprised a significant portion of our population. According to Stanley M. Aronson, Emeritus Dean of Medicine at Brown University, "The National Institute of Aging, of the National Institutes of Health, in a news bulletin issued in December of 2001, declared that every month, the world's population of persons aged 65 and older grows by 800,000 individuals" (Aronson, 2003b: 59). According to the United States President's Council on Bioethics, "In 2000, 35.0 million people [in the U.S.] were over 65 (or 12.4 percent of the population), a number that is projected to rise to 71.5 million by 2030 (or 19.6 percent of the population) when the youngest baby-boomers have passed age 65" (President's Council, 2005: 7).

Within this study, I defined the older adult as age 65 or older, following the American Social Security system's definition of a senior citizen. I realized that to say being a senior started at the particular age of 65 followed a political and social

construct. This construct could be traced back "to a decision by the 19th-century Prussian statesman Otto von Bismarck, who thought it unlikely that many people would live beyond this age to become burdens of the state" (President's Council, 2005: 5).

All of the older adults that I studied began as part of the young-old category. They were still mobile, but were somewhat isolated by their move into senior housing. One participant transitioned into the oldest old when she turned 81, but she remained mobile and independent. However, even though the aged people in my study were mobile and relatively healthy, it was highly possible, considering the American attitude toward older adults, that they had already experienced ageism and isolation. Numerous studies and writings have discussed the phenomenon of ageism, even though the term had only been around for 32 years:

Robert Butler, a pioneering gerontologist and geriatrician who was [the] founding director of the National Institute on Aging and established the United States' first formal Department of Geriatric Medicine at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York, coined the term 'ageism' in his Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Growing Old in America—Why Survive?* in 1975. Butler saw ageism as similar to racism and sexism—a negative view of a group, and a view divorced from reality. (Rowe & Kahn, 1998: 120)

As Aronson (2003a) said, "Old people will tell you that most assumptions about the elderly are little more than errant presumptions" (41).

Older adults have been not only misunderstood, but opinions about the aged have been often flat out wrong: "Our perceptions of the elderly fail to keep pace with the dramatic changes in their actual status. We view the aged as sick, demented, frail, weak, disabled, powerless, sexless, passive, alone, unhappy, and unable to learn" (Rowe & Kahn, 1998: 119), whereas the older adults are often healthy, very active, and quite productive (Rowe & Kahn, 1998; Vaillant, 2002). Nevertheless, "for decades aging has

been viewed as a problem in the U.S." (Sheild, 2003: 67). Part of the reason for the misunderstandings was that earlier in this century people were not living as long.

According to *U. S. News and World Report*:

In 1900, the average person could not expect to live beyond 50. When Social Security began in 1935, the retirement age of 65 was actually older than the roughly 61 years the average male could expect to live. Today, Social Security recipients of both sexes can expect to live at least into their 70s. (Smart, 2001, par. 13)

We need to work to understand the old and to correct misunderstandings about older adults' desires and lifestyles, especially with people living longer.

Retirement

This dissertation study dealt with retired older adults. As Robert C. Atchley (1993) stated, "Retirement is a social invention. It was created through social processes to achieve social aims, and as such, retirement is very much a part of the shifting and changing political, economic, and social fabric of society" (Atchley, 1993: 4).

Retirement has evolved with the definition of senior citizen. As mentioned earlier, most adults did not live to 65, or retirement age, a hundred years ago. However, the age limit for retirement did not become later as Americans became healthier. A couple of the reasons for this, in America, might be that retirement theoretically helped reduce the amount of older adult poverty and/or minimized unemployment by opening up the job market to later generations (Atchley, 1993: 13). Nevertheless, unlike the participants in this study, many aged people living in the late 20th and early 21st century chose to not retire. A portion of non-retirees worked until they died (Smart, 2001). They made this choice perhaps because death came before retirement, or because they enjoyed their

career, or because they could not financially afford retirement, or because they avoided being considered old, which, as mentioned earlier, can have negative connotations.

In the early 2000s, many American older adults retired, like this study's participants. Retirement could happen anywhere from 65 years of age and up. Some people even retired earlier, as early as age 50, because of wealth, or because of early retirement incentives, or because of health concerns. Some people retired later on, in their 70s or 80s, because they enjoyed their work, because they could not afford to retire, or because they were waiting for retirement incentives.

In 2005, according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, retirees' funding came from four main sources: Social Security, employer's pensions, income from saved assets, and extra earnings. Social Security, which compensated 96 percent of retirees in 2005, accounted for an average of 39 percent of American retirees' incomes. The American government developed Social Security in 1935 to keep workers from becoming part of the welfare system and to keep them off the streets. As mentioned earlier, many people did not live to retirement age in 1935, but that is no longer the case. By 2005, most people lived "well into their 70s" (Smart, 2001, par. 13).

Collected from both employers and employees, the Social Security tax was then redistributed to retirees, to disabled workers, and the children and spouses of deceased workers. Although Social Security became officially titled Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI) Program, government documents and public officials continued to refer to the program as Social Security (United States Government

Accountability Office, 2005). In the 2005 Social Security Reform Pamphlet, the U.S. Government Accountability Office stated:

In 2004, Social Security paid almost \$493 billion in benefits to more than 47 million people. This currently represents 22 percent of the federal budget and 4.3 percent of our nation's gross domestic product (GDP). Social Security has contributed to reducing poverty among the elderly. Since 1959, poverty rates for the elderly have dropped by more than two-thirds, from 35 percent to about 10 percent in 2003. [...] Still, for about half of today's elderly, their incomes net of Social Security benefits are below the poverty threshold, the level of income needed to maintain a minimum standard of living. Nearly two-thirds of elderly get at least half of their income from Social Security. One in five elderly Americans has no income other than Social Security. (4)

While Social Security helped prevent homelessness and a massive exodus to welfare in old age, many older adults remained poor, much like the participants of my writing group study.

Financial issues in old age affected senior citizen lifestyle and housing choices. During retirement, older adults had as many choices of activities as their economic status allowed. Retirees with money had the option to travel and explore more expensive hobbies. For example, Lorraine T. Dorfman and Douglas C. Kolarik (2005) observed that retired professors were known to maintain activity through exercise, through their continuing scholarly work, and through travel.

Retirees with financial constraints, on the other hand, sometimes found themselves isolated and depressed. In fact, senior citizens who had less money did not live as long, or with as much health, as older adults who had more money (Bond, Krueger, Rogers, & Hummer, 2003). Poverty amplified the disadvantages of old age, and many aged people were poor in the early 2000s.

According to Nancy Libson (2006):

More than one-third of elder households have incomes at or below \$17,500. Indeed, a Harvard University report, *State of the Nation's Housing 2002*, found that 8.4 million of the nation's 21 million elderly households have incomes of less than \$10,500 a year. Among those with the lowest incomes (6.5 million), 38 percent pay more than 50 percent of their annual income for rent. (9)

Many older adults could not afford the higher quality healthcare or the extracurricular activities that would keep them healthy. In fact, many senior citizens struggled to pay for their housing.

Because I planned that all the older adults in my writing group study would be healthy enough to be independent, I studied the housing options for independent elders when choosing my research site. Housing for the healthy older adults could range from home ownership to apartment living to community housing. If a senior citizen was unhealthy, arrangements could be made for nurses in the home, adult day care, respite care, and assisted care visits to a home. For non-homeowners, assisted living centers existed where older adults lived in housing complexes with assisted care. Also, there were nursing homes for the severely ill. In 2005, among healthy adults who owned houses, most had paid off these homes before retirement. If not, financially disadvantaged homeowners were able to apply for mortgage assistance or to sell the home and move into more affordable apartments. If they kept their home, programs were available to help seniors with the basic maintenance of their homes (Vatter, 1998).

A percentage of more financially viable and healthy senior citizens sold their homes and moved into smaller condominiums. Other senior citizens, like the parents in the TV sitcom *Seinfeld*, were able to afford a second condominium, enjoying their retirement years split between a vacation spot and someplace closer to family. Stanley

Aronson stated that the "world of the elderly is a contracting world. Things get smaller, desires diminish, needs become more modest. Standards, and even definitions, change with increasing age" (Aronson, 2003a: 45). Based on this statement, a significant portion of older adults who moved from homes into apartments or condos exemplified satisfaction with a shrinking space. As Aronson stated, aging could change an individual's priorities. Other reasons for moving to a smaller space could have been the increased ease of mobility in a smaller place and the satisfaction in having less to clean.

Among older adults who moved into a smaller place, be it an apartment or a condo, some chose to move into community housing. Moving into community housing afforded older people with peer communities and programs geared toward their age group. Many communities structured their properties for various senior citizen sub-populations. For example, some older adult communities were oriented to work with a university community (Dorfman & Kolarik, 2005), and other communities were specifically for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transsexual) elders (de Vries, 2006).

What about the poor older adults who struggled to afford housing? Resources existed for these aged people (Mashburn, 2006), although experts wondered how well some of these resources would survive the Bush administration (Libson, 2006). Low-income housing options included governmentally funded housing and rental assistance. Two main governmental sources for funding were the Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly Program and the Section 8 Project Based Rental Assistance Program. According to Libson (2006), "Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly program was established in 1959 and remains the only direct-financing resource for construction of housing for older people" (10). Also, Libson stated, "Though not technically funding

for construction or development, Section 8 Project-Based Rental Assistance is the principal subsidy that supports acquisition and rehabilitation of affordable housing"

(12). Section 202 and Section 8 have been essential sources for older adult low-income housing, assisting in the creation and sustenance of such housing:

Today, more than 1.6 million households, located in every congressional district in the country, are subsidized with project-based Section-8 assistance, including Section 202 properties built from 1974-1994. Two-thirds of these households include people who are elderly or disabled. HUD has a number of tools that help preserve this housing stock and protect residents from exorbitant rent hikes. (Libson, 2006: 12)

In these housing units, senior citizens were charged 30 percent of their income for rent, and the rest of the rent was subsidized. This allowed extremely poor older adults to be able to afford decent housing (Libson, 2006).

I wanted to work with low-income senior writers because they have not been studied as much as middle class and affluent older adult writers, so I chose to work in a subsidized senior housing project as described above.

Just as older adult housing options have varied greatly, so have senior citizens' activities. Keeping in mind how many poor older adults there have been, city and state services have often tried to help the retired population maintain a high quality of life in a variety of ways. Mary Barron (2006) cited several award-winning public housing programs that helped the elders exercise more, developed excellent senior communities, and helped aged adults learn computer and internet communication skills. City, county, and state agencies also have offered services for older adults. Senior centers have been staffed and maintained to provide classes, activities, guided exercise, and social interaction. In Pennsylvania's Allegheny County, senior citizens have been given free bus access, access to free college classes, free or discounted admissions to cultural

venues and events, free exercise opportunities, and discounted meals at restaurants (Kissel, 2005).

Retirement for every person has been different because of income variation and diversity in interests. Because of housing assistance and community programs, even the very poor older adults have had the ability to live in decent housing and to maintain healthy activities. The more affluent senior citizens, of course, have had even more opportunities.

In my study, I chose to work with financially disadvantaged retired adults who lived in subsidized apartments on the North Side of Pittsburgh.

Composition, Literacy, Writing Groups, and Older Adults

As a compositionist, I was particularly interested in how to develop the writing abilities of the older adults in my group. First, I carefully defined and examined the concept of literacy before beginning the writing group because writing in any venue is a literate act. Then, through my research about how writing groups function, I defined what a writing group is and does. Finally, I looked at what researchers have learned about older adult writing groups.

Composition and Literacy

The field of composition, by definition, could be considered "the study of doing, learning, and teaching writing" (North, 1987: ii). As composition studies evolved, it also became concerned not just with academic and professional writing, but with other aspects of literate expression, like everyday writing (Phelps, 1988; Harrienger, 1995), technology and media (Selfe, 1999a; Hawisher & Selfe, 1999), and visual literacy (Hill & Helmers, 2004). The broadening focus of composition reflected theorists' developing

understandings of literacy. Because composition involves the creation of literacy products, an understanding of literacy remains important in any composition environment, especially writing groups.

Various scholars have defined literacy in different ways because the concept touches upon so much of our individual and social existence. Some have used the term to describe the ability to write and read the printed word of a particular language. Others have made the term envelop print media, computer and internet media, digital media, and audio media, all of which could be expressed in any variety of languages or dialects. Literacy, as a concept, will inevitably develop in new ways to reflect the innovations, changes, and priorities of a given society. The social theory of literacy, in particular, was important in my understanding of writing groups.

The social theory explained that literacy involves practices that are exemplified by events (Street, 1984; Street, 2003; Barton & Hamilton, 2000) and that literacy practices are a set of social practices, are historically situated, are embedded within larger social practices, and are constantly changing (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). David Barton and Karin Tusting (2005b) defined a literacy practice as functioning within a community of practice, which would be where members interact in various ways, have a common goal, and develop a "shared repertoire of common resources of languages, styles, and routines" that provide recognizable markers of identity for the group (2). Literacy events, on the other hand, "are activities where literacy has a role [...] Events are observable episodes which arise from practices and are shaped by them" (Barton & Hamilton, 2000: 8).

In synthesizing the extensive literature on literacy and composition, I expanded Barton and Hamilton's definition of literacy practices. This developed definition of literacy shaped my understanding of writing groups. In particular, besides the social nature of literacy, I thought it was important to also look at the individual and transformative potential for literacy events within the context of the social occurrences. Granted, Barton and Tusting (2005b) admitted the importance of the individual. They stated that "literacy simultaneously serves both individual and social purposes and, in fact, there can be multiple and conflicting purposes involved in any literacy event" (21). I arrived at ten important characteristics of literacy practices: communicative, powerful, social, individual, global, local, empowering, violent, multiple, and changing. Usually, only a portion of these features would be predominant in a literacy event, but literacy practices always contained the potential for each characteristic.

Literacy, in its simplest definition, is a form of communication beyond verbal speech. Writing, as a literacy event, gives us the freedom to share beyond our normal physical and social spheres and gives the ability to forge new social spheres. As Donald Murray (2004) commented in *Write to Learn*, "We forge communities when we share who we are, what we feel, what we think; and writing allows us a sharing beyond the room, even beyond our lifetime" (7). Reading, writing, interacting with websites, and participating in various forms of literacy allows the opportunity for connections among human beings "beyond the room" and even beyond our lives.

Because literacy is a means of transmitting ideas and ideologies among people, James Paul Gee (1996) noted that any text is imbued with power:

A text, whether written on paper, or on the soul (Plato), or on the world (Freire), is a loaded weapon. The person, the educator, who hands over the gun, hands

over the bullets (the perspective), and must own up to the consequences. There is no way out of having an opinion, an ideology, and a strong one, as did Plato, as does Freire. Literacy education is not for the timid (39).

Literacy education intertwines with instruction about a culture, a way of life, and an ideology. You cannot teach one version of English and think it a neutral act. A teacher of writing, for example, either supports the ideology behind the textual language's culture, or is critical of it, but the teacher can never be neutral. In fact, a text cannot be neutral, for even the language the author chooses to use within the text will embody that language's culture and ideology.

Literacy is also intrinsically interwoven with communicative power. Through sharing ideas, we share what we believe. Through sharing what we believe, we affect the communities that hear us. Even a mundane opinion can affect a reader. For example, a wife can tell her husband in a note, "Thank you for cleaning the dishes." The husband may be more encouraged to keep cleaning dishes, or may love his wife for being grateful, or shrug and think that's just what people should do. Still, he is changed by her written statement, even if only subtly. He may mention the note to his mother, who might mention it to her friends, and that note can affect others in a ripple effect. Through voicing our thoughts, or through taking in others' thoughts offered to us in media, we and our environment are changed.

Literacy inherently assumes an interaction of self and others. It is both social and individual, and involved in the delicate intermixing of social and individual forces (Yancey, 1994; Barton & Tusting, 2005a). In my Master's thesis, I observed that voice in writing has both social and individualistic definitions (Hancher, 2002). The idea of voice in text is complex because individual and social elements/voices are constantly

interweaving and being redefined within the author and within the text. Before discussing the individual aspect of literacy, I will further discuss the social aspect.

Literacy is inherently social, first of all, because the languages and modes of communication have already been formed for us. The culture in which we live teaches us how we will communicate, what means of communication are acceptable, and when communication is important within that culture. Further, literacy is inherently social because individual ideas have been developed within a context of societal ideas. In the early 20th Century, for example, the ideas of modernism not only preoccupied philosophers, but affected the work of writers, musicians, architects, artists, and the common populous. Whether aligning oneself with the philosophy or reacting to it, the ideas of modernism preoccupied a generation. However, ideas that shape generations can be much more subtle and pervasive and range from what is right and wrong to how to dress. Philosophies of ultimate meaning and philosophies of action that dominate an environment into which the individual is placed can be, and often are, dynamic and at odds.

According to Trimbur (1987), we can observe the different social influences on an individual mind in texts:

From Vygotsky's and Bakhtin's perspectives, the problem of composing is rooted in the cultural history of the writer and the polyphony of voices that resonate in the writer's mind. [...] [If] we pay the right kind of attention, we can hear the voices in the composing processes of a writer, the internalized voices, significant others speaking at the same time. (Trimbur, 1987: 217).

These significant others are processed within the individual, who attempts to discern a response. The socially constructed self then moves to reply to the community that shaped it.

Then, literacy is not simply social in its inception; it is also social in its execution. Through being a part of a social group, especially marginalized groups, our communication through literacy affects others. One exercises the ability to assert the power of oneself and one's group to other individuals and groups, as mentioned before. Paulo Freire (2000 / 1970) showed that, in Brazil, stories written by farmers helped them to learn to read and write and to critique their society. Sometimes, these stories served to overtly show the problems with their society and inspired others to try to make changes. Caroline Heller (1997) explained, "The words of marginalized people, transformed in writing, in stories, and in cultural performance, embody more politics and social critique and also more than new narratives of life experience" (20). In another circumstance, Thomas Paine illustrated how socially powerful a text could be in how he expressed the struggles of the American Revolution in his *Crisis* essays. He galvanized the colonies into a fighting force, in opposition to the British, through articulating the shared beliefs that spurred on the revolution (Foot & Kramnick, 1987). Literacy assumes a sharing, a social connection.

This social connection can be global, especially now in an age of the World Wide Web, and this connection can be local, pertaining to and communicating with the surrounding community, political organizations, schools, and the home. Global literacy allows us the opportunity to expand our knowledge base and critical abilities through contact with other cultures. Local literacy allows us the opportunity for knowing our own communities, and therefore better understanding ourselves and how we were shaped.

The social elements of literacy bring us back to the individual. Written literacy can facilitate self-discovery and offer an opportunity for constant redefinition of the self through the responses of others to our texts. Heller (1997) noted that "perhaps the most fundamental use to which language can be put is in the recovery of oneself, in the revelation to another, of who one is" (41). When we write and connect to the society around us, we can learn more about who we are and what we value.

Because of this opportunity, literacy can be personally empowering. Donald Murray (1996) claimed this in *Crafting a Life in Essays, Story, Poem*. He said that he wrote to say he was, to discover who he was, to create his life, to understand his life, to slay his dragons, to exercise his craft, to lose himself in his work, to share, to deal out revenge, to testify, to avoid boredom, and to celebrate (1-8). Reading can be as empowering as writing when treated as exploration. As Louise M. Rosenblatt (1995) stated, what we gain from reading tends to reflect our values and experiences. We develop our self-knowledge through discovery.

The individual then brings us back to the social context. Through advocating self-discovery and the use of the mother tongue in reading and writing in Brazil, Freire (2000/ 1970) showed how individual empowerment leads to social empowerment. Through self-exploration and an exploration of the local forces that have shaped a writer and reader, a person becomes better able to be an activist in his/her culture.

However, as Elsbeth Stuckey (1991) asserted, literacy can disempower as well. Literacy acts and practices can be violent. According to Merriam-Webster, violence can be an "injury by, or as if by, distortion, infringement, or profanation" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2006). Literacy can certainly be a source of distortion,

infringement, or profanation. Literacy can be violent when a standard dialect is imposed upon students, for this imposition infringes upon the dignity of their native dialect. It can be violent when a mother-tongue literacy is denied, for this denial negates the mother-tongue. Literacy can be violent when individuals are caught between different cultural forces and literacies, for this conflict infringes upon their free use of language. It can be violent when individuals hurl their angry words in literate forms at each other, for these actions distort and profane. Propaganda, hate, and deception are as violent in literacy as they are in conversation, perhaps more so because they can be distributed among a much larger audience. Ignorance about literacy can be violent as well. For example, ignorance of corporate sponsorship and agendas for literacy can lead people to feel guilty about their mother tongues because these people believe a distorted truth about the connection between gaining wealth and knowing the standard dialect (Brandt, 2001). We should not ignore literacy's potential for harm.

Literacy is always changing, just as humanity and its societies and individuals are always changing. Deborah Brandt (2001) showed how literacy education initiatives shift from literacy sponsor to literacy sponsor. One example she gave was how a company worker was able to work as a union representative, adequately communicating workers' needs, until the company changed its policies into legalese. His union role was supplanted by a lawyer; otherwise, the workers would no longer understand the company policy. The union representative had been considered literate until the rules of literacy changed.

Literacy not only shifts in meaning, but its importance shifts from individual to individual, from one moment to another. One company, or journal, or person may value

a particular kind of writing, whereas another may value something else altogether. Participants of a literate culture need to be flexible and adaptable. They must continue learning over their entire lives if they want to keep up with the changing literacy practices. Furthermore, literacy event texts can change meaning and function from context to context; Barton and Tusting (2005b) referred to this as "recontextualization" (23).

My goal as a compositionist is to help my participants be aware of the aspects and pitfalls of literacy and to help them learn to be multiply literate writers; in other words, I want my participants to be able to use and appreciate various literacy technologies and various dialects/languages in literacy documents. To be multiply literate can entail knowing how to use pen and paper, computers, word processors, e-mail, and other media for communication. Brian Street (2003) would call this fluency in multiple "literacies" (78). Being multiply literate can also entail understanding and practicing the written language styles of various discourse communities: from that of fictional writers, to that of governmental communication, to that of academia, to that of a particular magazine, to that of a group of friends.

Literacy is multidimensional, and that is something I wished to impart to this study's writing group.

Writing Groups

Writing groups help develop individual literate writing skills through verbal interaction and social negotiation. Anne Ruggles Gere (1987) showed how writing groups could emphasize the communicative aspect of literacy through "reduc[ing] the distance between writer and reader" (3). Writing groups get writers to share their

writing with other members in order to receive commentary. In this process, each member contributes his or her own local knowledge. Further, Gere (1987) showed how writing groups have, throughout their history, "highlight[ed] the social dimension of writing" (3). In fact, she argued that "becoming literate means joining a community" like a writing group (1987: 6).

Candice Spigelman (2000) stated that "for writing groups to function—and hence for writers to write—they must be committed to both public and private notions of ownership" (132). Writing groups are social and they are for the private individual; they allow for both authorial and shared ownership. While the group members expand the author's palette of possibilities for his or her texts, thereby becoming co-authors of a sort, the author has final say over revisions, thereby maintaining authority over his or her texts.

Building upon the local and global aspects of literacy, writing groups reinforce and experiment with local knowledge of what works in a text (Elbow, 1981, 1998, 2000), while providing commentary that can facilitate publication and more global forms of exposure (Murray, 1996).

Writing groups also can be venues for the expression of literacy's power, both for empowerment and social activism. Caroline Heller's (1997) Tenderloin study showed how empowering a writing group could be for a group of women in poverty. She also provided examples of how such a group inspired social activism. Writing group accounts of empowerment and social activism include Beth Daniel's (2003) account of an alcoholic women's group, Paula Mathieu's (2005) efforts with the

homeless, Eve Ensler's (Gavin & Sunshine, 2003) work with prisoners, and Rosa Vallejo's (2004) account of bilingual Puerto Rican teachers writing together.

Pat Schneider (2003), Ruth E. Ray (2000), James E. Birren and Kathryn N. Cochran (2001) showed how writing groups can involve interactions that foster conflicts. One writer may try to dominate a session, and another writer may insult group texts. Group members can distort the ideas of other members, impose their authority on another author's text, or even profane that which another group member holds dear (like experiences, language, or ideas). Overpowering voices in the group exemplify some of the violence that literacy can accomplish. Schneider (2003), Ray (2000), Birren and Cochran (2001) all offered suggestions on how to avoid such violence in the writing group setting.

Writing groups can accommodate multiple literacy practices and events. Heller (1997), Paula Mathieu, Karen Westmoreland, Michael Ibrahim, William Plowman and Curly Cohen (2004) showed how such groups can allow for multiple forms of written literate expression, from letters to poems to fiction and non-fiction stories to mixed genres. William Fred Ritke Jones (2004) examined how writing groups function online. These researchers explored the ways writing group literacy expectations can change through the development of online forums, group websites that feature online publication, and self-publications.

In *Beyond Communities of Practice: Language, Power, and Social Context*, the editors, Barton and Tusting (2005a; 2005b), examined the idea that literacy events occur within a community of practice. A writing group could easily be considered such a community, in that members interact through various means (usually through talking

and writing), and share a common language(s), routine(s), and goal(s). Each writing group may differ from another, but each group has these characteristics. I did not choose to use the term in this dissertation, largely because Etienne Wenger's (1998) term "communities of practice" would be intertwined with Wenger's belief that an educational setting "must aim to offer dense connections to communities outside its settings" (275). Writing groups, as educational settings, offer some connections to outside communities through closer links between individual readers and writers. I would not say that such associations are always dense, or even if they should be. It would depend on the group. Each reader may represent a larger community, but these communities would be hard to define, and idiosyncratic elements would have to be accounted for.

As I analyzed individual development of writing group members, I chose to define writing group as a social assembly that attempts to assist writers' individual composition needs, and which, at its center, negotiates with and is shaped by the ten aspects of literacy practices described earlier in this section.

Older Adult Writing Groups

Studies of older adult literacy and writing groups have emphasized how powerful senior literacy could personally and socially. In some cases, researchers talked how writing could enrich aged individuals' lives through continuing and developing their sense of self (Harrienger, 1998; Berman, 1994). In other cases, researchers discussed about how sharing writing within a group could be beneficial, not only for each individual, but for the group as a whole (Birren & Deutchman, 1991; Schuster, 1995; Kazemek, 1997; Chandler, 2001). Ruth E. Ray (2000) mentioned that

senior writing groups could also be powerful socially: in the worst cases silencing some members' voices, and in the best cases helping reconstruct participants' understandings of race, gender, class, and aging through each other's life stories. Counihan (2005) and Ray (2000) both discussed how writing groups could fail because of social clashes within the group.

According to Elizabeth Oates Schuster (1995) and Frank Kazemek (1997), senior citizen writing groups could provide avenues for presentations to audiences in the outside local communities. Also, according to Campbell (1985), such writing groups could help older adults achieve long-held goals of publication. Winterowd (2007) even published with his group.

Many of the publications on writing groups and older adults focused on how empowering it could be to write and to share writing. Kenneth Koch (1977) reviewed how writing poetry allowed senior citizens to share what they had never before disclosed. Campbell (1985) discussed how writing in a group enabled aged people to create a legacy, which helped the self-worth of aged people and made them more esteemed by those who received their documents. Schuster (1995, 1998, 1999) developed how older adults within a nursing home were transformed through the process of writing and sharing writing, along with the nursing home staff and the families with whom they shared their work. Kazemek (1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2003) emphasized how senior citizen writing, when shared across generations, could be empowering for all in the community.

Birren and Deutchman (1991) and Ray (2000) were chief among many researchers who showed how life writing, or writing about life experiences, and sharing

such writing in a group could be empowering for individuals. *Guiding Autobiography Groups for Older Adults: Exploring the Fabric of Life* described and analyzed 10-week guided autobiography groups geared for senior citizens, focusing on the psychological benefits of such groups (Birren & Deutchman 1991; Birren & Cochran 2001). Ray (2000) used the Birren and Cochran model in her feminist study of such writing groups. Their combined studies showed that such groups could be very successful in getting older adults to write.

Besides the work done on life writing and on older adult writing groups, other articles on senior citizen writing analyzed the physical limitations of aged people, focusing on communicative constraints that may come about because of old age. Examples of this included studies like "Age-related Decline in Spelling Ability: A Link with Fluid Intelligence?" (Stuart-Hamilton & Rabbit, 1997) and "Adult Age Differences in the Ability to Write Prose Passages" (Byrd, 1993). Although these works tended to focus on what had been lost by age, rather than what could be gained, they revealed possible limitations and causes for frustration among older adults during the process of creating and sharing their writing.

Studies at the intersection between educational gerontology and composition studies showed that senior citizen writing groups could be catalysts for written literacy development in old age and for personal and social empowerment.

This Study of an Older Adult Writing Group

Built upon the work done before, this dissertation study continued to explore the transformative effects of writing and of writing groups, effects that Schuster (1999) had studied within a nursing home context:

My research only scratched the surface of what I perceive to be a rich and unexplored territory. Existing research studies on nursing home writing activities overlook the transformative processes occurring when an older individual writes and shares stories with fellow authors, staff, and family. We have a great deal to learn about the ways in which writing is used by the very old to make sense of their world, as a way of bringing deeper meaning to their experiences—both past and present—and, as a means of contributing to and speaking out on issues that are of vital importance to the writer and to society. There is no doubt that a [...] writing group provides a unique opportunity for expression and for finding meaning in a world bereft of purpose. [...] Therefore, further study is imperative. (240)

In my study, I wished to do such research in a senior apartment complex setting, examining if similar transformative processes would take place among lower class, more mobile older adults. I planned to look at how writing would be used by these senior citizens to, borrowing Ann E. Berthoff's phrase, "make meaning" (1981) and, as Schuster (1998) so eloquently said, "find meaning," as well as to study how the writing group context would affect an older adult member's literacy practices.

In observing the written literacy development of my participants through their writing group, I planned to take note of how each participant developed as a communicating, powerful, social individual.

Choice of Location

As mentioned before, retired older adults comprise a diverse population. This population lives in a variety of settings, from urban to rural, from rich to poor, and from independent to more dependent settings.

Research on older adults and writing has examined some of these diverse settings. Koch (1977) and Schuster (1995) worked in a nursing home (Koch's was urban and Schuster's was suburban), where the senior citizens were already dependent on others for daily needs. Ray (2000) studied groups in urban senior centers where

elders were transported to activities from local nursing homes and senior housing.

Kazemek (1997) ran a group in a mid-western town community center where the older adults traveled independently from their homes.

I chose as my research site a subsidized apartment complex in the North Side community of Pittsburgh, PA. This housing complex offered rental assistance sponsored by Section 8 and other outside funding (as discussed in the retirement section of this chapter). Renters had to be at least 62 years of age, or disabled, and were required to pay 30 percent of their income for rent. In order to be accepted into the apartment complex, potential renters filled out a form describing their income level, personal information, and criminal history. Those qualifying were put on a waiting list.

I chose Pittsburgh because it has a large population of older adults, and it is known as a city where people stay most of their lives (Nelson, 1997; Fletcher, 2001; Briem, 2002; Economist, 2006). Also, the location was convenient, as I lived in the city, about 20 minutes from the housing complex I chose. I chose the specific context for my research partially because I already had contacts with the administration of this senior housing project.

Another reason for the choice of my location was that there had not yet been a documented study of a writing group within a subsidized housing complex for senior citizens, so this project examined a somewhat different population of older adult writers than other studies. These writers would live in a community, but would be still independent, despite financial difficulties and health problems. Unlike nursing home residents or those with in-house help, the senior citizens in such apartment complexes

were not at a stage where they needed constant care; nevertheless, they choose to live independently in a new, smaller environment.

The older adult housing I studied served a largely working-class population. The housing complex chosen for this study had community dinners, bingo games, and computer classes. A monthly calendar published all of the upcoming events and resident birthdays. While a good portion of the residents came and went as they pleased, some residents were in poor health and did not leave the building often. The complex's activities may have provided the only social interaction some tenants enjoyed.

Since the renters of this study's complex were by and large not financially well off, they also were not peers with senior citizens who had money to spend on classes, recreation, and travel. Most, if not all, tenants probably never participated in a writing group before and probably did not have any place to develop their writing since high school. Many of the residents of this study's housing complex had lived in a Pittsburgh working-class neighborhood all their lives, and most of the occupants had not gone to college. I surmised that most inhabitants would not start a writing group on their own, and I was curious if a writing group could encourage the literacy practices of interested members from this marginalized population.

I had the hope that an older adult writing group on the North Side of Pittsburgh would allow a population of aging working class to assess their lives and surroundings. As Schuster (1999) said, inherent in providing a venue for the senior citizens to write together in a group was the opportunity to provide a disempowered population a venue in which to share and communicate their ideas and experiences.

Structure of Writing Group: Participant Design

For this study, I created the name Participant Design to explain a writing group model where members participated in the construction of the writing group design. This format had not been used in previous studies of older adult writing groups. I chose this because I thought that facilitation did not just have to be about giving writers freedom to choose topics in a writing group, but could also be about allowing writers to decide what sort of writing group they would have.

Older adult writing groups that have been studied varied greatly in what writing the members shared and in how long they ran. When it came to genre, some senior citizen writing groups were exclusively designed for life writing (Birren & Deutchman, 1991; Ray, 2000); other writing groups were specifically designed for the writing and sharing of poetry (Koch, 1977); and yet other writing groups welcomed various genres, from fiction and poetry through non-fiction and life writing (Campbell, 1985; Schuster, 1995; Kazemek, 1997; Winterowd, 2007). When it came to duration, some writing groups were very strictly designed, offering certain writing prompts and only meeting for a set number of weeks (Koch, 1977; Birren & Deitchman, 1991; Ray, 2000), and others were more flexible (Campbell, 1985; Schuster, 1995; Kazemek, 1997). While Birren and Ray conducted successful life writing groups in a 10-week span (Birren & Deutchman, 1991; Ray, 2000), Campbell (1985) stated that in her experience, "a one-year commitment from a leader is necessary to build trust" (552).

This study's writing group welcomed various genres and ran, not for a set period, but for as long as the writing group members wanted, as Campbell (1985)

recommended. This allowed writers to grow at a pace with which they were comfortable. What made this group different from other groups was that I allowed the participants to make all of the major decisions about the writing group design, from deciding how many months we would meet to deciding the particulars of how each session would be conducted and what sorts of writing would be reviewed. They even decided how writing would be reviewed and what sorts of comments would be allowed. I called this format Participant Design.

Even though Kazemek (1997) cautioned that, in his experiences, older adults expected the guidance of a teacher rather than a facilitator, my vision of myself as a writing group director was colored by my experience with composition theory and practice. I felt more comfortable as a facilitator, in tune with the ecofeminist ideal where "[w]riters would give themselves assignments as participating organic members of our writing environments" (McAndrew, 1996: 379). As a compositionist, I was keenly aware that Peter Elbow, among others, championed such a writer-text-centered, teacher-less classroom (Elbow, 1998; Vallejo 2004). Such writer-produced texts gave a voice to writers' lives. Through writing their own stories, authors came to analyze and define their lives. Through hearing each other's stories, they learned that their journeys were shared. Through a sense of shared journeys, writing group participants began to collectively and consciously define and redefine societal themes important to them. In the case of Freire (2000/ 1970), such writing groups led to political action. Patrick Finn (1999) called this literacy with an attitude—the kind of literacy that showed writers that they were capable and powerful people.

I respected the wonderful progress that facilitators accomplished through fiction or life-writing groups; however, I did not want to dictate the topics because older adult populations, just like diverse younger populations, tended to have different values and therefore would tend to want to write about dissimilar topics. I knew I did not want to get senior citizens to write about what I wanted because I came from a different generation and probably had different values and interests. For example, Stanley Aronson (2003a) stated that it "would be a mistake to assume that those situations or interpersonal relationships that satisfy young adults will necessarily provide comparable gratification for the elderly" (44). Even if I followed the guidelines of Birren and Deutchmann (1991) or Kazemek (2002), guidelines developed after years of working with older adults, I still felt I would be imposing what I wanted upon them.

As a compositionist, I agreed with Ann E. Berthoff (1990) that "[a]ssigning topics—the essential strategy of the pedagogy of exhortation—is no substitute for instruction" (24). Assigned topics facilitate dependent writers, whereas having writers find their own topics facilitates independent writers. Counihan's study (2005) showed that older adults can, in fact, be resistant to specific requests for their writing. This may have stemmed from participants' feeling imposed upon by the topics, or it could have been just because her group was resistant to writing in general. Regardless, I, like Paulo Freire and other critical pedagogues after him, did not accept the banking model of education, where knowledge was fed and regurgitated, rather than discussed and negotiated (George, 2000). By giving group members permission to experiment with writing processes and to explore topics of interest and/or importance to them, I hoped to allow the writers to grow into the authors that they wished to become. I wanted to allow

my participants to write from their passions, for as Augustine (427/2001) once said, powerful rhetoric comes from passion.

I was curious about what might motivate retirees to write in the housing complex studied by this project. What would they want to write about? Would they choose to share the disturbing and painful aspects of their life as many college students seemed to be motivated to do in Blitz's and Hurlbert's (1998) study? Would they, like the participants of many writing group studies, be self-motivated and find writing to be affirming? Other studies of older adult writing found that senior citizens, when prompted, wrote life stories (Campbell, 1985; Campbell, 1989; Birren & Deutchman, 1991; Ray, 2000), poetry (Koch, 1977; Kaminsky, 1978b; Kazemek, 1997), fiction, and children's literature (Campbell, 1985; Kazemek, 1997). I believed with Nancy Atwell (1998) and Berthoff (1990) in the importance of choice in writing. I liked how the Tenderloin group, of which a few members were older, would often deal with multiple forms of writing that were important to each member. I also liked how each writer participated in multiple genres, even if only to comment on a co-member's writing (Heller, 1997). After my study, I saw that W. Ross Winterowd (2007) ran a senior citizen writing group where there were "no assignments except, 'Write!'" (4). He also stated that, "In the workshops that I direct, the term 'creative writing' is taboo, for the simple reason that all writing is creative, even drafting a proposal for funding or a set of instructions for assembling a complicated devise" (Winterowd, 2007: 17). He believed, as I did in this 2005 project, that all writing was creative and that a senior writing group should embrace all genres.

However, I kept Kazemek's and Birren's themes for writing on hand to show my participants what other options existed for writing groups, in case they wanted assignments. After all, in Participant Design, it was their choice. I knew Kazemek's older adult participants preferred the structure he gave them. In my study, this structuring was never necessary, but I was prepared for the possibility.

As the writing group facilitator, I did not want to just give the participants choice over what sorts of writing they would do, but to allow them to decide the ways we would run our sessions. Given a variety of options based on what other writing groups had done, members would decide whether writing would be completed during the sessions, whether writing would be read aloud or copied and read silently, how comments would be delivered, how often each member would present, how much writing would be presented at each session, how long each session would last, and how often writing group members wanted to meet. In this Participant Design, I worked as a facilitator not only of the sessions, but as a facilitator of how the participants designed the sessions.

Let me take a moment to explain why I chose the term "Participant Design." Simply, the term describes a writing group structural theory where participants collaboratively decide key elements of writing group design logistics, including frequency and length of meetings, and individually choose how the group will function particularly for each of them: how the group should help each person reach his or her writing goals, what comments to give each person, and so on.

My criteria for choosing this terminology included that the phrase be succinct, precise, flexible, and relatively unused in the fields of composition and educational gerontology. When I thought of the term, Participant Design, I liked it because it would

mean what it stated when put before "writing group". It would mean a writing group designed by its participants. I had to avoid terms used previously in our field that did not represent what I did by that term, so terms like "self-structured" and "co-constructed," which had been utilized in different ways than I intended for this term, were complicated by previous uses. Participant Design, on the other hand, even when used in other fields, had not been used in composition or in educational gerontology. I also wanted a term that had some flexibility: it could be used as an adjective, before writing group, and on its own as a noun. For example, "collaboratively structured" or even "participant designed" could only be used as an adjective and could not stand on its own. Finally, I hoped to create term that would not remind people of anything inappropriate. For example, the word "participant" was often used in research, and therefore could be reminiscent of research work, which might detract from its usefulness as a writing group structure term; nevertheless, I decided it still worked well to describe an active member of a writing group. In fact, I thought it was better than the other words at my disposal. To use something else, like "collaborative", could confuse the issue. A "collaborative design writing group" could mean that the writing was collaboratively designed, rather than the group. The word "participant" led to the correct reading of the term, that the participants designed the group experience.

I had considered using "self-structured writing group," "co-constructed writing group," and "collaborative structure writing group." After much deliberation, I did not find any of them satisfactory because they were not specific as to who was creating and designing the group, nor did they carry the tone I wanted because of the word "structure." According to the *Webster's Dictionary, Second College Edition* (Guralinik,

1980), "structure" as a verb could be defined as "to put together systematically, construct, organize" (382). That described what the group accomplished at the beginning of their meetings—they structured themselves. The noun, on the other hand, was too stagnant. Its first definition was satisfactory: "manner of building, constructing, organizing" (382). Its second definition, however, "something built or constructed, as a building or a dam" (382) added rigidity to the term which did not reflect the flexibility inherent in what I termed "Participant Design," where I hoped members would re-structure the group as time went on and as needs might change. "Structure," and even "construct," sounded too mechanical and did not have the flexibility of the word "design," which captured the group's active work in forming and revising the time and organizational constraints of our meetings. Design struck me as an elegant word that named the creative process of shaping time, space, structure, and organization. According to the *Webster's Dictionary* (Guralnik, 1980), although the word "design" often referred to drawn plans, the noun's definition included "a plan," "a purpose," and "a working out by a plan, or development according to a plan," and the verb's definition included "to plan," "to plan and carry out, esp. by artistic arrangement or in a skillful way," and "to form (plans, etc.) in the mind; contrive" (1413). I liked the artistic and more flexible tone in the word "design."

I carefully choose to put the word "participant" before "design." I did not use the word "collaborative" because, as I said previously, in the term "collaborative design writing group," one might imply that group members together structured written texts, rather than mutually fashioning the group design. Writers could craft collaborative texts in a Participant Design writing group, but it would be one of many options. Also, the group I worked with for this dissertation generally would have bristled to have their

writing considered collaborative, even if Candice Spiegleman would argue that all writing in a group is to some degree jointly-created (2000). This dissertation's group saw commentary as helpful in several ways, but did not think of it as creating co-authors of the members. Nevertheless, collaborative was still one of the better words to describe how the design format was chosen. While I did not choose to use the word "collaborative" in my term, I used that word to describe Participant Design.

I also liked the word "participant" because it, by definition, showed that actively involved individuals were necessary within the group. I did not choose the self- or co- prefixes instead of participant because, even though they provided me with the kinds of shorter terms I sought, they were vaguer and left the idea of contributing individuals implicit rather than explicit. I preferred to be explicit. Another option I considered was "member" and calling the group a member design writing group. However, a member of a group could be active or passive. In this writing group structure, each member must actively participate, and thus be a member, contributor, and co-leader. Participant, "a person who participates or shares in something" (Guralinik, 1980: 1036), by definition, engages all of these elements.

A Participant Design writing group embraces theories of collaboration and co-construction which other writing groups do not do to the same degree. A life-writing group, for example, may embrace writer commentary, but it may be run without the ability for members to redesign the group as time goes on and may dictate certain forms of commentary. Participant Design is a descriptive, rather than prescriptive, term that emphasizes members' active engagement in creating, shaping, and re-structuring the group's writing experiences.

While I created the name Participant Design, writing groups before this have followed this model without naming it. For example, Melissa Lynn King Rogers (2000), in her dissertation study of an extracurricular high school creative writing group, encouraged her participants to make decisions about the design of their writing group. Despite her later conclusion that she should have been more active in directing the group, she felt, like I did, that facilitating a writing group involved allowing participants to make choices about the design as well as the writing assignments.

Within older adult writing group research, the principle of Participant Design was in play when Kazemek (1997), based on his group's preferences, took a more authorial role. Kazemek hypothesized that what he learned from one, or even several groups, might be true for all groups. This study proposed that while some older adult groups preferred more explicit guidance, as Kazemek's groups did, other groups may not. Writing groups should be designed by participant desires, not facilitator assumptions.

Because Participant Design was unnamed before, this model had not been recommended or advertised in literature about older adult writing groups. This study examined the Participant Design writing group and its outcomes.

Research Methodology

I used narrative case study research to examine the experiences of my older adult writing group participants. I conducted narrative analysis using the holistic-content approach, as outlined in Amia Lieblich, Rivka Tuval-Machiach, and Tamar Zilber's *Narrative Research: Reading, Analysis, and Interpretation* (1998).

Interviewing and interview transcriptions provided my primary sources of data. I provided opportunities for participant input on my emergent themes. Participants'

protection came through IRB forms, through repetitive member checking, through their ability to quit at any time, and through their ability to accept or reject anything I wrote about them. Participants chose to not have their names changed for this study. I kept an audit trail, I provided opportunities for member checking, and I triangulated my data. The triangulation came from written notes about the writing group sessions and other pertinent events, from the tape recordings of our writing group sessions, and from participant commentary on transcripts and dissertation drafts. This chapter's subsequent sections discuss the research methodology in more detail.

Narrative case studies like the ones I conducted are part of the larger category of post-modern qualitative research. Like other researchers who have conducted similar postmodern qualitative research projects, I worried about the objective reliability of my results, and then I came to embrace the rich subjectivity of my data. The subjectivity of the study was precisely its strength, as many narrative and qualitative researchers assert (Schaafsma, D., 1993; Stake, 1995; Lieblich et al., 1998; Sohn, 1999; Gomm, Clandinin & Connely, 2000; Hammerley, & Foster, 2000; Brodkey, 2001; Vallejo, 2004; Counihan, 2005; Sohn, 2006). I understood that "personal involvement is more than dangerous bias—it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives" (Oakley, 2001: 31). During the study, rich relationships developed between the participants and me: the researcher and writing group facilitator. Richard J. Meyer (1996) stated that "reminiscing, recalling, and reflecting can be important tools for learning and understanding what happens in classrooms" (xii). The same would be true for comprehending what happened in a writing group. I designed the study to help me

more deeply understand the subjective stories of the participants and to carefully examine each participant's experience of the older adult writing group.

Participants

The writing group began with three participants: Verne, Hilary, and Ann. After a few weeks of meeting, all three enthusiastically joined my study. They each signed Institutional Review Board waivers, which assured them that they would have the right to leave the study at any time. Further, the waiver said that they would be able to read any part of the dissertation that referred to them and either approve, edit, or veto what was written. I made every effort to guarantee the protection of the participants. While I had intended to change their names for this study, after about six months of meeting, each participant insisted that the study use their real names. They wanted credit for their words, a fairly common occurrence among older adults who participated in writing studies (Koch, 1977; Schuster, 1995; Counihan, 2005). I respected their wishes and drew up a form where they requested that their given names be used in this dissertation (See Appendix G).

From the beginning, the three participants could not have been more different from each other. Verne was a spunky 80-year-old woman, with sharp blue eyes and fashionable short hair, dressed in nicely-pressed outfits. She had been battling cancer for years but was in remission when I met her. Verne had always enjoyed writing fiction, yet she went back and forth on whether or not she would be able to participate in the writing group when it began in 2005. As it turned out, she participated for nearly a year, at which time she moved from the complex.

Hilary was a charming 65-year-old man, with soft blue eyes and a full head of peppered gray hair, who dressed in jeans and a sweatshirt or flannel or T-shirt. He still worked part-time as a deliveryman of car sales magazines (the free kind available in front of grocery stores). He had been writing about his life in journals for years and flip-flopped on if he wanted to participate in the writing group. As it turned out, he did take part and continued to do so long after the study year.

Ann was a soft-spoken and smiling 65-year-old woman, with warm brown eyes and medium length mop of blond-gray hair, who often wore cotton pants and shirts. She had just recovered from a series of strokes that she had experienced a few years before. An unlikely candidate for a writing group because she had struggled with vision and writing disabilities throughout her life, she nevertheless had already begun writing her life story for her nieces, per their request, prior to my arrival at the senior highrise apartment complex. In fact, she exuded enthusiasm for the writing group at its inception and continued participating as an active member after the year-long study ended.

My three participants were from two separate cohorts of older adults: two were in the young-old category at 65 years of age, and one was 80 years old, nearly in the old-old category. While they came from different historical periods, what they had in common outweighed their differences. They were retired, they all lived in the same senior highrise apartment building, and they were all labeled senior citizens by the government and society. Hilary and Verne had both been married and were grandparents several times over. Verne was even a great-grandparent. Ann had never married, but she had taken on a motherly and grandmotherly role with her nieces and nephews. All three played roles of the elders within their families.

Because she did not remain in the study, a fourth participant will not be included in this dissertation. Jean (her name is changed) joined the group in late January of 2005 and was with us until March of 2005. She was a petite and wiry 75-year-old, with a shaking and frail voice. Her blue-gray eyes were scarred with multiple cataracts, and she had short, frazzled gray hair. She presented writing to us a total of four times, reading us lovely stories she had written about meeting her husband, being a wife, working, and being a mother. We enjoyed her company and her writing. However, Jean could not come regularly due to doctor's visits and vision trouble. Ultimately, the vision problems proved overwhelming. She quit writing and never came back to the group. Every time I saw her in the halls after that, she stated she hoped to come back, but she just couldn't write comfortably because of the deterioration of her eyesight. I, and other members of the group, tried to assure her that she could just tell us her stories and encouraged her to at least tape record them. Nonetheless, she had considered herself a writer and visual artist, and she said that the loss of vision broke her heart. I think the writing group served only as a reminder of what she no longer had. While Jean did not continue with the study and will not be a focus of any other section of this dissertation, she provided an example of how the writing group could not help all its participants. Her experience could not be examined more closely due to her withdrawal from the group and the rest of the study.

About the Researcher

Because I belonged to a different generation and socioeconomic group than the members of the study, and because my experiences with older adults were relatively limited before this, I must explain who I was when I initiated this writing group.

When 2005 began, I was a 28-year-old doctoral candidate in Composition Studies. Recently married, I lived in a house east of Pittsburgh, and I earned a living through a teaching assistantship at Indiana University of Pennsylvania and through adjunct instruction at several Pittsburgh colleges. My previous experiences with older adults were limited to conversations with my grandparents, with members of my church choir, and with a few non-retired colleagues. Also a semi-professional singer, my first publication comprised a CD of Ukrainian Art Songs and Arias completed several years before this study. However, even more than singing, I loved the teaching of writing and the composition process. I hoped to be able to share my love of writing with my participants.

Narrative Case Study Method

Dan P. McAdams, Ruthellen Josselson, and Amia Lieblich (2006), three of the leading narrative researchers in the world, stated that "Research based on studying whole persons in context in time through the narratives of their experiences is enjoying a renaissance across the social sciences" (4). In 1998, Lieblich, Tuval-Machiach, and Zilbur asserted that "the use of narratives in research has grown tremendously in the last 15 years. In the fields of psychology, gender studies, education, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, and history, narrative studies are flourishing" (3).

Narrative research is about understanding the stories people use to shape their decisions and their lives. As Lieblich et al. (1998) stated, narrative research:

refers to any study that uses or analyzes narrative materials. The data can be collected as a story (a life story provided in an interview of a literary work) or in a different manner (field notes of an anthropologist who writes up his or her observations as a narrative or in personal letters). It can be the object of the research or a means for the study of another question. It may be used for

comparison among groups, to learn about a social phenomenon or historical period, or to explore a personality. (2-3)

Narrative research could be conducted based on stories and could use stories to explain the data. In this study, I both collected narratives as data and used narrative to show some of the key writing group experiences. In other words, member narratives were the objects of the study, and narratives were also used as the means to express some of the study findings.

To accomplish the goals of this dissertation, I conducted narrative research because writing is a subjective activity, intertwined with the affective, as well as logical, systems of human thought. The stories of why participants attended the group and what they received from the group contributed the most important data for this study. I wanted to examine how writing group members perceived their experiences and growth. In fact, the subjective perceptions of the participants were more important to this study than objective events. Not as interested in the objective reality of each participant's motivations and experiences, like Dan P. McAdams in *The Stories We Live By* (1993) and *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By* (2006), I wanted to study how the participants *perceived* their experiences and to examine the effects of those perceptions. After all, their continued participation would be based upon how they viewed their experiences. For example, their interest in continuing to write for the group might be built upon a feeling that the writing group helped in some way, and decisions for revision might be made established from perceptions of writing group responses.

I chose to do narrative case studies, dedicating a chapter to the individual narrative of each participant's case because each person's perceptions of the writing group were situated within their lifetime of writing experiences. As Robert E. Stake (1995)

stated, "The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how different it is from others, but what it is, what it does" (8). I wanted to understand each individual case, in context of their unique histories (or, more accurately, in context of their perceptions of their unique histories). Roger Gomm, Martyn Hammersley, and Peter Forster (2000) said that "a 'case study' refers to the research that investigates a few cases, often just one, in considerable depth" (3). In my study, I focused on the unique narratives of each writing group participant. Because I was concerned with perceptions of experience, my guiding principle was to "focus on experience and follow where it [led]" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 188). Within individual case study chapters, I sometimes briefly made a comparison to another one of the case studies; however, in the last chapter, I created a more comprehensive comparison between the three narrative case studies, drawing the conclusions for the research questions. I wrote such a conclusion because I not only analyzed the perceptions of the writing group members, but how this older adult writing group worked together. In this light, analysis of the writing group as a whole could be considered a case study of the group. Therefore, this project contained three individual narrative case studies embedded within the older adult writing group narrative case study.

Research Questions

Three questions shaped the bulk of my research. According to Stake (1995), "[i]nitial research questions may be modified or even replaced in mid-study by the case study researcher" (9). Indeed, my research questions were revised during the study. The first two questions that follow are more focused than the original study questions,

but they cover the same content. In fact, the first question combines several related inquiries together. The third question developed during the study.

How Would Older Adult Subjects Structure Their Participant Design Writing Group, How Would They Perceive Its Success or Failure, and What Would They Say Was Accomplished as a Result of Participating?

Allowing the members to create their own Participant Design writing group made this study unique among other older adult writing group studies. There had not yet been an examination of the inception, development, and continuation of a senior citizen writing group that was designed by the participants. As stated before, older adult writing groups begun by researchers were usually designed with a certain goal in mind, where the facilitator dictated the rules. Counihan (2005) wanted her writing group members to write memoirs. Birren and Deutchmann (1991) and Ray (2000) only ran life writing groups. Kazemek (1997; 2002) provided small creative fictional and non-fictional assignments for his groups. Almost all senior citizen writing groups in the studies I read were not encouraged to make their own choices about the content and structure of their groups. Kazemek (1997) goes so far as to say that aged people prefer that the writing group facilitator play the role of leader and traditional teacher. However, I took to heart my role as facilitator, and I wanted to take the role of writing group facilitator to what I considered the next level. While a composition classroom of twenty or more students would dictate the need for some authority because of the grading and the need to manage so many students, a small writing group could be shown how to run itself. I hoped that if I presented the older adult writing group volunteers with options, that the participants would be empowered to create a design that would best suit their individual needs.

Furthermore, because I would be working with individuals far older than I was, I did not feel comfortable dictating the parameters of what we would do.

As I was pioneering a Participant Design for a senior citizen writing group, I wanted to understand how that design would work for such a group in a subsidized housing complex.

Furthermore, I wanted to know what such a writing group would accomplish for this particular set of individuals. As mentioned earlier, this was a situated study, placed in a subsidized housing complex on Pittsburgh's North Side. The participants were independent older adults, but considered financially poor. They were also socially constructed in a different area of the country than other senior citizen writing studies. While questions similar to "what did the writing group accomplish for its participants" had been asked before in other research projects (Schuster, 1995; Heller, 1997; Ray, 2000; Vallejo, 2004), because this study deals with a different participant population, the question needed to be answered for this particular writing group. Once their Participant Design settled into the shape that members wanted, I hoped to find out what would be accomplished for the participants. I wondered how this group's accomplishments would compare with other recorded writing groups. Would the group facilitate the transformative narratives like those in Koch's (1977), Heller's (1997), and Schuster's (1995, 1998) writing groups? Or would the writing group facilitate more ambivalent narratives like that of Counihan's (2005) writing group? Would the writing group inspire the writers to try new writing genres, as in Vallejo's (2004) group? Would the writers feel the group helped them become better writers, as in Jerry Phillips' (1991), Caroline Heller's (1997), and Sarah W. Chandler's (2001) writing groups? Would it inspire

comraderie and community, as it did for Heller's (1997), Schuster's (1998), Chandler's (2001), and Vallejo's (2004) writing groups? Also, I was curious how the perceptions of the writing groups' accomplishments would vary between each of the participants.

In order to better understand individual perceptions of what the writing group would accomplish, I wanted to understand the written literacy histories of the group participants. This would provide a foundation for my understanding member comparisons of writing group experiences to previous occurrences. I wondered how their perceptions of 2005's writing group would sit in the context of their lifelong-literacy history memories.

Would the Writing Group Inspire the Older Adult Participants to Learn More About Computer and Electronic Print Literacies? Why or Why Not?

Rose, the computer instructor at the subsidized apartment housing complex, described the residents as resistant to computers (Nora, 2004). Nevertheless, because we lived in an age where websites were advertised on television and e-mail was more common than traditional mail, I anticipated that the writing group would be influenced by electronic text. I assumed and hoped the writing group members would want to learn more about how to create such text. Computers gave users the ability to share ideas with broader audiences, to save different versions of one text, and to revise without having to rewrite. However, computers could be dangerous vehicles for identity theft. I felt that the writing group participants should be informed about the benefits and dangers of new technology, and I hoped to inspire them to try this technology as informed writers. This technological aspect was not a central activity of the writing group; nevertheless, I wanted to see what effect, if any, the writing group

would have in facilitating increased interest in electronic text. Someone else already ran a computer class in the apartment complex. I did not need to do so. I wondered if the writing group would inspire participants to make more use of the computer class or inspire participants to attend the computer class for the first time. I wanted to know if working with written literacy would inspire growth in participants' computer literacy in 2005, a year when computers, internet, and electronic print media were integral parts of American society. While some studies directly examined development of older adult computer use (Counihan, 2005; Werner-Burke, 2000; Lawton, 2001; Hollis-Sawyer & Sterns, 1999), this study explored how open my participants would be to using computers as they saw how much computers expanded the nature of print literacy.

