

A Handbook for Online Writing Circles

The Writing Circle



June 2003

A Handbook for Online Writing Circles

The Writing Circle

Funded by:

National Literacy Secretariat
Ministry of Training, Colleges
and Universities

Prepared By:

Catherine Mochrie
Red Lake District Adult Learning Centre

June 2003

Acknowledgments

Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities

National Literacy Secretariat

AlphaPlus Centre

First Class Client Internet Conferencing Medium

Alberta Literacy

Mary Zoccole

- LBS Field Consultant
- Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities

Deborah Morgan

- 5014 57 Street
- Camrose, Alberta
- T4V 2G2

Keewaytinook Okimakinook - Northern Chiefs

- 127 Mine Road
- Box 340
- Balmertown, Ontario
- P0V 1C0

Brenda Sherring

- Director/Head of Public Programming
- Godfrey Dean Art Gallery
- 49 Smith Street East
- Yorkton, Saskatchewan
- S3N 0H4
- director@deangallery.ca
- www.deangallery.ca

Red Lake District Adult Learning Centre

- 232 Howey Street
- Box 505
- Red Lake, Ontario
- P0V 2M0
- alc@goredlake.com

The writers themselves

Table of Contents

[Summary](#)

[Terms of Reference](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Part One: *Background*](#)

- [About Us](#)
- [The Writing Out Loud Program](#)
- [The Chapters Program](#)
- [History](#)
- [The Writing Circle](#)

[Part Two: *Steps*](#)

- [Step One - Facilitator's Preparation](#)
- [Step Two - Outreach to Participants](#)
- [Step Three - Set Up Discussion Groups](#)
- [Step Four - Facilitation or "Let's Do It!"](#)

[Part Three: *Samples*](#)

[Part Four: *Conclusions*](#)

[Part Five: *Bibliography*](#)

[Appendix A: *AlphaCom instructions*](#)

[Appendix B: *eLit.ca instructions*](#)

[Appendix C: *Questions and Answers*](#)

[Appendix D: *Group Guidelines*](#)

[Appendix E: *Let's Celebrate*](#)

[Appendix F: *Statistics*](#)

Summary

Participating in an online writing group will provide exciting new opportunities for adult learners. Twinning with another program in your region, Ontario or another province is a thrilling possibility. Adults enjoy sharing their writing with others. They enjoy reading one another's writing. It's an opportunity to use and enhance one's writing skills.

Programs will need to set up a facilitator for each writing group following the Writing Out Loud guidelines and the suggestions listed in our handbook.

We encourage literacy programs to try an online writing circle. We feel confident that you will be glad you did.

Terms of Reference

Keewaytinook Okimakanak - Oji-Cree term for Northern Chiefs

A non-political Chief's Council which advises and assists their First Nation members. The organization is mandated to provide program and advisory services in the areas of health, economic development, finance, public works, education and ICT services to its member First Nations. The First Nations include Deer Lake, Fort Severn, Keewaywin, McDowell Lake, North Spirit Lake and Poplar Hill.

Deborah Morgan - Writing Out Loud

Over the past 16 years, Deborah Morgan has worked in the field of adult literacy as a program coordinator, tutor, instructor, researcher, writer, program developer, and special project manager. She is the Past President of the Literacy Coordinators of Alberta. Her first book, *Opening Doors*, documented the lived experiences of literacy workers in Alberta, Canada. Her well-received second book, *Writing Out Loud*, has gained a following in Canada and around the world. Deborah received the Canada Post 2000 Educator's award in recognition of her groundbreaking work with the nationally acclaimed *Write to Learn Program*. She has also been honoured with the International Reading Association Carl Brawn Literacy Award in 1996, the Alberta Literacy Award of Merit in 1998 and the Camrose Chamber of Commerce Education Award in 1999.

Brenda Sherring - Writing Out Loud instructor

Brenda is currently the Director/Head of Programming at the Godfrey Dean Art Gallery in Yorkton, Saskatchewan. She obtained her Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in Montreal while on an ESL grant program as a teaching assistant in a French Post Secondary Institute. She later completed her Master's of Education at McGill University in Montreal. She became engrossed with Adult Learning Disabilities and Language Development while teaching in the USA and then pursued Literacy and English Language Teaching positions in New Brunswick. Brenda then returned to Yorkton, Saskatchewan and obtained the position of Literacy Coordinator for the Parkland Regional College. It was while in this position Brenda took the on-line Writing Out Loud training in 2000 - 2001 with Deborah Morgan. Brenda is presently working with the Public Library on drafting an Art and Literacy program that addresses the needs of a whole family. They aim to bring stories to life through larger than life puppets! It is called: Art Alive!

Introduction

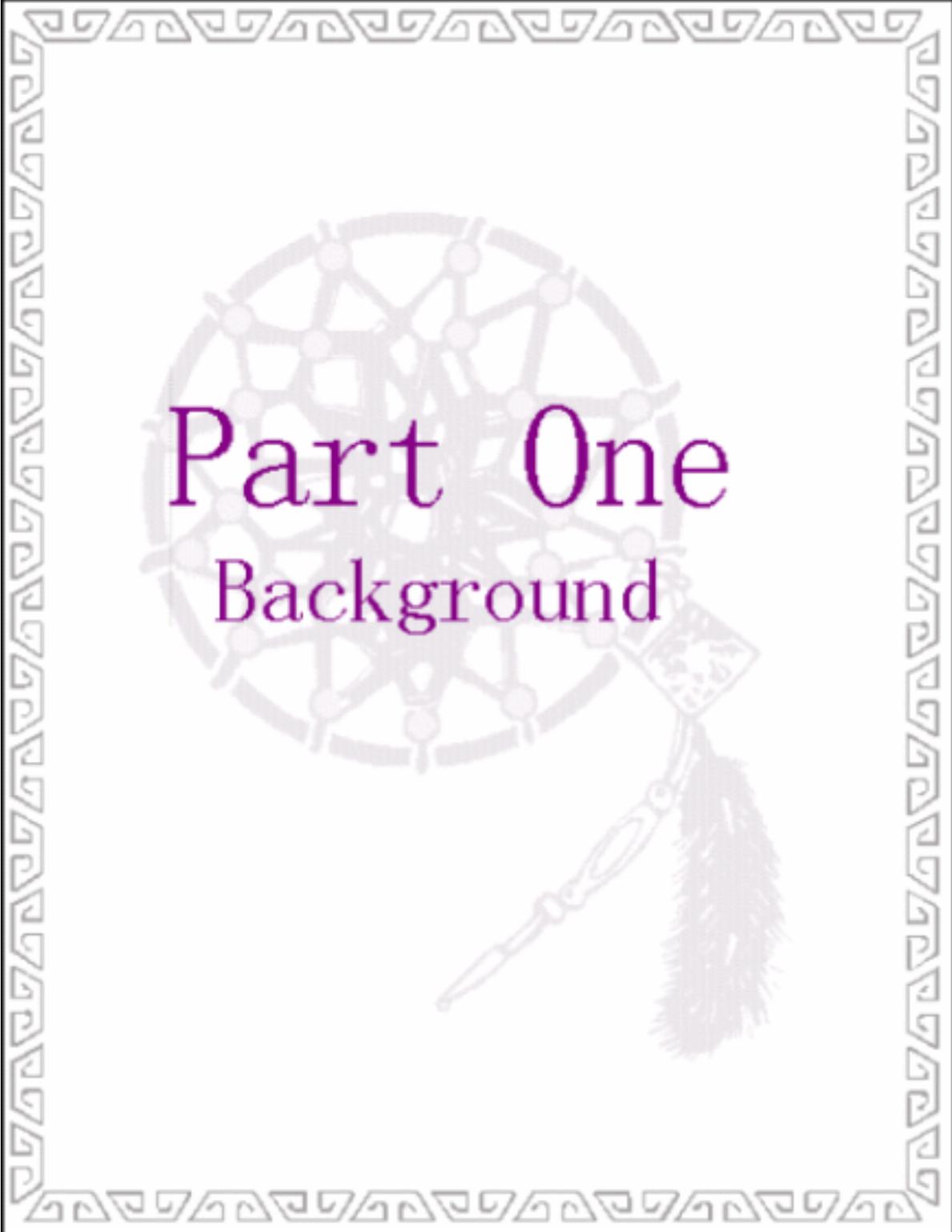
In the autumn of 2002, the Red Lake District Adult Learning Centre implemented an online "Writing Circle" with 4 Northern Reserve communities. The Writing Circle consisted of participants who wanted to improve their writing skills but could not physically attend a writing group because of their remote location.

