

4-28-2005

# Writing from the Inside Out: Connecting Self and Community in the First-Year Writing Classroom

Amy Leigh Hodges Hamilton  
*Florida State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/etd>

---

## Recommended Citation

Hodges Hamilton, Amy Leigh, "Writing from the Inside Out: Connecting Self and Community in the First-Year Writing Classroom" (2005). *Electronic Theses, Treatises and Dissertations*. Paper 4002.

This Dissertation - Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the The Graduate School at DigiNole Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses, Treatises and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigiNole Commons. For more information, please contact [lib-ir@fsu.edu](mailto:lib-ir@fsu.edu).

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

WRITING FROM THE INSIDE OUT: CONNECTING SELF  
AND COMMUNITY IN THE FIRST-YEAR WRITING CLASSROOM

By

AMY HODGES HAMILTON

A Dissertation submitted to the  
Department of English  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Degree Awarded:  
Summer Semester, 2005

The members of the Committee approve the Dissertation of Amy Hodges Hamilton defended on April 28, 2005.

---

Wendy Bishop  
Professor Directing Dissertation (Deceased)

---

Deborah Coxwell Teague  
Professor Directing Dissertation

---

Nicholas Mazza  
Outside Committee Member

---

Lad Tobin  
Outside Committee Member

---

Bruce Bickley  
Committee Member

---

Anne Rowe  
Committee Member

Approved:

---

Hunt Hawkins, Chair, Department of English

---

Donald Foss, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

The Office of Graduate Studies has verified and approved the above named committee members.

For Wendy, my constant light  
And for my family, my constant support

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are countless people to thank because this project is a result of all of the guidance I have received in both my personal and scholarly life. So, I thank all of the people who taught me:

I appreciate my family's constant love and support. Mama, Daddy, Pam, and Jen, thank you for teaching me compassion and openness, the heart of this project. And to Dad, my first teacher on the subject of life, loss, and experience, thank you for constantly reminding me of why my education and this focus is so important—to help people.

Thank you to my scholarly mentors and friends—Karen, Susan, Meg, Laura, and Kristi. Your words and ideas inspire me.

Thank you to my students, all of you, for what you have taught me about the art of teaching. Thank you for sharing your lives and writing—your words are the center of all my scholarship.

Thank you to my committee members for providing such a rich educational experience—Dr. Rowe, you showed me how to lead with grace; Dr. Bickley, through your teaching, you taught me to never lose my passion for students and the classroom; Dr. Mazza, you helped validate the psychology component of this project and you and your work have convinced me of the power of writing and healing in my own life; Lad, thank you for helping me keep Wendy's teaching alive through our dialogue and your support; Deborah, thank you for sharing with me the power of writing program administration, teaching, and pedagogy. I knew from the first day I walked into your classroom that I wanted to emulate your teaching style. The truth is I underestimated the power you and your teaching would have on my life. You are my inspiration.

And to Wendy who is still teaching. I love and miss you.

Finally, thank you Forest, for always believing in this project and in me, even when the days were dark after Wendy's death. You are the reason for this dissertation, and I don't know how I got so lucky to have you and all the joy you have brought to my life. You have taught me how to love unconditionally and for that I thank you.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
ABSTRACT .....	ix
1. THEORY TO RESEARCH METHODS: AN INTRODUCTION TO A WRITING AND HEALING PEDAGOGY .....	1
2. LIFE, LOSS, AND EXPERIENCE COMPOSED IN A FIRST-YEAR WRITING CLASSROOM: A CLASSROOM PORTRAIT.....	23
3. A CLOSER LOOK INTO OUR CLASSROOM.....	30
4. LOOKING BACK AND MOVING FORWARD .....	50
5. BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF WRITERS: THE DISSERTATION- STUDY COURSE .....	66
6. LOOKING IN AGAIN: FIVE DISSERTATION-STUDY VIGNETTES ...	92
7. TEACHER AS RESEARCHER AND LEARNER: TRAVELING ON IN COMPANY .....	116
8. REMEMBERING WENDY BISHOP: A TEACHING LIFE.....	134
9. MAKING AN ARGUMENT FOR A <i>PEDAGOGY OF TRAUMA</i> .....	147
APPENDICES .....	154
A ENC 1145 COURSE PROPOSAL.....	154
B HUMAN SUBJECTS APPLICATION.....	155
C ENC 1145 COURSE SYLLABUS .....	157

D OPENING QUESTIONNAIRE.....	161
E CLOSING QUESTIONNAIRE.....	162
F STUDENT ANALYSIS CHART.....	163
G ENC 1145 POST-SEMESTER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	164
H SPRING 2005 ENC 1145 POST-SEMESTER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....	165
I COMPLETE OPENING QUESTIONNAIRE .....	166
J LOSS ESSAY PEER WORKSHOP GUIDE.....	175
K COMPLETE CLOSING QUESTIONNAIRE .....	176
L COURSE EVALUATION REPORT .....	186
REFERENCES .....	189
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH .....	192

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. Photograph of Dissertation-Study Students .....	72
2. Lauren's Collages .....	76



## LIST OF TABLES

1. Life Essay Topics Chart.....	75
2. Life Essay Student Analysis Chart.....	75
3. Loss Essay Topics Chart.....	77
4. Loss Essay Student Analysis Chart .....	78
5. Experience Essay Topics Chart.....	80
6. Experience Essay Student Analysis Chart .....	81
7. Radical Revision Topics Chart.....	83

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores questions about how writing about life, loss, and experience leads to growth in students as both writers and thinkers. Through a qualitative teacher research study, I examine how a writing pedagogy focused on the interface between writing and psychology influences students' growth as writers, critical thinkers, and active participants in their communities. As a result of this study, I propose a writing and healing pedagogical framework which seeks to bridge the divide between pedagogical approaches that separate personal and academic writing.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Theory to Research Methods: An Introduction to a Writing and Healing Pedagogy**

I have read countless essays from students who have chosen to write about personal issues of life, loss, and experience. Since my first semester as a writing teacher, I have noticed the importance of listening to students, their words, and their stories. In one student's process narrative, she explained her decision to write about being raped by her stepfather as a way to continue living: "I chose to write about this because I want to survive." Students' stories of trauma and loss appear every semester in my writing classrooms, but *why*? Why do students choose to write about their lives, their losses? My students' stories moved me to ask questions about the effects of writing and healing. This research project poses questions about how writing about life, loss, and experience leads to growth in students as both writers and thinkers. According to Donald Murray (1994), understanding and sharing experience moves student-writers from passive suffering to active participation in healing.

I clearly remember reading my first essay on the subject of loss—it was my first semester as a college-level writing teacher, and Bill was the last student to turn in a narrative essay. He was two weeks behind, and I was concerned with how I might respond to my first "late" paper. By the time I sat down to read Bill's essay, it was getting late, and I was ready move on to another task. As I began to read his opening, however, I noticed the grief Bill narrated in his essay. I stopped rushing and began to read his essay slowly; as I read, I shared his trauma. Bill wrote:

Cursing my father and life in general, I didn't notice Jewels standing on the roof watching me...Whirling around, I directed my anger at her and yelled for her to get off of the roof and go back inside. As I stepped toward her, she involuntarily stepped back into an empty space. Those blue eyes widened in surprise as I dashed forward, hand out stretched, but it was too late. When I finally rushed down the ladder, she lay motionless on the ground. I held her in my arms and rocked her just like I had when she was a little girl, humming that song she liked so well, until those blue eyes closed one last time. I try not to blame myself for

my sister's death, but not a day goes by that I don't ask—what if I had held my temper in check? (Bill, college freshman, 1999; used with permission)

I wanted to encourage Bill to continue writing, but I was unable to formulate the right words of response. I was trained to discourage too much *emotion* in my students' writing, but I felt the depth of his *emotional* experience. I could tell Bill was struggling to make meaning over an event in his life that had engulfed him. I will never forget reading Bill's story of loss—that semester Bill wrote out of his own experience in a full portfolio, and his own experience held tremendous power. After that course, I began to design a pedagogy based on personal experience writing, and that pedagogy is the focus of this study.

### **Background: Theory and Debate**

In ancient Greece and Rome, scholar-teachers such as Quintilian and Cicero taught students how to argue and orate on public, objective *topoi*. In fact, Robert Connors (1987) reminds us that no attention was given to personal writing or speaking within educational frameworks in antiquity. It was not until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that personal writing was even viewed as an acceptable form of writing, and nineteenth-century romanticism encouraged writing about personal experience and writing in one's own voice, rather than with the voice of an orator. Connors also reminds us that Alexander Bain introduced the modes of discourse in 1866, and two of the modes—narration and description—became the foundation for many writing assignments within those modal directives. Although within twentieth and twenty-first century education, personal writing is more widely taught, at least within the modes of discourse, to this day, scholars grapple to define academic, acceptable writing. In his conclusion, Connors makes clear his support of moving the personal into the writing classroom as an acceptable genre:

The question persists as to what place personal stories and citing personal observations should have in the process of teaching students to write...but as teachers, we always have to encourage, even demand attempts at the next step—to go beyond merely personal accounts, either outside into encompassing the world in discourse, or inside into shaping our personal observations into the touching,

deeply empathetic and finally metapersonal stuff of which the greatest writing is made. (180-181)

Because of this ongoing debate, personal writing assignments are often criticized for their lack of attention to academic, sociopolitical issues in first-year composition courses. The impact of personal writing on students' growth remains under-investigated because of this severe opposition. Critics claim the focus on the personal as non-academic and even dangerous, particularly in required courses. Lester Faigley (1992) questions the authenticity of personal writing: "Why is writing about potentially embarrassing and painful aspects of one's life considered more honest than, say...[the] student who tries to figure out what Thucydides was up to in writing about the Peloponnesian War?" (121) David Bartholomae (1993) also discounts the emphasis of personal writing as "sentimental realism," and he finds the genre "corrupt" (488). Bartholomae believes composition classes should teach students to become critical, academic writers, and he would argue that this cannot happen through a focus on personal writing. "I don't want my students to celebrate what would then become the natural and inevitable details of their lives" (488).

Kathleen Pfeiffer (1993), in response to Carole Delentiner's essay "Crossing Lines," also questions the role of pain and trauma in the writing classroom. She discounts the "alleged" benefits of personal writing, "How does engaging in true confessions help students become better writers or thinkers?" (670) Pfeiffer's final criticism of the personal writing classroom represents the opposition facing any first-year writing pedagogy that allows students to explore personal and traumatic issues:

...this weepy world of confessions and revelations is a fundamentally egocentric sort of self absorption. Such teeth-gnashing and soul-baring might help a student recover from his or her lost inner child, but it will do little in the way of developing a sophisticated communicative ability, analytical skills, or a clear-sighted understanding of the world. . . .None of this can be accomplished when a student is taught to look inward and cry. (671)

Why would opponents of personal writing suggest that first-year writing pedagogy encourage students to investigate the community and culture they live in, but not the students' lives? According to opponents of personal writing, first-year writing

can teach about the public, not the private, what students think, not what they feel. The results of such dichotomies in college composition are serious, and my study investigates the merging of the two dichotomies—the academic and the personal. Charles Anderson and Marian MacCurdy (2000) remind college composition scholars that writing should be “...an ongoing, recursive process in which self and community challenge, affirm, serve, and extend each other in the drama of personal and public history” (17).

Proponents of personal writing remind critics that the personal essay, like academic writing, requires a composing process that encourages students to become stronger writers and thinkers by gaining control of their writing and becoming active members of the writing community. Thomas Newkirk argues that personal writing encourages students to “...see themselves as learners, open to revising even deeply held beliefs.” MacCurdy (2000), who views writing and healing as a subset of personal writing, argues that all writing pedagogies should value the art form involved in writing: “It is the craft that conveys truth and that can be taught” (191).

It is also important to remember that the personal essay moves the writer into shared experiences, and encourages writers to begin thinking about themselves as part of a larger community. Those shared experiences, however, are not always based on trauma or loss. When asked to write a personal experience essay, many first-year writing students write about their first dates or learning how to drive. Through my six years of teaching first-year writing, I have noticed that students are more engaged and effective as writers when they share narratives about that which they have felt deeply, regardless of whether the topic is senior prom or losing a parent. Writing as a way of healing invites students to tell their stories, no matter what they may be, while listening to the stories of other writers in the community. Carol Witherell and Ned Noddings further support this argument:

Through telling, writing, reading, and listening to life stories—one’s own and others’—those engaged in this work can penetrate cultural barriers, discover the power of the self and integrity of the other, and deepen their understanding of their respective histories and possibilities. (4)

Although writing and healing has historically been viewed as the most sentimental or inappropriately therapeutic genre of personal writing, in the last four years

we have seen the composition field draw from this form as a way to respond to national and personal trauma. Two of the most widely read publications to address the importance of personal writing and healing in composition include MacCurdy and Anderson's (2000) collection, *Writing and Healing: Toward An Informed Practice*, which focuses on writing and healing in composition studies, and the September 2001 special issue of *College English*, "Personal Writing: Storying Our Lives Against the Grain." The area of personal writing and healing is complex and contradictory for many scholars, but the call for attention to writing and healing is now being supported as a response to cultural events and by a number of teachers and theorists.

### **Defining Writing and Healing**

In my exploration of ways to connect writing and healing, I was faced with terminology that either focuses on personal writing or writing therapy—yet I could find little research on how the two fields intersect. Because many scholars in composition discredit the relationship between writing and therapy, I was faced with negative implications that writing teachers who focus on personal writing must assume the role of counselor; however, many psychological and composition studies are beginning to prove the importance of writing as healing. Wendy Bishop (1997) also addresses the terminology of writing and therapy, and we are reminded through her essay that writing "processes can be therapeutic; they can make you feel healthy and facilitate change, but the process themselves are not 'therapy.'" Thus, 'therapeutic process' seems to be the most appropriate term for what happens in writing or in a writing class" (as qtd. in Bishop 144). For my study, I define the process of writing and healing as writing that helps students create texts that connect their lived experience, the clearest expression of it, to self and the community within which the student lives and writes (Anderson and MacCurdy 9).

Mary Rose O'Reilly (1993) encourages writing teachers to look for connections rather than dissonance between writing and therapy: "In general, I find it more productive to look at how things (like teaching and doing therapy) are similar, rather than how they are, thus should remain, different....most of the healing that goes on in the writing class is self-healing" (47). MacCurdy (2000) also values the discovery of experience in personal writing, "The personal essay asks students to begin a journey into

themselves, but the journey will take them ultimately out of themselves and back to a community which can reestablish our common humanity” (198).

### **Writing and Healing Pedagogy**

The writing and healing course I developed, *Writing about Life, Loss, and Experience*, is as a writing workshop, where students are invited to write, reflect, and learn together as they become stronger writers and thinkers. My goals for a writing and healing composition course are to encourage students to become more invested in writing and making sense of their lived experiences, as well as the experiences of other members of the writing community. The very process of writing and revising invites students to tell their stories, to listen to what their stories tell them, and to hear and be heard by others in the community of writers who have shared similar experiences. A writing and healing pedagogy recognizes the healing potential of public and private discourses, and the importance of social interaction and the community of writers is evidence that this pedagogy invites much more than a look into the self.

To ensure a writing and healing pedagogical focus, I divided the course into three essay units—Life, Loss, and Experience. The first unit focuses on life writing or autobiographical writing, and I encourage students to write about what they know best—their lives. Students compose an essay that explores a time period from their lives that shaped them in a significant way. The second unit of the course focuses on personal loss, which is a major focus area of writing and healing. In this section of the course, students are invited to write an essay focused on an experience of loss, positive or negative, and at this stage of the writing process, students most often begin negotiating what healing is available to them and the community of writers. During the loss essay sequence, students conduct fieldwork through interviews and observations, and they also begin to connect to the community of writers by sharing their losses. The third unit of the course, the experience unit, focuses on students’ experiences and the sharing of those experiences with the workshop community and larger culture. In this third unit, writers are introduced to the importance of sharing their lives and writing with others by writing an informative essay based on one of their lived experiences. Judith Herman’s (1997) research asserts that healing only occurs when the survivor shares the experience with a community and begins to rebuild social ties. The third essay moves beyond the inward



focus that personal writing is often criticized for and encourages writers to connect their lived experiences and passions with academic, public writing.

One of the most important guiding principles for a writing and healing pedagogy is its natural discursive environment that integrates the personal and social and depends on the community's ability to be supportive, critical, and united. I have found semester after semester that my students appreciate one another's lived experiences, and they are often moved to social change as a result of the essays they encounter throughout the course. Students have important and meaningful things to share with us and with their fellow students, and a course designed around a writing and healing pedagogy invites them to take control of that learning—a writing and healing composition pedagogy encourages students to write and rewrite out of their lived experiences and to become more engaged writers and members of the communities in which they live and write.

It is the assumption of my study that those in the field of college composition have not adequately studied the effect of what happens when students write about personal loss and experience. It is crucially important to consider how personal writing impacts students as writers and thinkers. How does pedagogy impact students' decision to write about the personal? How are students impacted as writers and thinkers when teachers allow for writing that finds its focus on writing as a way of healing and growth? In order to examine these and other questions about a writing and healing pedagogy, I conducted a teacher research pilot study in my Spring ENC 1145 class, *Writing about Life, Loss, and Experience* and a teacher research dissertation study in my Fall 2004 ENC 1145 class.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Teacher Research**

To design this dissertation study, I consulted qualitative research literature, and I discovered the available research covers many different methodologies from ethnography to classroom teacher research. Because I am so curious about my own classroom and studying the importance of personal writing and growth, a teacher research methodology best fit my project design. I wanted to ask questions about my classroom, my teaching practices, and my students. Teacher research presented the best method for answering my research interests. Although many traditional researchers believe valid research is

only found through quantitative, empirical research studies, a recent shift toward qualitative research helps answer questions about teaching and writing.

Some critics of teacher research view qualitative research as contaminated and overly subjective. Stephen North (1987) discounts teacher researchers as “practitioners,” not researchers. He believes teacher research studies are validated only through empirical research and posits that teacher researchers rely on “lore” to produce their research findings (233). He critiques teacher research for its tentativeness and inability to be replicated: “Practitioners are not all that methodologically self-conscious. There is little pressure among practitioners for anything resembling strict methodological uniformity...Practitioners are satisfied with experience based testimony” (36). However, since the time of North’s critique, proponents of teacher research have argued that traditional, empirical methods are equally problematic for studying the classroom, because the researcher who visits a classroom community and interprets the data does not share the same knowledge base with the classroom teacher.

Ann Berthoff (1979), an early advocate of teacher research, encourages teachers to engage in a dialogue through the research process, continually reformulating “real questions” and sharing their “educational” stories (3). Berthoff defines teacher research as an “exchange between teachers,” which allows a teacher to look, reflect, and share what occurs in the classroom. From teacher research studies, variations can be created and carried out in composition classrooms, which Berthoff claims is more relevant and valuable in composition studies than reading the average of T-units and other empirical data findings derived from quantitative models. Berthoff also believes strong research depends on a connection between practice and theory, which is a major focus of the teacher research model. Research can give way to new perspectives, renewed teachers, and inspired student interest in writing.

Dixie Goswami and Peter Stillman (1987) provide one of the foundational collections of essays on teacher research, and they view teaching, pedagogical development, and research as interrelated models of inquiry. The collection argues that teachers are in the best position to ask questions about learning, and through teacher research, teaching is transformed in important ways. “Research is not a process of proving something, but a process of discovery and learning” (221). This collection of

essays advocates teacher research as a transforming theory through the testing of assumptions and connections with practices.

According to George Hillocks (1990), effective teaching must involve both reflection and research. He views teaching and research as inherently related, and he encourages teachers to use the language of research to describe their teaching practices and theories. He moves through the planning of students' goals, plans, teaching, and assessments in a study of his classroom, and he reminds the reader that "these [teacher research] projects are a formal extension of workshop reflections. The more careful and systematic reflecting becomes, the more it becomes like researching" (29).

Ruth Ray (1993) presents a unique view of teacher research in composition, where she claims that "teacher-researchers can gain a perspective on the theory-practice relationship from feminist criticism...within the institutions they seek to change" (25). Ray argues that teacher researchers and feminist researchers look to learn from and with their subjects, "not to control and dominate them, as researchers following the traditional scientific paradigm have done" (30). The most important parallel Ray draws between feminist research and teacher research is that both "challenge and extend established epistemologies or theories of knowledge" (30). Teacher researchers, like feminist researchers, ask new questions and seek new approaches to learning.

Because the teacher is an integral part of the teacher research design, David Hobson (1996) encourages teacher researchers to reflect throughout the study of the classroom. "Teacher research often begins with the individual but is shared with colleagues...when we start with ourselves and our students, we start with what is most useful. Then we move on from there" (16). Hobson contends that through careful attention to the collection and reporting of data, teacher research is becoming more valuable to the overall research community, and that value comes from the teacher's positions at the intersection between Gardner's inner and outer intelligences<sup>i</sup>. From this position of research and reflection, teachers can look at their own classrooms freshly and gather data that is both personally meaningful and practically relevant to the field.

Mary Sue MacNealy (1999) provides a more recent overview of the various research methodologies in composition. From her discussion of teacher research, we learn that teacher research finds its focus in the classroom and is most concerned with the

“behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes of the students” (243). As MacNealy advocates, I expect to share the research experience with my students and learn through their writing and their lives. Because the focus of teacher research is on the classroom, many teachers use teacher research to formulate new ways to think about teaching and writing practices and processes. Teacher research is the best way to address my research questions, and its goal is to fully and systematically describe what happens in the classroom through the formulation of research questions, data collection, data analysis, and reporting.

MacNealy concludes her examination of teacher research design by reminding scholars that “Though we can learn much from teacher research, such researchers must take the same care in drawing conclusions and presenting their findings as researchers in the sciences” (250).

Teacher research methods best suited my research goals and needs, as I shared the story of my classroom and asked questions about the effectiveness of a personal writing and healing oriented pedagogy. I explored my classroom with the principles Wendy Bishop (1997) writes of, “...honoring both practice and research—honoring story, testimony, observational anecdote... the spirit of what drew us to our field(s)” (319).

### **Research Studies Investigating Therapeutic Writing and Growth**

#### **Psychology of Writing**

Moving beyond teacher research designs, psychological inquiry is important when considering writing as a way of growth. Working in the underdeveloped interdisciplinary fields of social psychology and composition studies, Alice Brand (1989) creates a speculative framework for including emotional factors within rhetorical and cognitive analyses, and she undertakes and encourages further development of the linking of emotion and writing. Brand includes extensive case studies which all support further development of her key question: “Why then is inquiry into emotion without place in contemporary studies of writing?” (4).

Psychologist James Pennebaker’s (1991) study of expressing emotion reports the effects on the body of expressing trauma in writing. His collection of experimental studies proves how disclosing painful memories can lead to improved health. Writing about upsetting experiences produces improvements in overall health. Pennebaker found that because writers are able to organize facts about overwhelming experiences through

the writing process. Pennebaker concludes that writing about difficult personal experiences helps resolve them.

Judith Herman (1997) studied commonalities between writing and grief, and her study presents the findings of two decades of research and clinical work with victims of domestic and sexual abuse. The research also reflects on Herman's recent research with veterans and other survivors of terror. The findings of this study posit that therapeutic writing helps make the unknown known. Herman researched survivors' restored connections, which she argues can be reached through three stages of recovery: 1) establishing safety, 2) reconstructing the trauma story, and 3) reestablishing the connections between the survivor and the community. In the second stage of recovery, the survivor writes her/his story of trauma. And when the action of telling the experience is concluded, the experience belongs to the past (195). Herman encourages writing teachers and therapists to move writing into the community setting, because "nowhere is the experience more immediate, powerful, or convincing than when it is shared" (236). In my research study, I explored writing about issues of emotion and trauma in students' writing through the insights of psychological research, as well as through the insight of composition research that examine issues of writing and healing.

Lad Tobin (1993) studies the ways teachers and students shape writing, share stories, and change each other through the writing classroom. In his book, Tobin invites emotion and healing in writing: "I want to meddle with my students' emotional lives, and I want their writing to meddle with mine...Counter-transference emotions are threatening because they are so powerful, but they are most destructive and inhibiting in the writing class when we fail to acknowledge and deal with them" (32).

Wendy Bishop (1997) contributes to the scholarly discussion of the intersection between writing instruction and the process of therapy. Bishop continues Murray's claim that all writing is autobiographical: "If all writing is autobiographical, a life in writing must of necessity consider writing as a process of self-discovery and the writing classroom as a site for such exploration" (146). She encourages writing classrooms to celebrate the personal and notes the importance of exploring emotion in writing, the writing classroom, and the relationship between the teacher and her students. She calls

for action, because “we need to listen and respect the affective needs of our writing students and our selves” (156).

Nicholas Mazza (2003) provides the most comprehensive model for the practice of poetry therapy, which is not limited to the genre of poetry, both in the classroom and clinical setting. His writing therapy framework is divided into three components: the receptive/prescriptive, the expressive/creative, and the symbolic/ceremonial. The receptive/prescriptive, the first of the three components presented by Mazza, allows students to safely relate the reading of a poem or essay to situations or experiences the students have dealt with. The expressive/creative component invites students to use the act of writing as a way to invite a sense of control and perspective. The symbolic/ceremonial component involves the use of rituals, storytelling, and symbolism to help sift through emotions and experiences. Mazza explains that “all three components have the potential to address the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains of human experience” (17).

### **Personal Writing and Healing**

William Coles (1978) was among the first researchers to consider the importance of a focus on the self in the writing classroom. During a semester long study of writing assignments that engage students in self-critical phenomenology, Coles examined the individual and social function of writing. Through the semester, the class, individually and collectively, negotiated meaning in their writing and their purpose as writers. At the conclusion of his teacher-research study, Coles invited his students to reflect on their growth. He asked, “Where did you start this term? Where did you seem to come out? Who were you? Who are you now?” (258). Coles concluded that students are constantly evolving as writers and thinkers, not only as individuals, but also in the writing classroom.

In a 1994 teacher research study, Sandra Price Burkett describes the healing process of one of her students as he overcame addiction through writing. David explains the importance of writing his process in a reflection narrative: “I spent \$14,000 in that recovery program and never did I deal with the real issues involved until I got in this class and wrote about them” (195). Through her case study, Burkett found that writing encourages writers to find order in disorder, integration in fragmentation, and meaning in

chaos (192). As David began to write about his addiction to drugs, he began to find order in his writing, along with a growth in his sense of self. Burkett posits that a writer can remember and find clarity through writing about personal experience. “Integrating patterns of powerlessness, trauma, and change composed him, made him sane, redeemed him” (197).

Drawing from over twenty years of first-year writing teaching experience, Thomas Newkirk (1997) analyzes the importance and validity of personal writing pedagogies. Through his study of student-writing, he found that students grow as writers and create a “self” through the personal writing process (22). Newkirk argues that students appreciate the opportunity to write out of their lived experiences, and they also are able to connect with others through personal writing and this begins within the classroom community. Newkirk’s study also argues in favor of the therapeutic benefits of personal writing: “Writing may have healing power because it represents a third part of the relationship; it is an artifact, a construction, a relatively stable representation of experience...These writing situations can be therapeutic precisely because we don’t act as therapists” (19). Newkirk’s study recognizes the importance of personal writing, as well as the realization that knowing involves feeling and that discourse becomes sterile if it shuts out emotion.

Once a skeptic of the role of personal writing in the classroom, Guy Allen begins his teacher research account (2000) with a narrative of his own disinterest in the static quality of students’ “make-believe” writing (250). Because he noticed his students became interested in personal experience in relation to the texts they were reading and responding to in writing, he began to ask questions about his classroom and pedagogical focus. Thus, his teaching became his research. From his first semester of research of the personal vs. “academic,” he realized that his students *were* in fact telling him about the importance of personal discovery through writing. His classroom research helped him prove that the more he abandoned the paradoxes of his teaching of writing, the more engaged the students became in writing. Allen includes two case studies of students’ writing progress from his classroom to show how writing about self lends power to writers. He also argues against claims that teaching personal writing can be dangerous: “I have never seen writing students use writing to wander into issues they could not

manage” (273). In fact, one student, Kofie’s, process narrative validates the emotional benefits of personal discovery writing. She explains that “for years I had had witnesses—counselors and therapists. Something about putting it on paper took the witnessing to another level. I became my own witness” (273).

Michelle Payne’s (2000) work examines students who write about bodily violence, and it raises important questions about the place of personal, traumatic writing in the composition classroom. Payne begins her study by providing counter-evidence to the major criticisms levied against personal writing by composition scholars like David Bartholomae and Lester Faigley, and she views writing about the personal, even the traumatic, as important to a student’s learning and writing growth. She argues that when students choose to write about the personal they are using classroom space to become members of a community.

Through what Payne refers to as a teaching ethnography<sup>ii</sup>, she follows one student, Ann, who wrote about bodily violence with an ex-boyfriend through her semester in a writing classroom. By following Ann into her writing classroom, Payne is able to gain a better understanding of Ann’s writing community and context. She observes Ann’s relationship with the teacher and fellow students, and she is able to observe Ann’s development as a writer. Payne concludes that Ann’s own sense of self is constructed through her writing process, and her writing becomes a way to identify and negotiate that sense of identity. Ann articulates the importance of expressing emotions in her final interview with Payne: “I think a lot of time in our society people do feel shut down and they don’t want to say anything. I think it’s important to say things” (113). For students who want/need to write about painful experiences, the composition classroom should allow them that space to grow, according to Payne. “These essays become ways to build community, to reach out to others, and to control how they represent their experience rather than allowing someone else to control it” (127).

Jeffrey Berman (2001) presents a research study on the effect of writing about risky topics and life experiences in the composition and literature classroom. Through a case-study analysis of five English 300 courses he taught, Berman shares ways teachers can introduce subjects that are usually considered too personal for the English class, such as eating disorders, suicide, depression, rape, and death. His research concludes that



students improved as writers when invited to address personally relevant topics. “A pedagogy of risk will allow students to write about conflicts and identify rhetorical strategies and survival techniques” (254). By examining the five classrooms, Berman shows how writing about personal experience is healing for both writers and readers, which can “lead to both educational and psychological breakthroughs”(68). One of the case-study students, Diane, explains that the “there is a fear in disclosure that can only be overcome by instilling feeling of trust.” Throughout his study, Berman shows how a supportive writing community can lead to individual and community writing growth.

My research resembles Payne’s and Berman’s, as I examine the ways students write, grieve, grow, and celebrate, through a writing and healing oriented pedagogy as practiced in my classroom research studies. As evidenced in the limited number of research studies exploring writing and healing, further research into the area of personal writing and growth is necessary to the field of college composition.

### **Methodology**

In order to answer the following questions, I studied my Spring 2003 and Fall 2004 freshman writing courses, *ENC 1145—Writing About Life, Loss, and Experience*:

- When a first-year level writing class is designed and taught surrounding writing and healing, how does it influence students as writers, critical thinkers, and members of the writing community?
- What attitudes do students hold about personal writing as evidenced in *Writing about Life, Loss, and Experience*?
- What does a course that moves students from personal to academic writing prepare students for?
- To what extent do students note a change in their writing proficiency? To what extent do students note personal growth?
- How are students influenced as writers and thinkers when a writing pedagogy finds its focus on writing as a way of healing and growth?
- How is the teacher of a writing and healing pedagogy affected?

A teacher research design afforded me the opportunity to examine the effect of therapeutic writing on students’ development as writers and thinkers in the first-year writing classroom and answer these research questions. ENC 1145 is a special-topics

first year writing course, and the course met on Tuesdays and Thursdays for seventy-five minutes.

My research methodology stems from the work of several contemporary teacher researchers, particularly Lad Tobin, Robert Brooke, Wendy Bishop, Karen Paley, Mary Rose-O'Reilly, and Michelle Payne. Payne, in the opening of her study, explains that she studied students' stories of loss in order to encourage other teachers of writing to *listen* to students' lives and writing. I, too, examined my students' growth as writers through a classroom pedagogy focused on writing and healing in order to encourage teachers to consider such a pedagogy.

When I first proposed this course on writing and healing to the First-Year Writing Committee, I shared my rationale for a course focused on the connection between writing and healing, arguing that as students become aware of themselves as writers, they will learn to write and discover what they believe—whether the writing is autobiographical or academic. (See Appendix A)

Although in this teacher research project I have specifically designed a pedagogical framework that focuses on personal writing and healing, I have always incorporated personal writing into the curriculum of my writing courses. In every writing course I teach, I encourage my composition students to draw from their lived experiences in writing, and I have watched students become engaged in writing when their experiences are composed. Students' success with writing about the self is what initiated my research questions, and my investment in writing and healing is an important methodological awareness. Researcher bias was a potential concern because of my interest and belief in the success of a writing and healing pedagogy, and I used special caution and a triangulation of data in collecting and evaluating the results of my study.

Although I had observed students' writing and healing across four years in my first-year writing courses, I had never studied an entire class using a teacher research design. In order to best prepare for a teacher research dissertation project, I conducted a pilot teacher research study in Spring 2003. One of my methodological concerns was the impact the study might have on students' writing. Students' awareness that the process of writing and healing was being researched in the class could have potentially limited students' topic choices, engagement with the class, and/or the texts they composed.

Because of this awareness, I used many different methods for collecting and analyzing data. I also encouraged students, from the beginning of the course, to learn and research the effectiveness of the pedagogy with me. In order to assess the strength of this pedagogy, all students from both the pilot-study and dissertation-study courses were researched and all findings are reported in the analysis stage of the research project. I submitted a human subjects application to the Institutional Review Board, and students completed a human subjects consent form at the beginning of both semesters, in order to abide by university ethical research guidelines. (See Appendix B)

Because I am investigating the effect of therapeutic writing on students' growth as writers, the course syllabus, class texts, and the daily schedule are important to the methodological design. (See Appendix C) The syllabus introduced the students to the focus of the course on personal writing and experience, which was followed with an anonymous open-ended questionnaire completed during the first week of the semester. (See Appendix D) The opening questionnaire helped me begin to examine how students use writing for personal and academic growth.

The course design is also key to this study which is further detailed in Chapter 2. Across the research project, I examined the process of reflection and growth from the first essay of the course to the last essay, a radical revision, and I studied the effect of this pedagogical focus on students' sense of themselves as writers. The end of term portfolio also helped me examine the impact of writing and healing in the first-year writing classroom. The closing questionnaire, which remained anonymous until after the semester ended, helped determine the effectiveness of the course design from the students' perspectives. (See Appendix E) I also conducted follow-up interviews at the end of the following semesters with five pilot-study and five dissertation-study students who reported in the ending questionnaire some shift in their abilities as writers and thinkers. The follow-up interviews allowed me to most effectively study the impact of a course focused on writing and healing and how this pedagogical focus shaped students as writers and thinkers. Through this teacher research project, I hope to present another way to teach first-year writing and challenge the assumption that this type of writing sequence does not belong in the first-year writing classroom.

## **Data Collection**

The collection process of naturalistic research involved a triangulation of data and recursive data analysis. To obtain a full picture of my classroom over the course of both semesters, I attempted to capture as many snapshots of my students' writing and progress as possible. Data was obtained through the following methods and the data was collected on the weeks assigned:

### **Week One-Fifteen**

- Daily teaching and research journal composed

### **Week One**

- Beginning of the semester opening questionnaire

### **Week Four**

- Field Notes analyzed
- Student daily journals collected and analyzed

### **Week Seven**

- Individual Writing Conferences held

### **Week Eight**

- Field Notes analyzed
- Student daily journals and blackboard responses collected and analyzed

### **Week Thirteen**

- Group Writing Conferences held
- Field Notes analyzed
- Student daily journals and blackboard responses collected and analyzed

### **Week Sixteen**

- Field Notes analyzed
- All student writing collected for analysis
- End of the semester closing questionnaire

### **After Completion of Term**

- Photocopies made of all of the text artifacts, course schedule, and daily activities log
- Interviews with willing students who noted change in themselves as writers and thinkers

**Questionnaire.** As mentioned in the methodology section, I administered two open-ended questionnaires over the course of the semester. Students anonymously answered the first questionnaire at the beginning of the course, and they were held in the First-Year Writing Director's office until after completion of the term. The opening questionnaire helped me gain a better understanding of students' writing backgrounds and their initial interpretations of a writing course focused on life, loss, and experience. Students also completed a questionnaire at the close of the semester, which also remained anonymous until after the course concluded. The closing questionnaire provided students' views of this pedagogical focus.

**Field Notes.** During the semester, I kept daily field notes in the form of a teaching journal which helped me study the classroom and individual writers over the semester. My notes focused more on class discussion and student-student, teacher-student interaction, while the writing components of the course allowed me to focus on individual writer's growth. I participated in class writing activities, and I also observed students as they wrote and interacted within the classroom.

**Daily Teaching and Research Journal.** Over the course of the semester, I kept a double-entry journal where I recorded the events of class each day and the implications those events had on my research. On the teaching side of the journal, I recorded class activities, writing exercises, and my impressions of the day. On the research side of the journal, I recorded issues surrounding my research into my classroom, which included data collection, problems with design, pedagogical implications, and ways to analyze students' progress. This journal helped me balance my role of teacher and researcher.

**Individual and Group Conferences.** In order to study individual students' growth as writers, I met with students to discuss their writing and progress individually once over the course of the semester, and as part of a group once over the course of the semester. To balance the information from students, I focused the individual conferences around issues of personal writing, their view of the writing process and focus on the self, and their concerns with their writing, but I encouraged students to move the conversation to places in their writing growth that I may have failed to notice.

I also met with students during the third unit of the semester in small groups for writing conferences. In order to measure writing growth, members of the group came to

the conferences prepared to discuss their writing progress and concerns. During each individual and group conference, I listened to the writer's concerns and interests and took field notes.

**Photocopies of all of the text artifacts.** I collected and made copies of all text artifacts for the analysis and write-up of the dissertation.

**Course schedule and daily activities log.** The course schedule and daily schedule allowed me to focus the course around writing about life, loss, and experience, and it served as a map of the course. It also allowed for analysis of success of the course design and pedagogy during the analysis stage. (See Appendix C)

**Students' daily journals and online Blackboard responses.** Students kept a journal throughout the semester either in response to the readings, their personal lives, or freewriting prompts. Students were also invited to respond and create a dialogue on the discussion board section of Blackboard to the assigned reader, *Lucky*. Both the journals and Blackboard responses helped me analyze the ways students write about the personal, and I also analyzed writing developments made over the course of the semester.

**Students Portfolios.** Each student submitted a portfolio at the end of the semester, which included all writing they undertook over the course. The final portfolio also included portfolio or final drafts of all essays, and I asked for a course letter in which students discussed their growth as writers across the term. I also analyzed early drafts and class materials, freewriting, journals, writing exercises, and notes for each essay. Essentially, the students' portfolios represent the raw material of their drafting, revising, and inventing.

**Interviews after the term.** I also conducted follow-up interviews at the conclusion of the following semester (for example, for the dissertation study, the interviews occurred during Spring Semester 2005). In these follow-up interviews with five students who noted a shift in themselves as writers, I audiotaped our conversation of a minimum of thirty minutes and transcribed. If the interview was held via e-mail, I sent a list of detailed questions and then analyzed the students' answers as I would with a person-to-person interview. My goal for the follow-up interviews was to gain a sense of how the pedagogical focus on writing and healing impacted students as writers and thinkers over their long-term development as writers. In order to keep a parallel focus across all

interviews, I used a list of questions that asks questions about the impact of the course as students move into other areas of their academic and personal lives.

### **Data Analysis**

Data collection and analysis were expansive, and I continually read, condensed, and organized data throughout the data collection process. The aim of any teacher research design is to describe, as fully as possible, what happens in my classroom. I depended on the triangulation of data and thick description to analyze the experiences, the literature, and students' level of growth as I researched and wrote up the research report. I analyzed data by closely reading all data, organizing data into categories and charts, and recording my decision-making process throughout the analysis stage of the research project.

Because I am introducing a new way to think about the teaching of writing, I also self-analyzed my teaching and research journal for reflection and examination of teaching activities, paper sequences, students' involvement, etc. I also organized and analyzed field notes after each paper sequence in order to begin assessment of the effectiveness of the course design. The field notes and teaching journal were evaluated again during the analysis stage of the research project.

Because students' decisions and writing may be impacted by their participation in the research study, I asked all students to share in the research experience in their journals and process narratives throughout the semester. I also reported data as I found it through my observation of students' writing and any writing growth they reported, and in the write-up of the report, I avoided only including data that supports my research questions. Throughout my analysis, I carefully reported details through the use of narrative, charting, text artifacts, and questionnaire and follow-up interview findings—I reported through recursive analysis.