How Important Was Generativity to the Participation of the Writing Group Members?

Older adult development, as discussed by developmental psychologists, proved to be important to my study. The idea of generativity explained an important part of the participants' motivation to write and work in the group. Generativity, a term coined by the psychologist Erik Erikson, refers to the possible outcome of the seventh stage of human development usually associated with middle age (Erikson, 1959/1980; Coleman & O'Hanlon, 2004: 19). According to Erikson's theory (1959/1980), at the seventh stage of human development, one either becomes generative, fulfilling a need to give to future generations, or suffers stagnation. To be generative is to be active in guiding the next generation, often through acts of creation, and it is mutually beneficial to both older and younger people (Coleman & O'Hanlon, 2004). This stage of development is not limited to middle age, however, and could continue to be important throughout the remainder of life. Erikson called generativity in old age "grand-generativity" (Erikson, Erikson &

Kivnik, 1986: 74), but for the purposes of this dissertation, the word generativity sufficed, especially since other researchers have used this shorter term, generativity, with older adults (Coleman & O'Hanlon, 2004).

As Peter G. Coleman and Ann O'Hanlon state, "generativity is hypothesized to be important for the health and well-being of older adults" (2004: 46). The search for wisdom (as opposed to despair), Erikson's eighth stage usually associated with aged persons, was not as evident in my study. Also not evident in this writing group was the ninth stage of life, gerotranscendence, coined by Joan Erikson (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). However, generativity emerged as important motivation for the study participants' writing.

By the middle of 2005, I noticed writing group members had been reiterating that they were largely motivated to write for their children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and future generations. They appreciated the comments of the writing group because they felt these comments would help make their stories clearer to future generations. I realized that the desire to give to future generations, or generativity, was key to the older adult participants' continued involvement in the writing group. With that in mind, I went back through all of my data and analyzed the role generativity played in the older adult members' participation.

Gathering Data

In order to gain the participants' perceptions of their writing group experiences, I conducted four in-depth interviews of each research subject once every couple of months in 2005. According to John M. Johnson (2002), whose "In-depth Interviewing" was included in the *Handbook of Interview Research*, "in-depth interviewing seeks 'deep'

information and understanding" (106). According to Johnson (2002), "deep understanding" develops understanding of the subjects, reveals commonplace assumptions, inspires reflection of such assumptions, and "allow[s] us to grasp and articulate the multiple views of, perspectives on, and meanings of some activity, event, or cultural object" (106-107). Interviewing was a good source of data because it facilitated an environment where semi-casual conversation would mine the participants' multiple thoughts about their writing group experiences.

As Elliot G. Mishler (1988) and Irving Seidman (2006) recommended, I tried to keep each interview conversational and relaxed and only used pre-designed questions to restart the conversation or bring the conversation back into a focus. The pre-designed questions for the interviews were based upon the original research questions for the study (See Appendix A and Appendix B). They were used only as a reference to keep interviews on topic about the writing group. However, I did not need to refer to the questions often; conversations tended to naturally give me all the information I wanted. In follow-up interviews, the questions were adapted based on each member's answers in the previous interview as grounded theoretical categories developed. I did this to continue my understanding of the emerging categories (Charmaz, 2001: 251). Holstein and Gubrium (2001) said that "the interview and its participants are constantly developing" (61); so, I was curious to see how answers to key questions like, "What has been the writing group's importance to you?" would develop through the course of the year.

I considered the interview a time to converse with my participants (Denzin, 1989), taking an active view of interviewing:

the active view eschews the image of a vessel waiting to be tapped in favor of the notion that the subject's interpretive capabilities must be activated, stimulated, and cultivated. The interview is a commonly recognized occasion for formally and systematically doing so. (Holstein & Gubrium, 2001: 63)

While each member and I sometimes talked casually about his or her progress as a group member during and outside of writing group sessions, interviews were a time to "formally and systematically" (63) do so.

I conducted a series of interviews because I was curious how and if participants' perspectives would change over the course of time and what would lead to these changes. Also, the interviews served as a time when I could discuss my growing understandings of the writing group dynamics and experiences. Furthermore, the interviews were a good time to reassess the Participant Design and to decide if anyone wanted to change anything. When reviewing the data, I learned that the layered interviews were also effective because they provided participants an opportunity to clarify and develop earlier ideas about their writing group experiences.

The first interview took place a month after the project began, in February of 2005. Because I wished to compare the perceptions of writing group experience with that of other writing events throughout the participant's life, in this interview we discussed his/her memories of writing throughout her/his life, establishing a written literacy biography. After this, we discussed the participant's preliminary judgments about the writing group.

The three interviews that followed primarily discussed participant assessments about the writing group experiences, only casually referring to the past experiences if it was appropriate. The second interview took place in April of 2005. The third interview was in September of 2005. The final interview was at the end of the writing group year.

For Verne, that was in November of 2005. For Ann and Hilary, that interview was delayed until January and February of 2006. Ann had an additional fifth interview so that I could make better sense of her particularly complex literacy history. This fifth interview occurred in February of 2006.

Full transcripts of each member's interviews comprised the core of my research data. I transcribed nearly forty hours of interviews, accumulating hundreds of pages of raw interview data. As I transcribed, I listened repeatedly to each interview in order to allow each case study's narrative themes to emerge.

Through the interviews, I tried to elicit group members' narratives of writing and group experiences. The first round of interviews established a writing and literacy history, and the follow-up interviews tried to establish how each member felt s/he grew during the course of the sessions. These narratives provided the basis for my interpretive analysis.

Narrative Analysis of Data

As Lieblich et al. (1998) said in *Narrative Research*, narrative data analysis was influenced by the concept of grounded theory. Like a traditional, grounded theory researcher, I attempted to derive my "analytic categories directly from the data, not from preconceived concepts of hypothesis" (Charmaz, 2001: 249). Further, I attempted to build "research as it ensue[d] rather than having it completely planned before beginning the data collection" (Charmaz, 2001: 265). My literature analysis developed as I found themes within my examination of my data (Charmaz, 2001).

However, unlike traditional grounded theorists, narrative researchers embrace a more post-modern approach, rejecting the need for the comparative group prescribed by

traditional grounded theory researchers. Like many narrative researchers, I believed, with Adele E. Clarke (2005), that each situation is rich with its own meaning and that any comparison to another person's situation would not be fruitful in attempting to gain some deeper truth (Clarke, 2005). There was enough to be seen in one writing group's individual stories over a year.

I used Lieblich et al.'s (1998) model of a holistic-content approach for my data analysis. A holistic-content approach looks at the whole story of "an individual and focuses on the content presented by it" (Lieblich et al., 1998: 13). Like Lieblich et al. (1998), when I began to write my results, I first read over all my materials several times, allowing patterns in the stories to come forward. Then, I put my "initial and global impressions of the case into writing[, noting] exceptions" (62). I decided upon the case study focus points and content themes that emerged from this process, and I marked those themes in my printed data, double checking the themes as I went (62-63). These themes helped create the section titles and structure for each case study chapter.

I embraced the idea that "[c]ategories reflect interaction between observer and observed" (Charmaz, 2001, 249), so I allowed my participants in February, April, and September, to read selections of my journals and chapter drafts, allowing them to comment on my ideas, provide edits, and add their own ideas as to the validity and importance of my analysis. I encouraged participants to provide input on their chapters as I created them. I was inspired by the feminist researcher, Nancy A. Naples (2003), who said:

In my effort to utilize reflective practice in my research, I have also tried to recognize the agency of research subjects who also contribute to what can be seen and how to interpret what comes into view (198).

I wanted to recognize the agency of my participants by allowing them to not only contribute, but to interpret what came to my attention, and so to "invite informants to help [me] be a better researcher" (Wolcott, 1995: 115). I saw my writing group participants "not as passive objects of analysis, but as thinking subjects who may co-construct text and knowledge with [me] through negotiations and interactions, rationally and intellectually contributing to the research" (Blakeslee, Cole, & Conefrey, 2002: 136). I worked to develop a self-reflective project where each member was also a participant researcher (Holstein & Gubrium, 2001; Whyte, Greenwood, & Lazes, 2001; Gatenby & Humphries, 2001).

Triangulation

This interview data was triangulated by member checking, by personal research journals, and by tape recordings of all writing group sessions. In Hilary's and Ann's cases, their writing was also referenced. In Verne's, only final drafts were used because she stated she did not want to share her rough drafts with the study. Only the tape recordings of her draft readings were available. As mentioned earlier, I had each member comment upon the dissertation's emerging themes and its various drafts. Each participant was to ascertain if what I was saying was accurate.

Furthermore, I wrote thick descriptions (Geertz, 2001) of my experiences when I met with a member of my writing group, met with the group as a whole, or even spoke to a member on the phone. I also kept journals of my ongoing literature research and of my reflections on my growing understanding of my research.

I kept participant writing examples, except in the case of Verne, who only allowed me to keep final drafts. In addition, I tape recorded each session. Session tapes

existed not to be entirely transcribed, but to be there if transcriptions were deemed necessary in my interview and journal analysis.

Toward the end of the year, based on the success of one member's decision to write a letter about what the writing group meant to her, the rest of the group was also asked to write a similar letter. Hilary declined, but the two letters written by Verne and Ann were analyzed to further triangulate the data.

How I Wrote This Dissertation

In this study, I alternated between narrative and analytical discourse, attempting to balance the strengths and weaknesses of each mode. I embraced narrative as a mode of describing circumstances because, as Linda Brodkey (2001) stated, it is important to:

bring stories not yet heard to the attention of the academy. Stories introduce inconsistencies of one kind or another into the attempt to represent experience as wholly accounted for by our respective ideologies (109).

Further, I was influenced by the use of narrative, counter-posed with analysis, to share the experiences and discoveries of the researcher within other publications of writing groups (Schuster, 1995; Heller, 1997; Ray, 2000).

The introduction provides an overview, covering the motivations for the study, the background literature for the study, and the research methodology.

The second chapter uses narrative to paint the setting of the research through a depiction of the first official day of the writing group, January 7, 2005. This chapter is based on my notes and journal entries about the first day and the members' accounts of that day. This chapter is an example of "ethnographic writing as a form of creative non-fiction" (Ellis & Bochner, 1996: 28). Such a narrative sets the scene for this dissertation study. The narrative shows why I chose not to begin tape recording sessions right away,

reveals my initial reactions to the environment, and exemplifies the ways that the study's writing group members first responded to each other, to me, to the writing group activity, and to the research. This first session also demonstrates the writing group's Participant Design development.

I dedicate chapters three, four, and five to each of the participants' case studies, presenting their stories and analyzing their perceived key developments. The three case studies are of Verne, Hilary, and Ann, the three people who met with me on the official first day of the group and stayed for about a year. As the year progressed, it became evident early on that each member came in with different expectations and needs, so the group evolved to meet each one's needs. The individual case studies examine what the writing group meant for each participant.

Verne's chapter investigates a life-time writer renewed in her final years through the writing group to create, revise, and publish a series of stories for her family. Her chapter does not include as much of her writing as it does explanations and narratives about her writing, because she preferred not to share with me rough drafts of her work and asked that work she had not yet published not be included. However, the narratives of her writing and her shared final pieces of writing show what Verne accomplished. Furthermore, Verne's chapter examines how and why she found the writing group to be a life-giving activity.

In chapter four, I discuss the importance for Hilary of sharing his personal journals and his role as a local and family historian. This chapter analyzes his interviews and his writing and shows how the writing group had not only been a means of sharing

life history and gleaning the therapeutic benefits of doing so, but of giving to the next generations.

Ann's chapter develops to show how she, through the writing group, worked to overcome her learning disabilities and lifelong struggles with writing while creating a text that reflects her many layers of experience in the Atlanta, GA, Civil Rights movement. This chapter quotes liberally from her writing examples and examines, in the context of research on learning disabilities and writing, what the writing group accomplished for her that previous writing instruction did not.

In my sixth chapter, I provide a synthesis, creating connections and revealing divides between the members' experiences. In this chapter, I incorporate several of my memories, allowing my stories to connect "what [I] know to what [I am] trying to understand" (Pagnucci, 2004: 9) and keeping in mind that "in social life, there is only interpretation" (Denzin, 1989: 11). I close with implications for future study.

Conclusion

I created a Participant Design writing group where older adult members would decide how the group would be conducted. This dissertation used narrative research to understand the writing group experiences of three senior participants from a subsidized apartment complex.

CHAPTER TWO

BEGINNING THE WRITING GROUP: NARRATIVE TO PAINT THE SCENE

Introduction

Chapter two's narrative describes the study's first day. Whereas the previous chapter is the dissertation study's expository introduction, this chapter serves as the narrative introduction to the writing group. This chapter accomplishes four objectives. First, it shows how, by entering the older adult subsidized apartment complex, I entered a culture very different from that of the university. For example, in this cultural context time tended to be more lax. Second, this chapter introduces the initial participants of the study—Verne, Hilary, Ann, and me. Third, this chapter shows how fragile the group was in its beginning and why I chose to not tape-record the initial sessions. Fourth, this chapter reveals how I guided the group through designing their own writing group sessions, implementing a Participant Design.

I assured the group that the design we created could be adjusted or even changed in future months, but, as it turned out, the design we created that first day was, for the most part, sustained throughout our months of meeting together.

Our First Day

The outside of the highrise apartment building had beige and gray stucco walls and an entrance foyer where guests called residents in order to be admitted. Approaching the glass doors, I entered the five-foot square foyer and faced another set of glass doors. I could see my reflection: a curly haired bundle with a brown leather parka and several bags. I looked like a college student coming to visit grandparents, bearing gifts. As my

shoulder bag slipped down to my elbow, I used the console to the right of the entrance,
"Hey, Jen. I'm here."

"Okay. I'll buzz you in." The complex manager's voice crackled through the box.

Watching the door, I read the sign posted "pull after the buzz." I heard the buzz and pulled, just a second too soon. I tried again. It pulled open on the third try, and I walked into Jen's office that was directly to my right.

"Hi, there. It's great to see you!" Sitting at her desk to the right of the door, Jen had chestnut hair to her shoulders and womanly frame. She looked strong and about my age. Jen smiled and then went back to fiddling on her computer, which was facing the wall so that she could easily turn and talk to people as she worked.

"So, what kind of crowd do you think I'll have today?" I had met with two people, Mary and Ann, in a preliminary meeting here on December 7, 2004, but only Ann seemed interested in the group. Mary had thought the writing group signs meant that there was a handwriting group starting. When she found out that the group meant that members would share their writing content, she quickly excused herself. Ann and I encouraged Mary to stay through that meeting, so she did, sharing stories of hard work and caring for her family, but she remained skeptical about coming again. Ann, on the other hand, had already been writing in a journal a story of how she had come to march with Martin Luther King, Jr. in Atlanta, a story her two nieces had requested for her to write down some time before. Even though Ann was excited that I was starting the group, she suggested that I begin the group officially after New Year's Day because the residents were busy through the holidays. So, here I was, on January 7, 2005.

Jen smiled. "Well, I'm pretty sure Ann is coming down. I also think that Hilary is interested. He stopped by earlier today to ask when you were coming."

"Wonderful."

"Also, Verne said she might be interested, but she wasn't sure."

"Yeah. That's what she said to me when I met her last month. I ran into her in the hallway after I met with Ann and Mary, and when she figured out I was the writing group facilitator, she invited me up to her apartment and showed me a letter she was working on. It sounded like she really loves writing, but she was hedging about whether she could attend the group."

"Well, she does have a lot of health problems."

"That's what I understand."

"I posted your group meetings through the complex and put it on the calendar that I sent out for this month." She pointed to the calendar on the wall. It was green and reminded me of the calendars that were posted in the elementary school where I worked briefly before going to graduate school. There was our group on the Friday schedule, set for 1 p.m. in the Blue Room.

"I also fixed up your letter to send to both the residents in the building and the apartments across the street." As she handed me the letter, I noticed she simplified the format that addressed both apartment complexes. I also noticed the increased font size. Ah, yes, many of the older adults might have trouble seeing the size 12 font I had used. After all my reading about educational gerontology, I should have thought of that. I was glad Jen did.

"Thank you so much, Jen. This is great. I thought I'd have to do all this myself."

"It's better if it comes from me," she assured me. "I know how to approach the residents here."

"Well, thank you. Thank you very much. I guess I should head on over to the Blue Room."

"Okay. Let me know if you need anything. I'm not sure why no one is down yet, but I'll call Hilary, Ann, and Verne and let them know you are here. Maybe they forgot. I don't know if anyone else will show. These people keep themselves pretty busy, so we'll see. They can be funny about what they want to attend or not."

I wanted to ask what she meant, but I noticed it was five minutes until 1 p.m., and I should get ready. "Okay. Thanks! We'll see." I left her office, and paused a moment to look at the sitting room before me. Two couches that looked bright and tropical surrounded a small end table. It looked more like a waiting room, but what would people be waiting for? I turned to the right, and the elevator that serviced the five floors stood before me. Then I turned to the left, passed the mailboxes, and entered the door on the left.

The Blue Room was aptly named. It was blue. Very blue. Not a pale and soothing blue, but a blue with a turquoise tint that wasn't quite overpowering. Usually, I love blue, but this particular shade didn't appeal to me. Along the top of the blue walls was a blue trim about a foot thick covered in tall sailboats. To the right sat a huge four-foot screen TV, a checkers table, a bingo machine, and a set of six tables that looked about five-feet round. To the left was a full kitchen with two long rectangular tables set in front of it. This communal area had centralized meal events, apartment complex meetings, bingo games, and random other social events.

I put my bag down on the round table closest to the kitchen. The table sat by a window, so we would get some sunshine, and it was across from the door so that I could see people enter and greet them.

Across the hall from the Blue Room, I could see one man, small and hunched, working on a computer in the computer room. I wandered over.

"Hi there," I said brightly.

He looked up from his game of solitaire. "Hello," he said as he looked at me quizzically.

I smiled and nodded at his curiosity. "I'm Krystia, the writing group facilitator. Are you here for the writing group?"

"Nah. I'm John. I'm just playing."

"Oh, okay. So, do you enjoy working on the computer?" According to Rose, the computer instructor, not many in the complex were into learning about computers.

"Oh. Yeah. I have fun."

"What do you like to do?"

"Oh, I play solitaire. I sometimes check my sports figures. That's about it."

"Do you e-mail?"

"Not so much."

"Would you like to learn how?"

"Eh."

I nodded. This was what Rose told me to expect. Even though I knew already that he probably wouldn't be interested in the group, I fished anyway. Besides, I was waiting for people to show up.

"So do you think you'd like to join a writing group?"

"What do you do?"

"Oh, we bring writing and share it with each other. Whatever you'd like to work on."

"Nah."

"You could share your life stories, if you wanted."

He shrugged. I heard Verne's voice down the hallway.

"Well, I think some people are coming. It was nice to meet you." I turned to leave, and then looked back. "You're welcome to come if you change your mind."

He nodded and went back to his solitaire game.

Verne saw me come out of the room, and before I could say anything, she said, "Well, I brought a story with me. It's pretty old. Look at these papers." She held up both fresh and yellowed pages.

"That's okay. I look forward to it!" She was smartly dressed, just as when I had seen her in December. Nice black slacks, a button down blouse, and in her hands she held a yellow notepad and the pages she had just shown me, along with a pen. Her round face had a little make-up on it, and her hair was of a medium short length, blond and stylish.

"I'm so glad you came!" I smiled.

"Yes, I figured I'd give it a try. I can't stay too long, though. I have a bunch of things I have to take care of this afternoon, and the doctor is supposed to call later on."

"Sounds good. It's great to have you here!"

"So, is anyone else showing up?" she asked.

"I don't know. Jen said she wasn't sure. But I thought that Ann would be here. She seemed really interested when I met her last month."

"Ann?"

"Dorothy Ann. I guess she goes by her middle name. I have her last name here somewhere," I riffled through my notes from my last meeting. "Ah, yes. Skolnekovich."

"Oh, Ann. Yeah. She lives on my floor. Anyone else?"

"Well, there was a Mary with her, but it didn't look like she'd be interested."

"Why not?"

I shrugged, "It's not for everyone. Besides, she only came last time because she thought it was a handwriting group. But Jen mentioned one more person. Hilary is what I think his name was."

"Oh. Okay. I've seen him around."

"Hi!" I heard Ann's voice before I turned and saw her enter. She was dressed in navy cotton pants and a loose fitting white cotton shirt with small orange, red, and pink flowers on it. Her medium length, thin, sandy brown hair hung loosely, and she walked slowly with a slight limp.

"I'm sorry I'm late," she said as she put down the black composition book that she'd been using as a journal.

"That's okay. We're still waiting to see who shows up."

"Oh. I'm hoping Mary will come. I saw her earlier and asked her to, but I'm not sure."

"That's all right. I think that there is a Hilary coming."

"Oh yeah, I know him. That would be nice. Aren't there more people? You think they'd want to take this opportunity."

"Well, I don't know. Maybe they heard this was a research project, too, and wouldn't want to be involved."

"No, I would think that would make them want to do it more. They'd want to help you with your education."

"Well, not everyone would be interested in writing for fun. I'm sure a lot of the people here, like a lot of people everywhere, have some bad memories of writing."

"Maybe. But I'm doing it. It's a chance to share our stories."

"I know. And it's awesome that you are doing this, considering what you told me last week about your educational experiences. You're really an inspiration."

"Well, Courtney and Kathleen asked me to share my story, so I want to get this done. I can't tell you how glad I am that you'll be around to help!"

"What about Ann's education?" Verne cut in.

"Ann, you should tell Verne the story you told me last month."

"Oh, okay. Well, when I was young, they diagnosed me as mentally retarded and told my parents I didn't need to go to school, but I wanted to learn. So, I went to night school while I worked. I'm writing it all down, here." She patted on the journal.

I jumped in to add details. I was concerned that Verne might not give Ann a chance, especially after seeing some of Ann's difficulties with writing. "Ann had learning disabilities, like dyslexia, and they tried to tell her she was retarded. I guess they'd never heard of such problems and just assumed she was dumb. Can you believe that? Yet despite that, she hid from her parents that she signed up for and took high school classes

at night, the whole time terrified that she would get found out and told to leave. She did not tell anyone she knew about the night classes. But despite her difficulties, she finished high school, and then went on to college to become a nurse. Eventually, they figured out that she had vision problems and visual learning disabilities."

"Yeah, in my Master's program they let me take all the tests auditorily."

"You got a Master's?" Verne asked.

"Yeah."

"In what?"

"In counseling. But that's a whole other story."

"I can't wait to hear it," I said.

Verne nodded, "My daughter studies that. She has her Ph.D. in special education. She'd probably love to talk to you. She's presented all over the country about methods she's come up with for children." I silently breathed a sigh of relief. For now, it looked like things were going smoothly.

"Yeah, they do help kids now. It's really good." Ann turned to me. "I need to give you the paper I wrote on learning disabilities during my Master's."

"Sounds great."

"Hey, if we aren't starting yet, do you think we could move?" Verne shifted in her seat. "It's cold in here, and I think I'm catching a draft."

"Well, if it's only the two of us, I saw a table in the computer lab," I responded.

"Maybe we could move in there. It seemed warm in there."

Ann nodded. "I don't see why not. I think John just left, too, and there usually isn't anyone in there."

As we gathered our stuff, I asked them, "So do you use computers?"

Verne nodded. "I have a laptop my grandson gave to me. It's up in my apartment."

"I go to Rose's class and right now I'm learning how to do e-mail. I'd like to write my story on the computer."

Wonderful, I think to myself. Their backgrounds would help me encourage the computer literacy skills that I hoped to tie into this writing group. Yes, this was a good start, even if it was a little small for a group.

"Hey, there!" a male voice resonated through the hall.

"Oh, hi, Hilary," responded Ann.

"Yeah, I'm sorry I'm late. I'm Hilary. Are you the writing group?" He leaned over to shake my hand. Lean and athletic with a short haircut, he was dressed in jeans, a dark green hooded sweatshirt, and sneakers.

"Yes. I'm Krystia, and I'll be the writing group facilitator. I think you know Ann and this is Verne."

"Oh yes, I've seen you around," he nodded as we settled into chairs in the small computer lab. I sat at the rectangular brown table with my back to the outside wall and window. To my left, the table sat against the adjoining wall. Past the table, and before me, were the two computers and room entrance. To my right was a counter with books and a cabinet. Ann sat in front of me, and Verne sat to my left. Hilary settled into the chair at the head of the table to my right. We were a cozy bunch.

Verne nodded to Hilary as she pulled out a stapled set of slightly yellowed papers and set them before her. "It's good to see you." She then turned to me. "So, are we going to start now?"

"Sounds like a great idea. I'll keep an eye out for other people, but we might as well start. Do you have anything for us, Hilary?"

"Oh no, I was just coming to check things out. So, what's the deal here? How's this work?" His long face rounded a bit with his smile, yet his blue eyes expressed his hesitancy.

"Well, as you may have read, I decided to start a writing group at your apartment complex. Here you'll get to share writing and get comments. We'll decide the format as we go, but, so far, Verne and Ann already have brought writing they want to share. Sometimes writing groups focus on a type of writing, like life writing or fiction or poetry, but other groups accept all genres of writing. Some writing groups have prompts and everyone writes together, then they share what they write. Other groups let people bring writing they do on their own. And some writing groups give out writing for people to read and comment upon a week ahead of time, and people come to the meeting just to talk about comments. How I run things is pretty much up to the people who show up. Do you have anything you want to share?" He had come empty-handed, but I wasn't sure if he had anything in his pockets.

"Well, we'll see. I want to stay and watch first."

Ann chimed in as she opened her journal. "You should tell him about the project."

"Ah, yes. Well, if you choose to be a member of the group, you will have the opportunity to be a part of my research on older adults and writing. I have the permission

forms with me if you want to look it over." I reached into the bag I had settled over the back of my chair to pull out the crisp white sheets.

Ann jumped in. "She's working on her thesis."

"A thesis?" he asked.

"Yeah, she's getting her Ph.D."

I nodded.

"So what do you need from me for this project?"

"Well, if you decide to participate, I'll just need to do a group of interviews with you over the course of the year."

"Do you have enough people for this group?"

"Well, we'll see. It depends on how many people decide to join and participate."

"So you might not do it here?" he said as he perused the forms in his hand and then looked up concerned.

"I'm not sure yet." His comment touched upon one of my anxieties. While I had not expected the solitaire player, John, to be interested, his apathy had still made me apprehensive: What if this project did not work?

"I think that three people should be enough, but if I don't get that, I guess I'll see what I have to do from there." I didn't want to pressure him. "I'm sure even two would work. Or one." After all, I could refocus this study to just be about a single case study of an older person's writing.

"Look, even if people don't participate, that is also a result for me to study. I'll be fine." I could see he was worried. His brow was furrowed and he looked at me with concern.

"Just first figure out if you want to be in the writing group. Then decide if you want to be a part of the study." As I looked at him, my hand fiddled with my pen over the notepad I had set in front of myself.

"Well, I don't mind being a part of the study. I just don't know if I'll want to share anything. I've got the Emily Dickinson syndrome, I guess you could say."

"The Emily Dickinson syndrome?" I raised an eyebrow.

"Yeah, you know. I can't take criticism, and I don't really like sharing my work."

"Well, we can work with that. We can give you only positive comments."

Smiling, I tried to encourage him.

"Yes, that would work. But I'm not sure. I lost all my writing. I'd been writing for years, and I had poems and journals and letters, but I lost it all in the fire before I came here. I started again, but I'm just not sure." I saw that while Ann was nodding supportively, and Verne looked patient, almost a half an hour had already passed since 1 p.m. Verne would have to leave soon if her schedule was as busy as she had expressed.

"Look, why don't you just stay here today and see if you enjoy the session. You can decide later." I was glad that I had not put out the tape recorder today. I wasn't sure that Hilary would have stayed with the extra pressure. When I was sure I had members for this study, then I would start recording these sessions. "So, how will we do this?"

They looked at me. Verne was puzzled. "You're the teacher. Don't you tell us how this works?"

"Well, I'm here more as a facilitator, and I'd like to leave the format up to you. There are a lot of ways we could do this. As I told Hilary, writing groups can be run in

lots of different ways. A lot of senior citizen writing groups are run as reminiscence or life writing groups."

Verne frowned, "I don't have much to say about my life. I don't know how people can remember that much. I thought I could bring my stories."

"You can. We can decide to run a mixed-genre group, where you bring whatever kind of writing you like, be it fiction, or life writing, or poetry, or even letters. Aren't you working on a letter for your grandson's wedding?"

"Yes, I brought that today."

"Wonderful. And Ann, you're writing about your time marching with Martin Luther King, Jr., right?"

"Yes, but I started writing about my childhood, because my nieces don't understand how I ended up in Georgia."

"That's fine, so you can share that. Hilary, if you were to share anything with the group, what would it be?"

"Well, I've been writing journals about my life for years now. I had to start over, though, because of my house burning down a couple years ago. It took awhile to restart, but I've rewritten most of the first forty years of my life. I'm not sure I'd want to share that, though. We'll see." Hilary played with some paper on the table. "I also wrote some poems. I used to read them on Lynn Cullen's radio program sometimes, with a changed name, of course."

Verne smiled, "If you want poems, I have a few silly ones."

"Well, there you go. It sounds like we should be a mixed genre writing group. Now, it also sounds like you all have already done some writing. Do you want to do

writing in the group time, or just bring your own? I ask because some writing groups provide their groups with topics, and they write a little during the group time."

There was silence for a moment, and Verne piped in, "I don't think I'd like that. Maybe later, but right now I'd just like to share what I have. I don't know if I'll be able to come back later, anyway, though; so, you decide."

Ann had been watching both Verne and Hilary carefully, "It seems better if we just bring what we have. I just want to work on the story for my nieces. Hilary already has writing he has done, and so does Verne."

Hilary and Verne nodded.

"Okay. Sounds good. Now, sometimes writing groups hand out their writing to each other a week ahead of time, and the writing group meeting is a time for comments. Other writing groups just read their work aloud in the group time. Still other groups have people hand out writing the day of the meeting, and people read silently. What would you prefer?"

"Oh, let's just read things aloud in the group," Verne suggested. "I don't have time to make copies."

Ann agreed, "I'd like to have my writing read aloud."

Again, Hilary nodded.

"A few more things to work out. You'll want to think about what sorts of comments you'd want us to give on your writing, if any. Writing groups usually give each other comments, although some don't. You can always just tell us whether you want comments, and what sorts of comments you want before you read something. Still, I'd like to suggest that everyone be careful to keep any critical comments phrased as a

question, like "How would it change your meaning if you..." and then state your concern. I learned to do that from one of my professors, and I've seen how much easier it makes the whole comment process work. It respects the writer's authority over his or her writing by acknowledging that comments given may or may not provide the best guidance. That way, there is no chance the writer starts to feel attacked. In fact, I've found it increases the writer's sense of gratitude."

Ann was smiling, but Verne countered, "Oh, you can just tell me what you think. I want to get better."

Ann nodded slowly, "Yes, I do, too. But I can see how your idea would work."

Hilary shook his head, "I'll only want positive comments."

Nodding to Hilary, I assured him, "We can do that." Then, looking at everyone, "We can accommodate comments to each person's desires. Ann and Verne, we can give you critical commentary (although, Verne, I'll start with the questioning kind, just to see what you think), and Hilary, we can just focus on the positive with you. So, how often do you want to meet?"

Ann looked up from her papers, "How often can you come?"

"Well, I can meet with you once a week, once every other week, or once a month, or pretty much on any schedule you like. We could even switch times, if that would be better. Does this time work for you?"

They all nodded.

"So, Friday at 1 p.m. it is," I said.

"I'd like once a week, if that isn't too much for you," Ann replied.

"That's fine. I'd like to be here for you."

"I can't guarantee I'll come all the time, but once a week sounds fine to me, too," added Verne.

"Hilary?"

"Yeah, sure. It's not like I have that much else to do. How long will we keep meeting? Eight weeks? Fifteen weeks?"

"Maybe eight or fifteen weeks, but I'm willing to stay on for up to a year, or more. Basically, I'll be here for as long as you want me to keep facilitating the writing group."

"So why don't we get started?" Now, almost an hour had gone by, and Verne was checking her watch.

I nodded my head. "Okay. I think we've covered all the basics of how this writing group should be run. We could always change how we do things later. Beginning our session sounds like a great idea. Does anyone have any other comments or concerns?"

Everyone shook their heads, no.

Verne chimed in, "I'll start."

Introducing the Three Narrative Case Studies

The following three chapters present the narrative case studies of the three writing group participants, beginning with Verne, followed by Hilary, and then Ann. As mentioned earlier, four interviews shaped the content of the case studies. The first three interviews took place in February, April, and September of 2005. The final interview varied for the participants. For Verne it was in November. For Ann and Hilary, it was in January and February of 2006.

Each narrative case study begins with a short introductory narrative that highlights one moment with the subject. In Verne's chapter, I begin toward the end of

Verne's time, during the September 2005 interview, when Verne told me what the writing group meant to her. Her note to me that day provided the focal point for her case study, explaining how the writing group had given her a "new lease on life." Hilary's chapter begins with the first time he read to us because that day set the tone for Hilary's involvement in the group, establishing how important positive reinforcement would be for him. Ann's chapter starts with a conversation she and I had in the late summer of 2005 because this conversation dealt with the major focus of her chapter, how the writing group helped her take one more step toward overcoming her textual learning disabilities.

Then, the first section of each chapter provides the written literacy biography of the participant, giving the context for each participant's original perceptions of writing. In Verne and Hilary's cases, this exposition is relatively short, about five pages. In Ann's chapter, her literacy biography is extensive, over twenty pages long, because it is so complex.

The second part of each case study presents the participant's experiences within the writing group, focusing on his or her perceptions of those experiences. Per Verne's request, the rough drafts discussed are not included in her chapter. In Hilary and Ann's chapters, excerpts of their drafts are included along with the discussions.

The third part of each case study looks closely at each participant's interpretation of their writing group experience, in context with their memories of previous writing experiences. In doing so, this will touch upon the main questions of this dissertation: What did this writing group accomplish for each participant? How successful will Participant Design be? What role will the writing group play in encouraging electronic and computer literacy? How important is generativity to the writers of this study?

The three narrative case study chapters that follow use both expository and narrative writing to show the results of the research.

CHAPTER THREE

VERNE

As usual, Verne was waiting for me as I walked in the room, and she started talking as I approached. "I hope you don't mind, but I was thinking about this class, and I wrote down a few thoughts for you."

Verne persisted in calling the writing group a class, even when I corrected her, so I just let it go this time. "Hold on there, let me just get the tape recorder set up."

She smoothed her short, stylish blond wig as I pulled the recorder out of my bag, and she told me about her daughter's plans to publish their children's book, *Joel and the Magic Toy Tree* (See Appendix I), on Lulu.com, a self-publishing website I had recommended.

She paused in her story to see if I was ready. She wanted to start reading what she had brought with her. "All right, is your recorder set up?"

"Sure, sure, go ahead." I smiled at Verne's usual vigor and settled back into my chair, placed my notebook on my knee, and prepared to take notes as I watched her hold up the pages of her small drugstore notepad upon which she kept notes and revisions for stories. It also was on this notepad's pages that she had even written the occasional recipe for me after picking up on some random comment I once made about how helpless I sometimes felt in the kitchen. She cleared her throat and began to read from her notepad:

Krystia, my dear teacher, thank you for selecting [this location] to do your thesis for your doctorate. By doing so, you've done more for me than you realized, and I'd like to tell you how, okay? You revived my interest in writing again, because I pretty much gave up on it. You gave me the confidence I lacked, which I always lacked, because you kept assuring me that I do have talent and my stories are publishable. That's all I needed to hear. The brainstorming we do in your class is so beneficial. I know I've grown in my writing skills, and I think the others have, too. I could see it. Most important, you gave me a new lease on life, literally.

Literally. Because of my husband's ill health and mine, I was always in a deep depression; even the nerve pills weren't helping me because I'm in constant pain from that cancer. And I cry a lot because I feel sorry for myself. However, now I spend quite a bit of time thinking about what my next story will be, my next children's story. So that gets my mind off my pain and, oh, makes me happy, and boy, it makes my husband and my kids happy. They always cheer me on, as you do. So, anyway, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart. (Interview, September 2, 2005)

We were both wiping away tears by the end of her oration. She had started weeping, slowly and quietly, as she said, "You gave me the confidence I lacked." As I listened to the transcript later, I noticed that the last part of her reading was mixed with our sniffles and nose blowing.

After a few moments of silence, I said quietly, "Verne, I would have never known you had been feeling so blue."

Immediately, she grinned. "Yes, well, my friends always tell me I look good. No one ever believes I've been fighting cancer for almost ten years." Her face had delicately applied makeup and her wig was perfectly curled. Verne's cream blouse and black slacks were pressed and her nails trimmed. Yes, she looked nice. Her rounded face, with her smiling blue eyes, looked healthy and vibrant.

"Verne, you do look good," I replied with admiration. I appreciated how she was able to appear attractive and healthy when she did not feel that way.

She beamed. "I always have. Why should I stop now?"

In the note she gave me that late summer day, Verne handed me the basis upon which to organize my case study. She summarized the main elements that this chapter will examine: Verne's history as a writer, her empowerment through the writing group, and the connection between writing and Verne's health. Also, family was central in Verne's experience as a writer and writing group member.

Verne as a Writer

Verne had a long history of writing and creativity. Since her childhood, writing had provided her with joy. Verne enjoyed both the process of creation and the pleasure of sharing a final product with family and community. In her writing history prior to the group, her only regret was that she never had published.

Verne enjoyed writing as a child. When I interviewed her in February, she smiled as she talked about her memories of writing. She not only smiled, she glowed. Her posture straightened, her body language became invigorated, and as she spoke, it was evident her whole physical being was engaged in the discussion of her writing. She savored memories of a few songs she wrote as a young adult, and she eagerly shared how she had used her talents to write poems, stories, and plays to enrich her family life and community life.

One of her first memories was an attempt to publish a song:

Well, I always wrote. A little bit here, a little bit there. I wrote a song [which] was really quite good. I don't have the lyrics now, but I took it to a local orchestra leader, you know?

And he said, "Oh, that sounds good. I'll put the music to it, but I want 50, you know, 50 percent of the profits."

And I said, "That's not fair."

So you know what? I got a hundred percent of nothing. [...] Okay. I was 18 then, and I'm 81 soon. (Interview, February 11, 2005)

We laughed together at her telling of the story, one she told a couple times over the course of the year. That song was her first hope for publication, but not her last.

Creating "The Magic Toy Tree"

The first day I met her, she had invited me up to her room to discuss her interest in the writing group. While she hedged on whether to join or not because of her and her husband's health troubles, she shared stories of a lifetime of creativity and hesitant

attempts for publication. She told me of a story she wrote for her son, "The Magic Toy Tree," and how she had gone to the Carnegie Library to ask how she might be able to publish it. However, as she remembered it, the librarian cautioned her that her story might be stolen, which kept her from trying. Fear of having her idea stolen was evident in the February interview, where she danced around the plot of the story.

I did "The Magic Toy Tree" because my son Bill would try not to lie to me 'cause he knew lying was a sin, but he skirted the truth. Of course, being his mother I saw: his eyes would get wide and everything, you know.

[Laughter]

So, I told him the story about "The Magic Toy Tree." How it turned to wood, you know, because... Well, anyway, 'The truth will come out.' [...]
(Interview, February 11, 2005)

While she had not yet published the story, "The Magic Toy Tree" became a family legend, one passed on to her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Her stories provided the family with a sense of legacy and tradition. She told me of how her granddaughter had once come up to her and said, in awe, "I saw the magic toy tree! I saw it!" There had been a shadow of a tree seemingly dancing on the side of her house, and she took it to be the magic tree of grandma's story.

While perhaps the most memorable of Verne's stories, "The Magic Toy Tree" was only one of her creative works that added to the magic of her family's and community's childhoods. Writing, for Verne, also had been a means for guiding and helping her children and the younger generations. Or, as psychologist Erikson would say, writing was a source of generativity for her (Coleman & O'Hanlon: 2004).

Being a Playwright and Poet for Her Family and Community

When a new priest came to her church shortly before one Christmas in the 1960s, she rescued the Christmas play:

[The priest] said, "We don't know the children, so we probably won't have a play." And I said to my husband, "I'll be right back." [chuckles] I DO have more nerve than talent.

[Laughter]

So anyway, I, uh, went to him and I said, "Don't worry about it." I said, "I'll have a variety show. I'll do it all, Father."

He said, "Okay."

And it turned out pretty cute. But, I, for the three little angels, I had the mothers making the wings and all that. And then they repeated like three lines or so. You know. They did it together. It turned out so cute. Just looking at them was cute. (Interview, February 11, 2005)

After that, she continued to write other plays for the church's children, incorporating songs and stories and poems.

She even used poetry to help save money, while making something better than money could buy. She had a very vivid memory of writing a poem for her daughter for a school Christmas play, even remembering how she rocked her son with one hand and wrote with the other while listening to Liberace in the background:

For instance, my daughter came home and she said, "Mom, you have to buy me a puppet."

And I said, "Why should I have to buy you a puppet?"

She said, "Well, I have to have one. We're gonna have a Christmas play."

I said, "Why do you need a puppet?"

She said, "Everyone's having it."

And I said, "Then you don't want it. We'll do something different."

So, while I'm rocking my son, you know, with the one hand. He was laying on the couch, and I had the TV on. I even know what was playing then. He was playing the piano...Liberace. [...] I had the music back there so he would fall asleep, and then I wrote a three stanza poem for my daughter and I dressed her as an angel and I used her first holy communion outfit [...] Everything was white. And the teacher liked it so much, she had her read it in every one of the classrooms. (Interview, February 11, 2005)

Verne smiled triumphantly at how well her plan worked for her daughter and beamed with pride in her accomplishments.

Writing with Technology and Relishing the Writing Process

While developing as a writer and enjoying the process of creation in various literacy practices like written stories and poetry, Verne also experimented with multiple literacy technologies. She wrote most often with pen and paper, but she appreciated that her husband taught her how to use a typewriter in the 1980s (Interview, February 11, 2005).

It was obvious that her creativity meant a great deal to her. Her husband and children saw that and would try to get her to write to cheer her when she, in her mid-50s, lost the vision in her right eye due to nerve damage.

And then when I lost the sight in my right eye, I was very, very upset. So my husband went out and, uh, he bought me a typewriter. [...]

My husband brought the typewriter, and he said, "You always wanted to write." So he gave a thousand dollars so that I could go (and money wasn't that easy for us), so I could go to Famous Writers. But I did it through the mail, which is very hard. But I ended up with a B+. And I had a lot of fun, and my kids would be waiting there, "Mommy what did you get?" "Mom," they're calling me long distance because they were married already by then, "What'dja get?" It was like Santa Claus comin' and everybody wants to know what I got, 'cause I'd read 'em the stories over the phone and all, you know? And so, I found out that, I enjoyed... it... it's like doing a painting and, when it, you know, it ends up a nice painting you get so much satisfaction. Well, with writing it's the same thing. You've created something. (Interview, February 11, 2005)

Verne enjoyed the creative process of writing, and she savored the chances to share her creations with her family. She already understood "from experience the SATISFACTION that come[s] from a story," that understanding that is necessary, according to James Britton, to attain mastery (Britton, 1982/1997: 148).

As of 2005, Verne had embraced computer technology. She had become used to e-mail and was still in the process of learning different aspects of the word processor. In her first interview, she emphasized how she loved the word processor:

I am using one now. I'm just learning, and I'm loving it! And I had Rose [the computer instructor] come up yesterday and show me things I didn't know. I need more people to show me more stuff, you know? (Interview, February 11, 2005)

I hoped that with the work in the writing group, her enthusiasm would grow.

Verne as a Writing Group Member

Verne was a devoted member of the writing group during the year of the study. She postponed any appointments that could wait in order to meet with us, even excusing herself from visiting family. Furthermore, she put hours of time into her writing and revising for the group every week. Even still, Verne missed part or all of a fifth of the sessions due to her or her husband's ill health. Despite her absences, by the end of the year of the study, she had revised three old stories and composed and wrote six new stories. Verne was glad that the group helped prepare her for the publication she had hoped for all her life.

While she did not want to submit rough drafts to the study I conducted, she happily handed me copies of writing she felt ready for publication. Therefore, this section does not include copies of the works-in-progress that we discussed in group meetings. However, I have attached her self-published story as an appendix to the dissertation (See Appendix I).

Hesitating to Join

When I first met Verne in late December of 2004, a month before the writing group began, she was coy about whether or not she would become involved in my writing

group. She told me that while she had once enjoyed writing, she had become too busy with her and her husband's health problems to do much anymore.

However, she was preparing a wedding present: a letter for her grandson and his future wife. She invited me to her apartment to show off a draft of the letter.

As I entered, I noticed how tidy the rooms were. The apartment first opened into a kitchen, which was divided from the dining area beyond it by a counter. I passed the refrigerator that faced inward opposite the entrance. The counter ran parallel to the doorway and ended with enough space for a person or two to pass into the kitchen area.

Verne had a dining room table and chairs just past the kitchen area, by the windows, in a direct line from the apartment door. From the dining area, I could look to the right at a display shelf of family pictures that showcased children and grandchildren, as well as a photo portrait of her and her husband. To the left, a blue LazyBoy divided the dining area from the living area, facing the television set in front of it.

Verne told me to sit on the couch that was opposite the LazyBoy against the wall. This firm, elegant, and cream couch, had a pattern of muted peach and pink flowers on green leafy stems. Verne went into the back bedroom to get her letter. She noticed me looking up at a dazzling painting of a bowl full of yellow roses on the opposite wall, next to the window by the TV, above the LazyBoy. It was one of several beautiful wall decorations.

"Ah, my girlfriend, who's a painter, gave me that as a birthday gift." She smiled. She then proceeded to explain how she, in return, went through extraordinary efforts to get a special birthday gift for this friend, ultimately choosing a statue of two female

friends from a catalogue. Then she directed my attention to the letter she had started writing for her grandson.

She had jotted a few notes on a drug store notepad and began to read.

Verne started with how she and her husband were about to celebrate their 58th wedding anniversary and explained that the couple should endeavor to be each other's best friends, as she and her husband had been. She concluded with their congratulations.

"I love how you offer pointers based on what worked for you and Bill. What if you develop that more? You should definitely come to the writing group in January and share it!"

"You think? Will that be okay?"

"Oh, yes, it should be." I wasn't sure if she was asking if the genre was allowed or if the letter was good to show to others. But, both were true, and bringing her letter the first day seemed a great idea.

"Well, I'm not sure I can make it. It will depend on how things are with me and my husband."

Nevertheless, she attended on January 7, 2005, to kick off our first session. In fact, she was the first to arrive. The group was pleased as she presented her letter for her grandson's marriage. She insisted we give her some commentary, so we did. We suggested that she perhaps move her congratulations to the beginning of the letter and that she develop her experience with her husband even more. She thanked us, but when I asked if she would come back, she said, "I can't be sure. It all depends on the doctors and our health" (Journal, January 7, 2005). I was not sure if I would see her after that.

Savoring the Revision Process

The following week, though, she came and proudly opened the session with a suspense story, "It's Only the Wind," that she had written some 20-30 years ago. The pages she held were yellowed with age. We enjoyed the story, and the following week she shared another story she had written for the Famous Writers Club in the 1970s, about herself and her sister working at Kutcher's Country Club. Famous Writers was a course-by-mail that Verne had taken where published authors would read amateur texts, provide commentary, and produce overall grades for students.

As she read, we enjoyed how she captured the dialogue, but afterward suggested she develop the scenery more.

She nodded. "Yes, Famous Writers wanted a story written entirely through dialogue and gave me a page limit. I wanted more but wasn't allowed to do it."

"So, do it now," Ann urged as Hilary and I nodded.

"Okay, I think I will" (Journal, January 21, 2005).

On January 28, 2005, she proudly showed off the revised version of her letter, which was to be framed and given at the wedding. This time, she allowed me to keep a copy of the letter:

Dearest Paige and grandson Steven,

Congratulations on your marriage. We're so happy for you. Today, February 19, 2005, you will begin sharing life as one. Good, for no one should go through life alone, for though our world is full of people, one could be very lonely. Life with its ups and downs and unexpected turns could be overwhelming. However, if you have a soul mate, "a sorrow shared is half the sorrow, and happiness shared is twice the joy."

We, Bill and Verne Triscila, celebrated our 58th wedding anniversary on January 25th, 2005. Here's what worked for us: We are each other's best friend and enjoy doing things together like playing cards, scrabble, watching sports, and even worshipping together. Yet, at the same time, we allowed each other the space to participate in activities with others, such as Bill's bowling league and Verne's

women's card club. We did fight, but never stayed angry, and during our arguments we made sure not to use disrespectful, hurtful words because they are never forgotten even after you kiss and make up. Be patient with one another's idiosyncrasies and weaknesses, for we all have them. Instead, remember why you fell in love. Frequent doses of hugs, kisses, and hearing the words I love you works wonders and keeps your love alive; plus, it will make life together an exciting and enjoyable journey.

God bless your marriage! We wish you the best of luck!

All our love,
Grandma and Papa

Ann, Hilary, and I all agreed that this was going to be a present her grandson and granddaughter would treasure (Journal, January 28, 2005).

In the following session, she showed off the second draft of her dialogue piece.

We all agreed that it had improved, but I still had a few comments.

"I don't understand what the porch looks like or how far your apartment was from the country club, so when you both bring the two rich men over, I'm not sure where everyone is. Also, how did you get the guys on your apartment porch without bringing them into the apartment?"

Verne then described how there was a path from the kitchen to the housing for the help, and that the porch wrapped around the front of the apartment, and that the entrance to the apartment was through the porch.

"Wonderful. How would it change your story if you wrote what you just said?"

She nodded and quickly took some notes in her notepad and read us a few lines, repeating the process until she felt satisfied with her revisions (Journal, February 4, 2005).

Other new drafts came in the sessions that followed, and we cheered as she developed the details of her stories. By mid-February, Verne regularly attended the group.

As a writing group member, Verne was consistently punctual, lively, engaged, and always ready to help. She also frequently made us laugh with how impatient she could be. As I mentioned in my journal on January 28th, 2005, "She starts out our sessions almost immediately after I get there, excitedly, like a kid at Christmas."

She not only would read quickly, but she would push us to move on to the next subject, the next person, too. I welcomed her attitude, as the rest of us were perhaps a little too laid back. We laughed together at how enthusiastic she was, even as she learned to slow down and enjoy the moments of the group.

Through the writing group, Verne came to learn that "[e]ffective writing develops from error" (Murray, 1996: 136). A careful craftswoman, she often mentioned how she just felt that her first drafts were "perfect!" (Writing Group Transcript, July 1, 2005). They were very good, but the group and I often gave her pointers on how her writing might be made even better.

Growing through Participant Design

Verne so energetically asked for feedback from the very first week, she ended up getting more comments than her fellow group members. In the first week, I was the one who commented on her work the most, but as the other members began to see how excited she was to show off her revisions, they began to do more commenting as well.

At first, this led her to wonder if I thought her work not as good as that of the other members. I reflected on this at the end of January:

It finally occurred to me why [Verne] might have asked me in the elevator today if she wasn't as good a writer as the rest of the crew, to which I asked her if she was on crack. I realize I've been more comfortable giving her editing suggestions early on because she seems so confident and self-assured. (Journal, January 28, 2005)

That afternoon I explained that she received more comments because of how determined she seemed and because her writing was very good to begin with. I offered to give fewer comments, but she refused. She'd say, "I want to be better. Keep giving them." For several months, after that day, Verne was again her confident self.

As a result of the Participant Design developed on the first day, members were accommodated according to their needs. Verne received more constructive criticism than Hilary and Ann, generally, as she requested. Hilary got only his desired positive comments. He often said that he didn't want anything else, so we respected that desire. Ann, who still struggled with writing disabilities and a lifetime of minimal writing experience, often got proofreading and more generalized comments, like, "What if you developed this sentence into a story?" balanced with lots of praise designed to counteract a lifetime of negative feedback.

This differentiation seemed healthy for the group. However, sometimes the differentiation could cause some tensions. I periodically would need to remind Verne why she got so much more constructive criticism. In July, I re-explained it all again, not just in a moment outside the writing group, but within the writing group with all the group members present. I did this because Verne seemed disheartened that her newest story received so many comments:

Krystia: Verne, whereas Hilary admits he hates comments, you seem to live for the challenge. Ann works with her comments and is also eager for them. Still, you get so energized.

Verne: Yeah, well I thought my writing was perfect [her tone indicated she was smiling].

Krystia: I know, but you ask for comments, and then we tell you what might be missing from perfection, and then you come back a week later with all this energy and show how you can surpass all our comments and make it even closer to perfect. We respond to how you light up when you meet the challenge, and give you more comments. We can stop if you want.

Verne: No way. I just thought it was perfect already. But it will be next week. (Writing Group Transcript, July 1, 2005)

So Verne had consistently been a member who would "welcome and make use of instructive failure" (Murray, 1996: 136). She welcomed criticism, and so her writing consistently improved over the year. In April, Verne noticed how comments from the group helped her slow down in her writing:

Krystia: Has the writing group affected your writing in any way?

Verne: No, it helps it. What do you mean? How... how does it help it? Well I have a tendency, I worry about boring somebody with too many details, so I have a tendency to take short cuts and now I'm learning to put more detail in. So that's helpful. (Interview, April 15, 2005)

Verne would not only "accept criticism without rancor" (O'Reilley, 1993: 33), but accepted criticism with enthusiasm, setting an example for all of us.

Reviving "The Magic Toy Tree" in the Writing Group

Only once in the year of the study did Verne get to have the kind of response she hoped for upon the first reading of a story. That was on April 29, 2005, when she read to us the newly written version of "The Magic Toy Tree." We had been encouraging her to write the story down for as long as she had been talking about it. After five months of anticipation for me, and four months of build-up for the group, I worried that her first reading of the story would not meet the grand expectations she had built up in us. The way she described her children's, grandchildren's, and great-grandchildren's responses to her story made it sound like it could become a childhood classic. It already was a classic for her family.

She met all of our expectations, and then some, when she shared her story (See Appendix I for later published version).

After a few moments of silence, we started a round of applause that lasted almost a minute. It took over 15 minutes of gushing about this detail or that plot turn before we were able to even think of a constructive comment, and at that, the comments were hesitant.

"I love the poem posted on the toy tree," Ann said.

"I love the magical feeling of the glowing up over the hill. I also like how you drew the townspeople together in the middle of the night," I said.

"Well, is there anything I can improve?"

"I'm having trouble thinking of something, if there is," I said.

Hilary quietly chimed in, "What if you developed more about how Joel fooled his parents?"

We nodded, but I added, "Well, you could add more details, as always, but I'm not sure. I liked it as it was" (Journal, April 29, 2005).

Verne then went on to show her family the written version of the story, and her daughter urged Verne to begin a series of children's stories.

That day of praise helped spur the creation of six stories geared toward teaching children moral lessons. Until this point, Verne had not written a new fictional story in several decades. On June 11, 2005, her daughter came to the writing group with her mother to show off Verne's new story, "Ben's Gift," which was about accepting differences. This lovely imaginative piece explored how Ben accomplished the transition from Germany to the U.S. while teaching his classmates something about accepting differences through his unique connection to animals. Verne accomplished a realistic story that allowed for the possibility of a magical interpretation. The group loved this

piece, and while we didn't applaud, we gushed for a few minutes before offering a couple of comments.

The writing group helped reinforce my understanding of the power of praise. As Candice Spigelman (2004a) stated, we should see "[p]raise as action. Indeed, Aristotle is quite specific: 'To praise a man is in one respect akin to urging a course of action' (*Rhetorica* 1.9.35)" (Spigelman, 2004a: 145). Along with her daughter's encouragement, the praise from the writing group persuaded Verne to start creating new stories. Verne had not asked for applause in the Participant Design, but it proved to be a powerful motivational force for her.

Brainstorming in the Group: A New Element in Verne's Participant Design

Besides providing constructive criticism and praise, the group also began to help Verne brainstorm for new story ideas. This development showed a benefit of Participant Design's flexibility. On June 28, 2005, the group not only became a place to read stories already written, but also to talk about possibilities for future stories.

On June 28, Verne came into the writing group despondent and without her own writing. She had always come with some writing before. On this day, she was exhausted from chemotherapy treatments. Verne came to tell us she felt unsure whether she could continue writing, even though she had promised her daughter the series of stories.

"I'm too tired. I just can't write. I don't know even what to do for my next story."

"Oh, you can't give up now. 'Ben's Gift' was wonderful." I noticed how haggard Verne looked, but I mentioned her old story, knowing how when she talked about her writing, tiredness usually dropped away.

Sure enough, Verne smiled at the memory of the story she just finished. "Yes, and it was so much better last week, wasn't it?"

"Much, much better. You're a dynamo."

Hilary nodded in agreement. "You said you and your daughter would do a series, so you have to come up with another one."

Verne's shoulders slumped a little. "Yeah, but what?"

"Well, let's talk about any idea you've had at all."

Ann was absent that day, but Verne, Hilary and I talked about different story possibilities for almost an hour. This brainstorming led Verne to tell stories of her youth. She told of a river accident and a slashed toe. She also told us about a swing fall that hurt her spine. She even mentioned accidentally pushing her sister through a glass door.

These accident stories led to possible ideas for fictitious stories, but she didn't like any of them enough. We asked her about other stories.

She talked of her and her daughter's struggles with her daughter's polio. She then told the story of helping her daughter walk, the story of her preventing her daughter from accepting pity after her surgery, and the story of her daughter's persistence in becoming a minorette, which is a pompom and baton girl.

I put up my hand and had her pause after she told us about her daughter. "Now that is an inspirational story!"

"What if you wrote about your daughter?" Hilary added.

"No, my daughter was 15. I want it to be a picture book for little kids."

