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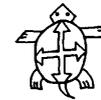
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Because there are so many myths & misconceptions about Native people, it is important to clarify myself to the reader who does not know me. I was not born on the reservation, but in San Francisco, part of a group called "Urban Indians" by the government. I grew up around Black, Latin, Asian & white people & am shaped by that experience, as well as by what my father taught me. He had been taught to be ashamed & has never spoken our language to me. Much of the fury which erupts from my work is a result of seeing the pain that white culture has caused my father. It continues to give pain to all of us. I am not the "Voice" of Native women, nor representative of Native women in general. I am not a "Spiritual Leader," although many white women have tried to push me into that role. While I am deeply spiritual, to share this with strangers would be a violation. Our rituals, stories & religious practices have been stolen & abused, as has our land. I don't publish work which would encourage this—so you will find no creation myths here. My purpose is to make it as clear & as inescapable as possible, what the actual, material conditions of our lives are. Hunger, infant mortality, forced sterilization, treaty violations, the plague of alcohol & drugs, ridiculous jail terms, denial of civil rights, radiation poisoning, land theft, endless contrived legal battles which drain our wills, corrupt "tribal" governments, harassment & death at the hands of the BIA & FBI are the realities we face. Don't admire what you perceive as our stoicism or spirituality—work for our lives to continue in our own Ways. Despite the books which still appear, even in radical bookstores, we are not Vanishing Americans.



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## CRAZY GRANDPA WHISPERS

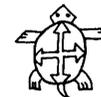
tells me: take a pick ax to new car row    hack & clear the land  
          plant Hopi corn down to the sea  
tells me: break open that zoo buffalo corral  
          chase them snorting through the streets  
tells me: put up tipis in every vacant lot  
          shelter the poor without rent  
tells me: steal those dogs the pound suffocates  
          cook them for Lakota stew  
          feed the hungry without words  
Crazy grandpa supposed to be dead    They locked him up  
He withered    Not dead I feel him shrivel against my backbone  
          when I see anybody behind bars  
Grandpa tells me: take back these cities  
          live as your ancestors    Sew up the mouths of the enemy  
          with their damn beads  
Grandpa I hear you through walls of my skin  
Grandpa if I obey you they'll lock me up again  
          like they did you  
          Grandpa it's such a fine  
fine line  
          between my instincts & their sanity laws  
          I've no time to sew moccasins  
          Grandpa I'm still learning how to walk in this world  
          without getting caught

## YOU CAN'T GET GOOD HELP THESE DAZE

Hey Hey Mrs. Robinson I'm keeping  
your toenails & hair  
I've got plans for you  
as I scrub your French Blue bathroom floor hands & knees  
stinking of Parson's sudsy ammonia empty your wastebaskets  
Iron your daughter's overalls & t-shirts  
Polish your silver trays tea sets compotes spoons  
& furniture Listen I want a trust fund too  
I'm as intimate as your daughter don't I know  
your husband's pubic hair his piss outside the bowl  
Mrs. Robinson I'm as close  
to you as anybody gets to anyone else  
Ironing your hand-embroidered cherry sprig slips  
amber linen breakfast napkins emptying pink tampon tubes  
Mrs. Robinson I know about you Your whole life  
sits in green flowered easy chairs I dust  
I have an interest in some  
of the money you've got in yellow page bank books  
I plan to get more out of you than \$21.50 a week  
Mrs. Robinson I'm already amusing myself  
studying your schedule figuring the locks watching  
for burglar alarm wires as I vacuum so intently your doe  
velvet carpets I don't want your little trinkets  
things you're afraid I might steal No you can trust me  
you're glad feel safe  
I've no desire to take your collections home  
where I'd still be polishing them Mrs. Robinson  
I'm scheming busy with your toenails making  
plans for you & for me I think  
I'll be willing to settle  
for 300 thousand

## FOOLISH

I dance hoot holler coo  
*LOOK* these clouds these blue blue skies full of deer  
Japanese flowering quince winks me a rosy morning  
*We're beginning!* First time arrives with yellow smells  
surprises These friends I planted rise up to embrace me  
All the people are buds  
their hearts whisper cream blue purple  
Time for us to come forward with green lips  
Peas sprout! Corn whinnies! Squash rumbles!  
*Here we come Here we come Get ready to*  
*know us Throw your doors down*  
Here come spiders lambs with round bellies & long legs  
Let's drink these red throats of song  
*LOOK* this is the moon of opens wide  
this is the moon of wind who plays  
this is the moon of rain & sun together  
*UNFOLD YOUR LEAVES NOW*  
we begin



## ACCIDENT

Windshield meets my face cracks inside prism shattered  
a lap full of diamonds dribble off my shoulders Hot  
copper taste of blood thick chokes swallow it Eyelashes  
webbed shut I'm upsidedown no I'm here repeating birth  
through glass tumble of legs arms fly off sun cooks  
my blood Lip split bathe it with my tongue want to heal  
some part which now belongs to cries of hospital corridors  
Watched him hit us stared into his face what  
was he doing skidded three car lengths before he stopped Didn't  
speak red light language Had a large car an American nightmare  
of a car we were in Hitler's beetle I was the main line  
intersection of impact day's entertainment at the corner  
of Shattuck & Dwight My bleeding disorder leaves steaming pools  
Want it back Don't leave my blood on the black street Give  
me a word for pain that's sharp enough Stains up through  
my jeans coming under the thin blue threads blood falls  
on top of seeping blood in my ears Teeth stuck together with terror  
My arms hold bouquet of glass knives Everything sparkles red  
landscape cut by blood red fire engine I'm trapped the door  
caved in sucks my breasts Truck sprouts men in black rain coats  
carrying a torch they'll blast me out with flames Red tongues  
chew through deep blue metal scream they're trying to blow up  
my feet fear eats me a deep ice red wail Sky smeared as  
the sun goes down as they lift the door away like a wing  
shovel me into a narrow white shaft strap me into backbone  
stare at ambulance ceiling pale sick room green smooth metal  
ridges I need the cool blue distance of clouds He puts that  
black rubber explosion on my arm *Keep breathing* he says *Stay  
awake* Watches me closely this stranger with no right to my face  
an intimate second our eyes collide I see by the way he  
twitches away from me that my eyes are glittering black broken pain  
He checks my pulse again his starched white uniform marred  
by dark blue bruises near the pocket which holds his pen His  
hands glint with hair I'm black & out

New & improved the emergency room chews me with plastic  
disposable gadgets gowns which snap Old this smell of fear in  
my armpits Not sterile in this white place my body feels the shock  
abandoned red as blood the door screams open I tunnel under thin  
blankets certain I'll be misplaced My fingers carve the sheets  
I'm a woman not an accident no one is listening Suddenly  
I'm missing have to return slide through the roof  
to the source see the hole in the crash doesn't have my voice  
split angry in hard shriek I drum the man who tried to drive  
through us into a blue battered heap I rip out his spine he who  
walked away he who lied/told the cop that he had the right of way  
the green light he whose wife in fur coat screamed at me as I  
was carried away I fill up my lost red animals with my throat  
crying blue leave this howl in the street bristling

O HONEYSUCKLE WOMAN

won't you lay with me,  
our tongues flowering  
open-throated  
golden pollen  
We could drink one another  
sticky sweet & deep  
our bodies tracing silver snail trails  
Our white teeth nibbling  
We could swallow desire whole  
fingers caught in our sweet smell  
We'd transform the air  
O honey woman  
won't you suckle me  
Suckling  
won't you let me  
honey you

*for Nanci Stern*

I WALK IN THE HISTORY OF MY PEOPLE

There are women locked in my joints  
for refusing to speak to the police  
My red blood full of those  
arrested in flight shot  
My tendons stretched brittle with anger  
do not look like white roots of peace  
In my marrow are hungry faces  
who live on land the whites don't want  
In my marrow women who walk 5 miles every day for water  
In my marrow the swollen hands of my people who are not allowed  
to hunt  
to move  
to be  
In the scars of my knees you can see  
children torn from their families  
bludgeoned into government schools  
You can see through the pins in my bones  
that we are prisoners of a long war  
My knee is so badly wounded no one will look at it  
The pus of the past oozes from every pore  
This infection has gone on for at least 300 years  
Our sacred beliefs have been made into pencils  
names of cities gas stations  
My knee is wounded so badly that I limp constantly  
Anger is my crutch I hold myself upright with it  
My knee is wounded  
see  
How I Am Still Walking

## DOCTOR'S FAVORITE COLOR

Her office blue enough to break you    accusations in her indigo  
velvet throw pillows    her coarse royal blue hopsacking couch  
her teal tweed carpeting where hours of my mind unreeled without  
catching anything    She bought paintings of misty  
flowers which evaporated in a delicate smoke of wounds    Wouldn't  
hang mine which leaned ashamed in her coat closet    Innocent  
robin's egg blue walls condensed at a slate blue metal  
desk containing alphabetical files of our nightmares    her extra  
nylon stockings & fastidious letterhead    Crane's best rag  
pale blue kid finish with navy engraving    Those windows watched  
the bay where we'd waited for my father on rough docks  
when he left    left again    left  
Somewhere else we waved a white tablecloth to him over sharp  
bridge railings    his dark ant body far below on deck    passing  
under us    the wind beat my coat through my knees blue with cold  
I stared out her mirrors    my father floated in every ship  
as he listened to the complaints of officers in white duckskin  
gold braid snakes    She wanted me to re-enact what I couldn't  
feel    handed me Fisher Price toy dolls to show her what it  
was like when my uncle took off my flannel pajamas to make  
me a real woman at 12    I explained my mother    hours  
of her voice repeated in mine while the baby blue  
telephone silently blinked for help    Doctor A told me being  
Indian didn't matter    Said I had Character Psychosis  
Doctor A she had her nose carved down    changed her last name  
joined the Unity Church    wore blue contact lenses    dyed  
her hair blonde as can be    carefully denied her Jewish father  
My visions    she assured me    were part of my sickness  
a tunnel my eyes couldn't light    So busy being not  
who she was born    how could she see me    as her desperately  
thalo blue curtains kept their stiff folds    She listened    bent  
forward on her Prussian blue velvet chair    to eat with her eyes  
the rose I saw glistening in multi-colored radiance on her exit  
door    Cheeks cold with confusion I touched nothing  
The state sent her forms in triplicate white pink & blue  
which cured me at their expense    She said I lived as though  
I had no skin    my heart hemophiliac    waited when she was late  
with the tear-streaked patient ahead of me    Shivered

her door opened    she leaned with a smile    *Come On In*  
Blue birds of happiness wheeled in her teeth    my stomach  
empty    her voice cooed    *How Are We Today*  
inferring a relationship I didn't swallow    Her sympathy  
like cheap perfume in a crowded elevator    I had no room  
for her explanations of my overdoses    Drugs she ordered  
that boiled me in passivity    Her thin unwatered  
philodendron whose brown strangling roots revoked my life  
laid me out in double solitaire with a taste of antiseptic  
Moans through her black leather padded door    Scuttle  
of metal instruments in the sterilizer of the office down  
the hall    My breath held itself    against time clicking  
her turquoise clock in random mockery    I didn't tell her  
the trouble was    I wouldn't live  
if I was a chronic undifferentiated schizophrenic thing  
my skin apostasy    Her room aborted    Her voice pulled  
me through azure walls    I was open to stars & coyote howls  
She suggested I go to the day care center  
where we danced in a circle with scarves  
trying to be planets rotating around the sun  
or strung wooden beads with dull awls    or accepted  
paper cups of yellow & blue pills at the end  
of long silent lines    She committed  
me    times when I didn't    make sense    to her  
dangerous mystery    I was so quiet & so loud    Cadet blue  
she had no smell    dry as anesthesia my throat couldn't swallow  
her face    I was acid-etched in a red sky    She was nowhere  
in sight    as she spoke    said she wanted  
to help me

*in honor of Sheila Gilhooly*

## SAILING

in a boat of brambles our lips ripe  
Our purple tongues signal the full moon  
in hot metaphors  
Your long fingers slip  
the sweetest berries into my mouth  
I drink your juiciness  
Rowing with soft strokes we  
bring one another home  
Plant a future out of season  
I promise pies  
You promise plenty of fruit

*for Pat*

## THERE IS A MAN WITHOUT FINGERPRINTS

who tortures rapes murders  
Three of us have grown cold under him in six months  
The police are testing his semen scraped out  
of our dead vaginas They have no clues  
He attacks with a nylon stocking right inside the door  
Those keys dangling from our locks don't speak his name  
in the morning He uses our kitchen knives wearing gloves  
to keep his hands clean  
He tortured one of us for eight hours before her death  
The coroner knows these things with the precision of our terror  
We shows signs of defending ourselves  
cut palms bruised knuckles He thinks the barrio  
is his territory All of the women lived alone  
I live alone holding a knife of murder in my stomach ready for him  
I watch the street as I come home with razor eyes ready for him  
I kick open my door ready for him  
He attacks between 8 and 10 at night Knew the habits  
of the women he's killed Watching us  
from coffee shop windows in cool sips  
The police who don't like to be called pigs  
are keeping him under wraps They say  
they don't want us to panic  
I only know about him because a woman police dispatcher  
announced him in my History Of Women class  
Her words a morgue  
This is not a poem it's a newspaper a warning written quickly  
Always be on guard ready to kill to survive  
He has no face He could be any man  
watching you

