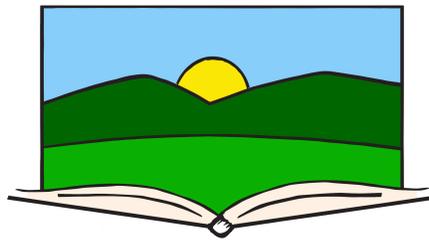


DC Poets Post-Performance Poetry Sample

Including poems by DC Poet Project winners

Susan Meehan, John Johnson, and Kevin Wiggins



Day Eight

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Talking
to the
Night

Susan Meehan

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DEDICATED TO

This book is dedicated to the memory of two young people from the DC area who recently suffered unexpected and violent deaths, one at the hands of public authority.

Two young men with whom I have had some level of personal connection were recently killed. It is always a real shock when someone with whom one has such connections dies at the hands of others so young and tragically. These young men had every right to expect to live happily and peacefully for many years to come. But instead, they were ripped away by violence, and to make it worse, one of those deaths was by the hands of misused public authority.

Their loss becomes ours, and brings out the realization that we all are vulnerable, and that thoughtfully-assigned public assistance needs to be put in place and skillfully-used on a long-term and hopefully permanent basis if we are ever to change the underlying reasons for our high murder rates. I pray that our government will show increased devotion to a path of mercy, so that we might as a population regain a way of life as beautiful, peaceful and blessed as the lives of those two young people, lost too soon.

SATURDAY MORNING LESSON

TWO CARS HEADED towards each other
down our narrow city alley,
our minivan filled with our young children,
the other, with two middle-aged women in the front,
a stately golden Cadillac, the golden brougham
of a local schoolteacher.

When the two cars reached impasse
and could go no further, we stopped.
The two ladies briskly debarked,
one on either side of that glorious car.
Silently and knowingly, as in a dream,
each squatted,
pulled her pants down
and simultaneously let out
a long, streaming geyser of golden piss.

The pissing finished,
the teachers pulled themselves erect,
carefully adjusted their clothes
and expertly backed the golden Cadillac
down our newly-watered alley,
and disappeared.

Our young children gaped and stared through the
windshield,
awestruck at what adults had leave to do,
and grinned, anticipating great freedom very soon.

LEAVINGS

And I think where did he ever learn about cars
and how did he learn to touch the heart of women
and where is he going now
and where will his journey end?
I guess that it will not.

And I think about leavings,
hurried under summer suns
slowly into winter nights
and when will they end
and how can I take the pain?

And now the pain has come again
as he goes out our door one very last time
away from home forever this very first time
and calls goodbye, waving happily,
fading quickly out of sight.

And I wonder,
is this my exchange?
is this my new child?
And so I hold the pain close to me
and make it dear
knowing it will be staying,
still with me
close to me
after he is long gone,
long gone
gone.

TO REMEMBER

I WISH MYSELF perfect again,
not forgetting names and places
that are extraordinary only in that
I can no longer count
on remembering them upon cue –
nor dropping my socks and
losing my sense of space,
all turned around.

My directions were always
sequential and coherent.
Now I write long notes
to remind myself of things
I need to do,
but forget and leave them
under the bed,
scrunched and ignored.

AS WE ARE ELDERING

As I LIE in the crook of his arm,
I wonder what I will remember the most
if Death were to take him first.

Would it be hidden laughter, eye-signed,
across a crowded room,
the surprising silk of male flesh,
the warmth of fingers gripping mine in the cold,
our talking for hours in the early morning,
the steady reach of a protective arm,
the many courtesies of a gallant man?

We anticipate cruelly our fear of separation,
knowing it will come too soon,
an unbearable parting of one into twain,
our complementarity like both sides of one hand -
inseparable in function,
inseparable in love.

FOREVER TURNING PAGES

WE VISITED OLD friends last night
as they sorted out their library
before they sold their home,
a lifetime of books
piled high against the evening windowpanes,
stacked along the couches,
over doors, under chairs,
near enough to be caressed one more time.

