

Voices from the Euclid Public Library

Edited by Kristoffer Diaz

FORWARD

The poems contained in this book were written during a six-week Performance Poetry workshop presented by the Cleveland Play House at The Euclid Public Library during the spring of 2007. All participants in the workshop were high school students or recent graduates.

Each student came into the workshop with varying degrees of experience with poetry. All had written some kind of poetry before. One student had even been previously published. The majority had never performed their work in front of an audience. In fact, most members of the group seemed to consider poetry more of a personal release than an art to be shared. Writing, for them, was a creative outlet. It was a way to organize their thoughts and express their feelings. The act of performing the poems wasn't nearly as important as the process of creating them.

On the first day of the workshop, we set out to answer the impossible question "What is poetry?" The students' answers had little to do with rhyme scheme and syllabic structure. Instead, the discussion focused on emotion. Poetry is my escape. Poetry is how I deal with my problems. I can't define poetry, but I know it when I see it. Or hear it. Or write it.

We spent the next six weeks dealing with that question by attacking it from all angles. We read poems from a variety of poets, with a special focus on works from the Broadway production of Def Poetry Jam. Beau Sia, Lemon, and Mayda Del Valle were quickly established as class favorites. We watched their work (and the work of other Def Poets) via youtube and myspace, taking full advantage of the internet age. Most of all, we wrote. Students were given specific writing prompts and ran with them. Examples include:

- *Write an apology with using the words sorry, or apology.
- *Write a love poem.
- *Write a hate poem.
- *Write a poem in which you take one specific aspect of your life and exaggerate it for maximum comic effect.
- *Tell the story of your life in exactly ten words.

Students also brought their own work to the table. These pieces were universally brave. Students talked about feeling lost, angry, and misunderstood. They spoke of abuse and death, of love and fear, of themselves and the worlds around them. Form was a secondary consideration. Our focus was on content. Our goal was to be heard.

On Saturday, May 5th, the students performed selected poems at the Euclid Public Library. Those poems, as well as several others, can be found in the pages of this book. Together, they tell the story not only of our six week workshop, but of the young men and women who participated in the workshop. Each member of the workshop will receive a copy of the published work, and copies will remain permanently available at the Euclid Public Library.

As facilitator of the workshop, it gives me great joy to present to you this book. The young people whose work is represented here each possess unique, powerful voices. They have something to say. They are saying it. I thank you for reading. Most importantly, I thank them for sharing.

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and all the members of the workshop.



Gassy Dry-Ass Surgery

By Dawn Sardes

Everyday, at quarter to three
They come into the library.
Released from the prison next door,
All they want is to hang out,
Or do homework, sometimes shout.

They need books though they think not
Tempers can flare and things get hot.

They think they're cool, they think they're playahs.
They don't need help from us quiet-down sayahs.

The boy came up and he asked me,
He had an assignment on obesity.
Did we have, he asked, in the library
Any books on gassy dry-ass surgery?

O please, don't laugh, I begged myself
Or never again will he ask for help.

Kim “Supermutt” Goodman

Junior's Lesson

Two little kids play together each day,
For hours and hours they play and play.
Two little kids play outside,
Junior is counting and Johnny go hide.
Inside the house the two adults talk.
Sometimes they grab the kids and go for a walk.
But this day they disagree,
They disagree about what they see.
Inside, the two adults are going at it,
While on the porch, Junior and Johnny sit.
Sue is mad; she grabs Johnny and go,
Now Gina considers Sue a foe.
Junior and Johnny can no longer play,
Cause Gina and Sue got into a fight one day.
A new family moved in across the street.
Junior and the new kid meet.
He invited the new kid over to play.
Now Junior and Lonnie play everyday.
George and Mary came over and introduced themselves,
Now Gina has someone to replace Sue who left.
Now everyone is getting along well,
What will happen next? Only time will tell.

A year has past
Tension is building fast.
George and Mary don't like what they see,
Gina's parenting style, they disagree.
So they invite Gina over to talk.
Gina didn't like what she heard and decided to walk.
Junior and Lonnie were forbidden to play with each other
So their friendship could no longer go further.
The adults were mad,
The kids were sad.
The situation was bad.
The adults ruined the good relationship the kids had.
Now the kids are in need of a blessing,
Cause little Junior has learned a very bad lesson.
"A child's feelings are worthless like dirt."
And when adults fight, it's the kids that get hurt.

My Hate Poem

I hope you burn in hell.
I hope you get caught and put in jail.
If you insulted,
I hope you get insulted.
If you severely beat an innocent person,
I hope someone innocently beats you.
If you rape someone,
I hop someone rapes you.
Cause I hate people who abuse.
I hate people who misuse.
I hate people who bully,
And I hate people who use their power abusively.

