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JULY 2024 EDITION

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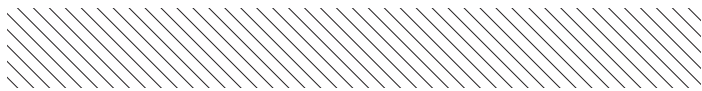
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EDITORIAL

Comfort Nyati, SDB
Chief Editor

Dear reader,

We often repeat the catchphrase *'I want to find my purpose in life'* while at the base of it we become blind to the fact that purpose is more than just finding it. It takes not only your nerves but YOU to pursue it. It is to step outside your comfort zone, face your fears, and embrace all that contends against your whims. Seeking and finding purpose is not a reward but a life fulfilling journey where you align with your true self. To this I would concurrently affirm with Robert Byrne who sustained that "the purpose of life is a life of purpose".

Furthermore, putting on the armour of our purpose in life requires conquering obstacles that are both visible and invisible, getting outside of one's comfort zone, and facing prevailing phobias. It has its full package that has packages. Thus, it is a package with packages. Within these manifolds of packages, one would not ultimately miss the fundamental questions of the whatness, whyness and howness of purpose. Finding purpose is a first stage of self discovery pilgrimage whose end is self-realisation. Because at the core of it is your "why," the reason you exist and why you get out of bed each day. It provides you

with a compass that guides you through life's cardinal points and gives your experiences a meaningful answer.

Consequently, in this 91st edition, one of our esteemed authors uses the Moon metaphor to exhibit one's journey of self-discovery. The metaphor therefore highlights the narrator's struggle with finding their purpose. Yet, by accepting their own pace, like the Moon's steady movement, they find solace and the strength to keep searching. Hence the beauty lies in the vast array of paths that can lead to a fulfilling life.

Wishing you a Happy reading



Call for Submissions

Writers Space Africa (WSA)
is accepting submissions
for its 93rd edition
(September 2024 Edition).

We accept Children's Literature,
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THEME
**SILENT
BATTLES**



Children's Literature





MY, OH MY!

Ainembabazi Lindah
Uganda

I think I lost my purpose
but not on purpose.

I tried asking my mummy
who only found it funny.

Could my purpose be trotting with the pups?
Or hiding among the buttercups?

I asked the charcoal seller
who was a good storyteller.

I ran to the zoo
but there was nothing to do.

Maybe I shall find it up on the hill,
if I stand still.

Silly me, there's no hill!

If only I had a purse
where I could safely keep my purpose.

I walked up to daddy
who brought me a big teddy.

Then he said, "You will find your purpose
when you're big enough to buy a purse

and a huge teddy
for your baby."

With that in mind,

I swayed into dreamland.



SHANTI'S BIG ADVENTURE

Nande T.S. Kamati
Malawi



It was a bright and sunny morning in the savannah, and Shanti the dung beetle was already hard at work. With a cheerful whistle, he rolled his ball of dung across the grassy plains, his tiny legs pushing with all their might.

As Shanti trundled along, he passed by a group of elephants enjoying a refreshing

mud bath. "Hello, Shanti!" called out Jerry the elephant, waving his trunk.

"Good morning!" Shanti replied, a big smile on his face. "I have so much to do today, but it's always nice to see my friends!"

"Busy as ever, I see!" chuckled Pombo, another elephant, as he splashed in the mud.

Shanti nodded, feeling happy about his work. But as he continued on his journey, he overheard the elephants talking among themselves.

“Do you know what Shanti does all day?” asked Jerry, his trunk pointed in Shanti’s direction.

“Roll dung, I suppose,” replied Pombo with a laugh.

Shanti’s heart sank. He had always loved his job, but now he couldn’t help but feel a little sad.

Later that day, Shanti met Asko the butterfly fluttering nearby. “Hey, Shanti! Ready for our game?” Asko chirped.

But Shanti couldn’t muster his usual excitement. “I don’t know, Asko. Maybe I’m not really useful after all.”

Asko gently landed on Shanti’s shell. “Nonsense! You play a really important role in our ecosystem. Without you, there would be no one to recycle all that dung!”

Shanti sighed. “But the elephants said—”

Asko interrupted with a twinkle in his eye. “Ah, but they don’t know the whole story. Let me show you!”

With a flap of his delicate wings, Asko led Shanti on a magical journey through the savannah. They soared over lush greenery and sparkling rivers, witnessing the beauty of nature in all its wonder.

“Look, Shanti,” said Asko, pointing to a herd

of antelope grazing peacefully. “Thanks to you, the plants grow strong and healthy from the recycled nutrients in the soil.”

Shanti’s eyes widened in amazement. “I had no idea!”

As they flew on, they came across a family of birds building their nest in a tall tree. “And there,” continued Asko, “your hard work provides a safe and fertile environment for new life to grow.”

Shanti beamed with pride, realizing the importance of his seemingly simple task.

Back on the ground, Shanti rolled his dung ball with renewed determination. “I may be small, but I have a big job to do!” he declared.

The elephants, noticing Shanti’s newfound confidence, cheered him on with trumpets and stomps. “Go, Shanti!” they called.

And so, with a skip in his step, Shanti continued his journey, knowing that he played a really important role in the circle of life in the savannah.

From that day on, Shanti embraced his purpose with joy and happiness, spreading smiles and laughter wherever he went.

And as the sun set on another day in the savannah, Shanti rolled his dung ball into the sunset, his heart full of pride and his spirit soaring high.

For in the eyes of his friends and the beauty of nature, Shanti found his true purpose, shining bright like the sun in the African sky.



TROUBLESOME TRIPLETS

Qondile Pearl
South Africa



Some time back in a distant grassy village, lived a father with his three children; Siya, Mbali and Mfundo. He always returned from work tired and covered in coal dust. Before he cooked, he always had to fix something Siya had disassembled or broken because he was the curious one; always investigating how things worked. After bathing, he always fumbled through his wardrobe to find decent clothes, as Mbali always cut part of them to make outfits for her dolls. And during dinner he always had to listen to Mfundo's jokes or answer his questions

and silly riddles.

Many days passed where the children got up to no good. Until one evening when their father returned from work and found that Siya had broken the stove; Mbali had cut one whole arm from his favorite shirt, and Mfundo kept imitating his stuttering teacher. He lined them up and smacked their fingers with a piece of wood like their teachers did at school with a board duster. Oh, how they cried themselves to sleep that night!

But it wasn't long before they got up to no

good again. When their father's overall had dried up and swung on the washing line, the wind blew through it and it puffed up..."Come, let's hit father," giggled Siya and punched the overall. "Yes, let's also teach him a lesson," joined Mbali with a stick. Mfundo came imitating his penguin-walk with a piece of wood and whipped the swaying fat figure as well.

Troubled by their behaviour as he heard their guffaws, shouting, dancing and whips on the overall saying it was him... Their father prepared their favorite meal; fixed Siya's bicycle, cut a piece of fabric from his pants for Mbali's dolls and gave the wrong answer to one of Mfundo's riddles he knew the correct answer to, just so they could laugh until their stomachs hurt. If only they knew what would happen next!

The following day their father never returned from work. Instead, a one-eyed, hunched-back limping grandma came with her many bags and black cat with red eyes. The kids watched in fear as she told them their father was gone and she was going to look after them. They exchanged glances, but none of them had the courage to say or ask anything, especially after seeing her long brown crooked nails when she tried to touch them.

