

poems



**thirty ninth**  
**parkmont**  
**poetry**  
**festival**

Poems by District of Columbia Students • Grades 6-12  
SPONSORED BY PARKMONT SCHOOL, MAY 1, 2021

**Many thanks to Jacqui Michel and  
David Weisman for their  
passionate and enduring support  
of the Parkmont Poetry Festival.**

## **Preface**

We are pleased to share with you in this booklet the poems of Washington, DC's young writers. The Parkmont Poetry Festival was founded in 1982 to encourage and celebrate the voices and verse of student poets in public, private, and charter schools from all eight wards of the District of Columbia. We honor the promise of diverse young writers, the importance of reflection, the value of community, and the beauty of language. This year we proudly celebrate 39 years of spotlighting and sharing these students' talents and their unique perspectives on their worlds.

We received over 300 poems for this year's Festival from students in grades 6 through 12. Our judges have selected these distinguished poems from the chorus of young voices expressing their spirits and vitality through poetry. While we were unable to assemble for an in-person Festival Reading this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the winning poets gathered for a live, virtual celebration that was subsequently streamed.



## 2021 Poetry Award Winners

Parker Alexander	<b>Splatter Paint</b>	1
Atrayu Lee	<b>My Imagination</b>	2
Jackson Sade	<b>The Poor Unfinished Poem</b>	3
Naomi Borek	<b>A Light in the Dark</b>	4
Amika Bibolov	<b>Thought, Not Paper</b>	5
Naquan Shepherd	<b>Staying Young Forever</b>	6
Stephanie Heggli-Nonay	<b>Letter to My Passing Youth</b>	7
DeMarco Randolph	<b>The Real Me</b>	8
Keaton Anderson	<b>Conflicted</b>	9
Anna Shesol	<b>Candles</b>	10
Riya Mehta	<b>What About the Children?</b>	11
Heaven White	<b>My Family is Like a Bookbag</b>	12
Laila Bapna	<b>Trains</b>	13
Mallika Mukherjee	<b>Orange Memory</b>	14
Ruthie Rhodes	<b>Origins</b>	15
Chetty Thomas	<b>I Am</b>	16
Ameen Bekere	<b>I am from</b>	17
Sloane Holder	<b>Blast Off</b>	18
Rahnell Jordan	<b>Hood</b>	20
Kevin Donalson	<b>True Colors</b>	21
Han Tran	<b>Untitled</b>	22
Mateo Ago	<b>Six Haikus for George Floyd</b>	23
Kadari Machen	<b>Reluctant to Love</b>	24
Lucas Whitworth	<b>Trump's Legacy</b>	25
Nina Prakash	<b>Grown-Up Shoes</b>	26
James Gnecco	<b>An Ode to the Shoes of Summer</b>	27
Alex Garrett	<b>Ode to My All Stars</b>	28
Leila Jackson	<b>Pink Sundress</b>	29
Noelle Tesfaye	<b>My parents told me</b>	30
Ani Sarukhan	<b>That One Dress</b>	31
Susan Lin	<b>Dawn</b>	32
Karla Rodriguez	<b>Treasure</b>	33
Ayorkor Laryea	<b>One Last Dance</b>	34
K. J. Harding	<b>The Lust of Love</b>	35
Jade Ferguson	<b>Icarus</b>	36
Callie Solomon	<b>On the Beach</b>	37
Brennan Kneller	<b>Too Afraid to Come Out</b>	38
Johanna Kempe	<b>Darkness is Easier</b>	39
Isabel Avidon	<b>Goddesses</b>	40
Yanna Contee-Jones	<b>In and Out</b>	42



## Splatter Paint

I am a canvas  
Splatter painted  
With blacks and reds  
Yellows, blues, and pinks  
Streaked across my surface  
By chance  
By luck

Sometimes  
When I am walking down the street  
Sitting with people I don't know  
They tell me  
That they're confused  
They see me as a mess of colors  
A pile of puzzle pieces  
They don't how to put together

Some people guess  
Mistaking the unique shades of my strokes  
For something that they've seen before  
Something that fits their limited perception of color  
Very few guess correctly

At these times  
I wonder  
What am I  
If nobody knows what I am?  
If I am a mashed up collection of colors  
Then am I anything at all?

But I brush these thoughts away  
Because who cares if people know what I am  
I know what I am

I am art

**PARKER ALEXANDER**, GRADE 12  
SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL

## My Imagination

Let there be heart shaped typhoons  
Take us to the sea and let our wandering minds  
Show us the woods — let our anger explode  
into the volcano to harvest our new imagination  
Let our fear bring us to a new direction  
Tell our story, but let the sun show us our future  
and heart's desires as rain drizzles a new path to guide us  
The atmosphere becomes clouds of gas and particles of dust  
Watch as our hearts melt and turn into flowers and  
A new creation joins in our imagination

**ATRAYU LEE, GRADE 7**  
CHARLES HART MIDDLE SCHOOL

## The Poor Unfinished Poem

angry, agitated, annoyed

His mother howled like a banshee  
But the boy still couldn't pay attention

He was distracted by the wily, white noise

cars passing  
machines humming  
clock ticking  
dogs barking

Wily, white noise begging him to sleep

angry, agitated, annoyed

It was just too hard  
Impossible, really

So he watched the patterns of light spread like a spider's silk  
web over the ceiling

The boy wanted his work to be done  
But did not want to do it

*One more sentence*, said the tired Mom  
But the boy closed his ears

angry, agitated, annoyed

The poor unfinished poem

**JACKSON SADE**, GRADE 8  
PARKMONT SCHOOL

## A Light in the Dark

Lights out,  
It's time for bed  
I pull my covers  
Just below my head

What's that?  
A creak?  
Who's there?  
Speak!

