

## **Food for Thought: A Poetic Medicine Event**

A list of poets and the poems they read for the November 20<sup>th</sup> event with ReImagine

### **Patrice Haan**

#### **A Waterfall for Elizabeth**

I spent three days building a waterfall for Elizabeth  
Elizabeth, grandmother, Jungian,  
with her grand piano and white cats.

No matter how I tried, my efforts were fruitless.  
The waterfall would not sing:  
trickling water, still pond.

In desperation I took it apart,  
piled the stones randomly, and then  
began to reach out blindly -

this, now this -  
my hands, my inner eye recognizing  
partners in the dance.

And the falls  
began to sing -  
a watery laughter, a gurgling lilt:

"Fooled you, little architect!  
Will you trust your heart?"

(c) Patrice Haan 2020

### **Instructions for Travel**

Take only an old stick  
one your hand knows,  
one your legs trust.  
Take your memories  
but carry them lightly  
ready to give away to the first dog you meet,  
to a passing crow.  
Sing your favourite song till the buttons fall off it.  
Then sing it again.  
Step as lightly as you can.  
Watch for feathers and four-leaf clovers.  
Watch for messages in the clouds.  
Yes, take only an old stick  
knowing, one morning  
you'll throw that away, too.

10.23.20 © Patrice Haan

### **Susan Cohen**

Inspired by Between What I See and What I Say... (1976) by Octavio Paz, 1990 Nobel Laureate

What I keep silent

Melts in poetry's warmth

My silent is an age-old iceberg  
Very large below the surface  
Most won't dare to approach  
For fear of freezing  
But poetry floats in on its courage  
Caressing the silent with warm truth  
Before I know it  
Silent is melting and moving  
Into the next line of the poem

## **Poem #2**

To live in this world  
You need courage, curiosity, and creativity  
If you want to just exist  
Then such things will not be necessary  
But if you want to  
Love with all your heart  
Explore to your last breath  
Build something from all of your ideas  
Then start  
Using courage

Sharing curiosity

Encouraging creativity

## Dennis DeBiase

*Prompt: W. Stafford's "The Way It is"*

There's a thread you follow  
that at times you forget is there for you  
when you find the atoms of your being  
disassemble, detonate, fly outside  
the cracked vessel of your body  
into the unknown terrors of your  
worst imaginings.

When you pick up that thread again —  
because it can never completely disappear  
since it is the very essence of  
your entanglement with every part  
of the vast and mysterious web of life  
you share a part it —

When you reel yourself back  
with the same thread  
that ancient Theseus held fast to  
when he entered the dark labyrinth of his  
worst imaginings,

you'll possibly be holding a thread of  
spider's silk,  
something spun in darkness,  
maybe your only true connection  
to a hidden truer light  
that makes your darkness visible.

*Prompt: Mark Nepo's "Labor Day"*

When it's time for me to go  
where you have gone before  
will you be there for me  
as I so attentively, so imperfectly  
tried to be for you?

When it's time for me to go  
will I see you standing over me  
keeping ghost watch at my deathbed  
or lying right there beside me  
where I can again feel your soft sculpted buttock  
warm against my cold hand,  
grasping your heat until the end?

When it's time for me to go  
will I finally have realized  
even you can't make my transition  
to the dark unknowable realms  
any easier than I once hoped

I was able to do for you?

When it's time for me to go  
will I at last allow myself  
the certainty of knowing  
that even through the lonely depths I'll circle,  
you'll still be there as you have always been for me —  
beautifully, imperfectly, always  
forgiving me,  
and always one or two steps ahead.

### Willemina Joseph-Loewenthal

#### **Take note**

**3<sup>rd</sup> November 2020**

You must note the way the clouds gather just before it rains,  
Or how, when Shadow Cat awakens, he stretches his body in little tiny stretches, from his  
shoulders to his tiny toes.

You must note, when in the morning, while it's still dark, the birds refrain from song. Their  
little conversations saved for the rising of the sun.

You must note also, the scent of rain on the hot pavement. That spicy odour that always  
reminds me of Mamma's cooking, somehow.....

You must note that I might roar like a lion and gnash my teeth, be as tempestuous as a  
Category 5 hurricane, but when I look at you there is love in my eyes.

## **Our Silent Companions**

**13<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

We walk everywhere with our shadows.  
They are our constant companions.  
Dogging our every footstep, they wait, patiently,  
Like pet dogs, as we stop to greet life's new heights  
Or give us comforting nudges when we descend into the depths;  
Mutely offering their silent sympathy.

