

iOW

InsideOUT WRITERS

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SUMMER 2020 NEWSLETTER

pen. paper. perseverance.





RESPONSE TO THE MURDER OF GEORGE FLOYD and the Uprising Town Hall

The entire world watched as a man was murdered on May 25th. Our world will never be the same. Thankfully, our community was able to come together and hold space for all of the pain, rage and confusion that experience instigated. We were able to share or empathize with experiences of trauma, police brutality and retaliation with a mindset of acceptance and hope for immediate change with those in our community who have experienced it most. IOW is an organization founded on community and respect and we will always uphold that. Since the senseless killing of George Floyd, nations around the world have come together to show that enough is enough. We will always stand up, always fight back and always advocate for peace and equality - as we have for the past 25 years. George Floyd, and every person lost to police violence will not be forgotten. Black lives have always, and will always matter and we were grateful for the opportunity to be reminded of the strength and beauty of our brothers and sisters as they processed their grief with us.

A statement from IOW's Executive Director, Jimmy Wu

I've been triggered. I didn't immediately understand why but after more than a week witnessing George Floyd's murder while under the care of law enforcement, I've had enough time to process why I've felt so much anxiety and fear. UNDER THE CARE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT. I have to emphasize that part. I witnessed, along with everyone else, a HUMAN BEING have his life slowly TAKEN from him. Not because he was a threat to public safety, not because he was a threat to those restraining him, but because someone responsible for CARING for him chose not to. Instead, this person CHOSE to KILL him. And those wearing his same uniform CHOSE to look the other way than to stop him.

I mentioned the word triggered. I haven't slept well at all, haven't been "productive." I couldn't understand why. Then I remembered, when tossing and turning these past nights, a memory I've suppressed and haven't openly shared with most people. I was 16 years old, just a kid, when I was arrested during the act of committing a crime. I walked backwards (with guns pointed at me) during my arrest, hands interlocked behind my head, until I was within proximity of my arresting officers to swiftly slap handcuffs onto my wrists and throw me into the back of a police vehicle.



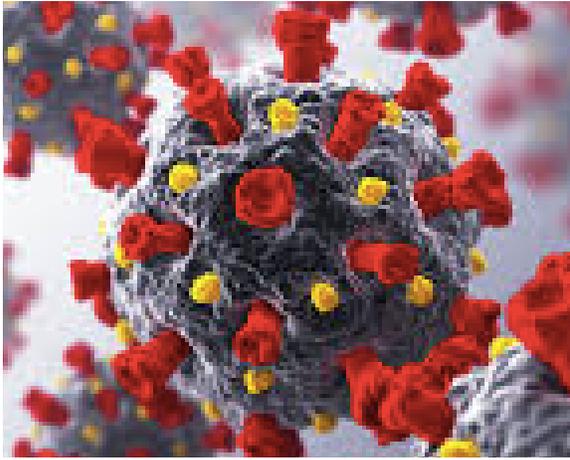
I was terrified enough sitting in the secured confines of the back seat of a police vehicle when the door to my right was suddenly yanked open and a police officer grabbed me by the collar of my shirt and began choking me. One enormous hand securely fastened itself around my neck. As I gasped for air, I was pummeled by the closed fist of a man twice my size. I was so full of adrenaline (or perhaps it was being in shock), that I didn't realize until days later my lower jaw had been dislocated. I remember being sent to juvenile hall and not much else until several weeks later. Maybe it was something I subconsciously suppressed. I'll never know. I was under the CARE of law enforcement. This was the care I received. As a 16 year old kid.



My point in sharing this now is because I have to. I have to talk about what happened to me, though it's uncomfortable. This is what happened to me, as an Asian American kid. I won't pretend to understand what it's like to be born Black, but I will take a stand when enough is enough. This isn't about being Black, White, Asian, Pacific Islanders, Latino, or Native American, but being a human being. That's it, that's all. Some of my closest friends and mentors are in law enforcement. I will refrain from categorizing them because I wouldn't want to be judged because of anything anybody else is doing, but from what I am doing. As my own person, as an individual, as a human being. However, if isolated incidents become routine, there is a problem and it MUST be addressed. If we are putting trust into our public servants and they are proving not to honor our trust, it's a problem. We have to take a look at where it comes from, understand it, then work collectively towards a solution. This is how we win. Not to give more ammunition towards division, but to unite. As human beings. And to speak our truth. Just shared mine. Would love to hear yours.

Sincerely,

Jimmy Wu
Executive Director
InsideOUT Writers



COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RESOURCES

In February 2020, IOW had to close its doors due to the ongoing pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus. Despite the need for social distancing and inability to meet face-to-face, IOW's staff worked tirelessly to bring IOW to a virtual realm and remind our community that despite the physical distance, our bonds were still strong. As IOW transitioned into this new frontier of 100% virtual connection, we were able to implement more specialized and long-term Writing Circles. Our aim was to provide the alums a space to explore their talents and develop their skills as writers with professionals in the field. We also began providing weekly check-in with our alumni to see how they were doing during the pandemic and offer resources such as baby supplies, referrals to COVID-19 testing sites, information regarding employers that are hiring, and numbers to mental health resources. Also, we encourage our members to think of ways to still get their goals done during this very difficult time. A few of our members have expressed a desire to complete their college degrees and we connected them to college programs in Los Angeles that work with previously incarcerated individuals to achieve their dream of earning a four-year degree. IOW will continue finding new ways to continue supporting our alumni--even if it has to be done virtually at this time.

