

Kinisha Williams, 26, was born in the Bronx, New York, raised in Portland, Oregon, and graduated from Benson High School in northeast Portland. One week shy of her 25th birthday, she was “blessed” with the opportunity to enroll at Springdale Job Corps which has been “life changing.” Since her enrollment, she has become a Certified Nursing Assistant and will finish with a certificate in Office Administration in January 2015. She enjoys the peace of mind living in the Columbia River Gorge provides and appreciates that during her time at Springdale Job Corps she has been able to focus solely on Kinisha.



How did you first hear about Write Around Portland? What drew you to joining the workshop?

The Springdale Center Director announced the workshop at our Monday morning meeting. She pulled me aside afterward to encourage me to join. When she said that we'd be published, I said, “Oh, that's definitely something I want to do.” For years I've wanted to be a writer. I like writing poetry, true stories, fiction.

Writing is a good place to be honest. It's safe. I jumped at the opportunity to be able to be honest on paper, and to have two hours a week when all I had to do was write.

What was your experience like in the workshop?

I liked writing with the group, and it's interesting to have someone give a prompt. Sometimes you think you don't have anything to say, then someone throws something at you [a prompt] and it opens up a whole other world of ideas, and you find out that you actually do. I liked hearing everyone's different perspectives on a prompt. It was really interesting how 10 people could get 10 different stories from the same prompt. I thought that was fun.

What was it like to share your writing with other people?

I explored a lot with those prompts. I had some pieces that touched some sore spots; I wrote about things that I'm comfortable talking about but other people may be still dealing with. I wrote one piece about how sometimes people can tell you that you're nothing, or they don't appreciate you and you don't know your worth. So I wrote that you should look at yourself as a trophy, if you're happy with who you are and what you've done, that's all that really matters. You can't impress everyone and you should always think of yourself as, in my words, “I'm all that,” and “I really don't care what anyone has to say as long as I'm happy with me.” People took really well to it.

You know, our generation – just anyone growing up really – has gone through at least one time when they felt they really weren't appreciated or that they weren't as good as the next person. I'm very confident despite what I've been through. I love me. But everybody's not like that so it's good when you can hear someone's piece [who is confident] and let that kind of sink in.

What did you think about giving and receiving feedback?

Our group was really honest about feedback while still being positive. We were able to build up one another with feedback and ask questions or point out places to elaborate and offer direction [for continued writing]. We had a good group. A different group. All different personalities, but we meshed well. We laughed a lot.

What was it like hearing other stories in the group?

One thing about writing is that people will always say more on paper than they will out loud, almost like they're living a different life. With the pen, when you hit a certain subject, people's emotions come out. You learn the most about people [when they write]. You thought you had people figured out and you didn't really. It was nice to hear the other side of people. Someone comes off as hard and then they read their words and it's like, "Oh, you have a soft spot." I liked the opportunity to see different sides of people.

It [hearing others' stories] made me more aware of how to handle people. I'm outspoken, but I can take a different approach, I can be more compassionate. There was one person in particular that [after being with in the workshop] I am able to actually communicate with in a more positive way instead of a negative way. I didn't think that was possible. It helped me be compassionate and communicate better with people.

What was your favorite part of the workshop?

More than writing, it was hearing others' pieces because I was anxious to hear what they were gonna say. To see what how they were different than mine, what direction they went; was it funny, more emotional, completely off the wall? So I just enjoyed hearing others' responses to the prompts. I had a lot of laughs and a lot of "Oh, I didn't think that," or "Wow, how did you get that?" moments.

Write Around Portland made a great impact on my group. I think a lot of people in my group weren't very confident in who they are. The workshop brought them a little hope and gave us more things to look forward to in life. I think that is the best thing Write Around Portland could have done for our group; build some self-confidence and give some hope while doing something we love and not worrying about what other people think.

How did you feel about reading at the anthology release party?

I'm all about the spotlight. It was nice to have the full attention of such a large group. After the feedback I'd already received on my piece, I felt prepared. I didn't have jitters or butterflies. The feedback and positive energy in the room that night made it a good place to read.

How did you feel about being published in the book?

That was a blessing. That's something I always wanted but never knew how that was ever going to happen. It felt good that somebody recognized and appreciated my work and that I'm in a book that people own and it's actually in a bookstore. That's cool. That felt like a big accomplishment to me.

Would you recommend Write Around Portland to other people?

Oh yeah, definitely. Everyone has their own opinion, story, their own voice. It'd be a great opportunity to be heard and to also have an opportunity to listen. We are a society that assumes a lot of stuff. It's different to assume and then hear the truth. Anyone who did it would

gain listening skills and learn how to be positive and how to speak up and have a voice. It's a great outlet for anything you've been holding in. Write Around Portland is a door opener for anyone who is looking for an outlet to be heard and start the new chapter.

Did your Write Around Portland experience strengthen your writing? What did you learn?

I can take any situation and make a story out of it. I was able to take the prompts and write about anything that was thrown at me. We tend to write about the same things, what we're comfortable with, what we like. I went beyond what I'm familiar with or what I like. And I learned that I can go deep, emotionally and with detail, as well as play with perception. I can play with my words and set a tone, make people say, "Oh I wasn't expecting that." I can elaborate on a subject probably outside of the context it was given and make it more than what you thought or what you expected.

I guess at the end of the day, I know I'm a writer and I want to keep writing. The workshop sparked the desire in me to want to keep writing.