

WRITERS



OF THE LOST ART

Summer Workshop Journal

- - - HANNAH W. - - X

This workshop was my third workshop. I had the privilege of being a student helper this year, and going into the workshop with a heart of service added something really special to the experience for me. I had a general idea of what I would be expected to do, but I expected some things to be sprung on me at the last minute.

Like when the girls in the dorms on the top floor of Rice had to be moved due to air conditioner problems. I was amazed by the way so many people banded together to help not only their friends but also the strangers on the hall. I was amazed, once again, by the sense of community and family that is present at the workshop and throughout OYAN in general. The way everyone is open and welcoming and loving to people that they don't know. The way everyone is accepted. The way one smile, one compliment, one 'hello' can be the beginning of a meaningful friendship that holds over hundreds and thousands of miles. I've never experienced that bond anywhere else.

I can't really capture the week without mentioning Steve Laube's talk on Tuesday night. When he had us write those private things on the papers, I totally blanked. I had a brief moment of 'there's nothing wrong with me; I don't have any issues at all,' before I wrote the first thing that came to mind: Being Alone. Being Alone in the sense that everyone else has someone they would pick over me, that I'll just fade into the background of someone's life, that when I finally have to go home after workshop it will just be me, alone, with no one to turn to when I need them.

Somehow, writing that down changed the way I looked at the rest of the week. I stopped caring if I made it to all the student-organized events on time. I stopped caring about getting the 'best seat' for sessions. I spent every possible moment with people who mattered to me. People who cared about me and people I know won't leave when workshop is over.

There are so many people I could thank individually for making this workshop so meaningful to me. These people are the ones that helped restore the joy and the happiness that I had been struggling to find. People who assured me I am loved and accepted and wanted no matter how hard my life feels or how alone I feel I have become. Some call workshop "home." But to me, it's the people that are home. No event, no place, no people, has ever shown me love the way the Summer Workshop does. I am forever grateful that I am a part of this amazing group.

Hannah



- - - Rachel E. - - x

I had been waiting three years for the 2017 Summer Workshop, when I would finally be an official student instead of just tagging along with my family. Workshop was already my home away from home and had been since 2014. The only thing getting in the way of the magic was that I wasn't old enough to be a student until this year.

However, with the new age and opportunities came new fears. Nightmares filled my mind about being rejected and kicked off campus. I even had a dream where Mr. S. told me I shouldn't be a writer, and I cried the next day like it had been real.

The fears eventually subsided, but were replaced with new ones as I found out most of my friends weren't going to workshop. What if I didn't make friends? What if people didn't like my story? What if people didn't like me? I knew my fears were ridiculous, since workshop is a magical place, but I had them anyway.

Meanwhile, the week before Summer Workshop one passage of Scripture was stuck in my head. I would find myself reciting it at totally random times, like when I was emptying the dishwasher or brushing my teeth. The words became my mantra for workshop.

Then on the second night of workshop, Steve Laube gave an excellent talk on how we are to wait on God. Then he brought up the passage:

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him and He will make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:5-6)



- - - Rachel E., cont. - - x

I had to face the truth: not all my plans were going to work. Some would fall apart, some would change, and others would stay the same. But God could map out my schedule, my interactions, my Open Mic Night performance and everything else better than I ever could.

And my fears? Guys, no fears like those can stand up against the awesome community OYAN is. I would call everyone in my critique group my best friends!

Plus, I was not alone in my fears or struggles. Tuesday night Steve Laube had us write down those struggles, and then he read them aloud. "Worry," "anxiety," "pride"—they all came up more than once, proving that we are not alone.

That was the beautiful thing about this workshop: we allowed ourselves to be cracked open, we permitted ourselves to be completely and utterly crazy, and we weren't wounded by our vulnerability. Rather, we were united and strengthened because of it.

As we were being united, we also were learning what it means to be selfless: to look outside of our own pain and help others through theirs.

If you didn't take away anything else from workshop, I want you to take away four things:

1. Be courageous. Nothing is impossible.
2. Be perseverant. Walk through the night of your pain.
3. Be wonder-filled. Look at the world with fresh eyes. Spread the hope that OYAN has given you.
4. Be a writer of the lost art of selflessness.

Rachel



- - -Aidan B. - - x

This was perhaps the strangest week ever.

Ever.

Unlike the previous years, I got there early. I was tackled by eight people. I was home. People loved me. But... I wasn't home. It wasn't right. Everything felt off, unknown.

The feeling continued through the day. I found people I knew and we hung out and we all agreed: it was wrong. We hung out in Spindle lounge that night and talked about how weird this workshop felt.

My workshop started wrong. It started with the mindset of "this is workshop, business as usual". That's not right. Workshop isn't business as usual.

Workshop is workshop.

Workshop is a cacophony of color and emotion and beauty and wonder.

Workshop is about truth and vulnerability and family.

That hit me Tuesday morning. From there, workshop righted itself. Tuesday, I met the critique group I was to lead (Snaketown is the best <3). Tuesday I met half a dozen people I'd never talked to before. Tuesday my arm started shaking uncontrollably from a pinched nerve and people actually cared that I hurt.



Tuesday night, Steve Laube changed my life. Throughout this last year, I've been impatient. I've been waiting: for school, for a job, for writing. I've been waiting and nothing has happened. I've put all my effort forth. And nothing is happening at the speed I want.