FOR SHAROL GRAVES

Deep breath    Inhale the drums    Feet begin  
    We sway in fringed shawls  
    sparkling beadwork    deerskin leggings  
    to the voice of the South Drum singing  
gently tin cones tingle    Whispers of women  
    as we wheel around the sun  
    wearing jewel-colored velvet skirts  
    moccasins only for dancing  
holding eagle feather fans    family blankets  
Beyond us    the men leap & prance shaking bells  
    their roaches bob  
    We're a circle apart  
    within  
First time you and I have danced together  
    In the distance  
    big silver cans steam with stew  
    drunks reel  
children eat fry bread dripping with honey & butter  
Our feet pass over the earth with soft thuds  
    Your otter fur braids swish  
    You've worked all year  
on the Thunderbird belt & ribbonwork skirt  
    for this day  
    Your beauty echoes  
    beyond drums  
    Holds me  
here now in my kitchen as I remember  
dancing with you washed in light  
    Our spirits whirl  
    Step into  
    the still center  
    of a friendship drum



MAYBE WE SHOULDN'T MEET  
IF THERE ARE NO THIRD WORLD WOMEN HERE

My mouth cracks in familiar shock    my eyes flee  
to the other faces where my rage desperation fear pain ricochet  
a thin red scream    How can you miss our brown & golden  
in this sea of pink    We're not as many as you  
But we're here    You're the ones who called a community  
meeting & didn't contact the Black Lesbians or G.A.L.A. or  
Gay American Indians or the Disabled Women's Coalition or  
Gay Asians or anyone I know  
You're the ones who don't print your signs in Spanish or Chinese  
or any way but how you talk    You're the ones standing three  
feet away from a Black woman saying  
*There are no Third World women here*  
Do you think we are Martians  
All those workshops on racism won't help you open your eyes & see  
how you don't even see us  
How can we come to your meetings if we are invisible  
Don't look at me with guilt    Don't apologize    Don't struggle  
with the problem of racism like algebra  
Don't write a paper on it for me to read or hold a meeting in  
which you discuss what to do to get us to come to your  
time & your place  
We're not your problems to understand & trivialize  
We don't line up in your filing cabinets under "R" for rights  
Don't make the racist assumption that the issue of racism  
between us  
is yours    at me  
Bitter boiling I can't see you

CLOSE YOUR EYES

Come  
into a deep dark flower night woman inside  
crescent moon petals Scratch your back on this magenta  
Roll around in scarlet Wake Up Open fur lips  
eat your saffron supper Lick her Tongues in your fingers  
taste her midnight bloom with thirsty skin  
Hold her petals of teal lime russet silver  
white light gold grass on a summer sleeping hill  
stroke this blue gray cradle These petal colors of dreamtime  
realtime in her hidden flower Here! Listen! Now melts  
Take off your think about it clothes  
Leave your answers in the closet  
Come for her petals glowing eyes open along your arms  
in this place her secret mouth her planting smell We'll wet  
these snow petals pale peach petals.  
early morning lavender petals  
See her in the deep holding time floating colortime  
coming hometime Climb into her silver melon breast  
held in the noplac of petals Downy  
Here's a dance singing  
here's a place to gurgle laugh sucking  
warm sweet sweet in her curly midnight flower  
Lotus of a thousand skies Each color an opening  
your eyes lick her  
sun yellow moon blue pine green sunrise pink  
into her night flower her moon bloom  
inside her dark fur corolla  
Roll yourself wet  
red salmon sepia mud brown violet gold  
Paint your mouth in petals  
Stay

DANCE A GHOST

Thump I leap you shake  
down memories your black wings  
in my throat hoarse You die, are buried  
your name closes the door  
youreappear atnight eyes wide I see the uncaught  
white man his shoes polished his hand gun  
last pulse the heart contracts dreams your knees crumple  
red neon flickers over your redman hands  
black moccasins on white ground  
curl unseen without frame  
No bells on your feet feathers still soles  
worn through  
I dance you

*Mani, murdered with his friend Marcus outside a Phoenix bar*

KUAN YIN GODDESS OF MERCY

writes to Francis of Assisi  
explains the meaning of light water understanding  
Many birds are in her words  
She says she misses him Asks when she may visit again  
& how are his Chinese conversation studies progressing  
There is a special relationship she says Not easily  
understood by many including themselves but their long silences  
are not indifference

On the contrary he is one of her best pupils  
His eyes clear very quickly  
She is sure the light on water will speak to him soon

They say *He's babbling that nonsense again*  
because he forgets where he is speaks Chinese  
He sees her face in everyone

She grows impatient when he does not reply  
turns her eyes elsewhere  
He suffers visions of hell

He writes to ask her if she will come  
Too late She's found  
another  
whose constancy reflects light  
He speaks Chinese to the birds

*for Anita Taylor Oñang*

TODAY WAS A BAD DAY LIKE TB

Saw whites clap during a sacred dance  
Saw young blond hippie boy with a red stone pipe  
My eyes burned him up

He smiled *This is a Sioux pipe* he said from his sportscar  
Yes I hiss *I'm wondering how you got it*  
& the name is Lakota not Sioux

*I'll tell you* he said all friendly & liberal as only  
those with no pain can be

I turned away Can't charm me can't bear to know  
thinking of the medicine bundle I saw opened up in a glass case  
with a small white card beside it  
naming the rich whites who say they  
"own" it

Maybe they have an old Indian grandma back in time  
to excuse themselves

Today was a day I wanted to beat up the smirking man wearing  
a pack with a Haida design from Moe's bookstore

Listen Moe's How many Indians do you have working there?

How much money are you sending the Haida people  
to use their sacred Raven design?

You probably have an Indian grandma too  
whose name you don't know

Today was a day like TB  
you cough & cough trying to get it out  
all that comes  
is blood & spit

*manda White*

## POEM FOR LETTUCE

I know  
you don't want to be eaten  
anymore than a cow or a pig or a chicken does  
but they're the vicious vegetarians  
& they say you do  
Gobbling up the innocent green beings who gladden  
any reasonable person's heart  
I'll tell you little lettuce  
you'll see them in cowskin shoes & belts  
& nobody can make sense of that  
Those virtuous vegetarians they'll look at you with prim distaste  
while you enjoy your bacon  
Makes me want  
to buy some cowboy movie blood capsules  
Imagine an introduction  
*I'd like you to meet Lily, she's a non-smoking non-drinking  
vegetarian separatist Pisces with choco-phobia*  
& I smile  
while secretly biting down on the capsules concealed in my cheeks  
then shake her hand drooling blood  
I whisper  
*Hi I'm a flaming carnivorous double Scorpio who'll eat anything*  
& as she wilts in dismay trembles with trepidation  
hisses with disgust  
Ah then little lettuces  
we'll have our moment of laughing revenge

*for Elizabeth Markell*

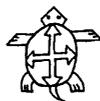
## THE SILVER WINDOW

tells me I'm a thick & simple woman whose hands  
have washed many plates cups bowls  
says my hair is a long  
dark sweep knotted in a past I don't sing  
Eyes deep as the earth I turn over for squash & peas  
my face a map of disease survived  
my skin has followed the sun  
to a rainy place where a blue heron nests silently  
The silver window tells a story of who I am when others look  
you could easily see that I fold the clothes & sweep the floor  
for a living A face of the plains my family crossed  
one that echoes wild rice elk  
traded corn from the place of light  
The silver window covers my memories like snow  
melted in a day  
They say I dance behind  
a silver window could say so but I'll tell you  
this morning I rose  
from dreams  
a slow moving lake deep with fish  
many birds in the grasses this morning  
the silver window was blank with my beauty I came  
with the sun  
burning off mist  
I sang all the way  
to the bottom

*for Jo Carrillo*

## MY BABY BROTHER

rides a blank face snow pony  
same one I rode  
through rat alleys garbage halls crash pads screw johns  
jack it up  
3 times he's come to stay with me  
& kick  
all 3 my rent went up his arm  
that cool dead horse that rocking down to smooth snow nothing  
horse kills the pain of a white fence world hard walls world  
eat or be eaten cement world  
kills me to see his eyes like marbles his arms a map of war  
his heart so faint a drum  
My baby brother rides a death head white powder stony horse  
somewhere  
last heard of in Texas  
a year ago



## VISION : BUNDLE

within mystery wrapped in torn deer hide  
We cannot speak of the sacred  
Our mother is who they want to strip : pull out her bones  
fuel their air conditioners  
unconditioned air is the one  
we breathe  
speaks to us  
tongues of stars wind times to plant times to be silent  
They have a machine for everything even this  
one soul looking for a song we might dream  
a smooth place where we could dance together  
without separation  
Buttons push them  
We live trapped in places we can't dig out of or move  
walls hold old voices  
want to be taken down & aired Go to a new place  
No one speaks our languages  
My father is ashamed of  
My mother won't think  
We've dead relatives & friends with no common burial place  
Scattered they say we are vanishing  
leaves of autumn red dust raked away so the snow can fall flat  
They have our bundles split open in museums  
our dresses & shirts at auctions  
our languages on tape  
our stories in locked rare book libraries  
our dances on film  
The only part of us they can't steal  
is what we know

by Barbara Cameron

YESTERDAY HE CALLED HER A PIG

he's a white man/she's Black  
she's his boss/he was egged on by some politically correct  
white lesbians  
it's better to avoid the subject of colors  
Today I swept her floor washed her sheets  
cleaned her kitchen bought food  
arranged a bouquet of bright  
red carnations  
I love her want to be an eraser for her  
Bear her insult more insults  
I let in light  
put her books in a careful stack beside the bed  
brought flowers  
it didn't help

*for Valerie Street*

WOMAN

will you come with me moving  
through rivers to soft lakebeds  
Come gathering wild rice with sticks  
will you go with me  
down the long waters smoothly shaking  
life into our journey  
Will you bring this gift with me  
We'll ask my brother to dance on it  
until the wildness sings

*for Lucia LoneDog*

## MEDITATION FOR GLORIA ANZALDÚA

On my forehead a bird in flight  
going places I can't see  
feathered in light my whole body aches  
& pulls following a tide  
Moon has become my lover  
lulls me with phosphorescent hands  
Her hair tangles mine like roots  
As far as my heart reaches - water breathes silver fish  
swimming in my fingers to food of colors  
Each stone in my shoe a reminder that I've so little time  
beauty is  
so vast I've so much more to get away with  
before there is no more  
with a hunger like fat red buds on brambles etched in frost  
hunger like winter mallards combing breakers for life hunger  
that burns me infernos hungry for early spring waiting  
in earth hungry for a shape I alone can make  
Wanting to blend water & fire  
Paint a deeper surface where  
we surge  
I want to take our breath away  
like this eagle diving for a shrew  
I want to go where all  
the wings are



## MAMA WANTS ME TO COME

home for Christmas  
Better Homes & Gardens says daughter is supposed  
to show up smiling Pretend it's not old cans  
bottles yellow newspapers  
I come to your vacant lot put a teacup on my knee  
watch you try to drape my queerness in ruffles  
stare at the dried weeds of memory  
We've nothing in common  
different views of the same demolishing crew  
Your words are rubble mama broken bricks  
glass shards rats dog shit  
I come home like a wino falls asleep in a doorway  
I come like fitting in a space no one else wants  
Your vacant eyes are weeping  
want me to say I love you & I do  
but I've rented a room with no view  
I burn your letter  
to keep warm

## NO PUBLIC SAFETY

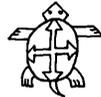
I can't tell you how much  
they want to lock her up  
She sleeps in their building It's trespassing How would you  
like to come to work in the morning & have to step over her  
See how little she has compared to you  
Chronic Paranoid Schizophrenic they say  
The law is ambiguous Can she take care of herself  
or not  
Obviously not if she thinks the building for Public Safety  
means just that  
There are laws against the literal interpretation of words  
She has been taken to Western State Hospital & observed  
They say she hallucinates  
Join the army murder a lot of people you don't know but don't  
hallucinate That's crazy  
Incompetent to stand trial they say Would you  
let her live in your house sleep on your porch  
keep her bags in your garage pitch a tipi for her on your lawn  
What would the neighbors think  
Better lock her up We don't want to look at failure scares us  
isn't safe They say for her to sleep alone in that building  
why anything could happen to her  
Let's keep the building warm & lit all night even after  
the janitors go home We like to take better care  
of our papers file cabinets metal desks plastic chairs  
potted plants posters of trees in Yosemite  
than an old woman  
Who does she think she is anyway expecting us to help  
to give her safety Anyone who doesn't take care of themselves  
should be locked up we have lots of places for it  
We're all terrified not of growing old but of being unable  
to take care of ourselves  
Would you rather sleep in the Public Safety Building  
or be locked up on a back ward at Western State Hospital  
the food the drugs regular & terrible  
This is her second trial Keep the lawyers off the streets  
They can take care of themselves with a little help  
from their wives who clean buy groceries take the suits

to the cleaners change the bed cook meals raise  
the children & admire  
Who admires Anna Mae Peoples besides me  
*What is shelter* the judge asks rhetorically  
you won't catch HIM sleeping under bridges or begging  
\$40,230 buys a lot of shelter a king size bed  
hot massage shower wall to wall carpeting or probably  
oriental rugs A long time ago Anna Mae Peoples  
probably waxed judges' floors  
Too old now her back hurts all the time  
the cool floor of the Public Safety Building is all she asks  
They want to label her gravely disabled  
they think there's a very good chance they'll win  
Nowhere in the six column article  
is one word  
that Anna Mae Peoples has to say

Anna Mae Peoples

GREEN

bright curve of snake  
slides through spring fallen pink petals  
in the lime grass  
going someplace with a smooth slither sleek  
move along move along says her head  
eyes black as night & more  
Faster  
than writing this



