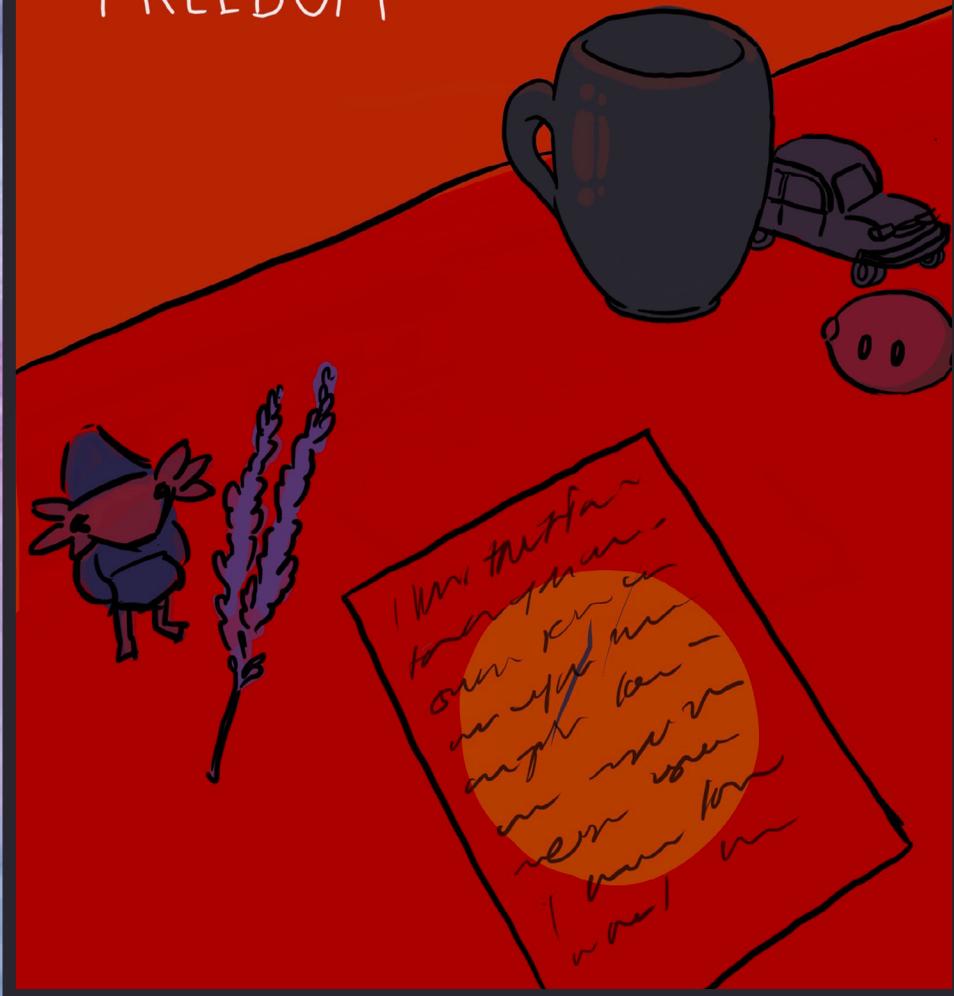


# WRITING FOR FREEDOM



A watercolor-style illustration of a young person's profile, facing right. The colors transition from a deep red on the left to a bright orange on the right. The background is white with a thin red border.

## Dedication

To anybody that ends up with a copy of this book,  
any young person that needed to hear this.  
To the people who needed to read these pieces now  
or when they were young, this book is for you.

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# I. Letters / Self Reflection

## Foreward

This poetry anthology is made up of pieces and art that arose from the first Siblings on the Rise cohort at Young Women's Freedom Center's Los Angeles Site. These writings come from system impacted organizers and leaders sharing their experiences, wisdom, joy and vulnerability on the page.

