

For A 2023 Better World



POEMS BY AZAZA DRAWINGS ON
PEACE JUSTICE BY
Greater Cincinnati Artists



**“For a Better World”
2023**

Poems and Drawings
on
Peace and Justice

by
Greater Cincinnati Artists

Editor:
Saad Ghosn

When Someone Deeply Listens to You

*When someone deeply listens to you
it is like holding out a dented cup
you've had since childhood
and watching it fill up with
cold, fresh water.*

*When it balances on top of the brim,
you are understood.*

*When it overflows and touches your skin,
you are loved.*

*When someone deeply listens to you
the room where you stay
starts a new life
and the place where you wrote
your first poem
begins to glow in your mind's eye.
It is as if gold has been discovered!*

*When someone deeply listens to you
your bare feet are on the earth
and a beloved land that seemed distant
is now at home within you.*

John Fox
(poet, poetry therapist)

Foreword

"That all these walls oppression builds / Will have to go!" writes Langston Hughes; and that they be replaced by cities of love, fraternity and peace, one can swiftly add.

To get peace, however, one needs among others, justice, forgiveness and compassion; the elimination of greed, selfish control and violence; the abolition of inequity and poverty; the celebration of essential basic human rights; the respect of everyone's intrinsic freedom...

Seventy six local poets in this 20th edition of "For a Better World" used their poems just for that end, addressing the many issues our world increasingly faces: greed, violence, racial and gender discrimination, prejudice, social and economic disparity, abuse of human rights, destruction of the environment, to name only the few. They used their voice and their words to reflect on their own life, on our societal problems, on our values, on what is really at stake for being human. Many of them, in this particular edition, also addressed the issue of hunger in the world.

These poets were joined by thirty four visual artists who used their artistic power to also contribute, in their own way, to peace and social justice; and thus, all in unison, to advocate for a better world.

The included poets and visual artists fight for everyone's rights, for the discriminated against, the oppressed, the weak and the poor; they combat darkness, violence and evil; and they spread compassion, love, and tolerance. They all speak for a world after their heart and values; a beautiful and equal world of hope, fraternity and unity; a rich and diverse world where peace is based on truth, justice, and kindness, and on the empowering and unique contribution of every individual.

Of all ages and backgrounds, these poets and artists use their art as their voice to state their concerns and affirm their beliefs and values. By doing so they also strengthen each other's diverse voices and give life to their hopes and dreams. With their lucid song, they also confront the evil in this world and promise to stand up for the fight. Their song is an appeal to each of us to join in and make a change; it seeks to eliminate our isolation and loneliness and invites us to hold hands and share in the same well of strength and energy for a better world.

To every participating poet and visual artist, and to everyone who directly or indirectly joined in the making of this book and in the spread of its message, my heartfelt thanks and gratitude. My appreciation also goes to Jerry Judge, Blanche Saffron Kabengele, and Zohreh Zand who kindly and generously reviewed all the submitted poems and provided their editorial advice.

For a better world, always, a world of love, peace and justice.

Saad Ghosn, editor and organizer
May 2023

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POEMS:

LAURI ANN AULTMAN

Since 2006, Lauri Ann Aultman has been a mixed media Artist Activist with SOS ART. This is her 3rd year in "*For A Better World.*" In 2021 & 2023, her poetry was used for *Global Water Dances* (Cincinnati). Lauri Ann is currently working on children's books.

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YANA KECK

Yana Keck has been writing poetry off and on since the mid 1980's. She is a member of the Cincinnati Writers Project and a past member of the Greater Cincinnati Writers League. In addition to poetry, she has tried her hand at short stories and various children's literary projects. Yana's other hobbies include art, music and theater. Currently retired, she teaches sociology at Mt. St. Joseph as an adjunct professor.

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DRAWING:

EMILY SITES

Emily Sites Karns is a visual artist living and working in Cincinnati, Ohio, with a background in printmaking and sculpture. Her work often explores elements of both the natural and unseen worlds. Currently, Emily is a tattooist and co-owner of Lonesome Town Tattoo located in the Pendleton district of Cincinnati.

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I Used to Like the Color Red

(by *Lauri Ann Aultman*)

I used to like the color red.
It brought to mind Rudolph the Reindeer and silly clown noses.

With deep velvety red roses, we could both feel the softness and smell the perfect scent.

Red was the color of the best baseball team around: The Big Red Machine.

The red octagonal sign on a pole meant something: STOP!

Red was fresh strawberry pie at Andrea's house after a long day swimming.

Red was the sweet cherry tomatoes we grew in the garden and later put in the "candy" bowl to share.

Red was the color of the barns, from the Fisher-Price barn that we played with, to the large painted barns we passed as we drove to see family.

Red was the color always present in Nana & Papa's rugs from a faraway country.

I used to like the color red,
but now all I see is RED.

Red is the color of the blood of INNOCENT people killed by mass shootings, suicide, war, and police brutality.

STOP the madness.
Red should be the color of LOVE.

May I Have This Dance?

(*Monterey Park, CA; January 21, 2023*)

(by *Yana Keck*)

Things felt different.
Like suddenly stepping on rough gravel
on an otherwise slippery street.

No moon
on this Lunar New Year's Eve.
What else is new?

Same stars shining
or so it seemed.
Just bright holes in a dark sky.

My pathological pain pounding
deep in my chest
from past abuse.

How can others be happy
on this horrid holiday
celebrating yet another fucking year?

I reach for the Norinco handgun.
The weight seems hopelessly heavy

to these 72-year-old arms.
Almost too heavy to carry,
it leaves a tiny hole in my faded dungarees.

In my cone shaped black and white hat,
I make my way to
the Star Ballroom dance studio.

White lights flashing;
people dancing in pairs.
Who will be my partner tonight?

The same slanted slits for eyes,
jaundice-tone skin, black hair:
I hate them.

And they
are just
like – me.

Slowly, I point the gun
into the crowd.
I pull the trigger.
The sound of the explosion
crashing in my ears.

Blood splatters like
Ketchup squeezed from an
Upside-down, over-filled bottle.

Ten more holes in the sky.

My head is whirling, swirling, twirling.
People screaming, "No!"
Oh! the hate, the anger, the angst!

will not go away,
will not go away,
will not go away.

One more task.
I point the gun
at my temple
and pull the trigger.

One more hole in the sky.

Unseen

(by *Lauri Ann Aultman*)

I told you about it before I started working in 2005, my unseen disability.
You couldn't see it, but I could feel it.

I could feel it even more when 2 coworkers told me to go back to where I came from: unseen.
And when my students told me about abuse, neglect, violence, death, and feeling lost: unseen.
And when I was forced to leave another community again, again, & again: unseen.

Then when M & L suicided,
When G lost at "Russian Roulette,"
When S was shot & killed trying to provide for his son,
When S was shot in front of her baby,
When G was gang-raped,
When LM played with a gun and died making his music video,
When other youth were shot for no reason,
When T was killed just walking down the street: unseen.

Knowing K is still locked up and L or MM will be in for a long while, my heart is broken, but still,
unseen.
And then, there were those coworkers that talked about private things in the front lobby & the
coworker who showed me that picture of his privates that I did not want to see: I wish that
could be unseen.

Dysfunctional, abusive, and unethical management: unseen by the public but felt by us.

I was thrown a boulder, not a life preserver.
They said two attempts at accommodation was enough.

Damn, I was "accommodating" for over 17 years, unseen. I "fought the good fight" for a job &
for people I loved.

My disability was not the only thing unseen.

See us, know us, help us.

We are all around: the secret society of the unseen disabilities, secret no longer.

At least now, we are unseen no more:
Seen, heard, known...
And someday, maybe even respected.

POEMS:

ELLEN AUSTIN-LI

Ellen Austin-Li's work has appeared in *Artemis*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, *The Maine Review*, *Solstice: A Magazine of Diverse Voices*, *Rust + Moth*, and other places. Finishing Line Press published her two chapbooks - *Firefly* (2019) and *Lockdown: Scenes From Early in the Pandemic* (2021). A Best of the Net nominee and a Martin B. Bernstein Fellowship recipient, she earned an MFA in Poetry at the Solstice Low-Residency Program.

Ellen co-founded the monthly reading series, "Poetry Night at Sitwell's," in Cincinnati, where she lives with her husband in a newly empty nest.

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SUE NEUFARTH HOWARD

Sue Neufarth Howard, a poet and visual artist, is a former Cincinnati, now residing in Long Beach, CA. She is a past member of Greater Cincinnati Writers League (GCWL) and Linton Street Writers.

Sue has participated in Ohio Poetry Day Contests and is widely published.

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DRAWING:

KATHERINE COLBORN

Katherine Colborn received her BA in Studio Art and English from Xavier University and her MFA in Studio Art from UNC Greensboro. Her work has been internationally published and nationally exhibited. Katherine has completed residencies at Burren College of Art and Vermont Studio Center. Recently, she has taught at Northern Kentucky University, Xavier University, and Manifest Drawing Center, and currently works out of her studio in Cincinnati.

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Poisoned Tritina (March 13th, 2022)

(by *Ellen Austin-Li*)

"In the name of God I ask you: stop this massacre!" Francis said, before asking the crowd to join him in silent prayer for an end to the war.

-Pope Francis's March 13th address in Vatican City

I hide in the garden during the war.
I dig and rake dead leaves while bombs crush
Ukrainians under the rubble. What can I do? Power's poison

kills humankind. I'm on my knees in the dirt, and poison's
alive, but here, I can't see it. It comes as it always does, the war
between me and the weeds. The daily news, this crush

that makes it hard to get out of bed. The crush
we're forced to live through. Now poison
ivy spreads its toxins on my skin. My arm, a war

zone blooming. Blistered war, the visible crush of poison.

Backwards Morality

(by *Sue Neufarth Howard*)

A foster child abandoned
no parent ever known
A child born of incest
with physical issues

Mothers raped
or molested by kin
forced to carry
the unborn child

Mothers jailed
for murder -
babes deceased
in the womb

Mothers in jail cells
on their child murder charge
will be felons
if ever released

A mother – no job now
forced to take welfare
for care of her
unwanted child

Back to the old days
Keep them at home
barefoot and pregnant
a life of child care

Laws to protect
the life of a child yet to be
yet no laws stop gun death
of the children we see

Under the Second Wave

(by *Ellen Austin-Li*)

How many times have I passed Seneca Falls on the New York State Thruway, driving east towards home? That sign: “The Birthplace of Women’s Rights,” and Elizabeth Cady Stanton—yes, that was about suffrage, but the vote isn’t all women have suffered for. 1958. The year I was born. How my mother couldn’t carry a credit card in her name if she wanted, and she didn’t want. How she deferred to her husband as the culture of her time told. Even I’ll admit I picked up feminine wiles from the era I breathed. *You always have such a beautiful smile*, Mark said—how I worked hard on that charm. Life’s labor felt—back then—subservient to the desire for love. How to catch The One. I watched what other women did. Dexatrim diets, tight tops, Maybelline lashes, lined lips—even as I heard a different wind stir. Bra burnings and women marching. Cheers about owning our own bodies. *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. *The Feminine Mystique*’s slow explosion. 1973. Roe v. Wade passed. I was fifteen. How unaware that just a few years before women’s choices were chosen by men. 1976. The Bicentennial. And I entered Freshman year at a Jesuit school. How I switched “The Right to Life” with “The Right to Choose” on a regular basis, confused by the slogans, how the “right to life” didn’t mean I had the right to live the way I thought was right. How I thought every woman had that right. How right it felt to honor everyone’s choice. That summer, I camped with my oldest sister and her friends at Saratoga Springs. How we heard Joni sing: *Don’t it always seem to go that you don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone?* How we sang along.

Sparks of Rage

(by *Sue Neufarth Howard*)

Evil fire this time
spews from the bowels
of lies as sparks
that smother hopes
shatter lives.

Lies are spikes.
Malice that will boomerang back
to depths of black soul.

Loving souls scorn
black words, evil deeds.
Create storm within
fuel brain hurricanes
powering up for
combustion of evil.

The storm within
powerful power keg.
Sparks of rage that will
shatter collusion
sow seeds of peace.

POEMS:

THOMAS BACKER

Tom Backer grew up in Ferdinand, Indiana. He gained his BS and MA at Xavier University and a PhD at UC. He taught History at Covington Latin School and is now retired. The *Xavier Athenaeum* and literary magazines such as *Wilderness House* and *The Writing Disorder* have published his poem and stories.

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DIANA BECKET

Diana Becket, born in Manchester, England, lived for ten years in the Netherlands before moving to Ohio. When she retired from teaching composition courses she began to write poetry about her community and home.

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CHUCK STRINGER

Chuck Stringer tries to be a loving partner, parent, grandparent, relative, and friend—an Anglican Christian living as a poet close to the earth. He resides with his wife Susan and tabby Kissa in Northern Kentucky, near Fowlers Fork.

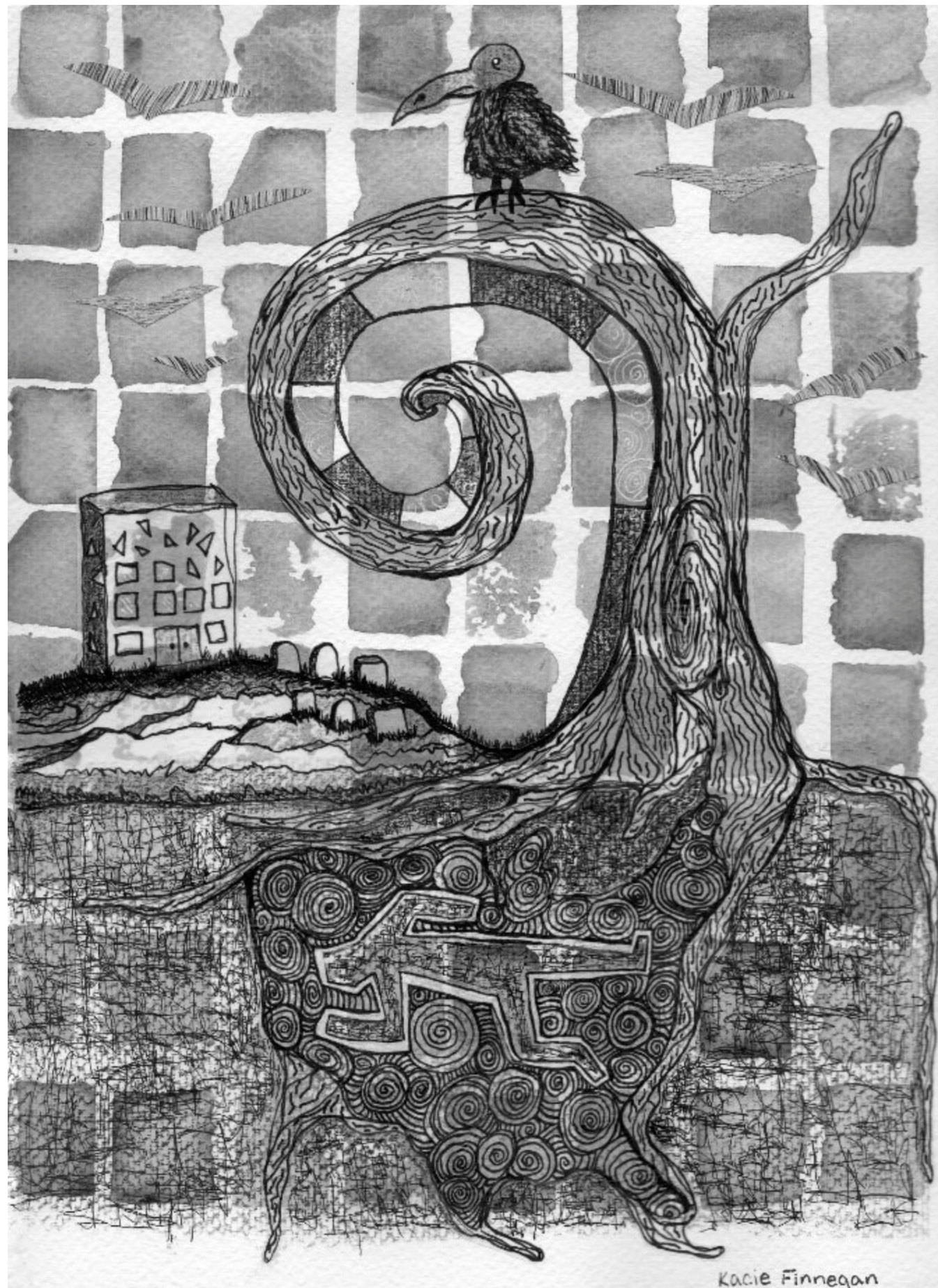
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DRAWING:

KACIE FINNEGAN

Kacie Finnegan (she/they) recently graduated from the University of Cincinnati, with a bachelor’s degree in Fine Arts, a minor in Art History, and a Museum Studies certification. They grew up in Mansfield, OH, and are currently based in Cincinnati, OH.

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Kacie Finnegan

The Arc

(by *Thomas Backer*)

buzzards
careening low
smell death

Sandy Hook
twenty kids and six teachers
Uvalde
kids identified by bits of clothing
faces blown away
a six-year-old shot his teacher
being black in Buffalo
Minneapolis or Memphis
being Asian-American anywhere
Putin's putrid war

"The arc of the moral universe is long
but it bends toward justice."
I still believe that
waiting for the line to bend.

She Waits

(by *Diana Becket*)

by the juvenile detention center window,
winter stressed tree stems brush the glass,
curled leaf blades cut through the dry
bark searching for light.

She's handcuffed

in the glare of neon signs that throw
shadows
of leaf patterns on the patched sidewalk
and shine on shafts of moss caught
in dirt-soaked food wrappers
on the broken paving slabs.

In the early light, shreds of cotton wool
mist soften distant
gnarled stems.

She watches

the clawed branch fingers
scrape her captivity
windows.

Moon Shot

(by *Chuck Stringer*)

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colorado_Springs_nightclub_shooting
<https://nypost.com/2022/11/22/nasas-orion-spacecraft-shares-stunning-views-of-lunar-surface-earth/amp/>

I know he loves to dance past midnight
with his Club Q friends in Colorado, cross-
dress in lively costumes, let the world

and every worry go; and so today I worry.
Son, were you there on the dance floor when
the bullets leapt and chose their partners?

Here at home in another state, I wait
and search for news, hear five are dead, twenty-
five injured, that the police haven't yet

released any names. I hope last night
you stayed at home, had a migraine, a cold,
or some other reason to rest and get to

bed. But in my mother's heart I know
you had a shot or two then hit the dance floor.
This morning I watch the latest moon shot

on CNN, watch the Orion capsule dance
within eighty miles of the moon, watch as
the earth appears in the distance like a

small blue pea in a sea of darkness—darkness
still as the wall of flowers piling at the entrance
to Club Q, darkness black as the fact

you haven't texted or called.

Parking Is Prohibited

(by *Diana Becket*)

on a cold Sunday evening,
when the shooting on Main
left twelve in the hospital.

Figures pace the sidewalk,
separated yet protected
by cellphones, eyes circle,
register and return. A girl's

hooded skinny shape pedals
into the streetcar tracks:
a screech of car tires,
the crunch of metal parts
trapped in tram lines.

Her slight form crumples,
seems caught in the bike's
frame, her face pushed
against road slabs. The driver
leans from the window,
watches as she wrenches
the bike free.

He asks if she's hurt,
waits as she hides
in her hood—
she doesn't answer.

Pushing her bike,
she makes her way
across the road,
pauses for the traffic
lights to change.

POEMS:

CRYSTAL E. BARKER

Crystal E. Barker grew up on a farm in the hills of Grayson, Kentucky. She earned a Bachelor's in Nursing from Berea College, Berea, KY and went on to earn her Master's in Nursing at California State University, Los Angeles. She has served Veterans for more than 30 years as a Registered Nurse in the VA Medical Center. Crystal recently published her collection of poetry, *Homelessness: Through the Eyes of a Nurse in the City*.

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LAUREL CHAMBERS

Laurel Chambers is a local poet. Her first chapbook, *Places in the Mist*, is available at Finishing Line Press. Her poetry has been published in *Within Us (A Poetry Anthology of the Greater Cincinnati Writers League)*, *Poetry X Hunger*, and *For a Better World*.

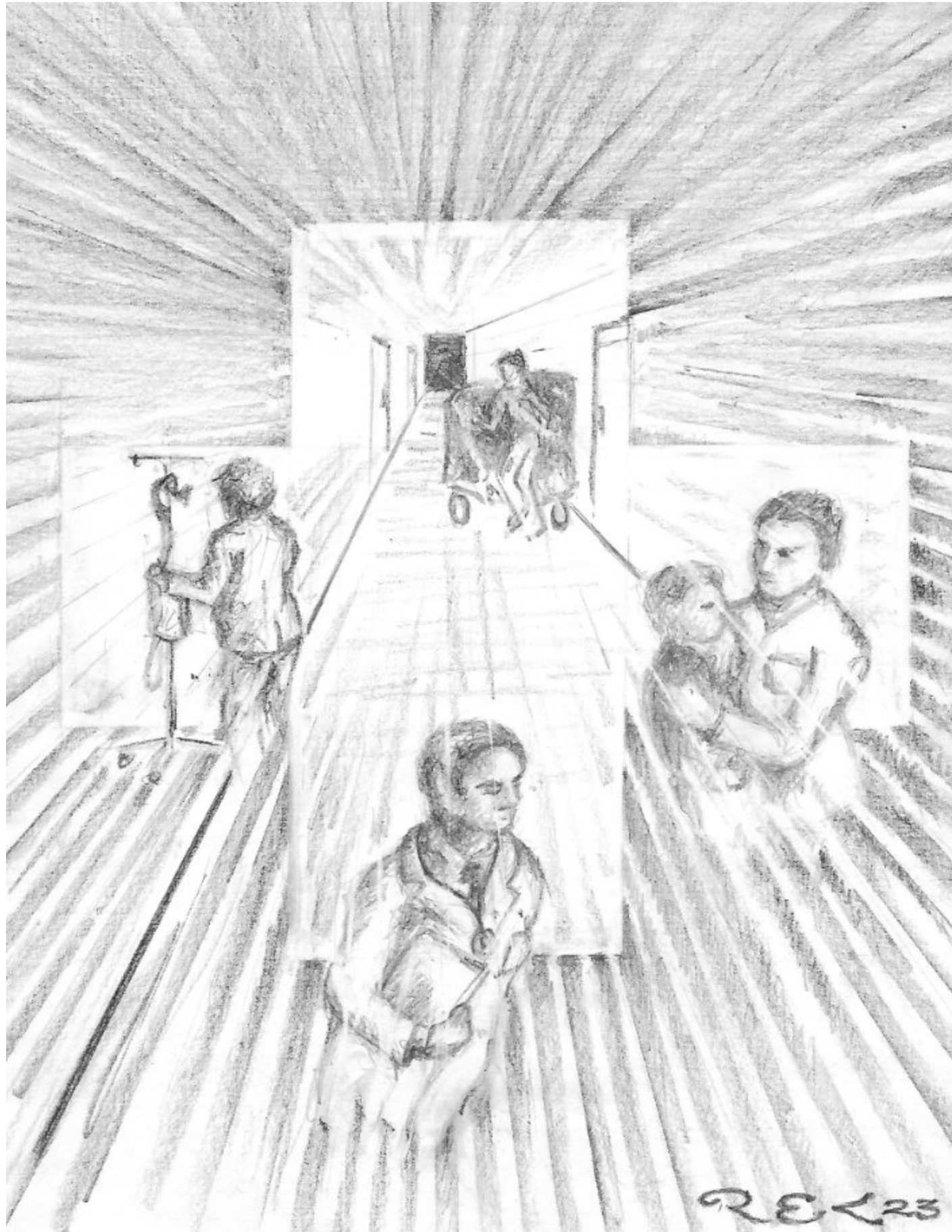
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DRAWING:

ROLF ERIC KUHN

Rolf Eric Kuhn has a BS degree in Graphic Design from the University of Cincinnati. He has been creating things since the age of 7, improving them and making them his; also drawing planes, farm scenes, pirate ships, cars... All through his college years, Rolf worked 1st and 3rd shift in a hospital, which made him particularly responsive to the poem *Night Walkers* he illustrated in this book.

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Night Walkers Third Shift: Christ Hospital

(by *Laurel Chambers*)

The sun slips down behind the city bricks.
Darkness drops like a shuttered eye
with a tiny sprinkling of moonlight.
A young woman with brown curls
nestles underneath his arm, breathes deep.
Little children are wrapped in flannel dreams.
Busy people, all freed into the world of sleep.
But the night walkers, they walk on.

