



**With Dedication:**  
New Poems

**May-June 2020**

Boston, MA

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## **To You**

To sit and dream, to sit and read,  
To sit and learn about the world  
Outside of our world of here and now—  
    our problem world—  
To dream of vast horizons of the soul  
Through dreams made whole,  
Unfettered free—help me!  
All you who are dreamers, too,  
Help me make our world anew.  
I reach out my hands to you.

- Langston Hughes



Dear Reader,

Participants in our “With Dedication” workshop met across five weeks to discuss and write poetry that would recognize, celebrate, and elevate significant people in their families, communities, and lineages.

We met in an online classroom since public spaces were closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. At a time when social interaction was severely limited, we unmasked in front of our screens, and practiced praising our particular language—and each other.

Some of these poems took the form of dedication proposed by the workshop; others followed conduits that beckoned more urgently.

Shortly after our second meeting on May 25, Minneapolis police killed George Floyd. Video of the killing ignited protests across the nation and world.

Part of poetry’s power is that it can speak to readers of any time or place. Yet all poets write in specific times and places. It feels important to note the larger context of where and when these poems were crafted.

Langston Hughes’ “problem world” remains our world; the tools of reading, learning, and dreaming are yet how we “make our world anew.”

Our book opens with Ayoka Drake’s “Freedom” breaking the “rools” of spelling. Answering Hughes’ call to realize dreams “unfettered, free,” Drake demonstrates that poets must do the work of dismantling in order to find truth in new language. Each poet of “With Dedication” does this in their own way: making sense through the five senses, forging together a truly original collection.

The book closes with Abria Smith’s pair of “delicate copper leaf earrings,” an image that speaks of craft and achievement. Like the poetry herein, what was once “raw / Unimagined” has been “etched” into something tangible, beautiful, and enduring.

We hope that you enjoy reading, and that you find within, perhaps, seeds for your own language to grow from.

Aaron Devine  
“With Dedication” workshop instructor



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## Freedom

By Ayoka Drake

I wanted to write a poem about freedom.  
See, there you go thinking it would follow some rules  
Perhaps it would if I had the rules  
What if I were free to be  
And have fun  
And be black  
And rap  
And not be judged  
But no, I must conform  
To the norm  
To be considered normal  
And not be angry  
Or a bitch  
Or aggressive  
Isn't that a wild pitch  
I'm not expected to strike it rich  
Or they'll flip the switch  
I want to be one of the "good ones"  
You no, educated and proper  
Know how to act  
Not one of the ones with one wrong look will give you a smack  
I want to be your neighbor, in any neighborhood I choose  
But because of your red lines I lose  
So what do I get to choose?  
How to survive  
How to stay alive  
If I'm lucky, I'll thrive.

## **Boarded Up**

By Ayoka Drake

I feel boarded up  
Wood planks all over  
Nailed together to keep me in  
Keep me safe  
Or keep others out  
Am I a boarded storefront or building? An apartment?  
Or ... am I really free, with wood just around me?  
Can I spring free at any time?  
Can I peek through and climb, like it's a playground?  
I'm so confused about where I am  
It's dark in here  
I'm kind of scared  
I want to live in this darkness no more  
Oh look! There's sunlight! I've found a door!!

## **Happy Apocalypse!**

By Martin Rodriguez

And merry good wishes  
to all my friends alive  
on other planets!

I know you are worried  
about me, stranded here  
on Earth like Robinson Crusoe

the only human left alive  
surrounded by mindless  
maskless killer zombies

capable of destroying me  
with a single virus-infected  
breath! But you mustn't.

It's not that bad.  
I am getting better  
at dodging them.

## June, 1954

By Martin Rodriguez

It began then. My parent's "love."  
I try to imagine it: the soundtrack  
to the sprouting of our family insanity:  
was it a favorite song of my mother's?  
*Lord, what a difference a day makes,*  
Jimmy Dorsey on clarinet, Tommy  
on the trombone, Bing Crosby singing:  
*That thrilling kiss.*

I want to travel back in time to warn her,  
argue myself out of existence, I know.  
"He could charm the pants off a nun."  
my father's sister told my mother, and  
my grandmother flicked her house lights  
on and off, on and off, if my mother lingered  
out front too long with him, listening  
to his flattery, admiring the shine  
made by the Vitalis in his black hair.

