

poems



thirty eighth
parkmont
poetry
festival

Poems by District of Columbia Students • Grades 6-12
SPONSORED BY PARKMONT SCHOOL, JUNE 2020

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Jacqui Michel and David Weisman
for their passionate support of
the Parkmont Poetry Festival

Preface

We are pleased to share with you in this booklet the poems of Washington, DC's young writers. The Parkmont Poetry Festival was founded in 1982 to encourage and celebrate the voices and verse of student poets in public, private, and charter schools from all eight wards of the District of Columbia. We honor the promise of diverse young writers, the importance of reflection, the value of community, and the beauty of language. This year we proudly celebrate 38 years of spotlighting and sharing these students' talents and their unique perspectives on their worlds. We received over 400 poems for this year's Festival from students in grades 6 through 12. Our judges have selected these distinguished poems from the chorus of young voices expressing their spirits and vitality through poetry. While we were unable to assemble for the Festival Reading this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the winning poets recorded themselves reading their poems and we compiled them into a video, available on our website at www.parkmontpoetry.org. Please enjoy watching them!

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At a Thrift Store

Sitting on shelves
with ripped blue jeans
and stained black shirts,
an abandoned argyle sweater from last season
waits
to be adopted

There is a poem among these discarded threads.

There are so many clothes,
folded,
strewn,
abandoned,
and ignored
I almost stop looking.

Then there is one skirt, picked at last,
woven with words each one intricately threaded
into the next line.
In a big pile of lost,
I have found the meaning.

Poetry is the found among the discarded,
not known and hard to understand.
Like leaves blown
away by the wind.

Poetry is the girl in the back of the store.
Not hiding but hidden.
Black hair and glasses,
with garments in her basket
like the words in a line.

She sees the hidden beauty in unwanted things.
She finds the true meaning.
She can find the poetry in a store full of old clothes.

COCO CAMPBELL BRAINARD, GRADE 6
SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL

Cargo

Rescued from the aftermath of Hurricane Maria
Found amidst piles of debris
Lucky enough to find its way
Leaving the tropical island of Puerto Rico behind

One of the lighter cargo, weighing only fourteen pounds
Awkwardly shaped, too long and too skinny
Needs to be protected
The label says 'please handle with care'

Scared and unsure because the engines are loud
And the space is too dark
Lonely as there is no one around
The nearby cargo all feel the same way

It arrives at Dulles Airport, not its final destination
Many people come and visit
One family falls in love then brings it home
Big brown eyes look out the window, still scared but not alone

The cargo is still growing, now thirty-three pounds and one year old
More confident and self-assured
Always with a brown and white four-legged companion
Rafael Noche, my springy black lab-whippet mix

JULIAN MONTES-SHARP, GRADE 8
GEORGETOWN DAY SCHOOL

Infinity Limit

Elements are my life
A calculator is my time
Factors are the enemy
My base is the face of cute
Analyze my place right
Set down thinking about you.
Plane, fly normal
slope the line of love;
logic based on a real number,
a theory of life.

MIJIA WILIAMS, GRADE 9
FRANK W. BALLOU SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Veery Thrush Wings

Veery Thrush wings flutter on my window
Singing a song of rebirth and grace
Singing to my sleeping soul
Their voices danced with such ease
I sing along and brush my hair with please

Next morning awaits and the voices I greet
The Veery Thrush wings flutter and speak
Singing a song of rebirth and grace
Singing to my sleeping soul
The song of warmth and a new beginning
I fell in love with their wings without resisting

Veery Thrush wings flutter on death
Singing a song short of their breath
Singing to my exhausted soul
The song of dead dirt and soil
And now that song makes my blood boil

The mother of my mother flutter in heaven
She sang a song of life and creation
She sang a song of beauty and poise
The song that my mother sang to me
The passing of the song came to be

Next morning awaits and clouds I greet
Wings did not flutter for me to meet
So I sang a song of rebirth and grace
Sang a song of warmth
Sang to my sleeping Grandma's soul
May she rest in those wings
And be spoiled with gold

Veery Thrush wings flutter on my window

TAKIYAH CHAPPELLE, GRADE 8
HOWARD MIDDLE SCHOOL OF MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

Doesn't have a name Yet...?

There are some days where I go outside
see the same two birds fight for something.
Some days it can be
a worm, a piece of bread, a stick.

At times the two birds remind me of
my parents arguing.
Sometimes the arguments are about
money,
my father's drinking problem,
my siblings causing problems
or at times, little random things.

Then these two birds remind me of
myself, arguing with my other side.
If I should do the right thing or be a daredevil
If I should
go right or left
ask myself again or just do it.

Just those two birds
bring up everything from my life.

But then what if those two birds
were showing their love for each other?

Reminds me of my parents
buying things for each other,
telling each other, "I love you."
My father getting flowers for my mother,
my mother making his favorite dish.

They remind me of my life now
reaching to that person that needs my love,
sending a message in the morning,
"I hope you have a good day."
Leading that person to the right path
walking with them to their destination.

Giving that person
a reason to believe
in themselves.

ESMERALDA CARRANZA MORALES, GRADE 10
E. L. HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL

Clean My Locker?

Why do you want me to clean out my locker? I just don't understand.

My locker is quite neat, in fact, the cleanest in the land.

So what if it takes me an hour to find the school supplies inside? It's not like a major problem happening worldwide!

And who cares if the pile of gunk inside has started to decompose?

It shouldn't be a problem if the locker door is closed!

What's the problem if there might be something growing in there?

It's not alive and sentient . . . as far as I'm aware.

And the smell? It's not like everyone's barfed or anything 'cause of the stink.

Only 12 or 13 kids have fainted so far, I think.

My locker is perfectly squeaky clean, thank you very much. The cleanliness level of it has been drastically misjudged.

ELEANOR SCHNEIDER, GRADE 6
GEORGETOWN DAY SCHOOL

Black Diamonds

When I was a toddler
I did not love
My thick black static hair,
that fell straight on top my shoulders
which I thought sure could not compare
while they tossed their light locks
and fluffed out their braids
they told me My strands were coarse,
unlike theirs that easily frayed.
I wished My eyes were not dark and black
like murky tainted water,
far different from the crystal ocean that I had always admired.
My skin was tinted with different hues,
not like theirs that shone and glowed
I wanted to be like them, I thought only then would I feel at home.