The hideous granny made them cook, clean, wash and fetch water, then set guard her cat to scare them if they cheated on their tasks. Their father never treated them this way, they murmured amongst themselves and

the cat almost pounced on them. And while they did their tasks, she would accidentally break Siya's toys, cut Mbali's dresses for handkerchiefs and make fun of Mfundo. But after many days the children could no longer take it. They cried and begged her to bring their father back. She laughed at them and added more tasks to their chores.

One morning, without telling the kids, she went away for a few days. When she returned, she found that they had completed their chores. Siya had not broken anything, Mbali had not cut anyone's clothes and Mfundo had not ridiculed anyone. When they came to greet her with a plate of food, she and her things were gone. Including the cat. As they wondered when she could have packed and disappeared... A hard knock came from the door. They huddled together in a corner. The knock came again, followed by wild scratches on the door. Quickly, they hid under the table. Then the door slowly opened and someone entered. They listened carefully under the table. Then a big pair of boots appeared from under the table, "Father!" they shouted, then held on to him for dear life.

While the new member of their family wiggled his tail, licked them and enjoyed their company; they told him all about the one-eyed hunch back limping grandma with her black red-eyed cat and promised to never be naughty again. He then gave each of them a gift that kept them busy and out of trouble.



BARAKA THE BEE

Shifaa Ibuni
Tanzania



Mama Nyuki had six lovely daughters whom she loved so much. They all lived in one big hive. In the morning, they would buzz around and have fun in the garden.

One morning Mama Nyuki laid an egg in a special tiny cube in their hive. The egg was like a tiny tiny seed. Every day Mama Nyuki and her daughters would gather and buzz around it humming the sounds of joy and happiness. "I can't wait for it to grow like us" The oldest sister said. "I can't wait to play with it" mumbled the youngest while

stomping her feet. Mama Nyuki and her daughters would gather and feed it some special wobbly jelly for it to grow big and strong. They imagined what kind of bee it would be and what adventures they would have together.

Then one cold morning a baby bee popped out of its cocoon. "Buzz! Zzzz!" the baby bee cried. "It's boy!" Mama Nyuki shouted flying up and down. All the sisters came to see the new baby "Let's call him Baraka! Shouted the big sister excitedly. Mama Nyuki

nodded and clapped her whiskers. "Baraka! Welcome to the family!" she said and smiled.

Baraka found himself feeling a little bored. His big sisters were busy buzzing around and there were no other boys to play with. "Mama, I want to go out and play with the others" he said stomping his tiny bee feet and buzzing loudly in frustration.

"Wait Baraka!" Mama Nyuki replied gently patting his head. "Wait until you are big and strong and then I will let you go out and be with the other big boys"

So, Baraka waited patiently inside their hive playing around with his sisters and learning all he could so that when he grows up, he could be strong and smart.

Every day, little Baraka would watch out of the window of their hive the big boys buzzing around, working so hard. "I wish I could be like them one day" he said.

One sunny day while Baraka was watching the other bees through the window, he started humming the new lullabies he had learned from his sisters.

*Pretty flowers all around
Make me happy when they sound
Smelling good and fresh for me
Different colors all I see
"buzz" "buzz" how I sing
When I see this pretty thing
One day I will go so far
Finding big and fresh nectar*

"buzz" "buzz" how I sing

When I see this pretty thing



Suddenly he heard a cry from the top far above "Help! Help!". The helpless bee shouted. Baraka looked up a tall coconut tree and saw a bee struggling to carry a big blob of juice. It was dripping, and the poor bee was struggling to keep on the weight; he was losing strength and the weight was taking him down.

"Hold on!" Baraka shouted flying as hard as he could, flapping his wings with all his might. "Hello buddy!" he called out. "Let me help you!" he told him. They both carried the big blob of flower juice with their wings all the way to the big factory hive.

When they arrived at the factory, Baraka spotted his mother. "There he is" Mama Nyuki shouted pointing to Baraka. The whole army of bees started clapping for Baraka. Baraka landed and looked at his mother "I am sorry mama!" he said politely. His mother smiled and gave him a big hug. "You made me so proud" she said.

A big bee with a big belly came out of the big factory hive carrying a badge on his hand. "From now on you will be part of the worker bees" he said. He stuck the badge on Baraka's chest. The workers' group clapped hard with joy. He looked at his mom and gave him a big smile. "See mama! You don't have to be big and strong" he said looking at his mom. "Yes Baraka! you just need a big heart just like yours" she smiled.

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Creative Nonfiction

ZOMBIES AMONGST US

Herman Owuor
Kenya

It's alarming how many youths and even adults drift through life like leaves on water, devoid of purpose. They move aimlessly, lacking conscious direction or goals, resembling zombies in a silent pandemic. While some may accept this as the new normal, it's far from it. The result is a vast reservoir of untapped potential wasting away before our eyes, with seemingly no one taking action.

In villages once vibrant with the energy of youth, arable lands now lay deserted as young people seek opportunities elsewhere. Meanwhile, in cities, crime thrives amidst the void left by purposeless individuals. Drugs

have become a sad substitute for meaning, leading many astray from their true path.

In this age of superficiality, people often make life-altering decisions based on shallow criteria. Careers are chosen for their monetary rewards, spouses are selected for their outward appearance, and homes acquired to meet societal standards. Many find themselves trapped in lives they dislike simply because they haven't discovered their true purpose.

But what exactly is purpose and why is it so elusive for many? Purpose isn't just a vague notion, it's the driving force behind meaningful

existence. It's the reason we get out of bed each morning, the guiding light that shapes our decisions and actions. Purpose gives life meaning and direction, infusing even the most mundane tasks with significance.

For some, purpose may be found in pursuing a passion or contributing to a cause greater than themselves. It could be in nurturing relationships, fostering personal growth, or making a positive impact on the world. Whatever form it takes, purpose provides a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction that transcends material wealth or societal approval.

Yet, despite its importance, finding purpose can be a daunting task. In a world filled with distractions and obligations, it's easy to lose sight of what truly matters. Moreover, societal pressures often push individuals towards paths that may not align with their authentic selves, leading to a sense of disconnection and emptiness.

So, how can one uncover their purpose amidst the noise of modern life? It be-

gins with introspection, a willingness to explore one's innermost desires and values. By reflecting on what brings joy, meaning, and fulfillment, individuals can begin to discern their true calling. This may involve trying new experiences, seeking guidance from mentors, or embarking on a journey of self-discovery.

Furthermore, cultivating mindfulness can help individuals tune into their intuition and inner wisdom, guiding them towards paths that resonate with their authentic selves. By living with intention and awareness, individuals can align their actions with their purpose, leading to a more fulfilling and meaningful life.

But discovering purpose is only the first step; living it requires courage, perseverance, and a willingness to embrace uncertainty. It means stepping out of comfort zones, facing fears, and overcoming obstacles along the way. Yet, the rewards far outweigh the challenges, as living with purpose brings a deep sense of fulfillment and alignment with one's true self.

In a world where so many drift aimlessly, living without purpose, it's time to reclaim our agency and chart our own course. Each of us has a unique gift to offer the world, a contribution that only we can make. By embracing our purpose and living it fully, we not only enrich our own lives but also inspire others to do the same.

Purpose is not a luxury reserved for the few; it's a birthright that belongs to all. It's time to awaken to our true potential, to live with intention and passion, and to make our mark on the world. For in the pursuit of purpose lies the true essence of what it means to be alive.

