

Horizons



A Poetry Showcase
Wednesday June 11, 2025
American Writers Museum



Chicago
Coalition to end
Homelessness



Horizons is a creative writing workshop program dedicated to helping participants find their creative voices through poetry, expressive writing, and storytelling. Horizons seeks to break down the barriers that often exist between people by bringing them together to explore each other's perspectives. Horizons is about empowerment—both for its writers and those experiencing their work.

Horizons offers creative writing classes twice a month at several transitional shelters and supportive living programs within the Chicagoland area.



Featuring the following poems:

"Unshaken, Unfolding, Unstoppable" by Jami Osowski	4
"Deck of Cards" by Kimberly Bailey	5
"Storms" by Wanda Cooper	6
"I Matter" Margaret Bingham	8
"A Father's Love" Taishi Neuman	8
"The Fire" by April Harris	9
"Unknown" by Carmen Brown	10
"You Came" by Carmen Brown	12
"Living Life Right" by Bianca Byrd	14
"Losing Yourself" by Marketta Sims	17
"Triggers" by Sonny Booker	18
"Love" by Yuri Rodriguez	20
"The World Silenced" by Shay Jones	20
"America's Poor" by Shay Jones	22

along with art from the students of Adler University

Unshaken, Unfolding, Unstoppable

by Jami Osowski

Today I share a piece of my soul with you.
In hopes that you will take care of it gently and embrace it.
You see I am homeless, and I don't say that lightly.
I am working on finding a home within myself.
where I am making space for all of me, the parts of me that will go to the moon
back for anyone.
I need you to invest in me and hear my words that people who are houseless affect
everything.
we see the shame in people's eyes when they see me, and they act like I have
disease
Those looks just give me hope because I know majority of people for a paycheck
away from being homeless
Sometimes you find the souls who have stood in my footprints, they hear me!
I look around and I see so many butterflies and it gives me hope because I see the
hope in their eyes.
So, stare if you must.
Whisper if you will.
But know this—
I carry hope like fire in my chest.
I've made it through storms you have never named.
And I am still here.
Unshaken. Unfolding. Unstoppable.



Deck of Cards

by Kimberly Bailey

When I was young, I saw women playing games with their lives- as a survivor of domestic violence I see the truth now- I will always be an advocate for people who have no voice – especially women who are experiencing domestic violence and those experiencing homelessness.

Hmm... where do I start?

First I would like to say this is coming from my heart.

Ever since I was young, I've seen people playing cards and to me it looked like fun.

To play the hand you was dealt no matter how good you felt about the cards.

When you had it made, but then you get mad because it's too many of one suit,

So you play the win hoping you have enough books in the end.

There's two books left, you throw out your card a Jack of hearts.

"Oh my!" it wins but it's still not the end.

Your last card is a spade, and you think "what was the last card played?"

Here we go! There is no more, you look at the score it's all tied up and all you're thinking is wish me luck !

Out goes their cards, man this is hard!

One is a club, the next a diamond.

Then you hear "oh my God come on, because they know you have won.

The last card to be played is the one that hasn't been laid and the only suit in your hand which happens to be a spade.

Finally, the game has come to an end, and you realize you "win!"

But that was just a game.

Ain't that a shame? That everything in life is the same "A deck of cards,"

you're in it win or lose –it's up to you which one you're going choose.

You're dealt a hand and you have no clue where your cards will land.

All you know is that you're in and you're going to try your best to win.

The first round you go down,

but there's still cards in your hand as you look at your footprints walking in the sand.

Walking on the hot beaches of this hard knock life.

Wondering if one day you will be a wife.

As I look at the sharp end of his knife.

When he tells me I have to play because it's a deck of card some might say...

I am a queen of hearts that had it so hard.

All because a king of clubs told me I would never be loved, why? I asked, "is it because everyone thinks I'm too fast and all the sins of my past?"

or is it because I'm a diamond in the rough stuck playing this game knowing that everyone is not the same.

Deck of Cards (continued)

I thought I had a king of hearts but later I found out that he was nothing but a joker.

Now I have no choice but to keep playing.

Hoping and praying that I get to see my kids grow up being that it's a sea of clubs. This is what I was afraid of. This deck of cards we call "life," in which I've always had to fight everywhere I went because they had the higher cars and wouldn't let me play in their yards.

