

Fall 2010

## Senior Citizens Writing W. Ross Winterowd, ed.; Senior Citizens Writing II Bill Reid, ed.

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### Recommended Citation

Marshall, Lauren. "Senior Citizens Writing W. Ross Winterowd, Ed.; Senior Citizens Writing II Bill Reid, Ed." *Community Literacy Journal*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2010, pp. 191–94, doi:10.25148/clj.5.1.009435.

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*Senior Citizens Writing*

W. Ross Winterowd, ed.

West Lafayette, IN: Parlor P, 2007. 276 pp.  
ISBN: 978-1-60235-000-7. \$23.00.

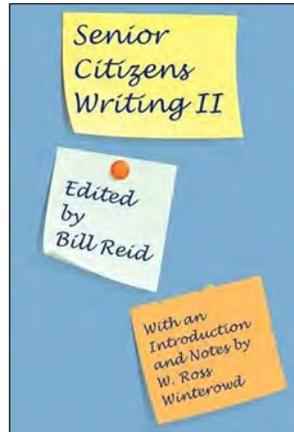
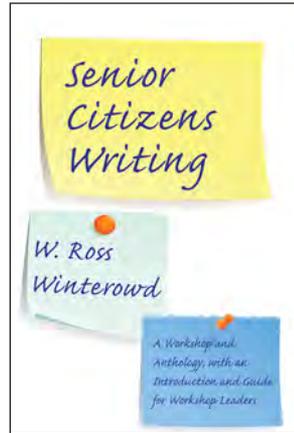
*Senior Citizens Writing II*

Bill Reid, ed.

West Lafayette, IN: Parlor P, 2009. 351 pp.  
ISBN: 978-1-60235-107-3. \$30.00.

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In W. Ross Winterowd's *Senior Citizens Writing* and Bill Reid's *Senior Citizens Writing II*, the editors, along with their contributors, demonstrate the urgent need for community-based writing outlets for elder adults. Both volumes anthologize works of short fiction and nonfiction by twenty-one self-identified senior citizens who participated in Winterowd's writing workshops in Los Angeles, reminding us that retired elders, too, engage in rich literate practices. As participant Vi Hinton writes, "I want my children, my grandchildren, even my great grandchildren to know that this aging woman they sometimes visit has not always been this aging woman" (Winterowd 173). Such expressions, which appear throughout both volumes, echo Winterowd's claim that seniors' motivations, lifestyles, and past experiences bring new ways and means of self-expression in later life. These volumes will be of interest to researchers studying the intersections between aging and literacy, and for writing teachers and individuals interested in finding accessible models of personal narrative or (auto)biography. Both collections also include practical advice to literacy workers interested in establishing their own community-based writing workshops for elders.



To those familiar with Winterowd's body of work, some of his advice might be surprising. For one, he qualifies his long-standing resistance to expressivist composition theory, claiming that, while expressivist pedagogies are inappropriate for young college students, they are necessarily applicable for retired seniors. Along these lines, Winterowd's workshops permit idiosyncratic style, grammar, and mechanics in final drafts, attributing these habits to "part of the charm of their writing" (Winterowd 9). For readers interested in running workshops of their own, Winterowd offers a breakdown of topics related to running a workshop in the 2007 anthology's brief introduction (digested in the 2009 introduction), including approaches to teaching and learning mechanics, invention, critique, creativity, and writing and rewriting across multiple genres, as well as nuts-and-bolts issues, such as how long a meeting should last. Emphasis in both introductions is placed on the role of the workshop facilitator, assembling knowledge common to writing center tutors and to creative writing workshop participants. Winterowd's advice fixes on promoting "happy anarchy" (a philosophy Winterowd claims to have adopted in his college classrooms) and open dialogue among writers. In working with elders, it is especially crucial to regard the leader's role as a facilitator and co-participant—as a fellow writer—rather than an instructor. Winterowd rounds out his 2007 introduction with an appendix that includes samples of written comments he has given to participants, which demonstrate his advice to be specific and offer readerly response that stretches and challenges the writer's imagination, rather than teacherly imperatives.

