

WRITING AND MEDITATION EXERCISES

# *Writing*

THAT FREE YOUR CREATIVITY,

# *from the*

INSPIRE YOUR IMAGINATION AND

# *Inner Self*

HELP YOU OVERCOME WRITER'S BLOCK

*Elaine Farris Hughes*



# *Writing from the Inner Self*

**Elaine Farris Hughes**

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# PREFACE

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All genuine writing begins with the self, with the moment when you dip into yourself—your memories, feelings, body sensations, observations, and imagination—and decide to bring something new into existence. Once you have discovered this continuous and fertile source within you, writing will become a never-ending, surprising adventure. New horizons await you: That is the promise of this book.

*Writing from the Inner Self* contains 48 exercises and about 300 writing ideas based on your experiences with the exercises. Each exercise employs some type of meditation or inner focus; all of them are designed to elicit original material from you. There are also several short chapters to help you with different aspects of your writing: using the exercises effectively, overcoming writer's block, keeping a journal, revising and expanding your pieces.

This book surprised me. I wrote it several years ago and thought I had said all that I had to say about writing from the inner self. Although that first book grew directly out of my classroom teaching, it was published as a trade book, meant for the general public rather than for college students. When it evolved into plans for a textbook version, I thought it'd be simply a matter of adding a little of this and cutting a little of that. I couldn't imagine what else I might find to say.

What happened, of course, is that I almost couldn't stop finding things to say. Prior to writing the textbook, I had developed the exercises as a way to generate in-class journal writing and there was seldom any connection between these writings and the expository essays students were required to write out in class. But once I began to incorporate writing-from-the-inner-self ideas regularly in my classes, ideas and techniques kept multiplying. With my students' responses and suggestions, I started finding ways to expand the personal writing generated by the exercises into more traditional expository essays required in college classrooms. All these new discoveries changed the original book into a totally different one—which is the one you are now using. My deepest hope for this book is that it will help you to love writing for the rest of your life.

Many silent contributors helped in the creation of *Writing from the Inner Self*. My major gratitude is to my students, who are the reason and the source for the book. Their pleasure in the exercises, their writings which have so often delighted me, their classroom responses, and their wise suggestions are the taproot of the book. Specifically, I want to thank the following students



who allowed me to publish their writing in the appendix: *Darren Barje*, *Emilie Borg*, *Robert Bruck*, *Andrew Cohen*, *Cynthia Davis*, *Joe Dourigan*, *Robert Echeverria*, *John Falino*, *Karla Fitzgerald*, *Gregory Garry*, *Gregory Schweizer*, and *Robin Simkins*.

Any textbook owes a debt to the reviewers, but mine is a large one. The dedicated attention of the ten reviewers kept me going on what I often thought was an impossible task of keeping the original idea intact while tumbling it into many different shapes. *Steve Beck*, Southeastern Community College, North Carolina, *Susan Becker*, Illinois Central College, *Mark Reynolds*, Jefferson Davis Community College, Alabama, and *Charles Suhor*, The National Council of Teachers of English, all reviewed the book twice and offered strong expert advice on content and reorganization. *Judith Olson-Fallon*, Case Western Reserve University, *Nell Ann Pickett*, Hinds Community College, Mississippi, and *John Presley*, Lafayette College, Pennsylvania, and *Ben Wiley*, St. Petersburg Junior College, gave me encouragement and important suggestions. *Polly Marshall*, Hinds Community College, not only served as a reviewer in the final round but also tested in class many of the exercises in both books. To *Dick Graves* of Auburn University, I owe a special debt: His suggestions helped shape the present book significantly and his enthusiasm for the first book planted the seed which later became the textbook.

It's corny to say perhaps, but never truer, that without my editor, *Jane Kinney*, there would be no book. She believed in the book from the start and made it happen—and then kept me afloat during the rough times. I also want to thank *Lynn Miller* of Proof Positive/Farrowlyne Associates, Inc., whose calm expertise kept the production of the book on a steady course throughout, and my son, *James Hughes*, for his help at two crucial points.

