

A SprinNG Anthology

WHY I WRITE

An overlapping compilation of
conscience, consciousness, faith,
belief, disturbances, relief, truth,
reasons, grief, religion, questions
and answers, loss, and wealth.

Contributors:

SELECT MENTEES OF THE 2019 FELLOWSHIP COHORT



WHY I WRITE

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Table of Content

2019 SprinNG Fellowship Cohort - Mentees	6
2019 SprinNG Fellowship Cohort - Mentors.....	7
Awoyemi Precious Paul	8
Rewriting the Gbolohun by Iyanu Adebisi.....	9
I Don Kill Pastor Uzor by Opeyemika Aremu	12
Between The Wor(L)D And Me by Nureni Ibrahim	14
Why I Write by Adewusi David	17
I Am Not My Father's Son – Using Words to Baptize a Bastard Child by Mbanefo Chibuike	18
Adenuga Adepeju	20
Why I Write by Oluwagbemileke Takuro	21
Why I Write by Okunlola Omolola	22
Why I Write by Theophilus Sokuma.....	24
Why I Write by Titilope Odeyinka	26
Kalu Onyinyechi Peculiar	27
About SprinNG	29

2019 SprinNG Fellowship Cohort - Mentees

Of the 30 mentees accepted into the programme, here are 25 writers who completed the fellowship's requirement.

1. Adebayo Emmanuel Toluwanimi
2. Adepeju Adenuga
3. Adewusi G. David
4. Adeyemo Oluwatosin Maryam
5. Adunbi Funmilayo Matilda
6. Afefarati Yejide Olamide
7. Aremu Emmanuel Opeyimika
8. Blessing Enejo
9. Dawodu Oluwaseyifunmi
10. Ebukun G. Ogunyemi
11. Favour N. Uchechukwu
12. Gimbiya E. Galadima
13. Ibrahim Nureni
14. Ifemide Omolawal
15. Iyanu Adebiyi
16. Josiah Akpan
17. Mbanefo Chibuike
18. Nnanyelugo Michelle
19. Odemakin Taiwo Hassan
20. Okunlola Omolola
21. Olawale Temitope
22. Oluwagbemileke Takuro
23. Precious-Paul Awoyemi
24. Titilope Odeyinka
25. Woli Bukola Kafilah

2019 SprinNG Fellowship Cohort - Mentors

1. Aanu J. Ojo
2. Abdulsalam A. Dante
3. Abimbola M. Mosobalaje
4. Adedayo Agarau
5. Emmanuel Jolayemi
6. Goodness O. Ayoola
7. Iyanu Adebisi
8. Jide Badmus
9. Kanyinsola Olorunnisola
10. Kehinde Badiru
11. Kizito Okoruwu
12. Kolade O. David
13. Lawretta Egba
14. Marie Chidi
15. Michael I. Oladele
16. Morawo Ayoyinka
17. Ogunfowodu Olufemi M.
18. Ogunyemi Ebukun
19. Olawale Ibiyemi
20. Oyindamola Shoola
21. Patience Lawal
22. Reves
23. Sarah Aluko
24. Servio Gbadamosi
25. Seun Lari-Williams
26. Tola Ijalusi
27. Tolu Akinyemi
28. Tomi Adesina
29. Uduak E. Akpan

Why I Write – A SprinNG Anthology

*The quote “Readers are Leaders”
was always on my Principal’s lips at
every morning’s assembly. However,
I believe that writers are true
leaders because they create what
the readers read.*

*I divulge experiences, exposures to
different cultures, and explorations
to life, then offer it to my readers,
taking them along the journey.*

Awoyemi Precious Paul

Awoyemi Precious-Paul is a dynamic writer whose works have engaged in numerous writing styles. He writes exploratively, including adventurous experiences filled with imageries that allow his readers to partake in the narratives of his works.

Precious-Paul draws inspiration to write from observing the lives of people, their cultural setting, and past experiences to make meaning of critical societal issues. He enjoys reading and writing; otherwise, he would be playing scrabble or listening to Travis Greene songs.

Rewriting the Gbolohun by Iyanu Adebisi

Gbolohun is a Yoruba term for sentence, also incantation. We have all been sentenced to death.

