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Website: <https://www.creative.pitt.edu/programs/our-own-write-creative-writing-lgbtq-elders>

Monday/Thursday Zoom info: <https://pitt.zoom.us/j/96411120633>

Program days and times

We meet on Mondays and Thursdays from 7-8:30 p.m.

Thursdays are dedicated to discussing that week's readings and to generating new work through writing prompts: time will be set aside in these sessions for you to begin to work on pieces relevant to that week's theme.

Mondays are workshop days. See below for details.

I'm also available for office hours by appointment to discuss your work or ask questions related to our readings in a one-on-one setting. Email me, and we can set a Zoom call that works for both of our schedules.

Optional and recommended additional opportunities

As part of our program, I've lined up some writers for special readings and Q&A sessions. These are marked below as "Recommended." I encourage you to attend as many of these as you can, but attendance is not required. You can register through the links provided.

Opportunities designated as "Optional" are strictly optional writing-related programs that you may be interested in attending.

Readings

I'll post the readings for our Thursday sessions on the website. These will be posted as far in advance as possible, but no later than a week before the relevant session. There will be a few required pieces (generally no more than one very short nonfiction piece and 2-3 poems), as well as some extra, optional material if you'd like to delve more deeply into the topic.

Workshops

Mondays are workshop days! We'll share our writing in progress with one another for discussion and feedback.

Submitting work: Each workshop will focus on writing related to the previous Thursday's theme. To submit your piece-in-progress for workshop, just email it to me by 6 p.m. on Sunday. You can send it as a Word or Pages document, a PDF file, or just copy/paste it into the body of the email.

On Sunday evening, I'll send everyone an email with the pieces to be discussed. Please do your best to read through them before we meet.

Depending on the number of pieces submitted, it may be that not everyone will have pieces in workshop each week. ***Submitting a piece to be workshopped is strictly voluntary!*** You do not need to submit a piece every week, though you are welcome to do so.

I'll choose pieces that raise particular issues or interesting questions, either of writing style or content, making sure that everyone gets an opportunity to share throughout the program. Pieces chosen for workshop are not necessarily the "best" or most polished work, so if you submit work that is not selected for that week, know that that is ***not*** a reflection of its quality!

I will provide written feedback/critique/suggestions on ***every*** piece submitted, even if your work is not covered in workshop.

In workshop: The writer of each piece selected for workshop will read it aloud to the group, then we'll discuss. Reading your work aloud is really helpful! It often helps you to identify things that are working well and areas for attention.

If you haven't attended a writing workshop before, you might feel anxious about sharing your work. Please remember that we are all here to support each other, and to work together to make our writing sing! This is a safe and supportive environment.

To that end, when we discuss each other's work, please offer the kind of feedback that you yourself would like to receive.

- Focus on and acknowledge strengths of the piece we're talking about. Did specific phrases make an impression on you? Did the content or perspective resonate, or strike you as unusual or fresh? "That was good" is a starting point, not an endpoint, for discussion: what was good about it?
- Keep criticism constructive. These are works in progress, so it's important to be alert to opportunities to make the piece stronger. Writing is mostly revision, so we need to know where things aren't quite working, could be clearer, or don't serve our intentions.
- When commenting on a piece, think about how you like to receive critique: keep it focused on the work and offer specifics. Is a particular phrase or word choice distracting or working against the piece? Is there an issue of clarity or focus, something that feels extraneous or unnecessary that pulls you away?
- If your work is under discussion, it can be hard not to feel defensive or to take criticism personally. That's natural, but it's also something to be alert to; it's an obstacle to improving our work. The writing that we do is *of* and *from* us, but it is not the sum of us. Every piece we write can be improved. I still find things I wish I'd changed in work published years ago!
- To that end, if your piece is being critiqued, try to resist the urge to respond to every comment. Some workshops have a rule that the writer whose work is being discussed must remain silent throughout. The spirit of that rule is good. Hold yourself open and receptive and remember that the workshop process is intended to lift your writing up!
- Questions are good. If something is unclear in a piece of writing, ask! "What was the intention of this passage or line? What's this image doing?"

Ultimately, the main rule of our workshop is to approach each other and our work both respectfully and honestly.

Zoom Etiquette

We'll meet on Zoom, so a few quick tips:

- Find a place that's quiet and comfortable.
- Please feel free to have a drink and snacks nearby!
- If you're comfortable doing so, please keep your camera on. It can be a challenge to connect with one another virtually if we can't see each other. We all have times, though, when we're Zoomed out, so if you need a break, it's ok to turn your camera off.
- If you have questions about using Zoom, please feel free to contact me!

Monday, June 12 | Welcome

Welcome! We'll introduce ourselves, talk about the program, and have a chance ask and answer any questions you may have.

Thursday, June 15 | Memory

Memory forms the basis of our work in this program. Joe Brainard's *I Remember*, a classic of 1970s gay literature, offers an accessible way into writing from memory.

Monday, June 19 | Workshop: Memory

Please submit any pieces to be workshopped by 6 p.m. on Sunday, June 18.

Thursday, June 22 | Family

Our relationships with both our biological and chosen families are complex, often difficult, but they are also rich sources of understanding. This week: work that illuminates these experiences.

Monday, June 26 | Workshop: Family

Please submit any pieces to be workshopped by 6 p.m. on Sunday, June 25.

RECOMMENDED

I Carry My Mother: An Evening with Lesléa Newman

Wednesday, June 28 | 7-8 p.m.

