

EDITED BY SPRINNG  
FOREWORD BY MBANEFO CHIBUIKE



*A collection of Essays, Short Stories, and Poems by  
the 2021 SprinNG Writing Fellows*

# COME BACK SAFELY



## *Come Back Safely*

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## ***About SprinNG***

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**Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram:** @SprinNGIm

SprinNG was cofounded in 2016 by Kanyinsola Olorunnisola and Oyindamola Shoola, and it is currently managed by a team of 8. SprinNG is a literary Society for the Promotion, Revitalization, and Improvement of New Nigerian Generations in writing and literature. This anthology is a compilation of writings by select mentees of the 2021 SprinNG fellowship.

The SprinNG Writing Fellowship is a free intensive 6 weeks online mentorship programme for developing writers with great potential and willingness to learn.

In January 2018, 9 completed the fellowship.

In August 2018, 20 completed the fellowship.

In 2019, 25 completed the fellowship.

In 2020, 48 writers completed the fellowship.

In 2021, 41 writers completed the fellowship.

This anthology represents the 2021 cohort with writings by 20 of the 44 writers accepted into the fellowship's fifth cohort, 41 of which completed the programme requirements.

Application for the fellowship opens in January of every year. Visit [www.SprinNG.org/fellowship](http://www.SprinNG.org/fellowship) to learn more.



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***“Real courage is holding on to a still voice in your head that says, ‘I must keep going.’ It’s that voice that says nothing is a failure if it is not final. That voice that says to you, ‘Get out of bed. Keep going. I will not quit.’”***

**—Cory Booker**

### ***List of Graduating Mentees***

*Class of 2021 - Congratulations on this milestone!*

Abdalmueed Balogun Adewale	Joseph Hope
Adedayo Adedoyin Onabade	Joses Adewara
Adefolatomwa Towe	Lynda Nneka Nnagboro
Afolasade Ola	Mazeed Mukhtar Oyeleye
Aiyejinna Abraham Oshokunofa	Modester Chinonyelum Alo
Ajilore Deborah Oluwatosin	Nentapmun Esther Gomwalk
Akinlaja Felix	Olatunde Ilerioluwa
Augusta Chinazom Declan	Olayemi Adewale
Balpolam Idi	Olumide Gabriel Areo
Chideraa Ike-Akaenyi	Omireh Chiamaka
Christiana Egbata	Osamudiamen Akinwale Joseph
Damilola Omotoyinbo	Overcomer Ibiteye
Ebubechukwu Udeoba	Oyim Theresa Ogu
Ekpeti Ifeoluwa Euphenia	Praise Tar
Enock Asante Osei	Samuel Monty Akanimoh
Favour Chinenye Okpor	Shitta Faruq Adémólá
Grillo Adedolapo Oluwalogbon	Tolulope Hope Kayode
Halimat Ojone Usman	Torsu Sewornu
Ife O. Olatona	Williams, Ibrahim Adeniyi
Jessica Ajuonuma	Ofoegbu Chidinma Peace
	Okafor Ozioma



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**“At SprinNG We Believe That You Be One to Teach  
One and Teach one To Be One!”**

**List of 2021 Mentors**

*We thank you for participating in this opportunity of service to improve and revitalize  
Nigerian literature through mentorship!*

Abdulsalam Abdul Dante	Kolawole Samuel Adebayo
Adedayo Agarau	Mbanefo Chibuike
Ivana Akotowaa Ofori	Michael Emmanuel
Ama Diaka	Michael Inioluwa Oladele
Ayomide ‘Wes Oriolowo	Muyiwa Adesokun
Ayoola Goodness	Nome E. Patrick
Chinua Ezenwa Ohaeto	Ola W. Halim
Ebukun Gbemisola Ogunyemi	Oluwatobi Adesanya
Ehi-kowochio Ogwiji	Oyindamola Shoola
Emmanuel Faith	Pamilerin Jacob
Fui Can-Tamakloe	Roseline Anya Okorie
Henneh Kwaku	Seun Lari-Williams
Imotola Akintola	Sherif Ogundele
Ishola Abdulwasiu Ayodele	Tola Ijalusi
Iyanu Adebisi	Tolu Akinyemi
Jay Kophy	Tomi Adesina
Jerry Chiemeke	Tryphena Yeboah
Jide Badmus	Turkur Loba Ridwan
Kanyinsola Olorunnisola	Uduak Akpan
Kehinde Badiru	Wale Ayinla



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## *Come Back Safely*

### **Foreword**

**By Mbanefo Chibuike**

Memories of storytelling or poems alongside essays about “*why I write*” means we are laced with this trouble of forgetting about the spotlight, comparable to Arinze Ifeakandu’s capturing in *New City*, “to be in a city is to be lost in the midst of inanimate things, to be swallowed up by bricks giants and bright lights.” We take in a dosage of heart-breaking tales before we can get the first glimpse of light or hope or anything beautiful. Yet the only way to fully absorb this gift is to get them together, standing each work next to the artist, but even then, we ask, not knowing for certain, how beauty resides in ugly places? Returning to Arinze Ifeakandu’s words, “but they must embrace their city whose roads remain the same death-traps but whose sky is as beautiful as any,” we understand that even the floods can make the grounds grow tender.

Every emptiness that words find, they fill. These new voices covering the pages of this curation leave so much room for exchanging laughter and reflections, anger, and pleasure, refusing to conform and spinning tales into what has been largely unknown. It is safe to say that all who have chosen the way of words will bear the name writers. In the words of F. Scott Fitzgerald, the very essence of literature is that “you discover that your longings are universal longings, that you’re not lonely and isolated from anyone.” This anthology highlights the yearnings of writers and the desire of readers that is not just African but largely human.

In reading this collection, for instance, there is a catch: the writer approaches the work, the work doesn’t come to the writer. The storytellers go to their stories, and poets go to their poems. The writers may resent why they started writing at first but do not contest the contribution to their progress. Hence, we trace a writer’s tone in the word choice and how the texts make the reader feel. Even though the tones for a few other writers span a wide array of styles, from terse to prosaic, everyone seems to know what audience to speak to.

*A Dawo Lafiya*, which translates as “**Come Back Safely**” amongst the many tales, tells the story of an innocent act that forever alters the fate of a young boy. The



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precision to which an event is captured and the desperation of people subscribing to any semblance of hope in an irredeemable environment. Yet there is a story below, *Beginnings and Revelations of hope*, trying to spread light around and colour the world. You take a blind eye, and it stirs despair. You open your eyes, and everything becomes memorable. Just as you return, you find out that these stories are wonderful sicknesses. It is this mix that leaves you scrambling for more.

In the final poem, *Meditations*, the narrations are marked by the beauty of finding clarity amid chaos. Words are slaves to memories, and memories are slaves to meditations: in losing oneself to this sudden confusion, the trick is not to enjoy the works because that is easy. The trick herein is to stay afloat when the poet offers you rhymes about pain and not be blinded by artistry. This is what could be rewarding, for it is easy to get lost in the marvellous flow of words when he says, “writing is how I lose my body. It is how I find my form,” but suddenly chokes you with this pain “and lose it again.”

This anthology ushers in new generation voices that may well break you or mend the broken pieces of what is left. Still, it is electric in the innocence of the personal stories, fuelled by the desire to begin a journey of storytelling and the poems collectively springing you to life again. It may be difficult for anyone to run through these pages without savouring their elegance and newness.

Mbanefo Chibuike,  
Stellenbosch, Western Cape.



