

## *The Deaf Poets Society*, Issue 1: August 2016

### POETRY SECTION

#### Editors' Note

by Ava C. Cipri, Cyrée Jarelle Johnson, and Sarah Katz

As founding editors of *The Deaf Poets Society*—and as sick and disabled poets ourselves—we've set our sights on building a platform to amplify the voices of our fellow crips. This issue is our first go at achieving this goal, and we hope that it cracks that proverbial ceiling of beliefs about the disabled body. To say the least, we found reading work from every poet who submitted a challenging, critical process—and, above all, as a gift to ourselves and our community.

We wanted to hear the stories of those living boldly, like us, and often close to the edge. We wanted poems that illuminate the complex constellation that is our lives, poems that seethe from visions and thoughts that only a person with a disability could have. We wanted to present the work of those giving life and shape and form to wide-ranging experiences of disabled life—as a woman, as a Black person, as a member of the LGBTQ community—and then to submerge readers in that transformative ocean.

We sure got them. These are poems that dive deeply into expeditions of bodily consciousness, cresting the waves of a

spine with its *tender / earthquakes* and meeting at nerves that are *raw scarabs* ("I was thinking about trying to teach myself to play guitar in secret," by Jen Stein). The poems upend metaphor: *forty miles of bad road* ("Bad road" by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha); negotiate with the experience of an exorcism: *i won't believe the hands of my root woman can pull me out* ("Playing the D's" by Ashley Young); and meet with Beethoven in the flesh ("Counterpoint" by Raymond Luczak). These poems investigate bodily knowledge and its tendency, sometimes, to act apart from the wills of the mind.

Altogether, this inaugural issue includes twenty-three poems from thirteen poets whose sensibilities and voices range considerably, but are united in a fierce desire to see beyond the current rhetoric about disability. You'll notice that space in all its forms frequently appears as a motif. Celestial space is one image, but the spaces of silence, anxiety, nostalgia, tinnitus, birdsong, and even disco appear also. In addition, the prose poems in this issue take up space on the page, and, depending on a poem's content, makes certain demands of its readers; the lineated poems pull us slowly through, their elements lingering in the way that chronic pain lingers in us, ever-constant; and still other poems pinball across the page, giving form to frenetic sensory experience.

Ultimately, these are poems borne out of a necessary vulnerability and an intense love. We love this work and are honored to present this issue to you.

**Ava C. Cipri** teaches writing at Duquesne University. She holds an MFA from Syracuse University, where she edited *Salt Hill*. Ava's poetry and nonfiction appears or is forthcoming in *2River View*, *Cimarron Review*, *decomp*, *Drunken Boat*, *Rust + Moth*, *WHR*, *Whiskey Island Review*, and PROSODY: NPR-affiliate WESA's weekly show featuring the work of national writers. Her award-winning tanka sequence "From the Barre" is featured in AHA Books' *Twenty Years, Tanka Splendor*. She is anthologized in Red Moon Press' *Contemporary Haibun Anthology* and SUNY's *Unruly Catholic Women Writers II*. Next reincarnation she wants to be drawn with wings.

**Cyrée Jarelle Johnson** is a black non-binary essayist and poet living and working in Philadelphia, PA. Cyree's work explores femininity as resistance and rebellion, emerging femme thought, and community as a site of trauma. Their writing has appeared in digital and print outlets in the United States, Canada, and Europe including *Feministing*, *Black Girl Dangerous*, and most recently in the Spring 2016 issue of *Bedfellows*. Get in touch on their website [cyreejarellejohnson.com](http://cyreejarellejohnson.com).

**Sarah Katz** writes poetry, essays, and book reviews. Her work appears in *Deaf Lit Extravaganza*, *MiPOesias*, *RHINO Poetry*, and *The Rumpus*. She earned an M.F.A. in poetry

from American University, where she received the Myra Sklarew Award for her thesis. She has also been awarded the 2015 District Lit Prize and a residency at Vermont Studio Center. Her poetry manuscript, *Country of Glass*, was named a finalist by Robert Pinsky for Tupelo Press's 2016 Dorset Prize. Sarah lives with her husband, Jonathan, in Fairfax, Virginia, where she works as the Publications Assistant at the Association of Writers & Writing Programs.

## Disfigured Fame

by Andy Jackson

a disguise would only make you more conspicuous  
everyone knows you (or thinks they do)        it's never particular  
features—wheels, absent limb, pattern of skin—but the whole  
picture suffused with elephantine euphemism you know that guy  
he's really (pause) tall        stooped, am I crouching to duck under

the unsaid?        attention creates the body (breaks it in two)  
so in a recurring dream passenger in a familiar and enigmatic vehicle  
I'm too clumsily elongated to limbo the loping curve of powerlines  
crossing the road        my head makes it through but my back  
gets stuck every time        course I shrug off each line

only to awake        surface into the double-taking public, always  
before a thought or pause shoehorned into excess and defect (too  
human  
and not enough)        a word or a stare is a kind of foot-  
binding  
still we long to burrow into our own private (        ) knowing

a mirror can be an undisturbed surface  
slow caress of mist on water        a body  
can be a closed parenthesis ) or open (

## Author Photograph & Biography



[Image Description: B&W photo of a white man, poet Andy Jackson standing against a wall.]

Andy Jackson's poetry collection *Among the Regulars* (papertiger 2010) was shortlisted for the Kenneth Slessor Prize. He won the 2013 Whitmore Press Manuscript Prize with *the thin bridge*. His most recent book, *Immune Systems* (Transit Lounge), explores India and medical tourism. A forthcoming collection, *Music our bodies can't hold*, consists of portraits of other people with Marfan Syndrome. He is currently co-editing a disability themed issue

of *Southerly*, and is a PhD candidate at the University of Adelaide, investigating poetry and bodily otherness.

## Bike Commute

by Maria Rosa Mills

The heat. It rose out of the dark  
in sticky vapor. Evolution  
doesn't work in links,  
I learned in school, but biking,  
legs aflame, knees aching

their crooked aches, I really believed  
I was a half-creature.  
Part of a transition species.  
Like the fishes with half-legs,  
half-fins, I'd swim the humidity  
with. I wanted to believe

this body's limits weren't all there was.  
That my heaving, hamstrings tightening,  
lunging with wobbly quads--  
beyond that, the wet mouth kisses,  
catcalls, hand-jobs with our heads down  
in cars--all of it

was part of being a half-creature  
in a species of half-creatures  
each extending a failing limb  
toward what will come next.

## Author Photograph & Biography



[Image Description: A black and white photo of a smiling white woman with long, straight, dark hair wearing a white blouse and leaning against a tree.]

**Maria Rosa Mills** is currently pursuing an MFA in poetry writing at the University of Washington, in Seattle. A prior academic and research background—in marine biology and biomechanics—lends a scientific persuasion to her writing. Currently, Mills is interested in questions of interpersonal connection and genetic identity. Her work has appeared in *Fredericksburg Literary & Art Review*, *Paper Swans*, *Sun Star Review*, and *The Journal of Experimental Zoology*.

## Trading Threes

by Emily K. Michael

Step out onto the lawn at dusk, dog leash  
loose like reins in your fingers.  
Over the quiet jingle of collar,  
cardinal voices cross the yard.  
Crisp patterns of two notes clinking  
from separate trees, the cardinals stretch  
the ee to oo. A line with two  
repeats. The near bird calls,  
gets an answer some way down the street.  
A second response further away,  
then back to the first. Touch of  
overlap—another grabs on to that next  
line. Always in the same key. No body  
speeds up, slows down, backs off. All  
volumes shaded by geography.

## Author Photograph & Biography



[Image Description: A young white woman with a curly and dark brown bob smiles. She wears purple framed glasses and a top patterned with turquoise, black, and white flowers.]

**Emily K. Michael** is a blind poet, musician, and writing instructor living in Jacksonville, FL. Her poetry and essays have appeared in *Wordgathering*; *The Hopper*; *Artemis Journal*; *Compose Journal*; *Disability Rhetoric*; *Breath & Shadow*; *Bridge Eight*; *Narrative Inquiry in Bioethics*; *I Am Subject Stories: Women Awakening*; *BREVITY's* Nonfiction Blog, and *Mosaics: A Collection of Independent Women* (Vol. 2). She develops grammar workshops for multilingual learners and participates in local writing festivals. Find her on

Twitter (@ModwynEarendel) and at her blog On the  
Blink: <http://areyouseeingthis.wordpress.com>.

## Barometer

by Mary Peelen

I skied downhill in the dark  
white Michigan woods

accelerating,  
frictionless as a vector,

exhilarated with velocity,  
magnitude, and direction,

my hair aloft in the frigid air,  
long tail of the arrow.

As in all creation myths,  
the details were biological:

a cranium, a sassafras tree.  
The moon was astrological.

The collision was random  
as any subatomic event.

Its effect was small at first,  
evolving in complexity

and technical precision.

Migraine as meteorology.

Symptoms are quantifiable  
when a storm is on the way.

# Aurora Borealis

by Mary Peelen

Far north,  
a reckoning in the neon sky

blinding as an ocular migraine,  
its taste of iron on the tongue.

In the very nearly breathable  
realms of the atmosphere,

solar winds animate  
the earth's polar flowlines,

magnetic pole gone glinty  
with souls of old ghosts.

Oxygen and nitrogen collide,  
charged particles ignite,

green and violet night-flares  
reach toward heaven

like arms of the reclaimed  
at the rapture.

Neurological sequelae

caustic as Arctic weather

invent the need for odd belief  
as a means of salvation.

## Author Photograph & Biography



[Image Description: A white woman with a close-cropped strawberry blonde bob smiles in the direction of a red and green apple she holds in her hand. She's wearing a light blue t-shirt under a beige jacket and multiple gold-colored necklaces.]

**Mary Peelen** was born and raised in Michigan. Her poetry, fiction, and nonfiction have appeared in *Bennington Review*, *New American Writing*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Alaska*

*Quarterly Review*, and *Poetry Review* (UK), and are forthcoming in *Gulf Coast* and *Antioch Review*. Recipient of an MFA from San Francisco State University and an MDiv from the Graduate Theological Union, she lives in San Francisco.

## Dear Hearing World

by Raymond Antrobus

*after Danez Smith*

I have left Earth in search of sounder orbits, a solar system where the space between a star and a planet isn't empty. I have left a white beard of noise in my place and many of you won't know the difference. We are indeed the same volume, all of us eventually fade. I have left Earth in search of an audible God. I do not trust the sound of yours. You would not recognise my grandmother's *Hallelujah* if she had to sign it, you would have made her sit on her hands and put a ruler in her mouth as if measuring her distance from holy. Take your God back, though his songs are beautiful, they are not loud enough. I want the fate of Lazarus for every deaf school you've closed, every deaf child whose confidence has gone to a silent grave, every BSL user who has seen the annihilation of their language, I want these ghosts to haunt your tongue-tied hands. I have left Earth, I am equal parts sick of your "oh, I'm hard of hearing too" just because you've been on an airplane or suffered head colds. Your voice has always been the loudest sound in a room. I call you out for refusing to acknowledge sign language in classrooms, for assessing deaf students on what they can't say instead of what they can, we did not ask to be a part of the hearing world, we can't hear my joints crack but I can feel them. I am sick of sounding out your rules—you tell me I breathe too loud, and it's rude to

make noise when I eat. Sent me to speech therapists, said I was speaking a language of holes, I was pronouncing what I heard but your judgment made my syllables disappear, your magic master trick hearing world—drowning out the quiet, bursting all speech bubbles in my graphic childhood, you are glad to benefit from audio supremacy, I tried, hearing people, I tried to love you, but you laughed at my deaf grammar, I used commas not full stops because everything I said kept running away, I mulled over long paragraphs because I didn't know what a "natural break" sounded like, you erased what could have always been poetry (strike that out). You erased what could have always been poetry. You taught me I was inferior to standard English expression, I was a broken speaker, you were never a broken interpreter, taught me my speech was dry for someone who should sound like they're under water. It took years to talk with a straight spine and mute red marks on the coursework you assigned.

Deaf voices go missing like sound in space and I have left earth to find them.

## Echo

by Raymond Antrobus

"Oral speech was deemed as superior in order to communicate with God"--*History Of Deaf Education* (British Sign Language Zone)

1.

My ear amps whistle  
like they are singing to Echo, Goddess of Noise  
wailing for her return as a ravelled knot  
of tongues of blaring birds, of consonant crumbs  
of dull door bells, of sounds swamped  
in my misty hearing aid tubes.

Gaudi believed in holy sound  
and built a cathedral to contain it  
pulling hearing men from their faded  
knees like Atheism is a kind of Deafness.

Who would turn down God?

Even though I have not heard  
the golden decibel of angels  
I have been living in a noiseless  
palace where the doorbell is pulsating  
light and I am able to answer.

2.

*What?*

that word becomes another echo,  
a sound that keeps looking  
in mirrors like it is in love  
with its own volume.

*What?*

I am a one word question,  
a one man patience test.

What language would we speak  
without ears?

Is paradise a world where  
I hear everything?

How will my brain know what to hold  
if it has too many arms?

Would you deafen yourself  
if all you wanted to hear  
was already a memory?

## Tinnitus

by Raymond Antrobus

*"the suffering that we don't see still makes a sort of sound"* -  
Kim Addonizio

Ten years after the diving accident, I'm having a hearing test.  
I'm meant to press the button every time I hear a high note.  
So, I'm pressing the button like a weak TV remote,  
and the audiologist tells me the test hasn't started,  
I must be hearing her.

She is a constant bleep  
in my life support. I remember how hard  
she turned up as I walked out the blaring  
Zulu Bar in Cape Town.

Where speakers with enough bass to ripple  
waves in Milk Stout Beer squeals

*Ray, DO NOT STAY IN THIS ELECTRIC RAVE!*  
like an annoying friend ringing at night.

I took her home to meet mum, but she couldn't hear her  
name,

She called her my imaginary car alarm.

But mum knew we were serious when I heard her for a week  
straight.

She was the first woman who slept in my ears.

Love is a condition,

a siren I can't unplug.  
So, in one tone, she tells me,  
it doesn't matter how soundproof the room,  
she will be there like background music,  
a one-note opera,  
my radio silence  
tuning me out of loudness.

## Author Photograph & Biography



[Image Description: A man with brown skin and close-cut, black hair stands amid a row of metallic storage doors. He wears a pink, blue, and green plaid shirt with a light blue t-shirt underneath, and beige khakis.]

**Raymond Antrobus** is a Jamaican British poet and educator living in London, Hackney. His poems have been published widely (*The Rialto*, *Magma Poetry*, and elsewhere). He has read at festivals and universities the world over. He is co-curator of Chill Pill and Keats House Poets Forum and is one of the first recipients of a MA in Spoken Word Education (Goldsmith's University). He is a Complete Works 3 Fellow

and is currently a poet-in-residence at Blanche Nevile Deaf School in London. [www.raymondantrobus.com](http://www.raymondantrobus.com).

## Bad road

by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

*"my body is 40 miles of bad road"- working class krip saying*

you mean well, but  
when I say I hurt            when I say some part of  
my body hurts        and you say *oh, did you do something?*  
I hear        *what did you do?* As is, it's your fault,  
there's cause and effect and there's a simple  
story, and if  $a + b = c$  we can fix it  
fast.

But there's no simple story in this body.  
She falls apart whenever she feels like it,  
which is often. She doesn't feel like going to  
work or up and down three flights of stairs, and she'll tell you all about  
it.

She can smell the weather.

She got a lot of stories  
and just like her mama did at slam church two decades ago,  
she spits them out my kneecap like a gun with chaotic  
yet accurate aim.

She is forty miles of perfect bad road  
all bumps and potholes that could take out your wheel.

You gotta know how to drive it.

You gotta not be too worried about breaking your car  
(because she's already broke            too)

I mean, I could tell you, everything happened! I could tell you my mama  
molested me, I could tell you hers did too,  
I could tell you we had to walk a long long way and get on a boat,

I could tell you I moved to brooklyn for love but there's a lot of stairs  
here too  
I could read you the particulate matter of the air, that they're spraying  
for pesticides today  
that I ran out of the fish oil that greases my knee into smoothing,  
and I don't know if the CVS sells it here  
- but does anyone want to hear all that?  
The staying chant  
the recitation  
of everything that's happening in my body, and their body,  
and the park's body, and on the subway huffing diesel and cigarettes

*When you say it's just pain for no reason all the time, fibro, right?*

I say, close but no cigar!

I say I intimate with pain tides

This ground not steady! Why would it be?

As soon as I figure it out she flips me the bird

shapeshift hip transforms and says fuck you, you figure it out

Sometimes the place where my mama threw me into the wall

at three and broke my sacrum talks to me,

locks all my earth into cement.

Some days I don't know what day it is.

Some days my ass leaks tidal marsh, briny river

Some times everything everything

everything every thing

hurts

like a church bell

like a call to prayer

and it calls me to pray

this pain

breathing into any place that doesn't hurt

some of which only exists in my revolutionary imagination.

Sometimes you have to talk quiet.  
Sometimes I can't talk at all.

*Of course you don't believe that,* but I feel the need to declare:  
my life is worth living anyway  
I love every jounce on this bad, bad  
underfunded budget cut frost heave road  
not everyone's car can make it down;  
    you gotta know  
    how to drive it  
I love every car that just gave up in the mountain pass  
every hubcap that fell off  
every- yes- road not on any map  
every rock and resisting  
every reason this happened  
every reason this body  
is reason enough  
for being.

## Femme houses

by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

*for Meliza, Neve, Jesse Manuel, Sabina, Naima and me*

1. This perfect pink house in South Central, your inheritance.

I see your room of your own, your bed, bong and books

Full pantry for now, cosmetics carefully curated:

I see the rich.

We smoke medicine and sleep well. You get up at four-thirty

to drive me to the airport, ten minutes on the streets.

I runlimp to plane, don't want to release my arms from your disabled  
parking spot hug.

I see your femme abundance,

your row of grandmother's pompadour pictures from east los in the 30s

your laugh crackle breaking out, how you say, mija, take anything you  
need.

This is your wealth.

You're here because your grandfather built this house,

left it to you. You will live here, building wordhouses,

femmehouses of your body, til you die. Maybe.

2. Home doesn't have to be forever to be home

I have it tattooed on my chest but I still forget,

daily. We've all lost our beloved places

to four dollar lattes and shiny white couples pushing children.

I want there to be neighborhoods they're afraid to go to.

I want them to know there are places they don't belong.

I want them to hate us, to fear us,

to not see anything pretty in our houses that makes them want to buy

them up for cheap.

