

Our Hope Will Rise... Jonathan Goodrich

Introduction:

Since March 2020, people throughout the Hampton Roads community have had their lives permanently altered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some have lost valued members of their family, friends, and community, but the losses pile up beyond the human cost. Members of our community lost out on job opportunities, once-in-a-lifetime experiences, and the memories they could have made with their loved ones as a result of the necessary precautions of social distancing.

Over the brunt of the pandemic, those who we often turn to for comfort were isolated from us, some suffering their own grief. As we move further away from those troubled times, the Our Hope Will Rise Project aims to reignite the feeling of community and support that was taken from everyone. By addressing what is known as “disfranchised grief”-referring to grief that goes unacknowledged on a personal and societal level- we can create empathy and connection between these losses.

Inspired by the work of artist Candy Chang, the Our Hope Will Rise project is a public art display centered around ideas of memory, community, loss, and hope. Over the course of workshops and canvassing, poems and other writings have been collected for display to honor National Poetry Month in April 2023. Personal expression is often unheard and unseen, but Our Hope Will Rise aims to shine a light on the expressions of our community, so that we may commemorate all we have lost and found over this time of national trauma.

Community Partnership:

Our Hope Will Rise partnered with the Mary M. Torggler Fine Arts Center for this project. The Torggler Center’s mission is to cultivate extraordinary experiences with visual art. With multiple galleries, studio classrooms, and other public spaces, the Center encourages all to engage with compelling and bold ideas through the lens of visual artistry. Soon, the installation will be on display in the center, open to the public to view and contribute.

Methods / Project Plan:

This project has undergone multiple phases, beginning with research and planning. Our first step was to gather information on a variety of topics. Since Our Hope Will Rise revolves around the idea of disenfranchised grief, understanding Dr. Kenneth Doka’s definition was essential. Disfranchised grief, in short, is the grief that a person may experience that cannot be openly acknowledged in social spheres. Our Hope Will Rise aimed to tackle these very specific types of grief, such as a vacation that was canceled or a wedding that was postponed as a result of the pandemic. Moving forward from this, we drew inspiration from Taiwanese-American artist Candy Chang, and her work that “envisions the future of communal ritual in an increasingly alienating world”. We were specifically inspired by her 2018 installation “A Monument for the Anxious and Hopeful”, in which visitors to the Rubin Museum in New York were encouraged to share their anxieties on slips of paper that were pinned to a wall. Our goal was to adopt a similar technique, encouraging members of our community to write poetry and pin their work to a cord stretched between poles.

Once we had our background completed, we could move towards collecting people’s expressions. By holding a writer’s workshop, we were able to introduce community members to new modes of expression and methods to process grief. Encouraging people to look to poetry for ways to convey complex and intimate emotions, we focused on rebuilding our community’s faith in its own strength and how to encourage hopefulness and empathy moving forward.

After struggling with community engagement through the workshop formula, we expanded the scope of our project to canvassing the larger CNU community for submissions. Through direct engagement with students, we were able to expand our installation. Through the whole process, we centered our focus on engaging our peers about the expression of grief and hope, and how we are all a part of a larger community that learns, changes, and grows because of all of our actions.

Project Goals:

Expression Through Creativity

The Our Hope Will Rise project’s main goal is to encourage creative expression. We want the members of our community to access their creative talents to express complex emotions and ideas, particularly the grief that is not publicly mourned. Using poetry to discuss these nuances allows people to process their grief in new and unique ways, and sharing these pieces to the public brings artist and spectator closer together. Our installation is another fulfillment of this goal, showcasing the loss and hope our community holds after a tumultuous time through art.

