

Mary Weitzel, 58, has lived in Portland for nearly 50 years. Though originally from Mississippi, Mary loves Portland's rainy weather and abundance of arts activities. In her spare time, Mary enjoys knitting hats for her loved ones; watching movies; talking on the phone to friends; and visiting with her mother, sister, and brothers who all also live in town. In fall 2014, Mary participated in a Write Around Portland workshop at Home Forward's Unthank Plaza where she had the opportunity to write with old friends and make some new ones. Mary stopped by the Write Around Portland office to share her experience in the workshop.

Can you describe the first few sessions of your workshop, how it felt, and how you got into a writing routine?

Well, at first I got a little irritated; but in my mind, I could be quiet, then I could start writing and I would keep writing, and then I loved it.

What did you love about the workshop experience?

It's fun. You meet friends. It just keeps your mind occupied. I like to sit around with people and talk.

Did your writing help you start to focus on other things in your life?

Yes...I said ok, well what do I write, what do I write? And I started writing about my friends I met there [at Unthank].

What other subjects did you write about?

I was trying to write about when I came to Portland [in the mid-60s]. I didn't have the chance to work on it, but I still have it in my mind, and I might put it in the next book.

After the workshop, do you see writing as something that will remain constant in your life?

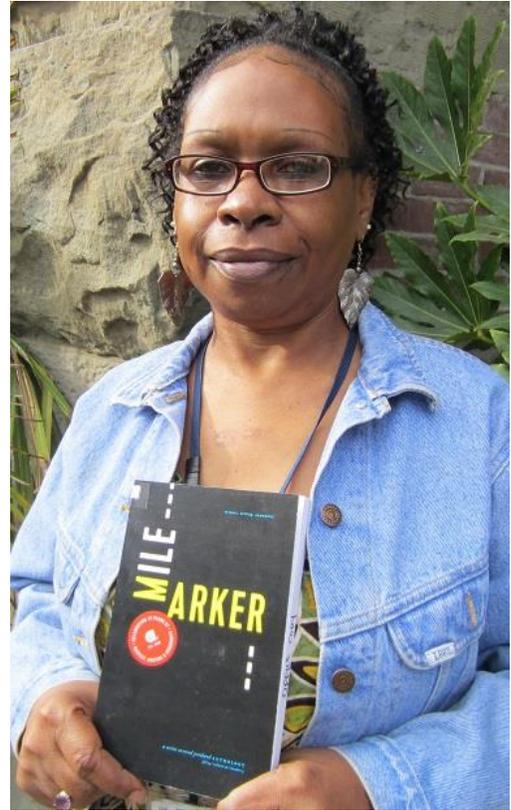
Yeah, I heard they might end up doing another [workshop at my building], so now I have to sit down and see what I am going to write about again!

Tell me about, "My Best Friends", your piece which was published in our anthology, *Mile Marker*.

I met all of my friends here [at Unthank]. Sometimes if I need to talk, we'll all talk about things. They help you if you need to have somebody spell a word you get stuck on. It's no problem because if you can't spell it doesn't matter.

So was this piece your way of paying homage to them?

Yes, and they liked it!



How did it feel to see your writing in the book?

I was so happy. I didn't know that I could write in a book that people made and put in all the bookstores around town. I'm so happy. I'm so pleased that I did it.

Would you recommend Write Around Portland workshops to others?

Yeah! I would say if you feel like you would like to join the class, you're welcome. Just come down and sit and see if you like it or not.

Why don't we talk about the reading; how was it sharing your piece for an audience?

I got my hopes up for the reading, and I said "I gotta do it!" But it felt like the way I sounded it didn't come out right, but my friends said, "Mary! I like that!"

Do you think after the workshop and the reading that you have more self-confidence?

Yes. [At the reading], I said "OK, it's my turn now." So I went up, and I started reading and I just said "OK, keep going!" So, I loved it.