3. Once I lived in a house for \$175  
for  
fig tree and black mold and chill to the bone  
and oven for heat  
and it was ok to cry in front of the washerdryer,  
it was ok to borrow someone else's fucked up car.  
You could live off the eggs and kimchi in the pantry if you needed to.  
We were always ready for the end of the world:  
earthquake water        bags of grain.

We are always getting ready for the end of the world  
and she keeps creeping. I thought a soft collapse and  
I would live and die in that house.  
Instead, whiteness refinanced its mortgage and moved back in.  
Instead, I moved into more falling apart,  
less pretty. Instead, I left the country again,  
with two big bags on a plane and all my stuff on Amtrak.  
Instead, I came back and squatted in  
another neighborhood mine invaded by white. As soon as the  
laundromat lady knew me  
to chinnod, I was on another plane  
to a place I hoped would have water, and a house,  
and it did, but it had cold and no sun.  
We made a femmehouse. I wondered if my hipbones could relax.  
They sort of did. Not like before.  
I lost my child's trust in a here safe forever  
I trust it is safe enough, now.

4. Their house has a pink canopy, a shower chair,  
no stairs. Takeout burgers and makeup. Mess.  
My house has a plum couch, a scrubbed tub, a hot tub. One stair.  
Her house has an apothecary, flogger shouts,

a witch stoop. Her house has two cats, steak and weed in the freezer.  
Their house has a crystal cunt,  
rolling tobacco pouch, mama's picture.  
We float in clouds and walk on earth.

## Author Photograph & Biography



[Image Description: A non-binary femme of Sri Lankan and Irish/ Roma heritage in her early 40s and a mixture of dark brown curly hair with fuschia pink and gray streaks wears a leaf green dress, bright pink lipstick, and a silver nose ring in a Brooklyn park. She smiles in delight with her eyes closed as she reaches towards a cascade of light purple wisteria blossoms. Her upper arm bears a tattoo of three cosmos

flowers and Tamil lettering, which translates to "in my blood a million stories."]

**Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha** is a queer, sick, and disabled nonbinary femme writer and cultural worker of Burger/ Tamil Sri Lankan and Irish/ Roma ascent. The author of *Dirty River: A Queer Femme of Color Dreaming Her Way Home* (Publisher's Triangle and Lambda Award 2016 finalist, American Library Association Stonewall Award winner 2016), *Bodymap*, *Love Cake* (Lambda Award 2012) and *Consensual Genocide*. She is also co-editor of *The Revolution Starts At Home: Confronting Intimate Violence in Activist Communities*. Her work has been widely anthologized, most recently in *Glitter and Grit* and *Octavia's Brood*. From 2006-2016, she co-founded and co-directed Mangos With Chili, North America's longest running QTPOC performance art tour. She is a lead artist with the disability justice performance collective Sins Invalid, and is a weirdo who writes about survivorhood, disability justice, queer femme of color bodies and lives in Sri Lankan diaspora sitting in her room. [brownstargirl.org](http://brownstargirl.org) has more.

## Accommodation

by Camisha L. Jones

The law wants my body reasonable  
My body won't fence in its demands  
Expects the world to stop  
Whenever it wants to lay down  
Throws up its middle finger  
At deadlines, task lists,  
Long awaited meetings  
It ain't open to negotiation  
Wants you to stop telling it to  
*Calm down*

It has three settings: rest, spark, flare  
All that talk about your inconvenience & your hardship  
It calls that *Bullshit*  
It will not wait in line  
It will not be polite  
It will not use its inside voice  
It wants all the space  
In every room of the house  
The entire sky & the full lawn of grass  
It wants to set it all aflame  
My body is a pyromaniac  
My body is the art  
Of Angela Bassett's right hand  
Letting reason go up in smoke

## In/Ability

by Camisha L. Jones

In the shower  
The sound of water  
Is crisp as a  
Head of lettuce  
Split in two

Then fading  
In the morning  
When the running sink  
Becomes a whisper  
In someone else's ear

Daily I enter and exit  
This turnstile of  
Here/hear and not here/hear

Press my way through  
A downpour of sound  
Divorced from meaning

I stand between the words  
A mediator  
And sometimes a barrier

Sometimes

There is sweet song  
Birds chirping  
A tune with no lyrics  
Keeping me company  
In the silence

Which isn't really silent  
Or quiet  
But static  
& loud

Coupling & uncoupling  
With comprehension

The mouth of each syllable muffled

Language is an ocean  
Of murky water

Words sinking  
Into buried grains of sand

A tide coming  
And going

Calling me the shore  
Calling me thousands of particles  
Stretched wide

Receiving what the waves bring  
Surviving what they take away

## Praise Song for the Body

By Camisha L. Jones

Praise for the body that takes pain and names it survival.  
That drinks anguish without ruling it bitter. Contains the  
daggers of sickness and bends them into a good home, a  
shelter, an escape route. Call this body miracle. Call it  
sanctuary. Name its ghosts but refuse to believe it is haunted.  
Refuse to give up on hope and all of its helium, its elevating  
power to raise this weighted vessel into a thing of light.

## Author Photograph & Biography



[Image Description: A close-up of a smiling black woman with hair styled in twists wearing brightly colored earrings and a v-neck purple dress.] Photo Credit: Brandon Woods.

**Camisha Jones** is Managing Director at Split This Rock, a national nonprofit that cultivates, teaches, and celebrates poetry that bears witness to injustice and provokes social change. Previous to this role, she was part of the spoken word community in Richmond, Virginia and competed with Slam Richmond at the 2013 National Poetry Slam. Camisha's poems can be found in *Rogue Agent*, *pluck!*, *Unfolding the Soul of Black Deaf Expressions*, and *The Quarry*, Split This

Rock's social justice poetry database. She lives with fibromyalgia, Ménière's Disease, and an adamant commitment to keep her writing life from scorching on the back burner.

I was thinking about trying to teach myself to play  
guitar in secret

by Jen Stein

1.

What is kept for me alone?  
My spine with its tender  
earthquakes, the way my sit

bones hold between them  
a robin's nest, engorged with  
autumn rain, silt and branches

swelling and pushing upward  
on each of my organs?  
The knots embedded beneath

the surface of my skin, the  
bound nerves, wheat within  
sheaths, tighter, then tighter.

2.

What I am is exposed. I tell  
you everything because  
to keep silent is to acquiesce

dead birds inside my head  
larvae in my mouth, a feeding  
frenzy inside but I am stop

motion, I move when scripted.  
I speak because an open mouth  
does not nurture the dead.

I want to touch, to hold,  
to be held, to see where  
your nerves are raw scarabs,

to feel your quaking bones  
and soothe them, to eat figs,  
cheeses and honey in the sun.

3.

For twenty-five years I kept  
secrets. I wrote them on receipts  
and gum wrappers, waited

to see if someone would find  
the truth in a discarded purse,  
an old pickle jar, beneath

scotch pines, raking in the fall.  
If secret, I could believe

it was phantasmagoria only

the things I see behind my eyes  
when I try to fall asleep.  
I learned the trick of sleeping

instantaneously. I learned it  
because I don't want to see faces  
in the darkness, I don't want

to smell the sick rot of pine  
and egg carton foam, molding  
beneath my back, the fester

of his face above me. Every time  
I closed my eyes I saw his face.  
It melted away, sinew then bone.

4.

Music in my head, music  
in my eyes. When I am quiet  
I can listen, the far-off sound

of guitar strings plucked  
with tentative fingers, afraid  
to hit a sour note, like one

wrong move would shatter  
an entire tray of glasses.  
When I rock back and forth

I sing a melody that has been  
growing from my sternum  
since I was a child, high and sweet,

I wish I could play it, that  
my swollen knuckles wouldn't  
obstruct the nylon and steel strings,

I wish I could accompany myself  
as I sing, a gift I could give  
to my spine and to you.

I would learn to play secretly.  
I would be perfect before  
we would sit together, a picnic

and I would take out a guitar  
let out the music inside me  
my flesh would fall away to show

all along I've been birthed of light.  
All this time, under my skin,  
I have been a murmuration

of starlings, I have been flying  
whorls, shying through my own  
ache. We never suspected.

The moment I realize I have become Eleanor Rigby

*for the 16-year-old student assaulted by Officer Ben Fields  
& Julianna Snow, age five*

Daily I compare my minutiae to stories I read.

At five, she decided to die rather than suffer, her

mother allows this choice. There is no hope  
but dignity.

My spine a cattail in water swamp stuck mud thick

press chin to chest supplicant, mendicant. Absorption.

What then my blood bloom lip whistlestop spasm

at base of skull a rent cup blister what of that then?

A girl at her desk a prop doll a bola wrapped

from his neck see how she smacks against the wall

she is stopped rice sack shucked cornhusk,  
imploded.

Why do I curl inward, blightful mute petal, why

mask, why breath    where is my shawl    I did not make  
this.

*Pain becomes infinitely easier to handle  
when you know you will never be free of it.*

by Jen Stein

You are a morning glory at dawn. Unwrap  
yourself from blankets, but do not  
yet lift your head. Take inventory.

Each muscle, each joint. Bead by bead  
the abacus of pain gives you a reading.  
Today it's spread across your lower spine,

arching up the delicate muscles connecting  
shoulderblade to base of neck, the large  
joints on your right hand, the small

strands of muscle behind your left ear.  
Your abdomen has been spared. Inhale  
deeply, feel gratitude push your diaphragm

downwards, causing a coughing fit. Inhale  
again. Roll to your side and begin to stretch.  
You will spend ten minutes unfurling,

opening your face to the inkygrey sky.  
This is a blessing. Make it twenty minutes  
if you can. Stretching is storm and bower,

mutiny and mantra. You are a self-contained  
revolution. You dare to stand up. You dare  
walking down the stairs. With every creak

of every bone, your body is singing an aria.  
"I am here. I am here. I am here."

## Author Photograph & Biography



[Image Description: A close-up of a smiling white woman with auburn hair wearing turtle-shell framed glasses. She has dark gray graphic tee on, with a white Nessie (Loch Ness Monster).]

**Jen Stein** is a writer, advocate, mother and finder of lost things in Fairfax, Virginia. Her experience as an advocate, with PTSD and fibromyalgia, and with the continuing process of diagnosis, healing, and reinvention informs much of her writing. She studied Creative Writing at George Mason University, and is assistant editor for *Rogue Agent*

*Journal*. Her work has recently appeared in *Thirteen Myna Birds*, *Cider Press Review*, *Menacing Hedge*, *Luna Luna Magazine*, and *Nonbinary Review*, and is featured in a micro-collection in *Wood Becomes Bone*, a series by ELJ Publications. You can find Jen on the web at [jensteinpoetry.wordpress.com](http://jensteinpoetry.wordpress.com).

## Counterpoint

by Raymond Luczak

*after Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827)*

You appeared fully formed, the locks of your hair sprouting like a lion's mane. You were the ghost of music that followed me all my life: "Isn't it so amazing that Beethoven could compose and not hear a thing?"

No one knew I couldn't hear until I was two years old. I didn't understand why someone had to twist my chin just to look at someone moving their lips at me. It was all so strange and disturbing.

The ringing in your ears turned into a flooding river. Catfish scurried between you and the blue sky. The oxygen tank of notes all in its combinations from sheer memory kept you breathing underwater.

The first time I truly heard music: horses galloped past the din of cigarettes and chatter from the gates exploding beneath the glass dome of the jukebox. The Bee Gees had arrived in white pantsuits and gold chains.

That noise stopping for a minute: you noticed a missed note, a certain pitch, an absence. So gradual, yet when you listened, a ghost of nothingness

whispered screams in your ears. You wanted suicide.

I heard "A Fifth of Beethoven" blasting on the radio.  
No words: horns and strings competed relentlessly,  
sweltering with the disco beat. Dreams of music were infected  
with the malaria of obsession. I had no mosquito netting.

When you could no longer follow a spoken conversation,  
you wrote back and forth in one blank book after another.  
You didn't hide much back then. When you died,  
your "biographer" destroyed 264 out of those 400 books.

Even back then people wanted to make you a saint.  
Disco has become a symphony of nostalgia.  
Each year I tear away each scribbled sheet of fear.  
Silence too has become my coda.

## Author Photograph & Biography



[Image Description: The B&W photo of Raymond Luczak, who is a white, bearded middle-aged man, was taken by Andrew Bertke and shows the author wearing a dark-colored velour shirt and standing to the side against a white background; he gives a slight smile as he glances back at something out of the frame.]

**Raymond Luczak** is the author and editor of 18 books. His latest titles include *QDA: A Queer Disability*

*Anthology* and *The Kiss of Walt Whitman Still on My Lips*. His Deaf gay novel *Men with Their Hands* won first place in the Project: QueerLit Contest 2006. He lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota and online at [raymondluczak.com](http://raymondluczak.com).

## Late

by Cade Leebron

*for the girl in Lubbock, TX, murdered by her step-father*

At six or seven I played babies, thought all us girls  
would make fantastic moms. *Girl with a mental age*

*of six or seven.* Dead now! Would you like details? Would  
have been a great mom, maybe not, but I'm feeling a little

argumentative. So yeah, fuck it, she would have made  
a great mother. She got her baby all sliced out instead.

By a man she might have called *father* when she could  
stand to. Girl who had a name but we don't get to know.

Instead we get her throat cut, womb cut, every rape before  
that final insult. What a list. Burnt up for her fertility. Why

is this what we have of her? All those instructions  
we're given, *tell your mom, the cops*, got her nothing.

Can you build a revolution on the body of a nameless girl,  
or do we need something more specific? I would like riots

in the streets, please. Open up your doors so we can burn  
down whatever's inside, thanks very much. I wonder if she

too felt this need to be polite. I want to know her  
favorite sneakers. If she understood her pregnancy,

had a name picked out. At six or seven I was really good at naming the fake babies. *Since she is a victim of a sex*

*crime.* No name for you, girl. What false protection. I hope someone is braiding her hair, making her dinner, too.

## Author Photograph & Biography



[Image Description: A close-up of a young white woman with red hair and flushed, pink cheeks. She's smiling and wearing black and white patterned blouse and lavender-colored earrings.]

**Cade Leebron** is earning her MFA in nonfiction at The Ohio State University, where she serves as Online & Art Editor at *The Journal*. She also serves as Nonfiction Editor at *The Fem*. Her work has appeared in *Brevity*, *Rattle*, *Electric Literature*, *The Boiler*, *The Manifest-Station*, and elsewhere.

She can be found online at [www.mslifeisbestlife.com](http://www.mslifeisbestlife.com) or on  
Twitter @cadeyladey.

## **Playing the D's**

by Ashley Young

### **Possession:**

the hand is staccato flinching to play a humming bird's song,  
the stem of the shoulder rolling pushing the memories of  
lecherous hands and i speak in tongues with the cadence of  
ghosts, little girls, devil men, 'come back' calls, chanting of  
present time and name and place to cast anchors that cannot  
plant and the sobbing comes in high tide waves, over and  
over with sorrys for the child and 'where'd you go' daddy and  
'wake up, wake up mommy' then the rocking away of the  
demon without mouth but with voice that threatens to chain  
me to the girl and bury us breathing with no one to pull us  
out

### **Exorcism:**

i won't believe the hands of my root woman can pull me out:  
the nightmare of hospital beds and a record of symptoms and  
should I pack a bag/will they let me have my beads/how long  
must I stay and the stones and sage and homebound scents  
will be altered and i won't know my root woman is fighting  
for me with razors and words and just how close she is to God

### **Aftermath:**

i am quiet, the storm rolls out of the sky and the demon  
whispers 'I will be back' that i, woman cannot hear and all  
that is left is the rocking and the knowing that the water is  
not poison and the water is me and i will swallow myself in  
the garden of my gut and whether anything grows, i  
myself, back once again, human woman child, well/sick  
knowing someone will fight for me when i undress from my  
armor, my spirit mama holds and sings sounds to my ground,  
that when i wake i will be paper thin, zombie blooded, woman  
beautied and back to the round of the earth once again

## Author Photograph & Biography



[Image Description: A young black woman with dark, close-cut hair and a black sweater and top wears fuchsia lipstick, black framed glasses, and septum and labret earrings. She sits by a windowsill festooned with various knickknacks, including a statue of a woman's torso, a candle, and a small, cauldron-shaped container.]

**Ashley Young** is a Queer Black feminist writer, poet, and teacher. Her nonfiction work has been featured in three anthologies as well as in various journals and she is a contributor at *Elixher* Magazine. She is a Voices of Our Nation's Foundation Poetry Fellow and a Lambda Literary Nonfiction Fellow. She currently works at the Women of Color Writer's Community in Brooklyn, NY and is working on a collection of poetry and prose as well as her first novel.

*From Anxiety Journal—Spring 2015*

by Gregory Luce

(for John Huey, with profound gratitude)

“The mind is the cause of our distresses  
but of it we can build anew.”—William Carlos Williams

I.

Write your way  
out of it my friend said.  
Can a ball-point pen  
cut through the mist nets  
of dread that entangle  
the heart and lungs  
and tighten around  
the temples?  
Stand as a lightning rod  
for the fevered currents that pulsate  
along the nerves at four a.m.?  
Provide the spark  
that kickstarts paralyzed desire?  
Will ink on paper  
re-water the streams  
where joy once flowed?

II.

Churchill's black dog  
weighted his bed mornings,  
rode his back for hours.  
My caramel cat jumps  
on and off the bed, noses  
every box, rubs against  
every piece of furniture,  
cruises the windowsill  
all through the dark hours  
after midnight.

III.

"The Soul has Bandaged moments -  
When too appalled to stir -  
She feels some ghastly Fright come up  
And stop to look at her -"—Emily Dickinson

When the net falls again  
at 5 a.m. and wraps  
the body tight at first,  
then prickles over the skin  
like a loose bandage  
over a bloodless wound.

IV.

Living with nerve ends  
a little too close  
to the surface:  
They vibrate  
like steel strings  
strummed with a razorblade.

V.

Tremor makes a partial rhyme  
with memory. Text from  
my sister: My great-aunt  
died this morning.  
Relief and grief make  
a full rhyme.

VI.

A rare morning of equilibrium:  
In a sunlit café  
I look down 14th St.  
COME UNTO ME  
in giant red letters beckons  
from the top of a building  
but I'm not ready  
to leave my seat  
on the ground.

## VII.

Breaking the surface  
after almost drowning,  
gulping air at first,  
then easing into steady  
rhythm of breath:

Shake the water  
out of your hair,  
float for a while.

## To S on Her Returning Home

by Gregory Luce

I. "The tulips are too excitable. It is winter here.  
Look how white everything is, how quiet, how snowed in."

—Sylvia Plath

First the unmarked snow, smooth, pure  
under the low sky, then imprints, tracks,  
drifts of leaves and paper, then the hard edges,  
sharp ashy ridges crusted with dirt.

