

WORDS MATTER.

CAYUGA CONNECTORS ANTHOLOGY



ABOUT THE PROJECT:

Litquake sparks critical conversations, and inspires writers and readers to celebrate the written word with diverse year-round literary programming, interactive workshops, and a ten-day festival.

Litquake's Elder Project is a literary arts project focused on creative expression through writing and performance.

Litquake brings the teaching artists to the elders in a classroom accessible to them. The class allows students to discuss and record past and current life experiences, resulting in personal empowerment through creativity. The goal is for students to find a new self-confidence using the creative process, writing and performance as a means of generating a dialogue within and outside of their community.

poems

Benita McCown-Harper

Benita is a 4th generation San Franciscan yet it was her 10 early formative years in Northern California's town of Eureka where she developed her love of reading, nature and the outdoors. As a child, living 5 miles outside town on Humboldt Hill, she spent most of her time outside in one of the 2 forests on either side of her house, and her favorite day of the week was when the bookmobile would arrive at the top of the hill and she would find a quiet place to read.

As an adult, Benita still loves books, journaling, nature and the outdoors. In this new "Senior Chapter" of her life, she took her first writing class, a Litquake Elder Project 9-week Creative Writing Class, and was introduced to poetry. This class has helped open a door to her creativity and her younger self, and she is very grateful for the profound experience and the gentle nudging of the inspiring teachers!!

Benita's proudest accomplishment is Motherhood and her current most enjoyable experience is the Joy of being a Grandmother!!! Her future goal is to follow her Childhood Dream of writing and illustrating a Children's Book!!

The Grove of Trees

A grove of tall trees in the distance beckons to me
As it finally comes into view.
It does not seem too far away.
The dusty dry trail, miles ago,
Is now only a vague memory.

The hike has been tiring and very long
And respite is finally near.
High and low terrain and twisty rocky paths
Are now just simply thoughts of the past.

Now present thoughts fill my mind and I imagine
The joyful chatter of birds, such a lovely sound.
The feel of damp moist earth and lush green ground.
What a pleasure to lay on, so cool and soft.

I close my eyes and breathe in deep and imagine
The scent of pine needles warmed by the sun.
I imagine the quiet hush of the forest floor
Surrounded by evergreens and much, much more.

I imagine staring up at the bright blue sky
Through the branches of the trees up so high.
I see the sun peeking out through the white clouds above
And I think, what more is there to imagine and love.

Now I open my eyes and see the Grove of Trees.
I take out my binoculars for a closer look.
There's a posted sign in front I first did not see:
"Private Property – No Entry"

I pay no mind

It's beautiful I know, and much, much more.
I've already seen it - I've been there.
In my mind's eye, I've imagined it before!!

It Can Be Seen Clearly

It can be *Seen* clearly
In the old, frayed photograph.
The way the younger new mother
Looks into the face of her newborn child.

It can be *Felt* in the spontaneous motion
As a husband reaches over to softly dry
A few droplets of water leftover from a shower.

It can be *Heard* in the “baby talk”
Couples begin to use
Even in public -- in practical, everyday talk to each other.

It can be *Seen* from behind –
A couple walking to the rhythm
Of their two-year-old son between them
All three lovely silhouettes holding hands.

It can be *Heard* in the neonatal unit
In the grandmother’s song she softly sings
to her grandson who’s come two months early
and cannot be touched or held in her arms.

It can be *Felt* when a friend’s hand
is softly placed over yours
As you drive off together after a family funeral.

It can be *Seen* from above
Looking into an itsy bitsy Hummingbird’s nest
Where she sits day in and day out
And waits for her little ones to arrive.

It can be *Seen, Felt & Heard*

In the form of Thoughts, Memories or a Present Moment
Captured forever now in the written word on a page.

Christine Arenas

I am a third generation San Franciscan. I don't consider myself a writer. But I am grateful for my experience with Litquake and Cayuga Connectors. Both have opened a new chapter in my life of retirement. I am most proud of being a grandmother of four granddaughters and one grandson who all live in the City. I am able to babysit three days a week and be a part of Cayuga Connectors, Litquake's Writing Class, a Women's Prayer Group, and I get together with many dear friends and family on a regular basis. I feel blessed that I have been given the opportunity to express myself through the written word at age 66!