ANITA TAYLOR OÑANG

April 23, 1951 — February 24, 1986

Cry to the sun on a pearl rainy day singing blues arms full  
of flowers she has terminal cancer  
at 34  
Try to read an old cookbook at breakfast brie & crackers  
anything to forget a recipe for mulled claret  
one for witches' coffee  
ladled from a silver bowl full of brandy & flames  
Her face is on this page Her eyes speak of always home  
She loves to fish See her bend intently over water  
reflections wavering gently on her brown rich skin  
her black hair glowing wispy long caught back  
but not really Her laugh O wide & taking everyone in  
How can we keep going without her smile Corny Beloved corn  
gift I can no longer bring as she waits in morphine for her sister  
to arrive from Germany where she fled after  
the Rajneesh explosion Detained by the US Government  
she may not be able to come in time for last words  
Time We rage at pink tape a handy target for what belongs  
to something we have no name for which takes Anita/leaves Marcos  
She doesn't fit in here  
Her calligraphy dances right past our eyes butterflies  
in her wake Could I tell you of her lovely delicate rooms  
which appeared & disappeared as she moved in three months or ten  
Flowers embroidered cloths tea cups A buddha with fat red  
candles flickering as we spoke in half sentences of our  
spiritual journeys brushing the place lightly as wings  
our words dust in sunlight against death  
Her life gives me so much As she swims toward peace  
selfish I want to drag her back shouting *This is not possible*  
hooking it in my throat too harsh a weight on her flight  
Time for this pain ours when we've seen her through  
singing O crying to the sun

## PORTRAIT OF ASSIMILATION

My father sits quietly in his brown Naugahyde chair watching  
TV with the remote control  
held out in his hand  
He switches off the sound  
at the commercials while intently gazing at the picture  
His hair is cut short  
he wears an electronic watch, white shirt, brown tie, gray sweater  
carefully polished black leather shoes  
Under his feet a prairie of green gold wall to wall carpet  
says nothing  
His chair is placed to hide the bad crack in the wall  
& to catch the heat from an economy quartz unit  
The walls are covered with paintings by his children  
photographs of his grandchildren  
A yellow box of Kleenex is on the table near a carved tusk  
made to look like a fish & a coral rose he grew  
in a turquoise glass vase from Woolworth's  
The way you know  
it's really him  
is the way he's wrapped  
old style  
in a red & blue blanket  
He says  
*Gets kinda cold nowadays for me*

*for Canyon Sam*



## WINGS OF A WILD GOOSE

A hen, one who could have brought more geese, a female, a wild one  
dead Shot by an excited ignorant young blond boy, his first  
His mother threw the wings in the garbage I rinsed them  
brought them home, hung them spread wide on my studio wall  
A reminder of so much, saving what I can't bear to be wasted  
Wings  
I dream of wings which carry me far above human bitterness  
human walls A goose who will have no more tiny pale fluttering  
goslings to bring alive to shelter to feed to watch fly  
off on new wings different winds  
He has a lawn this boy A pretty face which was recently paid  
thousands of dollars to be in a television commercial I clean  
their house every Wednesday morning  
2 dogs which no one brushes flying hair everywhere  
A black rabbit who is almost always out of  
water usually in a filthy cage I've cleaned the cage  
out of sympathy a few times although it is not part of what  
are called my duties I check the water as soon as I arrive  
This rabbit & those dogs are the boy's pets He is very lazy  
He watches television constantly leaving the sofa in the den  
littered with food wrappers, soda cans, empty cereal bowls  
If I'm still there when he comes home, he is rude to me If he  
has his friends with him, he makes fun of me behind my back  
I muse on how he will always think of the woods  
as an exciting place to kill This family of three lives  
on a five acre farm They raise no crops not even their own  
vegetables or animals for slaughter His father is a neurosurgeon  
who longs to be a poet His mother frantically searches  
for christian enlightenment I'm sad for her though I don't like  
her because I know she won't find any The boy does nothing  
around the house to help without being paid I'm 38 & still  
haven't saved the amount of money he has in a passbook found  
in the pillows of the couch under gum wrappers That dead goose  
This boy will probably never understand that it is not right  
to take without giving He doesn't know how to give His mother  
who cleaned & cooked the goose says she doesn't really like  
to do it but can't understand why she should feel any different  
about the goose than a chicken or hamburger from the supermarket

I bite my tongue & nod I could explain to her that meat raised  
for slaughter is very different than meat taken from the woods  
where so few wild beings survive That her ancestors are  
responsible for the emptiness of this land That lawns feed no  
one that fallow land lined with fences is sinful That hungry  
people need the food they could be growing That spirituality  
is not separate from food or wildness or respect or giving  
But she already doesn't like me because she suspects me  
of reading her husband's poetry books when no one is around  
& she's right I do I need the 32 dollars a week tolerating  
them provides me I wait for the wings on my wall to speak to me  
guide my hungers teach me winds I can't reach I keep  
these wings because walls are so hard wildness so rare because  
ignorance must be remembered because I am female because I fly  
only in my dreams because I too  
will have no young to let go

*for Dian Million*

YA DON WANNA EAT PUSSY

that Chippewa said to that gay white man who never has  
*Ya don wanna eat pussy after eatin hot peppers* he laughed  
I stared in the white sink memorizing rust stains  
He nodded in the general direction of the windows behind us  
Two Native women chopping onions & pickles  
to make tuna fish sandwiches  
for these six men helping to move  
He said *Ya didn hear that did ya* Good  
She answered *I chose to ignore it*  
I muttered *So did I*  
Ya don wanna take offense at an Indian man's joke  
no matter how crude  
in front of a white man  
Close to my tribe he probably guessed we're lesbians  
said that to see what we'd do  
which was to keep on doin what we had been doin  
That gay white man stopped talking about how much he loved  
hot peppers  
That Chippewa said *Not too much for me* *Don eat fish*  
probably another joke we ignored I said  
*The grocery was fresh out of buffalo & deer*  
Much later that gay white man called that Chippewa a drunk  
we both stared at a different floor  
in a different silence just as sharp  
& hot



LIKE A MOTH

at twilight caught inside  
searching the window for the hole back to life  
to air  
wings spread useless against glass  
I watch the sun go down slowly over water  
answers the wind could bring  
are some other language  
I'm caught in a web no one sees  
the spider  
myself  
gobbling

*for Cheryl Harrison*

## CASA COMPLETA

en este lugar donde mi hermana cree en  
una religión que me exterminaría  
y mi tía no deja que me acerque a sus hijos  
después de que supo  
y nadie se atrevió a contarle a mi abuela antes de que muriera  
y aquellos como yo se burlan de mi rareza en los bares  
tú  
me coses una chaqueta roja abrigada para la Navidad  
me abrazas abrazas a mi amante  
le coses una chaqueta a ella también  
ries con placer y exasperación ante mí  
me permites  
amar a tus hijos apasionadamente  
Sentadas esta noche alrededor de una mesa jugando al póker  
en español con tus primos  
barrigas llenas de tu buena comida  
en este lugar  
donde he sido un tallo de dolor frío entumecido  
tú me das hogar

*para mi cuñada, Consuelo*  
*Translated by Margarita Sewerin*

## CASA COMPLETA

in this place where my sister believes in  
a religion that would murder me  
& my aunt doesn't let me near her children  
after she knew  
& no one dared tell my grandmother before she died  
& those like me hiss at my strangeness in their bars  
you  
sew me a warm red jacket for Christmas  
embrace me embrace my lover  
sew her a jacket too  
laugh with pleasure & exasperation at me  
allow me  
to love your children passionately  
Sitting tonight around a table playing poker  
in Spanish with your cousins  
bellies full of your good food  
in this place  
where I've been a stalk of numb cold lonely grief  
you give me home

*for my sister-in-law, Consuelo*

## SAVAGE ELOQUENCE

Big Mountain  
you old story you old  
thing you fighting over nothing everything  
how they work us  
against one another They mean to kill us  
all Vanishing is no joke they mean it  
We don't fit this machine they've made instead of life We breathe  
spirit softness of dirt between our toes No metaphors  
Mountains ARE our mothers Stars our dead  
Big Mountain we've heard your story a thousand times  
We've grown up inside your slaughtered sheep Move here  
move there die on the way fences through our hearts  
ask permission to gather eagle feathers no sun dance  
take our bundles shirts bowls to put in dry empty buildings  
walls more walls jails more jails agencies thieves rapists  
drunken refuge from lives with nothing left  
take our children take our hands hacked from us in death  
tell lies to us about us lies written spoken lived  
death that comes in disease relentless Vanishing is no metaphor  
Big Mountain you are no news Our savage eloquence is dust  
between their walls their thousand deaths We go to funerals  
never quite have time to step out of mourning  
Everything we have left is in our hearts deeply hidden  
No photograph or tape recorder or drawing can touch  
the mountain of our spirits  
They are Still  
saying they know  
what is best for us  
they who know nothing  
their white papers decisions empty eyes laws rules stone fences  
time cut apart with dots  
killing animals to hang their heads on walls  
We cannot make sense of this  
It has nothing everything  
to do with us  
Big Mountain I've met you before in Menominee County  
at Wounded Knee on Trails of Tears  
in the back street bars of every broken city

I could write a list long & thick as the books they call  
Indian Law  
which none of us  
wrote  
We know you fences death laws death hunger death  
This is our skin  
you take from us These were our lives our patterns our dawns  
the lines in our faces  
which tell us our songs  
Big Mountain you are too big you are too small you are such an old  
old story

*for Aisha Masakella*

## NO MORE METAPHORS

To be a prostitute is to walk cold wet streets  
in a dangerous night dependent  
on the hunger of strangers vulnerable to their hatred  
fists perverse desires diseases  
To use one's face & body literally  
to pay the rent the pimp utilities nylons lipstick  
to wear a bruise where the heart beats  
to be a tunnel for the spit of men  
to be a hole for the hatred of women  
to sell one's body nightly  
you could say it's  
the only honest work a woman gets

To be a murderer of prostitutes  
is to be free  
to do it  
as many times as you want  
or to be warm fed regularly  
in a cell for which one pays no rent  
have free tobacco library arts & crafts sports programs  
rehabilitation  
To live to an old age  
secure in tight walls  
radio playing with wet dreams at night  
of their bodies  
breasts slashed open  
their faces no longer flowers  
memories of the way  
it really is

*for the Green River Victims*

## DOUBLE PHOENIX

She speaks burgundy birds  
blue gold wings flowers indolent on her breasts  
she moves slowly her hair curled tightly  
hands skimming my thighs she whispers into my ear  
*I want you* my vulva shivers clenches  
her mouth takes me her  
tongue tells long dancing stories of flight stars darkness burst  
fingers flicker in my bones  
she enters me in the moment when my blood begs her  
hard deep light lifts from my lips  
whirls moves tightly her mouth shivers  
birds appear in my hands  
my toes skim stars  
I'm wings in the night sky crying out in her breasts  
my hips wet flowers

*for Peggy Pullen*

## IN THE BROTHEL CALLED AMERICA

She is on the blue path walks against the dawn  
White powder her cursed solace  
Thievery & lies her language  
Needle her core  
No judgment in this lake of fire  
She is far away as stars  
Her eyes small winters of death

*Pray for her*

She can't keep warm without this spoon  
Takes us on a journey of defeat  
Her arms black with scars  
Path which comes to silence & stays  
Split in the lightning of red & white  
Pierced with love for women  
She falls to her knees hoarsely cries  
I cannot live without oblivion

*Pray for her*

Let our voices lead her to another way  
Pray with all our spirits  
Lead her stumbling bruised ashamed  
away from this dark drowning in white

*Stars give her strength*

*Sun turn her eyes*

*Moon guide her feet*

*Earth turning hold her*

*We pray for her*

*We sing for her*

*We drum for her*

*We pray*

## YOUR TONGUE SPARKLES

sun on water now in my mouth memory rich as real  
kisses I understand to my root to bone ancestors where red  
& so new you speak without calluses despite our scars  
Woman down my throat you stir my heart nectar where bitterness  
has fought to seed  
O you rainy tongue you amaryllis tongue you early spring  
tongue you smooth black leather tongue you firemoon tongue  
you goosebumps tongue you soft bites tongue you feather  
tongue you take me all in tongue you fill me up tongue  
you butter tongue you maple syrup tongue you rising  
wind tongue you creamy silky tongue  
you fine fine tongue  
you knows the way  
tongue

## FRESH OUT

of poetry today I polished brass all morning my feet aching as I stood at the sink staring out the window at the hedge clipped perfectly square by the old Filipino grandfather gardener who no one says hello to but me Wondering how Nina was doing with Mrs. B. in the house next door Mrs. is rich—always has been crabby & stubborn, wants to go for walks at midnight You have to watch her & of course, her abuse A. is worried about where the Lesbian Resource Center will move now that the women's gym is closing I'm worried about Big Mountain & my younger brother who hasn't called me in a long, long time & my other brother who has gone back to work so soon after knee surgery because they need the money 6 days a week planting, trimming & watering for the rich Our friends, the rich Worried about whether my girlfriend & I are unraveling Will anyone show up for the Lesbians of Color Potluck at our house & how can I get my expensive sunglasses back from J. who doesn't like me & thinks my calls are because I still want to sleep with her when I gave that up years ago only her ego prevents her from noticing Puget Power sent a letter saying we aren't paying the bill on time & they want another deposit We already know we aren't paying on time but perhaps they have to think of things to do Sitting all day in an office as boring as polishing brass The upstairs toilet is leaking into our apartment which I must clean before I can complain or risk eviction & when will I have time to do that The almighty bank is bouncing checks I've just heard that a friend has had a fire in her place & lost much The firemen accused her and her lover of starting the fire I can't walk across the floor of my studio because it's piled so high with things I have to do from a year ago There should be something new which moves through me like a chinook wing of wind Tender curling squash flowers should touch me enough to begin but the whole garden needs weeding I have to get the towels from the dryer down in the laundry room The cat has a festering sore on his neck from a fight Last week's dishes are still tottering in the sink I can't find all the poems I've already written There is no tower of ivory or time to build only this small plywood building from World War II which was meant

to be torn down but shows a profit if you divide up the old barracks into apartments where the overhead tenants are all elephants whose every cough is heard & walls mold over with damp In winter, frequent power failures mean no heat & no way to cook with not even enough of a belief in fame to bother sending work out when friends request it Tired much deeper than a few days' rest I could spend several years staring at nothing without speaking then poems might begin to appear All my friends feel exactly the same or worse but a nut house is the only place that will stand for silence & real bars again would kill me The grief I might feel at my life passing in stupid repetition of ordinary tasks, sheds itself as I drive from job to job eating my lunch on the way I could tell Tillie you don't even need children to be silent Modern life as a poor woman can shut you up with ease before you notice Your typewriter can die & even the lesbian repairwoman won't give you a break in price because the power company wants her bill on time too & she has a child to support by herself since the woman she had the child with has taken off for California with a new lover so much for always & forever Let's face it nowadays love is disposable & instant You see I could obviously rattle on this way for at least a few hours then I could take complaints from the audience I'm sure we could go on for weeks if I heard all your stories Our stories Who will remember them for us? Who will take care of us when we're old? Poetry mashed out of our bodies withering preparing to go back to earth & stars We'll know then how we've squandered our lives living for cheap thrills a new woman & a better VCR Listen Sun you girl that gets up every morning before the rest of us & hauls ass across the whole damn sky every day all day until your feet hurt too  
*Listen Sun give me  
a little courage  
for this joint*