“... six men came from the direction of the Upper Gate, which faces north, every man with his battle-ax in his hand; and one man among them was clothed in linen, with a writer’s ink bottle at his side....” – Ezekiel 9:2

I write because the man who held the death-letter, boasting about all the people he would kill if only he could find the lost half of the letter, is the first man in my ancestry – Erukwu, the slave of death. I have his genes and the second half of the death-letter.

In every poem I write, I re-write gbolohun, from death to life, and life to death. I am an offspring of the one who received the handwriting of god and smashed it with indignation. So, I write to rewrite the battered word of god, re-tell the true story of him who formed me, and repair the broken metaphor of divinity.

I am writing to etch god’s name in small letters, feel his/her/its hand hover over my own trembling hands, and dare to create a new earth, new heaven, and also a new hell.

I write to rewrite the death sentence, as a witness to a life observed, as minister at the temple of justice, as an advocate of the victim, and as a victim. I write to point a finger at the guilty and have the other four-point back at me, to implicate myself, to mirror the mess and the journey of becoming.

Why I Write – A Spring Anthology

In this aching world, I gather blood, consult tears, interrogate fear, communicate lament, acknowledge the mystery of what is lost and what is found with poetry as medicine, as a mirror, as ascendancy to the summit of the self. I strip naked and dance uninhibited to the song of my soul. I embrace the redeeming truth and prophecy of light.

I am always surrounded by weeping women. Women whose weeping enshrine in the way they laugh, dress, and edit selfies. The way they keep sorrows tucked in their marrows until there is a quaking, the slow cortege of wrinkling, bones crackling under. These women live like a burial procession, and everyone ignores their grief. I pay homage to their grief.

When I write, I am holding space for my mother's emotions. All the things she refused to mourn, tears she gulped instead of shedding. All the dead bodies she had to re-womb or risk shame. I am a testament to my mother's trauma, my grandmother's anger, and the injustice my great grandmother suffered. I write to help my mother weep.

And my dying brothers in the face of war; those who behead themselves because of a headache, those who mistake themselves for the mental illness, call their sickness a sin, a curse, those whose warrior-souls have brought them face to face with the impulse to die. I am writing to tell them, "we are all dying. It is how the star of life twinkles."

I write to inch towards a divine resurrection, but resurrection implies first, a death, and daily, I am crucified. In writing, I may create a dazzling miracle and be forced to wear a crown that does not fit, I may

Why I Write – A SprinNG Anthology

offend the rules and rulers, and be flogged with an iron whip to Calvary, but I write still, for I believe in the resurrection. I believe in the desert's ocean. I believe in a smile and a tear, in the sound of my heart beating, in the hot breath barreling out of my nostrils. I believe in the truth.

I am a slave of death, but I gain the right to live when I am writing.

Iyanu Adebiyi is a Nigerian writer, performer, and poet. She stepped into the Performance Poetry scene on 1st October 2016 with a piece titled *Up Nepa*. In 2017, Iyanu Adebiyi was awarded for her spoken-word video *I am Something* by the American Embassy, via the U.S Mission Nigeria's Strength in Diversity Competition.

As a part of the SevHage Publishers' Chapbook Series, a compilation of her poems and short story, *The Road Leads Me Home*, was published in 2017. In Abuja, Iyanu Adebiyi has performed in open mic, formal and informal events, including; The Korean Cultural Centre Poetry Feast, Agogo Liveroom, Enterprise, and Innovation Summit, World Poetry Day for The Arts and Civics Table Nigeria, and more.

She has also been featured on local media, including *Voice of Nigeria* and *Daily Trust* Newspaper. Her work can be found on literary journal websites like *Brittle Paper*, *African Writer*, and social media (@iyanuadebiyi).

Called to the Nigerian Bar, Adebiyi currently works as a corporate lawyer in Abuja. She writes to inspire, educate, and advocate for change with a new perspective on society's pressing challenges.

I Don Kill Pastor Uzor by Opeyemika Aremu

I write because I want to kill as many as possible before death comes for me.

One Sunday morning, I stared as Pastor Uzor took his seat after presenting his opinion on why we should pay our tithes. Everyone nodded and applauded as he wiped his sweaty face. I stood. I started saying the reasons why I feel Pastor Uzor could be wrong. Mr. Kay left. Mummy Bisi winked at me, the Yoruba style of "sit down you this boy, what do you think you know?" When my Dad looked at me with contempt, I sat and wrote.

