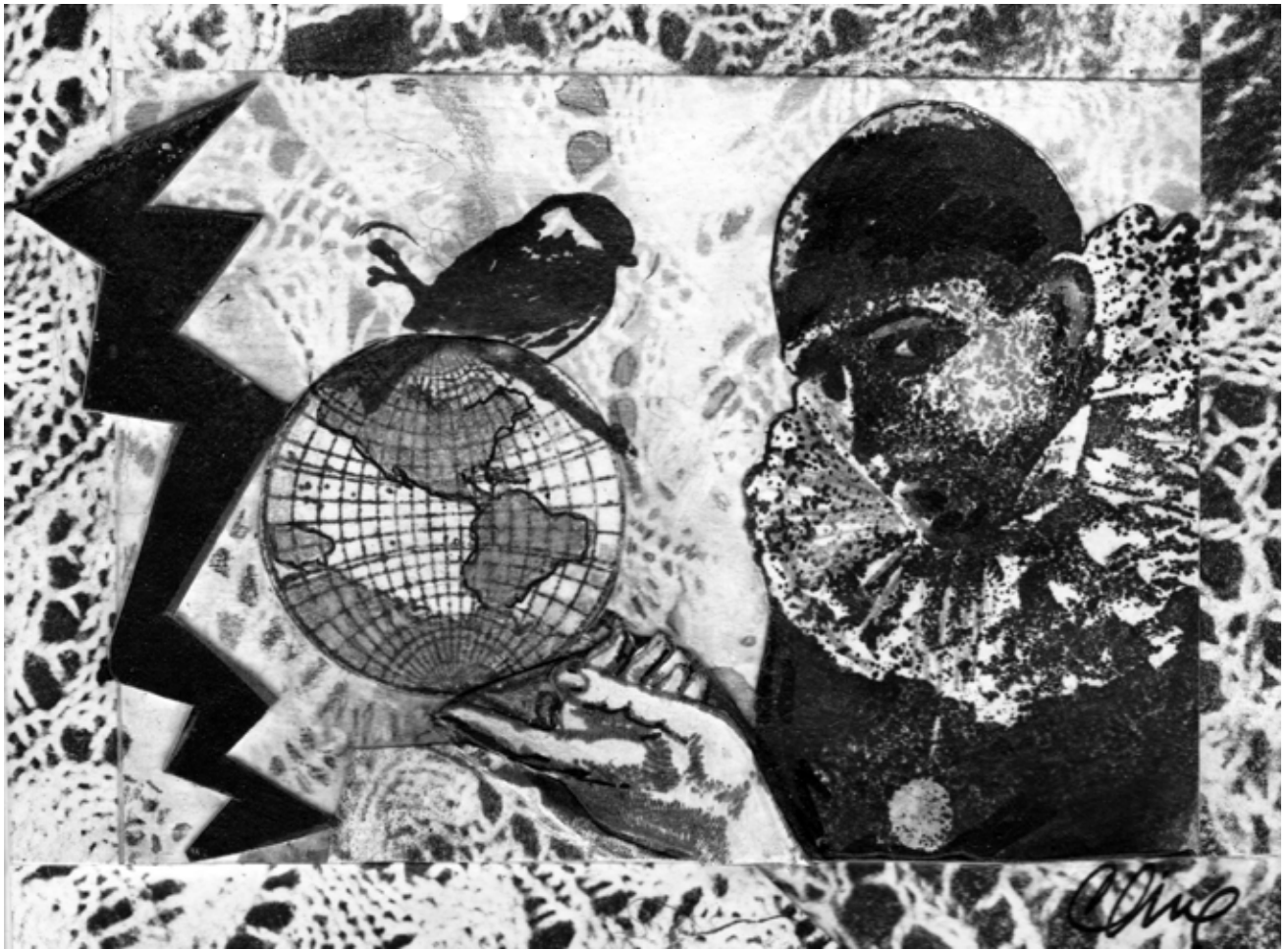


For A 2016 Better World



POEMS AND DRAWINGS ON
PEACE AND JUSTICE BY
Greater Cincinnati Artists

**“For a Better World”
2016**

Poems and Drawings
on
Peace and Justice

by
Greater Cincinnati Artists

Editor:
Saad Ghosn

“I have also decided to stick with love, for I know that love is ultimately the only answer to mankind’s problems. And I’m going to talk about it everywhere I go.”

Martin Luther King, Jr

“No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.”

Nelson Mandela

“The very first step in nonviolence is that we cultivate in our daily life, as between ourselves, truthfulness, humility, tolerance, loving kindness.”

Gandhi

Foreword

Speaking about his book “Artists in Times of War,” historian, writer and activist Howard Zinn said: “I would hope that it would suggest to artists who may hesitate to connect their art with the critical issues of our time -- war, poverty, inequality -- that there is a long and noble tradition, going back to the Greek playwrights, of art being used in the service of human rights. I would hope also that it might inspire political activists to think about moving out of their constricted, habitual ways of reaching people, and begin to use their imagination to lend a kind of artistic power to their political activity.”

In this 13th edition of “For a Better World” forty seven poets and thirty one visual artists follow Zinn’s advice and use their voice and their artistic power to combat darkness, violence and evil, and to spread instead love, peace and justice that they would like to see prevail. They speak for a world after their heart and values, a world of hope, of fraternity and unity. Of all ages and backgrounds, their art and talent 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.

In a world still prey to injustice and wars, these artists weep for the dead, revolt for the oppressed, denounce unjust societal wrongs, advocate for the poor, the homeless, and the neglected, reject violence and its consequences, fight for the battered environment. They also challenge the prevailing societal values of materialism, consumerism and domination and speak for a change in values towards love, compassion and forgiveness. They paint a beautiful world, a world of diversity and equality, where peace is based on truth, justice, and kindness. With their lucid song, these artists 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 Kate Fadick, Karen George, Jerry Judge and Gwyneth Stewart, who kindly reviewed all the submitted poems and provided their editorial advice.

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

Saad Ghosn
Book editor and organizer

May 2016

“For a Better World” 2016

Poet	Poems/Visual Artist	Page
Ellen Austin-Li	Wall of Fear	1-3
	Tilting Away from the Sun	3
(Carol) Joy Haupt	Into the Madness... Once Again	1-3
	Drawing by <i>Susan Naylor</i>	
Mary Pierce Brosmer	For Joey, Called Stella While in Utero	5-7
	Drawing by <i>Nick Petas</i>	
Ella Cather-Davis	The Single Mom	9-11
Ricci Michaels	El Barrio	9-12
	This New Generation	12
	Drawing by <i>Lydia Reagan</i>	
Laurel Chambers	Once in the City	13-15
	Migrant Child	15
	Privilege	15-16
	Drawing by <i>Jan Thomas</i>	
Vickie Cimprich	Yosemite Jubilee	17-19
Elisabeth Contadino	How Does an Atheist Pray for Peace?	17-19
Carol Feiser Laque	Peace: the Confession	17-19
	Fear of the Cul-de-Sac	19-20
	Drawing by <i>Allison Smith</i>	
Maureen (Mo) Conlan	Greenhouse	21-23
	Wearing Sunday Clothes	23
	A Whole New World	23
	Drawing by <i>William Howes</i>	
Elisabeth Contadino		pp. 17-19
Mildred Cooper	A Black Crying Shame	25-27
Hakiym Sha'ir	Start My Metamorphosis	25-27
	Drawing by <i>Clare Dunn</i>	
Kallie Crawford	Mama, Where Are You?	29-31
Carol Walkner	The Secret	29-31
	Drawing by <i>Nicci Mechler</i>	
John Cruze	Dirty Barney	33-35
Dick Hague	Finding Freedom	33-36
	Drawing by <i>Hannah Smith</i>	

Angela Derrick	In Memoriam	37-39
	Regarding the Guards	39
	Whatever You Do	39
	Drawing by Mark Hanavan	
Mark Flanigan	Do You Know the Way to Wisdom Palace?	41-44
	Drawing by Amanda Checco	
Teri Folz	Stories	45-47
	Eighteen	47
	Drawing by Andy Sohoza	
Diane Germaine	Purple Heart-6/23/2015	49-51
	Syrian Epitaph	51-52
	Drawing by Kurt Storch	
Joanne Greenway	War Stories	53-55
	Urban Lullaby	55
	Drawing by Ellen Price	
Robin Grisham Timothy Leonard	Evolving Revolution	57-59
	Ezekiel	57-59
	Eulogy Lost	60
	I like Ike	60
	Drawing by Billy Simms	
Dick Hague		pp. 33-36
(Carol) Joy Haupt		pp. 1-3
Suzanne Horton Noel Zeiser	Commandment #3	61-63
	Closed Minds	61-63
	Drawing by Alexus Chavana	
Sue Neufarth Howard	Sounds Like Fireworks	65-67
	The Price of Being Human – When It Is Too High	67
	Drawing by Kate Rowekamp	
Annette Januzzi Wick Janet Schenk	God Didn't Show	69-71
	Pain to Peace	69-71
	Streetwise	71
	Drawing by Chrissy Collopy	
Jerry Judge	For God's Sake, It Was Just a Nature Park	73-76
	Thought Picture	76
	The Death of Wendy's Father	76
	Drawing by Marc Leone	

Linda Kleinschmidt	When We Kill the Children	77-79
Kevin C. McHugh	Janus Drawing by Alexandra Morris	77-79
Laurie Lambert	Be the Hand	81-83
Cate O'Hara	Lincoln—The Man Drawing by Alicia Zavala	81-83
Carol Feiser Laque		pp. 17-20
Timothy Leonard		pp. 57-60
Rebecca S. Lindsay	Wild West Unawares Bethlehem Drawing by Lindsay Nehls	85-87 87 87
Kevin C. McHugh		pp. 77-79
Meredith Meyer	Privilege	89-91
Dana Schneider	Is Freedom Just Not That into Me? Drawing by Leigh Waltz	89-92
Ricci Michaels		pp. 9-12
Cate O'Hara		pp. 81-83
Terry Petersen	The Lone Blue Jay Naked Baby Dolls Facing the Darkness Under the Bed Drawing by Suzanne Michele Chouteau	93-95 95 96
Mica M. Renes	Monthly Siren Check	97-99
Mia Vera	Rachida Drawing by Shane Hatfield	97-100
Janet Schenk		pp. 69-71
Dana Schneider		pp. 89-92
Hakiym Sha'ir		pp. 25-27
Larry C. Simpson	My Mother's Pliers Learning to Grieve Spontaneous Combustion Drawing by Roscoe Wilson	101-104 105 106-107

Aubrey Stanforth	Silhouettes	109-111
	The Game of Life	111
	3000 A.D.	111
Sherry Cook Stanforth	Lost	109-112
	Hive	112
Aubrey & Sherry Stanforth	Koyaanisqatsi	113
	Drawing by Jan Brown Checco	
Jean Syed	A Defunct Era	115-117
	Cyberspace Sinner	117
	Drawing by Virginia Elliott	
Mia Vera		pp. 97-100
Carol Walkner		pp. 29-31
Gary Walton	Embrace the Monkey: A Thanksgiving Homily	119-121
Ken Williamson	The Warriors Reunion	119-122
	Drawing by Jake Brinkmann	
Fran Watson	What Peace Is	123-125
Ruby Young	Peace	123-125
	Drawing by Pete Hall	
Ken Williamson		pp. 119-122
Ruby Young		pp. 123-125
Noel Zeiser		pp. 61-63

POEMS:

ELLEN AUSTIN-LI

Ellen Austin-Li is a poet and freelance writer who lives in Cincinnati, Ohio. A long-time devotee of the power of words, Ellen is an active member of Women Writing for (a) Change. Ellen has had poetry published in *L.A. Writers Tribe Review*, *the Maine Review*, as well as *“For a Better World.”*

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(CAROL) JOY HAUPT

(Carol) Joy Haupt grew up in Brooklyn, NY, and has been living in Cincinnati since 1960. She attended Antioch College, majoring in Literature, and received a Masters in Social Work from the Ohio State University. Joy is an active member of the Woman’s City Club, a progressive, civic organization whose mission is to educate, empower and engage citizens for a just and sustainable community. She and her husband, both in their 80’s, have 3 children and 4 grandchildren.