Like soft brushes across the floor,
cat paws dressed in Danskin shoes
whispering down the halls, checking rooms.
Pushing little carts, dragging big machines
with wires and hookups, sterile and clean.
Folded papers slipped in narrow pockets,
notes on what they see, what someone needs.
The night walkers, they walk on.

They see cracks of light beneath the doors.
There are secrets that they hear,
silent witnesses to the longings and the fears
of those whose bodies stumble, break, and bleed.
They poke and prod, sometimes they pray.
Bring healing hands to the ones afraid.
Working through the night, this is how they save a life.
The night walkers, they walk on.

Delivering Death's Notification Over Sparrows' Song

(by *Crystal E. Barker*)

It shouldn't ever happen
that a young father
is told
that his son
has perished in school,
while sparrows
are singing in the background.

Memories on the Tenth Anniversary (December 14, 2012)

(by *Laurel Chambers*)

I remember first grade.
The cloak room blooming with red boots, striped umbrellas,
my yellow raincoat hanging on my post.
The rain slowly trickling down the windows,
hoping it would last all morning until the walk home.
Then we would splash in the puddles by the curb,
fearless, like the big kids who ran reckless behind us.

I remember first grade.
Longing for my new friend Marci from Lake Park
to invite me to her house, the pond in her backyard,
the foot bridge above the train tracks that led to her house.
I, who before had never known there was a bridge just for feet.
Her mother spreading orange jelly on crackers for our snack
to take to the Happy Hand Club in the room above her garage.

I remember first grade.
The brown sturdy chairs and tables in neat, straight rows.
Mrs. Seifert's black hair, our bunny named Butterscotch.
She would take him from his cage by the door,
gently passing her to each of us in our circle.
Anxiously, I awaited to feel his soft belly under the silky fur,
the fast quivering of his tiny heart against my hands.

Twenty children went one day to Sandy Hook Elementary School,
sitting in their wooden chairs, little blonde pears ripening in the sun.
Snuggling in the warmth of their classroom with their milk cartons,
their crayons and their thick blue pencils.
Unwrapping the wonder of all the letters and their sounds.
School lives had just begun, memories forever done.

Let's Get Back to Basketweaving

(by *Crystal E. Barker*)

Last year,
basketweaving class was cancelled
due to the urgent need
to offer Student Survival 101.
Instead of learning to shape
strands of fiber
into colorful walls of a bowl,
during shooter drills
our school children were prepped
with the knowhow
of building a barricade wall
made of legoed desks and chairs.
They were taught to paint
a guised mask of death,
using the color palate
of classmates' marooning blood
when there's no place to run,
no where to hide,
no way to fight
a possible madman with AR-15
standing in the doorway of
their literature class.
We need everyone's help
to find our way back
to days of peace,
where classrooms are filled
once again,
with young pupils
engrossed in basketweaving.

An Icemaker and A Water Bucket

(by *Crystal E. Barker*)

A young girl awakens
in her air conditioned room,
slouches towards the refrigerator door,
presses the water delivery pedal
filling her crystal glass,
then slides it sideways
to dispense several perfect ice cubes;
never giving a thought
to where the water came from,
how the water got there,
or the amazing concept
of an ice maker.
She returns to her bedroom,
no chores or duties
does she have assigned.

On the other side of the world
a young girl arrives at the community water hole
before dawn
which grants her reprieve of searing heat for this trip.
She lifts the filled water-bucket,
nestles it atop her head,
takes the one mile trek back to home,
shoulders squared,
spine rod straight,
legs and feet dusty,
skin not having felt a bath in weeks.
She will repeat this several times today,
her chore and daughter duty as water fetcher.

POEMS:

CAROL BARRETT

Carol Barrett coordinates the Creative Writing Certificate Program for Union Institute & University. She has published two volumes of poetry and one of creative nonfiction. Carol's poems appear widely, including in over fifty anthologies. A former NEA Fellow in Poetry, she has lived in nine states and in England.

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NANCY K. JENTSCH

Nancy K. Jentsch is a second-career poet who writes from her home in rural northern Kentucky. She believes that we can make our world better and is thankful for this opportunity to put her thoughts into words and share them. Her recent poetry collection is *Between the Rows*.

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DRAWING:

PAIGE WIDEMAN

Paige Wideman is a Senior Lecturer in the School of the Arts Art & Design program at Northern Kentucky University. She is an active member within the arts community both as an artist and a volunteer committee member at the Off Ludlow Gallery in Cincinnati, Ohio.

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Crust

(by Carol Barrett)

This morning, breakfast of bagels outdoors,
I watch deer foraging among shaded grasses
while a pair of hummingbirds buzzes my head,

racing for the feeder hanging from the eaves.
Such precision! Slim beaks draw the garnet
nectar, pull back to swallow, then dart in

for another sweet nip. All are fed in this desert
landscape. But I think of the children meadowed
in concrete. They peer into the apartment fridge,

stocked with ketchup, peanut butter, not much.
Hunger, old friend. I'll take a squirrely bunch
for a walk by the canal, where a woman is sprinkling

coffee grounds at the feet of roses climbing
the rinsed air. Lunchtime, we'll pick a boulder
perch, share the crust of sandwiches with chortling

ducks. The kids will carry the spirit of those ducks
back home, hopscotch the sidewalk as if navigating
pinecones and aspen shoots, their eyes mirroring

rivulets of the churning stream, content for one
more dark night. Survival is a daily practice,
sustained by gratitude. *Believe all can be cared for.*

So pleads the canal this crisp morning, while
someone I am called to teach shares an appeal
for the homeless, knowing what gnaws at their bellies,

the heady need for rest. He has been there, makes
friends on the streets that once swallowed him.
Words jostle like small stones in pockets, something

to talk about -- the rustling shopping carts, where
a meal can be had, no questions. He plants fountains
around his city, soap stations, clean water trickling,

the purring promise of sleep tugging at dawn.
The sound of swishing waters, company
for my trek home, blanket on a chilly night.

Orbit

(by Nancy K. Jentsch)

Our planet—smaller than a flick
of lint on telescope's lens—

stumbles along its once orderly orbit—
its human race wallowing blind

in profligate slash and burn.
If we only lusted after wonder and mere

sufficiency could we circle sober
like the holy O once ringed by mystics'

lips, keep our flight through time
from a final fatal frown?

Mars

(by *Carol Barrett*)

Faced with earth's annihilation, how will we fare?
A friend plants six varieties of lettuce. Another

loads up on powdered milk. A cousin stacks cans
of corned beef. He would last longer than most:

if there's a fish left in the stream, he'll snag it
with a hand-tied mayfly. Some insist on leaving,

consider Mars for a distant future. Italian
astronomer Schiaparelli identified 100 "canali"

on the planet. Humans must have built them
to irrigate crops. How we love to make other worlds

our own. We could colonize Mars. Is that
so different from the "New World," our mission

in Africa? But Martian canals are illusion,
merely our tendency to connect dark smudges

with a straight line. We hate being lost
in the woods, invent patterns to get us out of

the jungle. Even the straight arrow flies in an arc.
The winding curve, better symbol of survival:

wispy tendrils of yellow squash crooking their necks
to the sun, curved beak with the worm, *that worm*,

rounded contours of cones rolling along to drop
their store of seeds, ripples spun by a dragonfly

in shallows. Curves are elemental in life, as well
the pitcher's drive to outplay the batter. We want

to believe hand-dug ditches direct water from polar
caps to sentient life on Mars. Makes a good story.

But escaping a wasted planet takes more science
than fiction. We need to bend an arm around

a stranger, or three, eyedrop-feed baby bats,
bottle-nurse kid goats, rescue salamanders

from roadways, ride bicycles to work. Already
children sway with music of the spheres in a
tongue

not our own, winding toward the dimming light.

At the Warming Shelter

(by *Carol Barrett*)

Snow crusting on my porch, towels on windowsills thwart the draft.
Cold nights stiffen even my old hands, thumbs split in relentless
desert air. I wonder where to take blankets for the homeless.
A friend mentions a place near Winco. I fold a thick quilt, tad frayed

at the edges, that has long gifted me with comfort, and several fleece
blankets still warm from the dryer, load the car. When I pull in,
I notice three men in yellow plastic chairs outside, getting a little sun
in this 22 degree chill. They could all use a shave. A neon-vested fellow

opens the glass door. I ask might I leave some blankets. *Sure* he says.
A woman approaches, barefoot on the cement, clad in pajamas.
She says *that quilt is just like one my grandma gave me*, pulls out
a picture: her dog wrapped in the quilt. *He made it to nineteen*

she adds. *What a cutie* I say, his black and white face pleading still.
I leave my stack at the front desk, soft ladder of hope. On my way
out, the smokers stare, breath freezing in an unforgiving breeze.
I drift home, thinking of my linen closet, hard to close with what's

stuffed inside. Bundles press in on themselves like loaves of bread.

POEMS:

BLAU

Blau is a surreal/abstract artist and poet. They also provide lyrics to bands who need it.

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KAREN WEBER

Karen Weber writes poetry as a hobby, mostly about her large family, but also issues that touch her. She has been a teacher, community organizer and realtor. Now retired, Karen writes to please herself and honor others.

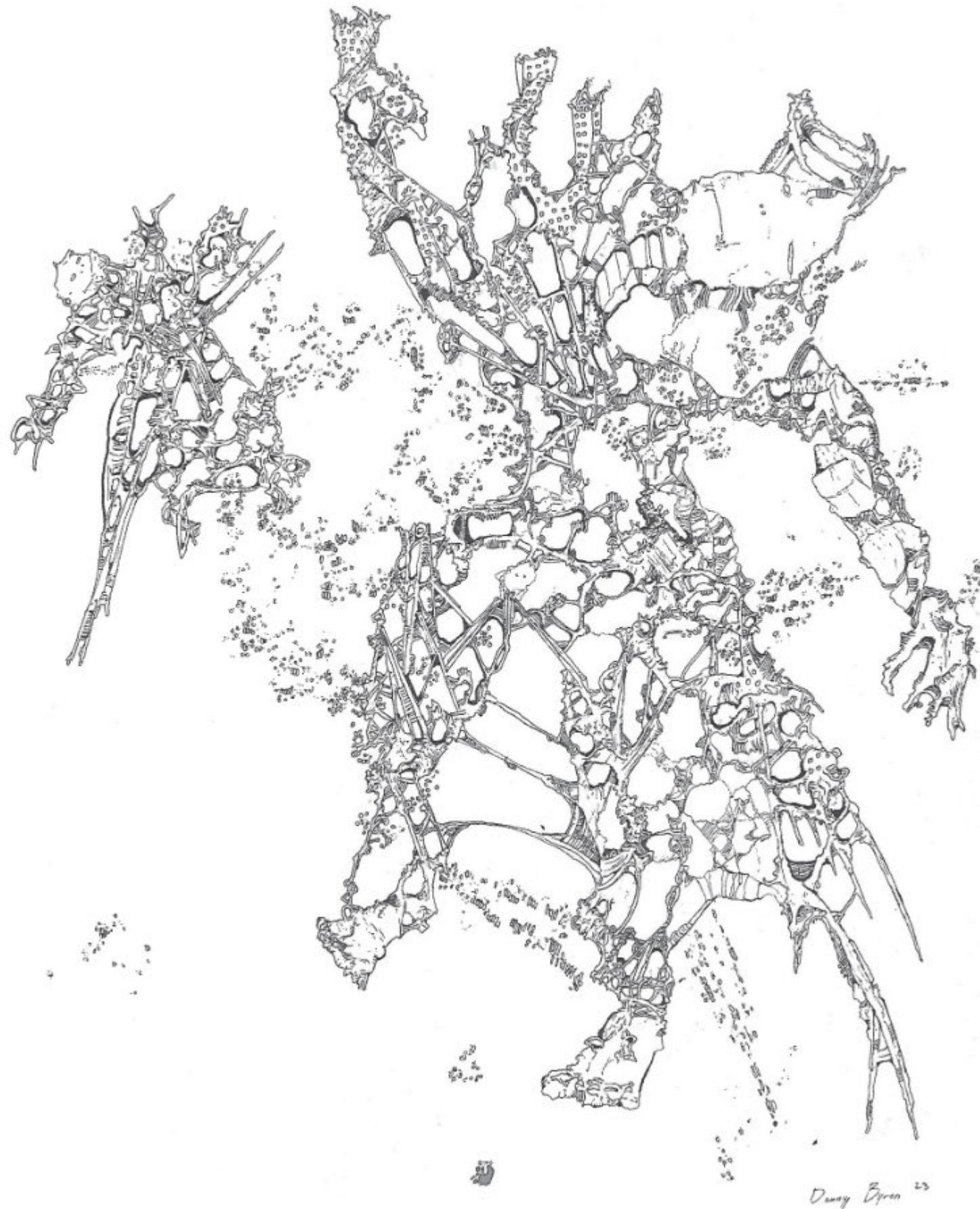
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DRAWING:

DANIEL BYRON

Daniel Byron is a visual artist from Rock Hill, South Carolina, who moved to Cincinnati, Ohio in 2019 to be with family. Daniel works in painting, printmaking and drawings. He focuses on abstract forms and scenes to create interweaving imagery.

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Encounter

(by *Karen Weber*)

Up close, I am you and you are me.
More alike than I can allow.
Your life a mystery to me,
Until now.

How do you live? Why do you live?
What's it like with nothing?

Survival rhythms shape your life
With monotonous uncertainty.
Your tenacity sears the threads
Of my neatly woven entity.

Our cities weave asphalt barriers
Of arteries and veins,
Forming lifelong separations
Anonymous, unanimous
Until now.

Our illusions form decisions,
Shaping hollow policy.
Without your truth my own existence
Is in complicity.

Our Hunger Games

(by *Karen Weber*)

Hunger is a game we play,
A game of give and take away.
A game of hoops
And jumps
And lies.

Doing what you must belie
The simmering anger you feel inside
At the maze of forms and lines created
By those who have negotiated
At a conference table
Whether you are able
To feed your family.

So Hungry

(by *Blau*)

(background music:
Temple of the Dog "Hunger Strike")

You don't seem to mind
Stealing bread from innocents
Leeching on the powerless

We're so hungry

We're on the chopping block
Our fires are extinguished
Our babies on the black market
Slaves are bleeding and dying
But you're binging and purging
on the scraps we can't scrape together

We're so hungry

More of us
then there are of you
Crowds outnumber the few
Sheltered in ivory towers
Time for workers to stop the grind
Grab the whips
Shred to pieces
Spread them over the potters field
Let bloom the flowers of revolution

We're so hungry

Last in Line

(by *Blau*)

(background music: Dio "Last in Line")

"Father,
Why don't those people stand in line like us?"
"My child,
Those are not people
Those are the rich"
"But aren't we all the same?
We're all human right?"
He hugs his child tight
and stares into their sad eyes
"Hopefully one day you will make it right"

Long cold winters
Eternal infernal summers
Seasons may change
but the situations remain the same

Pass by the indigent
on your way to the follies
Complain about the traffic jam
as your Hummer exhaust chokes
the roadside vegetable stand
Flick your cigarette butts out your window
Ashes and embers smearing children's faces
as they stand in line with their empty bowls
Hoping for another slice of government cheese

As long as it does not affect you personally
You don't give a shit
but unionization in sweat shops
Makes drops of designer coffee cost more
"That's obscene!" you cry in spilt milk
Fair trade is not fair when the scales are not
balanced
and crops are watered in salty tears

We may be the last in line
but we are not alone
There are more of us than you
Sailing upon a ship of uncertainty
Our resolve will never fail
Until we can laugh without tears
and hope without fear

We will not rest until our bellies are fed
and justice is blind no more

Stranger in a suit pauses in their daily routine
Blinks in the cold and breathes out a heavy sigh
Light from the sunset blinds them
but they know where they must go
Stepping into line
Otherwise trampled by the herd
Grunts and grumbles
about cutting in line
but shouts are averted
by a placing of a coat
and an extension of hot coffee
"It may not be much...
but it's a start"
Wipes away the ashen remains of the cigarette
"Don't you know?
Once you cross that border
You are the last in line"

Borders

(by *Karen Weber*)

Where do you come from?
Where have you been?
The shape of your history
Forms the life you are in.

An immigrant here has a battle to fight,
A struggle to prove they have the right
To the laws
To the justice
To the jobs
To the land
To the freedoms
We hold in the palm of our hand.

But dig deeper
Dig deep
Be willing to seek
The source of your own roots, rights and roof.
You are not native to here, this land you hold dear,
Your ancestors' bones carry your truth
We are immigrants all,
Immigrants all.

POEMS:

HOLLY BRIANS RAGUSA

Holly Brians Ragusa (she/her/hers) is an interdisciplinary writer, speaker and community activist based in Cincinnati. She is a poet, the author of *Met The End* (2022), *Dying To Know Myself In Time And Inverse; Informed Thoughts By An Unfit Poet* (2023). Holly is also contributor to Psychology Today and Opinion contributor to the Cincinnati Enquirer. She serves a range of nonprofits and lives in historic Over-the-Rhine.

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SHERIE SHAFFER

Sherie Shaffer has had poetry published in Otterbein University's literary magazine *Quiz & Quill* as well as *Spring Street*, Columbus State Community College's literary and visual arts magazine. She has won several writing awards. Sherie is most energized and inspired to write when getting away, enveloped by nature.

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DRAWING:

MARIN EMANUEL

Marin Emanuel enjoys barefoot walks and drawing flowers. She is honestly just trying her best to make peace with the world we live in.

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Sustained

(by *Holly Brians Ragusa*)

I stumble on uneven sidewalks
and still look sideways,
But with less concern
For belittling glances or sniggering of passerby

Indifference, that weed,
I cast off with a hope for better tomorrows
With less blame for the spoils of famine

Finding sorrow less filling than joy

My feasts don't come at the cost
Of inconsequential drama
Or devastating loss of
A person's esteem

Intrinsically I have needed
To cut out my heart
To slice it for others
To serve it with diligence and delight

I have experienced ineptitude
I have stuffed myself on fear
I have shared in shame and lack of principal
I have seized on regret from missed opportunity
As we all do

Yet- I farm what I bring to my table
When you stumble I will only offer a hand
To plant in mine

Concern for myself and others has taken root
And grows ever deeper in my fields
I am a bumper crop of peace in containment

Starving for possibility, for potential
Impatience waits on my counter
And my hunger is not fed on another's shock
Or glamour or stock value

Satiated on kindness, I crave small acts, I'm
ravenous for a smile, a door held, a word of care

I dine on the largess of a philanthropic heart
Savor the service mindedness of countless
hands

I devour a heaping plate of the common good
And delight in the delicacy of civility

Sit with me.
Sustain yourself on good intention
Swallow love whole
And grow a world worthy within you

Outrage

(by *Sherie Shaffer*)

Outrage feels like eating porcupine quills:
hard to swallow, piercing you inside.

Outrage tastes like molten betrayal:
denied nourishment, your gut erupts bile.

Outrage smells like discharging gun powder:
pinching teared eyes, assaulting flared nose.

Outrage locks you inside barbed red walls:
imprisoning you to shriek and pound the
walls bloody.

Outrage shoots vitriol into your brain;
your tongue spewing staccato metallic hate.

Outrage, born of horror,
is refused return to cower in the womb.

Outrage begets Outrage,
descending into chaos.

Will you rise above?

Will you love?

Hungry

(by *Holly Brians Ragusa*)

How can I feed others if I starve myself
Of knowledge and care

How can plates fill on empty promises
Waste lays in chances littered

How can a planet sustain as we squander
A cornucopia pillaged

How can people win if we only believe in winning
Fewer lessons lie at a finish line

How can I be less isolated
Feeding only myself

How can we know to ask better questions
If we only receive comforting answers

How can we live for being hungry
For always needing more

I am hungry for more
More solutions
More insight
More love
And more light

Shift the onus back to ourselves
Back to our fields
Back to our shelves
Back to our jobs
Back to our self

Shift the question
How can I be more fulfilled
To
How can I become more purpose filled
Shift the thinking
How can I get more joy
To
How can I create joy
Shift the results
How can I get what I want
To
How can I make a life I want to live

More or Less

(by *Holly Brians Ragusa*)

In the eye of the storm
Lives a hunger for more
More destruction
Less safety
More trauma
Less growth

In the belly of the beast
Lives a hunger for more
More power
Less knowledge
More fear
Less courage

In the way of society
Lives a hunger for more
More money
Less care
More things
Less joy

In the pit of this stomach
Lives a hunger for more
More peace
Less need
More solutions
Less greed

POEMS:

ELLA CATHER-DAVIS

Ella Cather-Davis writes poetry, essays and children's stories. She holds an Associates of Arts degree in English Literature from the University of Cincinnati, and is a member of the Thomas More Writer's Table, Greater Cincinnati Writer's League and Ohio Poetry Association. Ella's written work has been published in a number of books, anthologies and newspapers over the years.

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DIANE GERMAINE

Diane Germaine is a writer/choreographer/photographer who has had poetry in *For a Better World* since 2008. She presented choreography in Cincinnati, Israel, and New York; has been recipient of NEA choreography grants; and received *New York Times* acclaim for roles danced. Diane will be in a *Pones* production at Cincinnati Fringe Festival 2023.

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DRAWING:

SUZANNE MICHELE CHOUTEAU

Suzanne Michele Chouteau is Professor of Art at Xavier University where she teaches printmaking and art history. Her artworks have been shown internationally and nationally in solo, invitational, and juried exhibitions. A citizen of the Shawnee Tribe, she lives on ancestral lands in south-central Ohio with her husband, Chris Bedel, Director of the CMC's Edge of Appalachia Preserve. Their son, Elijah Bedel, is a versatile musician gigging regularly in the region.

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Confabulation

(by *Ella Cather-Davis*)

Post World War II, the citizens of planet Kepler-452 b began a mercy mission to planet Earth. Having observed our inhabitants through time, the Keplars feared we were on a collision course which would result in the annihilation of our planet.

In the manner of the Greek Gods who impregnated mortal women in history, the Kepler's mission was to seed Earthlings with the Kepler's advanced and non-violent natures evolving the aggressive bent of Earth's population.

The resulting children were precocious, curious and peace-loving. The dawning of the Age of Aquarius brought a message of light and love and birthed a generation who rejected war, social and racial injustice and embraced equality and women's importance.

The Kepler's mission was Interrupted in the summer of 1947 by the crash of the mother ship in Roswell, New Mexico. But the seeds were sewn and yielded a harvest of Hybrid-beings who sought enlightenment and peace.

Occasionally when my husband becomes exasperated at my quirkiness, he will say:
"Sometimes I think you are an Alien!"
Whereupon, I smile and think: Maybe, May be...

CHEETAH ALERT!

(by *Diane Germaine*)

Dear Cheetah:
Forgive me for cutting off
your left rear leg –

It didn't fit into the frame –
long as it was – but I do have
your magnificent head.

Your claws are unsheathed
and ready (!) to jump up,
begin your 80mph run

At full power toward
what you see that I can't.
It's there – off the right edge,

Beyond the frame.
I'm shooting out a window,
but it isn't me you see.

I'm safe in the Safari bus,
ready to capture your forever
portrait,

And I still wonder now,
how you allowed me
that brief moment in time
to know you.

Dining With the Dormants

(by *Ella Cather-Davis*)

The dining area is a veritable hive
Its worker bees dutifully serve heavy
trays of food to the Dormant, those
whose cognizance is dormant.
Eyes focus momentarily on the food
being served, resplendent and waiting.

The wall clock is dutifully clicking
each second, collecting each minute.
The Dormants look listlessly on.
Occasionally they doze or shout out,
or shuffle their wheel chair too far
away from the table to reach their tray.

Now one uses her fork to scavenge peas,
as her fingers eagerly grasp her pudding
The bib awaits to defray this tedious effort.
For some, the dilemma is just to begin,
what to do? The worker bees are spare;
they reason:
"Some can feed themselves, in their own way."

The wall clock announces the hour,
The food is collected, bibs removed and
the Dormant have once again dined.
Or not.

Hunger

((by *Diane Germaine*)

At 11:00pm they lifted him onto a gurney
as if he weighed 300 pounds: two men
heaving a bird. The death-nurse said,
"You won't be needing all those
Meals-on-Wheels. I'll take them."

She walked into the tiny kitchen,
pulled open the freezer door,
dropped a dozen into her shopping
bag one-by one.

At 88 my mother ate them as well;
the nurse ignored that fact or calculated
it would not be long before my mother
would not need them.

She was wrong; it would be six more
years before my mother earned "N/A."

*What the hell did she do
with all that stuff? Sell it?*

At midnight, all the lights still burning,
my mother and I sat frozen on the couch -
separate, silent. A long night was ahead of us
waiting for my brother to arrive and I
was starving....

The thing is, I ate them too.
Sitting at the tiny kitchen table
opposite him, I'd been sharing
what little time was left.

