



A Community Memoir-Writing Project for Women

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

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Just Released: *Passing Along the Dare to Care: A Mini-Memoir Course for Younger Writers*, by Erika Duncan**

June 2010 (Centereach, NY) – Herstory Writers Workshop is proud to announce the publication of *Passing Along the Dare to Care*, a complete memoir-writing course syllabus and collection of excerpts piloted this summer with 126 students in Stony Brook's Educational Opportunity Program's four-week institute. This very original treatment of the study of narrative structures – based on what causes a “Stranger/Reader” to care – fosters dialogues across differences, diversity studies and a sense of community, as well as enhanced listening, reading and narrative skills.

“This complete writing course is unlike any program I have seen in my long career as English teacher and administrator,” writes 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.

“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,” Wolff added. “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.”

Gloria Steinem recently wrote to Herstory Writers Workshop, whose compassion-based work reaches out to the most vulnerable populations: “Short of air, water and food, I can't think of anything that's more important than being able to tell our stories, to be heard, and to hear the stories of people around us. In some original cultures, a person who is ill is told, ‘You've lost your song’ or ‘You've lost your story.’ Your project is helping women and girls toward health and community.”

The complete four-week course outlined in this 70-page workbook takes students on a journey of self-discovery and dares them to allow their stories

*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.*

to make a difference. Warm-up exercises hone writing skills and the capacity to think holistically about the writing process, while sidebar meditations shedding light on a wide variety of writing techniques lead into larger issues and themes. The program as it was piloted at Stony Brook will be taken to the New York State conference for educational opportunity program directors in the spring of 2011, as a possible model for SUNY system members. This model designed for high schools and intermediate schools allows students at all ability levels to build their stories side by side in community. The course syllabus is as follows:

- **Week One – *Passing Along the Dare to Care: Finding your Page One Moment.*** Readings include a young girl's return to an orphanage in India where she was put up for adoption, a Native American girl's discovering some of her father's secrets, and three immigration stories written by students at SUNY Old Westbury.
- **Week Two – *Catching Moments of Awareness on the Page.*** Readings take students from first experiences of racism, to coming to terms with the sale of a sister in Korea, through the story of a half-Jewish child growing up in Nazi Germany and finally into three stories about the early deaths of parents from three different cultures.
- **Week Three – *Letting your Story Make a Difference.*** Readings include the story of a girl with a felony record trying to get a job and a piece for Marcelo Lucero, the Ecuadorian immigrant who was tragically murdered in Patchogue in November 2008.
- **Week Four – *Finding Your Larger Agenda.*** Helps students to consolidate their writing journeys as they put together the pieces of the memoir they have written and share their visions of where it might go next, should they be inspired to continue to write.

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 and awards for her innovative pilot projects in the teaching of writing, including one from the Ford Foundation.

Duncan's manual on Herstory's unique approach to memoir writing won praise from Erin Gruwell, author of *Freedom Writers Diary*. "There are many charismatic teachers, but Erika Duncan is one of the few who can deconstruct and articulate their methods," Gruwell wrote. "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 something new because it is a passionate testimonial to the power of well-crafted stories. It is a unique handbook and tool for empowerment!"

*Passing Along the Dare to Care* is available for \$14.95, with some discounts for larger orders for classroom use. We invite you to request a review copy to see if this program is appropriate for you. To inquire about Train-the-Trainer workshops for teachers and support staff, to find out about other Herstory presentations and publications or to purchase this volume online, call Herstory Writers Workshop at 631-676-7395 or visit [www.herstorywriters.org](http://www.herstorywriters.org)

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