



Poets Call for Zero Hunger in First of Its Kind World Food Day Contest

16 October 2018, Washington, D.C. – Aaron R. of Arlington, Virginia, has been selected as the first place winner of the first-ever World Food Day Poetry Contest. Followed by Jesse Alexander of Clinton, Maryland, and Teri Ellen Cross Davis of Silver Spring, MD, in second and third place. World Food Day, celebrated annually on October 16th, promotes awareness and action to end global hunger. It also commemorates the founding of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in 1945.

The FAO North America Office in partnership with Poetry X Hunger announced the inaugural contest in August 2018. The contest called for submissions from poets based in the DC, Maryland, and Virginia, on the theme of this year's World Food Day theme of "Our Actions Are Our Future: A Zero Hunger World by 2030 Is Possible."

A panel of renowned judges, featuring Carla Christopher, York Pennsylvania's 4th Poet Laureate, and widely published poet and playwright, Kim M. Baker, selected the top three winners and honorable mentions from over 36 submissions. The winners were awarded USD \$1000, \$500, \$250 respectively at the World Food Day Reception hosted by FAO's Liaison Office for North America on Monday, October 15th in Washington, D.C.

Christopher and Baker were impressed with the amazing strength and diversity of poems that were submitted. The judges selected the winning poem "Hunger Pains" by Aaron R. Whitehead for its unequivocal message and rhythm that enraptures and inspires, followed by "Hunger #1" by Jesse Alexander, and "Shutter" by Teri Ellen Cross Davis. Honorable mentions include "Ode to the Body in the Duman River" by Meg Eden, "Hunger Game" by Henry Crawford, and "The Voice of Hunger" by Diane Wilbon Parks.

"The connection between poetry and hunger is awareness. I think through my words, I can create a picture of what people are going through. This contest has given me an opportunity to bring awareness to situations, like world hunger, that people take for granted," said Aaron R., First Prize Winner of the inaugural World Food Day poetry contest.

"Rising hunger and widespread prevalence of food insecurity globally call out for our urgent intervention. Poetry is language at its most distilled and strongest, and thus ideal to inspire empathy and action in the fight against hunger and malnutrition," said Vimlendra Sharan, Director of FAO North America.

First conceived during a roundtable discussion on the "Power of Poetry to Address Hunger" hosted by FAO North America and Poetry X Hunger during the National Poetry Month in April 2018, the contest was an effort to engage poets and writers to lend their voices to issue surrounding hunger and malnutrition.

"It is great to see organizations like FAO encouraging so many powerful poetic voices speak up," said Poetry X Hunger Founder Hiram Larew. Poetry X Hunger will continue to work with poets to engage them in issues surrounding hunger. "We thank all of our participants for sharing their poems and our judges for contributing to this initiative." The poems will be kept as a collection for future dissemination to raise awareness about hunger and malnutrition.

For more information, please contact: Hiram Larew (hlarew@gmail.com) and follow facebook.org/PoetryXHunger for the latest news.

Related links

[Calling all Poets living in Washington, DC, and surrounding Counties for World Food Day](#)

[Unleashing the Power of Poetry to Address Hunger](#)





First Prize

Hunger Pains

In a world where we are concerned about the economy and marketing numbers
 How can we have people starving and dealing with hunger?
 We're too far developed as a nation to be faced with this situation
 So we have a plan and 2030 is our destination
 I'm not talking about decreasing, I'm talking about elimination
 So nobody is starving or walking around hungry in any nation
 Speaking of our nation, it's strange to me
 That in this land of plenty there's still people on the streets without food to eat
 We pay millions of dollars for entertainment but that's another topic
 People who are out here starving, we need to stop it
 We have money for wars
 We should be at war with not feeding the poor, this is something we shouldn't ignore
 Family's walking around with their stomach's growling and sore
 We as the people owe it to each other to do more
 So let's depend on each other and help one another
 To stop world hunger the world is going to need each other
 So my challenge to you and my challenge to me
 Do something small or large independently
 Together Everyone Achieves More If we can unite as a team – world hunger can be no more
 That sounds like a plan that's worth it to me
 So let's embark on our journey and do little day by day until 2030

Aaron R.
 Arlington, Virginia
aaronRpoems.com

Judges' Comments – This poem oozes hope and does so with music and rhythm that enraptures and inspires. This poem does not equivocate. “People who are out here starving, we need to stop it.” I imagine this poem standing in front of the world's crowd with a megaphone in hand -- a true call to action!





Second Prize

Hunger #1

hides with you after 1am (btwn guard shifts)
 trying to doze in backseat of your mom's old blue CR-V (
 good sleeping car, she said,
 rear seats fold down,
 her goodbye factory hands pressing your cheeks
)
 parked under sodium light in the back of the chemistry building lot
 next to the dumpster (with half-eaten mcdonalds other students threw out)

sneak into your dormroom (almost pranklike)
 when momma's check runs out
 before the end of the month midway into the semester
 demanding choices (am selfish):
 study me instead of physics
 nurse me instead of biology
 pay me your undivided attention
 cross your arms over your growling stomach
 curl up
 try to close your eyes
 and wait for morning.

Jesse Alexander
Clinton, MD

Judges' Comments – This poem felt deeply personal and several of the references tugged at my heartstrings and memories, and it still really carried the larger picture of raising hunger awareness, without losing the specific imagery and personal touch How do you tell an entire story in a line? This poem told many. Hunger -- it's that pair of dangling parentheses.





