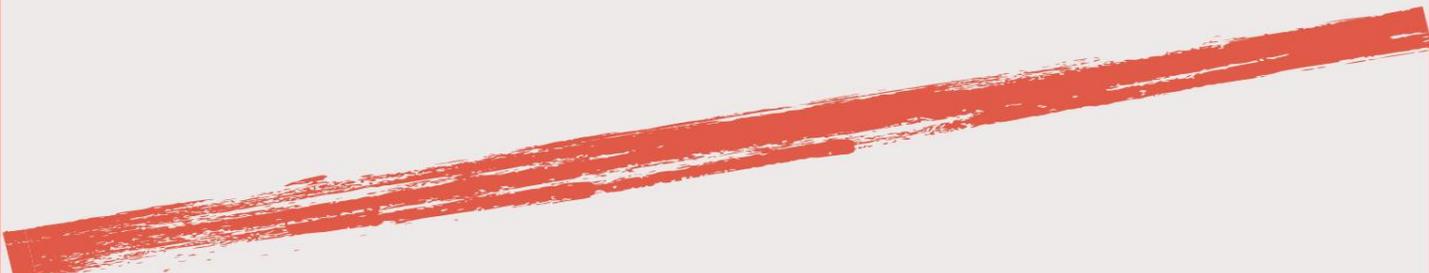


an anthology: a manual of survival

**TODAY,
I CHOOSE
JOY.**



**EDITED BY
JIDE BADMUS
MIRIAM OYENIYI**

Today, I Choose Joy.



an anthology: a manual of survival

Edited by

*Jide Badmus
Miriam Oyeniya*



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*Some of you say “Joy is greater than
Sorrow” and others say “Nay, sorrow is the greater.”*

But I say unto you, they are inseparable.

*Together they come, and when one sits,
Alone with you at your board, remember
That the other is asleep upon your bed.*

Khalil Gibran (Joy and Sorrow)

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EDITOR'S NOTE



*do not say our smile is cheap
or dare mock the scars it hides*

—Ifeoluwa Peter

The decision to call for submissions for this anthology was made after a promising young writer died. It was a suicide. A couple of months after, one of my daughters in the literary world made an attempt to end it all. A few weeks after that, I got a suicide note delivered as an early morning text; another promising writer took her own life.

It was as if suicide was a writer's issue. Depression seemed to be the writer's bane. It was becoming a thing young writers were getting obsessed with too. Mental health issues were becoming trivialized. Some felt it was a trend to jump on.

There were outbursts and underground rumblings at my choice of initiative. "What of those who don't have the luxury of choice", I was asked. But the aim is not to say that we are always in control.

Life is a coin—a tale of two sides! The world works on a theory of balance. There's a prospect of healing for pain—a chance that the pain would grow into scars or the possibility of new skin over scars. No night has ever overstayed its allotted time of reign. Even shadows are a proof that light exists.

The intention is actually to show that there are options and we can always desire life. The goal is to show that you can decide to fight on, that you can make deliberate efforts to hunt for joy. The fact that you have decided to seek medical treatment is a choice—of joy. The initiative was birthed in a bid to encourage everyone still hanging on to life—that you choose to find refuge in the church or at the gym or in a bowl of ice cream, that you seek bliss in nature or science or even poetry is your version of choosing joy. Don't let anyone mock your choice.

This anthology is a manual of survival—testimonies of those who have known pain and joy. It is a catalogue of battles and hard-won victories. It is an album of long nights, storms and sunshine.

- **Jide Badmus**

WHEN I SAY I CHOOSE JOY

JIDE BADMUS

When I say I choose joy,
It means that when life becomes a
Mural of gloom, devoid of zest,
I become a box of crayons & paint
A smile on sullen portraits.

When I say I choose joy,
I do not deny that sometimes I am
A lonely boat in the arms of a storm,
That I am like heavy clouds, bound to break
Into rain—I only rev my engines in anticipation
Of clear weather & another opportunity to fly.

When I say I choose joy, I mean
I have learnt not to pamper my pains
Nor cuddle fear in dark corners
Of my closet. I have learnt to
Till the night, fight the pests
Eating up my dreams until
The sun is ripe for a dawn.

I CHOOSE JOY

KOREDE KAKAAKI

when i say i choose joy,
i mean nightingales find an abode in my throat
& i wear my body like a cologne—though some memories are
snowflakes falling on sidewalk

when i say i choose joy,
i mean i hold depression at gunpoint &
lock my demons behind bars, because a smile is
a point of departure

when i say i choose joy,
i mean i am full of heights like the wings of a tropical
butterfly & i have learnt to knit my tales into moonlight
songs

when i say i choose joy,
i mean i am beyond the reach of the night

WHEN I SAY I CHOOSE JOY

IZANG ALEXANDER

I mean a feeling no pain can destroy
Each day like a piece of cake one at a time to enjoy
I mean taking life less serious than I did my best toy
Fighting my demons like the warrior of Troy

I mean seeing the sky for the colour it is
Not the erosion washing down the iris
I mean accepting both beauty and the beast
Bearing the fast as well as gulping the feast

I mean advertising not just my dental set
But also giving in to no shrieking voice of regret
I mean refining pain into a showering rain
With which to wash expectations down the drain

I mean forgiving life for failing me
As well as me for failing to be who I ought to be
I mean thanking life for the honey drawn from its bee
As well as for not drowning in its roaring sea.

I mean cursing not darkness' soring the eyes
But with zest hold aloft my candle up the skies

I mean counting the days not by the many scars
But by the varied shapes and lights in the night stars.

I mean courting the twins of faith and hope
Rather than prostituting on doubt and despair's slope
I mean saying "I do" for better or worse till death
I mean beginning my heaven while hereon the earth.

TODAY, I CHOOSE JOY

ANIMASHAUN A. AMEEN

This piece starts with a naked boy
Dancing happily in the rain,
With a mother's smile as she
Hears her child's first cry.
It starts with a widowed woman
Walking through a field of daffodils,
With a lost boy who learnt to make a home
Out of his truth.

Today, I choose joy.
I choose to burn away the darkness and
Find myself in its ashes,
I choose to stop this war inside of me,
Pick up all broken pieces and start afresh.
I choose to breathe and let love find me,
To bury all my pains and watch something
Beautiful grow in their place.
Today, I choose to be happy.

This piece ends with a broken woman
Rediscovering the essence of life,
With a child's chuckle as a cube of sugar

Melt on his tongue.

This piece ends with you and I happy,

It ends with us seeing past all the darkness

And clinging to light.

MOTHERHOOD

WISDOM C NWOGA

When I, a mother, say I choose joy,
It's not that my pot of pain is empty—
Its contents overflow.

My pages of hope were torn
Before its book came to life—
I never read from it.

You see, motherhood is a book
Filled with many wounds—
Of pains and sorrow, grief and gloom.
These wounds aren't my making.
But their healing, my responsibility.

When I say I choose joy,
It's not that my pot of pain is empty—
Its contents still overflow.

WHEN I SAY I CHOOSE JOY

ADELEKE BABATUNDE

On mornings when I proclaim that I choose joy, I imply that
I will wear a body of human and go in search of that which is not lost.

When I shout that I choose joy I mean that I will search in places known and unknown,
I will listen to things said and unsaid. For joy lies in them all.

When I decide to choose joy, I determine to cradle her in my arms
For joy is one with a slender body. I am willing to shield her, for I must never see her
break.

When I decide to choose joy, I leap out of bed energized,
Determined to plant the seed in the fertile hearts of men.

When the evening comes, I will gather the youngsters under the vast sky
and tell them a tale of joy—a story of how the day went for me.

I BELIEVE

MAXWELL OPIA-ENWEMUCHE

But many as received [believed, trust] him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God [with choice], even to them that believe on his name—John1:12

I choose joy

Not because I don't have troubles,

But I see them as bubbles

Springing me to greater height.

