

I WRITE WHO I AM

an anthology of Upstart poems

Compiled and edited by
Harry Owen

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FOREWORD

It isn't often that one is afforded the opportunity to work on something truly extraordinary, something that can make a real, tangible difference to the quality of people's lives - including one's own. Still less is this so when the 'work' involved is both inspiring and hugely enjoyable. But I have had the great good fortune to be given just such a chance.

When the remarkable Shireen Badat asked me if I would be willing to share my love of poetry with some of the young people in her recently established Upstart project by running weekly poetry writing workshops with them, I was happy to do so. Since I am passionate about the importance of the creative imagination and how poetry can be simultaneously such a sensitive and muscular means of expressing it, it was pleasant to know that there are still young people out there who like poetry too. But, in all honesty, I thought it would be a case of turning up a few times to give it a try until the inevitable dropping off of enthusiasm meant that another well-intentioned enterprise had run its course.

How wrong can you be, how wonderfully wrong?

Since that time it has been my immense pleasure to work with a group - a growing group! - of talented and committed young men and women who, through their dedication and friendship, have taught me at least as much as I may have managed to teach them. They believe, as I do, that poetry is often the only realistic way of expressing deeply held feelings, attitudes and emotions that otherwise might seem overpowering. It's true, and that's a great start, but they have also recognised that words and phrases need to be carefully chosen and crafted if they are to work as poems: raw feeling is never enough.

So keen were the participants to write, in fact, that they insisted on continuing even when they grew too old for the original Upstart programme - and so UpstartPlus was born!

All of the poets in this anthology use English as a second (or even a third) language, so the subtlety and polish, the allusive and quirky intelligence of many of their words in what is in effect a foreign language, is an enormous credit to them. They have worked very, very hard - and always with a smile. Yet the reality of their everyday lives means that it has rarely been easy for them, either to attend the workshops or to devote themselves so tirelessly to their writing.

So to be included in this anthology, fittingly called *I Write Who I Am*, is their reward for a great deal of effort, skill and dedication. But I hope it is only the start - the upstart! - of a lifetime of writing pleasure and success.

I salute and thank them all.

Harry Owen
June 2011

INTRODUCTION

In mid-2008 a group of enthusiastic post-graduate journalism students at Rhodes University helped me to start a school newspaper, Upstart, in seven previously disadvantaged high schools in Grahamstown. Working with Grade 8 and 9 learners, the project aimed to expand the abilities of schoolchildren in a variety of areas, including promoting a culture of literacy; developing reading and writing abilities; encouraging inter-school communication in order to break down racial, cultural and language barriers; and developing leadership skills.

The project soon expanded to include former Model C schools and at the beginning of 2009 we had to include Grade 10 members as our Grade 9 groups from the previous year did not wish to be left out. Currently, Upstart has clubs at 11 schools in Grahamstown and one in Kenton-on-Sea, with an active membership of 250 learners who meet on a weekly basis. Upstart has grown from a black and white, eight-page newspaper published four times a year, to a 16-page full colour newspaper published eight times a year. Through a culture of interactive learning and production, the learners are strengthening inter-school communication, developing knowledge, expertise and skills, and acquiring leadership qualities. Currently, none of these developments would otherwise occur, given the problems experienced in many disadvantaged public schools in the Eastern Cape.

The title of this collection of poems is derived from the title of Black Consciousness leader Stephen Bantu Biko's seminal book, *I write what I like*. When the poetry group met in a seminar room at Rhodes University to finalise this collection and decide on the title, the irony was not lost on us. We recalled that many years ago Biko was not welcomed at Rhodes and the authorities would not permit him to live in the residence. Fortunately these young poets live in a different world from the brutal racism and segregation of the apartheid period, though they continue daily to confront and battle to overcome the bitter legacies of apartheid. They are young people who are determinedly trying to carve out a future for themselves, drawing on their pride in themselves, and on their values, education, culture and community. Moreover, it is Biko's inspirational values and example that animate these young people from Grahamstown.

Louise Vale, the previous General Manager of Grocott's Mail, which houses Upstart, had the prescience to suggest that the newspaper be called Upstart. Since then, our wonderful and lively members have become true young Upstarts! Without Louise's dogged perseverance Upstart would not have seen the light of day.

Nompumezo Makinana began as an intern in late 2008. Now she is the Upstart Project Coordinator and known in the community as 'the manager of the kids.' Upstart would not be possible without her day to day co-ordination of members, volunteers and taxi drivers, provision of peanut butter and jam sandwiches and the like.

Countless volunteers have also provided energy and expertise to the project, including Desiree Schirlinger, who took the wonderful pictures for this book.

The young poets featured in this book have practised the art of poetry and developed a love for the written word under the guidance of Harry Owen. Without his unstinting dedication, you would not be holding this collection in your hands. We are deeply grateful to Harry for conducting the weekly poetry workshops since the beginning of 2010 without any remuneration. Watching these young Upstarts develop in confidence and bloom over the past year has been a humbling and inspiring experience.

Shireen Badat

Upstart Project Manager



Sindi Dingana

I'm Sindi Dingana and doing Grade 12 at Nombulelo Senior Secondary School. I was born on 6th April 1993, the third born of four children, and I live at home with my Mum and little sister.

I started writing when I was doing Grade 6, but I wasn't sure if I had a talent for writing until I was invited to perform one of my poems at school. After that I was sure that I am a born writer and I haven't stopped writing until today. My love for poetry is inexplicable; I can't describe it because it's deep and I don't ever want to stop writing because writing is my friend. When I'm sad I write, when I'm happy I write, and poetry lifts my spirits up when I'm down.

My favourite colour is pink. In my free time I like writing poems, socialising with friends, watching TV and listening to music. I am a nice person but I don't like bad things. I am a person who believes that I was born for a reason and the impossible can be possible if only you believe. My motto is PERSEVERANCE IS THE KEY TO GREAT SUCCESS, which simply means good things come to those who wait.

My role model is my mother because she is the only person who has always been there for me. She lifts my spirit up when I'm down, encouraging me to follow my dream and be what I want to be in life. I am so grateful for having a mother like her, because she is my rock.

When I finish school I would like to go to Rhodes University and study Law or Journalism. The reason for this is because I love to debate and ask questions so I think I would be a good prosecutor.

Sindi
Dingana

Are You Dreaming Again?

I'm walking in the deepest forest
surrounded by tall trees
It's dark and very quiet
I can hear my feet crushing dry leaves
I ask myself am I dreaming again?

I walk slowly. Suddenly I hear a baby's voice
but the voice stops and I hear something else -
very strange, it is walking fast behind me
I can say by hearing the footsteps it's TSUNAMI
I run for my life

Suddenly I stop
and I asked myself am I dreaming again?
The noise comes closer, closer,
my legs start shaking. I feel nauseous
and my stomach grumbles like a hungry lion

It's closer now and I run for my life
but I stop and ask myself am I dreaming again?