This handbook was developed with the intent of promoting the use of online writing circles by other LBS agencies. The literacy community will be able to access this information and strategies to host similar programs.

To our knowledge and that of the Writing Out Loud Program, there are no similar handbooks in existence.

With the assistance of Deborah Morgan, program co-ordinator and developer of the Writing Out Loud program and the financial assistance from Human Resources Development Canada, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, the National Literacy Secretariat and the influence of the Native organizations based in Red Lake, the project was put in place.

The participants needed access to computers connected to the internet. An internet conferencing medium (dedicated chat room) was set up and participants would send their writings to be read by just the instructor or shared with fellow participants.



Part One

Background

About Us

The Red Lake District Adult Learning Centre is funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to deliver literacy and basic skills training to the people in the Red Lake District. We are governed by a volunteer board comprised of community members and a learner representative. We have been operating for approximately 15 years.

As we have evolved, the Centre has seen an increase in First Nations participants. This has provided our staff with the opportunity to learn about their culture and some of the issues they encounter on a continuing basis. Many of our newly acquired resources are culturally relevant.

Our Mission Statement

The Red Lake Adult Literacy Board believes that literacy is essential to life long learning. Our program's aim is to assist and support adults in our communities who wish to achieve greater independence and to participate more fully in their community and workplace by improving their English language and numeracy skills.

Our Objectives

- to promote and encourage literacy and to consider and discuss all subjects affecting it
- to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas on matters affecting literacy and related subjects, and to take action wherever possible
- to provide for the delivery of classes and private instruction and the delivery of lectures and/or workshops in connection with literacy and related subjects
- to provide seamless access to ongoing education and training
- to promote community involvement and to raise annual funds within the community through public fund raising activities
- to establish and maintain a literacy resource library
- to associate, affiliate, and federate with organizations, societies, or association with similar objectives
- to invest monies of the Board, not immediately required, in such a manner as may be determined

The Writing Out Loud Program

When we talk about writing, most people think about essays, reports and business letters. That's only one kind of writing. The writing of the Writing Out Loud Program is what we call "writing from the heart" - writing about how we feel, in words that are as simple as the words we think and speak.

Many people think they cannot write because they cannot write "well". They think their writing has to be "correct" and assume that if they are not good at spelling or grammar, then they are not good at writing. It took the students a few weeks to believe the instructor when told that she didn't care about spelling or grammar or what the words looked like on the page. She just wanted them to write - to write for the pure pleasure of it. It was explained to them that if we worry about where to put the comma before we start writing, we'll never write anything. Once the students stopped worrying, they started writing. They wrote about things that were important to them, they wrote in their own words and they were amazed by what they had to say. This is writing from the heart.

Writing Out Loud is about writing. But, it is also about a learning readiness program in Camrose, Alberta called Chapters (not affiliated with the Chapters Bookstores) - a program that changed many people's thoughts and ideas about the value of writing and the value of life.

Deborah Morgan is the founder of the Writing Out Loud Program. The following is her experience and is written in the first person.

The Chapters Program

I was introduced to some people on Social Assistance who were really discouraged with where they were in their lives. They wanted (and needed) to find work, but they didn't know how to go about it. They didn't want to go back to school because of past failures and they were tired of being forced to go to employment programs or job placements that they were not able, for a variety of personal reasons, to fully commit to. They wanted to be off Assistance, but they didn't know where to begin to find a way that would work for them. They wanted to design something that would work.

We spent many, many hours around my kitchen table working on a proposal that combined the idea of "preparing for life" as well as getting ready for employment. Literacy was also a part of the proposal, because the group was genuinely keen to learn. They wanted to feel good about their learning but they didn't know how to make that happen. They wanted to call the program "Chapters" because they were looking forward to starting a new chapter in their lives.

Simply put, the students in the Chapters Program wanted and needed to be treated like whole human beings - people with real lives and real stories. This was not something they were used to. Years of poverty and getting bumped around in the welfare system had left them feeling bruised and afraid. I learned very quickly that the needs of the students were much greater than I had originally anticipated. They were people referred to by the social worker as "high needs clients". My background was in literacy; I thought he meant that they had low literacy skills and high learning needs. But it was much more complicated than that. Many had come from extremely abusive situations, some had serious emotional problems (and diagnosed illnesses such as multiple personality disorder and schizophrenia), some were dealing with alcohol and drug addictions and almost all were on high doses of antidepressants and tranquillizers. I remember the group who helped me write the proposal talking about wanting to be part of "the real world" or having a "real life". I was only just beginning to understand.

As I became more aware of the problems, I also realized that we wouldn't get anywhere if all we did was dwell on problems. I really wanted to get to know the students as individuals, to

know what was important to them now and what their hopes were for the future. The first thing that became really clear was their need to feel safe. They needed to know that I wasn't going to hurt them and that this program was not intended to set them up for another failure.

By the end of the first year we were doing a great deal of writing. We used writing as a way to tell our stories, clarify what was important to us and where we wanted to go from here. I always say "we" because the students weren't the only ones who were learning and growing. We wrote and put together three "sold out" publications in eight months. I think my favourite was one called "Rediscover Learning, Rediscover Life". This publication was a celebration of what learning meant to the women in Chapters. They were like little kids discovering toys in a sandbox. Look what I found! Look what I know! Look what I can do! Their joy and enthusiasm were wonderfully infectious. And finally, people in the field were starting to notice that something special was happening at Chapters.

Writing became the students' means of discovering and identifying personal and academic needs. And writing became the means that we as researchers and instructors used to better understand the needs of the students. The students and researchers worked together as a team to find ways to teach and learn that were relevant to us. We all agreed that students must be personally ready and comfortable with themselves as learners before they could effectively enter into concentrated academic or employability programs. And we discovered how powerful the use of computers can be in both literacy and life skills training.

As researchers, we put aside our agendas, openly recognizing that the needs and interests of the students had to come first. What the students wanted to learn, how they learned and how they felt about learning became the foundation of our thinking. What we started to call "the Chapters process" recognized each student as a whole, likable and capable person, no matter what their background or history might have been. This positive starting point paved the way for students to get past their fears, become involved in their own learning, and speak about and identify their individual needs and hopes.

We came to understand, that for many literacy/life skills students, the "needs" we talk about are not just learning needs, but rather personal needs that have to be dealt with before effective learning can take place. We talked about self esteem, but also about housing, security, child care, protection from violence, emotional and physical stability, and basic nutrition. We understand better now that self esteem comes as a result of caring about what we call "human being basics". We all need to feel like functioning human beings before we can see ourselves as capable or even interested learners.

We learned that the kind of writing we did in the Chapters Program, writing from the heart, is actually a journey in personal discovery, a gentle way for people to get to know themselves better. Thoughts come forward in simple, honest, heartfelt words - words we can understand, that are in our own language. As instructors, we need to recognize and celebrate these thoughts and ideas as the student's personal curriculum. They will learn what they need to learn as they need to learn it.

History

In 2000 - 2001 Deborah Morgan tried something new. She held an online training program for those who wished to become certified Writing Out Loud instructors. Literacy practitioners from Newfoundland to British Columbia took part in this unique form of training.