If nothing else, there were the drinks.  
Another beer, another shot, the ice cubes  
in my father's highballs clinking gentle  
alarms, all ignored by my mother,  
the blonde haired, virgin beauty queen.  
I try to imagine my mother's surrendering  
as if I were reconstructing a crime scene  
but I can only remember her eyes blank,  
sullen faced, her perpetual martyred stare.

## Reunion

By Carolyn Jackson

It has been too long, so long  
But that's how I am  
that's how I do  
Weaving long distances spaced with pregnant absences  
resembling that bridge tunnel bracing the Chesapeake Bay shore  
You and me meeting at an architect's dream-built glass and steel  
around and through and over that sterling forest  
You were a handful back then  
wild and free  
exploring those things that mothers wag fingers at  
we shared same thoughts  
but expressed them so differently:  
yours express as straight-up fun; mine were sneakily camouflaged unsanctioned missions  
Time caught up to you  
It not so gently peeled back Life's clenched fingers revealing the priceless gem: you,  
the devoted offspring  
patiently enduring mother  
ever present sibling  
unconditionally loving friend who has always hidden my  
absences  
in forgiveness shawled by kindness  
Today, your voice is comfortable and easy  
Time has tarnished nothing between us  
Then I hear the word  
My mind paused then rewound then re-played a split second of our reunion  
hearing "chemo" dripping off your lip, suspended on the air  
then folding itself into the other words circling my head

a ping pong ball sized silence seized my throat  
speechless  
swallow or cough isn't the issue to regain breath  
guilt stealthily appeared  
landing a punch to my gut  
Cowardice piggybacked onto the pain  
I'm afraid  
of losing someone I left too long ago for no reason  
I thought I'd forgotten you, being me, the child easily distracted by new shiny people  
but it was me I'd lost  
because I just realized you've always been in that place within me,  
I reserved for my dearest reflections of self. I don't recognize me, but you sound the same. Like  
family. I'm not leaving again,  
here, to pick up the pieces, to learn to hold the place you've held all this time for us, *my friend*.

## **Mr. Hackenrodt**

By Joyce Smith

The task was approaching with no time to waste,  
so you planted seeds to build up your case.

Higher, and higher your zest carries me like a kite,  
while your spirit wandered to take flight.

Your tender words were nothing but true,  
so how could I go on being blue.

The winds of time have scattered me to and fro,  
but your essence remains no matter which way I go.

Your beautiful gems that shine so bright  
have cultivated me for the rest of my life.

## **Journey**

By Joyce Smith

Sometimes I feel like a traveler in a distant land  
Your outside beauty & framework is at hand

Your radiant yellows shining so bright  
Your blushing blues gave me a fright

Your mesmerizing purples are such a delight  
How could you jog by without any delight?

Listen closely and you will hear  
the echoes of buildings in your ear

Once I was pretty & so-so kind  
But today I'm covered all over in vine

Michelangelo pallet whispers with glee  
for the 16th chapel walls for you to see.  
Towers cheer higher and higher with no degree

## **My Saige—My First**

By Candelaria Norma Silva

I see you first; I see you emerge and begin.  
I see you running to me as a toddler  
Your broad smile and unbridled enthusiasm  
I see you laying your head on my shoulder on the Ashmont train  
The gentleman across the way joyfully proclaimed: Aren't grands the best?  
*Yes!*

I see you climbing on every ledge as we walk up the hill  
Jumping from ledge to steps  
And around bushes that occasionally interrupt.  
The drudgery of the hill vanishes because of your energy  
I walk faster, too.  
*You!*

I see how beautifully colors look on the warm brown canvas of your skin  
Everything has to match: socks, shoes, ribbons  
Each summer your legs get longer,  
Your questions bolder, your curiosity stronger  
Why this, why not that, can we, Grandi, can we?  
*Yes!*

