



Vol. I

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Cover photo contributed by Rochelle Gilbert-Cage. She writes: “On the left is my father’s first cousin William, also known as Snake. My father’s brother and co-founder of Gilbert & Gilbert Construction, Hosea Gilbert, is in the middle. On the right is my Uncle J. D. Washington who has me hoisted on his shoulder. The picture was taken in the summer of 1956 in the backyard at our home, 1424 East 120th between Ashbury and Superior and across the street from Rosedale Elementary School. I was about to turn 4 years old.”

Cleveland Stories, Vol. I

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Introduction

Lee Chilcote

Cleveland Stories is a program that engages people in Mt. Pleasant and surrounding neighborhoods in writing about themselves and their neighborhood. Thanks to our partnership with Seeds of Literacy and Neighborhood Connections as well as Clevelanders' passion for writing and community, more than 100 people have participated. This anthology includes 25 of their stories, poems and essays.

Included here are voices you don't get to hear often enough writing about Cleveland's less-shiny east side neighborhoods. Like many parts of Cleveland, Mt. Pleasant is best known for what it used to be. The area's history has not been widely written about, unlike nearby areas like Buckeye, Glenville or Hough. The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History tells us that the first Manx farmers moved here in 1826; Germans, Czechs, Russians, Jews and Italians came to the neighborhood in the late 19th century; and that, after black construction workers were deeded lots in lieu of payment by a contractor in 1893, some of the city's first African-American homeowners settled here.

Susan Hall, who researched the neighborhood's six historical markers as Director of Community Relations for the Cleveland History Center, says Mt. Pleasant is a place that's rich in African-American history because so many successful black Clevelanders lived here at one time, including Carl Stokes, Don King, Jim Brown and Murtis Taylor.

“Mt. Pleasant boomed from 1910 to 1930,” she writes. “The population grew from just over 1,600 to 43,000. The growing African American population was solidly middle class. Blacks in Mt. Pleasant had higher homeownership rates than the city as a whole.”

Yet racism and disinvestment have also plagued this neighborhood and southeast Cleveland. “At the same time, Mt. Pleasant was also an ethnic ‘melting pot’ with German, Czech, Russian Italian and Jewish residents,” Hall continues. “Although integrated, discrimination and violent attacks occurred against blacks from the late 1920s through the early ‘50s. Mt. Pleasant’s population peaked in 1930 and has steadily declined. Its black population increased as its white population declined.”

These stories, about poverty, homelessness, addiction and violence, but also about model parents, black urban migration and growing up in the city, fill in some of the gaps. In “Hail Mary Time!” Demetrius Pate writes about playing touch football with the star quarterback for the Glenville Tarblooders. In “East 132nd Street, Mt. Pleasant, 1950s,” Cynthia Harris-Allen shares how neighbors sat in her driveway so they could listen to her dad’s jazz band practice in the basement. Stuart Terman relates how he rescued his grandmother’s old Singer sewing machine and Lionel Johnson writes about the swinging days of ‘67.

These pieces also grapple with more recent events. Charlotte Morgan’s “The East Side Newspaper of Record” reports on her time working for the *East Side News* while Naima Omar’s “Labeling the Inner City” challenges easy narratives about Cleveland’s east side neighborhoods. In “One Jaded Afternoon,” Quentin Congress gives us the view from behind

the library circulation desk, while in “East Side Mural of Hope,” Joe Black tells the story of a tragic neighborhood shooting. It’s not all grim, either. Gillian Johns’ “Two Neighborhoods” offers another perspective on the vitality of people living in Cleveland, and instructs us to look beyond appearances.

Read on for more. We hope you enjoy.

Part I: Glory Days

Mount Pleasant

Diane Kelley

You think the grass is greener on the other side?

I say, "That's a lie."

You say we kill more than you?

I say, "That's not true."

You see, my grass is green; I just live on the other side of the tracks.

Opportunity is what I lack.

I get it – my neighborhood is down on its luck,

houses boarded up, buildings torn down with a bulldozer truck.

Kinsman, One Hundred Forty Ninth Street, still have a lot to give.

I believe in this neighborhood; this is where I used to live.

I refuse to give up on what I know can be,

rebuilding Mount Pleasant – you, us, we.

Destruction, we shouldn't let this be the present,

we must bring back the glory days of Mount Pleasant.

Hail Mary Time!

Demetrius L. Pate Sr.

When I was growing up, my family lived in a neighborhood called Aspinwall in Cleveland's South Collinwood area. We could hear the freight trains along Saranac Road in the distance. It was a great neighborhood to live in because we were all like family. We would go over to each other's homes to eat dinner and all the parents knew our names.

There were very nice houses with big porches that we could play on. When we saw the ice cream truck coming, we'd run over and yell, "Ice Cream Man!" Kevin Shorts' house was the place to be because they had NFL high school and college footballs that we could play with.

The streets were very long, so we had to walk a good distance just to get home. But it was always safe to walk around because there weren't any abandoned houses, boarded-up buildings or empty lots.

On this one summer evening in 1975, the sun shone on the well-cut lawns, and there were people in their driveways washing their cars and some were cooking out on their grills. My friends and I were about seven or eight years old and we loved to play touch football.

We played a game on the cement playground at East Clark Elementary which is the school most of us attended. It was a solid brick three-story building with high ceilings, tall windows and wood floors. The game we played was a six-on-six football game. We knew that we were on the

right team. Why? Our quarterback started for the Glenville High Tarblooders football team!

Kevin Shorts came from a family that was involved with sports. His father was a boxing coach and his older brother Cecil was a wide receiver for the Tarblooders. So, the best thing going for our team was the fact that we had a star football player as a mentor and coach.

Kevin made us feel like we were champions. He taught us pass plays, trick plays and defensive plays. Since we were from 146th and Aspinwall and the other team was from 148th Street, there was a natural rivalry and competition. Also, they were a pretty good team that forced us to play hard. The game would be a fierce one that only one team would win!

There was another nemesis that we all had to beat and that was the street lights. Back then, you had to be home before the street lights came on. On this day, because it was getting late, both teams decided that whoever scored the next touchdown would win the game. This meant – Hail Mary Time!

We went into the huddle and Kevin described the play we were going to run. The play was designed to fake the ball to Makell, our running back. Everyone was to run to the end zone. Kevin stepped back, faked the ball to Makell and threw a bomb toward the end zone.

Most everyone on both teams ran into the end zone. Robert, Joe and I all jumped up for the ball. The defensive team crowded around us. I was smarter and separated myself from everyone else. The ball was in the air

and everyone was fighting for it. I looked up at the ball and was so focused on nothing but that football. My hands were stretched out to grab it. There was a lot of struggling and scrapping for the prize. Suddenly, that prize landed right into my hands for a touchdown.

My teammates ran up to me hugging me and this was, by far, the best day of my life. It helped me believe what Kevin had been trying to teach us all along – I can be a winner. A simple game of touch football – a Hail Mary pass and catch – changed me and helped me become a stronger, more confident man.

East 132nd Street, Mount Pleasant, 1950s

Cynthia Harris-Allen

Our two-family brick house was one of many on our street. A similar number of single frame homes peppered both sides from Abell Road to Kinsman Avenue.

Many homes in that area bore witness to my father's work. He was a bricklayer, one of the first Negroes to belong to the Bricklayers' Union Local No. 5.

As a private contractor, he built steps, added recreation rooms, erected garages, and poured concrete driveways. He did not confine his trade to the street we lived on; it stretched for blocks in Mt. Pleasant, the coolest television name for a multi-ethnic neighborhood.

Daddy built an addition to our home that added four more rooms up and down. Our first cousins lived upstairs. There was always one dog, a cat and his/her two friends, the two parakeets, Henry and Herman. They were our birds, but we shared the cage with the cousins upstairs on weekends by placing the cage on the third step to their door.

Mt. Pleasant borders Shaker Heights to the northeast. We jumped to touch the sign that read "Now Entering Shaker Heights" on our way home from school. We always did our trick or treating in Shaker. They passed out money! It was mandatory you carry a pillowcase to hold your bounty. The folks from our own neighborhood were generous as well.

We had German neighbors next door to our left, Anna Skarl and her grown son, Bob.

Bob took immediately to my brother, Jerry, calling him “Jer.” He would holler through the back fence to summon him to his backyard where he taught him everything he knew about a car’s engine. Bob worked at the Chevrolet plant in Brookpark, Ohio.

One Christmas, Bob gave Jerry a box with a “starter set” of car repairing tools. Jerry was about ten years old and eager to learn quickly at Bob’s feet.

Mrs. Skarl would walk to Shaker Square *every* morning, pulling behind her a squeaky gray cart. Most times, she returned by noon, her wagon filled to the rafters. In the summer, we would help her with the shopping bags, sometimes.

Other times, if she didn’t look toward us, we knew it meant she was on her own.

She paid us nickels to pull dandelion weeds from between the wrought iron fences at our school, Robert Fulton Elementary. She cooked them. We agreed there was nothing “dandy” about the smell that wafted toward our kitchen windows.

The Moores to our left were black people, a childless, retired couple, who passed for white, because they could! They went fishing every weekend and often shared their bounty with us. They would sit on their back

porch, decapitating and scaling their catch and inviting my grandmother to choose which type of fish she wanted. Three sets of white-haired seniors used that time to reminisce; I listened in often.

Across the street was my friend, Jackie. She was a thin, shy girl, with pretty, brown hair and a smile that went all the way around the block and back. And then there were the twins, Beverly and Barbara. They became my best friends. We were all the same age. Me and the twins shared classes together from elementary through senior high school.

There were six children in our family, one year apart in age. Three of us learned to play instruments, me the violin, Bobby the saxophone and clarinet, and Jerry, the guitar.

My dad played in a jazz band. He was a well-known artist in the area, playing the alto and soprano instruments. He always blew his “axe” over the bassinet of the youngest child.

Music from his tenor sax reached from our house to close neighbors and beyond. He blew his horn along to the tunes coming from the LPs that played on the stereo that looked like a coffin. Those jazz greats became my lifelong friends, familiar as learning the presidents of the United States.

On the group’s rehearsal day, he would come home from work, remove his steel-toed shoes and leave the cement dust in the outside hallway before he stepped into the kitchen. His thick fingers would pull my mother’s nose between his thumb and forefinger just as he had done

when he left in the morning. That was his gesture for “See you later” or “I’m home.”

He removed his work clothes down to his underwear while we teased him about his two-toned body. The parts of his body his work clothes covered were damn near white! For years, the sun and wind glazed his exposed parts a cinnamon brown as he hung from scaffolding twenty stories high or laid brick for a neighbor’s patio in the hot days of July and August.

His clothing kept his twenty-five percent Irish heritage under wraps.

The blue haze of cigarette smoke filled our basement when he and his friends rehearsed and took breaks from pretending to be Charlie Parker, Cannonball Adderley, John Coltrane and Max Roach. On the warmer days, people from the neighborhood would bring chairs and sit in our driveway or on nearby sidewalks, and even across the street, to hear the rehearsals well into the night.

Lots would drink alcohol, draw on their cigarettes real slow and wave with silent hand gestures that cautioned their children to stay out of the street as they welcomed the opportunity to be entertained by a “live band.”

Most households had working parents or at least one. I never knew a child whose parents did not have a job.

The Cleveland Press paperboy stopped to play jacks with us on the porch every Friday at the end of his route and collections. We set up a tournament board on the porch so the entire neighborhood could see who was the best and not so good.

We defended our title from other streets as far as East 140th; sometimes we didn't. Gray particles of dust painted the fingers and sides of our hands as we slid them over the big concrete porch, seizing as many jacks we could before the ball bounced twice.

We skipped to the Dairy Delight around the corner to buy cherry sodas and malts. We could walk there at eleven o'clock at night with no fear. Maybe ten to twelve of us would take the five-minute walk around the corner.

My brother Bobby's "secret call" to his friends to join him was "Kee ah Kee." His friends echoed the call. Some secret.

We wore empty soda cans on our feet by stomping our shoes in the can placed lengthwise so it would stick, and tap danced on the brick streets, making a lot of noise in retrospect. We would unwrap the C-shaped tops of thin coat hangers and strike them on the concrete sidewalks at night to produce sparks.

The Colony Theater at Shaker Square beckoned us every Saturday for a matinee. We skipped past stores like Halle Brothers, Fannie Farmer's, FAO Schwarz toy store, and Sterling Linder. The shopping center was a

ten-minute walk for us. The Shaker Rapid ran through the Square to points east and west.

It delighted us to see our serialized shows, *Buster Brown*, *Punch and Judy* and some *Roy Rogers* short movies.

Melted chocolate from Milk Duds and M&M's and Junior Mints on our hands merged with the salty, buttery popcorn taste on our fingers. The cadence of slurping straws meeting the bottom of our drink cups signaled a return en masse to the concession stand at intermission while the movie folks changed the taped reels.

We grew loud and happy, seeing in the light-filled lobby who had come to the theater besides us. The makeup of our friends, neighbors, and associates formed a paint strip sample that went from dark brown to white. Last names ended in -ski, some started with an 'O'; others carried a "berg" or a "stein" at the end. We did not know we should hate one another's race – yet.

The entry of two white brothers from West Virginia caused a stir when they moved on East 134th Street. Their drawl, long hair, and the jeans and jean jackets with the arms cut off they wore to school every day (which we could not do, per the dress code), upset our status quo.

We thought we had run the gamut of all types of white people! They tried to befriend us by singing like they were the Everly Brothers. Not impressed.

Our slave surnames of Johnson, Jackson, Washington, Jefferson, etc. rounded out the new Benneton commercial.

We put popsicle sticks in between the spokes of our bicycles to mimic the sounds of the English Racer bikes that were all the rage in Mt. Pleasant and beyond. The owners of the thick Huffy bikes had to settle for our newfound technology to at least appear to be a sleek roadster.

We had to be careful and diligent not to have any ball of any kind find its way on Mr. Nettis's lawn. It was perfect as a putting green. He would get up early in the morning to clear it of twigs, wayward leaves and anything that subtracted from its splendor. The lawn was a huge vacant lot he had purchased next to his home.

Nettis's word was his bond. He told our parents if he confiscated an errant soccer ball, tennis ball, football, and any other unauthorized sphere belonging to their child on his grass, it became his property. Over time, he had enough to open his own Dick's Sporting Goods!

All the parents agreed with him. How could a man wield that much authority? We moved our games further from his home after it became clear he was for real.

In those days, any neighbor, at any time, could get you put on punishment with no questions asked; children had no rebuttals or defense witnesses. Sometimes, this tribal village concept overstepped its boundaries.

Add to this our Chicago Rollers, Hula Hoops, Slinky toys, transistor radios, Kool-Aid, hot dog parties, Lik-a-Maid (sweet Kool Aid-like granules you put on your tongue and swallowed), Tootsie Roll Pops, suckers with a tootsie roll inside, and multi-colored rows of button candy on a strip of white paper resembling adding machine tape—and kites flown every March at Woodhill Park.

Woodhill Park was, and still is, fifteen acres of trees and land between Kinsman and East Boulevard. It had high hills that were prime real estate for sledding in the winter. It boasted a roller rink and a swimming pool. It was about a quarter of a mile from East 132nd. And again, we walked there with no fear.

I personally could not wait for a pending storm or high winds to show up. I ran with purpose to the park with my friends to set my kite high. Once, it flew so high my brother Bobby transferred his reel of kite string to my last dwindling piece.

The kite was nothing but a spot in the blue, breezy sky. Other kids ran to where I stood on the hill to marvel at how far away it was. I was a legend for one afternoon.

I proved to them it was still flying by asking them to touch the string; they felt the taut, long piece as it angled upwards to nowhere. I cut it loose and let it fly to Toronto if it wanted to.

Summertime

Diane Kelley

What time is it? Never look at the clock.
It's summertime, Kinsman, on my block.

Running up and down the street,
screaming for the ice cream truck for treats.

Hide-Go-Seek, Hop Scotch, fun,
playing Tag, run, run, run!

It's hot outside, turn on the hydrant, let's get wet!
We're playing in the street now, mama, don't you fret!

Police pull up, they turn off the hydrant. It doesn't matter,
we turn it back on, splashy, splash, splatter!

There's a gleam from the street light
letting you know it's almost night.

Mama is calling; it's time to come in.
Then tomorrow it all starts again.

The Singer

Stuart Terman

My Singer sewing machine rests near our basement furnace that offers it comforting warmth during our northern Ohio winters. Although it is now semi-retired, it was previously a full-time employee of my late grandmother, who bought it in the 1920's to help her pay the bills.

Her mother taught her to use a needle and thread when growing up in the Ukraine. Then she and her two sisters were sent to United States in 1913 to get far away from the progressing troubles in her home country.

My grandmother's father, Simcha, who was my namesake, never again saw his beloved children. Letters and charity were mailed, but they were soon returned unopened.

My grandmother, Gittle, used this sewing skill to earn money doing small jobs. She saved enough to help my grandfather gain a small home in the inner city, where I lived for a while.

