

WHO IS STILL HERE?

SARABANDE WRITING LABS, VOL. 8

SARABANDE WRITING LABS

An Arts Education Program from Sarabande Books

Sarabande Writing Labs is an arts education initiative created by Louisville-based nonprofit publisher Sarabande Books. We partner with social service organizations to promote writers in under-resourced communities through free workshops and literary events.

Visit our website for photos, updates, and upcoming events:

www.sarabandebooks.org/swl

ABOUT THIS VOLUME'S COMMUNITY PARTNER:

Americana Community Center is an organization in Louisville's South End that provides a spectrum of services to the diverse individuals and families of the Metro Area, including refugees, immigrants, and those born in the United States.

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INTRODUCTION

by Hannah Rose Neuhauser

On my first day teaching young writers at Americana Community Center, I overheard the following exchange:

Come on, man, poetry is cool. You get to write about your feelings!

But what if I am angry?

That's okay, you can be angry! The student looked at me, double-checking. I nodded.

For six weeks, in our hour-long workshops, the students explored their communities and identities through poetry. They read Kiki Petrosino, Ocean Vuong, and Jamaal May, as well as work from other young authors. They bravely shared their most vulnerable places—places of anger, of loss, but also of hope, of joy. Through this work, a new community formed. Writers gave one another the space to think and be heard.

Reader, when the title of this volume asks you, *Who is still here?* listen to these voices—they are the answer.

OUR FUTURE

After Kiki Petrosino's "Personal Style Monologue"

Fighting is in. Friendship is out.
Crime is in. Respect is out.
Responsibility is out. War is in.
Death is in. Health is out.
Hate is in. Discrimination is in.
Offending is in. Ignorance is in.
Safety is out. Destruction is in.
Family is out. Isolation is back in.
Not caring is in. Social awareness is out.
Intelligence is out. Food is still out.
Riots are in. Terrorism is in.
Expansion is in. Environment is running out.
Life is out. Killing is in.
Water has run out. Love has run out.
Who is still here?

—Bradley J.

I AM FROM

I am from a cell and an organism. But
where am I really from?

Agriculture thrives, setting sun feels alive as it shines
through the landscape. It dies every
night to let the moon shine
as we walk through the wilderness.

Rural. But a glance at the twinkling stars
will turn you to a multicolored stone.

—*Say M.*

THERE ARE PEOPLE HERE

After Jamaal May's "There Are Birds Here"

There are people here,
so many people here
who have come back home.
When they say it is a lost place,
a forgotten paradise, the final resting place
for generations of forgotten people. No.
The people are here
to give this forgotten place life.
To go back to the good old times
to remember what it was like before it was all ruins. No,
I don't mean all the people want to heal
 the forgotten place.
I said there are living people here, and no,
not all of them are the monsters we see on TV.
Not all of them go around sacrificing themselves for
 the cause.
I mean, there are people here.
People who want peace.
People who want to bring us together
and remember the forgotten ones who were lost to
 the cause. And no
not all of them will be able to heal us and bring
back the good times.
I am trying to say
the lost and forgotten place
is as lost and forgotten

as the memories it holds
as those who rest there,
the people who have waited years to go back home
but home is such a weird place.
But they won't stop saying
that it's too lost to save,
too broken to fix,
too bloodied and wounded to heal.

—*Ridwan Y.*

WHERE I AM FROM

I am from a place that is unsafe. A place where most of my dreams are gone. A place where everything is dark. A place where everything is hard to live with.

As a young girl in Iraq, I always dreamed to be a pharmacist, but a lot of things happened, that made everything disappear, like a dark cloud coming to cover everything in my life. Like a heavy rain coming so fast on me.

I am from that place where everything seems great. But many changes make it hard to live there.

I am from a long journey that went from country to country. I am from different hard experiences. I am from a journey that started from my home country to save my life. I am from nice mountains and rivers in my home country.

I am from a place where my family lives, my grandparents and my friends.

I am from a different country. But I started a new life here.

I am from here.

The only things that connect me to my home country are memories.

—*Narjis A.*

I AM MADE OF

I am made of dust by god.
Unbelievable but true.
Not mud or sand, but dust.

I am made of dust not air.
When I said I am made of dust,
I'm really talking about the first person on earth,
which makes everybody siblings.

I am made of dust with humanity,
where I am more human than dust,
still, dust.
Where I'm able to do the same thing
a regular person can do.

—*Baha W.*

TODAY

After Kiki Petrosino's "Personal Style Monologue"

Acting like thugs is in. Respect is out.
Holding in emotion is in. Manners are out.
Love is out. Ignorance is in.
Not caring is in. Elegance is out.
Smoking is in. Following is in.
Unstable mindset is in. Harming is in.
Anger is let out. Destruction is in.
Negativity is handed out. Drugs are back in.
Forgetting is in. Forgiving is out.
The right path is out. Intelligence is still out.
Needles are in. Immaturity is in.
Stupidity is in. Guns are out.
Masks are out. Bullying is in.
Wise people aren't out. Helping is out.
The epitome of our destruction is here.

—Julio M.

WHO AM I?

I am who I am.

A girl who always has a smile on her face.

An outgoing, brave, dedicated girl.

A girl who didn't know what she wanted to be
when she was back home.

A young lady who loves to see everyone content.

She would rather hide her feelings

just to make everyone happy.

A unique girl with a big dream.

She has overcome so many obstacles

before coming to the USA.

Who is she really?

