



Possibilities

Writings from the
DuPage Writers Group

Volume 5, Spring 2010

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Foreword

Welcome to the fifth volume of *Possibilities*, an annual literary magazine published by the DuPage Writers Group. The DuPage Writers Group is a vibrant non-for-profit writing group which meets to nurture the potential of writers at all levels of experience. We are dedicated to encouraging the creative voice in each person, which brings out a positive spirit, producing edifying writing that enhances us all.

The group was formed in 2004 by writers who met while taking writing classes at the College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn, Illinois. Meetings are held at the Carol Stream Public Library, the Carol Stream Park District Annex Building, and in local cafes. We are thankful for the support of these organizations. This literary magazine is published to honor our members' work by sharing it with our communities. We do not welcome writing that contains gratuitous violence, violent language, or sexually explicit content.

In this issue, we honor the people who died in the earthquake that struck Haiti on January 12, 2010. One of our writers, Marise Fleurisca, was personally affected when she learned that her nephew Kevin was among the thousands killed in the quake. We've included her poem written for Kevin entitled "*Angel's Song*," and Carole Ellermeier's poem, "*Kevin Sent*".

We also include the following letter written by Father Tom Hagan, OSFS, the founder of "Hands Together", a key educational and development organization working in Haiti's largest and poorest slum,

Cite Soleil. The letter, entitled "I am humbled by these people," is a stirring personal account of the quake and its aftermath.

This year, we have received donations from some local businesses and individuals in the community to help defray the cost of printing the journals. We thank them for their generous contributions. Their names are listed in the journal on the Sponsors page, just prior to the Table of Contents.

Carol J. Neumann
Editor

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Father Tom views the cleared rubble from the residence

'I am humbled by these people'

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Editor's note: Fr. Tom Hagan, 68, a member of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, is founder of a nonprofit organization, "Hands Together" (handstogether.org), which began its work in 1985 when Hagan, then a chaplain at colleges in southeastern Pennsylvania, started taking students on visits to Haiti. Out of those visits grew a network of supporters and a respected relief organization. Hagan moved to Port-au-Prince in 1997 where he oversaw a program he had begun in Cité Soleil, that city's largest and most desperate slum. The

program is widely recognized as one of the most effective educational and health organizations in that area.

Tom Roberts, NCR's editor at large, contacted Hagan by e-mail and asked him about his experience during the quake and his assessment of the future of Haiti and the church in that country. His response arrived by e-mail Jan. 24. With minor editing, the e-mail follows.

Dear Tom:

Sorry my first response did not get through! My setup here is a laptop on the ground next to a very loud electric gas generator and with what seems to be a thousand young all wanting to use the computer. I will try again.

This past week has been terrifying. I have lived through all the violence in Cité Soleil over the past years: being shot at and having guns held to my head, seeing people close to me down here shot, but none can compare to the horror of the earthquake. Doug Campbell, who has been with me for over 20 years and serves as the executive director of Hands Together, had just arrived. We were to meet with the archbishop the next morning about the situation in Cité Soleil.

Doug and I were sitting down talking when the quake began. I tried to get under a table that was only a few feet away but the floor was moving in the opposite direction. I felt totally disoriented and fortunately one of the young Haitians ran back into the house and grabbed me and Doug. There was almost total darkness and I

could hear screaming but also singing, which seemed weird to me, but I was told that the people were praying.

I looked up at the rubble that was our house for volunteers, seminarians and street kids. I was bleeding from the head and there was a terrific pain in my back. Doug ran back into the rubble to try and begin to pull people out, but then we heard cries that the gas was leaking and that there would be an explosion. One of the street kids, Makenson, who was shot and is now blind and whom I found two years ago literally in the street, was crying out to me beneath all the rocks and debris but we could not get to him. [Makenson was eventually rescued.]

It was then that two ex-gang members from Cité Soleil ran up to me and carried me to Mother Teresa's nuns. When I entered their compound they were already treating the wounded and they bandaged me up and I hobbled back to my place.