My earliest recollection as a child was watching as she expertly used this machine to make everyone's clothes behave. Grandmother's machine was the treadle type – with adequate foot power, there was no need for batteries or electric power. Singer's name was written in metal, proudly visible on the solid cabinet base.

After my grandfather passed away and she moved in with us, she would use this machine in my parents' small den. The Singer was a trusty friend

accompanying her through life, keeping poverty at bay and loose buttons in their place.

In 1959 or 1960, an elementary school grade homework assignment was to sew an apron. Others in my class were given similar domestic assignments to broaden our knowledge of this type of work by our progressive teacher.

It's rare to ask one's grandmother to help with homework, but after several hours of doing my best to sew this complicated object, Grandma with her Singer pitched in, and I was subsequently awarded a fine grade for this.

The apron indeed looked professionally done and the grade reflected the quality of the finished product. My 'A' from 1960 is still on my permanent record.

After Grandmother passed away, the Singer was carried down to my parent's basement by the tattooed movers. Over time, the beautiful wooden cabinet gradually deteriorated and the treadle and sewing elements became almost inoperable.

When my mother developed Alzheimer's and was admitted to the nursing home, several years passed when the home was vacant. As my brothers were all out of town I would regularly check on the house, schedule the needed roof, driveway and siding repairs, and clean out the stuff that had accumulated over the years.

Over the next year I did all this in preparation to sell the home, leaving my medical practice when needed to help or supervise the various cleaning/repair people who were there for one or two hours at a time. All this time, the Singer deteriorated in the damp basement, asking – silently – for help.

I realized that I needed to repair this remarkable item. The machine helped Grandmother, and I was ‘da man’ elected to pay it forward. I checked around the city of Cleveland, found a gentleman in the Buckeye neighborhood who repaired this type of machine, and told him that I would get the Singer to his office.

I was in my 40’s, in boffo shape, and decided that as heavy as the machine/cast iron frame was, I’d get it there. My previous job working for the furniture store at Severance Center in Cleveland Heights as a mover to help pay college tuition was still paying off.

I slowly muscled it up the one flight of stairs from the basement, then out the side door, and lifted it into the back of my car’s trunk, after which I drove it to the repair shop.

Two months later, the repair gentleman called me and said “all fixed”, so I drove there, rolled it out to the curb, hoisted it into the trunk of my Buick and drove home. I then eased the repaired machine into our basement, now dry thanks to the dehumidifier, and it indeed worked just as it had when my Grandmother used it.

I stripped away some deteriorating wood, re-finished and re-stained the cabinet and put a few new knobs on the drawers to complete the repair. Not as 'good as new', but damn close; it looked beautiful and worked great. The rhythmic whirring sound of the needle moving up and down was as familiar as my name.

As I repaired the small tear in an older shirt, I thought Boubi would be pleased.

Growing Up the Daughter of a Brickie in the Ville

Rochelle Gilbert-Cage

Before World War II, 90 percent of blacks resided in the southern states. Yet six million blacks traveled from the south to the northern and western states during the Great Migration which started during World War I and lasted for about six decades. There was a decrease in the number of European immigrants arriving in the manufacturing cities in the north. My great ancestors, which included our great-grandfather Pa William and our great-grandmother Gentry Moore-Gilbert, came to Cleveland during the Jazz Era and the Great Depression.

Pa William and Ma Gentry's clan produced a slew of entrepreneurs. Our elders made sure we descendants knew from whence we came; we were journeymen in the building trades, farmers, breeders of horses, educators, ministers, business owners, juke joint and tavern/pub/restaurant owners, sharecroppers, civil rights activists...the list goes on and on. Because we were reared in a family that honored traditions, Daddy said we were thoroughbreds. There was no ounce of slothfulness in the Gilbert blood and bones, yet plenty of intestinal fortitude!

When Daddy settled in Cleveland in 1949, he joined the Bricklayer Local 5 of the International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craft Workers. In the construction trades, he was known as the "Blade" for he was as adept with a trowel as Zorro was with a sword. During the day, Daddy would work for various construction companies such as Higley, West & Sons and Weiss and Foti. to name a few. After he would get off work, he and

his brother Uncle Hosea would build houses in the Ludlow neighborhood and also many homes in the western suburbs that were created on account of whites fleeing from Cleveland. They also built the Shrimp Boat restaurants as well as many churches. Daddy's love for his career as a grandmaster "brickie" (bricklayer/brick mason) along with Mama going into the work force in 1961, provided our family with a wonderful, comfortable standard of living during my childhood.

This decrease in the number of immigrants created a labor shortage. My ancestors had the vision to see an opportunity to utilize their entrepreneurial skills obtained from being sharecroppers. Fathers and families left in droves seeking to achieve the goal of living in freedom, being able to provide a comfortable standard of living for their loved ones, and obtaining a better education for their children and future offspring. Many arrived in their new destinations with a small amount or no money. I often ponder how our parents, elders, and ancestors endured cruelties and hardships on account of the color of their skin.

The Industrial Manufacturing Revolution industries started recruiting blacks who had survived slavery and the Reconstruction Era, which evolved into the Jim Crow Era. Many blacks jumped at the opportunity to leave the south and move to the north or the west ... the lands of "milk and honey." During the early 1940s, my father William Henry Gilbert Senior, my grandparents, Papa Sim, Mama Maggie, Uncle Hosea and Aunt Doris listened to the Golden Era of Radio Shows – The Lone Ranger, Amos N Andy, The Green Hornet and Jack Benny Show, to name a few. My dad said they would hear the Illuminating Company commercials

encouraging manufacturers and people to move to Cleveland, the “best location in the nation.”

Daddy moved from Giles County, Tennessee and Limestone County, Alabama to Cleveland, Ohio in 1949 at the age of 17. His parents and siblings moved to Indianapolis, Indiana with my maternal grandmother’s family Maggie Mae Brown-Gilbert. Daddy said blacks fled a world in which we were still being treated as slaves. He recalled that at the whims of some white folks you could possibly be lynched for sport ... hunted and hung like slaughtered animals for no apparent reason. He told us siblings it did not matter if we were male, female youth or adult. The Illuminating Company’s commercials gave Daddy the inspiration to move to Cleveland! After all the abuse of being treated as if he were subhumans and inferior, he said that he had nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Before boarding the bus ride to Cleveland, Daddy knew as well as other blacks that traveled this journey that he was not allowed to eat at the counters of restaurants. He told us he packed the migrant’s regular traveler’s meal which consisted of bread, fried chicken, fruits, drinks and any kind of nuts such as pecans, walnuts, almonds, peanuts etc. As Daddy traveled the scenic routes of I-71 then known as Routes 31 and 42, he pondered the explanation his first paternal cousin, who was named William but known as “Snake,” would give him for stealing the \$17 bus fare money. Aunt Frances, the eldest daughter of Pa William and Ma Gentry, had sent it to him in the mail.

Daddy imagined confronting him: *Snake, why would you steal my money? You delayed my trip, you know you was wrong, you knew Aunt Frances couldn't afford to send some more money. Who was you trying to get away from?*

Daddy was delighted and filled with much joy to see Aunt Frances and Snake as he exited the bus at the newly built Greyhound Bus Terminal on Chester Avenue (which has recently been added to the National Register of Historic Places). Before Daddy had a chance to question Snake about why he absconded with his bus fare, Snake was placing into Daddy's hand the money he had stolen out of the mail. Aunt Frances, a God-fearing woman, had already admonished Snake to return the money before Daddy arrived to Cleveland. It had been used to obtain an efficiency apartment above a tavern at East 55th and Woodland Avenue where now stands a Shell Gas Station.

Daddy loved the new neighborhood that he had migrated to. He loved the area because of the large number of blues and jazz venues, cocktail lounges, juke joints, and restaurants. The southern sharecroppers brought their mode of lifestyle and entertainment along with them. Daddy would often reminisce about how much fun he had at the nightclubs on the Chitlin' Circuit, a series of music venues located throughout the eastern and northern states that protected black entertainers from the discriminatory practices of the south. One of Daddy's favorite clubs were Gleason's Musical Bar, which was opened in 1942 by William "Jap" Gleason at 5219 Woodland, a two-minute walk from his efficiency. Gleason was an interracial nightclub, not very common back in the day. Daddy recounted how Alan Freed, the host,

coordinator and MC of the first Moondog Coronation Ball that occurred in 1952, recruited entertainers to perform on his WJW radio show.

Other venues included Leo's, which was then located at the corner of East 49th Street and Central Avenue, along with the Majestic Hotel on the corner of East 55th Street and Central Avenue. The community was also home to Outhwaite Homes, Cleveland's and the nation's first public housing. The Stokes brothers lived there; Louis became a United States Congress representative and helped to create the Black Caucus. His brother Carl became the first black mayor of an American city. The community also had excellent public transportation. It was Cleveland's version of Harlem!

Daddy moved into a rooming house on 63rd and Quincy Avenue in 1951. However, the area started becoming overpopulated because most southerners settled in or near the Cedar, Central and East 55th Woodland neighborhoods. The new residents started moving into the Fairfax, Glenville, Hough, Mt. Pleasant and Superior neighborhoods, where the Jewish population once lived.

In 1953 Daddy purchased his first home at 1424 East 120th Street, between Ashbury and Superior. It was no easy feat purchasing a home, since realtors discriminated against blacks and would redline neighborhoods in order to enforce segregation. The home he purchased was a beautiful two-family home with a spacious backyard that contained two peach trees, one huge cherry tree, and grape vines everywhere over the garage to the fence. Just about every house in every

neighborhood had some type of fruit tree in their backyard during my youth.

By the time I started at Rosedale Elementary School in the fall of 1957, Cleveland's school population was experiencing rapid growth. There was an increase of approximately 100,000 students from 1950 to 1965, and during that same time period Cleveland's black population went from roughly 148,000 to nearly 280,000. This was an increase from 16 percent to 35.5 percent of the city's total population. Because students were assigned to schools in their immediate neighborhood, we went to school with our neighbors that looked like us; however, there was a sprinkling of white children who attended Rosedale Elementary as well. In the first grade, I began to notice fewer and fewer white students. I began to wonder, why did white folks move out of a neighborhood when black folks moved in? Were white folks like roaches – blacks move in and they move out? Never could understand the reasoning behind white flight!

The beauty of attending Rosedale Elementary School is that it was within five minutes of Wade Oval where many of Cleveland's cultural institutions and lovely mansions are located. Daddy said the area was called the Gold Coast when he first arrived in Cleveland. By the time I started at Rosedale in 1957, I had two sisters and two brothers. The school was adjacent and across the street from our home. Kindergarten students attended school for a half day. During preseason training for the Cleveland Browns football team, on weekends Daddy, me, my sisters Renee and Patricia and my two brothers Lonardi and William Jr. would stroll down to the athletic fields at Case University and watch Jim Brown

and Leroy Kelly work out. Some Saturdays we would stroll over to the area where Mt. Sinai Hospital once stood and paddle boats in the lagoon. Daddy was always glad he settled in Cleveland, the Emerald City, because of the Metroparks system. It was always fun to picnic along Liberty Blvd, now known as Martin Luther King Jr. Drive. Another family outing was going to Euclid Beach Park; during the 1950s blacks were allowed entrance after 5 pm, and there was no mingling with white folks.

In 1957 many schools on the eastside were overcrowded; the Cleveland School Board decided to implement The Relay System, with the approval of the Ohio State Board of Education. Elementary school students in overcrowded schools would attend in half-day sessions. Many parents, including mine, became livid. I will always remember the words my father spoke upon hearing of the Relay System. Daddy said he thought he was coming to the land of milk and honey, and instead he found northern whites to be just as prejudiced but more covert with their racism than southern whites.

Using the methods of the Civil Rights Movement taking place in in the south during the late 1950s, the parents organized and formed the Relay Parents Group. The seeds of the black political movement in Cleveland were planted when the parents organized and formed this alliance. Although the school board did provide additional classroom space by using the basement and storage areas of overcrowded schools, this group also purchased trailers and turned them into classroom space. They rented space in churches, libraries, community centers, etc. The Relay Parents wanted their children to attend full-day sessions. The Relay Parents wanted their children to use the unused classrooms in the

white neighboring communities. The Relay Parents wanted the nearly 1,500 kindergartners who had to be put on a waiting list because of lack of classroom space to be able to attend school. The Relay Parents did not want their children to receive a part-time education.

In 1961, the Relay Parents were extremely frustrated because students in overcrowded schools still attended sessions for a half day. The board did not give into the demands of bussing black children to unused classrooms in the white neighborhoods. The parents formed the Relay Parents March to Fill Empty Classrooms. They marched and picketed at the school board headquarters until their demand for full-day classes were met. The school board finally yielded and allowed black elementary school students and their teachers in overcrowded schools to be bussed to neighboring white schools. However, we did not mingle with the white students. Once we arrived to the white school we had to remain in the classroom the entire school day. We were not permitted use of the gym, lunchroom, nurse dispensary, nor could we attend school assemblies. We were segregated from the white students. The school board acquiesced to the demands of the white parents who did not want their children to mingle with the black students.

That year, in the fourth grade, I learned that if your skin color is black, then get back and take the rear seat in the white man's world, I learned that many white people viewed us as inferior in our intellectual abilities. I was being bussed to the elementary school on Murray Hill Road in Little Italy. As we would arrive and depart, the Italians would throw rocks and stones at us. I did not drive through or shop again in Little Italy until I was hired at University Hospitals Main Campus in April

1995. By that time, Case Western Reserve University had many international students which made it safer for blacks to be in Little Italy.

Our parents did not tolerate us being abused. Soon, we were bussed to unused classrooms in the Collinwood neighborhood. The white parents in the Collinwood district protested as well, yet they were not as violent as the Italians. During this time, more elementary schools were built in the overcrowded neighborhoods on the eastside. Unfortunately, many of the schools had very few windows and looked like prisons.

I am very grateful to God that my parents and elders instilled in me and my siblings at a young age that we are worthy and to never to succumb to racism. Daddy taught me to be young, gifted and black, and that's where it's at!

Mount Pleasant, Winter 1967

Lionel Johnson

I step out of the house in the late afternoon sun, take a lung full of air and *Kimball* down 133rd street feeling pretty hip. It is a cold and windy day, but I am warm in my black full-length leather coat, grey western style pants with the pockets up front, red Italian knit shirt, black alligator shoes and long johns. I have black leather gloves on and my black Beaver hat cocked to the side a little bit. When I get to 130th and Kinsman, I look in the window of the pool room there. I don't see anybody I want to see in there, so I keep stepping. I am going down to the poolroom on 118th and Kinsman anyway. I will see some of my friends in there.

I *Kimball* down Kinsman Avenue, one of the main thoroughfares through my Mount Pleasant neighborhood. Past Brownies bail bond office, Golden Voice record shop, the Kinsman Grill, Mount Pleasant Bar B Que, the poolroom on 126th, a dry cleaner's, a doctor's office, and a real estate office. There is a shoeshine place that is a front for a numbers or policy operation, the flower shop where I got my corsage for prom and a corner store called Delicatessens. Everything and more than that is up here on Kinsman Road. Some of the businesses are black owned, some are run by whites. There are cars, delivery trucks and other pedestrians up on the avenue, too, and the number 14 Kinsman and the 56A buses whiz by full of riders.

When I get to 118th I slide in the poolroom and see Hick and Tony Berry, two longtime friends, shooting nine ball. "Tell It like It Is" by Arron Neville is playing on the jukebox.

“Well look a’ here ya’ll, it’s Shorty Longmier, my man, home from college an’ thangs,” says Hick.

“They kick you out, Shouty? Ha, ha. My dude,” adds Tony, chalking his pool stick.

“Naw Tony, ahm home fo’ Christmas. I ain’t doin’ all dat crazy stuff we did up at Adams no mo’. I’m tryin’ ta’ get my education.”

“Shouty say he tryin’ ta’ get his education ya’ll.” And the whole poolroom cracks up. “You jivin’ me. Soundin’ all smart an’ everything.”

“Like I guess I learned somethin’ down there since September, man.”

“You went to Central State, right, you was pullin’ my coat to it.”

“Right on Hick, Central State right across from Wilberforce University. A lot of famous people went to Wilberforce like Jimmy Rushing an’ Cab Calloway.”

“Check it out, I’m hip to them. A lot a’ big time people went to Wilberforce, Central State too.”

“Sho’ you right, Hick. What ‘chu doin’ now? Still down at yo’ father’s sto’?”

“I’m still at the sto’ on 87th an’ Quincy not too far from da’ Karamu House.”

“Dig that. I rememba’ when you first started. Yo’ fatha’ still goin’ strong, huh?”

“He still doin’ his thang.”

“And Tony rememba’ when you said you was gonna open a real estate office like Issac Haggins on 127th an’ Union?”

“I’m still gonna open me a real estate office.”

The poolroom is old with wooden plank floors. The walls and ceiling are grey. There are seven tables with lights hanging above. A pop machine is on one wall, the bathroom is in the back. The jukebox by the front window is now playing James Brown’s “There Was a Time” and it’s still jumpin’ in here.

