

POWER OF WORDS

Local author offers a chance to learn 'radical self-care'

By Ariana Kramer

An award-winning poet and playwright, Debora Seidman is no stranger to the power of words. She has taught writing for the past two decades, and her teaching has given her insight into writing as a tool for transforming lives. Seidman has taken that insight and crafted unique workshops for those who are new to writing – as well as established writers.

Recently, Seidman designed a 21-day course called “Come Back Home Through Writing,” available through the DailyOM, an online platform. She is also working on a companion book to the 21-day course that will tell the stories of its creation.

“Come Back Home Through Writing” is a series of daily creative writing exercises, personal reflection and what Seidman calls “radical self-care” practices. Due to its online platform, the course can be started anytime and, although it is designed to be taken over a period of three weeks, the lessons can also be taken over a longer span of time. The course is offered through the DailyOM at a sliding scale fee from \$10 to \$40. To register, visit dailyom.com/cgi-bin/courses/courseoverview.cgi?cid=750.

Seidman says she chose the phrase “radical self-care” because the dictionary definition of radical means “getting to the root.” “I use that word – radical self-care – because in the courses I teach, self-care is a very important part of how I approach writing. ... Radical self-care is getting at the root of self-care ... There are certain practices I suggest, and it’s also an invitation for participants to explore what they need. The real self-care you need isn’t a fixed thing — it changes. In winter, it’s one thing; in summer



COURTESY PHOTO

Taos author Debora Seidman

another. If you’re pregnant, it’s one thing; if you’re grieving your mother another. Life is fluid and our needs change.”

Seidman continued, “There are exercises I will suggest, but then there are exercises that will give a participant the opportunity to ask – and find the answers through writing – ‘What is my body saying?’”

As a young adult, Seidman attended writing workshops taught by Pat Schneider, the founder of Amherst Writers & Artists (AWA) in Massachusetts. Seidman was trained by Schneider and became certified to lead writing workshops through AWA in the mid-1990s. She received special training in working with underserved populations and taught her first group for people, like herself, who were living with chronic illness.

She was then invited to teach a workshop for women trauma survivors with the Greenwood Trauma Program. She co-taught the workshop with a psychotherapist.

“We were not asking people to write about their most traumatic memories,” Seidman clarified.

“We were giving a very safe, well-supported opportunity for women to write.”

Seidman says her work with trauma survivors was her foundation for both teaching and “for seeing the power of writing to transform people’s lives.” Tears came to her eyes as she recalled witnessing women who had “profound silence around the trauma and abuse” they had experienced. Watching them begin to reclaim their voices was “very, very moving,” Seidman said.

Following her work with women trauma survivors, Seidman began to incorporate her previous training in acupuncture and study of the human body into her writing workshops. She continued to specialize in creating an emotionally safe setting while integrating her knowledge of the body and mind into a workshop called “Writing the Body Home.” She held the classes in a yoga or dance studio and brought movement and rest into her teaching.

In 2005, Seidman came to Taos through a Wurlitzer artist residency. While in New Mexico, she visited Chaco Canyon. Her experience there inspired her to develop a new

workshop called “Writing the Prayer of Your Life.”

“‘Writing the Prayer of Your Life’ workshops built on what I was already doing, but ... heightened it to another level,” Seidman said. “People were drawn to ‘Writing the Prayer of Your Life’ at pivotal moments in their life. I wasn’t advertising it this way, but that’s what happened. And, because I had experience working with trauma survivors, I was pretty comfortable with anything people came with.”

Her 21-day course is a distillation of her many years of leading experiential writing workshops. For those who take “Come Back Home Through Writing,” she offers an eight-week follow-up course. Seidman also works as a coach and mentor in private sessions and facilitates a group for those working on manuscripts. As a coach and mentor, Seidman specializes in working with those, especially women, who have difficulty trusting their voices because of trauma they have experienced.

Seidman holds a master’s degree in playwriting from Goddard College and is the author of “The Lilac Minyan,” a play exploring themes of profound loss, grief and the strength of friendship. The award-winning play first premiered at the New Works Festival in Brooklyn in 2000. It was subsequently produced at Immigrant’s Theatre Project in New York City and at the National Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Massachusetts. In 2013, Metta Theatre staged “The Lilac Minyan” in Taos with actors Chris Maher and Nena Salazar. The full production was directed by Bruce McIntosh with artistic guidance by Seidman.

A Taos resident for many years, Seidman now divides her time between Taos and her home city of Cleveland, Ohio. For more information, visit deboraseidman.com.