The room was sweetly scented
by old paper
soft leather
fine ideas no longer common.

Once read and reread with passion and respect
the books were now being given away
packed off in uncertain voyage
their final destiny -
perhaps the city's trash bin or
the town dump,
dismissed
by a cold, untutored eye.

As love and memories passed
between their hands
in volumes
that spoke of times long gone
and places to be revisited only in the mind
I longed for time to stand quite still
for dust motes to stay settled in the air
for books to wait half-opened,
and bliss to outwit age.

About This Book

This book was produced by the non-profit Day Eight. Founded by Robert Bettmann, the mission of Day Eight is to empower individuals and communities to participate in the arts through the production, publication, and promotion of creative projects. In 2015, Day Eight received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to expand our publishing program. The grants made to Day Eight by The DC Commission on the Arts and LISC DC that supported production of this book expanded on that support.

This book was also made possible by the support of the featured poets in the DC Poet Project: Gregory Luce, Elizabeth Ashe, Abdul Ali, Ethelbert Miller, Melanie Figg, Joseph Ross, and Danielle Evennou, as well as project partners BRINK Media, Upshur Street Books, the American Poetry Museum, the DC Public Library, and individual donors. Thanks to the Day Eight Board of Directors in 2016 and 2017 for their support of the project, including:

Tim Mikulski
Ana Maria Rodriguez
J. T. Kirkland
Kelly Ann Jacobson
Gregory Luce
Patrick Cavanaugh
Jacqueline Drayer

To learn more about the DC Poet Project please visit www.DayEight.org.



Love for Her

JOHN JOHNSON

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Book design by Carly Thaw
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A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

This book is special to me because it is an ode to all of the amazing women in my life. It celebrates lust and love, short-term flings, and everlasting marriage. It celebrates the ways that women have shaped me. I truly believe, “God is a woman.” Thanks to all of the amazing women in my life, and I would like to specifically thank Kendra, Jada, Tedra, Marley, and Leah, for being the consistent reminders of the love that exists in the everyday. Loving an artist is not easy. In addition to all of the other challenges, you have to endure my incompetence in my attempts at being brilliant. Every day you all continue to guide and teach me to become not only a better man, but a better human being. To all the men that have encouraged me, including Jason, Scott, LaVan, Carl, Larin, and Jose: we still got a lot of work to do. Thanks also to Robert, and Day Eight, for all your efforts in getting these works published. PEACE.

John Johnson

August, 2018

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DCPS (DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC
SCHOOL SYSTEM)

I HAD A history teacher that kept it real when I was in
high school

He said life is a big chess board

They going to treat you like pawns and peons

Colonized by Europeans

Your black life matters

You are a human beyond

This world has strange customs

And most people wear masks and costumes

Outfits like Halloween

For example: the other day I was dressed up as a black man

And got pulled over by a man dressed as a cop

I knew immediately that I should have worn my white man in
khaki outfit

Because the interaction would have ended in him giving me
candy corn instead of tension

So I said, "Officer I know it's night and I am traveling home
diagonally like a bishop to my castle.

I am trying to do this without hassle I would like to make it to
the eight rank to my Queen

I live 64 squares away right off of Martin Luther King."

But the officer was like many of you...

He didn't know how to play chess

Nor did he know how to turn the body camera on that was on
his chest.

He didn't have the same history teacher either

The same history teach that said,

Life is a big chess board

They going to treat you like pawns and peons

Colonized by Europeans

Your black life matters

You are human beyond.

COFFEE SHOP

EXCUSE ME

May I have a Macchiato?

Minus the racism and gentrification

And hold the dairy

Because I am lactose intolerant

I am no longer tolerant

I want my teachers strapped with the truth and tank tops

Because then they can bare arms

America still drops booms

War

So much beefing

Can't be swallowed by vegetarians

So many bitches can't

Be vaccinated by veterinarians

You are probably judging for my content but not my character

This poem has a dream too

It dreams a little different than MLK's

This poem had a dream it was in the car

And Jesus was in the back

We nickname Jesus 'Black'

Cause Jesus Black!

