

VOLUME 3/3

**POEMS**  
**FROM THE SECOND ANNUAL**  
**ARTISTS THRIVE SUMMIT**

JULY 31-AUGUST 3, 2018  
BEREA, KENTUCKY

# TARIA PERSON

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## PREFACE

July 31st, I was on my way to the Artists Thrive Summit—“an annual convening of artists, administrators, funders and art advocates.” It was about a 6 hour and 30 minute drive from Chicago to Berea, which was enough time for me to dwell on being upset, anxious, depressed, not feeling good enough, and frustrated about being all of the above. In the rearview mirror, I inspected the soupiness of my face—a hue reminiscent of chunky tomatoes, and brown-lentils blended inside of a bowl. A bolt of lightning struck in the near distance electrifying the sky, which caused me to swerve into focusing on the road and getting to the summit safely; though, all around me, were masses of charcoal-gray, clouds striding through the troposphere, and thunder rumbling underneath the car. Without hesitation, “Worst Behavior” by Drake amplified over the speakers, and it’s through the shouting of his lyrics that I remembered to manage my emotions.

At the next exit, I stopped for gas and snacks for the rest of the ride, and jumped into another contemplation; a moment of remembrance—the time that I was in Ridgeway—A Transformative Leadership Experience—a cohort full of brilliant and compassionate people like Ali Blair. She was my accountability partner, and an inspiring force. I remembered her expressing to me that life was like a car ride through the mountains. Sometimes, you’ve got to pull the car over to get gas, fix a tire, and even feel your toes rummage through the nearby soil. In the station, I put a bottle of water, a tall can of Red bull, and a bag of Zapp’s Vodoo Chips onto the counter, then asked for \$20 on pump 8. The glass door swung shut, ringing the overhead bell.

Out in the open, I expressed in the form of a monologue:

Look, you’ve been commissioned to document your experience at this summit by using the ‘I AM AN ARTIST’ tool, because folk believe in who you are, believe in what you have to share, and your perspective, so get it together! You are not an imposter. Do you know who you are? Why do we have to keep going over this? You’re Taria Person: The Realest Person, an artist and badass! Who told you that you have to be anything else...that you have to be perfect? Cause you’re not...Who told you that you wouldn’t make it? ...Cause you are. I am! I’ve been! Taria, you’re a full-time artist. You manifested it! You’ve lived it, and you’re still going. My god, be grateful for where you are in your journey.

(...)

My heart palpitated from being worked up, and engulfed in an overactive imagination. I pumped in the remainder of cents, burned sage, and drove away. I thought of my love partner, my fiancée—Chanel, and what she had reminded me many times already, which conjured up a phone call from her. After she reiterated for me to breathe, drink water, and think happy thoughts, she asked what my deal was, and if I had eaten anything since I had been on the road. Of course I hadn't, yet before we continued, the bag of Voodoo chips and the trail mix—out of the glove compartment—were absorbed with both beverages.

She reprised to this time last year, when I had pulmonary embolisms, and blood clots in my right bicep and shoulder. I remembered the fear of thinking that I was going to die at the age of 26 with all of the follow-up hospital visits. Fear from the countless nurses and doctors being baffled, regarding how bizarre it was that I had produced blood clots, being that I was so healthy and that there were no known reasons for the sickness.

Chanel stated, “Bald head and sick! Mrs. Angela told us what it was; it's stress!”

I apply peppermint underneath my nose to deep breathe.

“You not gone tell me that you've had all of these tests done, and they don't know why you produced blood clots. You don't believe that fat meat's greasy! I keep telling you, mind over matter. You learned about managing your stress and time at Ridgeway. How to meditate and center...you just have to apply it. Like I keep on saying, you too great for this shit, man.”

In an attempt to rebuttal the encouragement, I replied, “I'm trying. It's just hard because I have anxiety, and this art life is hard, and I don't feel great about myself or work.” The storm proceeds, as does her confidence in me.

