

THE FRIENDLY SPIKE THEATRE+BAND

PRESENTS

# Quae Nocent Docent

*What Hurts, Teaches*

A Collection of Poems and Musings



## Acknowledgements

Like the organizations making this work possible, our literary undertaking is collective in vision and production. Made possible by the generosity of many, many people, it is our hope that all involved feel a sense of satisfaction for having contributed to an amazing anthology completed together.

With gratitude,

The QND Creative Team

## ***QUAE NOCENT DOCENT***

***What Hurts, Teaches***

***is a project of  
The Friendly Spike Theatre Band  
published by  
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Join our facebook page [Friendly Spike Theatre Plus](#)  
Visit [www.thesecrethandshake.ca](http://www.thesecrethandshake.ca)***



The Secret Handshake



## Quae Nocent Docent Foreword

Our clear and precious difference from artificial intelligence is our ability to feel hurt and to learn from it... *Quae Nocent Docent.*

My belief in how writing and other expressive arts can be a powerful route to self discovery and healing began during my time working in the inpatient psychiatry unit at Toronto General Hospital.

Shortly after arriving there in 1984, I began inviting Canadian writers to run creative studios, later adding visual artists, dancers and musicians. I was intrigued by the effect the artists had, bringing their own particular breath of fresh outside air onto the ward, engaging on an equal basis and exploring form, language, movement, colour and sound. I saw it promoting a sense of connection and agency in the patients.

Of all the studios, I found writing most compelling. We encouraged people to feel the importance of what they wrote, whether a list of appointments or a poem, by using beautiful small booklets made in the art groups. Others who were comfortable sharing their thoughts contributed to a ward newspaper.

When I saw the range of submissions gathered here, I was taken back to those days at TGH and felt a surge of admiration for the courage and resilience emerging from the stories and poems we'd been given. Sharing their desperation and darkness as well as the joy, hope and humour, the writers lessen the loneliness...both their own and ours.

It's been one of the warmest and most gratifying elements of my work and continued interest in art as a healing force to know The Secret Handshake and The Friendly Spike. I congratulate them and the contributing writers for the gift of this collection and thank them for the chance to be a small part of it.

-- *Wendy Campbell*

## Editor's Message

*“True happiness means forging a strong spirit that is undefeated, no matter how trying our circumstances.” Daisaku Ikeda*

Like the Latin expression, “**Quae Nocent Docent**” meaning “what hurts teaches or heals”, this great journey was born.

Marlene Charney and Ruth (Ruth) Stackhouse in conversation talked about the resiliency of the human spirit. Marlene mentioned “what hurts, heals” and I was reminded of this Latin expression. Eventually it came to involve many poets (including a Parliamentary Poet Laureate, a City of Toronto Poet Laureate, and a National Treasure).

To express a challenge and then claim how it strengthened the writer’s spirit or resolve, is a gift. Many, including myself, wrote of painful times and having to cope and then deal with this experience. This was not easy. This is the essence of our anthology. We all struggled together. I wanted each poet to capture the “happiness” of recognizing that through challenging their (our) circumstances, we could offer something of intrinsic value to our culture and society.

It was an honour to be involved with this project of exceptional people. Thank you for this privilege. I want to also acknowledge the leadership of Project Director, Ruth (Ruth) Stackhouse, the diligent artistry of our Designer Richard Paul, and the hard work and dedication of all of the QND creative team.

*- Honey Novick, Editor and contributor*

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## **An Abolitionist love letter**

Jennifer M. Poole (she/her)

10/01/2023

Toronto, ON - Treaty 13 territory

Sometimes, if hearts open just a little at the same time  
they grow into each other  
becoming interstellar.  
And connect everything that has been  
to everything that is.  
And it lifts us out of our heavy worry-cells  
and into something that exists outside of reason and fear  
outside catalogues of capital and competition.  
And we become as old as the first rocks on the farthest moons  
and as young as the tiny shoots that believe  
we are still worthy of witnessing their spring return.  
And we remember that we cannot be contained by any carceral  
logics  
and that we have and always will be spirit-free.



## **ON MY FEET AGAIN**

Daniela Violin  
12/01/2023  
Toronto, ON

I want nothing more than to dance  
until my feet are sore.

I want nothing more than to walk  
without anxiety, with confidence, without fear.

Jeff, babe, I'd take you in my arms  
and dance a waltz  
cut up a rug

I do a Kate Bush move  
and run up that hill  
Many people say it's not a hill to die on  
I have the Cadillac of wheelchairs

But I'd leave this thing in the dust  
Just to hold you on my feet, again



## 03

**My Hand on the Altar**

Cynthia Sharp

01/2022 (during the Covid-19 pandemic)

Vancouver, BC

Snow, dead tissue, the crick crick crick of fingertips in daily tasks,  
snapping in frostbitten numbness,  
pulse thrumming through as my heart struggles to hold onto them.  
Icy winter bleeds through peach roses.  
Diagnosed with intensifying rheumatoid and osteoarthritis,  
I watch my once slender fingers  
knot into swollen knobs like my typist grandmother's.  
I used to shake fresh snow out of lime-leaved bamboo trees;  
now I rest cut tendons struggling to restore themselves  
from overuse of the computer mouse, damage from sanitizing  
groceries accidentally repeatedly in flesh wounds,  
tingling electric numb.  
The hospital doctor predicts the swollen blue lines are a blood clot,  
my hand on the altar having sacrificed two years of physiotherapy  
to stay home be part of the solution stop the spread  
of contagious Covid while we ignore the rest of ourselves,  
give up swims, skates, exercise outside the apartment  
for the myth of martyrdom, taking the pandemic request to stay home  
to levels of unnecessary sacrifice.  
Dehydrated veins pray to outlive the roses,  
not crumple like the basil leaves I dried to fight infection  
before the confirmation white blood cell count normal.

## 03 My Hand on the Altar ...*continued*

Inarticulate fingers and a slowed-down body pause,  
breathe in surrounding foliage.

Green veins bulge through wrinkly skin like aging  
garlic with bulky shoots beneath beige translucent peel,  
weirdly wrapped enclosed cloves, deformed looking,  
yet a gift of abundance, free fresh chives to add to salad  
at no extra cost,

my stone fingers a blessing too of slower days, time,  
just being present.

I am soft earth with the right to live peacefully,  
my rounded knuckles, curves of ice and foliage,  
pink and peach sunset lighting the snow,  
the hope of longer days,  
as the scent of cedar wafts up freshly cut,  
promising balance for the rest of the journey.

## Invisible Boy

Dilan Qadir  
November, 2022  
Vancouver, BC

There is a difference between wishing to disappear  
and wishing to be left alone.