Every day, I meet a Pastor Uzor. Today, at the newspaper stand where we argue about football, tomorrow, in the Twitter thread where we discuss feminism in Nigeria. He shouts his views to the world and never cares about my diverging views.

The moment I stand up in an attempt to deliberate with him to see reason, his fans attack me. Or better still, they ignore me. I can never be right if Pastor Uzor is already, and I don't agree with him.

Friends and family come as my Dad ready to fight if my stance is different. They will shoot with their Ak-47 mouths about how stupid I sound.

Pastor Uzor is happy when they silence me. At least, they will listen to him without interruptions. That is why I try to kill him. Also, I want to unshackle my Dad. Pastor Uzor need not push hard with his opinion; all he has to do is appeal to the emotions of our Sunday

Why I Write – A SprinNG Anthology

school class members. Sometimes it is so easy he doesn't sweat.

I must silence Pastor Uzor if my voice is ever going to be heard. He must die if my opinion will ever make sense to his zombies. I take out my book to write because I want to murder Pastor Uzor.

On paper, Pastor Uzor is dead. Or at least he is silenced.

I write because I am a murderer whose gun is ink and whose bullets are my opinions that Pastor Uzor drowns out. I will shoot as long as a Pastor Uzor still walks the face of Planet Earth.

Aremu Emmanuel Opeyimika is a medical student at the University of Ibadan, a short story writer and committed reader. He believes that literature contributes to effecting changes for progress in any society. He is passionate about the fight against rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence.

Opeyimika discovered writing trying to compete with a former school classmate-turned blogger. He has since evolved to a standpoint where he sees writing as a necessary tool to share his perspectives. Because he is committed to learning and developing his craft, he participated in the third cohort of the SprinNG Writing Fellowship, where he received 6-weeks of creative writing mentorship. He looks forward to utilizing opportunities that allow him to explore his passion for healthcare and literature.

Between The Wor(L)D And Me by Nureni Ibrahim

That night was the first time I felt obliged to document my thoughts, experiences, and sorrows in writing.

January 24, 2009, was the last time Mariam dotted my mind. That night was memorable – the last time I clutched Mariam’s bosom and savored her clitoris.

That same night, I also saw blood gushing out, like several burst veins, as innocents offered pounds of flesh to a massacre. That night, Mariam closed her alluring brown eyes and never opened them again. That night, I prayed to Allah, not to see the colours of violence – not again, not even in my wildest dream.

I only wanted to find a place for sorrows and tears in my heart; but, some emotions became so headstrong, they register in my writing. Mariam and I had just lived out the very actions I described as “*ashawo*” in one of my erotic poems. I toured her skin and found a spot where shivering ceased. I touched her breasts and anointed the V- shape that served the nucleus to her body. When we both got tired of the journey to Libido Island, we talked poetry – why people considered writers as the architects of reality.

“Do those your silly erotic works depict reality too?” she asked, offering her lips for a shallow kiss.

We padded across the arena with fingers entwined. We strolled, like newly-weds, talking about the art of writing, how Africans loved erotic temperament in

Why I Write – A Spring Anthology

poetry they would not discuss in public. A sudden noise caught our attention. She looked everywhere to trace it.

“This is unusual. What is happening here?” She asked, fretting.

“I think it is a riot!”

“Riot?” I echoed, my eyes darting frantically, searching for an escape.

Within a few minutes, some men armed with broken bottles, sticks, and guns barged in. Before I could form my thoughts, Mariam was pinned to the floor, naked as I last felt her, being raped to death in turns. Her blood spilled and stained the floor like ink let loose by my angry fingers dripping on paper.

I fought to save her, and when I couldn’t, I expected them to murder me.

That night, Mariam’s death and the irksomeness of my society bored holes in me, which I filled with ink to write about rape, violence, war, and insecurity.

Nureni Ibrahim is a lifetime student, writer, book reviewer, and haiku enthusiast. He lives and writes from somewhere in Nigeria and has published works in *The Mamba Journal of Africa Haiku Network*, *Shamrock Haiku Journal*, *Under the Bashi*, *Heron’s Nest*, and elsewhere. As a spoken-word artist, he has performed at *Footprints of David Arts Festival*, *Ahmadu Bello University Day of Literature*, *Black History Month Festival*,

Why I Write – A SprinNG Anthology

Purple Awareness Show, to mention but a few. He is a 2017 scholar of the Nigeria Higher Education Foundation, New York, and a 2018 Fellow of Wawa Book Review Young Literary Critics.