It's nothing — don't worry  
It's just the wind outside  
But just in case,  
I call the dog to my side

To calm myself down,  
I open my drawer  
It's where I keep  
My mini bookstore

Grab my book,  
Turn the flashlight on  
Open the book  
And I am gone

Transported  
To a far off land  
Just from  
The book in my hand

Greeted with  
Infinite possibility  
Heart racing  
Yet utter tranquility

I can't keep my eyes open  
Any longer  
But my fear?  
I was able to conquer

Shining on my face,  
A moon beam  
While about the world I read,  
I dream

**NAOMI BOREK**, GRADE 8  
GEORGETOWN DAY SCHOOL

## Thought, Not Paper

Poetry is not a piece of dead wood  
with black ink put in patterns imprinted on the surface.  
It is not a contest to see who is sappier, more passionate,  
has more knowledge of difficult words,  
not a gray metal table, organized, industrial, empty.

It is a cry,  
For home,  
For strange adventures.  
Not yours,  
Not ours.  
Mine.

Poetry is a thought with evidence,  
A memory to look back on, to reflect.  
If it has bad word stuff,  
Regardless whether that which encompasses decorous  
denominations of grapheme,  
Or simply a

Word

Poetry is the thought,  
Not the paper.

**AMIKA BIBOLOV**, GRADE 6  
SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL

## Staying Young Forever

It's because you are old —  
You don't understand the way we dance.

But we are young  
like a volcanic eruption,  
fresh and durable

Our imagination is endless and apart;  
The touch of youth is like a magnetic moment

Our fashion is unbelievable and wordless  
The music isn't the language,  
It's the beat.

**NAQUAN SHEPHERD**, GRADE 7  
CHARLES HART MIDDLE SCHOOL

## Letter to My Passing Youth

The ruby-throated hummingbird  
that waves its tender wings  
and sporadically hovers  
above the white petunia  
to suck its nectar  
shall return.

The chestnut rabbit that digs  
a home for itself in your yard  
and conspires to feast  
on your harvest  
under the night's jewel  
shall return.

The evergreen moss  
that climbs your brick wall,  
weaving through the cracks  
and grasping for light  
it will never reach,  
shall return.

But soon the burnished gold of your hair,  
which shines in vain under the sun,  
will be a summit trapped under snow.

And the poinsettia hue that ignites  
your complexion will wither,  
your cheeks fossilizing.

Disenchant yourself!  
For time always triumphs  
with hearty contempt.

Your gentle neck,  
once a shining glass,  
will become, like you,  
earth, smoke, dust.

**STEPHANIE HEGGLI-NONAY**, GRADE 12  
SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL

## The Real Me

I am made of fear and darkness.  
I open my eyes to dark woods and three houses.  
When the shadows fall, that means it's time to eat.  
You might find me messing with three nice friends.  
I dream in shadows of my prey;  
My heart jumps when I'm close to eating them.  
My biggest fear is dying of starvation, and  
I have no friends at all.  
I feel like I can do anything when I devour them.  
There is nothing quite like the smell of three animals.  
It's time to rest in the dark times.

**DEMARCO RANDOLPH**, GRADE 11  
BALLOU SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

## Conflicted

Built

Built on a foundation that was stolen and returned

Confused on where to go, the family mourned

Crane; Towering over the plot of land

Crying, as they see their home gone

From small apartment to empty lawn

Frame, A picture frame found on the ground

Conflicted as we look over the Long Island Sound

Car, A car rolls up all black waiting

The man walks out with the plans waiting

The city looks towards the north to see what he's creating

6 months

9 months

12 months

A year has passed

An area brand new

New homes and people

But at what cost

But the cost of the normalcy of the oppressed

Created to give up their life, for the improvement of the rest.

The man wakes up from his dream

The man starts the day

Holding onto the plans he knows will hurt

Holding onto the plans that will improve his worth

But at what cost.

Conflicted

**KEATON ANDERSON, GRADE 11**  
THE FIELD SCHOOL

## Candles

Birthdays pile up  
And time slips away

Each year the cake crowds  
With another candle  
Planted in the strong roots  
Of the honey-sweet dessert

I sit in the same chair  
I sing the same song  
But each year feels different  
A little older  
A little wiser  
A little changed

Each candle pulls  
And scrapes away another inch  
Of the familiarity  
That I hold so close  
That I rely on  
That I need

I hold my breath as I wish  
But the uninvited arms of fear  
Wrap around my mind  
That can't help but wonder

What will it be like this time next year?  
What will I be like?  
Will I still be me?

The flames dance in my eyes  
Flickering as if to promise  
That they'll stay  
That they'll be here for me

The warm light meets my cheeks  
As I lean in

I squeeze my eyes tightly  
Afraid that this all  
Could be blown out  
With a mere breath

**ANNA SHESOL**, GRADE 9  
GEORGETOWN DAY SCHOOL

## What About the Children?

They say children are the future,  
so why don't they act like it?

