

# iOW

## InsideOUT WRITERS

## FALL / HOLIDAY 2020 NEWSLETTER

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# A Statement from the Staff and Executive Director at InsideOUT Writers

As we approach the end of what has been an unpredictable and complicated year, our team at InsideOUT Writers (IOW) is proud of what we've been able to accomplish despite several challenges and are grateful for the many lessons we've learned along the way.

This year began with several plans for IOW to celebrate 25 years of its Writing Program providing healing and trauma-informed creative writing classes inside the Los Angeles County Juvenile Halls. Just months into 2020, our plans to celebrate this milestone were derailed as the entire world was blindsided by COVID-19. As we went into quarantine, our hearts were broken knowing we would no longer be able to continue providing our classes to the kids kept behind walls. Now, more than ever, they needed to be reminded they were not alone and we were helpless to offer them those assurances and love.

For many of our teachers, staff, Board of Directors, and volunteers, the "Safer at Home Order" was only further proof of why our work at IOW has always been, and remains, so important. We have all been forced to conform and acclimate to a new way of life and continuously adjust to ongoing changes in our environment. Those who have self-quarantined since the onset of the pandemic now have a firsthand understanding of how it feels to be isolated and alone.

For 25 years, IOW has had a deep understanding of the detrimental effects of arrest and incarceration on a young person. We have spent time with, and have learned from, over 25,000 youth who have participated in our Writing Program.

**"We ask that you take a moment wherever you are and spend just a moment in reflection to think about your own journey this year"**

Similar to what we have all undergone together during this pandemic, we know that when a person is arrested and incarcerated, they have no choice but to leave a world they knew, learn how to survive in one that is foreign and new, and wait until they are able to return to their homes and communities that has also continued to evolve during their time away. Oftentimes, their journey is one they must take on their own, alone. That is why we've always done our best to walk alongside them in whichever ways we can, both while they're incarcerated and when they return home.

Our dedicated team rose to meet and overcome unanticipated difficulties by adapting as needed, participated in and learned from community partners and stakeholders, read and be moved through writings submitted directly from our Writing Program students and Alumni Program participants, and celebrate historic changes that have occurred in the Los Angeles County landscape. Each member of our staff contributed to this compilation with love and care and we hope that you will be inspired to continue supporting our organization.

As we prepare to say farewell to 2020, we ask that you take a moment wherever you are and spend just a moment in reflection to think about your own journey this year. We are proud you've made it and we are grateful to have you in our IOW family. If you need a reminder, please remember you are never alone.

From our hearts to yours, we wish you and yours the very best of health and joy and love during the holiday season. We look forward to seeing you in the new year!

With love and gratitude,

Katherinne Gamez, Programs' Data Specialist

Sarah Cho, Writing Program Coordinator

Emma-Cecilia Shahriari, Alumni Program Coordinator

Rodrigo Guardado, Chief Development and Operations Officer

Jimmy Wu, Executive Director

# Dee's Story

Daivion Davis shares his story about what IOW meant for him as a young student.

Before getting incarcerated at the age of 16, I pretty much became a product of my environment. Luckily I had a loving mother, she really tried to save me, but I took to the streets, and along the way, the trauma began. I wanted to follow my peers. I wanted to be hood famous, and I was willing to reach the goal by any means necessary. Two years into the gang lifestyle, things like being shot at, fighting, and causing mischief became my norm. By this age, I was numb to death, lost about 11 friends and family members, but losing my best friend is when my life really changed. I truly believe I lost the ability to feel. I became cold. I felt lost. I lost my brother whom I grew up with from the very tender age of six. Revenge quickly became my coping mechanism---that's when I officially lost myself to the streets. It took about a year of mayhem from this broken heart for my actions to catch up to me. By my 16th birthday, I got the biggest birthday surprise ever except it wasn't something I was wishing for. I was charged with murder and faced 130 years to life in an adult prison.



