Save the World

BUT FILL YOUR STOMACH FIRST

A COLLECTION OF WRITING
BY AUTHORS, AGES 12-17
FROM 826 VALENCIA’S MISSION CENTER
WRITING AND PUBLISHING APPRENTICES WORKSHOP

FALL 2020
Save the World

BUT FILL YOUR STOMACH FIRST

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FALL 2020
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Contents

THE LIBRARY ................................................................. 1
Opal Jane Ratchye

A DOLPHIN’S EXPERIENCE ........................................... 4
Sadie Poulsen

VIGNETTES ................................................................. 7
Alexander Lewis

BAKLAVA AND PEACH COBBLER,
WITH A SIDE OF RESISTANCE ................................. 10
Amina Mohammad-Fuller

CALLISTA ................................................................. 12
Reina Yee

A CREEEPY PLACE.................................................... 14
Toby Lee

SOUNDS ................................................................. 17
Mia Sixto

ABOUT 826 VALENCIA .................................................. 19
The Library

Opal Jane Ratchye, age 17

It was implied that I was supposed to love the library, since I loved reading so much. Adults cast shadows on my face as they bent down to soften their height to talk to me about how much I must love it in the library. At that time, I sensed that there was much I was missing in the world around me. I was surrounded by things I didn’t understand—including myself—and I needed to know more. Since the adults surrounding me seemed to know about me more than I did, I took their words as truth, as a clueless person does. I now know that I don’t have to like something because I like something similar; anyone with an Amazon account and a “you might also like …” bar will know that.

It took me a long time to love on my own, without being told to. And I do love the library: the elaborate architecture, the imposed silence, the misshelved books, and that one neighborhood grandpa reading the periodicals while wearing sandals and socks.

I would go to the library every second week to the same range of shelves in the children’s section with my three tote bags that my mom used for shopping. The light-blue synthetic fabric of the bags would feel exhausted from tears in the books’ thin plastic covers and pointy corners. Each week, I would come out with twenty to twenty-five books and drag them the couple blocks home to munch on apples and read.

This particular time, I entered past the squishy velvet ropes and the mysterious gray detector (that always kind of unsettled me) as I always did. I went to my favorite section of new arrivals, the highest shelf up, and tilted my head up to scan over the titles I had already read with fondness and look for new ones. I felt a little gross that day—my shoulder-length hair was unwashed and stuffed underneath a sage-green baseball cap, and my eyes were
kind of gritty from staring at a computer screen too long. When I had finished winding my way around the bookshelves on the perimeter of the room toward the librarian’s desk, the librarian looked up from her computer to speak to me. She told me (and I had heard it before), “I think it’s time for you to move to the adult section,” in the gentlest voice with the gentlest humor, and I froze. I must’ve laughed and replied in agreement and made small talk, but I don’t remember what I said.

I walked out of the children’s section that day with my heels hanging out of my light-blue Keens and my book bag banging my thigh, and I didn’t come back the next week or the week after. The afternoon light in the entryway that day came from the heavens to halfheartedly illuminate the dust and the gloomiest corners of the library. I crunched over the leaf I had tracked in when arriving on the industrial black welcome mat and continued toward the adult section. I peeked into the teen section, saw an actual teen, and made scarce immediately. I wandered aimlessly around the adult section not knowing what to look for. I felt surrounded by information that I didn’t understand.

That day was fruitless. I left the library for the last time, for when I returned, the low gray building was a different beast from the one I had previously faced; it was the ending of an era for me. I sat outside in the small parklet that day with someone eating a Pop-Tart and tried to figure out why I was so afraid of leaving the children’s section. I walked up the hill home as fast as walking would allow and I still didn’t know.

