

2018

Interfaith Collection

Vol. 1



About this project

The interfaith writing project is a communal spiritual storybook initiative, created in order to build bridges and facilitate appreciative understanding between people of differing identities, backgrounds and journeys.

These pieces are written by Hamline students.

Credits:

Writers

Sophie Warrick

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Yared

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Design

Executive

Steph Holland

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Featured Stories

Stories from the Cohort!



Sophie Warrick
Caregiver
Sherina Dyrma
Andrew Banker

Us four, along with Steph Holland, are the first wave of the interfaith writing cohort. We invested in a 3 week group process with each other. Experiencing the personal story-writing process as a micro-community deepened and widened our understanding of spiritual/ideological journeying and storytelling. We hope that the gift/opportunity/blessing of sharing your own journey with others is one that you find as well, perhaps even spurred by our stories.

Sophie Warrick

[think]"said".act.

[community]

"trinity"

.serve.

I came from a remarkably homogeneous community, where most of my friends and family held similar beliefs. I was raised with Christian based ideals, was baptized, confirmed, took communion, and went to church with my mom regularly.

[partition]

"spiritual"

.surroundings.

My dad didn't normally come to church with my mom and I. The reason? My dad holds a different belief than we do; he would say he was simply spiritual. There were two distinct belief systems in my multi-faith family, that weren't intentionally unaddressed.

[singular]

"tunnel vision"

.constantly closed off.

When I left home, I became incredibly self reflective, and began to come to terms with the fact that there were missing parts to my spirituality. There was phenomenon that I was unable to explain, aspects of my religion that I disagreed with, and members of my own faith that I didn't want to associate myself with. I learned that I inherently had no faith. When people would ask about my family or my hometown, I would respond with the term "tunnel vision".

[modulating mind]

“authority”

.new influence.

Suddenly, my surroundings were different. I met new people.

People that were vastly different than I. People that I didn't exactly know how to interact with, but people I welcomed into my life with an open mind, and a willingness to learn about these new figures around me. I entered my first place of worship that wasn't christian-based. I had conversations with peers and professors. I was suddenly leaving the tunnel. I began to have an open mind, actively trying to shape my own perspective of other religions and spiritual beliefs.

[doubt]

“none”

.learning.

I am in a constant state of buffering. I feel as though my brain is constantly being refreshed. With every new refreshed page, new influences both foreign and attractive ideas are presented to me. With multitudes of opinions and advice that are unwarranted from others, I often become disengaged with my own beliefs.

[thinking]

“cherry picking problem”

.deciding.

I have taken into account various perspectives from others. I enjoy learning. I thrive off of finding different ways to accept or contemplate the same problem. I jump at the chance to have conversations with people. In doing so, I have developed a roadblock, in which I can't identify with one singular faith. I see the

good and the bad in a wide set of beliefs, and am struggling to find my place.

[mayhem]

“fine”

.processing.

I am in a constant state of confusion. My mind is running around trying to decide between right and wrong. I have decided that I will strive to not be ignorant. I have found comfort in others' discomfort in my lack of knowledge of my own spiritual journey. I'm constantly contemplating new identities and new communities to be apart of, and am currently at a standstill in which box I check when asked “What is your religion?”

[and that's ok]

“and that's ok”

.and that's ok.

Caregiver

Hope

When you see the sunset,

Colors fill your heart

Red cheers with love

Blue calms and soothes

Yellow brightens the smile

When I see the sunset

The darkness controlled this art

Black carries the emptiness

Red fills with anger

Brown shares the color of my skin

When you see the sunset,

Cheerful memories pass in your thoughts

When you played in tall, green grass

Holding hands with the one you loved

When I see the sunset,

Thoughts of death is what I sought

Knowing that I will be alone

When I watched the smiles from afar

When you see the sunset,

You see the beauty and innocence,

That's what you expect

When I see the sunset,

I see the disappointment and emptiness

That's my reality

I believed in the sunset and its magical powers
The sunset touched every soul that crossed its rays
The light sparkled on their soft skin
The light warmed their spirit

But when I stepped into light, open and pure
That light slowly dimmed and never returned

Now I live in the darkness
With all of its monsters hunting me
While in this sunken hole,
I wish I could only see...

The sunset

Sherina Dyrma

Questions of Faith

My religious experiences is a lot like a pop quiz.

My father asks me: why do I have faith?

There must be someone to blame for your faith.

Isn't it all just a scheme to make people compliant?

He says you don't need a God in order to do good.

You should be rational.

My mother asks me why I pray five times a day:

Wouldn't once be enough?

