

VISIONS: Poetry Out Loud



**original poems from writers at
VISIONS at Selis Manor**

**with
Teachers & Writers Collaborative
and
poets-in-residence
Janice Lowe & Dave Johnson**

Spring 2016 / New York City

Introduction

Visions: Poetry Out Loud is a poetry anthology from workshops held in the spring of 2016 at VISIONS at Selis Manor, a nonprofit adapted learning environment and meeting place for blind youth, adults, and seniors. Teachers & Writers Collaborative was pleased to partner with VISIONS to present Poetry Out Loud for Seniors, a workshop series in which adults explored classic and contemporary poems and wrote their own poetry in response.

We are grateful to the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and Department for the Aging for supporting Poetry Out Loud for Seniors through a SU-CASA grant. Thank you to Liz Lee, Senior Director of Caregiver and Senior Services, Ann DeShazo, Senior Director of VISIONS at Selis Manor; and Carrie Lewy, Senior Center Director

Teachers & Writers Collaborative offers innovative creative writing programs and provides a variety of publications and resources to support learning through the literary arts.

The participants read and recited classic and contemporary poems from the Poetry Out Loud Anthology and wrote original poems inspired by their readings. The workshop was led by Poets-in-Residence, Janice Lowe and Dave Johnson.

As workshop poet, Ed Delgado writes, “We may lose sight, but not our vision.” Read on!

WORKSHOP COLLABORATION

I am supposed to

act my age

be polite

be kind

stand up straight

dress nicely

keep my house clean

keep my skirt down

I am supposed to

pay my taxes

I am supposed to

act like everything is ok

even though it isn't

I am supposed to

get out of town

tame my truthful thoughts

I am supposed to

do for everyone

I am supposed to

say what I think

I am supposed to

be happy

and never be sad

appreciate what I have

be generous with whatever I do have.

I am supposed to

love my neighbor as myself

DEBRA ZANCA

Me and You?

I am supposed to be there
for you
but now you take advantage
of the kindness
I have shown.
I open like a flower
to your love,
so don't close my petals
with your anger.

Strength and Survival

I want you to know
I'm here for you
and I want you to remain strong.

DEBRA ZANCA

There It Goes

There goes the time
flying by so fast.
It wasn't that way
in the past.
As kids we had
all the time in the world.
But now with fingers
all gnarled and curled,
we blink, it's Christmas,
we blink, it's summer.
Oh my God!
It's such a bummer.
I want to grab time
and never let it go.
But it begs for its freedom
and I can't say no.

DEBRA ZANCA

Life

Why do the stars shine only at night?
Could they shine during the day as well?
Since the world is round, couldn't we fall off?
Where is the balance between love and hate?
What is the key to true happiness?
Why is nature so complex?

DEBBIE HAYNES

I am supposed to trust

but you take my trust
 and destroy
 it.

You take it and abuse it.
Your sight makes it right
for you to steal whatever
 you can from me
because you have the advantage.
You are a wolf in sheep's clothing
slinking away
in the night
like the thief that you are.

A Cold

It comes to visit you,
an uninvited guest.
It wears out its welcome.
It stays for as long as it likes.
It stays as long as it pleases.

DEBBIE HAYNES

Someone Says,

Go back
to where you came from.
You don't belong here.
You are different
from us. We have
no place for you here.
You will never be
welcome here.
Step in my shoes for awhile.
See if you could find a reason to smile.

Why, Where, How, and What?

Where do birds go when it rains?
Why do rivers overflow their banks when they are swollen with
tears of suffering from people's hearts that are shattered and
broken?
What makes a brook babble on like chatting voices that go on in
chaotic rhythm?
What makes the trees stand tall with their branches spread out
like your arms reaching to the sky?
How do birds manage to create a song every morning in spring
and summer?

DEBBIE HAYNES

Unforgettable Memories

I was born in Lincoln Hospital
and raised in the Bronx,
in the North Bronx,
five minutes from Mount Vernon
on the Westchester border in Edenwald projects.
The grass was kept neat
and clean, no one was allowed
to walk or trample or disturb the lawn.
You smelled the flowers in spring.
The fruit man came around
selling the fruit he had.
He called out, *bananas, cantaloupes*, whatever he had.
And in summer the ice cream man
was there, too. And we went to a place
called *Freedomland*, where there was
a rocking-horse, a merry-go-round
and you could buy cotton candy.
It was awesome there
and it was a beautiful time in my childhood.