Peace and Innocence

The sun is rising, a lovely light filtering through the shaded trees
A new day is dawning and I'm free, I am free to be me
Free to wake up early and say my prayers
Free to enjoy the peace and beauty of nature
A meandering creek flows peacefully
The birds and wild turkeys are waking up too
Deer come to sip the cool water, an osprey soars overhead
I am thankful for this day to be free from the stress and confusion, the
demands and the busy-ness
Just for a day...or two, it helps, a breather, a refrain to relax
And then tomorrow I'm back with the babies, the busy-ness the never a
dull moment!!!!
But thankful for the best of both worlds...
Let the chaos begin!!

Innocence and Wonder

Just enjoy all the little things of each day
The wonder and the innocence of their little ways
Climbing, running, falling
And sometimes just bawling
Then...Peace and quiet
They are asleep!!
And then I can relax and have a little treat!!!

Dolores E. Fierro

Dolores E. Fierro retired after forty years of working in FDA-regulated industries as QA/QC/Global Regulatory Affairs Manager. She was born in the Philippines and immigrated to the United States at twenty-seven. Outside of work she pursued other interests like ballroom dancing, painting, interior decoration, and cooking, to name a few. At fifty, she studied DNA Technology. Her latest endeavor is to learn how not to write like a scientist. She's writing a legacy memoir dedicated to the two generations of her family who were born in the United States.

What I Did Today

listened to 528 Hertz sound
hoping to undo my BRCA2 gene mutation
it repaired DNA in the lab
but would it work in my body?

did diaphragmatic breathing
to induce my brain to make serotonin
I want to stock up on happy hormones
to avoid future depression

looked up and looked down
to exercise my back
don't want scoliosis
to further deform my spine

read the bible and psalms
to seek answers from above
I know God is with me
all the days of my life

no Danish for me today
steeped bitter melon tea instead
to lower my glycated blood cells
borderline diabetes needs to go away

danced Zumba using Beto's DVD
to keep up with the latest dance moves
to exercise my body and lower my A1C

showered and dressed up
in warm clothes because it's cold
put on my pearl earrings

and left my abode

first stop- OLPH Church
to read the epistle, the psalms
and the gospel acclamation
to the whole congregation

prayed two glorious mysteries
while driving to my next destination
with the rosary beads hanging
from the car rear view mirror

when I reached Doelger Center
I did Tai Chi with some friends
then drove to Lincoln Center
to help seniors exercise their brain

learning a new language
might delay Dementia
I taught them Tagalog on Tuesdays
while we learn German on Mondays

then I drove to Bethel Lutheran Church
where I facilitate a Memoir Writing Class
today it is the Litquake project for seniors
where I came to write something new

The Remarkable Flora

pure, white, innocent and shy
as graceful as Michelle Kwan on the ice
quiet music like Jules Massenet's Meditation
beautiful like a sunrise full of surprise
a woman in a tender embrace
a slow dance that never ends
like feeling the heartbeat of my love
soft, moist lips, unconditional love
a world without hate envelops my heart

sweet like a new-born baby
wraps me in angel's wings
your fragrance sits quietly deep in my brain
associated with sweet memories and sometimes pain

no plant or flower like you could lift my mood
and make me new again
crisp air brought your fragrance to the limbic of my brain
and I remember my beloved grandfather
gathering you from the trellis after the rain
and scattering you on my dying grandmother's bed
your scent was the last aroma she inhaled
Jasmine, you eased her pain

Grace D'Anca

Grace D'Anca was born and raised in St. Paul Minnesota coming to San Francisco in 1967 via New York City and Baltimore. Study and pursuit of the arts was the lifeline in her formal higher education. She performed with theater and dance groups around the Bay Area and in mental health facilities and youth lock-ups. That's where she got really interested in audiences, so she became a creative arts therapist working with people of all ages and abilities for 40 years. She is retired now and jubilant about having time to do what matters most.

Before I Found Out

Before I found out
my mother was dying
I belonged to a group
we thought of as
eight women to alter the world.

We sat on the splintery mottled floor of a decrepit
warehouse on Shotwell Street
with a scary sluggish elevator and
guys that had a swarm of plants for sale
down the hall.

We were out to do some
soul saving but they didn't
pay us any mind.