I was a mess, I struggled an inner struggle that no therapist could crack, but this IOW teacher did



While inside, I instantly fell into what I was used to. I was in a boiling pot of bad attitudes, "tough guys", and short fuses. That being said, I did what I was used to doing: putting on my mask and adapting to my surroundings like a chameleon. Then I was introduced to InsideOUT Writers (IOW).

I vividly remember only going into class for the snacks, but the IOW teacher turned our situation into something that really appealed to me. She didn't see us as little shackled up monsters; she actually cared and kept it real. She challenged me in a way that made me feel human, made me feel feelings I hadn't felt in years. What really stood out to me was the fact that she opened us all up. She challenged us to leave the mask at the door.

I remember a class where some of the hardest guys I've been locked up with crying. We had a rule that what was talked about in class stayed in class and even when she wasn't around, we valued that rule. I was a mess, I struggled an inner struggle that no therapist could crack, but this IOW teacher did. She told me, "All the stuff in your head, write it down. "The pen and paper won't judge you," she said. That was the start of my journey. Night after night, I'd write. I'd even have whole conversations, questions, and answers. IOW gave me and others hope that took us beyond what was in front of us. I hope that this holiday season you consider helping them out by donating any amount.

Sincerely,

Daiyion "Dee" Davis  
**IOW Alum and Teacher**



# VIRTUAL WRITING CIRCLE

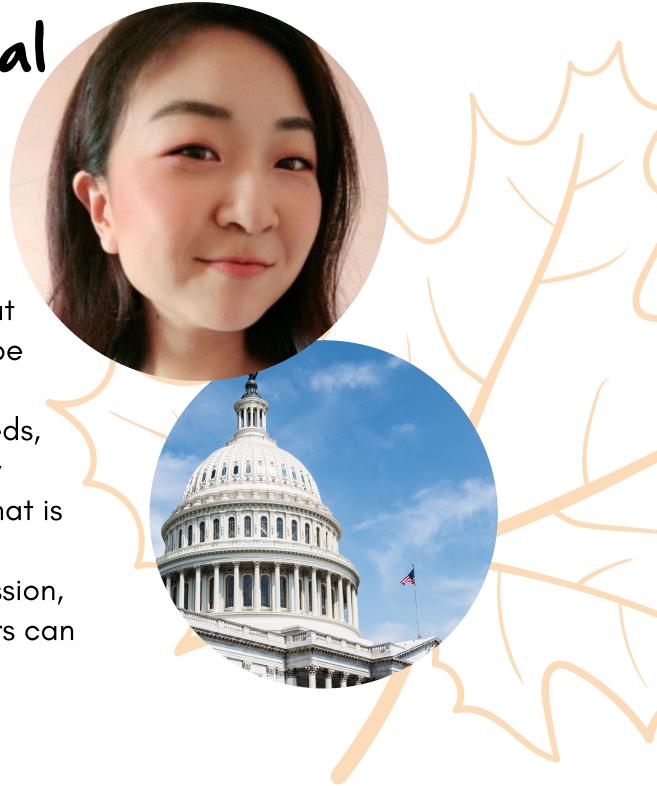
While InsideOUT Writers has not been able to provide creative writing classes inside the Juvenile Halls, we are proud to share how we have re-directed our creative writing teachers who normally teach inside the halls to facilitate Writing Circles on Thursdays.

This experience has been both rewarding and enriching for both our alumni members and our teachers who normally work with youth on the inside. We express deep gratitude to the following teachers for participating in our Virtual Writing Circle: **Ana Lilia Barraza, Matt Mizel, Anna Carey, Ben Lear, Shelley Diamond, Ken Mirman, Adam Weissman, Amy Spies, Aaron Bergman, April Hong, Lauren Dani, Leslie Poston, and Lauren Dani.**

## April Hong Facilitates Special Topics for Writing Circle

### Diversity in Politics

Diversity is a double-edged sword. By default, it implies that there is one color, one form or life experience that should be upheld as 'the norm,' or, 'expected.' In truth, the need for diversity simply shouldn't be. All races, colors, cultures, creeds, identities, and orientations should be equally loved, equally respected. That said, having proper representation when that is not upheld, as it is now, is imperative. To have officials in positions of political power who have faced racism, oppression, and bigotry and can show younger generations that barriers can be broken and 'new normals,' can be instituted – that is everything.