The final assignment was to prepare and deliver a workshop on Writing Out Loud. For her project, Brenda Sherring, a trainee from Yorkton, Saskatchewan, tried an online writing group with some individuals who were taking upgrading courses in Kamsack, Saskatchewan. Kamsack is a community that is rather remotely nestled in Saskatchewan Lake country. The unemployment rate is high and so is domestic violence.

Brenda traveled to the community to meet everyone and to explain how the online writing circle would work. The students' involvement in this writing group was to go towards their English mark. The English instructor gave them computer class time to participate in the writing circle.

Brenda Sherring would post topics on a regular basis and each person would write a response to that topic and post it to an online discussion group created just for them. Brenda suggested topics of her own at first and then later other topics came about as a result of some of the writings of the participants. Participants shared their thoughts and feelings through writing, even though they were sitting together in the same room. Brenda would respond to all the writings from her office in Yorkton.

It proved to be a raving success with participants wanting the program to continue. It provided an outlet for their emotional strains.

Quotes from some participants when asked if they enjoyed the experience:

"The writing circle was like therapy, if you were having a bad day you could write out your feelings and it actually felt good. It also took my mind off of my problems, I like to write."

"I enjoy the writing circle because, I like to write and talk!"

"I enjoyed all the exercises. It gave people a chance to know people."

"Because it just like conversing with someone. You get responses back."

The Writing Circle

A writing circle can take place "in house". Every morning at the Red Lake District Adult Learning Centre, the learners and instructor would write for 5 minutes and then share what they had written - if they wished. This proved to be beneficial and enjoyable for the group.

Because our "in house" writing circle is so successful, we wanted to try an online writing circle. We applied for and were granted a National Literacy Secretariat grant to see if we could facilitate an online writing circle with some of our northern reserves. We wanted to reach out to these communities that are closely related to our own community.

In 2002 the Red Lake District Adult Learning Centre implemented two separate online "Writing Circles" within 4 communities served by Northern Chiefs. We wanted to follow the guidelines established through the Writing Out Loud Program and to model our writing circles after the one created by Brenda Sherring in Yorkton, Saskatchewan.

Learning doesn't happen in isolation of real life. When we openly recognize that real life is actually part of learning, the learning is much more effective. Writing has always been seen as an academic activity. Writing can also be used as a means of self discovery and personal

growth. That's the life skills and literacy connection that we are convinced is of great importance to literacy programming today. When we are learning, we are growing. When we don't feel capable of learning and don't see learning as a good thing, we are also denying ourselves important opportunities for personal development.

Putting words on paper isn't something we should shy away from. There are significant benefits to be gained through writing.

Benefits to Participants

Improved Written Skills

Writings were not "corrected" as such, but sentence structure and vocabulary would improve with usage. The initial writing is done without regard for spelling or grammar. Students are often so pleased with a certain piece, they want to go back and correct their spelling or improve the structure of the sentences. This occurs when the grammar lessons are most effective - well after the students believe they in fact have the ability to write.

Emotional Healing

In the past, participants expressed that free writing allowed them to voice their suppressed emotions. Initial writings were guarded, but as participants become familiar and comfortable with one another, the writing group provided a release.

Improved Computer Skills

As the program was delivered through modem, computer skills were sharpened. This program would ideally involve participants who have a comfort level with the computer and are somewhat familiar with a keyboard.

Solve Personal Conflicts and Problems

Writing allowed participants to explore ideas they feel uncomfortable talking about. They were able to connect their thoughts and feelings and identify their values, hopes and goals. This would enable them to look at their lives in a more positive way and move forward in their lives. Their writings would also validate their stories, their lives.



Part Two

Steps

Are you interested in starting up a writing circle?

The following are the steps to setting up an online writing circle, but by omitting numbers two and three, you can set up an 'in house' writing circle.

We have attempted to describe what steps we took to setting up the online writing circles and we offer suggestions on how you can follow suit.

STEP ONE

Facilitator's Preparation

How we did it.

At Literacy Northwest's annual conference held in May 1999 in Thunder Bay, one of my students took a workshop entitled, *Writing Out Loud* facilitated by Margaret O'Shea Bonner, Alice Kneeland and Barbara McTavish. I heard such great reports from her and others who had attended that workshop that I bought the *Writing Out Loud* binder.

I read it cover to cover and the following September I tried out some of their writing ideas. Then in the spring of 2000 Deborah Morgan contacted all those who had ordered the WOL binder and asked if they would be interested in an online training program to start up that fall. Of course I said, "I would."

The Writing Out Loud Training Program was designed for literacy workers who share an interest in exploring the value of writing and a desire to share that interest with others. Using a unique multi-media, distance education approach to learning and information sharing, the goals of the Training Program were to provide the workers with

- a critical understanding of the use and value of writing as a means to facilitate both academic and personal development.
- a foundation of knowledge, practical skills and learning opportunities to assist the worker in presenting Writing Out Loud workshops.
- a community of writing enthusiasts to interact with and learn from during and after the completion of the Training Program.

The Training Program consisted of 7 interactive and informative Modules based on the ideas and philosophy behind the Writing Out Loud Handbook and the experiences of the Write to Learn Project participants. The assignments within the Modules challenged personal and professional knowledge and beliefs about writing as well as provided a learning opportunity and ideas to assist in meeting the goals of the Training Program.

Each Module contained the following headings:

- Goals
- Objectives
- Time lines
- Resources/handouts
- Assignments
- Preparation for Next Module
- Module Summary
- Module assignments

Each Module was designed to provide a variety of learning opportunities through the use of:

- **Readings:** Background information and preparation
- **Video:** The video introduced the students in the Chapters and Write to Learn Projects over the past 6 years which helped to make the training more "real".
- **First Class Conferencing (FCC):** With the use of FCC software and Internet access, "online discussions" were created to read the thoughts and ideas of others, respond to them and add to them. The discussions were moderated by the Project Coordinator to ensure that everyone felt comfortable.
- **Online discussion Questions:** Questions were posted in the Writing Out Loud Training Conference. The Trainees were divided into 3 groups and expected to answer one of 3 questions posted in each Module. Trainees were also encouraged to read and respond to the other questions posted. The questions were intended to encourage the worker to think about the issues raised with reference to your own personal and professional experiences and practice. Workers were then invited to share their insights with the other Trainees.
- **Field Work:** Each trainee established a group of people to explore writing ideas with, such as student groups, tutor groups, etc. The intention of this, was for workers to take their training and "try it out" with others for feedback and further ideas. Field experiences was expected to be shared with the other trainees.
- **Write to Learn Café:** The Write to Learn Café was open to anyone who has Internet access, anywhere around the world. The café was used as a place to present and share ideas, writings and resources. Trainees were expected to contribute to this web page and help build an on-line meeting place for writers and writing enthusiasts.
- **Teamwork:** Some of the Module assignments required meeting with a partner from another province/territory in Canada (By phone or e-mail). This was a bit of an experiment to help to build the network of people involved in the Training Program.
- **Teleconferences:** A teleconference was held to allow for some verbal discussions during the Training.

Are you interested in starting up a writing circle - either 'in house' or 'online'?

Some preparation tips:

- Read *Writing Out Loud*, by Deborah Morgan (cf. Bibliography) to get an idea of the philosophy behind the idea of a *Writing Circle*.
- There are qualified *Writing Out Loud* instructors all across Canada. Contact Deborah Morgan for the closest one near you to do a workshop on the *Writing Out Loud* program.
- Deborah Morgan offers an on-line *Writing Out Loud* instructors training course if you would like some training.

STEP TWO

Outreach to Participants

How we did it.

Many hours were spent researching this project. The Northern Chiefs provided much needed assistance along with their team of health promoters. There was concern that the writers may experience mental and/or emotional difficulties when writing about past experiences or their feelings. Arrangements were made with their mental health co-ordinator that if, for any reason, the instructor felt that any writer may be experiencing any depression or thoughts of suicide, she would immediately contact the health team at Northern Chiefs.