And riding shotgun was Harriet

And Marcus Garvey was driving the Cadillac Chariot

This poem had a dream that Tamir Rice never met Tupac

But maybe there is too much caffeine in my Macchiato

Or maybe it's just too melanated.

AMERICA

WHAT IS THE difference between Chicago and Vietnam?

Niggas don't get killed in Vietnam no more

They get killed in Iraq and Afghanistan

Fighting a rich man's war

Allen Stanford and Bernie Madoff with the Lehman Brothers

The Stock Market plummeted

And for a second the rich almost knew what it was like to
be poor

Poor like on the Southside of D.C., Philly, and Baltimore

But not really

No banker traded

In cufflinks for handcuffs

But if you look at the prison system you would think African Americans

Invented mortgage fraud and stock derivatives

So that's just one reason I don't stand for your anthem

Because the 14th amendment came with a prenup

I can no longer be immune

I am allergic to racism like a bag full of peanuts

So as white privilege is challenged

I understand why so much money goes to defense
I understand why you want to build a wall and a fence
In Arizona ice tea don't taste that sweet anymore
It's actually bitter
Bitter like the strange fruit that hung from poplars
Everybody's on social media got a hashtag and want to be
popular
And in the end I agree that "All lives do matter"
All Lives Do Matter
Just not in America.

THIRD GRADE LOVE

YOU REMEMBER THAT third grade love?

That never, ever, ever, die love

Because she checked the yes box

And you got the paper proof.

That third grade love

When everybody knew each other's whole name like

Eric McFadden

Lakesha Johnson

April Williams

Damion Madukaego

(He was the international student)

That third grade love

Kimberly Ware

My third grade love

I just loved her for her

She ain't have no ass or no titties

And I wasn't lookin' for none

That third grade love

I just liked her cause she was pretty and I liked the way she
wrote her name

She spelled it Kimberly, capital K-I-M-B-E-R-L-Y,

Ware, capital W-A-R-E.

She even knew how to write her name in cursive —

She was real smart, you know.

That third grade love

— When lunchtime vitamin A and D enhanced milk

Became a chocolate milk day

Because you got to see her face.

That third grade love,

When 6:00 PTA meetings were the only time you got to see
her at night.

That third grade love,

When y'all would secretly share each other's report cards—

Knowing you both got the same grades

Because y'all both copied off each other's paper.

That third grade love,

When the teacher asked you what you wanted to do when you
got older

And you said: I want to be the ice cream man and marry
Kimberly Ware.

Because the ice cream man was cool as shit in the third grade,

And so was Kimberly Ware

My third grade love

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL LOVE

NO MORE NURSERY rhyme book bags and lunch boxes

`Cause you're a big boy

`Cause you got you a ninja turtle backpack

And a trapper-keeper notebook —

The expensive one that came with a pencil and a protractor

That you used as a boomerang in the hallway.

Junior high school love,

When you can finally get a girl's phone number

Although y'all ain't talk about nothin' on the phone —

Except sometimes when y'all watched Bill Cosby together

And you would say: "Ooh did you see that?"

And she would chuckle and say: "Yeah."

Remember that junior high school love?

When you talked about how stupid you were when you
were younger

Because you wanted to be the ice cream man —

But now you got big plans

Because now you want to be a policeman, fireman, and the
President of the USA —

All at the same time.

Junior high school love

The first time you got a nickname:

She called me June bug because my birthday is in June

And I called her Ladybug cause she was my lady.

She thought I was cool because I knew how to use curse words

And because I told her I was going to pull the fire alarm one day

To prove how much I loved her.

That junior high love,

When you wrote each other love letters using your

Vocabulary word list —

When a date consisted of walking her to the bus stop,

When a kiss was equivalent to sex.

