

## **A Father's Dreams for his Son**

*Based on the 2015 StoryCorps conversation between  
nine-year-old Aiden Sykes and his father Albert Sykes*

By Sue Shachar

Dad, do you remember -  
What went through your head  
the first time you saw me?

I remember the doctor held you,  
Like a little Sprite bottle,  
The proudest moment of my life,  
Like I was looking at a blank canvas,  
Imagining what I wanted  
the painting to look like at the end,  
But knowing that I couldn't  
control the paint strokes,  
Knowing the statistics that black boys  
born after 2002  
in Jackson, Mississippi  
had a 1 in 3 chance of going to prison.

So, Dad -  
Why do you take me to protests so much?

I take you to see  
what people look like when they come together,  
To understand  
that it's not just about people who are familiar to you,  
That the work that Martin Luther King did  
was for everybody.  
Do you understand?

Yes, I understand -  
Are you proud of me?

Of course-  
You're my man,  
I just love everything about you,  
Period, son.

The thing I love about you, Dad -  
Is that you never give up on me.  
That's one of the things I'll always  
remember most about my dad.

So, Dad -  
What are your dreams for me?

My dream for you  
is to live out your dreams.  
A proverb says -  
Children are born with their fists closed,  
Because that's where they keep their gifts.  
As you grow,  
Your hands learn to unfold,  
Because you learn to release  
your gifts to the world.  
For the rest of your life  
I want to see your hands unfolded.

# ***I Can't Breathe***

*by Sandy Silas*

*Minneapolis, Minnesota 2020*

*I can't breathe  
His knee digging into my neck  
Crushing my windpipe.  
His stance purposeful, targeted  
There are screams in the background  
Pleading for my life.*

*I can't breathe  
My pulse quickens  
Flashes of light before my eyes,  
A heaviness in my chest  
as I feel my life force giving way.*

*Auschwitz Concentration Camp 1944*

*I can't breathe  
I am surrounded by guards barking their orders  
like rabid dogs.  
My body motionless with terror  
The sweat pouring off my skeletal frame.*

*I can't breathe  
as I am shoved into a space full  
of naked bodies.  
They call these rooms the showers  
But there is no water  
only the acrid smell of gas  
as I feel my life leaking out of me.*

*Lafayette Square, Washington D.C., 2020*

*I can't breathe  
as the government sends in the military  
to silence my voice  
Tear gas searing my eyes  
Tearing at my lungs  
Trying to silence me*

*I am black, I am a Jew  
I need to speak!  
My color identifies me  
My religion shapes me.  
I am hated, herded, boxed in.  
I will survive through decades of  
Torment, intolerance and hate.  
I will demonstrate,  
I will be heard!*

## Posing for the Artist

By Julie Grass

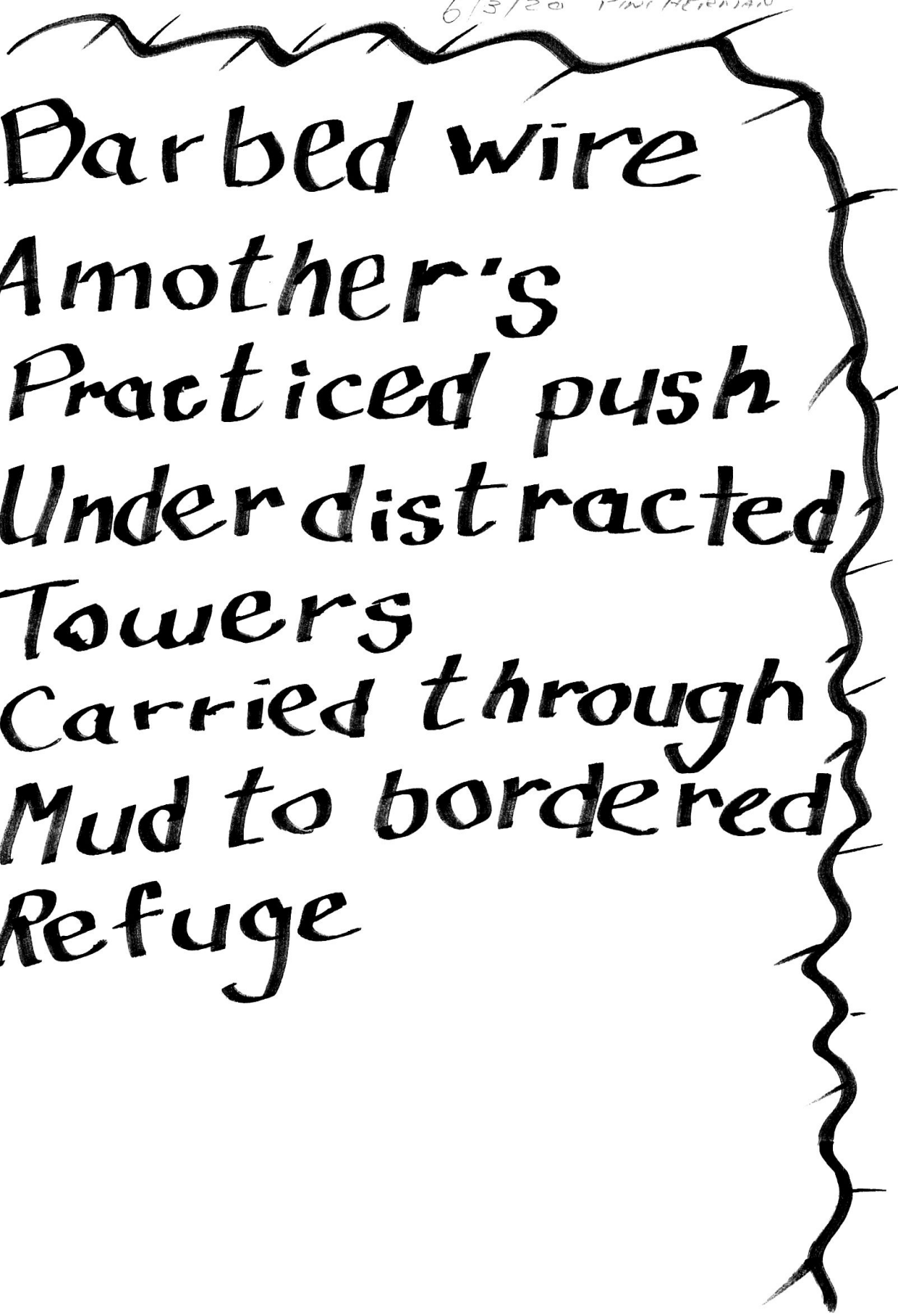
Rubens sits across from me  
surrounded by jars of brown and yellow,  
the hair on his chest is gummed with paint.  
I fill the couch belly-down,  
a thick strip of tapestry  
draped over my ankles  
and fleshy calves  
while he transfers me to canvas.  
I eat from a saucer of dried figs,  
platters of Belgian chocolates  
drizzled on flat squares of shortbread,  
fruit tarts of strawberry topped with lemon custard  
and cashews soaked in brandy.