A tall Amazon-looking lady named Jesse is running the pool room today. I look at the long brown slender legs coming from under her blue dress. Hick told me that Jesse sold some, you know what, for a hundred dollars before. That’s a lot of money for some if you ask me.

I sit and watch the others play pool and listen to the tunes coming from the jukebox. My tune “Our Day Will Come” by Ruby and the Romantics from nearby Akron comes on, followed by “This Old Heart of Mine” by The Isley Brothers.

I split after a while and head for 123rd Street on a hunch that I can catch Howard Glover at the pad. Howard goes to Hampton University in Virginia. I know that he is on Christmas break too. 123rd street has lots of trees. The trees are bare of leaves now, but the street looks nice when all the leafy trees are in bloom. Howard's younger sister Amy answers the door. She was a couple of years behind us at John Adams High school.

"Hey Amy, is Howard here?" I smile at the cute, fresh faced brown skinned girl.

"Yeah he upstairs. Howard!" She hollers up the stairs. "Go on up he ain't doin' nothin'."

"Um, you smell good," I say as I enter the house.

"I just took a bath, dude."

"I see."

"I'm goin' to the Christmas dance at the Hamilton Rec Center tonight."

"I'm hip to that place. My sister used to go up there. I ain't neva' been though. I oughta' come up there."

"You should." She smiles. "There are goin' ta' be a lot of girls there."

"Like, I can dig that, but like I'm in college now."

She laughs. "Aw look at you, shut up. You big time now?"

"Naw, naw it ain't 'dat," I say, a little chagrined. "Who you goin' up there wit'?"

"Me an' this girl Nan an' her boyfriend an' 'em."

"Uh huh," I say, nodding. "I know Nan. That spot is right aroun' the corna' from the crib. I ain't doin' nothin' tonight. I'm 'mo slide on through there, girl."

"Square biznezz? I'm goin' to hold you to it, Bruce," she says, all snappy and stuff, and she walks away with me checkin' out her body and stuff like that. Pretty nice.

"Right on, ha." Upstairs I rap with Howard about our respective colleges and the girls on campus while we listen to some jazz, "Plug Me In" by saxophonist Eddie Harris followed by some Coltrane. Then I slide to the crib thinking, *I'm goin' ta' be dancing' wit' some fine chicks tonight.*

Later at right about party time I split from the crib. It's colder now and I think I see a snow flurry or two. After a short walk I'm at the center and I slide in to the gym which is all done up in red and green holiday decorations. I spot Amy and she waves me over to her table.

"Hey, I see you made it, dude."

“Baby, I wouldn’t miss it for the world.” I sit down and get acquainted with everybody. Then I start hearing the tunes and ask Amy to dance on “My Girl” by the Temptations. She’s a good dancer. After that I dance with her and the other young ladies at the table on slow tunes such as “I’m So Proud” by the Impressions and “Oww Baby, Baby” by the Miracles. And fast ones like “Shot Gun” by Junior Walker and the All Stars and “Rescue Me” by Fontella Bass. Man, it’s swingin’ up in here. I stop jamming for a minute to get a cup of punch from a big bowl on the refreshment table. When I’m not dancing, I’m talking and laughing with the girls, trying to be cool an’ everything.

Time passes quickly as the records spin and the teenagers dance. Before I know it, it’s ten o’ clock and the dance is ending. Afterwards I walk down Kinsman Road with Amy and her friends. It is beginning to snow now, big soft flurries that are not sticking to the ground yet but coming down steadily.

“Man, it’s snowing’ out here,” says Amy. “Let me put my scarf on.”

“I know that’s right, girl, I’m goin’ to put mine on too.” And Nan and the other girls follow suit as we Kimball down lively Kinsman Avenue in high spirits. We pass all the bars and good time joints on the way down with big pretty cars parked in front. At Amy’s street we split from the gang and I walk her to her pad. On the porch I say, “I had a swingin’ time, Amy. I’m glad you told me about it.”

“Dig the vibe, college man, you can still have fun aroun’ here, dude, if you know the right people.”

“I guess you mean you when you say the right people.” And she gives a sharp look. “Ha ha. Naw I was jus’ playin’, of course it’s you, baby.” And I give her a warm hug and a kiss. Um, she puts a little tongue in my mouth. I like that, I feel a little stirring down there.

“I remember you on the corner wit’ your boys when my mother used to send me to the store.”

“I’m pushed, I used ta’ see ya’ come up there all fresh an’ fine an’ everything.”

“You be standing up there sharp to the bone.”

“Yeah, ya’ know, you gots ta’ be clean up on the corna’. That’s where everybody come ta’ find out what’s happenin’.”

Amy is a nice-looking girl. She has an afro framing her youthful face. Her winter coat outlines sexy curves. Maybe we can get together one of these days. I could dig it. We rap for a while more before she tells me with an alluring expression on her face, “Well... let me get in this house.”

“Right on, it’s cold out here.”

“Bye Bruce.”

“Lata’ on, sweetheart.”

Amy slides in her pad while I'm thinking, I have to call Nan and tell her all about it. The snow is really coming down now as I slide to the crib going up Union Avenue. I check everything out along the way. The Boddie Recording Studio, the poultry place. The Kroger's right on the corner of 124th and Union. The cleaners on 125th, Mack's bicycle shop, Issac Haggin's Realty, a black owned realty on 127th. The apartment building where I kissed a girl in the hallway, the Mount Pleasant Community Center on 128th, they are all still here. I cross the street and pass the herb shop and then the beauty shop on the corner of 131st and Union, where I see the big "Vote for Stokes" sign on the side of an apartment building.

Vote
Carl Stokes for Mayor of Cleveland
And
William Franklin for Councilman of Ward 10

Franklin has been councilman of Ward 10 for some time. Stokes is our new black mayor. They went all out – the sign covers the whole side of the building.

Winter, spring, summer – the seasons change, and I am home for the summer of 1968, having just completed freshman year. I have had a soulful greeting with my parents and shared a fish dinner with them. Now I decide to walk over to Larry Denis' pad on 140th to get my 110-pound weight set. I had let Larry and his brothers use my weights last year. Now I need them back. Coach Sherry, my track coach at Central

State, has started us on weight training. I want to continue with the weights over the summer.

As I go I see a crazy dog dart out and chase a car down the street. I hit 140th pulling my little red wagon to bring the weights in. Larry Denis cuts hair in his basement for 25 cents a head. I get my hair cut down there sometimes. My sense of smell is delighted by the scent of the fruit trees that are all over Mount Pleasant. That is something that I missed while away at school. We have three peach trees in our backyard on 133rd. The people who live next door have two big cherry trees in their yard. Others have pear and plum trees in the backyard and crab apples grow on every empty lot. Then there are the grape vines that hang from garages all over the neighborhood. All this fruit combines to make a wonderful scent.

At Larry's pad I find him cutting a dude's hair in the basement, listening to Mike Payne on WABQ. I rap with Larry for a minute before getting my weights and making it back to the pad.

Later in the evening, I go to meet Amy and we go to Woodhill Park to watch the skaters. It is nice to sit in the bleachers and listen to the music at the open-air roller-skating rink. They play all the tunes that we hear on Amy's little transistor radio. On the way back, we stop at Vince's ice cream stand on the corner of 116th and Kinsman where I buy us both a banana boat. As I walk Amy home, I think, "so far so good." It looks like the summer of '68 is going to be okay.

I Remember Buckeye

Brittany Ervin

I remember the simplistic things about Buckeye Road.
Here's a story from a piece of the 80's and 90's to be told...

I remember starting out in the apartments on East 130th, four years old,
visiting neighbors with my parents, always wanting to be on the go

Our apartment was on level three and was the happening place to be
with the gaudy carpet and the huge orange couch and a dozen plants

Family and friends were always stopping by
to spend time with us and to say hi

I remember the mulberry trees and how they used to stain the ground
...and how I used to have my dad to pick them off of the branches so that
we could eat them

I remember the smell of Indian cooking as I walked down the street
capturing my senses as I approached the restaurant

I remember the Kentucky Fried Chicken that was around the corner
I remember when McDonald's sandwiches were in Styrofoam boxes

I remember Lucy's Sweet Surrender and the donut shop
where I smelled the donuts each morning as I walked to Harvey Rice

I remember the complexities of being a kid,
being picked on in school for just being me
which often made me feel like an outcast and a nerd,
many times, feeling disturbed and perturbed

I recall going to Audubon Junior High during part of my adolescent years
and feeling rejected because I wasn't into mischief like some of my peers

I remember the Buckeye Festival from East 130th to East 116th street
full of activities, vendors and that good ol' fire safety RV for kids

I remember going outside to play almost every day, running through
sprinklers, drinking from the hose when water tasted like water

I remember riding bikes, catching lightning bugs
dirtying up the shoes my mom would buy me with grass stains and mud

How times have changed and are not how they used to be
Those are some of my Buckeye memories

Buckingham

Tyler Hughley

When I was growing up on Buckingham in the Larchmere neighborhood, my brother and I were the only kids who couldn't go across the tracks. What was so bad across the tracks?

The rapid screeched as its wheels rode the metal railings. That's how I knew another fifteen minutes had passed. Lying in the dark, I tried to make out the sounds of the night. Loud music drowning out the night-sounds. Tires gliding along the pavement. Sirens wailing.

That was on my side of the tracks. My ears were trained to know the difference, although my vision remained virgin to what lie on the other side.

I heard the screech of the rapid again. Sirens wailed. I whispered: "Father, be with those in need." In grade school, whenever we heard sirens, we stopped and said a prayer for those in need. This stayed with me.

Fireworks? But it wasn't the Fourth of July. Imagining vibrant red, orange and gold flares flickering, I relished the sounds.

My dad did fireworks every year. The neighbors would clap and say, "This was better than last year, Pete!"

I heard the whine of the rapid a third time as I woke up. I knew it was morning because I could see the sun creeping through the corners of the blinds.

Walking to the bathroom, I said, "Did you hear those fireworks last night, Ma?"

Peeking out her room, she said, "What fireworks? Across the tracks?"

I stopped brushing my teeth. "Yes, those," I gurgled.

"Tyler, those weren't fireworks. Those were probably gunshots. That's why you and Kyle aren't allowed across the tracks, even if it's just-to-the-park. Too often things happen to people who are simply in the wrong place at the wrong time."

Well, that explains the sirens, at least.

Part II: Transition Time

The East Side Newspaper of Record

Charlotte Morgan

Ulysses Glen was the publisher of the black weekly tabloid size newspaper, *East Side News*. The offices were located at 11400 Woodland Avenue. For a time in the mid-1980s, I worked there as an assistant editor, and then, as Editor. My employment there was after my time as a music reviewer and columnist at *Scene Magazine*. I remember I started there not long after the Jacksons' triumphant show in 1984 at the old Cleveland Municipal Stadium. What I didn't realize at the time was how important a black newspaper was to the communities that it served. The job enabled me to meet all the up-and-coming political luminaries like Lee Fisher, Jane Campbell, Peter Lawson Jones and George Voinovich as we served Woodland Hills, Mt. Pleasant, Buckeye, Shaker Square, and beyond.

At Cuyahoga Community College's Metro Campus, I had majored in Journalism and Political Science. As a reporter on the *Muntu Drum*, the black student weekly, I learned to cover politics, and entertainment. There I met Ulysses Glen who was a journalism instructor and advisor for our publication. Under his tutelage, I would eventually win a photojournalism award for a column that I ran called "Campus Camera." Each week I went around the campus to poll students on a timely topic in the news. Back then, many reporters were also fine photographers who loaded their own film, developed it, and made the prints. Working at the *Muntu Drum* gave me the opportunity to hone my skills as a photo journalist.

I had found myself without a journalism gig and so I applied for a job at the run by my old journalism instructor. Glen had prepared me to write about music, sports, politics and entertainment. So, it was a great opportunity for me to work for him covering news in Woodland Hills, Buckeye, Shaker, Mt. Pleasant and Cleveland.

My sister lived on 75th off Woodland for a time, so the trip up the hill to Drug World was common for us. My sister drove us past the office each week but I never noticed it as we went to the store for milk, diapers, and other groceries. Now I rode the bus to work each day, getting off at the Woodhill and Woodland stop, then making the walk up the hill to the offices.

The community newspaper featured columns from local politicians and press releases as well as stories that I penned from my desk on the first-floor newsroom. Upstairs was the typesetting machine and in the third-floor attic was a room where we laid out the paper, which was like putting together a giant jigsaw puzzle.

After I typed and edited the copy, I took it up to the typesetter, Frances. She keyed it into the computer and it spit out strips of type which I waxed and laid out on the pages.

The layout room on the third floor was hot in the summer and cold in the winter, yet that was the most fun I had working in years. Watching the white and blue lined pages fill up with copy was fascinating and challenging. Soon, I had developed a system of turning around the paper after it came back from the printer. The only problem was when Mr. Glen

would arrive late on our deadline day, he was prone to tear up the paper to insert a late advertisement – that meant money.

There were so many memorable days working at the paper. African Americans were fortunate to have their own alternative newspapers like the *East Side News* and the *Call and Post*. Local and state politicians made themselves available for interviews so that the neighborhood voters the paper served could read about the issues that affected their communities.

One interview that stood out was the one I conducted with the late George Voinovich who was the last Republican Mayor of Cleveland.

The day I remember the most was a tragic one. I had a desk by the door to the lunch room and was leaning back in the chair rocking back and forth, which was a bad habit of mine. My typewriter was always on and I prided myself on typing fast to turn out copy which I put in a nearby tray.

It was January 28, 1986, the day the Space Shuttle Challenger tragically exploded 73 seconds into its flight, killing all seven aboard. As a child who stayed glued to the screen when there was a manned space flight, I was called to action by Mr. Glen. We were going to dedicate the front page to news of the tragedy. Dr. Judy Resnik, only the second woman to go into space, was born in nearby Akron, Ohio which gave the tragedy a local angle.

What made the year unusual was that on January 31st, before the memorial for the astronauts took place, I remember leaning back in my chair and nearly falling over when I felt the ground shake as a huge truck rumbled up the hill. The sound was like that of a roaring freight train. What we later learned was that it was a rare 5.0 earthquake that was centered in, of all places, Chardon, Ohio. Another huge story.

Ulysses Glen was the type of publisher who made sure his employees were recognized for their contributions. That year I won the 1986 Professional Journalist Award which I proudly display to this day.

China Doll

Diane Kelley

China Doll running wild,
such a beautiful chocolate child.

One Hundred Thirty Ninth Street,
Miss China Doll, so sweet.

Running around with her friends,
hair braided to the ends.

Sassy girl you're not grown,
but some day you'll sit on a throne.

Men will fall at your feet,
beautiful queen, small and petite.

Try not to grow up too fast,
being a child, it doesn't last.

But you didn't listen when grandma said, "Keep your skirt tail down,
Cause those nasty boys will be sniffing around."

Age 15, didn't listen; belly swollen,
Disappointment, childhood stolen.

Now I look at your picture and I say,

“Your life could have gone a different way.”

I told you to enjoy your childhood and your neighborhood friends,
My China Doll, hair limp at the ends.

The Army Ain't No Place for A Blackman

D.L. Ware

9507 Union Ave., Cleveland, Ohio, 4 pm – The sky was a pinkish blue as the sun began to set. It was rush hour, and the avenue was full of two-way traffic flowing up and down the Union hill. The best thing about the #15 bus was that it stopped directly in front of my house. I lived with my Dad throughout high school. Our house sat on an acre of land atop a hill full of tall trees and various types of flowers, shrubbery and yard decor. The house was painted sky blue and it looked down on Union Avenue. My friends used to call it “Castle Grey Skull!” because it was the biggest and most eerie looking house on the block. Our driveway was long as it crawled to the top past various trees and flowers lining both sides. We had a red Doberman Pinscher that was chained to the fence next to the dog house in the open field on the east side of our home.

The house was bought by my great grandparents, the Lacys, during the Great Depression. It had helped raise three generations of my family on my father’s side. After my mother finally left my dad and remarried, she took my little sister with her and I opted to live with my dad. I enjoyed living with Pops because he held my identity. It always made me proud to hear people say I looked just like him. He was strict and enforced curfew and choir rehearsals; loud when it came to conversation; and messy when it came to cooking and handywork. We lived like kings or bachelors as father and son; we lived as men.

At the top of the driveway my car was parked with its hood open. For my 18th birthday, my father gave me his old 1989 Chevy Caprice and it was

tow up. It was our “Father-Son” auto-mechanic apprentice project. I was to learn how to “properly maintain my hog” as Pops would say – but it needed new everything. From the windshield to the tires, radiator to the transmission, my first car was a certified “hooptie.” It was jacked-up off the ground with wet car parts sprawled all over the place and tools laying a path towards the side door, up the steps and into the kitchen.

I walked into the kitchen to the smell of frying bacon and the sight of my leaky radiator on the kitchen table. His tool box, a blow torch and a copy of Haynes 1989 Chevy Caprice auto manual laid open to the radiator section were there too. My father was standing at the stove taking pieces of bacon out of the skillet and placing them on a thick slice of white Wonder bread. My dad has been a makeshift auto mechanic for over twenty-five years and he’d been mine since I started driving two years before. He swore by Haynes Auto manuals. *“Read the book, boy!”* he’d say anytime I had a question about anything.