“Well, the first thing is, just like we stopped claiming blood clots, stop claiming this anxiety, depression, and mediocrity. Let it go! And all of what you're doing is hard. Nobody said any of this was gone be easy. You're creating phenomenal artwork out of nowhere, trauma, joy, and you've performed these poems a million times, so it's not that you don't know them. You just have to get back to your confidence, Taria. Believe in yourself!”

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Here's a special thank you to the Emily Hall Tremain Foundation (and all associated), for commissioning me to attend and document my experience at the 2nd Annual Artists Thrive Summit. I give deep gratitude to my love—Chanel Braswell, my sister's—Tamika Person and Mikaya White, my mentor—Cheles Rhynes, and my poetry mother—Rhea Carmon for giving me constructive feedback and work-shopping my artwork. Also, for everyone that I was able to connect with at the summit, which greatly contributed to this piece. Much love. Peace.

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## Thrive

survival  
struggle  
thriving      striding  
    steady  
    never give up  
the mode is set to grind  
    refining craft  
    at the summit  
    we buff  
each other into better  
    past the pressure  
    drafting out plans  
    strategic building  
    pocket full of pens,  
    a couple napkins  
    to knock the crumbs  
    down from the corners  
speak on wonder and such  
    like all the knowledge  
    that we've learned  
    in many sessions  
    engulfed  
into much wisdom, money, value,  
    application  
    combust  
    from inspiration  
    adjust  
    our inner power  
    entrust



**Mantra**

art is not easy  
knowing balance takes practice  
remember to breathe

## Like a Tree in the Rain

At Boone Tavern Hotel  
I'm asked can I be helped,  
and this morning  
hesitation tells the truth.

When nervous  
I smile,

standing in a puddle of embarrassment  
telling stories.

My plan,

(because I ran out of gas)

walk across  
both drums at my sides  
a second trip for the stand

slipped,

and it's almost time to go.

At the front desk, I'm grounded  
like a tree in the rain  
when there's a deluge.

I expressed:

"I have a performance  
this morning.  
By chance, do you know  
if I can get a ride...  
on one of those golf carts?  
...It's raining."

I took a second to believe,  
to remember,  
and manifest flowers  
from the universe.

Beth Flowers—director of AIR  
Institute at Berea College,  
walked into the lobby. A smile stretched

(...)

across my face,  
but I am greeted with a hug.  
I asked for a ride,  
and my heart palpitates—

a flutter  
a physical reminder  
where my body begs  
itself to calm down,

but she is honored  
and can't wait  
to witness the power  
in my message...  
my performance.

I whooped, "Appreciate it!  
This truly helps me out."

In the car, windshield wipers added  
rhythm,  
and cleared the view.

"No problem.  
I was already on the way.  
I'm just glad  
that I was here  
to help.  
Sometimes, it just pays  
to be  
in the right place  
at the right time."

## Winning is a Mindset

If you went  
to the “Art Trivia Party,”

you heard Megan Flanders  
lure us in with

“Everyone  
is a winner. Today,

you are rewarded  
for what you don’t know.”

And an amen corner  
concurred!

There’s prizes  
envelopes full  
of mental puzzles  
pencils  
and joy  
like pop rocks  
droopy pandas and full-figured  
Winnie the Pooh erasers.  
A business card

with, “Getting your Sh\*t  
Together

making life better  
for artists.”

And I’m thankful

to be in a safe space  
a table of people  
sharing similar  
sentiments

like not knowing  
and laughing  
about struggling  
and thriving.

(...)

Real conversations  
excitement  
art  
support  
the anxiety of being  
uncomfortable, and surviving

in these moments.

Dressed in smiles  
feeling solid

and as a team, we figured

we all have minds  
strengths

and as a community  
we got this shit!

...and no clue  
and confidence  
and life  
and breath

and with that

we can do  
our best to lift this energy  
if not for ever

**In connection**

“There’s inspiration in the juice.”  
-Carolyn Finney

I followed the directions  
to make it.  
Worked  
for juice—a cup of inspiration,  
fruit in abundance,  
freshly squeezed by hand.

## Summit Quotes

“I’m picky about what I spend my time on.  
That’s self-care.”

-Pat Shelton

“You can have anything  
you want sis. Your success  
is important to me. When you win, I win.”