The answer is yes -

I wake up with such a fright
and I am wet from running

A Friend Like You

A friend like you is hard to find
and I'm proud to say 'this friend is mine'
we have so much in common
we know each other by heart

I sincerely hope that we should
never be apart
Losing a friend like you
would be like losing my life

Without you I wouldn't know what to do
for the other part of my life is you

I am glad that we have met
It's a special moment I will not forget
Friends forever we will be
It's such a joy to have you with me

A Candle

Live like a candle which burns itself
yet gives light to others

Look backwards with gratitude
upwards with confidence
forward with hope

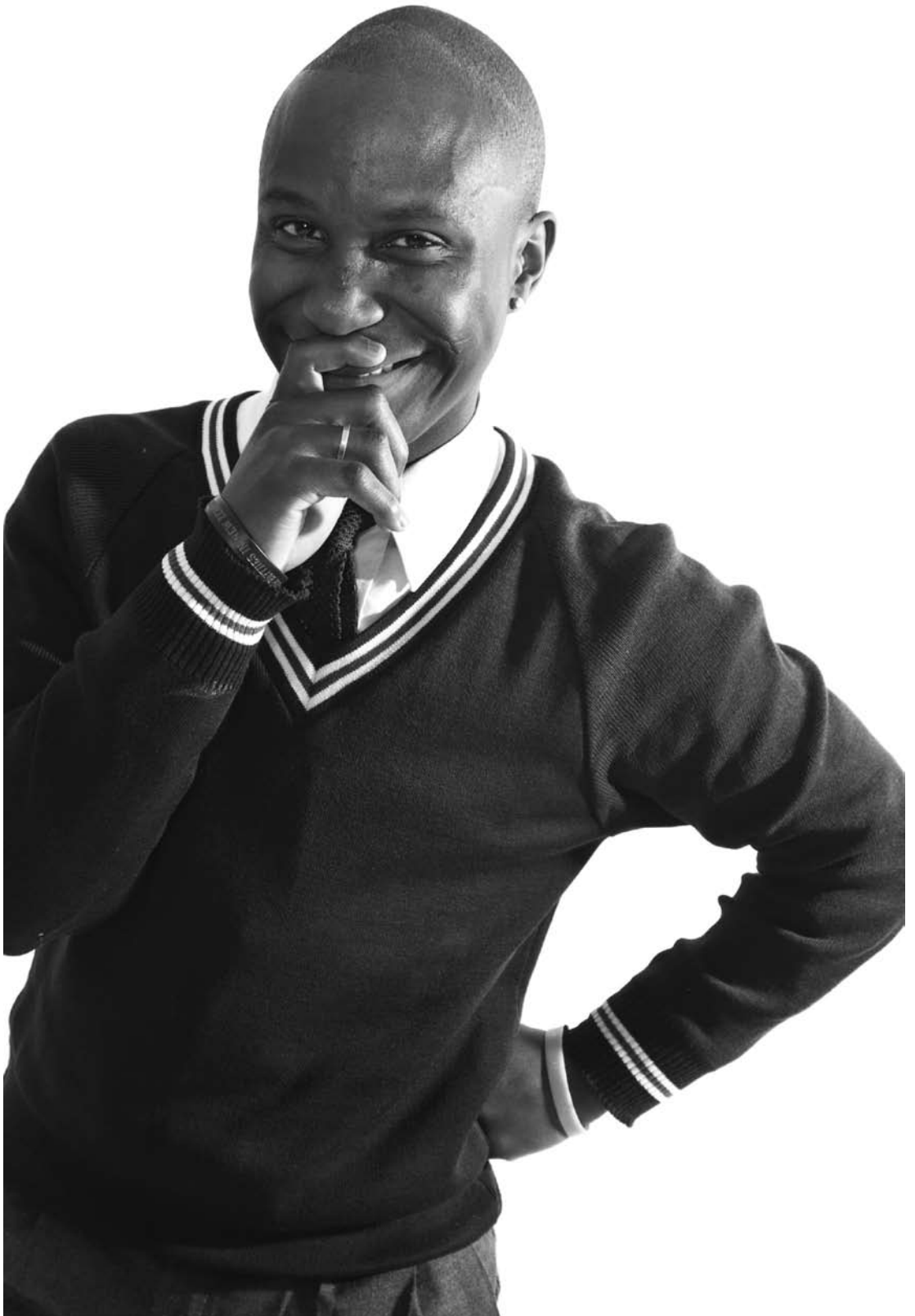
When you truly care for someone
you don't look for faults
you don't look for questions
you don't look for answers

Instead you fight the mistakes
you accept the faults
you overlook excuses and you
take each other to prayer

A gentle reminder that the most
precious things in life cannot be
built by hand or bought by a man ...

... but can see, hear, touch
taste, feel and love

Let's unite and fight
against discrimination



Jabulani Faltein

I joined the Upstart poetry group last year because I have a talent for writing poetry and I write poems because I just felt it. I write poems about something I see, or think; about things happening around my community, or just a dream and something else.

Most of the time I write about my life because I believe in writing poems about my future or the thing that comes first on my mind. When I write it is about something I have felt because if I didn't feel it, it does not make sense to me. I don't know about people who read my poems, but if they also try to feel it maybe it will make sense to them.

I like to be a part of the poetry group because I have learnt something new with this group of people. It's my second year in the poetry group. I hope that in future writing these poems will bring something interesting, more than I do now.

One day maybe I will have my own book, just like Mr Harry Owen, my mentor at the poetry group. I thank him for spending his time to teach me how to write poems and other stuff. And I didn't forget you, Mrs Shireen Badat, the manager of Upstart, for being there for me all these years.

Jabulani
Faltein
in

The Rats

I saw six mice in the early morning
being arrested for hijacking a Fidelity truck
last night, and four rats escaped from prison
before they could appear in court.

The four rats raped
a 3-year-old girl in Extension 9
and Detective Kanye West
wants them in jail.

Please, please, if you see these
rats contact Mr J.M. Faltein
on 083 512 7396 -
or for more news
just go to g.town.faltein