*Senior Citizens Writing II*, edited by retired engineer and workshop participant Bill Reid, who claims scriptwriting and editing as hobbies, continues in the same vein as the 2007 volume, but with the added richness of wider representation of global perspectives, including writers who spent their early lives in China, Scotland, and Vietnam. As Reid does not include his own editor's notes or commentary, Winterowd remains the prominent guiding voice in this volume, authoring the introduction and brief notes at the beginning of each contributor's section. These notes helpfully highlight particular strengths or concepts the writer's work illustrates (e.g., "visual imagination"), which are valuable take-away ideas and terms for new workshop facilitators, as well as key goals for aspiring senior writers. Unanswered in either anthology, however, are some fairly important questions, including how to recruit and sustain the interest of older participants from local communities; how to negotiate moments of dissonance during meetings; and, crucially, direct advice on how to support and collaborate with senior writers as a special group, which, as Winterowd suggests, is fundamentally different from working with younger students.

One important question these anthologies do help to answer: What do seniors have to say, if given the time and motivation to write? The writers

included in both volumes, nearly all born in the 1920s and '30s, take up an assortment of genres and, in general, write in response to one of two main objectives: documenting history and promoting social change. Most prominent are the personal and family history writers, who use memoir, fiction, poetry, and other genres for “recapturing an era and the author’s place in that era” (Winterowd, in Reid 157). Although such writers vary in their writing goals and strengths, the result is a stirring array of memories that animate the Great Depression, World War II, mid-nineteenth-century American farm life, and other significant aspects of social history that often put into conversation the past and the present, as well as the stories of other participants. For instance, Marjory Bong-Ray Liu and Bill Reid, in *Senior Citizens Writing II*, each describe their lives during World War II: Liu recalls the saga of her flight to “Free China” during imperial Japanese rule, eventually making it to the U.S., while Reid writes about picking potatoes as a child to contribute to the war effort in Scotland. Mary Jenkins warmly recounts her mother’s unpaid and unsung work at home raising nineteen children during the Depression—work Jenkins appreciates now, as a self-described “domestic engineer, specializing in child production and development” (Winterowd 275).

The second group of writers find purpose in various modes of civic participation, using the short story, the novella, or the opinion essay to forward social commentary on issues that are personally compelling, often delivering their wisdom through the delicate construction of fictional worlds. Gerry Gooding (Winterowd) writes a traditional essay-style critique of the trend toward direct democracy in the State of California; Richard Wrate (Reid) assembles a pastiche of recreated news articles, editorial commentary, and autobiography to record his efforts to illegally feed starving bears in Aspen. In a less direct attempt at social commentary, Marie Thompson’s prose fiction piece “Another Chance” (Reid) raises awareness of the urgent need for senior centers and community programs for otherwise housebound elders, and Royal L. Craig (Winterowd) contributes to abortion debates through what can best be described as a ghost story.

Although contributors often write tenderly about their familiar subjects, the majority of this work is not purely nostalgic or sentimental. Works in the historical strain inspire (even if they do not always answer) important questions for community literacy researchers and teachers with interest in narrative, history, or generational studies: what narrative devices or genres are most productive in helping writers make meaning from memories? How do we see the personal and social interacting in these historical accounts? How do older writers imagine their stories will be meaningful to members of their own generation? Of other generations? The writers’ social commentary work makes an important contribution to raising awareness of retired elders’ continued and often unrecognized work

toward social change. Particularly in a culture that rewards youthfulness and overlooks older adults, such evidence of civic participation is crucial—perhaps now more than ever.

Indeed, as members of the substantial Baby Boomer generation age, the field may well encounter Winterowd's prediction of a "new pool of prospective students" in every community (Winterowd 3) with similar motivation and time to write. As Winterowd and his participants suggest, we might have much to learn from the work of these contributors, and other elders in the U.S. and worldwide awaiting an opportunity to write for an audience. By appropriately foregrounding contributors' work, these anthologies are somewhat less helpful than other existing texts as practical guides for community and adult workshop facilitators or for community literacy workers; however, the contributed works of fiction, life history, poetry, and essays collectively argue for the sustained cultural relevance of the literate lives of elders in our communities.