



SHEARINGS FROM THE FLOCK

A PRIVATE EDITION



MADE ESPECIALLY
FOR
MARY FRANCES MINTON

DEDICATION

This Private Edition of "Shearings from the Flock" is presented to Mary Frances Minton in grateful acknowledgment of the leadership she has given to the Writing Your Life's Story classes at The Shepherd's Center of Richmond Open University.

Mary Frances assumed the teaching responsibilities for one class in 1992. As the Open University expanded from one location to two and then to three, she was eager, indeed insistent, that students at each site be given the opportunity to write their life stories. She readily agreed to provide the leadership. Mary Frances has the distinction of being the only person who has taught a class at each of our three locations each session, fall, winter and spring, these past eleven years. That means teaching 70 eight-week classes - an amazing feat.

We know her as a bright, able, humble, patient, understanding, supportive individual who has enriched the lives of all whom she has known and taught. Her impact has gone beyond the class participants to reach the lives of their families and friends as well. By encouraging class members to write their memories and showing them how, she has helped them preserve their stories for generations to come.

Special recognition is also due to Paul Minton. Each year he has typed, edited and made camera-ready each edition of "Shearings from the Flock." The countless hours he unselfishly devoted as well as his attention to detail guaranteed a product of which we all are proud. His loving support of Mary Frances these many years has made it possible for all of us to be blessed by both of them.

Thank you, Mary Frances and Paul, for eleven remarkable years. We send you off to Roanoke with heartfelt gratitude for all you have given to us and The Shepherd's Center of Richmond. We look forward to hearing great things from you in your new home. Our loss is Roanoke's gain.

June 9, 2003



Mrs. Minton
I would have loved
being in your class
at any age. Love to
both of you as you
retire to Roanoke.
Lois Amidon



MEMORIES

From my college years onward, my memories of childhood experiences, except for the unhappy ones, were sketchy. For the most part they seemed to have completely disappeared from my mind. Months of dedicated hours under the guidance of a therapist dispelled the unpleasant memories during my mid-50s but what should have been pleasant memories of childhood were still not readily available to me.

That all began to change some six years ago when I followed a friend's advice and became a member of the Shepherd's Center of Richmond. At the same time I enrolled in the Open University run by the Center and became a more or less regular attendee at the Thursday sessions. On my first day I decided to attend what sounded like an interesting class called "Writing Your Life Story" thinking "I don't remember the early part of my story, but I have always wanted to write, so perhaps this is my opportunity to do that and see what others remember." Little did I know what a difference this decision would make in my life!

After a morning of stimulating classes and a lunch break that had included an interesting talk, I went back to the second floor of First Presbyterian Church for my first ever "writing class." My first impression was of some ten or twelve students, with pads of paper or folders on the table in front of them seated around a square of tables. At first I thought the pleasant white haired woman seated with her back to the windows was another student but I soon discovered that this was Mary Frances Minton, the teacher.

Mary Frances, as I quickly began to call her, opened the class by welcoming everyone back and made a warm welcome to those of us making our first appearance. She proceeded to state that she did not "Teach" this class in the normal sense of the word but rather lead us in the discovery of our writing talents. She offered some useful tips and resources and then asked who was ready to read something they had written. I was overwhelmed, but inspired by what I heard that afternoon. From this group of men and women from various backgrounds and cultures came memories of things long past mixed with philosophies and understanding of themselves and others that was most impressive.

During the next week I tried my hand at writing—something that I had not done since college days with the exception of writing grants and reports in connection with my job. I determined that if those people could do it so could I, and I did. My first piece was entitled "Where Is My Home?" a recollection of the many houses and apartments in which I had lived, most of which had been torn down or remodeled into other uses, as well as a lament for someplace to call my own from years gone by. Surprisingly enough, my classmates seemed to enjoy it.

