



Empowered Writers Enriching Community:

A Creative Writing Anthology

FROM THE CLASS OF 2021

COLLINWOOD HIGH SCHOOL

CLEVELAND, OH

INTRODUCTION

During the winter and spring of 2021, two small classes of twelfth graders at Collinwood High School worked with Lake Erie Ink teaching artist Michelle R. Smith on creative writing. The students selected, from among the impressive array of essays, poems, and vignettes they wrote, the special pieces presented here in this anthology. They worked very hard to channel their creativity while enduring the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and attending class online, and for that and the quality of their work, they deserve so much credit.

We want to thank their teacher, Violet Taylor, for her unstinting belief in the value of letting students develop and raise their voices through creative writing and her heartfelt support of her students, to whose success she was deeply devoted.

We also want to congratulate the student writers that contributed to this anthology for going outside of their comfort zones and doing a new thing. We hope that you take those rich imaginations and novel ideas you have about the world and use them to not only produce more great writing, but to make the world better through your creativity and hard work.

Wings of Fire

by Nathaniel D.

I'm from the ash like a phoenix rising

experienced death many times

None that pierced my own vessel

from a home where you couldn't nestle

The stray cats, a warning sign of what's to come, a broken brain can't produce the chemical I want

at that same token the one who made me is going through a mental lapse

the fear felt for the turning of the next page of what's to come

Rode my majestic green steed but I couldn't outrun it all,

climbed up so high but dragged down now I'm scarred

I'm just a phoenix who died so many times

still I rise from brittle bones and a broken vessel and crying eyes.

The quiet cold instills the loneliness in my soul, scribed into my wrists but never told.

Still, I rise, barren hope and all

I take the flames of despair and stand tall, bloodied but unbowed amongst it all.

A tomato is a fruit

by Jazmyn B.

I was in the auditorium. This was a routine now, to be here in this part of the school year. Where the end of winter was near. Everyone huddled up in the seats with their coats snug. The lights were bright on stage while we sat in darkness. This was the yearly poetry slam. The English and acting classes would come and see the performances. These two boys from my class sat next to me. They were just chatting away as each poet came and went off stage. No one really took any mind to this event. We all either sleep or chat away. Everyone was now getting used to these poems. It's like they were the same each year. The poet either complains about school and the stress a teenager goes through or just mumbles everything. So, I didn't care whether I heard the poems or not.

It wasn't until I heard a boy come onto stage and started to talk about tomatoes. He was explaining how he himself was like a tomato. I was so confused, so I kept listening closely. The poet then went off to say that everyone always thought a tomato was a vegetable. And everyone grew up with that thought and loved that a tomato is a vegetable. But then one day someone told you that tomatoes were actually a fruit. He said the tomato was like him because everyone thought he was straight. All his friends that grew up with him did. But then he exclaimed that he is gay.

At that moment I heard a snicker from the boys, and then they said, "What a stupid f*ggot." I started to shake, and my heart was pounding. I was disgusted by those words of hate. I just sat there till the end of the poetry slam. I didn't want to interrupt the event.

I did tell my friend about what happened when class ended. She told me I should go tell a teacher. As school went on, I was trying to find the right teacher to tell this to, but then I gave up.

It wasn't until I was home, alone in my room, that I realized telling a teacher won't change anything. It won't change the fact that the two boys hate the poet. They'll still say that disgusting word when a teacher isn't around, and they'll never understand the terrible effect they have with their words. It didn't make sense to me how someone could hate someone else so easily. The boys didn't know anything about the poet, except that he's gay, and they still thought they had the audacity to throw a slur at him. It was just like the poem. Those boys can't be okay with the fact that a tomato is a fruit. I hope one day everyone will understand that whether a tomato is a fruit, or a vegetable it's still a tomato. The poet is a person whether he's gay or straight. And the hate people give to others because they're gay is appalling. I hope one day I'll have the chance to stand up to those that need to learn that everyone deserves respect and love.

Chaos

by Deb'briell W.

If the sky were red

There would be chaos, and riots and disbelief I believe.

"The sky is falling, the sky is falling," some idiot would say.

Maybe we would all be that idiot.

"I'm scared Daddy" some child would say.

A mother would cradle her children wondering if her husband would ever come back from the grocery store.

"I want my mommy" some elderly woman would say.

What if we are that little girl or that elderly woman?