From my heart to yours.



I AM THE MOON

Chigozie Anyanwu
Nigeria

1.

In China, there is a custom that has been passed down for ages. It is called the Zhuazhou where during the one-year celebration of a baby, different items, each symbolizing a career path are placed in front of it and the baby is allowed to pick an item. Any item picked by the baby will determine one's future inclinations or personality traits. This tradition serves as a blueprint for the child's education, shaping them towards a predetermined future.

The first time I clocked a year around the sun, my parents couldn't celebrate me, not by choice but by a situation that had them re-

cuperating from a ghastly accident that witnesses assumed would be impossible to survive. So, there wasn't an array of articles for me to pick from; no book to determine if I would be a scholar, or pen to be a writer, or ruler which meant I would be a Judge, or stethoscope which signified a doctor or nurse. Or in quintessential Nigerian style, a cake, food and drinks, and relatives and neighbours dancing to old-school music in commemoration of my entrance to the world.

But, hanging on the wall of our living room is a framed picture of me, frowning, in a red shirt with a Mickey mouse embroidery on the

breast pocket. And beside it, are similar pictures of my siblings, with that same shirt, wearing unique facial expressions that fueled our banter as we grew older. My parents made sure to capture these pictures on our first birthdays.

2.

The first two decades of my life have come and gone on a whim, and somehow, I still feel this crippling stagnancy.

Simply put, lagging.

One languorous evening, sitting on my aunt's balcony, my little cousin nudged me to catch a glimpse of the moon moving, his voice brimming with glee like he had discovered a hidden secret of the heavenly bodies. I indulged him and, looking up, saw the illuminated crescent and the clouds drifting past it.

I don't blame him for thinking that way. At his age, I also believed the moon followed me wherever I went. But still, I told my cousin that the moon wasn't moving. I tell him that the moon is stationary from our view,

but I don't explain the reason why. I don't really know the answer.

I am the moon.

3.

Moving in motion that appears so stationary when you look from afar, I am the moon. So stationary, it is perturbing.

I express my concern to my friend, K, about finding my voice, myself, my purpose, about how most people around me have found something worthwhile doing, developing their passion and craft, while I just sit and stare idly. I tell her about my friend who has published works everywhere, about one who is now a successful food vendor and another who has his startup. I even joke about those who have now become successful fraudsters. I remind her about herself and how much progress she has made, and she tells me, "Your journey is different. Don't compare yourself to others."

But how do I tell K that deep down, I haven't really figured things out? That I don't

really even have a destination in mind yet. Isn't setting a clear goal the beginning of a journey?

I want her to know that there is a heaviness in my chest each time this sudden realization dawns on me, anytime I hear that word "purpose," roll from a lip, that I am far from grasping mine. And that each time I think I have found it, it slips through my fingers like water. Even when I tried meditation, rummaged through my innermost thoughts, and fixed countless meetings with my creator in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, to hear his voice, to act as my navigator.

I still fix these meetings, to alleviate the heaviness, because with it comes tension as an unsolicited souvenir. It is this same tension I felt years ago sitting in the Guidance and Counselling office of my secondary school.

She was in charge of assigning students to their various departments; arts, science or commercial. I had dreaded this day, where I had to make this decision which

would change the trajectory of my life. A decision that, for years up until I sat in her office, I had not been able to make. I had expected her to ask questions, probe me, and counsel me through my conundrum. I had envisioned therapy.

But instead, she asked which class I'd be interested in joining. Instinctively, I chose to be in science class, because I had just read Ben Carson's book a day before and that answer was the only way of easing the tension that clawed at me.

4.

When the tech boom hit the country, there was pressure to pursue, but tech never quite appealed to me. I found it uninspiring in a way that didn't spark my imagination or enthusiasm. I believe my apathy towards tech stemmed from forcibly learning programming languages in secondary school. I found it so dull, and the excessive use of letters and symbols came with a potential for migraine. It was also why I disliked mathematics.

This year, I resolved to get outside my comfort zone. Perhaps, my familiar territory had become a rut and needed a change. So, tired of wallowing in idleness and fruitless introspection, I decided to try a variety of things. And like Jack of all trades, I didn't excel in any. They didn't resonate with me. They could not stop the heaviness too, because I felt dissatisfaction gnawing at me, and with it came a wave of despondency.

A friend offers me a different perspective.

He reminds me that this journey is a process and not a race, and that simply acknowledging the need for a purpose, is the beginning of pursuit of purpose itself, irrespective of the time it takes.

I latch onto his words of encouragement which I tap from each time the tension builds up. I remind myself that there is still time to figure things out. There is no rush, only soothing motivation.

5.

The weariness still lingers from this self-defining expedition that has become staid. When it becomes overwhelming, I can feel myself tethering on the threshold of despair, as doubt whispers its negativity. Yet, I am not allowed to give up. My spirit doesn't allow it, so it is a constant tussle; self-doubt and despair against perseverance. Two against one.

But I must persevere, because if I identify with the moon, then I must also remember that though seemingly motionless, this celestial body moves at its own pace. So, I take this as a cue, to continue moving.



Flash Fiction



KHAYA'S SOUP

Lihle Ndita
South Africa

Khaya looked at the bright blue coffin, wondering why anyone would choose such a tacky colour to be buried in. Coffins were supposed to be dark, elegant and made of mahogany, not something her 8-year-old son could have coloured in. Her stomach rumbled and with every rumble, she coughed hoping to mask them. Between the wailing and heaving, her mother-in-law, Doris shot Khaya a look of anger. Khaya sorrowfully dabbed her handkerchief to wipe away her non-existent tears. The leftover chicken soup she left in the freezer was all she could think about. Her husband was the only one who truly enjoyed her soup, so much so that he didn't notice the abdominal pain, nausea, and bottle of arsenic that made its way into it. A single tear fell when she wondered who she'd nurse back to health now that he was gone. She looked at her son, he quietly played with his aeroplanes and wondered... maybe he'd like some chicken soup.



Creative
SPOTLIGHT

Mimi Machakaire





Lise Nova Berwadushime interviews Mimi Machakaire, the Zimbabwean-born writer, journalist and publisher. Lise asks 9 questions which highlights Mimi's journey through her creative writing career and motherhood.

1. Please tell us in brief who you are.

My name is Mimi Machakaire but I recently got married so my new name is Mimi (Mat'sepiso) Kobile. I am a Zimbabwean born writer, journalist and publisher. I live in Lesotho with my husband, who is a Mosotho. I love telling stories, spending time with my family, one or two good friends every once in a while, travelling, eating good food, drinking coffee, watching Netflix, taking pictures and more. To be honest I'm more of a homebody kind of person, I enjoy my own company a lot and just being on my phone or my laptop browsing the web, maybe reading some articles online etc.

2. We want you to take us through your writing journey. How long have you been writing? How has been your writing adventure and evolution?

I've always loved writing. From the time when I was maybe 10 or 11, I was a heavy reader of many novels. I got into Harry Potter at a very young age and that became my comfort story for a long time. Then I said to myself, okay I probably need to read some other books once in a while and then I eventually build a collection of different things from Stephen King to John Grisham and others.

