



THE COMMON LANGUAGE PROJECT 2018

The Common Language Project
March 2018

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The Common Language Project is a spring annual North Texas creative writing competition that results in the publication of an online anthology and a reading at a prominent arts venue in Dallas, Texas. Our goal is to celebrate diversity in community through the use of thirty shared keywords that spawn a variety of poems as diverse in style and subject as the writers who penned them. The Common Language Project is conceived, curated, and produced by The Writer's Garret.

The Writer's Garret is a 501(c)(3) Literary Arts Center based in Dallas offering local and regional programs. In its twenty-three-year history, the organization has connected over 2 million readers, writers, and audience members with quality literature and each other. In that time, the organization has been awarded 20 NEA grants; twice ranked the #1 literary project and three times the #1 literary arts organization by the Texas Commission on the Arts. Many programs, including the Writers Studio, the acclaimed literary series taped for NPR-affiliates, received laurels as "Best of Dallas" and "Best of Big D." The Writer's Garret programs have brought to Texas audiences the late Umberto Eco, Barbara Kingsolver, Julia Alvarez, and many others, as well as Texas originals Naomi Shihab Nye, Owen Egerton, Tony Diaz, Tim Seibles, and more. In 2018, with a renewed commitment to inclusively supporting the community from which it emerges and within which it operates, The Writer's Garret has already laid the groundwork for success in its exciting next chapter.

For inquiries about The Common Language Project, email commonlanguage@writersgarret.org.

For inquiries about The Writer's Garret, email gen@writersgarret.org.

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About The Common Language Project

*No one sleeps in this room without
the dream of a common language*

ADRIENNE RICH

The Premise

Born of a desire to bring the many members of the North Texas poetry community into conversation with each other, The Common Language Project places participants in the same room and turns them loose to dream. United by a list of shared words and confined only by the space of a page, the poems of the project weave a tapestry of radically divergent experiences that sing, simmer and singe. Together, these poems give us a place to come together, somewhere from which we can start, from which we can thrive.

The Common Language

Contestants were asked to use all thirty of the following words in any order, as they appear, without changes in tense or form:

Living	Shade
Simple	Shelter
City	Singing
Trust	Harmony
Fathom	Chorus
Common	Stanchion
Tender	Embrace
Listening	Smiling
Weave	Clasp
Possible	Clamor
Frame	Scoop
Join	Platter
Luster	Serve
Once	Thankful
West	Receive

A Note from the Judges

Fatima-Ayan Malika Hirsi

A Common Language exists where hearts share more than tongues. The work here shares both. Though each poem in this collection is made of the same bones, the spirit that makes each poem breathe is as different as the leaves of a deciduous tree in autumn. The pieces that spoke to me most shared messages of the earth and the memories of our blood before the birth of current bodies. These poems were unafraid to share a soft touch, did not shy from the deepest parts of the night, and reminded me that yes, the waves are always listening.

Joe Milazzo

The tragedy of our shared experience is that it is so often traumatic in nature: some assassination, some detonation, some reminder that creation suffers our presence as much as it offers us its bounty. And, fraught as the triumphal is with chauvinism, violence (real as well as symbolic) and spectacle for spectacle's sake, we've compartmentalized that mode, consigning it to what we dare call low about our culture or otherwise turned it into fodder for our cynicism.

Consequently, it's become easy to overlook the vocabularies speaking each one of us into presence; to ignore the words observing us all in our mistaken alienation. We hear only infrequently the other voices whose (admittedly noisy) harmonies complicate those monotonous themes we're constantly humming to ourselves and deeming anthemic. Moreover, we've forgotten how the ethical consists of more than the matter we ascribe to conscience. When privilege prompts us to conflate our desires without our liberties, ethics check us. Ethics remind us that, sometimes, interpretations come before either "you" or "I," and with good reason.

Happily, the poets contributing to this collection have proven themselves willing to double down on the notion of constraint. That is, what the reader will discover herein is more than an acknowledgment of language's many limits and limitations. Instead, these poems lean hard into the commonplace that is cognate with the collective. In so doing, these expressions pass through the customary into realms of meaningfulness otherwise beyond the ken of invention alone. Crack, root, unearthing — these are all synonyms for breaking. But let us not forget that, once it has been broken open, a seemingly singular, seemingly unyielding thing may also cradle.

B. Randall

I am honored, touched, moved, and inspired! The work of these amazing writers stretched me. I returned to each piece over and over. There are no two poems alike, yet there is a connection outside of the words that were chosen for this project.

This collection of work is refreshing! The idea that several individuals can look at the same landscape of words and sculpt them so uniquely from the soul makes this work divine. Each work drew me closer to humanity and deeper into who we are and how we are shaped. It is my opinion that our use of common language in some ways gives us superpowers.

Henry VII: The Early Years

Margaret Allyson

Margaret Beaufort could not fathom doubt.
Listening to the milch cow strain against her stanchion in the shelter,
to the stable lads scoop grain into the manger,
the clamor of the poultry destined for the platter,
Smiling inside at the common, simple country chorus.
Thankful to embrace -- and even trust -- her exile from the city and the court.
For she would join in what was possible (once),
Living to frame the destiny of Henry, royal son,
Lacking the luster of the crown for now,
Failing to receive support.
She knew the West would clasp her cause --
to weave alliance with the Lancasters against the Yorks,
to serve a greater cause, a harmony.
Singing Henry's praises toward the throne,
processing underneath the shade of cloth of gold.
This was the violent and tender purpose of her life,
and so it was.
For Margaret Beaufort could not fathom doubt.