Sells and Money

I am the best seller,
I can out sell you,
On any holiday.
I can out sell you at any football game.
I can out sell you on eBay and Amazon,
Together.
I'll make mad money,
But you can't take it from me,
Cause I'm strong.
I'll give you a run for your money.
I'll punch you so hard,
You'll fall down.
I'll kick you so hard,
It'll hurt.
If it's two of you,
I'll punch you,
While I kick your friend,
Or I'll kick you,
While I punch your friend.
I know karate,
I took up boxing.
I'm tough,
I'm strong,
I lift weights everyday.
I'll show you why
My friends call me
"Supermutt."

Timeline

Once an innocent little child,
A shame the innocence only lasted a while.
Away from home, child so neat and clean,
The most well-behaved child you've ever seen.
Inside home, child deals with abuse,
Abusive mother's always on the loose!
Confused little child wondering "why?"
Can't do nothing except cry.
Child's world filled with so much fear,
Heart pounding, body shakes, mom is near.
A life filled with any type of abuse is sad,
How can a parent treat their child so bad?
Years of parent being so mean,
Changed this innocent child as a teen.
Sweet little child who was once so kind,
Suddenly starts to lose their mind.

The abused teen who is depressed and sad,
Will they reach adulthood and go mad?
Once a disabled child with a special need,
Who only needs love and acceptance to succeed,
Will they grow up to be an adult who can't do things right?
Or will they be filled with anger, frustration and be quick to fight?
All feelings of love and trust are gone,
Emotionally this person is all alone.
Years of torment and negativity fed,
Causes a person's hopes and dreams to become dead.
Best not good enough no matter how hard one try,
Leads a person to spend their lifetime wondering "why?"
A person like this is often misunderstood,
And believes that all people are bad until proven good.
Going through life alone and confused,
All because someone chose to abuse.

Judging Me

Do not judge me,
Or someone will judge you.
In whatever way you judge me,
You'll be judged that way too.

I am very unique,
So why do you judge me?
Look at yourself,
You have imperfections, but fail to see.

You hypocrite,
Take a look at yourself
Look, observe, listen and think,
What criticizing thoughts do you have left?

In your mind let this thought be,
Next time think of you,
Before you decide to judge me.

A Warm Thank You

I take a close look at you,
You take a close look at me.
You come closer,
I come closer,
We meet.
You put your arm around me,
I put my arm around you,
We embrace and hug.
I get a warm feeling inside.
It feels good.
You smile.
I smile.
You give me a kiss on the cheek.
I give you one too,
Just to say thanks,
For being there for me.

How Do It Feel?

How do it feel,
To be really
Close to someone?
How do it feel,
To have someone you can always,
Rely on?
Or have someone,
Who knows how you feel,
By just one look?
Or have someone,
Read you,
Like a book?
How do it feel,
To have a loving mother,
Who give you a hug and a kiss,
And then another?
And have a father,
Who's always there,
And relatives who always,
Show they care?

Most abused children,
Don't have a clue,
Many never had a sincere,
I love you.
In life they were cheated,
Cause they didn't get,
The love and attention,
They needed.
Abuse is always very bad,
But want to know something,
That's very sad?
Most people from loving homes,
Hate to admit it,
That they take their family's love and support
For granted.

All I Ask...

All I ask is, you give me a chance,
If you see me slipping, help me advance.
If you see me sad,
Help me to feel glad.
Cheer me up when I'm feeling bad,
And help me to calm down when I'm feeling mad.
Ask me how I feel,
Help me to build my special talent and skill.
When I lose hope, still believe,
Encourage me, it'll help me achieve.
Understand that I sometimes hurt,
And may need someone to offer love and comfort.
After a while you'll see me as a special gift,
And your life will receive an unexpected lift.
Tolerance and acceptance is a must,
All I want is your love, support, attention and trust.
Is that too much to ask?
Or is that such a difficult task?

Cierra Oduwole

Anger

To everyone around her, she's perfect
The perfect girl with the perfect family
Giving her the perfect life.
But deep inside she's angry.
She's been sheltered from everything since she was born.
Yeah, she's been around white people
And has a mixed array of friends,
But deep inside she's angry.
She's never stepped foot into a public school,
Never once been in a fight.
And why? Because she's perfect
But deep inside she's angry.
Her parents want the best for her,
They always have, always will.
But she's not what they expected her to be.
The little black girl with the hard to pronounce last name
With the, wait...nunh unh...a tongue ring?