"Why not tell the same story, but with a young girl?"

"Do they have minorettes for little girls?"

"I don't know," I said, and Hilary also shrugged.

"Hmmm. Maybe. I like that. I think I'll try that out. You think that would be interesting?"

"The story you just told was pretty inspirational. Just keep the heart of it," I said. "You could even have it be about a kid overcoming asthma, or cancer."

"No, that's too depressing. I think I'll make it a leg injury."

"That sounds good." Hilary nodded (Journal, June 28, 2005).

This story, shown to us in various stages over the next several weeks, developed into the third book in her children's book series, "Dance, Angelina, Dance," a story about the benefits of perseverance. After that, we began to help her come up with ideas for the stories that followed.

This development, her allowing us to help her come up with stories as well as offer comments on how to develop the stories, revealed a positive aspect of the Participant Design's flexibility. It also showed how deeply Verne came to trust and rely upon the writing group, enough to let us help her from the very beginning stages of a story's creation. Because we helped her maintain hope that new story ideas could be developed, she kept writing and kept coming to the writing group. Further, as she said in the September interview, gathering ideas became one of the important aspects of attending the group: "The brainstorming we do in your class is so beneficial" (Interview, September 2, 2005). This idea-gathering development in June proved important for the remainder of Verne's attendance.

The critical commentary Verne received from the writing group encouraged a renaissance of writing in her life, where she revised old stories and began a series of new

stories. The group adapted when Verne ran out of ideas and energy and became a place where she could brainstorm and become re-energized about the writing process. The group's Participant Design flexibility facilitated the group's success in meeting Verne's various writing needs.

Writing Group, Writing, and Health

As discussed in the previous section, Verne's work in the writing group for a year spurred a revival of Verne as a writer. The year 2005 saw the creation of a letter for her grandson's marriage, three revised adult stories ("Power Tube," "I Told You So," and "It's Only the Wind"), a history of her and her husband written as a dialogue interview with another grandson ("My Interview with My Grandparents"), and five children's stories, four of which were newly created ("Ben's Gift," "Dance, Angelina, Dance," "Bullies," and "Enough Already") and one of which was already a family legend ("The Magic Toy Tree," which became a book that her daughter Joan illustrated, *Joel and the Magic Toy Tree*). The creation and revision of these texts had taken place during a year in which Verne and her husband had been in critical health. Verne asserted that the writing group helped her mental and physical health: "It gave me a new lease on life, literally" (Interview, September 2, 2005).

Dealing with Cancer, Among Other Things

Verne was the oldest member of the Blue Room Writing Group. At 81, she was at an age that our society marked as the probable beginning of serious health decline, but she had already been sick for years. Doctors diagnosed her with ovarian cancer for the first time in 1997 and gave her only a 50 percent chance of survival. After that, she had two heart attacks and several other recurrences of the cancer.

One would never know that Verne was sick when meeting her. She looked good. She walked around, took care of her husband, and drove them both to their medical appointments. Although still in cancer treatment, she remained in relatively stable condition. Nevertheless, Verne hesitated about becoming a writing group member at the beginning of 2005 mainly because she had been unsure whether she could fit anything in between all of the doctors' appointments.

Over the course of the early part of 2005, Verne endured two rounds of embolization to her liver where the ovarian cancer had metastasized in 2002. According to Verne, they gave her drugs directly to the liver, not through the general bloodstream, but through a port that had been installed for direct access. These drugs were supposed to form a clot that would travel up the artery where it eventually would stick and block the blood supply to the tumor. According to Verne, "When they give me the chemo in my veins, then it helped. But it wasn't helping my liver. Not enough. So they tried this embolization (it's something new), so it was directly to the liver" (Phone Conversation Notes, November 7, 2005).

The March embolization treatment made the cancer smaller. The writing group rejoiced with her. When the late April treatment seemed to have very little effect, the writing group worried with her. The systemic chemotherapy treatments had been put on hold during the embolization treatments, and that left Verne vulnerable. She told me, "I asked if the cancer would metastasize again if they quit putting it in my blood. The doctor said 'But your heart can't take both.' Sure enough, in that month or two it metastasized to my spine. So, I was right about that" (Phone Conversation Notes, November 7, 2005).

Verne not only experienced a lot of ill health, she again faced another death sentence. "I'm crying. My children are crying. But what can I do?" she said after finding out in June that the ovarian cancer had metastasized again to her spine, pelvis, and hip (Journal, June 21, 2005). Around the same time, the cancer treatments made her so weak that she had to start using a walker. While it was a snazzy walker, a blue one that doubled as a seat and had a carrying bin, she felt cranky about having to use it. She went through another grueling round of chemotherapy, and by October was told chemotherapy could do no more. In late October, she began to look into experimental treatments. In November, her doctors told her she had only several months left to live.

While all of this was going on, she also had to contend with her husband's ill health. In July, her husband went into the hospital with pneumonia and two other viral infections. In October, he went into the hospital again because of internal bleeding. Both times, no one was sure if he would come out again. The second time kept Verne from the writing group for almost two months. It became clear that Bill would not leave the hospital. On November 10, 2005, the family was told that he had only a few days left, so he was taken out of the coma that doctors had induced to minimize his pain. This allowed him to say goodbye to his wife, children, grandchildren, and friends.

One way that her health affected her as a writer was that Verne no longer felt she had the energy or stamina to sit at her word processor, let alone continue to keep learning how to use it. By the middle of the 2005, medical treatments focused on Verne's lower spine and hips, which made it very uncomfortable for her to sit. She started to have trouble sitting all the way through a writing group session and would hurry us along even more because of this.

Although she owned a laptop, Verne stopped using it. While she had enjoyed learning about the computer before, it was no longer as important to her. She told me it took "too much effort to sit," as well as to type and figure out how the thing worked, she told me in the April interview and later in a conversation on October 29, 2005 (Journal). She found it easier to write the old way, while lying in bed. I tried to add to Verne's training through visiting her and showing her how to save her document and later reopen it, but I learned that while she was excited to learn about technology, health problems would impede her progress.

Verne's health did not prevent her entirely from using technology. Unsatisfied with only having handwritten copies of her texts, she came to rely on family members to type her writing into a computer. She wanted to make sure that files of her writing were being saved electronically. This way, she still utilized some of the benefits of the technology through other people. While working with me and with family, Verne came to understand terms like "copy and paste" and "send an attachment" and to appreciate the ability to print multiple copies of a text.

Verne liked the idea of self-publishing through an on-line website. She heard from her sister about an author that self-published a book before being discovered by a traditional publisher. This author urged potential writers to look up self-publishing on the internet (Journal, June 11, 2005). When I did a workshop on self-publishing, Verne took notes as I introduced Lulu.com, a reputable self-publishing website where a friend of mine had been published. The company website made sure a text was copyrighted and, for a reasonable price, would put an item for sale on Amazon.com and the Barnes and Noble on-line store.

Verne told her daughter Joan about the self-publishing website and collaborated with her daughter to begin work toward publication. While not directly using the new technology herself anymore because of her ill health, Verne continued to grow more technologically literate.

Accepting Help from the Writing Group

Along with Verne's family, Ann, Hilary and I tried to rally around Verne. At times, Ann watched over Verne's husband while Verne went to the doctor for her own treatments. Ann and Hilary both offered sympathy and support when Verne needed it. Still, Verne's family visited as needed, so most tangible desires were taken care of. The group tried to encourage Verne to keep writing. We all listened to the health updates, cheered her on, and kept asking for the next piece of writing and the next round of revisions. We were encouraged by how much healthier Verne looked when she talked about her writing, and that spurred us on to keep pushing her.

In the last months of Bill's life, the writing group showed Verne our support. When Bill was in the hospital, Ann visited Verne to keep her spirits up. Once, when Verne couldn't find a ride to the hospital, Hilary took her. I mentioned to him that Verne told me his kindness meant a lot to her, and he shrugged. "I felt honored that she'd ask me" (Journal, November 11, 2005).

On November 11, 2005, we cancelled our usual writing group session so that we could go together and join Verne and her family at Allegheny General Hospital in saying goodbye to Bill. We also went to thank Bill for always pushing Verne to join us and for encouraging her to write.

He died two days later. Verne asked me to sing the funeral liturgy for her husband, so Hilary and I carpooled together and, even as I led the singing, we wept together and with Verne's family at Bill's funeral on November 15, 2005. While Ann had to miss the funeral because she was in the hospital for diabetic complications, she called and gave her regards and prayers, as well.

Writing Group as an Act of Living

In the April interview, Verne told me how Bill had encouraged her to come to the writing group even when she didn't feel well, and she also first spoke of the growing significance of the writing group in getting her to write and keeping her mind stimulated. When I asked her what the importance of the writing group was to her, she answered:

I think the stimulation it gave me to go back to writing. That's what it is. I just mentioned that before. And I really enj...I relax and I'm enjoying it. My husband will say, 'Okay, go downstairs, I'm glad you belong to them.' My kids are so happy I belong to it. Because with all the illness I have, you know with my cancer and with my husband's illnesses, this is still keeping me alive and giving me something to look forward to, and I'll sit down, I'll repeat [my story and the group's comments] to my husband and he makes comments and he laughs about it, you know? So, so I said, it's giving me an incentive to live. And I think it keeps me and my mind stimulated. (Interview, April 15, 2005)

According to Verne, the writing group helped her stay alive by getting her mind off of her ill health and encouraging her to work on something she loved to do (Phone Conversation Notes, October 26, 2005). Verne exemplified Blitz's and Hurlbert's (2003) statement: "Writing puts us—and keeps us—in the thick of living, because it is an act of living" (85). By encouraging this "act of living," and keeping Verne in the "thick of living" the writing group significantly improved her quality of life.

Verne, in the April interview quote above, also emphasized how the writing group helped re-activate her mind. As we noted, the activity of thinking about stories and

writing would change Verne's physical demeanor. She looked and sounded physically healthier as she talked about her writing projects. Perhaps it was not just an illusion. In "Healing and the Brain," an entry in *Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice*, Ann G. Brand (2000) stated, "Whether we like it or not, the mind-body relationship is so powerful that it is humanly impossible to dissociate the two without grave consequences" (217). It was possible that when Verne said we were giving her "a new lease on life, literally," the truth might have been as exact as she suggested.

Her feeling better may have been due to several reasons. One possible explanation was that the writing group re-activated her love of writing. Another possibility was in how the group helped move Verne away from stagnation and wallowing in her ill health. As Verne said in her letter on September 2, 2005: "Because of my husband's ill health and mine, I was always in a deep depression [...] However, now I spend quite a bit of time thinking about what my next story will be" (Interview, September 2, 2005). The group also helped Verne once again give to her children, grandchildren, and future generations.

Writing Group: Reactivating Generativity

As mentioned in Chapter One, the next to last stage of human development involves either generativity, involving motivation to give to future generations, or stagnation, according to Erikson (1959/1980). Verne's work in the writing group helped reactivate her generative impulse. She wanted to create works that could be passed on not only to her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, but to future generations outside her family as well.

Verne and her family then showed how important Verne's generativity was to them. They expressed yearning for her continuing creative acts, as shown by her grandson's wedding request for a letter rather than a traditional present. His request exemplified how the younger generation looked to her for guidance.

However, "Just as the younger generations need older adults, so older adults need to be generative to younger generations; generativity is hypothesized to be important for the health and well-being of older adults" (Coleman & O'Hanlon, 2004: 46). Verne's daughter, Joan, was sensitive to this. She helped her mother set goals once she saw how writing stories for children enlivened her mother. She reinforced these goals when she visited our writing group, encouraging her, "You need to make a series of books, Mom!" (Writing Group Transcript, June 11, 2005). These children's stories were inherently generative in that they were designed to pass on the wisdom of years of motherhood and grand-motherhood while also tapping into Verne's creativity.

For example, as a mother and grandmother, she often had to deal with money issues. However, she saw parents who struggled with teaching their children the value of money: "I see children in stores today who won't listen to the word, no" (Writing Group Transcript, September 9, 2005). So, she wrote "Enough already," the story of how a girl became a saver, rather than a spender. Her character grew from a child who wanted everything to one who enjoyed having a "grown-up" checking account and buying things with money she earned by doing simple daily chores. I loved how the child was paid every week "like dad does with his paycheck," and I thanked her because I felt I learned how I wanted to handle money with my children someday because of her story (Journal,

September 9, 2005). Together, we realized that Verne was sharing her wisdom with the younger generations: both children and parents.

As Dan P. McAdams (1993) stated, "Desire, demand, concern, and belief lead to commitment. Commitment leads to [generative] action" (238). Verne always had the desire, and her family provided the demand. However, her concerns for others were mitigated by her concerns for her and her husband's health that occupied her every waking thought. The writing group helped Verne refocus her concern and provided her with some of the faith to reactivate her commitment and generativity.

Writing Group: Empowering

As much as she enjoyed the Famous Writers by mail class in the 1970s, it had also shaken her belief in her talents. As she said in both the February and April interviews, "I learned just enough to know I wasn't that great." The writing course was conducted by distance, and because it was conducted as a graded class, rather than emphasizing revision upon revision, it simply graded the stories she sent and provided cursory commentary. For example, she told us that she had been given a "B" letter grade for her story, "I Told You So" (Journal, January 21, 2005). How very final that sounded: a grade that said that she was very good, just not excellent. This reminded me of Patrick Hartwell's (1982) declaration:

Writing for writing classes is artificial and mechanical. It has no relevance to the real world. One writes down what one already knows, with special attention to the correct way to express it. One is never rewarded for one's effort and one's grading is always beyond one's conscious control. As a result, one learns nothing from writing; it's simply a matter of showing the instructor what you already know. (Hartwell, 1982: 32)

Famous Writers graded a story, rather than commenting on it and allowing time for revision. Once she sent the paper away, someone else stamped its worth, and she lost her

sense of control over her work. Our writing group, however, consistently reinforced Verne's talents, even as we gave her suggestions for her writing. In the article "A Psychological Basis for Empowerment," Jane Myers (1995) stated, "One way to empower older persons is to provide a means of involvement that promotes a sense of ownership and control" (116). Through re-establishing Verne's sense of power over her writing, we helped promote her sense of "ownership and control." This sense helped reactivate her own belief in her abilities. "Desire, demand, concern, and belief" (McAdams, 1993: 238) led to her re-commitment to writing.

Writing Group: Facilitating Publication

The writing group helped her recommit, and it also gave her a venue for her generative action. McAdams (1993) stated that "[t]here are three general classes of generative action. These are creating, maintaining and offering" (238). Within the writing group setting, she regained the ability to create new works, read aloud works she had already created, and offer us the joy of her stories. The writing group provided a test audience for Verne's generative texts. As Donald Murray (1996) said, "Writing is a private act with a public result, and most of us need a writing community that provides companionship in our solitude and a staging area that will ease us into publication before strangers" (123). In our case, Verne had us imagining how children might react to her story, as well as participating as co-generative adults with her in brainstorming how she could best reach children through her stories.

Verne ultimately wished to publish, which she emphasized in our first interview:

Krystia: So we're looking forward to publication, I'm guessing.

Verne: I love that. That's what gets me excited. (Interview, February 11, 2005)

This was the natural end to generativity: "The most generative adults draw creatively upon both the agentic desire for symbolic immortality and the communal need to be needed" (McAdams, 1993: 232). Publication provided symbolic immortality and inherently implied a fulfillment to a communal need. Murray (1996) stated,

Publication completes the act of writing that begins in private and ends in community. When we publish, we share what the writing has taught us and become a participant in the world in which we write. And, when I am published and receive a response to what I have written, I am stimulated to write. I am in the game. (152)

The writing group gave Verne a physical place that provided her hope that she could be "in the game" of publishing. It also gave her a place where she could be "in the game" of creating and revising toward publication, a place where she could develop her generativity, and a place where she could participate in the "thick of living" in an "act of living." The writing group was empowering, as Verne kept trying to tell me.

Writing Group: Inspiring Verne's Family and Promoting Verne's Legacy

Our senior housing writing group inspired Verne's family to act as a writing group, also, for she would also show off her writing to her husband and children and living siblings. This inspired her daughter, Joan, to begin illustrating Verne's stories. Joan proposed that they begin a series of stories called TrisCat Stories, based on the beginnings of both of their last names, and started calling her mom multiple times a week to not only talk about her parents' health problems, but also about her mom's writing.

This collaboration between mother and daughter was not only one of the most important side effects of the senior housing writing group, but it also led to the publication of *Joel and the Magic Toy Tree*. As Verne announced to me in September, this book would be self-published through Lulu.com and available December 2005. The

book would then be available through Barnes and Nobles and Amazon on-line booksellers. Verne determined that the other five stories would follow, as either self-published books, or as books through a publisher, if one adopted the series.

Verne regained a sense of control over her legacy and generativity in the face of illnesses that had been leaving her depressed (Interview, September 2, 2005). This led to another layer of empowerment. As Myers stated, "By helping older persons experience a sense of control in the management of their lives, and by promoting older persons as capable and self-determined, a sense of empowerment can be fostered" (Myers, 1995:116).

While Verne's interviews did not directly say that she avoided death through trying to write, publish, and establish her legacy, her productivity doubled in the summer months after she realized the cancer had metastasized again. Ernest Becker (1973), Pulitzer Prize winning author for his book, *Denial of Death*, talked about such a phenomenon. He said that "the idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is the mainspring of human activity—activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny for man" (Becker, 1973: xi). Verne said several times that she was not yet ready to die. I have wondered if writing and publishing had been one more way for Verne, besides still looking gorgeous, to fight back death's grip.

CHAPTER FOUR

HILARY

"I brought a poem about 9/11 this week," Hilary said to the group on January 28, 2005. His bright blue eyes searched our faces and then turned back to his two handwritten sheets of paper. He was clean-shaven. Black peppered the front of his graying head of hair. His red, logo-free hooded sweatshirt and jeans fit well on his athletic frame.

"Would you read it, or would you prefer that I do it?" I asked. Up to this point, he had neither read nor let me read, due to, in his words, his "Emily Dickinson syndrome." For the past three weeks since we started meeting, he had commented on Verne's and Ann's writing but had not shared his own.

"No, I can," he assured me.

I smiled encouragingly.

Hilary's body language grew more energized. He leaned forward as if he were about to give a sales pitch. "Okay, let me give you an introduction to this poem. I wrote this after 9/11, trying to capture all the emotion and commotion. You remember how crazy that time was?" He paused to see if we were engaged.

"Yes, that was a terrible day," Ann agreed.

I nodded my head.

"No doubt about that," Verne said.

He smiled and then grew serious again. "Well, this poem was my response. I thought I'd start with this because I've shared it before. Lynn Cullen, you know how she has this radio program? Well, I used to call in and she'd let me share my poems. She

must have liked all the poems, since she kept letting me read them and she'd say nice things about them. She even asked me to send her a couple. So, I thought I'd share this one."

Ann nodded, cheering him on with her smile.

"Go on, then," Verne encouraged him to begin.

He nodded and took a deep breath. "Okay, so here it goes:

PEOPLE GOING TO HEAVEN

September eleven people going to
heaven on 747's. Pray
brethren!

Mysterious faces from biblical places
with sinister plans for a free
land
all in the name of religion.

Smoking twins blacken blue skies,
working innocents fly to die,
to
end their agony.

To the South, in a fortress, paid
for by American resources,
steel
and granite merge into one,
bodies
disintegrate in morning sun.

People going to heaven, on 757's, it
was September eleven. Pray
brethren.

Flight 93 heading West, circles back
from whence it came.
Passengers
knew this was no game. In-
air
uprising to historical fame.

Slashing blades and bare knuckle
fists
screaming and shouting the
battle raged.
Courage and victory would
abound. Then
there was a hole in the
ground.
"Let's Roll!"

People going to heaven on
September eleven.

Men sworn to service, rush to the
scene
and confront a ghastly sight
never seen. Man-mule men
struggle with gear, up
clogged stairways looking for
strays.
"We're here!" "We're near!"

Melting steel and light-weight
trusses
give way to blood and guts as
thousands evaporate into
space

Crashing down one hundred floors,
onlookers gasp in disbelief,
to the noise that like that of a
thousand screaming eagles.
Then deadly silence, there
were no survivors...save
those on the street.

People going to heaven at 9:57.

People going to heaven at 10:27.

It was September eleven (and) Satan
devils were trying to enter
heaven under false pretense
and religious disguise.

On the ground in four different
places
tears ran down millions of faces and
WE grieved and grieved and grieved.

There was silence after he finished, and then we heard Ann's quiet voice. "That was beautiful."

"Well done, Hilary. Well done," Verne said.

"I loved the way you played with the words and still made us feel the power of that day. There was a wonderful use of alliteration and rhyme." I enjoyed not only the poem, but how invigorated Hilary was when he read and shared his work.

"That's what I like to hear. Positive reinforcement." Hilary sat back, crossed his legs, and smiled broadly (Journal, January 28, 2005).

This sort of positive reinforcement provided the motivation for Hilary's attendance in the writing group. He would refer to his desire for such commentary often and consistently, and he remained uncomfortable with receiving criticism throughout the year, no matter how constructive. As he mentioned in the above segment, Hilary would talk about having an "Emily Dickinson syndrome," where he dreaded sharing his writing. At the same time, his actions showed that he enjoyed having an audience, so long as he felt assured that it would be a positive one.

Hilary's nearly uncompromising insistence on positive reinforcement, crucial to his attendance and enjoyment of the group, formed the crux of his Participant Design. I must add that he made our job of giving positive commentary easy. Hilary wrote solid and engaging texts.

Hilary as a Writer

By the time Hilary joined the writing group, he had already filled seven journals with his writing and had told me in his first interview that he had written "piles of poems" (Interview, February 4, 2005). Much of his work had been lost in a fire in 2002, but he was well on his way to rewriting his life history when I met him.

Hilary had been an active writer for years, but he had not always valued writing. In his youth and early adult life, athletics provided his main venue for self-expression. In fact, failing an English class postponed his high school graduation and prevented him from playing in the final senior football game where talent scouts were recruiting players for college (Hilary's 1950s journal).

Nevertheless, Hilary was the only one of his brothers to graduate high school, fulfilling his "mother's dream that one of her sons would graduate." He even went to college, which he continued off and on for several decades: "It started in 1963 to probably 80-something" (Interview, February 4, 2005).

He did plenty of writing in college, discovering that he enjoyed journalism and communications.

It was four colleges, or five colleges and four majors. So, I have about 128 credits, so I have basically enough credits for a degree, but they're all, you know, different. I finally ended up with Journalism and Communications.
(Interview, February 4, 2005)

He was happiest with the Journalism and Communications degree, which he settled into during his final years in college; however, he did not finish because he was frustrated with the academic process and was approaching retirement age.

Hilary: Like I say, I [...] just got fed up. I just got to the point.
Krystia: Right, yeah, after all that time.

Hilary: Just changing majors and I'm like 50 at the time, I'm saying you know, I'm whistling Dixie. So now would just be a matter of getting it to get it, but, uh, the fact of the matter is that I'm still paying off my student loans.
(Interview, February 4, 2005)

Even without a completed degree, college expanded his interests. During his late years in college, he discovered how much he loved writing. Also, he realized that he loved videography. Both forms of recorded communication tapped his "creative juices"
(Interview, February 4, 2005).

Recording the Family History, Losing It All in a Fire, Starting Over

From the 1980s through 2002, Hilary began to record his own and his family's memories through pictures, videos, and writing. Then, in 2002, everything went up in smoke.

Krystia: When did [your house] burn [down]?

Hilary: Three years ago, this month, as a matter of fact.

Krystia: Wow.

Hilary: [...] I probably had a hundred tapes of video stuff, I mean with everything, my life just disappeared. I had done all this writing, journals and poems, and, so I just had a conglomeration of writings and videos and pictures and letters and, etcetera, etcetera. (Interview, February 4, 2005)

The fire destroyed all his writing except the written pieces that had been in a fireproof box. He told me in the second part of our first interview, conducted on February 11, 2005, "In the fire, I had a briefcase with some important stuff in it, luckily. Like secret stash stuff, and I saved that" (Interview, February 11, 2005). However, the fire destroyed all of his videos along with all of his video equipment. He lost the pictures he had been collecting from his family, as well as pictures he'd been taking. As he said, "When my house burnt down, I was like a keeper of the old family records and stuff, which is what put me in a heavy depression anyway, because of [the loss of] letters from the 20s and the 30s and the 40s and pictures, etcetera, etcetera. So, that kinda broke my heart"

(Interview, February 11, 2005). Old family photos were lost, as well as the letters written by his father to his mother during the Second World War. After taking over the home from an owner whose husband had recently died, he had not yet insured it. Therefore, he was forced to move into a subsidized apartment at the senior highrise complex.

For a short while, he felt too depressed to write, but a close friend of his insisted he start over and bought him a set of leather-bound journals. "She said it might be therapeutic for me" (Interview, April 4, 2005). This encouragement helped him to start again. However, he admitted it was hard to sit and rewrite knowing he had already written everything once. Frustrated by the feeling that he was not capturing the freshness of the previous version of his life story, he would go back and forth about whether to keep trying.

She bought me five or six journals and said, "Why don't you start writing again?" Which, I started writing again, but, uh, you know, it was hard getting into it [...] Sometimes you gotta write something for the second time [versus] if you write it when it's fresh in your mind, uh, it kinda comes out different. In fact, I was looking at stuff that I wrote 25 years ago [from the lock box that survived the fire], and I saw that [this time] I was having a hard time describing what I wanted to say. [...] Then, I got a mental depression by saying, "Why should I write all that?"

It's an interesting story and I should write that, but [...] I'm a right-handed and left-handed Libra, so I'm always fighting, you know. I'm always looking for balance.

[...] And I included that in a lot of my writing, the fact that I am a left-handed/right-handed Libra. (Interview, February 4, 2005)

In all his interviews, Hilary tied his contradictory feelings about rewriting his life story to the fact that he was a left-handed/right-handed Libra, which helped him describe incongruities within himself. He felt he had opposing sides of himself that wanted opposing things, so he always struggled to find balance. One part of him wanted to give

up. Another part of him wanted to keep writing. One part of him wanted to share his writing. Another part was dominated by an "Emily Dickinson syndrome."

Hilary also explained that part of him wanted to give up because he believed that his original journals were more relevant, special, and immediate. "I know that there's stuff I'll never recapture. The old journals had the heat of the moment. They captured the freshness of events" (Phone Conversation Notes, February 1, 2007). On the other hand, he wanted to have his stories in writing, even if he could not recreate the immediacy of the original versions. He eventually decided to rewrite, filling the journals that had been given to him after the fire.

Embracing Creativity, Writing, and Technology (To a Degree)

Besides wanting to record his life stories, Hilary enjoyed the creative act of writing. For example, he said, "I like to rhyme because I think [...] it's a talent trying to rhyme words, and I like to rhyme 'em because it's a, it challenges my creativity, actually. That's the same with my videos, the same thing" (Interview, February 4, 2005).

In every interview, he compared writing with videography, another of his past creative pursuits. Hilary often spoke about how he missed making videos, for he could no longer do so. The fire destroyed all of his equipment and he could not afford to replace it. In 2005, he tried to continue more visual literacy projects through a series of collage posters in honor of the Pittsburgh Steelers, which he would energetically show off to the writing group. However, writing remained his primary medium of creative expression.

Even though Hilary enjoyed the technology of the video camera for recording visual histories, the only tools Hilary used for his writing were a pen and paper. He knew

how to type, but did not use a typewriter. While Hilary owned a computer that a sibling had given him, he did not know how to use it. In fact, while he felt that "you gotta" use computers for writing in today's age, he was afraid of that technology.

Krystia: [...]how do you feel about using a computer with writing?

Hilary: *sigh* Yeah, that's... You gotta do that.

Krystia: Do you like that?

Hilary: Nah. I'm afraid of the technology. In fact, I have a computer in my room that a friend gave to me, and, ah, I was messin' with it for about ten minutes, and then I freaked out. I just unplugged it.

(Interview, February 11, 2005)

He reflected two years later: "I was in information burnout. All this multitasking. Yes, part of me said I should [learn how to use a computer]. But then I saw all those windows overlapping. It was irritating" (Phone Conversation Notes, February 1, 2007). On top of feeling overwhelmed by the computer, he was also concerned about his privacy. "I have this Orwellian-invasion-of-privacy fear. With computers, it's like your privacy is gone. All your information stored there for people to steal." As a result of his apprehensions about computers, Hilary never motivated himself to make use of the computer lessons available in the apartment complex.

Feeling Motivated to Write

Before Hilary joined the writing group in 2005, he had rewritten most of what he wanted to record from his early childhood through his middle-adult years and was well on his way to finishing his fifth journal.

He considered his writing important "because as far as I'm concerned, if you're writing about your family, uh, that's serious writing" (Interview, February 4, 2005).

Hilary wanted to pass along his experiences and wisdom to future generations. He said,

"I'm writing it for, uh, you know, my children and my grandchildren, basically. I mean, what else do you write for?" (Interview, February 4, 2005).

Hilary enjoyed hearing his family stories and reading his parents' old letters to each other, and he wanted to provide that joy for future generations. He told me:

My grandchildren and my great grandchildren [...]100 years from now, they'll say, "Ah, you know, what was my great-grandfather doing?" So, I'm on a mission, from that standpoint. (Interview, February 11, 2005)

Writing for his family fulfilled his need for generativity and gave him a sense of purpose in his later adult years.

Not only was he motivated to write for his family, but he also felt motivated by the fact that he was getting older. "You feel that you're running out of time, so I said, 'well you better put this down'" (Interview, February 11, 2005). After the loss of his house, Hilary realized that he probably would not have another 20 years to rewrite his journals, so he felt an intense need to work quickly.

After I knew Hilary better, he said that he also wanted to "set the story straight" (Interview, February 10, 2006). He had experienced some rough times during the '80s when his children were growing up, and as hard as it was for him to write about, he wanted the public record on his life to be told from his perspective. Still, he found himself stalling. He told me, "I'm almost stretching [the] '70s out, so I don't have to get into the '80s, because it's like a dark period" (Interview, February 11, 2005). By the time the writing group began in 2005, his writing had not broached the 1980s. Nevertheless, he wanted the chance to write down his story and explain his life from his own perspective.

While he had written about several of his dark periods prior to 1980, Hilary focused in his journals on the happier and more jovial stories. He spent much of his time writing about the anecdotes that friends and family asked him to document.

I have had certain close friends, family, and what have you, say 'Hey, that's a funny story, why dontcha write about that?' And I have done that, so, that adds to the positive reinforcement, but that's probably, eh, what I really need. Positive reinforcement. (Interview, February 11, 2005)

Positive feedback fed his desire to write and the desire for such feedback led him to participate in the writing group.

Hilary and the Writing Group

During 2005, Hilary was productive as a writer. An additional couple hundred journal pages joined the six or seven hundred pages that he had already written. He shared with the group his newly produced texts along with the texts he had created prior to 2005. As shown in the remainder of this section, because the writing group did what he wanted it to do, Hilary felt happy about being a member. Also, Hilary developed friendships with the group participants and enjoyed the positive feedback that they gave him. Hilary explained that he wanted such feedback from the writing group because it would help him continue his writing:

Krystia: What does participation in the writing group accomplish for you?

Hilary : Uhm, it helps my, my attitude about...fear of rejection, because I have that real bad, and I fight it all the time. So, hopefully, I'll get positive reinforcement from the class. (Interview, February 11, 2005)

As participant desires shaped the design of the writing group, we all made sure that, for Hilary, every week we focused on the positive aspects in his writing.

Because Hilary received the positive reinforcement he wanted, he both appreciated the group and kept returning.

Krystia: Have you been getting [positive reinforcement]?

Hilary: Oh, yes. From you, basically. Oh, and from, you know, other people, too. [...] I look forward to havin' this class. So... but, yeah, I'm getting what I thought I would get out of it. So, you know, I appreciate your feedback. More than you know. (Interview, February 11, 2005)

Positive reinforcement made Hilary look forward to the writing group and continue his attendance throughout the year. For example, in the opening narrative of this chapter where Hilary read his 9/11 poem, note how the group members and I emphasized the strengths of that poem. Verne said "Well done." Ann commented that the poem was beautiful. I said I liked his uses of alliteration and rhyme. Such general and specific praise insured that Hilary enjoyed a writing group session. However, from the fifth week of our meetings through the continuation of the writing group, positive reinforcement took an unexpected form: the enjoyment of hearing his texts read by another voice.

Hearing His Work Read by Another: "The Card Pitching Story"

On February 2, 2005, as we finished talking about Ann's story, Hilary opened his gray leather journal. "So, this is the journal where I have my stories from my childhood. After my house burned down, my friend gave me these seven journals, each a different color. In five of these, I write about a section of my life. This one is about my childhood."

"Hilary, would you like me to read for you?" I noticed that he had been bringing a journal down to the group for two sessions now, but he had so far been shy about reading from it. I wondered if it would make it easier for him if I read it.

"Well, let's try that," Hilary replied. While Verne preferred to read her own work aloud to us, he had seen me read for Ann for the last three weeks, at her request. He seemed to like the idea of not having to read the journal himself. "Start here, and then

continue until the marker. You'll see where to stop." He placed the leather strip about 20 pages into the text. In the group, the following account became known as "The Card Pitching Story."

Appearing out of nowhere in the spring of 1950 and overwhelming the 9- to 12-year olds and displacing somewhat the pick-up ball games was the baseball cards.

Three pieces of bubble gum and 5 baseball cards for 5 cents. What a deal! Baseball and football had sharpened my hand-and-eye coordination. Collecting and trading cards were the play. Well, the play for about a week.

Who [...]came up with the idea is unknown, but, there we were, 5 or 6 kids at a time pitching cards against Shep Cleaners wall from the curb about 6 to 8 feet away.

Closest to the wall wins all the cards. Like pitching quarters today; I guess they still do that thing. So between pick-up baseball games, card pitching was the new experience.

I had this cigar box that I would deposit nightly the day's winnings. Day in, day out, the frenzy of card pitching consumed the neighborhood kids and repeated throughout the country. Well, maybe not the pitching. I'm sure some areas of the country were collecting and trading and making fortunes 30 years later. Pitching on cement sidewalks shortened the life span. Sliding across the abrasive surface assured this. Well, for a while anyway. Frayed corners made the cards unusable; instead of sliding, they would have a tendency to float.

Winning 25-50 cards each day meant the cigar box became a shoe box. The competitive nature of card pitching consumed us all. Some would lose cards everyday and summer days brought schoolmates and older kids from other neighborhoods. The more affluent ones. Class warfare.

The deal was who could accumulate the most cards. Within the first month or two, thousands of cards were circulating in the area. (Hilary's 1950s Journal)

The story continued, building in suspense through the various increasingly difficulty levels of competition up to what Hilary called "Level 4":

So now comes the old card into a "tin pie plate." Level #4

While the hit on the wool cap (Level #3) would generally make you a winner, if you hit dead-center of the metal pie pan, the card would usually bounce out. So the skill of floating into the wool cap wasn't useful at this level and you had to "WALK" the card into the pie-pan. Land the card close and "Voila," there you go. Usually, the card would just barely balance itself on the rim of the pan.

No touching the ground underneath. If you didn't have 500 cards for the competition, it was wise not to show. It was the Super Bowl of card pitching.

The World Series, the Stanley Cup, the World Cup rolled into one. (Hilary's 1950s Journal)

By the winter of 1958, Hilary had accumulated a burlap sack full of cards, which then became the fodder for a different sport:

The sack was $\frac{3}{4}$'s full. Between 15 or 20 thousand cards. Now it's Christmas. My brother is 15 and has his eye on the Red Ryder B-B gun. At 15, he's mature enough. Additionally, the 50's mentality didn't border on paranoia. So Christmas morning, there it was.

Now he and I are in the basement, shooting cans, bottles, Christmas tree bulbs, whatever we could find.

"Let me shoot! Let me shoot" I'd whine. I'd plead.

It was tough to get my turn. From time to time, he would acquiesce.

"You're too young. You'll shoot your eye out."

Pleading with other members of the family moved the process along.

Unfortunately, the cans and bottle shoots lost their shine, and Christmas tree lights (burnt out ones) were in short supply.

In the corner of the basement sat a burlap bag filled with "CARDS."

My stash! Hey, how about the cards? Figuring I would endear myself with this great idea, thereby giving myself additional "time behind the gun."

The main thing about shooting the cards was there were faces on the cards and you vicariously were shooting bad guys or whatever.

So there I was setting up card after card on the sandstone foundation with little ledges here and there. Maybe 50 cards at a time. What a great idea! Sometimes you hit the perimeter border of the card and sometimes you would hit Babe Ruth right between the eyes. Outstanding. My brother with his BB gun was the play.

Sometimes we would throw the cards up in the air and try to shoot them before they floated to the ground, just like in the cowboy movies at the Atlas Show.

Day after day, January, February, March. Shooting! Shooting!

In April of the year, it was "city spring clean-up." Everybody in the neighborhood cleaning out the basement. And, as fate would have it, by April, the "sack" was empty and out went the cards, a hole shot in each one. So out went the fortune. Oh, well, what the hell? It was only money. But who knew? Who knew what the '80's and '90's would bring? "Millions!!!"

Whoops, another card show this weekend. Boo hoo! Boo hoo! Why me, Lord? (Hilary's 1950s journal)

We had sat silently in suspense as the text recounted the art of card pitching at various levels, and laughed and moaned as we realized with him the millions that had been lost when his cards were thrown away with one BB hole in each one.

At the end, Ann commented: "That was fun."

Verne added, "I never thought a story about cards could be so interesting. When I heard the topic, I expected to be bored, but you kept me with you through every level, waiting to see what would happen next!"

After he described what a heartbreaker it was to lose the cards, I nodded and said, "But what fun you had. You do a great job of sharing the moment-by-moment suspense, and you also moved nicely through the months of events."

Hilary smiled and added to me, "I enjoyed hearing you read it" (Journal, February 2, 2005).

It was a tribute to his writing that it was so readable. His words shifted in tone from one well-described moment to another.

Hearing his work read aloud relaxed Hilary and became another motivation to continue with his writing group attendance. As he said on February 11, 2005, hearing his writing read by another was "the biggest thing. [...] I was reluctant, and I said, 'Well, listen to what they have to say,' and I said, 'Well, I couldn't read it myself,' so the fact that I said, 'Okay, you'd read it then,' it made me feel more relaxed" (Interview, February 11, 2005). Later, hearing his writing read by another became, for Hilary, another important part of the writing group's developing Participant Design. After February 2nd, Hilary almost always requested that I read his work out loud. By April, he cited having his work read this way as a favorite part of the writing group for him, right next to positive reinforcement:

Hilary: My favorite? You reading my stuff [laughs].

Krystia: Okay.

Hilary: You reading my stuff and getting the reactions from the other members, obviously, you know.

Krystia: Okay.

Hilary: That's positive reinforcement. [...] That's all upper case capital letter, you know. That's been the biggest thing, positive reinforcement. And hearing your words read by somebody else. That's kind of a rush to me. Major rush.

(Interview, April 22, 2005)

In his April interview, he attempted to understand why he liked hearing his words read aloud by another. Besides enjoying the way I read his work, he found comfort in learning that another writer, Hunter Thompson, liked hearing his work read aloud by others as well. He surmised from there that seeing "how it [your writing] sounds and if it's interesting enough" is "one of the fun parts about writing":

I mean, I can read it, but [I like] to hear someone else read it. At least I [get to see if] it's kind of interesting, rather than, blah, blah, blah. So, [to hear words being read by somebody else] has motivated me [...]. And, I mean, you're an exceptional reader, anyway.

I've told you about this Hunter Thompson, who was an underground writer, writing for *Rolling Stone*? He was out in Colorado, and [he was doing] Gonzo journalism, and he was heavy into drugs, [and involved] with *Rolling Stone*...

In any event, one of the things he used to do [was that] he would have parties, and he would invite people to read his writing. When I heard that, I said, "I guess it is done. If you write, you like to hear other people read what you write." So I guess there's more to it [...]

Whatever there is to it, it's not unique with me. [Having others read your work] is done [by others]. I don't want to say it's done all the time. Maybe it is; maybe it isn't.

Maybe that's one of the fun parts about writing: having other people read your writing, and see how it sounds, and see if it's interesting enough.

(Interview, April 22, 2005)

Hilary listed different reasons for hearing a text aloud than those usually discussed in composition studies circles. As Darsie Bowden (1999) said, "[m]ost people who work in writing centers or writing labs or do any extensive work with students in one-on-one conferencing know, at least intuitively or anecdotally, the value of texts read aloud" (98), but she referred to the value of hearing text aloud for the purpose of revision. Peter

Elbow, like Bowden, discussed at the 2006 College Composition and Communication Conference how texts read aloud tapped into students' aural senses of language. For Elbow (2006) and Bowden (1999), the important part of tapping aural language was to enable students to correct themselves. However, Hilary did not want to correct his writing. He just liked to hear the auditory elements of his writing and to hear if his writing accomplished the moods and tones he had crafted into the texts.

When Hilary wrote, he had been keen to make the words sound a certain way. Hilary, through hearing me read, felt reinforced in the knowledge that his readers would engage in a process where readers "will see words that are literally silent, but they will hear intonation in their minds," as Peter Elbow stated (Elbow, 2006: 20). Hilary wanted the writing group to help him be sure that a reader would interpret his text with the intonations and inflections that he intended. He related to Hunter Thompson, who would have friends read his work aloud at parties, for reasons Hilary perceived to be similar to his own. Hilary enjoyed the sound of his words in another's physical voice as a form of audience response. He felt the rush of power in his words through seeing them performed and through seeing us respond. The process of hearing his text read aloud empowered Hilary as a writer and as a person.

Hilary also enjoyed "getting the reactions from the other members" (Interview, April 22, 2005). He liked to be able to gauge the listener's reactions and "see if it [his writing was] interesting enough" (Interview, April 22, 2005). He found it easier to gauge these reactions when he was not the one reading. Hilary saw that his audience responded to his texts. We laughed when he wanted a reader to laugh, we felt sad when he meant to be sad, and so on.

Sharing His Life's Story: The Craft

Hilary wrote in his journals to record his life, but he did not simply record day-by-day, moment-by-moment events. He structured his life into narrative stories that had dramatic arcs and connected with each other through use of themes and motifs. We found Hilary's stories fun to read because of his engaging voice, honesty, balance of detail and action, and themes.

For example, one idea that returned to his writing was his feeling of kinship with Jim Thorpe. Hilary had told us several times how much he had enjoyed watching the 1951 movie *Jim Thorpe, All American Hero* when he was a child. He said that the story of Jim Thorpe, the Native American winner of multiple Olympic medals, radically affected him as a child. In a phone interview, Hilary told me:

I was nine years old when I saw the movie, and the opening sequence really got to me where the father was taking Jim Thorpe from the reservation to the school house. Jim didn't want to go. He was scared. Maybe afraid he was going to get made fun of for whatever reason. He didn't want to go. So they get to school, and the dad turns the buggy around. Jim starts running through the woods, creeks, splashing and jumping over tree stumps. He beats his dad to the reservation. His dad asks him, how did you get home? "I ran all the way."

Well, where I grew up, there were trees and paths and rocks and creeks and cliffs and fields. Yes, it was the North Side, but we still had all that, at least for a nine year old. Well, I saw that opening sequence and said, "That's me!"

Then, later, as I got older, running would always bring me back to that moment when I watched the movie and related to Jim Thorpe. Jim played baseball and football, and as I grew up, so did I. No one could ever catch me, and I'd feel like Jim Thorpe, All American Hero. (Phone Conversation Notes, February 1, 2007)

The Thorpe analogy became one of several running themes in Hilary's life writing, so any allusion to it connected us to the other stories where he referred to Thorpe.

One memorable instance of Thorpe allusions occurred on April 1, 2005. Hilary arrived in the Blue Room wearing a red t-shirt and jeans. He handed me his green

journal, which covered his stories from high school and his early adult life. As usual, he wanted me to read straight through without commentary:

In the spring of 1956 at Perry H.S. twice a week, we would have phys. ed. at the athletic field.

Naturally, those on the football team, or those who were going out for the team come August, would start a pick-up tag game.

It had always appeared to me that boys had played quarterback were not capable of throwing long, and I generally out-ran their capacity to throw deep. Playing with my brother Doug and his adult buddies, going deep was not a problem. He (Doug) or whoever else was quarterbacking had the arm strength to accommodate my speed.

So, lo and behold, along comes a guy by the name of Joe Barrow, a black guy with a cannon 50-60 yards. It seemed I could score the long pass from Joe B. pretty much at will. Sometimes we would just practice throwing/catching at "phys ed" class.

Joe would be trying out at Q-back in the fall. I could hardly wait. No baseball scholarship (actually, baseball had always been my forté, but in the 50's, baseball wasn't even a sport at Perry HS), but a football scholarship now seemed possible. By then, I had put on another 15 pounds. At 150, I felt like the Carlisle Indian...Jim Thorpe...I had arrived at a critical juncture in my quest for fame and fortune and press clippings.

Let's see! What college would be a good fit for me?

The group laughed at this point. I smiled remembering how he had shared with us the story of how he related to Jim Thorpe. But I didn't say anything yet, I just kept reading. Hilary's story went back to talking about summer practice, and then he took off on a fun tangent, as he was sometimes known to do.

So, we're cruising around and Louie says, "You want to drive my car?"

Yeah! Sure! A car and a license (neither of which I possessed), obviously took one to the next level of independence, to say nothing about the steed one would be in the eyes of the opposite sex.

So, there I am, cruising the Ave. The car was a stick-shift. I was enthusiastic about driving, but was not confident with the clutch, brake, gas procedure. Especially on a hill when the car would drift until you engaged the clutch, gas pedal sequence properly. So, I'm on a hill at a red-light near Bascom St. Now I'm drifting at light's change, now I'm drifting backwards. BAM! Into a car behind me. The distance was only two feet or so and with bumper-guards the norm, the damage was nil. The noise, the embarrassment, and the fact that I didn't have a license put me into a scared situation. Oh, no! There goes my life. Off to

prison. Five to ten maybe. Two middle-aged ladies were the occupants of the car that I had drifted into.

Louie and I were in T-shirts and our football pants and stocking feet.

Seeing us they said, "Oh, you guys play for the high-school team?"

Yes, m'am! We say in unison, checking for bumper damage.

No problem! Off we go. Louie now behind the wheel.

Whew! I'm thinking to myself. That was an impression that will last.

Your first collision. But I got away clean, so they say. I'm thinking, "automatic transmission only" for me. When I get my first car, less anxiety!

The group laughed again. Hilary transitioned back to the second week of practice.

As the week progressed, I would solidify my position as first string right half. The next step would be impressing the coaches with my defensive ability. Playing both ways was the challenge. Let me digress for a moment. The week, the first week of practice was loosening up the muscles, light workouts, and studying play-books prior to full-pads scrimmage. Additionally, there were time-trials, 100-yard sprints, in shorts and T-shirts. It obviously was my time to shine. Speed had been my strong suit all my life.

10.3! What was that again? 10.3. WOW! The circumstance was really irrelevant. 10.3-11.4-12.5. Beating everybody was the play. 10.3 meant little. Winning the sprints and showing off your value to the team was the play.

Many years later, discussing the "old days" and current speeds, 4.5 in the 40's, I had mentioned my speed of 10.3 in 1956. The guy I'm talking to was knowledgeable in many areas of sport. His main claim-to-fame was track and field. And when I mentioned 10.3, he looked at me rather disbelieving and said, "Well, Hilary, the world's record for the 100 meters in 1956 was 10.1. With that info, I started to doubt what I remembered.

Maybe the coach misread the store-watch, or started it late, or whatever. So maybe it was 11.3. Close enough! Fast enough.

(Correction, the record for 100 meters was 10.1. For 100 yards it was 9.3). (Hilary's 1950s journal)

I closed the journal because I came to the spot where Hilary indicated I should stop.

Attached to the leather journal was a leather bookmark for keeping track of where one is reading. Hilary always placed the mark where he wanted me to stop. I briefly caressed the soft strand of leather, enjoying its texture, as we began our comments.

"Hey, it's pretty neat how you tied this back to your Jim Thorpe speed theme," I said.

He smiled. "Yeah, it'll come up again."

"I enjoyed how you added dialogue. You're learning from me!" Verne added.

Hilary nodded, smiling, although the piece was written in 2002. "I am adding more now," he said, referring to the writing he was doing presently.

Ann nodded, "Yes, I liked the dialogue, too. It's also just fun to listen, with the way you add details."

Verne looked at Hilary, "Yes, I'm still learning to do that."

"So am I," added Ann.

Since I was a college composition instructor, making constructive criticism was a habit. So, even knowing it would be unwelcome, I slipped and gave a little constructive criticism. "I think you could still add even more details and dialogue..." I realized what I had just done partly because Hilary became very still, even stiff, as I made my comment, so I quickly moved back to the positive comments, "but I agree with the group. This is engaging writing. Yes, you have a distinctive voice. You obviously took it all in stride, with a sense of humor, and that comes through in your writing. I love how you embraced the opportunity to drive and then show how you panicked when you messed it up. I just have to say again how neat it is to see the recurring ideas. The Jim Thorpe reference is nice, because it provides a connection to your earlier stories. The reference made me think of when you shared how you outran your friend, and when you were running bases in youth baseball. Of course, it made me think of that first reference, when you watched the movie with Jim Thorpe and dreamed of being the running superhero."

"Yes, that was fun," said Ann.

Verne just shook her head. "I just don't understand how you can remember all those details. That's why I write my stories. I'm amazed by how you remember it all. You and Ann" (Writing Group Transcript, April 1, 2005).

The conversation shifted and then moved on to reading Ann's story. In the meantime, I kept thinking about Hilary's craft. While he wrote about memories, as Verne mentioned, there was technique in his work. He had even told me in February how he worked to keep his writing interesting:

[Doing] it chronologically [...] gets to be a drag. You know. You say, "Well, then I got up. Then, I brushed my teeth. Then, I ..." eh, you know. So, I'm trying to get past the everyday mundane stuff. Of course, when I write, I jump ahead anyway. [...] But certain times I get stuck on it. And I say, "I wanna make it interesting, and I don't wanna sound, eh, well, you know, boring." It's important. (Interview, February 11, 2005)

While Hilary preferred that the group not provide critical commentary, he took the process of crafting his writing seriously.

Sharing His Life's Story: The Complexity

In every interview, Hilary hinted at the fact that his life story grew more complicated. He was unsure whether he would share all of it with us. I reassured him that he did not have to disclose any story that he did not feel comfortable sharing. In the first months of our meeting together, he emphasized how he was hesitant to divulge all his stories.

The writing group? I guess, when it first started, I felt a little uncomfortable...I mean, I feel comfortable now because it's one-to-one, but it's sorta like I was...I was reluctant to start reading about...things...because...in fact, there's still some things that I haven't even showed you that I...still don't want everybody to know. I mean, I'm sharing it with you, but [...] I'm watching what I'm letting you read. So then I try to stop you, but [...] I just kinda feel like it's an invasion of privacy...I mean, I'm a little more eased...relaxed with it, but I couldn't share all my writing with the class. (Interview, February 11, 2005).

Hilary was reluctant to reveal most of his adult stories; nevertheless, in the last five months of 2005, Hilary began to divulge more of those adventures and misadventures. As James E. Birren and Donna E. Deutchman said, based on their experiences with dozens of autobiography groups in various locations, "increased confidence and trust among group members" can facilitate a "greater willingness to share" (1991: 45). As Hilary's confidence and trust in the writing group grew, he allowed us to see more of his narratives.

Verne was delighted. She would say how she loved "juicy" stories. Ann, with her counseling background, smiled with understanding. I just kept reading and providing positive commentary on the good elements of his writing. Hilary began to share stories that revealed how, in the years after his wife's death, he returned to partying. While working hard, he also played hard.

On August 5, 2005, Hilary brought a photocopy of a full-page picture to the writing group. It was a black and white newspaper photo of a fit dark-haired man downing a bottle of champagne in a triumphant pose. It looked like there was a football stadium behind him, and several guards only a few yards away pointed and looked like they were moving in his direction. Behind them were a few football players in Steelers' uniforms. He wore only a huge towel wrapped around his waist, long socks, and sneakers. The yellow cloth said "Terriblest Towel" and had a Steelers' symbol and helmet picture (See Appendix K).

"What's this, Hilary?" I asked.

"That's me in the Three Rivers Stadium field."

"You?"

"Let me see." Ann pulled the picture over to her. Verne was in the hospital that day, so only Ann and I were there.

"Yep. That's me. That's from one of my streaks. This one is from the season opening game for the Steelers, September of 1979."

"Streaks?" I looked at the picture. He was still dressed, even if only with a towel, socks, and sneakers.

"Yeah. I used to get out on the field before some of the Super Bowl seasons to cheer on the Steelers."

Ann looked up and smiled. "Oh, you were that guy. I remember hearing about you. You were the Pittsburgh Streaker? We heard about you on the news down in Atlanta."

"That's right."

I looked at the picture again. Wow. My students would love this. I had some partying students at Indiana University of Pennsylvania who worshipped the Steelers and went wild about any Steeler history. Again, I was amazed by how this writing group brought together some very different personalities. I was a quiet bookworm, who hardly knew how to watch a football game. Here, I worked with and befriended a former jock and heavy partyer. I doubt we would have ever hung out socially, but we were brought together by writing.

The corner of the picture had "Pittsburgh Press" written across the side, but the date and page were cut off.

"*Pittsburgh Press*?" I asked. "I've never heard of that paper."

"Yeah. They went out of business."

"So, what day did this happen?"

"It was September 7, 1979. It was the first home game, the second game of the season."

"Is that the day of the article?"

"No, no. It was the Sunday paper, maybe a week or two later."

"Are you okay with me including this in my study? I know that you signed off saying you wanted me to include your name, but this is pretty public. Are you sure?"

"Oh, yeah. I'm fine. Include it."

I nodded, still concerned. Then I reminded myself again that several researchers noted that for many older adult writers, research written about them was a way to continue and extend their legacy (Koch, 1977; Schuster, 1995; Counihan, 2005). My group certainly seemed to support that conclusion. All of them insisted I use their legal names in my dissertation (See Appendix G).

I turned back to the picture: "Why the towel?"

"That's the terriblest towel, you know, like the terrible towel by Myron Cope."

"The radio announcer for the Steeler games?" Ann asked.

"I've seen these towels around Pittsburgh, but I didn't know their history." I was impressed. Hilary had been featured in the paper and had been a part of Pittsburgh's cultural history.

"Yeah. Myron Cope came up with the idea and sold them around town, giving the proceeds to charity. They sold like crazy. So my friends and I came up with the idea of the terriblest towel. It's a really big version of the terrible towel that I'd wear on my streaks, you know, to get the Steeler fans going."

Almost eight months after the writing group began, we learned that Hilary was Pittsburgh's "Terrible Streaker"—a title given to him by the Pittsburgh media. Even over 20 years after the photograph, a *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* article written about the burning of several homes, including Hilary's home, still referred to him as "Pittsburgh's 'Terrible Streaker'" (Tinsley, 2002).

"So you said this was your third streak?" I asked.

"Uh huh."

"How many times did you streak?"

"Five."

"Wow. Five times."

"Yeah. I've written about all of them. I wanted you to see the picture of that third streak, just to get a visual. You know. But first, you need to hear about my first streak," he told us.

He handed me his journal and I began reading as he explained that when the Super Bowl era hit Pittsburgh in the 1970s, he worked downtown in the insurance business during the day and was part of a core of Downtown regular partyers at night. We had heard of previous adventures with his crew, the "Banazak Bunch"; but through streaking, Hilary gained a whole new level of notoriety, not only with the Bunch, but with the Steeler Nation:

[...] Like everybody else, I was caught up in the 'Burgh hype.' The thought came into my mind about the "terrible towel" worn as a loin cloth and showing off my creation at the tail gate party. The guys—the Banazak Bunch—would think it way unique. The group had gotten media recognition for the gigantic banner 8' x 50' ("LUV YA BLACK and GOLD" edition #2) and with all the other groups vying for attention—the Franco's Army, Lambert's Lunatics, Gerala's Gorillas, Bradshaws Bombers, etcetera, etcetera—we felt smug in being part of the "12th

man" scenario which owners, coaches, and players alluded to in media interviews, including Chuck (Noll).

[...]

Now the common thought for my creation was that it should be the "Terrible-ist Towel." Thusly, labeled front and back. "Hey, Hilary, imagine the impact if you were to run across the field in the 'terribleist towel.'" The fans would go crazy. The media would eat it up. Hmmmm! These were advertising PR types suggesting the caper. Additionally, it would call attention to the group and steal the limelight from the other crazed fans from the other groups as I had mentioned before.

"Yeah, as I do the deed, who's going to bail me out of hootch-cow?" (Jail) Ha! Ha!

Being from the North Side along with the banner creator/painter, brother Jim, it was almost expected. You know, it was the Nort'side, then there was the "outside" (Everybody else).

I thought to myself what was the worst thing that could happen? Trespassing! Lewd behavior! Duh! I could plead temporary insanity, "That Myron Cope guy just psyched me up so bad, your honor, I could not help myself"...Blah! Blah! Blah!

With nothing having happened for longer than I wanted to think about, the notoriety achieved might be worth the consequences and underneath it all, the financial aspect entered into the equation. Having been spending like a drunken sailor at the different Market Square hang-outs including the widening relationship with Jo-Mama and dinner and drinks, the American Express card was being abused. The fact that there was no monthly payment with the card, "payment in full" was the deal.

January's bill was over \$400 dollars. Run across the field for \$500—and get square. Christmas was fast approaching and the cash-flow was being jeopardized by the heat of the moment. Like for most fans caught up in the hype. (Complete version in Appendix N)

Hilary had me close the journal there. With a smile he said, "To be continued." Hilary's friends bet him \$500 to do the streak, and that had been enough to convince him to do it.

"I love how you show us the development of the streaking idea. You did it on a dare. Wow." I again thought about how my students would love this sort of story.

Ann nodded. "That was fun. What you said is true about the North Side, too."

"As we're always telling you, your writing is conversational and engaging, with nice dabs of humor mixed in. What a fun story."