Later on, I moved away
to Manhattan to 23rd street
to taste independence and experience
living on my own, to have responsibility
and the freedom to live the way I wanted.

DEBBIE HAYNES

They Don't Get It

They don't get
that there are many different degrees
of visual impairments.
When I used to volunteer
during the pledge drive
at WBAI, 99.5 FM on the dial.
I brought a friend.
She has partial vision.
I am totally blind.
But they would say about my friend,
"Why is she pretending to be blind?"
They just don't get it.
There are different degrees
of visual impairment.

So What? Miles Davis

The song makes me think of Harlem
when I used to visit my aunt.

DEBBIE HAYNES

My Imaginary Tornado

If we had a tornado
I'd go downstairs and say hello
to the security guard
and go out to get me a cup of coffee.
And I'd be using my cane.
I told my friend, "I'd like to be in a tornado.
It's not all that bad. I was in one before.
It was a roaring sound in my ear.
And it lifted up my hair and pushed me along like hands
touching my back and lifting my cane, too."

She said to me,
"Debbie, you've never been in a tornado.
If you had you wouldn't be standing here.
You wouldn't even be walking
even with your cane."

SHARON JOYNER

We live in a visual world.
Too bad
they can't make paper talk.

Society

Someone says, we need
a change. But they're
not thinking and are willing
to grab anyone and not
consider the consequences.
We have to imagine the future
and dramatize it
and see if we can stand it.
We need to think of others
less fortunate
and not think of
who we'd like to be
or how much we can get out of it.

SHARON JOYNER

Spring Time

Spring is on her way.
The robins sing to tell us.
The rain brings forth life.
Thinner clothes feel much better.
It's time to party hardy!

Anxiety

An earthquake shaking all that it can
Flying objects swirling around
Burning fire refusing to be put out
Beating drums going on and on
A cooling breeze soothing the tide

SHARON JOYNER

How Do Blind People Play Basketball?

Playing basketball is the same
as the regular game
except when a totally blind person
gets the ball.

Let me start by saying
there is a beeper in each hoop
that a person on the sideline
is in charge of switching
the sound from hoop to hoop
for each team as they go
back and forth.

When a blind player gets the ball
the referee says, "Ten.

One, two, three," and continues counting.
The blind player is dribbling, listening
to the beeps and lining himself
or herself to the sound.

And before the referee gets to ten, shoots.

SHARON JOYNER

Truth

I want you to know
this world is filled with
forces and substances
like gravity and electricity
that we cannot see.
Life as we know it
is run by a being
that we cannot see.
Whether we want to admit it
or not this higher power
controls everything
weather we want to believe it or not.

Nature

The Bible says the earth groans.
Why can't we hear it?
They say there is water in the room.
Why can't we see it?
There is electricity in the air.
Why can't we feel it?
Why is politics so explosive
when it's supposed to be cohesive?
They say we can talk to the flowers.
What language do they understand?

ROBIN FINNEY

Words

Someone says, say what you mean.
When you speak the words
understand what you say.
When you open your mouth
close the hole in your tongue.
Speak intelligently and thoughtfully.

Deep in the Abyss

I am supposed to
feel embraced by
love ones,
but sometimes I feel
as if I'm out
in space
surrounded by the
ebony void
of infinity.

ROBIN FINNEY

Short and Sweet

I want you to know one thing.
I have my own conscience.
I don't need to hear from yours.

Artistry

A clear summer day
the sky paints the city streets
with its brilliant blue.

Hypocrisy Kit

One snake in a basket of grass
double face on head

ROBIN FINNEY

In Lieu of 9/11

Lugubrious times
on this massive real estate
blatant destruction
many sad faces in view
black cloud, hangover city

Mysteries

Why does my reflection not come out of my mirror to help do
my chores?
Why does color not have sound?
Why does matter matter?
Is the sky considered the ceiling of earth?
Or is it the floor of heaven?

KITTY GORMLEY

Always Speak the Truth

Someone says, you always say
what you're really thinking.
I think we should do that
and it would be a better world,
because hypocrisy is really
out of the question.

I Should Change Some of My Ways, But It's Difficult

I am supposed to love
 my neighbor
but sometimes
 I don't want to...
My door is not always
 open.

What do I call it?