POEMS:

CHRISTINE COLYER

Christine Colyer came to writing as an outlet for grief after the unexpected loss of family members beginning in 2015. She writes daily in the form of poetry and prose on topics ranging from loss, to love and spirituality, recovering from trauma, and the beauty and deep healing to be found in nature. She also uses photography as inspiration for, and companion to, her words. Christine recently retired from a 40 year career caring for and teaching preschool children.

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EVAN R. UNDERBRINK

Evan R. Underbrink is a poet and academic on the intersection of theology, philosophy, and the arts. Currently a doctoral student at the Graduate Theological Union, he has studied at Duke Divinity School, the University of North Carolina, Boston College, and Harvard Divinity School. His passion is looking at how art allows us to interact with the divine, deeper reality of the world and ourselves.

He currently lives in Berkeley, California.

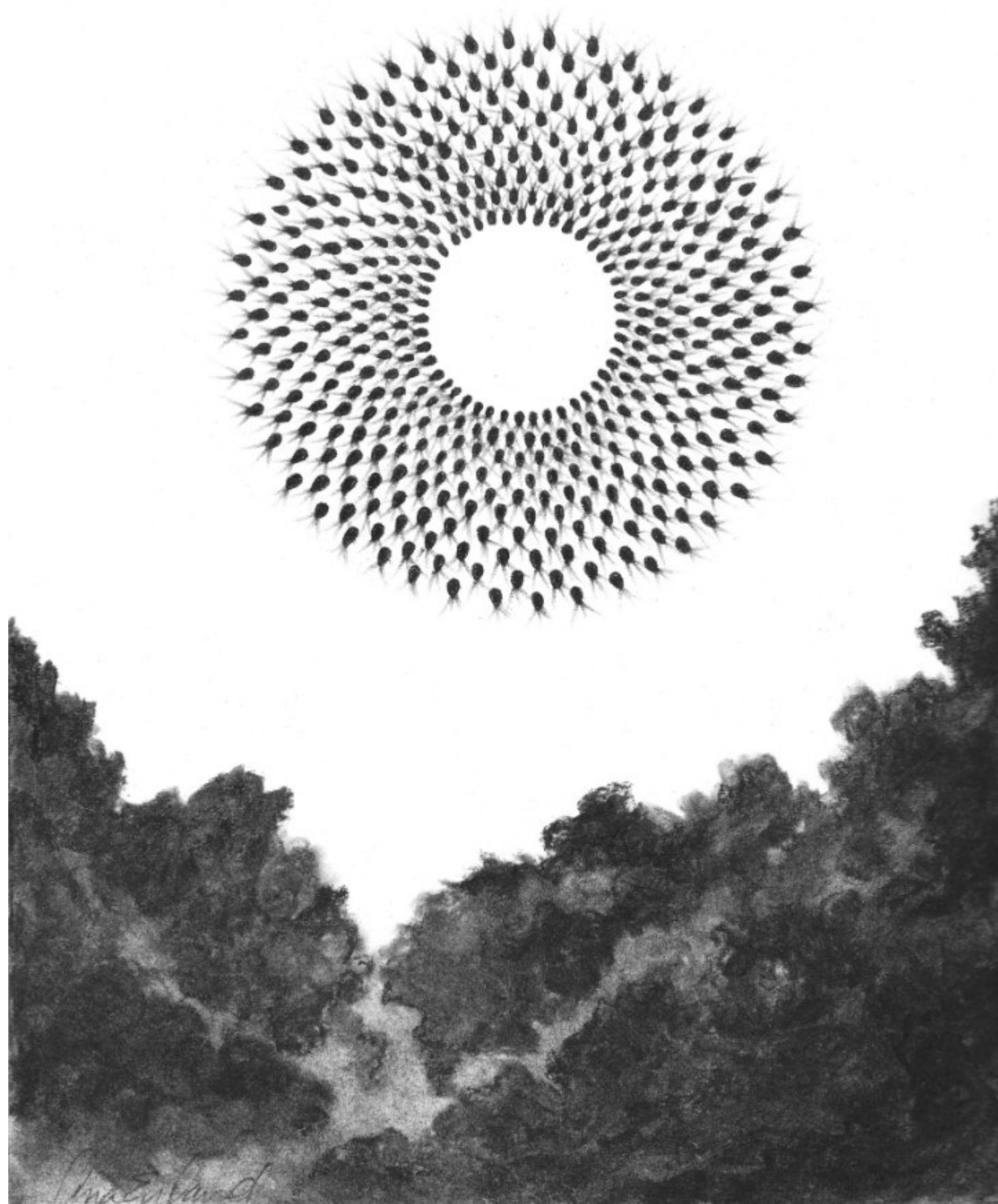
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DRAWING:

ANA ENGLAND

Ana England is a studio artist and Professor Emeritus at Northern Kentucky University. Her numerous exhibitions have been reviewed in regional and national journals such as *Sculpture* and *Ceramics Monthly*. Ana has also given many lectures and workshops at a variety of venues worldwide, including in Venezuela and Belgium.

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For Love's Justice

(by *Christine Colyer*)

It is time.
Be bold.
Stand up for Love.
Live your life with a passion for the goodness of God,
with a commitment to love's justice,
with irrevocable hope for mankind.

Sow seeds of love, kindness, and compassion every day.
Plant those seeds in every grieving heart and in every broken spirit that longs for love's enlightenment.
Plant those seeds in every barren landscape and in every bald patch of godlessness that cries out for love's beauty.
Press those seeds into the soils of injustice,
into the dirt of hatred,
into the manure of intolerance,
and into the mud of bigotry.

Germinate them with your Light.
Water them with your Faith.
Feed them with your Prayers.
Fertilize them with your Love.
And know that your devotion to these seeds,
as well as your dream for their flourishing -
for far reaching beauty, healing, justice, and peace -
will be made complete -
made perfect -
through the power and patience of Love,
through the promise of God -
through the fulfillment of "He who began a good work in you..." (Philippians 1:6)

For "...justice is love in calculation. Justice is love working against anything that stands against love. Standing beside love is always justice." (Martin Luther King)

Riverrun

(by *Evan R. Underbrink*)

But why must it seem so beautiful?
Slick pockets of ethereal rainbows trapped
Under the water, conjured
By the wave of a stick.

The cones in our eyes did not grow
To grasp such a fascination, to understand
it felt like magic
I was not surprised when they decided to burn it.

We breathe the things we cannot see,
And must find some answer when
We choke.

From where will the answer come?
America has no knights, only cowboys
Shatterhand, Lone Ranger, what can they do
When the train has become the villain
And the horses are all dead?

We must sing a new champion, who can see
Undazzled by ugly rainbows, we must dream
So that the good might achieve mightily in failing
To be such, and the bad
Become grippable, American, more,
Than just dead fish
On someone else's land.

Rain-Speak

(by *Christine Colyer*)

Rain, cleanse us of what is no longer needed,
of what no longer feeds the greater good.

Reveal to us nature's transformative spring green artistry
and the magic of her rebirth and new beginnings.

Wash us of our ill thoughts and judgement.
Scrub away our built-up grime of hatred and self-absorption.

Carry our fears downstream where their jagged edges can be smoothed by the currents of
time's knowing,
and where their heaviness can know the freedom of flow's strength to overcome.

Drench us in your downpour
until seeds of forgiveness sprout in our hearts,
love drips from our outstretched arms,
the light of awareness parts the dark clouds,
and the archway to peace opens before us.

Fill us with gratitude for your gift to quench all that is thirsty,
and for watering our gardens of burgeoning enlightenment.

Soak us in overwhelming appreciation for your power to blossom, to beautify, and to
overcome.
Fill every breaking heart and parched spirit with your life-changing rain-speak from above.

Soliloquy From a Fantasy of 15

(by *Evan R. Underbrink*)

*Lights up on Talk Show (smudge
the facts of who, and why, and what, this
is the moment where Algorithm, panoptic eye
of Fortuna gazes upon me with its millioned fractal
screens)*

My younger other, brother, sister,
I am of a paralyzed generation, grown
From parents dissonanced by their parents
They gave us wars on
Concepts, fought through screens
surrounded, scorned,
new devils, new gods, new words, languages,
we did not know what to
do as the world
screamed.
We bore the lashes, scorn, learned
helplessness, we came to live, and, best we could
Bore you, here. Now
the best of our power
is to receive you better, as you begin the
again.

Strong youth, bold youth, I believe in you.
To mine is the portion of chain breaker
Clearer of the gunpowder fertilizers in our hearts, I
Do not wish that we should make our scars your birthmark.
You must dream, dream! And from your dreams
To find the storehouse of hows to solve the direst things.
Forgive us, for the world was breaking when we grew up
You have received it broken, and know

What little power it is allotted to me,
No slayer of great things
*(Algorithm blinked on line 3, knowing
Where this was going, fixed
on faster, fascinating things, so
to the audience)*
Dear younger other, sister, brother,
I wish you only love from us, and a life
without the scorn of older things.

POEMS:

JOHN CRUZE & SUZANNE GLADE

John Cruze is a Greater Cincinnati poet. Suzanne Glade is a Chicago poet. In 2020 they began a “call and response” poetry project. Their poems in the book speak to the vital themes of Peace and Justice in our times.

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ZOHREH ZAND

Zohreh Zand’s father is Iranian and her mother German. She lived for 24 years in Canada and in 2011 moved to Cincinnati. Zohreh’s love for poetry started at the age of 12. She is a docent at the Cincinnati Art Museum, a member of the Monday Morning Writers Group, Cincinnati Writers Project, and Write Now @ King.

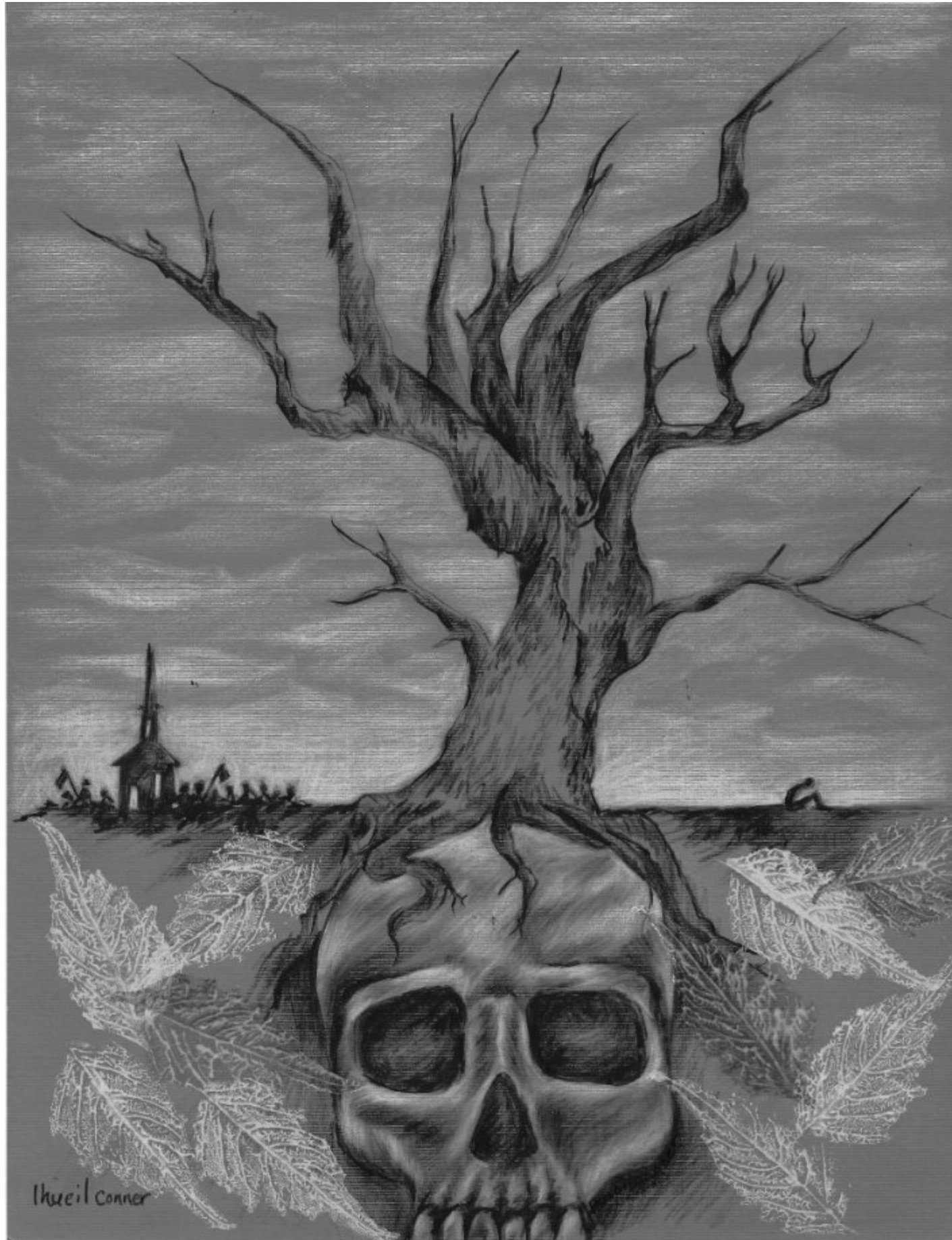
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DRAWING:

LISA HUEIL CONNER

Lisa Hueil Conner is a graduate of Edgecliff (Xavier) and a member of the Clay Alliance. In 2017 she retired from instructing 3 - 6 year olds for over 30 years in both private and public Montessori schools. She has been awarded several grants in the past for her work in clay. When Lisa is not working in clay, she enjoys gardening, historical research to inform her work in clay, and hiking

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Zan, Zendegi, Azadi Woman, Life, Freedom

(by *Zohreh Zand*)

On an autumn day
The wind of my emotions
blew down the leaves of my hurts
They were red and yellow
green and wrinkled
falling to the foot of an ancient tree
begging for forgiveness
Clouds of sorrow covered the sky
drops of tears soaked the ground
And I whispered to the tree
Help
poets, writers, rappers, artists, kids,...
young people striving for hope
are tortured and killed
For freedom
I'm far away
ashamed to be called a human
Dear tree, dear nature
forgive, forgive

Some kill in the name of religion
Others look away
Shame on them
Shame on them
Shame on religion
Shame on power
Shame on the deals behind the scenes

Young people
poets, writers, singers
rappers, artists, kids
are beaten and gunned down in the
streets
for singing
for chanting
I'm hungry
I want to be free

Zan, Zendegi, Azadi
Woman, Life, Freedom

Poem I Blank White Board

(by *Suzanne Glade*)

You cannot punish what has not been written
or so she thought holding a blank white board
The circle of silent watchers opens
as the men with guns lead her away

Her thoughts images on a blank white board
he grips her clothes her body to silence her thoughts
as the men with power lead her away
halting she raises one finger exposing her naked hair

He rips her clothes her body to silence her thoughts
while the protest on the screen reflects her bruised face
Halting she raises one finger tracing her bloodied hair
Without a sound her thoughts tighten into fists

Screens reflect her bruised face protesting
fall silent as we open the circle to watch
men with guns drag her by her tight fists
unheard screams fill the white that is blank

Poem II* Unspeakable Hunger

(by *John Cruze*)

in the square
people gather
hand-made signs
empty
but for some ghost
of what's been stolen

the proud words
the play of color
sequestered
repatriated
tortured into
something unspeakable

*Poem II, response to Poem I

Be Their Voice

(by **Zohreh Zand**)

Each of my e-mails end with
Woman/Life/Freedom
Zan/Zendegi/Azadi

I don't save it
As an automated ending

I have to type each letter
Every time
One by one
Again and again
Woman/Life/Freedom
Zan/Zendegi/Azadi

For not to forget
To stay connected
With the brave people
Asking for valuing
Woman/Life/Freedom
Zan/Zendegi/Azadi

I hear the click sound of each letter
I hear each word loud and clear
Enough to stir emotions
Woman/Life/Freedom
Zan/Zendegi/Azadi

Do you hear?

POEMS:

NANCY D'AQUILA

Nancy D'Aquila is a First generation Italian. She practiced as a RN in her youth and retired recently as a project manager. She is happily married and has 2 children. She Enjoys writing and being outdoors. She Resides in Newport, KY.

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GIFTED JOHNSON-WILKINSON

Gifted Johnson-Wilkinson uses her talents to be a catalyst, expanding interest and access to poetry; through reading, writing, speaking; overall fostering love of language.

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ALAN JOZWIAK

Alan Jozwiak teaches college composition and works as a professional writer, both as a theatre reviewer and playwright and with comics scholarship. He is working on a podcast concerning the first century of American comics.

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DRAWING:

KENAN OSMANAGIC

Kenan Osmanagic is very interested in environmental justice and sociology. He graduated in May 2023 from Miami University with a degree in Environmental Design with a Studio Art minor and a Horticulture minor.

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Waiting in Line at the Food Pantry

(by Alan Jozwiak)

The Line is great and the need greater still,
 extending clear around the corner
 and halfway down the block.
 The Line is hope for people in need
 lacking the essentials
 hoping what they will get that day
 will last long into the empty night.

The Line moves forward suddenly
 and the hope of food sharpens into focus,
 an Oliver Twist need for more
 when there has been only less.
 Waiting can breed impatience,
 but in this Line, no signs of that show--
 save for a squirming child or shifting stance.

The Line finally slows and ends
 in a rush of open bags, sudden choices,
 and a blessed stockpile for the week.
 What is needed is not always given.
 The Line can be long on butter or short on bread,
 causing frantic searches online for ways to cook
 dandelion greens before they rot in the fridge.

Attention Pantry Shoppers

(by Nancy D'Aquila)

*"Why should there be hunger and deprivation in
 any land, in any city, at any table, when man has
 the resources and the scientific know-how to
 provide all mankind with the basic necessities of
 life? There is no deficit in human resources. The
 deficit is in human will."*

Martin Luther King, Jr.

*Your bus no longer stops
 at St. Paul's Food Pantry.*

*Your home is gone;
 you've been banished.*

*Your resources are limited
 leaving you with food insecurities.*

*Your health and well-being
 are compromised.*

***Round and round and round we go
 where we stop no-one knows.***

*Like plugging up the holes of a sinking boat
 in the middle of a hurricane
 the so called "system" fails.*

*The volunteers' heroic measures and
 bountiful charitable donations
 do not mitigate the raging tempest.*

*This bitter pill
 just won't go down.
 "No, not my fault." Then whose?*

***Round and round and round we go
 where we stop no-one knows.***

*"Our only hope?"
 "Human will."*

Red Paper Cup

(by Gifted Johnson-Wilkinson)

*See me
 As you place those coins in
 My red paper cup
 I was once like you*

*But when the bough breaks
 Fractured cracks
 Become quicksand*

*Never believing the elements
 Of cold would know my name
 Be as familiar as this
 Emptiness pain
 Yet it surrounds me*

Until the rhythm of
My own shivers
Rock me to sleep

Dreaming this Red
Paper Cup will be the
Salvation I need
Stamp of approval
To no longer be subhuman
In your sight

I was once like you

See me
The spiral of the fall
Was as hard as the thought
Of the climb back up
But I found my middle
Under the bridge
Between the noise
Of the wheels that chase
The race

Tucked in this corrugated base
I call my own
Black and blue blanket
2 hand-made signs
"Please help me eat."
"Homeless, please help! God Bless"
And this Red paper cup
With just enough space
To curtail the wind

See me
Searching for relief from
The discomfort this brings
As I Guard the serenity
Of my freedom
And find my branch
Once again,
I am Human
And still have
Purpose, too

I was once like YOU!

See me
As you place those coins
In my Red Paper cup!

Lady Liberty

(by *Gifted Johnson-Wilkinson*)

Your mask precludes you from seeing the injustice to Us
Justice for all, a scale in one hand and a sword in the
 other
But if justice is Blind to the fairness of All
What good is it?

The system works exactly the way it was set-up
By the People, For the People

Maximum Inclusion, ... into the Penal system
Our bodies recognizably distinct from the system
In which it is now embedded
Which becomes an ingrained characteristic of
Our Existence; **Jail mentality**

Thank you ... **Your America or Our America**
Choices taken away
Elected officials spoon feeding into the hype
That we are all the same
If he'll do that then, you did too
If she is that then you are too
Simply because the melanin in
Our skin

Turning point...giving a Voice to the
Helplessness of the movement
Eliminate the **Status Quo of**
We the People
And allow Her to **see**
All the People
Equal Protection, Equal Justice

Lady Justice ... you are Blind Not Deaf
So, hear our pleas to
Balance the scale and
Cut through the Bureaucracy of the
Establishment

Don't ... Be ... Swayed!

POEMS:

ARIANNA EBACHER

Arianna Ebacher was born and raised in Cincinnati. A Tunisian American and a student at the University of Cincinnati studying Psychology, she has always enjoyed writing, using it as a way to vent and inspire herself.

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CAROL MARINO

Carol Marino has been journaling and writing poems since age 12. She has a Bachelor Degree in Fine Arts from Ohio University. A physician for over 30 years, Carol practices family medicine in Milford, Ohio.

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CAROLE STOKES-BREWER

Carole Stokes-Brewer is a licensed psychotherapist, published poet, and author. She is on a mission to discover ways to make what is better. Her poetry reflects her sensitivity to human experiences to find inspiration and new meaning.

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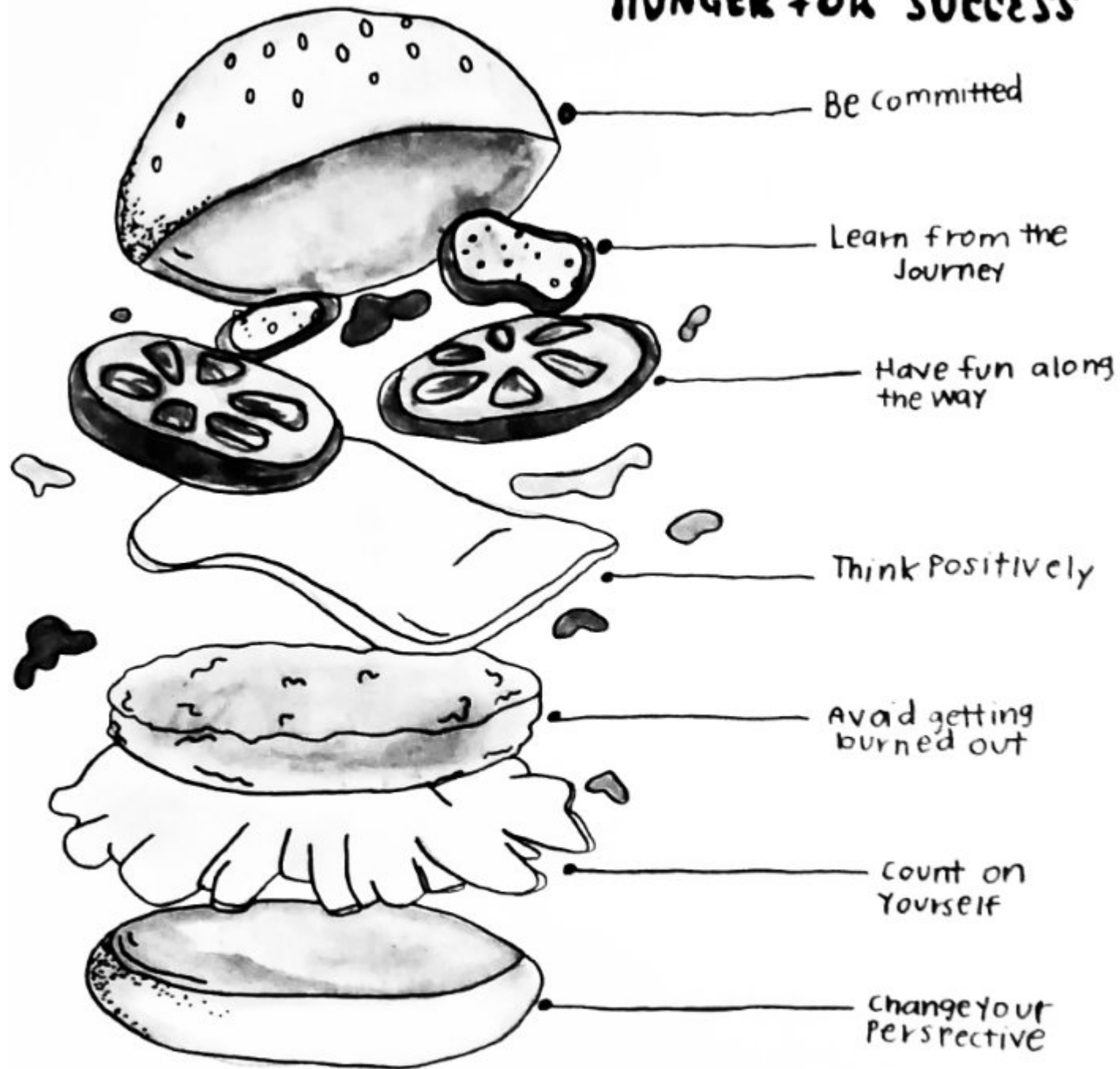
DRAWING:

MADYSON HAYNES

Madyson Haynes earned a BFA degree from Thomas More University (2021). Her art medium specialty is Ceramics, Illustration, Printmaking, and Watercolor. Madyson's artwork has been published in various books. She is currently an art teacher at Covington Latin and an instructor for youth classes at Baker Hunt.