The world is upside down.

Is what we would think.

Maybe the world would be happier.

If the sky was red

The world is unhappy when it is blue.

So, let's try something new.

I know the world is cruel.

I know this world is tainted.

Some would love this new sky.

Some wouldn't

"It's ok, Daddy will be home soon."

Some delusional mother would say as her tears seeped into her carpet.

"It's so beautiful."

Some underappreciated child would say.

Would the world still be the same?

Would I still feel unloved?

Would I still feel numb inside?

Or would that feeling fade because of the sky?

"I hate myself,"

That sad young man would say while his tears rolled down his cheeks

And his hand shakes with the razor to his veins

While his blood slowly seeps out into the water, he would say.

Everything would change but also stay the same.

People would still feel worthless.

Some will stay happy.

Some would be sad.

Despair

Tragedy

Some would feel obligated to do something.

with that same old heroism bullshit attitude.

This world would still let me down.

It's just some stupid sky.

Just a different color.

The world would react but soon get used to it.

We adapt to odd situations.

But it's nothing we can't handle.

I hope.

Becoming My Own Superhero

by Deja L.

Have you ever thought about how much bullying can have a significant impact on someone's life? I never thought about it until it happened to me.

2nd through 6th grade was one of the most unbearable times of my life. I was a light skin, chubby, shy, quiet, half-witted kid that had no friends and really no one to talk to. I was dealing with a lot of insecurities about myself. I did not like how massive I was. Another thing a lot of people did not know about me was I was dealing with a kidney infection which made me have accidents on myself. Over time the smell of pee was my regular scent. The kids did not know that, but nothing never stopped them from making fun of me. Most teachers knew but they did not do anything. I was the kid that walked around with her head down and did not really talk. I would sit back and watch the other kids point and laugh at me.

I never really understood why others would try and put other people down. I would sprint home and just to go in my room to cry. For five years I had to deal with getting bullied. At that point I could see why people would kill themselves because they were bullied. I would always think about what my grandpapa would say: "Tough times never last forever. They are laughing at you now, but they would be clapping for you later."

I used to try to do things to make friends because I really wanted one. That is what got me started in sports.

During the summer before 7th grade, I noticed how much people had hurt my feelings and I said, IT'S TIME TO PUT MY FOOT DOWN. I went to school the first day ready for someone to say something to me. By 7th grade the pee smell light way went away but it was still there. That school year I was so bad getting into fights every day and always getting suspended. The teacher would look and just ask what happened to me. After every fight they would ask me, "Why did you hit her?" I would just say enough is enough.

I noticed that was not the right way to move. I had to get payback by leveling up. So, I did a whole 180. I stopped caring about having friends, I started thinking about school more, I fell in love with volleyball, I started working out more to lose weight and even got my hygiene in order. And to this day I still have that same mindset. I was my own superhero. When I go to school and see someone getting bullied, I do something someone did not do for me, which is stand up for them, even if I get in trouble. And I tell them, be our hero, enough is enough and put your foot down. God made you the way you are, love yourself.

Dr. Facilier

by Paige W.

-his greed to be rich, different things he goes through to be rich, the outcome and why that was the outcome

Dr. Facilier is what they call me, I am known by many names such as the voodoo doctor, a dream catcher, and the Shadow Man, but what I want to be known most for is yet to be destined. I lay out in the Louisiana quarters waiting for a chance to meet my dream and very determined to reach my destiny. One day, in the streets of Louisiana, they say a Prince is coming to town and he, Prince Naveen, comes from riches in search of a wife, but little does he know, I have other plans for him. I caught him on his way to the ball & as the truth beholds his riches is far long and over due seemingly gone, so I gave him a read, a decisive read that gave him a chance at riches again, but what I really wished was to take his riches for myself. Turned him into a frog so that he will never be found again. I began to take steps to my destiny, but voodoo is not to be played with. As time progresses, everything I do goes wrong. He and his frog companion has escaped my command and has taken on the bayou to find answers for their transformation. He soon fully finds a remedy, which is the all time fairytale, which is love. A rare true emotional connection, and with that it is found.

I thought I knew how to beat this greed but it only drew me closer to the other side & I will never recover from that. Prince Naveen & Princess Tiana has been a chase but it really comes down to karma. I guess I had it.

Feeling the hate

by Eric E.

