



From the Ashes

Summer Workshop *2018*

— Journal —

I came to workshop with no clear home. I had a youth group. I had a homeschool group. But anytime I was with them, it was painfully obvious that they, as valuable as they were, were not my home. The only time I truly felt at home was with a friend who also writes.

When I joined OYAN, I got a taste of home. The hundreds of writers on the forum made me feel welcome, but online friends cannot compare with real friends.

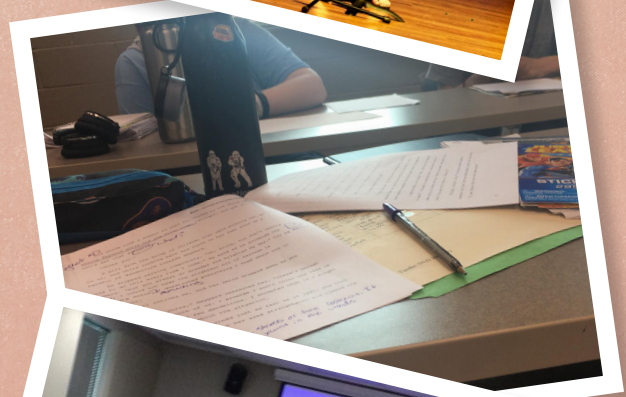
Then came workshop. I met old forum friends. I made new friends. I talked about their books, I talked about my book. We talked about anything and everything. I had the time of my life.

Friday night was when it really hit me. When we sang "Home" after Mr. S's final session, I realized that I had found my home. I didn't need to try to force my way into my youth group or homeschool group. They weren't my home because I didn't belong there.

I belong with OYAN.

This community is my home.
All of you awesome people,
members or staff, are my
family. It is my hope that OYAN
continues for decades to come,
giving other teenagers like me a
place where they can find both
Home and a Family where they
truly belong.

Garrett J.





I almost didn't come to Workshop this year.

Not because of money, not because of time, because I genuinely wasn't sure if I wanted to come. I wasn't sure if I wanted to be there. Last year was bittersweet for me. My friends from the year before either weren't there, or had gone their separate ways. I was alone, and didn't know what to do. I didn't want to be alone again.

This year, I came on a whim. I thought, "If I spend the week alone, at least I'll get some critiques and information on how to better my novel." I didn't expect to be proved so wrong.

The theme was the first thing to get me. The last two years have been so incredibly hard. Not for any particular reason, I've just spiraled. Spiraled into self-doubt, into self-loathing, into believing that I'm never going to get better. Spiraled into fear, into depression, into anxiety, and being alone. I knew as soon as Mr. S. explained the theme that I was in for an emotional week.

Jim's Student Speaker talk was the second to get me. I remember sitting there in my seat, tears streaming down my face as he said everything my broken soul needed to hear. I can't even begin to say how much I needed that. Torry Martin's talk on his testimony, and Christina's Student Speaker talk were just a couple of others that touched my heart. The one I've always kept so guarded.

To my surprise, I didn't spend the week alone. For one thing, people remembered me. Remembered me. That forgettable girl who never really gets out of her own head and actually just talked to people she didn't know. That girl who has always been too afraid of imposing to join in on any group or activity. They smiled and waved, and actually talked to me.

This Workshop was my Pheonix Moment. I came with no hope. I came accepting the fact that I was going to spend it alone. I came accepting the fact that I didn't deserve the time or friendship of anyone there. I came positive that no one there would like me, and that I was just there solely for my novel that I wasn't even sure anyone liked.

I left with a healed heart and the courage to take life on again.

I came to Workshop this year out of fear. I was afraid of what I'd miss if I didn't. I'd miss the jokes and not understand the references. I'd miss that one life changing moment that everyone else had. I was afraid. I was terrified. It's kind of ironic, isn't it? Fear was the only courage I had left.

But I did it. I came to Workshop. And you know what? I don't regret it.

In Torry Martin's first talk, he said something that really hit home. "When people start putting limits on you, that's when they start to apply to you," he said. I hadn't realized how many limits I was living under that weren't even there. I was letting my fear control me. I was letting the anxiety convince me that there were barriers and walls that didn't exist. There are no limits and no reasons to not rise up out of the ashes.

So thank you. For reminding me that it's okay to be a little broken. That I can rise up. That I have somewhere to call home. That sometimes fear is the only courage you have left, and that's okay. Thank you for healing my broken heart.

Nattilie K.



Since I can remember, I fought growing up.

If Peter Pan came knocking on my window with the promise of eternal childhood, I would probably have followed him. I knew growing up was inevitable, but it terrified me.

I came to SW knowing that very likely it would be my last and determined to get every moment out of it that I could. It had been a hard year for me. Friends I'd known all my life were almost nonexistent in it now. Others I'd looked up to since I was little, chose a path that I couldn't follow and though they didn't mean it, it felt like a betrayal. I came to SW not realizing how broken I was because I stuffed the pain down into the drawers of my mind, slammed them shut, and called it healing. So on the first morning when Nairam said she was going to play a song for the broken-hearted, I didn't think it applied to me. The song was beautiful, but that isn't what touched me. I still don't know exactly what happened, but halfway through the song, tears began streaming down my cheeks. I, who rarely cries, was weeping and broken and for the first time in a long time, open.

