



# In Good Company

Autumn 2006

Prior issues of In Good Company may be found on our website.

## CFL Turns One!

By Julianne Roth

Companions for Living celebrated its one year anniversary on September 6th. We have been very fortunate over the past year to be accepted into the healthcare industry and welcomed with open arms. We thank all of you who have been supportive to us over the past year, and look forward to continuing to build our relationships over time.

I always find it funny how life presents opportunities to us when we need them the most. A few weeks ago I was fortunate enough to attend the Connecticut Women's Council dinner at the Marriott downtown. The program for the evening was entitled Diamonds in the Rough. The speaker at the event was Erin Gruwell, teacher and writer of the Freedom Writers Diary. Erin's story (which is currently in the process of being released as a major motion picture starting Hillary Swank) began as a first year teacher in an urban LA school. She took 150 kids who everyone had written off and inspired them to change. In fact, with her guidance, all 150 of them have graduated from college and have gone on to have successful and meaningful lives and careers! I encourage everyone to see the movie. I don't believe there was a dry eye in the entire audience last night by the time she had finished telling her story, and the story of these kids.

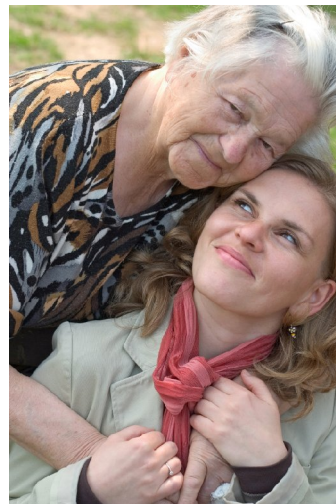
What I found as I listened to Erin speak is that Companions for Living has the same ideals and philosophies as Erin did, only on the opposite end of the age continuum. Erin kicked off her initiative with these kids with a *toast for change*, where they raised up their sparkling cider filled champagne glasses and toasted to change. This toast was the turning point for some of the kids. In light of our recent anniversary, I would like to make a toast for change as well.

To all of our clients, present and future, we salute the courage you've had by accepting our help to facilitate your own independence. We promise to continue to help you get back to the activities you used to enjoy doing by being gentle and motivating. We will help you to make a profound change in your life whenever we can, so you may start the next chapter in the book of your life. We appreciate your support over the past year, and always look forward to providing you the highest quality service.

If you have any questions about our life coaching service, please call us to discuss how it can be beneficial to you. (Look for a discount coupon on page 2.)

## Companion and Homemaker Agency Registration

Recently, state legislation was passed that requires all companion and homemaking companies to register with the state Department of Consumer Protection. As of October 1st, all agencies specializing in this area must be on record with the DCP and must have certain things in place in their business. Some of these things include: comprehensive background checks, specific service agreements, and a surety bond. Companions for Living was very supportive of this bill, but also participated in lobbying for some changes to the bill that fortunately were successful in being passed. This is a good thing for consumers to help ensure the agency clients work with is reputable and we are happy to participate!



## Now Hiring

Retirees... Stay at home moms...

Companions for Living is always looking for good people with the heart to join our team. Do you know anyone looking for a rewarding position? If so, Please have them contact us.

## Free Vision Open House

The NEAT Marketplace is hosting a FREE Vision Open House on Tuesday December 12 from 10:00–2:00. Learn about the latest equipment and services currently available for people who are blind or visually impaired. The NEAT Marketplace is located at 120 Holcomb St. in Hartford. For more information call Steven Famiglietti at 860-286-3100.

# Write from the Heart

By Wendy Millstein

One woman described an awkward embrace in the back seat of her friend's car. Another wrote about quiet groping in a darkened movie theater. And one woman, before she was overcome by emotion, began to tell of her first kiss, so sweetly innocent. Who are these women who bear their souls, who write of first kisses, great disappointments, moments of glory, shame and school memories? These women are members of the Lakeridge Women's Writers Group. They meet once a week in the summer and every other week in the fall and spring to tap into their creativity, revisit their memories and find their writer's voice.

