



SUMMER WORKSHOP JOURNAL 2016

FAIR WINDS & FOLLOWING SEAS

The OYAN Summer Workshop always changes me. And every year I struggle for the words to explain how and why. It's a conference for young writers, after all. And I'm part of the team that runs it. You'd think that grinding the sausage would ruin my appetite. Instead, it only makes me hungrier.

Family and friends who have seen photos of the workshop on Facebook always ask me how it went afterwards, and I appreciate their interest. But I stopped trying to explain it a few years ago. There is always too much to say, and I know my lengthy answers won't hit the mark. So I settle for "Great!" and "Really amazing!" and "It's my favorite week of the year!" All of which are true.

But those answers are a reflection of the problem.

This year Carrol and I were asked to explain the Summer Workshop at a house church we were visiting. And I realized, looking at that room full of unfamiliar faces, that my difficulty describing the workshop has always stemmed from the same thing.

We wear masks. Public and private and professional: masks for work and for school and for church. Masks for family. Masks for marriage. Masks for the mirror.





This is what I tried to explain in that house church living room: we all know what it's like to wear masks. But do we know what it's like to feel safe enough to remove them?

For me, this is what makes the OYAN summer workshop unique. For one week 200 young people come from all over the country and the world to share in each other's individuality.

The OYAN community isn't perfect. If it were perfect it wouldn't be real. And I'm sure that some students go home each summer without fully experiencing this. For some, the masks won't come off for another summer or two. But everyone feels it—the invitation to be yourself. To be valued for what's behind the mask.

Acting ourselves is risky. The world is often indifferent, and sometimes hostile, to real originality. A mask offers protection. We don't care too much if the mask is rejected because it isn't real. And because it isn't real, it's safe.

But if we are always wearing masks, what are we giving the world? And if we never dare to be, what are others really loving? Those who never take off their masks are never truly appreciated.

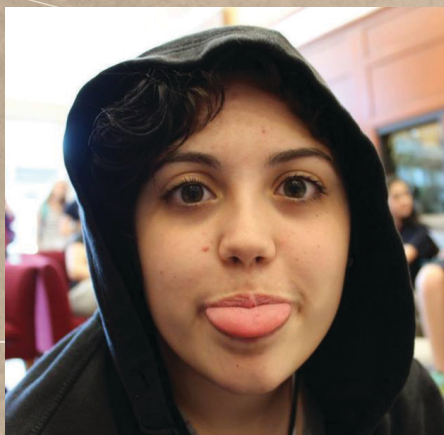
It was Carrol loving the real me, the man behind the mask, that made me understand the price we pay for not being ourselves. Perhaps this is why fame seems to produce such heartache, why movie deals and mansions do not guarantee personal fulfillment. Perhaps it's why so many marriages fail.





Some expressions are obvious and even noisy: the weird and wonderful costumes of a hundred fandoms (and sometimes fandoms of one), the LARP battles and Quidditch games on the lawn, the impromptu drum sessions and spontaneous fiddle music in the foyer of the Bell Center. (Is there anything more haunting, mysterious and heart-stabbing than a violin played well?)

Other expressions are more subtle. I listened to a partial reading of Tarzan, and Bailey's commentary on Edgar Rice Burroughs was brilliant and hilarious. I watched dry lightning crackling against the night sky with a group of old-timers who were just enjoying the silence of friendship. I saw acts of appreciation for those suffering loss, gifts of kindness given to alleviate boredom, clothespins of joy fastened to the unsuspecting like little wooden remoras*.