But finally a trickle of sun and then more  
sun, flows of water, and patches of grass  
astonishingly green.

II. "The soul has bandaged moments."

—Emily Dickinson

The itch and sting, painful rustle, stick  
and prickle, each breath measured out  
like medicine, counted like gold coins  
one on top of the other. The pain,  
my surgeon said, that's the healing.

III. "The water I taste is warm and salt, like the sea,  
And comes from a country as far away as health."

—Sylvia Plath

Not for drinking but good for floating  
until the strength to swim returns.

That country is on the far shore,  
remote but attainable.

## Author Photograph & Biography



[Image Description: A white man wearing a black bicycle helmet and a light gray sweatshirt stands under a yellow tent holding a quote-box shaped dry erase board that reads "@goDCgo" in the left hand corner.]

**Gregory Luce**, author of *Signs of Small Grace* (Pudding House Publications), *Drinking Weather* (Finishing Line Press), *Memory and Desire* (Sweatshoppe Publications), and *Tile* (Finishing Line Press), has published widely in print and online. He is the 2014 Larry Neal Award winner for adult poetry, given by the DC Commission on the Arts and

Humanities. He recently retired from National Geographic and lives in Arlington, VA.

# **Black, Blind, & Beautiful**

by Leroy F. Moore, Jr.

*For Lachi*

I heard her voice  
And saw her beauty  
It was my choice  
To keep digging

What I found was pleasing  
Black, Blind, & Beautiful  
And what came out of her mouth  
Is awwwwww so soothing

Lachi, is her name  
She took me on a Jazzy trip  
Back to Lady Day, Ella, Eta, Nina  
As a journalist I needed to create media

Let her talk  
Capture the story  
She speaks lyrically  
Interview & getting to know her deeply

Three B's buzzing around in my brain  
Black, Blind, & Beautiful  
Washing away ugliness like rain

Lachi, got me bug out

Saw her in Emeryville  
Standing on top of a hill  
Her songs flying on bird wings  
What a thrill

She plays the piano  
And I got to let the day's tension go  
Thinking about Black, Blind, & Beautiful  
My goal here is nothing but respectful

Oh yeah Lachi, do some scatting  
Can I mix my poetry  
Dreams coming true  
Poem songs all day long with you

Lachi, had to type it  
You are the shit  
More than Black, Blind, & Beautiful  
Standing ovations leaving us satisfied & full

## Author Photograph & Biography



[Image Description: A bald, black man in a black suit over a crisp white oxford and with a maroon tie looks thoughtfully up toward something outside of the frame. A cream-colored flower boutonniere is pinned to his suit. He's sitting in a chair in what appears to be a living room, with a red couch to his left and sun-lit windows revealing a yard and a lamp behind him.]

**Leroy F. Moore Jr.** is a Black writer, poet, hip-hop\music lover, community activist, and feminist with a physical disability. Founder of Krip-Hop Nation (an international network of disabled Hip-Hop and other musicians), Leroy is currently writing a book on Krip-Hop Nation. Poetic Matrix

Press published his poetry/lyrics book, *The Black Kripple Delivers Poetry, & Lyrics* in late 2015. Leroy has a poetry CD entitled *Black Disabled Man with a Big Mouth & A High I.Q.* and has put out his second poetry CD entitled *The Black Kripple Delivers Krip Love Mixtape*. Leroy is a longtime columnist of one of the first columns on race & disability that started in the early 90's at *Poor Magazine* in San Francisco. Leroy is one of the leading voices around police brutality and the wrongful incarceration of people with disabilities.

## *The Deaf Poets Society, Issue 1: August 2016*

### PROSE SECTION

#### Editor's Note

by T.K. Dalton

The bulk of the editing work for the prose in this issue took place in New York, but in these waning hours of production, I find myself writing my editor's introduction in a far more horizontal space, the suburban Houston house of my in-laws. It's fitting enough to be here, not there, since there is a word has been rattling around in my head the entire time I've been meaning to write this introduction, and that word is one I often mistakenly apply to the landscape of my wife's home state.

That word is 'void.'

It's a word that appeared in our own collectively written manifesto, published on *Drunken Boat* at the end of June. While a collectively written document ideally has no language with a single owner, this word--"void"--is one word that I want to take ownership of, and to think about briefly here in the context of our five excellent prose contributors.

In the manifesto, we wrote, of our mission: "We will help create access where there had been a barrier, language where

there had been a void.” The response to this line, as to many lines in the manifesto, was positive. Most readers we heard from recognized the aspiration, the call to action that we saw as just the latest in a long line of such calls reaching back to “The Preservation of Sign Language,” or farther. A few readers, though, found the word to be a slight, invalidating the work of writers, editors, curators, anthologists, scholars, and--most importantly--readers and viewers who had come before us. I am pleased about so many aspects of the prose fiction, nonfiction, and genre-blending works presented in our first issue: these works are inventive and transgressive, sly and wry, speaking to individual aspects of the disabled experience in ways that are accessible to so many in our community, exploring notions of trust and safety and wealth and autonomy. What I might be most proud about is that our upstart magazine has already incorporated the voices of different generations of disabled writers, from the emerging to the established, from our very first issue.

Our prose section distills this perfectly. It includes two writers who also have both poetry and books being reviewed--something I call *The Deaf Poets Society Triple Crown*. (Nobody else seems to think this is funny.) Joking aside, this situation, I think, speaks to two important aspects of a community-based magazine, the first of which is that the world can be small. The other takeaway from our Triple Crowners is this: that as excited as I and my fellow editors are, collectively, to get in the game--as we wrote in the

manifesto, "We are here to right literature."--it's impossible to do so without pausing to recognize that there are writers who have preceded us in this work. I knew that--as we all did--when we came to consensus upon the words, including "void". How could we know all that and still use that word?

In the week after the manifesto's publication, I did some thinking about where "void" had come from. I remembered feeling the "click" I have come to recognize, when it happens while writing, as meaning "right word, right place" in my atypical brain (laser-marked, scar tissue-carrying). What had I envisioned when that word came into my mind, onto my fingers, into my Chromebook, and, finally, our manifesto? Imagine a large space between two sides of a canyon on a dark night. In that space there is quiet, and there is stillness, there is darkness and there is mystery. But there is not absence. There is not even a lack of knowledge. There is not nothing there. It is a space where someone not paying attention could think that is so. The space between sides of the canyon might well be the one occupied by disabled writers; the people not paying attention might well be the producers and consumers of disabled characters through much of literary history, looking straight through what they've never learned to see; the notion that there is not nothing there is clear in the impressive, gorgeous work that many of the writers in this first issue have done prior to their publication here. A canyon is a canyon because there is a gap between sections of land, and that a long way down, there is

flowing water. The water isn't immaterial, but what gives the canyon its definition is the space between landmasses: the void.

But that's not, I think, in the end what caused the "click" for me, not with that word, not the noun form of it anyway. The notion of recognition, of being hidden in plain sight, is a thing folks with disability -- for me, anyway, as a person who's experienced chronic illness and neurodivergence -- grapple with. That definitely informed my image-making there, and if I wasn't as precise as I could have been in the manifesto, what made it escape me and our larger group is both the truth behind the experience of feeling hidden in plain sight, and the notion that this word appeared in a call for action.

Because there is another kind of void, and it's an action. The verb that is the word void declares something invalid, not bound by law or custom. And it's that action that is the crucial struggle of a moment when some lives are clearly worth more than others, a moment when the systems of government are not serving all equally, a moment when the very mechanisms of civic life are under pressure that may make them warp, bend, break.

It is this sort of void--these invalidations and erasures, these white-washings and airbrushings--that our contributors' work refuses. It is this sort of refusal that can only come from art

by a community, for a community. Art like the work you're about to read. Enjoy it. Prepare to be moved.

T. K. Dalton's essays have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and inclusion in *Best of the Net*. His fiction and nonfiction are forthcoming in *The Common*, *Duende*, and *Front Porch Journal*, and appear in *The Millions*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, *Radical Teacher*, *Deaf Lit Extravaganza*, *Disability Studies Quarterly*, and elsewhere. With poet John Maney, Jr., he edited *What if Writing is Dreaming Together?* He earned an M.F.A. from the University of Oregon and is currently writing a memoir. Tim lives with his family in New York City, where he works as an ASL-English interpreter.

## Riches: Oakland 2010-2013

By Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

Oakland, summer 2010 or 2013, pre- or early apocalypse. Walking slowly on your cripp parking pass and cane to that big Target on the Shellmound in West O. Limping in with all the other three hustles, waiting on food stamps, crazy and not eligible for state disability, or making state disability stretch folks. The chin-nod smiles to the other cane-using walkies and the chair users, people who clearly wet-wiped themselves down because the shower was just too much today, people who've been crying all day. Just like you.

You find yourselves here. Not at a community center run by the state or one run by anarchists or an eager social justice nonprofit. Your community center is all of you shopping the dollar section. Hoodie and scarf and leggings and vest ready to take on take off, Oakland hot cold, your cloth shopping bag full of special rocks and pain meds and tinctures and snacks and water, ready as you can be for any possible way your bodymind might fall apart.

After, you'll drive to one of the many free parks with spectacular nature to your east coast eyes--*redwoods?*--or the pull-off at 60th past the 80 to sit and watch the Bay. The cops won't show up unless it's after 10 pm or someone's drunk. No matter how fucked up your car is, how the registration's overdue from last year and you've got six

unpaid parking tickets you can't pay so they're gonna triple, that view of Mt. Tam and the big real ocean makes you rich. Seeing other brown, disabled, poor people around you makes you rich.

Your car's full of old coffee cups and mason jars, its rained on for twenty years leather ragtop is molding and flaking from the inside. But it's your palace. You can haul anything- free furniture you notice on Bay Area Queer Exchange when you're working from home and trying to be productive while your belly hurts and breakfast takes two hours because all your roommates want to talk (after all, aren't you always home?) All the snacks for the show, tons of nettles you pick for free at a secret spot near Muir Creek, your friend's manual wheelchair, all the performers back to Oakland from the Sins Invalid show (even though Aurora has to hang her head out the window because the mold is so intense.) All these places, they are rich. Four queer of color krip artists doing a show about sex and disability, getting paid, driving home late together? Riches. Lucky.

You're still broke as hell and worry about money constantly, but you always have. And right now, you feel rich, even with that worry. You've got enough for food and your \$175 rent, gas at the cheap place on San Pablo, community acupuncture at the \$10 spot, Arizmendi pizza crumpled tinfoil wrappers. Pretty is easier here than so many places, you can just look outside. You can go outside because it doesn't snow,

your hips hurt less because there's no snow, you can get high CBD weed from Harborside and a free reiki treatment while you wait for them to bag it up. Your bank account reads \$435, \$127, - \$97, sometimes \$1178 for a second before you pay rent and credit card minimums and student loans. But you have time. Time to write, time to drive your friend to work or acu. Time to have a meeting and another meeting. Time to be a disabled, queer brown artist.

Eventually, you will realize that all your smartass strategies that make you feel like a baller still don't pay anything close to what other people consider enough. But right now, you feel like you've figured out the secret.

There's fear. Always. The feeling in your gut of waiting on the check, walking to the mailbox, emailing to follow up again, what happens when there is some fuckup and some money you were counting on doesn't show up for months--*eight months one time*--and some abled money person is so casual about it.

It's hard for you to explain yourselves to the abled and monied. They figure, you must have a trust fund or a rich parent to be able to do all these things. Be sick and say it out loud. Not have a 9-to-5. Write. How do you explain, you're just poor, always been? You don't call yourself poor, because you are so clear you are not working at Walmart or cutting hair in Worcester like your cousins. You always feel lucky, so

lucky, just to be able to breathe. And just regular, regular. Poor folks you know don't call ourselves poor, we're just regular. Artists are supposed to be special snowflakes anointed by god, but there's this other way, the way you were taught, that we are ordinary, on the bus, falling apart. Especially when we're spending hours of our days on the toilet, making a movie with all your krip friends on your couch, too sick to work, laughing, writing a poem on your phone as your ass squeezes out more IBS. But you don't have access to so much able-bodied folks who aren't nuts can grab. All that little bit of extra art money went right to the therapy that stops your millionth suicidal ideation from working, that allows you to lurch back from pain, from another pneumonia.

It's hard to explain lifelong disability and insanity to people whose ableism makes them unable to see yours no matter how often you blow your spoons explaining it.

You look back at all those years of early 20s crazy girl hermit life, \$425 apartment life, weird brain, hustle, three days peace with the landline pulled out the wall, walking silent, writing poems on your Mac classic. Reaching to late-30s, big room in a shabbypretty collective house, hustle, bedlife, shared-password Netflix, words, picking free herbs in the park, \$100 car. All your queer sick friends on the internet, all the ones that slowly stump towards you, you to them. The blog posts you write on a level 6 pain day on a heating pad in your same

fleece sleep pants you don't have the spoons to wash, space heater blasting, pain patches slapped on, that you post up and maybe someone sends you \$20 in Paypal, someone thanks you, someone thinks it's bullshit.

Slow life, poor life, abundant in time and pain life, queercrifemmebrown writing life. Not the only one. Invisible to those who can't conceive of it. But here. Here.

## Author Photograph & Biography



[Image Description: A non-binary femme of Sri Lankan and Irish/ Roma heritage in her early 40s and a mixture of dark brown curly hair with fuchsia pink and gray streaks wears a leaf green dress, bright pink lipstick, and a silver nose ring in a Brooklyn park. She smiles in delight with her eyes closed as she reaches towards a cascade of light purple wisteria blossoms. Her upper arm bears a tattoo of three cosmos

flowers and Tamil lettering, which translates to "in my blood a million stories."]

**Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha** is a queer, sick, and disabled nonbinary femme writer and cultural worker of Burger/ Tamil Sri Lankan and Irish/ Roma ascent. The author of *Dirty River: A Queer Femme of Color Dreaming Her Way Home* (Publisher's Triangle and Lambda Award 2016 finalist, American Library Association Stonewall Award winner 2016), *Bodymap*, *Love Cake* (Lambda Award 2012) and *Consensual Genocide*. She is also co-editor of *The Revolution Starts At Home: Confronting Intimate Violence in Activist Communities*. Her work has been widely anthologized, most recently in *Glitter and Grit* and *Octavia's Brood*. From 2006-2016, she co-founded and co-directed Mangos With Chili, North America's longest running QTPOC performance art tour. She is a lead artist with the disability justice performance collective Sins Invalid, and is a weirdo who writes about survivorhood, disability justice, queer femme of color bodies and lives in Sri Lankan diaspora sitting in her room. [brownstargirl.org](http://brownstargirl.org) has more.

## "Neighbors"

by Raymond Luczak

*Author's Note: What you are about to read may sound odd and unusual, perhaps a bit incoherent. Actually, the story is told in American Sign Language, or ASL gloss. What does that mean? Simply put, it is not a translation. ASL is not English on the hands; like any other foreign language, ASL has its own grammar, vocabulary, idioms, and so on. What you are about to read is, I hope, a clear delineation of how ASL can be structured sentence-wise. [Editor's Note: The audio track was voiced by T. K. Dalton]*

House-house-house that-way neighbors new move-there. These-two move i-n eight-nine months ago, not sure exact when, eight-nine-months approximately. First meet, me-think okay-okay. Both hearing, facial-expression-extreme-show-teeth-for-lipreading not, nice. Themselves dress-fancy not. Man pants s-w-e-a-t-pants purple, T-shirt purple same, but strange what? Gold thick-elaborate-surround-neck b-l-i-n-g. Himself brag show money have. Me-look-him-up-down, okay. Other-person woman dress same-same j-u-s-t different color but unique what? Simple necklace gold p-e-a-r-l pendant. Odd man dress-loud attract-attention-from-everyone, woman simple good-enough. Their preferences respect okay.

Two-cars parked front have. One old blue paint fall-off-here-there r-u-s-t thick-layer bad whew. Other car strange: car

fancy-fancy B-M-W hot red, black stripes-emanating-from-front-grille-lining-car's-side, thick wheels. B-M-W typical-car not. Car expensive obvious whew-whew. Car strange worse what? My area you-know: nice simple houses, good school nearby, kids play all-over safe, neighbors down-the-block windows watch-supervise kids play. Live here thumbs-up. Plus neighbors here-there sign fingerspell a-bit, better than nothing. Fine-fine accept all-right.

Before explain deep happen, me-backtrack explain happen before these-two move. That house before own who? N-o-r-m-a-n S-l-i-m-m, name-sign-NS, nice old man. Like work-work fix-fix house, mow-mow, house clean-perfect pow-chin whew. Me-admit jealous house upkeep whew, but okay. House mine clean-clean perfect not, accept. NS hearing, not sign, but write-back-and-forth problem none. Us-two get-along fine. One day himself fall sudden front house. Me-spot-bam run-fast gently-turn-him-onto-back, himself-breath-hard, me-text 9-1-1 "heart-attack come now." Me-know 9-1-1 point-find-me fast. Me-focus NS careful-careful all-right, me worried okay, not sure, but watch-watch anyway. NS try talk, but lipread hard why? Part-face frozen, me-realize s-t-r-o-k-e. Me watch-watch look-around ambulance arrive, wait-wait, me worry. Pah! Ambulance arrive. Me-step-back let m-e-d-i-c-s do-do-do business theirs. One woman approach-me not realize me-deaf, first confused. Me-phone show type back-and-forth, question-question-me, type-phone work-out okay. NS carried-away hospital. Week later come-home. Walk slow,

different. Part face stiff. Facial-expression odd why? Left-eyebrow up-down-movement none. Blink can, but look-me strange. Time progress, me-used stiff-eyebrow. Write-back-and-forth same before. Stroke effect not bad. Me relief. Back-then house clean-perfect, now what? Little-by-little house clean-perfect dissolve dirty. Me-offer clean-clean house. Me good neighbor want. Agree, okay-okay. Weekend me-come wash-floor, wash windows, carry-machine-weed-eater-around house-base, trees back. Me finish thumbs-up me-go, but NS come-come, gesture money. Me no-no. Me-acquiesce meet-him garage. He-write, Me good neighbor, best. Wish more neighbors same me. Wish you my son.

Heart-touch. Me-gesture thank-you.

That night true-biz heart-attack die.

Couple recent move house his? Man NS son that. Different father wow. Background story not-know, but obvious flashy attention-want. First think money earn how? D-r-u-g-s. Week-week later eye-spot fancy car park front house. Money where from? Not obsess, but let-it-go. Plus busy j-o-b kids house upkeep et-cetera, pay-attention those-two not. Busy-busy.

But one thing notice: man fancy bling drive car fancy, woman simple drive car old. Strange, hit-me, oh-oh: why man

support woman money none? Old car that replace need. Man money give-give buy new car, why not? Not make sense.

