

From Our Hearts: Poems by the Image Spinners

Jo Clifton, Jan Eisenhard, Lois Hayward, JoAnn Nelson, Toby Saken, Nila Tanner,
and Nillofur Zobairi

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Riding the Waves

Riding a raft on the rough waves
Of ancient bias and prejudice
The gulf we're on seems endless
We see not, nor hear the cries of our fellows.
We hang tightly to old cracked boards,
Fearful of perishing from letting go of old ways.

We glimpse a child reaching out for a lifeboat
Someone not seen before offering a hand,
Love and compassion in a foreign tongue,
We suddenly know of the oneness of man
And relax the desperate grip of our minds
Ride the waves now bathed in new light,
Confident knowing we will cross the gulf.

Jo Clifton

Ouiji Board Man

My father lived on close terms with God
the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. I believed
in all of them, especially my father.
He said the suffering Christ
in the old carved frame
sometimes opened his eyes.
More than once I narrowed my field of vision
and stared until my eyes ached
and the hatched lines began to vibrate.
I could even see the warp and weave
of the ivory paper and the eyes didn't open
but time stopped and the darkening room
filled with the ghostly presence
of the Ouiji Board Man.
I didn't discuss this with my father.
I thought he had enough to worry about.

Lois Hayward

Old Nightmare

She is old. Very old.
In the gray-brown fog of memory
she shimmers like a mirage:
Gray and brown and very old.
My first remembered nightmare.
Bent almost double, she picks up brownny-gray dry twigs
and crackling ancient skeletons of leaves
off ground as cold and hard as lead.
She forces sticks and crumbling leaves
into her large jute sack
and, crouching even lower, creeping slowly, she moves on and on.
And I in terror stand still because
some older child has told me in the sack are children
whom she cooks and eats.
Although I see her pick the sticks and put them in the sack
I think one day she will take me.
My first nightmare is me
in a sack
in blackness

and when she opens up the sack
her eyes blaze red;
her dry white hair stands up around her head.

Looking back through time I wonder why
I was so scared. I saw her every day by the side of the road
bent low above her small stone oven. I even took fat golden corn kernels
for her to hide in hot gray-black sand
to turn into mouth melting popcorn
frothy and white as clouds.
I loved to watch her coax
the flames beneath her kiln
with her tattered brown cane fan,
and sift the magic curly whiteness from
the fineness of gray sand that poured
like rain back on scorched earth and stone.
I loved her magic; yet my childish mind
separated her good magic from imagined bad
and saw my own destruction, not her meager state:
for what else but yourself is there
when you are only three?

I look at her through mists of time
and wonder: will some three-year-old one day
look at me
and tremble at the nimbus dark with some magic
that she sees
surrounding me?

Nillofur Zobairi

Lost Innocence

Her skin, the color of burnt sugar is from her father.
Her soulful green eyes from her mother.
And her sense of self preservation
must be from a higher power.
These things she has been given
But taken, was her innocence.

Ten years old and already a victim of life's cruelty.
Let down by a society overwhelmed by its victims.
Was society to blame.

Not directly.
Did her parents prove their love.
Not by a long shot.

She is just one of many wounded children who have crossed my path
But her spirit has touched my life.
She arrived bruised but intact
and surprisingly strong.
Against all odds.

What sustains her
in a world filled with deceit and degradation.
It is dreams of the future.

I do what I can
But some things are out of my hands.
I can only hope that the hands of fate
step in to rescue her once more.

Jan Eisenhard

Oh Suzy Q

It was malignant
They cut off your breast.
You were hopeful
and bought a prosthesis
from the lady who makes her living
selling replacement body parts

It was hot and heavy
"Who needs breasts", you said
when they took the remaining vestige of your womanhood
You laughed
and bought a padded bra.

Then came the tumors in your brain
More poisons unable to tell the difference
between the cells you needed to think
and those that wanted to eat your brain.

Your hair fell out
I cried.
Other people have hair;
you had satin coils twirling to your shoulders
You bought a wig.

