

Featured Writer Natalie Cohrs

Natalie Cohrs, 26, is proud to be working in a peer support position for the Early Assessment and Support Alliance (EASA), an organization that helps 15 to 25-year-olds with early symptoms of psychosis. She participated in a Write Around Portland workshop at EASA's Center for Excellence in the spring of 2017 and was published in our 52nd anthology, *Illuminated by the Words / Iluminados por las palabras*. She also works part-time at Nordstrom. Natalie loves to draw and exercise, and always feels as if she wants to write more than she has time to do so.



Awakening by Natalie C.

Awakening

is a dream laid out for you
to explore the

Beaming of the sunlight
on your precious feline snuggled up in
your softest blanket.

The cool summer air blowing
gently into your bedside window

The stretches you fall into
as you discover your equilibrium.

The smell of coffee whispering
in the kitchen as you drift out onto
your secluded yet beautiful porcheside escape.

The feeling of absolute serenity
floating all the way and back again.

Awakening.

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Interview with Featured Writer Natalie Cohrs

Interviewed by Sarthak Shah, Write Around Portland intern.

How did you first hear about Write Around Portland?

It was actually through EASA, because I'm involved with the Center of Excellence for EASA. So, I'm part of the young adult leadership council with them. They offered us a group, and I learned a lot from them.

Were you interested in writing before you took the workshop?

Yeah. I haven't taken a specific workshop, but I've taken several writing classes in school. Basically, my whole major involved a lot of writing, with my communications degree, so I got to practice that way. But I obviously want to practice in other ways, and it inspired me to continue my own writing.

What was your experience like during the workshop?

Fantastic. I can't say enough good things about it. It was awesome how Armin [the volunteer workshop facilitator] was directing it, because he did it in a way where we all had a chance to speak. We all went around, and he gave us a prompt and we were able to tell if we wanted to share what we had written for that. He was just great with scheduling the workshop and having everyone participate pretty equally.

It can be hard sometimes to get up and share your writing. Did you have that experience? Did that get easier?

I think there was one instance where I didn't share something, because I hadn't got all my thoughts together for it, but most things I was totally fine with sharing.

People come to workshops from all different backgrounds. What was that experience like?

The different writing styles were super interesting to hear and to kind of bounce ideas off of. Particularly Armin's writing style, I really appreciated. He has such a great insight and detailed nature about him that just captures every single moment he's speaking of in a way that's just so inspiring.

If you had to pick a favorite moment or aspect of the workshop, what would you say?

I would say when Armin was helping me kind of condense my writing, and put it into more of that poetry-style, just because the words can be—and I learned this from him—so much more powerful when it's a little more succinct and a little more clear and to the point. I really appreciated him helping me with that part at the very end, when we were putting it all together.

Over the weeks, did you notice anything, any personal aspect of yourself, which was changing?

Yeah, my writing style definitely improved. Especially my more creative side, because sometimes I tend to write more nonfiction. I tend to write about more autobiographical aspects of my life, but this really encouraged me to think outside of that box, to get out there and be more creative. I felt more confident! I think more so, it helped with my perspective in my future work that I'm doing now with peer support, just how diverse people's stories can be, and how much that means to them.

What is your experience with writing after the workshop?

I am inspired to volunteer with Write Around, or some other writing group. Sometimes, it can be difficult to be by yourself and to be inspired. I think being part of another group would be really beneficial for me.

Would you take another workshop from Write Around in the future?

Yes, this is actually inspiring me to ask about the next ones right now!