REQUIEM

Rich Aubin

He had lost the harmony; she the tune.
The chorus did not clamor to save the piece,
ceased singing, and let it recede
a tenfold fathom below.

No melody to reach, though reach he did;
his hand could scoop only a cacophony.

He did not see her slip the line from
the stanchion of his soul.
Perhaps she loosed it in the shade, or likely darkness;
unmooring when she stayed West; smiling
as he departed to serve the city; him believing
their later reunion was thankful, if not tender.

But the notes that join and then embrace,
to receive a common trust,
had lost their clasp and thus:
the weave had come undone from the frame.

It was simple.
She was gone, but still living.

He took shelter in the recesses of his heart,
playing, again, the record of their inscribed music
- a platter now bereft of luster -
listening as the ebbing waves bore away
a life, once possible,
no longer.

Façade

Monica Berry

Simple living can be difficult in this city
Common feelings convince us to join the Joneses
Once smiling on our own and thankful for our individuality
We begin to fathom a possible peek at their platter of the shiny and new
Listening for our cue to clamor for their trust
An initial chorus of tender harmony beckons us closer
We want in on the scoop
The embrace of their open arms creates a stanchion
The luster of their lives is better than staying in the shade
They serve and we receive
We want to fit in and emulate
So we weave our independence into their frame of fiction
Seeking shelter
But our clasp is weak
And in the west our true voices are singing
Hoping to be heard

Mercy

Saba Boru

Each wound drapes a beaded suffering.
 We weave blood quilt enough to embrace us
 tender, empty, hardly living.
 Shade swallows sun and freedom unopen.
 My mother was once shelter,
 golden shingles under luster cloud,
 frame resting on emerald palm.
 My mother is a platter of west invasion,
 a scoop of barren remains with hostage wrists.
 A bludgeoning of braided fingers join
 ripped tongue forced to be smiling English.
 My mother, a tart red lake of losing.
 Her back, a stanchion holding young, brown,
 velvet graves, bruised necks swinging common and barefoot
 tied to sagging branches.
 She is purple milk, clamor in breasts.
 We cannot fathom a city, a body, a continent
 mourning dry and simple as mother.
 Her singing peels an awful chorus of wolves who rape wide, serve stone,
 hoard diamonds to clasp as fangs in their insatiable mouths.
 She will trust harmony, still, hear faint stretch of orange calm
 possible beneath charred dusk.
 She will receive them,
 just rebellion colored meandering wild things. Kiss them human again.
 Be thankful.
 Mother is not listening to wrath boiling, choked up in her stomach,
 God enough to keep forgiving.

Morning Journey

Trish Callahan

I enjoy city living,
the clamor of trucks
chugging their way up thirty-five.
Thankful to receive their grace,
I scoop up the space
they leave for stopping,
shelter in their shade
from the blinding west light,
reflected in the luster
of downtown's embrace.
Singing from the radio
and a chorus of rumbling engines
frame possible routes
that will shave minutes off my trip.
Listening distractedly, I trust in Google
and weave a simple path
around stanchions and potholes.
There is a harmony in our common plight
as I join the morning journey.
We are like tender children,
smiling as we wait our turn
to move five miles, two feet, three inches
closer to a destination only we can fathom.
Each in our own car, dreaming our own dreams,
We serve our gifts on society's platter,
clasp what we can in tight fists to take home
once the day is over,
and begin the journey anew tomorrow.

Lesson

Joan Canby

Once a lover of luster, the smiling clamor of fame.
Once a coveter for a platter of gold, the scoop

of adoration and for the stanchion statue to possible glory,
until left to find a place where a wooden join will fit

a frame. She found living single a simple reward after
surviving war and her besieged city. She saw the offered

hand of trust stopping her sleep-depriving pain,
her boundless fathom of grief then a common tumor
lodged between kneecap and ankle.

With the tender word “honey,”
a welcomed embrace,
a clasp of her hand before
the surgeon’s knife removed her leg,
her lesson began.

Later, listening to the civil war surviving nurses
in her shelter, singing in harmony their chorus of graces,
she watched them weave
between her West and their South,
a world far from starvation,
thankful.

“Receive soul’s shade,” she’s told,
“then serve.”

dance with life

Valentina R.N. Cochran

~the kaleidoscope of my beloved city stuns my senses~
~beautiful symmetrical forms adorn her skyline~
~her luster takes my breath far away~
~it invokes a primeval feeling i fathom with complete delight~
~my community is a chorus of open hearts~
~there is no stanchion on guard to divide us~
~everyone is invited to gather under the majestic frame of peace~
~singing souls are smiling as they weave in harmony~
~our shelter is a multifaceted culture of hope~
~all are encouraged to scoop from the platter of dreams~
~children women men reach with outstretched hands~
~they trust that the soul in each of us will spring its clasp~
~so that we may all join together to dance with life~
~we embrace each other while we give serve and receive~
~how is this way of living even possible~
~once we stopped listening to the clamor of chaos~
~when we chose to become one spirit~
~we grasped the knowledge of how to experience ecstasy on earth~
~the secret was so simple~
~we discovered the beauty compassion and power of acceptance~
~it was in that awakening we knew our universe was in bliss~
~we heard her sigh~
~her people were freed finally transcended~
~every evening as the sun sets in the west~
~if i pause long enough to rest in the shade~
~i am reminded that history has brought us back before~
~i am grateful for sweet surrenders and tender mercies~
~but most especially i am thankful for the common language of love in the human race~

City of Light

Trevor Cook

Once there was a city down west
The people living within a frame
And held in place by a stanchion

Listening to a tender voice preach what is best
The chorus begins singing in harmony as they embrace their shame
The people join together and weave themselves a bastion
They embrace each other, smiling but with no trust

The luster of the common, the people readily receive
I wonder, can none among them fathom uncommon appeal?
Is it possible to serve the people an escape from their shelter?