Workshop itself was amazing. After that first session, I was softer somehow. I found myself laughing and crying again and again. Most of my friends from previous years weren't there, so I got to know new people including some of the oldies I was so terrified of before. (Mrs. S was right. Most of them don't bite.) Andrew Peterson's talks and concert were amazing. I cried again. The week went on, faster than I wanted, praying; questing;

doing a skit for open mic night; then hugging and screaming with my fellow open mic-ers because we were all high from relief. I narrated an arm wrestling match and made it on the R.I.P. list in critique group. (Go Malvegils!) I threw Frisbees and danced until I was too sore to wear my cosplay heels the next day. I listened to Torry Martin speak and laughed a lot and cried a little too. Again. I talked to more people than I ever had before in a week. I had my first mentor appointment and despite my terror, it was great. Every morning I got up early to breathe and think alone. I had deep conversations with people I barely knew and inside jokes with people who felt like family. I danced and battled and prayed and wrote and laughed and cried and enjoyed every moment.

Then, Friday night came.

Mr. S began talking about innocence, about hope and new beginnings. I tried to understand why his words were making me hold my breath. And suddenly, I saw. In spite of all my kicking and screaming and fighting and dread, somehow in the past year, I had Grown Up. That hurt. Hurt hard. But I realized something else: I was fighting the wrong fight. When I should've been fighting to keep my innocence, I let disappointment forge impenetrable armor around my heart. The world poisoned me with cynicism and I let it. I was ashamed of the thoughts that battled for control of my mind, so I told no one, forgetting that the enemy's greatest ally is secrecy. I became jaded and hard and never realized that long before I ever lost my childhood, I lost my innocence.



After the session as I sobbed in an empty bathroom, I cried for the home I'd found, the place that allowed my mask to slip a little, the people who loved me unconditionally, the thought that I had to leave in the morning and maybe never return. But, maybe, I also cried for the thing I'd lost and for the person I'd become. And once again, tears brought healing. I stepped back out into the Bell Center and hugged and cried and laughed and talked with the most amazing people in the world. My favorite memories happened that night. Bubbles and worship and tears and laughter and deep conversations finished filling my heart to the brim.

I'm not so afraid anymore.

Growing up is not my enemy anymore.

That night, I laid down my battle, and I took up a greater battle. There was hope in Mr. S's words. And a promise made by One who came as a child, lived as a man, died as God, and yet never lost His innocence. The One who heals. I heard His promise, "Restoration of the ashes." And I answered.

"...to give them beauty for ashes..."

Shaina E.



Phoenix



When the dark is so black you don't know where you are,
When you're trapped behind prison's merciless bars;
When you walk through the ashes that choke you of breath,
When all of your life has turned to death...
Remember you will rise.

Cuz what if the sparks are the hope and the fire's the light?
What if the smoke is what lifts you right up to the sky?
What if the dark is what makes the light shine so bright?
What if the rekindlin' embers say, "it's alright"?

When the fire's so hot and you're screaming the pain,
When for once in your life, you want it to rain;
When all you can see are the flames all around,
And the ashes of your life, scattered on the ground...
Remember you will rise.

Cuz what if the sparks are the hope and the fire's the light?
What if the smoke is what lifts you right up to the sky?
What if the dark is what makes the light shine so bright?
What if the rekindlin' embers say, "it's alright"?

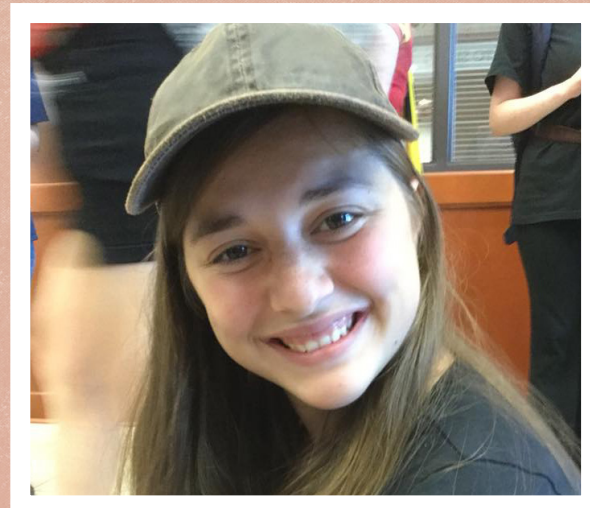
When all seems dead and all is courage lost,
When you're livin' in life's worst holocaust—
Remember the glorious Victor of death;
He's conquered this all and given you rest...
So you can rise.

Cuz what if the sparks are the hope and the fire's the light?
What if the smoke is what lifts you right up to the sky?
What if the dark is what makes the light shine so bright?
What if the rekindlin' embers say, "it's alright"?

There's a flash of light, oh brilliant light!
Rise up now, don't give up your fight.
From the ashes, rise up to the sky
Come on and shout your victory cry.

Cuz the sparks are your hope and the fire's your light,
The smoke is what lifts you right up to the sky.
The dark is what makes the light shine so bright,
And because of Him, it is alright.

Hannah T.



I tend to over-anticipate things.

I'm the kind of kid who almost likes an unopened present better than one I've got right in my hands.

It's easier to imagine something as perfect and fantasize how awesome it's going to be in your head. It's nice to have something "perfect" to look forward to.