Say their names:

Tamir Rice

Michael Brown

Children in cages,  
separated from their parents.

Drinking brown colored water,  
filled with lead.

*Because of the color of their skin?*

Not safe to go to school:

Sandy Hook

Marjory Stoneman Douglas

*Because our country loves its guns more than its youth?*

Distance learning,  
but no internet in some homes  
no desks for others,  
no quiet place to learn.

Restaurants are open,  
but not schools

*Because our country values food over books?*

California is on fire.

The world keeps getting hotter.  
Smog and pollution everywhere.

*Because our country is ignoring Greta Thunberg?*

They say children are the future  
so why don't they act like it?

If children could vote:

No child would go hungry.

Children would live in homes and not cages.

All children would learn.

Black lives would matter.

School would be a safe place.

We would all breathe clean air.

We would all drink clean water.

*Children are the future;  
let's start acting like it!*

**RIYA MEHTA**, GRADE 6  
SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL

## My Family is Like a Bookbag

My grandma is the big pocket —  
holding the essentials everyone needs to stay alive

My brother is the small pocket you use a minimal amount,  
where you keep small treasures like toys or your phone

My dog is the side pocket that you don't use a lot,  
something you don't really pay attention to, but you love

My sis is the handle that you don't use —  
I don't really know her like that

My dad is that one pencil you can't find  
because he is never there

And I am the straps that hold up the bookbag —  
I've been through a lot, but I'm still holding on

**HEAVEN WHITE**, GRADE 6  
PARKMONT SCHOOL

## Trains

During the Partition  
People fled their homes  
On trains that left the platform  
But didn't always return

Littered with rubble  
Splattered with blood  
Filled with refugees  
Trains of loss, sorrow, and hope

My grandfather once rode those trains  
When he was only fourteen  
Just a year older than me  
Seeking safety

He arrived in a new land  
But not without scars  
Of all he had lost  
Family, money, his home

But with hope  
Faint but still there  
Like an ember from a fire  
About to spark again

**LAILA BAPNA**, GRADE 8  
GEORGETOWN DAY SCHOOL

## Orange Memory

I was three years old in this photograph  
My mother stood behind me  
Pressing my left shoulder with her thumb.  
The air was thick with saffron light  
And the smell of the coconut oil  
She used in her hair.

Our feet scrub the burnt-red bristles  
Of the tufted rug clinging to our shadows.  
My right hand lays – flat, palm-down,  
Brushing the tulusi-stained wood table  
That stands at half my height.  
My left grasps a stuffed puppy;  
Its draping ears graze my leg.

My dress is bruised-green  
Barely scraping my knees  
Its texture so similar to  
The carpet compressed below us.  
My curls – long-gone ringlets – are damp;  
They stick, cold and dark  
To my mother’s white-ruffled shirt.

Together we stand,  
Crushed in time,  
A memory of figures trapped  
In coconut oil and saffron.

**MALLIKA MUKHERJEE**, GRADE 8  
NATIONAL CATHEDRAL SCHOOL

## Origins

I come from goodbye  
From adoption papers  
And hospital bracelets

I come from love  
From pink baby clothing  
And a little pink tent

I come from happiness  
From paint splattered clothing  
And torn up jeans

I come from summer  
From dolphins and stopwatches  
And ribbons and heat

I come from life-long friends  
From having sleepovers that last three days  
And spending every minute of every day together

I come from goodbye  
From I've loved you for forever  
And goodbye, 'til I don't know when

**RUTHIE RHODES, GRADE 12**  
THE FIELD SCHOOL

## I Am

She is the love  
that travels through music  
that lives in her home  
that she spreads  
until she is stretched thin.  
She is the namesake  
of all the places she's found  
of the person she used to be  
of her great grandma.  
She is the worry  
of the hands clenched tight  
of the long term plans  
of her mind's hurry.  
She is the sound  
of her guitar  
of her family's laughter  
of the music she's written down.  
She is the tears  
of the clouds  
of her mistakes  
of her grandma's line going flat.  
I am the footsteps  
that follow my heart  
that travel through our woods  
that carry on the roots of my family.  
I am not perfect  
but I know not to be.  
I didn't know who I was  
but now I can finally see.

**CHETTY THOMAS**, GRADE 6  
SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL

## I am from

I am from the bobby pin that sits on top of the glassed white-  
framed mirror like the only pencil in a pencil pouch

From the terrible touch of the towel

I am from the couch that sits

From widening, tidying creativity

I am from the fresh and not hot or cold smell of the house

I am from my sister's blank white soft and rough blanket like a  
deer's fur

From all the cooking skills and fixing skills

I am from the calm and hype music that played in my head

From all the paint under my bed

I am from my mother's womb

I am from my mother's fried chicken and chicken stew

From the spiciness

From the fresh eggs with toasted bread on the side

I am from all the math and from all the Greek and Latin words in  
my head

I am from me trying to grasp everything I love

**AMEEN BEKERE**, GRADE 8  
PARKMONT SCHOOL

## Blast Off

### *Ten Nine Eight Seven*

Being black in America is unwelcoming, unjust, and annoying.  
Being part of a marginalized group in America is not easy or fun.  
It comes with annoyances that are always in the back of my mind.  
They simply are present, like a heartbeat that is always pumping,  
yet I am not always aware of its existence.

