

Meet the Author of *With a Woman's Voice - A Writer's Struggle for Emotional Freedom*

Lucy Daniels, Ph.D.

*At the Academy meeting in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in December 2003, we had the privilege of meeting Lucy Daniels, touring her foundation with its excellent school for elementary school children who need psychological help, and hearing from her about her memoir. The following is the text of her talk at that Academy meeting.*

My book's title is actually much more complex and celebratory than it sounds. To most people, I expect, *With a Woman's Voice* suggests a woman looking back and speaking about her life. But, in my case, *With a Woman's Voice*:

- 1) Presents the voice of a person who has been voiceless,
- 2) Not a child's voice, neither a boy's, nor a girl's,
- 3) One that it is not a man's voice in a world where

heretofore only male voices prevailed.

Rather, it is a woman's voice speaking out about things our newspaper family, who idealized freedom of speech, tried to keep secret. Furthermore, I think most people would regard this woman writer as having a reasonable voice rather than the hostile shrieking ones I grew up witnessing in women angry and helpless from being silenced.

While risking boring those of you who may have read the memoir, I need to describe some of the details of my life in order to share

what I've learned in the process of returning to writing and of going public as a therapist.

I was born into the affluent Raleigh, North Carolina, newspaper family headed by my grandfather, Josephus Daniels, who had served as Secretary of the Navy under Woodrow Wilson and Ambassador to Mexico under Franklin Roosevelt. *The* thing most valued in our family (far more than any individual) was the liberal *The News and Observer*, nicknamed "Nuisance and Disturber." Only males were eligible for succession to its editorship. These circumstances were even weightier for me because of my birth slot. My father's first marriage had ended with the death of his wife in childbirth bearing a son who also died. As the first of my parents' three daughters in a family that de-valued girls, I was not only born one month after the sudden death of my mother's father but also was so cross-eyed that my shamed mother had to labor for years to help me correct this flaw with an eye patch and exercises, even after I had undergone two surgeries in my first 27 months. Who knows, perhaps this, too, was why for much of my early childhood, I was kept in a yard alone while my younger sisters required the full attention of our nurse inside.

Since my father and my grandfather were writers respected for their powerful words, I decided soon after starting school to

correct my worthlessness by becoming the writing "boy" my parents needed. And it worked! Until adolescence, when my writing success and developing body thrust me into intense conflict. You see, as my father told a newspaper columnist later when my first novel was a best seller, he was afraid he would have to live the second half of his life in my shadow the way he had to live the first half in his father's. At any rate, after my first short story was published when I was fifteen, the anorexia nervosa with which I had been diagnosed two years earlier became so much worse that I was hospitalized for five years. During that time I experienced every radical treatment existent in the 1950's, with the exception of lobotomy, and received no psychotherapy. Then, nine months after discharge as a 22-year-old high school dropout, I had the good fortune that a novel I had written in the hospital became a best seller published in several countries. *Caleb, My Son* also earned me a Guggenheim Fellowship, which led to the publication of *High on a Hill*, my second novel, five years later.

After that I developed a writer's block characterized by the deep conviction that I was not a writer and did not want to humiliate myself by putting out writing I was inadequate to produce.

Although hospitalization may have saved my life during those adolescent and young adult years, receiving no psychotherapy left

me feeling a ruined and untreatable freak after discharge. Only many years later (nineteen years after discharge), as a 40-year-old clinical psychology doctoral candidate and divorcing mother of four children, was I able to enter psychoanalysis, which ultimately gave me back my life by helping me to understand the reasons and feelings causing both my anorexia and my writing block. In analysis I came to understand the jam I had been in as a child as well as the terrible double bind involved in my laboring through writing to be worth something as a replacement son. Also, I realized that possibly my first novel had worked out so well because I wrote it in the mental hospital where I never expected it to see the light of day.

After the first five years of treatment during which I completed clinical training, assisted my dying parents, and built a private practice, my analyst took to asking, "What about your writing?" I resented those questions at first, convinced that giving up my weak, wooden, unimaginative efforts with words had been liberating. Then I did succumb to trying again and, in the process, discovered that the shortcomings I had abandoned earlier were still there. Since then I have labored and labored, achieved much greater writing freedom, and last year published this memoir.