Through the heaviness of the pandemic, we met with one another and shared space, held each other through times of uncertainty and fear and grief, through times of hope and pushing through, and brought each other to laughter and also tears. These writings are pieces from community navigating towards healing and care.

That being said, it should be named that there are heavy topics in this anthology: self image, self harm, sexual assault, childhood and adult trauma, gender based violence, experiences of incarceration and the foster system. Please keep this in mind before reading, though there are also pieces around self love and hope, future building and affirmations.

We hope this poetry anthology fosters healing and reflection for those reading, for whoever needs this space, for whoever is finding they need community like we did.

## Mirror

BY CELENA AFEMATA

Mirror Mirror what do you see?

I see a sham... you see a sham in me?

Yes I do, you smile during the day and cry at night  
and wake up each morning faking that you are alright.

Mirror mirror how can I change?

Well a good start would be to love yourself and stand strong  
by your name. Stop dropping your head as you walk by the rest,  
hold your head high and show them you are the absolute best.

Mirror mirror I am hurting inside, just to hear from you  
that you see through my disguise.

Mirror mirror I am going to change and make sure that everyone  
remembers my powerful name...CELENA AFEMATA!!

I am beautiful and strong and worthy of love but above all  
remember I have Angels guarding me up above!

## II. Body's Wisdom / Self Care

### Ode to You

BY CANDEX LOUIE

To my childhood self: you deserved better. You deserve love and care and support. You deserve resources and community and support and love, not arbitrary and confusing standards and punishment. You deserve joy. You deserve pleasure and care. You deserve understanding and nurturing.

You deserve time without shame. You deserve real friends. You deserve hugs and kisses. You deserve to feel honored and praised. You deserve investment that isn't conditional. You deserve investment that isn't violent.

I love you, I promise I will take care of you, I will grow with you and hold your hand. I will invest in us and give us time, and be patient with us and our dreams and aspirations. I promise I will give us time to experience new things and try even if we're scared, I promise if it doesn't work or feels bad I won't force us to do it.

I promise to be gentle with you, and honest with you. I promise, even as I am working things out and trying new experiences and navigating new things, that I will communicate with you, ask about what our boundaries and wants and needs are, will ask to move with support and love and gentleness and tenderness.

You are so precious to me. I love you so much.

### My Body's Wisdom

BY MARCEL RABANES

My body overcame molestation  
My body survived rape  
My body stood up to a fist, a pipe, a broom, a bat, an extension cord, and many other weapons of destruction.  
My body can wake me up  
My body can greet the sun  
My body can provide a wall  
My body can defend  
My body destroys, and self-destructs like clock work  
My body can communicate  
My body is also a vessel for love, life, hope, faith, friendship, and a forever place to build a relationship.

My body has its own masculinity deep in the roots of my essences and being.  
My body is changing with every beat of my heart  
My body is grieving over the loss of a body that has stayed way too long  
My body is scared..over all, Tired of the depression it caused  
My body wants to let go of the Girl that suffered so much  
My body is marring the scars that once kept me captive  
My body is changing..  
My body is growing..  
My body is almost free..

Can you see me??  
My body is embracing...me.

Marcel..the Man.. my body was meant to be.....

# Body's Widsom

BY CELENA AFEMATA

My body knows when I am happy, sad or angry.

My body tells me when I am neglecting it  
or consuming too much unhealthy food.

My body shuts down if I do not drink enough water  
especially now that I am getting older.

My body aches when the weather changes.

My body knows when I am the strength for others  
and I am holding in my hurt and pain  
that I end up having meltdowns.

My body has been through a lot of mistreatment  
but yet it's still fighting.

My body loves delicious food.

At times I feel it swaying side to side  
especially when I eat ribs, potato salad,  
greens and cornbread....

# Body's Widsom

BY BROOKE ERVIN

My Body is a spiritual being having a human experience.

My spirit guides me to receive wisdom from my ancestors.

