

WHEN I WAS ALIVE

An Anthology of 7th- and 8th-Grade Student Writing
X287—The North Bronx School of Empowerment
Bronx, New York
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David Surface & Amina Henry, Writers-in-Residence
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Teachers & Writers Collaborative

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Foreword

Welcome to *When I Was Alive*, an anthology of student writing from the North Bronx School of Empowerment. This anthology is the result of a special ten-week program, the *Anti-Gun Violence Initiative: Art A Catalyst for Change*, sponsored by New York City Council Member Laurie A. Cumbo.

For this special program, Teachers & Writers Collaborative has once again partnered with the Bronx Historical Society to provide young students with the opportunity to express themselves in creative and positive ways. We believe that by pairing young people with professional teaching artists, nurturing their talent, and providing them with new and positive outlets of expression, we can help bring about a change and end gun violence in this country.

This year's Anti-Gun Violence Initiative began less than two months after the tragic Parkland school shooting, and only two weeks after the March for Our Lives in Washington DC. While these landmark events did have a dynamic effect on this year's program, it's important to remember that school shootings and gun violence are not new to this nation, or to the children of the Bronx. Making our communities safe from gun violence is a long game, and it's programs like this one that can help bring us a little closer to that goal.

My thanks to my teaching-partner, Amina Henry, for the energy, insight, and inspiring presence she brings to this project.

Our thanks to Magdalen Neyra, principal of the North Bronx School of Empowerment, and Xiomara Esquilin, program manager of Sports & Arts in Schools Foundation, for their positivity and support for this project.

Our thanks also to Angel Hernandez, education coordinator of the Bronx Historical Society, for bringing all of this together, and for his strong belief in the power of art to change young lives.

Finally, a big thank you to the students of the North Bronx School of Empowerment for your courage, empathy, and creativity. This book is for you.

David Surface & Amina Henry
Writers-in-Residence
Teachers & Writers Collaborative



Now That I'm Gone

Mouhamed Ceesay

When I was alive, I wanted to do things I couldn't.

When I was alive, I used to dream about getting free money.

Now that I'm gone, I want people to remember that I made them laugh.

Now that I'm gone, I dream about being alive.

Now that I'm gone, I wish I could see my family one more time.



When I Was Alive

Uriah Nartey

When I was alive, I wanted to achieve goals and set records. I wanted to help my parents and give them good things as they'd raised me up and helped me become a good man, even after all their hardships. I wanted to make sure my parents' lives, when I moved out of the house, would rise and flourish in happiness. I could have done all those things, if that one bullet hadn't gone through my brains.

When I was alive, I used to dream about making it into the Big Leagues, the first best player in the world, following after my favorite player's footsteps, the blood that runs in my veins, my father. I dreamed about having kids that were spoiled, but not too much, just enough to respect the adults they'd seen in their lane. I could have done all these things, if that one bullet hadn't gone through my brains.

Now that I am gone, I want nothing to do with you or your family; besties before, and now enemies forever. I hope that you rot in the cell they place you in, and if they don't, maybe that's because half your victims were forged from slavery. I could have done all that I wanted, but that one bullet put a stop to everything.

Now that I am gone, I dream about paying, how you should suffer for all the lives that you took, furious and angry that your father gave that stupid gun back to you. I thought you would have been with me. We shared the same dream, hitting balls and killing teams, and not actual civilians. We could have done anything, if you didn't act like a jackass.

Now that I am gone, I want you to know that even though I hate you, and I'd probably really kill you, I still got love for you, but it's locked up deep inside, and finding it will take years. But you'll probably be dead then.



