

WATER DRUMS

PETER J. HARRIS

clock strikes 1,000 water drums call inundated memories
split into molecules cleaving to names initiated in long sutras
of libations generations gone surge into generations come
fission of time spilling blues over rim of carbonated rhythms
releasing energy to dance under water rise against submersion
& lean into wind smeared by swirling mud

it is 1,000 o'clock water drums keep time this is how we make
earth turn faster on journeys promising sanctuaries where
stained glass filters sunlight even at a child's funeral
harnesses chemistry of explosions whistling through hard-won
happy endings rallies us somehow water-marked awed that
we still hear the drumming between us

10-minute prayers douse flames & fears within danger's
accelerator immerse believers into the centrifuge of water
singing splashing surviving persistent breath breaks surface
spiraling upward into sanctified atmosphere spun in all
directions like blues exhaled through a conch shell choir
ebb & flow of VoiceMusic salting history with our startling
names

The Black Man of Happiness Project crystallizes more than 30 years of artistic & cultural work exploring the lives of Black men, including the 2011 collaboration with my daughter, Adenike A. Harris, on her Creative Master's Thesis: "Restorative Notions: Regaining My Voice, Regaining My Father: A Creative Womanist Approach to Healing from Sexual Abuse," (Georgia State University). In her thesis, she and I write a candid, ethical, loving call-and-response dialogue tracing how we worked together to confront, survive, and transcend her rape. (http://digitalarchive.gsu.edu/wsi_theses/23) My writing has been included in anthologies edited by, among others, Charles Johnson/John McCluskey Jr.; Rebecca Walker; Meri Danquah; Paula Woods/Felix Liddel; Terry McMillan; Kalamu ya Salaam; E. Ethelbert Miller; Juliette Harris/Pamela Johnson; and Gloria Wade Gayles. My magazine, "Genetic Dancers: The Artistry Within African/American Fathers," published during the 1980s, was the first magazine of its kind and asserted that African American fathers become artists through the frictions of conscientious parenting. My book, Hand Me My Griot Clothes: The Autobiography of Junior Baby, featured a philosophical elder Black man ruminating on life, love, and ethics, and won the PEN Oakland award for multicultural literature in 1993. In 2010, I wrote the forward to New Wine and Black Men's Feet by Keith Antar Mason (Red Hen Press). My essay, "1,000 O'clock: Johnson Time," was published in the 2009 anthology, The Black Body (Danquah) and extended the meditations of my 2004/2008 stage play, "The Johnson Chronicles: Truth & Tall Tales about My Penis."

