





# I Believe Survivors of Sexual Violence

(Flyer created by Emily Chávez)

1.  
i am numb  
and my throat cannot  
dance the language  
  
of violence  
of disdain  
of silence  
of shit flung as truth
2.  
how can i wrap her body white linen  
doused myrrh and
3.  
lavender how can i swing blues her way  
a melody where we both prevail in rhyme  
like sweet
4.  
sunlight how can our skins march and resound  
rest on our grandma's porch while plats drink coconut oil
5.  
how can i search for new tears new face  
new fortitude new hesi new peace  
new prayers new peace  
when the "news" ushers in a militia of bullets that split me from me
6.  
somewhere the spirits rebirth magic  
and unseen fountains sprout from blackwoman  
body
7.  
is what "they" thirst to carve out  
our dark and glorious wells freedom/
8.  
is what they aim seek shatter break apart  
in their trek towards divinity a sip of heaven  
an awakening in our lullaby breath

**Ebony Noelle Golden**

**For June Jordan - in thanks for the reminder that  
'Wrong is not my name'**

I am the history of rape  
I am the history of unspeakable truths - spoken and disbelieved  
I am the history of unrapable women - raped and surviving

I am the history of a Justice whose blindfold never concealed the brownness of my skin

who always seemed to see that I could not afford a lawyer  
and never missed the fact I am lacking a dick  
and perhaps the ability to say anything that matters

I am the history of a body whose services pay for pampers and formula  
a body whose services kept roof overhead  
and the lights on at night and shoes on baby's feet

a body whose services you confused with permission to act on the perverse fantasies of your bigoted imagination and your will to re-call how it felt when your forefathers violated my foremothers ...as my forefathers picked the cotton for your t-shirt

the history of a body whose services still cost me far too much

I am the history of a changing account  
I am the history of an inconsistent story  
I am the history of insufficient evidence

insufficient evidence of my humanity

of my value - my right to exist and give my consent or not give it

I am the 'lying whore' you mark your respectability against  
I am the DNA-dripping slut who makes you a 'lady' by contrast

I am the history of thunderous testimony to my own worthlessness and insufficiency and tangle of pathology

What would it take for you to speak your true name:

in a courtroom:

on the street:

on national tv:

in front of your family:

What would it take for you to hear it?

## A Spelling Lesson

for this and every survivor

drop

is a four-letter word  
an instruction after catching fire  
a movement behind stop  
a command we must memorize  
and tell ourselves  
if we would be safe

drop

is what we do to the kids  
at school, at practice, at auntie's  
training for a next that will keep them (running)  
warning that they will not be at home anywhere  
treason required by our other jobs

drop

is what the dj plays  
what the hypeman says  
the entrance of the beat(ing)  
stretching our skin like a place to call  
drowning our knees like a new heartbeat

and today

drop

is what my stomach does  
is a frame for the rain  
is the shape of the blood  
that would seek to be the last word  
as if we weren't students as well

but we know how to spell

so when i see D-R-O-P  
dropped open in front of me  
like it was new(s)  
all i do is add you  
all of bright breaking you  
all of impossibly speaking  
light leaking  
you

and the next word is yours  
P-R-O-U-D

love always,  
alexis pauline gumbs

I am the canon of expert knowledge proclaiming my  
limitations and disabilities and mental deficiency and moral  
poverty

I am the science of mongrels and abominations

I am the history of a world that would rather forget I am  
someone's mother, someone's sister, someone's daughter,  
someone's beloved

I am the history of a world that would rather if I just shut up  
and stop being so angry all the time while they go about their  
business of keeping me in my place and bending the backs of  
my daughters and locking up my son - while they kill and rape  
and torture and silence people in every direction who  
coincidentally are brown just like me.

I am the history of your shackles and the future of my creation

I am a person of note

My eyes have borne witness to the history you will to oblivion  
and my body holds secrets I cannot forget

In my ears there are whispers of transformation and from my  
heart I'm unearthing my truths

I stand as a survivor among millions

...and we are remembering our names.

-Serena Sebring



The earth is still and always being created,  
and it asks only that we participate in her  
making, that we give her the best we have.  
Walk the earth like you  
belong with it, only with it, and in a fit of  
gratitude offer it your very  
best self, as you would to someone you  
love. e.e. cummings says,  
"Stand with your lover on the ending  
earth", which sounds like "stand  
with your lover—the ending earth."

And the Holy Qu'ran says, "Even on the  
eve of the end of the earth",  
"the eve of the end of the earth"— and the  
Holy, Holy Qu'ran says,  
"Even on the eve of the end of the earth,  
plant a tree."

-Kriti Sharma

## Directed by Desire:

### A June Jordan Reading List

**Where to find the poems that inspired  
this collection:**

Passion: New Poems 1977-1980  
(Beacon Press, 1980)  
"Poem About My Rights"

Some Changes  
(E.P. Dutton, 1967, 1971)  
"In Memoriam: Martin Luther King Jr."