Then I learned about the Twilight series and I hated it so much, I told my-

self that I could actually do something better than that and then that's where it all started. However, JK Rowling was and always has been my inspiration to write and tell beautiful stories. I wrote a book called Princess Gangster by the time I was 17 after years of practising different genres and to my opinion it was the best I could have written for my age at the time. I worked so hard to try and find a publisher and used millions of publishing websites I could find. I'd stay up night after night using my moms Wi-Fi to try and find anyone who would publish me and then one day, it happened. I saw an email written, we would like to inform you that we're

interested in publishing your book Princess Gangster and that sent me over the moon. All the sleepless nights finally paid off! They contacted me with a proposal and I accepted.

They organised a book launch with 10 copies but we were not selling them, we were giving them out for free and well I didn't mind at the time because I was 19 when it was published so I didn't really need the money. Then they promised me 5 more copies of my book that never came and they never printed a new batch, which broke my heart because I thought I'd always have at least one copy of my book but sadly I don't anymore. I'm not sure up until today if anyone really has it with them after all this time but it's okay. That experience led me to say that if it happened once, it can happen again and so it did. Maybe not in the way I thought it would like in the past but in a different way.

My writing adventure continued into journalism thereafter. I was working for an online website who suggested a career in the field. They gave out the name of a school called Rutherford Hayes University (School of journalism) based in the US but it was an online school. From there I got experience working in newsrooms for years in different countries. The first was in South Africa where I was sent on an attachment. By then my family was already living in Lesotho where I travelled with them. After the SA job the school sent me on another attachment, this time I stayed local (Lesotho) and worked in another

newsroom called Lesotho times and Sunday express for one full year. I finished my diploma in journalism and continued working but this time not in a newsroom, I worked in public relations for a media company. I continued to work for a long time and for a while, my creativity was starting to fall off a bit because the company was doing more of events and organising than writing. Later it closed due to covid and I lost out on the job but I never let my guard down.

I started a blog where I found all the creative people in Lesotho telling their stories of how they started their passions and when I was tired of that I started to write again but in poetry. This is where I was published for a second time! I went to a writing workshop in Lesotho who offered a deal. They said if you submit your poetry to our email, we will select the best ones and put it all in a book. This ended up being a collaboration with other Mosotho writers and I was the only Zimbabwean whose poetry was published in the book.

The 10 of us were so happy we got our poetry published and this time the book was reprinted a few times over, which helped me keep a copy or two for a change. Then later on I found a self publishing company which is coincidentally located in Zimbabwe and to my surprise was actually a one-man operation. He was very good and affordable, he still is. We worked together to publish more books and I got to tell my stories in the time

frame that I wanted. This helped me stay in the game because honestly, I never wanted to be forgotten in the first place. With my books I'm able to go around Lesotho talking on different subjects and telling people all about the joys of creative writing and how they can tell their stories.

3. You like to talk about mental health/mental wellbeing. Why mental health? Do you perhaps have a personal experience that sparked that interest in you?

I like to talk about mental health because it's a topic that relates to a lot of people. I started to write about it when I did an article for my blog about a person who had bipolar and she expressed how hard it is to balance work life while being a mother all at the same time battling her mental health challenges everyday but she ended up starting her own organisation where she actually gets to spread awareness all over the country.

So, I shared this story on the Writers Space Africa platform and Anthony approached me to do a series called mental health for creatives. I wrote on it for a long time and I loved it because I had no idea, I could write about a topic like this. Especially because I have no experience in health or psychology in the first place. I mean I'm not a doctor or psychologist so I panicked at first but I did most of my research through interviews and the internet, while asking my mom questions who actually is a doctor and eventually the stories just flowed, sure I got help with the

editing and making sure everything is factual but I got the very essence of what I wanted to talk about in all the articles I wrote. I eventually turned it into a book with the same title and added stories from people who have personal experience with mental health challenges. I wanted to show the world that we are all going through a lot in this lifetime and it's okay not to be okay.

To be frank, yes, I do have a personal experience with it. What I mean is I'm an over-thinker and I always jump to the worst-case scenario in different situations in my life everyday and while doing my mental health book I learned a lot about myself. I found different therapists in Lesotho to speak in the book about their own experiences which led me to finding my own therapist. She's great and even does sessions with me over the phone, while I'm in Harare visiting my family but having a therapist or going to therapy doesn't always mean you have mental health challenges or mental illness. Maybe, it just means you need to view some of the events you have experienced in your life from a different perspective and sometimes therapy helps with that. I have family members who also deal with mental health challenges everyday of their lives and therapy also helps me understand them better. I hope they know I'm always here for them, no matter where I am in the world.

4. You recently blessed this planet of ours with a baby. Congratulations once again.

Now tell me, how has being a mother changed you?

Thank you so much. Being a mother has changed me in the sense that I now realise what my mother has been going through in a nutshell while raising me and my siblings. She had to put in a lot of work to just keep us alive and I'm grateful for that even more than I ever was. There's a lot of sleepless nights, energy and money that goes into raising a child and she did that like 3 times!

It also changed me in the sense that I'm never truly alone these days. Now, at the back of my mind for as long as I live, I'll always be thinking of my little one. No matter what I'm doing or who I'm with, if he's not with me, he's in my head. These days even if I leave him alone with someone for just 5 minutes I'm wondering if he's okay, does he have enough milk? Is he sleeping well? And most importantly is he safe? By the time I see he's happy and laughing and in a good mood, my mind settles for a little while until the next time. Overall, I'd say that Motherhood is probably the hardest thing I've ever done in my life but I'm happy everyday, I see my baby healthy, laughing and playing and I can't wait to see how he grows up.

5. Has becoming a mother affected your writing?

Yes, everything is kind of now baby related. My mom gifted me a book for Mother's Day that lets you record all of your baby's mile-

stones and I remember when she did one for me when I was a baby. It's very easy to forget these things from the moment your little one laughs for the first time, crawls and more. So, as I was writing some of the things I could remember I noticed my calligraphy needs work because I haven't hand written anything in the longest time. I'm always on my laptop or on my phone, so much that I forget to exercise my skills. This is something so simple we learn in primary school, that has become forgotten now all because of technology. So, part of me feels like I'm working towards using this information to maybe one day turn my baby book into mommy diaries and mention everything that I experienced in my pregnancy and raising a child, so that other women my age can see how I handled certain challenges that don't get talked about enough.

6. What would you tell us about WSA and your writing journey?

WSA is a great writing platform for those who need new ideas to practise something everyday. I'd like to thank WSA for giving me an excuse to write something different every once in a while. I wouldn't have tried writing on a topic like Mental Health if it wasn't for me joining a group like WSA and I hope to experiment with something new any time from now on. I have grown a lot in my writing journey from writing news articles, to blogs, to writing books and being able to publish my stories. It has been a great life ex-

perience for me and I hope that I can only continue to learn more.

7. *Mimi, how many books have you published so far?*

I have 3 books under my name titled, the land of Koala Bears and other stories, Mental Health for creatives and Princess Gangster (I'm republishing this book with a new cover soon). The last book is a collaboration between me and 9 other writers in Lesotho called Echoes of the kingdom.

8. *How would you like to be remembered, that is, when your time to leave this world will come?*

My mom always says I have a childlike spirit in the sense that it is like a light that brightens up the room most of the time, someone who never really looks their age and I think I'd like to be remembered for that. I'm not sure if anyone else ever had that sort of perspective from me as a person but I'd like to be remembered for my creativity and light.