To disappear is self-erasing,  
to be left alone is Other-affirming:

*We see you, you're here, and we won't interfere.*

Which wasn't the boy's case.

*Leave me alone*, he would have asked each and everyone  
if he could, if Others were willing to listen.

But no. In the absence of reciprocation, there is no celebration.

He still dared to ask, sometimes, making it worse.

The Others saw a weakness, they invaded his sensory space,  
got in his face, and the bullies invited him for fights.

*Unnotice me*, he prayed with silent fervor as he walked  
down the alleys coming back from school.

*Make them unsee me, God, make them unheed me.*

But an almighty God, if they existed, was too occupied,  
too grand to grant such wishes.

And so he learned to linger in the shade of their shadows,  
transforming himself into a dim dot on their surveying canvases

## 04

## Invisible Boy ...continued

observing their raucous speeches from a safe distance.  
But privacy was a rare article.  
How could he avoid the Others' ever-present gazes?  
He would have shrunk if he could.  
All he did was to stoop and count his steps when outside,  
eager to get back inside  
where he dreaded going outside.  
Tick-tock. Tick-tock. The wheels turned.  
The body grew taller. The need bigger.  
The determination stronger. He had to be his own savior.  
His mantra: Leave the people.  
His mantra: Leave the place.  
His mantra: Even the language.  
Those became his purpose and his focus.  
His personal and invisible glory.



## **Her Storm And Grace**

***A tribute to Lisa Marie Presley and her last album***

Elisha Alladina

01/17/2023

Toronto, ON

Storm and grace

Filled me with a warm embrace Comforted my emotions

With thoughts split in portions

Storm and grace

Went beyond her beautiful face Her deep vocals so soothing

Silenced my internal feuding

Storm and grace Made a strong case

Of convincing passion

To audiences in true fashion

Storm and grace

Took me to a safe place One where I could feel And be on a  
journey to heal



## Run

Michele Dickson  
 11/2022  
 Scarborough, ON

Intergenerational violence has me  
 I am torn within my characteristics  
 The flagrant disapproval of your past experiences  
 Gone through the process of finding out what is Approval for this  
 piece isn't steady yet  
 I fathom in my mind to make sure opportunity was not enough  
 Together within the next step  
 Breaking oaths is the best way of distinction between Crucial to our  
 success leaves clues for our study  
 He ruined my life while doing it without peacefulness Nowadays I  
 found a better communicator for  
 We swam the world that we should not have, first-hand  
 Lengthened, there was segregation in my tomorrow's past  
 Encroaching, I have a difficult time getting the right to Saying that  
 I stick to consider how long it would take Forgotten, screaming, at  
 the end of this  
 Enamored, I will never forgive him, mourned  
 He, grasping for lies with the aftereffects of trauma inflicted I  
 gave everything to everyone else and nothing for myself Wilted  
 within, writhing or less than the one who takes pity  
 I gave updates on this project, blindly, said he So many nights he  
 came inside  
 I quickly found results in a sentence that was written I, stuck to-  
 gether in the future, create  
 Reasonably good enough to break free

**RAYMOND  
HELKIO****Afternoons In The Attic**

Raymond Helkio  
12/2022  
Toronto, ON



Afternoons in the attic  
with my father.

Were Weird.

Photo of my mother willfully ignoring everything around her, 1964



## dauid dug th hole

bill bissett  
09/2022  
mattawa, ON

we onlee had 1 shovul  
i held my best frend boo boo in  
his magik blanket n lowerd him  
in2 his grave  
kissing n hugging him saying  
i love yu lil boo i love yu  
i cudint get up from his grave  
i wantid 2 b in 2

i held out my arm  
didint look up n cyndi  
pulld me up we moovd erth  
softlee on him thn top soil  
made it all firm n thn big rocks

no racoon cud budg n we all sd  
we love yu it was neer th ancient  
birch tree a few metrs from th  
rivr

he is a magik prson i talk 2 him  
ther n in my heart he lovd me  
uncondishunalee n me him  
mostlee peopul dont dew that  
but ths veree conscious cat  
duz

evn hes flying sumwher els  
n me as well beyond th fingrs  
uv time





## REVIVAL

Ruth (Ruth) Stackhouse  
12/2022  
Toronto, ON

### Part One- Diagnosis and Realization

“you’ve got a bad disease” she said  
her words ring true inside my head  
something I’d known for a while  
denial, however is my style  
hoping for a re – mission  
of this frightening condition  
pretending not a thing was wrong  
pushing forward for so long

### Part Two- Questioning and Regret

Now comes the day of reckoning  
a self care model indeed is beckoning  
But what is going on inside of me  
causing such pain and deformity  
“Hot- hot- hot blood in flamation  
is the source of your degeneration”  
Doctor professes this trajectory  
Should have read the signs more seriously

### Part Three– Defiance and Learning

No! No! No! I will not cry  
An RA\* title I will de – fy  
“nam myoho rengo kyo”\*\*  
I will grow–I will grow  
A fire burning internally  
can be slowed down responsibly  
through meditation and mindfulness  
diet, exercise and happiness

A life styled for survival  
will manifest my own revival!

\* RA - Rheumatoid Arthritis

\*\* “nam myoho rengo kyo” is a Nichiren Buddhist Chant

## 10

**GUTS**

Patricia Reid  
 01/24/2023  
 Toronto, ON

She was a lady in her mid eighties  
 Clearing her land for winter  
 She loved it so much  
 Admiring the bagged leaves on the curb  
 No boys doing it -she did it  
 That's what old age did- perfect preparation  
 She noticed a twig on her lawn  
 And bending down to grab it she lost her balance and fell  
 She could not get up  
 Everyone was inside for supper or tv  
 No help was available and then she saw her hand rake  
 Lying on the grass  
 It could help  
 Her right arm was painful but she used her left arm  
 With the rake an hour later she reached the Black Walnut tree  
 Now what?  
 She used the tree and the rake to get up  
 First on her knees - then her feet  
 Success! So tired she went to bed without supper  
 Next morning -her arm still hurt a lot  
 So she called her neighbour  
 And asked to  
 Be driven to her doctor  
 Her friend did  
 When the doctor checked her over she asked for painkillers  
 "Woman" he said "you've broken it"  
 GUTS, we all have them inside us  
 All of us



# thy realization

Sarah Wells  
10/10/2022  
Stouffville, ON

never ending stricken re-force  
tumbling into realization in  
all sorts of forms **mouldable within nature**  
**comes a day when I won't complain**  
complain about lessons  
the lessons these realizations made

## 12

**The Reaction**

Mark Guttridge

2021 (in the middle of covid)

Toronto, ON

Sometimes I admit, it's quite a strain  
to refrain from "acting out".