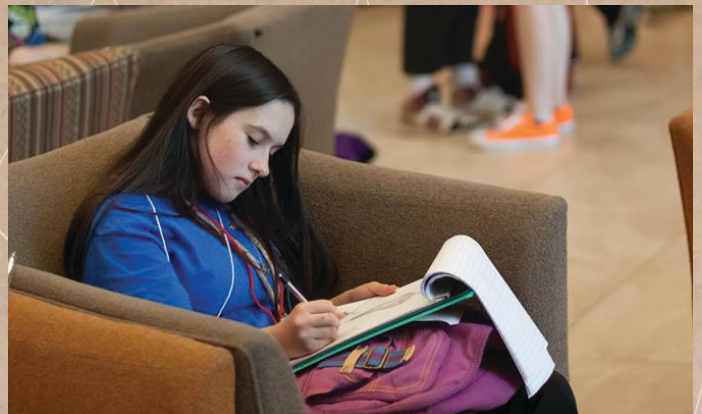
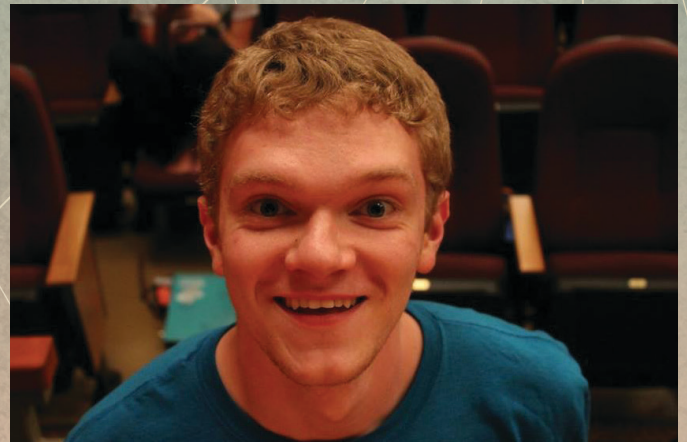
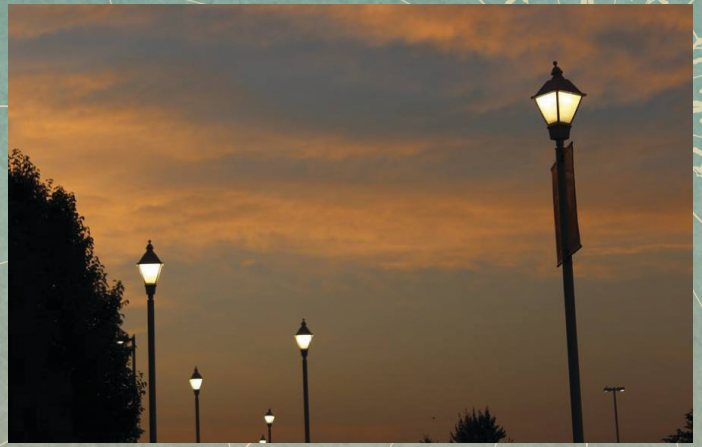
I saw human crutches and improvisational critique groups and food shared unconditionally with the hungry or chocolate-challenged. Hundreds of unique expressions—and each of them sharing a single basic message: you matter. Who you are—who you really are—is important to me, even if no one else cares.

I think that's why so many OYANers come back again and again.

I think that's why they—we—call it home.

** A kind of fish, often called a suckerfish, that attaches itself to larger fish.*

Daniel
Schwabauer



Going into this workshop, I thought I knew what I was getting myself into. I'd been to five previous full OYAN Summer Workshops – that's all of them – and while it's true that they were each different, I expected this one to follow the same general pattern as the others. I knew that I'd learn new things about writing and life, that it'd be a joy to see my friends again, and that'd it be sad when it ended – these things always happen, and this workshop was no exception. But while these features were the same, my overall experience at this workshop was very different than how I thought it would be.

I expected my week to primarily be about encouraging and guiding younger OYANers – leading a critique group, organizing events like Doctor Who Day and Quidditch Night, and just being present to help people. I told myself that while the Winter Workshops were more for my own benefit, the Summer Workshops were primarily for me to help others learn. This sounds nice and noble – but I was wrong in this, and I recognize now that this way of thinking was actually a form of false pride. I was silly enough to believe that I was somehow above being touched by the workshop – that there was not much else for it to teach me. I was, of course, wrong.



Throughout the week, I felt a sense of unity and peace permeating MNU campus like I had never experienced before. There was that same excitement, wonder, and joy as is always present at OYAN workshops – but it was the peace that struck me this time. During past workshops, I have always felt the need to constantly run back and forth between everyone, to make the most of every moment, to wear ALL the costumes. At this workshop, it was the quiet, simple moments that touched me most – a silent display of breathtaking lightning, illuminating the sky like a firework display. A quiet stroll across campus following the final session, with two of my closest friends. A short and swerving golf cart ride through campus, bringing laughter when I most needed it. These small moments, and others, each taught me even more than many of the sessions and critique groups – though those were also as wonderful as always.

I learned many unexpected lessons at this workshop, and God is still teaching me things through it. And in another unexpected twist, I learned one of the greatest lessons after it ended. The week after the workshop was especially difficult for me. My summer graduate courses began the Monday immediately following the workshop, and it was stressful getting back into the swing of constant readings, lectures, and assignments when I really just wanted to pray and process everything I'd learned. Working at MNU right after the workshop was also difficult, because of the workshop memories it brought back – and to make matters even worse, my car died unexpectedly. Experiencing this influx of stresses and responsibilities immediately after a week of such transcendent peace was definitely a shock to me – but even though it was hard, I am thankful for it. Sometimes learning to navigate through a storm teaches us more than do all of our plans and preparations during the safe times.

A ship is meant to leave harbor, and I knew this both before and after the workshop. I also knew that there would not always be “fair winds & following seas” – there would be dangers and storms as well. But while the winds of this world are not always fair, and the seas in our lives often conflict with the paths of our ships, there is a way to ensure that even despite this, we will make it to port. God is the perfect Captain, and He does not lead us astray. Even if we do not end up at the port we were planning for, He will always lead us to the right destination. He'll take us through fair seas, and He'll also take us through storms when we need them – but unlike lesser captains, He will never let us sink.