A simple scoop served on a platter and they will clamor in reprieve
Offer the oddity of shade, a place to feel
They clasp to their blinding oblivion without falter
None thankful for darkness nor dust

A Guide for the Visitors of Solovetsky Monastery

Alexandra Corinth

Are the waves always listening?

A Russian island on the west side of the White Sea,
shade and shelter from mainland polemics until its Catholicism
became merely theory, a smiling practice as fragile as
the clasp of their mother's treasured bracelet.

Does your body remember the weight of embrace?

Life behind the monastery walls was simple once, trust like a platter of silver,
precious and yet always in service, a living luster of grace.

Must we weave so not to break?

But the sun of Lenin crested the waves, and the long shadows of the gulag
reached slender fingers to scoop the monks from their study, serve them up
to violent agnosticism and purloin their home for greater purpose.

Is forgiveness possible in this city?

Where holy men stood to receive resplendence,
prisoners could not fathom the will to labor, desperate to join their youth
as figments of the forgotten, held in a frame against the angry winter night,
fractured like stained glass, and almost as beautiful.

What stanchion keeps the past at bay?

Sometimes, you can hear the monks still singing, a chorus of amen
and thankful, blessed retreat, and underneath the tenor, a tremor of common grief,
and in both, a harmony of histories, a tender clamor.

Embrace

V.P. Crowe

Leaving in the thick of morning traffic, I catch myself smiling as commuters honk and weave and shake their fists, open mouths and angry faces looking very much like song. Perhaps I'm not the only one listening to The Stones serve up some "Gimme Shelter" live from 1972. But then through the appreciative clamor of the audience, all I can hear, again, is Carlin's voice from back then too:
*That's what living in the city does, man,
 sticks your song in your throat.*

Finally, escape. Red earth, cattle grazing beneath the dubious shade of the occasional yucca tree. The reflected luster of the empty road ahead blends seamlessly with the ever more bluing sky, an illusion that always brings back wonder, and I remind myself to be grateful for the harmony of simple things, trust that anything is possible. But even in driving west, away, away, mountains and brief freedom ahead, the stanchion stays in place, the common wooden clasp and frame hold fast, and I cannot fathom how.

But we are still singing, even if the muted chorus does sound more like lowing, and once we join hands and close our eyes and bow our heads together, it will again feel very much like home.

For we do have shelter, after all. The meat is tender, the milk is sweet, the scoop and platter silver-lined, and we are thankful for these gifts which we are about to receive.

We Are Singing the West

Rhett Forman

we are singing the west
singing the living frame of Dallas city
singing the stanchion bearing plain
singing the once listening glistening luster
of the Trinity singing

singing thankful tender harmony
over the chorus of common concrete the simple clasp
and clamor we trust impossibilities made possible
we sing the bridge the smiling fathom over Oak Cliff
we sing the red Pegasus join the joints of wall and rock

we weave our quilt in the shelter of mesquite shade
scoop up this platter serve it out of black earth
fired in forgotten hopes to receive future dreams
we sing the left behind
we sing the embrace ahead

Nightlife

Brenda Gaba

It wasn't a singing I heard,
nothing close to celebration. The life luster,
a quick serve, was there, and then night dust lost it.

I had been smiling.

Now all ears were up for listening
this a.m. at 2:32 on the west side of the house,
not on the east, where the shade falls when the sun gets hot.

By the way, night is no simple city.

It was a shriek of small, a bird, I heard tender and sweet,
a living being, a warm I could at once scoop up, embrace,
not the drunks you hear screaming in the street.

A clamor cry caught in one lone throat, stapled
to a depth of suffering I cannot fathom, its small frame
without a stanchion stick to stand on.

I join the chorus.

Every window has an opening and a closing. I clasp
my hands, think of running to rescue. But how?
I weave I waver. Something outside dies.

In the harmony of nature where is the shelter?

A squirrel's nest high up in the tree isn't enough.
The utter struggle, some night owl
on the prowl, thankful to receive a meal.

Anything is possible in the city where trust and fear
must have something in common. No one is smiling tonight.
Hungry stands with a bloody platter outside my window.

I'd never heard that cry. Oh sad pain. Maybe once
before. A midnight battle the cats lost,
oh the screeching.

last important thing

Alan Gann

Cannot fathom why
the doorman does not lift this rope and let these shoes pass the stanchion.
Money is a shade that cannot buy
luster hidden behind his curtains, embrace of harmony,
or respite from city clamor—
so let them fall
and trust a once thankful earth to receive and shelter.

Singing to himself, doorman is listening to a chorus not possible
and no one is smiling.

I will weave my way west and join
heron and coyote silent beside last living river,
drink deep, release yearnings,
and grok all soon enough.

The catechism is simple—
forget how to frame the question,
understanding is a false god,
there is no common language.

Finally I'll let the doorman scoop pennies from my eyes,
place them on a tarnished platter,
and recognize tender hands that clasp
were made to serve.