*for Sky Yarbrough*

## ESTA NOCHE SOÑÉ OTRA VEZ CON ESA PLAYA

en El Salvador donde la policía secreta tira a aquellos  
con los que ha terminado  
Fotografía que me persigue jadeante no me deja quieta  
Esqueletos mezclados con partes de cuerpos caras y manos hinchadas  
por torturas grotescas Los familiares de esta gente indígena  
vienen aquí para buscar a sus desaparecidos  
madres, padres, hermanas, hermanos, amantes, amigas, amigos  
para llevarse huesos o carne podrida sus manos cortadas con dolor  
Me despierto gritando *Qué es esta enfermedad Qué es este*  
odio que va más allá del aliento de mi corazón  
Esta enfermedad que mata a la piel morena una y otra y otra vez  
a través del mundo Ahora  
en estos momentos mientras nos estamos  
mirando conteniendo lágrimas que no salvan a nadie  
Racismo una palabra demasiado chica  
Los números de desaparecidos son más  
que los granos de arena donde ellos yacen  
Mis manos son huesos de pena por mis familiares  
que se encuentran tan lejos cuyo lenguaje yo no hablo  
cuya sopa yo no compartiré cuyas vidas son la mía reflejada  
Nuestra impotencia frente a la policía secreta picanas eléctricas  
puños cuchillos cadenas me tortura constantemente  
*Mi voz no puede remediarlo*  
*Mi corazón no puede soportarlo*  
Mi vida se desgarrar con memorias antiguas Los mismos genitales  
blandidos en las espadas de caballerías hace cien años en esta tierra  
ahora se pudren en El Salvador El tiempo mueve un entretejido  
continuo de aniquilación  
*De qué sirve una poetisa contra la policía secreta*  
Nuestra carne frágil tierna  
*De qué sirve una poetisa contra el hambre*  
Nuestras barrigas hambrientas  
*De qué sirve una poetisa contra el dolor desgarrado por temor*  
*desgarrado por odio*

## I DREAMT AGAIN TONIGHT OF THAT BEACH

in El Salvador where the secret police dump  
those they are finished with  
Photograph that comes after me panting won't leave me alone  
Skeletons mixed with partial bodies faces & hands bloated  
with grotesque tortures The relatives of these Native people  
come here to search for their missing  
mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, lovers, friends  
to carry away bones or rotting flesh their hands cut with grief  
I wake up shrieking *What is this disease What is it this*  
hatred beyond my heart's breath This disease which kills  
brown skin over & over & over throughout the world Now  
in this moment as we look at one another  
holding in tears that save no one  
Racism too small a word The numbers of disappeared are more  
than the grains of sand on which they lay  
My hands are bones of grief for my relatives so far away  
whose language I don't speak whose soup I won't share  
whose lives are my own reflected  
Our helplessness in the face of secret police electric probes  
fists knives chains tortures me constantly  
*My voice cannot heal this*  
*My heart cannot bear this*  
My life tears open with ancient memories The same genitals  
brandished on cavalry swords one hundred years ago in this land  
rot now in El Salvador Time moves a continuous weave  
of annihilation  
*What good is a poet against secret police*  
Our tender fragile flesh  
*What good is a poet against starvation*  
Our hungering bellies  
*What good is a poet against grief torn by fear torn by hatred*

Nuestra sangre se acelera con memorias  
Esa enfermedad  
El sudor de mis sueños me despierta    Yo sé que si hubiera nacido  
en El Salvador  
tu estarías buscándome esta noche en  
Esa Playa

*Translated by Juanita Ramos  
assisted by Margarita Sewerin*

Our blood rushing with memories  
That disease  
My dreams sweat me awake    I know that if I had been born  
in El Salvador  
you would be looking for me tonight on  
That Beach

## GALLOPING

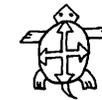
through gold our hooves  
spin autumn stars  
wide eyes flicker scarlet sepia lemon  
cedar madronna fir  
alder birch pine  
staghorn sumac  
manes flow smoky lace fingers  
tails dance a pink sky  
long our legs  
are fire

*for Jackie Davenport*

## COMING HOME

*February 21, 1972 — March 1, 1987*

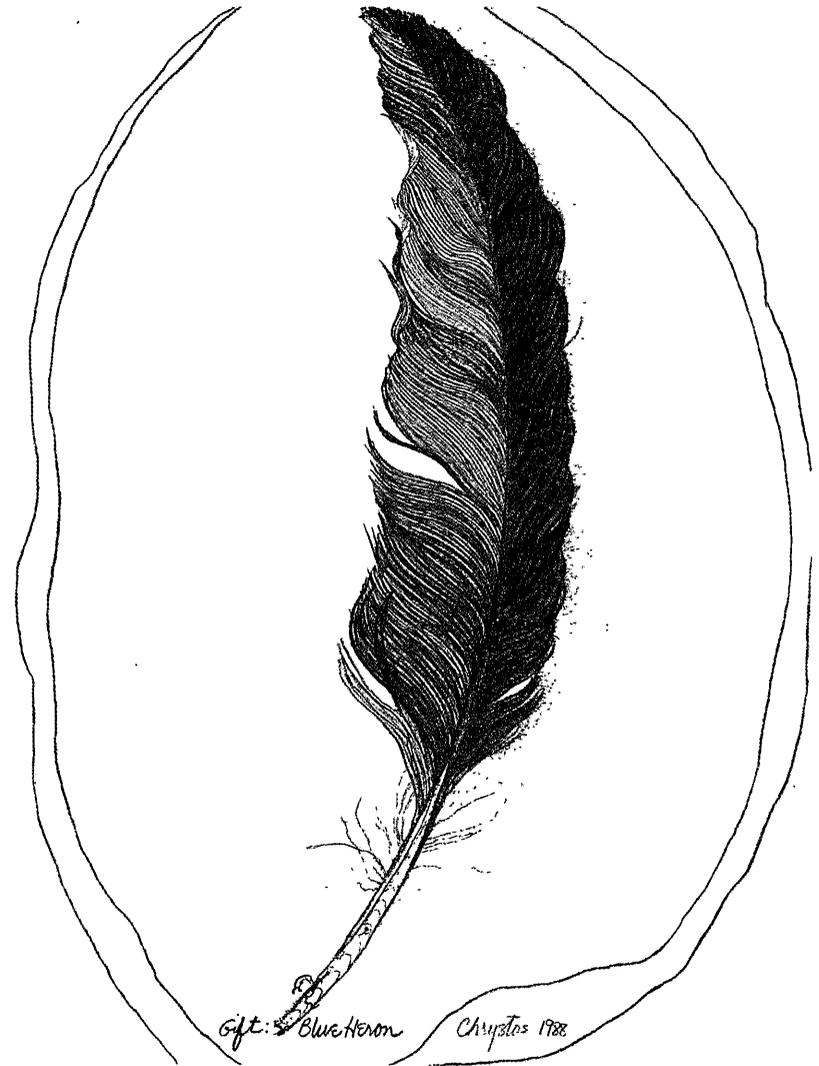
from a long week  
of convincing young white college women that  
racism is real  
She meets me at the airport with a face gray as rain  
*What is it? Is one of the cats dead? No*  
I make jokes Assume her strangeness is the fight we had  
before I left We collect my bags  
Thousands of strangers rush past us mostly white  
Once in the car safe behind tinted windows she says  
as gently as possible  
*Rahkisha's dead Sunday around nine*  
*her heart stopped Rain down my face*  
The streets rain puddles & accidents I notice forsythia  
blooming along the freeway think of Forsythe County  
in Georgia where in 1987 South Africa is alive in America  
a county for whites only  
She was fifteen A young Black woman who preferred  
the Beastie Boys to thinking of Georgia  
Later at the memorial service spring flowers  
too many huge urns of forsythia & a white ribbon  
printed in gold across my roses saying  
*We'll miss you Kisha*  
Her teenage friends weep open as sky while the older ones sit stiff  
& unblooming Some of us hear the Beastie Boys for the first time  
In the front with the teenagers where her sister sat me  
wearing new silver sneakers with stars on the ankles  
that I knew Kisha would have loved & borrowed  
my grief is not safe not free



## STRIPPING LUNARIA

tiny brown fans scatter on the floor despite my care  
I imagine each seed a plume of magenta blossoms  
planted near the Scotch broom in the field beside us  
This is peasant labor done by hand these moony  
stalks will stay with me Next year I'll sell my crop  
You want me to be completely honest  
as though after these years in an opaque white world  
pods stripped of seed  
in this sterile aftermath I could point to a piece of debris  
& claim it true  
Washed up here I'm opened like plumes around the moon  
turning away I stalk any story that will let me see  
another spring Silvery paper thin I could be honest  
stripped of lessons learned deep in seeds of sticks  
at my head legs back fists in the face missing teeth  
Lost years Lost home dirty bread pissed on  
that white boys forced me to eat cornered at seven  
my heart beating with terror I knew how much more they could do  
how little anyone would care  
chased learned to lie to smile when afraid  
to be silent instead of cry  
I've scattered myself common loose as wildflower seed  
Peeling these layers each edge is brown uneven different  
to be completely honest I would first need to be full as a moon  
journey I'm on as I gather myself off the floor  
where I fall each time a look strips me  
The seed sprouts My heart has frosts that kill  
Let's see if I can bloom next summer make seeds for another spring  
then we'll speak of  
honesty

for BJ



FOR ELI

I

Usually I don't read newspapers/can't/awhile ago someone  
left you in my car or  
your face was precise gray dots where I sat to eat  
*Are you here Eli* Come  
sit in my lap/let me rock you/explain with some meaningless words  
that your daddy didn't mean  
to beat you to death  
although we both know  
he probably did  
We're strangers/you're safer with me  
I hear your tape-recorded cries as I sleep restless  
my head unshed tears/I shout at strangers  
to speak up  
It's all that's left of you/faint gray dots/police evidence  
a mother hollowed  
why didn't she  
help you  
they all want to know/she was hiding out under  
the Father Knows Best rock with the rest of us  
she's a woman/even the American Psychiatric Association has charts  
to prove she's not a person an adult  
she's your big sister like me ducking blows that you're too small  
to escape  
You've escaped now/they want to talk about the tragedy  
what do they know of survival/nightmares/chronic mistrust/  
erupting paranoia/being locked up until you become the animal  
they say you are  
of the moment when backed into your own grief/terror/despair  
you could beat your son as you were beaten/are beaten  
There's no excuse  
What will we do with your poppa now that you walk with stars  
Beat him to death  
Fry him to death  
Talk him to death  
They say/even his cellmates at the prison wanted nothing  
to do with him  
Is that because he is Cherokee

How lonely/is a man/who beats his son to death  
One half himself  
Tortured you/pencils up your ass  
I've had/things/stuck up/me too/by those who were  
taking care of me  
Maybe that's why I get odd chills/at the words uttered casually  
Take Care/as though I have a choice in the matter  
Rage still some unseen beast/erupts anytime/to gnaw my heart  
*Eli could I smooth the hair from your forehead*  
Abstract tenderness possible/because you never/woke me up at 3 a.m.  
on a work night/screaming with an earache/until I was ready to kill  
for silence  
Eli you are not unusual/you simply got press  
coverage/briefly/knocked aside quickly enough  
by failed disarmament talks  
We couldn't disarm your daddy either  
his rage/his lost compassion/his shriveled kicked-in soul  
*Eli go to sleep now*

II

They ask me if I'll have children  
a question repeated so often I'm forced  
to answer *No*  
I raised my brothers & sister while my mother was too depressed  
to go on/my father gone *No*  
Give a child this world full of the deaths of children?  
Bring a girl child to one chance in three of being raped?  
To the barbarous fact of torture here & there?  
Bring new life to this dump we've made in greed & stupidity?  
Bring a child to hear me complain about the overdue rent/price  
of cauliflower/endless fight for a moment of peace/silence/grace  
To the certainty of my angry hands lashing  
*Bring you here again Eli* *No*  
*I could not do that*

## III

At the laundromat a woman I know slightly begins to talk  
about a book she is reading on creativity  
the author believes all writing/painting/dancing is motivated  
by fear