"Thanks." Hilary sat back and smiled (Writing Group Transcript, August 5, 2005).

A month later, Hilary also talked about partying with a different crowd, a group from New Castle, with whom he would go on drunken golfing weekends once a year. On September 21, 2005, he shared this story of golfing, and then family events afterward. He chose to read because he had made me beef stew and wanted me to eat it before it was cold.

"Are you going to read this time?" Ann asked. We sat in the Blue Room by the main doors because Verne had been catching a draft by the windows. Ann pulled her bulky cream sweater around her.

"Yeah, I'll read." Hilary had on his khaki hooded fleece with his usual jeans. He flipped through his green journal to find where he wanted to start.

"You're going to read? Okay!" I smiled and then went back to my stew, blowing on my spoon to cool my next mouthful.

Hilary continued, "Okay. This is about a group of us who used to go golfing once a year, and took a whole weekend away from our families to just kick back. So:

After the 15th hole I realized, and I'm playin' with the worst golfers, they set me up with the worst golfers, so...after the 15th hole I realized that the trip to the hotel was off the schedule. Hopefully, the awards banquet was still on the schedule. Additionally, I needed the worst golfer award to come from our group. Note: the next year the committee would name the award after JT, who was one of our group. The JT Thack worst golfer award. Ugggh. It was mean, going for the jugular. JT, however, took pride in having an award named after him.

We laugh. Verne quips, "It doesn't matter what kind of award."

Hilary kept on reading:

Needless to say, nobody cherished that possibility, accepting that award in front of a group of ball choppers. The next year, Don Griska would win the award. JT

would die during the year. JT Thack was 5 foot 2, 120 lbs., glasses, and a squeaky voice. We picked on him, but he loved the attention. He knew it was all in fun. Did I mention that he had a drinking problem? Single and living at home with his mother, I guess his loneliness got to the best of him. Other than the CLO [Conneaut Lake Open], he suffered from lack of attention. Rest in peace, Mr. Thack. He was 28.

Ann looked struck. I felt the same way. Did he commit suicide or die from the drinking?

I wasn't sure, and I'd ask later...

Verne sighed. "Wow."

Hilary nodded and continued:

Needless to say that CLO became a welcome relief from the trials and tribulations of my life. Each year, imitating Saturday Night Live skits, singing songs, refined this routine with Market square crowd. Sometimes you were the entertainers, sometimes you were the audience. Ball busting and laughter was always in vogue. Same situation with Market square bunch. Juggling with parenting.

Sat. afternoon disaster. Beth and Matt playing catch-me-if-you-can. Beth runs in the door. Slammed door. Matthew's face is slashed open.

Hilary was too choked up to continue. "I can't read this..."

"I'll do it." At that point, I took over reading. Hilary let me take the text since I had finished my stew minutes before. He wiped his eyes.

In his story, his son had to be rushed to the hospital, and Hilary had been racked with guilt for not being home when the disaster occurred. His son was well taken care of, but he needed stitches, and Hilary had to rush home from one of his weekend outings, feeling like he was doing too little, too late.

"You can't always be there for everything," Verne assured Hilary.

"It's something you never get over," he said.

"At least your son was ultimately okay. That could have happened even if you had been home," Ann added.

He could not be consoled, and I did not know what to say. I nodded with Verne's and Ann's comments, and we remained quiet for a moment together.

Finally, I said, "Moving back to the text...Hilary, this story exemplifies your ability to move us from laughter to tears, back and forth. That's impressive."

Now Ann and Verne nodded in agreement.

This seemed as good a moment as any for my question, "Why did your friend die? He died, right?"

"JT? Well, no one was ever sure."

"He was so young," Verne commented.

Hilary nodded, still preoccupied with his sorrow over the events in the second part of the story (Writing Group Transcript, September 21, 2005).

Despite the stress of sharing that account on September 21, Hilary continued to share. On the 28th, Hilary finally let us read about what happened after his wife died. He had shared with us the story of his wife's death on April 22—an emotional reading about her sudden unexpected death after the birth of their son and about his subsequent despair. However, he had cut that reading short by closing the journal before I read any further. In late September, he allowed us to read the story of his second brief marriage.

Sharing this story was difficult for Hilary, for it seemed he had never forgiven himself. Nevertheless, after he shared it, he thanked us for our understanding. Ann and I, who were the only ones present that day, sympathized with his story.

"Hilary, you never say so, and never make this excuse, but, from your writing, it seems to me that you still hadn't gotten over your first wife's death. From the text, it doesn't sound like you loved the second woman. She was a rebound. Am I wrong?" I

was concerned because he was sitting fairly stiffly in his chair, as if waiting to be condemned. In short, he had dated two women for several years after his wife died. He was having fun, until one of them conceived, so he did what he thought was proper and married her. However, he did it more out of obligation than out of love and found himself still having an affair with the second woman.

"That doesn't excuse what I did."

I nodded, trying to understand what he must be feeling. "Maybe not, but...look, you tried to do the right thing by marrying her, but you weren't thinking about yourself. You weren't thinking about whether you loved her or if you were ready to marry again. You just tried to fulfill an obligation. Maybe you didn't do a great job because you shouldn't have married her. Getting pregnant isn't a reason to marry. Love is. What do you think, Ann? I'm certainly no expert."

"That's right. But most importantly, Hilary, you need to forgive yourself."

"So you don't think I'm a terrible person?" He was looking down at his hands.

"No!" Ann and I both shook our heads.

The relief was visible. His shoulders dropped, his face relaxed. He still furrowed his brows, but he looked a little less burdened.

His marriage had lasted less than a year, but its end reverberated through his life. His boss, who had been a former lover of the second woman, decided to tell Hilary's wife about Hilary's affair. Within a year of the nuptials, Hilary's second marriage ended in an ugly and long divorce. I decided to move the conversation to how, in his writing, he delicately handled the events that led to the end of his second marriage.

"Now, let's talk about the text. I love how you bring out the humor in this section as you talk about your married boss's motivations to tell your wife about your affair. You paint a complex situation, where the boss had been cheating on his wife with the woman who ends up being your lover while you met your wife. Somehow, in the midst of your tragedy, you get us to laugh. You show how you came to date two women, which your boss knew, but never did anything about it. But, after you marry, he decides to tell your wife about that woman."

Ann interjected, focusing back on the content. "That was awful, especially since he had no room to throw stones. He started the affair with that woman while he was married. Did you ever tell his wife?"

"Nah, it wasn't worth it. He was just mad because his lover left him for me."

"But you're not an awful person. You were in an awful position. You weren't sure you loved the woman you married. You probably should have never married her."

"Not according to my ex-wife."

"Of course not." I felt at a loss as what to say. I wanted to say more, but I wasn't sure how. I knew I was utterly unqualified to make any sort of commentary on his experience. I was half his age and I had a completely different life. What could I say? All I could do was be supportive, and I was unsure which words would convey my empathy without making it seem as if I weren't taking his well-founded sorrow seriously.

Ann interjected, "You can't let your ex-wife's opinion rule you. She has her own issues. You've got to accept that you did the best you could with who you were at that time."

"I just feel bad for my daughter. I let her go with her mom because I thought it would be best. She had two other little girls, and I thought it would be best for her to be with her sisters and her mom." Then, he just shook his head.

I shuddered. Considering how angry his ex-wife had been described in the text, it was anyone's guess how she would have treated their daughter. Perhaps she was fine, but Hilary's sorrow suggested otherwise. Who knew what was true?

"Hilary, haven't you told me that you and your daughter from that marriage get along fine. That she's got a family now, and that you visit regularly?" I asked.

Hilary nodded. "But that doesn't make up for what happened before."

Ann shook her head. "Your daughter loves you. She's forgiven you. She sees who you are now."

I agreed. "The Hilary I know now is someone who makes cookies for his fellow residents, and is kind and considerate of others. Whatever happened in the past, the person I know now isn't a bad person. You're a good person, and you're a good writer, too. For example, in this piece, as you write with some humor, you don't take away from the drama of the moment. In your tone, throughout this piece, you provide a sympathetic voice to your circumstance. You don't dismiss your actions as okay, but you show how easily any of us could get caught in the same situation, if we were you at that time and place. That's good writing."

I was cowed by the power of the topic that day. Hilary, more than usual, seemed to need to hear what was going well in the writing, and in his life, after the reading. As usual, there was a lot going well. I did not admit that I felt he could have added more

dialogue. Instead, I told Hilary that I was struck by the way he wrote his text and helped us sympathize with him (Journal, September 28, 2005).

In early September, even before these readings in this section, Hilary admitted in his interview with me that he shared more than he wanted to, but he did so because he wanted our commentary. As usual, we were settled in the Blue Room on a Friday afternoon after the writing group met:

Krystia: What are you sharing with the group?

Hilary: Too much. [laugh] Well, you know, I'm sharing a lot of intimate thoughts that, uh, that I don't know why I'm sharing, other than the fact that, you know, I want to have some kind of feedback.

(Interview, September 2, 2005)

Because of Hilary's developing trust in the group, a result of our honoring his desire for positive feedback, he continued to share more stories with us.

Stretching the Comfort Zone: Revising

Hilary's stories were engaging. However, they were not always perfect, so in our eagerness to help Hilary, we sometimes offered critical feedback, despite his request that we not do so.

My compulsion to suggest changes arose when he occasionally mentioned that he hoped to publish his journals, which he brought up even in our first interview.

I was going through [my writing] and making correct spellings and adding words and saying, "Well, that's very vague, so..." I've been reading [my writing] and I said, "Oh, yeah, well, [...] I guess it's interesting." And, yeah, you wanna make it interesting, and I really would like to publish [...] even if I do one book, what-have-you. So that's kinda maybe where I'm leaning on you, for self-publishing. (Interview, February 11, 2005)

At first, I understood his statement, that he was leaning on me, to mean that he hoped for me, as the writing group facilitator, to make sure he had the feedback necessary to bring his writing to a publishable level. However, as the year went on, Hilary re-emphasized

his desire for all comments to be in the form of positive reinforcement. In a phone interview after the study, Hilary discussed why, even though he wanted to publish, he only wanted positive reinforcement:

[The desire for positive reinforcement] is part of my makeup. I've lost my wife and my job; my house burned down. There's been enough negative in my life. I want to keep it simple. Underneath it all, this is just for the kids. It's not so important that it is worth having any more negative. I just want positive. So, I can't take negative because I've lived it. Publishing became a spin off. It'd be nice. But this is really for children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. (Phone Conversation Notes, February 1, 2007)

Hilary could be considered a typical senior writer, according to Ruth E. Ray (2000). In her research, she found that "senior groups (that is, writer-based groups) accept all life stories uncritically and support and encourage writers in whatever they create" (146).

Ray noted that when one senior member of a group she observed wanted to publish, this senior found himself surprised by publisher's negative responses. "Writing for publication," she concludes, "would require, among other things, developing a critical stance toward his life as *text*. Given that most older writers in groups at senior centers are really seeking validation of their *lives*, few assume this stance" (Ray, 2000: 147).

Hilary's reasons for not wanting negative feedback perhaps pointed to one of the reasons why some seniors may be resistant to anything other than positive feedback: they have had too much that they felt was negative happen in their lives. If the writing could not be appreciated as is, then so be it. The writing would remain there for those who would unconditionally enjoy it.

As a writing teacher, I thought that Hilary really might be able to publish because of the local history imbedded in his stories, because of how colorful his stories could be, and because of the human drama in the arc of his stories. Verne and Ann thought so, too.

Still, I knew that his texts would need some revision, even though they were already very good. In response to my expressing this, he explained to me:

The thing that bothers me is I'm really writing it for my kids, because it still gets back to that. And my grandchildren. So, you know, I wanna publish, but the hell with it. Maybe my grandchildren will publish. Well, that's the other side. I mean, how could they not publish it? I give them a thousand pages of stuff. (Interview, September 2, 2005)

Hilary hoped that his children would deal with the publication issues.

Regardless, I could not always squelch the writing teacher in me who wanted his writing to develop into something better. Hilary would respond to any critical commentary with open annoyance. For example, on June 25, 2005, only Verne and I were present to hear the beginning of a story from his red journal—the journal of short stories. He shared about a time before he was born, when his father, a cab driver, tried to patent a chain-link connector for tires that would be easier to repair than the one already in existence. In the 1930s, drivers put chains around tires to help keep them from sliding in ice and snow, but when these chains were broken, they had to be removed for repair. His father came up with a way to make a chain that could be repaired while still on the tire. In Hilary's story, he detailed how his father teamed up with Hilary's uncle to solicit money for the chain-link patent and business. The soliciting came from parties and connections with prominent North Side businessmen, like the Rooneys (a well-known local family who owned the Steelers).

In his narrative that day in the writing group, Hilary never told us whether the patent was obtained (it was), but he walked us through the preliminary efforts to gain support for the patent.

"So, what happened? Did your father get the patent?" Verne asked.

"You'll have to wait to find out." Grinning, Hilary savored the suspense.

"But, Hilary, who was Dickey2?" Verne was puzzled, and so was I. He mentioned the character a few times, but we had no idea who he was or why he was in the story, or even why he had such a strange name.

"Yes. How would it change the meaning of the story if you added more about Dickey2?" I added.

Hilary responded to our comments coldly. "He just isn't important," he insisted. Hilary's body language became very closed in the face of even a question of asking to develop a character (Journal, June 25, 2005).

Nevertheless, the next week, on July 1st, he wrote an extra two pages on Dickey2 and let us read them. He came in smiling, so he seemed to have cooled off and to have seen the wisdom in developing the character after all. We responded with lavish praise and gratitude. He just smiled slightly and shrugged. "He still wasn't that important, but I remembered that he was instrumental in a few things and might need a little more explanation."

Later, in his September interview, he explained why he had been annoyed on June 25th.

Krystia: [Remember when we asked you] who Dickey2 was and you got really frustrated?

Hilary: Did I?

Krystia: You were...you seemed really upset. But then...

Hilary: Well, because it was only a detail.

Krystia: Yeah.

Hilary: It's a loose thread hanging on my tie. You know.

[...]

Krystia: I wasn't sure you were gonna come back, you looked so frustrated. I was like, Okay...

Hilary: [laughs] No, it was...I had Dickey2 on my mind, but it...he was like a sub-character.

Krystia: mhmm

Hilary: [...] my mother was a character, my family was a character, my children, the people I work for, are characters. [...] Some people, you know, you see once a year and say, 'Hey, how ya doing, la lalala la,' but they're not that relevant to your own life or what you want your grandchildren to know. (Interview, September 2, 2005)

He did not originally write much about Dickey2 because Hilary considered Dickey2 unimportant to the overall story he was telling, or at least, not as important as main characters: his family. Nevertheless, Hilary decided that we were right in asking him to develop the reader's understanding of Dickey2. "But [then] I felt like, yeah, that I should change that, because he [Dickey2] really was workin' for my uncle anyway. So, yeah, that was a revision that I had to do." For the first time, Hilary seemed grateful that we plowed ahead and insisted on giving him honest critical commentary.

Krystia: Then you came back and you wrote this whole thing about...

Hilary: Then I realized, I looked at and revised that, eh...

Krystia: How did you feel about that?

Hilary: Yeah, I felt good about that. (Interview, September 2, 2005)

In this instance, although Hilary had been annoyed with us for giving him anything other than positive reinforcement, critical commentary led to some productive revisions, just as the positive reinforcement kept him writing. His revisions, and the fact that Hilary was happy with the revisions, led Verne and me to try to give him critical commentary again.

On July 28, 2005, Hilary brought in a page of writing he had done in response to an advertisement in *Maxim* magazine for a contest. The winner would get a personal tour of New York City or Las Vegas.

Hilary wrote an essay with highlights from his life's adventures, touching upon the themes that were important in his life, but, as I read it aloud, we struggled with the text. It hinted at things that someone would not understand if s/he had not read his life's

story. The four of us tried to figure out how he could improve the piece and discussed it for nearly a half hour. In the meantime, Hilary became very quiet, appearing angry and uncomfortable with all of our commentary.

I interjected, "The more I think about it, this is saying, 'I want to be a poem.'" I added the text's statement in a high voice, trying to add some levity to the moment.

Everyone laughed heartily. I guess we all found my silliness a relief to the tension.

I looked at Hilary, trying to gauge if he also thought it was funny. He smiled for the first time in probably twenty minutes. Relieved, I continued, "It wants to be a poem, because of its fragmented nature. Right now, it's neither a poem, nor prose. And I think that's part of where the confusion is coming from."

"How bad is the confusion?" Hilary replied, quietly, as if restraining his agitation.

Uh oh. Hilary did not like my explanation. What did he mean? I replied to him, "What?" I was hoping for some clarification.

"How is it confusing?" Verne repeated for him. Then, before I could answer, she turned to Hilary, "Like you tell me, you know what you want to say, but you're not bringing it out for these strangers to understand."

Hilary once again looked stiff and uncomfortable. I tried to intercede, "Well, he only has these 200 words in which to express himself, but people like poems, too. If you turned it into a poem, then people would read it as something fragmented."

Hilary's eyebrows furrowed. "Do you want it to be a rhyming poem?"

I shrugged. "Either way. Whatever you prefer. You already do have parts that rhyme."

"Whatever is more comfortable for you," Verne added.

Smiling, I continued, "I mean, the poem you shared with us before was awesome. Right now, you've put so much in here, that if you try to read it as prose, it comes out like a riddle. So, maybe a poem would encase it. I don't think you'd need to change the words, then [reading from the text]:

Tell me a story, tell me a tale, believe what you want,
by me, HC.
The deal was they burn down my house, then I died
Or, I lived, then they burn down my house...
And get rid of the evidence.

I mean this already breaks like poem lines. I could see where the lines would break."

Hilary leaned back and shook his head. "Well, I was happy with the beginning, and then I got to the point where Verne was sort of like... And I wrote this in about 10 minutes, so I was... I saw the thing in *Maxim* and I thought I should give this thing a whirl."

The room was quiet. I wondered what I was supposed to do. He obviously didn't want criticism, but he had only spent ten minutes on the piece? And he wanted to win?

I wanted to help him win. I could tell that Verne and Ann did as well. This was easily the most uncomfortable moment of the writing group experience because usually we were laughing and enjoying stories or appreciating commentary. Today, Hilary was upset, and we all felt it. I continued looking over his paper, so that I could give him more options for improvement. "Well, for 10 minutes, it's really good."

Everyone laughed again, a laughter that seemed to ease the tension, again. I persisted, "Well, this would work if you divided it up into stanzas. How long do you have?"

"August 15."

"You can do this," I assured him.

Verne joked around with the idea of Hilary writing a poem, quipping, "Roses are red, violets are blue...", and pretending that would be how he would start.

"I can't handle rejection." Hilary smiled in what seemed to be a relaxed way, but then he took the contest application, tore it in half, and threw it on the table.

For some reason, we laughed again. I think that laughing seemed the only way to relax. Hilary asserted who he was, and we accepted him for whom he was, and we accepted how he would respond to criticism.

As I realized that he had just ripped his paper, I shook my head and silently tried to convey my sorrow that he was upset. We were trying to help him. I didn't know what to say, so even as my eyes were sad, I laughed with the group.

As the laughing calmed down, Verne said defensively, "I like when you guys give me comments!"

We laughed even harder, because we all could see how different Verne and Hilary were, and I tried to figure out how to rescue this.

In the meantime, Ann got up, went to the sink, and came back to Hilary with a cup. "Have some water, Hilary." She was still laughing. There was something healthy to this laughter. We knew this agitation Hilary expressed was how he responded to criticism. We knew we pushed his boundaries, and that his response was classic Hilary. This occasion was the result of breaking with the mutually constructed Participant Design. But, at least we could laugh together. It made the whole situation still feel safe, even though it was uncomfortable.

Verne decided to persist, hoping to still help Hilary. "It may change the meaning if you did the part of the dog the same way you did the part on the first part, instead of putting in all the connecting words, and then it would read line-by-line, you know what I mean?"

I nodded, realizing she was restating the same idea I had about his writing.

"You're talking about poetry, right?"

"Right."

"I like the jazzy style. It's got a jazzy feel," I added, hoping that positive reinforcement, grounded in the truth of what I saw, would be enough to smooth Hilary's discomfort with our comments. I remembered how he improved his writing the previous week, even though he was not thrilled with our comments before, either.

Verne interjected, after picking up and looking at the top half of his paper, "You need to move that part up here." She pointed to the text to show Hilary what she meant.

I laughed, looking over at Hilary and hoping he would not just get up and leave. "Way to be directive," I said with a smile to Verne, hoping to get her to laugh, too. Hilary was not in the mood for that kind of direction, which was something Verne struggled to understand. She always loved getting comments.

Verne looked puzzled, and then smiled, "No, no. I'm right."

The whole group again laughed heartily together. Internally, I sighed. The personalities in the group were certainly different, and sometimes that brought us close to a clash, like during this moment, but we already cared about each other enough and knew each other well enough to just laugh with understanding.

We usually accommodated each others' wishes. When we didn't, we could laugh. That was good.

I looked at the torn top half she had been looking at. "What she's saying is to put it in chronological order."

Verne nodded. "So you need to put this up there."

I interjected, "Well, you can put this up there, *if* you choose to be chronological." I emphasized the "if" so that Hilary knew that we recognized his choice in whether to revise it at all.

Our conversation digressed after Hilary got up to call his brother to postpone their afternoon outing.

"Hilary, do you just want to call it an afternoon? We can get going," I added, worried he was just trying to get away.

"No. No. I'll be right back."

Sure enough, about eight minutes later, he was back and we came back to discussing the contest essay.

Verne tried to make clear to Hilary why she wanted to give him input (or critical commentary). She said, "I was looking forward to coming here so that I could get your input. I feel that when I'm giving input, I'm doing a favor." She was trying to say why she felt he should enjoy some critical commentary. After all, critical commentary is what drew her to the group.

"That's fine." Hilary smiled and seemed happier.

"Because that's the way I feel," Verne continued. "I get a lot out of this class. I really do. And I think you do, too. Don't you think so?"

"Yeah, so long as it's positive." Hilary reasserted that his needs were different than that of the other two members.

We laughed (Writing Group Transcript, July 28, 2005). We knew what Hilary wanted, and we were usually happy to accommodate. After all, we had designed our sessions to match each person's different needs. Also, as I mentioned earlier in the chapter, if Ruth E. Ray (2000) was correct, Hilary was a typical senior writer in his desire to not have critical commentary. At least we were comfortable enough with each other to laugh when things did not go as hoped.

I think that Verne and I had hoped that this session would have been more like the session dealing with Dickey². We wished that he would rethink his frustration and make some great improvements to his *Maxim* contest application. However, we were disappointed in the coming weeks when Hilary said he never went back to his application. "Eh, it wasn't important," he said. This taught us that too much critical commentary would shut him down. He did not care if something was perfect; he just wanted to have reasons to keep going.

From then on, we became again very sparing with the criticism, following the request he had made the first day of our meetings. Although we still added some critical commentary, we did so with a lot more caution and less vigor and focused even more on the positive. In turn, Hilary felt pleased that we gave him so much positive reinforcement, and he tolerated the rare moments of critiques. While he remained uncertain whether he wanted to publish, he wanted his journals to speak to his children and grandchildren and descendants, so he became open to some small revisions.

Developing Relationships in the Writing Group

On February 11, 2005, at the beginning of the writing group meetings, Hilary said, "I like to listen to [Verne]" and he also said that he thought Ann's stories were "interesting." However, he admitted, "It's nice to hear other people, but I can't wait 'til we get to my stuff. Which is, you know, that's the way it is. [...] If you look at a group picture, who's the first person you look at? [...] Everybody's story is most important to them, obviously."

By April, Hilary began to list the other members' stories as a favorite aspect of his attendance, "I think the class is great, and it's good to hear other people" (Interview, April 22, 2005).

In September, he explained why listening to his fellow members became a new favorite part of coming to the meetings.

You know, you think that [...] you've had some tough times or, you know, the way you live your life...[You feel as if] you're out there by yourself. Well, then, you find that other people have their hardships, their heartaches and struggles that they have, [...] and almost a sense of urgency. Like Verne has really the sense of urgency, like she wants to get things out. So that it's kind of enjoyable watching Verne anyway, and I know you appreciate that, because, you know, she likes to go on [...] She's so extroverted and I find I'm extroverted and I think Dorothy Ann's a little bit on the other side. You had to drag things out of her, so she's a little more laid back, but I think she enjoys Verne and I being so extroverted and sharing things. [She's] a good listener. [...] So, I'm enjoying the class from that standpoint, because, just [it's nice] listening to what other people have gone through. (Interview, September 2, 2005)

Hilary noticed that the writing group helped him feel less alone because the group shared their tough times with each other. In fact, a few moments after this statement, Hilary commented that there was "a certain kinship [between us] because everything is from the heart." He also noted that the group shared a "sense of urgency," a sense he felt Verne

particularly exemplified. He enjoyed the way they interacted, and he enjoyed listening to what they had all experienced.

Nevertheless, he admitted he was still mostly focused on his own work. He added, "As I said before, I wanna get to *my* stuff. But I think Verne is the same way. [laughing]...and Dorothy Ann says 'Okay, okay, just let 'em go' [...] but she may have the most important writings anyway, you know?" (Interview, September 2, 2005). Unlike his comments in February, Hilary in September compared his focus with the viewpoints of the other members of the group.

By the interview in February 2006, Hilary still cared primarily about his story and joked about that. Hilary also became even more involved in Ann's story, especially in Verne's absence. He listed getting to know Ann's story as a highlight of the late 2005 meetings:

Krystia: What was your favorite experience in the group?
[...]

Hilary: [...] Getting to know Dorothy Ann's situation. You know, you're on your own ego trip anyway [laugh], whatever you've done is the most important. [...] [But] just seeing Ann struggle with her own problems, and hearing about her own problems, was kind of a motivation for me, too.
(Interview, February 10, 2006)

Hilary found Ann's story inspiring because of the tenacity she portrayed when surviving her various tragedies. Her persistence in the short time we knew her motivated him as well. His feelings reminded me of how writing group members that I had studied were inspired by their fellow participants (Birren & Deutchmann, 1991; Heller, 1997; Ray, 2000; Vallejo, 2004). Ann's written stories helped Hilary keep going.

Continuing Reluctance to Use the Computer

Hilary remained reluctant to use computers after meeting with the writing group, despite hearing Verne's, Ann's, and my praises of the word processor. He said he wanted to learn, but never really made an effort. I kept asking Hilary if he had attended one of the weekly computer classes offered in the building. He never did. Nearly a year after meeting together, thinking that perhaps a lesson on computer use might inspire him, Ann and I got together and gave a tutorial on how to open his computer after our December 2nd meeting.

Ann and I sat together on the green 1950s couch in Hilary's tidy, uncluttered apartment. We faced away from the door and kitchen and toward the computer and the window. To the left of us, pictures of Hilary's family spread across his entertainment center, and mail was neatly stacked on his faded recliner up against the wall to the right of us. His computer was not plugged in, which I corrected. After making sure he was watching me, I turned it on.

"Yes, I've gotten that far," he acknowledged. "It's what comes afterward that I find frustrating."

I groaned when I saw it ran Windows 98 because it was an older, slower, and more difficult version of the Windows operating system than I was used to using. Also, it only had Microsoft (MS) Works, which, compared to MS Word, had several extra steps to open to a blank word processing page. I witnessed how intimidating Hilary found this.

"What?" Hilary looked at me, eyes wide, as I tried to explain how to use the mouse. After several failed attempts, I started to show him how to use the control functions to do what he wanted to do, but we could not find the control functions for

every action and needed to use the mouse, which was the most difficult part of the computer for him. He could not get used to the hand-eye coordination involved in using a mouse. I wished I had thought to have this lesson sooner, but Hilary had never asked, and I had not planned this sort of instruction into my role as writing group facilitator. The building already had a computer instructor for these issues.

I had never before witnessed mouse difficulty as Hilary had experienced, but I had read about them. In her study of older adult students learning to use the computer, Nanci Werner-Burke (2000) mentioned that aged people sometimes struggle with this coordination. Like some of the older adults in Werner-Burke's study, Hilary struggled with the mouse to get to the menus and to click on the appropriate commands.

Ann tried to help. "It takes a while to get used to it all at first, believe me. But you do get used to it."

Hilary just nodded and tried to take notes as I walked him through opening a Works document. Then he got up. "Do you want some tea? I'll get you some tea." He circled the couch and paused by the stereo system that had a few family pictures on it. Next to the pictures were a neatly stacked pile of CD's with a variety of rock, jazz, and classical music. He changed the CD playing from the rock CD to the jazz. Then, passing the entrance to the bedroom and bath, he walked into his kitchen, near the apartment's entrance.

"So, I have this old tea, but it should still be good."

"I'm sure it'll be fine. You know, I had forgotten how hard it was to start working on a computer. I started when I was so young."

Ann interjected, "Yeah. It was hard for me, too, Hilary. I learned as an adult like you. You just need to play with it. You should do like John downstairs and play solitaire. Then, you'll get the hang of the mouse." Ann had a good idea; playing solitaire on the computer successfully helped aged students in Werner-Burke's study (2000).

He poked his head out of the kitchen. "You can play cards on the computer?"

"Sure."

"That's a great idea, Ann. I don't know why I didn't think to show that to Hilary? Definitely. You should practice with the solitaire game. Just go downstairs to one of Rose's lessons, and she'll show you how."

"Well, I'll see. I know I should go. I've been meaning to." Hilary came back with our tea, and we sat and looked at the computer as the window behind it darkened from the sunset.

"So, do you want me to show you how to save and then close everything?"

"Sure, why not?" Hilary picked up his pad again, took notes, and soon the computer was turned off.

Despite all of the time we spent trying to encourage him, Hilary never asked for another lesson, and he never started his computer again. However, he liked my laptop and talked about the possibility of getting one someday. In fact, on February 10, 2006, he played with my mouse pad and found that much easier to navigate. That day, in our final interview, he said that learning to use the computer was his New Year's resolution. But moments later, he admitted his fear of the computer for another reason, besides fear of how to operate the machine. "I have this whole Orwellian thing. You know. I've talked about it before. *1984* just gave me a whole new perspective."

He feared that all that he wrote would be available to anyone who wanted to invade his privacy. Also, he felt unsure whether privacy was possible on an apartment complex computer. He added that he remained skeptical of cell phones, as well, for the same reason. This led to his reluctance to ever using a computer.

Nevertheless, he liked that I typed out segments of his journals in preparation to write his chapter, and he asked for both print and electronic copies of his typed texts. Even without knowing how to use the floppy disks, he wanted to know that his writing was saved on such disks. He also enjoyed that he could have multiple printouts easily. He asked Ann to print some of his documents from the disks so he would have copies for his children. Seeing how Verne published her first book through Lulu.com, he even mentioned he might do the same. By the end of the writing group year, Hilary allowed such computer technology into his life.

Writing Group and Writing as Therapeutic

In our first interview, Hilary mentioned that he sometimes struggled with depression. For example, he stated that his house burning down in 2002 "put me in a heavy depression" (Interview, February 4, 2005). He told me that he hoped the positive reinforcement would help him. He was right.

Beginning in April of 2005, Hilary began to cite the writing group as something that helped alleviate his depression. On September 2, 2005, Hilary insisted that the writing group "is therapy for me." In response to my assertions that I was not a qualified therapist, but was a writing specialist, he stated, "I know it's a writing group as far as you're concerned, but I'm sure it's therapy for [the three of us]. I mean, that's my impression." I repeated that I was against the idea of calling the writing group a therapy

group. However, I could accept that the group was therapeutic. As Birren and Deutchman (1991) said,

The term therapeutic is defined as "having healing powers" (Webster's Third New International Dictionary, 1981). Many things are therapeutic without being therapy per se. [We] are distinguishing from therapy in that although [one may] not directly or actively pursue change in behavior or emotions, positive changes may result. (3)

Since I was not attempting to "directly or actively pursue change in behavior or emotions," the group was not therapy, but it could be therapeutic, as Hilary insisted it was. He felt so strongly that the writing group was therapeutic for him, that he felt that it was also therapeutic for the other two members.

Writing Group as Therapeutic: Creativity, Positive Reinforcement, and Community

Hilary said that sharing his writing with the group "was therapeutic from a creative standpoint" (Interview, April 22, 2005). As writing enabled Hilary to remain inventive, the writing group gave him the ability to share that ingenuity and gain positive commentary from an audience. This urged him to create more writing.

Hilary felt that the positive reinforcement about his writing helped build up his desire to compose. This was especially helpful when he had bouts of low self-esteem.

If you have low self-esteem...let's say, or, if you're...you know I told you I almost suffer from the "Emily Dickinson syndrome," [...] but when you get positive feedback, then it pumps you up to continue writing. (Interview, April 22, 2005)

Hilary needed to hear positive words in order to help combat his depression.

Furthermore, hearing good things about his writing helped him feel like he was not alone in his writing pursuits.

That's therapeutic, because now I'm getting feedback from other people, rather than just writing it and reading it myself, and, some things I haven't even [shared] before. Most of it I haven't! (Interview, April 22, 2005)

Before, writing had been a solitary act, but the group let him know that he was not just on his own and that his words were valuable to others beside himself. Hilary found it healing to be reminded weekly that a community cared about and enjoyed his written words and thoughts. That community response enabled Hilary to feel more motivated in his artistic pursuits.

Writing Group as Therapeutic: Generativity and Empowerment

In April, Hilary reiterated what he had told me in the first interviews: "The writing is basically for my children and for my grandchildren" (Interview, April 22, 2005). He wanted to be able to give his story to his family in order to provide future generations with their ancestor's history. This act of generativity was inherently curative (McAdams, 1993; Coleman & O'Hanlon, 2004). Hilary found the generative act of writing his journals to be healing in a two-fold way:

My kids, you know, they've lived it, and they've gone through, you know, what me as a father has gone through—the stress [laugh], so, [it's] therapeutic from putting things into perspective for my own kids, and therapeutic [when I write thinking of] my grandchildren, [as I am] establishing family history and the way it was, because I think everybody wants to read about their family, I would think. (Interview, April 22, 2005)

For his grandchildren, he was giving the gift of family history, something he felt everyone would enjoy. Birren and Deutchman (1991) asserted that such a desire could be motivated by the following understanding of autobiographical writing:

Sharing autobiographical writings can provide family members with bridges to historical times they may not have known or understood and assist younger generations in synthesizing their own identities. In this process, older persons represent "living stories" of tradition and transcendence. Sharing of the family history provides a common ground, instilling a sense of belonging and community. (18)

Hilary wanted to give his grandchildren the gift of knowing their family's past, thus developing their identities and giving them a common ground and a community.

For his children, Hilary wanted to give the gift of putting things in perspective. Birren and Deutchman (1991) stated that autobiographical writing could help "free the person of guilt" (18). One way writing could do this was by helping a person "come to terms with family issues that, in the past, may have been viewed as a fault of another person or oneself" (Birren & Deutchman, 1991: 18). Hilary was trying to heal, and to help his children heal, by reexamining the causes of family issues in his autobiographical writing.

His writing was a generative act and an act of empowerment; it was both a gift to others and a gift to himself. He admitted that he also wanted to exert some power over his legacy.

I guess if you don't write it, then you're at the mercy of what other people say. "Oh, well, yeah, I remember your dad or your grandfather, he was a Dirtbag, you know." So, I guess the other part is just putting it into perspective, if that's therapeutic. (Interview, April 22, 2005)

Writing allowed Hilary to take some control over how his family and other people would think of him. He appreciated this particular empowerment that writing gave him.

The writing group accentuated the generative aspects of writing that were therapeutic for Hilary. Because of the responses we gave, he saw how his family might react to his words. Because we responded positively, he developed more hope that his family members would do the same. He had more hope that he would be giving his family a gift that they would appreciate, and he had more hope that they would come to be more understanding of who he was because of how he explained his life decisions in his journals.

While Hilary had written a lot before he met the writing group, the group helped him continue an act that was generative and empowering for him. Also, the group helped him fight the depression which he sometimes suffered when he was afraid no one would appreciate or enjoy his work. The writing group provided some proof that his writing should be appreciated and enjoyed as a gift by his family's future generations.

Besides helping Hilary continue his writing, the group gave him an opportunity to be generative to someone outside his family. He was happy about the opportunity to help me, a woman of the younger generation who reminded him of his daughter. This reminded me of the senior citizen writing groups with whom Ruth E. Ray (2000) worked. The group members related to Ray (2000) as someone of their daughter's generation whom they wished to enlighten. Hilary overtly said he felt like a "surrogate" parent towards me, and that he felt a parental desire to help me:

I think, we feel as a group that we're helping you, and it's a surrogate instinct, if you will. [...] We feel we're helping the next generation out. [...] It's our need to help or our want to help. [...] It's sorta like my kids are here and there and all over, so I don't see my children, I don't see my grandchildren. [...] You remind me of my daughter, on her good side [chuckle]...I shouldn't say that...but anyway.

(Interview, February 11, 2005)

Hilary wanted to know that I was getting something out of his attendance. He hoped to give something to me. Like Verne, he wished to cook for me, rather than have me bring food. He preferred to offer more than he took.

I assured Hilary that he gave to me, just by sharing his stories and participating in the group. He expressed happiness in knowing that he helped me with my education through his participation in my study. He liked knowing that "Krystia's getting as much out of this as I am" (Interview, February 11, 2005).

At first, I felt uncomfortable with Hilary's statement that I was like a surrogate daughter because I wanted to be sure he provided honest answers for the study. I feared that his desire to be helpful to a daughter-figure would motivate him to shape answers that he thought I wanted to hear. I admitted that, yes, he helped me by giving me honest answers to questions, and I asked that he not alter the truth. One of those honest answers he gave me was his continued insistence that he thought of me as one of his children.

I came to understand that his fatherly feelings did not distort the study results. These feelings were part of the results. Hilary's insistence that he wanted to be generous with a daughter-like figure pointed to his deep need for generativity. His desire to help me get my Ph.D. was echoed in one of Beth Ann Counihan's (2005) participants in her older adult writing group study. Helen, a participant of Counihan's study, told Beth Ann that "I want to help you get your Ph.D." (60). In June, when I shared with him the concept of generativity and my developing understanding of its importance to our writing group, Hilary's face lit up. "Yes, that's it. You'll be writing that, right?"

In Hilary's words, the writing group was "about family; it's about putting things in perspective; it's about positive reinforcement; it's about helping you along, and sharing ideas with other people, and learning about Verne and Dorothy Ann" (Interview, September 2, 2005). Hilary enjoyed how the writing group made him feel happier, less alone, more motivated, and helpful. Thus, he grew to enjoy the group, to face some criticism, and to publicly deal with his past. The group seemed to have had a positive effect on him—a good end for someone who only wanted positive reinforcement.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANN

Introduction

"Would you like some tea or coffee?" Ann asked as we entered her apartment.

"Tea sounds great." Outside it was blustery February, 2006, and I could see in the living room window to my right snow falling. The writing group had been meeting for over a year now, and I got together with Ann to review her progress and to clarify how her progress tied into her writing history.

"Any particular kind of tea?" We walked into the kitchen, which was directly in front of the door. In five steps we passed the oak pantry, refrigerator, and the microwave on a wheeled natural wood kitchen cart. Before us stood the sink and counter. Ann looked comfortable in a white cotton long-sleeved shirt with tiny red flowers speckled across it and navy cotton pants. She rifled through the second cabinet from the left over the gray countertop.

"Whatever you have is fine."

As she sorted through boxes of tea, I noticed she looked very solid before me: a matronly figure firmly planted in white shoes that looked designed for comfort, like nurse's shoes. That would make sense, considering she had been a nurse.

"Do you want some Earl Gray or Lipton, or Raspberry, or Peach, or..."

"Earl Gray would be fantastic." Some hot tea would be just the thing after the cold drive here.

She took a plain black mug from the cupboard, filled it with water, and I had to step back for her to get over to the microwave because the kitchen was only about four or five feet square.

"What a neat microwave. I don't think I've seen one like it before." Rounded outward, the microwave was not a rectangle like others I had seen.

"Yes, they make them like this to fit larger dishes. I got it only a few years ago, and it's worked well for me. Why don't you go ahead and sit, and I'll bring the tea to you."

Ann walked with me to the table with a small plate of crackers, shuffled into the living room area next to the table, and moved a few papers onto the beige couch to reveal one of her two Pampered Chef boxes in which she had kept her writing from the class. For the last six months of the writing group, she brought one of these two boxes with her.

"Ann, it blows me away how much you've written this year. How many typed pages are there now?" I sat at Ann's table, facing the interior wall of the apartment. To my right along the same wall were the sliding door closet, the apartment door, and the kitchen sat across the hall from them. To my left was the living room, and behind me was the bedroom.

"Ninety-six pages, I think." Ann riffled through one of the clipped piles in the Pampered Chef box. "Yes, ninety-six."

Ann had dug that box up from one of the piles of papers scattered throughout the living room and on the dining room table. I smiled. I tended to be cluttered, so this felt familiar and cozy. I love cleanliness and order, but I feel comfortable in an organized mess. Ann seemed to be the same way.

"When I think that most of those pages are rewritten several times... are you counting the sixty pages you wrote about your early childhood years? And those early journals?"

"No, that's in another box. Here, I just have the journals and writing about my years in Atlanta."

"So, you've written several hundred pages this year?"

"I suppose so." I noticed Ann moved stiffly from the couch to the table.

"Are you all right, Ann?"

"It's just this pain. I keep going to the doctor and the emergency room, but the pain meds don't seem to be enough. And they give me such a hard time about getting me the pain treatment."

"That is horrible. Is there anything I can do?" Ann had missed several writing group sessions due to emergency room visits. Even though Verne was diagnosed with terminal cancer, she did not need to go to the hospital as much as Ann did.

"No, no. I'll be fine." Ann managed a smile, setting the box on the table by the wall. She lifted out several of the printouts of her writing, along with two of her marbled composition books that she used as journals, and put it all on the table beside us. Then, she walked a few feet to the microwave in the room behind us and brought over my tea. "Do you want sugar or milk?"

"No, plain is fine." Even if I had wanted sugar or milk, I would have insisted on getting it myself. Her movements were careful and hunched. While she smiled, I could tell she was hurting. There was no need for her to be up walking around any more. She still went back to the kitchen, though, to get herself a glass of water before sitting down.

"Do you know what is causing your pain?"

"The doctors think it's my diabetes. They haven't found anything else. I just got new prescription shoes, to help my legs be more comfortable, but they don't seem to be helping."

"Prescription shoes?"

"Yes. I went to a podiatrist to get shoes that should reduce the pain. My other doctor thought it would help."

"Huh. I guess it makes sense. So they are specially fitted for your feet to help your posture and provide better support?"

"That's the idea." She moved to her papers. "So, I added more to the story about my friend's brother."

Revising and Hoping For Publication

Looking at the pages, I again expressed my awe. "Ann, you totally rewrote this." She had added details, dialogue, and even some poetic reflections. "It'll be great when you share this with the group." Even though the group was now only Ann and Hilary, with me as a facilitator, I was in the habit of calling it "the group". "Maybe you'd want to send it to Verne, too. I'm sure she'd love to see your progress."

Ann smiled. "I talked to Verne a few days ago. I got the copy of her book, and we had a nice talk."

Verne had sent all of us free copies of her self-published book a month or so before.

"Well, you're on your way to getting your book done, too. You might want to start thinking about what chapters remain and how you'll tie it all together."

"It'd be nice to publish by the end of the year."

I paused. From what she had told me before, she was only about a third of the way through her story. To be completely polished, she still might want to do a couple more revisions. The revisions she had done had made her writing interesting and readable, but it was not without error or moments of ambiguity. Like all writers, she would need time away from her text to get it right where she wanted her writing to be. Ann had made huge strides toward being detailed and interesting in her writing, but she still needed to go much further before her writing would be publishable. I hoped she would see how that was true from how many times I needed to revise my chapters for this dissertation. I tried to think of a way to break the news to her that there was still a long way to go, to try to explain that this long journey was something all writers endured.

I said, "We'll see. I have to admire how tirelessly you've been revising, so I hate to say you might want to revise more. That'll be up to you. Don't you have a lot of the story left?" I did not have the heart to say more than that. After all, self-publishing did not have to be perfect—it only had to be as good as she wanted it to be.

Ann's reply re-emphasized her goals. "Yes. But I'd like to finish it for Martin Luther King Day, next year."

"Well, let's make that a goal. So far, you've been a dynamo. I mean, you've written over a hundred single-spaced pages during 2005, not counting revisions and rewrites. I think that's more writing than I did, if I don't count transcriptions." I smiled and thought to myself that we could have this conversation again later. First, it was important she finished writing the first main draft of her book.

Ann brought our conversation back to the past year. "The writing group helped a lot. You all helped me see that I needed to add more details, and how much I needed to add."

"And how much writing did you do before the writing group?" I looked through my notes trying to piece together the various things she had told me about her previous writing experiences.

"I did some, but not a lot. When I was getting my Master's in Counseling, I wrote some papers."

"But you told me that you had some disability assistance for that. You didn't type or write them yourself, like you did here."

"Yes. I received disability assistance because of my vision problems and learning disabilities."

I had taken one class on learning disabilities, but I was not trained to assist writers with dyslexia, dysgraphia, or vision disabilities. Throughout the writing group study, I hesitated over proofreading her work and wondered how much aid I should provide. I let Ann guide how I assisted her and trusted that guidance. My subsequent reading about print disabilities showed me I had been right to trust her. I learned that it was helpful to sometimes proofread, while at other times it was helpful to aurally point out the patterns of things that seemed missing in her writing (Lee & Jackson, 1992; Vogul, 1998; Hallahan, Kauffman, & Lloyd, 1999; Snowling, 2000; Lee & Jackson, 2001). The group members and I sometimes, then, helped her proofread. Mostly, we helped her by aurally pointing out patterns of words and punctuation that were missing. However, none of us wrote for her. Before this writing group, she had voice dictation programs that assisted

her with the act of writing. Now, she wrote, on her own, by hand and on a computer utilizing a word processor.

Understanding Ann's Disabilities

"Okay, now we're finally getting to why I came here for one extra interview. When I tried to write about your literacy history last week, in order to contextualize your progress last year, I found that I still had a hard time understanding how you've come so far. How did you go from being someone with severe problems with writing, who even needed disability assistance in her Master's degree, to being someone who wrote as much as, if not more than, all of us put together in this writing group this past year? How much can the writing group take credit for, and how much came from your previous education? I doubt we can answer those questions definitively, but I'd like to know how you understand your writing progress this past year in context of your lifetime writing experiences."

"This group helped me a lot!" Ann interjected. "Hearing you read my work aloud was a huge help, and, like I said, the comments helped me get better. The fact that you were facilitating and not teaching also helped me. I didn't need another teacher."

Ann's growth in a fairly conventional process-learning environment added weight to Brenda Brueggemann's (2002) assertion that, "The definition of a disability always begins (and probably ends, too) in its ambiguity, in its indeterminate boundaries" (319). Not only was it hard to discern the boundaries of Ann's print disabilities, but Ann's disabilities obviously were not what they once were. She now could function in a print literacy environment, even if she still made errors. In 2005, the process of writing and

revising her stories developed her belief in her ability to create a book. After a year of writing in journals and on a word processor, several nicely-formed chapters had emerged.

"But how did you get to the point that you could write without disability assistance? The computers here cannot handle a voice-to-write program, even if we had been able to afford it. And yet you wrote. Granted there were misspellings and some sentences that were hard to understand, but most of that was corrected as you revised.

"Because of your presence in my group, I ended up studying everything I could about learning disabilities and writing, and I have yet to find a study that talked about someone in their 60s, who had struggled as much as you did in your earlier life, progressing as a writer as much as you did this year.

"So, why don't we go back and re-examine your early life experiences with literacy, and see if we can chart your memories of your progress up until now. That may not give us completely accurate facts, but it will at least inform me, and other scholars, how you perceived your progress and what you remember helped you as a writer before this writing group. Your perceptions are worthwhile because how you remember events affected your choice to be in this writing group and probably affected your perception of how to work in our group. Then we'll talk again about how the writing group helped you, in context of your past. Finally, we'll try to examine why you think the writing group helped you."

Ann's Writing History

"What would you like to know?" Ann got up again and went into the kitchen.

"Well, you've told me that your early childhood was dominated with vision and learning disabilities' struggles, which were so severe you were written off by the educational system several times."

"That's right," her voice reverberated from the kitchen.

Being Labeled

"I have here the transcript saying that, when you were six, your parents were told you would have only a limited ability to learn. You told me:

When I was in first grade, it was 1945-46 school year, the first grade teacher stood in front of the class with crayons and told us to color everything the same way she had them, but, unfortunately, all I saw was either light or dark, and so it was either black or yellow. There was no variation in the two, besides not knowing the colors, I also could not learn to read, and I guess I must have been doing my letters upside down and backwards or sideways, because by Christmas, uhm, they told my parents that I was mentally retarded and that my learning ability would be very limited.

(Interview, February 4, 2005)

Even though you now know that you had vision disabilities, color blindness, and dyslexia in elementary school, you had been told you were retarded?"

"Yes, they had given me an I.Q. test, and the label 'mentally retarded' was put on my permanent record. In third grade, my parents were told to pull me out of school to work as soon as legally possible, which was the age of fourteen, then."

"You've also told me that they told your parents to put you in an institution? What sort of institution?"

"Back then, if you were mentally retarded, they would put you away in a home. They still do that, actually. But the school recommended that my parents do that to me." Ann moved the chair next to me back away from the table, and then she sat down with her tea.

"But they didn't," I said resting my hand by the cup of tea. I waited for the still steaming cup to cool.

Ann nodded her head as she lifted her steaming cup. "No. I was the oldest of twelve, and they needed me to help out around the house. Because they thought I couldn't learn, they kept me home a lot. My mom would have me home to help with my brothers and sisters who were too young to go to school."

I shook my head, sad that these mistakes had compounded her difficulties with school. "How often did they keep you out of school?"

"Oh, several days a week. Then, they took me out of school right after I turned 14, in 1955. They had me go work. I had a job in a bakery in Ambridge."

"That's north of Pittsburgh, right?"

"Yes."

"Was that close to home?"

"No. My family lived near where the airport is now, south of Pittsburgh. I took a bus."

"But you told me that wasn't the end of your education. You went back to school."

Fighting for Her Education

"Yes, I went to night school in Ambridge. They set it up for the veterans from the Korean War who hadn't finished high school." As she calmly told me her story, she paused and looked at my tea. "Krystia, you aren't drinking your tea."

"No, I have to wait for it to stop steaming. It smells wonderful, though. Anyway, how did you manage to get into the school?"

"I convinced the people at the night school to let me come. They tried to say no, but I wouldn't let them. I wanted to learn. I knew there wouldn't be much of a life for me if I didn't."

"What do you mean?"

"I didn't want to go into an institution."

"Is that all? Were you so sure that would happen to you?"

"I was scared it would. I was scared that if I didn't show I could learn, I could never have my own life... that I could never really help my brothers and sisters."

"Why not?"

"Because you need an education."

"Did you know that they were wrong about you? That you could learn?"

Ann shrugged. "I knew I wanted to learn. It didn't matter whether someone said I could or couldn't. I just had to. I didn't want a life without an education."

I nodded. That sort of determination was something I had come to associate with Ann.

"You told me that you kept your night classes a secret. How did you manage that?"

"Oh, I told my parents that I couldn't make the earlier bus and that I had to wait to come home on the night bus."

"Sounds like a long day."

"Yes." Ann closed her eyes as she recalled that time. "I used to get up at 5 a.m. to make my brothers and sisters' breakfasts and pack their lunches. I'd catch the bus,

then, to go to work. After work, I'd try to study at the library, go to my classes, and then come home and put my brothers and sisters to bed and make bread for the next day."

"Whew. I'm tired just hearing you talk about it. So, what about your textbooks? And school things? Didn't your family notice them?" I had my hand around the coffee cup and pulled it up to my nose and enjoyed the bitter aroma of my Earl Gray tea.

"Oh, I would hide them in a building by the bakery. It was a church, though I didn't know it at the time. My family stopped going to church, and I wasn't allowed out very much. We lived on a farm, and I didn't really have friends. I think my parents wanted to protect me from other kids picking on me. I really didn't know what a church was. In fact, I remember asking a teacher once who Jesus was, but he only told me to go ask my priest. That teacher knew my family was Catholic, but he didn't understand that we never went to church much."

"So, how did you hide your books? Did you ever get caught?"

"There was a closet right by the open doors, so I'd stick my books in there. Eventually, I noticed that there were sandwiches in there. I guess the priest noticed me, and he started leaving me food. The funny part is that I don't think I ever thanked him. A few times, he tried to approach me, and I ran. Finally, I let him get close enough to talk, and he tried to assure me that he wouldn't hurt me. I muttered out something about not wanting to be taken out of school again, and almost bolted again, but he assured me he wouldn't have me taken out of school. I left, but he kept coming out to talk to me, so eventually I told him I was going to school. He says, 'If you need help, I can get you in touch with a nun I know who can tutor you.' That was how I came to work with Sister (Sr.) Hildegard."

Getting a Tutor

"Tell me about her." I finally took a sip of the tea.

Ann's cup was already empty. "Sr. Hildegard was the nun Father (Fr.) Farina called in to help me with book work. She was an ex-school teacher. She would read and ask me the questions and I would give her answers, and if I wasn't giving an extended answer... she taught me how to give extended verbal answers is what she did. She tried to help me with reading and writing, but it just never worked. She was the first one who told me that I could learn, but there was another problem. She didn't know what it was. She worked with me up until she got sick, and I think that was 1960, so she had worked with me most of the time. She called St. Veronica High School and got the math teacher from the school to help me with the math, so I got through high school math. She taught me how to do it without writing, because memorization was the big thing then with math."

"So, by making a connection with the Catholic Church, you received one-on-one tutoring. Did you know that tutoring is something that modern learning disability experts reinforce is important for students with learning disabilities?" (Rodins, Garrod, and Boscardin, 2001).

"Yes, God was good to me there, even though I did not know Him."

"When did you realize you were in a Catholic church?" I asked.

"Fr. Farina told me. So, I asked him about Jesus, and then he sent me to another priest. He said because he was Italian Catholic, he could not help me, but a non-ethnic priest could. The churches were more divided by ethnicities then. Anyway, that priest... I can't remember his name... started teaching me about Christ and about Catholicism. I

couldn't get enough. I was just full of questions. In the meantime, Sr. Hildegard helped me with my high school classes."

Ann's face glowed with the memories. I, too, was moved by the charity of Fr. Farina and of Sr. Hildegard. Because of help from her tutor, Ann learned to do well in her classes. She even did well in her night school English class, despite her troubles with reading and writing.

"Ann, you told me in the February 2nd interview last year that you wrote for your English classes, but you never had to hand them in."

"That's right. We would present them to the class out loud."

I nodded. "Yes, in the February 2, 2005 interview transcript, I have this segment of our conversation:

Krystia: How was writing for you then?

Ann: Well, actually when I started the classes in night school, uhm, well we did papers. We wrote and stuff, but we never had to hand 'em in. What we had to do was stand up in front of the class and read them and I didn't have a problem with that part from my very first night school class. In English, my grades were always A's.

Krystia: Would you actually be reading your paper, or would you just be giving a speech?

Ann: [laughing] I was probably doing more by telling a story then, rather than what I actually wrote. Because I still do that today, and that's part of the problem of being nervous about it. It's because I can write one sentence and it actually covers a whole paragraph.

(Interview, February 2, 2005)

Ann, were you saying that you never looked at whatever you scribbled on a page? Were you just making up an impromptu speech based on the topic's theme?

"I guess so. They never looked at my papers and I got A's for what I said."

"But, later, in college, you still had trouble with writing?"

"Yes. In my Master's degree program, my academic counselor said I was functionally illiterate because of my disabilities."

"Interesting. But we're getting ahead of ourselves. I still need to get the story through high school. You also told me that before you finished high school, you started studying to become a Catechetical teacher at Duquesne University. How did that happen?" Ann's progress from a struggling student to a teacher of the Catholic religious beliefs highlighted the life-changing nature of the tutoring she had received from the nuns and priests.

Training to Be a Catechetical Teacher

Ann smiled. "I decided to get First Communion and my Confirmation, after learning about the Catholic Church from the priest, but, when I was done, I turned to him and said 'there has to be more to this.' I wanted to know more. They (Fr. Farina and the other priest) suggested I go to Duquesne to study with the people trying to become Catechists. They said I wouldn't have to teach, but it would be a place for me to learn more. So, I did."

"How did you find time?"

"I just did."

"I remember that you told me a little about the classes at Duquesne, and that you said that you found you enjoyed teaching."

"Yes," Ann replied. "The first time I taught the class, I was scared. But, I wasn't reading from my papers, so I had everybody's interest, and I was fine."

"You felt empowered by the fact that you didn't need to use papers and that you could communicate orally?"

"Yes. I found I really liked it. I didn't really use the board, and that worked out fine. The teachers at Duquesne encouraged me to go ahead and complete the Catechetical teacher program. Eventually, I did get all three certificates."

"Three certificates?" I looked around the room. The only things adorning the walls were taped up religious sayings, a picture of Jesus and Mary, and a few small crosses. It was obvious that her faith still meant a great deal to her.

Ann nodded. "Yes, you had to get three certificates to be a Catechetical teacher. I still have a copy of them in the closet behind you." I had no idea that it took so much to become Roman Catholic catechetical teacher. She had to take classes at a college, and she had told me before this conversation that she had needed to prove success by teaching students in a couple parishes before completing the whole certification cycle. I turned around and noted that before the entrance to the bedroom, behind the kitchen, was another sliding door closet.

Ann got up slowly to get to the closet. "Would you like to see them?"

"Sure, if it isn't too much trouble." I got up. "Here, let me help you. Where are they?"

"Over to the left. Yes. That box."

I lifted a two foot square box from the shelf and Ann opened it.

"Here they are."

Complete with gold seals, the three Diocese of Pittsburgh certificates were dated May 13, 1961, May 21, 1963, and May 15, 1967.

