



WRITEGIRL IN THE NEWS

Los Angeles Times

October 21, 2005
Associated Press Story in the Calendar section.

BEE Magazine

October, 2005
Feature article on WriteGirl in their premier issue
Only at Borders and Barnes & Noble newsstands.

Los Angeles Daily News

June 24, 2005
Feature article on WriteGirl

The Los Angeles Independent

April 2005
Feature article.

Family Circle Magazine

September 2004
Front of book profile on WriteGirl, highlighting
WriteGirl anthology, *Bold Ink*.

Poets & Writers Magazine

May/June 2004
"Writers Give Back" article:
<http://www.pw.org/mag/0405/wald.htm>

Los Angeles Times

April 4, 2004
Feature article Sunday, April 4th – California section

New Black City Radio

April 4, 2004
Interview on this national radio show.

KPFK Radio 90.7 FM

March 22, 2004
"Shelflife" with Marcos McPeck Villatorro.

STAR 98.7 Radio FM

February 8, 2004
Executive Director Keren Taylor interviewed by
DJ Skip Kelly on L.A. pop radio station

Westside Life Magazine

Winter 2003-04
Feature article.

PBS Television "In The Mix"

November 29, 2003
Episode "Arts Education...A+" aired across the
country on PBS stations, featuring Writegirl.

Written By Magazine

October 13, 2003
Writers Guild of America magazine, profiles a
WriteGirl mentoring pair.

Arts & Healing Network Online

October, 2003
Online interview with Keren Taylor:
http://www.artheals.org/news_2003/oct03.php

Daily Candy

August 11, 2003
Featuring volunteer opportunities with WriteGirl.

Hope Magazine

March 2003
Profile of Keren Taylor and WriteGirl





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April 27, 2005

WriteGirl: Developing Female Scribes

By KEVIN HERRERA, The Independent Staff

Pretending to be a serious yoga instructor, 17-year-old Sakara El ordered actor Jason Ritter to drop on the floor and “do the dog,” a popular stretching technique that looks something like a canine on crack digging holes in the dirt. As gifted as his late father, John Ritter, was at physical comedy, Jason did what he was told and flamboyantly flopped to the linoleum and started scratching, much to the delight of the all-female audience, which erupted with teenage laughter.

Even though she was supposed to remain in character, El couldn’t help but smile too, but it wasn’t because of Ritter’s performance. El was smiling out of pure joy. Finally real actors were performing a scene that she wrote, something El had dreamt of for years but never thought possible.

“That was just crazy to me,” the senior at Hamilton High School said as she sat on a bench outside the Yucca Community Center in Hollywood. “I get so frustrated with writing sometimes, but it seems like it’s all worth it when the actors bring your story to life. ... All I want to do is write. I don’t want to do anything else.”

El’s new-found love of creating screenplays couldn’t have happened, she said, without WriteGirl, a non-profit mentoring program that unites young girls interested in writing with female journalists, screenwriters, publicists and novelists.

The goals of WriteGirl are to get more young women interested in writing while helping to build their self esteem and provide the language and critical-thinking skills they need to succeed later in life.

“Whether they become writers or not is not significant,” said Keren Taylor, the founder and executive director of WriteGirl. “What is significant is that they be more able to handle themselves in any situation and being able to achieve their goals — which seems like such a lofty ideal, but that’s what it’s really all about.” As local school districts scramble to find funding for the arts, WriteGirl is filling the void, said Taylor, who got the idea after finding herself unemployed and searching for meaning in her life.

“Most public schools and private schools don’t have a creative writing program, and funding for arts and crafts programs is almost non-existent, so we really feel like we are fulfilling a need, and by mentoring these girls one-on-one we are not only giving them an outlet to express themselves “But we are showing them there is a person out there who cares about them and wants them to succeed,” she said. “Those two ingredients are magical.”