Listening for What the Walls Might Say

Christine Irving

I shelter in the shade of a simple city stanchion
scrubbed clean of spray paint, no hidden messages
embedded in graffiti's clamor,
no angry chorus of complaints
or self-asserting signatures. Once,
not long ago, the luster of their neon tweets
made living possible, built a kind of harmony
from chaos, a frame to offer common ground.
Those kinds of times make one embrace
anything the heartless west can offer;
join, clasp, and serve whatever cause
bestows some sense of family, camaraderie or care,
trust false gods and all the tender sounding prophets
who write their names on subway walls.
They got me through, till I clawed out
and fell from bitter want into this better life
I am so thankful to receive.
Later, I'll walk on home, eat a platter of fried chicken,
served with ice cream and a scoop of love,
but right now, back against this pillar,
I fail to fathom the weave of fragile happenstance.
I am still listening for what the walls might say,
What enabled this bright singing? And though
I can't help smiling at sweet fortune's turn, I wonder
if those vanished urban day-glow scribblings
are done with prophesy and me?

A Suppressed Great

Archana Kannan

I am now living in a simple, smiling city,
listening to the common people from a balcony
and I clasp your body into an embrace as you carry me.
I'm thankful for your tender shelter.

You take me into the dining room and we
serve ourselves a platter of your cooking. I stare
at your frame in envy as you get up to get a scoop.
I once had a body like yours.

I used mine to swim. My arms moved in harmony
with my legs, kicking as rapidly as possible. The clamor of
the water echoed into my submerged ears. Like a singer
singing the chorus of a song, I had reached my optimum ability.

I was finally not far from my dream: to receive an Olympic
medal on the podium labeled '1', and hear the song of
my land in tearful exhilaration. My insides throbbed and my chest
would fill with luster at the mere thought of it.

I could never fathom a reality where I was strong enough
to be worthy of being called one of the Greats, but I had
done it. I finally wasn't under their long shade but could
join and stand tall with them, like a beautifully carved stanchion

of an antique stand. I would officially be considered one
of them once the slowly approaching day arrived. Now, I
simply sit in this wheelchair, still staring at your sculpted body. I
glance at your legs in longing, and you notice.

I ponder the possibility of spiritual influences that casually
control the movement of my life, accidentally breaking my spine
along the way but fortunately intertwining my destiny with yours,
like fate was making a basket weave on a pleasant afternoon.

All I have now is my heart and trust placed within you, and you
direct my attention to the west-setting sun through the windowpane.

Anne's Lament (A Letter from Anne Hathaway to William Shakespeare)

Sara Kumar

Dear husband, it is I, your simple maid
 I trust the city sun shines bright for you
 The village chorus here whispers your name
 They who once cleaned the chapel of its art
 Now place above the font your common frame
 O tender, loving, sweet son of Stratford

Pardon these unseemly verses I weave
 I fathom but you know I cannot read
 And so clasp the man's hand who writes for me
 Listening for tidings I loathe to give
 Our son Hamnet is no longer living

You who with ink give birth to kings and knaves
 Must know the worth of a mother's embrace
 And when your invention exits the stage
 You breathe a new creature upon the page
 Fashion me then a shelter, some sound shade

I hear the child clamor and speak your name
 Like a ghostly star, falling west too soon
Come home father, scoop up your thankful brood!
 A stanchion holds your head in London's grip
 To serve your rude wit on a fine platter

There are no possible words you can write
 That will dull the edge of memory's knife
 Grief fills the room of our absent child
 Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me
 Puts on his soft luster, repeats his words

Receive his last words, play them with your pen
 Such harmony you will not hear again
 He left the world smiling, singing a hymn
Let me join the angels, O Lord, let me in

Children: Cities

Debra Levy-Fritts

Seek the welfare of the city...

— Jeremiah 29:4-7

What blessing can be made, what listening in, lifelong shade, really, to guide the steps away, the living out the life made? A chorus of harmony. Please. As if a shelter of peace. Amen. Go planting, building, singing.

West we rode, old mama and little man with tender chords between us
Trust. We, a dyad from birth speaking
Cooing a common language: Drop by drop pour Into
by mouth with wonder singing you nursery songs, ballads, poetry jams, jazz.

Daily prayers bound with twigs feathers set on wing. I clasp each dream together
Stanchion by stanchion until, strong with purpose
It seemed so simple clear to fathom, raising this life
Though fumbling inherent in the warp and weave of trying
Within the frame to stretch what is possible

Luster turns to lament wearies to night vigilance
Keeping watch over breath, and bent to the task
embrace to let fly

Driving across the plains to the big coast, the clamor,
the city where I'll leave you.
Or you, me: Goodbyes Wings

I scrape the icing bowl clean: I scoop you up and receive
Back the dandelion you blew in my gaze,
lips pursed to make seedlings spread - flutter time. From that first little moment you smiling genuine love on a
platter, you had me, Big handsome.
Embrace of pride and service
ego slides and so we fall, and rise: serve the future
Nevermore a single only I. Then two rolling westward
To see ya. Later
It is better to part after a blessing:
Seek the good of the place where you are, the best for where once upon a time
You will be planted. Get out. Go there. Ah, join.
Go, thankful.

