

**Stone Soup Presents:  
A Selection Of Poems Read  
for 100 Thousand Poets for Change**

Performed September 24, 2011

## **Dennis Daly**

### **At the Mustapha Hotel**

Thursday night they barbeque on the roof  
Overlooking Kabul; the plastic chairs  
And tables set up, above the nightmares  
Of neighborhood. The hotel is bombproof,

They joke: its walls are partitions of glass.  
I'm told the UN people like it here.  
The Germans just installed a tap for beer.  
At the downstairs bar we're at an impasse

Over my travel plans in the Hindu Kush.  
Weis, the bartender, nods, agrees with me.  
You'll make it to the tunnel, then maybe,  
If they let you right through, you'll miss the ambush

In bandit country. You're not serious  
Said another: Up there it's certain death;  
At that altitude not a bloody breath  
Comes easily. Don't be unconscious

To danger; Overland you cannot go  
Unless in military convoy.  
We left next morning with no scheme or decoy,  
Heading north to blown bridges and blasted snow.

## Peace

There is in solitude a gnawing peace  
Not found in the eye-center of mob crush.  
There is an ease of mood in tumult of pain,  
A fading into sleep as whole and complete  
As the bud and flower of universe:  
The begetting of our heaven and our hell.

Even as our elaboration of hell  
Respires from a self-absorbing peace  
To curtain with horror our universe,  
The sun returns like God's face to crush  
The intrusions of shadow, make complete  
Light's canticles despite obtruding pain.

In our intimate lives of strophic pain  
We create our demons, summon them from hell,  
Set the narrative, so total, so complete  
That it shudders our corporal self, our peace-  
Of-mind. We retreat from detrusion and crush  
To safer ground, to a public universe.

Here among the bricks and stones of universe  
We face the outwardness, the armies of pain  
Not obscured within the enormous crush  
Of humanity. These forces from hell  
Are faced; and the totemic word of peace  
Intoned, but unmeasured, not near complete.

Man's pride like Babel, unrestrained and un-complete.  
Harmony disturbed in this universe:  
Clashing of hosts, damning of what was peace.  
Paralyzed sensations, a shock without pain  
Allows the artist freedom in hell  
To create his object, to sunder, to crush.

It satisfies the ancient need to crush.  
The failure of rebellion must be complete  
As if we abolished the precepts of hell.

From this newer, renovated universe,  
A haven from pleasure and likely pain.  
But is this victory a conquest for peace?

In the very core of this universe  
Beyond the known attributes that define pain,  
Here in our heart's turmoil, finally— unloosed peace.

## The Tunnel

Past the line of opium trucks  
High in the Hindu Kush Mountains  
Above the flight of watchful falcons,  
Here in the birthplace of epochs,

We drove up to a flimsy gate  
Where two guards demanded papers, signed  
By some authority aligned  
With tribe: a signature and a date.

I had a yes, a written okay  
Of presidential protection.  
But passage was not for foreign  
Whims; they blocked the bombed-out thruway.

The radio man wheezed a message  
To find his Tajic commander,  
Who, clomping in like a centaur,  
Demanded his rightful homage.

He came with the construction boss,  
A Turk, the engineer of record.  
I'm here, I lied to the warlord,  
To inspect, then to double-cross

Your tunnel, both up to Mazar  
And back again in a few days.  
The job you're doing, I'll appraise  
Your pay I'll make an urgent matter.

They opened the gate; we drove through.  
Steno pad in hand, I noted flaws:  
Enormous potholes, which gave pause—  
Our auto barely making-do.

In the dark, nods of approval  
Aimed at us from commander and staff.  
Now I must say on my behalf:

This deception was most useful.

Before we had left I was told  
Get through it, that's bandit country,  
To go around is foolhardy.  
In these tall mountains, men are stone-cold

Killers, only the blown tunnel  
Saved the Russians and even Masood,  
The hammer unseen and unsubdued,  
From slaughter, from this set anvil

Of eternal war, where foes collide  
And after kin, a multiple  
Of murder. A blinding medal  
Of light meets us on the other side.

## **In This Hotel**

I'll have another ice cold beer.  
The Glocks pulled out, the braggarts brag;  
In this hotel there is no fear.

The veiled woman descends the stair,  
Warily nods, hides her handbag.  
I'll have another ice cold beer.

Security is here, is here.  
They question you; they push and drag.  
In this hotel there is no fear.

We sit and talk, quite unaware  
Of plot. We laugh: a showman's gag?  
I'll have another ice cold beer.

These beefy men, they have no care  
For God, or home, or even flag.  
In this hotel, there is no fear.

The soldiers come, they warn, they blear  
They ask us for our ID tag.  
I'll have another ice cold beer;  
In this hotel there is no fear.