I wish you all Fair Winds & Following Seas – but I also pray that even in the inevitable (though often unexpected) storms, you will remember who your Captain is. If you follow His direction, you will always find your way.

Addison L.





The Summer Workshop has been a part of my life since 2012. From Jeff Gerke's Water Break Applause, to "FREE STUFF," and the very, very permanent ban on glitter ("Flee from glitter, and the glitter will flee from you"), I've seen it all.

So when I drove to the MidAmerica Nazarene University campus the Monday of Workshop, it was with somewhat of a slightly jaded, albeit excited attitude. It was great to see my friends and the S.'s again. Shoot, it was even great to see the Stockton dorm again (excluding the bathrooms).

But was I getting too old for the Summer Workshop? Too old for the costumes, the late nights, and the wonderful, oddball madness of OYAN concentrated into one college campus?

In retrospect, this was a hilarious concern to have. But when you've just graduated high school, your point of view can be a little askew. Your ego skyrockets almost as high as the mortarboards thrown at graduation.

Thank goodness for gravity.

Gravity started pulling me down almost immediately that week. At first, it was the little things: Reading my Scuttle kids' (yes, I unofficially adopted my critique group) incredible stories; Listening to the first-year Workshopppers' critiques, and knowing for a fact I didn't produce insight like that my first year; Gaping as lightning webbed across billowing, dark purple clouds against the sunset; Watching the Open Mic Night performances, and realizing that, surprise, I'd been rubbing elbows with some insanely talented people that week.





I was not “too old” for these moments. I was not “too old” to be blown away by the students, the writers that I had the privilege of “Mom-ing” for the week. I was not “too old” to be awe-inspired as a Kansas summer thunderstorm loudly and incredibly reminded me of God’s power.

But my feet didn’t completely touch the ground until Friday night, following Mr. S’s last session (which was, I might add, centered around humility. Yes, God does have a sense of humor).

As the applause of the standing, misty-eyed audience faded, so did the Bell Center auditorium’s lights. We’d waited all week for this moment, an idea concocted by Mrs. S. on Tuesday morning: To turn on our phones’ flashlights and raise them in the dark for Mr. S.

But what had started as a fun, end-of-the-week idea became so much more in mere seconds. Looking from the Schwabauers’ faces, illuminated by the lights, to the faces of the students who held them up, I realized something. I am not too old for silliness. I am not too old for fellowship. I am not too old for “We love you” spelled out in countless lights in the dark.

Everyone comes to the point where they think they might be “too old.” The trick is to look up and look outward at the wonderful, bright and shining human beings around you, and realize that you may have some growing up to do after all.

Bailey C.





When I look back on Summer Workshop 2016, I remember lights.

The lights on the highway, when we arrived in Kansas well into Tuesday morning.

The lights inside every heart that reached out to me.

The lights of inspiration and revelation that sparked throughout the week.

But most vividly, the lights in the auditorium that final night. Lights that represented every soul,

every path taken, every joy and sorrow found along the way. The lights of each individual life,

coming together to celebrate the home we've built together.

No matter how dark the path ahead might get, I will never forget those lights.

And in the back of my mind, they're still shining.

Kelly R.



Home

Home is where the heart is,
So I hear them say.
But when my heart is far from
home,
It's hard to face the day.

Other places have smiles and
laughs,
But they just don't feel the same.
Here smiles are brighter and
laughter is louder,
And family's not born, but made.

It's the special-ness that makes it
sad
When the time comes to depart,
But you're not really leaving,
you're not really gone,
You'll remain inside my heart.

Our home may be in Kansas
For just one week of every year.
But inside each other's hearts,
We'll always be held near.

So though I'm sad to have left,
I'm happier to say
That I got to spend this week
In such an amazing way.

Time will pass and seasons
change,
And soon our thoughts will turn
From back behind to up ahead,
When to home we will return.

Our reunion might be over,
But we're a family through and
through,
And the time between will sweeten
The next time I see you

Bryce R.





The Summer Workshop this year was incredible. Everyone I met—whether we hung out most of the week or I simply walked by them once or twice and said “Hey, you”—was an amazing person. I used to think it was impossible to really, legitimately love more than a few people. OYANers, after three years and three workshops, have taught me that there is no limit. It’s pretty darn hard to run out of storage space in your heart.

And it’s not just the students who are amazing. This year, I introduced myself to many of the OYAN parents who attended. The speakers, too, continue to wow me every year – an adult who wasn’t dragged here by their crazy teenager, who actually wants to sit in the cafeteria and talk philosophy with us (and watch our arm wrestling matches, too)? Who wants to stand around after sessions telling us about tshirts with philosophical jokes on them? Who wants to discuss serious writing with a bunch of teenagers who have “vote saxon” written all over their arms? (Okay, okay, that was just me. It’s what happens, unfortunately, when you let your friend have a sharpie and your arm.)

