

Writing class January 24, 2009 with Natalie Goldberg
in Charleston, S. C. at the Sophia Institute

Write about love she said. For an hour.

An excerpt

Love love love. My father's and mother's letters during W.W. II. I have the collection and sent an excerpt to everybody one year for Valentine's, and my sister said it was the best Valentine she ever got. One time he wrote that he was blessed that she loved him, and then in midsentence he said, oh no, my first blessing is that I love you.

My first blessing is that I love, that I can open my heart that big and wide and deep, that I can. Like I can work, I can see, I can breathe and glory hallelujah I can love.

William, my 2-year-old grandson, my father would have adored him. He would be holding William and he would be holding Alice-Lyle and he would answer Davis's questions.

Davis (7) said if William dies, I am going to his grave every day and putting flowers there and Julia (5) said if William dies I will be so sad and Alice-Lyle said, me too, me too.

William is a special needs child filling up our hearts and souls and is the great truth of what matters in the end. What matters at the end of the day is I got to hold him, I got to talk to him, I got to help him hold his head up, I got to give him a rubdown, I got to catch his stare. His look.

My former husband, Phillip, William's grandfather, calls me and says, tell me what to do. Cook a meal, go visit and sit, build a ramp for his wheelchair. Love her, William's momma, our daughter. Take Davis on an adventure, and Julia, too. Read *Frog and Toad* to them.

Wheelchair, red with his name on it. WILLIAM. The back tilts back and comes upright. William can do well sitting in the tilted back position. He has Miss Christie, his physical therapist, coming twice a week and she works with him on the exercise ball, rolling and turning his head from side to side. Every little teeny bit of progress is welcomed AND we are settling into this is how it is. This is our child, our grandchild, and he has come to roost with us.

Alice Lyle and Stan are bigger and wiser and keep getting to know each other and themselves as they discover a reservoir of strength and love.

One time I asked Alice Lyle, don't you just love him and want to help him and protect him and don't you just love him more and more? And she said, I love everybody more and more.

Then in William's voice, a new musing

I am trying so hard to lift my head to hold it in the center spot where Miss Christie wants me to and yet I keep going over to the right. Then Nana moves to the left and talks to me and touches my left cheek and I just pop it over to look at her or sort of look at her, my eyes move around and around but I see her and love her and wish her well, wish her solace, her sadness for her daughter, my mother.

My mother is beautiful and a dreamboat and holds me and rocks me and pats me and gives me wonderful warm baths and she keeps figuring out how to help me grow and be better. I love her so much and love to hear her name, Mommy and one day I know I will say it.

Then Daddy and Davis and Julia can dance a jig or at least the cha-cha electric slide. They are so happy I said "Mommy."

Thank you for taking me to be baptized in my pretty white outfit. I am excited to be in that ceremony of commitment to telling me about God's love.

I know about God's love. And God gave me to you for you to know it every day. You are getting it in a full dose every day and I am here to give it to you.

All is well, all is well with my soul.

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We invite you to send us your own thoughts about what matters at the end of the day. Be as specific as you can. "I got to help him hold his head up" and "cha-cha electric slide" say so much more than "I spent time with my grandchildren."

Ginny Brien will collect your emails for posting as part of an ongoing conversation about what really matters at the end of the day. Send them to vbrien@dorrierunderwood.com and let us know if we have permission to use your name.