*Immediately I think of you Eli*

Am I most afraid of your father who lost his soul/before you  
were born/or your mother who denied the evidence of her eyes  
bruises/broken teeth/marks across your back  
when she was bathing you Eli      What was in her mind  
Did she give up her soul/to love your father

Am I most afraid of this rage in myself/reflected like a splinter  
buried deep in the palm

Your father could be/myself

backed far enough into walls that won't give  
He's crazy/pleads not guilty to the murder charge/that's what  
the lawyers probably told him to do

We'd rather die/than go back to jail

Eli you've already forgotten him/Safe now  
back in the stars walking/they say/with God

As we fold our clothes in neat sane piles

I tell her I'm writing about you/her face closes  
as so often happens to me/I'm too intense/speak  
the unspeakable

She veers into the subject of her son who is involved  
with a woman who just had a baby/not his  
Not long ago/she read of an 18 year old boy/charged  
with murdering his girlfriend's son

She's afraid      *That's not my baby*

she says      *He lives with his father now/I hadn't seen him in two  
years/This February he was a stranger to me      Not  
my baby now      & her arms*

unconsciously form a cradle in front of her breast

Her eyes blank with unspoken panic

Eli she would have protected you I think      as I would have

Easy now to surmise/to offer you shelter      Eli

will you ever/forgive us/for allowing one troubled man  
too much power

Who      will comfort your mother  
with her photograph ghosts/Who can swallow their disgust enough  
to heal her

Can she be healed

Daily I expect news that she's hung herself or been confined  
to a mental prison/Perhaps like Charles Manson's women/she's too  
far away for anything/as easy as that

This lesson repeats itself/We're capable of anything

Each of us/Chance pushes us toward torture/We women trained  
from birth to be decorative/to be amiable/to nurture  
participate/when we don't stop it

Suddenly/I see myself/part of a circle/children watching  
as Alan W./white bully of our block/pulled down the pants  
of a small boy named Bruce with a retarded sister/humiliated him  
beat his bare butt with a stick

I thought I was too small to stop him/Sick to my stomach  
told no one/None of us did/not even Bruce

Somewhere today Alan W. is probably a successful businessman  
he had that kind of heart/I wonder if he tortures his children  
or perhaps prostitutes on his lunch hour

Where is he/so I can vomit on him

Eli your mother/is more mystery to me than your father  
It's so easy to be simple-minded/We accept whatever it is  
that is said to us

We're the helpless women  
helping anyway

## IV

Eli I once lived with a little boy who was the son of my lover  
I'm deeply ashamed to say/I could not love him

I sent them away/when I knew

She begins to forgive me now/but he      Eli  
he won't look at me/I don't exist/he's killed me  
to survive my not loving him

I understand so well that I don't try to push past his rage

Everyone/says/he was so much better behaved/after he lived with me  
Yes/but I was exhausted/angry with our battle of wills

He was accustomed to anarchy/to running the show/to kicking  
everyone      to taking whatever he wanted/to refusing meals out of  
whim      & I      Eli/I was so often/very hungry/as a child

I couldn't be the one to break  
him/make him  
a reasonable person to live with I wanted  
privacy/time to write/silence  
His aggression/exuberance frightened me/Eli I can hardly  
say this/failure of spirit/& you/Jamie Lee/can't hear me now/  
as I scrape out the words sour in my mouth  
*I'm so sorry/it was for your own good*  
It is  
Some people simply shouldn't have children/I'm one of them  
Eli your father is another

V

My father/the unwanted residue of a marriage between red & white  
that both worlds opposed/His mother died when he was nine/  
His father locked up in a mental prison/Beaten from one place  
to another/not old enough to be useful/until he ran away  
to be a hobo at 13  
My mother/neglected disliked second daughter of a woman  
who craved only sons/seethes with hatred/she can't admit/as a good  
Catholic girl They hit me/I survived/thrown against walls/  
sticks that broke/coat hangers/yardsticks/belts/fists  
I was older when violence converged/five by then/my father gone  
most of the time/which is probably why I'm alive  
& you Eli are dead  
Beaten for crying when I was beaten I learned to be  
silent  
to sexual abuse/gang rape/beatings from lovers/from strangers  
Eli if you had lived I could not promise you better  
Beaten too often/one has ruts where it is so easy  
to be beaten again  
It is all I can do/to love those who won't beat me/because they  
are such strangers  
Eli I want you to be the last child who dies/I want your death  
to have meaning  
I'm so glad  
you're not alive  
to know that it doesn't

VI

I asked her if this was good enough  
*Good enough for what? To stop it*  
*No/only when you get rid of all the men/will it stop*  
But you Eli were a man & it's not as easy as that  
There have been a few isolated women  
who have tortured/killed children  
The disease not gender or race or class specific  
Those who beat children are under heels twisting them  
ground down to pulp in factories/prisons/K. Marts/welfare  
Perhaps money helps/one hires a nanny to change the diapers/calm  
the midnight terrors But it isn't the caretaking that causes fury  
It's no job/garbage in the halls/elephant neighbors overhead/  
eviction notices/overdue bills/outrageous "security" deposits  
from landlords & power companies/No one gives a damn about you  
why don't you just pack up/get lost  
your misery is all your own fault So easy  
so easy to be polite/when you've got enough money to grease  
your feet down the rails  
Rich women/I've known/carry bitterness in their bags/because  
they feel/their mothers didn't care about them/paid others to  
Perhaps we could figure out/how to raise children  
if we can get to the moon

VII

Most of the children I know/think I'm wonderful/I can be  
for two or three hours/listen instead of endure/make magic  
jokes/drawings/secrets If they were my own  
I would not be able to endure/selfish/dreamy/a child now myself  
I don't want to pay/that much attention/often can't afford  
to feed myself  
Eli I could be you/your father/your mother  
I could be the waitress who noticed you only able to eat ice cream  
because your mouth was bloody pulp/She wanted to take you home  
Looking for a last time at your smiling face gray/smudged  
I lose faith my edges curl  
*Eli I cry/in my heart/for you/with a dry face*  
I'm so afraid  
in a world where your daddy could beat you/to death  
plead  
not guilty

## OUT THE TOP I GO

leave my body like an autumn leaf  
head straight for the rolling  
cloud people Sing Laugh juicy with it  
whirl round til I'm dizzy  
hot with sky bread Jump from blue to yellow to night  
go see the moon Stick some stars in my teeth & hair  
race a thunderbolt lightning streak  
Grow a horse to gallop through the sunrise flying  
into some birds with a feast to share  
Go out the bottom of the bowl  
cruising down to black holes in a racy convertible  
hair slicked back looking for  
trouble & something to drink  
Turn into a buffalo munching on prairie sky  
tell the sun a joke she laugh so hard she fall over  
unexpected darkness Just a volcano  
Hard  
to come back here  
after all that fooling around

*for Elizabeth Woody*

## BITTER TEETH

*about my uncle, Jean LeMaitré*

Rummaging in these old shoes rain clouds frost stars  
worn out socks snarls of hair broken needs dead leaves  
I heave you to any black hole No space deep enough or far  
Every word we spoke Each kiss taken Years your cock  
down my throat hissing nightmares Shape you pressed in me  
concubine lying cheating warped commodity no future  
looking at too many ceilings not enough air I ache  
for your funeral Only place safe to see you again  
I'll spit in your face for once  
So young I  
So long your tongue taught me tricks I sweep my porch look to sky  
You're 750 miles away & don't have my address  
You're behind my back  
Praying for relief I've buried you therapied you  
talked you into blue streaks & scars cut my arms my breasts  
expelled a thousand seeds Wet clay to your fist I  
couldn't drink enough shoot up enough spread my legs enough  
hundreds of strangers & worse  
to wipe you out  
I'm afraid as I die I'll still want to bite out your heart chew  
to feel the gush  
Scrape it clean  
new infection erupts  
scrape scrape  
rhymes with your word

## BAG LADY

a monologue from the play, *Rudey Toot Zoo*

They call Indians & Negroes a thief. Now one of these people they stole from their own country & the other one they stole their own country from. Now you tell me who is the thief? WHO is the thief? & lazy! HA! I never seen nothing lazier than a white man. Even built a machine to sharpen knives. Ridiculous. Some spit & a stone is all you need. Listen, I've cleaned white houses since I was 15 & I'll tell you nobody is lazier. They'll vomit in a sink & not even bother to rinse it down. Wait for the cleaning woman to come. I spit at them. Yes I do. Sit everyday on Fifth & Pine & I spit at them going by. They ACT like I'm not there but you'll notice they stay out of my range.

No, no, I never been in that love stuff. I watched my mother & 3 older sisters cry & cry over men. No siree, I'm free & never cried for no one. Never let a man beat me or cut me or rape me or cuss me. I learned young to be mean enough to be safe. Don't even bother to think you can touch me. People are walking bags of disease. Less you deal with them, the happier you'll be. No that love stuff will tear your ass up. Don't ever be fool enough to think because you got somebody in your pants today means you won't be lonely tomorrow. No honey, lonely is what we all come to. You can't do nothing to change it so you might as well get used to it. All that crap they feed you about meeting your soulmate. We're all hacked willy nilly out of clay falling this way & that. Nobody matches. You want to pretend you do, you gotta fold up whole parts of yourself & let em die. No no. Human betrayals know no bounds. I'd rather be born a panther but I'm stuck here. No panthers left anyhow except their heads stuck up on some damn white man's walls. Glass eyes. Most people got glass eyes. They don't see nothing but themselves. Not even themselves. You think your electric toaster & hair dryer & stove & car are gonna protect you from your death. No they won't. I live today like I'm gonna die tomorrow. Don't pretend to own nothing. Cause when you're dead you're just some cold smelly meat. No matter how many toasters you think you own.

No, honey I'm not happy. Nobody's happy. Happy is just an advertising gimmick. You buy their thing & then you're "happy." Or you do what they want you to do & then you're "happy." Oh that happy shit is the biggest con game going. People pretending to be happy a mile a minute. Darlin I'm ALIVE & that's all you need. I

laugh a lot more than some happy folks.

I don't belong here. Not anywhere. Used to think I was from outer space & my people was long overdue to pick me up & take me home. Now I think I just told myself that to make it hurt less to be here. Oh I'll tell you this world has more pain than anybody can stand.

So people watch TV. Go bowling. Write stories. Glue macaroni on cardboard & spray it gold. Everything everybody be doing so intently all the time is just ways to get away from that pain.

Pretend we got control. The universe could get sick of us tonight & blow us to bits with a meteor.

Pain & fear. That's what this whole world run on. I look em both in the eye every morning when I get out of my dumpster. Now you go on now my feet hurt & I don't want to talk to you no more.

*especially for Karen Timentwa*

## I AM NOT YOUR PRINCESS

Sandpaper between two cultures which tear  
one another apart I'm not  
a means by which you can reach spiritual understanding or even  
learn to do beadwork  
I'm only willing to tell you how to make fry bread  
1 cup flour, spoon of salt, spoon of baking powder  
Stir Add milk or water or beer until it holds together  
Slap each piece into rounds Let rest  
Fry in hot grease until golden  
This is Indian food  
only if you know that Indian is a government word  
which has nothing to do with our names for ourselves  
I won't chant for you  
I admit no spirituality to you  
I will not sweat with you or ease your guilt with fine turtle tales  
I will not wear dancing clothes to read poetry or  
explain hardly anything at all  
I don't think your attempts to understand us are going to work so  
I'd rather you left us in whatever peace we can still  
scramble up after all you continue to do  
If you send me one more damn flyer about how to heal myself  
for \$300 with special feminist counseling  
I'll probably set fire to something  
If you tell me one more time that I'm wise I'll throw up on you  
Look at me  
See my confusion loneliness fear worrying about all our  
struggles to keep what little is left for us  
Look at my heart not your fantasies Please don't ever  
again tell me about your Cherokee great-great grandmother  
Don't assume I know every other Native Activist  
in the world personally That I even know names of all the tribes  
or can pronounce names I've never heard  
or that I'm expert at the peyote stitch

If you ever  
again tell me  
how strong I am  
I'll lay down on the ground & moan so you'll see  
at last my human weakness like your own  
I'm not strong I'm scraped  
I'm blessed with life while so many I've known are dead  
I have work to do dishes to wash a house to clean  
There is no magic  
See my simple cracked hands which have washed the same things  
you wash See my eyes dark with fear in a house by myself  
late at night See that to pity me or to adore me  
are the same  
1 cup flour, spoon of salt, spoon of baking powder, liquid to hold  
Remember this is only my recipe There are many others  
Let me rest  
here  
at least

*especially for Dee Johnson*

ELEGY FOR HILLS

Father gone again Mother locked in room Bathrobe all day  
Or screaming Stick & broom tattoo Throw school books at us  
Why can't you kids Boiling fury Poor abandoned mother  
Bills at her throat Lonely Frightened What If  
Can't grab coat Just get away Out Her screaming  
You goddamn whore walking the streets again I'm ten  
silent because beaten if I answer Out Relief Quickly to the last  
few hills city hasn't swallowed Deeper relief

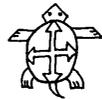
Soft you could roll down through prickers laughing find  
a cardboard box wax it with a candlestick &  
WWWHHHOOOOOOoooo! to the bottom roaring with speed  
& the long line where sky touches  
earth Golden except in spring Dry  
coming together at the bottom in cleavage so deep  
you could stick your foot down & not touch ANYTHING  
Olive trees sprawled drunken robins flew like eagles  
Blue belly lizards when the poppies & lupine bloomed you could  
hardly not burst from the beauty The old Japanese man's  
rows of prized iris that he sold downtown Chased us  
with his rifle when we went running through his tender  
shoots Last farmer surrounded by factories hanging  
on with his tongue We rode his cow She knelt down  
pitched us over her head into cowpies laughing  
I didn't know until years later that we were souring her milk  
& I understood the rifle  
A color no where else  
Gentle maybe tan maybe silver maybe gold  
breathing hard running jackrabbit my heart pattering drum  
old olive tree great grandma safe at last scramble into rough  
bark skinning knees & hide pounding blue sky haze of factories  
choking in those hills hanging on with their last grass  
Golden warm open Bugs & dirt prickers to throw at one  
another Riding down running over they were  
my mother & father Cried there thought buried dead animals  
watched began to be evening pink hazy dusk you could see  
stars before the lights blotted them out a silence there