Sometimes we carry them.  
Like small children who grow heavy with age,  
So do our shadows.  
Mine is quite heavy now.  
The poor thing has soaked up so much of my life  
That she is becoming quite sodden.  
She cannot wait for the day to come  
When I can wring her out.

## **Always a Joy**

**17<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

A joy appeared. A small bundle wrapped in the arms of the midwife.  
Her face crumpled up into her first yell of protest.  
Where was this place? This was not what she knew.  
The light, the unfamiliar sounds? All were hostile.  
Her pink mouth opened, and a shriek of regret left her,  
Surprising in its strength.

She screwed up her face and drew in her lungs preparing for another wail.  
She stamped her infant feet in rage.  
Her fists bunched – preparing for combat?  
I cooed at her.  
Miraculously, immediately, she beamed,  
A windy beam, yes,  
As she peered at me uncertainly.  
What a strange little being!  
A joy she was to behold.  
A joy she became.  
Always a joy to me.  
My girl.

## Nina Lewis

*Prompt: Elements – Marilyn Robinson/ To know the Spirit*

**To Know**

**30<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

To know the spirit  
is to live with trust,  
to be held, always.

To know the spirit  
is to be gifted



by a strength beyond  
anything human.

Is to believe  
that all things will work  
out, somehow.

To feel pain  
and know the wounding  
is a darker side of light.

To know the spirit  
is to walk in beauty,  
a for every season of your soul.

To know the spirit  
is to witness an umbilical  
connection made from stars.

To know the spirit  
is to dance steps  
you've never been taught.

To know the spirit  
is to see  
the full moon  
of yourself.

*Prompt: The Caged Bird – Maya Angelou/ The Free Bird/*

## **Free Bird**

**20<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

The free bird has the whole sky  
to define as its own,  
dreams exist beyond wingspan.

It carries the prayers of the unsung  
between its feathers,  
lets them fall where it nests.

It takes your pain  
high into the trees.  
Its morning song tells us of this  
before we are alert enough  
to really listen.

The free bird feeds truth back  
into the earth  
and lifts, those of us  
born without wings,  
so we too, can feel the air.

*Prompt: Absolute – Jacqueline Woodson /Who could try to tell me...*

## **Defining the Rules**

**14<sup>th</sup> August 2020**

Who could try to tell me...  
how to dress, what to wear  
and how to do my hair?

Everyone.

Everyone did,  
but I was younger,  
didn't listen.

This uniformed body  
was expressing,  
the crazier the hairstyle  
the better.

Some mad bird's nest  
Easter bonnet parade  
eccentric.

I'd braid and loop,  
French plait and curl.

After I did,  
they rewrote the rulebook.

Stated under School Uniform:

*Girls with long hair should wear plain hairstyles –  
plaits, buns or pigtails, hair accessories should be  
plain or match the school colours (red and blue).*

That weekend

I visited the Haberdashery,

mum bought ribbon

by the foot,

blue, white and red.

## Chaya Gusfield

### **You Can't Bring Back Dead**

You can't bring back the dead, but you can live with them inside your feet and your hands, guiding your cooking, your dreaming, your words. Singing melodies of comfort, so sweetly.

You can say their names out loud. Name your children after them, make movies about them and wear their socks or pajamas. Or a necklace made of jade, bought by them on a trip to Japan.

You can't bring back the dead, but you can ponder your regrets, write them I'm sorry letters, pray for forgiveness, and know that you might be one of those people that waited too long. Just maybe.

You can put together intricate photo collages of them in all their ages and glory, when they were sleeping, when they were posing, hoping to smell them again, or sit in their lap.

You can see them suddenly walking down the street, same gait, same clothes, same bad haircut.

You can hear their voice calling to someone.

You can't bring back the dead, but you can look into the eyes of your mentor and know that your dead sister is looking back you through her eyes, saying, "yes, it's me. You get another chance. Don't be afraid".

You can eat that chopped liver as if mom is in the room saying, "have some more, it's delicious".

You can tend to your plants as if her arms are your arms and your intuition is really hers.

You can't bring them back, but you can learn their Torah, passed down from generation to generation.

You can't bring back the dead, but you can mourn their deaths at the hands of the State. Cry out until someone listens, or just keeping crying out.

You can write their names on your sidewalks, in the synagogue, in your poetry. Never forget those who died during the great pandemic, or at the hands of white supremacist violence.

Why has the press stopped telling stories about those who died and are still dying?

You can't bring them back but you can remember their lives. Each individual life.

You can't bring them back but you can know that you will join them someday and others will not be able to bring you back, no matter how much they howl, or plead, or bargain.

