

**Dotsie Bregel,
Founder and CEO of
The National Association of Baby Boomer Women
(NABBW)**



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Presents

**A Path to Writing and
Publishing Memoirs**

With

Sue William Silverman

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Dotsie: Hello and welcome to the call.

For those of you who don't know me, I am **Dotsie Bregel**, and I'm founder of the **National Association of Baby Boomer Women** which can be found at www.NABBW.com and www.BoomerWomenSpeak.com which are the number one sites on major search engines for baby boomer women. My passion is educating and empowering women at midlife. Since launching www.BoomerWomenSpeak.com in 2002, I've been connecting, encouraging, and supporting Boomer women on a daily basis. I dedicate a great portion of my time to creating opportunities that inspire women to explore their passions and live life to the fullest. I've become the "go to" person for journalist who are interested in learning more about our generation of women.

If you're on the call and you're not a member of the [NABBW](http://www.NABBW.com), feel free to email me at dots@nabbw.com and I'll be happy to send you a link to join for \$25.00 off the fee of \$75.00.

This teleseminar is one of the many benefits of being a member of the NABBW, and you can see them all posted at www.NABBW.com. This is one of probably, I think, 65 teleseminars that are archived on the Members Only page. You can listen to them while you're working or online, and we also have them all transcribed so you can print them if you like, and read them at your convenience.

Let's get started. I'd like to introduce today's guest, **Sue William Silverman**; Sue, are you there?

Sue: Yes, I am.

Dotsie: Oh good, I'm glad I didn't lose you. Sue Silverman's new book is "***Fearless Confessions; A Writer's Guide to Memoir***," and I'm going to have to say that I'm a big fan of Sue's since we met back in 2002. When I launched www.BoomerWomenSpeak.com, she submitted a story and we've been corresponding every since. Her memoir which is, "***Lovesick: One Woman's Journey Through Sexual Addiction***," which was published by Norton, is also a Lifetime TV movie. And her first memoir, "***Because I Remember Terror, Father, I Remember You***," won the AWP award in creative nonfiction, and that's the Association of Writer's and Writing Program award. And I want to share that I've read all of your books, Sue and I'm just a huge fan and in fact, after reading your

memoir book, was when we decided to do the writing contest together for the association and we had many, really good submissions.

Sue: Oh thank you, that's sweet. Yes, it was terrific. I was incredibly impressed.

Dotsie: Yeah, so that was a fun thing to do. Sue teaches at the low-residency MFA in Writing program at *Vermont College of Fine Arts*. She has appeared on *The View* and *Anderson Cooper 360*. For more information, and actually you can even contact her through her Website if you want to email her with anything after the call, at www.suewilliamsilverman.com. Okay so Sue, how are you today?

Sue: I'm good. And I just want to thank you so much for inviting me to do this teleseminar and a big thanks to all of the listeners there who have called in, and I just really love what you are doing with the boomer women's Web sites. It's a real thrill to be here today.

Dotsie: Well good. We should have a good time today because these are always good because the women who always call in are intentionally listening because it is something that they're interested in. So let's start by giving them some good information. One of the things that you talk about is the redemptive power of memoir. And of course, we just want to mention that writing memoir is very different than writing anything else. And we'll get into some of that, but tell us about the redemptive power of writing memoir.

Sue: Well I think that there really is a sense that by writing your own story, your life story, that it is a kind of redemptive journey. I mean I guess I think of it in terms of discovering your emotional truths; sort of the kernel. You know we all have our own truths, our own life force, if you will, and I think that that is the part of kind of redemption, discovering your emotional truth which kind of frees up this life force. You know there is only one of you, and your voice is unique. And if you don't express yourself, you don't really fully discover who you are, and that essence of you will be lost. So by writing your memoir, I think it is kind of redemptive in terms of finding that emotional truth in that life force. And I think another way that it is redemptive is that also by writing our story, we really are helping others to heal. And I think there is an enormous amount of redemption around that. I mean I just get so many emails from women who basically thank me for telling my story, but more importantly, sort of thanking me for telling their story, too. So yes, that's kind of how I see the idea of redemption in memoir.

Dotsie: Okay, good. And you mentioned how our stories heal others and actually, so many times also first they heal us. I have not written a memoir but I do journal. I have to say that it is through journaling that I've gotten to know myself best. And it's something that was surprising to me because I didn't really understand the power of writing before I journaled.

Sue: Oh absolutely, yeah. If you want to be a professional writer, you can go out and try and get your work published. But that's only one piece of it. Just writing as a journal, or a diary, or just letters, or whatever, I mean just the act of writing is incredibly empowering. I agree. I hardly know what I think unless I write, so yeah.

Dotsie: That's right. That's right. Well I think people with busy minds have that problem because you have a hard time carrying thoughts to fruition. But when you're writing, you have no choice but to do so. And that's why I think it's so powerful.

Sue: Yes. It's really just going deeper, and deeper, and deeper into an experience, and when we're living an experience, you don't really know what it means. You're just sort of thrust into daily events and you go through it. But it's really only through the writing process later that I can understand what any given event means.