In the Cold and Dark Night

Darren Anokye

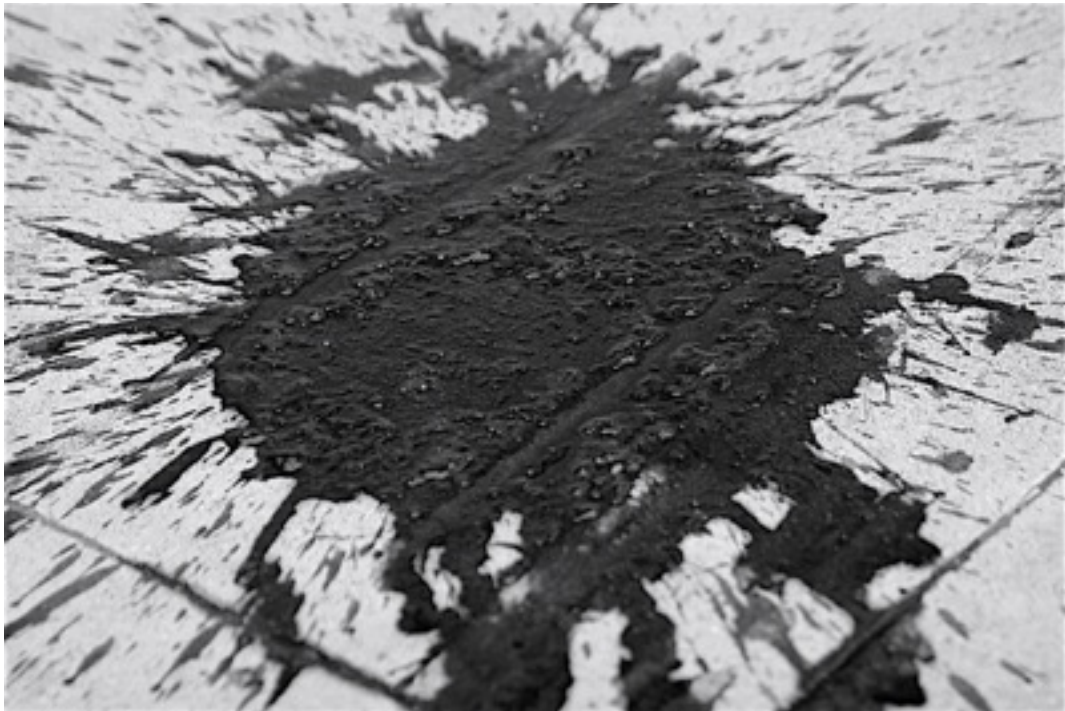
In the cold and dark night
the police roam through the town in their police cars
looking for anything
that would cause trouble
BANG
loud gunshots
like a lion roaring
a scream
like someone biting into a hot pepper



Shooter's Mom

Jay-Dene Bryant

All I saw was my son shooting someone from outside my window. The last thing I heard was a KA-POW, then everything around me went silent. I felt like I was about to wake up from a nightmare, but I didn't want to wake up and see him in my arms, knowing that he'd killed someone. I'm afraid that I'll be scared of my own son, that I might never want to look him in his eyes, ever again. I want to see my little boy and tell him I love him. But since it wasn't just a bad dream, I now dream about the pain that their family might be going through. I also dream about me confessing to the police, yes, my son killed that innocent person.



Blood

Kimani Irish

Blood. It's all I can see, since I'm drowning in it.
All I can hear is the sound of my crying girlfriend.
I can feel both the blood gushing out of my body
and my girlfriend's hand gripping onto mine.
All I wanted you to do was leave my family alone.
You terrorized my mom, and tried to murder my sister.
Now that I lying in my own blood
I'm afraid that I'll never see the face of my mom, my girlfriend, and sister
ever again.



When I Thought of the Gun

Ashley Akuffo

When I thought of the gun
all I saw was black and green.
People who kill
are mostly mental.
Guns bring anger to loved ones.
It feels like every day in Iraq.
Most shootings happen
in the rain, unseen, and unheard,
at night.
The shooter is always like an angry
roaring lion.



Because of Money

Ricky Jones

When I was alive, all I wanted was money.

When I was alive, all I dreamed about was money—it doesn't matter anymore.