They didn't like that I shine like a diamond even though my life was black like a spade.

Still, this was the game I had to play because of the life I led everyone wants me dead.

Laughing at my faults and constantly hitting brick walls.

Oh my God, really is this the game I have to play?

Forget it! I'm all in please believe me.

I plan to win. One day my king of hearts will find me that knows I've had it hard and makes me believe I won't be alone, in this deck of cards because he will know I've had a hard life and he will be my ace in the hole that will make me a wife.

Assuring me that I will never be cold because I will have his hand to hold

Just what I need a team player that will help me crush all my haters.

As I continue to play this game called life, where I've always had to fight with this screwed up deck of cards, I called my life.



Storms

by Wanda Cooper

Homelessness is like a thunderstorm—
high winds blowing,
lightning flashes,
I search for cover from the cold rain
that keeps washing me away.
Fake hope is a hailstorm.
It throws ICE as big as golf balls at my
face,
bruising my back, shattering my dreams
with promises never kept.
Lies behind my back
They say I'm headed to a beautiful place,
but that place never comes...it hasn't
come yet!
Favoritism is a tornado.
I think things will get better—
but they don't.
People turn on me because of the color
of my skin.
I'm caught spinning,
while they just stand there watching
as I turn and turn in this storm alone.
A dust storm is being labeled:
"dusty,"
"toxic,"
"lazy,"
"liar."
But who's strong enough to stand in this
storm with me?
Can they walk in my shoes?
Or are they here just tear me down- while
the dust clings to my face, my head, my
soul?
My mind is still in the storm.
It keeps slamming me against the walls.
High winds whip over my head as I walk
through streets that hold me back.
This storm has blown me away!

Is it the labels?
The whispers behind my back?
Or the thunder that won't let me
breathe?
This storm—this MONSTER of a storm
hasn't landed fully, but I feel it.
It's dropped me in a ditch of mud and
silence,
and I'm still searching for a way out.
Is the storm in my heart? Or in my mind?
Either way—it's a storm.
I cry out.
But no one pulls me from the storm.
They just let me die.
So, I close my mind and heart
to the pain of this storm.
But I've learned.
I've lived through a troubled
thunderstorm—
maybe not simple, maybe never safe.
And when they ask
HOW I survived,
HOW I overcame,
I will say: By the grace and mercy of God.
I did not do it alone.
God was always there,
opening doors and opening my mind.
He calmed the storm.
It was never about me—It was always
about God.

John 8:12

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."



"Calm after the storm" By Ashley For Wando

I Matter, and So Do You

by Margaret Bingham

CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS—DO YOU KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS? –I DO
It's when a person is homeless for more than a year – or like me—for many times,
for many years.

HOW DOES THIS KEEP HAPPENING TO ME?
I've had apartments, you see—
But the landlords never keep it safe and clean for me to live in.

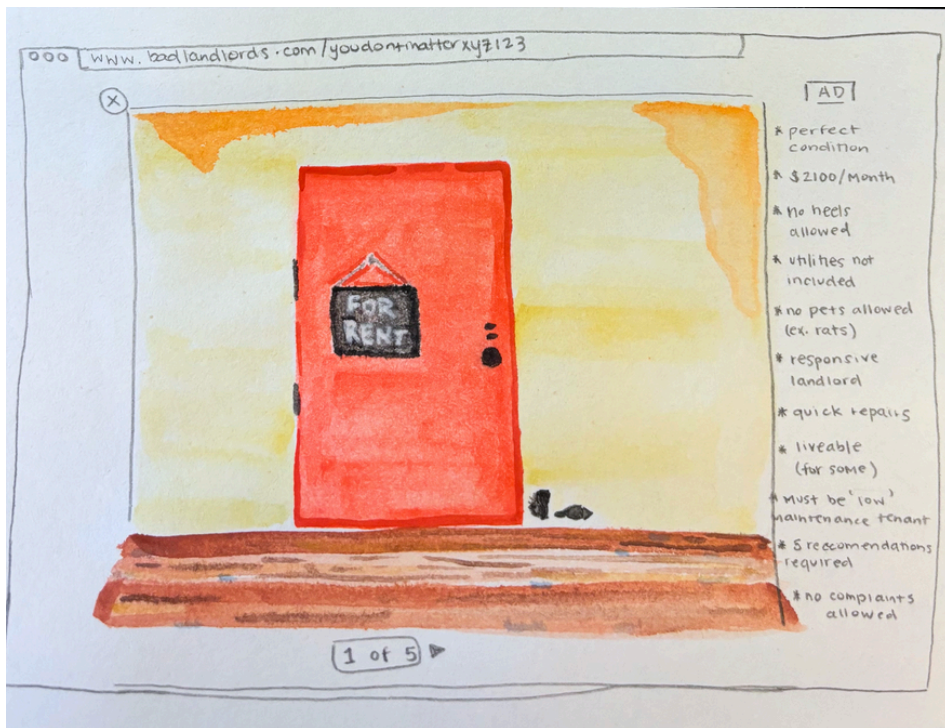
EVERYONE WANTS A FOREVER HOME—
We do not want to keep moving from door to door.

