

# Seniors pen their stories

By CHERYL SOMERS AUBIN  
Special to The Times

One man reads his story of being shot down in his B-26 Marauder bomber, losing his foot and saving all but one of the crew members. Another shares childhood memories about using sign language to interpret Joe Louis boxing matches for his deaf father and his friends. One woman tells of how she helped teach sewing skills to the underprivileged in the Dominican Republic. These and other stories of the ordinary and extraordinary are written and shared in this

## Thursday classes

Although the Writing Your Personal History class ends in March, another session starts in September. In the meantime, the Vienna Community Center will host the Sixth Annual Writing Your Personal History Symposium Thursday, May 4, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Bag lunches are encouraged. Cost is \$5. Call 703-255-7801.

The center also offers the following classes:

- Writing Your Personal History For the More Independent Writer, coordinated by Herman Carter and Pat Lavey; Thursdays, April 6 through Aug. 17, from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
- Leaving Your Legacy: Writing Your Values and Beliefs for Future Generations, Thursdays, April 13-27, from 8:30 to 10:30 a.m.
- Create Your Own Cookbook With Personal Precious Memories, Thursdays, May 11 through June 1, from 9 to 10:30 a.m.
- One Day Overview DVD Storyboard class, Thursday, May 18, from 1 to 3 p.m.

weekly writing class at the Vienna Community Center.

Meeting once a week for seven months, the personal history class has been led by Vienna resident Bob Middlemiss for the last three years. Middlemiss, an author of more than a dozen books and currently the editor-in-chief of Durban House Publishing Co., said he loves working with retirees and honing their writing skills.

"Over the last 25 years I have worked with a Nobel Prize winner's biography, a two-time Emmy winner and a Peabody winner, and a Rhodes Scholar, and by far this personal history class moves me the most," Middlemiss said.

Middlemiss's students feel moved, too. "From the first day I just loved it," said Oakton resident Debby Perras, who found out about the class by checking in her local paper. She had no idea what the class would be like, but hoped to be able to write for her own children.

"I love listening to everybody else—our lives are so different," Perras said, adding that she also likes to read her

own work to get feedback from the other students.

Lew and Joan Carr of Arlington agree that feedback is an important part of the class. "We felt immediate acceptance by the group," Joan Carr said. Lew Carr said he looks forward to the weekly meetings. "This class has helped me go deeper in my writing thanks to Bob's feedback and the other students' feedback."

Joan Carr feels the class has helped her discover the joy of writing. "I want my children to know my parents and me," she said.

The 22-member classroom meets Thursday mornings from 8:30 to 10:30 a.m. During this time, Middlemiss often offers some instruction, but the majority of the time is spent on student readings. A timekeeper helps keep everyone on schedule. Each person reads for about seven minutes, and then participants comment on the work.

Cheryl Harlan, the program coordinator for Life Enhancement for the Mature Adult at the Vienna Community

Center, said she is impressed with the seniors and excited about the continuing interest in the writing classes the Vienna Community Center generates. "I feel like we are leading the way in offering opportunities for writers interested in telling their personal history stories," Harlan said.

"My writing has gotten better because it's become easier and I'm more able to write now," said Vienna resident Herman Carter who self-published his autobiography in 2000 for his family. "The words come together and the memories become better."

Carter is also a longtime participant of both the writing class and one of the coordinators of the more independent writing group that follows the class.

As the class nears the end of its time together, some people are feeling surprised the time went so quickly. After sharing and hearing so many stories, the participants, many who started out as strangers to each other, have forged new friendships and relationships through their common goal of writing their personal histories.

The Vienna Community Center is at 120 Cherry St. S.E., Vienna. Call 703-255-7801 or visit [www.viennava.gov](http://www.viennava.gov).



Times Staff Photo/Brian Price

Herman Carter reads one of his writings during a weekly Writing Your Personal History Class at the Vienna Community Center. Carter is a member of the class and also teaches a class on personal writing.

As seen  
in the  
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