Walking back to the counter, he grabbed the mayonnaise and spread a huge dollop on the other slice of bread that waited on the paper plate. As he collected his five-piece bacon sandwich into one, he said, *“What’s up there, boy!?”* walking to his place in front of the radiator that was propped up on the kitchen table.

“It’s all good – you feel me?” I was a rapper back in those days. Everything I did had a hip-hop flare to it.

“Feel you!? Boy, you betta save that slang talk for those freaks in the street!”

He smashed his sandwich together with his grimy hands, picked it up and crunched down on his dirty sandwich. Dad had a presence about himself that was no nonsense. It was commanding – sort of like how John Amos played James Evans on “Good Times.” He spoke in a loud tone that almost roared when he got frustrated or bothered. It was forceful but it came from the heart.

“What’s up with the whip?” I said, referring to the radiator on the table. The crunch of the bacon could be heard with each chew my father took. While chewing, he pointed at his page in the manual and said with a mouth of white bread and greasy bacon, *“Your radiator has a leak and it says here on page twenty-five that I need to seal the leak with something called lock jaw adhesive.”*

“Lock Jaw adhesive?” I repeated.

“Yeah Lock Jaw – what chu know about adhesive!?” he challenged. Pops had this way of making everything a teachable moment.

Annoyed but trying not to show it, I said, “Nothing, Pops.”

“Nothing. Nothing. Boy that’s what’s wrong with the kids today – always need somebody to do something for them. I been working on cars since I was 9 years old and I was fixing my own car.” He took another bite of his sandwich - crunch, crunch, crunch – glup. *“Damn, that’s a good sandwich – make you a sandwich, boy,”* he said.

I was disgusted that he was eating his sandwich with dirty black fingers and hands with black grease pronounced on the white slice of bread. I said, "Nah...I'm straight."

"What's on your mind, boy?" he asked with his mouth full of greasy bacon and bread.

"I joined the Army today," I said nonchalantly while investigating the radiator.

"WHAA..." my father almost choked on his food. Coughing deep and loud, he grabbed his drink and took a big swig to clear his throat.

"YOU DID WHAT!?!... WHO TOLD YOU TO DO THAT?!... YOU JOINED TODAY?!... WHY YOU AIN'T TELL NOBODY?!... I ASKED YOU A QUESTION!?"

Subconsciously, I didn't tell him because I knew he would try to talk me out of it. Judging by his reaction – the look on his face and the way he put down his dirty sandwich – it was about time for another teachable moment. But it was too late. I had already joined.

"What chu know about signing your life away to a country that don't give two shits about you, boy!?"

"What chu mean!?" I said in a high pitch

"What chu mean ...Boy don't you know yo great grandfather couldn't enlist in the military because he was black!?"

"Huh," I said.

"Huh!?... at one point in American history black folks couldn't join the Army. And when we were finally accepted into their ranks we had to serve segregated. What chu know about segregation, boy?!"

"Segregation...what's that?" I asked.

"Lord help this boy...Segregation means to separate. They separated us by race. You know yo uncle Butch served in the racially segregated army, in a segregated platoon and all they allowed him to do was cook for white soldiers. not fight with them but cook."

"What?!"

"Black soldiers would return home from the war, yet still had to fight for equal rights. Ain't chu ever heard of Muhmad Ali?"

"Muhammad Ali the boxer?"

"Yeah Boy – the Greatest! They took his championship belt because he refused to go to war. He spoke out against the Vietnam War and was against black people joining the Army or any parts of the United States military. He believes that the Army ain't no place for a black man."

With a perplexed look on my face, I said, “No place for a black man?! I didn’t know about all that. I just want to pay for my education.”

“PAY FOR YOUR EDUCATION?! –YOUR GRADES TELL ME THAT YOU COULD CARE LESS ABOUT YOUR EDUCATION!” He said while looking at me in disbelief.

My father worked for the United States Postal Service and I suspected that he wanted me to take the civil service test when I graduated. Just like his father, he became a United States Mail Carrier and thought that I would be the one to carry on tradition.

In response, I said, “I just don’t want to be stuck in this city, in this environment. It’s my time to create a future for myself. I don’t know what my future holds, I just know that I want to get out of Cleveland and see the world.”

The tension in his brow relieved at my statement and deep down inside I knew he was proud. Here came the teachable moment. *“Well, son, every man has a journey that we must travel alone. I know we all gotta make decisions in life – and the best thing that you can do is make informed decisions. I wish you would have told me. I’m sure the Army has changed over the years and I hope you made the right decision by joining.”*

Blood Rules

Veronica Robinson

Just about everyone remembers the song, "I've Been Working on the Railroad." I heard this song when I was a little girl. I believe it's a song we read in a school book in elementary school. As a child, I could only remember the beginning of the song. And it went like this:

I've been working on the railroad

All the live long day

I've been working on the railroad

Just to pass the time away

Don't you hear the whistle blowin'

Rise up so early in the morn

Can't you hear the captain shouting

Dinah blow your horn

Dinah won't you blow

Dinah won't you blow

Dinah won't you blow your ho-o-o-orn

Dinah won't you blow

Dinah won't you blow

Dinah won't you blow your horn

In 1998, I was given an opportunity to work on the railroad. My sister's boyfriend was a conductor and he told me that the railroad was hiring women. I had a good job working as a mail carrier for the U.S. Postal Service and my family and friends didn't understand why I would even

entertain the thought of leaving my job as a mail carrier. They told me that I was already making good money and that I should make a career out of working for the Postal Service.

I rarely listen to others when it comes to my job choices, because I'm the one that will be working on my job, and if I don't feel a desire within me for the job, then I feel like I'm seeking someone else's goal or dreams.

So, I decided to apply for the job and I was called to take some tests to see if I was mentally and physically capable of working in the field of heavy equipment operation. I soon passed the test and was hired, and they had the new hires attend pre-safety training. This training was very intense, and they had safety videos that were mandatory for pre-employment.

They told us that most of the safety rules were created because of employee injuries or fatalities while working in the railyards or riding the trains. I had to watch some dismemberment and fatality films. The worst one was about a conductor that was injured while performing a coupling procedure that connects the freight cars by using the locomotive engine. The conductor had over twenty years of experience working on the railroad; they wanted us to know that it could happen to a new hire or a veteran employee. It was not easy to look at because he died after they uncoupled the freight cars. His wife had to come to the railroad yard and say her goodbyes to him, while he was in between the freight cars with two heavy metal knuckles in his chest.

I made a vow to myself not to rush but to doublecheck my work and adhere to all the safety rules required of me. I wanted the job and my life, and I didn't want to be a statistic who had violated what I call safety "blood rules."

I began as a brakeman, learning and working at the Collinwood Yard, then I became a conductor. By year two I was going to engineer school in Cumberland, Maryland. It was not easy. I had to work and train with men that had railroading in their families for generations. When they were kids they knew about the railroad through their grandfathers and fathers. I was a rookie and totally green to the railroad industry. I had to study extra hard and work long nights reframing myself to think and live a life of railroading. I had to do a lot of praying and trusting God to help me become a Locomotive Engineer. At graduation time, I was happy and sad at the same time.

How could this be? I thought. I was so worn out and tired of studying that I didn't have the energy to rejoice. I knew that now I must perform what I had learned and that scared me more than anything.

When we came back to Cleveland, I was glad to see my family and friends after six weeks of being away. I felt better about myself and what I had accomplished. I was a Locomotive Engineer, but I was working around men who were not always happy to see women working in this field.

My job required me to be on call 24 hours a day. I worked 15-hour days and had eight hours of rest. My route consisted of traveling from Cleveland to Buffalo, New York and Columbus, Ohio.

Working there taught me the importance of safety rules and how to pay attention to details, to prevent injuries and fatalities. Imagine you were working and your coworker became badly injured. You see their blood spill out on the ground. You can't stop working, because you are in the middle of an assignment that requires safety protection and you're between two freight cars, about to couple the air brake hoses together. If you stop in the middle of a safety procedure, you could get injured or die. That's why safety is number one on the railroad and that's why I call them blood rules.

About six months on the job some of my coworkers, ones that I had started with, were involved in accidents. I knew of a male coworker who was crushed by a freight car making a standard move on an icy track. It ended up being a fatality. One of my female coworkers was rolled between two freight cars in the middle of a switching move in the yard and badly injured. I had an encounter with a moving train one night at four in the morning, I was tired from a long day coming home from Buffalo N.Y. I could have been a victim of the blood rules.

Not long after starting my job as an engineer, I was diagnosed with cancer and had to retire early due to medical reasons. I realized that I was fortunate and blessed because I was able to survive the blood rules and cancer.

Even though I left the railroad, the blood rules followed me. I met my fiancée and one day he told me a story about his grandfather working on the railroad. He told me that his grandfather had died on the railroad while working in the yard. His grandmother had to say her goodbyes to him while he was still coupled between two freight cars. Once they released the cars, he died. What a small world – his grandfather was the worker that died in the safety film. This makes my third encounter with the blood rules. These rules had become a part of my life once again. But, now my connections with these rules has moved from my coworkers to my family to be.

Now the song “I’ve been working on the railroad” is about me.

Going to the Library

Kamilah Moore-El

When I was young, my mother used to take me to the library after school at Woodland Hills Elementary. It was located right up the street. There was a librarian named Ms. Carter who held reading circles for activities every week. Ms. Carter always had a new book to read to us each week. Sometimes she would ask someone from the group to help read the story. I would often raise my hand, but that was only after I had a few sessions with her, because I was shy. Every week after I attended the reading group, I would check out the book that she chose to read, and recommended that day. My mother would usually help me during reading time at home.

One week my mom took me to the library as usual, and Ms. Carter decided to choose me to help her read. The story was so captivating that I thought I was really in it. As Ms. Carter read her part of the story, I began to imagine myself, my father, and my brothers as the characters. She taught me how to bring the characters to life. She used her expressions and voice to convey a riveting account of epic tales, and I was able to follow her lead. She was also able to put emphasis on the main idea, plot, and ending of the story as we summarized the details. I did not fully understand then what she was doing, but I knew that I was alive in the story. After the story was over, I checked the book out as usual, and found that it was accompanied by cassette tapes that read along with the book. This reading was different. I would be proven correct later on after I got home and ready for story time.

At bedtime, normally my father would read along with the story as narrator in order to help us understand it. This time, we read *The Hobbit* by J.R. Tolkien, published in 1937. As soon as the tape began, my brothers and I began the adventure. I remember the eldest Hobbit, Balbo Baggins, walked along a path along with about five Hobbits in the land of Hobbiton. This was a long journey where danger was often present, but the group stuck together to fight. I remember some of those roads on the paths in Hobbiton were similar to streets where I lived, with winding sidewalks that lead to hills. One steep hill that everyone from my neighborhood was familiar with was named Suicide Hill, where in the winter, we would all go sledding. I can even remember walking those streets that led to wooded paths, and getting lost, but finding my way back.

In my mind, the story began with my father taking on the character of Balbo Baggins, the Wizard. My brothers and I were dwarves heading off together on the same mission, but we at first do not know what we are embarking on. I remember my father stopped the tape to tell us a story about when he was in Germany stationed in the Army. They had to run for miles with duffle bags filled with clothes down a long road. But for us dwarves, the path started at the library. The dwarves (us) had to learn the path from the Master of books (Ms. Carter), and the Wizard. Transported by the navigator which was my mother "Mrs. Baggins". My father had the ring. The test of all tests was unfolding. What a story!

Within my community, it may take a team of people to help guide others, especially the youth. People like Ms. Carter work in combination with parents in the community to help teach the children a different path. A

path which may lead to victory with the right tools. Use of imagination, compared with real world situations, can foster ideas in order to maintain positive thinkers. This process continues with leaders such as Ms. Carter and the Cleveland Public Library who contribute greatly to bringing continued hope for the future. I would like to quote Mr. Levar Burton of the WVIZ/PBS television show Reading Rainbow, who said: "Take a look, it's in a book." What a way to transform a neighborhood!

The Other Side

Willie Naps

“At least they like the food,” she notes as she clears tables left a mess.

Ahnha had studied hard in school because her grandmother made her, but she agrees with Mommo. She wants more out of life than being stuck in the ghetto, not that she doesn’t appreciate the culture. She loves it. She just wants to take it with her to new and wider places.

She used to dream of getting a good job and making enough money to buy a nice house somewhere quiet and inviting Mommo to come live with her and help her make the house homey. Unfortunately, Mommo passed before that could happen.

“I’m crossin’ the road, child,” Mommo had told her just hours before she was gone. It was a testament to her character that on her deathbed she could make her granddaughter smile, even laugh, although Ahnha tried to keep it in. Then, when she decided to just let it out, it came out all sobs.

When she was little, one day after school, Ahnha had come to Mommo perplexed.

“Mommo, why did the chicken cross the road?”

“I ‘spect to get to the other side, honey.”

Ahnha had laughed with the other kids earlier in the day when one of them had sprung the joke on the rest and then supplied the same answer Mommo just gave after the other kids were stumped, but she didn't understand it.

"But, why's that so funny? We don't laugh when we see people crossin' the street."

"'Crossin' to the other side' is a way of sayin' dyin', girl. That chicken's about to get herself run over!"

"Oh!" Ahnha was a bit shocked. "And that's funny?"

"It does put a picture in your mind like one o' those crazy cartoons, don't it?"

"Yes, I suppose so, but I still don't think it's funny."

"And that's why we don't watch those silly cartoons in this house. Violence ain't funny and shouldn't nobody try to make us think it is."

"Yes'm."

And yet, Mommo had found a way to wring joy out of such unjust humor by recalling that lesson with levity in a time of personal crisis. Bringing laughter to despair was her way of defying death in its faceless shadow. Death don't smile, but we can. We do.

Ahnha realizes she's stopped wiping down the table she's at and is staring at her own menu, at the Other Side Chicken Dinner entrée feature. Mommo is everywhere in her life, even if she doesn't have that house yet. Sometimes she wonders if she can ever really leave the city. There is so much of Mommo in it.

Ahnha wipes her eyes with the fold of her sleeve and hefts the tray with dirty dishes and glasses on it and heads for the back when a big hand reaches out from a booth she's passing to stop her, touching her where it ought not. She stops and closes her eyes for a moment to keep from shooting daggers at the man with the hand. He slowly removes his hand and addresses her.

"Girl, I could use some more coffee."

"Yes, sir. I'll be right back with a fresh pot."

He doesn't say thank you, but he moves his loitering hand back to his table and goes back to talking with his companions, so she's free to pass. She closes her eyes again for a second, takes in a good breath, and continues into the back where she leaves the tray in the dish line for Carlo to wash and finally exhales, resting for a second against the stainless-steel lip of the dish line.

She doesn't mind the steam from the dish washer getting in her hair and on her face. She just reminds herself that this is her place. She owns this restaurant. She bought this dish machine, this counter, everything in the place. She orders all the food and supplies. She hires all the help. She's

only waitressing because she's short-handed today on account of Taniya getting called in suddenly for a job interview.

Ahnha supported her employees in pursuing careers that took them away from her. She called her diner on the inside of Lee, the line between ghetto and suburbs, the Bus Stop for that very reason. She didn't hold it against them when they moved up while she was still gathering for her dream house and living on 140th, down. It was a nice, big old house and she rented the upstairs out, but her dreams were even bigger.

Blasie, her best waitress ever, had told her often enough that even when she bought herself the best house she could imagine, it wouldn't be a home if she didn't have someone to share it with. Of course, she meant a man and children, but these days, it could even be another woman and that'd be okay by most folks. It seemed the American Dream was growing faster than her own hopes. She didn't have anyone special in her life after Mommo, except her friends and they all worked for her. And then, they moved on, crossing the road, but she was the one left on the other side, her dream dying in piles of bills and dishwater.

She remembered wondering if Blasie was offering herself to her then dismissing the thought right after. Blasie loved men and men loved Blasie. She was the most attractive big woman she'd ever met. They were both big, but Blasie was tall and thick in her arms and neck as well as curvaceous. Yet, she had a way about her that kept her feminine *and* strong. And, she had kept the diner running smoothly and all the customers happy. That was back when it looked like Ahnha's dream

might come true. Receipts were good and her wait ladies were making good tips, too.

If Blasia *had* offered herself to Ahnha, she didn't know what she would do. She would be tempted to explore such a relationship, because Blasia could fill the role of a man in almost every way: almost. Shoot, maybe it would even be better. She didn't know.

But now she was being silly. Carlo kept suggesting she start going back to church and find a good man there. She usually just agreed that it was a good idea to end the discussion, but she had no plan to return to the church.

Mommo had only taken her to the church down the way, Original Harvest Baptist Church, when they were providing community service to all comers: free meals, clothing and household item giveaways, concerts, Stop the Violence marches, that sort of thing. Mommo used to say, "I'd rather you become a scientist than a gospel singer, but I'd rather listen to a gospel choir than a science lecture." Still, Mommo had taken her to both types of events.