Dotsie: That's so true. Okay, let's talk about how we can find courage to write our stories because a lot of the stories that our generation – and I give a lot of credit to our generation, Sue and I think you do too, as being the generation of women who really started sharing our voices.

Sue: Exactly.

Dotsie: And some of the stories that our women of generation have to tell, and just women, period, aren't stories that they're proud of in the sense that, oh people are going to hear this and it's just going to be great. You need a lot of courage to write those stories. So tell us how to find that courage.

Sue: Right, that's exactly right in that we're not necessarily writing stories that always put us in a good light. But we are writing stories that put us in a truthful light, and that's what's obviously, more important. And in terms of finding the courage, I think it's a matter of several things. First of all, the most important thing is to get your story down on paper. And I would always suggest you do that before you start worrying about kind of, what will my mother think, or what will the neighbors say, or you know, what will the general media write or think. That's just putting on way too much or putting way too much pressure on yourself.

First of all, I would just try to think about writing as just writing for yourself, and that's kind of Step 1. Then once all of your words are down on paper, you can kind of worry about the world. But I think in another way to look at it is knowing that we do own our stories. Things that have happened to us, we're the only ones who can tell that story, and just sort of claiming that, and knowing that this is our story, as writers we're really free to tell them. I know that ultimately I came to that realization which also helped me to have a lot of courage. The other thing is to be in a really good community; not necessarily of other writers, although that can help. Just say an organization like www.BoomerWomenSpeak.com just in an

organization where you do have a lot of support, particularly by other women who really can sort of hear your voice and so if you start off by saying, well I have a story but I'm kind of scared to write it, and then you get a lot of feedback from other women who say, oh but your story is real important, I just think that that can help us find a lot of courage to sort of not feel alone with all of that.

But you know, with me, I started out as a fiction writer and it was really my therapist who encouraged me to tell my own story. And so I really found a lot of courage through his belief in me kind of before I had my own belief in me. That's sort of okay, you know, to borrow someone else's courage for you until you kind of find your own. So I mean if you have a friend out there, or a spouse, or a woman friend, you know, any kind of support group, and just sort of start talking about what you would like to do, I think you would be amazed and very pleased with all of the support that you'll find about having the courage to tell your story.

Dotsie: And you know I think often times when we just speak it, our story, or a part of our story, to one other person it empowers us to continue and to carry on.

Sue: Absolutely. Yeah. I think that's true, and also there is a chapter in *Fearless Confessions* sort of about this whole issue. And I have a lot of quotes and interviews from other memoirists who have gone through this same process of you know, scared what their mothers would think, something like that. So just kind of listening and reading about what other memoirists have gone through, I think can be helpful to kind of know, okay, I wrote this book; I put it out there, and kind of the world kept turning, you know? Sure maybe some of the feedback we get is not what we want to hear, but that doesn't take away from the fact that what you've done is so, so important. And kind of in a bottom line way, you're going to help a lot more people, including yourself, than you're going to get people say, angry at you. There's going to be so many more people who are going to be supporting you and really hearing your voice and being very encouraging to you, rather than the opposite.

Dotsie: Yeah and I remember reading in your book, and it was probably in that chapter where you talked about you should just pretend you are writing for yourself.

Sue: Absolutely. I really do. If I start worrying about—well, even if I start worrying about will it ever get published...you just don't . . . I just try not to worry about any of that; what other people will say, what my friends might think, what my family might think, whether just like the people in the media. If you're sitting there in front of the computer with just all of that weighing on you, it's just too much.

Dotsie: Yeah, it's too much and I also remember you saying, or someone, maybe you quoted someone else, that it was about fear being the killer of good literature.

Sue: I wish I could take that quote as mine, but it's not. **James McBride**, who wrote, "*The Color of Water*," he gave a talk and a reading at Vermont College where I teach and he said that to like, oh I don't know, like over a hundred writers; that *fear is the killer of good literature*, and honestly, everybody in the audience, you could hear them scratching that line down on their pads of paper. It just resonated. Of course that's with, you know, there were fiction writers and poets in the audience, too but I mean like everybody wrote that down, because, you know it's true. Whether you're writing poetry or fiction or non-fiction, it's still scary to put your creative self out there.

Dotsie: Right, okay...alright. Once somebody has some courage, and even if, you know, I mean it reminds me in a way of when we were kids and we would write in our diary and hide them, and lock them, and everything else because we didn't want anybody else to read our words. And I'm sure that's what people go through when they write a memoir, and if that's what you have to do to get started, and if that's what helps you, then just have the courage to do that. But can you talk about some tips on bringing our stories to life?

Sue: Yeah. One of the first things that I try to focus on when I start a new piece really is sensory language. And that sounds so sort of obvious, you know we always hear about the five senses and using them. But it's actually crucial to implement them in order to bring the reader inside your story. And I have like just a little example here that—you know I wrote this memoir about recovering from sexual addiction, so if I just sort of sat here and told you or even wrote it this way, "Oh I struggle with sex addiction and I went into rehab for 28 days, and it was really hard." I mean you can heard how abstract that kind of language is and you would ultimately just kind of sound like *Time Magazine* or something like that. And of course I mean the writing in *Time* is fine, but it's not, you know, creative. But by using sensory description, I'm just going to read one sentence from *Lovesick* that sort of would show the difference between you know, yeah, I really struggled with sex addiction; it was awful, and then here is a sentence where I'm about to meet a...where I'm meeting a dangerous man in a seedy motel and this is just the one sentence.

