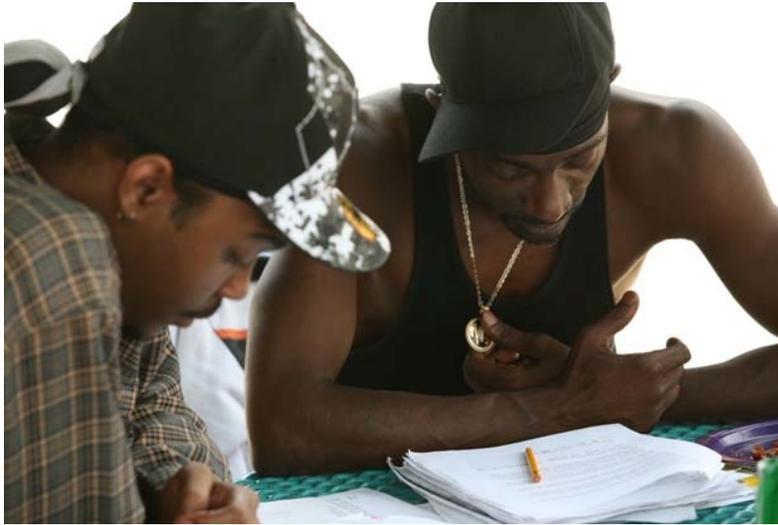


THROUGH OUR EYES ONLY: With the Power to Survive



“Through Our Eyes Only” is a result of *Writer’s Circle*,
an 8-week writing workshop created by Literacy Works in partnership
with *Critical Pathways for Education and Employment* at Schwab Rehabilitation Hospital.

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*Literacy Works’ mission is to fulfill the promise of a basic human right:
the right to read, write, and interpret the world.*

We accomplish our mission by training volunteers to assist children, youth,
and adults to comprehend, analyze and question the world they live in;
empower themselves to develop their own skills, talents and gifts; and
transmit to others the value of reading, writing and critical thinking.

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Photographs by Michael Flack

Critical Pathways to Education and Employment at Schwab Rehabilitation Hospital

Schwab created the *Critical Pathways to Education* program in 1997 to help people with life changing disabilities achieve their highest level of education and personal independence. Depending on specific needs, the program is designed to assist participants in attaining basic literacy, completing a high-school education or its equivalent, determining their career interest, becoming "job ready," preparing for application to a community college or university by meeting prerequisites, and completing the college enrollment process. Ongoing supports have also been developed to further assist participants throughout their educational and vocational career.

Heidi Curran

Staff with Critical Pathways to Education and Employment at Schwab Rehab

A lot of times the joy of writing is robbed from people at a young age. With that is taken not only a valuable life skill, but also an empowering tool for self-expression, reflection, and advocacy. It has been exciting to see this group of writers rediscover that joy, and in the process, learn a few things about punctuation, grammar, and each other.

My favorite part of the writing circle was when everybody would come together and give each other feedback on their writings. The feedback sessions were always genuine and sincere and often sparked very animated dialogue on both life and writing issues. It was fun to see the group learn from each other's work and input. The level of engagement far surpassed anything I had ever seen in a traditional education setting.

Everybody in this group has a very powerful story to share and I know we've only begun to scratch the surface. I am very proud of every writer and I know the work in this book will move you. I am thankful to have been a part of this group and to have the opportunity to hear about the world through their eyes.

Thank you Sara and Literacy Works for bringing this opportunity to our program.

Sara O'Neill Kohl

Literacy Works Program Director

I continue to be inspired by each writer who contributed to *Through Our Eyes Only: With the Power to Survive*. I feel incredibly lucky to have had the opportunity to work with and learn from this group.



Writers

Hector L. Bruno
Antoine Hatley
Andrés Rojas
Arlena Sims
Robert Snead
Marzet Tucker
Michael Ward

WHAT IS MY NEIGHBORHOOD LIKE?

Let me start off by telling you a little about my history and you'll better understand my neighborhood. I am twenty-eight years old with two children. I had my first child when I was sixteen years old. Two months after that, I turned seventeen and two weeks later I was shot and paralyzed in my neighborhood. If you want to know what my neighborhood is like, you would have to see life through my eyes.