Your religion should be spiritual: carry it in your heart.

She tells me there is no need for me to put my head to the ground,

Or cover my hair with a scarf.

Your religion should be spiritual.

My religious experience is a lot like a pop quiz, but

All the questions are wrongs,

All the answers

Unwanted.

Andrew Banker

Years

My journey over these three years that I have been in college cannot be assumed as a neat evolution, where I progressively get better, smarter, or stronger as time goes on. A lot of it is fumbling back and forth between understandings, new understandings, and misunderstandings. What I am proud of is that I seek, I knock. And doors do open. I call it growing. I call it seasons. I call it patience. I call it urgency. I call it paradox. I don't know what to call it.

[Self Reflections]

First Year:

Wow, I am blind to so much.

Second Year:

How could people be so blind to
such important things?

Third Year:

Wow, I am still blind to so much.

[Self Expectations]

First Year:

I can't pretend to understand someone else's pain. The uniqueness and separateness of their pain is of utmost importance to recognize.

Second Year:

I just gotta shut up. I don't know anything.
I don't come from anything. I know my friends respect me, but I also know my life experiences disqualify me from knowing anything of their suffering.

Third Year:

I actually have to speak up and participate. Otherwise, who am I passively enlisting to do all the heavy lifting? The people already experiencing the trauma? Damn.

Show up, Andrew.

[Theology]

First Year:

My faith inspires me to look beyond myself--to God, and to others. It can't just be about what makes me ok, but has to prompt me to act in compassion and care for others.

Second Year:

I think I am the worst Christian. Aren't I supposed to want people to believe what I believe? Yet, I find myself just in awe of the wisdom that people walk with. The way they make meaning of life is not small, not trivial.

Third Year:

I am too small to contain all the majesty of life and wisdom and God in my one brain and body. That's can't be my purpose or responsibility. So what is my responsibility?

[Race and the Church]

First Year:

“Hey [friend who is black], why do you think so few Black people go to churches with white people?”

Second Year:

“I’m so frustrated that these white Christian institutions just aren’t willing to acknowledge the reality of racialization in the church. White Christian church, you expect people of color to come swooning to your door to find community?

Did your church march? Did your church acknowledge the murder of Philando Castile? How could they know that you are a place that values their personhood? Saying stuff like that would be risky, right? Don’t want to get political, right?”

Third Year:

“I am so bad at navigating conversations about race with other white folks. I make them upset and defensive so quickly. How do I learn the skill of having these conversations with other white folks without exhausting those relationships? Without further alienating them from the joy of justice? And how did I find this joy? Only by a gracious process. So do I have a moral high ground? As if I am the “good white guy”? No. But connection like I’ve tasted is joy. Connection to others’ suffering, connection to others’ dignity. Connection is gospel. Of course I want you to taste it.

[Education Major]

First Year:

Money isn't the only thing valuable in people's lives. The people I label as living in (economic) poverty have a wealth of other things so easily overlooked: family, culture, spirituality, resistance.

Second Year:

Goes into the hall to talk with a 6th grade student (Black) who was just sent out by the teacher: "It doesn't matter, I'm just gonna end up in jail with all the other black boys anyways"

Third Year:

Laying under a tree crying after hearing a panel of people who have experienced the School to Prison pipeline talk about their experiences.

Prays: "God, may the drum beat of justice never stop pounding in my heart.
Please, please..."

[Lyrics I Listened To]

First Year:

So I act like I have a right to sing
about the things that aren't right
From the comfort of my couch
I pretend I've done nothing wrong
As I hoard my money closely,
bury coins for all my groceries
And I haven't met my neighbors yet,
but I promise I will someday soon
(Garden, The Collection)

Second Year:

Oh they got it but they don't get it
There's not one generation of believers
that has figured out the marriage between
proper doctrine and action
Don't pedestal these people
Your precious Puritan's partners purchased people
Why would you quote them?
(Precious Puritans, Propaganda)

Third Year:

Yeah, what's protest to the law?
Should I pray or should I riot?
Do I want peace, or do I want
power so I can try it?
Who's gonna give the truth
when these church moms retire?
When censorship gets you fired
and nobody gets inspired
I don't care what you look like,
black, white or magenta
I don't care where you come from,
Africa or placenta
We all desperate and broken,
given the same dilemma
Do I serve God, or do I
make him fit my agenda?
(Forward 1619, Sho Baraka)

[God is...]

First Year:

Love incarnated in many ways.

Second Year:

I AM.

(God refuses to be fit into the
constructs of naming and language,
because she is holy)

Third Year:

A third world, black, queer woman.