Now, I think I had grown up a little without realizing it, and an offhand comment had provided the terrifying snip of gardening scissors to a succulent cutting for me to let go. Forest birds will push their young out of the nest high in a tree to teach them how to fly, and here I was, plummeting. All the knowledge contained in the library and even the adult fiction section alone is more than anyone could know, but the children’s section was more conquerable, safe. There is a vast and uncontrollable mystery out in the world and inside ourselves that libraries help us discover and that I was just coming to know. So I have never stopped
reading, or loving libraries. That would take a piece out of me that I could not live without. But libraries remain in my mind both a sanctum and a terror, a symbol of personal freedom and constriction.
I will never understand you, humans. Why do you knowingly cause suffering against the innocent? Why do you hurt animals that have done nothing to them? I am a dolphin, I feel free in the water, I am at peace, and all I want is to play and have fun. That is what I understand. So I don’t understand you humans. How do you play and have fun when you hurt and kill those that are at peace? You must not be seeking to have fun, so then what are you seeking? What is more important than being yourself and free? I had only known fun and beauty until my mother was taken away from me. With your big machines, how can you use those machines? They reek of evil and destruction. They took my mother away. There is no way a species that is as gifted as the humans, with their intelligence and their skills, can have true motives of evil, so what motivates you to take away what has centered me my entire life? To ruin all I hold dear? To cause me to feel fear of being taken away? I don’t understand! What is your purpose you have dedicated for yourself? And why does it involve killing those who are at peace? I want to forgive you humans, but I can’t if I don’t understand. But I now believe that you won’t truly care about how you are hurting us unless you understand us, and I don’t think that will ever happen.

***

“Haul ‘em up,” came a shout from the captain, as he watched the ropes that slunk off the deck into the sea. I sighed as I looked down at the water underneath the boat. It was relatively calm, so I could see my reflection looking back at me. Medium-length wavy brown hair, hazel eyes, a smatter of freckles across my nose. Most of the time I was bouncy and joyful but right now, I was miserable.
“This is not what the girl who begged for the sailing job should look like,” I muttered.

What I did not realize about this job was that I would have to watch beautiful sea creatures be ripped apart from their homes, where they belong, to be sold alive all across the country.

“This dolphin is a female! And a beauty!” shouted the captain.

“Captain, if she’s a female, maybe she has a child!” shouted Tim, one of the more ruthless, brighter minds aboard. I was barely paying attention, until I heard, “That’s right, Tim! Anyone who finds the young one will be promoted to . . . the highest position I can get you! Less capturing sea creatures and more swimming in the big blue, or more than that!”

I heard murmurs all across the ship. It did sound like a forced lie, but if there is even a chance to stop this insufferable job, I will take it. But sacrificing a child? I hesitated, my morals and my ambitions fighting each other inside of me. Eh, most likely I won’t even find them. I leaned my head over the edge of the water, hoping, but also dreading the sight of another dolphin. And it came.

“Oh my god!” I said, too quietly for anyone else to hear. I was about to look to the captain and shout that I found it, but I couldn’t. I couldn’t do what I had always despised. Sacrificing these magnificent creatures for personal gain. As the ship headed back to the mainland, with our new dolphin, I saw my hopes of a promotion slipping away. But I didn’t care. I had made the right choice. Maybe one day I will be able to understand these amazing creatures that I love and wish to protect, but for now I can only watch and help from afar.
Vignettes

Alexander Lewis, age 17

SON OF SAXON

The way I grew up changed when my father El Willfried Ivanho ended the revolution of Saxons. I was free but hunted. I was forced to abandon my dignity at some point in the future and my dependable being of life in the most foul manner of sorts. For both my friends in the basic town and city where everyone grew, became strongly known for their pride in strangely stealing stuff from enemy pirate lines but now caused a pandemonium, killing and torturing things in the streets, forbidden to cross the line. It was those streets in which they rebelled that became death and destruction. This dust and strife wiped clean, knowledge and civilization itself. Magical cannibalistic canines, very much inhuman, who rooted out resistors, were in turn killed by upper-hand expert bowmen that stung with strong equality and justice. They changed the system, and the canines!

“JUSTICE.”
The stem ends up coming out of its socket halfway, its juices a mess. A big kind of intolerable mess of a messy sort of ball. This very idea is not up for debate in the ways of three counted by humans who sort of don’t like three on the dot, or maybe military time. Well, they and their days are going to be gone soon, for it is controlling their very souls. No other people are very determined to talk about the very stressed-out thing; a continuous subject but we put SUBJECTS to the side.

 Especially in terms of this all-day accusation of what they call beating around the bush.

 Since there is not another way to say this, the subject that we are certainly stuck on is not the perfectly shaped equal definition and extra explanation. Essentially the problem is still not completely solved. Specifically, in terms of the nature of the especially unsolved, mysteriously beautiful, glowing plant. These are extraordinary times, which means we must continue to move on. The extinction of the planet will discontinue all of our humanity for all eternity. Including us running out of our time over here at Teck. And we hold the key to stop the destruction of life as we know it. This will help. This sort of job we recall really matters, for now. Do you think so? If not then surely you can admit this. Then why?
CHAPTER ONE

The people walk in. They will have to go through all kinds of background security checks, directly with the gun keepers. The gun keepers have the most strict clearance level and the highest responsibility to maintain the machine assembly of directions, making sure the criminals don't escape. And yet still all hopes of detention very slowly fade.

