

Connection, Unplugged by Armin Tolentino

An introduction to Write Around Portland's 55th anthology, *Awake in Waves*, Fall 2018

Armin Tolentino has been a Write Around Portland volunteer since 2011. His first poetry collection, *We Meant To Bring It Home Alive*, is forthcoming from Alternating Current Press. He is a former Oregon Literary Arts Fellowship recipient and spends an inordinate amount of time fishing and cheering for the New York Knicks, both futile endeavors.



Let's try a thought experiment. Picture yourself twenty years from today's date. Maybe in this not-so-distant future your morning begins when the microchip behind your ear buzzes your neurons into waking. Your fluttering eyelids activate your smartroom which beams a hologram of traffic delays, weather patterns and top headlines from across the globe all at the foot of your bed as you yawn into the day. In the bathroom, your smartshower scrolls social media updates on the tile wall to keep you up-to-date on the daily minutiae regarding the lives of your ten thousand closest online friends and acquaintances, pictures and videos flashing as incessantly as the water drops hitting you.

A thousand terabytes of content have bombarded your senses before you even have your morning coffee (which, of course, is delivered by drone and paid for by retina scan to eradicate any in-person human interaction). Maybe this isn't so different from your reality today, deluged every moment with data, information, lies, breaking news, online trolling and viral memes. Do you think a simple book—this book you're holding in your hands right now, made of paper, ink, and glue—will still be relevant? Won't it seem archaic, ancient even, to hold something so static and still? Will the voices in these pages, so many years later, still matter?

Absolutely. 100%. Without a doubt. Why am I so sure? Because what's in this book is irreplaceable.

There's a paradox to our growing technology: as we strive to stay ever connected by digitizing our world, we somehow end up feeling more disconnected and alone. But in your hands is an antidote to that feeling of isolation, because the writing in these pages was forged in community, after all. For ten weeks, the authors of these pieces gathered, put pen to paper and had the courage to share their writing with one another. Unplugged. No screens to hide behind. No batteries necessary. They made each other laugh, smile, ponder, cry and feel heard and understood. They reminded each other over and over how much it mattered to hear each other's voices. Just people in a room creating art, telling their truths and caring about one another. What could be more human?

And the best part? They're now sharing this experience with you.

This is an invitation. Turn off your cell phone. Take off your smartwatch. Power down your VR goggles and unsync that chip implanted behind your ear (if you've got one of those already). If you really want to feel connected in this world—truly connected—flip to any page in this book. These poems, stories, parables and prayers are a permanent reminder that we are not alone, that we already have everything we need to connect to one another across time and space—paper, pen and heart.

Write What You Know by Precious Bugarin

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Precious is a designer, creative director and educator. She uses design as a language for equity. For over twenty years she has developed projects for businesses, entrepreneurs, nonprofits and individuals. She's worked with Design Week Portland, Mercy Corps, Nike Well, Partners for a Hunger Free Oregon and Write Around Portland among others. She teaches typography and branding for social good in the graphic design program at Portland State University and has called Portland home since 2001.



When Write Around Portland asked me to write an introduction for their fifty-fifth book, I was honored and a bit overwhelmed. For the past thirteen years I'd designed Write Around Portland's anthologies, and this one would be my last. I had a lot to say but didn't know where to start. My writing was either too formal or too love letter(ish). I wanted to hit somewhere in between, then remembered these words:

Write what you know, Sam had read in a book about writing, so Sam wrote about being a mouse.

When my daughter was born in 2010, Write Around Portland sent her a charming children's book called *Library Mouse*. Sam's words helped me to start. I'd write about design.

As a graphic designer, I'm trained to look closely at letters and how they work together to form words, sentences and paragraphs. A book designer's work is often invisible—we're here to give form to stories and ease a reader's journey through the pages. At times we're so focused on type details (font size, alignment and spacing) that we disconnect how letters look from their meaning. Words turn into shapes rather than shapes we comprehend.

In 2005, I designed my first Write Around Portland anthology, *The Sparkle in the Grit*, and the disconnect I describe above didn't happen. I had worked with words my entire career, but this was the first time I became emotionally absorbed in the content. The pieces I read were vivid and personal—the voices were varied yet lived perfectly together. I attended the reading and witnessed an audience listening with their hearts and readers filled with pride and excitement. The words I laid out in the anthology came to life through animated voices and diverse faces. The energy in the room was inspiring. I was flooded with emotion and decided to work on the project again and again.

Last spring, I participated in a Write Around Portland workshop for the first time and wrote the following about the experience:

Today we answered prompts, shared our writings and provided feedback to each other. Though I had read participants' words many times in the anthologies I designed, I never attended a writing workshop. After experiencing it today, all the different voices and backgrounds, I came to see our shared humanity. I realized how important it is to interact with people different from ourselves and to find the space to write.

As Write Around Portland's graphic designer, collaborator and friend, I can't say enough good things about how they bring our community together. I thank them for bringing me into their world.

Precious Bugarin designed this book you are holding in your hands. Since 2005 she has designed forty-two Write Around Portland anthologies and chapbooks, and this one—our fifty-fifth book—will be her last. We are immensely grateful to Precious for her beautiful work on our books and her dedication to our mission these many years. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with her, now in new ways.