### Mamba Mentality

Mamba mentality isn't only 4 am workouts – it's about focusing on your goal and following through on the steps you need to take to achieve it, it's knowing you have the power within you to pursue what you love with full confidence that every setback is only another opportunity to keep moving forward. It's knowing that how you achieve is as important as what you achieve and you have the power to choose. Kobe stood for what he believed in, he inspired others to do the same and he led by example. Every person matters, every person has a voice and it's important to know you always have the choice to use it. You don't have to be the #1 celebrity to be powerful, you just have to be you.



# VIRTUAL WRITING CIRCLE

## Social Media & Your Sanity In Today's World



The equalizing quality of everyone having a voice sometimes means voices are drowned out in the cacophony of discourse; social media has irrevocably changed our society, our understanding of connection, our power to change the narrative. It has opened a pandora's box of possibility, but it has also allowed us all to gather in the midst of a global pandemic to share our thoughts, fears, and hopes. For every positive, there is a negative. But like any tool, it is only as powerful or damaging as the person wielding it. Wield the virtual world with care and you will find endless possibilities. We certainly have.

Our stupendous alums brought eye-opening perspectives and enthusiasm to the session. Special thanks to our superstar facilitator **April Hong** for always coming in with knockout discussion topics and complete enthusiasm. April opens the space and guides our Alums with such enthusiasm and respect. She brings thought-provoking ideas to challenge us every twist and turn, leaves us all inspired.

## Self-Care In Uncertain Times with Gina Loring



Gina Loring

Authenticity, integrity, momentum, self-care - the recipe for true reflection, creativity, and retaining identity in the face of injustice. As a nation, we are living through unprecedented times - the largest united protest movement in history, a mass awakening to the need for community care over carceral systems, and the power of our voices in challenging injustice. What would our great-grandparents, our ancestors say to us now? What have we learned from them and what have we discarded? If Malcolm X were to speak to us today, what would he say? Our alums knew the answer - fight on, stand tall, and be proud. Do not bow your head in the face of injustice and know that your truth and your voice is not only important, it is necessary. It is time to strive for unity for all of humanity, destroy the us vs. them.

Much special thanks to Gina Loring for such a beautiful, powerful and moving Writing Circle. We are grateful for your wit, wisdom and absolutely incredible voice.

# VIRTUAL WRITING CIRCLE



Adam Scott Weissman

## How to Write A Movie: Writing Workshop Series with Adam Scott Weissman

Writing a film in 20-minutes is by no means an easy task. Our alums all explored such wildly different and versatile worlds with such depth and clarity. We were infinitely lucky to be able to witness the talent and creativity of our young writers thanks to our incredible facilitator, **Adam Weissman**. It was obvious of the love he has for writing and the genuine care he has for all our alums. We are so grateful for his enthusiasm and his profound belief to support our Alums!

### How To Write a Movie Workshop Part 1:

- Step 1: Take a place, an idea, a person – imbue it with color, sound and scent and splash that onto a page.
- Step 2: Look around that scene, that world, what else do you see? Why and who and what?
- Step 3: Take everything you did, all of the sights, sounds and smells, flip it on its head and shake – who are you looking at now? Is it who you thought? Are you who you thought? Rinse and Repeat. Now you have your movie.