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**Mbanefo Chibuike** is a native storyteller and poet who graduated from the Federal University of Technology Owerri with First Class Honours. Most of his works center on darkness, sexuality, and death. His story *Desolate Room* which explored sickle cell anemia in the prehistoric Nigerian family was published in *Dwarts Magazine of African and Mainstream Literature Issue 6*. His short story titled *Burying Memories* recently was longlisted in the 2018 K & L Prize for African Literature.

To heal from these things he cannot name, he began to live them in poems. His poem *Eleven Forms of Death* was shortlisted for the 2018 Creative Freelance Writerz Biannual Literary Award. Same year, he appeared in multiple shortlists such as the Christopher Okigbo Poetry Prize, Eriata Oribhabor Poetry Prize, Poets in Nigeria Food Poetry Contest, Great African Poets Award, Samson Abanni Poetry Contest for his poems *Man in the wind*, *Stripping a river its name*, *A Lagos of burnt boys*, *My father's burial through his body* and *Be home to our memories*.

Chibuike hopes for the blessings of writing stories and poems that dispossess and malign people. Some of his other works have appeared in *Kalahari Review*, *Brittle Paper*, *OkadaBooks*, *Creative Freelance Writerz magazines*, *Poets in Nigeria Journals*, and other online platforms.



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**NONFICTION**  
*Essay Responses to the Prompt*  
*- Why I Write*



**WHY I WRITE By Niyi Williams**

1.

There was this time, out of sheer idleness, I prayed to God to perish the whole world under a deluge as it happened during the time of Noah. I was six, but later at twelve, I understood that God doesn't answer stupid prayers made by bored boys who knew nothing more than ifs and buts.

One Saturday, at age eight, I sat before my father's 12-inch black and white television, wondering what would happen if I struck the TV screen with my mother's new and favourite pestle. What would it sound like when it shatters? Will the pieces of glass splutter around like leaves pushed down forcibly by a bereaved breeze, or will it collapse inside whatever the screen shields? A boy that touches a naked fire learns the hard way. And so did I, the boy, learn that the tears from the mouths don't stop long after the eyes run dry and that the path to pain is the wailer's choice to paint.

2.

Everything I wrote above is made up.

3.

My first personal writings began at pubescence. It was then I understood that words are the greatest weapons man ever created. Sorry. Cancel that. It was then I understood that words are the greatest gift God ever showered on men. And that the ability to mold words like a swordsmith molds iron is the elixir that preserved life on earth. So, I write. I write to conserve the different layers of my life. I write to tear apart the parts of my history that are not my history. I write to keep intact the part of my history that is my history.

4.

You would not believe it, but at age ten, my body swallowed 70 strokes of cane. My crime? Aunty Kenny alleged that we were playing the "mummy-and-daddy" game. She said, when everyone ran out at the sound of football, I locked the door on Dammy, who was the *mummy*, and I tried to go XXX on her.



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It was not true.

Thus, the reasons I was not allowed to defend myself, why no one believed me when I said she locked the door. Even though I didn't, the reasons why it was assumed that I, a ten-year-old boy, knew what a man and a woman do when the doors are locked became one of the reasons I choose to write.

I write to weigh the truth in social beliefs, pick it up like a brick from Jericho and see how frail it falls when facts invade it. The internet once shared a pearl of wisdom with me. She said that truth is determined by the one who wields the word. True, but not fair, so I write to reveal the fair and the factual truths.

5.

I write to test the depth of my ability to be a god, to bring to life stories that otherwise would have remained unsaid, unheard, and unknown.

6.

Years back, my close kin wrote an erotic poem to Psychosis. The aesthetics of his piece caused chaos in the family, and from thereon, I learned that nouns and verbs in times of need aren't as relevant as a simple comma. A simple comma means preventing all that could go wrong from going wrong. So, I write to tell my country she's a fool whenever she ignores a simple comma.

7.

Let's play the imagining game.

Imagine you're a little one. Imagine your blue balloon glides right above your head. Imagine an old woman - a bitch, if you please, snatches your balloon from the air, stares right at you in the face, and strangle your source of bliss... chaos. Peace. I write to be the mouth through which many people understand that a crescent, cross, and David's star can make a mirror sparkle.

8.



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If my life so far has been a white blank page with no love or hate to stretch into a theme,  
I would have buried my pen each time people pluck me for a crime we are all guilty of.  
But a part of me pines for life's dose of a morbid muse. So, what do I do?

I write.



## ***WHY I WRITE By Joseph Hope***

### **Beginnings and Revelations of Hope**

In the beginning, God created the heavens and me. I was formless and full of void, and darkness was over the surface of my deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of my waters. And God said let there be light, and I emerged.

The darkness made me grope around in the day, useless and uncertain with trailing thoughts like, "What an idiot to think I had a destiny?" I traveled through such darkness from my thoughts, through my veins, taking corners of despair and resting at junctions of hopelessness.

There is a thing about writing – the kissing of a pen to paper, the dripping of ink like Christ's blood on the cross that sounds like God saying to my soul, "*let there be light.*" They say the speed of light is 300,000,000 meters per second, and I wonder if it compares to the glow of my heart, charges running up my spine and into my brain when I write.

Other people ward away their darkness, but it is the beginning of all that is possible. It is the instinct of hope, the whisper of my name. So, now, when I write, I dip the tip of my pen inside the darkness lurking in the corners of my room and the world.

I write about the injustices hidden in the shadows of darkness, bringing to judgement the unamenable that have wronged God, and me the carrier of his light, a general, with a drawn two-edged pen.

I carry writing around like a ball of light, rolled deep inside of me, and I closed my eyes for far too long until God said, "*What you can't see isn't invisible— you need to look.*"

Writing opened the consciousness of things around me to my eyes, to understand the state of things, wonder, and mystery woven into a solid world.

Writing is God telling me to survive and carry the message of Hope – if only I open my eyes!



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### ***WHY I WRITE By Overcomer Ibiteye***

I like to think that between a snuffle and a smile is a cramped space called silence.

Silence is that tiny, dark alcove where time holds me captive. It is that stuffy cubicle where words like 'days' and 'weeks' attempt to slice me into pieces.

Silence is that seemingly unending phase where I sit and wonder, "*how did the world end without me knowing?*"

I write because I wonder. I wonder if the rest of the universe knows that I am three steps behind them. I wonder if they know that my wristwatch is always taken by surprise. I wonder if they know that I am hypoactive.

I write because I am a wonder. I scrub off tasteless medical terms like 'attention deficit disorder' off my skin and replace them with sugary couplets. I knit my body with golden verses and letters so shiny that the world stops to take a look at them.

I write to pause. The danger of catching up with everyone else is that you fail to catch up with yourself. You leave the sun in your soul and run to worship the candle in another. I pause. I stare at time in the eye and dare it to challenge me. I weave alphabets into my hair until it glows like that of a queen, emitting sparks of bravery and strength. I reach out for the flames that reside in my being and fan them with coals of poems until all that's left of me is fire.

I write to evolve. I have learnt that a cramped space is the perfect place to grow. Between a snuffle and a smile is a place to morph into something unique and unknown. You could melt into water or freeze into an iceberg. You could blend into ashes or become gold dust. You could fade into thin air or become the air that keeps the world breathing.

I write to become.



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### **WHY I WRITE** *By Oyim Theresa Ogu*

Country Music and Reggae hold memories of my father. So, whenever Bob Marley's *One Love* comes on, the year becomes 2005, and I am a little girl twirling in a blue skater dress with petals embroidered on them and singing, "*Let's get together and feel alright.*" It is a place I love to be, though ephemeral.

