



photo: m. emerson

A REASON TO WRITE

By Katrina Sinift

“Experience adds to life; literature multiplies life,” said Art Seamans.
“You can have more experience by reading than by living.”

Seamans’ belief in the power of literature led him to devote his life to reading, learning, teaching, and writing it. He studied literature at Eastern Nazarene College, Boston University, and finally at the University of Maryland, where he earned his Ph.D. He taught at several preparatory schools, as well as at Northwest Nazarene University, Mount Vernon Nazarene University, and Point Loma Nazarene University. Upon retiring from Point Loma in 2000, he was elected to be a professor emeritus of literature.

One of the many ways Seamans has found that literature multiplies life is that it allows memories to be shared with others.

“People don’t write letters anymore, so if you’re going to preserve memories, you have to do it intentionally,” he explained.

Transferring memories from mind to paper is one way to do that. And that is just what Seamans has done in his memoir, *Upstarts in Upstate*, which is about growing up in upstate New York. The first edition of the book is sold out and the book is now in its second printing. Though Seamans tells about his childhood experiences, they are not the focus of the book.

“It is more about the world I lived in than about me personally,” he said. “I think I realized in teaching students that they had forgotten or did not know the world I grew up in,” he said. “They had never been to a camp meeting. They didn’t know what it was like to grow up during World War II. It was a world that I wanted students to know about that is different from the world now. One can’t understand the present without understanding the past.”

Because Seamans’ childhood experiences were tied up with the Church of the Nazarene, *Upstarts in Upstate* also provides a window into understanding what earlier days of the denomination were like.

“There is a chapter in there about Eastern Nazarene College. It might be interesting for students at Point Loma to compare their experiences now with mine at ENC back then,” he pointed out.

Like many memoirists, Seamans has had a long-time desire to share his experiences with others. He was teaching at Point Loma when he began writing *Upstarts* – deciding to put into practice what he was teaching his students as a writing and literature professor. The students proved to be a great source of encouragement for him, as did his membership in the Tamarack Writer’s Retreat.

“They [the Tamarack group] expected that you show up with writing to share,” he said. “Every summer, I would write a chapter or two and bring it to them for feedback.”

Despite publishing a successful book, Seamans does not believe that he had an extraordinary story to tell but that the story he did have was valuable.

“I haven’t accomplished anything except for the fact that I’m a human being,” he said. “All human beings’ lives are interesting. I believe that everyone should write their memoir even if it’s only read by family members,” he said.

Seamans sees intrinsic value in writing, and that’s partly why he is so ready to encourage others to engage in recording their memoirs. For

him, it wasn’t only about sharing a story or an era, about leaving a legacy or a message of high import. For him, writing is valuable because it is reflective and beneficial in a whole host of ways. Writing helps people look at their lives with new eyes because true preservation is more than just jotting down the facts and day-to-day activities.

“Writing organizes your life,” he said. “Writing has given me perspective on my life. I have a philosophy of writing: to celebrate the past. I try to find meaning in the past, so it’s not just unfurnished realism.”

So how does one begin this process of preserving memory?

“Certainly start journaling,” Seamans said. “Start writing. Just keep writing. It doesn’t matter what order. Don’t be afraid to write about the commonplace. I used to tell students: ‘Don’t write about climbing Mt.

Everest. Your humanity is what you have to write about.”

Seamans told the story of how the writer James Boswell didn’t think that life was worth living until he wrote about it. He would write about everything. If he went to a party, he would stay up half the night afterwards writing about it.

“Everything is worth writing about,” said Seamans.

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Today, as a retired professor, Seamans still has a heart for teaching and encouraging others to write. And literature is still a very important part of his life. However, it isn’t as easy as it used to be. About 14 years ago, Seamans was diagnosed with macular degeneration, which has caused him to become legally blind. But he did not let that stop him while he was still teaching full time, and it hasn’t slowed him down in his retired life either. He stays quite busy.

“There’s not enough time,” he said. “I’m trying to keep intellectually alive by reading. I participate in faculty discussions and literary teas. I just got back from teaching on the Euro-term.” He also stays active by swimming almost every day.

As Seamans continues to be involved at Point Loma, he hopes that his life experiences can be of value to those with whom he interacts.

“I like to think that fossils like me are good to have around,” he said. ☺

*Seamans is also the author of several other books, including *The Dead One Touched Me from the Past: A Walk with Writers through the Centuries* and *The Brightening Lamp*.

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