I've carried with me through streets hassles fights  
knives in alleys tricks fists gun at sister's head thieves  
rapists deaths bars bruises drugs & beer  
In two years  
golden  
became gray #3742, gray #3744, white #3746, charcoal #3748  
dingy #3750, dead #3752  
thousands more  
They call it civilization

*especially for Dian Million*

## BONES

I was born on the streets of a war-swollen city my Daddy  
bringing home whores & bums to sleep on the couch  
of my Mother's appalled virgin tight stove apartment  
because they had nowhere else to go  
forty years later she's still angry with him  
I've brought home many a whore & bum in his honor  
been a whore & bum myself with nowhere else to go  
*O Daddy maybe we'll talk some day*  
maybe I'll lay you down in your grave without a moment to spare  
a moment to know to lose to touch  
Daddy they send for me at Yale want me to show them power  
I do while I'm looking for the back door way out fire escape  
I get paid  
Daddy I was supposed to go to college because you didn't  
worked & fled all your life so I could have more  
you're sad to see  
I seem to have chosen less  
less only in the shiny mirror gadget geegaws twisted greed place  
where things eat up things  
Daddy you can take me to Yale but they don't ask me back  
I've got you in my belly as well as myself  
I'm an arrow you want to ride makes me too strong  
they stick with fear cut me *O Daddy*  
*can't even send this*



## I HAVE NOT SIGNED A TREATY WITH THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

nor has my father nor his father  
nor any grandmothers  
We don't recognize these names on old sorry paper  
Therefore we declare the United States a crazy person  
nightmare lousy food ugly clothes bad meat  
nobody we know  
No one wants to go there This U.S. is theory illusion  
terrible ceremony The United States can't dance can't cook  
has no children no elders no relatives  
They build funny houses no one lives in but papers  
Everything the United States does to everybody is bad  
No this U.S. is not a good idea We declare you terminated  
You've had your fun now go home we're tired We signed  
no treaty WHAT are you still doing here Go somewhere else &  
build a McDonald's We're going to tear all this ugly mess  
down now We revoke your immigration papers  
your assimilation soap suds your stories are no good  
your colors hurt our feet our eyes are sore  
our bellies are tied in sour knots Go Away Now  
We don't know you from anybody  
You must be some ghost in the wrong place wrong time  
Pack up your toys garbage lies  
We who are alive now  
have signed no treaties  
Burn down your stuck houses your sitting  
in a nowhere gray gloom Your spell is dead  
Go so far away we won't remember you ever came here  
Take these words back with you

*especially for Celeste George*

## DEAR MR. PRESIDENT

I am a woman with 3 children a husband who has been out of work  
for 18 months & no place to go  
I am one of 400 families  
Emergency Housing has turned away this month  
The 399 others are no consolation to me  
This is an emergency  
Mr. P. I am a mother of two who lives with my mother  
who can no longer work  
Someone reported to welfare that I was working  
My checks have been temporarily stopped pending investigation  
I think my ex-boyfriend's mother called them for spite  
because I don't have a job  
although I have submitted over 200 resumes in the last year & a half  
We got evicted Emergency Housing can't find us anything  
This is an Emergency  
Hey Mr. Prez My boyfriend was beating me & the kids so bad  
I just had to get out before one of us was killed  
The battered women's is full & so is emergency housing  
The worker said she'd already turned away 378 this month  
We're living in my car & cooking at my mother's studio apartment  
in the old people's housing This is an emergency  
400 times a month in one city that bothers to try & fix it  
times 2 years  
is a class of people  
It is worse in other towns  
When we have no place to live  
Dear Mr. Pay Attention now  
we are not in economic recovery  
We are an emergency

*for Damita Jo Brown*

## TABLE MANNERS

I sit down with my plate to eat  
*You're Indian aren't you?*  
Yes  
*What tribe are you?*  
Menominee  
*What?*  
Menominee  
*What?*  
Me Nom I Nee  
*Is that your name or your tribe?*  
My tribe, Great Lakes region  
*What?*  
Great Lakes region  
*So you're from Wisconsin*  
No, I was born in San Francisco  
*Oh well what are you doing here I mean  
that's pretty far Do you still live there?*  
No, I live in Seattle  
*Oh, that's pretty far north*  
Yes  
*What group are you in?*  
The residents who are here to write instead of take classes  
*What? Oh So when did you start writing?*  
When I was nine  
*Oh well then I guess you'd better keep up with it*  
Yes  
During this entire conversation my fist clenched at my place  
polite mask tied firmly to my head with barbed wire  
I sat until I could get up casually  
plate in hand  
seem to move away without intent  
to a bench with no one else  
so as not to insult her  
who had ruined my meal

*for Denise Tuggle, who has had to sit with a few of these too*

## WHITE GIRL DON'T

tell me about El Salvador or Nicaragua  
especially if you go there for an educational  
vacation  
Tell me about First Street in Seattle  
the bench where the drunk Indians hang out  
tell me how long we've been wearing these same clothes  
& when was the last time  
we had something good  
to eat  
Tell me about the uranium pilings we've built our houses  
out of down in Four Corners  
Tell me about seeing your supposed people endlessly flickering  
across gray screens & still  
being called savages  
White girl don't  
tell me about South Africa  
Tell me about the streets of Philadelphia  
where a Black man slept in the snow & nobody cared but me  
Tell me about being an eleven year old girl  
whose leg is shot off  
because she was accidentally in the way of an argument  
the numbers runner is having with the Mafia Man  
Tell me about having a mother so drunk  
she can't take care of you because she knows  
even sober she couldn't give you what you need  
For every hungry belly you want to blame  
on somebody else somewhere else  
exotic or romantic  
I can show you ten bellies here  
empty as your words  
Don't talk to me  
about the prison conditions in Russia or Peru or Argentina  
Let me take you to Purdy white girl  
I'll show you some torture that works & works & works  
doesn't leave a mark  
Somewhere else is safer & not your fault & not your responsibility

Easy  
to be outraged & run off to save somebody  
on your white horse airplane  
come back with slides to show me how horrible it is down there  
gore gleaming in your eyes your excitement just  
held in  
I'll show you blood on every street in america  
We aren't the latest fad in your candy-striper life  
You want genocide  
look out the window at the road going past your house  
honey  
it's killing us  
Don't send me letters asking me to mail you money  
so you can go here or there  
to see how things are  
You need an eye exam right here in this town  
I've got El Salvador & South Africa in my throat  
when I stare down two white ladies  
staring at me in the fish & chips  
When I go on vacation  
if I ever have the gall to ask you to send me money  
I'm going to stay right here  
just not clean toilets for two weeks  
which will be quite educational  
stop crying stop whining  
Don't aim 5,000 miles away to a land whose words  
you barely speak if at all  
Right here now genocide  
I'll tell you about it

*for Jackie Moorey*

## CROONING

A soft old song for every lesbian who wants  
to go home  
again & can't  
with her woman lover in her arms  
holding hands in the streets simple in our love  
that they twist so No lies Not "cousins"  
not "best friends" not "roommates"  
No second bedrooms for show no pretend boyfriends  
no custody cases no hidden mouths no grim smiles  
at queer jokes on the job you'd lose  
if they knew  
Go Home with joy & strength  
go home be received instead of tolerated  
No anguished mothers afraid of father's response or  
neighbors' gossip or grandma's heart condition  
Go home to a clean welcome mat  
a double bed  
no questions accusations or expectations  
I croon an old soft song for us  
rocking down to a kind place we won't see in our lives  
fighting for it  
even when we're drunk in bars  
because we  
can't go home  
Crooning for us my heart split

*for Ana R. Kissed*

## I WAS OVER ON THE REZ

one hot hot Saturday blue sky Everybody except me was  
drinking beer & moving slow Cassie was inside watching an old  
Avengers re-run She really loves that Emma Peel Ron was  
listening to reggae on the headphones Lisa was outside on a lounge  
chair borrowed from the neighbors resting her back which had  
been bad for weeks Don't know where Gary was I watched the  
Avengers for awhile & got restless Decided to go down to the  
beach with the dogs & throw the tennis ball So we strolled down  
the road listening to the birds going slowly because Beaumont has  
a bum leg from where a car hit him He whimpers as he goes Not  
even a tiny wind blew the leaves All the shadows still I wanted  
to be alone to write but unless you walk for three miles inland that  
part of the Rez is very noisy & congested It's the town where most  
of the whites live with 2 bars on main street which doesn't have a  
name They were formerly known as the Indian bar & the white bar  
but are now "integrated" with disastrous results There's a thrift  
store which changes names & owners about every 6 months but  
continues to sell the same dreary stuff that nobody wants Across  
the street is the Tribal Police with petunias growing in a box a  
grocery store which sells green meat & the all-volunteer fire  
department which has the only free ambulance service in the state  
which is a point of loud pride The white people live overlooking  
the water in houses much too big for their lots & close enough so you  
hear your neighbors' toilets flush For the most part everyone gets  
along which means the whites hang out together & buy fireworks  
in July from the Rez stands & the Indians hang out somewhere else  
most of the time Occasionally there are bloody fights in one of the  
bars After the last one BJ gave mouth to mouth resuscitation to  
an Indian guy from out by Little Boston who got his ribs under some  
trucker's cowboy boots She's the only reason he lived They  
had to call the ambulance Everybody went away shaking their  
heads saying *LOOK at those boots! Those BOOTS man!*  
You could say that there is less tension here than on some other  
reservations where I've been Probably because it never stays too  
hot for too long Unemployment isn't too bad because of the Navy  
base nearby & this is where the tribe was in the first place They also

throw a big Pow Wow in the summer that whites love to come to  
And the main thing is there is no oil gold uranium  
diamonds or silver in the dirt as far as we know We'll be the first to  
go in a nuclear war because of the base which is fine by me  
People are already so mean I wouldn't want to survive & see how  
they'd get with no TV

So walking down past the bar through the gravel around the Tribal  
Youth Center which is a little house with peeling white paint we  
headed to the beach Some white guys in a big Winnebago towing  
a boat started making lewd disgusting comments at me Which is  
why I took the dogs Gives me a perfect excuse to shout *BADDOG*  
make an ugly face at the ground & go on without acknowledging  
those men at all The dogs understand perfectly who the real trouble  
is Near the water there were some hippies drinking beer so we  
went the other way There was old Charley heaped against the  
driftwood pretty drunk He called to me to drink with him & I said  
*Hi* shook my head & kept going The dogs got happily wet &  
didn't cut their paws on any of the broken glass all over the rocks I  
collected as much of it as I could carry to take back to the recycling bin  
up on the highway I felt a cold place in my breast & glanced down  
A blond boy was grabbing old Charley's hat & slapping him with it  
playfully He took Charley's glasses & put them on the hat brim  
Grabbed his empty bottle & broke it against the stones of the cliff  
So I went down to see if Charley was going to be ok His face has  
the wrinkles of someone who's survived many beatings As I came  
up on them the kid slowed a little & looked at me His eyes  
weren't full of the hate I expected I said *Maybe you should find  
somebody else to play with* His blank eyes told me that nobody his  
own age would play with him & it looked like his family wasn't too  
interested either *Why* he says *he's my friend* Charley was in  
a state not to care about cruelty or pride or much of anything So I  
shrugged Charley stared straight into my eyes & told the dog to  
bite me I knew why I wasn't drunk I was angry with Charley  
for letting the kid treat him like that I was ashamed because he is  
old & I need to respect him Because it was none of my business &  
all of it I had no right to say a thing Or think it I'm not  
willing to take Charley home & care for him Because it was too hot  
to think or feel & I was a reminder that he could if

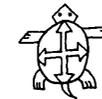
I stared back as though I was a hot drunk sky until he reached to shake  
my hand our truce formed He wanted me to go buy him a bottle  
with his crumpled dollar I couldn't If he could have moved  
he too would have shrugged I walked up the dry grass pitching  
rocks hard into the dirt mumbling about white kids under my breath  
to the dogs But really it was Charley who hurt He could have  
been my dead Grandpa who died locked up in a county home He  
could be making beautiful cedar canoes He could have a garden of  
beans & potatoes coming ripe now Instead he's the stereotype I've  
fought all my life often as cruelly judgmental as any white person  
I've written this sitting on the porch with everyone talking around  
me BJ playing the guitar blues The cat twitching her tail on my  
toe Everyone's hungry & waiting on me to finish up & go over to  
Poulsbo to get a pizza I'm the only one sober enough to drive  
Now BJ is brushing my hair I could cry if I didn't have to explain  
It's not anything Just can't get Charley out of my throat Maybe I  
should get the dog to bite me Not hard Just enough to place the  
pain BJ just bit me as she read over my shoulder & we laugh with a  
tinny taste of tears under our tongues

