



ONE YEAR
ADVENTURE
NOVEL

*Summer Workshop
Journal*

2015

Jake B.

In most things in life, the first time is the best time. All of the surprise and the joy in discovery are wound up in the first encounter, like a man seeing a mountain for the first time in his life. If he were to live there, the magic would still be present, but nothing would compare to the wonder of that original sighting.

But in the best things, the most lasting things, the opposite is true. And I found that most true of the OYAN Workshop. My first time, it was great; my second time, it was wonderful; my third time, it was absolutely incredible.

That is true because OYAN, on its most fundamental level, is a relationship, a friendship, a kinship. And a true friend is a person who gets better and better with time, because your knowledge and understanding of them grows.

And so this summer workshop was, for me, something that was better and more transcendent than other workshops. It was not the lectures or the storytelling tips or the critique groups that most affected me; it was the soul of the workshop. The collective joy of just being with other people who understand you. The collective passion for story, for transformation and beauty.

It is the essence of the workshop that is so emotional and inspiring. It is something intangibly good and wholesome. In a world full of despair, it is a ray of hope and joy. It is alive with the possibility that stories can affect this, that perhaps stories could help reverse the entropy of the human soul.



Jake (right) with a friend at the 2015 Summer Workshop

This is the atmosphere I feel when I walk into an atrium full of laughing writers. It is this atmosphere I feel when Mr. S speaks on the joy of fairy-stories. It is this atmosphere I feel, most of all, in the presence of my OYANer friends.

And if this atmosphere were to be incarnated into a physical location, I think the words of Chesterton would be fittingly carved into the gates of this place: "Abandon hopelessness, all ye who enter here."



“Do not sneer at the time when the creed of humanity was on its honeymoon; treat it with the dreadful reverence that is due to youth. For you, perhaps, a drearier philosophy has covered and eclipsed the earth.

“The fierce poet of the Middle Ages wrote, ‘Abandon hope, all ye who enter here,’ over the gates of the lower world. The emancipated poets of to-day have written it over the gates of this world. But if we are to understand the story which follows, we must erase that apocalyptic writing, if only for an hour. We must recreate the faith of our fathers, if only as an artistic atmosphere.



“If, then, you are a pessimist, in reading this story, forego for a little the pleasures of pessimism. Dream for one mad moment that the grass is green. Unlearn that sinister learning that you think so clear; deny that deadly knowledge that you think you know. “Surrender the very flower of your culture; give up the very jewel of your pride; abandon hopelessness, all ye who enter here.”

—G. K. Chesterton



Rachel G.

I didn't have to drive 1,300 miles on my own.

But you see, my friend was getting married, and I wasn't missing that.

I wasn't missing the 2015 Summer Workshop, either.

When I met my friend, she lived in Germany and I lived in Kansas. We couldn't exchange photos or email addresses, and she couldn't send me personal messages. Fortunately, the last one caved within a few months, when inexplicably pictures of her baby sister appeared in my forum inbox. Not pictures of her, mind. Baby sister.

In *The Four Loves*, C.S. Lewis talks about friends as "[see]ing" what others did not...they share their vision—it is then that Friendship is born. And instantly they stand together an immense solitude." My friend and I were side by side in love of God and of Story. It didn't matter to me that she was an avatar of cherry blossoms and a writerly screenname for the first year and a half I knew her. She was my friend, and I was hers.

At the 2010 Summer Workshop, my friend became real. I could talk to her, hug her, and—most importantly—exchange email addresses with her while our mothers circled, measuring each other up. Later, my friend and I sat side by side and we listened as Mr.S. told 50 young, awkward, newly-real teens that what we loved most in the world—Story—mattered. And we believed him.



Rachel (right) and
Tianna in 2010



The end of that workshop felt in many ways like the end of everything. She was gone to Illinois, but I had to stay in Kansas. Our friendship returned to pixels. She couldn't come to the 2011 workshop, but made 2012 and 2013. Our priorities and our lives changed. She moved states and I moved states. We never lived within 800 miles of each other. It still didn't matter. She was my friend. We still loved God, stories, and each other. What else did we need?

And so, I am driving through seven states in two days—for her wedding and for the 2015 workshop.

The workshop is different now, of course. I come smashed between a schedule of two jobs and an internship, worrying what I'll do when college ends. I am older and my friends are older. It is both harder and easier for me and my friends to get to the workshops—weddings proving especially inconvenient—but this year, I don't go for them.

I go, like Jill Pole, to reach the top of Aslan's mountain, where the air is clear and my mind is clear. I go to see again the wonder of the newly-real friendships, the pursuit of excellence, and the joy in our stories and each

other. I go to shed my 22-year-old cynicism and regain my 14-year-old wonder. I don't have to know everyone there, or everyone I talk to, or everyone I'm in critique group with, because friends or not we still tend to stand, side by side, in search of truth and in a common but increasingly multifaceted vision. In coming, I hope to say it matters and it lasts, and you, the person in front of me, matter the most.

I go because I believe our stories can change the world—but our love of each other will change it faster.



Rachel with Tianna at
Tianna's wedding in 2015

Lela G.

I don't know how explain what it's like to be surrounded by people who have the same interests as you, but no one is trying to be the same. It's so cool to have a serious discussion on the Hobbit movies with ten other people at lunch, or watch two kids have a foam sword duel, or walk around seeing people dressed up like Flynn Rider, Merida, Legolas, Captain America, a Hogwarts student, or their own main character. And it's not only accepted but applauded as well. I can't even describe the joy of being around people who are just as zany as I am and not afraid to admit and celebrate it.

The workshops were fantastic. None of the speakers ever lost my attention. They kept me on my toes and made me think about things. They were so encouraging, taking us all seriously and not treating us like little kids with hopeless fantasies. They made me wonder and imagine about what my book will be. And a shout out to Mrs. S. for the wonderful

session introductions. I think you should have a morning show on television. I would totally watch that.



Lela (left) with two friends





Critique group! Wow. I was scared about reading my stories out loud in front of strangers. I imagined it as throwing a bit of my soul among lions. It wasn't like that at all. I was really encouraged and was shown areas I could improve upon by my peers (it was so nice to hear their thoughts from their own mouths). It was a comfortable and safe environment. I really want to say thanks to the people who put critique groups together. You put so much effort into them and they are amazing.

Thank you Mr. S. for building this community.

This workshop was one of the best weeks I've ever had. It's a secure

atmosphere with people who are just excited to meet you as you are to meet them. It's really fun to have so much spontaneity. You may be pouring water on someone's head one moment then fighting for gummy bear rights while realizing you got tagged with a clothespin or someone "Sharpied" your neck.

I loved every moment there and I can't wait to see everyone again.

The oxytocin is kicking in.

I end by raising my imaginary pen in the OYAN salute (a nod to those who returned it).

Thank you all and goodnight,

Lela (LelaG)





Miguel F.

JUNE 22

i. This is the day of firsts:
our first hellos,
our first embraces,
our first songs.
And oh, what a crescendo
they shall make.

ii. An orange dwarf
approaches the stage,
with wisdom and wit
the spritely sage.

JUNE 23

i. We are craftsmen
shaping worlds out of clay hope.
Our bare hands
and our honest hearts
are the only tools we'll ever need.





