

Andrea Hope



What are your favorite ways to be creative? Poet Andrea Hope uses words to show her love for storytelling and helping others. She wants "to inspire other people to use what their talents or interests are to contribute to serving humanity . . ." She says, "We have all these different tools . . . like social media, like music and poetry. All these things can be used to promote positive concepts and to connect people . . ."

Andrea was born in the Bahamas and moved to Virginia, U.S., when she was six. In middle school, she started performing her poetry. After high school, Andrea earned a degree in Communication. She promotes spoken word poetry by organizing events where people share their stories. She's also published a kids' book of poetry-writing activities called *I Am and I Can*. Andrea and her husband, Marcin Góra, serve at the Bahá'í World Center in Haifa, Israel.

Q: What's your favorite childhood memory?

A: Doing fake TV shows with my sister when we were younger, when we had to do chores . . . If we had to clean the bathroom or do something, then we would pretend we were on a TV show in the bathroom mirror and explain to the audience how to clean and what we were doing.

Q: How did you start writing poetry so young?

A: When I was younger, I really always kind of felt the weight of the world on myself, and I felt like, how am I going to help with all these problems and issues? And so poetry was just somehow a natural way for me to deal with those emotions and to jot down my ideas.



When they were kids, Andrea (left) and her sister, Elizabeth, found fun ways to do household chores with creativity and imagination.

Q: What was the most challenging experience for you when you were a kid?

A: Mostly conversations about race. We grew up in the Bahamas, so we kind of had to learn about the history of race in America a little bit later . . . I was six when we came [to the U.S.] . . . So in school, I would get teased for acting white or [for] certain things that I liked or how I talked, and I was always in advanced classes . . .

I would just really talk to my mom about it. And she was always really supportive of us being individuals and us not being afraid to be ourselves and challenge people's stereotypes . . . And of course, the Bahá'í community was so diverse that I was just used to being around so many different types of people. It was really a positive grounding for me to have the Bahá'ís who were there saying we're different and we're friends and we love each other.

Questions and
Answers with an
Inspirational Bahá'í



Left: Andrea's 2012 CD of spoken word poetry features this joyful portrait.
Right: In April 2015, Andrea and Marcin Góra celebrated their marriage in 'Akká, Israel.

Q: How does spoken word poetry differ from written poetry?

A: When you write poetry, people have longer to connect with what you're saying . . . You can reread and reread and draw more things from written poetry. But with spoken word, it's very conversational . . . So when I write for spoken word, I really write kind of imagining that I'm talking to someone or understanding that someone is going to be reacting to this, and it's more of a community.

Q: What are some things that inspire you to write poetry?

A: Connection is the biggest inspiration . . . So in my poetry . . . my most wonderful moments are moments where I can connect with someone else and say, you're not the only person who is going through this . . . So being open and feeling connected and vulnerable is really what inspires me to write and to share and to listen.

Q: What qualities do you think are most important for a successful poet?

A: Creativity, to be genuine, and passion . . . You have to really care about something to have other people also care . . . You have to do it in a creative way, and you have to do it in a genuine way.

Q: You've written about how to break down prejudice. What's one important tip you have for kids to keep in mind?

A: When you need help . . . ask someone who looks different than you . . . When I was in school, I know a lot of times certain types of people would sit together at lunch, or they would . . . invite people who look like them, or people who listen to the same music as [them] to do things. And it doesn't have to be like that. Just because you don't have everything in common doesn't mean that you don't have some things in common.

Q: This issue of *Brilliant Star* is about building community. What advice do you have for kids who want to be of service to their communities?

A: Find something that you really enjoy that's a skill or an interest or a talent, and use that to find creative ways to support those around you . . . Find out . . . what . . . my community needs, what do my siblings and my family and people in my neighborhood want, or [what's] missing? And then how can I use the talent that I have, whether that's speaking out to people about it, or . . . doing performances and food drives, or whatever it is.

Q: What's your wish for *Brilliant Star's* readers?

A: To use your time when you're young to find out your interests and talents and abilities, and to commit to pursuing those in a way that serves the common good.