

Stripe

Prayer breakfast Wednesday

Chaplain (Brig. Gen.) Douglas Carver (right) will be guest speaker at a Prayer Breakfast 6:30 a.m. Wednesday in the hospital dining facility. Everyone's invited.



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Playwright offers writing as therapy

By Matt Mientka
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Though declared dead by *The New York Times* nearly 10 years ago, the literary memoir genre continues to explode in popularity as more Americans begin to tell their stories, online and in the "real world."

Now, Soldiers and civilians at Walter Reed may begin to tell their stories under the tutelage of playwright and performer Laura Zam, who visits here every Wednesday to conduct a workshop for those interested in improving their writing — for art, business or even therapy.

Scientific research conducted during the past couple of years has shown what Zam and other writers know intuitively: the act of putting thoughts to paper may alleviate symptoms of minor depression by allowing a person to bring order to his or her inner life.

Writing may help Soldiers recovering from psychological traumas incurred in war or anyone experiencing much more common problems, such as divorce and grief.

"This can help some Soldiers to

understand trauma," Zam told *Stripe* last Wednesday. "When you write something down, you're going to develop a different perspective on it."

An experienced playwright, performer and director, Zam's plays have run in Prague, off-Broadway in New York City and across the United States. Zam has taught at the University of California at Berkeley, Brown University and George Mason University, among others. On tour regularly with her work, Zam is currently crafting a collection of short stories and essays about her mother, who survived the Nazi Holocaust.

Since beginning the workshop this fall, Zam has been working regularly with at least one Walter Reed employee whose literary bent has led her to begin a novel, as well as others who've expressed interest in business and creative writing.

"Originally, I just wanted to do storytelling but then found that everybody I talked to had a different need," Zam said.

While one wished to develop "high-level" creative writing skills to write science fiction, other students have dropped by to write about their experiences with divorce or

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cancer — as a form of therapy but also as a way to help others understand their own personal traumas.

While some may wish to simply sharpen their skills for business, revamp their resumes and improve their professional correspondence skills, others "may just be drawn into telling their incredible stories," Zam said.

In the basement of Bldg. 17 near the Army Community Service offices, four writers met Zam to participate in what looked like any graduate school writing workshop: heads bent in silence with only the sound of the ticking clock and pens meeting paper. Zam announces "time" and heads pop back up to share or not to share their writing, before being sent down a different direction: What would you do if you were fearless?

What ties all of the different forms of writing together in the workshop is the act of conditioning, Zam said. A writing workshop is like physical training for the brain, training the synapses to fire in ways that allow thoughts to form in ways that make sense to others, and in ways that help the writes make sense of their lives.

"I think of the writing as really a muscular activity," Zam said. "My clinic's like a workout."

The writing workshop was made possible with support from George Goetzke of the Arts and Crafts Center here, with sponsorship from MWR of Washington, D.C.