Participants were found with the aid of Northern Chiefs and Mary Zoccole, LBS Field Consultant. The Northern Chiefs contacted the E-Centre managers at the Reserves who then found interested individuals. Posters and brochures had been distributed. Advertisements were also placed in the *Wawatay* Newspaper, a publication provided free of charge to the Northern Communities.

Some Outreach Tips

- Finding participants can be the hardest part of setting up an online *Writing Circle*.
- Service providers in the community may provide clients with your contact information.
- Advertisements on radio, tv, posters and in the newspapers work to a certain extent, but I have found that word of mouth works best. We still need the media, but do try passing the word around through your various contacts.
- Reach out through your students.
- Other literacy groups may know of interested individuals or parties.
- Groups need to be established with a lead/organizer/teacher to provide structure. As we do not have personal contact, we do not know why some never return. As we experience in our LBS Program, learners simply disappear. This was very much the case with the Writing Circle. A co-ordinator is needed at each site.
- If you will be working with individuals not affiliated with a school, as we were, then we suggest that you might target a larger population so that more will participate.
- There may be individuals who would like to participate but cannot because of lack of typing skills, physical conditions such as arthritis, or other obstacles such as illiteracy, etc. making it necessary to have a typist. These individuals, such as the Elders, will have the opportunity to put their stories to paper providing a written record of their unique heritage. These stories, legends, etc. will then have a better chance of surviving the ravages of time and can then be handed down through the generations.

STEP THREE

Set Up Discussion Groups

Two different Internet Conferencing Mediums were utilized for comparison. The first Writing Circle used AlphaCom. To use AlphaCom you need to join through AlphaPlus. The second Writing Circle used eLit.ca. With both discussion groups, the E-Centres sent the participants e-mail addresses to the facilitator and they were registered by the Administrator. This saved the participants the time and frustrations of doing it themselves.

1. AlphaCom is an electronic discussion system accessible through <http://alphaplus.ca/alphacom.html>. AlphaCom connects you to literacy practitioners and learners both in Ontario and across Canada. It is one part of the services offered by the AlphaPlus Centre.
2. While historically it was a project of AAAL, eLit.ca is currently best thought of as its own entity. It's an organization that is fostering a Canadian online literacy community.

eLit.ca is an online literacy community - 'online', meaning it is available anywhere on the Internet, and 'community', meaning that, beyond the computers and networks that make up eLit.ca, we are first and foremost a group of people who share a common interest and common virtual 'place'. We choose to participate and interact with one another in this place in pursuit of this interest, as well as in pursuit of the basic human desire to connect with other people.

Currently, eLit.ca is used mostly by people in Canada's prairie provinces - Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Literacy coalitions in these three provinces - Literacy Alberta, The Saskatchewan Literacy Network and the West Region Coalition in Manitoba - are members of eLit.ca. Other organizations, both large and small, as well as individuals, are also welcome to become eLit.ca members.

from eLit.ca's website

We have outlined two ways of setting up a discussion group. One is through AlphaCom and the other is eLit.ca. Comprehensive details are outlined in Appendix A for AlphaCom and Appendix B for eLit.ca.

Step Four

So, you're ready. You have done your research; you have your participants lined up and your online electronic communication system is up and running. Let's get started.

"Let's Do It!" Facilitation

1. The first submission of the facilitator to the 'Writing Circle' discussion group tried to answer questions that participants might have about a 'Writing Circle'.
 - o What is a "Writing Circle"?
 - o What do we write?
 - o Who will read my writing?
 - o What if I don't want to share my writing with the group?
 - o Will I be marked?
 - o What do I get out of this 'writing circle'?
 - o What does it cost?
 - o How long is this program?

Tip

Check Appendix C for a complete list of the questions and the answers.

The answers for the last two questions will vary depending on your program.

2. Next, the facilitator posted the Group Guidelines. These guidelines are modeled after those suggested in the Writing Out Loud program. They are to provide a safe environment for the participants.

Tip

To see a copy of our suggested group guidelines see Appendix D: *Group Guidelines*.

3. Once all the preliminaries are done you can settle into the writing. The facilitator next posted the first topic for writing. In both writing circles we started off with topics to help us get to know one another.

Each week one or more suggested topics would be given for the group to write about. Topics would come from the writings of the participants, from various resources or from the individual's own making. Participants would sometimes write more than once a week.

4. Once the topic was posted, participants submitted their responses to the topic to the discussion group.

There might be an occasion when participant(s) do not want to share their writing with the other group members. Then the participant(s) would send their writing only to the facilitator of the writing circle. This did not happen in either of our writing circles but, the possibility exists. Even in an "in house" writing circle, participants are not forced to share. One can "pass" if they do not feel comfortable sharing what they have written. c.f. Appendix D: *Group Guidelines*

Tips

See *Part Three Samples* for some examples of topics, participants' writings and facilitator's responses. For suggested topics, check out *Writing Out Loud* and *More Writing Out Loud*. C.f. bibliography

5. The facilitator tried to respond positively to every submission in the discussion group. In addition, the facilitator responded personally to every submission using the participant's email address.

Tip

One drawback to responding to every submission in the discussion group was that it looked like the facilitator had too much to say! Perhaps, a general submission including a reference to each person's writing would reduce the number of facilitator submissions to the discussion group.

6. For our online writing groups we gave a start date and an end date to provide a feeling of accomplishment or completion to the participants. The first Writing Circle had a ten-week time frame and the second ran for a 6 week duration. The second one was shorter due to computer access difficulties.

Tip

We found that 10 weeks wasn't long enough. You might want to try 15 or 20 weeks. Our next writing circle will hopefully be the length of the school year.

7. Following completion we felt it would be beneficial to have some sort of closure to our project. So, we put together a celebration package that we mailed to each participant. It was also a way to say thank you for participating in our Writing Circle project.

Tip

You may want to give certificates or celebrate in some other way. To see a copy of what was in our celebration package, see Appendix E.



Part
Three
Samples

Writing Circle

Main Message

Author: catherine mochrrie
Date: 09/11/2002 03:05 PM
Category: General
Subject: Getting Started

Greetings fellow writers!

Welcome, welcome!

We are the FIRST participants in an on-line writing circle in Ontario. It is my first time as a facilitator or moderator of a discussion group. So, I would like everyone to feel free to send me ANY comments or suggestions about the writing group - good or otherwise. I want this to be a great experience for us all.

So, let's get started.

1. Each Monday I will post a suggested topic for us to write about. I might get an idea from my 'idea book' or it might come from one of our writings.
2. Each of us will write on this topic and add it to the discussion. If you do not want to write on that topic it's okay, but you must write something. So, feel free to write on anything you wish.
3. I will try to respond to each of you before the end of the week. Remember, I will not be marking the writing.
4. Each of us can read all the writings and enjoy what each of us has written.
5. This writing circle will run for 10 weeks.
6. We are going to try to have a video conference session sometime during the 10 weeks.

So, I'll see you in print!.

Until then ...

Catherine

Writing Circle

Main Message

Author: karen
Date: 09/13/2002 11:18 AM
Category: General
Subject: About me!!

Hi...Joanna

I have a sister Joanne..anyways...

My name is Karen and my husband is from . I like living in because it's a quiet, small community. Compared to the community of three thousand of where I grew up in northern Manitoba. I'm happy to say that I'm glad my husband brought me to this wonderful place. People are friendly and they help people of when there is a need. I never did any writing.. except writing to my sister by email. One time I wrote a piece for WAWATAY about spring.. and was happy that it was printed! But I haven't written anything because of work and have two year old at home. I have been working since my son was three weeks old and been working since. My son will turn three in four months. I like working in the health environment.. in the office mostly.

I don't know which topic to talk about..any ideas?