I WANT TO RENT FROM A PERSON WHO CARES—
If my floors are falling apart- FIX THEM!
Don't put wood putty in the many cracks and yell—
"Stop wearing heels, Ms. Bingham!"

I WANT TO RENT FROM A LANDLORD WHO KNOWS RIGHT FROM WRONG—
I've begged my landlord, but he ignores me,
"Fix leaks? Kill squeaks?"—he slams all doors, and he ignores.

LANDLORDS GET PAID: MY LANDLORD GETS HIS RENT—
CHA sends the rent—TWENTY-ONE HUNDRED a month,
He acts like it's a problem; He acts like it's a crime.
This is not charity— this is your job!

DO NOT IGNORE ME— BECAUSE I MATTER!!
My landlord does not see my scars,
He doesn't know my truth,
or what I've been through.
But he will never erase me.
I'm here, and I will fight for change.
Because I Matter, and So Do You
With CCH helping me, I'll shout LOUD so everyone can hear—
I'm Margaret Bingham.
I matter.
And so, do you



A Father's Love

by Taishi Neuman

A father's love is heaven sent,
The love that is always meant,
A love that is unconditional that a child would understand
A love that makes you want to always hold your father's hand
My father's love was unique
My father's love will never be extincted.
A father's love does not mean he has to be blood,
A father's love just has to be true love
My father was a dad of many,
My father gave us love of plenty,
The hero my dad was to me
Would make any child want to see,
the greatest of father's love.
He gave me his heart
No questions asked

Dad, I think of you from day-to-day
Not having the words, I want to say,
The love you gave me made me feel so complete
The world doesn't know how you was so unique
You lived a life that you only know how
The love of God that you want everyone to know about.
The peace of joy you gave this world will always live in me.
Dad, I missed the phone calls we used to have,
The talks about how your grandbabies have grown,
the way you talked about your Morgan learning to drive,
Your old lady Mahayli learning to strive
Your big boy being around all these girls
You and mom called her Kali thinking she ran the world.
I MISS YOU DAD!
My father's love is what I will always remember,
God gave him to me for a while.
But his work here was complete and now he looks over me.

So you see- I learned a lot from my father.
To be a good parent – a good friend a great advocate to fight for the right of those
who have no voice.

The Fire I Carry

by April Harris

They told me to shrink—
to hush my truth,
to fold my pain into silence,
to carry my wounds like shame.
But I was not born to vanish.
I was born to set the sky on fire—
to torch every lie they spread about me,
to light the way for those still walking behind me.
Coming from luxury and privileges
I ended up in a world of cracked pavement and broken systems,
from places where women like me
are written off, locked up, or buried beneath labels.
But I refused to lie down and be quiet.
I rose—again and again—and again!

I am not the weak individual that they try to slap a label on.
I am a powerful woman – who knows her rights!
AND I WILL BE HEARD!

My voice is carved from the truth—raw and unshakable.
My heart is both a shield and a drum of war.
I carry the stories they tried to silence—
stories of people who look like me,
who were born to wear crowns,
but were taught to shrink,
conditioned to believe we were unworthy of thrones
built from our own brilliance.
Brilliance like that of my son.
My beautiful boy with a heart like thunder,
gentle, fierce, and kind.
A young lion, a born fighter.
He is the reason I keep breathing fire.



Unknown

by Carmen Brown

The greatest fear is not that I'm inadequate, but that I am powerful beyond measure.

I remember when you first appeared to me — it felt like you were a thief in the night,

But it was daylight when you showed up.

