



Novelist and essayist Erika Duncan, has devoted her life to giving voice to stories that have been silenced and unsung. Her novels, *A Wreath of Pale White Roses* and *Those Giants: Let them Rise*, chart the search for expression. Her portraits of writers

(written when she was a contributing editor for *Book Forum* and collected in *Unless Soul Clap its Hands: Portraits and Passages*) all touch on the moment when a writer found her or his voice. By the time Erika was in her early thirties, in the wake of the excitement of starting the Woman's Salon (described inside) she had begun to explore new ways of teaching writing, based on her belief that there is no such thing as a person who cannot write— that if one can find a way to skip over the differences in educational backgrounds and opportunities that so often set us apart, we can work together in community to develop the tools that allow us to raise our voices on level ground. This led to numerous experiments in university and grassroots settings, culminating in the founding of Herstory Writers Workshop, with its 11-17 weekly workshops all over Long Island. The Herstory vocabulary, given voice in Erika's new manual, *Paper Stranger/Shaping Stories in Community*, now echoes in Spanish and behind prison bars.

Founded in 1996, Herstory Writers Workshop provides opportunities through guided memoir writing that empower women from all walks of life (regardless of age, race, religion, financial status or sexual orientation, whether incarcerated or free) to turn their intimate stories into works of art crafted so that others can hear. Herstory is committed to providing an environment of intensive instruction which, in addition to creating literary works, upholds our values of empathy, inclusiveness, self-guided healing, safety and the search for social change in the expression of voices that historically have been most profoundly silenced.



13 YEARS OF WOMEN MAKING HERSTORY 33 YEARS OF FEMINIST ORGANIZING



Collage of of Woman's Salon Participants 1975-1976 Photos by Freda Leinwand

HERSTORY AND ERIKA DUNCAN ARCHIVE CELEBRATION READING AND RECEPTION

APRIL 20, 2009



Welcome to the launch party to celebrate the donation of the archives of Herstory Writers Workshop and of its founder, Erika Duncan, to Stony Brook University Libraries Special Collections. Included in the collection are newsletters, letters, photographs, draft and completed manuscripts and other memorabilia from both Herstory – a community memoir-writing program dedicated to giving voice to women’s stories that have been silenced or unsung – and the pre-Herstory Woman’s Salon, which met for a decade in the mid-’70s in Erika’s New York City apartment and enabled audiences to interact intimately with then-emerging feminist writers such as Susan Griffin, Dorothy Dinnerstein, Olga Broumas and Blanche Wiesen Cook in a forum where the works of women not yet known were heralded in by Tillie Olsen, Alice Walker, Kate Millett and Adrienne Rich, to name just a few.

More than 2000 women have been touched by Herstory since its inception, and many thousand readers enjoyed Erika Duncan’s front-page portraits of writers, artists, dreamers and doers that appeared each month in the *New York Times Long Island Weekly* between 1993 and 1997. These newspaper articles are archived in full, and document the search for a spark that led Duncan to devote her life to helping people raise their voices. In 1986 Studs Terkel described Erika Duncan’s first forays into the portrait form: “Singularly impassioned portraits of singularly impassioned writers, for whom life and art are one. A deeply moving work.”

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PROGRAM

Welcome: Dan Kinney

Introducing the New Collections: Kristen Nyitray

Tastes of the Works of the Women of Herstory:

Introduced by Erika Duncan

Marsha Benoff (Hub workshops)

Lonnie Mathis (Hub workshops)

Vivian Vilorio-Fisher (Farmingville Bilingual workshop)*

Adelaide Acevedo (Prison and Bridges workshop)

Angélica I. Ponce (Patchogue Bilingual workshop)*

Sunita Mukhi (Day-long retreats)

**English translations provided for readings in Spanish*

Stony Brook Libraries Special Collections

Charles B. Wang Center

Stony Brook University

Sponsored by the West Campus Chapter of the United University Professions, the Department of Hispanic Languages and Literatures, the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Center, Center for Study of Working Class Life, the Women’s Studies Program, the Charles B. Wang Center, School of Social Welfare, and Special Collections Library.