

meet the author

Cynthia Gustavson

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Writing to cope

Therapist and poet,
Cynthia Gustavson found
a way to merge the two

By **JENNIFER CHANCELLOR**
World Scene Writer

For many years, Cynthia Gustavson led two lives — one as a psychotherapist and one as a poet.

Today, she's melded the two careers to help people cope, heal and thrive.

"Growing up in Minnesota, I wasn't allowed to show emotion," she said in a recent telephone interview from her Tulsa home. "It had to come out eventually. It came out in poetry while I was in grade school, and it became the lens through which I see, enjoy, live and process the world."

She used that lens to develop a series of six psychotherapy poetry workbooks on topics for children, spirituality, eating disorders, adults, teens and those living with chronic pain.

"They are the only poetry therapy workbooks in the world," she said.

Some 20 years ago, when she wrote a poetry column for a Minnesota newspaper, things started to happen to her clients.

"Patients were bringing me poetry all the time," she said. "I'd get wadded up pieces of paper with poetry scrawled on it. They were pulling it from their pockets and giving it to me."

She realized that what helped her overcome her expressionless childhood was, indeed, helping many of her clients.

For nine years, she's been a psychotherapist in Tulsa at the Center for Counseling and Education. Her books are used every day by professionals and lay people, and she gets calls from across the globe about the popularity of "Re-Versing the Numbers," her poetry therapy workbook for people with eating disorders.

Her 1995 book, "In-Versing Your Life: A Poetry Workbook for Self-Discovery and Healing," was reissued last fall. Of "Fe-Vers: Feeling Verses for Children," Parent and Child Center of Tulsa director Desiree Doherty said the workbook was "wonderful — very inspiring and insightful," and it "made me smile and giggle and remember to adore the way kids think and process."

All of her books sell for about \$10-20 each and published by Blooming Twig Books. They are available in local bookstores and from her website at www.cynthiagustavson.com.

Her books have impressed many people, and with notoriety has come a host of perks that have helped her to more effectively reach out to others, she said.

Just six months ago, she won contest with Ingram Distributors, which allows her to distribute her therapy books for two years for free.

Of only 30 books chosen, six were hers, she said.

In June, she'll be the poet in residence at the White Pine Arts Festival in Stillwater, Minn. She's also been invited to hold poetry therapy workshops for adults and teens in Sweden in July.

Gustavson also has published several books of her poetry, which are available online at www.cynthiagustavson.com.

Her workbooks are available at Barnes and Noble Stores, Steve's Sundry Books and Magazines, or via her Web site or www.amazon.com.

"Poetry is powerful. When we don't know what else to do to help deal with life, we turn to it," she said. "It's not like we write to get published. We write to cope."

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