*You can't bring me back when I am called to the other side, but maybe someone will write a poem in my memory.*

**Daniel Raskin**

**Do I Have the Right**

Do I have the right? What kind of right?

It's not in the Constitution.

How about a new amendment?

The right to mourn what's inevitable,

The right to complain, a little or a lot

About the losses of aging.

You say no. It's inevitable.

A new procedure, a new pill.

I'll take my blood pressure at home.

Surely it will be lower than this

White coat, in-office reading.

What are the side effects,

What's the trade-off?

I could once walk 15,18 miles in a day.

No pill will give me back that.

Please sedate me well when

You put the probe down my gullet.

November 10, 2020

**Lynn Bravewomon**

## What May You Be

October 13, 2020

Dearest Annie, what may you be thinking as you lay dying?

Behind your angry reprimanding words

Of “not one more morning!”

Behind your demanding anxiety ridden words

Of “don’t let go of my hand!”

Behind your involuntarily obsessive words

Of “move that to the left- No- not that far!”

Behind your fearful words,

Of “no, no, no...”

As you straddle two worlds the pulse words of your heart chime,  
marking your truth and your vanishing time.

I honor your knowing Leo spirit.

Behind your angry words, I know the pulse words of your heart, I hear...

“I wish I had more healthy in-my-stride-time”

(I whispered, be free, we will live on.)

Behind your anxious words, I know the pulse words of your heart, I hear...

“I love you Lynn, Sam, and Josh”

(I whispered, be free, we will love you forever)

Behind your obsessive words, I know the pulse words of your heart, I hear...

“It is hard to let this solid world go.”

(I whispered, be free, go on your way with peace in your heart)

Behind what you have been meaning as you lay dying,

I know the pulse words of your heart,

I whisper, "I see you, I hear you, I feel you, I release you."

## **On loss, the place I wrote my first grief**

**August 2020**

The place I wrote my first grief poem spoke to me.

... dark, silent and loud.

She came to me after a keening and laid open the pathway of poetry- the first night after Annie died.

The new moon called through to me,

A molten swirling down through crystal still airspace

Shining just a whisper of courage into the terrain of my retching soul.

She then, with a hint of a hummingbird's heart,

offered the tenderest of possibility-

a barely flickering potential .... yet there, undeniably.

Anchored to earth and suspended by the strength of moon's magnetized hold,

My throaty words, hearty words, poured forth,

more torrentially, furiously, and demandingly, than tender.

In the place where I wrote my first poem of loss,

When the new moon called out

Unknown words told a timeless story of loss in their rhythmic and steady pulse.

Outward and upward through star strewn spaciousness,

the pure new moon drank in these words, illuminated them,

and shined them out to the universe.

... and then returned them to this, my solo soul.

Ohhhh... I beseeched you, universe, for just one moment of peace.

and new moon heeded this call.



The place I wrote my first grief poem spoke to me.

## **Ah Grief**

**September-October 2020**

Ah grief... you've lived so long perched on my shoulder,  
whisper-screaming into my ears.

For decades, I have cut my teeth on rejection of you.

I have pushed you down the stairs and fought you to the ground.

I have on you a mask of traitor... of batterer.

Grief, I made you enemy and I misunderstood- so I surrender.

Ah grief... your staying power sits you now as my consort,

As familiar and estranged as mother earth and universe to humanity.

I edge towards and in to you.

You are tormentingly attractive, seductively sacred, salty,

and, it seems,... a gift with an expiration date,

(though many argue with me, it's not so).

Ah grief... not friend,

a demanding guide for a solo tour, others try but cannot join.

This time I breathe in my heartbeat and your lifeline,

I invite you down from your perch,

side by side,

eye to eye,

I take you on,

I take you in,

You own my heart now for a while,

I choose, diving into this dark beauty of mourning.

I trust, waiting the delivery of ripe memories you promise in the rightness of  
your time.

## Candace Coston

### **Against Winter**

I remember myself in the spring

Of my youth.

Curious and determined.

Your hand clasped in mine.

The world new in my eyes.

The world black and white

With muted sound to you.

I remember myself in the summer

Of my adolescence.

Defiant and liberated.

Convinced I could make nature bow to me.

And you—

Your hair white and shorter.

Furrowed brow now wrinkled

Green veins like ivy under thin skin.

My hand tightly holding yours.

I hold you to me against winter

But my hold too weak—  
My rage not enough  
To fight against death.  
My only battle  
And I crumble in defeat.