Student Body

Kari Lynch

I watch you weave disaster out of bad decisions mixed with
 Good intentions
 Then hear you singing the common chorus of despair
 That I once knew the harmony to

Sometimes you trust with such simple naïveté
 That I want to shake you by the shoulders
 And tell you what is possible
 But I know you will know long before the smiling stops

Maybe while stuck in this plastic chaired prison
 Or amidst the luster of lacquer layered gym floors
 You will consider whether living
 Is/Is Not worth the trouble

But I hope that when the west wind is blowing you down
 And you can't fathom how your small frame can carry such a weight
 You will clasp the nearest hand
 And be thankful that you can still feel the gravity

That wiry stanchion is in your ear to keep out the city noise
 But I know you are still listening
 Clamor is to change as silence is to die
 Join together before they separate you

If it made a difference, I would scoop you up off the floor
 And receive you into these worn arms -
 Give a tender word, a reassuring embrace -
 But you and I both know
 That the answer is D. None of the above

So eat from this platter, child, and let me serve you
 You've been serving yourself for so long
 I know you are weary and seek shelter
 Rest here in the shade for a little while
 You've been dodging bullets for longer than they know

The City Monk and the Country Monk— A Conversation in Haiku

James Mendur

Spring in the city –
Living a simple monk's life
as it awakens

Summer harmony –
The clamor of cars, singing,
a chorus of horns

Autumn's luster shines
in iron frame and stanchion –
The sun in the west

Once Winter arrives,
hope again seems possible,
and peace to the world

A fine city year
will serve a platter of hope –
and I am thankful

Listening to Spring –
Tender shoots trust in the warmth
of the sun's promise

A Summer oak tree
providing shade and shelter –
The birds join in song

To scoop Autumn leaves,
clasp them in smiling embrace,
is to fathom joy

Winter's cool approach –
To weave its blanket of snow
on a peaceful world

A fine country year
will receive all of my thanks
in common with you

Take Shelter

Cole Murphy

Take Shelter,
Join the city,
Living in fear,
Learning to embrace the stanchion of life,
Thankful for the shade,
Tender and warm,
Listening to the harmony of the chorus,
Singing the common embrace,
West of north, nothing is possible,
Fame your perspective,
Clasp your clamor,
Scoop your luster,
Serve your plater,
Join the rebellion,
Trust the common goal,
Receive and fathom this idea smiling,
Once you weave the threads of life,
It's simple,
All is possible.

Goodbye

Mz Jolie

As you hear me singing, I hope you are really listening. I am sending up prayers hoping that one day my living won't be a crime. This Platter that I was forced to receive in life was bitter, but I am sweet. I've been known to turn my circumstances into miracles. And even though you only offer indifference I still serve you, smiling all the while. So as you clasp your hands in prayer, I hope you are truly Thankful. You asked me to join you, which isn't common so I was intrigued. Once, when our lives were simple, you were tender with me. You enveloped me in your embrace, but your arms became a Stanchion, no longer a frame to support me but to restrain. Suddenly, this city became too big for the both of us to reside in so I moved out west. You couldn't fathom why I would want to leave you. Is it Possible that you missed the signs? Before leaving I only treated you as a Bank but I couldn't trust you. Clamor and confusion lived in disrupted harmony with me. You began to give shade the day I left your shelter. I made you a blanket before I left. I began to weave love and peace in it, but it lacked luster. I made it to keep you warm on those lonely nights now that I am gone. I wish you no harm as I scoop up my pride and self-esteem and move on with a chorus of amens from my loved ones. I wish you the best. Goodbye.

lyric

Mark David Noble

our radio was listening to the day, the city, to us, to the possible uniform outcome collected from people we met, who called us looking for shelter from a bad living lyric they were in again, we each assumed our part, to try and weave harmony, to bring luster, trust, water and bandages, to be their answers, our job was to be there when they called, then scoop them up and make it better, or at least to not let them die, sometimes we failed to frame an answer, to clasp their none-too-tender requests, their answer more than we could fathom

Benny and I once responded, to the day, to an injured person alarm, in the pool, surrounded by a chorus, apartment dwellers in stanchion all around, talking, eating, nodding while the six-year-old floated face down, the common every day bystanders murmured and watched us clamor into the water, and the still summer evening waited to release its heat into the darkening west

he did not escape the shade, but we worked knowing he had been there too long, because to the day, to serve, is to learn how to lose, a life of sometimes simple, sometimes unbelievable, platter of stories, spoken to us over and over

to my very last day, my favorite call was for a woman named Ida, who was also already dead when we met, a seventy something retired teacher who had failed to wake one morning, her family found her, called and we arrived, brought her the lightning, drugs and breath and to our surprise, her heart returned, the hospital was not impressed to receive our success, asking us why we did not just let her be, to join the end of things embrace, four days later she was still thankful, singing and smiling at the marks our paddles had imprinted on her chest. When her family brought her to our station, she pulled up her blouse to announce, look it's North and South America!

Frame for a New World

Anne Gordon Perry

Living in this troubled age
with trust that things will change eroded,
we forget solutions can be simple
once common dreams are realized.

To fathom possible worlds,
build a stanchion that carries us
beyond the need for war
 (East meeting West,
 city and country cooperating,
 women and men in harmony,
 a chorus made of all the races,
 embrace of rich and poor)
we clasp the tender hopes of all.

To serve a platter of peace
 (receive it, smiling,
 thankful,
 listening with new ears,
 seeing with eyes newly wakened)
we find shelter under a larger shade tree.

There, we join the singing,
clasp the varied-hued hands,
clamor for wisdom from both youth and elder,
scoop the joy,
weave the wonder,
and invite the luster
of a whole new world.