I choose joy

Not because I don't wear pain,

But I've transformed every bitterness

Into juice, sipping, reaching for happiness.

I choose joy

Not because I feign reality,

But I understand the power of belief

For my thoughts can change my tomorrow.

I choose joy

Not because I don't feel bad,

But I distil my thoughts into action

Leaving me in a state of jubilation.

I choose joy

Not because I have control over today,

But I have control over my mind

As I wear my smiles every day.

I PROMISE YOU ARE GROWING, EVEN IN THE DARK

ADEMOLA ADEYINKA

To be human is to understand that life is going to meet you with circumstances that will bury you deep within yourself, things that will hurt too much to acknowledge, people who will fumble so deep with the way you feel. And to be human is to understand that life is going to meet you with opportunities that make your chest swell with gratitude, with victories that will make you want to live again, with people who will hold the most damaged parts of you and kiss them softly, fold them back into you: a little less bruised and a little less broken, than they were before.

To be human is to understand that you have the capacity to be the person you have always hoped to be, that you don't have to surrender yourself to the person you were when you were navigating your sadness, or your confusion, or how lost you felt in this world. To be human is to understand that you don't have to hang your mistakes on your spine—you are strong enough to forgive them, to do the hard work, to confront what is heavy within you. To be human is to understand that you are strong enough to set it all down, to let it go, to call disappointment by name so it no longer controls you.

To be human is to understand that happiness isn't a constant—neither is sorrow, nor grief, nor heartache. To be human is to feel it all, to welcome the lessons that come with the dark days, to welcome the softness of the light that saved you. To be human is to try, with every inch of your patchwork soul, to be proud of who you are. To care. To heal. To be your own home, even on the days you don't like yourself, even on the days where it doesn't come naturally. To be human is to grow in the ups, and to grow in the downs. To keep growing. Keep growing.

I CAN FLY

KENNETH NWABUISI

I believe I can fly

I believe I can touch the sky.

R.Kelly

I love to listen to the birds sing; It makes me forget the shadows you sprawl around me like a wet shawl. The bird's melodious voice reminds me of nights that went with sorrow and mornings that will come with joy.

You usually would come nibbling at me, in frost-freckled mornings, at sun-scorched afternoons, during bright evenings. I also love to watch the birds mate; the way they flap their feathers majestically and fly away from one *ukwa* tree to the closest *ukpaka* tree, still chirping marvellously. Sometimes I would suspend the dishes I was washing at the backyard while I gaped at them, fantasizing on flying away with the mating birds, away from you and my master, away from my father also. I know it isn't a dead end yet, all my life I have always believed in a world of hope.

"Onome! Onome!!" It was you, Oche, calling on me, your voice so loud as if you were reviving a corpse.

I would always run in like a demented bush rat, and would genuflect at the feet of my master; Inyang, your father. He would pat my back with the reverse side of his hand fan.

"My prince, you sent for me?" I would stutter and wonder if my tone was actually mild enough for you not to misinterpret it as a question.

"What made you not to answer me when I first called you?" You said, boiling in anger.

"I was busy with the dishes at the backyard." I replied while your palms created a print on my cheek.

"Come over here, you idiot." You said as I held my left cheek where the slap landed.

"I said come..." Master's voice cut you short.

"Oche, you don't have to treat him that way, he is still human. For the fact that we climbed the social ladder shouldn't make you treat others as worthless."

"Father, this guy is a slack ass, look at his mates." You darted your gaze at a female servant that passed and two other male servants standing by the entrance of the throne room; their eyeballs were steady and chests heaved.

"They all appear on a first call but he is always called the third time before he surfaces." You replied to master who had already lain his back resolutely on his throne, hurling his eyes round the inner chambers of the throne room; the roof was made with palm fronds tied intertwined to various strands of bamboo sticks, the wall was also done the same way but an air space opening was left halfway.

"Come close and kneel before me, you idiot." You watched as I moved towards you and knelt down, you threw forward your feet.

"I want you to locate a dust in my feet and lick them off." You ordered, I wasn't surprised. It wasn't the first day you had bided me to do such. My heart jumped a thousand times at the sight of a dust, I withdrew my tongue from my mouth and licked it off.

The last time I failed to trace a dust on your feet, you had given me a knock and it went down to my medulla 'oblangatha,' my backyard science teacher had taught me that but I never cared to look up the spelling from the dictionary.

I would scream, no, weep deeply in the night when the pernicious effect of the afternoon knock resonated, I had looked for paracetamol and later ended up taking malaria drugs; a leftover from the one I had bought from Papa Doc. I could remember the way his senile palms shook as he packaged the medicine into a white sizable paper few months ago. He

had become a messiah to the whole clan because his first male child had gained a degree in medicine and him, having a penchant for drugs was trained to it. Papa Doc's son always pushed in seals upon seals of patent deals for his father, his father was nothing like my father, my father still reeks with archaic mentality of the traditional chiefs which was the reason I'm here.

The night I was brought here was the day I knew my father had a persuasive quality in him.

"I told you son, you will enjoy yourself to the full here." My father had told me.

"But Papi, they are not in any way related to us." I had said, fighting the urge to cry.

"Just listen to my advice son, I won't mislead you."

He said he wouldn't mislead me but it seemed he did, after two weeks, you and master had turned to sad-faced beasts.

You took me to another planet the day you saw me exchanging a warm glance with your bird, that innocuous thing you always boast of, you said It has a glow effect in children's fingers. It was at the time you said chivalrously that her voice was as sweet as candy that I realized you were referring to a girl. She was truly a bird. In the annals of my heart, I likened the retina of her eyes to the evening sun, her pair of breasts; two ripe paw-paw.

I met the missionaries while they drove down the long lonely track, I was returning with a heavy log of wood, I brought them here to the scrutiny of the head that wears the crown and the chiefs as well.

"May the gods forbid"

"We are not going to entertain this in our land"

"They must leave our land"

It was the voice of your father and the chiefs, refusing entirely to the missionary's proposal.

"We are here for peace, it is for the good of your people."

The singsong voice of one of the outspoken missionaries couldn't convince the lions from getting off on people's blessings which they were seated on, your father had ordered the town crier to sound a note of warning to all the villagers; never to allow their roofs harbour any of the missionaries. They had no choice but to resort to the cave.

It reached your ears that I was made the middleman between the missionaries and the villagers who were humane enough to come along to the cave with food and water for the missionaries. My voice sounded loud enough each time I translated to the people.

"You are intelligent and smart." I noticed the missionary with a sing-song voice would always complement.

I was astonished, the only person that has ever confided in me was my mom, she is late though, I knew my father killed her before he brought me to this place.

You always dissuaded me from going to see the missionaries, when you found out I was in good terms with them, you stopped me from moving away from the house.

"If you step out of this house this night, Onome, I will cut your two ears and you would eat them raw." It was your voice that called out in the dead of the nights, I was afraid to return home, my father had sold my soul to this people all in the name of obeying the authorities, this is what you get when your uncles never cared. My mom, the only woman that would have brought me out of this mess is dead. I have no other option but to go and not return.

"He is lost in Ajuofia"

"The hungry hands of lions has devoured him."

"Are you saying lions? Or wild beasts"

"It is agwu, biko"

It was the grape vine and gossip or call it news in the lips of every one; ladies on their way to the stream, hunting boys, market women, elderly men as they walked to the throne

room for cabinet meetings. My being alive was known by few and was concealed to the rest.

Now I am back, it's my turn to take possession of my lost joy with a renowned mentality, we live in a world of balance and I have lived in the shadow of your darkness for long, but the missionaries have brought me to the everlasting light which has overwhelmed your darkness. They use to say "If wishes were horses," Now I believe that "wishes are horses" I now feel like I possess wings, I now believe I can fly, away with that bird I first hid my feelings from, if I could see that bird now, I bet you won't see our feathers as we will fly away with the gust of winds and would never perch on a twig.