9. *Which message would you give to young writers, and to writers with too many responsibilities outside creative writing?*

Keep going, no matter what. Don't let outside influences dull your light because your creativity can die out very fast. Just maintain that discipline, as much as you can. If you want to write a book, take 20 minutes out of your day to come up with a plot or a title and then that's all you need to do for that day.

Then come back to it and write a sentence, write a page or two and then take a break and go back to your life. Come back over and over again and allow yourself to work on that book as part of your leisure time, until you have a whole book and see what you can turn it into.

We are not robots in this society, where we have to shut down all of our creative energy and put it towards surviving. It's okay to write, paint, do your music once in a while or whatever it is you like to do and enjoy it. If ever your creative side can support your lifestyle, then that's great but it's also okay, if it doesn't turn into anything big. Live your life the way you want to, hustle and make money and also do your creative projects all at the same time if that's what you want to do. Just live freely and unapologetically.





PoeticAfrica is Africa's first trilingual poetry magazine published quarterly. The magazine showcases rich and diverse poetry in English, Kiswahili, and French from all over Africa to the world.



Poetry



REASONS

Unathi Mphikiswa
South Africa

The zeal to live
A motivation to succeed
And aim for the stars to attain
An excuse to wake up and try again
The engine that keeps life moving
What makes all worth living
The end goal.

It pushes us on our worst days
Daring us to never give up
It fuels our soul like petrol on fires
Making us unstoppable umpires
That thing we live or die for
Reasons, purpose.



THE SUPREMACY

Abdullatif Khalid
Uganda

It propels my vision,
And makes me fulfil my mission.
When backed up by determination,
It brings about the realization!

It travels across the sea
To obtain the key,
It never gives in to worry
Nor does it choose to hurry.

It makes a difference
Between failure and excellence,
Give it a place in your heart,
Cherish, and nurture it, so it won't depart
Nobody can oppose
One with purpose!



SOLITUDE

Pfanu Liphosa
South Africa

When the [whistling pine] sways to the sounds of heaven,
And the wind sweeps the grass to obedience,
When the dust briefly rests on crimson ground,
And the birds sing sweet nothings to the air,

Then, the storm within will rage without restraint,
And my unrest screeching louder than cars on a highway.
In the quiet of night, as barking dogs disturb the peace,
My anxiety rebels and keeps me in vigil.

There is a tornado inside my soul,
Wrecking all that lives within,
And taking my hopes and dreams as prisoners.



GALLOPING WAVES

Nadia J. van Rensburg
South Africa

Rearing at the harbour
The place to gather
In time to let go
Before riding the blue ribbons
Your baggage you must stow

As you bridle your choices
Gladly topple over the sacraments and the ROE
Pass by the mews in your goodly shoes.



LIFE IS MEANINGLESS

Akuei M. Adol
South Sudan

In the vast expanse of time and space,
We wander aimlessly seeking so(u)lace.
Purpose eludes us, a mystery unseen,
Lost in the chaos, where do we lean?

Like ships adrift on a boundless sea,
We search for meaning, but where can it be?
The stars above—indifferent and cold,
Mock our struggles as our stories remain untold.

We are mere shadows, fleeting and frail,
Pursuing dreams that constantly fail.
Time slips through our trembling hands,
As we desperately try to grasp the shifting sands.

Our tender hearts cry out for a reason to be,
But life is a puzzle, a harsh decree.
In the emptiness of our existence,
We yearn for significance and persistence.

But alas, it remains a distant dream,
A fleeting whisper, a silent scream.
Life... is a cruel and ruth-less jest,
Leaving us with nothing but unrest.

So, we roam this world...lost and alone,
Seeking a divine assignment—a duty to call our own.
But in the end, we are left to confess,
That life... is truly meaning-less, all meaning-less.



I WANT TO LIVE

Toluwani Oke
Nigeria

I yearn to win on this soil from which I was formed,
Just before I return to the One who created me.
I do not want to be like a fruit-bearing tree,
One watered during every season,
But fails to deliver at harvest time.
Great pain the farmer must feel!

I want to be like the trees that shed during Autumn,
Leaves that change their colours in due time,
The ones that are in alignment with their season.
Even if I do not get to happen,
Let me be the lightning that brightens the sky,
One that shows up regardless of the rains.

I have drilled my insides, carved out what is in me,
Ready to lead and to be seen,
With no part of me appearing gloomy.
I do not want to be okay with being just a glimpse,
I want to be the full view;
Bright and clear, not flickering nor bleary.

I hope that my maker is happy at the end,
When I go to meet Him.
I hope that my soil continues to snowball,
That my footprints may forever be seen,
So that the ones who come after me,
Would see how to live.

SUBDUE IN THE **MORNING DEW**

Ellen Kelly
Tanzania

Before the sun rises
He's always awake,
A dispossessed village boy
With nothing but just a vision,
To improve surrounding conditions.

Daily seeking access
To things he doesn't possess,
Piercing the mundane
To find the marvellous,
Finding rays of right,
Amidst darkness.

With the rising sun
He's working on concerns,
Not waiting for the day to end
With the same poverty trend.

As the sun sets west
He turns out the best,
Like a seed that germinates
Amidst harsh conditions,
He dominates
Amidst lack of provisions,
Subduing in the morning dew.



Short Stories



SHAKE WELL BEFORE USE

Celestine Seyon Reuben
Nigeria

The first time I knew you had changed shone from your response to the biology teacher's question: Why is the reproductive system the most interesting topic in Biology? Why are both Intelligence and Stupidity hereditary? You'd not question a question in class.

You, although, were mildly famed at the Junior level when you said, on the assembly that you found football interesting because of the swinging limp cocoon and phallic prints of the players. You participated in the end-of-the-year debate competition at the senior level on the topic, *'Gentle Act or Fierce Fling: Parenting in the current Twenty-first Century.'* Your conclusion occluded

the panel's larynx. You expostulated on 'Push Back.' The principal was befuddled. The head boy thought you read more than enough and your neck could no longer hold your head.

"A lot is infuriating to me," you remonstrated, emotionally. "Things are not standing well. We need to push back. Enough of the dismissiveness. I am tired of reciting the National Pledge."

After graduation from secondary school, although our external examination results were not out, yet, your brother, Jefferson said that from grade three, people refused your hand. A Muslim classmate at the computer institute you trained, also, shortly after graduation, said you

would attract a demon as a wife if you dine with it. He said the stigma vandalized your penmanship. If not for Mrs. Olorunleke, the Physics teacher, I wouldn't have known that you had to write a personal note on the vertical *DO NOT WRITE* margin on the answer booklet of every subject.

"Please consider my handwriting," you wrote. "My grandfather and some teachers destroyed my handwriting. I was never this. Thank you."

But if you didn't write that, would you have failed? I guess not; you were enormously intelligent. Do you remember the day Mrs. Balogun, the most famous *English language teacher*, ran

to rescue her son, Ayomide from that short and plumpy senior student? I'm still benignly stunned to remember that a calm woman was fractured at the knee because of rescue. Mrs. Balogun, very sporadically, ran to rescue her son from this senior student who had wanted a junior student to fetch two buckets and then was resentful that Ayomide lifted the bucket, one after the other, with his favourite hand. She ran after Ayomide reported.

I also flashed back how you were not allowed to grill, slice, chop, or stir in the kitchen during the Home Economics practical classes. There was something astonishingly flourishing about your sinistrality. Was it the energy it birth? Was it the perfection it shook? Was it the chirality it smoothened? In the midst of these, you were still intelligent.