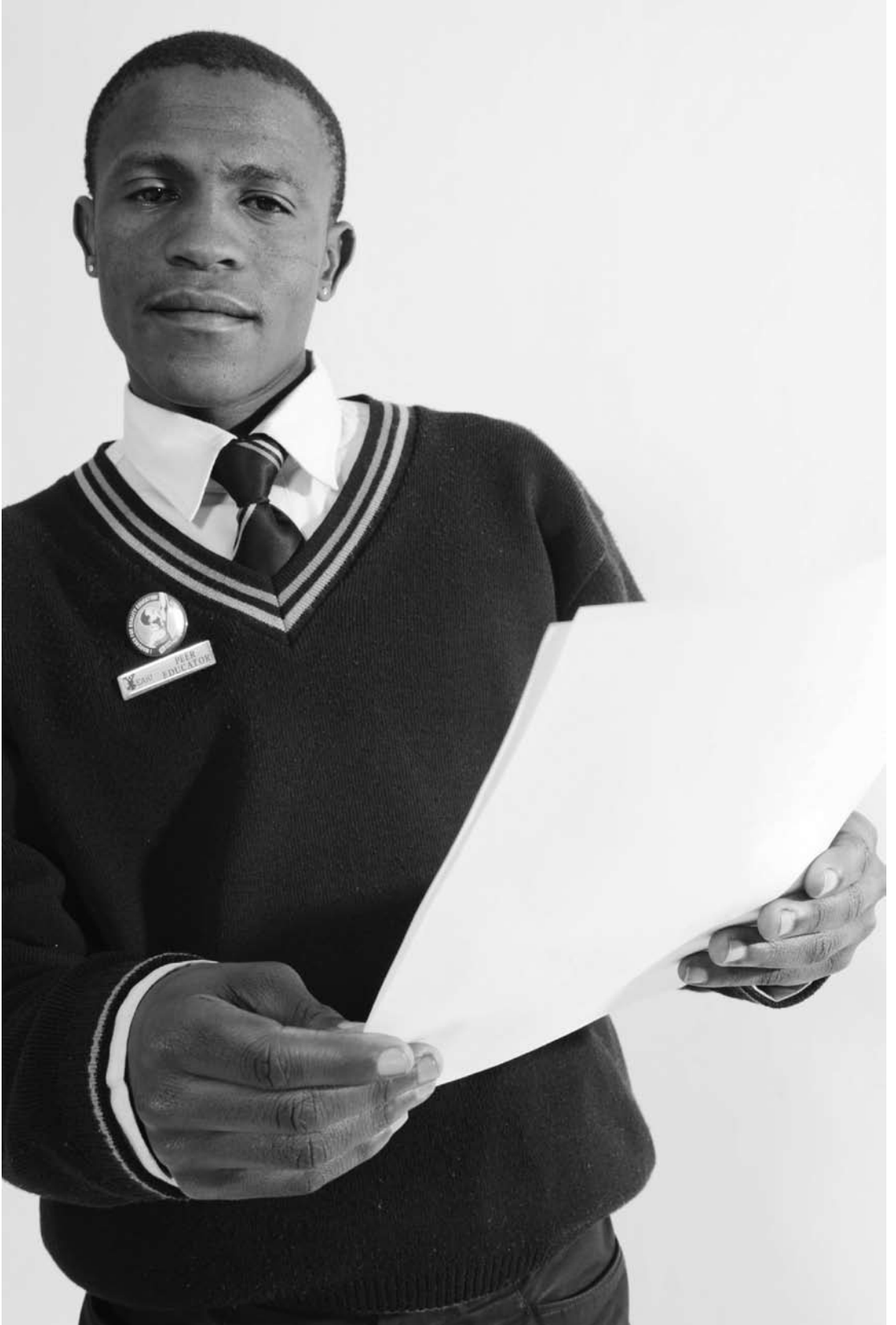
A time I will not forget in my life

I met with some guys
standing out, next to their cars.
When they asked for my authority to drive
and I replied that I didn't have it
they called a car with a siren
and drove me to a house.

In that house I spent a week,
in that house with no window
and no door, just a gate.
It had only one room, only a bed,
no front or sitting room
and just a small toilet.

That place was no good
for a human being to stay.

Please don't do what I did,
driving a car without a licence:
you will see what am talking about.



Lulama Fatyela

I was born in a small town called Steynsburg in the Eastern Cape. I am my parents' second born child, but my parents were not married when I was born. My father was a municipality worker and my mother was a domestic worker. I grew up in my father's home and I was raised by my grandmother who was old fashioned and religious. In 2007 I moved to Grahamstown to stay with my aunt.

In April 2010 I lost my mother. Things were not going well for me at school at that time. I was trying to concentrate on my school work but my mother's death was eating at me until her funeral took place. I tried so hard to accept her death and move on but what made me lost and shocked again was the loss of my father in April 2011.

I ask myself so many questions, but still I have no answers. Only God knows why, why I lost both my parents in the same month in successive years. So now I am trying to live my life without my parents, but I have one thing ingaba ukufa kona akuzukufa?

I joined Upstart last year and it has helped me cope with some of my problems. Every week when I meet with Upstart, I forget to think about all my troubles. The poetry has also helped me cope, because I can put my feelings on paper and express them in my poetry.

I would like to be successful when I am older so that I can help my sister and brothers.

Death

You interfere in our lives when we are having good times

You take those we love away from us

You take those we trust away from us

You take those we believed in away from us

You are like a walk in the graveyard

Why, death, will you never die?

We can't sleep at night because of you

You will never die because you were a curse from God

Tears flow like blood

My mind and my heart can't concentrate in my life

Death, why won't you stop stealing our parents?

You don't have any mercy

Ingaba kufa awuzokufa nangoku?

Beautiful things come to an end

I used to be a top student at school
a respectful child even in my hood.

Things were cool.

But
in the middle
things are not
going well for me.

At all.

But ye!
I'm trying my best to forget
about the past.

Now, Nozala,
I'm so happy that
I'm starting my new life.

Note: *nozala* means 'mother' in isiXhosa



Lutho Gqirana

*I'm Lutho Gqirana, born on 5th December 1994 in the City of Gold,
Johannesburg,
South Africa.*

I'm a tan male, not short and not tall either, although I'm close to it. I'm a bit long-tempered although I like to say what I don't like or what's on my mind almost as soon as it gets me, which is why some say I'm talkative at times. Some think I am an angry person and some say I have a lot of pride but I like to think of myself as fairly focused; a bit mischievous at times but not too much, just a bit. And I love everyone even if you've hurt or mistreated me (but the love part mostly happens to the girls).

Like any guy I'm interested in girls, especially the smart ones, but not too much.

Since my friends say I'm fun to be around, I like what every fun person likes - games.

Most of all I am mad about football. My favourite team in SA is Kaiser Chiefs; in Spain it's Barcelona FC but above all it is Manchester United.

Other interests are basketball, music and the latest is tennis. And reading, of course, especially code breaking, finding hidden messages.

Now I say live for the moment and never settle for anything less than the best in order for you to succeed & prosper.

Mother Nature

beautiful and blissful
loving and joyful
mother of all creatures
took us from dust
to become what we are
breathed life into all creatures
and then man arrived
in order to modify and protect

but now we betray her
acting like viruses
as parasites
we poison her
intoxicating her
killing her from the inside out
taking her from a lively green and a joyful blue
to a toxic grey and a flaming red
destroying even her last line of defence
with no antidotes
no protection
she is left for dead

although some are the resistance
most are the parasites
while forgetting one important thing:
a parasite always
dies with its host

Let's
Go
ana

The Nightmare

A place filled with care
honesty, beauty, peace
and, above all, love

A land where birds sing
dogs dance
cats and mice
share a slice

A place without crime
lies, fear and anger
and the rays of the rising sun
bring holiness and a lovely shine

At just a blink of an eye
darkness arrives in the form of a cloud
and suddenly the land grows dim

I see blood-seeking shadows
with red eyes and huge fangs
longer than my legs

some are flying
but most are gliding
and all are moving at the speed of light

I try to run
but they catch up
I trip and fall
as they just stare at me

I roll around once
and they grab me

I roll around twice
and realise I was dreaming

Life

Some say life is sweet
due to fortune and power
to rule over others,
living as royalty.