THE COLOURS OF EVERYTHING JOYFUL

JOHN CHIZOBA VINCENT

Joy is not a distant neighbour whose eyes
are always red in crimson anger and pains—
They say it has a handful of thoughts of
excitement, happiness and success.
Don't be a reflection of your own misfortunes.
Imagine wearing joy like a bangle
Around your neck,
Imagine wearing it like a perfume on
Your body—allowing your spirit to see faith—
Imagine holding its fragments in your soul.
When we return faces to heaven to kiss,
We don't remember the tears they once held, joy embraces those songs sung.
We return to Bethany beating *Samba* into the waters of self-gratification.
The colours of everything beautiful are seen
Underneath the beauty of what lies in you.
When you say goodbye, put a smile on your face,
It is the mercy that stands to reason with
What the universe know nothing of.

From the shelves in the library of the nightingales,
Be the shadow to the light of everything joyful,
A thing said in the absence of torment, fading
Into the surface of a shallow water to form freedom.
Freedom of the heart, of the soul and of spirit creating colours of
Everything joyful from the mind—the custodian of archives of laughter

WATERS

ADENIRAN JOSEPH

i don't know about your relationship

with raindrops that don't have

an end like substance but i know

you more than

you can ever know yourself even

the pain that lives in your heart &

how you wanted to destroy your body

like broken pictures & any thing that

means much to you. I have given

myself time before now to always

keep you inside my pocket with

the things we faced, I know mother

will be worried in her grave to always
remember us that we are still going

to flow beyond resolution & the metres
of our love shall rise against pains

for now, just know that water can build
us happiness because it's life.

know that water can make us manifest
because water is restoration.

know that what we believe is what
we will always love doing and that

will forever sustain us like air
like miracles, like happiness

like anything that comes out of light
because i choose joy & this time

my heart beats like the drums of
my father's memories that joy is peace.

LEARN TO BREATHE IN WATER

EMMANUEL UDOMA

sometimes, the sun smiles to a fault

& flowers wilt from so much love.

sometimes, clouds tear down to soften the earth

only to open floodgates that man begs for shine.

life throws tantrums in tonnes, you learn

to chameleon into forms you do not know:

—you become shapeless, like amoeba

—you become water, ice & then air

life's aches thunderstorms into the marrow

so, you must learn to breathe underwater.

A BODY OF FIRE

ADESINA AJALA

a boy wears his body of fire,
a rising and razing inferno,
he curls his tongue in the shapes of his torment,
wags it to the right & left, twirls & then he bites it.
this fire chars every part it touches with its cruel torch,
& a legion of onlookers gathers round this boy,
beats their bodies & bites their tongues in rhyme with him,
dangles heads on necks for his fatal fate.
he crawls with every courage the fire is yet to latch on,
sighs & draws near an altar of water,
lays his body of fire carefully on it.
begins to wash his torment into a cesspool of respite.
a boy begins to appreciate the colours of hope,
begins to babble in the language of revival.
he stares & shuts eyes,
& breaks tongue into ellipsis,
sinks his head down.
then the sky begins to drape a hue,

a ball of cloud like the fist of a man's hand sits over the sun,
then it begins to s t r e t c h, to s p r e a d,
he remembers the prayer mother taught him,
starts to stammer: *Our Father who art in heaven.*
& before he could say more, heavens begin to tear on everyone,
a boy begins to wear respite [with what whips others] into his body of fire,

begins to whisper to heaven for more rain.

JOY: HOW I TAME FIRE INTO LIGHT

TAOFEEK AYEYEMI

on days the debris from *Syria, Sudan,*
Yemen are lodged in my mind as if my
heart is the place to deposit grief;
on days my healthy *cv* vacates my draft
and *resumes* inbox with a pale visage;
on days the tears of wandering *Rohingyas*
flood my thought as ashes begging
for thickness in the touch of liquids;
on days my cooker couldn't heat my
pot of rice for lack of ingredients;
on days the kaboom in *Zamfara* breaks my
hope of "peace & unity" into dark shreds;
on days i wish to make my parents
smile to their bankers but couldn't;
on days i despise events for all i have is
a box of hand-me-down and faded attires;
on days i wish i'm not from this country—
on days like this, i look life in the eyes & say:

you can soil me, i'll live notwithstanding.

you can earth me. i'll sprout a woke seed.

because living, for me, is to die a daily death.

& be birthed again into mirth;

on days like this, i write myself a

14-page double-spaced letter,

typed in Monotype Corsiva, capitalized

& bolded in 72 sized font reading:

TODAY, I CHOOSE JOY.

A MANUAL FOR SURVIVAL

ADEOLA OLATUNJI

These scars tell how
I made it through,
And how far I have come.
They represent the pain and
Anguish I have suffered.
But most importantly,
They speak of something greater—
The love of the Almighty.
These scars are evidences of victory
And the overwhelming love of His.
Stare at them,
Say whatever you want—
These scars are mine and I love them.

A PORTRAIT OF SURVIVAL

DORCAS ODOK

This is how you choose joy:

First,

You fall in love with all

The brokenness that have become you,

Wear your scars

Like it's an appendage to your name.

Second,

You wear your fears

Like an outstanding gele,

Shrug off all the symphonies of pain

That cluster at the tip of your tongue.

Then,

You laugh at the faintness that dusk holds,

And all the ills it promises.

You laugh at the day it took mama

As you search for joy in the blazing eyes of today's sun

I DARED TO CHOOSE DIFFERENTLY

FUNSO ORIS

He sat on a rock; his feet planted in the calm body of water. Deep in thoughts, the expression on his face drew a sharp contrast with the beauty displayed by the lake and sky. Lake Michigan dazzled in the brilliance of the noon sun. The clouds were dressed in a sheet of white, a perfect canvas for an artist's creative conceit. The sky's azure competed fiercely with the lake's blue. In the farthest distance, the lake and the sky melted into a fusion of oblivion.

Tony looked up; his expression wore profound solemnity.

"This would have been my grave five years ago." He said calmly without shaking off his solemn look. I smiled. I understood fully well the weight those words carried.

Tony was at a point when taking his life would have been a very *reasonable* thing to do. Born into a religious family, he had his fair share of the conflict of growing up in Chicago. There were high expectations from the Yoruba family whose idea of a good son was reading books and attending church services weekly. His father was an Elder, while the mother was the Women's leader. The Yoruba community in Chicago was closely knitted, everyone knew about everybody. Hence, no family wanted to become the ridicule of the community. But there was also the temptation of Chicago's wildlife of fun and crime. To be seen as weak was a very costly thing to do, especially in high schools. However, for Tony, maintaining a balance between family honor and social life was an easy decision to make.

Tony was 6 feet 2 inches tall. A constant visitor to the gym, his athletic body made him a star athlete in high school and college. He was good at basketball and football. He was the star of his teams. He was also a brilliant student. He won a scholarship to study Computer Science at the University of Chicago. Though a ladies' guy, Tony ensured that he didn't bring disgrace to his family or his local church. Besides, he was also an active member of the choir.

“Yes, I can remember that day very well. Exactly five years today”, I said, looking straight into his eyes as tears were forming.

“I was about to jump and smash my head against these stones...” Sobbing profusely now, I moved closer to him. I didn’t stop him from weeping. These were tears of joy. Tears of a second chance at life.

In his second year at the University of Chicago, Tony was involved in an accident. His team just won a major college basketball tournament and they were returning from the victory, when their bus collided with a truck. He was one of the few survivors. But his injuries would prevent him from playing sports again. Though it took him nine months to fully recover from his burns, he was constantly reminded of the scars on his body and periodic flashbacks that led to post traumatic stress disorder.

“I am glad I came to the lake that evening,” I replied.

