



Marty Heisey/NEW ERA

Scott D. Feifer teaches a creative writing class at the county's Youth Intervention Center recently.

Teacher helping abused, addicted with gospel of therapeutic writing

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"I remember"

Those two words can open sentences about almost anything — ranging from what someone had for breakfast to someone's recall about seeing a mother thrown down stairs by a drunken stepfather.

And Scott D. Feifer employs those two words to evoke healing.

In his spare time, Feifer, a Landisville Middle School English teacher, travels to shelters for the homeless and abused, treatment centers for drug and alcohol addictions, prisons, and the county's Youth Intervention Center. At those places, he preaches a gospel of therapeutic writing.

"I feel there is a deep need

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Scott D. Feifer

for people to tell their stories — to be heard," said Feifer, 39.

"There is something about writing it down and claiming it as part of our past," he told a group of girls living at the county's Youth Intervention Center.

"Writing is about not being trapped by regret," he said to

the girls. "You can't undo what you have done, but you can't make a prison of it."

In his Writing Circles program, people pick up pencils at each session and — in eight minutes of writing — gradually bare their souls.

At a recent session, for instance, the girls at the shelter wrote things they might never have expressed. Then, with the understanding that everyone would be supported and confidences would be kept, some of them read aloud.

One girl wrote about the day she found out she was pregnant. Her mother cried. Her boyfriend claimed the baby was not his.

Another girl wrote a prayer to God. She thanked the Lord

Please see **WRITING** page B2

Writing

Continued from B1

for taking away the suicide attempts that followed her rape by her stepfather.

A third girl described being punched in the face by a mother high on drugs.

"I remember being hurt so many times," the girl wrote. "I remember wanting to cry."

Several of the girls did cry.

"The power of this writing is about the truth-telling," Feifer said.

Writing about events in their past — their joys, sufferings, failures and triumphs — allows them to put down shame and move forward, he said.

It also shows them they are not alone.

Along with the eight girls at the recent Youth Intervention Center session, two staff members also participated in the course.

One wrote of losing her sister. The other, in phrases punctuated with "I don't know what to write," told of the painful separation from her husband and the holidays that never again will be celebrated as a family.

"Every one of these stories is a survivor story," Feifer declared.

His own story is a survivor story, he freely told the group. A slender man in baggy, olive-colored clothes and sandals, Feifer told the girls he weighed about three times as much when he was a student at McCaskey High School in the early '80s.

He said he still carries the scars

on his self-image.

To Feifer, scars are a powerful thing. They are the physical evidence that a wound has healed, he told the group.

"I don't want to forget the good, the bad and the ugly, because all of these things — for better or worse — made me the person I am today," he said.

One of the girls, age 16, said afterward that it felt good to get things off her chest. But, she said, they are still with her.

Feifer said her memories will always be with her. But by writing and talking about them, her relationship with those events will change, he said.

Scott Martin, who coordinates the 40-some different programs at the center, said Feifer's stands out.

At many of the programs, the kids just sit there, he said.

"It takes a lot to get these kids to open up," he said.

Martin called Feifer's program "a blessing." Feifer first came to the Youth Intervention Center unsolicited.

He meets with center teens one or two times a week. He goes to his programs at the other locations monthly.

He said his contribution is not an unselfish act. He leaves each class emotionally drained but also spiritually refreshed, he said.

Feifer makes no claims that he can make pain go away.

"I'm not a therapist. I make that very clear. I can't fix my own problems, but I think there is something healing about writing."