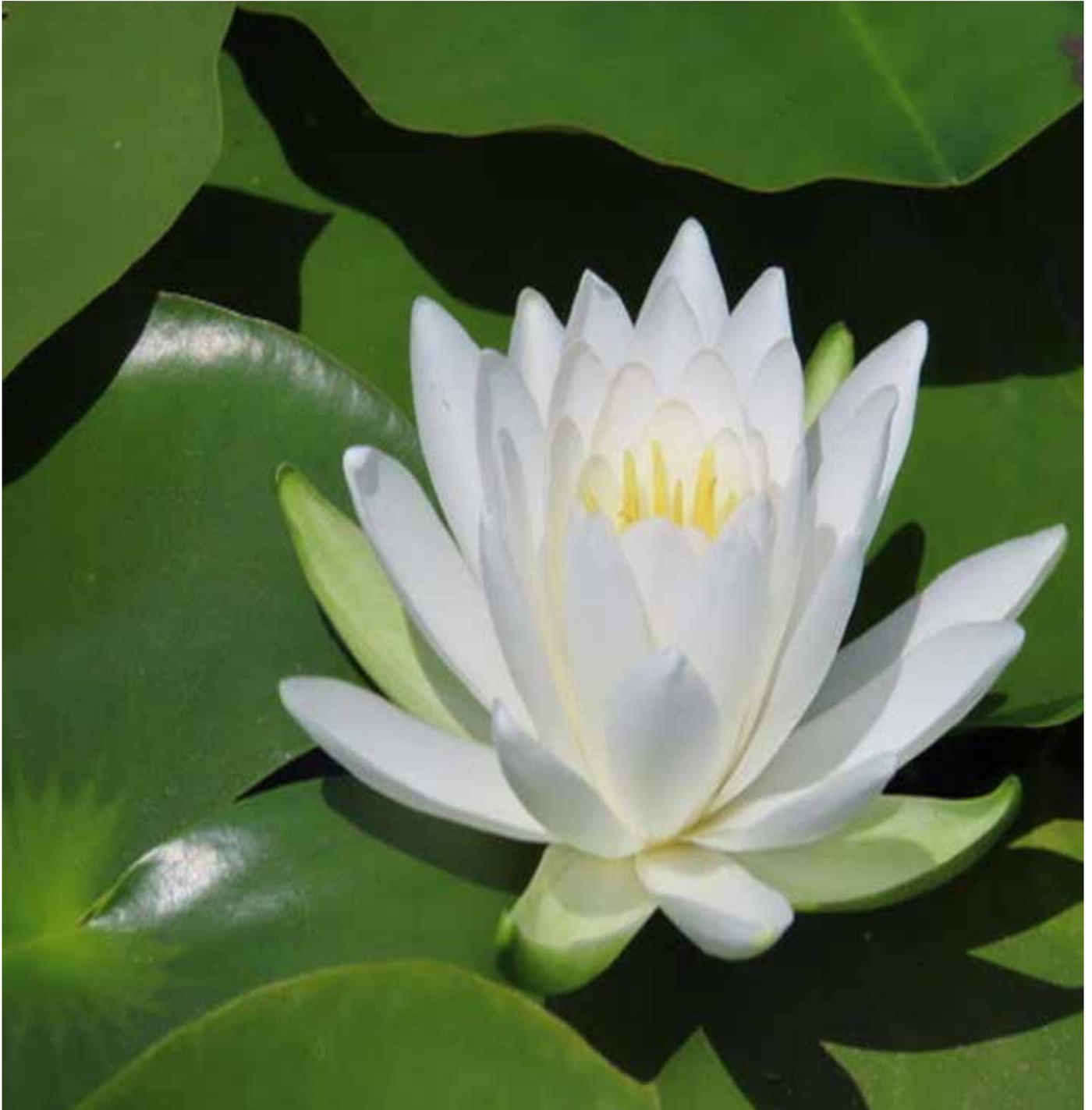


the community writing project journal

vol 1 / Premiere issue / November 2020



the necessary trouble issue

Sheila Benedis
Nakeisha Cantzlaar
Debbi Dolan
Arlene Eulalia Quiyou
Russell Evans
Nora Freeman

