

Syracuse, NY poems read for *100Thousand Poets For Change*

Martin Willitts, Jr
Syracuse, NY

Ay! Such Bitterness towards Haiti

The earthquake happened January 2010, as of August 2011 nothing had improved.

The floods came and so did the politicians.
The floods went and so did the relief.
Ah! Such bitterness for people who were already down.

When things pile up like garbage, which gets blame?
Certainly not the few politicians
strutting like roosters proud of themselves
in spite of the shortage of eggs.
Ah! Such misery rises with the sun
and stays past its welcome.

The floods came where they were least needed
and did the most damage
where there was so little to destroy.
What exactly are the excuses of the politicians afterwards?
Ah! The people are miserable because they are Haitians!

What do the excuses do? Do they feed us?
Do they rescue us? Do they make better built houses?
Do they restore the trees so the soil can hold back rain?
Ah! Misery is a Haitian without misery.

Martin Willitts, Jr
Syracuse, NY

American Gothic

Based on the Grant Wood painting

We no longer own our own heirloom seeds;
Round-Up does. This really happened.
They sprayed a farm five miles down the road
and their spray meandered in the wind,
altered our seed. The lawyers say
all our seed stock now belongs to them
and we have to destroy generations of once perfect seed.

We are losing the farm.
The tractor has been repossessed.
Our tongues are pitchforks, but we are too old,
weathered as barn paint. And we have seen too much
as the American dream became a nightmare.
We are grim as the land.
A patchwork of natural gas wells are destroying water,
their arms pumping up blackness while inserting poisons.

The bank increased the mortgage
although the bank was rescued by the government.
This was my tax dollars at work,
while I am put out of work.
Where is the sense in that?

There are barbed wire fences across my chest
as they take away the land from under my feet.
My bank account dwindles and bleeds red, white and blue.
We are burning our seeds --- our babies!
My wife grits her teeth into dried up creeks.

They say this cannot happen in America.
They say this as another factory is displaced.
Corporate farms swallow small guys like me.
Spit 'em out. Our voice is small as a seed.

I am forced out. This was all I knew.
My whole life was planting and harvesting,
rising with the sun, predictable and plain-spoken,
rough as the un-tilled ground. Now look at me.
Look at me, damn it!
What am I going to do at my age?
This is the American Gothic.

Martin Willitts, Jr
Syracuse, NY

We Are Not Discouraged

"We are not discouraged; we are not disheartened; we shall not stop work; . . ."--- "*Wadleigh's Report*," *The National Citizen and Ballot Box*, July 1878. Matilda Joslyn Gage edited and published this woman's rights paper for four years.

Perhaps they think we will go away,
pack up our picket signs, return to our senses,
return to our place in the home, making biscuits
as if nothing happened
and nothing we did was important.
They could pat us on the head
like a wayward puppy; scold us
with our tails between our skirt.
We could fetch their pipe.
Let them pity our fragile minds.
Pretend we did nothing to disrupt them.
Make it all go away.
That is what they would like.

That is not what they will get.
We will rise up like a phoenix.
We will conspire while baking bread.
We will gossip new strategies.
We will not go away.
We will not go away quietly.

We may go in chains.
We may go chanting and singing about freedom.
We will teach our daughters about justice.
We shall be a chain that cannot be broken,
one woman passing the good news to another.
We will do what it takes to make it right.
That is not what they would like.

Martin Willitts Jr
Syracuse, NY

Music in the Battlefield

Based on the watercolor, "*The Piper of Dreams*", by Estella Louisa Michaela Conziani,
1914

In the lull between the shooting,
I played my flute so quietly
music notes were blackberries.

For a moment, the fields were silent, my song
drifting across barbed wire, broken wheels, dying
split open horses, to the men agonizing,
cauterizing their wounds.

The quiet finds what needs to be lifted up,
and lifts it.

Linda Griggs
Syracuse, NY

Imbalance

The hand smashes a plate to the floor.
Anger vibrates the room.
Someone trembles.
A former official is strip-searched
with women observing,
shamed in belief.
Does it matter whether our passions
pain people in small ways or in large?
Both shake the universe.

Linda Griggs
Syracuse, NY

Uranium War Games in Brownian Motion

(Brownian motion is a physics term meaning that an object does not fall down and stay down, as in gravity. Radioactive uranium goes according to Brownian motion. A form of radioactive uranium, "depleted uranium", is used in bombs.)

The radioactive, tiny mites
join in a cloud, then dance
away, away, within, within,
whatever whim they like to take.
They grab and melt, or even break
genetic code, these little mites.
We cannot see, we may not feel,
we may not know that they've arrived
until we retch or bleed from ear
or have our guts burst out and die.
And yet we toss the tons of death,
creating blight we will not see,
as though we were immortal.
Oh, woe to those who will not look.
What we give out will come
to touch us, too.