When I was alive, I never thought that I would die because of money.

Now that I'm dead, I want to burn every piece of money, every form of money, every type of currency.

Now that I'm gone, I dream about revenge.

Now that I'm dead, I wish money never existed.



Victim

L Bryan

Why would you kill me? I trusted you with my life. And you killed me for my money. I could have given it to you if you asked.

I trusted you with my life, Kathy. I cared for you and told you all my secrets. I always help you when you are in trouble, and I always help you when people trouble you. I tell you secrets that no one knows about me, like people I like, and family problems.

My blood was all over the ground and my body was on the steps. Kathy, you put the gun to my head, and the gun went off.

Why would you do that?



No Regret

Shaniya Suggs

What didn't you have that you wanted to take Jeremy's life?

He is in the hospital, all because you are mad.

Question is, at what?

Me?

Him?

Us?

Yourself?

I'm not really sure, but, for real?!

Is there something that tells you to do this?

To hurt my child and pull down that trigger?

My baby was walking home as I walk with him

and he lay on the floor as I cried.

I felt SO angry, but I didn't have words to describe.

Man, if I was painting a red apple, I would probably have enough blood to paint forty.

Do you even care?

Do you even understand what you've caused?

Okay, fine.

Why didn't you finish?

No witnesses,

Right?

No pain,

Right?

No regrets,

Right?

No witnesses, no pain, no regret. No gain.



Gun Violence

Stephen Allen

Black night

It's summer in New York.

A red horse gallops down the street.

Regular people scream.

A sudden sadness.

Mountain of pain.

It may rain forever.



Victim

Ashley Akuffo

I was walking home from school and I saw you
standing there with a gun aiming at me.
I felt like my heart was about to shatter into a million pieces.
You were angry as a roaring lion.

What did I do to you? We can just talk about it, Nicole.

The shot of the gun went POW, POW, POW!
But luckily, you missed. I started running.
I was heartbroken; we used to be best friends.

I remember the times we went to the park, trips with friends,
us taking pictures on the swings.

Nicole says, "You had EVERYTHING—
the perfect family, money, good grades, a good future.
Why couldn't I!?"

I ran and ran, panting after every step.
I was dumbfounded by your actions.

A neighbor called the police and you were arrested.

I'm glad that you are gone.
I'm glad I won't have to see you again

I'm glad that you are out of my life.



Next Thing I Know

Uriah Nartey

In the darkness filled with extreme cold, something as fast as a cheetah seems to pass right through me. My body feels hot, by my heart, like spices in the food my mother prepares. Joel's father, demonstrating the gun he bought for his son, flashes and sneaks into my head. The next thing I know, I am on the school ground, gasping for my last breath, while my "old friend" stands over me, pointing the gun at my head. Next and last thing I ever hear is BOOM. Next thing I know, I am walking through bright daylight in a place that might look like heaven.



I Wish

Armani Goodison

When I was alive, I wanted to have money like nothing.

When I was alive I used to dream about having a big house and have billions and billions.

When I was alive, I never thought that I would be rich.

Now that I'm gone, I want good luck and better things in life.

Now that I'm gone, I dream about spending more time with my family.

Now that I'm gone, I wish that I had back my money and my life together.



The Mask

Rashaun Tugwell

One day I was walking home from school, listening to music. One of my friends named James was calling my name non-stop, but I never paid attention. As I approached my doorstep, I dug into my bag for my keys, and I heard a click, so I turned around and saw a man with a black mask demanding that I give him my bag.

“Take off the mask,” I said to him. “If you’re gonna shoot me, at least look me in the eye and do it.”

“Mmmh,” he said.

“I can’t hear you—say it louder.”

He angrily took off the mask. There were burns on his face, and scratches.

“Who did this to you?”

“Listen here, I did not come here to talk with you. I came to finish what you started.”

“What I started? I did nothing. Actually, I know what this is about...me taking your spot on the football team. It’s not my fault....”