Deborah Maier
Christopha Moreland
Kumi Owusu
Jacqui Reason
Golda Solomon



Jacqui Reason & Golda Solomon

Dear Readers:

The Community Writing Project (TCWP) began as a non-judgmental forum for writers and artists to share and connect with each other during the global pandemic. These virtual workshops have grown organically into impassioned discourse and discussion from writers of all levels. TCWP has taken on a new life energy in the form of an online journal.

The redesigned layout is a compilation of works submitted by Yonkers residents along with neighboring and global communities of writers, who span from teens to seniors. Writers submit drafts in progress generated in workshops. Contributors give permission to gently edit and/or excerpt original works for the purpose of publication.

Interested participants are encouraged to join us monthly on second Saturdays with ArtSpeak/From Page to Performance. These workshops are partially funded by Poets & Writers.

Allow me to thank Co-Editor Jacqui Reason, memoirist and playwright, Technical Specialist and Communications Liaison, Karim Ahmed, and Director, Blue Door Art Center Michele Amaro who nurtured and supported this project from its inception and hosts it on <https://bluedoorartcenter.org>



My deepest thanks to the Blue Door Art Center family,

Golda Solomon
Poet-in-Residence



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Contributors: A Global Community of Writers & Artists

Artspeak/From Page to Performance

Artspeak/From Page to Performance meets of each monthly on 2nd Saturdays. This generative workshop is partially funded by Poets & Writers and Blue Door Art Center.

Host Golda Solomon, Poet-in-Residence and co-host Jacqui Reason

lead a supportive community of writers in exploring poetry, music and art as both teachers and learners.

"We are all artists. We are all writers. We are all poets." Golda Solomon

Through the Blue Door

Debbi Dolan

Through the Blue Door
came a fluid family of writers
willing to share their perspectives and lives.
With each meeting came deeper understanding
more learning

Golda, the glue binding us together,
accepting everyone and everything as wabi-sabi
perfectly imperfect, imperfectly perfect.

Golda, unfiltered, setting us at ease,
catapulting us into new realms,
amusing us and sculpting our work
gifting us with talented co-hosts

Golda the vessel to our introduction
Rosi Hertlein, Renaissance woman
poet and violin muse, visual artist

Jacqui Reason, relentless pursuer of materials
tales of history, music and artisans
words that quench our thirst
'prompted' to write or make art
We are so grateful



Cuba #3, collage. Golda Solomon



photo credit: Debbi Dolan

Food

Poems inspired by the vegetables grown and distributed from the Science Barge in Yonkers, New York.

The Lotus

Sheila Benedis

Roots buried in mud
Stalks and leaves emerge
From deep within the dark, still water
Stretch outward
High in the air
Toward the light
Soak up the sun
Inner strength
Lotus flowers appear
Exhilaration
Seed pods ripen
End down
Return to the muddy depths
Light to dark reflects the cycle
Transforming imperfect to beautiful
Connecting heaven to earth
Positive energy to healing
Slow, smooth, soft, serene
Perfectly imperfect

Food for Thought

Nakeisha Cantzlaar

Mister Rapsallion needs a shave
Someone near is stalking Mrs. Celery
There are plans to beet up
the lot of them
But let us deal with that later
For now, Signore may go and
arbitrate Maybe pear them off

At this time, negotiations appear
fruitful
Lettuce orange it

Royal

Christopha Moreland

Rough, brown, hairy skin belies the existence of the treat within
Sliced in two, the plump oval reveals pale sweet flesh
punctuated with circular patterns of diminutive black flecks.
Each cut surface of the golden kiwi, a mirror image of its mate.

