



ALEXANDRA ROWAN FOUNDATION RESILIENCE IN WRITING SCHOLARSHIP WINNER: REBECCA MLAPAH

After being diagnosed with antithrombin deficiency, my life changed in ways that weren't always obvious to others. It wasn't just the doctor visits or medications it was the quiet, constant awareness of my body, the small decisions I had to make every day to stay safe, and the moments of worry no one else could see. Some days I felt frustrated or isolated, but I also learned to be patient with myself and notice the little ways I was growing stronger.

Living with this clotting disorder has shaped how I approach challenges more broadly. I've learned to slow down, pay attention, and stay calm even when things feel uncertain. It's given me a quiet resilience and perspective that I carry into school, sports, and the things I care about most.

Writing has always been my outlet, a way to process the quiet, subtle parts of life that often go unnoticed. My experiences haven't always been dramatic or headline-worthy, but they matter: the small microaggressions that ripple through daily life, the unspoken tensions in sibling relationships, the bittersweet feelings that come with graduation. Writing lets me give these invisible moments form and attention, helping me understand them and myself.

At times, writing feels like a quiet conversation with myself, a way to make sense of thoughts I can't easily speak aloud. When I sit down to draft a script or a poem, I'm tracing the lines of experience that are easy to overlook, the tension in a small gesture, the weight of a glance, the way words can both hurt and heal. These moments might seem minor, but they carry truth, and writing gives me a place to notice them without judgment.

Sometimes the act of putting pen to paper uncovers feelings I didn't realize I was holding. I've found that the small frustrations and hidden anxieties of daily life, whether tied to my health, relationships, or identity, helped me gain clarity and perspective when I write. Each sentence is a chance to step back, reflect, and see the patterns in my own story, even the ones that might otherwise stay invisible.

Ultimately, writing has taught me that subtlety doesn't mean unimportant. By focusing on the quiet, overlooked details of life, I've learned to honor complexity, embrace patience, and recognize growth in ways that aren't always obvious at first glance. Through my scripts and poems, I'm learning not only to understand myself, but also to invite others to see, feel, and connect with these understated truths.

Two of my poems, "The End: The Beginning" and "Crown" capture this approach, turning the understated moments I see every day into a lens for understanding and connection.

The End: The Beginning

Staring down the hall, with the lockers darkening at every square,
running my hands over the papers that once caused me so much despair,
I look at the driveways of classmates who once were,
and into the windows of their lives now scattered.

Some of them I no longer speak to.
Some have passed.
Some are behind bars.
Some are acclaimed researchers in cities I'll never live in.
And yet, once, we all knew each other's names.
We all shared the same halls, the same small-town streets,
the same early-morning bus rides,
the same lunchroom chatter.

There is something almost sacred about it,
the intimacy of growing up here,
where everyone's story brushed against everyone else's,
even when we didn't notice it.
Even when we were too busy being ourselves
to see the fragile thread holding us together.

And now, graduation nears.
And it is unbearably sad.
Not just because we are leaving,
but because leaving means knowing
that the next time we return,
it will not be the same.
The streets, the buildings, the hallways:
they will not hold us the way they once did.
And we will not be the same.

I think of the classmates I have lost:
some too soon, some to choices I cannot understand,
some who rose above everything I knew.
I think of the shared beginnings,
the awkwardness, the small victories, the quiet sorrows,
and I feel the weight of all that was once common
and will now be separate.

There is beauty here,
in the way we started together,
in the way a town can hold a life so closely,
even when it cannot hold it forever.

And there is grief, too,
a quiet, twisting grief,
for the people we loved in ways we barely understood,
for the innocence of knowing each other's names,
for the inevitability of moving on.

I linger in the hallways a moment longer,
listening to the echoes of voices that are not mine,
tracing the empty seats, the worn floors,
remembering that once,
we were all together here,
and that we will never be again.

Crown

Every morning, my hands trace the strands
as if mapping the lines of a map I didn't draw.

The mirror asks for perfection:
straightened, braided, combed, smooth, neat.
No kink out of place, no curl escaping,
because standing out is not an option.

For them, standing out is power—
a sparkle, a shout, a victory.
For us, standing out can be fatal—
a glare, a whisper, a warning.

There is pressure in every tug of the comb,
in the shine of the oil, in the quiet hours spent
making my hair something safe, something acceptable,
something worthy of passing without comment.

I am taught early that my crown
is never just mine, it is armor,
a shield, a mask, a performance.
Sometimes I want it wild,
to let it curl like rivers, like storms, like freedom,
but freedom is dangerous, and survival is expected.

The hands that braid me carry whispers of history,
of mothers and grandmothers who shaped their own crowns
to survive, to please, to belong.
I carry their patience, their pain,
their insistence that beauty is also survival.

And every time I step out,
my hair speaks before I do.
It says I belong.
It says I am careful.
It says I am enough, if only I follow the rules.