

# LEAP

LOUD • EMPOWERED • ACCEPTED • PROUD

**4**  
SAY IT LOUD  
We're protesting  
and we're proud.

**10**  
HEY, TEACHERS  
We have a few things  
to teach you, too.

**11**  
WHOLE AGAIN  
(yes, you can be).



# DEAR READERS

Are you ready to LEAP?

Are you strong enough? Do you think that they care about you? Do you really believe they accept you? More importantly, do you accept yourself? These are questions that we ask ourselves every day. Questions that will be answered in LEAP, a literary journal for girls who are Loud, Empowered, Accepted, and Proud.

This magazine will help you accept yourself for who you are, which is what working on LEAP did for us. It will give you a voice so loud that you won't be shouted down by the opinions and judgments of others. LEAP will empower you to stand with your sisters and believe in yourself, accepting your flaws and the flaws of your peers. It will encourage you to be who you want to be, not who the world wants you to be.

Go ahead. Take that one great LEAP and find your voice in a world that too often tells you to give up and be quiet.

*Kadasha Williams*

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Co-Editors of LEAP

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**Meet Kadasha**  
Co-Editor of LEAP

I am loud about **equality for everyone.**  
I am empowered by **living my life.**  
I feel accepted when **I share my poetry at a poetry slam.**  
I am proud of **my growth.**



**Meet Jala**  
Co-Editor of LEAP

I am loud about **what I believe in.**  
I am empowered by **my voice.**  
I feel accepted when **I express how I really feel.**  
I am proud of **who I am.**

# DEAR FRIENDS

**“Behind the story I tell is the one that I don’t. Behind the story you hear is the one I wish I could make you hear,”** wrote Dorothy Allison, whose autobiographical novel *Bastard Out of Carolina* explores the ways that race, class, and violence shaped her adolescence.

Allison’s words speak to the very spirit of LEAP, a literary journal created by and for Chicago-area girls, ages 15 – 17, whose lives have been altered by violence. The essays, poetry, and spoken word pieces featured in LEAP’s pages bring us painfully close to the violence that these girls - all graduates of The Voices and Faces Project’s “The Stories We Tell” testimonial writing program - have lived through or witnessed. These writings remind us that behind every social injustice there is a deeply personal story. And they provide a window into the world where income inequality, police brutality, sexual exploitation, and failing schools are far too common.

Yet despite - or perhaps because of - their experiences with injustice, our LEAP writers are demanding to be heard, with voices that are both truthful and hopeful. They are not sharing their stories because doing so is healing (although it can be). They are sharing them because they are necessary in a world that too often turns a blind eye to the lived experiences of inner city girls.

According to the World Health Organization, one in three women across the globe has been a victim of gender-based violence. The testimonial writings in LEAP help us see the stories behind the statistic. And while there is nothing beautiful about injustice, there is something deeply beautiful about the girls who are speaking out about it. Their testimonies make us pause, feel, and think. Our hope is that these stories will also compel LEAP readers to act.