Were you cerebral because of sinistrality? Anyone could be. I also remembered the day you asked the Visual Art teacher, Mr. Wusu, in the drawing and painting practical class, "Excuse me, sir, why are the elders so detested and resentful of the

Sinistrals?"

"Pardon?" he asked.

I knew you knew he didn't understand the meaning of the word '*Sinistrals*'. But you deflected and then said that you had forgotten how the question came to your head. You didn't forget. You felt that he would be embarrassed, and then deduct your marks as a penalty for disgrace. What about Mr. Olorunwa, the Geography teacher who always came to the class, always very early, and instead of teaching the subject, would go round and round telling stories with boring clichéd conclusions: "You have to understand and practice humanity. If not, your sanctimony will make you proud and destroy you."

Do you also remember that instead of him; to teach on *Climate and Applications of Meteorology*, he taught us the *Ethics of Life*: Believe before you pray. Think before you write. Listen before you speak. Try before you quit. Earn before you spend.

Ottun Yetunde raised her hand. "Sir," she asked, dismissively. "Should we write

all these things you said in our Geography note or do you now take another subject?"

What about the investigative research that Gbenga Durotimi, the best graduating student conducted? He traveled to universities in the South-South, South-East, and South-West geopolitical zones of the country. He discovered a massive decrease in the university students' population by thirty-eight per cent, and twenty-three per cent were among those massacred at the Toll Gate during the protest; the protest against the Black Police on a Black Tuesday. Students, who, many years ago, in their respective primary schools recited the National Pledge with excitement. But now, are in their beautifully charmed graves.

I chose the title of this letter because of your love for drugs. You once said in the class that you wanted to be like *Dora Nkem Akunyili*, that she was your crush, and the only thing that happened to her and still amazes you, was how she escaped the stray bullets from the bandits and one was eventually found

to have pierced her headgear. You were the only students in the pharmacology class, at the Department of Human Anatomy, Faculty of Basic Medical Science, the Federal University of Technology Akure, who read everything about drugs. Only the syrup had *Shake Well Before Use* written in the encased leaflet. Not even the injection or the infusion.

Now we are adults. After reading your debut novel *Skin to Skin*, which started with the words "*The newly assigned Biology teacher was more honest than the previous.*" I then thought that the meaning of 'Shake Well Before Use' is to understand the importance of terms and conditions before taking real action. Indeed, you were intelligent. I love you my dear friend – The newly appointed Minister of Education, Communication, and Culture. Hmmm, thirty years later. But I also thought about how this novel will be received and perceived in Nigeria.

Remember that Nigeria is a country of controversy, and even if there are no controversies, they would deliberately create one. I read the New Zealand edition of *Skin to Skin*. How did you think of such a title? What was the purpose behind this? I had thought how balanced the stories would be until I remembered a scene; the scene of denial, the scene of self-evidently true story denial but who am I to blame Nigerians who are so keen to erase even the most recent history?

Who said it? Who pioneered it that the Sinistrals, the left-handed, the left-preferred beings are worse than the others? Who postulated the theory we all now foolishly live with, that anyone who is right-handed is better

than the other? How did we get here? Also, remember what you always told us that we should not compromise our creativity; we should be truthful even if it would take our heads off our necks and your novel reflected that, but I am also trepid about something else. Remember when The President after the Black Tuesday protest at the Toll Gate, a few weeks later, admonished young promising school boys in his ancestral home state that those who studied History and English Language had no potential in the job market but only the sciences, I was stabbed; a furious plunge of stabs all over my body. The President of a country said that. Why? What did he want to gain from that? What was the purpose? A sane society or nation needs the creativity and innovation of both the scientists and the artists. The next move then was to commence my relocation to this place. So, if your novel would be banned because of how fictitiously truthful it is, let us start preparing for your relocation. When Nigerians are ready, they will call for you. And then, a few years later, I was stunned to see your face on the newly appointed ministers. If it wasn't *Skin to Skin*, was it your fight for sinistrality? Fictional fight through *Skin to Skin*.

I'll be forty-seven in three months and now live in New Zealand. My regards to all the citizens of Nigeria. And if the infamy is still overt in Nigeria, I believe in you to change the narrative. I love you. Extend my greeting to your wife, children, and the Nigerian people.



BE THE MOTHER OF **MY CHILDREN**

Abdulsamad Jimoh
Nigeria



As Wura settled in for a chilly night, the last words from her husband reverberated in her mind. He'd phoned earlier that day pleading for forgiveness and promised to be home the next day to make amends. But for Wura, it was difficult to silence the echo of empty vows as she tucked the blankets tighter around her children who were sleeping on a lumpy mattress. She reached for a kerosene lantern sitting at a corner, and turned its wick knob to cast a faint glow across the room. Lying on the rickety bed beside her youngest kid, she gently caressed his hair, and then, took a deep breath, hoping things might be different this time.

The following morning, she arranged her petty goods on the table outside the face-me-I-face-you building. The landlord had rented the space to her at a fair price. As the day progressed, her thoughts were divided, but she clung to the one that kept flashing the view that her husband would return soon.

The evening arrived with a shocking revelation when she received a call from a strange number. Her scream drew the attention of everyone within earshot, and some neighbours rushed over, asking if all was well. Her hands trembled, obviously—one clutching the phone close to her ear, the other gripping the edge of the table for support. Those around her swiftly sensed something was wrong when she asked the caller which hospital and how to get there in a quivering tone. Then, urgency took over; two neighbours volunteered to accompany her.

Wura felt every moment spent in the taxi like an eternity. She kept breathing in shallow gasps while her heart raced through a whirlwind of fears.

When they got to Emergency Unit that evening, the waiting area was crowded. And a receptionist told them to sit and wait. Wura found her eyes darting from the people moving up and down to the swinging doors where medical staff bustled through occasionally. Because her chest was rising and falling in jerky movement, she couldn't register her neighbours' calming words.

Later, a nurse came to ask if there was any male relatives present. But none. Then, she told Wura to follow her and suggested she bring her neighbours. The nurse ushered them to a consultation room where a doctor was waiting. The doctor introduced himself and paused. He glanced at Wura and gently constructed his statement, starting with the common words 'I am sorry' before revealing the worst. Her husband didn't survive the accident—he was dead on arrival.

The news struck her like a thunderstorm. She rose slightly from the chair and collapsed to the floor, howling at the top of her voice. While her neighbours tried

to console and help her up, the doctor stood nearby with his comforting words. But she couldn't stop wailing.

She barely spoke in the days that followed. Every consolation was lost in the storm of her thoughts. Her husband's death left her with mountain of responsibilities. Five children!

Her husband had married her straight out of high school. And for the past twelve years, she had been a stay-at-home mother, caring for her children while he was often absent to provide their basic needs. The neighbourhood had whispered about his infidelities and possibility of having children with other women. Despite being weighed down, she stayed silent, putting her children's well-being above other concerns. Nevertheless, the neglect and the alleged cheating, she expected none. She'd tried to confront him whenever the wind of life directed him home, but shackles of doubt always pulled her back, and her words remained trapped in her throat. He never came back with a penny, but with tales of misfortune—either

robbed or duped by 419 scams. And at the end of the long story, he'd vanish again.