My ancestors are strong so therefor I'm strong they center me,  
they show me the way to victory

My body speaks to me through sounds of the sea breeze and the tempo  
of a beat, it flows from the top of my head to the tips of my toes.

It responds to touch with flutters in my tummy like chocolate melanin hunis

Family makes my heart happy and my heartstrings strong it communicates joy  
and unity almost simultaneously smiling

My body communicates compassion for oppressed frustration for inhumanity  
and it communicates determination to be the change I want to see.

# Body's Widsom

BY CANDEX LOUIE

My body knows when I am angry.

It tells me about my boundaries.

My body is a container for all my big big emotions.

My body dances with me and calms me when I need to get out of my head.

My body tells me when I'm in pain.

My body tells me when I am hungry or crave touch.

My body is a cosmic portal.

A vessel of a warrior.

Sheathed in dragon scale and fairy dust.

My body is a message and a mystical dowsing tool.

My body has faced danger and been a danger.

My body knows its purpose and its divinity.

My body takes time and needs love,  
and communicates that to me.

My body loves me with a fierceness.

My body desires, desires respect, desires commitment,  
desires authenticity, desires communication,  
desires comfort, desires nourishment.

And it is fully deserving of its needs and desires to be met.

# My Bodily Widsom

BY RASHIDA AL AZIZ

Without the need for any interpretations by the mind  
My body creates language in/by/for/of itself  
A fulfillment not typically strived for  
Cuz it's something you rest in

Tingly, energetic, (re)storing, mapping, unlocking rooms  
All through a napping, never forgetting the rooms I come from  
The space it makes, the portals it trace

The history that (re)lays [beforehand],  
The history we bring, shows face. Shows what's left  
In either or's wake

Story-holding, people-holding, culture-holding  
(herst)oracle-telling, truth-telling,  
(inner) child- listener, archive listener,  
Intra- mapper, inter- mapping

# Self Care

BY MARCEL RABANES

*Why is it important to take care of yourself?*

I think it is important to take care of yourself, because resetting Self is a way to stay connected with an inner balance. I also think it is a time to heal your body after it has had a rough patch. Your body communicates with you in a way that lets you know when it is breaking down, hungry, stressed, sick, dirty, needs a nap, or a hug. So taking time to fulfill those needs are super important in keeping a healthy balance with self.

*How do you take care or nurture yourself?*

I enjoy taking a long drive or a long hot bath to relax myself. I also enjoy taking a puff and listening to music. A combination of these coping skills helps keep me from flipping out.

Relaxing looks like; Being myself

1. Breathing
2. Looking
3. Daydreaming
4. Listening to music
5. Eating
6. Watching movies
7. Smelling
8. Laughing
9. Smiling
10. Swimming
11. Loving myself
12. Creating dreams
13. Taking a break
14. Going to the beach
15. Hanging out
16. Driving my Truck

Self care is important for me because if I am not able to refresh myself, then how in the hell am I going to truly be able to care or love others like I do myself. I can only give the truest reflection of me. So please don't be offended if I need to sit on the bench for a timeout.

# My Body Knows

BY MARCY VALENZUELA

My Body Knows...

My body knows when it's unsafe, it will not let others get close  
My body knows the difference in touch, the good, the bad and t  
My body knows when somethings wrong  
My body knows when it's safe, then it's ok to rest  
It knows it is strong, even though sometimes it attacks itself  
It knows when it needs nutrition and when it needs water  
My body knows how to shut off so it wont get hurt  
Although its still learning its ok to feel  
My body likes to plaay and be active  
My body knows when it does feel safe, it's ok to move closer to another  
body  
My body knows how to protect others  
My body has been through a lot  
It remembers being violated  
It remembers being abused  
Its remembers being drugged, overfed, and appreciated  
It remembers holding and giving up food, the dance of give and take but  
just wanting to be nurtured  
It has survived everything its been put through and continues to move  
forward  
Today, this body enjoys touch, not necessarily sexual, just soft safe touch  
It likes hugs and caresses  
It loves being bathed in lotion and submerged in water  
It likes to move, move, move

### III. What Makes You Feel Badass

#### What makes me feel bad ass?

BY CELENA AFEMATA

Hanging out with all my younger cousins... love that they love being around me and can call me at any time if they need me.

