



# ROOTS TRUNK SKY:

by the members of the IWWG's  
*Imagination and Justice*  
Meditation-Freewriting Circle

# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments by Lisa Freedman .....4

## **PART ONE—Roots**

### **Listening to and Writing for the Ancestors**

In Memoriam .....6  
by Geri Gutwein

“As We Ran Out to Meet Ourselves”.....7  
by Anne Rath

Brush Cemetery.....8  
by Mary Ladany

## **PART TWO—Trunk**

### **Listening to and Writing with the World Now**

- SECTION ONE

An Atlas of a Difficult World, 2020 .....10  
by Suzanne Westhues

Moored.....12  
by Cate Dolan

At the Neighborhood Zoo.....13  
by Rochelle Jewel Shapiro

During the Heart of the Pandemic.....14  
by Rochelle Jewel Shapiro

Model Car.....15  
by Cate Dolan

Tower of Language .....16  
by Wanjira Gakuru Muthoni

Dear Pharma .....17  
by Rochelle Jewel Shapiro

- SECTION TWO

The Outsider/I Write Because.....18  
by Wanjira Gakuru Muthoni

Why Do I Write?.....20  
by Betty Fanelli

Dear Telal Comurs .....21  
by Lisa Freedman

And Yet .....22  
by Rochelle Jewel Shapiro

I Write.....23  
by Veronica Picone

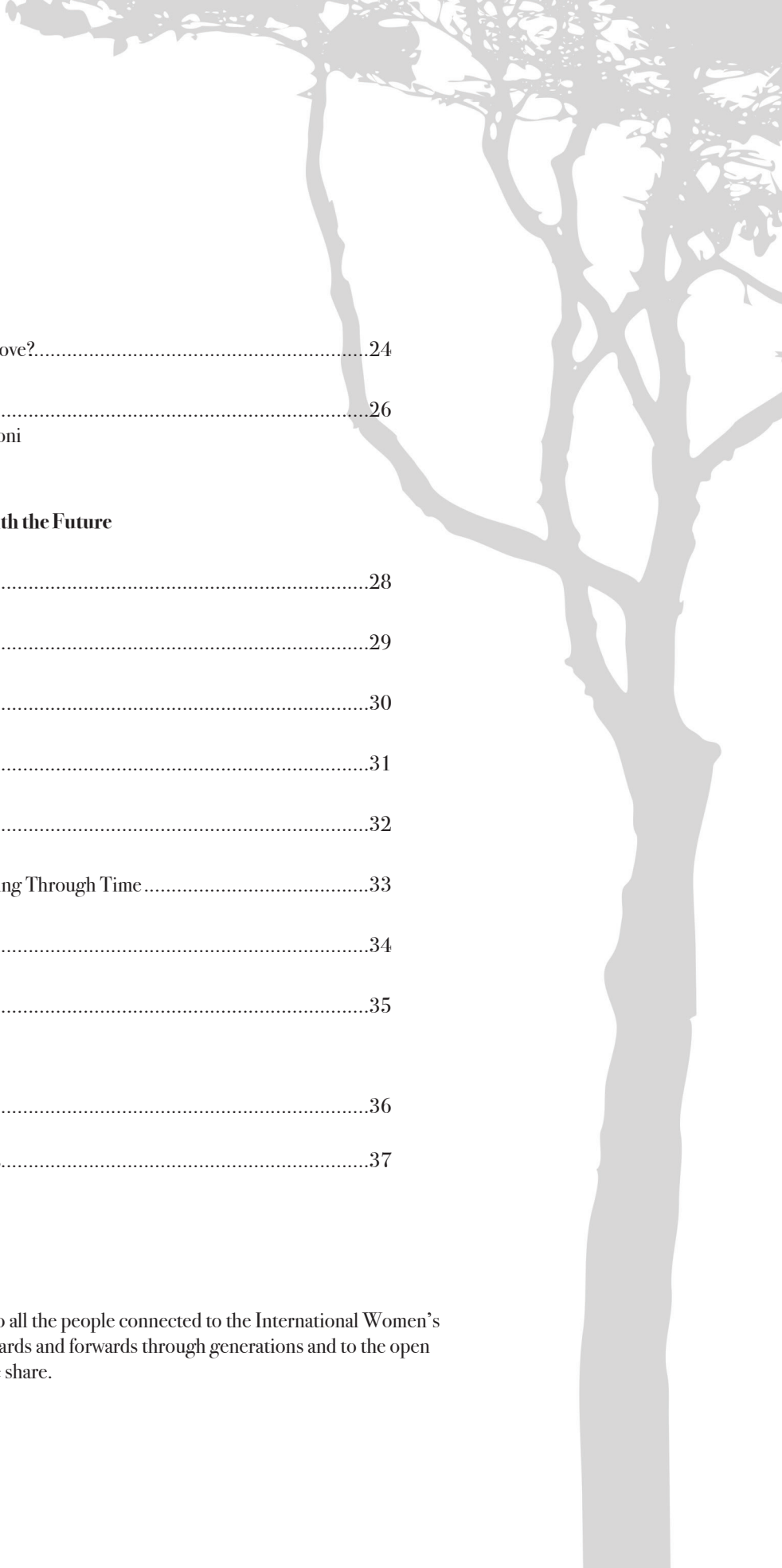
• SECTION THREE

What Is Justice without Love?.....24  
by Anne Rath  
Tell Them Why.....26  
by Wanjira Gakuru Muthoni

**PART THREE–Sky**  
**Listening to and Writing with the Future**

Can you see it? .....28  
by Mary Ladany  
Letter to My Son .....29  
by Betty Fanelli  
A Broader Palate .....30  
by Cate Dolan  
Mni Wiconi, Water Is Life.....31  
by Geri Gutwein  
A Map to the Next World.....32  
by Betty Fanelli  
The World Will Keep Trudging Through Time .....33  
by Anne Rath  
Our Own Map.....34  
by Wanjira Gakuru Muthoni  
Tulips .....35  
by Veronica Picone  
  
Afterword by Lisa Freedman.....36  
Writers’ Bios and Statements.....37

This collection is dedicated to all the people connected to the International Women’s Writing Guild flowing backwards and forwards through generations and to the open spaces of silence and song we share.