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VIRTUAL WRITING CIRCLE KICKOFF



While InsideOUT Writers has not been able to provide creative writing classes inside of Juvenile Hall, we are proud to share that we have re-directed our creative writing teachers who normally teach inside the halls to facilitate Writing Circles on Thursdays. This experience has been both rewarding and enriching for both our alumni members and our teachers who normally work with youth on the inside. We express deep gratitude to the following teachers for participating in our Virtual Writing Circle: Anna Lilia Barraza, Anna Carey, Shelley Diamond, Ken Mirman, Adam Weissman, Amy Spies, Aaron Bergman, Leslie Poston, and Lauren Dani.

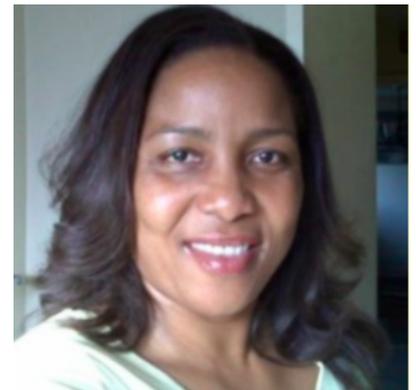


LESLIE POSTON

IOW's veteran writing teacher and former Writing Program Director, Leslie Poston, came back to host a Virtual Writing Circle in the month of May 2020. Leslie guided us through a poignant and incredibly powerful analysis of Black women's empowerment through the exploration of the career and music of neo-soul duo Floetry. As we held space for our alums to process the murder of George Floyd and the ensuing protests against police brutality we also explored the way police brutality and racism has affected every component of our lives and the struggle of living with the rage and pain inherent in existing under systematic racism. With Floetry, artistic expression and the messaging inherent in dreams as an example, Leslie guided us through the many ways that pain can express itself and the healthy ways to guide those feelings as they are experienced.

Welcome Marcia Salvary to IOW!

We are proud to welcome Marcia Salvary to the IOW family. Marcia dedicated her first Writing Circle to holding space for our alums to process the death of George Floyd and recent protests. Marcia is a seasoned non-profit professional having held various positions in social justice organizations including Junior Blind, Orange County Rescue Mission, Don Bosco Technical Institute, Los Angeles Urban League, Lynwood Partners Educational Foundation, and currently at The Achievable Foundation.



MARCIA SALVARY



LAUNCH OF THE WORKSHOP SERIES

As InsideOUT Writers (IOW) transitioned into this new virtual frontier, we were able to implement more specialized and themed-based Writing Circles. Our aim is to provide our alumni members a space to explore their creative writing talents and develop their skills as writers with professionals in the book, screen writing, and other commercial writing field. To do this, in addition to our traditional Thursday Writing Circle, we also began the Virtual Writing Circle: Workshop Series! Themes have included topics on The Hero's Journey and the Elements of Storytelling including plot, voice, setting, and character development. We are planning another Workshop on Screen Writing for this Fall.

ANNA CAREY'S BREAKDOWN OF CHARACTER, PLOT AND SETTING IN FICTION



ANNA CAREY

Beginning in June 2020, IOW was able to have Anna Carey, author of The Eve Trilogy (Eve, Once, Rise) and the Blackbird series (Blackbird, Deadfall) host our second Workshop Series! Anna's books have been translated into twelve languages and Blackbird is currently in development at Lionsgate to be a feature film. She studied creative writing at NYU and has an MFA in fiction from Brooklyn College. Her workshop was focused on building character, plot and setting in a short story. Alums were able to work on a piece over several weeks in a peer-reviewed space and with full access to Anna's mentorship for the duration of the Workshop. Their pieces will be presented during a special Life Skills Workshop coming soon, Breaking into Publishing as BIPOC to celebrate the culmination of their work as they discuss the realities of the publishing world with full-time authors.

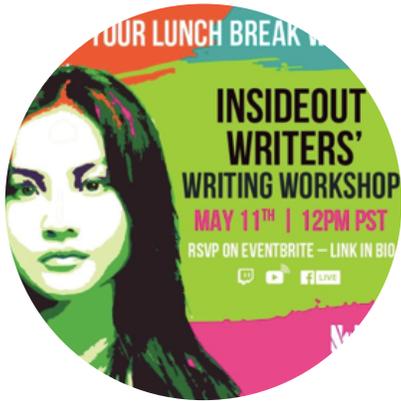
KEN MIRMAN'S HERO'S JOURNEY

June 2020 marked the culmination of our first Workshop Series with Ken Mirman as he deconstructed the concept of the Hero's Journey. During this multi-part series, our alums were able to work directly with five-time Clio award-winning writer, artist, digital effects pioneer and director Ken Mirman as he broke down the concept and necessity of The Wound in artistic expression, character and plot. Alums were able to explore how external and internal conflicts shaped and defined their characters and their writing as well as how that changed over time.