Everywhere I went I said
when I grow up I'll be a blonde,
eager and excited about a magical fairy wand
to turn my hair soft and wavy
forgetting all My shades of dark navy.
to add platinum highlights at the tips of my curls
that would wind down my back in delicate swirls.
I wanted the bright color trails that curved in their eyes
and a noticeable pupil that couldn't be disguised.
I said I wanted to dye my eyes
with a mix of green and blue,
because only then could I say my eyes are turquoise too.

But through all these years
it's in this skin I have grown.
It has been My thick black hair
that cushioned every fall,
it has been these eyes
that were My windows to understanding it all.

And even though it took some time
now I finally see,
My black diamond eyes can sparkle just as bright
as any of yours can be.

ANGELA DING, GRADE 6
SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL

I'm Byron Watson

I am from bad attitudes and acting tough,
like a juvenile delinquent.
I am from Flint, Michigan,
the coldest place on the planet.

I am from the place where tears turn into ice cubes,
and the snow and cold wind hang around.
In Flint, where lips get stuck on frosty windows.
They tasted sour, bitter, and almost sweet.

I am from icicles all over the house.
The whole family huddled on the couch in our coats,
and snow always covering dad's favorite car,
the Brown Bomber.

I'm from a caring mom, who hugged me,
a dorky brother, who got on my nerves,
a funny dad, who kept us smiling,
and a crybaby sister, who got all the attention,
but I love them all.

I am from Swedish Creams,
jeans and suspenders,
and visiting my grandma in Birmingham, Alabama,
where church bombs kill innocent girls,
just because they are black.

ARCHIE (AJ) LACEY, GRADE 6
ALICE DEAL MIDDLE SCHOOL

Retaliation vs. Alliteration

When you walk into walls of whispering, weeping willows
overflowing with flowered feather-filled pillows
there lies a portal full of evil, soulless mortals.
Maniacal, misogynistic morons —
Shoot 'em all with an AK-47;
Blow up the stereo and turn it up to 11.
Conquer and defeat, destroy. Crash and deploy.
Create, recreate, reiterate. Illiterate, retaliate, elevate.
When words collide, they conquer and divide.
Things you can't resist, they'll fall apart and they'll never exist.
I'm spitting, shooting, and shining big, bad bombs.
Bustin' rhymes, toll times, fools committing crimes, clock chimes,
money bagging with dollars, cents and dimes;
Bankrolling, Sunday strolling, blow up the joint;
Clear, concise, I'll get to the point.
What's yours is mine, point blank.
I just stole and won this competition.
And that's the finale of my rendition.

JAHIR GRAY, GRADE 11
FRANK W. BALLOU SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Rollercoaster in the McKenna Center

Some people fear
the unknown
stars,
The unwalked with
The unseen
The unheard

I looked away too,
But then push,
Fall,
There,

He sat in front of me,
Me before him,
Or rather him before me,
Eating the same meal,

Talked,
an awkward conversation
Ate,
a quiet meal
Uncomfortable,
how we both felt

My blood couldn't circulate,
My own words strangled me,
But then
he spoke,

He told me about the
clenched fist
thrill of traveling,
Like a rollercoaster,
His journey went around the
world.

I felt the bumping in my seat,
The breeze throwing back my
hair,
My stomach rolling around
somewhere inside of me,

Nigeria originally,
he called it home
Then Germany,
And France
And so many more,

In that split second,
The world froze around us,
Like it was muted,
No one else talking,
No TV in the background,

And after everything unfroze,
Just Maxwell and me.

ADAM UPPULURI, GRADE 11
GONZAGA COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL

The Barrier (الحاجز)

لغة أمي و أبي

The language my mother and father speak

اولاد عمي وأجدادي لا يفهموني تماما

My cousins and grandparents don't understand me fully

جمال تعقيد اللغة هو الحاجز

The beautiful complex language is a barrier

توقفني من المحادثات مع عائلتي في الخارج

It stops me from conversations with my family overseas

توقفني في المطار

It stops me in the airport

يجيدون اللغة كتهديد

They find the language as a threat

اللغة التي أجبرت والدتي أن تطلب مني أن أتكلم

The language that forces my mother to ask me to speak

لا تريد لهجتها القوية الجميلة أن تسمح للآخرين بالافتراض

She does not want her strong beautiful accent

to allow others to make assumptions

الافتراض بأن جنسيتي تجعلني غير آمنة لأكون حول غير اشخاص

The assumption that my nationality makes me

an unsafe person to be around

ولكن عندما يسألني شخص من أين أنا

But when someone asks me where I am from

أعلن بكل فخر أنني نصف لبنانية نصف فلسطينية

I proudly announce that I am half Lebanese half Palestinian

مولدة في بلد أنا فيه حرة

Born in a country where I am told I am free

حرة للتعبير عن نفسي و عرقي

Free to express myself and ethnicity

كذابين!

Liar!

يحكم علي عندما أتكلم لغتي
I am judged when I speak my language
يحكم علي عندما أقول أنا فخورة باني فتاة عربية أمريكية
I am judged when I say I am a proud Arab-American girl
يحكم علي عندما أرتدي الأسود والأبيض والأحمر والأخضر
Judged when I wear black, white, red, and green
بدلاً من الأحمر والأبيض والأزرق
Instead of red, white, and blue
يحكم علي إذا لا أكل الطعام الأمريكية النموذجي
Judged if I don't eat typical American food

هذا البلد كذب علي
This country lied to me
أنا لست حرة، أنا محكم عليها
I am not free, I am judged
ولكن أنا أرفض أن أخفي هويتي
But I refuse to cover my identity

LINA FAWAZ, GRADE 8
GEORGETOWN DAY SCHOOL

Short and Simple

Imma keep it short & simple,
One day I'm out at CVS tryna buy some Pringles.
I pay with a dollar bill and some change
And the cashier doesn't cash it.
He holds the dollar to the light and marks those coins.
I ask him what he do that for,
He said he's just taking precaution.
I guess I got that,
But as I'm walking, another dude came in and bought the
same thing.
The cashier didn't do to him what he had done to me.
I started to get mad like
What about my broken glasses looked so intimidating?
Guess I'll leave it there . . .
Got to keep it short & simple.

So I took my chips and headed to the train station.
15 minutes, I guess I gotta be patient.
That's when this one dude walked up to me talking crazy,
That look in his eyes was distant and kinda hazy.
Dude asked me for four dollars and of course I had some cash
But first I had to ask
What you finna do wit it?
Nothin man I just want a sammich.
So I act like Bruh Man and say *Cool man, here you go.*
Dude looked appreciative and said God bless yo soul!
Then walked straight pass the sub shop to a man on the
corner . . .
Gonna leave it right there,
Got to keep it short & simple.