Asides from the strings of guitar playing from my father's Stereo, the pages of a book also carry a warmth that belongs to my father. I remember his large collection of novels, newspapers, biographies, magazines, and academic books. Maybe I was too young for us to discuss these books, but I found and still find a part of him in them. It is a treasure bequeathed to me, especially as he is no longer here.

My earliest memory of telling stories will be break time in Primary 3, entertaining my friends with the stories I had just read. They always wanted more, and that was reward enough for me. Fast forward to my essay classes in secondary school. Writing became another means to tell my many stories. I recall comments on my essay assignments, one from Mr. Anicho and another from Mrs. Savage, two revered and hard-to-please teachers. Their validation stood out among all that came my way, and it plunged me deep into this craft.

I have found writing a providential means of unburdening pent-up frustration at different times in my life. There is a huge relief that comes with pouring to paper, things that I find nobody to tell. My journals are little memory boxes where I can peep in and see who I was, in a way that merely thinking about it does not provide. With the nonfiction writings I have done so far, when I do them, I feel like I am handing out pieces of myself in exchange for the pleasant comments from readers.

Upon reflection, I have seen what power words can hold, and I am attempting to be a wordsmith, forging words into stories consciously; this time, looking beyond memory boxes and my friends in Primary 3, looking to something bigger than myself. And because it is bigger than me, sometimes I am too afraid but knowing that I will always find my father in writings, that alone is enough.



## ***WHY I WRITE* By Samuel Akanimoh**

If there is a singular thing that consistently makes me happy, it is writing. If there is a singular thing that frustrates me (asides from the hassles of the average Nigerian), it is also writing. But if there is a thing I wouldn't give up, that thing would definitely be writing.

What started as creating basic wordplay and rhymes for my fictional childhood music career evolved into something more distinct, emotional, and expressive when I discovered and experienced poetry. I could barely believe the way words were crafted, the skill involved in creating and arranging these words, the artistry in storytelling, the originality of the scenarios, and the ability of these words to teleport me to the moment, space, and scenery captured in the poems. The intriguing thing I discovered in writing poetry was the ability of a piece to speak to my current experience, resonate with my then and now, and synergize with my emotions. The pieces felt like they had a life of their own, existed in a reality of their making, and with soft, enticing undertones, invited me to come into their world for a first-hand experience. I was hooked.

All of the things mentioned played a key role in inspiring me to write. For me, writing was an unfiltered, unadulterated channel of expression. It allowed me to explore different possibilities, depict diverse lives, say things that ordinarily my mouth would have failed me in delivery of. But, most of all, writing helped me tell stories.

Storytelling, I believe, is as essential to life as any other thing you can think of; if not, how would we know history? How would we know what our heritage is? How can we pass on cultures and values? There would be no need for family trees, news stations, advertising campaigns, commentary during sports matches, etc. The quintessence of living is all embedded within this thing called storytelling, and by picking up a pen and spilling ink on paper, I hope to play my part in telling my stories and the stories of people I have encountered over the years. Stories of the unheard or the voiceless, broken or hurt, crazy or joyful; I hope I can tell the typical and atypical Nigerian story. Running into poetry and writing, in general, was out of pure serendipity, one I have never regretted since.



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Why I write is such a cumbersome subject, but in the most simplistic and encompassing terms, I write because of you, I write because of me; I write for everyone that can't tell their story, for everyone that wants to tell their story and most especially for everyone that has a story, I write for you.



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### ***WHY I WRITE By Adedayo Onabade***

For me, writing is an inquiry.

It is a question of purpose, intention, motive, cause, and effect. It is to incite change, spur conversations, and reform our civilizations. Writing does more than investigation. It is digging deep into the world and questioning its intricacies.

But it is also more than a question.

Writing is an insight into existence, into the reason why I daydream of alternative worlds, of possibilities yet to be and experiences yet to become whole. It is me looking into my soul, drinking the immortal wells of inspiration yet being inundated by the brutalities of humankind – man against man, gender against gender, faith against faith, and race against race. With social structures in a superiority tussle, I want to sit with them and ask, ‘Why are you at war with yourself?’ For indeed, all of humanity is one and to be divisive is to be unethical to justice.

I have once pondered and answered this question of purpose - why I write, the basis of my scribbles, and my heightened sensibilities to mundane activities. And I answered with my earliest memories of exploration: the flames that first engulfed my home and led me to wonder about the vanities of this world. Then slowly, it burned in my heart to ask more *whys* and seek more *reasons*.

Today, as I answer this ‘Why?’ again, I see the longings of my innermost being and respond, ‘Writing is the only thing I know and have, the only language my tongue understands and dwells in.’

I write because I suck at Mathematics and self-diagnosed my numerophobia. I write because I am adept at the equation of words even though I do not know where X is.

I write to keep memories alive, to remember final encounters with loved ones who now live only in the memory of the times they lived, breathed, and walked this realm.



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I write to relive the best moments of my life, to taste the innocence of childhood again, and to commemorate my proudest moments as though they were only just happening.

I write to remember the cunning of the beef seller who swears by his ancestral lineage that the price can go no lower. I write that I may recall the benevolence of the garri seller who puts an extra hand of those dried, crunchy flakes long after I have downed the last granules of them.

I write to escape reality and unsavoury incidents, personal and collective. As if to say, 'You are not permitted to happen. I forbid your existence.'

I write to give a voice to the scrunched-up faces and silent thoughts of overbearing *adultier* adults whose disapprovals are presented as a flying elephant with flourishing wings.

I write to lend my voice to the discourses of my day, to speak the truth, however unpopular and imperfect it may sound. For what is truth but that which is living, sovereign, and though ignored, maligned, and deferred; it will eventually rise regardless.

I write to echo the wishes and wonders of souls like mine who think and ponder the origins of life, time, and love. So that when they read, they will say 'Aha!' They will understand, they will see through my eyes; live through the beauty and chaos of my words. They will see through my eyes, find light, endless sight. They will agree, and most importantly, they will identify and become.

I write because I have questions for writers, long dead yet, who are alive in their works and words. I am writing my way to the discovery of these answers. I am writing so that everything will make sense once again, in a world where the flight of life takes the day of the unknown.



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### **WHY I WRITE** *By Chiamaka Omireh*

This was how it started: me, cross-legged on the floor. My mother's room. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* before me. The middle page of my Basic Science note beside it. My pen hung limply between my lips.

I think it was fear; fear stopped me, at first, from writing the first words. Still, I let it out. The priest loved Kambili. He had to decide if he wanted his vocation or her. It did not make sense, but it made my sisters laugh.

I wrote for the first time because I wanted to give another ending to an already written story.

At different points in my life, I have written for different reasons. At one point, to be heard. At another point, to be seen. At different points, to help someone be heard. I have written to safe-keep memories.

At another point, I wrote for therapy. Books would always listen. They had no choice. So, I wrote on a book, of my first love story, my first heartbreak, my first kiss.

This is how it's going: I have learnt the essentials of loss. Perhaps, I am still learning. Loss is a language that we can never fully learn. Loss is part of life. When loss happens, writing helps recreate. It gives you the power to tell the story the way you want to.

I write because I want to remember. I write because I want others to remember.

I am unsure how it will end, but writing is not just an escape. Writing gives a voice when you are unable to speak. Writing tells a story even for the generations we did not know would come.



## ***WHY I WRITE By Deborah Ajilore***

### **Lagbaja**

When I was a little girl, I lived for words. So, at the sound of the closing bell, I sprinted home from school to feast on fantasies. I was hooked to anything that had a story and imagination in it.