UNKNOWN.

Deep inside the way-too-far-away part of the Unknown Wicked Woods, there is a camp that has a bunch of crookedly shaped pieces of lumber. The pieces of lumber are very giant and not too light but they lead to this light mess of leaves all strung up by the thorny weeds which surround, under everything. The dead ones lead to a fern. The poor thing, in the middle of the tree place. The fern ends up coming out of its bottom root half way, its juices a mess. A big kind of intolerable mess, of a messy sort of petal. The very idea of this is not meant to be argued or even discussed by cavemen in the middle of the day.
Baklava and Peach Cobbler, with a Side of Resistance

Amina Mohammad-Fuller, age 17

I belong to two cultures
Collard greens and kousa mahshi thrown in a pot and stirred as the word Blackestinian is born
Rich brown eyes like the dates plucked from the tree and left out in the blazing Turmus Ayya sun to dry
Skin the color of baklava glistening with a caramelized syrup
Stories of resilience carved into the three lines running down the palm of my hand
Stories too recent to be history
A chopped onion poured into a pan of olive oil searing the corners of my watering eyes
As I stir the black-eyed peas, a hymn comes to my lips
As they part a song emerges, Lift Every Voice and Sing
Next I make the khubz
I knead, and my grandmother Taita pats and stretches the olive rich dough to the rhythm of Ana min Turmus Ayya—an ancient song of our homeland echoed through generations
As the bread rises, I retreat to my phone
Notifications pour in bearing news that is too familiar
Another target
In a world where colonial misconceptions are disguised as truth and our story—history,
Eurocentric dominates
Palestinians and African Americans
The same but different
Food bridging our senses and our hearts
Unified by the love for our cultures
Unified by resistance to inhumanity
Callista

Reina Yee, age 13

There was a beautiful girl named Callista. She was seen as elegant, graceful, and polite, but if you got to know her, you could easily see that Callista was savage and ruthless. Callista was born into a society that would protect the rich and powerful. The society Callista was a part of was known as the Secret Society; there was no other name for it. The kids born into the society lived on an island and were trained until they became fifteen. Once they turned fifteen, they would be forced to complete a list of difficult tasks to be accepted as an official Secret Society member. The top five people to complete the tasks first would be able to become a Secret Society member.

This year, Callista was turning fifteen. The kids were given their list of tasks, and the first one was to find a golden apple that was hidden around the island. Callista waited for a while to think about where someone could have hidden a golden apple. She remembered that the week before they were given the tasks, the teachers on the island were insisting that the kids should learn how to swim. Callista ran to the edge of the land, where beautiful ocean water surrounded the island. She dived straight into the water and swam along the sides of the island until she found a small cave that had a small opening that allowed her to squeeze inside. Once she was inside the cave, she looked around the dark area, which was only lit by torches. Inside the cave, there were apples lined up in front of entrances that seemed to go into a labyrinth. A couple of apples were gone, which indicated that some people were already ahead of her.

Callista chose an entrance that was to the far right. She picked up the apple, there was no new clue. She did not move from where she was standing. Callista was ready to find what she was
supposed to do next but nothing happened. She looked down at the beautiful, elegant apple that was in her hand.

“What’s the worst that could happen?” she whispered to herself.

Callista took a big bite out of the apple and suddenly there was a gruff voice, speaking to her. The voice was all in her head, no sound was coming out, but she silently understood her next task. She needed to get across the maze and find a diamond flower on the other side.

“Well, this challenge seems completely based on luck,” Callista said aloud.

The open entrance behind her closed off the minute she stepped inside the labyrinth. Callista closed her eyes and decided to trust her instincts on where she would go next.
I thought it would be simple. Just head off to a floating island. But it was completely different.

“Horror has been lurking,” said the news on the day that I was packing to do my semester on the sea. I kept packing as my mom was watching the news. “This island called floating island has been acting weird since the opening,” said the news.

I thought in my mind that if it had been acting weird since the opening, wouldn’t the news have reported it? It had been seven years since it opened. I just thought it must be a joke, this whole year is a joke.