*especially for Viv Haskell*



## FOR CRYSTAL REBECCA

Sunday night we're sitting around the table greasy  
with rice BBQ ribs & scattered peas  
because your baby brother Manley is still learning spoons  
You're on my lap  
earnestly copying words I've printed for you  
from the bottom up  
Your delight & surprise at each  
W or O finished colors my heart  
Leaning back in my arms your eyes are dark with happiness  
I'm your Tia with no children of my own  
Your fingers trace my name on my shirt  
which you copy admiring the diamonds  
You shake your head seriously  
when I tell you they're only rhinestones  
You insist clearly that they're diamonds & they become so  
We laugh so hard at Manley throwing the rice into the salad  
Shyly you say to me in a whisper  
*Manley will get OLD like me*  
I remember when 5 was very old  
My fingers are orange from your Crayola marker  
I don't want to wash  
I save the poem you made of the words I wrote for you  
very seriously framing it in oak for my kitchen  
where it shines saying  
*Chrystos  
like Rebecca  
laughs birds  
the colors I love you*  
& oh how I do



TOLSTOY

the great writer

who cared so much for the poor  
they say

seduced

a virgin serving girl in his aunt's house

She was dismissed

Later he wrote a novel      His wife wrote in her diary  
that he described      . . . *fornication between the serving girl*

*& the officer with the peculiar*

*relish of a gastronome*

*eating something tasty*

His wife      ought to know

The serving girl probably had his child

probably died young

certainly the child died without ever learning to read or write

or meeting his father

ALL

we know of her

is her name

Masha

*for Uta Fellechner*

MY GRANDMOTHER LOOKS OUT OF MY EYES

Two white boys    11 or 12    with high voices

jeer

at a third who follows with head down

*Hey he's got shit on his toes!*

*Yeah fart face!*

One pisses against the crumbling garage wall

tosses his head & leers when he sees I've seen him

He's the one with an air gun he brandishes as he hoots

They shut up the birds & wind with their racket

*Yeah hey look at him stupid ass!    Yeah you eat your own shit!*

*Yeah hurry up manglefoot!      Their lips are dog snarls*

I watch them closely up the road

Shouting & braying there they go

in cavalry blue & gray

*for Mary McGough*

## SHE IS TOO FRIGHTENED

to write this herself would not want me to use her name  
as shaking she tries to stand being around my family or anybody  
At ease only when completely alone in the woods Otherwise drugs  
or drinking or any old thing to endure america  
Hungry & small her body is tight with scars where her adopted  
mother beat her Threw her out the window where nightmares  
come every night I've learned before she's awake to say  
*It's ok It's ok* & she goes back to those tunnels  
where her life has twisted her dry Longing to be held  
she reaches for me when I have no more to give but do  
because she only trusts 2 people & I am one of them  
Choking on the suicide of her brother & secrets too large  
to eat for breakfast Bashing her head in accidentally  
as I do when scared Taking drugs the system says will give  
her relief & they don't Desperate enough to kill a stranger  
nothing helps Sometimes we can get her to laugh  
by pretending to be the Three Stooges or Donald Duck or  
sarcastically making fun of white folks  
We happened to meet her on a street corner & it's a good  
thing/as she says/because there sure isn't any place else/no  
resource center/no library/no feminist counseling/no weekend  
retreat/no place  
where she's safe in america  
or where she can forget  
she's only alive  
because when she was 8  
her cousin was able to throw her into a ditch to hide  
right before  
he was grabbed & hung by the Ku Klux Klan

## BY THE LIGHT

of the full moon I'm writing to you  
here in this Grandmother whose silver hair  
streaks the water leading to my heart  
Wish you could feel this tide changing  
*Where does all the water go* Must be secret caves under  
the ocean Imagine a wonderful party  
with different waters laughing admiring flirting  
*Ah Querida O you are such a strange & sinuous pretty green*  
*Mais oui! The rocks I passed over today inspired me!*  
Language with no name my lips speak you  
Nothing but water soothes  
*There's a FISH* Slaps the darkness  
Too many lights on the far shore on all night they're  
a desecration We're well-lit  
longing for our deep black night mystery where spirit is  
Fear warps us *O LOOK A SHHHHOOooooottting star*  
red gold moving like a rainbow  
Grandmother's silver braid rustles on the water  
She's going dancing tonight  
She'll burn the ground with her quick deer feet  
O she's so moony in her shawl of stars love, c

*for Gloria Yamato*

## GOVERNMENT PEANUT BUTTER

There was a skin to bones cat living in Clyde's abandoned car  
it went in & out through the broken windshield  
The boys were torturing him & then we took over to save him All  
we had was white bread & government peanut butter which we hated  
So did the cat He would eat some & his eyes would bulge  
like they were going to pop out & then he would look at us like

*Are you serious*

We thought maybe we could steal some cat food from stores  
because they only watched the candy up front So we rigged  
a scheme where somebody would make a lot of fuss about which  
candy bar to buy which was a lie because we all knew  
to the last nut which candy bar was whose favorite

It was our serious business

I stole more than anybody because I was pretty good at getting  
the little can up under my dress between my legs fast & then  
going out like I was going to go to the bathroom at any minute

A skill I later used quite lucratively as a teenager in pursuit  
of nail polish face powder & sunglasses

We did a different store every time I must have learned  
San Francisco running around stealing for that cat

For awhile he stayed in the basement of our building  
which was a little warmer than Clyde's car & less likely  
to have a drunk barge in on him to sleep

We called him Gus until Gus had kittens & then we didn't know  
what to call him

They all died almost as soon as they were born I stole a towel  
from the Chinese laundry's line to bury them digging their  
grave at night through hard clay of the vacant lot next door  
after I made dinner & cleaned the kitchen My mother yelling  
out the back window that I was as crazy as my goddamn Indian  
grandfather & I was going to die in a nut house just like him  
or get a terrible disease from those stupid kittens  
which were so soft & sad Gus disappeared afterward

I wondered if my mother got the pound to come get her & kill her  
when I was in school because no one ever saw her at all ever  
again not even her dead body in a garbage can which was strange  
but I didn't dare ask & get a whipping  
that peanut butter  
could kill you

*in memory of Blo*

WINTER EVENING

in the northern mountains  
Moon is a silver turtle  
moving slowly through stars

*for Marlene Wong*

RICHARD WRIGHT I WISH YOU WERE HERE

it's 1987 I'm writing this on a paper bag at the quickie store  
where we've stopped for lunch  
& I noticed the home video cassette  
for a fine movie made from your book *Native Son*  
which I'd like to see again even though we don't have a VCR  
Make a tornado in your grave now  
for 6 pictures on the cover of the box  
5 of these are of white actors  
one of whom I don't even remember  
The one Black face in a movie of Black life  
is Oprah Winfrey who plays Bigger's mother  
Victor Love the star the Native Son  
is not pictured  
even on the back even tiny  
I need you Richard Wright to stare at me across this formica table  
our eyes flaming with indigestion & high blood pressure  
nodding slowly as we murmur  
Yeah only in america  
Yeah the central character lands on the publicity floor  
if he's a Black man  
Richard Wright please shrug for me as I leave for work  
where I could talk about this  
watch the veils slide over their white eyes  
Yeah america

*for Audre Lorde*

## INUIT SONGS

to soothe a crying baby    for the water    for wings of wind

Sisters    they sing to one another face to face

their mouths only a few inches away from each other

looking directly into one another's eyes

She wears an ivory baby carrier which their mother wore

to carry them

The first time you meet someone as strangers you throat sing

toying with her long fringe as she spoke

*The men do drum dancing*

*Women are the smart ones & do the singing*    she laughs

but he's written a song & she'll drum for him

*A song about how bad he's been in his life & how good*

He turns his back to the audience when he drums

dances as he calls    they're with each other    not us

the mixed audience of other Native Nations & whites

She sings a polar bear song which was her grandfather's

He says    *Nowadays nobody makes songs so we use the old ones*

*of our parents    This song    is one my father wrote*

*about when the people were starving*

the white woman on the other side of me

laughs

*for Elizabeth Markell*

## LET ME TOUCH

like falling cherry petals your face

after you come circling in the stillness

our hearts like hummingbirds

let me sweet pink & tender kiss your breasts

your eyes closed softly in dreams of whirling stars

our bellies

wet & stuck

*for BJ*

HERBERT JOSEPH JEANS

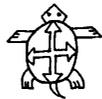
*died of AIDS, Oct. 31, 1987*

Here are tears Sweet Man to wash you to the other side  
up there in those glittering stars Hey I know you're gonna be  
so bright with your frosted blue pearl toenails & the longest  
fingernails of any drag queen in the world  
You Navajo/Oto hair burner with your pink scarf  
& black alligator tote bag full of old beaded moccasins  
jewelry more silk scarves  
I can hear you sashaying around up there Hey Herbie  
we'll miss you Hey here's a thousand  
yellow roses you love so much here's my hand  
again touching your forehead like a mother or sister to see  
if your fever's worse Sleeping next to you in my flannel gown  
Oh the stars were wondering those nights  
Hey we'll bead you a square for the AIDS quilt  
Girl they'll never see sewing like that again  
cut crystal beads of yellow roses & your name in silver bugle beads  
Hey Sweet Man every summer I'll paint  
my toenails pearly blue to say hello  
Do my very best to follow your advice

*Hey Girl*

*Go out there & have a*

*GGGGGGG0000000000DDDDDD time*



I COULD CARVE

these words in stones to leave on the moon or farther  
Dark black smooth ones Pink gray dappled beach granite  
Green ones with white feather smoke lines I could weave  
your name through every muscle of my body black with longing to be  
in  
you Have your mouth & fingers take me farther than the moon  
dappled with colors I've seen only in my sleep while your body  
prays beside mine through smooth nights No more bones cocks  
horses drag me in terror These answers in your feather green  
eyes whose questions were dark until near a fire  
at the beach you sat on a driftwood log our eyes were one light  
while the sun considered farther shores You walked with me  
as I carried buckets of salt water to douse forgotten flames  
whose smoke I smell in my hair now as your hands  
collect me carefully sorting colors for smooth cloth  
tied with feathers My heart hears your voice gallops  
like black silk You brush me my muscles ripple dreams  
Our smoky thighs dapple stars  
I put my questions under stones Lap you  
in  
Shores of desire drink me with new horses whose feet of smoke dance  
on the moon weaving answers through every moment  
Suns in our bellies as we dream of sleeping beside each other  
until through a fire of years  
we are no more than dust rolling itself into stones  
Our fingers traced with granite where we've carved our bodies Our  
in

*for BJ Collins*

GAY AMERICAN INDIANS MARCH ON  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

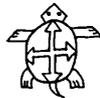
My voice is a basket calls weave a hidden story with no  
photographs through blue hours over america going home  
from going where we weren't quite welcome Going where I'm  
greeted after 2 days with enthusiasm but not fed He wept over  
the phone at 7:30 a.m. No one would take him in last night  
I was clear across town & out to dinner after waiting 2 hours  
for his call in a strange city as all cities are strange  
They threw him in the street Finally someone else took him in  
still crying a relief bird anger bird panic bird  
a 16 block walk with luggage bird My voice weaves call  
me a basket where her black eyes were closed maybe jealous who  
knows where hers were drunk belligerent ready to go to jail  
in a haze of broken heart vomit & my lover's friend would only  
let me stay there if I had sex with her  
where someone else wanted to help but did nothing  
where she was silent on the subject where we weren't needed  
or respected where I was a grieving bird where no one spoke  
Menominee or had even heard of us not even the eye bird darting  
for approval Cut off in mid-sentence No apology or one that  
was an excuse not from the heart She spoke to me of her  
desire for all others bird who pecked until I bled  
my eyes black with undreamt songs  
A basket calls weave me into joy away from this bitter meat  
turbulence of mistrust engine trouble in the communications pit  
elbowing for position bird take all the credit & run bird  
slapped down bird nails not clean enough & lonely bird  
queers in suits who spoke only to each other  
huge groups of all white queers who didn't notice their  
albino effect Microphone removed in mid-poem they didn't want  
to bother with me Change hotel rooms 5 times in 7 days  
eat popeye chicken with burning belly Bird whose wings  
tear with ignorance assumptions indifference Tall white taking  
bird Big talking black bird Narrow bird who leans  
into your face swallows all your breath  
They say we're the same loins pulsing but eyes dark with cold  
unless we've got a Real Indian Souvenir to sell

gay white america same as straight white  
Our black hair birds hurt going home  
Looking for grass to weave through holes they leave us  
cheering as we round the corner in the parade  
to show they Love oh how they Love those Indians  
Bird weaves a memory of 2 a.m. Nowhere to go  
My clothes locked up in a hotel room  
where the boss has changed the key  
familiar desperation familiar brown bird arguing with white  
assistant manager whose suit hissed demanding humiliation  
Even in gay america no place for Indian birds at the inn  
a basket empty with promises botched airline tickets  
I whisper to a bird going by in the blues  
she was right to refuse to come & eat indifference rudeness  
she knew what would be in the bowl We should be grateful  
they let us come at all or asked us to speak when they  
could have had hours more of Jesse Jackson who didn't mention  
Indians in his list of the deprived who should vote for him & isn't  
even queer  
Burnt basket we know so well  
Praying for thunder to clear the air

*for Randy Burns*

### THREE

children, Pajuta, Skybird & Sherri expand  
the world to a small pool  
of slippery stones cold spring water  
inside an overhanging willow  
where 2 swallows peck for bugs  
as the wind comes up  
my jeans hot my fingers unravel  
simple shouts of fear exhilaration challenge  
they've forgotten me  
as Skybird pitches a large rock in front of her  
climbs to it throws it forward again  
to bring it home  
Sherri leads the way while Pajuta  
howls from a place where he's been stranded  
we're safe in the river's breath  
soft as their eyes  
as grinning they get their clothes  
all wet