JUNE 24

**i. We begin our day
in the mutually tired company
of those we love.**

**ii. We breathe in the words
of our dear Jesus.
How sweet it is
in the waking of the sun.**

**iii. Some doorways
are as big as mountains,
inviting you to explore
the intricacies of their caves
and to find the treasures
they carry on the walls.
But some are as small
as the palm of your hand,
and the gems
are worth all the more.**

JUNE 25

**i. Throbbing chests
and tightened jaws.
If this is dying,
it's death to hopelessness
and to the inability
to feel.**

**But maybe humans are too vulnerable;
our bodies can't handle
the weight of the world.**

**ii. Clutch the ribs
to make sure the heart doesn't fall out.
Lay on your side,
to make sure the breaths
come out slow.
And then: breathe,
talk,
let go.**

**iii. And live in the relieving shame
of explanations without
excuses.**





JUNE 26

**i. We bound ourselves
in sharps and flats,
the pieces falling against each other,
slipping into place.
The music was the blood
in our veins
and our voices
the heart.**

**ii. Intertwined souls
caught between the branches
of our words.
Falling carries no fear
when you know you'll always
be picked back up.**

**iii. We chased our own childhoods
back through playgrounds
that seemed so much bigger
when we were looking up at them.
Growing out of your shoes
doesn't always mean
growing out of your own skin.**

**iv. Let's end this
the same way we started,
spirits so desperate to touch
that they forget even humans
have walls.**

JUNE 27

**i. The act of saying goodbye
gets so much easier with time,
but not so,
the consequences.
I fear the residue gets heavier
and my heart grows a little
too big
for my chest every time.**

**Miguel at the 2015
Summer Workshop,
Looking every bit the
part of the poet**



Brynn F.

Basically, everyone lied.

It is most decidedly not easier to leave the second time.

Now that we have that out of the way...

In the months before SW, I felt like I was hitting a roadblock in my writing. It was starting to be a thing I did rather than a thing I loved. I felt like I was making no progress in my quality, even if I was making progress in my novel.

At every turn, I was being told "you can't," especially in college. "You can't deal with that topic. You can't be a Christian and tell that story. You can't let your faith show in what you write. You can't make it as a writer these days. You can't get a job. You can't make money. You can't graduate at 20. You can't get published. There's too much competition, too many people who are better, smarter, more talented than you. You don't stand a chance."

I was starting to believe them. No matter how many articles my boss praised me for, or how many papers I got A's on, I felt like I was lying to myself and everybody else when I said being a writer was what I was doing with my life. And on top of it, being asked to do student helper/speaker things left me with a paralyzing fear that not only was I a failure, but now I would be a failure in front of the people whose opinions I most prized. And then I got to SW. Torry talked about how competition doesn't exist for a Christian writer. He said that at the end of the day, it doesn't matter who advances God's

kingdom, only that it goes forward. After all, that's why we're here.

That means we aren't supposed to be competing with each other, but it also means we shouldn't – I shouldn't – be spending so much time worrying about if I'm "good enough," because the goal isn't to be the best writer. The goal isn't to "fit in" to the writing community and be who everyone says a writer should be. The goal isn't to beat your competition. The goal is to point the world to Jesus.



Brynn (right) with staff member Tineke



That lesson wasn't just spoken from a stage, though. I spent the whole week watching my heroes live that out. I watched Torry praise other writers more than he talked about himself. I watched Tosca kick off her shoes and talk with and take an interest in a bunch of teenagers she could have easily considered beneath her. I watched Tineke do a million little things behind the scenes and never get recognized for it. I found out Mr. S. was a different sort of writer in college just like I am, only he was okay with it – and if he hadn't been, “home,” that beautiful place in Kansas I go to the last week of June, would not exist. I watched Mr. S. stand on the sidelines and give other writers the stage, and I watched him give the credit back to God when it would have been incredibly easy for him to take it for himself.

It wasn't just in the words they said. It was written in their eyes, on their faces, and I remember thinking, “This is what Christianity is supposed to look like.” Of everything I learned at SW, I think that was the most important thing. I learned what true Christianity is supposed to look like...what I wanted my Christianity to look like.



Elly G.

It is the people of OYAN that define OYAN. We are students – our minds open to words and new ideas and change. We are the characters of our own stories – ordinary heroes. And we are the writers of the next generation. In the words of Brynn Fitzsimmons, a student speaker this year, “This is a part of us.”

I have made life-long friends through the One Year Adventure Novel curriculum - people who have inspired me not only in my storytelling, but in my life. 2015 was my second Summer Workshop, and I can say with full sincerity that - while “things never happen the same way twice” - I loved it the same as before, and I learned just as much.

I was blessed with the people in my critique group (Fords of Beruna!), who helped me sort out my novel and boosted my confidence by giving me constructive, honest criticism. I enjoyed all the speakers immensely (though I especially loved the Perilous Realm and Brainstorming discussions), and I had a productive and eye-opening mentoring session with Jill Williamson.

And, though we were kept engaged the whole week, I had time to make fantastic memories with some of my best friends (huzzah for ‘20’s night and Newsies!) and get to know several more OYANers I might never have met otherwise.

The “Newsies” group





Torry Martin's talk on Networking this year really stuck with me. He talked about sticking to your beliefs in your stories, no matter what people criticize you for, no matter what junk people tell you to put in. "Strive to make a difference, even if the only one who changes is you."

This impacted me, as someone who sometimes tries too hard. As a confessed perfectionist and ambitious writer, his lesson struck a chord.

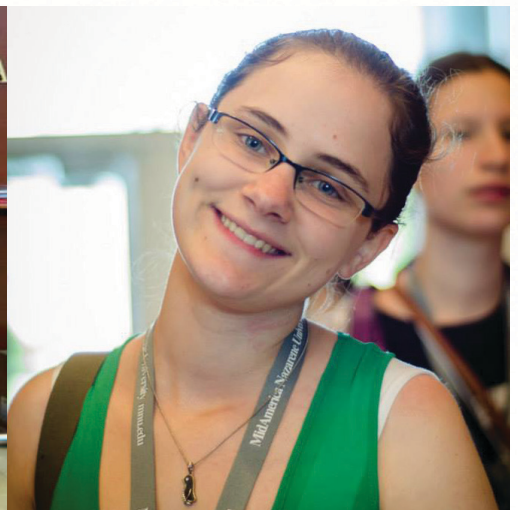
Not only that, but Torry also discussed how significant it was to form connections early in your storytelling career. And what is so beautiful to me - so amazing - is that we're already doing that.

Thanks to Mr. S (and Mrs.S), and all these speakers who come

year after year... We have a Summer Workshop where we can meet, discuss writing, build our passions and dreams, and form friendships.

The writing community I have found in OYAN cannot be underestimated. I hope more than anything that I am able to travel back through the wardrobe next year, so I can not only expand my writing toolbox, but also continue building a network with some of the most talented young writers I know. Until then, thank you to all those who made this week possible for us, and I wish each and every one of you the very best in your own Perilous Realms. God bless you all!

- Ellie G. (Eshe)



Kyle D.

For a while, many of us have considered the Summer Workshops and OYAN in general as these magical resting places along our journey of life. You can be dragging your feet through what feels like the Mines of Moria, and then light. You're in Lothlorien and you're safe for now. You can take some time to recite poetry with elves instead of that menial labor that is the real

path you're walking.