Finally, I want to acknowledge several people who gave me ideas for specific exercises: *Arnold Bennett* for "A Throw-It-in-the-Fire Confession" in his book *Self and Self-Management*; *Dorothea Brande* for "A Five-Minute Concentration Exercise" in her book *Wake Up and Live*; *Aharon Remez* of Israel for "A Seven-Year Inventory"; *Ralph Nazareth*, my colleague at Nassau Community College, for "Sex Change"; and *The School of Practical Philosophy* for the centering exercise "The Pause."

Elaine Hughes  
Nassau Community College  
Garden City, New York  
May 1993

The wine still waits in the cellars below.  
My beloved family still sits on the porch in the dark.  
The fire balloon still drifts and burns in the night sky of an  
as yet unburied summer.  
Why and how?  
Because I say it is so.

—Ray Bradbury  
*Preface, Dandelion Wine*



## *Prologue:*

### *Bean Picking*

You go out to the garden with a basket on your arm. Three people want beans for dinner. At first the pickings are so slim that you think you'll have to run out and buy beans or maybe just have carrots instead.

With each bean you pick, you think that this is the last one—there don't seem to be any others. Yet you keep finding another bean and then another. You're so busy looking and picking that you don't even notice the bottom of the basket, which is already covered with the long green pods.

When no more beans are in sight, you get down on your knees and search under the bushes. At first your eyes can't pick out the green beans nestled into the green leaves. But you stay with it. Soon your eyes grow accustomed to what they are looking for and you begin to find hidden treasures—many beans in clusters, others resting on the ground waiting for you.

Even so, moments come when you feel impatient with these tiny creatures playing hide-and-seek with you. Moments come when you feel that you're not going fast enough. There are many other things back in the house that need your attention. Picking these beans is interfering with your life.

But the beans don't understand that. They want to wait where they have ripened for your table until you can find them. They've done their job. Now they want you to do yours. So you keep picking. Some of them are not ripe yet. Others have decayed and have to be discarded. Some are so tiny that you think you should throw them away. But you need beans, so you toss them into your basket.

Finally, you've done all you can. You rise, look up at the sky, listen to the birds, take in the canvas of leaves above you, and breathe deeply. The hard part is over. You see that the basket overflows. Each little bean that you harvested has helped to fill it, and now there will be beans for three tonight at dinner. You make your way back to the kitchen, humming a little tune. Something in you remembers that this is how it always is. Yes, bean by bean—that's how everything gets done.



*For my students  
Who inspired this book  
and  
For Stefanie Woodbridge*

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# CONTENTS

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**Preface**   xi

**Prologue: Bean Picking**   xv

**Part I Preliminaries**   1

**Chapter 1 You and Writing**   3

Why Meditation Can Help Your Writing   4

Keeping a Journal   5

Suggestions for Journal Entries   6

**Chapter 2 The Exercises: Resources for Your Writing**   9

How the Exercises Are Arranged   9

How to Use the Exercises   10

Four Meditation Techniques with Writing Warm-ups   11

    Centering: The Pause   12

    Spiral Breathing   12

    Visualizing   13

    Memory Recall   14

**Chapter 3 Getting Words on Paper**   17

Writing Papers Using This Book: The Process   17

    Generating Content   17

    Shaping the Writing   17

    Creating a Full Draft   18

    Producing a Final Paper   18



Your Writing Process 19

Reading Your Papers Aloud to Others 20

    When You Read Aloud 20

    When You Listen to Others Read 20

Keeping the Flow of Writing Going 21

    Freewriting 21

    Freewriting Techniques 22

A List of Lists 23

Ten Writing Tips for Writer’s Block 24

**Part II Your Inner World 25**

Introduction 26

**Chapter 4 The Body 27**

Your Laboratory 27

A Body Symptom Speaks 29

Recapturing a Feeling of Yourself as an Infant 32

Scars 34

**Chapter 5 Childhood Memories 37**

First Love 37

Grown-ups 40

Family Snapshot 43

I Remember 46

**Chapter 6 Memorable Moments 51**

A Memorable Prank 51

A Moment of Rebellion 53

An Eating Experience 56

Water 59

<b>Chapter 7 Intense Emotions</b>	63
Early Rejection	63
A Throw-It-in-the-Fire Confession	66
The Angry Exercise	68
Jealousy	70

<b>Chapter 8 Observing Your Life</b>	75
A Seven-Year Inventory	75
A Parable for Living	78
Fifteen Minutes Under the Microscope	81
Your Life in Song	84