Ibrahim has won several poetry prizes, including the 2017 Calabar Poetry Festival Prize and the Wax Art Poetry Prize. You will find him in villages, schools, halls, and any literary garden.

Why I Write by Adewusi David

When I read Shakespeare's *Shall I Compare Thee to A Summer's Day*, I am forced to think of the lover he painfully praises. I think of the futility of death, and how the subject in the poem beats it with so little effort. It empowers me.

I write for the nights that come with no mercy. The nights that whisper in your ears. The ones that say “jump off the cliff” and remind you of being less worthy.

On these nights, I write to fight for sanity. To at least be able to argue football when the boys come. Or to be sane enough to remember, I love my girlfriend. It is a battle of words. Darkness has little power to torment my soul because every word I pen injects the elixir of life into my bloodstream.

There are voices in my head. Sometimes they sing, and they want the lyrics shared with the world, so I write in prose or verse, just as they dictate. I am continually asking for silence, but do I want it?

Adewusi G. David is a young writer whose works have appeared on *Kalahari Review*, *Praxis Magazine*, *The Naked Convos*, *Tush Stories*, and others. He currently works at *Praxis Magazine* as an Editorial Intern. He is a one-time invitee to the United Nations Economic and Social Council's Youth Forum for his contributions to Youth empowerment and training. He is an alumnus of the SprinNG Writing Fellowship – cohort three.

I Am Not My Father's Son – Using Words to Baptize a Bastard Child by Mbanefo Chibuiké

I would always drink grief that comes with the confusion of not knowing what I want to become out of writing and think them on paper, as signs of healing from being my father's son.

My father wrote many poems he never cared to publish - he is a picture of a bird swallowing his voice. In the pursuit of the meaning of who I am, as a prediction of my becoming, I wonder how a man tears the cold nights apart, only to hide the day under his fingernails. I have watched my father hold darkness in his palms better than he is at living the day of his truth, my truth, and his past, which is a becoming I do not want to unravel into.

I began to write so that this darkness does not find a home in my skin. I read books to disarm me from my father, although leaving me broken like a glass cup or empty like an abandoned building and opening my body for healing. Writing has given me this purpose but left me meaningless.

There are still times that I am yet to feel like a writer because a lot of my works would not make sense to me. Writing to me means meaning – sometimes I think: maybe boys like me forgot their tongues in their father's palms, and although I purge my soul with words, there are days when everything tastes like darkness.

In every daybreak, when I think of things the night has swallowed, I remember my voice and the memories of

Why I Write – A SprinNG Anthology

my father. I think perhaps, he too, despite having the world in his palms through words, was lost in confusion for meaning. Unlike him, the day burns the lining of my palms and wants to show me the path to find a home.

With or without meaning, I will still bare myself and wash my confusion into the river of words while breaking my mouth side by side to birth stories and poems. I do not know what I want to become out of writing. However, I know that in this pursuit, I feel like a bastard child whose feet will never fill his father's shoes. I am baptizing my father's fate off my body.

Mbanefo Chibuiké is a native storyteller and poet who graduated from the Federal University of Technology Owerri with First Class Honours. Most of his works center on darkness, sexuality, and death. His story *Desolate Room* which explored sickle cell anemia in the prehistoric Nigerian family was published in *Dwars Magazine of African and Mainstream Literature* Issue 6. His short story titled *Burying Memories* recently was longlisted in the 2018 K & L Prize for African Literature.

To heal from these things he cannot name, he began to live in poems. His poem *Eleven Forms of Death* was shortlisted for the 2018 Creative Freelance Writerz Biannual Literary Award. Same year, he appeared in multiple shortlists such as the Christopher Okigbo Poetry Prize, Eriata Oribhabor Poetry Prize, Poets in Nigeria Food Poetry Contest, Great African Poets Award, Samson Abanni Poetry Contest for his poems *Man in the wind*, *Stripping a river its name*, *A Lagos of burnt boys*, *My father's burial through his body* and *Be home to our memories*.