Taylor started the organization three years ago with only 13 volunteers. Now she has roughly 100 volunteers and over 50 students from all areas of the Los Angeles Unified School District.

(Cont...)



(Los Angeles Independent, page 2)

WriteGirl runs mostly on the energy of volunteers, Taylor said, but it has picked up significant donors in the last two years, including the LAUSD, the city of Los Angeles, and the Annenberg and Ahmanson foundations. The organization's budget is \$250,000, but Taylor said they have been able to raise only a third of that this year.

To enter the program, mentors and mentees must fill out an application, which they can find online at www.writegirl.org.

Mentors are screened and then paired with a girl. The two are required to meet once a week to discuss their writing, which can include screenplays, poems, fiction and nonfiction.

Each month the mentors and mentees gather at the Yucca Community Center for a writing workshop. Each workshop includes a different theme and the mentors and mentees then have to go through a series of writing exercises that end with a public reading of their work.

On a recent Saturday, the topic was creating characters and writing dialogue, with actors present to perform the scenes.

"This wasn't what I expected at all. It was pretty enjoyable," said Kamaria Holden, 12, a student at Palms Middle School who made her first visit to WriteGirl Saturday. "I thought it was going to be more about talking about characters and how to create characters. I didn't expect to have so much fun."

Melanie Gonzalez has been a WriteGirl mentee for two years and she credits it with not only improving her writing — she loves to write fantasy and horror — but also with raising her self esteem.

"I participate more in class and I debate in government more," she said. "I want to be a journalist now. I want to inform people so they don't have to be ignorant, and I think it is important to utilize the first amendment because a lot of people don't have that right."

Gonzalez, the first in her family to go to college, will be heading to San Francisco State University in the fall.

Taylor said 100 percent of her girls go on to college.

While the program helps teens achieve their dreams, it offers mentors a lot as well.

"I'm mentoring Sakara, but she's forcing me to write too," said mentor Jaime Buddle, 25, a part-time screenwriter and scene editor for reality programming at MTV. "This is great because I get to give something back, but at the same time I get support and the motivation to write myself. It's like we're a team. Everyone should have that."

Buddle and El are working together outside of the workshops on a screenplay.

"It's going to be a romantic comedy," El said.

Those who are not as ambitious as El can still get their work published in the WriteGirl anthology called "Pieces of Me: The Voices of WriteGirl," which is on sale at several local book stores.

"I think they should have more programs like this in school because it's really fun and it can actually help your English and help you organize your thoughts better," Holden said. "I'm definitely coming back."



Do the Write Thang

<http://www.dailycandy.com/friend.jsp?jsessionid=6178C9EF6D6197EEB09C027169ED0E00?loc=top&ArticleId=20861&city=2>

08.11.03

Dear Diary,

Foxy guy in mailroom smiled at me today! After work, gorged on leftover Chinese and fell asleep on the couch while watching Friends.

Got a knack for writing? Wish you could put it to better use?

WriteGirl, an L.A.-based not-for-profit mentoring program, pairs writers with young women from public high schools. The mission? To teach writing, critical thinking, and communication skills in monthly daylong workshops and weekly one-on-one meetings.

And the rewards aren't just academic. The girls encounter successful female role models and they develop the courage to pursue a variety of career options.

Not a writer? Not an excuse. There are plenty of volunteer opportunities for the less-than-Shakespearean do-gooder, like curriculum development, fundraising, administrative support, member outreach, and event planning. Check it out.

After all, doesn't benevolence taste a little better than last week's lo mein?

For more information or to volunteer, go to writegirl.org.



HOPE Magazine
March/April 2003

A Writer's Worthshop

by Stephanie Bowen

Two weeks after Keren Taylor got a pink slip at her Internet job, a group of thirteen women gathered in her living room to brainstorm how to combine her love of writing and her passion to help young girls. Soon after, Taylor launched WriteGirl, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit in which women writers mentor girls one-on-one through creative self-expression.