Every summer your hair changes  
Now a wardrobe of beads or bows, now crazy curls when you cut your locs,  
One day straightened, you almost break your neck as you flip it all around.  
Then back natural and dyed bright red at the top  
(I can't believe your mother let you do that!)  
*Stop!*

Saige you've aged to two digits, you'll never be a single digit again  
You are quieter now  
You hold my hand but you don't run toward me, you stride pass the ledges  
You don't bring your dolls when you visit  
You don't smile because of your braces.  
*No!*

And now you're a teen  
Crossing the bridge from girl to woman  
Your body becomes seen  
What will teen mean for you?  
Can I keep you hidden though you are in plain sight?  
*Please?*

I want you to know how much I cherish you,  
How terrific you are; how talented

I carry you with me.

I want you to never undervalue yourself,

To know that even in these times when we don't know what might happen next...

What?

You can be sure of my love, my commitment, my protection and prayer, my acceptance even when I push you to do more

My house is forever your home.

It is your sanctuary, your refuge, your vacation, your break.

You are loved, cherished, treasured, adored, admired, cheered, supported, elevated, and increased

You!

My first and forever Saige.

Grandi

## **4 Years Apart**

By Marissa Ferreyros

In the beginning the divide felt large,  
You were a newborn, and for a while everything was hard.

But that feeling didn't last long,  
Because sharing a space forced us into a strong bond.

Each night in our bunk bed you would ask, "Will you protect me?"  
I'd earnestly promise so that you could fall asleep.

I left home at 17 and didn't realize how time would seemingly change,  
Once I came back, we felt like the same age.

Those 4 years between us have melted away,  
So that now we can protect each other, and I hope that is how time will stay.

## **The Ripple Effect** (after “This is My Heart” by Joy Harjo)

By Marissa Ferreyros

These are my legs:  
Fire spreading,  
One, two, all consuming,  
Only a few more steps.  
Reminding me,  
Keep moving forward.

These are my lungs:  
Branches spreading far,  
Straining to swell.  
I breathe slowly,  
My focus on the rhythm.  
Reminding me,  
Take control.

These are my shoulders:  
Tense and tangled,  
Dull throbbing and rigid contorting,  
Only a gentle but firm grip brings release.  
Reminding me,  
Seek help from others.

These are my arms:  
Piercing electricity,  
Pins and needles.  
Ebbing and flowing,  
Descending through my hands.  
Reminding me,  
Practice acceptance.

The culprit resides in my own body,  
Aging my soul.  
It’s unforgiving, unrelenting, and inescapable.  
Missing the privilege of vigor and youth,  
Always trying to preserve something that is already gone,

But –

The insight is priceless.  
Forcing me to rethink who I am  
And what I am capable of accomplishing,  
An endless circle of introspection.  
Reminding me,  
Be thoughtful and compassionate in every moment.

## **The Paradox**

By Jered McInerney

Falling fast,  
I faceplanted in the freshly cut grass.  
Standing up to sprint again,  
Not far behind now... "Tag!"

Suburbia brings me back  
To Saturdays I was hungry  
But more hungry for fun than food,  
Finding friends by proximity.

I go back, in little moments,  
Through memories I almost missed,  
Rays of light lifting my solar sails, forming my visage  
It's a privilege, a reminder...

Every community is a paradox:  
Keys to a world of bagels and lox  
But not the whole world, just a part.  
So break the other locks!

## Quilling

By Jered McInerney

I have been spiraled,  
Bent backwards around  
And curving for miles,  
being stretched and bound.

I look as cinnamon sticks smell,  
...and look. I am a strip of paper,  
And you can tell  
How similar I am to my next door neighbor.

Glue me to my Siamese twin  
Not close to finished, but getting there  
And fix me with your steady pin  
So my twisting image whispers like air.