Mellow, citrus flavored liquid oozes over fingers
scooping spoonfuls dripping onto the dish assembled below
saffron-tinted diced papaya,
tart, juicy chunks of yellow pineapple
silken slices of golden orange mango
perfectly ripened honeydew gives an incense-like aroma
succulent sacrifices
on the dessert menu of the Ancient Gods



photo: Deborah Maier

Calendula Rising

Deborah Maier

Your outside's pure dark layers
pushing through fogs of ego
tiny fistful of winey feathers.

You'll open soon to a bright bed
for any creature needing your succor,
spokes of gold round a blackish red hub.
Elegant you are, healing and edible
unexamined, you're a child's simple petulance.

But your fondest wish is to love.
When your petals revert, this time dry rust,
you hate yourself, your paltry run of glory.

O self-seeder, you'll be back.
Maybe not where you were planted, but
where there's a loam of interrelation,
regard raked in deep.



Necessary Trouble

“Ours is the struggle of a lifetime, or maybe even many lifetimes, and each one of us in every generation must do our part. Get in good trouble, necessary trouble...”

*~Representative John Lewis speaking atop
the Edmund Pettus Bridge*

Get in Good Trouble Necessary Trouble!!!

Nakeisha Cantzlaar

Is it good trouble to help the old man pick his greens during this time?

Is it good trouble that you might be a vector that can bring possible harm

Is it good to just walk away and leave him be?

Or is it good trouble to just put on your gloves and lend a hand

Good trouble has become DANGEROUS trouble

Or so it seems when your nature is to help, but now at 6 feet



Photo: Debbi Dolan

My Good Trouble

Debbi Dolan

I have seen the dissipation of childlike wonder
when the seduction of electronics pervades the mind
pods in the ears, the screens, the mediated reality

The Nature Group connects us to the natural world
shows us we are all part of this
interdependent, complex, fragile world

For six years, nature enthusiasts acted
Save the Putnam Trail
an earthen path
teeming with wildlife
traversing wetlands in Van Cortlandt Park

For many in The Bronx
sacred ground
their only access to nature

That fight was lost
but not hope

It is hard not to jump into the abyss of despair
waxing ecoelegaic

When contemplating Anthropocene era
think about the destruction of the planet
accelerating global warming and climate refugees
threatening biodiversity
presenting an existential crisis

Future generations
we must believe
individual efforts combine for positive change

Colors of The World

Golda Solomon

Only one color for Sallie Bussie then
In my Crayola box - it was black
Not the beautiful brown of her skin
My elementary friend passed
Her tone would represent now
Colors of the World
Her hue acknowledged

Contradictions

Nakeisha Cantzlaar

Fight or Flight
Flow or overflow
Drown or Swim
In this world where you
Are forced to go,
Either up the ladder
or a rung below

A Real Man

Debbi Dolan

Matt was told he wasn't a real boy
Because he didn't play football

But my man carried me into the end zone
With Trust and Truth

What did he tackle?
My stubbornness he kindly
attributed to a multi-storied brain

He guides me with kid glove tenderness
We're on the same team

My Real Man and me
Double Quarterbacks!

Photographs

Jacqui Reason

I've never been much on photographs
When I was young
and even now in my vintage years
I am hard to see

But in the days, I envision my image
head thrown back
mouth wide open
heart covered in joy

I came up in a day where
children were taught
be seen, not heard

I have lived long enough
to like the way I look and
the multiplicity of my words

I lift my head and celebrate
the beauty of mi boca grande
the sound of laughter in my throat
and the sienna of my skin



Rage

“...Rage gets stuck in the throat,
suppressed...

Rage is a promise kept.”