Soft Touch

Gayle Reaves-King

God spoons up the living mountains like
ice cream, leaving only the luster of his cold breath
as snow clouds in the west. Great mounds of Rocky Road,
a fathom of mint chocolate chip — they disappear
scoop by scoop. There goes Jicarita, most
of Pueblo Peak, all the icy blood of Christ,
as we weave through slush and mud
of Taos streets to serve gingerbread men
at the city homeless shelter. From the platter
they receive offerings with yellow icing shirts,
sugary blue pants, M&M eyes. I wouldn't bring you
naked cookies, jokes my friend, a skier
with tender heart who cooks in harmony
with animals and worries about men trapped
in the frame of others' expectations, who manage to be thankful
without the clamor of thanks. For now they
join, warm in this common haven, where listening
is possible and trust just out of reach,
where we are all out of reach just this once,
of dreams shivering in doorways, of death
smiling in his simple tux by velvet rope and stanchion,
of the coyote chorus singing in winter's blue shade,
beyond the clasp of subzero beauty, God's chilly embrace.

Once

Erin Reeves

Once, I planted a stanchion around my heart—
a shelter,
as I hoped, smiling and thankful,
to receive your embrace.

Once, I tried to capture the west,
to serve it up on a platter of gratefulness, ready
to join you in the shade of intellect,
to scoop up the crumbs of your regard and
clasp them to my breast.

Once, it was possible to weave trust,
to fathom the tarnished luster of
your good intentions.
But our simple living deceived me,
the harmony of city life,
listening to the tender clamor, common
among those without.

Now, the chorus of my pain
is singing.
Singing!
I will frame this sound,
hang it over my bed and
remember,
trusting no path but my own.

Notes on Creating a Wellspring

Sylvia Riojas Vaughn

Fathom a retreat,
a possible Utopia.
Why not embrace it once?
Raise the first stanchion
of a simple frame shelter.
Far from city clamor,
near shade trees rustling
with squirrels, singing birds,
with wood, nails, shingles,
weave a common nest,
a place to join in harmony, trust.
Imagine smiling, listening
to a chorus of voices
round a table.
Thankful, clasp hands,
receive a bountiful platter
of fruits and warm bread,
a scoop of lentils with rice.
The wine will entice luster
from the most careworn cheek.
Serve coffee
on the patio facing west,
ponder tender deeds
for all living
in the wounded world.

Once

Cheryl W. Robinson

I bet I was happy and smiling when I first saw your face, believing it was tender and kind
 I wonder if you saw the luster in my eyes yearning to feel like I belonged to you ...
 Now, I know that you really didn't see me at all
 Without harmony you chose to sing me lull-a-goodbyes rocked with jealousy and envy
 Of course, I was too timid or ashamed to ask anyone if what I was feeling was common
 Smart enough to know -- it wasn't
 Instead I tried to pick up the chorus, the notes were too sharp and finally I just fell flat
 But you just kept on singing the same song over and over and over and over again
 Until I just held my breath and stopped listening
 Ultimately my hopeful spirit fell silent and it's possible I slowly stopped living
 Placing a steel stanchion in my feelings, building a limited shelter of trust while the one
 I loved continued to clothe me in shade
 I say East, you go West, I speak like a city girl, you yell *everything*
 It took fifty-two years for me to embrace that something seemingly simple was impossible
 That is unstitching this weave of familial dysfunction
 It's hard, really hard to fathom how and why you deliberately tried not to love me
 Wasn't I bone of your bone, flesh of your flesh?
 In spite of the depth of my pain, I am refusing to accept in your death that your maternal care and concern was
 completely absent in my life
 Instead, with a clamor of hope I imagine I'll see you again and join you in peace
 We'll talk and laugh like moms and daughters do while dining on a platter of forgiveness with a scoop of under-
 standing that we'll both be thankful to finally serve and receive
 Until then, I'll admire your beauty in a silver frame although you're always in my mirror
 And when I clasp your favorite pearls around my neck, I hear you softly saying,
 "Oh, baby girl I love the way they look on you. You're beautiful. I love you!"
 Trust me, I know you never said this, I know ...
 Not even once

Kindred Feeling

Talisha Simpson

My pulse suggests that I am breathing but the truth is that I am barely living.
 My mistakes ring loud in my ear like an overcrowded city.
 Battling with listening to my doubts and the harmony of my ancestors.
 They are singing to me.
 Telling me to join in and liberate my soul.
 I stomp my feet but I don't dance anymore.
 I was once in tune with their vibrations until the west got the best of me.
 Teaching me that my pain is indeed the real me.
 Like a simple child I posed for the frame.
 Allowing them to weave my mind into a shell of vulnerability.
 I forgot the strength I used to carry.
 These echoes say that it is possible to remember so I am fighting to wake up.
 Still, I cannot fathom why I ever chose to battle my own reflection.
 Their whispers remind me that my flesh is the shelter for my soul but I am much more.
 I am an infinite being.
 So infinite that my heart beats in tune with their chorus.
 They take hold of my hand and clasp me in their embrace.
 My heart feels light as if God put them on a platter to serve me.
 This feeling is anything but common; it is sacred.
 I am smiling because I no longer feel the need to clamor, I trust me.
 Like a stanchion they surround me praying prayers just as they did when I was forming in my mother's womb.
 I see my grandfather as he holds my mistakes so tender I know to let go.
 They scoop me in their arms and the shade feels more like sun.
 Adding luster to my soul like I do my fro.
 I am thankful because in this moment I let go of all doubt and fear.
 I am awakened.
 Vibrating on a frequency that will allow me to receive all God has for me.
 So yes, my pulse suggests that I am breathing and there is life within me.