Writing Circle

Response

Author: catherine mochrie
Date: 09/13/2002 12:21 PM
Category: General
Subject: Hi, Karen!

Great to hear from you, Karen. sounds like a lovely spot. Welcome to Ontario!. A 3 month old! What fun you must be having. Babies are soooo cute. That's what my baby would say and she's 13. Enjoy your baby, Karen, they grow up so fast.

We certainly have been having great weather this week. Have you been able to do any blueberry picking with your baby? We had great berries here. I hope I get a chance to make some jam.

I'm going to post the topic in the next message.

Nice to hear from you, Karen. I hope you enjoy the weekend.

Catherine

Writing Circle

Main Message

Author: Darlene
Date: 09/24/2002 11:52 AM
Category: General
Subject: My Introduction

Hi everyone... I am finally on here, had some problems with the login for some reason, took a few days, but I am finally here... :-)

My name is Darlene ____, and I am originally from Sioux Lookout. I now live in North Spirit Lake as this is where I got married back in 1982. We have a family of two sons, and four daughters.

I presently work at the North Spirit Lake E-Centre, as the E-Centre Manager. I enjoy working here, but we do have our challenges from time to time.

Enough said for now, I will write once again, about what I like about this past summer...

Darlene

Writing Circle

Main Message

Author: Karen
Date: 10/02/2002 12:05 PM
Category: General
Subject: Suggestion for topics

Catherine,

Hi. The topic should be about how the participants feels that certain day. If that person feels sad..should write about being sad (poem)or why are they sad.. etc. If that person feels happy..should write about why that person is happy.

About what they do at work..excluding confidentiality in the work place. For instance I would like to read of their travel experience..trip to wpg..sioux..thunderbay..and funny things that happened to anybody.

I'll tell you one story.

I went to this workshop in Thunder Bay and stayed at Victoria Inn. The hotel was nice and it seems conservative people go there. One evening before supper..my workshop participants (from other treaty communities). We were waiting patiently for the dining room, we were all sitting in the lobby by the bathroom. This lady with the dress suit came out from the bathroom and behind her was a trail of bathroom tissue..lol..poor lady..everyone was to embarressed to tell her and just looked at her go into Joe's sports bar restaurant. We were wondering if she had too many martini's or something.

Anyone want to tell a funny story.

Writing Circle

Main Message

Author: Darlene
Date: 09/24/2002 12:33 PM
Category: General
Subject: Danny's Grandmother

I would like to share about an elder who I loved dearly. She was my husband's grandmother, Rosie _____. She has passed away.

It was hard losing her, but I found the strength to keep on going, as she was old and her health wasn't doing so good. Just this morning, my husband told me that he was going to leave for awhile. Just to get out of the community, and see a Doctor for his knee injury. He told me that his grandmother told him, not to go.

Though she is gone, it is like, her spirit still watches over our family. I don't know how many of you believe this, but I am beginning to believe that this can happen. I personally haven't experienced it, but I believe it since my husband shared this with me this morning.

Darlene

Writing Circle

Main Message

Author: Karen
Date: 09/16/2002 02:35 PM
Category: General
Subject: What was the best thing about summer?

What was the best thing about summer?

I've had many good summers in my life time. I will tell about the summer in my childhood. I grew up with my brother Lawrence, and our grandparents raised us because our mother was ill. My grandfather was a small businessman and he had good crop of potato field. I remember we would work on the field, my cousins and I would help put in half cut potato and fertilizer in the ground. When it was harvest time, my grandfather would hire the local teenagers to pull up the potato crops. They would get paid five dollars, that was a lot of money in those days for a teenager. I was very happy to get paid too. Even though my grandfather told my brother and I that we would get paid by buying us something that we liked at the Hudsons Bay store. I have great memories of my grandparents, my brother and I were lucky to be brought up by wise people. There was no alcohol or violence in our home. I lived by the lake and loved to swim with my young cousins by the dock. We would swim dock to dock along the shoreway, but there was one dock we avoided when our mean uncle was there (and everyone must have a mean uncle in a family) and his dock was the best diving dock there was by the lake. We didn't know why he didn't want us to use his dock...even though his children were playing with us.

Every end of the summer as long as I can remember, the family would pack up, my uncles and aunts and cousins and my grandparents and my grandfather's two brothers and their families and except my mean uncle's family. The whole clan would travel by boat and it would take almost two days to get to our destination. Then we would have to walk the trail and carry our gear up a one mile walk into the hills. The best part was us children we didn't have to carry anything that heavy but played along the way. We collected rocks and small frogs and coming into thought I don't know why I did that. We would settle into a campment and make a bonfire. The next day we would go blueberry picking...yes blueberries. That's why we went to that destination to pick blueberries! The family knew where there was a huge crop of blueberries. So that was our family trip for the summers. I wonder if I would ever get back to those blueberry camping grounds. Those days are gone but a loving memory. My grandparents have passed and haven't gone back to my childhood place. I'm thirty years old at present and my grandfather died when I was just turning eighteen and he was 90 years old. My grandmother died when I was 28 and she was 89 years old. I then will pass this memory into my son so he'll know of where I came from and how I became the person I am today. I have more stories to tell about my grandparents in the summer but I'll tell it another day.

Writing Circle

Main Message

Author: Lily
Date: 09/24/2002 05:31 PM
Category: General
Subject: What is the best thing about summer?

The best thing about summer is that it is warm and we can spend more time outside. I like all the summer activities, baseball, swimming, camping, and fishing. I also like to spend time in the wilderness and admire it's beauty and its serenity. It's like a great big breath of fresh air for my soul. Going camping and lazying around in the sun with a good book. Going fishing with my two sons and watching their excitement at catching a fish. Don't really play baseball but I get really excited cheering on my favourite teams. Spend time swimming in the lake with my sons and the rest of the kids. Entering the fishing derbys with a bunch of female friends and spending time talking, gossiping, and just visiting with each other while fishing. I just generally like everything about summer. (Except for the mosquitos!!)

Writing Circle

Main Message

Author: Karen
Date: 09/30/2002 03:07 PM
Category: General
Subject: My friend.....

My Friend....

Living in the community has its ups and downs like a yo-yo. There are days when the community is quiet, hardly anyone driving their vehicles. Due to the dry gas barrels at the only gas station in town. Yes, I'm use to living here and I sometimes call it a "town". Hardly a town for a population of three hundred. I work on weekdays and spend time with my son in the evenings, my shift I say, since my husband takes care of our son during working hours. Even though I have friends at work and at the church. And I attend the social functions, workshops, feasts, fishing derby and rummage sales (my favourite). I like to spend my time at home and be with my family for now. I want to spend time with my almost three year old son. Like he's not going to be small toddler for ever..he'll be in school in one and half years from now. He's my little friend, we go for nature walks on weekends and at the playground school. Just two weeks ago we helped his grandma built a smoke house for her moose meat. And last week we watched h is grandma smoke some white fish and he had a good laugh by watching a bird stealing a piece from the smoke hut.And just yesterday he helped me stack lots of fire wood in the house for the upcoming cold winter. He wants to do everything he sees us do and help. I love my little friend very much and I will keep these memories with me. I hope he will keep these memories with him when he's all grown up as I have remebered when I was young as him.

The END.

Writing Circle

Main Message

Author: catherine mochrie
Date: 09/30/2002 05:39 PM
Category: General
Subject: My little friend.....

Karen, this writing is just delightful. An almost 3 year old can get such enjoyment out of life! Everything is full of wonder. Already your son has a sense of humour, laughing at the bird stealing the fish. I don't blame the bird, though, smoked fish is definitely a treat!!

Yes, you're right to enjoy these days, they won't last forever.

Catherine

Writing Circle

Main Message

Author: catherine mochrle
Date: 10/07/2002 09:43 PM
Category: General
Subject: TOPICS,TOPICS,TOPICS

Greetings, All!!