*From “Portrait of My Father as a
Young Black Man” from Rapture. ©
2016 by Sjohnna McCray*

The Rage Prompt

Nakeisha Cantzlaar

You are not what they expect
of an angry person
Oh! They don't know
you have control
lo and behold
controlled anger
is not the anger they can attack
when it comes planned, precise
and ten times fold!
tired you are
neutral you keep
when you are right
anger that blows your mind
upsets your plans and goals
not allowing it to impose on your soul
Tired you are!
Careful they should be!
for if they continue
You will have no mercy

Rage

Christopha Moreland

I had no recourse for the betrayal
that appeared so unexpectedly

No opportunity to discuss or diffuse
No time to reconcile
He was gone

Consequently,
wielding hammer and saw
I thoroughly destroyed the bookcase he made

Could Not Find My Tears

Christopha Moreland

Imprisoned, congealed in bitterness
forming a cave within

Abandoned, withered in some parched
unknown place

Perhaps they died a howling death or simply
languished in disuse.

Not so

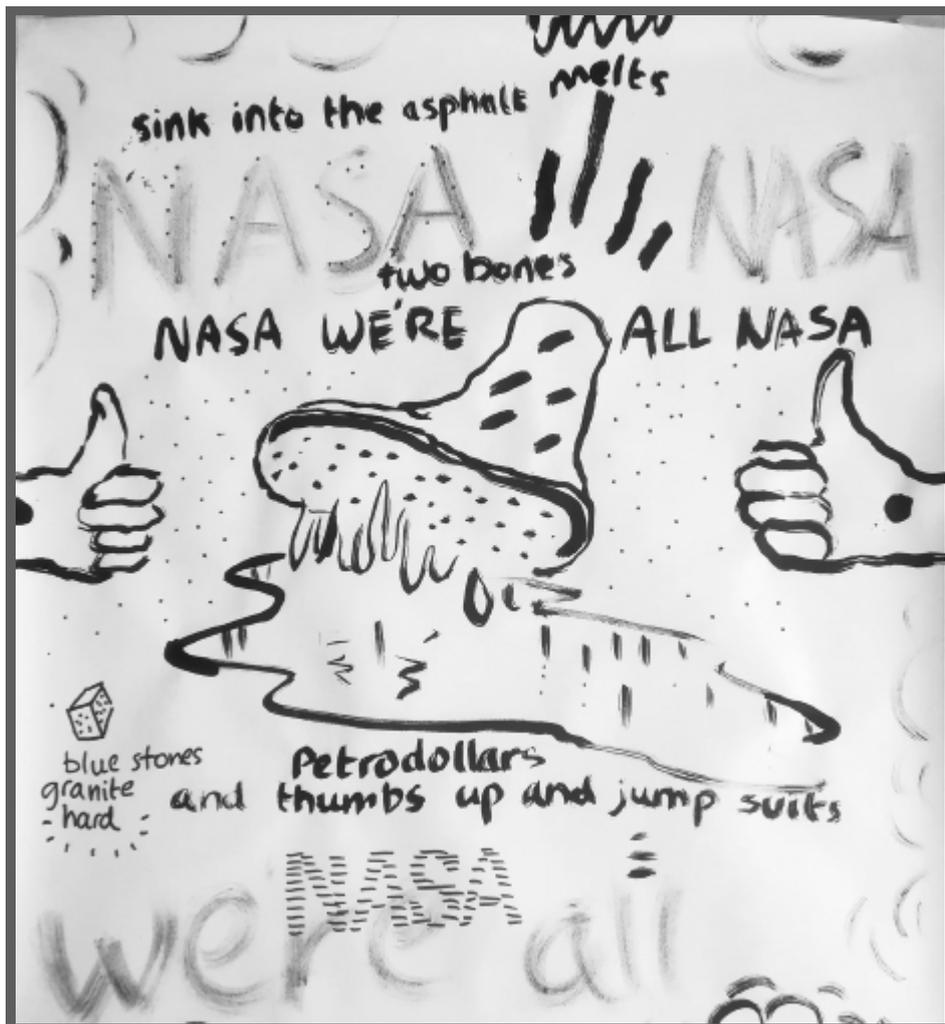
Betrayal's keen edge, icy
with surgeon's precision

Slicing deep to the edge of perception
flooding intent with stark numbness

And no healing tears

We're all NASA

Russell Evans



90cm x 80cm. Indian ink on paper

A visual poem focusing on the idea of separation and closeness as life was observed from the International Space Station webcam until the camera eye reached end of life in June 2020.