Dressing up, straightening my hair and wearing my 49ers gear.

Working out and being able to keep up with women that are extremely fit and go to the gym 2-3 times a day.

Being able to help my mom whenever she needs me even if it is financially, emotionally or even spiritually.

Overcoming my trials and tribulations although it may be slower than others I continue to make that effort!

Actually loving myself and being able to look in the mirror and tell myself I am beautiful, intelligent and worthy of positive relationships.

#### What makes you feel like a badass?

BY RASHIDA AL AZIZ

Re(grounding/creating) makes me feel badass  
Making my own jewelry makes me feel badass

Wrapping my locs up make me feel badass  
In fact, getting sibling locs makes me feel badass  
(neither the size of sister or brother locs)

Listening to Queer Afrofusion artists makes me feel badass  
Wearing african clothing makes me feel badass  
Queering my mudcloth, kente, print headwraps and tunics makes me feel badass

Learning how to tailor makes me feel badass  
Doing workings makes me feel badass

Curating medicinal wor(l)ds makes me feel badass

## IV. World Building / Future Writing

### Letter to My Gen Z's

BY BROOKE ERVIN

I am manifesting my vision of dreams upon my future gen Z's. Living a life without fear, struggle or pain being content in time to just BE and without judgement. Sharing in one's victories and prosperities.

My Gen Z's  
Break all chains seen and unseen. Generational curses broken. No more oppression, depression and division and instead endless possibilities and opportunities.

My Gen Z's  
No more poverty, human rights have been restored and prison walls are no more. Drugs that were placed in our communities to cause our demise no longer create stars in our eyes.

My Gen Z's  
Proper treatment for mental health, dental health, that hospitals will be accessible despite race gender or class status and for all.

My Gen Z's  
Cultivate and grow your own food. Healing plants and herbs will be your remedies. Digging deep into your ancestors recipes and knowing your lineage and history.

My Gen Z's  
Create a space for love and bonds

Build traditions that will last for generations and hold them close to your heart and leave a trail of footprints for our future Gen Z'sssssssss

## People Power + Community Love

BY CANDEX LOUIE

People power is food banks and community gardens, people power is making sure our homeless neighbors are fed and clothed, given things they need, securing housing for our people.

People power is on the ground work.

Institutional power is paperwork and jumping over hoops.

Institutional power requires things like grant writing and capital and quantifying your work and worth so you can justify why organizing matters.

Institutional power is policy and legal language.

Institutional power is why my friends who aren't citizens need to get married and manage multiple barriers to staying here, where they want to be.

Institutional power is why it takes years and years and phone calls and tears to get on the hormones you have already been prescribed, the surgeries that you need.

Community love is mutual aid, taking care of each other after gender affirming surgeries, is queer femmes getting together to do each others makeup or nails, is calling people just because, is care packages and making medicines, is feeding each other, is check ins, is asking each other to prioritize rest.

Community love is getting each other jobs, housing, calling for people when they need meds refilled, community love is shared space and time, community love is dialogue.

Community love is when we take care of us.

# To Build A World

BY MARCEL RABANES

*What world do you want to live in?*

I want to live in a world where fear is not the only emotion we operate on, resulting in Anger being the only form of communication we know, respect, and use back and forth in our daily life.

I want to live in a world that sees others as energy of peace, instead of the negative reflection of our trauma that we project onto each other.

I would like to see our world through a lens that is not foggy with my past mistakes, decisions, crime, upbringing, or preferences. I want to live in a world that sees color as it truly is; a beautiful image of our Creators' vision of the rainbow. Which is the perfect blend of love, peace, joy, and uniqueness. I want to live in a world where our language of love is compassion instead of oppression.