As a researcher, I looked for patterns and connections throughout the collected data. In order to make the data findings more readable, I sometimes use charts and summaries to report students' experiences in my first-year writing classroom focused on writing and healing. For example, in the dissertation-study course analysis, I used quantitative research methods to count the number of students who reported healing, the number of students who reported blocking, or the number of students who reported

change in their writing proficiency throughout each paper sequence. (See Appendix F) I also used quotations from students' transcripts to illustrate the research conclusions. Although I responded to students' topic choices and writing as the teacher of the course, I went beyond evaluation of student writing by analyzing students' stories of life and loss. Again, I analyzed the multiple roles of acting as both teacher and researcher in the analysis phase of the project (see Chapter 7). In my analysis, I relied on students' process narratives, which asked specific questions about their engagement with their experience in writing, the growth that may or may not have been present, along with other questions about a writing and healing pedagogy.

I am aware of the ethical considerations in reporting the research collected through my teacher research study, and I used multiple forms of data analysis to report accurate research findings. I took care in drawing conclusions, and I attempt to report a fair and accurate picture of a composition classroom focused on writing about life, loss, and experience. I also attempted to answer my research questions through the collection and analysis of data of my first year writing classroom focused on writing and healing.

When thinking about the teaching of writing through this dissertation project, I often refer back to my students who have written, and written effectively, out of their own experiences. The focus of this research design, writing and healing pedagogy, seeks to bridge the gap between the dichotomies of personal and academic writing by contributing to pedagogical thinking. I do not want to discount social constructionist theory, cultural studies, or postmodern perspectives, but I do want to introduce the importance of valuing students' lived experiences. Through this research project, I hope to contribute a pedagogy that recognizes the healing potential of personal and public discourses, an under-researched area of study in college composition.

---

<sup>ii</sup> In his work on identifying various intelligences, Gardner provided a framework for considering how people learn and grow. Along with the five basic types of intelligences Gardner proposes, he identifies two "higher intelligences," called *inter*-personal (the ability to notice and make distinctions among others, and to look outward) and *intra*-personal (relating with oneself, looking inward). Gardner saw the sense of self as the balance between inner feelings and pressure of others.

<sup>ii</sup> Payne explains in the introduction to her study that the research methods used throughout the study, while all qualitative, depended on the choices of her participants and their need for privacy. She explains chapter four, which looks at essays on physical abuse, as a teaching ethnography in large part because the student was willing to be interviewed and observed. The chapter focuses on one student and the latter two-thirds of her first year writing course. Payne observes the student, the community in which the student writes, and the student's writing.



## CHAPTER 2

### Life, Loss, and Experience Composed in a First-Year Writing Classroom: A Classroom Portrait

*Traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between individual and community. Those who have survived learn that their sense of self, of worth, of humanity, depends on a feeling of connection to others. The solidarity of a group provides the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience. Trauma isolates; the group recreates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma dehumanizes the victim; the group restores her humanity (214).*

*--Judith Herman, From Trauma to Recovery*

In order to best prepare for a teacher research dissertation project, I conducted a pilot teacher research study in Spring 2003. One of my methodological concerns was the impact the study would have on students' writing growth. I was also concerned that students' awareness that I was researching the course might limit their topic choices and engagement with the class and their writing. Based on my students' writing and written responses from the pilot-study course, I now conclude that I was wrong. I asked the following question in the closing questionnaire: "Explain how were you impacted by this semester study of our classroom." (See Appendix E) All 22 students reported that the research study did not impact their topic choices, writing processes, or writing growth. Kristi's closing questionnaire response to this question is representative of the class: "The fact that you used us as a study went unnoticeable. I rarely thought about it, and it never stopped me from sharing my experiences."

In order to best describe the overall pilot-study classroom experience, I used several methods for collecting and analyzing data. I also encouraged students to research the effectiveness of this pedagogy with me. I submitted a Human Subjects Application which was approved by Institutional Review Board prior to the start of Spring 2003, and I also asked students to complete a human subjects consent form during the second class session, in order to abide by university ethical research guidelines. (See Appendix B) I also provided a detailed syllabus and daily schedule to ensure that students understood the focus of the course and the course requirements. (See Appendix C) The Spring 2003

pilot-study helped me better understand the impact of a course focused on writing and healing and how this pedagogical focus can shape students as writers and thinkers.

### **Course Design**

*Writing about Life, Loss, and Experience* is designed as a writing workshop, where students are invited to write, reflect, and learn together as they become stronger writers and thinkers. The spring semester pilot-study course, ENC 1145-06, was a special-topics course that fulfilled the second-semester first-year writing course requirement. As I explained in the introduction, my main course goals were to encourage students to become more invested in writing and making sense of their lived experiences, as well as the experiences of other members of the writing community.

For the main text of *Writing about Life, Loss, and Experience*, I chose Louise Desalvo's *Writing As A Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives* (1999). Desalvo's book reveals the healing power of writing through an invitation to write and reflect, and through the writing process to heal. At the beginning of Spring Semester 2003, my students were quite skeptical and even critical of Desalvo's text. In a follow-up interview, Trevor explained his initial resistance to Desalvo was mainly caused by her repetitiveness: "Desalvo made great points but stated them one hundred times too many." Throughout the semester, however, students slowly became proponents of Desalvo's text. Darla's quotation from her follow-up interview demonstrates this turn: "Although melodramatic at times, Desalvo provided some key points of writing to heal." Kelli explained that Desalvo's book encouraged her writing process, "When I was stuck on an essay, I could look at Desalvo's tips and understand the effective means of writing to heal." From my analysis of the text and its use in the classroom, I found it helped students gain an understanding of the power of their personal experiences and the writing process, and the text allowed the community of writers to discuss writing and healing in class discussions and throughout their essay sequences.

Across the semester, I also incorporated essays and stories by authors like Maya Angelou and Cynthia Ozick on issues of life, loss, and experience. The readings were an important aspect of the course design, because they allowed students to discuss issues, experiences, and various writing styles and techniques with published writing. Nicholas Mazza (1999) supports the use of literature to begin safely sharing stories. The

receptive/prescriptive domain, the first of the three domains developed by Mazza, allows students to relate the reading of a poem, essay, or story to situations or experiences they have dealt with. I chose Joyce Carol Oates' *Best American Essays of the Century* as the essay collection for the course, because it honors experience, spirituality, and self. Throughout our readings, I encouraged students to respond freely in their journals, essays, and freewriting assignments. These reading response exercises proved effective, and the journals and freewriting assignments students composed across the semester helped with topic selection, drafting, and revision. For example, during the Life essay, the first essay unit, I assigned O'Brien's "The Things They Carried," and I invited students to write about what they each carried, tangibly and intangibly. This assignment led four students to their topics for Essay I.

Although I attempted to connect each assigned essay and story to the theme of the course during the pilot-study, students seemed disengaged with Oates' collection. Students struggled to connect Desalvo's text and the essays included in Oates' collection in class discussion and in their writing. Because of this, the essays served mainly as models for discussing writing genre and style. The follow-up interviews helped explain the lack of interest in many of the assigned essays, yet the students revealed a strong interest in the use of literature as a way to discuss lived experiences. For example, Kelli could not recall any author or title from the Oates' collection during our follow-up interview, but she explained that she "did remember that the discussion of the readings allowed the class to open up to one another even more and share our feelings openly." The dissonance between the Desalvo and Oates' texts in the pilot-study course led me to reconsider the assigned reader for the course. After researching a number of nonfiction collections and autobiographies, I selected Alice Sebold's memoir *Lucky* as the reader to accompany Desalvo's *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives*. Sebold's memoir moves Desalvo's theoretical invitation to write and heal into practice, and this connection should help students as they, too, move Desalvo's ideas into their own writing practices. I also incorporated an online course website, Blackboard, into my dissertation study, where students posted their journals and readings responses to *Lucky*, as well as collaborated in an online discussion with other members of the writing community.

To ensure a writing and healing pedagogical focus, I divided the pilot-study course into three essay units—Life, Loss, and Experience. The first unit focused on life writing or autobiographical writing. The students composed an essay based on some aspect of their life story or autobiography. The assignment read as follows:

In this *Life* essay, I invite you to write an autobiography of yourself. Think about an aspect of your life story that is important to you. Some examples might be: your love life, your development as a writer, your relationship with one or both of your parents, your career history. Build your autobiography around an issue, and you will know where to begin and what to leave out. This assignment should encourage you to start thinking about your personal writing and growth.

While composing the first essay, students completed writing exercises focused on life writing, like childhood experiences sketches and career dreams. Students were also invited to remember people and events through a writing workshop that provided prompts such as: “At what time were you the most content? How long did this contentment last? Where were you? Who do you see?” As students composed their life essays, we also read Chapters 1 and 2 from Desalvo’s text, which introduces writing as a way of healing, as well as essays such as Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. My main goal for the first essay unit was to help students begin to see themselves as writers. The pilot-study students appeared engaged in class discussions, writing assignments, and drafting sequences throughout Essay I. The students’ lived experiences were compelling, and the life essay served as an introduction to writing as a way of healing.

The second unit of the course focused on personal loss, which is a major focus area of writing and healing. In this section of the course, I invited students to write an essay based on an experience of significant loss, positive or negative, and it was at this point in the spring semester when students began to negotiate what healing was available to them and the community of writers. The loss essay assignment read as follows:

In your *Loss* essay, you are to write an essay focused on a moment/time in your life when you experienced a positive or negative loss that changed you in some way. Share your story of loss with your reader, and be sure to choose a focus that will show the moment of loss or trauma, and the healing/growth that may have come from your experience.

We also completed a number of invention and writing exercises to help students generate topics and drafts, including a “before and after the loss” picture collage assignment which invited the writers to consider who they were before the event and how the experiences of loss changed/shaped them. One student, Jeff, composed a collage representing his struggle with erectile dysfunction, and through his before and after collages, he found his focus and the title for his loss essay, “Mind Games.” Another student, Sara, composed collages representing a positive loss of her break-up with a physically abusive boyfriend. We also read Chapters 3 and 4 from Desalvo’s text, as well as Oates’ “They All Just Went Away” and Carver’s “A Small Good Thing” during the loss essay unit. To help students generate their drafts, I asked students to write a letter to the person most directly related to their loss experience. One student, Luke, composed a letter to his father who was murdered three years ago, and from this letter writing assignment, he decided to compose his entire loss essay in letter format. The power of Luke’s loss spread across the classroom community, and students began to share their lives and losses more openly.

Through students’ writing processes and the individual conferences I held with each student during the seventh week of the semester, I was able to examine students’ engagement and level of writing progress in the course. I received positive oral feedback on the focus and progression of the course from all but one student during the individual conferences, and I also began to notice an improved proficiency in students’ writing voices and drafts.

The third unit of the course, the research component, focused on students’ lived experience and the sharing of that experience with the community of writers and larger culture. In the third unit, the experience essay unit, I introduced my students to the importance of sharing their lived experiences with others through writing an informative, research essay that examined the broader issue surrounding one of their most significant lived experiences. The assignment read:

In your *Experience* essay, take some aspect of your life experience and write about it in a way that will be interesting to the classroom community. This type of essay is sometimes called a feature article, and you will choose a subject that you have experienced. Because this essay will require fieldwork and research,

you should look at a selection of magazines on a subject and style you are interested in (for example, you may explore golden retrievers for dog trainers, Safe Zone, stalkers, birth order, rape awareness, Vietnam veterans). The only stipulations for this essay are that you leave your room, leave your desk, and go talk to someone, conduct research, AND you must focus on some aspect of your personal, lived experience.

The third essay unit moved beyond the inward focus that personal writing is often criticized for, and encouraged writers to move their lived experiences and passions into “academic” writing. We also read the Epilogue of Desalvo’s text on how to move from silence to testimony, along with Chapters 7 and 8 on the different stages of writing growth. Pilot-study students also read models of experience essays by Cynthia Ozick’s “The Shawl” and Adrienne Rich’s “Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying.” During the invention stage of drafting, we discussed, in small and large groups, the various topics students might choose and the class members helped each other find their topics. We completed a topic question exercise, in which each student wrote their topic on a blank sheet of paper and then circulated their topics around the classroom for each class member to write a question about focus, information, or experience. This exercise was one of the most beneficial for students as they began the research process, and one student, Alicia, explained in her process memo that it was the topic question exercise that convinced her to write the “truth of her experience with child abuse.” Through this third unit, I moved the pilot-study students toward community action. Judith Herman’s (1997) research claims that healing occurs only when the survivor shares the experience with a community and begins to rebuild social ties, and that was one of my main goals of the experience essay.

The most effective exercise during the third unit was a half-class peer review workshop, because it encouraged students to both share their experiences and learn from their peers’ experiences, as they read and responded to one another’s work. It was also important for student-writers to negotiate revision ideas, and I noticed and recorded growth in students’ proficiency as writers and responders as they contributed to this collaborative project. During the third unit, students began to talk and write about writing and healing in class discussions and their experience essay process memos. For

example, Alicia wrote about her experience with childhood sexual abuse by a stepfather, and the power of her essay led to social action among the classroom community members. There was a legislative session on the topic of child abuse a few weeks after the half-class workshop and because of her essay, four of the twenty-one class members attended the legislative session with Alicia.

To continue the community focus, students composed a radical revision project with one of the three essays at the end of the semester. The radical revision project, introduced by Wendy Bishop (1997), invites students to shift their essay's style, perspective, or genre. Through this final project, writers were able to reflect on their growth throughout the writing process by finding an alternate way to share their essay's focus. The most important components of the radical revision project were the class presentations, because they provided the writers an opportunity to share their writing and their truths. The spring semester radical revision presentations celebrated the community of writers. Students were very positively responsive to the radical revision assignment and the presentations. For example, Sara composed her loss essay on the experience of running away from her abusive boyfriend. For her radical revision, Sara baked a "self-esteem" cake, and she wrote the ingredients necessary to get out of an abusive relationship on top of the cake in icing. We all laughed with her as she explained her difficulty with the icing melting the ingredients of her recipe together, but we also sat silent as another student, Amber, raised her hand and thanked Sara for her essay and presentation, because she, too, fled an abusive relationship. The last two sentences I recorded in my teaching journal read:

April 23, 2003

As I walked out of the classroom today and the pilot-study course, I realized just how much I learned through this research experience. Every student in ENC 1145-06 taught me that, yes, students have important things to write and share, as well the ability to gain powerful writing voices.

### CHAPTER 3

#### A Closer Look Into Our Classroom

To most effectively demonstrate the effect of this pedagogical focus on students' sense of themselves as writers and members of a writing community, I have chosen to describe in detail five writers' full portfolios and follow-up interviews from *Writing about Life, Loss, and Experience* (ENC 1145-06). The 22 students and the course itself can best be described through a close analysis of five students' processes whom I interviewed in fall semester 2003 after they completed the course during spring semester 2003. In an attempt to provide a varied glimpse into the pilot-study, I initially asked seven students to consider participation in follow-up interviews and case-study analysis. Out of the seven students I asked, five were available and willing to participate. The follow-up interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, and I provided the five students with interview questions to answer prior to our meeting. (See Appendix G) The interview questions invited students to reflect on their experiences in ENC 1145-06, and we discussed their answers during the individual meetings. During the follow-up interviews, I asked for students' permission to record our discussions through a hand-held tape recorder so that I could be fully engaged in the conversation. All five students agreed without hesitation.

In order to best describe the five students who participated in follow-up interviews and were chosen for pilot-study analysis, I will provide an overview of each student that I composed at the end of the Spring semester and elaborated on after the follow-up interviews. These five vignettes will provide necessary background information and will help describe the student's experience in the course and his/her writing process across the semester.

#### **Alicia Hogg**

*I have realized that there are other people in this world, closer to me than I think, who have suffered from misfortunes much like my own, like when I read Natalie's paper on child abuse. I also saw that I am not the only one who has had to recover and rebuild my life due to some of the events in my life. I also saw that there are still "good" families in the world, like when I read about Kristi and her mom. I believe that in the future, when time calls for it, I will come to realize just how much this course impacted my life (Alicia, Final Portfolio Letter).*



Alicia was a nineteen-year-old female from Deltona, Florida, and a multinational business major in her freshman year. Throughout the semester, Alicia was a quiet student and participant in most full-class discussions; however, when I observed Alicia in small groups and peer review workshops, she was very much engaged in dialogue and oral and written feedback. In fact two students, Cassie and Kristi, named Alicia as one of the most helpful peer responders and group members in their final portfolio letters.

I noted in my teaching journal that Alicia seemed a bit apprehensive in her writing and her enthusiasm at the beginning of the semester, and she explained her initial apprehension in our follow-up interview: “On the first day of the semester, I was afraid the course was a counseling class for college credit.” She went on to explain, however, “that the course was so different than I expected. I pictured us crying together, but what we really did was learn to connect feelings with experiences and research. That’s the biggest thing I learned.” In response to healing, Alicia wrote in her final portfolio letter, “I do not believe that any of the essays healed me, but the writing process did become much clearer and easier to understand because of this class.” Although she noted no healing in her final portfolio letter at the end of the semester, she explained during her follow-up interview that “all of the essays healed me in some way, especially Essay II and III because they are events that could happen again.” My analysis of this shift is simple, and I think Alicia articulated it best in her final portfolio letter: “I believe that in the future, when time calls for it, I will come to realize just how much this course impacted my life.”

As for Alicia’s writing progress across the semester, I noticed a shift in her writing style and her level of confidence as a writer from her first essay to her final portfolio. For her life essay, Alicia wrote an essay that chronicled the life of her first job at Convenient Travel Services. She titled the essay, “You can never forget your first,” and I was impressed with her level of detail when I responded to her third polished draft, which I refer to as the professional draft. I encouraged Alicia, in my professional draft response, to “work on clarifying specifics like timing, your relationship with your parents, actual days at work, etc. Your introduction is full of detail, and I encourage you to continue with that level of detail throughout the essay.” In the follow-up interview Alicia explained that all of the essays were healing, but “Essay I was not as much.”

Alicia wrote “A Letter Goodbye” for Essay II, which focused on the night she learned of the death of her grandmother. She explained how she chose her focus in her professional draft process memo: “I chose to write about the death of my grandmother because it was a time that I actually used writing as a way of healing.” In my professional draft response, I commended Alicia for writing through such a profound loss, and I encouraged her to continue adding detail and clarification for her portfolio draft. She included a portion of the actual letter she wrote to her grandma the night of her death in the portfolio draft, and I could sense the depth of her loss. Alicia’s writing voice was strong in Essay II, and I could feel her emotional connection to the topic. Alicia wrote in her final portfolio letter, “Essay II was challenging because I had to include emotion in my writing. I am normally not a very expressive person when it comes to sadness or grief, and I tend to mourn alone if possible, so writing about a time of loss was new and challenging.”

Essay III, the experience essay, was Alicia’s strongest essay, and her writing growth was clear. Alicia also noted Essay III, “Opposing Minds,” as her strongest piece in our follow-up interview: “My writing proficiency from Essay I to Essay III was very noticeable. Essay I was all about detail, but it lacked emotion. During Essay II, I started to link emotion and details, but in Essay III, I was able to incorporate the event, the emotions, the experience, and the research all together.” Alicia wrote a research essay based on her experience with child sexual abuse by her stepfather, and the power of the experience and research she shared spread across the classroom. The half-class peer responses were all positive, constructive, and sensitive. For example, Sara wrote in her endnote, “I’m very sorry you had to go through that experience, but I think you taught us a great deal through your experience and your research. I’m ready to help fight pedophiles now.”

Although Alicia’s experience essay was one of the most powerful and well-written essays composed all semester, Alicia explained in her follow-up interview that she did not choose child abuse as her focus immediately. In fact, she explained her invention and drafting processes to me in our follow-up interview:

I always tried to avoid that topic in my life, and I always censored the details. I knew if I chose to write about being sexually abused, I couldn’t bleep out the

details. Through the topic invention exercise, I decided I had to write about it, but I tried to give it a rosy tint at first. As I was writing, I would think, “Can I say that?” I didn’t want it to look disgusting, but I’m now glad I wrote so honestly. It’s easier for me to now share the whole picture/the whole truth. I realized it was important for me to share my truth because other class members were honestly sharing their experiences, and I was learning from them. So that’s the power of writing—sharing the whole truth.

Alicia carried her experience essay over into her radical revision project for Essay IV. Alicia chose to write a story of her sexual abuse experience from the perspective of a teddy bear. She also included a collage of the characteristics of the offender, the victim, the law, and her story. In her radical revision process narrative, Alicia explains that she chose this focus “because I wanted to allow someone who is too scared to report abuse to report it like I did. Perhaps if a child read this and then wrote their story, and then a pedophile read the stories, they would understand the pain they are causing. I want to truly show the hurt.” Alicia read an excerpt from her short story for her radical revision presentation, and the students were silent yet expressive. They clapped loudly when Alicia finished her reading, and one student, Kristi, stood up as Alicia returned to her seat and hugged her. Alicia responded very eagerly to the radical revision assignment, and her presentation allowed her one of the few opportunities across the semester to share her voice. She explained the power of the assignment at the conclusion of her radical revision process memo: “This writing is more intimate in a way I do not fully understand yet. When you write, you are more likely to tell the truth, and if you don’t write the right thing the first time, you can easily revise.” Alicia’s final portfolio shared the power of discovery and writing growth across the semester.

Alicia participated fully with the community of writers across the semester. I noticed, in Alicia’s written responses to her peers’ texts, that she was an active, devoted member of the classroom community. In our follow-up interview, Alicia shared her ideas on the community of writers: “It was so important to share and learn from others’ experiences and truths. We still see each other and talk, which doesn’t usually happen in my classes. We are connected because we know each other, and I always stop and ask about the people in their lives and their experiences.”

As far as moving from silence to testimony, Alicia explained during our follow-up interview that she now writes letters when she needs to express her emotions. “I’ve written two big letters since our class—one to my mom and the other to my best friend. I was really able to write how I actually felt and explain why I felt that way. I moved through the experiences with writing now.” And as she explained at the conclusion of our follow-up interview, “All of the essays helped me revisit the past and make sense out of things.”

### **Trevor Williams**

*The class focus on writing and healing was originally a source of annoyance for me. In the first few weeks, I was very opposed to the whole concept. I didn’t sign up for therapy, I signed up to write. As the semester went along, however, I became more receptive to the “healing” part of the writing assignments. I found that by writing through my feelings and problems, other parts of my life improved. My overall mood and demeanor became lighter, and I seemed to worry less. I now feel that writing is a great way to promote emotional and perhaps even physical health (Trevor, Follow-up Interview).*

Trevor was a nineteen-year-old male from Lake Wales, Florida, and a communications major in his freshman year. As documented in his opening quote, Trevor was the most vocally resistant student to the focus on writing and healing at the beginning of the semester. He questioned the writing and healing focus in class discussion, mainly in response to Desalvo’s text which he found “sappy at first.” He explained his resistance in our follow-up interview: “I came into the class looking for a quick, three credit hour course, but I came out to find that I learned a great deal about my writing style and myself.” Trevor was one of the most outgoing students, and he was always willing to participate in class discussions and writing assignments. His comments were meaningful and often sparked further class discussion. Trevor passed an advanced placement exam in high school to fulfill his first-semester writing requirement, and he entered the course a promising writer. His writing style did, however, improve across the semester, and his final portfolio was succinct, connected, and well-written. Trevor also noted writing growth in his final portfolio letter, “Not only did my writing improve, I learned how to connect with my reoccurring theme. I feel like my progress as a writer is not so much in the quality of writing, but rather ‘realness’ in the text. My writing has

become so vivid and engaging, compared to my slightly journalistic and boring former tone.”

Trevor noted healing with his experience essay: “Strangely enough, the essay that led to the most healing for me was the research paper. I wrote mine on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The paper allowed me to say the things I’ve been dying to say for years. The response from the class was exactly what I needed, and they seemed to hurt with me.” In our follow-up interview, Trevor explained that he was going through a difficult period while enrolled in the course, and many of the writing assignments allowed release and healing. He explained his release: “I knew my cell phone would be turned off, and I knew I could write about what was bothering me because my peers’ were doing the same thing. And I knew that I could learn about myself and my writing through this process.”

Interestingly, Trevor located a theme of faith and family with Essay I, and he carried that theme through all four essays. In Essay I, Trevor chronicled his life through his relationship to his parents from birth to boyhood to his break-up with a girlfriend and his return to his parents. He titled the essay, “The Picture Window,” and his level of description helped to demonstrate his writing potential. Trevor’s professional draft of Essay I was lacking a clear focus, and I encouraged him to work on strengthening his clarity in the revision. My response to Trevor’s portfolio draft showcases his effective revision efforts. “I can sense a transformation from the first draft to the portfolio draft in your style and in your voice. Your portfolio draft is strong, focused, and real.”

Trevor’s second essay, “Go West,” focused on the loss of his best friend, Aaron, when Aaron moved to California. The power of the friendship and the effect Aaron’s move had on Trevor was evident from the first page of the essay, and I noted a shift in Trevor’s willingness to share emotions in his professional draft of Essay II. Trevor explained in our follow-up interview that he experienced blocking with the loss essay. “I found it hard to write about loss. My paper was about when my best friend moved to California, and I still find it hard to read that essay without welling up. I was still healing from this experience when I wrote Essay II, but I can now say that for sure it led to healing.”

As mentioned above, Trevor found the experience essay, “The Mormon Church: An American Heresy” led to the most significant writing and personal growth. Trevor wrote his research essay on the history and principles of the Mormon Church. At the beginning of Trevor’s drafting process, I was concerned that he would not be able to remain informative because of his strong feelings against Mormonism; however, his portfolio draft is free from argument. I explained this power in my endnote: “Your writing style has moved from strong to powerful, and Essay III is proof. You share your experience with the Mormon Church, facts, and you shed light on a new topic for most readers.” The half-class peer response to Trevor’s essay was loud and vocal when it was time to workshop Trevor’s essay, and students were all very eager to learn more about the principles and beliefs of Mormonism. Two students, Luke and Sara, stayed after class to question Trevor further about his background in the Mormon Church. As a reader, I could sense Trevor’s commitment and passion with this subject. In his final portfolio letter, he expressed his desire to move his writing into action: “Hopefully this summer, I will be able to devote some time to working with the lost sheep of the Mormon Church.”

Trevor chose to radically revise his Essay I into a prayer, which continued the religious theme he carried across the semester. Trevor explained in his radical revision process narrative that the project “served a dual purpose. For one, it fulfilled the radical revision assignment. More importantly, however, it opened up my prayer life.” Trevor seemed very engaged with the project, and he encouraged his classmates to push themselves as they composed their radical revision projects. As Trevor recited the prayer to the class during his presentation, he choked up and explained the emotional power of the prayer. He explained that power in the concluding sentence of his radical revision process narrative: “I have had a blast growing in my writing, and although I don’t feel that this is a culmination of that growth, I am proud of the decision I made to write a prayer at all.”

Trevor was an active, engaged participant and writer throughout the course. Trevor most certainly shifted from the most resistant student in the course to one of the most outspoken community members. I made note of five times across the semester when Trevor stayed after class to help another student with a draft or revision assignment. Trevor was a natural leader, and he seemed hungry to learn from his peers’

experiences and writing styles. He explained his involvement in the community of writers during our follow-up interview, “When the semester started, I was harder than when I left. But I’m no different than everybody else, because I think we all have a desire to connect with others. This happened in our class through writing and having someone read it and through the presentations. I think we all had a desire to connect to others and that promoted lots of healing.”

Since the close of spring semester and because of the power of Essay III, Trevor has become actively involved with an online ministry, *Saints Alive in Christ*. He explained that “the ministry is dedicated to spreading the truth about the trap of Mormonism. I write personally and respond to questions, and I help maintain the site.” During our follow-up interview, Trevor was very eager to share the news of his involvement in composing music since our course. “I still don’t write diaries or journals, Ms. Hodges, but I now write songs. I’ve played guitar for years, but your class encouraged me to link feelings to experiences, and I can write lyrics now.” Trevor writes music daily, and at the conclusion of his follow-up interview questions, he shared the main things he learned through ENC 1145-06: “I took away the knowledge that writing can promote emotional health. I also took away a confidence in my writing ability.”

### **Darla Woodring**

*Through writing each essay, I gained a greater appreciation for myself. Some people walk around boasting that they are “strong people” and I can see it is just a front. Inwardly, I realize now, through writing, that I am strong. I overcame an eating disorder which people die from or struggle with their whole lives. I helped my mom through a divorce, and I had medical problems (even this semester I got a kidney stone). I am strong, independent, and feel compassion for others—that is what I learned from these essays. (Darla, Final Portfolio Letter)*

Darla was an eighteen-year-old female from Allentown, Pennsylvania, and a political science and economics major in her freshman year. From the first day of the semester, I could sense Darla’s excitement about the course and its focus. She explained her initial interest in her final portfolio letter: “I was ready to write about Life, Loss, and Experience beginning with Essay I.” Darla was a very detailed peer responder, and her comments filled the margins of the half-class peer review essays she responded to. Darla was also very open to writing as a way of healing in class discussions and in her writing,

and I wrote three times in my teaching journal that she might be the strongest supporter of the pedagogical focus.

Darla was eager to explore writing as a way of healing, and she elaborated on her healing process in the final portfolio letter: “The life essay, for me, provided the most healing. Even though it was only 7+ pages it gave me the opportunity to tell my life story as I saw it. I think the most healing took place because I had the opportunity to reflect upon events that caused me pain in the not so distant past, which was at first unsettling but then therapeutic.” Darla’s process follows the progression of writing as a way of healing introduced by scholars like Desalvo and Pennabaker. Although the personal writing process was initially difficult for Darla, through writing, she was able to gain control over some difficult life experiences. She explained the complexity of the writing and healing process in our follow-up interview:

I wrote about negative events from my life in a systematic and detailed manner which allowed me to understand why I felt certain ways. For example, I had a lot of pent up anger about my parents’ divorce—sitting down and writing about it brought back tremendous feelings of rage, sadness, astonishment, but I knew these feelings were natural.

Throughout the semester, I noticed a progression in Darla’s attention to detail and focus in her writing. For example, Darla wrote a life essay based on her struggle with perfection throughout her adolescence, which she titled “Innocence Is Bliss.” In order to document different stages of her life and her fight to maintain perfection which culminated with an eating disorder, she organized her essay around the different pairs and sizes of jeans she wore throughout her childhood. Although her professional draft of Essay I showed her writing potential, she lacked clarity in many places throughout. In my professional draft response, I encouraged Darla to “continue elaborating with details about your friends, memories, what your parents look like, etc. Your life story is honest and compelling, and I now want to know more as a reader. Please keep writing and elaborating.” In our follow-up interview, Darla informed me that although she knew Essays II and III were more well-written, Essay I provided the most healing. She said, “It was me!”



Darla was also a strong supporter of Desavlo's text and she moved "community" healing, which Desalvo advocates in Chapter 4—"Writing Pain, Writing Loss"—into her loss essay. Darla wrote "Last Chance at Life," for Essay II which focused on the loss of a friend on her high school swim team, as well as the loss a community experiences when someone within that community dies. The emotions and details Darla provided the reader in Essay II demonstrated a shift in writing proficiency, and her writing voice was moving and honest. Although Darla chose to focus on a community loss for Essay II, she explained in our follow-up interview that writing about death helped prepare her, unknowingly, for her cousin's sudden death at the age of 20 in October 2003. She shared, "I am not ready to write about my cousin's death yet, but eventually I will write his story. For now, I just don't know how I would have reacted to my cousin's death if I had not written Essay II. Now it hit really close, but the exploring death in Essay II helped me console my family and organize my feelings."

Darla also explained in our follow-up interview that as soon as I introduced the experience essay to the class, she knew the topic she wanted to explore. Darla chose to expand on her battle with bulimia in her research essay, and she titled her essay, "Relationship Between the Proliferation of Eating Disorders in Women and Sociocultural Factors/Societal Pressures to Be Thin." She went on to explain her decision in our follow-up interview: "If I was going to benefit and help others through my writing, I knew I had to write this essay." Darla opened her essay with her personal struggle with bulimia. Her opening sentence read: "I knelt in front of the blue porcelain toilet and forcefully jammed a toothbrush down the back of my throat—I gagged, and then gagged again." The peer response to Darla's essay was very positive, and her attention to research and details proved Darla was truly an expert on this topic. Darla noted that she also healed from writing Essay III because she finally realized the importance of sharing her story. I nominated Darla's experience essay for the 2003-2004 McCrimmon Award in First-Year Writing, which is given to the most outstanding essay in first-year writing. Darla's essay was a finalist for the award and was published in *Our Own Words: A Student's Guide to First-Year Writing*, which is a collection of first-year writing essays used in all sections of both first and second semester composition courses at Florida State University.

For the radical revision project, Darla chose to revise Essay II by composing a stream of consciousness poem from the perspective of Tommy's mother after her son's death. Her presentation and reading silenced the class, and one student, Mark, responded to Darla's reading: "I really felt the chill of death and loss as you read your poem. Wow." Darla's attention to detail, emotion, and healing was carried through Essay IV, and I, like Mark, learned from Darla.

As I mentioned above, Darla was a very active leader and student in the course, and she seemed very eager to work with other students in group discussions, peer workshops, and collaborative writing assignments. Trevor, Megan, Crista, and Kristi all described Darla as the student-writer who most influenced their writing and growth in the class. She elaborated on the community commitment in our follow-up interview: "People were affected by the members of the classroom, and we cared about each other. Even students who were opposed to writing in this way at first, like some of the guys, found the classroom community contagious." Darla's interest in the writing community moved beyond classroom involvement—Darla explained in her final process narrative that she wanted to impact the classroom community through her writing. She shared with me that her goal for writing her research paper on bulimia was "to help people."

Darla also moved from silence to testimony during the semester. As she composed Essay III, she noticed that one of her friends had dropped a great deal of weight in a short time. Because of her own battle with an eating disorder, Darla knew what her friend was suffering from. In order to reach out to her, she left a copy of her Essay III on her friend's desk with a note that expressed that she was ready to help or talk to her. Darla went on to explain, "Even though I want to do something to help and trigger a response, it's really up to her to get help. Unfortunately, she did not respond or seek help. I'm still aware, though, of the power of sharing my experience with others."

After the semester, Darla broke up with her boyfriend, and she explained in our follow-up interview that she used writing to heal. "It was hard to write about, but I did write a couple of letters to him, but I didn't send them. This gave me the strength to express my feelings and also gave me the strength not to call him." We concluded our follow-up interview with Darla's overall view of a writing and healing pedagogy: "The course and focus definitely impacted my life. I wrote about negative events from my life

in a detailed and systematic manner which allowed me to understand why I felt certain ways.”

### **Kelli Justham**

*My experiences in ENC 1145 were different than any other experiences I've had in a writing class. I felt open sharing my experiences with the class because I felt like everyone in the class opened up so much with one another. The topics we discussed allowed each of us to understand one another so much. Because we were writing about our experiences, many of which we had never talked about with anyone else, it allowed me to realize that I can write about personal stuff, even if it's not to turn in for a class, but to help myself feel better about the event. There are many times when I feel like I don't need to talk to someone but I'd love to just write it all down. The class allowed me to open up through my writing and express my feelings (Kelli, Follow-Up Interview).*

Kelli was an eighteen-year-old female from Fort Myers, Florida, and a criminology major in her freshman year. At the beginning of the semester, Kelli struggled with her writing proficiency, and she seemed fixed in the five-paragraph essay format. Kelli also had to work through some grammatical and stylistic weaknesses, and I was very careful in how I responded to Kelli's writing; I saw great potential in Kelli's writing style, and I wanted to encourage her to continue bending and stretching her writing. During our follow-up interview, Kelli elaborated on her progression as a writer over the course that she was initially wary of: “I was skeptical at first. I didn't believe the class could help me become a stronger writer, and I also didn't believe I'd see a change in my writing style. I did, though, and I feel really great about my portfolio work and about writing, in general, now.”

I held more conferences with Kelli than any other student in the course, and we met a total of six times for twenty minutes or longer to discuss her writing progress, drafting, or revision ideas. In Kelli's final portfolio letter, she explained how she felt after she received my responses to her Essay I professional draft, “I felt discouraged that I could ever write well.” The class period following the return of the Essay I professional drafts, Kelli asked to schedule a time to talk with me about her writing. We set a time to meet later that day, and as we talked about her essay, her focus, and her goals for Essay I, I could sense her determination and desire to grow as a writer. Kelli moved that determination into her role as a community member, and she was very responsive to class discussions of readings, as well as very engaged in group writing assignments and peer

review workshops. She elaborated on this in her follow-up interview, “Through the group writing assignments and discussion of the readings, it allowed the class to open up to one another even more and share our feelings openly. I think we all understand the benefits of writing as a way of healing now.”

Kelli demonstrated the openness she described in our follow-up interview through her essays. For her life essay, Kelli composed an essay based on the “life” of her first dating relationship. She titled the essay “Love Defines Me,” and I could feel the significance of Kelli’s first relationship, but her professional draft was filled with generalizations and the information seemed disjointed. In my response to her professional draft, I encouraged Kelli to “continue focusing on specific moments, descriptions, and examples from the life of your relationship with Nick. Take us back with you and your essay will gain even more power.” In our follow-up interview, Kelli explained her writing process with Essay I:

The first essay was really, really hard, and I sat at my computer and blanked. It wasn’t until we revised that I was able to say, okay, now I can add this in here and this detail there. I can now say that the professional draft I turned in was nothing like what it became after I revised. And as I revised, I noticed writing growth and personal growth. Though I experienced blocking while trying to write the essay, I think it only helped me remember all the times I shared with this person, and writing about Nick made it okay.

“Desertion” was the title Kelli chose for Essay II, and she focused on the loss she experienced the day she left for college, specifically the loss of leaving her five-year-old foster sister, Mariah. Kelli’s Essay II professional draft was much more effective, and I responded to her stylistic improvements in my professional draft endnote. It was at this drafting stage in the semester when Kelli’s writing growth became evident. She wrote honestly and vividly about her last day at home and exactly what she and Mariah did together, like nail-painting and eating at McDonalds. I also noticed a shift in Kelli’s attitude toward writing in her professional draft process narrative, “I feel that I have progressed in my writing since the last essay in that I tried to add a lot more detail, and I want the reader to visualize the event taking place. I want the reader to see the importance of Mariah in my life and the way she has changed me.” Kelli was able to

describe her goals for Essay II, and she took control of her topic—Kelli was showing signs that she believed she was, in fact, a writer.

Kelli decided to elaborate on her foster care experience with Essay III. The experience essay was by far Kelli's most well-written essay. Kelli also noted writing growth in her final portfolio letter, "In Essay III, I was able to see that I've changed since my first essay, where I only presented the experience on the surface; now I am able to write a paper where the reader can see me and my experience clearly." In our follow-up interview, Kelli shared that she is different because of the foster children that have come into her family, and she wanted to share the importance of foster care with other people. The community of writers was very interested in Kelli's essay, and she received the most positive, eager feedback from her peers during the half-class peer review workshop. In fact, I had to stop the conversation to move us to another topic. Natalie's endnote can help demonstrate the power of Kelli's essay, "Your paper provides everything anyone needs to know about Foster Care and what it takes to be a foster family. I learned that you must be a very determined family to become a foster family (not to mention caring and dedicated). It's a very moving essay, Kelli." I, too, learned about the foster care system, and the importance of foster care in Kelli's family, and she did an excellent job of combining her personal experience with research.

Kelli decided to move her loss essay into her radical revision project for Essay IV, and she created a photographic collage with pictures of foster sister Mariah, as well as words and sentences from her essay. She explained her focus in her radical revision process narrative: "When creating my project, I hoped to portray Mariah in the way I envision her. I must say I am very satisfied with the result. I feel like the statements displayed around the photographs coincide well with the emotions of the photos." The emotion and connection Kelli had with Mariah was clearly presented in the photographic collage and her radical revision presentation. She was passionate about sharing her project, and her peers were excited to finally see Mariah, the little girl Kelli used as the backdrop to her Essays II and III. In our follow-up interview, Kelli explained that her essays about Mariah and the photographic collage are especially meaningful to her now. She shared, "Mariah left us this summer, but at least I have the radical revision photographs and the essays and details about our sisterhood and time together. I don't

know what I would do if I didn't have them as reminders that she forever changed my life." As a reader and responder, I, too, still think about Mariah and foster care—Kelli experienced the most significant shift as a writer in the course, and her full portfolio well-documented her revisions as a writer and thinker.

Kelli repeatedly mentioned the importance of the classroom community in our follow-up interview. "The classroom felt so comfortable, and everyone was so friendly. The peer experience made it easier for me to write about my life because they were writing about their lives, too. The half-class workshop was like a conversation, and it was my favorite part of the class." Kelli was unsure of her writing style and the writing and healing pedagogical focus at the beginning of the course, which may have been what kept her from immediately joining the community of writers. I did, however, note that Kelli became much more involved in class discussions and writing workshops after she drafted the professional draft of Essay II and gained some confidence in her writing ability. By the end of the semester, Kelli was dedicated to sharing her writing, her experiences, and her writing strengths. "I had respect for my classmates, and they respected me and my experiences. I think I learned a great deal for my peers, and I still think about them and their essays."