Why do I like sports so much, especially baseball?
Why is Edgar Allan Poe my favorite author?
Why can't we remember all of our dreams and only some?
What's the point?
Who will be our next president?
Why can't I sleep well every night?

KITTY GORMLEY

I Can Do It Myself

I was raised in a beautiful home
for blind children.
I don't remember when
I first went there.
They were kind but firm.
I don't remember learning to dress myself.
But once when my mother came
to take me to her home,
I must have been five or six years old.
She tried to dress me and I said,
"Mother, I can do it."
In her Greek accent, she said,
"You dooo. You no dooo."
I said, "I can do. Speak English correctly."
She said, "You fresh. I put you to bed early."
I said, "But I can dress myself."
She said, "Ok, I go."
And she left me.
When she came back I was dressed.
She said, "Oh, you do, you do. You good girl."

When I grew older
I realized that although we were disciplined,
the home for blind children
was the best place I ever lived.

KITTY GORMLEY

I Say What I Think

I want you to know
I will always remember
some good points about you,
but I will never forget the bad.

Around The World

Around the whole world
sometimes people aren't happy.
They feel quite sorry,
complain about everything.
I wish I could make them smile.

Last Night

I dreamed about poetry class.
My mother said, "You no do."
I said, "I can do it!"
She said, "Oh, you do, you do!"

KITTY GORMLEY

I Was Captain of the Baseball Team

The player that was supposed
to come to bat
wasn't hitting.
So I changed the batting order
which I wasn't supposed to do.
I assigned the girl
that got the most hits to go first.
After class the teacher scolded me
and told me, "You're not going to be
captain of the team anymore."
The girl didn't get a hit anyway.
I think the teacher struck her out
on purpose.

America is Beautiful

America is grand.
She's my land, she's your land.
She's everybody's land.
So let's all be true
to the beautiful
red, white, and blue.

JANET SETH

Relatives

Someone says,
I can't deal with this anymore.
They're your problem.

Immovable

I want you to know
I am my own person.
What decisions I've made are mine,
like a rock in the middle
of a stream
water parting around me.

Today

Brittle sun
spicy fragrance of hyacinth
radiator hot for my shower.

Tuesday Tankas

An urban cock crows
the morning sun to the sky
his call sounds, blocks around
before car or truck noises
people still asleep in their beds

My keyboard
has yellow keys and
black letters
we are teaching, talking
to this computer now

I Think People Don't Get Visual Problems

I was trying to think of how
to give a concrete example.

If you go into a room
and you don't know where the chairs are
and you don't know where the door is...

Woman's Heart

purple kimono
draped to the floor with rose obi
carved ivory fan
woman's heart concealed
ritual rains supreme

Homes, Houses, Residences

I was born in a town of four thousand people,
elevation, four thousand feet.

History since 1860,
mostly Mormon.

Completely rural,
cows and field corn, tractors and hay bales,
horses and ATVs.

Cowboy boots, hats and shirts,
Levis and Wranglers.

Graduated from high school
improved my life in college,
Provo and Salt Lake City, Utah.

On my twenty seventh birthday
I escaped to New York City.

I lived in Manhattan on East 67th Street,
a second floor of a six story walk up,
white hexagon tiles in the bathroom,
deep claw footed tub,
gas light pipes dead in the walls.

NYC has been my home since 1974.

I found my career, met my husband here.

When our daughter started school
we moved to magnificent Queens,
land of cemeteries and airports.

Now residing forty-two years.

Revenge of the Garbagemen

I am supposed to keep my walks shoveled
even if three feet of snow buries
fences and trash, put out for pickup.
There is no trash pickup when it snows.
Snow plows are mounted on garbage trucks
with clanking chains circling tires.
Trash freezes
under snow,
plows bury cars
beside roads.
It warms and thaws a little,
snows again, reburies all.

Ice Desert

Freezing wind, dry wind
shrieks across glaciers.
Ice rivers bury mountains
compress ranges
slide down hidden valleys,
carving them deeper.
The scientist's snow mobile roars
loud as the howl of the wind.
It doesn't snow much,
never rains.
Subzero temperatures ensure
snow becomes eternal ice.
Ice shelf, thick like land, floats
on salt sea water.
Ice grows thicker
scientists, busy proving
global warming, on Christmas Eve
trapped on their science ship.
They wait for rescue,
ice breakers fall.
After ten days
fifty-two scientists, journalists
and tourists were transferred
by a Chinese helicopter
to Australian Icebreaker, Aurora.