Over the last six years I have written numerous pieces of memory about my life for I discovered that listening to others recall events from their pasts, whether in England, Pennsylvania, Stuart County or Texas, triggered memories of something that had happened to me. What a joyous revelation! One other joyous thing has come from taking this class, I have come to know Mary Frances as a friend, not just as a teacher and

mentor, but as someone I will treasure forever. She and her husband Paul, whom I met through membership on the Board of the Shepherd's Center, are dedicated to teaching whether in a collegiate setting or the Open University but, more importantly, they are interested in people and experiencing the journeys and feelings of others.

Mary Frances and Paul are moving to be closer to family. They will be missed on our scene here at the Open University but knowing them they will find new ways to impact the lives of their new neighbors and friends. We wish them Godspeed, good health and happiness in their new environment. Thank you both for all that you have brought to my life and know that you will live in my memory forever.

Tom Bass

A Lasting Friendship

by Ruth Blevins

How was I to know on that eventful day in early January 1990 that it was the beginning of one of the happiest periods of my life?

My motivation for joining the Shepherd's Center had come from Avery Bybee Fife, a former roommate at what was known back in the early 1930's as the Richmond Extension of the College of William and Mary. Much credit for my joy is due to my introduction to the teacher of our "Writing Your Life Story" class.

My husband had died in February of the previous year. Since it had been our golden anniversary year, our daughters had already started planning the big celebration for August 22, 1989. Now that it could never take place, I used that year to accomplish some much-needed chores. After having the slate roof replaced, getting the house re-painted inside and out, buying a new sofa and wing chairs to spruce up the living room, and polishing all the brass fixtures and the silver, I was now ready to branch out into a new life. The Shepherd's Center was just what the doctor ordered.

But it wasn't until after lunch on that fateful first day that my "new" life really began. My discovery of the "Writing Your Life Story" class and my introduction to the teacher made a big impact. Mary Frances was so positive in her outlook, so encouraging, and so charmingly upbeat that I was immediately hooked. I felt impelled to write and inflict all my memories on her and the class members. Mercifully, they received my stories with gracious tolerance, and since then I've rarely missed a class. These thirteen years have been happy ones, with my favorite class and teacher to look forward to each week.

The very best part of the deal, though, has been the friendship with Mary Frances and Paul. Suppose all of this had never happened? How much poorer and bleaker my life would have been! And, although for several years now I've been unable to spend much time with them other than during class, it has been comforting to know that they were not far away. Now that they are moving to Roanoke, a big gap has opened up in all our lives, and we will miss them terribly.

For their dedication, long hours, and hard work to immortalize our stories in the many volumes of "Shearing from the Flock" we are eternally grateful. And for the lasting bonds of friendship we give thanks, no matter the distance, as friendship knows no boundaries of time or space. And so we raise a toast:

Here's to Mary Frances -
Teacher, mentor, friend -
Publisher of all our tales,
Her patience without end.

Texas' gift to Richmond,
She gave us of her all.
So join our toast to unforgettable
Mary Fran and Paul.

Special Relationships

A few months after I moved to Ashland in 1995, a happy coincidence occurred. My daughter took me to a community event, where I was introduced to a retired professor who taught art history at Richmond's Shepherd Center. When he learned that I had been a faithful Shepherd Center follower back in South Carolina, he invited me to ride with him to try out the local chapter.

And so began two treasured relationships – my friendship with Jon Longaker and my participation in the Shepherd Center of Richmond.

Being a newcomer to this Center, I followed the lead of my "chauffeur" and joined his art history class as well as the class called "Writing Your Life Story." Jon's art history class opened my eyes to many art forms, artists, and themes. I especially liked the lectures about religious art, from which representing many periods and many cultures. His lectures full of facts, illustrations, and anecdotes, all presented in his gently humorous and laid-back style.

Art history was a fun class. However, it was in "Writing Your Life Story" that I found the greatest satisfaction. Everyone in the class was asked to write a piece each week about his or her life and share it with the class. At first, people were shy, testing the waters about what to write and what not to write. But with the gentle prodding of our teacher Mary Frances Minton, my classmates and I gradually gained confidence in our ability and got to know each other through our essays and stories. We shared experiences of growing up in a world very different from the present one. We also shared our differences in background and perspectives. Some participants were uncomfortable about or physically unable to read their work aloud. In these cases, others volunteered to read for them. Jon read several of my essays to the class, on days when my breath was too short for performance.