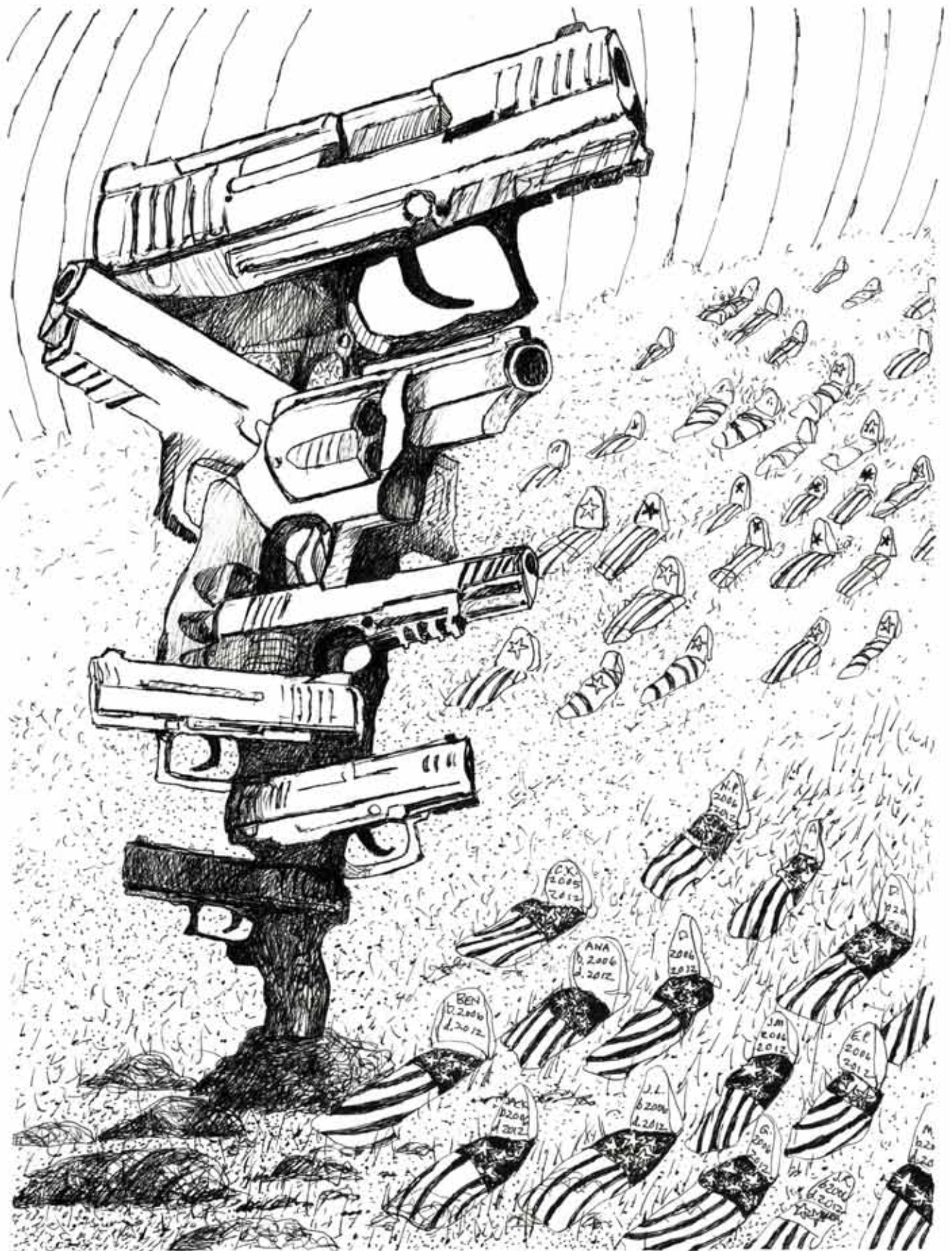
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DRAWING:

SUSAN NAYLOR

Susan Naylor, educated at the University of Maryland (B.A. 1966), and by 70 years of Life on Earth, has continued making images not only to make herself happy, but also to call attention to the survival of life as we know it on this Planet. Serious compromises are being made to our food, air and water; and there may be a grim future for humans ahead of us.

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Under the PIECE TREE... final sleep, too soon!

Erin Hayes

Wall of Fear

(by *Ellen Austin-Li*)

Gunfire's report
shatters goodwill,
open arms once embracing
fold tightly
across the chest,
only unfolding
to gather stones.

Stones must be piled,
we insist,
against all others.
Erect a barricade,
close the gate,
lock the door,
throw away the key.

Their suffering
cannot be separated
from those
wielding guns.
Construct the walls,
strengthen the mortar,
turn your backs.

Our fear
is more important
than our charity,
our safety sacrosanct.
We make impenetrable
our borders,
sealing ourselves off
from our humanity.

Tilting Away from the Sun

(by *Ellen Austin-Li*)

Sunlight slants
shallow bands of light
as our axis tilts
away from the Source.
Our eyes adjust
to angled rays
of lemon yellow,
slanted low beams

temporarily blinding us
to the warmth
ever present -
if only we would
turn to face the light,
if only we could
remember our own
grace.

Into the Madness... Once Again

(by *Carol Joy Haupt*)

Thrust into the madness of terrorism,
death, fear, racism, white supremacy
masquerading as safety and security
I am reminded once again of all the ways
human beings have mistreated one another.

I've been reflecting about the onslaught of
mass shootings over the last several years.
Too many have died, lost loved ones
to senseless violence, terrorism, misguided fear.

Grief...whether because people go into schools
and open fire, set off bombs in public places,
or a parent beats a child to death because
he "acted "too much like a girl"

is the same grief. Being shut out or
shut down no matter who you are,
where you come from, what you
look like, how you dress.

We are all connected; it is up to us to
honor those connections, talk to
one another about what our needs are.

Perhaps the questions of our time are
not about who gets to carry a gun or
who we get to shut out but rather:

how can we carry one another...so that we all
may live a little longer, be understood a little better.
My life depends on this kind of engagement...
which means yours does too.

[Erasure poem from "No More Lists", by Rev. Mykal
Slack, *Standing on the Side of Love*, love@uua.org,

11/20/2015.]

POEM:

MARY PIERCE BROSMER

Mary Pierce Brosmer is a poet and social entrepreneur, Founder of Women Writing for (a) Change which she was instrumental in passing on to a new generation of leaders who are now celebrating the organization's 25th year of life. Mary writes a column, "Uneven Surfaces" for the street paper, *Article 25*.

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DRAWING:

NICK PETAS

Stergios (Nick) Petas is currently a student in the Graphic Communication Design program at the University of Cincinnati, DAAP. He is also working towards a dual minor in Fine Arts and Art History, exploring the many complexities of drawing and painting, and relating them to graphic communication. Nick's work has been exhibited in UC's 840 Gallery show, *Shapes n' Shadows*, as well as the 2015 *Artist Immersion exhibition*.

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NICK
Petras

For Joey, Called Stella While in Utero

I.

Some few weeks before
the night of shock and awe
a Disneyesque display launching
what is now five years of war in Iraq
I dreamed a crocodile infestation,
reptiles multiplying in secret.

You were two months in utero then.
For reasons I disremember if I ever knew
your parents nicknamed you Stella.

In my dream I fight the reptiles
alongside women I love,
our fury fueled by knowing
crocs drown and devour children.

Our enemy-beasts live in schools--
especially the best schools,
by day on the bottom floors
creeping upward toward classrooms,
by night creating lairs in corners.
Nothing we say changes the official
story of Exemplary Schools,
despite the now-obvious reptiles.

II.

Stella, I wrote to you then
feeling the darkness gathering
around us, as our leaders infested
our dreams with what they
called intelligence and airways
bulged with WMD hysteria and
reasoned arguments for bringing
down an evil dictator, once our ally.

*I said Stella, star in the gathering
darkness of war, why are you,
body gathering light--why are you
on your way here
and not to a mother*

*in Iraq, crocodile-ruled nation
the bloated reptile Hussein
feeding on women and children.*

Yet in my dream crocodiles
infest our schools,
chew our soft children's bodies to bones.

I imagined a series of poems for you
something like the six or seven I managed
for your brother, Max,
fierce, snap-eyed Max born half a year
before 9-11, month and date
weighted like a holy wafer
on the tongues of those elected
to console us on who we've become.

I thought of buntings too
caps and baby shawls
some soft project my hands
could make sense of
but time,
that haughty croc
seemed to suddenly, evilly
lunge for my life.

What good, I wondered
would a poem do in a bomb shelter,
I could not wrap you in it,
nor might your Iraqi mother
if you were a star
appearing in her night,

darkness which even we
opposed to the madness
could not have foreseen.

POEMS:

ELLA CATHER-DAVIS

Ella Cather-Davis, retired with her husband of 48 years, writes poetry, essays and sometimes children's stories. She holds an Associates of Arts degree in English Literature from UC and is a member of the Greater Cincinnati Writer's League and Ohio Poetry Society. Ella's written work has been published in a number of books, anthologies and newspapers.

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RICCI MICHAELS

Ricci Michaels is an artist, poet and veteran and the founder of the Urban Expression 101 Project, an organization that promotes the arts through outreach.

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DRAWING:

LYDIA REAGAN

Lydia Reagan is a graphic design and printmaking student at Xavier University, with minors in writing and computer science. Lydia has done many different forms of design, including books, projections, packaging, props, promotional and web.

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Trickle Down

Lynne Ryzon

The Single Mom

(by *Ella Cather-Davis*)

Here comes Peanut driving up in her little red van,
stretching up tall to see above the steering wheel.
She unfastens the baby hurriedly from the boxy car seat,
kisses him "I love you" and then hands him over to me.

We exchange information and she rushes off to her job,
eager to earn the tips and meager wages which will sustain her.
She wears scuffed black shoes, slacks, and apron awaiting fulfillment.
Her makeup is patiently, perfectly applied as with an artist's brush.

She speeds away determined in her independence.

Next morning a text rings in, Peanut has awakened and
is ready to return to parenthood until her next shift.
We meet half-way to save her gas. Here comes Peanut,
stretching tall again to see above the steering wheel.

She takes the baby to the boxy car seat and fastens him in.
We hurriedly exchange information. She thanks me.
She asks can I meet her again later for her night shift. I say yes.
She thanks me, then departs until the evening rendezvous.

Speeding away, defiant in her independence.

El Barrio

(by *Ricci Michaels*)

Have you ever seen El Barrio ?
You know the place
well I have, I looked it in the face.

I've seen the junkies, the troubles,
the slums
and people wishing someone would
come...
to tear the place down and get things
done...
maybe then the people would be proud.
If I had the money I'd come around
and get things done and everyone
would say..
I never thought I'd see the day.

And I would feel ten feet tall,
no more sickness from eating the walls.
And all the people would want to stop
taking dope and smoking pot,
But it's all in my mind, just a dream
maybe I could plot or think up a scheme,
to make the government help everyone
so, in order to survive people would need no guns.

Oh, urban America how I do love you
and if I had the money
oh, what I'd do...

This New Generation

(by *Ricci Michaels*)

There was an old woman
who lived in a boot.
She had so many problems
she didn't know what to do,
her kids wouldn't listen and
her old man walked out.
And she could never just talk,
she always had to shout.
but...

As a single parent she did all that she could.
A few kids went to college
but the rest were no good...

She pulled herself up by the strings of her boots
and her faith in God gave her good roots,
Oh, the government helped as least they could,
they closed after-school programs
and sent us back to the hood..

Now we stand around in groups with our pants hanging low,
disenfranchised with no place to go.
So, left with few options, I'm coming for you
Cuz, my single parent Mama did all she could do...

