

# The Winners Are...

*Three poems*

**Dennis Wilson, John Cubeta Zibluk,  
and Gabriella Brand**

*We are pleased to print here the winning poems from the 2011 New Haven Free Public Library Poetry Contest. Dennis Wilson, John Cubeta Zibluk, and Gabriella Brand won in the adult, youth, and elder categories, respectively.*

*—The Editors*

### **Searching, on a Winter's Day, for the Promise**

In Edgewood Park we find secrets worn thin by the wild gossip of  
Winter: layers of snow beneath the snow,  
Yellow perch under a frozen pond, the sunken moon behind a mist  
Of mica. Okay. From here we ply the frosted sidewalks to

Whalley and Winthrop: this corner Jamaican us crazy with its heat-welted  
Lean! Rastafarian philosophers and rabbis, an open-air barbecue in 30  
Degree weather with goat curried soup sugared breadfruit and Red  
Stripe in paper bags. Unfinished, freezing, we catch the B bus to

Chapel St. to warm ourselves inside Van Gogh's Night Café: cadmium  
Yellow hedged against the peak of stupor, gaslight curved  
Through the pant of prowling drunks. *Hey*, the guard warns us:  
*Don't get too close to that painting.* So we trudge down to the

Jungle to receive the joyful shoveling-out of nations: Ecuadorian Spanglish  
Speaking a streak of orange across the backs of our necks, reggaeton  
Blowing ragged through our hair, Haitian French winding like fingers  
Between our gloved fingers. Laughing, alive, we are hungry:  
Wooster Square? Fair Haven? Wherever the old country  
Rides its sweaty spices into the new, be that old country Italy or Nigeria,  
Turkey or Thailand or Tennessee. Full, but never satiated,  
We have the whole silver evening to walk from anywhere to

Anywhere: Saint Raphe's hard healings, the Trey, the Ville, Phelps gate,  
From rock to rock and sound to river. Toward midnight, we will arrive  
at this reckless conclusion: if the promise of a place comes down to bridged  
distances, let's just keep moving. With spring merely a breath away,

Let's always keep searching.

—Dennis Wilson

### **For Daniel, my Friend**

(written for a Tutsi survivor orphaned by the  
genocide in Rwanda)

Where is the Garden of Eden?  
Where are the Gates of War?  
All the times we looked away  
While you suffered more.  
My life is considered beautiful.  
I cringe at the thought of death.  
But mother earth's eyes grow grey and dull,  
and she shudders with each breath  
at the horror of pain and suffering,  
the evil of greed and wealth,  
the sounds of nations bickering  
and trust's decaying health.  
Our promise is forgotten;  
to help all those in need.  
While you know only pain and fear  
and see your loved ones bleed.  
The hatred, carnage and burning  
must stop so wounds may heal.  
From the devil we must turn  
and to light must kneel.  
Oh! Where is the Garden of Eden?  
Where are the Gates of War?  
Why do we still turn away?  
While you suffer more and more?

—John Cubeta Zibluk

## This Haven

Back when the river was lush with oyster,  
long before the *Hector* rounded the point,  
the first tribes understood the sanctity of promise.

Through season and tide, through harvest and flood,  
who knows how many oaths have been sworn or shattered  
between the red rocks of this land?

Think of the Sachem giving his nod,  
scratching his mark on the line next to Eaton's,  
expecting that strangers would honor their word.

Think of a colony anchored at the Meeting House,  
planting its hopes on nine new squares,  
trusting that the Maker would always provide.

Here, to this haven, dredged deep by courage,  
came scholar and merchant, mutineer and protector.  
Here, to this sanctuary, carved rich by immigrant,  
came artisan and craftsman, inventor and muse.

In time, the fame of the village rippled beyond harbor.  
In time, a city grew, mosaic-shaped and celebrated.

Who knows, tomorrow, what promises will be seeded  
in this still new shelter  
where each generation's covenant lies entwined with the next,  
broken and frayed, perfected and whole?

—Gabriella Brand