What a chilly morning we have here in Red Lake. It's even cold in our building as the heat was off for the weekend. Brrrr.

Anyhoo...

Topics:

1. Write on anything that comes to mind as you sit down at the computer. What are you thinking about today? What were your thoughts as you looked out the window this morning ? or
2. Arnold mentioned living in a small community. What do you like about living in a small community? or What are the drawbacks?
3. Darlene mentioned how much she enjoyed Friday. Do you have a favourite day? Why?

So, until later,...

Catherine

Writing Circle

Main Message

Author: Darlene
Date: 10/07/2002 10:42 AM
Category: General
Subject: On my mind...

There is many things on my mind, as I like to get things working. I work as the E-Centre Manager in our community. However, I have worked with before, for about 4-5 years.

Being part of this new technology that we have in place is pretty neat. When it first started to happen, I never believed that would have the opportunity to be part of it. Boy... was I ever wrong. :-) To this day, our community now has access to the internet, which we are told, is pretty fast... We have video conferencing, where we are able to see other places, that have the units working.

I am kept busy, being a computer technician here and there.. I enter information into the homepage database for homepage request on knet. Lots to do, and it seems there just isn't enough time in the day.

On top of that, I am the Chair person for the Health Committee. I enjoy keeping busy, and I don't like when I don't have nothing to do, but there are times that I take the time when I know that I need it.

Lots on my mind, relating to computer technology, and home invoices that have to be done.

Writing Circle

Main Message

Author: catherine mochrie
Date: 11/27/2002 02:52 AM
Category: General
Subject: ideas or topics for writing

Hello again!

I've finally got a good connection to the internet, so I'm trying to catch up on all the correspondence!!

As I was walking this morning - at 5:45 am - the snow was softly falling. It was also sparkling or should I say twinkling. It was beautiful, nevertheless.

Do you like snow? Could you write a poem about snow? What does snow mean for you? Do you like to play in the snow?

Hmmmmmm What do you think?

Catherine



Part Four

Conclusions

Conclusions

This project presented us with many challenges. There were ups and downs. I felt discouragement during our writing circles because I was using the number of actual participants as a judge of how well the project was going. As the stats show (c.f. Appendix F page 68), there were quite a few who didn't participate even though they had signed up. Not all of the participants contributed every week. Though, there was one individual who was really interested in participating on a regular basis.

I suppose I was so disappointed because Brenda Sherring's writing circle in Saskatchewan was so successful. But her circumstances were different. And that might be the key.

In the Saskatchewan project the students were in a classroom setting with an instructor. Participation was incorporated into their English mark. They had support and encouragement from someone plus some extrinsic rewards.

To use our model requires a larger population base. Our writing circles dealt with a few small communities. There needed to be more - perhaps all of Northwestern Ontario, or even Northern Canada. Though the logistics of reaching out to a larger population could be daunting. Of all the people who signed up, only a small proportion were regular participants.

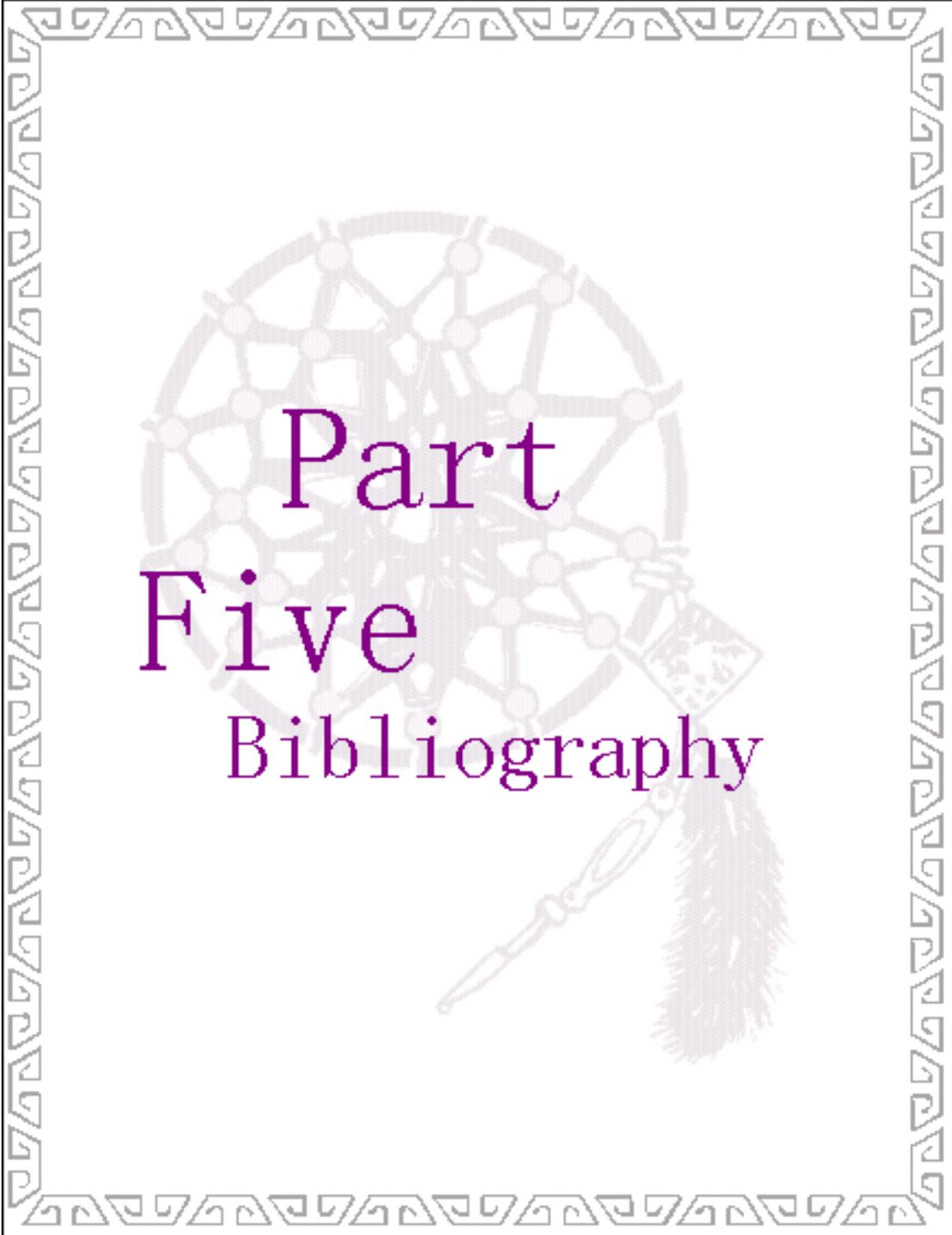
But, if we disregard the numbers who participated in our trial writing circles and instead looked at the quality of the participation, then, I feel these writing circles were a success. Although ten weeks is not a long time, there were individuals who really enjoyed the sharing of writing and it just whetted their appetite for more. I feel individuals would have derived a greater benefit from an extended writing circle - how long I don't know.

I enjoyed the sharing of writing with people I did not know. I didn't feel that the participants were intimidated by the anonymity of the group.

We've taken the lessons from this experience to attempt another writing circle as we see the positive potential of a writing circle with a group of individuals from another community.

We will be corresponding with another adult program in British Columbia.

The groundwork has already been laid. There are instructors at both sites who really support the idea of a writing circle. Time will be scheduled for each group to participate in the writing circle. This one, I think, has a better chance at having more regular participation.



