



Community Poetry Night: Connection

Two River Theater

Saturday, April 25 | 7PM

“Hope is the thing with feathers (254)”

Emily Dickinson: 1830-1886

United States

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,
And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.
I've heard it in the chillest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

“Paul Robeson”

Gwendolyn Brooks: 1917-2000

United States

That Time, We All Heard It.

That time

cool and clear,

cutting across the hot grit of the day.

The major Voice.

The adult Voice

forgoing Rolling River,

forgoing tearful tale of bale and barge

and other symptoms of an old despond.

Warning, in music-words

devout and large,

that we are each other's

harvest:

we are each other's

business:

we are each other's

magnitude and bond.

“Perhaps the World Ends Here”

Joy Harjo: 1951-

United States

The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live.

The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table. So it has been since creation, and it will go on.

We chase chickens or dogs away from it. Babies teethe at the corners. They scrape their knees under it.

It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human. We make men at it, we make women.

At this table we gossip, recall enemies and the ghosts of lovers.

Our dreams drink coffee with us as they put their arms around our children. They laugh with us at our poor falling-down selves and as we put ourselves back together once again at the table.

This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun.

Wars have begun and ended at this table. It is a place to hide in the shadow of terror. A place to celebrate the terrible victory.

We have given birth on this table, and have prepared our parents for burial here.

At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and remorse. We give thanks.

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite.

“Love Comes Quietly”
Robert Creeley: 1926-2005
United States

Love comes quietly,
finally, drops
about me, on me,
in the old ways.

What did I know
thinking myself
able to go
alone all the way.

“Today”

**Billy Collins: 1941-
United States**

If ever there were a spring day so perfect,
so uplifted by a warm intermittent breeze

that it made you want to throw
open all the windows in the house

and unlatch the door to the canary's cage,
indeed, rip the little door from its jamb,

a day when the cool brick paths
and the garden bursting with peonies

seemed so etched in sunlight
that you felt like taking

a hammer to the glass paperweight
on the living room end table,

releasing the inhabitants
from their snow-covered cottage

so they could walk out,
holding hands and squinting

into this larger dome of blue and white,
well, today is just that kind of day.

“The Wall Hanging I Never Noticed”

Dorothea Lasky: 1978-

United States

I never noticed before
How the red flowers hang from the blue branches
I never noticed before the light in this room
I never noticed the way the air is cool again
I never noticed anything but you
But you but you
So that I couldn't sleep
I never noticed what was anything but you
Until I noticed you
And could not help it
Until I noticed you I could not help it
Until you made the red flowers alive again
Until the blue branches
The lemons you loved, but also the way you loved me, too
Until all of this I never noticed you
But once I did
I never minded noticing
I never stopped noticing
Until I noticed you
I never stopped noticing
Until you, I never stopped

“Housekeeping”

Natasha Trethewey: 1966-

United States

We mourn the broken things, chair legs
wrenched from their seats, chipped plates,
the threadbare clothes. We work the magic
of glue, drive the nails, mend the holes.
We save what we can, melt small pieces
of soap, gather fallen pecans, keep neck bones
for soup. Beating rugs against the house,
we watch dust, lit like stars, spreading
across the yard. Late afternoon, we draw
the blinds to cool the rooms, drive the bugs
out. My mother irons, singing, lost in reverie.
I mark the pages of a mail-order catalog,
listen for passing cars. All day we watch
for the mail, some news from a distant place.

“[Sonnets are full of love, and this my tome]”

Christina Rossetti:1830-1894

England

Sonnets are full of love, and this my tome
Has many sonnets: so here now shall be
One sonnet more, a love sonnet, from me
To her whose heart is my heart's quiet home,
To my first Love, my Mother, on whose knee
I learnt love-lore that is not troublesome;
Whose service is my special dignity,
And she my loadstar while I go and come.
And so because you love me, and because
I love you, Mother, I have woven a wreath
Of rhymes wherewith to crown your honoured name:
In you not fourscore years can dim the flame
Of love, whose blessed glow transcends the laws
Of time and change and mortal life and death.