Linda Griggs
Syracuse, NY

On North Alvord Street

By North Alvord Street
twenty-year-old prostitutes slowly walk
up their beat, wiggling their hips,
shadows of girls in desperate dance.
Hopes extinguished by North Alvord Street.

Near North Alvord Street,
a man is hit, smashed by a pipe,
lies unconscious by bus stop sign,
victim of boys who thought he was rich.
Blood soaks into cracks by hardened concrete
near North Alvord Street.

On North Alvord Street
the children learn early
to steal to survive, to not trust their neighbor,
to lie to protect, to hide all their feelings,
to live in confusion, to act out of fear
on North Alvord Street.

In our own minds we all have a street,
a North Alvord Street. We can lie to ourselves,
be fearful, not trust,
make a head game,
a mentality street
that just divides people,
encourages hopelessness,
encourages the fixes of drug, food, or work
to hide from the pain
in our hideaway street
like North Alvord Street.

David Harper
Syracuse, NY

Diss Advantaged

By chance, born

Male
BoreoEuroAmerican
Righthanded
Heterosexual
Omnivorous
Eventually sixfootone
Bodily complete
Not ugly

By accident, living

Nourished
Clothed
Housed
Moral
Literate
Educated
Espoused
Insured
Employed
and Pensioned

By *no* accident, retaining

Bones unbroken
Identity intact

To say nothing of remaining

Unabused
Unimprisoned
Untortured

So . . .

Whom do I blame for arriving over the hill

Without achieving the top?

Authoritarian father?
Dreamy mother?
Taunting sister?
Inadequate teachers?
Incompetent bosses?
Slick, tricky politicians?
Greedy moguls?
Conniving peers?
Clueless shrink?
Suicidal fundamentalists?
Illegal aliens?
Militant Martians?

Voluptuous Venusians?
Global warming?
Ozone holes?
Black holes?
Expanding universe?
Approaching last days?

What's that, you say?
What do you mean ?
“The mirror???”

David Harper
Syracuse, NY

Discounting 9/11

By now, over half a million souls
tortured, blasted,
bombed.

Newly awakened hope once buried
under predictable tyranny,
now screaming
voicelessly
in slow
Death.

(Will this morning's quest
for oven-fresh bread
be punctuated by
blinding light and
piercing-hot
steel?)

Beyond endurance, millions flee,
while ardent young recruits
spurred by promises
of better worlds
strive to out-awe
and out-shock
their faceless
enemies:

Those other ardent young recruits
spurred by promises
of better worlds
who strive
as faith-
fully.

Escalating revenge sprung from
incomprehensible acts of
nineteen stoic
zealots

Bringing down three thousand
passengers, pilots, police,
paper-pushers, janitors,
brokers, rescuers,
and receptionists—

immolated,
vaporized,
shattered,
ground
to
0.

Which we unscathed survivors,
remotely shocked and awed,
glibly condense to
four syllables
three digits
two words
o n e
breath
.

David Harper
Syracuse, NY

9/11

N o
two words
three digits
four syllables
glibly rattled off
can begin to convey
the measureless agony
of thousands of human spirits
passengers pilots paper-pushers
policemen zealots rescuers
warlords peddlars peasants kids
soldiers and pacifists
vanquished and vanished
i m m o l a t e d
vaporized
shattered
ground
to
0

David Harper
Syracuse, NY

Exit Strategy

I've got it! At last!
The ultimate scheme
The final solution
To all the world's woes.
The fascists of right
And fascists of left
Will join to rejoice
Hearts overflowing
Reaching their dreams.
In peace that will follow
No soul will feel pain
Starvation abolished
No tear will be shed.

It's simple indeed
This vision of mine:
All WMDs
And ICBMs
IEDs and
Missiles which cruise
Bins of bacteria
Cases of chemicals
Kalashnikov caches
M-16 stashes--
Oh gather them all
In one monstrous mass
Deliver them now
To the doorstep of him
We can trust without doubt
Whatever the price
The course to stay:
None but dear Rumsfeld
None but old Rummy
Can carry it through
When we march to his door
And chant all as one:

"Arm aged Don!"

"Arm aged Don!"

"ArmaGedDon!"

"ARMAGEDDON!"

David Harper
Syracuse, NY

Hacking and Fracking

Delving deep into our unexplored interior,
A cancer spreads laterally
Throughout the realm of hidden desires,
Shattering our bedrock beliefs,
Flushing out pent up energy and toxic secrets;
Our utterly private sentiments
Exposed to daylight,
Broadcast,
Enriching a few,
Consumed by all
For a moment's perverse indulgence—
And enduring degradation