



TORONTO WRITERS COLLECTIVE

ISSUE 1  
SEPTEMBER 2016  
FREE COPY

# Newsletter

NEW  
Write On!

The Toronto Writers Collective has been honored to receive matching funds from artsVest Toronto and BMO Nesbitt Burns to launch a new initiative providing TWC writers with the opportunity to cultivate, strengthen and perform their writing. TWC writers come from 18 workshop locations throughout the GTA, where our creative writing forums encourage voice to those traditionally silenced. The Write On! project will add additional benefit and motivation to our writers who will be given the opportunity through this 8 month project to learn advanced writing techniques, presentation skills, and gain publication experience. These workshops, based on strong professional mentoring in the fields of writing, performance and publication, will strengthen both the writing skills and confidence of the writers who take part. The crowning achievement of the program will be a spoken word event to take place the summer of 2017. TWC writers will perform at the launch of the printed anthology of their original work created during the Write On! project.

TWC gratefully acknowledges BMO Nesbitt Burns, a new and valued corporate sponsor of the TWC for 2016-17. BMO Nesbitt Burns proudly supports charitable initiatives in the communities where they operate with a focus to alleviate poverty through social change. To change society, one needs a voice. Write On! cultivates that voice.

“Through support of training programs, like Write On! We hope to help create a resource for skill-enhanced learning that will give individuals opportunities to share their unique stories and help break the cycle of poverty,” said Steve Kaszas, Managing Director, BMO Nesbitt Burns.

TWC’s Write On! project begins with four initial workshops in November where TWC writers will be mentored by professional writers, theatre professionals, publishers and TWC expert facilitators in small groups of 3 to 5 participants. Our writers will then receive intensive mentoring during further workshops - exploring story structure, character development, longer form writing and editing of their work. Instruction in live performance will also be given.



PHOTO: STACEY BOWEN, WRITER

## A Second Chance

For 21-year-old Jobim Novak, music has given him a second chance and a way out from a very dark place. “I spent a lot of my teen years, in fact all of them addicted to drugs and struggling with mental health issues and schizophrenia,” says Novak. “Even though at that time, I didn’t know that was what I had.”

**READ MORE ON PAGE 4**



PHOTO CREDIT: TWC WORKSHOPS



## What happens in a TWC workshop? **Magic!**

The Toronto Writers Collective was founded in 2012 by Susan Turk, a certified Amherst Writers and Artist facilitator to encourage voice and illuminate undiscovered strength in Toronto’s most vulnerable communities.

**M**agic is the word we often hear, as words from those who are surprised by the depth of their creativity seem to spring from an unknown source.

Poets are discovered, buried voices, long without vitality, return to life, dreams are conceived and often lost individuals connect, deeply. Perspectives shift as the barrier of difference is broken.

We recognize the common humanity that bonds us all. Each workshop is profound in its way, as writers, often coming from harsh lived histories, experience the power of seeing and being seen by others.

It is this source, once discovered, acknowledged, and possessed that creates the positive transformation we see again and again. It is writing together and so much more.

There is great empowerment when one unlocks that reservoir of inspiration and strength. A pen and paper is the simple key.

**W**eek after week in the Toronto Writers Collective’s creative writing workshops, I have the privilege to see and hear writers who were once invisible and silenced tell their incredible personal stories.

I see the human connection and experience the celebration of value and dignity for all of our writers, and the sheer life changing magic of writing... the simplicity and power of voice.

I witness the profound healing of words touching the most sensitive and wounded places and reaching the most exalted places too, bridging differences, seeing hope and not despair.

All of this happens within our forum, not once, but dependably, week after week.

