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WELCOME

If history doesn't so much repeat itself, but rhymes, and if we can remember moments of great hope, solidarity, and healing from the past, then what is the rhythm that we're called to step into today? How do we transcend merely mirroring the despair and anxiety in our culture, but reenact the healthy lament of past generations and also dance into their inspiration? We're asking these questions at *The Porch* - at our retreats, festivals, circles, and here in the magazine. From a conversation with two healing storytellers to reflections on historic poetic activism and contemporary comic revelations, from making amends for past injustices to a son's eulogy, we want to make a space in which light can dance with the authentic struggle to live well in a moment of such uncertainty. The good news is that no one has ever been able to predict the future, so we already have that in common with folks who learned the path, and walked it. We're glad you're traveling it with us too.

Keep in touch, and may today's journeys be full of light, depth, and curiosity.

Gareth Higgins
Editor & Publisher, The Porch

THE BEST WE CAN

Mike Riddell

My father died recently. He was 92 years old. He'd had a tough life in many ways. He was born "out of wedlock" as they used to say, and carried a deep sense of shame that went with the imposed callous label "illegitimate." When he met my mother, he cried while telling her his secret—certain that she would want nothing more to do with him.

Later in life they divorced after he'd abused alcohol over a long period throughout their marriage. He was severely beaten while drunk and needed surgery. He developed cancer of the jaw, and it looked like he might die. Fifteen years after this he had a major stroke and couldn't speak. Then he gradually began to lose his sight.

His name was Ron. For most of his life he was a laborer and hard work took its toll. But he overcame all the assaults on his body, and lived alone, remaining in his own house for most of the final years of his life. He did this through a fierce stubbornness that resisted any challenge.

He couldn't bring himself to tell me he loved me. I suspect he thought to do so would be transgressing some sense of male identity. The closest he got to affection was to finish our phone calls with "all the best." It was less than I hoped for, but it was as much as he could manage.

For the final three weeks of his life, Ron ended up in hospital-level rest home care. With his mental faculties dimming, he had some falls; and being blind, had no idea where he was. I went to see him in the distant city where he lived. By the last day of my time with him, he didn't know who I was.

I tried to feed him, but he couldn't swallow and so the food spilled out and ran down his chin. When it came time to leave, I kissed him on the head. There was no flicker of recognition. He died a week later. Fresh out of the hospital with my own encounter with cancer, I was able to return and be there for his funeral.

My dad was racist, homophobic, sexist, and bigoted. He was also a damaged man with an enticing smile and a great fund of stories. In his better days, when we both lived in the same town, I'd spend time with him in the pub every week. It was his natural environment, and the best way to get to understand him.

I would try to hug him, but he did his best imitation of a surfboard, clearly embarrassed and reluctant. I was a little hurt by his reticence, but found it easy to forgive him. Even if we don't recognize it, the social currents in which we exist often shape us. I was willing to cut him some slack.

We're all doing the best we can. Ron played the cards that were dealt him, without much sense that he had a shitty hand to start with. The great thing about a funeral is that it gives the opportunity to name and dismiss human faults, while

celebrating the essential goodness that lies within the journey of a life.

We live in fractious times. It's all too easy to cast difference as evil, and to adopt an attitude of enmity. Certainly there are times when resistance is needed, but more often than not it is the ideologies that mold people that require our attention, rather than the unthinking products of such dogma. The temptation to personal hatred is subtle and corrupting.

I find in myself a reservoir of anger, brewed in the dark places. Often this gets hooked onto an external source of provocation. Sometimes there's good cause for my arguments—but little justification for the vehemence that accompanies them, nor for the disrespect I demonstrate toward those who oppose my views.

The person I damage most in such moments is myself. I diminish my own humanity by doubting that of others. I don't beat myself up about my character flaws. Like everyone else, I'm doing the best I can as well. But I do try to reflect on the dynamics of my anger. Hatred is a poor methodology to reduce hate.

My home country, New Zealand, is a long way from the sort of conflicts that literally threaten the future of existence. I watch in wonder as world players seem to acquiesce to the prospect of nuclear war or environmental collapse. But even in these situations, it's useful to attempt to get behind the posturing and find the causes.

Which came first—Nazism or Hitler? It was a symbiotic relationship, clearly, but the figurehead is nothing without the ideology that fuels him.

Many years ago I spent a day at the Dachau concentration camp. After touring the site, I took time to sit and reflect in a beautiful Catholic chapel, named Todesangst Christi—literally, Christ's fear of death. In meditation, I peered into the heart of darkness.

While earlier I'd felt rage at the Nazis, now I came to the realization that this evil was lodged inside my own heart rather than outside it. Whatever any human is capable of, we all are. If we are to condemn, we include ourselves in it. Otherwise we border on extinguishing the lives of others.

I'm not advocating quietism, or just rolling over and letting terrible things happen, but simply that we try to live out of connection and inquiry, rather than projection and vilification. I no longer believe it is possible to bring light to any person unless we find it in ourselves, and then make common ground with the other. After all, it's not our own light we're offering.

My father loved animals, the whole of his life. In his childhood, he had a pet trout, a pet owl, and a pet penguin (don't ask). Later he had dogs, and in his later years cats—including one that travelled the country with him in a VW van. There was a mutuality of love between them.

He made a lot of mistakes along his way, but he got many things right as well. There was a kindness that struggled to find an outlet, and it's this that I hold on to now that he has gone. He was doing the best he could. Twenty years before he died, I wrote him a poem that I think of as an epitaph. It included these words:

It's the inner wounds
That take their toll;
A childhood as a bastard,
A loneliness in your heart
That nothing ever reaches.

I watched you scrape new spuds
With tenderness and skill,
A gift to us from your garden.
Only in these silent gestures
Can you describe your care.

Your cross-country running
Gave the pattern;
Stamina, endurance of pain,
Solitude - but now
Where do they leave you?

"Your father misses you,
Lives with regrets," said Kath.
Have none on my account.
I never needed words
To understand you.

There's something of the father

In the son.

Before you go,

Pour yourself another beer

And know I love you.

***INHERITED INJUSTICE:
RECONCILIATION AND RIGHTING
UNRIGHTABLE WRONGS***
Michelle LeBaron

In 2012, an unusual convocation ceremony was held at the University of British Columbia where I am a member of faculty. One by one, elders moved slowly across the stage to be handed diplomas denied decades before, festooned with armfuls of flowers and heartily congratulated by dignitaries amidst flash photography. I sat in the front row, eyes full of tears as 90 year old Roy Oshiro and other Japanese Canadians who were forced to abandon their studies at my university in 1942 accepted their degrees with dignity and quiet joy. This was meaningful to me not only because I work for peace and justice, but because my family were unwilling players in the terrible theatre that was forced internment of people with Japanese descent living on Canada's west coast.