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HUNGER FOR SUCCESS



Maddison Haynes 2023

Hunger for Success

(by Arianna Ebacher)

Hun·ger /'həNGgər/
Verb - "have a strong desire or craving for"

It lives deep within me,
I feel it in my bones,
My soul yearns for its fulfillment,
I cannot escape it.

The stronger the feeling the more it constricts me,
My movement is slow and meticulous,
A surgeon with a future in hand,
Conserved energy for fear of burnout.

If this need overcomes me,
Swallows me whole,
My hunger will not be fulfilled,
Only muted,
But still remains the faintly felt hunger.

Succumb to this yearning I will not,
I will overcome this time and the next,
For hunger is recurrent,
My drive is relentless.

We Hunger

(by Carol Marino)

We hunger for justice, we hunger for peace, in the coldest of winter, we hunger for fleece.
At the banquet table, we hunger for seat, we hunger for water, for fruit, and for meat.
We hunger for shelter, we hunger for food, we hunger for sustenance when we're not in the mood.
We hunger for joy, we hunger for time, we hunger for us to have peace of mind.

We hunger for respect, we hunger for knowledge, we hunger for the money it takes to buy college.
We hunger for people to know we are able, we hunger that our situations be stable.
We hunger for medicine to make us feel better, we hunger for mercy when we find ourselves debtors.

We hunger for coats when we're out in the cold, we hunger for youth when we find ourselves old.
We hunger for hats, and we hunger for shoes, we hunger for relief when we're singing the blues.
We hunger for housing that we can afford, when we need transportation, we hunger for Ford.

I Starve

(by Carole Stokes-Brewer)

I am a ton of steel
no one sees
the belly of my soul
void of grain

I cry out
no one sees
my tears
that hydrate my thirst

I feel pain
When those who walk past me
Kick dust my way

I feel hunger
for those unable to see
the soft side of steel
as it starves.

We hunger for companionship, we hunger for kindness, we hunger when people treat us with blindness.
We hunger for love, we hunger for inclusion, we hunger for family harmony that's not an illusion.

We hunger for babies, we hunger for kin, we hunger for forgiveness when we realize we've sinned.
We hunger for Jesus, we hunger for Christ, we hunger for housing devoid of all mice.
We hunger for our pain to just go away, we hunger for comfort to last through the day.
We hunger for dignity, we hunger to matter, we hunger to be heard when we voice what's the matter.

We hunger for opportunity, just give us a chance, we hunger for pleasant surroundings, we hunger for plants.
We hunger for politicians who hear our issues, when we cry from the heart, we hunger for tissues.
We hunger for self love, we hunger for credit, we hunger and spend way too much time on Reddit.
We hunger for color when it is black and white, we hunger for daylight in the darkness of night.

We hunger to not feel the hurt and the pain, we hunger for dryness when we're out in the rain.
We hunger to sing, we hunger to write, we hunger for sleep when we worry all night.
We hunger for presents all tied with a bow, we hunger for our ducks to be all in a row.
We hunger for calmness, we hunger for dress, we hunger for God to take care of the rest.

What hungers in one of us, hungers in all, united we stand, and divided we fall.
Unite! Lend a hand, look around, take a stand,
hunger to help someone,
just know that you can.

I Softly Sing

(by *Carole Stokes-Brewer*)

*Sometimes the mist overhangs my path, and blackening clouds about me cling.
But, oh, I have a magic way to turn the gloom to cheerful day—I softly sing.
~James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938)*

I softly sing
as I go through
turmoil, battles, and hatred.
poor and cold and hunger.
No one looks my way.
Oh, how I wish that there was a new day
A new way where
the universe opens its heart
to comb through destitute and sorrow.

A way to stop the battles of hate
and awaken a spirit that accepts differences
and see the beauty that's in my voice
hear my voice
just hear my voice
as I softly sing.

POEMS:

J EICHE

Jason "J" Eiche is an aspiring children's author and poet. He works at Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY, in collegiate athletics and is pursuing a [Masters](#) in Education Leadership and Social Justice. He is the son of an elementary school librarian; husband of a Reiki energy healer; and father of three talented and unique children. His other best pals are his pets and his guitar..

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MARGARET GRAY-DAVIS

Margaret Gray-Davis is a poet passionate about writing thought provoking and inspiring poetry. She has written a book of poems centered around social justice issues because she strongly believes that right is right and wrong is wrong.

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DRAWING:

IVÁN BAUTISTA

Ivan Bautista has a BFA with a major in printmaking from the University of Oaxaca. He currently lives in the city of Oaxaca and works there at Taller Burro Press.

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Another Black Person Another Black Man

(by *Margaret Gray-Davis*)

Who is this Black man?
Isn't he just another Black Man?
Some call him Negro, Uncle Tom,
watermelon man, bucks
Is he a no good jigger? Is he my jigger?
Savage, Jim Crow, Lynch mob, Uppity,
Blackball, Colored

Maybe he is a thug
or a dope dealer
He has been "sam", slib, boss
Can you believe a grown black man is
called a "boy"

Someone called him "a cute little monkey"
Coon, Sambo, Jigger-Bo, monkey, lazy
May 1782 the term "African American" was
one of the names

Africo-American was given in 1788
"Black American" was given in 1818
Glenwood Waller born in Georgia 1927
knew those familiar negative names
He was a black man also known as Father,
Son, Brother, Husband, Grandfather,
Steel Grinder, Fisherman, Christian

But first of all he was known to me as my
Daddy

He said I don't have to be what you call me

Miranda

(by *J Eiche*)

If you are white; You have the right...
to rename silence

Everything we've failed to say; to do
Has been used against them
Far beyond a court of law
For far too long

If you have the right to the best attorney;
bigger brackets; better schools;
cleaner water; greener grass;
a comfortable life
I'm speaking to you

If you're stuck with whichever attorney;
barren billfolds; barely schools;
brownish water; greener grass... in rearview...
on the other side
I will speak for you

To the privileged
Do you understand the birthrights provided to you?
With these rights in mind
Do you wish to speak for them?
Will you stand with them?

You have the right to rename silence
So that one day
Our children's children
And their children
Will remember us as the ancestors
Who woke up; on the right side of decency
Washed out; the final swallows of remnant hubris
Stood; cuffed arm-in-arm, together

Until the day that—they; indivisibly became—us

And we, All, were afforded equal opportunity...
to breathe

Brother

(by *J Eiche*)

Top dog
Or bottom feeder
Silver spooned
Or barely eater
Lofty heights
Or brink to teeter
Me; I see—two kinds of leader
One with means
To lift another
One with ways
To light the other
Come together
And discover
What it's like—to live as brothers

Water Pressure

(by *J Eiche*)

Water pressure
I have none
By none
I mean plenty
My cup runneth over
Stuff glaciers are made of
Skin ivory—from trunk
My head is not for hauling
My hair is squeaky clean
There's no pressure
Yet all the pressure
needed (Wanted)
To set sail
Pen portside
And deliver
Water pressure
As a world and a half over
Somewhere across a pond
Where there is no pond
Where disease adorns a glass half empty
Where bark and bones are boastfully brittle
Where skin is the only elephant-like attribute
Where glacier isn't even a word yet
There—
water *pressure*
Is an actual thing

Should've Could've Would've Useless Words Sometimes

(by *Margaret Gray-Davis*)

Should've signed the bipartisan gun control bill
Could've saved the children
Would've turned out differently

Should've noticed the 18 year old on the school ground
Could've responded to the 911 cell phone calls
Would've had the police there sooner

Should've paid attention to the gunman in Buffalo New York the day before
Could've saved the 12 Black folks lives
Would've allowed relatives to say good bye

Should've warned the Ukrainians about the Russians
Could've given them time to prepare to fight
Would've turned out differently

Should've prepared to make a change with the risk of what will happen
Could've hugged and told each other you love them
Would've never forgotten to care for one another

Should've, Could've, Would've useless words

We should make noise if we want to be heard
We could choose our actions
We would not want to do too little too late

We will do better the next time
because it will be a next time

POEMS:

PENELOPE EPPLE

Penelope Epple (Pronouns: [in writing] *e/h*/h*s, [in speech] they/them, e/em, one/ones) **has** previously had h*s work published in *The Aze Journal*, *X Marks the Spot*, *For a Better World*, *Deviant: Chronicles of Pride*, *Nature Held Me Close*, and *Lions-on-Line*. *E is currently working on books of poetry with themes of queerness, Catholicism, exclusion and erasure, aroace experiences, and space.

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NOEL ZEISER

Noel Zeiser is a member of the Monday Morning Writers Group and of The Cincinnati Writers Project. She has published two books: *The Pearl Street Flood*, the story of her father's experience during the 1937 Ohio River flood, and *Salute the Moon*, a collection of poems, stories, and essays.

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DRAWING:

ASPEN Q STEIN

Aspen Q Stein is a multidisciplinary artist who is interested in texture. They love how the act of making creates opportunities for people to explore and work through the big and small instances within their life.

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Agnieszka Stein

Today

(by *Noel Zeiser*)

I study the parable
of the mustard seed,
 small to plant,
the tallest tree when grown,
rich with leafy branches.
There, birds flock to sing.

We appear unimpressive
in a world vast and stony.
But our tiniest kindness
stretches wide as a branch,
easing bitter hurt,
lifting the day to song.

Just Another Day of Being Trans in the Hoosier State

(by *Penelope Epple*)

1.
I check the news again,
and what will it be this time?
Another state trying to outlaw healthcare for all trans folks
18 and under, 21 and under, 26 and under,
or just across the board?
Or are they trying to make it an offense to use our pronouns?
Are they trying to create lists of state-identified trans folks again?
Make it illegal for us to play sports,
even after study after study shows
we have no advantages over cisgender folks?
Are they legally writing nonbinary folks out of existence,
or are they just trying to ban all trans folks from public places again?
I check the news again,
and right now as I write this,
Indiana has seventeen proposed anti-trans laws.
That makes us one of the worst states in the whole country.

2.
Bills have been proposed to ban any and all
puberty blockers, hormones, surgeries,
really any gender affirming care
for trans minors in Indiana.
(You know, the same things that are
forced on intersex kids without their consent.
Funny, how the laws never protect them.)
I could quote studies and statistics to you.
Or I could just tell you that
the trans kids in my community are afraid this will kill them.

3.
It's been weeks since it was announced that
the BMV has to start issuing nonbinary IDs again.
Despite the court orders stating
that they violated our privacy and broke the fourteenth amendment,
they act like nothing's changed.
I'm no closer to getting a correct ID than I ever was.
(Add the news clippings to the stack of legal documents.
Do you have a stack of legal documents
that have held up in court
proving you are your gender?)

4.
I'm still waiting to hear back
from the surgeon I've contacted about getting top surgery.
I know that he's backlogged;
he's the only top surgeon in the whole state.
(Please call me,
please email me
before more choices I make
about my own body are made illegal.
Please.
I don't know how much longer I have left.)

5.
And I go to work
and I smile, and I try to sound upbeat,
as I try to convince you that
everything's fine, everything's fine, everything's fine,
everything's fine everything's fine everything's fine
everything's fine everything's fine everything's fine...
(It's not fine.
I fear we've stopped being
the third most lethal country for trans people.)

6.
Did you hear that
all the ways that trans folks are being treated in this country mean
that we're moving from a six to a seven
on the United Nations' scale of genocide?
It only goes up to ten.
Every one of us trans folks will be dead at ten.

7.
I want to put something about trans joy in this poem,
because despite everything that still exists.
But these days I mostly feel
trans fear, and trans grief, and trans anger.
We're your coworkers, your students, your neighbors, your children.
Can you please do something to
make the world safe for trans joy?

8.
We're not a threat to you.
We've never been a threat to you.
And we shouldn't have to plead to you for our lives.
But that's where we've gotten to.
We're not a threat to you,
so could you please not be a death sentence to us?

POEMS:

GREGORY FLANNERY

Gregory Flannery is a retired newspaper reporter and editor. He now spends his time repenting of his sins, an enterprise that will keep him busy for a long time.

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MARILYN KREBS

Marilyn Krebs has a bachelor and a Master's degree in Music Education. As a retiree she enjoys teaching group guitar lessons at Sands Montessori and piano lessons in her home. Marilyn has also taken up watercolor painting and is finishing her second book of poetry.

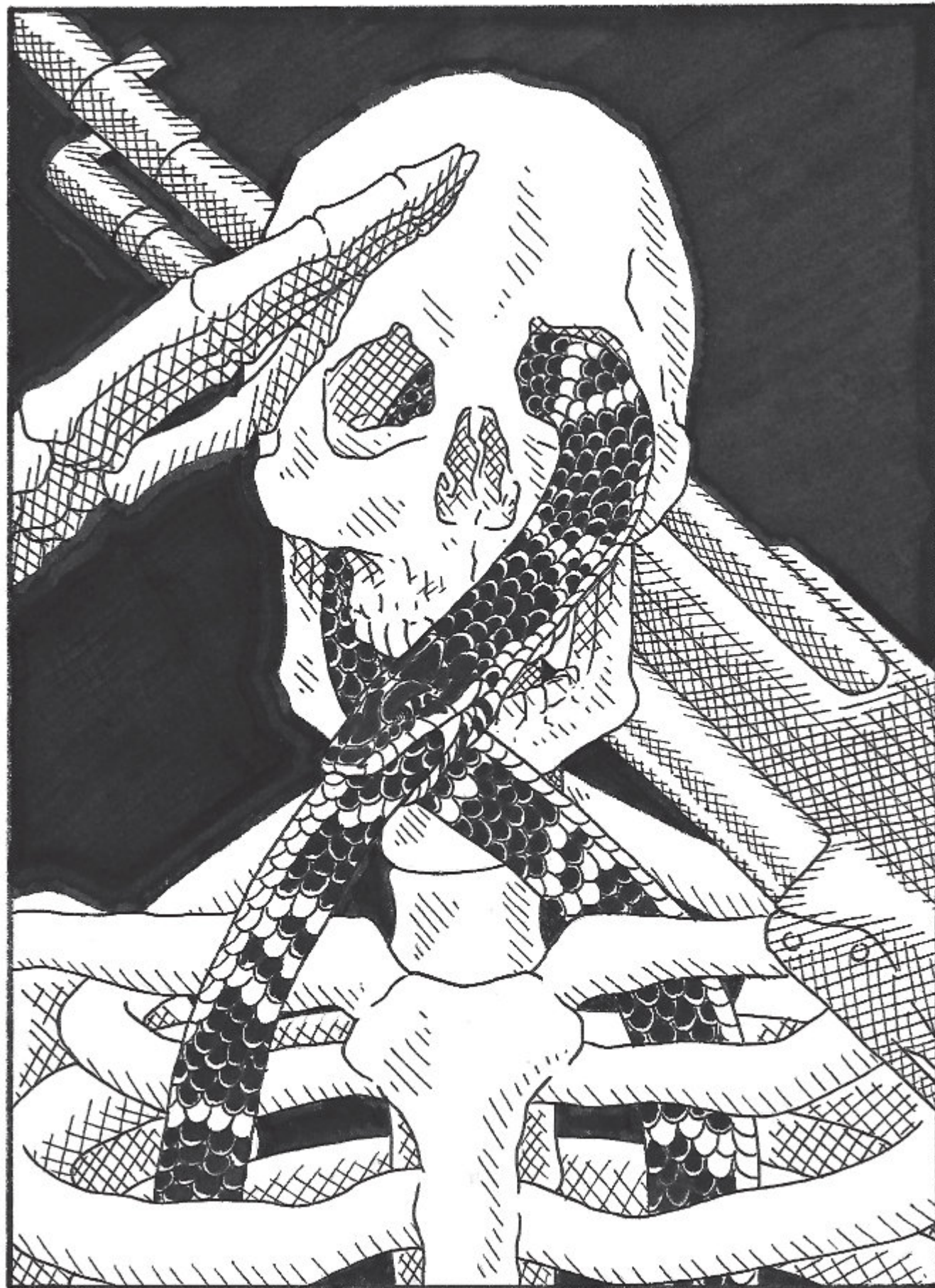
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DRAWING:

NIKKI MCGLOSSON

Nikki McGlosson is a multifaceted artist and craftsperson who works with many mediums including printing, painting, woodworking, metalworking, ceramics, and costume creation. They received their BFA in printmaking in 2019, and currently work front of house for the Cincinnati Arts Association.

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NIKKI MCGLOSSON

A Geopolitical Analysis in 200 Words

(by *Gregory Flannery*)

These are the days when
We are told to love Ukraine,
Freedom's bastion.
Gone are the days when
We were told to hate Ukraine,
Host of Holodomor and Shoah and
Chernobyl, radioactive pesthole.

These are the days when
We are told to hate Russia,
Who tortures Ukraine.
Gone are the days when
We were told to love Russia,
Who drove the Germans from Ukraine.

Gone are the days when
We were told to hate the Germans.
These are the days when
We are told to love the Germans.
Gone are the days when
The Germans sent weapons to Ukraine
To kill Ukrainians and Russians.
These are the days when
The Germans send weapons to Ukraine
Only to kill Russians.
We are told this is good and to be desired.

These are the days when
A holy patriarch blesses Russia's murderous march,
And we are horrified.
Unheard of!
Gone are the days when
Every holy man blessed every army's murderous
march.

These are the days when
A Jew presides over Ukraine.
Russia calls the Jew a Nazi,
A sin greater than
Calling a Nazi a Jew,
Although that could get one or both shot like a dog.
Is that moral equivalence?

THE PAWNS OF WAR,,,,, The Ukraine

(by *Marilyn Krebs*)

If the world were a giant chessboard,
There would be Kings and Queens to rule.
Knights to be soldiers, Bishops as church leaders
And Castles to store the gold.

But out on the front lines would be the poor Pawns:
The artists, the builders, and farmers without guns.
These are the families, the brave and the helpless,
First ones to fall in the game of chess.

Would the game be just as fun if the Kings and
Queens were the first to come,
Standing in front to defend the rest
With powerful moves since they are the best,
Leaving the Pawns to flourish and grow with seeds
of love to sow?

And if the Kings and Queens were the first to fall,
Perhaps there would be no war at all!

Casualty

(by *Marilyn Krebs*)

Inspired by "For Want of a Nail"

For want of a lawn, the wildflowers were lost.
For want of fertilizer, the bees were lost.
For want of plastic, the ocean was lost.
For want of a house, the forest was lost.
For want of connection, privacy was lost.
For want of fame, the soul was lost.
For want of dominion, the animals were lost.
For want of fuel, the climate was lost.

Judgement

(by *Marilyn Krebs*)

I decided to walk my dog to the mailbox across the street.
We had been stuck in the house a lot, stranded by snow and sleet.
I like to send poems to warm someone's day,
And lighten my mood with something to do along the way.

As we neared the crosswalk and I pressed the button for the light,
A black man leaning on the mailbox and smoking gave me a sudden fright.
What should I do? He had no mask.
Would he try to bother me? Would he move if asked?

Wait! I was almost there, so why should I turn around?
I had my dog. We crossed the street and trudged the snowy ground.
I asked the man, could he please move, so I could use the box?
He gladly stepped aside, but seemed to want to talk.

He said he was waiting for the bus for work, just as I used to do.
He had been stuck inside like me and enjoyed the fresh air too.
So it seems I was meant to brighten his day, and he to enlighten mine.
"Judge not, lest ye be judged." I'll be more open-minded next time.

POEMS:

STEVE FREY

Steve Frey, a native of North College Hill, was a teacher and school principal for 37 years. He is currently CEO of Ascendant Educational Services, a writer, and a photographer. In addition to poetry, Steve writes short stories.

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JOHN KRAIMER

John [Kraimer](#) is a poet, artist, musician, accessibility advocate and promoter of the sport wheelchair football. He has been involved with running open mic poetry and music events since 2003 including the current Creaiva Open Mic group.

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EILEEN TRAUTH

Eileen Trauth is a poet, playwright and inclusion advocate. Her chapbook, *Ordinary Time*, will be published in October 2023 (Kelsay Books). She is a member of the Greater Cincinnati Writers League, Ohio Poetry Association and Fourth Friday International. She lives in Cincinnati with her spouse, Kathy.

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DRAWING:

HARRIS MARTINSON

Harris Martinson (b.1985, Rockville, MD) is an artist working in painting, drawing, and sculpture. His work leads him to a greater understanding of the world and his place in it. Harris left New York City and his corporate career behind in 2020 to enroll in Miami University's MFA program (Oxford, OH). He graduated in May 2023.

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HM

Talking With Jesus

(by *Steve Frey*)

I had a talk with Jesus
 In the supermarket
 In the produce section
 He surprised me with a cheery, "Hello"
 Then he launched into a monologue
 About the state of the world
 I politely listened, of course
 He talked about hunger
 People suffering in the cold
 Those strangers---he paused
 Pondered for a second
 Sick people
 He even talked about prisoners
 I wanted to respond
 But I couldn't get a word in edgewise
 His voice was rising
 I looked around, embarrassed
 But nobody was listening
 He said not to get him started
 About those dishonest---
 He didn't finish
 So many led astray by them
 "What hypocrites," he whispered
 He paused again
 Coming back, he finished with
 "It all comes down to,
 As I always say,
 Treat others as you want to be treated"
 Then he looked at me
 He looked squarely into my eyes
 "Whatever happened to love your neighbor"
 His stare almost hurt, and I had to turn away
 Just for a second
 Then he shook my hand
 "I didn't even introduce myself," he said
 "Jesus," he said
 I dropped my oranges
 They fell with a thud on the floor
 A couple rolled for a foot or so
 "Jesus Rodriguez"
 "Ahh," I said as I bent to collect the oranges
 It was only a second

When I rose, he was gone
 I looked around embarrassed
 But nobody was listening

Our Daily Bread

(by *Eileen Trauth*)

Hail winners, full of dough,
 hallowed be your game.

Your realm's been won
 your will be done:

despoiling Earth
 leaching into the heavens.

Let us keep our daily bread
 and forget about those

who trespass against us
 with their need,

lead us not into temptation
 to give to them,

and deliver us from generosity.
 Again.

WWJE

(by *John Kraimer*)

WWJD

What Would Jesus Do?

Forget that!

WWJE

What Would Jesus Eat?

fishes and loaves and a cup of red wine
 a Slim Jim, Fritos, and a 20 oz. Dew
 gourmet cuisine, pâté, soufflé, flambé, chardonnay
 two all beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese,
 pickles, onions,
 on a sesame seed bun

a hot dog, elephant ears, pigs in a blanket

Buffalo wings, Boston baked beans, Chicago style pizza
Maine lobsters, Idaho potatoes, Florida oranges, Kentucky Fried Chicken

PBJ's, BLT's, MRE's
alphabet soup

Italian sausage, Canadian bacon, French fries – um, I mean freedom fries
red beets, white bread, blueberries, American cheese
apple pie, cherry pie, chicken pot pie
a TV dinner

angel food cake
deviled eggs
hot cross buns
fish on Friday
an ice cream sundae
a super sized, all you can eat, everything under the rainbow sherbet
with free refills

or like millions of people
like millions on Earth...
he would eat nothing and go to bed hungry

“For When You Saw Me Hungry...”

(by **Steve Frey**)

The Christmas charity has faded away.
The celebrities have all called it day.
The lights and cameras were taken down.
There's no longer a need to come around.

No more free turkeys thrown from trucks.
They got a full food box, with any luck.
But that's now gone, goodwill and all,
Like old graffiti on a peeling wall.

Free meal souls shuffle, heads bent low;
So many poor folks eat quickly and go.
The good volunteers serve warmly and smile.
Some smile back; some just stare at the tile.

Kids hike back home with sunken eyes.
Moms work two jobs, and nannas cry.
Hunger gnaws and stomachs ache.
How much pain can people take?

Poverty prowls through the projects' halls;
Through haphazard rooms, barren and small.
With shadows dark and fingers cold,
It snatches the spirit, young or old.

But out of the darkness, the angels appear:
A teacher sneaks snacks to the girl with tears;
And the school nurse knows why they need the rest;
The neighbor lady's handouts always taste best.

