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My journey in the Toronto Writers Collective

Shrin Tobie-Paul, TWC

Three years ago, I brought my children to their weekly chess game at a west-end library. Browsing the community board for a seamstress, I found a page about a weekly writing workshop. How serendipitous! Days before, I was thinking about finding an activity that allowed me to slow down. Something just for me.

I inquired about the Toronto Writers Collective workshop and the branch head, Richard Austerberry, responded. I signed up for the next week and my life has not been the same since.

It was beautifully cathartic to get my words onto paper. I'm a writer from the old school: I believe there is magic in writing with pen and paper, a dance between writer and words as the pen or pencil waltzes along each line. My writing poured out. I loved that everyone's work is treated as fiction, which gave me new licence to use my writing to heal old wounds. Every prompt seemed to spotlight an area that needed a bit more healing.

I enjoyed the workshops and wanted to join the TWC team. But since my schedule at the time was packed I couldn't imagine how, so I stored the thought away.

When I heard of the opportu-

nity to be part of an anthology, I bubbled with joyous expectancy. This was a weeks-long workshop with the opportunity to have my writing vetted by a published author whose great work was already touching hearts. Enter Julie Hartley, poet, storyteller and all-round world changer. It was an honour to work with Julie and I was thrilled to have her feedback on my pieces.

I wrapped up 2020 as a published author in the anthology, and had the opportunity to read my work at a TWC-hosted event.

Someone from the writing group suggested becoming a facilitator. I knew early on that I wanted to add value to the organization that had assisted me in reclaiming my gift. I signed up for the facilitator training session and learned much more about the Toronto Writers Collective's mandate and the team that makes it all possible.

The team's desire to serve those who need a safe space for their stories spans communities, provinces, and indeed the world. We collaborate with many community groups who work with drug abuse and rehabilitation, mental health, domestic abuse, the elderly, youth, veterans and the blind and hearing-impaired.

Now that I'm a facilitator, I count it as a privilege. I am

honored to write with others, to be a guest facilitator in some workshops and to assist with training. I call myself the roaming facilitator as I work on different projects and collaborations with myriad community groups locally, regionally and most wonderfully, globally.

The onset of the pandemic meant that we had to go online, allowing us to expand our reach. I was thrilled that we all adapted quickly to serve our communities. We have held more than 600 virtual workshops bringing people from Canada, the United States, Australia, Africa, Asia and Europe, together into one safe space to write and heal.

I recently worked online with a group in Ghana whose stories portrayed a rich culture and radiant pride. I am grateful for the opportunity to travel the world hearing stories shared, some provoking thoughts of goodwill and others of deep exploration.

My favourite part of being on the TWC team is that my children get to see my dreams become a reality. They lovingly allowed me the space to write and now get to see me serve as a facilitator. For many children, values are caught, not taught. There are no better words to hear than "Mommy, I'm so proud of you!"