I often went to the lake to reflect and share my thoughts with nature. During that time, I had just come off a very painful relationship. And as if that wasn’t enough, I lost a job that I started barely 5 months. I was in a very vulnerable emotional state. *Sometimes, I wonder why bad things happen to people who care about others.* The experiences were so traumatic that coming to the lake was therapeutic for me. Having studied psychology, I knew fully well that if I dwelled in my loss and pain, it would just be a matter of time before I ended up using *Abilify*, *Seroquel* and *Risperdal*. The truth is, these medications just address the symptoms, and not the cause. Depending on them offers temporary relief, but the tag—mentally ill—seems to be a lifelong stigma. Besides, I needed my sanity to fight for my future. I had been through many experiences to know that there was no permanence in life—whether good or bad.

“I recall I came to the lake to ease the ache on my mind when I saw you”, I added.

Tony’s scars were not the only thing he had to battle. He became addicted to pain medications. These pills significantly affected his ability to live a normal life. He lost interest in school, became withdrawn from everybody and developed a morbid feeling about life. He was diagnosed with depression as a result of his post-traumatic stress

disorder. A once handsome young man became a shadow of himself. Estranged. The challenge of coping with his mental status took a toll on his family. He became the talk of the community. A shame to his family. A constant reminder of their failure.

“Yes, I really didn’t know why I responded to you when you asked me for a direction to the restroom.”

“I had lost interest in talking to people”, he added. “That was one of the reasons I lost my girlfriend”, he reflected.

Tony was not only addicted to pain medications. He also abused street drugs. Opioid provided some relief, though temporary. And since the effect soon wore off, there was the need to get more pills to do the job. He needed to numb the pain that overwhelmed him. Being heavily dependent on drugs, he pushed away those that mattered to him, including his gracious girlfriend, who stood with him during his hard times. She had to leave, for her own sanity and mental health too. She was breaking down because she felt blamed for not being able to help her guy. Tony felt unloved, undeserving of any affection. This also led him to have resentment for God and everything that represented Him—including his Christian home. He blamed God for the accident. He reasoned that God should have prevented it, if He was that powerful as often preached. When he couldn’t endure the pain, he felt taking his life was the way to go.

“I have tried to overdose several times.” “I can’t say why those medications didn’t stop my heart.”

Drug abuse is one of the leading causes of death in the United States. This epidemic cuts across age, gender or profession. A nurse was fired from her job because she was using drugs meant for her patients. And a mom lost her two sons to drug overdose. The heart just stopped due to the strain suffered as a result of too much chemicals. Tony had hoped for a similar relief.

“Perhaps, God has a purpose for your life.” I said, looking at him with a broad smile.

“I must say that you’re right. He really had a plan for me, even though I didn’t know it then.”

“I recall that your accent gave you out as a Nigerian.”

“Yes... and that was what led to a life changing conversation”, he interjected.

There is something about meeting a stranger and learning that he or she is a Nigerian. We quickly drop the Yankee parlance and switch to mother tongue. The typical conversation is about family, studies; the sort of conversation an elder would have with a youngster before Nigeria lost its values to the whims of social media madness. Nigerian youths still use honorifics when addressing elders in Chicago and other US cities, a sharp contrast to what happens in Lagos and other Nigerian cities.

Knowing that Tony was Yoruba, I felt at home chatting with him. As we talked, I noticed his mood and was able to decipher that something was not right. My psychological instinct kicked in. I could tell that he was exhibiting somatic symptoms. I asked if he was in pain, to which he responded in the affirmative. I pressed further to know if the pain was due to the obvious scars on his body. Initially, he told me it was. But when he added that the accident was over two years, I knew it must be more than just a memory of scars, there was something deeper.

“I must thank you for talking with me that day.” I said thoughtfully. “You could have ignored me.” I added appreciatively.

“No. It is I who should be thankful”, he cut in. “I’m really grateful for stopping me from taking my life.”

“You know...” he paused for few seconds, as if he was searching for something important from his memory. “As we began to talk and you shared the pains you had been through, I decided to open up to you”, Tony added.

“Yes, I remember.” I responded thoughtfully. “Two hurting Yoruba men.” I added with a soft laughter. Tony laughed too, his face lit.

“Do you remember the exact words you said that changed the conversation?”, he asked, hoping that I could remember everything that happened 5 years ago and replay it in that precious moment.

“I said a lot of things...”

“Yes, you did.” “But there was something you said that me tell you I was planning to jump to my death.” He said, nudging me toward a specific scene in our flashback.

Taking a deep breath, I looked up, like I had just come off a trance. “Yes! I remember!

Excitedly Tony stated, “In life, you may not be able to control what happens to you. But you can control how you let it affect you. Sadness, like joy, is a choice. We all have the power to choose.”

“Yes, we must dare to choose joy over sorrow. We must choose to move on and change the narrative.” I added.

I told Tony that it isn’t delusional to choose to be positive even in the face of one’s failure and shortcomings. This is not some motivational feel good stuff. Pain is real. Loss is real. But how we respond to bad situations in life determines what we do in life.

“I remember I told you that when I lost my job, I had the choice to become despaired.”

“But you chose to learn new skills and prepare yourself for the next job”, he added.

“I would tell myself that if I got trapped in my vulnerable state, I wouldn’t be able to prepare for the opportunities ahead”, I said, reflecting on the choices I made to change my life for the better.

“Do you remember what I said about Jesus’ experience of emotional distress?”, I asked. Tony had shared his theosophical view about why God should be blamed for all the evils in the world. So, I had to meet him where he was by engaging him in some pragmatic realism, just like the exchange between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well of choice.

“It got me when you said that even Jesus once felt that God abandoned Him.”

“And it was the choice He made that changed His life and human history.” I pointed out.

“More so, it wasn’t God who nailed Christ to the Cross. It was the conspiracy of those who felt their interest and influence were threatened who wanted to get rid of Him.” I pontificated.

“Well, we can say it worked out for a higher purpose”, Tony chipped in. I marveled at his transformation from agnosticism and cynicism to faith in God. I have often argued that *faith in God* is a personal experience. Not some spiritual concoctions perpetuated by a history of docile acceptance and religious infallibility. It is a choice. An informed decision of trust.

“But there is a common misconception about people who push the decision making to a supernatural being...” I began.

“The truth is that the more we learn to take responsibility for our actions, the more we will realize that everyone has been given the power to choose and make a difference.”

“Tony, you remember ... the driver of the truck that crashed into your bus was driving under the influence?” I asked, recreating the exchange we had that led to the *haha moment*.

“And if I had not sat at the back of the bus... you know, I usually sat in the front being the team star, I would have been dead by now”, he added.

“Yes, it is the choice we make that changes the outcome.”

“If I had not pushed everyone away, I wouldn’t have ended up abusing drugs ...” he thought out loud.

Tony decided to turn around his life that day. That began a mutually beneficial relationship. He checked into rehab and became clean. It wasn’t easy; but determined. With the support of his family and friends, he became sober. He returned to college to finish his degree. He graduated *summa cum laude*. Being the best graduating student of his class, Tony was also the valedictorian. The title of his speech to the graduating class of 2018 was *Choosing Your Future*. Tony works with Google and is happily married. He

is expecting the delivery of his son in the next few months. Tony is also a Director of a youths' program that helps youths dealing with depression and drug dependency.

“You made a choice to chat with me that day, though you had a more important *thing* to do”, I stated. I wasn't going to treat the decision of taking one's life lightly. No matter how critical society is about suicidal ideation, it is a serious thing to end one's life due to loss of control and self-condemnation.

“I am glad I chose differently by talking to you.” “I'm grateful to God for a second chance.”

“I am glad we are celebrating your success story now.” “Thank God, you allowed Him to work through you for a second chance.” I added.

“I need a favor of you,” Tony asked, pleadingly.

