TARIA

PERSON
POEMS
FROM THE SECOND ANNUAL ARTISTS THRIVE SUMMIT

JULY 31-AUGUST 3, 2018
BEREA, KENTUCKY

TARIA
PERSON
PREFACE

July 31st, I was on my way to the Artists Thrive Summit—“an annual convening of artists, administrators, funders and art advocates.” It was about a 6 hour and 30 minute drive from Chicago to Berea, which was enough time for me to dwell on being upset, anxious, depressed, not feeling good enough, and frustrated about being all of the above. In the rearview mirror, I inspected the soupiness of my face—a hue reminiscent of chunky tomatoes, and brown-lentils blended inside of a bowl. A bolt of lighting struck in the near distance electrifying the sky, which caused me to swerve into focusing on the road and getting to the summit safely; though, all around me, were masses of charcoal-gray, clouds striding through the troposphere, and thunder rumbling underneath the car. Without hesitation, “Worst Behavior” by Drake amplified over the speakers, and it’s through the shouting of his lyrics that I remembered to manage my emotions.

At the next exit, I stopped for gas and snacks for the rest of the ride, and jumped into another contemplation; a moment of remembrance—the time that I was in Ridgeway—A Transformative Leadership Experience—a cohort full of brilliant and compassionate people like Ali Blair. She was my accountability partner, and an inspiring force. I remembered her expressing to me that life was like a car ride through the mountains. Sometimes, you’ve got to pull the car over to get gas, fix a tire, and even feel your toes rummage through the nearby soil. In the station, I put a bottle of water, a tall can of Red bull, and a bag of Zapp’s Voodoo Chips onto the counter, then asked for $20 on pump 8. The glass door swung shut, ringing the overhead bell.

Out in the open, I expressed in the form of a monologue:

Look, you’ve been commissioned to document your experience at this summit by using the ‘I AM AN ARTIST’ tool, because folk believe in who you are, believe in what you have to share, and your perspective, so get it together! You are not an imposter. Do you know who you are? Why do we have to keep going over this? You’re Taria Person: The Realest Person, an artist and badass! Who told you that you have to be anything else...that you have to be perfect? Cause you’re not...Who told you that you wouldn’t make it? ...Cause you are. I am! I’ve been! Taria, you’re a full-time artist. You manifested it! You’ve lived it, and you’re still going. My god, be grateful for where you are in your journey.

(...)
My heart palpitated from being worked up, and engulfed in an overactive imagination. I pumped in the remainder of cents, burned sage, and drove away. I thought of my love partner, my fiancée—Chanel—and what she had reminded me many times already, which conjured up a phone call from her. After she reiterated for me to breathe, drink water, and think happy thoughts, she asked what my deal was, and if I had eaten anything since I had been on the road. Of course I hadn’t, yet before we continued, the bag of Voodoo chips and the trail mix—out of the glove compartment—were absorbed with both beverages.

She reprised to this time last year, when I had pulmonary embolisms, and blood clots in my right bicep and shoulder. I remembered the fear of thinking that I was going to die at the age of 26 with all of the follow-up hospital visits. Fear from the countless nurses and doctors being baffled, regarding how bizarre it was that I had produced blood clots, being that I was so healthy and that there were no known reasons for the sickness.

Chanel stated, “Bald head and sick! Mrs. Angela told us what it was; it’s stress!”

I apply peppermint underneath my nose to deep breathe.

“You not gone tell me that you’ve had all of these tests done, and they don’t know why you produced blood clots. You don’t believe that fat meat’s greasy! I keep telling you, mind over matter. You learned about managing your stress and time at Ridgeway. How to meditate and center...you just have to apply it. Like I keep on saying, you too great for this shit, man.”

In an attempt to rebuttal the encouragement, I replied, “I’m trying. It’s just hard because I have anxiety, and this art life is hard, and I don’t feel great about myself or work.” The storm proceeds, as does her confidence in me.

“Well, the first thing is, just like we stopped claiming blood clots, stop claiming this anxiety, depression, and mediocrity. Let it go! And all of what you’re doing is hard. Nobody said any of this was gone be easy. You’re creating phenomenal artwork out of nowhere, trauma, joy, and you’ve performed these poems a million times, so it’s not that you don’t know them. You just have to get back to your confidence, Taria. Believe in yourself!”
Here’s a special thank you to the Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation (and all associated), for commissioning me to attend and document my experience at the 2nd Annual Artists Thrive Summit. I give deep gratitude to my love—Chanel Braswell, my sister’s—Tamika Person and Mikaya White, my mentor—Cheles Rhynes, and my poetry mother—Rhea Carmon for giving me constructive feedback and work-shopping my artwork. Also, for everyone that I was able to connect with at the summit, which greatly contributed to this piece. Much love. Peace.
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Thrive

survival
struggle

thriving    striding

steady

never give up

the mode is set to grind

refining craft

at the summit

we buff

each other into better

past the pressure

drafting out plans

strategic building

pocket full of pens,

a couple napkins

to knock the crumbs
down from the corners

speak on wonder and such

like all the knowledge

that we’ve learned

in many sessions

ingulfed

into much wisdom, money, value,

application

combust

from inspiration

adjust

our inner power

entrust
Mantra

art is not easy
knowing balance takes practice
remember to breathe
Like a Tree in the Rain

At Boone Tavern Hotel
I’m asked can I be helped,
and this morning
hesitation tells the truth.

