

An interview with author Linda C. Wisniewski

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NASHVILLE, TN—Linda C. Wisniewski is no stranger to the literary world.

The Bucks County, Pennsylvania resident is a librarian, newspaper feature writer, and teacher of adult education memoir classes who also finds time to write award-winning essays and articles for various literary journals and e-zines. In April of 2008, Wisniewski adds her own personal memoir to her impressive list of publications: *Off Kilter: A Woman's Journey to Peace with Scoliosis, Her Mother, & Her Polish Heritage*.

For Wisniewski, writing is not just a job; it is a common language she encourages us all to speak along with her.

For as long as she can remember, Wisniewski has kept a journal. After reading a book by Susan Albert called *Writing from Life* 10 years ago and joining an organization founded by Albert called Story Circle Network, Wisniewski's interest in memoir writing was awakened.

Wisniewski was inspired to teach after taking a number of workshops, so she started offering a women's spiritual writing group at her Unitarian church. The group was met with great success. From there, Wisniewski wrote a proposal for a course at Bucks County Community College, where she still teaches memoir writing.

"It's been a great journey," Wisniewski says. "I find that writing about my life has helped me understand myself and other people by putting things in perspective."

Wisniewski says there is a growing interest in the world of memoir writing, especially after the events of September 11th, which prompted a trend toward self-reflection and an interest in the meaning of our lives. She views memoir writing as a chance for us to connect with others and a personal look at how we overcome common human challenges.

Although loss and hardship can move us to put pen to paper or hands to keyboard, memoir writing is not simply about life's struggles. Wisniewski also views memoir writing as a healthy and beneficial way for us to share our experience and knowledge so we can help one another.

As a teacher, Wisniewski sees students from many different backgrounds struggle with memoir writing. First-time writers, business writers, and even English teachers have all had trouble getting started, but she encourages these students to practice, go beyond general information, and provide details that will make a gripping story. And to be persistent—after all, Rome wasn't built in a day!

For people who are interested in memoir writing but don't know where to start, Wisniewski suggests reading, writing, and list-making. Read memoirs you find interesting,

and try to figure out how the author presented the parts you liked best. Write a lot; continuous writing can only lead to improvement. Make lists of anything from jobs you've held to your favorite childhood toys. Any item on your list could become the starting point for a story.

Wisniewski is putting her lessons and experience to work in her forthcoming memoir, *Off Kilter*.

Over the years, Wisniewski had written a few essays and stories about her family and issues she considered important in her life. Eventually, that personal writing became something she wanted to share with others. She had wanted to remember the experiences for her own personal healing, but making those memories public would allow others the healing power of reflection.

In *Off Kilter* Wisniewski chronicles a number of troubling issues, such as her battle with scoliosis, an emotionally abusive father, an emotionally absent mother, and being brought up in a Polish Catholic culture that idealized martyrdom. Wisniewski tried to portray her struggles as accurately as possible. "I'm very concerned about keeping to the 'emotional truth' of my story, by which I mean that what I write should always convey the tone of the event or person," she says.

Wisniewski's scoliosis became a metaphor for her life being imbalanced. After coming to terms with her physical condition, her parents, her heritage, and other issues that troubled her, she was able to stretch herself and finally find a life that fit.

Off Kilter is a beautiful illustration of the healing power of reflection and writing because Wisniewski puts her human experience into words we can all feel.

Susan Wittig Albert, author of *Spanish Dagger* and *Bleeding Hearts*, calls *Off Kilter* "funny, honest, deeply moving." Linda Joy Myers, author of *Becoming Whole: Writing Your Healing Story* and *Don't Call Me Mother*, says, "Everyone should read this book!"

As a writer, teacher, and reader, Wisniewski understands the importance of personal writing and reading. She believes personal writing is beneficial because it takes the "sting" out of painful episodes and turns them into art. As a constant reader, she reads memoirs, poetry, and publications that prompt her to think about life. She encourages readers to do the same.

"Don't ever be afraid to tell your story," she adds. "The truth has always been dangerous, but it really does free your heart."

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