Now I'm on the train goin home,
Sun's down and I'm feelin real sleepy.
We get to a station that's not mine,
But I still had to get off.

The police was there and they was pullin people off.
Latino,
Asian,
No White,
Oh wait there's a female being pulled out now,
And Black too.
That was me.
They was tryna find a thief or something, but I wasn't stressin.
I believed I was bless and I wouldn't second guess it,
But as I'm laying on the grungy pavement
I remember this movie with Michael B. Jordan.
Something about a Fruitvale Station.
The stories end the same way,
With a BANG!
I'll leave it right there . . .
Got to keep it short & simple.

CADEN TURNER-ADAMS, GRADE 11
BENJAMIN BANNEKER ACADEMIC HIGH SCHOOL

2 Sides to the Same Story

Papa and Mama gave my brothers the talk yesterday.
She said I didn't need it, but I could join if I still wanted to be
informed on it.
I never understood the talk,
never understood why everyone was so scared after it.
I also never understood why they also said it stuck to their minds,
yet when the time comes . . .
they forget all the steps Papa and Mama told them.
One thing happened and my brothers had a slight encounter with
the police,
I don't think it was that bad.
Right?
But maybe that's why they never told me the context of the
meeting in their office downtown.
My brothers are good boys, no attitude, no issues.
At least that's what Papa said they should be
when they see a man in a blue uniform pull them over.
"Keep your hands far apart and on the dashboard, over the wheel."
"Don't reach for anything unless asked for it."
"Describe your every move BEFORE you do it."
We don't want no more burials on this block,
or in this house.
My brothers asked my Papa,
"Why do we need to know this?"
Couple days later they found out why.
Sirens going off
"Please pull your vehicle over sir."
"Can I see your ID?"
"Are you under the influence?"
"Do you know why I pulled you over?"
My brother thought that he was supposed
to answer that last question.
He told that white man in the blue uniform,
"I on know, some dumb reason, prolly."
"Dumb? Oh you think driving too slow is dumb, huh son."

My brother, oh he forgot the most important step . . .
don't argue back unless you have a death wish.
He told that man,
"On an empty highway?"
Do you know,
on average in the United States, a police officer
takes the life of a citizen every 7 hours.
I should know, I have an app that tells me so.
That day, March 24th, 2015. MY brother was the name I saw on
that app.
Poor brownskin baby.
Now missing his life.
All because of a system that contradicts our talk completely.
"Now cadet, tell me what you've learned today?"
"Pull over anyone with skin color different from ours."
"Speak kindly, but insult them so they get 'ghetto'.
"Accuse them of things, simple ones at that."
"If I see them move at all, fire."
Mama and Papa taught us everything they could.
Told us cause we darker and different,
they not gonna always like us.
It's not like how 2 PAC said.
We lost my brother
to the very people who promised to protect and serve.
"Thank you cadet, you pass."
Congrats, you're a certified killer, protected by the law.

ARIANA MARQUEZ, GRADE 11
E. L. HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL

Where Are You From?

Where are you from
I am from the the times she didn't have it
From the missing handles on the car door
The years we live with my aunt
The beatings that left me in tears
I am from the sad walk from Holy Cross

Where are you from
I am from the laughter with them
From the countless movie nights
From the times I slept with her
The moments where I was mad at her
I am from the love she gave me

Where are you from
I am from all the call homes
From the years below grade level
From the books I wished I read
I am from the teachers who cared

Where are you from
I am from the fields of Marlow Heights
The slippery courts of Seat Pleasant
The cold days of Fort Washington
I am from the 15 years of life

DAMILL BOSTIC, GRADE 8
WASHINGTON JESUIT ACADEMY

I Am

I am from pens of every size and shape
Collected throughout journeys
across new landscapes
I am from Olive oil and coconut cream
Smooth, pure, and smelling sweet
Tastes like sandpaper and gelatin on my tongue.
I am from the blue house, hidden beneath the trees
Warm, small, yet it makes room for us all.
I am from dandelions
And pretending their flying seeds are fairies riding the air
I am from sparkling apple cider and traveling the world
Savoring each drink of heaven I take from the sky.
I'm from the honest abes and late bloomers
From the "Non-negotiables" and "Estrecha la mano!"
I am from unity around a tree
Covered in lights, ornaments, and each person's glee
I'm from George Washington Hospital, DC
In my blood runs immigrant ancestry.
I am from biting into the dessert of the moon
Soft, sticky, and sweet
Filled with red bean paste and the occasional dim-sum I long for
I am from Shepard's pie
Hot, creamy, savory, my mouth melts
from the heat, as I jig to the fiddle, ghillies on my feet
I am from tapas in Spanish bars, cheese, olives, oysters, caldo gallego
Small dishes with every imaginable color
Hot, cold, sweet, sour, balanced by music during happy hour.
I'm from swinging on swings
My feet bare
Moving my toes as I fly through the air
I'm from my main entrance hall
Full of distant worlds that reside on the wall.
I am from wishing I could
dive into these moments forever frozen in time
and come back with a souvenir.
I am Ava.

AVA BLUM, GRADE 9
GEORGETOWN DAY SCHOOL

American

She's been in this country since before she said her first words or
learned her ABCs

Her first steps were walked on the same soil as yours were,
and it was on this land that her tufts of
peach fuzz turned into the locks they are now.

How is she any less American than you?

He spends hours picking tomatoes, red like dried blood encased
in cracks on his knuckles.

His stomach pleads, begs for food as he shucks corn, again
and again,

CHHHHH CHHHHH CHHHHH

so your dinner plate isn't empty.

He picks and picks, shucks and shucks all day.

Nail beds bleeding, throat dry from lack of water, like sun beating
down on his hot back

She gets home *from* work,

her back aching and her knees bruised from hours she has spent
kneeling over toilets

scrubbing them raw,

her eyes teary *from* bottles and bottles products she uses to
make silk expensive luxurious clothes

perfect

She gets home *from* work drained

worrying that after fourteen hours it still isn't **enough**

Every morning she looks at her reflection and her frizzy hair
speaks and tells her,

"You are not American."

She spends hours trying to flatten her hair, trying to dull the voice
and make her thick brown hair thin like girls in her class.