Children Wrap in Silver

Arlene Eulalia Quiyou

No more borders
Yet my island fringe in palms
Pulls me
I see the waves ripple, softly on the page.

Bright flora lines my path
Scarlet flamingos strut on soft ice

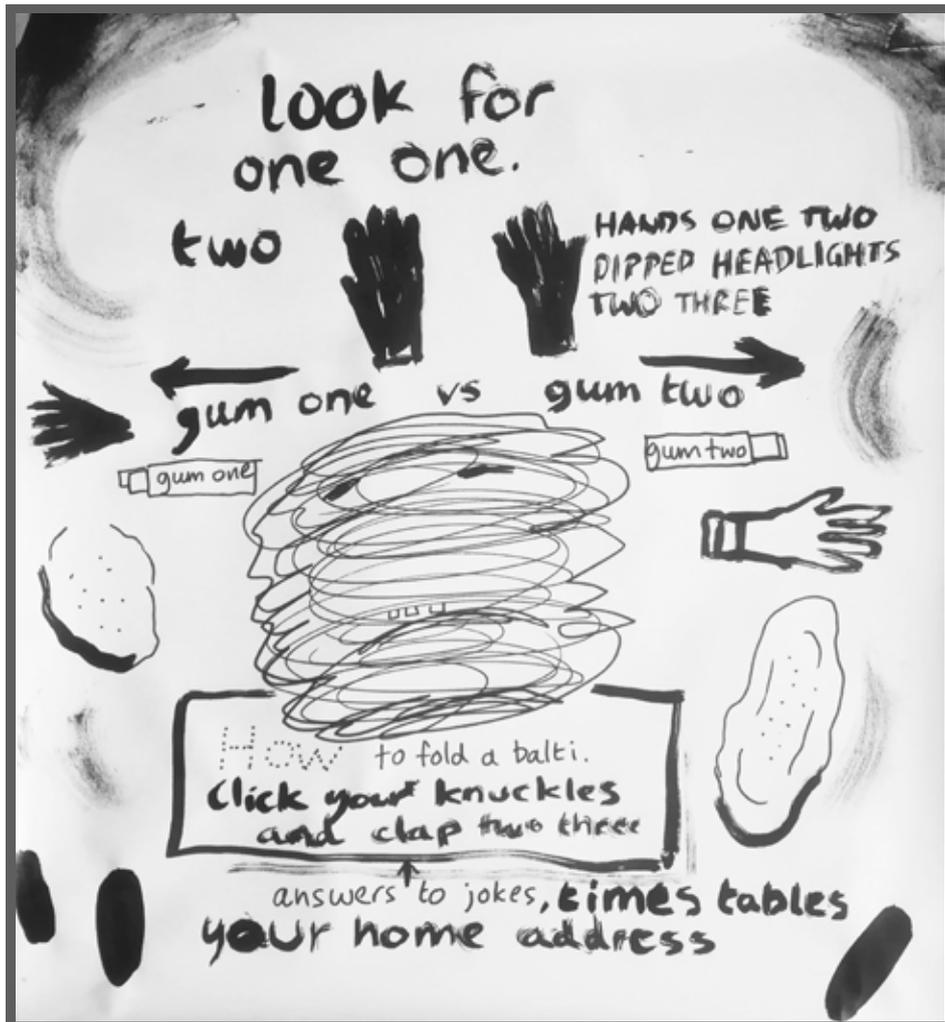
I offer salutation to the sky
Rain bathes me

In my adopted home
my Trini-American heart hurts

I plea
No more barriers with
children wrapped in silver

Gum 1 vs Gum 2

Russell Evans



90cm x 80cm. Indian ink on paper

A visual poem arising from issues of abuse, of limited opportunities and of questions that arise in an upbringing in poverty.