She recalled a time when the continuous gossip became unbearable and was tempted to follow the path of several women in the community who had faced similar challenges. They had divorced their husbands and moved on to new relationships. Yet, reaching a conclusion wasn't easy, especially with the sight of her children. The thought of leaving them behind was inconceivable.

To cater for them, she'd taken loans upon loans from the community women thrift. As her debts piled up, they were reluctant to release another loan to her. But in their final deliberation, they granted her one last loan on the condition that she would use it to start a business to repay them weekly. That was the genesis of her petty provision business. Yet, it wasn't enough to keep up with her children's school fees. She had to plead with the school management, and they designed an unusual monthly payment plan. Her husband's promises of repayment remained unfulfilled.

Before her husband's burial, she prepared herself for drama of women who would come and claim connections to him. It wasn't uncommon in the community. She'd witnessed such occurrences before at some men's funerals, where unknown women and their children emerged out of nowhere to claim special positions. Nobody could even dispute the facts, considering the shocking and striking resemblance those children bore with their deceased fathers.

The day her husband was lowered to the grave ended with no sign of any woman claiming connection. It was surprising to her. Perhaps, they were on their way and would appear later. Or maybe, they didn't come because her husband was badly off. With these feelings, she realised how terrible the alleged promiscuity had shattered the trust she used to have in him. Obviously, the situation left the busybodies dumbfounded. They couldn't believe it because they knew that no matter how faraway these women might live, somebody somewhere would inform them to

come to the scene and claim their rights.

Some weeks afterwards, it was two men looking for her. They were in black suits and held briefcases. She never expected such visitors and couldn't even tell if she'd ever seen them before. They must have noticed the confusion and surprise written all over her face, before one of them quickly uttered her husband's full name and introduced themselves as his legal representatives. She never heard her husband talk about retaining legal counsel, but was eager to know why they came.

Some neighbours who were at her apartment left when the lawyers demanded to have a private meeting with the family. Then, she gathered her children to listen to what the strange men had to say.

The lawyers mentioned that they had initially consulted the community elders to determine an appropriate time to pay their respects during the mourning period, in line with the customs of the community. Then, they began to talk about the main purpose

of their visit. Wura's eyes blinked in seconds and her lips parted when they revealed that her husband left behind a will. A will? Her mind wondered, as though the words weren't clear enough. She had no idea he had anything worth living behind.

One of the lawyers pulled out a thick document and revealed that it contained the details of her husband's assets. He read through its contents, listing plots of land, landed properties, and shares in companies. Clarifying that the paper was merely to inform her about her husband's estate, he stressed that the actual will would be formally read at the probate registry once the requisite procedures had been fulfilled.

Apart from specific properties given to the children upon attaining adulthood, the substantial portions of the estate were bequeathed to her. Her eyebrow swiftly climbed upwards and her mouth made way for the air that rushed into her lung. Everything was outside her imagination. Her husband described her specifically

with a phrase 'the mother of my children, Wura.'

The mother of my children. It seemed her ears replayed the words again. They were familiar. Searching her mind, the origin surfaced. It was the day her husband proposed marriage to her, and she remembered his exact words: 'Will you marry me and be the mother of my children?' She remembered that she'd nodded countless times, saying yes without fully comprehending the weight of his request. But now, she realised that her purpose had been clearly articulated from the very beginning by those simple yet profoundly powerful words. Be the mother of his children when he couldn't father them. Be the mother of his children after he ventured into the realm beyond return.

Two drops of water escaped her moist eyes as she slowly turned to look at her children who were seated around her. She had endured all those years of hardship and uncertainty because of them. They were the reason why she stayed. They looked at her with pitiful faces, blinking their eyes as though tears

were imminent. They were innocent. Perhaps, only two or three could understand the situation. She brought them to her bosom and enveloped them in a tight embrace.



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(Rwanda)



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Verah Omwocha
(Kenya)



Anthony 'PenBoss' Onugba
Chief Judge



Affluent Authors



Liza Chuma Akunyili
@iamlizachuma

COLLABORATION

The last month has been intense as I upgraded my professional skills in wellness and management but that is not why I am writing today's piece. I am starting today's piece with this information because that is where my inspiration began.

One of my classes was a resource material from Professor Krishna N Sharma. Out of sheer curiosity that I had never seen his name before, I went straight to his website as displayed on the material so I do not end up on another

website.

Of course, I am a writer and would naturally begin from his published books section. The number was a shock but the topical range was another ballgame entirely. 254 books have got to mean something!

Now, you can be jealous all you want and say "they will be small books", "they are self-help books and do not require much", and "many of them can be compressed into other books". Or you can be humble and learn a thing or

two from this serial writer.

I went searching for many of the books and found their sales links were broken (an error we will address another day) but I found something intriguing: all visible books were collaboratively written!

Collaboration is generally defined as working with someone to achieve something or produce something.

Collaboration is one of the priority four Cs in education for the 21st century learner. If this is globally a require-

ment, it begs the question of why writers think they are above this law.

1. We are trained as writers to sweat it out and create our own things. This is a great mindset except we do not have someone to challenge our creative process until we get to the publishing phase.

2. We are told independence is synonymous to expertise at what we do and now, we struggle to achieve it.

3. Suffering and overwork are glamourized as we lock ourselves up for months and even years cooking up glorious pieces.

There is a place for this level of independence and intense work but it is not the only thing an affluent author knows. An affluent author knows how to ebb and flow in a way that allows them to be profitable and enjoy life while doing the hard work of authoring.

Some benefits of Collaborative Authoring are:

1. Reduced creation time: six months would compile an average poetry book but six months with three authors involved will produce a great poetry anthology.

If you were creating that alone, you will probably use the whole year, get fatigued at some point, drop the collection because you are wanting for inspiration and hopefully, you will get back to it in record time.

2. Fresh perspective: I used to debate when I was younger and my favourite part of debating was not winning as much as it was listening to the rapid-fire rebuttals my opponent comes up with - it's free education.

Writing with someone else is like a debate; they will place your perspective to the test and you have to defend it in a way that showcases your mastery during the writing process and that experience solidifies your work.

If you were writing a collection of short stories, your character building will be more holistic because there's

someone there who is less sentimental about your characters and focused on the overall collection.

3. Publishing opportunities: it is less likely that two or three authors would write a book that is flat and bare except all three are afraid to critic each other or are completely novices.

If all authors present invest themselves searching for publishing opportunities, you are likely to get a couple of good options as opposed to when you search alone.

4. Royalties and payout: let us assume the publisher decides they need one face for publicity's sake (this is painful), there will be a constant flow of money as your royalties such that you have some level of passive income that allows you to go and write your solo book.

While your collaborative book might not make you very famous because you are a second or third-wheel author, it is very likely to provide you income and introduce you to the audience of

the main author.

Collaborative Authoring is regular in the world of research and academic writing for good reasons - do your research.

5. Negotiations: with two or three authors writing one powerful book, you have the ability to negotiate better if you know what you are doing.

You can negotiate for lesser service rates, more live events, more book signing, higher royalties or even sales of more book copies.

Any of the above negotiations would mean more visibility or more financial flow. Decide where you can settle.

It would be funny to assume collaboration is the end of your struggles as an author or potential author. Let's see the tricky side of it:

1. Too many collaborations: when you do not have a single published book, people start to question what you actually do with your writing team?

If you are the lead writer, we wonder if you are using the younger writers and if you are the other writer, we wonder if you are a leech.