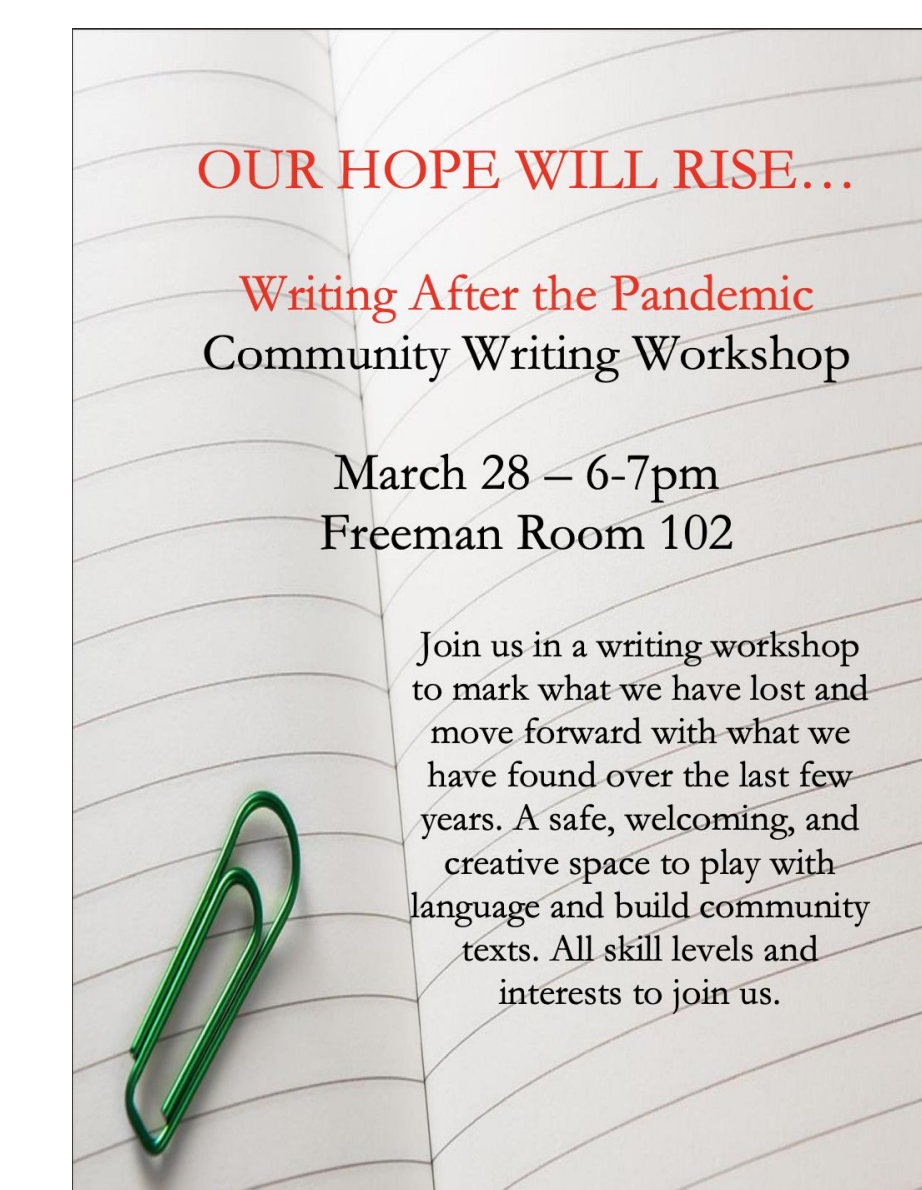
Build Connection

Our Hope Will Rise was intended to help all of us think of our place in a larger community. How do our personal losses reflect that larger community, and the way it responds and grows to match a time of hardship? We strived to impart a deeper connection with our community among one another, and to recognize and process the region’s grief. We aimed to instill hope of a better, more connected future, where disenfranchised grief can be expressed, supported, and properly mourned.

Celebrating Art as a Social Tool

We chose to primarily engage with the community through poetry due to its unique modes of expression. The conventions of the form encourage writers to step outside of convention and discover new ways to represent nuanced emotional topics. We wanted to encourage participants of all experience levels to challenge themselves and their comfort zones, to find new ways to empathize and connect with their peers through art. Since April is National Poetry Month, we wanted to find a way to honor this particular art form by introducing our community to its benefits and celebrating it publicly in the installation.

IMAGE PLACEHOLDER



Results:

The main result of our project is the public art display, viewed near this poster. After our workshop and collecting of our pieces, we strung the poems on a cord between wooden posts. The significance of the design is in the simplicity of it; as more people view the display, they can contribute their own expressions of loss, grief, and hope. As more of our community engages with each other in their shared experiences, the installation will continue to grow and provide inspiration for all to see.

We found significant results as we spread the art of poetry to our community. As they move forward, we hope that they continue to use poetry to process their feelings and share them to the world. There were challenges in initially engaging an audience for our project, and coordinating workshops to spread our project’s message. However, we learned much about community engagement, and how art is a tool for social change.

Project Significance:

Our Hope Will Rise is all about building hope through community. By strengthening the bonds between us, the Hampton Roads region can begin to move forward following the emotional devastation that the COVID-19 pandemic wrought. We aimed to provide an opportunity to mark the losses we all suffered over the period of social distancing and isolation, and encourage people to connect with one another and acknowledge their grief, in the hopes of rebounding and growing stronger.

One way this project surprised us concerned the art form itself. We found that there was a significant impact resulting from the use of poetry, and how it affected our community members. We hosted poets with a diverse range of experiences with the medium, and worked to open their minds to the possibilities of expression that poetry offers. We discovered a significant impact on those who participated in the project, as they found new ways to process emotional issues and express themselves in a creative, artistic way. Bringing art to people and making it accessible to all participants was a major impact of the project, and we hope to continue encouraging artistic expression for social issues moving forward.

By creating a public installation, we have found a way to visually commemorate these losses and express themselves in front of their peers, drawing more people to participate and engage with the people all around them. We hope that by showcasing all of our shared experiences, the installation will encourage more of our community to contribute to the display and process their own hopes, fears, and dreams of a better future.

Future Steps:

There is a built-in continuation of this project, based upon its output. The installation is open to the public, and we hope to encourage all who visit to contribute their own work to the display. Future workshops can also be held and expanded to new areas. Some examples include:

- Community Writing Centers
- Art and Cultural Centers
- Public Libraries
- Public Schools

Since our project is centered around building hope from the ashes of grief, Our Hope Will Rise does not only have to apply to the losses centered around the COVID-19 pandemic moving forward. As time passes, our community endures cycles of grief, pain, and loss, always needing each other to build hope. This display should serve as a monument to all of our collective grief, giving voice to emotions often silenced.

References:

Doka, K. J. (Ed.). (1989). Disfranchised grief: Recognizing hidden sorrow. Lexington Books/D. C. Heath and Com.

Fig. 1. Candy Chang. (2018). A Monument for the Anxious and Hopeful. [Public Installation]. Rubin Museum. New York, New York, United States of America.

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