Throughout the night we held vigil, and slowly we were able to get everyone out except two of the 21 seminarians who were living with me in the house. I remember vividly that night seeing people who were burned badly by the electric wires that had fallen everywhere. The next night we were all huddled outside when we would experience a very large aftershock.

It was very frightening. On the same night at about midnight we began to hear screaming and people were screaming that there was a tidal wave coming. We all started running, and for the next hour I, along with

thousands of people, were moving to higher ground. We did not know what to believe.

I am ashamed to say that I am still frightened, but now I am also experiencing a feeling of being overwhelmed. When I go through Cité Soleil now I see the eight schools that we built (schools that were totally free and the only free schools like that in the country with more than 9,000 kids). I walk past what was once our clinic that took care of 20,000 – again the only totally free clinic in the area. I see what once were the houses that we built for 150 people and the elderly projects for over 800. I look at the large kitchen area where people prepared hot meals each day for over 10,000 – and all of it is gone.

There is also the problem of the destroyed prison, from which over 4,500 men were freed. They all escaped, and there is a side of me that is happy that they did. Many of them should never have been there. I would visit the prison every week and there were as many as 600 in one holding cell and many of them had never even been in front of a judge.

Unfortunately, some are psychopaths, and all of them are now back in Cité Soleil.

I just came from offering four Masses. Each time I would finish, another crowd would come up and ask for Mass. This is a real comfort to me and more than ever I realize that I, we, can't survive if we do not simply put everything into God's hands. I've got to work hard to practice this.

Tom, you ask about the church. Well, the people here lost a very holy man [Archbishop Joseph Serge Miot] and a very good bishop, especially one who was supportive of me in Cité Soleil. He was a good friend, and I will miss him greatly. But the church will survive.

It is during a time like this that I find myself very proud of my church. Everywhere you go, you will see the church reaching out now and helping the people. The Missionaries of Charity (Mother Teresa's nuns) are just amazing. The people here have a great faith. When I go to Cité Soleil now, as I do every day, I see few tears. The people have an amazing resiliency. Maybe it is because they have few material possessions and apparently their happiness does not depend upon possessions. The sight of a sunset means more to them than their possessions. What makes me most proud of my church is that the message we give the people is that they have enormous worth in the eyes of God and that they are infinitely loved and that this terrible disaster is in no way a punishment from God.

I recently said this in a sermon and the people all stood up and began clapping and cheering. I had to ask the altar server why they were clapping (I thought that I had said some thing wrong because my Creole is not good) and he said, "Father, no one ever tells them that they have worth."

The Catholic church will survive, and I am sure of it.

But the longer I am here, the less I know. I really could not speak with much authority about what will happen with the government or even what would be the

best way to help the people. I also struggle a great deal even being here. I feel strongly that we can do a great deal of harm with the best intentions when we begin to be the benefactor.

Even with all this aid coming in, we must go slowly, and every step of the way we must include the Haitians in the decision-making.

During these very difficult days, I find myself really loving these people. These are the same people who endured the slave ships, a horrible system of slavery, and who would be the ones who would eventually defeat Napoleon. They would continue to suffer greatly but they have a strength that is remarkable. I am humbled by them and privileged to be with them.

Pray for me. Take care!
Tom Hagan, OSFS

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The DuPage Writers Group would like to thank the following businesses and individuals whose donations helped to fund the journal.

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We'd also like to thank the Carol Stream Public Library, the Carol Stream Park District, and the Bloomingdale Barnes and Noble for providing meeting space.

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Art Credits

Painting on the cover and on page i.	<i>Evangeline Alagaratnam</i>
Photograph, page v	<i>Hands Together</i>
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Photographs, pages 3-9	<i>Gregory Toreev</i>
Photographs, page 11 and 14	<i>Marise Fleurisca</i>
Signature, page 16	<i>Carole Ellermeier</i>
Photograph, page 30	<i>Beth Orchard</i>
Photograph, pages 32- 34	<i>Maxine Ledford</i>
Drawing, page 37	<i>Natalia G. Toreeva</i>
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Photograph, page 123	<i>Chad Ellermeier</i>
Photographs, pages 124 and 125	<i>Helen K. Toreev</i>
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Drawing, page 133	<i>Rose Calkins</i>
Photograph, page 134	<i>Rose Calkins</i>



Photograph by Gregory Toreev
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Writing Prompt Challenge – “Write What You See in the Picasso in Daley Plaza, Chicago.”

