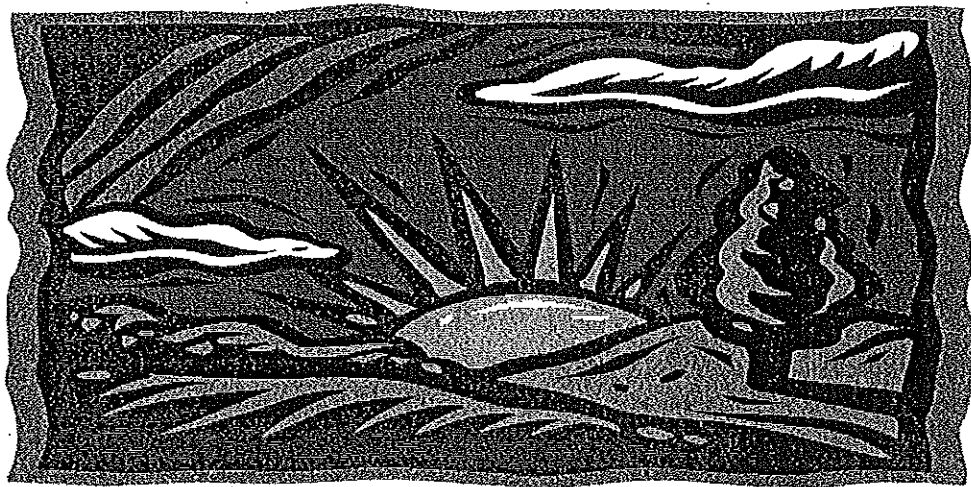


# *In A New Voice*



*Poems of John Bartram  
High School ESOL Students  
June 2002*

## *A Note to the Reader*

Get ready for a surprise. These poems aren't what you'd expect from mid-level ESOL students, many of them struggling with the most basic reading and writing skills. Quite a few came here from war-torn African countries where they spent more time fleeing from danger and living in refugee camps than in formal classrooms. Yet their energy, love, creativity, and drive to express the truth of who they are transcend all that to an amazing degree.

While I've published similar collections in previous years, most of those poems were by Advanced students who had been given more time to develop a sense of just what it is one does when one writes a poem. With this year's Intermediates I didn't squeeze in poetry till close to the end of the year -- but after a very few preparatory activities, and a fair amount of freely perusing poetry books, they caught the ball and ran with it. I showed them some models, pummeled them with reminders about concrete sensory imagery, helped some of them say what they wanted to express, and made technical corrections -- but all of the feelings and ideas you'll find here are their own. Two of the poets, Nassah Roberts and Gift Kaoma, were Beginners who caught the energy and wrote on their own without even having been in the class.

Playing with words is great fun, and can also help uncover the subtleties and possibilities of a language. Recalling a memory, even a painful one, and turning it into something beautiful is gratifying and motivating. Finding the right word to express a feeling without a knowledge of complicated grammar can be a revelation. But the real point of my story is that it's *easy* to create good poetry with kids at all levels if we just open a few simple doors for them. Their experience is vast and important; they really, really want to communicate it; and they're willing to learn how from pretty much anyone. They're ready. We just have to squeeze in the time.

Claudia Gellert Schulte  
John Bartram H.S., Philadelphia PA  
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## Can You Imagine What Happened During the War?

Can you imagine what is happening?  
I saw a beautiful flower  
where a snake was going into its nest.  
Can you imagine what is happening during the war?  
I saw a man with one hand. Can you imagine  
what is happening? I saw a woman putting her baby  
into the well. Can you imagine  
what is happening in the world?  
I saw two women who were fighting  
for a man's business.  
Can you imagine what is happening?  
I heard a baby crying in the forest.  
Can you imagine what's happening?  
What I heard was the sound of a rocket bomb  
on the ground. I tasted a dog, a cat and a snake;  
It was so nasty but what could I do? It was life  
to live on. I smelled a beautiful flower that  
smelled like a cake. I smelled fish,  
cassava leaves, rice.  
I felt a fire burning in my hand and a rocket bomb  
in my foot. I was tired from all that.  
I wanted to kill myself but my grandfather said,  
"My daughter, it is life to live on."  
Can you imagine what happened during the war?

Nahwloe Tarpeh  
Liberia

# On My Grandma's Farm

On my grandma's farm  
I saw her bring a bowl  
of rice from the platform  
where it dries.

She was carrying it on  
her head. She beat it  
in the mortar like magic seeds.

I went into my grandma's  
hut on the farm.

When I went it was like I was  
going into another world,  
a world without a name,  
but it was so beautiful,  
full of waterfalls and roses.