POEMS:

LAUREL CHAMBERS

Laurel Chambers, born in Cleveland, is a wife, mother and grandmother. She has worked as a newspaper reporter and feature writer and is now a retired English teacher. Laurel has also worked as an adjunct English instructor at UC and Xavier University and most recently has taught English and Journalism at McAuley High School. Having recently begun to write poetry, Laurel believes that writing, reading and listening to poetry can help create a peaceful place both in our lives and in our world.

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DRAWING:

JAN THOMAS

Jan Thomas has been both art educator and working artist in Cincinnati for over forty years. An eclectic fiber artist and printmaker with a penchant for assemblage, Jan creates pieces that reflect her concern for issues facing women.

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Once in the City

I lived in the bowels of the city,
once,
long ago, when I was young.
There was a balcony outside my door
shaded by majestic trees.
A place for love on summer nights,
mixing mint with morning tea,
humming birds in the warm sunlight.
But nothing ever came to be.
The floor was cracked, the railing loose.
“A dangerous place,” the inspector said,
“for people, kittens, even a flea.”
I lost my dream of candle light.
No Romeo ever came for me.
I drank my tea in the sad brown chair.
They didn’t sell mint anywhere.

I lived in the bowels of the city,
once.
I’d open my window to feel a breeze.
All I heard was the sirens’ scream.
The dirty wheezing of the city bus,

it heaved and choked, the breaks squealed.
Like a monster coming down the street,
it roared and clambered, destroyed the peace.
I closed the window, it killed the breeze.

I lived in the bowels of the city,
once.
And on a dark and snowy night
with snowflakes large as flowers
cascading like a waterfall into the midnight hour.
Underneath my window seat,
a light was shining on the street
where an old black man, rocked and moaned
holding onto the lamppost, covered in the snow.
“He’s drunk,” they said, “Maybe full of junk.”
“A fool to be out and about, not home.”
His mumbles echoed through my rooms.
Thumping on my heart with a steady beat,
pounding in my brain a different view.
What harm could such an old man do?
I rushed outside in the black, cold night.
He was blind and had dropped his cane.
Freezing, frightened, all alone.
His white cane buried in the snow.

I lived in the bowels of the city,
once.
long ago, when I was young.
And on a cold and snowy night
I walked an old man home.

Migrant Child

I do not think the birds will come back
to sing their happy songs
in the bare and burning trees.

I do not care that all my toys
exploded into the smoky sky,
or that my little cat misses me.

I do not remember the faces of my friends,
whom I used to see at school
before that building crashed down too.

I do not mind sleeping in the rain,
hanging on to boats all through the night,
or never having somewhere to play.

I do not worry about my wound,
or if my injured hand still bleeds,
as long as mama can still hold me.

What I wish and pray for, every day,
Is to find a place where it’s safe to stay.

Privilege

You say you don’t know what it means,
but it is everywhere.

Some of it is white, most of it is green.
It’s in our eyes and the air we breathe,
Oh, you can taste it, see it, touch it
smell it.

Privilege has power over everything.

It tastes like fresh fruit every day,
and garden vegetables at night.
In the summer, you can grab a peach.
The bread is fresh, the milk is cold.
Your coffee comes with cream.

The eggs you crack and splash
fall into a buttery stream.
There are layer cakes with whipped cream frosting,
chocolate cookies, lemon bars,
cherry pies made for a queen.
But mostly privilege tastes like meat.

It looks like polished buildings
with big brass handles,
bronze locks on shiny black doors.
Privilege has signs that read,
“Drop packages on the back porch.”
It is pretty people in magazines, on movie screens,
that rarely look like you.
They only choose those with a lighter hue.

Privilege is not being watched when you walk into a store.
It blooms in green lawns and flower beds
bursting in colors gold, purple and red.
It’s signs that read “private drive, members only.”
Sometimes it shouts from lakes and trees,
angry words that yell “No trespassing.”
We all know who that means.
Privilege is free to travel about,
go anywhere, laugh out loud.

Privilege feels like boots that fit,
no bloody blisters on your toes.
No holes in your shoes or in your teeth
where the sugar falls through and makes you scream.
It feels comforting like your puppy’s fur,
all soft and clean with a golden sheen.
It feels like the cool crisp water of your neighbor’s pool
where you go swimming after school.
It feels thick like the lining of your ski coat
that keeps the snow and cold away,
so you can do one more run that day.
Privilege feels warm, fun, upbeat.
Oh, the places you go, the people you meet.

Privilege most always smells fresh and sweet,
not like garbage festering on the street.
It is a cinnamon candle burning in your home,
crisp, bleached linens on your bed.
Privilege is where you go to work each day
at a clean place where someone else has stayed
all night to wipe, scrub, scour, and mop the dirt away.
Privilege smells like ocean air; salty and pure, but not ev-
erywhere.

You can’t always see it; you think it’s not
there,
but you can smell privilege in the clean,
fresh air.

Privilege is loud and it’s very strong.
It walks tall, it’s never wrong.
People carry it in their hearts
from the day they’re born
till their souls depart.
Privilege never whispers; it always shouts.
“I am important.
My life counts!”

POEMS:

VICKIE CIMPRICH

Vickie Cimprich's poetry collection *Pretty Mother's Home - A Shakeress Daybook* (Broadstone Books, 2007) visits events and persons, including Shakers of African descent, at the Pleasant Hill Shaker Village.

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ELISABETH CONTADINO

Elisabeth Contadino, a resident of Cincinnati, is a massage therapist/energy healer who works with the geriatric population and seriously ill and dying individuals. After the death of her mother, she started writing poetry for herself.

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CAROL FEISER LAQUE

Carol Feiser Laque's most recent collection of poetry is *POETIZE*. Her New projects include a chapbook with Pablo Otavalo, a poet from Uruguay, and a new collection of poems. Carol is a member of *RHINO*'s poetry critique group in Evanston and is composing in Chicago.

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DRAWING:

ALLISON SMITH

Allison Smith received her MFA from DAAP and has been involved with ArtWorks for several summers. She is an instructor at the University of Cincinnati, Wright State University, and the University of Miami, Middletown. Her work has been exhibited locally at the Phyllis Weston Gallery and 21C Museum and Hotel.

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Yosemite Jubilee

(by *Vickie Cimprich*)

Extraordinary river,
channel of mercy,
Merced,

reflect us to ourselves,
broken and mended
possibilities
of pine and sky.

“Symbolically calling on the entire global Roman Catholic church to take up his papacy’s central message of compassion and pardon, Pope Francis on Friday announced that he is convoking a jubilee year to be called the Holy Year of Mercy.” National Catholic Reporter, Mar. 13, 2015)

How Does an Atheist Pray for Peace?

(by *Elisabeth Contadino*)

Domino falling emotions, resounding and echoing away
A beacon, a call, beckoning and leading home
Back to the sureness of bonding molecules.

The muted kicking up patter of water drops
As tires and wet road meet.
An occasional car approaches, then passes by my house.
I guess at the number of seconds between silences,
Might be five, other times six or seven.
Only these distinct, quiet ascending and descending sounds
Merging with the late morning cloud-shadowed world
Just outside
Ready me.

Every day for over a week
The anger has meandered from head to foot and back
Navigating twists and turns with the ease of a butterfly.
This medieval, treacherous, mountainous landscape,
Terrain that leaves me gasping.
Not long ago the unwanted emotion shadowed me.
Now I follow it,
Pulling in a link of chain one at a time
As I can.
Perhaps, if only it could be an umbilical cord
Pulled taut and ready for a knife wielding hand.

Instead smelted, soldered, galvanized.
To set down is only to pick up again.
So now, walking and knowing the calm
of a barrier reef
The gap closes.

Peace: the Confession

(by *Carol Feiser Laque*)

I whisper my own
secrets to the sparrow
who is unafraid of me.

She hops in and out
of eternity, so I swallow
our dreams at once.

I will never let her go.
I will always let go of her.
Dreams like Imagination
are
the
Monarch
of Reality.

A sparrow runs the risk
of being a Prayer
hopping on two feet.

This bird hears
my confessions.
At once she is
a Fragment
of God.

Fear of the Cul-de-Sac

(by *Carol Feiser Laque*)

In the world we want
the security of this day,
and all the days to come.

We are content and happy
in our anger: all
people have the right to marry.

We love and accept all
with spirituality; we feel
Love has no circumference.

We cast our vote for
the sanctity of women
and men's bodies and souls.

We women break it down –
Everything is whole,
Everything belongs in the circle.

This circle contains our
friendship, our love, our tears.
We hold our hands with peace and joy.

POEMS:

MAUREEN (MO) CONLAN

Maureen (Mo) Conlan is a writer and a visual artist who, for more than 30 years, was a reporter and editor for the Cincinnati Post Newspaper -- including a long stint as books editor. She is now co-owner of a web site -- *writers-resources-cafe.com* -- that has readers from around the world, with more than 10,000 page views per month. Mo writes poetry, prose and fiction, edits books and makes visual art.

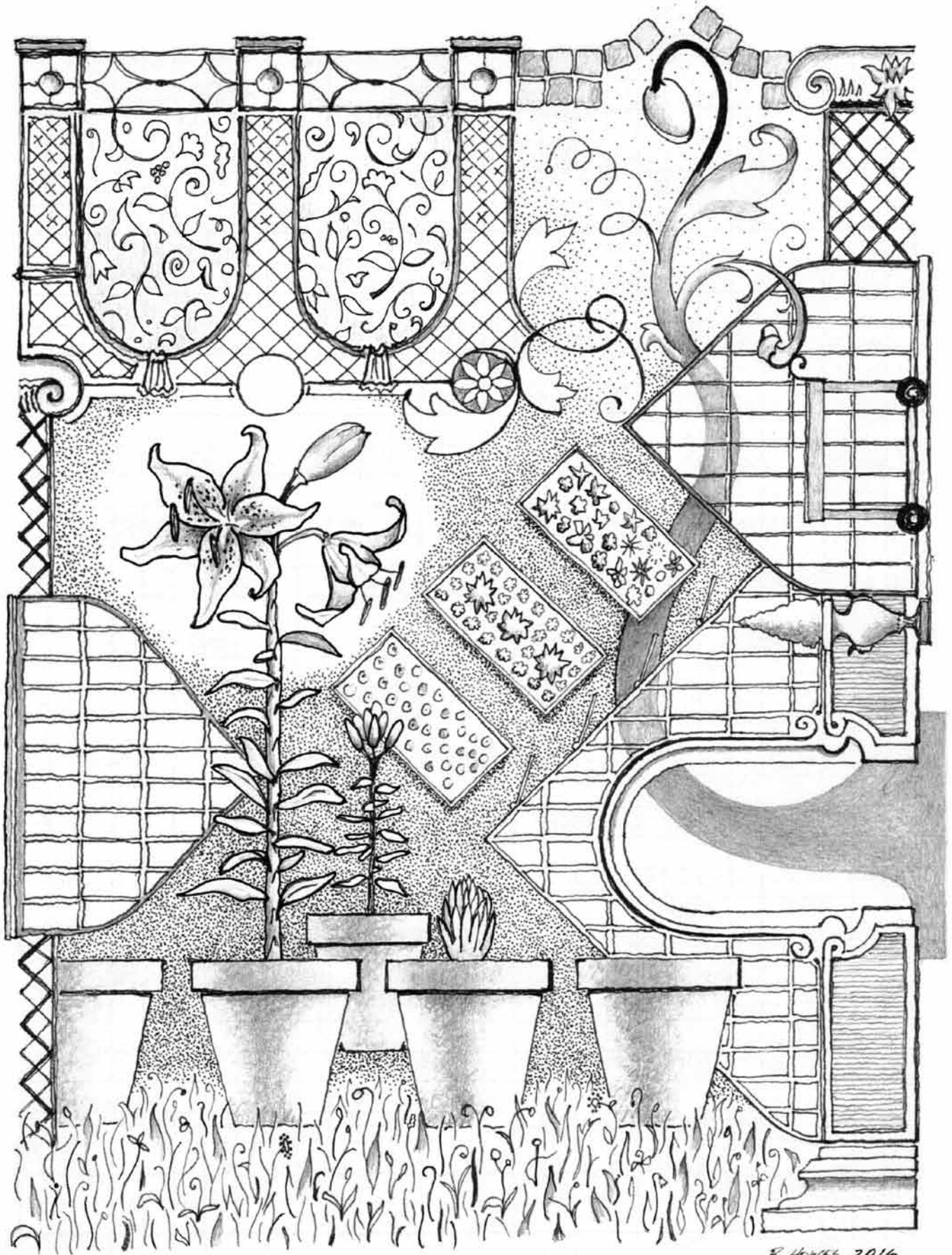
Contact: moconlan@aol.com

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 and photography and has been documenting for several years the disappearing architectural heritage of Avondale, a once rich and diverse neighborhood of Cincinnati. He is also an avid gardener.

