

Oct 8, 2021

Aloha Honolulu Rotarians,

Thank you for the privilege to visit your October meeting and share some poems and hear your poems and memories too. I think it is powerful when we can do these kinds of things together--strengthening our connections and opening our hearts. It was an honor to share with you, and very moving to hear our voices together.

Someone asked about reading the poems again, so please find some of them below. The last one I shared and that we did together is still in progress, so I didn't include it.

If any of you are interested in another poetry session or just want to chat, feel free to get in touch with me at ayamashiro@hihumanities.org.

Take care,

Aiko

Women Who Are Poems Shouldn't Fail Literature Class

By Aiko Yamashiro

Do you remember when you were 18
and you had come to talk to me
about failing Biology
about failing Economics?
You felt like a failure.
School had promised you
a new, shiny future.
Instead, you found yourself
inspected and dissected
by teachers and scantrons.

You told me:
I wanted to help my mother: B-
She's struggling: maybe a C+
So I majored in business: F
We were homeless for 3 months before, and I
never want to go back to that: D/D-

I remember all the doors and windows wide
open.
I remember seeing every empty room in you,
in that drafty light.
And I heard your voice echo in that lonely
house.
Most of all, I remember how shitty it felt
to see you hold on to that story, like a good
girl,
as if it were the only story you had.

Do you remember our literature class?
How you were worried you weren't good
enough,
pretty enough, smart enough, to write a
poem?

You wrote one anyway.
And memorized it.

About brave love bleeding,
about an ocean of feeling,
about speaking.
And on that last day of class,
when you stood in front of all of us
I remember how you rose like the wind
storming through our houses.
Loud enough to make us stop.
And listen.

And breathe
the salt air, your dark hair,
The story you are, the one
we could never write.

--

This poem is dedicated to a student who taught me a lot about what it means to be strong and to love through obstacles. Her story reminds me how small and unsafe many of our students feel within our current educational system, and inspires me to think about how to create "genuine security" in these fragile spaces.

AIKO YAMASHIRO was raised in Kāneʻohe and is co-editor of The Value of Hawai'i 2: Ancestral Roots, Oceanic Visions.

Children's stories

Lāna'i -- Sept 2018. Moon getting full.

At the papa ku'i 'ai

Children chatter

Kuku'i leaves flutter in wind and light

In the clearing

Old trees wait for visitors

To practice singing

In the kitchen

Nasturtium, mizuna, basil

We cook the plants we grew

In the mother

There is a treehouse

And bright hibiscus thoughts

In the bed

There is a boy in a black malo

Who feels safe

In the garden

Anthuriums

Guard a chicken palace

At the birthday party

There is time for every child

To say "pōhaku"

In the father

Is another father

In the airplane

Is a coconut tree

For you

The sun sets gently

At the horizon

Of your forehead

Red Lāna'i dirt

You sleep

In the height of your ancestors

Close to rushing stars

The forest moves

I say sorry to my baby
For doing everything wrong
Cory says wrong is just an idea
We believe in
We go and come back
Full of homes and children's stories
And chances to flicker
And chances to hold
The grace to overflow
And love how life changes us

Aug 19th, 2019

We are all dying
Without knowing
When we know
What a chance
To be tender
I want to give up
I want to go home
I know, I replied.
You told me already.
I mean I want to go home
In the generic sense.
I want to feel safe.
I want to feel secure.
The feeling of home.
Of family.
Not a fortress.
Not a hospital.
We are all 1.8 cm
From dying
Without knowing
When we know
What a chance
To be understanding
I ran away from him
And he disowned me!
Amy says
Are you and your dad similar?
Dr. Koo asks.
Grandpa wanted me to be a lawyer
Because I always argued back
Just like Amy
I laugh
Yes
Amy is strong yeah?
Like you, he replies.
You are strong.
You are doing a good job too,
Aiko
I had a panic attack,
And I heard your voice:
Breathe.
Breathe.

How do I calm down?
Focus on our touch,
Amy says.
Dad as a boy
Our turn to be ancestors
Carry him home
When you're here
I feel more confident.
Help me find a safe space.
You're a good dad, we reply.