Wenwu Mulbah

Ghana

6/14/02

# **The Light of a Candle**

**In the Middle of the night  
There was a house near the rice field  
with the light of a candle  
and the sound of a girl crying  
like an insect suffering in the winter  
She always came to this house  
When she had any problem  
Because her new world made  
her happy, deeply dreaming and joyful**

**She was always struck by  
her stepfather and  
worked hard like a slave  
but there was a man  
Who would become my father  
Who rescued her from  
sadness and loneliness  
giving her a new life  
that got hard  
when I came along  
but was also happy and joyful**

**Chanda Roeung  
Cambodia**

# Quiet Girl

I am a quiet girl  
Do you know me?  
I don't talk too much  
but I can feel.

I thought a mountain  
was the highest thing in the world  
But when I think of it  
a tree is higher than a mountain  
because the tree grows on the  
top of the mountain.

I watched a big balloon lying in the  
sky with bright colors  
as it fell onto my face  
I held the balloon with my hand  
and flew like an angel  
for a short time  
Then I heard it pop in my ear  
I fell down through the quiet air  
So they call me Quiet Girl

Peomalika Tav  
Cambodia

# My Mother's Love

I remember  
when my mom  
told me to  
curl up on her back

Because I had had  
a scary dream about  
witches

I was behind her  
in her bed like  
a baby who was  
just born

The next day  
I brought flowers  
to thank her for  
the love she has  
for me

I love you  
so much,  
Mom!

Marlana Bah  
Guinea

6/14/02

## Your Love Sparkles

For Mr. Kurian on his wedding

Your love sparkles  
in your life like the stars.  
She makes your dream  
come true. Your dream is  
from another world.  
Her world is like a jungle  
filled with magnificent animals that run wild.  
The blue deep ocean  
always floats with magic  
deep inside her.  
Under the sea, that  
magic world is there for both of you.  
It sparkles with roses  
and beautiful waterfalls.  
It's like a heaven that always  
brings joy.

by Wenwu Mulbah  
Ghana



## My Neighborhood

It was one of the best neighborhoods  
In the city and one of the scariest.

The cemetery was located right  
behind the hood . It was  
surrounded by a little river,  
with big noises moving like  
A bullet shot by a hunter,  
it was full of beautiful girls  
with elegant faces, like the stars  
in the sky. My special time was  
listening to some memorable  
songs with my grandma.

My best friend was my dog,  
who played with me all day  
like fish in the river. I miss  
my neighborhood with the lovely  
people; the thing I miss most  
was the afternoon sky  
with beautiful colors,  
full of different kinds of birds.

Edward Sambo  
Sierra Leone

# School in Cambodia in 1998

I walk to a small room  
The light shiny to my eyes  
Inside my eyes are  
filled with many different colors  
When i close my eyes all the colors  
fall down one by one  
it's like a rain falling down from a sky

At 11:00 o'clock  
I smell something  
I thought they brought some  
food to a small class but  
when i looked out the window  
they weren't cooking food  
they were cooking a bunch  
of flower seeds that smelled  
like chicken to me.

I went to a garden flower  
One of the man cut the flower that i like  
killing all the butterflies that i love  
The air before was fresh and  
smelled like a perfume  
But when a garden of flowers is gone  
the air becomes dusty  
I was mad, my face red like a baby apple.

Peomalika Tav  
Cambodia

## My Village

There were many children  
in my village. Most of them  
were boys. I was the youngest  
among them.

We used to go in to the jungle  
Hunting for little birds. I was  
The youngest but I was the  
Bravest.

Our special time was to go  
In the river, and swim all day.  
But most of our parents were  
wild; if they found out, we  
would get punish<sup>ed</sup>, so we had  
to rub lotion after swimming  
and go to the soccer field so  
they would think we were  
practicing. I miss my village,  
especially the magnificent river,  
surrounded by beautiful little  
houses, in an elegant forest.

Edward Sambo  
Sierra Leone

# MY GRANDMOTHER

I remember the days  
When you were alive  
You had beautiful smile  
and beautiful eyes  
with white skin and  
black hair like a  
girl from China

I heard the sound in the  
Kitchen with knife cutting meat  
and the sound of boiling water  
like a waterfall from the mountains

When I came to the kitchen  
I saw you stirring fried foods  
with a beautiful smile  
coming from your mouth  
and I smelled the food coming from  
the bowl it smelled delicious  
like the flowers in  
the Spring smell of perfume

I felt full and sleepy because  
I ate three bowls of food

I know you're not in this world  
but I still keep your memories  
and your beautiful smile  
close to me all the time

I love you Grandma!