I write because I have an unexplainable urge to document every story living rent-free in my head, so they don't fade away. Sometimes, it is too heavy- it presses its weight on me, looking to find expression through my ink.

Writing is the spirit to which I have surrendered myself and a vessel, hoping to be golden. I write because it takes hold of me like a prophet, and I'm doomed if I don't write out the words becoming prophecy in my heart. My hands tremble on paper as whispers of words fill my ears to guide my soul into tranquility.

Some days, words fly untamed and unbridled in my head, not wanting to be restricted by the rigidity of language. So, I clothe my thoughts with alphabets and adorn them with jewelry of imageries.

I write to describe my fears, bind them by their name without stuttering. My diary has listening ears, and its white sheets are void of judgment about my pieces. I get to know myself better. I pry apart every layer of scrambled thoughts I have hidden within myself. I write because I want to be known for something; writing adds meaning to my life. Without it, I would just be a *Lagbaja* who walked through the earth without leaving footprints. What do I have to give this world, if not my thoughts and stories written down in boldness and even cowardice?

On days I am unable or unwilling to write, I remember how good it feels to play God with stories hiding and revealing different parts of me. I immediately acknowledge this is what I am made for; I take out my pen to write again.

### **Interpretation**

Lagbaja: *A Yoruba word for a nameless person.*



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### **WHY I WRITE By Augusta Declan**

*“...the world has been broken for as long as anyone can remember. Everyone, sooner or later, gets a thorough schooling in brokenness. The question becomes what to do with the pieces?”*

*- Michael Chabon*

I write for a myriad of reasons, each bouncing off the other like a kaleidoscope of colours. First for myself, and then for others.

I write to expel the demons of my childhood, to undo the broken thing I was, following years of sexual abuse; to cast off such labels that proclaimed me marine spirit because I became a skulking, hollow-eyed shadow, struggling for identity.

I write for all the things I am just learning to be, the words whose meanings I learnt too late. Happy. Carefree. Innocent. I write to express the words I couldn't speak for fear of inheriting a shame that would break my father. In remaining silent, we could all pretend I was his sterling, brilliant daughter, and the people on my street could go on calling me *Oyibo* without pity in their eyes or a sinister curve to their lips.

I write to settle the unrest in my soul, on the nights when my past threatens to choke off my air. The words are a soothing balm, and the process, a numbing exercise. I write to preserve the small pockets of happiness I experience when I think of the rich, heady smell of wet earth, colourful tapestries woven in sunsets, starry nights, and moonlit loving because then I am reminded that I am capable of beautiful things too.

To write is to reach into my soul, a thing I dread. There can be no lies, no half-truths. The words present the truest reflection of self and my body's many scars in testimony. I write to keep in mind all the things I must not hide from, the things I must not become. *Unhappy. Unjust. Inhumane.*

I write to paint lucid pictures that evoke sighs and laughter, tears, and outrage. To give voice to my neighbour's woes because pain is a kindred spirit. To prod your



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conscience because the meaning of life is in love. In doing so, I strip myself of the perpetual helplessness I feel.

I write to remember the past and its lessons, to immortalize the stories I am burdened to tell. Strung together, they create some semblance of sense. These stories, I wield as a vehicle for positive change, first for myself, then for others.



## *Come Back Safely*

### ***WHY I WRITE By Favour Chinenye Okpor***

*Spill out upon a page*

*This is his way of self-healing*

*A mind in turmoil*

*-Harry Horsman*

The first time I saw my father's tears, something broke within me. I had just returned from school, bloated with stories about our ongoing inter-house sport, only to be punctured by confusion at the sight of my broken father. As a child, it was difficult to reconcile the man I had once thought invincible to the crumbled one before me. I tried yet failed to grasp why his brothers would frame him up for a crime he never committed. This was a man who would break his back for those he called family. Every second my father spent proving his innocence filled me with a rage that burned through my trust.

I had no idea how to fill the ever-expanding void and provide answers to the seemingly unending questions plaguing my sanity. So, I began to write, to bring a semblance of calm to my otherwise chaotic world. Losing myself in the intoxicating world of words helped numb the pain of my reality.

I discovered that when we give names to our demons and crucify them, we render them powerless. So, I unleashed my wrath into my ink and murdered my betraying uncles. Impersonating God gave me a taste of power and led me on a quest to sate my insatiable hunger for peace and justice.

I write to heal, exhume the ancient balm buried in words and soothe my aching soul. In writing, I carefully stitch back the trust humanity broke in me. I write to tell the world secrets my lips are wary of uttering. When I write, I howl my fears, mourn, and lay grief to rest with every final punctuation.



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I am writing for my father, who, despite being found innocent, never fully recovered from the wounds his brothers inflicted. I am clearing the battlefield for him to purge the war from his blood, hoping he finds redemption in the words as I did.

There is no greater purpose than drowning in the elixir of poetry and exorcising the enemies clamoring for my silence. The warmth seeping through each alphabet cuddles my bones and lulls my raging blood.

At first, poetry was a form of escapism from the overwhelming anger I felt at my uncles' betrayal. Now, it is the signature of my soul- tightly woven into the core of my being. Poetry is planting flowers in the hearts of the broken, watering them with love, and watching them



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**FICTION**  
*(Short Stories & Flash Fiction)*



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### ***A DAWO LAFIYA - COME BACK SAFELY* By *Balpolam Idi***

*A Dawo Lafiya* was the last thing I read before hopping on the lorry passing by Katakoto junction. As an almajiri boy, it is not every day Keke and cab drivers eagerly give you a lift. Even if willing, many passengers are distrustful and look at us with disgust. So, it is not unusual for us to jump on passing lorries, trailers, and trucks to go from one end of the city to another to stand a better chance at getting alms.

My last day in Jos started like all the other ones of the past six years since my arrival. It was a cold morning, and after saying our Asuba prayers, we cleaned up by rubbing little water on our extremities, rinsing our mouths, and ensuring no dried drool on our faces. Bathing was a luxury we could not yet afford - warm water and time, soap, and jelly to rub on afterward.

Frozen toes and fingers give you so much perspective on the nature of the sun, her benevolence, and evident shyness in Plateau State. The sun slowly opens one eye and looks upon us with a blurred vision till about the third hour after daybreak, when she fully awakens. Even then, she is eager to hide behind a cloud for hours until coaxed like a reluctant bride coming to her groom. She could bestow her rays on you, like an angry ex, keeping up with pleasantries but withholding her warmth.

After our morning lessons, I went to *mai-kosai* by Sukuwa junction, fetched some water and firewood in exchange for *kosai* and *kunun gyada*. Usman, my best friend, and I told the other boys we were going to Terminus. Some followed us.

The lorry we hopped on was transporting yams and vegetables. It is a great deal of ease, travelling with farm products rather than with cattle. You could sit on the cargo rather than hanging on to the metal bar at the rear of the vehicles that convey cattle while trying your best to avoid poking horns and whipping tails. We used the big cars to move in the mornings and evenings.

*A Dawo Lafiya* was a green and yellow freshly painted car with a terrible drawing of a lion's face, a palm tree, a dagger, and a horse. It had a trampoline covering its bed, and it was the jackpot. I climbed into the truck bed to rest on the mounds of yam. Eight of



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us made that decision, enthused to be in a warm enclosure, away from the howling wind and biting cold, and in our frenzy to get good spots. We didn't notice someone was lying in a corner. We all sat facing the rear of the lorry, so we could see passing cars through holes in the trampoline and would know when we got to our destination. We got comfortable and started chatting about Kasim and the underserved flogging he got from two older boys. Rashid was giving us an embellished recollection of the event. All of us were so engrossed in his gist that we did not hear or see the man get up. One moment, we were sitting on yams, listening to Rashid, and the next, we were covered by a big, dark blanket, overcome by a choking smell. "*This is not normal!*" were my last thoughts before I fell into the darkness of oblivion.