# Acknowledgements

Amazement: That's what I felt as my pen moved across the pages without hesitating at my first IWWG summer conference in 1987. Something about writing in a room full of other women writing quieted the inner censor. Then we read out loud and wove a net with our listening, and we gave each other the courage to leap and keep on writing. Over the years, it's the connections I've made through the Guild that have strengthened and enlarged my sense of being held by sister writers, even when I'm at home writing alone. When Covid came and kept us all at home writing alone, the Guild had this invisible infrastructure of women writing and listening together. Our collective net helped us shift to virtual gatherings and still feel supported as we risked sharing ourselves over shaky wifi connections and in between choruses of "You're muted." I'm grateful to everyone who has ever supplied and/or held on to any of the countless strands of the Guild's net to make writing circles like the one I lead possible.

Thank you, IWWG Executive Director Michelle Miller, for the oceans of positive energy you bring to guiding and growing the Guild and its supports for women writers. You encouraged me to dive in and lead a writing circle, and you said yes to my idea of using meditation and freewriting so we could hone our abilities to hear and convey the stories that are ready to emerge. Then you said yes when I asked if it could be possible to collect and publish some of the pieces that were coming through in the circles. Thank you.

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~ Lisa Freedman



# ONE

Roots:

*Listening to and Writing  
with the Ancestors*



## **In Memoriam**

by Geri Gutwein

*after Muriel Rukeyser*

*for the First Nations and Indigenous Children who lost their lives in the residential boarding schools*

The children whispered, “They found us, we are going home.”  
Hear their voices, their cries in the sun rising over unmarked graves,  
their remains secreted away from their families.

Lost generations of children

Now their spirits rise from the depths of anonymity.  
Mourn their lives, the loss.  
Generations of families, generations of survivors  
honor their spirits in the Wiping of Tears Ceremony,  
a sacred space of convergence,  
where grievors heal and spirits are released,  
and the ancestors will walk with the children on their journey  
to the spirit world.

Author’s note: The phrase “They found us” is attributed to Jarvis Googoo in his response to the children whose remains were found at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School, Kamloops, British Columbia. Whitney Gould created a painting depicting one child whispering to another, which was inspired by the words “They Found Us.”



## “As We Ran Out to Meet Ourselves”

by Anne Rath

*after Joy Harjo*

ran out of breath  
– out of time,  
out of the eternity we lived in,  
under those starry skies where  
each of us sieved light  
as it pierced our bones.

This was the before time.  
Before they taught us  
we were a stain,  
before we knew shame  
our limbs loose, our sex holy.  
The before time when  
we bore the ache of longing  
the ache of vanishing  
the ache of belonging.  
Together.  
Each one of us an imprint,  
a mark in the dark firmament.  
Each one of us named  
for the first breath that claimed us.

Remember the ancients gathered  
in circles to celebrate each birth,  
each being - a firelit path from the mystery,  
from the ancestors.  
Who, with flint and stone  
birthed the first spark.  
Who, in a cave mixed their spit  
with ochre and ash,  
scratched out the future  
in the marks of the sky,  
called out the constellations  
dropped into their own rhythms  
drummed their feet on the earth's skin  
leaned into flesh and bone  
claimed the whole planet of breath  
claimed the song-lines to dreamtime.



**Brush Cemetery**  
by Mary Ladany

*1803-1883*  
*Bovina Center, NY*  
*Corner of Maple and Main*

Under the towering pitch pine,  
fissured bark, irregular crown  
damaged by ice, and snow  
no more than twenty gravestones—  
some sunken into the ground  
others uprooted by it.  
Names of the dead are no longer knowable.

Author's note: I want this poem to capture the invocation at the beginning of our Breathe/Read/Write circles to feel the alignment between our rooted bodies and open wide sky level mind.





# TWO

Trunk:

*Listening to and Writing  
with the World Now*



# *Trunk – Section One*

## **An Atlas of a Difficult World, 2020**

By Suzanne Westhues


*There where you have landed, stripped as you are* (Adrienne Rich)

Over here we have the Coronavirus cases  
Old men, young men, someone's best friend  
The immunodeficient, the vulnerable  
A childhood friend who stood up for you at your wedding  
And held your gown, so you could pee  
A young man about to graduate high school  
Someone who just lost a grandmother  
Someone who won't see his girl again.  
Someone's old age, with the volume turned way down.

Then we have Black Lives Matter, again  
Someone's nephew, son or brother shot  
All the boys who know the same old story  
All the girls who have seen their moms and dads  
Pulled over and harassed by police all their lives  
Another sign for the lawn, another march down the street

The older people all know this song  
They watched Martin Luther King, Jr get shot  
And JFK and RFK and Malcolm X.  
The boys from Vietnam booed and hissed.  
They know what anarchy looks like  
And they're not surprised.  
It's happened before. It will happen again.