And I'm telling you, I was *really* looking forward to this summer workshop.

The first time I went, I didn't know a lot of people. I had only a few friends. Only a few people knew my name. I had a few wonderful mishaps of getting sick and losing my phone over the course of the week. I'd just had the worst time of my life moving from my home in Washington and really just didn't know where I belonged.

But in spite of all that, I loved it. I knew I'd found my home and my people: what I was really searching for at that point. And I knew I was going to come back.

So after working my way through another couple years, I finally got my money together. I was going to workshop again. I was going back home.

This time things were a little different.

I wasn't going in hoping to make a few friends to keep up with on the forum. Maybe have a few fun interactions and learn some stuff.

I knew all that was happening.

I knew I had a whole fanclub for my book now that I'd get to meet and thank and discuss with in person. I knew I'd finally get to meet one of my favorite authors in person. I knew I was going to have a week packed full of meaningful moments and finally getting to actually hang out with some of my best friends in the world. I knew it was going to be incredible.

But I also knew it was going to only last a week.

That once it was over, it . . . would be over. I wouldn't have that date on my calendar that I'd be counting down the days to anymore and plotting with friends about all the fun things to do.





It would be in the past. And for me that wasn't a fun place to put things.

I determined I'd make the most of my time. I'd spend every waking second of my time making as many spectacular memories as I could. Hopefully the feelings and memories would be slower to fade afterwards if I made every moment unforgettable, right?

I'd say I got a pretty good start on the first night. I met a ton of people. I helped throw a birthday party in the dorms and served a pumpkin pie with a credit card and paper towels because I forgot to bring any utensils.

It was awesome, just like I thought it'd be.

And then after talking my poor roommate's ear off in the dark that night, when everything was quiet, I just lay there for a long time. Partly because of the inconsiderate lightning storm that showed up. And partly because the terror of workshop being over had started in the back of my mind. That was one day back into the irretrievable past. The clock was ticking.

And so I woke up the next morning, bolted out the door and proceeded to frantically have as much fun as humanly possible. It was really fun. I loved it, so long as I didn't remember that it was all going to be over in just a few more days.

At the end of the day, I couldn't have imagined a better time to put Andrew Peterson's talk and concert. A few of his songs (I believe it was "The Dark Before The Dawn" specifically) just . . . It's hard to put exactly into words, but I later told my mom it was like a big knot had untied in my chest while I was listening.

I of course had another really long talk with my roommate that night while we both sorted out our thoughts afterward. I can't remember the exact words in Andrew Peterson's talk that hit that front for me. But I can definitely tell you that I slept better that night.

Because at least the jist that I came away from his talk with stuck with me through the rest of the week and actually helped me have a more genuinely good time than just one spent misering away good moments. I didn't cry when I left. It was a happy parting and I went back into everyday life more encouraged and fueled to face it, not crushed because SW was over.

Just because something good ends doesn't mean it's not good anymore.

Rosey M.



I have nightmares—some are ridiculous, but most twist a piece of reality out of proportion and make it terrifying. My most memorable pre-workshop nightmare was hideous: I stood on the sidewalk, and no one would speak to me. People I'd spoken to on the forum for three years, faces I recognized from workshop photos—no one noticed me, until they started laughing. I woke up in a panic. That wouldn't be me at workshop. It couldn't. So, I analyzed the problem. The issue in the nightmare really wasn't that no one would talk to me. The real problem was that I let it affect me. If I let no one affect me, it no longer mattered, and was just a weird case of every OYANer at workshop being rude.

When I got on the plane to fly from Washington State to Kansas, I was alone. It didn't bother me. Maybe it should have—I was seventeen, alone, and had never been in a plane before. I felt capable and prepared for whatever happened. 2016 and 2017 were stuffed brimful of family conflict, betrayal, and depression. I'd handled most of it alone, as my own island. Whatever happened, I could handle it alone. I wasn't lying to myself when I said I wanted nothing magical out of workshop. I didn't believe in the whole 'workshop magic with a unicorn on top' feeling that everyone talked about, anyway. It was a college campus in Kansas. Seriously. My standards were low. I wanted to learn more about writing, and ... I really wanted my roommate to like me.

Three years of endless messaging, video calls, phone calls—we had to be good friends in real life, right? Except for that, I didn't need anyone else at workshop, and no one needed me. That was how I wanted it. I was proud of my self-sufficiency, the way I bundled everything that hurt me into a tidy little package with a bow on top.

Then, I cried.

On Tuesday morning, no less.

It was Jim Viebke's student session that made me cry. They were quiet tears, the kind that no one noticed, and I distracted myself from it by drawing all over my knuckles and palms—plus signs, stars, words like KILLMONGER and SHURI. Meanwhile, his talk cracked open all the little spaces I'd barricaded so carefully before workshop.

On Tuesday night—after the homicidal golf cart ride, The Hug, Andrew Peterson's concert (that I cried through)—I felt magic. Confident in a way that wasn't Cassie, army of one. It was Cassie, one of an army. I loved the feeling. But late Tuesday night, I got a cryptic text from my mom. It was the kind that sent my sky-high emotions into the depths of anxiety. I laid awake most of the night, with shaky hands, nausea, and feeling like there wasn't enough air in the room. I got a text the next morning that cleared everything up again, but that night made me afraid again. Okay, so I had a little workshop magic—the payoff for my Jonah act of running away from everything, straight to workshop. But that text proved it. Once I went home, every problem would wrap around me again, and no





matter how I changed over this week, it wouldn't matter. I couldn't box up the magic and take it with me. Maybe my army-of-one approach was the only way to make it in the real world.

