

Healing with Playwriting



By: Anne M. Hamilton, M.F.A.

This month marks the thirtieth anniversary of my best friend Curtis' death in a car accident. The loss was one of the most significant events in my life, and I'm sure that it helped influence me to be an artist.

I've been writing a play named ANOTHER WHITE SHIRT about four women who have lost their men accidentally or suddenly. Some losses happen in fatal accidents and some through illness. The play started when

I wrote a monologue featuring a character named Mary, a teenager who is modeled after me. Mary, too, has lost her best friend in a car accident, and in the scene she visits his gravesite and talks to him. She expresses feelings of helplessness, anger, fear of the future, and a quiet desperation now magnified by this sudden loss.

When my friend Curtis died in 1979, my emotions became frozen. Although I was suffering turmoil, I also walked around in a state of numbness. After studying playwriting and dramaturgy at Columbia University, I gained the tools to express many things – the emotions in a deeply dramatic situation, the process involved in building or tearing apart relationships, and the incremental steps to maintaining stability despite unexpected situations.

I used ANOTHER WHITE SHIRT's writing process to pull long-buried feelings out of myself, and to move thoroughly through the particulars of my loss. By actively engaging my deepest emotions – and fears – I found that I had not lost love, but had

gained it by actively continuing to find my place in the world.

I encourage anyone to try her hand at writing plays. We all made up stories as kids, and most of us know how to tell a good story. Just take some time, go into a quiet room, and imagine a scene in your head. Then write it down. During the writing and production process, I'm sure the playwright gains more insight and benefit than anyone, even the director, actors or audience.

The play has had two readings at Julia's Reading Room, a program of the League of Professional Theatre Women, and it is close to completion. I have also been promised a development workshop in NYC early next year.

ANOTHER WHITE SHIRT is ultimately about healing – about moving through the process of grief until the mind, body, and mind/heart can stabilize and reach some sense of acceptance of the present and hope for the future.

To read Mary's monologue, please visit my web column at

<http://opentohope.com/hope/dealing-with-grief/grief-and-depression/how-grief-moves-through-the-body/>

Anne Hamilton, principal of Hamilton Dramaturgy, has eighteen years of experience in the professional theatre in New York City, across the nation, and internationally. STAGE DIRECTIONS magazine named her a trailblazer in her field. She

is an award-winning Columbia University graduate and will serve as Dramaturg for the New Voices student play festival at Muhlenberg College in October.

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Multi-tasking Working Mom Pens Children's Book



By: Linda C. Wisniewski

When pharmaceutical sales rep Kristie Finnan dressed for work, her year-old daughter cried "Shoes Off!" Like other working moms, Finnan wanted to reassure her child that while mommy puts on high heels and goes off to work, she loves her little girl, misses her and always comes home again.

She looked for a children's book to help but saw very few about mothers working outside the home. One written by a male

author was about a witch who is "sometimes mean" but still loved by her husband and kids.

Finnan decided to write her own story. She mulled over the idea for a couple of years, and by the time her daughter was three, she made the decision to self-publish, after learning from editors it would take another two to three years to bring her book out in print.

The author grew up in Jamison, went to Penn State University, and attended grad school in Boston. She lived in Doylestown Borough for five years before moving to Plumstead Township. Finnan has a degree in nutrition and worked in clinical research before switching careers to sales. "I'm not the behind a desk type," she says with a smile. She has worked for Genentech, a large biotech company, for six years. "Genentech is one of the top ten companies to work for, and is also on the Working Mother list," Finnan reports.

Mommy's High Heel Shoes is also produced in digital format by Mobistories, with music by Hollywood's Grammy-nominated Stephen Edelman and Finnan

reading the "mommy" voice. It can be downloaded from www.mobistories.com or the iTunes store for reading on the iPhone, the iPod Touch or any computer screen. "It's another format of reading," Finnan says, convenient for kids to use while in the car or doing errands with mom or dad.

"Don't expect rejection," Finnan advises would-be writers. "Expect to be successful. Send your work out with a good vibe." She has her children kiss her new manuscript, a sequel to the first book, for good luck before she mails it off to publishers.

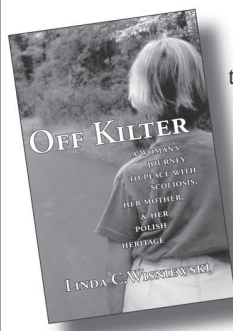
"Know what is out there in children's literature," the author recommends. "Research your idea. Is there another book on this topic or with a similar title?"

Finally, the best place to market your book may not be in bookstores, she said. Finnan loves to visit schools and teach kids about writing. So far, she's done school visits in Central Bucks, Council Rock and Downingtown School Districts and is booking appearances for the 2009-2010 school year.

Her daughter is now four and a half, she has a three year old boy, and is expecting her third child, a girl, in early August.

Readers can find out more and order *Mommy's High Heel Shoes* at www.kristiefinnan.com. The book's illustrator is Pat Achilles, who lives in Bucks County with her husband, daughter and son. Visit her at www.achillesportfoliol.com.

Linda C. Wisniewski is a writer and teacher of memoir workshops. She is available to speak to groups about the healing power of writing. Her book, *Off Kilter*, can be ordered through Amazon, your local bookstore, or the publisher at www.pearlsong.com/offkilter.htm. Visit Linda's website at www.lindawis.com or call her at 215-297-5104.



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