Contact: howes.life@yahoo.com



B. HOWES 2016

Greenhouse

If you want to see people smiling,
exuding bonhomie,
go to the greenhouse to buy plants.
Watch them pushing cartloads of
pink, purple and white petunias,
mulling over which color
geranium would go best
on the porch – the salmon pink
or red.
A man has an entire cart filled
with stargazer lilies;
people come up to admire them,
to ask him about their growing habits.
Are they annuals?
Or perennials?
Flowers – being enveloped
by their sweetness --
create permission
to speak as friends.
Impossible to act grumpy,
to be in too much of a hurry,
to cut in line or be rude at the checkout.
That would be like acting badly in church ---
the smells of plants and earth mixing,
the air an elixir shot through with endorphins.
I would like to put
a greenhouse over the world
And fill it with plants
And people talking to each other.

Wearing Sunday clothes

In fall sunshine
They walk to church
To pray to their God.
I drive by.... *Pray*
To a god who is not
A god of war,
I pray.

A Whole New World

Come back and tell me
we are on the cusp
of a whole new world,
one we only glimpsed
before – perhaps
it was in a dream,
but I think it was real,
that time when time dropped
slow as honey
through the hour glass.
Walking down the street
we were unafraid,
embraced strangers,
invited them home for spaghetti;
knew all the words to all the songs
and all the songs were about love;
talked and danced and drank
sweet wine into nights
velvety with promise.
I want you to come back
and tell me again
we are on the cusp
of a whole new world
where every act of love,
every courageous step
is reflected back to us
by creatures something like angels,
something like sea anemones
that lie just beyond our range of vision.
They will move closer.
Feel the waves?
And, now, our eyes
are sharpened
and ready.
I want you to come back
and tell me,
and believe.

POEMS:

MILDRED COOPER

Mildred Cooper is a poet and community activist whose fiery militant words of truth have graced the back streets of Cincinnati over the past 38 years.

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HAKIYM SHA'IR

Hakiym Sha'ir: Cincinnati born; Introspective poetry; Revolution lives in him; Facebook lyrical insurrection; Instagram hakiym sha'ir; Youtube hakiym shair.

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DRAWING:

CLARE DUNN

Clare Dunn attended Covington Latin School, a local high school known for its competitive academics and skipping of students from 5th grade to 8th. During her time there she became interested in art as a possible career choice despite the advancement of grades. She graduated at 15, and is currently in her junior year at Xavier University. Illustration and printmaking are her main focuses of study.

Contact: clare.f.dunn@gmail.com



A Black Crying Shame

(by *Mildred Cooper*)

I went to Krogers today
to get a bit of food
another sister was shopping there
I must say they treated her quite rude.

She had an argument with the cashier
and then the manager came
he shoved her and pushed her around
then he tried to remove her bodily as if
her legs were lame.

There was a lot of name calling
and quite a bit of cursing too
her young black son that she
brought along...
started crying, then yelling,
he didn't know what to do.

They forced her into a back room
and then the officers came
they beat my poor black sister up
my lord, it was a crying shame.
This is no lie or story that I set
before your face
this is gross reality, perpetuated
on the entire black race.

Start My Metamorphosis

(by *Hakiym Sha'ir*)

Start my metamorphosis
As g.o.d takes office
The sun keeps the earth in orbit
Never give up surrender
or forfeit
never forget the task at hand
black lives matter endangered species the black man
and family
police slam me down on concrete
I just want my woman and seed to eat
but we're not free
Wisdom
Wise words spoken
to open the mental graves
of the descendants of slaves
in this so called land of free home of the brave
modern day police state
trading in klan robes for badges to hide the hate.
Roman Greco alpha bravo
Charlie delta echo echo
exodus let us go
to another state of mind
change the paradigm...
Shift I'm a public enemy professor griff
like a skater I'm grinding
lay down a trick
middle finger flip a bird
spoken word lines blurred
on that extra molecule
smoking fuel
an activist on activist
my dean on lean
capitalistic sadistic prison
make the bands
rage against the machine.

POEMS:

KALLIE CRAWFORD

Kallie Crawford is studying English with a concentration in Creative Writing at Thomas More College. When she isn't writing, Kallie is playing with her dogs or listening to music, and can't wait to pursue writing further.

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CAROL WALKNER

Carol Walkner is a right brained entrepreneur, successful business owner, workshop leader, transformational coach, and Reiki practitioner. She is an award winning poet, author, and imagineer and a graduate of the Women Writing For (a) Change feminist leadership academy.

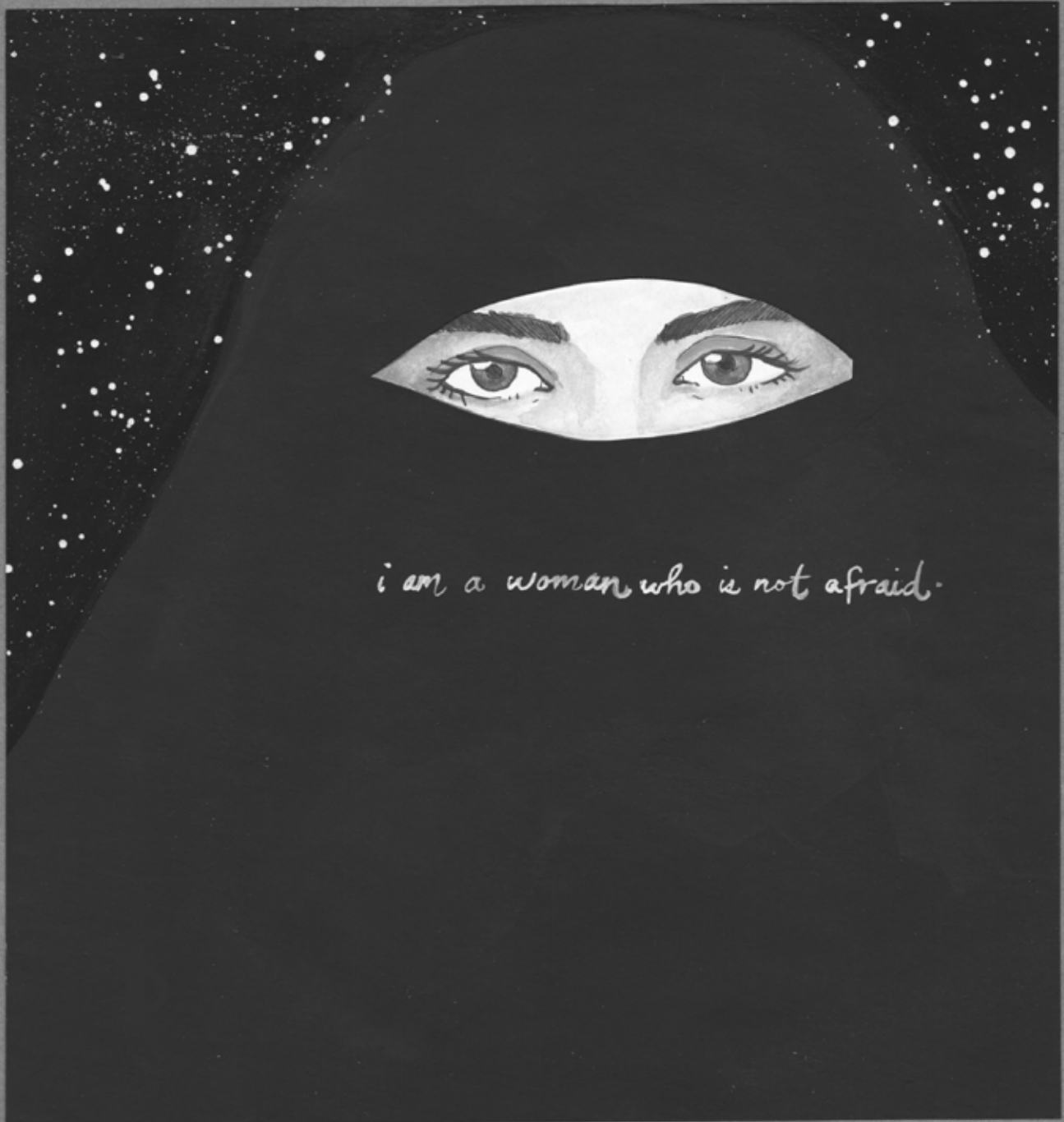
Contact: carolwalkner888@gmail.com; www.carolwalkner.com

DRAWING:

NICCI MECHLER

Nicci Mechler has an affection for spinning tales & making art. She runs Porkbelly Press (porkbellypress.wordpress.com), a micro press specializing in handbound chapbooks of poetry & prose. The Ohio River Valley is the place she calls home.

Contact: ikeepmyshoes@gmail.com; damnredshoes.wordpress.com



Mechler

Mama, Where Are You?

(by Kallie Crawford)

I cannot sleep.
I hear children laughing,
Jealous they have toys and clothes and food
and moms and dads and so much love.
They'll never use it all.

I rest my head on the hard, wet ground
waiting for her to come back.
She promised she would
but I am still alone,
save for the cat meowing in the dumpster.

I wonder if the drugs are that good,
if they're worth it:
leaving your child with nothing –
no food, clothes, love –
leaving your child to die alone in the cold.

I wonder if that's all I have to look forward to.
I wonder if that's what I'll want too,
wonder if I'm just like her, like dad says.
So the next time I see the baggie on the table,
should I take it?

The Secret

(by Carol Walkner)

I am a woman wrapped in a burka
from early morning until late at night.
I am a woman covered from head to toe
in 120 degree weather.

I am a woman wrapped up in a culture
that despises me, spits on me, beats me,
will not educate me, refuses to allow me
to even show my face outside my own
home. I know this.

I am a woman wrapped in a secret.
This is the life I was born into and
when I was 11 years old I decided

the revulsion, the beatings, the being
treated like chattel would not break me.
But rather it would make me
stronger.

I am a woman, now 35, with a computer
hidden under the living room carpet.
I email, I write, I tell the world to
remember me, remember all of us
wrapped in our burkas, wrapped
up in a society that despises our
vaginas, our power over the men who
think they control us.

I am a woman who is making a
difference for women everywhere.
I am a woman who is not afraid. I
know they will beat me until I no
longer remember my own name,
stone me until I am no more, if any-
one ever discovers what I am doing.
I know this.

I am a woman whose mother, father,
brother, aunt, sister and children would
betray her to save their own family name.
I cannot stop the words from flowing.
I am a woman who will work tirelessly
to remove us all from bondage, who
will never betray her sisters
anywhere.

I am a woman wrapped in a burka who
walks 20 paces behind her husband
when we are out in public, because...
that is where I belong. I am a woman
wrapped in a secret – I know where the
land mines are.

POEMS:

JOHN CRUZE

John Cruze, a mediator, teacher and GCWL member, tries to make sense of his experience through poetry and photography. His keen interest in his work, his art and the natural world around him, is renewed regularly by the curiosity of his four grandchildren. His work has appeared in earlier editions of *For A Better World*, *WORDS* (Thomas More College) and *Express Cincinnati*.