And the children of the immigration stories  
Little girls with big dark brown eyes  
Separated from their sisters in the barbed wire  
Their pink nail polish scraped off  
They forget to play princesses and fairies.  
And wait for the ending of their own stories.



The class of 2024 at the “local colleges”  
Spread all over the world, not brought together  
On Commonwealth Avenue to take their classes.  
A young man turns on his laptop in Saudi Arabia  
Another one crouches under the bunk bed  
he shares with no one. Not this year.  
A young woman in a pink nightgown in China  
Listens to her teacher explain American racism  
Over Zoom. She wonders if she made the right choice.

A middle-aged woman in a purple dress writes poems  
With other middle-aged women in Ghana and Kenya  
They share birth stories, heartbreak and loss  
The take-away lesson: it’s not easy to be a woman  
No matter where you live.

And the Trump supporters, blinded by hate  
The overweight white boys who drove used cars  
With American flags and grew sideburns to buy alcohol underage  
They just don’t know what to make of all the trans boys and girls.

This is the start of an atlas of a difficult world.



## Moored

by Cate Dolan

### I. The Portugal Coast

Seeking the 100-foot wave, we look only at the surf.  
Not one of us contemplates progenitors, those masters  
of the waters now burning down the Amazon.  
Do not blame the beasts put there to graze;  
it is their nature.

Our hearts pound mechanically.  
Appetites and jet skis drive us to majestic doom,  
plunging down the insurmountable palisades  
to splatter on unwelcoming shores.

Far-flung companies whose names our wet suits bear  
capitalize on our insatiable yearning.  
In collusion, we dragoon the waters.

### II. The California Coast

The beach, originally a colony of converts;  
today the rich man wants to privatize it.  
There are already so many swimming pools.

The rich man, like all conquerors:  
They touch; they own.  
The cardboard box homes, women's wombs and  
workers' bellies, bulldogs bred breathless,  
the water coaster rides of our dreams.

These once Chinook protectorates now ingest  
plastic-filled mini-Godzillas floundering  
through wasted resource and time  
to come across the last of their kind.

Guzzling Gulliver's, the rich man gazes past  
the sunset over his deck's redwood railing.  
He's cruising the highways his container ships  
gouge out of the blue, the waves below belching  
sand as far as Hawaii, where other surfers seek  
more towering sites to call their own.



## At the Neighborhood Zoo

by Rochelle Jewel Shapiro

Pray for the gaped-at animals at the neighborhood zoo.  
The crane, knees on backwards, regards us side-eyed  
through the chain-link fence. Stir-crazy, the otter  
in his murky pool swims frantic figure 8's.

The leopard pads its small cage with a let-me-out face.  
There's no room for the condor's 18-foot wingspan.  
It perches on a roost, head hanging like a beaten asp.  
The bison, crooked-horned, must wonder  
what he's doing on display with a couple of deer.

Barn owl, feathered pancake face, probably wishes  
he's on the rafters of a barn where he can swoop  
for his meal instead of an being served up  
already-dead-mice. With its skulk, sharp teeth,  
and ears erect to hear prey, the wolf stalks  
his small cage like a metaphor for Sisyphus.

Donate big. The monkey wing will be named for you.



## During the Heart of the Pandemic

by Rochelle Jewel Shapiro

You've never seen such a profusion of squirrels  
coming so close, not park squirrels tamed to eat from palms,  
but ones that once raced up trees at your approach.

The sky was an un-smoky blue that made you  
want to unmask and breathe deeply, even when you still believed  
that droplets of virus hung in the air like arrested rain.  
And there were no contrails from planes crisscrossing the sky,

nor the buzzing zoom of jets, just birds:  
swallows burbling  
doves cooing  
sparrows cheeping  
all loudly calling, answering.

For the first time in over a century, the snowy owl  
touched down in Central Park.

Nature owns the earth.  
We are the interlopers.



## Model Car

by Cate Dolan

*after Arthur Sze*

I once bought a car that had a deep pock mark in its hood.  
To my mind, it was clearly a bullet hole,  
and I made a joke of this to the salesman, who did not laugh.

But I have seen bullet holes – in the ionic columns of Dublin’s GPO,  
in the Casa Rosada in Buenos Aires, La Moneda in Santiago.  
These are the bloodless bodies.

Nor did I invent the boy in Kenosha,  
only 17 and already a killer  
for the rest of his life.

Surely in his bones, surely that boy knows  
he can’t recast the history we remake  
simply by destroying his gun.

These all will happen – let us have no illusions – again.  
As they must, to rattle our skeletons  
out of this death grip of indifference.

So...how will we besiege this stranglehold?  
Drawing on that old firing squad joke,  
will we simply all gather with our guns  
in a circle?



## Tower of Language

by Wanjira Gakuru Muthoni

They came to our land uninvited  
and imposed their language and  
their names, and their religion, and  
their ways, and their law became the law.

The winner dictated perception,  
said the only acceptable sport was climbing trees.  
We, being the fish, had no say;  
we would always lose.

Their tattoos were considered beauty  
but not our traditional African facial marks.  
Eliminate at once, those primitive,  
harmful, sinful, native traditional practice, they said.

Their language told us what is good,  
according to them, and our languages, to them,  
told only what is bad, what is sinful, what  
is against the same God who gave us our languages.

Their language made us wise, they said,  
beyond our wisdom of ages, beyond  
our sayings, our proverbs; without their language  
we were fools, an uncivilised lot, they said.