I didn't have answers on Friday night. But it didn't matter. People were singing, hugging, crying, holding each other. I felt like I was home. People needed me—I yanked someone into a group hug, wiggled my arm between seats to hold someone's hand till my arm went numb. Despite everyone's tears, I was happy.

Outside the Bell Center, in the dark, with people draped over each other, swaying back and forth, and crying, I tried to be brave because I wanted to tell Jim how much his talk meant. Halfway through my prepared sentence-and-a-half, I almost cried. That brief half-second of almost crying brought people around me. I ended up at the epicenter of four or five hugs. I wasn't the army of one. Other people didn't need me. I needed them. I was one in an army, and that was okay.

Cassie B.





When I joined OYAN, I heard about how this Workshop happened every summer in Kansas. I vaguely wanted to go, but I wasn't sure I would. As it got closer to June, I started seeing topics on the student forum where people hyped about Workshop. After pounding out the rest of my novel, I signed up for Workshop and joined the excitement. I looked forward to meeting OYANers, but at the same time I was nervous because I tend to be awkward when meeting new people. I wasn't sure I would fit in with all the people who had attended before.

Monday: After a three-hour flight, I arrived at the MNU campus. I stepped out of the shuttle to be greeted by a tacklehug from The Silver Brid. I met a few people I'd chatted with on the forum, but it was very awkward and I spent most of the time standing near the wall. After getting my packet, I discovered that my critique group leader was Tabitha, whom I had talked to on the forum. I found my roommate, Kelly, and sat with her and Lela at dinner, they were both super fun to be around. The orientation session was funny (sock monkeys, anyone?), and Mr. and Mrs. S. are awesome.

Tuesday: I cosplayed as Wanda Maximoff/Scarlet Witch and was adopted by Samantha (also Wanda) and Theta (Quicksilver.) I started cafeteria clapping for Mr. S. at lunch, one of the only cases of cafeteria clapping that had a purpose. Hanging out with Garrett and Amy was cool, we conversed in British accents. In critique group, reading my own excerpts aloud wasn't as nerve-racking as I thought it would be. I crossed swords with many worthy foes in foam sword battles. I loved the Andrew Peterson concert, especially the songs he played on the piano. I'd never heard his music before. I played late night chess with Garrett... which I remember none of... and eventually I lost on purpose.

Wednesday: I went symbol hunting with Amy, Kelly, and Garrett. The gazebo and Tipping Lounge were our nemeses. My critique group shipped my characters without my permission. I participated in foam sword empire night. Like foam sword battles, but less organized, outside, and at night. Not what I expected, but still fun. I went on Mr. S's haunted golf cart ride and yet returned safely to the Bell Center.



Thursday: Daniel spoke on falling in love with your writing, something that I definitely need to do more. I opened a bag of jelly beans in critique group and it exploded, thus the “floor jelly beans” and the “floor-free jelly beans.” Our entire critique group adopted Lexis, a character in Tabitha’s novel. A bunch of us congregated to hear Rosey read *Blank Mastermind* and we got to see Jane on Skype. I played a Lord of the Rings piano medley at Open Mic Night. I went first, and I was super nervous beforehand, but I got the best hugs from the OYANers backstage. It made me happy to hear that people enjoyed the music. OMN in general was awesome, all the participants did great and I had fun watching all the acts. I learned swing dancing and danced with a partner for the first time. I randomly started dancing in circles in the gym after swing dancing, I think someone filmed it. I fangirled over *Blank Mastermind* after midnight with Kelly.

Friday: I cosplayed as Wonder Woman and people loved it. Last day of critique group: photo shoot, fangirling, and yeet chorus. Foam sword battles, part 2: Ethan running distraction; seeing the fear in my opponents’ eyes; and proving with Ethan that it is, in fact, possible to “kill” someone with only one leg left. Mr. S’s “Crownless” speech was probably my favorite speech all week. “Home” and all the glowsticks were awesome. A group of us bounced a balloon with a face (named Louie) around in the air. 11 PM mafia game in front of the Bell center while listening to worship songs.

Saturday: I ran around getting people to sign my binder and workshop shirt. I was finally comfortable walking up to people and initiating conversation. Adrienne adopted me into her “family,” which was awesome. Right before leaving workshop, I hugged as many people as I could reach. The whole way home, I kept thinking, “I have to come back next year.” OYAN gave me an opportunity to make new friends. Summer Workshop was an epic adventure, a reminder to hope.

*“From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
A light from the shadows shall spring;
Renewed shall be blade that was broken,
The crownless again shall be king.” – The Riddle of Strider*

Dara J.