### WATER

She walked again over stones of so many colors listening to quiet lapping rustle of mallard wings as they drifted high screams of hungry gulls Mountains were still there could be relied on And water So often she'd come here with torn eyes her heart frantic hands twisted in her pockets head soggy with grief asking to be healed Another fight long & miserable over the telephone with accusations that didn't belong to them but to some characters in a soap opera paid to say such things She held tenderness in memory brief as flight hands cupping her breasts her own mouth nuzzling the softness of her lover That made sense like corn meal or potatoes or onions could be made useful She had these fights with white flowers When brown flowers fought with her it was about money or flirting in the bar or drinking too much or sex Fights like rocks that ended were concrete not at all mysterious They were the fights she'd heard & watched all her life But these others spoke to her as though across water The sound carried was amplified but the words were lost indistinct Often she'd say *Please explain I don't know what you're talking about* Their frustration with her would infuriate her further Speaking different languages they knew no sign They fought about words concepts about all you couldn't see or grasp or cook with They wanted things from her that she could not give She wanted to give her hands loving cooking tending gathering They wanted something more which belonged only to sky to earth to first buds of spring They wanted her spirit to obey them She couldn't wear those kinds of shoes She continued to love them to kiss them Easier because they were so many Because brown women often did not find her desirable Because maybe her mystery was no mystery to them Because sometimes dark eyes looking into dark eyes hurts too much Because we've been brainwashed to see only blonde as beautiful Because there are so few of us that friendship is safer & lasts Because it is more comfortable to be loved by those connected to those who run everything White flowers tended to stay Driven by curiosity perhaps They'd say *You fascinate me What are you thinking* She might answer that she was looking at the wild rose hips to see if they were ready to harvest They'd answer in exasperation *But what are you REALLY thinking*

She turned away not knowing what they meant As soon describe  
how water flows as describe the quickly passing patterns of thoughts  
Talking to her for hours of their lives their families their  
opinions on everything even about things they hadn't seen She  
liked to listen to these stories of another country Cautious about  
sharing her stories because she hated their pity or horror or thrilled  
gasps or not laughing in the right places They often said she had a  
bizarre sense of humor But she knew their hands & mouths were  
filled with love *Communication* they said *We have terrible  
communication* She'd nod & go on slicing vegetables for dinner  
She wanted so deeply to bridge that gap to understand her  
fascination with that other world she mocked & hated & admired  
She encouraged her friends to go to college though she could not face  
it herself She wanted a place It had to be here in this white world  
She could not be a lesbian on the reservation especially since she had  
too many white ways  
She wanted to be able to go to bars & laugh & clap women on the back  
& talk freely about jobs & television shows She was one of them  
She didn't like men in her bed There was nothing to be done about  
that Brown flowers came & went Sometimes they called  
themselves players which meant they couldn't take her seriously  
sometimes she wouldn't act right Sometimes they said she was too  
close or too uppity or they said nothing & she thought they didn't care  
Sometimes they hurt her so badly she left without speaking  
Sometimes their drinking flooded her  
Walking the beach she wanted to hold communication in her hand like  
a stone or shell look at it closely until she understood  
Somewhere in a place she rarely went she knew they were all  
underwater gasping They all wanted to be of a place to know  
each other as kin to belong but they didn't even eat the same  
foods they came with armloads of other cultures who hated anyone  
unlike themselves They could hardly find a clear place to speak  
There would be meetings coalitions study groups She would  
go watch the arguments desperation for power anger She  
would in turn be angry desperate & arguing Walking home she  
wondered how they'd ever make something of so much  
misunderstanding She would see one woman chosen as scapegoat  
& beaten down She had seen that so many times She had done it  
once & still carried the shame She could no longer go to meetings  
She wanted to do something slowly carefully with respect

She wanted to know what it was that really needed to be done She  
wanted a new season with her whole being Dreaming of it  
awakening to this icy reality with groans in her heart the longing  
unbreakable in her chest Not more bandaging Not more  
mopping up of blood & urine & grief She wanted to sit for a long  
long time with women not speaking Until like stones they grew  
used to one another & didn't need to fight Didn't need to tear one  
another apart to survive Didn't need to play distorted ego games to  
feel more powerful or more correct than anyone She wanted to  
walk backwards She wanted the separations healed  
She wanted to know where to go to make the best use of herself  
She wanted to cook a feast that would bring all the women together  
laughing No one would look down on anyone else Abuse of all  
kinds would stop She stood looking across the water watching the  
light move as the afternoon went over the mountains in coral streaks  
She remembered her father saying *Ah little mitamu you are such a  
dreamer*

*for Rosie Diaz*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As nothing is possible without relationship, I wish to speak of those who've sustained me, given me lessons & shaped my visions. I thank my mother & father for bringing me here. My first woman lover, Peter, literally rescued me from the gutter — drugs & tricking — to love me for 8 years while I tried to kill myself; was in & out of looney bins & continued to sleep with men because I was afraid to call myself lesbian. Her courage & loyalty taught me my first scraps of self-esteem. I owe her my life.

When I was fresh from my last looney bin, Kate Millett encouraged me to publish. It was the first time anyone saw me as a writer instead of a nut & it's from that moment that I resolved to live, to stay out of bins & to be a voice for all of us who aren't supposed to speak. It's been more than ten years, but I've done it, & in her honor, I've included some prose, as she hates poetry.

I'm deeply grateful to Audre Lorde for her creative inspiration & for telling me to take myself seriously.

Barbara Cameron is the strong wind who brought my work to the attention of Gloria Anzaldúa. Barbara's patience through many years of my Scorpio rages & passions has been magnificent. Gloria has loved my work so much that I began to love it & to have the confidence that helps this book appear.

I've been inspired by the creative work of so many, among them, Dian Million, Elizabeth Woody, Lillian Pitt, Kim Anno, Beth Brant, Sharol Graves, Canyon Sam, Wendy Cadden, Jeanne Clark, Ann Hollingsworth, Laura Israel, Carole Graham, Nanci Stern, Paula Ross, Marcy Alaincraig, Sarita Johnson, Theresa Clark, Carletta Wilson, Gloria Yamato, Cheryl Harrison, Gwen Avery, Blackberri, Frieda Feen, Jackie Moorey, Karin Spitfire, Ana R. Kissed, Mary McGough, Joy Harjo, R. Carlos Nakai, Mary Watkins, Susana Santos, John Trudell, Floyd Westerman, Kitaro & many others.

A very special thanks to my three cats — Beast, who sleeps in my hair at night; Sappho who is a spry 14 & especially, Pusiina, who perched on my neck most of the time I typed this.

My deepest thanks to Gay American Indians, which has been a huge source of pride & strength, especially to Marlyn, Gary, Clyde, Trini, Jerry, Will & Randy.

I've been blessed with love from many sources, often unexpectedly. For all those who have encouraged me, given me gifts after readings & wept at my words, I pray that you will also speak out until our voices drown out Warmaker (Trudell's word).

I'm very grateful to Press Gang Publishers for all their work, despite difficulties, their patience with my year long procrastination, especially to Della McCreary who called & wrote & called with encouragement when I was convinced this was a waste of trees. Barbara Kuhne is the one who helped me figure out how to have it look the way I speak it & re-think my line breaks, which were too long to fit. Penny Goldsmith survived typesetting this very complicated manuscript with sensitive & flying colors. I appreciate the generosity of my translators Juanita Ramos and Margarita Sewerin. Val Speidel was very helpful in negotiating the cover and layout terrain. Please join with me in thanking the women of the printing collective whose labor brings this book to your hands.

Some of my good friends are here, in various poems dedicated to them. They all know how much they are my breath of life, especially Valerie Street, who has known me longer than I can remember & is the only person I know who is better at intimidating fools than myself. Barbara Cameron, Co-Founder of GAI, is a cherished friend, even though I never write. A special thanks to Janis Portal for many years of friendship.

I hope all those I've lost touch with over the years, especially Leslie Dilbeck, Suzanne Cameron, Maria Leon, Terry Sanders, Kenya Johnson & Pam Hom will write to say Hey.

The Lesbians of Color Potluck keeps me as sane as it is possible to be (not all members would agree). Especially precious are the friendships of Gloria, Cheryl, Aisha, Jackie, Damita, Sky, Shirley, Rosie, Marlene, Celeste, Amanda, Dian, Viv, Theresa & Renée. Thanks also to our "white girls' auxillary" (this is a joke), Leslie, Barbara & BJ.

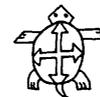
& so I come to you, BJ Collins, who has managed to love me for the last three years, sometimes by the skin of both our teeth. Wee Dew.

If anyone sees Joanne Garrett fooling around, better tell her to get on up here for a visit because the salmon are yelling her name.

I would like to honor the name of Ada Deer, who worked so hard for the re-instatement of my tribe & to honor all those with whom

I've worked politically over the years to make america safe for Native people.

I say prayers for those who have gone before us, whose spirits live on in me and in this book — Anne Christine, Pat, André, Cloud, Mani, Ron, Anita, Kisha, Mabel, Louise, Herbie & all my grandparents.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chrystos is a Native American, born in 1946 and raised in San Francisco. A political activist and speaker, as well as an artist and writer, she is self-educated. Her tireless momentum is directed at better understanding how issues of colonialism, genocide, class and gender affect the lives of women and Native people. For the past ten years Chrystos has made Bainbridge Island in the Pacific Northwest her home.



"Chryso's work is a sign of the times. It is the first time a woman has been able to express her feelings in a way that is both honest and beautiful. It is a work of art that will stand the test of time."

"Chryso's work is a sign of the times. It is the first time a woman has been able to express her feelings in a way that is both honest and beautiful. It is a work of art that will stand the test of time."

Chryso

"The beauty and grace of the work is a testament to the power of the human spirit. It is a work of art that will stand the test of time."

"We have been waiting for a work like this for a long time. It is a work of art that will stand the test of time."

Chryso

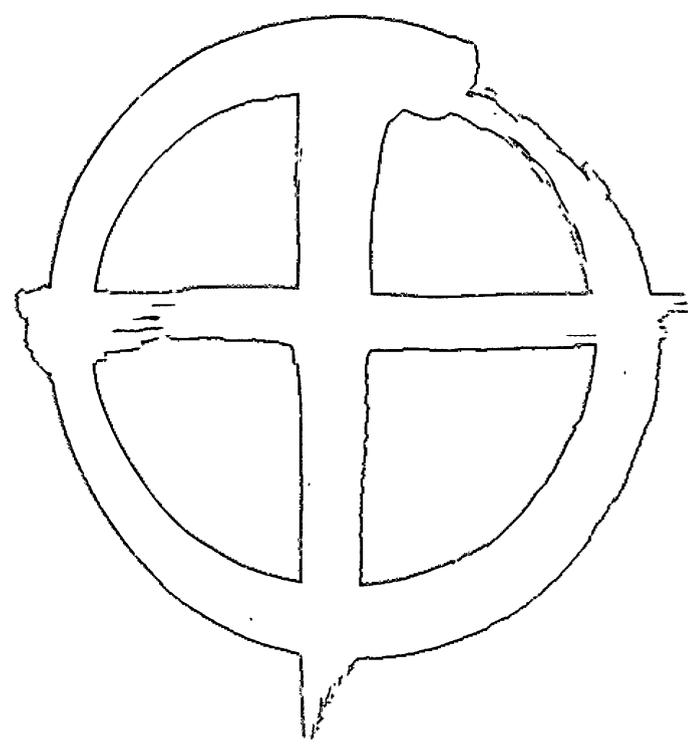
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## CEREMONY FOR COMPLETING A POETRY READING

This is a give away poem  
You've come gathering made a circle with me of the places  
I've wandered I give you the first daffodil opening  
from earth I've sown I give you warm loaves of bread baked  
in soft mounds like breasts In this circle I pass each of you  
a shell from our mother sea Hold it in your spirit Hear  
the stories she'll tell you I've wrapped your faces  
around me a warm robe Let me give you ribbonwork leggings  
dresses sewn with elk teeth moccasins woven with red  
& sky blue porcupine quills  
I give you blankets woven of flowers & roots Come closer  
I have more to give this basket is very large  
I've stitched it of your kind words  
Here is a necklace of feathers & bones  
a sacred meal of chokecherries  
Take this mask of bark which keeps out the evil ones  
This basket is only the beginning  
There is something in my arms for all of you  
I offer this memory of sunrise seen through ice crystals  
Here an afternoon of looking into the sea from high rocks  
Here a red-tailed hawk circles over our heads  
One of her feathers drops for your hair  
May I give you this round stone which holds an ancient spirit  
This stone will soothe you  
Within this basket is something you've been looking for  
all of your life Come take it Take as much as you need  
I give you seeds of a new way  
I give you the moon shining on a fire of singing women  
I give you the sound of our feet dancing  
I give you the sound of our thoughts flying  
I give you the sound of peace moving into our faces & sitting down  
Come This is a give away poem  
I cannot go home  
until you have taken everything & the basket which held it  
*When my hands are empty  
I will be full*



*This book is for all Native Women*

especially for Barbara Cameron, Sharol Graves, Kim Anno, Anita Valerio, Jo Carrillo, Burning Cloud, Gloria Anzaldúa, Beth Brant, Leota LoneDog, Celeste George, Dian Million, Elizabeth Woody, Lillian Pitt, Karen Timentwa, Amanda White, Viv Haskell, Jackie Davenport, Maria Williams, Jeannette Allen, Marsha Gomez, Paula Gunn Allen, Joy Harjo, Vickie Sears, Dee Johnson, Janet McCloud, Chris Stewart, Bonnie Price, Raven & Sipsus in Maine, who gave me a turtle story to carry me through

and for our future in

Rebecca, Manley, Kyle, Scott, Stephanie, Jim, Juanita, Sherri, Pajuta,  
Jamie Lee, Rashida, Tatsu, Ahmad, Rubin, Cassie & Afi Loren

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