Chibuiké hopes for the blessings of writing stories and poems that dispossess and malign people. Some of his other works have appeared in *Kalahari Review*, *Brittle Paper*, *OkadaBooks*, *Creative Freelance Writerz* magazines, *Poets in Nigeria Journals*, and other online platforms.

Why I Write – A SprinNG Anthology

As a heavy downpour persists, I glance from the window seat of a yellow bus, and there is an inescapable urge to put my thoughts into writing.

The passenger to my right now rests on my shoulder; he probably strained his neck to complete my story. I shift my shoulders to jog him back to reality as his stench announce my surroundings. The bus driver smiles at me using the rear-view mirror, assuming my overtly nosy neighbor and I are a couple. God forbid, I entangled with a bucktooth, bean head, idiot.

In time, the stories I must tell, the stories I seek to tell, and the ones I have told, rage. And until they are out, I do not rest.

Adenuga Adepeju

Adepeju Adenuga is a content writer driven to create unique, useful, and compelling web content. She is passionate about brand storytelling and as a result, worked with several corporate brands across industries. She holds a Master's degree in English (Literature) from the University of Lagos and has earlier bagged a Bachelor's degree in English and Literary Studies. She was a fellow of the SprinNG Writing Fellowship – Cohort three and is currently a student member of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations.

When Adepeju is not writing fictional stories, poems, and drawing up content strategy, you will find her reading, dancing, and traveling.

Why I Write by Oluwagbemileke Takuro

I am talkative; however, I avoid speaking about my personal life so much that my friends often say they don't know anything about me. "You know what you need to know," I would say to them. There is something about revealing that I find sacred. So, when faced with issues or questions that require me to go into private lands, I use words as my shield, and my talkative expertise to deflect.

The short answer to why I write is "because I enjoy it." However, the longer, detailed, and possibly more authentic one sits on the very foundation of my social orientation. I write because it is one way I let go and connect with my true self. I believe that my spoken words would not carry as much life as they would when written. I write because even when I cannot trust humanity or my mouth with my secrets, I am confident that my journals would not betray me. They would not interrupt me as people would when I attempt to speak of myself.

Oluwagbemileke Takuro is a writer with a focus on narrative essays, short stories, and poetry. Currently, an undergraduate student, she also is an avid reader who relates to the themes of love, loss, friendship, health, gender studies, and religion. As a writer, her interests revolve around the same topics to enforce change and document realities that would otherwise be lost in the rubble.

Some of her favorite reads are books by Karen Kingsbury, articles on Medium by Oreoluwa Fakorede, and narrative essays on Catapult and Brittle Paper. Besides these, she enjoys babysitting, listening to music, and volunteering in community service projects.

Why I Write by Okunlola Omolola

Recently, I applied for a job as a curator, and was asked “what does it mean to be you?” The application that would have taken about 30 minutes to submit ended up consuming two hours because I had a little existential crisis. I had never had to describe what it felt like to be me.

Before then, I avoided questions that required me to think about who I am. There are many stories, but anytime I try to express them in words, it feels like I’m looking for something concrete, and when I think I’ve found it, it dissolves like sugar in water, and I am left with jumbled thoughts.

I decided to treat that question like a poetry prompt because I needed an answer. I would later go on to say,

“Who I am is ever-changing, always evolving, and never static. I could tell you what it means to be a writer, but I’ll tell you that I am a chronic over-thinker, with a head full of stories and poems I’m scared I’ll never write.”

I was accepted for the position.

I write to find answers to questions of existence that I would naturally avoid in fear of finding the truth about myself. I write in fear that I would find the truth, and it would transform right in my palm into something that I don’t recognize. Sometimes, I write to find peace or because it encourages me to reach inside myself and dig out treasures that I would never have guessed were there or because it enables me to be honest with

Why I Write – A SprinNG Anthology

myself, and my reasons vary with each piece. Sometimes, my questions have no words, so there's an inkling of confusion, a modicum of chaos and it comes out split and spluttered because it is not fully formed yet.

In the words of Sarah Kay, "I write poems when I have something I'm trying to figure out. It really is a problem-solving process for me." I rejoice in the face of finding answers.

Okunlola Omolola is an avid reader and a Nigerian writer of poetry and fiction born in Kwara State. She is passionate about mental health and sexual abuse topics and sees writing as a problem-solving experience; a way for reality to shift to the perfect state. She uses her art of writing to affect lives positively, advocate women's rights, and break the stigmas surrounding mental health in Nigeria, aiming to provide new perspectives on rising social issues. Okunlola loves sharwama and pink. She is currently studying at Babcock University for a B.Sc. in Mass Communication.

