

## Remnants of Spiral Notebooks by Elizebett (Liz) Eslinger

An introduction to Write Around Portland's 50<sup>th</sup> anthology,  
*Draw the Outside*, Spring 2016

Elizebett (Liz) Eslinger is executive director of Write Around Portland and has been on staff since 2012. A child of Portuguese immigrants and a first-generation college graduate, Liz earned her Master's in nonprofit management and has ten years of experience in the nonprofit sector. Of all her responsibilities at Write Around Portland, she most enjoys facilitating writing workshops for young people, English language learners and adults with disabilities.



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The summer before sixth grade, when other families were buying their first home computers, my mom came home with a heavy, manual typewriter. She had purchased it from a thrift store in our small town where I was embarrassed to go for fear others would assume we couldn't afford to shop anywhere else. The typewriter was baby blue, and it came with a matching plastic carrying case that awkwardly snapped on and off. Its ink ribbon was almost dry, and only my index fingers were strong enough to punch the clacky keys, two of which couldn't quite hit the ribbon no matter how hard I typed.

I adored it anyway.

I spent many summer days in front of that typewriter, slapping stories onto leftover loose leaf paper. Once the loose leaf ran out, I tore out the remnants of spiral notebooks, cut off the fringe, and rolled those sheets into the feeder. This hideous, ill-functioning and ill-equipped piece of equipment took in my stories and gave them life.

I didn't know it then, but that was probably the first time I thought my voice had value. Having a medium to press ink into paper, let me see my words printed differently, and I started to believe I had something to say that was worth hearing.

Too many voices are whispered or unheard in this world, and too often we need to listen. Write Around Portland offers places and spaces for all of us to share and hear our stories. Workshop participants gather in rooms throughout Portland and beyond to write together. Often there's a table, but sometimes there are desks in a circle or one's own lap to hold a journal. Words are written and shared—sometimes with the help of a scribe—and everyone is celebrated for the gifts in their writing and the risks they take sharing them.

Paper and pen, text-to-speech technology, a used baby blue typewriter: there is no one way to write. There is no right way to put words on paper or to share the stories that are ours. Write Around Portland brings writing in community to everyone, without limitation, because we all have stories to tell that we all benefit from hearing.

Right now, you are holding Write Around Portland's 50th anthology, which contains the stories of adults and youth who participated in writing workshops in the spring of 2016. This anthology is also a testament to what has come before, the impact of Write Around Portland's work, and everyone who has helped make this book, the last 49, and the next 50, possible.

So please, read on. Listen and hold space for the words to come.

## Metaphor of the Key by Joanne B. Mulcahy

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Joanne B. Mulcahy teaches creative nonfiction at Lewis and Clark College and with community groups that celebrate stories in prisons, libraries and other settings. Her essays appear in journals and anthologies that include *The Stories that Shape Us: Contemporary Women Write About the West* and *These United States*. She is the author of *Birth and Rebirth on an Alaskan Island*, *Remedios: The Healing Life of Eva Castellanoz* and *The Writer Abroad: A Companion for Writing Across Cultures* (with Peter Chilson, forthcoming).



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Over twenty years ago, I worked with women writers in Northern Ireland to create a gathering where Catholics and Protestants, long divided by the thirty-year Troubles, could share stories. To announce the event, we sent out brochures bearing Muriel Rukeyser's words, *What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split apart*. That spring, at the Rural College in the heathered hills of Draperstown, women related a mix of tales—some joyful but many wrought by personal and political violence. One participant, Rosemary, had come to my earlier workshop in Derry. Though she attended weekly sessions, she resisted writing for fear of the emotions it might unleash. Yet to my surprise, she came to Draperstown. She joined a workshop with storyteller Liz Gough, who offered each person a key, with directions to narrate through the locked doors in their lives. I experienced the session only through Rosemary's excited words in the hallway afterwards, when she grabbed my arm and whispered, *I cried!* but more powerfully, *I wrote!*

I've carried Rosemary's story and the metaphor of the key through many workshops and in varied settings. At Lewis and Clark College's Northwest Writing Institute (NWI), with help from the Rene Bloch Foundation, writers from the Write Around Portland community have often joined the workshops. In every case, their voices added dimension and depth to the group's story. A shimmer of faith, trust and belief in the power of the word shapes the Write Around Portland experience, as does a generous spirit of response. One year, a young woman who joined my class, *The Healing Power of Story*, offered a metaphor to stand alongside the key. *We write*, she said, *to create a mirror whose clarity refutes the distorted reflections society sometimes displays*. In this spring's Write Around Portland workshops, participants include middle school students, domestic violence survivors, incarcerated men and women, seniors in assisted living—a vast range of writers holding up mirrors to one another. These images shine with the potency and uniqueness of each individual story. Together they deepen our shared humanity, as did the writing of the Irish women who came together at Draperstown. For while Rosemary's transformation was individual, it happened with the collective renewal of the peace process that swept Northern Ireland. New writing groups formed from that gathering, a spirit of connection that continued and grew.

Our stories accrue meaning through time, from being collected, retold and reread. Yet too often, publication is driven by commerce and longing for fame and a false sense of which stories matter. Such measures are fickle in timing and endurance, while the power of stories shared in community, the unlocking that happens with that turned key, the clear light of a new reflection—these persevere. This anthology extends the life of stories created in Write Around Portland workshops, for a broader world to savor for their wisdom and courage. Each realizes Muriel Rukeyser's words—a truth told, the world split apart.