### *Six*

Being black in America is unwelcoming, unjust, and annoying.  
Being one of only a few black kids in my class.  
Reading a book that has the n-word in it  
and the whole class turns to look at you.  
When a teacher calls me by the other black girl's name  
and doesn't even realize their mistake.  
Always having to speak for the black race,  
yet I am only one black voice.  
The guilty feeling I have that if I don't speak up,  
other people may think I don't care.  
The pressure of working two times harder than everyone else  
knowing it may not pay off in the long run.

### *Five*

Being black in America is unwelcoming, unjust, and annoying.  
Not being safe in my own home.  
Being scared of a cop car as it passes by,  
knowing I did nothing wrong.  
Being afraid of walking my dog on my street,  
as if I am a criminal.  
Being sure to have my hands out of my pockets  
when I am in a store.  
Being followed in the local store as if I did something wrong  
just because I am black.

### *Four*

Being black in America is unwelcoming, unjust, and annoying.  
Always having to look presentable when out in public,  
because wearing sweatpants doesn't cut it.  
Having to always put my hair up or else  
it will be called unprofessional and improper.  
Always fighting for my right to own my own personal space

because people touch my hair without asking.  
Being stared at by white men and women when I go outside  
as if I am not even human.

*Three*

Being black in America is unwelcoming, unjust, and annoying.  
That feeling of always having to be quiet  
when it comes to talking about race.  
The feeling of not feeling loved by a world that has shown  
what it truly thinks and feels about me.  
That feeling that the world is out to get you.

*Two*

Being black in America is unwelcoming, unjust, and annoying.  
The frustration of seeing black people being killed on the news  
...over and over again.  
The frustration of seeing the police get away with murder,  
literally murder,  
as if our lives do not matter.

*One*

Being black in America is unwelcoming, unjust, and annoying.  
Being an outsider to the world.

*Blast off*

Heavy. Heaviness like bricks in my heart..  
This weight I carry on my shoulders  
is more than you can conceive.

Sometimes,

*maybe all the time,*

I want to be known as someone other than just the black girl.  
I want to be known as Sloane.  
I want to be, just be.

**SLOANE HOLDER**, GRADE 8  
GEORGETOWN DAY SCHOOL

## Hood

Dear Hood,

Under my hood is a melting lock  
waiting to let free a caged animal

Under my hood is a powerful mind with scars

My hood is dark black

My hood has a spiral window without a soul

Then my hood fades and I see a bright afternoon sky  
outside of the hood

I move forward out of darkness  
into light

I now regret being under that hood

At one point in time, I never knew  
outside of the hood existed  
but now I will say farewell  
to you,  
the hood.

**RAHNELL JORDAN**, GRADE 7  
CHARLES HART MIDDLE SCHOOL

## True Colors

### I. Red

America's rage and  
hatred  
dispenses a fiery red  
aura,  
while the warm blood  
of mine embraces the  
hard, cold pavement.  
A gory Pollock painting,  
it splatters everywhere,  
the rusty red exploding,  
all because of the greeting  
of a bullet,  
and the wrath of an officer,  
but did I resemble some monster,  
or a threat?

### II. White

The color of bags,  
that give faceless cowards  
a name.  
The tone of one's skin,  
who at first  
breath,  
is given a different type of  
privilege.  
Yet are we so different?

### III. Blue

Sorrow and sadness  
fills each citizen's face,  
while the news spews  
unrealistic and hateful ideas  
hallucinating viewers.  
Always  
over the little things:  
a knee,  
or having a voice,  
or the simplicity, yet  
blissful nature that is  
freedom.  
But in America,  
who is really free?

**KEVIN DONALSON**, GRADE 12  
GONZAGA COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL

## Untitled

Just because I'm Asian  
doesn't mean I have coronavirus  
My ethnicity is not a virus  
You told me to "Go back to China"  
But I'm not Chinese, I'm Vietnamese  
Not all Asians are Chinese  
We are Asians  
And Asians are good at math  
Asians can be successful  
We work hard  
Asian lives matter

**HAN TRAN**, GRADE 10  
E. L. HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL

## Six Haikus for George Floyd

The knee on his neck  
His repeated cries for help  
His life extinguished.

Ruled a homicide  
He just needed oxygen  
He didn't get any.

Police say the cause  
Of death was suffocation  
And possibly drugs.

The brutality  
By police is what killed him  
That was the true cause.

George Floyd, a rapper  
As well as security  
He was a student.

He was a big guy  
"He was a gentle giant,"  
Said his family.

**MATEO AGO**, GRADE 9  
PARKMONT SCHOOL

## Reluctant to Love

Who are we?  
Are we thugs, gangsters, outlaws?  
Or are we heroes...  
Always fighting for a country that doesn't love us back?

A country that has yet to face its history,  
A country that is destined to repeat its mistakes...  
If nothing changes.

We are commonly created,  
One country, one body, with many parts,  
When one part is in pain, the whole body suffers.

We are needed more than ever,  
In a nation, split by race and hatred.

Hatred for the other side,  
Believing that their opinions must be lies.  
Hatred for the opposition,  
Saying it must be wrong, if it's not my opinion.  
Hatred for opposing views,  
Claiming I can't agree, I must refuse.  
So quick to hate,  
But so reluctant to love.