“genetics”

**Jacqueline Woodson: 1963-
United States**

My mother has a gap between
her two front teeth. So does Daddy Gunnar.
Each child in this family has the same space
connecting us.

Our baby brother, Roman, was born pale as dust.
His soft brown curls and eyelashes stop
people on the street.
Whose angel child is this? they want to know.
When I say, My brother, the people
wear doubt
thick as a cape
until we smile
and the cape falls.

“What the Living Do”

Marie Howe: 1950-

United States

Johnny, the kitchen sink has been clogged for days,
some utensil probably fell down there.

And the Drano won't work but smells dangerous,
and the crusty dishes have piled up

waiting for the plumber I still haven't called. This is
the everyday we spoke of.

It's winter again: the sky's a deep, headstrong blue,
and the sunlight pours through

the open living-room windows because the heat's on
too high in here and I can't turn it off.

For weeks now, driving, or dropping a bag of
groceries in the street, the bag breaking,

I've been thinking: This is what the living do. And
yesterday, hurrying along those
wobbly bricks in the Cambridge sidewalk, spilling
my coffee down my wrist and sleeve,

I thought it again, and again later, when buying a
hairbrush: This is it.

Parking. Slamming the car door shut in the cold.
What you called that yearning.

What you finally gave up. We want the spring to
come and the winter to pass. We want
whoever to call or not call, a letter, a kiss—we want
more and more and then more of it.

But there are moments, walking, when I catch a
glimpse of myself in the window glass,
say, the window of the corner video store, and I'm
gripped by a cherishing so deep

for my own blowing hair, chapped face, and
unbuttoned coat that I'm speechless:

I am living. I remember you.

“A History Without Suffering”

E.A. Markham: 1939-2008

Montserrat

In this poem there is no suffering.
It spans hundreds of years and records
no deaths, connecting when it can,
those moments where people are healthy

and happy, content to be alive. A Chapter,
maybe a Volume, shorn of violence
consists of an adult reading aimlessly.
This line is the length of a full life

smuggled in while no one was plotting
against a neighbour, except in jest.
Then, after a gap, comes Nellie. She
is in a drought-fisted field

with a hoe. This is her twelfth year
on the land, and today her back
doesn't hurt. Catechisms of self-pity
and of murder have declared a day's truce

in the Civil War within her. So today,
we can bring Nellie, content with herself,
with the world, into our History.
For a day. In the next generation

we find a suitable subject camping
near the border of a divided country:
for a while no one knows how near. For these
few lines she is ours. But how about

the lovers? you ask, the freshly-washed
body close to yours; sounds, smells, tastes;
anticipation of the young, the edited memory
of the rest of us? How about thoughts

higher than their thinkers?... Yes, yes.

Give them half a line and a mass of footnotes:
they have their own privileged history,
like inherited income beside our husbandry.

We bring our History up to date
in a city like London: someone's just paid
the mortgage, is free of guilt
and not dying of cancer; and going

past the news-stand, doesn't see a headline
advertising torture. This is all
recommended reading, but in small doses.
It shows you can avoid suffering, if you try.

“Biography of LeBron as Ohio”
Sean Thomas Dougherty: 1965-
United States

When is a poem one word? Even at 17 he was Baraka
on the court, Coltrane gold toned, a kind of running riff,
more than boy-child, man-child, he was one word like Prince.
How back in those drunken days when I still
ran in bars & played schoolyard ball
& wagered fives & tens, me & my colleague
the psych-prof drove across Eastern Ohio
just to see this kid from powerhouse St. Vincent,
grown out of rust-belt-bent-rims, tripped
with the hype & hope & hip hop
blaring from his headphones, all rubber soled
& grit as the city which birthed him.
We watched him rise that night scoring over 35,
drove back across the quiet cut cornfields
& small towns of Ohio, back to the places
where we slept knowing that Jesus had been reborn, black
& beautiful with a sweatband crown rimming his brow.
He was so much more than flipping burgers & fries,
more than 12-hour shifts at the steel plant in Cleveland.
More than the shut-down mill in Youngstown.
More than that kid selling meth in Ashtabula.
He was every kid, every street, every silo, he was white
& black & brown & migrant kids working farms.
He was the prince of stutter-step & pause. He was the new
King. We knew he was coming back the day after he left
his house in Bath Township. He never sold it.
Someone fed his fish for years. Perhaps our hope? Fuck Miami.
Leave Wade to wade through the Hurricane rain. LeBron is
remembering that woman washing the linoleum floor, that man
punching his punch card. He drives a Camaro, the cool kid
Ohio car driving through any Main Street. He is the toll-taker, &
he is the ticket out.
He keeps index cards documenting
his opponents' moves. One leans forward before he drives.
One always swipes with his left hand. The details like a preacher
studying the gospel. He studies the game like a