[Scripture]

First Year:

(1 John 4:12)

No one has ever seen God; but if we love
one another, God lives in us and his love
is made complete in us.

Second Year:

(Isaiah 58: 6-7)

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice and untie the
cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke? Is it not to share your
food with the hungry and to provide the poor
wanderer with shelter--when you see the
naked, to clothe them, and not turn away
from your own flesh and blood?

Third Year:

(Micah 6:8)

He has showed you, O humanity, what is
good. And what does the Lord require of
you? To act justly, to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.

[Questions]

First Year:

Do I have anything to give?

Second Year:

Am I a good man?

Third Year:

Am I even made for myself at all?

Further Contributions

Yared

Logan Whitlow

Anonymous

Isabel Miller

Megan Brennan

Sophie Warrick

Caregiver

Sherina Dyrma

These students each contributed pieces to further enrich the scope and diversity of the collection.

Yared

Patience. الصبر

I have lived a life of constant change.
Left a country at the age of nine to join another.
Changed the language that I spoke
Changed the way I behaved and
Eventually converted people whom I grew up with
Into a selection of memories.

My faith remained the same,
It was the one thing that served as
An anchor to the place that I had left.

The anchor which united me with the
Grandmother which will no longer be there
On the day I may return.

The faith which acted as a bridge
between two cultures as a statement of
similarity for those who wanted division.

Yet, as I listened to parables, poems, and reason
A curiosity sparked within me, a curiosity that
Lead to a shift of spirit and faith.

This shift was first embodied by fear
Fear that I was abandoning a part of my past
A fear of losing myself.

Today, I find comfort in what I have found
I am reassured by the smiles and laughs which
Have come with this path.

Today, a compassionate and merciful light has flooded my heart.
A love which has unified
All that which others have questioned.

There remains a state of respect and love for the
faith which held my hand with tenderness
through my childhood and lead me to the Love of today.

I have been blessed
To have found the Love and Light
As I prostrate on the prayer mat.

I must remember to be Patient,
To enjoy the polishing of my Heart
And being grateful for the blessings
Found in the curves and pronunciation of his name,

الله

Logan Whitlow

(1)

Due to their life experiences with religion, my parents never forced any religion onto me or my sister. But even with that said, growing up we started attending church, but ended up no longer attending around the later elementary school years. Around that point, I just fell out of any religious identity, and became more or less agnostic.

That remained the same until 7th grade, where I started going to youth groups and getting back into Christianity. I tried getting into it as much as I can, but as I was trying that, I found myself having multiple difficulties. I couldn't find anything to latch/hold onto firmly, and if I thought I found something, it would crumble away soon after. In my later high school years, I realized that no matter how hard I was trying, I always ended up feeling hollow and unfulfilled by Christianity. And by the time I got to my first year at Hamline, I slipped back into that more agnostic state of identity.

It was during that first semester when the first domino fell that ultimately led to my new religious identity as a Neo-druid. In Bush Library, there was a book in their new book section titled, "Controversial New Religions: Vol. 2". I thought that it'd be an interesting read (which it certainly was) and checked it out. I became so enamored learning about all these historically recent religious movements and spiritual identities, particularly the section where it was talking about the neo-pagan movements. Not long after I read that book, I found myself wanting to learn more about those sort of things, so I'd find myself looking at stuff like Wikipedia to look at stuff regarding magical traditions, definitions, etc. As I was researching all the neo-pagan stuff, I found myself actually

finding truly spiritual meanings in those traditions, and in particular, I found myself being drawn to the neo-druid spirituality and practices. Flash forward over a year later: at the start of spring semester within my second year an old friend from high school posted on Facebook about a job interview at a store that specialized in books, materials, and services for neo-pagans. At that point, with everything setup for me, I decided to convert to neo-druidism.

(2)

Back when I was in middle school, I became friends with a girl who was Muslim. I had no idea back then that Islam even existed, as despite my rather agnostic identity and the open-minded mentality of my parents towards religion, I grew up in surroundings that were mostly if not entirely Christian so I thought that was the only religion in the world. I never asked nor thought about anything regarding her spirituality as I didn't think of it at all at that point in my life. She was nice, fun, just an awesome person overall, and she was my friend, which is all that mattered to me. By the time I was in high school, I knew about the conflicts in the middle east to a much deeper extent than I have before. I understood the deeper themes within such conflict, particularly how news outlets were focusing on the religious aspects of the conflicts. When it came to my understanding of Islam at that point in my life, all that I had knowledge of then was the fact that it was some christian-like religion but not quite, and whatever the news was saying about it, which was mostly negative stuff.

