

Featured Writer Interview with Allison Krause

Allison Krause, 45, is originally from southern California but moved to Oregon 12 years ago to live on a farm and grow Asian pears. She had two daughters, but her daughter Kayla passed away five years ago. Because Kayla was able to donate her organs, Allison became involved with Donate Life Northwest. Allison is a massage therapist, a swimmer, and an avid traveler. Most recently, she visited Hawaii, where her family is from. The place she wants to visit the most? Japan.

This past spring, Allison participated in a Write Around Portland workshop at Donate Life Northwest for organ donor recipients and organ donor families. Her piece “Big Brown Eyes” was published in the spring 2016 anthology, *Draw the Outside*.



Excerpt from “Big Brown Eyes”
by Allison Krause

Momma, what were you like when you were my age? my little girl asked while laying in my lap, her big brown eyes peeking through her overgrown bangs. Oh, how I do love her. She’s so inquisitive and yet sometimes intrusive, in one neat little package. Sometimes I want to dance around her questions, avoiding the hard stories I held tight as a child. How on that summer day long ago my dreams were shattered. Do I hold back to protect her from hearing my pain? Or do I tell her so she may learn?

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Interview with Featured Writer Allison Krause

Interviewed by a Write Around volunteer

How did you first hear about Write Around Portland?

Donate Life Northwest invited me. I just felt like I had been in this stuck place since Kayla, and I didn't know where to put it, and I didn't know how to do it. I just felt like I was stuck for years, and then I started coming back around at the beginning of this year. I was like, “I need to do something,” and then [the opportunity to be part of a workshop] fell into my lap. I was like, “Okay, then, fine! Here we go!” It was perfect timing. Because I needed it in my life again. It was a good way for me. Like you know you need to go to the gym, but you don't know where to start, but you need a social part. Oh, this is perfect, having the feedback, and the social interaction with people again.

What was the workshop like for you?

Wow. It was so awesome. You were amazing as the facilitator. The way that it was structured was just what I needed. I just felt like it was enough structure yet enough freedom to be able to express myself in the way I needed to and then hearing everybody else's [writing], just because of the fact that we were all kind of going through the grieving process, and to be able to come together and have that safe space, that was huge for me. It was like a support group with the encouragement; and with the practice of writing again, it was like a two-fer for me. I loved it. I really, really loved it.

You were at the anthology release party and the reading. What was that like for you?

It was exciting, and life-threatening (laughs). Well, it wasn't that bad. I was very humbled that I was one chosen for it, and then to be there with everybody else, and to hear [them] going through the same thing. It was exciting but at the same time scary because my guts were being exposed. But after it was done, I was like, "I did it, and I'm okay."

What was it like to hear other people's stories at that reading?

It was amazing. You can hear the different struggles from within their stories, too, and know that we were all there. It was like a little sister-brotherhood. We're here together. It was great.

What was it like to be published in a book?

Very humbling. I can actually say that I'm published, I'm accomplished, now. That was huge for me. Huge, huge. My friend pointed out that I was on the back cover, and I was like, "What's wrong with these people?" It was strange for me, because I've not had the confidence, or enough experiences like this to say, "Oh, yeah, actually people like me." It's very humbling.

Could you read what's on the back of the book?

Sure. "I have loved this workshop. I had not been writing since I lost my daughter, and when the opportunity came to me, I jumped in. It has helped me get my voice back, has given me confidence, and it's sparked my interest in sharing my story... The workshop has started a flame inside me." Yeah, that's it exactly.

Tell me about that flame. It's been several months now since we stopped meeting. Are you writing?

When I went to Maui, it was kind of like this healing trip. It was not something that was planned; I was totally broke. I put this little thing on Facebook – sometimes I do these little things, very vulnerable, and transparent – but I said something like, "It's a month and a half until Kayla's angel-versary (that's what I call it), and all I want to do is be on a beach alone. In Maui." I started getting all these comments, like "Why don't we start a GoFundMe," and I was like, "Come on, you guys, no," but people were messaging me like, "We can do this," and I was like, "No this is ridiculous, people are dying, people have cancer, I don't need this." Long story short, people started sending me money, I went on this trip, my brother came. I tried to prepare myself to just be, to just write, to have the experience of just remembering, and like, really digging down deep, and to be able to record it. And it was just really raw. I was hearing your voice [as the facilitator], and I was just writing down a prompt, and then I just kept that pen moving, and some really good stuff came out of it. I did start a blog, but I haven't figured out how I'm going to use it yet, exactly. Maybe someday a book. I have all these journals that have all these bits and pieces of me, in different phases of life, so I'm like, what would it look like – kind of like what we used to do [in the workshop] – to take a piece of writing and pull out bits and pieces, and edit, and start from there again.

What was your favorite part of the workshop?

Gosh. I think I liked the instant feedback. There were so many different parts, but I think the instant feedback. Because you know, when you write something down, you don't know what's going to impact other people. I just write. I'm not going, "I really want to shock people", or "How are people going to look at this?" But getting that instant feedback, of what people are taking from it, that was really, really cool. When other writers are there, saying, "I like how you did this," I think I liked that. But I think there are lots of good things.

Would you recommend taking a writing workshop with Write Around Portland to other people?

Oh yes, I've told a lot of people.

The Donate Life Northwest community feels pretty strong, but I'm curious about whether you feel connected with them differently now.

I had seen a couple of them before at different events, but you know, [the workshop] was like another healing part, because they've been there, in the same position. That's always been very helpful, when I'm around other people who've been through the fire and can relate in that way. It's harder to talk to people who haven't experienced it, so it's kind of like therapy, because you can share with their grief, and you can bounce things off their writing too. If it was just a regular writing group, I probably wouldn't have written about some of the stuff that I did. I felt a lot more free to say, "Do I feel like writing about Kayla? Yeah, I do."

There were times when a lot of people were really writing about grief and loss, and memories that are difficult, but then there were times when people wrote about something else entirely. And we'd get all of that in the same night.

I liked that a lot. It kind of epitomizes me. I'll have these moments of really dark, but then I can be a goofball, and I don't

care. That's the quirky side of my being.

Any final thoughts?

I just wish everyone could experience one of the workshops. I mean everybody should. Writing is such a freeing activity. You can take yourself places, and you can take others with you, and I think it's a great thing.