The day before the convocation, Mr Oshiro said this to the press: "This is one thing that will happen once in 1,000 years," warning he might throw his arms up and shout "Hallelujah" when he took his turn across the stage. "Never mind watching for me," Mr. Oshiro said. "It's the people who started all this – they're the ones who should get all the credit. We're just the recipients of their goodness." He was referring to fellow *Nisei* Mary Kitigawa who began the campaign to award degrees to those who had been forced by internment to stop their schooling.

If my grandmothers Antonette or Luella had been at that ceremony, they would have recalled well the story of how Japanese internees arrived on their Canadian prairie farms in the 1940s. I've reproduced the account as I remember Antonette telling it when I was young enough to sit under the quilt she was blocking and listen.

We didn't have nothing at first. No land and no money. Wilford worked a section of the Johnson's land, backed down onto the coulee, while he waited for his homestead. That gave us near enough turnips for the winter. I guess I don't care if I ever see another turnip.

The only folks who had less than us was the Japanese; they came during the war. Lived in our shack out back, the one we used for the sugar beet pickers or the planters when they came to get the crops in or help take them out. Used it sometimes for harvest time, if rain was coming or some of the boys were away. It wasn't much, just a few boards strung together to keep them out of the worst of the cold and the weather. Then the government told us they were sending some Japanese to live there for a piece. A whole family of them.

We went out back, tried to pretty it up some. Got some old curtains out of the boys' room and put them over the windows. I figured they'd need it more than the boys. Tried to clean the old sink out there, badly stained with rust. Swept the floor, except the dirt wouldn't come out of those old cracks. You know, the place was never meant to be more than a shack. It made me uncomfortable, knowing folks was going to live there all that winter.

When Mrs. Yamaguchi came with her little boy and a tinier girl, we went out and took them some biscuits and a fresh jug of milk. It was a warm day, and she didn't make a sound as she walked around the two-bedroom shack

in her black shoes with clacketty heels on them. She had a clean white apron on over her dark dress. After walking around the whole place, she sat silently on a chair, pulled that apron up over her face and cried. At least I think she cried. She barely made a sound.

Her husband come later. How they were all going to sleep in them two old beds, I didn't know. I told Vivian to go back in and get the second quilt off my bed. At least they wouldn't freeze on my account.

It was the war, you know. No one had much. Flour, sugar, stockings rationed. We were lucky to be on a farm. We shared eggs with them, offered some of the cow when we butchered her. Helped them a bit with some vegetables in the summer. Couldn't do nothing about the rice, though. They had to go down and beg the Chinaman at Airway Market for rice. They kept to themselves. Never complained. They lived there for near three years, and I don't know to this day how they done it. I never knew they had a house on the coast until much later. After the war, they still didn't go back. They built that corner store on the highway, at least it was on the highway until they built the new bypass. I guess they got lots of customers in those early days.

Whatever their lives had been before and during the early days of the war, Japanese internees were left without the properties, vehicles, livelihoods, and careers they had before October 1942. Since my post-war childhood, I've tried to imagine those times. I resolved to go back to that tiny prairie town at some point and talk with Mrs. Yamaguchi. I wanted to know how she had survived in the midst of not only deprivation but striking injustice. I wanted to know how she found it, living in that prairie community where she must have

been regarded as alien and “other” though she had been born in Canada.

I never found Mrs. Yamaguchi. Someone said she had moved out east. But I found a Japanese woman who had lived in the prairies through that time still living in the town where my father grew up. She had passed the war on someone else’s farm. Sitting at her rough pine table, I listened to her stories of those days. Her lack of bitterness struck me. It was something more than looking at a glass half-full, something about being patient with the process of belonging. Though the town was a Mormon town and Mormonism was a ticket to fitting in, she did not convert until her husband had died. Only then, she joined the Mormon church and said it gave her a measure of peace.

When I flash forward to the time in which I now live, so publicly fractious and filled with horrors flashing across screens, I remember Anonette and the Japanese families forced to leave the Pacific Coast during WWII. While both the Japanese internees and their European-origin hosts may have been less likely to question authority than I am today, I find it unsettling to remember that only two members of the University of British Columbia faculty protested the actions taken against Japanese Canadians in 1942. I want to continue to be unsettled, to advocate with all my strength for reconciliation with Japanese Canadians, indigenous people, and others whose voices have been marginalized and whose lives have been damaged by racist policies.

I’ve learned a lot from watching, reading, and listening to Japanese Canadians in their campaign for redress, finally granted by the

Canadian government in 1988. Here is some of what I learned: bitterness is corrosive, even when injustice has been done. Church suppers – everyone at a dinner table with kindreds – are powerful ways of breaking boundaries. Belonging is a process, and it may be long, permeable, and uneven. Law doesn't always help; it has too often been a tool of the powerful excluding the so-called "other." Reconciliation is not an event or an outcome, but a call to action as the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission reminded us when they issued their final report on the legacies of abuse in Indian Residential Schools last year. Finally, gratitude seems to be a life-changer, even in the midst of darkness or unfairness. Or perhaps it is a life-changer especially in the midst of darkness or unfairness. If those perpetrating injustice never come to their senses and long-delayed degrees are never conferred, gratitude claims back a measure of dignity as an affirmative choice about how to see things, about how to remain intact even while fighting for justice. I remember this every morning and every evening; it is an anchor for me in remembering the past injustices from which I still benefit, and a touchstone when I feel those words coming on that we have all said: It's just not fair.

***GIRLS TRIP AND SAWUBONA:
AN EXPERIENCE OF VULNERABILITY
AND CONNECTION***

Micky ScottBey Jones

The scene: Early in *Girls Trip*, four pajama clad Black women—close friends since college—are kneeling down around a bed, heads bowed, hands clasped, praying. Dina, played by the comedian Tiffany Haddish, leads her friends in a prayer over the long awaited girls' trip that is just beginning...

“Heavenly Father, I want to thank you for this day of life...my heart is so full of joy for these women right here...Lord, please make sure that Lisa don't get an STD...and that nobody has kidney failure, cause we fiddin' to get messed up...and let me get pregnant by somebody rich...that's all I ask...Amen.”

Maybe not your most traditional prayer, but this isn't your most traditional movie. *Girls Trip* is funny, not at the expense of the Black women portrayed by Queen Latifah, Jada Pinkett-Smith, Regina Hall, and Tiffany Haddish, but in a way that displays humanity in these fictional characters' lives. Like our lives, the comic relief is embedded in the relationships and realities we navigate.