mathematician conjugating equations, but when he moves he is a
choreography,
a conductor passing the ball like a baton. He is a burst of cinders
at the mill. He is a chorus of children calling his name.
The blistered hands of man stacking boxes
in Sandusky, the long wait for work in Lorain.
A sapling bends
& reaches in all directions
before it becomes a tree. A ball is a key to a lock.
A ball is the opposite of Glock.
America who sings your praises,
while tying the rope, everyone waiting for Caesar to fall,
back-stabbing media hype city betrayed
by white people with racist signs.
I watch the kids play ball
in the Heights, witness this they say. We will rise. I watched
LeBron arrive & leave, I walked, I gave up drinking
as he went off & won a ring. The children's chorus calls out sing
brother, sing. Everything is black. Storm clouds gather
out on Lake Erie. But the old flower-hatted women
at the Baptist church are heading out praise cards,
registering teenagers to vote. To turn a few words into a sentence.
He is a glossary of jam, & yes he is corporate
chugging down green bubbly Sprite, running in Beats head
phones, he is Dunkin his donut, he is Nike, witness, ripped.
On a spring day in Akron a
chorus of children is chanting his name on the court by the
chain-link fence. He is forged steel, turning his skinny body into
muscle, years of nights lifting, chiseling, cutting, studying.
Watching the tape. To make a new kind of sentence. He is passing
out T-shirts, this long hot bloody summer he was returned
to the rusted rim along the big lake. He is stutter-step. He is
spinning wheel. He has a cool new hat. He is speaking of dead
black children. He is giving his time. To make the crowd
sway like wind through a field of corn.
Does LeBron think of dying?
Does the grape think of dying as it withers on the vine by
the lake? Or does it dream of the wine it will become?
He is wearing a shirt that says I Can't Breathe.
They said he was arrogant. I said he was just Ohio.

He married his high school sweetheart. Bravado laid out
on the court. No back down, he is Biggie with a basketball inside
of a mic, no ballistics, just ballet. He is Miles Davis cool,
quietly cerebral, turning his back, tossing up
chalk like blue smoke, blue notes, blues. He is Akron,
Columbus, he is heart & Heat turned to lake effect blizzards,
freighters frozen in ice, looking for work & no money to eat.
He is Ashtabula & Toledo. He is carrying so many across the
river, up through Marietta.
The grapevines are ripe in Geneva.
He returns, Man-child, Man-strong, Man-smart, Man-
mountain, Mansfield to East Akron, minus into Man, or should we
say Mamma raised? Single mother fed, shy child, quiet child
who grew, who suffered & taught his body to sing, his
mother worked how many shifts, doing this, doing that,
never gave up for her son. He is third shift at the rubber
plant in winter, he is farm hands & auto parts piecework
& long nights the men at the bar, eyes on the television.
The lake tonight is black as newly laid asphalt.
There are no ellipses. He is turning paragraphs
into chapters. Long ago the hoop Gods made this deal
at the crossroads, Old Scratch is flipping the pages
of his program & waiting high in the stands—to belong to a
place most people would call
nowhere, to show the world how tough we truly are,
twelve-hour shifts at the Rubber plant in Akron. How he is, how
he is a part of this asphalt court we call Ohio, & how we
suffer, & how we shine.