As I try to suppress my aggression.

**I take a deep breath.**

Have I seen too much imperilment,  
too much sorrow?

Have I learned my lesson,

Do I need to borrow from the cup of  
Life and Liberty?

To regain my sense of credibility.

And am I concerned, too facetiously, with the  
delusion of Death.

Where a perpetual silence awaits.

I take a deep breath.

Is it too late, to challenge my fate?

Whilst I proceed judiciously

Down an undiscovered trail.

But with You, by my side

How could I fail?

HOW COULD I FAIL?

*I take a deep breath.*

## 13

Stuck In A Crow

Amelia Does  
01/02/2023  
London, ON

How is blame useful  
It is impossible  
It goes nowhere  
It goes in the throat  
And wreaks havoc  
On the self  
Until it is realized  
Transformed  
Expunged  
And magic comes in  
To fill the space  
In there.

## 14

**Wounded Healers**

Catherine O'Donnell  
 2012 (Song Lyrics)  
 Weyburn, SK

Wounds hold the power to bless the pain  
 Difficulty helps others to gain  
 Some wounds never heal, that's a natural fact  
 I'm the wounded healer, I am that

The sane, the sorted and the strong have always belonged  
 To that group over there, over here we're wounded songs  
 Bellowing on the outside, healing from within  
 We're the wounded healers, hmmm mmmm

Our strength is in our weakness, that which we know so well  
 We can guide and counsel well, 'cause we've seen our private hell  
 To live is to suffer, yet find joy and beauty in all  
 We're the wounded healers, we've seen it all, hit the wall, we stand tall

At times there is a burden that weighs me down  
 Part of my history, so long been around  
 The time has come to shed it, release it to the wind  
 Forgiveness .....

Wounds hold the power to bless the pain  
 Difficulty helps others to gain  
 Some wounds never heal, that's a natural fact  
 I'm the wounded healer, I am that

Our strength is in our weakness, that which we know so well  
 We can guide and counsel well, 'cause we've seen our private hell  
 To live is to suffer, yet find joy and beauty in all  
 We're the wounded healers, we've seen it all, hit the wall, we stand tall.

## 15

In Time

Gregory Betts  
St. Catharines, ON

I'm not a religious man  
 but I cry at commercials for brands I  
 would never buy  
 cringe whenever a needle  
 approaches skin  
 I feel exposed to see an image  
 of an eye  
 cut my body responds blindly  
 to bodies  
 yet I do not fear death

We are meant to see the shadows  
 between stars  
 with wonder but I  
 see permission  
 to cross beyond  
 the boundary of  
 my empathy  
 We are meant to read sand  
 as the desert of eternity but  
 I see dead atoms  
 failing to recombine  
 in my body  
 and do not fear death

and say so to that night sky that  
 you might find me  
 in time

## 16

**Dawning Of The Shrew**

Rebecca Gail Chernecki

01/16/2006

Toronto, ON

Morning comes softly, my limbs experiencing numbness  
They are still coming, the ghosts and the night terrors  
In the still air, Jesus comes bringing Light  
Movement  
is slow, life shatters into dark corners.

The people here sway to a rhythm unknown to the Heavens  
The happiness here comes in family ties and bearing children I,  
I am an outsider, knowing not a child, or mother here  
All becomes grey.

Goddess brings forth compassion, yet the sorrows are untold  
Goddess lights the sky with her starry interludes, woven into  
Stories of loss and defeat, growing wild, like daisies upon the  
cracks in the sidewalks.

Cultures here are fragmented, religious beliefs staid.  
Yet I, I exist on the margins - my body and soul aching from  
years of being asked questions about my sanity.  
I want the Goddess as my Saviour

May Tara, Green Goddess of Compassion, save me from a shrew  
Save me from being cast into quarters unknown to my faith  
May Tara, come to me as if in dance  
Assisting me in seeing some beauty in this small place.



## 17

Carry On

Justin Ziadah  
09/02/2023  
Toronto, ON

My tale begins in disbelief  
from what I've come to know.  
As days went by, my heart still  
ached. It's hard just letting go.

My nerves had got the best of me.  
Can't think or concentrate.  
All I longed, a second chance  
... but, now it's much too late.

Past mistakes played on repeat  
each time I closed my eyes.  
I heard their voice within my  
dreams, beyond my soothing lies.

Hopelessness was taking hold.  
Despair, a constant fight.  
To mourn the loss of those you  
love, there is no end in sight.

Weeks went by without a thought.  
Despondent and estranged.  
I tried my best to hold the past  
Before I longed to change.

It took some time to come to  
terms and slowly face the facts.  
To heal myself and look ahead.  
Instead of turning back.

After all that's said and done,  
my darkest days have gone.  
In the end, I'll find my way.  
It's time I carry on.

## 18

So, it is

John Vlachos  
01/28/2023  
Toronto, ON

So, it is with every day that goes by,  
announcing that something else is coming,  
something new and complex and just as splendid.  
A window is revealing a light peering in the dark.  
It is my mind.  
A door is opening down the hall.  
It beckons me to enter like a gliding arm pointing the way.  
I walk in.  
I see myself looking out the window into another room.  
From that room I am looking into another room.  
Again, I am looking, and it seems to never end.  
There is a repetition, like a ritual that must be performed.  
It is the ritual of the endless leaving and arriving,  
the endless living and dying,  
the endless being and not being.  
It is the ritual of putting on and taking off,  
to be a servant or a master,  
to have title or be stripped of it.  
It is the ritual of penance and pain.

It is a lament while suffering is transformed into majesty.

## 19

**MY HUGE VOICE**

Robert Priest

1977

D'arcy Street Toronto, ON

I was born with a huge voice and I lay there with a huge voice in a new world, my voice too big for me. When I screamed I shook birds from the roof. My father called me “Big Mouth’ and went to sea. My father came back and beat my voice and my voice got harder and harder. My mother grew my huge voice in a pot. She put its feet in the cradle and gave it a story at bedtime. As the body grew, the voice grew, larger and larger, stronger and stronger. Soon I was dragging this huge voice through the public school system, sometimes hardly able to fit through doorways my voice was so huge and so stuck in my throat, and though I rarely sang, though I only whistled, though I talked at normal volume, my voice was huge and I knew it. Finally at the age of twenty I began to let my voice go. My voice that was gigantic. Which if I screamed could shake temples, topple towers, and blast leaves from entire trees. Slowly I let my voice unwind. I let it shake and shatter as it welled up, lying back, blasted open, almost broken by the voice blaring up out of me. It is hard to be a body for a voice like this — a huge voice that wants to be heard everywhere. Sometimes I try to keep quiet and end up shouting. Sometimes I try to go to sleep, all swollen up with this voice, and it is too late to sing, too dark to speak, so I must lie there till the morning utterly silent, my body, an elastic to the sun, a small halter the voice is breaking through, my mind just a trembling seed for the wonder of this voice.