Thank God for meals the school offers for free;
They afford a short respite to a degree.
But weekends are hard when there's nothing to eat,
And summer's the worst, with the hunger and heat.

So moms worked ragged still come home late,
While kids sit by windows and silently wait.
Nothing much changes; the hunger just grinds.
And in our rich land, some just close up the blinds.

POEMS:

GARY GAFFNEY

Gary Gaffney is Professor Emeritus, Art Academy of Cincinnati. He is a professional visual artist and a sometime poet.

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MAY LANG

May Lang, a poet and mother from the Northern Kentucky area, has a Bachelor's degree in English. She uses writing, photography, and other art forms for an ongoing search for peace and justice, and to communicate with herself and others.

SHERRY COOK STANFORTH

Sherry Cook Stanforth is the founder/director of Originary Arts Initiative and the managing editor of *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*. Her writing contributions are inspired by place keeping, family storytelling, and Appalachian heritage. She performs in two bands (Tellico and Tangled Roots), keeps bees, and studies native plants.

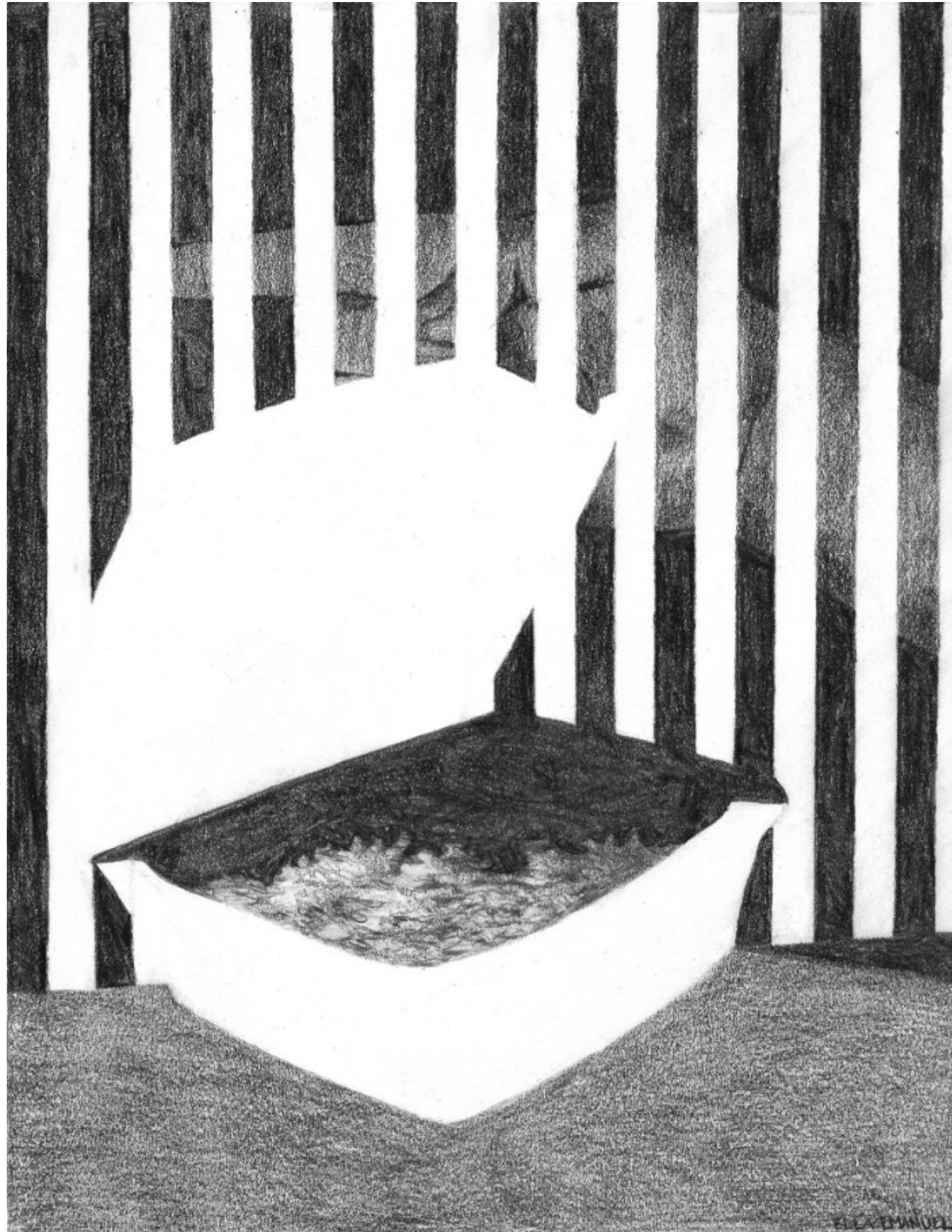
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DRAWING:

ELLA EMANUEL

Ella Emanuel is a 20 year old artist based in Cincinnati, OH currently attending the University of Cincinnati/DAAP. Ella creates primarily figurative works in oil paint and charcoal.

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Chicken Fried Rice

(by *May Lang*)

I waited to remember
what he ordered
exactly.

Chicken fried rice
he said and this—
he said— this is mine.

He said,
hold it right
there and don't
touch it.

I'll know if you touch it,
he said.

I touched it.

I was hungry.
I ate a layer of hills
and valleys followed
exactly.

I ate with one finger.

I ate a map under a map
so the water re-
congregated
under the styrofoam lid.

When he came again
and took it from me
silver drops rolled
down channels carved
as if for the first time,
as if the underside
of the plastic
was a face
that had never cried
til that moment.
It was beautiful.

I'll know if you touch it,
he said.

I touched it.

He did not know.

Decades later
I spoke at 70 mph.
I spoke over a distance
of comfortable existence.

I ate it, I said.
I ate it.

I waited like a tooth
up under gums, a split
sliver yellowed by trauma.
I waited
and I said

what I said.
I said I ate it
and all I heard was myself,

a whistle blowing
like steam
into your empty ear.

My victory slipped through
the narrowest
of openings

and I am the only one
who has ever seen it.

Hungry

(by *Gary Gaffney*)

Count the countless starving children
Too many to hold in a head or heart
No helping of tenderness or love
Can fill their bloated bellies

Me, I have never felt
Hunger in persistent waves
Three times a day I clean my tasty
plate
While hungry children populate the
fertile earth

Warring armies, plagues, droughts,
complacency
Heap crying babies on my plate
Sacks of grain are on the way
Messengers of shameful wealth

Babies find only brief contentment
Too young to hope in hope
Cuddled, loved, forgotten, invisible
Waiting for sustenance or death

Cracked Plate Pantoum

(by *Sherry Cook Stanforth*)

I kept a cracked plate
from my grandma's young days
She named it a sign
of her hard scrabble times,

those lost childhood days
sprung from North Georgia fields
where for hours at a time
she'd hoe rows and pull weeds

Crouched in low Blue Ridge fields
she survived by the dirt
of red furrows, wild weeds—
lived a *waste not* want life

She survived, and wore dirt,
eating beans and more beans,
Said her wasted young life
grew from hunger and dreams

Fueled by red dust and beans
she left home for this place
bearing hunger and dreams
she could never forget

Here, I'm standing in place
recollecting her words,
tracing splits—don't forget
how chipped edges lead home

to the truth in her words,
handed down by design
to my privileged home, to be
served on a cracked plate

POEMS:

JAMES A. GEORGE

James A. George is an author of sixteen published books, three academic, many biographical mysteries, and over three thousand poems. He is a retired consultant to the U.S. Department of Defense.

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JEROLD LONDON

To Jerold London, Cincinnati poet, playwright, and blogger, poetry and theatre are to travel other planes of consciousness; to ring bells others have not heard that way before; to kick-start imagination; to celebrate the personal freedom of journeying the unfamiliar; and to pull strings of compassionate human behavior.

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TERRY PETERSEN

Terry Petersen has published a trilogy, *The Star League Chronicles*, and writes for Piker Press. She also writes a blog at <http://terrypetersen.wordpress.com>. Terry finds enormous joy in celebrating the lives of her grandchildren.

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DRAWING:

JIM CONROY

Jim Conroy is a self taught artist, Cincinnati native, and a retired firefighter/paramedic. He is a member of the Cincinnati Art Club and PAN NKY, also a current Cincinnati Art Club board member. Through his art, Jim works to create a language of shared experience and understanding.

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Five Windows

(by *Jerold London*)

Five windows light a life we feel and see:
 At one, called Reverence, we stand and breathe.
 Another brings us music of the spheres.
 A third lends touch of rain like heaven's tears.
 A fourth is nature looking through the glass.
 The last lets spirits, when they're ready, pass.
 But Man resists, for stolen joys are sweet,
 and life seems incomplete when it's complete.
 A billion different faces of Earth's God
 In hunger, thirst, and nakedness abroad.
 Some, prisoners. Some, strangers in strange
 lands.
 Some, ill, unhoused. All needing mercy's hands.
 Too many facing faces turned away
 To search less tender scriptures they obey.
 Ask not what kind of godliness is true.
 Instead to ask: what kind of face are you?

Empty Hearts

(by *James A. George*)

A starving child doesn't know
 what it is that makes them
 feel this way -- depleted, sleepy,
 irritable, sick with pain.

They have no concept
 for what is lacking
 as sustainability is
 an adult idea, out of grasp.

A dry mouth wants water,
 and nourishment though
 they only know the wet
 they feel when it goes.

Clean water and food
 are essential for survival
 over which they have
 no control.

Suffering is the hunger
 that steals life from children,
 victims of being
 at the wrong place and time.

Insatiable is the appetite
 of millions of children
 lost on barren political landscapes
 where caring hearts are empty.

My Name Is World Hunger

(by *Terry Petersen*)

My name is world hunger.
 I am both well-known and ignored.
 I appear in any place around the globe
 where war has assaulted and destroyed
 dignity and peace. I live where
 there is too much or too little water.

I flourish where greed sings
 every important song and
 silences smaller voices.
 I was created, not born.
 Like disease, I am not normal.

Yet, I long to be healed,
 to be in tune with the whole,
 rounded into softness,
 not rounded inside the bellies
 of my victims.

My name is world hunger.
 I did not choose existence.
 May I slip inside history,
 remembered as a shameful plague,
 corrected and shaped

inside a power known as peace.
 I am willing, so willing
 to belong to the past,
 gone, but never forgotten.

More Than a Trip to Canada

(by *Terry Petersen*)

My husband and I seek relief
from monotone-delivered news horrors.
In Canada local radio stations broadcast
birthdays and local events.

In a small café a First American
lives the loss of his ancestors.
A woman from Poland speaks
of her mother's death from leukemia
as a victim of Chernobyl.
I give a reverend silence and
the fullness of my attention.

Moments before a restaurant closes,
a man who has had 22 surgeries
relives his stroke and his brother's suicide.

I meet engineers, lone travelers,
a young gay merchant from the states
who emigrated to be with her wife.
My heart embraces a
Ukrainian refugee family,
away in body but at home in spirit.
Yet, I can only tap the wife's wrist
and meet her eyes with mine.

Yes, there is beauty in the northern land and
color in the trees, lakes made
as perfect as possible by nature.

Yet, the glory in the road comes not from
escape, but from roots made of common soil
and routes made of concrete.
I drink a cup of tea given by
a motel-mate from India.

With all travelers we celebrate stories
joined through shared experiences.

I don't escape from world news.
Instead, I leave fear behind.

POEMS:

ELENA ESTELLA GREEN

Elena Estella Green is a poet and native New Yorker who currently lives in Cincinnati. She studied creative writing at NYU Gallatin School. She is recipient of a co-fellowship with The Well.

Elena lives near Eden Park and is inspired by Nature and the Human Condition.

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MARY ANN JACOBS

Mary Ann Jacobs has taught writing in elementary school, high school, and college. She enjoys writing essays, poetry, mysteries, and children's books. Her mystery *Don't Mess with Me in the Berkshire Mystery Series* was published by The Wild Rose Press, January, 2023.

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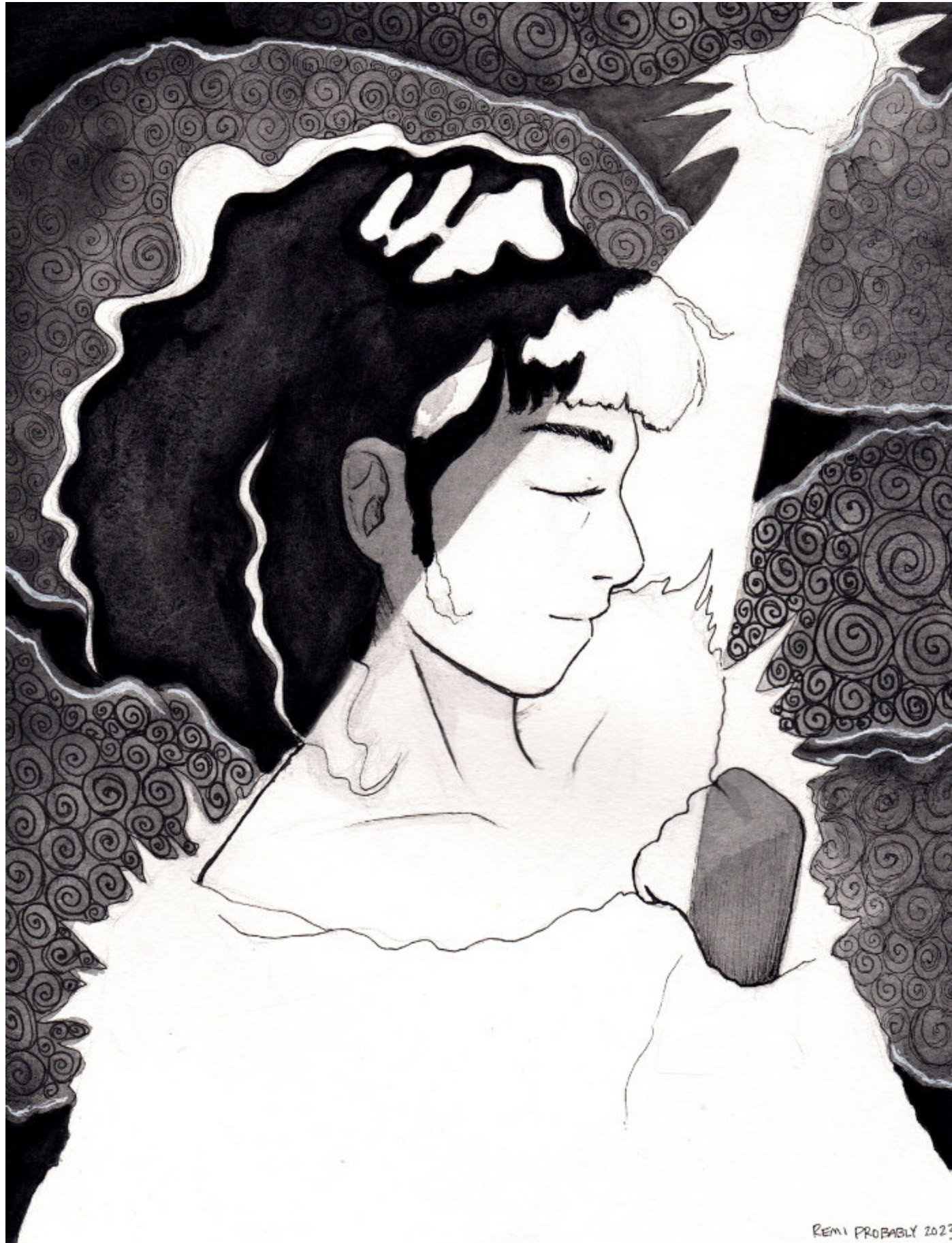
DRAWING:

REMI PROBABLY

Remi Probably is an autistic artist and writer currently based in Cincinnati, OH.

They enjoy creating surreal works using ink, acrylics, gouache, collage, and sometimes cat fur. They graduated from the Art Academy of Cincinnati in 2020, and recently published a nonsensical poetry book, *Wordplayground*.

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Peaceful Spring Wraps Maria in Happiness Again

(by *Mary Ann Jacobs*)

My Dad was killed
My Mom cried and cried
I felt a raging waterfall inside me
I craved justice for his death
Then I stared at the sun and decided

Sadness begone
Sunshine invade my being
Rays of sun shot into my waterfall
Destroyed my fears and woes

I loved my Dad
Mr. Silly, I called him
When I was young
Dad danced
 Sang, played the guitar and
 whispered riddles to me
Knock, Knock, he'd say
Who's there? I'd answer
Giggle monster, he'd yell
And we'd tumble to the rug
and giggle and giggle and giggle
I miss him so

Sunbeam shines down on my tears
Peace bathes my being
Welcome sun
Warm and hug me
I need to be happy again

Thank you sunshine
You've been away
Too long

Reelz

(by *Elena Estella Green*)

Scrolling through reels
Reduced to tears
Young singers
Hitting those notes
The flow begins.

Starting the day in the dark
The night gives way
To morning,
The heart gives way
To the light within.

The hunger begins.
A yearning for goodness
A desire for peace.
5AM in the valley
Beside a river town.

The past seven years
A journey road
From life to death
And second chances
Gasping for breath.

The glory comes
In answered prayers
Even more in unanswered
Ones. No more pain
The body rises

To meet the Dawn.
The beginning of everything.
The faint cry of birdsong
Sets in motion

The promise of a new day!

Is Missing People Essential to Life?

(by *Mary Ann Jacobs*)

How I hunger for the lost friendships in my life.

First my Grandpa died.
Gramps was my buddy.
He taught me everything about the LA Dodgers
And how to keep statistics for all the sports' teams.

Next my neighbor Jenny, who shared my growing up years, died.
Cancer was the silent killer.
I hate cancer.
I hate not sharing with her every day.
I hate facing the future without my friend
To share with,
To dream with,
Who understands everything about me.

Violence in our neighborhood happens often.
A drive-by killing, that's how Hosea, the shortstop on our baseball team, died.
Every ball hit to a shortstop reminds me of my friend's enthusiasm
His joy
His fun seeking ways.
When I miss the ball, I wait for Hosea to taunt me.
He doesn't.
He's gone.

Gone like my Gramps,
Gone like Jenny,
Gone like so many others that death will touch in my future.
I hunger to see them again.
Grant me peace as I miss them so.

POEMS:

BARBARA GRIMSLEY

Barbara Grimsley is a local poet who works as a Senior Writer for Shattles Communications, a Cincinnati-based full-service marketing communications agency. She lives with her husband and two daughters, a constant inspiration and source of hope for a better world.

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BRIAN SHIRCLIFF

Brian Shircliff is long-time fan of words and the pauses between them. He is the author/translator of *The Naked Path of Prophet* series of biblical translations and graphic novels (illustrated by Sean K. Long) revealing the wildly sexy, clever poetry-rap that most Bible translations ignore or even cover over. Director of VITALITY Cincinnati's donation-based holistic self-care programs and avid meditation/movement sharer, Brian writes for vitalitybuzz.org.

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DRAWING:

PATRICIA CLARK ROPER

Patricia Clark Roper is a native of Paulding, Ohio. In addition to teaching in several Ohio elementary and secondary schools as well as at the University of Cincinnati, she has studied and taught in Bogotá, Colombia and Madrid and Barcelona, Spain. Patricia has no memory of a time that she did not draw and paint for family, friends, and spiritual fulfillment.

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Through the Eyes

(by *Barbara Grimsley*)

Through the eyes of a child,
I want to see the wonders of space,
the limitless possibilities for my life, time
and the ability to imagine anything.
I want to fully immerse myself in a daydream,
play pretend and love with all my heart.
No preconceived notions—
Everyone is good
and being fair and kind
are more important than labels.
That is how I want to see.

Fred

(by *Brian Shircliff*)

in a world where our children grow up, where violence is just assumed as just-the-way-it-is on even the most 'children-friendly' shows, where speeches and attitudes and social media-angst stir fellow-humans to blast fellow-humans with their bottled-up feelings at schools or supermarkets or movie houses or worship houses or nightclubs or anywhere as if we're in a demented video game, where video games with extreme violence are the norm and action figures from those games are given to children for young birthdays, where loud wars in the news and quiet wars by drones continue without much protest, where political violence in a human's personal home or our People's capitol-home is starting to seem normal...

i long for a new Fred Rogers...who can remind us all...

FRED

It is written —

that he arose very early
in the pool by 5 am
swam his mile
weighed himself every day after his swim
and was always the same weight
every day of his adult life

he swam naked
as was the tradition of his club
as was the tradition in gender-segregated pools
across the country, across the world at that time

as was the tradition of the Baptizer whom Jesus searched out
as was the tradition before them of the naked prophets
on the mountaintops
getting all ecstatic on YAHWEH, the wind

i wonder what he worked out
within himself
in those naked swims
every morning
before he visited his child psychologist-friend
to plan out the day's show
to a very sharp T
and if he got on set and thought that some
way of phrasing something
could be harmful or misleading
to a single child
he'd stop production and
walk on back to his child-psychologist friend
and work it out
before returning to the set
to get it right
with an even sharper (and wiser) T

it's a good thing he was wealthy before
his Neighborhood show made waves
before the droves of children would line up for a few seconds with him
just a steady glance from him
was all most of us ever needed —
to be seen, to be heard, to have our feelings exposed
through his Neighborhood
the whole cast his very soul and ours

where all are welcome

it's a good thing he was wealthy — his parents' wealth
and never had to worry about the monetary success of
his Neighborhood show
because he just wanted to do what was right
and not what was commercially sound
and whaddoyaknow every show was magical
through that not caring about the dollar
and instead caring for every single child

where his Make Believe seemed to
know
all of our insides

It is written —
that he had trouble with his own teenage children
that the man to whom everyone brought their own children
had trouble with his own
no matter how soothing this puppets or his wife's piano

it takes a Neighborhood, i suppose
a whole cast of characters that need voice
that need to be seen
that need their feelings to be noticed
and even called forward by an adult who knows
who has swum in those deeper waters
and who loves that cast of characters (us)
no matter what

it's such a good feeling...

POEMS:

RICHARD HAGUE

Richard Hague is author of 20 volumes of prose and poetry, including *Riparian*, the anthology of Ohio River writing and photography published by Dos Madres Press. Recent work appears in or is forthcoming in *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *Still: The Journal*, and *Northern Appalachian Review*.

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JERRY JUDGE

Jerry Judge has published 8 poetry collections. He lives in the Cincy suburb of Finneytown with 2 royal felines and one earnest canine who walks him frequently. He is proud to be a long-time contributor to *For a Better World*.

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RHONDA PETTIT

Rhonda Pettit, a professor of English and editor of the *Blue Ash Review* at University of Cincinnati Blue Ash College, is the author of two poetry collections, a poetic drama, literary criticism and a portfolio of poetry collages.

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DRAWING:

EDITH CHÁVEZ

Edith Chávez lives and works in Oaxaca City, Mexico. She has a BFA with a major in printmaking from the University of Oaxaca. Edith has been selected in Printmaking Contests in Italy, Japan, Spain and Mexico. She has had collective exhibitions in Argentina, Mexico, China, USA, Cuba, Nicaragua, Japan, Serbia, Italy, Ecuador, Spain, Taiwan, Canada and England.

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Cassidy

(by **Jerry Judge**)

In a soft voice and demure manner,
she dropped bombshell after bombshell
rattling every margarita glass in Mar-a-Logo.

Guts appear most often in unlikely people.
Her words expose her now as prey
with a bounty to every Proud Boy in the land.

What has any Proud Boy done ever to be proud?
Some, long in tooth and graying in hair,
are hardly boys and hardly naïve, just craven.

Where can she go now and feel safe?
She has insulted an American plastic Mohammed -
hating and angry followers lurk everywhere.

Marshall Law

(by **Richard Hague**)

A Republican who urged the Trump White House to declare martial law to stop Joe Biden taking office has only one regret: that he misspelled "martial"

No problem, sir:
we know who you meant.
The one in the tall hat, in from the saloon
from *Gunsmoke*: his dusty Stetson,
his brassy corset of ammo,
the never-smile frozen on his face.
Here he needs no gimpy sidekick,
just a tongueless AR-15
loyal at his side,
gleaming in whiskied light.
He arranges and rearranges
his hat brim
instead of talking,
closes his eyes when spoken to.
His fists are veined grenades.

When the first round is served, he
shoots. After the smoke clears
he shouts. No one knows
what he's saying. Eventually,
though, everyone marches,
magazines and holsters
helter-skeltered across the floor
as after a mass shooting
or tornado.

It's he they have called
to make their plans go well,
the cops overrun, patriots
stabbing with flags, the good
old boys, those tough Dan'l Boones,
bear-spraying their way into history.

