



Prison and Justice Writing Program
PEN America

2023 PEN America/L'Engle Rahman Prize for Mentorship Mentee Letter

Named for the 10-year written friendship of the late acclaimed author Madeleine L'Engle and scholar, writer, and former Black Party leader Ahmad Rahman, the PEN America/L'Engle Rahman Prize for Mentorship honors mentor/mentee pairs in PEN America's longstanding PEN Prison Writing Mentorship Program, which connects incarcerated writers with correspondence-based mentorship and other resources. Recipients of the award receive \$250.

The prize was generously endowed by L'Engle's family and memorializes L'Engle's participation as one of the program's very first mentors, along with Rahman's extraordinary journey from serving 21 years in prison—framed in an FBI sting of the Panthers—to a celebrated and beloved assistant professor of African and African-American History at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. The pair began writing in the early 1970s, establishing a rigorous working rapport that informed both of their works.

My Playwriter Mentors By Larry Stromberg

I've been blessed to have two mentors over the last six years in the PEN America Mentoring Program. Rose from Canada who is established teacher and playwright who mentored me with my play (I'm Here for You) which ended up winning third place in the drama category for the 2019 PEN America Prison Writing Contest and was published in the book (As I Hear the Rain, the 2019 PEN America Prison Writing Anthology) that is available for purchase on Amazon. My other amazing Mentor is Kate from New York City who is a global playwright, teacher and poet who has had her plays staged all around the world. Her fantastic theater knowledge has turned my short play (Running with the Devil) into a masterpiece that I'm forever grateful for.

These two great mentors that the PEN America Mentoring Program chose for me took the time through months of writing and editing through mail correspondence to make my plays into something that I'm truly proud to call my own. My goal in life now is to leave a good legacy with my written works. I don't want to be known for my crime that put me behind bars with a Death by Incarceration prison life sentence that I'm forever remorseful for. I hope I'm remembered mostly for my theatrical plays, screenplays, poems and essays. Well, that is my main goal. But, I'm not naive, my crime will always be connected to my name. But, I hope my written works will always be associated with my search for redemption. My mentors (Rose and Kate) through Pen America have been a huge part of for my search of redemption be helping me to strengthen my plays on the page for others around the world to read and hopefully experience on the stage someday.

Rose took the immense time with theatrical suggestions, punctuation and grammar to improve my play (I'm Here for you) into a dramatic piece of theater dealing with the aspects of remorse,

regret and sorrow that is genuine to a remorseful individual incarcerated reliving their past failures over and over again. It's the regretful rollercoaster madness of failure. I believe we all endure and relive past failures. It's just human nature. With Rose's professional guidance, she helped me to redraft (I'm Here for You) into an award winning play. Without Rose's expertise, that wonderful goal wouldn't have been achieved. An achievement I'm forever grateful for.

Kate's vast theater and educational experience suggested theatrical changes, punctuation and grammar corrections to tremendously improve (Running with the Devil) into a fast moving traumatic play dealing with the intense realities of imprisoned addiction behind the razor wire. I took every suggestion that Kate suggested to me seriously to make (Running with the Devil) into a memorable theater experience to me and the audiences that hopefully will be able to experience my play on the stage someday. I believe, Kate saw my vision and my end goal with my theatrical piece. We were on the same page of greatness to make (Running with the Devil) the best it could possibly be. Without Kate's vision and expertise that wouldn't have been possible. For that, I'm tremendously indebted to Kate.

Being granted two mentors (Rose and Kate) over the years in the PEN America Mentoring Program has made me a better writer and more importantly, a better human being. Both mentors saw the best in me. They believed in my work. They believed in me. They encouraged me to write on. That's exactly what I've been doing and will do whether I remain in prison till the day I pass on into the next life or if I'm given a second chance at mercy back into society someday. I will write on. I will follow PEN America's motto in the freedom to write. That's where my true healing and redemption dwells: in the writing. Thank you Rose and Kate for believing in me and my work. My gratitude is sincere.