

# THERE'S NO FULL STOP TO CREATIVITY FOR THESE WRITERS



Charlie Getter, Litquake instructor.



Trude Warshaw

Nat King Cole sings in the background. Eight seniors seated around a table are waving sprigs of rosemary, the pungent fragrance wafting about the room.

"Does this scent bring back memories?" Marina Lazzara asks the group.

"I just thought of my dear Aunt Dora," one person responds.

This is the Litquake Elder Project, a program sponsored by the creators of Litquake, the Bay Area's literary arts project. Marina, who is one of the instructors, is warming up SFCJL's Jewish Home & Rehab Center's participants for this week's writing project, using rosemary's association with memory enhancement. As the hour-long session progresses, participants will write a letter of gratitude to someone who has been important in their lives. They will read the letters aloud to the group, and at the end of the eight-week program, their collective writings will be featured in an anthology. Later still, Litquake will hold a public reading, where participants can share their creative output with family and friends.

"I wrote to my dad," says 101-year-old Berenice Palmer. A former journalist, Berenice was pleased to hear about the formation

of the group and eager to take part. *I want to thank you for passing on your musical genius to my son, your grandson, she writes. It makes me happy to know it has passed on to Claude. I hear you again.*

"I'm *verklemt*," murmurs Life Enrichment coordinator Kamran Sanei, who uses the Yiddish word to describe his emotion while observing the session.

Participant John Kuppinger has heeded Marina's addendum that they need not write to a real person. *Dear Jerry, Thanks a lot for the night on the town, John writes. "I made it up," he chuckles, adding that the program has been most inspirational for him. "I like to write. Sometimes I write like Thomas Wolfe, my favorite author."*



Dulce Martinez



Berenice Palmer

At one end of the table, resident Phyllis Koestenbaum and Litquake intern Ashyka Davé are quietly talking. As Phyllis, a poet, cannot use her hands, she is dictating to Ashyka a thank-you letter addressed to her high school friend. "Arlene thought of me as a poet way back then and encouraged me," Phyllis explains.

"Because we transcribe, it's really powerful that Phyllis can continue to be creative through this group as well," acknowledges Lisa Galloway, Litquake Elder Project director.

According to Lisa, the goal of the project is meaningful engagement, empowerment and guidance, so that each participant is enabled to produce work they are proud of and feel safe to share. Instructors use music, scents (such as the aforementioned rosemary), sound patterns, and other

techniques to encourage creative expression in poetry and prose. "The participants have a writing community," Lisa says. "It gives them opportunities to tell stories and have someone listen."

When Litquake approached her about presenting the program, "I didn't know what to expect, and I wasn't sure who would be willing to take part," relates Mediatrix Valera, SFCJL's Life Enrichment director. The upshot is that the Litquake Elder project with Jewish Home & Rehab Center's residents has proven to be so successful that the initially planned single eight-week series has, to date, extended into three series.

"It's developed into a group that's constantly engaged," says Mediatrix. "It's truly a joy to see them so engrossed in their writing and to hear them confidently share their work." ■