When nervous
I smile,

standing in a puddle of embarrassment
telling stories.

My plan,

(because I ran out of gas)

walk across
both drums at my sides
a second trip for the stand

slipped,

and it’s almost time to go.

At the front desk, I’m grounded
like a tree in the rain
when there’s a deluge.

I expressed:

“I have a performance
this morning.
By chance, do you know
if I can get a ride...
on one of those golf carts?
...It’s raining."

I took a second to believe,
to remember,
and manifest flowers
from the universe.

Beth Flowers—director of AIR
Institute at Berea College,
walked into the lobby. A smile stretched
across my face,
but I am greeted with a hug.
I asked for a ride,
and my heart palpitates—
a flutter
a physical reminder
where my body begs
itself to calm down,

but she is honored
and can’t wait
to witness the power
in my message...
my performance.

I whooped, “Appreciate it!
This truly helps me out.”

In the car, windshield wipers added
rhythm,
and cleared the view.

“No problem.
I was already on the way.
I’m just glad
that I was here
to help.
Sometimes, it just pays
to be
in the right place
at the right time.”
Winning is a Mindset

If you went to the “Art Trivia Party,”
you heard Megan Flanders lure us in with

“All everyone is a winner. Today,
you are rewarded for what you don’t know.”

And an amen corner concurred!

There’s prizes
envelopes full
of mental puzzles
pencils
and joy
like pop rocks
droopy pandas and full-figured
Winnie the Pooh erasers.
A business card
with, “Getting your Sh*t Together
making life better for artists.”

And I’m thankful

to be in a safe space
a table of people
sharing similar
sentiments
like not knowing
and laughing
about struggling
and thriving.

(...)

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Real conversations

excitement

art

support

the anxiety of being

uncomfortable, and surviving

in these moments.

Dressed in smiles

feeling solid

and as a team, we figured

we all have minds

strengths

and as a community

we got this shit!

...and no clue

and confidence

and life

and breath

and with that

we can do

our best to lift this energy

if not for ever
In connection
“There’s inspiration in the juice.”
-Carolyn Finney

I followed the directions
to make it.
Worked
for juice—a cup of inspiration,
fruit in abundance,
freshly squeezed by hand.
Summit Quotes

“I’m picky about what I spend my time on. That’s self-care.”
-Pat Shelton

“You can have anything you want sis. Your success is important to me. When you win, I win.”
-Jonathan “Courageous” Clark

“Define success for yourself.”
-A guy from the money session
Clear the Space

inside of a puddle of tears, which reflects the current, rub the rough smooth, into resilience, the brilliance of you let it shine.

reach for your highest self.

remember that you were made in the imagine of rainbows

a reminder that you are beautiful in the midst of the storms coming towards the courage that you’ve built, the endurance helping you to continue.

remember that it’s you plus everything. be intimate with your impact.

it’s time to believe in the name of health, laughter as medicine, the act of pouring power into yourself, your alluring mind.
“You have a powerful voice. Don’t let anyone try and take it from you. I know you won’t let them, but I thought I would just let you know, anyway.”

-Karen Lowell

Aesthetics

Someone questioned me my words my worth my existence, asked:

“Don’t take this the wrong way, but why do you have to write so black?”

He chuckled.

And in my opinion, the inquest reminded me that many folk want to be in control of everything even my life the way I show up.

I breathed.

His investigation continued:

“I’m only asking a question, what’s up with the attitude?”

I nearly rolled my eyes into the lenses of my glasses, and said:

“I don’t have a bad attitude if that’s what you mean.”
He uttered with the audacity:

“Well, why are you breathing all hard then?

Like my mouth was or has ever been his screen door
like I have to be reminded
not to let the air spill
out onto the front porch
or into the field
like I need his permission
to stay in or outside and play.

But this is home,
and I’m here
for none of that. Not here to entertain
code switch
or feed his ignorance.

I served my response
un-sweet.
Demanded,

“Why the fuck not?
Why should I breathe any softer?
And since you think you know me so well,
what’s best...How should I be writing if I’m not writing Black?”

He evolved
into the color of cherry-tomatoes.

“I’m not trying to offend.
I’m just saying that you don’t have to write in dialect. You can just say
that the characters are black,
from a certain demographic
and hood,
and we’ll get it.”

I gasped in awe, and proceeded
to laugh.

“Honestly, it’s just hard for me to read,
and it’s going to take a long time,” he said.
Loud
as if exclaiming
from the top of a mountain, I shouted:

“I know many people
that will ‘get it.’

Like how messages seep through music
brewed in culture and risks
to be
creative and represented

messages, and how they remain
like dreams stitched into Appalachian quilts,
the trails directing us to freedom,
and back
to the message
for the people it’s meant for—”

Trying to find a way out of the dark
hole created, he implicated:

“Why are you making this all about race?
This is about writing. We all have to study,
right?