My neighborhood has different parts to it. Depending on how you look at it, it can be good or bad. I wasn't born in my neighborhood, but I was raised in it. The part I grew up in was like a mini suburb. The part I was shot in is like the projects and the part I live in, some would probably say it's like a whole new world. No matter how I describe it, it's all one neighborhood.

The part I grew up in is like a mini suburb. Where I lived is a residential area with a lot of beautiful houses. In every house lived two-parent families. Everybody worked or went to school. The children were in the house when the streetlights came on. There were no shootings or vicious fighting. The neighbors kept the streets and sidewalks clean. The grass was green and the children played happily in front of the house or in the yard. I loved living in that part of my neighborhood. When I was a child, violent crimes and drive-bys didn't exist. It wasn't until I strayed away from home that I discovered the other part of my neighborhood, the part I was shot in.

The part I got shot in is like the projects. When I say the projects, to better describe it, I would say gangs, drugs, and violence. This part wasn't residential, it was a commercial area. Gangs hung out on corners, in front of stores. Children hung out in front of houses or in front of other people's houses. Parents hollered out the window for their children. The children stayed outside after dark with no parental supervision. Most parents didn't work. Most adults or young adults were either selling or doing drugs. There were random shootings from time to time. In this part, your regular blue and white policemen didn't ride around. It was basically unmarked detective cars. You would ride past from time to time seeing detectives having some drug dealers or gang bangers on the wall, harassing or arresting them. Young children look amazed as the drug dealers ride pass with their sounds and music vibrating. Although I felt comfortable and secure in that part of my neighborhood, I would often wonder about a new world.



The part I live in some would say is like a new world. A new world is like paradise. Most people would visualize paradise as having palm trees, beautiful sand, and blue water. Where I live is not quite that paradise, but it's like paradise compared to where I've been. I live on the lakefront, which is beautiful with the water and scenery of downtown. My building is a high rise, which is a tall building with at least twenty-two floors or more. On the outside of my building there are people jogging and walking their dogs, children riding their bikes on the bike trail, and just up the street there is a country club culture center. Right next door to my building are two blocks full of beach houses. Although it has always been there, I never took the time to actually discover this part of my neighborhood when I was younger.

I live on the eleventh floor and from my window on one side of my apartment; I can see most of the city. On the other side of my apartment, I see all water. My favorite part of my apartment is my room because I have the best of both sides. On one side, at night, I can see the sunset. On the other side, right before the break of day, I can see the sunrise. It is paradise to me because, in spite of my daily challenges or the things that I've been through, I have the opportunity to actually sit in that type of setting and just look out and feel like I'm in another world. I gain a sense of relaxation, which helps me to meditate. When I'm in that type of setting, all my problems are gone. And that is paradise to me.

The experiences that I've had in my neighborhood represent my basic life stages. While in the suburban area, I was a child growing up. In the project area I was a teenager discovering life. The new world represents my adult years, after everything is said and done. The new world is something I chose on my own with more freedom, more opportunities, and more responsibilities. I believe that everybody sees their neighborhood in different shapes, forms, and fashions. It is only through your eyes that you see the reality.

– Arlena Sims

THE LIFE AND DEATH STRUGGLES IN THE HOOD

I started a piece on this last week. It was a rough draft of my thought about the hood, well, it's like this: my hood isn't different from any other hood with the exception of the upper class whose hood always got someone cleaning their street and homes. My hood consists of good and bad first off. The word deathful to me is a word that explains the living conditions how we as low class people struggle to make a way out of it. This can mean losing someone very dear to you to the street. When that happens you feel like when your time or number comes, it make you wonder if in fact it does happen, who will take care of your business? Everyone say they could be trusted but not everyone can, then there are money problems which everyone has except for those who have it like that, (Might I add I 'aint mad). With all of the new rules coming about it's getting harder to support your living cost, not to mention your children or mother. When we as children leave school to hang-out with the guys to sell drugs in order to provide for needs. Let's face it, there ain't nobody just going to walk up and give us nothing. We find a way to come into money (whether) it is to use folk, sell something, or taking something. The point is, life in the hood makes you become more grown up then you need to be.