**GLORY**

Robert Boates  
Winter 2023  
Hamilton, ON

Dodge the bull in your mind's arena.  
Live with cloaked injuries.  
Disappear into nothingness. Make it a wish.  
Pain is your playground. Pay the toll.

How we become our illnesses. Life in cages  
Doctors minus interest, compassion, miracles.  
Sing carols of glory under the moon.  
Escape when you can.

## 21

Heart To Art

Penn Kemp  
02/2023  
London, ON

Roses reside inside, arriving  
by scent from smooth petal  
scarlet or white. Roses arrive  
and rest

assured.

They rest not knowing  
the future as I do and so the rest  
is easy before

rust nips at the coiling edge of  
hope, nips and tucks, curtains, till  
petal droops, curls and drops  
on stone. Heart suspends suspense  
and pauses, skips the beat  
to bear what can't be

born.

The heart does not grow over.  
It grows through the lump in  
the throat and out the mouth—  
new birth of sorts, of change.

Heart knows its kind, knows its  
own, knows as well kind  
words. They too can cut  
clear through skin, so many  
layers meaning... what?

To stay kind, to stay kind  
of alive in metaphor— beating  
beating heart, the rhythm of  
survival, thriving.



## After the Explosion

Halifax NS, 6 December 1917

Don Link  
02/2023  
Toronto, ON

The city blew up around my grandfather, a boy of 7—  
the sound so loud that there was no sound, only  
a flurry of flying glass.

The boy stood frozen on the stoop of the butcher  
shop, having just bought meat for supper. Mother had  
sent him. (Something funny, but not so funny either:  
the cash register had legs.)

They lifted him into a wagon with the other children,  
then a horse took them to higher ground on  
Citadel Hill. He got quick attention once they re-  
moved his coat. A large bloodstain was observed on  
his right side, but when they removed his shirt, there  
was no wound! After some questioning they deter-  
mined that it was the hamburger, the package the  
boy had been holding, pressed tight to his side, now  
lost. He fought to keep his fist closed—change from  
the butcher’s— *Mother’s change! He promised to give  
Mother her change!* (It took days for the imprint of the  
coins to fade from his palm.) He saw Mother one last  
time in hospital, her neck thickly bandaged. Did he  
open his hand to show her the mark? Did he show her  
that he had kept his promise? After she died, Father  
gave him to the nuns.

## 22

After the Explosion ...*continued*

We can stop our story there, but the story never ends—it reverberates through the generations—more explosions, unexpected or self-manufactured, in spite of ourselves—an unwanted but inescapable inheritance.

A sound that was once deafening is now a thin ringing in my ears, a kind of tinnitus, like distant bells. The bells are calling me—to what?—to take the hand of the boy who was my grandfather, the boy who was myself, and lead him to higher ground. Sit him in the wagon that will take him to Citadel Hill, pay the horseman extra, and say goodbye.

## THE REDEMPTION OF FOUR TIMES A CHIEF

Linda Rogers  
02/14/2023  
Victoria, BC

pinned to his eyelashes, paintbrushes,  
adze, no defence against words, so his  
last are praise for the bully who can't  
do consonants, hurls vowels, this comic,  
soon a convert in the corner they've all  
been sent to, walls closing in, the end,  
where "Loser" sounds like "Sorry", and  
"Indian!" "I'm in", as in "All my relations."

He inhales at midnight,  
turns all the lights on.  
No room for shadows in  
doorways, weaponized  
words, snowballs with  
rocks like the ones he's  
been carving with no  
time for the anodyne,  
snow tapped on mirrors,

his treasure lost in a storm,

where branches, maybe  
blackbirds, lift whispering  
"Hush baby, go to sleep."

Mu'pem'kim Kla'wadzee, four times  
Chief Big Copper, exhales, listens to  
Dzunuk'wa speaking softly, huuhuu,  
the song of cedar still breathing out  
oxygen/advice: "Never turn your knife  
on yourself, " the one that will guide  
you back through the wound in the  
bark on the tree you came from,  
this Mother Portal calling you home.





## lifeline

Kate Russell  
02/14/2023  
Flesherton, ON

helpless trauma trigger endured  
solitary witness to addled addiction  
reflected in clouded tearful eyes  
gaze into my own blackened mirror  
who am I to sit in judgement  
on despair struggle of another  
who has sunken soul deep  
captivated by diabolical spirits  
dysfunctional drunken jerk  
hurts my beleaguered ego  
grasp thoughtful forgiveness  
not as an innocent dupe  
but with eyes wise open  
peer into him and find myself  
sparked in patterned response  
roll and smoke a little kindness  
dull a careworn empathic ache  
not so vastly dissimilar from  
vile affliction of shadowed beloved  
who only asks my healing touch  
compassion cry in deluded darkness  
cuddles his feral brindled feline  
takes another tiny vodka shot  
escapes oppressive reality  
pill pauper seems too broken  
to struggle a courageous exit  
snug deep dirty hole he digs  
where perpetual smooth lives  
engulfs his melancholy spirit  
my bright lifeline might reach  
if I only dare cast IT cool  
from the shaken shore  
of my irrepressible love...



## ARROWS

Kathy Adachi  
01/25/2023  
Toronto, ON

She often hated those,  
who shot their arrows into her heart.  
Swift and keen their aim.  
Grinning, bantering and slinging their  
stones of fire.  
Masks of iron on their heads,  
whittled down to points of  
ignorance, hatred, greed.

The poisons, spurred on that wounded one,  
who, in turn, wounded others.  
As did that foolish woman, who, non awakened,  
lived in hidden darkness too.

Acid rain fell upon the naif, that night,  
and drowned her soul, and partly does, unto  
this hour. Stumbling, she struggles through her  
thickets of despair and doubt.

But, balms of wisdom/love words,  
from The Awakened and The Anointed,  
do  
slowly, gently  
heal.