OYAN is Rivendell. OYAN is Lothlorien. OYAN is any one of those wonderful resting places that have the nice, not creepy elves (We're looking at you, Mirkwood) that make our heart yearn for the day that the rest can be complete and the journey can be over.

They're the hint of the Gray Havens across the sea.

OYAN is our Narnia, where we can

leave the horrors and loneliness of abandonment in World War 2 and become kings and queens.

The Bell Center is our Wardrobe, and we know there is a lion on the other side.

I like these metaphors a lot. I really do. But I think they're missing something.

See, Frodo never has to defend Rivendell or Lothlorien beyond the whole saving all of Middle Earth thing.

What makes them so wonderful, so restful, is that they don't need defense. The struggle can take a break and Frodo can simply think about, I dunno, Beren and Luthien (Presumably? I'm not really sure which Middle Earth fandoms Frodo is committed to. Gabrielle can tell me, I'm sure, but she's busy. But it's probably Earendil), and poetry, and peace.



Kyle (2nd from right) in 2014



He can rest.

And that's good. **WE NEED REST** from time to time, and I don't want to take away from that at all.

But I want to challenge you all with something as well.

I want you to think of OYAN and the Summer Workshops and this community as your Terabithia as well. (SPOILERS for Bridge to Terabithia incoming, but if you haven't read this book, you **REALLY SHOULD, OKAY?** It's great.)

See, Terabithia depends on the children in the story because Terabithia isn't a place. It's an idea. If Edmund refused to see Narnia (like a dwarf), that wouldn't make Narnia any less real. Middle Earth is a real place. But Terabithia is something that the children create together by belief in it. Not in some magical, "I do believe in fairies!" way, but in simple pretend. And that's what OYAN is as well.

You can't point to a tree and say, "See that? That's the border of OYAN! It goes here and no further."

We make this community by how we treat each other, by what we choose to believe about each other, and how we imagine each other.





This community is a big act of mutual belief. What I love about the Workshops goes deeper than the sessions and teaching and critique groups and food and everything. It even goes deeper than the presence of my friends.

It's this mutual act of belief that we have come here to have a good time, to enjoy ourselves, to be ourselves.

We come to the workshops expecting to be loved, and to our great joy, we find that to be true.

None of this is geographical or an element of programming. It's not something we find at MNU or because of the forum software. It's something we make together.

And the real beauty of Terabithia is that one day, it is our job to pass it on. When the spoilers happen, Terabithia becomes something bigger than the children because the choice is made to send it on into the future, to allow its magic to spread to others.

We have that opportunity. That privilege. This thing that we have here is for us, but it's also bigger than us. We make it together and then pass it on.

So lets pass on the best version we can, okay?

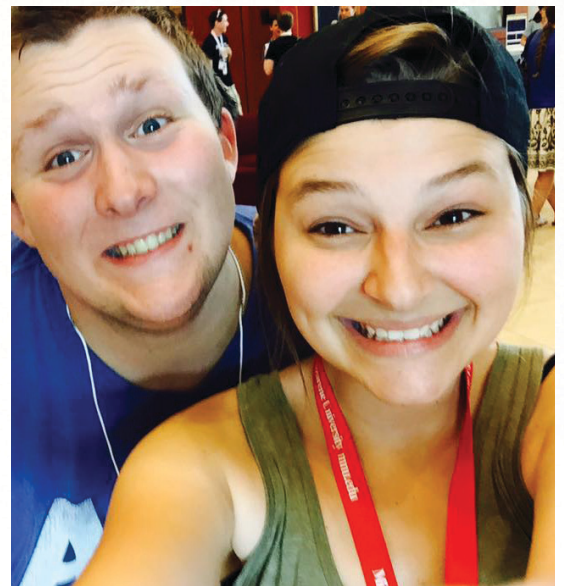


Hillary M.

It was velvet darkness
all warm and close and soft .
Did you see the stars that night?
I didn't notice .
Surrounded by companions, allies
Ready for adventure .
You and yours is at last
The same as
Me and mine .
My heart swelled to see
How easy it is to love one another
When our voices are singing the same songs
When our feet are dancing along the same pavement
Even if my feet only ever
Dance out of time
And my voice can't carry the tune.
I found in the darkness
That I was not afraid of you
Or of what you thought of me
Only afraid that you might see me cry
When I know our time is over .
Did you see the stars that night?
I should have noticed.
The heavens were pressed down on us
And the stars would have been close enough to touch.
But I didn't pay any attention
I was distracted by you
And by how the wind made me feel
So much more alive than I did before.
How I felt the vastness of a moment
And how I hoped the distance between us all would
Always be short enough so I could hear you whisper
From the other side of the playground.



The fabled
playground at MNU,
starring Mr. S. as the
park monster



Hillary (right) in 2015

Bethany F.

The months leading up to my first Summer Workshop were filled with excitement, to say the least. I wondered every day what it would be like. I checked the forum several times a day to see what kinds of activities were being planned for the week. I planned all of my free-time out ahead of time.

But those months were also filled with one worry. There's always that one, big, "what if" that comes along with every new experience. And this one was one of the biggest questions I've ever had to ask myself: "What if I'm not really a writer?"

Having called myself a writer for as long as I could remember, the notion was unthinkable. The title was simply a part of me. Still, the more time I spent on the forum, the

more I wondered. There were so many kids out there that had written several novels, and several drafts of each! I was only on the first draft of mine. And I hadn't really written anything other than scripts for a bi-monthly vlog, and a few short screenplays throughout the past year. And writers wrote novels. Didn't they?

I was greatly encouraged when I saw that Torry Martin would be speaking at this year's Summer Workshop. Though I hadn't heard of him before, I knew he was a screenwriter. And I was just so thankful to already feel a connection with at least one person that would be there. Maybe I'd even have him as a mentor for that mentoring session I signed up for! I prayed long and hard about that (and God answered those prayers).





Finally, I finished my first draft and set off for the SW. And yes, I was still a bit worried that I would be one of the only people there who did not intend to make a living solely from writing novels. But I knew I'd have an awesome time. I already had some great friends that I'd made on the forum, and I knew that there would be people there that shared some interests of mine (besides writing). In fact, the first thing Mr. S and I talked about was music. And the first session of the week was given by Torry Martin, full of great information for screenwriters. Those were just the first of many little connections I made with people throughout the week.

As the SW went on, I found fellow filmmakers, photographers, and musicians. Through each of those connections, I learned so much, and made great memories. One of the greatest of those memories was playing the guitar with Joshua/"The Man with a Plan" and Luke on the last night, while others sang with us. It was in that moment that I realized just how unique and important the friendships we make at the SW are. And I couldn't just leave these people.

But alas, that dreaded Saturday came, when I hopped onto an airport shuttle, trying desperately not to cry because King_Elessar had previously predicted that I might. I, unfortunately, had accepted it as a challenge. Note: I succeeded. Though, I promise you, I won't be trying anything like that next year.

These friendships (whether or not they were built on our shared interest in writing) encouraged me as a person. And writing being such a big part of me, they encouraged me as a writer, too. Ironically, what I learned from the One Year Adventure Novel Summer Workshop is that being a writer isn't just about writing novels. It's about recognizing that you have a story to tell, and finding the courage to tell it. And in each of these little connections, I found that courage. And because of the OYAN SW 2015, I still dare to call myself a writer.