I'll whisk you away when you finish me  
To places you will want to see  
And fill your heart with joy and whimsy  
Like familiar rhymes falling naturally

## Three Little Christmas Party Pigs

By Helen Greer-Guilford

Three days before Christmas Mass at a party committee meeting.  
Winston, a member of St. Kitts Beach Combers Club.  
Declared a little roly poly suckling pig for roasting would soon be there.  
But to his surprise the pig arrived, was too old, too lean, no meat was seen.  
It is two days before the party, what shall we do?  
I know! someone shouted, get pig number two.  
Pig number two came with some of the same problems as pig number one.  
Disappointed, it is true this pig number two will never do.  
Longing and hoping the menu would include a roast pig as the party day drew near  
Roast pig is out—only chicken, lamb, and fish will be here.  
Our fears confirm from statements heard the taste for that roast pig we no longer share.  
Sunday Party Day is here.  
Driving to Major's Bay Beach and approaching Mermaid Cove.  
The aromatic sweet-smelling aroma admitted from spices engulfs and permeates the air.  
Droplets of fat made hissing cracking sounds as pig number three turns slowly roasting on a  
handmade spit deep in the sandy ground.  
Gastric juices start flowing, mouths start watering while waiting for the eight hour roasting to end.  
There was swimming, water-sports, snorkeling and assorted games to play.  
Santa Claus was there, with presents for all.  
We sang a few songs I do recall.  
There was plenty to eat and drink.  
Hors d'oeuvre of every kind.  
Authentic Caribbean Dishes: fritters, plantains, dumplings, and curry goat just to name a few.  
Liquid refreshments: soft and hard, sorrel and goat water. I do not remember the names of them all.  
Desserts all kinds of cakes, puddings, pies, and cookies too.  
To pig number three, I would like to say:  
You are the one; your roast made and saved our day.

## **Mr. J. Riley (aka The Swatter)**

By Helen Greer-Guilford

Mr. Riley is one of the warmest, friendliest and most sociable people you will ever meet. Every man, woman and child hails and happily greets him by name as he goes down the street. He gives of himself in every way he can, never says no to anyone in need. He's always doing very good deeds.

He needs no excuse, this party planning man, hosting every Sunday afternoon beach parties at Majors Bay's, Mermaid Cove tropical sands. With swimming, water-sports, snorkeling too and fun-full games to play are waiting for you. Liquid refreshments of every kind and plenty of authentic Caribbean pot luck foods to eat. O what a treat.

But look out flies, mosquitos too, your executioner with fury is waiting for you. He spares no mercy at all; armed with his trusty swatters he will instantly kill you all.

Big swatters, small ones and fat ones, he has them all just for you.

His electronic ones are big as tennis rackets with strings that zap with a buzz as it kills its prey.

He also has a telescopic swatter that springs out to 28 inches making it possible for him to catch any flying insect in its flight.

No, I would never like to be a bug of any kind on Cousin J. Riley's wall.

This kind, gentle, loving man becomes a vengeful bug killer.

I know not which swatter he might choose to squash me on his wall and see me fall.

## White Rage

By Willie Wideman-Pleasants

My Ears lock into the echoes of thousands  
crying, "Another Black victim killed,  
White-on-Black crime by *the Uniform Blue*"  
that should protect me and you.

My Eyes saw his action as premeditated hate  
with feet on neck for 8 minutes delay.  
"Code of Silence," that invisible hate  
like a snake that spews out venom,  
the very hate that goes astray.

My face, Black faces  
beaten beyond recognition,  
tortured until life was forced to die,  
human dogs with deep rooted anger.  
When will Blacks be able to FLY?

My back aches with years of persecution.  
Held down by privileged whites' institution  
that begrudges Black's restitution.

My feet are tired of walking back and forth  
with laws that go back and forth.  
Protests that wrap around a century of  
miles of walking with signs on endless roads  
Just to get right back where we started,  
to start all over again. "I - am - so - tired."

Tired of being the pawn in your game. Helping  
you build wealth, helping you advance your careers,  
helping to win the elections, helping to build this country,  
for the elite that deny constitutional rights.

Break the systematic generational pull of hate  
Eradicate laws that denigrate,  
Like mandatory sentences for felony crimes,  
Racial profiling, stop redlining.

Stop burning down our black wall streets,  
which keep us economically poor.  
Stop your Black Codes of sin,  
Our fight is for J U S T I C E, a historical win.

