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April 9, 2021

Dear Friends,

It is still National Poetry Month. ALL MONTH LONG!

[Toi Derricotte](#) is one of my favorite writers. Truly, she is a National Treasure. [You must read this.](#)

She started an organization in 1996 (Cave Canem) to lift up the voices of Black poets and it continues to support extraordinary writers whose voices must be heard. And Toi is also a true [mensch](#), a human being with a big heart and a bigger smile. I was honored to host her at Life is a Verb Camp several years ago as a speaker and she changed lives there. I know she changed mine. She also returned the next year as a Camper because she had so much fun there.

Toi is turning 80 on April 12th. [Come, join this virtual celebration of her](#) tomorrow (April 10) at 6pm ET. You will be uplifted.



And here, read this poem of hers aloud. Slowly. Let it wash over you. In a year of such loss, and in a year of such racism, let her words of loss hold you up, and then hold others up in recognition of what she uncovers for us here.

Elegy for my husband

Bruce Derricotte, June 22, 1928-June 21, 2011

What was there is no longer there:

Not the blood running its wires of flame through the whole length

Not the memories, the texts written in the language of the flat hills

No, not the memories, the porch swing and the father crying

The genteel and elegant aunt bleeding out on the highway

(Too black for the white ambulance to pick up)

Who had sent back lacquered plates from China

Who had given away her best ivory comb that one time she was angry

Not the muscles, the ones the white girls longed to touch

But must not (for your mother warned

You would be lynched in that all-white town

Where you grew up—the one, the only good black boy)

All that is gone

Not the muscles running, the baseball flying into your mitt

Not the hand that laid itself over my heart and saved me

Not the eyes that held the long gold tunnel I believed in

Not the restrained hand in love and in anger

Not the holding back

Not the taut holding

LINKS YOU MIGHT ENJOY

Damn. Elizabeth McCracken can write [a smart short story](#). She does it [again and again](#) for what I pretend is my own personal reading pleasure.

[BIPOC: what it means and how to use it.](#)
[How to spot depression in young children.](#)

[ALS is so cruel](#) and yet it engenders beautiful reckonings and recognitions.

Want to be calmer and less reactive? I have [made most of these changes](#). I love the silence.

UPCOMING CLASSES

I have so loved holding my small writing retreats several times a year for many years. I will soon announce a *virtual* weekend writing retreat for June 17-20. It will be intimate (for just 10 women) it will be challenging as well as inspiring, and it will be fun because that is one of my prerequisites for doing anything. I am very excited about this. You'll hear all the details in the next Orange Desk!

FREE THINGS!

FREE WRITING PROMPTS FOR 2021 - Do you want to get back to a consistent writing routine in the New Year? I am offering free writing prompts **every Monday-Friday** in 2021. If you'd like to receive them, you can do so in either of the following ways:

By text: Text "writing prompts" to me at 828-248-7513 to sign up for free. Your first prompt will arrive via text the day after you sign up (Monday - Friday).

By email: [Go here](#) to sign up for free. Your first prompt will arrive the day after you sign up (Monday - Friday). We added this method because some of you couldn't participate by text. I hope it is helpful!

I'll see you next Friday from my Orange Desk! Until then, even if you are vaccinated, double mask, wash your hands more than is practical, and social distance. Two friends are in the hospital with COVID as we speak.

Patti

Sent to: [_t.e.s.t_@example.com](#)

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