Depending on your demographic profile, *Girls Trip* may or may not be on your radar, even though at the time of its release, it was the current title-holder for largest opening of a live-action comedy in 2017. You may not have noticed it because like much of US culture, films are still largely segregated, from casting to marketing. A comedy with four

Black female leads is easily dismissed as a “Black film” that would only be of interest to a subgroup of moviegoers. I am a Black woman, so it was no surprise I joined another Black girlfriend of mine for opening weekend. She was actually my companion on my #FabFlirtyFantastic40 Birthday Trip this year, so a funny movie that might at least slightly resemble the beach adventure we just enjoyed sounded like the perfect night out. I expected to laugh-scream (I do that) and exchange knowing looks and arm slaps throughout the movie, but I didn’t expect to do a deeper dive into my deepest longings for belonging, community, and self-love.

There I sat, watching this comedy about college friends reuniting for a weekend of raunchy fun, nearly in tears from a prayer that is largely a comedic element. In Dina’s prayer, I heard something I am longing for and am still trying to cultivate—real relationship, both divine and human. I don’t want to pray with “thee” and “thou” anymore. Like Anne Lamott, I want to pray with “thanks” and “wow.” I don’t want to just encourage my friends in some sort of generic way to have enough strength to get through the day. I want to encourage Monica not to cuss out the wrong person when she gets angry. My prayers reveal a lot about how I’m relating to the divine and others. I can tell when I’m just running down a prayer list, spitting out flowery words to impress the Spirit (as if that’s a thing) or when I’m actually thinking about an actual person, flaws and all, when holding them in my mind.

This movie is genuinely funny. It’s not in the same genre as some “Black films” that are in the morality-play-dressed-as-comedy predictably safe category. From the first scene to the last, the theater was loud with the laughter of people laughing at well-delivered lines. I mean, the premise alone is ripe for a good time. The “Flossy Posse” was

a college crew of four women who have all grown up and been too busy to connect for years. Ryan, the successful relationship writer and motivational speaker of the bunch gets an invitation to take the mainstage at the Essence Festival in New Orleans and calls the rest of the posse to join her, making the trip into a much needed reunion. What unfolds is that each woman brings not only cute dresses and heels on the trip, but her real life struggles and challenges.

That sounds potentially formulaic, possibly cheesy, and very...laugh-it-up and then roll out the morality lesson at the end. And while the arc of the story did offer a little of that, what carried the story was the fullness of the characters. They were not just shell characters delivering one-liners, they were women who I could relate to.

Lisa is the mom with an intense career who has long ago left behind a social life to manage every aspect of her children's lives. Then there's Sasha who is a driven entrepreneur trying to make things work, even though the finances are not working. Dina is working that cubicle life—navigating corporate America while trying to keep sanity and self-respect. And then there's Ryan, the relationship expert, an author and speaker who seems to have it all, at least on the pages of her books, but not in a way of substance since her husband has a habit of infidelity.

With so much pressure on Black women to fit the Strong Black Woman stereotype (see *Too Heavy A Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength* by Dr. Chanequa Walker-Barnes), it was nice to see a portrayal of Black women that wasn't just the backbone-of-the-family praying grandma or sexy cutthroat professional in 10 inch designer shoes. Every one of them is beautiful and full of Black Girl Magic, and yet, each one is also navigating heartbreaking and complex challenges. In the midst of these

challenges, they gather for fun and connection. They do not wait until all the stars have aligned to answer the call of the Flossy Posse—they come when their friend calls, bringing the challenges of their lives with them.

As someone who struggles with the demon of perfection, who has nearly worn the Strong Black Woman stereotype as my epithet and epitaph, I saw the narrative beneath the jokes. This desire for community that accepts me in my vulnerability is not an indulgent wish. My need to be seen and loved is not because I am needy and flawed—it is because I don't exist without a "flossy posse," without others who can see me, reflect me, and help me be me.

In South Africa I learned the Zulu greeting *Sawubona*. When I asked my friends what the word meant, it felt like an unfolding, a slow reveal of the real meaning. At first they explained that it means hello or good day. It's a general pleasantry but as with many words of the African diaspora, it carries more that is essentially untranslatable. *Sawubona* means I see you. I see not just your physical appearance, your face, your hand waving in greeting, or that you are standing there. I see *you*—a human being with value, dignity, worth, and potential. I see you in your vulnerability and strength. I bring all of me, my history, experience, and understandings to how I see you. I see you and I am responsible to you for what I see. I cannot greet someone with sawubona and put my headphones back in; sawubona is an acknowledgement of the life and identity of the other person. A pause. It is an opportunity to see and be seen.

Girls Trip reminded me that I would rather be seen than be seen as perfect. I am accomplished. I am highly educated. I do good work in

the world. I look good in a little black dress. I also have a therapy appointment for 1pm today because I do not have it all together. I want, no, I *need* people in my life who will look at me and see all of that and respond with love and connection. I am still figuring out how that actually works out in practice, but I will keep greeting in the spirit of sawubona—of seeing and being seen as a way of practicing connection in relationship. I will keep sharing my cute dresses and real life challenges with my friends. It can be scary being seen, but it's better than being a one-dimensional character. I lived that story for too long, and I'm no longer interested in that narrative.

And, you know, an actual girls' trip to New Orleans is also an appropriate response to this movie. I just might have to make that happen... and pray no one gets kidney failure.

PROFESSIONAL MOURNERS - ZAKES MDA'S "WAYS OF DYING"

Tyler McCabe

One of my wisest friends, Dyana, who's also a writer I deeply admire, suggested to me once that the US could benefit from a national day of mourning. We could frame it like a memorial day for the afflicted, the survivors, the perpetually marginalized, and the dearly departed. Or we could frame it like a timeout from a scolding mother—in essence, a day to stop and *think about what you've done*.

There is a lot to mourn. I don't think I need to tell you. For me, I am mourning that some close friends just lost their pregnancy, and another friend is moving out of the city, and yet another was dropped from the running for a dream job; and an enormous hurricane just hit our neighbors; and trans leaders in our military are being insulted and denied the right to exercise important freedoms; and our president just shamelessly pardoned a man who has acted with such callousness that the pardon is likely to reinforce not only the dehumanization he meted out to others, but his own broken self.

Dyana explains that we need something more than an escape from these realities. We need a better response than self-care. I want to know how to mourn as the *active expression* of anger and sadness. In this sense, mourning sits opposite from passive despair. Mourning is muscular.