Her grandmother wasn't for attending any church that didn't have a humble and modest pastor. But, nearly all the preachers in the city seemed out to impress the others and exalt themselves over their flocks. They dressed like pimps and drove the same cars as pro athletes. They showed up for the tithing but didn't come around when it was time to help the children with their homework or cook meals for the hungry, except for holidays when the press might show up.

But, church was unarguably a big part of the culture she loved. Mommo didn't trust the church, but she recognized gospel music as an important part of American culture. She never said, "African American" or "Black" culture. She always said "American" culture, like she was happy to have white folks and everyone else take in as much of it as they could handle and make it their own, too. She even liked some white singers and Hispanic music, even though she didn't understand a word of Spanish. But gospel was her opera and jazz her orchestral music, America's classical. Blues was her pop, truly the foundation of America's pop music. She would dance to the blues and all that extra-cultural stuff, but she would sit and rock to gospel and jazz, eyes closed, listening with her whole soul. She said hip hop had promise but was being badly abused by companies peddling the gangster image like a boogie man. But she cautioned, these companies were owned by white men *and* Black and the radio stations by a Black woman.

Ahnha came to similar realizations about Black folk seeking power in the white way when she attended a church giveaway on Woodland one time, hoping she might find some nice things for her home, maybe for her dream house. The church had kids passing out fliers all over the east side promising a bookbag and school supplies for every person and child that showed up, plus household items and toys. That's how they worded it, "person and child," like children aren't people. Oh well, she'd seen plenty of worse grammar in signs and hasty online articles. The event was scheduled for just a week before school started back, so the yard next to the church was packed when she got there.

Ahnha had begun to despair that anything good would be left by the time she got to choose but decided to stay and observe the event. There was a microphone set up and vans and cars with city markings. She wanted to find out what that was all about.

She got in line and slowly shuffled toward the table where she thought she would be getting her number, but when she got to it, she discovered it was for voter registration. She was already registered to vote. She did so every year at the BMV. The lady at the desk pointed her to another, longer line to register for a number for the giveaway.

Once she got in that line, petitioners arrived seeking signatures. They called out, "Who wants to sign to give Trayvon Martin a trial?" People raised their hands and the petitioner approached, held out a clipboard and handed the signatories a pen on a string attached to the board. The petitioner then shoved the clipboard at everyone nearby and got more signatures.

Ahnha was confused, but when someone next to her raised her hand and signed off, she was presented with the clipboard. What she didn't understand was what the petition could be. First off, Trayvon was dead, so sad, so he wasn't getting a trial, but she understood the meaning was that the man who killed Trayvon was the one they wanted to take to trial. There were several problems with that proposition, though. First, that all happened in Florida and they were in Mt. Pleasant, Cleveland, Ohio. So, maybe they wanted a federal investigation and trial. But, second, criminal investigations and trials aren't subject to petition. It's up to the prosecutors in the various jurisdictions to determine whether

or not to investigate or go to trial. So, maybe it was a petition for publication, a social demonstration, so she decided she wanted to read the petition before she signed, which she wasn't sure she would do considering the ambiguity of it all, despite her clear desire to see Trayvon's killer tried at the state and federal level.

As she flipped the paper over, she noticed there was no petition on the top page, but she found it on the bottom page, buried under several still blank signup pages. She read the petition, even though the petitioner was trying to grab the board back. When she was done, she glared at the petitioner and saw that she knew what she was up to. The only white man she saw in attendance, who was in line next to her, asked to read the petition, so Ahnha handed it to him.

When he was done reading it, he held it up and shouted to the crowd, "Y'all, this is not a petition to help Trayvon Martin's family out at all. It's a petition to legalize gambling in Ohio," which it was.

The petitioner, a big woman herself, jumped up higher than Ahnha thought she'd be able to and snatched the clipboard from his hand. Then she started to shout herself, "This man is a plant! He's part of a hate group that's been disrupting our events! Don't listen to him!"

By this time, the white man had his cell phone out and was recording her. He also responded. "I'm not lying! Read the petition! Find out the truth for yourselves!" Then, amazingly, he stayed in line, got his number and waited like everyone else. No one seemed to take any notice of any

of it, except one young Black man who carried his young son on his shoulder who congratulated the white man for speaking up.

Then, Ahnha saw the petitioner who had been outed walk over to one of the city vans and briefly talk to one of the suited security men with a wire hanging out of his right ear and disappearing under his collar. He then let her pass to speak with a woman wearing a badge who then approached the white man, who was still recording what he could of all this on his cell phone.

The lady came over to the white man and shoved her cell phone in his face, almost down his throat, and asked him who he was. He just said he was a resident there for the giveaway. Then she got clever and said the city needed sharp people like him and asked him to give her his contact info, so she could recruit him for a job. She asked him if he liked the mayor.

He claimed he did and that he had voted for him, but he called the mayor “Michael Jackson,” as if fusing former mayor Michael Green with current mayor Hank Jackson or just misspeaking and uttering the more widely known recently deceased king of pop’s name. Ahnha realized he was being crafty back at her, making himself appear less threatening, less educated or intelligent than he was. It worked, because she left him alone after that. Ahnha did get close enough to notice that the lady’s badge ID’d her as working for the mayor’s office. Now, she was determined to stick it out and find out more about why the mayor’s office was in collusion with the church to rob the people of their signatures in order to bring gambling to Cleveland and three other big

cities with large Black populations where the poor would be enticed to throw their money away on the hope of luck or divine intervention to deliver them the American Dream, since it was so remote otherwise.

Mommo hated gambling. She especially hated the lottery. She saw too many of her friends and neighbors wasting money on it. Even when they won, they would spend their winnings on more tickets. Thus, they didn't even allow themselves to reap their winnings when they did manage to eke out some. Plus, Mommo had told her about how the politicians had promised to use the lottery proceeds to fund the schools, but then simply moved an equal amount of money that had previously been earmarked for the schools to other items in the state's budget, resulting in no net gain for the schools. At the same time, the state had lost four suits against them for underfunding schools along racial lines in the Ohio Supreme Court but ignored the findings which had no enforcement power. But, more than this, Mommo had warned that beyond being a dirty trick and undermining poor people's standard of living, it caught them up in the underlying fallacy of the prevailing economic philosophy that unearned (or ill-earned) and counterproductive wealth for a few at the expense of the exploited masses was acceptable and just, even necessary.

When Ahnha had reached college, she had asked Mommo if she was a socialist. She had responded that, although she thought it was a better system for poor people than most others, she was not, herself, a socialist. She believed in people earning their way ahead. She used to say, any system will work if the hypocrisy is removed and the cheating prevented. So long as the same rules apply to everyone and there is truly

equal opportunity, the people will adapt and thrive. There are two caveats, points of clarification, really. The lowest standard of living for fulltime work mustn't be lacking in the basics or threatening survival and leadership must be held to the highest standards, not permitted to veer outside of the standards as it chooses. The condition of the working poor is exploitive and a cheat in the social contract. The excusatory rules of sovereign immunity that governments employ to get their hands dirty for propounded justified ends is hypocritical, sets the wrong example, and drags all of society into evildoing along with it. Poor leadership alone damns all of society and its ubiquity endangers the world. Ahnha felt she learned more from Mommo than all her professors combined. Of course, she spent more time in Mommo's class than theirs.

The pastor, dressed in finery, stepped to the mic and addressed the crowd. He blessed them and the church and city and the mayor, but rather than preach, he talked about how the mayor had always supported the church and would have come himself if his schedule had allowed it. He was basically stumping for the mayor's re-election. Then he turned the mic over to a deacon who began to call out the first and last numbers of groups to come up and get their items.

Long before Ahnha and the white man and the young man with his son sleeping on his shoulder got to the tables to pick up items the church providers had run out of school supplies and household items. All that was left were toys and food items past their prime. Ahnha got nothing useful, except insight into local politics and the surprise of witnessing a white man who gave a damn.

She reminded herself of that day whenever she was having a bad day, especially when white men were being offensive, like the man with the hand, or when Black folks were preaching Afrocentric racism. Mommo was proud to be Black, but she didn't go in for any kind of racism.

She pours the man with the hand a cup of fresh coffee, determined to repay his inappropriate grasp with impeccable service and a bit more distance. The smell of the gourmet blend she delivers seems to work to make him feel he's being treated especially well, which keeps him from piling on any further insult. His caffeine reverie dissipates his cantankerousness with an aromatic vapor. Ahnha's clever in the customary way.

She leaves the cream and sugar with him, lest he be inspired to make some lewd crack about Black coffee, sweetness, or cream. Just then, a pair of police officers enter the diner, one Black, one white. They aren't city cops. They're county housing cops, the worst. They're SWAT on patrol, which seems all too provocative to Ahnha's sensibilities. *Mommo, keep me from undue attention*, she thinks.

She brings the officers menus and offers them coffee from the pot she still carries. They accept both and thankfully return to their own conversation.

Mr. Wilson at the counter motions for a refill of fresh java and she brings it to him. He's just finished his plate of pork chops and greens, the Straw House entrée, so she clears the setting away and asks if he's ready for

some pie. He declines, saying he can't fit any more food in, but wishes he could, knowing how tasty her pies are.

"Thank you, Mr. Wilson. You just enjoy your coffee and let me know if you do need anything more, you hear?"

"Thank you, Ahnha, darling."

Ahnha is starting to regain pleasure from her enterprise. She glances over at the picture of Mommo on the wall beside the register. Mommo radiates pride, not just personal pride, but pride in her, in Ahnha. She took that picture just after telling her that she bought the diner. That was a special smile she preserved like the finest jam ever made. It got her through all kinds of troubles.

The county officers order burgers made the same way with home fries. Carlo cracks wise that they're secret lovers who have grown to have identical tastes in all things. Lamar works the grill and shares Ahnha's pride in providing excellence despite anything and everything else. He even grills at home and is a neighborhood culinary legend. Some of the entrées on the menu are his inventions.

The man with the hand leaves an okay tip. The county officers enjoy their burgers and leave a small tip, too. As the officers are leaving, a group of young white kids comes in. The housing police officers don't give the kids a second glance, but she knows if they were Black, they would. She gets the teens menus and asks if they want anything to drink.

They ask what beers she has, but she reminds them of the drinking age and smiles. *Nice try.*

They look hurt but don't press the matter. They order sodas. She leaves them to peruse the menus. When she comes back they're all giggles again.

"I want to try the Spaghetti Platter," the blond with his arm around the blonde says. That's one of Lamar's creations. His brunette friend with his brunette date shoots him a look. "It's on the menu, dude," the blond says.

"Yes, that's one of our many specialty dishes. It comes with a salad. What type of dressing would you like?"

Silently, she guesses right: ranch. His date then asks for just a salad, but French dressing; ditto for the other girl. The brunette doesn't hold back.

"I'll have the Wild Child Chili."

"Would you like fries with that or crackers and bread?"

"Can I get cheese fries?"

"It's a dollar extra."

"Yeah, that's okay. Let me get the cheese fries."

"Anything else?"

“Not yet,” the blond says. She takes their menus and walks to the window to clip the order to the wire for Lamar. The diner isn’t very big and isn’t very full tonight, so she can still hear them talking.

“Wild Child Chili, huh?”

“Yeah, they have that or Mild Child Chili – too boring for me – or Middle Child Chili.”

“Well, you’re a middle child, aren’t you, Bret?”

“Yeah, but I don’t think it’s meant to be literal. You don’t live in the ghetto, do you, Chad?”

“You know I don’t.” More giggles. “Hey, you don’t think the meat sauce is made with rats, do you?” This time, the giggles are muffled and mixed with the snorts that result.

“I bet it’s good. The waitress must eat here.”

“She is a *big* girl,” one of the white girls adds.

“That’s what I’m saying. She probably nibbles all day long.”

Ahnha does not nibble all day long. She’s too busy, usually, to even consider it. Plus, she tries to be professional and doesn’t encourage potentially dirty practices in the kitchen. Lamar is free to taste his

cooking to check the quality, but he doesn't usually bother. He knows he's good and he's got all the recipes down.

She doesn't care that they're talking about her weight. She wouldn't want to be as scrawny as those girls anyway. They don't appreciate a fulsome gal like the men she knows do. It has been a while since she's been with a man, though, but she doesn't think it's because of her weight. She just hasn't had the time. The rat meat crack was ignorant, though.

She brings the kids their salads and takes their glasses to get them refills, but the girls ask for just water this time, the poor starving little things. By the time she fills the boys' glasses, she sees that Lamar is plating their meals.

She gives the boys their refills and tells them she'll be right back with their entrées. No one thanks her, but they're still talking amongst themselves, so she figures they're just preoccupied more than intending to be rude.

She returns with spaghetti for the blond and a bowl of chili for the brunet and his cheese fries. "Everybody doing alright?"

"Yep," from the boys and nods from the girls.

She gets the check together and waits for them to finish before asking if they want dessert with the check handy if they don't.

"Uh, miss?" Chad calls out. Ahnha goes to see what he needs.

“What can I get for you?”

“Nothing. I found a hair in my *spaghettos*.” He holds up a short, light, straight hair.

She looks at it, then at him. *Dag*, she thinks, *skipper brats*. That’s what Lamar calls them: white kids who come into a restaurant, order what they want, eat it all up and then try to skip out without paying one way or another, not because they don’t have the money, but because they don’t have any decency or respect for working people.

“Honey, that is a blond hair.”

“And?”

“And nobody in the kitchen has blond hair.”

“So, you don’t hire blond people? Is that what you’re saying?”

“No. I’m saying, no one working here today has blond hair.”

“So, maybe it got on the plate because it’s dirty in here.”

“It seems like there’s another possibility that’s far more likely.”

“What’s that?”

“That it fell off your head.”

“I’m too young to be going bald.”

“You’d be surprised, but you don’t have to be going bald to lose a single hair. It happens all the time.”

“Well, it was in my food.”

“You ate all your food.”

“Well, I’m not paying for it.”

“Tell you what, I’ll take \$5 off for your trouble, okay?”

Bret notices Lamar on the phone, so he pokes Chad under the table and the girls look worried too, so he decides to accept a reduced victory and agrees to the discount.

Ahnha scratches out the total and deducts five in the new total and hands Bret the bill. He takes out his wallet. She notices he has platinum credit cards already, but he hands her cash.

“I’ll be right back with your change, sir,” she says, despite not wanting to call him sir at all. Lamar lifts an eyebrow, but she tells him it’s alright. She rings up the order, enters the discount, adds the payment and doesn’t even check the display. She doesn’t have to. She knows the correct change already.

She grabs his change and hands it to him. "I'm sorry there was a problem," she magnanimously tells him.

"This place is filthy," he lies as he grabs his date's arm a little too roughly for a gentleman, which he is not. He's already pocketed the change and, of course, leaves no tip. The brunette girl tells Ahnha the salad was really good and the blonde girl nods, which gets her another rough tug on the arm.

The four leave with the devil child popping the door hard on the way out. "Mommo, keep me strong," she says with an upward glance.

"Skipper brats! I knew as soon as they walked in," Lamar says, although, she doubts he even saw them come in.

"At least they like the food," she sighs.

Homeless

Ramona Turnbull

As I walked down the chaotic hall
Wondering how did I get here?
I felt a warm wetness on my face
I realized that it's a tear
And that I am genuinely sad
All the important decisions and sacrifices
I've made in the past
Seem like such a waste
A bitterness overcame me and
Then I realized I was mad
I had lost everything important to me
Through no fault of my own
I had no hope, no security, not even a home
As time gave me a chance to heal
My mind started to clear
A different feeling came over me and
I realized it was fear
And I started to pray
After a while all the demons I saw in my head
My very first day
Miraculously started to go away
It was like a breath of fresh air
I felt the life coming back into my body
And I began to think maybe I am finally there
I reached way deep down inside myself

And found the courage to face the truth
I am a responsible adult
I can no longer think the way I did when I was a youth
Something deep inside me woke up
I need to make a change
I must be healing, before everything
Was so far out of range
My faith informed me that it's time
To make an important decision again
Up until the time I had no hope or faith
That I would ever be able to heal within
As my hope began to blossom I released myself
And cried and cried
And then I made the most important decision
In my life
With Jesus Christ as my guide
It no longer felt as though I
Was being strangled by a rope
The ungodly pain running my life left me
And I said goodbye to it forever
I hope

Switching

Naima Omar

The food runner sashayed into the kitchen as if he were trying to win a contest for gayest man on earth. "I am walking like Naima," said the large African man with a huge grin on his face.

"Naima walks like she is listening Boogie Wonderland by Earth Wind and Fire all the time," replied Will the waiter with a smile.

They weren't the first people ever to make fun of how I walk. I once had a boyfriend who actually thought that my mother spent hours teaching me how to walk seductively. The truth is, that's just how I walk. There's no real reason for it.

I really don't know how people walk without switching. I mean your legs are moving, your butt is attached to your legs, so of course the butt cheeks are going to move back and forth! I don't think I could get anywhere if my booty just stayed perfectly still while I tried to walk.