Anne K. Ream



R. Clifton Spargo

Co-creators of “The Stories We Tell” Testimonial Writing Program

# LEAP<sup>1</sup>

LOUD • EMPOWERED • ACCEPTED • PROUD

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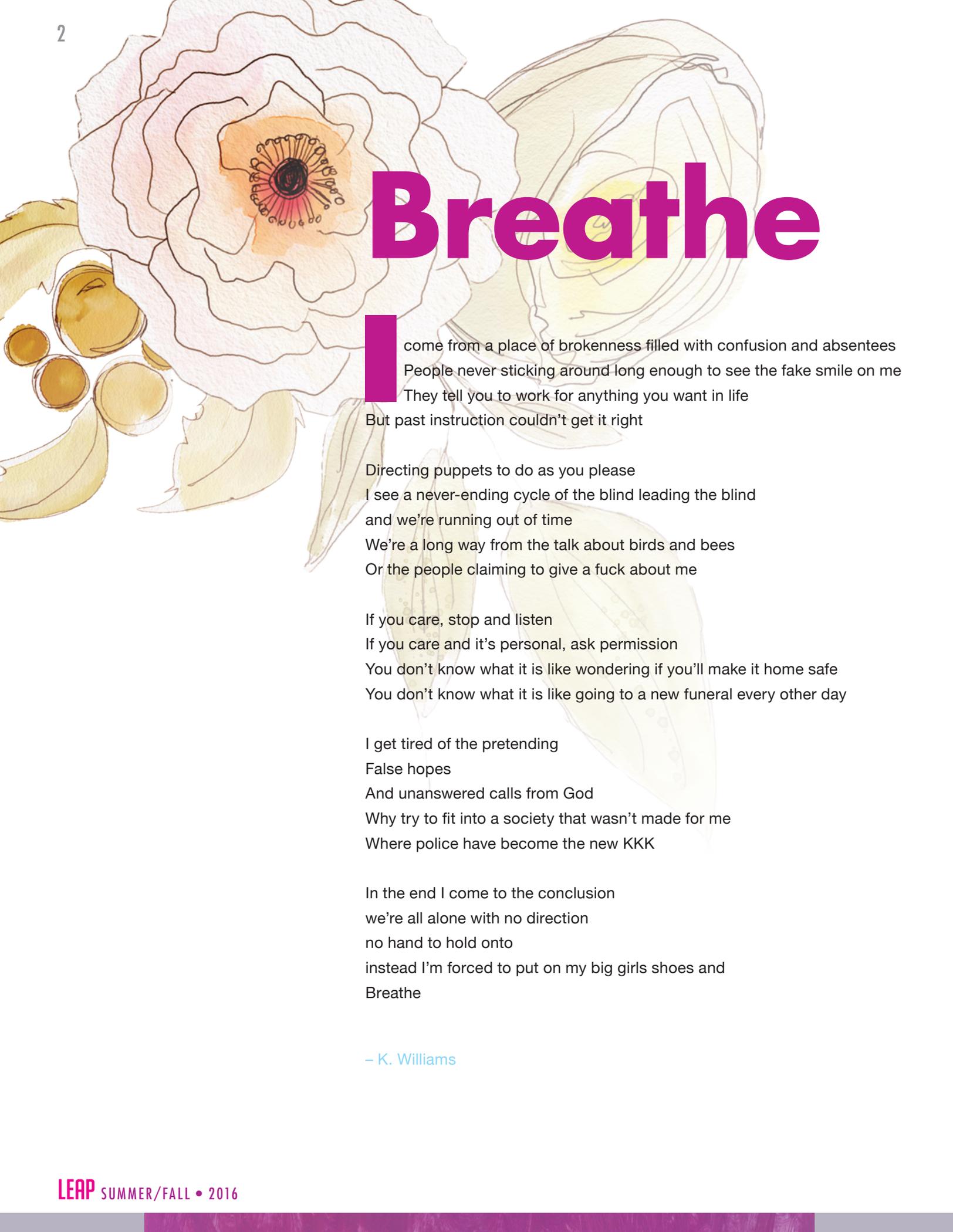
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WORDS FROM THE WISE



# Breathe

I come from a place of brokenness filled with confusion and absentees  
People never sticking around long enough to see the fake smile on me  
They tell you to work for anything you want in life  
But past instruction couldn't get it right

Directing puppets to do as you please  
I see a never-ending cycle of the blind leading the blind  
and we're running out of time  
We're a long way from the talk about birds and bees  
Or the people claiming to give a fuck about me

If you care, stop and listen  
If you care and it's personal, ask permission  
You don't know what it is like wondering if you'll make it home safe  
You don't know what it is like going to a new funeral every other day

I get tired of the pretending  
False hopes  
And unanswered calls from God  
Why try to fit into a society that wasn't made for me  
Where police have become the new KKK

In the end I come to the conclusion  
we're all alone with no direction  
no hand to hold onto  
instead I'm forced to put on my big girls shoes and  
Breathe

– K. Williams

# Love who you are, love who you are not.

love my skin

The soft touch, the caramel complexion  
I'm happy with the skin I'm in.

My body is my temple  
I'm a force to be reckoned with  
The bold confident girl  
who speaks up  
when not spoken to.

Love who you are  
Love who you are not  
It doesn't matter  
I love the skin I'm in.