The book I'm turning to for guidance is *Ways of Dying* by Zakes Mda, celebrated South African novelist and playwright. This novel is centered on Toloki, a "professional mourner" who appears at funerals throughout a metropolitan area, unbeckoned by the grieving families, and offers his services—to mourn, to stand in the crowd and engage in the art of expressing grief, anger, and injustice fully, vocally, and loudly. He embodies it. In fact, it's during a description of his smelly, tattered suit that the reader first begins to understand he lives on the margins of society. It's from those margins that he identifies a deep and abiding need for proper mourning.

The novel is often narrated from the point of view of a "we," the collective voices of onlookers that function as a Greek chorus. They continuously disapprove of his actions—the crying, the stinking, the showing-up, the reminder that things are *not as they should be*. They advise him to wash, to get a job, to pay exorbitant fees to the violent men who will burn down his house if he refuses to bribe them. The onlookers narrate the story while rarely comprehending what Toloki is doing. But over the course of the book, I come to understand: he is "amazed at [those]... surrounded by all the contraptions that speak of how close to the door of death [they] lie. Yet all [they] can think of is how rich [they are] going to be." He is a professional mourner: he mourns for his nation each time he refuses to indulge niceties or traditions that cause pain, each time he embodies the stink of death and injustice, and each time he refuses injustice to become normalized.

I'm keeping in mind that Toloki has no illusions about his profession, how it contains a seed of futility. Mourning does not undo past evils. Mourning does not even guarantee a better future. Mourning doesn't make enduring change or disappointment much easier, or restore a disaster area, or rewrite bad laws.

Mourning is maybe, instead, like prayer. It happens in the body. It has the effect of returning one to sanity, and knitting people together. Toloki says, "Tomorrow I must find a funeral. My body needs to mourn."

Dyana taught me a way of thinking about processing feelings in terms of alignment—asking yourself, are your emotions aligned with reality? Are they proportionate? In the US right now, a particularly distressing series of events could make you feel crazy, as if there is either no proportionate response or that the response you want to make will take up too much space—perhaps your friends and family will worry about you, advise you to take a few more self-care days. But mourning is a proportionate expression, a proper response to injustice. It is definitely not the only or final response, but a necessary one.

What that actually looks like—it could be a lot of things. But it is physical. It has a taste, a smell, the weight of a fist hitting a bag, the sound of cloth tearing. And it is temporal, it takes time.

At one point, Toloki tries to teach the sound of mourning to a friend, but during the lesson they both start laughing. When she apologizes, he insists that mourning is like laughing. He says,

“Some memories are happy. Others are sad. But there is no bitterness in either of them.” It’s almost as if mourning, like laughter, has the effect of returning one to the present, but lighter. I think he means that mourning is a form of healing, possibly one that prepares the way for things to come.

I think he means it’s easy. I think he means we could do it every day.

GARDEN POETRY

Milton Brasher-Cunningham

When my mother was in hospice she made a point of discussing how her things would be divided between my brother and me, and then what would go to her friends or be given away. Since I was the one who grew up standing beside her in the kitchen, I inherited the kitchen stuff, which included a collection of cookbooks and her recipe file. Among the books she passed on to me were the favorite cookbooks of both my grandmothers. Because I grew up overseas and away from them, I didn't know them well, but I do have memories of my mother's mother opening jars in her kitchen in Texas City, Texas—jars filled with things she had made and canned.

My wife Ginger and I live now in Guilford, Connecticut, where she pastors. The town is rich with history. First Congregational Church is one of the oldest churches in the state, founded in 1643. We live in the parsonage behind the church—a building that was the town school in the 1800s. Next to the house is an old barn we now use for dinners rather than farm supplies, and behind it is a large field where we have planted a large fifty by twenty-five foot garden: emphasis on the *we*. Last summer I tried to tend the garden myself and lost most of it to the weeds. Last spring, a couple of folks from church asked if we could do it together. Our team approach means the weeds did not win, we have grown a lot of food, and I have learned a great deal.

Before we moved to Connecticut, Ginger and I had no idea it was such farming country. Much of the land here has been cared for by families whose names go back to the founding of our town and our church. The

place where we planted had been a garden before, but not for many years. Tom, my planting companion, knows a great deal about how to grow things in New England. At his suggestion, we used a “no till” method so we didn’t disturb the soil food web—the network of trace minerals, bacteria, and microorganisms that runs through the soil. The relationships literally run for miles in ways we do not understand. We subdivided the plot into smaller beds using straw walkways so we could pass between them to weed and water.

Every region has its own sense of timing. When it comes to growing seasons, New England starts late and finishes early, and even when it is time to plant, not everything goes into the ground at once. I had to learn to be patient. We planted greens and then we waited. Corn and beets followed. Then zucchini, summer squash, and cucumbers. Since I knew summer is short around here, I was impatient to plant because I knew things take time to grow. Finally, we planted the tomatoes—my reason for having a garden in the summertime. And then we waited some more. We waited and watered and weeded—actions that have marked summers in these parts for more summers than we have been a nation. Actions that find resonance in fields across the planet and even in parables.

Most every morning before work, I have gone out to the garden to water, kill squash bugs, and check the progress of our labor. Some mornings, I read poetry or sang hymns to the seedlings, hoping to urge them into becoming. In the evenings, we weeded and killed more squash bugs. The days moved into weeks before I felt hopeful about what I saw each day. Somehow the little plants that looked as though they were going to be nothing more than evidence of what I had done wrong began to grow. The weeds became less plentiful, if not less

determined. And when something ripened, it ripened all at once. And I had to learn how to can.

When the cucumbers came in, I made twenty-four quarts of pickles. I made marmalade out of the Sungold tomatoes, salsa verde from the tomatillos and jalapeños, marinara sauce from the San Marzano tomatoes. And I remembered my grandmother taking the metal ring off the Mason jars and popping the seal on the lid so we could get to whatever was inside that she had made some previous summer. I have canned by choice; our ancestors did it to have food for the winter when they knew nothing of supermarkets. Tom brought me some of the green beans he pickled. The woman who owns the spice and tea shop in town gave me a jar of zucchini relish her family makes every year. The stories were as nutritious as the contents of the jars.

When we planted the garden, we had hopes that other folks from the church would come and plant as well. It didn't happen this year; just as we had to wait for the things we planted to mature, we will have to wait for our idea to come into its own. We made a point of sharing our produce as much as we were able. We took a bag of vegetables to the Syrian refugee family down the street almost every week. We gave nearly a hundred pounds of produce to the Guilford Food Bank. I even took a couple of bags of tomatoes and tomatillos to the people who park their taco truck in front of our church everyday. Things will not continue to grow in the garden. Even now it looks tired. But while there is an abundance, it feels important—significant—to share it extravagantly, leaning into the abundance. What we can't save or share, we eat, which means we make plans for people to come to dinner. Our barn has a table that seats sixteen or eighteen and we have gathered to

taste and see all that is good. As we gather, I can hear the echoes of meals after days of labor and harvest.

