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Note: I changed all of the names for privacy

I glance inside the little pane of glass on the wooden door to the teen writer's club meeting room in the library to check if anyone else is here yet. I see a brown halo of hair – Maura – and George's side profile as they chat and wait for others to show up. I walk, side by side with my mom, to the front desk of the library to drop off the heavy blue-pink bag of books that I've borrowed. My mom sees the excitement on my face and waves me off to go back to the teen writer's club meeting room. I open the door to a warm chorus of hello's from Maura, George, Stella and Laura, both of whom were too far from the window for me to notice when I just peeked in.

We chat for a little bit – George ends up going on a little rant about how you kids these days just don't get the freedom we did, and all of you deserve to wander alone across Chicago on a spring day on your bike like him as a child. Right as he decides he's rambled a little too much, Emma and Anisha open the door and take the last two (comfortable) chairs around the table. George picks up a stack of papers and slaps them onto the table. Alright, he says, before licking his finger and distributing this week's writing prompt.

This is how my Thursday nights went. Thursday nights were for teen writer's club.

In middle school, I went to teen writing club at my local library religiously. In the beginning, I was quiet and shy and barely talked. Still, I kept showing up. The other club members were mostly older than me – I was a middle schooler, and most of them were high schoolers, and the leader of the club, George, had grandchildren – but I still felt connected to them. We had a number of similarities: most of us were assigned female at birth, many of us were LGBTQ+, we were all roughly the same age, and we had a lot of overlapping interests (we spent one meeting belting out *Hamilton* lyrics). But what we really bonded over was writing: complaining about it, talking about our ideas, avoiding it, and actually writing together. Sharing our writing made us vulnerable, but that room was a place to be and share ourselves, wholly and unapologetically and safely.

Our weekly writing prompt and the stories we shared varied from lighthearted in-jokes to the deeply serious and vulnerable. I co-wrote a story about dating Satan, we wrote from the perspective of pets, and we repeatedly joked about and shared characters from the 'teen nomads', a group of post-apocalyptic rebels that we came up with. But that 'teen nomad' group came from a serious prompt: we were trying to process the 2016 election of Donald Trump as best we could, through writing about the worst case scenario of his presidency, in which he becomes a totalitarian dictator who brings about World War 3. We wrote about Charlottesville after the alt-right protests. Anisha shared a story about a girl who, after being sexually harassed by sailors, transforms into a siren to get revenge. Stella wrote about a story about someone being tied to train tracks and another story about a car accident.

No matter the subject, learning to share and appreciate each others' stories brought us closer. We were vulnerable and honest with each other – our oddities and idiosyncrasies came out in our writing, but we didn't judge each other for them. Each of us belonged there.

Middle school is challenging. School was tougher; academically, I had more work than elementary school, and socially, the school was much bigger and some of my friends from elementary school went to a different middle school, so although I wasn't alone, I wasn't as well-supported as I had been. So to have something to make me look forward to the middle of my week was incredible.

Since then, I've sought out writing communities. Even as I drift from actually writing, I always feel an inexplicable immediate sense of comfort when I learn that someone writes: it's a little reminder that we're all cut from the same cloth.