Tackle hugs and goofy grins
 Hunt your stamps for phoenix pins
 Elven style jewelry bins
 Battles with foam noodles

Loud laughter and an awesome roommate
 Sessions help you to create
 Flash mobs, giggling, up too late
 A night for all your doodles

Costumes, clothes-pins, purple hair
 A game of ninja here and there
 Lift Cecilia in a chair
 And give her a pumpkin pie

G'nomes, selfies, marvel day
 Sign my binder, banana bae
 Dabbing, star wars, Kylo, Rey
 Gatorade likes your bowtie

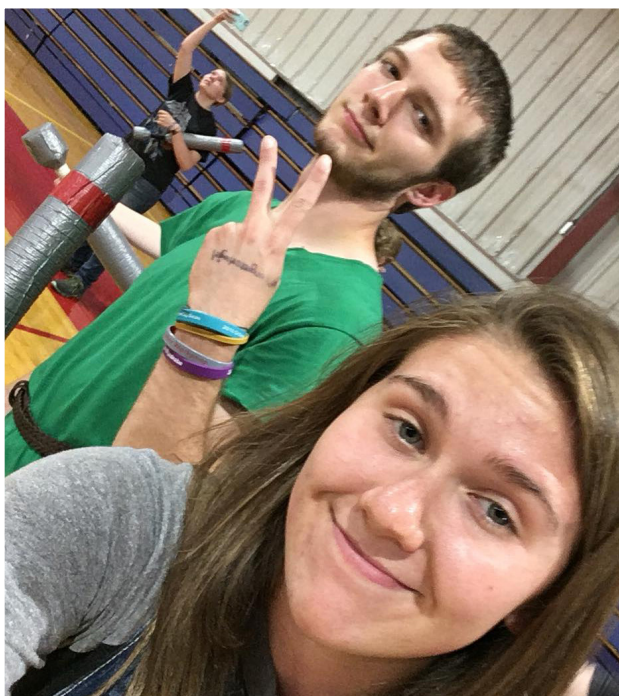
Open mic night, swing dance too
 Fireflies and . . . have I met you?
 Sunsets, sitting with your crew
 A haunted golf cart ride

Concerts, hashtags, ice cream scoops
 Laughter and critiquing groups
 Glowsticks and pink earring hoops
 Finally at your side

Music, sing out every song
 Goodbyes have always felt so wrong
 But I'll see you next year, won't be long
 Bubbles, friends and stars bright white

Authors all, here we unite
 Tonight everything feels alright
 Together where we belong.

Addy M.





My first summer workshop was in 2015, mere weeks after I joined the forum. The theme was Through the Wardrobe, which was fitting for a thirteen-year-old so new to OYAN. I liked it so much I convinced my parents to make the 19-hour journey again the very next year.

SW 2016 is where I really found the SW magic everyone talks about experiencing. I felt like it really made an impact on me, and I found somewhere I really belonged - a small part of the sea of lights shining in a dark auditorium, part of a crowd of the people who had become so special to me so quickly.

I had to make the hard decision to skip SW 2017. I knew money was tighter, and I knew my parents would do everything they could to make it work. I made the decision before they could, but it really hurt. I avoided pretty much every mention of SW that year.

I finally returned this year, full of both excitement and anxiety. I found myself fearing meeting the people I'd come to care about so much. What if they didn't want me around? What if they all ended up in a critique group without me? And what if this SW didn't have any of the magic for me at all? I'd like to think I've grown as a person and a writer in the past two years, but what if that meant the sessions were no longer what I needed to hear?

The magic of SW was different this year, but it was just as present and just as beautiful. With the new tracks, I was able to find some sessions I could learn from, even if they weren't the same things I needed to learn back when I was fourteen.

I stopped worrying about missing out. I skipped some of the biggest student-led events in favor of spending time with a smaller group of my favorite people in the world.

I got to feel like I mattered to the people who mattered most to me. And that was exactly what I needed.

SW isn't going to have the same magic for me every year, and it won't have the same magic for everyone. This year, I found it in new places.

SW always has been a light for me. But this year, it wasn't the sea of lights I was looking for. It was the individual lights within the sea, and the people who held them. The people whose shoulders I could lean on as I cried, the people who read excerpts in funny voices and sang songs from musicals with me at the top of their lungs, the people who saluted when I walked into the room, and the people who shared secret smiles as they wrote #meep on the back of their evaluation sheets. The people who hugged me anyway, even after I warned them I was getting sick.

I found the magic of SW in the people who shared it with me. I found it in the individual moments we spent together. And I got to watch my friends search for it wherever they needed to find it. I don't know if everyone found it, but I hope I could create at least a little bit in return for the magic they gave me.

Someday, I'll look back and realize I've grown up again. What I found this year might not be what I need anymore. But I hope the friendships that have impacted me so much will grow even stronger. I hope the lessons I've learned and the memories I've made stick with me. And I hope I can continue to find and appreciate those magical light-in-the-dark moments and people.

Jaina P.

Everyone is looking for something when they go to Summer Workshop. I wasn't sure what I wanted to find this year, but it ended up finding me. I found love. I found strength. I found kindness and joy. I found good hearts and deep souls. I found what I left last year, and then some.

I found my faith, trapped deep inside me, begging to come out. I cried during Andrew Peterson's concert. Surrounded by friends, by family, the people who love me, I knew God was there. And He was there with me the rest of the week. He was there when I had to say goodbye. He's still here.