And, on top of it all, they want to come back. I guess I can’t blame them, because I want come back, too. I can’t wait to come back.

Hannah B.

Summer Workshop 2016 was filled with laughter and tears, music, coffee, friends, wonderful sessions, cosplays, foam sword battles, fanfiction, dancing, show tunes, Polaroids, plot bunnies, adventures, ninja, the human knot, critiquing, brainstorming, drabbling, talking, Doctor Who, and the S's and all the staff's self-sacrifice and love.

We learned to be humble, to be brave, to be wise, to be kind. We learned how to write realistic characters, how to market, how to prioritize, how to brainstorm.

We laughed, we wrote, we sang, we cried.

We are going to respect art, be humble, stay in touch, change the world.

We are OYAN, we are writers, we are family, and we are difference makers.

Kiera M.



My 2016 SW experience was a truly amazing one--perhaps even more amazing than all my past SWs. I think I even cried for the first time--but they were happy tears, not sad ones, and that encapsulates the entire experience for me.

As with every year, I gained a host of new memories which I shall treasure: being shocked to find Caleb at SW, teaching Cynthia how to sword-fight, retaking the Striped Clan picture, going through Micaela's Europe pictures with her, being Kylo Ren and throwing a temper tantrum, performing again with the Writers Who Don't Do Anything (even though I forgot my line during the performance), swordfighting Scott again, "selling Wonder," #grumpyBoba, John Otte's unsurpassable romance expertise, videoing Father Dots giving a deep and inspiring speech about OYAN whilst blowing bubbles, having a "war of the gods and men" with the adjacent critique group and turning out their lights from our room, arm wrestling, having a yes vs. no balloon fight with Josh, The Hunger Games, the foam sword battles, swing dancing, and experiencing that surreal final night with the Home song and cell phone flashlights as Mr. and Mrs. S. stood on stage beholding the reward for

not giving up on the gift that God wanted to give the world through them. That was when I cried.

At the end of this workshop, I felt the usual sadness of leaving my friends, but I felt a stronger happiness and hope as well. Mr. S. gave a session on the last night about humility, and it inspired me to go back to my life determined to live out that humility and spread the amazing love I had felt at OYAN. The first post-SW week has been hard for me, but each day I've kept remembering the glorious hope and love I felt so strongly at SW, and it's kept me going. It's kept me determined to spread that love even when I don't feel like it. I'm learning to focus on how I can give love instead of how I can get it.

I know we shouldn't search for perfection in life, but I feel like God blessed me with something PERFECT last week.

Daniel M.



Maybe it was the fact that I grew up a little, and didn't scramble around the workshop yelling my head off like the excited newbie I once was. Maybe it was because I didn't follow my sister and her friends around- because I had my own people now. But this year was different.

In 2013, my 4th workshop, and second time as a student, I knew as it drew to a close I wouldn't be coming back for a while. It was an odd experience...somehow God decided to drop that over my head on the last day. I remember walking from the Bell Center to the beloved Tipping Lounge with a friend and telling him I didn't think I was coming back. I don't know in what way God told me that, but I knew it would be a while before I saw that campus again.

2014 went by. My sister Rachel left and came back from the workshop, and maybe, yes, I sulked a little bit about it. But I hadn't gone- I wasn't meant to go. 2015, and it was financially impossible to go. I had gone to Mexico a few months before and that had drained my savings. It didn't hurt quite as bad, and I was still writing, now turning into a ghost on the forum, becoming a lingering oldie that couldn't quite disappear. The 2015-16 school year began and I dove headlong into my real passion- music. I took lessons of all sorts, ended up in the public school system for two incredible classes, and thought that maybe, just maybe, OYAN was in the past for me. Music was what I did, and while I loved to write, it wasn't the primary goal anymore. And yet, when registration opened, I wound up in front of the computer, signing up for the 2016 workshop. A few months later, and somehow I was wandering around the campus with friends





Monday morning, waiting for the crowd to show up. I watched as they screamed and ran in circles, jumping into each other's arms and laughing so hard I thought their hearts would burst. It's one of the most beautiful pictures in the world to see, and while I wasn't quite among the throng of excited teenagers anymore, I felt their joy and grinned ear to ear standing against the wall with my best friends.

I was a critique group leader, a student helper, an oldie who had abandoned ship a couple years ago and had somehow found herself back home. My role was different this time around, and the workshop was still priceless. Still taught me more about writing, about God, about myself and the people around me. More than I could ever manage to express in a short journal entry.