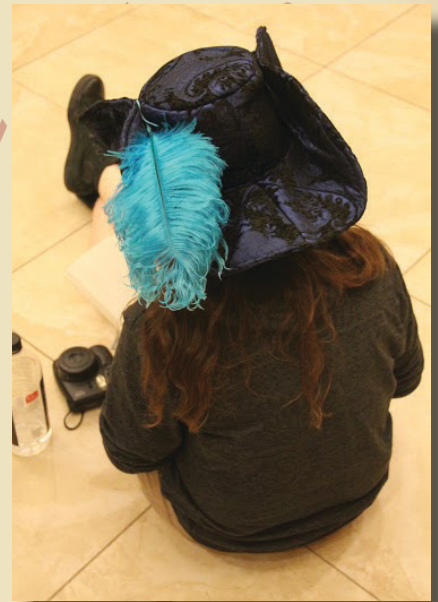
He asked us to write our struggles on paper. I'm gonna be honest and it's scary to do it: I wrote "my pride". When he read it aloud, I felt that pride literally writhe in my chest. It hurt to hear it said aloud.

Steve spilled my insides and no one even noticed. I think that's what hurt my pride most. I heard him reveal it, bring it to light, and no one knew it.

Steve changed me. He dumped it all out, and I had to decide which bits to stuff back in. Did I stuff some pride back? Undoubtedly. There's no way I got rid of all of it.

In the midst of this turmoil over my destroyed sense of pride, Wednesday came. That day, I did nothing but talk with people. At this point I was lost in the midst of hating myself and my pride. But these people cared about me. Even though I hated myself, they didn't. They didn't even know it was happening. They helped me heal from Steve's mortal wound and they didn't realize it.

- - -Aidan B., cont.- - x



Thursday was full of new things. I went to swing dancing. I danced. This might not seem huge, but it is. I'm extremely self-conscious when I dance. I'm not a great dancer. My pride hates that fact, so I don't dance.

But people made me dance, so I learned to dance and...I smiled a lot. Was I excellent? No. I baltered ("to dance, without particular grace or skill, but perhaps with some enjoyment"). And I smiled.

Friday came.

It went.

I wasn't expecting to be emotional. I was riding the highs of dancing and people who cared.

Screw that.

I sat in the Bell Center, listening to Home and watching people shine their lights. I sat in silence. I mouthed the words of the song and watched the joy of others.

I cried.

It was that weird sort of crying where the tears don't come out (save one) but they make your vision swim. Where your chest constricts and you can't breathe. Where everything trembles a little and you want to make a sound but you're struck mute. I cried.

- - -Aidan B., cont. - - x



That night, I found out how much I care. Later, I drove around with a few other people. Nowhere in particular, just around. When I came back, I found more people to talk to.

Emily was there and she gave me a taste of Winter Workshop's Joy. She reminded me of what it was to be a Joymaker and why they matter so much.

I stayed up late with the bros.
I slept.



Saturday came.
I said goodbye.

This workshop was different. The other workshops taught me things. They encouraged me. They made me feel things like joy and self-worth and belonging. OYAN gave me those things. This year, workshop took from me. It took from me some of my masks. It took from me the way I hide my pride. It took from me my belief that I was still young and childish and dependent.

Workshop took from me.

But you guys didn't.

You guys still gave me all the things I'd been given in the past.

You guys are my Joymakers.

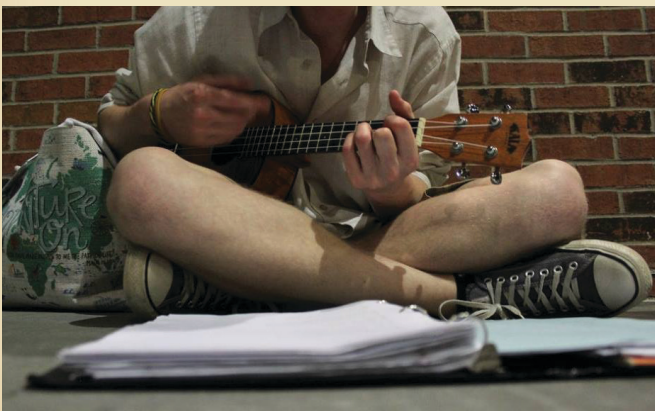
You guys are my fair winds and following seas.

You guys are my wardrobes.



I love you all. Whether or not I see you again, whether we know each other or not, I love you.

I'm not very good at it. But I want to try.



Aidan

- - -Annelise D.- - x

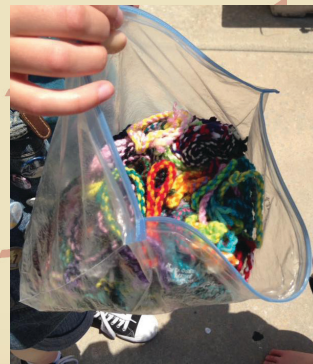
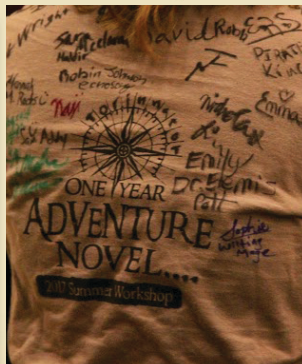


It's the little things.

This workshop was not the emotional whirlwind I expected. I didn't feel thrills of excitement when I thought about it beforehand. Getting there was another normal day, but with a lot more hugs and one rush of adrenaline as we arrived.

We call the Summer Workshop "Rivendell" and "Narnia": a place to rest from the storms of life. I thought I understood it, but this year there was so much more solace than previously. I wasn't as worried about needing to hang out with everyone. Simply focusing on the moment and the people right in front of me made everything so much more relaxed. I think I looked at the schedule maybe twice. Another part of the relaxation was resting in the knowledge that it wasn't the end. Not the end of the friendships, not the end of workshops for most of us, and not the end of time. In the middle of the week, a lovely friend and I were remarking on not dreading the last day, because as Christians, we have Eternity to spend together. Here on earth, we're growing up. We're walking into the Perilous Realm, but if we so choose, we can do life together. Someday soon we will all have driver's licenses or the means to save up for plane tickets. The community of workshop does not have to stay in Kansas.