## 26

**PINK TAFFETA**

Jathinder Sandhu

09/2022

Surrey, BC

strange voices come climbing in.  
 her tiny bedroom decorated in pink taffeta.  
 she hears the addicts outside the window, see the disgust they  
 have for themselves and the disgust she feels  
 I used to be amongst them, falling down, my clothes peeling  
 off my body, my hair unwashed, smelling of urine  
 her face is scarred from picking at the bugs under her skin  
 no-teeth but a gaping hole, straggly hair, too much makeup,  
 holding herself in a stupor, flagging her next trick  
 strange voices come climbing in  
 her tiny bedroom decorated in pink taffeta  
 she falls over herself, grins at the johns  
 is a spectacle for passengers on buses and cars  
 and trucks that go “swoosh swoosh swoosh”  
 strange voices come climbing in  
 her tiny bedroom decorated in pink taffeta.  
 her pimp struts the street, gold around his neck  
 he pulls her by the arm, smoking a cigar, looking malevolent  
 She played with Barbie dolls, stripping them naked  
 Showing mama what daddy did to her  
 But was greeted by a wall of silence  
 now she cannot hold a monarch in her hand because  
 strange voices come climbing in  
 her tiny bedroom decorated in pink taffeta

## “March 2021: My First Suicidal Thought...”

Bruce Eves  
 03/2021  
 Toronto, ON

... And every day I go out  
 For a long walk –  
 Partly to get out of the house,  
 Partly to let the thoughts and ideas flow.  
 Often what flows In One Ear  
     And Out The Other is  
     Nonsense – but  
 Usually problems come into focus;  
 Solutions are found;  
 The Germs of Ideas begin to replicate ...  
     Among the Nonsense of  
 Song Lyrics, News Stories, and  
 Grudges Reaffirmed floating In One Ear  
     And Out the Other was  
     One that Wondered  
 What would happen if I Downed the  
 Newly Replenished Three-Month Supply of  
 Heart Medications All At Once ...  
     Immediately followed by  
 Song Lyrics, News Stories,  
 Grudges Reaffirmed, Problems  
 Coming Into Focus and Solutions  
 Being Found While the Germs of Ideas  
     Are Allowed to Replicate ...

(revisited January 30, 2023)

## A Letter To Somerset Maugham

Henrik Kartna  
02/23/2023  
Toronto, ON

Dear Somerset Maugham:

Although you have been gone 58 years, your work continues to resonate with readers, myself included. I am especially grateful to you for Philip Carey, the protagonist in your coming of age novel Of Human Bondage (1915). This is because I identify with him.

Carey lost his mother at a young age, so did I.  
He has a disability, so do I.  
He is self conscious about it, so am I.  
Carey's lived experience has made him resilient, and ultimately successful, as am I.

To this day, disability continues to be under represented in culture, Yet over a century ago, you created an attractive leading man, who happened to be disabled.

Thanks for the recognition.

Sincerely,

Your devoted reader

## 29

The Dresser by the Black Sea

Kevin Spenst

02/08/2023

Vancouver, BC (on unceded Coast Salish territory)

The sun hauled me out of bed but  
I tricked it and put on a headdress

of dreams, so it was that my dresser  
sounded odd. The top drawer opened

to rubble from foreign borders of  
old, slick with townships of tears.

The next opened with claws of  
crustaceans grasping at some sub-

kingdom of gold promises where  
eerie emblems kept us guessing.

Each drawer opened longer to  
more in attendance. All my sisters

stood next to me as I pulled out  
our childhood home and the litter

of kittens born in the basement,  
kept in the lowest drawer of all.

Each tiny mouth opened like a flower  
grown out of an unlikely crevice,

out of the pincers of millions of pre-  
dators. We all pocketed our favourite

pattern of survival. We all woke up  
and we all fell down with a little sub-

littoral meow that popped up from along  
a shore of cats and dogs and songs.



rewritten

Marie Sinclair  
 Summer 2022  
 Hamilton, ON

flushed cheeks and flaming eyes  
 expectations held so hard  
 that hands are cut and blood dried  
 armed at a battlefield with only words  
 run chasing  
 ragged breath  
 dare  
 with closed lids dream of a white flag  
 letting go  
 chain link armour of defiance,  
 stubborn will  
 suffering simmers into sorrow  
 that sours into fear  
 a stagnant trail  
 what was learned can be unlearned  
 surrender sweet  
     like  
       falling  
        rain  
 can wash clean -  
 begin again

## 31

Ten Thousand Seasons

A. D'Agio  
02/27/2023  
Toronto, ON

**Chorus:**

speak to light...shining bright  
 shining bright  
 honour the truth in all  
 let our colours unite  
 speak to light  
 (I will) honour the truth that calls.

**Verse 1:**

a willow moon  
 behind its veil  
 a fox gives chase, skyline red  
 doves coo soft  
 stars blink into space  
 ten thousand seasons, the ancestors said

**Verse 2:**

wash of kelp  
 on guarded crag  
 warm lava hush, deep oceans cool  
 though injuries mend  
 there's one yearning for its voice  
 ten thousand seasons, echoes of truth

**Verse 3:**

winter's glint  
 night enshrines  
 when hope retreats it dims for all  
 whatever shackles  
 a soul to its haunted place  
 let us be building when the chains fall free





XLVI.

George Elliott Clarke  
 [29 & 30 août mmxix  
 Carmel-by-the-Sea (California)]

Immense wrecks, Dixies's scorched, toppled columns,  
 Startle gentle historians who thought  
 God had ceased to unleash prophets, Golems,  
 To crush pyramids, set pharaohs to rot.

To gilt graves, lucrative latrines, goes each  
 Guillotined Sphinx or sage or sibyl,  
 Damnable monsters, whose blood knows no bleach:  
 Their souls—ink-blots—shrink back from the Bible!

Intense is Christ's stabbing, spiking, wracking,  
 Upon the Cross. That's why His gaze stares down—  
 Scares off—massas, their visages cracking  
 With adverse tears, brimstone-hot, ruddy-brown:

Indescribable are their pulpit thrones:  
 Their books open graves, their letters all bones!



## Grow Joy

Carys Owen

June 2022

Vancouver Island, BC

Take a tiny seed  
 a memory  
 ~ dried up and dormant ~  
 of something that brought joy  
     re-enact the scene  
     re-engage the feelings  
     the sights, the smells  
     the fullness of being  
  
 a walk in the woods  
 a visit with a friend  
 a song long forgotten  
 your own secret recipe  
     practise it faithfully  
     though joy may feel far off  
     practise it faithfully  
     a few minutes a day  
  
 be there, be in it  
 let your body remember  
 let your heart recall  
 how good it feels to connect  
 how good it feels to create  
     grow some joy from a simple act  
     ~ even for a moment ~  
     place a hand on your hurts  
     and take respite in your soul

## 34

**PETER'S MAGICAL MISSION**

Rudy B. Solomonovici  
 Summer 1967 rev Winter 2023  
 Toronto, ON

Once Peter - Peter Pan, my pal,  
 Took leave of Land of Never  
 And floated down to Darling Town  
 For Wendy, his Endeavor.

He pounced upon the window sill  
 Of house on English landscape  
 And tinkled with Miss Tinker Bell  
 To route those sleeping - sand -caped.