I looked over the certificates. "Okay. Yes, I remember you telling me that you were working on your third certificate in Yankton, South Dakota. But, somewhere before

that, you finished high school and went to college. And, somehow after that, you went to nursing school. How did all that happen? Or, more important, how did you get to the point where you were able to write coherent prose for this writing group forty years later?"

Graduating from High School at 21

Ann put the certificates back in the box. "Well, I got the first catechetical certificate in 1961 without my family knowing, but, shortly after that, my dad told me that he found someone for me to marry. I didn't want to marry anyone then. I wanted to keep going to school. Eventually, that forced me to tell my dad about school. He asked to see my grades and cried when he saw that I had all A's and B's. 'I knew you weren't retarded,' he told me. He said I had to be smarter because of the way I helped with my brothers and sisters. He didn't understand why I did so poorly in school.

"Anyway, he went to my old high school, and showed Mr. Henderson, who was a new principal there, my grades. The principal called me in and started asking me questions about how I had been tested. I told 'em that we just answered the questions in class in order to receive our grades. I did not understand that at night classes we primarily listened and responded verbally. I thought I was reading and writing, but not really. We didn't have any written tests. So, he instructed all of the teachers that I had to be verbally tested, not tested by writing. Although, they did still have me write."

"And did anyone notice that the writing and verbal answers didn't match?"

"Well, if they did, they sure didn't tell me. Remember, I was 21, and their goal was to make sure I graduated because that's what he promised my dad."

I was confused. "The principal promised your dad that he would make sure you graduated?"

"Yes."

"So, you went back to school full time?"

"Yes, for my senior year, and I started teaching Catechism, or CCD, at my parent's church that year, too."

"The one your parents didn't attend?"

"Yes."

"How did classes go, then?"

"Much better. I graduated at the end of that year."

I looked up at the clock, and 30-minutes had passed. "Wow, we've only gone through the first third of your life. I still need to understand the next 40 years in order to put your writing group experiences in context of all that."

Ann grabbed our emptied cups from the table to put back in the kitchen. "Maybe we should move to the couch. It'll be more comfortable."

"Sounds good to me. Here let me get those dishes. I'll take them to the sink and you can clear the couch for us." I took the cups from her, along with the small plate, back into the kitchen and came back to see Ann taking the papers off of the sofa.

I sat down and enjoyed how perfect the beige couch felt—not too firm, but not too soft either. The sofa reminded me of my deceased grandmother's couch, which also looked like it had been from the '60s. I pondered how Ann had lived through a harder life than my grandmother, who dropped out of school in third grade after her mother died and her father lapsed into alcoholism. She left school to work in a factory so that her eight

brothers and sisters would have food to eat. Ann reminded me of my Baba, my father's mother, also a devout Catholic and stubborn family-oriented woman. Perhaps because of this I felt a kinship to Ann. Of course, Ann defined success through education, rather than simply through work, so her decisions were much different than my grandmother's. In that sense, I was more like Ann than I was like my Baba, so perhaps that made me feel even closer to her. Of course, these connections were so arbitrary. Ann was very different from anyone I had known before; nevertheless, I felt a strong kinship to her. I shrugged off the reverie. I needed to document how Ann ended up a college girl. "So, what did you do after high school?"

Going to College

"Well, after high school, the bakery where I had worked went out of business, so I tried to work as a waitress, but I was fired because my numbers were upside-down and backwards (although I didn't know that at the time). No one could read my receipts. I started to think that I needed to go to college to learn how to better read and write. Anyway, I went to the unemployment office with my sister, who just graduated from high school, to figure out what to do next." Ann frowned at the memory. "The woman at the office told me I belonged in a home and my sister should work in a factory. I was angry because my sister was smart and deserved better, and I said so, but the woman said that better jobs were for people who went to college. This reinforced my desire to go to college. Nobody expected me to want to go on to school. But I knew that if I gave up, then all of my brothers and sisters would give up also. If I would go to college, then all my brothers and sisters would know that they could, too."

"How did you get into college?"

"The teachers at Duquesne helped me get into Robert Morris, which was a Junior College at that time. The guidance counselor at Robert Morris helped me with getting into Mount Marty College in South Dakota. The name for the school came from Bishop Marty, who had been the first Catholic bishop of that region. I thought about becoming a nun, and Mrs. Anderson said she would write the letter recommending me. It was a small Catholic college where she thought I could receive the help I needed. I also had letters of recommendation from the sisters who taught the catechism classes I attended."

"Did you like it there?"

"Oh, yes. I taught catechism classes at the Indian Reservation nearby. That was the first time I started to notice how differently people would treat others from different backgrounds. People in Yankton could be very mean to people who lived on the Indian Reservation. I didn't understand it. Anyway, I taught the class for students who were going to make their first communion on the reservation. There were two students that the bishop did not expect would pass. The catechism teachers before me had called them 'unteachable.' Well, I was determined they would pass, and I worked very hard with them. When the bishop came at the end of the year to test them, they both were ready for first communion, along with the other fifteen students. Everyone was surprised."

"Yes, I'm sure that you knew how to teach in lots of interesting ways that worked for you—ways that got those kids learning outside of a textbook."

Ann smiled. "I never really used the book."

"Exactly my point. The students were probably more tactile and auditory learners like you. You were the perfect teacher for them. But, how, without the books, did you learn the catechism that you taught to others?"

"I asked a lot of questions in my religion classes and at the catechism sessions we had to attend in order to teach catechism. No one really noticed how many questions I asked, though, because that was during the time when everyone was trying to understand the Second Vatican Council changes. Everyone was asking a lot of questions. Mount Marty would have special sessions just so that we could ask about things.

"I also would go to Sr. Wilma's office and talk about the material for the catechism class. She was the director for the program on the Indian reservation and she taught religion in college. She was actually the very first person who said that I was not mentally retarded, but that I was not seeing right. When instructors asked her how she knew, she would point to the success of my classes with the Indian reservation children."

"Ann, you mentioned you learned how to write legible letters while at Mount Marty?"

"Yes. I took a calligraphy class with an art teacher. When she realized that I couldn't write, she started me from scratch. She would help me feel what it was like to make the letters, by working with me through the motions. That helped me a lot."

"Makes sense. One of the things teachers do to help learning disabled children is to trace the letter on their backs, to trigger another part of the brain in the learning process. One of the main suggestions for helping students with disabilities is to try to teach by accessing as many different kinds of learning as possible: sensory learning, auditory learning, and so on." I thought of the studies I had read that highlighted the importance of multi-sensory teaching (Lee & Jackson, 1992; Vogul, 1998; Hallahan, Kauffman, & Lloyd, 1999; Snowling, 2000; Lee & Jackson, 2001).

"I got that later on, too, during my Master's degree, when they were re-teaching me how to write."

"I'm still trying to understand how you got from Mount Marty to your nursing school. I remember you said once that the classes you took at the college didn't go well. I have a piece from your first journal that you shared with the class where you said you didn't pass many classes. In January 2005, you wrote:

Since the only Subject [sic] I passed was religion, the school was also devied [divided] on if I could learn. Also, it was in SD when I was 1st told I would be blind by the time I truned [turned] 30. It had something to do with the fact that both eyes where truned [turned] out[ward].

The teachers weren't sure if you could learn?"

"Yes, but because of Sr. Wilma, they thought it had to do with the fact that my eyes were turned outward. They thought my eyes being turned outward affected my ability to read and write. Sr. Ann told me to go home and get my eyes fixed or find out if I was going blind. If I lost my eyesight, I could return. If I could have them fixed, I could return, also. However, they needed to know which it would be, and I could not stay without knowing what was happening. I went home and had eye surgery. The doctor couldn't tell me if I was going to go blind or not, so I couldn't go back to school at Mount Marty. He was the first one to tell me, though, that I saw upside-down and backwards."

"But, Ann, I know you ended up in nursing school. How did that happen?"

Nursing School in Atlanta

"I applied for some other schools around Pittsburgh, but no one would accept me because 'mentally retarded' was on my permanent record. I ended up going to Atlanta because a friend wanted me to stay with her mom, who was getting too old to be by

herself. She thought the nursing school there might accept me, and they did. That's how I moved to Atlanta."

"And Atlanta is what you've decided to write about for your book while in our writing group because it was there that your church activities got you involved in the Civil Rights movement. Right. I'm so glad you are writing about that phenomenal time in your life! But let's focus on the reading and writing side of things in Atlanta: How did you get through nursing school when you had so much trouble reading and writing?"

"I don't know. I know I went to every class—those for the white nursing students and those for the black nursing students. I also went to the classes for the black medical students and for the white medical students. I worked very hard to learn."

I was still shocked by the segregation that had allowed Ann to attend so many classes, that of both the nursing students and that of the medical students. Such segregation was foreign to my world. When Ann was in nursing school, her hospital was totally segregated, with one half of the building's H shape designated for whites and the other half for blacks. "That's right. But, in the first year that you were there, the school was supposed to follow federal regulations to integrate, even if, as you said, integration only meant pretending to the officers from Washington, D.C. that everyone was blended." She had told Hilary, Verne, and me that white nurses and doctors pretended to be patients for the black nurses and doctors, and vice versa, whenever a government official visited. Otherwise, segregation was still a way of business. There had been so much turmoil and fear about the Ku Klux Klan's retribution that over half of Ann's nursing class quit.

"Yes, but I couldn't understand why the color of someone's skin was such a big deal. I had seen some prejudice before at Mount Marty against the Indian community, and I didn't understand it there either. I just wanted to learn my subjects and get my education."

"How was writing for you in nursing school? I have an excerpt from our interview last year where you said you copied your notes into a mirror to make them legible for other people:

Ann: [...] I would sit down and do my nursing notes, take 'em in the bathroom and lock the door, hold 'em up to the mirror and copy them from the mirror.

Krystia: huh.

Ann: [...] I was almost all the way through nursing school before anybody figured this out.

[we laugh a little]

Krystia: How did they figure it out?

Ann: Well, you know. Learning disabled people do amazing things to get it done. [...] It was during a cardiac arrest and somebody saw what I was writing and they couldn't read it, and then whenever they came back and got my nurses notes, they could read it.

(Interview, February 4, 2005).

You used a mirror because the eye doctor who fixed your eyes said that you were dyslexic?"

"He didn't use the word 'dyslexic'. He just said I saw upside down and backwards. But, yes, that's why I used the mirror."

"How did you write legibly using the mirror?"

"Because that calligraphy teacher taught me how to write."

"But, you couldn't just do that automatically. You had to use the mirror and think about it."

"I guess so."

I was at a loss to understand what processes had occurred to get Ann from illegible to legible text. The process of copying with a mirror seemed to trigger her calligraphy lessons and allowed her to transcribe her notes into something others could understand. But if she did not understand how, I could not. I suppose it did not matter. What was important was her story and what got her to keep trying to write.

"Still, you graduated nursing school? Since you worked as a nurse, you must have somehow passed the nursing exam?"

"Yes. I don't really know how. I put the paper upside down and backwards to make sure I could read it. I'm not sure I did that test; I think God did that test. Cause that's what I said, 'Jesus, I'll nurse for you if you'll take this test for me.' And the only question I missed was the one I became very afraid of, and the fear took over in that one. Even so, that part was multiple choice. I didn't have a problem with the other parts of the test, where we showed what we knew."

I frowned. Her claim, that her passing of the test's written portion was a miracle, was not going to fly in academia. "Ann, considering how little you understood about your disabilities, I think it might be possible that you were doing some reading."

"Maybe. I probably did a certain amount of reading. I don't understand how, though."

The more we sat and talked, the more I understood that the borders of her disability were harder to define than I ever expected.

"Did you ever come to a point, Ann, where you felt comfortable with writing?"

"Not until this writing group. I started to learn more about why I had problems with writing when I finished at the community college, and later on, during my Master's. But I wouldn't say I felt comfortable with writing, ever."

I paused, trying to understand it all. "So, why did you want to join a writing group now?"

"Because I wanted to write my story for my nieces."

"All right, Ann. That just brings me back to wondering how you got to a point where you could write with some level of comfort and independence so that we were able to help you. It sounds like even when you left nursing school, writing was still hard for you. Not something you'd want to do for a hobby." I got up from her couch to stretch my legs. I could tell that my coverage of Ann's writing history was already twice as dense as that of her fellow writing group members. I would have to give it a lot more space than I gave the other two members' histories when I wrote about it.

"Dr. Gottlieb helped me a lot. Then later, the disability support center at my Master's program helped a lot, too."

Going to Dr. Gottlieb for Visual Therapy

"All right. Tell me about Dr. Gottlieb. I have that article you gave me that explains his work with you, but first, how did you come to work with him? What did he do? How did he help you become a writer?"

"I met Dr. Gottlieb when I was at DeKalb Community College."

"How did you end up there?"

"I tried to go back to school to get a Bachelor of Science degree at Georgia State. But I failed the reading class that they required, and they told me I didn't belong in school."

"You had to hear that again? That had to be hard. How did you end up at DeKalb?"

"I was working as a nurse, and the head cardiologist, who happened to be African American, he said to me, 'Skolnek,' because that's what they used to call me, 'Skolnek, tell 'em...!'" Ann paused. "Oh, I don't know if I should use the language he used."

"Go for it. We're all adults."

"Well, he said, 'Skolnek, tell 'em to go fuck themselves! Keep on truckin'! Go to DeKalb Community College because I know you can learn.' So I did."

"How did that go?"

"Well, I kept not passing the first English class there. But I kept taking two classes every quarter, one was the writing course and the other was something else. I got A's and B's in the other courses, but I kept failing the English 101."

I looked at her wondering if this was the college's version of a composition course. "What was the class like?"

"It was English, learning how to create sentences and where to put the punctuation. And, then, at the end, we had to write a paper, but it was more of a spontaneous paper done in the classroom."

I groaned. Not only is there over 100 years of research showing that grammar lessons do not help students write better, in comparison with how writing in process could help (Hartwell, 1985), but she had to write impromptu essays, too? It sounded like

there had been no opportunity for writing development in that class at all, if she remembered the course correctly. Considering that she took the class multiple times, there was a pretty good chance she remembered how it went.

"For how long did that go on?"

"Six years."

"Two classes a year?"

"It was on a quarter system, so I took it four times a year."

"Wow," I said, quickly doing the math, "twenty-four times." I paused. That took a moment to absorb. "You failed the composition class twenty-four times?" Ann was telling me this as calmly as if she had told me that the mail had come late. I felt grateful that DeKalb did not kick students out for repetitive failures, as I knew some schools did. This led me to wonder how many students had been eliminated who, with the right interventions, would have eventually succeeded.

Ann responded to my question. "I guess so. Then, an instructor, a woman who moved from Texas taught the class and asked for our transcripts if we had taken English 101 in the past. When she saw my record and how many times I had taken the class, she said, 'You have to know this material. I don't know what's wrong, but let's talk about this.' She asked me some questions. After I answered them, she said, 'You know all this. I don't know why it isn't coming out in your writing, but I'd like you to go see disability services.' So I did. They wanted me to see an eye doctor, and I said, 'I already know I'm going blind. I don't want to see another doctor.'"

"Why did you say that? What doctor told you that you were going blind?"

"I had seen an eye doctor in Atlanta because I couldn't read some of the prescription labels anymore. I had to quit working at a hospital and was only working privately because of that."

"Oh."

Ann continued, "Anyway, the woman at disability services told me that maybe a different doctor would have another opinion and told me to try again. It took a while before I agreed, but I eventually went to Dr. Gottlieb. He helped me learn to see, but it took a while. At first, he didn't know what to do with me."

"Yes, I saw that in the article you gave me, written by your friend for the Atlanta Catholic diocese newspaper. I liked the description about what it was like for him to meet you. Why did the article call you Dorothy, though?" I rummaged in my bag to find the article so that we could refer to it.

"Dorothy is my mom's name, too, and I don't use it when I'm near home. I use my middle name, Ann, in Pittsburgh. But in Atlanta, everyone knew me as Dorothy."

I found the article and scanned through it to find the section that described when Ann went to see Dr. Gottlieb. "Okay. I see here that the article about you said this:

Dorothy [Ann] walked in the door in early January 1980 with four pages of handwritten description of her vision problems which the school counselor had asked her to write out. Over a brown bag lunch in the examination room at the rear of his offices, Dr. Gottlieb read the pages and reflected.

He saw a grown woman, very agitated and excited. The pages he read looked as if they had been written in several different handwritings. The spelling was "atrocious," filled with reversals of many letters and phonetic spelling. He started asking questions like "Who wrote this?," "How many times did you sit down to write this?," and "Is this true?"

Privately, Dr. Gottlieb said later, he was recalling his parents' admonition to listen well and "to have faith in people."

To himself, he was thinking, "Try to believe that she's telling you the truth." (Keiser, 1983, par.10-13)

As you say, he didn't know what to do with you at first. Considering his description of your writing at that point, I'm still amazed that you made it through nursing school. But, how did you make it to the point that you can write as you do now?"

"It's there in the article," Ann told me. "Dr. Gottlieb found that my eyes were still splitting after my surgery. They were still moving in opposite directions, even though the surgery was supposed to allow them to move normally. Dr. Gottlieb gave me prisms and bifocals to help me focus my eyes. He started visual therapy to help me learn how to use my eyes together. See here. It talks about it in the article, too."

I nodded my head. "Yes, I have the spot. The article says:

[O]ptometrists who practice vision therapy have been proclaiming that vision is a learned process that builds from one state to another, just as a baby gradually learns through sight and also through the use of the whole body, where objects are, how far away they are and to "see" in a landscape where objects are in relation to one another.

For Dorothy [Ann] this process had never taken place because the correct images had never been perceived in the first place. As far as she knew, the world was moving and unstable.

"She could never trust that something she saw at one moment would be the same at the next," Dr. Gottlieb said.

"She had nothing to base her perceptions on. Everything was confused and not consistent." (Keiser, 1983, par. 19-22)

How was your vision confused? Could you give me an example?"

"Well, I used to think that dogwood flowers floated in the air, because I couldn't see the stems. I once asked Dr. Gottlieb, 'what are those flowers that grow in the air?' I brought in a branch from the dogwood tree to show him what I meant, and that's when he started to figure it out."

"Yes, it describes here how he taught you to start to distinguish objects:

One of the first efforts was to train Dorothy's [Ann's] eyes to work together to "fuse" the multiple images into one stable image. Like a young child, she began to see large objects and moving objects first. One day she came into the office and

asked "if you could see bird's wings in the air." She has "seen" for the first time a bird in flight.

Perhaps the most challenging moment came when at the insistent question of a two-year-old child she was caring for, Dorothy [Ann] tried to identify something that was "around her ... always behind her." The object sometimes was big and sometimes small, she said. Dr. Gottlieb, who knew that therapy had brought her vision to a stable state, feared that she was "psychotic." He asked her to show him what she was talking about. It was the shadows of objects, including her own shadow. She'd never seen it before.

A notebook she was asked to keep describes in a poem her reaction to "a friend in the air" as she watched a squirrel picking its way along a utility line. As the therapy progressed, she was trained to pick out small objects and finer details. (Keiser, 1983, par. 29-31)

So, you weren't so much going blind as having vision problems because you didn't know how to use your eyes correctly?"

Ann was pensive, "Something like that. But since you read the article, you'd know that wasn't all that was wrong. I still was having problems, and Dr. Gottlieb wasn't really sure why. One time, I failed this English literature test because I had written over my own writing...but, wait, just read this section here." Ann pointed toward the bottom of the page.

I nodded. I read the section in the article aloud.

In June, struggling with final exams, Dorothy [Ann] told Dr. Gottlieb that she had done poorly on an English test despite studying. She thought she had written over her own handwriting.

"I knew she had studied ... I knew (her vision) was fused at that point ... I couldn't for the life of me figure out what had happened," Dr. Gottlieb recalled. He reviewed the green exam paper. Line after line were written on top of each other. When he asked why she had written it that way he discovered she couldn't read it back. He took out the green appointment forms she had been using in the office on a regular basis and asked how she filled them out. She had memorized where every question and space was on the complex form. "It never occurred to me that I was supposed to be able to read what I had written," she said.

Dr. Gottlieb took the exam sheet and placed it on the brown office rug and asked her find it. She couldn't. He tried it again in another room and again, to Dorothy's eye, the paper vanished.

They had discovered that despite overwhelming odds against it, Dorothy was almost completely lacking in red-green color perception. "Less than one percent

of women have color perception problems," Dr. Gottlieb said, and he discovered in Dorothy the most severe red-green perception problem he had seen. (Keiser, 1983, par. 33-36).

"Then, you were color blind? But, what kind of color blindness? I didn't realize color blindness could make things seem like they disappear."

"Yes. That's why I couldn't see some medicine labels any more, as a nurse, because they had red and green labels and the text disappeared for me."

"It says here that he got you contacts to correct the red-green perception problem?"

"Yes, and after all that, Dr. Gottlieb told DeKalb that I needed to have assistance with both my reading and writing. So, the school gave me that help, and, that next year, I graduated with two Associate's Degrees in Liberal Arts and Mental Health. In the meantime, Dr. Gottlieb finished the therapy."

"You went on for a Bachelor's degree after that?"

"Yes, at Franciscan University of Steubenville. I finished my Bachelor's in one year and went on for my Master's in Counseling at Dayton University."

Receiving Disability Assistance and Getting a Master's Degree

"Through the rest of your education, you received disability assistance?"

"Yes."

"But you said Dr. Gottlieb and your Master's helped you learn to write."

"Dr. Gottlieb helped me find out what was wrong with my eyes, which helped me get the help I needed to get my Bachelor's degree. At Dayton, I used disability services to help me with my class papers, but I also asked them to teach me how to visually read and write. They asked me if I would let myself be tested for I.Q. and if I would like to be

tested for how literate I was. I said no to the I.Q. test. In fact, I wrote a paper there about all that's wrong with that test." Ann's eyes hardened when discussing the I.Q. test. "The counselor said I was functionally illiterate. At both the University of Steubenville and at Dayton, I had readers and writers. The counselors at the University of Dayton said that if it was possible for me to learn how to visually read and write, they would try to teach me."

"Amazing. But you were obviously in a Master's degree." I paused, realizing she just said she wrote a paper about the IQ test. "Wait. You wrote a paper?"

Ann nodded. "Yes, thanks to disability services' help. But, while they helped me get through my classes, they also gave me lessons in reading and writing."

Ann's determination to overcome her reading and writing difficulties, to be a "supercrip" (Price, 2007: 72), persisted even when she learned she could succeed without those literacy skills thanks to disability assistance.

"That's how you are able to write legibly now?"

"Yes. But they told me that there will probably always be issues with spelling and structure. When I graduated from Dayton, my advisor even mentioned that in my recommendation letter. It was a wonderful recommendation letter, but she wanted anyone who hired me to understand my disabilities."

Having Troubles at Work Because of Her Writing Disabilities

"It was all okay after that?"

"Not exactly. The job I got after my Master's, in 1986, asked me to do quite a bit of paperwork. I tried to do as I was asked, and my boss got tired of correcting my work. He tried to fire me."

"What happened?"

"I took them to court. I think it was just after 1990, after the American Disabilities Act had passed. The court said they couldn't fire me because my disabilities had been disclosed before. They should have supplied me with disability services."

"So, you kept your job?"

"Yes, but I transferred to another department in 1994. There, I had a job where they had me answering phones and referring people for medical assistance. I don't think the boss wanted me there at first, but then the thank you notes started pouring in because I was pretty good at helping people on the phone, especially with my nursing background. I was even thinking about going on for my Ph.D., but then, in 2000, I had the strokes, and I was forced to leave and retire early. That's how I came here to the apartment complex. I even own a house, but I had to leave it because I couldn't go up and down the steps anymore after the strokes. I'm renting it out to my nephew."

Ann was so calm. She told me her life story with a sense of peace and acceptance. If I had never talked with her about her past, I would have thought she had lived a pleasant, uneventful life. She treated these events like just another one of those things, like someone might treat memories of food shopping. I paused a moment and admired her courage, faith, and her sense of peace through long-suffering. Knowing her life story made it easy to understand how she could approach her writing with such strength and determination.

Moving to the Senior High Rise and Writing Her Story

"How many strokes did you have?"

"Four. The doctor said if I had another, it would kill me."

"It's impressive to have survived four."

Ann shrugged. "That's how I came to be here when you arrived wanting to start a writing group."

"While I'm sad that so much had to go wrong to bring you here, I'm glad you were here, Ann. It's been a joy to work with you, but what made you interested in the group? Why did you want to join? Why were you so enthusiastic? I'm not sure I would be after a history of problems with writing like you describe."

"I was writing already because my niece Courtney found out about my time in Atlanta. No one in my family here knew that I had marched with Martin Luther King, Jr., but when I was in rehab on Martin Luther King Day, 2002, Courtney was with me. I was having a hard time speaking, and the therapist started talking about Martin Luther King, Jr. and asked me what I had been doing when he was marching. I managed to get out that I had marched with him. My first words after that stroke were the stories of my time in Atlanta during the Civil Rights movement. Courtney then told her older cousin Kathleen about it. They asked me to record my stories for them. I started writing about it on Martin Luther King Day, in 2004, before you came to visit that December."

"Why did you choose to write, instead of tape record the story? Hearing your story, it sounds like it would have been a lot easier to record rather than write."

"Dr. Gottlieb always told me to tape record it. He's been asking me to record my story for years now."

"Did you tell him you were writing it all down?"

"Not yet. I want to wait until I finish."

"But, why write it?" Again, I looked at the hundreds of pages of writing. I did not think I could have been as tenacious as she had been. Of course, with her life, I felt I would have given up on any kind of writing. I shook my head. I could not know what I would have done with her life. All I knew was that I wanted to learn to be more like her in her tenacity.

"Because I wanted this to be in my words, on paper. I like that I can fix things and change them around when I'm writing."

"I guess that makes sense. Plus, you've been trying to be a fluent writer for most of your life."

"Still, I never really thought I could make it into a book that other people would want to read until you came and I worked with our writing group. I thought it would just be a journal. Even if things were misspelled and hard to understand sometimes, the girls would figure it out, and have a record of my story. I had some tapes that they had given me to record it, if the journal didn't work, but I wanted to try to write it."

Joining the Writing Group after a Lifetime of Writing Struggles

"You have had a hard time with writing your whole life because of dyslexia and vision problems, but you wanted to join the writing group because you thought you were ready to grow as a conventional writer?"

Ann laughed. "That pretty much sums it all up."

"Well, I guess that wraps up our interview today. Now, I have to write this out, write about your progress in the group, and incorporate our combined analysis of your progress. Thank you so much for your time."

"No problem. My pleasure. Would you like more tea?"

Ann in the Writing Group

Ann had enthusiasm for the group because she wanted to grow as a writer. Every week that she came, she had at least a dozen new pages for us to review. By the end of the year, she had written hundreds of pages, more than she had ever written in her life, and she was on her way to writing a book.

When Ann joined the writing group, she expressed her eagerness. She also shared her understandable nervousness. When we met for one of our early interviews a few hours before the February 4, 2005 writing group meeting, we sat in the Blue Room and Ann explained how she felt:

To do, to actually write the stories that my nieces have asked me to write, I'm kinda shaky about. Kinda nervous. Kind of not sure what to put in and what not to put in, let alone how to make the phrases and so it's kind of...my writing experience has kind of been mostly negative. Most of it, I've come as far as I have because I haven't given up.
(Interview, February 4, 2005)

Despite her nervousness, she seemed convinced that the writing group would be successful. As I noted in my January 2005 journal, "There doesn't seem to be a lot of enthusiasm for this writing group, but Ann assures me that things will pick up. She, at least, is very eager."

In January and February, Ann brought a composition book that she used as a journal to the group. In this book, she had written an introduction to her story of how she came to march with Martin Luther King, Jr. She then started her story in her early childhood. In order to explain how she ended up in Atlanta, she felt she needed to explain the struggles she experienced while getting an education. She also felt she needed to document her spiritual development, which, she emphasized, led to her passion to help those who suffered from discrimination.

In these early months, her writing consisted of broad summaries, punctuated with periodic misspellings and missing words. I would read her work aloud, and, at her request, soon I became comfortable helping her with the spelling of a word or even telling her about punctuation. By April, these sorts of corrections became part of the reading of her piece.

Getting Help with Editing and Adding Detail

On April 22, 2005, Ann, Hilary, and I (Verne was at the doctor's) were sitting around the table in the Blue Room, as usual, with Ann having me read through one of her stories. I paused because I didn't know what the next word was.

Ann interrupted, "Urban league. That's 'urban', and I couldn't find it. I searched in the dictionary for almost an hour." Ann was dressed in blue cotton shirt today with gray slacks, and she looked calm considering she had spent that kind of time looking for one word.

I realized that she usually had to spend that kind of time looking for a word. I did not know if I could sit, as she did, looking up every couple words in a dictionary to make sure they were right, often not finding the word. If I had not known that she spent those hours looking in a dictionary and trying to sound words out, I might have tried to work her through that process. However, I knew that Ann preferred to hear the answer— hearing spelling was part of how she learned. So, I spoke the answer aloud, "U-R-B-A-N."

Ann shook her head. "I didn't know that." She then wrote the word down on her copy of her story.

I nodded and then tried to reread the sentence, "'In the black city' and then you don't need the comma before 'In the urban league,'" I added, because I knew she liked to hear where and when commas should be placed. Then, I paused, knowing she would want to correct the other misspelled word. "L-E-G-A-L. Did you mean league?"

Hilary stepped in, "L-E-A-G-U-E?" He wasn't sure either.

After writing Hilary's spelling of league down, I nodded my head. Yes, the word looked right to me. I had not been sure, either, until I saw it. "Yes, that's it. There we go."

Ann had not heard Hilary. "How's that?"

We both replied, "L-E-A-G-U-E."

"All right." Smiling, Ann wrote it down as well.

I looked at the word, realizing how Ann's spelling had been a good attempt. Spell check probably gave her "legal" as she tried different spellings. "It's a funny word, you know? I don't know why it has several silent vowels."

"Okay. Could you mark the word, too?" Ann said, very used to struggling with the various oddly spelled words in the English language.

"All right. I'm writing 'urban league' and we'll cross out 'erban legal'." I went on to reread the sentence, "There was another issue at that time in the black city's urban league..." I paused because the sentence continued and I was lost as to where her thought was going. Then, I realized there should be a period after 'at that time', and that it belonged with the previous sentence. "Okay, Ann. At that time, period. The black city's urban league had gone into the inner city in the early...sixties [I paused while I added an 'i' before the 'e'] building large community centers and staffed these centers with paid

white college graduate social leaders." I stopped there so that we could go over how to spell '60s and to discuss the punctuation briefly.

Hilary took that moment to comment, "Ann, I remember those times. It's good you are writing this story."

"Yes, Ann. Powerful stuff here," I agreed. The story, and how hard she had worked to get it written, impressed me. "I'm so glad that you are so patient."

Ann shrugged. "It's just what I need to do. Do you have any corrections for that sentence?"

We continued with the sentence's adjustments.

Finally, I reread the section, as I would do any time I would have to interrupt a reading as often as I did in the example above. "There was another issue at that time. The black city's urban league had gone into the inner city in the early '60s, building large community centers and staffing these centers with paid white college graduate social leaders." I thought it interesting that the community centers in the black city's urban league staffed these centers with white social leaders. Were no other races trustworthy for leadership? The governing body was white; furthermore, from all Ann had told us, the government of Atlanta was determined to stay white when Ann first moved to Atlanta. While I felt a little frustrated by having to stop and start so many times to understand what Ann was trying to write, Ann's accomplishment in writing her thoughts and memories amazed me. Furthermore, her topic awed me because I realized I sat with a witness to an important part of my culture's history. She had seen and lived what I had only read about before.

"Ann, how did you know about the Atlanta urban league?" I asked.

"Well, I was in nursing school there. I worked with the church in the inner city."

Ann's face brightened when she talked about those memories.

"It looks like it was a happy time for you."

"I never felt so alive before that. They were hard years, but they were also invigorating."

"Why not write a lot more detail about that?"

"Yes." Hilary nodded. "You could tell us what the city was like then. You could show it to us."

Ann reminded me of my beginning writing students, who tended to summarize and skip information in writing, assuming that a quick overview would satisfy a reader.

"Ann, you can add so much—conversations, moment-by-moment stories like Hilary gives us. You can show us, through walking us through the important events there, what you experienced in Atlanta. You can show us how it was invigorating."

"Do you think that would be interesting?"

Hilary and I both replied, "Yes!" We wanted the stories from the nursing school, and the stories from her work in the inner city. Ann seemed to enjoy writing about her time in Atlanta, and soon she began to write more and more about that time period.

Using the Word Processor in the Early and Middle Parts of 2005

Throughout Ann's time in the writing group, she alternated between handwritten journals and text typed on one of the apartment complex computers. For example, after the first interview in February 2005, Ann began to use the word processor to type her stories. When I asked her why on April 22, 2005, she told me, "To some degree it was because you encouraged me. Also, I had written using a computer before."

"Before, you had people to help you with editing?" We had moved our interviews in April to the Blue room, and we could both see the trees blossoming outside the window.

Ann nodded her head to my statement.

"Didn't your old computer have voice-to-write technology?"

"Yes. I wish I hadn't given that computer away, but after the strokes, I just wanted to get rid of as much as I could and move in here. I didn't think I'd ever use that computer again."

"Do you like using the word processor, even now that you don't have help or the voice-to-write technology?"

"Oh, yes."

"Why?"

"I like how it helps me correct my spelling. It doesn't always help, but sometimes it gives me some good options, and it makes my search through the dictionary easier. I still have to check all the words to make sure they are the right ones, but it is a lot easier now."

"I see."

"Oh, and it makes editing a lot easier. I don't have to retype everything or rewrite everything completely over. I can just go in and make changes."

By May, Ann had typed over 60 single-spaced pages about her childhood, high school, and first year of college, and wrote briefly about how she came to Atlanta.

However, in late May, Ann began to handwrite again in her journal. I asked her about it at our writing group.

"Ann, I've noticed that you're bringing handwritten journals again."

"Yes." She frowned. "I was told I shouldn't be typing all night in the computer lab."

"Why?"

Ann shrugged. "I noticed a leak when I was in the computer lab last week. Must have been about three in the morning. So, I called maintenance. They must have complained."

"Are you still using the computers in the daytime?"

"I don't know. It'll just be easier for me to work in my journals now anyway. I do most of my writing at night." Ann was angry. She added, "You know? I don't really want to talk about it."

I didn't press the issue.

As I held Ann's journals, I noted that they reflected how working on a word processor had affected her writing process. She would write a section, and then notice where something needed development. Then, she would create an insert where a section was developed with more details. This insert would then be paper-clipped to the appropriate page. Eventually, even the inserts would get inserts.

When I would read her text aloud, Ann had to guide me on the order of the texts, but I enjoyed watching how she invented a way to insert details and events into her handwritten journal drafts. Over several months, she filled a journal that included anywhere from 5- to 14-page inserts on each page, and often one page had several inserts. She numbered the inserts like footnotes with numbers or letters that correlated to the appropriate spot.

At the end of the summer, Ann returned to the word processor to begin typing what she had recorded in her journals through the summer months. I noted in my August 2005 journal that when I asked Ann about it, she shrugged and said, "Yes. I'm okay with using the computers now. It's nice to be using them again." She wouldn't answer what in particular had changed to make her feel welcome in the computer lab again.

While using the word processor to rewrite her stories, Ann expanded on her handwritten stories even more. The computer became part of Ann's writing process, combining handwritten and word processed text with aural review from the writing group. Her process developed into the following routine: journaling, adding inserts to her journals, and then copying into a word processor all her journals and inserts while expounding even more on each story. Between each of these steps, Ann would have me read what she had written to help her hear the text, so she would perceive what was there, what was missing, and what she needed to add. Through this process, Ann began to overcome her tendency to summarize her story. She was learning how to elaborate. The writing group was a key element of her writing process, along with journals and the word processor.

Writing about Marching with Martin Luther King, Jr.

One example of how Ann began to elaborate, rather than just summarize, in her writing could be found in the development of her story about marching with Martin Luther King, Jr.

In my May 2005 journal, I recounted a conversation I had with Ann. I mentioned to her, "We've been hearing about Atlanta since late April; what about marching with Martin Luther King, Jr.?"

"You mean it's not there? I thought I put it in."

"Well, you mention it, but you don't show it to us."

"Okay, I'll have to do that," she replied.

On July 1, we heard the first developed version of her experience. In this draft, there were numerous instances of creative spelling and some missing words, but we could also see that she was getting more and more of the details she wanted to include in her writing. In this version of the story, Ann described marching to the Atlanta TV studio and how she inadvertently caused a stir in the studio while listening to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s talk:

[E]very time the cameras would shine on us, it would hurt my eyes and the heat from those camera[s] caused everyone to sweat [sweat] instantly. I am very light sensitive [sensitive] and so the light felt like it would pull my eyes out of my head. I was trying to hide from the light and pain. The second time I tried [tried] to hide from the light some one behind us though [threw] something that ~~hit~~ hit Fr. Jerry in the head. When he "Fr. Jerry turned to look around he saw me trying to look away from the coming light. Fr. Jerry told me to put on my sunglasses NOW. I got them on just as the camera [camera] moved to view us. Because the partitions [partitions] were not sound proof we were not to talk. Fr. Jerry did not say anything until after the camera move away from us and into the other partition. Then He ask me what I was doing. I answered, "The light hurts." [S]ome one from behind us shouted "Keep your sunglasses on, [.] We know how bad the light hurts but if you move from the camera it looks like you are ashamed to be seen with us [.]" Without thinking I looked back at the group and said [said] why would I be ashamed to be here with you? And those cameras [cameras] were [were] on us again as some one from the speaker [speakers] shouted there is a fight in the audience [audience]. Fr. Jerry turned me around just as the cameras were moving [in closer] toward us; and no one moved or said anything. With the cameras [cameras] on us [I said] "I am okay now [.] [T]he pain stopped, [.] He was just going to help me, that's all."
(Ann's Atlanta Journal, 2005)

The story continued, she explained that as the Civil Rights activists in her partition calmed down, the people against integration in the neighboring partition became upset. I

noted to myself to ask her about why the people in the other partition were stirred up, and I just kept reading.

While going through the story, I corrected some of the spelling and added some of the missing words, as could be seen in the brackets above. But, when I concluded reading her text, I quickly moved our discussion toward the content. "Ann, this is so much more detail!"

"It wasn't there before?" Ann asked.

Hilary shook his head.

Verne added, "No. I remember watching Martin Luther King on TV, though."

"What if you add more detail, Ann?" I asked.

"There isn't enough?"

"Well, it's good, but you could add a lot more," I replied.

"I like that you added how the light and sweat hurt your eyes." Hilary smiled at Ann. "That was some nice detail."

Verne nodded. "And you started to have some nice dialogue there, too. Like where someone shouts to keep your sunglasses on, and how you reply."

"Definitely. This is worlds better, Ann," I added.

"So what could I add?"

I looked over the text. "Well, I was confused about how the people in the neighboring partition were stirred up."

"Oh, they tried to knock the partition down."

"Why?" asked Verne.

"Because they were angry that we were fighting for equal rights. They were threatening our lives."

I was still confused. "How did they know you were there?"

"They could see us."

"How?" I pursued.

"Oh, I need to explain that." Ann wrote a long note to herself on her draft.

"Yes," I agreed. "And what was the fight they were talking about in the text? Was it the people from the other partition?"

"No. It was one of the guys in my partition. He was upset with me because he thought I was ashamed."

"Is that the person who threw something?" Hilary smiled encouragingly.

Ann's eyes widened, and she nodded her head. "Okay. I'll explain that better, too." She wrote more notes on her paper.

We encouraged her to slow down even more, savoring each detail, showing the drama, and then we waited to see the next draft.

In September, Ann presented her revision of the march with Martin Luther King, Jr. story, which she had playfully titled, "How to Start a Riot." While she had allowed her sister to proofread before she showed it to us, what was striking about this draft was not how clean the draft was; we were impressed by how much Ann had improved in her pacing and development of details. On September 30, 2005, Ann, Hilary, Verne and I sat in the Blue Room around her newly typed and revised draft, snacking on Hilary's freshly baked chocolate chip cookies, and I read from her word processor typed document:

The heat from the cameras had caused everyone to sweat instantly and incessantly. So besides being very hot, wet, and hurting from the bright lights, I

also had the salt from the sweat running into my eyes. The salt from sweating made my eyes feel like they were on fire in addition to the bright lights making my eyes feel like they were being pulled out of my head. Suddenly, the lights were coming at us a second time. I was trying to hide from the lights and keep the sweat from getting into my eyes. At the same time, someone from behind us threw something very sharp that hit Fr. Jerry in the head.

As Fr. Jerry turned around to see who had thrown what had hit him, he saw me trying to look away from the lights. He was very close beside me. Therefore, as he was turning around, in a very low voice, he said, "What are you doing?"

"The light hurts my eyes and they feel like they are on fire." I said as the lights were coming closer. "Put your sunglasses on," he said, "And do it very quickly."

I got my sunglasses out of my purse and put them on just as the cameras were moving in on us. At the same time someone in the back row was saying, "See those white people down there, they ain' innerested in our needs. They just wanna preten' they care."

As that person was speaking, a very tall black Spanish-looking young man was coming down the bleachers two rows at a time. He had an angry demeanor. This caused tempers to flare on the other side of the partition as well.

The cameras seemed to be brighter while moving faster. Fr. Jerry said in a very low voice, "Pedro do not move, she is hurting."

Our side of the partition became very still. No one moved or said anything and the cameras were directly on us. With the cameras on us, I said in a whisper not so very low, "I am hurting from the lights." Because no one moved, the TV cameras moved to the other part of the studio. As the cameras were moving away, Pedro said "I want to see her with the sunglasses on."

The lights from the cameras suddenly came back toward us. I stood up, turned completely around facing Pedro and said, "I am ok now the pain is going away."

Pedro just looked at me. The cameras were coming closer; the lights were so very bright that I could not see. I was still facing the back. Someone from the top row shouted, "See, she has her sunglasses on. She is not trying to hide her face."

The TV cameras very slowly were moving away from us; At the same time someone from the back of our section said in a rather loud voice, " tell her to keep her sun glasses on, we know what it is like to hurt."

"Yes," shouted someone else, "We know how bad those bright lights can hurt. But if you move away from the cameras, it looks like you do not want to be seen with us." "Are you ashamed to be here with us?"

Without, thinking, I jumped up turned around, and shouted back to them, "Why, would I be ashamed to be with you?"

While these people were talking Fr. Jerry had asked me to turn around and sit down. I did as he has asked.

And then those bright lights and cameras were back on us. Someone from the speaker table shouted; "There seems to be a fight in the Audience." And so in a much louder voice I said; "It is ok, he was just trying to help me. That is all"

I paused in my reading to get a sip of water and to comment. "Ann, this is really improved. Nice dialogue and detail."

"Great job, Ann. I knew you could do it," added Hilary.

I smiled and said, "Now you're explaining how close to rioting the situation was. I'm glad you added that because I really didn't get it before, even when you explained it."

"Thanks."

"Shall I continue?" I asked.

"Go on then," Hilary nodded.

I kept reading:

Since everyone on our side of the partition was quietly sitting without moving, the TV Cameras moved to the other side of the partition.

The group on the other side of the partition was standing up and moving toward the steel door which separated the two sections. Some white men had already reached the door. They were trying to break the glass. Some of the men had hammers and were trying to knock down the door. This group of people was shouting; "Those white trash who are over there hate us." The people who wanted to stop integration believed equal but separate rights were working just fine in the South.

The cameras very quickly came back to the audience and focused on those who were hammering the door. They stayed with that group for what seemed like a very long time. Because of the things they had shouted at us on the way to the studio, we knew that if that group would have broken the door or glass they would have tried to kill us. Luckily, since the cameras were spotlighting their behavior and they seemed to be all professional people, they calmed themselves and sat down. The attention returned to the speakers who were ending their presentations.

As I stopped, I couldn't suppress my elation. "Ann, you've improved so much!"

"Bravo," Hilary added.

"Now, I have a picture of how scary the anti-integration activists had been. Because of your description, I began to understand how frightening the social environment was at that time."

Ann smiled. "I didn't think I could do it, until Hilary told me I could. I wanted him to write it. But he said I could, and after we talked, I got this."

Verne jumped in with more praise, and I never got to ask Ann more about that key moment in her writing process until months later.

In our February 2006 interview in her apartment, Ann explained to me what had happened the day she approached Hilary for help.

Ann: I said to him [Hilary] in the hall (I was comin' out of the computer room and he was comin' out of his apartment), [...] and I said, here, make this alive, and he just kinda looked at me. Yes, he didn't say anything to me; he just looked at me. We were meeting Fridays, then, right? And so this was like Mon. or Tue. that I did this to him, and that Friday, [because we had made you food and you couldn't read aloud and eat at the same time], you told him to read it, and so he did, and that's when [...] he told me to take out all of those Mrs. and Mr.'s and to give names, and I did, I changed from Mrs. T to Mrs. Thelma. That was a major change, really.

Krystia: That was.

Ann: Yes, and it was hard to go back through everything and put in the names, and still I think there are places where I didn't catch them all. [...] [A]nd even the fact that Mrs. Thelma used to say "Dorothy, dear", I would have never put that in without Hilary saying, that that was fine, because that was the way some of the older southern women talked. [...]

(Interview, February 23, 2006)

This moment was a turning point for Ann, because she felt fully supported by a peer.

While he had been supportive before, his expression of confidence in her abilities touched her in a way that his comments previously had not. As she told Hilary months later, "You didn't put me down, you didn't say 'no', you said 'we'll see about this'"

(Writing Group Journal, April 26, 2006).

"How to Start a Riot" was not the only story that had improved dramatically. Ann had taken and created chapters out of all of the scenes from her journal and had revised each of them several times to a consistently higher quality. When on the phone with her on October 5, 2005 in order to set up an interview time, I mentioned, "Ann, you are starting to sound like a polished author in your rewritten sections about Atlanta."

"Yes. I felt like my life began when I went to the South."

"What do you think about making your book begin with the stories from Atlanta. You could always refer to the old stories in flashbacks, if you needed them. You certainly have more than enough material for a book during the Atlanta period."

"That might work." I could hear Ann's smile in the excited brightness of her tone. "I think I'd like that."

Ann relished her memories from Atlanta, for it was a time when she felt alive, had developed friendships, and had contributed to her society.

Beginning to Write a Book

Ann decided to begin a new computer file in September of 2005, and she titled that file "Bread of Life." In "Bread of Life," Ann transferred her introduction, and then transferred the story of how she came to be in Atlanta. She continued writing into this file and developing her story throughout the next year. By January of 2006, the document was 80 pages single-spaced, and she had only rewritten a third of her summer journal entries about Atlanta.

Ann's Success in the Writing Group

Why was Ann productive as a writer in the 2005 writing group? As explained in the following sub-sections, Ann's interviews revealed that she felt her development was

due to eight factors: being able to hear her work, peer camaraderie, small and large scale commentary, learning to be a critical user of Microsoft (MS) Word, mutual respect from the group, having me work as a facilitator rather than as a teacher, having a hand in the design, and her desire for generativity.

Finding Success in the Writing Group: The Importance of the Oral

Ann felt that the fact that I read her writing aloud helped her progress as a writer. Hearing the text was crucial to her being able to understand what she had written and what she had left out. When explaining why the writing group helped her, Ann listed the auditory aspect of the writing group first:

[T]he first part of it is simply having somebody read back to me what I've written, because if I write, and it doesn't matter if I do it on the computer or handwritten, [my perception is that] what I think is on the paper, so I will never see my own mistakes, because there's no...that takes in the, uh, visual, uh, it's like the visual/hand coordination problems, but instead of it being visual/hand, it's visual/words. So if I think it is, it is on the paper, even though it may never get on the paper. And so part of having it read to me, is "Oh, you left these words out that need to be put in. " (Interview, April 22, 2005)

In this quotation, Ann explained how she could not see what she wrote without auditory stimulation—stimulation that seemed to enable the connections in her mind to help her see the text. What was true for her has been true for other writers, especially learning disabled writers. Patricia Dunn (1995), for example, was able to help her nephew "see" his handwriting in *Learning Re-Abled* by reading with him and helping him shape his letters. Dunn (1995) recommended multisensory tactics when helping the learning disabled read and write. However, unlike Dunn's nephew, Ann had already experienced years of touch and auditory therapy to help her achieve print literacy. Furthermore, she had already internalized much of what she now could perceive in print literacy. The auditory stimulation of hearing her text read aloud during a group session seemed to

further develop her ability to perceive what was written in her texts. She could see. She could read and write. In the year of the writing group, Ann developed her ability to see what she did not include in her text. Through that process, she learned what she still had not explained in her texts and then made subsequent revisions to correct such issues.

Finding Success in the Writing Group: The Importance of Her Peers

Ann also felt it was helpful to her writing that she had peers in the group who had lived through the time periods about which she wrote:

[T]he history that I'm talking about, not only did I live through [it], but that other members of the group have lived through [it] in their own way, and so they relate to that, and they make statements about it, which helps me to remember other things that maybe should or should not be put in, and so that helps in the revision. [...] Especially since I'm talking about a time of history that was so vibrant and out in the news, and trying to make it real. That there were real people that lived in this time period and had hands-on experiences with it, and had to struggle with decisions, suddenly, because none of this was, well, let me think about this, am I going to do this or no? There just wasn't time. It's either do it now, or don't. And, and that whole, uh, 60's, 70's era was just like that. It was like it was right there. And you had to have, you had to have at least enough of yourself to know which way you were going to go. And it is hard, it is hard to make that real. That real live people did this, and why. (Interview, April 22, 2005)

One of the ideas behind an older adult life writing group has been to get groups of peers commenting on similar memories (Birren & Deutchman, 1991; Ray, 2000). In our case, our writing group understood Ann's generational culture. Hilary understood that culture because he was near her age. Verne understood, even if she was technically a generation older than Ann because she had lived through that time, too. Ruth E. Ray (2000) defined a generational culture as one that "entails shared beliefs, assumptions, and moral vocabularies, as well as a feeling of separation from other generations" (Ray, 2000: 228). Ann felt she grew to be a better writer because of the feedback from her peers on the elements of her writing unique to her generation. For example, Hilary and Verne

remembered Martin Luther King, Jr. and the TV broadcasts she talked about. Through discussions of those times and comments on her stories, the group helped Ann plan revisions that developed her writing's content and contexts.

Finding Success in the Writing Group: The Importance of the Commentary

A third part of writing development in the group for Ann was that she not only had peers, but that she received commentary about small scale and large scale ideas for improvement. As she said in the April interview, "And then there's always the third side that says, um, to make it better, these things should be switched around and changed or another word put in or whatever" (Interview, April 22, 2005). Here, Ann showed that through the writing group she moved beyond writing what she thought in a draft or two. As shown earlier in this chapter when describing her development of "How to Start a Riot," Ann was taking our comments and learning to revise.

She began to apply a process of development to her texts. This maturation of her writing process further connected her print literacy development to the vast amount of literature on process theory (Moffet, 1968; Graves, 1983; Macrorie, 1984; Elbow, 1981, 1998, 2000; Murray, 1996, 2004; Atwell, 1998) and post-process writing theory (Trimbur, 1994; Kent, 1999; Matsuda, 2003). Ann's citation of commentary as important in her growth reminded me of what Nancy Sommers (2006) found to be true for Harvard students: a reader's commentary could have positive short-term and long-term effects in a writer's growth. Ann showed that this could be true for her, a senior citizen, as well.

Finding Success in the Writing Group: Developing a Critical Use of the Word Processor

At the beginning of the writing group, Ann felt that the computer processor was a gift of God in helping her write for it minimized some of her disabilities. MS Word's

spell-check function often helped her spell her words, even if she still found herself spending hours double checking a dictionary to be sure she had been given the correct word. She also took joy in the fact that she did not have to worry about letter shaping: the letters were always correct (rather than upside-down and/or backwards).

Later that September, Ann quickly began to notice that the grammar check on the computer was not helping her all the time, as she had hoped.

[...] the computer has helped, but I have to watch, because the computer will do the strict English, um, correction, and so [...] if I'm not careful it will wipe out some of the emotional, and so I have to watch for that. And that's part of the constant revision—that I have to go back and make sure the computer didn't take out an emotional statement I made because it didn't sound English-correct. (Interview, April 22, 2005)

She noticed that sometimes the grammar check would rob her text of the vibrant language with which she was trying to describe and interpret her stories. She became aware of what Tim McGee and Patricia Ericson (2008) called MS Word's "Invisible Grammarian" and began using the program critically.

Finding Success in the Writing Group: The Importance of Respect

The fact that she felt respected by the group also helped Ann grow as a writer, as she articulated during the first interview:

I think the first feedback that was memorable was when I understood that in receiving the feedback, it was constructive, and, oh, not downgrading. That was the big point, not being pitied. (Interview, April 22, 2005)

This seemed to be partially because the group was comprised of kind people. It was also partially because of my insistence upon only one rule: always word your critical comment as a question, respecting the fact that what you comment upon is someone else's work.

What I did with my writing group I had learned from Claude Mark Hurlbert, who had been, for me, a model facilitator. In the classes I observed, his composition students were taught to be respectful of fellow students' authority in writing by gauging all critical and corrective comments in a "How would it change your meaning if you...?" question format. This format was one that he had learned from Ann Berthoff's writing on how to articulate commentary. I transferred his classroom model of commenting to the writing group.

Comments were not given simply to criticize or to correct, but to offer the writer other options—options that may well reshape and refine a work into a better piece of writing for a reader. However, the person making comments was also to understand that a comment might or might not help. Only the writer could decide the best course of action for his/her text.

My insistence upon using question format for all critical comments was further inspired by how I have seen this commentary style work. People writing together insisting upon respectful dialogue could learn to "find common ground, work through differences, and learn from each other's strengths as they [work]" (Day & Eodice, 2001: 178). This sort of cooperation and negotiating could be seen as a sort of peacemaking, where we would "facilitate the striving beyond ourselves, widening our identity toward the oneness behind diversity" (McAndrew, 1996: 380). This group reinforced how these caring and nurturing environments, which come about as a result of an insistence upon respectful commentary, could facilitate courageous and inquisitive temperaments. Besides fostering an environment of consensus, writers also became comfortable with disagreeing, accepting the dissensus that Trimbur (1989) discussed, and joking about

disagreement. Further, this group showed how this sort of environment transformed a set of people into a community that was mutually invested in each other's growth and development.

Ann told me that because of her lifetime of negative experiences with print literacy, the respectfulness of the comments was not only appreciated, but that it was crucial to her continued attendance in the writing group and her growth as a writer.

Finding Success in the Writing Group: Facilitator vs. Teacher

My self-description of my role as a facilitator, rather than a teacher, meant a lot to Ann, despite the fact that it did not seem to mean as much to the other members:

I accepted your role as a facilitator, rather than as teacher. [...] [I]t just meant we were equals. And because we were equals, um, I didn't have to worry about making mistakes and so that was a big thing. That was a big issue. [...] [M]y view of what you were doing [...] helped me advance in my own writing. [...] Teacher? I would have run the other way. (Interview, September 2, 2005)

Ann said that because of her lifetime of negative experiences in traditional school environments, she had little desire to work again with an authority figure.

Frank Kazemek (1997; 2002) described how in senior writing groups, older adults were used to thinking of the leader as a teacher and authority figure and recommended that a writing group facilitator simply respect that desire. Ann's appreciation of my self-description as a facilitator, however, might show that for some older adults, perhaps especially those with a history of learning disabilities, it is still worth trying to name oneself as a facilitator.

The fact that Ann understood my less authoritative stance may also be because she was from the Civil Rights activist generation, a generation that only just became considered older. This generation helped create the idea of teacher as facilitator. Ann

was someone who, only because she retired early, in 2005, fell into the definition of senior citizen (President's Council on Bioethics, 2005).

Finding Success in the Writing Group: Participant Design

Except for my commenting rule and my insistence upon my role as a facilitator, I had left the design of the writing group up to the members from the very first meeting, as I described in the first and second chapters of this book. After considering a variety of writing group formats, Ann, Verne, and Hilary as the three core members of the writing group were the ones who decided that they would bring the work they were already working upon, read the writing aloud, and then discuss it. Furthermore, they decided upon the kinds of comments they each preferred. I always left the design open to revision. Every couple months, I asked if we would want to try another format, but they reiterated that they liked the way the group worked.

Ann's success in the small group format lent support to Patricia Dunn's (1995) assertion, and James C. Wilson and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson's (2001) reiteration, that small group work could "potentially benefit the disabled student" (Wilson & Lewiecki-Wilson, 2001: 9). Reminiscent of how finding what a "deaf person wants and needs out of tutoring session" could help facilitate a deaf student's writing growth (Babcock, 2008: 35), Ann's story emphasized how important it was to allow her, as a disabled adult, to collaborate with the other members on how the group functioned. Her choices to have her work read aloud, to get a lot of critical commentary, and to present every week led to much of her growth and her sense of success within the writing group.

Finding Success in the Writing Group: The Importance of Generativity

Ann's entire motivation to write at this point in her life began with her desire to give her story to the next generation. As I discussed in earlier chapters, this desire to give to the next generation has been called a drive for generativity (Erikson, 1959/1980; Erikson et al., 1986; Erikson & Erikson, 1997; McAdams, 1993; McAdams & de St. Audin, 1998; McAdams, 2006). Ann began writing only because Courtney and Kathleen asked for her story. Often, she referenced these two nieces as her audience in her writing.

This writing group's success for Ann came about in large part because it helped her accomplish her goal to give her story to future generations. As the group supported her generativity goals, Ann felt supported as a whole person. When I asked Ann in September why she still participated, she showed how her motivation to work with the group had changed.

Krystia: So, are you motivated to write for the group? Or are you just writing for yourself, and happen to bring it to the group? Or both.

Ann: In the beginning, I was writing for the girls and just brought it to the group. [...] Now I can keep writing because of the support of the group, otherwise I think I would have stopped it...

(Interview, September 2, 2005)

The writing group moved beyond just sustaining her in her generativity; it met her needs as an individual. Her focus shifted from her future audience to her immediate audience.