The community of workshop does not have to stay among OYANers, either. As we internalize what makes the community so encouraging and safe, we can try and do our part to treat everyone like we treat OYANers. Look at people as special individuals who are worth talking to and who have something to share with the world. See the precious child within the grotesque exterior of the dragon.



- - -Annelise D., cont. - - x

Appreciate the tiny pieces of wonder. The colorful rocks on the exhausting hike. Flecks of gold in brown eyes. A flower poking through the sidewalk. Keep finding beauty in the normal. Find the beauty in a blanket. Appreciation of wonder is a lost art for us to rediscover.

It's the little things.

Being entrusted with The Pelican, an impromptu critique session with Nori, Becca, and Eesie, the peace of Eve playing the piano, Ashley and Samantha being prepared enough to bring cheese and crackers for everyone. Making a ridiculous video with Lilly, Becca, and Danny, stealing all the sips from Alena's earl grey latte, splitting my own earl grey latte with Mhairi, people taking the time to teach me to dance. Listening to Garrett sing and play ukulele, talking about eternity with Hannah Brown, magical 2 a.m. yoga with Lela, proud older sister moments when Karis read her poem onstage, sitting on the steps just talking and being. Mrs. Williams, Mrs. McSweeney, and Mrs. Grattet being the coolest and nicest people ever, Alexis blasting Space Unicorn, Naji drawing a weird smiley face right on my forehead approximately ten seconds before I left, Hannah Williams drawing half-suns on everyone's fingers and sharing my second-hand embarrassment.



These are the reasons that Lela and I stayed up until 3 AM writing friend appreciation notes.

This is why we're crying over washing our laundry from the week.

Workshop this year wasn't at all what I expected. It wasn't just "another workshop." I truly found the safe haven this year, the springboard for the scary parts of life. After my time being sharpened, I'm refreshed and ready to be a battle sword. Workshop wasn't what I expected, but it's exactly what I needed.

Annelise



- - -Sarah Beth M.- - x



The first time I came to a SW seminar as a sibling, I came with my parents and heard Mark Wilson speak. This year I came and was super sad because Dad isn't here to celebrate with me as I attended SW officially and to discuss the talks with me afterwards.

On Thursday I had the most fun swing dancing (and twirling my skirt so dramatically that Luke had to tell me cut it out for my partner's sake) but I also felt a twinge of loss as I felt the disappointment of having to wait an entire lifetime before I can dance with Dad again.

Saturday I couldn't cry much until I realized that Father's Day is today and I was leaving these people who wouldn't be here to hug me through the hurt of it all.

...

But I realized how glad I am to feel the sadness in that. It means that these OYANers are truly a safe place for me. I sometimes avoid telling people that Dad died a year & a half ago because people don't know how to respond. Especially people my age—it almost becomes a barrier because they feel like they can't relate to me.

The thing is, I don't expect people to relate to me in that way. Even if someone else has lost their father we can only relate with one another to a certain level. Each story is different. Each person is different in how they process & struggle through hard things.

But these people understand that. They understand that's okay that they can't perfectly relate to me & my hardships. They know that my life story & struggles didn't start with Dad dying and haven't ended with Dad dying. Losing Dad is a significantly huge loss in my life and I feel the resounding effects of it every day, and they acknowledge that while also knowing that my story is not defined solely by that.

- - -Sarah Beth M., cont. - - x

I came to SW wanting to hear their life stories and I found that they came with listening hearts to hear mine too. I can't say how much I need these people. I need my people to look deep down and see through the surface things – to understand that even the threads I tell them are just that: threads. It's not the whole story or the whole of what make me, me. . . and they can understand and reach out without knowing my entire life story (in fact, I think that would be very unhealthy if every one of them knew everything about me).

. . .

I woke up today: Sunday, Father's Day—feeling comforted. . . sad, but comforted—because I feel so deeply known & loved.

My people have uncovered and pressed on wounds that I willingly covered up and grew numb to. I am grateful. That's the truest gift friends could ever give.

Whether they know it or not these people loved big and didn't withhold and they've carried me places I didn't want to go through but desperately need to. I really couldn't have ask for a better gift, leaving SW and facing another hard day/year.

*Sarah
Beth*



- - -Emily A. - - x

In 2015 I watched as what seemed like most of OYAN packed their bags and left to go to a place called "Summer Workshop." They called it magical. They called it Narnia. They called it home. I heard them, and wanted it to be true so badly- but I was shy. How could people make something magical? People are scary. I thought maybe in this wonderful place it wouldn't matter if I was shy—I'd walk through the doors and BAM! I'd know exactly what to say and who to talk to! That was my assumed definition of magical.

So I planned on going in 2016. I went. I walked through the doors and saw lots of people. It felt the same as any other large group of people I didn't know. I still felt scared. I still didn't know what to say or who to talk to. I tried a few times to find people I knew. I managed to talk to a few people. They were wonderful. But I was scared of being hurt. I was too scared to talk to anyone else, so I spent most of the free time sitting in corners and pretending to draw or read.