S-o: Me decide watch-watch out-of-the-corners-of-my-eyes what's-up-what's-up these-two. Me do-do, like drive school drop-off kids, me go work, me food shopping, et-cetera. Me come-go come-go. Me set time follow strict not. First take-care-take-care family home.

Anyway, yesterday strange happen.

Me happen mow-mow l-a-w-n morning. Hot sweat nose-wow but problem. Rain-rain recent all-week grass too-tall. S-u-n fine grab opportunity mow-mow. Know-that-know-that rain tomorrow do-do, have t-o mow-mow. Go-ahead mow-mow. G-a-s run-out. Nose-ptooey. Mow 1/2 finish. Plan go garage me-spot-bam woman three-places-down sit p-a-t-i-o cry-cry. Look-like blood head but can't t-e-l-l three-houses-down, plus sun-in-my-eyes. Me-stop do-do? True-biz beat-up? If call police, find nothing, laughter-caught-in-throat? Me-go ask help? No interpret. Hearing you-know emotional cry-cry hands-cover-face lipread how?

But still me-doubt, help, hands-off?

Woman head turn-quick, man walk p-a-t-i-o. Bling gone. Appearance ordinary. Tank-top shorts finish. Those-two mouth-talk sudden argue-argue yell-yell. Man point-finger

woman, woman point-toward-me. Not think those-two see me there. Argue-argue awful. Me-think leave alone, go-ahead garage g-a-s container bring mower. Pour g-a-s finish, put b-a-c-k finish. Me-pull-pull-start mower. Old, you know? Have t-o pull-pull whew, but run good. Dad give-me his old still-standing real-fine. Motor run perfect. Me go-ahead mow-mow, glance those-two argue still? Seem they-left, okay. Mow-mow finish. Me sweat stink nose-whew, time shower. Ready enter bathroom shower, front-door-lights-flash. F-k! R-o-b-e put-on-me, walk-down-stairs open-door. Woman p-e-a-r-l pendant stood there. Face shoulder arms blood b-r-u-i-s-e. Me-think, Communicate how? No paper write-back-and-forth, no phone type-back-and-forth. Me gesture, Wait-one-minute. Ready enter house get paper p-e-n, but woman do-do? Sign. Mind-me enter house? Her-sign not awkward, not like hearing, you-know? Fluent sign like deaf. Mind-flipped. Herself not come house inform-me sign before. Anyway, woman-stand there signing. Happen herself C-O-D-A grow-up parents deaf. Few years back herself enter program d-e-t-o-x why? Drug addict. Hard work become clean, d-r-u-g-s, alcohol, marijuana all stop. During program met NS son same problem. Both fall-in-love, but s-e-x none because program forbid.

Man true-biz work-work quit d-r-u-g-s, but problem: sober few months, w-a-g-o-n fall-off, roller-coaster. Woman frustrated, not-know do-do. Seem that morning those-two argue why? Man beat-beat h-e-r. Took car k-e-y-s, I-D, et-

cetera, escape can't. I-D out-there important, you know?  
Woman fed-up decide come-straight-me house why? NS tell-  
her me deaf good neighbor. Mind-scar that. Me-suggest call  
police file report catch-him bring-to-jail, maybe herself go  
special house women D-V. Et-cetera that. Woman sweet why?  
Call police request interpret if need me witness. Nice whew.  
Police come those-two house. Woman hide my house,  
policewoman know where hide, policewoman interpreter slip-  
undercover my house back door, police interrogate woman  
then me. Paperwork fill-out finish, police car arrive these-two  
house. Police knock-knock, man open-door shock yell-yell,  
swear look-like, turn-around take-off, but police capture-him  
arrest handcuffs finish. Stay jail how long, me not know, but  
important everyone safe.

## Author Photograph & Biography



[Image Description: The B&W photo of Raymond Luczak, who is a white, bearded middle-aged man, was taken by Andrew Bertke and shows the author wearing a dark-colored velour shirt and standing to the side against a white background; he gives a slight smile as he glances back at something out of the frame.]

**Raymond Luczak** is the author and editor of 18 books. His latest titles include *QDA: A Queer Disability*

*Anthology* and *The Kiss of Walt Whitman Still on My Lips*. His Deaf gay novel *Men with Their Hands* won first place in the Project: QueerLit Contest 2006. He lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota and online at [raymondluczak.com](http://raymondluczak.com).

## Eloped

by Angele Ellis

She is in the field, surrounded by buttercups, clover, Queen Anne's lace as ragged as the house curtains in her nightmares. Wearing black pants and T-shirt—too loose on her, now—and black Chinese-style slippers: standard issue. Made for shuffling, the slippers would be too large if her feet weren't swollen—from something they put in the water, maybe. She is in the field, with no money, no ID, only a silver gum wrapper rummaged from her pocket. She licks its white underside for the faint taste of mint and sugar, while she cowers in this empty lot ringed by steel buildings and a rushing river of traffic. If she used the heel of brown glass lying in the weeds—a broken bottle—she might be able to dig up some coins for the bus.

She is in the field, like when she was a kid up in St. Regis dreaming of being an archeologist, and unearthing with Nana's soup spoon a wheat penny, a buffalo-head nickel, a Nehi bottle cap, a hexagon of bathroom tile. But this is an urban wasteland, marked by a bus stop on the corner. She tries to focus on the familiar blue sign, the color of peace and healing. Soon, a mechanical elephant will lumber through the cars to save her—but she has no money. If she managed to smile at the bus driver—a normal smile—he might let her ride free to the airport. She could call Daniel from there, he could accept the charges, he could fly to meet her, he could take

her someplace safe...*Daniel, my brother, do you still feel the pain?*...She is in the field, but the bus isn't the right number for the airport; the airport is as far away as St. Regis, as far away as the moon. If she is unable to hide, to blend into the camouflage of dirty worthless weeds, the orderlies will find her and take her back to where they will hurt her.

She is in the field, and the only glass is that winking bottle, and although she knows another way to use it—curving her left wrist inward and slicing vertically at blue-green veins with the hub gripped in her right hand—she doesn't have the strength, and she might not bleed to death before they find her, and then they will hurt her more. *Break glass in case of emergency*...She is in the field, and if she were a Boy Scout—or if she had been a good Girl Scout who earned more than four badges—she could make a fire by forcing the sun's merciless rays through the thick lenses of her eyeglasses. In her mind, she escapes through smoke and flames, walking free past bulky firemen and snaking hoses...*An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*...There are dozens of bridges across the Allegheny and Monongahela, and would a crazy person remember those names—Allegheny, Monongahela?

She is in the field, alone: *in bad company*, as Ambrose Bierce wrote in *The Devil's Dictionary* before he disappeared into the Sonoran Desert. Although Joseph once said she was good company—despite all his other women, he said that. Before his eyes became gray marbles—moggies—whenever he looked

at her, before he gave her an infection that never went away—although a curly-haired doctor wrote her a prescription—and then shot her a look of contempt, as if saying, *You stupid bitch, this is a venereal infection, don't you know your husband has other women?* She is in the field, and this is the way everyone looks at her now, doctors and nurses and orderlies and Joseph and her friends, *you stupid bitch*, although they don't say *bitch*, even Joseph doesn't say it no matter how much he may complain to his girlfriends, and when other people are around his eyes are fake-kind, and he cries a little. But when he's alone with her in the terrible room, his eyes are moggies, and if she reaches for him, he pushes her hands away.

She is in the field, and when her best friend comes into the terrible room—Anne, the only friend she trusts, as a stray dog trusts a human being—Joseph gives Anne his fake-kind look, and Anne is fooled. Even Anne, who sits with her, and strokes her hair, and says with real tears in her eyes, *Sweetie, I'm so sorry, I wish that I could help you.* She is in the field, and Anne can't help her, wouldn't believe her about Joseph and his girlfriends even if she used an old-fashioned doctors' word, *intercourse*—a word that used to make her smile, as if there were only one kind. That word makes her long to travel back in time, when the word—the world—had happier meanings.

She is in the field, unable to force one normal smile. She can't remember the last time she could. It must have been before Dr. Janus told Joseph that she was having a complete breakdown, and fake-kind Joseph promised to help her. But when Dr. Janus phoned to tell Joseph about a place where she could go for a rest—a real rest—Joseph just said *Yes...Yesss...Yesssss*. After he hung up, Joseph looked at her with his moggie eyes and pronounced—each word shattering on the polished oak floor of their living room—*Dr. Janus is a nice woman, but that isn't the place for you*. Numbly, she swept the floor clean, and then sat on the sofa after Joseph went to bed, writing a suicide note on one of his yellow legal pads. But when she went to retrieve it the next morning after Joseph left for work—to mail it to Daniel, or to bury it—the note was gone.

She is in the field, as alone as she ever has been, more alone than when she stood in St. Regis with Daniel, staring at the icy patch in front of her grandparents' double gravestone, Nana's death date chiseled beside Grandpap's at last. Sweet Nana, who always protected her. It was January, the North Country earth frozen too hard to dig. As difficult as it was to think of Nana underground, it was more difficult to imagine her cold body waiting on a slab until spring thaw, as if she had been divided from her soul.

She is in the field, *eloped*, as they call escape from the psychiatric ward. It was almost too easy. The door of the

locked ward clicked shut behind her and a bored blonde nurse, and *voila!* she was in the regular part of the hospital. A long corridor stretched before her like a wedding aisle. The nurse didn't turn to her or touch her, expecting her to follow. They were on their way to an assessment—by who or what the nurse didn't bother to tell her. She is in the field, and when the corridor widened suddenly—beautifully—into a lobby with a revolving glass door, she bolted to the right, through the sharp slice of daylight that led to the outside. She glanced back to see the nurse standing in the lobby with arms crossed, making no move to follow.

She is in the field, in no one's company, and no longer anyone's bride. As the blonde nurse was pressing the magic combination that separated psych world from normal world, she turned her head to the left and saw Joseph, sitting in the consulting room, eerily visible through the bulletproof glass window in the room's upper wall. Wearing a pinstriped suit and sky blue tie—identical to his wedding clothes—his weight and prematurely white hair giving him an air of authority. Joseph was nodding at the psychiatrist, fake-kind and terribly convincing...*I'm not a doctor, but I play one on TV...* When she looked at Joseph, protected by that unbreakable window, she was horrified, thinking: *He can make them do anything—lock me up forever—get them to kill me in here.*

She is in the field, three blocks from the hospital, with three choices: wait here for the orderlies to find her, go back to the

hospital on her own, or throw herself under the treacherous bus. She doesn't have the nerve for bloody suicide—think of the poor bus driver, the stunned passengers, and the angry line of cars, honking and honking until they clear the mess away. If she was as smart as she was supposed to be (once upon a time, even Joseph called her smart) she would have hoarded her pills and swallowed them with a glass of milk—sweet Nana's milk and cookies—instead of letting Joseph find her with an unopened bottle, hands trembling, shaking the orange cylinder like a gourd filled with dead seeds. She is in the field, longing for Daniel—even for her sister, Teresa, a vet who loves animals more than people. *Teresa*, she says in her head, *now I am one of your strays, but you can coax me to come out, I promise I won't bite.*

She is in the field, and there is no way out—only the way back—down the busy street, and through the revolving door that lured her with its fragment of salvation. Now that door will suck every ray of light inside—like sobs stifled in the night—sealing her eyes in the cruel field of her fate.

## Author Photograph & Biography



[Image description: Angele Ellis is a pale-skinned woman with shoulder-length reddish brown hair and dark brown eyes. She poses in front of a statue of the Buddha, along a garden wall covered with green ivy. She wears dangling pearl earrings and a red velvet V-neck pullover.]

**Angele Ellis's** fiction, poetry, and reviews have appeared in over fifty publications and ten anthologies. She is author of *Arab on Radar* (Six Gallery Press), whose poems won her a fellowship from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, *Spared* (A Main Street Rag Editors' Choice Chapbook), and a forthcoming hybrid book of flash fiction and poetry whose focus is her adopted city of Pittsburgh.

## **Medication Cookbook**

by Sara Pisak

### **Ingredients:**

1 can (19 oz), Progresso Chicken and Wild Rice Soup

8 tablets (5mg), Methotrexate

1 child using a red crayon to color a picture of a football

2 parents pacing between the microwave and an oak kitchen table

### **Instructions:**

Use an antique cranking can opener with the choppy gears and the knob which looks like a fashionable bowtie to open the can.

Place entire 19 oz can of soup in favorite, handmade, red clay, bowl. A bowl too heavy for four year old-muscles to bear.

Cover the bowl with Saran Wrap and heat in GE microwave, setting the chrome knob for 60 seconds on medium/high heat.

As you look at the back of the tiny, brunette head now grasping a blue crayon, let cool for roughly another 60 seconds.

Once cool, parents ensure each spoonful teems with chicken, rice and vegetables.

Garnish with one small, football-shaped (yellow<sup>572</sup> or orange<sup>604</sup>, whichever Weis Pharmacy had that month) 5mg Methotrexate tablet.

Don't worry! The orange pill resembles a carrot.

With shaking hands, feed to stiff and swollen four-year-old girl in Bugs Bunny pajamas and 101 Dalmatian socks she picked out herself.

Repeat until recommended dose, usually eight pills, is gone.

### **Variations:**

Progresso Beef Barley soup, Progresso Minestrone soup, Mrs. Grass Extra Noodle Chicken soup, Motts Applesauce and Fruity Pebbles.

### **Note:**

I didn't know what real food tasted like until the age of eight, when my parents and doctor switched medications and food's taste drastically improved. When the prescription changed from football-shaped yellow<sup>572</sup> or orange<sup>604</sup> pills to a translucent and soluble liquid, there were fewer carrots in every bowl of soup. However, water acquired a sour taste.

## Author Photograph & Biography



[Image Description: Black and white photograph of a young white woman in a patterned shirt and black pants, who reads while seated in front of a bookshelf.]

**Sara Pisak** is a recent graduate of Wilkes University with a degree in English Literature and English Creative Writing. Sara participates in the Poetry in Transit Program and is a Region 1 Winner in general column writing from The Society of Professional Journalists. Sara was diagnosed with Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis at the age of two. She uses her writing to explore the varying perspective of illnesses from childhood and adulthood. When not writing, Sara can be found spending time with her family and friends. You can follow her writing adventures on Twitter @SaraPisak10.

## The Bookseller

by Martine Compton

*Give me the weight of a man, his style of dress, and the length of his stride. Tell me how many children he has had with his wife; with other men's wives. "Ah! Yes, take down a novel of Simenon's..."*

*Show me a woman with freshly cropped hair and perfect teeth, who is shod in down-at-heel Ferragamos while her hands are chapped from housework. "Give me two titles you've read and enjoyed..."*

*Talk to me for five minutes, let me study (seemingly my thoughts are elsewhere) the cadence of your speech; how often you employ three-plus-syllable words, break into a smile, or get me to laugh, and I'll say:*

"I have a title for you. The historic facts of this novel are impeccable." (I can tell by the way you command a room...)

Or:

"You like to start at the beginning, I can tell." (As you do not waste words...) Or:

"Dialogue is more important to you than plot." (The rhythms of your speech correspond exactly with this author's crisp and chatty dialogue...)

*An old woman who's walked in the door with shoulders straight back puts me in mind of the ballet. She takes more care in her dress than in the cleaning of her teeth, is used to being seen at a distance; she is muscular and slight. She makes an entrance silently, her eyes sweep the room; not untrusting is she, but alert. For her, setting is central, the broader view is vital. Perhaps, the Hebrides, a century ago...*

*And this young woman, her dark, cloak-like clothes are finely made if a bit worn. She has some secret joy, and can keep secrets. We speak of the weather generally, then of the rain. When I make mention of London, her eyes for a moment are yearning, so I say with a knowing smile, "Once, many years ago, I took a train across England, with a book called 'Neverwhere'..."*

*After ten minutes, I can tell a little more: what parts of them, by how they move, are sore. This book will make them laugh at page one. They won't put it down, no matter how it tires their arms; clearly they withstand much pain... Laughter will heal them, deep within.*

*Rings around his eyes tell me: "You'd enjoy this book that kept me up all night..."*

*Beneath the young man's Midwestern accent, I can hear crisp consonants: the influence of a family grammarian. The faint whiff of cigar smoke on his clothes reminds me of my*

*grandfather. I can tell, by how he makes room for the aged couple sharing the aisle, he enjoys the company of the elderly, perhaps sees them as contemporaries. I take a risk and select a volume of John Dickson Carr. "He is haunting without being graphic. His characters are great company. An excellent storyteller..."*

*And just now at the book group, this quiet man, with elbow patches on his modest jacket, was the only one who caught the author's humorous observations of life in the U.K. He has traveled. He enjoys humor that is subtle, clever. Irish short stories. "William Trevor is for the ages," I let drop when I later catch him browsing the display table.*

*And if they speak churlishly, abhorring small talk, say simply and directly: "Here is the master-work of a suicidal poet, ahead of his time..." They will leave feeling less alone, the slim volume now in their care.*

This is your calling: talking to strangers, reading their silences, beckoning their daydreams, and matching felicity to mood. You are on your feet for hours without feeling it. Unthinkingly, you take your lunch standing up at the counter, poring over a newly arrived tome you've laid out like a treasure map. This vocation often means holiday work without holiday pay. As you shelve the hundreds, the thousands, of books, titles and tales have locked away in the corridors of your mind, you consider: you tune out the world,

and listen with your eyes. You catalog readers by cut of raincoat, distance from other shoppers, whether they come alone or in pairs; by their comfort with silences, sensitivity to proximity of others, oblivion to all life not found on a page; those whose motions are swift, birdlike; those who glide along as ghosts. All this you see and more. If they approach you but speak low, turn your hearing aids up, and laughingly say, "Ahh... I was lost in this wonderful book..."

## Author Photograph & Biography



[Image Description: A photograph of a smiling white woman with long sandy hair wearing a white beanie.]

**Martine Compton** is a Metro-Detroit-based artist. After having had her first short story published at 15, Ms. Compton has published cartoons, verse, fiction, and essays for numerous publications as varied as *The Midwestern Worker* out of Chicago, and *Damazine: The Voice of the Arab World* out of Damascus, Syria. With her photographer husband she writes travel articles, most recently for the Beijing-based newspaper, *The Global Times*. She can be reached at [wordsmithforhire@gmail.com](mailto:wordsmithforhire@gmail.com) and via Twitter @MartineCompton.

## *The Deaf Poets Society, Issue 1: August 2016*

### ART SECTION

#### **Editor's Note**

by Janet Morrow

I have been viewing, analyzing, making, and experiencing work about disability, or work by artists who have disabilities, for a number of years now. The ways in which art and disability can be intermingled are myriad, and there are about as many intriguing ways disability may be expressed in art as there are artists who have disabilities.