I was eleven years old when we were abducted. When I came to consciousness, the first thing I sensed was the pungent smell of urine and sweat combined. There was a dull, throbbing headache and dryness in my mouth, but it was the smell that made me aware of how much filth I was in. We were in a strange, uncompleted, and very hot building. It was hot in the morning, hotter at night, and hottest at noon.

A few days after being there, we heard our captors talking about reinforcing the fighting boys. How very fortunate for the younger boys who were lanky and malnourished, us included. It could have been us. A dread that made my stool so watery you would swear it was smelly piss that overcame me. Soon enough, we were separated from the other boys, though Usman and I were lucky enough to have been sent off to a sugarcane farm together. I remember the despair that cloaked me as much as the perpetual sweat.

Years later, I will trace that location to the savannah sugarcane plantation in Adamawa state. There was the backbreaking work of farming sugarcane, the sweltering heat, the persistent unquenchable thirst, and the consistent bouts of malaria and typhoid that will drain you within an inch of your life. None of this broke me. I was positive we could work until we learnt our whereabouts and planned our escape. Nothing broke my resolve. Not the beatings, not the hunger, not the abuse, nothing. Until a snake bite took my best friend's life, that was when I knew what it meant to be utterly alone.



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I laid awake on many nights, thinking about my life. The day Ummi and Abba dropped me off at Mallam Shamsu's, I cried for hours. I cried through the introductory classes and most night duas. I cried for weeks, holding out hope that Ummi would come and get me. I was only five when Abba decided to send me to Mallam Shamsu for almajiri education. I was clueless; playing football with the worn-out ball our neighbourhood kids shared was my sole joy. I did not notice Ummi had become withdrawn, quite clingy, while her co-wife, Ya Kadijah, taunted relentlessly. Maybe I would have understood that she was not in support. In a man's world, the offspring's fate is beyond the mother's. I felt discarded, like a garment that could easily be replaced. It didn't matter that all Ummi did was apologise and plead that I learn well and come back to her. I was lost, but Usman was the first to show me kindness.

At twenty, I had eaten stolen sugarcane to stay alive more times than I said my prayers. Sometimes, I would finish my work and sneak to the sorghum farm for extra cash so I could afford a new pair of slippers. I wondered quite often. Did Ummi miss me? Was she well? Did Abba divorce Ya Kadijah like he always threatened to? Life in Kebbi came to me in little flashes, a distant memory. So faint, almost fictional, but I know I had a family once.

Soon enough, astute observation, a sharp mind for numbers, and attention to detail got me promoted from forced labour to hired help. I got paid to do some inventory and odd jobs and moved from the farm's ramshackle to the sugar company premises. I lived in the boys' quarters with three other men, Ahakapwa, Kamal, and John. I missed Usman terribly.

Time flies when you are struggling to stay alive; find meaning and identity. It has been eleven years since I naively hopped on *A Dawo Lafiya*, seven, since Usman stared at me, unblinking. I still remember the acrid smell of chloroform on the day of our kidnapping. The stifling heat of our ramshackle. Usman's heaving and groaning before the convulsion and paralysis. These remain fresh in my head. But my life before Jos is now a blur. I wonder if anyone ever looked for me and if I was missed. I wonder what they told Ummi if they ever did. **Ban dawo lafiya ba** - I did not return safely.



***LIMITS OF FATE By Aiyejinna Abraham O.***

Again, it is this time.

Your sister is tied above small firewood bundles and her mouth foams. Her caked skin is already too rough to take another cut from the healer's knife, and even with the oil lamps burning in the hands of the gathered villagers, you no longer know how to describe a corpse.

She is bound with chains. The herbalist tightly clamps her pale cheeks with his index and thumb and makes her steam in a hot pot. She squirms in pain, and the villagers roar in a celebration that this six-year-old has set the devil free again.

Her skin is no longer a costume. You know that a lot will have to align for her to survive this yearly torture. You two have been part of a miracle before, yet you cannot say for sure if there are limits to what fate can offer.



***NOSTALGIA By Olayemi Mudashir Adewale***

Bright clouds hover above Mama Agba's stall at the busy Bodija market in Ibadan. Her wrinkled old lips crunch up in a smile as she faintly hears the playful footfalls of her grandchildren approaching, although drowned by the loud Fuji music blasting from the radio in the corner.

I have never lived through a holiday without seeing Mama Agba, her creaky old hands against mine, or pressing her paper-like cheeks into a ball. She seemed immortal and ever-present, forever stationed in her stall like a sentry.

Tuesday evening, as I walked the market road approaching her stall. The sea of people parted. Her stall was empty except for the shadowy figure of my father. He sat in a slant position, mumbling. From his countenance, it appeared the earth had been cruel again. Then, cursing the gods of his fathers, he stuttered, "Mama Agba is dead."



***DANGEROUS DISMISSAL By Halimat Ojone Usman***

In the wake of the morning and the piercing sound of birds signifying the light of day, the sound of someone howling in the distance sends chills of anger down my spine. It is the third time since the week began, and again, we have been jolted from our sleep by our neighbours fighting away their morning. With the voices getting louder than the last time and sounds of glass shattering in the distance, I stare longingly at my stereo lying in the corner of the room. Suddenly, a loud deafening noise with a frightening closeness but a definite direction to my neighbour's living room jolts me out of my mind. For a minute, it felt like abrupt silence. But for the screams of my wife calling out "Nkechinyere!" our daughter's name, I would have laid still on the bed, contemplating if I recognized the sound of a rifle.



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# POETRY



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***SAME OLD TALE By Abdulmued Balogun***

I yearn for, in the sky of my pallid  
heart— the rainbow of a perfect home.

I paint on the plaque of my  
patriotic mind— the portrait of a  
country, rooted in the soil of justice.

I yearn, but, just the same old tale:  
"mourning equity," reincarnating—  
in different forms, in different costumes  
like a con artist's hook, homing for fishlings.



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***SPLITTING By Abdulmueed Balogun***

Splitting into darkness,  
the dandelion of light fades gently  
like dawn at the eve of dusk.

Unity in diversity, a fairytale,  
when survival is a tenant in the duplex of a precipice.

Our souls in our hands, in jeopardy,  
the sky is about to unleash torment,  
heads without umbrellas.

Still, blindly unto faith  
we cling like a termite,  
waiting at the shore of miracle,  
from this reverie, when will our hearts awake  
and tackle the looming doom ahead?



## *Come Back Safely*

### ***THE MANY FACES OF ME By Adedayo Onabade***

I know my many selves,  
The many different parts that make me up.

I know the child, timid—  
innocent and anticipatory of the world's goodness  
as if life lends its grace to all who come by.

I also know the teen, vain—  
expressive yet misunderstood.  
She learned soon enough that the world is no breeding ground for hopefuls.

But my newest self is a fusion of them both and more:  
Of all that I have forgotten,  
lived  
and I am yet to learn.  
So, what does that make me?

Sometimes, I think I am a cocktail:  
a mishmash of characters,  
a puppet playing to the bidding of another.  
For when Anxiety pushes Timidity to the fore,  
desperation to be understood moves me to act,  
to prove that I am more than you envisage.

There are other many faces of me  
hidden in abandoned papers,  
and soon the world becomes  
complete of its remembrance.