Their language said demarcation of land by the clan  
preserved over centuries, passed down from  
generation to generation, was primitive,  
that each one should have a lonely title deed.

And today, their language says walking  
around half naked is freedom but covering the face  
is oppression, that same sex marriages  
is a good choice but our polygamy is oppression.

Their language allows their jobless youth  
To come and work in Africa as expatriates  
But considers jobless Africans moving north in search of jobs  
As illegal immigrants who should be sent away.

But our languages are ours  
Our languages are good for us  
They enable us to see the beauty of our land  
And to appreciate the wisdom of our people.





## Dear Pharma

by Rochelle Jewel Shapiro

“The Proud Boys are coming for us,”  
my husband insists at 4:00 am, looking  
at me with eyes of anguish. “Get up.  
We must get out of here now.” He shakes me  
and shakes me, my head knocking  
the headboard. From his refugee  
family, he knows how easy  
it is to round up Jews.

Risperdal is the fix for his paranoia,  
his delusions from dementia. Now his tongue  
clicks, his limbs jerk. He’s in a wheelchair  
and can’t pee. Off Risperdal and onto  
WVAT inhibitors, which may or may not  
stop his inner earthquake.

Grandma Ada used to flush  
her meds down the toilet. “If they bob  
up,” she said, “it proves they won’t work.”

All those meds flushed or excreted  
making their way into our water chain.  
Osmosis treatment filters out most,  
but picture the octopus dosed on Risperdal,  
tentacles splayed, the rings of its suckers  
sealed to a rock as it bashes and bashes itself  
and can’t stop.



## *Trunk – Section Two*

### **The Outsider/ I Write Because...**

by Wanjira Gakuru Muthoni

*after Beth Brant*

God created Mumbi and Gikuyu  
Placed them in Mukurwe-ini wa Gathanga –  
the garden of paradise, in Murang'a – and said,  
spread far and wide; enjoy the wealth out there.


And God named the woman,  
Mumbi, a creator, a pottery maker  
And the man, Gikuyu,  
the sacred fig tree.

And they were blessed with children, ten girls,  
who later married men from neighbouring tribes;  
men that swore to accept the women as heads  
of the clans and thus, the house of Mumbi began.

And then one day, the men revolted  
against the women's leadership and  
everything changed – women headed  
clans and men headed the sub-clans.

Since then I am mutumia  
a woman – the one who remains silent.  
They say I'm mundu wanja, the outsider,  
mundu muka, one who comes from elsewhere.

I am not a man and hence, I am not  
mundurume, the one that is brave,  
or muthuri, the one who chooses –  
I have no choice and can never decide.



For some time I had to stay silent, even though  
I had questions and I had to  
be quiet unless instructed – I couldn't  
even initiate a conversation as I was  
mundu muka, the one from elsewhere.  
But now I write –  
I write because I want to understand how  
society came to consider me mundu wanja  
that either I marry and go to my husband's  
home or stay at home and remain an outsider.

I write because I want to understand why  
towards the lake where, if I were to die  
before I got married, I would be buried –  
outside the homestead, outside the  
family graveyard because, I am mundu wanja.

I write because I want to understand,  
why goats and money are given to my family  
the moment I find a man to marry;  
why I cannot take part in the dowry negotiations  
And can only be respected after my  
husband has paid ngurario – the final  
dowry, and still, cannot inherit family property

I write because I want to understand why  
I can't question why I should be  
the silent one, the outsider, one from elsewhere  
I, daughter of Mumbi.



## Why Do I Write?

by Betty Fanelli

*after Beth Brant*

As Joan Didion said, “I write to know what I am thinking.”  
Opening the floodgates of my mind  
thoughts that swirl in my brain flow through the conduit  
of my arm to the pen in my hand

like blood from an open vein onto the blue-lined paper  
to see, to read, to know what lies within.

Like hieroglyphics carved in stone,  
the dates, events, thoughts, and memories  
are recorded, preserved, and revealed  
to ponder, learn, and understand  
myself and what I am thinking.

I write because I need to.  
I am what I write.



## Dear Telal Comurs

by Lisa Freedman

*after Minnie Bruce Pratt and Muriel Rukeyser*

1.

Dear Telal, is it not astounding to the words on the page when some delicate balance  
of utensil and prayer  
of stones and spells  
of bricks and shelter  
appears?

An orgy of words astounded by their uses.  
Humble apart. Ecstatic aligned  
and broken with precision. The poet surgeon after long study  
feels her way to the caesura  
ceding to the white expanse  
like a wave or the Bay or a fog-gilded sea.

Is it not astounding for these used words to become life rafts? to feel themselves floating and ready to bear weight?

2.

Dear Telal,

*My life clenched in my fist.*

A porous conflagration of aggressors of con men  
except I didn't need to be conned.

I was ready to open. Docile. To not even say ouch. To wait so long to say no.  
To not even realize I had choice.

No choice, no progress.  
Just backsliding.

No consent. No feeling together. No sensing with another.

Telal, how much imagining gets squandered if lovers are not feeling and sensing together? What might lovers dream  
if they entered one another's hopes and visions with delighted steps?

3.

What are *almost unimagined values*?

Telal, I imagine tenderness being more praised than force.  
Listening having as much clout as making a mark.

Author's note: I collaged this poem from lines I found underlined in my journal, lines that my companions in the  
Imagination & Justice Circles said they liked the sound of. It was so nice to feel connected to my sister writers again  
as I worked alone at my desk.