Others find it bitter
as they feel worthless,
used and neglected.

As the world turns
their lives get worse
though they're doing all they can
to produce for their loved ones,
laying their heads in exhausted sheds
with peep holes visible on bird's eye view.

This is where dust and rain sneak in at will,
carrying destruction and diseases
and leaving behind pain and agony.
With dry skin and white lips
they are no longer living
but surviving -

while our leaders live it up
leisurely and luxuriously.

Yes,
we are abiding by the law of the jungle
where it is survival of the fittest
and elimination of the weakest

But it's time to change -
and the change begins with you.

Let's
change



Mfundo Jacobs

My name is Mfundo Jacobs. I was born in Gugulethu in Cape Town on 29 December 1991. As a toddler I lived with my grandmother so that Mom could find employment. As a child I lived in Grahamstown, in Joza. I don't have any highlights of the time I spent with Gogo there, but I do recall that I was a very naughty boy and she would pinch my bum every time I did something wrong.

I attended primary school at Ntlebi Primary in Grahamstown. I used to love playing karate with other kids during break time. From there I went to live with my mother in Cape Town. I had to attend a new school. I finished the rest of my primary school years at Searidge Park Primary in Tafelsig.

Life at Tafelsig was a major change for me. I had to learn English and Afrikaans immediately. However, within my first year there I was able to speak both languages. My mother was like my second teacher at home. She would never allow me to go to sleep without reading something. If she came into my room and found me sleeping, she would wake me up and tell me to read.

I used to love fixing electronic stuff, but for some reason I would always come back from school and find them thrown in the bin. Mom hated it when my room started to look like a pigsty and stressed neatness in man.

After finishing primary school I went to Princeton High School, a technical school. This is where I fell in love with writing. I had so many thoughts in my head and I enjoyed putting them down on paper. Early teenage years came with their challenges and I found myself not writing. I even found myself requesting a transfer and I stopped attending school.

I was then out of school doing nothing. Eventually I managed to find a job, but over time I got fired. I became bored and hung around with the wrong crowd. Eventually Mom had enough and sent me back to Grahamstown.

Here in Grahamstown I found writing again. While in my previous school I had written a short story called 'Sitting with Andile' and when Upstart heard of this they loved it and encouraged me to continue writing. I am currently now doing my matric at Graeme College.

It was not our intention

Dear Lord have pity upon us,
it was not our intention,
but something had to be done.

I tried following your word,
but my stomach spoke louder
and Satan came to me when I was most vulnerable.

He kept all his promises
except allowing me to live in peace
and today I only see the light through one window.

At least I get good malnutrition.

My dog

You act innocent by day,
wagging your tail around me,
yet by night you give me a fright
alerting everyone that I am here.

My brain goes mad;
you scare me to death
yet still I love you -
you, my dog.

Mrs Jacob



Dumisani July

My name is Dumisani but others call me Mr Praise.

I enjoy reading and writing my poetry.

In my spare time I just write my poems and my songs

I'm writing hip-hop songs - I have passion about it,

actually I love it .

I'm even a story teller but only few people know that.

I'm talking about those who need advice and share their

pains (I'm a pain reliever). Sometimes I share jokes

that are crazy .. lol .. (laughing out loud). I'm joking!

I write nice jokes with messages.

Poetry is like a mother, even a brother, to me,

because it never disappoints me, but people do.

I first fell in love with poetry when Mr Harry Owen

was showing and telling me about poetry,

how to write and perform,

so from there my eyes were able to see the light.

Lastly, I'm just a cool guy who loves people

and who likes to move around a lot,

seeing people, knowing things.

Actually I'm curious.

*I like playing games and sitting with my friends
or sitting alone proving my creativity
and I don't like to be unknown or to be
ignored and undermined.
I want to be happy every time,
smiling, laughing and shining.*

Yeah!

That's me, Mr Praiseeee! (whispering)

My Culture

Made precious
by art and beliefs
so gorgeous
it is my great power
same as mighty Jesus

It is my food of life
that I can not live without
It destroys darkness
and gives me light
This is my key to unlock every door
that is tight

*Isithethe namasiko ziphuma ezantsi
ebuhlanti*

*It's where izinyanya zikhona
people always say*

'kufuneka uzazi usukaphi, uphi, uyaphi?'

Every time I take my pen and paper
to write about this I am proud
Ubuntu kwa-Xhosa is what
we breathe
in and out

*Mandiyishiye lendawo
ngesithozamo nembeko*

Peace - I'm out

Jealousy

when I was young
I used to say
I want to own a big house
with two kids and beautiful wife

but

I didn't know things would change
because of jealousy
that leads me to seclusion
and to forget about
all my wishes and passion

I lost the best things in life
even vision
because of commission
no smiles even compassion
nothing to do without conception

what a name - jealousy?
people burst into clamour
the glamour of days before
is upon this name
that is immortal

how can it be original, when I'm writing
my journal?
no words to explain this pain
my face is sad
my friend who was trying his best
is now dead
but this name is still there

I'd rather be alone
so that I could not hear
from there to here
eish!

my ink is dry
just give me seconds
to cry

I can't remember

It was there
but I don't know where
I can't remember
the colour or the structure

Many of them have seen it
but few have touched it
they say it was soft and lovely
it was dark as a shade

When I ask them,
Where is it now?
they say it was washed away
by the tsunami
but they just can't remember
the day

I keep on asking
was it Monday or Sunday?
I can't remember
which day



Vuyiseka Kahla

I am Vuyiseka Kahla, a rising poet and a Grade 11 student at Nathaniel Nyaluza High School. I was born in the Western Cape on December 9th 1994 but brought up in the Eastern Cape. I am the second of three children.

I enjoy reading fiction, novels, in a quiet place; writing poems; listening to music as well as playing with my phone. I am not against jokes as I always have a smile on my face.

Writing poetry is what I enjoy the most. I write poems about issues that concern me; for example, when I am feeling hurt I take paper and write about my feelings. It helps me deal with these feelings because when I write it makes me feel as if I am talking to someone and getting rid of all the hurt.

But I hate rude people: they make my blood boil.

I am a decent, obedient, respectful and lovely girl. My friends, everyone I know, calls me “mother of all” because I don’t get moody, I smile all the time and I am a good listener and comforter to people.

I’m also a sensitive person; I can easily cry. I love progress, don’t want to see anybody hurt and I can’t stand seeing people in pain. I cry when I see poor, suffering people.

I have dreams and goals for the future. One day I would like to be a lawyer and see South Africa as a country like other countries where there is no crime and high levels of education.

Vuyiseka
Kahla

Black

The darkest colour of all,
not attractive to others
but attractive to the sun.

The colour of blacks,
the colour of my country,
it's my tattoo,
my African badge.

The colour that separates
day from night,
a colour that has dignity:

My black, my pride.

Music

Boom! Boom! Boom!

You hear sounds in your ears

It feels good

Taking you to another planet

You dance

You cry

You feel

You get the message

Feeding the soul

Satisfying ears

Stretching legs

Bringing back memories

So many rooms

It enters

It touches

It heals

Bringing smiles and joy

Making pockets fat

Shaking the world

around

and people get

crazy ...!