He paints in the nude,  
this artistic giant,  
wearing nothing but thick woolen socks  
and a bandage on his left knee,  
so intent he doesn't recognize his own erection.  
He is stymied by the curve in the small of my back,  
touches it with fingers, fills it with tepid water  
as if it were a holding pool.  
He rearranges my middle  
and watches the folds in my back create new shapes,  
unpins the braid coiled on my head,  
splays the hair with his fingers until it opens  
like a blanket to cover my shoulders and neck.  
I love to be touched.

Through these months of working with Rubens,  
I now see the roundness of my bosom,  
the heft of my thighs, celebrated  
in layers of oil on his canvas,  
sharing his bed and meals of creamed potato,  
charred leg of lamb  
and warm honeyed sherry,  
I've grown fond of us both.

6/3/20 Pini Herman



Barbed wire  
Another's  
Practiced push  
Under distracted  
Towers  
Carried through  
Mud to bordered  
Refuge

A father's  
Ache toiled  
Shoulders  
Stinging with  
Weight of  
other son  
Lost behind  
Barbed wire  
Resilient sons  
Will be raised

6/13/20 Pini Herman



## **Feminist Come Lately**

By Barbara Meltzer

A hard-core mystery fan, I longed to be Della Street.  
Became super secretary, okay in those days, then veered away from law and  
Perry and found my way to Johnny Carson

Serious, skilled and shapely with long and bountiful hair,  
I walked into my Tonight Show job, a pre-#metoo world  
during feminism's 2<sup>nd</sup> wave.

What I thought was silly and annoying, would today be  
called harassment. "Please take your arm from around  
my shoulder; My name is Barbara, not babe."

Never admitted to being a feminist. Even when Gloria Steinman  
was a guest on the show. Never Bella Abzug, never Betty Friedan. Always Gloria.  
Smart, eloquent, and beautiful, with her long hair  
and clingy Pucci dresses. Men longed for her; I longed to be her.

I used to feel invisible. Easy for someone who in her youth kept construction  
workers on their feet hooting and hollering  
while they should have been hammering and hoisting.

Now a proud feminist, an advocate for purposeful and healthy  
aging and a community leader. Now with my hair streaked with gray  
and no longer bountiful; now with a loss of two  
inches from my height causing the loss of my waistline,  
I march into the future standing tall.

**The Mind**  
By Mimi Reisbaum

The Mind is a wonderful thing.  
Sources of new information make my Mind ring.  
My Mind thrives on lectures that ChaiVillageLA brings.

Lectures on Israel abound.  
Steve has been so Enlightening to have around.  
New info on the Balkan Jews,  
42,000 who escaped Nazi abuse.

Devorah and Talia a huge Thank You,  
For everything that you do.  
ChaiVillageLA has kept my Mind busy,  
While the whole World has been in a tizzy.

Also, Ruth Weisberg, a Big Thank You,  
For the beautiful Poetry and all that you do,

The Mind is a wonderful thing,  
I'm so thankful for the Joy and Knowledge it can bring.

## When Will It End?

By Caroline Bloxsom

It's a constant lament in these times.

In fright we plead it, sheltering against our unseen enemy.

When our western medicine brews its vaccine potion,

We'll sigh, "At last, it's over."

But is it?

In grieving rage, we shout it, marching to end racism.

When our justice system turns over, vowing to serve us all,

We'll sigh, "At last, we're equal."

But are we?

In a poisoned world, we cough it, warning of our impending extinction.

When our modern science magically undoes the toxic damage,

We'll sigh, "See, all better now."

But is it?

When will it end?

We'll never stop asking.

We'll never know.

**Decamerone**  
By Ruth Weisberg

Yes, we are seven ladies,  
O.K. a few more,  
and two or three gallant gentlemen  
in 1349.

*Tre Cento Quaranta Nove.*  
We are passing the time,  
in *Firenze*,  
trying to outwit  
an epidemic.  
We are telling tall stories  
and writing poetry.

Time please pass  
so we can write our poetry  
in the year 2020.  
Another pandemic has hit.  
We are sequestered at home,  
a long way from *Firenze*,  
and feeling *abbandonata* and alone.  
So we try the grid  
We're telling our stories again  
and, *come sempre*,  
we're writing poetry.