

# **JOURNAL OF ORDINARY THOUGHT**

## **Now and Then**

### **Fall 2004**

Writing from youth and adults at West Englewood Branch Library.

Photography by Cecil McDonald.



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The *Journal of Ordinary Thought*  
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#### **MY LIFE NOW AND THEN**

**Lynda Shah**

Lately I haven't felt like writing.  
I haven't felt like much of anything.  
Sometimes I want to cry. Sometimes  
I want to laugh. What's that about?  
I don't know.

I am tired of this neighborhood.  
I am tired of the shooting every night -  
almost every night. I have  
no money to move, no money to save.  
I am crying now. I don't really want to  
cry. I am sad. My daughter hates this  
neighborhood. I was raised in this  
neighborhood. I am always telling her,  
remember where you came from.  
Give back to the community.  
What community?  
I work. What money do I have to show  
for it? I feel like the working poor.  
I guess I am.

I keep telling myself I am blessed.  
Some people don't have a place to live,  
running water, and food. When I think  
about those people, I feel a little okay,  
a little more motivated. Then I say,  
"Lord, what's all this for?"  
I want to live, but am I living?  
I want to enjoy life.

Hey, that's what I need to do.  
Where do I start? Where do I begin?  
Look in the mirror girl. Look in the  
mirror man. Is this the answer?  
I don't know.

## **WHEN I LOOK OUT MY WINDOW...**

**Marissa Purnell**

When I look out my window  
I see a gang of boys standing around a light blue car  
I think they are drug dealers  
Or that they are doing something they have no business doing  
As I turn my head to the right I see a big, brown building  
Sometimes there are kids playing or riding bikes  
The next-door neighbors are always on the porch  
Talking and laughing

## **THE FIRST THING I SEE WHEN I WAKE UP IS...**

**Brother Keith**

Darkness!  
I wake up in my room  
A three-bedroom house  
My girl and I  
Been there two years now

When I get out of bed  
I see darkness  
Then, some light  
Coming from the outside

Darkness doesn't feel good  
But the light feels great!  
Darkness is a burden  
A heavy cloak, almost  
But it's only mental

When the sunlight comes  
Through the shades  
I feel good  
Mentally and physically  
The sun feels good  
The heat  
The brightness  
Inspiring too  
I can't say enough  
About how it makes me feel

I know  
It's going to be a great day!

## **HARD BLOW**

**K Frances**

Has life ever dealt you a blow so hard  
that you longed to curl up in someone's  
arms and be a baby again?

## **WHAT'S INSIDE OF ME?**

**Johnice Epps**

Inside of me is my heart  
Inside of me is my spine  
Inside of me is my breath  
Inside of me is my mind  
What's inside of me?  
Inside of me is flesh  
Inside of me is blood  
Richer than the chocolate skin I am in

## **MIDNIGHT BLUE**

**Ugochi Nwaogwugwu**  
**(A Haiku for Bertha)**

painful memories  
stain DNA like coffee  
three days old in mug

**I KNOW WHERE LIFE'S COMING FROM**  
**Akbar Ali Muhammad**

I was born and raised in the slum on a crowded Chicago street.  
I had to run from a gun, it sure as hell wasn't fun.  
They say, "When you are Black, you ain't nothing, son."

But now the nightmares are gone and I got all my homework done.  
I am way past twenty-one and I know where life's coming from.  
Yes, I know here life's coming from, and I know what I am gonna do.  
Yes, I know where life's coming from and I know what I am gonna prove.  
Everything I got was the hard way.  
I had to fight for everything I own, but somehow it's made me strong.  
It gave me strength to carry on.

Um, umm.

I have seen many things.

Um, umm.

I have cried bitter tears.  
They say, "When you are Black, you ain't nothing, son."  
But now the nightmares are gone, and I got all of my homework done.  
I am way past twenty-one and I know where life's coming from.