Nevertheless, Ann's desire for generativity continued to motivate her to be more receptive to writing group comments. Her impetus to revise was not just to become a better writer, but to clarify her stories for the future generations. She wanted the written story of her personal experiences to help future individuals understand her experiences—her generation—and what could be learned from the Civil Rights era.

Ann: I didn't realize that until I started writing how much the personal point of view is important to the younger people.

Krystia: What made you realize that?

Ann: Well, actually, I now have an 11 year-old niece who is bi-racial and she, too, has begun to study Martin Luther King, Jr. in her formal education, and she spent about 10 days with me a few weeks ago. I had part of the story sitting out. It was the piece on what I call 'How to Start a Riot.' Olivia picked it up and read it, and she said, 'oh, these were real people who did real things.' That was when I really picked up on how important it is for the young people to know the day-to-day facts about why the Civil Rights people did what they did. And it has always been for me, more than just marching with Martin Luther King, Jr. Because that was really a very insignificant part of what we were really doing, or what we were really trying to do. Because we were actually after a social change in a culture that didn't want to recognize the value of people being people.

(Interview, September 2, 2005)

In this sense, I became a key part of the group for Ann because I could explain aspects from her time period which remained unclear in her descriptions, especially for someone who did not live through the 1960s. Then, in response to this sort of commentary, Ann would put a lot of thought and time into explaining sections that might not be comprehended by people who came after her generation. I could also tell her when things she wrote surprised me. Ann's first person accounts impressed me, as they did Olivia, as they brought to life some Civil Rights era stories from my history books.

Generativity remained important in Ann's writing and in her writing group participation. Ann kept composing because she wanted the generations that followed her in her family, and outside her family, to come to understand the way she felt God had worked in her life during a crucial historical point.

The writing group design that Ann helped to develop was particularly conducive to her successful development as a generative writer. What helped her was not only the respectful atmosphere, but also that she heard her work read aloud, connected with the

lives and histories of the group members, and received a variety of responses that led to the revision and successive improvement in the quality of her texts.

After a lifetime of trying to become a print-literate individual, the writing group provided the reading and writing experiences Ann needed to accomplish her goals. I am sure that past interventions, her work with Dr. Gottlieb and with Disability Services during her college degrees, combined with the group's effects. Because of her documented disabilities, Ann did not have to write, although she always felt the societal pressure to do so, especially from her childhood and early adult memories. There was no denying that she felt pressure, that as someone with a disability she had to "work extra hard in order to 'overcome' or 'compensate for'" (Vidali, 2008: 46) her disability. In fact, she had been told she was incapable of learning. She never let that stop her, and she strove to be the superhuman "supercrip," a person identified by overcoming disabilities (Price, 2007).

Ann's identity as a disabled writer shifted over the course of the study, aligning more with her identity as someone who prevailed over adversity because of God's grace. When Ann began the writing group year, she only hoped to get her words down in a rough journal form for her nieces, but she never expected her writing to achieve the same articulate composition levels she had seen others convey with far less effort. A writing group sensitive to Ann's needs and attentive to her requests, as described throughout this chapter, helped her realize her aspirations, and more. By the end of one year of meeting with the group, she could not only write well, but she was well on her way to completing an engaging book manuscript.

CHAPTER SIX

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

Looking Back

This section looks back to the original research questions of the study, explores the answers to those questions based on the data, and examines the limitations of this study. As outlined in Chapter One, three major questions guided my study:

1. How would older adult subjects structure their Participant Design writing group, how would they perceive its success or failure, and what would they say was accomplished as a result of participating?
2. How important was generativity to the participation of the writing group members?
3. Would the writing group inspire the older adult participants to learn more about computer and electronic print literacies? Why or why not?

While a query about generativity emerged mid-study, after the one about electronic print literacy, in this chapter I reverse the order of the first chapters' second and third questions because the generativity inquiry's answers influence the literacy inquiry. Through answering the above questions, I further explore the significance of the writing group for Verne, Hilary, and Ann.

Participant Design

As mentioned throughout the dissertation, all members negotiated the writing group meeting structure. I, as the facilitator, did not solely develop the structure. Nor did I enter my research site with a particular agenda as to what I wanted my participants to write, how often we would meet, or how to structure meetings. I did not feel the need,

nor even feel that I had the right, to tell my elders what to do and how. I wanted the participants to have a say in what sort of writing group we would have. As a result, the group became more successful than I hoped, eventually even getting together for fun.

The Reading, Part One

Ring. Ring. I reached over to pick the white mobile phone up where I had it perched on a box.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Krystia?"

"Ann?" I recognized the voice. Her lilting tones still were reminiscent of her time in the South. I wondered if she knew that.

"Yes. I was calling you to see if you were coming to the reading today?"

I paused. Ah, yes. Hilary had mentioned hearing about a reading on the Southside on July 28th. "Is that today?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I'm not sure. I'd like to go, but Jerry and I haven't had much time to spend together between the various moves and all our work. My brother just left, too."

My husband and I were not even married one year, and the last year had been so busy that we had hardly enjoyed it. First of all, we had to sell his house because its location didn't work for both of us. We were frazzled from showing the old house to prospective buyers, commuting, and looking to buy a house that hopefully would work better for both of us. We had just recently found a buyer for our house, and had moved into an apartment, while trying to close on the newly chosen home. Perhaps if that had been all, I wouldn't have been as tired, but we were both pursuing doctorates and working

to earn a living. Finally, we had just had my brother stay with us after an emergency hospitalization. We were worn out. I wanted to go with the writing group, but I also needed some quiet time with my husband.

Ann knew all of this, as did the rest of the group. While I had learned about their lives in the writing group, they also picked up facts about my own.

"I know it's been a tough month for you, Krystia. Everyone will understand if you can't come. You need that time with your husband."

"Still, I'd like to go. This is the first time that the three of you are getting together and going out."

"Yes. Hilary's going to drive us over there at 6:30 p.m. But, don't you worry. There will be other times."

I hoped so. "Well, Ann, I called Joseph Beth Booksellers. They'd be interested in sponsoring a reading for the three of you. However, their events coordinator resigned, and they are in the process of getting a new one. They told me that they can't schedule anything yet."

"That sounds promising, though. I'll look into some other places, too."

"Do you think you will all get to read your own writing at this event?"

"Hilary thinks so."

"What are you going to read?"

"I printed out a new copy of the 'How to Start a Riot'."

"Excellent choice. Ann, I'm going to try to make it. We'll see." The more I talked to Ann, the more I wanted to be with her, Hilary, and Verne. Yes, I would see

them tomorrow. Yes, I still needed time with my husband. Yes, I was still tired. But maybe I could work something out. I decided to email my husband about it.

"Krystia, you just take care of yourself. We'll see you tomorrow and tell you all about it." Our usual Friday afternoon meeting was less than 24 hours away.

"Okay. See you soon, Ann."

"Later."

I got off of the phone and smiled. I liked that the whole group was getting together, whether or not I joined. This signaled a fairly significant shift in the group dynamic. Throughout the first several months, Hilary and Verne had mostly focused on the group as a class, where I was the most important element as the teacher. This marked a defining moment where the group came into its own identity.

Participant Design's Emergent Structure

When I designed the writing group to be mutually constructed, I had no idea how crucial this would be to its success. Before I explain how it made the group successful, let me review the structure: All participants decided they preferred to write on their own and then share their work, rather than write within the group time. They chose to embrace multiple genres of writing including life-writing, journals, fiction, and letters. Each participant could share whatever kind of writing s/he worked upon. The group also decided to meet for however long it took to get through everyone's selected pieces of writing, typically one to three hours. Furthermore, we accommodated the relaxed environment of retirement housing by allowing ourselves up to an hour to socialize and catch up on the week's events. This socialization usually occurred before, and sometimes between, the one to three hours of reading, critique, and discussion.

Each member preferred a different type of critique, which led to customized writing assistance for each participant. I only requested that everyone's critical comments would be worded in supportive ways, respecting the author's power over his or her text. Verne soon made it clear that she preferred blunt criticism, whereas Hilary wanted only positive commentary. Ann stated from the beginning that she preferred my model of supportively-worded critical comments. They were all adults who knew themselves and what they wanted, so we worked to accommodate each participant's wishes. My role as facilitator was to make sure we stuck by the rules everyone had agreed upon, to provide commentary as requested, to read aloud others' pieces when asked, and to provide opportunities to adjust the structure when or if members wanted change.

Every now and again, we would test members' boundaries, as discussed more fully in the case study chapters earlier. Verne learned that brainstorming with the group helped her. We learned Hilary tolerated a little criticism. Of course, more than that would make him uncomfortable, and even upset, so we came to respect and enjoy the simple pleasures of his writing. We pushed Ann on with high expectations for her story and found she could grow more fluent as a writer than what we initially expected.

The Reading, Part Two

My phone rang again 30 minutes after I got ended the conversation with Ann. I was in the middle of lunch.

"Krystia?" Verne's alto voice resonated with her enthusiasm.

"Verne?"

"So, are you coming with us to the reading?"

"I'm not sure. I told you all last week that this wasn't a good time for me. My brother just left, and I'm getting ready for our move next week. Jerry and I were hoping to spend a little quiet time together. You're going to the reading for sure?"

"Yes. I'm feeling a little better after the embolization, and Bill should be all right without me for a few hours."

Her voice sounded happy and excited. She continued, "I'm bringing my new story—'Ben's Gift'."

"Not 'The Magic Toy Tree'?"

"No. I like this one better, now. I'm so proud of it, the way the animals don't speak, but seem to. Are you sure you won't come, too?"

"I'm not sure. Where is this reading again?"

"On the Southside. Hilary's going to drive us over."

"Well, I don't live that far away. I'll try to stop by, even if just to hear you all read."

"Wonderful!"

"Where is this reading again?"

"I'm not sure. Hilary has the information. He's supposed to give it to me so that I can get directions from my granddaughter. She's going to look them up through the Internet."

"Well, have him call me with the address, too. It'd be easier for me to just meet you there, since you're all coming from the opposite side of town." I lived to the east and south of Pittsburgh, whereas they lived to the north and west of the city.

"Okay. See you tonight."

"Yes, I'll try to be there."

This was not an event to miss. My husband had emailed me that we could hang out later, somehow. I just couldn't miss their first reading, even if I was trying to schedule another one.

Participant Design's Effects

The results of the study show that the Participant Design of the writing group was key to the group's success for each older adult participant. Verne, Hilary, and Ann were able to grow in the ways that each one wanted to grow.

Verne felt the writing group kept her alive. It gave her a creative and social activity that allowed her to become confident enough to publish. Her enthusiasm showed through when any opportunity to read to others arose. The Participant Design allowed Verne to revise old fiction and to write new fiction and life-writing. Verne preferred fiction to life-writing, but, because other members' work inspired her, she experimented with writing about her life as well. Critical commentary invigorated her. The sincere praise, combined with her daughter's support, inspired her to publish. The writing group was not the only motivating factor for Verne, but it helped her achieve her life-long dream of being published.

Hilary felt the writing group eased his depression. He wanted to hear his work read aloud, but not for editing; he wanted to hear his writing performed to make sure it sounded as good as he hoped. Not interested in revision and only somewhat interested in publishing, Hilary just wanted to share his already written journals. Because he requested only positive feedback, he received all the reinforcement he desired, including the ability to hear his work performed. He also found the audience he needed to keep

him writing his journals. As a result, Hilary perceived that the writing group had a therapeutic effect for him.

Ann felt the writing group helped her achieve her dream of becoming a writer. She thought the group helped her overcome previous writing disabilities. Like Verne, Ann came to the group with writing that she wanted to edit. She wanted to hear her writing read by me, the facilitator, to help her with her editing process. Because of the Participant Design, we accommodated Ann's wishes and read her work to her at each meeting. Listening to her writing read aloud helped Ann edit her texts. Furthermore, she got the commentary she wanted to be able to become a more proficient writer. Because of the support of the group, Ann developed dreams of not only writing for her family but of publishing for a wider audience.

The writing group helped each member in the unique way that s/he wanted, and all three participants of the study felt that they became more confident as writers because of the group. As a result of their participation, Hilary found the courage to share his life's story, Ann began to dream of publishing, and Verne self-published one of her stories with her daughter.

All three members also discussed the social support they felt the group provided. This social support spilled outside of the group into other parts of their lives, where Hilary and Ann helped Verne during Bill's illness and where friendships developed between them and me. We trusted each other, so Verne, Hilary, and Ann continued participating in the group for as long as they could. Ann and Verne would even reschedule doctors' appointments to be able to come to a meeting. As a result of the perceived growth caused by the writing group, Verne's family members encouraged her

to come. Verne's daughter, Joan, befriended each of us and even attended several of our meetings with her mother.

The Reading, Part Three

"Hello?" A couple hours after talking to Verne, my phone rang again. I was in the process of packing up kitchen items my husband and I would not need in the next week.

"Krystia?" Hilary's energetic voice resonated with his years of salesmanship.

"Hi, Hilary. I hear plans are in motion for this evening."

"Uh huh. Verne mentioned I should call you with the address. So, you'll make it, after all? I don't want you to stress yourself. You've got too much on your plate. You've got to take care of yourself."

"I'm fine. I'm fine. I admit, it's been a lot to handle lately, but I feel better now that I've packed a few things. I promise I won't exert myself too much."

"You need to spend some time with your husband."

"I know. I will. But there won't be another first reading. Are you sure that you'll all get to read at this event?"

"Well, it was advertised as a reading. I think so. It won't hurt to try it out and see." I could tell he was excited about the prospect.

No, I could not miss this.

"I'll be there, just in case. And if it isn't, well, I've talked to Joseph Beth Bookstore. They should work out for you, if this doesn't. They're just waiting to replace the events coordinator."

"Joseph Beth Bookstore?"

"Yes. They're in the Southside, too, in the Works. I have my CD for sale there. They support local artists. They said they'd be interested in your reading. But we'll have to wait until they are ready. In the meantime, this is a great start. I hope you're right that this place has an open mike. What would you read?"

"Verne wants me to read the Card Story that she liked so much. I figured that was as good a way to start as any. Get people hooked into my story."

"It also works as an anecdote of Pittsburgh history, too."

"Right. Connecting with my brother's marble world championship wins."

"And the whole BB gun craze that put an end to your baseball cards."

"Still breaks my heart."

"I love that you quote *A Christmas Story*—'you'll shoot your eye out,'" I smiled. Yes, that was a fun story. The audience would enjoy it.

"Great movie. Worth quoting," Hilary agreed. "I'm working on something new, too. I'm writing an entry to a *Maxim* magazine contest. Figured they'd be moved by my life story. I'll be showing it to you all tomorrow."

"I look forward to it!" I had to smile at his gusto. "So, where is this reading tonight?"

"I have here: the Brew House Performance Garage, 2100 Mary Street, off Carson Street."

"All right, then. Ann said you all were leaving at around 6:30 p.m.?"

"It says that the doors open at 7 p.m., and it shouldn't take us longer than 20 minutes to get there."

"Yeah. It shouldn't take me longer than 15 minutes. Okay, then. I'll see you in a few hours."

"Later, alligator."

Participant Design's Success

Each participant responded differently when identifying the primary benefit of the group. As discussed in the case study chapters, because each participant received what s/he requested from the writing group, Verne found the group to be life-giving, Hilary found it therapeutic, and Ann found that it helped her write even with her literacy disabilities. These were three diverse, important benefits to gain from one group. As we strove to meet each writer's needs, the group helped each participant in the way s/he most wanted, not simply as writers, but as people. Verne felt more alive, which was a welcome break to the constant bouts with illness and reminders of impending death. Hilary received the healing and support he hoped to get from us. Ann obtained the assistance to help her take one more step to writing independently for the first time in her life.

The life-giving and healing benefits of the writing group point to the close connections between writing, identity, and human life. As Blitz and Hurlbert (2003) said, "writing is a means to create a self that knows how to say its self, [...] a self that can at once take its own measure and recognize its own immeasurability" (88). In this group, writing allowed each person to extend themselves in calculable ways (text), simultaneously reflecting their incalculable lives.

Even with the fiction that Verne wrote, she utilized her own creativity to craft written shapes of her wisdom. Her writing reflected, in measurable portions, the

immeasurable experiences of her life. Through sharing her stories, Verne's engagement with the writing process reinforced her identity as a writer and as a creative person. Also, commentary from me and the group encouraged her identity as someone who could and should publish. This, in turn, helped her feel more satisfied with life and helped her feel healthier. She had a "heightened sense of aliveness and vitality" (Erikson et al., 1986: 323) which improved her life.

Hilary created a coherent written self in his life-writing narratives to replicate and bring order to his life. As some scholars suggest, "the function of the life-story construct or personal narrative is to 'emplot' (Ricoeur, 1977) these chance events with meanings that render the presently remembered course of life as coherent or integrated account using the same template as other stories in our culture" (Cohler, 1993: 119). Hilary created a consistent account of his life using the patterns of cultural stories (like those of the movies *Jim Thorpe: All American Hero* and *A Christmas Story*), thus grounding his identity and life into a larger context and creating meaning for his life. Besides recreating his life in the writing group, the performances of his texts enabled him to see if an audience would see his life the way he saw it—the way he reconstructed it in his writing. He perceived a positive response to his writing as a positive response to his life, and so his writing, identity, and life were intertwined for him. The writing group helped alleviate his depression and led to a greater sense of well-being. Positive reinforcement helped support Hilary's positive self-identity and life-view.

Similar to Hilary, Ann reconstructed her life through her writing, but the process of revision also allowed her to restructure her identity as a disabled person who could not write coherent prose. As Brueggemann (2002) asserts, disabilities are ever shifting and

difficult to define; they have "indeterminate boundaries" (318). For Ann, working through her writing process over the course of 2005 enabled her to record and refine her life-writing into detailed, reflective, and rich prose. Not only did her writing help undergird her identity as a spiritual woman who had overcome many obstacles, her growth as a writer continued to reinforce that self-image. Her identity was that of a "supercrip," a person perceived to have "overcome" disability in some way (Price, 2007: 72). She believed that she was able to be a "supercrip" because of her acceptance of God's grace. Writing and sharing her stories helped reinforce this narrative construction of her life.

The Reading, Part Four

I felt frustrated as Carson Street stretched out before me, riddled with red lights. As always, this was a slow drive through traffic. Finally, I made my turn, and then turned again onto Mary Street. As I moved away from the congested street with small bars, restaurants, and eclectic shops, now before me were rows of houses packed together. Then, the scenery opened up to large buildings. I almost laughed as I pulled up to the Brew House, which was a renovated warehouse. It was directly behind the storage unit where my husband and I had stashed half our belongings, including most of our wedding presents, when we put his house up for sale. My aunt had insisted that only a half empty house would be appealing to a buyer, so we had opened the presents to write thank you notes, and then stored them away. In a week and a half, we would be here one last time to finally put all of our things in our new house.

I parked next to the storage unit and walked in. The ceilings were high, as would be expected in a warehouse. Artwork, hanging on the walls and on the makeshift room

dividers, featured various styles. A food table was to my right, and before me was a table selling tickets. I paid \$4, and picked up the poster (See Appendix R) that said:

Pittsburgh Arts & Lectures and Pittsburgh Filmmakers presents
'The American Shorts Reading Series No. 3 point 5.

Hazards

Thursday July 28, 2005

Brew House Performance Garage

2100 Mary Street/Off Carson Street, Southside

Doors Open 7:00PM, Readings begin at 7:30PM

Terrance Hayes reads Jhumpa Lahiri's *When Mr. Pritzi Came to Dine*

Rob Rogers reads T.C. Boyle's *Almost Shooting an Elephant*

T. Foley will screen her film *Hazardous Materials* and will be there to discuss the film, answer questions, and introduce us to her action figure!

As I had feared, there would be no open mike tonight. I dreaded my group's disappointment.

"Krystia! We're over here."

I smiled and looked up as the trio entered. Verne supported herself on her walker, Ann walked with a slight limp, and Hilary stayed with them as they approached, although he remained in good shape and could easily have moved faster. Even though they walked slowly, I could tell they were invigorated as they smiled and laughed while arriving in the warehouse.

Hilary brought Verne and Ann to where there were chairs and then went back and paid for them. I stopped him. Before they paid, I had to break it to them. "Hilary, this isn't an open mike night."

"That's okay," Ann interjected. "It's just fun to be out." She put her papers down to dig out some money and handed Hilary her four dollars. Verne did the same.

As Verne settled into her chair, with Ann's help, Hilary walked over to the ticket table, paid, then moved to get them some snacks off of the food table.

"Too bad," Verne said. "This group is missing out on three great readings. At least no one will be able to take my idea." She laughed and we joined her. "I probably should publish it before I read it, anyway."

"We did put a copyright on it and you saved the file. You should be fine, Verne."

"So, what are they doing here, if people can't go up and read?"

"Looks like an art showing," Ann commented, looking around.

"Yes. And the reading starts at 7:30 p.m. Sounds like they'll have professionals reading published stories...and a movie." I handed them the flyer. "You're right, Verne. They'll be missing out. I guess we just have to make the Joseph Beth reading happen."

"In the meantime, we can enjoy our time out," Ann concluded.

I smiled, looking at the group, appreciating their joy in this moment. Even though they did not get to have that reading, they could go out and spend time together enjoying some art and culture. I was glad I had made myself join them.

"You never know. They may let us up, after all," I heard Hilary say, and we laughed.

I ended up hanging out with them for a half hour, laughing, joking, and getting our picture taken together (See Appendix Q).

Afterward, I went home early to hang out with my husband for a while. Much as I would have liked to stay, I went to the reading to hear Verne, Hilary, and Ann and to be there for them in their first reading. Because they were not presenting, time with my husband trumped an extended social outing. Verne, Hilary, and Ann stayed for the whole performance. The next day at our writing group meeting, they told me about the remainder of the evening.

"I think Hilary's story was better than that shooting an elephant one they had performed at the reading, much as I enjoyed it," Verne stated.

"I think we almost got to hear him. I think he was about to jump up and grab the mike when the movie started," Ann added.

"I would have gone up," Hilary agreed.

We laughed.

"Too bad. It was a fun movie, though."

"I'm glad you all stayed. It sounds like you had fun."

"Oh, yes. It's been too long since I've gone out like that," Verne said.

Hilary and Ann nodded.

"Well, we'll just have to make this other reading work out."

Unfortunately, it never did work out. Every time I called the bookstore, they were still in the midst of a transition. Although the bookstore loved the idea, they emailed me to schedule a reading date only after Verne's husband became deathly ill. It was too late.

Reading their own writing publicly became one part of the emergent participant design that did not come to fruition for our group while we were all together. However, two members took the initiative to find the opportunity to read on their own. In 2006, after she moved away, Verne got to read her then-published book, *Joel and the Magic Toy Tree*, at a bookstore near her daughter's house (See Appendix S). Ann eventually read her "How to Start a Riot" story to her nieces' elementary school classes in 2007. Hilary did not get to read his pieces publically after the group, although he had performed his 9/11 poem on the radio before 2005. Maybe he should have jumped on that Southside stage before the movie, while they were all together.

Role of Generativity in the Writing Group

My analysis shows it works best to discuss generativity before discussing the technological development of the writing group participants, for a desire for generativity prompted the desire to use the technology to publish.

My study reveals that Erik Erikson's (1959/1980) concept of generativity (to give to future generations) played a key role in motivating my participants to write and to be a part of the writing group on a long-term basis. According to Erikson (1959/1980), generativity forms the seventh stage of human development. Erikson's eight stages "produce the strengths necessary for a mutual involvement in an ever-increasing social radius, from infancy through adulthood and into old age" (Erikson et al., 1987: 33). The stages are hope (basic trust vs. basic mistrust), will (autonomy vs. shame), purpose (initiative vs. guilt), competence (industry vs. inferiority), fidelity (identity vs. confusion), love (intimacy vs. isolation), care (generativity vs. self-absorption), and wisdom (integrity vs. despair). Each of these stages belong to a certain period of life, but George E. Vaillant (2002) emphasizes that Erikson's stages work more as tasks, since they could be accomplished non-sequentially (44). Vaillant is not alone in interpreting Erikson's stages as more complicated than steps that must be fulfilled sequentially. McAdams (et al., 1998), and even Erikson himself (et al., 1986), explain that stages are not always completed in order and that they can occur at varying ages, so generativity can be accomplished even in old age.

Vaillant (2002) goes further. Based on his examination of the Study of Adult Development at Harvard University, which studied over 824 individuals of three cohorts since as early as 1911, Vaillant re-categorizes older adult tasks. In his words, "The Study

of Adult Development at Harvard has allowed me to study Erikson's theory empirically. Similar to time-lapse photography of blooming flowers, the Study of Adult Development permitted me to remain the same and watch Study members evolve from adolescents into great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers" (Vaillant, 2002: 44). In turn, Vaillant redefines life tasks into the development of identity, intimacy, career consolidation, generativity, keeper of the meaning, and integrity. Vaillant (2002) argues that senior citizens attempt to achieve a "keeper of the meaning" status, which "extends beyond one's immediate community" (45). This correlates with Erikson's concept of grand-generativity. For Erikson, grand-generativity is a subcategory of generativity reserved for the older adult. It goes "somehow beyond middle age's direct responsibility for maintaining the world" (Erikson et al., 1986: 74). More clearly:

The capacity for grand-generativity incorporates care for the present with concern for the future—for today's younger generations in their futures, for generations not yet born, and for the survival of the world as a whole. It contributes to the sense of immortality that becomes so important in the individual's struggle to transcend realistic despair as the end of life approaches, inevitably. However, grand-generative concern for the future in the abstract must be integrated with simple, direct caring for the specific individuals who are part of life today. (Erikson et al., 1987: 74-75)

Erikson clarifies that grand-generativity should always be grounded in generativity, whereas Vaillant (2002) thinks that the "keeper of the meaning" task is entirely separate from generativity and deserves its own category.

Writing group members from this study were motivated by a need for both generativity and to be keepers of the meaning. However, throughout the dissertation study, I stayed with Erikson's term generativity for both giving to immediate younger generations and giving to those on a wider social scale. One reason for my choice to use the term, generativity, is that the word coined by Erikson is more versatile than "keeper

of the meaning." Generativity can be adapted as a noun, adjective, and adverb. It is an elegant term of a complicated concept. Also, while my study's results were representative of both Eriksonian generativity and grand-generativity, the shorter term, generativity, often sufficed as other researchers also used that term to refer to both ideas with older adults (Coleman & O'Hanlon, 2004). Now, in this concluding section, though, I think it worthwhile to tease out the levels of generative impulse within this study.

Dan P. McAdams and Ed de St. Audin (1998) emphasize that generativity "fails to fit into a single stage" or "into a simple conceptual category" (485). Vaillant's (2002) "keeper of the meaning" task delineation had me re-examine Verne, Ann, and Hilary's generative impulses and divide them into local and global spheres. All three members of the study had the generative desire to give to both immediate and larger cultural spheres. Writing provided them the means to do both.

Generativity: Giving Writing to Their Families

Members of my older adult writing group admitted that they were writing for their families, much like Vi Hinton of Winterowd's (2007) writing group, who said "I want my children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren to know this aging woman they sometimes visit has not always been this aging woman" (173). This desire for later generations to know and learn from her motivated her to write. My writing group members had such motivation. Hilary said, "I'm really doing this all for my family—my kids and my grandkids, mainly." Ann said, "I'm writing for my nieces and nephews, so they understand what it was like." Verne talked about how her stories could help the children of her family and the children of future generations. As Erikson described, for

all three writers in the group, generative desire was grounded in a desire to give to immediate family.

Work in the writing group directly inspired generative interactions with family. Writing shared with the group inspired conversations with family members. Verne eagerly shared her stories with family. When Verne's daughter visited, she would tell us how the family appreciated that the writing group inspired Verne to write again. Joan cheered on her mother's participation in the group, especially when Verne wrote *Joel and the Magic Toy Tree*: "We've been waiting for mom to do this for years. *Joel and the Magic Toy Tree* has been a very important story for all of us" (Journal, November 2005). As Verne continued her stories, Verne would talk about how happy Joan's input made her: "My daughter sat with me all this past week and helped me work this story out. I'm so excited with what we've done" (Journal, August 2005). Verne would say how she wanted to teach future generations some of what she had learned as a mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. Her writing allowed her to be generative and to enjoy the reciprocal fruits of that generativity. After she published, she commented to me over the phone, "My whole family is so happy that my daughter and I published this story" (Journal, January 2006).

After the 2005 meetings, Hilary mentioned to me how our enthusiastic response to his card story inspired him to share it with his family: "I shared my card story with my son and his children, and I'm trying to get a binder together of my Pittsburgh Streaker stories" (Journal, May 2006). Before meeting with the writing group, Hilary had been shy about sharing with his children the journals that he had written. The writing group

helped facilitate the concrete generative sharing that had been inherent in the process of writing the journals.

Also in 2006, Ann sent some of her memoirs to the two nieces, Courtney and Kathleen, who requested her story. She wanted to share, even though she told her nieces that the stories were still in the process of revision. Her nieces's positive response encouraged her to continue. As I was part of the same generation as her nieces, my opinion also had a lot of weight for Ann. I assured her that I was learning a lot from her Civil Rights era stories, such as just how violent and frightening the 1960s American South had been. Her stories revealed heroism and anti-heroism in ordinary lives from the Atlanta, GA, Civil Rights era.

Ann then shared her stories with her 12-year-old niece, Amber, who is half African-American. Ann told me that Amber, after she read her aunt's work, commented, "I didn't know that Civil Rights times were like that" (Journal, August 2005). Besides communicating the history in which she participated, Ann wanted to impart her spiritual experiences. She wanted to give that gift to the future generations of her family, as well. She hoped others would understand the Catholic spirituality that inspired her self-sacrificial choices and missionary spirit. Ann was a dedicated secular Franciscan, and she wanted to show how her life's story had been affected by her chosen belief system. She thought that her faith had been a great gift in her life, and she wanted to impart that gift to her nieces and future generations.

Generativity: Giving Writing to Society

Writing group members not only wanted to give to family, but to the younger people of society more broadly, tying into Vaillant's (2002) "keeper of the meaning" task

and Erikson's (et al. ,1986) grand-generativity. Hilary and Ann accepted commentary from me, a non-family member, and all three were happy that their work together helped me achieve my dissertation. They liked that this dissertation would help spread their stories to a larger audience and might help the academy.

Verne self-published so that her story could reach more young people than that of her family. Hilary at times hoped to publish to a larger audience, even if that desire was ambivalent. In fact, he tried to publish his first stalker story within a local paper in 2006, but the editor rejected his story because the narrative had been too long, and he remained unwilling to change it. While he was unsure if he wanted to vigorously pursue publishing, he told his story to friends and acquaintances after sharing them with the group. He wanted to reach a wider audience than that of his family. He wanted his stories to help and entertain more people. Also, in 2006, Ann presented her story to her younger nieces' classrooms. Furthermore, she talked of publishing her book, perhaps through a small Christian press. All three writing group participants expressed a hope that their texts would extend their wisdom to other young people beyond their relations.

Generativity and Legacy

Wanting to give writing to families and society stems from an innate desire to share knowledge and wisdom—a desire captured by the term, generativity, which is something different than just wanting to have a legacy and a desire to be remembered. Nevertheless, the desire for legacy intertwines with the desire to be generative. As McAdams (1993) states, "The most generative adults draw creatively upon both the agentic desire for symbolic immortality and the communal need to be needed" (232).

Hilary certainly mentioned his hopes to be remembered. Verne wanted to insure that she would get credit for her work and that no one would plagiarize her ideas. The three writers expressed their desire that their work would be published. Still, for all three participants, in all my interviews, the hope to be able to give something to the future was more evident than the hope of just being remembered. Legacy was part of their generative work but played a secondary role to it.

Generativity: What This Study Reveals About Giving

Studies like those of Dan P. McAdams (1993; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1998), show that generativity can sometimes take the form of story gifts. Other forms it could take are crafts or instruction that is passed down. This study shows that writing is one of the powerful means for the older adult to give to the next generations.

In the cases of all three participants, they all were not writing as much to gain a legacy, as to give the gift of their legacy. More than to be remembered, they wanted to give the future some part of themselves, their experiences, and their knowledge. Such giving was innately a demonstration of their worth as human beings. This generosity most often came in the form of written language, as this was a writing group setting. Through written composition, the group showed off their ability to use language and shape it into stories that would give back in several ways, depending on the writer. Verne, Hilary, and Ann chose to give back ethically, historically, and/or morally.

For Verne, it was important to share stories that emphasized ethical development, based on her long life experiences. She shared this wisdom through a letter to her grandson at his wedding and through her fictitious stories. She did not just give ethical stories, though. Because of her experiences with Hilary and Ann, she also decided that

she wanted to give to the past some history, so she wrote a fictitious interview that allowed her to chronicle her and her husband's lives.

Hilary, on the other hand, had little interest in ethical or moral gifts. More than anything, he wanted to impart the history of his life, of his family, and of what he knew of Pittsburgh and its North Side. He repeatedly said how he valued stories from the past, so he hoped to give such stories to the future and to give distant generations a sense of who he was and what his life had been like.

Ann wanted to share her history, like Hilary, but for a different reason. She wanted to share because she hoped her story would provide the moral lessons she had learned during her life. She hoped to share her love for God and how she felt that God's love transformed and guided her life into something more than it otherwise would have been. Not only that, she wanted to show how, while life could be full of prejudice and even violence, a life given to God could have great joys and redemptive value. She wanted her story, her gift, to reinforce the larger Christian story that she believed.

Verne, Hilary, and Ann show that for older adults, generativity can take different forms within a writing group setting.

The Writing Group Study's Role in Promoting Generativity

Let us look at generativity in yet another way, in particular focusing upon the role of research in facilitating generative reflection throughout this project. Dan P. McAdams explanation of generativity worked well for this dissertation. He divided generativity into "seven features" (9) involving:

- (a) *inner desire* for agentic immortality and communal nurturance combine with
- (b) age-graded societal norms experienced as *cultural demand* to produce in the adult years an increasing and more or less conscious (c) *concern* for the next generation. Ideally reinforced by a (d) *belief* in the goodness or worthwhileness

of the human enterprise, generative concern leads to (e) generative *commitment*, which, in turn, may produce (f) generative *action*. Generative acts may take the form of creating, maintaining, or offering that which has been created or maintained to a community. Finally, the adult apprehends his or her own generative efforts—giving meaning to the unique pattern of inner desire, cultural demand, generative concern, belief, commitment, and generative action in his or her own life—by constructing a (g) *narration* of generativity, which becomes part of the larger life narration, or life story, that makes up a person's identity (McAdams, 1985). A person's life story can itself be a kind of generative legacy, for the story itself is psychosocially created and maintained and sometimes offered to others (e.g., one's children or others who may benefit from knowing about one's life) as a lesson or gift (Maruna, 1997; McAdams, 1993). All seven features of generativity are oriented around the overall goal—a goal that (ideally) the individual and society share—of *providing for the next generation*. (McAdams, Hart & Maruna, 1998: 8-9)

Within the writing group, all three members had inner desire to be remembered and to nurture the future generations, which combined a sense that they should be helping the future with their inherent concern for their families and other young people. The writing group reinforced that they should write for others. The participants innately believed in the worth of their writing, and the writing group supported that belief. This led to the generative commitment to, and the generative action of, writing. Finally, the reflection embedded within the study of the group through the interviews created a meta-narrative of the generative writing within the group. Now, at the end of the project, I think it would be inappropriate to ignore the value of reflection within the writing group setting, for which my research was a catalyst.

Kathleen Blake Yancey (1998) says that, "Through such reflecting, within the multiplicity of these contexts, I create my truths, for today" (205). The study affects its own results because by examining their own life histories of literacy in context of their experiences in the group, members reify their positive perceptions of writing group

experiences. This adds an additional layer of generative narrative, evident in this dissertation's stories written about their interpretations.

Generativity: Concluding Thoughts

The generative spirit of my writing group members might have been further inspired by a fear of impending death. There was only so much time left to give what they had to give. Death was ever present in their environment. Hilary commented on the feeling of urgency he felt within himself and the group because more time lay behind them than before them (Interview, September 2005).

However, the generative spirit seemed to come more from satisfying the otherwise frustrated need to give to their families. Because they were in senior housing, Hilary, Ann, and Verne were often isolated from younger generations. As Erikson et al. (1986) state, "Grandparents are often deprived of relationships with grandchildren, whom they scarcely get to know. In an industrial system such as ours, profit making and greed take precedence over other values, such as generational continuity" (306). Charles J. Fahey and Martha Holstein (1993) add that, "Old age remains a life stage largely devoid of social expectations. It is a life stage set adrift, often devalued both in terms of personal respect and increasingly in terms of a challenge to public expenditures directed at the old" (255).

This writing group helped the members do more than be "uninvolved with nothing to think about except their own deterioration" (Erikson et al., 1986: 319). Accomplished through their writing, generativity, "centrally implicated in psychological well-being, social adaptation, and mental health" (McAdams & de St. Audin, 1998: 484), allowed the writing group members the opportunity to connect to and give to younger

people, even if only in their minds. As Blitz and Hurlbert (2003) state, "Writers write not only for those whose minds they hope to engage, but for those who have not yet arrived, for those who might never show up" (86). Through facilitating generative acts of writing, the group satisfied a generative requisite that Erikson (1959/1980) says needs to be fulfilled before the older adult participants can fully achieve the wisdom from human development's eighth stage (Coleman & O'Hanlon, 2004: 19).

Computers and Publishing

In this dissertation's first chapter, I discussed the importance of literacy development to this study and my curiosity as to whether this group would spur on, in particular, technological literacy development pertaining to writing. This group's members began with some understanding that literacy is multidimensional, involving more than pen and paper writing, more than one genre and audience, and more than one dialect or language. Verne enjoyed writing in a variety of genres. Hilary not only wrote in multiple genres but created posters and, in the past, had made videos. He also embraced dialect in his writing and posters. Verne and Ann already used computer word processing and email. Besides learning to be more articulate and becoming more empowered generative writers during the study, the most significant literacy development was that all three members became intrigued by online self-publishing.

All three members wanted to learn more about the use of computers at the study's beginning, but integrating the use of computers into the writing group time did not happen because the members all stated they preferred to read and discuss prepared text during meeting times. They did not want to use writing group time to work on computers or to turn the group into a computer class. I hoped that our discussions of digital literacy

would inspire the members to make use of the computer class that the apartment complex already offered, but only Ann went to the class as she had been doing before our group began. On June 11, 2005, however, all three members become very excited about the use of a computer to self-publish, and self-publishing on-line captured all the participants' imaginations. Their desire to publish was grounded in their desire to be generative to their future families and to the larger future society.

Verne started the craze by talking about an author who visited her sister's reading group. "She said that after self-publishing her book, a real publisher picked her up. She told my sister to just put in 'self-publishing' into Google, and some good sites would come up."

I nodded my head. "Yes. You know what? I should have thought of this before. My husband's friend used a self-publishing site to publish his first book. I know he would have done a lot of research before doing so. Self-publishing on a website: that's a good idea, Verne."

After our meeting that day, Verne, Hilary, and I huddled around one computer in the lab and started to search for self-publishing sites, just to learn what existed. Ann was in the hospital that day, so she missed out on the first, and only, time the group gathered around a computer.

As we sat in that small, warm room, the computer's processor struggled furiously just to open the desktop page.

"Wow, these are slow," I commented.

"Tell me about it. My laptop isn't much better." Verne fumbled in her bag to get a pen to take notes.

Hilary's brow furrowed as he concentrated on the screen. "I guess my computer would be slow, too. It's probably as old as these are, if not older. So you just turned it on? Did you do anything else?"

"Nope."

"I'm lost already."

Verne smiled. "It took me a while, but it isn't that hard."

"You should go to Rose's class."

"Yeah, I know. Wednesday mornings, right?"

"Yes," I replied.

Several minutes had passed before I was able to click on the Windows Explorer icon and get us online. A few minutes later, we waited for the Google results on "self-publishing." Lulu.com was the first site listed.

"Huh. This looks familiar," I said. "I'm pretty sure my husband's friend published here."

"How does this work?" Verne wanted to know.

"Well, I don't know." I searched for instructions and found the website's guide to publishing. There was a printable version, so I clicked print, and we started reading.

"If I use this, can someone steal my stories?" As usual, plagiarism concerned Verne.

"Let's see. It seems to cover the copyright. And you could put it for sale at major booksellers like Amazon and/or Barnes and Nobles, if you pay enough." We went over the costs, and then Hilary took the pile of printouts to the apartment building's office to get copies for each of us.

Verne and I started looking at their books, particularly the children's book categories.

"Those look nice."

"Yeah, and you don't have to pay for pre-printing of your books like I had to pay for the printing of my CD. Did I mention that the production of that CD cost me thousands?" I winced again at how much it cost me to make a CD of Ukrainian art songs and arias, a project that took five years of my life. "Hey, it looks like I could sell my CD here, too."

"Why don't I have to pay for the pre-printing?"

"Well, you send an electronic copy of your story with a cover and front pages. Then, they only print as many copies as the writer pays for. Each person who orders a copy pays for the cost of printing, and it looks like you only make a profit on each book if you want to do so. Look, there is my husband's friend's book. I thought he was in here."

"Why wouldn't someone want to make a profit?" Verne asked.

"I guess they just want people to have access to their ideas. Maybe they view it as a public service," I replied.

Verne shook her head and thought for a moment. "I think I would charge a couple dollars more per book. I earned it!"

I smiled, "You certainly did."

Verne turned to Hilary, who had just returned with our copies and was handing them out. "You can publish your own work and sell it. Who would have thought it could happen?"

Nodding, I added, "It's rather remarkable, but it makes sense because documents can be saved electronically and printed only on an as needed basis. Lulu.com is making more authors accessible to wider audiences. The big downside is that you don't get the input of an editor, but I suppose our writing group could help you there. We could help you catch what you missed while writing as you read out loud to us."

This delighted Verne. "And a real publisher might pick you up. Hilary, you should publish your stories, especially your card story."

"Well, I'm thinking about it. That's why I wanted my own copy of this. It's easier for me to read than looking at that screen, anyway" (Journal, June 11, 2005).

When Ann received her copy of the Lulu.com materials, she was as excited about the possibility of online self-publishing as Hilary and Verne. After Verne and her daughter published *Joel and the Magic Toy Tree* through Lulu.com at the end of the 2005, Verne sent us all copies as a thank you for our work with her.

Both Hilary and Ann became more determined to finish their books. The idea of publishing a book motivated Ann to focus her story into just her years in Atlanta during the Civil Rights movement. The desire to publish inspired Hilary to start getting his journals typed into electronic form, even if he was not the one doing the typing. Hilary's reluctance to use a computer remained, but he grew willing to use other people's skills at the computer to help him publish.

Electronic text on computers, computer printers, and the Internet transformed publication for my participants. Instead of publication only being some far off hope, at the whim of some remote publisher, publication became something that Verne, Hilary, and Ann could control. While they were not all Internet- or computer-savvy, they all

appreciated that the computer could help them create attractive print documents of their words at an affordable price. They had access to the printing and distribution of their ideas.

Nevertheless, my participants did not want me to post their stories on a website, unlike Counihan's (2005) older adult participants who had been happy to have their stories posted on the Internet. Hilary, Verne, and Ann worried about having their stories stolen. They feared how unsafe such open information could be. However, they liked the idea of a website's publishing their work in a print version and selling their work online. They became comfortable with electronic text when it worked in familiar ways—where text was shared at a small cost, and where text was copyrighted in a way that they understood, similar to "real" books.

The interest in self-publishing through an online source spurred Verne to make sure all of her stories were typed into electronic text. When she had trouble typing, she recruited her daughter and me to take over for her. Even Hilary began to ask if family members and I would type up his journals into electronic texts, despite the fact that he himself remained uncomfortable with turning on a computer. Ann, the most experienced with computers of the three, continued typing electronic text, for the first time relying on her typing skills more than on a voice-to-write technology. She also learned new tricks like copying and pasting, saving to floppy drives, and attaching files to e-mail. Furthermore, she learned to be critical of MS Word's "Invisible Grammarian" (McGee & Ericsson, 2008) and to thoughtfully use the technology to help, not hurt, her writing. These skills helped her edit, helped her have multiple copies of her book, and would help her publish her book when the time came. Online self-publishing through Lulu.com

became the key motivator for most of the writing group's development in computer literacy.

Limitations of the Study

This study only had three participants. It would therefore be impossible to make grand generalizations about older adults and writing based upon these participants' responses.

As a participant researcher, I was enmeshed with the proceedings and results of this study. While I only worked as the facilitator and did not participate as a writer, I was still involved with the writing group activities. Furthermore, I became friends with the writing group members and began to care about their lives outside of the writing group as well as within it.

This dissertation is subjective and tells the stories of the writing group members as I understand them. As many researchers note, such subjectivity can be the strength of this sort of qualitative, narrative study (Stake, 1995; Lieblich et al, 1998; Sohn, 1999; Gomm et al., 2000; Brodkey, 2001; Vallejo, 2004; Counihan, 2005; Sohn, 2006).

Nevertheless, I had members check my work to balance my subjectivity. Writing group participants read and commented upon every part of this dissertation that concerned them. Also members of my dissertation committee made sure that I was grounded in my depictions of the group members. What resulted was a narrative that reflected, as much as possible, the participants' writing group realities.

Because only a few people attended the group, I did not examine how this group represented the larger culture of subsidized apartment dwelling senior citizens who write.

Perhaps future scholars might examine this population. If they should do so, they will be able to say that how my group represents that population.

Need for Further Examination of the Subsidized Apartment Setting

When I began this study, I expected that the setting and financial situation would be a more important factor than it had been. My readings indicated that this population would have fewer opportunities and perhaps be less inclined to write. This ended up being hard to gauge. The writing group participants rarely discussed their financial status, and they did not mention financial concerns or housing as a factor in their writing or group attendance. I could only infer that my availability within the apartment complex facilitated their attendance, and that for either financial or health reasons, or perhaps a lack of advertising, they had not ever attended another writing group at a senior center or other location. I also could only infer that experiences in more traditional poor working class writing classrooms (Finn, 1999) deterred most of the remaining apartment complex's population from even trying to attend, despite the fact that they, too, had stories to share. More study, which would examine such issues more directly, will be necessary.

Still, I thought it was meaningful that Verne felt the writing group gave her "a new lease on life" because circumstances within subsidized housing certainly were not as enriching and diverse as in other housing situations described in my readings (Dorfman & Kolarik, 2005; de Vries, 2006). Yes, there was bingo and a few social groups, many of which Verne helped organize as a social director, but the ability to travel and engage in many activities was limited not only by health, as the study showed, but probably by the housing location and financial situations of the participants as well.

Looking Forward

Implications for Composition Studies and Younger Writing Students

I believe this study's results are best used for future analysis of older adult writers, but that does not mean that we cannot learn from this older adult writing group how to perhaps better reach even the younger students in our classrooms. Those of us who teach writing have seen people like Verne, Hilary, and Ann in the composition classroom. We have had the eager writer who dreamed of publishing, but just was not sure s/he was cut out for it. We also know the student who is barely willing to share his or her writing, and when it is shared, s/he would prefer it not be criticized. Sometimes, this student may even express that s/he has experienced enough negative things, so that further criticism is unbearable. Furthermore, we all have encountered the student who struggles to write for reasons we cannot understand, who needs help that we have not been trained to give, but nevertheless wants to succeed as a writer.

All three, but especially Verne, reveal how a compositionist's encouragement can engage a writer in an enjoyable revision process, which can lead to publication. She also shows how grades can stunt even this sort of writer's growth, although critical commentary helps enhance it.

Hilary, on the other hand, reminds us that not all writers want or need that process. His story points to some student's needs to have journaling assignments, which are ungraded and only meant for sharing and enjoyment. His needs overturn basic assumptions about the necessity for critiques and remind us to carefully think about how we respond to students and how we foreground assessment.

Ann's story shows that that we should have faith even the writers we have met who seem doomed to never be able to write well. We should also continuously learn about disabilities that impede writing development and learn about the resources available to help people with such issues, keeping in mind that we all lie on a fluctuating spectrum of ability. In the process, we should keep in mind that many argue that since literacy has not been a necessary human function for much of our history, disability is a tenuous term, at best, for such difficulties (Dunn, 1995).

All three show that our student writers' needs are varying and in conflict with each other, so we should be multifaceted in how we approach our teaching. They also show how careful we need to be about how we respond to various students and how we facilitate peer response. Our students each have different needs, so we should ask how we can re-design what we do to assist diverse writers. In short, their stories encourage a re-examination of foundational issues in the writing classroom like critique, peer review, and assessment.

A writer like Verne would not desire journaling and other writing just to be read—she would strive for excellence joyfully, wanting and savoring both critical commentary and the revision process. On the other hand, a writer like Hilary would need and prefer to have ungraded, un-criticized writing assignments, which build up his confidence and understanding of what an audience appreciates.

A writer like Ann would need many, many opportunities for revision and for people to not judge her and to provide countless opportunities for growth and success. Also, a writer like Ann would require an understanding of literacy difficulties, and, many times, the help of some support services. Some students like Ann, depending on the

severity of their difficulties, may just need to be taught how to function and contribute their vast intelligence without traditional writing, but to use voice-to-write programs and other avenues for communication. However, if such students are determined to write, we should admire their tenacity and give them every opportunity. Ann shows us that people can surprise us and themselves.

I hope this study reveals that we should respect all the writers who enter our classrooms, whether or not they succeed in ways we would expect. Verne, Hilary, and Ann remind us that the writers we meet are people with not only great potential, but with something important and worth sharing right at the moment we have the privilege to know them.

Implications for Colleges and Universities

Many facets of the traditional academy can benefit from my research and studies of older adult writers. This work intersects the fields of composition studies, literacy studies, educational gerontology, developmental psychology (particularly generativity studies), and disability studies. Sociologists could examine the social bonds senior writing developed in this research. This work could also interest academics involved in peer group studies, service learning, and continuing education programs. In addition, this study could fascinate those who research the connections between writing and healing, identity, and development. Academic administrators could examine this study because such work fulfills the mission of the university to serve the community through forging connections between the young and the old, tapping older adults' needs to make those contributions and the community need for such generativity.

Verne's case, in particular, contributes to the work done on writing and healing. It shows how the writing group's encouragement kept her centered in "the act of living" (Blitz & Hurlbert, 2003). By doing this, the writing group "gave her a new lease on life" (Interview, September 22, 2005). I can think of no stronger motivation to run an older adult writing group, but more study can be done of such groups to see how pervasive this life-giving phenomenon might be.

Hilary's case study adds to the research on expressive writing and psychological healing, specifically that work that looks at how expressive writing groups can be therapeutic (Birren & Deutchmann, 1991). He felt the writing group was psychologically beneficial, despite the fact that it was run very differently than most senior citizen expressive writing groups. While not exclusively for autobiographical writing, this group still provided Hilary with the community and commentary that led to greater feelings of well-being. Also, his case study is important for composition research because it reiterates Ray's observation that writing groups for older adults need to respect a desire for only positive comments (Ray, 2000). However, in the context of the other case studies, this project also shows that all members within a group may not have the same needs. Some may need only positive comments, whereas others may want a variety of commentary.

Ann's case study has implications for learning disability and composition research. While learning disabilities usually affect a person throughout a lifetime (Dunn, 1995), her case shows that even late in life steps can be taken to accomplish tasks that previously seemed impossible. Disability identity is "highly permeable" (Vidali, 2008: 45) and hard to define (Breuggemann, 2002). Often the permeability of disability refers

to how one can become disabled at any point (Price, 2007, 2008; Vidali, 2008). It also can refer to how the identity can shift when the body and mind grow, change, or adapt (Breuggemann, 2002; Price, 2007). Ann's disability identity shifted during the course of the writing group study. While Ann had struggled with writing her whole life, composing became a source of growth and even enjoyment in later life. It took her over sixty years to become a fluent writer, but in doing so, she accomplished a lifetime goal. In addition to her great tenacity, Ann's progress may point to the possible success of Participant Design writing groups for other writers with textual learning disabilities.

Verne's, Hilary's, and Ann's writing group experiences all connect with disability studies. Verne had cancer and on several occasions mentioned struggles with depression over her and her husband's illnesses (Writing Group Transcript, September 2, 2005). Hilary also had problems with depression and the after-effects of a kidney transplant. Ann not only had literacy disabilities, but vision disabilities, diabetes, and a cracked spine, which was not diagnosed properly until 2006. Disability was a daily issue in their lives, and discussions about disability took up much of our casual talk time within writing group meetings.

Nonetheless, none of the participants wanted to write much about their disabilities. Verne did not want to write a children's story about cancer because it would be too depressing (Writing Group Transcript, June 28, 2005). Hilary's stories focused on his years of health. Ann developed her depictions of her literate disabilities due to our encouragement; we told her that by depicting her specific struggles, readers would better be able to understand her conversion, her education, and her Civil Rights work. However, she did not write about her diabetes or other disabilities. Nor did she talk about

them when discussing writing group progress, except to say why she might be at the hospital and not be at a meeting. Their avoidance of discussing disability in writing could point to their awareness of living not only in an ageist society, but an ableist society which either wants to ignore disability or, at the most, focus on heroic stories (Price, 2007). Also, the writing group was not designed to have them critically engage their disabilities, as Margaret Price (2007) might say we should do. Nor was the group designed to help with their disabilities. It existed to help them write whatever it was they wanted to write. Regardless, participants reported the writing group helped with some, but not all of their disabilities.

I emphasize that I did not ask directly about the relationship between disability and writing, which someone could say reveals mildly ableist assumptions of my own when beginning this study—ableist in the sense that I did not think such questions would be polite or necessary, not in the sense that I in any way devalued participants because of their disabilities. The reason I did not include such questions was that I worried about Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval if I added them. Also, I had no desire to pry into participants' private medical histories or to make them more vulnerable.

Nevertheless, members volunteered some of their disabilities when I asked how the writing helped them. As stated several times in this document, Verne thought the group gave her "a new lease on life" in the face of her cancer. Hilary felt it helped alleviate his depression, but did not say if the writing group had any effect on his physical ailments. Ann thought the group helped her take one more step toward conquering her literacy disabilities, but, like Hilary, made no correlation between her physical disabilities and our meetings. The participants sometimes also explained how disabilities prevented

them from writing as much as they wanted to do. Verne had trouble sitting, which made writing difficult, especially on a computer. Hilary sometimes was too disheartened to write. Ann's hospitalizations prevented her from working as quickly as she would have liked to do. The relationships between disability, writing, and healing in older adults that were beyond the scope of this study deserve further examination by disability scholars.

All three cases point to the importance of Eriksonian generativity, or what Erikson (1986) sometimes calls "grand-generativity"(74) in senior citizens, to motivate the older adult participants to write and participate in the writing group. Birren and Deutchman (1991), Ray (2000), Kazemek (1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2003), Campbell (1985), and Schuster (1995) all mention the importance for older adults to impart experience and legacy to future generations. This study shows that such generativity motivated this group's older adults to write. It also exemplifies that generative fulfillment provided a main source of satisfaction for the writing group members. Further research can be done to further explore in older adult writing and writing groups the role of Eriksonian generativity, grand-generativity, and Vaillant's "keeper of the meaning" task.

All three cases also show that this Participant Design created a writing group that met members' individual needs. Participant Design played a crucial role in this older adult writing group's success. I recommend future study of other senior Participant Design writing groups to see if this achievement was just a single phenomenon, or if this design would be successful in other contexts as well.

I hope this work inspires further work in the field of older adult composition. Educational gerontologists, as experts in research and analysis of the older adult population, have already begun to look at older adult writers, creating intersections

between their field and the field of composition studies. As Jaber F. Gubrium (1993) states, "Gerontology has come a long way in its short 40-odd years" (60). Smith (1982), Harrienger (1995, 1998), Ray (2000), and Crow (2006) are among the first specialists from the English field whose research forged connections between composition studies and educational gerontology. Recently, W. Ross Winterowd (2007) published his own reflections on senior writing workshops that also points toward work that can be done through publishing with senior citizens. Much more work remains.

Compositionists, as writing experts, would do well to incorporate older adult composition as a sub-field to examine the ways, reasons, and means of older adult literate expression. As Crow (2006) states, "Almost every subdiscipline in our field could create studies that integrate aging issues into research designs" (Crow, 2006: 136).

Compositionists could work side-by-side with educational gerontologists in larger scale studies examining multiple senior writer populations and their effects upon their environments. This subfield of older adult composition could study the connections between writing and healing in later life—correlations this study's results support.

This subfield could forge connections with other fields, as well. For example, developmental psychologists could work with such compositionists to examine the mutual interplay of generativity and writing, extending the work of this study. They could answer what variety of purposes writing could play in older adult development. Sociologists could assist studies of how senior writing impacts (or not) readers of various ages and social networks. Sociolinguists could study how the many, various older adult populations use language in writing. Disability studies experts could add their insights into how writing in old age is affected by the many disabilities which develop in the

senior years, along with the disabilities which may have previously existed. They could examine "the central and often insurmountable difficulty of being old or sick—the sense of loss—[which presently] goes virtually unnoticed" (Harrienger, 1995: 138) and how this influences writing. Literacy experts could help compositionists look at how older adult writing within various contexts and social groups reflects lifelong literacy practices. Peer group specialists could work with composition specialists to develop their understanding of the older adult group dynamics. Service learning experts and compositionists could continue to analyze classroom excursions into older adult spaces and the generative reciprocal gift of seniors writing with and for younger writers. Furthermore, they could study what undergraduates could learn from research of senior writing. Continuing education specialists, along with compositionists, should examine this study's writing group and ones like it in order to thoughtfully restructure courses for older adults. All of the researchers collaborating in the subfield of older adult composition could develop academia's understanding of how older adult writing can be healing, how older adult writing and identity intersect and develop each other, and how older adult writing and older adult development affect each other.

Questions for Future Research

Some general questions for future research include:

- Why are some older adults so motivated by generativity when writing?
- How much of a role does generativity play in older adult writing?
- How would explicitly dealing with generative needs impact writing programs for older adults?