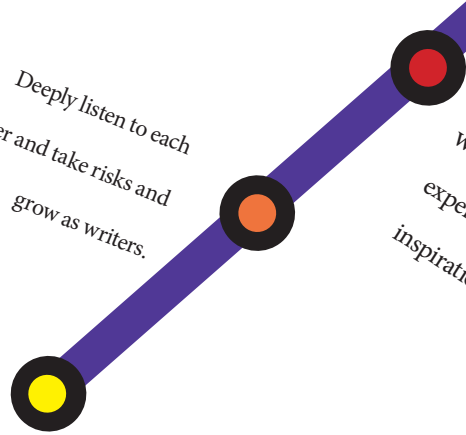
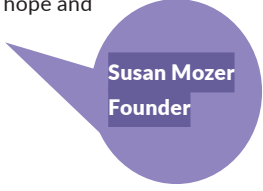
**I**witness the profound healing of words touching the most sensitive and wounded places and reaching the most exalted places too, bridging differences, seeing hope and not despair.

All of this happens within our forum, not once, but dependably, week after week.

Through encouragement and support, people grow as writers.

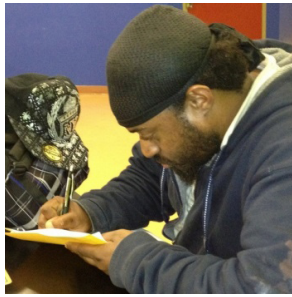
Deeply listen to each other and take risks and grow as writers.

W...  
expe...  
inspirati...





## Resist De-Voicing and Dehumanization



The creative writing group at Fred Victor is very small and intimate. It is the start of an ongoing need to resist this “de-voicing” and dehumanization. By focusing intensively on the fundamental act of dialogue, by warmly supporting self-expression and listening, the group serves as a healing and growing space where participants can re-encounter, sometimes painfully and, it seems, always with varying degrees of struggle, the powerful and definitively human act, of telling their story and connecting with others.



It is important to contextualize this magic. The writing group demonstrates what is possible when we cross social borders to collaborate with and listen to groups who are usually ignored. It kindles moments, in a little over an hour each week, of dialogue that can transcend the barriers that usually divide us. It is an inspiring and incredibly positive experience for participants and staff. It should inspire our city to not only support this program but to listen more faithfully to the groups our society stigmatizes and demonizes, especially when we find it most challenging. The writing group demonstrates a way to honour dignity that applied more broadly – in our workplaces, our government, our culture, and our communities, could reduce the need for places like Fred Victor.

Andrew Mindszenty  
Community Development  
Housing Worker Fred Victor



The work we experience from Dominique, Josh and the support we have received from Ve’ahavta, Toronto Writers Collective is reliable, professional, committed, creative, and every effort has been made to be culturally safe with our community.

It is a welcome and generous addition to our group to our curricula and program, and clinically relevant to our Mission to improve the health and well-being of Aboriginal People in spirit, mind, emotion and body...within a multi-disciplinary health care model.

Several of our staff have been told what a great addition this is to our program by a number of clients, and one of my clients put it clearly and succinctly when he said, “I used to think I was just an addict, now I see that I am more than that. In creative writing today, I saw that I am creative, that I am writer, and that I just might have something to give back after all.”

With respect/Meegwetch.  
Chris Pike  
Chayuueyitim  
Team Lead/Concurrent Disorders Counsellor  
Aboriginal Mental Health & Addictions Program  
Anishnawbe Health Toronto