My mom asked, “Are you sure you want to go?”
I replied, “Yeah, Mom.”

My mom asked, “With everything going on, are you still sure?”
I replied, “Everyone will be tested every day, and their temperature taken at every door they enter. I will be fine.”

I would be wrong.
I have been here waiting for three years.

Oh, I almost forgot to introduce myself. Hi, I am a freshman girl named Alyssa. About three years ago, I found this website from my school about spending a year on this floating island. I didn’t know what it was, so I told my parents and said that I wanted to go. My mom said, “It is really hard to get in, but I will try.” A few days later, I got the email that said I had been added to the waiting list for 2020, when I hit eighth grade. In 2019, three weeks before I went in for my first day of eighth grade. I got an email saying that I got in. I showed my mom. My mom was shocked because a few years before, my older brother was rejected. The email said that on Wednesday, we had to go to this dock, where the people will wait.
They had given us a brief history about it and told us that only about a thousand freshmen were accepted. And that there was a 90 percent chance that we could stay in. But in February 2020, as the virus hit the Earth, the person who manages this program said that this year and next will be canceled. But I kept hope. As more teachers have been tested, the program was uncancelled and that we need to be tested.

NOW

I keep thinking about what pants to bring. My mom was just staring at the television, learning about the trip and the story that formed. I kept positive. To prove that it was safe for me to go, I went on my phone and asked my friend’s brother about it. This is how it went:

6:59 Alyssa: hey did anything happen to you when went on the semester thing
6:59 Alyssa: since you know. You went there last year
7:00 David: no not rly only things like the wobble when a shark goes under
7:00 Alyssa: wait sharks!!!
7:00 Alyssa: I heard nothing about it
7:01 David: are u sure
7:01 David: didn’t you have like seniors go to your QnA?
7:01 Alyssa: yea but they never said anything like that
7:02 David: Well legends have it that the seniors are the one who makes the sharks go under.
7:02 David: well you never know
7:03 Alyssa: ummmmmmmmm bye
7:19 David: cya
7:20 Alyssa: wow you reply so late
7:24 David: cuz I ain’t no simp

The chat ends there.
5:30: My alarm went off. Being lazy, I didn’t want to leave my bed. And yet I did. I went to check the ticket and looked at the time of departure. It said 8:00 a.m. As I headed to the bathroom to get ready with my hair in my eyes, I hit a wall. It looked like I was drunk. I went to the bathroom, got ready, and stuffed everything into my backpack, as I kept saying in my head what I needed to pack. *Laptop, toothbrush, towel, phone, charger, headset.* I kept saying that in my head so that I wouldn’t forget. Twenty minutes later, as I was zipping up my backpack, my phone rang, and I went to look at it. It was a text from a flight agent telling me that the flight would be twenty minutes early, so the departure time would be 7:30. Then I got another text from the teacher saying that we need to meet up at 6:30. I looked at the clock and it said 6:12. In my head, I said, ****! I didn’t even eat breakfast. So I put on my backpack, suitcase in hand, and ran out. I ran as fast as I could, but it did not help that my suitcase weighed 300 pounds. I ran and got there at 6:29. I could not stand up, I was that tired. I looked around and saw my teacher. I went and signed myself in and no one was there, not a single classmate. At 6:31, everyone was loading in. Some were looking half dead. But we all got onto the plane. As I looked outside at the plane, it was so clean. I got through the tight rows as the plane was filling up. I went and found my seat and got ready for the engine roaring.
Sounds

Mia Sixto, age 12

Can you hear them?
The birds swooping down, and the bees buzzing by, and the quiet
rustling of the wind against the tree leaves
Can you hear them?
The faint music in the distance, probably some generic pop song
on the radio
Can you hear them?
The children giggling and running around the park while their
parents smile lovingly at them
Can you hear them?
You can, can’t you?
Not so long ago, I’d say yes
But not now
Not here
Not in this setting
Not in this world
I try to scream but can’t even hear my own voice
The sounds of my tongue hitting the roof of my mouth
The sounds of my dog’s barks
I used to get annoyed by it but now I crave the sound
The sounds
The sounds of those stupid cookie-cutter pop songs
The sounds of the neighbourhood kids running along the dirt road
The sound of life
Now all I hear is nothing, this silent sound of death
You can hear them, can’t you?
WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

826 Valencia is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting under-resourced students ages six to eighteen with their creative and expository writing skills and to helping teachers inspire their students to write. Our services are structured around the understanding that great leaps in learning can happen with one-on-one attention and that strong writing skills are fundamental to future success.