The children roused, still slightly drowsed,  
 And Wendy greeted Peter.  
 This made the boys glad in their heart,  
 But Tink thought she was sweeter.

Then Peter's shadow ran away  
 And hard it was to catch it.  
 But Wendy did and with some thread  
 And needle, she did patch it.

Next, Peter sprinkled pixie dust  
 From Tinker, all around  
 And everyone it touched upon  
 Was lifted off the ground.

Postscript

By twinkled light of second star,  
 They up and journeyed very far.  
 'Twas to an island in the sky.  
 "We can fly !"

## 35

**I WANT TO BE IN TOUCH**

Wendy Devine  
03/23/1993  
Toronto, ON

I want to be in touch.  
With who I am.  
With my soul.  
With the baby in me.

I need to keep her safe.  
So that she can grow  
Gracefully into adulthood.

Growing old gracefully  
When I have never even grown up  
I don't know what I want  
I don't know who I am.

I only know that underneath  
A beautiful person,  
A flower unfolding  
Waiting to express itself.

Maybe only God will know  
Maybe only God will see  
That I am a decent, warm human being  
That in spite of it all  
I have lived my life  
With integrity

That I have value for who I am  
That I will know that I am loved  
Worth loving  
Valued.

## 36

**Us and Them**

Rosalba Martinni

03/2023

Toronto, ON

Isolation. Deprivation. Devastation.  
I am vaxxed; you are not – us and them.  
We should be enemies, some would say.  
That is a game I do not play.

Rest and recover from the wounds.  
Don't mourn your losses for too long.  
Rise and create a kinder world  
Write and sing your healing song.

Division still exists among many.  
Still pandering to the powers that be.  
Critical thinking is not to be trusted.  
Or you'd be judged as maladjusted.

What to do next? What can be done?  
Pretend all is well and then move on?  
Praise the authorities in a grandiose paragraph?  
No. That shall never be my epitaph.



## **Forest Pond**

Zan Redcrow  
03/2023 (Song Lyrics)  
Thornhill, ON

Losin' my way  
between Heaven and Hell  
Was getting harder to tell  
Just where a soul belongs

Then came across a forest pond  
Where wounded souls have gathered round  
To sing and share  
Their healing songs.

## The Unknown Flowers

Naomi Hendrickje Laufer

03/2023

Toronto, ON

The unknown Flowers  
gathered in a dream  
sitting on the island  
where once he had been.  
They bloomed in the  
nighttime and in  
incessant storms but  
also in the daytime when  
    they were first born  
Their tranquility seeped  
and answered to the  
    stars crawling through  
    the shadows and resting  
    in a jar  
Broken with time for there  
was no time here  
They rearranged themselves  
then disappeared.





## **We, the creatures**

Caleb Donat  
3/23/2023  
Elgin, IL

The idea of  
religious freedom,  
is a corrupt one;  
faith a responsibility  
and a curse.

For us all,  
whether persecuted  
or adorned,  
life demands  
a reality that  
agrees with it.

For longer than  
can be imagined  
we, the creatures  
of willful creation,  
are precursors won.

Yet, loosely bound  
in thought,  
quickly neglect that,  
everyone's rainbow  
is a different one





## **Witness**

Maureen O'Donnell  
03/2023  
Toronto, ON

As the air thinned  
and the sound of machines took over the fading day  
As the sound of loneliness won out  
As history was making a turn  
Known and unknown love woven under covers  
Too light to matter any more  
Soon given over to another  
Soon imprint's memory gone  
Eyes true as the morning sky  
Turned elsewhere, no more to see here  
That tender heart that worked so hard  
Retired now and done, pushing through the last shift

Witness to the awe  
Shadows of the shadow fading

## 41

**Why She Laughs**

Helen Posno

3/31/2023

Toronto, ON

“WHEN once a flame is kindled in your  
Heart - many leaves and many trees within the Forests of your soul  
- are lost: before your Will  
can quench it to a Coal

Yes, even so - sayeth my SPARK - will I  
Come unto all they who search for ME to  
Keep me in their souls and there will be  
Brought much ruin and devastation unto those Who know but  
understand me not  
Even as I have declared it - Sayeth my SPARK - So will it come to  
pass

One cannot keep fire and control it for its  
Benefit unless that one has first been  
Burned: Yes, Must they even have lain cold in the ashes of  
Themselves - in order to rise up - and  
Tend that selfsame fire as they  
Ought

And only then - Sayeth my SPARK - Will they know  
WHY SHE LAUGHS.”



## **Right Behind You**

PJ Thomas

09/07/2022

Peterborough, ON

I need to hide from the zenith of the day.  
Any peak is precarious,  
unless like you, we teeter-totter  
on the top of Mount Olympus.

You are unafraid  
of your own passing,  
know you have done life  
with skill and caring,  
know love from the dawning  
and on into evening  
when you kindle the fires  
for mood and for warmth.

I toast you with clear champagne  
from glaciers melted  
into the cup of good cheer.  
Be forewarned that I don't say goodbye  
well.  
I just ignore the oblivion  
that will follow this heaven  
of being in your wake.

## **He Had No Use For Me**

Honey Novick  
01/2023  
Toronto, ON

He had no use for me  
that was hard to take  
but I did, slowly  
ever so slowly

I couldn't conform  
I would if I could, but I couldn't  
and for that and my big mouth  
I was shunned

and in retrospect, it was liberating  
hard to take but I took it  
transformed it into something good  
good for me

slowly, slowly I turn my back and walk away  
and walk away  
I transform my walk, my path  
into something empowering and good  
good for us all

His mother said,  
“you're bad because you're too smart”  
I could hardly believe my ears, “too smart is bad”  
yes, the doctrine of stupidity – keep the girls  
stilted and stifled in their spirit  
I smiled but was blown, literally, in to my seat  
falling into me, staying on the sofa for 3 days  
and then I rose

one foot at a time  
one breath at a time  
beseeching the warrior goddesses  
“wherever you're hiding, I need you NOW”  
they came, left signs, gifts, assurances  
that with each step, each breath we'll keep going  
we'll keep going step by step, breath by breath

## 44

**Fragmented Moments**

Goldie Wallensky  
04/07, 2023  
North York, ON

The scrap-book filled with  
sweet and bitter memories  
A time capsule, locking  
pure joy and endless laughter  
Days passed steal our youth  
Feeling not good enough  
Adding heart-ache and pain

Running from the hurt  
Counting emotional scars,  
while the clock is ticking  
Yearning for acceptance,  
years become a wasteland  
Every loud striking minute,  
hits harder with sadness

Escaping the fleeting seconds,  
moving in a lost direction  
Being confused and lonely  
Finding renewed faith  
Positive thinking shines,  
with an eternal healing glow  
Reaching for helping hands  
in community connection

Learning the sense of now  
Taking back self-worth  
Cherished valued moments  
Living love in the present,  
embraces hope and peace  
Stand tall and proud  
is the image  
of lasting beauty



**Manhole**

Toshio Ushiroguchi-Pigott  
2021  
Toronto, ON



## 46

**I remember Tikal**

Joan Sutcliffe  
04/08/2023  
Toronto, ON

I remember scent of copal incense  
blue/green plumage of the quetzal bird  
and incredible music of the wind  
swaying the jungle foliage  
ethereal as a Mayan flute.