I went to a carnival and the air was filled with the smell of funnel cakes, and hot sun on the asphalt. Me and my sister Mariah went to a big public carnival, and at this time I was only 12, but there was a section in the fair that I really was interested in. It had instruments that I could not even carry, instruments I did not even know how to use. It was amazing!—until I witnessed the ratio between blacks and whites in this section.

It was primarily white because of this rock band that I did not know, but they were popular. I just wanted to check out the activities and learn about some of the instruments and music, but no one wanted to talk to me even if I initiated the conversation. And then I thought to myself, “Do I smell bad?” “Are my clothes not right?” and then my sister Mariah was looking for me for a decent minute, and then she found me. “Eric, where have you been?”

She looked shocked and scared when she found me. I did not know why at the time, but it was because of my skin color.

The perspective of my sister Mariah:

Me and my brother Eric went to a public fair with some of my friends and I told my brother that I had to use the bathroom. “Eric stay right here, I will be right back.” I noticed that he was not paying attention, but I really needed to use the bathroom and so I ran for the nearest bathroom. It was about the time I was done using the bathroom and my brother was gone from the spot. But when I told him to stay, I noticed that he had his eyes locked in the music section of the fair.

It took me and my friends 10 to 15 minutes to find my brother, and I noticed he was all alone looking at some people playing guitar at this small booth. I had to hurry up and grab him. “Eric, come on.” When I was going to grab my brother, I noticed that the section of the fair looked like it was reserved for certain people. Then Eric asked me, “Why is everyone separated by the color of your skin?”

I answered my little brother with an awkward smile and told him, “Mom can tell you when the time comes.”

I....Exist...

by Deb'briell W.

I am 11 and I feel so grown up.

Being grown up is hard. I wish I was 5 again.

I am 13 and never had "the talk" with my mom.

I am 14 and I'm a young lady now.

I want my mom; I want her to hold me, but she only hugs the hospital bed.

I am a girl with no one to hug or hold onto.

I am smart because I am lonely.

I am lonely because I am smart.

I want to be alone, but I want to be surrounded with love.

I am weird and I am brave.

I am sad all the time, but I am not depressed.

Being sad is being weak.

And I am NOT weak.

I AM STRONG

I think.

I hope.

I pray.

There's so much I want to tell you.

But I can't

Stop asking, I'm not going to tell you.

I'm not weak.

I'm not strong.

I'm not here.

But I'm not there.

I exist.

But barely exist.

I live in my head.

But I want to escape.

Life in the Mask

by Eric E.

COVID-19 really affected my life. Because of the rapid spread of Covid-19, I was not allowed to have the full extent of my 18th birthday on February 24th. I was supposed to have a family reunion for my birthday, but then we weren't able to get together. That made me really anxious. I felt really disturbed by this big change in my plans. These feelings set the tone for my quarantine experience. It started with negative emotions, and they have lingered all the way until now.

The quarantine really affected my social life with family and friends. I had just met my mother's side of the family before the pandemic, and with social distancing, I wasn't able to get to know them better. During the quarantine, I also wasn't able to attend certain social activities like going to the movies, shopping at the mall, playing basketball, playing football, or just hanging out with my friends. It also affected a large portion of my 12th grade year of high school. That's when everything in a person's life is supposed to start, right? I wasn't able to participate in certain programs at school or get my name out to certain colleges. The social experience of my senior year was ruined too because real-life events like senior meetings went online, and prom and commencement were moved to other buildings, not the building where I actually spent all my years learning. Getting used to online school has been cool, but it does have its downsides like getting used to time limits and due dates on assignments, finding missing assignments and completing them, and remembering to charge the computer for the next day of school.

On top of all of this, there were so many restrictions that happened. Stores were closed, some permanently, and in almost all the open places you had to wear a mask. Wearing a mask really affected my life because every time I stepped out of my house, I had to put on a mask whether I wanted to or not. I also had to carry a bottle of hand sanitizer. I felt irritated by the masks. They felt suffocating to me. Hand sanitizer has a strong, astringent smell that I don't like, so I didn't like using it. After a year of following these restrictions, I am angry. I want everything to go back to normal, so I don't have to follow these restrictions anymore. The pandemic really put a lot of time in my hands, like most people my age who go to school.

What if the sky was red and turn dark red at night?

by Summer B.