"I feel a damp chill between my shoulder blades. How can love be two bodies wrapped in a sheet that's singed with careless cigarettes, here in a room with plastic curtains, tin ashtrays, stained carpets, and artificial air."

So just by using that kind of sensory language, you're just bringing that reader right into the motel room and they can actually enter the experience in that way. And this is not a sentence from my book, but let me give you two other sentences that just sort of contrast that.

Rather than say, "I was in love with a cute guy," you could write, "John's hands, the color of cinnamon, stroked my bare shoulders." I mean just to see the

difference between that kind of abstract, flat language like, “I was in love with a cute guy,” doesn’t bring you into that experience. But to actually add those sensory details, then the reader can kind of feel what it is that you’re feeling. So to me, when I start writing anything, a new essay, or when I started writing those two books, that’s when I first sort of try to come up with is, you know, I sort of picking a moment of when I’m going to start the memoir, and what did that moment smell like, what did that moment taste like, what did that moment sound like, what did it feel like, you know, what did it look like? Just really focusing on those sensory details, I think, is the best way to write, you know, to have really dynamic writing.

Dotsie: Okay so you really focus on the senses. Any other tips for bringing the story to life?

Sue: Well of course the overall key is to kind of, when you’re writing a memory or even an essay, is to know that, even if you’re writing a 300-page memoir, that you’re not writing a whole life. A memoir is kind of a slice of a life, and so it’s really important to find the theme of any given piece that would very narrowly define what it is you’re going to write about. And a theme is not necessarily anything like a statement that would end up in the book or the essay, but it’s something that is important for you the writer to know so that you can have a really clear focus. And that’s why, even though on the face of it, my two memoirs seem very related, because obviously I had the sex addiction because my father molested me, so there is that kind of clear connection, but yet, those two books could never have been one. I mean at first I really had to concentrate on kind of growing up in this incestuous family. That’s the clear focus.

The second memoir, *Lovesick*, that’s very narrowly focused on the 28 days I spent in rehab recovering from a sex addiction. But that’s really good news because if you could throw everything into one book, then you’d only have one book; whereas if you clearly define it, you get more books to write. And now I mean I’m working on an essay collection and I have something like 23 essays, and so there’s a lot of material. And each essay, just like each memoir, has a clear, and kind of narrowly defined focus. So I think that knowing your theme, that really narrow focus, and then once you know that, trying to bring that theme to life, you know, injecting life into that theme; those are probably the first two things that I think are really important.

Dotsie: Okay, let’s talk about beginning a story because like you said, if somebody wants to write about something that happened in their childhood, but your childhood is a very long time, and happens over many years, but how do you narrow it down? How do you figure out where to start?

Sue: Usually the best way *not* to start is at the beginning. Kind of like, well, I was born, you know ...you yourself as a writer would be asleep by page three. Usually the best way to start is at the point of impact. What just happened in your

life, you know, in terms of the life of the memoir that causes the action to start? You know, what just sort of jump starts the piece? For example, and I know that some of you have probably read my book, you know ***Because I Remember Terror, Father, I Remember You***, begins when I first start therapy and that's when I first realized I'm ready to kind of deal with my past. So a logical place rather than the start—yeah, I could have started with a scene of my father molesting me, but that in a way didn't seem as if it would give enough of a focus to the book because the book, overall, while it is writing about growing up in an incestuous family, the reader had to know that there is kind of hope and help out there. And so in order for the reader to stay with you for the 300 pages or whatever, I think it was also important for the reader to know that okay, Sue finally gets help, you know, there she is in therapy.

Dotsie: Right.

Sue: But it also was kind of the point of impact because within the life of the book, or within the framework of the book, I did not know how to speak about my childhood until I entered therapy. So that is sort of what jump starts the exploration of the past. And then with *Lovesick*, it basically begins just right the day before I'm entering rehab. That's sort of an easier structure because I've got the 28 days that I'm going to be writing about. But I chose to start it not as I'm entering rehab but really the day before in order to show a sort of a contrast and sort of what I'm up against. Like this is my life outside of therapy which is just a total disaster and I'm a wreck. And so by starting there and then bam, write the second chapter and I'm there entering therapy. So it's really about finding that moment that really does just kind of jump start that action and usually that's sort of in the middle of things, but then of course, you'll have flashbacks in either the essay or the book, too, that will show your past, whatever it is that lead you up to this moment, this kind of point of impact. So it's not that this material will be left out, it's just where do you want to start it. You want to start it at a moment of really high drama.

Dotsie: Right, and that's like what you were saying that that book is about the 28-days of rehab but looking back on it, I don't really remember it that way, specifically, because you intertwined everything that kind of brought you to that moment, too.

