

POETRYBONES ANNIVERSARY WRITING SESSION
JULY 9, 2020

Bless These Poetry Bones

MEGAN HERLAAR

It's a magic you've all brought me,
An unfurling of a fiddle head,
An opening in pewter skies
Through which a splendid brilliance seethes
That I hesitate to name.
Yet there is no other way to say
But first I must explain
That God for me, has ripened
From bitter, stern and vengeful
To a succulent fruit whose perfume
Transports and cradles me
On tufts of air,
Etched by splinters of light.
Lifts me through these shafts, smoke through a hollow reed
Thinly growing
Spreading out beyond myself,
Effacing into translucent lucidity.
I soak, absorbing this enchanting mist
Of life and love, and pain and sorrow.
Words and form flow through our blended hearts.
We are writers
In amongst the clouds,
Receiving the beam that can only be
God.

[A toast to your courage and obstinacy]

KIMBERLEY HEALEY

A toast to your courage and obstinacy.
You have trod on the metaphors
And plodded around old syntax
And driven the unruly beasts of your mind
Up a hard mountain. Thank you.

There are poets among us
And sad mothers, and slow thinkers,
And dedicated observers of the goose.
Your words painted high tea with sex lurking,
Or sadness at time's commingling of union and loss.

So much loss.
The rose gardens behind the walls of your personae
Have blossomed and faded, sprouted and become heavy in fragrant words,
Dropping to the stones for me to recall and roll around in my mouth for days,
Like good candy that only exists in childhood books.

Your secrets, your confessions, your raw hard smelly truth pause me.
You write, I remember.
Your fears, my solace.
Your breathing words, my dreaming ear.

I see you on my screen.
The cock of a thinking head, the pensive pause,
And your good reading glasses.

There is a river flowing beneath us and
In this last year its waters are deeper, darker;
Full of horses and boats and sapphires and
A floating eagle feather and a child's first glasses and
A husband's gone love.
Sometimes I am afraid to jump in.
This river with its armful of giant current.

« You can swim. You can swim. »
I see it on your faces, I hear your thank you's,
I watch your funny movements to stay afloat,
None alike.

And I want to go with you in the stream even if there are giant spiders,
Or Godot is waiting under a rock to pull me down or if all this swimming will
Make us big naked De Kooning women, laughing with the cold water in our wavy hair.

Thank you for letting me swim with you, for pulling up the trapdoors of your minds and hopes.

May the year to come wash big waves of you and life onto the shores of these notebooks and
give us all the courage to jump in, to trust the moving waters because
We trust each other.

[Just now, it occurs to me]

MICHAEL COOPER

Just now, it occurs to me:
The weight of this morning,
This dark cocoon woven of fitful dreams,
Has lightened.

I took a breath,
A sigh of pleasure, really,
Hearing these fine words with you.
I felt a lightning, an easing.
Pleasant edges crept in through the cracks
In this dark armor of night.
The pain and perseverant thoughts
I have not yet laid down
Paused.

We all have our stories to tell.
So many have said it better than I
But I will say it too:
Please don't let anyone shame you
For telling your story

Don't let them pathologize you,
Make you small,
Tell you in some way that you
Should've moved on by now.

You deserve to hold your story,
You lived it!
In your story is the very power
Of life itself,
Be it ugly, messy, sticky, and
Radiantly beautiful.

May you be free to move
Within the story of your life
As you will.
For you are its proper owner.
There is no shame in that.

The wound that weeps
Can heal us all

A Wish for Brave Poets at Sea

MELISSA HURT

After "May you sail in your innocence, sail through this to that"

May each line you write weave the sail on the boat that glides you through this to that.

May you feel the wind at your back—as the Irish have wished—but take it to move courageously forward.

As Natalie said, "Go for the jugular"—don't hesitate! See it bulging, throbbing, or smooth, but don't miss. To doubt yourself is to slip the blade.

Be honest in your work and say what you mean. Don't dance around it and know there's no need to keep it polite.

Go there. From this—the seat of decorum—to that—the moment that's got you enraptured → take us with you. Choppy waters be damned, make the sail wide and vast with every purposeful word, every brave line, every stanza as real as the blood that swells from your needle-pricked finger.

Go there. Be courageous. Face yourself with the wind and your reader at your back.