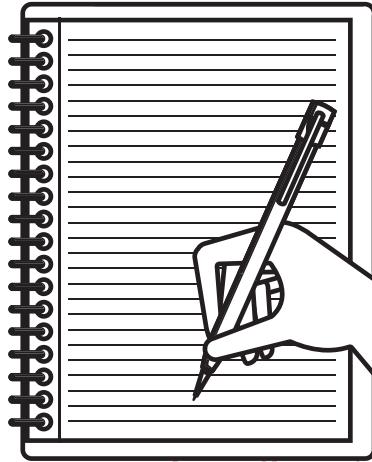
### How To Write a Movie Workshop Part 2:

- Step 1: Look at everything around you, everything that has ever influenced you, scared you, inspired you – now break that down scene by scene.

Step 2: What story is being told? Who is telling it and how? How do we the audience, understand you, the creator? Who do we hear first, as the opening credits roll?

Step 3: Find a way to translate the vibrant colors of the sky, the street stalls, the ocean, a passerby's t-shirt, so much that we can feel it, we can smell it.

Step 4: Leave to roast for 20 minutes. Now you have the bones of a movie.



Thank you to our alums for making the time and creating such incredible, well crafted film concepts! We thank Adam for being as excited about this workshop as we were. We look forward to more Adam Weissman's Screenwriting Workshops!

# VIRTUAL WRITING CIRCLE



Ana Lilia  
Barraza

## The History of Voting in the United States with Teacher Ana Lilia Barraza

Who we cast our vote for will only be part of the equation, but what we do in our every day will be what counts most. Will we focus on encouraging positive change in our communities? Will we do what we can to help our neighbors when we have the power to? Will we remember the importance of the work contributed by the people who cared enough to raise their voices for those who couldn't? Having the power to do something can be taken for granted when it was not a power you had to fight for. For all of those who fought, lost their lives, lost their worlds, gave everything to their dream – give them a voice. Vote. For those who can't cast a ballot because of a decision made long before, you vote every day with the decisions you make, the people and companies you support, the time you spend, and the media you consume. Remember your power, vote if you can. Endless thanks to our awe-inspiring alums. Breaking open worlds and expectations without so much as a backward glance for the fears left behind.

Special thanks to Ana Lilia Barraza for her guidance, awareness and ability to find the beauty, humor and strength in every situation. We are humbled and we are grateful. Keep writing!



Amy Spies

## Monthly Meditation Sessions with Amy Spies

Beginning in August 2020, **Amy Spies** began hosting monthly meditation sessions for our alums to unwind, destress and center themselves in a peer-supported group and safe space while they learn daily meditative and mindfulness techniques. Amy is a longtime writer and teacher in film, television, and new media. She's written documentaries, drama, comedy, as well as blogging for the Huffington Post and Los Angeles Review of Books. She serves on diversity, human rights committees and as a writing awards judge for PEN International Literary Association and the Writers Guild.

Amy has been a regular Virtual Writing Circle Facilitator and her meditatively focused Virtual Writing Circles have been profound, peaceful and deeply healing for all of our alums.

# VIRTUAL WRITING CIRCLE



Lauren Dani

## Choices & How It Defines Us with Lauren Dani

A little talent is important if you want to be a writer. But the only real requirement is the ability to remember every scar.

- Stephen King

**Lauren Dani** guided us through two writing circles. One, the power of representation and the importance of telling our true stories. We may not all be influencers on Instagram, have thousands of Twitter followers or be bestselling authors - but our voices matter. As always, our alums took the topic and flew with it, breaking down barriers, old expectations and societal guilts with a finely crafted sledgehammer wrought from their prose. In her second writing circle, Dani poses important questions: What is choice and how does it define us? Could it be the truth of our characters revealed or simply the circumstances we find ourselves in forcing our hand? When and how do we know the difference?

Thank you again to our pearl, amethyst, ruby, sapphire and emerald, also known as our alums, and knock-it-out-of-the-park Facilitator **Lauren Dani**, for her time, space and incredible grace. We are also so grateful to have been able to welcome **Olivia Carrasco** to her first IOW Writing Circle on the outs! Once again, our alum **Imrith Rode America** encapsulated the beauty of the Writing Circle in his endlessly captivating poetry.



