

Featured Writer Interview with Verna Mae Glass by __, March 2013 Newsletter

Verna Mae Glass, 56, was born and raised in Portland. She has worked as a housekeeper and with hospice patients, has taken care of her brother and sister in nursing homes, and she survived cancer.

She writes, makes art and enjoys decorating her home to make it a happy place for both adults and children. Her extended family includes 15 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren: "Life never stops when there's 15 of them!" Verna says, laughing.

She participated in Write Around Portland workshops at the Southeast Multicultural Center for adults and seniors living on low incomes and/or with disabilities.

Verna lost her son, daughter-in-law, and a granddaughter in late 2009. A few weeks later, her husband of twenty years was deported.



How did you first hear about Write Around?

My daughter had attended a Write Around Portland workshop. When I lost my son, I went into a lot of depression, and she came in and said: "Mama, you need to find something to do." And they had a workshop that was coming up, so I picked up the phone and called to see if I could be a part of it.

I was so glad that they said yes. It gave me motivation to get up and just get out. And so I attended, and it was really the effort that I put in, by getting myself dressed, getting myself to the bus stop, getting myself to a place where there were people that could relate to me. I didn't feel as if I was the only one who was going through some type of suffering.

What was it like to write with the other participants in the workshop?

When I first started writing, it was a challenge for me. I had kind of given up on life, and for me, it was the restart. It was the beginning of living again. It was a healing process, it was something that I took very seriously. I needed to come out of my shell, and I needed to put my feelings into words, and put it on paper. And so I really was grateful that Write Around Portland was there for me. It allowed me to grow.

What were the workshops like?

They were a place to connect with people you see on the street every day and you don't know their ability to help you—to help you get through some things—just by using words and just by writing.

What was it like to write and share with other people and to hear their stories?

Sometimes you look at other people, and personally, you judge them, and you shouldn't, because they can give you the greatest gift that you need in spite of how they look and how they're afflicted.

I learned that very much in Write Around Portland: I had to give other people the chance to speak their own words to me and understand what they were saying. They were wonderful people.

When they share things—sometimes they share some really weird stuff! It doesn't make me afraid, though: it makes me think. They're from this world, but they have a strong imagination or they see different things.

How did you feel about being published in the anthology?

It was an honor. It was an honor to me. It was an honor to my family to see that I had sat down and accomplished something. That's a pretty powerful thing to put your name down in a book and for somebody else to be able to pick up and see that you are the one that wrote it.

Can you tell me a little about the piece you wrote called *Aunt Lorene's Birthday*?

I wrote about my Aunt Lorene in my last write [in spring 2010], and it was published in the book "The Top". When she passed away April 9, 2012, I was so filled up with grief I needed to find and have the words to express myself again.

The greatest thing that I could have was that page in a book, to share at her funeral. It allowed me to have it ready, to express what I wanted to say to my family, and not be so much at a loss for words, and I really want to thank Write Around Portland for that opportunity because sometimes you look back, and it's not the moment, but the moment comes later—and your writing is right on time.

Have you continued to write, outside the workshops?

My journal got filled up long before my group was over! Because I went and sat down every day and did my own write outside of the group.

Would you recommend Write Around Portland to other people?

I need others to recognize Write Around Portland, how importantly it could change their lives. I've been through a lot of things in my life, but I've never really taken the time to sit down and put them in words.

When you get into Write Around Portland, it's like you pick up the pieces. You pick up one little piece of something and you start to write about it. And you start to build the pieces into words—and meaning.

It was something that I wanted to pull from myself, but it was drawn through others. I couldn't do it by myself. I had the support of the whole group around me—sharing words, sharing stories, sharing their writing, and it always touches my heart.