Like her peers, Kelli also moved toward action after the close of spring semester. She shared in our follow-up interview: "As a result of this course, I have taken a huge step in testimony." She explained the effect of writing Essay I: "I realized that I could talk about what happened with Nick, and the assignment opened up and then healed open wounds." Over the summer, Kelli contacted Nick and they now talk occasionally, and she explained that she found closure. "I don't think I would have ever been able to this had I not been given the opportunity to write about him and thus learn to appreciate my past." Kelli also has moved her Essay III into action, and she has begun volunteering for the Department of Juvenile Justice. "I want to work with children, maybe even foster or adopt, and this is my way of reaching out to children in need while in college. Essay III made me aware of the need to continue reaching out." Overall, Kelli said in our follow-up interview that through the course, "Most importantly, I gained a new writing style."

## **Kristi Patterson**

*After writing about my biological father in Essay I, I was given the opportunity to meet him and I accepted it. I truly don't know if I would have had the courage to do this had I not shared my feelings about him in the essay I wrote in your class. Knowing how I felt about him made it much easier for me to stand up for myself and not let him take advantage of the relationship he neglected for so many years. I was able to express my true feelings and meet him for the first time, both things I was not ready to do before the course.*

Kristi was a twenty-year-old female from Oshkosh, Wisconsin, and was a business administration major in her senior year. As a transfer student and a senior, Kristi was the most advanced student in the course; in fact, the remaining 20 students were either at the freshman or sophomore level. Kristi's maturity and her level of education were evident from her first writing assignment; however, Kristi lacked confidence in her writing ability, and I made note of this after our individual conference the seventh week of the semester. She explained during our follow-up interview the impact of the course's focus for her:

The focus on writing and healing impacted me as a writer by providing me encouragement and confidence. At first I felt uncomfortable writing about my personal experiences and especially having to share them with others. But after my first paper, I realized that no one was going to judge me, and actually they were very interested in learning more about my life and experiences.

Kristi was, along with Trevor and Darla, one of the most vocal and active students in the course. At the beginning of the semester, Kristi participated in the group discussions, but by raising her hand, looking straight at me, and speaking softly. Toward the end of the semester, however, Kristi commented with much more ease and authority, and she directed her comments to the entire class. In their final portfolio letters, Kelli, Kassie, Alicia, Jeff, and Jon recorded Kristi as the most helpful peer responder.

From the beginning of the semester, Kristi was a promising writer, but what I noticed most over the course was Kristi's realization of her writing strengths. As she became more confident in her writing voice and style, her essays took off. For Essay I, Kristi wrote about an essay that chronicled her life and relationship to her mother. She titled the essay, "Me, My Mom, and I," and I was excited by Kristi's style and her

attention to specific moments from her life in her professional draft. As a reader, I was able to see into her life story and her relationship with her mother, and I encouraged Kristi to share her tribute with her mother. During our follow-up interview, Kristi explained that Essay I gave her “strength” to find and meet her biological father.

Because of the strong relationship between Kristi and her mother, it was very difficult for Kristi to move from Wisconsin to Florida. After discussing her topic ideas during our individual conference, Kristi chose her move to FSU as the focus of her loss essay, and her emotions were clear and strong in her professional draft of “A Home Away from Home.” Kristi elaborated on the emotional power of Essay II in her final portfolio letter:

My second essay surfaced a bunch of pressed back emotion that I was holding inside. As I started writing, it was as if I was going through the loss all over again. But when I was done, I was really able to see how much my loss experience has changed my life and who I am as a person. Writing and reflecting on this essay was a very helpful and rewarding experience for me. Overall, this essay was by far the most healing.

In our follow-up interview, Kristi mentioned the healing that came from writing Essay II. “Until writing it, I was constantly second guessing myself, and I was having a hard time finding meaning in my new life thousands of miles from my mom who was my life.” Not only did Kristi note personal growth with Essay II, she also began to believe more in her writing ability. This confidence was now apparent in her writing.

Kristi struggled with the topic selection and invention stage of Essay III, and she said that she was “the least satisfied with Essay III” during our follow-up interview. Because her long-term boyfriend was involved in an accident on the baseball field and had to undergo plastic surgery, Kristi decided to focus on plastic surgery for her experience essay. She titled her essay “Altering or Re-gaining Your Image: The Two Sides of Plastic Surgery.” In my teaching journal, I made note of the disconnection that Kristi seemed to have with her topic and her research process. She explained in our follow-up interview, “I experienced blocking because I didn’t know where to go with the essay or how to arrange it. I really struggled.” Although Kristi’s experience essay was not as powerful as her Essays I and II, her writing voice remained strong, and her peers



were very interested in the topic. She received very detailed feedback and questions during the half-class peer review workshop, and she moved that feedback into her revision of Essay III. In Kristi's final portfolio letter, she shared the importance of the assignment for her: "I learned, overall, that research doesn't have to come from books; it can be a broad range of topics, like the personal experience and interview I used in my essay."

Over the course of the semester, I learned that Kristi was also a very talented artist. I first realized her talent when she asked me about the radical revision project during the second week of the semester. She explained that she wanted to get started on the project, because art was her passion. I told her that I would introduce the radical revision project in more depth later in the semester, but I remained interested in what Kristi might compose for her radical revision project. Kristi chose to radically revise her Essay I into letter format, and she included the letter in a scrapbook of pictures and memories from her relationship with her mom. Kristi explained her composing process in her radical revision process narrative, "As I began to revise my essay into a letter, I felt like I was telling my mom our life story, which she obviously already knew. But after I thought about it, I realized that my perspective could be entirely different, which turned out to be the case. As soon as she read the letter, she responded, 'I never knew.'" Most importantly, Kristi noted that the radical revision project helped her better understand the revision process. Kristi was one of the first students to volunteer to present her scrapbook and letter for her presentation, and she passed the scrapbook around the room for her peers to see.

As mentioned above, Kristi was anxious about sharing her writing at the beginning of the semester: "I was very wary of reading and sharing my essays with others, but the peer workshops turned out to be my favorite part of the course. It made me better as a responder, and I was able to really share ideas on how to make my peers' essays stronger." In our follow-up interview, Kristi reiterated that the group discussions and peer review workshops were the most effective component of the course. "Working together and helping each other with our papers really added to the overall experience. It encouraged me to share my writing with my peers and openly accept their input. It also made me better at critiquing others' writing."

Out of the five students, Kristi took the most difficult step toward action after the close of Spring semester by choosing to meet her biological father. At the beginning of Fall term, Kristi stopped by my office to tell me about meeting her biological father over summer break. She was very confident in her decision, and I could tell she, too, noticed that inner strength. During our follow-up interview, she explained that writing about her biological father in Essay I gave her the words and emotions she needed to meet him, but not to allow him to step back into her life. “Meeting him confirmed the fact that I don’t want a relationship with him, and it gave me an even greater appreciation for my mom.”

Kristi also shared her ability to better express her emotions and feelings to those people in her life that she cares about the most as a result of ENC 1145-06. She has composed letters to the people in her life who mean the most, and she wrote tribute letters to her mother and her boyfriend’s sister. In Kristi’s follow-up interview written answers, she explained, “It felt great to write share my feelings in writing, and in one situation, it has positively influenced the bond I share with that person.” Through the course, Kristi grew most in her confidence as a writer, and her writing voice gained much more authority. In our follow-up interview, Kristi explained what she gained from the course: “I took away confidence in my writing abilities, which has proven itself in my other classes. This new confidence has started to also prove itself in my personal life as I am much more comfortable sharing my feelings with those people I care about.”

### **Moving Toward the Dissertation Study**

As evidenced in the five student vignettes, one of the most important guiding principles for a writing and healing pedagogy is its naturally discursive environment that integrates the personal and social and depends on the community’s ability to be supportive, critical, and united. Through my Spring 2003 pilot-study, I found that students appreciate one another’s lived experiences, and some were even moved to social change as a result of the essays they encountered throughout the course. I also found that students have important and meaningful things to share with us and with their fellow students, and a course designed around a writing and healing pedagogy invites them to take control of that learning—a writing and healing composition course can encourage students to write and rewrite out of their lived experiences and to locate whatever healing of that experience is available to the student and the community within which the student

lives and writes. As a teacher of a course focused on writing and healing, I, along with the students, was moved to change and I decided to further examine the role of the teacher in my dissertation study.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Looking Back and Moving Forward**

After completion of Chapter 3, I decided to share the chapter with the case-study students because their contributions were central to the overall success of the pilot-study. I invited them for dinner at my house right before Winter Break 2004, and they all seemed excited about meeting from the first round of e-mails. In fact, Kristi, who now lives in Madison, Wisconsin, wanted to fly down to get together with everyone—we even joked about putting her on speaker phone. It was clear that the community remained strong, after nearly two years.

The dinner was held on a cold, wet night, unusual weather for Tallahassee, and Trevor was the first student to arrive. He said he is always early. Even though it had been over six months since I had seen Trevor, our conversation was easy and he immediately began to tell me about his plans to pursue a PhD and teach Speech and Communication at the college level. Alicia arrived next, and she has always been quiet but she had a bright smile on her face all night. Kelli came next, and she also quickly began discussing her career plans, which seemed to be at the forefront of all of their minds. Darla arrived last and brought me a holiday candle set; as I listened to her, I realized that I had forgotten her strong voice that carries throughout a room.

We ate pizzas, which I know sounds cliché for college students, but I wanted them to feel relaxed and comfortable. We sat down for dinner at 7:30, and we did not move from our spots, except when I left to bring dessert to the table, until 11:00. The conversation was constant and engaging, and it was like they were all dying to share their updates. In our follow-up interview, Kelli said she couldn't believe how quickly the time passed as we talked and shared. Darla and Alicia talked about applying to law schools, Trevor and Darla argued about the way the educational system is organized, and Kelli told us about her family getting Mariah back in their home, the foster child she focused on in Essays II, III, and IV. We were all mesmerized by her story, and it was moving to see how much Kelli's fellow students remembered about Mariah and her essays. What's even more interesting is that during our follow-up interview, Trevor told me that he was not particularly close with Alicia, Darla, or Kelli during the class, but he still felt like it

was a reunion. He said, “Everyone in that class was responsive and cool. That only happened in one other course I ever took.”

After they left, I felt full. Alicia was using her child sexual abuse research process as the focus of her law school application statement, Kelli told us that she wants to write a new draft of her Foster Care essay, and Darla continually uses the research findings on eating disorders to encourage her swimmers not to fall into the trap of bulimia or anorexia like she did. She explained in our interview, “Parents want their children to be perfect athletes, models, students. That’s what pushes them toward this disease.” Because they are still writing and using concepts they either began or learned in the course, I asked them if they would be willing to sit down with me, two years out, and discuss their growth as writers and students. In the follow-up interviews, I was most interested in students’ writing lives and the community of writers that formed throughout the semester and remained strong two years later. To help guide our discussion, I provided students with a list of questions to consider. (See Appendix H) The following is what Alicia, Trevor, Darla, Kelli, and Kristi shared with me.

### **Alicia Hogg**

Alicia is graduating Spring 2005 with honors, and she is waiting to hear back from law and business schools she applied to, which include Harvard, Duke, and Miami. In her law school personal statement, Alicia wrote:

Writing can have a dramatic affect on a person; not only the person reading the piece, but the person composing it as well. In this writing course we were required to write on personal issues. As I discussed my experience with child abuse and the legal proceedings I went through to convict my stepfather, my interest in the law increased. I began researching the legal system and the various laws in relation to the abuse of children. The abundance of information enthralled me. Sharing my experience and research could encourage and inspire victims of abuse.

I asked Alicia why she chose Essay III as the focus of her law school application. She explained her decision in our interview:

Although the judge won’t care about what happened to me when I was 10, it will help me relate to clients. And there were certain things I wanted to get across in the application, like perseverance and dedication. I thought about writing about

my life as a dancer, and I guess I chose the abuse story because I could tie in legal interests and research. And it was an example of a writing project which is important for law school—it kinda tied everything together.

As we continued to discuss Alicia's writing life, she explained that when she sat down to write the seven essays required for most of her law school applications, she was more confident and the process "flowed." She continued to describe what she took away from our course: "The biggest thing I learned and still use from the course was diversification of my writing style. That and incorporating personal experiences with research. It makes the research seem more real." Alicia went on to share that her business teachers have told her numerous times that her essays are easy to read and understand because she seems personally invested—connection of the personal and analytical.

When I asked Alicia what she took away from our course, in addition to writing skills, she said that while taking this course she realized for the first time that everyone suffers loss. "I was actually surprised that a lot of people have gone through similar things or worse things in their lives, even things you wouldn't think people go through. I found it very interesting that people were willing to open up. I thought people were going to lie, but then I realized it would be a lot harder to write an essay about a shark biting my arm off." I asked her once again about her struggle to share the "whole" truth which was a constant theme throughout her case study. Alicia responded with another reminder of how the course renewed a sense of humanity and honesty for her. She said, "I would have never believed people would share with me their abuse story or about their parents adopting children. I just never thought people would talk about those things, but there was a class of 21 people and all of them did, willingly. I find that amazing."

While on the topic of the classroom community, I asked Alicia what it was like for her to reunite with some of the class members last December. She responded, "It was great to see everyone. I only saw Kristi and it was because we were both business majors. I didn't even know she graduated, so it was awesome to hear everyone's updates. It also showed the strong relationships we share." Alicia went on to explain that the level of engagement throughout the course and even beyond the semester was an unusual experience for her, and she attributes the level of connection to the fact that everyone was

sharing their “truths.” Much of the debate surrounding this type of pedagogy focuses on questions of honesty. Jeffrey Berman (2001) responds to this idea of needing to share the truth: “I don’t claim that risky writing is more authentic than other types of writing, but I believe it reveals students’ efforts to tell the truth as they see it, including shameful truths that are hidden from view” (28-29).

As Alicia walked out of my office, I thought about her influence within the class and throughout this study. Why do I always share Alicia’s research essay on child sexual abuse as an example of an essay that joins the personal and academic? I believe the power of Alicia’s writing style lies in her honesty. For example, when I asked Alicia to reflect on her initial response to the course’s focus now that two years have passed, she laughed and explained that she was afraid on the first day that we would spend our class time, “crying and kissing and hugging. But looking back I laugh, because it was a great class and it made me realize that we can all learn from each other. I got a lot out of it.” Alicia is right—learning is just it, and I continue to learn from her.

### **Trevor Williams**

I was scheduled to meet with Trevor on a Tuesday at 11:00 a.m., and by 11:25, I decided to e-mail him. He immediately responded with a huge apology for missing our meeting. I laughed because I almost sent a reminder to everyone, but in this chapter, I was focusing on the pilot-study students as grown-ups. I felt like an e-mail reminder would cancel out that focus. Perhaps I was wrong.

Trevor and I met the following day, and he began by apologizing for missing our interview and for not having any written answers to the follow-up questions. I was secretly relieved that Trevor forgot to respond in writing to the questions, because Darla and Alicia looked to their written answers throughout our talks. Without written answers, I imagined that my conversation with Trevor would be more organic.

Plus, I was certain he was still invested in the classroom community because I saw him at the campus fitness center, The Leach, last spring, and he ran up to ask me about some of the other class members. He was still thinking about the class, and 1 \_ years had passed. During our talk, I asked Trevor to reflect on the classroom community and the experience of reuniting with some of the other class members. He shared his thoughts:

It was neat. I actually wasn't close to any of the people that we got together with. There were other people that I had become closer to, but they are all people that I would talk to if I ran into them and have. It felt like a community even during the class because you forced us to talk in the beginning and then within days, you didn't even have to force it. It was one of the best, if not the best course, to share and get feedback from everyone.

Trevor then began to talk about how much he learned through the course, the writing assignments, and the class discussion, but how little he benefited from the peer workshops. "I felt stifled with my peer group. I wanted someone who would challenge my writing. And all I ever got was 'it's perfect.' But I know for a fact that my writing isn't perfect, so that was very frustrating." I asked Trevor how he thought that could be changed for future writing students, and he explained:

It's nothing that a class can fix. That's something that I think our university needs to fix. We don't learn before college how to respond to and critique writing. I would never rip apart a weaker writer's essay. Instead, I would focus on what's working in the essay and talk about ways to make the rest of it better.

As we talked, I felt like I was having a conversation with an incoming teaching assistant.

While on the topic of writing, I asked Trevor what type of writing he engages in now. He shared:

I am still writing songs. As far as my writing goes, if it's not academic, it's e-mail. I don't want to lie to you, and you know me, I'm a pretty emotional guy. I don't have trouble expressing my emotions so I can't say that your class was an emotional breakthrough. But it was definitely interesting to do that type of writing in an academic setting. It was cool to experience that with other people, especially other people who were not exactly like me.

I asked him to reflect on the above comment about being such an emotional being, because he was expressing his concerns about a pedagogy that joins writing and emotion from the first day of our course. Trevor responded, "Well, it was strange for me in the beginning to realize that I was going to be really myself in an academic setting, whereas in other classes, I'm more of a version of myself and that was new for me—you and the class members got to know more about me than other classes." From this comment, I



realized that, in the beginning, it's even hard for students to understand and value the importance of joining the emotional and analytical.

As we shifted the discussion to the course, Trevor reflected on his writing life: "Any time I put pen to paper now it comes back to what I learned in our course. I ask myself how to make the writing interesting and not stiff and journalistic." I told him the power of his writing style was best evidenced in our course through his essay on Mormonism: He said, "Wow, that essay was unbelievable to write. I will never forget writing that essay, just because (I'm not afraid to tell you) I cried a lot while writing that essay and had to face demons I had been pushing away. It could be twice as long and twice as detailed as it is, so I would love to revisit that essay." I went on to ask if he was still working with Saints Alive, the organization he was involved with during our first follow-up interview and he responded, "I was involved with Saints Alive Ministry, but I can't get anyone to respond to my e-mails...I think they got taken down by the greater LDS church like other organizations. I would like to publish the essay I wrote, though. I think it's really important for people to know the truth." I hope he does continue this writing project.

When I asked Trevor what the course prepared him for, he said, "I can honestly say that I did become a better writer and not because of the books and not because of the peer evaluation, but honestly because you forced me to look at my own writing in a different way and you asked how I might continue to strengthen it constantly." He continued to explain how the course encouraged him to recognize his abilities as a writer which he continues to use in his major coursework. I asked him to give me an example. "Okay, I just got back a think piece from my Gender and Communications course, and I wrote about something in the media that I found interesting in response to women's rights. I chose a Sprint commercial that I found degrading to women, and that was cool—I got a really good grade on it."

As we continued to discuss the course as a whole, he said, "I know that as a teacher myself one day, I will always keep in mind the positive tone or attitude of your course, which has a lot to do with you. Another thing is that I felt like grading was very low on the priority level, and I hope to do that one day."

Throughout our talk, it was very clear that Trevor was moving forward toward his own teaching life. At one point during our conversation, I asked Trevor how he imagines using writing in his career. He responded, “I would like to teach at the college level, so I can imagine that I will have to do a lot of writing. I’ve even narrowed down some graduate school options, and LSU looks really promising because they have a PhD in Communication Studies. Or I want to do something with education reform.” He went onto explain his ultimate “teacher” dream: “Wouldn’t it be cool if I had enough money to build a school where I could teach any way I wanted and offer teachers significant salaries? I mean, imagine if all middle school teachers had master’s degrees or PhD’s in urban areas and offer them 6 figures.”

Trevor is also involved in a training course this semester which prepares honors students to become teachers for FIGS courses or Freshman Interest Groups. Trevor shared his ideas and beliefs with others, both positive and negative, from the first day of our course, and in our second follow-up interview, it was clear that he has realized, like I did during our course, that he is a teacher.

### **Darla Woodring**

I have been in touch with Darla more than any other pilot-study student, because she asked for my mentorship throughout her law school application process. She is also the most vocal and social of the group, so she keeps in touch with ease. Darla, like Alicia, is graduating this semester and awaiting responses from the laws schools to which she applied. Darla is also very involved as an honors student and swim coach for a local high school. She’s busy and with everything she touches, she requires perfection.

I remember Darla’s determination and perfectionism well because that was the focus of her life essay, “Innocence is Bliss.” She wrote in the beginning of her essay: “My appearance was just another aspect of my life that I was determined to control. This disorder stemmed from my perfectionist tendencies.” As we began our conversation about Darla’s current writing life, she, too, reflected on her first essay: “The way I used the jeans theme in my first essay is how I came up with the idea to organize my personal statement for law school around the different women and gender roles throughout three generations of women in my family—my Grandma, my Mom, and me.”

We spent the first five minutes discussing the LSAT and Darla's frustration with standardized tests serving as a measure of intelligence—a frustration I share. She also explained that her family wasn't coming to her graduation because she is only one of 8,000. She said, "There are 200 people better than me. Although I like being number one, 200 out of 8,200 isn't bad." In the middle of my response, Darla said, "Okay, it's time to focus on my writing." Where Trevor and I drifted into talk about educational reform and his career goals, Darla wanted to remain on track.

When I asked Darla to reflect on what skills she took away from the course, she explained, "The describing, detail, and critical thinking skills are the things I still use from our course. Writing in this way helped me understand that, of course, I was upset—all of these things happened to me. Writing was to organize my life and thinking critically about those experiences." I followed by asking when she has found those skills to be the most useful. She responded:

This semester for the first time since our class, I was required to write about myself in a critical manner for my Human Sexuality class, and the assignment was a 5-7 page paper on how I developed my sexuality. A lot of other students were confused on how to link an expository and research paper. For me, I went back and examined events in my life, how they made me feel, and the kinds of conclusions I drew from them. For example, instead of just stating that I was a tomboy when I was young, I tried to examine why I developed that identity. In the course, I wrote about things that I may have been uncomfortable with in the past but writing it down provided some healing. This taught me that if people are willing to write as a way of healing, it's powerful. I didn't even think that when I wrote the sexuality paper that I sat down at the beginning of our course to write the life essay and wrote about this one thing in my sexuality paper, but I wasn't willing to share it two years ago. With time, I think we'll all feel more comfortable writing about things.

Darla is so comfortable with the semantics of writing and healing, and as we talked, she shared with me that she doesn't feel ready to sign her cousin Nick's obituary guestbook, but she learned in our course that she doesn't have to write unless she's ready to share her story. Darla said, "I know when I sit down, it will be painful and Desalvo

said that I don't have to write if I'm not ready—and I'm not. But I know I will be, because in our class, I wasn't ready to write about the exact topic I chose for my sexuality course.” Darla reminded me of the importance of being ready to share our stories, especially in a community setting. This is something I always emphasize in my courses and Darla's reminders are good proof.

Because Darla has always been such a strong proponent of this pedagogical focus, I was curious as to what she thought about the focus after two years. Darla reminded me that this is the type of course that she views as necessary to build a balanced education. She shared, “Usually academic courses don't have a fringe benefit [I laughed hard]; for example, in my Economics courses, I can draw curves but I don't feel better at the end of the day. I did, however, feel better when writing in your course.” When I asked her which essay she felt the best about or remembered most, she responded:

I was proud of all of my essays because each was very different. The first one provided the most healing. The second essay on my friend's death was the most descriptive and I think it also prepared me to cope with my cousin's death. Like my radical revision from the perspective of Tommy's mother, I now know that feeling of tragic familial loss. Essay III was the most informative; and the personal aspect gave validity to why the topic was important.

Darla's sharp memory of every detail of every essay she composed comes as no surprise to me.

We talked, too, about the theme of the loss of perfection that ran throughout her portfolio drafts, and I asked her to reflect on that experience. She said, “I'm more willing to talk about things now, especially body image issues, with my swimmers. One girl on the swim team asks me every day if I see stretch marks on her legs, but she is tiny. So I always try to encourage her to see herself as beautiful, just the way she is.”

Darla seems to be involved with a range of communities, both within and outside the university setting. As we talked about community, she reflected on our classroom community:

For the real world, just being in the class with so many different people with so many different problems, I became more compassionate. I think the course also prepared me for other aspects of life in general. Since we shared our work in

class, I was exposed to an array of unique experiences that taught me that individuals struggle with different things and no one's life is perfect. This also allowed me to be more compassionate at my job.

Darla also talked about the community celebration: "It was neat to see everyone, especially because people in our course were from all different backgrounds and shared all different experiences—yet we were close." When Darla left my office, I was full of energy and I wanted to go conquer the world with her. I'm confident that Darla will continue to enter and enrich communities with her intelligence, determination, and perfectionism.

### **Kelli Justham**

I looked very forward to talking with Kelli because I was anxious to learn more about the process her family went through to get Mariah, her foster sister that she focused on in Essays II, III, and IV, back into their home. Kelli, like the other students, is moving forward, and she began our interview by telling me of her decision to extend her degree one more year and apply to law schools in Fall 2005. I asked Kelli why she wanted to go to law school, and she explained her dream of going into the FBI.

When I asked Kelli what she took from our course and used in other aspects of her life, she explained that she feels like she grew immensely as a writer through our course. "I can express myself more easily, which was hard for me at first. And I'd never been asked to write about myself. Now, every time I share a story, I give tons of details. Even when I write research papers for other classes, I'm able to add more of me." We continued to talk about Kelli's writing growth, which was immense in fact, and she went on to elaborate on the skills she gained from the course:

What I have taken away from this course isn't simply at the educational level. I feel that I've grown as a person as well. Throughout this course, I was told to write about myself and my experiences, something I hadn't been given the opportunity to do in a long time. However, I learned that it isn't as easy as you might think, being able to express to a reader the most unexplainable experiences is a difficult task. By the end of this course, I learned that I could express myself as a writer and that is something that I continue to do today. I learned how to allow the reader to capture my experience.

The most capturing events Kelli shared in writing involved Mariah and her experience with the foster care system. When Kelli and I met for our first follow-up interview, Mariah had been taken from their home and placed into a home with her biological brother. When we met for the pizza celebration, Kelli shared that Mariah had finally, after a year, been permanently placed back with her family. Kelli explained that Mariah has trouble remembering things, and they think she might have a neurological disorder. Kelli is convinced that she has just been through such a great deal of trauma that she blocks information and memories. Mariah is now 8 years old, and she is still very close to Kelli. Kelli told me that she uses her writing from our course as a type of memory box: “When we got her back this summer, I showed her the essay and the collage because she doesn’t remember anything. The radical revision makes me angry because they took a year of her life and when I was creating the radical revision, I had no idea that she was going to be gone. I use my writing as a way to look back.”

Kelli also mentioned the importance of support from the classroom community in response to her topics on foster care several times throughout our talk:

The course helped me see other people differently. Something I didn’t think about until I was reflecting was just how well we all knew each other. When we presented our radical revisions, everyone knew who Mariah was but they didn’t really understand our relationship. Once I opened up the class members understood just how important Mariah was in my life. You don’t see that often in academic classes—people empathizing and connecting. In my criminology classes, there are often conversations about foster care and I want to defend the foster families, although I know that many of our kids come from foster families who were abusing them. I got such a positive reaction from my peers with writing the third essay that I felt like a success. It opened a door to my writing life.

We also discussed the continued feeling of community, which we both felt was present during the pilot-study celebration. Kelli said:

When we got together, I felt like I talked a lot. I couldn’t believe how much I talked. I was in a group with Trevor, but I didn’t really know Darla and Alicia. I don’t usually form relationships with people from class. That’s why I loved your

class because people got really close and we were all social. We all wanted to know more about each other, even after two years. I couldn't believe what time it was when we got up from the table.

Throughout our conversation, we continually shifted to a focus on Mariah. So I asked Kelli if she had considered continuing this writing project or taking further action toward what Desalvo calls "testimony." Kelli shared:

I have been drafting and brainstorming for another piece of writing I am about to start a continuance of my third essay, which talks about Foster Care, and I am going to take a different approach and write about what a lot of people don't know about the system. I am going to use the bulk of my research on when Mariah was taken from us. Being able to express the pain and hurt my family went through to others is a way for me to hopefully come to terms with losing a member of our family for over a year. So my testimony would be to help people understand Mariah and foster care. The system stained her life, and I want to make a testimony for children.

I had the privilege of going to lunch with Kelli, her mom, David, age 12, Victoria, age 10, Mariah, age, 8, and Gage, age, 4. I have never felt more humbled. Kelli's family members have given their lives to become a family to abused and neglected children. As I watched David, Victoria, Mariah, and Gage play, I remembered Kelli's essays and her words: "I am hoping that through my writing, others can see that it's not always the foster parents that harm the children; the actual system does the most harm." What Kelli shares through her writing and life makes her a hero in my estimation, and I hope she will continue the fight.

### **Kristi Patterson**

Kristi is the only student of the five pilot-study students who has graduated and moved into her professional career. She is working as a Marketing Executive and Recruiter for Trek Bikes in Madison, Wisconsin. Kristi also recently got married, and she seems to be established in her personal and professional life. Because of this distance, it was difficult for her to find a time to talk with me about the course, and we discussed the course on her way to work on a Wednesday morning at 7:30. Kristi also e-mailed me written answers and although she was afraid she might be a disappointment

because of how little she now writes; I wasn't disappointed at all. In fact, I wanted honesty more than anything, and with Kristi, that's just what I got. This can be evidenced through an e-mail when we were trying to find a time to talk:

During the week probably wouldn't be the best time, I know you mentioned that it would take possibly a few hours and I don't have that many minutes on my cell phone, and I am usually extremely busy during the week. Maybe we could do it next weekend. I am having an open house on Saturday and Sunday, we are going to try selling it ourselves, but we could do it before or after.

I don't know how exciting my interview will be I haven't really done any type of writing since I graduated. I will try to get to the questions that you sent me this week.

I responded and assured Kristi that we didn't have to talk for hours, and I was reminded throughout our conversation of Kristi's maturity, which was first made evident during our course. It was so great to hear Kristi's voice, and I began the conversation by asking her what she took away from the course and used in other aspects of her life. She explained that she grew not only as a writer, but she took big steps toward personal growth: "It's easier now for me to share how I feel, especially on paper. By writing the first essay, I discovered things I didn't realize I felt and I became aware of just how much of an impact my mom has had on my life. Before that class, I'd never written passionately." I asked her what the course prepared her for and she explained that "This class prepared me for my professional life after college by making me realize my strengths and weaknesses as a person and writer. I knew the types of things I needed to work on to become a better person and what things I was really good at which helped in interviews." We continued to talk about personal growth which seemed to be a focus for Kristi and she shared: "Personally it prepared me for future challenges that I may have. When things seem difficult to sort out, I know that I can take out a piece of paper and make more sense out of it by putting everything in writing."

We then shifted our conversation to the course's focus on writing and healing, and I asked her to share her ideas and experiences with the pedagogy. Kristi detailed, "I was nervous at first, but I liked your teaching style so much that I stuck with it. And I'm



so glad I did. The class changed me a lot, because putting things on paper helps you realize how things change or affect you.” I asked her which essay affected or changed her most and she said Essay I for sure. “The essay about my mom was my favorite, especially the final product. I enjoyed writing it, too—I would get into these moments where I would just write and write forever. There were so many things that I remembered while typing, and you don’t usually sit down and reflect on your childhood.”

Kristi made it very clear that she has not engaged in personal writing since our course, but I asked her what she writes. She explained:

The things I write now are completely work related. I write up sales presentations and business proposals. Right now, I’m reading books and researching ways to increase retention within the plant, and it’s the first time I’ve conducted research since the course. As I’ve been researching, I’ve put my thoughts on paper so I guess in that sense, I’ve spent a lot of time writing, well, research writing.

I asked Kristi if her attitude toward writing had remained positive since our last interview and she said, “In the past, even writing a research paper, it was so hard for me to get my pen going. Now I know that it’s okay just to begin writing because it’s not as if it’s stuck there on the page.”

As we shifted the discussion beyond the class, I asked if she had moved from silence to testimony since we last spoke. Kristi again shared the powerful move toward action when she chose to meet her biological father:

After I wrote the first essay, I did go meet my biological dad. That was a major move and transition for me. When I first learned of the chance to meet my biological dad, I just sat next to the phone for an hour and it ate me alive. It all began really when I put my thoughts down on paper in your class in the first essay. I thought that I would like to know where I came from and what I look like. Having that all down made me realize it wouldn’t be so bad to meet him and it didn’t mean we had to be best friends. I realized I could go and then be done with it if I wanted to or not.

I asked Kristi if she kept in contact with him. She responded, “No, he called my uncle four months ago to get my address and phone number and my uncle said he couldn’t give him that without knowing what I wanted. He ended up calling my mom and she

explained that meeting him was a closure for me.” I think, in a way, this last conversation with Kristi was also closure for me on the pilot-study experience. Kristi’s strength has always been so inspiring, and it was very clear that she has matured into a strong businesswoman.

After completing the last follow-up interview, I began asking myself what I gained from revisiting the pilot-study and investigating the continuing writing lives of the case-study students. Overall, these conversations helped validate the importance of this pedagogy for me as a teacher and a researcher, because it is clear that all five students continue to use the rhetorical skills they gained from the course in their personal, academic, and professional lives, to varying and individual degrees of course.

In fact, it is that individuality that convinced me of the third component necessary for the success of any writing pedagogy—the writer himself or herself. The classroom community and pedagogical focus are of great importance but I think we often lose sight of the student in the midst of pursuing our interests in feminist theory or cultural studies. I also think it likely that personal writing teacher-scholars, in response to the criticism against personal writing, move beyond a focus on the self or, in other words, the student. Marian MaCurdy (2000) extends the danger of this move away from the self in her introduction: “Writing teachers find themselves more and more alienated from students who seem less and less attentive and more resistant to the increasingly abstract benefits of academic literacy, which students experience as increasingly removed from their personal histories” (13).

As evidenced through this case study analysis, each of the five students engaged in both personal and academic writing in order to locate their “personal histories.” Through writing and research, Alicia discovered her passion for the field of law, Trevor decided he wanted to be a teacher, Darla realized the power of her experience with bulimia, Kelli decided to fight the foster care system, and Kristi met her biological father. And yet each student’s writing and writing process varied throughout the course, and these five snapshots demonstrate that this is also true for their educational, personal, and professional paths. In order to adequately study composition pedagogy, I believe it is necessary to reflect on and analyze the various ways students compose themselves and

their writing. It is clear that these are five students who are well on their way to shaping the worlds in which they live and write. Writing from the inside out, in action.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Building a Community of Writers: The Dissertation-Study Course**

Ann Berthoff (1979), an early advocate of teacher research, encourages teachers to research their own classrooms and then share their research findings in order to strengthen the ways writing is taught. In order to best present the dissertation-study course and students, I used many different methods for collecting and analyzing data. In this chapter, I will share that data by introducing the classroom community members, the overall course design and texts, and students' writing and responses to that writing across the semester. James Potter (1996) supports this layout as an effective form of presenting teacher research findings: "this [method of analysis] allows the data to speak for themselves unencumbered by the author" (176). Potter argues that a qualitative research approach relies on three types of evidence-gathering: "document examination, interview, and observation" (177). I will use all three of these measures while analyzing the dissertation-study course.

#### **Welcome to Class: An Introduction to the Classroom Community**

I was extremely nervous before the start of class on the first day of the semester, August 24, 2004, because I knew that this dissertation-study course would either validate or discount the value of a writing and healing pedagogy. I also knew that as an ethical researcher, I had to present both positive and negative findings in my reporting of the data. With these concerns in mind, I encouraged students, from that first day, to learn and research the effectiveness of this pedagogy with me. I also provided a detailed syllabus and daily schedule to ensure that students understood the focus of the course and the course requirements from the start of the semester. (See Appendix C)

At the beginning of the second class session, I focused again on the dissertation-study because I wanted to stress that there were no risks involved in being part of the classroom study. I briefly explained my research interests and focus, especially for the students who added the course late, and I read the opening paragraph from the first chapter of the dissertation as a way to explain my research goals. I also assured students that they could withdraw as participants in the study at any time. When I asked if they had any questions, they all just looked at me. It was clear from this moment on that I was more concerned about being ethically sound than they were. In fact, they seemed

completely comfortable with the classroom research study and this is probably due at least in part to the fact that FSU is a Research I institution.

I also explained to students that I submitted a Human Subjects Application which was approved by Institutional Review Board prior to the start of Fall 2004. I asked them to complete a human subjects consent form during the second class session, in order to abide by university ethical research guidelines. (See Appendix B) They all signed it without any questions, and Aimee asked, with a big smile, if I thought it might get published.

I also administered two open-ended questionnaires over the course of the semester. Students anonymously answered the first questionnaire during the second class session, and their responses were held in the First-Year Writing Director's office until after completion of the term. The opening questionnaire helped me understand students' writing backgrounds and their initial interpretations of a writing course focused on life, loss, and experience. Students also completed a questionnaire at the close of the semester, which also remained anonymous until after the course concluded. The closing questionnaire provided students' views of this pedagogical focus.

The opening and closing questions mirror each other, and students' shift in response from the beginning to the end of the course helped showcase their writing growth. The full opening questionnaires and each student's response can be found in the appendices, although one student, Ola, did not complete an opening questionnaire because she added the course late. (See Appendix I) Although the questionnaires can only evaluate students' short-term responses to the pedagogy, they do provide an important overview of each student's ideas about the writing process and the pedagogical design. The following are the opening questionnaire questions and an analysis of students' answers:

**1) What do you write? Make a list of the type of writing you normally engage in (i.e. e-mail, academic papers, lists, etc).**

A majority of students reported that they wrote e-mails, papers, and to-do lists. However, Brittani's response moved toward the personal focus of the course. She wrote, "I believe I write because I sometimes don't know how to say things aloud. I will write how I'm feeling in a 'diary' or write reminders and notes to myself. I write a lot of e-mails, memos, letters, and papers." Out of the 21 students, 12 of them reported that they

wrote journals or kept a diary. For example, Candice noted that she wrote when she was “sad or angry.” Aimee also described writing as a way of release: “When I have lots of emotions, positive and negative (usually negative), I write to sort out my feelings.” A detailed analysis of the response revealed that more than 50% of the student population was already engaged in personal writing at the start of the semester.

**2) What do you think you will learn from a course focused on your life, your loss, and your experience? What worries you about the course? What excites you about the course?**

Students were honest in their expectations and apprehensions about the course. Of the 21 responses, 17 of them focused on their anticipation about writing from personal experience. Roseli expressed her excitement, “Nothing really worries me about the course; I feel safe enough to write about personal issues. I am excited about digging deep into myself to write about life, loss, and experience.” It is important to note that one student, Phil, was resistant toward the personal in his opening questionnaire. In response to what he might learn from the course, he responded, “Not too much because I am lucky to have not lost much. I am worried I’ll have nothing to write about.” Phil wasn’t the only student concerned about what they might write about. In fact, Susan and Aimee also mentioned their concern about finding meaningful topics to explore in response to their “worries” about the course. Aimee wrote, “I’m at a good/neutral point in my life so I’m worried I won’t have enough to write on!”

The similarity between Lauren’s and Rachel’s responses to question two is also fascinating. They became strong friends and colleagues across the course, and they both wrote their loss essays on their rapes which may be what they are referring to in their responses. The joining of words and experiences began here. Rachel wrote, “Hopefully, I will learn how to better put into words my emotions and experiences. **I guess I am a little worried about what I will find out about myself, but at the same time, that’s what excites me most.**” Lauren wrote, “I’m convinced that this course will help me to grieve for my losses, recount my experiences, and help me further throughout my life. **I’m a little weary about what I’ll find, but that also excites me.**”

Students also expressed their anxiety over sharing their writing with the classroom community—Jessica C., Jessica R., and Collen all shared this concern. Jessica R. described her anxiety: “The only worry I have is that I won’t open up right away. I’ll be

a little more hesitant.” Colleen explained, “I’m worried about the workshops because I hate group attention and others reading what I’ve written.” Jessica C., who became one of the biggest proponents for peer workshopping wrote, “What worries me is sharing my writing by reading it aloud. Yikes.” The apprehension they expressed in their responses to the opening questionnaire was never made evident throughout the course, and Jessica R. opened up to the entire class more than any other student.

**3) What have you written from your personal experience? What did you gain from the act of writing about your personal experience?**

Phil was the only student to have never written about personal experience. His response to this question reads, “Nothing.” Out of the remaining responses, 18 of the students described personal writing as a way to gain closure or as Candice explained, “to deal with problems.” Andrea’s description of her personal writing experience is reflective of the overall response:

I have written about the world and how I feel about society. I have written about relationships, friendships, being a teenager, being angry, wanting something better for myself, and also about what is great about my life. From writing about these things, I calm my mind and heal myself.