– Robert Snead

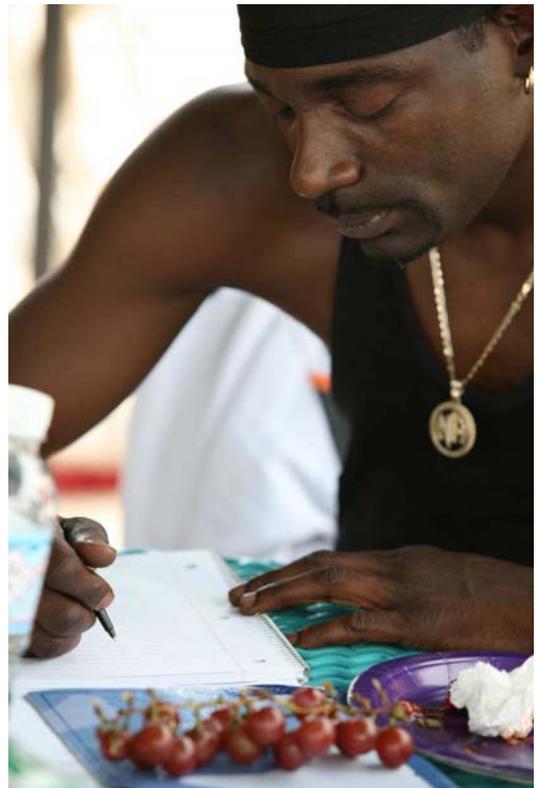
QUESTIONS

“Man”, look at me I have so much to say and (argue) on. If I could say something about homeless people would people listen to me? Would people care about me? I bet if you could tune anybody out of your head you would probably try and tune out everybody in the world. I wonder if I was given superpowers what would I do to make the world safe? Question after question... so on...

I as a man wrestle with these things everyday of my wellbeing. Let's change the playing field back (OK). I have to go back and solve these questions, my biggest thing is will I be remembered? When is my time coming again to take hold of it (properly)? Shall I regain strength only to have problems, stress, and death to zap it all the way gone?

Always remember not to let the question you seek become too hard or stressful. Just remember to relax, for every question there is an answer.

– Robert Snead



IF YOU COULD CHANGE ONE THING ABOUT SOCIETY WHAT WOULD IT BE?

If I could change one thing it would be Congress and the lawmakers who set the standard for our way of life. There will be no more homeless people. Next I would set up a program for the people who are not educated but need to work to support their family. My next order is to make school more exciting so the drop out rate decreases instead of increasing. My next order of business is to crack down on crooked cops, judges, state attorneys, lawyers, drugs, and gangs. I would change how business is done with other countries to really have a peaceful end. Basically I covered what I would change, but not to forget people with disabilities as well as the medical budget for old people. Just maybe, someday, my cry and prayer will be reality.

– Robert Snead

WHAT IS MY HOOD LIKE?

First off my hood is a lot of things, good and bad. In most cases my hood is just like every other hood in Chicago, consisting of many things like death, money, garbage, jail, and hope.

Death- Death where I'm from is widely accepted and just a part of our every day life. It is so common that most people expect to die from unnatural cause and don't really look too far in to the future. Where I'm from people die for many reasons including: money, jealousy, common mistakes of identity, hatred and just because. That is what death is like in my hood.

Money- Money is what makes the hood what it is. It is the motivation to rob, steal, kill, and hate your brother. Everyone needs money but there is not enough to go around, so you do what you have to in order to come across as much as possible in the shortest amount of time.

Garbage- Garbage can mean many things you look there are empty bottles in the grass or next to the curbs, potato chip bags, marijuana bags. In most cases you will have more garbage than grass. Mentally, garbage can be the baggage on your mind, to the bad thing you think about on a daily basis. Not only your hood, society can also put so much pressure on your mind that you pop, leading to the bad things that cross through your mind. Imagine growing up in a place where all there is to obtain is what's right in front of your face and that's not saying much. Imagine being a child at the age of 6 and having 20 friends to play with but by the time you're 15 most of these friends are no longer your buddies but enemies and the ones who haven't turned traitor on you are no longer around because they are either dead or in jail. The few loyal comrades you have, you take a life lesson and watch them with every blink of an eye so you won't get your emotions or pride hurt. There is a ton of garbage the mind can create on its own without the burden of your surroundings.



Jail- Jail is a second home to most of us. Many kids visit a correctional facility before they hit puberty. These kids will get out and go in and out back and forth until there is so much negativity on their records, that they can pretty much call it quits on looking for a better life. Most people with one strike can no longer get jobs, because the people doing the hiring can't see past your criminal background.