For someone who thought her writing days were almost over, you can imagine my surprise when after Jill Williamson's lecture, I found myself frantically scribbling down notes to a story idea I had been considering the past two years-without the courage to write it. Why in the world, did every single lecture exactly line up to a story idea I'd been trying to figure out? Why were my fingers again itching for the feel of a keyboard, and a screen slowly accumulating words? It was odd. I wasn't sure what to think. I'm not sure what to think. But my writing days aren't over yet.

By the last day of perhaps the most peaceful workshop I've attended, I was getting another message from God I didn't know quite how to handle; two words came whistling from the sky and hit me hard on the head, forcing me to stagger back.

Welcome back.

What?? I thought I had said goodbye three years ago, walked off the campus with a feeling it would be a while...but then, I suppose it has been a while. And somehow I wound up at another workshop. And why am I called back again to OYAN?

I don't know. I have another itching, another inspiration and motivation to write another story. Maybe my last story, but at least I have another one. Am I supposed to come back to more workshops? Be more active on the forum? Just keep writing? For some reason, and in some way, I'm back. I'm not quite done with this place, with these beautiful people in their weird costumes, funny accents, incredible stories, and amazing hearts. I've come back. OYAN has another part to play in my life... and I'm looking forward to walking through the next chapter.

Carolyn G.





Several months ago I joined the OYAN group not knowing how great of an impact OYAN would have on my life. I had heard of this mysterious curriculum from my sister who had quit before giving it a chance. Since the day of my joining I spent my time in thought about the book that I would write during the process of taking the curriculum. My thoughts moved from the depths of space to the invasions of World War 2 until finally I decided on a story set in ancient Rome. Then I began to write.

Now, close to 8 months later I am home after spending a week among, if I may borrow a quote from Tolkien, "Such excellent and admirable [OYANers]."

I have been to many different week long endeavors, from TeenPact to various christian summer camps, all of which have impacted my life. However the OYAN summer workshop has already had (even though it ended mere hours ago) the most unique impact of them all.

At the workshop I saw the epitome of brilliance and craziness melded into a single week of learning. From elves sharing the same hallways as Kylo Ren to Colonel Shepard interacting with Scarlet Witch, the Workshop created its own land where everyone could be a part of a story that was utterly unique and unrepeatable.

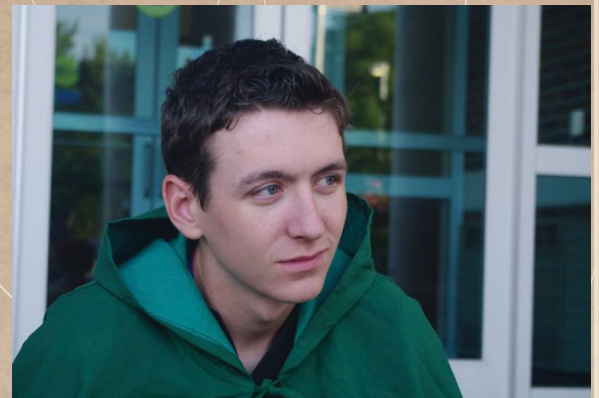
It staggered me how these people of my own age could be developing innumerable worlds and characters, each one with a marvelous story to be told, and yet no story was considered less than the others. A more perfect environment of friendliness and camaraderie could not be asked for. And yet despite all of this I remained separate, unwilling to take part in the fun happening all around me.



I remained separate not wanting to join with the OYANers despite the perfect opportunity to truly become, what I have dubbed, one of the Children of OYAN.

The Children of OYAN are a group of lost boys and girls all following the example of the man who has remained young by telling stories and influencing lives. They write and create worlds, they pour water across worlds and see it settle into rivers and lakes. They imagine hills rising and mountains forming. Air ships take to the sky and catapults are raised from the ground to sow mayhem on the world. Dragons sleep and cities are built in the dark. Lost memories are remade and fairy tales retold. Loved ones are lost and the underworld conquered, and these are only the stories I had the privilege in hearing told or helped tell during my time at the workshop. And yet even what I saw there barely scratched the surface for a whole community exists within the fathoms of the forum, a community that I have ignored up till this point. But I wish to change that. . .

Ben W.





It has been interesting for me to see this year the reactions of my comrades to the session about humility the last night. And I would agree with their reactions: we needed that. We all did and didn't know it. It was necessary.



Mr. S. emphasized that we need to be servants but not to let ourselves get run over. Those two things are hardly ever presented together which I think is a huge problem in our society, especially within Christian circles. We are told to be servants, to "be nice to people" and we get run over. We become doormats. And Jesus was not a doormat. We still need to keep our backbones as we serve one another.



Our kindness needs to be intentionally well-meant with a heart for Christ, not a begrudging "nice" gesture. That doesn't well-represent our Father at all. Mr. S. reminded us that we don't do these things to impress ourselves, impress the world, or even to impress Mr. S. We do these things to glorify God.



Lela G.