*How do you want to build that world?*

I want to build a world inside myself first. Applying these open lines of hope in all I do. I want to practice with my best friend and partner on a level where "I just understand her," is my first thought of response, instead of just reacting to the words that are being expressed. I also want to be able to hear others' messages, instead of the delivery. I would like to change my way of processing the quote that; "It's not what you say, It's how you say it". Hell sometimes that's just how people communicate!

*How do you orient towards community and liberation?*

I practice through being vulnerable to my own mistakes, failures, and shortcomings. I never want to give up or allow myself to just be a reflection of my 'used to be' state. Instead, I want to create, shape, grow, and cultivate myself into the man I want to be.

## Self Reflection Questions / Journal Prompts

We met for nearly 6 months, and had a recurring writing session each week, sometimes several times a week. We wanted to share our prompts for our readers' reflection and to make space for you to follow along and to inspire your own writing.

- What is your body's wisdom? What does your body communicate to you?
- What makes you feel badass? How do you tap into your power? Individually? In community?
- How does your body communicate joy?
- What world do you want to live in? What world do you want to build? How do you orient towards community and liberation?
- Why do we need to care for ourselves? What does care and nurturing mean to us? What does it look like? How do I nurture myself?
- How do you plan on practicing your love languages? / What do your love languages mean to you?
- Community Love and People Power as alternatives to Institutional Power: What does that look like?
- People Power vs Institute Power: What does this mean to yall, can you think of examples?
- Theme of Community Love: What does Community Love mean to you? What does that look like?
- Ode to you/your childhood self/to future generations: What are our promises/commitments?
- Violence/Trauma: How do we self soothe? How do we use somatics (healing practices through movement/body work) as a healing practice/ response to oppression/systemic marginalization? What kind of movement motivates you?
- What animals do you identify with / Year of the Ox / How does your animal move / How would you want to move?

# Bios

## **AIMEE UBAS, 16 years old (She/They/Them)**

I was born in the Philippines and immigrated to the U.S at a young age. I was raised in San Francisco California in the Tenderloin District, also known as the most drug infested neighborhood in San Francisco. I got introduced to the YWFC when Lucero came to Juvenile Hall and did a group when I was 13 years old and ever since then I been working with them. She's been working with me for almost 4 years and connecting me to other YWFC around Cali because I kept getting sent to different placements.

As a current youth in the system I hope to become a youth advocate for other youth who are in the system when I get older. I am training to gain self confidence and a louder voicer while working in the YWFC. My goal is to gain leadership skills and better communication skills so I can help other youth like me in the future.

## **BROOKE ERVIN (She/Her(s))**

Brooke is a formerly incarcerated black woman who grew up in San Diego and currently resides in the Los Angeles area. In addition to her internship with Siblings On The Rise, Brooke has been committed to ending the incarceration of men, women and youth to support reunification with families. Her work is rooted through her own experience. Exposed to a world of domestic violence drugs and oppression, Brooke decided to change the narrative not only for herself, but for her black and brown communities. Brooke is committed to educating and empowering her folks to stand and speak our truths who have been silenced for so long. Brooke has mentored at risk youth and adults impacted by the justice system, conducted and organized seminars, fundraisers and community advocacy while offering workshops called "Pathways to Freedom" and Freedom to Choose, teaching practical communication and emotional competency skills. Brooke moves forward in her work setting out to help as many people as she can.

## **CANDEX 'DEX' SEOKYI LOUIE (He/Him and They/Them)**

Candex 'Dex' Seokyi Louie is an asian nonbinary trans author, artist and organizer and YWFC LA Youth Fellow and facilitator of Siblings on the Rise. Born and raised in unceded Tongva Land, otherwise known as Los Angeles, Candex's experiences as a formerly institutionalized genderqueer person shape their art and organizing. They spend their time and energy creating work that explores and challenges notions of what is natural and normal through carving out spaces that center fluidity, queerness, and othered existence.