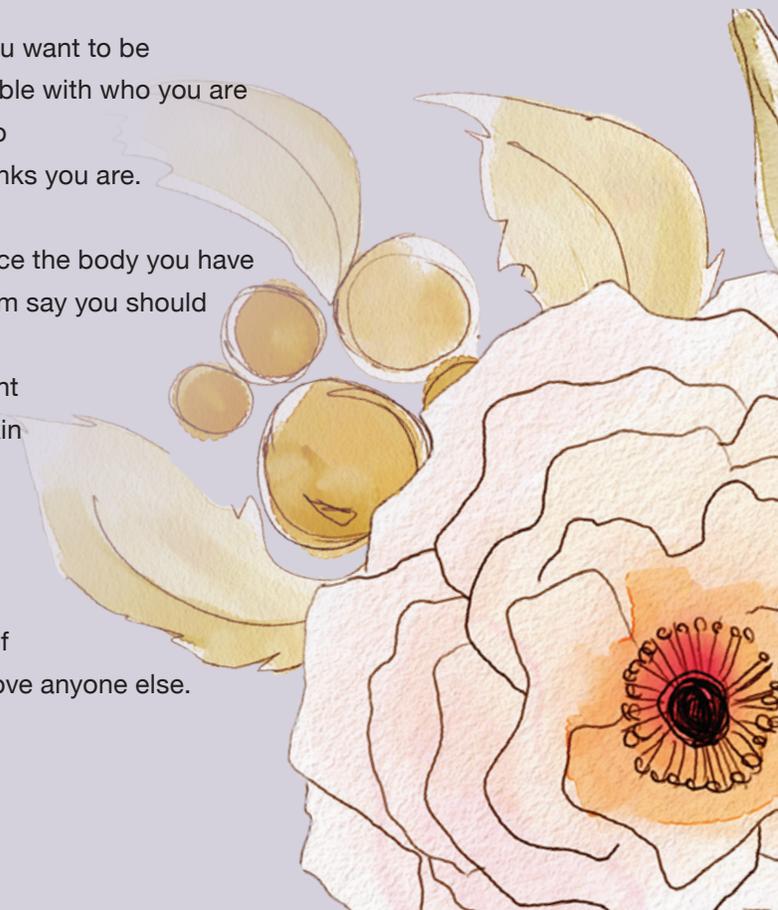
I am the choices I have made  
The things I have said  
They judge your body  
the tattoos  
the scars  
the looks.

Love who you want to be  
Be comfortable with who you are  
Not with who  
everyone thinks you are.

Don't disgrace the body you have  
Don't let them say you should  
lose weight  
or gain weight  
Love your skin  
the color  
the size  
the texture.

Love yourself  
before you love anyone else.

- J. Williams



# SAY IT LOUD

WE'RE PROTESTING AND WE'RE PROUD.

Forget 140 characters. Sometimes you can send a message with just a few well-chosen words. The Voices and Faces Project writing workshop leaders asked our writers to put their hopes, dreams, and demands into words. The end result: these protest posters. To download, print, and share, visit [voicesandfaces.org/LEAP/PROTEST](http://voicesandfaces.org/LEAP/PROTEST).

We WERE  
**ALL** BORN  
 QUEENS



IT'S NOT  
 Justice  
 IF IT'S NOT  
 for  
 Everyone\*

\* Nov. Me. All.

KEEP FAMILIES  

 • TOGETHER. •

I'm H E R E By Force

Supporting Prostitution IS Supporting Violence AGAINST Women ~~CHOICE~~

*promise, it'll give you intellectual insights if you talk to someone who has agreed to disagree. And if that person doesn't agree, make a good point, don't be mad. Instead accept it and find something that you could agree on. Conversation is good. It helps us expand our*



Who's Violent US OR THEM? Police Stop the Violence

do the math: Violence = Hurt every time. no exceptions.

# Where I Come From

I come from busted windows and broken doors  
boarded houses and people  
walking around like Zombies.  
Where I come from, girls hate and boys don't care.  
Police deceive  
and we despise.

It's hard to grow up happy where I come from.  
There are shootings, murders, and rapes.  
Some of us scared to live  
in our own skin.  
I come from "Chiraq."  
Some embrace that name  
but I hate it.

I come from a mother who is my mother  
and my father.

I come from project buildings where  
adults tell us  
we won't make it  
and some of us don't.

But where I come from there is a woman  
who never gave up.  
An educated  
humble  
woman  
who's a hero in my eyes—  
My mom.

I come from a smart, healthy family.  
We make mistakes  
but we are proud.  
I'm happy with the skin I live in.  
I'm happy with the choices I have made.

— J. Williams

Photo: Patricia Evans



# Why did you go?

**“I told him to leave before I called the police, bluffing in a sense 'cuz it's the hood, and they ain't gonna come.”**

His hand swiftly crossed your face and I could see the goose bumps rise on your skin. I jumped, shocked at his blatant disrespect. He cursed your name, your being, and your existence. But your feet never moved.

Your eyes cracked like breaking levees and I can only imagine your mind was full of questions. He grabbed your shirt, shaking you around as if you were a leaf blowing in the trees. You screamed for help and by the time I got my shoes on, his foot was two inches from imprinting your face. I ran downstairs with the broom in hand. I told him to get off of you, and he thought I was asking. He yelled obscene things like “Bitch, mind your business.”

I stood firmly ready to knock his head off at the wrong move. I told him to leave before I called the police, bluffing in a sense 'cuz it's the hood, and they ain't gonna come. But he stood with so much hate in his eyes that if looks could kill I'd be dead. Then he slowly walked off.