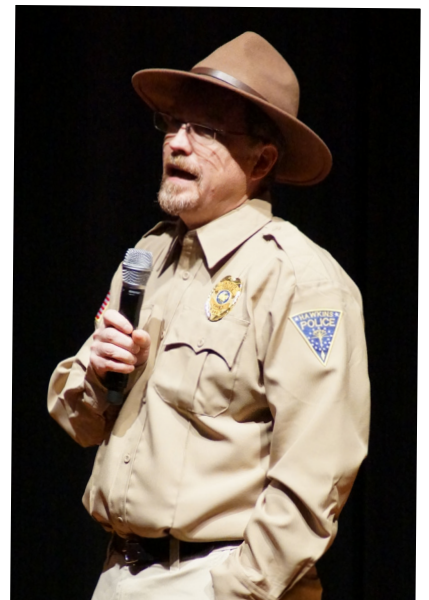
I found old friends, and I made new ones. I kicked down the walls in my heart to love people with all that I had. I took my mask off so I could look people in the eye and let them know that I'm real. And it felt good. Friendship is about vulnerability and trust. It's a risk, but it's worth it. It was especially worth it this year.

"I found hope. That was the message this year. Rise from the ashes. Hope in the darkness, find joy where there is none. Good things are hard. Don't give up. Mr. S's talk on Tuesday was the perfect start to the week. He said don't deny the darkness, but look for different kinds of light. Be a different kind of light."

I don't want to lose anything that I found at workshop this year. I took it all home with me, but it's so hard to keep hold of. Being yourself is easy at workshop, but I put my mask back on when I boarded the plane to go home. It's easy to forget about being a light when you're caught up with school and other responsibilities. It's easy to forget about all the good things when the bad things are waiting at home. Please don't forget. Please don't give up.

Life gets really busy. Priorities change. I understand. But don't forget about being a light. Don't forget about love and hope and trust. Hold onto those things. We'll see our family again one day.

Martha M.



I came into workshop with a mixture of emotions: excitement because I was coming home, fear that workshop wouldn't be the safe haven I needed.

Tuesday morning Mr. S. unpacked the theme of "From the Ashes". As I listened to him talk about the phoenix rising from the ashes, a flicker of hope awakened within me. It seemed too big of a coincidence to not be God orchestrating it. Maybe, just maybe, workshop would be what I needed. A rest. A revival of whatever optimism and hope and love had died inside of me.

But fear rose within me, quelling my hope. How could I be honest with others about my struggles, like Mr. S. suggested? How could I—broken and burned and hardened—rise from the ashes?

My story was always the last to be read at critique group. So as I listened to the others read their amazing stories, waiting for my turn, fear reared its ugly head again. I could literally hear my heart beat in my ears as I read my excerpt.

Inwardly, I scolded myself. I had received positive feedback for my story on the forum. Yet I had this overwhelming fear that made me want to cry or hide or both: I was afraid that they would hate my novel as much as I did.

I knew my novel wasn't good enough to be published. I knew that no matter how much positive feedback I received there would always be problems with it. But I was afraid that it was garbage, that it wasn't worth all the effort I had

put into it.

Each morning at a student prayer group I thought, "Today will be the day that I'll tell them about what's going on. They'll still accept me, right?"

But I was too afraid.

Fear seemed to mark my workshop. Whilst playing Balderdash, I was too afraid to ask what a verb was because I always got parts of speech confused. At lunch, I was too afraid to voice my thoughts or sit with someone I didn't know. At critique group, I was too afraid to tell them how scared I was and how I didn't love my story as much as they did.

I was afraid that I would be judged for my fear, cynicism, and discouragement. So I stayed silent.

I believed that everyone else could rise from the ashes. Everyone else could be honest. But I couldn't. I had burned too long to rise again.

Around other OYANers, I could forget about my fear and laugh and joke and talk about writing. I was genuinely happy. But whenever I was alone, the fear that was so easy to ignore around others was suddenly overwhelming.

You're probably expecting that the climax of this story is when I finally worked up the courage to tell someone and received hugs and love and acceptance. But that didn't happen. I was too afraid to speak out.





But that didn't stop God from speaking to me through others.

As I walked to critique group on Wednesday, I ran into Torry Martin. I told him about my novel, and he asked me what I planned to do with it. I told him, "I'd like to get it published, but I know it's not good enough. Plus, I'm on the ninth draft, and it's getting a little ridiculous at this point."

He didn't tell me not to have those thoughts. He didn't tell me that nine drafts is ridiculous. Instead, all he said was, "The least amount of drafts I've done on a screenplay is 36." Hope flickered within me. Maybe, just maybe, my story wasn't worthless.

On Thursday morning, I listened to a student speaker talk about falling in love with writing again. And in some strange way I knew that God was speaking to me through him, telling me that my fear and cynicism about writing wasn't the end of the story. Instead I could fall in love with writing again. I could love something flawed. I could rise from the ashes.