My heart was open and caught off guard —

Boy, if I had only paid attention, and if I would have known the hour you would have visited me,

I could have put on my whole armor, shield, and force field to have combat it you.

See, I was naïve and had no knowledge of you.

I had tears running down my rosy cheeks, searching for a savior to rescue me.

I cried because I thought love had gone — but I found out love lay dormant, ready to be resurrected.

First, I had to get rid of you who appeared to me first.

Second, I had to gain knowledge of you.

And third — the third time is the charm — to combat you.

Some would say, would you change what appeared to you?

I would say no, because if I never would have known you.

I never would have known who you were, or the knowledge —or combat.

But I would never know you again.

The first time you appeared to me...Fear no more.



You Came

by Carmen Brown

You came out of nowhere. I wasn't expecting you.
I wasn't expecting you, but it wasn't entirely unknown either.
I had heard other people talk about you, but I had never experienced it for myself.
Now that it hits home and I truly see it for myself,
I realize I didn't know I'd have to carry such a heavy weight.
I didn't know I'd be pushed beyond my capacity.
But I also know that there is better.
I know that this is only for a moment in time — and I plan to get through it.
Everything was stacked up against me.
I was at war — war on the outside, war within myself.
War against my thoughts. War against my pride.
War against not having housing.
But if I had lost focus on the end goal,
I wouldn't have found the resources or the inner strength —
The substance that will forever shape my future.
Now I'm being forced to deal with unseen forces and unfamiliar experiences.
These are things I never thought I would encounter on my journey.
This path has made me feel like I'm not a productive member of my community.
So now I know I have to break things down — step by step —
To get to the root cause of this situation that's been placed in front of me.
It feels like I've been placed in a classroom.
I've been given a syllabus.
And at the end, I'll have to turn in a final report.
I have assignments to complete.
I have to gather resources, gain understanding, and learn the lessons —
So I don't end up repeating the same grade, the same class, all over again.
My mind says I already have an A+,
Even if the lesson plan says otherwise.
Because I've lived this —
And now, I'm not just the student, I'm the teacher.
I carry the lessons of my experiences — not with shame, but with truth.
And with the help of many people, I've found focus and belief.
Not only will I earn that A+,
But I'll teach others how to walk through this journey and not be defined by it.

Living Life Right.

by Bianca M. Byrd

My love for Chicago runs deep,

I plan to do whatever it takes to make Chicago a better place
Better for you,
Better for me,
Better for everyone experiencing homelessness.

At a young age, I found out what homelessness really means.
From Ohio to Chicago
Trying to find housing was always difficult,
like chasing a dream.

Affordable housing in Chicago
Sometimes comes with your own waterfall,
Dripping from ceilings when it rains.

I found out shelters are not safe,
Shelters do not always mean they care.

If you look like an adult- BE CAREFUL!
They split you from your mom,
Even if you are still underage.

When you have emergencies, and there is nothing but stress
No support,
No funds,
No clear pathway to a healthier life,
No way out—but ending your life seems like an escape.

In those struggles,
I also had those dark thoughts,
Heavy ones that overwhelmed me
In the silence, when I was all alone.
But all those thoughts began to go away
When I found my purpose,
To fight for homes, for healing, for hope.



Living Life Right. (continued)

I found my KING, when I was homeless,
Who showed me I was a QUEEN who deserved a CASTLE.
He married me and together we have a home.

He reminded me that I am somebody,
Somebody who can bring change to this City.

He showed me that CCH has opportunities
To stand tall, to speak loud,
To be a part of the fight for the rights of those who have no voice to declare that
HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT!

This poem is dedicated to Myron Byrd – my KING!



Losing Yourself

by Marketta Sims-Gilford

Being houseless not only affects you physically, but also mentally. when enduring the flames of redemption and trying to get help, Along the way you can lose yourself.

Being there for so many people in my life and then not knowing that I was misguided, even those that I had confided in.

Taking one step at a time to reflect back to oblige that through it all self-care is a must, it is within you that you trust.

Abused, confused, used, and torn, out of this torture, a new you is born.

Make space to heal from your journey, so you don't end up on a hospital gurney. Reality is my truth, finding strength while I was young and not knowing how to navigate through and through. Now that I know a better way, I can replace pain with peace for brighter days.

Like having Generational wealth, health, nothing is worse than actually losing yourself.