She pretends like she can't hear when her classmates call her an
alien, put her in a zoo for them to **spectate**.

Pick and put in the basket

Pick and put in the basket

Over and over

"Faster!" they scream

faster and faster he goes so they don't call him **"lazy"**

His life orbits around this one motion like earth does sun

It is the only thing keeping him and his family alive

When the day is done he returns home with little to nothing than
he had the day before

Night after night her memories conquer her mind like stars filling
the sky

Her baby boy had brown hair that could never be held down by
a comb

His smile was a lottery ticket, once in a lifetime opportunity, first
snowfall of the season

His cheeks round and red like so many apples that are picked by
her people every day

His little plump hands were soft and smooth unknown to dry
skin or calluses

His eyes sparkled still, peaceful blue

He was her everything

She wishes that she could go home to her mother and father
waiting for her at the door like families in all the Hallmark movies,
So she tries to hide her loathing and embarrassment of her
parents

when they come back after 14 hour shifts, with their joints aching
from endlessly

picking, harvesting, shoving, cleaning, and being treated
like they are anything but humans.

Hands tired.

Feet tired.

Body tired.

He is tired.

Tired of his employers forgetting to add a few 100 dollars to his
paycheck.

Tired of having to hear his wife tell him about how she is
assaulted, by white men
who chew on her and then spit her out like gum.

Tired of watching his children come home, bruises pasted on
their faces

that cover their expressions of guilt and embarrassment for
being where they are from.

Her son was her everything

yet thin green paper **invaded** her mind and **poisoned** her
thoughts

Because when her baby boy can't get better

can't get healthy you start questioning **everything**

America is the only solution to fix everything

So she left

Left her perfect boy and didn't stay to watch him turn into a man
She has been nothing but a friendly neighbor, a straight A student, a
helping hand.

She never learned Spanish for fear people would realize that her
caramel skin

isn't the same shade as your fair skin.

She followed all of your rules.

Land of opportunity,

American Dream

But he is not living a dream

This is a nightmare

But no matter how many times he pinches himself,

he can never wake up

She crossed the border, wall that divides her from her baby boy

Crossed the border with nothing in her hands

But in her mind she carried the hope that this would help

Not knowing that America would be filled with fear and terror that
one day

She will **pay the price** for stepping across the border

And treated as if she will never be American

You call her a "**criminal**" just because all those years ago she passed
the barrier

into her true home.

How can you look at her brown skin and imagine

badged men coming behind her, bringing her down to her knees

**as she bellows to be left alone, reaching out for her home but her
hands are tied back.**

How could you deny her from being American?

She has come here to help her family and yet her black hair and
light brown skin

make it so that she will never be able to relax, take a breath

And if she does try and come up for air you will not help her

You will push her back into the water so that she can't get any air
and watch her as she sinks deeper and deeper into dark shameful
water

Watch as she disappears

He gave his life to this country, and for what in return?
He is exhausted, and yet his country continues to use his dream
as a punching bag,
knocking him down every chance they get.

Bang

Dirty wetback

Bang

Thief

Bang

Lazy Mexican

Bang

You don't belong

Bang

You are not American

But they are American

Nearly 15% of the US population are immigrants

They are real

**EMMA PARDO
ALI HELLERMAN
MELANIE BRESLIN,
GRADE 8
SHERIDAN SCHOOL**

The Drooping Branches [of a First Generation American's Family Tree]

There is so much of me
An ocean full of my parents' memories
I drown underneath the damnations of my history
The weight of all my legacies, my countries constrict
 my chest and make it
hard to breathe
My roots have been scattered over too large seas
I don't know where my ancestors were buried
I am a hybrid seed but the wind has swept me too far away from my
family trees
I've never been to the cemeteries where the crucifixes stood watch
I can't find the land that could have been my burial plot
I know where my mother's tree grew, she was Avocado pits and
red bush [Roiboos] leaves
My father's tree had bats in it, but I don't remember what fruit it grew
so I pretend it sprouted oranges like Gioconda Belli's.

GABRIELA OROZCO, GRADE 11
SCHOOL WITHOUT WALLS

Your Smile Waves Me Bye

You fill me up
Like a pot of tea
I'm no longer empty
Your hugs and kisses always warm me
Like a fuzzy blanket covering all of me
Your touch against my skin
Sent shivers down my spine
I wanted more
I wanted you to be mine
Your smile waves me bye
And I am swarmed with butterflies
I thought everything was right
But you had a secret that was secretly in sight
It
Start
ed
slow
And you started to let go
Like hanging off the cliff
You let go of the rope
I was left with these questions
Why?
Why?
Why?
My stomach dropped oh so high
Your faded smile waves me bye
And my tears drop to the side.

LAINY POLMATEER, GRADE 12
THE SIENA SCHOOL

Anne Arundel Medical Center

Deep in the maze of sterile hallways
machines beep while nurses
whisper
and Papa Joe lies still, head resting
on his palm
His mind may be frail, but his hand
is steadfast

He stirs
reaching over, I put his hand in
mine
Veins form peaks in the delicate
skin
ridged fingernails, like chipped
stone
and brown splotches like spilled ink

Our fingers fit snugly

His warm grasp is tender
Drawing me close on Passover and
bringing me for long walks around
the College
on worn paths by red brick halls
A haven of autumn light

His palms slip on the harsh metal
bed frame
accustomed
to gripping grainy wood, crisp
pages, woven chairs
to splaying behind a cover and
spine
to resting, aside the pondering
head,
pausing, to dutifully deliver
perceptions to a page

With a devoted hand,
abstract thought became sprawling
script
Ponderings sculpted into meaning
The mind was a guide, a
companion, a purpose
It was the study brimming with
books
slowly deteriorating.
Emptied shelves in a haze of dust,
a confused toss of pages,
Maddening, incomprehensible
writing
Silent decay.