## **David P. Miller**

### **As they do each year**

Ascending by escalator,  
finding the subway station lobby  
pervaded by unexpected sweetness.  
Summer flowering trees  
on the next block  
bring me up short  
just this way  
as they do each year.

Pausing in the shade  
on this national anniversary,  
examining their leaves and blossoms,  
wanting to recall their kind.

On this national anniversary  
low flying jet fighters  
smash the quiet to fragments  
leaving in their wake  
one more ordinary sweatbox  
summer afternoon.  
With two pretty trees  
as corner ornaments.



## Scruffs

He's about my height  
takes a 36 inch waist  
    34 sometimes  
Be sure to get him a belt just in case.

Here's a likely pair  
sharp-pressed with cuffs  
darkest on the rack  
    used to belong to someone's dad.  
No more off-white pants for him,  
    nuh-uh.

We're both just being realistic  
Bus drivers won't let him on now  
Dark pants hide the stains  
As the passersby all look away

Ten dollars with the belt.

George Harrison's voice  
bursts out from  
the thrift shop pop mix:

*Now I've watched you sitting there  
Seen the passersby all stare  
Like you have no place to go  
But there's so much they don't know  
About Apple Scruffs.*

Tongues of flame disassemble my cranium  
I'm fifteen years old  
forgotten synapses fire nonstop  
my heart is in flood  
tearing through thirty-eight years  
of walls and bridges  
Maybe I'll meet a girl  
    a long-haired brunette  
    with a Swinging London cap

who knows this song too –

Pants and belt in a bag in my hand,  
tracing his usual route  
    between bus stop and subway station.  
Not there this afternoon  
No trouble  
I'll tote it till I find him  
The same spot the same bench  
where the passersby all look away  
    not to watch him sitting there  
    like he has no place

## Torso, Inverted

Once: a great stone embankment.

Heavy masonry

    shouldering trains to Providence and New York  
    commuter rail traffic from suburbs still green.

Homes of shoe-factory and brewery workers

    backed right against  
    these stones, with

German clubs pool hall public library

lunch rooms doll factory violin maker's shop

street hockey stoop ball

and the trains fifteen feet overhead.

Later: wasteland.

Two miles of razed buildings

    shops and homes vanished

weeds dirt rubble

and an immense dark defaced wall,

testimony to a phantom highway:

    I-95, strangled at birth,  
    still took the neighborhood down.

Now: inverted

the ghost embankment

lives as its opposite,

    a deep cut for trains to Washington,  
    subway to downtown.

At parkland's edge

through chain link fence

odd shrubs reach for sun

    out over the tracks.

Unimpeded

thriving on light

they thicken, distending diamond gaps

plant life twisting metal

    till pruned or uprooted.

Here: moss-patched

skin split and shredded  
this trunk plunged into earth  
divides in two as it rises  
    toward the tracks.

Limbs amputated still force the fence outward  
over the orange-blossom trains  
    passing below.

## Treason

We request that  
our brave young men and women  
prepare to face the ultimate sacrifice  
so that we may honor  
the ultimate sacrifices  
made by  
the brave young men and women before them  
who assumed the ultimate sacrifice  
in defense of the memories  
of the courageous young people  
who in turn preceded them  
and who with unmatched bravery  
faced the ultimate sacrifice  
to keep us all free.

And so on back.  
It's turtles all the way down.

To be clear:  
Ultimate sacrifice does not include  
lifetimes of mental illness.  
The latter is sacrificial  
but not ultimate.

Similarly  
with both humility and pride  
we will request that the next generation  
of brave young men and women  
defend the honor  
of the current sacrificing generation  
as well as  
the second third tenth and further generations forward  
    a generation being understood  
    to encompass  
    two to three years  
for as long as it takes  
until everyone agrees  
ultimately and forever

that the sacrifices  
faced by all previous generations  
of heroic young men and women  
have kept us free  
to express our love and gratitude  
for their sacrifices.  
Any residue of doubt  
requires further sacrifice.

This is what keeps us strong.  
Anything else is treason.

## April Penn

### **What dirt would say**

Sometimes living in apartment towers in cities you forget  
I'm here. Today you pass a historical burial ground  
that is under construction near the Boston Common.  
A pile of me mounds up on either side of the tombstones.  
Shovels try to wound and scar, but they merely shift and shape.  
Remember playing with a piece of clay?  
Remember how you use things outside your body to build heat?  
I am the outermost and innermost womb.  
You spread seed over me. Poison me with insecticide.  
Stumbling drunk, slurring my speech like a slippery mud hill,  
you dig and dig trying to find some part of me  
you don't already own. Your drill breaks over rocky selves.  
You are lost inside yourself, aren't you now?  
Gather up a fist full of me, then let go. What do you feel?  
Grass anchors in my body like the hair in your scalp.  
I want you to know me like you do your hair, each morning,  
feel I have a new composition, dry, fluid, cracked, wind swept.  
Growing longer with strands of death and rebirth,  
I may not always run smoothly in your comb.  
Your head may burn and ache as you try to untangle the mess.  
Relax, you can't be separated from me, only loosened.  
You go and come back, go and come back.  
You can choose to ignore wherever I am, but one day  
I will be everything you have become  
and we will quake together beneath the sleep of days.