A Toast to Writer Companions

KATHY FLANAGAN, 2020

Here's to you, with all your hidden joys and sorrows
And all the gladness and sadness you wear
Pinned to your ink-stained sleeve.
To all the words you blurt about
And those you store within so no one else can hear.
To your loves, those consummated
And those lost
Especially those lost loves
Because they are the juiciest ones
That haunt us late at night,
Resonating with your pain
And rejoicing in your survival.
Here's to your pen that keeps moving
And your keyboard that keeps clacking.
May you never tire or hesitate
From pouring your blood out in ink
Or laser toner sprinkled on the page.
May you never fear the harsher light of morning
When the sparkle of midnight words begins to fade.
May you shed all regret for words unspoken
Or words that said too much, too soon.
Your pain, regret, joy, and exuberance
So brazenly given, for that we owe a debt
That can only be repaid in our own lives and lines.
And so we toast your courage, art, and generosity
And hope at least we'll share another round.

[To all writers]

NANCY FRIEDLAND

To all writers
who come to practice day after day
or week after week
and spread their words
spread their souls
write the worst shit and
the best shit
allowing me to write the best and worst as well.
The prize is in the listening
buoyed up by the struggle,
the raw humanness, the depth, the pain, the suffering
and also the beauty, the celebration, the glory.
It may be that writing practice had a hand in how I see the world.
How I notice the birds chuffing out their feathers
how their beady eye glints in sunlight
how the gnarled willow trunk twists its way into the sky
how the wind tickles the stray hairs around my face, reminding me of my breath
my strength, my openness, my courage.
I knew I loved words but I didn't know how much.
I knew I loved words but I didn't know about arranging them
Placing them just so, offering a breath, a hope, a prayer.
Thank you most of all to Natalie.
It is not the only way, this practice
but it has become second nature
and it has given me this community of writers
so dear, so familiar,
so warm and welcoming
Who say thank you to the best and the worst in me
And sometimes smile or nod.
We are mighty, as the word is mighty.

Covid Writing Blues

JANINE THEODORE

A toast to all the writers that
I have read – that led me
into ventures I had not known
I even needed.

A brief Covid quarantine kiss to the cheeks
to my new writer friends
who bless my Thursday's Zoom with
their latest creations and inspirations.

A shout out to the other side, to Jeff Tagami
for his poetry of travails about the Filipino farm workers of the valleys
who sustain our lives. I hope to live up to your
words that I would "have my day."

Another reach out to the other side to the two headed woman
dear Lucille Clifton, my mentor, my teacher,
of not only Black women writers, but how to face
adversity with grace and carry on, my friend –

"The problem is,
you look like them Janine
but you're not like them, You
have lived the life of a Black woman" –

And –

"It's too late Janine,
You have listened
to too much
Jazz music

Words, words, words
can't live without them
can't imagine ever not
wanting to capture them to
create meaning, to arrange them on a page just so
and hope that they will stick.

Fire, Earth, Air, Water, and Words,
give these words legs,
set them a fire
bring them to an earth of understanding
let them float on the air to
open ears to
water the dreams of your nights.

May they fill your cup of inspiration,
love to all the wordsmiths
who's sweat keeps me up
at night
to read just one more line,
just one more page,
before my sleepy lids guide my reluctant hand
to turn out the light and say good night.

Gifts and Gratitude

NANCY READ SMITH, July 9, 2020

New to this group of Poets,
I am happy to be here.

Thankful for the gifts, the talent, the words,
the verses that surround me.

Each Thursday I come away
Awed again by the beauty, the depth, the joy and not,
And always the truth of being I witness.

Each Thursday I come away wondering how I can be here?
Among such accomplished, open, courageous Poets ...

A bit intimidated I am.

These people can write, I tell my husband each Thursday.
I am so bad at this.

But Thank You, Poetry Group, for accepting me, for listening,
For each thank you granted as I submit my ramblings.

Thank You for all the lessons I am learning, how to lift myself from
the flat literal to the high-flying images all the way through to
the metaphors, the similes, the colors, and finally, to exquisite
feelings –
angst, humor, confusion, silliness, et al.

Thank You for giving me the courage, the audacity to put pen to paper,
And explore some deep down level I have too long been avoiding.

Thank You for allowing me to find some truth in me that I didn't even know was there.

Thank You for your poetry.
(It's really good!)