## Recognize

By Willie Wideman-Pleasants

Hamburgers, fries and a glass of wine,  
High heels, bowlegs and standing in lines  
Lines that wasted time.  
Even without rain, I think of you.

Late mornings with rested eyes,  
With notebook of sideline memories.  
Held just thoughts.  
Like unplanted flower buds.  
Buds that never get to bloom.  
To leave a sweet smell in a room.

What I want to ask is what can I do in your presence?  
What I want to ask is, what will it take,  
to draw out the sour taste of indolent.  
What I want to ask is did you ever feel  
your life could have been better?  
What I want to ask is, when will you recognize...  
It's you?

**This is Me** (after “This is My Heart” by Joy Harjo)

By Abria Smith

This my chest  
Chockfull of bottled up emotions  
Rage and pain like water and sand  
Wearing away the protective cage around my heart  
Love that warms and fills hollowed out spaces

These are my shoulders  
They bear the weight of regret  
And still hold space for a sorrowful head  
To shed tears

This is my belly  
Fluttering  
Made queasy by chaos and injustice  
But always finding nourishment  
In the good that exists

This is my back  
Bent by the burden  
Of knowledge and experience  
But fortified by hope

This is me.  
Even through adversity, I persist.

## **Copper Leaf Earrings**

By Abria Smith

I was once raw  
Unimagined and full of possibility  
Like the hands that shaped me  
Powerful hands that never ceased to create

I'd bend, twisting in surrender  
Forged by the music and art of those hands  
Every hammer strike releasing notes  
Of pain, loss, joy, love

Every etched line, complex  
Like the stories revealed in the lines on those hands  
Hands strong enough to move mountains  
Yet gentle, patient and skillful enough to create me

A delicate pair of copper leaf earrings.