## And Yet

by Rochelle Jewel Shapiro

*after Beth Brant*

Eyes that need artificial drops to tear,  
sting, stinging  
with the memory of tears. A close  
friend whose name suddenly escapes  
you, and you flub by just saying, "Hi,"  
and your friend, eighty-seven now,  
calls you by her dead sister's name  
without knowing she has forgotten yours.

Grief is your husband whose long strides  
you had to double-step to keep up with,  
now teeters as if trying to ford the warped  
floor of a fun house Davy Jones Locker,  
as if preparing to be one of the drowned.

Grief, like death, never forgets you,  
yet, yet  
when, through your paned window,  
you spot the neighbor's black cat stalk  
a robin, upraised paw coming down, but the robin  
flies off,  
and the cat puts its paw to his forehead  
like your grandma's oy vey,  
and you feel your laugh lines deepen  
into commas, commas  
that nestle into the lines  
you write.



## **I Write**

by Veronica Picone

*after Beth Brant*

I write because the stories must be told  
my story, hers, yours  
demanding their private audience with life  
woodpeckers at my fingertips calmed only  
with the to and fro of my pen along the line  
certain to make me wretched if shooed away or silenced

I am experienced with silence  
the tape across my mouth  
depressed my breath for decades  
fueled my shame into blisters along my lips  
parched my lungs

until I found a fellow hostage  
whose melodies had lyrics  
and she sang to me



## *Trunk – Section Three*

### **What Is Justice without Love?**

by Anne Rath

Lisa Freedman presents Martin Luther King Jr.'s words during the third session of the Imagination and Justice Meditation and Free-Writing Circles:

*Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anaemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.*

And I ask myself, *what is justice without love?*


Simple, like turning a page to say: Write, tell your story! But writing your story means a return to the cold place – the frozen place of ice, of fear, and terror – of the throat's habitual memory of swallowing the truth, the habitual move to silence, in a bid to stay safe, to belong. The terror of letting our "no" be here, present to the grief of this time of loss, the realization and grief that knowledge brings when we name the truth, when we acknowledge all those times we did not speak truth to power, did not stand your own ground.

Fear also in remembering the times when you did speak out, when you stood and said "No, this is wrong," and you felt the imprint of the slapped face, the imprint of hatred in the gossip and whispers of all those inside the lines of power, the ones mentored in the art of keeping safe, those on the inside who knew the soft landings of being one of 'our own', the safe pairs of hands that keep the systems of silence going, scaffold the architectures of power that silences all those outside the lines into the 'other'. The systems of fear and terror passed down in mothers' milk. Afraid too, that if you release your voice on the page, you will be like a loose cannon run amok. Your anger - a lava burst that destroys, kills everything. You will become Demeter setting fire to everything that lives, without mercy as she searches for her lost daughter.

What is it to begin that story? To drop into the icy receptacle of fear where you feel your life is threatened, the fear that tells you if you break the silence you will be cast out, the ancient fear of being alone in the wilderness. Is this at the root of all the times that good people turn away, look away and why we follow the tyrannical wisdom that bows to the false icons of safety, security and belonging even if belonging means you swallow your own voice, your own truth, your own life force, betray yourself in small lies of conformity, small lies that numb and deaden the life that is here, the scream that says "No, not true. Not in my name."

And now we are waking up to the icy fear and realization that no our silence will not save us. We are waking up to the false lies of safety. Being silent in the face of the current world systems of degradation, devastation does not serve us. We have been asleep to the false narrative that someone is in charge. Waking up to the lie that our leaders have a God's eye view of the world. No. Not anymore. No, not in our name.





We have earned the right to speak out loud and clear. We, the women, we of the crone generation. We need to kill the false gods. We need to stop believing someone is in charge. We need to interrogate the lies of democracy, of government. The governments that write the secret contracts and embezzle our future on this planet, who construct the loopholes to allow for its unholy desecration.

Will we now weep for the sacred forests and seas? Will we weep for the poisoned rivers, the fish floating silver facing the sky? Will we weep for the pulverized ancient cities that have fallen, the cultures and communities scattered to the four winds?

Will we continue to believe the narrative that the wealthy have earned it? Will we believe those who fan the fires of addiction, the false lies of progress, the constant lie of growth at all costs, the balance sheet of profit the only goal?

We now know about the secret deals and polite conversation of these gentlemen's agreements on the golf courses and the platforms of power. We now know the strategists who have the power and money to play the long game, the corporations who divvy up the spoils of the planet before we even know the name of the game, and how governments open the doors for more gain, the Pandora box of sweet deals that happen in the back rooms of the carnivals of power. These are the places that silence grows. The voices of the powerless are cast aside. The machinery of governments merely the stamp of the industrial complex on every living thing, every being, plant and stone, bird and insect, mineral and soil becoming commodities to extract profit at all costs.

In our silence we condone it all. We become the compliant, silent cogs in the wheels of progress. We watch silently as another bomb is dropped, another boat of refugees capsizes, another famine looms, another ancient city and culture is gone forever, another wall is built to make us feel safe, another drug is prescribed to keep us docile, asleep, silent in our small icy stone of existence while the planet burns.



## Tell Them Why

by Wanjira Gakuru Muthoni

Justice, come down –  
Come down to all the affected,  
help those in pain to experience joy.  
Don't force those affected to retell their tale  
of pain, for that would take them back to  
that cold place – where hurt happened

Justice, come down –  
Save the children in despair, in abandonment,  
save mothers suffering from lack,  
fathers struggling to feed their families,  
Yes, come down –  
and tell us where the young freedom fighters,  
those who went into the forest  
but never came back, disappeared to.