Why I Write by Theophilus Sokuma

I grew up with a body, without language to form and exist in.

As a child, I was timid and feeble, my bones were too fragile to engage in manly activities, and my soul was osteoporised. I hid in books for shelter, took their spine, and attached them to my back, slowly building a persona. In books, I felt seen. In words, I formed and existed.

Mahmoud Darwish, in one of his poems, said I am my language. In that same way, I say I am my language, and I write to preserve myself. No land on earth bears me. Only my words bear me. When lumps gather in my throat, I open my mouth to write, and language gathers onto the page.

Writing is my way of acting; of being; of existing outside of this body that doesn't make me feel at home – this body that I haven't claimed as mine in a way that language has owned me.

“Give me proof of the existence of God.” A male classmate pronounced in an argument, and my tongue locked with words in my mouth. Days after, hidden behind a phone's keypad, I breathed and spoke, saying – “Hey God exists, and I'll give you proof.” There was safety for me to live through words. To break part of myself, my flesh became a word, and the word became light, and the darkness could not comprehend it.

The first poem I wrote was about the existence of God, more so for me than for anyone; to speak to my bones

Why I Write – A SprinNG Anthology

and tell them that God exists, and he loves me even though I don't feel it. I write to empty the stream of questions in my mind that always trickled down to God, *why did you make me this way?* I write to stop existence and query – to ask if *this. is. what. God. wanted. to. happen.*

We are bodies of stories, and I write to tell tales stuck in our bodies. To tell the tales that raises the hair on my body. I write to make sense of the world. To undress the world with language and dissect it with words. To stitch it back and sometimes to leave it as dead if it deserved to die.

Theophilus Sokuma is a Psychology major at the University of Lagos. He engages in poetry, short stories, and essay writing. His works cover the themes of mental health, masculinity, childhood trauma, religion, nostalgia about home, and childhood he wishes he could remain in.

Why I Write by Titilope Odeyinka

I write because of how powerful it makes me feel; I am the god of my story and can decide that my sky is brown and the trees have blue barks.

I write because it frees me. I write because (I think) I am good at it.

I write because I have a story to tell, and I have realized that no one can ever say it the way I will.

I write because stories are floating in my head, refusing to leave until I birth them on the pages, the characters urging me, nearly to the point of madness or what do you call rushing out of the bathroom in the middle of a shower, just to pen down a story?

I write because even I am curious to know how the story ends, and can only discover this by writing the story.

Titilope Odeyinka is currently pursuing a major in Psychology at a Nigerian University. She is a lover of storytelling, food, and art.

Why I Write – A SprinNG Anthology

“My first motive to write was out of sheer egoism — the desire to be talked about. I wrote. I showed few friends but none embraced it the way I sought. I wanted more than – ‘it’s cool.’ I wanted to feel a limp in their hearts, and see expressions of glow in their faces.

The beautiful thing was I began to learn, unlearn and relearn why I should write. I began to write for me.”

Kalu Onyinyechi Peculiar

Kalu Onyinyechi Peculiar is a lobbyist-turned-writer passionate about using storytelling for business content-creation. She’s a recent graduate of History and International Relations.

Thanks for reading.

About SprinNG

SprinNG is a literary society for the Promotion, Revitalization, and Improvement of New Nigerian Generations in Writing and Literature.

It was cofounded in 2016 by Kanyinsola Olorunnisola and Oyindamola Shoola, and is managed by a team.

www.SprinNG.org



This anthology is a compilation of writings by select mentees of the June 2019 SprinNG fellowship.

The SprinNG Fellowship is a free intensive **5 weeks online mentorship programme** for developing writers with great potential and willingness to learn. It is strictly for writers between the ages of 18-25 who reside in Nigeria and have not published a book (eBook/hardcopy).

In January 2018, 9 writers were selected to be mentees as the programme's first cohort, and in August 2018, 20 writers were accepted into the fellowship.

This anthology is a representative of the June 2019 cohort with writings by 10 of the 30 writers accepted into the programme's third cohort, 25 of which completed the programme requirements.

Visit www.SprinNG.org/fellowship to learn more. Applications open January of every year.