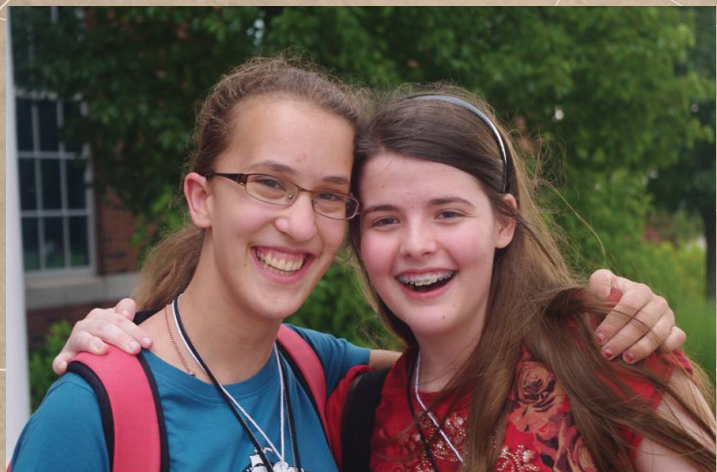
Raindrops flooded down on me as I stepped out of the shuttle with my friends, some new, some old. An overwhelming amount of familiar faces met us, and arms were thrown around us, no one caring that we were all soaking wet. This was my second workshop. And I was ready to do everything right.

I was ready to find my people and to be myself around them. I was ready to be focused in critique groups, and to give the best critiques I could. I was ready to perform "Thank God I'm an OYANer," with Joshua and Emily at Open Mic Night, even though we'd just finished writing the lyrics the night before we arrived.

But I wasn't ready to feel lost. And yet, that was how I felt for the first couple of days. I thought the fact that I knew everyone would make it easier than the year before, but somehow knowing more people made it even harder to decide who to hang out with. So, I strolled along the edge of the crowd, watching, admiring, waiting.



until Thursday. On Thursday morning, I sat with Brandon/Wesley Turner for one of the morning sessions. He made funny comments that I couldn't quite hear throughout the whole session, and we laughed together, whether I'd understood what he'd said or not. At lunch I met up with Anvard, my critique group from last year, and we went over our inside jokes and other memories together in one of the corner booths. On Thursday night I hung out with my friends backstage, anxiously waiting for Open Mic Night to start. We all pressed into the doorway of the stage, listening to the acts that came before ours, sometimes running down the hall and into the auditorium so we could see what was going on. Then we sang our song, and had such a great time with it, despite our mistakes. Afterwards we gathered in the gym. WaterSnail gave me a piggyback ride. Writergirl14 pulled me into a running chain. Emily taught me some swing dancing. Joshua and I led a





parade singing and playing "Hey Brother" as we walked back to the dorms with some others, announcing curfew to the people that were still dancing outside. We ended the night by singing "Wake Me Up" outside of Stockton. Then we parted ways. I got back to my dorm feeling like I finally understood why God had brought me to this SW. I had known that He wanted me there from the start, but something clicked that day. But it was Thursday. There was only one day left.

And we made sure to make that last day count. Friday night alone was worth the wait from last year to SW 2016. Towards the end of the night, a few of us sat together in the lounge by the gym, just singing and having a good time. After we played through songs like "I See Fire," and "Home," we shifted into our repertoire of worship songs. Joshua played his electric guitar, and I followed him on my acoustic. Brianna played her whistle, and Cobalt Girl joined in on the flute. I didn't realize how big of a crowd sang along with us until I watched the videos, but all I knew was that I was surrounded by other kids who loved worshiping the Lord. They closed their eyes and smiled as they sang. Some lifted their hands. I for one felt tears come to my eyes, because this moment was exactly what I'd been waiting for. Not only at the SW, but in my everyday life. Before I came to Kansas on June 13, I had been longing for some friends that had the same desire for God that I did. And on that Friday night, I realized that I'd found them. It didn't matter that I didn't want to be a full-time novelist, or that I'd never seen an episode of Doctor Who. All that mattered was Jesus. And I couldn't be more thankful for the time we all spent worshiping him together at the 2016 Summer Workshop.

I don't know where God will lead me in the years to come. I pray He will lead us all back home at some point. But whether or not our paths cross again, you've all shown me that I'm not alone. None of us is. And that's all I need to know.

Bethany F.



I Literally cannot even
Find words to express the pain.
A missing piece of my heart;
My world will never be the same.



I'm not afraid of getting hurt;
This pain cuts deep inside.
But only for my family
Could it ever touch my life.

Without their undeserved love,
How could I feel lost
At leaving them, unsure
Of when our paths might cross?

In this pain I revel
Because I know, no doubt,
Their love for me is endless:
Impossible to count.



Without the darkest points in life-
The valleys, alleys low-
How could I truly fathom
How high the mountains go?

Paul M.