Room Divided by Blackboards

Arlene Eulalia Quiyou

Tingles moved up my spine
straightening my back
I refused to cry
Waiting
My hands extended
His face set determined

I refused to cry
In the room divided by blackboards
I see my friend's faces,
We just danced on the school grounds
They bowed their heads to the desk, waiting with me

I refused to cry
The whip scolded my trembling hands
Flesh swollen
Blisters throbbing
Fingers unable to write the word checked wrong

A word seared into me
Under webs of nerves and skin and bones

SURFACE

now sits next to words
that feeds me
Turning rage to fuel

Shallows

Russell Evans

breathe if I can under the river in the ripples dragonflies a mute child
a toy boat where stones drop in moonmotion bubbles rise like lemonade
I drink the river I learn to I can I learn to drink the water the waves the seeping one swallow
at a time river of furniture trucks iceboxes rope shoes
the problem is in the middle the antibaptism of surfacing no longer breathing water
stopped on top of mountains church steeples geese grey beaks drag me up
weeping under the waves is to breathe like fish no mouth no more no death no more
still alive
I dive

Bee Sting

Debbi Dolan

Class sizes were large
about 40 to a class
Discipline strictly maintained by the sisters and brothers

I had managed to avoid a private visit to the cloakroom
where the offender went in with the nun
and was paddled

We heard every stroke, every muffled
cry, saw the return to class
stinging tears of humiliation

One day, in fifth grade
as I lifted my desktop
the verdict was delivered

Messy Desk

I was yanked from my seat
by my ponytail
slapped with the sting of a bee

My classmates invited to parade
around my desk and me
like judge and jury

I felt alone
friendless
Hated by my teacher



Photo: Debbi Dolan

A Celebration of Fathers

“Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

~ *James Baldwin*

Reverence to My Father

Sheila Benedis

My Father
from an orthodox family
played football in high school

first in his family to go to college
studied law

unhappy in marriage
his wife frightened to stay at home

difficulties in his career
loss of a relationship with me

he felt distant
yet, the day before he died

he bought an insurance policy
for my college education

I did not know how much he loved me

Losing My Father

Debbi Dolan

My father, third son of Polish immigrants
my rock, my anchor, figured out
his life and took chances

Nearly drowned in the Connecticut River
hitchhiked to see the Boston Red Sox
wrote to my mother on a dare

My father, who would do anything for us
survived friendly fire in the Air Force
rescued us from a cold-water flat in the projects

My father who worked three jobs
provided vacations at the Jersey shore
showed us how to fish and body surf

My father, fiercely devoted to my mother
made it to the nursing home with his walker
by her side from morning till night

My father, a part of my whole
in his dying days called
my life a success

My father showed me how
one dies with dignity
in gratitude for a good life

My Father's Magic

Nora Freeman

In high school I signed up for an elective. Photography. I chose it because it fit my schedule, but I never really connected with it. Soon, my father became the student. He'd never shown any interest in photography but wanted to help me. He read up on it and tried to get me engaged. But I was young and stubborn -- leading a horse to water and all that.

He made an old bathroom we never used his darkroom. My dad's attic darkroom became a special place in our house: big trays filled with gallons of mysterious liquid, a persistent vinegary aroma, an enlarger that resembled a microscope, photos spread out, drying above an old bathtub with claw feet. The photographs became part of the magic my father made. I remember him in the room.

Long after the class was over, he pursued his own path without me. Photography was something I blundered him into. He bought better cameras, taking photos of family, friends, random moments that appealed to him and many, many nature scenes. There was a whole wall in the house covered with his photos.

He entered local contests and won, none as special as the memories of my father.