To say history rhymes means it doesn't repeat itself, but there are resonant themes that return, which, I suppose, can be a thought filled with either hope or despair. Seamus Heaney wrote a poem in honor of Nelson Mandela called "The Cure for Troy" that closes with these lines:

*It means once in a lifetime
That justice can rise up
And hope and history rhyme.*

I would like to think you can hear that rhyme at dinnertime—in the food prepared, the dishes digested, and the stories shared. Everything in the garden that gives its life for that moment, that meal, gives a rich and generous gift. At the table, we find nourishment and new life.

When we pass the farm stands, or go to our farmers' markets, we are visiting outposts of hope. We are interacting with poets who have soil under their fingernails, and who call us to hear the rhythm of love and the rhyme of hope in what happens between us and the food we eat, even as they call us to feel the tether of resonance and responsibility that ties us to those in places where there is not enough food or hope. They have a place at the table as well.

I suppose it is fair to say that our planting pumpkins in our garden doesn't change anything in Pakistan or Sierra Leone. My singing to the squash and tomatoes won't stop a war. Poetry never falls for the language of such direct logic. I hear the rhyme of the soil food web, the

connection I cannot see, but I can trust. I will plant hope here and let it grow wherever it can.

WHAT WOULD WHITMAN DO?

Peterson Toscano

These days I find comfort, guidance, and inspiration from the past. Faced with an uncertain future because of political, environmental, and social instability, I refuse to be shaken or destabilized. This is not our first rodeo. The future has, of course, always been uncertain.

These days I soak in Walt Whitman. Many know Whitman as the poet who created *Leaves of Grass*. His poetry was so radically different from anything that came before it, and because it was so scandalously revelatory about sexuality and bodies, it was frequently banned. In fact, Whitman did not even put his name on the original 1855 edition. Instead he included a drawing of himself with an open-collared shirt, hand on hip, looking jauntily at the reader.

These days the words of Whitman speak to me, but it is his personal story that comforts and guides me. The rambling verses in *Leaves of Grass* did not simply appear out of thin air by an artist who displayed early promise. Whitman, born in 1819 to a working class Quaker family, was already in his mid-thirties when he self-published them. Up until then he struggled to keep a job or even stick to a profession. His teaching career was short-lived and shrouded in a mysterious scandal. He had a string of newspaper jobs and did typesetting at a series of print shops. He started businesses that went bust; he abruptly left one city for another.

In his twenties his poetry was mediocre at best. Socially he presented himself as a fop who spent just about as much time critiquing opera-

goers as he did watching the performances he reviewed in the papers. Scanning the crowd at one opera house, he later wrote of his fellow audience members, "What an air of polished, high-bred, deliberate, heartless, bland, superb, chilling, smiling, repelling fashion."

But beneath the bluster about opera fans, there was something beautiful here. Historian Gary Schmidgall suggests that it was Whitman's encounters with opera which jarred Whitman awake to become the extraordinary artist who produced *Leaves of Grass*.

Despite poking fun at audience members, Whitman did enjoy opera. In fact, he allowed the artistry of the opera and its singers to move him. In *Walt Whitman A Gay Life*, Schmidgall references Whitman's *Letters from Paumanok*, published in 1851. After hearing a performance, Whitman was stirred:

Here is an author obsessed, ravished by the human voice—especially that of the tenor Bettini, whose "clear, firm, wonderfully exalting notes, firm and expanding away, dwelling like a poised lark up in heaven, have made my very soul tremble."

A year later Whitman heard another singer who shattered his soul. On an unseasonably hot New York City summer night in 1852 Whitman had an encounter with a woman. She moved him not as a lover, not with this man, although later Whitman revealed that something masculine in her stout, fat body and short boyish haircut had attracted him. What shook Whitman that night was not love but art in the form of a voice, the voice of Madame Marietta Alboni, the great Italian opera singer on her triumphant American tour.

Whitman had heard nothing like this before. Without flare, Alboni sang with clarity and strength. As Whitman listened, his creative soul shook. This was pure art. Not the trite shallow stuff he had written as a young man. That night Whitman had an *apocalypse* - not a catastrophe, as in its popular definition, but something more like the original Greek meaning: *a revelation*, as if a curtain had been pulled back and one sees what has been hidden, a vision that jars one awake. That night Walt Whitman awoke. He quit his job, left the city, settled into a personal breakdown, and wrote feverishly.

Three years later he self-published *Leaves of Grass*.

Walt Whitman found his voice at last. He took his role as a prophetic poet seriously, and likely would have kept his hands covered in ink until he faced a second apocalypse. In 1861, six years after he first published *Leaves of Grass*, the American Civil War began. By its end in 1865 over 600,000 soldiers died, the largest number of US American military fatalities in any conflict before or since.

Whitman was a pacifist, and while visiting his wounded brother in an army hospital, surrounded by the groaning anguish of war-mangled young men, seeing hundreds of amputees and boys dying from infected wounds, his eyes opened to the need around him. He wrote that he felt “a profound conviction of necessity.”

For the remainder of the war years, he volunteered as a nurse, visiting soldiers in army hospitals—writing letters for them, bringing small gifts of food and books, sitting by their bedsides, holding them as they died in his arms, providing comfort however possible.

In the war diaries he later published, Whitman wrote:

These Hospitals, so different from all others - these American young men, badly wounded, all sorts of wounds, operated on, pallid with diarrhea, languishing, dying with fever, pneumonia, well they open a new world somehow to me, giving closer insights, showing our humanity, tried by terrible, fearfulest tests, probed deepest, bursting the petty bonds of art. To these, to him, what are your dramas and poems?

Whitman was not forsaking his art. Rather he was recognizing that there are times when art is not enough, a time when we have to get our hands dirty, when artists need to take a stand with our bodies. This is the tension that tugs at many artists who feel the need to go inward and artfully explore while all the time there are pressing needs around; we see family, friends, and strangers suffering. These propel us out of our sanctuaries into the flesh and blood of the world we try so hard to understand. For me this often feels like a messy affair of inadequacy as I fumble to give comfort and care. While the services I offer to the grieving, the sufferer, the person waylaid by a storm or injustice does not reflect the thoughtful, polished art I so much aspire to create, perhaps this physical manifestation of my concern, the “profound conviction of necessity,” the word made flesh, is art in itself. As Whitman reveals, we can enter a process of transfiguration in which our bodies become the poetry.

