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Domestic violence survivor uses her writing as therapy

Year of the Rabbit began as collection of short stories

By Randy Ray

After surviving a violent attack in 2003 at the hands of her former husband, Theresa Jobateh needed an outlet that would help her deal with the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and maintain her sanity while supporting three teenagers and working full time.

For Jobateh, a resident of Nepean, that outlet was to take up writing, a pursuit which initially produced a series of short stories and this spring resulted in the release of her first novel *The Year of the Rabbit – A Novel about Fate, Family and Forgiveness* under the pen name Florence T Lyon. “How does a survivor of domestic violence deal with symptoms of stress? How does this single mother keep her sanity while supporting three teenagers and working full-time? She writes,” says Jobateh who was attacked in her family home in the presence of her children.

“She learns and networks with seasoned writers and published authors. She volunteers her skills and time to assist others in reaching their own goals. And above all, she maintains a sense of humour. She also welcomes interesting characters into her world and gives them life on paper or the computer screen.” Using writing as her therapy, and with the help of medical professionals, family and friends, Jobateh gradually healed and re-



Attacked in her family home in the presence of her children, Theresa Jobateh used writing as part of her recovery process.

turned to work five months after the attack.

The self-published book does not deal with Jobateh’s personal struggles but does touch on the issue of domestic violence.

In the novel, readers meet a young priest who goes through the motions of following the teachings of the church in a small Muskoka town during the 1970s. He finds his true calling through unexpected encounters with his precocious love child. A little girl tries to make sense of her lonely world and sees the *Year of the Rabbit* as one of hope due to the birth of her illegitimate nephew.

The story explains how an 11-year-old girl deals with loneliness and the loss of her best friend who is whisked away to a secret location along with her battered mother. It also addresses the effects of domestic abuse in a small town and how the priest deals with the surprise discovery of his biological daughter.

“Was it coincidence or was it fate ... that’s what I want people to ask after reading the book,” says Jobateh. *The Year of the Rabbit* began as a collection of short stories written since 2006 that take place in the fictional town of Seguin Sound. They

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– Theresa Jobateh

evolved into a novel over the years and provided Jobateh with a welcome distraction from a lonely, challenging existence.

“The book touches on issues that include belief systems, sexuality, teen pregnancy, family relationships and coming of age. It contains some profane language, references to disturbing circumstances and ... a murder,” she says. Reflecting on her own trials and tribulations, Jobateh says: “Emotional scars don’t heal as quickly. It has been a hard journey to repair my family’s life and guide the children on paths with a future.”

Not wanting to use her married name to pen the novel, Jobateh chose the name Florence T Lyon. There are many reasons why this particular name was chosen.

Jobateh has been a member of local writers’ group Ottawa Independent Writers since 2006 and a volunteer on the OIW board since 2007. She enjoys using her computer and web skills to help the club enhance its presence and improve services for members.

For more information about *The Year of the Rabbit*, visit: www.yearoftherabbit.ca.

The big yellow buses are back

By Vicki Morrison

It’s back to school time again. That means there are more people on the road driving, cycling and walking to school. School buses are running on full schedule, covering all routes. It’s time to remind all drivers to safely share the road with children. While children are excited to be going back to school, their minds are not always on safety. They are easily distracted and easily missed as they dart out from between parked vehicles, or as they run across the street to meet a friend at a bus stop. As a parent it’s time to remind kids of school bus safety rules. As a driver it’s time to slow down and pay close attention. We all have a part to play in keeping kids safe.

Parents play a big role in the safety of their children at the bus stop. If parents, teachers, bus drivers and children work together the rules of safety will be top of mind for everyone.

Parents may underestimate the importance of the thumbs-up sign, one particular tool bus drivers use. When a bus driver gives a thumbs-up sign to a child, it doesn’t mean the child behaved well that day on the bus; it means the bus driver is certain that child is safe to cross the street. This is a very important signal and parents and children need to pay attention to and obey the thumbs-up sign.

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Reel kids making real movies

Public première of Reel Girlz short films to take place at Arts Court on Sept. 8

By Iona Green

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With the support of grants from the Community Foundation of Ottawa and a partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters Ottawa,

the Independent Filmmakers Cooperative of Ottawa is introducing local young people to the “reel” art of filmmaking. Through both the Reel Boys and Reel Girlz projects (run over the last two consecutive summers), youth from low-income communities have been receiving filmmaking training, production equipment and supplies toward the creation of their own Super 8 short films. And this year’s crop of new films will soon be screened at a special première event at the Arts Court Theatre.