During a US history class I had with that friend of mine who was Muslim, we were doing some group activity that had as drawing aspects of life for an American family in the 1800s or something like that. But she was drawing the pictures, and when she was trying to draw a Bible for the religious picture, and she laughed saying she didn't know what a Bible looked like, as she wasn't a Christian.

That sparked my confusion and curiosity, and I asked her what her religion was. When she told me that she was a Muslim, I was surprised to say the least. The only stuff I was told about Muslims came from those news stories, and I was dumbfounded to learn that my friend was in that religion, as I could no longer believe that these ideas and stories about Islam being something bad were true, I have a good friend who is completely opposite of those things. And since I understood the Christian v. Islam mentality within these stories, this experience ended up being one of the many complications I had maintaining a Christian identity, which I ultimately gave up on.

Anonymous:

I do not believe in organized religion and I believe we all are interconnected. Through organized religion, I feel it is based in institutions that perpetuate different forms of oppression and covers up people who choose to do bad things, so I have chosen, at this time in my life, not to consider myself as religious. I am spiritual though. My spirituality comes from within. It helps me to feel connected to people, society and nature. It is also something that has gotten me through multiple deaths in my family, the loss of identities and the hurt I see in the world. While my belief that there is a higher being is only one of the elements that connects all of us, it has given me a greater sense of purpose and community. It has given me more empathy and a greater understanding of people and our world. I am still working on understanding where I am at with religion and spirituality, but I am okay with not knowing. I am not convinced that anyone ever fully figures everything out and that gives me a sense of peace for where I am at.

Isabel Miller

Hands, Touching

What is the grace of God?

Where do we find it?

How do we know it?

Can Grace be given without our knowing it?

When we love each other,

I think I see grace

And I know that it doesn't end

Like I do.

Catholic Women

Women are the warriors of Christ.

Women have survived on Love.

Women have lived, breathed, known Christ

long before,

long after,

He came.

Women war where battles are not easily seen.

We build Sacred Communities,

cement together Holy Families,

knit a Living Body within ourselves.

In My Church,

Women are Warriors.

Faith and Shipwrecks

A teacher said to me
"We cannot talk about Faith
without talking about Shipwrecks"

And I knew it was true,
down to my toenails,
because I can still feel the awful crunch-
the barrels of my safety
giving way.

The water coming in
sea salt burning my eyes.

It hurts
it hurts
it hurts.

Anger in my heart.
Fear on my tongue.
The ship has burned,
all the debris gone,
but here I am-
hopelessly lost.

My faith is a shipwreck
and somehow I know
even when I can't see it
that we cannot talk about Faith
without talking about Shipwrecks.

Even if there is no lifeboat coming
(which there is)
even if there is no storm calming to a bright beautiful day
(at some point it must)
even if I drown here
(my corpse would float gently)

There will still be healing
There will still be Faith
There will still be God
There will still be Shipwrecks.

Megan Brennan

I believe in statistical mechanics. I believe that, though the overall behavior of a large system of billions of particles is easy to predict, the individual behavior of a single particle in that system is nearly impossible to predict. I believe that, though the fate of the world is predetermined, the fate of individuals is uncertain and even irrelevant. I believe that things are destined to happen, but that who ends up doing them is not important. I do not believe that anyone is destined for greatness, only that certain great things are destined to happen regardless of who does them.

This is why I do not believe my college education matters. This is why I am disillusioned with college life: because they tell us to go far, to strive for greatness, when it makes no difference. I am not going to discover something that no one else could possibly discover. I will not think of an idea that no one else ever could. And why should I force myself to push towards something great, when I could be happy with something small?

Sophie Warrick

I was raised Lutheran. My mom's side of the family was your stereotypical German-Lutheran family. My Grandfather was a pastor, my Grandmother is the head of the quilting group at her church, and my mom and her brothers always would stress the importance of acknowledging one's faith. My dad was raised catholic, and as he grew older he simply became more spiritual.

While growing up, I would ask why my dad would get to sleep in when we had to go to church, and my mom would always just brush it off and never answer my question. I grew to accept this answer, and began to never question it or ask my dad about it.

I was baptized when I was young, went to various Bible camps, a couple mission trips, and was confirmed when I was in 8th grade.

However, I have always questioned my faith. I've wondered why bad things happen to good people, why God has always been seen as a white male, why not all Christians are accepting of others, why there is such a wide multitude of faiths (which one is "right"?), and have wondered what happens after we die. When I asked my pastors about these different topics, I would always receive vague answers, which, in retrospect, was beneficial; it let me come to my own conclusions. However, I never truly felt like I had a correct answer. So, I decided to take an Intro to Religion Course in my first semester of college, and it was life changing. I learned so much about my own religion, as well as giving me a well-rounded, unbiased understanding of other world religions. In the midst of taking this class, I came out as bisexual to my best friend, and nobody else. This was a huge step for me, and couldn't be happier to share that with her.