## **I'm from...**

I'm from Walmart killing the downtown shoeshine business where the railroad once carved all the main roads.

I'm from wrought iron balconies on big, white mansions and neighbors who can't afford houses with porches, so they sit out on their lawn chairs instead.

I'm from Shoot Off Whatever Damn Fire Crackers You Have on the 4th of July.

I'm from This is Not a Celebration of Our Nation. It's a booming revolt.

I'm from Marxism, Atheism. A small Christian town where a local college provides the biggest diversity.

I'm from a Ryder truck.

I'm from the endless stretch of roads through dusty little towns and shimmering green fields.

I'm from a Midwestern family that forgets their immigrant cultures.

I'm from No, We Don't Want to be the Anti-Culture.

I'm from the Theatre of the Mind.

I'm from briefcases I lose the combination to.

I'm from the old woman who lived in a shoe.

I'm from shoe shine.

I'm from shiny beaches at Waveland that have now been decimated by natural and manmade disaster.

I'm from the airport, molecules of noise resounding as another blue and orange Southwest plane takes off.

I'm from endless years of wars abroad and budget cuts at home.

I'm from the droning of a vague electrical purpose that tries to silence us.

I'm from florescent light in place of sun.

I'm from broken sidewalk, armpits of wood littered with expired batteries, underpasses where pigeons go to die.



## **Julia Grace Vogel**

### **Beside You (Fantasy Version)**

May come true your fondest wishes.  
May you fulfill your fondest dreams.  
Please be happy and ambitious,  
No matter how the world seems!  
Through every single passing year,  
Though shalt not, shed one single tear,  
For, I will be there right beside you,  
To give you strength and to guide you!

### **Beside You (Realistic Version)**

May come true your fondest wishes.  
May you fulfill your fondest dreams.  
Please be happy and ambitious,  
No matter how the world seems!  
Through every single passing year,  
If though shall shed... one single tear,  
I will be there right beside you,  
To give you strength and to guide you!

## **Get Along**

I'm so sick of animosity,  
Population growth of the hypocrisy,  
In our pathetic screwed up democracy.  
What the hell happened to society?  
Don't get me wrong. I'm not a communist.  
Their system's way more messed up then ours is.  
Why can't we just get along?  
We need to analyze, contemplate, compromise to fix the situation.  
Not just kick back and let it end in oblivion.  
Please, we need to get along!  
We need to release the bad thoughts with sugar and spice.  
If you don't do these things then we're gonna pay the price.  
Please don't do one thing and say another.  
Can't you see we're just torturing each other?  
If not when will we discover,  
How to get along?

## **United We Stand Divided We Fall**

We used to be a wonderful nation,  
Full of tons of moralistic respect and tons of compassion,  
But now it seems like most of us only care about the green dead presidents in our pockets.  
Now we've become just more like a petty greed station.  
You'll see it in the news the papers and even on television.  
And if you think about it you may understand why,  
The old fashioned folk,  
Better appreciate the old days in age.  
Too much competition is what's making crime rise...,  
Because the people on the bottom,  
Hardly get enough of what they deserve...,  
Which makes them angry... to eventually snap, because of their rage.  
Why can't we stick together more,  
And help each other out more... to become a better nation.  
And remember the words that made this nation.  
"Together we stand and divided we fall!"  
Tell me why we can't become more like the nation we used to be?  
It may have been less high tech,  
But at least half of us weren't screaming, "All for one and one for all!",  
While racing neck and neck!

## **(The Fake Peace)**

### **Within Peace There Must Be Truth**

I believe the fake peace is, when everyone acts & looks the same.

I believe the fake peace is, when it is a crime to be different...

And you get punished for innocent freedom of expression.

I believe the fake peace is filled with hypocrisy...

and is masked by good intentions never followed.

Don't get me wrong... We need our boundaries!

But in the fake peace,

Our boundaries will be constantly violated...

And masked by us lying to ourselves, that they haven't been.

Even though we clearly state, and make clear to all...

what those boundaries are.

I will not live like this!

I will not live the fake peace!

I don't know who is going to bring about the fake peace...

Whether it's the antichrist,

Or possibly some of the withering society.

But it won't be me!

I stand up against the fake peace!

In the fake peace --- people wanting to be creative and unique...

Who are not hypocrites... who have good intentions followed,

Will be mistaken for being withering society...

Including people who just can't help to be different,

Like societies races --- and the gays.

We can simply not let this be!

We must stand up --- Against the fake peace!