Zombie Gospel

Christopher Stephen Soden

Once I could never fathom living
in the city. Without simple trust, without
shelter of common harmony. There is
something about the luster of the Golden
West. No shade, never quiet enough

to encourage listening. Just the clamor
of a cynical chorus, disguising rage
as contentment, dishing out comfort
with scoop and platter, smiling.

Is it possible to weave authentic
existence? To clasp hands and embrace
the Father of all fathers? To receive
the Sacred Mother? I frantically search for

bliss in the here and now, but cannot
frame it. I cannot pretend I am thankful
for my stanchion. I serve and bend
my sorry neck in splash and chaos

of the shower, crafting an aria
to the tender endlessness of nothing
and nothing and more nothing still.
Come join my ridiculous singing.

For Now

Ruth Woolson

I sit alone in the shade of the willows
Thankful that it is possible to be consumed with the simple act of living,
Smiling while I view the luster toward the west
A glowing golden platter, fading in the sky beyond the city.
Once I could not fathom that its glow could weave between the tall structures.
But now, I frame the view and my imagination soars as I fade into slumber.

I clamor to my feet, as if being called to serve by a far greater power.
I am being serenaded by a choir singing softly in harmony.
They are whispering my name and inviting me to partake in the chorus.
Their gowns loom above in swaying silhouettes which obstruct their golden backdrop.
A stanchion blocks the path and holds me back, though a simple snap of its clasp would release it,
Leaving me tempted to surge ahead and join their verse, forever singing their tender melodies.

But no. I shelter my eyes with my hand and block the setting sun.
I want to scoop the golden ball from the sky and pull it to my heart,
To swallow its glow, receive its strength and radiate its warmth.

Listening again, I hear the choir and see the swaying tendrils.
Now, the warm breeze gently lulls the willows and softly whispers its song
Strong and sturdy, yet tender in the fading light.

We are each born into the light, yet there is nothing common about it.
It will embrace our souls and bring us dreams of what will come.
But for now, I trust that I should just stand tall and grounded like the willows... for now.

Contributors

Margaret Allyson writes poems and songs in Fort Worth. After a career editing magazines and books, she now works with recycled silk. She's a decent human being all the way around.

Rich Aubin had no idea that he was a repressed poet until a friend pointed it out to him, encouraging him to write and submit to The Common Language Project. Rich's appreciation for poetry and his writing is inspired by the friendship and tutelage of the late poet laureate of Maryland, Roland Flint. Rich and his four daughters live in Garland where he practices law and serves on the City Council (having learned he was a repressed politician two years ago!).

Monica Berry grew up in Albuquerque. She attended Big Ten schools for college and law school but ended up in Texas. She's a general counsel who writes in her free time, believes in fairy-tale endings, and eats dessert before dinner whenever possible.

Saba Boru is currently shapeshifting her entire soul into a timeless piece of African literature, writing to the echo of ancestors. She is a graduate of the University of North Texas creative writing program but experiencing evolution under the tutelage of life. She is part chaos, part constellation, unraveling from "normal" one layer at a time.

Trish Callahan is a poet and writer residing in Dallas County.

Joan Canby is a native Californian who came to Texas to work first in the F-16 program at General Dynamics in Fort Worth then later in the Telecommunications industry for L.M. Ericsson and Nortel Networks in Richardson. She is retired and lives in Garland.

Valentina R.N. Cochran has been writing since elementary school. She used to have her own column in the local town paper her senior year of high school. She attended St. Edwards University in Austin, Texas. She began writing full time a year ago, is writing her first book of poetry, and would like to write a one woman show and return to her acting roots someday.

Trevor Cook is a junior in high school at Alcuin School. When he's not doing homework, he is either playing the guitar, listening to rock and roll, writing music, or playing video games. Music is his main creative outlet, which does involve writing lyrics.

Alexandra Corinth is a poet and artist living and performing in the DFW metroplex. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Thimble Literary Magazine*, *The Artifact*, the mise en abyme poetry tarot project, *Mad Swirl*, and *Atticus Review*, among others. You can find her online at typewriterbelle.com.

V. P. Crowe stumbled onto the Dallas poetry scene a very long time ago via Joe Stanco's Poets' Roundtable, and the Dallas poetry scene hasn't quite been able to shake her loose since. She has served on the board of the Dallas Poets Community and been published in *Red River Review*, *Illya's Honey*, *Electron Press*, *the Texas Poetry Calendar*, and assorted anthologies. She makes her home in the suburbs with a mad scientist and a houseful of fur.

Rhett Forman is an instructor of General Studies at Tarleton State University. He received his Ph.D. and M.A. in Literature at the University of Dallas and his B.A. from St. John's College, Santa Fe. His work has been published by *Make It New*, *Ramify*, *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, and *Clemson University Press*.

Brenda Gaba is a poet and essayist whose work has appeared in *The Texas Observer*, *Amarillo Bay*, and a book of poems, *Pete's Book and the Friends of Pete*. She lives in Dallas with her husband and dogs, Newton and Sawyer. She visits her two sons who live in New York City and London as often as possible.