To Say Thank You

MARY JO ANDREWS

An opportunity to say thank you more deeply
Not just a passing phrase after hearing your words
Or a wave and a blessing as we close the screen.
I am deeply touched – it's not cliché
Words of beauty and joy clear the cloudy, cluttered sky
Pain and suffering – crying words of loss
My own memories of what I
no longer hold – no longer carry –
And then you touch on some sweet or shattering memory
Or, together we riding the waves of life's unexpected turns
And I remember – somehow – somewhere
some strong force brought us here – now – today.
Today and yesterday and tomorrow, or maybe Saturday or Sunday or any day.
A long, deep sigh – no matter our age, our experience or clever craft of words – we knew
We simply knew – the time is now here –
Now – We sit – We meditate – We meet monkey mind
I in mine, but in yours too.
Some silken thread weaves between us, holds us, here today
in something deeper than gratitude
in some union, communion
drinking in each other's lives.
Touched without harm.
A ritual of voices rising.
You've held me up – carried me through – listened to my repetitive themes
"the worst junk ever" and always smile,
mile after mile of pages and ink
That explore the mind.
Yes, and as I lay my most fragile threads before you –
you say thank you
And I'm restored in the grace of your listening.

To my poet family

HEATHER MILLER

May the words you carefully craft
capture that yearning deep in your heart
that needs to be sounded by you
and needed to be heard by the reader.

May the mystery that is you
be framed in images grown of your ground
and shared, for we need you!
as we need each person's voice,
often inspired by others' voices
in a great web of humanity
so we can celebrate a kaleidoscope
of who we are.
There we will find our unity, our divinity.

Our words, born of the dark earth
that is embracing us in this wintering time
even as the cherries ripen
are needed more than ever,
so that we may see a new dawn of mankind and our world.

*Lastly, please go to **poetrybones.com** July 9, 2020,
to hear Sarah's recorded poem.*

{ KEEP SCROLLING }

[At the end of the Anniversary session, we read Joy harjo's poem "For Calling the Spirit Back." Heather serendipitously came across this additional poem by Harjo to share with the group.]

A Map to the Next World

JOY HARJO

for Desiray Kierra Chee

In the last days of the fourth world I wished to make a map for those who would climb through the hole in the sky.

My only tools were the desires of humans as they emerged from the killing fields, from the bedrooms and the kitchens.

For the soul is a wanderer with many hands and feet.

The map must be of sand and can't be read by ordinary light. It must carry fire to the next tribal town, for renewal of spirit.

In the legend are instructions on the language of the land, how it was we forgot to acknowledge the gift, as if we were not in it or of it.

Take note of the proliferation of supermarkets and malls, the altars of money. They best describe the detour from grace.

Keep track of the errors of our forgetfulness; the fog steals our children while we sleep.

Flowers of rage spring up in the depression. Monsters are born there of nuclear anger.

Trees of ashes wave good-bye to good-bye and the map appears to disappear.

We no longer know the names of the birds here, how to speak to them by their personal names.

Once we knew everything in this lush promise.

What I am telling you is real and is printed in a warning on the map. Our forgetfulness stalks us, walks the earth behind us, leaving a trail of paper diapers, needles, and wasted blood.

An imperfect map will have to do, little one.

The place of entry is the sea of your mother's blood, your father's small death as he longs to know himself in another.

There is no exit.

The map can be interpreted through the wall of the intestine—a spiral on the road of knowledge.

You will travel through the membrane of death, smell cooking from the encampment where our relatives make a feast of fresh

deer meat and corn soup, in the Milky Way.

They have never left us; we abandoned them for science.

And when you take your next breath as we enter the fifth world
there will be no X, no guidebook with words you can carry.

You will have to navigate by your mother's voice, renew the song
she is singing.

Fresh courage glimmers from planets.

And lights the map printed with the blood of history, a map you
will have to know by your intention, by the language of suns.

When you emerge note the tracks of the monster slayers where they
entered the cities of artificial light and killed what was killing us.

You will see red cliffs. They are the heart, contain the ladder.

A white deer will greet you when the last human climbs from the
destruction.

Remember the hole of shame marking the act of abandoning our
tribal grounds.

We were never perfect.

Yet, the journey we make together is perfect on this earth who was
once a star and made the same mistakes as humans.

We might make them again, she said.

Crucial to finding the way is this: there is no beginning or end.

You must make your own map.