Imrith Rode'America

### The Question At Hand by Imrith Rode'America

One faithful thought, often makes a pilgrimage into my temple.  
Did God create us, or did we create the Almighty idea?  
I was told, free will was bestowed upon me.  
I don't recall ever consenting to exist in a world  
where armies fire freely at will.  
In school I refused to follow what Simon said.  
I didn't pretend to be duck, nor geese.  
Instead I had to pretend my mom enrolled me in school to learn.  
When in fact, she was just securing a lunch for her kid.  
Because at home, there was no food in the fridge.  
That hunger, and thirst, made me the architect of my very own  
Golden Gate Bridge.

# VIRTUAL WRITING CIRCLE

## A.R.T. Training and Workshop



Back in June, the IOW team were fortunate to be able to complete the Aggression Replacement Training course. Originally developed by Arnold P. Goldstein, Barry Glick and John Gibbs, A.R.T training is a cognitive behavioral intervention program to help children and adolescents improve social skill competence and moral reasoning, better manage anger, and reduce aggressive behavior.

We are proud to announce that, as of August 2020, IOW has been able to begin holding A.R.T workshops for youth referred by LA County Probation! This momentous step marks IOW's first step of our long-term vision to develop our full Diversion program!

With this training, IOW will be able to tackle the societal and internal complications that lead to incarceration and recidivism at its roots while also helping young people better express their needs and interests in difficult situations.

# VIRTUAL WRITING CIRCLE



Professor  
Kenjus Watson

## Racial Battle Fatigue with Professor Kenjus Watson

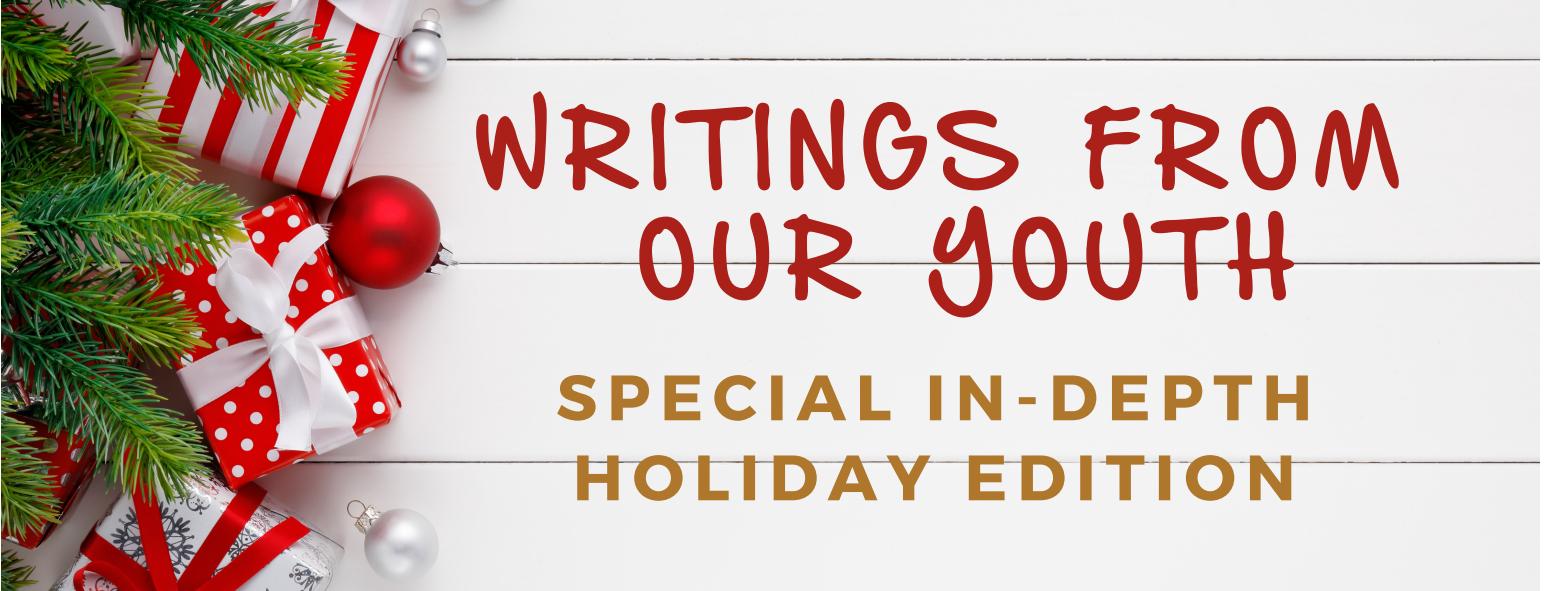
Breath, community, meditative focus, indigenization – this is what restores peace. This is what restores health; mentally, physically, spiritually. We have the power, down to a cellular level, to address the stressors born of structural and systemic racism and prejudice. This is something every one of us is capable of integrating into our lives, and it is one of the most powerful things we can do. Our alums engage in this practice every time they put pen to paper and we are so fortunate and grateful to be able to experience that healing power week after week.