KEN MIRMAN

SPECIAL EVENTS AND WORKSHOPS AT IOW



WE RISE 2020 Virtual Event

IOW was fortunate to be spotlighted with WE RISE LA during their 2020 Virtual Event. We were highlighted as an organization that has been working tirelessly to provide safe and effective spaces for previously and currently incarcerated youth while they accomplish their re-entry journey.

June Pride Event

IOW is an inclusive community and are proud to represent all expressions and forms of humanity. This year, we were happy to celebrate Pride month with a space dedicated for our alums to review the origins of Pride, our experiences as members of the Family and what being 'out' means in modern times. Initially started as a riot by founder, activist and Black transwoman Marsha P. Johnson, Pride has developed into a far more celebratory experience in recent history, but its activist focused roots were re-centered this year as it coincided with the largest protest movement in history.



Know Your Rights Workshop

Maureen Pacheco of the Alternative Public Defenders Office and **Colleen Flynn** of the National Lawyers Guild held a Q&A session with our alums to answer questions about their rights while protesting and the differences being previously incarcerated makes when dealing with law enforcement. Members from the California Justice Leaders/AmeriCorp were also invited to participate in this very timely discussion, especially as the nation was protesting the death of George Floyd and against police brutality.





Racial Battle Fatigue Discussion

Professor Kenjus Watson, a researcher and advocate associated with UCLA's Black Male Institute and Occidental College's Critical Race Theory and Psychology departments, led a discussion of his research into the cellular effect of Racial Battle Fatigue on Black and Latinx youth as well as the positive and achievable ways to combat the negative long-term health affects his research uncovered.

Monthly Meditation Session with Amy Spies



Beginning in August 2020, Amy Spies began hosting monthly meditation sessions for our alums to unwind, destress and center themselves in a peer-supported group and safe space while they learn daily meditative and mindfulness techniques. Amy is a longtime writer and teacher in film, television, and new media. She's written documentaries, drama, comedy, as well as blogging for the Huffington Post and Los Angeles Review of Books. She serves on diversity, human rights committees and as a writing awards judge for PEN International Literary Association and the Writers Guild. She has been a regular Virtual Writing Circle Facilitator and her meditatively focused Virtual Writing Circles have been profound, peaceful and deeply healing for all of our alums.

A.R.T. Training and Workshop

Back in June, the IOW team were fortunate to be able to complete the Aggression Replacement Training course. Originally developed by Arnold P. Goldstein, Barry Glick and John Gibbs, A.R.T training is a cognitive behavioral intervention program to help children and adolescents improve social skill competence and moral reasoning, better manage anger, and reduce aggressive behavior. We are proud to announce that, as of August 2020, IOW has been able to begin holding A.R.T workshops for youth referred by LA County Probation! This momentous step marks IOW's first step of our long-term vision to develop our full Diversion program! With this training, IOW will be able to tackle the societal and internal complications that lead to incarceration and recidivism at its roots while also helping young people better express their needs and interests in difficult situations.

OUR ALL-STAR COMMUNITY

Celebrity Writing Prompts

IOW's number one focus is our youth and how we can best serve them. We have been profoundly concerned with providing a safe and positive space for our alums to process the pandemic, the Uprising and their everyday lives as so many facets of normalcy change. Therefore, we were ecstatic to discover that there were 18 major celebrities who had the same concern who wanted to reach out to both our students incarcerated and our alums. John Legend, Ester Lou-Weithers, Wale, Dane Cook, Sarah Silverman and more all wrote writing prompts specifically for our community with the focus of reminding us all of the equalizing power of writing and the importance of unity during times of change.



Teacher Get-Together

IOW is so fortunate to have a community of incredible volunteers who go into the juvenile halls every week. It is because of this generous contribution of time and effort that IOW is able to exist and continue to impact the thousands of incarcerated youth we reach every week. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our ability to access our population of teens and young adults inside has been temporarily suspended. In the meantime, we have been doing everything we can to stay up to date on our ability to access our students inside. We are grateful for all of our teachers who have been able to volunteer their time to our Alumni Program as Facilitators for Writing Circles or Workshops as we continue to work to return to our students inside.

iOW InsideOUT WRITERS

This mission of InsideOUT Writers is to reduce the juvenile recidivism rate by providing a range of services that evolves to meet the needs of currently and formerly incarcerated youth and young adults.

Using creative writing as a catalyst for personal transformation, these young people are empowered with the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully re-integrate into our communities becoming advocates for their future.

PEN. PAPER. PERSEVERANCE.
I write from the inside out.

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