

Dear Warrior Writers,

It is a pleasure to follow up on what has been nearly three years of research and site visits with news that my radio and performance project, tentatively titled *A Desert Home Companion*, has received funding and will launch in less than a year, on September 24, 2016.

As some of you may know, it was conceived as a site-specific project for Philadelphia. I knew from the beginning I would be interested to make use of the specific context and opportunity of Philadelphia, in both the people and organizations tied to it. Early on we met an Iraqi refugee couple, and the project took form around them--Bhajat Abdulwahed—the “Walter Cronkite of Iraq”—and his wife Haifa Abdulqader, another prominent broadcaster in Baghdad. This has given me a framework to consider the stories and contributions of many participants through a serialized radio program (ten episodes of approximately 25 minutes each) kicked off by a live performance on Independence Mall. We expect the project to have a very high local visibility given the performance location, and a large dispersed audience through the radio component, across the United States, in Jordan, and very likely in Iraq.

Warrior Writers has been such an inspiration to me and it was through multiple collaborations with Aaron Hughes that your projects and published anthologies came to my attention. I’ve had the honor of collaborating with Kevin Basl, Nicole Goodwin and many other members through *Enemy Kitchen* cooking events. I am very excited to build this project in collaboration with you and the city’s Iraqi refugee community.

Going forward, I think it would be good to begin scheduling some workshop sessions, in order to generate content for the program (there are possibilities to participate through writing, but also through live performance and recorded performance). There are so many directions to investigate, which is a gift but also daunting. Some of my own encounters with veterans like Aaron Hughes have introduced me to narrative therapy as a treatment for PTSD. I find this to be a very beautiful and useful storytelling mechanism that could have a profound impact on the listener. To recollect one’s experience in Iraq, whether as citizen who became a refugee, an émigré, or asylum seeker, or as a soldier who returns also as a refugee of sorts, could create the non-space I’d love these programs to linger within. The attempt to piece things together to learn about a past experience lost in trauma, like fragments of excavated artifacts, would be beautiful to hear.

Aaron also spoke of his own dreams, where the landscape of Iraq intersected with the landscape of Chicago, creating a kind of mirage, or hallucination. These types of dreams or visions would be great to illuminate through words.

As Bhajat and Haifa were news broadcasters, their hosting style will likely be familiar. I plan to take advantage of some conventions of radio—the emergency

interruption, advertising, weather reports, for example—to play with the possibilities afforded by the format, and reflecting the complexities of ideas that traverse geography and time, the real and the fantastical, and individual and collective experience. In this spirit, Warrior Writers’ interventions and interludes can take advantage of this, and allow for the slippery space between descriptive recollections and a more idiosyncratic, surreal recollection to emerge.

And of course, there is poetry and music that can be incorporated.

I’m not interested in being too directive about how this process will work, because I want our imaginations to stay open to possibility. But, summing this all up, perhaps a good way to think about this project before we meet is to consider what you would like to say, and to tell a widespread audience through the beautiful blindness afforded by radio.

I will also continue to meet with groups of refugees in this process, and once we are further along I imagine we would have some meetings all together before we get to the production time of the performance. Over time things will become more clear as the fluidity of the process leads us, but in the meantime we are happy to answer any questions you may have. I do want you to know that the Mural Arts Program is incredibly supportive of this project, we have a great team of dedicated collaborators who will work to make the impact and reach of this project as great as possible, and that due to the generosity of the Pew Center for Arts and Heritage we have been able to budget to fairly compensate participants.

I look forward to seeing you soon.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Rakowitz', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael Rakowitz