**Professor Kenjus Watson**, a researcher and advocate associated with UCLA's Black Male Institute and Occidental Colleges' Critical Race Theory and Psychology departments, led a discussion of his research into the cellular effect of Racial Battle Fatigue on Black and Latinx youth as well as the positive and achievable ways to combat the negative long-term health affects his research uncovered.

We are so grateful for our community and for the wealth of love, knowledge and strength we bear witness to every time we come together. We thank Professor Watson for sharing these truths with us and doing the work that you do!

Please watch "If These Cells Could Talk". Now available worldwide at:  
<https://www.apocalypticeducation.org/knapsack>





# WRITINGS FROM OUR YOUTH

## SPECIAL IN-DEPTH HOLIDAY EDITION



In the depth of my mind  
I know what I see  
the translucent lights  
of my past memories  
All in my head  
the good times  
the bad times  
my past, passive aggressively  
I used to do things out of impulse  
Scar of love, hate, and pain  
all out of impulse  
this is what is in the  
Depths of my mind  
But it's my short bit of  
Life that seems like  
Forever  
It's not even a lifetime  
I know in the future  
I will be dwelling on these lines  
In the depths of my mind

by Diego R.  
Central Juvenile Hall  
Unit Boys KL



I am a female, a girl  
But my life is a twirl  
Although my hair doesn't curl  
I see a long path  
Just as a single strand  
Straight, not gay  
But a lot of love from my side  
To LGBT Pride  
I always my head held high  
Showing the respect I get  
Not the neglect I felt  
At the start of a warl never commenced  
I'm mindful of others  
But a mind full of positive vibes  
As a sunset rise  
My smile deprives  
When a storm arrives  
But the sun comes out  
Like I saw my true colors came out  
Not the closetBut my personality  
Beautiful not true.

by Daisy U.  
Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall  
Unit Girls TV

# WRITINGS FROM OUR YOUTH

Hold on to your dreams  
There is a rainbow after the storm  
Hold on to your dreams  
Be like the hawk, never lose sight  
Hold on to your dreams  
There's always a reward for great accomplishment  
Hold on to your dreams  
There's always a seed from a tree that grows big  
Hold on to your dreams

by Heidi P.  
Central Juvenile Hall  
Unit Girls D

My endless walk  
Im on my feet all day  
I go and i go  
So I have no time to stay  
Ruff skin, red heels  
I keep going so I have no time to deal  
But when do i stop, where is my break  
Im bottled all up and have no more space  
But when do I stop  
Where is my break

by Sienna F.  
Central Juvenile Hall  
Unit Girls C



I will choose to speak up and beat my silence  
I will choose to be a better person each and every day  
I will choose to be a young independent lady  
I will choose to do better even when temptation is around my life.  
I choose to have a poetic voice for the better for my anxiety  
I will choose to not be a mess up.  
I will chose to love myself like I've never done before.  
I choose to let myself know that I care about life and every choice I make.  
I choose the lifestyle that leads in my world of tough love to myself  
I choose to find myself in a world that's cold  
I choose to speak up from now on because I refuse to be misunderstood  
I choose to be outspoken even if I shout for attentionl choose to be golden.