2. Same authoring group: if you only collaborate with the same group of authors, you are likely to coast after a while because you all become familiar with each other's writing style (that's great when writing a long series) and you lose the storming phase that challenged your person at the beginning.

3. Publishing rejections: you experience a different type of rejection when writing creative books collaboratively because a group is harder to market. It means the publisher has to build a brand around each author and that is tedious work that a lot of people are not excited about.

However, if you are comfortable with one of the authors representing the team (it does not have to be you) as the face of that book, you are good to go. Just make sure

you have enough legal contracts in case they go rogue (never do collaborative work financially without enforceable legal documents).

4. Loss of voice: when you are a junior writer, collaboration can bring you to the table where industry giants are and it can steal your voice at the same time. You are likely to assume, this is a privilege that you go with everything they suggest.

If you do not deal with impostor syndrome and the need for creative validation, you will sell yourself (your originality) in exchange for a book title and some media publicity.

It is important to set your goals before you begin collaborative authoring. What you want to achieve, why you want to achieve it and the implication of it on your personal projects before you step out.

Collaboration is a coal mine: it is messy but it has the capacity to keep you warm. Choose wisely.



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THE LION AND THE DANCING GIRL

A Children's Literature by
Agatha Racheal Akullu, Uganda

Reviewer

Benita Magopane
(Botswana)



Racheal Akullu's, *The Lion and the Dancing Girl* is a reminder that our inner child is a part of us. And pushing this part of ourselves away, only renders us lost and sad. But, also that our inner adult is part of us too, and is in its way very important. As the story begins, we meet Kela, a little girl who loves to dance but keeps it a secret. She then befriends a shy lion cub called Simba who really admires her dancing and has sadly forgotten his rhumba, because, as a lion, he has to be tough and serious.

The two characters resemble life as we grow older. Kela resembles our lives as children, playful, fun and whimsical and Simba our lives as adults and what is expected of adults to be. Tough, serious and almost dull.

As the story continues, Kela helps Simba find his rhumba and consequently, his happiness,

but Simba also helps her find the courage to share her happiness with others. A lesson that, there are qualities in our childlike nature and adult nature that complement each other to make us the best of ourselves.

This story essentially brings us to the lesson of attaining equilibrium with our young selves and adult selves and appreciating both sides. Both indeed must co-exist, for we cannot always just dance our lives away, but must also be grounded and tough, but not always either. It's about attaining that balance, then we can become the stronger version of ourselves, just like Kela and Simba's friendship. A lovely and sentimental coming-of-age tale that I would recommend for both adults and children.

BARBIE DREAMS

A Creative Flash Fiction by
Rehema Zuberi (ResH), Kenya

Reviewer

Funmi Richards
(Nigeria)



The Barbie Dreams packs a powerful emotional punch in a concise form. The narrative delves into the protagonist's experience of childhood poverty, where the mother prioritises survival over the luxury of toys. Through vivid details of hunger and longing, the author captures the harsh reality of poverty and the sacrifices it demands.

The story cleverly utilises juxtaposition. The protagonist's childhood hunger is contrasted with their adult obsession with dolls, highlighting the lingering impact of deprivation. The dolls themselves become a symbol of unfulfilled desires. This desire for material possessions, however, is subtly challenged by the introduction of plants.

The act of nurturing the plants with the dolls suggests a form of self-care, a way of providing for the neglected child within. This shift hints at a deeper message – true happiness may lie not just in acquiring material things, but in addressing the emotional needs stemming from childhood experiences.

The story's ending leaves room for interpretation. The protagonist's potential explanation

to their mother suggests a desire for reconciliation and a newfound understanding of the sacrifices made. This unresolved tension adds depth to the narrative, leaving the reader to ponder the complexities of parent-child relationships and the lasting effects of childhood experiences.

Readers who enjoyed this piece might also appreciate works like "Hunger" by Roxane Gay, a memoir that traces body image struggles back to a childhood marked by hardship. Similar to Barbie Dreams, uses powerful narratives to explore the complexities of childhood challenges and their lasting influence on adulthood.

Finally, this flash fiction effectively utilises symbolism, juxtaposition, and emotional nuance to explore themes of poverty, childhood longing, and the journey of healing. It's a poignant reminder of the enduring impact of our early experiences and the human desire to find solace and fulfilment, even in unconventional ways.

SOMEWHERE IN THE PORTRAIT

A Poem by Thompson Emate, Nigeria

Reviewer

Akuei M. Adol
(South Sudan)

Reading Thompson Emate's 'Somewhere in the Portrait' reminds me of H.G. Wells' words that "in every adult, there lurks a child—an eternal child, something that is always becoming, is never completed, and calls for unceasing care."

The piece explores the struggle between adulthood and the yearning for childhood's simplicity and innocence. The persona contemplates a hidden part of themselves, symbolised by the metaphorical inner child, which craves attention, expression, and freedom from the burdens of adult life. The persona's introspective journey leads them to self-awareness and acceptance as they navigate their mind and soul, guided by their inner child.

The poem reminds us to reconnect with our pure and innocent selves unburdened by adulthood. By acknowledging and honouring our inner child, we can find joy, creativity, and wonder overshadowed by adult responsibilities.

Themes of self-discovery, nostalgia, and authenticity resonate throughout the piece as the persona grapples with inner conflicts and desires. The relevance of Thompson's poem to the inner child theme is evident in the longing

for simplicity and honesty embodied by the childlike persona.

Emate's poem comprises four stanzas, each with four lines, following a consistent structure that reinforces the reflective and contemplative nature of the content. The structured stanzas mirror the internal conflicts and desire the persona struggles with, creating a rhythmic flow that enhances the emotional impact of the poem.

The author employs a reflective and contemplative tone, evoking introspection and longing. The language used is simple yet profound, inviting readers to connect with their own inner selves and explore their emotions. Thompson's piece relates to Rupi Kaur's "Milk and Honey" poem, which also explores self-discovery, healing, and the inner child, using minimalistic language and raw emotions to evoke a powerful response.

In conclusion, the piece teaches us to embrace our true selves, navigate life's uncertainties authentically, and cherish the childlike essence that shapes our identity and fuels our imagination.

UNDERNEATH

A Short Story by
Henry Chukwuma, Nigeria

Reviewer
Rose Wangari
(Kenya)



The author introduces us to a cold day and creates an image of himself, how he had dressed up to ward off the cold, in his neatly pressed clothes tucked underneath his coat.

A cold drizzle soaked a meticulously dressed doctor on his way to the hospital canteen. News of his beloved uncle's passing chilled him further, "cold both in temperature and spirits." He trudged onward, his focus broken only by a light that materialized in front of him.

The light coalesced into a beautiful woman, her every detail etched in his mind: ward coat, dangling stethoscope, a vision of perfection. He readily accepted her coffee date, mesmerised by her wit and radiant personality. She was a beacon in his darkness.

But at home, the light revealed its shadows. Toothpaste squeezed from the middle, left uncapped on the mirror – each quirk chipped away at his infatuation. He blinked repeatedly, metaphors for a budding relationship revealing a darkness beneath the initial brilliance.

The allure of light and dark had birthed a connection, one needing therapy, perhaps for both of them.

This story is captivating in the way it uses imagery and humour to explore the disillusionment that can follow initial attraction. The author applies different figures of speech to create images and situations. He also uses humour to bring his point home. What lay underneath the light was only revealed a little later.

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