Reluctant to love the black on my skin.  
Resistant to acknowledge the pain we've been through.  
What if we were quicker to listen and slower to judge?  
Maybe we could get a little closer to each other — and a lot  
better at love.

**KADARI MACHEN**, GRADE 11  
GONZAGA COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL

## Trump's Legacy

You stand behind your pedestal of fame  
Sewing discontent and anarchy  
Making duplicitous claims  
You say it was stolen, then you try to steal it.

Your legacy will be one of infamy  
On one side, remembered as a hero  
The other, as a liar who spread bigotry  
Most of us know which is the truth.

But you don't like the truth, do you?  
Because you sparked something with your lies.  
Your supporters call it a revolution  
But that's just a guise.

**LUCAS WHITWORTH, GRADE 11**  
PARKMONT SCHOOL

## Grown-Up Shoes

They run toward me with wide smiles and sparkling eyes  
carrying four of those black bulky pieces of leather.  
I back away, tail between my legs, with a small whimper.

I've seen Striker wear them-  
Snoopy and Fido too.

We four used to run wild in the fields together,  
chasing the uncatchable squirrels,  
playing tug-of-war with our leashes  
and keep away with our toys.

But ever since they put those shoes on their paws  
they spend their days grooming their fur,  
waiting patiently for their owners,  
acting like they don't smell the steak on the counter.

Is it my time to wear these shoes?  
To stop chewing up my bed?  
To walk with my head high on my leash?  
To guard the house with a newfound ferocious bark?

I could finally have a bigger bowl  
teach puppies the best places to bury bones,  
shake new stranger's hands,  
and maybe even roam the house without supervision.

Can I carry this weight on my feet?  
Where will these shoes take me?

But even if I can't fill these shoes,  
I know that my family will still tuck me into bed,  
still take me for walks,  
and still buy me ham treats for Christmas.

So I put on the shiny new shoes and take a few cautious steps,  
away from yesterday's chewed-up sandals.

**NINA PRAKASH**, GRADE 12  
SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL

## An Ode to the Shoes of Summer

Boots stained with mud,  
legs strained under the weight of heavy packs.  
Sounds of nature,  
the screaming of birds, a barking of a dog.  
The smell of sweat and look of exhaustion.

Running shoes pounding pavement,  
legs wear loose fitting jeans,  
Sounds of the city,  
The screaming of police sirens and a lockdown.  
The smell of fear and look of excitement and adventure.

Vans stained with blood and kitchen grease  
Legs draped in work jeans strain under the weights  
of a kitchen apron, a knife, and a notepad.  
Sounds of the Kitchen  
Screams of “Vamos, gringo” and  
“What’s wrong kid, never been burned before?”  
The smell of excitement and look of reward  
from receiving a full paycheck.

Bare feet, caked in mud, spotted with blisters,  
and cut open from broken glass.  
Legs water-colored in spotty brown from the river.  
Sounds of the roaring river.  
Screams of excitement from teenagers who dive from cliffs.  
The stench of the muddy river intermixed  
with sweat and adrenalin.

**JAMES GNECCO**, GRADE 12  
GONZAGA COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL

## Ode to My All Stars

I love my luxurious, gleaming LeBron sneakers.  
Their slate and crimson complexion blends  
more beautifully than a brilliant bonfire in the black night.  
They sit side by side dreaming in their closet,  
like a pair of eagles nestled high in a tree.  
Your reflection glistens  
like a mirror.  
I try not to stare,  
but your sleek texture attracts me.  
I first saw you,  
gazing at me in the Footlocker window,  
telling me that you were the one.  
You comforted my feet more than ever,  
no need to keep the tag,  
because you are my treasure.  
Tournaments, practices, through and through,  
what would I do without you?  
Screech!  
Your high pitched voice echoes against the court floor  
with traction grooves hugging my toes.  
Yet you have such a soft sole,  
softer than baby powder,  
or sand at the beach.  
You smell of fresh fabric,  
and launch me to heights I never imagined.  
You inspired me to be fearless,  
like the heart of a Lion.  
Do you remember when you helped me  
go to the basketball AAU finals?  
You were my rocket fuel,  
to energize me enough to make the game winning shot.  
Lift off.  
When we are done, I gently place you on my shelf  
Where you go to sleep like babies,  
with your laces untied,  
ready to be strapped back up  
for the next game.

**ALEX GARRETT**, GRADE 6  
SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL

## Pink Sundress

I didn't hear it at first.  
I was eleven, worn flip-flops  
and scarred knees, waiting on the bench outside  
for my mother to finish her hair. A car driving by—  
I heard the wheels and then the shouting, unintelligible at first  
and then I understood. They were loud, and I was so  
alone, eleven years old in my pink sundress with the big pockets  
and fifty cents extra change burning a hole in them,  
the shame of my own body burning two holes  
in my cheeks. The rain  
was suspended in the air, invisible droplets  
brushing up against my skin; it was only  
a matter of time.