Ever since,
the lonesome hand
Left adrift, alone, abandoned by
sagacity
merely a pen without ink coursing
through

standing by the doorway
both hands raise and extend
toward the study
venerating a resilient friendship
with open palms
before the yellow lights dim to
black
and he firmly shuts the door

I clutch his hand tighter in mine
a sorry substitute, I think to myself
but he looks up at me, benevolent
I kiss him gently on the forehead
and turn away as the yellow lights
dim to black

ALEXA COHEN, GRADE 11
MARET SCHOOL

Broken hearts, Broken minds

I have broken hearted people around me
(This is a real story so pay attention)
I lost a close friend and he was like a brother
When I got the phone call
my heart was broken and my mind went down
some dark streets
People are walking around with broken hearts
Heaven and earth are not the same
Heaven is a magical place and Earth is like Hell
because we aren't doing things right down here
and everybody's acting like it's okay
going through the cold season without family
still lost with broken hearts & broken minds

OCTAVIA JOHNSON, GRADE 12
FRANK W. BALLOU SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

A Father

No matter how much I tell myself
“I was better off without him,”
A part of me hopes that isn't true,
That if he stayed I'd have him and
No one else would.

If he stayed,
My sweet crazy mother would not
have to
Sacrifice and endure so much
If he stayed,
My brother would've had a better
example
Of the man he should become
That if he stayed,
I would have had someone capable of
protecting me,
Someone to teach me my worth,
To help me through all of my
insecurities
And shield me from this
Dangerous yet beautiful world.
I'd have a warm hand, larger than my
own,
To guide me.

But instead,
I had a father who was
Locked in a prison cell.
Dressed in a blue jumpsuit,
Covered in tattoos,
Who was part of many dangerous
Criminal gangs,
And an illegal immigrant from
El Salvador.

It wasn't till my mother told me
He was being deported

That I grasped the full situation.

As I leaned over the back of our couch
Listening to my mom talking as she
stood with her phone
In her right hand,
I realized at 8 years old, as a small
petite child, I had
Lost my father.

I would never see him again, I'd never
share snacks with him from the
vending machine,
I'd never sit on his lap again,
He'd never listen to us ramble on for
hours,

But the hardest thing I realized was,
He would live his life without us.
We would live our lives without him.

The last thing he told me was that he
was proud of
My brother and I,
He wished my brother congratulations
on graduating from high school,
And we haven't texted or spoken
since.

The thing is, if he'd stayed,
My mother would have had to endure
much more,

My brother
would have had a terrible example of
a man,
And me,

Well, I hope he's holding my new little
sister the way

I wished he held me,
Because I'm no longer his baby.

MIAJAH SPRIGGS, GRADE 10
BENJAMIN BANNEKER ACADEMIC HIGH SCHOOL

My Grandmother

Gone but never forgotten
Death is not the end
Her words telling me that she loves me
Her angels watching over me
As I try to comprehend

I love my grandmother
I love her so well
Her warm hugs welcome me
But now that she's gone
My heart begins to swell

My love for her was like a pet
Always clinging to its owner
But when the owner is gone
The pet will never forget
It just waits for it to come back as the days grow older

I wish she were here
Spreading wise words in my ear
Although she has left me
She has impacted my life greatly

I wish she were here reassuring me
Telling me I'm going to be okay
Making her journey back home
As her days start to slip away

Why did you do it
Why did you do it granny
Leaving me by myself
So sad and lonely

KIMANI JOHNSON, GRADE 8
HOWARD UNIVERSITY MIDDLE SCHOOL OF MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

A Pipe Cleaner Pantoum

I remember only pieces of my childhood
The way I remember pieces of that podcast I fell asleep to last night,
The way I remember pieces of that lecture during which I only doodled in curls,
The way I remember pieces of that movie I watched in Portuguese that one time.

The way I remember pieces of that podcast I fell asleep to last night,
I remember sitting in a flimsy chair in the front of the beauty parlor.
The way I remember pieces of that movie I watched in Portuguese that one time.
I remember the crisp sound of scissors and the delicate fall of crescent hair.

I remember sitting in a flimsy chair in the front of the beauty parlor,
Braiding pipe cleaners to pass the time.
I remember the crisp sound of scissors and the delicate fall of crescent hair,
And the expected frustration of the pipe cleaners' permanent curl.

Braiding pipe cleaners to pass the time,
Blue, white and black.
And the expected frustration of the pipe cleaners' permanent curl
Comes from the fact that—

Blue, white or black—
No matter how many times I press the fuzzy wires between my thumb and
forefinger,
There comes the fact that
The pipe cleaners will always be wrinkled.

No matter how many times I press the fuzzy wires between my thumb and
forefinger,
No matter how many times I try to iron them straight,
The pipe cleaners will always be wrinkled,
Not the smooth, straight line that slid from the box.

No matter how many times I try to iron them straight,
I remember only pieces of my childhood—
The way I remember pieces of that lecture during which I only doodled in curls—
Not the smooth, straight line that slid from the box.

GISELLE SILLA, GRADE 12
GEORGETOWN DAY SCHOOL

Color, Light and Life

Color, Light and Life
Graced her eyes.
Graced her world
Graced her life

And now she can see the soft, blue sky, covering the
ends of the earth.

The rain, as it pitter patters on the sidewalk, the sight
of enchanting droplets

The lush grass, for it smells like fresh sunshine and
looks are like a fairytale garden.

Her eyes are opened, so she can never look back
To

The

Dark.

Before

All she saw was black.

It used to all be an endless void, sucking her in

Limb by limb

Eye by eye

There wasn't even a reason to dream about hope
anymore

She has learned a new way to read by gently grazing
her finger on textural dots

and a new way to see by getting used to the dark

Until

She

Finally

Opened her eyes.

SOPHIE HAAR, GRADE 6
SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL

My Escape

My trusty orange ball rests in my hands
the worries of tomorrow gone.
Lunging to the left I bounce the ball off the wood
my teachers' voices no longer ringing in my head.
I stop and prepare to shoot
my tests lose their importance.
The ball rolls off my fingers
my parents' nagging quiets in the distance.
At the sound of that swoosh
all my problems are gone.
A round orange ball
the only way that I feel calm.

QUINN FISH, GRADE 11
GONZAGA COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL

Checkmate

Velvet cushion taping furnished wood

Tension build, sweat dripping from cufflink palm

Tic, toc, tic, toc, tic

Arm extends to table's end

Moisture runs from the temple damping the face

Shift at the shoulder, shift at the elbow, up, place

Checkmate

SEAN MAXFIELD, GRADE 10
SCHOOL WITHOUT WALLS

Disguised Passion

Passion is inside of a fencer.
Dressed in all white, nobody knows the disguised girl.
Lights are flashing, red and green.
Beeps and clangs distract her from each side,
But she must stay concentrated.
She shows anger by slashing and clanging her sword through the
air.
She fights her hardest, panting and thrusting herself towards her
competition.
No one knows her, she is just another competitor.
She is hungry to win, but must stay patient.
Touch 1.
Bam!
Touch 2.
Clang!
Touch 3.
Slash!
Touch 4.
Lunge!
Touch 5.
The audience is shocked.
Who is the masked girl?
A champion, a doubter, a fighter
Or just an ordinary girl.