I came in 2017 with an entirely different mindset. I tried to see the people around me as people. People who had fears. I was doubtful, but to my surprise, everyone wasn't perfect. And they seemed okay with it. I watched people make mistakes. And instead of the world crashing in on them like I thought would happen if I made a mistake in public, it was...okay? Everyone laughed and forgot about it. So I tried it. I talked to more people. I didn't have to pretend or act fake—I was accepted by anyone I talked to. I made just as many mistakes as I was afraid of last year. But it was okay here. The more I gave of myself, the more I got back. I didn't give it all. But I got closer than last year. I pushed my limits as far as I could. Next year? I will continue to push. I'll get as close as I can.

Emily

- - - Logan M. - - x

One of the things they always used to tell us on Monday night or Tuesday morning of a workshop was that it's a new workshop. This workshop really embodied that principle for me. There were a few familiar faces that weren't present this year, or people I laughed with last year that I barely talked to this year. I settled into a group with a bunch of people I knew from the Forum who had never been to a workshop before. But we settled into our friendships so easily that you would have thought we'd known each other all our lives. We sat down together constantly at sessions and meals. I continued my rank-pulling war with Captain Leprechaun, and Elly/Motivational Toast decided to join in. They stole my possessions for a laugh—and I can't complain, because I stole Karisca1's Narwhal during lunch on Wednesday (Don't worry, I ensured that it was returned. XD).

And I feel like I took more ownership of my SW this year. I did a lot of things that I never had before, like a mentor session, and Open Mic—something I've been dying to do since my first workshop in 2014, when I saw you wonderfully talented peoples perform. I organized my own event on Tuesday and Wednesday night, and got up on Friday and led the cafeteria in singing "Mekon," an alteration of "Gaston" from Beauty and the Beast, in honor of our sword-fighting master.

And no, it wasn't a perfect time. There were moments when I was supposed to be practicing for Open Mic Night and would instead be found playing a lonely song on the piano. But time passed, and loneliness vanished, and I fully embraced the magic of this community around me. And then suddenly the week was almost over. That was the final strange part—it never properly hit me that it was almost over until suddenly it was Friday. And Friday still ended up being the best day of the entire workshop. We got an amazing talk from Mr. S on the power of stories, persistence, and selflessness. We danced like hooligans onstage, and I got to play music with two epic friends. It was wonderful.

So yes, this was definitely a new workshop. But I wouldn't change a thing about it. Because it was just as magical as it ever was.

Logan

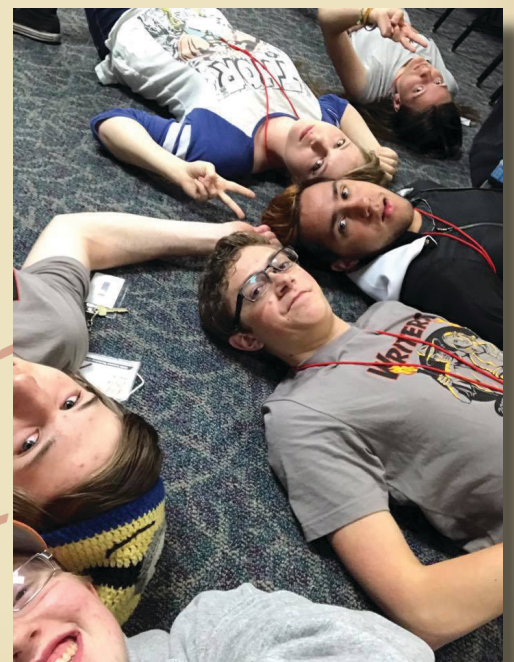


- - -Lela G. - - - x

-Workshop Is-

Familiar smiles, new faces
Excited hugs and memorable places
Dinner laughs and teasing
(A bit of anxious breathing)
Headaches, stomach bugs, a glimpse of lonely
Realizing you're not "the only..."
Gogo, Kylo, Gaston, Doctor Which?
Safety pins do in a pinch
Late nights spent a-talking
Early mornings, zombie walking
Masks give way to sparkling eyes
Each emotion sympathized
#Squad night! Pizza Polaroid
In critique group you're lucky to have two boys
Mr. S's crazy golf cart rides
"I'm here!" in Frisbee before jovial dancing strides
Sharpie tattoos
And clothes peg tag
Battles with foam swords
Bruises to be had
Theatre black box talks
Lots of hurried little walks
Worship night, totally impromptu
Tomorrow we leave? I don't want to...
3 A.M. letters passed out
Another round of hugs goes about
Blessings issued, "Fair Winds and Following Seas!"
A little shaky at the knees
The car pulls away, feeling pretty rotten
Knowing that you won't be forgotten
Though the next is still a year away
The community is here to stay
Carrying a loveliness, commissioned to impart
Rediscovering friendships, the true Lost Art.

Lela



- - - Courtney M. - - x



This was my third SW...and it broke me.

My whole life I've built up impenetrable (or so I thought) walls around my heart. Every year the walls got thicker and taller. I didn't want to show myself to the world anymore because it hurt to be rejected.

In 2015 I came to the workshop curious to see what all the hype was about. Everyone talked about coming home, but I didn't meet many people that year. I sat in sessions alone until I was invited to sit with a group. I hovered in the background, wanting what everyone else had. Several OYANers reached out to me and showed me love. I was intrigued...and I wanted more. There was a tiny crack in the wall.

So I came back.

2016 I was determined to not hide. I cosplayed for the first time. I danced. I went up to people and introduced myself. I sat with OYANers I didn't know during meals and sessions. I made beaded geckos to hand out. I was confused because I was accepted. I was...loved. But my walls were still up.