This is what you shall do; Love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to every one that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence toward the people, take off your hat to

nothing known or unknown or to any man or number of men, go freely with powerful uneducated persons and with the young and with the mothers of families, read these leaves in the open air every season of every year of your life, re-examine all you have been told at school or church or in any book, dismiss whatever insults your own soul, and your very flesh shall be a great poem and have the richest fluency not only in its words but in the silent lines of its lips and face and between the lashes of your eyes and in every motion and joint of your body.

These days I feel the crush of disasters and battles all around us. Mega storms smash into US cities in the South, Southwest, and islands in the Caribbean. Extreme heat and wildfires rage in the West and Northwest. Undocumented residents throughout the US are despised and rejected by the federal government. White supremacists boldly parade bigotry and racism. Transgender people in the military, in public restrooms, on the job are subjected to being dehumanized and attacked. I sit in my study and wonder, "To these what are your dramas and poems?" Where must I show up? Art, like faith, without works, is dead. So we act. We open our homes. We give our time, efforts, and money to join the struggles rocking our world or in many cases affecting our own lives and security.

These days to ground myself and to find hope I look to the past, to examples like Whitman, but the poet, who once also served as a nurse, prods me to look ahead, to imagine a simple, stable day many years from now. In his poem "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" Whitman stands on the deck of a ferry early in the morning and then as the sun goes down. He then travels ahead into the future, into our present and beyond. It is like he is looking through a spyglass and sees you and me when he writes, "And you that shall cross from shore to shore years hence are

more to me, and more in my meditations, than you might suppose." He sees us not as victims or as heroes, rather as earthlings free to find pleasure in being ferried across a body of water.

Fifty years hence, others will see them as they cross, the sun half an hour high,

A hundred years hence, or ever so many hundred years hence, others will see them,

Will enjoy the sunset, the pouring-in of the flood-tide, the falling-back to the sea of the ebb-tide.

Whitman reminds me of the illusion of time when it comes to our imagination and our art. "What is it then between us? What is the count of the scores or hundreds of years between us?" He provokes and encourages me to see a future that is not deluged by the present but is instead filled with earthlings who benefit from the successes we are about to achieve in these dangerous days.

These days one can become overwhelmed and weary from the weight of it all. Yet in spite of all this, with each blow, individuals and communities wake up. People are experiencing apocalypse—that jarring, life changing revelation and a profound conviction of necessity. Right now the poets, healers, and change agents are taking their places.

CURIOSITY IS THE ANTIDOTE TO FEAR

A Conversation with Brian Andreas & Fia Skye

Brian Andreas and Fia Skye work together weaving stories and images that heal the soul, expand the mind, and invite community. They're good friends of *The Porch*, and when we talked we began by asking them about the earliest stories they remember:

Brian Andreas: I grew up in an environment of storytelling, so it wasn't until I was probably in my twenties where I recognized stories as a discrete thing. So when you say what's the first story I remember... it's like breathing, what's the first breath I remember taking? You breathe, you breathe, you breathe and all of a sudden you go, "Wow, I'm actually breathing." So, I don't really have an answer for that, yeah, I can't remember the first one.

Fia Skye: I remember the books on my shelf... *Winnie the Pooh* was a very big thing, you know, *The Night before Christmas*, but we didn't have that atmosphere growing up so it wasn't until I started doing theater that I started to think of stories as breathing livable things.

GH: So when you look back on your childhood from this perspective, can you observe the outlines of the contours of the story that your family believed about the world?

FS: My dad worked for Caterpillar and we had a lot of issues with the unions in a lot of family stories, you know. My dad had this idea of the story of how he was supposed to put his children through college. It's like you inherit these stories and then you say, I like it, I don't like it, I'm going to fix this because this is wrong with my generation or my dad said it was wrong and so on. I remember the story we got around the dinner table was of course that my dad was helping save the

company [from the unions]. And there were a lot of stories in my family about what a man is, what a woman is. My dad doesn't do the laundry, still doesn't do laundry, only cooks because he has to survive.

There were no global stories except for Russia the Cold War during that time period, but I would say that in the Midwest it was very isolated stories, before computers and before cell phones.

GH: This is probably a fairly common story, we grew up with the notion that there were good guys and bad guys...and we knew that we were on the good guys' side.

FS: Absolutely.

GH: So, I'm assuming you no longer think that unions are bad and that a woman's place is in the home, that kind of stuff [laughs]. When did those stories start changing?

FS: I have been so fortunate to have some incredible teachers. I remember working at Sam Shepard's play *True West*, and it was a game changer for me and I just saw how this teacher's voice in conflict changed everything. I had never seen a woman with such strength and beauty and ferociousness. In theatre when you step in and you have to give voice to somebody else, you have to speak somebody else's truth with conviction to a room full of strangers, you have to go off your centre.

You had to look at the whole story then you have to look at all of the different players and all the different pieces and you understand that I'm playing this character. You begin to understand how people are incredibly human and how they begin to believe stories that other people tell them if they offer something that they want to believe is true.

BA: It's interesting because I came out of a story telling environment in my [extended family]. In childhood you [pick up that] there [is] some vague bit of shame around this particular person but your experience of them is, they're really great and they always bring you baked goods!

The big story that comes to mind is my great aunt Anna. I spent a lot of time with her in college because she lived in the same town. My family were bakers in a small town in Iowa, and during World War Two one day she was the front of house and at the bakery and her father came in and said, "Anne, we're all out of flour, write President Roosevelt and tell him that we need things too just like the boys on the front." So I heard stories of independent thinking of people willing to follow their own vision; their willingness to tackle things that just felt was were worth tackling. That particular ego was built into my family: that we were leaders.

I think that one of the things that I have seen over the trajectory of me being a story teller is that we have been isolated and decoupled from the truth of it, that storytelling has been turned into a thing that's "for children". Where people still see storytelling as powerful is in advertising. But the stories are [far more important than that] - they were actually the thing that set the tone for how we live our lives, guidance for how we get up in the morning, the real heartbeat of our psyche.

"What is this thing called water? I mean I've been hearing a lot about water and it's like it's the entirety of everything you swim in and we... it's the entirety of your life." So until you actually come into consciousness about that, story is entirely fluent knowledge.

FS: Politicians want great stories behind them to justify what they're doing and that's different than the kind of true stories that we're telling

ourselves, and it creates this idea that we're not all story tellers. People are more willing to accept the stories that they're told because they don't believe that they have any power over because these people that are seeking power are cherry picking stories and massaging stories for their endgame.