Although all art is a commentary on the human condition and our perceptions of, or from, that condition, works that examine issues of embodiment, particularly problematic embodiment, seem to me to engage this commentary at its most raw and honest level, and I find that a heady experience.

Someone once commented to me that disability art, at its best, is like a quick slap to the face. Perhaps we are tapping into that experience of the sublime that stops us in our tracks for a breath or two. What we see and experience ensnares our focus, our attention, our being, and we depart from that moment, changed.

I am so excited to share with you the work of the artists featured in this, our inaugural issue. Their work, to me, represents that beautiful quick slap in the face. You will see a variety of media and of styles. Some artists speak visually with specificity about disability and some do not. I tend to think that when an artist who has a disability makes a piece of art, disability is always present, whether the work is overtly "about" disability or not. Disability is part of the artist's identity and good work is almost always autobiographical to some extent.

Stephen Lapthisophon, in his statement, says that his work reflects "my interest in being in the world." I love that sentence. All of these artists have made the choice to be in the world and their work communicates the essence of their unique states of being. It is first person, it is real, and it is beautiful. Enjoy!

**Janet Morrow** is a conceptual artist and teacher. Much of her work examines themes of deafness, disability and otherness. She holds an MFA in Intermedia Studio Art from The University of Texas at Arlington. Her work has been exhibited at Surface Gallery in Nottingham, England, Access Gallery in Austin, The Smithsonian International Gallery in Washington, D.C., and many other venues. She has taught art and Disability Studies at The University of Texas at Arlington and Tarrant County College Northeast and currently teaches art for the MHMR Pine Street Recovery Center. Janet lives in the Dallas/Fort Worth area with her husband Jerry. She has two grown children and is a very proud new Grandma.

"The Tumble Down and Up Again," by Anastasia Keck, relief print, 2015



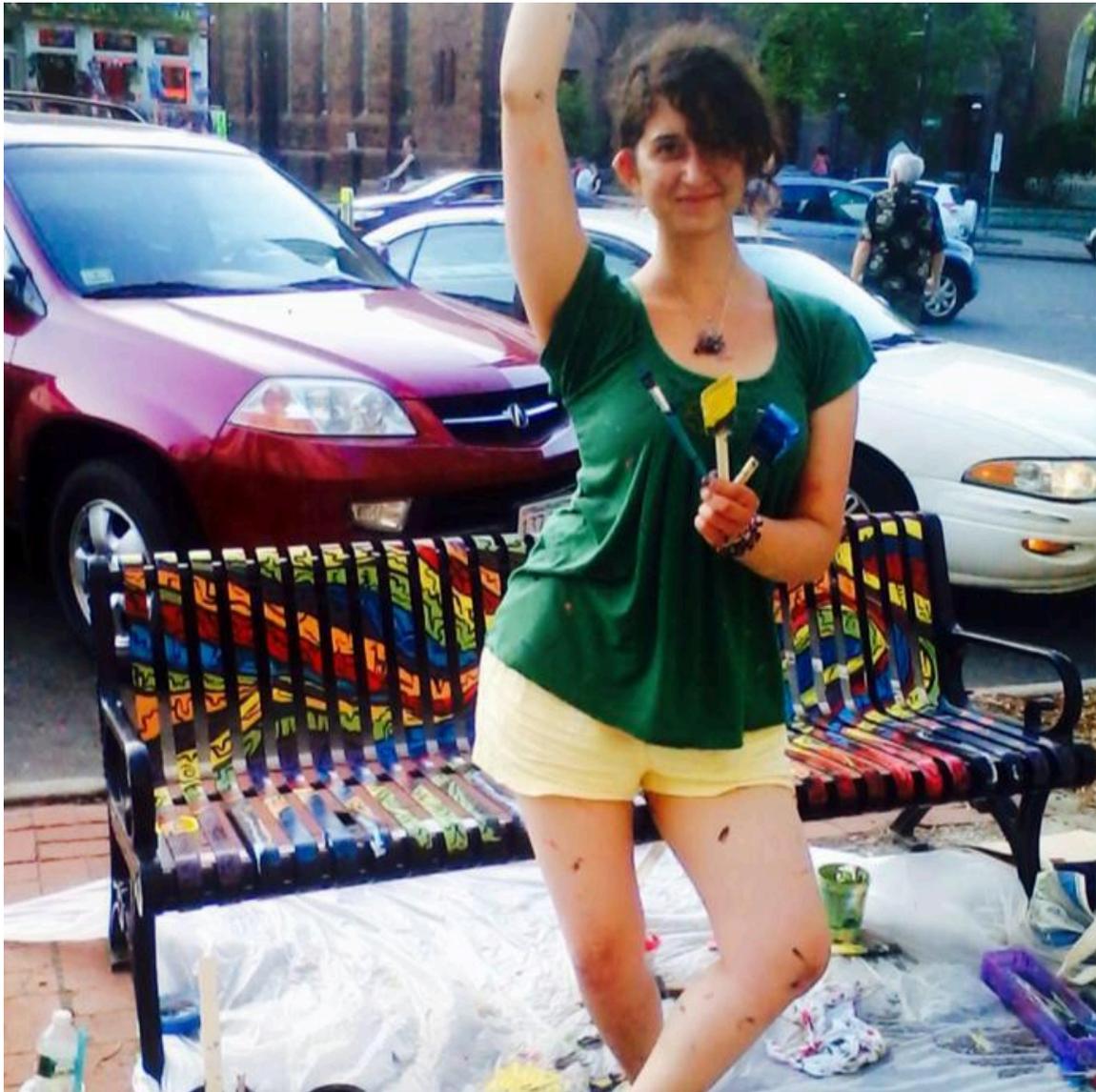
[Image Description: A visual collage of an upside down sunset, a sideways fence, half a tree, and birds morphing into a human figure who is desperately trying to catch something.]

### **Artist's Statement**

"The Tumble Down and Up Again" is a relief made from rearranging the blocks that formed a different

image. Rearranging the original plan seems to be generally how life goes for me, but sometimes what's formed from the remains of an old idea can be exciting, get the point across better or open up door ways to something new.

## Artist Photograph

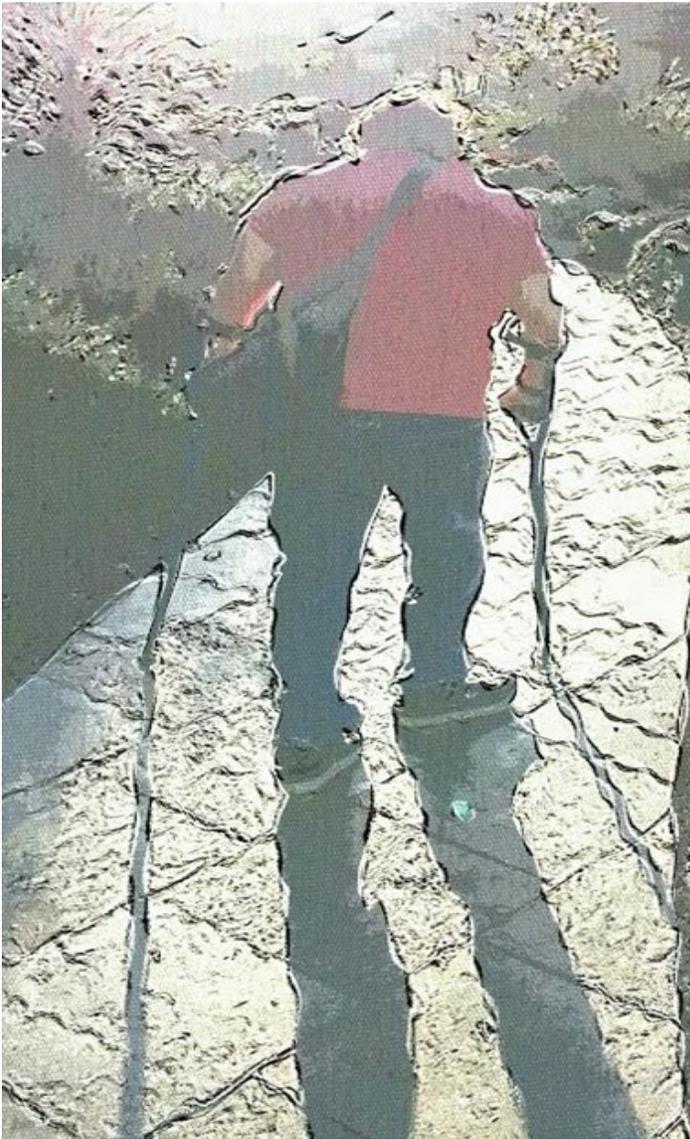


[Image Description: A white woman posed in front of a half-painted bench holding paint brushes.]

## **Artist Biography**

**Anastasia Keck** is a visual artist who uses her work for healing, to reframe her experiences in the psychiatric system, and to challenge societal norms around "mental illness." She attended Hampshire College and currently works at the Western Mass Recovery Learning Community as a Peer Advocate at their community centers, peer-run respite, and Career Initiatives Grant Coordinator.

"Lisa in Campbell" by Barbara Ruth, photograph, 2016



[Image Description: A light-skinned woman with curly auburn hair wearing a red short sleeve shirt and jeans is walking away from the camera. She is using Canadian crutches and has a bag over her right shoulder, resting on her left hip. She walks in a courtyard with pavers, and the photograph has been manipulated so the shadows of her legs and crutches are

wavy, making patterns with the pavers. Vegetation is on both sides of her; she walks toward an area of increasing light and plants.]

### **Artist's Statement**

This photograph was taken with a Samsung Note 2 cellphone and manipulated with filters both on the phone and online. I began taking photos in 2013. Doing so has made me more visually aware of my surroundings, more present to the beauty of this world. Editing a photograph has much in common with editing writing, through cutting (cropping) and enhancing. I often find something in a photo which wasn't what I was going for, some little section which is interesting when enlarged and altered. This is a picture of my beloved, Lisa. I like how the shadows of her legs and her crutches come out toward the viewer.

## Artist Photograph



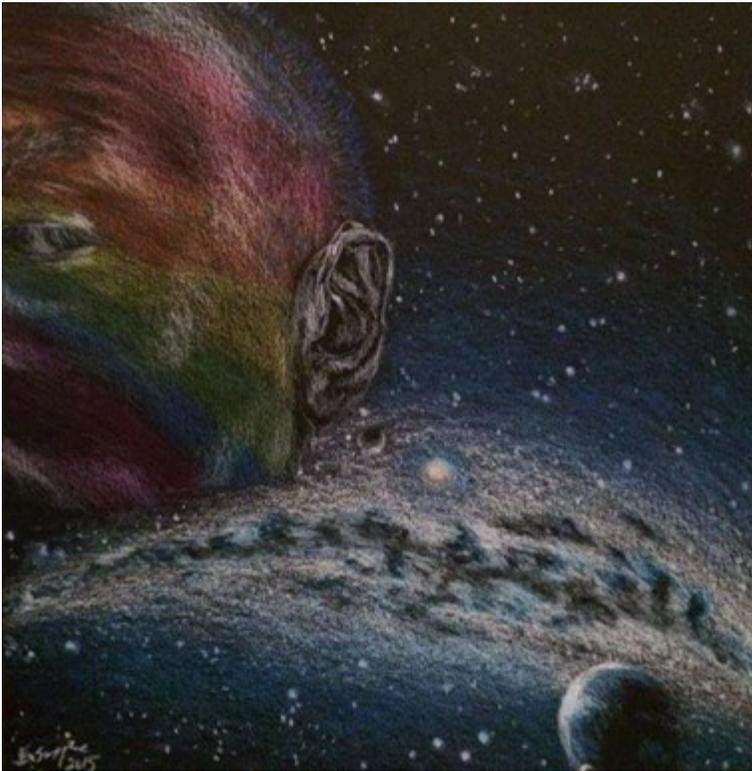
[Image description: Close-up showing part of the face of an olive-skinned woman with dark brown eyes. Parts of her gray and brown eyebrows are visible. She is looking down and has a slight smile and a fairly prominent brown mole under her left eye. Photo Credit: Barbara Ruth.]

## Artist Biography

**Barbara Ruth** is drawn to the edges, the in-between, the transitional lenses of her glasses, the equinoxes, the mixing of watercolors on the thirsty paper, the going up and coming down, the phases of moon and tide, not this/not that. She is a physically disabled neurodivergent photographer, poet, fiction

writer, essayist, and memoirist whose work has been published in Australia, Canada, India, UK and US, and widely anthologized in disability, feminist, literary and queer anthologies, including *QDA: Queer Disability Anthology*, *The Spoon Knife Anthology*, and *Barking Sycamores: Year One*. She lives in San Jose, CA, USA.

**"Rainbow Face with Hearing Aid" by Eddie Swayze, color pencils on colored paper**



[Image Description: A portion of a man's face, tinted with rainbow colors, floats in front of a panorama of a galaxy, stars and planets in outer space. A hearing aid is in the man's left ear.]

### **Artist's Statement**

I am a deaf visual artist and happen to be gay. I have been drawing series of self-portraits or parts of myself, or deaf-themed artwork, that portray my gay pride (LGBT issues). Many of the drawings also have space-related images such as galaxies, stars, or planets. They refer to my strong spiritual

relationship to the cosmos and my fascination with the universe. The space images around me or behind me provoke the idea of oneness of myself and the whole universe. The latest series are colored pencil drawings on colored papers.

This Rainbow Face with Hearing Aid drawing shows a self-portrait of myself with a rainbow painted on my face. I drew my face on black paper with colored pencils, using a photographed image of myself on the computer as a reference. I made sure the hearing aid in my one ear can be clearly seen. I then used a photo of the stars and planets from the Internet as a reference and drew them around me. For this particular work, I'm saying that I'm beautiful as a human being that happens to be gay and deaf, and I perceive myself as valuable and part of the whole universe as one, not irrelevant or insignificant, or separated.

## Artist Photograph



[Image Description: Photograph of a white man in a light-colored shirt, wearing a black bowler hat, glasses with heavy frames, and an earring in his left ear.]

## Artist Biography

**Eddie Swayze** was enrolled at Rochester School for the Deaf until 1976, then enrolled at Horseheads Elementary School under B.O.C.E.S's (Board of Cooperative Education Services) Total Communication mainstreaming program in Horseheads, NY. He graduated from Horseheads High School in 1983. He studied Art at National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) in the Applied Art and Computer Graphics Department until 1985, then cross-registered into RIT's (Rochester Institute of Technology) College of Imaging Arts and Sciences. He studied Painting and Illustration and received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 1989. He continued at the same institution and graduated with a Master of Fine Arts degree in 1995. He taught Art, Art History, and Literature. He also tutored English and Literature at NTID.

He is a visual artist, poet, performing artist, actor and educator. He received three New York State Council on the Arts Strategic Opportunity Stipends grants and two New York State Council on the Arts Decentralization grants. He creates mixed media, draws, and paints. He also creates digital artwork in computers, using PhotoShop/Illustrator/inDesign software, and other software and apps.

"Untitled (hands with gold pigment)," by Stephen Lapthisophon, photograph, 2015



[Image Description: A photograph taken looking down at a man's open hands, both palms up, smudged with gold pigment. The ground, pavement and part of a foot in a black, white, and red sneaker are visible beneath the hands.]

"Egg Bell," photograph of an installation, part of Lapthisophon's project, "Toccare (Non) Toccare" at The Nasher Sculpture Center, 2015, rope, string, egg, nail, and gold pigment



[Image Description: A broken eggshell hangs suspended in the air, a nail attached to one side of it. The outside of the broken shell appears to be smudged with dirt. The inside of the shell and part of the nail are covered in gold pigment.]

"Broken Egg 13," photograph, 2015



[Image Description: An out-of-focus photograph of a broken egg with the number 13 written in black on the shell. The egg rests on a surface that is gold in color and a brown wall is visible behind it.]

"Clear Spot," latex house paint, coffee, coffee grounds, pencil, spray paint, oil, ink, stick, string, and hair on stretched canvas, 48" x 36", 2015



[Image Description: A rectangular, non-representational artwork with a mottled white and ivory background and a few faint smudges of red pigment. The canvas is spattered and encrusted with dark black and brown substances. Faint pencil scribbling and writing appears in the lower right-hand quadrant; one can make out the numbers 15 and 5+. Near

the center of the canvas, gold metallic paint drips down the canvas. To the left and below that gold paint, a splotch of dark gray paint also drips.]

### **Artist's Statement**

In 1994, I became partially sighted due to a neurological disorder. I have remained legally blind since then. Although I have on occasion made works of art that reflect this condition, I take no "position" on disability as such. I am an artist. I am disabled. I make art directed at the social, the real. However, that rarely involves the specificities of being disabled.

The works represented here reflect my interest in being in the world. An interest in real things, human scale, shared space, and the reach and limitations of the body. I continue to be interested in the reach of art in history and the ways that we learn from the past. These works represent the work of my hand, its reach, and its grasp.

## Artist Photograph



[Image Description: A dark-haired white man wearing a black t-shirt and jeans looks toward the camera. Part of a dark brown and white non-representational artwork on a canvas is visible over his right shoulder.]

## Artist Biography

**Stephen Lapthisophon** is an American artist and educator working in the field of conceptual art, critical theory, and disability studies. Lapthisophon received his MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1979. His work combines poetry, performance, sound art, and visual arts with postmodern philosophical concerns. Among his influences is the legacy of the Situationists, who sought to make everyday life a focus of artistic activity. Lapthisophon has taught at Columbia College in Chicago, the School of the Art Institute, and the University of Texas at Dallas. He currently teaches art and art history at The University of Texas at Arlington.

## *The Deaf Poets Society, Issue 1: August 2016*

### IDEAS SECTION

#### **Editor's Note**

by T.K. Dalton

I am thrilled to introduce our first set of talented writers with disabilities reviewing literary work by and about the disability community. Without exaggeration, I can say that editing the work of the contributors to our Ideas section--which began as reviews, but has expanded to include interviews and, at least this issue, a collectively written manifesto--collaborating with these energetic, dedicated, talented writers has influenced everything I've read these past weeks, from Smart Ass Cripple's take on Mike Pence to the daily installment of *The Happy Little Yellow Box* (a big hit with the under-three set in my house).

But no place have my exchanges with this group and their criticism infused my reading more than with the debut novel from Kaitlyn Greenidge, *We Love You, Charlie Freeman*. The novel centers on a Black family that has moved from Boston to rural western Massachusetts to work at the Toneybee Institute, a place with an upsetting history of racism and eugenics. The job that has taken them there is teaching sign language to a chimpanzee, who lives in their house. That's a lot of loaded material for one book, but Greenidge weaves it into a spectacular, thoughtful dream. I'm not going to talk

about it at length here, except to talk about how Greenidge-- who is not d/Deaf and whose connection to American Sign Language is limited to her mother, a hearing person who earned a master's degree at Gallaudet--succeeds where many established and even canonized hearing writers have failed, that is, in incorporating sign language into literary work written in English.