In the fall of 2004, I asked my mother if she thought some of her friends might enjoy participating in a writer's group. My mother, who is usually right about most things, was dead wrong this time when she said, "No, I don't think anyone would be interested." I persisted and called Debbie Bombard, the activities director at Lakeridge, a vacation and residential community not far from the foothills of the Berkshire Mountains in Torrington. Debbie was very enthusiastic when I suggested offering one initial session to test out the waters and see if there was a genuine interest in sustaining such a group. There was. Ten women showed up at our first fall meeting to sit on the patio of the West Lodge, take in the warm sunshine of an early fall day, listen to the sound of geese flying overhead, note a few yellow leaves falling gently on the pond and write.

I explained that we would start with fastwrites, essentially warm ups for more writing. These fastwrites were to be time-limited, no more than five minutes of open-ended, stream of consciousness writing based upon a simple prompt, written without regard to grammar, punctuation or spelling. This was a hard sell to a group of mature women who had gone to school at a time when writing wasn't considered "good" writing if it wasn't grammatically perfect, syntactically formal, and of course, flawlessly spelled. The women range in age from their mid sixties to our oldest member who is eighty-seven. This was a first time experience because they had never before enjoyed the pure uninhibited release of writing from the heart, from the gut where thoughts and emotions churn uncensored and can find expression only when allowed to move from inside to outside free of critical editing. But it didn't stop there. I explained that there was no pressure to share what was written, it was optional, voluntary, but if they were willing to share, it would help others to hear how writing is formed and to begin the process of creating a writing community.

My little speech was totally unnecessary. These women wanted to share and share everything. There was almost urgency in their willingness to divulge secrets and uncover memories that for some had laid dormant for over fifty years. Jean wrote of a strict Catholic education when nuns thought nothing of striking a student's hand to make a point about discipline. Sheila recalled the rich aroma of Friday night Sabbath dinners wafting into the hallways of her Brooklyn apartment as her Bubbie and other women were hard at work preparing brisket and chicken soup with knaedela. Rosa struggled to hold her composure as she shared a description of nightly visits from her husband, now dead for sixteen years, "My husband refuses to die. Every night he wakes me, appearing by my side just long enough for me to scold him for wearing worn pajamas." The women cry and laugh, but always enjoy the unique and rich benefits that writing and reading bring, especially when done in the company of others.

During their younger lives the members of the Lakeridge Women's Writ-

ing Group were dedicated to family and work, with little time for creative expression. Each of these women had husbands, children and the daily responsibilities that came with the territory of post World War II womanhood. The writing group provides the opportunity to sit back and reflect on those years, to process the lives they have lived and to share their experiences with other women in order to find meaning in their diverse, and yet similar experiences.

Last spring their poems and essays were compiled and published for the Lakeridge community, as part of The Lakeridge Writer's Workshop. This summer the group is meeting more frequently, and the writing is taking on a greater level of sophistication as the women master the art of showing, not telling. The writers are encouraged to tap into their senses, paint pictures with their pens, bring characters to life, take the audience into the moment, and use detail to enlarge and elaborate while exploring various forms of writing including dialogue, short stories, and poetry. Now they give feedback to one another, asking the writer to go further, to clarify a point

or shorten a passage that seems to drag. Some members are working on screen plays and memoirs, investigating publishing opportunities and participating in other writing groups. The fastwrites serve as catalysts for this development. June is experimenting with romance writing and screen plays. Jean is working on a piece for NPR's This I Believe essay submissions. The group maintains a consistent core of participants, but in July a few other women joined, bringing fresh perspectives and new voices.

It seems every day we read another article about the importance of exercise and mental stimulation for living a long and active life. We are told that eating right, watching our weight, and engaging in challenging activities like playing chess, completing crossword puzzles and learning to play a musical instrument can keep us healthy and alert well into our twilight years. Well, I have one more suggestion. Write, and write often. Write about anything. Write about a conversation, a memory, your mother, your grandfather, a first experience, loss, loneliness, or love. Form writing groups in your community, hold readings in your home, have friends over for coffee and writing, but most importantly, have fun and let the inner demons loose.

If you would be interested in joining a new creative writing group for seniors, please contact the Companions for Living office so we may add you to the list and let you know of the details. Call 860-413-9306.

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