Their published works include articles for digital and news media on queer and trans workplace justice, poetry on mythology, queerness, spirit, institutionalization and anticapitalism, and Future Pleasures, an ongoing queer and trans science fiction and fantasy anthology they co-write with other QTBIPOC authors.

## **CELENA AFEMATA (She/They/Them)**

Celena Afemata is a Mexican/Samoan intern for the YWFC/SOTR. She was born and raised in the City of Compton. She was formerly incarcerated in WCCW and, upon release, worked for different companies to survive while still developing leadership skills and great work ethic. Until now working with the YWFC has helped her find her true passion, which is working with the youth. Working with the YWFC has helped her develop skills that will allow her to continue her journey with the youth in our brown and black communities and transform the system that continuously keeps our youth feeling as if they had no hope.

## **MARCEL RABANES (He/Him/His)**

I am a 41 year old formerly incarcerated (lifer), Transgender man. I was incarcerated in 1998 for carjacking, kidnapping, and robbery at the age of 19 and sentenced to 14 years plus 5 consecutive life terms without possibility of parole. I remained in prison until April 09, 2020 when I was released after being found suitable from the Board of Prisons Hearings (BPH). I currently live in Rancho Cucamonga CA. I enjoy driving, listening to music, working with dogs, and working with the youth. I am a survivor of physical, mental, and sexual abuse. Not only from my parents, but from the system as well. I am a carpenter, builder, welder, facilitator and, most important, a friend. While inside, I worked with my peers to create groups for people like us (confused, transgender, gangbangers, sexually abused, and just plain angry).

I am currently working on transitioning into society, truest self, a man, and an adult. My goals are to work on my B.A in child development with a minor in business, own a house, have a family, and open a youth center and/or housing for transgender youth. I would like to listen, learn, and help guide them into whoever they aspire to be. That is how I would like to give back to the community. I am a pretty laid back guy, funny, honest, real, loyal, blunt, super clean, and authentic. Normally I am a black and white thinker, however everyday I am able to see the color in the world. I am looking forward to my future and the opportunity to learn, share, and build community with self and others.

## **MARCY VALENZUELA (She/They)**

Marcy is a proud queer chicana born and raised in East Los Angeles. She is the second oldest of 9 children, which is what drives her strong belief in siblinghood. She took custody of her 3 younger siblings who were in foster care when she was 24 years old. Through having to navigate both the juvenile justice and foster care systems all her youth, she became passionate about fighting the systems that oppressed, abused, and disserved her and her peers. She became a community organizer and soon helped other young people develop their leadership skills and find their voices. Marcy was first introduced to the Young Women's Freedom Center by helping co-found the Sister Warriors Freedom Coalition. Marcy fell in love with the organization and community and immediately knew she wanted to work for the Center one day. She is now the Program Manager at the Los Angeles site, where she supports young leaders through the Siblings on the Rise program. On her down time, Marcy enjoys spending time with her dog, camping, roller blading and traveling.

## **RASHIDA (They/She)**

rashida is a BlaQueer Trans Femme Youth (22 y.o.) born and raised in the LA area. Their first love is for poetry and to bring those skills into qmmuniTy as a politiQal artist, educator, and story-teller/mapper. Their drive working in qmmuniTy is their source of art-making and vice versa. Both parts hold each other, support another mutually. As a Qmmunity Educator, she does webroot (virtual grassroots) consciousness-raising workshops on poetry, care-culture, (inter)personal frameworks, and traditions of BlaQ legacy work. These interests in legacy and lineage building are mirrored in their archival work, joy of story-telling/mapping, and love of and for people.

2021

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on the Rise cohort at Young Women's  
Freedom Center's Los Angeles Site.