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Jacob Volkman Human Rights Fellow
Within the Herstory/CCW Fellowship Program
Kennesaw State University

The Herstory/Coalition for Community Writing Fellowship aligns impeccably with my goals as a writer, community member, and activist. Ultimately, I desire to establish a community-based publishing resource center in Georgia with offerings similar to the Independent Publishing Resource Center (IPRC) in Portland, Oregon. This fellowship will provide unique opportunities to learn, share, and collaborate with others who are also passionate about memoir as a tool for positively impacting communities. Indeed, at their best, stories help

us connect, protest, educate, inspire, and empathize. This is the type of storytelling I wish to facilitate in a space where community members can engage in the equitable and affordable creation and dissemination of their stories. I cannot imagine a more impactful experience than this fellowship to prepare me for this work.

Audre Lorde tells us: “As we learn to bear the intimacy of scrutiny and to flourish within it, as we learn to use the products of that scrutiny for power within our living, those fears which rule our lives and form our silences begin to lose their control over us.” Creative storytelling is powerful as it can unite communities and effectuate change. I’ve experienced this firsthand as an editor and community activist. A lifelong writer and student of nonfiction, poetry, and fiction, as well as a meticulous developmental and line editor, my passion and experience involve engagement with organizations that address critical public concerns—particularly those of unhoused populations.

I am a creative writing student in Kennesaw State University’s Master of Arts in Professional Writing program who is also studying the field of publishing. My studies also include non-profit operations and grant-writing courses so that I can better understand how to respond to immediate community needs. I see my future including a continuation of my work as an editor and book designer via mixed-format community memoir book projects within the nonprofit sector.

Building upon my academic foci, my thesis is a multi-generational story collection incorporating memoir, poetry, and visual art. The project, focused on Selma, Alabama, will expand existing narratives to help others better understand the injustices faced not only historically but also currently, especially given the COVID-19 pandemic. While known for its role in the Civil Rights era and memorial marches, there are more stories to be told about Selma that shed light on the injustices that continue to wreak havoc in its communities, including urgent issues such as public health, environmental,

employment, and housing inequalities; many of the very issues that Herstory and the Coalition for Community Writing endeavor to address.

My journey to do this work began with my time as a volunteer at the IPRC. Their vision, in part, is to “provide equitable access to space, tools, and resources for creating independently published media and artwork, while building community and identity through written and visual art.” This ignited my desire to bring community-led literary and arts programming as well as publishing resources to my hometown in Georgia. Lived experiences shared through story is my passion, and I believe Herstory’s mission to provide fellows the tools to facilitate community-based memoir writing groups will enable me to move forward confidently to create a space for this work in my community.

Guidance from the Herstory Writers Workshop, the Coalition for Community Writing, and the Jacob Volkman Human Rights Fellowship Program leaders will teach me how to employ the Herstory approach to optimize storytelling quality and create more impactful empathy-based community writing projects. Most importantly, the fellowship will enable me to support community members who have not historically had a seat at the table to tell their stories.