

Poetry as a Healing ART

“Poetry shows that someone was there before you—lonely, brutalized, aware...and that someone has survived with some passion, some compassion, some humor and some style.”

—Maya Angelou

Fast Forward

by Kelly Perez

fast forward to a place
unfamiliar to me
my brilliance could blind
no fears...in love, out of love
believing within me resides
the power to create
life and pure joy
like riding a horse or a bike
with no hands
trusting the air to hold me
while my outstretched arms
bathe in the power
of creation and life
without fear i aim to live
this way
in truth knowing
that i can count on nothing
and giving it all anyway
held in the sanctity
of faith and love
the suffering remains
yet it doesn't tarnish my shine

Ambivalence

by Jennifer Hampton

We stay together
we leave each other
I want this
and the empty street
To honor my unyielding
rushes in behind us
Loyalty and desire
I don't see you. I
Against all odds
lose sight of love
We stay together
to find love
hope may be behind
a bright colored doorway

As early as the first century, physicians were prescribing poetry for their patients. Benjamin Franklin used poetry therapy with his patients in the 18th century and published their work. Many other scientists and doctors, including Freud, Adler, Jung, and Reik have attributed much of the understanding of the subconscious to poetry. Today there are institutes and places of higher education that support poetry and other creative arts therapies because of their effectiveness in dealing with trauma.

By encouraging people to put difficult emotions and memories into words, writing therapy provides therapeutic release. For this reason it has been shown to be particularly beneficial for those who tend to keep their feelings internalized. After a session of writing therapy, many people say they feel calmer and more in control.

In addition, some scientists believe that the release offered by writing affects the body's physical capacity to withstand stress and to fight off stress-related infection and disease. Writing therapy has also been shown to have a positive impact on heart rate and blood pressure.

—WholeHealthMD.com

Beyond the ability to heal trauma and increase physical and psychological health, poetry accesses the power of the written and spoken word to change our perceptions and thereby create positive change in our lives. Poetry and other creative therapies offer a safe way to release the fear and self-doubt that can keep us from realizing our dreams.

- ☞ *This was fantastic! I never expected it to be so cleansing and therapeutic.*
- ☞ *The workshops were very relaxing; the writing helped me find my inner self.*
- ☞ *When I started the workshop, I was worried that I didn't know how to write poetry. But I found out we are all poets!*
- ☞ *I had just lost a job and was in the process of ending an eight-year relationship as well. The writing exercises and sharing that we did in the workshop created a healing and transcendent experience for me.*

The writing process has been developed after extensive research and 12 years of working with youth who have based their identity on the negative experiences they may have endured or on the difficult circumstances in which they find themselves... a situation not uncommon to us all. The goal of each workshop is to access the creative right brain, allowing the subconscious mind to find its voice while bypassing the editing of the analytical left-brain. Each poem expresses the deepest concerns of the human heart and can also offer ways to resolve those



ART From Ashes Inc.

Phoenix Rising poetry program • 853 Inca St., Suite 1A • Denver CO 80204 • 303.837.1550 • www.artfromashes.org

Empowering high-risk youth through poetry and other creative therapies that facilitate expression, connection and healing.

Replace Fear With Love

by Rachel Julkowski

When it comes time to sleep,
lay your head with care.
Let it fall with openness,
not with hesitation. I dream
of worksheets and time cards;
dreams out of reach;
and expectations unmet.
I will wake again with peace,
lay down my weapons of fear; the
ones I believed I needed
to protect myself.
Without these barriers,
won't love fly towards me?
Won't good deeds fall
into my path? Won't I sleep
with peace and deeply?
This will serve me. As I shift
my eyes from service to joy,
the land will cascade
like water, opening itself
with the possibility of spring
– of rebirth. And I will rise
each day to meet it.

Words

by Jeremey Moss

You rise from the ashes,
Like a rock from the sea.
You smell like a petal
From a rose in the spring.
Yesterday is gone,
Words cannot
Nor ever will they
Be taken back.
Create your world
And the life you want
To walk out on this earth.

Featured poems were written by participants in the Art from Ashes adult workshops. Each was written in three minutes from a prompt.

concerns. Often the questions contain their own replies through symbol and metaphor. By allowing the intuitive self to find the answers, the poet honors the wisdom and creativity that surpasses the rational thinking process upon which most of us have been taught to rely.

Providing an opportunity for people to express themselves and listening carefully to what they have to say is therapeutic in itself. Even beyond that, guided poetry writing workshops provide three benefits:

- catharsis, the purging of potentially damaging thoughts/emotions;
- connection, through association with the emotions of featured poets and others in the group; and
- healing, restoration through self-awareness and the development of a more positive life view.

The benefits of catharsis, connection and healing are long-term. If we feel heard and respected, if we develop a sense of self that is based less on negative experiences or circumstances and more on our ideals, and if we are better able to relate to the struggles and dreams of others, we can create a more positive and soul-affirming life for ourselves. Using our own creative power and the creative power of the word, we can embrace our past, find joy in our present, and believe wholeheartedly in a positive and powerful future.

“This experience has been magical, soul moving, life sustaining, empowering. I am a poet—who knew?”



Art from Ashes Inc. is a Colorado nonprofit organization formed in 2003. Our primary mission is to contract with other youth services organizations to provide poetry and creative arts workshops for high-risk youth, including youth in residential treatment, urban youth, homeless youth, incarcerated youth, youth in diversion and on probation—any young person in need of hope and a self-determined future.

The writing groups and individual sessions help support the goals of the organization. Group writing workshops are limited to six people per one-hour session. Larger groups (up to 20) are two hours long. Groups can be tailored to meet the needs of young singles, married couples, single parents, women only, men only, youth or children. Individual sessions also are available. We also offer workshops focused on specific topics, such as: spirituality, conflict management, eating disorders, forgiveness, eliminating negative emotions, body image, sexuality, identity, and more.