We went out to dinner
You took your bald head
and steroid swollen face
We helped you walk
We cut your food
Your hands trembled
Your dinner didn't want to stay in your mouth
Stranger stared and moved out of your way
You said, "Everyone has their time.
Now it's mine. Someday it will be yours."
You bought a morphine pump.

You never did learn to walk again
remember my phone number or that I had called
The insatiable plague invaded your bones
There was nothing left to buy
No wigs, bras, pills or pumps
No hope
You said, "Enough!... Good bye"

Toby Saken, 1/20/04
In memory of my beautiful sister, Suzy: 6/28/48 - 12/21/02

Untitled

It's another gray, miserable day
in my drab miserable life.
Listless pellets fall disinterestedly
from a lead-hued sky to lie
sullen and cold
in the frozen earth that is my heart.

To lie with the ash that sifts through my house
into my eyes , through my pores,
gritty and dry. Dry, an old woman's skin,
flakey, thin, like my life.

But gentle still, gentle,
a grandmother's kind gray ghost
covering my face with tender kisses,
leading me away through the brume
that is my life.

Nila Tanner

The Bedroom at Aries

This is Vincent's room
Sparse testimony to his poverty
A small table
His few possessions
Unusually neat for such an untidy soul

Walls with pictures never sold
The bed, two pillows-
A love never shared
Two chairs-friendships lost
conversations that never were

A study in primary colors
The blue of "Starry Nights"
Yellow, symbol of happiness
His beloved "Sunflowers"
Green floor
Worn thin by the pacing of a man thought mad

Three times he painted this room
His vision of perfect peace?

Toby Saken
6/04

Mothers' Days

Like Picasso's bouquet of flowers extended from one hand to another, I clasped the succulent water- laden stems of marsh marigolds (in those days I called them cowslips) and presented them to my mother. I was six, just returned from my first venture alone to the hummocky meadow where green shoots of grass sprang out of the blackened marsh where Dad had spring- burned. Waxy yellow bright, the cowslips glowed on the kitchen table by the east window, white curtains fluttering around them.

Almost seventy years later on a Mother's Day Sunday I'm tiptoeing on a marshy path in order not to crush the cowslip- marigolds beside the Huron River in Ann Arbor while visiting adult daughter Nan. She led me to the natural area where they grow. it must be in our family blood to find such things. The full- yellow flowers greeted me like a returning sun bringing a warm flood of memories.

Back at Maplewood in Champaign, a good generation ago, I was the recipient. I opened my ears to the sound of young whispers and giggles at my bedside, then a chorus of "Happy Mother's Day! " Our children thrust a slip of paper in my direction. This was no Lucia Day cinnamon roll....that was for a winter morning.... but a little piece of school tablet paper that promised to lead to something important. "Treasure hunt!" they yelled. I was fully awake then.

"Follow directions carefully," the note said, "and you will find a surprise. Clue Number 1: "Look behind the refrigerator." Sure enough, the clue there led to the dining room, under the northwest corner of the leg of the piano bench. More clues, indoors and out, led eventually to the fireplace downstairs. Inside the screen a brown paper^r bag with a crayoned message, said "Surprise!" The bag was filled with smooth rounded brown nuts- in -the- shell, hazel nuts, my favorite.

I like to think that we found the nutcracker and enjoyed a spontaneous crunching good feast, right there and then, like happy squirrels, but I've forgotten that part of the story. I hope I didn't use the gift only for baking; I hope we dug into the bag, shared some of them, all around.

For many years I saved the little bundle of well articulated, carefully printed clues, tucking them into an envelope in a slim paperback book that promised to contain them safely and appropriately always, the *Art of Loving* by ErichFromm. The last time I looked, they were not there, but I know they are not lost; somewhere, in the depths of *Art of Loving* the treasure clues live.

JoAnn Nelson
Labor Day, 2004

Gratitude

He lived alone in his shotgun house.
And collected junk in his tiny back yard
Filled with old tires, pieces of scrap metal,
Discards of the lives of more prosperous folks.
He'd sell what he could for a dollar or two
To supplement what he got from the state.
His gnarled black hands could no longer work
No retirement for drivers of cabs.