I woke up in the middle of the night because I heard screaming outside. I got up, angry, to see what was going on, and it was dark red outside. I was confused and worried. Then, in the corner of my eye, I saw a lady with blood over her face, screaming. I started to panic.

I then ran to wake my best friend up next room to me to tell her that there is someone outside screaming with blood on her face, and the sky is red. She looked at me like I was crazy. I told her I was being serious. I pulled her out of bed to go see, and when she did the lady was sitting on our porch crying. My best friend looked back at me with a worried face. I looked at her with an “I told you” face.

So she then went outside to grab the lady, but first the lady was scared, but my best friend told the lady, “It’s okay, we won’t hurt you.” She grabbed her arm carefully and brought her to the house and sat her down on the couch. I was in the kitchen fixing her some tea and then my best friend asked her, “What happen to you, what’s going on?”

The lady responded and said, “There was this unhuman thing in my house and killed my family. We have to get out of here before that thing comes here. It’s a lot of them.” I then walked in the room and gave her tea and of course I heard everything, so I closed all the windows and grabbed all my things, including my emergency bags and guns and knives. My best friend did the same as well and then she gave the lady our extra emergency bag. And we all went in the garage and made sure we had extra everything—clothes, food, drinks, guns—then we got in the car. I was thinking to myself, it’s going to be a long day.

4 days later

We were still driving. It was a long drive, but soon it would be my turn to drive. While we were driving, I looked at the lady and thought, we never asked for her name, so I asked her.

“Hey um I totally forgot to ask you your name and we forgot to introduce ourselves. I just realized that—I’m totally sorry.”

The lady then replied and said, “It’s fine. My name is Racheal, and your name is?”

Then I replied and said, “My name is Summer and my best friend name is Jessica.”

We all laughed and started eating snacks and listening to music. Then suddenly Jessica stopped the car and had a scared look on her face. We were in the back of the vehicle laughing. Jessica stopped the car very fast and the girls’ food dropped, and Jessica then said very quietly to not make any noise. We looked at her confused until we looked out the window and saw... A tall alien looking creature was standing in front of the car. Everyone then froze. The girls' hair stood on their backs. They had never seen nothing so hideous and terrifying in their life.

THE BULLY

by Aniyah P.

The time when I was at school, I saw a group of kids picking on this girl. They were calling her fat and saying she needed to lose weight. The girl went and told the teacher. I went to make sure she was okay. This made me feel bad for her and it kind of made me feel like they think the same things about me because I have weight on me too.

So a few weeks later they made her feel so bad about herself that she didn't come to school for weeks. Then when she came back she had a new hairstyle, new phone and new school clothes on. Her first day back she made a few friends, but she was still getting bullied by some of the students in her class. "Oh, you finally have on new clothes." She got upset and ran to the planning center to talk to the teacher.

I feel that the teachers should have talked to all the kids' parents, to try to stop it from happening again, because she probably feels that nobody cares about the way she feels. "THOSE WHO JUDGE WILL NEVER UNDERSTAND, AND THOSE WHO UNDERSTAND WILL NEVER JUDGE."

Sky Color

By Jameal M.

My story is fantasy and a little more realistic.

One day, I was outside in the park with my friend on a sunny day. When me and my friend were playing in the park, the weather slowly changed colors into red, but none of us didn't notice this.

The weather intensifies into red and dark, like it's sunset to dawn to night. Everyone is worried, scared and confused, even me and my friend. Minutes later, the government is kinda challenged and can't stop it, which causes everyone in the world to be freaked out, angry and scared.

Me and my friend are kinda scared to see a full-blown sky turning blue into red and dark. Everything is dark, but with a little bit of cloudy red fog.

The world begins to protest, like the 1967 Detroit riots (no offense). The conspiracy theories are saying that the real red figure, the devil did this, but no. The real main reason why the weather has changed color is because the aliens did it (still a conspiracy theory about aliens coming).

The military and government handled and took down the aliens, the weather changed back to blue sky, and everything went back to normal. Except for the damage the protest did, like the windows shattered, valuable things stolen, burned buildings, all the things the people did.

THE END.

That's all I have and can think of...



Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Ms. Violet Taylor for bringing Lake Erie Ink to Collinwood High School again.

Many thanks to her students, who were always a pleasure to work with!

We would also like to thank the Ohio Arts Council who made this program possible.