Tikal where time touches ancient  
like a ghostly specter gleaming in moonlight  
its pyramid loomed mysterious  
half hid in tattered shreds of vegetation:  
It was the meeting with destiny  
so intense my longing to ascend it.

So I climbed – and I climbed  
until a stone beneath my groping hand  
broke loose a cavalcade of tumbling masonry  
that hurled me down  
battered and bruised a heap of agony:  
A dreadful silence ensued  
anticipating the surety of death.

But I did not die  
comrades pulled me to my feet  
and made me walk  
and walk, and walk  
ignoring the pain, the nausea  
the throbbing in the skull.

Then Tikal lay bare its antique heart  
in threads of gold entwined with scarlet  
I saw the rain gods soak the earth  
wild fields turn to emerald fertility:  
I heard the spirits of star-gazing towers  
And I wrote my very first poem.

## 47

**PAIN**

Philip Cairns  
04/07/2023  
Toronto, ON

Z-z-z-z-z, the mini-saw  
cuts into my right hip,  
Through skin, muscle, bone.  
Gouge out the arthritis,  
in with metal and plastic.

Can't get out of bed  
without screaming,  
Can't pee or poo,  
can't do anything,  
Endless weeks of torture,  
Walker,  
sleep two hours, up for four,  
Pills, food, exercises,  
Sleep, sleep, sleep.

Watching half an hour  
of a movie  
then ready for bed.  
Was this a good idea?  
I'm worse off than before.  
Living underwater,  
Can't function,  
can't do anything worthwhile.

Diligent exercises every day.  
Everyone is so paranoid  
about pain meds,  
They won't hook me,  
I hate them.  
Patience, week after week,  
Sleep, eat, washroom,

sponge bath, pain, bathroom,  
"Hazel" reruns on Roku channel,  
Be careful you don't dislocate the hip.

After a month, my brain returns,  
I reenter my body.  
Using a cane,  
going for walks outside.  
Can shop, again.  
No more Instacart rip-offs.  
Can't cut nails, pedicure in salon.

Waiting for summer,  
My body will be back to normal,  
No more hideous hip pain,  
Bone growing over metal,  
foreign object is accepted,  
Looking forward to long walks,  
sunshine, sex,  
Everything back to normal,  
no more living in a tunnel.

Repeat after me:  
Every little cell in my body  
is healthy,  
Every little cell in my body  
is well,  
I'm so happy, I'm so happy,  
I'm so happy, I'm so happy,  
Every little cell in my body  
is well.



## **Miraculous Mending**

Sean McGlynn  
01/02/2023  
St. Thomas, ON

The stardust of my brain released.  
I did not feel any pain.  
The memories flashed before my eyes,  
fast and furious like stormy rain.

It was like a film going backwards  
right to left to the beginning of my life  
My family stood beside my bed  
The doctor offering hope  
that I would not be brain full of strife

The flashback movie started in the sixties  
when I was just a little boy  
Sitting playing quietly with  
my favourite toys

They put me on ice bags and  
medications to keep me calm.  
My heart and brain were one  
There will be no singing of death songs

The experience was surreal  
As I danced around this place  
I woke up bewildered  
No one singing amazing grace.

They had saved me, many thought me gone  
Im glad that I'm still here  
To write the poem swan songs

Though humble in my mind  
As I walked out the hospital doors  
I do not have much recognition  
Grateful the staff for evermore

So I used up most my stardust  
But have a little left In need of a little rest  
The traffic of my memories did flash before my eyes  
I sit here sometimes wondering why  
not my turn to die

So when its your time most will never know  
But now I don't fear death  
I peaked at the gates of heaven  
And the greatest show.



Art by:  
Tyson Schunamon

## 49

**Icarus on Bloor Street**

Richard Van Holst  
03/7-26/2023  
Ancaster, ON

He had slathered his hands with liberal layers of sunblock. Mid-stroll, treacherous, they slip off the handles. And with clatter of crutches he plummets down to pavement.

*So now I know how it felt for Wile E.*

*Coyote.* No scrapes, welts or rising lumps at least. Arms, legs and crutches radiate

like sunrays. Now he's Bambi on ice, though not adorable in that doe-eyed

Disney way. He can't levitate, for this

is a downtown Toronto sidewalk, not

Hogwarts—but he must act quickly before

good Samaritans swoop in like vultures

scouring the landscape to spot a fresh kill.

He scrambles to gain hasty leverage.

Somehow, anyhow, he lurches upward

hanging suspended over the crutches.

Now he is spraddle-legged, a giraffe drinking from a Serengeti watering hole.

*(This, comments David Attenborough in*

*flawless British tones, is the hazardous*

*time when lions can leap out of the*

*underbrush to strike its vulnerable*

*hindquarters.)* Onlookers, not bent on blood

after all, wonder how to intervene.

*Are you okay?* inquires one. *Need a*

*hand, son?* asks another. *You know,* confides

a third, *I felt so sorry for myself*

*because I sprained my ankle the other*

*day, but now I guess I'm not so bad off.*

*And your courage is inspirational.*

He bites back a sarcastic retort

and offers a confident smile. *Just a*

*little tumble. I've fwallin but I can*

*get up, ha ha.* Humour as crutch, or crutch

as humour? Well, I guess it's a moot point.

## 50

**My Brother**

Richard Paul  
04/14/2023  
Mississauga, ON

What is said and done  
We often times cannot  
comprehend  
Till the years of fears  
have fully passed  
When finally reflected  
it's too late  
to ask  
Or say I didn't mean it,  
or that time is gone

Maybe that's the consequence  
Past meets future in its fiery  
eloquence

we think back on conversations,  
machinations and inclinations  
that can't describe the sudden  
fleeting cathartic moments

polarized, vibrating  
cascading, murmuring  
bubbling in their tectonic fissures  
touching the ivory measures

Incline my hearing to broken words  
Reactants carving out vital chords

Pertinent, persistent, placated  
All this while the water drips  
From stuccoed rotting musty  
ceilings  
We face our stuffy ephermer-  
al beings  
And the moan in wind  
storms  
Which speak with creeks and  
crows

From transforming vibrations  
Comes glaring realization  
Polarization imagination  
Flutters like a broken but-  
terfly

Skiping needle thoughts  
Restore my sight just fine  
Here we are, where we should  
have been all this time.