The fact is, where I'm from, any jail time is a life mistake that most people never recover from.

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Hope - Hope is another strong topic that depends on each individual person. Hope can mean anything. I figure, most of the people in my hood think hope is a way out. It doesn't have to be a way out of the hood, but a change. Any change as long as it is positive. My hope is school; a better education is key to my survival. I grew up with a lot of struggle. Most things people hope for, like mansions, being a movie star, fancy cars, millions of dollars and so on is just unrealistic to me, but a college degree is something that I feel that I could obtain and that will be the first step to my way out.

My hood consists of a lot of things: death, money, jail, garbage; but this is my hope, what is yours?

– Marzet Tucker

Marzet
Great,
Special, Complicated
Son of Marzet Sr., Brother of Lydell Bailey
Friend of not too many people
Who feels Happy, Sad, Mad and sometimes nothing
Who needs nothing, but wants a lot
Who gives attention, time, a hand
Who would like to see a community where everyone
works together
Resident of Earth
Tucker!

– Marzet Tucker

BEFORE

Before coming to terms with my disability, I was a bitter person. I really didn't want to live for a while! But, as soon as I entered my rehab stage and saw people way worse off than me I felt really ashamed of my complaining. It took awhile, but finally I came to terms with my disability. I had my ups and downs. Through it all I had my mother and brother who were always there for me. My disability is the result of a gunshot wound!

It was many years later that I really turned my life around. While watching TV I saw a piece about wheelchair softball. I wrote the number down and called the next day. I've been involved in sports ever since and now encourage getting involved in some kind of wheelchair sport. It motivates you and keeps you in shape.

I also enjoy my volunteer work that I do at Schwab Rehab. It's a good feeling when I see someone just hanging around and I approach them and ask how they're doing and if possible get them out there enjoying things they thought they could never do again. By this I mean playing basketball, softball, hockey, etc...

Life is not over after a disability, you just have to adapt and do things differently. Don't get me wrong! It's hard when you end up with a disability. You go through pain, you go through changes in your life that you were not prepared for. But through it all you have to strive and be the best that you can be. And if on the way you see someone who is recently injured it won't hurt to just take the time and let him or her know that they're not alone and that life goes on after a spinal cord injury!



One thing I would change about society is the prejudices and stereotyping of an individual, race, and also people with disabilities! Sometimes because your skin is a different color, or if you have an accent, immediately you're looked upon as a second class, or, should I say, lower class status. This also applies for a person with a disability.

Society should realize that just because we're in wheelchairs it doesn't make us stupid or less than an able-bodied individual. We should learn to respect everyone no matter what race, religion, or disability! If we can learn anything, it is that we are all human beings with feelings.

– Hector L. Bruno

MY LIFE

My life, born and raised in the projects, was not the way I would like for it to be. I barely played with other kids. Mom, dad, and the family were doing other things, which led me to become what I once was.

Living there as a kid, you seen people getting killed, people getting jumped on and other things you should not see as a child, but you do. What do you know about coming out of your room and almost seeing your uncle shoot his friend by mistake?

Getting older in life, you really start doing s--- you saw adults doing as a kid. What do people know about your mom giving you up for a man. You, your brother, and two sisters. Nobody in the family wants y'all and you don't know what's going to happen to you and your brother and sisters. Then Grandma says she is going to get us and do the right thing for us.

Then your aunt sees how much money they were giving your granny and she went behind your granny's back and took y'all from her. As far as I'm concerned, my aunt never wanted us and didn't give a f--- about us at all. I knew it after four years went by, so I said f--- it and started doing what I knew how to do.

I moved around a lot in my childhood life. I went to five different kinds of grade schools from grades 1-8. At that, years later my granny passed and I was so all alone. My sisters and brother were taken from me. I was on the run from DCFS, running around selling drugs and doing all stupid things because I really felt lonely in the inside and out. There was no one to care about what I did or didn't do. I ended up getting shot in a car accident. And then I thought that I was going to see my granny and get hugs and kisses from her.

People always would ask me why I don't care about anything in my life. Where's the love? When you grow up with no one to care for you but your granny and she passes, the world feels like it's coming down on you...hard. So if anybody wants to know why I am the way I am, it's because it was the way people, or should I say family, made me.

