

## POETRY

### Time of Need

December birds chirping, Sister Julie is in flight  
She gathers food, clothes, prayers for morning  
light.

She knows women and men who stay in the  
harsh weather  
There are natives who know the power of an  
eagle feather.

Sister Julie understands the circle, holds the good  
word  
so it will be heard. She stands vigil watching for  
fallen birds.

Sister Julie encircles them listening to their words  
and needs. She stands vigil watching for fallen  
birds.

Sunlight splinters, Sister Julie is the morning light.  
She holds the good word for them who stay the  
night.

Morning birds chirp, she like Mary knows flight  
She gathers sacred words, prays for morning light.

—Earle Thompson

### GOOD P: A Homeless Woman

STARVING and timid  
in the Land of Plenty  
in the Land of Freedom...

STARVING for Love  
STARVING for Respect  
STARVING for self-respect

TRYING/unable  
To make sense of  
What is happening to her

in this country that CLAIMS  
to worship the SAME GOD  
that she does...

the God of Love  
the God of Peace  
the God THAT TURNS THE  
OTHER CHEEK...

WHEN

What she SEES  
What she feels  
IS

CONFUSION  
DEGRADATION  
and DESPAIR

She speaks GRATITUDE  
for the CRUMBS  
for the KICKS

And

TRIES to smile  
Managing only  
A painful grimace

She

BREAKS DOWN  
and cries

BITTER TEARS

—Marion Sue Fischer

### Untitled

Here's to code six and Jimmy  
And the frolicking of whores  
Drinking hard forgetting  
The atrocities of war

The memories have vanished  
But the sidewalk's closing in  
Jimmy stares as code six falls  
And bounces on his chin

—Sally Johnson

# The Vet

*(40% of the Seattle homeless community are veterans)*

He was 18 then, and now he's 48 -  
30 years later, still a victim of fate.  
But the scene in his mind is so crisp and so clear,  
how he raised his gun at the smell of his fear,  
but too late to save the one by his side.  
He cradled his bloody friend in his arms as he died.  
That was just the first of many close scrapes.  
It was a hard 2 years before he escaped  
back to a country he no longer knew,  
that had no idea what it put him thru,  
and now has forgotten about him and the war  
that he still fights trying to settle a score  
in the jungle of his memory and the maze of his mind.  
He doesn't understand how we can be so blind,  
or forget so quickly what arrogance wrought:  
how it forced him to kill in the battles he fought,  
and then there's that little messy detail  
of how he sometimes shakes and wails,  
of how he sometimes loses his head  
and swings in violence to silence the dead,  
and reaches for the bottle in hopes to drown  
the demons that feast like fleas on a hound.  
So it was long ago that his family finally left.  
And though he understands why, still it was just another theft.  
Then the government shrinks tried to put him in a cage  
for daring to embarrass the army with his rage.  
They dressed his wounds with barbed wire and salt  
and urged self restraint and told him it was his fault.  
Now he lives in a box under the bridge by the bay,  
and he plays his mouth harp for spare change by day.  
He's ragged and rheumy and dirty and cold,  
seems lost and confused, ill-mannered and bold.  
He wears fatigues, but his medals are long gone -  
In '69 he threw them onto the White House lawn.  
But he's still a soldier, still fighting a war  
against what he calls "a government of whores".  
And yes, the politicians don't want to hear the name  
of that long lost war and the national shame.  
But more than this, they're afraid what he knows  
will infect young men who will refuse to go  
because they'll understand that war is slaughter -  
not glory, not video games, not adventure, not honor,  
but murder and rape and genocide and fear.  
These are the facts the old vet knows well  
as he burns on his corner like a prophet in hell.

like a crucified hero, a villain unmasked,  
like a broken winged angel, or a question unasked.  
He was 18 then, and now he's 48 -  
30 years later, is way too late  
to be all that you can be.

- Todd Steven Davis

# Being Poor

It can be a kid as white as you,  
a kid with an old face.  
And it is hope.  
hope that the sheriff doesn't come  
to serve the eviction papers  
when you happen to be home.  
Hope  
that you don't have to put anything back  
at the check-out counter.

Being poor is waiting,  
and telling your children to wait,  
wait their whole childhoods away.

It is knowing  
they blame you.

It is wondering  
if there isn't a better way.