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RICHARD HAGUE

Richard Hague is author of fifteen collections, most recently *During The Recent Extinctions: New & Selected Poems (1984-2012)* (2012) and *Where Drunk Men Go* (2015). His second volume of collected poems, *Beasts, River, Drunk Men, Garden, Burst & Light: Sequences & Long Poems* is forthcoming in 2016. Richard is Writer-in-Residence at Thomas More College in Crestview Hills, KY.

Contact: haguekort@fuse.net

DRAWING:

HANNAH SMITH

Hannah Smith is a current junior at Xavier University working towards her BFA with a double concentration in Printmaking and Sculpture and a double minor in Art History and Business. She is an aspiring curator with a passion for work inspired by social observation, language constructs, and art historical research.

Contact: smithh7@xavier.edu



Hannah Smith

Dirty Barney

(by *John Cruze*)

somehow over time
the righteous people
of Mayberry
came to believe
they could fight change
if only their little town
had a high profile
take no prisoners
police presence

now suddenly
it's all over the news

Finding Freedom

(by *Richard Hague*)

(after visiting Gettysburg battlefields, September 2015)

First, you must taste blood. This is inescapable, for freedom gets lost in the wildernesses of women and men, in the wildernesses of greed, pride, power, fear. So, you must taste blood, it is sad but true, for reason and peace and love do not prevail.

Then, you must eat the bitterness of losing your better self to war and disaster. Even as you feed on this bitterness, you starve, but you must eat this bitterness and starve, you must nearly perish of hunger for justice and liberty, you must slash and rip the flesh of your enemy, you must smell the battlefield, after rain, with all the horses dead.

Then, you must forgive. Yourself, first, for you are the closest sinner to you, and then you must reach out and forgive those who have sinned against you. It is hard, it is a stern medicine, it is like cutting away the rotten flesh of your own infected wound.

It is a gruesome business. It is pain, it is a burden on the soul.

But you must taste the blood, you must eat the bitterness, you must somehow forgive the wickedness in yourself and your neighbor and your country, and—impossible!—you must love.

Then, after a night of battlefield moans and wailing, far off, over the fields of Gettysburg, as over the paddies of Khe San, as over the beaches of Hastings and Gallipoli, the plains of Troy,

as over the streets of Watts and Ferguson,
in first light, you will see freedom crawl forward on all fours, itself almost broken,
but looking for you, freedom seeking you yourself in all your brokenness,
and it will demand that you lift it up, that you hold it (smell its blood, touch its tears)
so you will begin to heal.

POEMS:

ANGELA DERRICK

Angela Derrick, a poet and antideathpenalty activist, is the author of *Melancholy Is When I Leave You: Poems From the Wife of a Death Row Prisoner*. She is currently collaborating with SOS Art to publish *Voices From Death Row: A Book of Poems and Drawings on Peace and Justice by Death Row Inmates in America*. Her second volume of poetry will be published in early 2017.

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DRAWING:

MARK HANAVAN

Mark Hanavan, a native Cincinnati artist, resides in Middletown, Ohio with his wife and three children. He earned his MFA in Painting from The University of Cincinnati, DAAP, in 2003. Mark's stark, austere portraits make commentary on our human condition in the face of contemporary culture; including but not limited to current technologies, social media platforms, and "Art" itself.

Contact: mhanavan@aui.edu; www.markhanavan.org



Mark Hanavan

In Memoriam

This is for Frank Valdes,
the death row inmate
beaten to death
by nine
prison guards
who came into his cell
one morning,
their boot prints
imprinted on
his broken back.
And this is for
Russell Hudson, the death row
inmate who od'd
in his cell one night
and disappeared
from the prison roster
as though he was never there.
And this is for the
woman who visited her
husband on Saturday and
was told on Monday
that for the
next six weeks
she would see
him behind glass
until the day the state
pumped drugs into him—
on that day
she could hug him
one last time.
And this
is for all the people
I've met over the years
at the prison, changed
and molded by the
constant pressure
of the steel and
cinder block, yet
retaining their
spirit and will.
This is for us.

Regarding the Guards

Today I want to say something to
the guards in recognition of your
commitment here, however large

or small it may be; all of you
embracing your role as keeper
of the kept wholeheartedly, some

with patience, grace, and understanding,
others no less committed with annoyance,
contempt, and malice. You are the squeaky

wheel that turns the machinery of this
institution. However well (or not) it runs
is because of you. I would like the

opportunity to ask each and every one
of you: how did you come to be here?
What events led you to this very place

where you are afforded the privilege to
be a force for good or evil in the lives
of others regardless of what they may

think, feel, or desire? What has made
you the way you are? If you do not
know the answer to my questions, I

am sorry for you: you, in a different form
are just as kept as those you guard. You too,
are in your own type of prison.

Whatever You Do

Whatever you do
as you go about
your day—
do it whole.

When you eat
your oatmeal
taste the warm
lumpiness of it
as you are
nourished.

When you watch
the news do it
whole—let the
awfulness of
another shooting
wash over you.

when you take
a walk—be fully
present—listen to
the sounds of the
city or country.

When you talk to
someone—really
talk and
really listen.

Whatever you do—
do it whole so
that you are filled
up with the
singleness of it.

POEMS:

SUE NEUFARTH HOWARD

Sue Neufarth Howard, a poet and visual artist, is a member of Greater Cincinnati Writers League (GCWL), Linton Street Writers, Colerain Artists. Sue received awards in several Ohio Poetry Day Contests since 1998 and her poems have been published in several journals and anthologies. They also appeared in 4 chapbooks: *TreeScapes*, *EarthWords*, *In and Out of the Blue Zoo* and *Haiku Moments*, available on amazon.com

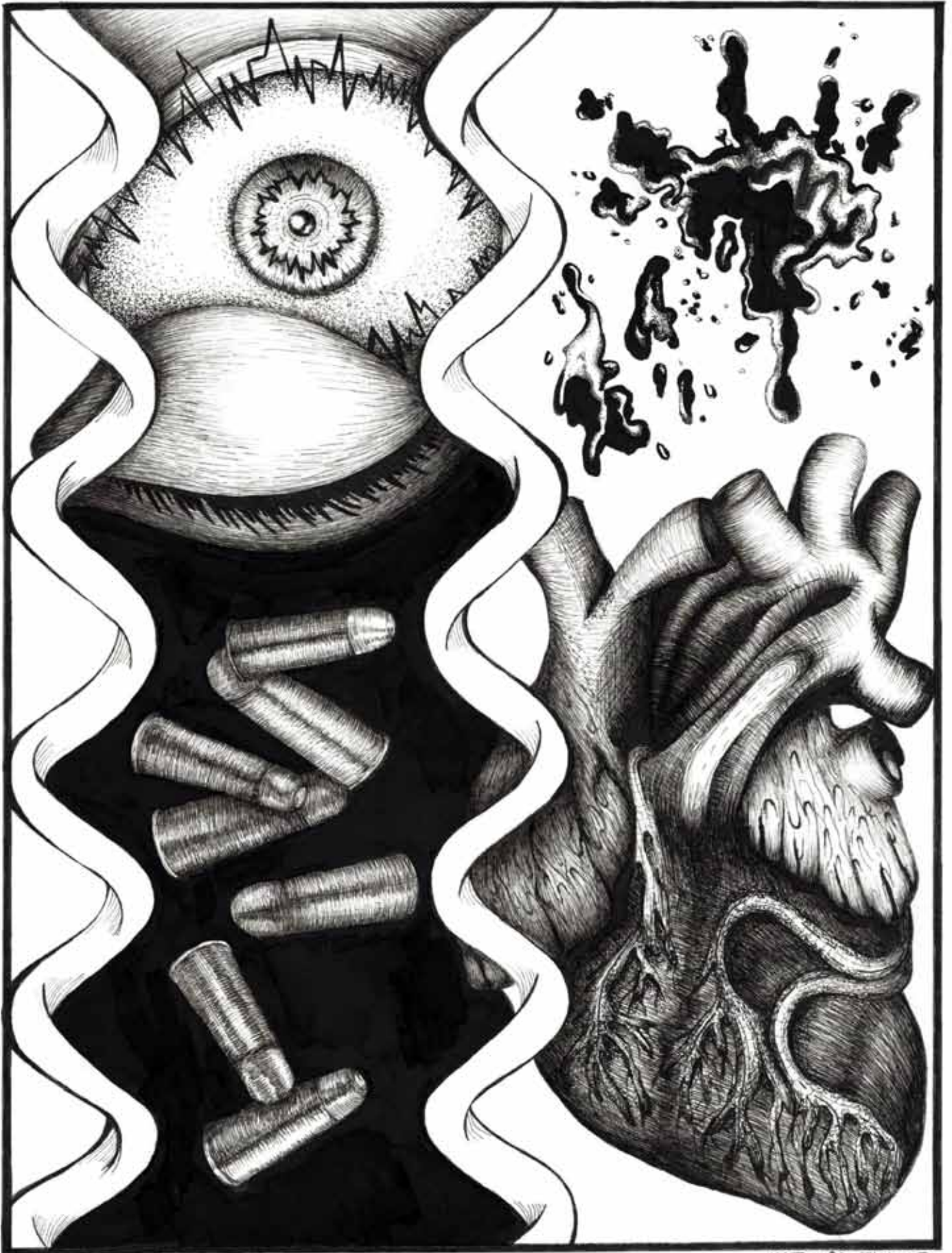
Contact: snhpoet@fuse.net

DRAWING:

KATE ROWEKAMP

Kate Rowekamp is a multimedia artist specializing in printmaking, animation and illustration. She earned her MFA in 2-Dimensional Studio with a concentration in Printmaking from Miami University in 2015, and her BA in Studio Art and AA in Art History from Thomas More College in 2012. Kate lives in Cincinnati and works out of her studio in Kennedy Heights.

Contact: kate.rowekamp@gmail.com



KATE ROWEKAMP

Sounds Like Fireworks

Pop pop pop
Six years old shot
on the sidewalk
laying in blood
bullets intended
for someone else

This is what gun violence
looks like

Breathing slows
going slower
and slower
a mother
her baby girl die

Gun violence here
on our city streets

Hospital
two blocks away
close to death
more than 20 doctors
surround – heart
stops twice

What gun violence looks like
raw, ugly, costly

One beautiful brown eye
lost – nicked diaphragm
damaged spine
a hole in the lung
bone fragments
paralysis

The price of gun violence
kids killing kids on city streets

Growing up self-conscious
with one false eye
recovery far from over
wheel chair bound
therapy three times a week
learning to pick up a leg

In the wake of violence on city streets
one little girl rides her bike no more

*(Found poem from "The Bystander," by Chris Graves,
Cincinnati Enquirer, January 3, 2016)*

The Price of Being Human – When It Is Too High

Post-traumatic stress, the price
of being human. When threat arises,
in the brain the amygdala directs response,
flee, fight or freeze.

Acute crisis passes,
brain's prefrontal cortex adapts.
Fear response decreases.
Life goes on.

But in some people amygdala
overrides decision-making.
PTSD locks, a constant loop of
flee-fight-freeze,

a crippling condition, can
last years, effects cascade
through the body, depression,
high blood pressure, cardiac issues.

It's the amygdala responding.
Some develop anxieties
that last for years, some do not.
The VA would pay

for a test using DNA -
determine which psychoactive
drugs work best...maybe
use for deeper research,

find genetic component of PTSD.
Vietnam vets – for decades avoided
dealing with traumas...
at last seeking treatment.

*(Erasure Poem from "Fighting Another Battle Inside," by
Anne Saker, The Enquirer, Sunday, August 30, 2015.)*

POEMS:

ANNETTE JANUZZI WICK

Annette Januzzi Wick is a writer, poet, teacher and community builder. She lives in Over-the-Rhine and is currently at work on a novel about the power of music to drive one's desires.

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JANET SCHENK

Janet Schenk is member of a large family. Writing poetry has been a great part of her life since 1970. She is retired, enjoys working and playing with children, volunteering, being out in nature, being and doing with others, reading, knitting and meditating.

