

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
Amother's
Practiced push
Underdistracted
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 2nd 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.