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## Intuitive Writing Project Empowers Young Women

By Sophie Braccini



Elizabeth Perlman at her new location in Orinda's Theatre Square Photo Sophie Braccini

for and receive stories. "When we are able to take our experiences and write them down, we form a narrative, and when we have that narrative, the mind is able to understand and let go of things," she says.

During her teens and formative years, Perlman experienced pressure to conform to her surroundings. It took her years to discover who she really was, to find her unique strengths and to value herself. "I wanted to extract what had been the most helpful to me in my 20 years of self-development and build a 12-week program creating a way for young women to access their own wisdom, find their own answers and realize their own worth," she says.

Perlman set up her program as a nonprofit. "I believe that she chose (to become a nonprofit) because her heart is in the service of those girls," says Maureen Brown, treasurer of Intuitive Writing Project. Brown who is the mother of an eighth grader at Orinda Intermediate School has experienced how the Amherst Artists and Writers method that Perlman uses with the girls can transform someone. As a mother, Brown is aware of the pressures the girls are under and how important a program like this is for them.

The first module focuses on accessing the right part of the brain and intuition. "There is something unique about the female brain," says Perlman, citing work by neuropsychiatrist Louann Brizendine, "because we have more bridges between the right and left hemispheres." Puberty is the time when self-esteem goes down, Perlman says, and this is the best time to remind girls of their inner wisdom/intuition, and that trusting it gives them power.

Veronika Pister, a sophomore at Miramonte High School, says that Perlman has showed her how to tap into the right side of her brain. "School is so left side intensive," says Pister, who loves mathematics and has now learned to be in touch with her emotions. "It is such a challenge in high school to figure out who you are and what you stand for. Putting it into words gives it strength." She reports being happier and more balanced since she started the program six months ago. She has also developed a close bond with the four other girls in her group (six is a maximum for Perlman). "My writing has also improved incomparably," she says. She attributes it to the weekly practice and the confidence built through the positive reinforcement of the Amherst method.

The students also have a module on media literacy, and another about body image. They learn

The first thing you see when entering the new Intuitive Writing Project location in Orinda's Theatre Square is a wall filled with pictures of women who have made a mark in history. The message above the picture mosaic is clear: "Heroines write their own story."

The Intuitive Writing Project is a place for girls to be empowered as they find their own voice. The program and its curriculum are the creation of Elizabeth Perlman, who draws on her training and experiences as a writer and art director. She has passionately developed a 12-week module to empower teen girls. The newly opened location in Theatre Square is the manifestation of her dream.

"Arts enable us to understand ourselves, develop as people, and find our answers," Perlman says. Pulling on the work of Professor James Pennebaker (University of Texas), Perlman explains that the most effective expressive art form is writing because the human brain is wired to look

about non-violent communication, "a more direct, but from-the-heart way to speak your truth and get what you want," says Perlman. The girls work on building healthy relationships as well.

Perlman also works one-on-one with students, helping them list their strengths and passions. "Life's work is where your strengths and passions overlap," she says. "The first part of the work is to realize your value, then to recognize that you are part of something bigger."

At the end of the program, the girls do a visual self-portrait and put together a book of their writings that they can draw from in the future, possibly for their college essays.

Pister says that she will continue to work with Perlman as long as she can. There is a continuing writing program for the girls who have graduated. Pister plans to intern for Perlman in the future.

"Now I can find beauty in everything," she says.

For more information about the program, visit [intuitivewritingproject.org](http://intuitivewritingproject.org).

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