The personal writing they described mainly took the form of freewriting, journals, and poetry. As Jennifer explained, “I have taken up writing on several occasions when I was overwhelmed by a situation and caught up by what was happening around me. I’d write to calm myself.” Three students, however, noted that they had written personal essays in academic courses. Roseli wrote: “In ENC 1101, I wrote about something that impacted my life. I wrote about moving to a new state during high school. I was able to really find out how and what I was feeling.” The thing that struck me as I analyzed the data is that a majority of students were already using writing as a way of healing before they entered the course, and I think this is why many of them were confident writers coming into the semester.

**4) How would you define therapeutic writing?**

When holistically examining the opening questionnaires, the responses seem most passionate in response to Question 4. All 21 students described therapeutic writing as writing that allows a person to express emotions, heal, soothe the soul, or find peace. The

following five responses help demonstrate students' knowledge of the importance of writing in this way:

Roseli Agulair: Therapeutic writing is a way to soothe your soul. It helps **heal** the wounds.

Jack Andrews: The act of writing performed by a person (not always in need or ailment) for the **soothing** of one's soul. Quieting the relentless side.

Jessica Culbreath: I would define it as writing that allows you to leave you pen and paper **feeling peace** and self comfort. Sometimes a blank piece of paper can be the best listener and reviewing yourself as a reader puts things into a satisfying perspective.

Andrea Gold: As a kind of writing that is limitless, without boundaries, that lets you **express** yourself freely and entirely without judgment by anyone. Therapeutic writing is something that **heals** your pain and makes you feel better.

Lauren Hill: Therapeutic writing entails writing about an event in one's life in order to overcome the emotional constraints associated with that particular event and **heals** one's self.

Another striking discovery from the analysis of students' responses to this question is that they recognize that writing and healing is not a quick fix. Wid and Aimee describe therapeutic writing as a process that takes place over time. As Wid explains, therapeutic writing is "Something so detailed that when you read it *years after*, the emotion is just as strong but it's manifested into words on a page, instead of pain in your heart." Aimee also focuses on the process of writing and healing: "Writing your thoughts and feelings down leads to a *gradual understanding* of the deeper thoughts and feelings that couldn't surface because your thoughts and feelings were so out of control." The questionnaires were completed before any discussion or practice of writing and healing ever took place. I'm no longer surprised that they had so much to teach, even during our first discussion of Desalvo's text.

##### **5) Why did you choose to take this special topics course on writing about life, loss, and experience.**

Students' responses varied in their rationale for registering for *Writing about Life, Loss, and Experience*. Six of the students recorded that they registered for the course because the time fit their schedule. As Jack explains, "In all honesty, I took this course because it fit my schedule. Now that I have it, I know I would have picked it because it



challenges me to evaluate myself.” The main reason 10 students noted for registering was that the course was an alternative to the required research writing course, ENC 1102. Harmony shares her rationale: “I wanted to take a “writing about” course rather than a regular ENC 1102. This course sounded interesting, and I feel more comfortable writing about myself than just doing research.” The remaining students mentioned the chance to write about the personal as their logic for choosing to take the course. Mike’s response is reflective of the general response: “I chose this class because I expected that I would be able to write about what I know best (myself). I feel that writing about a topic I feel strongly about will help improve my writing.”

The opening questionnaire analysis establishes students’ individuality as well as their likeness. Although the students answers are all different based on their experiences and knowledge, a large majority of them reached similar conclusions, which is what I would argue made the class dynamic so unique. And that dynamic also varied due to students’ demographic backgrounds. The following is the class’s gender, ethnic, and academic population data:

**Gender**

Male: 7                      Female: 15

**Ethnicity**

Caucasian: 16              African-American: 3              Hispanic: 3

**Academic Standing**

Freshman: 19              Sophomore: 2              Junior: 1



Figure 1: Photograph of Dissertation-Study Students

### **Moving Across the Semester: A Look into the Course**

As discussed in Chapter 2, *Writing about Life, Loss, and Experience* is designed as a writing workshop, where students are invited to write, revise, and learn together as they become stronger writers and thinkers. The fall semester dissertation-study course, ENC 1145-07, was a special-topics course that fulfilled the second-semester first-year writing course requirement. My main course goals were to encourage students to become more invested in writing and making sense of their lived experiences, as well as the experiences of other members of the writing community. The very process of writing and revising provided an opportunity for students to share their experiences and be heard by others in the classroom community. It was clear from the beginning of the semester that this classroom was very open to becoming a community of writers. And that they did.

The strong community atmosphere was apparent during our discussion of Desalvo's first chapter, "Why Write." I began our third class session by asking students what they thought of Desalvo's opening: "Writing has saved my life." Did they believe

her? Was it too touchy feely? Jessica R. immediately said, “No, writing can save your life. Like she said, when she writes, she’s healthy. When she’s not writing, she’s sick. And I mean, you can tell she has experienced loss and healing, and I like how open she is and she talks to us.” Rachel read the quote on page eight by Alice Walker as further evidence that writing has the power to heal: “Writing, she once remarked, not only for her, but for us all, is ‘a matter of necessity and that you write to save your life is really true and so far it’s been a very sturdy ladder out of the pit.’” Aimee responded that she really liked that quote, too, and she agreed that writing can help you get out of the pit, but she said the ladder is never sturdy. Aimee’s comment led to a discussion about the messiness of drafting, writing, and revising.

I then asked students why they thought we should write about our lives. Lauren raised her hand immediately and said that writing in this way makes you aware and moves you toward action. Harmony said she had never thought about linking the past to the present in her writing and that’s what seems so powerful about this focus to her. Their responses were what seemed powerful to me, and I wrote in my teaching journal, “I can’t believe it—they get it already, and they seem so excited.”

After we talked about the writing and revising process, I asked them who considered themselves a “writer.” No one raised their hands. So, I asked, “What do you write?” and I made a list on the board. Their list looked like this:

- songs
- e-mails
- letters
- cards
- instant messages
- poetry
- journals
- short stories
- assignments
- essays
- lists
- reminders

Finally, I asked students what they imagined to be the purpose of writing and healing. They responded by stating that writing and healing provides hope. Wid responded, “Writing about life helps you rethink your perspective or feelings about a past experience because you have to take into account the entire experience, the people

involved, your emotions, how you are now....” Jack said, “Yeah, like on page 3, Mark Doty writes, ‘What is healing, but a shift in perspective?’”

Students appeared ready to explore writing and healing as we entered the life essay unit, and a majority of them found their topics quickly and excitedly. Students seemed especially eager during the remembering people and events invention exercise, and Colleen, Adam, and Jessica R. shared that this exercise led them to their topics. For example, Colleen explained that she found her focus on her family’s life struggle with her father’s alcoholism through the following prompts:

**First, let’s remember people.**

Someone who had authority over you—Mom

--Someone who helped you through a difficult time—Mary Beth

--Someone whose advice impacted you—Dad

--Someone who taught you something important about yourself—Dad

--Someone who inspired love in your life—Dad

--Someone who inspired hate in your life—Lyle

--Someone who inspired envy in your life—Laura

--Someone who disappointed you—Mom

--Someone who helped you re-define your sense of identity—Laura

**Secondly, let’s remember events and time periods.**

--At what time in your life, were you the most content? How long did this contentment last? Why were you happy? Significant events? Where were you? How old? I was content for 3 years when I was really young, because I thought my family and the world was great

--At what time were you the most angry, miserable, or discouraged? How long did you remain discouraged? What was happening in your life? Where were you? How old? When my family was torn apart because of my dad’s alcoholism.

**\*DAD\*** for Essay I!!!!

This invention assignment also led Adam to write a life essay about the different cities he grew up in, and Jessica decided to write about the relationship with her father who continually abandoned her. Other students found their essay topics through workshop discussion groups, Desalvo’s writing invitations, and the sensory observation exercise.

My main goal for the first essay was to invite students to begin to see themselves as writers by composing essays based on important aspects or chapters of their lives. The dissertation-study students’ life essays were creative and effective, and their topics are divided into the following nine categories. These results were taken from their professional draft packets:

Table 1: Life Essay Topics Chart

Topic	Number of Essays
Relationship with Family/Family Members	7
Dating Relationships	3
Life as a Musician/Athlete/Dancer	5
<b>Other:</b>	
Religion	1
Films	1
Life as a Drifter	1
Personality	1
Broken Bones	1
Life as Southern Belle	1

On the day student-writers handed in their professional draft packets, I asked them to complete a survey to help determine if the life essay sequence led to blocking, healing, writing growth, personal growth, or a stronger or weaker connection as a community member. Their written responses were held in the First-Year Writing Director's office until after completion of the term. Of the 16 students who completed the survey, the results are as follows:

Table 2: Life Essay Student Analysis Chart

**Life Essay**                      **Mark an X in the columns that represent your experience drafting Essay I. You can also include written comments.**

Experienced Blocking	14 Phil: "at first." Candice: "somewhat." Brittani: "after every paragraph or before." Aimee: "memory."
Experienced Healing	8 Jack: "Healed on some subjects." Rachel: "I don't know about healing, but it made me happy."
Note Change in Writing Proficiency/Writing Growth	13 Jack: "Got better. Way better. New voice." Jennifer: "From opening to close, my perspective shifted." Jessica C: "a little bit."
Note Change in Personal Growth	8
Feel More Connected as a Member of Writing Community	11 Jack: "Tried a new style and it felt good as well as enriching."
Feel Less Connected as a Member of Writing Community	0

The second unit of the course focuses on loss or trauma, a major focus of writing and healing. In this section of the course, I invited students to write an essay based on an experience of significant loss, positive or negative, while critically evaluating how the experience of loss shaped them both as individuals and as members of their communities. It was at this point in the semester when students began to negotiate what healing was available to them and the community of writers. Many of them mentioned the freewriting exercise where we wrote while listening to Peter Gabriel's "I Grieve" as the most healing exercise. Candice ran out of the room crying and all 22 students wrote furiously for ten minutes.

Students completed a number of additional invention and writing exercises to generate topics and drafts, including a "before and after the loss" picture collage assignment which invited student-writers to consider who they were before the experience and how the experiences of loss changed/shaped them. Lauren recorded the following words to describe herself before and after her rape:

Before Loss

confident  
invincible  
trusting  
fearless  
happy

After Loss

skeptical  
depressed  
stressed  
self-conscious  
vulnerable

Notice how these emotions are then visually represented on the page:

Before

After



Figure 2: Lauren's Collages

She then took the power of the collages and moved them into her Essay II.

Through the individual conferences I held with each student during the seventh week of the semester, I was able to examine students' engagement and level of writing progress in the course. During the first five weeks of the semester, I commented multiple times in my teaching journal that students seemed to rely on my approval before they began the drafting process. However, during the individual conferences, students shared and discussed their loss essays with much more confidence. I reflected on this growth in my teaching journal: "It seemed like students were writers coming into a writing workshop, whereas during the first conferences, they seemed much more interested with what I, as the teacher, had to say in response to their essays. Today, they were interested in my response as a reader."

Their growth was also clear through the peer workshop of Essay II, and students worked diligently as they read and responded to each other's writing. The groups took on a different role in response each essay—responder 1, responder 2. (See Appendix J) And the class was at ease; for example, Wid read his essay aloud while the room was quiet, which made everyone laugh. I also overheard a number of constructive comments from each group, and they asked questions about details, missing people, and clarification. They workshopped as writers and responders, and I had to remind them to wrap up when class was over. Students identified the individual conferences and the peer workshop groups as the most helpful exercises, and their resulting essays were as follows:

Table 3: Loss Essay Topics Chart

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Number of Essays</b>
Loss of Friend or Significant Other	6
Death of Family Member	4
Loss of Innocence	3
Loss of Familial Relationship	2
Loss of Pet	2
Rape	2
<b>Other:</b>	
Breast Reduction Surgery	1
Motorcycle Accident	1
Loss of Dance Scholarship	1
Loss of Car	1

The 18 surveys completed in response to Essay II also support this increase in students' writing strengths and participation as members of the writing community:

Table 4: Loss Essay Student Analysis Chart

**Loss Essay    Mark an X in the columns that represent your experience drafting Essay II. You can also include written comments.**

Experienced Blocking	12 Lauren: "very difficult to write about." Wid: "Hard to relive; blocked things out." Matt: "For a while, I did." Mike: "Always experience writer's block." Phil: "Yes, not many important losses." Ola: "personal experiences are hard for me to write about."
Experienced Healing	17 Lauren: "helped me realize that I still had some hidden feelings." Jennifer: "Yes, it helped and I'm not so uncomfortable talking about it now." Phil: "No, healing started and ended when I found my truck." Jack: "I transferred from uncomfortably numb to sensitive again." Matt: "To some degree, yes."
Note Change in Writing Proficiency/Writing Growth	13 Jack: "another new voice." Phil: "a little." Jennifer: "My writing is more focused." Ola: "The more you write, the more you grow."
Note Change in Personal Growth	13
Feel More Connected as a Member of Writing Community	13 Jack: "I feel more capable as writer and community member" Rachel: "not sure?"
Feel Less Connected as a Member of Writing Community	0

In the experience essay unit, student-writers were introduced to the importance of sharing their lived experiences with others by writing an analytical, research essay that examines the broader issue surrounding one of their most significant lived experiences. The dissertation-study students were so engaged in writing about the personal that I was concerned about moving them toward the research focus in Essay III. Where the pilot-study students joined the personal and academic naturally, the dissertation-study students were much more apprehensive about the research process. Because of students'



nervousness, we spent a great deal of time discussing the merging of the personal and academic, we read Desalvo's Epilogue which argues for moving from silence to testimony, and we looked at a number of example experience essays together as a class. I also held a class session in the library to help students introduce students to their new roles as researchers. Even still, all students grappled with locating their research focus, and Brittani is a good example of this struggle. The following anecdote is an excerpt from my teaching journal:

Brittani has struggled most out of the writers in the class, and she tends to move toward general essay topics, which in turn lead to general essays. For example, her essay I was on her life as a dancer, and she never really lets us see her dance. Then her second essay was on the loss of a friend, but again, she did not focus on the moment of loss, rather she shared the history of her circle of friends and how badly her friend Roxanne talked about her behind her back—because she has had a tendency to move off topic, and my main response suggestions have been on focus and style.

She wrote her first journal exploring her research topic on discrimination against black female athletes but she was unable to find any research to support her ideas. Then she told me in conference that she wanted to research dance. And I said, "Okay, great, how is this related to significant experience and how might you focus? What about dance do you want to research?" She sat in silence.

Then she said, "Well, I love hip-hop, but I could write about rape."

"Were you close to someone who was raped?" I asked.

"Well, I was and my mother was raped." She shifted in her chair.

She said she really didn't think she was ready to research an area surrounding rape, and I of course didn't push her. I thought, if anything, this resistance might show me something interesting about the writing and psychology process and when a person becomes "ready" to write.

After talking through different aspects of dance, Brittani decided she wanted to explore the history of hip-hop dance. We agreed that we would meet again on Tuesday to make sure her research was coming together and she felt strong about the topic.

When we met after class, she said, "So, I've changed my topic again."

I responded, "We are now into the drafting process, and I want you to find a focus so that you don't fall behind (her fellow students brought in a research proposal and a 2-page draft today).

She explained, "Well, I just went to the library and I found three sources on dance as physical exercise."

"Again, how is that connected to one of your important lived experiences." I went on to explain that I had pushed many of her classmates away from general topics, and I was required to hold them all at the same level. I also explained that because the focus of the course is writing and healing, I want them to choose topics that they might not otherwise explore and get the most out of the course and the pedagogy. Something in her eyes shifted as I spoke, and she lit up.

"Well, while I was being sexually abused, I threw myself into my dance and it was therapy in a way. Could I write about dance therapy?"

YES! We talked further about her ideas and we got online and looked up a few sources on dance therapy. Brittani went on to write one of the strongest experience essays in the course, and in doing so, she gained the confidence to revise and present a strong portfolio.

Also, because Brittani was one of the weakest writers in the class, I could've just given up on her...let her research whatever she wanted to, because at times it seemed that no matter the time I spent conferencing and responding to her work, she wasn't growing. But it's clear upon reflection that was simply not true.

As Brittani left my office that day, she said, "I've never been excited to write or research, and now I can't wait. I'm calling my mom and telling her that I want to major in dance and become a dance therapist so I can help people like us." And she actually danced. Her brown eyes glowing.

I could share many other research journeys like Brittani's to argue for the importance of inviting students to research topics they are personally invested in—because by the half-class peer workshop, all of the students were connected as writers and researchers. Their topics included:

Table 5: Experience Essay Topics Chart

Topic	Number of Essays
Medical Illness/Procedure	3
Relationships/Abuse	3
How to Survive _____	3
Drinking/Addiction	3
Surfing/Skydiving/Salsa	4
<b>Other:</b>	
Police Life	1
Midwifery	1
Adoption	1
Dog Training	1
Life Insurance for Single Mothers	1
Cuban Revolution	1

In establishing the half-class workshop groups, I divided students based on topics, writing strengths, and personalities. The half-class peer review workshop was the exercise a majority of students noted as most influential, and I would argue their findings are based on the fact that the workshop required students to share their experiences and learn from their peers' experiences as they responded to each other's writing. Roseli, Aimee, Jessica R., and Wid all talked about the half-class peer review as being one of the

most beneficial aspects of the course because it showed them that their peers cared. Wid reflected on this in a journal: “The responses to my paper were great. Everybody researched something they were passionate about so it was easy to read and respond to their work. It was awesome.”

Through the workshop, student-writers were also able to negotiate revision ideas, and I recorded growth in students’ proficiency as writers and responders as they contributed through this collaborative project, notably shyer students like Roseli, Susan, and Andrea. During the third unit, *all* students, even Phil, began to talk and write openly about writing and healing in class discussions and their experience essay process memos. And they encouraged each other to continue writing and researching—in the half-class response to each of the 22 essays, at least one comment focused on elaborating on research findings or personal experience in the next draft.

The 15 survey results verify the shift from blocking to writing growth. It is also important to note that only three students identified healing, where 13 of them noted writing growth—students were moving from the inside out:

Table 6: Experience Essay Student Analysis Chart

**Experience Essay Mark an X in the columns that represent your experience drafting Essay III. You can also include written comments.**

Experienced Blocking	13 Matt: “I had more trouble drafting this essay than any other.” Jack: “Yes, there is a difference between researching and just asserting.”
Experienced Healing	3
Note Change in Writing Proficiency/Writing Growth	13
Note Change in Personal Growth	6
Feel More Connected as a Member of Writing Community	14
Feel Less Connected as a Member of Writing Community	1 Colleen: “I missed the half-class workshop.”

The strong communal focus and the fact that 14 students felt more connected as community members after drafting Essay III was important in introducing the radical revision project because students were already moving toward action. The dissertation-study students were excited about Essay IV. Aimee explained that they were ready to “take a break from writing.” When I introduced the assignment, Wid was the first student to volunteer to share his idea about composing and singing a song in response to Essay I. Through this final project, writers were able to reflect on their growth throughout the writing process by finding an alternate way to share their focuses.

It was also through the radical revision assignment that the dissertation-study students finally grasped what the revision process involved. For example, Aimee shared with the class that the first sentence of “Distorting the Mirror: Radical Revision and Writers’ Shifting Perspective” helped her to finally understand what I was saying about revision. She read aloud to the class, “...when revision is seen as an act of invention rather than editing.” Aimee went on to explain how we can’t revise without taking risks and the radical revision is the “final step in that process.” The discussion Aimee began that day was like a revision “revival” which was surprising because students were so resistant to the idea of global revision up to this point in the semester. Yet during this discussion, they all wanted to share their ideas and revision stories with each other, so I asked: “What happened between last Thursday and today to change your attitudes about revision?”

Jessica C. replied, “I’ve wanted to write all semester, because you encouraged us to choose topics that we’ve felt deeply, so we aren’t going to be an essay detailing a major loss, and we all knew that so we took our writing seriously. I’ve started to go back and make all of my essays stronger. And by doing this, I’ve found that revision is essential to becoming a better writer.” Wid ended the discussion with this comment about grades: “Before this class I always flipped to the back of the essay or test to find my grade. In this class, it’s not about grades; it’s about getting out what’s important and what I’m passionate about. This is the first time this has ever happened in my LIFE and it happens through revision.”

Everyone agreed, almost in unison, about the power of revision and the entire class session was devoted to a lively discussion about revision and radical revision; as a result, students chose to radically revise as follows:

Table 7: Radical Revision Chart

Essay Revised	Number of Projects
Essay I	8
Essay II	9
Essay III	5

The most important component of the radical revision project were the class presentations, as was the case with in pilot-study course. The presentations provided writers with opportunities to share their experiences, and students were very responsive to the radical revision assignment and presentations. For example, Brittani created a dance performance that moved through her life as a dancer—she began with tap, moved to jazz, ballet, and finally hip-hop. Students responded wildly to the music and her presentation. Roseli radically revised her experience essay on the art of salsa. She performed a dance and shared a “how-to” sheet, and she made us all grab partners and dance following the directions. In counterbalance to the fun atmosphere, Ola presented a poem and painting in response to her sister’s sudden death which she wrote about in her loss essay. Lauren composed a poem about her rape in Essay II, and she had to stop reading in the middle of her presentation. Students clapped as she returned to her seat, and Rachel hugged her.

### **Other Voices in the Classroom: The Course Texts**

Louise Desalvo’s *Writing As A Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives* (1999) was the main course reader. Desalvo’s book invites readers to write and reflect, while moving toward healing. At the beginning of Fall Semester 2004, my students were excited about Desalvo’s text and all it revealed about the writing and healing process, unlike my pilot-study students who were quite skeptical at the beginning of their reading. The dissertation-study students underlined and highlighted sections from Desalvo’s first chapters, and they shared passionately in class discussions. I also marked in my teaching journal how well they seemed to concentrate on the most relevant points; for example, Jessica R. shared with the class in her response to chapter 4: “The main purpose of this course is to share lived experiences, like Desalvo stresses on P. 43. ‘Writing about difficulties enables us to discover the wholeness of things, the connectedness of human experience. Through expressing ourselves, we establish a

connection with others and with the WORLD.”” However, by the time we reached our discussion of Chapter 5, students were becoming restless with Desalvo’s text, and they reiterated that they felt like she could have written a five-page chapter, instead of a twenty-page one. Rachel, Lauren, Harmony, and Aimee all said that they were beginning to find the book very repetitive, and they zoned out as they read. In fact, the only criticism in the course evaluation data was to choose a different reader.

The negative response to Desalvo spread across the classroom community, until we reached the Epilogue, “From Silence to Testimony.” Jessica R. led the discussion, and students were fighting over each other to share their thoughts. At one point Jessica R. asked the class, “Do you agree with Desalvo that you have to tell your story to be healed?” Aimee said that she had to heal somewhat before she was ready to share her writing, but writing is what helped her get to that stage in the healing process. Wid agreed that telling his story helped him heal. He explained, “I thought I was over my Dad until I wrote Essay II. Through writing, I realized I did need to heal. Writing unlocked the door.” Then Harmony read a sentence from Page 208 that stresses the importance of “using our writing to help build community.” To conclude the discussion, Jessica once again stressed the importance of moving from silence to testimony, and she read the following quote from Page 216: “All are writing to right a human wrong—one that affected them and affects others, too.”

When I asked the case-study students after the close of the semester to reflect on this contrasting view of Desalvo’s work as both necessary and repetitive, they all focused on the fact that Desalvo was arguing for what we, as a class, were already engaged in. Aimee described it this way:

I think students were so opposed to Desalvo because you taught us everything we learned. I remember asking myself, ‘Why am I reading this—she’s teaching us this and not repeating herself a million times.’ I learned most of what I learned from you, not any book. And I think Desalvo could have helped me more if I were trying to write a book. It was the kind of book that would help you if you didn’t have a teacher and if you needed healing which is why I gave it to my friend.”

Wid also echoed this argument:

I read Desalvo but it felt like she was telling people what to do, over and over. I felt like she was writing, ‘this is what I did, do it, and you’ll feel better.’ She came off like she was on pedestal. It wasn’t like Dr. Phil’s motto, “get over it,” but what works for one person may not work for the next person. But you gave us the freedom to explore our lives and we were already engaging in what Desalvo was arguing for.

Although students were resistant to Desalvo’s text, they all commented on its effectiveness in relation to Alice Sebold’s memoir, *Lucky*. Because the pilot-study students felt a disconnect between the *Best American Essays* collection and *Writing as a Way of Healing*, I chose Sebold’s *Lucky*, which is based on her rape and the aftermath of her rape, for the dissertation-study course. The dissertation-study students mentioned many times that Sebold moves the theory Desalvo presents into practice. Aimee explained the power of reading *Lucky* for her as a writer: “I could easily see how Desalvo related to the course and how *Lucky* related to Desalvo. And Alice Sebold was mentoring us in a way, and it made me want to write a powerful story. It made me realize I wasn’t only writing for myself, but for others.” The Blackboard and class discussions on *Lucky* were often very passionate and heated, but I recorded in every discussion a sense of community being formed as students communicated.

This was especially true with the discussion of Sebold’s conclusion, “Aftermath.” Students were extremely vocal in response to the conclusion, and Susan commented at the beginning of our discussion, “Alice was brutally honest throughout. Can we fault her for that?” Throughout their response, students reiterated that Alice was self-destructive in the end, and they had little pity for her. I asked students why they were mad at Alice because it didn’t seem to me that she was glorifying her trauma or her bad decisions. Wid responded, “I’m mad because she continues to get these chances to heal, but she refuses.” Ola concluded the passionate discussion with the following: “The ending was perfect for me because it was real and that’s what we’ve been talking about all semester—sharing our truths, pretty or not.”

Wid was the most vocal and irate in response to *Lucky* across the semester, and I was a bit surprised. I think I expected more anger from the three girls in the class who were raped—Rachel, Lauren, and Brittani. So I asked Wid in our follow-up interview why his response was often so fervent. For example, he raised his voice and shouted out

during one discussion, “He beat her, raped her, put his fist up her and ripped her open just because he had a hard on...he knew what he was doing, and he should be punished severely.” He responded to my question:

I got through the fourth page of Sebold’s memoir, and I had to put the book down. I thought to myself, ‘I don’t know if I can take this course if I have to read this book.’ It was upsetting because I had found out that my mother had been raped and the girl I was seeing at the time had been gang raped the semester before. I found this out the week before we started reading the book, so I was reading this chapter and I got angry and I cried, because Alice was my mother, the girl I was seeing, and all the girls I knew who had been sexually assaulted by their fathers and boyfriends. When Alice is laying on the ground she is a manifestation of all the women who I know who have been raped. She was them. All these women in this one body being attacked, so I had to put the book down. I couldn’t bear to think about that, but I gained the courage to finish the chapter and book. I felt horrible about being a man after reading the first chapter. I couldn’t understand but I could just sympathize with her.

Wid’s experience is another example of the power of sharing stories, both published unpublished. As mentioned above, the sharing of stories and response to *Lucky* took place largely through a Blackboard online discussion, and it was exciting to watch as students’ responses became more critical and analytically-based. Ola illustrates this in her final blackboard posting response: “All through the book Alice has been nothing but straightforward with us, through her language and tone, and I think it would have been wrong to end her story tidily. It was not a tidy story. It was painful. And it was real, just like Desalvo argues throughout her text.” Aimee responded to Ola’s post, “And this is what we’ve been doing in our own writing—moving from the personal to the public.”

In many ways, I think students grew more as critical thinkers through their analysis, both positive and negative, of both texts. Through a detailed analysis of students’ overall responses to the course texts, I believe they were effective in leading students toward growth as writers and critical thinkers.



### **A Community of Writers: The Closing Questionnaire**

The closing questionnaire responses provide proof of the aspects of the course students found most helpful—community building, writing and revision growth, and personal healing. The complete closing questionnaires and each student’s response can be found in the appendices, although Rachel and Colleen did not complete a closing questionnaire due to their absences. (See Appendix K) One of the main differences between the opening and closing questionnaire responses is the detail and length of students’ responses. The following are the closing questionnaire questions and an analysis of students’ answers:

**1) What do you write now that you have taken this course? Make a list of the type of writing you now engage in (i.e. e-mail, academic papers, lists, etc).**

In the opening questionnaire, half of the class recorded that they engaged in personal writing. Yet in the closing questionnaire, 75% of the students listed some form of personal writing whether it was poetry, song lyrics, journals, or letters. Brittani reported as she did in the opening questionnaire that she wrote poetry, e-mails, and papers. But she also reported that all of her writing “tends to be longer and more grammatically correct.” Students also seemed more excited in their responses and more authoritative as writers. The following is Aimee’s list: “Essays and I love it, revision, revision, journals, e-mails, instant messaging!” Overall, their writing tasks remained similar—the divergence took place in response to what they learned as writers.

**2) Do you feel you have grown as a result of this course focused on your life, your loss, and your experience? If so, how did you grow as a writer and person?**

Out of the 20 responses, everyone but Adam reported writing growth. Adam said he did not grow as a result of the course because he had “always written like this.” Six responders focused on their experiences as writers in the course. Harmony described her progression: “I think I have grown as a writer. I look at so many different aspects now while writing. I also see a paper as a work in progress which I didn’t see it as before.” Only four students focused solely on what they learned as people. Matt, for example, explained that because of the course, “I feel more comfortable sharing my feelings with people.” Lauren reflected on her personal journey: “When I first signed up for this class,

I wasn't sure what I was getting myself into. This course has helped me exhume some feelings/emotions I had long ago buried. Now, I know I still have a long way to go, but at least I'm on my way." Nine students reported both writing and personal growth. Mike, a student who struggled in the beginning as a writer yet concluded the semester with a strong writing voice, disclosed his thoughts: "I do feel I have grown as a writer and person. I feel my writing abilities and strengths have improved more than I ever thought they would." Jessica R. elaborated further on this same idea, "I think I have grown as a writer because now I realize how important revision is. Now I know what revision is. I think this class has helped me with my focus when it comes to writing. As a person, I've been able to open up more, be honest with myself, and share with others."

**3) What did you gain from the act of writing about your personal experience?  
What did you lose?**

The overall response to this question centered on the confidence students gained as both writers and people. The words "self-discovery," "confidence," and "understanding" appear repeatedly throughout the responses to what they gained from writing about personal experience. Susan described what she gained: "I gained the knowledge or confirmation that my life and experiences are worthy to be written about."

Every student's response to what they lost as a result of writing in this way focused on losing their inability to express themselves and their emotions to others. I found that students felt more open as both writers and thinkers. For example, Susan's response to Question 3 continues, "I don't think I lost anything, except an unwillingness to share my thoughts with others." Wid also focused on his willingness to share more freely: "I didn't lose anything. I'm finding out who I am for once. I'm not sugarcoating when I write anymore—it's who I am all the time." Even Phil, the most resistant student in the class, was forced to open up: "I lost my ability to go unnoticed and remain disconnected from this class." Analysis of students' responses clearly revealed that they did not feel at risk as writers or community members. In fact, the losses they all describe were positive.

**4) How would you define therapeutic writing now that you've participated in this course?**

Students were passionate in their responses to this question in both the opening and closing questionnaires, and each of the 20 students used the words "writing and healing"

in their responses. They also told me numerous times in class discussions that we should refer to it as writing and healing rather than therapeutic writing because “that’s what it is,” as Matt explained to the class. Students’ written definitions also support the need for a change in terminology.

Students’ responses argued that the writing, revision, and critical thinking processes are what lead to healing—not simply venting on paper. As in the opening questionnaire responses, they understand that writing and healing is not a quick fix. Jessica C. explained this argument well: “I would say that revisions in therapeutic writing bring you closer and closer to a healthy, realistic view with sorted emotions rather than uncontrolled, frantic ideas. This helps with healing and understanding. Aimee also described writing and healing as “healthy and good but the revision is what really does it. Revision forced me to dig deep and allowed me to understand better. I hadn’t healed at all in my first revision of Essay I. But after revising (after I turned it in) I can confidently say that I have written and healed.”

**5) What are you taking away from this course on writing about life, loss, and experience? How did this course prepare you for future writing? How do you view writing about the personal?**

What did students report taking away from the course? Nine students recorded a greater sense of themselves as writers. Six of them felt they took away the ability to include rich detail in their writing and research. And five students listed revision strategies as the most important skill they took from the course. Andrea, among other students, recorded all three of these skills: “I am taking away confidence as a writer and also the importance of revising. I never realized how much an essay could be changed for the better until I took this course. It prepared me for future writing because now I know my abilities and what I need to work on.” Matt’s response echoed this: “I now include more details and my revising process is much more thorough.” A few students, however, focused more on what they personally felt prepared for as a result of the course. Aimee explained, “I don’t know if I’ll have the time for this...but I feel that when something traumatic happens, I will know what to do—write and deeply revise. Every time I write, I’m eager to use what I’ve learned from this course and that’s a first.”

**6) Explain how were you impacted by this semester study of our classroom.**

I was especially interested in gathering this raw data because I was anxious to determine how students felt about being part of a teacher research study. Surprisingly, the dissertation-study students did not address the classroom study in their responses at all; instead, a large majority of students focused on the classroom community itself. The following five responses demonstrate the answers most candidly:

Ola Oparah: Everyone goes through hardships that impact them in different ways. I have learned to appreciate the experiences of others without bias.

Andrea Gold: I was impacted very positively throughout this course. Not only did I feel like I got to know you, but I felt like everyone in the class became close because we knew more about each other than we would have know if we had taken a regular English course. I feel like I grew as a writer and that I learned a lot of important steps that need to be taken in order to make your writing the best it can be.

Lauren Hill: This could take forever to explain. . . .I realized that the world is a rough place and everyone has a story to tell.

Wid Kever: I'm impacted by the people in this class. I've never grown with a group of people like I've grown with this one.

Harmony Kranitz: I was impacted by other people's writing and lives and how all of us opened up and grew together.

Yet it is important to remember that this was not a class of best friends from the beginning. In fact, as Jack explained in his response to this question, "I learned that disagreeing with someone's opinion on a matter is not a bad thing and to openly air disagreement is healthy."

### **An Honest Look Back**

The dissertation-study was challenging in many ways because of two class cancellations caused by hurricanes, students' open hostility toward Desalvo's text, and their resistance toward research and revision. In the end, however, the 22 students moved toward the importance of this pedagogical design and all without my forcing. My final dissertation journal entry examines this most honestly:

#### **TH 12-2 Last Day of Class**

I can't believe class is over. In fact, I think subconsciously I made the decision to give them until tomorrow to turn in their portfolios, so that I could have another chance to see them. I am like this about every class I teach, though, but there was something about the fact that they were opposed to some of the ideas, they resisted revision, and then so

amazingly moved toward the pedagogy by themselves (without my forcing) that made this class and study that much more memorable/important. I think I expected this class to go as smoothly as my pilot-study course went, but it just didn't happen that way—Lauren wrote strongly about her rape in Essay II, but then fell apart when it was time to research the topic for her research/experience essay. Brittani struggled and seemed angry about the class and writing in general at the beginning of the semester, and when she decided to research how dance became her therapy after being raped, her writing life opened up. Aimee stayed focused on clichés until her boyfriend raised his voice at her and she balled up in a corner—then she decided to write her life essay on her fear of male abandonment in the form of a story, and it's beautiful. Wid decided he hated *Lucky* when we got to Chapter 13 and almost threw his book out the window. Ola pushed my patience on absences and late essays, but she read a moving poem today from the perspective of her nephew about her sister's/his mother's death and she painted an amazing portrait of her sister with strong women surrounding her. Matt got mono in the middle of the semester and missed out on some of the writing growth that was close for him. Mike started out writing in the five-paragraph theme, and ended the semester with detailed essays...I could tell he was excited today. Rachel wrote her experience essay on being adopted and upset her mother terribly when she read it...then when she read her poem in class today, not only did she cry, but so did Ola, Harmony, Lauren, and me. Thanks, to all of you, for all you taught me about writing about life, loss, and experience.

The dissertation-study course was an entirely different experience from that of the pilot-study course. As I explained in my teaching journal, the course was filled with many challenges and challenging students. Yet in the end, the dissertation-study students all acknowledged writing growth. As both a responder and evaluator, I, too, can support evidence of that growth through students' final portfolios. To best highlight students' development as writers and critical thinkers, I provide an examination of five students' writing processes across the semester and after the close of the semester in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 6

### Looking In Again: Five Dissertation-Study Vignettes

We write our lives, and our lives rewrite us.

Tilly Warnock, “Language and Literature as Equipment for Living”

In order to further examine the effects of a writing and healing pedagogical focus, I have chosen to mirror the case-study analyses I conducted and reported in Chapter 3 with case-study analyses of five willing students from the dissertation-study course, *Writing about Life, Loss, and Experience* (ENC 1145-07). In an attempt to share a range of experiences from the dissertation-study course, I initially asked eight students for their participation in follow-up interviews and detailed analyses. I then narrowed my focus to five students who best exemplify the class as a whole. These five students chose to write essays on a range of experiences from dog training to child abuse which I hope will help demonstrate that students are not, in any way, required to write on the traumatic with this pedagogy—nor are they prohibited from writing on traumatic issues.

The Spring 2005 follow-up interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, and before our meetings, I provided students with the same interview questions that the pilot-study students answered. (See Appendix G) At the beginning of each interview, I asked students for their permission to record our discussion through an I-Pod recording device so that I could be fully engaged in our conversation. All five students immediately agreed.

In order to provide the most effective comparison between the pilot-study and dissertation-study students, I will follow the same reporting order as in Chapter 3. I will first provide an overview of each student that I composed at the end of Fall 2004 and elaborated on after the follow-up interviews. Then I will analyze each student as a writer and community member. These dissertation-study vignettes, like the pilot-study vignettes, will help describe the student’s experience in the course and his/her writing process across the semester.

#### **Aimee Ludlow**

*On a personal note, I am much more confident about my past. I feel like I have it under control and that finally, I have the upper hand. I think that has a strong correlation of*

*being able to organize it (my life) and write a strong essay (my life essay). I am much more secure about who I am, how I got here, and why I react the way I do to certain things. You would think that seeing a psychologist would have done this for me. He began the process, but it was the writing that made those feelings so strong and concrete. I like that I can say I did that—thanks to the class. All together, I am a more confident, self-assured, composed, and collected individual (Aimee, Follow-Up Interview).*

Aimee was an eighteen-year old female from Gainesville, Florida, and a social work major in her freshman year. From the beginning of the semester, Aimee was vocal and active as both a writer and student. In fact, Aimee is the only student who had perfect attendance. She responded to this in her final portfolio letter: “I was really surprised at first that I had perfect attendance but when I started thinking about it, it wasn’t as surprising. I felt like I had to come or else I would miss something.” As a writer, Aimee struggled with her organizational style, especially in Essay I, but she also became very excited and invested in the revision process as the semester progressed. She elaborated on this excitement in her final portfolio letter: “The thing I loved most about this class is that I learned how to revise. Revision forced me to dig deep which helped me understand things better. I didn’t heal until I deeply revised Essay I, and now I can confidently say I healed.” Aimee was a very engaged community member, and Candice and Susan listed Aimee as the most helpful peer responder in the course. She also often questioned assignments, readings, and her peers’ written and oral responses. I think of Aimee as a firecracker and it was always clear to me that she was asking questions and exploring ideas, not only for herself, but for her fellow classmates.

When I asked Aimee about the course focus in our follow-up interview, she shared her continued investment: “I really loved it. Although I was hesitant about the course at first, I definitely improved as a writer and I’m no longer scared to write, even about myself which I proved in Essay I.” In response to healing, Aimee continually emphasized the healing that came from writing and revising her life essay. In her final portfolio letter, Aimee explained:

I thought that I was as far as I could go in the ‘healing process’ when it came to all the hurt the men in my life have caused. I never knew that the essay I hated would eventually push me to see life so differently. I can’t really explain it, but I’ve moved to the next stage of the ‘healing process.’

She elaborated on the healing made available to her in our follow-up interview: “For me, healing came first and writing growth came naturally behind it.”

In response to Aimee’s writing progress across the course, her final portfolio clearly demonstrates her growth as a writer. For her life essay, “Will I Ever Be Enough,” Aimee chose to focus on her relationships with men who continually abandoned her throughout life. During our first individual conference, Aimee explained her decision to focus her life essay on the men in her life, and she said that this topic was a difficult choice because her experience with men has always been either abusive or dysfunctional. However, she knew it was an important topic for her to explore. Although Aimee struggled throughout the Essay I unit to organize her life story, I could sense she was working to understand how these relationships influenced her life—and that she did. The following is the opening of her portfolio draft and it is important to note that she worked most on how to effectively open and organize the essay across the revision process:

“Would you stop? I’m not mad at you.”

I turned away from Jesse, my boyfriend, curled myself into a ball, and put my hands over my eyes. There was something in his tone that shook me.

It took him a few minutes to realize that I was upset and when he did, he immediately put his arm around me and begged me to explain. I was silent for a little while and then turned to him and said, “I had a hard life.” I knew that wasn’t enough so I told him my story.

In the follow-up interview, I asked Aimee to describe the experience of moving what was, at first, a disjointed draft into such a focused essay for the portfolio. She responded, “My first essay was so chaotic which is how it felt in my brain. When I was able to gain control over the paper, it felt like I gained more control over my life.”