Annotation X

(by **Rhonda Pettit**)

America
why did you bury
wisdom with the arms?
Did it slip through the hands
of men holding pens
or a widow's dowry
or the lines of a senti-
mental song?

America
what price peace
what price compromise
what song america?

America
who was taught to sing you
who was taught to fear you
who remained
an annotation
whose hands were left
in the margin?

America
what is the compass of your voice
are you a home or an interval

or a word looking for a home
is home just
another word?

America
our hands will be
the witness to our words
and our X \$

Who among us has not slept at intervals?

Variation on a Theme by James Wright

(by **Jerry Judge**)

After "Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota"

Over my head, I see black feral cats
pace on top of the rusty dumpster,
snarl like panthers daring their prey
to attempt just one move.

Down the street and two blocks up,
I hear sirens, police and fire.
Perhaps one lucky bastard has died
at the top of a high before Narcan
can prolong his miserable life.

August sun shines the puke on my chest golden.
I see the lady of our block stop, hesitate,
then rush to the car of her next John.
Evening will come erasing any trace of light.

My mother knew it would be this way.
Yet, she still gave birth.

POEMS:

CAROL IGOE

Carol Igoe's parents encouraged her reading and writing from an early age. By the time she was in her 60s she was writing to resolve matters in her life and poetry became the method that she could explore her emotional self.

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MARY-JANE NEWBORN

Native Cincinnati Mary-Jane Newborn, liberation vegan, VeganEarth volunteer, Certified Master Recycler, Little Free Librarian, Reiki Master, and extreme composter, lives in a Certified Natural Wildlife Habitat. Mary-Jane modeled 26 years for art classes; she loves to laugh and make others laugh.

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DRAWING:

JAZMINA ROBINHAWK

Jazmina Robinhawk, from the Cincinnati area, has recently graduated with her BFA in painting from Northern Kentucky University. She has showcased her art in multiple galleries, publications, and murals around the Cincinnati greater area.

Jazmina is currently working on an extensive mural project in Covington, KY while transitioning from student to graduate.

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Rescue at Lesbos

(by *Carol Igoe*)

We weep,
Watch Sailors
Rescue and retrieve
Bodies, still some living,
Mothers and children,
In great peril, adrift.
Dark Oceans sweep over,
and against them.
Against great odds,
They are pulled aboard,

A small human gift.

Invasive Species

(by *Mary-Jane Newborn*)

Taken from their native lands,
unwillingly, sometimes unwittingly,
transported over vast distances
over seas, wounded, injured,
sometimes dying,
sometimes only offspring surviving,
as orphans, as seeds,
planted deliberately, or thoughtlessly,
or both, in unfamiliar soil
to toil,
stepped on, ignored, despised,
sometimes prized as trophies
to be possessed, escaping captivity,
condemned, hunted, destroyed,
considered pests to be eradicated,
enemies to be subdued.
Nonetheless, some resilient ones thrive
and flourish,
obstreperously insisting to live.
Who invaded whom?

Out of one fertile valley,
venturing in a trickle, in a tsunami
in all possible directions,
exercising agile legs and hands and brains,

killing, always killing,
reliably wiping out species, families, classes,
on every continent,
transforming forests to deserts,
poisoning waters,
cooking up new combinations
of rocks, of metals, of toxins, of genes,
burning, always burning,
until not one square inch of the entire planet
does not carry smashing bigfootprints
of the one, true, most invasive species
of all.

I'm So Hungry I Could Eat the World

(by *Mary-Jane Newborn*)

Stop all those people from crossing our border!
Build that wall twenty feet high!
Never mind that they're the ones
replacing my roof in blazing heat
taking down my trees in frigid wind,
mowing my grass, cleaning my workplace,
harvesting my vegetables and fruit.
Never mind that my squandering of fossil fuels
is rendering their homelands uninhabitable
so that they run the gauntlet of deserts,
of border patrols, of vigilantes,
desperately seeking ways to feed their children.
What do I care if my would-be apex predator diet
is raising the temperature ever higher,
that the food I waste feeds methane into the
atmosphere?
What's it to me that those people
slaughter the animals I devour,
and that their own blood and skin and flesh
ends up mixed into the ground-up meat,
so that as I eat fast food,
undocumented DNA takes up residence
in my cannibal belly?
My appetite knows no bounds.

Multiple Choice

(by *Mary-Jane Newborn*)

Proliferationale:

You say you are pro-life?

Wow! That's wonderful!

So that means that you take great care
never to harm any living being
if you can possibly avoid it?

That you are mindful of the consequences
of all your actions?

That you endeavor to shop, to travel,
to eat and drink, to dress and work and play
in ways that use the least energy,
exploit least the Earth, the waters,
the trees, the animals,

the workers in every industry,
those who serve in every capacity
to provide your sustenance?

And that you are keenly aware
of the effects of all your decisions
on countless unborn generations
of every form of life to come?

Natal selection:

So, you know that no girl dreams
of having an abortion when she grows up,
and that women don't decide to get pregnant
so they can experience a termination procedure.

You know that, right?

And no woman just ups
and gets herself pregnant
all by herself.

You do understand that,
don't you?

Doesn't abortion represent
a huge abnegation of responsibility
on the part of the male sex?

Why don't they police themselves?

What makes men think they have the right
to dictate what women do with our very bodies,
when they don't seem to be able
to control their own?

Stand your ground, girl!:

Now that many states have passed
legislation that holds killers immune
from prosecution

if they say that they felt threatened
and acted in self-defense,

go ahead and get an abortion,

' cause no doubt you feel threatened,
with good reason, in many, many ways.

You should also be immune from
prosecution,
or persecution.

Sauce for the gun-toting gander
is definitively sauce for Mother Goose.

If a man's castle is now apparently the
whole wide world,

a woman's very own body must surely
be hers.

Coming Home From Cairo

(by *Carol Igoe*)

Plane to catch, I glimpse

Wrapped in his long galabeya,

A man, curled on the ground,

Sleeping under Cairo's dawning sky.

Driving across the arid Sarengeti,

Nothing to see, no green, river dry,

Silently, a man rides out of a shimmering cloud,

Maasai, wrapped in red,

He bicycles past, with a nod,

Fades back out into empty dust.

Up from the deep down Egypt tombs,

Camera in hand, I freeze in time

Expressway, donkey car, a monster jeep.

A father walks by the guard rail,

Holding his small son's hand,

Pilgrims in hallowed land.

On my way to work, back home,

Turn down Central Parkway

Where the highway roars:

A mother walks ahead,

Strung out behind her,

three small children,

No one holds their hands.

Oh, my country,

Where is safety? tenderness?

Where is the caring human heart?

POEMS:

CARLYE JAMES

Carlye James is a psychology major at UC Blue Ash. Writing poetry has been a passion of hers since she was little, and she hopes to ease the loneliness of the world through her poems.

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PETER K. KABENGELE JR.

Peter K. Kabengele Jr., a Cincinnati Native, attended Winton Woods High School. He enjoys working out, writing poetry, and keeping a journal. For Peter, writing poetry is a way to help him see his way to becoming a better person.

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JEREMY SMITH

Jeremy Smith, born in Cincinnati in 1991, wrote his first book "*C*" *My Light* in 2016. While growing up in the lower middle class, Jeremy went through the struggles of divorce, poverty, a violent environment and segregation. Through this struggle, the need to express was utilized through art and poetry.

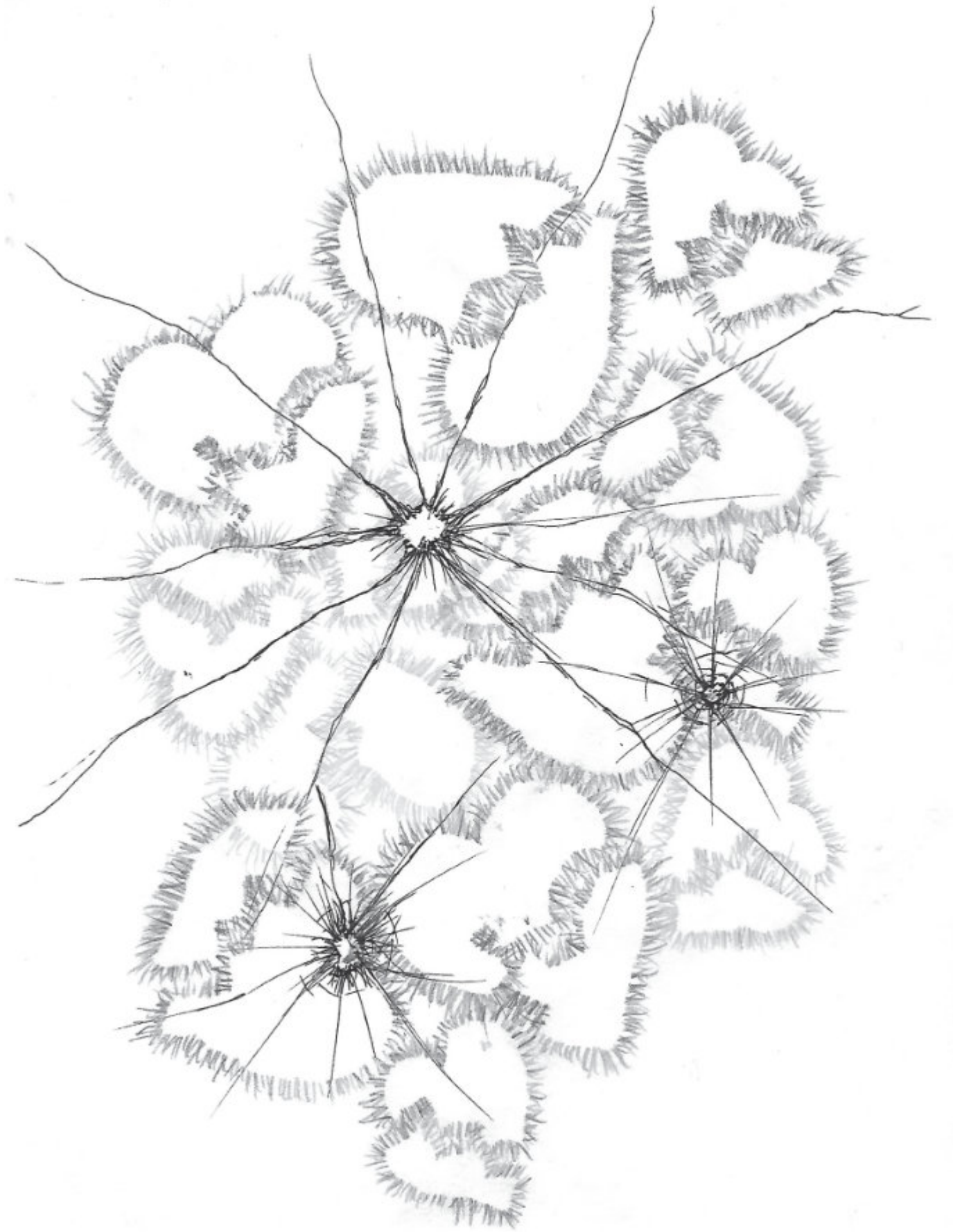
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DRAWING:

BRENDA TARBELL

Brenda Tarbell earned a BFA in Ceramics from Ohio State University (1973). She moved to Cincinnati in 1974 to teach pottery and has been living and working there ever since. Brenda is a member of the Clay Alliance in Cincinnati and has received a City of Cincinnati Arts Grant and a Summer Fair Foundation Grant.

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Brenda Jarbell

Embracing Shattered Pieces

(by *Carlye James*)

The crunch of fallen leaves mimics the sound of a broken soul
The eye's film that creates a flowing river
Trees that break the sun's light,
Tiny fractures of the body.

Where daylight means loneliness
Where moonlight means being alone
Where reveries are a safety net

When the bright blue sky is damnation
And the night sky is a haven

To become a kaleidoscope of wonder,
To heal with love,
Is to accept all the shattered pieces.

Change

(by *Peter K. Kabengele Jr.*)

Things change
People change
Situations change

It's time for change
If you want to grow
From a boy to a man

Change comes
From going with things
In your life

Taking the good
With the bad
Knowing when

You are right, when
You are wrong
Taking responsibility

For where your life is going,
Looking yourself in the mirror
Being able to know

Where you come from
Learning to let things go
Staying focused on the present

And not worrying about the past
Knowing your worth
Standing up and doing

And doing the right thing
Being able to go
To the next level

When nobody thought
You could go
I believe I can change

My life all the way
Around
For the better

City Life

(by *Jereny Smith*)

Hustle on the mind, while my peers die inside.

Exuding all the signs.

Unified by the search for the same thing at the end of the day, happiness with a revised minimum wage.

Being able to live how you choose after getting paid.

Greedy is the soul that is deprived, forced to see unattainable images of success, breeding emotions like jealousy and desperation.

Negativity festers deep in the soul with no understanding of the sickness.

No understanding of worth.

Educated to use a false scale.

A scale that is manmade.

Over and over, the repetitive nature is what makes the struggle for one's mind unbearable.

Mindset vexed behind the insurmountable opposition.

Desperate for an explanation of the false scale given to judge the world around me and how to shake its grip.

Now knowing I'm incorrectly educated, the struggle's impact maims my psyche with such force it knocks all the ambitions out of my sacred evergreen.

Not wanting to settle.

But rather fulfill one's true purpose.

Will the peace of justice ever deliver me to my rightful place in this world?

POEMS:

KAREN I. JAQUISH

Karen I. Jaquish has lived throughout the Midwest: Detroit, Dayton, Fort Wayne, Lawrenceburg, and now Milford Ohio. She has been writing since she was three years old when she would dictate her stories to her grandma. Her poetry chapbook is available from Finishing Line Press.

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REBECCA SUTER LINDSAY

Rebecca Suter Lindsay's award-winning historical fiction novel, *The Peacemakers*, is available from Shadelandhouse Modern Press. Forthcoming from SMP, is her chapter book for 7 – 10-year-olds, *Mr. Tux and the Little Garden Hotel*, the story of an abandoned cat who takes a position as butler at a small French hotel.

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DRAWING:

MARY ANNE DONOVAN

Mary Anne Donovan has a BFA in Art Education(UC/DAAP) and an MFA in Painting and Sculpture (University of Montana). She has exhibited her work regionally, nationally and internationally. Over several decades, she has explored oil, acrylic, mixed media, ceramic, and sculptures. For 21 years, Mary Anne was a Lead Teacher/Art Specialist in the Cincinnati Public Schools, earning several Art Teacher Awards from the Ohio Art Education Association.

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Mary Anne Donovan

They Were Our Cousins

(by *Karen I. Jaquish*)

Horrible.
Disturbing nightmare.
Smoke drowns our screams.
I can't breathe, cannot breathe.
A missile lands near Irena's home

I run to find her until Alexi pulls
pulls me back shouting they will
shove me into a pile of burning dead.
They will shoot and shoot
until their rifles are blank like
their dead eyes.

Last night they killed an infant sleeping
in his mother's arms. She held
her first born tucked safe (so we thought)
in her trembling arms.
His comrades shouted,

then vomited from
the eruption of blood.
Which came first the threats
and lies from their leader or the choking
smoke of the guns our cousins used
as they entered these cities.

Our Leader says we won't quit;
we are strong and invincible.
We are rich and smart, our land
is plentiful. They were once
our cousins, we share blood.
We used to cross the border
to visit weekly bringing bread
and raspberry jam. We used to cross
the border with smiles.

Why did they turn us into enemies?
Didn't they recognize the lies?
Everywhere I look is destruction,
My uncle is missing. In the bedroom
a music box plays a Russian folk
song.

I do not want to live with this fear,
the terror of falling buildings, missiles
crashing, the smell of blood and burning.
I want to escape but there is no safe zone.
Oh, Gregor, your mother gave me
that music box.

PROTEST

(by *Rebecca Suter Lindsay*)

I have put away Grandfather Frost,
that happy figure carved from wood
by a skillful hand. Dressed in a red
robe, trimmed with ermine and
speckled with silver sequins painted
on with a fine brush, he shelters in

gloom. Shut in the dark is the roly-poly tree
from Baltic shores, gilded and green,
dotted with cherries like Christmas stollen.
Its jolly bell that brought me much joy
no longer rocks and rings like a steel drum.
Now it sits silent.

I have hidden, too, my nesting dolls,
who, dressed in babushkas and shawls,
come bearing bright strawberries.
They huddle in shadows beside
the teardrop egg hung on a gold chain
and the postcards from the Amber

Room (replica or real?) purchased
on a pilgrimage to the Catherine
Palace. Deleted from my screen saver
are the photos of St. Petersburg—
the fountains of Peterhof,
the Hermitage, and the public

restroom where, for a mere 210
rubles, I became a hero. I have put
away my treasures because
the covetous one, beset with insanity,
has cloaked them in disgrace,
besmirched their beauty with blood.

Wrapped in tissue of blue and yellow,
they all are sequestered, stashed in
a dark cubby in my desk. And there
they will stay until the people of
Ukraine once more breathe free.

My Father's Child

(by **Rebecca Suter Lindsay**)

To the Contractor

Before you stands a weathered wall,
cement crumbling from between
the fossiled rock, limestone brought low
by taxus roots, cheeky chipmunks,
repeated freeze and thaw,
and hillside thrust.
Before you fire up your CAD,
collect your rocks and blocks,
and tear this wall down, listen.

My father was a bootstrap man.
Deprived by the Depression of higher education,
he worked long hours,
and raised five kids. At night,
he studied calculus and logs.
He persevered until he earned
the title, Certified Engineer.

When I was old enough to tag along,
I followed him to sites,
explored the stick-built skeletons
of buildings yet to be.
I learned what a urinal is,
the meaning of male and female
when talking pipes. Older,
I typed his specs, those
notations gleaned from catalogs,
ingredients in a construction recipe.

I know how to build this wall.
I can talk Allan block and pea gravel,
Plot materials and labor,
debate concrete vs. substrate footings,
and calculate the cant.

I know how to do the math;
I just don't have the muscle.

So, while you work,
Guard your tongue.
Unless you want to catch my ire,
Don't call me "the Mrs."
Go ahead now and draw your diagrams,
run your toys, doze it down.
Order blocks and rocks, and
build a new wall in its place.
Just remember:
I know how to build this wall.
I am my father's daughter;
I am my father's child.

POEMS:

BLANCHE SAFFRON KABENGELE

Blanche Saffron Kabengele's teachers thought she was daydreaming when she was composing metaphors. Blanche is the author of *Quiet as It's Kept, Me Too, and Other Poetic Expressions* and *Conjugal Relationships of Africans and African Americans*. Her poems have appeared in numerous poetry journals. Blanche is retired and lives in Cincinnati with her husband Peter.

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JUSTIN WILLIAMS

Justin Williams, a Cincinnati Native, has written poetry for over 20 years. He has since used his gift to teach for the past 11 years, and continually offers it up in service to God, whenever he has the opportunity.

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DRAWING:

KEN OBASI LESLIE

Ken Obasi Leslie studied art history at UC and Philander Smith College in Little Rock, Arkansas. He is a founding member of the Neo-Ancestralist art movement in the 90's. Ken has exhibited his art widely, including at the Cincinnati Contemporary Art Center; he served on the board of the William Thomas Art Gallery and curated shows at the King Center, and Wilberforce College. As a musician, Ken loves the improvisation process of implementing color and images.

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The Green Child

(by *Blanche Saffron Kabengele*)

*A fish may love a bird,
but where would they live
The film Ever After*

The Green child wears shoes
Brown and black, tied in a knot
Rarely a perfect bow.

But for a child such hue
As this one, could
Make even grass envious.

The green child
Exists in a world
Like all others.

One not, of their making
But of need by one
such desperate folk.

To gain entry
Into a land born
Not.

But one promising
A future bound
Needing roots

From one such a child,
To anchor into
This, a foreign land.

Once born becomes
Much forgotten.
As color now changes

Black now. Also, green.
For such, so sad,
Disposable green child.

Coloring Outside the Lines

(by *Justin Williams*)

I used to love coloring outside
The lines; guiding crayons like loaded
Missiles to cross borders that I pretended
Never existed; watching my purples

Declare war on my oranges,
While crashing into my yellows
Because they were running away from
My pinks until I swore I had
An aneurysm trying to tell

Which one was which;
Then one day my momma told
Me to stop. When I asked her why,
She said, "Baby,

This country is a coloring book that loves
Keeping its colors separate more
Than keeping them safe; It treats corpses
Like broken Crayolas to show

What colors belong where
Before they go back in the box
And these lines have been there for Centuries."
In 1865, Uncle Sam blasted

The Mason-Dixon with
Freed Blacks and Browns
Until every bit of Green faded
From the face of The South, and

Ever since then, we've watched
Streaks of Red, White, and Blue
Pour from the blood, bone, and bruises
Of discarded colors being bleached

By their own history every time
Another one of them dies.
In 1876, South Carolina Whites
Pressed down on felt-tipped triggers

To black out a Black Vote
Before it could stain a State Election.

In 1919, Jim Crow clawed into dried out
Markers that bled through

36 different cities until the
Entire summer was shaded in Red;
In the 1950's The KKK would trace

Loops from tree limbs to snap
The necks of high strung
Colored Pencils; In 2006,
NYPD Blues drew on Sean Bell

With Gun Metal Greys that
Tinted his "I Do's" into
"Never Wills" the night before
His wedding day. In 2012,

Treyvon Martin's memory
Was scribbled in Skittles
And iced tea because

He "Stood His Ground"
On the wrong side of the page.
In 2020, George Floyd, was smothered
On the sidewalk by the chalked up truth

That some colors should only
Be allowed to breathe from behind
The lines of t-shirt's and hash tags.
How did America become a country

So afraid of color that she would
Star-Strangle her own Dream of
Blending together her Light, Dark,
And Different as one Nation
Under God for 400 years?

Why does she hate me
So much? I can only pray
That one day she will be
Brave enough to cross over

The same lines that she
Has drawn in her own
Ignorance, so that we can
Stand united long enough

To finally see her
True Colors.

oh how it hurt to hear

(by *Blanche Saffron Kabengele*)

*for Abraham Jones born 1820, 112 years
old at the time of the project
Federal Writers Project 1932-1936*

I sat in that restaurant
that wall just to the right
of me. just a heap a worn

red dusty leftover bricks
many cracked,
wouldn't match a quarter

all about to soon
fall,
from former

*self-righteous
past
glory.*

trying hard to still
hold on tight, but
mortar chipping

away privilege.
injustices happened
not just, yesterday.

as I sat in that restaurant
that wall just to the right
of me, that wall inside

a business now, selling steak
and hamburgers. Everybody
happy in that place,

where, the young the old,
all who makeup everybody,

congregates in that place.
chattering and dealing
and drinking premium beers,

and chardonnays, saying,
pour me another one,
if you please."

hardly paying any
attention to that faint,
those sounds I hear

seemly to be
the only one
to hear,

*a man talking about teeth
open your mouth,
boy*

*and wenches cooking,
and other things,
I'm certain you understand*

was clear. in truth
oh, how it hurt
to hear, for me

in just my ears,
maybe I was the only
one that could hear,

maybe there is something
in deaf hearing, finding
comfort in denial.

POEMS:

LINDA KLEINSCHMIDT

Linda Kleinschmidt is a worldwide editor/consultant for ESL writers, academics, businesses, and freelancers. She writes on women, human rights, and the many curiosities of life. Linda has published picture books, articles on the craft, poetry, and won writing awards. She loves visiting New England for inspiration.

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ALEXANDRA MCINTOSH

Alexandra McIntosh lives and writes in Kentucky, her favorite place in the world. Her debut book of poetry, *Bowlfuls of Blue*, has been published by Assure Press.

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REMI PROBABLY

Remi Probably is an autistic artist and writer currently based in Cincinnati, OH. They enjoy creating surreal works using ink, acrylics, gouache, collage, and sometimes cat fur. They graduated from the Art Academy of Cincinnati in 2020, and recently published a nonsensical poetry book, *Wordplayground*.