## With Dedication: Writing Poems to and for Other People

Mondays online, 8-9:15PM from May 18 – June 15

Instructor: Aaron Devine

### FEATURED POEMS

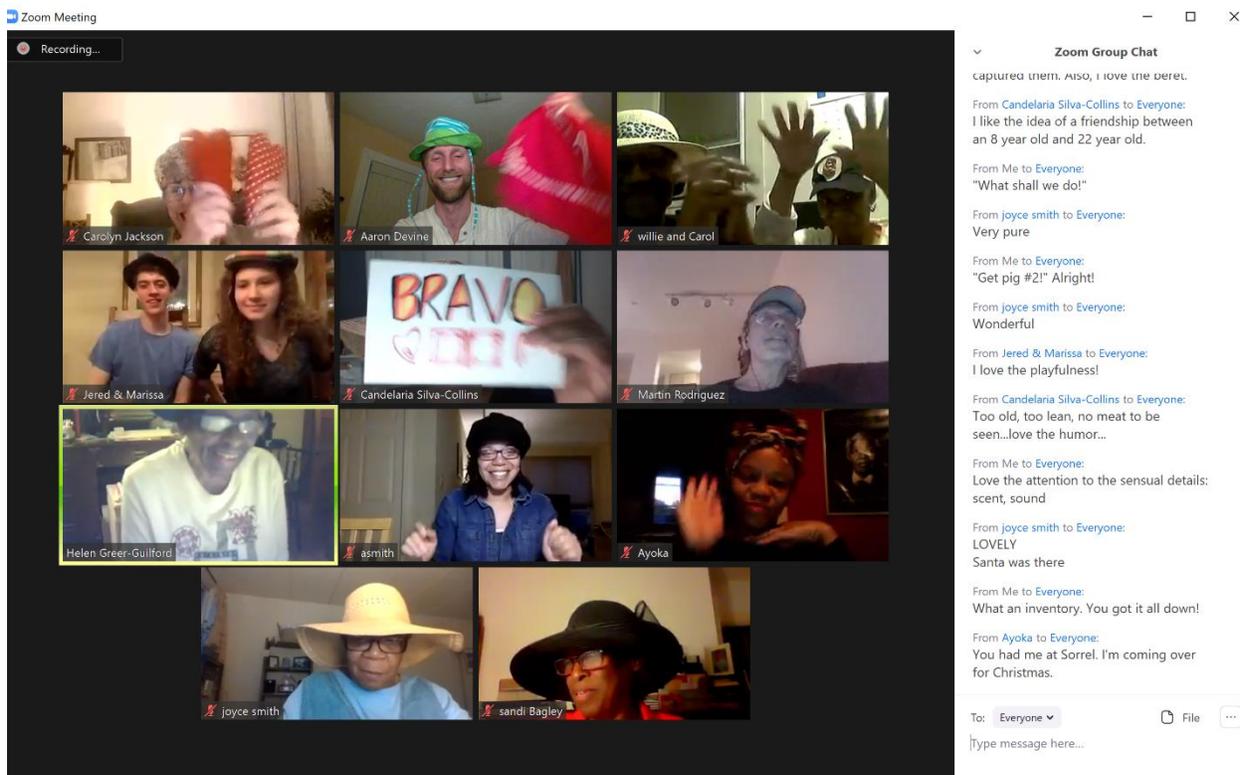
*(To Loved Ones/Family)* “Mermaid Song” by Kim Addonizio, for Aya; “You Therefore” by Reginald Shephard, for Robert Philen; “For K.J., Leaving and Coming Back” by Marilyn Hacker; “To Fanny” by John Keats; “For Love,” by Robert Creeley, for Bobbie; “Fury” by Lucille Clifton; “Tamara’s Opus” and “Carbon Copy” by Joshua Bennett; “Poem for Charles’ Birthday, September 25” by Sandra Kohler; *(To Friendship)* “The Rare Birds,” By Amiri Baraka, for Ted Berrigan; “Sunday Morning” by Ted Berrigan for Lou Reed; “The Armadillo” by Elizabeth Bishop for Robert Lowell; “Latin & Soul” by Victor Hernández Cruz, for Joe Bataan; “Quilts” by Nikki Giovanni, for Sally Sellers; “In the Library,” by Charles Simic for Octavio; *(To One’s Community/People)* “For My People” by Margaret Walker; “A Remix for Remembrance” by Kristiana Rae Colón; “Shake the Dust” by Anis Mojgani; “Shrinking Women” by Lily Myers; “Unsolicited Advice to Adolescent Girls with Crooked Teeth and Pink Hair” by Jeanann Verlee; “Unsolicited Advice (after Jeanann Verlee)” by Tonya Ingram; “Like Totally Whatever” by Melissa Lozada-Oliva (in response to Taylor Mali’s “Totally, Like Whatever, You Know”); *(More Poems of Dedication)* “Someday I’ll Love Ocean Vuong” by Ocean Vuong, “Letter to a Playground Bully” by Andrea Gibson; “Spring and Fall: To a Young Child” by Gerard Manly Hopkins; “Dedication” by Czeslaw Milosz; “Sidewalk: For Sybrina Fulton” by Krysten Hill; “Blizzard Poem: For the Boston Yeti” by Aaron Devine.

### WRITING PROMPTS

*(Week One)* Write a poem dedicated to a loved one or family member (you may define these terms as you understand them). Leave an impression of their character using imagery and detail. You might let the poem’s emotion come from these details (without stating it directly). You may use free verse or emulate another poem’s structure. *(Week Two)* Write a poem dedicated to a friend or friendship. Give this poem a particular setting in place and/or time. Play with sound as you write; create complementary and dissonant sounds that work with or against the emotions of the poem. *(Week Three)* Write a poem dedicated to a community, lineage, or other kind of “people” that you belong to, value, or want to uplift. Find a voice or tone that can catch their attention, break through the noise, and transmit a necessary feeling. Show them how well you recognize them; tell them something vital they must hear. Decide if you need to tell it directly or indirectly, through what your speaker says or what your speaker leaves out.

### SPECIAL THANKS

To the Fellowes Athenaeum Trust Fund of the Boston Public Library for supporting this and other programs that inspire arts and community.



Participants read and celebrate their poems (using non-verbal applause while muted) during the “With Dedication” workshop’s closing reading, June 15, 2020.