My dad came to pick me up from college and drove me home, a long four-hour drive. While driving, I came out to him in probably the most awkward way possible, sobbing on the freeway with french fries in hand. He pulled over to tell me that everything was going to be ok, and he reminded me that he loved me. I told him that I was nervous to tell my mom, due to her deeply held Christian beliefs. He told me that she would love me very much, and that the only hard part would be to tell my extended family, who aren't known for being the most accepting people in the world.

We continued driving, and I was going on and on about how much I enjoyed my Intro to Religion course, and how I was so excited to learn about all of these different religions that I had never been exposed to before. As I was telling him all about the class, I mentioned the religions that I hadn't really known about like Hinduism, Paganism, Wicca, and Nones. Because we were both extremely exposed and I was feeling comfortable, I asked him to tell me more about his religious beliefs, because I truly didn't know where he was and was curious. He reminded me that he was raised catholic, and then told me that he was extremely interested in the Wicca belief systems. I was shocked, and had no idea. The rest of the drive home we just talked and talked about this new idea that was introduced to me. The fact that I had never known that my dad was interested in a belief that was different than my own was life shaking, and ever since I have looked at the world differently. I have always been hesitant about my religious beliefs, but recently I've questioned them more and more, and currently identify as a None. I think that religion is fluid, and am content with that concept.

Caregiver

Dark Trinity

Three is the magic number
Just like the holy trinity
But my trinity is dark
And feared by everybody

The Spirit
Driven by hope
Reaching for love
Open to possibility
But has fallen short by

Depression
Trapped in a hole
Stricken by the cold
Feared of failure
And continues to live inside

Me
Lost in all directions
Confused by thoughts
Empty but filled with what?

Me is just a puppet
Being dangled by Spirit and Depression
As they fight for control

The Holy Trinity
God, Son and Holy Spirit
Live in harmony
Miraculously changing the world
But I grow jealous of the Holy Trinity
Because my trinity is dark, cold and unimportant

Does the Holy Trinity struggle as much as my
darken trinity?

My Light Dims

“This little light of mine,
I’m going to let it shine,
Till Jesus comes”

The lyrics ringed in my small ears
As I wore my white dress and little pink shoes
I stood in front the the congregation
As we sang filled with religious hues

I was taught to always be the light
that God wanted me to be
But what if my light dimmed
Till no one can see me

My light dims
Over and under
But never fully out
It flickers and flickers and flickers
With every step I make
Each flash is like a knife
Sharper as it reaches the tip

I’m afraid of that light
And what it can do to me
Because I am told
it should never go out

Sherina Dyrma

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

I was named after my great-grandmother.
She used to recite the Quran every night.
My father distrusts all religious movements.
He is named after Albania's communist dictator,
The man that banned religion.
My grandmother still says the Bismillah
before she eats, sleeps or gets up,
My grandfather has never missed a Friday prayer
for as long as I can remember.
At ten years old, I used to say I was both Christian and Muslim,
Because I didn't know what either meant.

Ten years later, a Syrian friend in an American dorm room
is teaching me how to pray.
I can't pronounce Allahu Akbar correctly,
He gets frustrated.
I don't know how to tell him that I can't say the words out-loud,
Because they remind me of only one thing:
The blockbuster movie with the angry bearded men
and the dusty explosions.
I am standing in front of a prayer mat with my eyes shut.
I try to quiet my mind,
The image of fragmented street corners persists.

Ten years later, I am taking an Islam class.

It reminds me of my grandpa's rosary,

It reminds me of my grandma's warning words,

It reminds me of the minaret that looks over the church yard.

It reminds me of the friend I questioned so harshly,

Why would she revert to Islam? Who is forcing her to do it?

I ask my mother to tell me the story of my name-sake.

She tells me she was loved,

In her small village, everyone would come to her for advice,

She would recite the Quran for them,

She would pray to God for them,

She would feed them.

I am sitting in a dorm room,

My friend is telling me to close my eyes,

Imagine the name of God being written with light on your heart.

And I start to understand

Why my grandfather never misses a Friday prayer,

Why my friend chose to revert,

Why I need to pray.

I am standing in front of a prayer mat with my eyes shut,

I hear my great-grandmother reciting the Quran,

God's light runs through my heart,

I feel peace.



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