by Preciosa L.  
Central Juvenile Hall  
Unit Girls Care

# WRITINGS FROM OUR YOUTH

Once upon a time, there was an elf named Brownie. She was the tallest out of all the elves. Her favorite colors were blue and white. She was always a holly jolly elf. She cheers everyone up. One day, she stumbled upon a girl. Her name was Sanchizzle. She was all alone in the corner. Brownie wanted to help her decorate the sleigh. She asked her if she wanted help. Sanchizzle smiled and said, "Yes, please". Brownie smiled with her dimples and made Sanchizzle laugh with silly faces. She laughed for almost an hour. As soon as they finished, Santa flew away. Brownie and Sanchizzle cheered because it was successful. Then a snowman came in and danced. Oh, how they had a holly and jolly their Christmas was! At the end, they prated and made gifts for everyone. They said, "Have a Merry Christmas!"

by Holiney B.  
Central Juvenile Hall  
Unit Girls ESU

If I was at home for Christmas, I would be at my first cousin's house. All of my family would be there. Our family friends would be there. We would eat a lot of food and other goodies. Then after I eat, I would go out with my friends and have fun. This is something I would do every year. Also my Christmas gifts would be open two or three days ahead because waiting for Christmas would be too long. I would want to open my gifts. Also... I would already know what I got.

by Kennedy S.  
Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall  
Unit y2



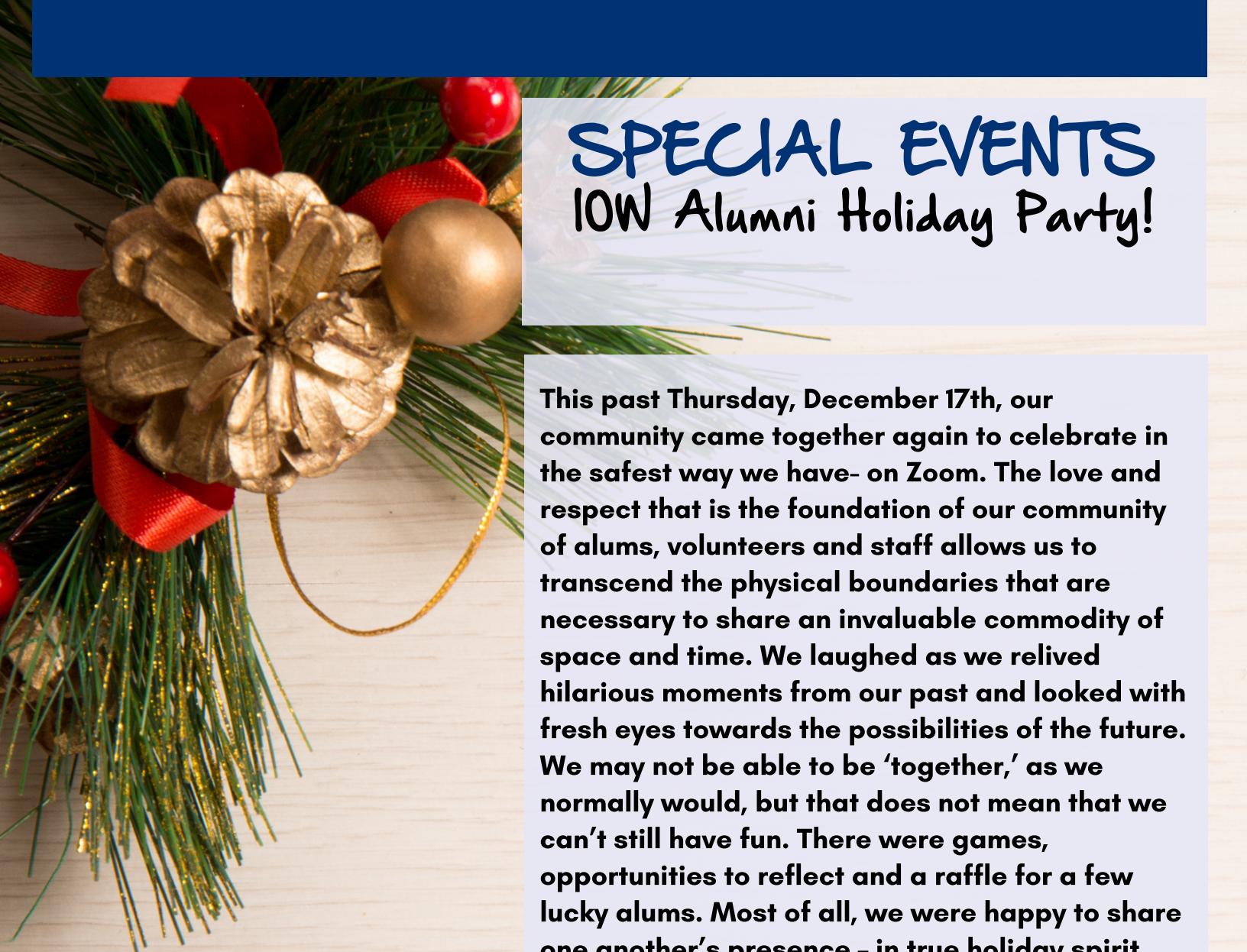
To read more writing from our InDepth Special Holiday Edition,  
visit our website at [www.insideoutwriters.org](http://www.insideoutwriters.org)