The girl who really doesn't give a fuck about school
But is smart enough to be on the dean's list.
The little girl who hates her church
Because everything is phony as fuck
And everyone there is so judgmental.
The little girl who's in love with a female
But can't bring herself to tell her parents because she's perfect.
The little girl who loves her family with all her heart
But can't seem to show it.
The little girl who can't do shit for herself
Because she's never had to.
Whose parents did her own god damn school work.
The little girl who feels like she was born into the wrong family.
And deep inside she's angry.
The little girl who's not a little girl anymore,
But doesn't know how to be "grown up" or an adult.
The little girl who sometimes feels like giving up on everything and everyone
Because deep inside she's angry.

Untitled

He beats his wife till she's unconscious

Why?

Because he's angry

She teases her little sister and makes her feel like shit

Why?

Because she's angry

She runs away from home every week

Why?

Because she's angry

She eats and eats until she throws up

Why?

Because she's angry

He carves her name into his arm then crosses it out

Why?

Because he's angry

He rapes his nieces and nephews every chance he gets

Why?

Because he's angry

She drinks everyday until she's passed out

Why?

Because she's angry

She opens her legs to every fucking boy (and girl)

Why?

Because she's angry

He kills his family one by one

Why?

Because he's angry

Why the fuck is everybody so angry?
Cuz you don't listen
You don't ask
You don't teach
You don't try
You don't care
They want you to ask questions,
Get answers,
Ask them what they did all day,
How was work,
How was school,
How was your weekend,
Can I help you with your homework,
Can I take you and your girl to the movies,
You can talk to me,
I'm here for you,
I'll cry with you,
I love you.

Torn

I'm torn between two worlds
One real, one make believe
The hardest thing about it
Is from neither can I leave

In one world all is perfect
Love, life, and happiness
And the way I'm living in this world
Never will I forget

But the second one is not quite like this
And why I'm here I do not know
Cause something is anchored to my heart
And I can tell it's never letting go

I cannot leave for one world
And leave the other behind
Cuz I don't know what I'm looking for
And I don't know what I'll find.

Ayla

Daddy

Come see me Daddy!

I am born

Come see me!

You won't?

Time for school,

Wake me up!

You can't?

OK then...

Come pester my new boyfriend Daddy!

You don't even know I have one?

You left me and Mommy.

Don't we matter to you?

Oh Daddy...

Daddy?

Daddy is that you?

Daddy!

Wait don't go!

Please don't leave me again!

Please Daddy!

I promise to be a good little girl!

I promise!

Please don't go!

Please?

Please don't leave me and Mommy again?

Daddy please don't go.

I don't want you to leave me again.

Please?

Daddy?

Please don't go away again Daddy.

Daddy

Extreme Reading

My friends say

I read too much.

I say

I read not enough.

20 books a day is not cool.

Make it 20,000

And then I'll drool.

I can read more

Than you ever can.

I can read more

Than yo mama can!

I can read so fast

It goes by in a blur.

Some of my friends say

“Look at her!”

I can read more

Than you.

In fact

More than both of you.

I can read so much

It will make your head spin.

I can read so much...

Forget you man I'm readin'

The Life of an Unfortunate Woman

October 30/Mama died
October 31/Daddy died
December 1/I met someone
December 20/I found out I like him
December 31/I found out he likes me
January 29/My birthday
February 14/He asked me to marry him
February 14/I said yes
May 5/We were married
May 16/He beat me up
May 27/He beat me up again
June 4/I left his abusive ass
June 24/He found me
June 24/I killed him
July 3/I went to jail for murder
Three years later May 25/I got out
June 20/I found a friend named Dawn
June 29/I met her son
August 1/I found out he likes me
August 1/I don't like him

August 1/I met a guy
November 2/I told him what happened to my ex
November 30/He said “I will never do what he did to you. So will you marry
me?”
November 30/I said yes
August 21/We were married
September 1/We adopted a little girl named Aradia
January 14/I found out I was pregnant
May 16/That unborn baby died
July 5/I found out I was pregnant again
February 12/I gave birth to a girl named Adella
February 12/I died in childbirth
February 12/The life of an unfortunate woman ended

Tosha Shady

Surviving

With a gun to my head and a tear in my eye,
I pull the trigger slow as I watch you watch me die.
You think it's a joke as you laugh and say I'm not that violent,
But your laughs become echoes and fade when my words become silent.
I see you all stand around in disbelief and sorrow,
Hoping the image you see is false and that you'll see me again tomorrow.
But tomorrow comes and tomorrow goes and I'm still not included in your
engagements,
And then the tears pour down again as you sit and make funeral arrangements.
You wonder what could be so bad for a seventeen year old to want to die,
You wonder what could she possibly feel...that makes her want to cry.
I wish I could explain to everyone how I felt inside.
I wish I could explain to you the reasons that I cried.
But even then, you'd still say to live my life for me,
Tell me to say FUCK YOU and leave me be.
But it's not that easy for a young teenage girl,
It's not that easy surviving in this crazy world.

