



## Articles

### The Magical Aspects of Writing!

BY ANA HAYS

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In 2002, I went to Maui for a workshop and decided as many do when they get there to stay for a time. This was unexpected for a person such as me who has never understood why people go to Hawaii in the first place.

Not a beach person, I stunned myself by deciding to stay for nine months to write a book about the search for my birthmother and to attend the Maui Writers Conference over Labor Day weekend. Nine months had to be enough time to write a book. So I sub-let a house and set up my writing space.

Looking for a writing community I initially found one at Unity Church of Maui. This group was not a critique group, but one facilitated by an individual who led us into our writing through prompts. The process fascinated me because it gave me places to start my writing from which truthfully I might not have ever considered.

Each evening I attended, we were given a guided meditation, sentence or word intended to inspire our writing. Then we'd write for 10-20 minutes and after we were finished, we were invited to read our writing aloud. In this particular group, no feedback or acknowledgement was given other than "thank you for reading."

What I loved about these evenings were the things I wrote about and what I heard myself and others read aloud. The written word has power when it touches the ear. And I was amazed each time by how I never once heard a bad story or piece of writing. How can that be I wondered?

And as I silently sat there observing I heard a small voice within myself say, "God, I'd love to lead writing groups like these someday."

Since returning from Maui, I have participated in similar writing groups with best-selling authors and published writers because this writing process has fertilized the ground from where my writing comes from and allowed it to expand and grow. And eventually, I realized my dream on Maui and began leading my own groups after I was asked to facilitate a writing group for women living with cancer. Because of this opportunity, I began to research the benefits that I'd already begun to notice from participating in writing groups that use the "prompt" and "read aloud to the group" method.

Writing with this technique has many benefits. It can be used to develop the craft of writing, which was what I was using it for. Or it can be used to break through creative blocks and to



experience a creative outlet. And more importantly for people like the women I'd encountered living with cancer; it can be used as a way to heal from emotionally challenging experiences. As Sharon Bray wrote in her book *A Healing Journey*, "this simple act of retelling my life experience in writing catapulted me into a new realm of creative self-expression and self-discovery. It gave me a way to relive and reframe my life. It gave me permission to tell my stories. It also helped me come to terms with my own cancer experience."

When people call me to inquire about my writing groups, I invariably tell them that magic happens during any given workshop. People remember things they'd long ago forgotten; have insights into life experiences; or if they are working on a piece of writing or hope to write something new – it happens. Claudia, one of my participants, wrote after attending a workshop, "while I attended because I wanted to improve my writing technique, what I discovered was that it's not about getting published, but rather for the creative joy of writing. For the first time, I wrote fiction and it was a thrilling discovery that I could do this."

No longer am I stunned by the stories my writers read aloud in my groups because each person's life is a story and through the writing and telling of their stories writers discover who they are and who they are becoming. Writing I have discovered is indeed magical.

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