And after he disappeared half way down the block, you stood up as if you were liberated and ran after him yelling, “Baby I'm sorry.” And I just want to ask you why? Why did you go? Why wouldn't you let me help you? Why would you go back? I wish I could see you and ask, “Are you okay with being this battered woman? With being helpless?”

– K. Williams

# Innocence

(the day everything changed)



didn't expect anything different to happen that day. I was home when my sister and her friends came in making lots of noise. I heard gunshots, then ran to the window. I heard blood-curdling screams that made my heart stop.

Who got shot?

I ran across the street barefoot with pajamas on. I saw the legs of a little girl. I inched closer and closer to the body. My mind was stuck on this thought: Tanaja is gone, and she's only 8. Who would do this? My heart didn't want to look, but my feet had a mind of their own. God, why did I look? I started to run back home, but my body made me return to her side. I looked in her big brown eyes, saw the pretty smile on her small face, her beautiful brown skin, the innocence. Saw her precious blood seep into the cracks in the ground.

You could hear the voices saying, "Why, she's just a little child!" I couldn't cry, I couldn't think, I couldn't breathe. I walked back home, still with no shoes, but I felt no pain. I sat in my brother's empty room, where I wished he could comfort me. I was sad, I was angry. I saw a window and balled up my fist. I screamed until I couldn't breathe. I punched that window.

**In memory of Tanaja**  
**October 27, 2001 - August 10, 2010**

My rant stopped. I had a 3-inch gash in my arm with blood coming down like a waterfall. I ran down the stairs towards the firefighters and asked for help. I saw them washing her blood away, and I wanted to see her again. She looked so peaceful.

I wanted to hear her contagious laugh. I wanted my little sister back. Why did these boys take her away? Why is violence so important? I went to a hospital and got 27 stitches in my arm. The doctors told me I was lucky to be alive, but I felt differently. Tanaja was gone. Her innocence was gone, and so was mine. It will always be with her.

God, why did she have to leave me so soon? Why did you take her away? Why did she die on the concrete? Help me understand. You took a piece of me when you took her away.

– J. Williams



# AN AMERICAN STORY

**“I stood there confused as my Mama broke down. Without me knowing it, she was dying right there.”**

**W**e were sitting on the couch, after eating what Mama made. Tonight she cooked roast mac and cheese, collard greens, cornbread, and peach cobbler for dessert. After eating I had to clear the table, my little brother Terry had to take the garbage out, and Mama washed the dishes.

Daddy had long been gone from our lives, and my oldest brother Louis was stationed in Afghanistan. Mama had been worried lately, even more than usual, because Louis hadn't responded to one of our video calls earlier. It wasn't like him. Whether he was upset, sad, homesick, or even just busy, he would always pick

up the phone for Mama. As I was flipping the channels, with Mama sitting in daddy's old chair and Terry playing his DS, the bell rang. “I got it, Mama,” I said.

Quickly hopping to my feet and racing to the front door I opened it and saw two men. One dressed in green army fatigues, and the other dressed in black. Their faces held serious expressions, almost as if you could see sorrow dripping from their eyes. Before anyone could say anything, I screamed “Mama” at the top of my lungs.

Each sound of her shoes hitting the hardwood floors felt like a gunshot wound to the heart. When she got to the door, she stood there quietly taking the men's attire in.

She shook her head wildly from side to side, mumbling, “No...No... Not my son.” I stood there confused as my Mama broke down. Without me knowing it, she was dying right there.

As I looked at the men their lips were moving, but I heard no sound. Instead I just heard my mother's curling cries. Terry stood at my side. We knew it was just us now: Louis wouldn't be returning home. Instead he would be buried with a flag, six feet under.

The world had stolen my brother, her son, his father figure. Something we would never get back. Something that would be lost forever.

—K. Williams



# Hey, Teachers

## We have a few lessons to teach you, too.

I'm sorry I didn't pay attention in any class regarding math. I just couldn't grasp the reality of Algebra. You teachers, providers of knowledge, the beginners of brilliance, know nothing about me as a person. Me as a student. Pre-judging my "conduct history" and deciding I didn't want to be anything in life or that I was just a product of my environment. How can I be anything when I'm shuffled into overcrowded classes with underpaid teachers who don't care if I grasp anything as long as they get a salary?

I'm sorry I didn't wear my gym uniform, I just didn't feel the need to get sweaty for a teacher who was going to flunk me anyway. And I'm sorry for any teachers I met in a dark time in my life. I was blinded by the ones before you, and didn't always give you a chance. So, to all you educators: Pay attention to how many days a student misses or to their behaviors. If you give us a chance, you just might find the next Einstein.