"Writing Your Life Story" not only helped me get to know my classmates, but it also provided lots of opportunities to talk with my daughters about people and adventures from my past, as well as about our shared memories of their youth, their father, and other family and friends. Perhaps most important, the class helped me to get to know myself better. Now, you would think after the age of 80 that I would already pretty well know myself. But when I began Mary Frances's class, I truly felt that I had nothing to write about. I thought I would just sit back and listen to stories of other people's lives. In listening to the writing of fellow classmates and sorting out my memories, however, I realized that I had lots to tell. Some of my pieces (like the "Dirty Neck Contest") were humorous, some wistful, and others simply my opinions. For awhile I focused only on the happy memories; most especially, I resisted writing about the sad life of my brother Billy. But once I came to terms with the story of his battle with alcoholism and read my essay in class, fellow students came up to thank me for writing about a topic that had also caused pain in their own families.

Now, I am no longer able to attend the Shepherd Center classes and, sadly, my friend Jon Longaker is gone, a victim of Lou Gehrig's Disease. But I am privileged to hold dear in my memory Jon, Mary Frances, Tom Bass, and all the other friends I found at the Center. When I reread the books of student essays that Mary Frances put together each year and recall my stories, alongside those of the others, I realize what a special relationship we had. Thank you, Mary Frances, for the important part you played.

Betty Culp

June, 2003

Dear Mary Frances,

What joy and gratitude will always be mine because our paths crossed when I heard of your writing class at the Open University of the Shepherd's Center. The warmth I received from you and the fellow members of the class gave me courage to record my memoirs.

Over the years my two daughters listened to my stories but knowing they would never remember them they urged me to put them in writing. You, in your gentle way, gave me the inspiration and encouragement to undertake this.

I have now combined these stories into one complete account and it was a great honor to be asked by the Ginter Park Woman's Club to give a talk at one of their programs. I made several photographic slides which have given both color and support to my talk. These dear, genteel ladies of the Club heard, I think for the very first time, what it was like for an English girl to marry an American soldier and eventually journey 6,000 miles to Washington State to begin a life so very different from anything she had ever known before.

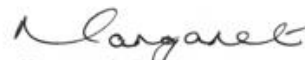
Now I have another story to write. Last month I reached the age of 80. My two darling daughters completely surprised me with a day's happiness, along with some of my very dear friends, which I shall always treasure.

Thank you so much Mary Frances.

Not to exclude your dear husband Paul, I would like to thank him and his singing companions for the many occasions I have been entertained by them.

My loving thoughts go with you both as you begin another stage in your lives. My eldest daughter lives in Roanoke and it is a beautiful part of the State. Maybe our paths will once again cross - who knows!

Lovingly,


Margaret R. Larson

5108 Bulky Drive, Apt. 204
Richmond, VA 23228

May 18, 2003

Mary Frances and Paul

I wish to thank both of you for what you taught me in your classes at the Shepherd Center. Also, because of you, Mary Frances, my family and I have stories of my husband, Stanley, early years and also his living at the Shepherd home. We have those memories in his own words and his handwriting. I too have written many stories of events in my life story. My family would not have these two large books containing our life stories if we had not attended Mary Frances' Life Story class at the Shepherd Center Open University. Paul, we attended your Opera classes. You make opera so meaningful for me. We often listened to opera or watch it on TV.

I wish the very best for both of you.

May God Bless both of you abundantly

Goretha Hatter

At times, when I am sitting here,
I frequently will find
That very pleasant thoughts of you
Will come into my mind.
I'll wonder what you're doing,
How you're feeling, what is new,
I think you'd be surprised
At just how much I think of you.
So, though we're not together
All the time, I hope you see
That in my mind and heart and prayers,
You're often here with me.