- What are the different shapes that a Participant Design older adult writing group might take?
- What role can Participant Design writing groups play in helping older adults redefine their own written learning disabilities?
- What role can Participant Design writing groups play in helping the physical and emotional well-being of other older adults?
- How successful would Participant Design be for other types of writing groups?
- How many shapes could Participant Design take? Would all be equally successful? Why or why not?

This study provides only a beginning. Future research should be conducted of older adults in other contexts, areas, and backgrounds. Future research might examine other incarnations of Participant Design model writing groups, both for older adults and for other populations. Further study of Participant Design, in general, will reveal its benefits and limitations as a writing instruction design model.

Personal Reflection

Not all older adults need formal groups. Motivation can come from family and from within. Verne needed both her family and a professional group, but some people do not. We should also further study, for example, writers like my 91-year old grandmother and Myrna Harrienger's (1995) *Grace*. As I end my project, it leads me back to its inspiration.

While proofreading this dissertation in late September 2007, my thoughts about older adult writing led me to call my grandmother and check on her writing progress. She told me a new story—one that writing helped her remember.

"I was just writing about Pra-Babcia and Teta Xenia," my grandmother told me in Ukrainian. "Did you know that they each saved an opera performance?" Pra-Babcia was my great-grandmother, and Teta Xenia was my grandmother's sister Xenobia (teta meant aunt), who I knew of as the painter and architect of the family.

"How did they do that?" I knew my great-grandmother had a spitfire personality, and I could see her stepping up and doing something spectacular. Recently, my grandmother told me of how my great-grandmother had been expelled from one school because of her pranks. In her second school, she had been in the dunce's corner, but by cracking a joke about the lesson and getting the teacher to laugh, she regained her seat in the class. On the other hand, I had only previously heard of my great-aunt as a quieter person who did not take to the stage.

"Well, my mother sang in the L'viv Opera Chorus when the soprano lead sent word that she was sick. The orchestra was in the pit. The audience sat in their seats—several hundred people, mind you. The lead had lost her voice. My mother stepped up saying she knew the part. When tested, the conductor saw that she did know it, and she took the lead. People still talked about how well she did in her performance when I was a girl. She was given a scholarship to go to the L'viv Conservatory because of that day, but when my Babcia heard of it, she said 'and how will that pay our bills?' You see, my grandfather was dead, so Babcia had to work, and there still was not enough money. So, my mother declined the scholarship and went to work. That was where she met my father and then settled down to have a family. But she always stayed involved with the opera chorus. Both she and my father sang. My father also played the violin. It was a musical home."

"And Teta Xenia?"

"Well, Director Barvynski of the L'viv opera remained close friends with my family. He was often over for dinner at our apartment and asked my mother when she would be singing again. She replied that at that point her place was with her family. Then, when my sister and I were grown, he offered my mother a role in a small opera: *Nocturne*, by Lysenko. It was a very nice children's opera with five roles and ballet dancers. But my mother declined, saying it was the turn of the future generation, so they offered the part to me. You see, I was already established as a singer in L'viv.

"The day of the performance, here comes one singer's brother, saying, 'My sister can't come because she is sick.' Her lips were so fluffy and bloated that she couldn't talk or sing. The whole orchestra is out there. Everyone is dressed. The audience waits. And she sends word that she can't move her lips. At the last minute, to replace her was not really possible. The whole thing had cost over \$300. Director Barvynski was distraught."

As my grandmother spoke, I wondered how much \$300 in Polish currency of the 1920s or 1930s would translate to in American dollars now. The western region of Ukraine had been under Poland at that point, as far as I could remember.

My grandmother continued, "At that moment, Teta Xenia, who had heard the whole opera because I practiced by singing all parts from its beginning to its end...At that moment, Teta Xenia stepped up. And so it happened, that Teta Xenia, when the conductor did not know what to do...weighing all of the terrible options...she took the singer's place. She said, 'I'll substitute for the singer.'

"She was very nicely built, like a marble statue; she had a nice figure, a nice build. But she was taller than the other singer. I look—I'm already dressed, and for Teta Xenia...here my mother was taking the clothing and sewing and fixing the costume for her. And the director stands over her and directs, and she sings. She sings the part, because in the house, we sang and played the whole opera. Minute opera, you know. She knew the part. She had a delicate voice, lyric and only sang as God gave her to give. He directed her to find out how much she knew. She knew it, even if she only had a lyrical, coloratura voice that was not trained. And so it happened, Director Barvynski decided to continue with the performance.

"Here the orchestra is playing, and she realized she must get up and go. She sat, and quickly asked, 'What should I do?'

"The venue had a great curtain which lifted to show the audience. It opened to show her and her partner, the officer, and the painting, where I stood with my partner. The most important five roles. We were to dance the waltz. In any event, the orchestra was only playing the overture. 'What will I do on the stage?' she asked herself. When the overture ended, she threw herself into the role and performed. She was a chirping cricket, and her partner cricket sat on the other side of the stage. She sang and danced. Mind you, Teta Xenia had only been at the rehearsals, but she had not done the role. Before this, she had just watched. But she did it now.

"Director Barvynski wrote in the program that Xenia Sushko did a heroic act by rescuing the whole performance. It was an impressive moment with her performance. Even if she hadn't sang, even if she had just danced and played her role, she would have saved the performances of the other singers.

"On a side note, a friend of my mother's said, 'I saw that she moved her mouth, but I did not hear her, because she had a delicate voice.' But, because she went on stage, the opera was saved. In other words, that heroic act which Director Barvynski included in his review of the opera in the paper."

As I always did, I savored this narrative, but this time I noticed how writing had helped my grandmother remember a story she had never told me before. I also became aware of how much more detailed her stories were after she wrote them. I thought about how she had never even mentioned these interesting stories before she composed them.

I began this dissertation hoping for stories like my grandmother's, but I did not realize until I was completing the project how important generativity was to me. I smiled while listening to my Babcia because I now noticed how I learned more about myself through learning stories of my ancestors. Singing, opera, performance, being a strong woman—all these things were parts of my heritage, which continued as part of my life. My grandmother's stories gave my actions more depth.

Of course, if these had been less inspiring stories, I am sure generativity would have worked in a different way. Recently, I learned how my great-grandparents on my father's side had been violent alcoholics. Those stories show how different my life is from theirs, thanks in part to my grandparents' choices to be different than their parents. They also show me how close I could be to problems that otherwise might seem distant.

I notice now how Verne's, Hilary's, and Ann's stories also enriched my life. For example, when I spend money now, I think of Verne's story, "Enough Already," and I am more inclined to save. Also, I feel more connected to Pittsburgh, seeing ghosts of Hilary's hangouts when I travel in the city. I think more deeply about my freedoms

because of Ann's troubles as a writer and her work within the Civil Rights movement. When I encourage my college students to examine their disabilities and racial issues, I have more awareness of how hard individuals have fought for the privilege of those conversations. The participants' stories deepen my life, much like the stories from my family. This leads me to realize that, yes, my peers' and students' younger than myself also enrich my life, but they add a wideness—a breadth. However, stories from the past provide depth.

Through implementing and studying a senior writing group, I gained much more than what I had hoped for. Besides conducting a rich academic qualitative study, I became blessed with three new friends whose stories I treasured as much as those of my family. I also had the opportunity to help three older adults achieve their dreams. I helped foster a community of writing in a subsidized housing complex. This community extended its effects upon family members and friends who were able to read the stories the participants wrote. I found that participant design could foster transformative writing groups of senior citizens much like the groups that had inspired this study (Birren & Deutchman, 1991; Heller, 1997; Blitz & Hurlbert, 1998; Schuster, 1995, 1998, 1999; Kazemek, 1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2003; Ray, 2000; Gavin & Sunshine, 2003). Furthermore, I, too, learned how to become a better writer by experiencing Verne's enthusiasm, Hilary's writing style, and Ann's tenacity.

AFTERWORD

Hilary, dressed up in his black suit and tie, opened the faded navy blue passenger door of my 1994 Honda Accord. "There you go, Ann."

"I can sit in the back, Hilary," she said as she put her hand on the door.

"Nonsense." Hilary continued to hold the front door open for her.

Ann settled into her seat and smoothed out her black pants and matching blazer, while Hilary opened the back door. "Do we have time to stop at the flower shop?"

I nodded.

After everyone was settled, I pulled out onto the main street. "Which way to the flower shop?"

"Stay straight on California Avenue."

"Which way is straight?" The six-way intersection had two roads to the right, two to the left, and one in front. You have to love Pittsburgh.

"Follow the car in front of you," Ann assured me.

Ah, so the soft right was straight. A pretty spring day, April 4, 2007, marked almost two years since Verne read the "The Magic Toy Tree" in its first written version, before it became *Joel and the Magic Toy Tree*, to our writing group. It had been almost two years since we applauded her imaginative and carefully-crafted story.

Ann and Hilary guided me as I drove through a small area of homes and soon we were at the florists. We approached it from the side and then turned so that the shop window was to our left. This street was thick with storefronts, but the florist's shop stood out with its bright displays.

"You just keep the motor running. I'll take care of this." Hilary popped out of the car and ran into the store. In order to get back to McKees Rocks quickly, we needed to turn the car around to face the way we came. The spots in front of the shop were filled, so we let the car idle a little bit up the street. While we waited, Ann and I talked about the progress of the past year since Verne left to go live with her daughter. The conversation turned to Ann's health, which had been poor most of the year.

"Ann, I never realized how much pain you were in until after your surgery this year."

"Yeah," she frowned. "I'm glad the surgery worked. They wouldn't have figured it out if I hadn't switched doctors and finally got that x-ray." She got a hard look, her jaw stiff, and her eyes were serious. The new doctor told her that a few vertebrae of her upper spine had deteriorated because of long-term damage. If she had suffered a hard fall, she would have cracked her neck and died. In the meantime, she had other doctors who had dismissed her pain and accused her of being addicted to pain medication—No matter that she'd been in and out of the hospital with increasing frequency for pain this past year.

I saw a new angrier, tougher side to Ann in 2006. I visited her in the hospital when she finally had the scheduled surgery. The surgeon was to put a metal support in her spine, a procedure that the doctor said could kill her because there was a risk that, during surgery, the sharp damaged bone ends could cut her spine or hurt the nerve cluster at the base of her neck. Despite the risks, or perhaps because of them, she spent the time before her operation writing letters to help implement changes to improve the lives of

people she knew, letters that she would need to follow up on after the surgery. She told me that the letters pertained to "a life or death issue."

I leaned back in the car seat and looked at Ann. "Well, I'm glad you made it. I'm looking forward to you finishing your book."

She smiled, but only a little.

"Verne told me in January that her daughter had finished illustrating her second children's book." I looked ahead for a sign of Hilary. "But they lost a lot of the illustrations when their hard drive crashed. I wonder if they were able to redo the illustrations yet."

"I don't know. The last time I talked to Verne was last year. I guess I should have called."

"You had a lot going on, Ann. I have to say...I miss Verne."

"Yeah. Me, too."

"I'm glad Hilary thought of the flowers."

"Me, too."

We were quiet for a few moments. "There he is." I put the car into drive. Hilary was carrying three large red roses wrapped in silvery tissue paper.

I pulled up and over to the front of the store so he could quickly get in the car.

"They're beautiful, Hilary. How much do we owe you?" Ann smiled at the sight of the roses.

"Oh, no. I've got it."

I thought about fighting his decision, but Hilary looked determined. He had the same calm but unmoving look on his face that he would get when we would try to give

him constructive criticism he did not want and assured us he would not want. I decided to let him buy the flowers.

"Well, I guess we better get there." As I crossed the McKees Rocks Bridge, I noticed it was longer than I thought, like two bridges connected to each other. I saw the sign to McKees Rocks to my right and exited off of the bridge into the small town immediately on the other side of the Ohio River from the North Side. We laughed as I drove, talking about how Verne loved to revise her own work. I remembered how angry she had been when we would give her suggestions, but then all she would talk or think about were those suggestions as she revised. She had come back to the writing group invigorated, eyes shining, resonating with vitality. She loved the challenges our concerns rose.

I grinned at the memories. "Remember how she'd say, 'but I thought it was perfect'?"

"Oh, yeah." Ann nodded.

"She always kept us laughing." Hilary chuckled with the memory.

"Yeah, I miss that."

I sighed. "It's good she went home with Joan, though."

Hilary looked out the window. "It probably kept her alive."

"Yes." Ann, too, was looking out her window. "She was ready to die with Bill."

"Yeah." We were quiet for a moment, and I repeated, "Yes, it's good she went to live with Joan. While she was always sad about losing Bill, she told me she was enjoying her daughter and her grandchildren. Also, Verne would still talk about her writing, too, even though she didn't keep up with it."

"Really?"

"Yeah. But you know that her daughter set up an author reading at the library and a few book signings at bookstores in her area? There was even an article written in their local paper about Verne's book signing."

"No kidding."

Thinking of her made me smile, but as I got off the bridge I wasn't sure I remembered where I was going. "So, how do I get there again?"

"Just stay straight." Hilary said leaning over from the back seat. "That's right. A couple more short blocks. Here we are."

I pulled into the same funeral home where Bill had been laid out, a small one-level building with an Eastern European last name title. Four Catholic and Orthodox churches stood within blocks of it, and these churches caused us to raise our eyes up to their roofs, their crosses, and the clear blue sky above them. A beautiful, cold, day. In a couple weeks, it would be Easter.

"I can't believe Verne is dead." The words felt surreal as I said them. I couldn't feel them.

"Neither can I," Ann said softly.

"Too many people keep dying," Hilary said.

I decided to stay positive. "But she had a good life. Who knew you could survive cancer and its death sentence for over a decade? I'm grateful we were given the chance to know Verne."

Both Ann and Hilary nodded their heads to my comment as we walked into the dark carpeted hall. To the left was the room where Bill had been, and now Verne was.

Joan was talking to someone quietly before Verne's casket, and, when she saw us, her face brightened. I thought of how I cried at work when I opened my e-mail after returning from the Conference on College Composition and Communication and saw her message to me about her mom, asking if I was still willing to sing for her mom's funeral. Of course I was.

Soon, Joan was hugging us, wiping a stray tear and energetically telling us how her mom talked about us all the time, how her mom had missed us, and how grateful she had been for the work we had done with her mom.

I looked down at Verne, who looked thinner but still lovely with her rounded, carefully made-up face surrounded by curled hair.

"It's her own hair," Joan said. "She was so happy to have her own hair at the end." And then Joan talked about Verne's last days. She told us how Verne insisted on getting up and using the restroom down the hall even three days before her life's end, although she was almost completely crippled by pain. We also heard how Verne dictated which make-up to use, insisting that she look pretty when her family came to visit her during her last week of life.

"Mom talked about the books." Joan's smile grew wider, so that her face, framed by her short auburn hair, became radiant. "I finished illustrating *Ben's Gift*, you know. While we're still getting the illustrations back into the computer, we're hoping to publish the book soon. Mom was so proud of her work and so happy about your writing group. We're all so grateful to you."

I felt honored and a little embarrassed. Much like I couldn't absorb Verne's death, I couldn't absorb how much my group had meant to its members.

As we spoke, Hilary placed the three roses on Verne's chest and I found myself distracted, looking at them. To me, they symbolized the group, and our love for Verne and her work, and now here we were. After living with her, we were here with her in her death. Comprehension of what I was experiencing eluded me; I could only feel the pain, sorrow, and, yes, joy of this moment. This experience entailed both a mourning of Verne's death and a celebration of her life.

Joan guided us over toward the small crowd chatting in the back of the room where, on a small table, sat the nearly completed copy of *Ben's Gift* surrounded by photo albums of Verne's life, and the published volume, *Joel and the Magic Toy Tree*. In the back of the room, accompanied by instrumental versions of songs from each era of Verne's life, a video played through a sequence of Verne's photos from birth to the end of her adult life.

I picked up *Ben's Gift*. "You did a great job illustrating these, Joan." Ben was painted as a tidy, blond, boy within a stylized design something between a cartoon and reality.

"Yes. Mom was so proud of this book. She kept saying she thought it was her best one."

"And it was the first fictional story she wrote from scratch for the writing group. Verne would always say how proud she was of how she'd walked the fine line between reality and animals talking. Her animals never really talked, but they seemed to, and what they seemed to say helped Ben develop as a character. It was a clever technique. I remember it was largely thanks to you that your mom wrote it. Verne was ready to give up."

Joan smiled broadly. "Mom couldn't give up. She had too much to give. She just needed someone to listen. We'd sit and I'd write down her ideas when I was in the hospital with her. But it was your group that made it all possible...that got her interested in writing again."

Ann was perusing the book with Hilary looking over her shoulder when a man approached Joan. "We'll be leaving for dinner soon, Joan."

"Okay, Bill."

Ah, this must be Verne's oldest son.

"Bill, you have to meet Mom's writing group, and this was Krystia, her teacher."

With both hands, he grabbed mine.

"Thank you so much." Looking to Hilary and Ann, he continued, "She always was talking about the work you all did."

Joan nodded. "Oh, yes. She loved your stories, always talking about how in awe she was about your lives and how you could remember all those details. We hope you finish writing them!"

A few other people approached Joan. "Joan, we'll be leaving in about fifteen minutes."

She turned to us. "I hope you'll come with us."

Ann explained for me. "Krystia has to work, and so do I. But we'll see you tomorrow at the funeral." I was teaching a composition class at a local university that night, and Ann had recently taken on a position at the highrise apartment building helping coordinate social activities for the tenants, a position Verne had proudly held for a year and a half. We looked at Hilary.

"Oh, I have to go, too. I am meeting my nephew. I wish I could come tomorrow, but I'm working."

"Well, you have to meet everyone." Then, turning, she addressed the entire room. "Everyone, remember how Mom would talk about her writing group? Well, this is her group. Here is Ann Skolnekovich and Hilary Opperman whose stories she'd tell us, and this is Krystia Nora, her teacher."

The room broke into applause.

They were applauding us. I think they were applauding Verne through us. I, in turn, wanted to applaud every theorist and teacher who had ever talked about the importance of writing groups. I blushed and thought how I wanted to applaud everyone who had encouraged me to create and study this group.

Looking around, I saw every man, woman, and child clapping. Faces were smiling, and soon, I was meeting one of Verne's brothers and a couple of her sisters. I felt my heart tighten as I talked to her sister Ann, whom Verne had written about in her "I Told You So" story. She looked so much like Verne. Talked like her, too.

Bill, Verne's son, returned with his brother, Jim, and I was surrounded by her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, all of whom she had talked about or had written about.

Adam grabbed my hand and shook it heartily—he was Verne's grandson whom she had used as a fictional audience for the combined life stories of herself and her husband.

Verne's granddaughter Andrea, whom Verne used to worry was too overweight, came over and gave us hugs. "Yeah, my grandma could say some things where I'd be like 'you didn't just say that!'"

I had to smile when she referred to Verne's tendency to say what was on her mind, thinking of how sometimes she would, without meaning any emotional harm, bluntly describe just what she thought was wrong with Ann or Hilary's writing. Her only intent was to help, always, and since she appreciated bluntness, well, so should everyone. That was just Verne.

Andrea continued, "But she was an amazing, strong woman. I think she and I clashed so much because we were so much alike." She smiled, standing tall with shoulders back, proud of her heritage, proud of how she inherited her grandma's strong personality.

Ann leaned over to me. "It's amazing."

"What?"

"How well we knew Verne. We knew about everyone here, like we were family, too. And we really knew her... her life... and we only knew her for a year."

"Yeah. Like we were something more than friends, but not quite that, and not quite family, either. Something else."

"Yeah."

Jim (Verne's younger son) was now at my right. "We really enjoyed your article about our mom."

"Article?" I hadn't written an article about Verne. Not yet.

"Yes, you wrote about her and her experience in your group. You totally captured my mom."

"Oh, my chapter. The copy of my dissertation chapter that I gave her to approve? I had no idea that she let you all read it."

"Oh, yeah. She gave that to all of us."

I paused, thinking about how the interplay of my role as researcher and participant was inexorably intertwined and muddled. I knew this would happen, but I hadn't expected that even my draft would be shared with others, further affecting my study's depth and range.

Joan was nearby. "Oh, I should have remembered to bring that chapter. We could have put it here."

"Have you seen Grandma's video?" asked a dark-haired great-granddaughter, about eight years old.

"No, not yet. But I don't want to hold you all up."

"Nonsense," replied Joan. She got her son to get the VCR running again and Hilary, Ann, and I gathered around the TV as Joan narrated, explaining the supporting characters next to Verne in her pictures. Bill, her husband, we knew, and we watched pictures of their courtship, including one sexy picture of Verne in a bathing suit. We saw pictures of her marriage, of children and grandchildren, of retirement travels, and of time with great-grandchildren. In the span of fifteen minutes, I watched visual excerpts of Verne's eighty-one years of life.

Because of Verne, and because of Hilary and Ann, I began to see life as relatively brief, with all its interwoven events brought into meaning by a conscious mind that shaped, savored, and refined them through retelling. As Betram J. Cohler (1993) states,

Indeed, examination of the life-story construct, using concepts of interpretation and criticism in the humanities, together with methods and findings from social science studies of lives over time, has brought about a renewed appreciation of the significance of meaning and coherence, as well as the role of memory and present experience, in laying the foundations for an individual's life-story construct, or personal narrative. (108)

My research grounded in examinations of lifelong literacy narratives showed me how each member's stories constructed their appreciation of writing, as well as their attitudes to other aspects of their lives. Ed de St. Aubin (1998) explains that "For McAdams, the psychosocial construction of self (identity) is the fundamental and enduring mode of adult personality development and the 'generative script' (one element of identity) is the self defining story one narrates regarding his or her efforts to create lasting contributions (1985, 1993)" (de St. Aubin, 1998: 392). Ed de St. Aubin's analysis of McAdam's take on narrative helped shape my understanding of life-stories. People's stories about their lives affect their desire to give and to continue to grow—our interpretations of our lives are arguably more important than the events of our lives.

Behind us, family was starting to go to dinner, so we said our goodbyes. I walked over and looked again on Verne's face, grateful for all she had given me and taught me. She reinforced the power of humor and of family. She taught me to savor the revision process. She showed me how important a writing group could be.

In a recent conversation with my grandmother, she mentioned that she, too, might like to self-publish the book of her life. She had not thought it was possible until hearing

about my writing group's accomplishments, so the writing group continued to reach past its perimeters.

If my creation of a writing group had done nothing other than help Verne publish, it would have been enough. However, it had done a lot more. The writing group had helped Hilary feel better about his journals and his life. It had also helped Ann grow as a writer. All three members moved closer toward a dream of publication, even if only Verne managed to fulfill it during the year of this study. Also, the writing group had forged connections between four near strangers: Verne, Hilary, Ann, and me. These connections shifted how we viewed ourselves and the world around us. Verne came to see herself as worthy of publication. Hilary grew in his confidence in himself and his writing. Ann became a self-assured writer after a lifetime of being told she would never be able to write. I learned that retired older adults could be more than just grand-parental or parental figures. They could be my friends. They were my colleagues in research. Together, we learned to be interested in and grow from each other's writing and lives. In doing so, our writing group affected not only the members, but their families and friends. I have learned that it is impossible to thoroughly measure the effects of one older adult writing group.

At the end of 2006, the group gradually dissolved first because of Ann's health problems, and then because of renovations to the building. Now, a year after Verne's death, I prepare to start the group again in 2008. New people have moved into the housing complex. I'll be interested in seeing how things work out this time.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of Approval from Research Site

Letter of approval from the study site:

From: "Rose Kulczycki" <rosek3@earthlink.net>

Subject: project

Date: Fri, 27 Feb 2004 08:14:12 -0500

To: "Krystia Nora" <krystia@iup.edu>



Last night the [research site] board reviewed your project and approved it. On March 8, Luke Ravenstall, the new representative, is coming to speak to the tenants and if you want, you can be introduced and talk to the tenants about your project. Or, if that date is inconvenient, you can talk to the tenants on one of their Bingo nights. Let me know what is good for you.

Rose Anne

Appendix B: Flyer for Research Site Residents Inviting Them to the Writing Group



Let Us Write

A chance to record your priceless memories for future generations.

Come, explore, and share your writing.

[Blue Room] Writing Group

A supportive and helpful environment for
ALL your writing needs.

FIRST MEETING:

Blue Room, Saturday

December 9, 2004

3 PM

Contact Krystia Nora at 412-241-4460, or 412-867-0028, if you are interested but cannot meet at this time.

Appendix C: Letter to Research Site Residents

Dear resident,

You are cordially invited to participate in the [Blue Room] Writing Group. In this group, you will have the opportunity to share and develop your writing in a safe and supportive environment.

Writing that you bring to the group could range from letters to memoirs and more. This writing group will be geared around what YOU as a participant want to gain from it.

Even if you have always *hated* writing, you may want to try out this group. You may learn to look at writing in a way you never thought of before!

The initial meeting will be Saturday, October 9, 2004, at 3p.m. in the Blue Room. At this meeting we'll talk about the group, future meeting times, and start to go over any writing you would like to share.

If you cannot meet at this time, but would be interested in participating in the [Blue Room] Writing Group, contact me, Krystia Nora, at (412) 241-4460 or (330) 518-5933.

It should be noted that by participating in the group, you will also have the opportunity to participate in my research about what writing groups can accomplish for the elderly. As a writer and a writing instructor, I have seen and read about how writing groups help all sorts of groups of people grow as writers because of the supportive feedback of writing group members. I feel certain that a writing group could do the same for you, but I can only be sure through recording the satisfaction levels of members of this group through individual interviews. By participating in my research, you could help future generations of writing groups for the elderly.

However, you do NOT have to participate in my research to participate in this writing group. Also, if you choose to participate in my research, you can withdraw at anytime and still participate in the writing group. I will NOT write about you in my research if you choose to not participate.

If you do choose to participate in my research, I assure you that all names, dates, and even our location will be changed to protect your identity. Finally, if you do choose to participate in my research, you will read anything I write and be free to correct it, or even ask me to omit something.

Sincerely,

Krystia Nora

Appendix D: Initial Interview Questions for Writing Group Participants

Interview Questions at the Beginning of the Writing Group

- What have your previous experiences with writing been?
- Do you enjoy writing?
- How do you feel about sharing your writing with others?
- Have you ever used a computer to write, or to record or even publish your writing?
- Have you ever written an e-mail, scanned websites, or even created your own website?
- How do you feel about using a computer for writing?
- How do you feel about using a computer to record and/or publish your writing?
- How do you feel about using a computer to write e-mail?
- How do you feel about using a computer to explore websites and other people's writing?
- How do you feel about using a computer to create your own website?
- What would you like this writing group to accomplish for you?

Appendix E: Original Questions for Writing Group Case Study Interviews

Interview Questions During the Progress of the Writing Group

- What writing do you share with this group? Why?
- How motivated are you to write for the writing group? How motivated are you to revise based on writing group discussion?
- How would you rate your experience with the writing group thus far?
- What is your favorite experience in our writing group?
- What is your least favorite experience in our writing group?
- How would you like the writing group to change?
- Are you attending regularly? Why or why not?
- Are you taking advantage of the opportunities to use the computer provided by this writing group? Why or why not?
- If you have used the computer, how have you used it? How have you felt about the experience of working on the computer to write, record your writing, publish, e-mail, explore websites, and/or create your own website?
- What does participation in this writing group accomplish for you?

Appendix F: Human Subjects Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form for Krystia Nora's study,
"What Is It to Grow Old?: A Study of a Senior Assisted Learning Center Writing Group"

You are invited to participate in this research study done by Krystia Nora of Indiana University of Pennsylvania. This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/357-7730). The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision whether or not to participate. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

By participating in the [Blue Room] Writing Group, you also have the opportunity to participate in my research about what writing groups can accomplish for the elderly. As a writer and a writing instructor, I have seen and read about how writing groups help all sorts of groups of people grow as writers because of the supportive feedback of writing group members. I feel certain that a writing group could do the same for you, but I can only be sure through recording the satisfaction levels of members of this group through individual interviews. By participating in my research, you can help shape this writing group to best suit your needs, and you can help shape future generations of writing groups for the elderly be geared to best suit their needs. To participate in my research, you merely have to sign this voluntary consent form.

Participants in my research study will schedule a tape recorded interview with me, Krystia Nora, in mid-October of 2004 for a half hour to an hour about their expectations for the writing group, as well as about their previous experience with writing. Then, there will be 5 follow-up interviews, each lasting about a half hour, about the participants' experiences in the writing group. These interviews will be scheduled at your convenience in late November of 2004, mid January of 2005, early March of 2005, early May of 2005, and late August of 2005. A final interview, lasting a half an hour to an hour, will be scheduled with you after a year of our writing group sessions in late October of 2005.

Further, if you permit, I will include quotes from you as a participant during the writing group sessions, gathered from transcriptions of tape recordings of the sessions, and even include excerpts of your favorite pieces of writing.

I assure you that all names, dates, and even our location will be changed to *protect your identity*. Finally, if you do choose to participate in my research, you will read anything I write and be free to correct it, or even ask me to omit something. Therefore, participating in this research poses no risks to you as a participant.

However, you do NOT have to participate in my research to participate in this writing group. Also, even if you choose to participate in my research, you can withdraw at anytime and still participate in the writing group. If you wish to withdraw, you will simply sign a brief form stating that you changed your mind and would prefer not to be written about in my study. All the information from our interviews and your writing

group participation will be burned. The transcript data pertaining to your participation will be deleted. I will NOT write about you in my research if you choose not to participate, but you will still be very welcome in the writing group!

For more information, contact:

Researcher: Krystia Nora Phone: 412-241-4460, or 412-867-0028 (cell phone) E-mail: dszk@iup.edu School address: English, Leonard Hall, Rm. 110, Indiana, PA 15705	Dissertation Director: Claude Mark Hurlbert Phone: 724-357-2322 E-mail: hurlbert@iup.edu School address: English, Leonard Hall, Rm. 110, Indiana, PA 15705
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the statement below and deposit in the designated box by the door. Take the extra unsigned copy with you. If you choose not to participate, deposit the unsigned copies in the designated box by the door.

Informed Consent Form (continued)

VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this informed Consent Form to keep in my possession.

Name (PLEASE PRINT)

Signature

Date

Phone number or location where you can be reached

Best days and times to reach you

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.

Date

Krystia (Christina Maria) Nora

Appendix G: Copy of Request to Include the Legal Names of the Participants

I, _____, request that my legal name, and not a pseudonym, be used in Christina Maria (Krystia) Nora's dissertation, and in articles and conference presentations pertaining to the dissertation. I understand that the dissertation manuscript, articles, and presentations (and any changes made to them) will be member checked by myself.

Signature

Date _____

Krystia Nora, Dissertation Author

Date _____

Appendix H: Emergency Replacement Form

Emergency Replacement Form for Krystia Nora's Study

Date _____

In case anything happens to me that will make it impossible for me to member check and add my commentary to Ms. Krystia Nora's dissertation, I,

_____ wish to appoint

_____ to stand in my place as my replacement and provide commentary.

Further, should anything prevent my ability to manage my writing, my appointed replacement will have copies of all my writing. This way, Ms. Nora will be able to request copies of segments of writing for her dissertation, pending my replacement's approval of the segment and of the content for the segment.

This is my replacement's contact information:

Address _____

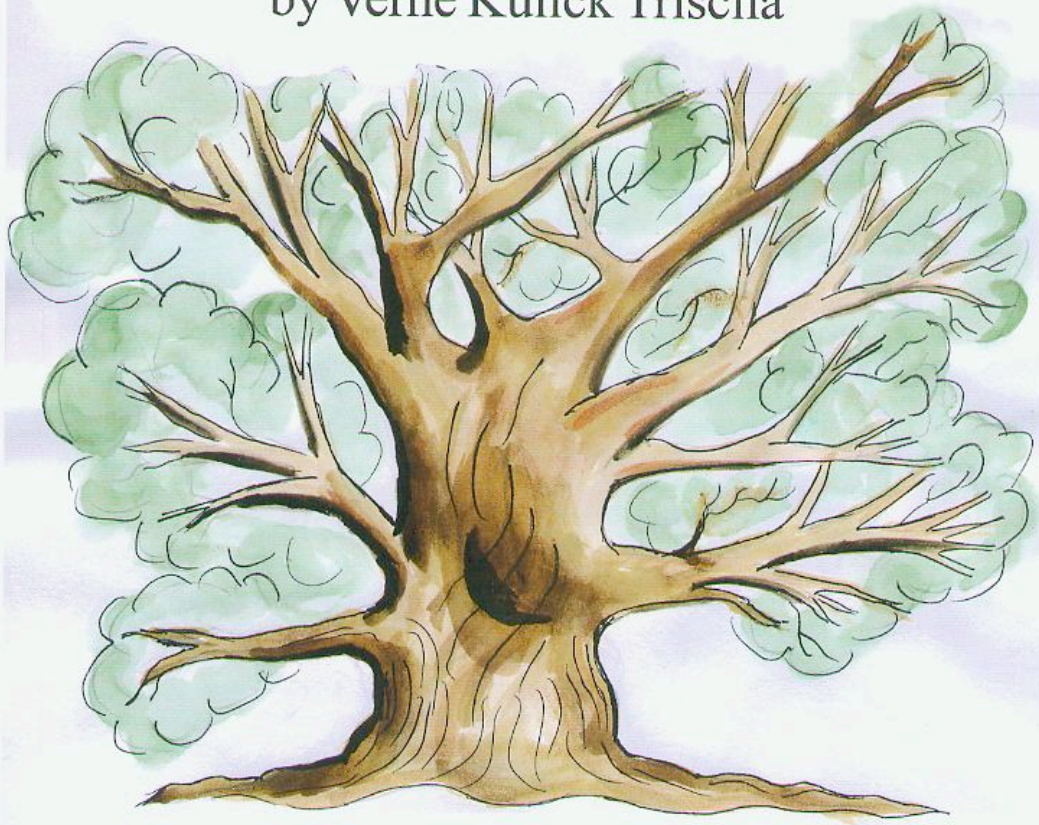
Phone number(s) _____

E-mail: _____

Member Signature _____

Joel and the Magic Toy Tree

by Verne Kulick Triscila



Illustrated by Joan Triscila Caton



Joel and the Magic Toy Tree

by Verne Kulick Triscila

Illustrated by Joan Triscila Caton

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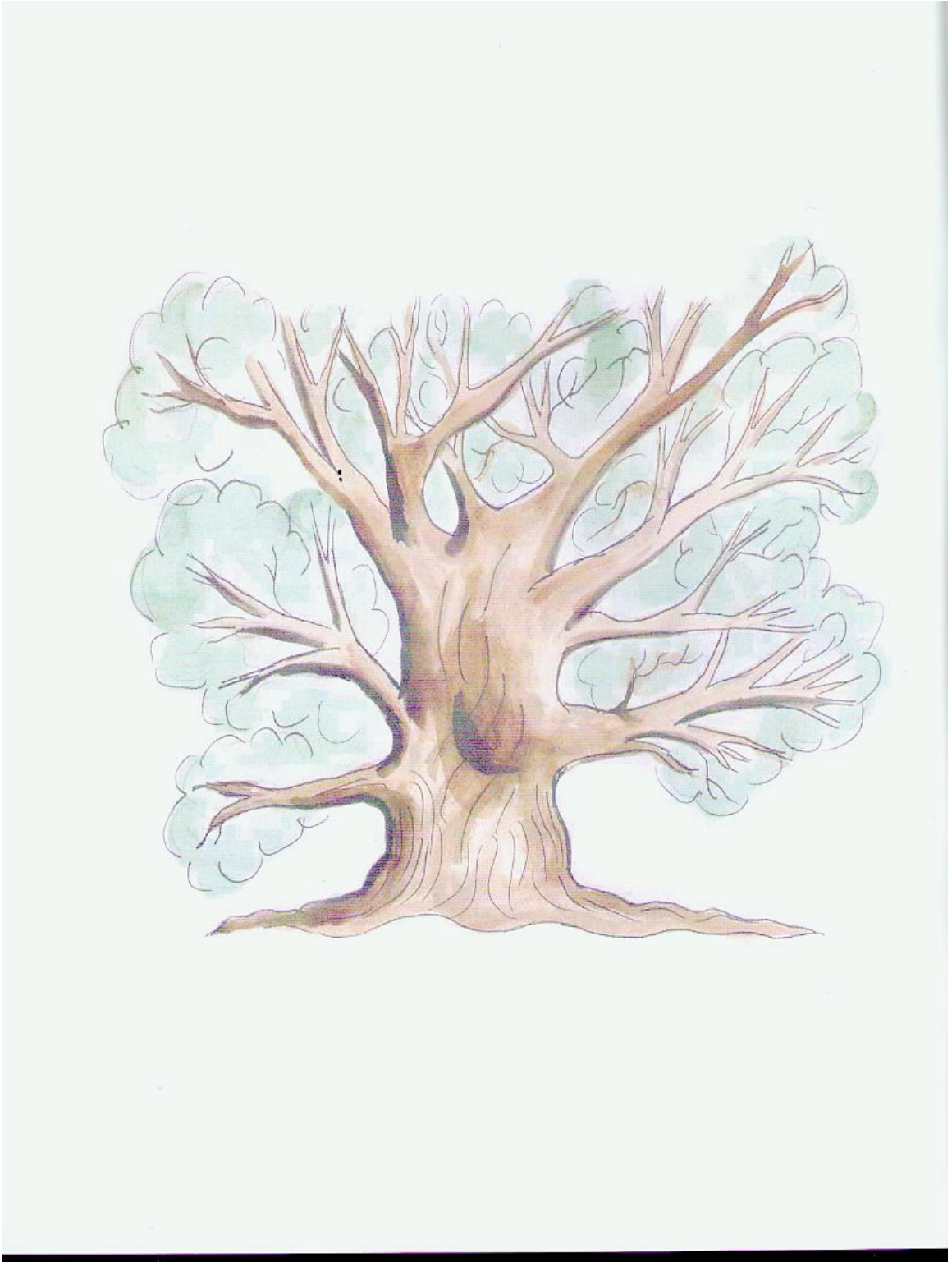
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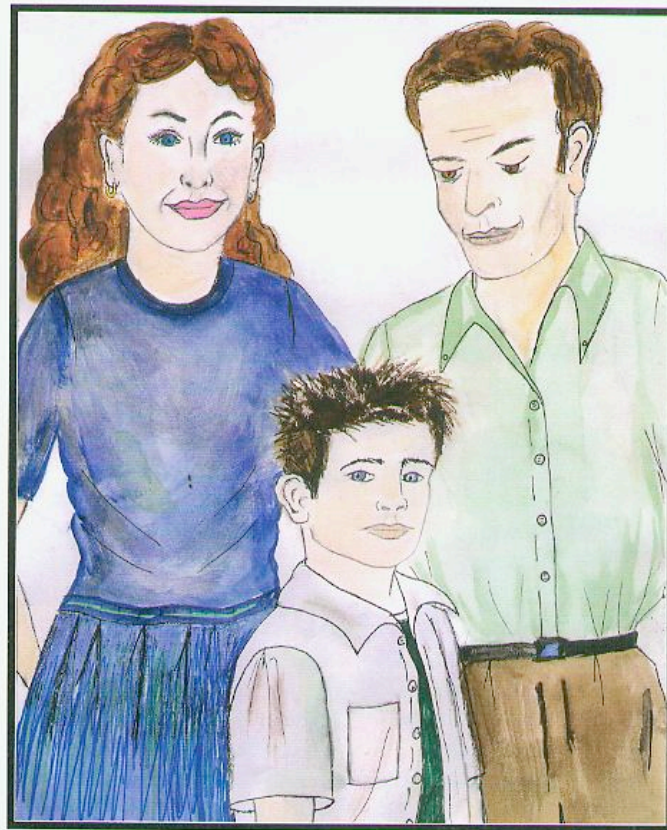


This book is dedicated to our beloved husband and father, William Triscila (1922-2005), whose devoted support, great values, and quiet humor were so inspirational to us.

Acknowledgments

To our family and acquaintances who encouraged us to persevere and bring *the stories* to print, to Krystia Nora, a doctoral student at the University of Indiana, Pennsylvania, for rekindling the spark to write and giving crucial guidance, to Dorothy Ann and Larry of the Sheptytsky Arms Senior Citizen Writing Group for their encouragement and ideas, and especially to Paige Caton for her countless hours of wonderful technical support. We are indebted to these great influences in our lives!





Scott and Brenda Anderson love their seven-year old son, Joel.

“He’s such a good boy, isn’t he Scott?”

“He sure is!” says the proud dad.



Joel is well behaved at home; however, to
his neighbors of the small town of
South Midland, he's a
bully and a **troublemaker**.

Each day after school,
he runs down the street to the alley
behind the Johnson's backyard.



He picks up a handful of stones and throws them over the fence at the Johnson's three-year-old dalmation, Lady Lucy.



The dog yelps whenever a stone hits her and runs in all directions to keep away from the stones. Joel laughs and keeps throwing more stones.

When Mr. Johnson sees Joel hurting his dog, he scolds the boy and warns him that he will tell his parents. Joel stops for a day or two, but then begins throwing stones again.





Not only does Joel bother animals, he also picks on younger children. He's always teasing Kathy Warren.

5

Although the six-year-old girl tries to keep away from Joel by running home after school, Joel still follows her. One day, he followed Kathy into her yard and began teasing and even hurting her.

“Mommy, Mommy, Joel’s pulling my hair, and he won’t let go!”

“What’s wrong with you?” asked Mrs. Warren. “Let go of my daughter’s hair, you big bully! Go home, NOW!”



Laughing, Joel ran out of the yard. As he hopped and skipped down the cracked sidewalk, he yelled,

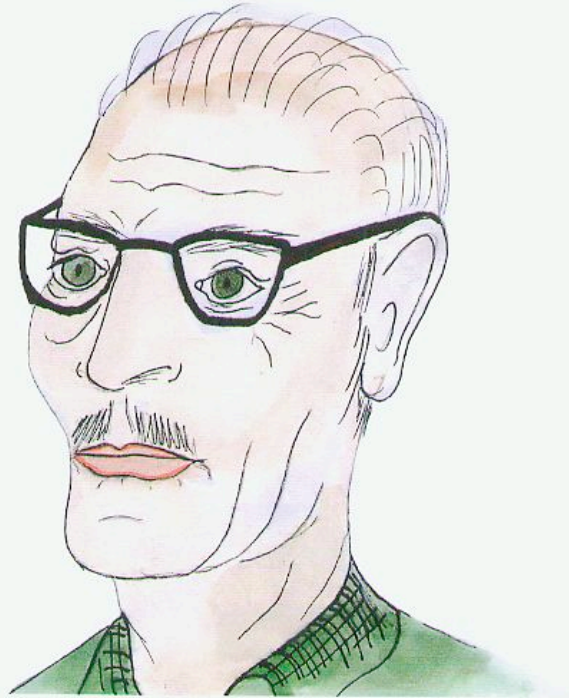
“Kathy’s a **cry baby,**

a big cry baby,

a cry baby...”



On some days, Joel angers another neighbor, Mr. Schuster. Carl Schuster is one of the people who grow strawberries for Brown County's yearly Strawberry Fest. Everyone loves his big, red, juicy strawberries, especially the neighborhood kids.



Mr. Schuster doesn't mind if the children eat a few strawberries from his garden. He only asks that they be careful where they step. While the other children usually walk slowly and step between the vines, Joel always stomps through the whole patch.



“Hey, Kid!”

Mr. Schuster called out from his
back porch one day.

“If you want to eat a strawberry or
two, you may, but **please** don’t step on
the plants.”

However, Joel didn’t pay any attention
and continued to
crush many of the vines.



At various times, each neighbor complained to Mr. and Mrs. Anderson about their son's behavior. When his parents asked Joel, he always said he's been good, and they believed him. Thus, the boy continued to be a troublemaker in the neighborhood...

...that is,

until **one**

dark

night

in June...



Around two o'clock in the middle of the night, a **bright light** beaming through their windows awakened the people of South Midland.



12

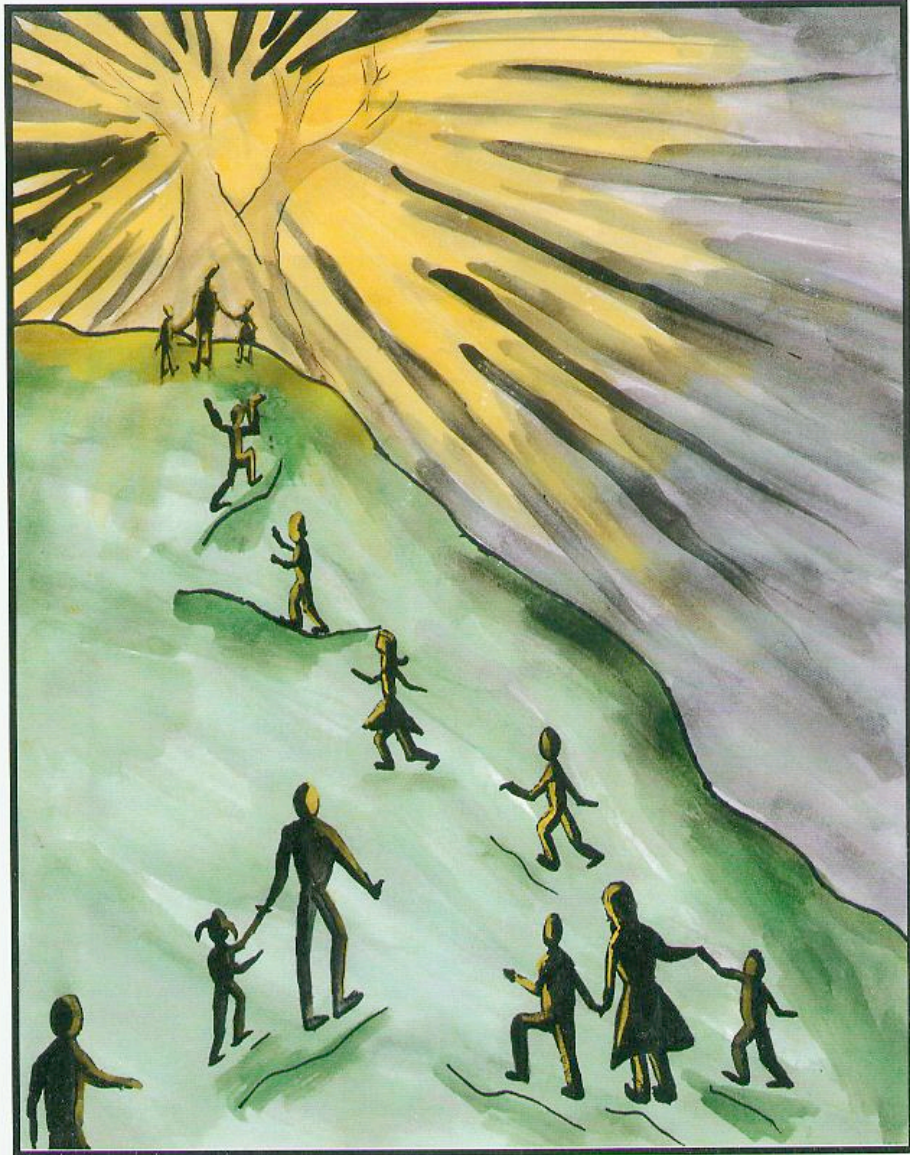
Startled, the townspeople gathered outdoors.
They wondered out loud,

“What could it be?”

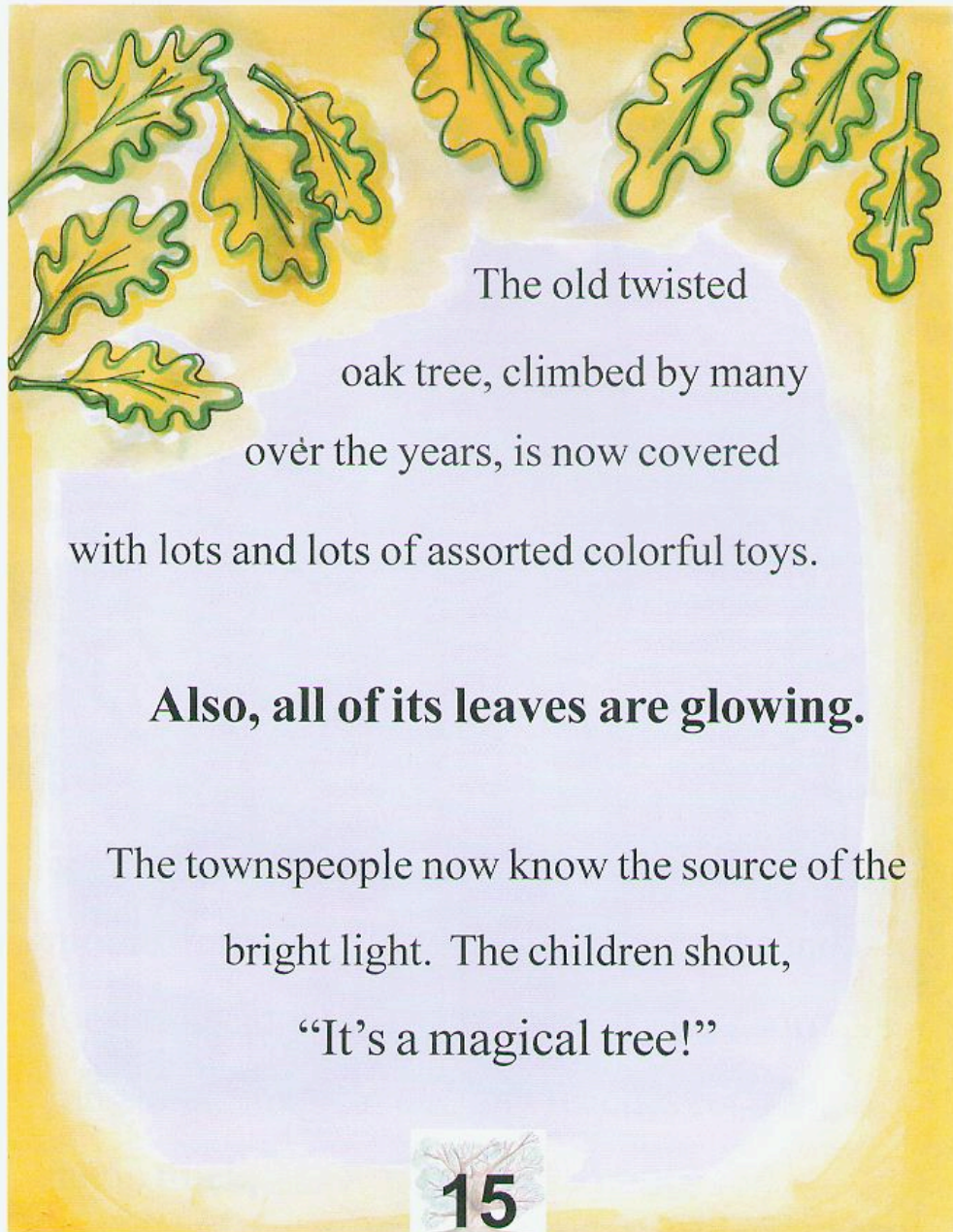
They see that the light is coming from the top
of Clayton Hill, a fun place for sledding in the
winter and cardboard riding in the summer.

Children and adults climb up the steep hill
and are surprised at what they see at the top.





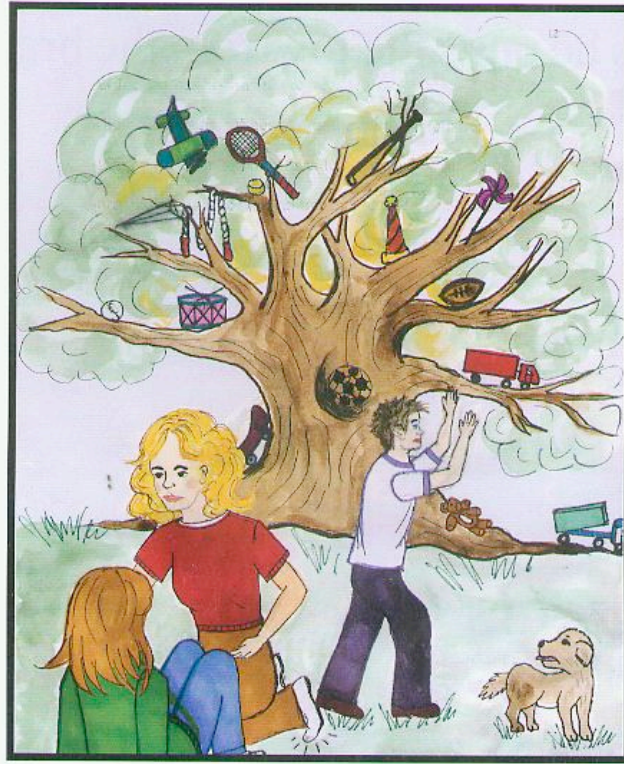
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The old twisted
oak tree, climbed by many
over the years, is now covered
with lots and lots of assorted colorful toys.

Also, all of its leaves are glowing.

The townspeople now know the source of the
bright light. The children shout,
“It’s a magical tree!”



As Joel pushes his way to the tree, he knocks down a little girl who begins to cry. When her mother turns to help her, Joel steps on the mom's foot by accident. Instead of saying he's sorry, he runs to the magical tree and reaches for a red dump truck.

As he pulls the toy from the branch,
it turns to **wood**,

and
moments
later...



into **sawdust**.

18

Joel shouts in an angry voice,

“What’s wrong with this stupid toy?

It must be broken!”

The boy then grabs a red, white, and blue drum, but it, too, turns to wood, and moments later, into sawdust. Joel turns to his parents and asks,

What’s happening?”



“We don’t know.” Looking around, the Andersons see that the other children are joyfully playing with their new toys.



Mr. Schuster calls out, “Joel, maybe you should read the sign next to the tree.”

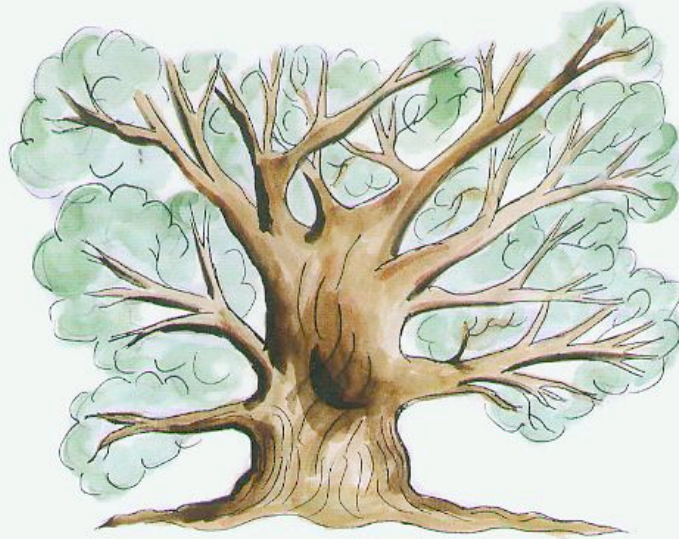
The Andersons go to the sign, and Joel reads the following:



On my branches hang these toys
Free for all good girls and boys.
If their behavior is not good
All these toys will turn to wood.
Just as iron turns to rust,
All their toys will be sawdust.

Mrs. Anderson says, “Joel, you were not telling us the truth about your behavior; the neighbors were.”

Joel begins to cry. He and his parents leave for home.



The next morning, still wanting a toy, Joel begs his parents to go with him to Clayton Hill. However, when the three of them get to the top, the magic toy tree is now the plain old, twisted oak tree.

Seeing how sad he is, Mr. and Mrs. Anderson try to make their son feel better.

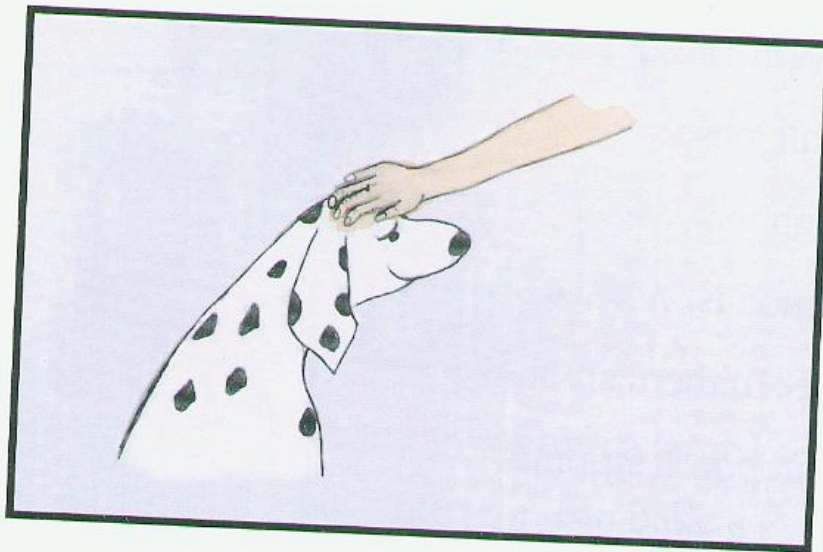
“If you behave, the magic toy tree might appear again,” say his parents who have no idea if it ever will. Joel, though, truly believes it will.

“I know it will appear again. I just have to behave, and I can’t lie anymore.”

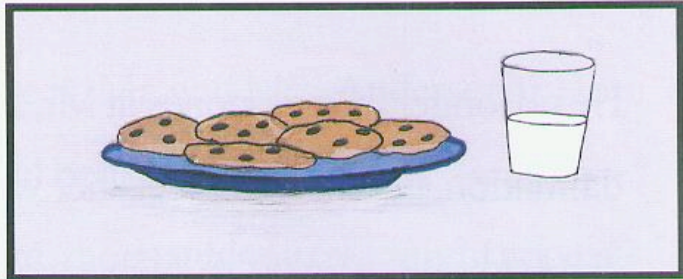


**Joel soon becomes the
nicest kid
in town!**

He no longer throws stones at Mr. Johnson's
dalmation, but instead greets her with a cheerful,
"Hi Lady Lucy! You're such a good dog!"



Also, Joel now walks home with Kathy Warren after school. They share comic book stories, and Joel is always invited to have cookies and milk when Mrs. Warren bakes.