It's just music.



Sibusiso Klaas

I am Sibusiso Klaas and I was born 25 August 1994.

I developed an enduring love for poetry when I was doing Grade 9 but when I was in Grade 10 I started attending poetry classes. I began writing poems for the Upstart newspaper when I was in Grade 8, in 2008.

When I am not writing poems I like to read.

I started school in 2001 at Samuel Ntlebi Lower Primary, continued at N.V. Cewu Higher Primary and then in 2008 moved to Nombulelo Secondary School, where I am now doing Grade 11.

I joined the poetry group because I love writing poems. I am shy so I like to express my feelings by writing them down. When I am not actually in school I like to attend extra classes so that I can get a lot of information. I get involved in many things so that I can see where I fit in. In 2008 I joined Upstart because I wanted to know how to write for newspapers and also to get experience of journalism. Maybe if I am good at it I can do it further in University.

When I grow up I want to be an orthodontist because I like working with teeth. I believe that our beauty lies in our smile, so if your teeth are not healthy then you are ugly - that is why I want to fix people's teeth!

I am a talkative, loving and caring person who does not like to see people sad. When I am around I make sure people laugh, and my friends tell me to become a comedian.

My goal is to study at Rhodes University or the University of Cape Town, and when I finish school I will work and then help my community.

Sibusiso
Klaas

My Mother

My mother is a motivator -
she believes nothing is impossible
and always puts a smile on my face.

She is a beautiful glass table,
unique and special;
she is like sunny weather,

bringing light and warmth,
making people feel comfortable
whatever they're wearing.

She has a beauty that glitters
like a star in the sky.
Beauty like hers I have never seen at all.

She carried me for nine months in her womb
like a kangaroo carrying its child,
raised me and gave me Agape.

I love you, Mamtshonyane:
you are my hero
and a pillar of the house.

Death

Death is heartless, it attacks everyone in
sickness and health. It is careless,
leaving people hopeless.

It is like a knife that cuts everything:
made of a shiny metal with sharp teeth,
it always leaves a wound in people's hearts -
when you touch it you are hurt.

Like a train on a railway
coming fast without noticing it,
it hits and does not look back.

It is part of life,
not easy to accept,
but it puts souls in rest.

Like a sharp sighted eagle
mounting to a great height,
watching a fish in the water while it is in the sky,

Death is cruel and leaves people shameless.



Xolela (Mike) Landu

My name is Xolela Landu, known to everyone as Mike, the child that comes from a family of two. As the light of day dawned on 16th August 1993, there I came brightly. On a Monday I was born. Life on my side has been such an honour, my parents gave birth to one of a kind.

I grew up living with my grandparents because my grandmother had an adorable little girl named Thuleka and I had to go live with them so we could grow up together. Most people thought that we were twins and really we grew up like twins. I also have a brother and two sisters who were born after me. They lived with my mother and father.

I have a passion for becoming a journalist one day because I really like writing and reading, especially short stories. Going out in my community is the best thing that I like doing. Doing research and investigation is my game. If you have a story that needs to be investigated, I am your man.

I like writing poetry because it is easier than writing news articles. It is easier to read and less boring. I like to write about crime and life in general in my poetry. I hope that people who have no direction in their lives will be inspired when they read my poetry.

When I finish schooling I would like to study Law and Journalism at Rhodes University. I would like to thank Upstart for giving me a chance to express myself, and thank you to Mr Harry Owen for supporting me.

I'm worth it

i'm worth something in my land
i'm rated not too far from valuable
i'm worth what i bring in myself

if you would want to know
the value of worth
i'm worthy to be borrowed

whatever costs low, i'm not worth it
the more cost, the more honour

my opinion is worth nothing
unless paid for

Time

the time behind is never
in time tomorrow

if you lose an hour
in the morning
you will
look all day for it
in your own time

what is it they say?
everything is good in its time
everything is good in its season
everything has a reason:
time is a great healer

take time when time comes
for other time will never come
now is now

hope

if you lose hope
you lose all
great hope makes
good success

hope keeps us
alive, but can
kill like death

where there is
life there is hope

hope is but a
dream of those
that wake

hope well and
have all



Lwando Manyonta

I am Lwando Manyonta, born on the 10th of January 1993 here in Grahamstown and I was also raised here. I am currently doing Grade 12 at Nathaniel Nyaluza, one of the oldest schools in the Eastern Cape. It is where I got my inspiration for creative writing and where I was one of the founder members of Upstart.

I am a very lively person who loves to play around and joke with people, because that's what I do best. I love an audience because I do drama at school, not as part of my studies but as a hobby. But drama is one thing that inspired me to write poetry and stories.

My work is about performance. I write performance poetry. My poems always have that humour and energy you would find on stage. I always try to write poetry whereby people won't get bored at the end of the poem. I want them to giggle a bit while reading my material.

What I deeply dislike are people who are naïve, who think they know everything, who don't want other people's views to be heard. And what I truly like is performing. Drama is me, and I live it!

Lwando Manyonta

Nails

From a family of
metal and steel
finely crafted and shaped

hammered and beaten
way back in time

we look useless
but we're not pointless
they still use us -

now this is their gratitude!

An army will arise
seeking revenge
we will come silently in the night

WE WILL STRIKE YOU

NAIL YOU

BRUISE YOU!

and tear your flesh into pieces

WE WILL CAPTURE YOU

TORTURE YOU

SMACKDOWN YOU!

and make life a living hell

WE WILL COME FOR YOU

AS WE DID TO YOUR SAVIOUR

YES, *JESUS*, WE NAILED HIM!

we will come for you

we will come

FOR YOU!

LWANTMA
CROON
BYON

Racism

we've lived
half a century of horror
and inhumanity

we've wept
from the forbidden tree
pain and misery

striking every time
it has threatened
to ruin man's dignity

it has power to tumble
over governments
strength to conquer nations

and the ignorance of a child

but now it's forbidden
stopped or crushed

now it will forever
hold its peace



Andile Mengu

I am Andile Mengu, a 17 year old boy, born on 25 February 1994. I started my lower grades at Fikizolo Public Primary School, from Grade R to Grade 5. I then went to Adelaide (Eastern Cape) to continue school from Grade 6 to Grade 7. I was only there for a year then I came back to Grahamstown to live with my mother and father. In primary school I was captain of the cricket team.

I live with my mother, sister and twin brothers. My father passed away last year on 26th May.

I am now at Nathaniel Nyaluza High School. Last year in Grade 10 I chose to do the following subjects: Pure Maths, Physics, Biology and Geography. When I get to university or technikon I want to study Information Technology.

When I grow up I want to be a Liquid Engineer, working with an oil company. I am truly looking forward to achieving my dream. I am a self-sufficient person.

I joined the Upstart Plus group this year. My intention was to show that I am not just a learner, but also a young poet. Poetry inspires me. There is a lot that I've learnt from being part of the poetry group such as how to write a poem and how to structure poetry.

My friends like me because I enjoy cracking jokes with them. My friends and I started a Hip-Hop dance group which is called OUTCAST 4.1.0. I love hip-hop dance as well as poetry because I am able to express myself as a performer in both of them.