**LEILA JACKSON**, GRADE 11  
GEORGETOWN DAY SCHOOL

## **My parents told me**

How to shine brighter than a star

How to be better than you are

How to be as strong as an elephant

How to be regal and elegant

How to be more powerful than a god

How to have stronger bonds than titanium

How to know if the pie calls your name

How to never be the same

How to be louder than a rocket launch

How to make sure you get a good brunch

How to say hello to Mr. Sun

How to know the fun is never done

**NOELLE TESFAYE**, GRADE 8  
PARKMONT SCHOOL

## That One Dress

A few years ago  
My grandmother bought me  
A nice  
Long  
Beach dress.  
With a thin  
Deep  
Blue  
Trim.  
A beautiful  
Dark shade  
Of blue.  
Like the night sky  
Or  
The deep  
Dark  
Ocean.  
It's white.  
The fabric.  
All white.  
With  
Tiny little palm trees  
Scattered all around,  
Like puzzle pieces  
Scattered  
Across the floor.  
It's a sort of  
Memory  
To me.  
A memory of my childhood.  
I used to love dresses.  
Every day  
I would love to wear one.  
Dance  
And spin  
And twirl  
With the soft  
Swaying  
Fabrics  
That flew around me  
When I spun.

But now  
Now I have grown  
And I have  
Outgrown  
My love  
For the dresses  
All  
Except  
For that one  
Dress.  
The one  
With  
The soft  
White  
Fabric  
And the deep  
Deep  
Blue  
Trim  
And small  
Little  
Palm trees  
Scattered around the dress  
The one dress  
I enjoy wearing  
The one dress  
Which I still hold on to  
The one dress  
Which I will never let go of  
And when i finally outgrow it,  
When it finally  
No longer  
Slips through my arms  
And settles at my waist  
I will still  
Hold on  
To the memories  
It carried  
And how much I loved  
That  
One  
Dress

**ANI SARUKHAN**, GRADE 6  
SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL

## Dawn

In dark night, a little, naive girl smiles  
Stepping on her motherland, bright eyes open  
She looks around, one new world compiles  
Strange yet enchanting feelings awaken

From riding horses in boundless prairie  
Wind whispering by her ears: free, roaring  
Watching sunset from snow mountain, over there  
By the sparkled, untamed river, singing

To traveling afar to the great Qin,  
Observing construction of the Great Wall  
Visiting prosperous Tang, which had been  
Golden age of culture before its fall

Lots have changed, but she still wants to keep on  
exploring, like before, by nearing dawn

**SUSAN LIN**, GRADE 10  
GEORGETOWN DAY SCHOOL

## Treasure

Communities work from morning sunlight to dawn, but what if **we**  
Worked together? Would labor be stress-free, would we **think**  
Of our neighbors as family? Life is about surviving, not having **as**  
Many materialistic things as possible. We are **human**  
We have dealt with failure, loss and betrayal. As **beings**  
Nothing lasts forever. And what about the things around us? Do **we**  
Treat them with value? Give them the appreciation they **deserve**  
I used to think trees and plants didn't feel **every**  
Time I pulled the leaves, when my hands rushed past every **last**  
Leaf. They can't speak and tell you, hey don't cut me. I'm not just a **thing**

**KARLA RODRIGUEZ**, GRADE 11  
PARKMONT SCHOOL

## One Last Dance

Two lovers  
Perform the swing,  
Twirling their cotton clothing,  
Adorned with matching ties  
Moderating the wind,  
Relevéd feet hover the ground,  
Rhythm reflects,  
As their toes keep tapping  
Over time, their bodies grow stiff  
Originating from their necks,  
Then migrating below  
Their speed decreases,  
The tempo slows  
As their final dance comes to a close

**AYORKOR LARYEA**, GRADE 10  
SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL

## The Lust of Love

The skies weep as spring comes  
Beating on the window drums  
The summer flowers bloom  
Pink, yellow, blue

The warm scent of perfume  
With the shadow that looms  
And ripening of the plums  
Watching as he succumbs

Summers are the longest days  
Wading into deathly craze  
Nothing left to do  
But wait 'til fall rolls through

It would be a lovely view  
If she were there with you  
But time passes, in honeyed daze  
Ignoring how he prays

The tears dry up with fall  
And there's nothing left to bawl  
Browning leaves  
Wilting trees

Goodbye summer's breeze  
Welcome winter's freeze  
On his face, a smile so small  
But his heart waits in thrall

Together in this room  
So much left to assume  
But now we have timeful sums  
And of this place, we're the only ones

**K. J. HARDING**, GRADE 11  
DC HOME SCHOOL

## Icarus

These wings  
My wings  
My freedom

I was given these wings to fly  
And by chance I could be free

Nevertheless if I fly too high  
I could die  
And find new freedom from this world

Feather after feather  
Wax turned fierce and trickled

To fall after soaring,  
The inescapable fate

If only I used my wings  
My freedom, to its true potential

I would be able to fly again  
No longer terrestrial

**JADE FERGUSON**, GRADE 12  
BENJAMIN BANNEKER ACADEMIC HIGH SCHOOL

## On the Beach

Every wave is someone born.  
And all the shells are something mourned.  
Each grain of sand is someone in need.  
While the shapely clouds are there to heed.  
The wind that blows is oppression.  
Which goes hand and hand with aggression.

Footprints made are stepping stones.  
As people's futures they condone.  
The sun shines down to make things clear.  
Permitting problems to disappear.

What does it mean when the waves subside?  
Carrying the souls of all who died.  
Making room for those new born.  
Never forgetting those we mourn.