As Aimee began to gain control over both her personal and writing life, her writing style strengthened. This was most evident with her loss essay, “Sugar,” which described the day her dog, Sugar, got into a horrible dog fight and died. Aimee effectively takes the reader through her first loss as a little girl, and, as I read, I felt like I was in her backyard, witnessing the dog fight with her. For example, Aimee wrote on page 5, “Sugar let out earsplitting whimpers as her struggles to get away caused their



teeth to tear more skin. Tiffany and I stood back, helpless.” During our follow-up interview, Aimee was eager to talk about her loss essay:

Everything clicked when I wrote my loss essay. I was eager to share the story, so I began writing immediately about Sugar, even on little pieces of paper which I included in my portfolio. I wrote everywhere, and in random places—on the bus, waiting for class. It was cathartic for me. I needed to get that essay out on paper. I sometimes would tell people that I witnessed a dog fight and Sugar died, but it was a lot worse than that. The story needed justice and writing it down did just that.

Aimee’s writing voice and attention to detail were strong in Essay II, and I could sense her connection to the loss.

Three weeks into the semester, Aimee stayed after class to ask me about the third essay, the experience essay, because she wanted to research boxers or dog showing. We talked about ways she might use her expertise with dog training and showing when writing and researching Essay III. From the beginning research writing assignments, it was clear Aimee was an expert on this topic. In her professional draft, “The Road to a Well-Trained Show Dog,” Aimee focused on the necessary requirements to train and show a puppy, and I was impressed with her seven outside sources and her incorporation of research.

Her fellow students were equally impressed with Aimee’s expertise on this topic, and Rachel’s written response demonstrates how much the workshop members learned from reading Aimee’s essay: “I must admit that I knew nothing about dog training until I read your essay. Your research is really strong, and you’re clearly an expert.” One of Aimee’s main strengths as a writer was her ability to revise and learn from her peers. She explained the benefits of the half-class peer workshop in her final portfolio letter: “The cool part about the workshop was that I saw what everyone else saw. Once they pointed it out, I realized it and worked on it. I usually found it very hard to take others’ advice, but I was more comfortable with it in this class because it was part of the process.”

Because of her success with Essay III, Aimee decided to carry her experience essay into her radical revision project for Essay IV. After freewriting on different possibilities for the radical revision such as writing a short story from the point of view of

Sugar for Essay II or writing a poem for Essay I, Aimee chose to radically revise Essay III by presenting five steps to successfully train a dog. In her radical revision process narrative, Aimee shared that her main goal was to “inform the class on how to train a dog because it isn’t hard but many times, people aren’t given correct instructions.” For her radical revision presentation, Aimee brought a boxer puppy into class, complete with his training table and “fried chicken” treats. Although Aimee’s ideas and handout were effective, she felt rushed and unsuccessful in her presentation. She elaborated on this in our follow-up interview: “It was hard to show how to train a dog in five minutes, and I didn’t feel like I had enough time to effectively teach my fellow students. I wanted to share with them because they were sharing with me.”

As evidenced thus far in the analysis, Aimee was always willing and ready to share and participate with the classroom community. I asked her in our follow-up interview to reflect on her experience as a community member. Aimee explained, “The class was completely different from any other class I’ve ever taken. In my other classes, I never made a friend because of the class or our writing. But Candice and I became friends because we got together and talked about our writing. To be honest, I cared about everyone.”

Aimee’s concern for others has extended beyond our course and she has moved from silence to testimony in three major ways. During one of our last conferences of the semester, Aimee shared with me her decision to give her copy of Desalvo’s book to a middle-school friend of the family who had just overcome cancer and since fallen into a deep depression. She elaborated on this in our follow-up interview:

I gave her Desalvo’s book and a blank journal titled ‘My Life,’ as a Christmas present, and I explained to her that I read this book in class and it helped me. I don’t know when or how she will use it, but I think when she’s crying one night she may decide to pick up a pen. Plus, Desalvo focuses a chapter on writing to heal physical things, and I pointed that out to her.

Aimee also shared the power of writing and healing with her boyfriend’s mother, Jen. Aimee explained that after a series of tragedies, Jen decided she wanted to write about her losses. Aimee explained, “When Jen told me she wanted to write her story, I was so excited and I immediately told her more about the class and Desalvo. Then, I got a copy

of the book from Candice.” Aimee has also remained in contact with her grandfather whom she first decided to reconnect with after writing Essay I: “We are working on rebuilding our relationship and our familial connection.” As we ended the follow-up interview, Aimee concluded, “I haven’t had the best experiences with writing in the past, but I am now more willing to write and share my experiences and emotions.”

### **Andrea Gold**

*I have used ENC 1145-07 to reconnect with what matters to me, and I have used it to show my family how I feel about them. Whenever, I wrote a paper for this class, I would send it to my family and they would respond with overwhelming pride and happiness. They were proud of the topics I chose and how well I wrote, but what they enjoyed most was seeing how much life experiences matter to me (Andrea, Final Portfolio Letter).*

Andrea was an eighteen-year old female from Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, and an international affairs and Latin American Caribbean studies double major in her freshman year. Throughout the semester, Andrea was a quiet student and community member in most class discussions, but she came alive in her writing, our conferences, and small workshop groups. In my teaching journal, I observed Andrea’s excitement when sharing ideas with workshop group members a total of six times throughout the semester.

Andrea entered the class a strong writer, having been exempt from the first-semester writing requirement, but she was apprehensive about the course and its focus at the beginning of the semester. Within the first two weeks, Andrea approached me three times to ask questions about the research essay, revision, and assessment. Andrea even reflected on her initial concerns in her final portfolio letter:

I have to admit that I didn’t really believe that taking this course would do much for my skills as a writer. I am sometimes arrogant when it comes to writing because my whole life, I’ve been told by teachers, friends, and family what a gifted writer I am. It turns out, however, that I was wrong. I may write well, but there’s always room for revision once you stop being too stubborn to believe it. In all, I definitely grew as a writer.

Although Andrea was nervous about the course at first, she became one of the biggest proponents of this type of pedagogy by the end of the course. Andrea explained in her follow-up interview answers that, “Being in this class reminded me how important it is psychologically and emotionally to express yourself through writing, and I realized

how important writing has been in my life.” In response to healing, Andrea explained that both Essays I and II led to healing. In her final portfolio letter, she wrote: “For me, the life essay was most healing because it helped me realize why I feel like I healed from this essay because it helped me reconnect with my faith. Through writing, I was able to analyze my entire life in relation to Judaism to see why it touched me so deeply.” In our follow-up interview, however, Andrea told me that she thinks Essay II was most healing because her breast reduction helped change her identity: “The essay that led to the most healing was my loss essay, because I finally felt comfortable telling others about this very personal change in my life.” When reflecting on Andrea’s shift, I am reminded that the healing effects of writing are not always immediate.

Although Andrea’s writing style was promising across the semester, her final portfolio demonstrates writing excellence. She addressed her writing growth in the follow-up interview: “My final portfolio is stronger because I learned how important the writing process is as far as being serious about your writing and then taking time to revise what you’ve written.” So revision is the main skill Andrea, like Aimee, took away from the course.

As a writer, Andrea chose topics across the semester that she was clearly invested in. Andrea focused her life essay on her relationship to Judaism, and she titled the essay, “My Spiritual Center.” The importance of her faith was clear from the professional draft, and she provided an in-depth analysis into Judaism; however, some of the stages of her personal faith journey were underdeveloped and I asked her, in my professional draft response, to share anecdotes that would support her life story, in addition to details about Judaism. The following sentences from her portfolio draft illustrate her revision: “I had contemplated the Orthodox belief a few times in my young life...I soon realized faith is not a matter of technicality, rather a matter of feeling spiritually connected to something outside yourself. Based on my interpretation, I am a Jew.”

Andrea’s second essay, “Reduction,” focused on her breast reduction surgery, which she described as a happy loss. “I’ve never really lost anyone close to me, and the breast reduction was new for me. Since the beginning of the course, I thought it would be really neat to move that experience onto paper. So as soon as you introduced the loss essay, I thought, ‘Well, I did lose my breasts.’” The power of this loss in Andrea’s life

was evident from the first paragraph, and she was much more willing to share emotions and details with the reader in her second essay. She describes the pain of having size 38DDD breasts, the day of surgery, post-operation sickness, and seeing her new, smaller breasts for the first time.

And she grabs the reader by introducing and concluding the essay with Jewish prayers and humor. In her introduction, she writes: “Dear God, please bless my mom, dad, sister...Also, I’d really like it if you could make my boobs grow.” She concludes the essay with, “God and I still chat every once in a while at night after I recite the night Hebrew prayer, but I’ve decided to be very careful with what we discuss. I’m not sure if it was God who answered my wishes for big breasts, or if I wanted them so badly that I willed it to happen. Either way, I’ve learned my lesson: I don’t ask God for favors anymore.” I asked Andrea about her creativity with all three portfolio drafts, and especially Essay II, in our follow-up interview. She responded: “I used to write a lot of poems and freewriting, so I was used to expressing myself on paper. I’ve started writing about my life again, and I had stopped doing that before the course.”

As I mentioned above, Andrea was terrified of research writing, and we met several times to discuss her topic ideas for the experience essay. After a series of invention exercises and a trip to the library, she decided to write her experience essay on the diagnosis and procedure for people who undergo reduction mammoplasty, and she titled her essay, “Reduction Mammoplasty: The Procedure and My New Lease on Life.” Andrea was very successful with the merging of personal experience and research. She explained that moving her focus on breast reduction in the loss essay into the research essay helped ease her into research writing: “I was scared because I hate researching but Essay III was almost like an extension of Essay II, and I was able to explain the surgery and the facts surrounding reduction mammoplasty. The process of learning how to write about research was helpful. Not fun, but helpful.”

The half-class peer response to Andrea’s essay was exciting. Andrea’s essay was one of the strongest in the half-class workshop and although most of her peers’ comments focused on how this was a new topic and learning experience for them, Jack asked a few bold questions like, “How many people noticed and did yours grow?” When I asked Andrea what it was like to share a research essay on such a personal topic, she explained,

“It was important for me to be able to share my experience and research with others, and they really knew me after I wrote Essay III.”

It did seem like Andrea was letting the classroom community get to know her throughout each essay sequence, and she continued that with the radical revision project. For Essay IV, Andrea chose to radically revise her life essay into a visual representation of her life as a Jew. She decorated a Hanukia and placed pictures from the different stages of her life and faith in the candle-holder spaces which created a 3-D effect. Andrea also brought in edible dreidels for her presentation. She described the radical revision presentation as the most memorable experience for her all semester, because as she said, “I realized in that moment, as I shared my life story and faith, that the whole semester was not only about opening up with myself, but also with others.” Jack and Colleen stayed after class to look more closely at Andrea’s pictures and Hanukia, and the power of Judaism in Andrea’s life was made very evident through her radical revision project.

As evidenced through this detailed analysis, Andrea opened up more and more as a writer and community participant across the semester. I asked Andrea what led to her openness, and she responded: “I liked how we became a family, which I never imagined would actually happen. But it did and everyone was so open. In this class, there was so much more interaction with the teacher and with the other students that I wanted to share.”

Since the close of the semester, Andrea has continued writing personally for herself and for school, and she was very eager to tell me about the poetry and freewriting she now composes. She also explained that, as a result of the course, she is much more open with the important people in her life. As far as moving from silence to testimony, she shared: “I gave my younger sister *Lucky* because I wanted her to read it and become more aware. And I know I will continue to share through both writing and the actions I take in life.”

### **Colleen Pratt**

*When I first began as a writer in ENC 1145-07, I never thought the class would have such an impact on my daily life. As the semester began and progressed, the healing process took its course and I found that writing about my experiences really did help. The classroom environment was amazing. I felt extremely comfortable and I never felt*

*that anyone would judge me for things I said or wrote. I miss the class because it's the only class I've taken where I developed a relationship with the students as well as the teacher. We were not made to feel that we were just someone filling a seat in the class, but instead an actual person (Follow-up Interview).*

Colleen was an eighteen-year old female from Tampa, Florida, and an interior design major in her freshman year. Colleen was an extremely quiet student and she rarely spoke in class discussions; however, I could tell she was always present and engaged. Colleen responded to her lack of communication in her final portfolio letter: "You never made anyone feel threatened by calling on them to answer in a discussion and I really liked that. It's not because I didn't want to participate in the discussions but I was nervous and shy." Colleen was also anxious about writing, and I spent a majority of my time as a responder focused on confidence-building. I was sure of Colleen's writing potential from the beginning of the semester, and I worked diligently to help her also realize those strengths. After one of our conferences, I wrote in my daily teaching journal: "Colleen is convinced she's a terrible writer. I'm trying to convince her otherwise."

Across the semester, Colleen did gain more confidence as a writer and she reflected on what she learned in her final portfolio letter:

This course, Writing about Life, Loss, and Experience, has changed the way I look at writing. I no longer think of a paper as an extremely grueling experience that I write and turn in for a grade without much thought. I look back at every paper now when I'm done with confidence. I find myself revising and trying to make all of my writing better. I truly did take 'writing as a process' away from this class. I'm actually writing drafts for my other papers, instead of writing one copy and turning it in.

Colleen's most successful example of "writing as a process" was her life essay, which she explains also led to healing: "While writing this essay, I did experience healing. This essay was the most healing out of all of them for me. I realized that my father's alcoholism may have been difficult, but in the end, it turned out for the best. After I told my story, and no longer left it pent up, I felt much better." As evidenced in this quote, Colleen was open to the benefits of this pedagogical focus, and she defined writing and healing as "writing that invites you to share with others, revise, heal, and move on."

Although Colleen's overall focus on her father's alcoholism was not intentional, Colleen's final portfolio moves from a personal look into her father's alcoholism in Essay I, her community's reaction to his alcoholism in Essay II, and finally to a research focus on Children of Alcoholics in Essay III.

Colleen centered her life essay on her family's struggle with her father's alcoholism and she titled the essay, "Our Family Crutch." Colleen found her focus during the first invention assignment, the remembering people and events exercise. She wrote on the bottom of the exercise, "Dad for Essay I." She was clearly committed to her topic, and I could sense how important both her father and this experience were in shaping her life story. However, in her first draft, Colleen seemed to barely skim the surface of her family's battle with alcoholism, and I encouraged her in my professional draft response to, "Replace generalizations with specific memories because you have such a strong, important life story to tell." She did, in fact, share a strong story by the end of the semester—her portfolio draft is 15 pages and her attention to specific memories is compelling. On page 10, she writes, "I read the letter from my father, but at first the words had no meaning to me. I was too upset. '...alcohol problem ...AA ...apology.' It wasn't until that moment that I began to piece everything together." When I asked Colleen why she held back details like her father's apology letter in her early drafts, she explained:

I was blocked in the beginning of this writing process because I was afraid to tell what actually happened. I felt bad, in a way, writing this essay because I didn't want to expose my dad. But once I began to write and let everything out, writing became much easier. And I realized just how much we grew as a family.

"Losing Lisa" was the title for Colleen's second essay, and she focused on the loss of her best friend when her family moved from New York to Florida because of complications surrounding her father's alcoholism. When Colleen and I met for her individual conference during week seven, we spent most of our time discussing how she might write a compelling essay on the loss of a childhood friend, a topic she was afraid was cliché. Although Colleen had a promising focus, I encouraged her to think about how this loss shaped her identity. Colleen's professional draft was flat, and she struggled with meeting the page limit. During our follow-up interview, Colleen explained that through



the writing process she discovered that Lisa represented the loss of that part of her family and community identity. She went on to explain:

When thinking about Lisa, I realized that Lisa was a loss of that time in my life. I lost my friendship with Lisa four months after I moved from New York to Florida, and my dad was still in the midst of his alcoholism and my family was in disarray. I probably could've expanded it better in my essay, but I didn't know how to let the reader know how upset our disconnection made me. I should have figured this out sooner, but writing is never really done, right?

Colleen chose to research alcoholism with her experience essay, but she shifted her focus from the alcoholic to children of the alcoholic. She titled her essay, "Alcoholism and the Roles It Plays in the Lives of COA's." Colleen was very passionate about her topic, and she explained that researching facts about children of alcoholics helped her understand herself and her family better. "Although I always knew I wasn't the only child going through this, researching the topic helped me understand some of my behaviors and my parents' behaviors and how they really affect us. It made me realize that things aren't really that bad because everyone goes through some form of trauma." Although Colleen located a plethora of sources, she had trouble incorporating all of her research findings into an essay format. She explained that she just wanted to keep writing, and her essay could have easily been book-length. This is the same student who I noted was worried about writing a one-page journal during the second week of the semester.

Colleen missed the half-class peer review workshop because of a terrible case of the flu. When I asked her to reflect on her absence from the workshop, she responded:

Missing my half class peer review, I feel, may have hindered my ability to revise Essay III to the best of my ability. It would have been beneficial to hear what needed to be worked on and hear others opinions of my work. I also feel that aside from the academic part of it, I missed a chance to get to know the students in the half class workshop better than I already had. I feel that it would have been such a wonderful opportunity to get closer to those individuals and really understand what they had gone through to motivate them to write their papers.

Colleen's research into the reasons behind alcoholism and whether or not it is hereditary or self-induced, as well as the emotional behaviors of adult children of alcoholics were very impressive, and I could tell her workshop group members were disappointed that they missed the chance to respond to Colleen's essay in person. Jessica and Susan both mentioned how much they learned about the high percentage of people suffering from alcoholism from Colleen's essay. For example, she warned on page 8: "Out of the seven students who responded to my survey, all seven of them said that, yes, either they or someone they know has at least one alcoholic parent." She concluded her essay by providing several available resources like the American Counsel on Alcoholism where her readers could access more information on the disease and its effects.

For the radical revision essay, Colleen created a 3-D art project with her loss essay. Colleen took the pool scene from her loss essay and created an art piece that shows her drowning or as she says "suffocating." The art piece placed Colleen at the bottom of a pool, where she is trying to figure out how to save the friend floating on top of the pool. Colleen seemed to have fun with the project, and she shared in her radical revision letter that Essay IV allowed her to "look at the situation of losing a best friend in a different, more comical light." Colleen appeared the most at ease with the entire class as she presented her radical revision project, and I asked her about this during our follow-up interview. She said, "I liked seeing everyone else's in the presentations. Lauren's presentation was amazing. I mean, we obviously knew her rape affected her but when she wrote a poem and had to stop in the middle, it was easy to see just how much that loss affected her. I felt with her and everyone else as they presented. It was like a celebration."

Although Colleen was shy, she was an influential community member and Andrea and Jessica named Colleen as one of the most helpful responders to their work. Throughout our meeting, Colleen repeated again and again how much she "loved" the class:

I loved our class because I developed relationships with all of the students. I still see them now, and we always stop and talk which is nice—I never had relationships with people in any of my other classes. And reading their essays

gave me a glimpse into who they each were, and I understand them better now.

It's not just another person that I see from a class—we have a connection.

Colleen continues to act on that connection. For example, she shared Andrea's research essay on breast reduction with her older sister because her sister is considering undergoing breast reduction surgery. "Andrea's essay helped my sister realize she's not the only person suffering from back pain because of large breasts." Colleen also explained that she continues to use the invention exercises introduced in the course, such as the collage exercise, to process and work through emotions. She went on to describe her freewriting: "I'll make a list of songs that relate to a topic I'm dealing with, like a break up, and then I take certain lines and write from there. And I feel better now after I write." As far as moving from silence to testimony, Colleen and her sister are planning to attend Children of Alcoholics Meetings, because as she explained, "After writing about my experiences in the class, I became more aware. I want to continue to learn." She concluded by reiterating how much she gained from the course as a person, "I'm more open as a person. I find myself telling people things that I would probably have never told them before our class. I tended to keep things bottled up in the past, so it feels good to open up."

### **Wid Kever**

*Here I am—I'm Wid Kever, and this is my life (Follow-up Interview).*

Wid Kever was a twenty-year old male from Titusville, Florida, and a music education major in his sophomore year. From the first day of the semester, when Wid read his response to Terry Tempest Williams' "Why I Write" to the class, I was taken in by his writing style. Wid shared with the class that he wrote to grapple with truth, love, and understanding. When I found out later that Wid was a musician, I wasn't surprised—his writing across the semester was lyrical in many ways, and he was a very promising writer. He reflected on his writing progress across the semester in his final portfolio letter:

I knew in the beginning of class I was a strong writer, but now I have more confidence. My goal for all three papers was to allow the reader to come into my heart and mind and feel how I felt. I have definitely grown from this experience. I have tried to open up more with my writing. People in class have read my

darkest times, and because of that, I'm no longer afraid. People now understand who I am and I love that.

Despite Wid's writing strengths, he did not revise thoroughly, especially Essay III, and I asked him about his lack of revision during our follow-up interview. He responded, "It was time. I didn't have time to revise because I had other finals and concerts. My first two essays were strong, which I know is no excuse to dumb down Essay III, but I just didn't spend enough time revising. I knew it was a good paper 'as-is' so I just edited."

Wid was the most vocal and active community member in the course, and he almost became the 'star' of the class. Out of the 22 students in the course, 16 listed Wid as a helpful responder and peer which I believe has much to do with the fact that he shared so openly and passionately with everyone across the semester. He expressed his anger openly in response to *Lucky*, and as I shared in Chapter 5, both his mother and an ex-girlfriend were raped. The course focus on writing and healing was natural for Wid, because as he explains, he was writing in this way before he ever thought of registering for our course:

I came into class on the first day with a journal in my backpack that I wrote in all the time, but before I took the class, I didn't write to heal. I always thought I just felt terrible and I needed to write it down. But I wasn't healing; instead, I was just writing, crying, looking at it, and then I'd cry again. In class, it was different—I felt like I was bearing myself, especially with the essay about my father. I was sharing something that I had only shared with a few people before writing about it. It helped me grow as a thinking, emotional man and it helped strengthen my sensitivity toward others. I realized I'm not alone, and everyone goes through difficulties.

Throughout the semester, I encouraged Wid to choose topics and write essays that would challenge him to bend his rhetorical style. His creativity was most evident with his life essay, which he titled "...And your lady like a queen." Wid focused on the "life" of four different dating relationships, and he opened his essay with his grandfather's advice to "treat a woman like a lady and your lady like a queen." Each of the four relationships is vividly presented and he moves from relationship advice to his life story throughout the essay. This can best be evidenced when he concludes the story of his first

girlfriend, Pam: “We confessed to one another that the last six months of our relationship was held together by sex. Another lesson learned, relationships consisting of nothing more than sex? Ruined.” Wid shared with me during our follow-up interview that Essay I was healing for him to write: “Out of all the essays that I wrote, Essay I was the one that helped me heal. That essay helped me grow the most, because I resolved those feelings. For example, Jessica broke my heart but she’s now in my psychology course and we sit next to each other and we’re friends.”

For Essay II, Wid chose to focus on the losing a relationship with his father after he attempted to kill his mother. Wid’s loss essay was by far his most powerful essay, but he did not choose this focus immediately. Wid told me during our follow-up interview that he began writing about his grandmother’s death and then a time when he lost his pride, but his mind continually shifted to his father: “Everything I thought about took me back to my dad and how everyday I think about him and he’s not here. I could call him up on the phone, but I’ve lost something.” The details and moments that led to the loss are chilling and he takes the reader into the trauma with him. First, the reader is introduced to his father’s abuse and struggle with Epstein Barr Syndrome, and then Wid takes us into the trauma. On pages 5 and 6, he describes:

I watched the cane, as evil and ancient as my father, but much stronger, land a heavy blow across my mother’s face. The cane broke in two across my mother’s jaw with a huge crack. I went insane. I jumped to my feet. I grabbed my father’s shirt collar. ‘I’m going to kill you!!!’ I screamed. ‘I swear to God I’m going to kill you!!!’

He was hopeless. I dug my forehead into his and stared into his dog shit brown eyes. He was afraid. It was my turn. . .My father barely made it back on his feet and into the car before we heard the sirens. He raced out of the driveway and down the street. Never to see his children again.

When I asked Wid to elaborate on the experience of sharing such intense, personal emotions with his peers, he said that it was important and helpful for him to share his essay with the community of writers:

I wasn’t ashamed to tell the story or for people to read my essay, because I knew the people in the class wouldn’t let that loss reflect badly upon me. My father

beat my mother relentlessly and drank and drank and drank and did drugs. But I don't drink and I don't beat my girlfriend. I didn't want to hear, 'Oh, Wid, I'm so sorry.' And I didn't. The students very much respected me—Jessica R. was especially sympathetic and understanding.

And it is important to note that Jessica R. was also writing about a neglectful father throughout the semester. Because Wid said that the writing process allowed him to gain a different perspective about the relationship with his dad, I asked him if he experienced any healing from writing his loss essay. He responded, "I still have the feelings I expressed in the essay I wrote about my father. Those feelings aren't going to go away, because I'm not ready to forgive him. For my own personal sanity, I'm just moving through the healing process slowly." We spent a majority of our time together discussing Essay II, and I could sense that Wid was, in fact, moving through the healing process. As we looked over his portfolio draft of Essay II, I reminded him just how powerful and vivid his loss essay was. He responded, "I had to write it vividly, because I wouldn't have written the paper if I couldn't tell the story in the way it needed to be told."

Wid carried the topic of abuse into his experience essay, "The Abuse of Our Children." Wid was incredibly passionate about educating his classmates on the dangers of child abuse, but his professional draft seemed disjointed in both his research findings and personal experience. Although he provided research on different types of abuse, including neglect, physical abuse, and emotional abuse, his sources were not properly supported and I wanted more information as a reader. I encouraged Wid in my professional draft response to work on, "ways to best support and elaborate on each of your main points. You have shared a glimpse of abuse; now, I invite you to go deeper and share statistics, experts' findings, and stories from your life and the lives of other abused children." The half-class workshop response to Wid's essay was very energetic. Lauren told Wid that as a reader, she appreciated the historical analysis of abuse, and Ola asked why he waited until the conclusion to share with readers that he was an abused child. Because the half-class peer workshop response was so strong, I was disappointed that Wid did not take time to revise his research essay for the portfolio.

As a musician, Wid did not struggle with what to do for his radical revision. He explained, "Music is my life. I learned guitar from my dad, and I excelled in music

quickly, so when you introduced the radical revision, I knew I wanted to write a song.” Wid described why he chose to move Essay I into a song in his radical revision process narrative: “My goal for the radical revision was to make a serious topic light, and I realized that I can do more than I thought I could do with emotions and words.” Wid sang “Fixing a House to Create Excuses” while playing the guitar for his presentation, and the class loved it. Students were dancing and clapping as he performed. Even with this overwhelming response from his peers, it wasn’t his own presentation that he focused on during our follow-up interview. Wid repeatedly mentioned the power of both Andrea’s and Ola’s presentations: “I liked Andrea’s radical revision a lot, because I feel like in some ways racism is coming back—I hate that people use the word ‘Jew’ as a racial slur when it is a religion. I really respected her coming out in this new age of racism and sharing that she is Jewish. It was touching for me. Ola’s presentation touched me so much, too, and it made me think about my sister. She was so passionate.”

Even four months after the course, Wid remembered specific moments and essays throughout our meeting. And he repeated how important the classroom community was in encouraging his writing growth: “I’m a different person now because I’ve been in a class with twenty other people who feel the same way I do and who’ve also experienced hurt. What was shared in that room was powerful and some family members may not even know what we know as a class. I walked a little lighter when I left your class and even though we were bonded together by loss, we were friends and there was a closeness. It was like a family.”

Wid continues to write personally for himself. For example, he shared that over winter break, his grandfather got very ill and almost died. Rather than sharing his fears with his younger sister, he wrote about them as a form of therapy. Wid has also moved from silence to testimony by sharing his research on emotional abuse with a friend who was abusing another friend. He elaborated on this experience:

When I was researching child abuse, I came upon emotional abuse and it really hit home. Many people don’t think words equal abuse, but words hurt more than fists. One of my fraternity brothers, Chris, was feeling discouraged because he lives with Dave, who is an ‘alpha-male’ personality and he picked on Chris constantly. Chris is a trusting, innocent guy but because of that Dave, well,

emotionally abuses him. So I decided to show Chris my research and then I told him I would talk to Dave, so I printed out all of my information on emotional abuse and shared it with Dave. I feel like that's the biggest thing I've done since our course. I talked to an abuser and the abuse stopped.

It was clear that Wid continues to use the skills he gained from the course in both his writing and his life. "I write all of the time—just two days ago, I had a really disturbing dream about a girl I dated who was gang raped. In my dream, she had huge welts on her chest and they were taking over her body. I woke up and wrote it down." I trust Wid will continue writing and sharing what he describes as the "power of words."

### **Rachel Keller**

*My overall experience in ENC 1145 was a great one. I learned an enormous amount, and I have made irreplaceable friendships. I have learned that the writing process is a long one but not necessarily impossible. Most importantly, I have become 10 times more confident in my writing ability (Rachel, Final Portfolio Letter).*

Rachel was a nineteen-year old female from Ft. Lauderdale, Florida and a criminal justice major in her freshman year. Rachel was the social center of the class, and she participated more than any other student in class discussions, especially in response to *Lucky* and Desalvo. She often shared her frustration with Desalvo's repetitiveness but she always insisted that she liked her main points. Rachel was also very vocal in her oral responses to *Lucky*, and she explained in our follow-up interview that Sebold's memoir is what convinced her of the value of this pedagogy. "Writing and healing is what Sebold was doing and it made sense to me."

At the conclusion of my teaching journal, I recorded that Rachel was an outspoken student, a strong community member, and a promising writer. Rachel was not very confident in her writing ability, however, throughout much of the course, and I asked her about her fear in our follow-up interview. She revealed that her high school English teacher was very discouraging and told her students that half of the class would fail their college-level writing courses. Because of this, Rachel entered the class afraid of failure, but as she explained, "I like writing now. I hated the analytical writing I was forced to do in high school. This focus made me realize I don't have to write about things I'm not interested in, which made me more confident as a writer."



Rachel was also incredibly supportive of other students. For example, during one of the loss invention exercises, Candice ran out of the room crying. Rachel approached me immediately and asked if she could go check on her. She was also extremely supportive of Lauren's writing across the semester. Rachel explained in our follow-up interview that Lauren is the reason she decided to write about her sexual assault in Essay II: "I wasn't sure I was going to write on the topic I chose, but Lauren told me she wasn't sure she was going to write her loss essay on her rape, either. I knew she needed to, so I told her that if she'd write on it, I would, too. I know, now, that writing the essay helped me heal, but that wasn't my goal in writing it." Rachel was not always this at ease with writing and healing, and she elaborated on her apprehension in our follow-up interview:

I was nervous at first because when I heard we were going to write about ourselves, I thought, 'I don't want to write about myself.' I didn't want people to know about my life, but as the semester went on, I understood the importance of writing in this way. In fact, the class helped me realize I wasn't the only one who has experienced loss or who is struggling—even though many of our struggles differed, we were all moving through hardships.

In Rachel's closing questionnaire, she defines writing and healing as "writing to survive." And that is just what Rachel did throughout the semester. In our follow-up interview, we talked about the theme of solitude Rachel located in her final portfolio. She explained that all four essays focused on isolation in many ways—loss of love, rape, and adoption. She shared, "The fact that I was assaulted set me apart from everyone, and the fact that I'm adopted set me apart from everyone, too, and now I'm single which sets me apart from all my friends, too. I've always felt different. My mom always told me I was special. But special equals different." In response to any healing that came from writing, Rachel claimed that both Essays II and III were healing, but she experienced the most healing from writing and sharing the loss essay:

The second essay was definitely healing, and I'm no longer as scared to share it. It explains a lot about who I am, unfortunately, and it was healing to share my story. I was scared when I first shared it because every reaction I'd ever gotten had been negative. But when I shared the essay with my peer workshop group, they got angry when I was angry in the essay. It was after sharing my essay that I

realized, ‘oh, wait a minute—this is how people were supposed to react.’ If these people had been around five years earlier could I have healed quicker? Healing at 13 instead of 19.

In Essay I, Rachel chronicled the life of her relationship with her first love, and she titled the essay “When I hear that song I go back...” Rachel expressed her concern about writing on a “cliché” topic from the beginning of the drafting process because she was one of three students focusing on the life of a relationship, so we discussed ways to bring the relationship alive through anecdotes and sensory details. Her professional draft, however, was general in many places, and I encouraged Rachel in my professional draft response to work on replacing generalizations with specific moments: “Let us see Trevor, let us hear the music and stories, and let us feel the breeze from the lake, etc.” Rachel’s portfolio draft was strong, and I asked what guided her to a successful revision. She responded, “When I went back to revise it, things had changed because Trevor and I broke up. I thought, ‘oh no, what do I do now with the conclusion of my essay.’ But I think in a way, I was able to share more openly after we broke up. Now, I enjoy going back and reading it because it’s like a chapter of my life.”

Rachel’s writing growth was evident in her loss essay, and she chose to focus on her sexual assault in eighth grade by two fellow classmates, Alex and Steven, at her private school which also became her ironic title, “Coral Springs Christian Academy.” Although Rachel did not come to choose this focus immediately, her essay held tremendous power. On page 3, she described leaving the kindergarten classroom where the assault occurred:

Now at this point you would think I would have run away as fast as I could but for some reason it seemed like my legs wouldn’t work. I managed to walk away somehow. I was almost to the door when Alex caught up with me, grabbed me by the waist and pulled me against him. I will never forget the words that came out of his mouth—*What? Do you feel violated now?*

We talked in-depth about her sexual assault and Essay II, and Rachel repeated how unfairly she was treated after her assault. When I asked her why she thinks it took our class for her to make sense out of this trauma, she responded quickly and passionately:

Alex was in my English class of ten students for three years. We had a graduating class of 60, so they were constantly around. After the assault, people would talk about it in front of me like it was just a good story. I tried to heal by going to a counselor but after our second meeting, she said, ‘Oh, she’s fine.’ She told me to pray about it and then she let me go. Even at 13, I knew I wasn’t fine. I appreciated the chance to write about it all these years later.

The supportive response that led to Rachel’s reported healing can best be evidenced through Wid’s response to her second draft. He wrote in his endnote: “Your essay is powerful and moving and you take the reader into the situation and make us feel what you felt. Your tone is powerful, and you draw me in. I love your whole first page. Thanks for sharing.”

Rachel explored issues surrounding her adoption in several journals across the semester, so I wasn’t surprised when she chose adoption as the focus for her experience essay. Rachel began the drafting process focused on the emotional effects for the birth parent, the adoptive parent, and the adopted child which she referred to as the “Triangle Effect.” Through her research and drafting, Rachel realized how broad her topic was and decided to focus on the adopted child: “I realized that I didn’t know what the adoptive or birth parents were feeling. But I knew what I was feeling, so I decided to focus on the child. It was cool to see that there are books and research articles devoted to helping adopted children out of these feelings of loneliness or isolation, and I enjoyed the research part of the essay.”

She titled her essay, “The Life of an Adoptee,” and she focused on the fact that for many adopted children being adopted is just a blurb in their biographies, but for others, like Rachel, it is something that consumes their lives. She explained in her opening: “When I was a child, I would rip my house apart looking for information about my birthmother which I learned later never existed.” Although Rachel’s topic and professional draft were moving, her research was vacant, and I encouraged her to continue reporting data to support her analysis. The half-class peer response was also encouraging, constructive, and sensitive, and Rachel took her peers’ advice and moved it into her portfolio draft.

Rachel moved her research essay into her radical revision project, and she created a collage of pictures from her childhood, with a poem she wrote to her birthmother as the center of the poster. She even brought in books on adoption that her parents read to her as a child, and she gave me a copy of *The Chosen Baby* because I shared with her that I will likely adopt children. Because of Rachel's total involvement in the class, I assumed she looked at the radical revision presentation as another chance to share. In our follow-up interview, she proved my assumption wrong: "I wasn't sure if I wanted to read my poem aloud, because I wasn't sure people would understand. Then Wid and Lauren shared so openly, and I decided I had to share, too. After the presentation, I was thankful I did it. The reaction was much more positive than I'd ever imagined it might be." In fact, Rachel described Wid's presentation as the most memorable moment from the class because as she explained, "It felt like a celebration."

As detailed, Rachel participated fully across the semester as a writer and student. In our follow-up interview, Rachel reflected on the classroom community: "Our class was so different, because I knew everyone and something about their life—like Lauren and Brittani for example. I never imagined that there were other people going through aftereffects of rape and then there are three people out of a class of 22. It created a closeness."

In moving from silence to testimony, Rachel has been in contact with her mom's best friend's daughter who was recently raped. And Rachel made it very clear that she plans to continue moving toward action: "Because of the course, I want to reach out. When I hear that someone has been raped, I want to protect them and tell them that they will make it through. I'm now able to share with people without being ashamed."

### **The Power of Joining the Self and Community**

As described in the ten pilot-study and dissertation-study vignettes, students have meaningful and important topics to research and explore, and all ten students' portfolios demonstrated a shift in writing proficiency. As established in Chapter 3, one of the most important philosophies for a writing and healing pedagogy is its naturally discursive environment that joins the personal and academic and depends on a supportive writing community. Through my Spring 2003 pilot-study, I found that students appreciate one another's lived experiences; through my Fall 2004 dissertation-study, I verified that

students learn how to analyze and write more effectively when they choose to explore topics they are passionate about and respond to equally passionate essays written by members of the classroom community.

All ten case-study students wrote and researched powerfully out of their lived experiences, and these vignettes validate the importance of a pedagogy that joins the self with the community. Every student I interviewed reported that sharing their writing with the classroom community was one of the most influential components of the pedagogical design. To further support the power of the writing community, many students reflected in our follow-up interviews on moving from silence to testimony, as Louise Desalvo urges writers to do throughout her text. In fact, Desalvo (1999) argues that writing and healing can only occur when writers make their writing public:

Writing testimony, to be sure, means that we tell our stories. But it also means that we no longer allow ourselves to be silenced or allow others to speak for our experience. Writing to heal, then, and making that writing public, is the most important emotional, psychological, artistic, and political project of our time.

(216)

Through a detailed analysis of the vignettes, it is evident that the ten case-study students were engaging in what Desalvo refers to as *writing testimony*, and they researched and wrote on topics that affected them personally, but as they drafted, they learned many of their experiences affect others, too.

As a result of the case-study analysis, I also determined the necessity of an analysis into the role that the teacher plays in the community success of a writing and healing course. Because of this decision, I recorded my experiences as both teacher and researcher in my Fall 2004 dissertation study course in a daily teaching journal and after the semester, I analyzed and reported the data to help demonstrate the responsibility of every member of the classroom community, including the instructor. The following chapter analyzes the teacher's role within this course design.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **Teacher as Researcher and Learner: Traveling On in Company**

I believe in teaching.  
Because I relearn my life as my students explore theirs.  
--Wendy Bishop, *Teaching Lives*

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, researcher bias is a potential concern for any qualitative teacher research study because of the teacher researcher's binary interest and belief in the success of both the pedagogy and study. Therefore, I want to reflect on and examine the ways in which I, as a teacher researcher of a writing and healing pedagogy course, was influenced as both a researcher and teacher. James Potter (1996) supports this sort of reflection as essential in qualitative studies: "Because qualitative researchers cannot remove themselves from the situations they study, they need to be able to reflect on the research process and illuminate this for their readers" (187).

Conducting the dissertation study taught me a great deal about myself as a researcher and teacher. As a result, I continue to formulate new questions, remember teachable moments, but most of all, through my teacher research, I learned to value qualitative research design as a valuable and essential method of collecting and presenting research findings. And learning is what my study was all about, from the first day. This is best evidenced from my first teaching journal entry:

#### **Week One Journal**

##### **TU 8-24**

I was so nervous about my first class this semester. I suppose it is because this is my dissertation study course, and I have to report what happens within the classroom community, be it positive or negative. I just feel so strongly in the value of this pedagogy, but I know that to be a fair qualitative researcher, I must ONLY report what takes place throughout the semester—in the course, classroom community, and in students' own writing. I think I imagined a group of monsters would stare at me this morning and mumble, "Writing and healing is a joke, and we're not doing it."

That is, of course, not what happened this morning. I walked toward my class and caught the attention of the frightened freshmen waiting to be let into the classroom. They were my students. Instantly, I felt calmer and more in control of my course's focus and validity. I first took roll of the 22 students in attendance, and I immediately noticed that there are students from varied backgrounds and cultures. There are more females than males; 15 females to seven males to be exact.

I then went over the syllabus, and I encouraged them to remember that we would not be holding hands and singing in a circle, that I was not a therapist, and that the course would invite them to reflect on their lives and losses, whether their experiences are positive or negative. They seemed responsive and encouraged by my news. I also explained to them that I would act as a teacher during the semester and a researcher AFTER the semester and assured them that I was not trying to prove a hypothesis; rather, I plan to explain what happens in a classroom/pedagogy based on writing and healing. I also informed them that we would spend time focusing on the research study, informed consent forms, and the opening questionnaire on Thursday.