-Jonathan “Courageous” Clark

“Define success for yourself.”

-A guy from the money session

## Clear the Space

inside of a puddle of tears, which reflects the current,  
rub the rough smooth,  
into resilience,  
the brilliance of you  
let it shine.

reach for your highest self.

remember that you were made  
in the imagine of rainbows

a reminder that you are beautiful in the midst  
of the storms coming  
towards the courage that you've built,  
the endurance helping you to continue.

remember that it's you plus everything.  
be intimate with your impact.

it's time to believe  
in the name of health,  
laughter as medicine,  
the act of pouring power  
into yourself,  
your alluring mind.

“You have a powerful voice.  
Don’t let anyone  
try and take it from you.  
I know you won’t  
let them, but  
I thought I would just  
let you know, anyway.”

-Karen Lowell

## Aesthetics

Someone questioned me  
my words  
my worth  
my existence,

asked:

“Don’t take this the wrong way, but  
why do you have to write so black?”

He chuckled.

And in my opinion, the inquest reminded me  
that many folk want to be in control  
of everything  
even my life  
the way I show  
up.

I breathed.

His investigation continued:

“I’m only asking a question,  
what’s up with the attitude?”

I nearly rolled my eyes  
into the lenses of my glasses, and said:

“I don’t have a bad attitude  
if that’s what you mean.”

(...)

He uttered with the audacity:

“Well, why are you breathing  
all hard then?”

Like my mouth was or has ever been his  
screen door  
like I have to be reminded  
not to let the air spill  
out onto the front porch  
or into the field  
like I need his permission  
to stay in or outside and play.

But this is home,  
and I’m here  
for none of that. Not here to entertain  
code switch  
or feed his ignorance.

I served my response  
un-sweet.  
Demanded,

“Why the fuck not?  
Why should I breathe any softer?  
And since you think you know me  
so well,  
what’s best...How should I be writing  
if I’m not writing Black?”

He evolved  
into the color of cherry-  
tomatoes.

“I’m not trying to offend.  
I’m just saying that you don’t have to write  
in dialect. You can just say  
that the characters are black,  
from a certain demographic  
and hood,  
and we’ll get it.”

I gasped in awe, and proceeded  
to laugh.

“Honestly, it’s just hard for me to read,  
and it’s going to take a long time,” he said.

(...)

Loud  
as if exclaiming  
from the top of a mountain, I shouted:

“I know many people  
that will ‘get it.’

Like how messages seep through music  
brewed in culture and risks  
to be  
creative and represented

messages, and how they remain  
like dreams stitched into Appalachian quilts,  
the trails directing us to freedom,  
and back  
to the message  
for the people it’s meant for—”

Trying to find a way out of the dark  
hole created, he implicated:

“Why are you making this all about race?  
This is about writing. We all have to study,  
right?











“And if I have to pull out the OED—  
Oxford English Dictionary  
or sit in classes for years to understand  
English  
or immerse myself in other languages  
or make love to books  
or live in the library  
or put up with the generational  
look of hatred for being

black  
a woman  
a queer-ass-lesbian

and since we are studying,

I think it’s safe to learn and ask  
the right questions.  
At least try understanding,  
and witnessing the black ink  
on my hands.

(...)



It's resemblance to the blood  
shed, tears,  
the stains we have  
embraced as beautiful,  
the scars we have fought for  
to defend our existence  
as important beings  
as important beings  
as important beings—”

“You don't have to be rude,  
and you don't have to keep repeating  
yourself. I get it!”

He stormed off.

Guessed he understood  
what I meant after all...



## First Friday

I was invited to perform  
at the Berea Music Series—a festival  
full of local food, bubbles, handmade crafts, & warm hugs like an  
introduction  
from Ali Blair encouraging me to bring the resistance;  
however, before I made a sound, someone from the audience plugged their  
ears.  
Stunned. I shielded my soul with a smile to conceal all tenderness, and  
planned to be louder than the beat.