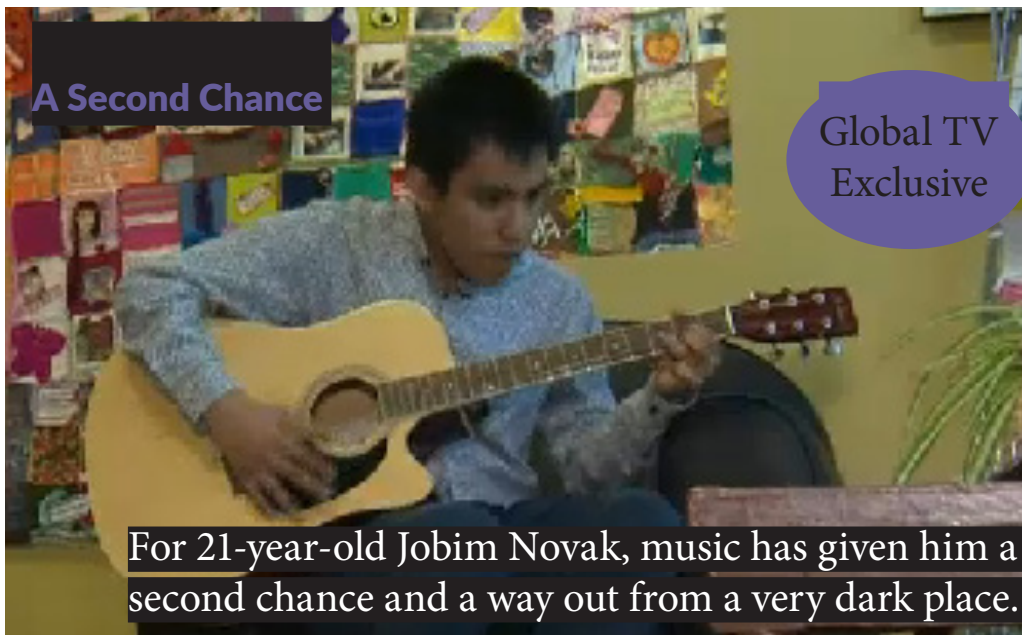
Ve’ahavta and the Toronto Writers Collective have my fullest thanks and of course Meegwetch to Josh and Dominique for their generosity of Spirit and Gift. I look forward to our ongoing relationship as we work to bring healing and wellness to our First Peoples here at Anishnawbe Health Toronto.

Everyone is a writer regardless of prior writing experience and formal education.

There’s a unique creative genius in every voice.

agement  
grow

TWC provides a non-judgmental, open and respectful community where all writers are supported. Each person’s experience provides a wealth of knowledge as a writer and an artist.



Continued from page 1

Novak was overwhelmed by the voices he heard and the hallucinations he experienced. He soon discovered music as a way to cope.

“It gave me a focus. It gave me a voice. It gave me a reason to live,” said Novak.

He entered rehab for substance abuse, taking that first step to recovery, but he did not do it alone. Novak started attending writing workshops at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health’s out-patient centre, L.E.A.R.N.

Moshe Sakal, a peer support worker at the centre says, “We’re offering them a connection back to the community. I’ve had experience with mental illness and I can tell you that it can be very challenging to connect to the community.”

One of the ways Novak made his connection back to a healthier life was through a writer’s workshop – a partnership between L.E.A.R.N and the Toronto Writers’ Collective.

“Expressing myself is my way of coping and in many ways, getting out of the hole I dug myself,” says Novak. “I’m doing more than I expected I would. I’m living the life that I dreamt of when I was in the midst of my addiction.”

Novak will be recognized for his achievements at the Transforming Lives Awards presented by CAMH.

by Susan Hay, Anchor/Producer  
Reprinted courtesy of Global News



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Poem by Jobim Novak

I used to chase dragons, I really wished to battle em’  
 But every time I tried it was me stabbed by my javelin  
 Traveling dark roads to caves that housed monsters  
 I was scared a lot but knew to press onwards  
 I walked through all the ashes, ran through all the smoke  
 Knowing I would meet a dragon I couldn’t choke  
 I slipped and fell, down into a hole  
 I lost all sanity but still I had my soul  
 I got up slowly, almost from a daze  
 The dragon took the place of what used to be purple haze  
 I was faced with a choice, fight or maybe die  
 So I ran from all my foes I ran for you and I  
 The battle had changed, running promised life  
 Leaving the dragons den was leaving behind strife  
 The drugs were the dragons, the dragons were the drugs  
 I left behind my dragons, and I did it outta love