“WriteGirl is about self-empowerment, creativity, identify, culture and community,” says Taylor. “Those are the themes underlying all of our workshops.” Girls are recruited from fourteen public middle and high schools in a predominantly Asian and Latino neighborhood of Los Angeles. For many, English is their second language, making WriteGirl as much about literacy as creative writing.

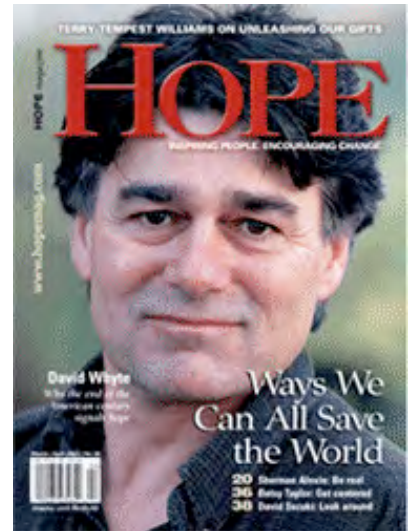
With more than fifty matches and its second season well underway, WriteGirl has a long list of accomplishments: publication of a 100-page literary anthology, *Threads* ; a public reading at a prominent Hollywood performance venue; and a variety of writing workshops on journaling, screenwriting, creative nonfiction, and poetry. Financial support comes from nonprofits, the Open Meadows Foundation and the Beyond the Bell Program of the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Taylor works full-time as executive director of WriteGirl but has yet to see a paycheck. Her commitment, combined with the core volunteer staff, and mentors who collectively contribute about 1,700 hours a month, keeps the organization running. Many of the accomplished writer volunteers — Maria Elena Fernandez, of the LA Times; Shawn Schepps, author of screenplays for *Encino Man*, *Son-in-Law*, and *Drumline* — point to someone in their childhood who encouraged them as writers, and how different their lives would have been had WriteGirl existed when they were teens.

“I used to hate to write,” says Pamela Becerra, age sixteen. That's hard to believe when reading her “Mud Under My Feet” in *Threads*. “I'm in the countryside. It's pouring rain and getting dark,” read the first two lines. “My clothing, which Momma made out of blankets, is getting dirty.” Now, Becerra says, writing is easy.

But WriteGirl struggles. “We are in start-up mode. We are nearly invisible to the public and the community and are operating on something thinner than a shoestring,” says Taylor. The realities of running a dynamic organization often take their toll. “Somehow my life of things to do, people to call, proposals to research and write, is continually growing,” says Taylor. “Some nights, my husband will knock on the wall at 2 a.m. and I just have to shut down even though I'm not done.”

A songwriter and poet, Taylor says it's the power of the written word that lights the spark, and sharing that passion is where the magic begins. “When you add the dimension of having this dynamic group of women commit their energy toward helping girls,” says Taylor, “you have a very powerful community at work.”



Los Angeles Times

On The Internet: WWW.LATIMES.COM

SUNDAY, APRIL 4, 2004

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Writing Frees At-Risk Girls to Be Themselves

A nonprofit program allows professional women to offer insights and encouragement to those who need a hand.

By MICHAEL CROSS-BARNET
Times Staff Writer

The brightly painted Yucca Park Community Center, a wild splash of color, stands out against the rest of its drab Hollywood neighborhood. Inside, two tribes sit at opposite ends of a large room. They are worlds apart — but not for long.

On one side, about 40 teenage girls, most from crowded schools in gritty neighborhoods, whisper, stare into space or scribble furiously in purple and beige journals. Fingers nervously flip pencils back and forth. On the other side, a like number of professional women — screenwriters, lawyers, entrepreneurs, advertising executives — also chat quietly, passing to jot a few lines in notebooks.