When I learn that a hearing writer is incorporating sign language into a written work I always approach that information warily. As the hearing child of a late-deafened parent, as someone who has worked as a sign language interpreter since 2010, as a writer whose fiction and nonfiction often incorporate d/Deaf characters and their diverse relationship to language and communication, I dread learning that a hearing writer with loose or nonexistent ties to the signing Deaf community is incorporating the language or the culture into their work. Take for starters the seminal anthology *Angels and Outcasts: An Anthology of Deaf Characters in Literature* (Gallaudet Univ. Press, 1986). On the page, these characters pale compared with Deaf people as written by Deaf people, in everything from *Eyes of Desire* (Allyson Publications, 1994), the book that changed my kinda-CODA, proto-bi-boy life, to Gallaudet University Press' *Deaf American Poetry* and their two-volume *Deaf American Prose*, not to mention the recent *Deaf Lit Extravaganza* (2013, Handtype Press), and even some

contributors to a new work we review in this issue, *QDA: A Queer Disability Anthology* (Squares and Rebels, 2015).

But most of what I feared in Greenidge's novel was the idea that ASL would be the kind of cherry-on-top, two-point-conversion that it is in otherwise brilliant literary work. The classic example for me here is the often-anthologized Amy Hempel story "In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson is Buried." Never mind the hospital visit, which is the entire temporal frame of the story; I love the way Hempel renders this, and I spent a bunch of my childhood at the Dana Farber Brain Tumor Clinic. A perfect story sours in its last lines when Hempel writes, almost randomly, of a gorilla who learned sign language. The story ends with the fact that when the gorilla who'd learned sign language had a baby and the baby died, the gorilla said, over and over, *Baby, come back*, and Hempel writes that the gorilla was "now fluent in the language of grief."

It's a beautiful line, but one that has always bothered me. One reason is the narrator still can't speak that language--though maybe, in her defense, this story hews to the Elizabeth Bowen line about being "the moment after which a character's life changes." (Though if that's the case, she's suddenly fluent in grief? Does that even make it a language? Or an electrical circuit? Would this be the same story if the gorilla were "allowing, in the binary way of basic home wiring,

the flow of electrons of grief?" It's no small trick, to be fluent in electricity.)

The other problem is this: leaving the character aside, the writer finds no way to articulate this notion that now the language of grief has seeped through the language of trivia than by appropriating sign (or, maybe more exactly, appropriating its appropriation, in a way that the author seems to think, well, is appropriate.) Is the exoticizing of the animal using a manual language is the only route to this "moment of grace"? I don't think so; rather, it seems like a cheap shortcut.

In an interview that will appear later this fall on the website of the magazine *The Common*, the writer Jillian Weise remarked to me: "So often the nondisabled writer goes to the disabled subject solely for the purpose of objective correlative or metaphor or some kind of gravitas that maybe the poet cannot get from another subject." It had always seemed to me that this is what was happening in Hempel's work, and when I heard about the premise of Greenidge's work, I dreaded seeing this path taken by yet another talented writer. (And Greenidge, she is the real deal. Seriously, read the essay "My Mother's Garden," like now. There's a link to it in the text.)

Greenidge's novel, thankfully, proved my fears unfounded. In a book that is sheerly brilliant in a great many ways, the

decision I most admire in her as a writer was her restraint when it came to what the two sisters could and couldn't do with sign language. I think here of a scene where the sisters get into an argument with a white employee of the Institute, who has been filming them interacting with Charlie. The argument is over the correct sign for AFRICA. (The all-caps in this essay are a gloss, not extra emphasis). There are layers here--the powerful, employing white man controlling the video camera is telling the employed, working Black young women in front of his camera how to use a language that isn't his. Let's face it, ASL doesn't really belong to any of them, but it belongs less to him, the documenting scientist, than to the girls, who are purportedly Charlie's teachers or, more sinisterly, his peers. To put it differently, the sign for AFRICA is being appropriated by each character in different ways that vary in their respect for the community from which they've taken the word.

What I like most about it is that this moment exposes or confirms for me the underlying reason behind the ease with which the girls have communicated ideas that I can't easily back-translate into ASL. To put it another way: I, a hearing writer, wouldn't necessarily present this exact italicized English if my goal was to preserve a semantic sense that could echo ASL's discourse, if not its syntax. (For exquisitely echoed syntax, you'll need to look in our Prose section, at Raymond Luczak's "Neighbors"). These girls, in my reading, are not at all using ASL but a manual communication system

specific to them, a home sign system not so very much unlike the kind of gesture that might be based in signs that my brother, who is on the autism spectrum, uses to sim-com with my father, who stopped signing ten years into his life as a deaf person, when I left home, not so long before I spent six months at Gallaudet University. Greenidge's characters don't bite off more than they can chew, and in this way, they can own whatever they think the language is, because it's not what it actually is to anyone but them. By being clear, at least to me, about the girls' lack of actual ownership of the language, the story they have is not shoplifted from a bookstore, but loaned from a library. Even they know it's not theirs.

What is so very impressive about Greenidge's incorporation of signed language into the novel is how her lack of appropriation allows all the novel's other themes--race, power, family, history--to shine through the thing that makes the book stand out--ASL--rather than cheapened by it to those who know better, or inflated in value to those who don't. The presence of ASL doesn't overwhelm the book's other themes, but complements them, deepens them, allowing the novel's exploration of the intersections of these characters and these conflicts to fully reach across the page.

In our reviews and interviews this issue and in future issues, we look for poetry and short fiction, novels and memoirs, anthologies and plays, art exhibits and new media that do

exactly this. And I'm remiss in having spent an awful lot of words before saying what the pieces in this section will make clear: that nobody articulates the disabled experience like disabled writers and critics.

We invite you, our readers, to send us anything you come across that might be worth a closer look. Send an email to [thedeafpoetsociety@gmail.com](mailto:thedeafpoetsociety@gmail.com), with the subject heading "TIP".

T. K. Dalton's essays have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and inclusion in *Best of the Net*. His fiction and nonfiction are forthcoming in *The Common*, *Duende*, and *Front Porch Journal*, and appear in *The Millions*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, *Radical Teacher*, *Deaf Lit Extravaganza*, *Disability Studies Quarterly*, and elsewhere. With poet John Maney, Jr., he edited *What if Writing is Dreaming Together?* He earned an M.F.A. from the University of Oregon and is currently writing a memoir. Tim lives with his family in New York City, where he works as an ASL-English interpreter.

## On *Buck v. Bell*, the Real Tragedy of Eugenics and Adam Cohen's *Imbeciles*

by Kit Mead

The tragedy of eugenics is not that it happened to ostensibly non-disabled people. The tragedy of eugenics is that it happened at all. The tragedy of eugenics is that individuals—eugenicists such as Harry Laughlin and state institution superintendents like Drs. Albert Priddy and John Bell—used the prospect of disability to justify it. The tragedy of eugenics is that anyone, disabled or not, lost their right to choose if they wanted children. Proponents of the practice like Priddy used the prospect of disability to justify sterilizing anyone doctors and state institution superintendents decided to—disabled people, people of color, sex workers, women, low-income people, or a combination of those, for the most part.

In his new book, *Imbeciles: The Supreme Court, American Eugenics, and the Sterilization of Carrie Buck*, journalist Adam Cohen asserts that Carrie Buck, the subject of the 1927 Supreme Court case *Buck v. Bell*, was mentally “normal.” Cohen is not alone; other writers addressing this case, at least in part, including Harry Bruinius (*Better for All the World*), Paul Lombardo (*Three Generations, No Imbeciles*), and J. David Smith and K. Ray Nelson (*The Sterilization of Carrie Buck*) largely agree that Buck and her family were actually quite “normal.” Cohen takes the argument beyond the particular case to the practice of sterilization at large. Cohen

writes: "Many of the victims [of sterilization] were, like Carrie [Buck], perfectly normal both mentally and physically—and they desperately wanted to have children."

In *Imbeciles*, Cohen argues that Carrie Buck's sterilization was unethical because she did not have an intellectual or developmental disability (I/DD), and that she should never have been in the Virginia Colony for Epileptics and the Feebleminded. In one regard, he is correct: Carrie Buck should never have been in that institution. In another regard, he is incorrect. Though Cohen is not alone in implying that there was a correctly-targeted group, just as Carrie Buck should not have been institutionalized and sterilized, neither should anyone else have been.

\* \* \*

Carrie Elizabeth Buck was born in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 1906. The eugenics movement took hold as Carrie grew up. Her father Frank was dead, or had simply left—no one knew. Her mother was Mrs. Emmett Adeline Harlow Buck, called Emma. Her mother took to the streets and got put on charity lists to try and take care of her children. There may have been substance abuse issues with drugs. Emma sometimes went to having sex with different men to try and make ends meet, and had more children. A family called the Dobbsses took Carrie from Emma when Carrie was three or four. Emma eventually was put in the Virginia Colony.

When Carrie was seventeen, the Dobbsses' nephew Clarence raped her; a pregnancy resulted. The Dobbsses wanted to avoid scandal. They packed her off to the Virginia Colony as "feble-minded" after she gave birth to a girl, Vivian. Facts of the case were not observed—the Dobbsses testified that Carrie was unruly and had epilepsy, neither of which were true; the Dobbsses had "no proof she was mentally deficient, and her grades from school, for as long as she had been allowed to attend, showed no lack of intelligence." There were also no provisions made for Carrie to have a lawyer that could explain her side of the story.

Cohen points out the various injustices in Carrie's case through the course of *Imbeciles*, and at one point highlights one of his core arguments: that the Supreme Court and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., had "little to offer a poor, uneducated young woman from the rural South, who wanted the court to protect her from...the popular social movement that had caught her in its sights." In this single sentence, Cohen offers up what he thinks is the injustice: that the movement "caught her in its sights," unethically so because she was not actually "feble-minded." Cohen presents this story as the tale of a young, non-disabled woman who fell into eugenicists' crosshairs by unfortunate happenstance. Carrie was indeed unlucky—but Cohen and other writers should take care to not write that the reason it was unjust was because

eugenicists targeted her instead of someone with an intellectual or developmental disability.

\* \* \*

In 1927, *Buck v. Bell* went before the Supreme Court as the final appeal of previous rulings in Carrie's case through circuit and state courts. The institution's superintendent, Albert Priddy, had chosen Carrie Buck for a test case of Virginia's new sterilization law in 1924, which was written by former lawyer and now Senator Aubrey Strode, a friend of Priddy's. The sterilization law replaced an old one also written by Strode that had only given superintendents of hospitals authority to make decisions in the best health interests of any patient there. A family called the Mallorys had sued Priddy; Willie Mallory and her eldest daughters had been placed in the Colony after Willie got accused of running a sex-work house and arrested. Priddy sterilized Willie and her eldest daughter Jessie. Priddy came through after the court ruled he had acted with "medical discretion," but the judge told Priddy to stop sterilizing patients until the law became clearer.

Strode, a native Virginian like Priddy, believed strongly in the purity of Southern women. He had already written or voted on several mental health bills during his tenure in the Virginia Senate, spurred by his parents acquiring dementia and dying in state institutions. Strode was known as a progressive reformer in many circles. Priddy asked Strode to write a piece

of legislation that could beat any opposition from Virginia legislators and stand up to constitutional challenges. The man known as the progressive reformer complied, drawing on prominent sterilization-enthusiast Harry Laughlin's "Model Eugenical Sterilization Law" from his book *Eugenical Sterilization in the United States*. Laughlin was the head of the Eugenics Record Office at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory under another famous eugenicist, Charles Davenport. He would later provide a written deposition in a case he knew nothing about. He copied Priddy's notes on Carrie almost word-for-word that stated she came from a "shiftless, ignorant and moving class of people."

Before it arrived at the Supreme Court, Carrie's case had gone before the board of the institution. They voted to sterilize her. Her appointed guardian filed an orchestrated appeal that was not truly on her behalf. The case arrived at the Circuit Court in Amherst County; the array of witnesses included teachers of Carrie's relatives, a social worker, and Arthur Estabrook, a field worker at the Eugenics Record Office. Carrie's lawyer, appointed for her by the Colony, was Irving Whitehead—a former Colony board member. Judge Bennett Gordon ruled in favor of the Colony in a speedy fashion. Whitehead filed appeals in every court up to the Supreme Court, who decided to hear the case. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. felt particularly excited to see this case reach the Court. A supporter of eugenics and not the progressive justice people viewed him as, he would relish in convincing the other justices to agree.

Cohen portrays Strode in a curious way. Strode he characterizes as a reluctant, passive supporter of eugenic sterilization due to the fact that the bill “made many fewer Virginians subject to eugenic sterilization,” due to omissions of classes of people from the Model Law. In addition, Cohen pointed out that he had previously written a weak law, one that barely protected Priddy when the Mallorys sued. Cohen also argued this characterization with the reasoning that Strode did not vote on the sterilization bills. The characterization of Laughlin and Priddy as sterilization zealots is, however, accurate.

In *Buck v. Bell*, the Supreme Court delivered a devastating 8-1 decision, with only Justice Pierce Butler dissenting. It declared the non-consensual sterilization of Carrie Buck, a patient at the Virginia Colony for Epileptics and the Feebleminded, and the three-year-old Virginia law that had allowed it, both to be constitutional. William Taft, the Chief Justice, asked Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., to write this infamous statement in the opinion:

It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind. The principle that sustains compulsory vaccination is broad enough to cover cutting the Fallopian tubes. Three generations of imbeciles are enough.

\* \* \*

Buck v. Bell was an injustice done to Carrie Buck, and to the tens of thousands of people, mostly in institutions, who came after her, and still an injustice if Carrie had had an intellectual or developmental disability. It was an injustice. It was an injustice to the women in the California prisons who underwent forced sterilization as recently as 2014, and to the women who went before a Tennessee district court prosecutor who forced plea deals involving sterilization.

Legal loopholes still exist with sterilization today due to the simple fact that Buck v. Bell has never been fully overturned. State eugenics laws were not overturned until the 1970s and 80s. People are still being sterilized today, in the United States and elsewhere. There does not seem to be a legal initiative to overturn *Buck v. Bell* in its entirety; in 1995, the Supreme Court had a chance to do so: a woman with an intellectual disability challenged Pennsylvania's involuntary sterilization law, and the Court declined to hear the case.

*Buck v. Bell* reached beyond the borders of the United States. The Nazi Party cited it as justification for some of their war crimes. They drew upon American eugenic ideals. Cohen, among other writers, has pointed out the facts relating American eugenics and Nazi eugenics and notes "the views that Davenport and other American eugenicists were

expressing were ones that, in a couple of decades, would be associated with German racial theorists." Carrie's case and the Supreme Court ruling also influenced European countries, including Nazi Germany. Cohen writes that "Nazi Germany adopted its Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring in the summer of 1933...the German eugenic sterilization operated on a scale that eclipsed its American model. The law authorized sterilization for many of the reasons in Laughlin's model law..."

In the Nuremberg trials, United States officials, distancing themselves from American eugenics, acted as the primary agents in prosecuting Nazi officials, doctors, and others. Despite its association with Nazism, eugenics is not dead. Victims are still in living memory, and states have been slow to offer apologies and compensation.

From the women sterilized in California prisons and the women forced to take plea deals, to the parents with disabilities seen unfit to parent and have their children taken away—eugenics still has a strong influence. Robyn Powell, J.D., is a former attorney advisor to the National Council on Disability, and currently a disability rights attorney and a team leader at the Disabled Parenting Project. She notes in this piece for the Boston Bar Association that "Bell was cited by a federal appeals court as recently as 2001, in Vaughn v. Ruoff." Vaughn v. Ruoff ruled that "involuntary sterilization is not always unconstitutional if it is a narrowly tailored means

to achieve a compelling government interest.” She also notes that “several states retain a form of involuntary sterilization law on their books. A few even retain the original statutory language.”

The eugenics movement’s power and prominence are not distant memory - and, perhaps, they should not be. We would do well to remember its devastating effects at its most powerful as courts routinely strip disabled parents of their rights, and forced sterilization lingers on into the 21st century.

## Author Photograph & Biography



[Image description: The photo is of Kit Mead, a white non-binary person, smiling at the camera. Their hair is brown in a few areas but mostly dark reddish-pink. Kit is wearing tortoise shell glasses and a teal crocheted hat, with bright pink flower blossoms stuck in the hat.]

**Kit Mead** is a writer and blogger on mental health and disability. They are Autistic as well as having ADHD and identify as disabled, and have multiple mental illnesses. A person whose gender is undefined and vague, as well as identifying as queer more generally, Kit's work has appeared in *QDA: A Queer Disability Anthology*. It has also appeared or is upcoming in *Aurora* (arts and literary magazine at Agnes Scott College), *Luna Luna Magazine*, and the *Establishment*. Kit blogs at Paginated Thoughts <https://kpagination.wordpress.com>, where an earlier version of this essay first appeared.

## A Trip to Crip World: On Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's *Bodymap*

by Cyree Jarelle Johnson

This review was long in coming, because I spent much of the day it was due watching non-disabled adults cheer for a 14-year-old black disabled girl who has made the choice to end her life. Many of the non-disabled internet trolls typed many of the standard bearing mottoes of ableism, such as “If I was in constant pain, I would want to kill myself too,” and “Who are we to decide whether she can end her life?” These comments were beside the point; of course I value the right to death, but to encourage a disabled teen to kill herself only demonstrates the way that disabled life is undervalued. After a day full of hyper-visible violence against disabled people, I needed a trip to Crip World.

“crip world” is the third section of Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha’s book *Bodymap*, and it reads like a group of love poems. Some are romantic, some are fraught, but all depict the intimacy of disability, and the loneliness and loss of disabled life. But *Bodymap* is far from tragic. It paints a portrait of crippled body sovereignty in a world that would rather isolate us until we disappear.

Piepzna-Samarasinha explores these disappearances in the poem “dirty river girl,” which starts:

There's an underground river flowing through every queer-of / colour community I've ever been a part of / and kissed. The underground river of kids who went away. / The girls and boys who got sick and tired, spent hours curled up / sleeping.

Ah, the forgotten. Oh, the invisible illness, the invisible people who roll, or walk, or limp, or move away. So little literature deals with our absence, which is part of how we stay hidden in plain sight. It's difficult to conceive of lack without illuminating the darkness to see what is not there. Without investigating interactions that are otherwise whispered. The poem goes deeper in the voice of the well or able-bodied person saying "Sick? you sick again? You still in bed, girl? It's three in the afternoon!"

