

Writing is Art

By Janelle C. Jeffries

FACE
 Free Allowed Content Exceptional
 My words are music
 Writing is my Art
 Living is my FACE
 You know the heart
 Sings in letters
 My soul puts on paper
 Can you feel this pulse?
 Moving, flowing, feeling
 Like the warm wind
 Kissing my cheek
 When you see me—
 Say hello
 Your beat catches me
 I can hear the shrill violin,
 The mystic mandolin
 Reading my writing,
 You are reading my notes
 Art has never had such a wonderful
 FACE
 People—you brighten
 My day and make me smile
 Thank you for feeling me—getting' me
 And all that I am
 You never know who've you've touched
 Until you look them in the FACE

The Urban Gypsy

Julie McCurdy resides in Portland and is experiencing homelessness with her Italian greyhound, Maggie. She is a regular contributor to Street Roots.

Violence has exploded around me without warning. Jesus, this shit is real and unlike TV movies. I can't switch the channels or walk away, so I sit here frozen with stunned horror watching as the paramedics haul the victim away.

His arm muscles hang out through his leather jacket. His face is slashed and possibly his neck. See that! They are putting something in a body bag. Could he be the perpetrator — who knows? I can't tell because right now, I have to remind myself to breathe both in and out.

Right now, I have to become ready to do triage to the participants. Right now, I don't have the luxury of sitting here frozen with shinned horror because there are more lives on the line in the next week if people don't focus on de-escalating the tension threatening to explode in the air. The man that has been stabbed is a crippled man whose offence was being in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was attacked by a man obviously intoxicated on some

substance. A woman stood between them and certain death till two other men could get there to help.

On a side note, three weeks later I can tell you, neither participant died of this. St Francis Dining Hall was closed two days later. My tent was wrecked by a man who thought to attack me. He apparently thought I was someone else. The personal violation and community tension has eased for the moment.

Three weeks later, I am back to the land of the semi-coherent. The shell shock is beginning to wane and my eyes have stopped spontaneously leaking without my knowledge or consent.

Three weeks later we are calm for the moment, and this week poverty and despair haven't turned us feral. The difference is here and now. With my eyes gritty from lack of sleep, I realize I am forever changed. I honestly don't think I'll ever see things the same. But then that's the way that goes—here in paradise.

On the Yellow Line

By Thea Constantine

To board the Yellow Line requires very little action and virtually no preparation, barring the required fare and a knowledge of where you're headed. This is freedom. I'm going on vacation and I count myself extremely lucky in this. The only drawback to the entire proposition is: getting there.

My vacation requires air travel, the most humiliating of all travel options these days. Going to the airport and getting on a plane is no simple thing in the 21st century. As a matter of fact, the closest I can come to a synonymous experience is that of going to jail. I was talking to a friend who was taking a trip last week and we were commiserating on the fact that both of us at one time were enthusiastic air travelers. I have always been lucky in that among my various (and numerous) neurosis, fear of flying wasn't a problem. This is no longer true. While neither of us were actually afraid of anything happening to the plane, I now become apprehensive simply entering the airport.

The tragedy of 9/11 changed everything, and among those changes seems to be a license to treat people in the most inhumane fashion while declaring it is for your own good and you should be ashamed to complain about it. My friend told me her first experience after 2001 had been so rotten she hadn't boarded a plane since. We swapped stories of luggage restrictions and gung-ho security goons. It was here I began to make the analogy between entering the penal system and air travel. You begin by being issued a number. Then you join an endless line which may or may not be the right one and which can change at any time on the


whim of your captors. Your belt, shoes and keys are surrendered. You can be subjected to bodily searches, clothing removal, and the inspection and confiscation of your property. You can be held against your will, and you will not have the option of legal representation. You can be profiled and treated poorly simply because you fit the description of someone else. If you are lucky enough to actually pass initial muster you'll find your ordeal has just gotten started.

Now you will be seated in a plastic chair which has been bolted to the floor for a period of time which may or may not be the one you were told to expect. After another long line and inspection of your assigned number and papers, you are then confined to a 2x3 foot area where you are strapped into another seat which is bolted to the floor and which you may only leave to join another line for the privilege of using the stainless steel toilet. Your inedible meals are served to you on a plastic tray at a randomly chosen times by uniformed staff. Upon arrival you count yourself among the lucky if your property is returned to you intact.

My friend asked me if I had any handy travel tips and I told her she could print out her booking slip 12 hours in advance. When she looked at me funny, I realized I had meant to say she could print out her boarding pass in advance. After a good laugh, we realized maybe it wasn't so funny after all.

My fantasy is that perhaps one day air travel will be as simple as boarding a Yellow Line train. It is then that we will know that mankind has truly reached its golden age.

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