Wary glances and nervous smiles pass across the room; many of these girls and women have never met before. Yet, by day's end, brought together by a program called WriteGirl, they will have bared their souls to one another. Today, adolescent awkwardness will melt in choruses of laughter and affirmation. Shrinking violets who might not raise a hand in class will confide in strangers about the pain brought on by a parent's absence, a friend's drug use or the everyday angst of school, hormones and bad hair days.

Egged on by workshop leaders, girls will raise their voices and their pens in celebration of themselves.

"I feel like dancing and never stopping," one young woman offers when asked for a positive statement starting with the word "I."

"I feel like laughing my guts out with absolutely no fear," a second chimes in.

"I'm a shirt that has been washed over and over — because it's a favorite," says another.

For five or six hours, these girls will talk, listen, learn and share. Most of all, they will write: journal entries, lines of poetry, personal essays, fragments of



ANACLETO RAPPING/LOS ANGELES TIMES

EXPRESSION: Taylor Gray writes in her mentor's journal. The program pairs successful women with girls, especially those in danger of failure or trouble, helping them escape the pressures of adolescence and discover their artistic voices.

short stories. The founder of this "literacy program in disguise" didn't name it WriteGirl for nothing.

Laid off from her online sales job in the fall of 2001, Koren Taylor needed a new outlet for her abundant energy. She recalled the satisfaction she had gotten as the mentor of a girl when she lived in New York City. And that memory inspired her to create an opportunity for girls — especially those at risk of failure or trouble — to escape the pressures of adolescence, discover their artistic voices and just be themselves.

Two months after losing her job, Taylor brought together 20 women and 20 girls for a creative writing workshop. WriteGirl was born.

Since then, the nonprofit organization — funded by the Los Angeles Unified School District and the Annenberg Foundation, among other sources — has matched nearly 200 girls with successful women from around

the L.A. area who volunteer as one-on-one mentors. WriteGirl also has monthly workshops during the school year in which all participants write and exchange ideas. And it is presenting six public readings in 2003-04, up from two its first year.

Perhaps WriteGirl's crowning achievements are its publications: "Threads" and "Bold Ink," two glossy, professionally designed books in which girls' and mentors' writing appears side by side. A third volume is due out in June.

"Unlike traditional mentoring, we focus everything on writing," says one WriteGirl mentor, Allison Deegan, a marketing consultant and writer. "What I've seen in these workshops is the freeing aspects of that... For a lot of these girls, this is the one place they feel comfortable."

The mentors and their "mentees," as the girls are called, often form a special bond, with the adult sometimes a big sister, sometimes a literary muse. They

even help with things like college applications. Fairfax High student Mara Bochenek says her mentor, Shawn Schepps, is more than a writing coach.

"I can talk to her," Bochenek says. "If I get into a fight with my parents, I can always call her, and she makes me feel better."

Bochenek and Schepps, a screenwriter whose credits include "Drumline," discovered a shared taste in movies and went to see "Hedwig and the Angry Inch" together. The gender-bending theme of that movie seems to find its way into Bochenek's poem "Tee Hee," which starts:

*I wear a tie people think
I'm a guy
I wear a skirt people think
I'm a girl.*

The women who run WriteGirl say its relentless concentration on creative writing boosts girls' confidence and communication skills, while its emphasis on community-building and self-respect reduces their chance of

dropping out of school, abusing drugs or getting pregnant.

A supportive, all-female environment is crucial to Taylor's philosophy, because "boys do all the talking" when boys and girls mix in school and elsewhere, she says. "There's real value in having a place where girls can be girls."

By 1:30 p.m. in the Yucca community center — WriteGirl's home since June, after it outgrew its space at the Breeze Community Center — the ice has finally broken.

With sunlight trickling through the beveled-glass windows and yellow and pink balloons dangling festively from the ceiling, small groups of teens and women sit around tables sharing notes on topics like "What you should know about me" and "Who do you admire most in the world?"