On Tuesdays, Joel does small jobs for his elderly neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Edmonds. Afterwards, the three of them sit on the front porch sipping homemade lemonade.



Joel loves to hear stories about Mr. Edmonds when he was a boy.



Seeing how Joel has changed, Mr. Schuster invites the boy to help him pick strawberries for the upcoming Strawberry Fest. This time, Joel is very careful not to step on the plants.



Afterwards, Mr. Schuster gives him a large bowl of berries so that Mrs. Anderson can bake a strawberry pie.

At the end of the summer, South Midland once again lights up the middle of the night. This time, the townspeople know what is happening, and they are excited! They quickly dress and go toward the light at the top of the hill.

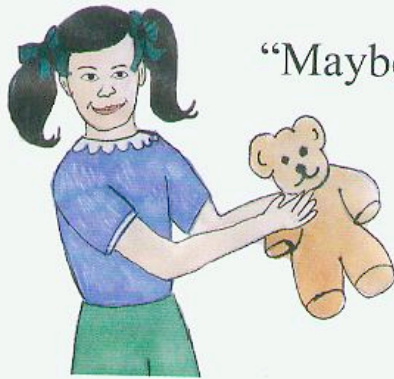


Many of the children are shouting to each other as they climb.

“Do you think the magic toy tree will have as many toys as last year?”



“Maybe it’ll have more!”



“I’d like another doll!”



“I hope I can get a basketball!”



Joel knows he has
behaved well all
summer.

So...he slowly,

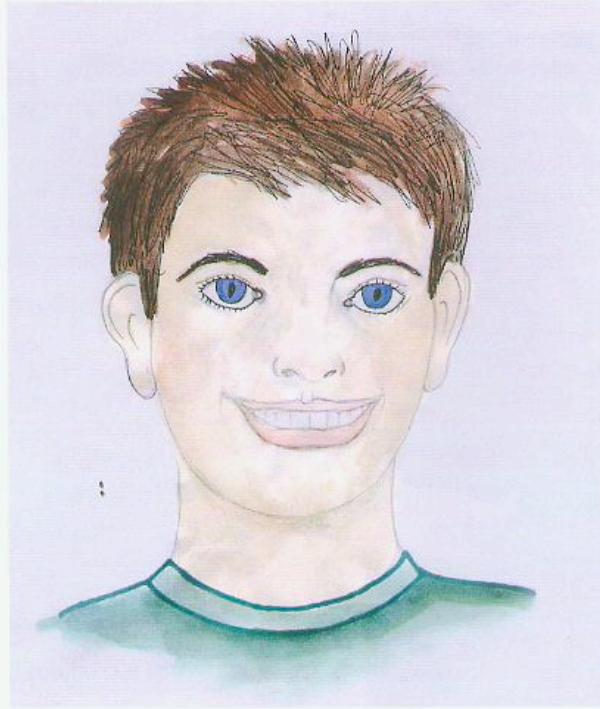
slowly

reaches for a
golden horn.

Once he takes the horn, Joel waits to see if the
toy will turn to wood and then to sawdust. It
doesn't.

“I did it, Mom and Dad!” Joel shouts happily.

“Great job, son! Take another toy,” says Mr.
Anderson. Joel takes a guitar, smiles, and then says
he has enough.



While he begins plinking on his guitar, Mr. Schuster walks over to the boy and says, “You seem so happy, Joel. Your good behavior really paid off, didn’t it?”

Joel looks up and says with an even bigger smile, “Yes, Mr. Schuster, it really did. This has been the best summer ever!”



Verne Kulick Triscila always loved to create stories, poems, and church plays to teach lessons to children, especially her own. However, it wasn't until the end of 2004 when she became part of a writers' group under the direction of Krystia Nora that she became serious about publishing her works. With encouragement from her daughter Joan, Verne decided to create a whole book series on *Learning Life Lessons*. She chose *Joel and the Magic Toy Tree* as the first book in the series because it was a favorite among family members. It has been verbally handed down from generation to generation. Mrs. Triscila hopes that your children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren will love it, too!

Joan Triscila Caton has her Ph.D. in Educational Psychology and a Masters Degree in Special Education. She also attended art classes for five years at Carnegie Melon Art Institute in Pittsburgh during her middle and high school years of public education. Since 1973, she has taught students with special needs, teacher candidates, and graduate students. During this time period, she also directed the West Suburban Center for Learning at National-Louis University for students with learning challenges. Throughout all her professional experiences, she has utilized her art skills to enhance the learning process.

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Appendix J: Hilary Opperman's "People Going to Heaven"

PEOPLE GOING TO HEAVEN

September eleven people going to
heaven on 747's. Pray brethren!

Mysterious faces from biblical places
with sinister plans for a free
land
all in the name of religion.

Smoking twins blacken blue skies,
working innocents fly to die,
to
end their agony.

To the South, in a secret fortress,
paid
for by American resources,
steel
and granite merge into one,
bodies
disintegrate in morning sun.

People going to heaven, on 757's, it
was September eleven. Pray
brethren.

Flight 93 heading West, circles back
from whence it came.
Passengers
knew this was no game. In-
air
uprising to historical fame.

Slashing blades and bare knuckle
fists
screaming and shouting the
battle raged.
courage and victory would
abound. Then
there was a hole in the
ground.
"Let's Roll!"

People going to heaven on
September eleven.

Men sworn to service, rush to the
scene
and confront a ghastly sight never
seen. Man-mule men
struggle with gear, up
clogged stairways looking for
strays.
"We're here!" "We're near!"

Melting steel and light-weight
trusses
give way to blood and guts as
thousands evaporate into
space.

Crashing down one hundred floors,
onlookers gasp in disbelief,
to the noise that like that of a
thousand screaming eagles.
Then deadly silence, there
were no survivors...save
those on the street.

People going to heaven at 9:57.

People going to heaven at 10:27.

It was September eleven (and) Satan
devils were trying to enter
heaven under false pretense
and religious disguise.

On the ground in four different
places
tears ran down millions of faces and
WE grieved and grieved and grieved.

Appendix K: Hilary Opperman's "Card Pitching Story"

Appearing out of nowhere in the spring of 1950 and overwhelming the 9 to 12 year olds and displacing somewhat the pick-up ball games was the baseball cards.

Three pieces of bubble gum and 5 baseball cards for 5 cents. What a deal! Baseball and football had sharpened my hand-and-eye coordination. Collecting and trading cards were the play. Well, the play for about a week.

Who...thank you very much...came up with the idea is unknown, but, there we were, 5 or 6 kids at a time pitching cards against Shep Cleaners wall from the curb about 6 to 8 feet away.

Closest to the wall wins all the cards. Like pitching quarters today; I guess they still do that thing. So between pick-up baseball, card pitching was the new experience.

I had this cigar box that I would deposit nightly the day's winnings. Day in, day out, the frenzy of card pitching consumed the neighborhood kids and repeated thru out the country. Well, maybe not the pitching. I'm sure some areas of the country were collecting and trading and making fortunes 30 years later. Pitching on cement sidewalks shortened the life span. Sliding across the abrasive surface assured this. Well, for a while anyway. Frayed corners made the cards unusable; instead of sliding, they would have a tendency to float.

Winning 25-50 cards each day meant the cigar box became a shoe box. The competitive nature of card pitching consumed us all. Some would lose cards everyday and summer days brought school mates and older kids from other neighborhoods. The more affluent ones. Class warfare.

The deal was who could accumulate the most cards. Within the first month or two, thousands of cards were circulating in the area.

Now came level #2. Bigger pots! Winning 5 or 6 cards was one thing. The better card-pitchers needed more "juice."

So now came "KNOCK DOWN THE LEANER" (KDL). The pots would be 15-20-25 at a time. Then, "KDL" became knock down 2 cards, then 3, then 4. The pots grew (extemporaneously...exponentially).

Sometimes, well, most times, to knock down a leaning card/s you had to hit with force and in the right place. The cards therefore would become frayed quicker and [be rendered] useless. Enter scotch-tape around the edges of the card.

Lucky for me the competition didn't pick up on the trick. The extra weight "zzzzinged" the cards and protected the Rookie Mickey Mantle cards from further damage. The

Jackie Robinsons, Honus Wager, Pie Traynor, Babe Ruth, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. Well, further damage for the time being, anyway.

Lucky for me, my older sister was working in an office where dispensers of scotch-tape were readily available. Well, on the sly, let's say. Working older brothers would supply any additional tape supplies.

The shoe box became a brown shopping bag. The stash was over 1000 cards. Put them in a vault and 30 years from now you'll be a millionaire...yeah! Yeah! What's a vault?

The frenzy continued all summer long and the shopping bag became a 100 pound potato burlap sack.

By September/October with school back in session, the school yard was a card-pitching mecca. After a while, the nun's took a disliking to the card-pitching frenzy. Devil's work! Gambling, humph! Kids losing their pocket-full of cards and looking depressed, or worse, eyes "watering" up, caught the nun's attention and they started to confiscate cards. They eventually banned card pitching all together.

This created some "bad vibes" with the kids, who then cried to the parents who then would call the church pastor (Head-honcho), Father Atkinson, and express their displeasure. The compromise was that the cards would be initialed and returned to the rightful owner at the end of the school term. Next June!

Next June! Card pitching continued after school and on week-ends, especially Saturday 10AM until dark about 6 or 7 p.m..

Enter Level #3.

So now I'm consumed by accumulation of the "CARDS."

The colder weather brought about the navy tassel caps, wool and warm, which everybody wore.

"Okay, card pitchers, the new game." The decent "pitchers" were always up for a new game. More juice!

Eight or ten feet away, we would place a tassel-cap and the first one to put a card into the cap, not touching the ground, would win all thrown cards. With 4 or 5 players, 100 cards could accumulate quickly. Sometimes, 8 or 9 players would participate.

Needless to say, Level #3 became more intense. The "main rule" was as such: "If you were out of cards and the game was still in progress, you were out of the game." So, you had to load up your pockets with cards. Front pockets and back pockets bulged with your past winnings. It was high-rollers stakes.

By the end of October, the 100 pound sack was more than half-full. Additionally, the floating of the card into the tassel-cap meant there was little or no damage to the cards as sliding across the cement caused, as in knock down the leaner game. Preserving those cards for future use, or until another gig came along.

Usually Saturdays were the main day of competition. During the week, the high rollers from other streets and neighborhoods would pitch and resupply their stash from lesser, not so competitive underlings. The 8-9-10 year olds were easy prey, like baby gazelles on the Serengeti. By Saturday, they, the "high rollers," would come to a predetermined spot.

On rainy days, the action would be on Billy LaLonde's porch across from Annunciation Church. We were like "junkies" needing our daily/weekly fix. After pitching cards for 5 months every day and practicing at home evenings, my pitching skills were hone to a fine edge.

Level #4

Now the ultimate pot-builder: the object was to own every card in the neighborhood. Some of the cards in my stack were of virgin, cherry quality. Pitched just one time. The smell of bubble gum still present on them. Pitching and bubble blowing went hand and hand. By the summer of 1951, the City Parks and Recreation Dept. would sponsor BUBBLE-GUM blowing contests.

Somehow, the card pitching phenomenon burnt itself out by 1951. Primarily because the Little League Organization introduced organized baseball to the neighborhood. Many families rejoiced. The card pitching sickness disappeared. Praise Jesus!

Anyway, I digress. The nature of pitching the card into the 100 percent wool cap was that when you landed the card on target, by nature of the fiber, it stuck. I should point out that we would use an empty Mother Oats container and fit the cap over the same. That would give it a stand-up effect and a more inviting target.

So now comes the old card into a "tin pie plate." Level #4

While the hit on the wool cap would generally make you a winner, if you hit dead-center of the metal pie pan, the card would usually bounce out. So the skill of floating into the wool cap wasn't useful at this level and you had to "WALK" the card into the pie-pan. Land the card close and "Walla," there you go. Usually, the card would just barely balance itself on the rim of the pan.

No touching the ground underneath. If you didn't have 500 cards for the competition, it was wise not to show. It was the Super Bowl of card pitching. The World Series, the Stanley Cup, the World Cup rolled into one.

Out went November, in came December and the snow. The "pan" pitching was confined to porches and Saturday in as much as it was dark shortly after school was out. Little time left for the "pan-pitch." The games could go on for 20-30 minutes. So the play was Saturday.

The cold and snow and especially the wind made the "pitching" passé! Christmas was nearing and after massive doses of card pitching for six/seven months had taken its toll. Burn-out! Committed to re-hab!

The sack was $\frac{3}{4}$'s full. Between 15 or 20 thousand cards. Now it's Christmas. My brother is 15 and has his eye on the Red Ryder B-B gun. At 15, he's mature enough. Additionally, the 50's mentality didn't border on paranoia. So Christmas morning, there it was.

Now he and I are in the basement, shooting cans, bottles, Christmas tree bulbs, whatever we could find.

"Let me shoot! Let me shoot" I'd whine. I'd plead.

It was tough to get my turn. From time to time, he would acquiesce.

You're too young. You'll shoot your eye out.

Pleading with other members of the family moved the process along. Unfortunately, the cans and bottle shoots lost their shine, and Christmas tree lights (burnt out ones) were in short supply.

In the corner of the basement sat a burlap bag filled with "CARDS."

My stash! Hey, how about the cards? Figuring I would endear myself with this great idea, thereby giving myself additional "time behind the gun."

The main thing about shooting the cards was there were faces on the cards and you were vicariously were shooting bad guys or whatever.

So there I was setting up card after card on the sandstone foundation with little ledges here and there. Maybe 50 cards at a time. What a great idea! Sometimes you hit the perimeter border of the card and sometimes you would hit Babe Ruth right between the eyes. Outstanding. My brother with his BB gun was the play.

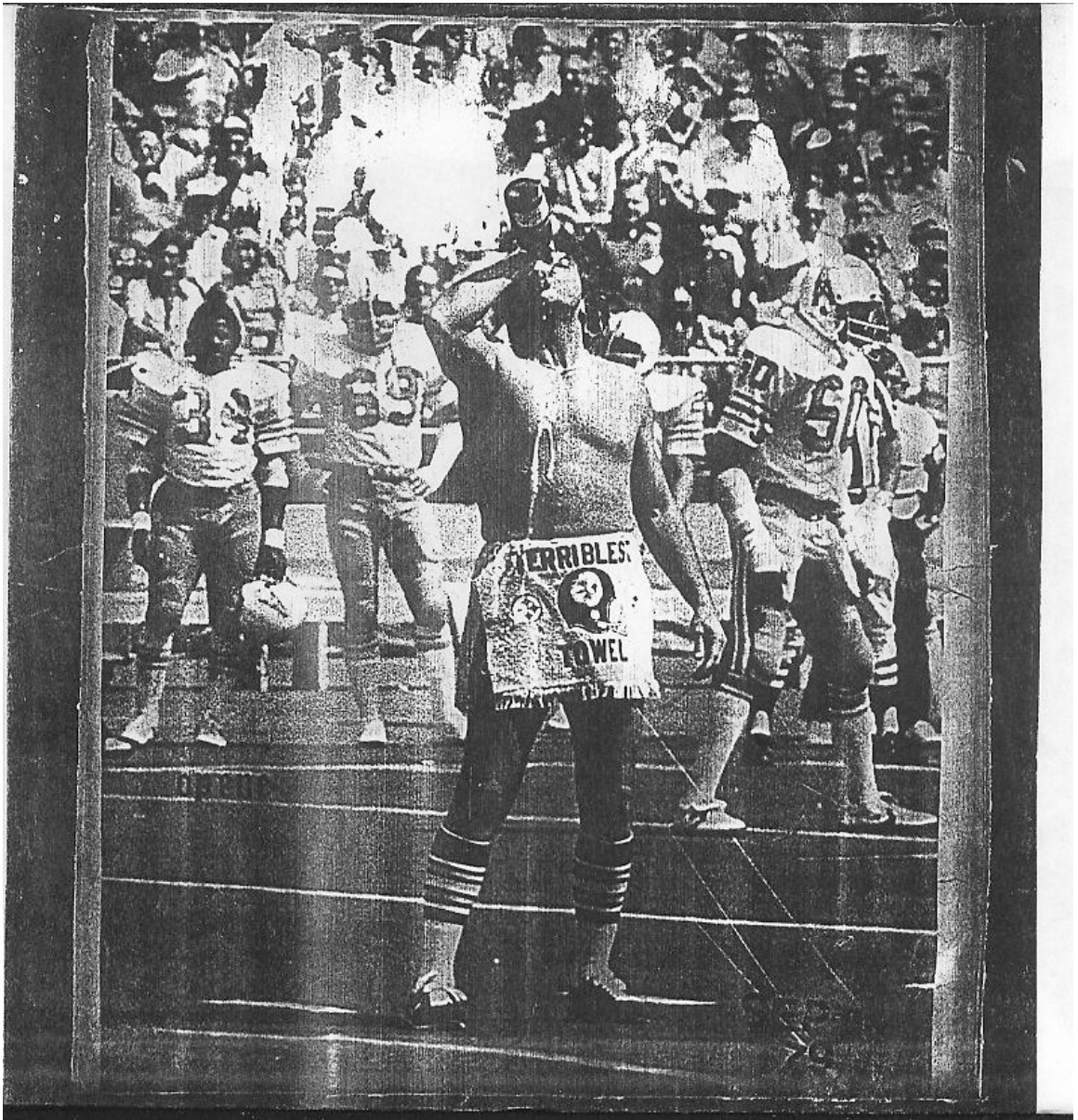
Sometimes we would throw the cards up in the air and try to shoot them before the floated to the ground, just like in the cowboy movies at the Atlas Show.

Day after day, January, February, March. Shooting! Shooting!

In April of the year, it was "city spring clean-up." Everybody in the neighborhood cleaning out the basement. And, as fate would have it, by April, the "sack" was empty and out went the cards, a hole shot in each one. So out went the fortune. Oh, well, what the hell? It was only money. But who knew? Who knew what the '80's and '90's would bring? " Millions!!!"

Whoops, another card show this weekend. Boo hoo! Boo hoo! Why me, Lord?

Appendix L: Hilary Opperman's Streaker Photo



Appendix M: Hilary Opperman's Third Streaker Story (for Streaker Photo)

Champagne Celebration...In Pursuit of a Cope-a-nut

It was nearing 11 a.m. as I crossed the Fort Duquesne bridge heading for the Three Rivers Stadium (3RS). Sometime after 1 p.m., I would realize the final "5" of my 15 minutes of fame. It was opening day, September 7th 1979. The "Staylors" (Steelers) mission on this picture perfect, cloudless day, was to continue the drive for a fourth Super Bowl Championship.

The team had eeked-out a win 6 days ago on a Roy Gerla's field-goal in the final minutes in Fox boro. Additionally, it was the opening game of the Monday Night Football (MNF) series. The Steelers now, 1-0. The Patriots, 0-1. The fans in 27 cities distraught over their Tuesday morning coffee. "Them damn Steelers, Lucky bastards!" So, now the fans were primed. Time to celebrate the official return of the black and gold warriors. Our warriors. After all we were the 12th man...Art said we were...Chuck said we were...the players said we were.

So, in line with the celebration, all that was needed was a bottle of champagne. Strangely enough, it was in the cooler on the back seat. Then, the most important prop for my self-styled buffoonery was resting in my gym-bag on the shot-gun seat: The "Terriblist Towel," so named by my Market Square compatriots, all members of the Banazak Bunch.

As I looked to my left, I had a birds-eye view of the vast parking lot area, which was $\frac{3}{4}$ full. Not surprising, in as much as the fans had been arriving since Saturday midnight. Needless to say the fans were "tuned." So, what else was new? As I approached "our spot" across from the Gulf Station and currently the Science Center, the energy, the excitement, the anticipation, the circus-like atmosphere was creating a vacuum, adrenalin fed.

By kick off, two hours from now, a vortex consumed the interior of the 3RS.

As fate would have it, back for more abuse, at this grand and glorious party, were our friends from Houston. Last seen, last January for the AFC

Championship drubbing. As "Bum" had quoted to the media at the time, "the road to the Super Bowl goes through Pittsburgh." Now, he's thinking, "Why does it have to start so friggin early?"

As I approached the pay-booth, \$3- at the time, I realize that I have not secured a very important prop, a match-book.

It is very important to remember that the insanity, the "vortex" consuming the confines of the 3RS was present with the league leading Pirates, as well. This was their year to win the World Series. So, basically the fans were out of control, and the trifecta would eventually play-out Super Bowl, World Series and the repeat of January Super Bowl Championship in Pasadena. As a result, there was "road-kill" everywhere, if you get my drift. It was a fitting way to end the decade of the 70's. Four Super Bowls and two World Series Championship...oh my!

But I digress!

vortex (vôr'teks'): a state of affairs that resembles a whirl in its rush, an absorbing effect, catastrophic power...THE 12TH MAN [Webster's Dictionary definition, adapted by author]

So, as I started to say... "Excuse me, do you have any matches?" As I hand him the \$3- fee.

"No!" says he.

"Harry!" he hollers across the way on my shot-gun side.

" Do you have any matches?"

He nods East to West.

As I pull even with the same man, he says, "Just a minute!" as he reaches into a nearby Ford Sedan Visor, presumably his car, and walla, produces a critical piece to the ongoing trip I'm on.

"All right!" I'm thinking to myself.

Making the loop and now heading back from whence I came, I'm passing the gathering masses and now feel the energy at ground level. The vortex is gathering. I think to myself how beautiful and memorable it is being a part of this insanity. Feeling sorry for the fans whose teams have not enjoyed the magical, mystical trip of Champions.

Six or seven of the "bunch" are already present and Joey, designated cook, is tending the grub. Scallops and Shrimp over pasta with an alfredo/fettucini mixed sauce. Eddie G. hands me a cup. Joey quickly pours in some home-made Italian wine. I add a good hit of VO for good measure. Courage in a bottle.

By 11:15 a.m., the entire crew is accounted for. By now the entire parking lot is a sea of black and gold and three lanes of cars are circling the lots and the stadium itself. Needless to say, parking is at a premium. Sixty thousand fans ready to welcome the team home. The smell of food overpowers the nostrils.

The chants overwhelm your senses.

"Here we go Steelers, here we go!"

It's madness. Everyone is psyched. By 12:30, we start to make our way towards the stadium. Time to check on all my necessary gear.

I have removed the champagne from the cooler and put it into an Aladdin jug; unfortunately, the top of the bottle is sticking out of the top. Additionally, I have made my own towel, yellow bath-size for waving. Duh! Also, the towel will cover the protruding bottle. I plan to, after a healthy swig of the bubbly, to lay the towel on the fifty and place the champagne bottle on top. A nice addition, I thought. Oh, by the way, did I mention that I had "No ticket!" OW!

I'm starting to think that I'm making things too complicated. I have visualized everything in my head, but the physical aspect of pulling this champagne-toast-on-the-fifty given all the nuances may not be practical. Possible. The three "industrial strength drinks" are kicking in, hopefully not clouding my thinking.

As I approach Gate A, I will be using Eddie and Pat Gallagher for cover. Blocking the ticket-takers complete view. After all, bottles are not permitted and tickets expected. Right! Or a reasonable facsimile, thereof.

Down to the last 50 yards of Gate A, I make sure that the \$20 dollar bill is folded correctly around my ticket. The match-book that Harry gave me earlier in the morning. The striker and matches removed. The colored advertisement on the cover adds to the credibility as per the actual ticket. Going through the turnstile, Ed and Pat block the view from the right side—next to the last turnstile, and, as I enter the last one, the wall on my left, blocks the view of the jug-bottle-towel-combo from the ticket taker.

As I hand him my "Ticket" there is a moment of surprise as our eyes meet, a quick second.

"Hey, how you doin'," I offer. Diversionary tactic.

He very deftly slides the combo underneath all the legit ticket stubs. With a slight nod. The match-book idea at least showed creativity, he's probably thinking. See you next home game, now that I know the idea worked. Anyway, I'm through. Cool!

Once inside, Ed, Pat, and I split-up; they heading for their second level seats, me heading for the field level boxes. Section 67. As I hurry through the crowd, I hear different comments from those fans who recognize the outfit.

"All right!" one shouts. Another, a quick high-five.

"There he is!"

"Right on!"

"Go get 'em my man!" As the fans make me feel less embarrassed, which is what I feel underneath it all. More high fives as every one scurries for their seats as game time nears.

There is sort of a euphoric feeling that surrounds the scene and I guess the alcoholic consumption and a couple "hits" of puna has heightened the trip.

Last, but not least, I am as anxious as I was the other two times, AFC Championship last January and the Super Bowl in Miami. To be perfectly honest, "Scared as Hell!" Still in all, if it can pull off the "caper," it will be a moment and the fans will go nuts.

"Shit!" I'm thinking...was it 67, 65, 69 section? As a certain panic is setting in.

Still, in all, 67 is sticking in my head. A quick 30 feet up the tunnel and I break into the sunlight and immediately feel the energy.

"Hilary! HILARY!!"

It's my drinking buddy and member of the Banaszak Bunch. Jimmy Ford, a Teddy Roosevelt look-alike and brother of the Oakmont C. G's golf-pro, Bob Ford. He is five rows up from the tunnel entrance of the field boxes section. He is also on the end seat and as it was last January, the steps lead right down to the three foot-high pipe railing. Again, as was the case last January, easy access onto the field at about the 45-yard line.

Naturally, the fans in the immediate area start to mutter. Talking in supportive tones.

"Yeah, Streak!," feeding the ego-trip, somewhat subduing my anxiety.

Off goes my shirt, out comes the champagne, and the waving "terrible towel" in hand. Lastly, on goes the "Terriblist Towel" loin cloth over my black shorts with some new black and gold knee-high socks and some neat \$100 black and yellow Nikes. The new attire is an improvement from the last two "streaks" at the AFC Championship game and the Super Bowl in Miami.

A fan nearby and also on an end-seat hollers, "What's the champagne for?"

"Are we welcoming the Steelers back home from the third Super Bowl victory?" I shout back. "Is this a celebration?" I continue. "Well, what's a party without the bubbly?"

He gives me a thumbs up.

The fans in the immediate area enjoying the moment, given early warning of the upcoming buffoonery. Let's see how the other 60 thousand respond.

Down on the field the teams are going through the traditional coin toss, with the "Oilers" winning the game of chance call. Unfortunately, that will be the extent of their winning for the day. Their luck has just run out.

As was the situation last time the teams met in January, the Oilers will receive, only, this time they have the chance to receive at the other end of the stadium. Damn, now I'm out of position and will have to come onto the field behind the receiving team. Now the chances of getting caught increase because I have to run the length of the field as it was only half the field as it was the first time. Quickly, I glance to the scoreboard side of Three Rivers and notice the maintenance gate is open and my friend (the security cop) and some ground crew personnel are standing nearby. "Just leave the gate open, old friend, old buddy, old pal," I think to myself. I'll be there in about 58 seconds. After all, I used to do the 100 at Perry High School in record time. Whereas, realizing the importance of timing in this thing, I stand up from the seat and down the tunnel to the inner circle of ground level. As I race down to another section to enter by, I almost wipe out some lady with a handful of "goodies" from the nearby refreshment stand. A quick "excuse me" and I'm gone. Because of poor planning, I have to arbitrarily pick a new section which I feel is close to where I want to enter the field. The sign at the tunnel reads 59-60 section. "Close enough." As I hit the sunlight, I realize the ball is teed up and the game is ready to begin.

Well almost. Thank God for the last pre-game commercial. I would like to personally thank that corporation's commercial, because without them, this streak would have not been possible. You know how the saying goes, "Football, hot dogs, apple pie, and commercials."

As I run down the tunnel, I realize I'm confronted with the section that ends not at the field, but at the visitor's baseball dugout. Doesn't matter. It's nothing that I can't handle. I can jump from a four foot height. In a flash (corny, I know), I'm atop the dugout, and in another flash (still corny), I'm looking down to the field. Four feet, my ass. Would you believe eight, maybe ten?

Having been exposed in full "battle regalia" and carrying a bottle (glass a no-no) and running from Section 67, I have attracted the attention of a few security guards. Now they are in pursuit and the national anthem is playing, thus slowing their chase to a walk. They are closing the gap down the 30 odd steps to the dug-out I'm now standing upon.

"Now folks, let me tell ya."

There was a movie about a decade before that was a classic already. It starred Paul Neuman and Robert Redford. The name being "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid." In one of the memorable scenes where their only choice was jumping from a cliff, down hundreds of feet into a river to escape their relentless pursuers. That scene flashes into my head. Standing atop the dugout and looking down to the reddish brown track below, I think, "Now what, stupid?" Realizing I can't stop now, "off I go into the wild blue yonder."

As I fall that eight to ten feet, I realize I can't control my flight. The reason is because of having a bottle of champagne in one hand and the Terrible Towel in the other. My weight had been distributed too much to the "rear" (no pun intended) and I land heavily on my right foot, and more specifically, the heel bone, and finally toppling completely on my backside. "I just broke my god-damned ankle," I think to myself, to

say nothing also of a badly twisted left ankle. Hearing the roar of the fans in that particular part of the stadium is an instant healer. Shit, man, this is show biz.

Back up on my feet, I enter the field somewhere between the ten and twenty yard lines near the Oilers receiving trio. Dropping the Terrible Towel somewhere around the twenty-five and in the middle of the receiving team, the "power of the towel" has been unleashed. So far, so good. Have not seen any security people, yet. I guess the element of surprise may be applicable here. Now, if I can only get to the fifty.

"...And the home of the brave!"

Having pre-loosened the cap on the champagne bottle in the stands, then ran, jumped, and then one hearty last shake for good measure, the cap "exploded" into orbit (would you believe 30 feet?) and now the toast, "We love Younse Guys," "Go for four!" I'll drink to that. Setting the bottle down on the fifty, I'm off for the open gate, behind the goal post and below the score board. Racing past the Steeler kick-off team, I notice #47, Mel Blount, and I say "go get 'em, Mel!" The 30, 20, 10.....now I realize the giant door which had been open is slowly closing and I'm trapped. Thanks old friend, old buddy, old pal. The fans respond with their appropriate "boo's." Which at least now I know they're psyched up, and that's the whole reason for this foolishness anyway. "Disrupting a public assembly" (Article 5, Section 2A of the PA Penal Code).

Within seconds, I'm surrounded by three security police. Are you ready for this? Do you know the first thing they do? Frisks me. Do you believe these people? Frisking me. "What the hell am I hiding?" Better yet, "WHERE THE HELL AM I HIDING IT?"

Now, for the first time since jumping from the dugout, I realize the extent of my pain.

I say to my captors, "I think I broke my ankle, or my heel. Could I see a doctor?"

Five minutes later, I'm being uncuffed and an ice pack is placed on my heel.

They have assigned a security cop to watch me, like I'm going someplace. As those who have ever suffered any kind of foot, ankle, or knee injuries while being involved in any sport activity can tell you, the longer you sit, the more it stiffens up.

After about fifteen minutes, the paramedics are transporting me to Divine Providence, which is minutes from the stadium. After dropping me off at the emergency room. They leave, and I think, "Well, at least I'm free and will not have to go to jail." Thank God for that, because Sunday night would be an agonizing, sleepless night, even at home. I couldn't imagine me in jail in this condition. Thanks Chief for passing the word: no harm, no jail. He had his reasons.

As I cruise around in the waiting area via my wheel chair, I come to realize there is no television. I go crazy, "Don't you guys realize the Steelers are playing football today?" I say to the nurses in the area. Damn. Not even a radio to listen to. Damn. Damn.

Wait a minute. I have an idea. I'll call my sister's house and listen to the game over the phone. After two rings, she's on the phone and before I can start listening to the game over the phone, I have to explain that I'm in the hospital and I think I broke something.

She tells me Myron Cope over the radio went crazy (a typical Myronism). That's why he's so popular with the public and his show is so successful, I think to myself. Of course, his love for the Steelers doesn't hurt his image in the "title town."

Cope was getting word that I had been taken to Divine Providence with a possible broken ankle, and that I had still ran the length of the field. He made me a Cope-a-nut right over the airways. That's heavy. The cope-a-nut was more of Myron's "shtick" from his 6 to 8 Monday to Friday Sports talk show on WTAE radio, 1250 on your dial. Making listeners a Cope-a-nut saluted them for outstanding comments or feats. Yadda! Yadda! Yadda!

After the x-ray, a few ankle wraps, and crutches, I'm on my way back to the stadium area and my car. The distance is about a mile, and a nice walk on a Sunday afternoon, but hundred miles to me. Why the hell didn't I take a cab? God, I wish I had some pain pills, or even a joint. I guess the main problem I'm having is the left leg is supposedly supporting my weight and the ankle is twisted so bad, it's not doing such a good job. In essence, I'm dragging both feet. After almost two blocks of this, by the Clark Candy underpass, I'm aware that blisters are starting to develop on both hands.

Why the hell didn't I take a cab? After "gutsing" it out for another block, I get the attention of a young guy in a van and ask for a ride. I guess he could see the state I was in, and said, "Okay." After I explain that I just left the hospital, he says, "You should have taken a cab."

As we drove near the stadium, I could hear roar after roar, so I knew the good guys in black were doing their thing, and the "Super Fans" theirs. Luckily, our tail gate area is directly across from the Gulf Station and the outer border area, so my car was quite close to where I exited the van and handed the guy \$5. He rejected it, but I was insistent, and he accepted. Hell, that's what the cab fare would have been anyway.

At long last, I'm in the car, and extending the seat, almost touching the rear seat in a full reclining position. I turn the radio on just in time to hear the fourth period action.

The thought goes through my head, "It's going to be a ball driving home in my condition. Now the bad news....the car is a stick shift." Where the hell are my E-Z riders?

The good news is that we won, and the crowd's 12th man action made my whole jaunt worth it.

Somehow, I managed the drive, and as I limped badly into my house on Kenny Street in Pitcarin, my kids had me go through the whole story about the jaunt before kick-off and the reason for my pain. After the inactivity since one o'clock, the stiffness had set in big time.

Nevertheless, the Steelers were 2-0 and Cope had made me a Cope-a-nut for running the length of the field with a broken ankle. Not a bad day.

What about the bruised right heel? Almost being disabled with pain in both feet and ankles, desperation was setting in. I had chores to do around the house, kids to look out for, although Beth, 15, Hilary, 14, and Matt turning 11 tomorrow would ease the household chores.

Having twisted or bruised feet and ankles over the years was almost old hat with me. Although, two injuries at the same time confounded the situation.

So, not I'm sitting on the couch with two buckets. One kept boiling, one filled with ice. After every ten minutes, switching legs and/or buckets. Cold for swelling. Heat for pain. And, finally, my mother's approach: painting the whole area, feet and ankle, with iodine after the last hot water session, this approach drawing out more pain through open pores. As usual, it would work.

Monday at work at the lab, I can remember driving around the Oakland area and hitting a pot-hole and the pain was excruciating. I'm thinking, "man, I did myself good this time."

Needless to say, the bills needed paid and the kids need shoes, as they say; therefore, I had to guts it out. So what else is new? After a week of the Sunday ritual, hot/cold/iodine, the limp was slight and did I mention that the crutches were put away?

By Friday, the notoriety plan was continuing. There was a newspaper bit and a picture on Monday's Pittsburgh Press. Obviously, the Cope mention at kick-off time and now a Friday evening appearance on Sam Nover's Friday night taping added to the celebrity rush. It was an NBC affiliate which, at the time, was carrying all the AFC games. The appearance was heady stuff and was extending the fifteen minutes of fame. Needless to say, I was caught up in the hype. The celebrity. The notoriety.

The Sam Nover Show was taped from 7 to 8 pm. I would be on around the 7:30 to 7:45 segment.

There was, as it seemed to me, some other business that I could take care of on the way and add to my brush with fame.

As I mentioned earlier, Myron Cope's talk show was on between 6 and 8 pm, and the WTAE studios were on the way (in Wilkinsburg) from the house in Pitcarin, along the parkway east. Being informed that I was made a Cope-a-nut on Sunday's broadcast, I guessed that I should drop in—"crash"—his radio broadcast and collect my...whatever a Cope-a-nut entitled you to. Certificate! Badge! Medal! Which unfortunately was just a radio mythical hype. Being recognized on the radio broadcast was the extent of the bestowal. So, around 6:30 or so, I walk into the studio, "Here to see Myron."

The receptionist said, "Go ahead."

Down the hall, wave to Ertha, the black female producer, who recognizes me; and in the studio I go.

Myron looking surprised and elated, sort of, I guess, "Oh, here's the stalker, just come into the studio," he stutters, as only Myron can.

"Okay, Cope, I'm here to pick up my Cope-a-nut. Where is it?" in a demanding, confrontational tone. So, to add a little theater, approaching Myron from the rear, I grab him around the neck as I'm saying the above.

Laughing at the buffoonery, "Ahhhh! Ahhh! Yoi! Yoi!"

"Oh, you don't have it! Bogus!" say I, "See you later!" Out the door, down the hall, past the receptionist desk, and the woman who is laughing. The broadcast was on the speakers in the entrance hall, so she was privy to the whole episode.

Into the car I go, and I naturally turn on the radio to hear Myron's reaction to my appearance and ball-busting.

Nothing! Push some buttons! Got reception! What the hell? Push the 1250 button. Nothing! Have all other stations, but no Cope. Within minutes, finally Cope's voice breaks in.

"Opperman, I'm going to get you for this," feeding off the live "schick" that just occurred.

It seems that when I grabbed him in the head-lock from the rear, I disconnected the wire that put him on the air. So, there was nothing but silence. He was off the air for about five minutes, thus the above comment.

Well, he never got even, so I guess I'm in the clear, 27 years later.

After the Cope episode, I was off to Channel 11 for the Sam Nover Sports Show. Actually, I should point out that the Friday in-studio interview was really a taping which was then broadcast at 11 a.m. Sunday morning. Naturally. Duh! Who would have think differently?

The continued attention was certainly acting as a drug. More attention to feed the celebrity beast.

Appendix N: Hilary Opperman's First Streak

28 January '04

Ironically, today is basically the 25th anniversary of the third Steelers Super Bowl victory, the first team to immortalize itself with that feat. Anyway, somewhere along my travels and like everybody else was caught up in the 'burgh hype' The thought came into my mind about the "terrible towel" worn as a loin cloth and showing off my creation at the tail gate party. The guys—the Banazak Bunch—would think it way unique. The group had gotten media recognition for the gigantic banner 8' x 50' ("LUV YA BLACK and GOLD" edition #2) and with all the other groups vying for attention—the Franco's Army, Lombart's Lunatics, Gerala's Gorillas, Bradshaws Bombers, etcetera etcetera—we felt smug in being part of the "12th man" scenario which owners, coaches, and players alluded to in media interviews, including Chuck (Noll). Actually, I had showed off the creation at the Cobblestone Inn, our favorite Market Square hang-out, a week before the up-coming AFC championship Game, with the Houston Oilers. With some serious betters in the downtown and serious bookers alike, we had gotten fat all season long as Steelers "usually covered." The Chief, a gambling man with long time friends, - Northsiders-, of that elk also knew that point spreads were made to be covered. Shhhhh! About that deal. Too much conversation was directed toward that aspect for fans, players and sports commentators for anybody to think otherwise. After all the team was purchased for \$2,500 in a poker game—Duh!...so the story goes.

The biggest purveyor of the hype was the infamous Myron Cope. The color man for the WTAE radio, Steeler broadcast—turn down the sound—a Mon-Fri. talk show 6-8 host and the creator of the "Terrible Towel" and he was enjoying every last minute of the furious trip of the 70's.

Now the common thought for my creation was that it should be the "Terrible-ist Towel." Thusly, labeled front and back. "Hey, Lar, imagine the impact if you were to run across the field in the 'terribleist towel." The fans would go crazy. The media would eat it up. Hmmm! These were advertising PR types suggesting the caper. Additionally, it would call attention to the group and steal the lime-light from the other crazed fans from the other groups as I had mentioned before.

"Yeah, as I do the deed, whose going to bail me out of hootch-cow?" (Jail) Ha! Ha!

Being from the Northside along with the banner creator/paintor, brother Jim, it was almost expected. You know, it was the Nort'side, than there was the "outside" (Everybody else).

I thought to myself what was the worst thing that could happen? Trespassing! Lewd behavior! Duh! I could plead temporary insanity, "That Myron Cope guy just psyched me up so bad, you honor, I could not help myself"...Blah! Blah! Blah!

With nothing having happened for longer than I wanted to think about, the notoriety achieved might be worth the consequences and underneath it all, the financial aspect entered into the equation. Having been spending like a drunken sailor at the different Market Square hang-outs including the widening relationship with Jo-Mama and Dinner and drinks, the American Express card was being abused. The fact that there was no monthly payment with the card "payment in full" was the deal.

January's bill was over \$400 dollars. Run across the field for \$500—and get square. Christmas was fast approaching and the cash-flow was being jeopardized by the heat of the moment. And like most fans caught up in the hype.

I It was the modern day "Sodom and Gomora" on the shores of three rivers. As history would prove this analogy correct, people lost jobs, wives/husbands, lost houses, some lost their lives, sex drugs and rock n' roll. Everything was fair game. This maybe the last time this situation would happen. Nobody wanted to miss out on the party. The party would continue from Sept. of 1978 until December of 1980 when the Steelers were eliminated from the playoffs and the 1980 Pirates had failed to repeat as World Series Championships.

After 28 months of intense buffoonery, it all came to an end. Thank God! Not even taking into account the preceding 6 years, there had been enough casualties including myself, and sadly, my children, which weighed heavily on my mind.

By December, the job at Pgh Pathlab had provided a company car, a 4-door Subaru, and helped the financial distress when the leased Mustang became expendable. Mobility-wise! But it meant defaulting on the 2-year lease as the "re-po'd" the car. My good credit standing taking a major hit.

By mid-week before the Championship game against Houston, anticipation was running past the inferno point for everybody, "Fogging up a mirror" was all that was necessary to prove you were still alive to party. I was thinking, what did I get myself into here? Running across the field was fine in my mind, in actuality, I was apprehensive, nervous even. Scared for that matter, not knowing how the whole thing would turn out. If I got caught by security before I even got on the field, it would be embarrassing.

There was always courage in a bottle...or some other substances. That's what [talketing] was for...I guess.

The plan was to park the vehicle near "gate C" with a change of clothes, if the caper was successful, that is.

I got there (3 rivers) as the parking lot opened around 8 a.m. for the pre-planned idea. I would leave the keys under the floor-mat of the unlocked car and if I got caught and went to jail, one of the guys could remove the car before it got locked up within the parking lot, or, worse, towed for \$65.00 recovery fee at the auto pound. Been there, done that! Next, the "bunch" was scheduled to meet at the "Cobblestone" to get warmed up at 10:30 a.m.. The 8 x 50 banner had been stored each week in the basement. The gates opened at 11 a.m. and it was mandatory we (the banner hanging crew) be there first so we could hang the banner in our primary spot. It was on the second level end-zone on the river side of the stadium. It was the primary spot because any field goal or PAT, the TV cameras would pick up the sign perfectly! Those advertising guys had it all figured out. We had worked out the scenario with management (the Northside Rooneys) to enable the hanging crew to enter and leave the stadium using our game tickets. Thank you very much.

Now back to our tail-gating spot. Jimmy Ford, Bob Ford, Oakmont's pro-golfer, brother, had seats on the 40 yard line, field level. This would be the point of entry onto the field. Down 20 steps and a 3 foot pipe fence offering little impediment to my "streak." The atmosphere, adrenalin filled, consumed the stadium. Prior to the game, a local college had unraveled the largest terrible towel known to man. The fans in possession of their own terrible towels wavering frantically added to the energy. The

terrible towel on the field reached from end-zone to end-zone. Wow! What a sight it was.

The sleet and ice did little to dampen the atmosphere. This was Steeler weather. This was no temperature controlled by Astro-dome man. Footing would be at a premium and to our advantage, slowing down the Oilers running game, mainly Earl Campbell. Like our defense needed help. The weather added an element of drama to the battle.

The point spread was probably 7 or so and I had already wagered the \$500.00 financial consideration thereof before we (the banner hanging crew) left the Cobblestone Inn.

As I crouched down next to Jimmy Ford's end of the aisle seats and as the gigantic terrible towel was being rolled up, I noticed that the gate behind the end-zone was wide-open. How convenient was that? Maybe those in "power" had caught wind of the caper and wanted to make it easy on any "streaker" types. What harm would it be? Other than pumping-up the pumped up fans further. Retrospectively, it was sort of strange, in as much as 99% of the time it was closed.

The final part was when to start the craziest thing I had done, at least to this point. Oh well! What the hell!!

Make my move onto the field as the national anthem was being played and everybody, including security—especially security—was standing still and erect. The teams were already lined up. Houston receiving, defending the south-end of the stadium.

I would have to weave my way through them to reach the exit at gate C. Talk about everything being in place, and as the anthem reached, "and the home of the brave," I made my move, over the 3 foot barrier onto the field, actually not the playing field, the entry onto the field was jumping over the Oilers bench waving my terrible towel.

The end of the national anthem had brought the normal hoots, hollers, clapping, whistling, etcetera, etcetera and just as the noise was diminishing, I appeared and the roar was astonishing. I felt like a rock star taking the stage. Sixty-some thousand going nuts. By virtue of the element-of-surprise, I had successfully "done my thing" and it had taken less than 60 seconds from stands to my car outside gate C and within another 3 minutes back in the stadium to enjoy the 34-5 crushing of our LUV YA BLUE boys, and like Bum said, "the road to the Super Bowl goes through Pittsburgh." Not this year, Bum. There's always next year.

So, I enjoyed the notoriety of the media and now the plot thickened. What about the Super Bowl? Will you streak? And as we partied in Market Square, I ran into Mel Blount, and as I congratulated him on today's victory and success in Miami, he also said the terrible towel streak was neat and the players got a kick out of it. "Thanks! I just wanted to pump up the fans," I said, "Like they needed it."

"We really had a sense of the 12th man on the field working on our adrenalin," he said.

We hung out for a while, had a couple of drinks, then went our separate ways. The banner was retrieved and rested in the Cobblestone basement. Taking the banner to Miami for the showdown with Dallas was up for discussion. Serious discussion. Simply speaking, signs were banned from display at the Super Bowl games. The rule, edict, had been in existence for twelve years.

Appendix O: Ann Skolnekovich's "How To Start a Riot" Rough Draft

Then I maked [made] my 1st march from the Capital Building to the T.V. station. We sang "I will overcome," this was a song from the stricking [striking] Union's members, not a Civil Right song. We were part of the T.V. adunance [audience] that Friday Night. We were behind this thick glass window. There was another group behind this thick glass window, and we seem to be seperated by a thick steel door.

The specker [speaker] was Martin Luther King Jr. The main idea of this spech [speech] was that it was time for poor people to be give a chance to prover who they were as people and what they can do if they are given the right to learn

It was hard to set in the T.V. studeeo and [hear] what [He] Him [was] talk[ing about] because every time the cameras would shine on us, it would hurt my eyes and the heat from those camera caused everyone to sweet [sweat] instntly. I am very light senctive [sensitive] and so the light felt like it would pull my eyes out of my head. I was trying to hide from the light and pain. The second time I tried to hide from the light some one behind us though [threw] something that ~~hid~~ hit Fr. Jerry in the head. When he "Fr. Jerry turned to look around he saw me trying to look away from the coming light. Fr. Jerry told me to put on my sunglasses NOW. I got them on just as the cramera [camera] moved to view us. Because the partichens [partitions] were not sound proof we were not to talk. Fr. Jerry did not say anything until after the camera move away from us and into the other partichen. Then He ask me what I was doing. I answered, "The light hurts," some one from behind us shouted "Keep your sunglasses on, We know how bad the light hurts but if you move from the carmera it looks like you are ashamed to be seen with us" Without thinking I looked back at the group and saed [said] why would I be ashamed to be here with you? And those crameras where on us again as some one from the specker [speakers] shouted there is a fight in the autenance [audience]. Fr. Jerry turned me around just as the carmeras were moving [in closer] toward us; and no one moved or said anything. With the carmeras on us [I said] "I am okay now the pain stopped, He was jut going to help me, that's all."

When I made that statement everyone sat down. Those on the other side of our partiction [partition] were all white people who wanted to stop intergration [integration] because they believed equal but seperate was working in the south. The all white group stood up and were banging on the partiction to knok it down. These white people hated us white people who were supporting the black people.

Appendix P: Ann Skolnekovich's "How To Start a Riot": Final Version

How to start a Riot

My first march with the civil rights movement group in Atlanta was the last Friday of February, 1966. We walked from the State Capital Building in Atlanta to the local TV station. As we marched hand in hand we sang, "We Will Overcome." This was a song from the Labor Unions of the late 1880's.

There was a group of people who were not for integration on the sidewalk across from the Capital Building. This group was shouting something about taking their rights away from them. This group of white people walked to the TV station and they were going to be part of the TV audience. I guess you could say they marched because they wanted to be heard. They too wanted a voice stating their fears or concerns for the other side of the issues. They entered the TV studio from the white side of the building. This was a restless group of people with very deep emotions for what was happening socially. The old worldviews were changing and they just wanted to hold on to their belief systems. These people were fearful of losing their land and homes again. They hated us? for the losses that had happened to their great-great grandfathers because the South did not win the Civil War.

Once we were in the TV studio, we were part of the audience. There was a thick glass window separating the audience from the speakers. Also, this same type of a thick glass window was framed to form a wall, with a steel door, that separated the groups from each other. These glass partitions were not sound proof. As we entered the bleachers we were asked not to talk while the program was being aired. The sound system would pick up our conversation and it would go out over the airwaves, causing the conversation of the audience to interfere with what was being said by the speakers.

The main speaker was Martin Luther King Jr. His main idea was that poor people be given a chance to prove who they were as people. Also, to be given a chance to show what they could achieve if given the same standard quality education.

Because my eyes are very sensitive to light, it was hard for me to sit very still in the TV studio and hear what he was saying. When the cameras would shine on our section of the audience the bright lights made my eyes feel like something was pulling them out of my head. This is a medical problem that will be explored and explained later. I was moving away from the bright lights and covering my eyes to stop the pain. I did not know that covering my eyes or moving away from the cameras was negatively interpreted by both groups. In the past people who did not want to be seen in public as marchers, would hide their face from cameras.

I was not trying to hide my face from the cameras but only from the pain their lights caused me. Neither group knew I was hurting from the bright lights. Both groups thought I was trying to hide from the cameras, and these actions from a white person who was marching with Martin Luther King Jr. were enough to cause both groups to become upset

and negatively react. Most of all, neither group believed I was sincere because it looked like I was trying to hide from the cameras. By these actions I was viewed as a person who was not being honest about my feelings and beliefs that people of different ethnic groups should have equal rights.

The heat from the cameras had caused everyone to sweat instantly and incessantly. So besides being very hot, wet, and hurting from the bright lights, I also had the salt from the sweat running into my eyes. The salt from sweating made my eyes feel like they were on fire in addition to the bright lights making my eyes feel like they were being pulled out of my head. Suddenly, the lights were coming at us a second time. I was trying to hide from the lights and keep the sweat from getting into my eyes. At the same time, someone from behind us threw something very sharp that hit Fr. Jerry in the head.

As Fr. Jerry turned around to see who had thrown what had hit him, he saw me trying to look away from the lights. He was very close beside me. Therefore, as he was turning around, in a very low voice, he said, "What are you doing?"

"The light hurts my eyes and they feel like they are on fire." I said as the lights were coming closer. "Put your sunglasses on," he said, "And do it very quickly."

I got my sunglasses out of my purse and put them on just as the cameras were moving in on us. At the same time someone in the back row was saying, "See those white people down there, they ain' innerested in our needs. They just wanna preten' they care."

As that person was speaking, a very tall black Spanish-looking young man was coming down the bleachers two rows at a time. He had an angry demeanor. This caused tempers to flare on the other side of the partition as well.

The cameras seemed to be brighter while moving faster. Fr. Jerry said in a very low voice, "Pedro do not move, she is hurting."

Our side of the partition became very still. No one moved or said anything and the cameras were directly on us. With the cameras on us, I said in a whisper not so very low, "I am hurting from the lights." Because no one moved, the TV cameras moved to the other part of the studio. As the cameras were moving away, Pedro said "I want to see her with the sunglasses on."

The lights from the cameras suddenly came back toward us. I stood up, turned completely around facing Pedro and said, "I am ok now the pain is going away."

Pedro just looked at me. The cameras were coming closer; the lights were so very bright that I could not see. I was still facing the back. Someone from the top row shouted, "See, she has her sunglasses on. She is not trying to hide her face."

The TV cameras very slowly were moving away from us; At the same time someone from the back of our section said in a rather loud voice, " tell her to keep her sun glasses on, we know what it is like to hurt."

"Yes," shouted someone else, "We know how bad those bright lights can hurt. But if you move away from the cameras, it looks like you do not want to be seen with us." "Are you ashamed to be here with us?"

Without, thinking, I jumped up turned around, and shouted back to them, " Why, would I be ashamed to be with you?"

While these people were talking Fr. Jerry had asked me to turn around and sit down. I did as he has asked.

And then those bright lights and cameras were back on us. Someone from the speaker table shouted; "There seems to be a fight in the Audience." And so in a much louder voice I said; "It is ok, he was just trying to help me. That is all"

Fr. Jerry turned me around, and said, "Sit down, do not move or say anything."

Once again those bright lights were moving in on our section. There was just enough time to sit down before those cameras were on us. This time I did not move or say a word.

Since everyone on our side of the partition was quietly sitting without moving, the TV Cameras moved to the other side of the partition.


The group on the other side of the partition was standing up and moving toward the steel door which separated the two sections. Some white men had already reached the door. They were trying to break the glass. Some of the men had hammers and were trying to knock down the door. This group of people was shouting; "Those white trash who are over there hate us." The people who wanted to stop integration believed equal but separate rights were working just fine in the South.

The cameras very quickly came back to the audience and focused on those who were hammering the door. They stayed with that group for what seemed like a very long time. Because of the things they had shouted at us on the way to the studio, we knew that if that group would have broken the door or glass they would have tried to kill us. Luckily, since the cameras were spotlighting their behavior and they seemed to be all professional people, they calmed themselves and sat down. The attention returned to the speakers who were ending their presentations.

Appendix Q: Picture of the Blue Room Writing Group



Appendix R: Hazards Flyer



PITTSBURGH ARTS & LECTURES
AND PITTSBURGH FILMMAKERS
PRESENT:

THE
AMERICAN
SHORTS READING SERIES


☆☆☆☆☆☆

No. **3** POINT **5**

Hazards

THURSDAY, JULY 28, 2005
BREW HOUSE PERFORMANCE GARAGE
2100 MARY STREET/OFF CARSON STREET, SOUTHSIDE
DOORS OPEN 7:00PM, READINGS BEGIN AT 7:30PM

TERRANCE HAYES READS **JHUMPA LAHIRI'S** *WHEN MR. PRITZI CAME TO TOWN*
ROB ROGERS READS **T.C. BOYLE'S** *ALMOST SHOOTING AN ELEPHANT*
T. FOLEY WILL SCREEN HER FILM *HAZARDOUS MATERIALS* AND WILL BE TALKING WITH US TO
DISCUSS THE FILM, ANSWER QUESTIONS, AND INTRODUCE US TO HER ACTION



Appendix S: Article about Verne's Reading

"They nagged me about it. I said, 'I only did it verbally,' and they said, 'Well, sit down and write it.'"

Verne Triscila, author, on how her children got her to write "Joel and the Magic Toy Tree"



JOHN PATSCH/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Author Verne Triscila and illustrator Joan Caton talk with Pat Gillian at the "wearing of the green" tea at the Gourmet Junction in Plainfield last month.

Novel approach

Kids press mom to pen favorite story

By Dawn Aulet
STAFF WRITER

When Verne Triscila and Joan Caton talk, they finish one another's sentences. Like an old married couple, the mother-daughter team shares more than just genes and memories. They are business partners.

Verne, of Plainfield, has been a storyteller all her life. When her oldest son, Bill, was a child, he had an episode where he was, as she said, not lying but not telling the truth either.

"He did not want to lie because I taught him not to, but he was skirting the truth," Verne said.

She thought she could get through to him better with a story, rather than by punishing him, so she told him the story of "Joel and the Magic Toy Tree."

For generations, that story, about a boy who has to behave well in order to choose a toy from the magic toy tree, was a verbal tradition. But, Verne said, her children—Bill, Joan and James—have been pressuring her for years to write down the story.

"They nagged me about it. I said, 'I only

FYI

Verne Triscila and Joan Caton will be at Plainfield Library, 705 N. Illinois St., at 2 p.m. on April 22 to read "Joel and the Magic Toy Tree" during a special storytime.

The book is available at Gourmet Junction, 505 W. Lockport St., or visit www.kulu.com and type in the title or author's name.

did it verbally," and they said, "Well, sit down and write it," she said.

It was not until she joined a writing group, however, that she more seriously considered writing the story.

A doctoral student in her writing group suggested that Verne not only pen the book, but that she self-publish.

Verne took heed, and the project also became a family affair. Joan served as the illustrator for "Joel and the Magic Toy Tree," and one of Joan's daughters-in-law did the layout.

Though the characters in the books are not based on any family member, the main character's name is a derivative of someone in the family—but not Joel.

"I was having him do nasty things that my

son did not do," Verne said.

Every story in the TrisCat series planned by Verne has a lesson attached to it, including perseverance and learning to save and value what you have.

While everyone in the family remembers hearing the story about the magic toy tree, Verne's next book, "Ben's Gift," was written under more extreme circumstances than a misbehaving child.

In 1997, Verne thought her stories would have to live on in her children. She was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. When the cancer spread to her liver last August, she was given a couple of months to live. Despite treatments, the cancer spread. While she was undergoing a liver embolization, she and Joan brainstormed "Ben's Gift," which is about accepting differences.

"We laughed, we had so much fun I forgot about my operation," she said.

The book should be available in the next few months.

Joan admits that her mother's illness put her on the fast track to get the first book published.

"This was to be my Christmas gift to mom," Joan said. "So she could autograph the first 50 copies that were printed."

As Joan speaks, Verne leans over and whispers in my ear, "before I died."