Part
Five
Bibliography

PART 5 BIBLIOGRAPHY

References

Changing Paths - Elizabeth Fry Society of Edmonton

Bev Sochatsky & Sarah Stewart
Edited by Sarah Stewart
Copy edited by Lisa Stewart
Desktop published by Dish Design
Printed in Canada by Dial Printing
Published by: The Elizabeth Fry Society of Edmonton
10523 100 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 0A8
Co-published by: Learning at the Centre Press
ISBN 0-9731470-5-9

More Writing Out Load

Deborah Morgan
Copyright 2002 Deborah Morgan
Grass Roots Press
A division of Literacy Services of Canada Ltd.
PO Box 52192
Edmonton, Alberta
T6G 2T5
ISBN 1-894593-17-0

Simple Abundance A Daybook of Comfort and Joy

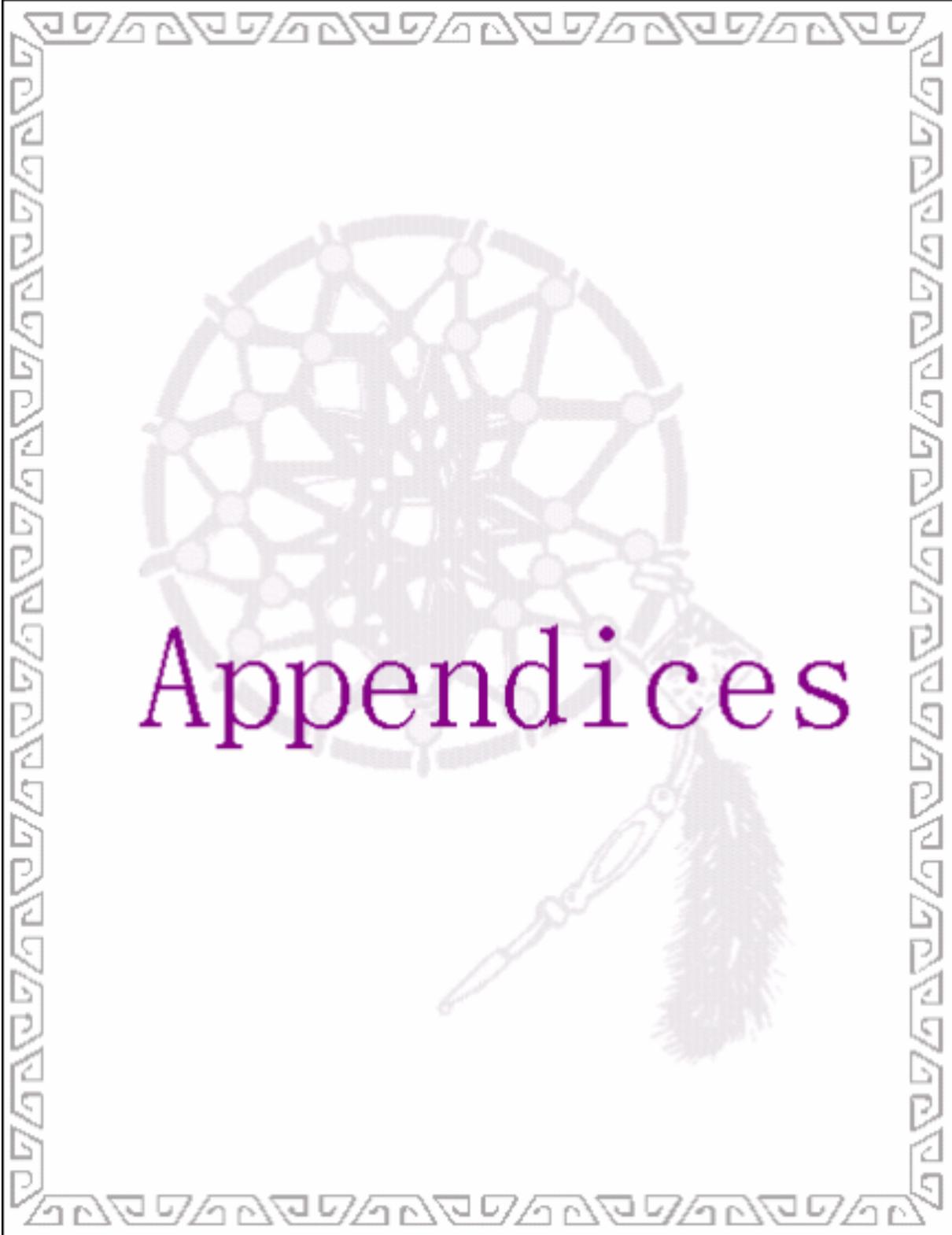
Sarah Ban Breathnach
Copyright 1995 by Sarah Ban Breathnach
Warner Books, Inc.
1271 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY
10020
ISBN 0- 446-51913-8

Writing Out Load

Deborah Morgan
Copyright 1997 Deborah M. Morgan
#206 4917 50
Camrose, Alberta
T4V 0S2
ISBN 0-9681993-0-5

Writing Down the Bones

Natalie Goldberg
Shambhala Publications, Inc.
Horticultural Hall
300 Massachusetts Avenue
Boston, Massachusetts 02115
Distributed in Canada by Random House of Canada Ltd.
PN145.C64 1986 808'.02 86-11840
ISBN 0-87773-375-9



Appendices

Appendix A

A. Setting Up an AlphaCom Discussion Group

contact the webmaster at Alphacom

AlphaCom Quick Start Guide

For First Time Users - Find AlphaCom on the Internet - <http://alphacom.alphaplus.ca/home>. This is the electronic address for AlphaCom's home page. Click on the word "Register" that has a hand pointing to it.

Register yourself with AlphaCom; get a User Name and Password. Before you can use AlphaCom to join in the Literacy discussions for the first time, you need to register your name, contact information, and a password.

If you have already registered but have trouble getting on again, please Do Not register again. If you have problems, just call the AlphaPlus help desk at 1-877-772-2345

Sign Up for First Time Users

1. Click on the word "Register" on the AlphaCom homepage.
2. Fill out the Sign up Form
3. Use the Tab key on your keyboard to move from one part of the form to the next.
4. The first and last name that you write on the sign up form becomes you User Name on AlphaCom.
5. Please include your personal or program's e-mail address. If you don't have one yet, just write `tobeadded@alpha.com` in the space for now. You can change it later.
6. You can create your own password by deleting the random password that is in the box and writing in a new one. It has to be 8 characters long. It can be numbers or letters or a mix. Please write down your new password. A password is case sensitive. If you forget it, call AlphaPlus to reset it.
7. Once you've filled out the entire Sign Up Form, click on the Submit button on the bottom of the screen.
8. Once your registration has been accepted you can join a discussion.
9. Click on one of the groups of "Discussion By:"

Already Registered?

You may already be registered for AlphaCom discussions.

1. If you know your user name and password, type in `http://alphaplus.ca`. In the white location box at the top of the screen. This will take you to the AlphaPlus home page.
2. click on the words "AlphaCom Discussions". Then you can either: -click on the word "click here to continue" or -click on the words "click here to fill in a registration form".
3. A small box will come up asking for your user name and password.
4. Use the tab key on your keyboard to move from the name space to the password space. When you are finished, click on the "OK" button.

If the computer screen says "Authorization failure", use the back arrow key at the top of your screen to go back and try again. Check the spelling of your name and your password. If it still doesn't work or if you forget your password, call AlphaPlus for help. PLEASE DO NOT TRY TO REGISTER YOURSELF AGAIN with a variation of your name or a new password.

5. Once you find a discussion you're interested in, click on its name in the list.

You will see the Discussion Profile screen. The profile gives information about each discussion. On the top of that screen, you'll see a button "Subscribe to Discussion". Click there.

Then click on the grey box that says, "Yes, subscribe...." Your registration request will be sent to the discussion moderator who will consider your request. It may take a week or more to join a private discussion.

To see a list of your subscribed discussion, click on the button "My Discussions" on the left of the screen.