Bethany (left) with a friend

Ezra W.

The author wishes to share something about the SW with the people of OYAN, something he swore never to do. He always found those journal-like topics to be repetitive. But he owed a debt to this Gabrielle person. Friday night in the Bell center he and her, and for a short time the honorable Rachel, mindlessly organized multicolored yarn bracelets. He wore a large chef's hat. It was a rather lovely time they had, but Rachel did disappear partway through, leaving behind some article of clothing like a sweater. It was all very Jane Austeny. Save the hat.

This particular instance is mentioned because it perfectly demonstrates what the author of this work found most endearing about said Summer Workshop. (That, and he needed to explain that he owed this Gabrielle for a lovely time. Either or. We'll go with the former.) Where else but there could one wear a large chef's hat, have delightful if utterly random conversation, hand off bracelets to strangers (for support of the Syrup Wars), and say goodbye via the screaming of a death curse at a friend?

What the author is trying to say is that the Summer Workshop is a place that yanks you further out of your comfort zone than you have ever been, while simultaneously making you feel as comfortable as possible. (Either that, or the natural easygoing demeanor of the author just made it that way. If this instance was not true for you, you need to be more easygoing is what the author is saying. Five hundred words left...erk.)

The author will now use 1st person.





We come to the SW as writers, uniting as . . . writers. I assume. And that beautiful bond stretches deeply across us. It's why we don't see anything wrong with saying hi to a Nazgul in the morning, having a large bumblebee in your critique group, or giving standing ovations to three guys who can't sing. (What gives, people?) But something I personally found beautiful is that there was an even deeper connection. Even if not very often thought of, it was there, a deep bond of Christian love spreading throughout the entire campus. And as I see it, with my own very probably biased eyes, that is why we see such love and joy amongst so many people of so many backgrounds.

The author now realizes he put the touching part in the middle, and hasn't given all the examples yet. The author has now slapped his face. The author remembers he promised a fragmented journal of meaningless nothing. The author smiles. It's like placing plot holes wherever you need them.

Critique groups are marvelous things. It could be the fact that I went in having predetermined that I would thoroughly enjoy them, and not be nervous, and that any nervousness I might feel would be blotted out instantly. It worked, seemingly. Perhaps I was too rowdy with Brandon, perhaps I was often too distracted, but the bonds of friendship in there . . . blah. One sentimental thing is enough for me.

Ezra (left) with fellow Canadians





The Summer Workshop was the first place I've ever attended to which the saying, "What you put in is what you get out" actually applied. If you have a disposition to run on a rather eccentric, overbearingly extroverted autopilot, and speak to everyone *cough* then everyone wants to talk to you. If you like your own small group of friends, they're all there. If you happen to be a giant pickle masquerading as a skinny 'Murican . . . that's just fine.

Saying goodbye is hard, you know. I didn't think it would be. And in a way, I was right. I was in excellent spirits Saturday. I laughed and sang, and it wasn't forced, either. In fact, the hardest part of Saturday morning was figuring out what to do with a group of about twenty girls sobbing in each other's arms. In the end, I just shook hands with the father of one of 'em, and left them. Fun fact.

Maybe it's not the saying goodbye, though. To say goodbye means you're still there, talking. With them. Maybe that small pit in the bottom of your stomach that churns uneasily is actually the knowledge that goodbyes don't last forever. That soon you'll be sitting on a plane bound for home, and you'll finally be alone. Maybe it's a bit of foreknowledge of the emptiness you'll feel when you curl up in your own bed, and you no longer have your dorm mate only four feet away.

But then again, if we didn't feel those things, how could we say we truly had the time of our lives, eh? All things considered, I'll take the pain, and wait for next year.

Gabrielle D.

To talk about the Summer Workshop of 2015, I first have to talk about the others.

About 2010 there is very little to say. I knew no one, I barely spoke, and I considered the whole event a bizarre but amusing referendum on how easy it was for my dorky parents to find themselves trailed by a fan club. At 14, I hadn't even tackled 9th grade yet – I wasn't about to tackle a novel. It was a world undeniably my parents'. They built the house; I played on the outskirts. I peeked in the windows, smirked, and ducked away.

In 2011, I had grown a bit of self-confidence, my critique group hit it off on day one, and for the first time, I considered OYAN something I could enjoy, not just witness. Before, it was interesting, like a scientific specimen. It was the joke I made to my parents: "Are the 14-year-olds clamoring to talk to you again?" Afterward, it was intriguing. I stood on the porch and knocked at the door.

2012 is the turning point – the inciting incident, if you will. I piled nametags and stationed myself behind the table to hand them out. I reveled in my status as child-of-the-famous-ones – not because it brought me attention, but because it gave me a theme for interaction. Striking up conversations is hard. Passing out nametags is easy.

When I use the phrase God spoke to me, I want you to know that I don't take it lightly. I walked into the parking lot that summer evening, lighthearted and laughing, and stepped into a wall of holy quiet.





While dozens of my peers huddled together in a mass, singing songs and praying for each other, I stood on the sidewalk, mouth hanging open stupidly, as God spoke to me in the clearest words I can remember. I thought OYAN was my parents' world, and I was blessed to be a part of it. He told me that OYAN is my world too – not just my playground, but my responsibility.

I didn't join the singing, praying group in the parking lot. I sat alone in a stall in the bathroom and cried, because I loved you all and I didn't know why, but I would have wrestled a tiger just to prove it.

Fast forward three years. The boy I met in the OYAN chatroom became a friend, then a boyfriend, then a fiance. I spent the last of the school year this past April and May just waiting, waiting, waiting for my best friend to come back. As I waited, my world shrank until it could hardly fit anyone in it but me. The Summer Workshop approached, and I dawdled, and I tried to pull myself out of the kind of depression that only "loneliness plus selfishness" can equal.

In 2015, to be honest, I almost forgot you. With a fiance who had just arrived in the USA, a dozen different paint colors to apply to our would-be home, and only a few weeks until our wedding, the Summer Workshop was looking less and less like the summer's

main event and more and more like the card trick preceding Gandalf's fireworks show. To be honest, Kyle and I wrestled with the decision of whether or not to attend at all.



Gabrielle (left) at the 2012 Summer Workshop



Gabrielle at the 2015 Summer Workshop



Thanks in part to my now-husband's enthusiasm for critique group leading, we chose attendance. We put down our schedules and invite lists and piles of to-dos and immersed ourselves in the community. The stress fell off for a little while. My story idea unfolded under the careful tutelage of those more learned than I. But most of all, I saw my tiny, selfish world for what it was. My whole existence had narrowed to the span of a few weeks and our frenzied planning. Cynicism was rustling the bushes outside my door.