# SPECIAL EVENTS

## Virtual Giving Thanks

In a normal year, we would be gathering at the office to share a home-cooked meal together, hilarious or heart-rending stories about the ups and downs of the past year, and reflections on years past - ultimately taking a moment to appreciate each other's existence and the community we have. This is not a normal year, but that doesn't mean that we didn't have the ability to gather together and share space and time. Thanks to the technology we have access to, we were able to gather over Zoom and reflect on this past year - our triumphs and losses, excitements and setbacks; despite distance and a global pandemic. The concept of gratitude can seem overplayed or downright pretentious when as a community, we have experienced so much grief. But this is when gratitude is most important. We have the unique privilege of coming together every week to write, to reflect, to look forward. Every week, we are lucky to bear witness to incredible strength, unshakeable devotion to learning and growth, and the profound bond that has been created between our alums, our volunteers, and our staff, into a fully-fledged community. At IOW, we are eternally grateful.

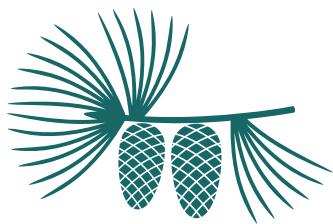


# SPECIAL EVENTS

## IOW Alumni Holiday Party!

This past Thursday, December 17th, our community came together again to celebrate in the safest way we have- on Zoom. The love and respect that is the foundation of our community of alums, volunteers and staff allows us to transcend the physical boundaries that are necessary to share an invaluable commodity of space and time. We laughed as we relived hilarious moments from our past and looked with fresh eyes towards the possibilities of the future. We may not be able to be 'together,' as we normally would, but that does not mean that we can't still have fun. There were games, opportunities to reflect and a raffle for a few lucky alums. Most of all, we were happy to share one another's presence - in true holiday spirit.





# iOW InsideOUT WRITERS

This mission of InsideOUT Writers is to reduce the juvenile recidivism rate by providing a range of services that evolves to meet the needs of currently and formerly incarcerated youth and young adults.

Using creative writing as a catalyst for personal transformation, these young people are empowered with the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully re-integrate into our communities becoming advocates for their future.

**PEN. PAPER. PERSEVERANCE.**  
*I write from the inside out.*

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iOWriters



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