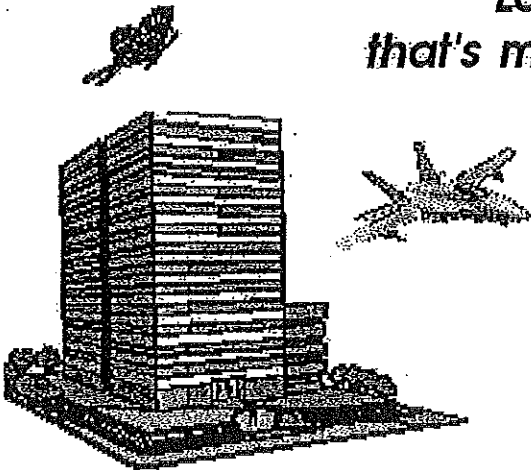
By: Chanda Roeung

# LOVE

Love is like a shiny sky  
Love is like a beautiful rose  
Love is like cool world  
where you can fly like a bird  
Love is a huge waterfall  
Love is like a fruity juice  
Love is like huge mountain  
that you have to climb  
Love is sweet fruit  
Love is like sunflower



Love is a huge shiny place  
that's made up of diamonds and gold  
Love is sunshine in the morning  
Remember sometimes love  
breaks your heart like  
an apple falling down  
from a tree.



Selimuddin Miah  
Bangladesh

# My Grandmom's Town

In a town called Ziah,  
I see rain falling with ice  
I hear him say, "Without you I can't  
live," my mom giving orders, "Do it now"  
Something in me says God's time is  
the best

I've smelled water before  
I smell many foods in my kitchen  
Other people believe in breakfast  
Quick oats taste good, corn with  
buttermilk. Anything you eat is part  
of your blood

All people are not the same in this world  
Others have different kinds of foods  
Some eat some kind of meat and  
others don't eat it at all. When I see  
all of this, it reminds me of Ziah

Kou Larkpor  
Liberia

# Love is Great

"Love." A few years ago I saw my grandmom take a bath with hot water. She said, "I love it hot."  
I saw an apple. It looked like sweet love.

"Love." One day my grandmom gave me a cold cup of water. It tasted like ice! My grandmom cared for me like a fish loves water.

"Love." I see a bird singing on a flower that has many colors, that is so lovely! This bird says, "I Love you, you Love me. Our Love, The world needs our Love."

Kou Larkpor  
Liberia

## THE LAST TIME I SAW MY MOM

The last time I saw my mom  
Was the day I was coming to the  
United States. But

I remember  
I remember the taste  
Of the last food my mom  
Gave to me.

I remember when she was  
Looking at me like a crystal

I remember when I  
Was listening to her like I listen  
To my favorite song.

I do remember the smell of  
Her perfume like a sweet flower

I do remember when she was  
Hanging onto me like she would never  
See me again.

And I remember very well  
How much she loved me, and I saw  
In her eyes the pain of our  
Separation like the tree from its Fruit.

*Oumou Bah*  
*Guinea*



6/14/02

## **Speed Boat**

When I am doing something

I want to speed like a

boat, speed so fast

that no one will

ever see me.

I want to speed like a

magic carpet that will fly

around the world in one

day. I don't want to speed

slowly so people would think

I am the slow one in the world.

I want to speed fast for people

to notice me and for the

world to open its arms

to me. Also for people to

know that I belong in this world without judgment.

I want the world to welcome me for who I am.

From this day on I want my name to be Speed Boat.

Speed Boat of the world, freedom, magic and forever.

*by Wenwu Mulbah*

*Ghana*

# For You

I love the  
way you walk  
and the way you lie  
to me  
And I love the  
ways of your  
eyes and mouth  
Also, I hope  
I can be  
your size  
in love  
and life

Gai Nguyen  
Vietnam

# The Key to My Heart

I hear music  
it sounds like an angel  
I feel the sun  
and the mountain open  
The fire can not stop  
I am over the mountain  
I touch the flower; it opens  
like the key to my heart  
I sing and angels open the door  
The key to my heart is like  
the Rose that opens

Jayne Paul  
Liberia

# When I Was a Kid

When I was a kid  
my mother told me to eat  
It was an age of fear .  
I liked to be happy  
with everyone. Early morning  
I sat on my chair  
and looked outside at the sky  
In the evening I looked at the moon  
In the day I looked at the sun  
The wind blew and the sun shone  
I was covered with love

Jayne Paul  
Liberia

# **LAUGHTER**

His name is Laughter.  
Any time someone says something  
he laughs.

He laughs at his  
own jokes; he even  
laughs when you call him.  
He says his name  
is funny.