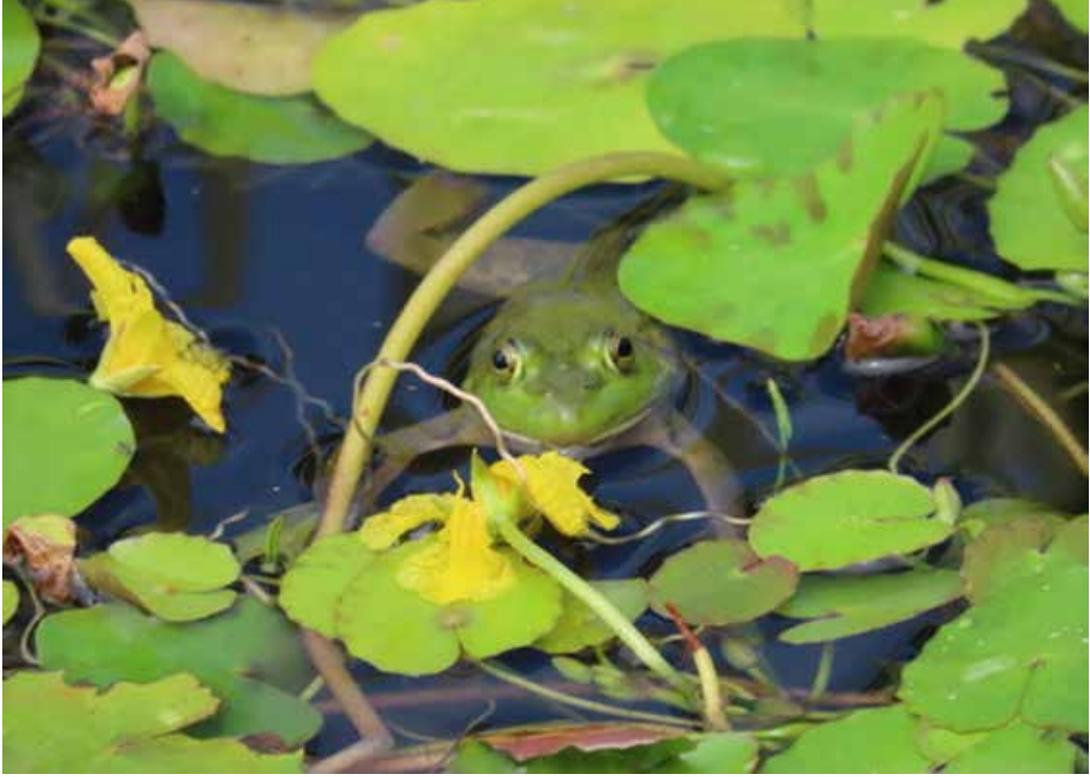


Photo: Debbi Dolan

There's No Place Like Home

Home

Sheila Benedis

Home is my identity as an artist
having time and space for creativity
no responsibility for my husband
lost in exploration
like a meditation
not a hobby
not an impersonator
not making money
my reward is satisfaction
a true accomplishment

Kumi's Home

Kumi Owuso

(Marcus John plays guitar to Maxwell's Bad Habits first verse)

I am in pursuit of my home, of my peace,
my humble abode
Mi casa es su casa for my friends

Foes who intend to lend
their dirtied hands will never reach me there

Will never see me
Carefree in my constructed heaven on earth

I want what Golda has with the Hudson
how it reminds her of everything she loves

I want to love my setting
as she loves hers

I want to love not
where I lay my head
but where my bed is able to live
its very eventful life

I want my walls to speak

You are loved

Born Ghanaian American
has taught me to be human
to cradle all my insecurities as my identity

I never have to fold
never have to shrink myself at home

Jacqui was always a girl from the Bronx
I guess I've always been too
Always destined to be built this way

Where else could I have been born
except the boogie down Bronx?
where you see black bodies fight to go away

