

Michael Brunner, 63, has overcome hurdles in his life. He has experienced homelessness, battled depression, and struggled in his marriage. Talking to Michael, you'd never know it. He laughs animatedly and his smile reaches his eyes when he talks about things he loves: photography, '65 Mustangs, Eminem, and, of course, writing.

What sparked your interest in writing?

I took an art class in 1980 or so and one of our projects was to keep a journal. I started writing and I kind of developed a taste for it and getting in touch with my feelings. From there it kind of evolved. People say, "Everyone has a story to tell." I haven't quite figured out what my story is yet, but I like writing and I think I have something to say.

What drew you to Write Around Portland?

A few years ago I was homeless and not doing very well, so I sought help through Transitional Projects Incorporated, an organization that helps homeless people. They helped me get back on my feet. They've been very influential to me, so I volunteered to help out, kind of as pay back. One of the case workers told me about Write Around Portland and asked if I'd be interested in it. Of course I was, and I took the class and loved it.

What kind of things did you write about in the class?

Our facilitator gave us prompts, and we could write about anything we wanted. We'd only write for like a minute or two, which really got me inspired because she'd give us a word like "cold" and then I'd have to go through my mind and think about what it represented, write it down, and make sense of it. You didn't have to read it, but I'm just that kind of person; I'm going to read what I wrote. I wrote it and it's for me. It may be nonsensical, but I'm still going to read it.

How did the workshops enrich your life?

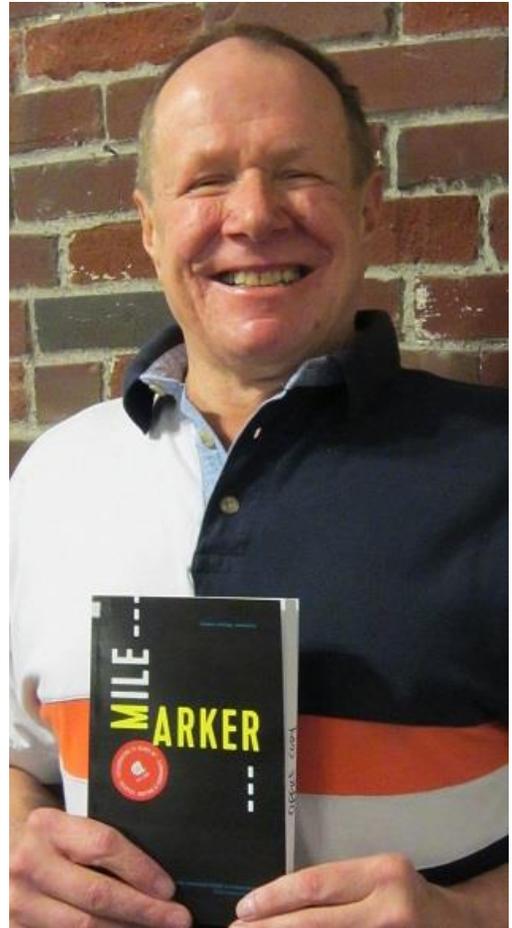
They gave me a sense of community. We all kind of came from the same background and most people were down on their luck. We all have stories and I think a lot of that stuff is healing. It also helped my self-confidence because the more I wrote the more I explored parts of myself.

Do you think that confidence will go with you throughout your life?

Yes. Definitely.

What's your favorite genre of writing?

My favorite genre is poetry. I've been trying to write poetry and things that touch the heart. It's like music. I plan to write things that are uplifting.



Can you talk a little bit about your piece, “A Long Journey to Go”, that was published in the Write Around Portland anthology? What inspired it?

The piece I wrote came from my heart. The long, long journey part is something that is part of me. It has been a long journey. I was married for 30 years, and I wasn't really happy. Finally, I came to the conclusion that happiness is what counts to me and being confident. Not having confidence is something I've had for a long time. So the piece I wrote came from that kind of feeling; I have a long, long way to go and I have a long way from where I came from. I went through some hell and I'm glad that I went through it, which is hard to believe for most people. But I had to do some life changing, and what I went through helped to improve my view of life and myself so that I don't want to be where I have been; I want to move on. That's kind of what the story was about.

How'd you feel about your poem being published in the anthology?

That was cool! That was a feather in my cap. I'd never dreamt about that before.

Would you recommend Write Around Portland to anyone?

Yes, I would, definitely. It helps people develop confidence. It's like doing artwork; bringing it out of people sometimes is the hardest because people are reluctant like, "It's something I haven't done before and I don't think I can be a good writer." But bringing people out of their shells and expressing themselves, everyone can write. It doesn't matter if you don't know how to spell. There are a lot of things that we keep hidden and buried. Bringing those emotions out is important.