## Glad Day Event



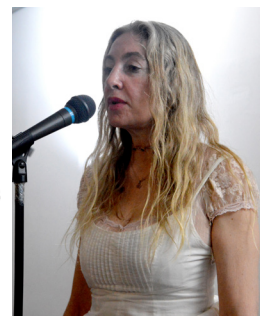
Arys Allen-McPherson



Christina Walsh



Leonard Benoit



Naomi Laufer

# Something I Realized

*"My strength is for sharing, not terrorizing."*

It took me a long time, to realize people were right, I sometimes showed strength. I knew that this referred to my character, and not anything physical. I was a sickly child and a favourite target for bullies, because I could not run more than one hundred yards without doubling over with an asthma attack. When I tried to run, it was flat footed, which made me slow. I don't know when it was, but I suddenly realized that I got a lot more speed if I ran on my toes, with my heel out of contact with the ground.

I suffered for years thinking I was retarded, because that was what I was called in the schoolyard, because I had to repeat grade one. The second time through, I discovered dinosaurs, and that made reading fun. I could spell Tyrannosaurus Rex before I could spell many simpler words.

I spent a lot of time alone, and had maybe three kids I could think of as friends, but they could turn on me in a flash. I survived, I got lousy jobs for the most part, but I survived. Part of the change was getting the diagnosis of Aspergers Syndrome when I was forty. Now I had something to hold onto, though some social workers told me not to let myself be defined by a label,

I had to explain how the label freed me. There were texts on Aspergers, and there were people I could talk to on the Internet about autism. This was finally something solid I could stand on, and reach upwards.

I am weak on social skills, I am weak in many areas. I walk with my head down, and sometimes passersby will berate me for not looking up, for not being like them. Do I explain that this is a defense against being overloaded with information? I also find money people have dropped, so that is all good. Over \$17 this month.

I now realize I have strength, and that I can see other people's sides in things, and start to recognize the parasites, the emotional vampires, and steer clear of them. Some of these destructive people have a sort of innocence, not understanding that they hurt you, but are very aware when you hurt them.

One friend abandoned me when he finally realized I was no longer someone they could control. To them, people are just chess pieces, and they flee from situations they fear they can't be in full charge of.

I am not very social, and that is how I like it. I have my books, I have my internet,

I read all day long, and write too. There is enough of me that I can share, and help, I hope, others to realize who they are too, and what they too, can do. If people get on my nerves, I can give them several broadsides of sarcasm. Sometimes they go away, other times they keep coming back for more.

I struggle sometimes to bite my tongue, and not give them what I really, really want to.

My strength is for sharing, not terrorizing.

KEN ROSSER

IS A PROLIFIC WRITER WHOSE PASSION IS SHARED WITH OTHER WRITERS IN WORKSHOPS THAT HE ATTENDS AND LEADS. HE IS CURRENTLY EDITING HIS 3-PART NOVEL ABOUT FLYING SKUNKS.



PHOTO: KEN ROSSER, WRITER



# Award Winners 2016

In Collaboration with - Ve'ahavta, sponsored by the Ontario Trillium Foundation



To  
read the  
complete  
text, visit:

[torontowriterscollective.ca](http://torontowriterscollective.ca)

**"Struggle is the foundation of freedom."**

- Jade Brooks, Words from the Street, Creative Writing Contest, Second Place Winner

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## Antonin Cubrt / ***Little big man***

His heart thumped deep and strong, waking him from his nightmare. He was being chased by a crazed demon, and he just had to keep running. Like a centipede, the relentless assailant moved impossibly fast, its face too grotesque to bear. Wait. No, that's wrong. The demon's head was actually twisted 180 degrees around, facing backwards! Tony shuddered ...

*(continued online...)*

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## Phyllis McKenna / ***A Reflection of an Eagle's Changes and an Anishnawbe Kwe's Healing Journey***

This story is a reflection of me on a small part of my healing journey. A simple Anishnawbe/Irish kwe (woman) that has had a long battle with mental health issues and how chi (big) changes are needed in order to be reborn. I reflect back on a teaching of an eagle and the changes it has to go through in order to survive.