Sue: Well exactly. I mean, I start the day before I enter rehab and then there are several, kind of extended flashbacks, that show that kind of bad behavior of mine before I ever entered rehab. So basically like those flashbacks are written—I'm in rehab, I'm on that unit, and the flashbacks kind of take the reader into the past to show how it is that I ended up in rehab. So it is a kind of twining between the past and the present.

Dotsie: Yeah and so what we're going to do at the end is that we're going to let anyone on the call to ask questions and that might be a really good question for

someone who has a story and could give a little background, and say what might be a good place to start.

Sue: Yes, absolutely.

Dotsie: Alright, and because memoirs are so inclusive, I imagine it would be really hard to decide what to put in and what not to put in. I can tell you, I read lots of memoirs, and I have read some poor ones. I had to laugh when you said, "I was born on . . ." because I have read one similar to that, in particular. And everything is included *and* everything is included at length. It just didn't appeal to me at all. So I think that there has to be a way to figure out really what's important to the story, how do you know what to include in your memoir? I mean it sounds like a ridiculous question but you have to figure it out.

Sue: No, but you're absolutely right. A lot of beginning writers, I mean that is something that, myself included you know, even now, it's not that you ever totally figure it out because like with these essays I'm writing each one kind of has its own challenge. And a lot of that is kind of trial and error and I wish I could just give you the magic answer, but a lot of it is trial and error. I mean the first draft you're probably going to go one of two ways. You're either going to include way too much material, which is what I tend to do, or it's going to be too skimpy. But let's say, since I know about the too much material better than the other because as I say that's what I do. I mean I do sort of throw the kitchen sink in to some extent on my first draft. And then as I'm writing I'm sort of figuring out the theme. And then in the second draft, it's almost taking it paragraph by paragraph, often scene by scene, and sometimes sentence by sentence, and saying, okay, how does this paragraph enhance my theme? Does it reveal what it is this book or this essay focuses on? And if it doesn't, you just have to be ruthless and take it out and kind of not love all of your paragraphs too much. You know, be willing to kind of sacrifice them.

And also just tell yourself, okay, this paragraph doesn't work in this essay or book, but it'll be in my next one, just to make yourself feel better. But it really is being...it's not something you are necessarily going to know on the first draft. I mean I never do. But it is kind of as you revise the first time, I mean everything I write has like a bazillion drafts. So as you revise it is just going through it, sentence by sentence, and maybe there's a whole kind of persona, or character, who you really wanted to write about, but maybe that person who is in your real life that you're trying to cast on the page; maybe that person doesn't fit in that book. Maybe you have to take out one whole character or persona. I mean sometimes that happens.

Or there's a whole theme, there's some episode that happened to you that you think is just absolutely fascinating and you want to try and shoe horn it in. But ultimately, by about the fifth draft if it is feeling kind of clunky, then just be willing

to say, okay, I've got to take this out and hopefully, that will appear somewhere else. But a lot of that really is just trial and error, I'm afraid.

Dotsie: Yeah and you know, it's interesting and oh, I really am just enjoying hearing such a professional writer, you know, a published writer with big publishing houses, etc, just to hear this information because it's so interesting to hear when you are in the early stages of writing. And I'll just share something that I'd like to point out and that's how you're talking about the drafts, the drafts, the drafts. And I think that a lot of times new or young writers, not necessarily young age 18, but "young" being new to it, think that you can just write and get it right the first time. I've read, and I'm sure you've read, Stephen King's book on writing. At the back of his book he has a really great example of his edits, like his first draft.

Sue: I remember that!

Dotsie: You remember that? It's always stuck with me because it just made me realize, oh my gosh, Stephen King does this, you know? And so I think that's really important to know. You write it, and you rewrite it, and you rewrite it, and you rewrite it. So that's one thing.

Sue: Absolutely. I mean I don't know any writer who just kind of cranks something out. It's a struggle and even though you think, okay, I've written this book, or essay, and now I sort of "get it," everything you write is going to bring it's own challenges. I mean, I spent like 6 months on one, like 16-page essay. And I worked on that sucker every day, and I just couldn't figure it out. I knew I had something to say, and I just draft after draft after draft, it just took a long, long time and a lot of struggle. And once you get down to the basic story and you know, you've got your plot, and you've got your images, you've got your metaphors; you've got all of that; then I mean I still go through at least two or three drafts just going sentence by sentence, just making each sentence as clear and precise as I can make it. Are the commas in place? You know you sort of go from the big things, from theme, down to commas.

Dotsie: Right and I think that's something that's really important to point out while we're talking about this because there's so many pieces to this writing memoir, getting published, etc. But let's say okay you're to the point you've had the courage; you've written, you've got your story down on paper. And then this is something—Sue has been in our forum community at www.boomerwomenspeak.com, a couple of times, and most recently she was in there discussing her latest book, "***Fearless Confessions; A Writer's Guide to Memoir***," and I remember; I think this was the big topic was, finding the courage to show your story to friends and family and the world. So we go from saying, okay, I'm writing it, I'm hiding it, I'm doing the best I can, and then you think, you know what, I really have a story that has healed me in the writing and that can probably heal other people. So now what am I going to do?