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DRAWING:

CHRISSEY COLLOPY

Chrissy Collopy lives and works in Oxford, Ohio. She studied in the fine arts program at Miami University and has taught many art classes in her community.

Chrissy is currently a Lead Artist with Opening Minds through Art. Her art is inspired by surrealism, abstraction and expressionism. She often paints, draws, and sculpts to create fantastical worlds where a person can engage in a self-interpretive process.

Contact: chrissycollopy@yahoo.com



Chrissy Collopy 2016

God Didn't Show

(by *Annette Januzzi*)

She knew I was coming
as I rushed a bath and blow dry
and fed the mutt

pulled on boots and gloves
to brace for cold to melt
my heart, if I could get there.

Six bells rang
I stepped in by seven

and lingered near Benny
the homeless guy with his forehead
resting on the walnut pew.
It was that kind of day.

I tossed off my hat, unzipped my coat
shamed by its smears of city soil.
But God forgives - if She shows.

So I stared and waited
for sunrise through stain
of glass, no doubt colored by sin.

If I sat long enough
would God arrive?
I tried
to will Her here
to levitate pews –
I thought pews with leaves
carved in their sides could fly.

When seats didn't soar
I waited no more.
Truth be told, I let Her go too.

A teary calm rained down me
as Benny raised his eyes
maybe caught a draft
or God walking out ahead.

Pain to Peace

(by *Janet Schenk*)

The Serenity to accept
The Courage to change
Wisdom, I await
your enlightenment.

Right now I agonize
with lack of wisdom.
Will you show up
when least expected?

I breathe in deeply
to expand my heart.
I breathe out to join
others feeling pain.

Streetwise

(by *Janet Schenk*)

From Chicago taxi
I observe...

A Man pushing a cart,
what are his treasures?
He walks the sidewalk
in the park.

A woman sits on
a bench in the park.
Is she asleep after
being early awakened?

All she cherishes
in suitcase and shopping bag,
a coat on her back.
Does anyone care?!

On my morning walk
to visit Claire...

A young man on sidewalk
shouts at his demons,
swings fiercely to save himself!
Who really cares?

POEMS:

MEREDITH MEYER

Meredith Meyer recently started writing creative non-fiction and poetry and is a part of Women Writing for (a) Change in Cincinnati. She works in education and is particularly passionate about learning outside the walls of the classroom.

Meredith and her husband Steve have two small children and live in Mt. Washington.

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DANA SCHNEIDER

Dana Schneider is a senior in high school living in northern Kentucky. When she's not writing poetry, she's reading news, eating mangoes, listening to Beyonce, or doing all three at once. Dana hopes to one day be an influential feminist author and social justice activist.

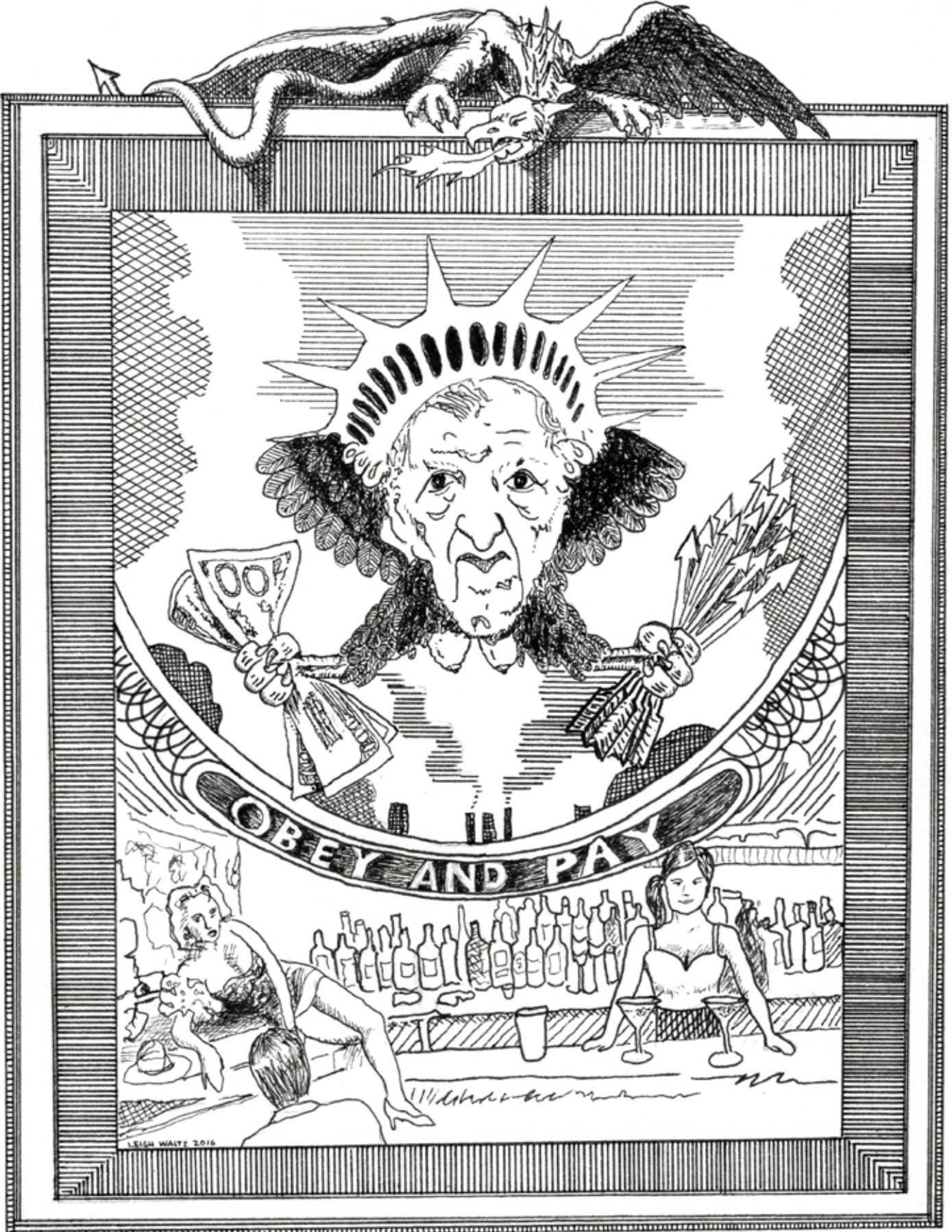
Contact: danas@fuse.net

DRAWING:

LEIGH WALTZ

Born in Dayton, Leigh Waltz has lived in Malaysia, Holland, Austria, Italy and Germany (and visited 29 other countries). He is an advocate of the Transition Movement and Permaculture. Leigh learned about art and printmaking and has shown his work nationally and internationally. He now lives in Tipp City, Ohio.

Contact: I_waltz@yahoo.com



Privilege

(by *Meredith Meyer*)

I move through the world
recklessly confident
that I can work it out
that someone
maybe a stranger
will come to my aid
if life moves off course.

I wear rumpled clothes
to the store
with hair a mess
and no one assumes anything
or keeps an eye trained
on me – after all,
I have white skin
and good teeth.

My son will grow to be
10, 12, 14 years old
and his soft straight

sand colored hair
will clarify that he is
just a boy
not a criminal not a threat
even when he is unruly
even when he is moving
with a crowd of other boys.

There is no undertone
of fear no need for
constant vigilance
in this world that was
built for me.

And so
I step effortlessly
from the threshold
of my home
unaware and ungrateful
for the calm
handed to me by a world
that doesn't have a habit
of handing out
many favors.

Is Freedom Just Not That into Me?

(by *Dana Schneider*)

When I first met Freedom, I was smitten.
Its panache hexed me:
It quoted Locke and Jefferson,
bought shots of patriotism for the whole bar,
dressed in rich reds and blues, reminiscent of a diagram of the veins pumping
bald-eagle-screeching-adrenaline into my naïve heart.

Years after that first encounter, the honeymoon phase ended.
Realizations that Freedom treated me and others differently than its
less female,
more Christian,
fewer melanin possessing,
enormously wealthier friends
demolished the previously rock solid wall of dominant beliefs I inherited from those before me.
As I began to rebuild,
I resentfully adopted a new nickname for Freedom:
Privilege.

In retrospect, there were red flags in some of our earliest encounters:
Freedom used sexist pronouns and made weird jokes from its childhood about how
we only have had forty-three and three-fifths presidents;
in my own defense, my judgment was impaired in the moment by those free rounds.

Freedom is apathetic towards me, but I don't take the unrequited love personally.
I have heard many stories of Freedom's upbringing, and it sounds as though
its fathers were people pleasers, occasionally compromising at the expense of
Freedom's neglect.

That neglect wore holes in the pockets of Freedom's memory,
which is why when I scrawl my digits on a receipt under the words "Call me!,"
I rarely hear back.
There's enough space in that pocket for the contact information of all of humanity—
we just need to sew the holes.

POEMS:

TERRY PETERSEN

Terry Petersen is the author of the middle-grade fantasy *“The Curse Under the Freckles.”* She is a regular contributor for Piker Press, an online magazine, and writes a blog focusing on positive thinking in the messy real world (terrypetersen.wordpress.com). Terry aims to dive through the muck of life and come up with a gem.

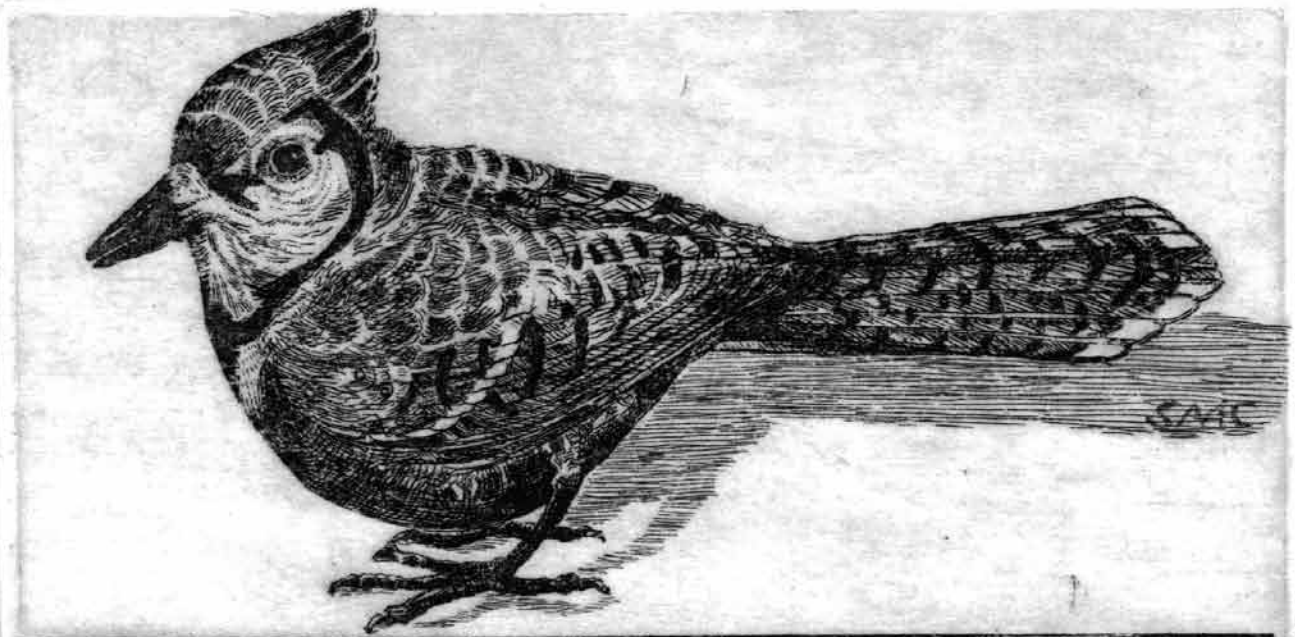
Contact: tpetersen@fuse.net; terrypeteren.wordpress.com

DRAWING:

SUZANNE MICHELE CHOUTEAU

Suzanne Michele Chouteau is Professor of Art at Xavier University. Her prints, drawings, paintings, and mixed-media combinations have been shown in many solo, invitational, and juried exhibitions. Suzanne is married to Chris Bedel, Director of the Cincinnati Museum Center’s Edge of Appalachia Preserve in Adams County, Ohio. Their son, Elijah Bird Bedel, is a sophomore at Xavier University.

