



Herstory founder Erika Duncan: Writing is a tool that can create harmony among those divided by hatred.

Leveraging the power of writing for good

By KENNETH R. CERINI

You can hear the stories being shared in several languages behind prison bars, on the streets and in the schools. The stories are empowering, compelling and touch those from all walks of life. Founded in 1996, the Herstory Writers Workshop has been inspiring women through guided memoir writing, using the power of pen on paper to help individuals release, learn and grow.

"We focus on taking our intimate experiences and transforming them so others can be a part of them," said Erika Duncan, founder, executive and artistic director of Herstory Writers Workshop. "Through our words, we are healing, helping strangers and building a sense of community, so that each new work produced might begin to change the world we live in."

What is Herstory Writers Workshop? Herstory is committed to providing a free environment of intensive instruction which, in addition to creating literary works, upholds values of empathy, inclusiveness, self-guided healing, safety and the search for social change. Whether a woman is just beginning or is already rewriting, whether she has many advanced degrees or her life has afforded her little formal schooling, we work intensively with the writer to develop each scene so that the reader can truly enter it. We offer 11 to 17 weekly workshops including two in Spanish for women and adolescent girls in prison, as well as numerous community options for women and girls.

How does Herstory work to effectuate change? Writing to dare another person to care is an important human rights tool that allows us to hear one another's stories and create a harmony among individuals and communities separated by violence and hatred. As we engage legislators, prison guards, institutional caretakers, clinicians and students in becoming a part of our workshops and public presentations through an expanding training and education and activism program, our programs transform the institutions where we have a presence.

How do you know you're having an impact

within the community? We recently received a grant to document the impact of the work we're doing, and have been asked to take the first steps to spearhead a pilot program that will reach into six states. A specific example is through our work in Suffolk County's two correctional facilities, and the Nassau Correctional Facility. Recently, the Riverhead jail purchased 250 copies of our book-length journal, "Voices: Memoirs from Herstory inside Suffolk County Correctional Facilities." The prison has made it mandatory reading for every corrections officer who graduates from the academy. Observing the impact of the approach on young people, Legis. Vivian Vilorio-Fisher arranged for a member item to cover the cost of printing a limited edition of "Passing along the Dare to Care: A Mini-Memoir Course for Younger Writers," to be given away free of charge to teachers and community leaders for use in their classrooms or youth empowerment programs.

What is your advice to the aspiring writer? Writing is a love relationship between your potential reader and yourself, and somehow, you have to find the way to invite them into your story, whether through memoir, fiction or other literary forms. Even if you haven't written before, if you structure each scene to become part of a larger journey that a reading stranger will be able to take with them, each new chapter you write will take you and your reader to a new place of understanding, building bridges page by page through your tales.

Organization: Herstory Writers Workshop
Address: 2539 Middle Country Road, Floor 2, Centereach, NY 11720
Executive & Artistic Director: Erika Duncan
Phone: (631) 676-7395
Website: www.herstorywriters.org
Year Founded: 1996
Paid Staff: 1.5
Annual Budget: \$200,000
Fundraised Expenditures: \$200,000
Program Service Percentage: 90 percent

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Win-win for DDI and St. John's

The Developmental Disabilities Institute in Smithtown recently partnered with St. John's University in Queens in the school's Executive-in-Residence Program. In the hands-on internship program, 17 senior business students worked with top executives at DDI, which provides services to adults and children with autism and other developmental disabilities.

A program of St. John's since 1977, EIRP teaches students to approach business from a top management mindset while developing leadership, critical thinking and analytical skills. Partnering organizations benefit by getting fresh and innovative ideas from the students.

"Hopefully, this hands-on experience will lead [our students] to consider careers or volunteer positions in the many not-for-profits that provide so much valuable service within our society," Larry W. Boone, an associate professor of management and director of EIRP, said in a statement.

Successful event for angels with golden arches

More than 400 attendees helped raise \$100,000-plus for The Ronald McDonald House of Long Island at the annual McAngel Dinner Dance. Held last month at the Inn at New Hyde Park, the event, themed "A Touch of Red," also celebrated RMH-LI's 25th anniversary.

The event was planned by the McAngels Auxiliary, which was started nine years ago by a group of friends who wanted to become involved with RMH-LI. The McAngels have since raised more than \$550,000 for the New Hyde Park-based organization.

"The McAngels are true role models for their children and the community," Matthew Campo, executive director of RMH-LI, said in a statement. "Their continued hard work and commitment to our mission is incredible and for that we are truly grateful."

Talk about grants ...

The Mental Health Foundation announced the 2011 "It's OK to Talk About It" grant initiative. The Albany-based organization is offering funding to individuals and nonprofit organizations for projects that provide education, promote public awareness and reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues for young adults.

The foundation will provide project awards ranging from \$1,000 to \$10,000. The application deadline is April 30; visit www.mentalhealthfoundation.net.

Citi Field goes to the dogs

On April 23, foul balls might be caught in mouths when the New York Mets take on the Arizona Diamondbacks at Citi Field. For the Mets' Bark in the Park 2011 event, which benefits North Shore Animal

League in Port Washington, dogs are not only allowed, but they get to parade around the field with their owners prior to the game. During the game, dogs will sit with their owners in a designated area.

The entire profit from dog tickets (which cost \$13) and a portion of the profit from human tickets (\$39) go to North Shore, the world's largest no-kill animal rescue and adoption center.

140 scholarships to stem from this grant

Suffolk County Community College has been awarded a grant of \$600,000 over the next five years from the National Science Foundation. The award will support the college's STEMS II program, which provides scholarships and mentoring for academically talented, financially needy students pursuing studies in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The grant will enable SCCC to provide scholarships to 140 students.

SCCC, which has campuses in Selden, Riverhead and Brentwood, has received three NSF grants since 2001.

Vying for lofty titles to fight blood cancer

The 2011 Man & Woman of the Year campaign is in full swing for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Long Island chapter. The annual fundraiser, one of the most important for the organization, features an intensive campaign to raise funds by a select group of 10 men and women. The candidates who raise the most funds over the 10-week period ending May 10 will be honored as man and woman of the year.

Last year's title holders, David L. Mammaia and Sonia Codling, are providing guidance to the candidates, who have made a commitment to raise at least \$20,000 each.

Nonprofit recognized for doing good

The Workplace Project in Hempstead will be honored with the Liberty Bell Award from the Nassau County Bar Association. The award presentation will take place during the NCBA's Law Day celebration later this month.

NCBA, which is based in Mineola, cited The Workplace Project for exceptional service and support to the legal community and the public. The Workplace Project is the only nonprofit organization on Long Island whose efforts focus exclusively on educating, organizing and advocating for day laborers and other low-wage Latino immigrants, according to the NCBA.

—BERNADETTE STARZEE

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