



POETRY BOOK

NIGHT OF APHASIA ARTS
2026



Realizations

Shaun Best

Sometimes we think,
Sometimes we drink!
Sometimes our mind,
Is lost in liquor or wine!
The trouble between both black and white,
Is that each see their view as right!
Let's work together for a single master,
Instead of fighting, which ends in disaster!
We could try annihilation of others,
But I ask you, who would go first!
With so much deviance in our behaviour,
The human race is quickly becoming a disgrace!
With more and more conflict, prejudice,
and discrimination,
What is becoming of our so-called wonderful nation!
It is not too late for us to live in assimilation,
But the longer it is put off,
this leads to disorganized nations!
All of us have God-give rights,
Why can't we live together,
peacefully & quiet!
Let's all work together and end this vicious cycle,
Let's stop xenophobia, before it destroys us!!!

Reasons

Shaun Best

Puppets on a String

Is it a state of confusion or unlimited knowledge?

Where are we all to go?

When one is down and beat,

Why do we allow?

Many questions, which have been asked before?

The common resolution is one must persevere!

There are many paths to take or not.

What is the loss, if one takes no risk!

There is a method, which is sure to complete.

This approach is often ill fated.

This question remains.

What is the euphoria of the misery?

What must one do to realize their fate?

Results are so inestimable, but risk is so extraordinary!

Be a puppet or a innovator like I,

"A Challenged Conquistador!"

WAKE UP WORLD, LIFE IS RISK!!

No Question, No Rewards!

Nothing!!

I Wear My Aphasia

Aphasia dressed up as true courage in discomfort;
apprehension of expression

Personally drawing upon humaneness,
unchanging in essence;
remaining whole

Distilled formed utterance expended,
resilience over flooded emotions

Creating an atmosphere from slippery speech;
suddenly spilling into life

Weeping nature of wildly wounded words,
blustery conditions across rugged surf

Spontaneity swims with the current waves,
illuminating reactivate forces unhealed;
for possible intervention

Buoyant tales tremble, tilting towards tone's thin interpretation;
stillness and potential

Communication rushes without apology, particularities may soften in
velocity

Never fully recovered, squatter's rights acquired;
shared extra space for complexities

Before and after fulcrum,
settles pivot point,
multitude of thoughts;
simply redirecting

Between often-unrecognized connections
rising and returning,
resolving and releasing;
revealing pathways to wider realities

Dusting off and re-anchoring denoted call and response in dual fashion

An incomplete sentence
could be sliding of attention,
perhaps the missing words,
don't want to
give away the ending

Emphasis on new strategies,
enduring and consuming,
takes time and energy;
like the sun finding its zenith

Jo Carroll

I Talk Slow

Mark Harder

- I talk slow
like a golden sunrise
- I talk slow
like honey and milk
- I talk slow
like a morning coffee
- I talk slow
like after a
siesta invigorating
my brain
- I talk slow
like Mick Jagger singing,
hearing the first
letter through the last
feeling every word I breath
- I talk slow
like a full moon
kissing your cheek
as tears go by



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Aphasia Koan Poem: Part I

Dr. Stephen "Andy" and Michelle Cheshire

What is the sound of a human brain bleeding?
Tell me, Dr. Buddha:
What's it like when your language simply leaves you?

What is the scent of fear?
What is the taste of frustration?
What are the colors of hope and healing?

Once upon a time, a man
who studied Zen Buddhism in his youth
who happened to be a prescribing psychologist in private practice
woke up, took a shower, and started getting ready for work.
He had many patients to see that day,
people who needed his help.

But he never made it to work because
he had a massive stroke instead.
Nobody could see his brain bleeding.
Just like nobody can see his aphasia now.
His supreme challenges.
His heroic struggles.

What does it look like, inside your mind?
How do the animals know?
Are we really so superior?

Tell me, Dr. Buddha:
What does it feel like to have your precious words stolen?
Do you want your memories back?

I know some days are hard.
I know some days are scary.
I know I love you, beyond words.

I try to understand, but maybe
(you taught me) sometimes it's better
to just be.