Gold and Colors

Standing on the dock
in the watery mangroves
at the southern tip of India.
Waiting to board a rowboat, party of four.
Behind eight ladies, dressed for a ball,
heavy gold jewelry, gold thread on silk saris,
vivid hummingbird colors.
Boat capacity six.
They kept adding people.
Water oozed over the sides,
filled the boat's bottom.
As the boat sank
they were still negotiating
to add another person.
We got into our boat,
the rower pulled on his oars,
out into the stagnant brackish water,
tree trunks and air roots,
above water, bark smooth gray.
That boatman really moved
right back to the dock.
We were still crawling out of the boat
as he hurried up to the shed;
he had to make sure he got paid
for our light load.

Revenge of the Garbagemen #2

Sanitation workers had been without
a contract for five years
when our imperial mayor
jetted off to his secret Caribbean
holiday hideout.

His travel plans were not announced.
Assistant Mayors were scattered,
chasing European ski vacations
or sugar plum fairies.
They left their Blackberries in New York.

It began to snow. It snowed all day,
December 26th.
It was still snowing on Dec 27th, 2010.
When it ended Central Park had twenty inches.
As soon as flakes fall
snowplows are mounted on garbage trucks
tires circled by clanking chains
ready to roll,
salt spreaders made ready.
Big storms mean big overtime.
Garbage pickup is suspended.
Alternate side parking is suspended.
All effort goes to snow removal.

JANET SETH

I am supposed to keep my sidewalks shoveled
even if three feet of snow
buries fences and trash put out
for pick up.
Usually with a long storm
snowplows will pass several times.
Something was wrong.
The only city official around was
Commissioner of Sanitation.
That old guy didn't scare anyone.
There were no plows on our street.
It took four days to get one plow.
There were two tire tracks where SUVs
had braved the snow.
We heard reports of people dying;
emergency vehicles could not get through.
They finally started plowing.
Cars were buried beside the road.
We joked that we could ski down our
shoveled snow mountains.
Where could we stash our trash?
Ten days without garbage removal is a long time.
We were finally able to get off our block,
first thing we saw were five
garbage truck plows parked
near Dunkin Donuts on Horace Harding Expressway.
That's where snowplows hide.

PHYLLIS JOYNER

The Moon

I was raised in Windsor, Virginia,
a town of 650 people.
We lived in a house
with umbrella trees in the side yard.
I visited the neighbors often.

When I was nine we moved
to a big house. I remember
writing a poem, looking out
the window at the moon
in the direction of the old house,
longing for the left behind.
But I made new friends.
There were four of us
walking to school every morning.
We were a tight enviable group
in our red striped pinafores.
One day at lunch we saw two dogs
stuck together and we were
terribly concerned.

PHYLLIS JOYNER

Blood Boiling

I am supposed to wait
 patiently for the bus
but 25 minutes...really?

I'm Losing It

I want you to know
I don't want to think about it.
I'm sinking into a depression,
it's that tone
that cadence.

Today

From that place
into which I have sunk
in poetry class,
I recall the daffodils
and jonquils
swaying in the wind,
Wordsworth and his sister
roaming the English hills,
he to fame
and she to solitary neuroticism.

PHYLLIS JOYNER

I have resistance

to confinement in any shape,
but this can be fun.

Perseverance is good.

Playful pleasure is better.

Good Grief

Who did it?

Why do I always feel so guilty?

Why do people who study a lot think they know all the answers?

Why do the Tibetans think listening to certain chant sounds
will enable birds who hear it have a precious human life?

Why is it called mystery school?

ED DELGADO

Hasta La Victoria Siempre

I want you to know one thing.
If you betray the revolution
I will still continue
the struggle.

Imagine

lost sight, not vision
fifteen-dollar wage increase
high rents in New York
dreaming of a better world
for all imagine, why not?

JOYCE ARTIS

The Candidate

Bernie came to town
shut Long Island City down
came to make a speech
Hunters Point now a rally ground
dreams of being White House bound.

Resurrection

Out of winter's heart
frozen solid at a time
life makes it flower,
buds blooming now, sun beams down
spring is making a comeback.

Connections

Why do I have dreams I cannot interpret?

Why can't I just dream about myself?

Why do certain voices put me in a trance when the topics are interesting?

Why do I have strong spiritual connections to nature?