ALEXANDRA (LEXI) RABASCO, GRADE 8
GEORGETOWN DAY SCHOOL

Slam Poetry About Road Work

Thank you all for coming to this City Council meeting.
Today's topic will be completing the receipt
to fill in the concrete that the streets are needing.
Sitting at the seat of District 3, I feel the heat
to complete this bill. I've seen it in action; these potholes kill.
*But we need to assess the mess and make sure
there's no excess in our spending.
The press is unending when they're condescending to us,
we need our address to be best.*
Councilman Cress! We still have to try to buy the supplies
so a kid doesn't scrape his knee and cry!
So a driver doesn't go off-road and die!
It doesn't matter how much it costs to buy,
and that's the reason why! Open your eyes!
*I've opened my eyes! And by the by,
you need to get your head out of the sky!
Use your head and calculate the overhead expenses!
Until then our defense is to put up signs stating,
"Road Work Ahead!"
That will stop everyone from ending up dead!*
And what if you're wrong, Councilman Cress?
Is that your best guess to avoiding the mess
we would get into if this isn't a success?
We'd have to confess to the press about the mess!
The stress would put this administration to a halt!
So if someone skids on the broken asphalt,
it'd be your fault!
*Councilman Galt! You're treating this problem
like it's an assault! Pole vaulting over the arguments
I provide! It's like you're hiding the fact
that you want our treasury to default!*
Cress! Galt! I need to establish order in this meeting,
the debate is heating, and I don't want anyone
to be pressed into halting their best verbal assaults!
This meeting is adjourned, I hope we've learned
a bit more of where everyone's concerned.
We'll come back in fifteen minutes.

HENRY ROSSER, GRADE 12
PARKMONT SCHOOL

Rush Hour on the Metro

My train pulls into the station with a gust of warm air
The doors slide open until they click into position
Please allow customers to exit before boarding the train
Then the mass of other commuters and I
Pack into the car as tight as possible
Step back to allow the doors to close

I don't like how close the man next to me is
I don't like how his body is turned to face my side
I don't like how as the train sways and rattles
I can feel the weight of his body leaning against mine
And slowly easing off when we turn right
To navigate the underground tunnels
Then leaning back on as we turn to the left

Stop being dramatic
It's all in your head
A stern voice tells me
Calm down and tough it out

But still my heart is racing erratically
And I start to sweat under my hoodie
The air feels thick and heavy
My 5'2" frame has never felt so small
As it does when I feel his stomach press into my side
And his arm looming over me to hold the bar above
I want nothing more than to get off at the next stop
And sit there for however many hours it takes
Until the trains that come through are empty
Completely devoid of people
But I also want to get home in time for dinner

So I ride down the line until the crowd dissipates
And then I take a seat by myself
And ride in silence until I reach my destination
The doors slide open until they click into position
Please allow customers to exit before boarding the train

It's okay
I'm okay
I tell myself
I just don't like rush hour on the metro

OLIVIA VERGASON, GRADE 11
THE FIELD SCHOOL

Morning Coffee

after *Orange Car Crash Fourteen Times* by Andy Warhol

Redemption demands creativity.
Each brushstroke that glides along the mural of self-forgiveness
acts in pursuit of molding coherency between the freethinking parts.

In time, doubt of my humanity surfaces
when sociopathy mingles with my innermost soul.
Maladroit remorse is left to its own devices.

My unwavering will triumphs over my worst decision.
It stands aloof on a solitary podium of steel,
signaling out to a bewildered crowd.

Even when those blighted memories thrust themselves back
into my mind like the marigold leaves
that blew over that moonless thoroughfare,

I brush them off.
I turn the page of my newspaper.

DYLAN ROSOFF, GRADE 12
SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL

Dear Politicians

Christopher James Bishop loved teaching German
Ryan Clark, a month from graduation
Caitlin Hammaren, a talented violinist
Alicia White
Joaquin Oliver
Meadow Pollack
Peter Wang
Clayton Parks
And on and on and on

I could list thousands of names
Stories of lives torn apart
Bullets piercing bleeding bodies
Beating hearts hear gunshots and fall silent
And when I am done reading
Another name will be added to the list

Your calloused hands claw for bloody bills
Breathlessly, blindly,
Politicians accept bribery
Like puppeteers
The NRA pulls in politicians and keeps them on a string
Paralyzed, hypnotized, as you look in the eyes of injustice's aid
Destruction and death
All for a letter grade

You cite open doors
A violent video game
Each death you think up something else to blame
You pitiless people profiting off pain
Pacify never rectify this pathetic paradigm
As if lives loved and lives lost amount to nothing
As if!

If you collected our tears we'd flood the world
Washing away the remnants of the lives that you stole
I could build an ark to keep me afloat
With bulletproof windows and a kevlar raincoat

And still there are more names
More lives owed justice
Henry Lee
Juan Ortiz
Nicole White

Carrie Parsons
Don't you see what you've done?
You're blind to the broken hearts
The heartache, the heartbreak
The Kindergarteners cowering under desks
Faces fraught with fear
Just a drill, just a drill, why is this a drill?
You are numb to the frantic I love you whispered into phones
Don't you see: we are the ones who reap the inaction you have sown

So when your eyes are pried open and you see what you've done
I'll send my thoughts and prayers

ABBY KELSO, GRADE 8
SHERIDAN SCHOOL

3129

3129 pulled the trigger
The world stands still
His girlfriend is screaming and crying
She's angry and wants to kill
Him
3129
He walked away without looking behind
Talked to his radio "we have a situation"
I'm frozen as a statue but begin to tear up without hesitation
When he was shot his body was left open
For me I remember everything . . . in slow motion
I memorized the officer's face.
Long nose, pale skin and slanted eyes
But his badge number was most important
3129
He shot him so quickly, to stop him . . . I didn't have enough time

3 years later, my cousin is buried in the dirt . . . decaying and alone
It's so quiet and empty without him at home
Auntie says because I saw what had happened, I'm scarred for life.
She's probably right because I'm terrified to close my eyes
Afraid to walk outside
Afraid to look at a neighborhood officer and say hi
I can't stand to look at his room door across the hall
Even when I open it, my thoughts will go crazy
I lose my balance, so I can't stand tall

