

# Stories from 'Within the Circle' break through to reality

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I remember...  
    *"...when I first started smoking weed."*  
    *"...my world before I got clean/sober. Bad, bad choices..."*  
    *"...late nights in my room with a can of ether..."*  
    *"...the day when we were to bring our dads to school. Mine in jail for 10 years of my life."*

What these people remember isn't always pleasant. In fact, it can be downright, soul-searingly painful.

But it's reality. A reality they are willing to acknowledge through the cathartic process of writing. And some of them, after writing their stories, are willing to share them with others.

Several stories will be shared in a very public way this weekend as part of the Hempfield High School Dance Theatre production "No Limits."

Snippets of these and other memories will be heard during a dance number titled "Revolution: From Within the Circle," which features audio recordings of the writers reading what

they wrote and video scenes of writing hands and words on a page. Dancers move to the spoken words.

The stories are told thanks to the work done by Landisville Middle School teacher Scott Feifer, who conducts "writing circles" with a variety of support groups in the community.

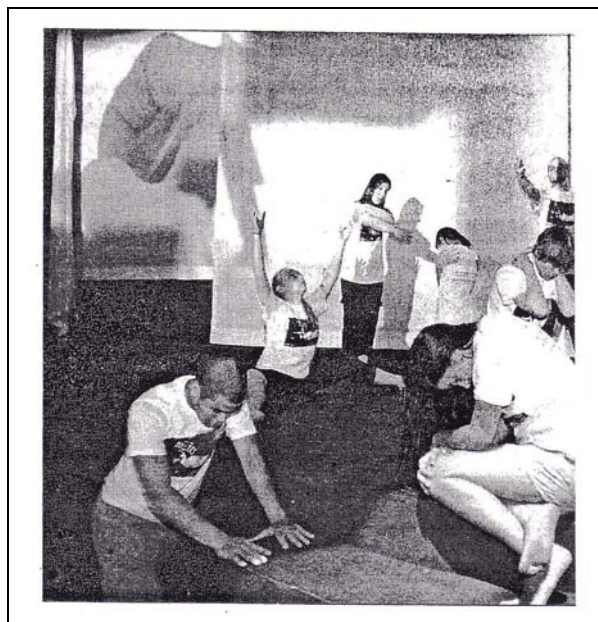
Some writings come from young people — the Manos House drug rehabilitation program for teenage boys, the Lancaster County Youth Intervention Center (Barnes Hall), and Project Forward Leap, an educational program for middle schoolers.

Others come from adults — English as New Language classes; Gatehouse for Women, a drug and alcohol rehab facility; and the Domestic Violence Services of Lancaster County shelter.

But all remain anonymous for the dance.

The writing produced in these writing circles is a "fast, reflective, free writing" done in eight to 10 minutes in response to the prompt "I remember..." The writings are then read aloud by those willing to share a private piece

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of themselves with others in the group.

And no, this English teacher doesn't correct grammar and spelling (although excerpts in this story are). Rather, the idea is "to have people's stories be heard and shared," says Feifer.

"The things that come out of people in those nine minutes are astounding," says Feifer.

A memory could be from five minutes or five years ago. People write about what they love, their biggest regret, what hasn't killed them. And the emotions are likely to be raw. Like the memories of this writer:

*"I remember being beat until I couldn't sit down any more. ...I remember having to run up the street knocking on doors to ask them to call the cops. I remember looking into my stepdad's eyes and wanting to kill him. ...I remember being locked into a room for days. I remember being hungry...I remember not having a father. I remember when my mom told me she was gay. ...I remember the day I laid all of this down for God to pick up and feeling like he never did, so I picked (it) back up along*

*with the anger, strife and pure hatred."*

But not all excerpts are heart-rending.

Others have a playful tone, such as a piece about "my legs," which is used in its entirety during the 16-minute dance number.

*"I remember my legs so small. Fuzzy down covering, full of life and joy. ...I remember my legs shaved and tan. They took me where my attention went. ...I remember my legs running. Afraid to stop, afraid to find a bad place or good. ...I remember my legs in love. I look at the differences of mine and his..."*

Then there's the person who describes "going on stage for the first time to dance. I been dancing forever." (Which is how the kids at Hempfield feel right about now.)

Other voices express more sobering events and sentiments:

*"...me and pops duking it out. I remember the pain inside hurt more than the broken nose..."*

*"I remember my mom praying for hours in a mindless monotone in her room, trying to silence whatever voices she heard. ..."*

*"I feel stripped sometimes (as if) I'm missing pieces, that I can't find, and I want to, but I can't find them. ..."*

*"...regret and looking on the past doesn't do anything but*

*keep you there. There's a lot of people I wish I could apologize to and take back what I did, but I can't. ...you're stuck in the present with the future to look towards. ..."*

Feifer started doing writing circles at school nine years ago. For the past six years, he has worked with numerous groups, including Clare House, Milagro House and Bridge House for women, TLC (Transitional Living Center, formerly Harb Adult), Vantage/Guadenzia drug rehab, and Summit Quest Academy.

He's also worked with acting students, hospice workers, grief groups, nursing home residents and prisoners. In addition, he's gone to Philadelphia and worked with detention center residents and inmates through the Mural Arts Program.

"I'll go anywhere people will do this with me," says Feifer, who volunteers up to four nights a week.

"People are prime to reflect on what they've lived. People who are hoping and struggling to change their lives, as we all are," adds Feifer. "I leave so much richer because people encourage me with their courage. They inspire me with their resilience. It's really stunning."