This is how I birth more selves,  
because when knowing is everything,  
the child becomes.



*Come Back Safely*

***A PRISON HE CALLS HOME By Adefolatomwa Toye***

The city welcomes its newest guest  
with a blinding greeting  
of glass stacks reaching the sky.

He listens to the melody of desperate honks and angry shouts.  
Longing to join the orchestra  
he casts his gaze of admiration upon his fellow inmates  
- a swarm of walking, driving, talking machines  
with a frown of slight impatience  
plastered on their faces.

He is trapped  
in this wild attraction  
in this wonderland  
of crowded roads and busy people  
who don't see him  
nor seem to care

But his confinement suits him well.  
He embraces  
his barricades of sky-reaching blocks  
and dances to the brazen sounds  
drowning his voice.

He throws his identity into the sea  
of faceless bodies.  
He'll become a part of a whole.  
He'll join their endless routine  
of walking a maze with no exit.

The city welcomes this willing guest  
to a prison he calls home.



## *Come Back Safely*

### ***REALITY IS A DREAM By Adefolatomewa Toye***

They tell me not to lose myself in dreams.  
Say, "Reality is here on the ground."

But if I stand on the ground, it attacks me,  
Stifles my passion and sucks out my wonder.

The more I tether myself to this broken place,  
The more it takes and takes  
Until it fills me with emptiness.

My breath trembles inside of me,  
My heart, a machine that won't start.

There is salvation in dreaming;  
It is how new realities are formed.

It is why I live each day daydreaming,  
Seeking refuge in the beauty of dreams  
When life is at its darkest,  
When the battle is at its fiercest.

I am a questioning soldier.  
Will life's trepidations continue to slice me?  
Until numbness is a welcoming comfort?  
Why should my survival equate to the loss of myself?

I am a reluctant runner in a race with no end in sight.  
The wake of victory invites a consuming thirst for more –  
An unending cycle.

Reality is indeed a dream.  
For aren't dreams extensions of what we know to be real?



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Maybe reality is to live each day in its fullness.  
To release its jugular from the tight grip of ambition.

I feel my mind escaping from these barricades of soul-crushing battles.  
I am soaring far into the sky, farther away into the stars.

I am the shooting star, yet I am the wish.  
Every time my body breaks, I remember my wings.

Every entrance into anguish is a signal to release  
What is known and embrace what is possible.  
I was not made for this ground. Even the sky holds my name.

And right here in the sweet silence of space,  
In the tiny breath of a gentle dream coursing through my veins,  
I will find the most real moments of all —  
the moments that are truly mine.



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***UNSWEET HOME By Deborah Ajilore***

Home is the crook of my lover's arm,  
a place filled with musk of sweat & soap.

The walls are painted with blood  
like crude oil floating atop an ocean of memories,  
gouged with scars his past lovers left him.

His eyes are a mirror I stare into,  
hoping to see nothing but me  
but there I witness cynical deadness  
his irises raped of their youthful glow  
by a lover's heartbreak.



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***THE MOURNING FIGURE*** *By Augusta Declan*

They pointed out your mother,  
in the circle of tall, proud women, stamping  
and clapping in tune to a dirge.  
A hunched, keening figure  
with legs splayed in misery, thrashing  
in a bed of red, running mud.

They pointed out your mother, the figure  
half-naked with breasts that droop to her knees.  
Her skin, ashen with neglect, is wrinkled with age  
and the labours of youth.  
Around her waist is a torn, dirty thing  
unlike the regal *George* of nuptial bliss.

They pointed out your mother, the figure  
with a head shaved bald and spotted with blood.  
Her sorrow is a wraithlike shroud, worn  
in wild, sunken eyes, red-rimmed with grief and  
ugly bruises, cuts, and scratches,  
now caked in red, drying mud.

They pointed out your mother when  
you shoved through the circle of women;  
the hunched figure resigned to drinking  
from a gourd of a dead man's fluids.  
Locked in a red, muddy embrace,  
a fresh keening  
that drowns out all other sounds,  
you understand that your father is dead.



## *Come Back Safely*

### ***AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS... By Favour Chinenye Okpor***

On days we cage ourselves  
inside our bodies, alienated  
in the vessels of loneliness

remember the comfort brewing  
in the hearth of our palms.

On days we feast on grief,  
claw desperately at our souls,  
preying on an ugliness that was never there

remember to unearth the poems buried  
beneath our skins and  
read ourselves back to life.

On such days, we pick  
our sorrows like errant pimples,  
nibble on grief and  
clutch our scars like trophies

remember the wars we've won  
ourselves back from.

Flawed as we are,  
our bodies are not  
museums of ancient tragedies.

We are not meant to  
feel the same pain twice.  
This too shall pass.



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***GHOSTS WE MADE By Joseph Hope***

We don't need eyes to see the footprints  
of the ghosts trailing us, our skin like litmus paper

can tell about the wrath of the sun,  
as our legs sink deeper inside the trap sand,

the iron trap of decay, infesting us with gray hairs  
and a rotten nervousness as sharp as pain.

We don't need ears to hear the eerie drums  
of the past forcing our souls to dance to

its weary un-poetic rhythm—  
The ghostly stench of the present is enough.



## *Come Back Safely*

### ***A PATRIOT'S INVITE* By Mazed Mukhtar Oyeleye**

my feet reacquaint themselves with  
the ailing earth & I ascend my mount,  
pitching my reflections at the tip of my pen

join my search for estranged places,  
where the flickering dreams of a people  
parried by ethnocentrism come together.

come to my father's falling forge where he  
carves models with chalk; let's sit before him &  
his minions to become the Solomon of our clime.

let's search for rich fields where my  
mother etched her golden name in  
memories with nursery rhymes.

hunt with me for shelters which see blokes  
cocoon into folks who can forestall generations  
who slumber in reposeful blankets of ignorance.

let our focus be the gleam that carts youths  
out of the seed bags of farmers who cultivate bitter  
apples & rotten tomatoes to enthrone anarchy.

let's find the uterine walls of education and  
enlightenment & be reborn for "unity, faith,  
peace, & progress" to thrive in our motherland.



## *Come Back Safely*

### ***RIGMAROLES By Modester Chinonyelum***

Once, I tried to tell my story,  
But the empty pages of my book booed me.

My heart is a fountain—  
All night, I pour these raging waters into buckets.  
A hollow lives in my chest and my eyes sparkle in tears  
While he only pounds me like his life hinges on it  
Without giving my ears life with sweet nothings.  
My walls spring forth and sour sweats drown the bed.

I am a lost child seeking home, a toddler abandoned by the mother.  
How do you keep sane when your heart is a burning flame?  
And your tongues can't tell tales—  
I shut down like a low battery,  
Seeking comfort beneath my skin.

My mind wanders to unwelcome places—  
Always trying to drown my voice elsewhere.  
My thoughts drift slowly like a kite.  
Even if this body is the spirit's temple,  
It feels like a torn wrapper—  
You stitch it here, and it tears there.  
You tack it there, and the seam breaks here.  
Till everything becomes messy like a rag.  
And like a rumour,  
Like the wind, like wildfire without a clear direction  
my exhales spread about.  
And panic is the butter spread on my body;  
I drift into my closed eyes till I feel no more.