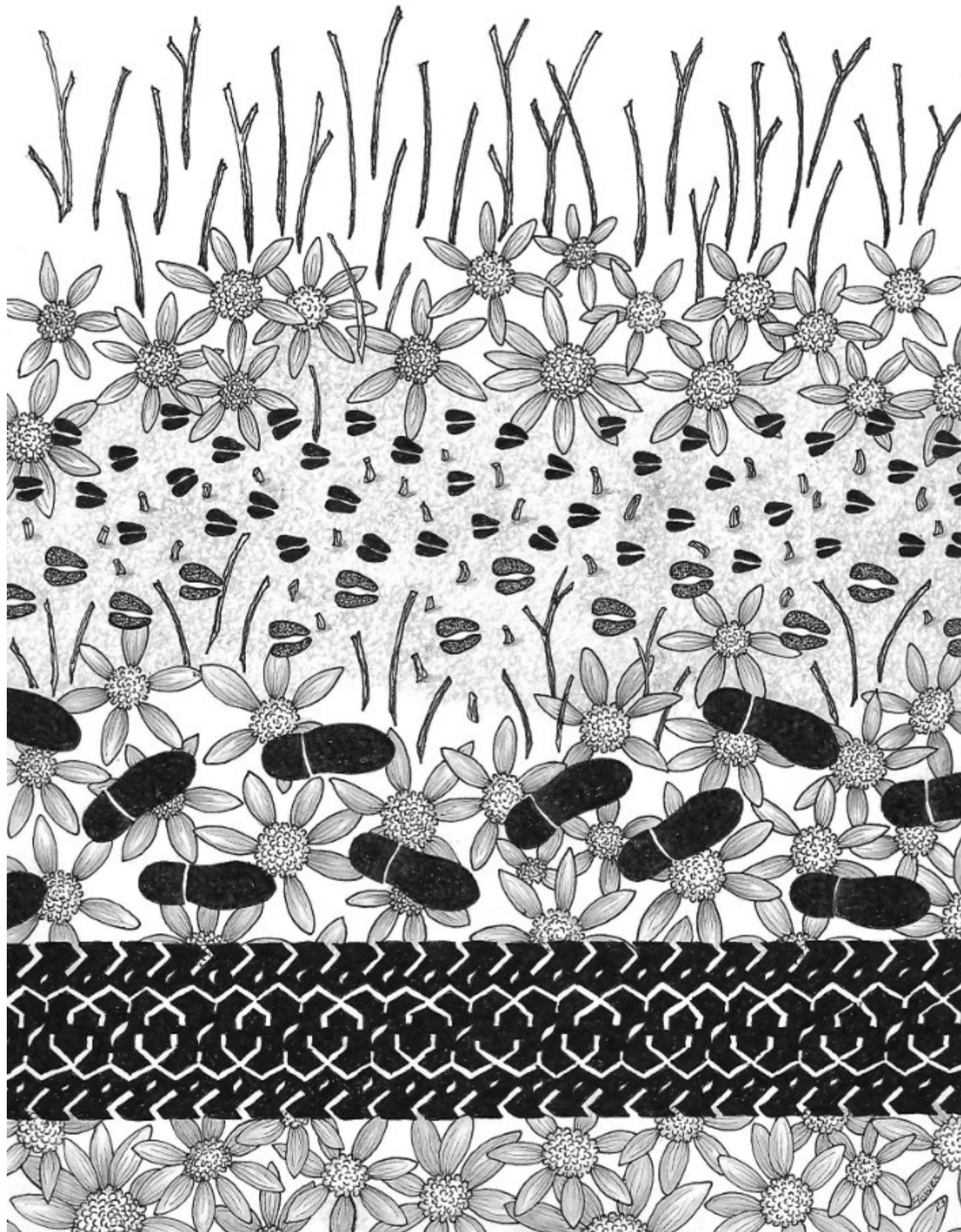
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DRAWING:

WILLIAM HOWES

William Howes, a native Cincinnati, graduated from the University of Cincinnati with a degree in Industrial Design. William is interested in architecture, photography and gardening.

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An Enchanted Doe

(by *Linda Kleinschmidt*)

In the final shards of twilight,
She appears, an evening doe,
Tall and limber, a shadow,
Yet strong, precisely
Silhouetted in the fading
Evening shade crossing our summer garden.
She pauses, ears twitching,
Listening like a statue would,
Transfixed amid the greenness and
The thick bushes and blossoms that are
Roses, peonies, and hydrangeas.

My first inclination is to shout,
“Shoo!” before she spreads havoc
On my precious plot.
But I hesitate, stay quiet.
Watch her feign left, then right.
Until a tiny fawn appears
Small, slight, still
Dependent. Nuzzling close, the small one
stays
Partially hidden in the familiar
Patch of day lilies by the far open fence.

The doe noses the greenery,
Raises her head, observes all about.
Perhaps she senses me, admires
My labor, even its worth.
She nibbles the grass, then the foliage,
Bends to catch a scent of lavender,
Then carefully, nearly
Noiselessly, she moves off,
A mother with child in tow,
Back to another garden I suspect,
In her own woods and fields nearby.
One can learn a lot from doe visits.

Missing the Forest

(by *Alexandra McIntosh*)

I pass a semi on the highway— *Make Your Land
More Productive* in bold green brushstrokes.
The square frame slaps the air, a groaning *woosh*,
metallic-gasoline-scent through my open window.

Behind it, hills fresh with wildflowers
roll toward the horizon, the Kentucky River
hums, and families of deer stop to drink.

flowers

(by *Remi Probably*)

I never stopped to think about
who takes care of the flowers
in the pots on the side of the street

I could've killed one or two
with an unfinished beer
at the end of a graceless night out

now they're being replanted
by somebody
what?
did I think
they just sprung up?
in a concrete block
on the edge of the sidewalk?

I don't know what I thought
but it's raining now
& I hope the new ones drink up

POEMS:

LINDA MAUSER

A resident of Northern Kentucky, Linda Mauser is a retired English teacher who is finally finding time to pursue other interests, including writing.

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DANA WANGSGARD

Dana Wangsgard is a writer, artist, and mechanical engineer originally from Fair Oaks, California. Her endeavors are focused towards making the world a kinder and more inclusive space for her multi-racial grandchildren.

Dana currently resides in Berea, Kentucky, where for the past decade she and her husband, have worked to rid the U.S. of the Nation's chemical weapons stockpile.

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DRAWING:

JAMIE SCHORSCH

Jamie Schorsch, a Cincinnati native, holds a BFA and MA in Art Education with PK-21 licensure from the University of Cincinnati's College of Design, Art, Architecture, and Planning as well as a MED from the College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services. Engaging local and global communities through art is the foundation of Schorsch's personal philosophy and approach towards education.

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Ukrainian Spring, 2022

(by *Linda Mauser*)

To everything there is a season.

The earth tilts, and the days lengthen.

On the other side of the world, it is a time to be born
in a bunker.

It is a time to die
needlessly.

A time to plant
one's feet upon the land
and

A time to pluck up
one's life, hoist belongings upon the back, take children by the hand, and turn away from
home.

It is a time to kill
because there is no other choice,
and to pray for a time to heal.

A time to break down
what is not essential.

To build up
barriers of old tires and scrap metal.

It is a time to weep and to laugh bitterly.
There is not enough time to mourn or to dance.

It is a time to cast away stones showered down and to gather stones together, both shield and
weapon.

It is a time to embrace, tightly, for it may be the last time.
It is a time to refrain from embracing because it is time to go.

It is time to seek
whatever can be grasped;
to lose
everything.

It is a time to keep
shreds of the life that was
and to cast away
that which cannot be carried.

It is a time to tear apart
the past and to sew together an uncertain future.

It is a time to keep silence in the heart, but to speak for the world to hear.

It is a time to love while one can, to hate as one must.
A time for war, and a time for peace, for spring.

To everything there is a season.

Let the earth tilt once again, until sunflowers fill the craters.

Poem of War, Worry, Hunger, and Helplessness

(by *Dana Wangsgard*)

Hingum-tringum, breathing in large gasps,
Reflecting on wasted talent
The remarkable reduction artist Elina from Moscow
no longer printing with vibrance, optimism, or a lens of naivety
Instead arsleing.

Worry for the gifted
the resilient printmaker Olesya and her innocent daughter from Kiev
Unable to put aside the burden of genius,
defiantly cutting wood from the farm and printing
with mud of the Ukrainian earth.

I am powerless to the zeitgeist of the machine
Powerless to men who ride horseback bare chested
Powerless to men who deceive whilst over-combing dyed golden locks.

In the glow of the shelling, overhead or on flat-screen,
we search for exquisite memories
of humanity, love, and hope.

Wishing for Gossamer rest,
Word of kin or friend,
sightings of the courageous,
messenger cries silenced,
lethal lost pregnancies and families no longer

Respite from kamikaze Iranian drones
Repose from emaciating hunger, and mass graves
Reprieve from pictures taken from flats overlooking demolished bridges and playgrounds
Cessation from all news of this war.

Modern society is the insane asylum
Yet, in all the frenzy we still search for beauty
Occasionally plead for nothing less than Apathophy
as a minimum be able to enjoy their gifts.
With our overloaded dinner plates in hand, we head for the sofa,
breath in and out and wait for 6:30 pm.

But Why?

(by *Dana Wangsgard*)

Another mass shooting, another day of fear,
Another community left in pain and tears.

Another headline, another news brief,
Another moment of shock and disbelief.

Another set of families left to grieve,
Another call for change, but will it ever be achieved?

Another moment of silence and mourning,
Another reminder of need for constant warning.

Another mass shooting, another senseless act,
Another plea for peace, but where is the impact?

POEMS:

LISA PRANTL

Lisa Prantl is a Cincinnati-based writer, gardener, death midwife, and writing circle facilitator at Women Writing for (a) Change®. Lisa believes poetry is a way to make sense of, survive, and heal a hurting world.

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LARRY C. SIMPSON

Larry C. Simpson hosted readings on WAIF-fm Community Radio, led poetry workshops and readings, wrote and produced *The Cave With No Name*, aired on WGUC & WAIF, and *Writers for Radio* with Cincinnati Poets and musicians.

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DRAWING:

JENNA SHRIVER

Jenna Shriver is a 20-year-old, multidisciplinary artist native to Northern Kentucky and the Greater Cincinnati Area. She is currently attaining a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in the University of Cincinnati's DAAP program. Jenna's work tends to focus conceptually on bringing awareness to the struggles of mental health issues.

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In Three Parts...

(by *Lisa Prantl*)

I

I wrote a poem once about regrets
line by line my choices labelled dreadful
appeared on paper
letters prone and splayed
the black and white of mistakes
in meter and stanza.

The poem sits
somewhere
quietly simmers
an unrepeatable past
that I do not ponder
often.

II

A friend, tortured by a
screaming work life
missed a funeral
her regrets and remorse texted repeatedly
a thumb-flagellation of
words and emojis
traveling to cell towers
and switching centers.

During mass and graveside service
pings pushed at silenced phones
until at last, gathered around food and
recollections
mourners reengaged with electronics that
danced the lights and sounds of her absence
her personal penance

*Sorry, feel horrible,
regret, sad
tearful, shame-faced
ping,
ping, ping.*

III

As I drive home
I think about regret
and wonder if it is a wasted emotion,
like worry
a self-condemnation
that grows where planted, perennial,
then spreads invasive, despised,
the Bradford Pear tree
of consciousness and feeling.

*In the **1960s**, the Bradford Pear was cloned to
become the pervasive street tree of America's
suburbia. Over time, it morphed from pervasive
to invasive, overwhelming native plants and
reducing biodiversity.

Anthropomorphic Apocalypse

(by *Larry C. Simpson*)

A molten bronze streak
like a wall of fire
across the horizon,
a ball of brilliant light
haloes a solitary tree.
It is silent.
It is beautiful.

The shock wave arrives in three minutes.
What do you do?

Indelible Flash

(by *Larry C. Simpson*)

I don't know why I thought of him,
after all these years.

I don't even remember his name,
but I remember what he said, even though I don't want to.
He was about my age, but unlike me, was not married,
no children.

To my faded memory, he wore wire rimmed glasses,
and was slightly balding with a neatly trimmed beard.
He worked for the bus division, and I worked for Engineering.
The bus department wanted to build a communications tower
in case a bus got into trouble.

The trip was to see how the steel components
of the communication tower were fabricated.
I was the inspector who would climb the tower
to make sure it was put together right.

But the trip was irrelevant.

The pieces were being welded together,
relatively small triangles making up each of three legs.

Except, how can you inspect something that is being
welded without a welding mask? Or even with a mask for that matter.

It was on that long drive back home
that he blurted, "you know that girl who got killed
on the westside some years ago?"

I told him I live on the Westside but, I may have been out of town.
I may have also mentioned the Cincinnati Strangler from when I was a kid.

"No, this was a knife. There was blood everywhere."

"Maybe, I heard something...."

"She was my girlfriend, and they tried to pin it on me," he said.

Then he didn't say anything.

It was a long drive back, and there is only so much time
you can think about something, that you can't do anything about.
It was like the welding. I couldn't get close enough to examine each weld.

I would have to wait until it was in the air.

In that long drive home, a fleeting thought came to mind,
if he did it, what if he kills again?

When I got home to my wife and kids, there was no time for abstract worries.

I guess I redacted it from my mind.

But weeks or years later, I heard from my supervisor,
"You know that bus guy who took you up to the steel fabricators?
...He killed himself."

It was like that indelible flash from a welder that leaves an afterimage.
If you look too long, you go blind.

POEMS:

BRIAN ASCALON ROLEY

Brian Ascalon Roley is a writer of Philippine and American descent. He is currently Director of Creative Writing and Professor of English at Miami University. A recent National Endowment of the Arts Literature Fellow, he has also received fellowships and awards from the University of Cambridge, Cornell, the Ohio Arts Council, the Association of Asian American Studies, the Djerassi Foundation, Ragdale, the VCCA, and others. His work has been featured in a California Council for the Humanities statewide reading program.

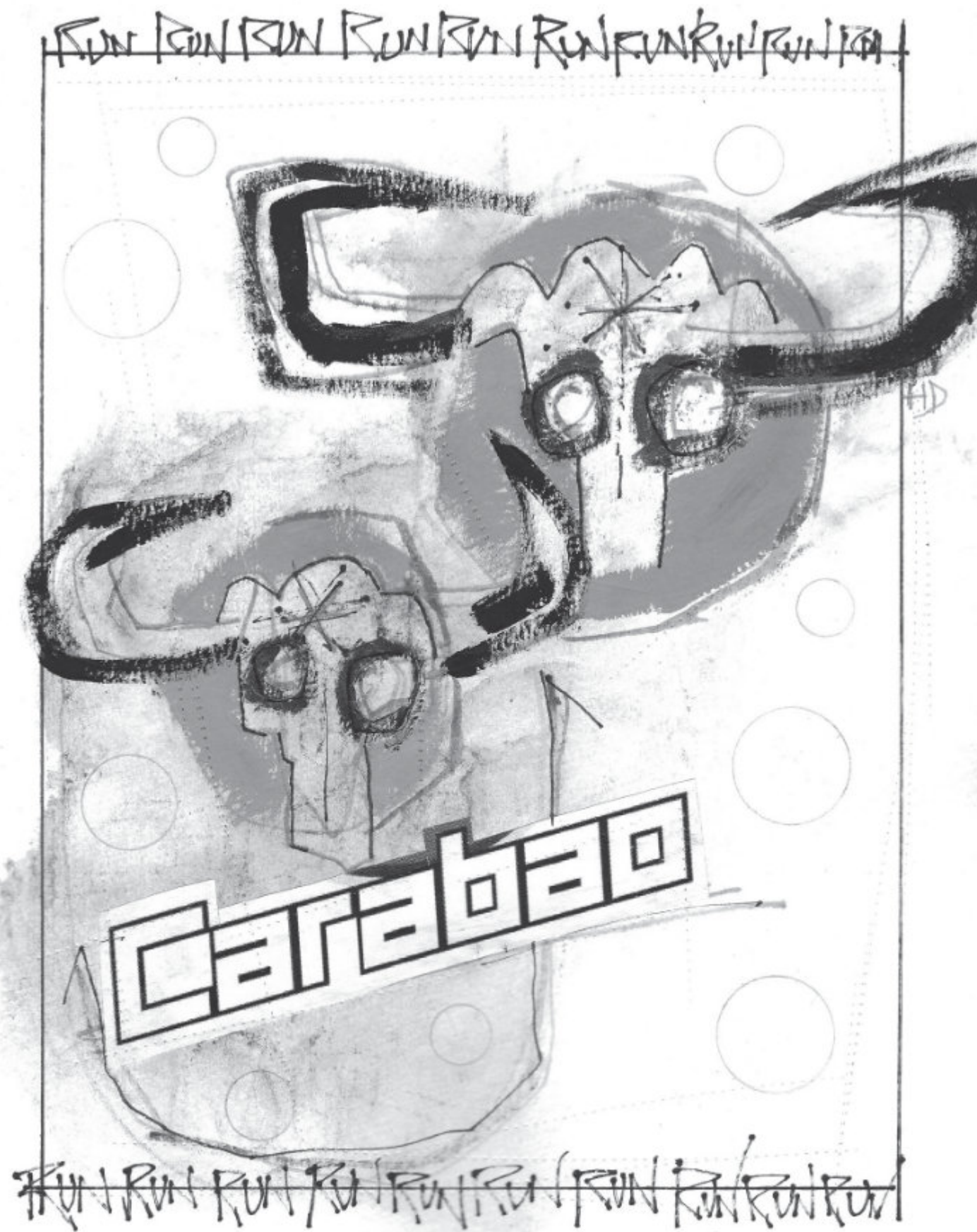
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DRAWING:

HOLLAND DAVIDSON

Holland Davidson resides in Cincinnati, Ohio and has exhibited her art professionally since 1993. Her paintings and drawings have been included in many projects with the SOS ART organization, and are held in collections both public and private worldwide.

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MIGRATION ["Carabao"]

At school we learned of the Caribou migrations, great herds thundering across continents, over frozen grass sedges, forbs, scrubs chased by calculating packs of nimble wolves

But my mind filled with visions of the Philippine carabao black, big-horned, lumbering beasts slow, stubborn, of ox-strong haunches, nostrils flared and angry. I could not comprehend how such a thick-boned

monster could migrate so many miles, across oceans. How could this water buffalo used to wading tropic swamps prance across tundra like ballerina to out run wolves? How did they swim from our island nation to the cold country up north? Why would they flee the warm swamp jungles where they could eat all day lazily in rivers, why swap such languid Eden for barren plains beneath silvery skies?

Like my mother's own migration decades ago, bewildering. She came from a country full of crowded streets and bedrooms, homes full of eating guests and tita laughter nephews who dote on elders without embarrassment, to this country of cold winters, wide lawns, where her husband doesn't even know the names of second cousins and teenage kin shelter behind closed bedroom doors at the sight of her coming and nobody offers guests leftovers after parties in case they might wake up lonely the taste of something imagined on their tongues.

TACTICS [“Anting-anting”]

During the last decades of the Spanish empire revolutionary leader Emilio Aguinaldo popularized the practice of posting heads of native collaborators along roadsides as warning to behave.

After the Amerikanos allies betrayed him and took his country as their own that decorative practice continued

among others that would be studied across decades and continents—by Vietcong, Castro, FARC, Peshmerga, Mujahideen—and taught at U.S. military colleges into the present century.

In our new schools in California we did not learn about Aguinaldo’s ambush nor of the half century of U.S. colonial rule that followed, though we did spend several weeks studying about European acquisitions and their not-so-best-practices in Latin America, India, Africa, Bora Bora, Tahiti, the Middle East.

Why do you speak such good English? our new classmates asked.

Aguinaldo was said to have anting-anting—the mystic power to evade your bullets or capture but the Amerikanos eventually did fell him by arranging a fake parley under white flag and attacking the men and their horses a practice Lt Funston learned from men who in boyhood hunted the last great warriors of the arid plains, Comancheria and remembered.

Conqueror’s Tongue

1.

A professor once explained to me that when lay Filipinos call the molave wood babies (crowned as kings and adorned by costume jewels) Santo Nino, they are mistaken. It’s the Infant of Prague an appropriation from colonial times. They should throw these statues into the fire to join ash dictionaries of Spanish.

My grandmother kept Santo Nino at her bedside, beside the virgin, knelt before it nightly. We prayed rosaries, chanted lines of St Teresa de Avila like Tibetan mantras rubbed its feet to knobs smoothed by adornment. Adoration. A bow. The kiss of lips.

2.

Years later, you walk into St Patrick’s church, SOMA, see the marble statues adopted by old Filipina ladies, toes rubbed smooth by their adoring touch beneath stained glass erected by Irish a century before images of Gall-Ghaeil-style saints, chiseled features beards white beneath severe blue eyes like Norse god warriors ready to descend on you with swords in the year of Lindisfarne first ignited uttering guttural words in an ugly tongue when monks lay bloodied defenseless seven centuries before Cromwell, and libraries burned.

POEMS:

RICHARD SCHOEFF

Richard Schoeff, born in Cincinnati, writes poetry outside his world of work where cold prose lives. He is attracted by the possibility of using fewer, maybe mysteriously more expressive, words to create artful and interesting nets to catch illusive and important ideas, emotions, wishes and dreams.

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AYANA SLOAN

Ayana Sloan, a practicing attorney, is an emerging poet. One of her poems was published by Opelle Publications in its *Rise Up-Poetry Anthology*. Ayana was also a Finalist in Opelle’s “*Coming Home*” Poetry Contest.

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MICHAEL WHITNEY

Michael Whitney is a Cincinnati based writer. Employed by Ford Motor Company and a member of UAW 863, he is proud of their commitment to equity and inclusion of every employee. Michael’s poetry has been published previously in *For a Better World* anthology.

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DRAWING:

CINDY SCHOENBORN-YOUNG

Cindy Schoenborn-Young has educational and employment background in Art as well as in Nursing. She is studying art locally with Manifest Drawing Center and works in various visual art mediums. Cindy lives in Loveland, Ohio with her husband, Steve and their Labrador retriever, Wiley.

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1/10 Between Light and A Darker Gate CSFounta

WARNING – OFFENSIVE LANGUAGE

(by *Richard Schoeff*)

you say we on the same train
that we all be feeling the same pain
an we all got the same luck

but you head up somewhere dark
see life like a musement park
every ride for under a buck
but you folks that got don't give a fuck

to me that game's no dice
it's a long long line for a small small slice
and a long long wait for a darker gate
like we're fish to take some plastic bait

you say we on the same train
that we all be feeling the same pain
an we all got the same luck

but I say the folks that got don't give a fuck

some live they lives in a golden chair
an take their breath from higher air
wash they hands from glacier melt
frown and say how much we smelt

sure the train they mean's where it end
an true enough we round the same bend
but you all be ridin in style
an we be pushin all the while

you say we on the same train
that we all be feeling the same pain
an we all got the same luck

but I say most those that got don't give a fuck

tell the walls come tumbling down
an all that was can't be foun
food an drink all gone away
ever thing in disarray

then we be on the same damn train
feelin then the same damn pain
an livin wit the same damn luck
maybe then you give a fuck

How to Feel Like an Ugly American Without Even Trying

(by *Michael Whitney*)

It was like we were Popes
handing out miracles,
small hands of the Burmese children
grasping for the Thai coins worth
more on the Myanmar
side of the Mai Sai river,
and, when the coins were gone,
they grabbed the plastic bags
of street treats we bought
at the stalls in the black market
zone, where open selling of
counterfeit designer purses
and bootleg DVDs were guarded
by junta militiamen standing on the
balconies above the awnings
of the bustling stalls.

Then, when they had emptied
the baggies of the few remaining
sugar snacks and breaded balls they
licked the last crumbs from
inside of the plastic pouches,
their hunger shaming me,
for my youthful embarrassment
of my food stamp,
welfare assistance childhood,
that fed me, clothed me and
comforted my ills,
the luck of my American birth
obvious, by my
over stretched shirt.

The Insatiable Thief

(by *Ayana Sloan*)

Poverty has stolen my story:

It has vanquished me to a life replete with uncertainty, shame, self-reproach and fear.

It has robbed me of all the dreams I used to dream and reduced the remnants of my life to the tattered trash bags I guard as if they contain priceless treasures.

It has relegated all I was or believed I could be to a tortured, brutal existence, devoid of mercy, absolution or hope for relief.

Poverty has enslaved me:

It has imprisoned me in an invisible hell where I shiver in fear, defenseless against the fury of the elements and am easy prey for the evil lurking in the shadows of the night.

It has forced me to constantly bargain away the remaining shreds of my dignity in exchange for the scraps regularly discarded by those with more than what they need.

It has taught me to savor these precious morsels carefully extracted from someone else's trash and treat them like a feast prepared for a king.

Poverty has devoured me:

It has pillaged my memory of the son, daughter, father, mother or child I used to be.

It has made me impervious to the disdain and stares of those who dispassionately turn from my despair and refuse to acknowledge the pain or fear they see in my eyes.

It has branded me as a worthless human being, jettisoned me like excess baggage and condemned my soul to die a thousand deaths in an interminable nightmare of isolation and suffering.

Another Complaint

(by *Richard Schoeff*)

We wallow in the things we think we know

Turn our backs on the seeds we sow

Balance between our simple things

And excitement over what com- or per-plexity brings

We people now have lost our souls

And found ourselves in deep deep holes

We whistle as we all consume

Blind to how the suppliers bloom

A nation led by bankers burglars and bubble gum venders

Is screwed without makers and only has spenders

POEMS:

ROBERTA SCHULTZ

Roberta Schultz, author of *Asking Price* and *Underscore*, is a maker of songs, poems and drum circles from Wilder, KY. She writes some of her songs on a mountain in North Carolina, and is co-founder of the *Poet & Song House Concert Series* with her *Raison D'Etire* trio mates.