My home will be my protest, my heart in art
A place so me
you'll have to call it by name

Aunty Kumi's House

We'll pray and be grateful
that we found each other

That we are welcomed
in one another's home

To actively participate
in love as we should

We'll thank God
for painting us
beautiful paradises in progress

Just bring yourself
as a housewarming gift

The glow of loved ones
is what keeps the lights on

2020 picked us up in a helicopter
and dropped us off

Wherever we may have fallen
home is not only the destination but the journey

If you don't see me
don't worry
I am on my way home

An Empty Space

Sheila Benedis

After Maleka Frucan

empty of culture, art, music, creativity
no drawing, no painting, no piano lessons, no concerts
emptiness led to starvation
starvation led to indulgence
many concerts in college
until i was satiated

compulsion to create art
extraordinary passion
process of creation
inspired by nature
organic shapes
earth tones
autumnal colors
texture
curiosity
self-discovery
silence
inner voice may speak
experiment
finally found my true purpose

i am a visual artist

Finding Home

Debbi Dolan

In the 80's out came the back seat of
my chevy impala cruise vessel
in went my futon mattress

In March I ventured cross country
would home call to me
in a place, yet to discover

Beside the fabled spa waters in Hot Springs, Arkansas
In the desert pueblo of Jimez, New Mexico
mile high in Denver, Colorado

Or at the base of Mt. Shasta volcano
in California many wondrous sights
fascinating people met—thrilling

My greatest discovery
my roots dug in deep
my family

My life blood
called across the miles
new york was always my home

Turquoise

Christopha Moreland

Turquoise is my go-to color
Spread liberally in my environment
silences threads of inner conversation
muddled thoughts, distracted focus

Surrounded by turquoise
I can feel heart rate slow
muscle tensions decrease
Peaceful calm settles over
I am more productive

In a kitchen corner, I look up from my writing desk
gaze captured by a large beachscape mural
Deep turquoise rippled ocean
under pale turquoise sky
receding toward infinity

If You Should Go

Countee Cullen 1903 - 1946

Love, leave me like the light,
The gently passing day;
We would not know, but for the night,
When it has slipped away.
So many hopes have fled,
Have left me but the name
Of what they were. When love is dead,
Go thou, beloved, the same.
Go quietly; a dream
When done, should leave no trace
That it has lived, except a gleam
Across the dreamer's face.

Countee Cullen b. 1903 d. 1942

An imaginative lyric poet, he wrote in the tradition of Keats and Shelley and was resistant to the new poetic techniques of the Modernists; his work represents the range of subjects and aesthetic interests that poets of the Harlem Renaissance addressed.

*This poem is in the public domain. Published in Poem-a-Day by the Academy of American Poets
(retrieved from the poets.org website)*



'Golda'
Drawing by Russell Evans

A History of ArtSpeak/From Page to Performance

ArtSpeak/From Page to Performance was conceived by Golda Solomon, Poet-in-Residence and communications professor, in response to the Blue Door Art Center's (formerly Blue Door Gallery) mission to include creative writing workshops for residents of the Yonkers, NY community and beyond. Initially, BDAC exhibitions/art served as catalyst, prompts (ekphrastic writing) and included exploring how to find writer's performance/public reading voice.

As the workshops developed and to further meet community needs, diverse authors, contemporary and classic poetic forms, discussion, and guest artists/writers/musician hosts were included in the spirited workshops.

ArtSpeak/From Page to Performance and ancillary BDAC summer writing projects would not have survived without the continuing support of Poets & Writers and collaboration with other local businesses and organizations. Writer/participants have been as young as 12 and as matured as 85 years plus.

No one is ever turned away and each writer novice or seasoned is welcomed.

“We are all artists. We are all writers. We are all poets.”





Photo: Debbi Dolan

*“Nature’s first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.”*

Robert Frost

From *Nothing Gold Can Stay*

The Poetry of Robert Frost, edited by Edward Connery Lathem

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