Actually, however, in terms of my going public as a therapist, the memoir's publication was a relatively late development. Once I began seriously writing again (in the early 1980's), I shifted from short stories to producing an autobiographical novel as my analysis continued. Then in the late 1980's I had the opportunity (in a family struggle) to sell my *News and Observer* stock for a fair price and, thus, obtain the funds to establish the Lucy Daniels Foundation and the Lucy Daniels Center for Early Childhood. In the early 1990's two different agents told me my autobiographical novel needed to be a memoir. So I struggled with the issue of whether to convert it or to put it in a drawer and give up on it. In the end I did decide to put the material into memoir form, a major task. I want to be clear what my motive and that process was and what it wasn't. Writing this memoir was not therapy or catharsis for me. Nor was it, by then, mainly an effort to return to writing. Psychoanalysis had already assisted me with those. Rather, you could say that writing this memoir was a form of revenge. Feeling so fortunate to have been helped so much by psychoanalysis, I wanted to put my story out so that other suffering people could know there was help and hope. Indeed, once the memoir was completed, my old agent respected it and wanted to sell it, but he could not. Bottom-line focused publishers wanted only the hospital part, whereas I was determined to tell the whole thing - how I

developed my illness and writing block, how I was medically mistreated, and the psychoanalysis that ultimately freed me.

I want to tell you about some of the experience I have had and the wisdom gained in both returning to writing and going public as a therapist. In private practice as a psychologist, I have always appreciated the importance of keeping the therapist's life out of the consulting room. I have also come to appreciate that when patients (especially children) press me to shed my anonymity, it has to do with some shift in the transference and trust level on their part. An intrusion that I began learning to work with early as a psychologist was that very occasionally a patient would discover and come in talking about one or both of my novels. This was unusual because my writing name differed from my married/practicing name, Lucy Inman. When that happened, because of my own experience in therapy, I knew to say, "Oh? How did that make you feel?" or "What did you think about that?"

Later selling my newspaper stock for a fair price led to the establishment of the Lucy Daniels Foundation. At the Foundation, starting in 1993, I have taught a seminar that I now entitle "Our Problems As the Roots of Our Power." I have tried different formats, but the one that works best is eighteen weekly meetings either altogether or in three sections in the fall, winter, and

spring. I limit participation to sixteen to eighteen people, all of whom are committed to a creative endeavor. To date, participants have included artists, musicians, writers, opera singers, design students at the North Carolina State School of Design, and people in other professions who also have a serious creative commitment. In these seminars, I use myself and my struggles with anorexia and writing block as an example. In so doing, I set the example for others to do the same to whatever degree they choose. The emphasis is on the relationship between your work and your inner issues. I have frankly been amazed by the content of the classes after I've laid the groundwork in terms of psychoanalytic concepts and ways of considering yourself. Tremendous openness and exchange is possible when it is your creative work rather than just your life problems that is the focus. My first seminar participants are still meeting monthly to talk about their dreams and their creating. Using dreams and creative process and products as mirrors for self understanding and artistic growth is a major facet of these seminars. In addition the Lucy Daniels Foundation has had annual conferences since 1992, and in my opening remarks at most of these I have been little by little more and more open about myself.

Last year the publication of my memoir was accompanied by

substantial local press - full-page stories in both the *News and Observer* and the *Cary News* as well as in the *UNC Alumnae Review* and on the television and radio. Obviously this is not the kind of thing many serious therapists would consider appropriate.

Here's what I've learned. Some patients know about my book and carefully avoid it. Others read it and come in and talk at length. The father of one patient read a review and commented on it. One patient discovered my memoir by walking into a bookstore to buy another book; he bought my book instead and felt attacked. Other patients appear oblivious. Some former patients' react to the book. One former patient called to ask me to autograph a copy of the book which enclosed a letter about it. A patient who had talked about the book earlier was able to terminate a twenty-year treatment. Some people called for therapy after reading the memoir. Still some patients remain oblivious, or just don't mention it.

What you do and are publicized for outside your office may well not be the intrusion some therapists have thought. Certainly there are effects, but what you do *in* your office, how you show yourself there is extremely important. Indeed, I have had several experiences that demonstrate how exposure outside can be helpful to the treatment. I have had many heartwarming letters

from people who have read the book as well as from people who have attended my readings all over the state. All this has made me glad I went to the work and to the exposure of producing the memoir.

On the other hand I have been extremely disappointed by the lack of response from analysts, whose work I have hoped my story would help. I have received comments from only a handful. In an effort to understand this I have talked with several analyst friends. Two offered quite different explanations. It is possible that some analysts admire my courage and disapprove of my putting my story out. Alternatively, what silences some analysts in regard to this book is a problem of competition, their belief that only the analyst can speak authoritatively about the patient and therapy.

As you might imagine, there have been even more valuable revelations as a result of my return to writing. When my literary agent could not sell the memoir, I put it away and focused on a collection of short stories. Then an advisor at the Lucy Daniels Foundation asked me, "Do you want to publish your memoir or get rich?" As a result, I pursued private publishing.

In the process I had a very positive experience that was somewhat at odds with earlier expectations. I discovered that

with private publishing I could have both widespread effective distribution and control over the final product such as I had never had before and at a time when other writers I knew who were being commercially published found themselves maligned and humiliatingly represented. As a result, in the future I will examine both public and private publishing possibilities before going with the best benefits offered.