“I won't refuse you a favor.” “Besides, today is a great day, you know!”, I exclaimed.

“I'm naming my son after you.” He stated. While I was still basking in this pleasant surprise, he declared: “You are his godfather!” I hugged him.

I was overwhelmed with joy. Not because his son would be named after me. But because it was the joy that a decision to choose life instead of death, joy instead of depression, help instead of suicide, culminated to this momentous celebration!

HOW TO SEEK AND FIND YOURSELF

EDAKI TIMOTHY

I

Before mother died, she held you in her arms and told you to never let anyone put you down; to never let anyone tell you how less of yourself you are as a woman. Mother told you to call yourself pretty, beautiful, intelligent. She held your hand, fixated her eyes on you and told you to know your place in this world, that you are a star and stars never seek their brightness, they just glow. Mother said you are the moon and you should never look for yourself in the rubbles or among the smithereens; you should never let anyone tell you that you are beneath them. Mother said you are a country of beauty, a continent of greatness, a map of love; you are a river of joy and that is your identity.

II

Really, it was hard to believe that your identity was hidden safe in the stars because your father didn't see things from your mother's perspective. The only thing he saw were the scars he imprinted on you every night with his fists and kicks. Even the words he spoke from his tongue never failed to tear your skin. And sometimes, you wondered how mother could say those words—she called you her angel, and her glittering star—because father never stopped short of leaving her with swollen faces, black eyes, bleeding lips, and broken bones which made you wonder if mother lied.

It was at this point you began to seek for yourself, to try to find your place in this world, your identity. It was here you decided to find out who you are.

III

You had no friends. From the time you were old enough to distinguish between left and right, you knew you were different or maybe it was the world that was odd. Everyone avoided you, ran away from you. They didn't want to have anything to do with you and some nights you wondered why they should even try. You were always the one with the

tattered uniform, with the unkempt hair, with the slovenly appearance and the one without books. It wasn't that you were dull but your intelligence didn't match up to theirs. It wasn't that you weren't pretty but beside them, you were the ugly duckling, the gorgon. You were the only one who didn't always have a sports partner. You were the only one who made the other kids cry whenever they were paired with you.

And your classmates never stopped at distancing themselves from you—they had to include words like bastard. Idiot. Asshole. Born by mistake—but those words didn't hurt so much because your father had used them on you many times that somehow they lost meaning. It only solidified your view that you were different and not like them.

IV

Then puberty came and met you, wedded your body against your insistence; told you it was for the best and it really did seem that way at least at the beginning because your body began to look like one to be desired, with the curves and twists. With the plums and growth. The first boy came and he seemed to be the only one who saw the stars hidden inside your body, the glitter covered with petals of grief, the sparkle covered by scars. He was the only one who told you that God had blessed you with a singsong voice, that you were a song he would love to sing, a poem he would love to write and a river he would willingly die to swim in. He was the first one to write you poems and read to you. He loved to read you Joel Benjamin Nwatwa a.k.a Nevender. His favorite poem to read was *The Poem You Are*:

I mean, look how you make your steps,

As though you were ascending a throne.

See, you're a poem in a person, right from your body to your spirit.

He said you were a queen, a royalty. He said you were to be served, a goddess to be worshipped. He said you were a painting he wished he had created, a poem he wished he had written, a word he wished he had invented. He was too good and because you didn't want this fairy tale, this fantasy to end, this love, this adoring, this cherishing, you offered

him the diamonds in between your legs, let him suck off the gold buried in between your thighs.

And then he left but not before treating you like trash or throwing you outside, out of his house and out of his life. You didn't blame him. You blamed yourself. You didn't have curves like the models he watched on his television. Your black melanin didn't shine like the ones he gawked and leered at on Instagram. You didn't have rotund ass that bounced or jiggled heavily like the ones on YouTube. You didn't have big boobs like the girls in the magazine that littered his bedroom. Your hair didn't lie down straight like the girls in the hair attachment posters and billboards. You didn't have pointed nose, pink lips, supple but enticing skin. You were just you. You didn't have an angelic voice. A seraphic one. You didn't kiss just right. You didn't know how to make a man feel alright in your body. You were not a figure eight or hourglass shape. You didn't look like Cinderella. No supple hips. You were just you.

V

You were different and hence you were searching. Looking. Seeking. For yourself. In people. Places. Things. Boys. And so when the next one came, you did your best. Behaved the way you thought he would like. Painted your face and accented your voice but that seemed to help little and the story didn't change. So, you began to wonder if God was asleep or even alive. Didn't He see the way you were being treated? Didn't He see that the people He created hated you? They didn't love you. They despised you and really, really you told God, you were so tired of it all.

VI

Mother had said to you on the day she died "Luvvie, never let anyone tell you that you are less of yourself. You're an embodiment of talent, a collage of greatness, a mosaic of beauty. Seek yourself and you would find. You will see my dear. You will see that you do not know yourself. I know it's hard but you must find yourself before anyone can find you. It is easy to pity yourself but that is not the way of dignity. Getting love and respect and courage and strength and hope and beauty first begins from the inside. No-one can

bring it from you. Show your scars and wear them on your skin. Let the world see them.
This is how you find yourself."

VII

You didn't tell anyone but you were seeking for yourself using mother's world as a guide.
You were going to find out who you are. Going to discover your true self. Going to
realize and bring to reality the being you were letting lie dead in you. You would make
Mother proud.

THE JOY I CHOOSE AT DAWN

TUKUR RIDWAN OLORUNLOBA

at the times my heaven obliterates,

my ample space constricts

for the size of brightness to be locked away,

my sky wears fabrics of dark clouds,

disorganized like amoebas, I become

a stormy season of turbulent downpours,

pelts, melts: the adversity of my iceberg

across the summer sea, life's scorching sun

setting fire to my veins, leaking my energies

through the tight spaces in my red eyes,

unlike the freedom of rain, I am the torrents

cascading the windowpane of my cheeks,

these are times my innocence knows guilt...

you say pain, but I also say my nights

have breaking points too.

a new dawn breaks from a dead dusk,

check your clock, speak of the sunlight peeping

from the dark horizon across that distance

between you & your heart desires,

yes, that sunlight is the simile of joy,

the first thing I choose at my wake,

like that luminous smile brought

by the first knock on your breaking door

with good news, this is the joy I choose

every time I give this gloom a room to bloom

& breathe his last, because I could see smiles

rising on my cheeks like the sun at noon.

NATURE'S JOY

OTTI VICTORIA

Streams of joy flows down the lane

Fruits of nature fly all around

Clouds parade with tending colours

And the atmosphere seems happy

Multitudes put out their clothes

With shades of black and white

The white seems to outshine the other

To produce a sparkling moment

The mother earth seems gladdened

The day flourishes with sun flowers

Above hold the brilliance

Of a solar prodigy

The heart got stuffed

Trying hard to push out lumps from fine sand

The face tried to manifest the heart

But I don't seem to understand

How unstable I was

Bad memories flooded the mind while

Nature tried to showcase its Joy

To give the me a burning thirst for it

Oh I prayed to nature

Fill my heart with your mysterious Joy

Let my heart dance again

And it was presented on a platter

Now I look into the stars

With tears trickling down my cheeks

And it whispered to me

Things are bound to happen

But we are bound to be happy

I'M NO MORE AFRAID OF THE NIGHT

JOHNSON VICTOR

I'm no more afraid of the night.

Once I was,

Haunted by my fears

But now that I can transform into a ghost.

I'm no more afraid of the night

Even if it's without the moon and stars.

I'm no more afraid to be by the riverside alone,

Since amidst the rustling waters

Words will hold me tight.

The night is full of terror.

We are shattered and scattered

But, like seeds, we will still rise.

I'm no more afraid of the night,

Because if I never dwelled in it

I would never appreciate the light.