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Blue Jay (Bird boy) A.P.

Erinanne Michelle Chouteau 2016

The Lone Blue Jay

A single blue jay squawks
at our bird feeder.
Without understanding avian messaging
I decide he wants the seed for himself.
Jays bully sparrows and wrens.
They are known as beautiful, but ornery.

Then again. The toothless girl
begging at the corner.
Does she have meth mouth?
Or did she grow up with sugary
Mountain Dew in her baby bottle?
The woman with the sour face
in the checkout line.
Is she innately angry?
Or did she just find out
her husband is having an affair?
The man who swerves
across the center line.
Is he drunk, or, did a disruptive
child distract him?

As the jay flies away I notice
our feeder is empty.
I forget entitlement lectures
and fill a pitcher with sunflower seeds.

Naked Baby Dolls

Child-proof dolls
with painted black hair
and eyes forever open

lie on the floor
of the toddler room.
Identical, except for

brown or peach plastic bodies,
the dolls are naked.
The children don't care.

Bare babies and honesty
fit the simple ambience
of parallel play.

I watch as each doll
passes from child to floor,
and back again. The brown babies

get picked first.
My toddler granddaughter pouts
as another child grabs

the dark doll she had been cuddling.
I try to hand her the paler version.
Her frown deepens. On the rug

the dolls that wait
look anemic, pale.
I think about human skin shades

from ivory to licorice, and mentally
list a larger number of darker tones.
Nutmeg, cinnamon, chestnut, bronze

chocolate, mahogany, coffee, umber.
Strange that at this age
the little people choose the toy

with the richer complexion.
Yet only a few of the children
resemble darker hues. The toddlers' choices

contradict the prejudiced
adult majority. Someday I pray
these children see beyond the exterior.

The dolls wear a paint layer
thin enough to be chipped off.
Their differences can be altered with a brush.

People share diverse histories
and cultures, but living hearts beat
a common rhythm to survive.

May we grow
together
as one human race.

Facing the Darkness Under the Bed

As I sweep under the bed and touch
the darkness below the frame
I imagine going back into time

and watching my mom as her mother lies
on another bed. Twelve-year-old Mary Ann
cooks and washes dishes.

Her history text book is opened
on the kitchen table. Ancient war dates fade,
battles with human losses,

each its own variation
of untold Pyrrhic victory.
She hears a different kind of battle

in the next room.
The young girl longs to soothe
the endless cries of her mother

laboring forty-eight hours.
Mama survives, but delivers
another dead baby. Mary Ann learns

to bury hurts as well, cover them
inside forgotten dreams. She leaves
the darkness under the bed

with the dust. Imagination may be
my sole impossible tool,
but, I take the hand

of the twelve-year-old girl who will one day
give birth to me, and allow her
the gift of forbidden tears.

POEMS:

MICA M. RENES

Mica M. Renes N.D. has her practice in Cincinnati where she supports people to walk their life in positive and best possible ways. Short energy clearings are part of each session. She also offers phone and internet appointments. She lives in the hills around Rabbit Hash KY.

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MIA VERA

Mia Vera is in her final year at UC for Literature and Cultural Studies. A Texas transplant, she has found her voice and place these past six years as a performer in Ohio. Mia proudly claims Cincinnati as the place that raised her, even though she is southern bred.

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DRAWING:

SHANE HATFIELD

Shane Hatfield is a freelance artist residing in downtown Cincinnati. A graduate of the Art Academy of Cincinnati, he has worked in several art fields including printmaking and illustration, and currently casts bronze sculptures for other artists at Casting Arts + Technology.

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Street Artista '16

Monthly Siren Check

(by *Mica M. Renes*)

The monthly siren check
Screams through the Wednesday
Noon hour
Oooowee, oowee, owee
Click

It is a topsy turvy screech with scrambled
Letters of despair
And horror

Aren't we happy
To be tested

And have a fire squad
A bomb squad
A secret squad
A terrorist squad
A homeless squad
A health squad
An against everything squad
A
Be aware of sin squad
An I am blind squad
An I am lost squad
and
An I'll amaze the grace out of you squad

Ooowee, Oowee, Owee
Click

Rachida

(by *Mia Vera*)

I have become accustomed to images
of the body
in pain

I say the body because any body concerned
is merely the flesh and bones and inevitably artfully photographed blood
of their temporal form
you cannot see a soul in pain
because we have written off the soul as possible

We have a body
to pinch to touch to rape to cuddle
and the Mind
to form to falsify to ponder to ignore
all the evidence left that
we might've
at one point in time
been capable
of sharing
pain

Is this what being an adult is about?

I have become accustomed to images
of the body
in pain

Specifically brown bodies black bodies children's bodies
women's bodies
all the bodies that we know to be the truth
that we know are the capital R Real
based on the proven capital of their expendability

The things we count as real
which are few
are very economically weighed and quartered

Is this becoming an adult?

Occasionally, at the movies, as the digital frames sweep by
there is a cry
a shaking body
a woman with mouth anguished and stomach torn open
it is then
the prick in my eye
the stone in my stomach
I take a deep breath to subside the discomfort
Now is not the place to cry.
I have grown accustomed to the body in pain.

And the question of pain,
we demand they make proof
of their grief

We demand they gut open loved ones to show us
the theatre of their worth.

We stand firm—you cannot enter here.
You cannot heal with us.

There is no room in our laboratory of
righteousness to house
the experiment of your suffering.

I have grown accustomed,
as a grown woman,
I remain rooted to the ground.
I watch the spectacle of 21st century
violence.
I heat my popcorn over a bunsen burner
and wonder why others cannot feel
the warmth.

I have grown accustomed to images
of the body
in pain.

POEMS:

LARRY C. SIMPSON

Larry C. Simpson hosted in the 1970s readings at Arnolds and a radio show, *Folk Poetry* on WAIF. In the 1980s he produced a story poem for radio, *The Cave With No Name* aired on WGUC, and the Writers for Radio Project with funding from the OAC. In the 2000+ he self published a print version of *The Cave With No Name* and a novel, *Lost Cave of Jaguar Prophets*. Larry was most recently published in *Appalachian Journal*.

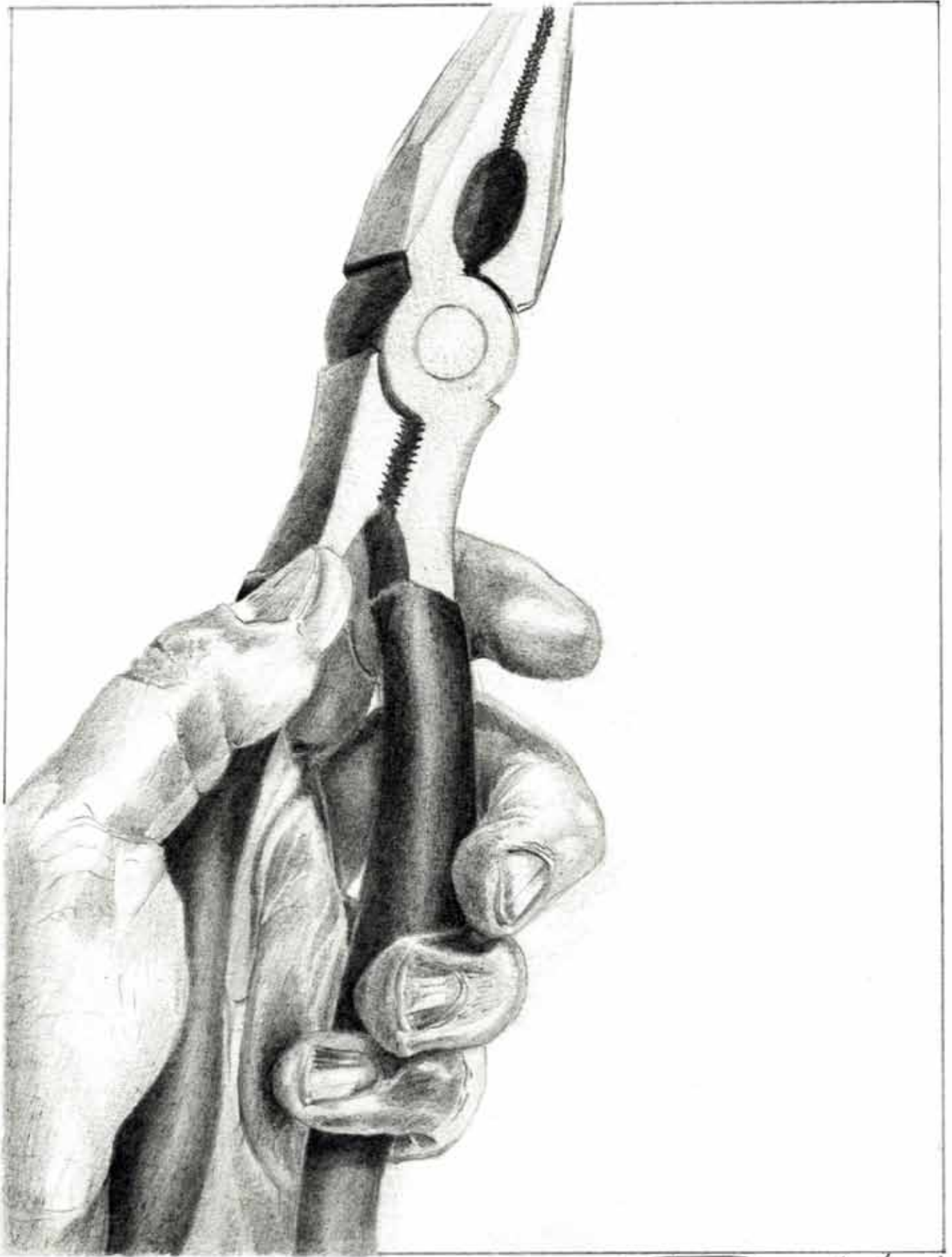
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DRAWING:

ROSCOE WILSON

Roscoe Wilson was born and raised in northern Indiana and southern Michigan; his environmental values were shaped in this mostly rural Mid-western setting. Roscoe received a B.A. (1997) from Wabash College in Indiana, a M.A. (1999) in Painting/Printmaking from Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, and a M.F.A (2002) from the University of Wisconsin, Madison where he furthered his interdisciplinary education by studying Printmaking, Sculptural Installation, and Painting. He is currently a Professor of Art at Miami University, Hamilton.

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Roscoe Wilson '16

My Mother's Pliers

I still have the needle-nosed pliers
my Mom used to wire bombs during World War Two.
Her father's family came from somewhere in Germany.
He died hunting rabbits near Faubush, Kentucky,
his son by his side and a shotgun at hand.
It was the Great Depression
and a heart attack that did him in.
He fixed trains at the roundhouse until it went bust.
He did what he could to feed a family of six.
My mother was nine when Wall Street crashed.
She said a grocery store once burned down,
and people who had it rough waded ash
to gather what was left.
She said she learned to tell peaches from corn
by the numbers stamped on blackened cans.
She said if you stood in the snow by the tracks
the stoker might throw a chunk of coal
for your stove when a locomotive passed.
She said she learned to live on less and do without.
My Daddy didn't have it near as bad.
His Father kept his job riding the tracks,
as a conductor through both World Wars
taking the soldiers and sailors north.
My Daddy was born just before the first.
He delivered papers as a kid and liked to fish,
and rode a motorcycle he got by selling scrap.
A train ride from Kentucky took him west to the Navy
and a ship ride to a paradise they called the Pearl.
He was there for the attack when water burned
with oil and floating flesh.
As a kid, I asked my Dad what he did that day.
He said, "I hauled the wounded and dead."
That's all he'd say.
My Father kept secrets and hid his memories well.
They only returned as groans in his sleep and calls for help.
My Dad worked nights at GE and slept days.
He worked at a lathe turning turbine blades,
for jet engines that flew senators and business men,
and the bombs that fell on Viet Nam.
In the Sixty's we rode our 57 Chevy back home
from Cincinnati to Somerset, Kentucky
for Christmas and Easter.
My brother and I traded punches and teases.
My Dad yelled a lot but never cussed.
My Mother read us books and quoted Jesus
while smoking Kools with the windows up.

