

Restore

Ending Violence Against Women



Collection of Poetry

Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada

wicc.org/restore

Holy and Good by Thomas Troeger
(this is a hymn with meter 10.10.10.10)

Holy and good is the gift of desire,
God made our bodies for passion and fire,
Intending that love would draw from the flame,
Lives that would shine with God's image and name.

God weeps for all people abandoned, abused,
God weeps for the women whose bodies are bruised,
God weeps when the gift that God has infused,
is turned from its purpose and brutally used.

God calls to women and God calls to men;
"Don't hide from terror, or terror will win.
I made you for love, but love must begin
by facing the violence without and within."

Sotto Voce at First Christian Church

by Ruth Johnston

[*sotto voce* is a musical term for "in an undertone"]

See her there, your sister
In the second bench from the back,
Beside her children,
Always there,
Always smiling,
Sometimes a little too quiet,
Sometimes a little too loud.

What if they knew
How he threatened me this week
Or how he punishes me
Because it's always my fault
When things go wrong.

She comes in late, breathless,
Hurrying the children past the feet
Of those already seated.
Why can't she get ready sooner
And come with her husband?
What patience he must have,
To stand up at the front,
To see her stumbling in,
And still to lead the service
With such dignity.

Last night, in a fit of rage
He drove my car into a snow bank
Because I parked in his way.
I shoveled snow alone this morning
While he left early to take his place
Up at the front.
I have no bruises, at least not outside
Where they can be seen;
No marks to show the world
So that I can say,
Surely I'm justified to leave.
But if I go, he too will be hurt,
The children won't understand,
Our friends will take sides,
And I will be condemned.

The text is read:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion;
Blessed art thou among women.
And Mary sings of mercy and strength,
The angels sing of peace and goodwill,
And the woman sings,
In the second bench from the back,
Beside her children.

Mary, did you hear
The weeping of the mothers
Who lost their baby boys
When your son was born?
Do you hear my weeping
When my children are hurt?
Do you see my low estate
When I am hungry for love,
Or protection, or forgiveness?
Is there any blessing left for me
After the first-born Adam
Has taken his share?

The text is read:

He that dwelleth in the secret place
Of the Most High
Shall abide under the shadow
Of the Almighty.
And the woman takes comfort
And sits a little straighter
In the second bench from the back.

Oh God, I'd like to stay right here...
This secret place is safe.
But God, my faith, my church, my home,
They are all bound in one, the same.

What shall I do?
Leave and forever be cut off
From all that comforts me,
Or stay and suffer, until I long for death?

This secret place feels sometimes
Like a jail.
I need to know who holds the key
Before I can go free.

The congregation rises for the benediction
And at the back,
In the second bench,
The woman composes herself
So that no one will see her pain
And pity her,
Or feel her anger
And condemn her.

She wraps herself in a smile
And carefully,
Carefully,
Tucks the edges in around her
So that no tears can possibly
Leak through.

[Reprinted from *Braiding Hearts and Hands*, Edited by Kathleen Hull and Wendy Kroeker,
Winnipeg, Man: MCC, 1994.

My daughter only three
cautions as I rush out the door
"Don't stop on the road, Mommy;
somebody will hurt you."

Are little girls born
with this fear of dark
unlit streets
and being caught alone?

Visions of the kingdom
crowd into my mind:
of a world without fear
and little girls
not old at three.

Jean Ward, from *Broken by You: Men's Role in Stopping Woman Abuse* by Morton Paterson
(Etobicoke, Ontario: The United Church Publishing House, 1995), p. xii.

This is My Body

This is my body
an orchard of pomegranates
eyes like doves
lips like a crimson threat
breasts like two fawns
 that feed among the lilies
rounded thighs like jewels
hands dripping with myrrh
stately as a palm tree
comely as Jerusalem
This is my body, shared, with you.

This is my body
bone of your bone
flesh of your flesh
sanctifying the marriage bed
bearing the fruit
breasts rounded with babies
stretch marks tracing
 the pangs of childbirth
wrinkles trading
 the streams of tears
This is my body, wedded to you.

This is my body
sacrilege--sacrifice
punched, kicked, slapped, bruised
stalked and pillaged
split lip, broken bones,
 battered heart
eyes like shadows
 of a civil war
where love is strong as death
and passion fierce as the grace
This is my body, broken by you.

How will you remember me?

From *Broken by You: Men's Role in Stopping Woman Abuse*, by Morten Paterson, The United Church Publishing House, 1995.