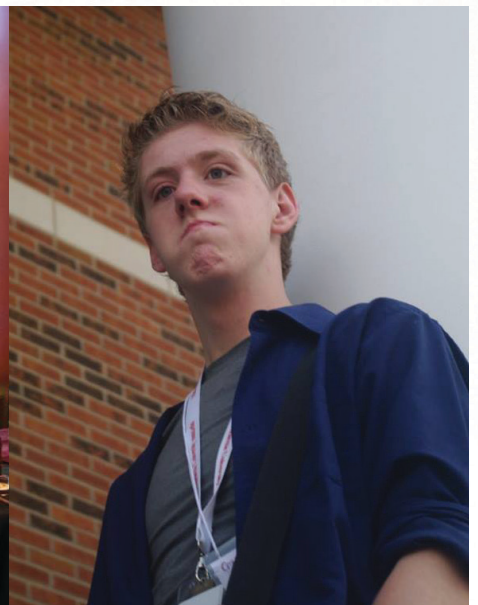
And God whispered to me again, somewhere in the middle of Open Mic Night (an event about which I have historically been . . . unpleasant) and my world burst wide open, unfolding

like the pages of a book. Remember 2012, when I told you that these were your people? Did you forget them?

I did.

Glimmers of light began to sprout like pinpoints in a stifling sky. My husband's face lighting up in critique groups. Late-night walks and shared lunches. My old friend Rachel falling over laughing in the grass. My new friend Ezra recruiting me to mischief.

For the last three years I have been living with OYAN, in this great communal "house" always under construction around me. This summer I remembered how to pick up my hammer, how to build something new for all of you to enjoy.



Jeremy J.

So. Perilous Realms.

Most OYANers are the writers who don't write anything. (Thank you for that beautiful song). And it's fine to only write as a hobby or be part of OYAN for the relationships if you are pursuing another calling.

But I think many of us are afraid.

We are afraid that our writing is awful or we're afraid that we cannot ever be good enough to get published.

On a wider scale, I think many of us are afraid of pursuing anything artistic or non-conventional because we are afraid that we will fail. My whole life my parents have groomed me to study hard so I can go to school on scholarship money so I can get a piece of paper so I can get some job so I can get money so my parents can retire comfortably and so I can never be in need and never be weak and never have to rely on God for anything.

Like Mr. S said, it's important to take the dangers of the Perilous Realms seriously, but so many of us see the giants and the witches and the evil kings and the mountains that we run screaming from the wardrobe or quietly lock it up and pretend it doesn't exist. Some of us become Susan, but I'm afraid many of us are not fallen queens of Narnia, but aliens who never visited, content to only peer through the windows of Cair Paravel.

We indulge in fae things in childhood, but then put it behind us because we fear the peril of that realm. We put language on it to maintain our pride: Following our dreams is impractical and childish. Eventually everyone has to grow up and get a real job. Some of us are so good at disguising our fear that we forget that we ever wanted to write music or teach children fairy tales or dance professionally or become president or cure cancer or end world hunger.



Jeremy (top right)
with his critique group



Rebecca Harrison's talk on our tendency to slip into cynicism was convicting. Life can be brutal. We are all heroes in our own stories with our own black moments. We can get surrounded by evil and hopelessness. The perils are real. Family strife is horrendous. Financial loss is terrifying. Social betrayal hurts. Jadis is real. We will be betrayed by Edmunds and sometimes we will be Edmunds. Sometimes we will be useless Eustice, and sometimes we'll push him off a cliff. We all will mess up the signs. But no matter how dark life gets, we have to remember that there is sun. Aslan is real too. And He is terrible. The perilous realms are not safe, but they are good. And I for one wish to stand with Puddleglum.

I am terrified of pursuing writing and filmmaking as a career. If I fail, I'm screwed. I have been neglecting to better myself in those areas because I'm afraid. So when Mr. S was talking about tackling the unknown with courage, a large part of me quivered in apprehension of a life with risk, but a deeper, hotter, suppressed side of me somewhere in my stomach roared 'YES!'

Please. Whatever it is you feel that you are called to do, what stirs your chest late at night or when talking of your dreams, what you wish you could do in a perfect world, what brings you fulfillment and meaning, please, please, please don't let fear keep you out of the wardrobe.

Here there be witches, but there are also Lions.

Tackle life with ferocity and roar.

Abandon hopelessness all who enter here.



Susan S.

I've been telling people that the 2015 OYAN Summer Workshop was the best I have experienced to date. I can't tell exactly why... Perhaps it was my taking part as a Student Helper, or being a Critique Group leader, both of which let me feel like I contributed to the cause that has helped my dream along so much. These things certainly were part of the reason for the feeling of fulfillment I had upon leaving Olathe when it was all said and done.

But I think the major cause of that feeling of wondrous contentment was the final session, in which Mr. S told us about the Perilous Realm – both in our writing and in our lives. Again, it's hard to put into words exactly how it affected me. All I truly know is that, as my family and I drove away from Kansas City, I felt that looming sense of dread and anticipation.

In one sense, I was leaving my Perilous Realm. The combination of awe and fear I always experience when stepping into the Bell Center for the first time, seeing all the wonderful people that both intimidate me and fill me with joy. I was turning my back on it, and leaving it behind. And I felt that same sense of loss that I always do, but somehow, this year, it was stronger. I didn't want to go back; home wasn't enough anymore.



Susan (center) with two friends in their "steampunk" outfits

But if I were to be honest with myself, it's been more like transitioning from one Perilous Realm to another. A different one, perhaps not quite so exciting and dangerous... but it has its pitfalls and its small wonders and its wearying normality that can sometimes be more terrifying than any great and notable episode.

It's hard to return to the everyday after a taste of the exemplary. It's hard to be content with the mediocre when you've experienced a phenomenon.

But the Shire needed saving too. There is always a time to go home. And after every adventure in Narnia, the children always returned to their own world (except for The Last Battle, but that's another subject).

But you know what? That adventure doesn't have to stop just because you step out of the wardrobe. And that's the beauty of it.

Because as it is, whenever you reach for the stars, you step into a Perilous Realm, with all the danger and pain and wonder and miracles included, no matter where you are.

And that is a comforting thought.

"Abandon all hopelessness all ye who enter here."



Laura W.

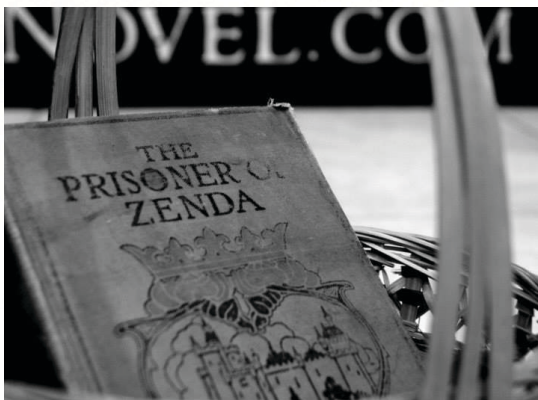
For a while I felt alone in my craft, like there was no one to whom I could talk who shared the same passion that I have. Although I knew there were other writers out there, I didn't know them. I was unable to talk to anyone except my dad about writing.

But that has all changed since I went to the 2015 Summer Workshop. I met many other writers and knew for sure that I was not alone in the world of

writing. It meant the world to me to be encouraged in what I love to do just when I was starting to feel discouraged. Everyone was friendly and amazing.

The critique groups were very helpful. The people in my group were able to point out issues with my storyline that I couldn't see and gave me tips on making my characters and their situations more believable, something with which I was struggling. I am very grateful for all of them and the help they gave me.