## Care Can Caress

© Ian Cognitō  
08/2016  
Yellowpoint BC

There is a softness in shared pain

Carla Stein, *Accretions*

“there is a softness  
in shared pain”  
it can round the edges  
of a solitary struggle  
blunt the prickly shards  
of isolation  
defang the demon  
of aborted hopes  
one tooth at a time

many, many things  
can be borne  
once an empathetic shoulder  
has been laid bare  
and offered



## colour me [ ]

Natasha Sanders-Kay

06/2018

Burnaby, BC (Coast Salish Lands)

*after Adèle Barclay's poem "Gin Is All the Colours Because It's Clear"*

materials:

sketchpad (thick)

full box of markers

crayons, Bingo-dabbers

my copy of *If I Were in a Cage I'd Reach Out For You*

the entire group therapy room to myself

I hold

all the colours

and all the colours

hold me



**infinity**

Elaine Stewart  
04/14/1988-2023  
Toronto, ON

I woke up  
on a morning close to today, I was happy  
I was happy...not something I recall often at the wake of the day  
my life had breathed as a maker  
There was a new root starting to grow from this heart home  
It was just beginning  
the seedling growing from it had not reached the sun's blessings yet  
then  
i met a twisted system  
it stole from me  
my body  
i could not  
hammer  
saw  
drill  
build  
sew  
stitch  
fabricate  
move through dark basements of tattered resources  
junk piles of fashion's discards  
do something else  
something 'creative' to bring you home  
art school  
watching the layering, developing, growing all around me  
unable to partake at the feast  
to understand this  
a crack that leaks hope, rolling forward

## 54

**Hear my song**

Thania Valle  
04/15/2023  
Toronto, ON

I have a dream  
a dream for everyone  
to hear my song  
longing to be sung

It is a song of love  
A song of hope  
It is a song of tears  
That triumph over fears

This is my song  
Fought for and won  
Through struggle and hardship  
I'm not the only one

So keep your shame  
Keep your hate  
I don't want your cruelty  
Don't you pity my fate

Hear my song  
That means to say  
I'm stronger now  
than I was yesterday

**Vortex**

Henry Martinuk  
2023  
Toronto, ON

When the world sickened  
and the city shut down  
the cold cut deep  
and froze us all

uncertain spring still  
brought cherry blossom buds  
and the selfing crowds  
to bellwoods park



## 56

**PCA And The Single Girl**

Sonya Popovich

12/2022, Toronto, ON

Abandoned bras, Paninis  
 Sharing chocolate and lottery tickets with those who help  
 When I ask  
 When I can't open my mailbox  
 When I can't do up my coat  
 When I lose my nerve at an escalator or on a busy, windy street  
 When I lose my bearings  
 So much is so frustrating  
 Getting dressed is very hard. Sometimes I am in a tangle  
 Which is the back and which is the front? Where does my arm go?  
 I chase the cap for the toothpaste - how can this be so difficult?  
 Some days it stays uncapped  
 I can't put a card in an envelope  
 I can no longer read, make sense of numbers, or write, though I try  
 I can talk on the phone. I can listen to CBC  
 I can enjoy a song, a dance, a good play, or art exhibit  
 For two years I could not lock my door, but now, with a new fob,  
 I can! It clicks!  
 A friend stops by to read to me and take me to Fiesta Farms  
 I buy prepared meals and eat them cold  
 I eat when I want to  
 I savour fresh dates, the taste of an orange, a radish, a butterhorn  
 I am happy I have a home I don't have to share  
 I listen to the news, I lie down when I'm tired  
 I fall asleep with my socks on  
 They may not match, but they keep me warm  
 I have my Google - "Hey Google, play Lambchop, The Bible!"  
 "Hey Google, call Nick!"  
 "Hey Google, what's the temperature today?"  
 "Thank you, Google!"  
 I do what I can - It's sink or swim for a single girl with PCA\*  
 I have only one ask  
 When you see me on the street, don't walk on by.

\* PCA - Posterior Cortical Atrophy is a form of dementia



## **A Melody Of You**

QND Writing Together Collective  
Poem assembled by Honey Novick  
03/14/2023  
Toronto, ON

When I had no poem  
I stepped in the shoes of acceptance  
finding a language, a song yet to be sung  
putting into words, the hope we want to have again  
a burden shared is a burden lessened, a burden lightened  
thus sharing our stories, our pain helps repair trauma's damage  
to share is to feel less alone, less isolated  
to share a piece of ourselves is to be healed and comforted  
like leaves and branches, we heal, we grow towards the sky  
the dawning of a new day can make the pain go away  
providing an oasis for our struggles  
as tree roots entangle, a hand in the darkness brings light to  
each other, pain teaches wisdom  
for when you're hurt, you're open to comfort others  
with meaningful determinations to survive  
one's own heart can lead to compassion for others  
alone is good for creating, lonely is not  
through pain we see our true selves, a glimpse that can last forever  
gaining another's perspective is very helpful  
like a balm of compassion, swelling like healing waters  
pain that was never allowed is like opening the door on the cage  
and we understand we are not alone  
as a light brightens the darkness  
transcending our isolation

we find loving support from the heart,  
 like a sweet embrace  
 from women's tears, we find the comfort of together  
 transforming into the majesty  
 flying away like a white dove  
 through sharing we break the walls, rain falls, renews, revives,  
 singing "L'Chaim"\*  
 we see bridges over rivers, givers of hope

\*L'Chaim is the Jewish toast meaning "to life"

QND Writing Together Collective  
 Poem assembled by Honey Novick

Kathy Adachi	Sonya Popovich
Lillian Allen	Patricia Reid
Marlene Charney	Penny Riegle
Paul Edward Costa	Kate Russell
Wendy Devine	Donia Saad
Shirley Gillett	Rudy B. Solomonovici
Cadd Gold	Ruth (Ruth) Stackhouse
Mark Guttridge	Elaine Stewart
Raymond Helkio	Thania Valle
Glen Hewitt	Daniela Violin
Henrik Kartna	Jon Vlahos
Rosalba Martinni	Goldie Wellensky
Honey Novick	Sarah Wells
Ariadna Ochrymovyc	Cathy Xinman
Catherine O'Donnell	Zan
Maureen O'Donnell	
Richard Paul	

**Founded in Toronto in 1989,  
The Friendly Spike Theatre Band  
was established to  
create and produce stories  
by marginalized people.  
A biproduct of our many collective  
efforts has been the creation of  
community.  
Join us.  
FB: friendlyspiketheatreplus  
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