### **Part III The Outer World 89**

Introduction	90
--------------	----

<b>Chapter 9 Seeing</b>	91
The Eye of the Camera	91
Here-and-Now	94
A Rock	96
A Kitchen Utensil	99

<b>Chapter 10 People</b>	103
People-Watching	103
Outrageous Acts	105
A Family Legend	108
The Other	110

<b>Chapter 11 Places</b>	115
A Place You Know	115
A Place That Used to Be	118
A Place You've Never Been	121
Home	124



**Chapter 12 Events 129**

Today's News 129

A Blood-Boiling Issue 132

A Modern Hero 135

A Moment in History 138

**Part IV The World of Invention 143**

Introduction 144

**Chapter 13 Reading 145**

Words 145

A Book Recalled 149

People on Pages 151

A Favorite Author Revisited 154

**Chapter 14 Mind Play 159**

A Five-Minute Concentration Exercise 159

Dreaming Up an Invention 162

Repeat Performance 165

Sex Change 168

**Chapter 15 Imagination 171**

Whisper 171

You Are the Camera 174

Empty Stage 176

A Nightmare 179

## **Part V   Going On   183**

### **Chapter 16   A Few Essentials   185**

Voice   185

Audience   186

Revision   187

Introductions, Conclusions, and Titles   188

Correctness   188

Proofreading   189

Writing on a Word Processor   190

Crediting Your Sources   190

### **Chapter 17   From Freewrite to Essay   193**

Shaping the Mass   193

    Making Cuts   194

    Making Expansions   194

A Look at Three Drafts   195

Steps for Turning a Freewrite into an Essay   201

### **Chapter 18   Going On   203**

Appendix   207

    A List of Books   209

    Sample Writings   215

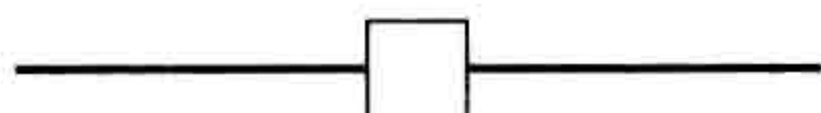
    Alphabetical List of Exercises   235

Index   237



# Part I

## PRELIMINARIES







# Chapter 1

## — YOU AND WRITING —

Nobody else can write what you can write. You are one of a kind and have had one-of-a-kind experiences. On top of that, nobody else sees or feels exactly what you see and feel. If you're old enough to be reading this, you already have a limitless reservoir of thoughts, memories, ideas, facts, dreams, and fantasies from which you could write for the rest of your life. In fact, right this very minute, you've got enough material stored within you to write a shelfful of books.

The prospect of writing may delight or depress you. Or maybe you see writing as simply some activity you have to perform in order to get through a class. Perhaps you even hate the idea of writing or feel you're not a good writer or that writing is harder for you than for others. All of these feelings and attitudes are possible at different times. But whatever your particular situation or attitude is at this moment, this book can help you. The 48 writing exercises that follow lead you to look inside yourself first and discover a personal connection with the subject before you even begin to write. Stated another way: This book is a source book for using yourself as the primary source from which to write.

But don't expect writing to cost you nothing. Any kind of writing—good, bad, or indifferent—takes time, energy, and attention. Mrs. Lipsey, one of my most memorable teachers, said to our class one day when we were all groaning over the multitude of comments on our papers: "Don't you know that writing is harder work than digging ditches?" I thought that remark to be a playful exaggeration at the time; but since then I have come to know what she means. When you dig a ditch, you know exactly what is before you. The sun may be broiling, you may have a bum arm and indigestion, but you know that the ditch has to be four feet deep and three feet wide and you know that it has to be dug in six hours. You can see that it will require mostly physical labor and the determination to endure. The knowledge of those limits somehow helps you knuckle down and get the job done. But with writing, you never know what the limits will be. Writing requires *all* your resources—mental alertness, imagination, emotional response, a relationship with chaos, physical stamina, and the courage to face the critics who will read what you've written.

Yet, while writing can cost you a lot, it gives back far more than it takes. The very act of writing can integrate you in ways you may never consciously understand. In fact, I'll go far enough to say that the act of writing can change your life in positive ways. I've seen it happen many times in the classroom. For when you write from the inside, from the place within where the real you