I Am Who I Am

I am who I am

I am special

I am unique

I am

They keep on telling me

I am a fag

but I prefer myself

a boy of many talents

They are trying to tear me down

beating me up

swearing at me

spitting at me

but they can't

because I always tell myself

I am who I am

I do not back down

from any challenges of life

I fear nothing and regret less

They can love or hate

but they cannot defeat me

because I am who I am

The Day I Will Never Forget

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

What's up?

What have we done?

Can anyone give me an idea
of what is going on?

They sneaked in
intimidated us
brought a huge
bucking dog
to sniff us

They grabbed what is our belonging
without a permit from us
just kept on
with what they were doing

They brought

guns

handcuffs

spray guns

along with them

(but none of us tasted them)

Why is this? Why is this happening

to us

instead of others?

Why is it even happening at all?

Why?

Why?

Why?

Dreams

A dream is your life in future

Dreams are not nightmares
but lead us to our tomorrow
If you ever forget your dream
your dream may never ever forget you

You can achieve your tomorrow

It does not matter who you are,
what you are, but dreams keep
on popping in. They do not
lead us to nowhere

but to somewhere

America
The
mag



Sanele Ntshingana

I am Sanele Ntshingana and I was born on 25 August 1993, in Grahamstown. I grew up in 'E' Street, and then I moved to Hlalani. I grew up as a very inquisitive child, full of energy and always wanting to know everything. I am the last born in my family and the only black in complexion compared to the whole family of whites in complexion.

When I think of my earliest memories, I remember when I had lustrous, big dreams of becoming a lawyer or a judge one day, but that turned into the other dimension when I moved in to high school.

Having a chance to do a variety of different things in high school - poetry, drama, debating and plunging into Science activities - made me realize that the dream that I once had was false.

When I was doing Grade 9, I really hated poetry or anything that was written in the form of a novel with no picture, or something rather gloomy. This attitude of mine completely changed when a friend of mine from America, Jason Torreano, who was volunteering at Nathaniel Nyaluza High School, introduced me to poetry and creative writing, and that was the same year when I joined Upstart at its early stage. That was the time I started composing my own poems, attending some poetry workshops and shows.

I love Science, and I will definitely pursue a science-related course in tertiary. I am involved in different science activities. I started loving science when I was doing Grade 10 and I think science is one of the most important and necessary subjects that should be done, not by all learners of course, but it should be taken seriously, as it is by me.

One of the things that I think people don't know about me is that I am a very God-fearing person, and I value my beliefs. I live by the quotation by Napoleon Hill that says "Success through a positive mental attitude". In everything I do, I always have a positive mental attitude and I'm always optimistic, even when the conditions are ghastly but I continue doing what I'm determined to do by that attitude.

I really value friendship, and I am very close to my friends; I share everything with them because they inspire me. They are optimists. Some are older than me, some are at my age and some others are younger than me. I associate myself not with the bad company, but rather the opposite of that. We all have a lot in common and we share the same vision of doing more, learning more and becoming more so that we can be future leaders.

I am not giving myself a credit but I am undoubtedly one of the most intelligent, generous and inspirational citizens of South Africa. I embody the spirit of the country: vibrant, communal, full of potential, and determined.

Querulous African Snake

I have travelled every path of the road,
every corner of the street,
my meandering ways, sun burning,
winds blowing,
rain falling,
until my skin get acquainted with those conditions.

I curse this vibrating
dhaking and vibing African soil
that obliges me to take its narrow
filthy paths
leaving me moulting
dying of shedding
and ultimately leaving
me wandering
After that I only possess vague sight
and languid motion

These giants think I'm not tall
I just crawl
fall, that's all
I can do

It's my innate proclivity to spit
yank you off the tree
while enjoying your
lush and luscious fruits

I have endured
all the pain and agony
that this filthy
world has carried for me

I am tired
I don't owe you anything -
let me live in my own world

Now can I
rest in peace?

Hlalani, my Dwelling, my Domicile

Hlalani, my dwelling, my domicile

this is how I view you

your ever dusty monotonous gravel roads

your comic houses engulfed by tall trees

originated from Mount Zion yet full of wicked deeds

You'll never get tranquillity in this village

neighbours always swear at each other

fighting fiercely when intoxicated

small children so reluctant to set off to school

no promising expectation, no unity, no amity

just calamity

When it's dusk and you enter the first lane of my village

you'll see earliest thugs glancing at your possessions

with frightening facial expressions

then an apprehensive sentiment that takes its toll

Starvation is the middle name of Hlalani

when you pass by my village during the day

you'll perceive some attractive *Equus asinus* with lean structures

and *Canis familiaris* seeking food in all quarters

due to humungous starvation

Hlanani, my dwelling, my domicile
you have never given me the love
that any typical child deserved
but proclaiming the truth
doesn't say I complain
I am successful
and I have vanquished
those ghastly circumstances

I have acquired endurance, fortitude and charity

I thank you Hlanani
for giving me an opportunity to reside in you
and now I have an attitude
of gratitude



Athenkosi Office

Hello! My name is Athenkosi Office. I was born near King William's Town and I am 19 years old.

I am the young up-and-coming talent who soon will be exposed to the media. I define myself as the boy who is not afraid to create and compose something and make a name for himself to the reality of the world. I am passionate about dancing and writing poetry. What is so interesting about me is that I find my own way to connect the dance to poetry and express them in my own way. Furthermore, I would like to share with you something about my love of poetry and how it all started.

Mostly I am a boy who grew up in very hard and challenging times. So many things have happened to me and I had to face them on my own. I find this very challenging in my life. I have been through lots of difficult things, like losing my mother and people who are very close to me, so for me to deal with the pain I start to write it down in a poetic way and try to find and compose a dance out of it.

Poetry and dancing are the only ways I find easy to express my feelings, thoughts and views about something. Most of my poems, as you will see, are deeply emotional poems and they are truly from experience, meaning things that I have come across in my life.

I started to share my poetry when I decided to join Upstart in 2009. I am one of the Upstart founder members and I have had such great time in Upstart since then. When I joined Upstart people started to know and recognise me as a poet and some were surprised when I told them everything I write is from experience. They never thought some things like that would happen to me because I look happy every day and they never see me suffering. And that's true because I write everything down in a poetic way and by doing that I am being held inside my heart, so I would say poetry to me is like a medicine for the pain that I am going through.

I am also a dancer for the youth company from Rhodes University and I have been there for two years. Dancing and poetry are my life and my passion and they make me very patriotic and confident. No amount of glitter, of gold or precious diamond stones or silver, can take away my love of poetry and dance.

I am the African boy

I am the boy whose
culture is African
The world contains only me,
no other Africa
has been before.

No one can view
and value things as I do
I have been created in my own way
I have a hungry brain
that needs to be fed
by African people.

I am confident, mature
and handsome
I am like the natural resource
as African boy
I am wonderfully made,
the African boy.

I am the boy whose
future is on the right track
I respect, love,
ignore, avoid, pretend
and I hate when I have to.

