

Interview with '08 grad Clemantine Wamariya

Wamariya speaks on best-selling novel and human rights advocacy

by Amelia Jacobson

On Mar. 14, Clemantine Wamariya, Class of '08, returned to New Trier as one of nine recipients of the 2019 Alumni Achievement Award.

After New Trier, Wamariya graduated from Yale University with a BA in Comparative Literature. Wamariya is presently an accomplished human rights advocate and a New York Times bestselling author. Her memoir, "The Girl Who Smiled Beads," was written with Elizabeth Weil, and debuted in Apr. 2018.

In 2011, President Obama appointed her to the board of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, making her the youngest board member in the organization's history.

While at New Trier, Wamariya was active in theatre and charity work, like collecting change for Habitat for Humanity. She found the stage an ideal place to learn about herself.

"I would say between theatre and dance, and just being in a art room, was my favorite [part of being at New Trier] because every person in theatre, we all had a question about ourselves, about our identity, we weren't confirming to us a certain type of being," said Wamariya.

Wamariya has a love of storytelling, nurtured early in her life by the stories her nanny told her. Her book is named after one such story, and she found theatre to be a great place to share a story.

"It was really fun to do costumes together, or to be able to do lighting together, or to be able to do setting together. You know, to gather everyone and to be able to see how each one of your efforts adds into a story, and that story being on stage is absolutely amazing," she said.

Wamariya's path to New Trier is a story of survival and accomplishments. 25 years ago, more than 800,000 Rwandans were killed over a 100 day period as the Hutu majority slaughtered the Tutsi minority. Fueled by ethnic differences, and flamed by government propaganda, neighbors killed neighbors.

Wamariya's book recounts her six-year journey from her homeland, through six African countries, before being granted asylum in the United States.

She was just six years old and her sister Claire was 14 when the violence broke out in Rwanda. Her parents sent them to their grandmother's house hoping that they would be safer there. The violence soon followed them and they were on the run after soldiers killed her grandmother and the rest of those in the house.

The trek, mostly by foot, was over a thousand miles, often at night.

Stops at various refugee camps brought relief, but also many difficulties. Not knowing the fate of their parents, Claire's determination



Wamariya returns to the new building of the Winnetka campus | Instagram

to find a home with dignity kept them moving until they were granted asylum to the US.

The Chicago area welcomed her and Claire, and soon she was living with a family in Kenilworth. She began her first formal schooling at the age of thirteen on the North Shore.

Wamariya's entrance on the national stage happened while she was in high school. She entered an essay-writing competition organized by the "Oprah Show" about why "Night," Elie Wiesel's book about the Holocaust, was still relevant at that time.

Wamariya's essay was about her experiences in Rwanda. Her essay was one of the winners so she and her sister were invited to appear on the Oprah show.

be in, or what I want to embrace," she said.

Today, Wamariya is dedicated to inspiring others through storytelling. Recounting her story of her childhood in Rwanda, her journey with her sister through different countries and refugee camps, Wamariya wants to inspire others to persevere, whatever their challenges.

"Joy and peace all come from within, when we try to find joy and peace outward and think 'if I get this purse I am going to be more peaceful,' just get that thing because it's fun, or colorful, or because it's new. We are always peace and joy, we are already love, but we are also the opposite of that. It depends on where you put your time and your energy and awareness," she said.

Wamariya puts a morning notification on her phone to remind herself to be present to joy that day. In addition, at night there is a notification to remind her to forgive.

"The brain is all muscle and you need to train it," she said.

Wamariya recommends New Trier students read "Sister Outsiders" by Audre Lorde and to keep an open mind to ideas around them.

"My hope is that every New Trier student, if they would like to read, to know, or be really open to not knowing. And to be able to have stories in whichever form. Food is a story. Music is a story. Colors are stories. Words, everywhere around us, are stories."

New escape room opens in Wilmette

Outatime Games creates a mysterious Jack the Ripper adventure

by Katy Pickens

Nothing puts on the pressure quite like a ticking clock. Escape Rooms are the latest activity for puzzle solving, team building, and competing against the clock. Downtown Wilmette now has an escape room of its very own: Outatime Games.

Outatime Game's Wilmette location opened in early fall of 2018 at 1153 Wilmette Avenue, debuting the "Escape From the Whitechapel Club" challenge. Though typically escape rooms focus on getting out of the room in under an hour, your task at the Whitechapel Club is to uncover the identity of the grisly killer, Jack the Ripper, and prevent the demolition of the historical building containing evidence about his victims.

