

If your morning includes a trip to the Pearl Bakery in Northwest Portland, you'll probably see Lori L. Lematta, 51, outside selling Street Roots, which she does six days a week. She's been a Street Roots vendor for about a year, and her customers are the best part of her job.

As she describes it, "I get to know them as humans. I'm there on a regular basis and just them opening up to me about their lives, is wonderful."

Lori, who grew up in Vancouver, has lived many places but has made Portland her home for for the past six years. Her dachshund, Susie, is a service animal, but Lori doesn't need Susie's help like she used to. Most days, when Lori goes to work, Susie can stay home and nap.

When she's not working, Lori is an active volunteer. She's completing an internship at Central City Concern's Old Town Recovery Center, and she facilitates four art groups in the community.

"In what time I have left, late at night, I work on my own art and writing projects," says Lori.

She enjoyed writing essays in school, and she started trying creative writing in 1988, when she was working in the music business. Long lunch hours allowed her to make writing in her notebook at a nearby restaurant a daily habit. Lori participated in our spring 2015 workshop in partnership with Street Roots.

What do you get out of writing? Why do you do it?

I get answers about what's in my head. It's a lot different from what's rolling in my head to what comes out on paper. It does make me feel accomplished. I've stopped hoarding my art and writing work. When I let that go, I feel like I have a gift for people. Because I know when I read or see other people's art, I get a lot out of it, so I want to be able to share.

We did a lot of sharing in the workshop. You shared your writing, and you shared your thoughts about other people's writing. Tell me about your experience with that.

Well, I have to say it was the best workshop I've ever been to; it's not just the prompts. It can't be just the prompts because you just got a lot out of me that I didn't know I had, a lot of creativity in me. Sharing gave me sort of a sense of responsibility to get stuff on paper, because I knew that inside me I had to share, or I *wanted* to share.

Can you say more about how the workshop helped you tap deeper into your creativity?

I have a problem that my psychiatrist is trying to help me with. I have music looping in my head all the time, absolutely nonstop. I can't express myself clearly anymore, because I can't think right. Having to sit down and write and having people around me distracted that music,



and it had to go into the background. I was able to utilize all the vocabulary that I grew up learning in a different way, and I liked that.

What was it like to hear other people's writing?

That was my favorite part. You don't really know a person until they express themselves creatively. Until they do that, you don't really know who that person is. It was like flowers blooming. [I] was, I don't like to use the word "surprised" because I know that people have so much in them, but [I saw] so much talent. Everybody has something unique to say, to express.

Did being in the workshop change how you relate to the other people in the group?

It's sort of a gratitude thing. I'm just thankful that they opened up. It's not easy to do, and I just feel like we have sort of a kinship. We never need to say a word, we just have to look at each other, and it's like "I have an understanding about you." It's kind of an emotional support.

What was it like when you got up in front of the crowd and read at the anthology release party?

It was fun for me. In school I was a dancer, and I liked performing. In LA I had a theater company, so I've always liked the stage. I mostly liked hearing other people's work. It felt comfortable for me to get up in front of people again, actually.

Would you recommend Write Around Portland to other people?

Absolutely! I facilitate art journaling at the [Central City Concern] Old Town Clinic, and another facilitator and I want to get Write Around into the Old Town Clinic Recovery Center. I want the clients to have that there, and I recommend it *anywhere*. I want to take it again — in big bold letters!

Anything you want to tell your readers about your writing?

I'm doing it from my heart, my wounded heart. At my age, there's no time to be anything but sincere. It may sound corny, but I hope that people can relate.