The Streets

The streets are my friend. They wrap their cold unloving arms around me. When I lay my head down at night the cold cement calls to me. It keeps me cold when I want to be warm. It keeps me penniless at a time when I need money the most.

When I have trouble keeping my sanity the streets help me lose it. When I am down they pull me down further. They keep me in a sea of depression. When I find a foothold it takes it away. When I find something to hold onto it makes sure I lose my grip.

When will I get off these streets? When will I stop losing this battle? It seems as though it will never happen. The streets have a permanent hold on me.

—Marissa

Encounter at Pike's

I was at Pike's Market yesterday. Unfortunately I declined the magazine from a vendor. I later picked one up at Barnes & Noble. The whole issue was most interesting. The poetry section was a special interest.

My eighteen year old daughter accompanied me. We are on a vacation from Alaska.

The sun's rays touch the whiteness of our northern skin.
A blanket of grass beckons us, ours still hidden under crunchy gray and yellow.

Colors, long trapped by the black part of the earth, wave in the breeze.

Purses bulging with purchases and necessities of habits, my daughter and I settle to breathe in spring.

You appear ... someone else's daughter.
Alone.
Eyes vacant yet searching.
Muttering to no listening ear.
Backpack dirty and worn.

Do you see color?
Do you feel warmth?
Does anyone care where you sleep tonight?

I breathe a silent prayer for you as I run away to my reality.

—Nona Mahugh

Human Rights in China

I hear media protest
Chinese abuses to human rights
How China employs prisoners
Making garments
Ships body organs of criminals
To Hong Kong hospitals
Jails dissidents without other cause
I watch King County inmates
Clean trash from roadsides
Another Washington state prisoner
Is hung
A cop hits a loud kid
With a billyclub
I ask
How people seem
Blind

—David Newman

October 1998
After the Honeymoon

razor-sharp spiderwebs crisscross rays of
white moonlight, broken glass windowpanes
and stained glass skin—mommy listen
listen when I tell you
he has a temper, he has quite
a temper.

razor-sharp porcelain fragments on
bloodstained linoleum, purple skin fading
to dark red, under ice — oh mommy listen
listen to me when I tell you
I have to get out of here, I have to
get out

—Holly Day

Sunshine

This sandwich is good.
I made it myself. Ham and cheese. Wheat
and rye.
I’m going to eat it now.
I have to leave this place.

Too many walls in a building. Too many exit
signs leading to locked doors.
Too many windows that cannot be opened.
Too many voices screaming in my
head on the phone on the intercom it’s all just
a bunch of words and I
refuse to understand them anymore.

It’s such a nice day.
I think I’ll eat my sandwich outside. There,
beneath the tree.
A black dog shares my shade.
I’m going to die here.

It’s the simplicity of memos. It’s the arrogance
of middle management.
It’s the concept of “superiors.” It’s a denial
of my peers.
It’s the way my high heels catch
on the loose stacks of carpet
the way my pantyhose stretches to snag
and snap and
snake like ripped tendons
up the backs of my legs.
It’s the charred bullet hole I had to put
in my head
to get all this corporate verbiage out.

Go away, black dog.
I will not share my sandwich with you.

—Holly Day

Share

A crowd means... is it
everything? This crowd — is it a
reason and
an opinion, and a
place

of my own choice? If

your
name is one
in the center, while you
know

that I have reasons — broken,
yes! then,
stand

close
to mine. Tell me your story! help
me
to repeat it.

—Stan Burriss
Lottery
I prayed a lot yesterday
some more today
I need a wish to come true
on Saturday
I'd trade my good right arm
to win the Lottery
I swear oh God I'll share the
dough

It is Thursday night I placed my bet
the numbers came right out of my head
there was a feeling there
that felt so correct and rare
my hopes are high if I lose I'll die
oh God oh please watch over me

It's Friday night the town is loud
there's people everywhere walking
close with pretty girls
talking soft and looking sweet
I'll win the lottery then they will
want to be around a guy who's
rich and cool

I'll be a famous party freak
I'll buy the ladies drinks and things
to eat the clothes I'll wear
will make the fellows cry
on blessed Saturday my lonely
life will change when I oh I win
the Lottery

It's very close right now to 7 o'clock
the little balls have dropped
they're showing up the first one's 3
the next 13 the third 6
then 23 here comes 36 then 43

Next week will surely be my day
I'll pray a lot go to church right
through the week oh god won't you
please put your hands on me
I need to win the Lottery.

—Roberto Valenza

Illness
The leather beats the soft skin hard,
the screaming pierces the air too far,
for the sickness has caused the rage,
hurting a girl who is young at age.

Without the addiction he is nice,
but with it the girl is made to pay the price,
for stopping is not what he has planned,
as long as he is not hurt and can.

For that girl I weep and weep
dreaming of her as I sleep.
I want to see her and try to say,
"Run girl, run, don't stay."

—Lisa O'Neill