The challenge begins in a small, cement room with a group of anywhere from three to twelve people. We scoured the room for clues and keys and eventually made our way into a larger room with mysterious portraits of dogs, potential identities for Jack the Ripper, and another locked door.

The room featured some local details as well, including the 1800's Wilmette home of H. H. Holmes. We had to solve a puzzle depicting Holme's house at 38 John Street, which has since been demolished but would have been located on Eleventh Street between Lake and Central today.



Escape room is based on the house of H. H. Holmes in Wilmette | Google

Uncovering the clues involved lots of shouting, jogging between the many secret rooms, hunting for hidden symbols, and general chaos. We raced against the clock in what was a fun but frantic atmosphere, only feeling occasional frustration with our fellow group members.

We worked with twelve people to solve these complex riddles and puzzles, and nine of them were complete strangers. While we do believe having a big group is helpful for solving the room, it is oftentimes easier to be in a stressful situation with people you know well enough to yell at without hurting any feelings.

There was only one truly contentious moment during the hour. It involved an anagram, a map, a lock, and the slightly condescending Northshore mother that was in our group. In order to preserve the integrity and secrecy of the escape room, I cannot say more. However, we would recommend going with a larger group of people you know well and that you feel certain won't give unreliable lock codes when you are getting down to the wire.

Despite a few struggles, our group was successful in discovering

the identity of Jack the Ripper and preventing the building from being demolished with 8 minutes and 5 seconds to spare. Usually "mixed" groups of people that don't know each other aren't able to solve the puzzle, but we defied the odds and were victorious regardless.

Escaping the Whitechapel Club was an overall fun experience that focused mainly on problem-solving and puzzles. Unlike some other escape rooms, there were no jump-scares or staff members in the room with you, making this a fantastic option for people that are not fans of horror. Booking the escape room costs \$35 per person, which seems a little pricey but is roughly the average price for most escape rooms nearby.

We thought the room was tricky but definitely not impossible to solve, especially with a big group. Though there are more difficult challenges out there, Outatime Games in Wilmette is a great starting point for people just discovering escape rooms. We would definitely recommend stopping by Outatime Games to try to "Escape the Whitechapel Club" if you think you can handle the challenge.

Ben Senior wins Best WTF Film at film festival

Greg Harris Film Festival showcased student films

by Grant Feldman

The 11th annual Greg Harris Film Festival commenced on May 1 at the Wilmette Theatre. Named in honor of former English teacher Greg Harris, the festival showcases one to six-minute films made by current students.

Awards were presented to a handful of movies at the event, ranging from Best Dialogue to Best Editing. Senior Ben Senior received Best WTF Film.

"Winning Best WTF Film definitely felt fitting since it is one of the strangest projects I've worked on, but I think that the audience reaction to my film is more important to me than the awards, and seeing the audience slowly transfer from laughter to unease is always exciting to watch," said Senior.

This was Senior's second year at the Greg Harris Film Fest, but he said the variety and quality was better this year than last.

"Personally, I think the lineup of films was better than last year. We had a lot of different types of films from many different kinds of filmmakers, leading to a much larger variety than last year. I think every film I saw at the festival was unique in its own way. As far as the awards go, I know that the festival organizers try their best to give every film some recognition, and I think they definitely accomplished that this year," said Senior.

As for his personal endeavors, Senior is currently working on two films — one as a producer and one as a producer, writer, and director. The

first film is written and directed by sophomore Robbie Petrie, and Senior has had to take a different approach to solely producing rather than being involved in all the stages of a film's creation.

"Working as a producer is difficult because you have to balance what the director wants and what can realistically be accomplished," said Senior. "I love the process because I feel like the work I'm doing is worth something."

Senior's other film is titled "The Fall," and is much larger in scale. The film is about a young man named Michael who meets a girl named Evie while taking the train home from school, and how their relationship evolves as they both discover what they want in life.

"The film is loosely based on my personal experiences, but I wanted it to be a kind of universal story that everyone can understand," said Senior. "We've been shooting the film since September of 2018, and as the school year comes to a close we're moving into distribution. We're planning to have a premiere in early August at the Wilmette Theatre and release the film for purchase on Amazon Video later this year."

The release date for "The Fall" is undetermined, but is expected to be announced over the summer. Senior is heading to Syracuse University next year and is unsure of what his next project will be, though it will probably be smaller in scale.

"I plan to keep making films until I die, so I'm sure I'll have another project in the works soon, but for now I'm focusing on completing The Fall. Most likely my next project will be something smaller and simpler, because making a feature film isn't exactly a walk in the park," said Senior.