MYSTERY OF MY FAILURE

BLESSING OMEIZA OJO

I've never failed exams before now—
No matter how witty my instructor was,
I'd dribble him mercilessly.
When you say life is unfair,
You're referring to this man
Without conscience, without a heart
Without feelings, without life—
This man was the pain in my head,
The worm biting my stomach,
The scary image in the wake of darkness.

Word problem—the only god I feared—
Was thought to bend knees before me.
How it happened, no one knew.
Then came world problems in the form
Of death that claimed my parents,
In the form of everything absurd.

Life threw tests at me, the way we feed
Leftovers to a goat in Africa,
And handed me a manual to pass.
To pass is to dance to the sound of tears.
To pass is to devour dirges until there is no room
For joy to rest its head even a second.

And this is the beginning of my failure...
I am the bone unbroken in the jaws of a lion,
The rising sun after the cock crows,
The star that twinkles when night sleeps,
The bird that sings hallelujah in the bright cloud.
For the very first time, I failed!
And forever, a failure I will remain
For I am the lyrics of joyful songs.

OVERCOMER

EMMANUEL OKORO

Calamities danced on roofs

As the trees blew with flare

Dust crapped my

Eyes with the tears of the death of

A legend whose mission was aborted

The day he embarked on the journey—of no return

My heart was infuriated

With ceaseless tears as the source

Of our earnings disappeared into

The icy hands of death

The journey of suffering

Started with unending rents

The folds of mother's wrappers, rimmed

With patches, could not reproduce our source of livelihood.

The streets of *Surulere*

Was where we found solace
After our properties were stolen
By evil kinsmen
Whose throat hungered for the
Golds of my father

On the streets my story changed
As a helper picked us and raised
Us from the deserts of poverty—
Lifted our smiles with joy
After we crossed turbulent red seas...

I AM NOT A WRITER

PRAISE EBIRIM

I saw the twilight sun,

As it kissed the moon.

Its promises radiated in the night...so I picked up my pen

And I wrote....

I am not a writer.

I was seven when I cleaned the blood that trailed mom's shadow.

When her wails sang squeaky lullabies.

I did not write, I smiled...

I am not a writer.

I was ten when my brain cells died...with my smile

Where lips leaked as I ate

I did not mourn, I laughed.

I am not a writer.

I chose to laugh at dad's jokes—

A frail man stumbling and staggering on a path.

Coming home with a smile still...

I cried.

I am not a writer.

I am a kid with a choice...

Who could always look at the darkness.

And smile as I await the sun.

GATHERER'S SONG

JACKSON KESTER

Emulate the birds in all you do
A friend told me at the zoo
But do birds in solitary rejoice?
Or do you reckon my crying today is a choice?
As you see them chanting in joy
Dancing like a baby whose mother bought a toy
They save nothing and lack nothing
And as man because of food goes hunting
They sing and dance from tree to tree
Since creation man has not been that free
As such I won't play the bird
And until tomorrow is dead
My gourd of hustle will have me tide
Life stands so long the lady in the moon baths her child.

FUTILE SPEAKS

IYEJARE OLUSEGUN

Take away the flowers,

Erase every colour—

Still this beauty remains.

My beauty is a nature

Not an accessory.

Dip me in darkness

Still the beauty is light.

Peep into the grave—

I'm not dead there.

I'm feasting where I'm dipped

'Cause I can see the gates opening

And an incision cut through the dark—

An array of pleasant colours

Coming for my soul.

At the end of this journey, I'll be fat.

The grave is not my last terminal

I am just to be made grave.

MY NUMBER ONE COMPANION

OKIOMA JOY

She hangs with pride—

Pride of value and durability.

Although she was made from various materials

She still sits to be favourite of all my possessions.

For a wedding, she is my handbag.

For a birthday party, she is my handbag.

For a burial, she is my choice.

For no matter what the weather

brings she keeps my heart from breaking.

It's been 12 years now,

Still she fits into my current status.

I've been pressed on all sides

I've been beaten by circumstances

I've been robbed

But I never let go of her even at the gun point of depression.

I carry *joy* around like a loyal handbag—

Irrespective of what the day brings,

She remains my number one companion.

ANOTHER WORLD

AMINA AHURAKA

There's this land

That's found within poetry

It's a land that makes you

See things differently

That tells you

Your problems aren't really problems

And makes you find solace

Within your own soul

In this land

The terms are changed

It's no longer depression but darkness

No longer awkwardness but introversion

No longer loneliness but solitude

You realize that though

The world might be sad

It's actually a beautiful place to live in

That it all depends on your perception of it

It's the only land

Where the darkened soul finds light

And maybe if you too would join us

Maybe just maybe,

You wouldn't need the poison no more.

TODAY I CHOOSE JOY

DAMILOLA OLAWUYI MERCY

Words of commitment and selfless dedication

On that altar lay—

Where lambs of individuality were offered.

Honey-coated promises on a platter.

Moved on nuptial's fast lane,

Conjugal vows were exchanged—

Our fingers quickly bearing the bands—

We both swore to be clinched

Regardless of forever's uncertainty.

TODAY I CHOOSE JOY

OLUSHOLA AWOYEMI

It is bottled

Pick it up from the counter-ground

Open up metallic aura

From a source of Brownian friction

An overflow finds its way out

Thankful for space and air

Simultaneously empty and full

Isn't that what they say life is?

...Bottled ebullience is what I go for.

TODAY, I CHOOSE JOY

IBRAHIM YUSUF

Like a dictator,
I rule worries—
They're below me, muted.

My happiness speaks aloud.
Woes become deaf
I only hear joy, joy, and joy.

My life's tongue
Kisses honey
And holds onto sweetness.

Today,
I choose joy.

TODAY, I'LL GO FOR JOY

TEMIDAYO JACOB

He who stares at joy

While it walks freely

Will return to find it

When it is gone.

And he who hugs joy

Lives in the sunrise

Of humans' eternity.

II.

Today, out of all places,

I'll travel down to joy.

My feet will kiss the earth

Even if it is burning.

Today, out of every wine,

I'll pick joy and drink

Till no drop is left.

Today, out of every meal,

I'll eat joy to satisfaction.

I'll take a bite from no other

Till this bowl of is empty.

Today, out of all things,

I'll protect this joy,

For the end of joy is the

Beginning of poverty.

I CHOOSE JOY

UCHENDU MUKANAETO NJIONYE

I know the sky now has a leaking roof

And its sheets aren't made of zinc or its rafters of wood.

Our craftiness is nothing to seal this rift

Nor our swiftness able to escape the curse from her tongue.

You perceived a stink,

It came from my unwashed mouth and starved belly

A place everything edible forbids,

Something must be found in dreaded places

So I left those smell to remind you that I still breathe.

The earth has enough blood stacked in her womb

But gluttony still leads her to trick my brothers

Into the choking hands of a hanging rope,

I know termites love well garnished meals

So they fast and pray till their gods offered them father's flesh.

They say the wind will bring good news
And when birds fly over your head
They prick our prayers to perch on heaven's gate
But the hunters return with seven eagles
And the hurricane found peace in our cottage.

I know the anthem of anguish
And lyrics of neglect
I can pick out tears from a cup of sea water,
The former is my daily bread
Yet,
I choose joy,
For the things that birth my worries
Shall run into menopause
And the brook of my sorrow has reached the last drop.

I choose joy,
For the rejected rejects not his strength
Aye!
Man has to be his first friend.

BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE DON'T JUST HAPPEN

NDIEMA CHEPKESIS

Life isn't fair, at least not to most

But to some of us it is simply cruel

Life has dealt us blows we don't know how to rise from

It has crushed us and wrung us dry

Pushed us to the core of defeat and hopelessness.