I didn't explain all this to my silly coworkers. I just laughed, but when I was a child I didn't find it funny at all.

I still remember the first time someone had something to say about my swagger. I didn't like it and neither did my cousin Mishawn. She was more outgoing than I was. She was brown skinned with long pretty hair she wore in two enormous braids on each side of her head. She had

friends that lived on different streets and we traveled together from 149th to 143rd, which was an adventure for us.

Next door to where my Aunt Hattie lived, there was a house with about 8 brothers and sisters. Lots of neighborhood children gathered there. We played tag for a while. We would all put our feet in a circle and someone would call out, *Eenie meenie miney moe catch a pepper by his toe*. Then whoever wasn't it would scatter. Later on, we played hide and seek. I hid behind a bush and got all these prickly things stuck in my shirt.

One little boy kept holding his penis out saying, "I'm gonna pee on you!" He couldn't have been older than 3 and his penis and belly button were almost the same size.

Another older light skinned boy with curly hair was showing everybody his pocket knife. He asked me if I was scared. Most of the girls were sitting on the porch singing along to a Michael Jackson tape. We all loved "Human Nature." We discussed what we would wear if we ever got a chance to go to a Michael Jackson concert.

There was one older girl who kept making fun of the way I walked. "Look at that little girl switching," she said with disdain.

She repeated it several times to anyone who would listen. At 5 years old I really didn't know what she meant by switching. But I felt so self-conscious with her pointing at me and telling everybody I was switching. She was one of those pretty girls that everybody always listened too. I kept hoping she would just forget about it but she kept bringing it up.

All of a sudden Mishawn just busted out crying. The older girls rushed over to see what was the matter. She bawled out, "I'm tired of you all making fun of my cousin." I was glad she defended me. After that the girls apologized and everyone turned nice. The girl who had been making fun of my switch let me ride on the handle bars of her bike and then we started playing hop scotch.

Labeling the Inner City

Naima Omar

There has been a lot of controversy over the years about how certain ethnic groups should be labeled. Africans, Ethiopians, Negros, Coloreds, Blacks, African Americans. Different terms used to describe the same group of people. There are of course other labels that are universally considered insulting and unacceptable. No one wants to be called a nigger, a coon, or a porch monkey. Yet there are many words that are just as damaging to our community that everybody just accepts.

The easiest way to give a word a negative connotation is to associate it with low income black people, also known as inner city residents.

The term inner city should not have any racial connotation, but it does. Inner city is always just a polite way of saying “place full of broke ass niggers that we look down on.” Using the term inner city that way doesn’t make sense. The United States is at least 70 percent white and most large American cities are at least 40 percent white with sizable populations of Latinos and Asians as well.

The term inner city is basically just a substitute for the word ghetto. This word has no business being applied to African Americans either. It started in Germany when the Jewish people were confined to certain areas. Ethnic enclaves in the U.S. were also described as ghettos during waves of immigration. Somehow it became applied to blacks, and now largely refers to poor African-American areas that are stereotyped as dangerous.

It doesn't stop with inner city and ghetto. Another label we get stuck with is "the hood." The term is obviously just short for "neighborhood," but many people perceive being from the hood as some sort of problem to be overcome.

Sometimes words suddenly acquire a negative connotation. The word "entitlement" has a very clear denotation; if someone is entitled to something that means they're supposed to get it. People in a variety of situations are entitled to certain things. I've seen so many people get upset about Social Security being called an entitlement program when that is exactly what it is. People who have worked for 40 or more years and are now retired are entitled to a social security check. There is nothing wrong with that. The negative connotation comes from other entitlement programs such as food stamps. Some people have a problem with assistance because they think it makes people lazy or that it causes people to feel that they are entitled not to starve.

The real reason government leaders don't like entitlement programs is because they cannot control the budget. They have to give the benefits to whoever is entitled to receive them which means the worse the economy is the more they have to spend on these programs. Section 8 on the other hand isn't really an entitlement program because they can put you on a neverending waiting list until more funding becomes available.

Even though all these terms have been drilled into my head since I was a child, I'm still skeptical about the concept of a bad neighborhood. I know that it's common knowledge that I live in an area with a high crime rate, but I'm 41 years old and I've never been a victim of crime here in my

own neighborhood. The worst crime I experienced personally was when I lived in Maui. When I walk down the street and pass my neighbors sitting on their porches walking their dogs and doing yard work, I have no reason to think that they are a bunch of murderers, robbers and drug dealers.

There was a time, of course, when I was a teenager in the early 90's when drug dealers did seem quite plentiful. But not every D boy you saw standing around on Kinsman lived in the inner city. Some of them lived in Shaker Heights.

Americans have the idea firmly in their minds that public schools are supposed to be bad, especially if they are located in large cities.

My oldest child attends MC² Stem. He is in 10th grade taking biology, Geometry, American History and Engineering. He already took Physics, Chinese and Computer Science last year. His School Robotics team won an international championship in 2016. His school received an Excellence in Secondary Education Award from the alliance for Excellent Education. Many of the students there have done internships that led to employment with major companies like General Electric. My eighth grader goes to Campus International. Many of his Classmates live in suburbs such as Cleveland Heights, Lyndhurst and even Mentor.

Three years ago, when I decided to move out of my cramped basement apartment in Shaker Heights, my favorite cousin criticized me for moving on 153rd because Cleveland's schools were bad. But this past year she pulled her daughter out of Cleveland Heights schools and

enrolled her in a charter school at 36th and Superior. She considered sending her to Campus International, but it was full. They didn't change the name from Cleveland Public Schools to Cleveland Metropolitan School District for no reason.

Part III: The Time is Now

One More Obstacle

Diane Vogel Ferri

Once or twice a week I travel down a long straight road and cross an invisible line. On my end of the road there are manicured lawns and blossoming flowers. There are smooth streets and people jogging. There are cozy cafes with patrons sipping overpriced coffee. After I cross the line there are boarded-up buildings and broken windows. There are payday loan businesses and dollar stores. There are people standing at bus stops with nothing beautiful to look at as they wait. I have lived in Cleveland suburbs all of my life, but until four years ago I had never been near this neighborhood.

I am on my way to tutor people who are working towards their GED degrees at Seeds of Literacy in the Mt. Pleasant neighborhood. Seeds of Literacy offers a free program with one-on-one tutoring. It is there that I meet Omar.* Omar and I have a unique friendship and an even more unlikely kinship. He is a young black man who has led a difficult life of poverty and crime. I am an older white woman living in a comfortable suburb, yet we get along like old buddies. I admire his tenacity and fidelity to the program as I do the other young, middle-aged and even older students who are there trying to overcome the mistakes and misfortunes of their lives.

Over the months, Omar tells me his story. He lives somewhere near the run-down violence-ridden neighborhood where we meet to study. It is estimated that 95% of the residents of this area are functionally illiterate. Many of the students know each other, which indicates to me

that they have all spent their lives trapped in this godforsaken place. I know that his childhood was difficult and being bullied had a great effect on him. His father died when he was young and his mother was uninvolved in his life. Omar is a recovering alcoholic and has several felonies on his record. But he is also fun-loving, amiable and kind. He works tirelessly in his church and cares for his grandmother.

Omar dreams of owning a transportation business for special needs children. He had a job doing that at one time and says he understood the children and had a knack for dealing with them, and I am sure this is true. For a time, Seeds of Literacy hired him to pass out flyers and encourage more people to come and study for their GEDs. Being a people person, he was quite successful at this and took great pride in the job.

One day I arrive to find an Omar I have never seen before. For the first time he does not break into a smile when he sees me. His face is dark and sinister looking. His eyes are bloodshot and narrow. Having known other alcoholics, I immediately fear that he has relapsed, but that is not the case. I tell him we don't have to work, but he asks me to stay. Somewhat incoherently he begins to comment on the "air-headed bitch" who has told him to stop chatting and socializing. Someone has treated him like a child and he is deeply offended. His anger and language are unfamiliar to me. I fear this could completely change his attitude about the place and his long-term goals. He mentions that the job he loved will now just be for the money. On this day I do much more counseling than teaching.

Omar and I have worked together for an entire year. I remind him he is there to improve his life. He has worked so hard and come so far. He

can't allow this perceived slight to his personality to lead him away from his goals. Slowly the sneer on his face lightens. Omar almost returns to the outgoing young man I know. He wants me to come every day. I am tempted to rearrange my life for this young man – to save this one person from giving up. How much determination does it take to get up every day facing an onslaught of obstacles to move forward in life and to hope for something so far in the distance? One wrong decision, to drink, to fight back, to not show up at the probation office can destroy months of effort.

The reasons for not completing high school would surprise some of us who grew up with love, encouragement and hope, with graduation and college never in question. Several students have told me they were forced to quit to stay home and care for younger siblings or told to get a job to help support the family. Some of them just gave up because no one believed in them and education was not valued. As adults they are facing a much more difficult path to get where they want to be in life. Now they have children, jobs, and family members expecting their help. Omar tells me he was expelled from high school for being too old and too far behind.

Omar revealed his fragility that day. He needed an advocate, someone to believe in him, and that person was me. I constantly worried that one day he would be gone just as others I have worked with have disappeared after months of effort.

For over a year I walked in the door to his smiling face, but one day he was not there. He returned a few weeks later to say goodbye and to tell

me he would never come back no matter how much I tried to change his mind.

Sometimes one more obstacle is one too many – whether real or imaginary – in a life of difficulties and setbacks. Sometimes the years of study ahead seem overwhelming, or maybe someone just said the wrong thing one day.

* Omar's name has been changed.

I Hate Guns

Diane Kelley

Am I my brother's keeper?

No, that's what some people say.

But do they really know what's going on today?

Bullets f-l-y-i-n-g

People

dying

M c

a r

m y

a i

s' n

g

I felt the throbbing ache in my bones.

I felt the grief, I felt alone.

Am I my brother's keeper?

Yes, I shout, yes, I say!

But that's not the American way.

Blood d how can I go on?

r

i

p

p

i
n
g

Gun violence, it's just wrong!

Heartbeat, heart stops, this is a dream!

No, it's reality, I scream!

A GUN killed my brother.

Tears from my mother.

Like a beet d red

r
i
p
p
i
n
g

My heart was dead.

My whole world shook with a shudder.

I could hear the shots ring out like thunder.

The anguish I felt, my God, not another!

The hurt I felt, not my brother.

My whole world came crumbling down.

Tears of sorrow shattering the ground.

The pain, anger, not glory.

There's so much more to my story.

I have daughters, grandchildren, I have a son.

I tell them to be safe, have fun.

Lord, I hate guns!

We have to do something about this inner-city blues.

Cause next time it could be you!

The Parade

Diane Kelley

It amazes me how politicians come around during the Labor Day Parade,
Mount Pleasant, Kinsman, at night they're afraid.

Come talk to me after you've won the election,
don't change the road in another direction.

Rebuild our community, help us now,
you pledged to assist us, you made a vow.

We understand we have to help ourselves too,
everything is not up to you.

Yes you, the politicians who are out of touch,
do you remember the time when you didn't have much?

Or were you born with a silver spoon, a privileged life?
Never worrying about the pain and strife

of poverty, struggle, trying to survive,
providing for your family, fighting to stay alive.

Where are the businesses? Our homes are being torn down.
Please don't just stop by when the parade is in town.

Yesterday

C. Henry Yarboro III

*Yesterday, all my troubles seemed so far away
Now it looks as though they're here to stay
Oh, I believe in yesterday*

*Suddenly, I'm not half the man I used to be
There's a shadow hanging over me
Oh, yesterday came suddenly*

--The Beatles

1.

Those words from The Beatles song "Yesterday" embody my life since my stroke in September 2003.

Needless to say, these words are haunting. Or one might say surreal, which still does not adequately express or put what I was feeling or going through at the time into words.

I woke up early that day, which was usual for me. I'm not sure what time it was. But as I rolled over, it was black! Not dark, but black. I opened my eyes, or I thought I did.

I instinctively rubbed my eyes, only to find out they were open. I even stuck a finger to my eye, and found the same results.

But why could I not see? Suddenly desperate, my mind raced frantically back to when I was a little boy in North Carolina and had what was commonly called “sore eyes.” This is when your eyes are closed shut by a thick, yellow purulent mucus-like substance. The mucus closes your eyes by sealing your eyelashes together while sleeping.

I remember waking up and not being able to open my eyes, crying out to my mother, “I can’t see!” But due to my eyelashes being matted together, my eyes were sealed shut. At the time, I was unable to tell whether the lights were on or off. But this time was different. There was no light, only darkness. Just black. I was terrified, screaming out “I cannot see!”

I heard footsteps running towards my bed. I looked in the direction of the sound of steps and shuffling of shoes. “Your eyes are open,” I heard someone say sarcastically.

“I can’t see!” I yelled frantically.

“You looked at me when I came to find out what was going on,” she added.

“I cannot see!” I screamed again. “I just heard you coming.”

I was sitting up, “looking” at faces with voices. Or, more accurately, I was looking at voices without faces, if that makes any sense. Everything was so strange, so unfamiliar and so unbelievable. I had a lot of questions.

What happened?! How long will it take before you can do something? Will I ever be able to see again?

I had a plethora of questions; unfortunately, there were no answers. “I want answers and I want them now!” I spat out.

2.

My mind was racing a thousand miles per hour. No, it was faster than the speed of light. My thoughts ran the gamut, as I was in a frenzy trying to process the calamity of what was happening to me. I was trying to process everything, but I could not focus or concentrate. For the life of me, nothing made sense as I attempted to go over the events which preceded this life-altering catastrophe. I was devastated and confused. I had no clue. To quote the title of a 1960s song, “Just Dropped In (To See What Condition My Condition My Condition Was In).” Truth be told, I did not know what my condition was. As I continued to put the scrambled pieces together, nothing was adding up. The more I tried to wrap my brain around my present predicament, the more helpless I felt. All in all, I did not like this feeling, which was vulnerability to the point of defenselessness.

Although I was in the dark, literally and figuratively speaking, I could not sleep. I wasn’t sure if I could sleep with my eyes open, or if my eyes would close if I fell asleep, because I’d never been blind before. *Well I guess there’s a first time for everything*, I thought. *This will certainly take some time getting used to.* Being blind was definitely no joke. I was not

laughing. If this were a joke, it was a cruel one. It was difficult to find any humor in the predicament I found myself in.

3.

Then slowly, reality began to sink in. What a sobering thought. I began to process what happened, but it was difficult to channel my thoughts as they were running rampant, wreaking havoc in my head. It was especially hard at first because of the dark, black hole I found myself spiraling down. Feeling hopeless, I fought relentlessly against the gravitational forces that were tugging and pulling at me.

It took every ounce of strength. It took everything in my body. In fact, it took more. I could not give in or lose an inch. Not even a centimeter or a nanometer. I had fought too hard. I did not want to lose or give up any ground, because I needed to get back to yesterday. *Oh, how I long for yesterday!*

4.

Like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, the road back to Kansas would not be an easy journey. In my case, it was back to yesterday. A place where I felt safe, protected and in control. Right now, that place, wherever it was, seemed to be light years away.

Where do I start? Where do I begin? How long will it take? These are the first of many questions I have, and I'm sure that there will be many more

as I begin my odyssey back to yesterday. What are the pitfalls and the dangers that lurk ahead? What would be my lions, tigers and bears?

Next, what direction? North, south, east or west? Do you go left, or do you go right? There is no GPS to guide us back to yesterday.

A constant refrain, so many questions, so few answers. In fact, I find that there are more questions than answers. This only adds to my already difficult and complicated predicament. One thing that I was certain of was that it was not going to be easy!

Reasons to Come to Class at Seeds of Literacy

Billy Hallal

Dorlinda comes to class to snack. Funyuns, Doritos, donuts. She spills powdered sugar all over a chair in the computer lab. Her husband left her for her downstairs neighbor. She starts crying in the middle of class one day, and Kara, who runs class with me, spends the better part of an hour comforting her. About once a month, we have the same conversation with Dorlinda: she's going to get her act together, she's going to come to class every day.

Carmen comes to class because she looked through the window. She's in her sixties, wears a denim jacket with Tweety Bird on the back. She stays just a couple blocks down the street, had walked past Seeds a hundred times. She said to herself, "I'm going to go in there one day." Months passed. Walking past, she looked through the window, the one that says FREE GED CLASSES HERE in huge letters, and saw Kara "skipping around" class, smiling, helping students. Now she comes to class every day.

Jake comes to class to type. He works hard at his math and reading packets, but typing is his favorite. He's trying to get up to thirty words per minute. Handsome guy, nineteen or twenty. Just out of jail. A new student, a girl his age named De'ja, starts coming in, and they sit together. I observe them with Todd, who runs the computer lab. We cheer for them to become an item. Jake all but confirms this when he calls her his "private tutor" and she blushes. A few weeks pass and neither of them are in class anymore.