I then handed out a copy of Terry Tempest Williams' short essay, "Why I Write." I began by reading the first paragraph and then I invited a full-class reading and we went around the room, each reading a sentence. The sentences read like this: "I write out of silence. I write to soothe the voices shouting inside me, outside me, all around me." At the end of the essay, I asked, "Why do you write?" I then invited them all to freewrite about why they write, past experiences with writing, what they hope to write and learn this semester. This is what I wrote, before moving on to work on getting the Blackboard site up to show them how to best access our course website:

I write to honor Wendy's life –to remember all she taught through her words, her actions, her teaching. I write to finish this degree which I have worked so hard to earn. I write to better respond to my students. I write to share with others. I write to understand loss and find hope.

After about 10 minutes of writing, I asked if anyone would like to share their writing, and I honestly didn't think anyone would volunteer...this seemed like a respectful but shy group to me. To my surprise, one student immediately raised his hand and said, "Should I read the whole thing or part of it?" I was excited and I told him it was completely up to him. If he wanted to read, great. If he wanted to share ideas with us, great. He responded, "Well, I write to make others laugh." Then another male student raised his hand, and he began to read his writing. He explained that he wrote to grapple with truth, love, understanding...I was taken in by his writing style, and he gave Williams a run for her money. Then two girls volunteered their responses, and each explained that they wrote as a way of release and to better cope/understand. I was so relieved as I listened to these new students' responses, because it felt like they were registered for the course because of its focus, not despite it. These students seem ready, eager, and open to a pedagogy focused on writing and healing, and it's only Day 1!

After the fourth volunteer, we were out of time so I shared their homework reading assignments and welcomed them to the class and semester. After class, several students made eye contact with me as they left and smiled. One student came up to me and shared that she really wanted to take the course after seeing it in the schedule, but she was a senior and has already fulfilled her FYW requirements. Another student asked me if the focus of the course was going to be on grammar and syntax, because that's all her other past teachers ever focused on. Then a student with her head down approached me and thanked me for the focus of this course, because she really needed to write about some

things and has been excited since registering for the course. Wow—Day 1 and already lives are being changed. That is what teaching is all about. I sit here now excited and ready for Thursday.

### **Teacher as Researcher**

My main research concerns were presented and addressed within the first four weeks of the semester. Even though I conducted a pilot-study in Spring 2003, I was still new to the role of teacher researcher, which was something I had to negotiate. As evidenced in my first teaching journal, I was afraid students would immediately discount a writing and healing pedagogy and the idea of being part of a dissertation-study course. These fears were, of course, not realized. I recorded on the second day of the course that, “I walked in to class today more confident and excited than I did on Tuesday.” My building confidence as a researcher was challenged three times early in the semester.

Students were very engaged from the first day of the course, and I wanted to somehow capture that excitement and level of engagement. I wanted to share their discoveries word for word, which in time presented my first research challenge. So I wrote in my journal, “I may think about a tape recorder?” I decided an I-Pod could contribute to my overall research experience by allowing me to record each course session and then divide and upload them, day by day, to my computer. It seemed like the perfect way to enhance the thick description of data, so I decided to address the class and ask their opinions on recording our semester-long study. Here is my journal describing this experience:

#### **Week Two Journal TU 8-31**

I asked students if they would agree to my audio-recording class this semester with an I-Pod that I can then upload into my dissertation documents, and they seemed excited. No one objected, and I told them that I decided to record the class sessions because of their strong, initial responses last week. And it’s the truth—I want to be able to report exactly what they say and how they respond to certain elements of this pedagogy. It will also be helpful when examining the teacher’s role, and I plan to use the recordings as another way to collect data, or I may not code it all.

I began recording our class sessions that day, and I have never been so aware of anything or anyone watching, recording me—mentors, classroom observers, students, friends, parents. That little white device was distracting me in such a way that I acted



like I was on stage for an opening night performance. As class ended, students filed out, and I immediately began to replay our class. I also immediately began analyzing myself, my voice, my ideas, even the pace in which I presented material. It is important to note that students did not have the same reaction. Weeks later when Aimee asked me why I stopped recording our class sessions, she explained that she didn't even notice it, which is why the students were a bit surprised when I talked with them about discontinuing the use of the I-Pod in Week 3, just one week after recording began. I explained my rationale in my daily teaching journal:

### **Week 3 Journal**

#### **TH 9-9**

The main discovery I made today is that the tape recorder is inhibiting my teaching. I am overly conscious of its presence, and I think it is what has caused me to call my teaching effectiveness into question. I do think, however, it was a neat possibility but because it is not listed as one of my data collection methods, I have decided to terminate recording class sessions. I will be diligent about recording important comments and moments throughout the rest of the semester, and I hope to come home directly from class to write about specific moments from the classroom. I also think, like the pilot-study, that students' writing and portfolios will help me the most as I analyze and report data. Also, I want to present an organic, overall look at this pedagogy, and I don't want to analyze my performance (which is what I've already begun to do). I'm relieved by this decision!

This was my first lesson in the importance of remaining flexible and self-critical throughout the research process. And Goswami and Stillman (1987) reminded me that "Research is not a process of proving something, but a process of discovery and learning" (221).

My second research challenge was a surprise. During Week 2, we began our reading of Alice Sebold's *Lucky*. You see, I was certain students were going to respond positively to Sebold's memoir because I taught the text in the semester between my pilot-study and dissertation-study courses and students responded amenably to the memoir and the Blackboard discussion. I assumed things would go similarly this semester. They didn't.

Where do I begin with students' responses to the first chapter of *Lucky*? The lines between researcher and teacher seemed blurry as I faced this challenge. On one hand, I was thrilled that students responded so honestly and passionately, but on the other hand I did not, under any circumstance, want our class to turn into a therapy session, which the

focus on the personal is so often criticized for. And I especially didn't want to fail to reach the most important aspect of the course—writing. Lauren's Blackboard response started it all:

I am the one out of every five girls who is raped before age 18. The only difference is it's happened to me twice. Nothing can possibly prepare you for the first time, let alone the second. Well, I guess I should call it one and a half. The second time, he was not successful. Thus, I can most definitely relate to Alice Sebold's account of her rape. I don't think she displays the type of emotions that I am used to. She is strong; she doesn't ask "why me?" like I did. She says that her body is "disassembled, gagged, dead" (p.8). I think that aptly displays emotion. She feels dead inside, not herself, at least not how she did before. She even compares herself to her friend saying, "I was no longer like her (Tree) but was the other" (p.20), meaning that she as a person has changed. She is different from her friends. Her friends have not been raped; they do not understand the trauma caused, and worst of all, they cannot calm or comfort her. I know. I've been there. I actually couldn't even go to my friends because my first rapist was my best friend's boyfriend. I was afraid of being shunned by my friends and possibly my family. I was afraid no one would believe me. So while I feel that I was "lucky," I would definitely agree that Alice Sebold was "lucky."

Then, Rachel replied to Lauren's posting:

Although I have never been fully raped, I was sexually assaulted by two classmates my eighth grade year of school. I can only imagine what you went through because what I went through was hard enough for me to handle. I guess I am right along there with you!!

And then Rachel posted her own response:

I think what Chapter 1 did for me was make me realize that I could of had it worse. My eighth grade year of school I was sexually assaulted by 2 guys in my small private school. At the time it was the hardest thing I ever had to deal with and to be completely honest I guess I am still dealing with it. Yet Alice Sebold makes me realize that I actually had and do have it pretty good. I can't help but wonder if I could have dealt with my situation better. Looking at her makes me

feel guilty for the way I handled it and makes me think that I should have stood up for myself better in the aftermath. I do think that Chapter 1 was incredibly graphic however I do not think that it was unnecessarily so. She did such an incredible job of describing the events that it felt like I was right there with her (not willingly however).

Truthfully, I was shocked. I couldn't believe that two of my 22 students had been raped (I would find out later in the semester that 3 students out of 22 had been raped). I was at a loss with how to react in this situation. I am still surprised by my reaction, because, first of all, this pedagogy is a response to the violence and trauma that students are forced to live through. Secondly, I have read essays about traumatic experiences like physical abuse, rape, and death many times before. To be honest, I just didn't expect two girls to have shared any experience that early in the semester. I think I also feared that it could backlash or become too much a focus of the course. Again, I teach writing, not therapy. And the class and Blackboard postings felt a little too therapeutic. In my daily journal, I asked, "But is that okay?"

The answer I have for myself now, that four months have passed, is yes. It is more than okay. Like Michelle Payne (2000) explains, sharing something like rape in a writing class "inevitably changes the social relationships of everyone involved" (14). Upon reflection, I think I was hesitant to allow the course to take its own shape, to change, to form.

When I first began the dissertation-study course, I assumed that students would begin to write more openly as the semester progressed, as they became part of the community. And that did happen. For example, Brittani shared the story of her rape in her experience essay on dance therapy. But Lauren and Rachel are examples of students who chose a relatively unknown space as the safest place to share their stories. And it is also important to note that this is the second time Lauren shared her story. Peter Stearns (1994) provides a possible explanation for Lauren's decision. His research suggests that Lauren decided the classroom was the perfect place to share her writing because she had control over how the story was told and, to a certain extent, how readers interpreted her story. Payne and Stearns' research supports the belief that strangers in a new community,

in this case my classroom, are less dangerous than intimates. In other words, close people in their lives like family and partners don't have to witness the emotions, struggle, and truth of the loss or trauma as it moves through the writing and healing process (Payne 17).

After negotiating the need and right for both Lauren and Rachel to share their stories of rape whenever they felt appropriate, I started to relax into my role as teacher-researcher. And then the hurricanes came. Not one, but two hurricanes, Hurricane Frances and Hurricane Ivan, caused the university to close, resulting in the cancellation of two days of our course and my dissertation study. Although I remained calm on the exterior, as shown below in my e-mails to students, I was concerned that missing an entire week of a 15-week semester could hurt the overall study. But John Van Maanen (1988) reminded me that, "We rarely read of unsuccessful field projects where the research was presumably so personally disastrous to the fieldworker that the study was dropped or failed ever to find its way to publication" (79). Notice below how I try to avoid the "disastrous."

### **Week 3 Journal**

#### **TU 9-7**

All classes at FSU were cancelled today because of Hurricane Frances, so I have revised our weekly plans to hold class on Thursday and conferences with students on Friday and Monday. Below is the e-mail I sent to students:

Hello all,

I trust you are all safe from Hurricane Frances. Because classes are cancelled tomorrow, class will meet on Thursday. During class, you will sign up for a conference to be held either Friday and Monday.

Please spend time drafting your life essay. For Thursday, bring a rough draft of Essay I to class, and we will work on strengthening your draft's attention to detail.

Take good care,  
Ms. Hodges Hamilton

I really want to meet with students one-on-one, so I plan to hold shorter 15-minute conferences with each student to discuss Essay I, and I hope to learn about their initial reactions to the course and its pedagogy. On Thursday, I am going to encourage them to think about detail in their writing, using a sensory observation exercise to springboard into their essays.

### **Week Four Journal**

**TU 9-14**

I felt better about class today, and I think I'm learning how to turn off the researcher/analyzer button. I need to teach—to put my entire being (like I always do) into the classroom. Also, I have my fingers crossed that Hurricane Ivan won't hit here and cancel classes on Thursday. I don't want it to hit anywhere, though.

**TH 9-16—Hurricane 2**

Hi Everyone!

I hope you are all well and safe. As you now know, FSU will be closed tomorrow and our class will not meet. Although I will know more about making up the class session soon, I would like to collect your Essay I packets by the end of the week. We can then begin Essay II next week, without the lingering of Essay I.

Therefore, I will be in my office (225 WMS) from 10:00-12:00 on Friday, the 17th, to collect your Essay I packets. If you are not going to be on campus Friday, you can leave your essay packet in the box on my office door anytime between now and Friday afternoon. I will stop back by my office late Friday afternoon to pick up any remaining essay packets. If you have any questions or concerns, please send me an e-mail.

For Tuesday of next week, read Ch. 3 of Desalvo's text and "The Shawl." "The Shawl" is a short story handout, which is attached in three separate documents to this note. Please download and read the story for Tuesday and pay special attention to the theme of loss.

Also, write a one-page journal that "unburdens your heart" (37). In other words, just sit down and write what is on your heart and mind after reading Ch. 3 and "The Shawl." Also, don't forget to keep up with the *Lucky* readings and postings.

Talk soon,  
Ms. Hodges Hamilton

After the hurricane challenge, I began to understand Ruth Ray's (1993) argument that teacher researchers and feminist researchers alike look to learn from and with their subjects, "not to control and dominate them" (30). In four short weeks, I learned that to be an effective researcher, I couldn't control the I-Pod distraction, I chose not to gain control over Lauren's and Rachel's journals about their rapes, and I finally learned this when two strong hurricanes left me sitting in my house without electricity or means by which to control the study, the students, or my one biggest fear—the possibility of failure.

### **Teacher as Researcher and Learner: The Necessary Combination**

After navigating my way through these three storms and settling into the role of researcher, I also became more of a fellow learner. My journal in Week 5 demonstrates this turn:

I am moving through metacognition, where I am experiencing and observing at the same time, and that process can sometimes get tangled. The book I am reading right now by Kennedy and Charles, *On Becoming a Counselor: A Basic Guide to Nonprofessional Counselors and Other Helpers*, made me aware of compassion fatigue or secondary trauma which results from reading and sharing the experiences of loss and trauma with my students (like Adam, Rachel, and Lauren). I need to be more forgiving of myself as a teacher and researcher, and I need to let myself miss Wendy during this process, because it is only natural. I need to be more sure of my abilities to teach and encourage these students to become better writers—I'm already witnessing some of the results, and I am going to make a conscious effort to allow myself to teach and then observe.

Another major challenge for me as a teacher researcher became one of my greatest learning experiences through the course—Lauren. Lauren was one of the two students to share the story of her rape in her first Blackboard response, but that's where Lauren's writing focus on her rape began. She stayed after class the day that I introduced the loss essay to tell me that she was not ready to write about her rape and I, of course, told her that was completely fine. In fact, I discouraged her from choosing anything as a topic that she wasn't yet ready to share publicly. However, somewhere along the drafting way, without talking with me, she decided to write her loss essay on the experience of rape. In the follow-up interview, Lauren explained that, "I tried really hard to come up with different topic ideas with the loss essay, but then I thought 'I've already opened the can of worms so why not tear the lid off and get going'" However, Lauren encountered blocking and difficulty recounting the details throughout the drafting process. In a late night e-mail on September 29, she wrote:

ms. hodges-hamilton:

im having a really hard time with this loss essay. im writing about what happened to me, but i tried to change my topic because it was so hard. now ive changed it back, but im not done with the draft. i only have about a page and a half or two pages. if i have more time to concentrate on it this weekend, i might be able to tackle it a little better, i just didn't want to get in trouble for not having a

completed draft tomorrow for in class. please let me know if it's ok...i promise it'll get done this weekend, im just not in a strong enough emotional state to tackle it right this second. thanx.

lauren

I responded:

Hi Lauren,

Of course, you can bring a 1 or 1 1/2 page draft of your loss essay tomorrow. I just wanted you to begin the writing process, which you have done. I completely understand that writing about your rape is hard (and remember this is exactly what Desalvo writes about). It hurts to bring up loss or trauma, but it ultimately helps us regain power--I, along with many of my past students, have found this to be true. And I think you will, too.

We are going to work on a letter writing assignment tomorrow, which might help you express emotions and continue writing. Also, we can continue to work together next week during your individual conference.

I hope this helps,

Ms. Hodges Hamilton

Lauren was able to overcome her writer's block and although she struggled in her individual conference and the peer workshop to share her essay with me and the classroom community members, she produced one of the strongest, most powerful essays across the term. Here is an example of that power from Page 5:

His hands resumed their roaming and ended up on my breasts. He pinched and manipulated them like an artist without clay. They had marks on them for weeks afterward. He bit them, lightly at first and then harder until I was screaming in pain. He whispered, "Shut up, you know you like it." But my breasts were throbbing from the torture inflicted upon them. I couldn't stop crying. He was becoming more impatient with me. He picked up one of the smaller speakers and told me, "If you don't shut up, I'm gonna hit you with this." I tried to stop. I really did. But my attempts were not enough to satisfy him. He hit me over the head with the speaker, causing me to temporarily black out.

Throughout the entire essay, like in this description, Lauren takes the reader with her into the panic and trauma of the rape. In her final portfolio letter, she explains what she took away from the writing process: “I think essay two opened the door to healing, and I plan to pursue it further in order to reach complete healing.”

I thought Lauren was on her way to healing after she wrote such a powerful loss essay, until we reached the drafting stage of Essay III, the experience essay. As I introduced the research essay, we spent a great deal of time discussing personal vs. academic writing and the merging of the two. I also stressed, at length, the importance of choosing a significant and moving experience to build on with Essay 3, one that would allow students to move from silence to testimony.

For this reason, I was a little surprised when Lauren’s first exploratory journal explained how she wanted to research why men are from Mars and women are from Venus. When I asked questions in my response to her journal, she insisted that she wanted to research relationships. Then in another journal, she explained the reasons for her decision to switch her topic to the research of marriages...but she’s not married!

It wasn’t until I was walking around the library database session that I was completely taken aback. Lauren said, “Ms. Hodges Hamilton, I think men are like fish—you have to know which ones to pull in and which ones to throw back. That’s what I want to research.” Excuse me, I thought. No, this can’t be happening—not when students choose important, solid topics every time with this assignment. It’s fail-proof. I immediately thought, *Oh no, my ideas about merging the personal and academic aren’t working*. But I knew it was her decision and her topic, so I simply encouraged Lauren to move toward a more analytical, academic look into relationships.

I decided to send her a note explaining that she needed to think about what she hoped to share with her readers through her research about relationships. I explained that the topic, as it stood, did not draw from a significant experience and it seemed flat. I asked, “What is making you want to write an essay about relationships?” And I suggested she think about toxic relationships, college relationships, victimization of women, etc. I also explained that her loss essay was very powerful and I wanted to see that power transferred into her research essay. Lauren’s a good writer, so I secretly scolded myself for even asking her to think more about her topic choice, although I know



it was my job to move her away from attempting to write an academic essay on how men are like fish.

It was during our conference that Lauren suggested researching rape awareness. She said, “I know I’m helping others in the classroom, and I find it hard to believe that there are only two of us who’ve been raped. I think it’s important that I write an essay on victimization of women. I just don’t want to write about rape laws, because I didn’t press charges. What do you think?”

I almost jumped up and down and not as a researcher, but as a teacher. Lauren moved toward a more academic, meaningful focus and she was relieved and excited—and it was her discovery. The story doesn’t end here. In fact, Lauren experienced more blocking and difficulty as she drafted, and we decided to meet on the morning of November 2. I asked her why she thought she was having such a hard time writing this essay, and she explained that she just hadn’t faced the facts before this point. In our follow-up interview, Lauren went on to explain that it was easier for her to write Essay II, because it was about her, “but reading others’ stories and realizing how horrible it could have been was too hard.” I continued to ask questions, and I explained that was the exact reason I wanted her to move toward a more serious focus. We went online and looked up some promising sources, and she even created a survey during the class workshop.

However, I remained bothered throughout this conversation with Lauren because I felt like I unintentionally pushed her toward focusing on rape again in Essay III. During a follow-up interview, Lauren reflected on this experience:

I think I interpreted your praise of Essay II as where I should focus Essay III. I was trying to find something to write about, and I wanted to explore men and then I shifted to relationships, although I now know I couldn’t have written a research-based paper on how men think. I guess you didn’t really push me at all, but I put it off, put it off. I knew I was going to write about it from the beginning, even before I picked the other topics. I knew it would have something to do with my rape later, so I kept trying to push it out of my head. And I was surprised, in the end, when my research essays became one of my strongest essays.

Here are a few sentences from Page 5 of Lauren's portfolio draft to document the growth that occurred throughout the drafting process:

Abuse is very common in teenage and college level relationships. 'Statistics show that one in three students has experienced violence in a dating relationship' ("Teen"). Although there are several types of abuse, they all stem from a central cause: control.

Through this long process toward a topic that was rewarding and research-based, Lauren helped me consider the following questions: When are students ready to write on traumatic topics? Do they have to be at a certain stage in the healing process? Or is it always painful when student-writers initially begin writing about traumatic experiences, whether personally or academically?

Lauren wasn't the only student who presented a challenge within the study, especially in my role as responder. As detailed in the essay topic charts in Chapter 5, a large majority of students chose to write about personal issues of life and loss throughout the semester. For example, Adam wrote about being gang raped in his life essay, Jessica wrote about her father abandoning her over and over again in her life essay, and Wid wrote about watching his father try to kill his mother in his loss essay.

Adam opened his life essay with the following: "I was born in Lowell, Massachusetts; a cute little town full of gangs and crack heads....Other than Steve, the bully, my step dad's car getting robbed, and a couple of my female babysitters molesting me, I had a nice childhood in Lowell." My marginal comments focus on the power and anger in his writing voice, and I asked him to continue thinking of ways to elaborate on that power in each aspect of his life story.

Although responding to Adam's essay seemed like a natural part of the process, I was then faced with the human side of my responding role. As critics of personal writing like Ann Murphy (1989) and Kathleen Pfeiffer (1993) argue, writing teachers are not properly trained and are too overworked to assume the role of counselors. But that's not the role I was tempted to move into in my response to Adam's life essay. Instead, I wanted to respond as a person—ready to listen. James Pennebaker's research (1990) suggests that the need to be heard is one of the main reasons people choose to write about loss or trauma. They want to regain control and cease living within the role of "victim."

He explains that, “Writing is particularly effective in dealing with issues that are uncontrollable. After a death or trauma, writing helps sort out complicated feelings and memories” (194). Even with this knowledge, I found myself asking what role does the writing class hold throughout the healing or growth process. I found my answer in Michelle Payne’s study (2000). She reminded me that students, like Adam, Jessica R., and Wid, who choose to write about traumatic events, are moving one step further in the healing process by sharing their experiences with others. Because of this bold step students are taking, we must, as responders, “encourage their self-direction while helping them meet the expectations of the course” (122). So how did I respond as a person? I told him, as part of my endnote, “Adam, you have an important story to tell, and I thank you for sharing it.”

Through an examination of my course evaluations, I was able to determine that students felt comfortable with the multiple roles I assumed within the dissertation-study classroom, including the role of responder. For example, in response to whether or not the instructor was concerned about students learning the material, 90% strongly agreed. (See Appendix L) The evaluation asked the following question, “Was the instructor enthusiastic about the subject matter in the course?” Of the students, 100% strongly agreed. “Was the instructor enthusiastic about teaching the course?” Again, 100% strongly agreed. In Section B of the course evaluation, students were asked to respond to my ability to provide helpful feedback, and 95% of students recorded that they strongly agreed; the other 5% agreed. Out of the responders, 100% of students agreed that I treated everyone with respect and was readily available for outside help.

So what do these statistics show me as a teacher and researcher? Overall, I learned that students did not always agree with the pedagogy, reading choices, or course structure, but they overwhelmingly recognized my respect and concern for their learning growth and development. This can be further explored through a few of the responses to the written statement, “What did you like most about the instructor? What could be improved? Give examples.” Students focused on my enthusiasm and excitement as a teacher, my willingness to put myself on the line:

--She was always energetic and persistent in motivating us.

--Her enthusiasm and encouragement for me to succeed in this course.

--I loved how enthusiastic she was and how much she cared about her students. She is an excellent teacher and great mentor.

They also focused on my genuine concern and respect for them, which I think is essential for a writing and healing pedagogical design:

--She made me want to do well on assignments. Her feedback was always helpful in and out of class.

--I really enjoyed how she made the classroom feel like a community. I've never felt more comfortable in a class before.

--Very understanding and was there for her students.

--The teacher was very helpful and concerned about our writing process throughout the course.

--She was always upbeat and made a relaxed atmosphere while also keeping control of the class. Also, she was very willing to meet with us at anytime which was very helpful.

--The instructor was a very good teacher. She helped us write as a process, which I believe made me a stronger writer. She was very understanding and helpful to all students. This is the first time I've enjoyed English!

--I liked the way she was so easy to talk to. I wasn't afraid of her.

--The instructor was very clear on every assignment. She was very organized and always kept a positive atmosphere.

--I liked her laid back way of teaching and she really cared about us.

In addition to the humbling experience of reading and analyzing students' evaluations, they proved that students are aware of our interest and investment as teachers, and 18 of the 20 written responses focused on my belief in their writing and learning process. A positive, supportive teacher role is essential for the overall success of any pedagogical design, especially a writing and healing teacher who is inviting students to explore their most significant lived experiences. Anderson and MacCurdy (2000) support the requirement for a teacher's respect and concern in order for students to reach healing and growth:

As we manipulate words on the page, as we articulate to ourselves and to others the emotional truth of our pasts, we become agents for our own healing, and if those to whom we write receive what we have to say and respond to it as we write

and rewrite, we create a community that can accept, contest, glass, inform, invent, and help us discover, deepen, and change who we have become as a consequence of the trauma we have experienced. (7)

### **Teacher Researcher as Writer**

In order to become a full member of the writing community, I composed the loss essay with my students. I explained to them on September 21 that I would be drafting, asking for feedback, and revising with them throughout the loss essay sequence. During that same class session, I introduced the loss essay, and we spent a large part of the class discussing the inevitability of facing loss. Rachel read the following quote from Chapter 3 of Desalvo to the class, “For loss is a universal experience, something we must all learn to deal with. Sharing our stories of loss, and accepting loss as a common feature of life, as Allende says, helps us ‘enjoy the good times all the more’” (39).

I was convinced that I wasn’t ready to write about Wendy. I definitely wasn’t going to share the intimate details of my struggle with infertility at a young age, so I settled on the decision to write about my family’s financial devastation with the savings and loan crisis. However, during the following class session, on September 23, when I asked students to freewrite about the loss that first came to mind when I introduced the loss essay, while listening to Peter Gabriel’s “I Grieve,” I immediately began writing about Wendy:

I wasn’t planning on writing about you, but I have to follow my own prompt—right? And you were the first loss that came to mind as I introduced the essay. I just don’t know that I’m ready to share my strong emotions about your death, the hole in my life. Candice just ran out of class crying. I wish I could, too.

During our next class period, we sat in a circle for the first time and I told them I received a call from a journal for reflective essays on Wendy’s teaching and academic career and it was due the same day as their essays, so I was planning to give it a try! They were very supportive of the idea because I spoke often of Wendy. Jessica R. smiled and told the class, “I want to know more about her [Wendy]. I didn’t realize the dynamic between teacher and grad student before.” As we moved on with the daily schedule, it was like Wendy was there. Really, class went extremely well, and it was nothing superb that I did. Perhaps students appreciated my openness and willingness to move through this research and writing with them. I, too, appreciated the opportunity.

I drafted with the class, and I passed out copies of my draft on the loss peer workshop date, October 12, and I gave students the option of whether or not to respond to my draft. I did tell them, however, that I would appreciate any responses they might provide. At the beginning of our next class, students were eager to communicate their ideas. Ola talked about how much she appreciated the honesty in my essay, Jessica R. once again commented on how much she learned about the teacher/student relationship, and Adam said he just thought it was cool that I shared my writing with them. Almost collectively they shifted from my essay to a discussion on the openness of the classroom community. This conversation led us perfectly into our schedule for the day, as we began to focus even more on the idea of community and action with the introduction of the third unit of the course, the experience essay unit. Through this process, I was easily convinced of the importance of my participation not only as a teacher and researcher in the course, but also as a writer. This was confirmed in an e-mail Aimee sent me the following semester:

It is kinda funny. I started working my abs randomly, and I laid down on the ground to do some side crunches. After I finished my right side I turned over to start my left side and there, lying in front of my face was your paper, "Remembering A Teaching Life." I never read it when you first handed it out, but I've kept it this whole time, knowing I would want to read it sooner or later. I wish I had read it sooner.

You are Wendy to so many of your students. You were for me, that is for sure. You touched my life deeper than any teacher ever has, and probably ever will. I never had a teacher that would ever come immediately to mind when asked who was my favorite, or best, teacher. Now I do. You dove with me deep into my thoughts and feelings. You turned writing into something positive, instead of something dreaded because I felt like I wasn't good enough. You helped me break down doors that I didn't even know were there.

"But I've realized that Wendy continues to share through her words and scholarship, and if I sit quietly with my dissertation data or a job application packet and listen, really listen, she is still teaching."

Wendy is still teaching through you. So many things that you experienced and talked about in this essay, I experienced in your class. YOU "pushed me harder and further than any other teacher I have ever worked with."

Teaching college writing is right where you need to be. I think being a high school teacher would have been a waste of your talents and a stretch (or shrink) in the wrong direction. You are "completely dedicated" to all of your students. And not just in their writing. You genuinely cared about all of us, as people.

And as a result you have deeply influenced and inspired a lot (for a lack of a better word) of people, including myself. You are an amazing teacher and person. Wendy lives through you...the light that you explained in that paper is noticeably shining out in your personality and work.

Enough to where I noticed and remembered months later and will remember it for years to come. Thank you for being the amazing person that you are.

Aimee

Aimee's words helped me once again realize that my teacher and major professor, Wendy Bishop, never stopped teaching. Two weeks before her death, Wendy took time to respond to the first chapter of my dissertation. She was shaking from the radiation therapy, but still teaching. Wendy wrote in response to my first chapter that an effective teacher is always "willing to talk, to share, to travel on in company." I want to "travel on in company" with my students, and the thought of teaching with the force of Wendy was forefront in my mind throughout the entire dissertation project.

That is why it is no surprise that it was Wendy's teaching life that I chose as the focus of my loss essay, which is included in its complete and final form, thanks to my students, in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 8

### Remembering Wendy Bishop: A Teaching Life

*Even though writing is a solitary act, when I sit with words that I trust will be read by someone, I know that I can never be truly alone.*

--bell hooks

I wrote:

thanks for your encouragement and guidance with my prospectus. like you mentioned, maybe we can discuss your suggestions in person rather than through margin notes. i'm just thrilled you are reading it.

my presentation went well, and my fellow students responded with great ideas and comments. this psych course is another validation that my focus is real and important. i hope i do it justice :)

love,  
amy

Wendy responded:

sure--let me finish reading. i'm really doing what i'd do as you translated it into diss chapter so i'm editing more than you need for circulating it and getting it signed off. just can't help reading and revising.

glad the presentation was good.

enjoy the fall,  
l,w

This e-mail exchange occurred three weeks before Wendy's death. Her words are what I continue to go back to—both published and unpublished. And that is the power of Wendy Bishop's legacy. Bishop wrote nineteen books on writing and pedagogy, and she also authored a countless number of professional journals, poems, and short stories. Wendy took on many different roles within the field of English: Writing Program Administrator, Ethnographic Researcher, Creative Writer, Poet, Expert on Alternate Style, Editor, Writer, and *Teacher*. It would be easy, of course, to rely on Wendy's range of scholarly and pedagogical publications to demonstrate her excellence as a teacher-scholar. But Wendy was the greatest teacher I've ever known, and not just in theory. She lived a teaching life.

The *Tallahassee Democrat* article published four days after her death made it clear that Wendy was devoted to teaching and writing. For example, weeks before her



death, she took a colleague's paper, had the type enlarged so that her faulty eyesight could read the text, and got on her hands and knees to respond. Her colleague, Bonnie Braendlin, reflects on this experience: "That's how interested she was in the writing of others. That's why she was so successful with her students. She just entered into an exchange of reading and writing with people."

Two weeks before Wendy died, I shared a similar experience. Wendy and I spent 2 \_ hours at her kitchen table editing and discussing the first chapter of my dissertation. I left Wendy's home that Thursday afternoon in early November full of knowledge. I think I ran out of her house, because I had so missed her words and her teaching, and I felt full again. I called Wendy a week later to stop by for a visit at the hospital, but she was tired and asked if we could just talk on the phone—something she didn't often do. So we did. We talked about the program, her children, my studies and wedding plans, and then she said, "I love you, Amy."

And I thought WOW, and said "I love you, too."

That was the last exchange I had with Wendy, and how thankful I am for those words.

### **Dr. Bishop: My Writing Teacher**

But our teacher/student relationship didn't begin with I love you's and afternoon talks at her kitchen table. In fact, Wendy pushed me harder and further than any other teacher I have ever worked with. I first walked into Wendy's classroom as a junior at Florida State University in Fall 1997. I then returned to her writing workshops a total of four times in three short terms. I'm sure, now that I have my own repeat students, that Wendy wished I would try a workshop with a different instructor.

That first spring semester, Wendy was teaching an *Advanced Article and Essay Workshop*, and I was told by a fellow English major that Bishop allowed students to play and experiment with writing. Looking back on my decision to register for Wendy's class is a bit of surprise, because I preferred to write one draft, turn it in, and move on. I was a perfectionist, and Wendy found this out very quickly. Even after the very first class period, there was something I appreciated and admired about Wendy's style. She introduced the course goals and syllabus, all while sitting among us. I was used to my teachers standing in front of the classroom, almost over us. I was intrigued by her openness, and I could tell she was much more humble than she should be. And, of

course, I was right. She was, by the late nineties, one of the strongest voices in the field of composition. Yet in class, she wrote with us, shared with us, and always entered into writing exchanges as our equal. This was especially moving for me, because I had already begun wrestling with the idea of teaching writing at the college level. Of course, I should also preface that I had very little self-confidence; I thought earning any graduate degree was a stretch for me.

It was through the four writing workshop courses with Wendy that I began to see the power of writing for myself, in my own writing. At first, I kicked and screamed about fat drafts, memory drafts, and radical revisions. I remembering bringing in a draft to conference that I thought strong, and Wendy questioned, probed, and talked about who she still wanted to see, what she still needed to hear. She challenged my assumptions about the drafting process, my own writing voice, and she even asked me to evaluate myself at the end of each semester, which was nearly impossible for me to do. I'll never forget the literacy narrative I wrote the summer I was to graduate. I wrote more than I had ever written, 20 pages, and I remember being more proud of the process than the result. I began to buy into power of the writing process that summer, which I would come to better understand four years later by taking another class with Wendy, as a Ph.D. student. But I'm jumping ahead. . . .

I remember saying goodbye to Wendy the summer I graduated from college. Her office was in the basement of the old English Department building, and it smelled wet and sticky. I walked around the dark corner to find Wendy reading and giggling at an essay she held in her hands. She looked up and smiled, and it seems as if our conversation went something like this:

"Thank you, thank you, thank you, Dr. Bishop!" I was trying to thank her for teaching me so much about writing and myself, but 'thank you' was all I could muster.

"You should thank yourself, and call me Wendy. It's time," she responded. I always offered more praise than she ever felt comfortable receiving, and I struggled to call her Wendy. She was elevated to me, at a different status.

"Well, I'm going to Tennessee to try for a master's degree in English, after all."

"Great, just keep writing." As she looked up at me, I remember wanting to hug her, to thank her, to tell her she was the reason I was going to get a master's degree. But

I already knew I gushed more than she found appropriate, so I just turned around and said goodbye. What I really wanted to tell her was that she changed my life.

And she did. I earned a master's degree in American Literature, and the thought of teaching with the force of Wendy never left my mind. When I was asked to teach as an instructor at the institution where I received my master's, all that Wendy taught me about writing resurfaced. As I began to teach freshman-writing courses and study composition on my own, I noticed the frequency of articles in professional journals written by Wendy Bishop. I never knew this as an undergraduate student—Wendy never boasted about her most recent book publication or the fact that she introduced major ideas like 'radical revision' to the field. It was 500 miles away, in a small library, that I discovered the power of Wendy's words spread across the composition community at large.

After I taught at Austin Peay State University for an academic year, I was convinced that I wanted to work on a PhD in Rhetoric and Composition. During my PhD application process, I talked with senior faculty at APSU, and they provided numerous leads to graduate programs in Composition and Rhetoric across the country. Without exception, they all mentioned Wendy Bishop as one of the top scholars in the field. I would then share the story of how I came to love composition through Wendy's writing courses. I was secretly surprised that they all knew her, but I now realize that what she shared with me in the undergraduate writing classroom, she shared with others through her writing and scholarship. So I chose to return to Florida State University in Summer 2001 to pursue a PhD and to once again work with Wendy.

### **Wendy Bishop: My Graduate Professor and Mentor**

I think I expected to return to FSU and Wendy's classroom chanting my devotion and admiration, and in turn, she would welcome me back and share that she, too, had hoped that I would once again return and study with her. But that's not what happened at all. In fact, our reunion was rather anti-climactic. I walked into the classroom, and she was already sitting amidst the circle of desks—she was always early to teach. I didn't want our reunion to take place in front of the other students, so I just took a seat directly across from her. I smiled and tried to make eye contact throughout the class, but I didn't

receive a response or acknowledgement from Wendy. I always wanted to ask her why, but I never got the chance.

My first graduate course with Wendy was *Theories of Composition*, and I was completely lost from that first day. I remember reading and liking Donald Murray (I'm sure I didn't know his first name was Donald at that point), but that was the only name that I even remotely recognized from the syllabus. I thought I knew a fair amount about composition, because I had, after all, read current research and taught for two years at the college level. Wendy, once again, showed me how I had much to learn—years before, as a writer, and in this moment, as a beginning scholar.

My first semester as a Rhetoric and Composition student was challenging and there were moments when I felt like a big fake as we marched through forty years of composition theory. I didn't talk much in class over the first few weeks, and Wendy admitted later that she was surprised by my silence. My shyness was not in response to Wendy's teaching style, though; it was the same style I loved so much as an undergrad. She was real—she always forgot to include assignments for one week in her syllabi, which is evidenced by an e-mail she sent the class: "i'm sorry i always mix up the syllabus. something about me and calendars." Beyond the fact that she was sincere, Wendy always grappled with the readings and her ideas and shared them with us. Throughout the course, Wendy invited us to question, think through theories and pedagogies, and the weekly journal assignments were the space where I felt most safe to question ideas. I've just located those journal entries and Wendy's comments, and it was on my last journal of the semester that Wendy finally acknowledged my return. She wrote:

Amy—great entries and I like how there is a thread (your enthusiasm to teach and students) and an examination of each new idea and text. It's a pleasure to have you back at FSU. -Wendy

So it wasn't until I wrote thirty-pages of journals, a practice to theory essay, and a final major essay on a major theory of composition that she welcomed me back. And that made it that much sweeter.

It is also important to note that it was during this course that the tragic attack and destruction of the World Trade Center in New York on 9/11 took place. I taught a first-

year writing course on September 12, 2001, and I asked myself that morning, ‘what would Wendy do in the face of national tragedy?’ I specifically remember my answer—Wendy would address it. So, I invited my students to write and reflect on the attacks of the previous day. I will never forget walking into the classroom on that particular morning. Twenty-three faces stared, and the room was eerily quiet. No one moved in their seats, or greeted each other, and even the trees outside the window refused to sway.

I began the class that day by playing Peter Gabriel’s “I Grieve,” and then I invited my students to choose a person to write to about the tragedy of the previous day. After the song played, still no one stirring, we began writing. I then took them through four prompts to help them capture their thoughts and their grief. The students seemed joined in grief and their words were directed to us all. Emily’s reflection represents this unity:

People are still calling from their cell phones, Jen. Can you believe that? I guess they are trapped under the rubble, but I feel so sorry for them. Why would God allow innocent people to die? Why? Why? Why? Why? It’s all so mesmerizing. The TV keeps saying the same thing yet I can’t take my eyes off of it. I sit paralyzed staring at the screen.

When I woke up this morning the sun was shining so bright, and I felt happy. Then I remembered, and I looked outside. All I saw were blank faces of kids walking to class. I heard a fighter jet, too. Sorry I don’t know much what to say. I wanted to write to you when my teacher asked us to choose someone to write to, but the right words won’t come. I love you. I’m glad you’re okay...is that selfish? Anyway, I am. Love you, Emily

Some students sent the letters home immediately following the class; others chose not to share their letters with anyone, even me. At the very end of class, we all read our letters aloud, unified. As I listened to the power of their words and my own together, I was once again reminded of the power of writing and teaching. Wendy had not only taught me to develop as a writer; she shaped my teaching life.

