

# 90 is the new

**Poems**

**Vilma Olsvary Ginzberg**



**McCaa Books • Santa Rosa**



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**For R-P,  
who eschews hyperbole  
but loves these poems**

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## **pregnancy**

it waits there  
this unborn poem  
its eyes unformed  
its own flame as yet unsparked  
its hands mere buds  
unable to yet hold its thought  
its shape not of itself's becoming

I cradle it  
with my enveloping darkness  
protect it  
from the blinding light  
of even my own  
inquiry

it will come  
in its time  
I say to no one  
but itself

and if not  
I already know  
how to mourn  
the unborn  
with a respectful silence  
and gratitude  
all too familiar

nature

## **for all things there is a season**

Hold off, my August-blooming children!  
May is not your time.  
What will be left for you to do  
in what should be your prime?

Patience be your marching step,  
trust your holding rein.  
When the summer sun invites,  
you will bloom again.

Keep your blossoms hid for now.  
Wait to sing your song.  
Life is short, the seasons set.  
It will all move along.

Stretch your passion, make it last  
for yet another while;  
Waiting for the rip'ning blush  
will grant us all a smile.

Be not rash to rush the clock.  
Stroll the weeks away.  
Breathe the scents, bathe in the breeze.  
Nothing's here to stay.

## **Eclipse 2017**

we watch this cosmic pair  
in their rare dance

great fiery mass  
father of all life  
ruling all in its orbit  
defining day and night  
on this blue ball of rock and sea  
we call home

and this weaker orb of measured visit  
mirror of the great sun's light  
whose feeble glow bounces off his radiance  
while waxing and waning her monthly way  
in and out of our night-dreams

on this 21st day of this august month  
marching her fullness out  
in broad daylight  
she becomes the dark presence  
who blocks his power  
who shrinks his fire to a mere perimeter  
daring the arrogant  
to dismiss her

anomaly of nature  
womb of superstition  
specter of fear to our uninformed forebears  
this mid-day darkness  
this dance of light and dark  
swaths its way across the continent  
bringing together  
the naïve and the knowledgeable  
the innocent and the instructed  
all one in solemn awe  
on this uncertainly spinning globe



# the fires

Santa Rosa CA, October 2017

Vilma's reading of these five fire poems was used in a PBS documentary made by KRCB-TV for an anniversary retrospective on the 2017 fires, aired on October 8, 2018.

## **firestorm**

east wind bodes ill  
turning fierce  
whipping any loose thing  
into weapon

the afternoon sky grows dark

awakened at 3 a.m. into blackened room  
power out  
the only light the sky  
glowering red  
above the rooftops

floating flashlights appear  
dance briefly  
then leave  
questions in their wake

east wind brings trouble  
fierce reckless fiery trouble  
fast furious unstoppable trouble  
wind and fire  
flowing like lava  
over the hills into the valleys  
through the innocent sleeping neighborhoods  
undiscerning unpredictable  
flaming monster devouring the landscape

## **refugees**

For Puerto Rico, Mexico City, Houston, Florida, Northern California,  
Africa, and all refugees everywhere

ripped from daily habit  
torn from the arms of familiar  
stripped of everything but the nakedness of now

we are refugees

disaster triggers adrenalin  
adrenalin triggers response  
we respond with amazing acuity  
energy sufficient  
generosity beyond resource  
resourcefulness beyond supply  
always, creativity  
    peppered with wit

we are refugees

our common circumstance makes us tribal  
    intimate  
    gentle or ferocious, as needed  
old barriers vanish  
private shadows disappear  
    in the light of need  
we make do  
    accept gifts  
    celebrate the thinnest of choice  
discover talent  
    ours and others'  
inconvenience melts away under gratitude

we are refugees

discovering our real home  
    in the broken mending heart  
    of community

## **waiting it out**

morning

white banana moon

smiles at

still leaves

silent birds hide

is it respite

or

warning

## after-fire language

are you ok? is the question

the lucky ones tell tales of inconvenience  
even adventure

but sometimes the answer is simply  
I'm still here or we're still here  
and we know the unspeakable has happened

it's in the voice  
and the slight bend of neck  
a certain emptiness of eye  
the paucity of words  
those who lost everything have lost their tongue  
as have we

I'm sorry we stutter  
for your loss is what we think  
with some unspoken survivor guilt creeping in behind

and thank goodness we say in our helpless little tones  
weakly affirming the big gift so often taken for granted

what else is there to say  
that is neither Pollyanna nor intrusive  
we offer hugs to strangers as well as the beloved  
write bigger checks  
drop clothes into receiving bins  
wonder what else we can do

fire: the great and fearsome leveler  
has once more made family of us all  
as we fall into the after-fire language  
of gratitude and grief  
that exhausting silent companion-pair  
of the new normal

## **the grief of ashes the ashes of grief**

For Kathryn Kubota

she comes here every day  
sits in her car  
before her the now razed lot  
she once for so many decades called home  
and cries

for the lost photo albums  
the jewelry marking special love occasions  
the marriage license  
the birth certificates  
the transfer deeds  
the saved greeting cards  
the grandchildren's drawings on the fridge and the china and  
the silver and the carved wood and the stainless steel and the  
linens and the silk ties and the cotton comforters and the  
leather belts and the shoes in the closets and under the beds  
and the jackets for all seasons and the books including the  
open one on her nightstand and the tools in the garage and in  
her kitchen drawers and the last embroideries of her grand-  
mother's arthritic knuckles  
and every time she remembers another lost thing

and she cries dry tears  
she is so empty anymore

no pierced and dented cup of hope  
can hold a single watery word of comfort

all is gone

all that is left is her grief  
held like a stone heart in the pit of her being  
ashen as the anonymous debris  
she once called home

I feel as if I have been erased  
she says

out there

## **hand on the Bible**

he puts his hand  
the one he bragged  
could grab any woman's crotch  
because he is  
a star

he puts that hand  
on the same Bible  
Lincoln's work-roughened hand  
graced

the same Bible  
Obama's generous palm  
gently laid on

he puts that vile hand  
on that sacred Bible

and I am coiled to my core  
by nausea



**Dear Charleston**, and Columbine, and Baton Rouge,  
and Sandy Hook, and Dallas, and Charlottesville, and  
..... the names are too many to remember .....

just a note to let you know  
I'm thinking of you

with apology

that I don't have arms enough  
to embrace your sorrow

tears enough for the ocean of sadness

love enough  
to fill the canyons  
left gaping in your world

fire enough to melt the avalanche of hatred  
waiting every day

words enough for

the

impossible

ineffable

outrage

## for Mike Tuggle

Poet, fellow laureate 2008/2009

Author of *The Singing Itself* and *Absolute Elsewhere*

and the days months years crawled by  
leaving an unexpected week  
on my wall

where were you all this time?

here is your name  
fading on my to-do list

I meant to call

suddenly you are gone

and the Cazadero redwoods whisper your name  
to the nighthawks  
and the weeping moon

and dim do I hear you  
strong-legged and Okie-drawled  
singing  
to the absolute elsewhere

## **April 15**

I emerge  
from the deep sea  
of churning numbers  
dripping sums  
and subtrahends  
gasping for a breath  
of digit-free air