A little later, they will listen to music ranging from Tuvan throat singing to flamenco guitar, letting the evocative sounds

inspire words on the page. Then it's on to a lesson in the many methods of keeping journals.

Certain themes come up again and again as girls of different races, ethnicities and class backgrounds talk about why they are passing up the mall or the park to spend a Saturday afternoon indoors with pen, paper and their thoughts.

"They point to writing as a way to cope with stress, anger and other powerful, negative feelings. They describe the WriteGirl community as a safe place to spill their guts — where they can be sure that they'll be supported rather than judged."

"Everyone here is equal," Lovely Umayam says. "Everyone just gets along."

In Umayam's case, the program didn't just give the Marshall High sophomore an outlet for self-expression; it also led to her goal of a career in journalism. Before getting involved in WriteGirl, "I expected to be a secretary or something," she says. The program "helped me find what I want to do in my life."

Umayam's contributions to the WriteGirl books include a short meditation on being invisible and a poem about the surprising similarities between boys and books:

*Some books are confusing
With unexpected twists and turns*

*Like the mind of a player,
Trying to worm his way out of something...*

Umayam doesn't limit herself to journalism and poetry, however. She's writing a novel too.

Alli List, a student at Luther Burbank Middle School with a sharp gaze and a T-shirt that says, "Boys make good pets," finds that words work best when they're connected with music. For List, who writes poetry and composes songs with the help of her mentor, songwriter Michelle Lewis, the ability to put thoughts down on paper means never having to feel alone.

List surely speaks for many of the WriteGirls when she says: "Writing is like having a best friend who you can talk to at 3:30 in the morning."

The website is www.writegirl.org. "Bold Ink" is available on Amazon.com and at Vroman's in Pasadena, Skylight Books in Los Feliz and Portrait of a Bookstore in Studio City.)



Circle This

What's Up • What's Hot • News to Use

By Margaret Jaworski

WriteGirls

"Mentoring gives me the chance to nurture a young girl who's finding her way in the world," says Roberta Grant, a Los Angeles-based freelance writer and WriteGirl volunteer. "To see her respond and grow warms my heart and makes me feel useful." Grant is one of 100-plus women writers who give their time and talent to mentor teenage girls attending high school in central Los Angeles. During the nine-month program, the girls meet weekly in one-on-one sessions with their mentors and participate in monthly workshops where they share their creative expressions while developing and improving their writing skills. The WriteGirl experience isn't solely literary. It's life changing as well. "Many of these girls live in less than optimal situations," says WriteGirl founder Keren Taylor, a poet and songwriter. "The girls' self-confidence is low and their fear of abandonment is high," she explains. Through the "tenacious commitment" of the staff and mentors, the girls learn to trust others and believe in themselves. And so do the mentors. "Writers are a quirky group with their own insecurities," notes Taylor. The proof of the program's impact is in the writing. The girls' work now appears in two collections: *Bold Ink: Collected Voices of Women and Girls* and *Pieces of Me: The Voices of Write-Girl*. Read excerpts at www.writegirl.org. All proceeds from book sales benefit the nonprofit program.



WriteGirl pairs women writers with teen girls eager to improve their creative expression. Pictured at left: Mentor Roberta Grant (right) with teen Anna Liu.

Stimulate Your Sentences!

Below, some tools to energize your self-expression from *Bold Ink: Collected Voices of Women and Girls*.

- **Songwriting.** Write a lullaby to a small child. Consider what kind of rhymes and rhythms would be soothing.
- **Journalism.** Interview your grandmother or the owner of a neighborhood store. Prepare provocative questions to jump-start the conversation.
- **Comedic writing.** Think of two opposite characters (for example, a vegetarian and a butcher) and put them in a situation where they have to talk to each other—e.g., a blind date. Have fun with the differences in the characters' voices as they attempt to communicate.



Photos: Michael Kraus (bottom left); Everett Collection (bottom right).

www.familycircle.com

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It Gets Lived

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