Come down and tell their children  
what happened to their fathers' lands  
that suddenly got allocated  
to those who had supported the coloniser.

Justice, come down tell them why  
they have nowhere to live –  
and are forced to survive in  
city slums, living off dumpsites.

Come down and tell these disadvantaged  
children why they have no food to eat,  
why they have to walk many kilometres  
to fetch water, yes, come down and tell them why  
they can't access good schools and hospitals.  
Are they not also children of the land?

Justice come down and  
Tell these people when and if  
You will ever visit them, the same way you do  
the favoured, and if not –  
tell them why.

# THREE

Sky:

*Listening to and Writing  
with the Future*





## Can you see it?

by Mary Ladany

“I want to show you the frog pond,”  
Rita says  
adjusting her bifocals  
“It’s at the far edge of the property.”  
I’m not sure why Rita comes  
or what she sees here but I see  
brackish water clouded with algae and leaf litter,  
a broken chair propped against a birch tree.  
Then I shift my gaze.  
I think Rita senses this...  
The birch leaves flutter  
turn silver side over.  
Somewhere, near here, it’s beginning to rain.

Author’s note: “Can you see it?” communicates the act of imagining which feels essential to any movement towards change.



## Letter to My Son

by Betty Fanelli

*after Adriene Rich*

I know you are reading this poem  
because life is short – so very short  
and you are thirsty – so very thirsty.

Thirsty to learn, to know  
who you are and from where you came  
anxious to learn of the generations  
who came so long ago from  
who knows where and why

Read this poem in the dim light  
of knowledge you already possess  
coded over with the grease on  
your hands as you eat  
from the basket of Italian food,  
the Irish potatoes and the fast food of now

You have searched yourself and the world  
seeking - always seeking –  
yourself and meaning.  
What is it all about?  
Finding many answers, accepting unknowables,  
and still you keep on seeking.

I know you are reading this poem  
as you have read so many I have left you.  
Seeking answers I could not give  
to the why? why? because each must find their own.

I know you are reading this poem  
as I am no longer there  
to inquire of as you sift  
through years of moments and writings.

Search, look under the debris  
under the layers of years  
Look in hidden corners  
shine a light into the shadows  
and perhaps you will someday  
find yourself  
and write your own poem.



## A Broader Palate

by Cate Dolan

*We lick our wounds with the same tongue.* Tsering Wangmo Dhampa

Our tongues should be longer  
than our mouths can hold,  
reaching beyond our duplicitous lips  
to taste what does not come only  
from our own bellies.

We see, we hear, we touch, we smell;  
we weather all the senses.  
At times, one makes up for the other.

Closing our eyes, we can smell the meadow.  
Covering our ears, we can feel  
the thunder, even of bird flight.  
The gloves we wear cancel our phones.  
Plugging our noses, as if bleeding,  
we hear the lavender stems in the breeze.

But taste insists on detecting poison;  
the vagus nerve, the longest, rushing  
down to warn our gut, to prepare  
our body for the fight or flight  
that foreignness feeds.

Perhaps we could try walking around  
licking each other, pretending to care.  
In that theater, we could ingest sensations  
far beyond ourselves, far past history  
clung to by paralyzed fingers.

We are meant to lick more than wounds.  
We can skim our tongues over the universe.



## Mni Wiconi, Water Is Life

by Geri Gutwein

“Someone needs to explain to me why wanting clean drinking water makes you an activist, and why proposing to destroy water with chemical warfare doesn’t make a corporation a terrorist.” Winona LaDuke (Ojibwe, water protector, land protector, activist, economist, and author)

Activists camped for months  
to protest the Dakota Access Pipeline  
and the inevitable oil leaching.  
Water Protectors  
Water Warriors  
learned from the past.  
Fought for the future of water,  
Our Lives.

Families of Flint sipped water  
cooled by lead ice cubes that clinked  
in glasses before they knew  
that with each sip they  
swallowed poison.

Children of Love Canal swam in toxic pools  
and nursing mothers breastfed their newborns  
chemicals,  
unaware of their carcinogenic milk.

Oglala families’ drinking water  
was poisoned by uranium mining  
that seeped into aquifers.  
Nine months later, women gave birth  
to deformed babies,  
dead babies, stilled by water  
that tainted women’s  
wombs with toxins.

Water Protectors continue  
the fight.  
Water Protectors continue  
the chant.  
Water Warriors defend generations.  
There is no other choice.

Mni Wiconi, Water is Life  
Mni Wiconi, Water is Life  
Mni Wiconi, Water is Life  
Mni Wiconi, Water is Life

Author’s note: “Mni Wiconi” (m’NEE, wee-CHOH-nee) is a Lakota phrase that means water is life used by the Dakota Access Pipeline protesters, on the Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota, in their opposition to the construction of the pipeline. The protest began in 2016 and was led by indigenous activists.



## A Map to the Next World

by Betty Fanelli

*after Joy Harjo*

In a world so alien,  
we think we cannot make it  
without the supports and conveniences,  
the paths we have trod and know so well.

We will see mountains we had  
not thought we could or would want to climb,  
but once on top we will see  
clear visions of worlds and ways

unknown to us now.  
We will wander and  
find our way through  
the maze, looking for familiar

scenes and people – forgetting  
they are on their own new path.

To reach the next world  
we need not leave this one.  
We can carry it with us  
like dropped breadcrumbs.