Being poor is trying  
not to envy almost everyone you see.

It's not getting enough  
and getting mad.

Being poor is bones and hearts  
and marrows and gray street dirt.

If there is a God,  
and if there is a God anywhere,  
we haven't heard the half of it.

—Elizabeth Romero

## POETRY

### Untitled

It doesn't help knowing  
that others have had it worse  
right now. It increases the horror  
Hope is pretty handy, without it  
I'd go to a bar and hustle drinks  
until I was too drunk to think.  
And then I'd let some gun-collector  
take me home.

I'd prescribe for this  
resigned and local pain  
a temporary anesthetic,  
and learn one more thing  
I can't look back at  
without that one more step  
away from forever.

Strikes, layoffs, unemployment,  
welfare vouchers, loans.  
Crack the code for me.  
Give me a spell,  
Give me some money,  
I'll buy us some drinks  
and bring back all the change.

—Elizabeth Romero

### Comfortless

I know what it's like  
to sit on a curb  
in a strange town

(small) bag in front of you  
worn and dusty  
(as you are)

CONTAINING  
all your worldly possessions

To sit on a curb  
DIRECTIONLESS  
... waiting  
for  
What To Do Next

Broke, or nearly so  
Your options meager

Your spirit flagging  
perhaps a chill wind, as well

On a curb  
Waiting for a CLUE

Waiting for a friend  
Where you know no one

Waiting for a Guide  
to lead you  
to

WHERE YOU BE-LONG

IN  
from the cold and wet

IN  
from the WANT

INTO  
the comforting Presence  
of  
BE-LONGING

(PLEASE pray/for/our/Souls)

—Marion Sue Fischer

### I Give Up!

For THOSE of us

Who have OUTLIVED  
their Partners,

God opens up  
A rich world  
of Freedom  
and Solitude

...to please ourselves  
...and God

I pray for GRATITUDE

—Marion Sue Fischer

## The Woman Coming Toward You

The woman coming toward you  
is trying to hang on.  
You can see it in her eyes,  
her wary sidelong glance

The woman coming toward you  
is trying to hang on.  
Her clothes flap loosely in the wind.  
Her red shoes clash

The woman coming toward you  
carries the patient rage of her mother  
and her mother before that  
like that cracked plastic handbag

*Elizbeth Romero*

## Food Bank

The tell-tale brown paper bag,  
bottom damp from turkey juice,  
sits heavily in her arms.

Corn, carrots, cauliflower  
mixing and poking through  
leaving a trail of rice.

An older man kindly warned,  
"Next time, bring an extra plastic bag."

On the bus home  
some people move away.

They say, "It's the pits  
to stand in line for food  
the last act of desperation!"

She says, "We want to work again!"

How long, how soon,  
before you hold  
a damp, donated bag of pain?

*—Lonnie Nelson*

## The Last House I Will Ever Enter

There will be wine, food and Miller Beer in the  
Last House I will ever enter:

There will be a peppermint family giving candy,  
candy, candy in the Last House I will ever enter.

There will be axes with meat and blood in the  
Last House I will ever enter:

My scream will be heard for miles, miles and  
miles in the Last House I will ever enter:

I will see a light shine in my eyes and I will hear  
the police, they be running down the stairs but it  
will be too late because I will be found dead in  
the Last House I will ever enter.

*Daryl Ary*

## Under the Ballard Bridge

Maybe gone native brother made a bad mistake,  
saying he didn't like white people.

It was only five days away him thumping a friend's  
chest, getting him awake for enough time to say, "I'm  
okay" before an hour later breath was gone. Heroin.  
Anyway, a week ago I came into port, sailing my boat  
on down from Clayoquot Sound, west coast open  
waters...Tied up right by the bridge... And here it was  
I met my friend, asking me to dress his stab wound  
on account of Lakota getting hurt and angry over her  
friend who OD-ed and stabbing with knife in her  
pain... So... there were other folks under the bridge,  
right by the creosote timbers and the mix-blood  
mallard ducks and the Canadian geese that no longer  
follow the migration. And they must have taken way  
strong offense to my gone native brother's comment  
about white folk, 'cuz while he was sleeping under his  
borrowed blanket, two men in a black car came up  
and put a gun to his head...then made a big joke  
about it being unloaded...

*—Bobu of the Sea*