He could still drive in his old pickup truck
But no one would ride with a deformed old black man
And have to stare at those knobby old hands.

And his body would've only struggled in pain
If he'd had to sit all day in the seat of a car.

He thought he was rich, had more than his need.
His two freezers were full of the meat
Culled from the butchers who sold him the scraps
They could no longer sell to anyone else.
He gave the excess to those who had less
And expressed gratitude for all that he had.

He sat on his porch on warm summer eves
Invited his neighbors to share cups of tea
And read to him the words of inspiration
He had never learned to read for himself.
His shiny black face glowing with joy
That his life was full, blessed with friendship and love.

Jo Clifton
Oct. 25, 2004

Yesterday I Went to a Farm Auction

Shoulders nudging shoulders
feet shuffling
eyes peering
fingers poking
seeking, searching,
waiting, waiting for the auctioneer

In a wheeled chair, going nowhere
she sat
the young girl inside her
polishing her mother's silver
one more time
today on plywood, instead of mahogany
while she
waited, waited for the auctioneer

Old men in bib overalls
whispering, chewing spitting .
in the dust.
No silver for them
Dead trucks, greasy tractor parts, old iron and rust
Ah, finally, here comes the auctioneer

Numbered cards in pockets,
feathering hat bands, clutched in fists.
"Do you have a number? Come closer,
come closer" shouts the auctioneer

Come closer, come closer
Let me show you the trinkets
of an old woman's memory
Let me share with you the knick knack
pieces of her life.
You think they are beautiful?
Why, thank you.
I bought them at the auction.

Toby Saken

Flashback

Under my wise and ancient spreading oak
the snow lies smooth, patterned by tiny prints
of creatures adventuring through a winter day.
Well-fed, warm, and secure,
my cat eyes them with lazy curiosity,
then falls asleep, content.

A calming scene. ...

But something in me roils and churns.
Memories dredged up by talk of war rise to the surface; clamor to
be told.

Sirens screamed only after the bombs fell, and people died.
Three weeks we lived and moved in mist-a haze of fear, uncertainty;
our world torn up; nothing the same.
Loudspeakers, radios told us we would fight
"TO THE DEATH".
We learned that bombs don't fight.
Bombs shred, mash, maim, turn inside out - bring death, impartially.

Our leaders met *their* leaders, called a truce.
Nothing changed.
Every now and then they go to war,
shatter more lives,
and call a truce.

Years later, in another country,
Gunfire, explosions, woke us.
Through the day,
smoke, black and greedy, ate the sky.
We watched the rebels fleeing down our road,
bearing their dying leader like a tattered flag;
leaving behind baby soldiers, dead,
clutching guns bigger than themselves.
Children and women, kidnapped to serve the rebel cause,
were also left behind
to live or die, who cared?
Deserted by their enslavers.
Slaughtered by their saviors.
Just numbers, in the end.

Snow falls. Snow melts.
We kill. We talk of peace.
And we forget so easily.

Nillofur Zobairi

Hiroshima

A world peopled in terra cotta:
humans glazed like so many fine pots,
sacrificed hearts still beating.

Doctors worry the sockets
where eyes should shine
but the eyes have spun round
turning forever inward.

Rigid holes for mouths
too surprised to accuse
unable to shout out a dream
in which the whitest of lights welded the folds of their brains.

Shafts of stopped sun
drill into the motionless sea.
Kyrie, Kyrie, keen the gulls
and the birds of prey.

Lois Hayward

Saving Helen

"I'll save her," I screamed so excited I peed my pants.
Helen Ann Davis had just fallen into the branch.
You could just see the top of her white head scarf above the icy brown water.

With her heavy winter coat on I knew she could not float and I was afraid she would be sucked into the culvert that ran under the rock road.

At eight years old I did not know the branch flowed the other way, but all my life I had wanted to be a hero. To be ready when opportunity presented itself, I did Charles Atlas exercises that I saw on the back cover of a Superman comic book. I had to be strong, alert, and ready.