I shared this exercise with Wendy and our graduate class the following day, and Wendy was openly interested in this exercise and my response. After a failed attempt to write a book review comparing Robert Brooke’s *Writing and Sense of Self* and Lad

Tobin's *Writing Relationships: What Really Happens in the Composition Classroom*, my final essay found the teachable moment of 9/11 as its focus. It was during this semester that I discovered my interest in writing and healing, and my composition self was beginning to form. Wendy always wrote with her students and this particular semester, she wrote a 'practice to theory' essay, and she questioned how various theories of composition informed her teaching life:

I do not believe I can have a smorgasbord pedagogy, but I do feel entitled to range widely, as a teaching generalist, as a writing specialist, Then I'm obliged to think systematically about my practice, even if I do so in snippets of time—at the market, on the commute, between classes, during the department meeting. I am obliged to define, refine, name and explain my practice and to build new knowledge from which to set out again. It is the building and the appreciating and the setting out strongly that matters to me. Writing teachers who get up each day and do their work are doing their work; they do not have to apologize for having values and beliefs, for coming from one section of a field and for moving—perhaps—to another section—from one understanding of instruction to another understanding of it—as long as they are willing to talk, to share, to travel on in company.

That's exactly what we did. Wendy was always "willing to talk, to share, to travel on in company." In fact, she insisted on it. I found this to be especially true in our work outside of the classroom. In spring of 2002, Wendy asked me to write a chapter for the third edition of *The Subject Is Writing*. I was stunned. This collection had been the main text for my own freshman composition course, years before. Wendy asked me to explore the invention process, and I, of course, accepted quickly and excitedly.

I was also progressing enough in my relationship with Wendy that I felt comfortable asking specific questions about composition theory, my writing projects, and my own writing classroom. When I began to allow myself to enter into a dialogue with Wendy, I began to learn even more about composition and writing than I ever thought possible. For example, I decided to focus on invention at all stages of the writing process for my first published essay, and it was well-received. This was my first proof that my pedagogical ideas might actually add something to the field.

And as I became more self-sufficient, Wendy began to include me with more frequency and ease. So it was letting go that drew us closer. For example, Wendy asked me to assist her in the editing stages of the project, and this is her response to my thank-you. She wrote on November 6, 2002:

this is actually fun and exciting and i want you to see the entire book production process if you're interested--part of my lifelong mentoring goals of showing you how the whole system works,

w

It was during fall semester 2002 that I began to really explore personal writing pedagogy and particularly letter writing. Wendy sent me a note in late November asking if I would like to coauthor a chapter on letter writing for a collection with the working title, *National Trauma and the Teaching of Writing*. Wendy's invitation and the collaborative project itself is what finally convinced me that Wendy saw me as a promising composition scholar. I know, it had been five years—I'm a little slow. We worked together, wrote individually, and this was the first time I had to respond to Wendy's writing. Wow, that was tough. When I sat down to respond to Wendy's first draft, I tried covering up her name and responding as if it were a peer's essay. Then I wrote my ideas on a separate sheet of paper. Ultimately, I became engrossed and responded as a reader. This is evidence of another invaluable lesson she taught me, but notice there are no lectures, no notes. Instead, Wendy taught me through her actions, her words, and most importantly, her collaborative spirit.

The moment I felt most proud to be Wendy's student took place during my first presentation at the College Composition and Communication Conference—the 2003 CCCC in NYC. I sometimes wonder if Wendy asked me to sit on her panel because she knew I was on the cusp of believing in myself as a teacher-scholar—I'll always think so. We presented on Rhetoric and the Return of the Sentence, and the room was too small for the people squeezed into the room in chairs, on the floor, peeking through the door. I was very aware that Wendy was who drew people to our panel. I fought my way to the presenter's table at the front of the room, and I saw Wendy the most dressed up I had ever seen her. She wore dark slacks and a deep hunter green blazer, and I think she had

on a little blush. Or maybe she was just as nervous as me; as you know, she hated crowds.

But the moment I will never forget from this experience is not Wendy's presentation, although it was fabulous, or mine, although I made it through and managed to get the most follow-up questions. It happened before the presentation ever began. I sat next to Wendy with my hands in my lap, and my legs shook uncontrollably. As the moderator began to introduce each of us, Wendy reached over and placed her hand on my knee and just held it there for what seemed like five minutes. Every thirty-seconds or so, she would gently pat me. Up to that point, I had only hugged Wendy once and that was when Rick Straub died. And as I got up to speak, she whispered, "Share your passions Amy; that's all you have to do." Another unforgettable teaching moment.

The second graduate course I took with Wendy was *Research Methods*, and we investigated various types of quantitative and qualitative research methods, read books and articles by researchers like Stephen North and Nancy Sommers, and Wendy even brought in her 600+ page ethnographic dissertation. I could hardly lift it; it was that heavy. For our final research project, Wendy invited us to write a prospectus.

Throughout the course, I was really drawn to qualitative methods such as ethnography and teacher research, so I chose to write a prospectus on a writing pedagogy that examines the interface between writing and healing. Well, I wrote what I thought could serve as a draft of a dissertation prospectus, but Wendy wasn't so sure that I had arrived in her initial response to my annotated bibliography: "Although I think this a window into your ideas and an important exercise, you may not produce an actual prospectus, think of it more as a drafting process." I took Wendy's response as a challenge, and I believed my final project was a prospectus draft. Wendy ultimately agreed and wrote on my final portfolio essay: "You've done it. This is a prospectus, which makes me think you might be able to finesse doing a Fall 2003 teacher research study if we manage to complete the paperwork in the spring. Great start! w."

Although it was my last required graduate course, it was during this semester that I began to really pull the layers of writing, research, and composition together. I shared this experience with Wendy in my final portfolio letter:



I am very excited about my own teacher research study, and I feel better able to read and respond to research studies in our field. Honestly, theory, practice, and research in composition came together for me this semester, and I feel grounded as a new member of the field. This process narrative is the last text I will write to finish my course work and begin studying for exams, and I am so grateful for the experience of this course and your teaching. Your knowledge and love for students and writing has been evident in every course I have ever taken with you, Wendy, and I will never forget your grace, your guidance, and the knowledge you have shared with me and countless other students. I came alive as a researcher and member of the field this semester, and I have you to thank. So, thank you.

### **Wendy: My Major Professor**

Now that I look back, I realize I probably didn't even have to formally ask Wendy to serve as my major professor. In January of 2002, Rick Straub, another amazing composition scholar and professor at Florida State University, met his tragic death. Because of Rick's absence, Wendy was the only composition professor who could direct doctoral students. But I think that formally asking Wendy to act as my major professor may have been partly a ceremonial decision for me, a culmination of the long and sometimes difficult process that led me to this place. It was during fall semester of 2002 and as I began to think about preliminary exams I knew that it was time to form my committee. I sent Wendy an e-mail and set up a time to as she always said, "chat."

I was nervous as I walked down the short hallway that led to Wendy's office and her door was cracked. Although by this time the English Department had undergone major renovations, her office was still small and crowded and overflowing with books. I slid the door open and found Wendy with a student-essay in hand. This time she was responding to an undergraduate writer, and I'll never forget how engaged she was during our meetings. She was always present, and especially so in this moment. I remember my question:

"Wendy, I have learned so much from you, and I would be deeply honored if you would please act as my major professor." I shifted in my seat.

"Well, of course, and we need to begin thinking about your reading list, which usually consists of 300+ books and articles...." I left this moment that I had so looked

forward to and began to hyperventilate at the mere thought of reading and comprehending such an expanse of composition theory and practice.

That's all I remember about that initial prelims talk, but I will never forget the preparation and examination process; it was a rite of passage. I revised my reading list five times before Wendy felt comfortable approving it, and she asked me questions about Aristotle and Quintilian, and modern scholars like Susan Jarrett and Peter Elbow every time I saw her, which became more and more often as I read and prepared for the exams. I spent countless hours in the library—the librarians started to call me by name as I walked by the circulation area on the way to my desk on the second floor. They even placed a reserved sign on it as a joke one day. As I prepared, there were times when I was convinced my mind was on the verge being taken over by the history of rhetoric or feminist pedagogy, but Wendy would always send me notes at the exact moment when I needed them most. I printed this one out and taped it to my computer screen and to my car dashboard:

you spoke from a place of authority and power last night at the comp meeting.

keep doing what you're doing. you're ready. W

Wendy also taught me to never stop learning. I came into our last meeting before my preliminary exams feeling confident, because I felt like I'd processed the mounds of theory, theorists, and dates, but as we talked, I realized I knew nothing in comparison to her. I find myself pushing strong students to continue writing and questioning when we meet for individual conferences or in my reader-response comments, and this is a direct result of my relationship with Wendy. I don't believe I will, however, ever know as much as Wendy—she really was a human card catalogue. She could hold intelligent conversations on a wide range of important topics within and outside of the field, and it was the first time I was honest with her about how much she amazed me. It was not the last.

I took my preliminary exams in April 2003, and I wrote fifty-eight pages over three days on various issues of composition and rhetorical theory and practice. Before the oral exam, I tried numerous times to meet with Wendy so that I could prepare for the second part of the preliminary exam process. She never agreed to meet, and she told me afterwards that she wanted me to prove to myself that I could stand on my own. I did and

after a short deliberation, Wendy opened the door and welcomed me back into the conference room. She said, “Congratulations, Amy, ABD.” And she hugged me. The second hug.

I began work on approval of my dissertation prospectus the summer after I passed my preliminary exams, and I also spent time finalizing the first chapter of my dissertation. I talked with Wendy once every few weeks about my research, students, and the pilot-study course I was beginning to analyze. But truthfully, I decided to give myself a bit of a break. If I had known this was our last summer, I may have made a different decision.

To help celebrate prelims, prospectus, and my friend Kate Brown’s MA graduation, Wendy, Deborah Coxwell Teague, Kate, and I went out for a celebration dinner. When I walked in to Mozaik, one of Wendy’s favorite restaurants, I noticed Wendy was weak, tired. I had only ever seen her look strong and present. She explained to the group that she couldn’t seem to break a nasty cold and the doctors were calling it bronchitis. She sat directly to my right that evening, and I watched her as she spoke and smiled. I was keenly aware of the moment, maybe because it was our first dinner together. Sadly, it was also our last.

Three days later, I received the hardest news I’ve yet to receive. Wendy was sick, maybe even dying. Critical ICU. I was visiting my parents for a week, and I sat in my dad’s paisley recliner all day, just rocking, praying. I thought back to our dinner, her cough, her words: “the doctors think it’s bronchitis, but I might go in for a chest scan.” I thought about her family. This first day was the only time I thought we might lose her—when I saw her a week later in ICU, I was convinced she would fight it. She did.

I was scared to go visit her in the hospital, not because I didn’t want to. I did with everything I had, but I was afraid I wasn’t close enough. But Wendy welcomed me into her room, held my hand, and comforted *me*. And I was just a student. She was always teaching, always. Throughout her three-month fight, there were many tender moments between Wendy and me. She was softer somehow, but still completely dedicated. I took her sunflowers, chocolate muffins, dinners as part of a dinner brigade, and I sat on her hospital bed the day after I got engaged. We tried on each other’s rings, and she made my wedding date, May 15, 2004, her get-well date.

One day as part of a dinner brigade, I prepared a special pot roast, and because I was so excited to see her, I just got out of the car and walked straight up the cobblestone sidewalk to her front door, without the pot roast in hand. As I reached the steps and realized my mistake, I turned around to retrieve the dinner. I heard, “I told Dean, ‘I see Amy. Oh, no, there goes Amy. I thought I might be imagining things on all of this medicine, but you’re really here.’” She stood in the doorway, bald and smiling.

Now this leads us back to the last teaching moment I shared with Wendy—our talk on the phone a week before her death. And you can understand the importance of the last words I ever heard my teacher speak, *I love you*.

I know there are countless students, teachers, and writers who could also share stories of wonderful writing and teaching relationships with Wendy Bishop, because she gave so much to so many until the last day of her life. But I’ve realized that Wendy continues to share through her words and scholarship, and if I sit quietly with my dissertation data or a job application packet and listen, *really listen*, she is still teaching.

## CHAPTER 9

### Making an Argument for a *Pedagogy of Trauma*

After completion of this research project and the analysis and reporting of data, I have concluded that it is critical for the composition field to stop thinking of personal and even traumatic writing as threatening and anti-intellectual. Instead we, as a field, must ask how we might, as do feminist-theorists, philosophers, and psychologists, begin to recognize emotional appeals as ways of knowing. Michelle Payne (2000) explains, “When the more powerful are trying to control the emotions of the less powerful, what is at issue is not the basis for the emotion but the cultural interpretation of it.” For example, an academic analysis of spousal abuse is usually considered more scholarly and appropriate within the university than one written from the perspective of an abused spouse. Wendy Bishop (1997) addresses this paradox: “A writer who in discussing a paper also discloses childhood abuse is not simply ‘burdening’ us with more than we’re trained to handle—rather this student has connected to us, made our day more whole, more human, more important.”

But what does this mean in terms of how we encourage student-writers to connect to their topics, regardless of whether the topic is personal or academic? What if students disclose traumatic emotions, and we don’t know how to respond? What if the fear in a student’s essay is contagious, and infects the classroom community? Jeffrey Berman (2001) responds to teachers’ fear of encouraging students to write about their significant lived experiences with a reminder that there are also risks in restricting students from emotional engagement, including the possibility that emotional denial may keep students from writing about the most important issues in their lives. He explains, “Many of the fears of writing are symptomatic of fears of emotion.” Therefore, it is important that all writing teachers begin examining ways to invite students to explore emotion and writing, in both personal and academic discourse.

I am not claiming that through this pedagogy we will heal students. In fact, even if we as composition teachers had the necessary training in therapy, I would still argue that the focus of the first-year writing classroom is to encourage students to become more invested in the writing process. As Marian MacCurday (2000) explains, “The purpose of the writing classroom is different from the purpose of therapy: therapy’s goal is mental

health; our goal is to help students become strong writers. However, the writing and therapy processes can inform each other” (161).

### **Moving Toward a Pedagogy of Trauma**

Do we think students can be truly educated if they do not have the opportunity to develop what Daniel Goleman (1995) calls “emotional intelligence,” which he defines as self-awareness, persistence, zeal, self-motivation, and empathy. Although Goleman does not spell out the responsibilities college writing courses have in this movement, the goals are obviously relevant to college courses: “an emerging strategy in emotional education is not to create a new class, but to blend lessons on feelings and relationships with other topics already taught. Emotional lessons can merge naturally into reading and writing.” Jerome Bump (2000) introduced “emotional literacy” to the composition field, and he explained its main goal as helping students identify and articulate the emotions they feel as they read, experience, and write.

*Trauma and the Teaching of Writing* also places the interface between writing and trauma at the center of pedagogical practice. Shane Borrowman (2005) argues in his new collection that we, as writing teachers, “may be facing trauma as a permanent state rather than an occasional anomaly. We have always faced trauma in a way, in fact—trauma as and ongoing condition—without fully realizing it” (199). Jeffrey Berman’s review of Borrowman’s collection extends the argument for teacher-scholars to begin paying attention to personal and even traumatic writing as valid discourses within the writing classroom:

Moreover, so may people, especially college students, suffer from psychological conflicts, including clinical depression, suicidal ideation, eating disorders, and drug and alcohol addiction—all of which contribute to a traumatic culture. This is one of the first books on what might be called the *pedagogy of trauma*.

When considering implications for future study, I hope to provide a book-length project on what Berman calls “a pedagogy of trauma.” After carefully reflecting upon the teacher research pilot study and dissertation study, the follow-up interviews, and the mounds of student portfolios, I am confident that a pedagogy based on the interface between writing and psychology can help students grow as writers, thinkers, and active participants in their communities. Peter Goggin and Maureen Daly Goggin (2005)

support the need for this pedagogical focus as part of the field: “Given the public and scholarly turn to trauma and discoursing (about) trauma, it is somewhat surprising that little scholarly ink has been spilt on the subject of trauma and its discourses in pages devoted to the teaching of writing” (30). As Goggin and Daly Goggin defend, it is necessary for the field to analyze the relationship between writing and healing in the classroom.

Another important conclusion derived from this study is that the experiences students choose to write about within this pedagogical design are not always based on trauma or loss. When asked to write a personal experience essay in *Writing about Life, Loss, and Experience*, many of the pilot-study and dissertation-study students wrote essays focused on their first dates, moving to college, or the big game. I determined that students are more engaged and effective as writers when they share experiences about that which they have felt deeply, regardless of whether the topic is senior prom or losing a parent. Because of this, writing teachers should not limit students’ topics to academic issues. Goggin and Daly Goggin (2005) write, “The paradox here is that while it is crucial that we do not mandate writing trauma, it is equally crucial that we not silence it.”

Writing and healing is defined as an invitation for students to tell their stories, no matter what they are, while listening to the stories of other writers in the community and moving their rhetorical strengths into the various other communities in which they live and work. Dori Laub (1992) argues that the community plays a vital role in helping the writer regain control both in her writing and her life: “What ultimately matters in all process of witnessing, spasmodic and continuous, conscious and unconscious, is not simply the information, the establishment of the facts, but the experience itself of living through testimony, of giving testimony” (85). As evidenced throughout this project, the discursive and supportive community of writers is what many students listed as the most important aspect of the course design. Therefore, the function of testimony within the writing community is essential for the success of this pedagogical design.

As students explored their experiences within the writing and healing classroom, they became more aware of their roles within various cultures and many students moved toward what Laub and Desalvo refer to as “testimony.” Students are surrounded by many types of trauma—personal, cultural, national, international. And

where better to think critically about these issues than the writing classroom? As Cynthia Gannett (1995) posits, student-writers can help end oppression through the writing process:

Child abuse, and incest, and other forms of violence against women will not disappear just because they can't be written about, nor will these experiences stop having profound effects on students and learners. Indeed, writing about the events that silence and fragment (female or male, minority or white) can help them heal sufficiently to see themselves as knowers once again. (126)

### **The Merging of the Personal and the Academic**

Through my teacher research study and analysis of the research findings, I have also concluded that the joining of personal and academic discourse helps provide students with “balanced writing lives,” as Darla termed it in her follow-up interview. Candice Spigelman’s (2004) recent study of what she refers to as “personal academic writing” urges teachers to assign writing exercises that ask students to examine the events that shape their lives as social participants:

We really can live with contradictions, as postmodernists suggest, and by holding, simultaneously, opposite (or at least different) perspectives for example, personal and academic, narrative and ‘rational,’ expressivist and social constructionist—we may arrive at richer and more complex understandings of the issues we choose to investigate. (xvii)

As teachers and researchers, it is important that we join personal and academic writing in our course designs. Wendy Bishop (1997) writes, we should “allow for the personal and public to co-exist, to communicate” (320). Paying attention to both the personal and academic in a writing course can help emphasize individuality in the context of the community, the practice of inventive, collaborative, and revision exercises as modes of critical thinking, and the dialectical relationship among rhetoric, emotion, ideology, and lived experiences. As a field, we need to specifically examine the merging of personal and academic writing in future research projects.

This dissertation project presents a pedagogy that invites first-year writing students to write critically about what they are most passionate about, even when it seems risky. Of course, writing teachers will want to adapt this pedagogy to best fit their



teaching philosophies—perhaps create new assignments or readings. This pedagogy can also help equip teachers with the necessary skills for responding to national traumas such as 9/11 or the War in Iraq by encouraging students in the writing classroom to write, analyze, and engage in critical discourse. Overall, a writing and healing pedagogy invites both students and teachers to decide what experiences, both positive and negative, personal and public, shape their personal and academic lives through the writing and revision processes. As Michelle Payne (2000) reminds us:

Writing teachers don't need to be therapists to renew humanity in our classrooms, and we don't need to reinforce the violence that has destroyed someone else's humanity by banning that person's story from the classroom...these students have much to teach us if we would only listen to what they're saying. (128)

As Payne suggests, we, as teacher-scholars, must listen to our students.

Throughout this research project, I have listened to my students through their participation within the classroom community and in their writing. Their words built the argument for the necessity of a writing and healing pedagogy within the field of composition. The following are their reflections on the effects of a writing and healing pedagogy:

**Darla Woodring**

Writing about Life, Loss, and Experience changed me as a writer/person because it was the first time in my academic career that I was encouraged to reflect on aspects of my life that maybe even I was unsure of. The course assignments required more than just a chronological listing of events, rather my task was to examine the events in my life in a more critical way—why did I feel this way, what caused me to form these opinions, etc. It has been two years since I took the class, but I still remember Desalvo's key piece of advice: connecting feelings to events.

**Lauren Hill**

This class opened my eyes to so many things and taught me quite a bit about myself. I loved how close the class became in such a relatively short period of time. As far as I know, many of us have stayed in contact. The closeness and openness of the classroom made it much easier for me to share some of the details of my life. If the dynamics of the class had been different, there's a very good chance I never would have gained anything

from it. My essay 2 was the most healing. To keep something like that inside you for so long and then to finally release it was incredible. I'm not saying writing it didn't hurt and cause me to relive that night over and over again. It made my life worse before it made it better. I had frequent nightmares for weeks following the beginning of the writing process. But honestly, I knew it wouldn't be easy and decided to anyway. The feeling of accomplishment afterward made it all worthwhile. I also learned that writing and healing are interconnected. Usually, one comes with the other.

### **Trevor Williams**

What I remember most from the course is the process of self-examination that it took to even begin the assigned essays. Each prompt was so in depth that I remember having to invent, if you will, a new way of "digging deep" into myself to figure out exactly what I wanted to write. You were so encouraging of this journey, and I believe my writing really reflected both improvement and discovery.

### **Kelli Justham**

Taking my second essay and turning it into my radical revision (a collage of Mariah's pictures with sentences from my paper attached to it) was very special to me because I could see that my classmates understood our bond and saw how special Mariah was to me. After four months of describing her and sharing our bond with my classmates, they finally realized that Mariah was not just a foster child in my home, she was my sister. Being able to have a room full of strangers realize that this beautiful child shared the same bond with me as they did with their biological siblings was incomparable to any other moment in my life.

### **Andrea Gold**

My most vivid memory from the course is when we were presenting our radical revisions. It was such a weird feeling because I showed a menorah with pictures of me and my Jewish religion. I remember being really nervous to show the class my revision because I was showing them a personal part of me, but at the same time, I felt a strange calm because I felt comfortable with the class. We had become like a little family. Throughout the semester, we shared so many personal experiences with each other that I think, in a way, it softened our hearts and made us care about each other more. I know in that moment I was very nervous, but then I remember looking up and just seeing a bunch

of smiling faces who seemed happy and interested in what I was saying. It was very surreal, yet comforting and it made me realize that the whole semester was not only about opening up with yourself but also with others.

**Colleen Pratt**

From ENC 1145-07, I most remember the effective writing strategies that were used to get us to start writing and bring us out of blocking. I liked the collage assignment most of all. I felt that it really helped me express how I'm feeling and even now I find myself making collages when I am upset. It provides an alternate format of communicating my feelings. This course taught me that not expressing your feelings and keeping things bottled up inside does not help. If you fail to express what you are withholding you'll never fully feel better or in essence, heal. I feel that Writing about Life, Loss, and Experience was not only a writing course, but also, a form of personal therapy.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **ENC 1145 Course Proposal Writing about Life, Loss, and Experience**

Because of my interest in personal writing, I am very interested in students developing individual writing identities, and my classroom is always centered around writing about personal experience as a way to understand and articulate a sense of self. I believe a course focused on personal writing experiences and issues of loss and life will be a great asset to my global research, as well as an effective pedagogical model for beginning writers. A course focused on life writing focuses on exploration of the individual writer and process pedagogy. The students will engage in a variety of writing assignments, practices, and relationships, as they write and discover their personal writing identities. The course will focus on personal experience writing, workshopping, conferencing, and self-reflections made by the writer. Process pedagogy and personal experience writing will give students permission to make mistakes and find meaning in their writing. Writing to discover will include pre-writing, writing, and re-writing. Through drafting, writers will invent their writing identities by finding out what works best for them individually. As they become aware of themselves as writers, students will learn to write to discover what they believe—whether the writing is autobiographical or academic. The writing environment will be inviting, and students should feel comfortable interacting with their texts, peers, and me, the teacher. (Excerpt from ENC 1145 Course Proposal)

## APPENDIX B



Office of the Vice President For Research  
Human Subjects Committee  
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2763  
(850) 644-8673 · FAX (850) 644-4392

### APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 7/26/2004

To:  
Amy Hodges  
2001 Old St. Augustine Rd. Apt. H310  
Tallahassee, FL 32301

Dept.: English

From: John Tomkowiak, Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Tomkowiak M.D.", written over the printed name.

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research  
Writing about Life, Loss, and Experience

The forms that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Secretary, the Chair, and two members of the Human Subjects Committee. Your project is determined to be Exempt per 45 CFR § 46.(b) 2 and has been approved by an accelerated review process.

**The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals, which may be required.**

If the project has not been completed by 1/21/2004 you must request renewed approval for continuation of the project.

You are advised that any change in protocol in this project must be approved by resubmission of the project to the Committee for approval. Also, the principal investigator must promptly report, in writing, any unexpected problems causing risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairman of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols of such investigations as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Protection from Research Risks. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

Cc: Wendy Bishop  
HSC No. 2002.654

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**  
**Spring 2003 First Year Writing**  
**Writing about Life, Loss, and Experience**

I freely and voluntarily and without element of force or coercion, consent to be a participant in the research project entitled "Writing about Life, Loss, and Experience."

This research is being conducted by Amy Hodges, M.A., who is a Teaching Assistant of English at Florida State University. I understand the purpose of her research project is to better understand writing practices. In addition to writing practices, the study is exploring students' growth as writers and thinkers with this pedagogical design. I understand that if I participate in the project I will be asked questions about my feelings about writing, my progress as a writer, as well as general information about myself and my writing habits.

I understand I will be asked to fill out paper and pencil questionnaires, participate in conferences throughout the semester with the teacher, and submit a final portfolio and process narrative focusing on my writing and growth. I may also be asked to participate in a follow-up interview in Summer 2003. I also understand that my grade will not be impacted by the results and/or my participation in this study.

I understand my participation and writing in this course is being researched through qualitative measures. My name will not appear on any of the results and special coding will be used to present the analysis of the study. My contribution to this study will remain confidential, to the extent allowed by law.

I understand there is a possibility of a minimal level of risk involved if I agree to participate in this study focused on my life, my experiences, and my growth as a writer and thinker. I also understand there are benefits for participating in this research project. First, my own awareness about my writing may be increased. Also, I will be providing the composition field with valuable insight into students' feelings and behaviors regarding writing and healing.

I understand that this consent may be withdrawn at any time without prejudice, penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I have been given the right to ask and have answered any inquiry concerning the study. Questions, if any, have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I may contact Amy Hodges, Florida State University, Department of English, WMS 327, (850) 644-1802, for answers to questions about this research or my rights. Group results will be sent to me upon my request.

I have read and understand this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Subject) \_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Witness)

## APPENDIX C

### ENC 1145 Writing about Life, Loss, and Experience Florida State University, Fall 2004

T/TH 9:30-10:45

Instructor: Amy Hodges

Office: 224 WMS

Office Hrs: T/TH 10:45-12:00 and gladly by appointment

E-mail: alh5718@fsu.edu

**Course Description:** This writing workshop course is designed to help you develop original writing, primarily nonfiction prose while finding a voice in your writing. There will be frequent opportunities for drafting, revision, and editing. The course will focus on writing as a way of healing and growth. In addition, you will learn how to analyze and enhance your own, your peers', and professional writing to learn more about writing conventions, research options, stylistic alternatives, and audience expectations.

**Course Requirements:** Above all, you will be encouraged to write and develop your skills as a writer. We will use our texts and in-class freewriting to generate essay material. You will write three original essays (5-7 pages) and a radical revision essay of either Essay I, II, or III at the end of the semester. You will also be required to respond on Blackboard and in journal responses to our readings. You will each lead a discussion on one reading this semester. Your participation in peer review groups and entire class workshops is also a course requirement.

#### **Required texts and materials:**

Louise DeSalvo, *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives*

Alice Sebold, *Lucky*

*The Longman Writer's Companion* by Chris Anson, Robert Schwegler, and Marcia Muth (you should still have this text from ENC 1101)

Reading Packet—see daily schedule

**Plagiarism:** All the work you hand in must be work done by you specifically for this course. Plagiarism is grounds for suspension from the university as well as for failure in this course. It will not be tolerated. Any instance of plagiarism is reported to the Director of Undergraduate Studies. Plagiarism is a counterproductive, non-writing behavior that is unacceptable in a course intended to aid the growth of individual writers. Plagiarism is included among the violations defined in the Academic Honor Code, section b), paragraph 2, as follows: Regarding academic assignments, violations of the Academic Honor Code shall include representing another's work or any part thereof, be it published or unpublished, as one's own.

If you turn in a paper that is not entirely your own work, a minimum of two things will happen:

You will receive an F on the paper, and you will receive an F for this course.

This is your warning.

**Attendance:** Four unexcused absences are allowed in a workshop course that meets only twice a week. More cuts will hurt your final grade. If you miss more than five classes, you may fail the course. When you are absent, you are responsible for finding out what assignments you missed, and late work will not receive full credit.

**Late Policy:** Lateness is not accepted. Three tardies equals an absence, and you will be marked absent if you arrive in excess of ten minutes from the time class begins. Also, if you arrive unprepared for any of the three peer review workshops, you will be marked absent.

**ADA:** Students with disabilities needing academic accommodations should in the first week of classes 1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) and 2) bring a letter to the instructor from SDRC indicating the need for academic accommodations. Class materials are available in alternative format upon request.

**Grade Distribution:** Your grade for the course will be based on the following:  
Class Participation, Conferences

In Class Writing, Blackboard Responses, Leading Class

Discussion 10%

Radical Revision Essay 10%

Final Writing Portfolio 80%

(I will evaluate each portfolio based on my knowledge of you as a writer, and how you developed over the course of the term. Throughout the semester, you will receive work in progress evaluations on professional drafts, which should help you chart your progress as a writer. I will also ask for a substantial letter of self-evaluation to be included in your final portfolio, discussing your development over the course (this is in addition to the process cover sheets for each paper).

**Blackboard Response Writing:** In order to generate class discussion, analytical skills, and your writing development, we will write reader response entries for each chapter of *Lucky*, in addition to personal journal entries I assign in class. In general, your posted responses (except for journals I assign) should 250 words in length. I may provide specific suggestions for responses to a particular chapter, but in general your reading responses should relate to what you found most interesting or disturbing about each chapter of *Lucky*. Make sure your journals are relevant to your own life experiences, and this will help you each generate topic ideas. You can access our course website by connecting to [campus.fsu.edu](http://campus.fsu.edu).

In addition to posting your own reading responses (by adding a new thread on the discussion board) for each chapter of *Lucky*, you will also respond to at least two of the reading responses your peers post for each chapter. Your journal responses are due by at least 4 p.m. the day prior to class discussion, which should give you adequate time to respond to a minimum of two of your peers' reading responses. I will act as a moderator on discussion board, not a participant. This is a space for you to play with ideas, share your thoughts, readings, etc.

**Discussion Leaders:** Across the semester, you will each be responsible for leading class discussion on one assigned reading. You will be responsible for generating discussion and leading the class through the chapter/essay. You have flexibility in designing your discussion, but you might consider posing questions to encourage discussion, discussing key issues the text raises, and/or your reactions to the text.



### **DAILY SCHEDULE**

The instructor has the right to make changes in this schedule as needed. It is imperative that you read the chapters from Desalvo and Sebold, as well as ALL essays before coming to class, and bring your books and journal responses to class. Failure to read WILL hurt your final grade.

### **WEEK ONE**

- TU** 8-24 Introduction to Class; and questionnaire  
**TH** 8-26 O'Brien's "The Things They Carried," and In-class writing

### **WEEK TWO**

- TU** 8-31 Read Ch. 1, "Why Write," and Chapter 1 *Lucky*, Essay 1--*Life Essay*, and begin topic ideas and freewriting for Essay I  
**TH** 9-2 Chapter 2 "How Writing Can Help us Heal," and Angelou's, "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," and childhood experience writing in class

### **WEEK THREE**

- TU** 9-7 Read White's "Once More to the Lake"; Sensory Observation Exercise  
**TH** 9-9 Read Chapter 2, *Lucky* and *Picture This* Writing Project; bring photograph related to Essay I

### **WEEK FOUR**

- TU** 9-14 Peer Review for Essay I; bring 4 copies of Essay I for peer review workshop  
**TH** 9-16 **Professional Draft of Essay I due** (all drafts of Essay I and process cover sheet due in folder). Read Ozick's "The Shawl" and Chapter 3 *Lucky*

### **WEEK FIVE**

- TU** 9-21 Chapter 3 "Writing as a Therapeutic Process," begin topic ideas and freewriting for Essay II--*Loss Essay*  
**TH** 9-23 Chapter 4 "Writing Pain, Writing Loss"; Read Chapter 4 *Lucky*; Therapeutic Writing Exercise

### **WEEK SIX**

- TU** 9-28 Collage Writing Exercise (you will need scissors, tape, and a few old magazines); bring Essay II in progress  
**TH** 9-30 Read Chapter 5 and 6 *Lucky* and

### **WEEK SEVEN**

- TU** 10-5 Individual Conferences--Class Does Not Meet; bring Essay II and questions about your writing development to conference  
**TH** 10-7 Individual Conferences--Class Does Not Meet; bring Essay II and questions about your writing development to conference

### **WEEK EIGHT**

- TU** 10-12 Peer Review Workshop; bring 4 copies of Essay II for peer review workshop

**TU** 10-14 **Professional Draft of Essay II due;** Essay III--*Personal Experience Essay* (research component); Read Chapter 7 *Lucky*, and Epilogue, "From Silence to Testimony"

#### **WEEK NINE**

**TU** 10-19 Why research about your interests, passions? Topic Question Exercise (you need a TOPIC)

**TH** 10-21 Research Day; Visit Strozier Library

#### **WEEK TEN**

**TU** 10-26 Read Chapter 8 *Lucky*; Group Research Assignment and MLA talk

**TH** 10-28 \_ Class Peer Review Copies of Essay III Due; Read Ch. 7 "Stages of the Process, Stages of Growth I" and Chapter 9 *Lucky*

#### **WEEK ELEVEN**

**TU** 11-2 \_ Class Peer Review

**TH** 11-4 \_ Class Peer Review

#### **WEEK TWELVE**

**TU** 11-9 Essay IV: Radical Revision Essay; Read "Distorting the Mirror: Radical Revision and Writers' Shifting Perspectives," Chapter 10 *Lucky*

**TH** 11-11 Veteran's Day—Class Does Not Meet

#### **WEEK THIRTEEN**

**TU** 11-16 Revision Workshop; Bring all essays (in progress) for class workshop

**TH** 11-18 Continue Radical Revision Discussions; Read Chapter 11 *Lucky*, and example radical revision essays in groups

#### **WEEK FOURTEEN**

**TU** 11-23 Radical Revision Workshop; bring 4 copies of radical revision process cover sheet and radical revision for peer review workshop, Read Chapter 12 *Lucky*

**TH** 11-25 Happy Thanksgiving—Class Does Not Meet

#### **WEEK FIFTEEN**

**TU** 11-30 Ch. 8, "Stages of the Process, Stages of Growth: II"; Discussion of writing development and growth and final questionnaire, Read Chapter 13 and Aftermath *Lucky*

**TH** 12-2 Radical Revision Essay IV Presentations (4-5 minutes each), and **Final portfolios due** at the beginning of the last day of class.

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Opening Questionnaire**

- 1) What do you write? Make a list of the type of writing you normally engage in (i.e. e-mail, academic papers, lists, etc).
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) What do you think you will learn from a course focused on your life, your loss, and your experience? What worries you about the course? What excites you about the course?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) What have you written from your personal experience? What did you gain from the act of writing about your personal experience?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4) How would you define therapeutic writing?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 5) Why did you choose to take this special topics course on writing about life, loss, and experience.

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Closing Questionnaire**

- 1) What do you write now that you have taken this course? Make a list of the type of writing you now engage in (i.e. e-mail, academic papers, lists, etc).
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) Do you feel you have grown as a result of this course focused on your life, your loss, and your experience? If so, how did you grow as a writer and person?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) What did you gain from the act of writing about your personal experience? What did you lose?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4) How would you define therapeutic writing now that you've participated in this course?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 5) What are you taking away from this course on writing about life, loss, and experience? How did this course prepare you for future writing? How do you view writing about the personal?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 6) Explain how were you impacted by this semester study of our classroom.

## APPENDIX F

### Student Analysis Chart

	Essay I	Essay II	Essay III	Radical Revision
<b>Students who reported healing</b>				
<b>Students who reported blocking</b>				
<b>Students who reported change in their writing proficiency</b>				
<b>Students who reported</b> <hr/> <b>(All categories will be determined by the students' process reports)</b>				

## APPENDIX G

### **ENC 1145 Post-Semester Interview Questions**

Please answer (on a separate sheet of paper) the following questions honestly and thoroughly in response to your experience in ENC 1145-06, *Writing About Life, Loss, and Experience* last spring semester. We will discuss your answers during our interview, but please elaborate as much as possible in writing.

1. Describe in detail your overall experience as a student-writer in ENC 1145-06.
2. How did the class focus on writing and healing impact you as a student and writer? As a person? What did you take away from the course? What attitudes do you now hold about writing about your life and experiences?
3. List and elaborate on any essay(s) that led to healing. If you experienced blocking while drafting any essays, please describe. If you experienced a shift in your writing proficiency while drafting any essays, please describe.
4. Share your experience using the two assigned texts for the course—Desalvo's *Writing as a Way of Healing* and Oates' *Best American Essays of the Century*.
5. What have you taken away from ENC 1145-06 and used other aspects of your personal and academic life?
6. What do you write now that you have completed ENC 1145-06? Make a list of the types of writing you now engage in. Make note of the items on the list that were influenced by the writing and healing course.
7. Since ENC 1145-06, have you written personally for yourself? For school? Describe the writing.
8. As a result of the course, have you moved from silence to testimony, as Desalvo describes in *Writing as a Way of Healing*. Describe any action(s) have you taken as a result of the course. For example, did you write a letter to the editor about eating disorders?

## APPENDIX H

### **Spring 2005 ENC 1145 Post-Semester Interview Questions**

Please answer (on a separate sheet of paper) the following questions honestly and thoroughly in response to your experience in ENC 1145-06, *Writing About Life, Loss, and Experience*. We will discuss your answers during our interview, but please elaborate as much as possible in writing.

- 1) What have you taken away from ENC 1145-06 and used in other aspects of your personal, professional, and/or academic life? What did this course prepare you for academically, personally, or professionally?
- 2) How did the class focus on writing and healing influence you as a student and writer? As a person? What did you take away from the course? What essay do you remember most/are you the most proud of? What attitudes do you now hold, after two years, about writing about your life and experiences?
- 3) What do you write now that you have completed ENC 1145-06? Make a list of the types of writing you now engage in. Make note of the items on the list that were influenced by the writing and healing course.
- 4) Since ENC 1145-06, have you written personally for yourself? For school? For work? Grad school? Describe the writing.
- 5) As a result of the course, have you moved from silence to testimony, as Desalvo describes in *Writing as a Way of Healing*. Describe any action(s) have you taken as a result of the course. For example, did you write a letter to the editor about eating disorders?

## APPENDIX I

### Complete Opening Questionnaire

**1) What do you write? Make a list of the type of writing you normally engage in (i.e. e-mail, academic papers, lists, etc).**

Roseli Agulair: e-mail, instant messaging, letters to friends and family, academic papers, notes for class and myself

Jack Andrews: e-mail, lists, notes, some freewriting, more like poetry than a document.

Jessica Culbreath: For school, of course, I am required to write academically through research papers and assigned topics, but personally I usually do a lot of writing in the form of poetry, letters, and a diary/journal.

Adam Daggett: poetry, rhyming, songs, comedic scripts, autobiography, action, violence, sci-fi

Candice Egger: for class assignments, e-mails and letters to friends out of state, love notes, freewriting when I'm sad or angry.

Andrea Gold: e-mails, essays, academic papers, lists, poems, short stories, letters, notes

Lauren Hill: e-mails, journals (on my computer), academic papers, lists for daily chores (things to do today), and poetry

Susan Hirschberger: e-mail, writing papers, occasional a journal

Rachel Keller: e-mail, poetry, journal entries, short stories, academic papers, schedules

Wid Kever: journal, poetry, lyrics, screenplays

Jennifer Koger: I spend most evening engaged in AOL Instant Messenger communicating with friends all over the U.S. I write e-mails when I can't seem to reach a person via phone or IM. I try to keep academic papers to a minimum. I also write when I'm extremely stressed out or lost on an issue.

Harmony Kranitz: poetry, lists, songs, academic writing, letters, not very often e-mail



Aimee Ludlow: e-mail, academic, lists, reminders, and when I have lots of emotions, positive and negative (usually negative), I write to sort out my feelings.

Matt Lukas: e-mail, academic papers

Phil Murphey: e-mails, lists, papers, IM's

Colleen Pratt: Everyday I engage in writing that includes making lists, e-mailing, writing letters, writing in my journal, poems, and when I have to, academic papers.

Zach Prisland: I usually write e-mails or academic papers. Besides that, I do as little writing as possible.