Piepzna-Samarasinha moves headlong into the pain and shame of disabled life, the part that has little to do with the actuality of a sick body and everything to do with societal ableism. She deftly navigates the most stigmatized parts of the body itself through unbridled and honest portraits of disabled sex and love, both romantic and platonic. In "crip sex moments," she uses her ink to draw attention to the magic that is cripple-on-cripple action, but doesn't shy away from meditating on its sacrifices: "I wanted you so bad I made my whole wardrobe and body product line fragrance-free in the hopes that when we made out I wouldn't give you a seizure."

Perhaps those words would not betray the hope and possibility of new romance to an abled person. This book is not for them. The beauty of *Bodymap* is that it is written for us: crippled queers of color. In all our horror, in all our glory.

Although she highlights sick crippled experiences in ways that are loving and positive, Piepzna-Samarasinha sugarcoats nothing. In “this is what I know about crazy” she holds mentally ill folks accountable for our actions with her trademark SharkMom tough love: “the thing I wanted to say about crazy is: / 1. There is nothing wrong with you /2. it still sucks sometimes /3. you gotta figure out a way to love yourself anyway.” It's a complete departure from the constant blame that mentally ill folks are asked to accept for our differences. No one is let off the hook, no bad behavior is excused, but there is also no love lost. It is a new model of radical acceptance that eschews prose, that can only be expressed through poetry.

As a longtime reader of Piepzna-Samarasinha's work, I value the way that her words move disabled bodies from the periphery of social justice conversations to the center. Many works regard themselves as “intersectional,” a term that emerged from Kimberle Crenshaw's black feminist scholarship, and has become a buzzword that sometimes denotes tokenism and a “only one of each” mentality. Piepzna-Samarasinha's work is overflowing at the places where identities meet: where brown and mixed meet femme,

where slut meets crippled, where working class meets artist. These crossroads are fertile ground in *Bodymap*; by converging in this territory, she breaths poetry into a community too often isolated from queer spaces, and from radical identities.

The non-disabled world regards disability as horrible, abject. It is, to them, as Piepzna-Samarasinha writes in the closing poem of *Bodymap* "the worst thing in the world." And sometimes, they are right, but not always. But there is beauty, there are blessings. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha reminds us of this as the book shuts its eyes, reminds us "we've always come on boats. we're going to keep coming. we/ know the waves and rough water./ bless the rough water and the small boats./ bless the worst thing."

## Author Photograph & Biography



[Image Description: A black person in glasses, dark pants, & a jean vest stands on a spiral staircase by a bridge & lake. Photo Credit: Nicole Myles, 2015.]

**Cyrée Jarelle Johnson** is a black non-binary essayist and poet living and working in Philadelphia, PA. Cyree's work explores femininity as resistance and rebellion, emerging femme thought, and community as a site of trauma. Their writing has appeared in digital and print outlets in the United States, Canada, and Europe including *Feministing*, *Black Girl Dangerous*, and most recently in the Spring 2016 issue of *Bedfellows*. Get in touch on their website [cyreejarellejohnson.com](http://cyreejarellejohnson.com)

## On Adam Haslett's *IMAGINE ME GONE*

by Loretta McCormick

The isolation and invisibility of the 10 million Americans managing disabling mental illness is too often compounded by ableist assumptions: that people who experience major depression or bipolar disorder nurture their unhappiness, that they depend on drugs as a crutch rather than use them as a legitimate treatment, that they are taking too many drugs, not enough drugs, haven't given their drugs a chance or have been taking drugs for too long. Even more painful, these misconceptions often come from well-meaning family and friends who frequently double as caregivers who provide systems of support. The guilt, love, anger and worry that comes from navigating mental health within a family is at the heart of Adam Haslett's *Imagine Me Gone*. Narrated by various members of a family—lonely and depressed Michael, responsible Celia, uptight Alec, and their parents, Margaret and John—the book is unified by their struggle to understand one another and be understood in return.

After opening with the suicide of Michael, Haslett quickly moves back in time to the restrained and nervous courtship of Margaret and John. Soon after their engagement, and without warning, John is hospitalized with what his doctor refers to as an "imbalance." Margaret discovers this is not the first time John has been hospitalized, but decides to marry him despite the uncertainty of his mental health. John's inability to

manage his depression and his eventual suicide when his children are still young foreshadow his son Michael's difficulty in managing his own mental health. However, Haslett's characters don't reduce Michael's depression and anxiety to a genetic inevitability. As Margaret realizes her son needs medical help, she also refutes the all-knowing assumptions of doctors. She notes, "They hear about John, and that's it. They're convinced it's in the genes. Which I am sure is part of it. But they didn't know them both. Michael's not his father." But, Haslett also deftly explores the consuming uneasiness and exhaustion, guilt and frustration the family shares in understanding Michael's mental illness.

For each of them, including Michael, their patterns of managing become increasingly untenable. Late in the novel, when Celia returns home after dealing with Michael's latest crisis, she explains, "After that trip, the way I had always been toward Michael gave out like an exhausted muscle." She muses, "Where did it end? What level of need couldn't he surpass?" and realizes, "No one's capacity was infinite." While Alec and Margaret find it more difficult to draw boundaries in their interactions with Michael, they too feel a mounting level of stress in their inability to "fix" him. When Celia receives a call from Alec wanting to discuss the family dynamic she notes, "There had been an episode...And now the charge of anxiety it had sparked was completing the family circuit." Although they love him, Michael's family simply doesn't always know how to talk to him. They make mistakes. They

make assumptions about his illness. Most notably, Alec is confident that Michael just needs to stop taking medication. As he tries to help wean Michael off of his meds, he thinks, "We were doing the right thing. He just needed to take off the last bandage. Like Celia said, the sedatives had walled his feelings in, and the higher the walls go, the more he feared what they protected him from."

As powerful as each of Michael's family members' perspectives are, the chapters narrated by Michael himself allow this novel about the impact of a family living with mental illness to bloom. Rather than sidelining him in his own story, the chapters narrated by the voice of the character who actually experiences mental illness are the most intriguing and powerful. When we read Alec worry about Michael's medication, or Celia at her breaking point with Michael's endless, late-night calls, he comes off as selfish and distraught. But in his own voice, he is self-deprecating, and endearing, particularly in his love of music. He reveals, "I listened to records in every spare hour, including while I did my homework, and on my headset after I'd 'gone to bed.' I couldn't be certain what it meant to 'Give Up the Funk,' or 'Tear the Roof of the Sucker,' or why Parliament would title an album *Mothership Connection*. But I had my first secret joy at knowing that beyond the veil of the apparent, meaning ached in the grain of music."

Even with the prevalence of suicide and the themes of familial guilt and loss, Haslett avoids wallowing in melodrama or mawkish sentimentality most successfully with Michael's chapters. Margaret, Celia, Alec, and John often narrate one poignant moment in their lives which distills their relationships with one another and illuminates where they fit in the family unit and the outside world. Margaret remembers learning of her fiancé's mental illness. Celia remembers a boat ride with her father, in which he plays a macabre game with his children, asking them to imagine him gone. Fretful Alec remembers a time he pretended to lock himself in the bathroom forcing his father out of bed. These are deeply internal and heartbreaking moments that also do so much work in defining the family dynamic. But it is Michael's chapters that offer a surprising and necessary humor.

Michael's chapters recall Haslett's earlier short story collection, *You Are Not a Stranger Here*, particularly the story "Notes to My Biographer." In this story, Haslett has created a hilariously compelling character—an inventor with a history of institutionalization who, nearing the end of his life, is going on a road trip in a stolen car to visit his estranged children. This narrator possesses a similar self-deprecating and sly humor and reveals the way his mental health issues are manifested in very selfish behaviors. The narrator of "Notes to my Biographer" never really lets the readers too far past his glib veneer. However, the breadth of the novel allows Haslett to

imbue Michael with a sensitivity and heart that tempers his selfishness.

Unlike the rest of his family, Michael tells his story in various forms including a recorded voicemail message, psychiatric intake form, letters to his aunt, an “after-action report” of a family therapy session, and a request for a loan forbearance. Speaking in overt metaphor, he is sly and witty, and his words can carry a sting. But, the depth of love for his family is also revealed in a way that he doesn’t seem capable of stating outright. These metaphors also allow him to speak of his disappointment with himself and address his own shortcomings. When filling out a patient intake form, he describes his family history:

Let’s not pretend either of us has time for a complete answer here. In brief, Dad didn’t make it; Mom’s never taken a pill in her life; Alec had an ulcer early on, when they were still fashionable, but has since transitioned into the back-pain industry; and I’d guesstimate Celia’s chronic fatigue peaked out around ’94 somewhere in the Bay Area, though she still has Persistent Annual Lupus Scare Syndrome (PALSS) and Cryptogenic Abdominal Rash Syndrome (CARS). As for my grandparents, all four suffered from Eventual Death Syndrome (EDS).

Later, after a family therapy session, Michael describes the attempt to find a parking space this way:

Trying to regroup, Alec commenced a psyop designed to convince Mom that an open stretch of curb downwind of a laundromat ended more than twelve feet from the adjacent hydrant. The operation failed. Mom ordered a higher alert. Celia observed that we had been on one for a decade.

The novel, perhaps inevitably, circles back to Michael's suicide. And, the trajectory of the rest of the family at the end of the novel does feel a bit too tidy. It aligns itself a bit too closely with a medical model of disability. Disability scholar Rosemarie Garland Thomson explains, "The medical model that governs today's interpretation of disability assumes that any somatic trait that falls short of the idealized norm must be corrected or eliminated." Within the confines of this model, Michael's ill body must necessarily and inescapably disappear because it cannot be cured. Further, it is only after his disappearance that his abled family members can find closure. But, with the closure of this novel, there is also a satisfaction that comes from being able to feel the loss of Michael, knowing that we were allowed into his mind and the minds of those who loved him so deeply, that even in his flawed family, compassion and love and family and caregiving overwrite mere obligation.

## Author Photograph & Biography



[Image Description: A white woman with brown hair and bangs wearing a blue tank top, standing in front of a book shelf.]

**Loretta McCormick** is a English PhD student at UWM and is the Editor in Chief of *cream city review*. Her fiction writing and her critical interests often explore issues of disability and she is particularly interested in exploring intersections between myth and science.

# A HERD OF GLASS UNICORNS: A Review of *QDA: A Queer Disability Anthology*, edited by Raymond Luczak

by Thomas Muething

*QDA: A Queer Disability Anthology* (Squares and Rebels, 2015) is an excellent first foray into the complicated web of disability, love, and desire. Most powerful among its many strong contributions are the prose of Kenny Fries and Andrew Morisson-Gurza; the poetry of Donna Williams, Liv Mammone, and Kristen Ringman (whose novel *Makara* I also recommend). With their work, these writers show that the most difficult thing about dating as a disabled person—or as an able-bodied person interested in a disabled person—overlaps with what is difficult about writing about life as a disabled person more generally: that is, finding the right words to explain disability, ability, and desire.

One of the anthology's strongest contributors is Lydia Brown, a genderqueer law student who is a neurodiversity and autism rights activist based in Boston. Brown primarily writes from the point of view of an autistic person and about boards and conferences focused on autism. Sarcastically, they write that conferences ought to "[r]elegat[e] disabled speakers to the 'inspirational personal story' presentation. You should ignore any of their interest or ability to speak about public policy, best practices, recent research developments, advocacy

strategies, theory, etc.” Brown’s work echoes editor Raymond Luczak’s mention in his introduction of inspiration porn, and the ways in which it is harmful to people with disabilities. Although I certainly agree with Luczak that this sort of pornography is harmful to disabled people, I do feel it is necessary to distinguish from the variety of ways in which disability is exploited for the able-bodied, hearing majority’s comfort. For example, hearing people’s tendency to view ASL as performance art is qualitatively different impact-wise than the cliché memes on social media featuring a physically disabled person performing some physical activity with the caption, “what’s your excuse?” Brown’s work, and *QDA* more generally, endeavor not just to challenge this way of thinking on disability, but aim to offer a more holistic view of disability.

Perhaps there is no better antidote to such exploitation than the way that *QDA*’s writers explore the effects their disabilities—and the hearing able-bodied majority’s often pitying, exploitative gaze—on their personal, dating, and sex lives. Of the question, “Can you feel that?” Andrew Morrison-Gurza writes that sexual touch with a gentleman caller “feels incredible to me because for once I am being touched out of desire and not duty.” He has escaped the label, a problem of being “typecast” as a patient even in a sexual context. This typecasting presents a daunting mental and emotional challenge to true intimacy. It was a theme captured well by Morrison-Gurza’s concise and private work, which afforded the

gentleman caller respect while allowing readers to play around with a generic disabled person.

A corollary to the typecasting of disabled people as patients is the problem—in religious circles, notably—of treating non-heterosexual/non-cisgender orientations as medical problems themselves that need “cures.” Jason Ingram’s “They Called It Mercy” focuses on attempting to “rehabilitate” his sexual orientation as though it were an actual medical problem. Of whether the “patients” were allowed free movement, Ingram writes that although patients could technically leave, the real emotional and financial costs would far outweigh any theoretical physical harm. Ingram’s piece reinforces a common happening of queer people, particularly d/Deaf gay/queer people: it is often much more practical for us to form our own families than to try to do an alchemy of the soul to please our hearing, hetero-/cis-normative families.

A touching contrast to these stories of painful misunderstanding are two creative nonfiction pieces, one by Carl Wayne Denney and the other by Larry Connolly. In “Our Son is a Beautiful Girl,” Denney lovingly reflects on his daughter’s self-actualization as a transgender woman and the family’s process in accepting her actual identity as a woman. Denney recounts that a counsellor had admonished the family to stop using male pronouns, saying that it “is vital for her development,” to which the author continues with, “The mother nods; she has taken this to heart. The father doesn’t

argue; he is fully vested." This is the ideal situation, and I have several transgender friends who would love nothing more than to be accepted as the genders they feel inside. The format Denney takes is novel: the third-person style, far from removing the reader from intimacy, allows for great character development and for the reader to approach it in the heart as a kind of fairy-tale in which the happy ending is revealed at the end to be real.

In "The Worst Husband You Can Imagine," Connolly's flowing prose looks back on his marriage to a wheelchair user, and the struggles that arise from such a living arrangement. In particular, the image of this argue-then-laughter scene should be personally meaningful to many wheelchair users: "I am...brandishing a rolling pin and screaming, YOU LEFT YOUR GODDAMN WHEELCHAIR IN THE MIDDLE OF THE LIVING ROOM. Silence covers the earth. We know a line has been crossed." Though it was not Luczak's purpose to collect anecdotes from able-bodied partners of disabled people, I feel this vein could potentially be a rich one. More than being seen as mere sexual novelties, as the sole glass unicorn in a menagerie of glass animal figurines, and more than always having our partners be seen as valiant caregivers, *QDA's* greatest literary service is redefining "normal" and forcing the readers to grapple with what limits they feel love has.

As a collection focused on at queer, disabled life, I felt the topic of queer, disabled sex could be explored more fully.

Perhaps a future anthology may focus more on kink and fetish. The complex relationship many disabled people have with the different kinds of pain could also fill an entire book, as could the topic of "devotees," or people who are sexually attracted to disability. Even the different roles that sex workers and personal care attendants could be explored: sex workers might provide a safe outlet for sheltered disabled people to explore at a cost; personal care attendants might assist by handing disabled clients toys or placing them near an erogenous zone. *QDA's* contributors are varied in disability, in sexual orientation, and in gender expression. This great inclusiveness makes this reader want to see it expanded even further.

I do quibble with Luczak's claim in the introduction that "The LGBT community is commendable for their efforts to be more accessible and inclusive." I do not agree. Though the gay bar scene in Seattle is shockingly accessible compared to almost completely inaccessible scenes in Washington, DC, a Seattle non-profit that offers support groups for the LGBT community was until recently run out of a house where one group was conducted upstairs. (To be fair, the venue is now accessible). Additionally, the overwhelming majority of bathhouses are inaccessible to wheelchair users, with the notable exception of Steamworks in Berkeley, CA. Structural barriers in businesses and non-profits that serve the public and/or receive federal funding, in addition to likely being illegal, contribute to a rather abysmal sexual attitude for

physically disabled gay men that d/Deaf gay men just do not, and will likely never, face. For his part, Luczak does a good job reaching out to varied disabled contributors and addressing the needs of a wide audience. As one example, the included comics are accompanied by verbose visual descriptions, so that, if the National Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped should record an audio version for blind readers, the reader and recording team will be freed of the task of figuring out how to make these comics accessible to blind readers.

*QDA* ought to be read widely, and further discussed by disabled and able-bodied readers alike, so that a fairer and loving world might exist in reality, instead of in dreams and books. *QDA* covers a lot of ground, and covering a lot of ground can be exhausting, but this book should be a welcome home to any person, disabled or not, straight and cisgender or not, and is a trove of literary art.

## Author Biography

Thomas Muething is a proud 2010 graduate of The Ohio School for the Deaf. As a gay man, he enjoys heckling local LGBTQ+ businesses to ensure they accommodate wheelchair users and other disabled people. As a person, he harbors a not-so-secret love for mathematics, and enjoys solving linear, quadratic, and trigonometric equations, as well as learning new math skills. In a past life, he was certain to have been a chorus member in the company of *Chicago* and *Damn Yankees*, and was a paramour of Tennessee Williams. He enjoys tragedies and cooking, and is based for now near Seattle.

## An Interview with Adam Pottle

by Bruce Hunter

*Editor's Note: The audio for the text of Bruce Hunter's portion of this interview was voiced by Prose & Reviews Editor T. K. Dalton. Adam Pottle's responses were voiced by writer and actor Andrew Dahl. (You can read Andrew's very funny essays on parenting at the blog "Pack a Small Bag," linked to in the text.)*

*Bruce Hunter spoke with Adam Pottle about *Ultrasound* debuting at Theatre Passe Muraille, Toronto, April 28, 2016.*

How apropos that *Ultrasound* debuted during National Poetry Month as it was inspired by poetry. That in turn led to a series of events culminating in a powerful new play. But first, a little about its author.

Adam Pottle is gaining recognition for his noirish, robust and intelligent exploration of Deaf and disability culture in his award-winning poetry and fiction, including *Beautiful Mutants* and *Mantis Dreams*. 2016 is a banner year for Pottle with the debut of *Ultrasound*, the completion of his PhD thesis and a novella, *The Bus*, to be published by Quattro Books this fall.

Originally from B.C. but now based in Saskatoon, 32 year-old Pottle is deaf, having profound hearing loss in both ears and says he is not yet fluent in American Sign Language (ASL).

