Litquake Elder Project writings borne of experience, sharpened with wit and wisdom

Description

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Published poet Lisa Galloway is the person who added the Elder to Litquake.

A spinoff of the popular, annual Bay Area Litquake Festival â?? Oct. 11-20 â?? the Litquake Elder Project is a writing program for seniors that offers instruction, community and the opportunity to share their voices. On Oct. 17, a Litquake Elder All-Star reading is free to the public, from 11 a.m. â?? noon at Bethany Lutheran Church, 2525 Alemany Blvd.

The Litquake Elder Project was birthed two years ago,, soon after Galloway moved to San Francisco from Portland, Ore. While interviewing for a job with Litquake, she learned that it offered writing programs for kids and teens but not seniors.

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Litquake Elder Project Founder Lisa Galloway, left, with writer MG Thomas. (Photo by Judy Goddess)

She had worked with seniors, recording their stories as part of making end-of-life videos for Kaiser Permanente. She knew they had lots to say and were eager to share. Litquake took her suggestion and agreed to offer a program for seniors if she could find the funding to support it.

Galloway, fortunately also an experienced grant writer, accepted the challenge and secured funding from the California Arts Council for a demonstration project at the Oakland Senior Center. When logistics made it difficult to offer a second session there,, Galloway brought the project to San Francisco. It has since been offered four times at the San Francisco Campus for Jewish Living and is now completing its third series at the Cayuga Community Connectors, a program of the San Francisco Community Living Campaign.

Galloway expects to start a new series with the San Francisco Village community. Programs at Cayuga Connectors and the Campus for Jewish Living will continue, with matching funds from The California Arts Council. But additional programs will need additional funding, she said.

The Litquake Elder Project contracts professional, published writers as instructors. Classes meet for 90 minutes a week for eight weeks; a public performance of their work culminates each series. Many of the instructors are poets, others write fiction or prose. Instructors alternate â?? often teaching two consecutive classes â?? so that students are exposed to various writing styles. Galloway organizes the instructional teams.

â??For the Cayuga program, I deliberately chose teachers from diverse age groups: 40s, 50s, and 60s. I wanted everyone to have someone they could relate to,â?• she said. The classes have been popular, with many repeat students. â??Iâ??m so pleased with the program. Everything I wanted to happen is happening. Itâ??s exciting when you see students incorporate what you teach in their writing.â?•

Before the public reading on the last day of class, Galloway and the instructors compile an anthology of student writing.

Read more and learn about the authors in these PDFs of the some of the Litquake Elder Project anthologies.

Litquake Elder Project Book â?? Cayuga Spring 2018

Litquake Elder Project Book â?? Cayuga Summer 2018

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And here are some samples:

â??The Crazy Quiltâ?•by MG Thomas

Waking up, the first thing I see is the quilt on my bed.

The squares tilted like baseball diamonds,

colors scattering madly, running into each other

like a kaleidoscope.

How I loved those as a child

watching myriad squares shifting and sliding

into the next impossible design.

The next impossible design being marriage.

How could two such crazy quilt squares as us

ever fall into a pattern that fit?

Those right-angled metamorphoses of life

kept tipping us off-center, bouncing off each other.

Bouncing until I bounce free

through a lattice-work gate and onto

St. Charles Avenue where I watch

a Mardi Gras jester dance along the parade route,

his jacket a civil disturbance of geometry and color.

Later, deja vu, that design reappears at the race track

on my jockeyâ??s jersey, the diamond pattern

shimmering in the sunlight as

his horse meanders across the finish line.

My dream of retiring rich ruined,

my attention wanders across a diamond walkway,

back through my bedroom window and onto the bed

where the quilt has continued to sleep soundly,

completely unaware

of the journey

it just led me on.

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â??St. Paul Streetcarâ?• by Grace Dâ??Anca

St. Paul streetcar going downtown

going oing oing down the tracks

old white driver

bounce jiggles in his chair

going oing oing down the tracks.

Iâ??m too little to go it solo

so mama holds my hand.

caned seats stiff in winter

through our heavy coats

sticky sweaty in vapid

zapid summer air.

Going oing oing

going downtown

through the revolving door.

Too hot inside

inside heavy coats

going to the notions floor.

St. Paul streetcar oing oings down

the tracks

past 7 Corners

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humble, shabby, seedy then.

Chic with boutique antiques now

I hear.

Somewhere in a summer

they took the tracks, dug â??em up leaving mounds of yellow

brown dirt punctuated with rocks.

Old enough to solo now I

traipsed over the mounds

to the corner store, popsicle juice

tattoos my hand, tromping to my back door

chucking pokey rocks on the stair.

St. Paul streetcar gone

replaced by a noxious bus 22

still goes downtown

past 7 Corners, stops

at Wilder pool. Men who have no bathrooms

shower there and

girls like me learn to swim.

Mean Betsy, my 4th grade fiend learned

float and crawl. Me, I floundered

while chirpy whistleblower teacher squished

my hand when I reached for the rail.

Mean Betsy didnâ??t have it all good.

Her mama died, her daddy married Peggy

nice enough, but Betsyâ??s rich grandma said

Peggy has piano legs.

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On St. Paul noxious bus

Mean Betsy and me

hats, white gloves, quarters in hand

going to high stooled shiny beige Woolworthsâ??s counter

for hot dogs, chips and cokes

then to look at bras.

Solo on that bus

coming home with my first

Elvis 45, later

open close open

close stiff bags to peek

at fashions found on sale

through the revolving door in vapid

zapid summer air.

The tracks are gone, the corner storeâ??s

a pizza parlor now

and we still use that back door.

â??Massageâ?• by John Edmiston

I stepped into the dimly lit room

Essential oils barely wafting into my awareness

Ochre brick fireplace

Lovingly housing a serene seated Buddha

Gauzy tattered fabric softening the

image of the crowded world outside

I am here to be healed,

to soften the rigid muscles

in my neck and back

Cords of wood suddenly calcifying

Straining ridges knotted visibly under my skin

stealing my attention

The therapist reaches under my shoulder blades,

skillfully probes the attachment

radiating a bilious yellow throb,

pulls, stretches, coaxes

recalcitrant armored lumps out,

Softening the tightly held knots below my skinâ??s surface

He works his way up to the cord of my neck

Where a rod of iron ends at the clavicle

Like a sprung bear trap clenched under my jaw

And I try to explain

with just words

how I came to be here

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supine on his table

The radiation was not so bad for the first week

Caged from the top of my head to my pectorals

A web of plastic molded to my face neck chest

Snapped onto the table, trapped motionless

as the rays traveled through my soft vulnerable pink flesh

still healing from the surgeonâ??s knife

The burns appear and grow and merge, 31

I wake each day on bloodied pillows,

Sheets crunch with dreams that fell away in the night.

Clots of skin and blood and crust slough off

catching in the drain

vermillion staining the water washing over me

I tried to tell him all this from a place of detachment

his fingertips already knowing so much.

I started to say

â??It was really quite horribleâ?¦â?•

but then I could only cry.

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1. All Posts

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