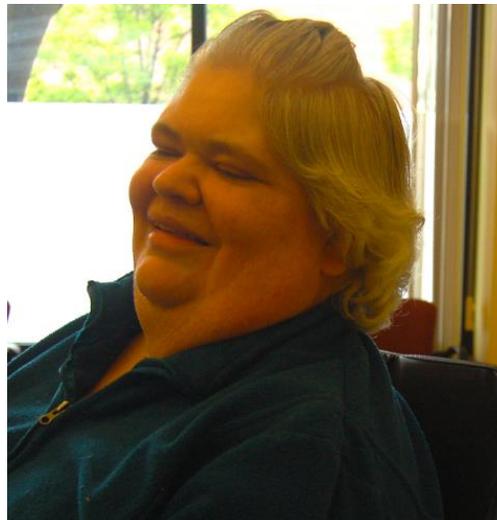


Colleen Lynn Utter is 53 years old. “Sometimes I feel more like I’m 653,” she is quick to add with a grin.

The month of June marks one year for Colleen as a Macdonald Center resident. She fills her days with the Center’s full range of activities — everything from bingo, to meals with her neighbors, to Write Around workshops. Earlier this year, after journeying through life with a much-loved canine companion, Colleen adopted 11-year-old Clarice, a Siamese-American Shorthair “jet-black kitty cat.” When she’s not doling out fish snacks, or packing up the nine-key Perkins Braille (a braille typewriter) she’s used since high school, Colleen enjoys crafting and selling beaded rainbows. Colleen was a participant in our writing workshop at Macdonald Center.



**Some of your writing has featured animals as characters. Can you identify with your cat’s struggles to “fit in,” to be “at home”?**

There are some parallels. Even though there are two other blind people here, I’m the more independent of the three of us. And it took me a while to get to the point where—you know, I would either be running into them [physically], or they would be running into me. It was just like, “Okay, where do I fit into this scenario?” A year later, we’re doing pretty well. My visual disabilities are such that I have light perception, I can see sharp contrast, I can see primary colors, to a point. But don’t even discuss depth, distance, or detail. I can see people in front of me, but I cannot tell you from one minute to the next how close or how far away they are. I can stand at the top of a flight of stairs, and it’s just like standing on this floor. A lot of people have the misnomer that if you’re blind, you’re totally blind. That is not the case. You have varying degrees of blindness. It’s a mixed bag.

**Can you remember your very first Write Around workshop? What were your expectations?**

It was held at a resource center over on the East Side. I don’t remember what year that was. It was a room similar to this, similar to a classroom. I didn’t know what to expect. I had never done anything like that before. But once I got going, once I got to doing the writing, it was really a lot of fun. I’ve had enough medical and physical issues, you know, I’ve gotten to where I just kind of go, “Okay, Lord, I don’t what’s going on here. But hey, you do, and that’s the main thing.” It’s not easy. Sometimes people have a hard time going beyond the wheelchair. Beyond the blindness. Beyond the weight issues, and that’s hard on me.

**Have you encountered any of those attitudes in Write Around groups?**

No, no, never.

**What do you think it is that draws people in a writing group together?**

Being able to share something in common. Being able to share their voices, and their lives.

**Can you tell me something about the [characters] in your stories?**

[...] with Star, the character in “Freedom,” she kind of duplicates, to a point, my world, in a way. I didn’t experience the pain that she deals with, at her age. When I write, I guess I kind of take up more of the things that I do know, rather than what I know nothing about.

**That makes sense. So what are the things that you do know?**

I love interacting with people. I’ve gotten to where I know different types of people around me. But sometimes I think I notice something, and I’m like totally wrong! Aren’t we all?

**Let’s talk about writer’s block. It doesn’t seem to slow down the keys on your braille writer very often. Where does your mind go in beginning to form a story?**

That’s a hard one. Sometimes [the story] just jumps ahead of me as I’m writing. It’s tricky. I really can’t edit. All you do when you erase is kind of rub out the dots. It’s not practical. Which makes writing harder, because I’m not able to go, “Eh, that’s not what I wanted to say.” Having the newer technology would be helpful, but those writers are so expensive. When you realize, even before there was written language, that this is how people communicated [in a circle, without erasure], it can teach us a lot of things.

**Lastly, for someone who might be peering through the window, at our Write Around circle, what would you tell them?**

Come on in. The water’s fine. Jump on in.