### **I Belong There**

In the darkened corner  
Behind the dusty bookcase  
Filled with books of Homer, Socrates, and Plato.  
Away from the pathos and ethos  
They espoused.  
Far from the bright, shining world—  
With its clear definitions of wrong and right.  
I belong there  
In the recesses.  
The crevices.  
Caverns.  
The unseen thing drying up.  
Unfed.  
Undernourished.  
Life in death.  
Death in life.  
I belong there.  
Because I am the terrible thing—

Known as truth.

## Jasmin Walter

Based on: Courage by Jan Zwicky from *The Long Walk*

What will you do?

What will you do?

Now, that you have tasted the scent of salt in the wind?

It has brought to you –

Memories that make you belly soften and your pen fly over white paper.

This is where you are meant to be.

You can see the hills rolling behind your closed eyes.

All that ever touched your heart comes by for a visit.

Minutes, when you feel the sun turn golden and your skin soften as clouds.

You want much but so little makes you happy.

Go for the closed eyes, the smile to the morning sun and the jolly talks with the trees.

Based on: *The Way it Is* by William Stafford

As people keep asking

Keep smiling.

Don't give in to that sinking feeling,

as they haven't sent a danger,

they have only asked a question.

They just wonder –

And even though you wonder too,

you leave room for not knowing.

They want to make sense of your life –

And so do you.

They want to find you sitting in that room at that time and know you're there.

It's just not that easy.

Instead, you are floating in the dreamy morning sky, high above their heads.

And you keep smiling.

And they keep asking.

### **Based on: The Way it Is by William Stafford**

#### **Your thread**

Do you want to pretend it is not there? Like a far-away island?

Pretend you do not know exactly how the waves talk, as they roll in and out in the morning?

And the way they curl up like little animals on their way to the shore?

Pretend you have never tasted the sweet fruit, that fall in front of your feet, wrapped as gifts from nature.

Well, you know what I mean,

You know your paradise and don't pretend, that you have lost the map to find it.

It is written all over your face and engrained in your smile.

Pack your bag, take a step and a breath and the wind will take you there.

### **Eric Milliren**

#### ***Prompt: Seed of re-beginning***

In our decades of struggle to maintain your health  
we established a pattern of cherishing each moment,  
each day that came along.

In the end we had trunks full of cherished moments,  
untold riches few could see.

In that living in the moment we set the stage for  
our seed of re-beginning.

We are different now,  
you are energy floating in the cosmos  
and I am here  
stuck in the soil of my remaking.

***Prompt: Free bird***

The bird set free and off to flight  
in the middle of the night.  
Your destination unknown to us  
is scheduled on your magic bus.  
Tripping across the universe  
going forward not in reverse.  
Travel that's unstoppable  
seems strange to us, not even probable.  
A perfect trip completed so  
as all of us must someday go.

***Prompt: Now you are a part of me***

Now you are a part of me.  
Your funny mannerisms, your obsessive compulsive inclination,  
your silliness, your big heart  
your compassion, your dedication to community.  
All of it, all of you has filled out  
the change of address card for the move  
to the not quite tangible space of now.  
In a world without you.  
how can I forward your mail?

## Kathleen Kraemer

You Must Cease

June 2020

*with gratitude to Alice Walker for "to Change the World Enough"... and for her lines "you must cease to be afraid" and "fresh... high place" which inspired*

You must cease to be afraid  
or your life will stay small and trembling  
and what you have to give  
will shrivel and finally be  
as if it never was.

To truly live,  
to live your part that the mystery needs  
to grow, change, heal our world,  
you must allow your heart to expand  
to its own definition of courage.

You must hold hands with your trembling child  
and walk together with every hand  
every size and shape and color  
every hand of our one human race  
walk together with  
every living thing that reaches out to be held  
walk together  
towards the fresh high place  
walk together to  
where we all belong  
and where the light there  
makes us all see

and all be bravely known.

## **The Summer**

**August 2020**

Even now

after so many circles around the sun

this summer feels like

my very first.

The greens never greener

and so many shades.

Un-nameable, uncountable.

My legs taking me

high into the Alpine forest

life growing out of hard solid granite millions of years old

the impossibly blue sky

the exquisite and delicate wild and fleeting offerings

of equally impossible purples, pinks, sun yellows

the poignantly short-lived brilliantly

petaled painted flowers

and this fresh new feeling in my heart

crystal clear

and empty

of all

but this

## **Redwing Keyssar**

**In the Beginning**



6.12.2020

I love poetry

I love the way words  
filter through thin white curtains  
that are not hung  
to hide the light  
but allow shadows  
or silhouettes  
to be seen

I love the way words  
flow like a choppy river  
not that water itself is choppy  
except in certain circumstances  
like when it encounters serpentine rocks  
set in its way  
for centuries  
or massive oak trees  
who spent their lives attached  
to a slowly eroding  
steep hillside  
and then fell silently  
in a winter storm  
and rested  
lying across the waters  
with dark green moss  
caressing the bruised bark

of their strong trunks

I love the way words

open my heart

bypassing my mind

like a road on a dark windy night

allows you to take a wrong turn

and for a moment

you feel you are lost

but then

you hear

the hooting of an owl

and look up

and catch a glimpse

of moonlight

wafting her message

through the patchwork

of black leaves

illumined

just for a moment.