Jackie comes to class for the clubs. She'll stop in at math club and computer club. She brings food for book club every Wednesday for months. She even started her own club with Carmen and Catherine: Granny Club. They call each other "granny names" like Bonita and Mary. Someone brought them a tiny wheelchair. I take Jackie to Playhouse Square for a book awards ceremony. Afterward, there are long lines for food. I ask her if we should get in one, and she laughs. She goes up to the food she wants, politely asks people in line if she can grab some. She hands me plates of endive salads, squash medleys, gourmet mac and cheese. We eat like kings.

Jada comes to class infrequently. Mid-twenties, comes to class half the time like she's dressed for the club. Her scores are off the charts. Todd and I plead with her to come at least once a week. She tells us we don't understand. She can't have people knowing she goes to school. "In here, I study," she says. "Out there, I'm the queen of the ghetto." She comes in one evening with her lip split open. We ask her if she's ok, if she can tell us what happened, but she tells us everything's fine. At the end of class, I tell her to please be safe out there. Her eyes well up. She gives me a brisk hug, then walks quickly out the door into the night.

Jackson comes to class almost every day. He's an older man sporting a durag with glasses and an Eagles jersey. His laugh is low and infectious. He passes three of the four sections of the GED, has only math left. Math is the hardest. He knows this, but he's ready, excited to get to work. He doesn't show up for class the next day though, or the day after that. We call his number, but the line is disconnected. We send emails, but they bounce. We know that things happen. We know our students have to

move unexpectedly, get jobs, get sick, take care of family. We know they get discouraged. But not Jackson, we say. Jackson will turn up again. We wait weeks, months. He doesn't come back.

Charnice comes to class and gets frustrated. She's passed all but Math. She's in her forties or fifties, has a precancerous condition. She's struggled with addiction before. She may be struggling with it now. She will come to class and speed through a math packet, get half the answers wrong. Slow down, we urge her. Take your time. She ignores us and schedules the test. She takes it three times in three days. She passes on the third day. In the office, we jump up from our chairs, whooping and cheering like the Indians have just won the pennant.

Catherine comes to class and feels welcomed. She sits at a table with Carmen and Jackie, goes to book club every week. One class, a new volunteer tutor works with her. The guy is enthusiastic and well-intentioned. He gives her the hardest problem in the unit and tries to have her solve it. She thinks of school when she was younger, how frustrating and embarrassing it was. She cries and walks out of class. Kara sits and talks with her. A week later, she comes back to class and shows the same tutor how to finish the same problem. She tells this story to a group of prospective tutors in training. She thanks them for giving their time but makes a request: "Please don't hurt our hearts."

I come to class to work with students. My drive down Kinsman takes me past bombed-out buildings and barbecue joints, hair salons and Dollar Generals and churches. I pass a tree-lined park where high schoolers practice for cross-country, a community radio station, an urban farming

collective. I pass the redbrick church at Kinsman and 93rd, where I handed out rulers with the Seeds logo at a community fair and I danced with a Zumba instructor on the street. I pass Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority, which recently held its lottery for the Section 8 waitlist. Around 60,000 Clevelanders applied for one of 10,000 spots on a waitlist that could take up to three years to get through. Todd and I helped dozens of students apply. They knew the odds were long, but they wanted to try. Our students are always willing to try.

Break-In

Ada Fuller-Gilbert

My home was broken into on January 15th, 2018. I pulled in my driveway, saw my curtains moving in the window and immediately froze. I recall saying to my son in the back seat of the car, "Someone has been in our house."

My hands started shaking. I couldn't think. Robotically, I went through my usual routine and got out of the car. My son was already running to the door, but I stopped him.

It did not register to immediately call 911. I approached the front door, but it was still locked. When I opened it, I found a plant overturned near the window. Binoculars that were in a cabinet in the living room were now on the floor near the window but everything else was intact downstairs.

I dialed 911 then, but I was still in shock. I was trying to relay my address and reason for the call as I climbed the stairs to the second floor. At the top of the stairs, I could see my bedroom door open, the attic door open, my office door open. I could see papers strewn over the floor.

Yet it was when I entered my bedroom that I became ill. My clothes and underwear covered the floor. My dresser drawers were open. The closet door was open. My bed was covered with the random remains of my jewelry from a jewelry chest. The drawers and everything else in them were gone. Keepsakes – the last ring my husband bought me, rings from

my mom and brother, both deceased – gone! Guns that belonged to my husband – gone! Change that I had been saving to start a savings account for my son – gone! The thief had taken a pillowcase and two bags from my closet to carry out stolen goods. One of them had *Cleveland Police* embroidered across the top in large letters.

I have never felt the emotions that flooded me in that moment. “Devastated” cannot even describe what I felt.

I first moved back to the Glenville community with my daughter and husband, a former Cleveland police detective, in 1993. Then, after becoming widowed, I resigned from the job where I’d worked for 21 years in March 2017.

My daily commute to downtown Cleveland led me to make this decision – passing the vacant, decaying buildings and homes, litter everywhere, I felt deeply compelled to do something to help bring change to my community. Eager and excited, I began reaching out to my neighbors that I didn’t know. My plan was to start cultivating and establishing relationships on my street based on kindness and respect. I was aware of the crime and drug activity all around me but believed love – real, true, unselfish love – conquers all.

Yet now, standing amidst the wreckage of my home, my dreams shattered, focusing was almost impossible. I called a couple of my neighbors to let them know, but I did not have one neighbor that came to my door to offer support or consolation. The police came and took the report. I did not sleep that night.

The next morning, I was angry! I was not scared, I was angry and made a point of letting as many neighbors as I could know my home had been broken into. I was shocked at how many break-ins had occurred all around me! No one shared! No one sounded an alert!

The days ahead of me were very painful ones. The violation of my personal space left the deepest of scars.

I continued to have trouble sleeping. The inability to know who knew and was not telling took a toll on me. I wanted to withdraw completely and not have anything to do with anyone because everyone was a suspect! I had to seek counseling to help me move past the worst of my anger. I have to seek God insistently to help me not hold the pain inside.

I refused to allow this incident steal my resolve to be a positive influence with the people on my street and in my community. I found the courage, the strength, to smile and wave and converse as I always had. However, I am a lot more cautious now. No one enters my home if they have not invited me in theirs.

We are all poor together in these communities. We have nothing of any real worth in all that we possess, and now we have even less because some take from those of us who struggle, trying to keep hope alive in our communities wrecked by poverty, raped over and over again by violence. Where is the love? Where is the hope? Where is the peace?

I can't hold back my tears. My heart feels as if it will burst from the pain. But I will not stop loving you. I will not stop hoping. It is mandatory. This has become my coping antidote.

One Jaded Afternoon

Quentin Congress

The drizzle dropped onto the ground followed by an overflowing downpour of rain outside on this warm, gray late September afternoon as I sat my workstation at the Mt. Pleasant Branch. I wanted to be anywhere but there working as a branch clerk. It was a slow day; there were hardly any patrons in the library. My fellow coworkers were doing their daily duties taking inventory of broken items or weeding books to discard for the book sale.

My mind wandered off into another world, another city, or even another country; it wasn't focused on Cleveland Public Library. Suddenly, I was snapped back to reality when I saw this guy enter the branch wearing an old, worn tan coat with a gray hoodie wrapped around his head. He had his right hand tucked away in his pocket. The dude strutted towards me at the circ desk. I looked up to see that it was Maurice, an old friend from my elementary and junior high days standing in front of me. It had been a year since I saw him. He was a year older than me; he had the same light brown skinned completion as me. He teased me about how we were twins when were kids. Now, Maurice's once boyish looks were washed away by years of hard living.

Maurice had his wars with substance abuse; he also battled mental health issues as a child which had become much worse due to his self-medicating. His eyes had a glazed gaze, and his mind was on a permanent high of a long wet trip into that he wasn't coming back from.

“Gimme yo’ money, Quentin!” Maurice convincingly demanded.

I looked down at his jacket. He took his hand out of his pocket, which revealed his bare hand, and Maurice gleefully chuckled like a little kid.

“Ey, I’mma load up my gun right quick,” he quipped to me as loaded imaginary bullets into his imaginary gun.

“Everybody, get down on the floor!” Maurice yelled in his most menacing tone as he removed his hand away from his jacket, raising two fingers in the air.

Some of the patrons on the computers grew leery as they treated Maurice’s threat seriously. He put his hand down and still laughed raucously if he was having serious fun with his twisted joke.

“Maurice, please don’t do that,” I pleaded to him because I didn’t want him to get into any trouble. Plus, I didn’t want to deal with hassle of rehashing the story on a Security Irregular Report.

“Is this motherfucka serious? He’s gonna blow up the spot where I make my money!” I angrily thought to myself.

Maurice strolled over to the end of the circ desk and approached Destinee, our security guard, and went into full player mode. She was laughing and talking with him, but she really wasn’t feeling his vibe or him. He slid back over to me at my workstation.

“Ey, Quentin, lemme get on the computer right quick,” Maurice requested.

I typed his name in the computer to pull up his library card number. He owed a lot of money for “Assumed Lost” CDs, which put his account in “Collection” status. I printed out his library card number and handed it to him.

“Alright. Thanks, Quentin,” Maurice said.

Maurice strolled away from my workstation and signed himself onto the nearest available computer. I went back to my daydream vacation, but my daydreams brought me back to reality when I heard a chorus of kids’ loud voices booming down the street and closer to the library.

“*Shit!*” I thought to myself.

The kids came stampeding through the doors as if it was the Running of the Bulls, and we were the spectators trying to dodge being trampled or stabbed by their horns. Most of the kids were loud, obnoxious, hyper and rowdy as they blew off their pent-up energy from their school day. Some kids rushed to get on the computers. Other kids were quieter and more reserved, just wanting to do their homework or check out their favorite items, but I wished they’d all go home.

“I’m going to lunch,” I informed my fellow branch clerk.

I stepped away from the circulation desk and made my way to the staff room to eat last night's leftovers for lunch. As I plugged my earplugs into my cell phone and listened to music from my playlist, I came to a long, hard conclusion: over the course of my 12-year library career, I'd become jaded. I was tired, bored and frustrated with the same everyday routine, the patrons, everything. I felt like I was Bill Murray in *Groundhog Day*. I was getting up, going to work, filling out the money, processing the holds, checking out and discharging patrons' items, showing people how to copy and fax, hearing that annoying doorbell to buzz people into the bathroom, discharging unclaimed holds, processing new materials, being an emergency parent to the kids and an occasional counselor to the adults. Then I'd go home, eat dinner, sleep, wake up the next morning and do it all over again.

As I sat and ate my lunch, my mind began wandering back to a time when working for the library was new to me. I was back in a different time and place where everything was all ignorantly blissful. I realized that I'd lost the balance that I had when I started working for the library. I regained my balance by realizing that working for the library is not all bad because somebody has it worse than me as I saw with Maurice. And, despite the few nuts that come into the library, many residents in the Mt. Pleasant community appreciate my services. Those things help curb the mind-wandering and jadedness, although they both set in every now and then.

East 28th Street Mural of Hope

Joseph Black

One summer evening, I sat in my office completing some paperwork, preparing to go out in the community and participate in the painting of a mural on a neighborhood bridge. Up until that point, my day was moving in a typical manner, when my coworker walked into my office and shared that there had been a shooting two blocks away and the victim had been pronounced dead at the scene.

I quickly grabbed my car keys and ran out of the office in an attempt to identify who had been killed and, more importantly, support the needs of those present on the scene. Minutes later I arrived and immediately noted the number of police cars and the sight of the yellow tape that marked the crime scene.

I vividly remember that there was an eerie feeling in the air. To a degree, it felt like a normal day, families and youth still walking around engaged in their daily rituals, but then that feeling of normalcy was met with a feeling that suggested nothing was right. As I walked through the public housing estates the feeling became more and more intense, increasing each moment that I gravitated closer to the scene.

Finally, I was in clear sight of the police and the lifeless body that lay on the ground. While I was standing there examining the scene, a local public official asked me to walk beyond the bounded territory. Our walk was slow and tiresome, yet each step had a purpose. We arrived at a group of people, who were identified as the family of the 34-year-old

murder victim. Within a matter of minutes, the members of the family and I found ourselves deep in prayer.

Afterward, we separated, shared our condolences and contact information and proceeded to go in opposite directions. As the family drove off, I looked down the street and saw a group of people standing in the street roughly 1,000 feet away. This group happened to be the individuals who were painting the mural. Ironically, I noted that the sole intent of the mural was to address racism and to build community. The weird feeling that I felt walking towards the crime scene was now becoming the reality that death lay at one end of the street while hope was being painted at the other.

Looking at my surroundings even closer, I begin to wish that the wet pavement that marked the scene of another dead black man could have been painted with colors of optimism. The experience of that day continues to deepen my involvement in the community. Now I work with the intent of using my skills as a paintbrush, and my passion as the creative design, to paint hope on the hearts and minds of the people who live in my community.

Two Neighborhoods

Gillian Johns

Every time I am out in the ‘hood “power-walking’ – as I like call it, though my bad back slows me down – I am struck anew by the abject dinginess of the environment. It’s a simple point, not intended for irony or ideological dexterity. The ‘hood is dingy. No question about it. Many resource-rich folks will avoid traveling through if possible. Highways are sometimes even built to accommodate their sensibilities. And in fact, one thing that never ceases to amaze me, especially during the cold and flu months, is the minefield of snot—or lugi, my brother would say—on the sidewalks; it grips my attention because I can never decide whether I’m more struck by the chronic congestion of its local hosts or by their disregard for the litter’s inconvenience for the long list of other walkers who will follow them on this path.

But what also often captures me, when I’m out power walking, is the incredibly valuable human freedom or sovereignty you can discern in the dinginess of the ‘hood (especially if you squint—no, just kidding here!). Most days over 50 degrees or so, I’ll see a few folks sitting on a porch or a stoop in front of a store that has at least a partly hand-written name on it. Nothing more than a re-purposed house on a corner with a makeshift parking lot that will fit maybe two cars. The writing and advertising on the door and walls as dingy as everything around here, and probably the items (say, meat patties or ice cream cones) wouldn’t be available today if you asked for them. Yet folks are not fixing the situation. They might be talking to themselves or greeting others, expressing and amplifying their points, smiling and enjoying the sun,

taking a break from the work inside, or maybe doing some other business.

How would I know? How would anyone know, really, what all could be happening – unless they lived or walked here at ground level? But, if I may, I want to tell a very little story about a Mt. Pleasant neighborhood friend I met on my walk route some years ago. But I'll also, first, have to give you some context...

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I was raised a long time ago, and a lot has happened to me and to the world, for sure, over the intervening years. So, I can't pinpoint who, in the community that raised me, passed on some of the potent messages I internalized – or what they may have intended precisely. One of the (still) mind-jarring oddities of being black and transracially adopted, for me at least, has been the sense that it was a normative worldview that took me up – not just the nuclear family of sweet, loving folk who chose me – indeed, a whole culture, way of life, and mindset that took me in and shaped the sensibility in me which is still foundational, fifty odd years later, even, as I said, though so much has happened both to me and to the world. I won't claim that this experience is inevitable or even exclusive to my kind of biography. But it was in fact the case in my case.

So, I remember gaining the shrill message, during my upbringing in and adjacent to a small, mostly affluent, all-white community about eleven miles north of Philadelphia, that we were only ever safe within the closed and closely monitored circle of our enclave. Our own trusting and

trustworthy beloved community was the grace and blessing the Lord had bestowed on us. Outside—and I’m *not* kidding here—the people were OCs, “Old Church” or “Outside (the) Community”; they were poor unfortunates who were forced to survive somehow without ever having the option of laying their burdens of stress, fear, and isolation down. What’s more, because they had not had the good luck of being born (or brought) into our “New Church,” they could never gain admission into the highest or celestial Heaven.

For as long as I can remember being conscious, I was disturbed by this message. It didn’t seem just – or even logical, really – that a loving and all-powerful God would leave *most* of his creation out in the cold, shifting for itself without the hope of transcendence one day after death. Who does such a thing, *with love*? And why then bother with social or moral uplift? But in any case, my parents – who had adopted seven of the eight of us, the last three of us “of color” – by some apt instinct wanted us kids to not fear folks outside the closed circle, so they made sure we had contact with OCs. By the time I was three, we had moved to the (still mostly affluent, all-white) township adjacent to the Church-based borough that served as the moral hub of our social, educational, religious and extended family lives. My parents, who – *trust me* – never had much available cash, were excellent barterers and creative problem solvers. They bought up a 12-acre plot of land that included a huge house that had once served as an inn, two barns, and several beautiful fields, and they parceled off some of the acreage in order to afford the area they used. (My father will still be proud to tell you, if it comes up, that *they* – the realtors? church leaders? local government? or well-off family

members? – did not like the fact that he and my mother had the great idea to, and did indeed, execute such a loophole.)

So, we always had a lot of traffic around our place because of my parents' contacts and initiatives: e.g., boarding horses for the local wealthy and hosting their children's riding lessons, making and selling sheepskin coats, harboring neglected or just lonely and bored neighborhood kids. Also, of course, our unique "United Nations" family – as my siblings dubbed it – was a draw for the socially curious and/or the reformer. It was always chaotic: lots of kids and animals of various kinds, insufficient supervision and resources, wildly different, unintelligible, and incommensurate needs. And the doctrine that the ordinary people we knew could not enjoy the balm of community or the final fruit of the highest Heaven didn't seem right to me.