2017 has been a very hard year for me. I came to the workshop hurting and very, very lonely. My friends quickly cured me of the loneliness and I felt happier than I had been in a while. But I still felt as if my heart could shatter at any moment. Friday night my walls fell down. I watched someone crying on someone else's shoulder and being comforted and I was overwhelmed by all this love. I could feel it for the first time. It was God's love shining through.

My heart broke and I cried. I cried in front of everyone. But instead of judging me and rejecting me, I was loved on. All the pain I had been holding inside rushed out and I felt broken, completely broken.

But I had to break so God could put me back together.

I still have a lot of healing to do, but I'm on the mend. I feel more whole than I ever have.

I want to thank you guys. Even if you don't know me very well, you still touched my life. We may have never talked, but just watching you interact with your friends and just loving each other has changed me. Yes, the world can be a cruel place and people can be hurtful, but the world is also a beautiful place and people do love each other. I'm not alone. And...I am loved.

Courtney

- - - Jessica B. - - x

I noticed something this workshop. Something that made me stop and think. Normally, I am a strong introvert and if I'm going to be honest here, I have to say I hate talking to strangers. Polite conversations with strangers are enough to kill social gatherings for me. I usually end it quickly, give them a small smile and disappear into a corner.

Workshop is different. Especially this year. I felt comfortable talking to people I had never met before. I met so many "newbies" and enjoyed watching them experience their first workshop. I found myself just walking up and introducing myself to people or talking to those in line with me in the cafeteria, having the same small conversations that I dreaded at other social events. We talked about little things, their homes, their family, what state or country they were from, and I loved each of them.

I wondered several times throughout the week: why did I act differently here than anywhere else?

Then one girl I was talking to summed it up in one word. Acceptance. You don't have to worry about "fitting in" at workshop. You just have to be yourself and everyone will love you for it. There is no worry in showing these people your true self. These people won't harm you if you take your "out in public" mask off for the week because then they can also be real with you and trust that you won't do anything to harm their real selves.



As I showed one newbie in particular, Callie, the wonders of the workshop, I found myself looking to the little things, the simple joys, as well. That's why Gabrielle's quest was so perfect for me this year.

Restoring simple joys to others and seeing the world through fresh eyes—that's certainly what workshop did for me this year, and what I hope that it did for others as well.

Needless to say, this made leaving hard. Really hard. Facing the real world again after a week of being comfortable with being yourself isn't easy. But isn't that what Mrs. S said? We are swords designed for battle, not for decoration. We were just given a week to hone our skills, sharpen our swords, and prepare ourselves to bring to the world what we learned and what we believe through the stories He gives us and helps us write. And, if we can be real with other OYANers, how much more real can we be with the One who created us and knows us better than we know ourselves?

Jessica



- - -Adrienne R.- - x



This year's workshop was different.

This year I watched newbies find the family and passion that I found at my first Workshop 7 years ago. I witnessed them taking up the mantles of older students no longer in attendance. I saw them cry as they hugged their friends goodbye, clinging to the last moments in a desperate attempt to hoard every bit of love and wonder that they could.

And it was beautiful.

I listened and cried as Steve Laube read off the struggles and pains of my peers and I, and told us that anticipation is our gift during periods of waiting on the Lord for answers. Robert Treskiland reminded me of why I write. Jenn Bailey taught powerful tools in engaging your reader. Stephanie Morrill helped me gain confidence for editing. Mrs. S impacted me with her Indiana Jones allegory on life. And Mr. S's talks pointed out to me my need to become more selfless.

Through each of the speakers, God poked at my heart. And it too, was beautiful. I found joy in becoming better friends with newbies. I found laughter in sitting in a hallway with sleep deprived teens reading flash fiction. I reconnected with my best friends of almost 8 years. I was myself this workshop, which, though I didn't realize it, hadn't happened for a very long time. And it was beautiful.

Yes, the OYAN Summer Workshop of 2017 was different, but it was also my favorite. Not because of all the things I got to do and hear, but for what I watched others experiencing. Because that was the most beautiful thing of all.

Adrienne



- - - Ryan R. - - x

This workshop experience was unique for me—like all are—but I never really had one big “a-ha” moment during or after the workshop like with years past. Instead, this workshop changed me subtly. One of the themes that permeated my workshop experience was connection. As with every workshop, I reconnected with old friends and made new ones, but I feel like I built deeper relationships at this workshop—friends that I’ll keep for the rest of my life, friends I’ve already kept in great touch with since. Not only did I connect with other OYAN students, but I also was blessed to be able to get to know some of the speakers on a deeper level than, “Hi, I enjoyed your talk; can you sign my book?” I actually got to have lunch with Nadine Brandes and chat with her several other times during the week and even since being home. Linnea and I talked with Steve Laube for probably two hours one evening—about writing, publishing, and just about life. Not that I never made connections in past workshops—because I definitely did—but this year was different—more connections, richer relationships. And I think that’s partly because I freed myself to just truly be myself.

This past year has been one big identity struggle for me, but, at OYAN, I felt comfortable to just be me unabashedly. I hadn’t realized before the workshop that I had lost pieces of my happiness and my authenticity, and, again, there was no one single realization at the workshop, but since being home I’ve noticed I’m happier, more authentic—I have those things in full.

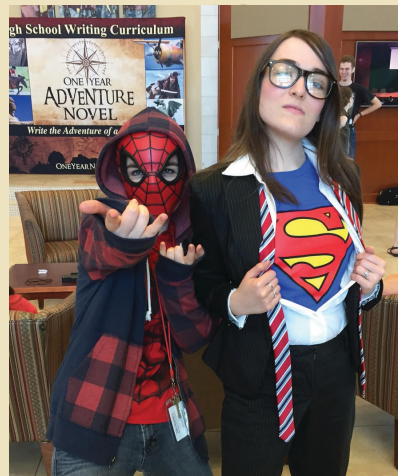


- - -Ryan R., cont.- - x

I go into work now unafraid that my coworkers might not like me, and I even have joy on days that I work; I'm not only looking forward to days off, but I'm living every day as the gift it is, believing that every individual day is a chance to do something great and meaningful...to live.