Right after I joined the One Year Adventure Novel Student Forum in June 2015, it seemed like everyone left for the Summer Workshop. I wasn't sure what this whole workshop thing was, but I was determined to find out.

Throughout the year, I watched all the SW memory videos I could get my hands on, and I read the Summer Workshop 2015 Journal more than just once. I was enthralled. This Summer Workshop thing looked like heaven on earth.

I began saving up my money, and when May 2016 rolled around, I was registered to attend the 2016 Summer Workshop. No one could've been more excited than I was. My brother drove me 15 hours straight to take me all the way to Kansas. (We were kinda late, but better late than never.)

For the first couple days of Workshop, I was almost disappointed. Everything was awesome, of course, but...I didn't feel any, well, magic. I had dreamed of Narnia, and Middle Earth, and Neverland, and all I found was...well, a college campus. Don't get me wrong, those first few days were absolutely amazing, and meeting all the people I had talked to online was the coolest thing ever. It just wasn't as magical as I had expected.

By Friday, my mind had been changed. There was magic at the Summer Workshop. I felt it that last night, and it almost overwhelmed me. I had never felt like that before. It was beautiful. It took me a whole week to find it, but it had been there the whole time. And next year, I won't have to waste time looking for it, because it will already be inside of me.

God bless you, Mr. and Mrs. S. Y'all changed my life. To both of you, fair winds and following seas.

Martha M.



I just came back from the Summer Workshop. People have been asking me all week what my favorite part of it is, and, while I've been answering "the people," I really honestly don't know. I mean, "the people" is right, but it's also so incomplete as to be wrong. There were the sessions, in which I not only learned about writing, but I also learned things about life and faith, things that were more meaningful, more applicable, than anything I've ever heard at a youth group retreat.

Then there was the music. Honestly, the music and everything related to it was one of the major highlights of the workshop, for me. On Tuesday night, when Fíriel, Sir Marshall Longsword, The Man with a Plan, and I sat down and played, it was wonderful, the first time I felt that I really fit. And then the next night, when there was a large circle of us playing. And Friday night the whole lounge we were in was singing. And the people. The arm-wrestling battle in the middle of the cafeteria. Falling asleep on someone's shoulder. Frying Pan chasing someone around the Bell Center. The in-jokes in critique groups. The clapping that sprang up everywhere (I know I have become an OYANer - I clap for everything). The clothespins. The swing-dancing. My roommate and I awake to the wee small hours of the morning.

At the end of the workshop I was friends with maybe ten people, but... everyone was family. We're a giant family, even when we don't know each other. Before the workshop, I had seen all these things about not building your expectations up too high, how people had heard it was magical and then when the magic didn't happen for them they were disappointed. But it did happen. It was... honestly, I don't think there's a word in the English language to describe it.

Actually, there is. And that's OYAN.





One memory I will always, always carry with me is of the last night. Mrs. S had come up with the idea a day or two earlier, and Mr. S had no clue. As he concluded the last session, and we gave him a standing ovation, they dimmed the lights. The whole theater went dark. And we turned on our flashlights, our phones, our book lights. We stuck them up in the air. And then music played.

At first I didn't recognize the song. Then I realized what it was. It was Home. Mrs. S came up on the stage with Mr. S. We swayed and waved our lights in time to the music, and sang along. Then came the line of the song, I'm gonna make this place your home. I broke down. They were tears of happiness, of belonging. Mrs. S was crying, and I think Mr. S was tearing up, too. It was then that it hit me. I'm part of a family, we're all part of a family. And this is our home.

Brianna H.





A Week of Wonder.

That is what is on the Summer Workshop page.

My first Summer Workshop was more than a week of wonder, it was an experience I will never forget. When I walked through those doors into the Bell Center, a place I had seen in pictures for a year, it didn't feel real at first. This was the place for which I had saved every penny I could for the past year.

This place had magic in the air. This was the place I had wanted to go to for so long, to meet new people and make friends.

And make friends I did.

I had so much fun talking with other kids about ships (because what else would we talk about?) and life on my dairy farm. Getting to meet authors whose books I had read was so neat as well, though frankly I thought I would faint when they asked what my book was about. One of my favorite things was critique group. I loved talking about my work with others, and my group pointed out flaws that I didn't even see in my novel. One memorable moment was when I rode with Mr. S on the golf cart and we got smacked in the face with the sprinklers... which wasn't so bad, because it was hot.

Mrs. S, I loved your morning introductions. You should have a morning show, I would totally watch it.

Friday night was also special. As the lights went dim and our flashlights came on, and the song played the words, "Just know you're not alone, 'cause I'm going to make this place your home," I think everything that happened that week, all the love, the fun, and the friendships made came crashing down on me, sweeping away painful memories like a tidal wave. And I knew that I wasn't alone, and that this was home. That is another memory that I shall never forget.