BA: They've done enough studies about how when you retrieve a memory of your own story it really matters the point where you start. So if you ask, "Talk to me about the time you were most terrified about someone of another skin color," you're retrieving the memory already hinted by that question.

The work that I do with stories is giving a different starting point for the retrieval of the memory. So if you say, "Here is a memory of that time when you recognized that life was sweet," you're going to come at the very same memory of running across somebody of a different skin color from a different point of view and you will retrieve it differently.

FS: I think there is a misnomer, this idea that "we" are right, "we" are in consciousness and "they" are not.

BA: That's one of the things that we will bring up is that the pleasure centers in the brain line up when you're *giving* advice and the pain centers line up when you're *hearing* advice.

FS: But if we create this third space together, ultimately we might actually come up with something possible in that "my" idea was only going to be an ingredient into the greater thing. The third space is where we actually need each other, we need all of the different opinions and the diversity to come up with all the different possible solutions and I better be more curious about what we're going to do together than about getting my idea forward.

BA: Yeah, and I would add onto that there are techniques for accessing the third space as well ... even now we could close our eyes and feel into the energy of the other people in this conversation there. We could say, "Okay, now let me ask the question out of that connection to each other rather than out of my own concerns and only what I know or think I know." It gets beyond your own knowing and into an experience of the knowing of the four of us right now. So instead of four individuals, we actually are a single entity that has different yet connected views.

FS: That's Ubuntu, I am because you are.

GH: These days we hear a lot about fear and the illusion of security, so let's lean into this question.

FS: Yeah, but here's the thing about fear. Fear is about the past or the future, it's never about the present unless you're actually in the experience of being violated in that moment. Fear is the imagination or the possibility of whether something has happened that it might happen again. It's one of those things where our culture is stockpiling it up in the future. You know we pay social security, we have to have insurance for everything, you have to make sure your savings account has x amount of dollars for the future. People wait to do anything until the weekend, or they wait till they have vacation, they wait till they have retirement. But meanwhile all of life is these tiny, tiny individual choices that make up a relationship, that make up a community, and communities make up states, and all the countries in the world. If I go to what I'm grateful for right now, and I think, "Okay, I am so grateful that I have time to walk my dog every day," or I am on a walk with my dog or I feel the breeze or I see a green church, and it can be the simplest things...there are flowers everywhere if you choose to see them.

As soon as I get to the point where I actually *am*, there is always something that's going right, always, always, always. At least, "Oh wow, thanks for the clarity in that relationship, thanks for I know where I stand, I didn't know that it was important to me before." I [can even] be grateful for conflicts because it gives me information, or an opportunity that will add an edge and an opportunity to go somewhere new.

BA: Curiosity is the antidote for fear, because when you become curious about something it doesn't necessarily change, [but you do]. The classic story is the Buddhist monk being out on a mountain side and suddenly there's a tiger that's coming towards him and he's right at cliff edge and he goes over the cliff and he's hanging onto the root of a single pine tree. Above him is the tiger pacing back and forth and he stops and sees a single blossom that has just a single wild flower right there in the roots of the tree and he stops and picks that right then and there. It doesn't change anything else but your ability to actually be there with something that completely dissolves fear. There's a really useful technique out of gestalt therapy which is paying attention to the actual sounds in the room, identify them, so [you might] get a little bit of traffic in the background and you hear the clinking of pots. Once you are using that portion of your physiology, when you are listening, you can only be in the now, it's only that's all listening ears you can only be *there*.

GH: How does all of this relate to people who are targeted by social structures and injustice, and for whom it might be reasonable to say, "Yes, that's easy for you to say."

BA: Here's how I would approach it. Often people who go through Mumbai, India, for instance, are coming from all kinds of so called, first world privileges where you've got everything, you've got electricity,

running water, health care and all the food that you need. They visit Mumbai and say, "Why is everybody who has nothing so happy, how can they do that, I mean, I've got all this stuff and I'm not happy, how can they be happy and they've got nothing?" That is a typical response of people who visit Mumbai.

I think where I come at the question is, "What is our personal responsibility at our individual level to take care of the garden that we've got?" You have a choice. Yes, we have all these privileges for which we're grateful, and we [also] have the [problems] that we're dealing with. I can sit around and whine endlessly about those [problems], or I can stop and go toward the things I love, the things I cherish, and that gives me a rich life and a core from which my story springs. When you talk about somebody who is [targeted] in a harsh environment of racism and sexism and where there is physical violence involved, yes, there are the actualities of that and yet there is also, "How do I make choices every day to move forward into the life I want to be, into the human being I want to be?"

That's one aspect of it. Then there's the academic aspect where people are privileged need to *fucking get a clue* and stand up for the things that aren't right, that you will not go quietly into that dark night. No, it's more than what these individual do. Every day I choose to look at things from the perspective of how is it going to expand me, how is it going to expand the people around me, how am I going to come from love? In everything I do because that's what I get, I get the moment of this life.

What's my responsibility? It's not like, "Here's what *you* can do." It's like, "Here's what *I* can do, right now." This moment demands our best, our best selves, our most skillful use of the tools that we have. So if we're story tellers then *fucking tell good stories*.

GH: I think we could all list a litany of everything that is wrong with the American story. So I won't do that. But what is the light in the American story? What is already great about America that needs to be called to a consciousness right now?

FS: I think we're writing the best story right now because they are out in the open now. The seams are showing and we have a chance to...

BA: I think more people understand the systematic problem of the country and there's no hiding, there's no going back from this, and so I hesitate to say this is the best part of the American story because if anything, I think, what we're coming to contact with is the entirety of humanity. And so the fact that we are speaking up in ways that we haven't spoken up, and the way that we are actively taking part in ways we haven't taken part before. It's one thing to send \$10 to a starving child in a village in Botswana, never seeing them, never knowing anything about them, it's another thing to be people standing up in New York, in Charlotte, in Houston, in Dallas, in LA, Seattle, Portland, the people who stood up there and lost their lives in the process. I think it's a larger space of where we're in the country right now, there's an anguish that we are tired of being quiet about it.

FS: Amazing things are happening every day in response to people realizing where they stand.

BA: Yes, and now there's more, "What do we want, really what do we envision?"

GH: I live in the place of being deeply theoretically committed to wonder and being invited into what a teacher of mine said to me the other day is, he calls his spiritual practice "daily manual labor". This is not theoretical for him. He said to me, "If I don't do my spiritual practice if I go two days without doing my spiritual practice, I'm as

scared as everybody else. But if I do it, I learn to live above it and above is not the same as aloof."