Laura with Mrs. S



Ryan R.

The Perilous Realm is where all adventures happen; it's where we are called by God to be living. While I was preparing for this year's Summer Workshop, God helped me write more of my story than I ever have. It was an incredible experience, because, as I wrote and developed my story, I truly fell in love with it, and I grew closer to God. Then June 22 arrived, and I was on a flight to Kansas, on my way to a wonderful week.

Torry Martin began the week with a talk on networking from a Christian perspective, which was insightful. The following day I attended Torry's morning talk. He told us to "think sequels," as producers and publishers like it when you at least leave room for more. At that time, my novel was a stand-alone fantasy novel; I had never really thought about direct sequels.

Torry's session was right before lunch, so I had the opportunity to walk with him over to lunch and to eat with him. I briefly explained the ending of my book, and he said my ending left room for a perfect sequel, which was very encouraging. He then asked me what I was thinking for the third book, because, as he had mentioned in his talk, publishers (and producers) love threes. I responded that I had no idea. He immediately said, "What about...?" and proceeded to suggest a plot for my third book. It was genius!

Ryan as a student speaker



Torry Martin presents



That is just one example of how I was practically equipped at the SW to enter into the Perilous Realm. And there were many more! Tosca Lee led an innovative activity for character building. Jill Williamson's talk on villains and their clichés was helpful to hear. Susanne Lakin did an incredible talk about world building, which was my favorite session. In it, I realized how underdeveloped my world was, and she provided so much insight on how to develop it. And, of course, Mr. S did a wonderful job inspiring us and charging us during his opening and closing talks.

The OYAN SW is truly an amazing experience young writers cannot get anywhere else. To be able to hear seminars from writers, publishers, literary agents, and editors, people who have experience in the field, is so helpful. But the speakers do not stop at their talks. They go above and beyond to equip us. Torry Martin was not the only speaker to eat lunch with the students. They make themselves available to us, even outside of mentoring sessions, and that is a unique opportunity.

To have so many mentors on one campus for a week who are truly passionate about not only their fields but OYANers as well is why I love the SW. It is definitely a lot of fun, but it is so much more than that. Because of the OYAN Summer Workshop 2015, I feel truly equipped to be entering into the Perilous Realm.





Catherine H.

Sometimes in life you need a good old slap of humility to the face.
Now, it's not what you think.

My experiences didn't squash the pride out of me and trample me in the mud of humiliation. And I didn't come home some pious, revived, ex-sinner ready to conquer the world with Joan, either. In fact, I didn't think about the word "humility" at any time during summer workshop 2015, but that doesn't mean I didn't experience it.

This was a refreshing slap, like cold water on a sweltering day, to the face. Every person I encountered at the workshop displayed humility: the speakers, the critique groups, the cafeteria workers - everyone.

And that makes me stop to think. Did I display humility? Or did I look down my nose at the newbies? Was I encouraging with my critiques when I know I can be brutally honest? Was I a bore at lunch, or did people genuinely enjoy my company? Did I talk too much? Did I talk too little?

Dozens of questions pepper my mind, but then I remember the goodbyes. I remember the tight hugs and smiles. The frowns when people found out I had to leave early. The whispers that I'd been a good friend. Wishes that we could spend more time together.

To my many questions, I don't have answers. Save one.

I know I left the summer workshop humbled by these beautiful, beautiful people.



Kaitlin W.

There's a line in a book that I read once about being infinite and knowing in that moment that you are. I think we get so caught up in day-to-day life that we forget ourselves as truly infinite beings, and stress out over the little things. In response to this tendency, God places little pit stops for us to halt our worries and realign ourselves with his image of us. The workshop is one of those pit stops.

On a clear night in the middle of the week, we found ourselves in a circle—and it's always a circle, I don't know why, and the circle is always outside of the gym—on the pavement. Some of the people I knew well; others, not so much. But we meshed and fit seamlessly, sharing stories and laughter like we'd always been there and like we always would be there. That's what feeling infinite is to me.

It is the feeling of cold, scratchy sidewalk under my hands, the sound of laughter when it cracks and peels like wild lightning, the soft hum of voices in praise songs, the quiet murmur of admissions and sharing of hurts. The smell of wet grass and the warmth of your friend's shoulder brushing against yours. That's what the workshop is to me. Little moments that God

orchestrates where you feel a sense of ultimate belonging, a glimpse into the future Heaven we will inhabit, and a love that's so much bigger and more powerful than you could've ever imagined.



Kaitlin (left) with her critique group

Christina A.

Accents
I'm bacon
Free stoof
Oxytocin

Old friends
And new
Sticky doors
Student helpers

Old speakers
New speakers
Barefoot
While on the stage

Critique groups
Western Wild
Don't forget
She's a girl

Cosplays
FMA
Making videos
In Kansas heat

20's night
Swing dancing
No music, but remember
Christmas is in December

Flaky dust
Flaky dust
Octagon
Awwwww

Drabbling
Death scenes
Late Nights
Memories

Crying
Laughing
Helium
Balloons

Through the Wardrobe
And into
The Perilous Realm
Of the world



Christina (upper left) with her critique group

Adrienne N.

On reflecting back, many of the 2015 Summer Workshop attendees said this year was about the people. I know it was that way for me.

I went to this year's Workshop very last minute. I had decided not to go, because I wanted to be able to attend another writer's conference that I work for. But something pulled me. A deep desire to be myself. The girl who God created and placed a ton of crazy excitement and love into. And all that excitement and love wanted so desperately to ooze out onto the people I hold the most dear. Suddenly, that plane ticket home didn't seem too expensive.

It was worth it.

Picnics with Bailey. Candle smelling with Katie. Jerah's hugs. Amy's hugs. My Baymax. Jeff Gerke. Torry Martin. Tosca Lee. Singing. Dancing. Owl City. Wardrobes. A Lamppost. Cosplays. Love. The memories just keep flowing. The proud moment when your parents rock a stupendous cosplay that just makes you squeal with delight. Surprising people with your presence and getting engulfed in happy hugs. Meeting best friends for the first time.

This workshop was different. I knew it would be. This entire year has been different. And you know what? That's okay.





This workshop also left me with something. In Tosca Lee's advance track class, she did things a little differently. We sat there, pens in our hands, ready to take notes on how to write. And then she asked us the question: What is your number one secret fear? For the next several minutes, we all wrote down answers to deep, hard, and sometimes painful questions, that caused us to look into ourselves in vulnerable ways.

That exercise opened my eyes to why I want to write. It's because in our world today hope is something so precious and yet so scarce. There is so much darkness in this world, and I desperately want to bring some light to it – even if it's just a tiny little pinprick. Because sometimes, that's all that is needed to set off a spark of hope.

I left early from the workshop, on Thursday, right before lunch, so I missed Mr. S's amazing last talk on the Perilous Realm. But thanks to friends who share their wisdom and notes, I feel I got it second hand pretty adequately.

Abandon Hopelessness, all who enter here.

I for one, intend to fight for hope through the Perilous Realm with everything I've got.