She was diabetic and caring and nervous.
She started each day with a needle in her leg.
Her coughs were like small explosions, almost unnoticed.
One night in 1976, I was home with my Dad and Mom.
I don't know what time it was when I awoke
to my father calling my name from the other room.
I thought it was just another dream.
I don't know how long it took to wake me up,
but it was too late to save my Mom,
even though she was still warm.
The taste of that last cigarette was still on her lips
when I tried to bring her back
like a doctor I once saw on the TV set.
They said it was a massive heart attack.
In 1994, I drove my Father to Florida in my new Mitsubishi,
my daughters, buckled in, trading tickles
and giggling in the back seat.
When I praised the design of the car and the cost,
my Father was silent, or lost in thought.
Ten years after his death, I learned on TV
that Mitsubishi had made engines for the planes
that crossed the sea to bomb Pearl Harbor.
This fact may not have occurred to my Father.
By then his mind sometimes got stuck.
A cat-scan report said his memory loss
was from micro-strokes inside his head
like little bombs in the blood, I guess.
That was not long before his mind broke down,
and he had to go to a nursing home.
He once said he saw guided missiles
falling outside his window,
and he thought I was my uncle.
It was '95 or '96 when we got the call about our Dad.
He would not last long, the doctor said.
I agreed they should not resuscitate.
He was quiet, if not at peace in that strange place.
My brother and I stayed late beside his bed
until I said he might want to be alone,
and so we left our Father.
He, like me, always liked his privacy
and wouldn't have wanted to be a bother
to anyone.

Learning to Grieve

I am learning to grieve for my father
who is not yet dead,
his skin as thin as that of a mushroom,
his body held by so many strange hands,
hands turning him like some pale orchid,
like the earth turned to fallow,
hands bathing him, feeding him, tying him down
with detached care,
eyes glancing at his resigned humility,
his stripped pride,
his soiled bed sheets,
ears ignoring the stuttered cries,
rage reverberating in a hallway of whispers,
curses, voices of nightmares
that erupt in the glare of daylight.

I am learning to grieve for my father
who can sometimes pass a sentence between his lips
to convey disjointed memory into the present.
His hands are still strong enough
to topple a wheelchair,
crashing his restrained body to the floor.
His hands are large, wrists purple
from fighting the gauze shackles
that protect him from delusions of freedom.
His hands that once worked a lathe,
fixed an engine or gutted a fish,
hands that once pulled
a splinter from my own small hand,
now shake and grapple air
while trying to help hold a fork that feeds him.
Alone among others,
he takes company with those who are not there.

I am learning to grieve for my father
whose blue eyes are like the morning sky
when the fog first begins to dissipate,
but his fog will not dissipate,
the visions in his dreams more clear
than my own hazy face in his eyes,
in a home that is not home.

Spontaneous Combustion

In school we were taught
to look both ways before crossing,
not to talk to strangers, and not to play with matches.
On the street a man in rags
shouts to no one in particular,
talking to God on a first name basis.
There is a notion that he might have some truth to tell,
some knowledge gained from pain and hardship.
But whether fraud or prophet,
there is a heat in his eyes that could singe your eyebrows
if you get too close.

Fires start in unexpected places:
a cat playing with a lamp chord,
vapors rising from an uncapped can
or oily rags stored in a cellar.
There once was an ex-marine who hid in a Texas tower
to fire randomly into a scattering crowd,
as if shooting at distant candles.
There was the teen age boy who set his alarm
and arose one morning before school
to kill his Father, Mother and Sister,
still in their beds.
And there was a man burning with his own lone obsession
who walked into a school and shot children,
round after round
until sickened of the taste of smoke and sobs and blood,
he felt the impact of the last bullet
in his own head.
There are men who build bombs
like calculated bonfires, men crazed with a cause
with twisted justification,
who send the prayers of strangers,
the hopes of those who have known
some moment of happiness
into an eruption of debris and smoke.
It's as if an ember
carried on the wind were to land
hidden in your backyard garden,
to burst raging in the lilacs, suddenly swallowing the night.
Could the spark that ignites the artist
to paint flaming sunflowers
with the swirl of a brush,
who focuses all the more to overcome solitary agony,
be similar to the one that smolders

in the demagogue
who sets a wildfire of fear
in the hearts of his followers
and fans the inferno of hate
until he himself is consumed by his own blaze?

Could the hot coal
that burns in someone torn by the love of life
and the ache of living,
one who translates a flicker of beauty
into tones on a piano,
be the same heat that flares
inside the mind of a man
who torches hearts with acrid lies
that blind the eyes of those
so eager to believe and to be led into the flames?

Could it be,
that for each Joan of Arc who stands in the fire
with a prayer in her heart,
there is an inquisitor
fearing for his own power
who sets the spark of her funeral pyre?
Could it be,
that for every Hitler who deceives so well,
he deceives himself,
and brands humanity with a searing iron of hell,
there also comes a King
who brings the dream of peace,
who teaches truth to awaken our best placed faith?

POEMS:

AUBREY STANFORTH

Aubrey Stanforth is a home-schooled seventh grader very involved in creative writing and music. She performs regionally, singing and playing guitar in an Appalachian family band, Tellico. Aubrey is also interested in astronomy, photography and theater, and is taking Mandarin lessons and studying Spanish at Thomas More College.

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SHERRY COOK STANFORTH

Sherry Cook Stanforth is founder and director of Thomas More College's Creative Writing Vision Program. She teaches fiction, poetry, environmental and ethnic literatures and is co-editor of *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, the literary journal of the Southern Appalachian Writers Cooperative. Sherry's poetry collection *Drone String*, was nominated for a 2016 Pushcart Prize.

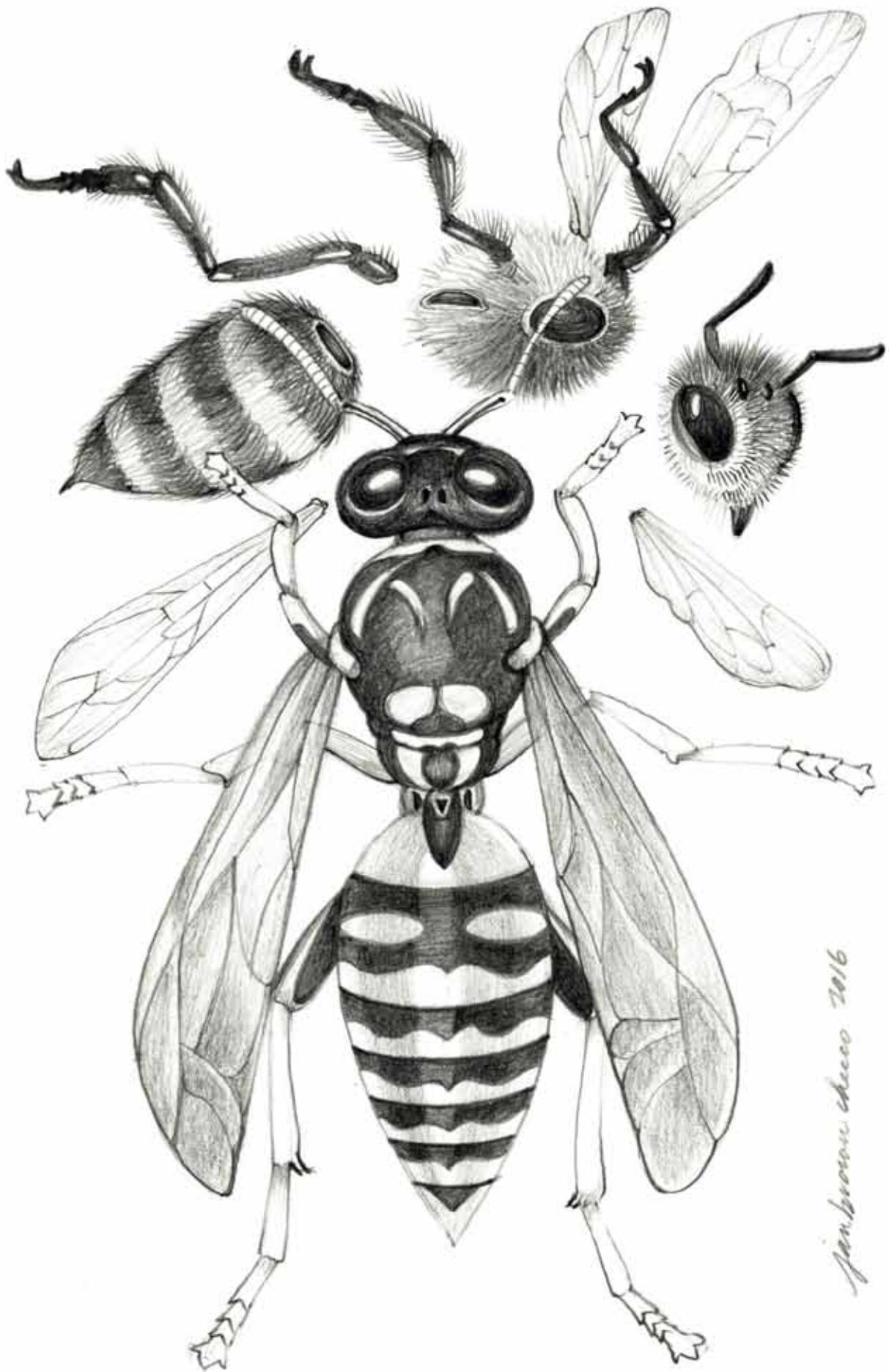
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DRAWING:

JAN BROWN CHECCO

Jan Brown Checco is a studio artist and arts administrator specializing in community-based projects. Her architectural ceramics embellish plazas in Munich, Germany and Liuzhou, China as well as walls and floors of several Ohio structures. Jan designed and directed the Sister Cities mosaic project at the TM Berry International Friendship Park Pavilion, art directed 7 Butterfly Shows at Krohn Conservatory, and "The Black Brigade Monument" at Smale Riverfront Park.

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Jan Brown Chico 2016

Silhouettes

(by *Aubrey Stanforth*)

our silhouettes
swing step dip
on and on
we glide across the white
our color marking
clean white snow
so little do we know

a shadow of darkness
smothers our raging flame
splash sizzle smoke
black ink spills
covering the canvas
turning something to nothing
a midnight background
no silhouettes showing

The Game of Life

(by *Aubrey Stanforth*)

We choose
what we say
what we do,
but what if
we don't?
What if we're chiseled game pieces
plucked and placed by invisible hands
eating nothing but plastic,
walking cardboard roads
doing not what we want,
but what the players choose,
our thoughts nothing
but their babbling voices.
We are puppets
supported and controlled
by transparent strings,
so open the box
and let's begin!
And it's okay
until our player makes
the wrong move.

3000 A.D.

(by *Aubrey Stanforth*)

I see right through
your fake glinting walls
layered on top of the real misery at hand
the gurgling muck
drooling onto the spoiled grass
I know that those thunder clouds
aren't what you say
instead—fogged up masses
of dead animals
dead plants
this whole place is
dead
 dead
 dead
so no
your artificial
gumdrop world
hasn't fooled me
it's just another plastic layer
upon rotten layer
upon the real layer
and soon enough
we'll peel off those layers
to discover the
flushed out
miracle

Lost

(by *Sherry Cook Stanforth*)

nasty Bradfords pomp up, blow
halos of white into my line of vision,

reminding me that it is time to walk
down the hill and open up the hive

I break the waxy seal they've made
around the lid to lock out the cold

find that nothing lives on the inside
so I've only come to grieve a lost