As a Christian, I used to find myself getting so hung up on looking forward to my Happy Ending (which is definitely an important thing to believe in and garner hope from), but, for me, I was letting that make me forget that Jesus gave us a Happy Beginning and a Happy Middle, too—a chance to start over and a chance to have happiness and a meaningful life in the day-to-day. And my increased happiness and authenticity and living day-by-day attitude since being home weren't conscious decisions at first; I just noticed them in reflection—subtle changes in myself that had occurred because I chose to be myself at this workshop. I opened up the real me to OYANers and found real friendships. I cosplayed for the first time not caring if my family would think it a waste of money (and, hey, I met Nadine because of it). I got up on stage at Open Mic Night and just let myself have fun even if it wasn't perfect. So thank you to everyone for this workshop. Thanks to my core group, my best friends, my Critique Group (and last year's who I reconnected with), my roommate, the speakers, the S's, the staff, my road trip buddies, the friends I made on the first day and the last. Because of you, I was myself at this workshop and found it freeing, and it's come home with me.

Ryan



- - -Charlotte A. - - x

i. regrets

I didn't finish my quest.

I only truly said goodbye to maybe ten people.

Somehow, I managed to spend my entire week feeling like I was neither spending enough time with Paul, or with anybody else.

I regret the things I miss out on a lot. Sometimes I was too exhausted. Sometimes I had conflicting priorities.

Workshop feels unfinished to me. For the things I mentioned above, and because I live in the Kansas City area now.

ii. a quest

This was my miracle workshop. I shouldn't have been able to go at all.

Everything else was set up for a miracle too: the speakers were all incredible, I had a one of my favorite critique groups, I saw lots of amazing people, and—heck—I got engaged to somebody beyond my dreams.

But in all these miraculous things, this workshop felt ordinary.

Comfortable.

Home.

But home in the sense of coming in from a long day at work and collapsing on the couch. You're still exhausted. You're still stressed.

But you are home.

And for that moment, you know that at the very least you have a place to belong, and people who care for you.

I didn't have to leave home to be home this year, and what an ordinary miracle that is.

I can still carry out my quest - it really is a never-ending one. Let us keep pursuing courage through selflessness.

Love strong, my family.

iii. ordinary miracles

- Eight people crashed at our house for a night, accidentally causing everyone to be awake before 7:30 a.m.
- Finding out my critique group name was a location in Japan.
- Walking up to talk to someone and discovering 1. She is super cool. 2. She would be in my critique group.
- Finding out I loved every novel in my critique group. Incredible talent surrounding me.
- "Do carbs, not drugs."
- A Dungeons and Dragons elf named Lorum Ipsum.
- Sitting in the car: "I really wanted to go on a walk today." The moment I realized that Paul was about to ask me to spend forever with him.
- #griffithdriveway2017
- "okay."
- Sitting in the hall and telling his family.
- The look on Jenn Bailey's face when she read my first page//the gift she gave me in words//the intangible gift she gave me
- Sharing the joy that is Chipotle with Jim (and lots of other people too.)
- An evening just spent talking with people I didn't know as well. Remembering how Giant the people around me truly are.
- Henna
- Pepper x Tony
- "If you face the fear that keeps you frozen//Chase the sky into the ocean// That's when something wild calls you home//home
- Papyrus
- The tears and the difficulty of The Song of the Nightstick
- Jeremy's Mom
- A photo re-creation
- Washing little dogs
- The mouse on the wall at Sonic

Charlotte

- - -Elizabeth D.- - x

It's not every day you get to survive a haunted golf cart ride.

Three of us, tingling with excitement, squeezed onto the vinyl seat. We were elated that the S's had chosen us, deemed us worthy to endure the exhilarant terror of the golf cart. What more was there to life than this? Then the engine roared to life, and I knew immediately that we had made a terrible, terrible mistake. The contraption bucked and rattled, clearly unhappy with the presence of such naïve, inexperienced passengers. I knew deep in my shaking bones that pleading for mercy wouldn't save us, so I clung to the metal bar with all the desperation of a warrior making a last stand. My friend held onto me for support, but I'd already volunteered to speak at her funeral; I couldn't keep her on the mad chariot of death if it chose to cast her away. Mr. S. had promised that the seat belts would protect us, but where were the seat belts?

However, despite all our expectations, we somehow emerged unscathed from the wrath of the haunted golf cart, and that glorious ride is indelibly seared into my terror-tinged memory. Near that new memory is an old one, recurring echoes of the gang I somehow started last workshop. I longed for those friendships to return, but they belonged in another week and another year. Still, I came back to Kansas expecting sameness.

Of course, this workshop was different, gloriously different, but I still wanted the same answers, the same peace and joy I found last year. Instead, I found a different kind of sameness in a handful of all-too-familiar emotions. Sadness. Fear. Loneliness. I shook them off as best I could and tried my hardest to Have A Good Time. I mostly succeeded, but the expectations lingered. At the top of the list floated the longing for another workshop epiphany. ("Fair Winds and Following Seas" had gifted me with the courage and humility I needed to finally become the person I'd been afraid to be.)



- - -Elizabeth D., cont. - - x

But this week passed without another blinding realization. Instead of driving away my ghosts, the workshop seemed to intensify them, amplifying the noise in my head until I couldn't hear anything else.

