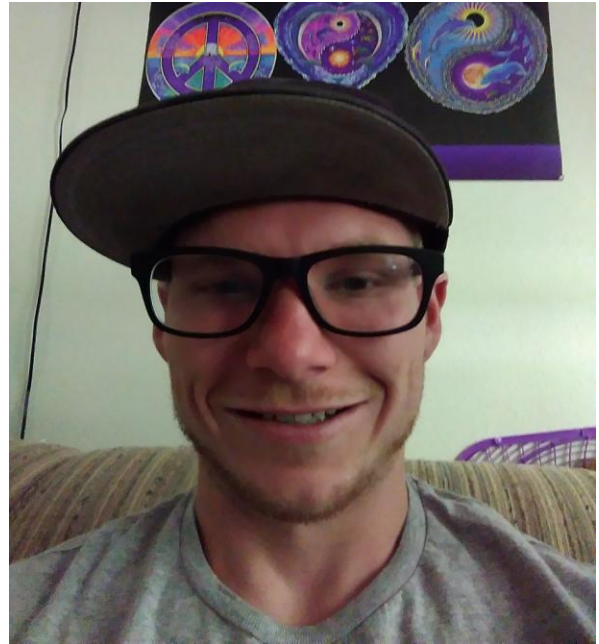


Featured Writer Micheal Read

Micheal Read, 23, participated in Write Around Portland workshops during his years living in incarceration at MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility. Since his release in May 2017, he has lived and worked in Salem, Oregon. He's a history buff and enjoys visiting museums and walking around town to learn about local history.



*Excerpt from **The Heart of the Lotus***
by Micheal Read

As I sit in full concentration on my breath, my heart thunders beneath the surface, my own mantra, my own drum. Telling me it's okay, you'll be fine, these wounds will heal.

Uncovering the man I want to be.

Discovering the addict I was is not the real me. Knowing my full journey is the tale of the Rose that grew from the concrete.

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Interview with Featured Writer Micheal Read

Interviewed by Elisabeth Geier, Write Around Portland volunteer facilitator.

How did you first hear about Write Around Portland?

Kathleen Fullerton from the Hope Partnership at MacLaren goes around and talks to groups. One of the guys I was locked up with said, "Hey, it's really cool, you should check it out," so I went and checked it out, and turns out it *was* a really cool writing group!

What was your first Write Around Portland workshop like?

My first one I was really nervous, didn't know what to think. I wasn't really much of a writer then. I was writing here and there, but I wasn't a very exquisite writer. I wouldn't sit down and express everything, I was kind of shy and shut off from the group. As my experience continued, I became more sociable and accepting of feedback from others.

You said you were nervous and shy at the start of your first workshop. What changed that made you open up and feel more comfortable?

About four or five weeks in, I just had that comfortableness. People were sharing more deep and emotional writing, and that gave me that confirmation that it was an okay place to express myself in writing.

How did it feel to get feedback about your writing?

I was always open to giving and getting feedback and being available to hear and understand what people were saying about my writing. People could offer me different things. It's really interesting to hear other people's perspectives on my writing.

When I first started writing it was really dark and emotional deep stuff, and some of the guys said, "You should talk about more of your interests and your hobbies," and so I started doing that, and talking about the outdoors and how it feels to be outside, and I kind of learned how to let go of the past and move towards the future.

How did writing and sharing your work with the group affect your relationship with other guys at MaLaren?

It gave me a close-knit group of people to talk to. I had four or five friends I stayed with throughout my incarceration and we would constantly be doing workshops together.

How did it feel to have your writing published in Write Around Portland anthologies?

It was a feeling of accomplishment because there's things I've done in my life that nobody in my family has done. I've run a marathon. I have five or six [pieces] published in anthologies. I graduated high school. My family doesn't know what to do with me sometimes.

For *Hear Each Drop*, [Write Around Portland] actually took one of the lines out of one of the pieces I published. I wrote about the Oregon wilderness, listening to the rain fall, and that became the title of the book. I was really excited because I was the first one at MaLaren to have that. I've been MaLaren's poster child for Write Around Portland.

How did participating in Write Around Portland workshops affect your experience at MaLaren?

They saw a lot of improvement from me. A lot of improvement with my behavior and overall ability to do things. There was days where I'd be in trouble and be sitting in a group or in time out. And then I start writing, and I start going to these groups, and I would spend less time on time out and more time as an honorable guy on the unit that the staff can go to, like, "Hey, can you talk to this guy 'cause he's struggling." I was that guy that people could come to.

You're in the unique position among Write Around Portland participants of having participated in a lot of workshops! Many people don't repeat the workshop, or they repeat it once and that's it. What do you think you gained from participating in so many workshops?

It was a bit of an experience because towards the end of my last workshop I was able to be a leader for the guys who were new like I was once. I was like, you know, "This is life, this is writing, this is how you can be in groups." As new or younger guys would come into the facility I would take them into Write Around Portland and show them a place where they could be themselves and they didn't have to put on a front in front of four hundred other inmates. It gave me that leadership skill.

What would you tell someone who's considering taking a Write Around Portland workshop but isn't sure if it's for them?

I would tell them, honestly, "Hey man, just go deep, just go for it. Just do it because it's gonna change your life. It's gonna be one of the better experiences you'll have in your life, it will show you a way to do something you've never done before and teach you something you've never learned to do before."

Is there anything else, any information or message that you'd like to share with Write Around Portland supporters?

The only message I'd like to get out is just to let the world know that when it comes to writing it's the best way to express yourself and you really get to know who you are as a person when you pick up that pen and paper. That pen and paper can become your best friend. It's very therapeutic.

What is your writing life like now that you're out of MaLaren?

Writing is literally almost every day for me. Before I go to bed I sit down and I try to write something. Majority of the time I'm trying to write letters to my girlfriend or journal. It's a lot easier to express myself through writing than it is through talking. I have a journal that I carry around in my backpack and write about my travels. When me and my girlfriend get an apartment I'm going to give it to her.

I've found a very supportive person in my life and she's become my rock and my everything. And she loves to write too. She actually wrote me a love letter and it was kind of a poetic love letter thing. And I actually—there's a bench here in town and it's got the name "Ralph" on it and it's for this guy named Ralph Baron and I was sitting there waiting for my girlfriend this morning and I ended up writing a little bit. I called it "Falling and Feeling." I guess you could say it's a book that I'm working on. [Reading an excerpt]: "Here I am, chilling with Ralph, enjoying the busy city scene waiting for you...her name is Savannah, and this is the story of us."