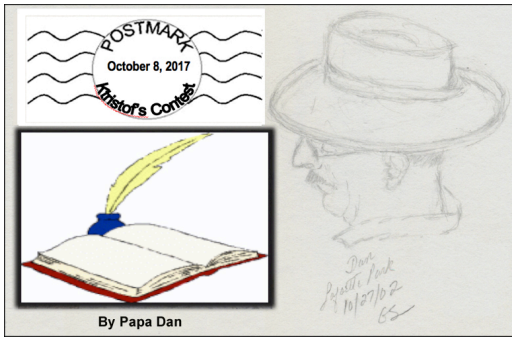


For Nicholas Kristoff's *New York Times* Poetry Contest — September 2017



On September 15, Nicholas Kristof invited readers to submit entries to a new contest in the *NYT* — his invite: “Announcing a Trump Poetry Contest” at: <https://kristof.blogs.nytimes.com/2017/09/15/announcing-a-trump-poetry-contest/>

Below are six entries by two local writers: myself and Lauren de Vore.

Below are Dan's three entries to Kristof's *New York Times* “Trump” poetry contest.

After those are three poems submitted by Lauren de Vore. As of October 8, it is unknown if any of these were selected to appear in *The Times*. We'll see ...

- Consistent with the topic, my intent was to reflect on a distortion of the Presidency with a distortion of the sonnet form. Like classic sonnets, my entries are written in iambic pentameter, but, unlike those others, each has 20 lines (4-7-5-4) and no rhyme, just like this Presidency.
- Another objective: to fulfill contest requirements without mentioning a certain name. — PapaDan

What This One Hasn't Learned

By Dan Sapone

A president presides but does not claim
all triumphs and achievements for himself.
He praises goodness that we've all achieved
together to become the change we seek.

My Dad's advice: “Give credit and take blame”
was offered free to any who would lead.
“Lift up the folks around you when you speak.
Say not ‘I'm great’; for if you are, the world
will tell YOU so; and you can humbly say,
“It's WE who make the world a better place,
together all,” he adds, “Unless we don't ... ”

For then, true leaders know to change the path
and say, “Together, follow me this way,
and bring with us those needing helping hands,
for hands we have; and other hands we'll need
when harder work will be required of us.

D'yathink that HE can learn what those before
him knew and brought with them to leadership:
that greatness lies only in “Us” and “We”
and not at all alone in “I” and “Me?”

Dancing on the Edge at the End of the World

By Dan Sapon

Poets've said a lot 'bout how it ends.
Said one: "Some say in fire, some say in ice."
Another wrote we should expect the sound
to be "a whimper" only not "a bang."

So, on the edge, so near the end, we dance.
We've grown up thinking of a sudden end
to all we've known — a blast, a mist, then gone.
But those who watch may notice that a slow
decline precedes the end. A lack of care,
neglect of values writ in stone by those
who came before. They warned us loud and clear:

"Take care of those who need — we're all the same.
Become the change we seek. Beware of those
who shout the loudest, those who wish to rise
by pushing others down." But we forgot,
and looked away, while demagogues arose.

And so we dance, here on the edge. While some
will quickly pay the price of our neglect,
it's all of us, in time, who'll see it end.
Yes, all of us, in time, will see it end.



“In a democracy people get the leaders they deserve.” — Joseph de Maistre
(popularly misquoted and mistranslated as having originated
with Alexis de Tocqueville and Abraham Lincoln)

The Leaders We Deserve?

By Dan Sapone

A coupla hundred years ago, a few
observers offered this enduring truth,
that over time, “In a democracy,
the people get the leaders they deserve.”

That begs some questions those of us who vote
must ask ourselves: Is THIS what we deserve?
What earned us this foul-mouthed incompetent
who represents us all around the world?
Can we of right say loudly “Shame on him”
or must we own it and say, “Shame on us?”
How can we know what is it we deserve?

Do we disparage those unlike ourselves?
Or welcome others with our minds and hearts?
Do we speak of each other with respect?
Do we contribute to a common good
to help make us into a better us?”

Perhaps our leaders mindlessly reflect
the image that our honest mirror shows.
Perhaps we must admit the painful truth:
We got the leaders who are just like us.

Lauren de Vore's three submissions to Nicholas Kristof's Poetry Contest

Here are the poems Lauren submitted. In announcing the contest, Kristof asked for poems that “capture the ethos of our times” and noted that “if you can make us feel better, or laugh, or think more deeply, so much the better.” As much as I would have liked to be humorous, I do not find the current ethos to be such that verse can make anyone feel better. Rather, my poems give voice to my disgust and despair over these Trumpian times as well as the moral responsibility those of us who disagree with the current Administration and Congress have to stand in resistance and as witness to this dangerous and damaging period in our nation's history. As for thinking more deeply, by all means do so, but not at the risk of sinking into an abyss. One must have faith in the ability to change things for the better in order to fight for the better.

Directive for the 21st Century

by Lauren de Vore

Be not numb. Turn not away. Someone must bear witness.
Hone your nerves that you may be shocked, offended,
Outraged by the sandbox-bully meanness,
By the lies and the flag-waving god-invoked hate,
That you may be horrified, anguished, incensed
In the face of act upon act of violence
And the blood-lust glee of the perpetrators.
Shrug not. Retreat not into cynicism.
Someone must feel the pain.
Though you march not on the front lines of protest
Against those who would destroy
What they envy, what they fear
And torment the weak simply because they can,
Avert not your eyes and hope it will all go away.
Rather, stand unblinking,
Witness to the rending of a nation.
And when the land lies blood-soaked and torn,
Like a troubadour of old, tell the tales of the slaughters
And the resistance, of the villains and the heroes,
That some who survive the madness may listen, may learn.
Be not numb. Turn not away. Someone must bear witness.

*Written in response to “Truth, Lies and Numbness,”
by Roger Cohen, *The New York Times* (August 24, 2017).

Masquerade

by Lauren de Vore

Drivel passing as profound Sound bites
proclaimed as wisdom Bluster and bullying
ranted as righteousness Lies hustled as
truth Hatred spewed as patriotism And
bigotry cloaked in the robes of faith

Even as Tolerance is scorned Compassion
mocked Otherness reviled Restraint and
reason Spurned and derided As weakness
As foolishness and naiveté

Yet who are the naïve The foolish, the weak
But those who refuse to see This masquerade
for the farce it is And wrapping themselves
in spangles and stripes Dance on the precipice
Of our undoing

AWOL

by Lauren de Vore

There is no “i” in country
There is no “u” in nation
There is no peace in poverty
Or hope in homelessness
No tolerance in tea parties
No grace in zealotry
There is no trace of humbleness
In hubris, not a shred
Of decency in demagogue
What future is there for
This grand experiment that’s U.S.
When hate and blood and fear
Run rampant in the streets
When politicians sabotage
The land they claim to serve
And super-PACs buy votes and laws
To feed their appetite for ever more
When body politic prides ignorance
And presidents toss covfefe
Into the swirling winds
But there’s an “I” in nation, “you” in country too
Perhaps one day the “S of A” will find again its “U”