Participating in a discussion

1. Click on a discussion title in your subscribed list. You will see a list of all the messages that have been put in a discussion by participants and the moderator. These messages are organized by date, with the newest messages first.
2. To read a message, click on the "hotlink" (The hotlink is usually blue and underlined). In the screen shown above, the "hotlink" is the title of the message. After you have read a message, the hotlink will probably turn purple. This lets you know that you've already read that message.
3. When you are first joining a discussion, you may want to catch up on all the messages and read them in the order that they were posted, scroll down to the bottom of the screen using the down arrow key on the right side of your screen, and then read the messages from the bottom up.
4. To add your own messages, click on "Write New Message" on the top of the screen or "Write Response" on the top of the screen to respond to a message you are reading that you want to respond to.
 - o Be sure to fill in the Subject box as you write your new message.
 - o Use the tab key to move from the Subject line to the message box.
 - o When you're done, click on "Add your Message" on the bottom of the screen.

Navigation Side Bar

At the left side of many screens in AlphaCom, you will see navigation buttons. By clicking an icon in this bar, you can move quickly around AlphaCom.

If you click on

- My Discussions:
 - o You will get to the list of the discussions that you have subscribed to.
- All Discussions by:
 - o You will get to the list of all private and public discussions.
- All People by:
 - o You will reach an alphabetized list of everyone who is registered on AlphaCom. You can find their organization and e-mail. You can get more information by clicking on their name.
- My resume:
 - o In this area, you can edit your personal information, including address, organization, and e-mail address, and change your password.

Appendix B

Setting up FirstClass Client -Internet Conferencing Medium

Go to www.elit.ca

Click on 'JOIN'

Click on 'Using FirstClass Client'

To use eLit.ca with the special FirstClass Client software (highly recommended), you will need to download, install and setup FirstClass Client on your computer. Here's how:

These instructions assume you have a working knowledge of computers. If these instructions are confusing to you, get help from someone who knows about using your web browser to download files and is familiar with installing software on your type of computer.

First, you need to download the FirstClass Installer.

To download the Installer, click on one of the following:

- If you have a Macintosh, click here.
- If you have a Windows PC, click here.

Some web browsers give you the option to automatically open a file after you've downloaded it. For example, Internet Explorer 6 in Windows XP gives you this option.

If you choose "Open", Windows will open the Installer for you. Otherwise, when the download is finished, double click on the Installer's icon.

The installation process is quite simple. The installer will walk you through everything. When it's finished, the installer will have put an alias/shortcut to FirstClass on your desktop. Simply double click the alias/shortcut to use FirstClass.

Important: when you use FirstClass for the first time, you need to configure it with elit.ca's address before you can login. You'll only need to do this the first time you use FirstClass.

To automatically setup your software, simply click this link:

[Automatic eLit.ca setup](#)

Your FirstClass Client software will open, and eLit.ca's address will be automatically entered.

To confirm your software is properly setup, look at the top of the Login window.

In a small number of cases, the automatic setup won't work. If the eLit.ca address doesn't appear in the Login window, then click the "Setup" button in the Login window. (If the login window doesn't appear at all, then double click the FirstClass icon on your desktop.)

In the "Server Setup" window that appears, enter "eLit.ca" in the space for 'server'.

The server setting may have something already entered. If it does, replace it with elit.ca. You don't need to enter your user ID, password or any other information in the setup window. Leave all the other settings untouched.

Once you've entered the eLit.ca server name, click 'Save'. You're done! Your FirstClass software is now ready to connect you to eLit.ca. To login, enter your UserID and password in the Login window and click the Login button.

Although getting up and running with FirstClass Client is usually simple and problem free, sometimes things go wrong. Sometimes people who work in organizations, usually larger institutions like colleges, find their use of an office computer is restricted in one or more ways. Sometimes they aren't permitted to install software. Sometimes they aren't permitted to access the Internet except with certain software (their access is blocked by something called a 'firewall'.) Often these restrictions prevent the use of FirstClass Client, but usually there are ways to deal with this situation. There is never a good technical reason for an institution to prevent the use of FirstClass Client software. Often, if you provide network administrators with good information, they will realize that they can make things better for you, and will. And sometimes, even if the network administrator won't help, there are things that can be done to avoid some problems.

If you are having difficulty using eLit.ca with FirstClass, contact Terry McGuire, eLit.ca Administrator.

terry_mcguire@eLit.ca

Appendix C

Questions and Answers

1. What is a "Writing Circle"?

I've known of quite a few circles - circle of friends, quilting circle, knotting circle, coffee circle, story circle,.....This is a 'writing' circle. Just like the other circles, it's a group of people who get together to share - coffee, stories, knotting,....only, we will be sharing our writing.

2. What do we write?

Every week I will suggest a topic. Participants may write once, twice, as many times as they want every week. I, too, can post topics once, twice - depending on what the group wants. For starters, we'll start with one topic. But please feel free to write more than that. Topics range from: what do you think of winter?; what famous person would you like to have dinner with?; what are you proud of? ... Many topics will arise from what others in the group have written. You may write a paragraph, a poem, a page or several pages - it's up to you.

3. Who will be able to read our writing?

Only the people participating in the 'writing circle' will be able to read what we have written. It will not be available to anyone else.

4. What if I don't want to share with the rest of the group?

You don't have to. It is possible to send your writing only to the facilitator.

5. Will I be marked?

No. The facilitator will not mark for grammar or spelling or anything else. There will be a certificate presented at the end of the session for participation only. It is not a credit course.

6. How long?

The 'writing circle' will last 10 weeks.

7. What does it cost?

Nothing.

8. What do I get out of this 'writing circle'?

The joy of writing. Improved writing skills. Computer/internet skills. A greater confidence in your own writing abilities. Improved ability to express one's self through writing. Perhaps the desire to take your writing further - publishing, speaking.

Appendix D

Writing Circle

Main Message

Author: catherine mochrrie
Date: 09/11/2002 03:18 PM
Category: General
Subject: Group Guidelines

Hello!

I have some suggested guidelines for us. If there is something that you would like to add, then tell us. These are not carved in stone, only written on paper/the screen.

Catherine

Group Guidelines

1. Everything 'said' in this discussion, stays in this discussion. We need to respect everyone's privacy.
2. Feel free to 'pass' on a topic if you do not want to write on that topic. But please write about a topic of your choice each week by Wednesday.
3. ALL writing in this group is GOOD writing. The idea is to put words on paper (the screen??). You do not need to worry about spelling or grammar.
4. Take time to read everyone's writing.
5. Please feel free to comment, positively, about other's work. As my mother used to say, "If you can't say anything nice, then DON'T say anything at all!"
6. Give yourself permission to relax and have fun!

Appendix E



Let's celebrate!

In your Celebration Package you will find:

- 😊 *balloons to be blown up and some confetti*
- 😊 *a letter from Catherine*
- 😊 *an evaluation form*
- 😊 *some candy*
- 😊 *a magnet and note pad from the Red Lake District Learning Centre*
- 😊 *a reminder to get your writings in for the book we will publish*

Appendix F

Statistics The statistics for the September to December Writing Circle are as follows:

	Total	Women	Men
Participants	10	7	3
Entries	284	270	14
Wrote more than once per week	6	5	1
Wrote more than twice per week	3	3	0
Wrote more than 5 X's per week	3	3	0
Number or subscribers who never wrote	11	7	4

The Statistics for the January to February Writing Circle are as follows:

	Total	Women	Men
Participants	8	7	1
Entries	30	28	2
Wrote more than once per week	2	2	0
Wrote more than twice per week	1	1	0
Number or subscribers who never wrote	3	3	0

Words of Our Own

by Catherine Mochrie

Writing was my voice.

I was scared.

I felt nobody would believe me.

I felt alone.

I was afraid of making mistakes.

Would I be accepted?

Writing is Healing.

Praise, practice, writing in a group helped me get over my fears.

It helped me to laugh.

It is important to learn.

You are never too old.

Write about what you know.

Write from the Heart.

This poem was inspired by the video, *Write to Learn*. In it we meet Sharron, Barb and Alice who discuss how the Chapters Program and writing changed their lives. c.f. ***The Chapters Program*** p. 12