Let me use my love

my words

my moments of open heart,

mind, soul

to serve

this sad world

where so many tongues

do not utter truth  
where love  
of words  
of rivers  
of trees  
of fire, in its gift  
of heat and light  
even  
love  
of human beings  
does not seem  
to be enough.

How do we move mountains  
and re-direct  
the River of Time?

Or are we to drink deeply  
of this great intoxicating Sadness  
and become delirious  
so that we may glimpse  
a new  
wider , wilder  
darker , deeper  
bolder, brighter  
universe  
that will begin again

with a word?

## Coke Tani

### Bereavement

(ed. 11.10.20)

In my mom's mourning, her mending is neuromuscular.  
It is light of mind over tug of bone,  
the braiding of remnant over ribbon.

Her bereavement is born  
in his last exhalation.  
It is in her adrenal *No*—her ribcage through her mouth,  
an unbounded hole in the night.

It is in her deep cells joining figure with shadow,  
the drift of her shoulders to the door at suppertime  
heart rallying  
lips parting to ask  
*how was your day?*  
It is instead seeing my then-husband walk in,  
a close-enough place to land.

It is her right wrist flipping pearls of *gohan*  
rice cooker to porcelain *chawan*  
her grasp on the ivory *shamoji* a comfort—  
*scoop, flip*  
*scoop, flip.*

It is her legs carrying her trunk and dreaming branches  
serving the *chawan* to the candlelit portrait  
placing his favorite *o-hashhi* across the thin rim of the unheld bowl,  
napkin to the left  
teacup to the right.

It is her five-foot body on the ride side of their bed  
rolling left nightly at 3am  
right hand skating between sheets  
to massage malignant metastases.  
It is discovering none there.

It is rising with a persistent twinge  
that wants to make its home in her body.  
It is the drawing back of tissue memory  
the teething insistence of the new.

## Counted

Do not be afraid.  
Someone said that this is stated  
365 times in the Hebrew Bible and Christian Scriptures, combined.

First, I want to know about the person who counted these.  
Second, it can't escape me  
how much Fear must have been the pervading state,  
and 365 times that must surely equal trauma.

Someone else said that trauma happens

when something occurs that is  
too fast  
too much  
or too soon.

This seems to account for natural disasters.

But what about the unnatural ones?

8 minutes and 46 seconds?

Say. Their. Names.

While there is still an illusion of time  
enter it  
your cells into its fibers  
your heart's hand discovering willingness in another's,  
undoing the fear-filled threads of lies  
one filament at a time.

### **Corona Crown Down**

I didn't realize I'd been under a lead blanket until the votes were counted, and counted.  
I peeled back the heavy corner and this is what I found—  
A throbbing, as if the earth herself had a heart into which all the deceased had fallen  
at the speed beyond names, though to Her none were nameless.  
It was as if I knew each person, and each of their survivors too;  
as if the lead blanket gathered all of us beneath its weight  
little planets quaking in the dark  
an intimacy quickening between us,  
murmurs of the unexpected,

our own throbbings too.

And so.

And so I count my hopes.

## **Ah Grief II**

*inspired by Denise Levertov's "Talking to Grief"*

Ah, grief.

You've been living under my porch.

Waiting so patiently in the open shade  
amongst the pots and soil and mulch.

I am sorry to be so seedless.

I am sorry to be so breathless.

Life has been falling through my fingertips  
when all I want to do is  
twirl and raise my hands,  
open my mouth to the sky.

Speak to me in the space between porch and pillow  
in the spaces around the night stars  
in You, the ground beneath my feet  
that I have yet to bless.

**Poems Read by Redwing**

## **These Days**

**By Charles Olson**

whatever you have to say, leave  
the roots on, let them  
dangle

And the dirt

Just to make clear  
where they come from

## **Late Fragment**

**By Raymond Carver**

And did you get what  
you wanted from this life, even so?  
I did.  
And what did you want?  
To call myself beloved, to feel myself  
beloved on the earth.