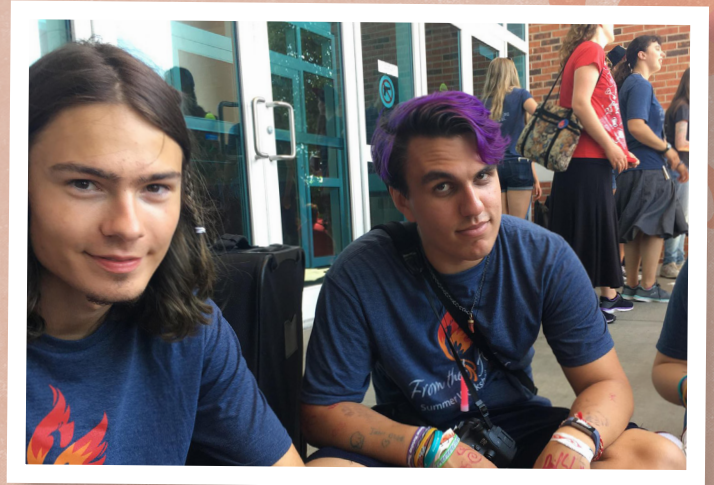
Then on Friday night Mr. S. gave his last talk of the week. He said something that challenged me: "God can restore your innocence."

Looking at the cheerful, innocent writers around me who still loved their stories like crazy, I thought I couldn't ever be like that again. I thought I was too far gone, that I would forever be cynical, fearful, and discouraged.

But God told me that there was hope. He could restore my innocence. He could rekindle what had died within me. He could make me rise from the ashes.

And that night something happened: From the ashes a fire was woken, and my fear couldn't stamp it out.

Rachel E.





Do you remember the time when
We gathered our hopes and dreams
Pulled ourselves together and
Tried to stop bursting at the seams

Waited a whole year for this
And the time has finally come
Will they remember our names or
Have we become the forgotten one

We try to hide our pain and
Our broken emptiness
This place is supposed to be different
But our fear says it's like the rest

Still we soldier onward for
We've waited far too long
Our friends are out there waiting
To join us in the song

There are people we've never seen before
And yet we know them so well
We haven't heard their voices
But they make our empty hearts swell

And at last the day is come and
We're locked in a tight embrace
Though we'll all have to go home one day
We'll never leave this place



Samantha A.

There are so many things I want to say about this workshop, but I feel like I wouldn't be able to cram it all in here without it turning into a novel about my Summer Workshop experience.

So although this short little entry into the journal won't feel as if it cover everything I want to say, I'm gonna focus on how I felt at this workshop.

I felt at peace. This workshop was an escape from everything in life. Since this workshop felt like a new era in OYAN (at least for me), this workshop was like an empty slate. There were new people to talk to and meet. A lot of people from previous workshops were gone. Going out there living their adult lives and God bless them as they continue to fight through this world.

But for me, I got to practice being a bit more of an adult here at this workshop. I was a student helper and that role helped me focus on serving and making all the newbies feel welcomed and loved. It gave me responsibility and a safe environment to learn how to serve and be a role model to newbies. I took it very seriously.

The odd thing though, however was, I was anticipating to be stressed and tired and anxious the whole workshop because of the role and duties I had. And there were times through the week that that definitely happened. But the satisfaction I got from seeing all the newcomers break out of their shell throughout the week and reveal their unique and flourishing personalities had me feel like I was doing something right.



So because of that, this week was the most peaceful week I ever had at any workshop, or probably my whole life so far.

So overall, that's what this workshop was. Peace. Observing a new era of OYAN. And practicing how to be a God-honoring adult.

And there is so much more I want to talk about. To list a few: I'm discovering how much I love writing because of this workshop, I felt the most like myself at this workshop. I was the most comfortable at this workshop.

And memories. So so many memories. I could write a whole other entry purely focused on nostalgia from this workshop that come to mind.

But all those feelings have a place elsewhere. I can talk to people in conversation about these memories. I want this entry to focus on the most important stuff I could draw from this workshop.

And that is peace. Peace with people, peace with writing, and peace with God. This workshop let me slow down my extroverted, crazy mind, to just relax and enjoy the week. Away from how life can weigh you down. Away from drama. Away from all the things that needed to be done at work. Away from trying to plan my future.

Just take a breathe. Enjoy that blue sky. It's okay to relax every once and a while.

Luke C.

I like to give every workshop a one-word theme. I initially gave this year the theme of Hope, but I'm starting to think that it's actually Truth.

2018 was a rough year for me. I spent a lot of the last six months dealing with depression, and while I'm mostly healed from that, it still touches me sometimes. Healing is a process, and while mine is taking its time, I am healing. And my experience has taught me a lot of things. Being in the dark for so long has made me appreciate the light a whole lot more.

I don't know if this year's Workshop was my favorite (I prefer not to have favorites, honestly), but it was so much what I needed. This Workshop was so full of love, and truth, and hope. Heck, the literal theme was "From the Ashes". I spent a lot of this year sitting in the ashes. But I don't want to stay there. I want to burn again, to hope again. To be happy again.

I didn't realize until recently how much I'd been lacking truth in my life. But now I realize how important it is. One spark of Truth can dispel the heaviest darkness—and I know now how heavy the darkness can get sometimes. But the truth can shatter that looming veil of darkness, like a flaming sword that pierces the heart, and a shining light that restores life to the broken.

Andrew Peterson talked about truth during one of his sessions. He said "Tell the truth as beautifully as you can." I think he lives by that standard. I could sit for hours and listen to him talk, or listen to his songs, or read his books. One of the reasons is because they're so beautifully composed. But the main reason is because they're deeply saturated with truth.