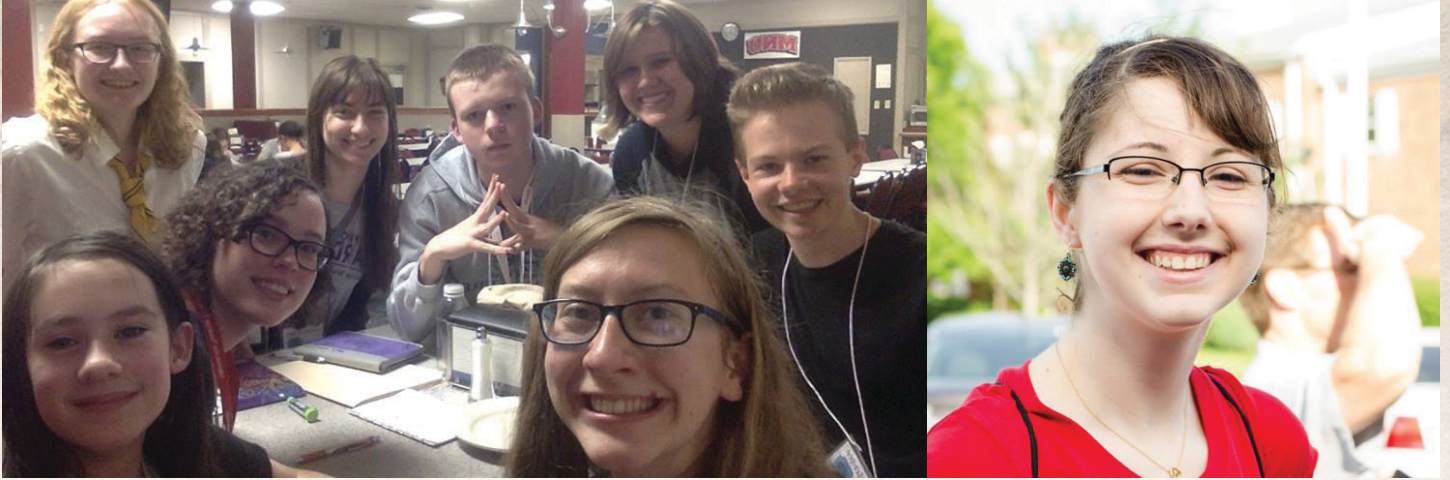
This year's SW was filled with over-the-moon joy, heart-stabbing pain, and a tinge of fear. But God was there. And He was working. And even the pain and the fear were worked out for good, and hopefully His ultimate glory.

"Love is confusing and Life is hard/ You fight to survive 'cause you made it this far/ It's all too astounding to comprehend/ It's just the beginning, this isn't the end."

- Owl City, "This Isn't the End"



Adrienne at the 2015
Summer Workshop



Madelynn L.

Summer Workshop 2015 was my third workshop to attend, and by far and for many reasons, it was the best workshop experience I've had. I'm so thankful that God provided the means for me to go again.

When I arrived at the MNU campus on the airport shuttle, my dear friend Harpley glomped me so hard we almost fell over. That's when I knew I had come home again at last.

The week lasted for an age, or so it seemed. Besides fantastic teaching and lessons and amazing feedback and encouragement for my story via critique groups, I experienced so much more than I ever have on a social level. I actually did well in the foam sword battles. Someone I wanted to meet happened to be in my critique group. I spent time with my close friends, deepening relationships with them, and met lots of new people. I joked and laughed a ton. I had friends who cared for me when exhaustion made me a little sick. OYAN is where I have friends who I feel comfortable talking about my writing to, something that I can't find anywhere else.

But these friendships wouldn't be complete if I didn't reciprocate the love my OYAN friends showed me. My favorite parts of the workshop included moments where we got really into someone else's story during critique groups, or talking to my friends, both old and new, about their stories and what they hope to accomplish in their storytelling, or those small moments of offering even the slightest bit of encouragement to someone.

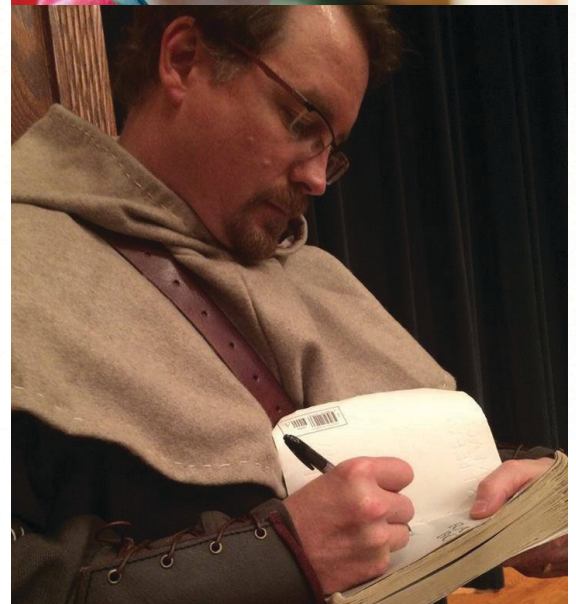


This year happened to be both the hardest and the easiest when saying goodbye. It was hard because my friendships this year were so much deeper and meaningful than in years past. But it was easier because I felt so encouraged and refreshed, more than I ever have after a workshop, and knew that the friendships strengthened or made this year would continue.

My final OYAN farewell took place in the line to get on my airplane. Harpley had spent my final twenty minutes waiting with me, and as they called for boarding, she hugged me tight and told me to go have adventures, but to come back to Narnia soon.

Narnia. The perfect definition of Summer Workshop. Irony that I only figured it out this year, though the theme of the workshop helped with coming up with that.

The week, as I mentioned before, felt like it lasted for an age. At least, for me it did. But then...I returned to find that only a short time had passed since I left. And when I did return, I felt like nothing would ever be the same again. I had gone through the wardrobe, had an unbelievable, indescribable adventure, and come out again, changed, but empowered.



Mary Beth G.

The biggest thing I learned this year at the Summer Workshop is that a story is never a lost cause. I learned that I can take my novel that is two years in the making, take the almost-perfect idea that I have in my head and spit it out on paper to be an absolute mess. This absolute mess can be turned into something incredible! It might even turn into something better than what I originally pictured in my head.

I learned that I can take my flat, one-dimensional villains, and turn them into characters who are three-dimensional and as developed as my hero. I learned that I can leave the clichés in my book, but give them a different twist. The one thing that has stuck with me the most is the suspension of disbelief. I can give my readers something totally out there, but still keep them interested if I can help them have a good time while reading.

Not only does this apply to my book; it also applies to my life. I can develop myself, my relationships and my perspective on things. I can turn these goals and dreams inside of my head into a reality. Sure, it might be rough right now because I'm barely planning it all out, but in the end, I will have mastered what I want it to be. I will fix many typos in my life, and I will backspace many times; write thousands of words, only to delete hundreds of thousands more. I will cry over misfortune, and laugh over success. I will find plot holes, and experience plot twists of my own.

Mary Beth (right)
with a friend





Being a writer isn't one-dimensional. I got the opportunity to speak with Mr. S over lunch near the end of the week. As I told him my plans for life, and the concern that I may never get to come back to the summer workshop, he told me something I will never forget. He said I am multi-dimensional. And that applies to writers. We aren't just good at putting words on paper. We are wordsmiths, warriors of the phrases that can build each other up as well as break each other down. We understand plot twists and random characters that come into our novel and make us shriek, "Where did you come from?!"