We strive to live right, to make the right decisions

Yet somehow, we end up in pits we never imagined

Covered in mud, drenched in sweat, tears flowing down our eyes

Minds flooded with questions that have no answers

Our hearts broken and in utter anguish

Life isn't unfair, it's cruel

When the very person who should protect you

Turns out to be the cause of your misfortunes

When you learn that, they deliberately, made a choice

To jeopardize all that you ever worked for

To throw you into a state of disarray

To frustrate your little efforts to live a decent life

When love to you is synonymous to betrayal

Yet love should be the essence of purity, the core of humanity,

When love is tainted.... Life is brutal!

They say *The most beautiful people we have known*

Are those who have known defeat, known suffering,

Yet have found their way out of the depths.

In those moments of profound loneliness, you rediscover life

And right there, you make a choice...to wallow in self-pity

To let bitterness consume you

Or to embrace your new self with new found strength and enthusiasm.

To win at life and wear your scars as crowns and badges of honour.

To choose yourself, to choose joy.

To be beautiful!

WE DON'T LOOK LIKE WHAT WE'VE FOUGHT

IFEOLUWA PETER

do not say our smile is cheap
or dare mock the scars it hides
scars are receipts of wars we've won—
broken homes, heartbreaks and more,
we don't look like what we've fought—
pain and plagues beyond all thoughts,
but we'll smile without pretence
for true joy is what we've earned.

when father checked out of our lives,
he planted live bullets in our home—
every corner of our hearts became a tomb of tears
you could hear the sound of mother's silent groans.
because home is not where it used to be,
mother said we have to strive to live.
but we can't love from an empty place
so we chose joy all the way.

& when our body becomes home for tears,
we'll watch the rainbow as it fades—
there is silence calling behind the cloud
spreading hope on wings of dying birds,
there's healing in spreading our hands
to transcend the hills of memories,
we'll be fine when the late birds fly
we won't know how our tears drain out.

I THINK ABOUT YOUR EYES ALL THE TIME

PAMILERIN JACOB

(title culled from Lovebug by The Jonas Brothers)

their shimmer how in that ward they held

my frame the way obsidian holds black.

my faults negligible as strands of

hair caught in a comb I whispered *goodbye*

after every kiss & each time you said

shut the fuck up I am not losing you I

had a brain obsessed with rigor mortis.

edited my suicide note nightly. can't

say you saved me but it

would be a lie to say you had nothing

to do with my lungs refusing atrophy. miracles

bore me but I think

you have made me one. your eyes

I run into them the way fingers run

into pockets for

sustenance.

MAAKU

DEJI JOHNSON ADAFIN

I was saddened this morning when greeted with the headline of a minister of God who committed suicide in Abuja. I also read a story of another undergraduate who wrote a short note of his suicide before he died. I saw many RIP comments on their walls and wondered if they would still choose to take their lives if the ratio of those commenters cared in flesh.

The rate at which people yield to depression these days is alarming. The question is, why will someone think of taking his own life? —hope! Where people see no hope, they see no future; where they see no future, they see no reason to move on. When there is no reason to move on, they quit.

I had been depressed several times in my life too. Honestly, I had once thought of hanging myself. I had written my suicide note, apologising to my mum and brothers; but no one knew. I was laughing with everyone. Funny, I was a minister of the word then. I would preach on pulpit, but would sit down and feel nothing was working. More so, people around me were not helping matters. I didn't always feel like going home, because the only thing I hear is how my faith in God is a scam. They told me of how they saw a friend of mine who had made it and I had nothing. I shed secret tears. I knew the word of God was true but I didn't know how it would work for me.

Like a lady in an abusive relationship, I felt I was forcing myself on God. I had no job; marital relationship wasn't working and the funny thing is that nobody in the church was sensitive enough. I remember sharing a testimony and hinted on the thought of killing myself and the next minister that climbed the pulpit did not mention my name but said something like *if you kill yourself, you just kill yourself for nothing*; he was encouraging the church, but he was killing me the more. My heart longed for hope, but found none.

My closest friend who I confide in, Damilola was out of the country studying and I had no one. People saw a Man of God full of faith, but they didn't know I was dying. My

family saw a good Christian and one they desire to push to make it, not the broken man who was gasping for breath. I woke up daily waiting for the best opportunity to carry out my plan.

As I wrote my suicide letter, tears streamed down my eyes. The only person I thought of more was my mother. I felt my brothers would get along as time passed. I wondered how I would make the death subtle so she would not be too broken. If I hung myself, the pain would be much for her; perhaps if I drank poison. I thought of running into a fast moving car so it would look like an accident. I was concluding my thoughts, when a question came to my heart *If you die now, where will you go?* I couldn't give an answer.

Even though things were not working fine yet, I believe in life after death. I believe death is only a conclusion of the seen and a beginning of the unseen. I cried and dropped my pen. I knew that was the end of my scheme. I prayed loud and told God how abandoned I felt. I really poured out my heart. Then I just felt this peace, like someone massaging my back. The peace soon filled my heart. I heard no words, but I knew God was there. Tears and joy came at the same time. I could not tell what was making me joyful, but I could tell God was there. I told God I was sorry, tore the suicide note, then I heard in my Spirit the promises of God. God gave me a reason to live. I wanted to live not just for what I have or don't have; I wanted to live as his masterpiece. I saw myself having no right over my life, He has it and I can't determine how to use it, He does. This is not a fiction; this is what happened to me.

You might be going through depression or you know anyone who is going through it; I can't promise you that all will be well. Life is full of challenges and only those who overcome are celebrated. You are reading my story today because I didn't die. It is over five years that I had this experience. I am married with a beautiful daughter and a great hope for the future. You need to know that you are not only living for yourself. If you take your life, you are not relieving the pain, you are going to RE-LIVE IT.

Life is not determined by the number of material things you have. Most things that people kill themselves for are things that are not eternal. Is it sickness? If someone has been cured of it before, then you can be cured also. Is it finance? If someone can have it, then

in due time, you will have it too. Don't kill yourself because of the lies people flaunt on internet. Many don't own what they claim is theirs. Honestly, true joy comes from a relationship with something more eternal and for me, that is faith in Jesus Christ, which was my own way of coming out of depression

If you feel the hurt is more than you can bear alone, please find someone to confide in and if you can't find don't forget God is always there. These scriptures will help you: Matthew 10v29-31, 28v20b, Philippians 4v13-13,19

Don't die!

BIOGRAPHY

Jide Badmus is an electrical engineer, a poet inspired by beauty and destruction; he believes that things in ruins were once beautiful. He is the author of *There is a Storm in my Head*, *Scripture*, and *Paper Planes in the Rain*; curator of *Vowels Under Duress* and *Coffee* poetry anthologies.

Badmus explores themes around sensuality and healing. He writes from Lagos, Nigeria. You can reach him on twitter @bardmus, IG @instajhide

Oyeniya Miriam has been writing for four years now, been on book projects as a writer and sometimes as an editor and is steadily building a highly rewarding career around writing, especially content and fiction writing. She is the chair of the Total Writers Convention, Nigeria and enjoys organizing the yearly writers conference that garners positive reviews from all over the country.

Pamilerin Jacob is a Nigerian poet & mental health enthusiast. His poems have appeared in *Barren Mag*, *Agbowo*, *DWARTS*, & *Rattle*. Author of *Memoir of Crushed Petals*; *Gospels of Depression* & *Paper Planes in the Rain*; he is a staunch believer in the powers of critical thinking, Khalil Gibran's poetry & chocolate ice-cream.

Temidayo Jacob (Mayor Jake) is a Sociologist who writes from North Central part of Nigeria. He explores real life experiences and societal happenings. His works have appeared and are forthcoming on *Rattle*, *Kalahari Review*, *Peeking Cat Poetry*, *Art and Rebellion*, *Words Rhymes and Rhythms*, *Sub-Saharan magazine*, *Ngiga Review*, *NantyGreens*, *Inspired* and others. He is a contributor to leading anthologies.

