

The Unwritten is a publication for disabled people by disabled people. It's a space for them to share their stories without fear of being filtered for the non-disabled gaze. Most importantly, it's somewhere for disabled people to feel seen, heard, and to know that no matter what, they are valid.

The Unwritten was created during a year that none of us saw coming. The awful circumstances of 2020 rocked us all, but disabled people in particular were disproportionately affected. I was watching my community fight, terrified and grieving each day - but outside of disability Twitter, I wasn't seeing half as much outrage as I was expecting. As a freelance journalist I had been reporting on disability issues throughout the pandemic, but I found it increasingly difficult to have my work published unless it had a news hook or I plumbed the depths of my pain.

I realised how vital it was that disabled people have a space to share their stories. Frequently the only time you hear about disabled people is to inspire non-disabled people or give them the warm fuzzies. Even worse is that a lot of the time the only way disabled writers can get published is when our trauma is relived for pity.

When non-disabled people tell our stories, they're not speaking from experience, so it isn't possible for them to represent the whole truth. There are also very few disabled people in newsrooms. An NCTJ report in 2017 found that just 14% of all journalists in Britain were disabled.

This is why The Unwritten came about.

I began floating the idea of The Unwritten on Twitter in the Autumn of 2020 as "a hypothetical disability-led publication" and although I knew there was a need for this, what I didn't realise was just how much disabled people needed a publication like this. The response was absolutely overwhelming, from offers of support, to messages of endorsement from disabled campaigners such as Ruth Madeley and Jack Monroe. When our fundraiser launched we received over £500 in donations in the first weekend and when we opened the call for pitches, we had hundreds of people desperate to share their stories.

Since launching in December we've published some vital perspectives throughout the pandemic and about the disabled experience. Shona Louise's unreserved missive about how she shouldn't be grateful about disability rights was a battle cry to others.

An unexpected popular category for articles has been disabled perspectives on sex and relationships, largely missing from mainstream culture. Eva Grant's incredible essay about how she couldn't leave her abuser whilst going through cancer, was relatable and emotional without feeling exploitative of her trauma because it was her unfiltered experience.

A breakthrough piece was written by me and something I'm immensely proud of, as a response to the news that disabled people in hospital with Covid are facing forced Do Not Resuscitate Orders, simply titled Please Stop Killing Us. This struck such a chord with others, with its massive popularity putting us in the media spotlight.

The feedback I've received has been incredibly overwhelming. It's really brought home how big a difference it can make when disabled people see themselves represented in the media and issues that affect their lives being discussed instead of being brushed under the carpet. I'm not exaggerating when I tell you that I cry with joy on a weekly basis. I am astounded by what these amazing freelance writers are willing to give to my dream.

Another priority is paying my writers. Not only do not enough publications showcase disabled stories, the ones that do such as The Mighty aren't run by disabled people and don't pay disabled writers. My dream is to have a full team of staff that I can pay fairly for their work and also take on freelancers.

We are 100% crowdfunded, this means that I pay £75 per article and publish once or twice a week. If we were to win this award, the prize money would help me to amplify more voices and work towards upping my fee. I am hoping that the award will also open doors for us in the industry to receive further sponsorship and endorsement.

My hope for The Unwritten is that I can make a positive change in how disabled people see themselves and are represented in the media. In time I also hope that we can change how the media sees disabled people, as more than just inspiration porn, to real people, with real voices.

The Unwritten Work Examples

<https://www.theunwritten.co.uk/2021/01/05/i-dont-want-to-be-grateful-and-patient-about-disability-rights/>

<https://www.theunwritten.co.uk/2021/01/20/for-me-answering-why-didnt-you-leave-your-abuser-sooner-is-simple-i-was-disabled/>

<https://www.theunwritten.co.uk/2021/02/14/please-stop-killing-us/>

The Unwritten Georgina Henry Award application appendix

BBC News: Covid: Disabled people account for six in 10 deaths in England last year
– ONS

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-56033813>

Office for National Statistics: Updated estimates of coronavirus (COVID-19) related deaths by disability status, England: 24 January to 20 November 2020

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/coronaviruscovid19relateddeathsbydisabilitystatusenglandandwales/24januaryto20november2020#main-points>

NCTJ: Diversity in Journalism Report for the National Council for the Training of Journalists

<https://www.nctj.com/downloadlibrary/DIVERSITY%20JOURNALISM%204WEB.pdf>