10-year-old black girl sees her cousin shot by a white man
By a cop
By someone who ran
When the gun made its shot
Imagine that, 3129
You damaged a 10-year-old's black girl mind
You murdered her best friend, you damaged his lover
Is this a new trend
Maybe not because you didn't have any charges
Nor did u break your cover

Sisters . . . heartbroken
His mother . . . mournful but no words spoken
His girlfriend won't stop crying and refuses to move on
You took him away from his family, which is the strongest bond

3129 I hope you hear and this gets to you
Because forgiveness is something I will never do
Nor will I act in ignorance and come for you

Two years later. Now I'm 15
I still have nightmares of the horror I'd seen
My mom is struggling
My dad can hardly sleep
Thankfully my little brother is still care free
But Auntie still cries at night
When I look at her eyes, they no longer shine
Over the years I've realized the justice system is corrupt
Fred Hampton, Rekia Boyd, Tamir Rice, my cousin
The more I think about it, I slowly lose it
If I protest, I get shot
If I let things slide, I'll have heated thoughts
So what do I do?
The only thing promised in life is death, right?
But I have too much ahead of me to die out of spite
So my cousin J can watch over me, and be proud of his baby girl.
I'll make a difference. Change the world.

CHOSAUN RIDLEY, GRADE 8
HOWARD UNIVERSITY MIDDLE SCHOOL OF MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

Passenger

The sun stays the same
But the moon changes its phases

The stars stay the same
But the clouds change shape

I don't always fit in.
I'm the one who is not the best.

The sun stays the same
But the moon changes its phases

The stars stay the same
But the clouds change shape

I am the scraps
Left over from what happened
That day
A piece of myself

JERMAINE BROWN, GRADE 8
CHARLES HART MIDDLE SCHOOL

The Hotel California

after Pablo Picasso's *The Old Guitarist*

Years have loosened the
threads woven beneath
my forehead and cheeks.

Yet the tang of iron and zinc
Still linger on the roof of my mouth
Like regret begging to be put to paper,

My sick mind thought lead
Would bring me rest but
Lead carried me to where I can never dream

So, I drink the ghost of you
Like scorching spirits
Conjuring small infernos in the back of my throat.

You can't enjoy a buzz up here,
So I don't understand
Why we all drink like fish.

Just the other day —

A lady in all white said
When my mother found me,
She held me for eighty-three minutes straight.

Eighty-three minutes,
She said,
I bled in my mother's arms

Only then did she let those men carry me away.

So every night, for eighty-three minutes straight,
I pluck for her blood harmonies,
Until my fingers paint the strings crimson.

To drown out her cries,
To drown out her screams,
Though I know my hollowed melodies never reach her ears —

I miss the smell of my mother.

Because heaven smells like cheap wine
And chlorine swimming pools.

SAMUEL MITCHELL, GRADE 12
SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL

The Dawning

When the sky is a dark navy
And you hear noises
A deep low growl that was
probably your father's snores
And you see a shape in the night
that's probably your old stuffed
animal
But your stuffed animal didn't have
those bright yellow eyes
Did it
And your stuffed animal didn't look
at you with a hunger that even a
starving man couldn't feel
Did it
It has begun
The dawning
Soon you will see bright sharp teeth
Teeth like none you've ever seen
Like the finest ivory
Smooth and elegant, coming to a
graceful point
glistening lethally in the moonlight
bared in malevolence
And hear the sound
dark wings spreading wide with a
rustle and a shake
But as the sky turns from navy
to purple
to light lavender
It
That thing
Goes away
It retreats
back under the bed
Back into your head

And what was the horror of your
night
Is your mother shaking you awake
But the next night it comes back
Angry and hungry
Vengeful
But skeletal
knocking on death's door
One last meal
you hear it say in a voice that was
probably the creak of your bed
Low and sure you say
go away
Let me sleep
in a voice masking fear
It has begun
The dawning
The dawning of courage
With you
You who used your
voice to fight
The monster under the bed
The fear in your head
so tomorrow when
It returns
It will be nothing more than a
nightmare
As weak
As your
Own
Shadow
soundless
Soulless
And dead

LAUREL ELIOT WRIGHT STRONG, GRADE 6
SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL

Light Always Finds Its Way

The world in the back of my mind
has a night and day
Passed by the sun was a blue jay
Soon the moon glooms over
And the blue jay leading, sped
forward
To the light that has hidden
Inside the feathers forbidden
The Phoenix revealed
The light appealed
Made day again
So I know my mind is at zen

There's a river that flows
It appears when I doze
It's only there on good days
When my thoughts aren't filled with
haze
When they are nice and calm
And they haven't been bombed
Though that flow can change in an
instant
And could make me very distant
I listen to the melodies in my head
And they calm the riverbeds
So the tides aren't high
And the waves haven't dried
So I can smile to my friends
And be happy again

The clouds are purple and pink
They match what I think
My thoughts are usually bright
and contour out the night
But the clouds are sometimes blue
It depends on my mood
Because they can become very dark
As quick as a light of a spark
That spark burns bright
And brings light back into the night
So my mind is beaming once more
And I don't have to worry about a
storm

The world in the back of my mind
has a night and day
It's a joyful world but sometimes
that joy goes away
Sometimes night comes by
And the day waves goodbye
But the light always comes back
So I never feel like I lack
The happiness in my life that I need
To show how happy I can truly be
With my heart heavy in my mind
And my thoughts not going blind
The day is welcomed again
And I wave hi to my old friend

KAYA RICHARDS-ALLEYNE, GRADE 8
HOWARD UNIVERSITY MIDDLE SCHOOL OF MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

This World We Live In

We live in this world
As a captive of our own insecurities
Tangled in its web of
doubt and lies
Convincing us we aren't good enough
Convincing us to strive
To be
Better.
Prettier.
Perfect.

Models and celebrities
Our idols, who we dream to be.
Unblemished
Flawless
Edited to perfection
No room for error
Because God forbid we make an error.

Messages of hate and greed
Flood our social media feeds.
Their insults a cleaver
Our self esteem on the chopping block.
Everyday becoming harder to be who we want to be
In this world of insecurity.

Girls in the locker room
Begging to grow a bigger chest
A smaller nose
A tiny waist
None of us give it second thought
None of us even blink
In this twisted world we live in.
A world where young girls are called thots for wearing
What *they* want
God damn it let the girl do what she wants.
Don't give us another reason
To hate what we see
When we look in the mirror.
In this tear-stained world we live in.