Thinking I'm Something

by Catherine J. Foote

"You really think you're something, don't you?" It's forbidden.
Me thinking I'm something, me caring for me, me feeling for me is forbidden. Liking
myself is forbidden. Me listening to me--it isn't allowed.
"Who do you think you are?"
All-knowing God, how could you love me?
Don't you know who I am?
Small, stupid, ugly, bad. Dirty, clumsy, dumb.
And inside, deep inside, there's something wrong with me.
How could you love me? Don't you know me?
Don't you know how scared I get? how sad? how selfish? how angry?
Wise One, if you know me, you can't love me.
Gracious One, if you love me, what do you know?
Yet your love breaks through, as you hold me close, as you look into my face and into my
soul.
You look at me like an old friend, like someone you know well, like someone you know
completely, and you say I love you.
You love me, and you know me, even better,
even more than I know myself.
Give me strength to trust your knowing and your loving.
Give me courage to go on with the knowing,
in faith that it will lead to loving.
My soul runs from you. My self hides.
Will you say, "You really think you're something, don't you?"
Or are your words the ones I long to hear:
"I really think you're something. I'm really glad you're you."
Amen

Catherine Foote, *Survivor Prayers*, Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.

Body Talk

by Catherine J. Foote

God of incarnation, Word become flesh,
It is so hard for me to talk to you about my body.
I long to reconnect with what was stolen from me.
I search for a way to separate sexual assault from sexuality,
and to rediscover the beauty of your gift of the physical.
So many times my body has felt like a trap, like evil, like pain.
My body scares me and I'm scared to tell you that. To survive
I had to disconnect, to deny, to learn to feel nothing.
Now, in healing, in growing, I discover my desire to reconnect,
to learn new lessons about this physical me.
To find a home here in this body, which I so quickly left when it
was being hurt, when it was being assaulted.
To know the joy of giving, not the terror of being robbed.
To know the pleasure of physical love.
To find a home in me.
These are the longings I feel in my flesh.
Word become flesh, God of incarnation,
lead me to the healing of this body,
to the reconnection of body and spirit,
to the place of wholeness in myself.
Amen

Catherine Foote, *Survivor Prayers*, Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.

Late Poem to My Father

by Sharon Olds

Suddenly I thought of you
as a child in that house, the unlit rooms
and the hot fireplace with the man in front of it,
silent. You moved through the heavy air
in your physical beauty, a boy of seven,
helpless, smart, there were things the man
did near you, and he was your father,
the mold by which you were made. Down in the
cellar, the barrels of sweet apples,
picked at their peak from the tree, rotted and
rotted, and past the cellar door
the creek ran and ran, and something was
not given to you, or something was
taken from you that you were born with, so that
even at 30 and 40 you set the
oily medicine to your lips
every night, the poison to help you
drop down unconscious. I always thought the
point was what you did to us
as a grown man, but then I remembered that
child being formed in front of the fire, the
tiny bones inside his soul
twisted in greenstick fractures, the small
tendons that hold the heart in place
snapped. And what they did to you
you did not do to me. When I love you now,
I like to think that I am giving my love
directly to that boy in the fiery room,
as if it could reach him in time.

Sharon Olds, *The Gold Cell*. Alfrd A. Knopf, 1987.

The Temperature of Cruelty

by Jean Janzen

We think of the beaten baby
dead against the darkening stain
on the bed, soldiers pulling out
fingernails, the prisoner dangling
for days. But also the years
of bitterness in a family, the cold
turning of the shoulder, the look
that erases you. What is
the temperature of cruelty?
Fire? Boiling oil? Or the great
weight of ice, gravel shearing
rock in a slow grind. Or
that April frost, so lacy
and beautiful, whispering
and biting the orchard to death
in one slow night, when all
the blossoms blacken, and all
that was possible withers and shatters in the wind.

From *Three Mennonite Poets*, Good Books, Manitoba.

nonresistance or, love Mennonite style
by di brandt

turn the other cheek when your brother
hits you & your best friend tells fibs
about you & the teacher punishes you
unfairly if someone steals your shirt
give him your coat to boot this will
heap coals of fire on his head & let him
know how greatly superior you are
while he & his cronies dicker & bargain
their way to hell you can hold your
head up that is down humbly knowing
you're bound for the better place where
it gets tricky is when your
grandfather tickles you too hard or your cousins
want to play doctor & your uncle kisses
you too long on the lips & part of you
wants it & the other part knows it's
wrong & you want to run away but you
can't because he's a man like your father
& the secret place inside you feels itchy
& hot & you wonder if this is what hell
feels like & you remember the look on
your mother's face when she makes
herself obey your dad & meanwhile her
body is shouting *No! No!* & he doesn't
even notice & you wish you could stop
being angry all the time but you can't
because God is watching & he sees
everything there isn't any place to let
it out & you understand about love the
lavish sacrifice in it how it will stretch
your woman's belly & heap fire on your
head you understand how love is like
a knife & a daughter is not a son & the
only way you will be saved is by
submitting quietly in your grandfather's
house your flesh smouldering in the
darkened room as you love your enemy
deeply unwillingly & full of shame.