Triggers

by Sonny Booker

You saw what just happened.
That was like gut punch to my Peace
I thought I was better but that just reminded me Of Everything I'm trying to heal
through.
Help me to step over what use to trip
Give me the strength to follow you and not my pain, I refuse to go backwards.
Yes it happened to me but it does not define me.
I trust that with you all things are possible, —even creating a future so bright it
Heals the Pain of the past
So, I will step over this Trigger and Keep Walking Towards You.

Love The Worlds I Carry

by Yuri Rodriguez

Love is hot,
Love is cold,
We want it young,
We want it old.
We lock it in our
Hearts like sacred gold.
We hold on to it and
never let go.



The Worlds Silenced

by Shay Jones

My ear-bridge discerns the sorrowful moans and inaudible screams of the betrayed and trafficked ones. I feel in my being. The imperceptible thrumming that resounds into the cosmos.

The vibration of those silenced voices is reverberating into and through the bodies of sensitive souls like me, who are able to pick up the unsettling frequencies of the horrors inflicted upon them. I transmute with the energy of love.

The cries of the helpless go unnoticed. Passersby, cannot perceive the thunderous echoes whispered on the winds. I transmute with the radical spirit of peace through... wisdom with... joy.

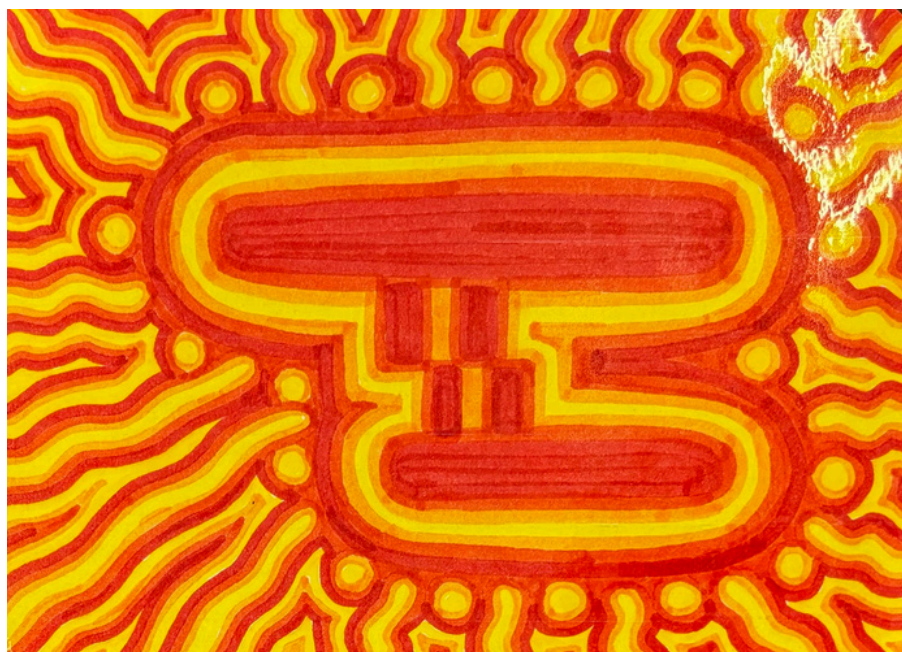
The “innocent ones” are invisible. They only know devastation. They live their lives in fearful dread. There is no peace for them to know. Every awakened day is demoralizing.

Its innocence lived in chaos, a life of cognitive dissidence: existing in a well so dark and deep they cannot feel a change. But I postulate: there will be many.... Changes. The vulnerable are the worlds silenced. We are also the ones who are not forgotten, but ardently loved by our creator with every breath. Without ceasing, I pray.... fervently, for all of us, that have been so silenced.

I've uncovered that my self-control, is a passive passion... being released!

And I rise to take authority over my voice, to display truth to the unseen powers which cannot defeat what God has already ordained. I am that!





America's Poor

by Shay Jones

America's poor was created by America's wealthy. The government in which we live have been guilty of expropriating and overseeing property that they adopted by theft and murder. The foreign European immigrants came in like locust, and deposited themselves, imbedding themselves in and literally destroying everything they could get their hands on, since landing on its shores. They have extended themselves from sea to shining sea. While erasing every spiritual, and Melanated sign of creativity.