**CALLIE SOLOMON**, GRADE 8  
GEORGETOWN DAY SCHOOL

## Too Afraid to Come Out

Fear hides in the shadows,  
too afraid to come out.  
Fear wears a sweatshirt and sweatpants.  
He thinks that wearing thick clothes makes him look bigger and  
feel less afraid.  
It doesn't.  
Fear is so afraid of doing something wrong,  
he never comes out of his shell.  
He thinks if he lives by himself with no friends, no family, he  
won't make any mistakes.  
He does.  
Fear lives in a cave: a deep, dark, daunting cave,  
Too afraid to step out into the unknown and unsafe world.  
Fear has given up hope.  
They separated a long time ago.  
Hope said they were better off by themselves.  
She left that day.  
The day courage turned into fear.  
Fear locked himself in a cage.  
Too afraid to come out.  
The bars were thick, cold and spaced close together.  
He put the key outside the cage.  
He stayed there for as long as anyone can remember.  
One day fear dreamt of being with hope.  
His one true love.  
He wanted her back.  
Her long blonde hair,  
her magic touch.  
He wanted to see her again.  
He wanted to give her a call.  
There was only one problem,  
he couldn't get out of the cage. He was too afraid.  
He had given up.  
He had lost all hope.  
Until one day, he reached for the key.

**BRENNAN KNELLER**, GRADE 6  
SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL

## Darkness is Easier

When the wind blows, it bites my cheeks, it stings and tosses me  
about.

But far worse, is when it stops.

And the aching silence is gray-misted with cold, acid dew.

When there is only me; the retreat in my mind, of weakness and  
imagination.

When all I can do is drown in everything that could have been,  
every sin that tears at my heart.

When the flowering song of life seems to slip away into the dark,  
clouded water, and I gasp for air.

How hard is it, to ask for help, how hard to admit...

I am scared.

When you feel the pull of dishonesty,

Would it not be infinitely easier to toss the chains of morality  
away?

And then I remember. The ones who submit to the pull...

are the ones who make my heart ache like it will never stop.

They tear away at tender emotions.

They break your humanity, until you slip into the darkness after  
them.

Sometimes I try to hide.

It finds you faster if you hide.

It smells fear, but it senses bravery.

When the time comes... I know I can't be ready.

But I can open my heart...

And I can sing.

**JOHANNA KEMPE**, GRADE 7  
WHITTLE SCHOOL AND STUDIOS

## Goddesses

Lurbira stretches luxuriously,  
All wide hips and broad thighs,  
All lined with  
Stretch marks like rivers.  
Wrinkles like canyons.  
Veins like spiderwebs.  
Symbols of her love for us, her children who walk upon the world.  
Why should she diminish herself when she has a whole planet to fill?

Innana's lips open, showing a gap between her  
two  
front  
teeth.  
She has no need to hide it, after all, why should she?  
She knows her power, she knows she is beautiful too.  
What do her teeth matter when all rejoice to see her smile?

Medb stands strong on her throne,  
head held high, eyes flashing fire and lightning.  
Her skin is scarred from an eternity of battles,  
And she is missing  
a hand.  
She forges herself a new one out of metal and magic and fights again,  
Stronger than before.  
Faster than before.  
Dazzling her armies, terrifying her foes.  
No one dares to call Medb weak.

Aphrodite rests on a couch draped with silks and shakes her head at  
Botticelli,  
Bouguereau,  
Giordano,  
and all the others too.  
Why did they not paint her truly?  
Why did they not paint the hair between her legs?  
Why did they not paint the mole on her shoulder?  
Why did they make her so thin, so delicate, so unlike  
herself?  
But then she shrugs and smiles.  
She loves herself, it is enough.  
She is  
enough.

A young woman stands looking into a dressing room mirror.  
She shakes her head—  
Not those pants. They make her look  
Fat.  
A child scrolls through Instagram, looking at  
Perfect, pearly smiles.  
Teeth white and flawless.  
They smile into their own camera and frown, then shove the phone away,  
and close their  
mouth.  
A high-school girl gasps as needle bites tender flesh, blood welling up.  
It had said on the website that this was  
safe.  
Would get rid of  
pimples.  
Gross, ugly pimples.  
But now she is bleeding.  
She looks at herself in the bathroom mirror and turns away in  
disgust.  
  
Lurbira weeps.  
Innana's smile crumples.  
Medb covers her face with her silver hand.  
Aphrodite sighs deeply and turns her face away.  
Why can't they all see that  
they  
are  
goddesses  
too?

**ISABEL AVIDON, GRADE 8**  
GEORGETOWN DAY SCHOOL

## In and Out

On the other side of now  
I will celebrate friendships  
The strength of bonds that couldn't be broken  
Even through the vicious outbreak of isolation  
I'll celebrate the bond that did break, the necessary cutting of ties  
And I'll buy new clothes that don't tear so easily  
Sew stronger ties, possibly repair a few ripped ones, too  
I'll stitch them together with my aching hands  
The adrenaline racing through my veins  
Just like I used to run, breathlessly, around on the playground

On the other side of now  
There will be the sweet aroma of a Chipotle bowl after school  
The sight of old friends on the bus  
The delicious taste of Papa John's for Tuesday lunch  
And hot oozing Domino's cheese on Thursdays