From *questions I asked my mother* by Di Brandt, Turnstone Press, 1987.

With No Immediate Cause

by Ntozake Shange

every 3 minutes a woman is beaten
every five minutes a
woman is raped/every ten minutes
a little girl is molested
yet I rode the subway today
I sat next to an old man who
may have beaten his old wife
3 minutes ago or 3 days/30 years ago
he might have sodomized his
daughter but I sat there
cuz the men on the train
might beat some young women
later in the day or tomorrow
I might not shut my door fast
enough push hard enough
every 3 minutes it happens
some woman's innocence
rushes to her cheeks/pours from her mouth
like the betsy wetsy dolls have been torn
apart/their mouths
menses red split/every
three minutes a shoulder
is jammed through plaster and the oven door/
chairs push thru the rib cage/hot water or
boiling sperm decorate her body
I rode the subway today
and bought a paper from an
east Indian man who might
have held his old lady onto
a hot pressing iron/I didn't know
maybe he catches little girls in the
parks and rips open their behinds
with steel rods/I can not decide
what he might have done I only
know every 3 minutes
every 5 minutes every 10 minutes
I bought the paper
looking for the announcement
there has to be an announcement
of the women's bodies found
yesterday the missing little girl
I sat in a restaurant with my
paper looking for the announcement

a young man served me coffee
I wondered did he pour the boiling
coffee on the woman because she was stupid
did he put the infant girl in
the coffee pot because she cried too much
what exactly did he do with coffee
I looked for the announcement
the discovery of the dismembered
woman's body
victims have not all been
identified today they are
naked and dead/some refuse to
testify one girl out of 10's not
coherent/ I took the coffee
and spit it up I found an
announcement/not the woman's
bloated body in the river floating
not the child bleeding in the
59th street corridor/not the baby
broken on the floor

"there is some concern
that alleged battered women
might start to murder their
husbands and lovers with no
immediate cause"

I spit up I vomit I am screaming
we all have immediate cause
every 3 minutes
every 5 minutes
every 10 minutes
every day
women's bodies are found
in alleys and bedrooms/at the top of the stairs
before I ride the subway/buy a paper or drink
coffee from your hands I must know
have you hurt a woman today
did you beat a woman today
throw a child across a room are the little girl's pants in your pocket
did you hurt a woman today
I have to ask these obscene questions
I must know you see
the authorities require us to
establish
immediate cause

every three minutes
every five minutes
every ten minutes
every day.

Ntozake Shange, *Nappy Edges*. St. Martin's Press, 1972.

Pocket-sized Feminism

by Blythe Baird

The only other girl at the party
is ranting about feminism. The audience:
a sea of rape jokes and snapbacks
and styrofoam cups and me. They gawk
at her mouth like it is a drain
clogged with too many opinions.
I shoot her an empathetic glance
and say nothing. This house is for
wallpaper women. What good
is wallpaper that speaks?
I want to stand up, but if I do,
whose coffee table silence
will these boys rest their feet on?
I want to stand up, but if I do,
what if someone takes my spot?
I want to stand up, but if I do,
what if everyone notices I've been
sitting this whole time? I am guilty
of keeping my feminism in my pocket
until it is convenient not to, like at poetry
slams or my women's studies class.
There are days I want people to like me
more than I want to change the world.
There are days I forget we had to invent
nail polish to change color in drugged
drinks and apps to virtually walk us home
at night and mace disguised as lipstick.
Once, I told a boy I was powerful
and he told me to mind my own business.
Once, a boy accused me of practicing
misandry. *You think you can take
over the world?* And I said *No,*
I just want to see it. I just need
to know it is there for someone.
Once, my dad informed me sexism
is dead and reminded me to always
carry pepper spray in the same breath.
We accept this state of constant fear
as just another part of being a girl.
We text each other when we get home
safe and it does not occur to us that our
guy friends do not have to do the same.
You could see a woman in half

and it would be called a magic trick.
That's why you invited us here,
isn't it? Because there is no show
without a beautiful assistant?
We are surrounded by boys who hang up
our naked posters and fantasize
about choking us and watch movies
we get murdered in. We are the daughters
of men who warned us about the news
and the missing girls on the milk carton
and the sharp edge of the world.
They begged us to be careful. To be safe.
Then told our brothers to go out and play.

<http://www.vagabomb.com/This-Powerful-Spoken-Word-Poetry-Brilliantly-Addresses-Sexism-and-Violence-Against-Women/>