There are some powerful bonuses from the writing process. Because of his input, those have to do specifically with my analyst, but they have also ranged far beyond him. Indeed, because of events quite outside of both my analyst's and my control, analysis and its psychoanalyst/psychoanalysand relationship have had a profound effect on my writing. I gave my analyst a copy of the memoir hot off the press in December 2001.

He died suddenly on July 1, 2002, and I've been glad ever since that he had a chance to read it before he died. Before that I had never shared my professional writing with him. After many years of analysis, I had come to seriously contemplate termination but put it off till completion of the novel I had begun in 1997 because I did not want mourning to contaminate the writing process. In the months since my analyst's death when I have been completing the novel manuscript, I have recognized and dealt with the feelings of leaving the place where I had been and

worked with Dr. Howie.

What I have learned and what I most want to convey to you is the tremendous impact/power Dr. Howie and his death have had on my creative writing after the fact. On July 1, 2002, as I continued my pursuit of "Real Writer" me through completion of this novel, Dr. Howie's office cancelled that day's analytic session, and that evening he died of a collapsed aorta and complications from cardiac surgery.

On July 4, 2002, I dreamed that my right arm had been ripped off at the shoulder. I knew this related to the tremendous loss of Dr. Howie, but I also knew that he would have said to me, "Despite the pain of this loss, it may also be an opportunity for considerable growth." I worked on the novel the rest of the summer. I did memoir readings all over North Carolina. I kept my analytic hours free in order to continue experiencing the loss.

Then on September 26, 2002, a dream began as though I was in analysis with Dr. Howie sitting behind me. But instead of the reclining chair of recent years or the chaise lounge before that, I was lying on the somewhat lumpy mattress of the single bed in the tiny room that became my bedroom after my just younger sister

Adelaide was born or when I was about 27 months old. Behind me, Dr. Howie (as a cadaver) was speaking. I do not remember the few carefully chosen words, but the gist of them was to ease me into talking about death, not my feelings about the transition of death itself but especially about *my* thoughts about *his* feelings about dying and being dead. After a while I noticed there were several other people in this tiny room where I had slept alone and, out of fear, pretended to be asleep at age four when my baby sister Cleves was born and I was alone in the house with Father). Then Dr. Howie and I shifted our positions so that we were sitting close together side by side sideways on the bed with our backs against the wall beside it. In that position I could see Dr. Howie's large right hand very close to me. By then everybody had left except my cousin Edgar. While I was looking at Dr. Howie's hand, Edgar stood in front of us, leaned over and kissed Dr. Howie good-bye on the mouth and left too. This emphasized that it was a good-bye, parting situation. Focusing on Dr. Howie's cadaverous hand, I could see that it was strong but stiff and hardened and leathery. At times I wondered whether it was really his hand or a boxing glove. I decided it was both, a mix.

Despite or perhaps because of my pain on awakening, I knew very quickly that this was a dream about my *doing* what Dr. Howie had years before told me I needed to do in order to become the writer

I longed to be: *Reject your father and join your father.* We had discussed that many times in terms of my needing to claim the full power of my voice and not hold back from overshadowing or angering my father. My cousin Edgar, sixteen months older than me, has been obese and curly-headed ever since he was adopted at three. In the dream, I could see Edgar represented *fat-boy me* kissing my father goodbye with the kind of kiss I had always feared and, indeed, had become anorexic to make impossible. Sitting beside and close to Dr. Howie on that bed, I had a feeling never available to me when he was alive, perhaps because I had needed to keep him a revered higher power. Whereas the dream had begun with him listening and speaking astutely as in analysis, sitting side by side we talked like a couple of crooks. Ultimately I decided that Dr. Howie's right hand, so prominent there between us, might represent the strength he had modeled and helped me develop, ready now to be integrated with my own writing ability.

Since that dream, I've benefitted emotionally from a variety of writing experiences. Besides hunkering down to complete the novel, I realized as I neared its end that this required me to deal with leaving the place (psychologically) where I had worked with Dr. Howie. At the same time, I began to become aware of the benefits from losing my first good object. Dr. Howie had lived

life to its fullest while at the same time helping people like myself. Outside the office he rode around town on a motorcycle and had a trailer added for his border collie. Inside the office I was the one who talked while he was silent and listened reverently and occasionally asked provocative questions. His example of getting all you can from life was one I could feel blessed by identifying with. In writing this takes the form of being able to observe, understand, and often mitigate the flaws that compromise my products. It has also led me to search for more effective resonators for my fiction and to write and send out more short stories. In these ways, I suspect, after our years of work together, Dr. Howie's death may have freed me as the planned termination never could have.