FS: I listen to as much to the sound of your voice as to the shapes that become language, and for me actually it's that it's a very moving to me that you have people from very different backgrounds who care deeply about the same thing, and I think that's extraordinary, how we stumbled into each other's lives and said, "Yes, and all of a sudden something awakens in all of us and it changes our day because we're empowered to." So, I'm blown away by simple magic like this.

FINDING YOUR FEET WHEN THE WATERS ARE TROUBLED Jasmin Pittman Morrell

Sitting on the counter in my grandmother's kitchen, the afternoon sun blankets my back from the window behind me. My knees are pulled into my chest, and my toes hang just over the edge of the counter. Beside me, she is chopping carrots, onions, and green peppers for the meatloaf we will have for dinner. When she finishes, she pulls a cast iron skillet from one of her cabinets, and sets it on the stove to heat up. She takes a block of butter from the refrigerator, slices off a pat or two, and tosses it into the warming skillet. Once the butter is bubbling, in one swift motion she brushes the vegetables with one hand from the cutting board into the pan. There is a sureness and a knowing in the way she moves around her kitchen, and without disrupting her rhythm, she reaches into the cookie jar, hands me a gingerbread man, and kisses my forehead.

Wade in the water, she sings under her breath, almost to herself. *Wade in the water, children. Wade in the water. God's gonna trouble the water.*

As a young child, I did not know that my enslaved ancestors sang this song in the night, to help light the path of liberation for each other. I did not know that my grandmother's mother, and her mother before her, carried this melody on their lips and in their blood. I did not know that my grandmother sang this when she needed the comfort of remembering a time when *she* felt small and safe, sitting in a kitchen while food was being prepared. I did not understand how singing songs could save them.

There's much I still don't understand. I've recently moved to the mountains of Southern Appalachia, a place that feels so resonant that it almost hums in my body, a place dotted with my family's history, particularly my mother's family. The land is familiar, in a long, old way of recognition. As I walk the city streets or venture out to hike the hills, I look around thinking, *this is home*. And yet. I'm still feeling displaced.

It's home, but also not quite home. I don't always remember my way to the grocery store. I don't run into people I know when I run errands. A plant in my yard I did not recognize gave me hives. It tends to be cloudier here, and my mood has dipped from the lack of sunlight. My heart may know it's home here, but my body has not yet adjusted to life's new rhythms.

In much the same way, I look around at this country and know that I belong to it. My people were forced to pick cotton here, their sweat and blood quenching the thirst of Empire. My people emigrated here, Irish settlers who were the first to live on America's original mountainous frontier because they were poor and that was where land was cheapest. And some of my people were simply already here, living in fluency with the earth and sky, before they were massacred, the survivors forced away from the land they honored and cherished. I'm as American as it comes. This place, and my intimate relationship with its marginalization and oppression, is in my blood.

And yet.

I'm still feeling displaced in this particular moment of our nation's history. *How can this be my home?* I often find myself wondering. I

wonder, despite the knowledge that the beast of white supremacy is also as American as it comes.

The stories of my people, my own personal family history, have nearly vanished as many of the elders have died and their children live lives disconnected from each other. Though my memories of my grandmother are everything memories of a grandmother should be—idyllic, warm, and comforting—I wish I knew more of her story. I want to know what it was like for her to be a young Black woman attending college in Greensboro, North Carolina in the late 1940s. I want to know what it was like to marry a man with drive and ambition, despite—or perhaps because of—the color of his skin. I want to know what it was like for her to be a housewife in the 50s, living in a white neighborhood, and sending her children to be among the first to desegregate white schools in the area.

I want to know these things because I am fairly certain my grandmother was something of a heroine in the face of her own particular moment in this nation's history. I want to know that I inherited her courage, her dignity, and her grace. I want to know how she formed community; if she wore a mask to hide her vulnerabilities, similar to the one Paul Laurence Dunbar so elegantly describes in his poem, "We Wear the Mask:"

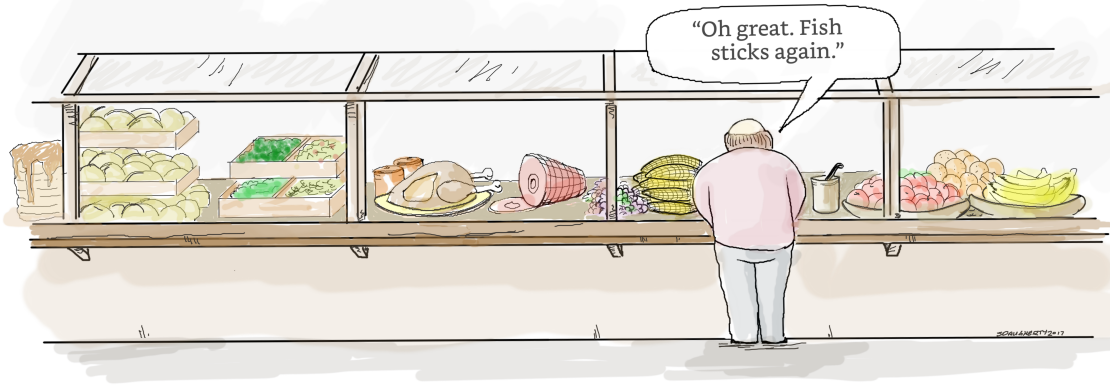
*We wear the mask that grins and lies,
That hides our cheeks and shades our eyes...
We smile, but, O great Christ our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise...
We wear the mask.*

I want to know all the tiny facets of her beautiful, full-dimensional humanity.

Our country has been beset with troubles since its inception, with power and greed and patriarchy doing what power and greed and patriarchy do. We see the consequences—in the environment, in impoverished communities, and in the politics of calculated indifference. But we also see the people who rise up to resist, to advocate change, to write poetry, to serve as healers. There are hallowed names in that canon, names like Phyllis Wheatley, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, Audre Lorde, Alice Walker, and bell hooks. They are bright lights that we can look to for inspiration and for hope; to absorb their stories is powerful, almost as if by osmosis we can better learn how to grieve, heal, and mend the breaches that divide us.

And: It's become equally important for me to chase the desire for stories of those whose names aren't well known, names no one may ever really know. Women like my grandmother, or perhaps yours, who may not have been on the front lines of change, but whose presence and quiet perseverance made a difference in her community. I dream that as we continue to move through history, we'll find our feet, discovering our balance: even in unexpected, mundane places like kitchens—cooking in rhythm, singing songs of liberation; echoing our past and informing our future.

CARTOON by Steve Daugherty



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