Boom Boom, the shots went off.

“You see what you made me do?”

Sirens wailing....



Dead Victim

Rolecia McKenley

I remember seeing blood everywhere. Blood exiting my body as I was shot by my shooter. I remember hearing the ambulance arriving at the crime scene. I remember hearing the bystanders and witnesses calling 911. I remember getting shot by my shooter. What do you want? Why did you do that to me?! I dream about that night like a baby dreams about sucking its pacifier.



Victim's Mom

Darren Anokye

Two days ago, I saw my son Zach get shot two times, and his body laying helplessly in the street, like a rabbit run over. I felt broken down because I couldn't protect my son. I was home catching up on *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*. All of a sudden I get a call from my son's friend. He said, "Zach was shot up on the street." I ran out of the apartment barefoot. There he was. Zach. He wanted to be a professional football player, and he was good, too.

I want my son to live and I want the shooter to go to jail so that he will suffer for what he did to my son. I am afraid that the shooter will be free in the streets and my son will die. I trust the police, but no one saw the shooter's face.

I dream about everything going back to normal, and that this event didn't occur. How could this ever happen to my boy? What trouble did he get himself into?

Ever since I got those hours at work, he has been getting into more trouble. What isn't he telling me?



Shooter

Kimani Walker

I can't do this anymore. Every day, I get bullied and there's no solution to it. My school always says they're going to fix the problem, but they never do. So now I'm taking things into my own hands. My dad has an assault rifle in his gun safe, and I'm going to take it and kill all those kids who bully me. I just really don't care anymore.



Shooter's Friend

Jamaury Lewis

Knock, knock, knock. “Open,” I said. *Boom*, the door hits the wall. “Did you hear? Did you hear?” my friend Kobe said. “Hear what?” I replied. “Jose shot someone.” I’m afraid now, because what if I’m mean to him or get him mad—will he shoot me? I feel like now I shouldn’t be his friend, and Kobe agreed. Now, late at night, I dream about him killing me. In my dream, I am at the playground, playing basketball. It’s a close game. I foul Jose for the winning shot, and he’s very mad. He yells in anger and leaves. Ten minutes later, he comes back. Everyone starts running out of the park, and I wonder why...



That Doesn't Change

Jay-Dene Bryant

It's the circle of life
where you're terrified on a misty Fall night
and a black bolt comes out of nowhere
like a cheetah; you think it's Hitler
raised up from the dead, but
wait...it's the police
That doesn't change much,
does it?



I Want My Life Back

Lauryn Bryan

When I was alive, I wanted to travel the world and help people.

When I was alive, I used to dream that I would go to Paris.

When I was alive, I never thought that I would be dead.

Now that I'm gone, I dream about my best friends.

Now that I'm gone, I want my life back.



Shooter's Mom

Beverlin Leiva

I saw you pull the gun out of your pocket.

I saw police, I saw ambulances.

I heard from the news, a lot of damages will happen in your life.

I felt so disappointed and worried, because I didn't teach you this.

I want you to learn how other family members feel about their kids dying.

I want you to understand the causes and effects of others' feelings.

I want you to be a helpful person.



Shooter's Friend

Uriah Nartey

The first day I met you, I thought you could be something more than my friend. You were the only person who understood me and helped me in school. But the last day I saw you, you were in handcuffs, being escorted into a police car. I heard you yell at kids while showing no mercy, like you had on me when we met. And then, begging for forgiveness and mercy, and then gunshots following.

What did you want? Had they done something to make you this mad, you could have talked to me, but instead, you took what the devil had wanted all along, and took the lives of the innocent, and also your peers. We all had your back, and yet you rejected and destroyed. I was afraid you would pull the trigger when you saw me, but instead you passed right by me, with that grin on your face.

I wish I would have seen this earlier. I am sorry for you, and all the kids you took, and hope they've forgiven you.

If you are reading this, I want you to know that I have started moving on, know that life goes on forward and not backward.