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April 2013

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Villagers Share Their
Heart-Felt Stories**



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Villagers Share Their Compelling Stories About Writing

Story by Village of Virginia Trace resident Mark H. Newhouse

Photos by Diane Pattie

Why do so many people turn to writing and what will you gain by sharing a special piece of yourself in our new Village Neighbors Writing Contest?

I decided to ask some of the 175 members of the Writer's League of The Villages how writing has helped them over the years. What I've learned is that writing is powerful medicine whose influence transcends years and lives.

Sometimes people who think they hate writing are surprised at its therapeutic power.

William Russell – President Elect of Writers League of The Villages and Author of *The Guardian of the Tomb Trilogy*.



In 1986, Bill was laid off from his 20-year job as a support contractor with the United States Navy. The shock of the layoff, the sense of not being valued, was devastating to Bill. Not working for a month and feeling hyper, he didn't know what to do with himself.

One day while visiting his son, Bill heard the front door slam open and then slam shut. His grandson raced through the kitchen and down into the cellar. He asked his son what was happening and was told six-

year-old Stephen was terrified of thunder storms and was looking for the lowest and safest place to hide. Bill joined his grandson in the cellar and saw him hunkered down by the oil burner, terrified. He explained there was nothing to be afraid of and eventually his grandson followed him up the stairs.

At home a few days later, Bill began to think of that lowest, deepest part of the cellar where his grandson had hid. He had been reading about Egyptian tombs, and the two thoughts merged together into a 'wow' – the birth of a story. He found himself writing feverishly. It took 30 days to complete the rough draft, and to his surprise, he felt great – completely happy and content for the first time in months.

Bill said, "I felt motivated again and soon found another job. Even though I didn't get back to the book for three years, writing the story inspired by my grandson, Stephen, helped me bridge the time when I had lost one job and found another.

"That time was almost like the loss of a life. Writing helped me overcome that problem by allowing me to focus on something that was fun and rewarding. Now it's like a bug, an itch. I have things to say and I feel so much satisfaction looking at the finished product. When I got a copy of my first book, *Guardian of the Tomb*, it was unbelievably exciting. I couldn't wait to show



The Writers League of The Villages provides a wonderful opportunity to exchange ideas and learn from other experts in the writing field. Seen here are several members of the Writers League of The Villages.



These books were written by members of the Writers League of The Villages. As it is with most writers, many find it therapeutic to put pen to paper.

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my grandkids and my son and daughter.

"I feel as if I can accomplish something other than my profession, something that my family will enjoy forever. In the beginning, writing overcame my sense of loss. I still do it today because I love the ability to be creative and share my stories."

Childhood sometimes makes us want to escape.

Barbara Phillips
– Writers
League of The
Villages and
Author of *The
Space Darling
Series* and *Blue
Wizard Quest
Series*.



Barbara Phillips began writing by thanking a library for an enjoyable visit. She was ecstatic when she saw her letter posted on the library wall. She never dreamed writing would help her for the rest of her life.

When she was younger, Barbara's father was in a horrible accident leaving him with multiple back fractures. He was placed in a cast for six months and during that period his doctor prescribed alcohol to help deal with the pain.

Barbara's father became an alcoholic and she often retreated to her writing as a safe haven. It gave her control of her life and her dreams.

She always wanted to explore how much she could do and writing gave her the ability to become what she wanted. She often resented her father's alcoholism and its effects on her life, but when she got older, she learned about her father being encouraged to drink by his doctor

and realized his illness wasn't his or her fault.

Now a college professor and teacher, Barbara writes to empower women.

"(Initially) writing was an escape, but now it's just plain fun."

Sometimes the reasons people write are less related to the past than to the circumstances of life today. Mary Ellen Taylor has found that writing keeps her relationship with her family close though they are separated by distance.

**Mary Ellen
Taylor – Writers
League of
The Villages
and Author of
*Animal Tracks***



"I have had many conversations with Villagers who lament that while they love The Villages, they miss their grandchildren. I too, felt the pangs of being an absentee grandmother while still living in Delaware. Our daughter is married to an Air Force officer. Hence, her family, including our four grandchildren moves frequently. Seeing the family only twice a year didn't fulfill the desire to maintain family ties.

"The idea of writing a book with the grandchildren came to me in the middle of the night. It took three years from presenting the idea to actually getting it published. Our writing workshops via the telephone, US Mail and the Internet created a bond for life (with my grandchildren). Through writing (the book) *Animal Tracks*, our love for one another continues to flourish."

It truly was a team effort – Mary

Ellen wrote the poetry, 11-year-old Kirsten performed the animal research, eight-year-old Zachary did the illustrations and three-year-old Nathan and five-year-old Josiah added several animal illustrations of their own as well as dictating their animal descriptions that would be included in the book.

The book begins with a Forward explaining its history and how it came to fruition. The last paragraph of that Forward sums it all up for Mary Ellen.

"We hope that this book will serve as a model while encouraging other grandparents to reach out to their grandchildren to create a life-long bond through writing and illustrating a special book."

Sometimes writing offers a way to express love, loss and hope. It can also be a way of solving problems and expressing feelings in a relationship.

**Gail Braman –
Writers League
of The Villages
and Author
of *BALLS!*
(*Confessions
of a Rural Golf
Course Owner*)**



Gail had the terrible experience of losing her twin sister in 1998. That prompted her to write a beautiful, moving piece for Chicken Soup for the Sister's Soul. "I wrote a memorial tribute for her and for my husband who died in 2008. These were extremely cathartic experiences for me."

Gail also wrote to resolve problems. "One of the major ways my husband and I would work out very thorny issues would be to write him these long letters while he went into his 'man cave' to

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contemplate my displeasure or our disagreement.”

Writing has a very practical side too, as Gail stated, “Writing for me has always been a way to ‘look at’ painful times and try to put them in perspective.”

Writing has many benefits, but most authors always hope something will live on beyond us, one of the dreams on our ‘bucket list’.

Ellie Totten – Writers League of The Villages and Author of Lake Charm and Buried Secrets.



“I’ve always been in awe how someone could create a story that would live on for generations. I envied their gift and wished I had

that capability. An unfortunate situation occurred in my family that ignited the flame,” Ellie explained.

“My sister-in-law was stricken with breast cancer, and while she was undergoing treatment, she wrote stories. She was a gifted story-teller, and had a wonderful imagination. Maryann never published a book, but wrote therapeutically. She shared with me her last story. It was three-quarters finished. She told me how she wanted it to end.

“Unfortunately, her illness took her from us. Her story remained unfinished. A couple of years after her passing, I asked my brother if I could complete it for her as a tribute. Of course it would be in her name, and not mine. However, it was met with resistance by her daughter, my niece. I respected her wishes and nixed the idea, but a friend of mine suggested I try to

write my own story, so that’s what spurred me on.

“Moving to The Villages gave me the opportunity to join writing groups, take classes, and accomplish a dream on my bucket list.”

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We have touched upon only a few of the many compelling reasons why so many of us write. Now it is your turn. Village Neighbors Magazine and The Writer’s League of the Villages invites you to share your special story.

Whatever your reason, whatever your skill, this is your chance to join the millions of writers who have felt the sense of satisfaction that a part of their lives will be shared by their children, grandchildren and beyond. Thank you for being willing to share your life with your Village friends and the future. Have fun as you join us in spreading a love of reading and writing.

It’s your turn now. ❖

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