Alan Gann is the author of two volumes of poetry: *That's Entertainment* (Lamar University Literary Press, 2018) and *Adventures of the Clumsy Juggler* (Ink Brush Press, 2014); and *DaVerse Works*, Big Thought's performance poetry curriculum (2014). He supports his writing habit by facilitating after-school programming and creative writing workshops at Texans Can Academy in Oak Cliff. His non-existent spare time is spent outdoors: birding, biking, hiking, and photographing dragonflies.

Christine Irving writes novels, plays and travel pieces, and you can sometimes find her in her studio pasting together a collage, though her favorite métier is poetry. Christine is the author of: *Be a Teller of Tales*, *Sitting on the Hag Site: A Celtic Knot of Poems*, *You Can Tell a Crone by Her Cackle*, and *The Naked Man* (on Amazon and Kindle). Her newest work *Return to Inanna* is undergoing its final proof.

Archana Kannan is an eleventh grader attending Alcuin School in Dallas. She is in the International Baccalaureate program and is working towards obtaining the IB Diploma. Born in the USA, she grew up in India. She enjoys swimming and Taekwondo and competes professionally.

Sara Kumar has worked as a control systems engineer, a high school chemistry teacher, and is currently serving as the secretary at a Catholic church. She has a BS in electrical engineering from Rice University and an MA in Faith and Culture from the University of St. Thomas. In her spare time, Sara enjoys participating in community theatre and spending time with her nieces and nephew.

Debra Levy-Fritts is a mother, wife, former legal assistant, writer, and community leader with a focus on social action for education and women's issues. For over twenty years, she has served families of dyslexic children and adult ESL learners through advocacy efforts at Richardson ISD and Literacy Instruction for Texas. She fell in love with poetry when memorizing Longfellow in fifth grade.

Kari Lynch lives and teaches in North Texas.

James Mendur has visited and lived in a number of strange and exotic places, including Ireland, China, and Indianapolis. Although he enjoys experimenting with various poetic forms, his first published poem was a haiku and he has a particular fondness for that form. He currently lives in Denton County and does not own any cats ... yet.

Cole Murphy is a junior at Alcuin School in Dallas, Texas, graduating in 2019. He enjoys being creative, whether by working in the theater or writing poems. In his free time, he is fond of working with younger children in his community and helping out at school. He is currently serving as Student Council President, ending spring of 2019, previously serving two years as Student Council Event Coordinator.

Mz Jolie has been performing poetry professionally for a year. She has an eclectic style of writing. She will be releasing her first CD, *Jolieizm*, later this year. You can catch her performing at The Dallas Poetry Slam every Friday at Heroes Lounge.

Mark David Noble is a writer, videographer, and multimedia developer who enjoys working on poetry, plays, and short stories. His work has been published in newspapers, magazines, and as lyrics for choral music. He is also a poetry graduate of the CAMP project at The Writer's Garret, a founding member of Pandora's Box, a monthly poetry showcase featuring the best poets in the DFW Metroplex, and a retired firefighter from the Mesquite Fire Department.

Anne Gordon Perry has a PhD in Aesthetic Studies and teaches writing and humanities at the Art Institute of Dallas. She has two published books for children on Amazon: *Magnificent Moles of Mede Meadow* and *Unseen Witness: Sarah Farmer & The Portsmouth Peace Treaty*. She has also published various essays, biographical pieces, fictional stories, poems, and reviews. She lives with her husband and four cats in Duncanville, TX.

Gayle Reaves-King is a poet, educator, and Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist. A Texas native, she lives in Fort Worth, has reported from all over the world, and now braves I-35W regularly to teach at the University of North Texas. Her chapbook *Spectral Analysis* was published by the Dallas Poets Community.

Erin Reeves considers herself a photographer who also writes, but the truth is she was a poet before she became a photographer. Erin had a few poems published so long ago it feels like a different lifetime. She lives in Deep Ellum with her husband, two rescued greyhounds, and two very naughty cats.

Sylvia Riojas Vaughn of Collin County, Texas, worked as a journalist and a certified ESL teacher after graduating from Southern Methodist University. A Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net Nominee, she has been selected three times as a Houston Poetry Fest Juried Poet, and was named a Waco Wordfest Distinguished Writer in 2017. She learned craftsmanship with the Dallas Poets Community.

Cheryl W. Robinson is a freelance writer who endeavors to write the truth, especially her own, to inspire, motivate and encourage others. She is an alumni of the prestigious Hurston/Wright Writers Week Workshop. Currently, Cheryl is a staff writer for *Epitome Magazine* and has also shared her talents with several online and other print publications, including *RollingOut Magazine*.

Talisha Simpson believes that self-care and healing can be achieved through the power of word. At a time when she felt lost, poetry was her return to freedom. She feels that poetry is her mother, father, and ancestor's way of reminding her that she has a voice which needs to be heard.

Christopher Stephen Soden writes poetry, plays, literary, film and theatre critique for *sharpcritic.com*, *EdgeDallas*, and John Garcia's *The Column*. Christopher's poetry collection, *Closer*, was released by Rebel Satori Press in 2011. Other honors include: Distinguished Poets of Dallas, Poetry Society of America's Poetry in Motion Series, Founding Member, President, and President Emeritus of The Dallas Poets Community. His work has appeared in *Rattle*, *G & L Review*, and others.

Ruth Woolson was born in New Jersey but has made Denton, Texas, her home for almost 30 years. Her love for poetry began when, as a child, she read and illustrated her grandmother's poetry journals. Her lifelong passion for poetry motivated her to try her hand at it. She hopes to inspire her children and grandchildren to pursue their passions as well.