They injected into history, lie after lie after freakin lie, that only they meant to be told and held up as facts.

Driven from their homes, the early inhabitants of Turtle Island have been cheated and lied to by the makers of the laws written against them by the colonizers. Human beings were slaughtered and forced into dehumanizing events, not of their own making. Laws were written to secure that people with Melanated skin, would never have a chance to live a life of security and fairness,in this country. And even when black people created and had businesses and thrived and lived in their own communities, the Klan groups; and here's a fact: which has been documented and widely known worldwide, since the 1990's, that all Europeans, have the genetics and DNA of 1-3% of Neanderthals, and Africans: ...zip...None!

"A system born from conquest and greed, carried on the backs of men escaping prisons of their own making." And because of their self- righteous hue, they were allowed to come in and burn down the Melanated communities and murder the inhabitants of them. Actions, sanctioned by officials who voted themselves in to do so.

Those people were adept at stealing lands that they took from others, while taking credit for inventions they didn't create.

The colonizers have always had an unfair advantage over the people. Legislated. The constitution wasn't written for anyone other than for Europeans... A fact, written in the constitution itself.

Brown skinned people have been summarily targeted. Swindled out of the right to exist. We have suffered at the hands of those who do not look like us. Robbed of the inheritances that they were not entitled to. All over this country, a particular group or groups of people flooded brown communities and made lakes and parks of the land, killing at will and getting away with it. I wonder if America could go back and look at land deeds in obscure archives, somewhere it would possibly be found that brown skinned people still own the lands they were forced from.

From the White House's builders to the black inventors of everyday items still in use today, school books will never teach the youth the truth... at least not yet.

America's Poor (continued)

Rich and wealthy people would never want go back in time to find or locate the real owners of deeded lands of the true people of the America's. So, we have to continue to fight in 2025 for the right to hardly live and barely breathe in the land in which we live. I don't feel sorry for the blood suckers of humanity. Their day is coming: a reckoning!

Deuteronomy 5:9-10 speaks about God's jealousy, the sins of the fathers... visiting the sons to the third and fourth generations. Are we there yet?

I will continue to find joy in the life that I live. I will be purposeful for the peace and prosperity, that I claim for myself, my loved ones and my family. I will continue to pray for and encourage each new generation to know and research their own history as they are led. They need to be their own heroes and sheros and not hold up celebrities as anything other than another flawed human being. And I will not keep dimming my light because somebody's uncomfortable with the brilliance of it. Shining is a gift from the creator!

We rise, we are to shine! We, are experiencing a shift in the atmosphere. It's been coming for a while... even if we cannot feel it.

The Chicago Coalition for the Homeless are change agents, we're supposed to be! Heads up! Shoulders back... Ya'll. We must fight and hold people accountable. Not in anger but in love and truth. We must change the laws which are unfair to everyone. We must vote into office, only the people who work for others and not just themselves. People proven to be of reputable character, and who are actually doing the work.

I work for THE CREATOR as an actuator, and will continue to do so... I want to live to be a righteous citizen of the kingdom of heaven, while I'm still living here on earth. I am strong in the Lord and in the power of HIS might. I have bodyguards: Angels to back me up. Psalms 91.

I am not a PK. I have scars as a PW. I am an elder, I have Faith. My acronym for faith: final authority in the Heavens. Because I work the word. My acronym for word: Wisdom of Royal Decree.

Buckle up... Life is a struggle. You get out of it what you put in to it, joyfully.

So, take a deep breath and breathe. My acronym for "Breathe": Blessings restores every area that heaven elects.

The avenger says in Romans 12:19 Vengeance is Mine. I will repay.

Yes, America's poor was created by America's most wealthy. And still, this continues to be so.... By now, they should be so embarrassed.... If they have a conscience.

Don't look at people with money as anything special. They have money. Money is a tool. And they cannot take it with them when they go into the "great unknown".

Seek clarity for wisdom and integrity.... because you can't face yourself or anyone else.... without it.

This is Shay for today, with much more to say.



Acknowledgements

Carla Johnson, Master of Ceremonies

Claudia Cabrera, Program Lead

Wayne Richard, Horizons Founder

Doug Schenkelberg, CCH Executive Director

American Writers Museum

CCH staff and volunteers

in addition to,

Dr. LaCivita and the graduate students of Alder University

Art Therapy for their generous and inspirational support