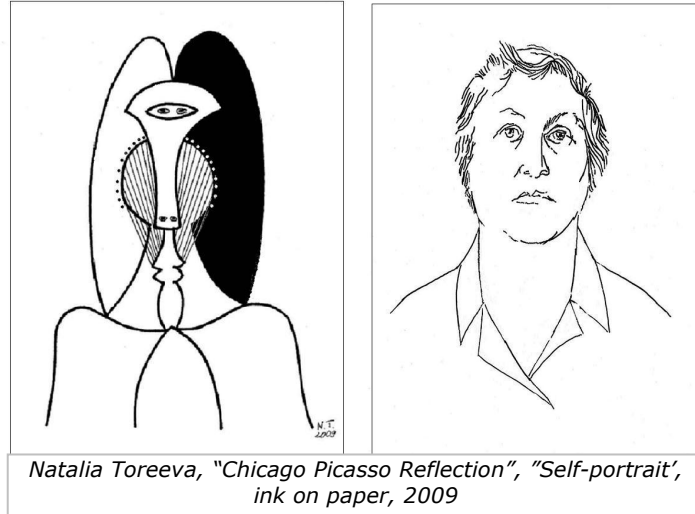
This challenge started when Natalia Toreeva submitted her poem “Art Connection” for the 2010 Possibilities Journal. The poem talked about what she saw in Chicago’s Daley Plaza Picasso. Carol Neumann, the editor of the journal, saw something entirely different in the Picasso and mentioned that to Natalia, who challenged Carol to write about what she saw. Natalia then suggested this would be a good prompt for one of our group meetings.

When doing a prompt, we limit ourselves to 7-10 minutes. Whatever we write (with minor edits to correct grammar) is what we submit. This demonstrates the creative writing process of the group that takes place in real time.

The group was asked “What do you see, who do you see? It is open to interpretation, whatever your mind’s eye captures, or if this captures your heart, a memory, or if a story develops, write that.”

The following are Natalia’s original submission and the prompts we received from the group.

Possibilities



Art Connection

I always remember
This statue, the Chicago Picasso -
The steel horse or woman's face,
I studied in Russia.

Now we're both here, in the heart of Chicago,
Two strangers together -
Face to face,
Two different worlds
Looking at each other.

I am so immensely grateful
For this titanic conversation -
Is it a metal woman's face in its abstract form,
Or just a human monster mask, made of a pile of iron
rust,
Making a mysterious tie in this modern art connection?

-Natalia G. Toreeva



A Mandrill Monkey?

Now, as I gaze skyward, I see the face of a mandrill monkey high in the air atop Picasso's steel sculpture in Chicago's Daley Plaza. But I didn't always see it. Years ago, I saw the long face of a horse where I now see the monkey's head. But, once the suggestion of the monkey entered my mind, the vision of the horse flew away, perhaps as far as Lake Michigan, and the monkey replaced him.

Perhaps it's because I recently saw a mandrill up close and personal at the Milwaukee Zoo. He stared into my eyes and seemed to smile when I talked to him. I didn't think about the Picasso at the time, but now that I see it again, the shape of the face is the same.

Who knows what else I might see in the future that will make the mandrill fly away too? Makes me wonder what Pablo Picasso saw.

-Carol J. Neumann



The Chicago Picasso

The abstract of modern art is in the eyes of the beholder. The Chicago Picasso, for example—a giant anteater with wings made of steel, hovering over the ice skaters below with questionable eyes on a brisk winter day.

-Paulette Winston

Picasso Writing Prompt

I see an upside down silver cup. The top part looks like wings. It's a magical angel that sits on the top to watch the passerbys. It is trying to disguise itself. It is wearing a mask so that others can't see its face because it is so bright. The middle of the angel is a harp because of its strings and plays heavenly music. The cup contains water that the angel every so often pours on people to fill them with love and renew their soul.

-Britney Pieta