Dr. Fred C. Mallory
Mrs Fred C. Mallory
9225 Holbrook Dr.
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6-9-03

AS WE MEET NEW PEOPLE,
ONE AFTER ANOTHER,
SOME STAND OUT IN A SPECIAL WAY.
THIS COUPLE CAME TO VIRGINIA,
TO TEACH AT VCU,
AND THEY MADE THEIR MARK.
AFTER THEIR RETIREMENT,
THEY GAVE TO SHEPHERD'S CENTER
THEIR KNOWLEDGE AND THEIR CHARM.
WE ATTENDED THEIR CLASSES,
WITH EXPECTATION AND DELIGHT.
THEY ENJOYED IT, AND WE ENJOYED IT.
THEIR MESSAGES AND THEIR STYLE
BECAME PART OF OUR PERSONALITIES,
AND WE BECAME BETTER PEOPLE.
THANK GOD FOR THE MINTONS.

Fred and Jackie Mallory



For the past 3 years I have participated in Mary Frances's "Writing Your Life Story" classes offered through The Shepherd Center. On entering the class I found myself in a group of veterans who had been writing with Mary Frances for a number of years. Everyone welcomed me warmly, and Mary Frances's friendly style encouraged me.

The classes have given me the discipline I needed to write regularly. I especially liked Mary Frances's idea that one need not sit down and write a chronological history of one's life. Rather, she said that if you author enough short memoirs of various events eventually they can be strung together to form a life story. This non-threatening approach appealed to me, and now that I have a collection of 46 little memoirs I can see how they can be used as the foundation for my autobiography. More importantly, having been written about both major and minor life events they seem to me to have more readability and spice than they otherwise would.

Writing one's story is only a part of the class. Hearing what the other members write is of equal value. Appreciating the skill others have in expressing ideas and being inspired and stimulated by their stories helps feed my own creative spirit. The fact that Mary Frances not only was our leader but also participated by reading her own stories each week added to the appeal of the classes for me.

We all have commented on how much we know about each other after being in Mary Frances's class. No casual conversation would ever have been so revealing as listening to the stories of families and events both happy and sad. We all become warm friends through this sharing.

Because Mary Frances has accomplished all of this through The Shepherd Center for so many people for so many years it is mind-boggling to consider how many lives she has touched in a positive way. I am so glad that I am one of them. Thank you, Mary Frances, for sharing some of your life story with me and inspiring me to write and share mine.

Ann Shibut
May 2003

Shearings
from the
Flock

by
Seasoned Citizens



Volume V
1992-1993

Foreword

The stories which follow were written by the members of the Shepherd Center Open University classes in "Writing Your Life's Story" at all three locations, West End, North Side, and South Side, in Richmond, Virginia, during the fall, winter, and spring sessions of 1992-1993.

"Writing Your Life's Story" is an idea which appeals to many of us as we hear questions from our children, their children, other relatives, and friends or are reminded of interesting or humorous events and artifacts from the past. We want to share with current generations, as well as generations to come, what it was like growing up in Richmond, rural Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, Texas, Montana, and assorted places in between.

Many of us have difficulty getting started writing or organizing what we have written. A class serves to keep us inspired with ideas for writing and for putting together collections of stories for posterity. All across the country there are many classes devoted to such pursuits, and there are as many ways of approaching the subject as there are classes.

In our classes at the Open University, we have found that the experience and discipline of writing regularly, with minimal guidance and suggestions from the teacher, along with the reactions and suggestions from class members as we read what we have written, have resulted in our feeling more competent in our writing. The instructor suggests a broad topic for possible writing during the next week. This topic is no more than a suggestion, and each writer is free to choose another if he or she desires. The majority of the participants have generally chosen to write about the "assigned" topic; the wonderful surprise is then the great variety of interpretations we hear from the individuals in the class. Some of those topics and their variations are represented in this book, for example: winter, mud, a most unforgettable teacher, a favorite food.

As each person reads his or her piece for the week, others in the class often take notes for additional writing on that or a related subject. We serve as inspiration for each other, and we enjoy hearing the other stories at the same time that we make progress in writing that book we want for our descendants. And no one has any more fun than the "teacher."

Mary Frances Minton
August, 1993