Before I found out my mother was dying
we danced in that shell of a place
in the name of therapy. I argued
for real crazies to come. One of us
a high horse princess with frizzy hair
and words like thrown stones
wanted a more genteel clientele.
She had to pay her Saks bill.
She worried we would not have
caviar when we had not even
beans. So little children came
holding hands banging on
timbreless drums circling
on the splintery floor
while the gigantic gritty windows looked on.

Before I knew my mother had stopped

trying to beat the thing
we had dances on velvet nights
throwing open the gigantic windows.
Music splashed onto the dangerous street
soulblueseggae, a high school garage band for salsa.
We bobble danced
like popping seeds in hot oil
in dim light with no chairs
salt sweaty.

When I found out my mother was dying
had given up making her cattywampus quilts
but could remember everything, I sat with her asking questions.
She was not patient to answer. I was impatient to listen.
She said she didn't know why she kept waking up each day
she felt the angels coming for her
bubblefingers on her chest.
She said heaven would be lots
of ice cold water.

I sought and found
a grief counselor and
drew many stick figures for him
until I could dance through the next door.

Jane Harvey

She looks at me every day
on my way to make coffee.
Words fly
out of her eyes. She is
Jane, not yet twenty. Her cheeks
are velvet, her gaze reticent,
holding
shooting questions like rain
on metal. She leads with her right eye.
The oval of her face pronounced
by granular gray shadows, dark hair and brows.
Tiny bits of wiry tresses sprint up into the shadows
making her more precious to me.
Her nose is short, mouth full holding back
apprehension, anticipation, am
biv a lence. Unadorned expect for
an oval pin at her neck, she is
a handsome woman. She has
presence.

*Mama was an orphan, my mother said. She made
away from the many bridges of Valley City North Dakota
to the big bare house on the shanty side of St. Paul's Summit Avenue.
She gave food to tramps who came to the back door.
Mama was quick my mother said, my Pa
didn't let us have any friends...*

Words fly out of her eyes.
She was an orphan. She was a dressmaker.
She crafted *peau de soi*, georgette, pongee, crepe, lawn
and taffeta into works of wonder

for other women. She made, remade
remade her own clothes until there was
nothing left.

She was a handsome woman with presence
this orphan who married a mean
philandering man who wanted his way
with wife and woman both. She had three sons
and a daughter
named for her.

They barred the door
with their bodies to keep that woman out
when Jane died at 44 *with a broken heart*
my mother said. This one thing
they did together.

I hear the words flying
out of her eyes. *What happened to my youngest son
the sweetest one?* Is it best she doesn't know
he broke, that kind neighbors found him hammering
their cement basement floor looking for his good
grandfather? That he kept a knife under his pillow
until he could not live at home any more, that he had shock treatments
and pills that made him sick, that he talked only about
cats, and smoked cigars letting the ash
get as long as his finger, and tore through chocolates
we brought him like a tornado?

Is it best she didn't know her other sons
were misanthropes, bilious
like their father? One rode the rails
turned up at the back door sullen and hungry leaving
grubby handprints on the pink bathroom towels.

The other brother was my favorite until
he called my father a wop
dago. She would have grieved the opportunities they
wasted. Ashamed.

She looks at me every day
with quizzical eyes from the oval frame
on my dining room door. I think about how
her life was, was not, would have been
as I make coffee she would have shared
with the tramps.

JC Walker

Biograph Pt. 1

I've done some other writing
Been shot at while hitchhiking
Was once struck by lightning
Found that kinda frightening
When I caught cat scratch fever
It made me a believer

Was editor of the paper in school
But finding the censorship cruel
We put out an underground paper
And as a result of that caper
My journalism career
Was kicked in the rear

So I'm writing this bio
But how far back should I go
As far as I know
I'm most all Anglo

While quite the talker
My name is Walker
And like Fishers and Bakers
And Farmers and Shoemakers
The name comes from the work
My ancestors took

We didn't just walk through the trees
Shooting the breeze
There's no money in that
We'd never get fat

In urine we soaked skins
And then the fun begins

We threw the skin on a rock
And we'd walk and we'd walk
As the stink doth waft
Until the skin is soft
Luke may have the sky to walk o'er
But the force is with the pisswalker

Prose Poem

Prose isn't poetry
However poetic
And poetry isn't prose
Though perhaps prosaic

I'm not much of a poet
Doncha know it
Prose is just more my thing
My bell it doth ring

