

# Therapy Through Writing: Herstory Writers Workshop

Nicole Guillet and Paola Guzman

## Writing to Heal:

Expressive writing is a recent form of expressive therapy recognized in the 1980's. However, this practice has been going on for centuries. We now call it expressive writing but this only means keeping a diary or journal, which is a popular practice. It was only until the 1980's that expressive studies began. As the studies expanded, it was clear that expressive writing has a grand effect on one's physiology and psychology. Biological effects include enhanced immune function, better lung function, and lower pain among people with arthritis. Psychologically, expressive writing effects one's mood (sometimes feeling sadder) short term, and feeling happier long-term.

Information taken from "Writing to Heal A Guided Journal for Recovering from Trauma & Emotional Upheaval" by James W. Pennebaker, PH.D.



## Abstract:

This semester we have had the privilege of getting involved in the Herstory Writers Workshop, which is a civic engagement internship prevalent across many colleges and Universities on Long Island. Herstory's mission statement advertises that we "bring unheard voices into the public arena, transforming lived experiences into written memoirs powerful enough to change hearts, minds and policy." Our program here at LIU Post partners Pioneer students with high school students from Westbury High School, who come together right here at LIU every Thursday to share and listen to each other's stories. Through writing our own personal narratives we highlight social justice issues, stories of personal growth, and provide feedback in order to improve our writing skills. Herstory has allowed us to share our stories as written work, and hear the stories of our friends and classmates opening our minds and broadening our view of the world around us. The program coincides with English 184, a writing and healing elective which demonstrates the benefits of therapeutic writing.



## What is Herstory?

Erica Duncan, founder of Herstory, created these memoir-writing workshops to empower people, change policy, and give a voice to those who are not typically heard. Erica has created a particular technique to capture an audience. First she asks the writer to think of a "page-one moment" which would be where the writer would like the "stranger reader" to meet him/her in his/her life. Erica also likes the writer to think of "there-ness" as opposed to "about-ness." She encourages the writers to capture the reader in a way that is much more sentimental than explanatory. With these methods, Herstory has had workshops in various high schools, universities, and prisons to shine light on social injustices.

## Student Testimonials:

"I really liked in the beginning when we talk about our stories, we got into our emotions. I think that we started off well, talking about our backgrounds and what Herstory is really about" –Westbury High School Senior

"I really appreciate what this program has brought to not only myself but everyone, it has given me an opportunity to write about my feelings that I didn't even think were in me. It's been a really good experience." –Alison Sanchez, Westbury High School Senior

"I feel like Herstory provides a sense of empowerment for people who have hidden and sensitive stories that touch upon social justice issues. For this reason I feel that Herstory as an organization can have a life altering impact on someone." -Nicole Bellinger, LIU Post Graduate Student

<http://www.herstorywriters.org>

**LIU**  
Post