Sincerely,

*Every girl you've  
ever underestimated*

# WHOLE Aggain

– Marline S. Johnson

I'm so tired of people telling me to get over it  
Nobody ever tells someone who lost someone to get over it  
Do they know that  
Every single time someone violates my body I lose a part of myself  
My insides were torn apart  
But my soul remains intact  
I'm so tired of being called out by my name  
For not succumbing to the catcalls of strangers  
Do they not know that  
I get tired of having to defend myself  
See  
My wounds were rendered invisible  
Because people refuse to see them  
I guess  
My black was black enough to conceal these scars because  
Nobody ever asked me how I got these scars and  
Nobody asked me why I was so angry and  
Everyone was so preoccupied with why I was so loud  
But I was loud  
Because I was screaming for someone to  
LISTEN to me  
To hear me  
But most importantly  
I wanted someone  
To see me  
Often times  
Society made me feel like  
Samples at the grocery store  
Set out to be picked over and never fully paid for  
So no wonder  
My wounds were rendered invisible  
And No wonder  
My wounds were buried under secrecy and shame  
And No wonder  
It took me nineteen years to talk openly about my survivorship  
See  
I never had anyone tell me it was okay for me to tell my story  
Until A Long Walk Home  
I couldn't be  
What I couldn't see  
So I've been searching for examples on how to be whole  
Again.



**K**ia tasted the blood as it leaked into her mouth. She saw the crazed eyes and she didn't recognize him. This wasn't the guy she had known and loved. "How could he hit me, why would he hit me?" she thought to herself. She tried to scream, but no sound came out. Or maybe it was just that her scream fell upon deaf ears.

She felt her eye swell from the powerful hand of a man, her mind spinning, "Why would he do this to me?" She didn't expect him to call her a liar, a bitch, a cheat. He started to apologize, but it made her angry.

She punched, screamed, spit, and kicked. When she finally realized that he had abused her, she hated him and loved him all at once. "How can I leave him alone?" she thought. She wanted to walk away, but her heart put a lasso around her body, like a crazed man in a straight jacket.

She couldn't grab the handle on the door and walk out of his life. She was stuck like someone in quicksand. Why wouldn't he just leave, why did he love her? Her mind hated the idea of him, hated the sound of him,

**She was so blinded by the "I love you's" that she couldn't see her own black eyes.**

and hated the look of him. She wanted to leave, but her big heart made her stay.

Love is a drug, a common drug. Love is lethal, love is blind. But she loved him and refused to leave him behind. She was so blinded by the "I love you's" that she couldn't see her own black eyes.

– J. Williams

# WORDS FROM THE WISE:

## A note from our writing workshop sponsor.

**One of my heroes is Sojourner Truth.** A brilliant but illiterate woman, she was a great orator and powerful presence who possessed courage and determination. I often read her words: “If women want any rights more than they’s got, why don’t they just take them, and not be talking about it.”



D. Sharon Grant

An unwavering defender of women’s rights and an abolitionist, Sojourner continues to fuel my determination to fight for equality for women and the underserved. As I sat and listened to the young women participating in The Voices and Faces Project’s writing workshop, I was again inspired by young women who have taken their life circumstances to build courage and dedication.

In listening to them it was clear to me that strong women run through their blood, but their journey toward becoming strong, confident young women has not been easy. To see their courage and fighting spirit was refreshing and gave me a sense of awe to be in their presence. What a wonderful way to spend an afternoon! I invite and look forward to meeting all of you young women on the battlefield for women’s and human rights.

It was a pleasure for the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center Foundation to fund The Voices and Faces Project’s “The Stories We Tell” writing program.

With great admiration,

D. Sharon Grant  
Executive Director  
JTDC Foundation

**The stories we tell can  
change the world.  
And changing the world is  
what LEAP is all about.**

LEAP is a publication of The Voices and Faces Project, an award-winning non-profit storytelling project. Featuring work created or discussed during "The Stories We Tell," an immersive testimonial writing program for girls whose lives have been affected and altered by violence, LEAP is made possible through the support of the JTDC Foundation. To find out more about The Voices and Faces Project, or to support "The Stories We Tell" scholarship fund, visit [voicesandfaces.org](http://voicesandfaces.org).

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*Photo: Javier Otero*

[VOICESANDFACES.ORG/LEAP](http://VOICESANDFACES.ORG/LEAP)

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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

**SHARE  
YOUR STORY  
CHANGE  
THE WORLD**