Now I can say that I found another family, brothers and sisters that motivate me and make me feel like I can accomplish anything because I know they'll be there for me. When I do something that I should not do or say, they let me know.

Arlena. Saalim. Devoy. Maurice. Rob. I got love for them because I know they got love for me.

KeKe. Reeses. Anthony. You three people hold it down for me. We love y'all and miss y'all very very very very very much. Wish y'all were still here.

– Antoine Hatley





WHAT IS YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD LIKE?

For lack of a better word unstable. I say that because one minute it feels like the safest place on earth you know! When we chilling having a good time like we some fake rap stars or something then reality sets in. At any minute it can all go south: beat downs, gun shots, harassing police officers, murder, drug raids, etc.

That was dealing with the environment, now as far as the people go I would probably not rather live anywhere else because most people outside the hood would probably be surprised at the type of minds we have in ghettos. Even some of the “killers” sound like straight intellectuals, although that should not be surprising to the so-called upper class... being that somewhere in the distant past their family or group went through similar situations, whether it was here in the new world or the old one (Europe) (Asia) etc...

My hood is exactly as it was set up to be, a breeding ground for crime. Not because the people there are wild animals or something but by the fact that we are all driven by the will to survive... I understand the order of things. We live in a capitalist society. To thrive you must have the haves and the have-nots, in most cases where there is a large population of “Black” and “Hispanic” people they are the easy targets because a long time ago we formed Brotha’ hoods to counter oppression. “They” found a way to make the good into bad by turning these groups into gangs and by flooding the environment with drugs to start wars and we are bearing the fruit of that wicked labor now to this day.

In closing to say it all: they make laws outlawing drugs. They put the drugs in the community, they lock you up for the drugs, then you get out of prison looking for a job, they won’t hire you because you are a felon now. You are either selling drugs again or graduating to worse crimes to survive. The end...

– Michael Ward

“WHY IS MAN’S JUSTICE ONE-SIDED?”

I start this piece by posing a question why is man’s justice one-sided after years of hearing about horrible crimes against humanity like slavery (transatlantic slave trade), Rwanda, the Ivory Coast, apartheid in South Africa, and last but not least the Ethiopian Holocaust. That’s right, I said Ethiopian Holocaust because I know a lot of people haven’t heard of it, as a matter of fact I just heard of it myself about four years ago. A lot of time is spent on exposing the European Holocaust, and rightfully so as it was an atrocity, but it wasn’t the only one.

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At the same time the European (Jewish) Holocaust was taking place there was an equally evil slaughtering going on in the continent of Africa in Ethiopia where Mussolini killed over 2 million Ethiopians. This took place between 1935-1941, damn near the same time as the European Holocaust, but nobody cared but the Ethiopians.

If you've noticed I rarely say Jewish Holocaust because there was another similarity between the two crimes committed on these people (Europeans, Africans). The Ethiopians that were bombed and gassed are part of an ethnic group called the Falastins/ Fhalastins. The word Falastin or Fhalastin is Swahili for alien, meaning that they are not native to that area, but to make a long story short they were Jewish, but due to racism they weren't given a place of refuge, nor were there nations opening their arms to protect them, neither was there any new or permanent homes prepared for them although they were Jewish. To make it so bad they just started recognizing the fact that they deserve a place in Israel (the state of Israel) because they are Jewish.

Not to mention the 100 million lives lost during slavery and the Middle Passage that never got the respect to even have a burial ground because most of them are in the Atlantic. I just point out some of these injustices to ask the question, "Is man's justice one-sided?"

– Michael Ward



WHAT IS YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD LIKE?

Well my hood is ghetto. I got a lot of love for my hood and my boys. Because they be looking out for me all the time. There is a lot of shootings, burglaries and having to deal with crooked cops.

My neighborhood where I live is ghetto too. I don't live in my hood. I live in somebody else's hood. There's a lot of gang bangers there and a lot of crack heads around there.

– Andres Rojas

ONE THING

Write about one thing that you're proud of? Well I am proud of myself because I don't give up easily. I always try my best for everything I do, like trying to get my GED and my life together.

I am also trying to go to Job Corp and I am also trying to stay out of trouble. I don't chill in the hood like I used to. That's why I am proud of myself.

– Andres Rojas