A world that allows a boy
To rate another girl at summer camp.
A human being you've demeaned
By giving her worth a numbered name tag.
Just a number to you
But to her it is a tattoo
Inked into her wounds.
In this painful world we live in

A world where a girl just wanted to learn
But her professor thought that that meant
She wanted to have sex for a better grade.
Because to them
We are objects to be played with,
Toys to wind up and make dance.
They can't seem to understand
That we **don't exist for them...**
In this desperate world we live in

In a world where
Our intelligence is underestimated.
Where we are told we will be provided for.
Where we aren't expected to be competent.
Where we're called dramatic
If we show emotion
Insane
When we prove ourselves
Delusional
If we have a dream
Unhinged
When we fight for something
A bitch...
For speaking our mind
In this world where it would be crazy
To even try...
We all pray for a better future
But no matter how tight we clasp our hands together
Prayers are not prophecies

And we cannot see
What tomorrow will hold
For our rights and our liberties.
No one
Can guarantee a better future.

Because of this
Twisted.
Tear-stained.
Painful.
Desperate.
Uncertain world,
That we live in.

POLLY PARTRIDGE, GRADE 8
SHERIDAN SCHOOL

The Package That I Came In

Dear Melanin,
From the moment I was born
I always Knew I shined as bright as a star.
My hair sandy brown, golden as a crown
While my skin toffee, just as dark as coffee.
As my skin meets the sun, I remember how perfect of a hue you are.
My melanin is a flex, As it glows as I rest
My melanin is poppin' along with my big hair floppin'
My eyes are glowing as I stare
To all my melanin girls out there,
I hope you can see the beauty is
Your skin.

LAUREN DESTRY, GRADE 7
ANNUNCIATION CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Great

I was just a young girl in elementary school, bite sized
Surrounded by hawks who preyed on the most timid and shy
They chose me
I would be the one they looked down on
I was the one that they said “wouldn’t be noticed”
I was invisible
The rest of my class grew stronger but not me
They ate good meals and drank fresh milk
I didn’t
The tall girls wanted to be models when they grew up
I wanted to be an astronaut and fly to the moon
The boys wanted to grow tall and be basketball players
I wanted to run, run and run, faster than anyone.
They said I couldn’t
I love my body, I reach zones that other people can’t
I can climb to the tree tops, light as a feather
I can crouch gracefully, without hitting my head
I can sleep cozy, covered head to toe
I’m bite sized but not disabled

KARLA RODRIGUEZ, GRADE 10
PARKMONT SCHOOL

Perfect

Writer's Block
What will I write
I'm not sure what to do
When that wall
Blocks your imagination
From going wild
From being

Perfect

When you're insecure about what school is telling you
What the other kids will say
When you feel like you are weird
And soon you believe that you are alone

And that's weird

When you ask yourself:
Am I the only one being insecure?
And that you should follow the crowd
The trends
The popular kids
Because they seem

Perfect

When you feel silenced
As if you want to SCREAM
"I'm not the weird one!"
"I want to be myself! I want to be unique! I want to be
different!"

Because you see that all of the followers are
Basic
Silenced
Robots
That don't feel like they're equal
That they're less than the popular kids
Because the popular kids seem as if their lives are

Perfect

As if they're on a tv show
But what they don't know about these so-called "Weirdos"
Is the "Weirdo" that isn't wearing the "trendy" clothing
Will start the next trends
The "Weirdo" that doesn't use social media
Will make more meaningful friendships
And the "Weirdo" that is reading alone at recess
Is learning more valuable things than petty drama
So, to all of those kids feeling insecure,
If you are being yourself you are
Already Perfect

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Acknowledgments

Thank you to Ron McClain, Head of Parkmont School, for his ongoing support of the Parkmont Poetry Festival.

Many thanks to our generous donors!

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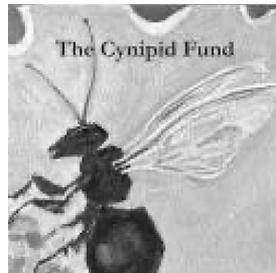
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The Parkmont Poetry Festival extends sincere thanks to our 2020 Festival judges:

SUSAN SCHEID is the author of *After Enchantment*. Her poetry has appeared in *Truth to Power*, *Beltway Quarterly*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *The Sligo Journal*, *Silver Birch Press*, *Tidal Basin Review*, and other journals. Her work is included in the chapbook anthology, *Poetic Art*. Susan serves on the Board of Directors for Split This Rock. She lives in the Brookland neighborhood of Washington, DC with her family and two cats, who more often than not find themselves as subjects of her work.

CORTNEY BLEDSOE is a novelist, poet, and book reviewer. His works have been featured in different literary journals and anthologies. He's been nominated for the Pushcart Prize on different occasions and had two stories selected as Notable Stories by Story South's Million Writers Award.

JOSE PADUA was born in Washington, DC and is a veteran of New York's spoken word literary scene. His first book, *A Short History of Monsters*, was chosen by Billy Collins as the winner of the 2019 Miller Williams Poetry Prize and is now out from the University of Arkansas Press.

PATRICIA GRAY lives and teaches in Washington, DC, where she formerly headed the Poetry and Literature Center at the Library of Congress. Her poetry collection *Rupture* is from Red Hen Press. Most recently, Gray's poems appeared in *Oberon* and in *Endlessly Rocking*, an anthology about Walt Whitman as part of the Whitman 200 Project. The recipient of several Artist Fellowships in Poetry from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, Gray has twice been selected for Bread Loaf Writer's Conference and has served as a judge for three years for the Poetry Out Loud national recitation competition. Her MFA in creative writing is from the University of Virginia, where she won the Academy of American Poets Prize.

An additional debt of thanks to Ron McClain, Head of Parkmont School and Founder of the Parkmont Poetry Festival; Judy Lentz, Coordinator of the Festival for 25 years and tireless supporter; and Sharan Strange, Festival emcee. Sharan's forthcoming works include an essay on poetics in *Furious Flower: Seeding the Future of African American Poetry*, and the libretto for an opera by composer Courtney Bryan, commissioned by the International Contemporary Ensemble. In June 2018, she received a Georgia Author of the Year Award from the Georgia Writers' Association.

We are grateful to our 2020 design team:

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**Finally we wish to thank our 2020
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