“Toasting Marshmallows”

**Kristine O’Connell George: 1954-
United States**

I am a careful marshmallow toaster,
a patient marshmallow roaster,
turning my stick oh-so-slowly,
taking my time, checking often.

This is art---
a time of serious reflection
as my pillowed confection
slowly reaches golden perfection.

My brother
 grabs ‘em with grubby hands
 shoves ‘em on the stick
 burns ‘em to a crisp
 cools ‘em off
 flicks soot
 eats quick.

I’m still turning my stick.
He’s already eaten six

“The Passionate Shepherd to His Love”
Christopher Marlowe: 1564-1593
England

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove,
That Valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
Woods, or steepy mountain yields.

And we will sit upon the Rocks,
Seeing the Shepherds feed their flocks,
By shallow Rivers to whose falls
Melodious birds sing Madrigals.

And I will make thee beds of Roses
And a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle
Embroidered all with leaves of Myrtle;

A gown made of the finest wool
Which from our pretty Lambs we pull;
Fair lined slippers for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold;

A belt of straw and Ivy buds,
With Coral clasps and Amber studs:
And if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me, and be my love.

The Shepherds' Swains shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May-morning:
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me, and be my love.

“The Spire”

**Ellen Bryant Voigt: 1943-
United States**

In the Bavarian steeple, on the hour,
two figures emerge from their scalloped house
carrying sledges that they clap, in turn,
against the surface of the bell. By legend
they are summer and winter, youth and age,
as though the forces of plenty and of loss
played equally on the human soul, extracted
easily the same low bronze note spreading
upward from the encumbrance of the village,
past alluvial fields to the pocked highland
where cattle shift their massive heads
at this dissonance, this faint redundant
pressure in the ears, in the air.

From the village, the mountain seems
a single stone, a single blank completion.
Seeing the summit pierce the abstract heavens,
we reconstruct the valley on the mountain—
a shepherd propped against his crook, birds
enthralled on a branch, the branch feathering
the edge of the canvas—transposing
such forms as can extend the flawed earth
and embody us, intact, unaltering, among
the soft surprising trees of childhood,
mimosa, honey locust and willow.

Wood in the midst of woods, the village
houses are allied in a formal shape
beside a stream, the streets concluding
at the monument. Again the ravishing moment
of the bell: the townspeople, curious
or accustomed, stop to count the strokes,
odd or even—the confectioner counting out
the lavender candies for his customer,
the butcher, the greengrocer, the surgeon
and the constable—as the housewife

stands on the stoop, shaking her mop,
and sees the dust briefly veil the air,
an algebra of swirling particles.

“Ode to Wine”

Pablo Neruda: 1904-1973

Chile

Day-colored wine,
night-colored wine,
wine with purple feet
or wine with topaz blood,
wine,
starry child
of earth,
wine, smooth
as a golden sword,
soft
as lascivious velvet,
wine, spiral-seashelled
and full of wonder,
amorous,
marine;
never has one goblet contained you,
one song, one man,
you are choral, gregarious,
at the least, you must be shared.
At times
you feed on mortal
memories;
your wave carries us
from tomb to tomb,
stonecutter of icy sepulchers,
and we weep
transitory tears;
your
glorious
spring dress
is different,
blood rises through the shoots,
wind incites the day,
nothing is left
of your immutable soul.
Wine

stirs the spring, happiness
bursts through the earth like a plant,
walls crumble,
and rocky cliffs,
chasms close,
as song is born.
A jug of wine, and thou beside me
in the wilderness,
sang the ancient poet.
Let the wine pitcher
add to the kiss of love its own.

My darling, suddenly
the line of your hip
becomes the brimming curve
of the wine goblet,
your breast is the grape cluster,
your nipples are the grapes,
the gleam of spirits lights your hair,
and your navel is a chaste seal
stamped on the vessel of your belly,
your love an inexhaustible
cascade of wine,
light that illuminates my senses,
the earthly splendor of life.

