

Departure

In the days when your departure
was eminent
but the outcome was still unknown

as machines pumped air
in and out of your lungs
and triggered your heart to beat

I whispered in your sedated ear
I urged you to acknowledge
an impending arrival.

The night before there had been the taking
of an unexpected test
and the surprise prospect of a new life

so I hoped this news
might delay your departure
might be something to fend off what was coming

but there was never an acknowledgement
never the happy spark in your eyes
of grandmother-hood all over again

and days later your departure
seemed a cruel trick
with this new life swelling toward arrival.

Window View

From here on the couch if
I look out the window
at just the right angle
I can see the crest of
Mar Vista hills lush and green.

I hadn't noticed this
view until she was born
and I nursed her alone
staring out into the
world instead of at the
baby suckling at my tender breast.

Out there on that hill the
palm trees pressed into the
blue sky swaying slightly
far above the garbage
trucks and horns, sirens and
voices calling out in
English, Spanish, or some other tongue.

I stared and felt so very
separate from it all
from the trees and voices
the motors and the wails
and even though this tiny
life had pulled me into
life's circle and connected me,
I still felt so separate from it all.

Hero

You are walking down the beach
holding a most beautiful child.
She is the one I notice first
staring at me and I stare at her
and you, her father
and I yearn for her story
but it hasn't been written
and is nothing compared to your story,
of how you lost your legs
if it was an IED
or a mine in a desert country
whose name and precise location
I don't know
and I wonder if you see yourself as fortunate
to be standing here on this beautiful shore
in sand
with stylish sneakers
at the end of your prosthetics
or do you miss
the feeling of sand
on your feet
as you walk down this stretch of beach
holding your beautiful daughter.
I hope you are happy
and that the feeling of sand between your toes
is something you still remember
with your phantom limbs.

Damage

Speeding along the freeway
I never used to imagine
the tragic results a collision
would have.

Speeding along the freeway
didn't bring images
of twisted metal
and severed limbs
and my children surviving
and living only with
the dim memory of
their mother

or the even more awful
scenario of surviving
the mangled mess
that the rear-facing car seat
and the front-facing toddler seat
couldn't protect my little ones
and I am left
with an empty void
where my children
once breathed.

What Were You Doing?

I remember watching *Eyes on the Prize*
with my mother in our living room and asking her
“Were you there, Mom? What were you doing?”
And Mom told me, “I was at home raising kids.
I was being a mom.”

It was the year 1968
the year my oldest brother was born
the year they killed Martin Luther King, Jr.
the year they killed Robert Kennedy.

Then it was 1970
the year my sister was born
the year they killed four students at Kent State.
the year they killed two more at Jackson State.

So by the time I was born
in the year 1974 it had been
a year since they killed 11-year-old Clifford Glover.
a year since they killed 12-year-old Santos Rodriguez.

But 2012
the year my oldest was born was
the year they killed Trayvon Martin.
the year they killed Rekia Boyd.

and 2015
the year my youngest was born was
the year after they killed Eric Garner and Tamir Rice
the year they killed Walter Scott and Freddie Gray

So in 2016
the year they kill Alton Sterling
the year they kill Philando Castille
I can no longer stay at home.

I march through the Los Angeles streets
because some day my children
will ask me what I was doing
and I can't just say, “I was at home raising kids.”

Some year when they ask
“Were you there, Mom?
What were you doing?”
I will tell them, “I was saying their names.
I was being a mom.”