I saw Helen Ann first, and I would be the one to save her. There was not time to tear off my coat and pull off my heavy boots. Sue or Joyce Ann, my sisters, might jump in first, then they would be the hero and I wouldn't be. Or Jimmy Davis, Helen Ann's brother, and the love of my young life, might just lean over, reach down, and pull her out. I might never have this chance again. "I'll save her!" I screamed shrilly, for the third time.

You can't be a Charles Atlas hero if no one is aware of your heroic deeds. As my audience turned to my frantic voice, I plunged, plunged into that icy brown water pushing Helen Ann down a little deeper. Grabbing her by the coat collar I struggled to the steep muddy bank and heaved her out like a sack of potatoes.

Both of us sobbing with shock and cold I carried my dripping burden through the field, up the hill, and under the fence to our house while Joyce Ann and Jimmy Davis ran ahead to get mom.

Sue walked behind me snickering and calling, "I'll save her! I'll save her!" A prophet gets no honor in her own village. I guess a hero doesn't either.

Nila Tanner

Coyote

Spotted fawn shivers
sleeps safely on as silent death
slips quietly past.

In the distance
near the frog pond
a doe scampers happily.

Frog croaks distantly
doe jumps exuberantly.
Meadow lark calls poignantly.

Nila Tanner

Nature's Way

Long and slim he slid along the grass
Looking for a tasty meal
Satisfied with a small bug at last
He swallowed it down with zeal.

Crossing the road to the other side
He rushed across the warm black tar
Hoping to catch more bugs he'd spied
Not even seeing the approaching car.

A shiny green snake lay dead
Unnoticed on the side of the road
His lovely green faded from green to blue
While the bugs he'd tried to catch had a meal.

Jo Clifton

Art Gallery

Like a living rose window in burnished bronze and copper,
back lit by autumn sun,
furrowed trunks and lacey branches enclose an explosion of leaves
as if to frame their vibrancy.

In a tapestry woven of threads of reddened oak, iridescent sweet gum
mingles with splotchy white columns of sycamore and sunburst patterns
of sagey lichen, green velvet moss on rocks held firm by toughening oak.

In a collage of texture, sunlit shapes are cooled by shaggy cedar;
pine seeds spill from prickly cones on tissue paper sails;
aster and golden rod, gone to pearly puffs, scatter like milkweed
over crunchy acorns, nibbled by scurrying creatures.

More than rose window, tapestry, collage, we behold the sacred text
of an illuminated manuscript: Nature's liturgical year,
a blazing end to deciduous growth and fallen fruit,
a silent celebration of the web beneath, lying in wait.

JoAnn Nelson
October 24, 04

Mood in Season

(i)

Fall blazes
her beauty of decay defiantly-hot yellow dull dogwood red and cedar rust.

Magenta leaves with mustard veins.
Still glossy vines tinged ruby red.
Burnt orange carpets crackling underfoot.

Like autumn leaves
my bones whisper and rustle when I move-arthritic murmurings foretelling the sad
brown days to come.

(ii)

On
sunny
sleepy
summer afternoons
among the books

watching a bee
glide
dip
dart
hover over
a swaying cone flower

hearing
the click click
of the bamboo chimes
in which the bee resides

I know this is my heaven.

Nillofur Zobairi

Evensong

A bend in Rocky Comfort Road
brings us to a pond over which
a harvest moon is shining plump and golden as a pumpkin.

We stop to watch a wedge of geese
homing in for the night. They break
formation and come diving down
plashing softly into the dark water.
Moonlight silvers the wakes they leave.

After a day of foraging
they have much to tell each other.
Their merry gabble slowly settles
to a hush and then to slumber.
Now and then a goose shifts in its sleep,
the wind caresses the water.
I drift among them, my blood humming.

As the moon rises I take this peace into my hands
and hold it as I would anything holy and alive.
May I love peace as I love this pond, these geese,
this harvest moon. Blessed be. Amen

Lois Hayward