("Deaf" with a capital "D" typically means culturally Deaf and fluent in ASL). Pottle's accomplishments are remarkable for anyone, but he says, "My accomplishments come as a result of my hearing loss, not in spite of them."

Adam Pottle's work eschews disability porn and pity politics in a style free of sentimentality and stereotype. His work is literate, accessible and compassionate. In his poetry and fiction, he uses fresh, sharp language to create nuanced, believable characters, who face dramatic moral and emotional quandaries. *Ultrasound* is no exception. Pottle is a passionate and visionary writer.

In Cahoots Theatre's press release, Pottle says, "Deaf and disabled people seldom get the chance to share their stories, whether in the theatre, in literature, in film or in television. For two major Canadian theatre companies to throw their weight behind a play like this constitutes a distinct shift in the artistic landscape, a shift that will hopefully spur other Canadian theatres into exploring these subjects."

I first saw *Ultrasound* at a table reading at Cahoots' Creation Space in Toronto's Cabbagetown a year ago. After a powerful performance by Deaf and hard of hearing actors, I learned the play would debut this year. When I returned to Cahoots April 5, 2016 for an Intense, interesting morning at another reading of this co-production between Cahoots Theatre and Theatre Passe Muraille, the artistic directors spoke about the

play's unique challenges. The packed room buzzed with the excitement of the creative team and members of the Deaf community in attendance. There was a sense of a pivotal, if not historic, moment in the making in Canadian theatre. When the play concluded, many hands rose aflutter in the ASL sign for ovation. It was an emotional morning. Cahoots' Marjorie Chan then described how the actual production will use ASL, dramatic titling and creative projection design to accommodate both hearing and Deaf audiences. There will also be two ASL/English interpreted performances in which a Deaf interpreter will shadow the female lead, Miranda, who is losing her hearing and has only basic ASL.

Theatre Passe Muraille's Andy McKim discussed how *Ultrasound* has challenged his theatre to reconsider the accessibility not just of one co-production but their whole season to include an audience of the autistic, Deaf, hard of hearing and hearing, to name just a few.

It was inspiring for me, as a deaf writer, for the first time to read a play written in ASL. Through my own writing and research I've learned we are not a small or inconsequential group. According to the World Health Organization, over 360 million people or about 5% of the world's population have significant hearing loss. Above all, we want and need to be heard. Adam Pottle is a compelling voice from our midst that demands attention. And it is exciting for me as a poet to

consider too that this remarkable moment in Canadian theatre was all sparked by his poetry. My conversation with Adam about his journey from the page to the stage follows.

\* \* \*

Bruce: First, congratulations. But *Ultrasound* is just part of a triple-header for you: you've also just completed your PhD and learned that your novella will be published. How are you feeling about all of this?

Adam: I tend to go through cycles. One day I feel excited and proud of the work I've done, and the next I feel anxious and impostor syndrome-y. At this moment, I feel proud.

Bruce: Before we talk about your play, can you discuss your other creative work? And can you tell us how your own deafness informs your work?

Adam: I've written since I was sixteen, but I didn't actually become a writer until my mid-twenties, when I started writing about Deafness and disability. I was born with hearing loss in both ears, and that, combined with family and work experience, drives my writing. Deafness and disability inform my work in a few ways. They inform my perspective of the world, and they drive me to do things differently—to deviate from what's familiar, or to highlight what we seldom notice. To that end, I've published two books to date: a poetry

collection called *Beautiful Mutants*, and a novel called *Mantis Dreams*. I have a third book, a novella, coming out this fall. It's called *The Bus*. It'll crack people's hearts in half.

Bruce: You're also an accomplished critic and academic. Can you discuss your PhD dissertation and what motivated you to choose this topic?

Adam: My dissertation discusses Deafness and disability in Canadian novels published between 1984 and 2007. A few things provoked me to write about this subject. First, I wanted to see how Canadian writers portray Deafness and disability, and whether there's a connection between how these people are portrayed and how Canadians think about disability in reality. Second, we seldom explore Deafness and disability in academic circles outside of the medical and rehabilitative spheres. I'm interested in disability's social, cultural and political presence: how we think about it, why we think about it in certain ways, and how we react when we encounter Deaf and disabled people. A third motivator was the desire to see more acceptance for Deaf and disabled people in this country.

Most Canadians think they're quite accepting, but the truth is their attitudes toward disability are nebulous at best. Part of the problem is that we typically define diversity in terms of only colour and gender. Sexuality doesn't often enter the conversation, and Deafness and disability almost never come

up. I'm hoping that my academic and creative work brings Deafness and disability into the discussion.

Bruce: Poets who are playwrights are not uncommon in literature, to wit: William Shakespeare, W.H. Auden, Langston Hughes and e.e. cummings all wrote plays. Was it a leap for you?

Adam: It was a major fucking leap. *Ultrasound* began as a long poem, with the sign language and English and Shakespearean verse kind of bouncing off one another. But then the speakers began to become more than speakers; they became people, so the text became a play.

All throughout *Ultrasound's* production process, I've been constantly reminded of my audacity. How dare I write a fucking play without any background in theatre whatsoever? I'm used to writing poetry and novels, where the voices remain inside my head and nobody questions what I've written—at least not as much as with *Ultrasound*. With the play, I've had a dozen or more people asking me questions: what do you mean by this line? Why does this character phrase it like that? What's the motivation here? How can we smooth the transition? That's been the biggest shift for me: accepting feedback from so many people. But really it's all for the best, because it improves the play, and I think I've improved as a writer. And the people I've worked with have been absolutely fantastic.

Bruce: What inspired you to write *Ultrasound*? How did it come into being?

Adam: Two things provoked me into writing *Ultrasound*: my own experience as a deaf person, and the persistence of eugenics in contemporary society. Throughout my life I've hovered between the Deaf and hearing worlds, never fully becoming part of one or the other, though I have become aware of the tensions between them. Those tensions find expression in the play.

About eugenics: we often hear about the latest scientific advances that allow us to detect genes for Down syndrome or cerebral palsy or Huntington's disease. Eugenics is not a thing of the past; it's very much alive and well. Thanks to eugenics, we often have this attitude that, because we have the technology and resources to eliminate them, certain traits and conditions and disabilities should be screened out of the population. But what does that do to the people who have those conditions, those disabilities? It makes them feel their lives are not worth living. It's a terrible feeling.

With *Ultrasound*, I wanted to take the basic idea of eugenics and turn it on its head: "In what situation might someone not want a child because it was normal?"

After interviewing geneticists and researching Deaf culture, I wrote the first draft in Saskatoon in 2012, and have been

developing it since then. In 2013, *Ultrasound* was selected for a workshop and public reading for the Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre's annual Spring Festival, which took place at the University of Saskatchewan drama department. Many people were involved in that workshop, such as Yvette Nolan, Charlie Peters, Gordon Portman, Peter Owusu-Ansah, and Elizabeth Morris. The initial script was written in English, but the grammar of ASL doesn't allow a direct translation, so we had to translate the English into signs. That took up quite a bit of time during the workshop.

The public reading was on a Friday, and when I went in that morning for rehearsal, I saw the festival staff bringing in extra seats for the theatre. I asked Gordon Portman, then the festival dramaturge, about the extra seats, and he said that *Ultrasound* was the hot show, that there was a lot of buzz around it. The theatre was full to bursting that night. It was a great feeling.

When it was over, Yvette Nolan said she had to use her entire bag of theatrical tricks to prepare the actors and the script for the public reading.

The infrastructure to put on a play like this doesn't exist in Canada. There's little to no support for Deaf actors and artists, so we have to feel our way through. Hopefully this play will build a foundation that theatres and artists across Canada can use to their advantage.

Bruce: What's *Ultrasound* about?

Adam: *Ultrasound* is about a married couple, Miranda and Alphonse, and the tensions that arise when they decide to have a baby. Miranda is hard of hearing and has cochlear implants, and Alphonse is profoundly deaf. They both use ASL, but it's not Miranda's first language; she speaks also. The tension in the play comes from Alphonse's desire to have a deaf baby.

Bruce: Your play is written in both English and ASL. Can you speak about the challenges of writing a bilingual play using a very visual language such as ASL.

Adam: The initial drafts of the play were written in straightforward English, but after the workshop we had in Saskatoon in 2013, I saw how the grammar of ASL functions, and that I needed to write the lines in both ASL and English. Since then, whenever I've worked on the play I've been writing in two languages at the same time. It's like trying to get your eyes to see in two directions at once. At the same time, though, ASL is a performative language. It's very animated, and seems to lend itself naturally to theatre. It was fun imagining how certain signs would show up onstage and how much resonance they'd have for the actors and the audience.

Bruce: How did your script come to the attention of Marjorie Chan, artistic director of Cahoots Theatre?

Adam: Marjorie and I met at the IMPACT conference in Kitchener in 2013. Majdi Bou-Matar, the artistic director of the MT Space in Kitchener, had invited me to speak about the possibilities of using ASL and telling stories about Deafness. Marjorie approached me and we began talking about *Ultrasound*. She then gave me her card and asked for a copy of the script, which I sent her. Since then, we've been working together. It's been great.

Bruce: *Ultrasound* presents a Deaf husband and his hard of hearing wife struggling in a moral quandary over whether to raise their child in Deaf or hearing culture. What would you like listeners/viewers to take away from the play?

Adam: I'm hoping that people become more open to these types of stories—that is, stories about Deaf and disabled people. I also hope they see the vitality of Deaf culture: the beauty of ASL, the way Deaf people see the world. Deaf people are currently experiencing a major cultural moment—shit, more than a moment. They're showing what they're capable of: Nyle DiMarco, *Spring Awakening*, the #DeafTalent movement in America. All these things are demonstrating the possibilities, and we need to build on that, particularly here in Canada.

Bruce: Based on what I've seen and heard of the play so far, you write beautifully and poetically in both ASL and English. There is no doubt your play will speak powerfully to Deaf and hard of hearing people, but what do you hope those who are hearing will take away from it?

Adam: Deaf people have a lively and vigorous cultural voice that refuses to be ignored. With a little imagination, we can make room for everyone in this world.

Bruce: Thank you Adam, for another engaging conversation. I look forward to many more.

Adam: Ditto, Bruce. Thank you for your questions.

\* \* \*

*Ultrasound ran from April 28 to May 15 at Theatre Passe Murielle. Adam and Bruce spoke previously in this project on the Brick Books website, where this interview first appeared, about writing, deafness and disabilities.*

## Interviewer Photograph & Biography



[Image description: A smiling 60ish man with ruffled brown hair and short white beard. His face is tanned and slightly-wrinkled from the sun and he has laugh lines. He's wearing an orange open-necked shirt and he's smiling as he squints at the camera.]

Deafened at the age of 18 months, **Bruce Hunter** is the author of seven books. His novel, *In the Bear's House*, about a young deaf boy who comes of age in the wilderness of Alberta's Kootenay Plains, was selected from 100 books from

10 countries for the 2009 Canadian Rockies prize at the Banff Mountain Book Festival. [www.brucehunter.ca](http://www.brucehunter.ca)

## Interviewee Photograph & Biography



[Image Description: A black and white photograph of a smiling white man with short gelled hair and a beard, who sits against a brick wall wearing a black Led Zeppelin t-shirt. The black and white edges of a tattoo are just visible on his left arm.]

**Adam Pottle** is the author of the new play *Ultrasound*, as well as award-winning poetry and fiction, including *Beautiful Mutants* and *Mantis Dreams*. He recently completed a PhD

thesis and a novella, *The Bus*, the latter of which will be published by Quattro Books this fall.

# The Deaf Poets Society Manifesto

1.

## Here to Right Literature

Disability is the civil rights movement you've never heard of. That movement is the reason you can reliably find curb cuts in the sidewalk and elevators at the mall, for your strollers, for your bicycles, for your tired, tired feet. The bathroom stall in the airport large enough for your oversized suitcase and a sun salutation or two? The captions for the TV show you're binge-watching on mute so your boss doesn't hear over your cubicle wall? You're welcome.

Disability rights affect everyone, disabled and able-bodied alike. These rights envision a free and appropriate public education for all children. The right to not have to crawl up courthouse steps in Tennessee. To not lose your job after chemo. De-institutionalization.

The vision of disability rights began in legislation, which resulted from significant advocacy and input on the part of people with disabilities and their allies. These laws—the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act—articulate a vision at the level of society. These laws reflect a progressive vision aimed at reorienting and reorganizing and

equalizing something huge, complex, and moving: for us, that motion was pushing against us. These laws righted a skewed trajectory. But we'll leave law to the lawyers. [We're here to right literature.](#)

"Constrained," by Art Editor Janet Morrow. Four cement blocks with ropes tether a spotlighted and large, balloon-shaped blanket of plastic. In the background is a white wall with two black panels on both sides of the sculpture.

2.

## Against Invisibility

Here at [The Deaf Poets Society](#) we are not all d/Deaf, and we're not all poets. Some of us are sick as fuck; some of us used to be, which is to say, will always be, which is to say what Audre Lorde—patron saint of black queer sickness—already said in *The Cancer Journals*: "Once I accept the existence of dying as a life process, who can ever have power over me again?" Lorde's question is concerned with power and who wields it, with the story of the body and who tells it. We believe that the actual literature and art of people with disabilities and chronic illnesses cannot be constrained by the binary of life and death, or of doctor and patient, of temporarily able-bodied and weak, pitiful Other.

O dead white male able-bodied poets, O interviewers who ask us "If you had just one wish...", O well-meaning friends and family and neighbors and lovers who assume that an absence of illness or disability is wholly synonymous with health: We have tired of your presence in our stories, poems, and art. We are not your dystopia, your travesty, your nightmare, your wet dream, your fantasy, your paradise. Don't pray over us. Whatever prayers we seek will not be yours, and whatever we have to mourn, we will mourn it ourselves.

At *The Deaf Poets Society*, we aim to create a literature of a society with a different center, where the writer with a disability is not literally seated on the floor of the writing workshop while others are seated at the seminar table, where the writer with a disability does not spend years telling stories that make others comfortable, and themselves invisible. 'Deaf poets', as a descriptor, is as good as any. 'Deaf poets' understand what people with disabilities also understand, what Deaf poet (and Issue 1 contributor) Raymond Luczak means when he talks about [orphans](#).

What we aim to incubate and amplify here is the literature of the movement that fights back against bigoted policies of sterilization and the racist, classist pseudoscience of eugenics. This literature fights the echoes of "three generations of imbeciles is enough" in the mocking of a physically disabled reporter by the presumptive Republican nominee for president.

We are the literature of the Martha's Vineyard of the 1700s, where everyone on the island knew sign language, of the energized Gallaudet University students and alumni who shut down a campus to demand a Deaf President, and then, a generation later, protested again for a Deaf President who matched their diversity in race and culture. We are the literature of the movement that passed laws requiring all phone calls to work for all people and everything on the internet to work for all people—from the audio of the cat video your mother posted to Facebook to a JAWS-narrated description of a photograph of Mars. We are that literature on the internet, and the aim is always to be accessible to every reader. We are the literature of a people who understands the difficulty of managing physical pain. Of a people who spend days in the white rooms of hospitals, in the labyrinth of referrals and insurance company touchscreen menus that would dizzy Kafka. We are the literature of the recovery rooms, the psych ward, the hospice.

3.

*This is a here for us to find us*

Since we're not in the canon, we began [TDPS](#) as a *here*, a here for *you* to find *us*. Or, more to the point: *this* is a *here* for *us* to find *us*. What does that mean in a practical sense? It means that the poetry, prose, art, and reviews we publish will be composed by people with disabilities, period.

The benefit of this might seem obvious, but it's worth saying them clearly: the existence of a platform will provide the opportunities that are harder to access elsewhere.

Because the voices of all the writers will be the voices of people with some disability or other, the collective voice will, in our ideal, showcase the wide spectrum of people who identify as having a disability. For our community, diversity involves a huge range of disabilities. In our community, diversity also involves a huge range of other facets of identity.

Incubating and amplifying the voices of writers, poets, and artists who are Black, indigenous, people of color (BIPOC), queer, immigrant, working-class, women, or other people relegated to the margins of literature is a crucial part of our work. Our work must also create a space where writers with disabilities who are white will recognize their own complicity in white supremacist systems. Such systems have advantaged white people, including those with disabilities. The work of white writers with disabilities in our magazine needs to reflect an understanding of that historical injustice and, in the slant way that art can, consciously work to dismantle it going forward.

Beyond publishing and reviewing the work of underrepresented folks, allying with existing fights for social justice is essential. A disability-focused literary magazine can find ways to fight anti-Black racism and police violence, even

in our small way. If we can do this often enough and effectively enough, disability can be centralized in discussions about social justice activism, rather than an afterthought. We will mirror the progress of the last half-century, with our concerns, our ideas, our words, our art, our stories, integrated into communities. We will help create access where there had been a barrier, language where there had been a void.

4.

#### **No, We Have Not Met Before.**

You may think you've met us in literature, in "Good Country People," in *The Miracle Worker*, in "Idiots First." Every damn Christmas you hear the pitiful rattle from Tiny Tim's chest. At a barbecue your neighbor's precocious middle schooler recounts to you the plot of *The Fault in Our Stars*, and you might think, "How tragic." In an air-conditioned theater, you see a preview for *Me Before You*, you might think, "How sad." Yes, sad, yes, tragic, but hardly for the reason you may think. You may think you've met us—people with disabilities—here, in the cliched first-thought, worst-thoughts that comprise too much of the imagined work from many an able-bodied brain. Here's the truth: We're not there. We have always been *here*, living boldly, in front of your able eyes, within your able earshot, just within your able reach.

Here at *The Deaf Poets Society*, all bodies are welcome at the table, with disabled artists and writers at center stage. If you are abled, come sit and listen to the voices and visions of Black, Asian, Arab, indigenous, Jewish individuals across the disability spectrum and across gender and LGBTQIA status. Understand that our work resists closure, resists bilateral ideology about disabled and abled bodies, resists simple delineation of complex bodies and lives. Understand that, if you're a cisgendered, heterosexual, white person with a disability, you do benefit from privilege in a way that a person of color does not, and it is you who will determine whether the privileges bestowed on you via white supremacy, transphobia, and homophobia diminish the voices of your counterparts. Allies are key to systemic change and true disability justice; as long as someone is not free, nobody is free.

So come to our home, come in and sit. Marvel at how our work reveals the wide spectrum of experience across identities and at the intersections. Marvel at how alive we are, despite constant and implicit and complicit metaphorical arguments to the contrary. Marvel at how our language muscles through the page with verve and idiosyncrasy, at how our brushstrokes and pencil markings and photographs undo what you think you know about the body, what the narrow range of voices in the traditional canon thinks they have figured out, but never did and never will.

—The Deaf Poets Society Staff