I wink, smile and greet
I cry, I fear, but still
I am the African boy.

Athen
Office

She was and she is no longer

She was the golden egg
from the golden woman,
her smile would make you cry
but she was and she is no longer

When she was talking
you wished she would not stop
until you fell asleep.
The world contains only her,
no other her has been before.

She was a river
where you can get water,
for the source of your joy,
a comfortable heart to cry on
but she was, and she is no longer.

A woman with a dark, soft skin,
beautiful legs as if they
were a doll's legs,
a loving and caring woman
but she is no longer.

No one can replace her -
she was created
in her own way,
a perfect God creation,
but she is no longer.

Letter to Africans

Under the dusty slums
we stand.

Crying against liberation
we suffer and breathe death,
killing all men, all races
with selfishness.

They never give us a room to grow,
calling us an inferior race, but black
was a gift to classify all those
that were oppressed.

They collected one another
for freedom purposes
to strive and fight back.

Let us applaud them for
sacrificing their lives.
Some are dead, but spiritually
they are among us,
speaking for freedom and truth,
and some are still alive but strengthless.
Why, South Africa, why?

Let us look back
and rectify the wrongs of the past,
my Africa, my home,
Africa, soul home of joy.
Look back, Africans -
my challenge to you is to take Africa back
and that depends on you and me.

We can make the difference.



Nosizwe Qhude

I am Nosizwe Qhude. I live in Hlalani Location with my mom and my three siblings and I am doing Grade 11 at Nathaniel Nyaluza High School.

When I grow up I want to be a pharmacist. I hope that will come true.

I like myself very much and there are certain things that I love about me. First of all I try to be a friendly and humble person with a great attitude. I don't let everything or anything get me down, because I am not giving up easily. In other words I am a great go-getter.

I take interest in other people's views and opinions about matters. I am a person whom you can trust to confide in with anything that bothers you but I am not afraid to speak up when I am not clear about something.

Did I mention how cute I am? Well, I'm an attractive woman, but I don't fool myself: I do take no for an answer. There's really a lot I can say about myself, but above all confidence is the greatest strength which each and every one has to have about themselves in everything that they do - which I think I have in me.

Well, what can I say? That's me for you!

Nosi
zwe
Qhude

Heart Breaker

You never know what you have
until you lose it
and once you lose it
you can never get it back.

My heart was taken by you, broken by you,
and now it's in pieces because of you.

Loving you was like falling down
cos in the end I left hurt, scared,
and now I have the memory of it.
You're the one who broke my heart
and yet I'm still in love with you
and I don't know why.

A million words would not bring it back, I know;
letting you go was the craziest thing
but now I have made a choice
to finally let you go because
I can't stand the pain.

I'm crying today
not because I miss you
or want you but because I realise
that I'm going to be all right
without you.

Far from done

Going for a song,
a life that's gone wrong:

I don't need it anymore,
it's become such a bore.

Nothing ever goes right,
just an uphill fight,

I can't face another day
with things not going my way.

Surely it can't be fair
that I see problems everywhere?

So I'm throwing in the towel
because this life's just been foul.

Goodbye everyone,
this life and I are done.

"Wait!" shouts life. "Before you take me with you,

just allow me one chance
to prove we deserve a second glance.

Look a little closer and you're sure to see
all the deep things deep down in me!

I have so much to offer -
all I need is time to prove that together
we can do just fine.

Focus on the good in me
and it's a fact you'll soon see

that the good outweighs the bad
and I'm actually the best deal you've ever had.

You and I are far from done
whilst we can still have so much fun!"



Claudia Sheriff

I am Claudia Sherriff and I am 17 years old. I come all the way from Sierra Leone, which is in the west of Africa. Sierra Leone is my home, it is where I was born. In 2007 I came to South Africa to visit my mother for the holidays. As I liked it here, I decided to stay. So now I am in South Africa with my mother, uncles and brother.

I am still in High School, doing Grade 11. When I am finished with High School I would like to attend University, and study Pharmacy. I believe that it is my passion but if any opportunity comes my way then I will go for it.

When it comes to my personality, I think that I am very playful, someone who always likes to tell jokes. I am very caring and always sympathise with people when they have problems. I am a happy person so anywhere I am there must be peace and happiness.

I do not like to get my hands dirty or involve myself in any bad things. I am carefree, stylish and I'm also a prankster. People, I think, love me. I am always wearing a smile on my face and I am a very humble person. People sometimes say that I am arrogant but I don't really believe that.

This is pretty much how I would describe myself. But if I ask people what they think of me, then they will probably have much more to say.

Claudia Sheriff

I Am a Loved Child

yes! I'm the one
who was conceived
on that winter night
one of those days with wind
blowing from left to right
in each and every hole it penetrates

I'm a loved child
yes! I'm the one
I was planned
yes! I'm the one
I don't back down
from any challenge

I concentrate and set my base
then nothing will never hold me back
I am a loved child

Why me, oh, why me?

You have been abused

Your hair is messy

Dress stained with blood

You can barely walk

You are lost

and nowhere to be found

You can barely see

Your nose is broken

by the beast that abused you

You are bruised from head to toe

You are confused and have no idea

on what to do

You have been crying for weeks and months

Your heart aches and you want revenge

The trust you once had is all gone

It's very hard to look at yourself in the mirror

You are disgusted by yourself

You always have nightmares and flashbacks

You are a teenager, only 15,

and you are scared for your own life

The self-confidence you once had is all gone

People see you
and they think you have healed
But when you look at yourself
all you see is pain, bruises, blood and tears

You want your life back the way it was
but you are constantly thinking of your past
and you are the victim

Can the beast look people in the eye
and say he is not guilty?



Mawande Tyatya

I am Mawande Tyatya, an 18-year-old, fun-loving, active young man who enjoys playing games and meeting new people. I am energetic and I got that habit from Drama at school. I like socialising with people from around the world.

Writing poetry these days is all I ever do because I can turn something from nothing into something that is useful.

I like hanging out with my friends, watching movies and chilling at the park. I also enjoy listening to Rap music, Gospel and a bit of R&B. I sing at my church (Apostolic Faith Mission) and am in the senior choir. My goal is to finish my Grade 12 and study in Rhodes University for a career as a Psychologist because I want to help people who are suffering mentally, physically and emotionally.

I like Upstart because it has taught me everything I know presently and has opened up many doors for me. I'm grateful for that and because I am now exposed to various expectations globally.

I hate Mathematics - that's why I am doing Maths literacy. My other dislikes include disappointments and reading alone, as well as selfish and greedy people who only think about themselves.

Remembrance

The mischievous smiles
The luxurious laughs
The wiggles, the giggles
Oh! what good times
I had

The yells and screams
The celebrations
The collaborations
The *mmms* and the *aaahs*
Oh! what good times
I had

The splish, the splash
The ups the downs
The indoors, the outdoors
Then exhaustion taking its toll
Oh! what good times
I had

Hair

Black like me, beautiful
and shiny - yes, I am indeed.

I cannot speak, in case
you have not noticed,
but I do appreciate
people looking at my potential.