But you are more than love,
the fiery kiss,
the heat of fire,
more than the wine of life;
you are
the community of man,
translucency,
chorus of discipline,
abundance of flowers.
I like on the table,
when we're speaking,
the light of a bottle
of intelligent wine.
Drink it,

and remember in every
drop of gold,
in every topaz glass,
in every purple ladle,
that autumn labored
to fill the vessel with wine;
and in the ritual of his office,
let the simple man remember
to think of the soil and of his duty,
to propagate the canticle of the wine.

“Ode with Interruptions”

Rick Barot: 1969-

United States

Someone is in the kitchen washing the dishes.
Someone is in the living room watching the news.

Someone in a bedroom is holding a used stamp
with tweezers and adding it to his collection.

Someone is scolding a dog, barking now for
decades, a different dog for each of the decades.

Someone is reading the paper and listening to
a baseball game on the radio at the same time —

At the base of the altar, you drop some coins
into a wooden box and the lights reveal the vast,

worn painting in front of you. The holy subject
is illuminated for a few minutes before it is dim

again. There are churches all over Italy where
you can do this. The smell of incense, stone —

Someone is taking the ashes out of the small
cave of the fireplace, though this might have been

a hundred years ago, when the house was new
and we didn't live in it. Someone is writing

a letter on thin blue paper. Someone is putting
down the needle onto a spinning record, just so.

On the couch, someone is sleeping. Upstairs,
someone is looking into the bathroom mirror —

While we were waiting for her surgery to finish,
I walked around the hospital and came across

a waiting room that had an enormous aquarium.
The black fish with red stripes, the yellow fish
with blue stripes, the triangle fish, the cylinder
fish, the little orange schools and the cellophane
glints of their quick turns in the box of water,
among arrangements of coral, the city of bones —

Someone is walking down the creaking staircase
in the dark, a hand sliding on the rail. Someone

is on the telephone, which means nobody else
can use it for another hour. Someone in his room

is doing homework, me or someone almost like
me, twenty, fifty years ago. Someone is reading

in her room. Someone is talking to the gray wall.
Someone is talking to the gray wall. In summer,

on a hot afternoon, someone peels at a corner
of wallpaper and sees more wallpaper beneath —

I used to think that to write poems, to make art,
meant trying to transcend the prosaic elements

of the self, to arrive at some essential plane, where
poems were supposed to succeed. I was wrong.

“Wild Geese”

Mary Oliver: 1935-2019

United States

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

“The Builders”

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: 1807-1882

United States

All are architects of Fate,
Working in these walls of Time;
Some with massive deeds and great,
Some with ornaments of rhyme.

Nothing useless is, or low;
Each thing in its place is best;
And what seems but idle show
Strengthens and supports the rest.

For the structure that we raise,
Time is with materials filled;
Our to-days and yesterdays
Are the blocks with which we build.

Truly shape and fashion these;
Leave no yawning gaps between;
Think not, because no man sees,
Such things will remain unseen.

In the elder days of Art,
Builders wrought with greatest care
Each minute and unseen part;
For the Gods see everywhere.

Let us do our work as well,
Both the unseen and the seen;
Make the house, where Gods may dwell,
Beautiful, entire, and clean.

Else our lives are incomplete,
Standing in these walls of Time,
Broken stairways, where the feet
Stumble as they seek to climb.

Build to-day, then, strong and sure,
With a firm and ample base;
And ascending and secure
Shall to-morrow find its place.

Thus alone can we attain
To those turrets, where the eye
Sees the world as one vast plain,
And one boundless reach of sky.

“Spanglish”

Tato Laviera: 1950-2013

Puerto Rico

pues estoy creando spanglish
bi-cultural systems
scientific lexicographical
inter-textual integrations
two expressions
existentially wired
two dominant languages
continentally abrazándose
en colloquial combate
en las aceras del soil
imperio spanglish emerges
control pandillaje
sobre territorio bi-lingual
las novelas mexicanas
mixing with radiatorocknroll
condimented cocina lore
immigrant/migrant
nasal mispronouncements
baraja chismeteos social club
hip-hop prieto street salsa
corner soul enmixturando
spanish pop farándula
standard english classroom
with computer technicalities
spanglish is literally perfect
spanglish is ethnically snobbish
spanglish is cara-holy inteligencia
which u.s. slang do you speak?