Tell me now, Dr. Buddha,
in your own words:
What's it like to achieve enlightenment?

Listen.
Be present.

Aphasia Koan Poem: Part II

Dr. Stephen "Andy" and Michelle Cheshire

Listen.
Be present.

human spine trailer hour
park phenomenon fight
travel across
hover
wisdom within
mindful

UFO out

Aphasia Poem 3

Robert Guzikowski

something say anything say
jumbled not halting not nonsense not
seeing not concerned that look facial.

swarmed infarcts lesions jarred
wetware bio-lightning bugs neuron
queen hives misfire miscommunicate.

matters crux sentences
perfectly sensical fine to these
if any problem thing other ears.

unexpressed beautiful
marauding lunar thoughts deceptions
chase and howl approval.

connections disconnected within
recognized discognitions without.

This poem is from the book "Unwordly" by Robert Guzikowski, UnCollected Press, Copyright © 2024, Robert Guzikowski.

The Color of Water is Like Words

Mark Harder

Fluent and streaming,
aqueous and meandering,
translucent and ebbing,
flowing through words.

But when the words are too
hot or too cold the spigot stops,
freezing or boiling speech,
the life of language.

Broca's Aphasia is like ice
in your voice, frosting your
lips, tongue frozen to a pole,
sub-degrees of communication.

Wernicke's Aphasia is like steam
in your mouth, words bouncing and
bobbing into each other, bubbles
of words in the wrong arrange.

The color of water is like words,
a brook translating thoughts
down a river of knowledge and
feelings that cannot be seen.



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Alone in the Dust

Lisa Smith

The leaves brush
around, over the rock,
the street, the lawn.

Where to go?

The tree won't let them
back up there.

I guess the leaves,
brown and almost
dead, will make a
place for
the dogs and people
could scramble about,
jumping high and
frolicking wherever.

But they are dead,
the leaves are dead.

The leaf blowers, like
bagpipes, will make a
horrified
sound of somebody dying.

Isn't that's the way it's
been? The young people,
all bright and shiny,
look up and all around
it is sunny and light,
radiant, luminous, glowing.

Old people lost that bright
shiny disposition and now
they are waiting for the
people blowing and
bagpipers to send them on
the way.

*"We shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is long,
but it bends toward justice." -Martin Luther King*

Justice

Lisa Smith

Justice,

Martin Luther King used to say that the
"the arc the moral universe is long but it
bends
towards justice."

In Justice there will be no blind, no deaf,
no crippled, no lonely.

No aphasia either, and I am one of
them,

Justice,

We see the blind, the deaf,
but how do we talk? And talk better!

We see the see the cripple, and I am
one on them.

We see farther and wider,



Justice,

We see the lonely,

I am lonely inside of myself,

the layers and layers

of myself.

Oh, I want to get out but patience calls!

Brick by brick,

I slowly made myself a new person,

Not great, but a person,

Justice,

Like the blind and deaf,

the lonely ones, the crippled, and

Parkinsonians, the autistic, the brain

injured.

Not great, but a person.

Justice.

Shadows of the Swamp

Desiree Wright

Chapter One – Lost

Private Elias Hart had never heard silence so heavy. Not the silence of home, where winds combed the wheat fields in Ohio, but a silence that pressed in, wet and unyielding, broken only by the drone of insects and the splash of something unseen slipping into dark water.

He clutched his side, where the bayonet wound still seeped through his shirt. The regiment had been advancing south when the line broke, gray and blue colliding in a storm of smoke and curses. He remembered stumbling, losing sight of the flag, and then—nothing but swamp.

For hours he waded through muck and roots, each step pulling him deeper into despair. The trees were black skeletons against the moon. His musket was gone, swallowed by mire. Hunger chewed at his belly. Fever licked at his brain.

“God help me,” he whispered, but the swamp only echoed his breath.

Then came the lantern.

A pinprick of gold shimmered in the distance. At first he thought it was campfire light, but when it drew closer, he saw a woman. Her dress was ragged, her bare feet silent on the sodden ground. She carried a lantern that burned steady, though the swamp’s breath tugged at it.

“Ma’am?” Elias croaked, his voice hoarse.

She didn’t answer. She only turned, as if expecting him to follow.

And he did.

Chapter Two – The Guides

By dawn, there were more.

A tall man walked with the woman, a carved wooden cross hanging from his neck, polished from long handling. He never looked directly at Elias, but each time Elias faltered, the man raised his hand toward him, steady and sure.

Later, a boy appeared, no older than sixteen. He hummed softly as he walked—a tune Elias didn't know, yet it calmed him, filling the silence with rhythm.

When the ground grew treacherous, when roots twisted beneath the water, another figure joined them. He moved like part of the swamp itself, flowing where the footing was firm, pointing silently at hidden paths.

They never spoke, yet Elias felt their presence binding him together.

Once, near dusk, his fever surged. He stumbled into a thicket and collapsed. Shadows closed in, and he thought he would never rise again. Then the woman knelt beside him. She

pressed her lantern close, and the warmth of it seemed to seep into his skin. His fever broke in the night, and when he woke, he was able to walk.

He began to wonder if these were not people at all. Stories came back to him—tales whispered in camp of enslaved men and women who had fled into the swamps, who had fought or died there, who lingered still. Spirits, some said, restless and unyielding.

Perhaps that's what they were.

Chapter Three – Between Life and Death

The swamp stretched endless. Days and nights bled together, marked only by hunger and thirst, by the pull of the lantern's glow. Elias followed them blindly, though doubt gnawed at him.

“Are you real?” he rasped once, staggering after the boy who hummed. “Or am I losing what's left of my mind?”

The boy never answered. Only kept humming.

Another time, Elias demanded of the man with the cross: “Why me? Why not leave me here to rot like the rest?”

The man turned then, for the first time. His eyes were deep and dark, filled with something Elias could not name—sorrow, maybe, or endurance. Then he looked away and pressed forward.

By the third night, Elias had begun to accept that he walked in some space between life and death. The swamp was no longer earth alone but something liminal, where the living brushed against the remnants of the enslaved, where his fever might be opening a door that should have remained shut.

Yet still, they led him on.

Chapter Four – Return

It was morning when he stumbled out of the swamp. The land opened to dry ground, and in the distance he saw blue coats and tents. A Union camp.

He turned to thank them, to ask at last who they were. But the woman with the lantern, the boy, the man with the cross, the silent guide—all were gone. Only cypress and shadow remained.

He staggered into camp and collapsed at the surgeon's feet.

When he recovered enough to speak, he told them his story. He told of the woman with the lantern, of the boy's humming, of the cross. The surgeon shook his head. "Swamp fever," he said flatly. "Hallucinations. You should be dead."

The captain dismissed him too. "Be grateful you found your way. Don't spread ghost tales."

The other soldiers laughed, mimicking his words in jest.

Only Elias knew the truth—or at least what felt like truth.

Chapter Five – The Living Echo

Weeks later, still weak but walking, Elias sat near a wagon as a regiment marched through camp. He looked up, and his breath caught.

They were Black Union soldiers. Their boots struck the ground in unison, their rifles gleaming. Faces resolute, proud.

Among them marched a man with a carved wooden cross swinging from his neck. Another hummed softly as he walked, the same low tune Elias had followed in the swamp. At the flank, on night duty, a soldier carried a lantern that burned steady in the wind.

Elias rose to his feet, heart hammering.

The swamp rushed back—the light, the song, the silent guidance. He felt again the fever’s haze, the weight of unseen hands steering him through darkness.

Were they ghosts? Were they visions of what was yet to come? Or had his mind, in its desperation, conjured guides fashioned from the very men who now fought beside him?

He did not know.

But as the regiment passed, he raised his hand in salute, shaky but sincere. The soldiers marched on, eyes forward, carrying freedom on their shoulders.

Elias stood rooted, humbled, and haunted, with a single truth pressing deep into his chest: whatever had walked with him in that swamp—spirit, dream, or echo—it had not left him alone.

And perhaps no man ever truly walked alone.

Terence Ang

Thunderstroke

A POETRY MEMOIR INSPIRED BY A TRUE STORY

Drawn from
A Cry in the Dark



A Cry in the Dark

*i hear a voice crying
from the depth of my being
it's my inner child
falling down
and asking for help*



Thunderstroke

*the thunderstroke
roared and struck
shattering the dark
its power was enough
to ignite my soul
to awaken the light*



The Light

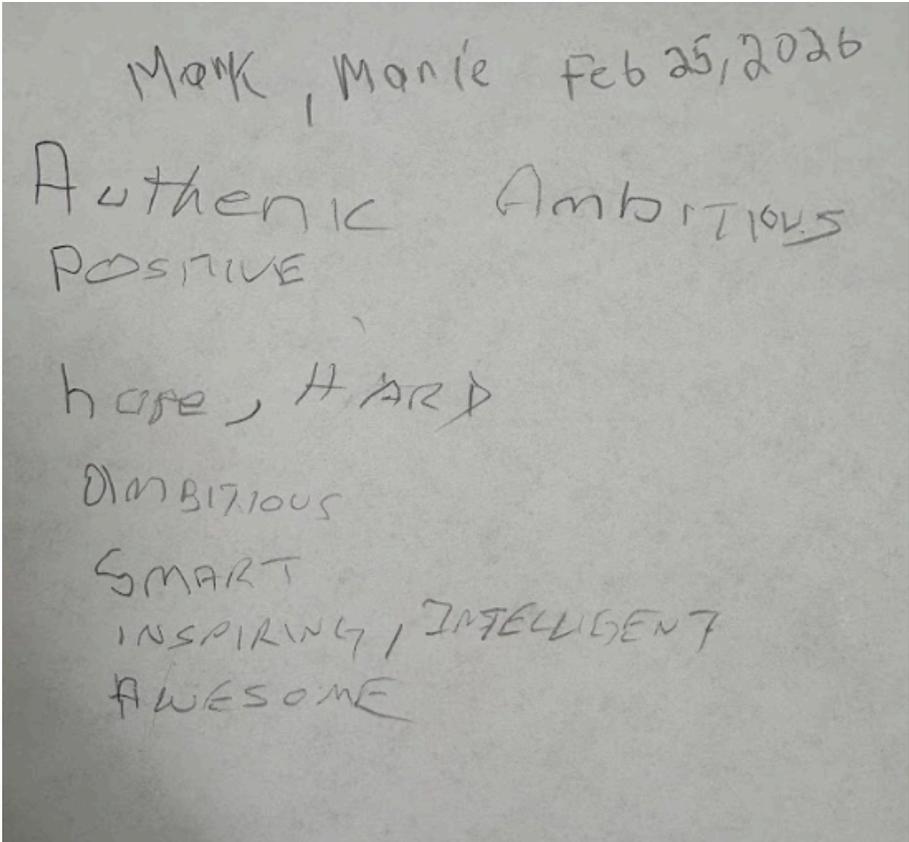
*i found the light
within myself
as if i was meant to fall
through struggles
and into darkness
to realize
i am the light
the one who can enlighten*

"There's always
something to
LAUGH about,
even when
you're CRYING"

Terence Ang

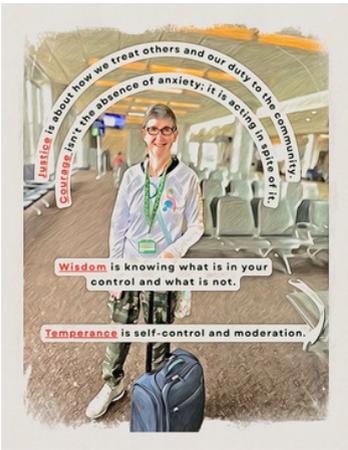
Poem About Aphasia

This is an acrostic poem written by the members of Brooks rehabilitation Aphasia center.



The Stoic Speaker: Presenting at ASHA

Trish Hambridge



1. Courage

Courage is the strength to stand at the podium and own your voice. I will stand tall and speak my truth.

- The Challenge: Standing before thousands of experts (SLPs) and fearing a language "hiccup" or losing your place.
- The Virtue: Speaking anyway. Courage is showing the professionals what aphasia looks like in real life. By sharing your "Lead Pathfinder" identity, you are being vulnerable, which is the highest form of bravery.

2. Justice

Justice is your duty to the Aphasia community and to truth. I represent the voices of all those with Aphasia.

- The Challenge: Feeling like you are just "one person" talking.
- The Virtue: Recognizing that your speech provides Justice for all PWA. You are giving the audience a perspective they cannot get from a textbook. You are advocating for better treatment and understanding, ensuring that the "patient" voice is finally heard as a "leader" voice.

3. Temperance

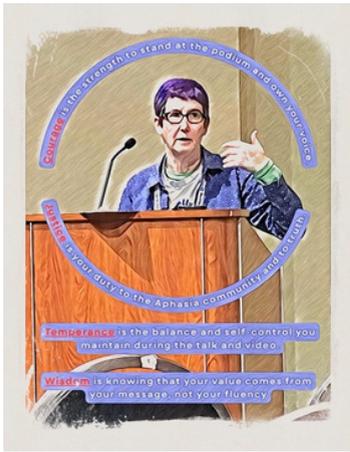
Temperance is the balance and self-control you maintain during the talk. I will breathe and use my tools with a calm mind.

- The Challenge: Getting overwhelmed by the lights, the large crowd, or the pressure to be "perfect."
- The Virtue: Maintaining a steady pace. Temperance is knowing when to pause, breathe, and use your SCA tools. It is the self-control to stay calm even if a word doesn't come easily. You are in command of yourself, even if you aren't in command of every word.

4. Wisdom

Wisdom is knowing that your value comes from your message, not your fluency. I know that my presence here is the greatest lesson for these experts.

- The Challenge: Judging yourself based on how many "mistakes" you made in your speech.
- The Virtue: Wisdom allows you to separate your effort from the outcome. You cannot control if every listener understands every word, but you can control the heart and intent of your message. Wisdom is knowing that a "hiccup" doesn't change the truth of your framework.



The Stoic Pilot's Compass for the Airport

Trish Hambridge

1. Courage

Courage isn't the absence of anxiety; it is acting in spite of it. I will speak up for my needs.

- The Challenge: Ordering food or speaking to a gate agent when you feel "anticipatory anxiety."
- The Virtue: Having the bravery to use your SCA tools even if it feels uncomfortable. It takes courage to say, "I have a speech problem called aphasia."

• 2. Justice

Justice is about how we treat others and our duty to the community. I am a traveler with rights.

- The Challenge: Feeling like a "burden" to the people in line behind you.
- The Virtue: Realizing that you deserve to be there just as much as anyone else. It also means staying kind to staff who may not understand aphasia yet—you are an advocate in that moment.

3. Temperance

Temperance is self-control and moderation.

- The Challenge: The "Hiccups"—noise, crowds, and flight delays—that make language harder. I will stay calm during "Hiccups."
- The Virtue: Staying calm when things go wrong. Instead of letting frustration take over, you practice acceptance. You control your reaction, even if you can't control the flight schedule.

4. Wisdom

Wisdom is knowing what is in your control and what is not. I will focus only on what I can control. (I wore the sunflower hidden disabilities lanyard.)

- The Challenge: Trying to speak perfectly during a stressful security check.
- The Virtue: Knowing that your "identity" is not your "impediment." Wisdom is the "Lead Pathfinder" knowing when to use a gesture, when to write, and when to take a breath. It's the logical choice to use the tools that work.

Learning to Teach #1

Robert Parker

Worst high school.
Half black, half white.
Groups despised each other.
First semester.
Forty per class.
Five classes.
Beleaguered intern.
Only musty grammar text.
No show Supervisor.
No-thing about English.
I struggled to keep afloat.
What else could I do?
Two weeks had flown by.
I was tired all the time.
Black math teacher asked me
to stop by after school had ended.
What the hell. I stopped by his class.
I knew he had been a football player.
His muscles bulged, had a gut that
plunged over his khakis, and
looked me straight in the eyes.
I suspect that he knew a little about
the whitey-white, age twenty two,
naive, and struggling to find himself
as an intern English teacher.
Why in the hell had he picked out me?.

Did he know that in high school I had gone out for football, basketball, and baseball teams? Maybe he did. Math teacher laid the question like this. "You must coach football for 10th grade team." "Teach English and coach football?" I answered. "You have to be kidding." Rooted in my seat, I listened to what he told me about football, both on and off the field. "Respect for everyone who tries out for the team." It stuck in memory. I recalled the grudging respect black basketball high school player made when he jumped high and tipped the ball in. I imagined "A whitey-white intern blowing the whistle to start practice. Ends, tackles, guards, center, running backs huddled around quarterback. The clap as they took their stances." What could I say? 'Yes' rather than 'no'? Naively ready, I donned the football hat, whistle, and trotted out on the field. Thrilled at four wins and zero defeats, coming back from the fourth game, we thrust our fists in the air and shouted "Keep on trucking you folks! Woo Hoo!" Trudged to fifth floor. In amazement burly black tackle said "I've never been in a white man's apartment." Racism engrained in him by black culture.

I gave no thought to his experience.
Vastly different from mine.
“Come in and look around.
You might like the books.”
I glanced out the window.
“You can watch traffic flow either way
from this vantage point.
Plop on the couch.
Have some cream soda and crackers.
Whatever you want.”
Blinding light flashed on.
“Be respectful. Understand humans
that are different from me.
Blacks and whites must get along” I whispered.
Echoed words had been spoken.
The vast gulf was crossed.

Our eyes understood that minor miracle.

Perch

Robert Parker

Yawned. Eyes open. Sleeping bag stirred.
3:30am. I scanned glass smooth lake.
Vast radiant moon haunted lake water.
Lake glimmered with a greenish streak,
spilling into the ever fading violet blue sky.
I sensed perch about to break the surface.
Brothers dressed silently and rolled canoe
downhill. We paddled faster. A swoosh
of rippled water in the wake of the canoe.
“Wait. Here” I whispered. We threw paddles
under gunnels. Spinning rods out.
A tiny lure with trembling minnows went
‘W-i-s-h.’ It sank beneath the lake.
We caught three dozen quivering perch.
Perch scattered. We stared at glassy water.
Whirls of whiteness came from depths below.
‘Was that beneath the smooth, curling lake?’
Mystified we glanced up. Giant aqua
moon sinking across horizon glowed.
Pale yellow trails streamed across the sky.
Puzzled we conceived of ‘Pre-sunrise.’
We drank bitter coffee and scrubbed
our mugs. Brothers bonded around question:
‘What will we do with the rest of our lives?’
An unknown island surrounded by pristine
sweeping Lac de Mille Lacs in the middle
of nowhere in western Ontario.

***Poem recited by Eric Camhi
It is description of the devastation of
stroke written by Aphasia Sufferer***



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Campfire Voices

The MnCAN Drama Club proudly presents a reading of Campfire Voices - a play written by Kens Kerns, a person with aphasia. Campfire Voices shares the journey of life with aphasia. This captivating video takes the viewer through the many emotions and seasons of aphasia.



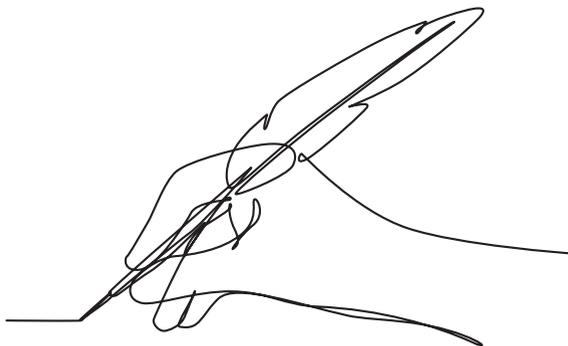
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Still Here

Please enjoy this powerful and truthful play written by Ken Kerns, a person with aphasia and MnCAN participant. The MnCAN Talk To Me Drama Club did a beautiful job reading their script and sharing about life with aphasia.



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[Clickable Link to Playlist](#)



Thank you to all of the poets that
contributed to this book.

Your words create vision and
inspire those who read them!



National Aphasia Association
aphasia.org