I got my kiss, too.

It was a Tuesday and I just gave Ladybug a pretty flower —

I think it was a dandelion.

I said: “Here, Ladybug — I profess my love to you!”

(Profess was one of our vocabulary words.)

And she looked at me,

She looked at me like I had answered some type of question
in her life

And then our lips attached like refrigerator magnets

And we were stuck together forever with that kiss —

And I didn’t even have to pull the fire alarm.

That junior high love —

My Ladybug and me.

ABOUT DAY EIGHT

This book was produced by Day Eight. The mission of Day Eight is to empower individuals and communities to participate in the arts through the production, publication, and promotion of creative projects.

Example 2018 projects:

The DC Arts Writing Fellowship was created to support early career arts writers. Fellows are served by a committee of professional critic mentors, and Fellowship Directors. The Fellowship was initially funded by a grant to Day Eight from the National Endowment for the Arts, and recently received a multi-year funder commitment.

The DC Poet Project is a reading series and open-to-all poetry competition that supports DC area poets. The project is designed around partnerships with the DC Public Library, Anacostia Coordinating Council, and Brink Media. Related to the DC Poet Project, Day Eight recently conducted a poetry practicum in partnership with three of D.C.'s Senior Villages, supported by a grant from ride-sharing company Lyft.

Since 2017, Day Eight's local art history projects have included work on The Jefferson Place Gallery Archive, which documents D.C.'s first artist cooperative gallery, online at www.JeffersonPlaceGallery.com. An Advisory Board of community members and arts and museum professionals oversee and support the archive's development.

All of Day Eight's projects are overseen by committees of volunteers. To learn more about our programming, or to join a committee, please visit www.DayEight.org or Facebook.com/DayEightOrg.

PORT of EXIT

BY KEVIN WIGGINS

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AUTHOR'S DEDICATION

Thank you to the readers who take the time to really submerge themselves in these poems. I've always struggled with feeling wanted and I appreciate you for witnessing me in a real and personal way through my words.

This book is dedicated to the readers, and also to my family and friends who encourage me to pursue my art.

Keith: although you are no longer here in the flesh I keep your encouraging words in my head and in my heart.

Chris Thomas and Barbara Trawick: my poetry disciplinarians, thank you for constantly pushing me in the direction of greatness. Your love and guidance led me here.

Taylor Monae Davis: poetry had lost its power until I rediscovered it mourning your loss; I love you and I miss you.

Selah: you were there from the beginning, speaking greatness over my life. Thank you for helping me to believe.

My Mommy: I never can say it enough, and I know I don't, but I love you.

Finally: to every Black Gay boy who has found it difficult to see themselves as beautiful, talented, worthy and necessary, I dedicate this to you! The world needs you, and don't let anyone convince you otherwise.

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CHAIN OF INFECTION

Now I want to know who told these boys to stop crying

How many generations have we lost by teaching them to be men
that they've got to tattoo their teardrops?

Release everything that's natural about your DNA and become
inhumane to maintain your masculinity

To never open up

All the while being exposed to this toxicity

America has been the reservoir that bore and nurtured this
contaminated mindset that men shouldn't be allowed to feel

Port of exit these ideals to a black man whose mode of
transmission becomes violence because he now allows his hands
to do the talking

Damaging the port of entry and the psyche of the susceptible
host with this toxic masculinity

Then you have someone like me

Whose sexuality will never make him man enough

Who is openly attracted to masculinity so my masculinity can
never be masked enough

Because I am somehow a poor representation of a black man and
his community

Question:

Why are you so offended by me?
When did I become your enemy?
Would there be more inclusion for me if I had a woman to beat
If I had a family to leave fatherless or was more condescending in
my speak?
If I no longer wore my war wounds as rainbows would you then
invite me to your table of brotherhood –
Which I might I add ain't looking no better without me bruh –
Because in their eyes we're all black and on the same scale
Call it Libra
But my manhood isn't intimidated by my freedom
Which is intimidating to you
So you leave us out in the margins of an already marginalized
group
But I guess when the world has stolen your worth from you
Then you've got to find something to devalue too
Smart man you're just playing into their hand
Don't you understand that they already refer to us as "beast"?