**Where to find a model for how to make  
poetry in community:**

June Jordan's Poetry for the People: A  
Revolutionary Blueprint  
(Routledge, 1995)

The Voice of the Children  
(Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1970)

**Where to find illustrated radical  
words for ageless children:**

Dry Victories (Holt, Rhinehart and Winston—  
brilliantly written in Black English)

Fannie Lou Hamer (T.Y. Crowell, 1971)

**Where to get all the fighting words:**

Some of Us Did Not Die: Collected Essays  
(Basic Books, 2002)

**Where to get all the love poems to  
other women poets, the world and you:**

Directed by Desire: The Collected Poems of  
June Jordan (Copper Canyon Press, 2005)

## Walking the earth like we belong on it

In Song of Solomon, Toni Morrison writes:

"He found himself exhilarated by simply walking the earth. Walking it like he belonged on it; like his legs were stalks, tree trunks, a part of his body that extended down down down into the rock and soil, and were comfortable there on the earth and on the place where he walked."

He walked the earth like he belonged on it. He walked the earth like his legs were comfortable there.

This happens so near the end of the book. Why did it take him so long to feel comfortable on the earth? Is feeling like you belong on the earth something that you don't master until near the end of the book, when you hang on your last lines, close to death? Why would anyone spend their days walking the earth like they don't belong on it? Perhaps you can't walk the earth as if you belong on it until you can inhabit your body as if you belong in it

And isn't that what June Jordan meant in "Poem About My Rights", when she wrote

"Even tonight and I need to take a walk and clear my head about this poem about why I can't go out without changing my clothes my shoes my body posture my gender identity my age my status as a woman alone in the evening/ alone on the streets/ alone not being the point/ my point being that I can't do what I want to do with my own body because I am the wrong sex the wrong age the wrong skin and suppose it is not here in the city but down on the beach/ or far into the woods and I wanted to go there by myself thinking about God/ or thinking about children or thinking about the world/ all of it disclosed by the stars and the silence: I could not go and I could not think and I could not stay there alone as I need to be alone because I can't do what I want to do with my own body and who in the hell set things up like this and in France they say if the guy penetrates but does not ejaculate that he did not rape me and if after stabbing him if after scream if after begging the bastard and if after smashing a hammer to his head if even after that if he and his buddies fuck me after that then I consented and there was no rape because finally you understand finally they fucked me over because I was wrong I was wrong again to be me being where I was/ wrong

to be who I am

[but]

I am not wrong: Wrong is not my name

My name is my own my own my own."

Wrong is not my name. Am I the wrong age, the wrong sex? Do I inhabit the wrong skin? Is my body wrong? Wouldn't it be wonderful to walk the earth as if I belonged there, as if my body was not wrong but was instead deeply, unequivocally right, unquestionably free?

We can't walk the earth as if we belong on it until we can inhabit our bodies as if we belong in them.

But sometimes your body doesn't go on easy. Sometimes it feels like carrying a corpse, not in your arms but on your bones, like dead skin, dead hair, dead things entwined intimately with something living. Some days, it's your heart that feels like hair—limp and dead but braided into your living body, which is itself held together only by a fragile, breathing thread, hair thin. It's the deadness that comes over you when you stare down the barrel of a gun, or the length of a penis, or the edge of a knife, or the rubble after the bomb, or the corpse in the trees, or even up the long hollow column between you and the top of a skyscraper where someone sits playing dice with whether or not you'll be evicted, or get a paycheck, or have something to eat. Your body feels meager in that moment, awkward, inadequate, weak, wrong. Your body crumbles under the shame of seeing the thin cloth that covers civilization come off, and finding a naked order in which only might makes right.

It's the breathtaking, heartstopping violence of living in the time in which we live, the place in which we live, the way in which we live. Some say it's the violence of being alive at all—that it's the law of the jungle, the nature of things. I say nature is full of creatures with humble bodies saying through their struggle, "I am not wrong. Wrong is not my name. I belong here."

So even when you're sad, despairing, speechless, angry, violent, raging, if you walk the earth with your head high, and your body on easy and comfortable and natural like it's your favorite thing to wear, you'll find that the earth can support your anger, the earth can support your grief. The earth loves to feel your small but steady weight upon it. The earth is lonely when you become weightless—uneasy, unfeeling, inert, not yourself.

The earth loves to feel your small weight upon it, just like you love to feel your lover's weight upon your body. Lovers don't belong to each other. But they do belong together. So it is with the earth. Walk the earth like you belong on it, like you belong with it. Walk the earth like you belong with its every inch, like you belong over and under and in between the stifling, senseless, barbed-wired borders between the "nations", like you belong on the place where you fell newborn and naked onto the world, like you belong in your body in the place where you stand and when they declare war on you for inhabiting the "wrong" body and standing in the "wrong" place, say, like all the struggling, humble-bodied creatures who came before you, "I am not wrong. Wrong is not my name. I belong here."