



Writing Toward Healing

If someone you love has died, I have a recommendation for you: take a writing workshop. Not just any writing workshop. Take one of the three I'll be offering Saturday mornings this fall at the Hospice and Palliative CareCenter of Winston-Salem (September 21, October 26 and November 9, 9:30–noon). Better yet, take all three.

Thanks to support from Project Compassion and The Inavale Foundation, these "Writing Toward Healing" workshops are free and open to anyone in the community who is suffering the loss of a loved one—a spouse, child, friend, co-worker, partner, even a pet.

You might be wondering: What would a writing workshop do for me? I'm not a writer. I don't even like to write. And I'm in too much pain.

You don't have to consider yourself a writer. As I always say, if you can talk, you can write. Just talk to yourself on the page. You'll be surprised what happens when you give yourself the opportunity to explore your deepest feelings in a safe environment.

Last fall, I offered two workshops at the Hospice and Palliative Care Center. A bereaved mother, Janet Foster Lewis, whose son had died two years earlier, was skeptical about attending, but made herself show up. Here's what she said later: "I never knew writing would bring out so many feelings that I had no idea were even there. Feelings that seemed to be stuck in my heart, my chest, my throat."

And, actually, releasing these feelings through writing is good for us. Research shows that writing about deep and, yes, painful life experiences lowers our blood pressure and pulse rate. Our bodies produce more helpful T-cells, boosting our immunity.

In the workshops, we gently probe, reflect, remember, and reconsider; we honor our loved ones, re-imagine our lives now, and discover inner resources we had no idea were within us. We also make connections we wouldn't otherwise make.

We often discover healing shifts in perspective. As the writer, Lee Smith, who lost a grown son, wrote, "Simply to line up words one after another upon a page is to create some order where it did not exist, to give a recognizable shape to the sadness and chaos of our lives."

Often we're so busy and sometimes so scared that we don't give ourselves time to reflect. One aspect of the writing workshops I really like (and I always write with the group) is that we turn inward and go deep to write, yet we are not alone. Others all around us are writing, too. But unlike in a talking group, we don't have to share, to interact with others, unless we choose to.

Janet, from last year's workshop, continues: "I was allowed to just be there for me, not having to worry about taking care of anyone else. I never do that and didn't even know I could."

Sometimes people worry they won't have anything to say. I've been offering these workshops for fifteen years and everyone has always

written, plenty. And I send people home with lots of accessible ways to keep writing.

I am passionate about the restorative value of writing,

because I've experienced it. After my first child died in open-heart surgery, I wrote a memoir, *Losing Malcolm: A Mother's Journey Through Grief*. When I gave readings, desperate people approached me afterwards, telling me their unbearable stories and asking me for help. All I could say to them is what I tell myself: "Write."

Author Flannery O'Connor wrote that if you share your writing, your words might save somebody's life and, if you don't share, your words will still have an impact on somebody: you. The life you save might be your own.

Writing has saved my life.

Janet said, in closing: "I left the workshop feeling drained, but lightened. I was actually smiling for the first time truly in over two years. I know that I still have many hard days ahead, but feel I now have a new tool, writing, to help me begin to work through my aching grief."

Each of the three workshops will be different. I encourage you to come to any or all of them. I hope to see you.

Registration is required. To register, call 336-768-6157, ext. 1600.



Carol Henderson is a writer, teacher, and workshop leader whose first book, *Losing Malcolm: A Mother's Journey Through Grief*, 2001, was named a "must-read" summer memoir by USA Today. She has published widely in magazines and newspapers in the US and Canada, and edited a number of memoirs and essay collections. She offers writing workshops in medical centers, faith communities and universities across the US and abroad. Her new book, *Farther Along: The Writing Journey of Thirteen Bereaved Mothers*, was published in July 2012.

For more information, please visit Carol's website, www.carolhenderson.com.