CAN I BORROW YOUR INIQUITIES?

If you don't mind

Can I borrow your iniquities?

Since my sins are so much greater and heaven has no room for me - could you loan me your transgressions?

See my sexual prowess is so detestable that I need to prove to the almighty that I'm worthy of a straight man's blessing

Christian - let me borrow your passive aggression, so I can somehow learn the lesson that Jesus loves you but you will burn... in the name of the Lord

Let me borrow your discord, Christian!

Let me borrow your discord, Christian!

Let me borrow your discord, Christian - how can you use your Bible as a double edged sword and think both of those testaments will only pierce me?

Or is Judgment reserved only for those heterosexuals of you who sin so beautifully?

Could you loan me your audacity?

Your ability, your nerve, and the capacity to love and hate all in the same breath?

See my plea is simply to be sure, happy, and wanted, as myself

So I feel that somebody owes me some confidence

Because after hearing all the reasons why I'm not worthy of his mercy I have no certainty except in the fact that I've been robbed of all of it

Christ paid it all but he didn't factor in the cost of me?

Somebody, please! My soul is said to burn eternally

Let me borrow your inequities and pretend to be better

See my sexuality somehow severed my ties to the savior so could you do me a favor:

Touch your neighbor and ask him can he grace me with a bit of his graces since Jesus couldn't afford me and heaven struck homos from its budget but adjusted it just to make room for you - the virtuous and perfect insufficiency

But I wouldn't mind seeing those streets of glory

Would you mind holding on to my purgatory just for a second so I can peek at your promise?

See I'm so honest that I'd give your paradise back to you

Even though you're so willing to snatch mine away from me

You're that same thief in John 10:10 who comes to kill and destroy - but somehow you've still carved out life abundantly

You are so high above me

Even with your gluttonous way of fucking me

Your fornication and adultery

Your lies from the pulpit

And your sodomy in secrecy

Preacher

Let me borrow your teachings

As you pray for my delivery

Not to your God

But still on your knees

Can I borrow the lies that excrete between your teeth so I can
misuse forgiveness and its power

So that I won't cower at the idea of being forsaken

I know this is blatant and selfish of me to ask but since you sin

So much better than me

Can I borrow your iniquities?

Where's my manners

And excuse my urgencies

As I can see

That you clearly are not done with them yet

I WANNA BE A REAL NIGGA

I wanna be a real Nigga

Like that strange fruit that once dangled from trees

As long as my neck noose is draped in diamonds and bling bling
then label me

A real Nigga

And cart me off for auction in market places

Deface our graces

And cage our kings

Leave no representation of our heritage

So we won't realize we're royalty

And label me

A real Nigga

Who will sell my soul

For the wages of the highest bidder

But freedom is priceless and we're so small in our thinking

I'd bet there's limp dick that's bigger

Leave me limber in my identity to stand confident in my
deception

Televise and make over the faces of former slaves

To paint them as masters so we can be the leaders of our own
oppression

Pressing on

And walking

In self made chains

To be certified real

Like blood spilled by former slaves

— I guess it was all in vein —

So lay me prostrate cut me open

And drain me of this DNA that makes me real

Nigga

I guess Nigga

Ain't Nigga enough

Unless you're outside working that white cotton

Like them field Niggaz

But what about them Emmett Till Niggaz?

Them Martin King, them Malcolm Lil Niggaz?