I'm not averse to a verse
However perverse
But it's prose I suppose
That just curls my toes

My prose can be purple
Or even go blue
When my mind is fertile
I can write any hue

It can touch your heart
Or smell like a fart
Right from the start
To this last ending part

DOG GRR REL

The first thing you will see
Is how damn cute is he
With short legs and big ears
He looks young for his years

He's just so pretty
My Itty Bitty
And with that frufu tail
You may think he's female
But he's as male as can be
As soon you shall see

You might think he is fat
But you'd soon realize that
You would lose that bet
He's quite skinny when wet

It's his fur I'm sure
That you will concur
Is so soft and silky
Touch it and you'll be
Under its effects
Almost better than sex

Speaking of which
I find it quite rich
That he's still quite the stud
Though he shoots just a dud

He just keeps humping his bed
Til it's so big and red
Almost gave me a stroke
When I thought it was broke
But he's just fine and dandy
Despite being so randy

John Edmiston

I was born in Lewiston, Maine, in the same hospital where my mother was born, which I'm sure she didn't intend. I grew up in south Florida, where my father worked at a hotel in Miami Beach owned by Arthur Godfrey, where it was for a time forbidden to page a Jewish name over the PA system. As an adult, I led nearly 600 people on week-long rebuilding trips to New Orleans, LA and Biloxi, MS, over seven years after Katrina. As a survivor of HIV and throat cancer, I know something out there will get me eventually, but that's a mystery I can put off for a while, writing stuff about stuff. I live with my husband of 28 years, nine of them recognized by the state of California, and now going on three years recognized as legal in the US.

Circles

Circles everywhere

The drain in the sink where I brush my teeth
swirls with foam squeezed from a
circular nozzle on a wrinkled tube.

The showerhead drenches,
steaming water streaming through whorled pinprick perforations
released with a slide of the stem of the missing knob.

The hairdryer noisily blows hot air around my head
before I dress, and put on my wedding ring.

Upstairs in the kitchen.

Cold coffee from the fridge poured into a gaping round black mug,
placed in the microwave for 90 seconds on high, almost too hot to drink
before circling the blocks around my house with Baci and Olive.

A hawk wheels serene loops high in the sky,
her bright sharp eyes pitched for pigeon.

And I circle back, to feed the pups
and round up the old news of yesterday
in today's Chronicle
and commence my daily perambulations
as the minute hand spins
and the earth rotates
and the galaxy spirals around us.

Easter Sunday 2018

Spring green whorls from the center
of every branch of the young Magnolia.
Reaching skyward, lifting skyward,
lifting my eyes skyward
to a pair of marble pigeons hurtling headlong
and even higher.

I would never have seen the bright sparkle
of a white seagull with black fringed wings
so high up as to be almost invisible
if I had not looked up.

But the day is one for looking up.
The sky a glorious, cloudless, rapturous blue;
All that came before, forgotten.

And I know I am happy
right now,
this moment
illuminated,
bursting with light
and a silver breeze.

Karen Pudoff

Native Montanan, life-long Californian in the Bay Area with an urge to return to her roots. With encouragement from family and the opportunity to write poetry for eight weeks, a novice poet emerged. Family, friends, and life have been important inspirations as well as nature. An avid cross stitcher, needle and thread to fabric evolves into colorful pictures.

Sunrise, Sunset

Up early in the morning,
coffee cup and camera in hand,
creaking up the curved stairs to the rooftop.

Waiting to capture all its splendor,
for the sun rays to stream up
from the seashore at sunrise.

Orange and red highlights glisten
and paint the clouds. Click.
Stop, look up at the dancing and changing colors.

In minutes, the sky is blue against the yellow sun.
Go about our day happy and excited
to have seen such a beautiful morning.

Later, we curse that big orange ball glaring into our eyes,
not taking time to appreciate the equally beautiful purple and red
sunset
as the sun rays creep down to the horizon and...disappear.