“The Friend”
Matt Hart: 1969-
United States
For Nate Pritts

The friend lives half in the grass
and half in the chocolate cake,
walks over to your house in the bashful light
of November, or the forceful light of summer.
You put your hand on her shoulder,
or you put your hand on his shoulder.
The friend is indefinite. You are both
so tired, no one ever notices the sleeping bags
inside you and under your eyes when you're talking
together about the glue of this life, the sticky
saturation of bodies into darkness. The friend's crisis
of faith about faith is unnerving in its power
to influence belief, not in or toward some other
higher power, but away from all power in the grass
or the lake with your hand on her shoulder, your hand
on his shoulder. You tell the friend the best things
you can imagine, and every single one of them has
already happened, so you recount them
of great necessity with nostalgic, atomic ferocity,
and one by one by one until many. The eggbirds whistle
the gargantuan trees. The noiserocks fall twisted
into each other's dreams, their colorful paratrooping,
their skinny dark jeans, little black walnuts
to the surface of this earth. You and the friend
remain twisted together, thinking your simultaneous
and inarticulate thoughts in physical lawlessness,
in chemical awkwardness. It is too much
to be so many different things at once. The friend
brings black hole candy to your lips, and jumping
off the rooftops of your city, the experience.
So much confusion — the several layers of exhaustion,
and being a friend with your hands in your pockets,
and the friend's hands in your pockets.
O bitter black walnuts of this parachuted earth!
O gongbirds and appleflocks! The friend

puts her hand on your shoulder. The friend
puts his hand on your shoulder. You find
a higher power when you look.

“Divorced Fathers and Pizza Crusts”

Mark Halliday:1949-

United States

The connection between divorced fathers and pizza crusts is understandable. The divorced father does not cook confidently. He wants his kid to enjoy dinner.

The entire weekend is supposed to be fun. Kids love pizza. For some reason involving soft warmth and malleability

kids approve of melted cheese on pizza years before they will tolerate cheese in other situations. So the divorced father takes the kid and the kid's friend out for pizza. The kids eat much faster than the dad. Before the dad has finished his second slice,

the kids are playing a video game or being Ace Ventura or blowing spitballs through straws, making this hail that can't quite be cleaned up. There are four slices left and the divorced father doesn't want them wasted, there has been enough waste already; he sits there

in his windbreaker finishing the pizza. It's good except the crust is actually not so great— after the second slice the crust is basically a chore— so you leave it. You move on to the next loaded slice. Finally there you are amid rims of crust.

All this is understandable. There's no dark conspiracy. Meanwhile the kids are having a pretty good time which is the whole point. So the entire evening makes clear sense. Now the divorced father gathers the sauce-stained napkins for the trash and dumps them

and dumps the rims of crust which are not corpses on a battlefield. Understandability fills the pizza shop so thoroughly there's no room for anything else. Now he's at the door summoning the kids and they follow, of course they do, he's a dad.

“Human Family”

Maya Angelou: 1928-2014

United States

I note the obvious differences
in the human family.

Some of us are serious,
some thrive on comedy.

Some declare their lives are lived
as true profundity,
and others claim they really live
the real reality.

The variety of our skin tones
can confuse, bemuse, delight,
brown and pink and beige and purple,
tan and blue and white.

I've sailed upon the seven seas
and stopped in every land,
I've seen the wonders of the world
not yet one common man.

I know ten thousand women
called Jane and Mary Jane,
but I've not seen any two
who really were the same.

Mirror twins are different
although their features jibe,
and lovers think quite different thoughts
while lying side by side.

We love and lose in China,
we weep on England's moors,
and laugh and moan in Guinea,
and thrive on Spanish shores.

We seek success in Finland,

are born and die in Maine.
In minor ways we differ,
in major we're the same.