Sue: Sure; and there really are choices. Just so you know, I do have a whole chapter on marketing and publishing in “*Fearless Confessions; A Writer’s Guide to Memoir*,” but I really would like to share a few of the Web sites here with your group.

First of all and just so you know, there are three ways to get published. You can get published with a small, university press, or you can find an agent and get published with a large New York City publisher, or you can self-publish. And I should also add that one of the members of www.BoomerWomenSpeak.com forums is Lynn Tolson who I think is with us today, and she wrote this great, little article for my book and I mean she wrote it especially for the book—thank you Lynn, again—about self publishing and how she went about it and sort of the pros and cons of it. Now if you’re interested in a small press, or university press, which my first book was published with a university press, a really good Web site that talks about smaller presses www.newpages.com and that’s just an amazing resource.

Now on the other hand, if you’re interested in trying to find an agent, there’s a really helpful book that is Jeff Herman’s *Guide to Book Publishers, Editors, and Literary Agents*, and I’m sure it for sale on Amazon.

But there are also like some free online Web sites, www.agentresearch.com/. Another is www.aar-online.org and that’s the Association of Authors Representatives. So those are just a few places just to kind of get started and then of course once you start “Googling,” you know, agents and things, there’s just going to be all sorts of things pop up.

Dotsie: Okay, anything else on that because I did want to track back a little bit and ask you about showing the story to friends and family. Like can you give us an example of like when you wrote your story and you were ready to show it to someone. Who was one of the first people and what was their reaction to it; if they were a family member and didn’t know what was going on in your home, or they did know what was going on in your home, but had never spoken about it. Can you just tell us a reaction?

Sue: Sure. I tend to not be forthright with family. Well, first of all my parents were dead before I started writing my first memoir, so that frankly, made it easier I have to say. But I do have a sister and I actually ended up telling her like two minutes before the book was going to be published. So I really put it off. But the first person I showed it to was both a friend, a writer friend of mine; a buddy I knew from graduate school; and I trusted her. I truly wanted her to read it as kind of this literature and did she think that it was literature or was it just kind of like, ah...a journal for myself to kind of figure things out; and I was sort of going to be fine either way. But she felt that I should really try to get it published so from her

reaction and from a personal standpoint, she read it, and still liked me. She didn't think I was an awful person. .

Dotsie: Yes, that's what I think is important that you tell.

Sue: Yeah, she read all of these things that had gone on with my father in this incestuous relationship and she absolutely did not judge me. I mean, just not at all. And you know, as Dotsie mentioned, that book won a literary award and to me, I think that's astounding and I think it's really important you know, for women to know because when I sent it off to this contest, I was kind of sending it off kind of knowing it would not win, but yet I would still feel like I was trying to get published. Because I thought to myself, well, gosh, you know, a memoir about a woman growing up in an incestuous family, that's just not going to win a literary award. It's just isn't. And then the judge chose it, and it did. That's empowering to me, but it's also empowering, I think, to all of us, to women's stories in general; that this judge, a well-respected author himself, selected this book from all of the other manuscripts. So that was incredibly positive.

And then he wrote me like just this incredibly beautiful letter about what he thought of the book. And then the third person who read it was my editor at the *University of Georgia Press* and he loved it. So my immediate feedback was all so incredibly positive. The thing I guess to maybe take away from this is that yes, there may be people in your family and friends who aren't going to like to hear the truth. I mean that's true; that can happen. But again, I've said this before but I don't think you can say this too many times, I still firmly believe that all of our stories will receive much, much more praise and not like hollow praise. But I mean sincere praise. Like *thank you for telling this story and by telling your story you've really helped me too...* that kind of support and empowerment. I just think that for me at least in my experience, and really for the experience of all of my writer friends, it's been much more positive than not.

Dotsie: Okay and you just have to believe. You have to believe in your story and you have to believe in yourself. And that's a whole other piece of that courage.

Sue: Well, it really is, and you do have to. Or if you don't believe in yourself, write anyway. It's sort of like okay to do that. Just sort of feel really bad about yourself but just still keep writing because ultimately, I think, you *will* start thinking more positively about yourself and have more of a belief in yourself. Once you have five pages down, I mean once you have a sentence down, once you have one page, ten pages, you know, thirty pages, kind of every word that you put down on a page, that kind of courage really sort of grows. Like, oh, okay I can do that. I wrote that sentence and nobody else in the entire universe could have written that sentence. It's my sentence; I own it. This is a piece of me and I put it down on paper. That's incredibly empowering.

Dotsie: Yes, it sure is. We're kind of running out of time and I have a few things I want to squeeze in. Do you necessarily need an agent to market your story?