*(continued online...)*

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## Tonya Liburd / ***You Don't Want to Know Me***

You will not know me / You will not remember me / And, furthermore, you don't want to know me / You may bump into me on the street while I'm mentally confused, trying to hide my embarrassment / at not having enough change for the bus, yet still desperately counting, "... / one... two..." You may look at me and give me that look / I'm used to it / Always hurts just that little bit ...

*(continued online...)*

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- Zubaida Zang, Words from the Street Creative Writing Contest, Second Place Winner

**"I decided I want to see what I can grow into."**

By Ana Dinar

## Life of Lilies

### Life of Lilies

The Lilies lined up ever so lovely,  
The lilies lined up ever so lovely,  
Smelling lively, hanging loosely,  
smelling lively, hanging loosely,  
And laughing about the time that they were but mere buds,  
and laughing about the time that they were but mere buds,  
that they were but mere buds  
needing so much attention and care.  
needing so much attention  
While whistling winds washes their wayward leaves,  
and care, while whistling winds  
Their petals now have puddles of pounding rain that fell upon them.  
washes their wayward leaves,  
their petals now have puddles of  
Fearing that this is the end friends, we may never see each other again.  
Fearing that this is the end friends,  
But the sun shined the next day  
we may never see each other again.  
But the sun shined the next day  
still breathing, beautiful, bountiful air  
still breathing, beautiful, bountiful air  
Feeling fresh and fantastic,  
Feeling fresh and fantastic,  
for the struggles that they feared, led to survival.  
for the struggles that they feared, led to  
survival. From our servant that kept  
us safe, totally satisfied we smiled  
while doing a dance called salsa.  
while doing a dance called salsa.  
We all stand together until we  
wither away, We all stand together  
you  
same time next year  
run til we wither away,  
where the growing process  
be seeing you some time next year.  
piles us up to make profounding  
perfume for the people around  
Where the growing process piles us up  
the world to acquire perfume as  
to make profounding perfume as  
we were,  
for the people around the world to remember us as we were.  
For who shall shower all of us  
with splendoring love.  
For who shall shower all of us with splendoring love.

ANA DINAR: I WAS BORN ON A BEAUTIFUL ISLAND CALLED MADEIRA. THERE ARE OVER 60 DIFFERENT SPECIES OF FLOWERS THAT BLOOM BRILLIANTLY, BUT NONE OF THESE FLOWERS BLOOM QUITE AS BEAUTIFULLY AS MY SWEET GRAND-DAUGHTER LILY. BORN ON APRIL FOOL'S DAY 2011, WITH EACH PASSING DAY, LILY BLOSSOMS AND FILLS OUR HEARTS WITH NATURE'S MOST POWERFUL BEAUTY. SHE IS THE ROOT OF MY VERY EXISTENCE.





# Empower the unheard



PHOTO: STACY BOWEN, WRITER AND RICK TRUS, HOST/WRITER/FACILITATOR

The Toronto Writers Collective uses creative writing to positively impact the diverse and underserved populations across communities in the GTA.

*Established on a shoestring budget, over 400 people have experienced the power of their words, creating positive life-changing results. We need your help to leverage this simple yet profound concept to meet a real demand.*

*You can be a meaningful catalyst to continuing the training of facilitators and helping our writers find their voice. Every dollar donated goes to advancing the cause and directly impacts our community. This is one of those early stage opportunities when you will be able to look back later and genuinely say that you did more than write a cheque - you empowered something truly meaningful.*

## Funded with the support of:

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For More Information, please contact Jesse Cohoon: [jesse@torontowriterscollective.ca](mailto:jesse@torontowriterscollective.ca)

Donations can be sent directly to: [info@torontowriterscollective.ca](mailto:info@torontowriterscollective.ca)

Support information can be found at: [youtube.com/watch?v=wYKEAn\\_flbw](https://youtube.com/watch?v=wYKEAn_flbw) and [globalnews.ca/news/2721915/toronto-man-over-comes-mental-health-challenges-through-music](https://globalnews.ca/news/2721915/toronto-man-over-comes-mental-health-challenges-through-music)



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