



Rural Oklahoma Museum of Poetry  
Racial Justice Poem Contest 2020  
WINNERS

1<sup>st</sup> Place: Professional

Dr Dawn Karima, Cherokee NC

The Things We Forgive

The Things we forgive begin with a stutter,  
Weave into a whisper,  
Wrapped in a scream.  
We sew medicine into beads and feathers,  
And leather, to make them heal in our dreams.

The weight of the heart is a cruel transaction,  
Measured in virus, wind and blood,  
And mud.  
Water, a weapon of too much or too little,  
Exacting revenge for our toxins in tears.  
Years of crying, our relatives fight dying,  
Weary of the poisonous Things we forgive.

2<sup>nd</sup> Place: Professional

Ruth Weinstein, Marshal AR

I WILL NEVER BE  
(a ghazal)

Old white woman in the woods--could go at a POP!,  
But this I know, I will never be shot by a cop.

Privilege--and danger--in nature surround me,  
But I know this, I will never be killed by a cop.

Lightning could fry me, a giant tree fell me,  
But I will certainly never be tased by a cop.

A copperhead could strike me, a rabid bat bite me,  
But I damn well know I will never be choked by a cop.

Raging rivers could sweep my car away, with me,  
But I will never ever be drowned by a cop.

With luck I will die in my garden, gracefully,  
But I will never be shot by a cop.

Where is blind Lady Justice in America, the free,  
When even one black life is murdered--yes lynched--  
by another acquitted cop?

3<sup>rd</sup> Place: Professional

Darrel Dionne, Norman OK

For George Floyd

How can I keep quiet  
When the very elements speak up  
Wind howls  
Rain weeps  
Blood of Able  
They said he resisted  
Already cuffed  
One minute  
Face pressed in the concrete  
Knee on his neck  
Two minutes  
Knee in his back  
For the crime of being black  
In America  
Three minutes  
He called for his mother  
Four minutes  
I can't breathe  
Five minutes  
I can't breathe  
Six minutes  
I can't breathe  
Seven minutes  
I can't breathe  
Eight minutes  
Silence  
Nine minutes  
Silence

Silence

Silence

1<sup>st</sup> Place: 18 & Over

Brittanei Wayne, Kansas City MO

The Journey of my Ancestors

I am the dream my African ancestors had while sleeping at the bottom of the ship that transported them from home to a foreign land.

I hear the echoes that cried at midnight when the moon lit a path from home to hell.

Shackled and bound.

Working and slaving.

Lynching and burning.

Running and hiding.

Escaping the white massa.

Dreaming and stealing our way north to freedom.

Freedom that cost us, from the cotton fields to the back seat of a city bus.

From hanging deep down in the bayou to strange fruit full of black bodies swinging from the ropes of trees.

Back and forth we sway.

From one generation to the next.

Yet we march on tired feet.

Bodies bloodied.

Hearts bruised.

We are the resilient.

The brilliant.

The past, present, and the future.

Beautiful hues of brown that are deeper than Mississippi muddiest clay.

We are them, they, and here to stay.

We are bold.

Beautiful.

Black.

We are stolen Royalty.

Ready to take our rightful throne and world back.

2<sup>nd</sup> Place (TIE): 18 & Over

Bill Guthrie, Locust Grove OK

True

Packed in a flatbed truck, my father would drive to pick them up each May  
From Louisiana and areas all around the South  
Before the ripening cotton bolls called them to other fields.  
They'd work for my kinfolk picking strawberries in steep, rocky hills  
The work was hard and hot and backbreaking

"They stayed in the n\_\_\_\_\_ houses out back, that's what we called them  
We didn't think anything about it"  
I heard this all my life.  
Didn't they know-do they now?

My young curiosity, peaked "what are those fields of gold flowers, with fuzzy brown  
middles" I'd watch them fly past my side window-living streams of sunlight  
"Those are n\_\_\_\_\_ navels"

I didn't ask again.

"Hey, guess what"  
I replied instantly, reflexively, without thinking  
"You're a n\_\_\_\_\_ and I'm not"  
Biology was no place for this  
Tara, my friend, up until then  
Cleaning the lab station just behind

I sensed her jolt and freeze as the universe realigned  
Gut punched and head panicked  
Embarrassment and shame swarmed  
A stinging hive of wasps

I never did apologize  
I'll never know why

This is where this tale ends  
The cycle commenced, the circle unbroken  
Indoctrination, it would appear, was complete

Or was it...

2<sup>nd</sup> Place (TIE): 18 & Over

Jen Wilson, Madison WI

Lying in Wait (for Breonna Taylor)

A hundred days and the hyenas  
Roamed free, teeth bared and hate  
Dripping from jowls long used to snapping  
At undefended necks.

A hundred days and the white paper with ink-black  
Words lied in a file: no injuries  
While all the while she was laying in the black  
Of the body bag.

Three months of Sunday and the hyenas lied  
In wait: "i just want to get on with my life"  
Blackness of woman buried, lying, lying, lying.

3<sup>rd</sup> Place: 18 & Over

Regina Philpott McLemore, Stilwell OK

### RACIAL REVELATION

My granny's skin was like warm honey,  
My cousin's as dark as strong coffee.  
My father was light olive, my mother a pink rose.  
I grew up loving people in all shades of cream and toast.

But I didn't see a black man until I was half-grown,  
And I didn't understand what he faced every day.  
Now, I am older and wiser,  
But I remain remarkably ignorant.

What little black babies absorb through osmosis,  
I learned from history books and second-hand experiences.  
All I could offer was sympathy and well wishes,  
And prayers for peace and equality for all.

But when I saw you on the street, bloody and beaten,  
When I saw you on the sidewalk, choked and cold.  
My heart and my humanity were quickened,  
And my voice screamed out, "No more!"

1<sup>st</sup> Place: Under 18

Jamie Smith, Chicago IL

Walk

We walked out the same door  
And headed to our homes.  
Some of us made it home.  
Some of us did not.

If you are interested in  
Knowing which is which,  
You can come out in the street  
And be a part of the movement.

If you are interested in walking  
Home from school or walking  
From work or to school or to  
Any place, just come out.

Just come out and be here.

2<sup>nd</sup> Place: Under 18

Ivy Scott, Locust Grove OK

Colors of the Rainbow

People fighting people because the color of their skin  
It makes no sense because we are all human  
Black and white why is it a fight  
Hopefully equality is in sight  
We all cry tears  
But no skin color should cause fears  
We all bleed red  
We just have different wrapping paper because God said  
Let us come together and not apart  
Show that one beat can come from all hearts

3<sup>rd</sup> Place: Under 18

Alexis Copeland, Locust Grove OK

Not a color just accept me

Why don't you see me for what's inside of me?

I'm not a color or an enemy,

I'm a person living and breathing.

Get your knee off of me

I shouldn't have to scream help me .

I shouldn't be scared of the ones that swore  
to protect me

why can't this society just accept me?