The only organization of its kind in Ottawa, IFCO has been providing local filmmakers with the facilities, training and funding to make independent films in authentic celluloid formats since 1992. Over the last several years it has expanded its programming to engage local youths in exploring the art of filmmaking as a creative outlet for telling their own stories.

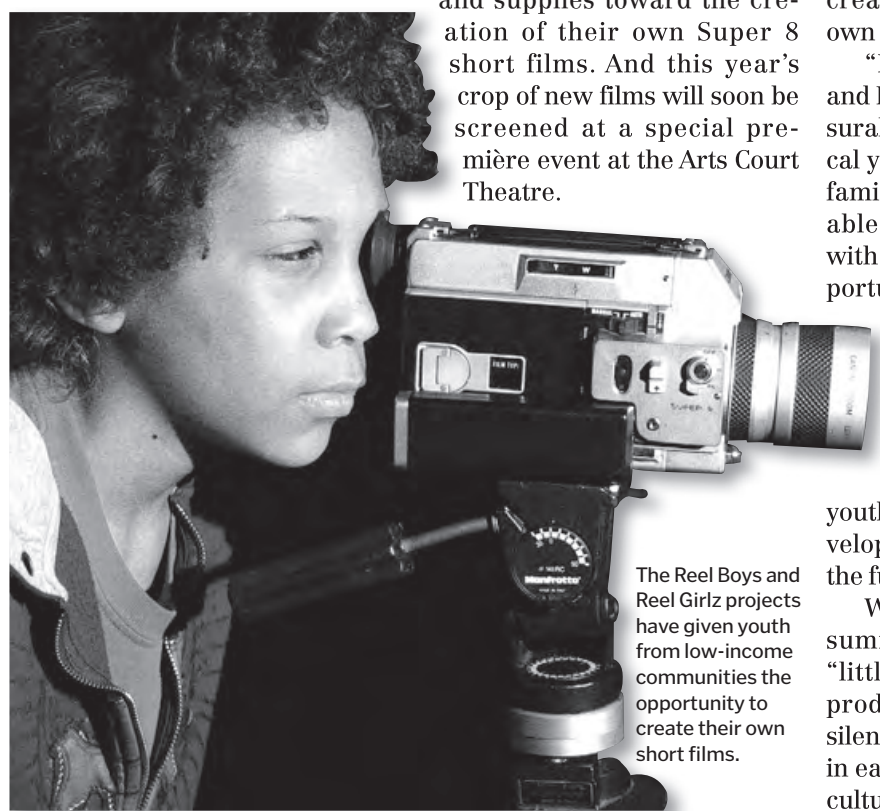
“Projects such as Reel Boys and Reel Girlz contribute immeasurably to the development of local youth, especially those whose families would not otherwise be able to afford to provide them with access to these types of opportunities,” said Patrice James, executive director of IFCO. “Thanks to the grants we received from the Community Foundation of Ottawa, we were able to offer this under-served group of youth an opportunity to grow, develop and express themselves to the fullest.”

With the help of BBBSO, both summer programs paired five “littles” with five “bigs” on the production of black-and-white, silent, short films that are rooted in each participant’s ethos, ideas, culture and vision. “All of our Reel

Boys and Girlz participants walked into IFCO as novice artists and walked out as budding filmmakers,” said James, “They take with them the additional knowledge and confidence that they can achieve anything they set their minds to.”

The public is invited to share in celebrating the work of the Reel Girlz filmmakers at the première screening of their shorts on Thursday, Sept. 8 at 7 p.m. at the Arts Court Theatre at 2 Daly Ave. Food and refreshments will be served at a post-screening reception in the Arts Court Studio. The event is being presented in partnership with the Downtown Rideau Business Improvement Area.

For more information about IFCO, visit www.ifco.ca. For information about how to make a difference in the community or apply for a grant from the Community Foundation of Ottawa, visit www.cfo-fco.ca.



The Reel Boys and Reel Girlz projects have given youth from low-income communities the opportunity to create their own short films.



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