If we lose our way  
if we cannot accept  
the life we find elsewhere,  
we can return.

But I doubt we will.





## “The World Will Keep Trudging Through Time”

by Anne Rath

*after Joy Harjo*

ice caps melt  
gales gather on the horizon  
swallows depart  
the ruin of their voices ghosts the air  
death walks through locked doors.

Wait no longer.  
Listen, the ancients call out.  
Kneel on the ground,  
fall down now  
‘til you lie prostrate  
arms spread out – open.  
Let your skin and the earth’s  
skin breathe as one.  
Listen, ‘til you hear its beating heart  
the pulse of its river within.

Wait,  
‘til you hear the song  
of roots and soil knit  
you back home.  
Wait, ‘til the beat soothes  
you through the dark.  
Stay close now –  
this is all you’ve got  
This aliveness.  
This dark day.  
This earth’s song.  
This breath rising and falling.  
This whisper inside.



## Our Own Map

by Wanjira Gakuru Muthoni

When the superpowers graciously supply the map,  
Mother Africa is emaciated, kneeling below them,  
lacking beauty, reduced in dimensions,  
debased, lacking basic resources.

The Sahara desert is blown out;  
Underdevelopment is highlighted;  
our forests, minerals, landscape are diminished;  
our wildlife minimised, and undermined.

The Congo Forest and its immense wealth  
Is somewhat reduced in dimensions while  
child labour to mine coltan for their phones  
somehow, escapes everyone's attention.

East Africa with its wide landscape,  
parks and reserves full of wild animals –  
Serengeti, Ngorongoro, Tsavo, Amboseli,  
won't be seen without a magnifying glass.

If the map is from the east, it will show  
Africa needs infrastructure that only  
they can provide, in exchange they will  
take our fish, charge toll for sixty years!

Let us make our own map,  
showing our own world, as we see it;  
A world we can show our children and grandchildren –  
their world, and let them see the grandeur in it.



## Tulips

by Veronica Picone

I planted tulips in November  
the morning after the heavy rain  
just as the instructions said  
(I read instructions for things I've never done before  
hoping to get the thing done right)

I dug into the soft earth and didn't care that  
I'd already torn the tips of my gloves  
dirt caressing my fingernails  
sure to linger way into the afternoon or even tomorrow  
resisting the scrubbing and soap and hot water  
holding on the way the roots of the old oak tree hung on  
not one bit disintegrated these four years since it was cut down  
and I mourned for months

holding on the way the faces of the young Salvadoran brothers  
doing next door's fall cleanup  
stopped to help me  
offered a shovel bigger than mine  
bent to dig a shallow trench around the old hard resilient roots  
then said No gracias, Señora to my outstretched hand of dollars  
bowing their heads a bit in reverence of my gray hair

all I could say was  
I will remember you  
wanting to wrap my dirty arms around them  
in solidarity with their inherited grief  
like mine, seeping through time and soil,  
theirs from El Mezote, the worst massacre in Latin American history  
(one thousand skeletons mostly little children  
unearthed decades later)  
mine right here in New York  
(generations of estrangement never healed)

but they left me here  
with the hope of blooms  
over the stubborn roots  
next Spring

# Afterword

The poets gathered in this collection all have our own relationships to silence, both the silence that's imposed from outside – about which Anne Rath writes so powerfully in her “What Is Justice without Love?” piece above – as well as the silence that we enter willingly. Coming together in Zoom fortified us for the work of speaking back to the censors. It helped us find the words that tend to remain out of reach when we write alone.

We got ready for each round of writing by getting rooted in our bodies, resting our attention on the breath, and feeling the alignment between our earth-level bodies and our spacious sky minds. In this way, the poems in this collection grew out of a sense of connection and interdependence.

These qualities are woven into the meaning of “guild.” According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, this word emerged in the early 13th century to fuse two ideas: the idea of a collective or fraternity (or in our case a sisterhood) and the idea of service, offering, tribute, or payment. Just as tradespeople centuries ago paid to join a guild to defend their common interests, we women writers sign up to be a part of the IWWG so we can join in the shared project of “getting down to the bedrock,” as Adrienne Rich puts it, and find what's below “the gauzes and masks” so we can write honestly. It's fitting that the verb “to yield” is also connected to the word guild. It's when we come together in a supportive circle of sister writers that we find the courage to be vulnerable and give ourselves over to what is ours to say.

~ Lisa Freedman

# Writers' Bios and Statements



**Cate Dolan** has degrees in dance, anthropology and law and has worked in these fields, principally in the nonprofit context, galvanized by a radical political sensibility. A Colorado native and only daughter of labor organizers who helped found the American Newspaper Guild, Cate now lives with playwright Mark Levine and their twin rescue cats in New York City, where she tackles the challenge of poeticizing her politics.

Charcoal by Hugo Gellert



**Betty Fanelli:** As a young girl, I kept a diary with a lock and key, safely recording my feelings. In elementary school, I learned to enjoy memorizing and reciting poetry. High school English class introduced me to the eloquence of Shakespeare. The church brought me the beautiful language and metaphors of the Bible. Throughout life, I have been sustained by words and writing, so even now— at age 92 – I continue to write what I think and feel with daily journaling and poetry. It brings me joy. A joy that has been nurtured and enhanced by 15 years of IWWG’s summer conferences – and now with the wonderful zoom workshops and writing circles taught by very excellent writers and teachers. Born in NYC, I migrated to Maryland where I taught special needs children. Then I retired to rural Virginia where my three children, two grands, and two great-grands come to visit.