Sue: No, I mean you only need an agent if you want to try a big New York publisher like *Norton*, or *Doubleday*, or *Random House*. So the big ones you do. But just for the university press, or for the hundreds and hundreds of smaller presses, and again, that web site for the list of all of those, that www.newpages.com, for those you actually do not need an agent at all. You just start collecting names, and once you go to a web site like www.newpages.com, then sort of start going through them and look for publishers who are interested in women's stories. They'll sort of tell you what kinds of things they publish. So once you come up with a list, then basically then you go to their web site and they'll give you submission guidelines. Maybe they want to see the first fifty pages, maybe they want a query letter. Whatever it is, they'll tell you what their guidelines are. But do your research. Don't send off your book to a publisher that you're not familiar with the kinds of things they publish, because then you're kind of wasting your time and their time. So just browse the Web. That's one of the great things; it's easier to get published now, at least to find publishers, than it used to be, so it really *is* all out on the Web.

Dotsie: And you can just submit right online, too. Yeah, and this might be a good time to talk about like the community of writers because you talk about not submitting until you're ready, and maybe that community...if you want to talk about the importance of that? Because that would be a really good time, another time, actually I should say, to use that community of writers.

Sue: Yes, I think it really is important to be with other writers because being a writer is kind of lonely and kind of thankless, in many ways. And I think there are two ways to go about it. You can do it sort of formally. For example, I teach at the low-residency MFA in Writing Program at Vermont College of Fine Arts, and actually, if you're interested in that, it's www.vermontcollege.edu. It's a low-residency. So basically you just go twice a year for ten days and then the rest of the semester, you work one-on-one with your faculty advisor. Like this semester, I have five students and once a month they send me their work. But sort of being with that community at Vermont College is really ah, it's just amazing. I love my students, I love my colleagues, it's just really kind of saves my life in many ways.

But then there are other ways, you know if you don't want to pay for getting an MFA degree, you know there are lots of summer writers conferences. And if you go to a bookstore, or I think they have an online version like [Poets and Writers](#). All of the bookstores have it. It's called *Poets and Writers* and if you go through that, you'll see hundreds of [writer's conferences](#) in the summer and you know, just go to a writer's conference. It may be three days, four days, and you'll meet a lot of good writers there. If that's even too much, then just like go to your local bookstore and ask them if they know of any writer's groups in town. Or even reader's groups, you know? Just finding people who read a lot is really nice, too.

But either way, I think that's one way, or on Web sites, like boomer women Web sites there's a strong presence of women writers or people who like to read a lot. So there's lots of different ways to find a community and it's really just finding the one that suits you. I mean I kind of like doing all of them, really. You really can't have too many writers in your life.

Dotsie: And you know, there's actually a woman in our forums who wanted a writer's group and she launched her own. She put something in her local newspaper and she now has her own writer's group. But it's important because you can get so holed up, and so lonely, and so zoned, in on your own writing that you really need other people to read it, and to give you feedback. And you have to have a tough skin because we were talking about it is not just about the writing, it's the re-writing and re-writing, and re-writing.

Sue: Exactly. Exactly.

Dotsie: Okay, let's see. We talked about some different publishing outlets and I would like to share that I've done an interview with *Sheri McConnell*, who is the founder of the *National Association of Women Writers*, about different writing, whether you have the personality for self-publishing or traditional publishing. A lot of it has to do with your personality, how much of it you are willing to let go, and how much you like to control your own project. Anyway, that teleseminar is on the **Members Only** page at www.NABBW.com and Sheri did a really good job of explaining what route you might want to take based on your personality and your project. I thought that was really interesting.

Sue: That's a good point.

Dotsie: Yeah, like some people aren't willing to give up a whole lot, and if that's your case, then you probably should go with self-publishing because you have more control over the project.

Sue: Yeah, in a bottom line kind of way, I do write about this more in "**Fearless Confessions: A Writer's Guide to Memoir**," but I know we're running out of time. The advantage of having someone else publish your book is that outside of all of the writing, they do all of the work. They do the marketing, they design it, they market it, and they get it into bookstores, so you don't have to pay for any of that. But if you self-publish, then you basically have to pay to get the book itself in a form, between covers, and you have to do all of your own marketing. So in addition to that sort of control thing, that's also just kind of something to keep in mind.

Dotsie: Okay, alright. Let's talk a little bit about tips for marketing the story.

Sue: Yeah, I think there are traditional ways, of course, just sort of sitting around and hoping to get reviewed in the *New York Times*. But I don't always think that's

the way to go because the New York Times reviews very few books and they've not reviewed anything of mine. And that's just really tuff and as you probably know, more and more newspapers are going bankrupt anyway. As that whole market shrinks, you have to be even more kind of proactive. And then of course, with the advent of the Internet, that makes it easier. I mean because you know, I went on a blog tour with this new book and basically, just camped out at a lot of different blog sites, Web sites where writers were hanging out and besides just having a great time and meeting a lot of terrific people, you also get to market your books.

The other thing that I've done is since like I have these topics that I've written on; recovering from incest, or recovering from sex addiction, you know is that I started contacting both local and national organizations that deal with things like that and promoting myself as a professional speaker. Now mind you, before I did this, I had never spoken professionally at all. But I just went ahead and decided, well heck, I can do this, and so I said, yeah, I'm a professional speaker and I can come speak to your group. And low and behold, I wrote a speech, and I presented it, and it worked.