One time his mom  
called, and he  
started laughing so  
she slapped him.  
Then he said the word  
'laugh', so everyone  
called him Laughter.

Mohammed (Lamine) Barry  
Guinea

# Can You Imagine?

Thinking without a brain  
I feel the pain without heat  
She looks beautiful without seeing her  
Birds without color  
Dying without resting in peace  
Running with no feet in the street  
Getting blessed without praying to the Lord  
The fern floating in the air without wind  
Talking without a voice

Raoul Thelon  
Haiti

# For My Mom

How did you do all that stuff?  
You gave me all that I needed  
And you brought me up  
Under my protector, God  
You are not only my mom  
But also my soul

My soul inside me  
I can't live without my soul  
The same as you, Mama  
You helped me a lot  
You brought me up  
You are really my soul

Solane Roro  
Ethiopia

# Tall Tree

He was in deep  
water every night  
He grew taller  
every hour  
When the sun shone  
in his eyes  
The water dropped  
down like rain  
When the air was flowing  
down from the sky  
his body flew like a bird  
He liked to sit under the  
tall tree when he was  
falling asleep  
So that he could dream  
in bright colors like tree leaves  
He liked to wear  
green and brown  
So they called him a Tall Tree

Peomalika Tav  
Cambodia



# PLUMS

look at the tree  
all the plums are ripe  
it makes me hungry  
and so excited

look at its beauty  
the scene feels jealous  
leaves turn yellow  
it looks unhappy  
wind blows

all fly up to the sky  
spring comes back  
brings life to everything  
plum trees are blooming  
they look like before

Nasiet Neak  
Cambodia

# Old Flower

He could enter your heart  
When you first saw him.

He was near the lake.  
He sat on the grass;  
He looked like mud.

I asked his name  
and he told me.  
After a few minutes  
He went back to his house.

I was thinking about him  
because he told me he had a problem.  
I saw him again another time  
but his face had changed and become ugly.  
Now I call him Old Flower.

Winta Asmelash  
*Eritrea*

# My Shoes

You always go with me  
You've always been on my feet  
You're always with me wherever I go  
You are the best kind of friend  
You protect my legs  
No one can take your place  
Wherever I go you're always with me  
You are the queen of my body.

Winta Asmelash  
*Eritrea*

# Friends

I see the angel over the sky  
The moon is in the clouds  
The bird is flying all over  
Rain is falling into the river  
The rainbow is blue  
The roses are beautiful.  
The birds are singing  
People are talking  
People are telling stories  
The girls are fighting  
The candy is sweet  
A smooth rock reflects the sun  
I'm eating my favorite chocolate  
The baby's face, smooth like a rock,  
Smells like the wonderful roses  
Ice cream melts into milk  
I can smell the sugar cake  
I'm alone,  
You're a friend who's been there  
For me the past three years  
The storm was so bad  
You're alone with  
Your friends not here,  
The world has changed from September  
It's hard to be yourself.

# BABY FACE

Your face is soft and smooth like a baby.

When I touch it, it makes

me want to touch

you forever.

It is so smooth like a pillow when I think

about it. The smile on your

soft and smooth face

makes me want to

draw you.

I can hold you as long as I want.

It's all mine. I'll touch

your soft and smooth

face forever because

it is so smooth and

touchable.

*Nassah Roberts*  
*Liberia*

## Someone Else

He was sleeping  
when he started dreaming  
about a dog.

In his dream  
he saw me and him  
walking on the street.

When he saw a dog  
running to come bite him,

He made the sound of a dog;  
we named him Boy  
with Sound of a Dog.

*ABDULAI DIALLO*  
*Guinea*

## Christmas in my Country

I remember on the morning  
of Christmas  
when everyone was hurrying to  
take their bath, eat, and go to pray.

Other people were trying on  
their nice dresses with nice  
plastic flowers on the front.

I remember seeing children  
walking house to house  
asking for money, so  
they could make a party in the night.

ABDULAI DIALLO  
*Guinea*

*-Poem-*

Most people think they are all  
That but they're not -- they are just  
Playing around, they don't know  
what is going on. The world is  
impossible to understand if you  
don't pay attention to God, praying.  
You're just nothing; God is good when  
you follow his words. God can change your life if you  
pay attention to him. Everything you will ask in  
the name of Jesus the Father will give you, so please  
pray to God, everybody. One day we went for over  
night; we began to praying and I started to feel like  
fire in my chest, and I started to speak the language  
that I did not know the meaning of. And I really  
thank God for what he has done for me. Some of my  
friends who're in Africa, I don't know how there are  
living.

*Gift Kaoma*

*Zambia*