



Words On Paper

by Marie Finlay

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**JOURNEYS
IN LANGUAGE,
LEARNING AND CULTURE**

Helen Woodrow · Carmelita McGrath, Editors

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WORDS ON PAPER

Marie Finlay

During my childhood days in the classroom, I never had any time for English Language. I was always scared of the word "English." I was afraid to write words on paper. Over the years that fear has lessened. Now I can write words on paper. My mother, authors, teachers and writing workshops have all helped in some ways to make that happen.

Years ago in school, when I had to write a composition, I would ask my mother to write it for me. It always impressed me how easily she would take a pen or pencil and in no time she would have the words on paper. She would never say "I hate doing this" or "I have no time for this": she felt really good about writing for us 13 children. I always wished I could write like my mom. At a young age she became my writing model. Although she had to leave school at an early age, and did not have much formal education, she could write anything. I think to some degree it is a talent you are born with. When I look back I think writing was a hobby for her, something that she felt relaxed doing because she was good at it. It may also have been a coping mechanism, something quiet and private that helped take her mind off her many motherly duties.

I think, in some small way, I have some of my mother's talent. Many years ago, when I was struck with a tragedy in my life, I began to write. It would make me feel better to write my thoughts and feelings on paper and it would give me a sense of peace. I was never scared to write for myself — I guess because I did not have to be particular with my grammar. When my grief eased somewhat, I still continued to write, realizing what had once been a coping mechanism had now become a hobby.

For years I felt the words I was putting on paper were not of any value, just something to take the pain away. My ideas about writing changed when I attended Adult Basic Education (ABE), where I did a course in communications. I was taught to put words on paper so that they would make the reader use his/her senses. To write a poem about a walk along the seashore, I used all of my senses so that the reader could use his/hers. Later, at my teacher's suggestion, I did a research paper. Writing the paper was a big project, and helped make a turning point in my writing.

While attending ABE, I also had the opportunity to attend a writing workshop. The workshop gave me greater insight into writing. It made me realize that material for writing, no matter what it is, is of value because it is yours. The workshop leaders said: do not be scared to write it down — just write, write, write. There would be lots of time for editing and proofreading after the first draft was written.

Up until then I was always reluctant to let anyone see what I had written, but that session gave me a positive attitude towards writing. I was given the privilege of meeting a Newfoundland author. I was amazed to see his first and second drafts — they were something like my own, and he has written many books. When I attended school years ago, there was no rewriting or editing: just get the thing done right, no matter. I figured books were written by people whose words came out perfectly the first time.

Later when I enrolled in secretarial science studies, I learned other writing skills. I was taught how and where to use grammar — not necessarily what a noun or verb is but where it should go. I think that this an excellent approach because you do not get lost in what nouns or verbs are; instead you learn how to use them.

All those experiences have given me a different concept of writing. I have had the experience of publishing a poem, "Memories," in a book called *A Newfoundland Spell*. I am very proud of the poem, and the day I received the book was my mom's sixty-fifth birthday. I was extremely happy to present her with a copy.

Getting away from being scared to let others read our material is a wonderful accomplishment. Some of us like to keep our writings in a comfort zone. We know that when we publicize our writings it is somehow letting the public into our minds. Writing, whether it is public or private, should give the writer a good feeling, a sense that it is worth writing the words on paper. When the writing is made public, it gives some of this feeling to the reader, and a chance to use his/her senses to enjoy the writing.

From my experiences, I have come to believe that if you feel like writing you should "just write." Once you get the words on paper, you can change or rewrite or edit them. I am very thankful to all those who gave me the opportunity to let my words be made public and to feel good about my writing.