Nothing

A wise man once said to escape criticism you must do
Nothing, say nothing, and be nothing.
That means see nothing, hear nothing, and feel nothing.
You might as well stay in your house,
Your house full of nothing.
No TV, no radio...just sit in the corner
And do nothing...
As a matter of fact, don't even breathe nothing
Because when you inhale nothing you become nothing.
Therefore you are nothing trapped in a world of something.
A nobody, a complete failure.
But don't feel bad because I once was nothing,
In a family of somethings and sombodies, someones.
An outcast nothing looking at the world of somethings.
I write these empty words of nothing but to me,
They make complete sense, and to you,
They just compete cents, till you're left with no sense, it's nonsense.
But still in the end it's nothing, but in order to be nothing,
You must first,
Be something...

Maybe If

Maybe if I would have loved you more, then you would still be here today.
Maybe if I could just be stronger...then I would never have to feel this way.
Maybe if I tried a little bit harder on the thing I needed
Instead of the things that I wanted
I wouldn't feel like I was so misused all the time and taunted.
I feel that just maybe if...I had the power to take it all back,
If I had the power to rewind and put everything in my life back on track,
The things that I go through wouldn't be so difficult to understand,
And these soft lonely feelings would turn to the joint of one's hands.
Maybe if I was your "average girl" people might accept me more than they do now.
But maybe if people didn't judge, I wouldn't ask why or how.
My father might accept me, maybe if there was more color to my skin,
Maybe if my grandparents looked past race, they would see the "Me" within.
Maybe if I just wasn't here, the world would be such a better place.
Maybe if I wasn't such a good friend, people couldn't throw my kindness back in my face.

I feel like a bolted up locked door with no windows and no key,
Somewhere inside I have all the answers, and they're just waiting to be free.
Maybe if I had a family who cared, my voice would then matter.
Maybe if I didn't have a mother whom I had to try to please and flatter,
Maybe if I wasn't me, I would have a better life.
Then maybe I wouldn't always solve my answers with the blade of a knife.
It hurts me because my razor is like my best friend,
But maybe if it wasn't there would be nothing to mend.
Sometimes I feel that I should just go somewhere and down a whole bottle of pills,
Maybe write a suicide note so people would maybe know how it feels.
Maybe if my life was better and everything was completely placed,
These deep feelings I write on paper wouldn't be easily erased.
All my thoughts and feelings turn into rhymes that are never heard,
But people never really understand my life until they read it word for word.
Maybe if they look in deeper between the words they'd get more satisfaction,
Maybe if my silence was heard, I wouldn't result in these dramatizing actions...
You know, people never look my way when I sing this sad song...
But maybe...just maybe I'd get your attention if one day I was gone.

Dear God

I was told to write you a letter but decided to write you a poem.
Sometimes I want to come to you and ask why I feel so alone.
I come to church all the time and see people filled with your praise.
I want to know what it's like, I want to feel your ways.
They say you are mighty, faithful and forgiving,
They say you died for our sins and that's why we're still living.
They say you can cleanse me white as snow and fill me with your grace,
That if I obey all your ways I can be in your special place.
I was told you were almighty and in your ways so abstract,
But my path is filled with darkness so I'm unable to see the track.
I heard no church was perfect and that only you can be.
But one can be close; I guess I just can't see.
I guess I feel alone on my search to find you.
I guess I feel nobody can relate and I don't know what to do.
I tried to follow you and obey all your words,
But being a teenager has so many curves.
So I come to you now with all my bags and all my sins,
And I ask you for forgiveness and to see my love within.
So I come knee-bowed with tears in my eyes and a mind set clear,
Only to be filled with your words as long as you're there.
I will be yours and only yours even as a young lady,
So please come help me

Sincerely yours,
Na'Tosha N. Shady

Who I Am

Sometimes I look around and wonder why the world takes my kindness for weakness.

Or when I'm in a loud crowded room they take my silence for speechless.

To me I'm unique and they consider that strange,

I'm from an urban city and they call our language slang.

I'm very confident and they say it's conceit,

And all the mistakes I make they see as defeat.

WHEN I become successful they'll say it's accidental,

Filled with great intelligence that they'll minimize to potential.

The advancement I'd place would somehow be unfair,

So if I try to stand up for myself I'd be too defensive,

But if I left it alone I'd be too apprehensive.

The world in which we live judges in such a negative way,

That's why my pride in myself makes me who I am today.