Then one day in critique group, my friend handed me back my excerpt. She'd circled all the 'I's in one paragraph, revealing far too many of that particular pronoun for a few sentences to contain. While I didn't think much of it at the time (beyond a note to revise my narrator's train of thought), those spirals of ink contained that missing epiphany: my life is a paragraph with too many 'I's.

As a narrator of a first-person novel, it's impossible not to talk about oneself. However, no two novels are the same. Some narrators choose to begin each sentence with themselves, with an 'I'. They talk about the things they've done, the things they've accomplished, the golf carts they've survived. But others manage to find different subjects. They manage to talk about anything and everything, and when they do talk about themselves they gloss over it with a grace that lifts others up and fills them with excitement.

I'm that first narrator. The proud, selfish narrator that can't think of another way to begin a sentence.



To be fair, I've done my share of interesting things. In Kansas alone, I danced and sang on stage with a myriad of joyful personages, joined the dab squad, wore multiple tiaras, and impersonated Darth Vader. I even survived a haunted golf cart ride. But I forgot that even though the narrator is important, there are other characters in our first-person novels. Some of those characters are known and well beloved, while others are little more than annoying necessities. The richest stories explore these other characters and acknowledge how important they are, even if we don't always like them. Even if they hurt us. Even if we give and don't get anything back.

My workshop epiphany reminded me that my first-person novel is very much a work-in-progress. I'm still afraid to walk into a roomful of people, my perseverance is weaker than my muscles, and wonder is awfully hard to come by—and that's not even mentioning such unattainable things as selflessness. But the workshop managed to penetrate all my cowardice and weakness and teach me one thing: life's a little bit like a haunted golf cart ride. One has to have courage to get on it, to do what we know we should, and, before that, the perseverance to wait for our one glorious turn. But when that turn comes, we hold on, screaming and laughing, to the wonder of that ride, because after the sadness, after the fear, after the loneliness, there is always joy.



Elizabeth

- - -Luke C.- - x



This workshop was different. The fact that it was strange made me afraid. I'm terrified of change, after all. However, no matter how hesitant I was coming into this workshop, I quickly adjusted to the change and realized it was for the better. I've grown up more, a lot has happened since the year prior, and I was trying to figure out how to adult, so I may as well get use to change happening.

This workshop was different. I got out of the car feeling a bit drained, but then I felt surprised as I was immediately tackled by 30 people all at once and was overwhelmed by joy and excitement. There were a lot of new faces. And they all had a sense of wonder and shock and intrigue about this place we call home. This was what I liked about this workshop the most: witnessing all the newcomers experiencing this for the first time and finally understanding the magic of workshop.

This workshop was different. There was an emptiness of several people missing. But you can't really blame them for not coming. All of them are busy adulting and maturing in life as much as you are and workshop was simply something that they couldn't go to because they are busy changing the world. It was a miracle that I was even able to come to this workshop. And I didn't prepare myself for what was to happen this year.

Yes, this year was a whole lot of different. People have come and gone. New people have entered in my life. New circumstances affected the personality development within me as I explored new jobs, figured out insurances for everything, and started to pay bills. Yeah, I thought, it's amazing that I am able to get to go to this workshop. But maybe I've outgrown SW...

This workshop was different because I proved myself wrong. I still needed this workshop no matter how old and wise and mature I thought I was. I would be 20 in a few months before this SW. When you are older, you are expected to act more responsibly and be a role model to others. That's a lot of pressure. Coming to this workshop and being able to fulfill that role to some extent was a learning curve I needed.

- - - Luke C., cont. - - x

This workshop was different because more new people were here and fewer old people were around. But that's okay. It's was as if it was time for a new generation of OYANers to rise up and discover everything awesome about OYAN by going to SW for themselves. In past years I was always one of those middle children of OYAN...

This year was different because a lot of the older siblings were now gone and now I had to fulfill that oldie role for some newbies going to the workshop. And it was terrifying yet also a joy. I was not able to talk to the vast majority of first time OYANers going to SW. Yet the ones I did impacted my life while I tried to impact theirs. Many of them are so young—or young at heart—and I was able to see something in them that I was beginning to lose sight of in myself. Wonder. The kind of wonder you see in an innocent child.

This year was different because I know that I'm no longer a child. I've made many mistakes in life and will continue to make more in the future, but there is something I feel like you should always try to hold onto: wonder. Because wonder keeps you young. People feel like wonder sometimes is in the way and push it aside to do more adult-y things because there is absolutely "no way" wonder can be as important. But it's one of the most important qualities a person can have and it's a very rare quality to see in today's culture.

This workshop was different because I was different. I've changed so much this past year that this workshop was something I desperately needed. From hanging out with old friends to hanging out with new. From scribbling critiques in critique groups to sessions about writing and life and God's plan for you.

The definition of this workshop was different. And different scares a lot of people because you don't know what to expect. I was absolutely terrified at first too. But this was probably my favorite workshop. Because coming in and saying to myself, yes it's different, and taking it all in, I moved forward with and just simply "YOLOed" it.

Workshop was different, but that's okay. Sometimes different is better because it develops your character, makes you brave, and carves you into the person that God wants you to be to change this lost world deprived of wonder.

Luke



- - - Brianna H. - - x

My first Workshop, in 2016, was a miracle. Not because it was hard to get there or anything, but because it gave me a home, a place where I fit in. A place where I was loved. It was there that I was the happiest I've ever been. It was my Narnia, my magical land discovered at a small college in Kansas. Leaving was the hardest thing I have ever done in my life.