[Register here](#)

Lesléa Newman is the author of 80 books for readers of all ages including the dual memoir-in-verse, *I Carry My Mother* and *I Wish My Father*; the novel-in-verse, *October Mourning: A Song for Matthew Shepard*; the short story collection, *A Letter to Harvey Milk*; and the picture books, *Sparkle Boy* and *Heather Has Two Mommies*.

Her literary awards include poetry fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Massachusetts Artists Foundation, two National Jewish Book Awards, two American Library Association Stonewall Honors, and the Association of Jewish Libraries Sydney Taylor Body-of-Work Award. From 2008-2010, she served as the poet laureate of Northampton, MA.

Thursday, June 29 | Coming Out

The process of coming out is both communal and intensely personal. It also tends to be ongoing: we choose to come out, or not to, throughout our lives. This process is our focus this week.

Monday, July 3 | Workshop: Coming Out

Please submit any pieces to be workshopped by 6 p.m. on Sunday, July 2.

Thursday, July 6 | Body

Aging often makes us aware of our bodies in new ways. This week, we focus on physicality in writing, on connecting with and communicating the ways in which we experience our bodies.

Monday, July 10 | Workshop: Body

Please submit any pieces to be workshopped by 6 p.m. on Sunday, July 9.

Thursday, July 20 | Intimacy

Love and sex are fundamental experiences that can be difficult to write about. This week, we turn to work that celebrates the joy and complexity of intimacy.

Monday, July 24 | Workshop: Intimacy

Please submit any pieces to be workshopped by 6 p.m. on Sunday, July 23.

RECOMMENDED

Digging to Wonderland: An Evening with David Trinidad

Tuesday, July 25 | 7-8 p.m.

[Register here](#)

David Trinidad's numerous books include *Digging to Wonderland: Memory Pieces*, *Notes on a Past Life*, *Peyton Place: A Haiku Soap Opera*, and *The Late Show*. He is also the editor of *A Fast Life: The Collected Poems of Tim Dlugos*, *Punk Rock Is Cool for the End of the World: Poems and Notebooks of Ed Smith*, and *Divining Poets: Dickinson*, an Emily Dickinson tarot deck. Trinidad currently lives in Chicago, where he is a professor of English and Creative Writing at Columbia College.

Thursday, July 27 | HIV/AIDS

Our experience of the world was radically changed by the eruption of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s. We engage with affecting work that emerged from the crisis, and tell our own stories.

Monday, July 31 | Workshop: HIV/AIDS

Please submit any pieces to be workshopped by 6 p.m. on Sunday, July 30.

RECOMMENDED

I Don't Want to Be Understood: An Evening with Joshua Jennifer Espinoza

Tuesday, Aug. 1 | 7-8 p.m.

[Register here](#)

Joshua Jennifer Espinoza is a trans woman poet. Her work has been featured in *Poetry Magazine*, *The Nation*, *Split Lip*, *Poem-a-day* at poets.org, and more. She is a Pushcart recipient and has had multiple poems anthologized. She is the author of *I'm Alive / It Hurts / I Love It* (2014), *THERE SHOULD BE FLOWERS* (2016), and *I Don't Want To Be Understood* (2024). She currently lives in West Virginia with her wife, poet/essayist Eileen Elizabeth, and their dog and cat.

Thursday, Aug. 3 | Divas

We shift to the lighter side this week! Pop culture is fertile ground for writing. Who are your divas, and what do they mean to you? We delve into music, TV, and movies to shape new work.

Monday, Aug. 7 | Workshop: Divas

Please submit any pieces to be workshopped by 6 p.m. on Sunday, Aug. 6.

Thursday, Aug. 10 | Pride

If “the personal is political,” how do we position our individual experiences as LGBTQ folks within a community context? How do we “write pride”?

Monday, Aug. 14 | Workshop: Pride

Please submit any pieces to be workshopped by 6 p.m. on Sunday, Aug. 13.

Thursday, Aug. 17 | Going On

We’ll talk about what we discovered over the last eight weeks, and about resources and opportunities to continue to develop our writing.

RECOMMENDED

The World That the Shooter Left Us: An Evening with Cyrus Cassells

Thursday, Aug. 24 | 7-8 p.m.

[Register here](#)

Cyrus Cassells was the 2021-2022 Poet Laureate of Texas. His most recent book, *The World That the Shooter Left Us*, was published in 2022, and his ninth book, *Is There Room for Another Horse on Your Horse Ranch?*, a finalist for the National Poetry Series, will be published by Four Way Books in March 2024. Among his honors: a 2019 Guggenheim fellowship, the 1981 National Poetry Series, a Lambda Literary Award, a Lannan Literary Award, two NEA grants, a Pushcart Prize, and the William Carlos Williams Award. His 2018 volume, *The Gospel according to Wild Indigo*, was a finalist for the NAACP Image Award.

Still Life with Children: Selected Poems of Francesc Parcerisas, translated from the Catalan, was awarded the Texas Institute of Letters’ Soeurette Diehl Fraser Award for Best Translated Book of 2018 and 2019. His second volume of Catalan translations, *To The Cypress Again and Again: Tribute to Salvador Espriu*, was published in March 2023. He was nominated for the 2019 Pulitzer Prize in Criticism for his cultural reviews in *The Washington Spectator*. He is a University Distinguished Professor of English at Texas State University.

Thursday, Aug. 31 | Open Mic

An optional virtual open mic! We’ll invite family and friends to an opportunity to read some of your own pieces and celebrate the work that you’ve done.