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PAUL SHORTT

Paul Shortt: Creative diversions from stage design, fifty years felt so sublime;
Further journeys of imagination – short stories, essays, plays and poems –
Enrich the journeys in which we roam.

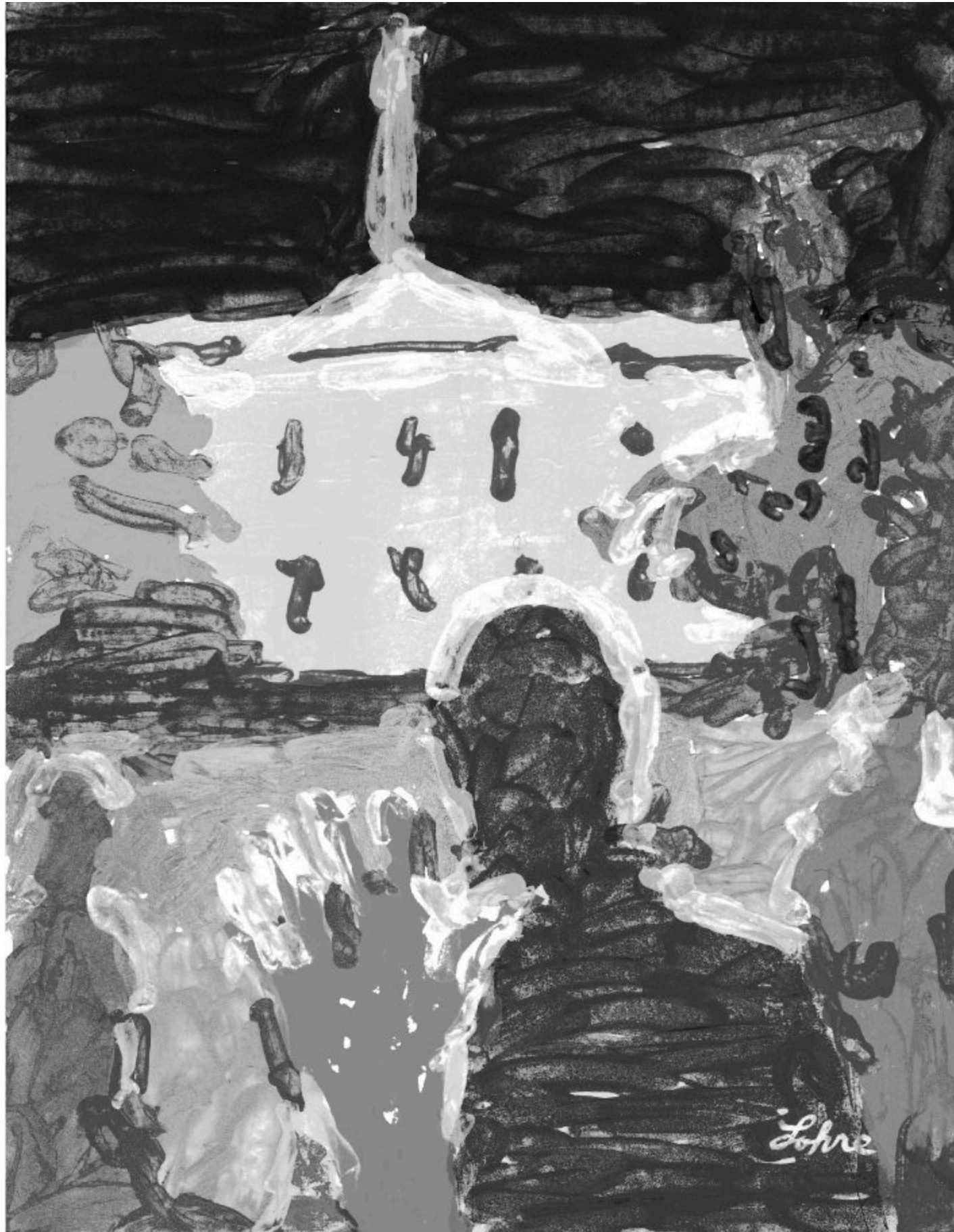
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DRAWING:

TOM LOHRE

When Tom Lohre was a junior in college, he met his mentor, portrait painter Ralph Cowan. Seven years later he had mastered the academic method and went on to a career painting portraits. But being able to copy did not make him a master. Ralph was a master because he had the ability to produce works that have undeniable individuality. Tom, at 70, is still looking for the same.

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Two Presidents Pass Through My Neighborhood

(by *Roberta Schultz*)

I look up to watch for the chopper.
I look up to notice gunmen on the roof of the student center.
I want him to see the flag as he flies over.
I try to join the protest on the other side of campus.
I wave the flag as the chopper convoy roars over our barn.
I wave back at the grinning man inside the massive SUV.
I will never feel as sure that the world can change.
The Secret Service won't let me (or the mother with her baby in a stroller)
cross Johns Hill Road.
I wanted him to see how hope looks from the air.
I wanted him to see real people, silenced here on the side of our road.

Gunplay at Mr. Pitiful's

(by *Paul Shortt*)

Essentially sad and tragic
Guns in pockets as easily as car keys
An' chewing gum

Get pissed off an' out they come
Pullin' the trigger's even quicker

Serve 'em right, you dum ass nigger
Who you callin' me nigger, you dumb
ass nigger

An' several shots
Bounce 'round tenement blocks

White or Black, their guns tuck neatly
Down their back

Or hang on window racks
Of pick-up trucks
Of dumb ass fucks

Or two Suburban Dads spoilin'
Odd little Billy Barr
Whose needs are met
By these two that spar

In front of little Billy's car
Then solve it by signing

Billy's permit to buy
His new Christmas AR

All of these folks
And these are no jokes

Cherish the Amendment
That creates their contentment

And relish their freedom
That can leave masses bleeding

This Second Amendment
For Arms so Resplendent

2nd Amendment

(by *Paul Shortt*)

2nd Amendment

“A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.”

Armed Forces

Active Reserve

National Guard

Law Enforcement

Security Guards

Oath Keepers

Para Military

Cartel Gangs

Self-Regulated Rural Militia / Street Gangs

Racists / Grudge Holders / Hate Mongers

U.S. Capitol Insurrectionists Jan 6, '21

Assault Rifles &

Long Guns &

Hand Guns &

Sandy Hook &

Columbine &

Las Vegas &

Parkland &

St Louis &

Buffalo &

Aurora &

Uvalde &

28+15+59+

17+2+10+12+21

+13+7+12+6+10+16+

5+8+26+9+31+4+9+7+5+

4+7+13+21+8+9+18+6+9+14+

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16+8+5+9+6+7+9+4+8+4+12+18+12+6+10+22+31+4+9+7+5+4+9+10+14+18+

THE FOUNDERS COULDN'T SEE — NO MATTER WHICH END OF A GUN —

PEOPLE STILL DIE!

American Patriotism 20 – 24

(by *Paul Shortt*)

This large group meets, mills, and shouts,
“You’re either in, or you’re f–ing out!”

Citizens, Rebels, Cops, and Klan,
Women, Children, and one Black Man

All shout allegiance to their Great Golden God
Who’s raised his arms to quiet His Mob

To wide-spread arms and small spread fingers
They all lean in and no one lingers

On every word they’re ready to Cheer
Primed with warm Whiskey and Ice-Cold Beer

His huge Flags waving near hallowed Graves
Of long-dead Heroes – our Fathers brave

Their Patriotic Juices now are flowing
Larger and larger his White Crowd’s growing

Into what was once quite impossible
This Presidential gathering He’s most responsible

For urging all of the six millions’ needs
This Lawless Golden Leader of
Hell-Chosen Words

It’s happened before
In the Thirties galore
And then came Their War
All They’d ever wished for

A World all Aflame
And What was to Blame?

Now, just Perhaps,

Here We are...

Again.

POEMS:

RHESE VOISARD

Rhese Voisard is a first-year student of Creative Writing and Entrepreneurship at Miami University. She loves storytelling through the art of poetry. Rhese's work has appeared in *The Luna Collective* and *Soft Quarterly*.

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GARY WALTON

Gary Walton has published seven books of poetry, his latest *Waiting For Insanity Clause* (Finishing Line Press, 2017). His novel about Newport, Kentucky in its heyday as a gambling Mecca: *Prince of Sin City* was published by Finishing Line Press in 2009. Gary has been nominated for the Pushcart prize twice and in 2010, was voted Third Place: "Best Local Author" Best of Cincinnati 2010 issue in *City Beat* magazine. He is also editor of the *Journal of Kentucky Studies* a professional journal of critical and creative work.

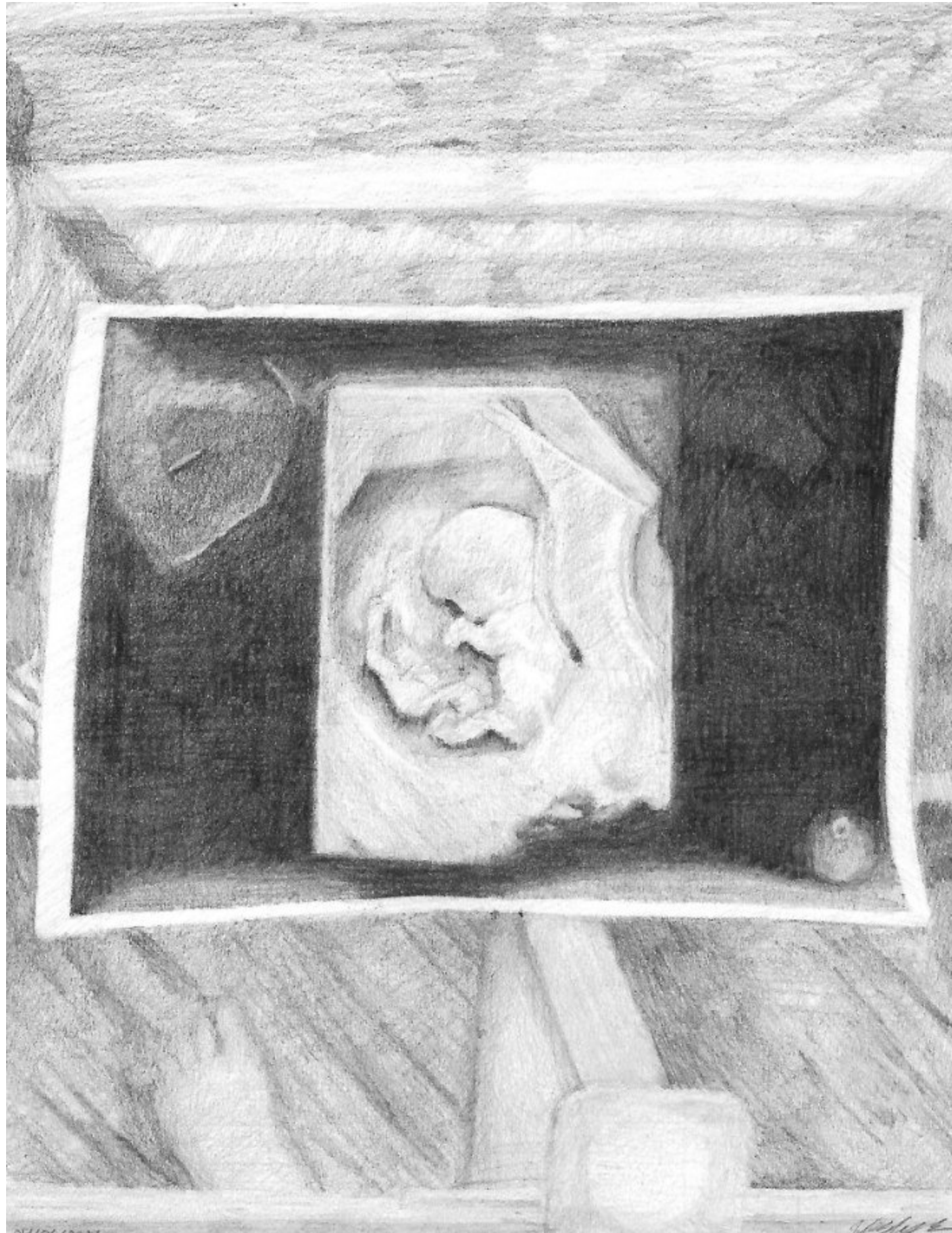
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DRAWING:

WESLEY ERICSON

Wesley Ericson is a painter, draftsman and muralist. Through his visual works, he implies states of the human condition. Discovering what aspects of life he gravitates towards, based on subjective observation, he correlates meaning in expressive use of touch and color to communicate these realizations. Encompassing far more than the perception of reality, but intertwining intrinsic themes of time, placement, and relationships.

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The Delicate Doors That Trap Us

(by *Rhese Voisard*)

The wind often whispers against the windows,
reminding her that she is indeed submerged in ivory isolation.
To perform some choreographed routine:

Heavy spins followed by eloquent dips to masquerade the echoing walls of The Waiting.

To discard outmoded shells is to wallow in the depths of uncertainty— feigning strokes and tossing ropes to all those who wander.

Glass dens graced with patient petals in the midst— a veil of solitude to protect, but also to deprive because we all crave the presence of light on our cold hearts and minds.

She never minded the quiet— it gave her space to run and feel. but speaking to stars gets lonely when all they do is glitter, despite the dark.

Don't Bury the Lead

(by *Gary Walton*)

One spring day, Miss Anonymous America Began musing about her generation: Here in the Postmodern, she thought, all History, myth, story and context has collapsed

On itself, like a Red Giant Star sliding into a White dwarf or even worse a black hole that Sucks everything down into it—even light— What we have now has been recycled and

Reconstituted, not exactly like sampled music In Rap songs, but more like powdered milk Mixed with high fructose corn syrup: Joseph Campbell is a character in cartoons;

The Hero's Journey with its call to adventure, Trials and mystic boon have devolved into Podcast memes and leaden clichés—Bastardized Multiverse theory has replaced Chaos as the theme

Du jour—we consume it like the image of Mona Lisa Painted in sugar on a party cake or cookie with as much Thought as a pie in the face or a pratfall of Bozo The clown—simulacra has replaced the palimpsest—

Non-fungible has surpassed mechanical reproduction; The *ding an sich* has been lost or ignored in the Maelstrom of the ubiquitous commercial imperative And the authentic only exists on the Block Chain

(as long as you don't forget the password!) Consider that two percent of all energy consumed in The United States is used to power vast computer farms Whose only purpose is to solve complex cryptographic

Hash puzzles, absurdly intricate mathematical constructs Solely to win invisible tokens to be spent in virtual Markets for imaginary products, like ghosts in some Manic superfluous addiction machine.

Forgotten Souls

(by *Rhese Voisard*)

They cut the grass.
What was once a sweeping field of wild
tendrils
is now a short cut yard.

They chopped down the tree.
Years of reaching and growing
started from a seed
and made it to the sky,
sits as a stump,
dark and cracked.

They killed the bird.
Who once soared among the wisps of clouds
and sang in golden mornings
struck by man-made slaughter
skull crushed.

We are ignorant.

Death is everywhere.
When it's us,
we offer sparkling vases of lilies.
But everything else
is simply
irrelevant.

A breath lost in the murmur of the wind,
falling off the edge of the Earth
in a merciless descent.

Meanwhile, silk drawn hands
drip onto glossy hardwood floors,
pooling so that we may see our tainted
reflections.

There is so much death
so that we may live
comfortably and content.
But what about the ghosts?

POEMS:

MIKE WILSON

Mike Wilson's work has appeared in magazines including *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Mud Season Review*, *The Pettigru Review*, *The Coachella Review*, and in his book, *Arranging Deck Chairs on the Titanic*, (Rabbit House Press, 2020), political poetry for a post-truth world. Mike resides in Lexington, Kentucky.

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LAURA WRIGHT

Laura Wright, a graduate student and poet, wants to use her creative writing to incorporate poetry back into elementary and higher education. She desires to bring awareness to social justice and the healing power of poetry, to help promote emotional healing for those dealing with trauma, peace, and justice toward a better world for all.

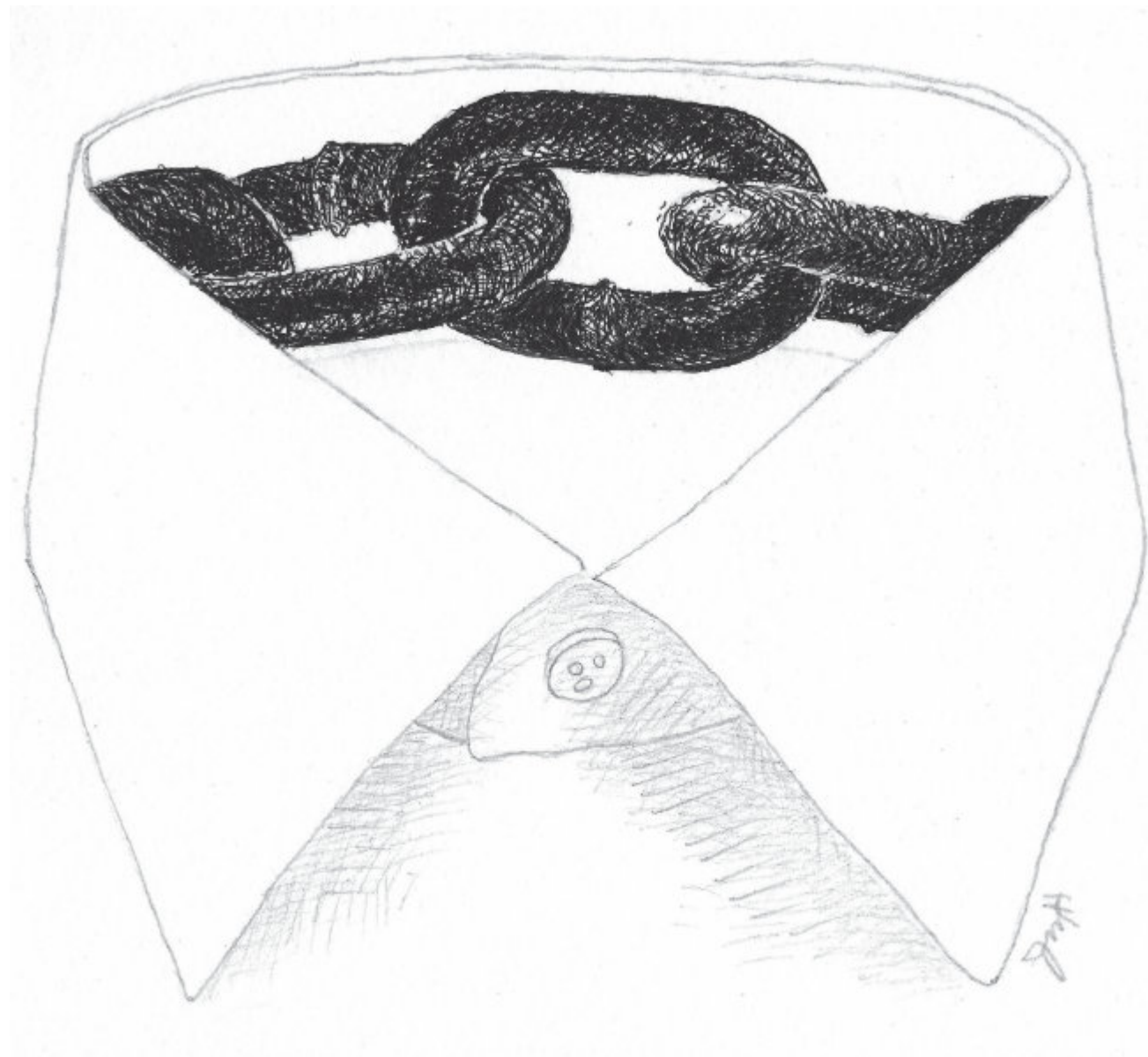
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DRAWING:

JAY HARRIMAN

Jay Harriman is a printmaker and photographer living in Cincinnati, OH. His work often deals with paradoxes or subjects with an opposing subtext, such as laboratory drawers full of dead bird specimens collected by conservationists to preserve the species. For this book, he enjoyed turning his hand to illustration, accompanying poets speaking out against the injustice around us.

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Freedom

(by *Laura Wright*)

For the last time who died and made
all of you judge, jury and executioner
why must the decision solely rest with
a chosen unwanted few.

Now don't get me wrong the law is the law
even though it was designed with many flaws
but those who claim to uphold it are the ones
breaking, bending and destroying it.

Instead of focusing on the color of one's skin
try establishing a true motive to win you just
might nab the right suspect friend.

Set aside that almighty dollar and listen to the
cries of the victim holler it just might make you hot
under the collar enough so that without a reasonable
doubt there is no way the guilty one is getting out.

Understand it takes a real person to stand firm on what
they believe in and another one to wallow in his ancestors'
sin so tell me whose shoes are you walking in?

Tree by tree all I see are dead bodies staring back at me
yes courtroom after courtroom all I hear are perpetrators
being set free by judges who don't respect and hate those
who look like me.

Oh the hypocrisy what oath are you upholding whose young
minds are you molding every time that gavel hit the
punishment
don't fit yet behind a closed door you receive restitution and
more is that all a part of your constitution or the four scores
and seven years ago.

Let me grapple with this for a moment you keep my people
in torment day in and day out making laws that protect every
class except them it's hard for them to secure housing,
educational loans, medical insurance, higher-paying jobs and
more again this is what we are fighting for we deserve true
Freedom.

Do a 180 to See Weep-Worthy

(by *Mike Wilson*)

It's not pangs of the starving that twist
ley lines of right and wrong into knots,
but the unquenched thirst of not enough
for the haves that creates the have-nots.

Observe thick velvet curtains of greed
shielding eyes from importunate need.
Ear pods broadcast *I am not my neighbor*,
looping song inside an echo chamber.

For honest deaths from hunger, do not cry –
weep for selfish craving that won't die.

Blind Leadership

(by *Laura Wright*)

This day has finally come for the world
to wake up and see the destruction whisk
upon them by so many claiming to falsely lead.

How many more must not eat or sleep
simply put they are dying in the streets
with no place to call home lost and alone
but we put more focus on the next new iPhone.

Scavenging around with no food in sight
night after night and day after day yet
plenty of restaurants have leftover food
but they discard it as waste, right?

What happened to help our fellow
man don't they deserve life liberty and
justice for all or do you enjoy seeing them
fall are we, to understand it's not your fault.

Tell me why can't things change for the better
that's what you said in your acceptance letter
there's hope and peace for tomorrow, but all we
see is crooked promises, pain, death, and sorrow.

Instead of giving voice to homelessness, poverty
better healthcare, and hunger you advocated for
more prisons truly did you think about the error
in your decisions or just concerned with personal
agendas.

Try unifying a country divided by uncertainty what
happened to it takes a village instead the world is
plagued with privileged under minded by its friends
just because the color of their skin tell me, who wins.

Have you considered the ramifications behind those
lack of constant communications yes daily another
life lay stretched out shot down by the bullet of a
trained officer's gun where is the accountability?

Again, how could one stand idle by watching another
mother as she buries her precious child this behavior
is foul, especially from someone in your position when
you needed votes you lobbied for our support is it not ok,
for us to expect responsibility all we see is transparency.

Yes, enough it's time for the world to change we need
the current roles revised with new life and new faces
ones that will take this country to new places it's a
state of emergency the time has come to rebirth laws,
restore humanity, and reconstruct this Blind Leadership.

Justice

(by *Laura Wright*)

What does it mean to you
for us, it's a reality of untruth
and years-long suffering and abuse.

See things you're allowed to do, don't
measure up to half of what my brothers
and sisters who sit rotting in prisons are
falsely accused of but you get a pass, right?

A system designed to entrap, enslave
suppress, and eventually criminalize
them yet, you don't see this as a
weapon but you enjoy using it as one.

It rips families apart and kills innocence
all for the sake of this personal resonance
you fail to understand your insolence yet
ignorant to the fact isn't a failure to react.

Just because you wear a suit doesn't mean
you're in pursuit of the right cause it just
speaks volumes to the person as a whole
and the hidden identity of secret goals.

Let me make one thing clear open your
ears so you can truly hear the time is now
for us to band together and show you how
true power puts their feet down.

We stand united, never divided fortified in
one cause yes enacting new and just laws that
benefit us all it's time to level the playing field.

Our shield is our knowledge, the power is our
vote hope is change and in God, we trust that's a
must so keep going no matter what until they
finally know we deserve the same equal Justice.