In the in-between time I counted down the days (I had a no-kidding paper chain going in my room); I couldn't wait for the next year. I started making plans before June was even finished. It was what I lived for. I counted other events around the Church calendar and Workshop (and not in that order). It got to the point where OYAN became an idol for me, and I had to step away from the Forum for a month.

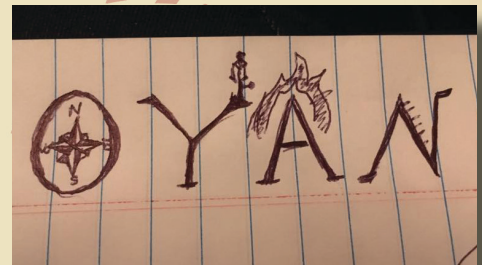
This year, I went into the week with the expectation that I was going home. To see my friends, to have fun, to do the things that brought me joy. It was all about me. Not consciously, I didn't really think "this is my Workshop, I'm doing this for me," but that was the attitude behind it.

When Mr. S gave his first session, I thought I agreed with him, that he had moved me. Selfishness is something I've known I've struggled with for a long time. But there was a large part of me (who am I kidding, most of me), that was going "but this is my Workshop, I want to spend time with my friends and do the things I have planned and I don't want to be selfless."

That's the attitude that I took all week, and it made everything feel off. Sure, I definitely had fun, but it wasn't the pure, unadulterated joy of last year, and it led to me being deliberately oblivious to others' needs and wants and desires and feelings.

I want to say it was Workshop, the last session or something that happened afterwards that changed things, but it wasn't. It was actually all the other reflection posts in the Facebook group and on the Forum. After reading each one I'd just sit staring at the computer screen in stunned silence. Thank you guys for writing those.

For me, OYAN had become my everything, Workshop the place I was always trying to get back to. But really, it's a waystop. A place to refresh, to learn, to be renewed and strengthened for the battle that is to come. My first year, it was my Narnia, now it's Rivendell. Guys, it's really, really hard to love strong. I'll pray for you, will you pray for me?



Brianna

- - - Lydia D. - - x

My most life-changing Summer Workshop moment occurred while I was lying on my stomach on the sidewalk, all by myself.

Well, I wasn't really by myself.

The bugs were there.

One of the things that made the 2017 SW special was that there were three optional self-discovery quests to choose from. I chose Gabrielle's quest: seeing wonder. The first mission was to find something mundane on campus, then "Quietly observe it until you discover unexpected beauty," and write a poem about it.

By the time I could begin my quest on Monday night, it was already dark outside, so I wandered around outside the Bell Center looking for an easy thing to write about. The first thing I saw was a rock on the sidewalk. I came up with a stupid, phoned-in poem idea about the rock.

Oh, come on, I told myself, you can't just pick the first idea that pops into your head.

Fine. I would skip the rock and find a bug. I loved bugs.

I began scanning the sidewalk for one.

It didn't take long for me to find my bug. She was black, winged, and tiny, much smaller than a common housefly. The odd thing about her was that her front pair of legs were longer than her back legs, making it appear as if she was almost trying to stand upright.

I could write my poem about how weird it was to see an upright bug. I watched her crawl around the sidewalk for several minutes.

Then, she walked past another bug—a bug no more than half her size. That was interesting! I had been completely selling myself short with my idea for a poem about the length of her legs—clearly, the interesting thing I was supposed to notice was that even among two very, very tiny things, one could appear to be a giant while the other was a dwarf.

But then, my upright bug left. She abandoned our sidewalk to crawl away, disappearing into the grass.



- - - Lydia D., cont. - - x

I mused that if one bug had crawled into the grass, there might be thousands more that I couldn't see. Aha! There was my poem idea—the fact that there's probably more going on in a patch of grass than meets the eye.

I was wrong about all three of these ideas for a bug poem. The real poem came a moment later.

I was right that there were thousands of other bugs in the grass. I was wrong that I couldn't see them.

Once my bug, my tour guide, had led my gaze into the blades of grass, I realized that I could see all the other bugs within. And I knew what they were doing.

In the fall, I had opted to skip physics in order to take entomology—the study of insects. That class enabled me to actually understand what was happening as I watched my bugs crawl in the grass. The bugs with the larger thoraxes, including my “guide,” must've been the females. They would crawl to the top of a blade of grass and wait. The bugs with the thinner thoraxes were the males. They were fighting over the females. I even got to observe the behavior of a male “guarding” a female from other males after mating with her, something I had only read about in my textbooks before.

I won't share my entire poem (it was vague and frankly kind of impenetrable), but one of the lines was, “What could we love if we learned how?”

If I had known nothing about entomology and had stumbled upon the insects in the grass, I might've thought it was cool. But I wouldn't have been awestruck.



- - - Lydia D., cont. - - x



Because, looking at those insects, I was awestruck. I found it unfathomable that people were just walking by not knowing what was going on down there. I wanted to scream to the world to pay attention. It felt like a burden on my heart that I was bursting to share—but I wasn't sure if anyone else would understand and care.

That is wonder.

I had needed to work for that wonder. I had needed to spend an entire semester going to an 8 a.m. college class to learn enough to even care. And I had needed to be patient, ignoring my lazy poem ideas until I actually found what I was meant to find. Learning begets wonder. Patience begets wonder.

The entire Workshop experience represents that. SW is a wondrous time, but it also is designed to be a learning time. Knowing too much should never kill your wonder. Knowing the process should never "take the magic out" of the result. Knowing and learning and striving should increase your wonder of the world. And they will—if you let them.

Lydia

