

Guideposts

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Every Day Spirit

By Mami Rader, February 26, 2010

My 14-Year-Old Writing Instructor

It took several hours for Guadalupe to look at me. I focused on the iridescent green shadow on her lids while her espresso colored eyes held down the floor.

We were both participating in a fiction and non-fiction workshop, given by the non-profit organization [WriteGirl](#). Founded by songwriter, vocalist and poet Keren Taylor in 2001, WriteGirl promotes confidence and self-expression through creative writing to empower inner-city, at-risk teen girls in Los Angeles.

WriteGirl participation doesn't only result in better self-esteem, more positive behavior, increased communication skills and sharpened creative talents for these teen girls.

In a school district where dropout percentages are 60%-75%, WriteGirl has a stunning 100% success rate of not only graduating their teen participants from high school, but sending them all to college. All of them. Every single girl.

I was thrilled to finally be able to volunteer for an organization I felt passionate about—I'd been wanting for years to be involved in something that resonated deeply within me. Like [GUIDEPOSTS](#), this organization is clearly making a difference—and changing these young girls' lives in ways they and their families had never thought possible.

This past Saturday was my second workshop with WriteGirl since joining this January. After I was matched with Guadalupe at the start of the workshop, we chatted and completed several writing exercises together.

While I had to grasp at remembering my own feelings of being 14 to better relate to Guadalupe, it wasn't hard to understand her nervousness and shyness. I was just as eager to impress her and have her like me.

Guadalupe told me she missed visiting her grandmother in Honduras, that her family hadn't been able to afford a trip to visit her in the last few years. She loves eating fried bananas there, and the slow pace of life in her grandmother's small town.

As we worked on the creative writing exercises, I learned as much as she did about writing skills. While I earned a degree in communications, I learned how to write for print and broadcast news. Most of my writing has been either personal, true stories, like the ones I write for [GUIDEPOSTS](#), [ANGELS ON EARTH](#), and this blog, or the copy I write to sell things, which I use in my marketing career.

I couldn't remember the last time I wrote just to be creative, just to conjure and release words for their own deliciousness. I was blown away by how creative these teen girls were—how unedited and raw their writing was—I envied their free expression.

It was obvious at my first workshop that they were much better writers than I was, and that I would be learning from them perhaps more than they would learn from me. I was just there to encourage them and feed their self esteem, to offer unconditional love, praise, and admiration, no matter what they wrote. It wasn't hard to do.

Guadalupe still didn't look me in the eye when she handed her journal to me and asked if I'd like to read it. Of course I said yes, and marveled at her uninhibited style...un-self-conscious, deeply truthful, and unafraid to explore with words. I definitely had some things to learn from these girls about writing.

Keren had told us to never be discouraged when we thought we weren't getting through to the girls—that we made more of a difference than we thought, even if the results didn't seem apparent.

I tried to be cool and not show my elation when at the end of the day Guadalupe finally looked at me and asked if I'd be at the next workshop. My coolness didn't prevent me from giving her a hug, and telling her what a wonderful writer she was.

I will definitely be at the next workshop. If you would like to help change the life of a WriteGirl, please visit their website and purchase their most recent, and already award-winning, anthology *Silhouette*, or make a donation. Just \$25 provides writing workshop materials, including journals, for three girls.

I can promise you the writing of these amazing teens will blow you away. You might even learn something, just like this 45-year-old writer does, every single time I'm with them.