Tukur Ridwan Olorunloba, is a poet, literary critic and essayist who hails from Lagos State. His works have appeared on a number of online literary platforms. He authored his first poetry Chapbook, *A Boy's Tears On Earth's Tongue*, in April 1st 2019; has co-authored several other poetry books with some of his contemporaries.

Edaki Timothy is a Nigerian student. His works have appeared in Sub-Saharan magazine, Praxis Mag Online, Scarlet Silk Anthology, Kalahari Review, SPIC Anthology, EverGreen Poetry Journal and elsewhere

Taofeek Ayeyemi fondly called Aswagaawy is a lawyer and writer, winner of PoeticWednesday Poetry Contest, 2018; First Runner-up Okigbo Poetry Prize (2016) among others. His works have appeared in 100Bards of 2019, Tuck Magazine, The Quills, Peregrine Reads, Akitsu Quarterly, Wales Haiku Journal, Frogpond, Seashores, Presence, The Mamba and elsewhere.

Okoro Emmanuel Chukwuebuka was born on December 3rd 2002. He is a poet and a novelist. He hails from Abia State, Umuahia-South LGA. He is currently writing from the Federal capital territory, Abuja(FCT). He aspires to be a diplomat and an international lawyer. He targets his literary works to correct societal ills in the society. His poem 'Emergence' has won the 2019 edition of Korea-Nigeria Poetry Prize (Junior Category).

Born in Delta State, Nigeria, **Wisdom C. Nwoga** teaches English language and literature. His works have appeared on some major national and international magazines, anthologies and journals. His writing focuses on Futility of existence, political disillusionment and moments that have really moved him. He has won several awards and accolades as a literary artist

Korede kakaaki is a fair-headed young Nigerian poet from the tribe of the Yorubas, he explores the theme of depression, women abuse, boyhood & godhoo. He is trying to break waves & hopes to find himself someday

John Chizoba Vincent is a writer, Filmmaker and cinematographer. He writes about boys, nature and Society issues. He has his works in online magazines and blogs all over the world. He lives in Lagos where he writes from.

I am **Otti Victoria Chiemerie**. Born on the 15th of November 2003 to the family of Barr and Mrs otti. I am the first child of my parents. I am currently a student of Jewel Model School kubwa.

I have passion for writing poems, most times to express my feelings on the day to day happenings. I get inspirations most times from the things that affects me positively or negatively. I aspire to

become a poet and a medical doctor so as to touch the lives of people through these fields by God's special Grace.

Sprouting physician-writer, **Adesina Ajala**, aspires to grow roots in the loam of words and the stethoscope. His works have appeared in Writers Space Africa, Parousia, Brave Voices Poetry Journal and elsewhere. He was the co-winner of the first place of 2018 TSWF Writers Prize. He's on Instagram as @adesina_ajala.

Adeniran, Joseph is a poet|writer|author and a student of Bowen University, Iwo, Osun State, Nigeria. He spent more of his time studying about himself. He writes from Ibadan.

Animashaun A. Ameen is a Nigerian poet from Lagos. An undergraduate at The University of Ilorin, he is different, an oddball and he is determined to grow and evolve into the best version of himself. A butterfly.

Olawuyi Oluwadamilola Mercy O. is a graduate of Agricultural Science Education from the University of Ilorin. She is currently observing her National Youth Service Corp at Ado-Ekiti. She loves writing and started at age 9. Her first book, "Never Too Late" was published in 2009. She impacts with her writings.

Naeto Uche Njie is a poet before a Mic and in Journals, deeply in love with art and computers. He lives and writes in an empty room in Aba.

Amina Onyinoyi Ahuraka was born on the 15th of March 2003. She hails from Ajaokuta local government, Kogi state. She is recently concluded her senior WAEC and is currently writing her NECO exams. She is a science student whose talents all revolve around art, ranging from drama to painting to poetry. In collaboration with some of her mates, she coauthored a book "ocean of dreams" which was published by her school "jewel model school" early this year. She was among the shortlisted candidates of this year's edition of knpf competition. She has also participated in other writing contests where she came out successful. She writes based on the emotional problems people face and has so far been excellent in her way with words.

My name is **praise EBIRIM**. Born in Abuja and lives in Abuja. She is a science student who has been very successful in writing poems. She won the Korean poetry competition and had

consolation prize. She is a zealous, extremely hardworking girl who is currently writing a book and a poetry collection. She is a sixteen year old who has been an effective leader in school with dreams of affection the world through her ink. She is "The Pen".

Odok Dorcas is a student of the Department of English and Literary Studies. She hails from Boki local government area, Cross River State, Nigeria. She is a literary activist, writer, poet and advocate. She is greatly interested in breaking the silence hovering around female and African narratives.

Emmanuel Udoma is a 500 level medical student of the University of Uyo, a creative writer and poet inspired by daily human challenges and societal ills. He sees art as a means of self-expression and creating societal reforms.

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Iyejare Olusegun is a Nigeria-based Nigerian writer, singer, and lover of arts (strongly, the art of loving God). He started writing in 2015 and is currently a student of University of Ilorin

Kenneth N. Nwabuisi is a Literature Student in a Nigerian University, each time he is not in the lecture hall, he is at a corner or in his room, reading, anytime he is not reading, he is staring into space and scribbling in a paper Scratch

I am **Deola Olatunji**, a writer and poet. A student of Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ogun state. I'm looking forward to being an epic and prolific writer.

Opia-Enwemuche Maxwell Onyemaechi is a poet, novelist and essayist who write from Umuahia, Nigeria. His book, The Oracle of Isieke speaks on humanity and the need to live together as one devoid of things that breeds rancour and disharmony in a growing world.

Babatunde Adeleke is a student, a leisure poet and a writer who contributes to several blogs and publications including the Nigerian Tribune newspapers. He writes under the name Lakez.

The writer is born and bred in Jos, Nigeria, resides therein. Catholic-christian by orientation;

majored in Philosophy and holds a Professional Diploma in Education; currently pursuing a degree in Criminology and Security Studies. Passionate about Literature, focused on the poetic genre.

JOHNSON VICTOR OLUWATOBI, was born in the earliest 20th century, He hails from the small town of Ayetoro Oke in the Oke Ogun side, Oyo state, He is an Alumni of the great Olivet Baptist High school , and currently a Student of the University of Ibadan, A Political Scientist in making, Victor is a young poet and Novelist, that have featured on many Anthology and online Journals. He is also a Seasoned Public speaker and currently serves as a Assistant Coordinator in Place of Discovery (A online Platform for youths), Editor at Winsala Muses, and Volunteer at Damien Foundation.

Except being a well-informed poet, He usually gives lectures on various topic ranging from Youth issues to Political activism in different online platform and also non relenting in his journey of discovery.

Iyejare Olusegun is a Nigeria-based Nigerian writer, singer, and lover of arts (strongly, the art of loving God). He started writing in 2015 and is currently a student of University of Ilorin

Deji Johnson Adafin is a Pastor at GRACELAND, a church with the mission to teach truth and shape lives. He loves his wife so passionately that he calls her TEE. He his has daughter, Jemima's Best friend.

Multimedia is a tool in his hand and he has mastered the art of using graphics designing, web-designing, photography and motion pictures to communicate his values online and offline.

He loves music and has written about 20 songs. He is the Author of DREAMING IS NOT ENOUGH, with other books yet to be published.

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Funso Oris is a Literary Scholar, Poetry Investor and Author from Chicago, USA.

Funso has been creating poetry and investing in poetic legacies for more than 25 years. As poet, critic, anthologist and curator of exploratory poetic styles, he focuses on using poetry as a tool of influence and change. He has written forewords to many prominent literary collections. He holds Masters in Literature, Communication and Psychology. He is the co-author of *State of the State: Sordid Beatification*.