So all of it's kind of a learning curve. Learning how to write, learning how to market your stuff. But I think that you do have to be a little bit kind of proactive and just waiting for book reviews is not the way to go. But then the Web is just phenomenal, I mean, with the hundreds of billions of Web sites out there, you know, it can take some time. But whatever your topic is that your writing on, literally, whatever your topic, there's going to be some organization or some group of people on the Internet that will want to hear it from you. And so whether it is writing a blog post, or being interviewed, and then also finding out if they have a real organization, not virtual, but a real one where you can come and speak, I mean it's all out there. So just set aside, if you have a book coming out whether self published, or published with a publisher, set aside a few months both before the book comes out getting everything lined up, and then after the book comes out, just really, that's all you're going to do. I don't even think about writing when I'm promoting a book. There's just not enough time and not enough energy. So just be willing to make that kind of commitment.

Dotsie: Okay, anything else about the publishing side that you want to mention. I mean it's a huge topic, but any other little pointers?

Sue: Well not really but just to know that once your words are down on paper, you know, just go for it. You've taken the time to write it and now I think, why not publish it?

Dotsie: Right, right, and I will say this only because everyone is different, but I have a good friend who wrote a memoir about her childhood, and her husband read it. And it was just eating away at her to write this. She ended up after he

read, it throwing it in the dumpster. I can't image it, but she did. She said she really only needed to write it for herself.

Sue: AH! That's amazing!

Dotsie: Is that amazing? I still can't believe it. I don't encourage anybody to do that, but I know her and I know she did it. She was renovating her house and there was a dumpster out front and in it went. But I don't encourage people to do that but it totally freaked me out and when it comes to memoir writing, I just have to mention it.

Sue: Wow. That totally freaks me out.

Dotsie: There are a few things in your book, Michelle Otero, she wrote a few things and I believe these were her words, and I thought this would be interesting and important to share. I'm sure you remember this but one of the things that she was talking about was telling the truth. And she said, ..."telling the truth asking others to take responsibility for their actions or inactions, is not the same as blaming." And I think that's important. Because when you're writing about something, and you know, we're talking about memoirs as being things that might not be, you know, something that is easy to tell, but there are memoirs that are wonderful to tell, so we have to mention that too. She also mentions that, "it lifts the heavy weight a survivor carries on her back and redistributes it among her family and her community." I think that's huge.

Sue: It is.

Dotsie: It's like you carry this burden ...

Sue: And then you ask other people to help you.

Dotsie: Yeah! Yeah!

Sue: I think that that article she wrote for the book is just beautiful and you know, her story where her brother had sexually molested her, and the brother I think until this day is still pretty angry with her for writing about it, but she does not regret it. Yes, it was hard, you know, letting the family know, and letting the family read it. I mean, she went through a really tough time with that, but ultimately, she feels so positive about having done that.

Dotsie: Yeah she says in writing memoirs and releasing family secrets, we're saving lives; which is what you mention in the very beginning. Okay let's see. Any other resources, of course, other than your book, *and* reading your memoirs because honestly, I think we can learn so much from reading other memoirs, seeing their style, seeing how they start, seeing how they flashback, etc. I just

think it's so important to read other ones. I notice while reading your book that you mention so many that you have read so I know you're a big fan of memoirs.

Sue: Absolutely. I am and I should say that on my Web site is also the book which you can get this right instantaneously, on my Web site, I have a reading list of contemporary creative non-fiction. So if you go to my website which is www.suewilliamsilverman.com, and if you scroll down on the homepage on the right-hand side, you'll see a link that says "Sue's Reading List," or something like that. Just click on that and it'll take you to this really long reading list. It's divided by category which sort of helps you. And so just kind of browse through there and look for books; books for categories that might interest you. Some are about childhood, coming of age, there are those about illness, others about relationships, so you know, just kind of scroll through that and start reading because yes, absolutely, when I was growing up all I did was read. I just can't say too much about the importance of reading to help you in your own writing.

Dotsie: Right. So let's see if anybody has any questions for Sue. Sometimes it takes people a couple of seconds to get the courage to ask a question.

Sue: But do feel free to ask questions because that's what we're here for.

Dotsie: Yes. Is someone there?

Caller No. 1: I'm here. This is Lynn Tolson. Sue gives me courage and Dotsie gives me courage.

Sue: And you give us courage!

Caller No. 1: Oh thank you, and thank you Sue for mentioning my essay in *Fearless Confessions* about publishing.

Sue: Yeah, and it's a terrific essay and it will pretty much just tell you everything you want to know about self-publishing. Lynn did just a terrific job on it.

Dotsie: And I've also read Lynn's memoir. Lynn, do you want to tell us the title of yours and your Web address?

Caller No. 1: Oh sure. The title of my book is "***Beyond the Tears: A True Survivor's Story***," and the Web address is www.beyondthetears.com. And I wanted to say that I had all of the doubts that were mentioned in terms of writing the memoir and then putting it out there, and I probably kept my book a secret for about a year and I had it in manuscript form. Now Dotsie had asked, who do we share it with? I was sharing it with my therapist. I was going through therapy for my cancer experience and it was a matter of a life review. So that's how my book about my childhood started. And she said, you really should think about publishing this. So my point is I didn't see any other books like it, and so I said I

can't publish this, there's nothing else like it out there until I came across, "***Because I Remember Terror, Father, I Remember You***," by Sue William Silverman! And I just was blown away by what I was reading; the authenticity of the truth, and the style of writing. So I have said over and over and over, that Sue has been my hero not only in terms of the subject matter, but also in terms of the exceptional way that she crafts her writing.