Someone you don't have a clue exists.

A funny, goofy, and hardworking girl.

I am Veronique.

—*Veronique G.*

THERE ARE BUTTERFLIES HERE

For Haiti

After Jamaal May's "There Are Birds Here"

There are butterflies here,
so many butterflies here
so many butterflies
when they say Haiti is crap.

And why even bother
picking up the trash? No
one cares. No.

The butterflies are here
to bring joy. To bring happiness.

To try and help the people
to have a better education. No,
I don't mean to bring violence,
I said to bring joy, and no,
not war, not anger, not hopelessness,
not giving up.

I mean butterflies are beautiful. Just
like Haiti. It's still forming
though. But it's beautiful.

There's joy here. And no,
it's not crap. You just need to see it.

I am trying to say
butterflies are here to stay.

It is as beautiful and peaceful (kind of)
as America
as England.

We just need to form like
a butterfly.
But they won't stop saying
how trashy it is, how no one
cares. And it's too poor to bother with.

—*Gabby J.*

DREAMING BIG

After Kiki Petrosino's "Personal Style Monologue"

To be hopeful is in. Summer is out.
Future is in. Hotness is out.
Honesty is out. Sadness is in.
Mercy is in. Madness is out.
Truthfulness is in. Being busy is in.
Being helpful is in. Life is in.
Darkness is out. Time travel is in.
Angry is out. Fighting back in.
Dreaming in. Safety out.
Happiness out. Happiness still out.
Wishing is in. Support is in. Blessing in.
To be a beautiful young girl is out. Being responsible is in.
Everything is out.

—*Mebrehati W.*

BIG DREAMS

After Kiki Petrosino's "Personal Style Monologue"

Love is in. Missing is out.
Respect is in. Madness is out.
Unknown is in. Loyalty is in.
Truth is in. Reading in darkness is out.
Challenges are in. Dreaming of the future is in.
To be shy is out. Safety is in.
Running away is out. Love is back in.
White is in. No rights are out.
Taking away is out. No hope is still out.
Wishes are in. Planning is in.
Happiness is in. Goals are in.
Joyfulness is in. Escape is out.
Lies are out. Singing is in.
Madness is out, and sadness is out.
And courage is always here.

—Narjis A.

FAMILY

Family is like fighting and hurting each other. Families are not the same as other families. Family is about trusting, believing, and giving chances.

The world is full of families and people who love and hate one another, but always come back safe.

Family is like water that moves, but is sometimes calm and quiet.

Family is like animals that don't talk but always care for each other.

—*Eh H.*

THERE ARE HOMES HERE

For The People

After Jamaal May's, "There Are Birds Here"

There are beds here,
so many people come here
for safety and warmth.
When they said homes are
for people with money only
it is not true.
Homes are for everybody.
The homes are here
to keep people warm
and safe. From being
in the cold or rain. No,
I don't mean a safe house.
I said homes are for people, and no,
not jail or prison.
I mean homes that you
can call yours, a place you can
run to, a place to be safe,
warm, and loved. And no,
I'm not saying jail or prison isn't home.
I'm trying to say
a home is for anyone.

—Yazmin K.

I AM FROM

I am from El Salvador,
a small country,
but with a pure heart
a country who is trying to help
poor people and make the country
better.

I am from a small place that has
fourteen volcanoes. I am from El Salvador
and I am proud of what my country
is capable of doing.

I am from a country that improves
every day and that tries to make the country happy.
I am from El Salvador.

—*Gerson C.*

MY "PERFECT" LIFE

After Kiki Petrosino's "Personal Style Monologue"

Jealousy is in. Happiness is out.
Fake love is in. Love is out.
Makeup is out. Inner beauty is in.
Slim is in. Fat is out.
Anger is in. Hatred is in.
Blonde hair in. Barbies in.
Black hair out. Blue-eyed in.
Dark skin is out. Oh wait, it's back in.
Brown-eyed girls are in. Contacts out.
Happiness is out. Happiness is still out.
Love is in. Thin is in.
Thick is in. Jealousy is out.
Barbie is out. Inner beauty is in.
Anger is out. Hatred out.
Happiness is still here.

—Gabby J.

I AM FROM

I am from Thailand

I am from 11:00 morning prayer

I am from juice—mango and peaches

I am from a Thai family

I am from Christians and peace

I am from Thailand and Asia and Thai noodles

From the story of me

—*Tun T.*

I AM MADE OF

I am made of the swish of a basketball net.
I am made of good and bad,
thick and thin.

I'm from working hard on the basketball court
to make it out of Louisville, KY, and into the NBA.

I am made of hard work and putting dedication
into everything I do
to help my family.

—*Victor F.*

THERE ARE PEOPLE HERE

For America

After Jamaal May's "There Are Birds Here"

There are people here,
so many people here
is what I'm trying to say.

When they said those people
were metaphors for what
is trapped between buildings
and buildings. No.

The people are here
to look around for
safety and freedom.

No,
I don't mean a place where no one will hurt you.
I said safety and freedom and, no,
not freedom where you get to
kill people.

I mean safety and freedom
where everybody gets to do anything,
and everybody is safe.

—*Baha W.*

HOW TO BE A DREAM CATCHER

Lay down on a flat surface
close your eyes
breathe deeply
let the memories come to you.

And when you remember,
stretch your arms up high
and catch the memories.

Catch the good times,
the happy times,
and hold them close.
Because there will always be times when you need them.

—*Ridwan Y.*

