

Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance 2015 Maine Literary Awards : Youth Non-Fiction

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“Through the Storm”

I went walking through the streets during a snowstorm. Houses, cars, and sidewalks were hidden by white cold ice. I wore sweatpants, a sweater, and a string-clothed hat. I had my Jordans on. I walked along Merrill Street, up on Munjoy Hill. No one was in the streets. It was foggy. You couldn't see anybody. I was trying to find the new apartment my family had moved to in the East End. The new apartment was about a fifteen-minute walk from where we used to live. The night seemed unending.





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About the author

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I kept moving through the same streets, but yet the snow still dropped. Big snowflakes hit my eyes, and the coldness raised goose bumps all over my arms. The cold burned. I felt like going into a random apartment just to catch the warmth inside. I walked up the same block I had been through. When I had moved down Lafayette Street for the fourth or sixth time, I realized I had lost my way back home.

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Home was back in Africa, where it was full of markets, people, and motorcycles. I loved sitting on the small front porch of our house. We had a little garden where we planted a few crops, such as tomatoes and avocados. I remember two big trees we had. One of them was called muarbini. It could treat forty illnesses. The other one was known as mravumba, and could treat skin diseases and headaches. My mom was the one who told me that the muarbini tree could treat the worst disease in Africa, known as malaria here. The smoke from burning the wood or bark of the muarbini could kill all the mosquitoes in

one's house. Putting its leaves into a pot with water and drinking the liquid helped destroy malaria. I once tasted the muarbini, but it tasted sour, like green pepper, but worse than that. If you couldn't resist it, you could puke.

Near those trees, in my neighborhood, I loved playing soccer. Blocks bet money on games. My friend Tutu and I played a lot. I used to play as a defenseman or midfielder. We played eight-on-eight games. I knew most of my teammates well because we lived close to each other. My best friend Tutu played striker. During the weekends or on vacations, we wandered through the streets of Mumena and Kivugisa, where the sun shined upon us.

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I grew even colder. I couldn't feel my fingers. I had to heat myself up by rubbing my hands together for friction. I kept moving through the snow, still wondering where my apartment was. At times, I thought I saw familiar buildings, but when I got closer to them my hopes died and the fear in me grew. I couldn't take it anymore. I asked a man for his phone to call my mom for directions.

The man was tall and he had covered himself in a long coat.

"Excuse me, sir, can I use your phone to call my mom?" I asked.

He looked at me and said, "No, I don't have a phone."

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In Africa, I felt fear, too. It wasn't always sunny and safe. Sometimes it was worse than the snowstorm. Wild things had surrounded me, back when I lived on the banks of the Akagera River. I saw dangerous animals there: crocodiles and hippos, and some wolves. The harm they could cause was either injury or death. They were a threat to me, especially when I went to collect water in the morning. News could come back to us that someone had gotten caught by a crocodile and died, no remains found. That really scared me. And even worse, small and medium-sized snakes from a military camp that my family and me lived close to came to our house. Sometimes I stepped on the small snakes, killing them without even knowing it. I remember when a cobra snake was in our outdoor kitchen. It frightened my mom really badly. "Aaaaahhh!" she yelled, and then called my dad on his cell phone, and one of my uncles who lived close to us. A few minutes later, they came to our house and told my mom and me to stay away from the kitchen. They used a machete and a metal bar to kill it.

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The idea of death came to me when the coldness got to my feet. I couldn't feel my toes. That was the worst feeling ever. But in me I said, "I can do it. Let me just keep moving." And then I saw a kid about my age. He was a white kid, kind of big. He was dressed for the weather in a big jacket.

I asked, "Hey, there, do you have a phone I could use to call my mom?"

He replied, "No I don't, but there's a gas station across the street. You might find one there."

I felt relieved. I thanked him and walked fast to the gas station, where I met a lady who was polite and gentle. She let me use the phone. I dialed my dad's number, but I didn't get an answer. And then I called my mom's phone.

"Hello?" she said.

"Hello, Mom, it's me, Faris. I'm at 7-Eleven, and I'm lost," I said.

"What are you doing out this late at night?" she asked.

"Mom, I'm freezing. I've been out here looking for the house for two hours," I said.

"Well, walk straight up the street from 7-Eleven till you see Emerson Street, and turn left," she said.

"Thank you," I said.

She ended the call, saying, "Get here quick. It's too dangerous outside."

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It was way more dangerous in Africa, because of the witchcraft that occurred, day and night. We had to stay away from witches and evil spirits. Some people in America do not believe in witchcraft; they say they never believed in that voodoo stuff. But I do, because I've seen it. Witchcraft is used out of greed and selfishness, or to get back at someone, or to get wealth, love, and more. For example, you could find yourself at the same income level as someone else, but the day after some witchcraft you might find out that he or she had become rich out of nowhere.

Some witches contain more power than others. Some send evil creatures to carry out their power, such as a human bat. This scares other men and me because it is believed that it can rape any man it can catch. These spirits and witches had rules that should be followed to avoid their evil doings, and if not followed properly the wicked deeds could come back at you. The majority of people who use witchcraft are rich politicians and famous people who seek more than they have and do not think of the poverty and misfortune they cause the victims of their actions.

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I finally got home and I felt really happy, at last getting to see my parents and my sister. But I was also angry that if I had only moved further out from where I was at first instead of making the same small circles I could have reached our new apartment on my own. But still I felt relaxed and calm, and I headed to the shower. While in there I thought of my connections to my friends back in Africa. I thought, "If I die, or something bad happens to me, how would they know what happened?" It was pretty horrible to think about, but on the other hand the people I love most are with me, and living together in a country of peace and prosperity, where I know I am safe at all times. I took a glimpse out the window, and I saw the snow was still falling, but it looked soft. I thanked god that I made it home.

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