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And here's the story I promised.

Recently I found myself in a small prayer circle calling on God to heal my friend Roy Brown – or Bandit, depending on where you know him from, since he is an expert pool player who will beat you using only one hand, not so much because he's that good but more precisely because you will think he can't do it, and he'll take you off guard. Roy is in the hospital, at the main campus of the Cleveland Clinic, too suddenly diagnosed with cancer after years of what had always seemed to me gentle hypochondriac concerns about various allergies and other aches and pains. It was maybe a sorry little circle, from the outside: just skinny Roy

in his bed, me, Red Dog, and Bubba, all of us clasping hands while Bubba read a Psalm. I was solemn and sad the entire time, thinking not just about my good friend Roy Brown, but also – as usual, much too self-reflexive – about the four of us in this invisible circle and about all those ever-fancy folks beyond who cannot see the extraordinary value of such a hard-won human thing. Bubba’s voice booms, with love and joy and sure victory, and he wears an extravagantly beautiful smile. Red grips my hand harder when I cry and then fetches me a Kleenex.

While they pray, these seventy-year-old (self-identified) Players provide me – who is only here *accidentally* – with some of the greatest sense of security I have felt since my mother died thirteen years ago. I remember some good times – usually in Roy’s backyard on Memorial Day or some such holiday, in another circle of only five or six folks, over barbeque – when Roy and Red, fantastic old-school dressers for any party time, have told me that people used to call them the Cowboy and the Criminal. Red, who is originally from upstate New York, and who migrated to Cleveland at about 21 to work for Ford, would, I imagine, wear a Western-style hat with some extra “clean” suit and boots, and Roy would likely stride alongside, grinning his name Bandit and performing a search for trouble, in another fine suit with absolutely everything – from hanky and shirt, shoes to hat – color coordinated.

This was before my time. But from what I could tell, as we all now enjoyed the pleasure of sharing imagination to figure this pair at their finest, the verbal creativity was the main point and achievement. The *shared effort*, that is, to practice intentional naming—the Cowboy and the Criminal – was the spiritual adhesive that both made the bond and

could spread such bond – as only language can do! – to others easily, fluently, graciously. Today, when we leave Roy’s room, and I thank Red and Bubba, *so very much*, for letting me come visit and pray with them, Red of course already *knows* what a gift it is; he claims, with a big smile: “Yeah, we’re Buck and the Preacher, coming to the hospital to pray with Roy every day. This is what has to be done. It’s what it takes. So, it’s what we’re doing. Me and Kenny (Bubba to *me*, who knows him only from the street) been coming here every day together for the past two weeks.”

Science tells us that what we experience as objective truth is actually grounded and bound by particular perspective. And someone might look at Bubba and Red Dog as untenable or insignificant human beings. Might think the stability of community is lost on such casual or verbally playful folk. Maybe neighborhood folks like that don’t require the kind of predictability or security that my privileged white folk took for granted as a necessity for themselves. But when I think of Bubba and Red on that day, I see a risky heroism that places nothing more or less than a loose *bet* on the human agency that *might* be able to forge community—and, even at that, only for a moment. From what I can tell, community building is not easy for anyone. It takes heart, energy, and good time. Yet some folks go after it. They stake a claim that the other in the midst is knowable and potentially one of theirs. It’s true that they later might— from a viewer’s distance—make it *seem* easy. After the fact, that is, they’re all sitting around and sharing a meal.

But consider Bubba and Red making the drive to the Cleveland Clinic and parking, every single day, to hold tight to a neighborhood friend. Roy can sure get on your nerves sometimes. And they are not kin, not family; just

people who have gone so far back together, by choice and action – human agency, I’ve said above – that they can’t see their lives without the one here in the hospital. So, they won’t let go until they have to. They’ll keep after Roy’s Brown’s righteous presence among them until (only) God (and no other) proclaims otherwise. And this cannot be made easy or soft. You invest the highest – and yet most frightened and unsocialized – levels of the self to show up for this social work. No bullshit. No drama other than that ritually called for in the verbal acumen or role play that could set the other at ease. And—again, *trust me*—there’s a whole lot of hate out here, in these streets, to make the reach feel real threatening. But there’s also, I’m saying, incredibly valuable human sovereignty.

Time + Place = NOW!

Joseph Black

1. Time

It's **1 a.m.** and shots are fired

My heart beats fast, a million **miles per hour**

Pushing my emotions to their **daily** limit

Why is this world I live in changing by the **minute**

We're living for **instant** "posts" as if life is a gimmick

While our "morals" may last **forever** our men die unforgiven

Consequently our **endless** journey to this place is rarely mentioned

Instead our **daylight** is hidden

Disguising the **history** of our Paine with *Common Sense*

Life renews with every **second** that ticks

2. Place

As our **community** is drowning in the sound of sirens

I begin to question the **world's** ability to uplift and empower

Churches dethroned, sin is winning

Family dinners at **home** foregone, and this is the beginning

Our personal interactions are lost we're **computer lab** dependent

Urban **streets** emptied our fathers exempted

And our **history** is corrupted as if we're non-existent

While our **schools** are shipping grounds for a life in **prison**

Only to be solved by the **banks** of our common cents

The **future** is now we must commit

3. Time + Place = NOW!

It's 1 a.m. and shots are fired.... As our community is drowning in the sound of sirens

My heart beats fast, a million miles per hour..... I begin to question the world's ability to uplift and empower

Pushing my emotions to its daily limit....Churches dethroned, sin is winning

Why is this world I live in changing by the minute.... Family dinners at home foregone, and this is the beginning

We're living for instant "post" as if life is a gimmick....Our personal interactions are lost, we're computer lab dependent

While our "morals" may last forever our men die unforgiven....Urban streets emptied our fathers exempted

Consequently our endless journey to this place is rarely mentioned....Because our history is corrupted as if we're non-existent Instead our daylight is hidden.... While our schools are shipping grounds for a life in prison

Disguising the history of our Paine with *Common Sense*....Only to be solved by the banks of our common cents

Life renews with every second that ticks.... The future is now we must commit

Contributors

With passion running through his veins, **Joseph Black** fell prisoner to the belief that education and exposure are the primary tools for institutionalizing systemic change. Unsure of how to accurately pursue his vision, Joseph blindly began to offer his love, through his work on matters such as truancy, drug and alcohol abuse, mental health, education, and social justice. After 10-plus years of service to many of Cleveland's eastern communities, Joseph knows that his work is grounded by his responsibility is to serve as a husband to his beautiful wife and a father to his two sons.

Quentin Congress was born in Cleveland in 1983 to Thomas and Angela Congress. He grew up on Cleveland's east side along with his two older brothers. He graduated from John Hay High School and later attended Cuyahoga Community College. In 2004, Congress began working for Cleveland Public Library, and in 2013, he transferred to the Mount Pleasant Branch where he currently works. In addition to writing personal essays and blogs, he also has a YouTube channel called Talkin' & Grubbin'.

Brittany Ervin (a.k.a. Miss Brit) is a writer and author. She has written "Sincerely Yours: My Poems & Thoughts". It features works from her poetry and writing collection spanning from her teen years to adulthood. Brittany also previously published the book entitled "Real Talk: Quotes to Get You Through to Becoming a Better YOU!" which features her original personal quotes and affirmations. Brittany is a Cleveland native and currently working on her next book.

Diane Vogel Ferri's first career was teaching children with special needs. She now enjoys tutoring adults working towards their GED at Seeds of Literacy in the Mt. Pleasant neighborhood. Her poems and essays can be found in numerous journals. Her second poetry chapbook is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press. She is a lifelong Clevelander and a graduate of Kent State and Cleveland State Universities.

Ada Fuller-Gilbert was born in Starkville, Mississippi in 1957, moved to Cleveland in 1974, and graduated from Glenville High School in 1975. She attended Cleveland State University and Cuyahoga Community College. Writing has always been her passion. Since winning an essay contest with her piece "God in Public School," she has begun her journey to write her first short story yet to be titled.

Rochelle Gilbert-Cage is the first member of the William Henry Gilbert, Sr., family hailing from Limestone County, Alabama to be born in the North. She is the eldest of six children. Her sisters, Renee and Patricia, brothers Elkcanor Lonardi, William Jr., and youngest brother Gregory, along with her mother Lois Hall-Gilbert all reside in Cleveland. Rochelle attended the Cleveland Public Schools while growing up in the Glenville neighborhood. She graduated from Iowa Maple Elementary School in 1964 and Patrick Henry Junior High School in 1967. Her parents built a home in Shaker Heights and she graduated from Shaker Heights High School in 1970. She attended Ohio State and John Carroll University and graduated summa cum laude from Bryant and Stratton College with a degree in Accounting in 1995. She enjoys cooking and catering events, making floral arrangements, and mentoring the Iowa Maple Green Team Scholars in their gardening program. Since the death of her father in

2013, Rochelle has been helping her youngest brother Gregory to continue to grow the family construction and masonry business.

Billy Hallal was born east of Cleveland. He has written on the city's food, history, and culture for Scene, Thrillist, and Cleveland Magazine. Since moving back to the area, he has taught classes at Cleveland State, led a writing center in Collinwood High School, and supervised a group home in Garfield Heights. He began working for Seeds of Literacy at the Mount Pleasant location, but has since transferred to the West Side. He still visits Seeds East when he can.

Cynthia Harris-Allen was born and raised in Mt. Pleasant. She attended Robert Fulton Elementary School and Alexander Hamilton Junior High and graduated from John Adams High School. She is completing a memoir entitled *East 132nd Street* encompassing life in Mt. Pleasant with her six siblings and their friends growing up in the 1950s. She is an award-winning author for her debut self-published book, *The Cricket Cries, the Year Changes* a historical novel about slaves on a Monroe, Georgia plantation.

Tyler Hughley was born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio to Charles and Theresa Hughley. She and two brothers grew up in the Larchmere community just minutes from Shaker Square. Unlike her siblings, who were talented football players, Tyler attended parochial schools throughout high school and post-graduation attended Ohio University, where she studied English and Creative Writing. For the last 5 years Tyler has taught English Language Arts, however, she has recently

transitioned out of the classroom into roles dedicated to student support and success at The Cleveland School of the Arts High School.

Gillian Johns earned her PhD at Temple University in Philadelphia and teaches African American and American literature in the English Department at Oberlin College. She lives near Shaker Square, where she has been a walker for fifteen years.

Lionel Johnson was born in Cleveland in 1949 to Oscar and Juanita Johnson. He attended Cleveland Public Schools along with his brother Darryl and sister Alexis. He later attended Cuyahoga Community College. He is a writer of short stories and is currently completing his first novel.

Diane Kelley was born in Cleveland, Ohio to Roosevelt Kelley and Mary Katherine Kelley in 1966. She is the youngest of nine. As an adult, she lived in the Mount Pleasant area where her children attended Cleveland Public Schools. At a young age, Diane enjoyed writing plays, poetry and songs. She graduated from Cleveland Heights High School and went on to earn an Associate Degree from Cuyahoga Community College, a Bachelor's Degree from Cleveland State and a Master's Degree from University of Phoenix. When she is not busy creating stories, she's spending time with her four children and two granddaughters.

Kamilah Moore-El grew up in the Woodland Hills area and moved to the Mt. Pleasant neighborhood in 1990. She is a former substitute teacher for the Cleveland Municipal School District. Currently, she is certified as a State Tested Nursing Assistant. She is a graduate of Cuyahoga Community College of Arts & Sciences, and the College of

Health Sciences. She has been involved in numerous research projects affecting global health and human services for adults and juveniles in the areas of biology and psychology at Notre Dame College of Ohio and Cleveland State University. She enjoys working in research, and serves as Ambassador to Cleveland Clinic Child Life Services in juvenile psychiatry, where she also tutors children. She also volunteers at the Cleveland International Film Festival's Film Slam for High School students, and the Cuyahoga Community College annual Jazz Fest. She received an honorary mention for work performed at the Board of Elections during the 2016 Presidential Election.

Charlotte Morgan teaches Composition and Intro to Fiction at Cleveland State University. She worked in the Buckeye Woodland area at the *East Side News*, a weekly newspaper that served the Mount Pleasant, Buckeye-Woodland, Shaker Square neighborhoods. In addition, she served as a workshop leader for Cleveland Stories, working with members of the community to write their personal recollections of growing up in Mount Pleasant and the surrounding areas. She says, “As a kid, I grew up reading New Journalism by writers like Norman Mailer, Tom Wolfe, and Truman Capote and as a result, I became a journalist in high school working at the Glenville Torch where Jerry Siegel, creator of Superman, once worked. As a workshop leader, my specialty is helping writers find their voices. While working on this project, I met some amazing people who had wonderful stories to share.” Presently, she is completing revisions on *Glenville: My Side of Paradise*, *Judgment in Goshen: A Taxonomy of Ordinary Murder*, two non-fiction works that take place in the Glenville neighborhood where she grew up.

Willie Naps spent most of his childhood in Solon, Ohio. He attended Ohio University, Cuyahoga Community College, and Cleveland State. He studied writing under several accomplished authors since 1983. His first three major publications were released this year, 2018: *Ancient Sky*, a science fiction novel and first in the *SumWon Out There* series of his *Covert Science* line; *Hook Up*, a creative nonfiction novel about life in Cleveland and first in the *The Wanted Girls* series of his *Life o' Paloin* autobiographical line; and *Planemetrics: A Classification of Worlds System: Regional Planemetrics*, an astronomy text and first in the *Cosmetics* series of his *Synergetics 3.0* line. All three are available at Amazon, under different pen names. He has self-published visual poetry since 1990 and several zines since 2007. He is a former K-12 Astronomy and Robotics instructor for NASA. He is also a musician and songwriter. He considers his time spent in Mt. Pleasant crucial to his current being and glorious, though not without struggle...hardly.

Naima Omar was born in Atlanta, Georgia to John and Valerie who taught her how to think for herself. She moved to Cleveland at age five. She attended AJ Rickoff, Robert Fulton, Riverside and Gracemount Elementary schools. She earned Associate degrees in specialized technology from Pennsylvania Culinary and Bryant & Stratton Colleges. She has 2 children.

Demetrius L. Pate Sr. grew up on St. Clair, Aspinwall and 146th Street. He went to East Clark Elementary. In 1979, his family moved to Woodland Avenue on East 64th to the King Kennedy Projects. He went to Dike Elementary and later when busing started, he was sent to A. B. Hart

Middle School and later East Tech High School. Growing up he hung out with friends, went to house parties and listened to hip hop music.

Veronica Robinson was born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1959. She has two children, Vaughn & Vandelyn Robinson. She attended Cleveland Public Schools along with her brother Angus and sister Elaine Berry at East Technical High School. She returned to school in her 50's and attended Cuyahoga Community College. She writes stories about her job working as a locomotive engineer for CSX Railroad, in the city of Collinwood. And she writes amazing short stories about fishing on the shores of Lake Erie.

Dr. Stuart Terman was born in Cleveland and lived on E 153rd near Kinsman with his grandparents for several years. He graduated from Case Western Reserve University and then graduated from medical school in Wisconsin. He trained at the Cleveland Clinic and Michael Reese Hospital in Chicago, and was an Assistant Clinical Professor of Ophthalmology at CWRU through 2012, practicing in Solon. He's had publications in *The Annals of Plastic Surgery*, *The Annals of Ophthalmology*, *The Consultant for Pediatricians*, and *The Ohio Family Physician* among a number of others over the years. He's married and has four grown children.

Ramona Turnbull was born in Cleveland, Ohio and grew up on Gay Avenue, which is in the Mount Pleasant area. She attended Cleveland Public Schools along with her younger brother. Along with some of their playmates, she formed a band called the Black Sensations. They did talent shows and community shows. When their band wasn't practicing,

and they practiced a lot, she would go swimming at Hamilton School and skating at Wood Hill. She lived on Gay Avenue until she got married and later moved to Youngstown, Ohio where she attended Youngstown State University and earned a Bachelor Degree in Social Work. She recently decided to move back home to Cleveland. She loves to write.

C. Henry Yarboro III was born in Fayetteville, North Carolina in 1950. He has had a wide array of personal experiences and previously worked for 25-plus years in the healthcare field. He has often been told that he should write a book, considering all that he has been through.

Damien Ware has organized as well as hosted various public performances and open mics and facilitated creative writing workshops for all ages. A zine-maker and poetic video blogger, Ware loves to share his talent for writing with the community, through self-publishing and public/web-based performances. In 2016, D.L. Ware' partnered with LAND Studio and the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District in publishing his poetry as public art installations in the Buckeye Neighborhood (Love Lunes over Buckeye & The Buckeye Road Green Infrastructure project). Ware holds a Masters Degree in Social Work from Wayne State University and a Bachelors Degree in African American Studies from Eastern Michigan University. He is a husband and father of three and writes daily.