Sometimes I grow to be very big
and sometimes I become very small,
especially to those who shave me off.

I am unique, loyal, decent
and handsome -

especially those curly
straight-up hairs of mine.



Starnley Simba Wyson

My name is Starnley Simba Wyson. I am a 17 year old poet living in Grahamstown with my mother, father and younger brother.

I like to read poems and my favourite poet is Harry Owen. I would like to be famous like him one day, that is my wish. But in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ my wish will come true because with the Lord everything is possible.

I am a cool guy; my friends always say that I have cool nicknames because of my doings. They call me Swagger-Boy, Mr Nice Guy or King. Because of my name, Simba, I am the Lion King.

My favourite music is hip-hop because I am a member of Cash Money, a music group. Lil Wayne is my boss. When it comes to sport I am unstoppable in soccer. My favourite position is Number 6. I enjoy playing video games and a day without playing a video game is like a day without sunshine to me. I go crazy, wild and sometimes grumpy.

All of my friends have girlfriends, including me. I always give advice to my friends about relationships. Sometimes I think about making them pay for my advice. That's where I am cool to them.

I am a serious guy when it comes to education. I am doing seven subjects at school: Maths, Life Sciences, Physical Science, Geography, English, Economics and Life Orientation. When I finish my education I would like to be an aircraft engineer and a poet.

The Past Always Comes Back

Do good today,
good comes tomorrow:
the past always comes back

Do bad today,
bad comes tomorrow:
you reap what you sow

The past is the foundation
for the future:
you can forget it
but it never forgets you

What you do today
will come tomorrow:
the past comes with good or bad

If bad
the past hunts you
holds you down
drugs you down:
it makes you weak
and ineffectual

The past comes
for revenge

or reward

The Tried and the Tested

When a child is born,
the parents hope for the best,
even resort to wishful thinking:

this child shall be a poet, a doctor, a pilot.

No one speculates
that the child shall be a thief
or a prostitute.

Children are the tried
and the tested,
the elite boys and girls,
the hands always stretching
towards the dream.

Let us invite a sangoma
to perform rituals,
so that we can study hard,
or maybe study under sea,
electric blanket,
or in a liquor store.
Or is it all about motivation?

For one writer said:
If you motivate a fool
all you will have
is a motivated fool.

HIV: You Shall Die

HIV you shall die

You may infect all of us
but you will kill the body
not the soul

Then we shall live eternally
you will be no more

Soon our best men and women
brothers and sisters
will become victims -
but
you can not kill me!

Though some have called you
the killer disease
uncured and dreadful,
we shall not perish

Die you shall, wicked HIV



Mziyanda Yawa

My name is Mziyanda Yawa and I was born on 15 January 1993. I was born and raised here in Grahamstown. I live with both my parents and we are a family of seven.

I started my lower grade at Samuel Ntsiko and went to Archie Mbolekwa and now I am at Nathaniel Nyaluza.

I joined Upstart two years ago and I attend meetings and interview people. Last year I joined the poetry group and we were taught to write poems and how to perform them.

I am so glad to be part of this group because the poetry words come from my heart. In 2010 I performed my poetry at Spiritfest which was part of the National Arts Festival. I was very nervous but it was fun and I will try my best to publish my own book.

I need to thank Upstart for this opportunity and Mr Harry Owen for everything. I will carry on writing poems for the rest of my life.

Mziy
anda
Yawa

Stone

I'm beautiful like humans
but I don't have a mouth to talk

I shine like stars
am hard like a diamond

on top I look like a crocodile
or dinosaur skin

I look like I'm wet
but am not!

people can see me like something to eat
I shine like a disco light

if I was sour I would call myself salt
but I don't
I smell fresh

I am brown, dark brown, white, black, grey -
I don't know what colour I am ...
do you know what colour I am?

I am beautiful as you

no body has life more than me

no body can break me

I build houses, offices, everything

I don't have hands to work.

but I love myself

Amara
Amara

This is my city

first come and first serve
right to left there's a lot of joy

peace and love
it is where you find it

lack of jobs
but lots of money

high buildings
small people

cars are busy
like school children

girls and boys
playing with toys

long nose
short nose
smell one thing

in township
people are busy like bees

joy and happiness

it is number one

urban areas

lots of villages

mud houses

are beautiful like flowers

less people

but lots of animals

cows sheep and goats

chewing grass like gum

soft love and peace

that's grahamstown

peace



Nokuthula Yona

I'm Nokuthula Yona, doing Grade 12 at Nombulelo Senior Secondary School. I am 17 years of age, very shy, but I like meeting new people and making friends. I started writing when I was doing Grade 9 but then I never realised that I could write, I was only writing for me. I never wanted anyone to see what I was writing because I thought that would embarrass me.

I joined this group because I love poetry but I'm not a performer. I realised that I could write when I received my first gold award certificate for writing poems.

I hate people who like to judge others. My role model is Minenhle Dlamini. I look up to her because she is a young woman and a go-getter in life. The person who keeps me going all the time is my cousin's best friend, Unathi. She motivates me every time when things go wrong; she tells me not to lose hope. I am easily irritated.

I don't like dogs and cats, have a fear of very dark places and snakes and I hate gossipers, especially people who think that they are better than others. I dislike them because they do what they do but after that they don't know what tomorrow brings them.

My motto in life is 'never let anyone get you down but do what you do best because no one does it better than you'. When I finish Grade 12, I would like to study Journalism and Media Studies at the UJ (University of Johannesburg). One thing that hurts me the most is to see someone who is so passionate about something falling apart or losing hope because he/she cannot find help for what they are passionate about.

When I'm not at school or in the poetry group I like to watch TV, read, write poems or hang out with my girls. My favourite colour is pink.

The only thing that I would like to tell youth is to believe in yourself because nothing is impossible - because 'impossible' says 'I'm possible' itself!

My Loss

The pain of losing you
was something I was not
ready to face. Life without
your presence is miserable.

You played many roles in my life
but in all that you were
always there for me.
I loved you, *Gogo*, but never told you so.

You forgave me every single time
because you were a parent
and you loved me. You taught me
how to live and you left

without a warning.

Why Do I Hate Him?

It's not that I hate him,
it's just that I don't like the way
he acts towards me.

He pretended to be an honest Mr Right,
but he is a pathetic liar.

He thinks that he's fooling
but I've seen him so many times with girls.

Sometimes I ask myself

What did I do wrong?

Then I answer myself, Nothing

but he doesn't know what he wants.

Guys sometimes think they are better than girls,
that they should date as many girls
as they want. But they must think twice,
think about how much risk they put their lives in,
believing that what they are is cool
when it is not.

Playing Mr Right is not cool:

guys can be charming and fooling

at the same time but

the right they think they have

is the one that will bring them diseases.

A Mother's Work

She carried me for nine months,
has given me love since the day
I was born and she still does,
even now.

She teaches me things I didn't know.
I wonder when her task will be complete.
Remember the first day of school?
She helps me with my homework,
encourages and supports me.

When things go wrong she tells me not
to lose hope. One day I asked her
when her task would be complete
and she said to me:

A mother's work is never done.