On the other side of now  
I'll have my 16th birthday party surrounded by friends and family  
The sound of a big celebration, happy voices, cheers  
Tight hugs and face-to-face interactions

On the other side of now  
I'll have several full Funko sets  
My figurines staring at me from the corner of the room  
Reminding me of my diversified taste in TV shows

On the other side of now  
I can share a warm welcome with everyone I pass  
as the day goes by  
Smile with the baristas at Starbucks,  
The bus drivers,  
My neighbors,

On the other side of now...  
I'll be myself again

**YANNA CONTEE-JONES, GRADE 9**  
PARKMONT SCHOOL

**The Parkmont Poetry Festival extends sincere thanks to our 2021 Festival judges:**

**SUSAN SCHEID** has been writing poetry since the days when her father read her poems at bedtime. Her book, *After Enchantment*, was inspired by fairy tale characters she loved in her youth. Her poetry has appeared in *About Place Journal*, *Truth to Power*, *Beltway Quarterly*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *The Sligo Journal*, *Silver Birch Press*, *Tidal Basin Review*, and other journals. Her work is also included in the chapbook anthology, *Poetic Art* and the anthology, *Enchantment of the Ordinary*. Susan serves on the Board of Directors for Split This Rock.

**CHELSEA IORLANO** is a poet, youth worker, gardener, and intuitive. Chelsea's people are from Mexico, Italy, and Ireland, and her roots grow in Southern California and North Jersey. Currently, she is a member of the RiverShe Collective and part of the brave team of staff at Split This Rock, where she supports area young people through high quality youth poetry programming. She believes in the power of poetry to express and celebrate difference and build power to transform individuals and communities. Chelsea lives in DC with her partner and their many plants

**MARITZA RIVERA** is a Puerto Rican poet and Army Veteran who fell in love with reading and writing poetry at a very young age and has been writing for over 50 years. Her work appears in literary publications, online journals, video and audio recordings and is featured in the public arts project, Meet Me at the Triangle, in Wheaton, MD. She has lived and performed her work in Rockville, MD, Tucson, AZ, New York City and San Juan, Puerto Rico and has dedicated many years to building a poetry community in the DMV area and beyond, to include Bahia, Brazil and Erice, Sicily.

**...and also to our 2021 Festival emcee:**

**SHARAN STRANGE's** works include an essay on poetics in *Furious Flower: Seeding the Future of African American Poetry*, and the libretto for an opera by composer Courtney Bryan, commissioned by the International Contemporary Ensemble. In June 2018, she received a Georgia Author of the Year Award from the Georgia Writers' Association.

## Many thanks to our generous donors!

### Poetry Festival Donors to Date 2020-21

#### Epic Poem Donors

Ron McClain  
Jacqui Michel and  
David Weisman  
Anne and Fred Woodworth

#### Villanelle Donors

Cynipid Fund  
Judy Lentz

#### Sonnet Donors

Debbie DuSault  
Shannon Burkart Morris  
Peter and Beatrice van Roijen

#### Haiku Donors

Harriet Patsy Davis  
Joseph Ferber  
Susan Vitale and Henry Levin  
Tom and Linda Yoder  
Mike Weaver

#### Friends of the Poetry Festival

Rosemary Dickerson  
Jennifer Hamilton  
Cassandra Hetherington  
Lisa Landmeier and Hugo Roell  
Joseph Ross  
Susan Willens

## Acknowledgments

### Sincere thanks for the hard work and dedication of our Poetry Advisory Committee

Jean Gurman  
Cille Kennedy  
Anne Harding Woodworth  
Judy Lentz  
Jacqui Michel

### We are grateful to our 2021 design team:

Booklet layout and printing: AURAS Design  
Tee-shirt design: Alice Lewis  
Tee-shirts printing: abc tees.

### An additional debt of thanks

to Ron McClain, Head of Parkmont School and Founder of the Parkmont Poetry Festival; Judy Lentz, Coordinator of the Festival for 25 years and tireless supporter; and Sharan Strange, Festival emcee.

### Finally we wish to thank our 2021 Parkmont School Board of Trustees

Joe Ferber, *President*  
Tom Yoder, *Secretary*  
Walter Ailes, *Treasurer*  
Deborah DuSault  
Cassandra Hetherington  
Cille Kennedy  
Judy Lentz  
Ron McClain, *Head of School*  
Richard Roth  
Mike Weaver  
David Weisman

# ParkmontSchool



**PARKMONT** is a small private school serving middle school students in grades 6-8 and upper school students in grades 9-12. An educational community that fosters individual growth and enthusiasm for learning, Parkmont believes that there is nothing more basic to the development of a person than a positive sense of self-esteem. This respect for the creative energies and contributions of young people is the driving force behind the Poetry Festival and many other school activities. Parkmont's Internship program puts students in offices, shops and organizations around the city to learn practical work skills. At school, students participate in all-school meetings that focus on ethical and practical problems confronting their community and engage in a vibrant, hands-on curriculum. Parkmont helps students to discover their talents and values. The Poetry Festival encourages students to give voice to their dreams and concerns.

If you would like to show your support for the Parkmont Poetry Festival by making a tax-deductible contribution in any amount, please send a check payable to Parkmont School to this address:

**PARKMONT SCHOOL**

*4842 16th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20011  
202.726.0740*

parkmont  
**poetry**  
festival