They chose to step outside of societal ideals

But you choose to walk back to plantations

With smiles upon your faces

Tracing the blueprint once outlined by our captors
And calling yourselves free
But you ain't free
You just free range Nigga
Found liberty in your limbs
But you're livestock still locked up
Because you've yet to attain a free brain Nigga
New age Nigga twice removed from your freedom
Took the whip out of your captors hand to remain a slave
You've just changed the master that beat him

Nigga

Slave

Buffoon

Baboon

Willing to assume any of these positions

Street Nigga wishing he can find his weight in a key

But freedom is still waiting and your mind is the waiting key

You can't liberate yourself without liberating your thinking

So miss me with that categorical Nigga bullshit
Because that only defines me a fable
The way I'm set up I'm diverse like your B.E.T's your MTV's
CNN's
Your Netflix or your cable
I'm who I choose to be
And the last thing I choose to be
Is something that's been derogatory throughout our history
And I don't care
How you chop it
How you screw it
How you spell it
How you use it
Because before we were labeled animals we were human
And that's what I choose to be
Flawed naturally
But y'all choose to be Niggaz happily
I'm sorry but prewritten definitions can't have me
And if I have to stand on my own
With only my dark skin

Dead kin

Backing me

Then fuck it

I'm a mysfit anyway

CRIMINALLY BLACK

The preface of my purgatory bore me black and stacked all the odds against me

No jury to await an impending judgment

Because my complexion already rendered me guilty

Sentenced to death by legalized hate crimes

Metaphorical lynchings of those criminally black in white America

The land of the free ain't so free for a black man in white America

Concentration camps didn't begin in Germany

They took their blueprint from white America trying to cancel out this black album and

Without a reasonable doubt they now use our penal system

Systematic injustices

To implement our slavery

And as successors to our lineage

We're all guilty as American gangsters

And they have unfinished business with the dynasty

Black people:

America promises nothing

40 acres and a mule

And we've yet to receive

Nothing

Have Medgar Evers and Rodney King taught us nothing?

Emmett Till's murderers got away scot-free

Time served was absolutely nothing

But yet Michael Vick does a two-year stint

Because in comparison to a pit

Black life is worth

Absolutely nothing

We are the hunted

Endangered species in this wild jungle we call our home

But we're not even welcome here

We're not even wanted but

If my skin were lighter maybe I'd understand why Dorothy
clicked her heels

And said

There's no place like home
Dethrone the idea that we're on equal playing fields
No this is a slaughter
But it's somehow legal
To take the life of skin darker
So we can't exactly call them robbers
They're monsters of this
Judicial gang called America
And being black is the treason
Killing niggaz back to back it's open season
When being black is a crime
Punishments are acts of
Stand your ground murders
Or enslavements by extensive stints of jail time

So if you ever find yourself seventeen with Arizona Tea
A tall being in a hoodie with skittles
Just don't be black
Because history has taught us
It's that which makes us
Criminal

ABOUT DAY EIGHT

This book was produced by the non-profit Day Eight. The mission of Day Eight is to empower individuals and communities to participate in the arts through the production, publication, and promotion of creative projects. Our vision is to be part of the healing of the world through the arts. Day Eight's programming includes an online magazine, poetry events, live arts programming, art book publishing, and activities to support arts journalism.

Example 2019 projects:

The DC Arts Writing Fellowship was created to support early career arts writers. Fellows are served by a committee of professional critic mentors and Fellowship Directors. Day Eight recently received a multi-year funder commitment to expand the project, which works in partnership with local news outlets Tagg Magazine, DC Theatre Scene, and The DC Line.

The DC Poet Project is a reading series and open-to-all poetry competition that supports DC area poets. The project is designed around partnerships with the DC Public Library, Anacostia Coordinating Council, and Brink Media. Day Eight recently received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts supporting the DC Poet Project in 2020.

Since its founding Day Eight has pursued projects documenting art history, including recently related to the Jefferson Place Gallery (D.C.'s first artist cooperative gallery.) An Advisory Board of community members and arts and museum professionals oversee and support Day Eight's art history projects.

Day Eight's projects function through the support of individual donors including the Board of Directors. To learn more and donate visit www.DayEight.org.