Sue: Thank you so much. That is so sweet of you. I know I, well gosh, Lynn and I have known each other for ages now. Yeah, thank you so much; that really is sweet.

Caller No. 1: Yeah and I recommend the program at Vermont College even if somebody can't go for the residency, their conference is really, really, worthwhile.

Sue: Yeah, we have just a summer conference also outside of the MFA program. I think it's in August and there's information about that on the <http://www.vermontcollege.edu> Web site also.

Dotsie: Okay thanks Lynn.

Sue: And you know what's funny is that when Lynn mentioned she'd shown it to her therapist before when you asked me who the first person I'd shown it too, I like blanked on the fact that my therapist was the first person. In a way he's just so close to me that I was thinking sort of about more outside people like this writer friend that I had mentioned. But of course my therapist was the first person who saw it.

Dotsie: Okay and he was the one who encouraged you, right?

Sue: Yeah, well exactly.

Dotsie: Okay anybody else have a question for Sue about writing or publishing?

Sue: Or life.

Dotsie: Or life in general?

Caller No. 2: Hi, this is Suzanne calling from Phoenix and I wasn't able to get on the call till about the last, like twenty before the hour, and I'm just really looking forward to hearing the audio, if that will be available, to hear the rest. I'm really happy to meet you and hear what you're up to.

Sue: Thank you! So are you writing also?

Caller No. 2: I am writing. It's actually, it's ah, more strategies, but it's a lot about my mom; when your mom has Alzheimer's, strategies to keep you sane and it's personal.

Sue: Oh interesting! That's such an important topic, I mean, specifically for us boomer women, you know, that our parents right now, are just struggling with that a lot, and I think that's such an important thing for you to write about to figure out for yourself. It's something that's just, you know, it's scary.

Caller No. 2: It is, and it's been the three and a half years for me, and the journey, and what I've learned all away along the way, things that I would never would have anticipated have been really quite extreme. And I feel like I have come to terms a lot with the whole situation, and I wish that I had of had some support of this type as I was in the early stages of adjusting to this. That's inspired me to write, and I look forward to hearing the rest of your interview.

Dotsie: Yeah that's great, yeah. I do think that's an important story so I hope that you do start writing it. I just think you'll—I mean, Alzheimer's is just such a scary thing, and I think that writing it, I think, the fear doesn't necessarily go away as such, but by understanding it and understanding what it means to you, it helps on some other level.

Dotsie: Yeah and let me just mention this. This is really crazy. I've been journeying with you with this Alzheimer's thing, not to get off topic, but my father-in-law has it and he's been in a care facility now for about, oh I don't know, little more than a half a year. But I just read an incredible book that a colleague of mine told me about because she knew that my father-in-law had Alzheimer's. I've read lots of books about Alzheimer's, but I read one that is really incredible and it's called, "Still Alice." It's a novel written by a woman, and it's about a woman who I think she taught at Harvard, and she got Alzheimer's early onset at age 51. And it's written from her perspective of what it's like to have Alzheimer's. And the story, really the jest of the story is that even though they have Alzheimer's, they still have something to say. And it's like, it's in them to say these things even though it doesn't come out the way they want it to. It's just so interesting. I highly recommend it. It's called, "Still Alice," I read it within 24 hours and I am really busy. So I stayed up late and I got up early, and I read it so, check that out. So anybody else have a question? We have a couple more minutes. Any questions about writing, or getting published? <pause>

Okay, maybe we've covered everything, Sue, so I just want to thank you so much. It is such a joy to interview someone who's accomplished so much in the writing world, and also for sharing your stories, and giving women the courage to share, and heal themselves through your writing. So I just want to thank you again, and I'm sure we'll be in touch. And as soon as we have this transcribed, and we have the link for the audio, we'll share it with you so you can share it with your audiences.

Sue: Well first of all I want to say thanks to you, and to your amazing organization and all the boomer women out there. But I also would just like to thank again the people who called in just to sort of join this conversation. I really appreciate you listening and asking some questions. I've really enjoyed this a lot.

Dotsie: Well good. You know a lot of people register for the call and they can't necessarily be on it. They just want to make sure that they get a link to it, so I know that a lot of people listen at a later date. And then it's always archived on the Members Only page at the www.NABBW.com. And so they just get listened to at random, that's for darn sure!

Sue: Sure, and also again, I'd just like to invite you all to visit my Web site. It's www.suewilliamsilverman.com and there's "contact me" information there if you want to email me, too.

Dotsie: Okay, sounds good. Thanks everyone for being on the call, we appreciate it, and Sue, have a great day!

Sue: Thank you so much.

Dotsie: Thank you, good bye.