



A Community Memoir-Writing Project for Women

named **2010 Organization of the Year**
by Long Island Women's Agenda (LIWA)

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**Announcing a New and Expanded Edition of *Paper Stranger: Shaping Stories in Community*, by Erika Duncan
*Writing and empowerment tool features a 70-page section for students in university and high school programs***

June, 2010 (Centereach, NY) – Every so often a new pedagogy comes along that encompasses a variety of social movements. *Paper Stranger* – a manual for grassroots, prison- and school-based memoir-writing initiatives – charts an approach to writing in community that over a 14-year period has changed the lives of thousands of women of all ages, incarcerated and free.

The notion of “passing along the dare to make another person care” – the cornerstone of the empathy-based methodology designed by novelist and essayist Erika Duncan, founder of the Herstory Writers project – is deceptively simple. The ramifications are far-reaching and profound. Dedicated to helping those whom society has silenced to raise their voices, Duncan and the facilitators she has trained have engaged and connected some of the most isolated and vulnerable populations of women, offering very precise writing tools not generally available to those without means and formal education, while stimulating seasoned writers and academics to take a new look at how to create dynamic structures.

“There are many charismatic teachers, but Erika Duncan is one of the few who can deconstruct and articulate their methods,” wrote Erin Gruwell, author of *Freedom Writers Diary*. “Her manual *Paper Stranger: Shaping Stories in Community* effectively demonstrates the methodology to teach compassion-based listening and story construction. The tools Erika Duncan has developed are dynamic and versatile, and are based on the simple challenge – to shape each piece of your story so that the reader will care.

“This book will act as a complete kit for teachers looking for

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.

something new because it is a passionate testimonial to the power of well-crafted stories. It is a unique handbook and tool for empowerment!”

This very original treatment of the experience of listening, reading and connecting takes the reader on a journey chock-full of meditation – about perception, about memory, about the nature of connection and separateness – so that even non-writers are able to enjoy its richness. At the same time, a series of concrete exercises sharpens the reader’s understanding of how to turn intimate memories into powerful writings meant to reach out to wide audience of readers.

- A unique tool for teachers, healers, social justice workers, community activists and individual writers alike.
- For use in train-the-trainer workshops and college and high school classrooms, as well as grassroots settings.
- Includes a new section for younger writers, on writing to make a difference, designed for use in the schools.

The expanded edition includes a rich selection of works by younger writers about immigration, searching for roots and birth stories, and first moments of awareness of injustice – integrated with works of older writers looking back at childhood and adolescence, as well as a selection by a young formerly incarcerated writer, asking the reader to look into her eyes. Set up as a four-week course to launch students on their own memoir-writing journey, topics include: “finding your ‘page one moment,’” “letting your story make a difference” and “catching moments of awareness on the page.” The selections cut across race, class and culture and make a strong case for what Herstory has found to be true again and again: the art of shaping our stories into a form that another will be able to hear belongs to us all.

Nina Wolff, founding director of Ethnic Pen, a nationally recognized student writers’ conference hosted by Bay Shore Schools and attended annually by 1000 students and teachers from across Long Island, had high praise for *Paper Stranger*, especially the new section for younger writers.

“This complete writing course is unlike any program I have seen in my long career as English teacher and administrator,” she said. “It is not a recipe book for one-size-fits-all formulaic writing, but an authentic guide on how to give structure to feelings and experiences. This writing program would be a perfect springboard for creating outstanding college admission essays and other memoirs that inform the writer and engage the reader.”

The volume will be piloted this July for entering freshmen in Stony Brook University’s Equal Opportunity Program’s summer institute, along with staff training in the method, with the goal of offering this methodology of compassion-based teaching of writing to SUNY Equal Opportunity Programs state-wide.

We invite you to request a review copy of this volume that speaks not just to writers and teachers of writing, but to anyone who is interested in bringing out the stories of others.

Erika Duncan is the author of the novels A Wreath of Pale White Roses (Magic Circle Press) and Those Giants: Let Them Rise (Schocken Books). Her portraits of writers, written when she was a contributing editor for Book Forum, were collected in a volume entitled Unless Soul Clap Its Hands: Portraits and Passages, also published by Schocken Books. Her front page “Encounters” for the New York Times Long Island Weekly, ran monthly from 1993 to 1997, expanding her portrait form to include not only writers, but artists, musicians, scientists and activists. She has received numerous grants for her pilot projects in the teaching of writing in university and grassroots settings, including a Ford-funded project with connections to mathematical thinking.