Morning Rounds

Jolted awake by the shrill ring
the Smiley Face alarm clock on the bedside table.
Sunlight streams through the uncurtained window
into the bedroom, the sound of the mocking bird mocking.
Pupils constricting, rubbing eyes,
stretching...Start the day.
Roll out of bed, through on the old raggedy robe,
slip into fluffy white bunny slippers absent pompom tails.
Carefully descend the circular black iron staircase,
meander outside. Destination...chicken coop.
Gather eggs freshly laid by the red hen.
Greet the morning, admire...
A fading full moon visible to the west, wispy white lace
with patches of cornflower blue.
A big yellow sun to the east shines down on yesterday's snowman
relaxing in the yard, mounds of frozen snowballs piled at its feet.
Baby blue eggs whirling in the bowl,
a feather fluttering in the breeze.
Crunching icy snow, retreat to the warm sunny kitchen,
amble to the tile counter abutting the old Wedgewood stove.
Retrieve butter from the fridge, frying pan from the cabinet.
Wash eggs in the sink, water swirling down the drain.
Ignite the gas burner,
crack eggs into the hot melted butter.
Avoiding the spatula, slimy yellow yolks, sprinkled with salt and pepper,
slither across the sizzling skillet.
Popping crumpets into the toaster, squeeze the orange
for pulpy juice. Gently flip the eggs.
Set the round table with fine china plates,
fresh starched napkins, knives and forks.
Butter the crumpets, slide the eggs onto plates,
sidle into the cushioned chair, napkin in lap.

Dip the crispy crumpet in the runny yolk,
savoring each bite washed down with OJ.

Mary Gayle (MG) Thomas

Born and raised in Texas, but improved by many more years in the Bay Area, MG lives in San Francisco with her husband, Rick, and two cats. She has always enjoyed writing prose. That, plus many years as an executive secretary, spent editing and correcting other people's writing, made writing poetry particularly painful for her.

The Crazy Quilt

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 jockey'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.

October 17

October 17, 5:04 pm, and I'm still at work when
The ground shakes, the building shimmies.
Twelve stories sway to the earthquake's beat
My first thought, "I could die here."
I clutch a doorway, steady my body,
Try to steady my heart, my mind,
But I could die here.

Fluorescent lights go dark,
A generator churns to life
Lights flicker back on, but are we illuminated?
We're stunned we're shocked
We're alive we're trapped.
I'm trapped-in a safe place-but trapped
Don't leave can't leave can't run I'm safe.
And I could die here.

But life is out there
So I do leave, I walk, I run
I step over the shattered glass
of open storefronts and
walk past traffic lights gone dark.
I run home. To two cats, unperturbed.

Darkness is their lifeline.
Droning helicopters overhead don't ravage their brains.
They say 'hi' and ask for dinner.
I take a cue from the cats, settle on the couch.
They purr and stretch and yawn
And gaze at me with calm, yellow eyes.
I breathe. I love. I smile.
I could die here.

Roger Underhill

Roger Underhill, once creativity seemed only in books. Trying to copy cartoons and comics. Spent some time in art school. Swimming dreamscapes underwater. Navy officer school. Doing photography, then film school. An unproduced screenplay. Making singles clubs fun. Playing and creating an SF volleyball league. Writing down dreams, and stories of unusual experiences. Combining photos and stories for a history project. Next, a memoir and more?

War Comes of Inhumanity

I'm Netan-yahoo-what a name!

Yahoo!

If you're Palestinian,
not real people,
whoa hoo.

So do what you're told!
Whoa hoe. Don't protest!
If you do, I'll shoot you.

I'm IsRay-el.

I'm in charge.
You don't count.
I don't care.
I have the U.S.!

The last one shot.
A flak jacket on.

It said PRESS.
That won't help.

Our snipers got you.

Screw you!

What's the meaning of this?

With all we see and hear,
to what do we pledge allegiance before some special event?

What does it mean?

Allegiance to a flag of united states?

United?

Really?

The Inhumane States of America?

Leaders in lies, incarceration and torture.

Just done like back in Medieval times,

That I learned in history class.

Only by the evil (the enemy) said my Army and Navy instructors.

And, change the pledge to "under God," Eisenhower said.

That'll make it all better.

What god?

Whose god?

Everybody HAS a god?

For those who say so,
others don't think so.

Or, the United Corporate States of Wall Street,
and the Koch Brothers,
under the Almighty Dollar?

Which means buy, buy, more, more.
Maybe don't just sing the old song
and do just what you're told.

Instead of corporations running US,

how about us running corporations?
Since originally intended to benefit all.
Make all corporations act as democracies.
Let's start with that.

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