Honesty has become a core value of mine, and I hope I live by that—being honest about my struggles and my joys, being transparent and genuine. But I think there's a slight difference between Honesty and Truth, like two sides of the same coin. Honesty sets you free. Truth sets everyone free. Truths like the fact that everyone hurts, and that's ok. Truths like the fact that this broken world is not our home, but Heaven is, and we are going there someday. Truths like the fact that God cares enough about his creation that he died to save it, and that he continues to care for us, gradually guiding us home.

Tell me things like that, with your stories, or poems, or songs, or even paintings. Tell others those things. Remind yourself of those things. And do it as beautifully as you can.

That's something I love about this community. It's something I love about the Workshop. And it's something I love about the S's. They don't sugarcoat things. They're not afraid to talk about the darkness in this world. The world is broken, that's the truth of it. But that's not the end of the story. There's hope

in spite of the darkness. Because the truth is, this world isn't our home. We have a real home, and we're going there one day. There is still hope to be found here, and that's what the best stories are about. Stories about the struggle between good and evil, where good always wins in the end. Stories about hope. Stories that tell the truth as beautifully as they can.

Lillian M.



"I think I experienced friendship in its purest form."

I feel like this sentence sums up my Summer Workshop 2018 experience perfectly yet I need to explain what this means to me.

Social navigation can be an intense task, for me at least. As I am sure some of you can understand, socializing can be turned into a mental spreadsheet of trying to evaluate motives and intentions. Are we in this together or is it every man for himself? That kind of constant questioning is exhausting. Always strategizing, enacting possible drama in the shower and trying to predict what new trend is coming into play takes its toll.

While OYAN has not really been as much of a whirlwind of social drama for me I've had my fair share from time to time, sometimes being not really sure of where I belong in the crowd. This year, the majority of the group in which I had spent the last three years establishing my place wouldn't be attending. We really aren't even the same group of friends as we were a year ago (though I am still in close contact with several of them). But I'd never "workshopped" without those people. I was going into this workshop feeling pretty alone.

Granted, I had a handful of friends who would be going. But it was not a group. It was a bunch of individuals I doubted would ever even want to hang out together (I think God likes to laugh at me) and that I expected I would have to seek out separately.

I walked into this workshop the least prepared I have ever been. My excerpts felt barely done, I had watched informational webinar recordings on my own, and I didn't pack at all until Saturday night. I had no jitters like I usually do when I think about SW. I thought maybe it was because this was my fourth Summer Workshop. Maybe it's because so many of my friends wouldn't be there. Or maybe it's because I've seen so many of my friends who are OYANers in the last year due to weddings, college visits and birthday weekends.

But I never felt a Workshop "vibe" even once I had set foot on campus. I was pleased to be there and see faces but I just wasn't feeling "excitement" like I thought I should be.

After orientation on Monday I sat on the grass and talked with a group of coming and going people, getting to know each other. The evening ended with a large group of people throwing around a Frisbee and laughing hysterically.





And I was uncomfortable.

I spent Monday and most of Tuesday, trying to make myself feel things I didn't. Trying to feel excitement, enthusiasm and wonder.

When I finally let go of trying to feel something I felt strangely... normal.

Here I was at my traditionally most highly anticipated event of the year and I felt normal.

It felt good.

My "group" of friends was less of a formed group but more of a fluid haven. Anyone was welcome to come or go. I don't think there was ever a time that we all sat together at once other than Friday night. We all met many new people. I think I talked to at least 100 different people during the week.



There was no guessing of whether or not we liked each other in this haven of friends. We always came back or dropped by a conversation to say hello. There was no social-political gains seeking. There was no "every man for himself" mentality. There was Once Upon a Time in the library, and ongoing conversations in the cafeteria and Bell Center. There was slap happy Frisbee and swing dancing in the gym. There was no rushing around to get everything done or milking every second to "make it count." There was peace and comfort. Hugs when you wanted them, an open seat at the table, an invitation to the game, someone to lean on when you laughed too hard.

There was the pureness of friendship. It was well-meaning, intentional, open, inviting and loving. It was one of the most peaceful experiences of my life.

I know that not everyone had this experience but I want you to know even though you may not have been able to experience it with me, I experienced it with you. I felt safe and welcomed. I did my best to help you feel that too and I hope I succeeded, if only for a few moments.

Lela G.

A STORY OF BELONGING

You belong
Not because you watch Doctor Who
(You've never seen it)
But because you watch lightning storms from
your window at night

You belong
Not because you write medieval fantasy
(You write Christian romance)
But because you tell stories that the world is
too afraid to tell

You belong
Not because you know the lyrics to every
Andrew Peterson song
(You don't even know one by heart)
But because you cry when beautiful music
touches your soul

You belong
Not because you can swing dance like there's
no tomorrow
(You watch from the sidelines or join and
stumble)
But because you've learned that life is about
dancing in the rain

You belong
Not because you always know where to go and
who to talk to
(You stand in the cafeteria for five minutes



before choosing a table to join)
But because you'll drop everything to run in the
sprinklers with friends old and new

You belong
Not because you've read every book by every
speaker
(You've read two)
But because you're hungry for knowledge and
eager to understand

You belong
Not because you're an "oldie"
(Though, you are getting there)
But because you are a wanderer

And though you've wandered through fire, you
are never lost
For we wander together, and if we should fall
We'll rise hand-in-hand and echo from cavern
walls
The story of Hope, of the place we belong.

Bethany F.