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***LOVE GERMINATION By Nentapmun Gomwalk***

I'll plant kisses like seeds  
So let them grow  
From your body  
So heavenly

Make no mistake  
I'm making a forest out of you  
Kissing you  
Letting the seeds bloom



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***THE SOUND OF BROKEN SONGS*** By Niyi Williams

in the heart of this city is a fading chorus:  
a blotched base of murmur so wane the voices  
help humanity to its early grave.

we walked past the blurred-out lyrics-  
*the sound of broken songs*, you say, pointing sideways,  
but all I hear is *the sound of broken sons*.

*it's the music from suspended souls*,  
the screams going to bed, not to life,  
their tired throats now dried

from too much of too little. but we don't hear them.  
or we pretend we don't hear them,  
turning fertile hands into food for fishes

& at other times, the soil softens their bones for worms. their past  
and future is an empty page. we love to see empty pages  
swirl -twirling like the ghost of dreams -unsettled-

the groan of a homeless man as he slaps his face to kill a fly,  
the sigh of young men with no hooks and no fish  
the silence of all that surrounds an empty living

when this city closes its eyes.



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***IN THIS PLACE By Overcomer Ibiteye***

In this broken empire,  
I can harvest bones  
from bodies fertilized by bombs  
& put them in my pocket  
since there are no spaces left for graves.

I can wrap the remains of a patriot in a weeping flag;  
say, a severed kidney,  
a throat bubbling with anthems and blood,  
a heart dripping with hope  
and bullets.



## *Come Back Safely*

### ***MEDITATIONS By Shitta Faruq Adémólá***

In this poem, I am a tarred road on a burning street.  
In my mouth, doves coo with  
sores in their throats and lightening breaks out in their wings.  
I am a poet with a broken heart for rhymes.  
My poetry is what they call a love story with woven fates -  
twisted like lobes. I metamorphose each time I write.  
I meditate. It is the autobiography of the wounds  
hidden inside my flesh. They narrate the tale of death,  
as they threw fire in my father's chest  
as its tongue stripped my mother to shivers.

What does it mean to write of your burn?  
Of the scars fashioned on your forehead as ornaments.  
What does it mean to salivate into clean water  
and find out that the sea is nothing  
but a body unburdened with flesh?  
Writing is how I lose my body.  
It is how I find my form,  
and lose it again.



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# CONTRIBUTORS BIOGRAPHIES



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**Abdulmued Balogun** is a Nigerian poet and an undergraduate at the University of Ibadan. He is a 2021 HUES Foundation Scholar and a Poetry Editor at The Global Youth Review.

Abdulmued won an Honorable Mention in the 2021 Whispering Crescent Poetry Prize. In addition, he was the runner-up in the Reform Naija Writing Contest - "FREEWILL" in November 2020, was longlisted for the 2021 Ebarcee-Prize, and shortlisted for the Brigitte Poirson Poetry Contest (BBPC) February/March 2021.

He is an alumnus of the 2021 SprinNG Writing Fellowship. His poems have been published/are forthcoming in Avalon Literary Review, JMWW Journal, Ligeia Magazine, Kreative Diadem, Subnivean Magazine, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, The Incandescent Review, The Remnant Archive, and elsewhere.

He tweets from [AbdmueedA](#).

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**Adedayo Onabade** is a Nigerian essayist, fiction, and poetry writer. She holds a B.A. from Olabisi Onabanjo University and an M.A. from the University of Lagos, both in English Literature. Her works have been shortlisted for SynCity's 'Poetry in times of Corona' and #TwitterWritingContest.

Adedayo volunteers with STER (Stand To End Rape Initiative), a social justice organization that works to combat sexual and gender-based violence against women, girls, and vulnerable people. Outside writing, she is fascinated by NatGeoWild, art galleries, reading, and documentaries.



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**Adefolatomíwa Toyé** is an architecture student and poet from Lagos. Her poetry is inspired by the diversity of human experiences and the need to represent the mundane moments in daily life. Her works explore human emotions, societal and environmental issues.

Adefolatomíwa was a finalist in the 2018 International Writer Talk Poetry Competition and performed at the Lagos Poetry Thon the same year. In addition, her literary works have been published online and in print on Society of Architecture Students' 18 Yearbook, The Eye of the African Woman, and CIA Fab Lab 03-Words.

In 2020, she exhibited her works at ARTCREATE 1.0 organized by the Department of Architecture, University of Lagos, and was selected as a SprinNG Writing Fellow the following year (2021). Adefola's writing seeks to connect poetry with visual appreciation. Her blog *Photo with a Poem* fuses poetry and photography.

When she isn't buried in a book or writing, you can find her crocheting or listening to history podcasts (usually at the same time).

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**Aiyejinna Abraham O.** is a Poet and a lover of photography. He writes on themes such as grief, suffering, religion, and other things his mind falls upon. His works are published or forthcoming on Channel magazine: issue 5, Brittle paper, The Rush magazine, PRAXIS magazine, EBOquills, and other anthologies. He was a finalist for: Nigerian News Direct Poetry prize 2020, Bridgette Poirson poetry contest April/May 2021, EOOP 2020. He is also an alumnus of the SprinNG Writing Fellowship 2021.

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**Chiamaka Omireh** is a creative and realistic storyteller based in Nigeria. She has been sprouting words creatively in many forms, including fiction and nonfiction.

In 2018, she was shortlisted for the African book club short story competition, and in 2019, she was longlisted for the Writivism short story prize and K and L writing contest. Her short story *Zikora* is published on Okadabooks.

When she is not writing, she designs.

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**Deborah Ajilore** is a Nigerian writer and photographer. She is a French Education graduate from Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo. Her works have been published by Praxis Magazine, The Quills, Mamba Journal, Shallow Tales Review, and elsewhere. She centers her artistry around themes like self-esteem, nostalgia, love, fear, loss, etc. She was a joint winner of the Poets in Nigeria (PIN 10-Day Poetry Challenge (May 2021 edition).

Deborah is an introvert who expresses diverse versions of herself through words and photographs. She likes to portray light and capture nature in her work. She hopes her art mirrors the world and resonates with people from all spheres of life. She wishes to write and publish pieces across different genres and languages.

When she is not writing, she is behind the lens, making memories, reading books, or watching Korean series recaps. You can reach her on Facebook [@Deborah Ajilore](#).



## *Come Back Safely*

**Augusta Declan** is an Igbo-Nigerian storyteller. Inspired by life stories and solitary spaces, she writes fiction, and creative nonfiction, exploring themes around pain and healing.

Augusta's work has been featured in The Peace Exhibit and Kalahari Review, and she writes at <https://logandlife.wordpress.com/> and on Medium @augustadecan.

She also volunteers with One Voice Initiative for Women and Children Emancipation, a non-governmental organization committed to battling gender-based issues. An avid lover of Afro-soul and riotous sunsets, she lives in Lagos, Nigeria.

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**Balpolam Idi** is a creative writer who uses writing to convey her thoughts, opinions, and occasionally, grievances. She dresses her ideas in stories; other times, they are disguised as poems, and quite often, she parades them naked as the day they were conceived in her mind.

Being a female born into a middle-class family in northeastern Nigeria had shaped her in more ways than she would like to admit. She is currently working on her first book, a memoir about her childhood. Balpolam is enthusiastic about education and health and will always be found volunteering towards a cause in these aspects. She strongly believes that words shape our world, and through them, minds can be reshaped, hope can be shared, and life renewed.

Her writing had been published in JETS Magazine, Project Naija Magazine, Sarauta Network, Data-Driven Investor, and one of her stories was longlisted for the Africa@2050 climate flash fiction contest. Her other works can be found on her Medium blog - [balpolamidi.medium.com](https://t.co/lxtLY7Uluh?amp=1) <https://t.co/lxtLY7Uluh?amp=1> and Instagram page - [@ballichashem](#).