826 Valencia comprises three writing centers—located in San Francisco’s Mission District, Tenderloin neighborhood, and Mission Bay—and three satellite classrooms at nearby schools. All of our centers are fronted by kid-friendly, weird, and whimsical stores, which serve as portals to learning and gateways for the community. All of our programs are offered free of charge. Since we first opened our doors in 2002, thousands of volunteers have dedicated their time to working with tens of thousands of students.
FIELD TRIPS
Classes from public schools around San Francisco visit our writing centers for a morning of high-energy learning about the craft of story-telling. Four days a week, our Field Trips produce bound, illustrated books and professional-quality podcasts, infusing creativity, collaboration, and the arts into students’ regular school day.

IN-SCHOOLS PROGRAMS
We bring teams of volunteers into high-need schools around the city to support teachers and provide one-on-one assistance to students as they tackle various writing projects, including newspapers, research papers, oral histories, and more. We have a special presence at Buena Vista Horace Mann K–8, Everett Middle School, and Mission High School, where we staff dedicated Writers’ Rooms throughout the school year.

AFTER-SCHOOL TUTORING
During the school year, 826 Valencia’s centers are packed five days a week with neighborhood students who come in after school and in the evenings for tutoring in all subject areas, with a special emphasis on creative writing and publishing. During the summer, these students participate in our Exploring Words Summer Camp, where we explore science and writing through projects, outings, and activities in a super fun, educational environment.

WORKSHOPS
826 Valencia offers workshops designed to foster creativity and strengthen writing skills in a wide variety of areas, from play-writing to personal essays to starting a zine. All workshops, from the playful to the practical, are project-based and are taught by experienced, accomplished professionals. Over the summer, our Young Authors’ Workshop provides an intensive writing experience for high-school-age students.
COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS
We offer a roster of programs designed to help students get into college and be successful there. Every year, we grant several $20,000 scholarships to college-bound seniors, provide one-on-one support to two hundred students via the Great San Francisco Personal Statement Weekend, and partner with ScholarMatch to offer college access workshops to the middle- and high-school students in our tutoring programs. We also offer internships, peer tutoring stipends, and career workshops to our youth leaders.

PUBLISHING
Students in all of 826 Valencia’s programs have the ability to explore, experience, and celebrate themselves as writers in part because of our professional-quality publishing. In addition to the book you’re holding, 826 Valencia publishes newspapers, magazines, chapbooks, podcasts, and blogs—all written by students.

TEACHER OF THE MONTH
From the beginning, 826 Valencia’s goal has been to support teachers. We aim to both provide the classroom support that helps our hardworking teachers meet the needs of all our students and to celebrate their important work. Every month, we receive letters from students, parents, and educators nominating outstanding teachers for our Teacher of the Month award, which comes with a $1,500 honorarium. Know an SFUSD teacher you want to nominate? Guidelines can be found at 826valencia.org.
826 Valencia’s success has spread across the country. Under the umbrella of 826 National, writing and tutoring centers have opened up in eight more cities. If you would like to learn more about other 826 programs, please visit the following websites.

826 National 826michigan
826national.org 826michigan.org
826 Boston 826 MSP
826boston.org 826msp.org
826CHI 826 New Orleans
826chi.org 826neworleans.org
826DC 826NYC
826dc.org 826nyc.org
826LA 826 Valencia
826la.org 826valencia.org
Each fall and spring at 826 Valencia’s Mission Center, a talented and mysterious band of heroes gathers. Who are they? The Writing & Publishing Apprentices, a group of writers aged 12–17. Their mission? To spend ten weeks honing their craft, filling pages with imaginative new worlds, and building a vibrant writing community. You are looking at the result of this venture, a chapbook filled with gripping prose and moving poetry. Mission accomplished.

AUTHORS

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Sadie Poulsen
Alexander Lewis
Amina Mohammad-Fuller
Reina Yee
Toby Lee
Mia Sixto

826 Valencia is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting under-resourced students with their writing skills. Since 2008, we have offered a variety of workshops at our Mission Center, where students are taught everything from running a mock trial to stop-motion animation.

Get involved at 826valencia.org