From the stage, I saw white-haired country folk snapping fingers on the  
off-beat,  
several shades of children flipping cartwheels and creating interpretive  
moves to perform  
along with me...Bohemians—rind in hickory, and hippies with florid cheeks,  
sitting crisscross applesauce, swaying, disrupting the image of the person  
closing off their ears.  
I shouted and beat the congas louder! Anger shedded from my shoulders  
during the message, the festival  
the poem full of shit like swears—heavy and real, black and existing like gay  
in my presence. The resistance  
in my rhythm, my tongue. My head elevated was the introduction

to my truth, the process of regaining all of me during the jam, and it's only  
the introduction,  
I reminded myself. Yet, offstage, I'm reminded by another person that  
“Maybe it was too loud a beat,”  
maybe there's justification for that person's resistance.  
But Raymond McLain—bedazzled in a blazer dipped in blue grass said, “You  
sho'll can perform,  
you're talented, and you've brought flavor to this festival.”  
I let the love embrace me and enter my ears.

Awareness brushed me like a tepid breeze on the ear.  
Realization that I was still on the shocking introduction,  
instead of the art, activism, admiration, and alchemy within the festival.  
I began to hand bone a beat  
to escape the sensation—a pinch of affliction. Performed  
along with childlike fun, stress-free.  
Sustained inner peace as a novel form of resistance.

Ali emphasized, “Hell yeah! I heard you say ‘fuck’ and ‘areola’ in your set.  
Bringing the resistance

(...)

to Kentucky. The last one you did, ‘Rapper,’ I really enjoyed that one.” Such a pleasure to my ears.

“I’m so glad you could come perform for us.” I’m embraced like the introduction she provided. My heartbeat calmed like the closure of the festival.

Once again, I, on the walk to the car, reflected on the importance of the festival—

to show up as present (even under the lenses of scrutiny or while receiving resistance),

to be deliberate as a pop of beat entertaining receptive ears,

to enjoy friendship, butterflies in the breeze, art, the reoccurring vibrancy of light across the sky. Witness, for self, the introduction of a sun setting like a complimentary boat of rainbow slaw. I sung low, performed

the tune to “Dipped in Black,” again. Performed it’s introduction over the bees and engine humming in my ears.

## Money Session

I. "...Anyone who is an artist is working, though!"  
Why so divisive?

II. "Labor does not talk about our value. Maybe... creative practice?"

III. "Why would any learn about money if you aren't going to make it?"

IV. "Really? ...Do artists give up? ...Maybe go dormant, pause...might disengage."

“Being scared is okay,  
it shows your honesty. Let fear be your guide.”

-Carmen Mitzi Sinnott

### Four Roses under the Moon

All smoke dissipates before the question,  
“Isn’t it scary being seen?” The crowd  
sparks light along the ink of space, and none  
of us speak for a moment; though, the clouds  
permeate through skies. Aloof is every-  
thing universe, and nothing. “It’s something  
to think about? I mean, especially,  
believing in our greatness,” and supping  
it up like some cornbread, a bowl of black-  
eyed peas...some type of green for nourishment.  
“Scary, right?” Behind a chilled glass, I act  
fearless. “...But here’s to your accomplishments,”  
they shout. Like I only know courage. Must  
be part of creation. Blowing from dust.



**Conjuring up Ancestors**

rhythm in mountains,  
rise as the moonlight to rinse,  
rock into movement

## BIOGRAPHY

**Taria Person** is an alumna of the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, where she received a dual B.A. in English Creative Writing: Poetry, and Interdisciplinary Studies: Africana Studies. She is the author of *Rainbow Elephant*, and her work has appeared in numerous anthologies, including: *O' Woman a Tapestry of Loving You*, and *Voices of Warriors: Poems of Hope & Healing*. Taria Person won 1st place at the regional Big Ears: Spoken Word Expo/The 5th Woman Poetry Slam (2017), the Regional Southern Fried Hip-Hop Slam (2013), and Knoxville Poetry Slam (2012). Also, she has been an actress and Production Stage Manager for The Carpetbag Theatre Inc., during its original series of stage productions that have been funded by The Roy Cockrum Foundation, in celebration of (CBT's) 50th Anniversary. Recently, Person won an Artistic Professional Development grant from Alternate Roots for her original stage play, *Hangers*.

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