Brittani Richards: I believe I write because I sometimes don't know how to say things aloud. I will write how I'm feeling in a "diary" or write reminders and notes to myself. I write a lot of e-mails, memos, letters, and papers.

Jessica Rollins: I write because I'm forced to as part of my education, and as a way to express my feelings, and as a way of communication.

\*e-mails, academic papers, journal entries, letters, "to-do" lists

Carolina Torres: e-mails, notes to friends, papers for my classes. I make lists and schedules so I won't forget.

Mike Wolfel: academic papers, letters to family who are elsewhere in the U.S. (on a regular basis)

**2) What do you think you will learn from a course focused on your life, your loss, and your experience? What worries you about the course? What excites you about the course?**

Roseli Agulair: I think I will learn that writing is a way of healing. Writing may soothe me if a tragic loss occurs or if a negative experience comes my way. Nothing really worries me about the course, I feel safe enough to write about personal issues. I am excited about digging deep into myself to write about life, loss, and experience.

Jack Andrews: I think I will learn how to naturally deal with some of life's curveballs through writing and self-expression. I am worried about digging up some skeletons. I am excited about reading new things, and I get to relive my favorite idiosyncrasy—I dislike people but love gatherings.

Jessica Culbreath: I think I will learn new ways to reflect on personal experiences in my writing. What worries me is sharing my writing by reading it aloud. Yikes. What excites me is that I will be allowed to write about what is easiest and most comfortable—my own life!

Adam Daggett: Perhaps I will learn to express myself a little better in my writing. Nothing worries me, and I'm excited about writing about subjects that interest me.

Candice Egger: I think I will learn to write in a less confined way than I was taught in high school and hopefully become a better writer in the end. My worries are virtually non-existent. I am very confident in the teacher and the necessity of this class in teaching how writing heals. The course itself and the readings are truly fascinating.

Andrea Gold: I think I will learn more about myself and my writing capabilities from this course. I am not worried about expressing myself...the only thing that scares me is having to write a research paper! I am most excited about being able to write about myself and include emotions in my work.

Lauren Hill: I'm convinced that this course will help me to grieve for my losses, recount my experiences, and help me further throughout my life. I'm a little weary about what I'll find, but that also excites me.

Susan Hirschberger: I'm really not sure what I will learn. I've never really had an experience that seems worth writing about, so I don't know exactly what I'm going to write about but it will hopefully be interesting to see what happens.

Rachel Keller: Hopefully, I will learn how to better put into words my emotions and experiences. I guess I am a little worried about what I will find out about myself, but at the same time, that's what excites me most.

Wid Kever: I will learn how to become free with my emotions and not hold back on paper. The whole student as "subject" worries me, but I'm excited about the writing portion.

Jennifer Koger: Nothing really worries me about the course. It is interesting to me, and I'm excited about writing on my own personal experience.

Harmony Kranitz: I hope to learn more about my feelings and why I feel the way I do. Nothing really worries me about this class. I'm a very open person, and I'm excited about becoming closer to people through writing in this class.

Aimee Ludlow: How much writing can effect me—I already understand why I get that urge to write when I'm upset. I'm at a good/neutral point in my life so I'm worried I won't have enough to write on! I'm excited that I have passion for a course and writing—which is rare for me when it comes to English or writing.

Matt Lukas: I think that I will be able to focus freely on myself and my feelings. It will allow me to take a good look inside myself. I do not have any worries about the course except for my grade. I am excited about the course because I have never taken a writing course that has sole focus on me.

Phil Murphey: Not too much because I am lucky to have not lost much. I am worried I'll have nothing to write about. The teacher seems cool.

Colleen Pratt: From a course focused on life, loss, and experience, I feel I will learn more about myself as I express my emotions through writing. I'm worried about the workshops because I hate group attention and others reading what I've written. I'm excited to create papers focused on my emotions and troubles.

Zach Prisland: I hope to improve my freewriting skills by taking this course. I really have no concerns, except for making it to class on time. I may learn something more about myself during this course.

Brittani Richards: I think I will learn to become a better writer, especially since this course and its topics make it much easier for me to open up and actually start to feel confident about my writing. The researching I find to be a little intimidating. I'm happy that I want to write now.

Jessica Rollins: I think I will learn how to take my experiences and use them in writing (better) papers. The only worry I have is that I won't open up right away. I'll be a little more hesitant. I'm excited because I can be me and use what I've been through to write and share with others.

Carolina Torres: I think that this course will improve my writing. I am not worried about anything in this course, and I'm excited about reading *Lucky*.

Mike Wolfel: I think a lot will be learned from this class. As I write about my life, I will be able to analyze certain experiences. I am very excited that in this class, I will write about something I find interesting, myself.

**3) What have you written from your personal experience? What did you gain from the act of writing about your personal experience?**

Roseli Agulair: In ENC 1101, I wrote about something that impacted my life. I wrote about moving to a new state during high school. I was able to really find out how and what I was feeling.

Jack Andrews: I mostly write about my personality and goals for teachers. I used to fabricate some feelings toward novels for teachers. They were too formulaic so I fed them their expectations. I gained a good concept of who I was both in the act of fabrication and defining goals.

Jessica Culbreath: I have written about my family, boyfriend, self-analysis. I gained knowledge and peace through writing my feelings on paper.

Adam Daggett: I have written quite a few papers on my own experiences. Happiness and maybe some respect.

Candice Egger: Most of my personal narratives have been written in times when I'm at my lowest point and its by writing that I've calmed down or found solutions for how to deal with my problems.

Andrea Gold: I have written about the world and how I feel about society. I have written about relationships, friendships, being a teenager, being angry, wanting something better for myself, and also about what is great about my life. From writing about these things, I calm my mind and heal myself.

Lauren Hill: Since I keep a journal, I've written about nearly every personal experience I've ever had. It helps me to release emotions I would otherwise keep bottled up inside.

Susan Hirschberger: Most of what I've written from personal experience has been in letters, e-mail, or a journal about random things going on in my life. I was able to communicate with others, sometimes I vented my feelings on paper and usually I felt better after writing.

Rachel Keller: I have written a lot of poetry and journal entries from my personal experience. They acted as a form of venting and letting go of what I was feeling at the time.

Wid Kever: I've written journal entries about life struggles. I gain and sense of comfort and relaxation.

Jennifer Koger: I have taken up writing on several occasions when I was overwhelmed by a situation and caught up by what was happening around me. I'd write to calm myself.

Harmony Kranitz: I have written many songs, all based on personal experience. It helps me control and understand my feelings of pain, joy, and loss.

Aimee Ludlow: I've written about crushes, the pain of rejection, when I'm really mad, sad, or disappointed. I've written about family problems and a death (grandfather in-law). Every single time my feelings came out (it was a gradual process), I was calm and more at peace in the end.

Matt Lukas: I wrote a couple of book reviews for the author Will Hobbs when I was in seventh or eighth grade and that helped me appreciate literature.

Phil Murphey: Nothing

Colleen Pratt: From personal experience, I've written about moving to a new town/state and hurtful relationships, and also about the loss of loved ones. Writing provides a release and relief from those feelings.

Zach Prisland: I have written about my grandmother's death, and it seemed to give me closure for the event.

Brittani Richards: In ENC 1101, I wrote about my wish to be a dance major but cannot because my parents don't think it is a "real" major. I found that it is easier to compose an essay dealing with personal experience.

Jessica Rollins: I have written about being an only child, getting adjusted to college/dorm life, my religion, my parents' divorce, my relationship with my father. I gained closure in some areas, and it gave me the chance to write about what I know best...me.

Carolina Torres: Last semester, I wrote a papers about my grandmother and how she passed away and about my overprotective mother. I really gained a lot from writing those papers because it helped me vent.

Mike Wolfel: Mostly writing about personal experiences and through academic papers. Although these papers were for school, it made me feel more confident about my writing because I felt strongly about the topics when I wrote about myself.

#### **4) How would you define therapeutic writing?**

Roseli Agulair: Therapeutic writing is a way to soothe your soul. It helps heal the wounds.

Jack Andrews: The act of writing performed by a person (not always in need or ailment) for the soothing of one's soul. Quieting the relentless side.

Jessica Culbreath: I would define it as writing that allows you to leave you pen and paper feeling peace and self comfort. Sometimes a blank piece of paper can be the best listener and reviewing yourself as a reader puts things into a satisfying perspective.

Adam Daggett: Writing about something that traumatizes a person.

Candice Egger: The writing a person does that allows them to get the peace, happiness, or just organization they are seeking.

Andrea Gold: As a kind of writing that is limitless, without boundaries, that lets you express yourself freely and entirely without judgment by anyone. Therapeutic writing is something that heals your pain and makes you feel better.

Lauren Hill: Therapeutic writing entails writing about an event in one's life in order to overcome the emotional constraints associated with that particular event and heals one's self.

Susan Hirschberger: Writing to deal with emotion.

Rachel Keller: I would define it as writing to cope with something, to vent about something, or to put into words what you can't come right out and say.

Wid Kever: Something so detailed that when you read it years after, the emotion is just as strong but it's manifested into words on a page, instead of pain in your heart.

Jennifer Koger: a style of writing that lets the individual express and deal with their emotions.

Harmony Kranitz: Writing that helps you come to grips with life and the experience wither bad or good that you may have.

Aimee Ludlow: It's great! Writing your thoughts and feelings down which leads to a gradual understanding of the deeper thoughts and feelings that couldn't surface because your thoughts and feelings were so out of control.

Matt Lukas: Just letting your pen and feelings connect and whatever ends up on paper just happens. Therapeutic writing is freely allowing your feelings to become visible on paper.

Phil Murphey: Writing down what happened to you and how that made you feel.

Colleen Pratt: Writing that helps heal a person by letting out emotions and channeling negative feelings in a way to feel better.

Zach Prisland: Writing that helps lift any sort of emotional burden you might have by putting it on paper.

Brittani Richards: Writing that relaxes you and makes it easier to express how you truly feel through words.

Jessica Rollins: A way of writing to deal with issues and a way to help solve a problem, just a way to get whatever is going on with you out in the open.

Carolina Torres: Writing to help you get your feelings out without having to tell someone.

Mike Wolfel: I would define it as any form of freewriting that you become involved in. Therapeutic writing is an activity that one chooses to relieve anger/stress.

**5) Why did you choose to take this special topics course on writing about life, loss, and experience.**

Roseli Agulair: Truly, it was at a good time. I wasn't really aiming for this class. I didn't want to take ENC 1102 and the other ENC 1145 topics didn't seem interesting to me, like writing about money and power or body art.

Jack Andrews: In all honesty, I took this course because it fit my schedule. Now that I have it, I know I would have picked it because it challenges me to evaluate myself.

Jessica Culbreath: Because it gives me the opportunity to bring my personal writing into an academic light, which I have never done before.

Adam Daggett: In the hopes that it would be a lot like ENC 1101.

Candice Egger: I needed an ENC 1102 class, but I wanted to write on something interesting so I chose this class.

Andrea Gold: Because I love to write, I feel that I'm pretty good at it, and I hate taking boring, droning classes, which is what I thought ENC 1102 would be like.

Lauren Hill: I chose to take this course because I feel it will help further my understanding and ability to write about my life experiences.

Susan Hirschberger: Because it seemed more interesting than anything else.

Rachel Keller: I chose this course because it looked interesting to me and something that would probably help me in the long run.

Wid Kever: I chose to take this course because it was offered at such a defining time in my life and I feel like I have not dealt with things in my life the way I know I should.

Jennifer Koger: It seemed interesting, and I didn't like the idea of the standard 1102 writing course.

Harmony Kranitz: I wanted to take a writing about course rather than a regular ENC 11-2. This course sounded interesting, and I feel more comfortable writing about myself than just doing research.

Aimee Ludlow: I didn't want to take normal English—I was told to take a special topics course and this one sounded most interesting—now that I understand exactly what the class is, I'm actually excited!

Matt Lukas: I had already taken an AP English course in high school and this course seemed most interesting.

Phil Murphey: It was at a good time and everything else with a good time was full and I needed ENC 1102 credit.

Colleen Pratt: I chose to take this course for a few reasons. The topic interested me because I felt it would be a good way to get over past issues. Also, I did not want to take the alternative to this course, ENC 1102.

Zach Prisland: It was more a freewriting course and fit my time slot.

Brittani Richards: I figured it would be interesting and different from any writing course I've ever taken.

Jessica Rollins: Because if I was going to sit in another English class, I wanted it to be interesting. If I'm interested in something, I do a lot better. Plus it was at a good time—not too early, not too late.

Carolina Torres: Honestly, there were no more ENC 1102 classes left, but I was really drawn to this topic because the way I best get my feelings out is by writing them.

Mike Wolfel: I chose this class because I expected that I would be able to write about what I know best (myself). I feel that writing about a topic I feel strongly about will help improve my writing.



## APPENDIX J

### Peer Review Workshop *Essay II—Loss Essay*

#### Responder 1

1. Tell the writer what you learned from reading their loss essay. Then tell the writer what you are eager to know more about.
2. Mark the strongest section of the essay and write an explanation in the margin. Mark the weakest section of the essay and write suggestions for improvement in the margins.
3. Tell the writer how they can more effectively grab you in the opening. How is the conclusion effective/ineffective?

**\*Write your comments and suggestions on the essay you are critiquing\***

#### Responder 2

1. If you were the editor of this piece, tell the writer what overall changes would you make? Also, list two specific suggestions for revision.
2. As you read the essay, pay special attention to the overall focus. Is the focus clear and well-supported with detail? Make notes in the margin where you still need detail as a reader and give the writer some ideas for how the scenes/people could be better supported?
3. While reading the essay, mark sections where the writer needs to pay attention to mechanics and style (you may even try marking surface errors like an evaluator).

**\*Write your comments and suggestions on the essay you are critiquing\***

#### Writer

Read back through your loss essay and write down 2 questions you have for your readers and ask the group your q's after they've shared their ideas with you. List your two questions:

## APPENDIX K

### Complete Closing Questionnaire

**1) What do you write now that you have taken this course? Make a list of the type of writing you now engage in (i.e. e-mail, academic papers, lists, etc).**

Roseli Aguilar: e-mails, instant messages, academic papers, to-do lists

Jack Andrews: e-mails, academic, journals, screenplays, letters

Jessica Culbreath: I still write occasional poetry like I always have, but I find myself branching out to a wider variety of topics than before. I also still write papers for school, and the only difference is I revise them now before turning them in.

Adam Daggett: life experiences

Candice Egger: emotional essays, e-mails, research papers, healing jumbles with words, academic papers

Andrea Gold: e-mails, letters, cards, academic papers, lists, notes, instant messages online, poems, thoughts/feelings, freewriting/venting on paper

Lauren Hill: lists, papers, poems, journals, random writing/venting, e-mails, letters (regular mail)

Susan Hirschberger: e-mails, instant messages, school papers, journals occasionally

Wid Kever: papers, songs, poetry, letters

Jennifer Koger: e-mails, text messaging, letters, mini-poems online

Harmony Kranitz: e-mails, lists, papers, songs, notes, post-its, poetry

Aimee Ludlow: Essays and I love it, revision, revision, journals, e-mail, instant messaging

Matt Lukas: e-mails, academic papers

Phil Murphey: e-mails, IM's, lists, school work, short notes, post-its

Ola Oparah: essays, academic papers, commentaries, journals, letters

Zach Prisland: academic papers, to-do lists

Brittani Richards: I still write e-mails but they tend to be longer and more grammatically correct. I also write more elaborate reading responses in my Theatre class than I did at the beginning of the semester.

Jessica Rollins: e-mails, academic papers, notes for class, grocery lists, to-do lists, journals (in and out of class)

Carolina Torres: It has helped me on papers for other classes and I know it will help me on any other academic writing to come.

Mike Wolfel: e-mails, papers, occasionally letters

**2) Do you feel you have grown as a result of this course focused on your life, your loss, and your experience? If so, how did you grow as a writer and person?**

Roseli Aguilar: I definitely think I have grown as a writer because I feel I have improved some of the things I did before like summarizing or listing. My details are more in depth.

Jack Andrews: Yes, I have taken giant leaps as a writer. I have broken the old standards by which I used to write. As a person, I have learned some new things about myself. I have felt emotions I'm not used to.

Jessica Culbreath: I totally believe I have grown from this course. Personally, I have healed through reading and writing Essay I. It brought complete closure. Also, I've grown as a writer. I challenge myself more.

Adam Daggett: I do not feel that I have grown because I've always written like this.

Candice Egger: Most definitely. I've become a better at seeing faults in my papers, taking a different perspective, and using my senses to describe and add more emotion to an event.

Andrea Gold: I do feel I have grown as a result of this course. I grew as a writer because I learned how important the writing process is as far as being serious about your writing and then taking time to revise what you've written. I grew as a person because I was able to have all of these memories and experiences down on paper, because now they're documented so I will never forget them, and so that my future children and family can read accurate information about my life.

Lauren Hill: Yes—when I first signed up for this class, I wasn't sure what I was getting myself into. This course has helped me exhume some feelings/emotions I had long ago buried. Now, I know I still have a long way to go, but at least I'm on my way.

Susan Hirschberger: I definitely feel like I've grown. I've become able to actually share my life and experiences, and I had a hard time with that in the past. I feel I am a much better writer now than I ever was.

Wid Kever: I have been able to focus my thoughts. I have always been able to clearly get words out on paper, but now I am able to do it more quickly and without any trouble.

Jennifer Koger: When I sat down to write before, I concentrated on writing everything as fast as I could without ever looking back. With my own experiences, I couldn't just write.

Harmony Kranitz: I think I have grown as a writer. I look at so many different aspects now while writing. I also see a paper as a work in progress which I didn't see it as before.

Aimee Ludlow: Yes, I do. I feel like I know my own story better. It is clarified in my head not foggy anymore. I wanted to share my loss story—I think it was healthy that I finally could. My experience essay was actually fun to write. I've always kinda liked research but this research was super fun!

Matt Lukas: Yes, I feel more comfortable sharing my feelings with people.

Phil Murphey: A little bit because of Essay I—it's hard to describe.

Ola Oparah: Yes, I was able to open myself up to my own experiences rather than writing about ones that I conjured up.

Zach Prisland: I feel I am more capable of expressing experiences on paper.

Brittani Richards: I have grown more as a writer than a person. I have always been able to express my feeling verbally but never as clear in writing. My feelings can be seen in my life, loss, and experiences essays.

Jessica Rollins: I think I have grown as a writer because now I realize how important revision is. Now I know what revision is. I think this class has helped me with my focus when it comes to writing. As a person, I've been able to open up more, be honest with myself, and share with others.

Carolina Torres: I see things from a different perspective. For example, I have realized that it wasn't completely my mother's fault in our dysfunctional relationship.

Mike Wolfel: Yes, I do feel I have grown as a writer and person. I feel my writing abilities and strengths have improved more than I ever thought they would.

**3) What did you gain from the act of writing about your personal experience?  
What did you lose?**

Roseli Aguilar: As far as gaining or losing, there was nothing major to gain or lose so I didn't as much as some of the other students. For my second essay, I had a realization of how much better life would be without my loss.

Jack Andrews: I lost nothing. I did gain a deeper sense of who I am and how my perceptions may have been inaccurate.

Jessica Culbreath: I gained a lot of self discovery and realized I got too stressed out over certain experiences I went through and that I had not thought enough about others until I wrote about the experience.

Adam Daggett: My memories came back to me. I did not lose anything.

Candice Egger: I gained more knowledge on midwifery, a topic I was extremely interested in but hadn't bothered to find out about. I really didn't lose anything from writing this essay. I mainly just acquired knowledge.

Andrea Gold: From writing about my personal experience, I gained more confidence in who I am because through writing about these experiences, I realized how deep and personal my (and everyone's) experiences are and how precious life is. I think, if I lost anything through this course, I lost any trepidations that I previously had about writing about how I feel or writing for a specific audience. I have learned the importance of sharing personal experiences with others.

Lauren Hill: I loved being able to write about my life and share it with others. I've always been a very quiet, introverted person and this class truly allowed me to come out of my shell.

Susan Hirschberger: I gained the knowledge or confirmation that my life and experiences are worthy to be written about. I don't think I lost anything, except an unwillingness to share my thoughts with others.

Wid Kever: I didn't lose anything. I'm finding out who I am for once. I'm not sugarcoating when I write anymore—it's who I am all the time.

Jennifer Koger: I can understand now more of what my dad was going through with his addiction. Before in my mind, it was all about me but now I can see him in my writing. I almost feel like I'd like to rewrite Essay II all on him.

Harmony Kranitz: I gained a new view on the events I wrote about. I see them deeper now. I don't think I lost anything, except some of my laziness when it comes to writing.

Aimee Ludlow: I gained understanding. I've lost the "woe is me" attitude. What I've been through is part of me but that's all. I don't need to keep rehashing the past. It does no good.

Matt Lukas: I feel I was able to write much stronger essays than I have ever written before. I don't feel that I lost anything.

Phil Murphey: I gained the knowledge that my life has had very few hard times so far. I lost my ability to go unnoticed and remain disconnected from this class.

Ola Oparah: I gained a better understanding of myself. I lost some of the pain from those moments.

Zach Prisland: I understand my emotions a little bit better. I didn't really lose anything.

Brittani Richards: Again, I learned to write my feelings clearly; mostly, show my readers rather than telling them. I don't think I lost anything. I never felt that I was an effective writer before this class.

Jessica Rollins: I gained more respect for myself. As I look back on my experiences, I can see I am not the same person I was at that moment. When I opened myself up, I had to face the criticism of my writing. It's not a loss but a gain.

Carolina Torres: I gained a better sense of understanding. I was able to let go of things I was clinging to.

Mike Wolfel: I gained confidence in writing about myself. I am able to use more of my own voice in my papers and they are more personal.

**4) How would you define therapeutic writing now that you've participated in this course?**

Roseli Aguilar: Therapeutic writing is a type of writing that helps you heal through a difficult time in your life by writing a journal, a letter, or just listing feelings that can help you process the pain.

Jack Andrews: I would define therapeutic writing as a composition that directly deals with an old issue instead of rationalizing it. It's writing and healing.

Jessica Culbreath: I would say that revisions in therapeutic writing bring you closer and closer to a healthy, realistic view with sorted emotions rather than uncontrolled, frantic ideas. This helps with healing and understanding.

Adam Daggett: Writing that helps one heal.

Candice Egger: It is a way of healing. A way of putting emotions down on paper or pressing keys on the computer and through releasing these thoughts, you feel a sense of accomplishment. You've identified how you feel and then find a way to move on. Desalvo had a lot to say about that (hee, hee).

Andrea Gold: I would define therapeutic writing as any kind of writing that makes you feel renewed and rejuvenated. You can write a bunch of curse words all over a piece of paper or you could write a love poem—no matter what you write or how you write it, it is therapeutic as long as you feel like you have taken important emotions out of you and created a new form of expression for your feelings.

Lauren Hill: Therapeutic writing—the process by which one heals/realizes problems, etc. and benefits from sharing the emotions associated with themselves and others through writing.

Susan Hirschberger: Writing that helps you sort out your emotions, and lets you know/realize how you truly feel.

Wid Kever: Honestly, I haven't healed much. It's therapy to write about my life, but I feel it's going to take a long time to heal.

Jennifer Koger: Analyzing my exact feelings, relating them to an experience, and then trying to figure out how I feel about them. Remembering these experiences helps you heal from them.

Harmony Kranitz: Writing down your true feelings as they come and sharing them with others—opening up and seeing from others' point of view. It's a way to write and heal.

Aimee Ludlow: I think it is healthy and good but the revision is what really does it. Revision forced me to dig deep and allowed me to understand better. I hadn't healed at all in my first revision of Essay I. But after revising (after I turned it in) I can confidently say that I have written and healed.

Matt Lukas: Writing down an event, including all details possible, so your brain is actually able to analyze the traumatic event.

Phil Murphey: Writing about your experience in depth for healing.

Ola Oparah: Therapeutic writing is communicating your life and loss that caused your pain through words that express your experience at the time of loss.

Zach Prisland: I think that it is mainly venting which establishes a base for healing but doesn't actually cause it.

Brittani Richards: Therapeutic writing is writing how you feel, finding a reason for the way you feeling, and learning from your feelings through writing.

Jessica Rollins: Therapeutic writing—a writing process that lets you put your feelings on paper and then you can see where you need to heal and where you have healed.

Carolina Torres: It helped me heal from my grandmother's death and remember her better as I wrote the essay.

Mike Wolfel: Any writing can be therapeutic. I feel every time I write, I am able to let go of what I'm thinking and let the words just flow.

**5) What are you taking away from this course on writing about life, loss, and experience? How did this course prepare you for future writing? How do you view writing about the personal?**

Roseli Aguilar: I think it's easier for me to write about personal issues. I can really show what I felt and I don't have to make something up. I really can dig in and be specific which helps me with precise details in all of my papers.

Jack Andrews: I am taking away a new sense of writing style and voice. This course showed me to take conventions and bend them to be unique.

Jessica Culbreath: I'm taking away a whole new level of writing. I pay attention to detail more and have learned how to "paint a picture" with words.

Adam Daggett: Maybe I'm a little more open with my personal stuff.

Candice Egger: I really learned a lot about revision and how taking some paragraphs and rewriting the whole thing isn't necessarily a bad thing. I also acquired knowledge on writing research papers, not only making them in interesting as well, which I know will be useful in the future.

Andrea Gold: I am taking away my confidence as a writer and also the importance of revising. I never realized how much an essay could be changed for the better until I took this course. It prepared me for future writing because now I know my abilities and what I need to work on.

Lauren Hill: I thoroughly enjoyed this class, and I actually learned that I can write for me, not to just fulfill assignments.

Susan Hirschberger: I'm taking away the knowledge that I can write well about my life. I like how this class emphasizes revising and I really think that's what I'll carry into other classes.



Wid Kever: I'm taking away a sense of myself. I'm finding out who I am. I don't have anything to hide. This is helping me deal with issues in my life and it's made me a stronger person.

Jennifer Koger: I don't think I really understood how to write before. In writing about my experiences, I learned how to let things flow especially with my research essay!

Harmony Kranitz: I'm taking away a stronger writing ability. I take more time writing and revising now. I loved the personal aspect of this class and writing.

Aimee Ludlow: I don't know if I'll have the time for this...but I feel that when something traumatic happens, I will know what to do—write and deeply revise. Every time I write I'm eager to use what I've learned from this course and that's a first.

Matt Lukas: I now include more details and my revising process is much more thorough.

Phil Murphey: The ability to write about myself which made writing easier. It doesn't bother me as much.

Ola Oparah: Be truthful to yourself and your audience will understand, whether they like it or not.

Zach Prisland: I am going to be a more detailed writer. I should do well in future courses.

Brittani Richards: I've learned that detailed information about life, loss, and experience can help people better understand you. This course has taught me how to add details to certain areas in my writing that would help me explain myself more clearly.

Jessica Rollins: I am taking from this course the stories that were shared with me. It showed me how open people can be and how my life is not as bad as others. I have a newfound appreciation for what I've gone through. Writing about the personal is beneficial for growing and healing.

Carolina Torres: I learned how to write more in depth and with more detail.

Mike Wolfel: I feel this class will and has prepared me for writing assignments that I could be faced with in the future.

**6) Explain how were you impacted by this semester study of our classroom.**

Roseli Aguilar: I learned that everyone has some issues that are hard to deal with and others have gone through way worse.

Jack Andrews: I learned that disagreeing with someone's opinion on a matter is not a bad thing and to openly air disagreement is healthy.

Jessica Culbreath: I think peer workshops were a great idea. Not only did you take the time to read our drafts but so did our peers, who struggled with the same things. I think the most helpful part of this was being able to see examples of others exemplifying things we needed help with.

Adam Daggett: To be honest, it hasn't impacted me too much. I just don't like that book *Lucky*.

Candice Egger: Greatly! I really enjoyed this class, even though it was stressful at times trying to juggle these essays with papers in other classes. I really enjoyed writing in this class rather than my others. Thank you for all you taught me.

Andrea Gold: I was impacted very positively throughout this course. Not only did I feel like I got to know you, but I felt like everyone in the class became close because we knew more about each other than we would have know if we had taken a regular English course. I feel like I grew as a writer and that I learned a lot of important steps that need to be taken in order to make your writing the best it can be.

Lauren Hill: This could take forever to explain. . .I realized that the world is a rough place and everyone has a story to tell.

Susan Hirschberger: I really enjoyed this class. It was really nice to have a class, my first semester of college, that I liked so much. I have a whole new outlook on how I want to write in the future now.

Wid Kever: I'm impacted by the people in this class. I've never grown with a group of people like I've grown with this one.

Jennifer Koger: Learning from others experiences helped me evaluate my own experiences. The peer reviews helped to open up my essays.

Harmony Kranitz: I was impacted by other people's writing and lives and how all of us opened up and grew together.

Aimee Ludlow: I loved the class atmosphere and it is because of that, that I was able to grow and heal.

Matt Lukas: I really enjoyed it. It was a great way for me to do therapeutic writing.

Phil Murphey: I think more creatively now.

Ola Oparah: Everyone goes through hardships that impact them in different ways. I have learned to appreciate the experiences of others without bias.

Zach Prisland: I am better able to write how I feel.

Brittani Richards: Writing draft after draft really helps with the professional writing process.

Jessica Rollins: I learned more about who I am as a writer. I now understand what I need to work on and what I'm good at. I learned what revision really is, and writing doesn't stop when you hand a paper in.

Carolina Torres: I never really thought that writing could help you heal, but it allows you to get your feelings out without having to speak about them.

Mike Wolfel: I loved the atmosphere of the class...discussions, peer reviews, and revision all made the class go by smoothly. Thank you!

## APPENDIX L

### ENC 1145-07 Course Evaluation Report

Assessment Services - Florida State University - Semester/Year: Fall/2004

#### Student Perception of Teaching

Instructor: AMY HODGES	Response Scale	Response Scale
Department: ENGLISH		
Course: ENC1145 Section#: 07 Ref#: 09992	SA = Strongly Agree = 1	E = Excellent = 1
Forms Ordered: 22 Responses: 20 (91%)	A = Agree = 2	VG = Very Good = 2
Procedural Discrepancies:	N = Neutral = 3	G = Good = 3
	D = Disagree = 4	F = Fair = 4
	SD = Strongly Disagree = 5	P = Poor = 5

#### Section A Demographics

	1st year	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grad/Other
1. <u>What is your year in school?</u>	17 85%	3 15%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
	<b>1.99 or less</b>	<b>2.0 - 2.49</b>	<b>2.5 - 2.99</b>	<b>3.0 - 3.49</b>	<b>3.5 - 4.0</b>
2. <u>What is your overall cumulative GPA?</u>	0 0%	2 10%	3 15%	6 30%	9 45%
	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>F</b>
3. <u>What grade do you expect to receive in this course?</u>	9 45%	11 55%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
	<b>yes</b>	<b>no</b>			
4. <u>Is this a required course for you?</u>	16 80%	4 20%			

#### Section B Course & Instructor Details

	SA	A	N	D	SD	(N)*	Median*	IQR*
1. <u>This course challenged me to think deeply about the subject matter.</u>	16 80%	4 20%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0
2. <u>The course materials (e.g., textbooks, coursepack) helped me</u>	11 55%	7 35%	2 10%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	1

better understand the subject matter.

3. The course assignments helped me better understand the subject matter.

17	3	0	0	0	20	1	0
85%	15%	0%	0%	0%			

4. The instructional techniques engaged me with the subject matter.

17	2	1	0	0	20	1	0
85%	10%	5%	0%	0%			

5. The instructor was concerned about whether the students learned the subject matter.

18	2	0	0	0	20	1	0
90%	10%	0%	0%	0%			

6. The instructor was enthusiastic about the subject matter in the course.

20	0	0	0	0	20	1	0
100%	0%	0%	0%	0%			

7. The instructor was enthusiastic about teaching this class.

19	0	0	0	0	19	1	0
100%	0%	0%	0%	0%			

8. The instructor clearly communicated what was expected in this class.

19	1	0	0	0	20	1	0
95%	5%	0%	0%	0%			

9. The instructor expressed ideas clearly.

19	1	0	0	0	20	1	0
95%	5%	0%	0%	0%			

10. The instructor provided helpful feedback on my performance.

19	1	0	0	0	20	1	0
95%	5%	0%	0%	0%			

11. The instructor evaluated my work fairly.

19	1	0	0	0	20	1	0
95%	5%	0%	0%	0%			

12. The instructor treated students with respect.

20	0	0	0	0	20	1	0
100%	0%	0%	0%	0%			

13. Students were able to get individual help.

20	0	0	0	0	20	1	0
100%	0%	0%	0%	0%			

#### Section C Overall Course & Instructor Assessment

	SA	A	N	D	SD	(N)*	Median*	IQR*
1. <u>Overall, I learned a great deal from this course.</u>	15 75%	5 25%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0.50
2. <u>If a friend were taking this course, I would recommend this instructor.</u>	19 95%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0

3. <u>If I were taking another course in this subject area, I would choose this instructor again.</u>	18 90%	1 5%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0
	<b>E</b>	<b>VG</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>(N)*</b>	<b>Median*</b>	<b>IQR*</b>
4. <u>Overall, considering its content, design, and structure, this course was</u>	16 80%	4 20%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0
5. <u>Overall, considering the constraints and opportunities inherent in the subject matter, this instructor was</u>	18 90%	2 10%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0

#### Section D SUSSAI (State University System Student Assessment of Instruction)

	<b>E</b>	<b>VG</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>(N)*</b>	<b>Median*</b>	<b>IQR*</b>
1. <u>Description of course objectives and assignments</u>	15 75%	4 20%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0.50
2. <u>Communication of ideas and information</u>	17 85%	2 10%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0
3. <u>Expression of expectations for performance in class</u>	18 90%	2 10%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0
4. <u>Availability to assist students in or out of class</u>	19 95%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0
5. <u>Respect and concern for students</u>	19 95%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0
6. <u>Stimulation of interest in the course.</u>	18 90%	1 5%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0
7. <u>Facilitation of learning.</u>	17 85%	2 10%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0
8. <u>Overall assessment of instructor.</u>	19 95%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0

#### Section E Additional Questions, Department

No feedback for this section.

#### Section F Additional Questions, Instructor

No feedback for this section.

## REFERENCES

- Allen, Guy. (2000) "Language, Power, and Consciousness: A Writing Experiment at the University of Toronto." Anderson, Charles M. and Marian M. MacCurdy, ed. *Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Anderson, Charles and Marian MacCurdy. (2000) *Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Bartholomae, David. (1995) "Writing with Teachers: A Conversation with Peter Elbow." *Cross-Talk in Composition Theory: A Reader*. Victor Villanueva, ed. Urbana Ill: National Council of Teachers of English, 1997.
- Berthoff, Ann. (1979) "The Teacher as Researcher: A Theory of Imagination is a Direction-finder." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the California Association of Teachers of English. San Diego, California.
- Berman, Jeffrey. (2001) *Risky Writing*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Bishop, Wendy. (1997) "Writing Is/And Therapy?: Raising Questions About Writing Classrooms and Writing Program Administration." *Teaching Lives*. Logan, Utah: Utah State Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1997) *Elements of Alternate Style: Essays on Writing and Revision*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Borrowman Shane and Edward M. White. (2005) "Are You Now, or Have You Ever Been, an Academic?" *Trauma and the Teaching of Writing*. Ed Shane Borrowman, 181-199. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Brand, Alice. (1989) *The Psychology of Writing: The Affective Experience*. New York, Greenwood Press.
- Britton, James. (1970) *Language and Learning*. New York: Penguin.
- Brooke, Robert. (1991) *Writing and Sense of Self: Identity Negotiation in Writing Workshops*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Bump, Jerome. (2000) "Teaching Emotional Literacy." *In Writing and Healing Toward and Informed Practice*. Ed. Charles Anderson and Marian MacCurdy. 313-35. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Burkett, Sandra Price. (1994) "The Butterfly Effect: Writing From Chaos to Composure." Brand, Alice Graven and Richard L.Graves, ed. *Presence of Mind: Writing and the Domain Beyond the Cognitive*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Coles, William E. (1978) *The Plural I: The Teaching of Writing*. New York, Holt.
- Connors, Robert J (May 1987) "Personal Writing Assignments." *College Composition and Communication*. V 38 n2: 166–83.
- Desalvo, Louise. (1999). *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives*. Boston: Beacon Press.

- Elbow, Peter. (1968) "A Method for Teaching Writing." *College English* 30: 115-25.
- Ensley, Gerald. (2003) "Influential FSU writing professor Bishop dies." *Tallahassee Democrat*. 25 Nov : 6B.
- Faigley, Lester. (1992) *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Gannett, Cinthia. (1995) "The Stories of Our Lives Become Our Lives: Journals, Diaries, and Academic Discourse." In *Feminine Principles and Women's Experience in American Composition and Rhetoric*. ed. Louise Wetherbee Phelps and Janet Emig, 109-36. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Goggin, Peter and Maureen Daly Goggin. (2005) "Presence in Absence: Discourses and Teaching (In, On, and About) Trauma." *Trauma and the Teaching of Writing*. Ed Shane Borrowman, 29-51. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Goswami, Dixie and Peter Stillman. (1987) *Reclaiming the Classroom: Teacher Researcher As An Agency for Change*. Upper Montclair, N.J.: Boynton/Cook.
- Goleman, Daniel. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Haimes Korn, Kim. (1996) *The Subject of Experience: How Students Negotiated Learning In A Composition Classroom*. Diss. Florida State University.
- Harris, Judith. (July 2003) "The Necessity of Mourning: Psychoanalytic Paradigms for Change and Transformation in the Composition Classroom." *College English*. V 65 n6: 668-675.
- Herman, Judith. (1997) *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Hillocks, George. (1990) "Teaching, Reflecting, Researching." Daiker, Donald and Max Morenberg, ed. *The Writing Teacher As Researcher: Essays in Theory and Class-Based Research*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Hobson, David. (1996) "Beginning with the Self: Using Autobiography and Journal Writing in Teacher Research." *Teachers Doing Research*. Burnaford, Gail ed. Mahwah, New Jersey: LEA Publishers, 1996.
- Hooks, bell. *Remembered Rapture: The Writer at Work*. New York: Henry Holt, 1999.
- Hunt, Celia. (1998) "Towards a Writing Therapy? Implications of Existing Practice and Theory." *The Self on the Page: Theory and Practice of Creative Writing and Personal Development*. Hunt, Celia and Fiona Sampson, eds. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Kinneavy, James. (1971) *A Theory of Discourse*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Laub, Dori. (1992) "An event without a witness: truth, testimony and survival." *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub eds., 75-92. London: Routledge.
- MacCurdy, Marian M. (2000) "From Trauma to Writing: A Theoretical Model for Practical Use." Anderson, Charles M. and Marian M. MacCurdy, ed. *Writing and*



- Healing: Toward an Informed Practice*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- MacNealy, Mary Sue. (1999) *Strategies for Empirical Research in Writing*. Needham, Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Mazza, Nicholas. (2003) *Poetry Therapy: Theory and Practice*. New York: Brunner-Routledge Press.
- Murphy, Ann. (1989) "Transference and Resistance in the Basic Writing Classroom: Problematics and Praxis." *College Composition and Communication* 40 (2): 175-187.
- Murray, Donald. (1994) "Where Do You Find Your Stories?" Brand, Alice Graven and Richard L.Graves, ed. *Presence of Mind: Writing and the Domain Beyond the Cognitive*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Newkirk, Thomas. (1997) *The Performance of Self in Student Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- North, Stephen. (1987) *The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Murray, Donald. (1994) "Where Do You Find Your Stories?" Brand, Alice Graven and Richard L.Graves, ed. *Presence of Mind: Writing and the Domain Beyond the Cognitive*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- O'Reilly, Mary Rose. (1993) *The Peaceable Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Payne, Michelle. (2000) *Bodily Discourses: When Students Write About Abuse and Eating Disorders*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Pennebaker, James. (1990) *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Potter, James W. (1996) *An Analysis of Thinking and Research About Qualitative Methods*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers.
- Ray, Ruth. (1993) *The Practice of Theory: Teacher Research in Composition*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- "Special Focus: Personal Writing." (September 2001) *College English*. V 64 n1: 34-108.
- Spigelman, Candace. (2004) *Personally Speaking: Experience as Evidence in Academic Discourse*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Stearns, Peter. (1994) *American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style*. New York: New York University Press.
- Tobin, Lad. (1993) *Writing Relationships: What Really Happens in the Composition Class*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Van Maanen, J. (1988) *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Witherell, Carol and Nel Noddings, eds. (1991) *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Amy Hodges Hamilton is the Director of Undergraduate Writing and Assistant Professor of English and Women's Studies at Vanderbilt University. After receiving a B.A. degree in English in 1997 from Florida State University, she went on to earn a M.A. degree in English at Austin Peay State University in 1999, and then returned to FSU in 2001 to pursue a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition.