

## Open Mic

I don't need the mic  
I'm loud enough.  
No, you aren't  
We can't HEAR you!  
Please hold the mic  
To your mouth.

She takes another huge sigh  
And dramatic pause.  
Flips her hair to the side  
Again  
And starts to speak, not read  
And stops. Closed eyes.

We all wait in pain,  
Willing her to remember,  
To start again  
To get this over with. To read.  
Even Churchill learned  
Memorizing doesn't work.

The thing about Open Mic  
One woman says,  
Is you never know  
What's coming out.  
That's why we return,  
The American Idol effect.

The sedate older woman  
Describes a somber formal meeting  
In Belgium in the 70's  
All serious foreign male educators  
And her. The only woman.  
The only American.

A set-up like NATO  
Or OTAN as they call it there  
Massive doors  
A horseshoe of solid oak tables  
Carved wooden nameplates  
Crafted just for these two days.

Fashion magazines and  
Nancy Sinatra's boots

Lead her astray.  
She leaves the Belgium boutique  
In boots and short leather skirt  
Feeling very cosmopolitan.

The men all look up as she enters.  
Already seated as she  
Walks through the big doors.  
They gasp in unison  
When her skirt snaps catch on a chair  
As she slides down the row to her seat.  
As her skirt falls to the floor.

We all gasp loudly.  
Who would expect this story  
From this tiny white haired woman  
A quiet community member  
You never know what you'll get.

"Here's what a palindrome  
means," one woman explains,  
"and closely related  
a semordnilap.  
I'm pretty sure this one is  
Original to me:  
Won Ton...  
Not Now."

"I thought I'd read  
the weather report,"  
one woman says.  
Oh great, we groan inwardly  
THAT sounds fascinating. Right.  
Turns out it is.  
30 different ways to describe rain.

A tall man almost runs  
Up onto the stage  
"I jumped a train in Montana  
and met Sir Francis Drake."

A young black man in  
Sweats & hooded sweatshirt  
Strides up to the mic  
We've never seen him before,  
Here or in the community

We would have noticed.

“I call this a mix of zen & ghetto”  
he says looking out at a sea  
of white faces and white hair  
an audience far removed from the ghetto  
but with more than a touch of zen.  
Mesmerizes us with a new rhythm.

The only other young man in the room  
Keeps tipping a bottle in a brown bag.  
Glugging down his drink,  
Not Coca Cola or even pomegranate juice,  
Red wine...Liquid courage?  
Or channeling Jack Kerouac?

“I wrote this after a fifth of bourbon,”  
he begins as he wobbles on the stage  
“peeing off my deck at dawn.”