My first Summer Workshop was more than I could have ever hoped for. I came home feeling so refreshed and rejuvenated. Ready to take on my writing and life's problems. I made friendships that will last a lifetime and I have memories that I will forever hold close. Thank you Mr. and Mrs. S. for this workshop that you two put together... I am entirely grateful.

I hope to see you all again soon. Until then,

Fair Winds and Following Seas

Rebecca M.





Ever since the summer workshop ended, a day hasn't gone by that I haven't thought about what I learned there. That week has thus far been the highlight of my year. I doubt that anything else coming later will top it.

Part of what made it the best week of the year was Mr. S's speech on Friday night. I had no idea what to expect, which made the message even more powerful. He conveyed to the entire OYAN community gathered in the auditorium that we are living in a time of fear. Mr. S. also told us that to live courageously, we have to humble ourselves before God and others. I realized how focusing on others brings true joy and courage to stand for what we believe in. The greatest heroes of all time have been the most humble people.

Humble yourself before God to receive grace, mercy, and courage. As Mr. S told me afterwards, the lesson on humility was not Mr. S's words, but God's. It is the lesson which all of us need to put into practice in our daily lives. When we do that, anything is possible because it is God who is working, not us. So, it seems that the best way to remember the 2016 Summer Workshop is to remember how it is bigger than any of us and how amazing it was to be able to touch it.

On Monday the excitement brewed as everyone reconnected with old friends or found new ones. Mrs. S. set the right tone for the rest of the week at dinner (as only Mrs. S. could). Mr. S. laid out the theme of the workshop and the guidelines for how to make the most of the week. The evening ended with me getting pulled out of my shell by some wonderful friends of mine. Tuesday through Thursday each presented a blast from early in the morning until late at night. Amazing speakers taught in the morning and evening about everything from writing characters and creating conflict to theology in fiction and publishing. The speakers from previous years still wowed us with their skills, and the new ones fit right in.

Perhaps the most memorable moments of the week were filled with laughter. Examples range from “When you think romance, you think John Otte,” to Steve Laube telling the hilarious story of when one author called him to vent about how his novel’s hero died by walking in front of a bus. Or how every morning, Mrs. S. would put a smile on everyone’s face with the ritual “Mrs. S. is herself.”

The other moments which stood out were the moments of serious reflection or wonder. Mr. S. giving his final talk on humility and his challenge to the OYAN community. Steve Laube confronting us with how many in the world are poised against the fiction we write. Mark Wilson reminding us of how the world, even when in rebellion, responds to the idea of a good king returning to set things right.



The list could go on and on. Stories of the world’s best martial artists. Magical moments of instruments being played under the stars. Golf cart rides to the dark realms of MNU. The most helpful feedback from other writers in critique groups.

All of the above written here would not be possible without the amazing people who made it happen. Thank you to the OYAN students, staff, and parents. Thank you also to the guest speakers, and of course, a huge thank you to Mr. and Mrs. S. Most of all I thank God for all of you and for the summer workshop. It is far bigger than any of us, I am thankful I got the chance to touch it.

Fair winds and following seas to all the OYAN community past, present, and future,

Chameleon

Nathan E.

Soli Deo Gloria!

The people are the core of it, you know. The people are why we come back year after year, scraping together funds out of our broke-teenager pockets, making sacrifices and commitments, throwing ourselves deep into debt, all for a single week in June.

The people are why we sit in the airport for hours while our flights are canceled and rerouted, why we write songs and poems and parodies, why we struggle off the airplane at 10:00 A.M. on Sunday morning looking more like the other people in the airport than we ever wanted to.

The people are why we open up our hearts and pour out love in ways we didn't know we could, why we dance our souls out on Friday night even though we're not sure how, why we give, give, give without grasping for anything, because we're assured, no matter how much we give, it will be returned to us tenfold.

It's the people who draw us, the friends we find, not make, under the sun in an unsung suburb of Kansas City, the friends who love us more than we feel we could ever love them back, who we talk down from cliffs and talk onto diving boards, who we argue with about theology and sing with about nothing at all, who we play music for even though it embarrasses us, and then realize that it didn't embarrass us, after all.

The people are the beginning and the end. The people are the ones we love; they're the ones who paint the week rose and gold and blue and gray.





They're the ones who stand in the lightning with us, helping us bear the breathless marvel of the soundless beauty that's leaping above us, the ones who hold us so tightly that we know we're safe, no matter how scared we felt before, the ones who slam into us from behind to embrace us and don't even care if they get soaked by the downpour as they greet us, just because they love us so much.

Maybe I see too much in them; I don't think so. I believe that what I see in the people is real, the respect and irreverence, the love and the annoyance, the way their feelings turn upside-down and right-side-out again just because you told them that yes, they were important.

The people love me, I think. I know I love them. That's enough to bring me back every time.

Garrett R.