**Lisa Freedman** received her MFA in Creative Nonfiction from the New School, where she now offers courses including “Meditation and Writing” (in collaboration with the Rubin Museum) and “Writing and Activism.” She also teaches for the International Women’s Writing Guild and The Poetry Barn. Her current studies focus on Tibetan Buddhism and the path of the compassionate warrior. Recent publications include *Satya Magazine*, *Grabbing the Apple: An Anthology of NY Women Poets*, and *The Shambhala Times*. In her work as a coach, Lisa uses meditation and free-writing to help writers clarify and communicate their ideas. She started Breathe/Read/Write in 2016, and these circles continue to nurture deep expression and connection. [LFWritingCoach.com](http://LFWritingCoach.com)



**Geri Mendoza Gutwein, Ph.D.**, professor emerita of English at HACC, Central Pennsylvania's Community College taught English, creative writing and Native American Literature there for many years. While at HACC, she was the director of the Wildwood Writers' Festival. A National Endowment for the Humanities Teaching Development Fellowship recipient her work focused on the integration of Native American literature, music, and art. Her Lakota and Mexican-American background figures prominently in her work. She is an enrolled member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation in South Dakota. She lives in Spearfish, South Dakota with her husband.



**Mary Ladany** is a writing specialist at Caldwell University, where for the past 30 years, she has helped bring young people to expression, work she has found to be deeply gratifying. She has collaborated with visual artists in Florida, worked with young playwrights at the New York Theater Workshop, and written and produced a performance piece of which has been staged in various settings, including an ecological center Blairstown NJ.

The mechanics of vision, landscapes of memory, and the limitations of language are what most inform her aesthetic. In 2009 her 23-year-old daughter was struck by a falling tree branch, an act which catapulted her from an abstract belief in an orderly and just world to a lived experience of chaos and inequity. This many years later, she has learned to live in the tension between those two worlds and tries to imagine geographies of equanimity and harmony.



**Wanjira Gakuru Muthoni** has written poetry and stories for children that have appeared in various journals and books published in Kenya. She studied Literature in French and received her doctorate from the University of Montpellier in France.

She has taught Literature in French as well as Gender issues at university level in Kenya. She has also trained for various international organisations all over the world, working as a Gender and Education Expert.

Since her retirement in 2019, she joined the International Women Writing Guild and has participated in numerous writing circles and published a number of poems in various anthologies.

Wanjira's statement:

I spend a lot of my time thinking about the world we are living in and comparing the way things are today to the way they were when I was ten years old, that is, the year my country gained political independence from the British and ceased to be a colony. My main point of wonder is what would have happened if the real freedom fighters who had gone to the forest to fight for our independence had taken control of the government instead of the former sympathisers of the colonial powers. I imagine the sense of equality that would have reigned and how the current violence in the country would not have existed or at least would have taken a different form. Fortunately knowing how to meditate and vent through creative writing helps me remain calm and become productive. In addition to this, I have of late met many other women writers of about my age with whom we have a lot in common and this helps me to feel I belong to a sane society.



**Veronica Picone**'s search for justice started before she could speak. A childhood trauma survivor, with only a three-year-old's heart and mind, it was her power to observe the hostile world she lived in that saved her. Having later spent most of her adult life estranged from her family, she keenly knows the costs of imposed exile and the loss of connection to clan, personal history, and community. Through her creative work as a memoirist, poet, and playwright, Veronica helps silenced people, especially children, find and use their voice. Her memoir, "TESORO, The Treasured Life of a Discarded Daughter," was nominated for the Kirkus Independent Book of The Year Award and later adapted into a two-act play produced in New York City in 2018. She remains an optimist dedicated to the labor of creating peace in the world, in the family, and in the individual, one story at a time. She is a licensed psychotherapist, lecturer, and motivational leader specializing in family reconciliation and lives in New York City.

Image from the Freedom Initiative.



**Anne Rath** is published in literary journals in Ireland, UK, and USA. She has been longlisted for Over the Edge, 2017, poet of the year award and shortlisted for Cinnamon Press Literature award, 2020, and most recently shortlisted in The Plough International Poetry Competition, 2021.

She is the recipient of an Arts Bursary and Artslink Award from the Arts Council of Ireland. She is an Amherst Writers and Artist affiliate since 2014 and leads writing workshops. Anne is passionate about writing as a practice of witness and activism. learn is empathy and understanding, and she has always worked for that in all of her classrooms.



**Rochelle Jewel Shapiro** is the author of *Miriam the Medium* (Simon & Schuster). Her essays have appeared in *NYT (Lives)*, *Newsweek*, and more. Her short stories have appeared in *Entropy*, *The MacGuffin*, et. al. Her poems have been nominated for Pushcart and Best of the Net Awards. She teaches writing at UCLA Extension. @rjshapiro <https://rochellejshapiro.com>

Image: This is Rochelle's Bubbie, Sara Shapiro, who gave her the gift of storytelling



**Suzanne Westhues** has been writing all her life, and she has had the lucky circumstances to be able to teach English literature and writing since 1995. She has taught and lived in Hradec Kralove, Czech Republic; Helsinki, Finland; and Boston, MA. She has run preschool story hours and taught American literature to Finnish teachers. In Boston, she has taught first year students from all over the world.

As a teacher and a mentor, she has always felt that the personal is the political, and even the smallest actions can make a difference. The biggest lesson we can all learn is empathy and understanding, and she has always worked for that in all of her classrooms.