Third Prize

Shutter

For Kevin Carter, Winner of the 1994 Pulitzer Prize for Feature Photography in The New York Times

And if you could go back, you would
You would pick the child up, gingerly like a newborn
cradling her large head, thin-skinned body, jutting bones,
And no mother you, but you would have hushed her

Won't you pick her up, gingerly, like a newborn
Shoo away the vulture, whose crime is hers too, hunger
And you're no mother, but you would have hushed her because
What distance is a lens, a camera's shutter, snap that captures

Shooing away the vulture, (whose crime was hers too, hunger)
Framing a moment that will pass, like breath, like life
Because what distance is a lens, a camera's shutter, snap that captures
Arid, ravaged Sudan, torn in two, like you as you crouch closer

Framing a moment that will pass, like breath, like life
And if you could go back, you would
into arid ravaged Sudan, torn in two, just like you, crouch closer
cradle her, large head, thin-skinned, body only jutting bones

Teri Ellen Cross Davis
Silver Spring, Maryland

Judges' Comments – This pantoum resonates and haunts with its repetition of lines and vivid imagery. It is a call to action for anyone who wishes she had done something differently -- “And if you could go back, you would.” I saw this poem without needing to see the photograph, and for me it perfectly captured the false distance we place between ourselves and people we cannot imagine ourselves as. This reclaiming the connection and oneness of us all was beautifully captured without being maudlin or exploitive. This piece is piercing in its smoothness.





Honorable Mention

Ode to the Body in the Duman River

after The Tollund Man

February 11, 2008, Tumen, China: The dead body of what appears to be a North Korean refugee is found in the middle of the Duman River. It lies in the frozen shallows perhaps 20 yards from Chinese border and 10 from that of N. Korea.
-Chosun Media

Pieces of you
continue to remain
unclaimed: frozen hair bun,
mud-caked skirt
hiding Bible pages,
feet bare, shoes stolen.
From a distance you are
indistinguishable
from river stones.
Ten-thousand river,
how many more bodies
live here, undocumented?
So short: the distance
between hunger & living.
In my car, I can drive
through three states in one day,
my worst complaint: the tolls.
My McDonald's bags,
crumpled on the floor.
If only something
of your urgency
should come to me
in this warm full house
where you are a window
I can choose to open
or close. Do not leave me
peaceful tonight. Out here
in suburbia, I forget
how lost I am
in all these good things.

Meg Eden
Severn, MD

Judges' Comments – The sharp staccato pacing and the mix of contemporary words with timeless nature images made this poem unexpected and striking. It stayed with me even as I read other pieces. This poem moves with its juxtaposition of haves and have nots. “So short: the distance/between hunger and living” anchoring the middle of the poem is the turning point to action. *If only...* says it all.





Honorable Mention

Hunger Game

Into the spaces made by
words I go when famished
admiring the two tall towers
that end in 'full' or the way
the 'y' in 'empty' is like a fork
of choices or the tectonic way
that 'ate' slams into 'p' and 'l'
to make a 'plate' or how
the stubborn 'n' in 'need'
can be undone with just a 'd'
to do the 'deed' as the sum
of 'something' can overcome
the no in 'nothing' or how
it is that just a bit of 'flour'
can go to work on 'nourish'
to make it 'flourish' or how
a single 'u' makes all sound
in 'you' and a double 'u'
can take an 'e' from 'feed'
to make a 'we' to leap across
an empty space to 'can'
the way two words together
can tell us: end hunger.

Henry Crawford
Silver Spring, MD

Judges' Comments - The distance between rampant hunger and none, as this poem-near-riddle wisely points out, is really only the single letter difference between need and deed.





Honorable Mention

The Voice of Hunger

(Writing the Wrong – Beyond the Wall)

Thoughts tremble and bend so far inward,
Shoulders become cups,
neck lines, exaggerated bones;
 chests turn inwardly to reconcile the pain of hunger.
 Hope becomes a wall, a place to write the wrongs.

Hunger awakens desperate voices
that echoes from skeletal walls, empty rib cages
that float above scarcity, hopelessness, disbelief
back into swollen bellies that do not distort truth.

An infomercial pulls me so far in,
my thoughts begin to run wildly through the brokenness,
the examination of thin arms and wilting legs,
small hands reach inside me, and turn the pages of my eyes
as I survey the withering and the loss,
the last hope for nourishment.
I become a wall – a place to write the wrongs.

A beautiful child speaks to me as if she knows my heart
Her eyes crouch inside my chest, and bend so far inward,
I churn into another time-zone,
She finds me pearled into a place of shame
a place where my heart tremors into fruit;
I follow her - inside.
She's my teacher and I, her student.
I sit inside her risen belly – a look of distortion.
Hunger has no name. I write my name of her wall.
I stand in the center of her hands, opened;
she's waiting to be filled with some assurance; I owe her that.
She lingers in my thoughts, mouth wide opened, like the doors of her heart and soul;
today, she represents every child, every woman and man
with tears that spill onto the shores of our cheeks – they need us.

I am left, contorted as the shapeless spasms
that live in the restless wake of hunger.
I am on the other side of a wall, still frozen by the growling echoes
of starving children, women and men who write their pain, daily on the wall of hope.

Let's ~~write~~ write right the wrong. It's time to move beyond the wall.





Diane Wilbon Parks
Bowie, Md.

Judges' Comments – This poem inspires with vivid imagery and with its personal nature. This piece illustrates how poetry – its hover and haunt – can be so powerfully useful in our fight against hunger. “I become a wall – a place to write the wrongs.”

Please do not use these poems without the consent of the poets and FAO North America.

