

important part of the writing. Participants are welcome to ask for feedback or help with spelling or punctuation, but what really matters are the stories that people tell and their confidence in sharing them.

Sharing stories is core to WRAP's mission, and echoes an ethic that was eloquently articulated by Northwest writer Barry Lopez in *Crow and Weasel*: "The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive. That is why we put these stories in each other's memory. This is how people care for themselves." Teaching people to care for themselves and others through writing is what WRAP is all about.

Sullivan has participated in three WRAP workshops, two of them through CAP. In addition to the benefits for himself, Sullivan realizes what he has to offer to the community at large. "As someone who has lived with HIV for almost 17 years, [WRAP] has also allowed me to delve into stories of others that I have had the benefit of befriending along the way. Most of them weren't as fortunate as I have been and are now deceased. By sticking with this workshop and allowing it to become a prime source of inspiration, I intend to continue telling stories about them." He adds, "So hopefully, I will be a member of WRAP for a long time to come."

**Youth find freedom to share and question**

**C**heyenne Tuller is another person with a growing WRAP history. When she started as a volunteer facilitator four years ago, she worked at a corporate job and wanted a creative outlet. She answered an ad for the program and has been involved ever since. Tuller never thought twice about being herself in the WRAP community. "You don't have to care about being out," she says.

WRAP accepts people as they are and never judges them. Since her first workshop at Project Quest, a support facility for people with chronic illnesses such as HIV and AIDS, Tuller has facilitated 10 workshops, including the recent group at SMYRC.

This was her first group with teens, and she was impressed with the resource center and the participants. "We didn't have places like SMYRC to go to when we were young," she observes. "[The participants] are so sure of who they are. I didn't have a clue at their age."

SMYRC participant Pros Seng might disagree with Tuller's perception. At 16, with a



Jeff Sullivan has participated in two WRAP workshops through Cascade AIDS Project

small build and a gentle, earnest voice, he feels like he is still very unsure about who he is and where he fits in society. "I'm still questioning everything," he says. He feels like he is too young to label himself and wants time to explore his sexual identity. Seng, like several others in the group, heard about SMYRC through his high school's Gay Straight Alliance and wanted to check it out. He went with some friends to the WRAP workshop.

"I always wanted to write for fun," says Seng. "WRAP offers me an opportunity to do that."

More than being fun, Seng discovered, writing was a great way to get out his frustration. "At school you have to hide some things or people will judge you. People will put you in a closet of their own." He was free to be who he wanted to be at the WRAP workshop.

**Respect, openness and Elmo**

**W**RAP takes care to create safe, comfortable environments that foster a sense of respect. At the beginning of each 10-week session, participants spend time establishing a list of guidelines that promote trust and safety. This unique list of ground rules,

which varies from group to group, then is circulated among the writers. Sometimes a facilitator may need to remind participants of the guidelines, but Tuller's group took its to heart from the beginning.

Unlike some of her other workshops, Tuller was surprised at how tuned-in and respectful of one another the participants were. If readers suspected that someone in the group would be offended by the writing, they were sure to warn that person to cover his or her ears or leave the room for the duration of the piece. The SMYRC guidelines included "We won't let personal differences get in the way of writing," "We will separate the writer and the writing" and "We will respect each other's work." The group also decided that sharing was optional, that all writing is good to someone and that they would "avoid tangential conversations about Elmo from *Sesame Street*."

Seng found the WRAP experience to be very supportive. "I draw strength

**"In English class, you get assignments that you have to do. Here, you write about things you care about."**

—Frankie

**Shadowed Light**

Our feet are the same size. I've never realized before now, with the moonlight streaming through the blinds, spilling onto our bed. The dark lines of shadow coupled with the pale, pure light that is such a contrast to our black satin sheets. And our feet at the foot of the bed, hers much whiter than mine, are the same size. I look to her face, slack and unguarded in sleep.

Her black eyeliner is smudged under her eyes and I know that if she were to open her eyes, they would be a beautiful pale blue. The first thing out of her mouth would be "What?" not "Why?"

I always thought it strange that if you look at someone a bit too long, they ask "What?" Shouldn't they ask "Why?" I wonder what she would be asking if she did ask why. Why are you staring? Why satin sheets? Why all the black? Why do I love you? Or maybe...Why are our feet the same size?

—Frankie Porras (SMYRC)

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