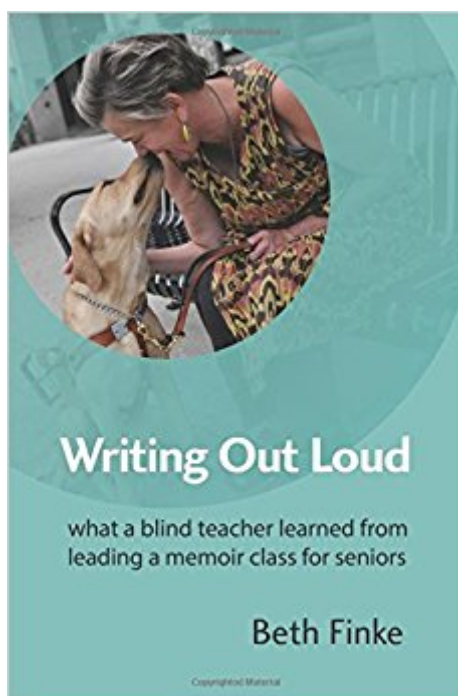


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# Writing Out Loud: What A Blind Teacher Learned From Leading A Memoir Class For Seniors



## Synopsis

You'll laugh. You'll cry. You'll write. She's never taught a class in her life. But when the City of Chicago calls on blind writer Beth Finke to teach a memoir-writing class for older adults, she reluctantly agrees. What she learns about her students, their stories, and herself will move and inspire you. Written the way Beth hears life, you will come to know and love Minerva, Wanda, Hannelore, and the whole colorful cast of characters who build a community around Beth's classes. Generously sprinkled with excerpts in her students' own voices, Beth's book will convince you to get your own stories down on paper while there's still time. "Honest, lyrical, and funny ... a beautifully-felt and deeply moving tribute to the ways sharing life stories can connect us with others, and sometimes, with ourselves." • Miriam E. Nelson, Ph.D. Bestselling author of *Strong Women Stay Young*

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## Customer Reviews

Honest, lyrical, and funny ... a beautifully-felt and deeply moving tribute to the ways sharing life stories can connect us with others, and sometimes, with ourselves. -Miriam E. Nelson, Ph.D., bestselling author of *Strong Women Stay Young*

Beth Finke is an award-winning author, teacher, and journalist. She also happens to be blind.

Beth's Seeing Eye dog, Whitney, leads her through airports and hotels to events all over

North America to speak on memoir writing, disability, workplace accessibility, and overcoming adversity. Audiences have included PepsiCo, American Library Association, United Stationers, Easterseals, The Seeing Eye, University of Chicago Medical School, and Carnegie Mellon University. In summer, Beth can be found leading writing workshops at the Northwestern University Summer Writers' Conference and at Chicago's Printers Row Lit Fest. She is the recipient of a writing fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts and the ASPCA's Henry Bergh award for children's literature. The Lisagor Award Beth won for a radio piece about the Chicago White Sox makes her the only blind woman in America to be honored for sports broadcasting, and she appeared on the Oprah Show in a short segment about working as a nude model for university art students before her writing career took off. Beth is married to Mike Knezovich. They have one grown son, Gus, and live in the Printers Row neighborhood of Chicago with Beth's Seeing Eye dog, Whitney.

Beth Finke's book demonstrates so many facets of how she enriches her life while she helps others do so alongside. The central theme that resonated with me is her resilience, and her formidable will to stay positive, generative and purposeful. Her writing stays close to the truth of how she wrestles with disappointments, but surprisingly, nothing seems to bother her for too long! For, she finds ways to soar. Like all humans, she enjoys empathy, strength and depth in the character of her senior writers, and gives voice to their lifetime of experiences. She helps bring out stories depicting the diversity in race, religion, ethnicity, culture, and socioeconomic status through history of times given the rich and long lives led by the seniors. One thought that crossed my mind was linguistic skills or vocabulary, high or low, did not seem to impact the substance of a good story by the senior citizens—as illustrated by Beth in her book. Beth weaves in the story of her adaptation to blindness and the hoops she has to jump through with iterations of seeing dogs as well as her abundant accomplishments. Her participation with NPR and WBEZ story-telling is inspirational. Having read books often set in NYC or elsewhere than in Chicago, I also enjoyed our "Second city" being in lime light through her writing. I enjoyed the depiction of the senior writer Minerva. Towards the end, as there are so many senior writers and their stories, I must admit that I lost track of them as my mind had to switch from one story to the other as I kept at it. Overall, it is a delight to read about the art of encouraging others who are finding fulfillment and human connectivity through the art of writing mini autobiographies of 500 words. It is a unique book, written by a unique woman, who refused to be trumped by blindness or any misfortune for that matter. She, instead, used those as a source of challenges to overcome. She is a force of life.

With honesty, humor, practicality, and spunky common sense, Beth puts real life in your hands with each chapter of this heart-warming book. My admiration for Beth grew with each page. Creative problem-solving used to deal with issues arising from living with blindness is something Beth has perfected. Her enthusiasm for life jumps off of every page. However, Beth is not the focus of this memoir sharing book. The participants in the classes she teaches are the stars as Beth highlights interactions with her students— their responses, hesitations, and triumphs arrived at by participating in her memoir writing classes. Through Beth's intuitive vision the reader meets a rich diversity of individuals that make-up Chicago's community. Meeting the real-life characters of Beth's classes and reading a sampling of their amazing life stories presents lessons in history that a brick and mortar school does not provide. I loved meeting these very special people as Beth shared her own stories entwined with the stories of her students. In keeping with her policy of brevity, or 500 words, Beth doesn't miss a detail. The book is thorough, informative, and very easy to read. I found myself pondering the stories I read far longer than it took to read them and found myself wanting to interact with all of her characters. While learning new ideas and life styles, I also found commonality in briefs Beth would share as she keeps it real. Her writing is authentic, warm, and engaging. I would highly recommend this book to anyone who loves people, their stories, and new adventures.

Everything in this book is just plain lovely - the laughs, the cries, the stories, the truth-telling. Beth Finke is an easy-to-read no hyperbole storyteller. Her teaching abilities shine through the stories of her students. You will feel compelled to sit down and start writing your own personal essays - and you'll be given foolproof instructions on how to do it. A great book for your book club.

This book is fabulous!!! I loved the human (and dog) interactions. The author does a great job of weaving the senior's writing assignments and histories together with her own essays and life experiences as a blind teacher/writer. Our society is so quick to ignore our elder citizens and assume they have nothing left to contribute. This book shows how wrong that assumption is. The senior writers' essays really are good. Their present lives and past experiences are amazing. I highly recommend this book.

I could not put the book down and read the entire book over a weekend. It is interesting, funny and poignant, and I loved how the author interspersed her own story with those of the older people in

her memoir-writing class. It puts a lot about life in perspective and I recommend it to those who like memoirs, history, and overcoming obstacles. It is told in short stories / vignettes so it is easy to pick up and put down, too. **Writing Out Loud: What a Blind Teacher Learned from Leading a Memoir Class for Seniors**

A charming book about what it means to use writing as a tool to better understand yourself and the journeys traveled. The stories shared by both the writer and her students make you want to sit down and put pen to paper. It's time to write down and share the tales that string together to tell a life's story. We all have ones that end with a little laughing, a little crying or a little left to do...I loved it.

What a lovely read! I've had the honor to meet Beth when we invited her to our local book club. I could have listened to her stories all night long! I vote her the most interesting writer of the century!

Amazing true stories written by a variety of writers. Some were love stories, some were funny and some were terribly sad. When I finished reading the book, I wanted to read more. I hope there is a sequel!

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