

Rebecca Tayvies is a mother of four who originally lived in Alabama. When she was sixteen years old, Rebecca marched with civil rights activists in one of the historic marches from Selma to Montgomery. For thirty years, Rebecca worked as a caregiver for adults living with mental disabilities and retired in 2006. Now, she spends a great deal of time with her grandkids and her great grandkids. She is currently writing on her memoir and knitting; she says that her big hobby is Netflix. Rebecca participated in a workshop at Home Forward: Ruth Haefner Plaza. The title of our summer anthology, *Paper in My Shoes*, comes from Rebecca's piece "Story of a Single Parent."



Rebecca (right) with her daughter.

The title of our most recent book comes from your piece, "Story of a Single Parent." What is that piece about?

Well, I was born in Selma, Alabama. When I was in middle school, there were a lot of teenage kids starting to help MLK with the march. I kept thinking, "Would I be able to make it? Cause my shoes had some holes in them." I had one pair of shoes per year (each June) and my mother worked in New York. My boyfriend at the time had the same kind of shoes. Everybody had a good amount of cardboard and paper in their shoes on that walk. Having those kind of shoes will make you have a real complex about shoes.

After the first march, I was taken to New York because there was some fear among the adults that something was going to happen, you know. We had some trouble with the KKK back then. They were just beginning to desegregate schools in New York, I was one of two black kids in an all-white school. I had to keep a B average if I wanted to stay in, they said, and I had to work for it because I wasn't able to go to school back in Alabama for three months of the year, because my Grandma had asthma — March, April, May, I wasn't able to go to school in Alabama during those months. Eventually I came back to Alabama, this time in Montgomery. I was in Alabama during the march to Montgomery, and my future husband walked in that one, although I didn't.

In the workshop, I was writing as a single parent, what I had to get through to be there. I felt like I was living out of a trunk, you know, traveling all the time. I always had a secret trunk packed. When Obama became president, I said well now I've got to go unpack this secret trunk, because I've got somewhere to stay now.

I never thought my story would have made it into a book like that; I wrote it fast and hard. I never talked to anybody about this all until lately.

How was your relationship with writing before the workshop? After the workshop?

[The workshop] gave me the chance to get some more things out of me. Writing a piece and reading it were two different things, and thinking about [the past] fifty years has made me think that maybe I have the stuff to write a memoir.

I was burying quite a bit in my body, you know, living down South. You see two water fountains (segregated). You couldn't go to a restaurant unless it had C-O-L-O-R-E-D. in the window. I only rode the bus twice.

Now, each time I get stressed out, I write or read in my journal. Instead of eating the wrong things, I go to my journal and write down my feelings and that helps with the stress.

What was your favorite part of the workshop?

Getting to know [the facilitator] after she did the workshop. She's a really pleasant person; she's the kind of person that you can really open yourself up to. At the end of the class, she had us write down some things that we wanted to be prompts, then she took them home and typed them up and brought back flashcards of them. I thought, oh Lord, flashcards! But they were our own prompts for us to keep writing.

What would you say you got out of the Write Around Portland workshop?

I remember coming home from school and seeing my grandma crying because they wouldn't let her vote because she couldn't pass the white people's test. Write Around Portland gave me the chance to open up about all this stuff — my daughter will tell you, I don't usually talk about it at home. My grandkids ask about it now because it's part of history now. It's been a rough road for me, and Write Around Portland really helped get it out of me.

What surprised you about the workshop?

That really blew my mind, my work getting published and making the front page of the book. I couldn't make it to the reading but I was going to have my daughter go up and read it for me. Taking this class was really exciting for me. They do give you a chance to express yourself. It makes you bring a lot out of you, it really does.

I had to come [to this interview] because I really respect [the facilitator of my workshop]. She's a wonderful teacher. She has that finesse, showing you that she can be confidential when you need her to be. She wrote us the cards so personally, we felt that we could take her into our confidence. I kept all the cards that she sent weekly, as a pleasant memory on the class I took.

Is there anything you would like to tell your readers?

If they're in a position to take that [workshop], they should. If you have problems with self-esteem or with creativity or whatever, it can show you what you can give yourself, and the prompts can help you be more creative. Everybody has a story that they want to write, and Write Around Portland gives you the opportunity to do that. That journal helped me bring myself out.