I don't know if most realize that we are well-equipped for this world. We can undertake hardship and adapt. We have the tenacity to write a novel, develop characters, edit hundreds of scenes, and sustain long-distance friendships. We certainly have that same ability to tackle life's plot twists.

The theme was 'Through the Wardrobe.' Be wardrobes for others and help transport others to a different dimension. I will never, ever forget those around me who have helped me grow, who have challenged me, and who have been dreamers with me. Thank you, OYAN, for being the biggest wardrobe in my life. Without you, I would not have this novel, I would not have passion in my lungs, and I would not have the most amazing family anyone could ask for. Into the Perilous Realm I shall go, never fearing, for I know there are those who dream, hope and wonder as I do.

Bryce R.

I attended last year's Summer Workshop as a sibling, and though I had to sit in the back, was unable to participate in critique groups, and generally wandered around not knowing anybody, the atmosphere of that place and the camaraderie of the people are what spurred me to

do the One Year Adventure Novel. Though I'd already been writing some, I originally didn't want to do OYAN, because I thought that it would restrain me, and I didn't want that. But at the 2014 SW, I saw a group of people who connected with each other. I saw friendship and laughter, and I remember thinking then how cool it would be to be able to be a part of that. I listened to all of the speakers and took notes, and came away inspired to write. I bought the curriculum and devoured it, and about a month later I got on the forum.

I was amazingly welcomed, and soon began to form friendships, despite my sometimes-unwise replies to certain controversial topics. XP I began to look forward to the next SW, thinking that it would be better than the last one, since I'd actually be a part of everything, and know some people. I was wrong.

SW 2015 wasn't just better than the last one, it certifiably left the other one in the dust, and a comparison between the two would be pointless. It was the best week of my entire life, and I mean that. Being able to see people with whom I'd communicated online for the past ten months was absolutely incredible. Being able to hang out with a group of awesome teenagers, each of which was a fellow writer, made me realize just how much I'd missed the year before. The speakers were once again amazing, and it was made all the more enjoyable by the fact that I was hearing them while sitting surrounded by you guys. Critique groups were just. So. Great. Seriously. Duffer Isle, you guys rock, your stories rock, and I am proud and happy to have you as critique partners.



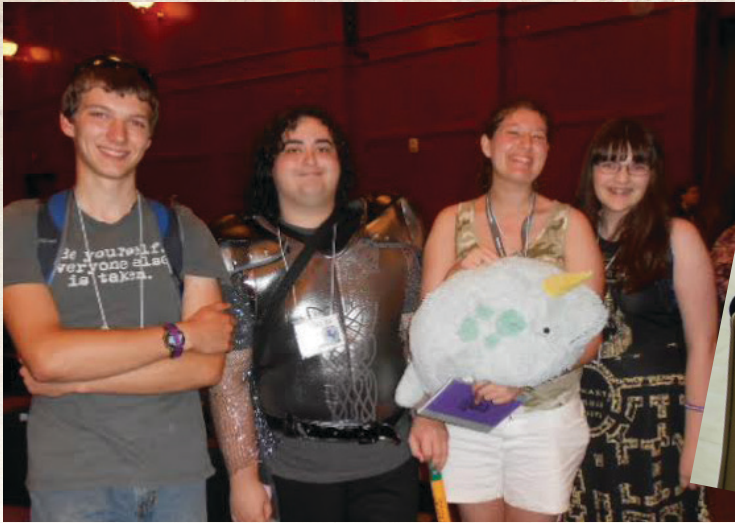


The atmosphere was euphoric, and the entire week passed by like a dream. Here are some of the specific highlights for me:

- Basketball. On Friday night, we had a line of Knockout that covered about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the court, and had everyone high-fiving down the line. That was awesome.
- Clapping! How hilarious is it that five people can start randomly clapping in the cafeteria, and the entire room joins in, despite the fact that they don't know the reason?
- The Writers Who Don't Do Anything. Mekon, Belaq, and Elessar, you will forever be remembered for your rousing performance on Open Mic Night. Seriously guys, that was the most brilliant idea ever.

- Gummy Bears Are People Too! Doomblade, you can sleep at night knowing that your story is now known, at least partially, by every OYANer in attendance at SW 2015, as well as Mrs. S. Seriously, though. Seven foot tall man-eating gummy bears? What's not to like? #gummybearawareness
- Torry Martin. The dude's hilarious. 'Nuff said.
- Friday night. I have mixed feelings about this night, but at the same time, it was wonderfully incredible. Yes, it was the last night, but so many amazing things happened. From massive games of Knockout (see above), to being serenaded with The Last Goodbye and I See Fire, to overtaking the forum chat room, if even just for a minute, to getting a group picture with Mr. S., Friday night held so many memories. Not to mention staying out until 1 o'clock, even though I had a 4:45 shuttle to catch. BECAUSE YOU GUYS ARE TOO AWESOME TO CUT HOURS SHORT.





Overall, in every aspect possible, the SW was a resounding success. Thank you to Mr. and Mrs. S and all of the OYAN staff for your tireless efforts to make the week as incredible as it was. Your hard work is not unappreciated.

For me, the SW transformed OYAN from a community of people who I talk to online to a living, breathing, laughing, hugging, group of friends. These friendships will last, I know, and starting the OYAN curriculum is one of the best choices I have ever made.



Luke C.

- The first day of this workshop started with me walking out of the car just to get tackled by five OYANers. I remember every tackle and every hug from the first day.
- On Wednesday night, Curious Nell wanted to play her harp before curfew, so several of us lay in the grass, looking at the stars as the wind softly blew through the strings of the harp and made a beautiful sound. It's one of those happy memories that you store inside and remember again throughout hard times in this Perilous Realm.
- On Monday night at the snack bar, a bunch of us sat at a corner booth and squeezed in like a bunch of sardines.
- I loved my critique group so much! It was not only informative and very helpful, but we all had a blast and it was so much fun!
- Torry Martin was awesome! He needs to come back next year.
- On Captain Top Hat's birthday, she got a present that about 20 OYANers pitched in to get, and I'll always remember how happy she was to get that present.
- One night, R. D. Clemens and I were hysterical with laughter in our dorm room. I laughed so hard that he threw pillows at me to shut me up, and afterwards we had a stomachache.
- I had so many great conversations with my friends.

Luke (right) with friends at the playground





- Swing dancing. That was an unforgettable night too.
- Lela and R. D. did the ice bucket challenge. That was awesome.
- I got to ride in Mrs. S's golf cart!
- Jacob and I took a picture with a sign saying "for Pen and Ink" since she wasn't at SW this year. She got the picture and it made her so happy.
- Catsi won the stuffed talking bacon.
- Leinad and I sang White Christmas together.
- Although the last day was painful and very sad, many good memories came from that day, and I'll never forget Saturday because of the good things. Riding back home with Lela and her mom was awesome!

Thank you all for an amazing year. The S's, Tineke, and everyone involved to make this happen are truly amazing people. I always learn so much from the sessions I go to and take so many notes that are helpful. The sessions are memorable because they give you so much information that is so easy to understand. They help my mind focus on writing and improve more.

I can't wait for next year. I want to see all my friends again! And I'll be 18, so I can go to the advanced sessions!