“And if I have to pull out the OED—
Oxford English Dictionary
or sit in classes for years to understand
English
or immerse myself in other languages
or make love to books
or live in the library
or put up with the generational
look of hatred for being

black
a woman
a queer-ass-lesbian

and since we are studying,

I think it’s safe to learn and ask
the right questions.
At least try understanding,
and witnessing the black ink
on my hands.

(...)

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It’s resemblance to the blood
shed, tears,
the stains we have
embraced as beautiful,
the scars we have fought for
to defend our existence
as important beings
as important beings
as important beings—”

“You don’t have to be rude,
and you don’t have to keep repeating
yourself. I get it!”

He stormed off.

Guessed he understood
what I meant after all...
First Friday

I was invited to perform at the Berea Music Series—a festival full of local food, bubbles, handmade crafts, & warm hugs like an introduction from Ali Blair encouraging me to bring the resistance; however, before I made a sound, someone from the audience plugged their ears. Stunned. I shielded my soul with a smile to conceal all tenderness, and planned to be louder than the beat.

From the stage, I saw white-haired country folk snapping fingers on the off-beat, several shades of children flipping cartwheels and creating interpretive moves to perform along with me...Bohemians—rind in hickory, and hippies with florid cheeks, sitting crisscross applesauce, swaying, disrupting the image of the person closing off their ears. I shouted and beat the congas louder! Anger shedded from my shoulders during the message, the festival the poem full of shit like swears—heavy and real, black and existing like gay in my presence. The resistance in my rhythm, my tongue. My head elevated was the introduction to my truth, the process of regaining all of me during the jam, and it’s only the introduction, I reminded myself. Yet, offstage, I’m reminded by another person that “Maybe it was too loud a beat,” maybe there’s justification for that person’s resistance. But Raymond McLain—bedazzled in a blazer dipped in blue grass said, “You sho’ll can perform, you’re talented, and you’ve brought flavor to this festival.” I let the love embrace me and enter my ears.

Awareness brushed me like a tepid breeze on the ear. Realization that I was still on the shocking introduction, instead of the art, activism, admiration, and alchemy within the festival. I began to hand bone a beat to escape the sensation—a pinch of affliction. Performed along with childlike fun, stress-free. Sustained inner peace as a novel form of resistance.

Ali emphasized, “Hell yeah! I heard you say ‘fuck’ and ‘areola’ in your set. Bringing the resistance (...)

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to Kentucky. The last one you did, ‘Rapper,’ I really enjoyed that one.” Such a pleasure to my ears. “I’m so glad you could come perform for us.” I’m embraced like the introduction she provided. My heartbeat calmed like the closure of the festival.

Once again, I, on the walk to the car, reflected on the importance of the festival—
to show up as present (even under the lenses of scrutiny or while receiving resistance),
to be deliberate as a pop of beat entertaining receptive ears,
to enjoy friendship, butterflies in the breeze, art, the reoccurring vibrancy of light across the sky. Witness, for self, the introduction of a sun setting like a complimentary boat of rainbow slaw. I sung low, performed

the tune to “Dipped in Black,” again. Performed it’s introduction over the bees and engine humming in my ears.
Money Session

I. “...Anyone who is an artist is working, though!” Why so divisive?

II. “Labor does not talk about our value. Maybe... creative practice?”

III. “Why would any learn about money if you aren’t going to make it?”

IV. “Really? ...Do artists give up? ...Maybe go dormant, pause... might disengage.”
“Being scared is okay, it shows your honesty. Let fear be your guide.”

-Carmen Mitzi Sinnott

Four Roses under the Moon

All smoke dissipates before the question, “Isn’t it scary being seen?” The crowd sparks light along the ink of space, and none of us speak for a moment; though, the clouds permeate through skies. Aloof is everything universe, and nothing. “It’s something to think about? I mean, especially, believing in our greatness,” and supping it up like some cornbread, a bowl of black-eyed peas...some type of green for nourishment. “Scary, right?” Behind a chilled glass, I act fearless. “...But here’s to your accomplishments,” they shout. Like I only know courage. Must be part of creation. Blowing from dust.
Conjuring up Ancestors

rhythm in mountains,
rise as the moonlight to rinse,
rock into movement
**BIOGRAPHY**

*Taria Person* is an alumna of the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, where she received a dual B.A. in English Creative Writing: Poetry, and Interdisciplinary Studies: Africana Studies. She is the author of *Rainbow Elephant*, and her work has appeared in numerous anthologies, including: *O’ Woman a Tapestry of Loving You*, and *Voices of Warriors: Poems of Hope & Healing*. Taria Person won 1st place at the regional Big Ears: Spoken Word Expo/The 5th Woman Poetry Slam (2017), the Regional Southern Fried Hip-Hop Slam (2013), and Knoxville Poetry Slam (2012). Also, she has been an actress and Production Stage Manager for The Carpetbag Theatre Inc., during its original series of stage productions that have been funded by The Roy Cockrum Foundation, in celebration of (CBT’s) 50th Anniversary. Recently, Person won an Artistic Professional Development grant from Alternate Roots for her original stage play, *Hangers*. 
VOLUME 3/3

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