

The Somerville News

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Books of Hope brings the writer out in Somerville youth

Off The Shelf by Doug Holder

Being a small press publisher I have always been impressed with the Books of Hope project. I interviewed the former director Anika Nailah and her young charges on my Somerville Community Access TV "Poet to Poet: Writer to Writer."

I was impressed by how Nailah instilled a love for the "word" in these kids, many from the Mystic Avenue housing project in our city. For nine years the program has trained kids from the projects and elsewhere in four key areas: writing, publishing, performing, marketing and outreach. The youth are involved in many aspects of producing a book, and their development is advanced through a writer-in-residence, guest artists and mentors, as well as field trips.



"Books of Hope" would be the envy of many presses, with their production of high quality and beautifully illustrated chapbooks of poetry and fiction. Soul Brown, the new director, has sent me a slew of titles from this ambitious small press. Included are: 'A Cup of Truth With No Sugar Please,' by Tanisha D., "Broken Home & Other Tales From The Hood," by Jessica Jean-Louis, "In Between The Lines Was A Story," by Jessica Masse, "Superwoman" by Tanisha D., "Simple Words Hide Amazing Secrets," by Farah Jean-Baptiste, "What Time Will Only Show," by Tanya Lovely Joseph, "Lightning Strikes Twice," by Maisha B. Antoine "Changes," by Reynalle Miranda Santanna, "The Many Voices In Me," by Farah Jean Baptiste, and "Double Dutch," by Bendhyy Wazaire and Onyx Thorton. I decided to use a few poems from this fine stash of verse.

TAKE A TRIP

Take a trip though my world where gold tooth boot
leg rappers walk around carryin STD's picking
up chicks on the street then havin sex with
Them in front of the cable TV

Yo take a trip through my world where people
get shot for havin something valuable
Like a Playstation 3 or Bape Ape Fashion or
Maybe not something valuable, just because
They feel like it's the season

Really take a trip through my world and
you would see gang violence like crazy
like blood fighting crips and MS13
fighting brave hearts.

Yo, if you took a trip through my world
love would be nothing but a dream
and hate would rule the world.

Shoot take a trip through my world and
you would get shot. Not even I would
take a trip through that world.

- Farah Jean-Baptiste

IN THE MIRROR

In the mirror in front of me
I see the real me...
The me that's afraid to walk out
of the shadows and into the light
The me that you don't know
but would like to know
The me that has felt the troubles
and sorrows of life
The me that's crying on the inside
trying to find his way out of this world
that he came in
But too much stress going through his head
it just feels like he's caving in.

In the mirror in front of me
I see a person who has mastered
the skill of illusions
A person who mastered the art
of hiding his true colors
A person who has mastered the skill
of shadowing his emotions
But knowing all that he still doesn't know
happiness.

- Bendhji Nazaire

9 MONTHS I'LL NEVER SEE

This feeling is forever
A feeling I'll never treasure
It brings tears and makes my legs quiver
It burns inside when I think of the 9 months
I'll never see
How I had something growing inside me
A baby
My heart shatters when I think of the face
I'll never see
How I knew someone that never got the chance
To know me
But my dream of holding you is gone
It will never be
But your spirit will continue to play on inside me
Like a never ending melody
While my tears become a river

And the river an ocean
An ocean of what could have been
But can never be.

- Tanya Lovely Joseph

Ibbetson Street Poetry Award

The winner of the Ibbetson Street Press Poetry Contest award (must be a Massachusetts resident) will receive a \$100 cash award, a framed certificate, publication in the literary journal "Ibbetson Street" and a poetry feature in the Lyrical Somerville column of The Somerville News.

To enter send three to five poems, any genre, length, to Doug Holder at 25 School St. Somerville, Mass.. 02143. Entry fee is \$10. Cash or check only. Make payable to "Ibbetson Street Press" or "Doug Holder." The deadline is Sept. 15.

The contest will be judged by Richard Wilhelm poet and arts editor of the Ibbetson Street Press.

The winner will be announced at The Somerville News Writers Festival on Nov. 22.

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