I note the obvious differences
between each sort and type,
but we are more alike, my friends,
than we are unlike.

We are more alike, my friends,
than we are unlike.

We are more alike, my friends,
than we are unlike.

“Harold’s Chicken Shack #86”

Nate Marshall: 1989-

United States

we’re trying to eliminate the shack.

— *Kristen Pierce, Harold’s CEO & daughter of founder Harold Pierce*

when i went to summer camp the white kids had a tendency to shorten names of important institutions. make Northwestern University into *NU*. international relations into *IR*. everybody started calling me *Nate*. before this i imagined myself

Nathaniel A. maybe even *N. Armstead* to big up my granddad. i wrote my whole name on everything. eventually i started unintentionally introducing myself as *Nate*. it never occurred to me that they could escape the knowing of my name’s real length. as a shorty

most the kids in my neighborhood couldn’t say my name. *Mick-daniel, Nick-thaniel, MacDonnel* shot across the courts like wild heaves toward the basket. the subconscious visual of a chicken shack seems a poor fit for national expansion.

Harold’s Chicken is easier, sounds like Columbus’s flag stuck into a cup of cole slaw. shack sounds too much like home of poor people, like haven for weary like building our own.

“Leisure”

W. H. Davies: 1871-1940

England

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.

No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.

No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like skies at night.

No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance.

No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began.

A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

“Love in the Time of Coronavirus”

By Nikita Gill:

India

For Trista Mateer

Today, we stockpile empathy
We supply love and good energy
We sing to each other across buildings.
We say ‘I love you’ through social distancing.

Do you know that writing letters
to our friends is back in fashion?
And that we finally have time to read more books,
whether historical or fiction?

My cousin told me she hadn’t seen
such a blue sky in her city before.
My uncle went on his first walk in the woods.
He heard a bird sing since the first time he went to war.

Even in sickness, this world
is allowed to be beautiful.
And we are still allowed to love it,
for there is always room for hope.

This is just me checking in
sending you the moon as a poem,
praying and wishing for us all
a speedy recovery.

And if nothing else,
There will always be poetry.
We will always have poetry.

“Peanut Butter”
Eileen Myles: 1949-
United States

I am always hungry
& wanting to have
sex. This is a fact.
If you get right
down to it the new
unprocessed peanut
butter is no damn
good & you should
buy it in a jar as
always in the
largest supermarket
you know. And
I am an enemy
of change, as
you know. All
the things I
embrace as new
are in
fact old things,
re-released: swimming,
the sensation of
being dirty in
body and mind
summer as a
time to do
nothing and make
no money. Prayer
as a last re-
sort. Pleasure
as a means,
and then a
means again
with no ends
in sight. I am
absolutely in opposition
to all kinds of

goals. I have
no desire to know
where this, anything
is getting me.
When the water
boils I get
a cup of tea.
Accidentally I
read all the
works of Proust.
It was summer
I was there
so was he. I
write because
I would like
to be used for
years after
my death. Not
only my body
will be compost
but the thoughts
I left during
my life. During
my life I was
a woman with
hazel eyes. Out
the window
is a crooked
silo. Parts
of your
body I think
of as stripes
which I have
learned to
love along. We
swim naked
in ponds &
I write be-
hind your
back. My thoughts

about you are
not exactly
forbidden, but
exalted because
they are useless,
not intended
to get you
because I have
you & you love
me. It's more
like a playground
where I play
with my reflection
of you until
you come back
and into the
real you I
get to sink
my teeth. With
you I know how
to relax. &
so I work
behind your
back. Which
is lovely.
Nature
is out of control
you tell me &
that's what's so
good about
it. I'm immoderately
in love with you,
knocked out by
all your new
white hair

why shouldn't
something
I have always
known be the

very best there
is. I love
you from my
childhood,
starting back
there when
one day was
just like the
rest, random
growth and
breezes, constant
love, a sand-
wich in the
middle of
day,
a tiny step
in the vastly
conventional
path of
the Sun. I
squint. I
wink. I
take the
ride.