## *Come Back Safely*

**Favour Chinenye Okpor** is a poet, short story writer, essayist, and content creator. She explores the themes of love, loss, healing, femininity, and whatever catches her fancy.

Her works have been published on online literary platforms such as UITESWRITE, TVO Tribe, Shuzia.com, Planet Wizard Africa, Open Door Anthology, Dansabe Media Institute, and elsewhere. In addition, her short story "Broken" was longlisted for the Shuzia Short Story (The Scarlet Thread) contest.

She enjoys devouring the works of other poets and hopes her poems impact lives and change stereotypical narratives. When she is not writing, she volunteers for Sexual Health Awareness and Gender Equality advocacy with various organizations such as LEAP Africa, WARIF Nigeria, etc. She writes from SouthWest, Nigeria.

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**Halimat Ojone Usman** is a writer, flash fiction, and poetry enthusiast studying for a Doctor of Optometry Degree at the University of Ilorin. She is also a renowned debater with many local and international awards to her name. Notably, she received the Best Female Speaker award at the All-Nigerian Universities Debating Championship 2018, Best Public Speaker at the Covenant University Invitational Tournament 2020, and 1st runner up at the OIC Grand final for the Bangabandhu Dhaka International Debate Fest hosted by the Bangladesh Debate Federation.

Halimat is a SprinNG Writing Fellowship alumnus whose works explore the themes of love, grief, and being.



## *Come Back Safely*

**Joseph Hope** is a student of Usman Danfodio University, Sokoto, Nigeria studying applied chemistry.

His works are forthcoming or already published in Reckoning Press, Evening Street Press, Zoetic Press, New Verse News, Praxis Magazine, AfroPoetry, Gemini Spice Magazine, Spillwords, SprinNG, Writers Space Africa, Nthanda Magazine, 5th Chinua Achebe Anthology, Ariel Chart, Best "New" African Poets 2019 Anthology, and more. In addition, he's a reader for the reckoning press.

He is an alumnus of the 2021 SprinNG Writing Fellowship.

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**Mazeed Mukhtar Oyeleye** is a Nigerian Economics undergraduate, award-winning poet, and writer who transits territories through the power of the pen. He recently won the GreenWrite Poetry Contest, 2021, and the Whispering Crescent Essay Prize, 2021. He is fond of Wole Soyinka and Jericho Brown's works. When he is not writing, he plays games.

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**Modester Chinonyelum** is a creative writer from the suburbs of Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

With her keen interest in creative writing, she contributes to a weekly column at Citizen's Advocate, a local media outlet in Abakaliki. In addition, she led a debate team in her secondary school days and wrote articles for the school press club board. She also served as an Editor for the school magazine where her writings were published.

Since 2018, Modester has created content on lifestyle and societal issues, having learned the fundamentals of Copywriting, serving as an assistant under an expert. In addition, she has written over a hundred blog posts for websites.

She is an alumnus of the 2021 SprinNG Writing Fellowship. While she aspires to get published by journals and contribute to more literary platforms, her poems can be found at Mirakee (mercurial), a writing-based social platform.



## *Come Back Safely*

**Nentapmun Gomwalk** is a freelance and creative writer with an academic background in communication and multimedia. Her non-creative work includes copywriting, content writing, proofreading, and editing.

She is an avid reader and loves experimenting with poetry, short stories, and screenwriting. Nentapmun's creative writing explores magical realism, fantasy, and the mystique of human nature. With such esoteric themes, Nentapmun's writing seeks to prod the reader into intrinsic inquiry and philosophy, aiming to learn a little more about themselves and the human condition.

Passionate about African literature, Nentapmun's book club, The African Bookworm, solely reads and discusses one African book every month! You can find her writing on Medium and join her book club on Instagram.

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**Niyi Williams** is a Nigerian writer and poet. He is a poetry editor with The Augment Review and a SprinNG creative writing fellow. He has works published on The African Writers, SerotoninPoetry, Punocracy, Fahamidan Journal, Nantygreens, The Quills, and elsewhere. Niyi currently lives in Lagos, where he is rounding off his postgraduate degree in English at the University of Lagos.

He is currently working on his first collection of poetry. Find him on Instagram and Twitter @niyi\_williams\_

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**Olayemi Mudashir Adewale** is a Nigerian engineer and a writer who loves art, books, poetry, music, and ice cream. He believes in the soothing and therapeutic effects of writing.

His works have appeared on the African Writers website, Elsie's blog, and other blogs. Many of them have also been featured in print magazines both locally and internationally. He also shares his works on IG [@yemightwords](#).



## *Come Back Safely*

**Overcomer Ibiteye** is a Nigerian poet and fiction writer currently taking her undergraduate studies in Physics at the University of Ibadan.

Her works have appeared in the Litfest Anthology, Shuzia Magazine, and on the TVO literary website. She was also shortlisted for the 2020 Michael Afenfa Prize for the END SARS poetry contest, 2021 Blessing Kolajo Prize, and the 2021 Poetry Prize organized by the Mentally Aware Nigeria Initiative.

Overcomer uses spoken-word poetry and science fiction to challenge stereotypes on mental health disorders, domestic abuse, religion, etc. She believes that words, when written or recited articulately, can cause a radical change in the perspectives of the readers and hearers. With poetry and storytelling, she makes her listeners view sensitive issues and topics differently and clearer.

She volunteers her free time with literary communities like Litfest to organize spoken word events, monologues, music performances, and stage plays.

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**Oyim Theresa Ogu** is a fiction writer based in Lagos, Nigeria. She's an alumna of the 2021 SprinNG Writing Fellowship. She believes storytelling can be fun and a means to spark conversations about her faith.

She is currently working on a chapbook. When she is not writing, she's probably searching for the Meat Pie with the perfect crust.



## *Come Back Safely*

**Samuel Akanimoh** is a creative writer, lover of poetry and music, and a creative designer by practice. He first discovered his passion and interest for writing in his senior year of Secondary School and has ever since indulged in reading books centered around poetry and fiction, writing, and performing poetry.

His writing is mostly brief, poignant, relatable, and direct, embedded in themes about life, self-awareness, growth, relationships, love and pain, societal pressures, faith, etc. His writing aims to communicate a clear and relatable message, even to people that ideally do not enjoy poetry. He aims to provoke readers to break from negative social conditioning and stereotypes, to live their best life, not the life they were told was best for them. He writes to encourage readers to love themselves, then love others.

Currently, you can find Samuel encouraging future young adults to make the most of the moment at Teen Talk programmes hosted by the Abuja Literary Society.

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**Shitta Faruq Adémólá** is a young Muslim poet, phone photographer, budding French linguist, and fiction writer from Nigeria.

He is the author of a micro chapbook, "All I Know Is I Am Going to Be Beautiful One Day" (Ghost City Press, 2021), and a forthcoming chapbook, "Night Club with Dogs" (INKspired, 2021).

His works have appeared or are forthcoming in Jalada Africa, Dream Glow, Serotonin, FERAL, Third Estate Art, Rigorous Magazine, Icefloe Press, and elsewhere. In addition, he is the winner of the 2021 Fitrah review poetry prize, a joint winner in the 2020 Shuzia PenProtest Contest, a joint winner in the 2021 Shuzia redemption poetry contest, and a joint winner IN 10-DAY Poetry challenge (November 2020).

He is a poetry editor at Litround and tweets [@shittafaruqade1](https://twitter.com/shittafaruqade1).



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Thanks for reading the SprinNG Writing Fellowship  
2021 anthology!



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