

Black History Month 2020

The Poetry Competition

Darren, Milly, Dinna, Georgy Holden, Patrice Belton, Paul Phoenix:

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DARREN: We launched it a few weeks back, only gave people a couple of weeks to get involved, but we decided to have a thing around anything that relates to Black History and Black culture. They could be open to anybody, black, brown, white, students, alumni, past, present. And so, it is very much an open competition. There was a lure of a prize 50-pound online shopping voucher for the winner and two runners up prizes of 25 pound.

A criteria for entry, poems could be in any staff, but we need to keep them short. So, under about 200 words. Must be original work, and previously published what was also acceptable. I don't know if you can see any slides in Milly. Minute because I can't.

MILLY: Not yet.

DINNA: They are on their way.

DARREN: Thank you for Dinna. We're also going to create a digital book that will try to make available as widely as we possibly can at the entrance, because it captures very much a time in terms of the thinking and the growth and the evolution that we're going through at the Open University. We're really delighted to have 40 entries from across the board, we put those entries to our five judges. Again, this is what I'm talking about.

We put those entries to our five judges made up of a number of published poets themselves and also a colleague from our marketing team. It was quite a tough choice, there was quite a lot of close marking, but we did come down to two runners up and a winner. And I'm going to stop talking because the really exciting part is to hear from the poets themselves. I'm going to ask if Georgy is around. Georgy are you around?

GEORGY HOLDEN: I am here, can you hear me?

DARREN: Hope you up your poem. Georgy was one of our runners-up. Georgy would you like to read your poem?

GEORGY HOLDEN: I'm really honoured to have been a runner-up. And this was written when I heard about the competition, it was written really in solidarity. Your history is my history. Though my ancestors were not dragged in chains from their homes, nor loaded onto ships and sold like cattle, nor work to death for the fortunes of others, raped and flogged. My land were not robbed of their riches, nor my heritage trashed, nor my boundaries set by the straight edge of a ruler.

My forefathers were not entitled to this country to be spat at and abused, no blacks, no dogs, no Irish. Nor detained and deported because citizenship has become a moveable feast and not all are welcome at the table. But through these acts, my history and yours are intertwined. Your loss my benefit, your grief my shame. So, tell me the truth of your pain, talk to me about your ancestors, your people.

The architect and artists, musicians and mathematicians, engineers, scientists and philosophers. The wonders and achievements of your past. Fill my mind with new stories. Let us moan and celebrate together, but your history is my history.

DARREN: thank you very much Georgy. That was really incredibly moving, so thank you very much for your contribution. I'm not sure if Fizra is around. Fizra you time around? If not, I'm going to ask very one Patrice Belton again to be our second runner-up Fizra Bibi. Thank you.

PATRICE BELTON: Sorry Georgy, it was beautiful. Thank you, Darren. OK, I hope I do this just this Fizra, I will give it my best shot, Knowledge is Power. Apartheid means apartness, but I laugh at their attempt to separate us from others. I laugh at their attempt of creating a hierarchy of slaves and masters. I laugh at the devastation, the heartache, the never-ending grief because. I laugh because no matter how much they separate us or single us out, it brings us together.

I laugh because they don't deserve my tears, they don't deserve to see me broken, hurt. No instead I remember that one person who stood up and questioned this and spread the knowledge of what was happening. No matter how many times they isolated him by imprisoning him and threatening him to remain silent. His voice was heard, he got it a following and his message was spread.

It was a voice that spread knowledge and spoke of the unjust treatment, the inequality, the racism, and it echoed, and it bounced off walls, and it caused an uproar. But they hated this, it enraged them, and they did everything in their power to stop this. But he said, if you're not

ready to die for it, put the word freedom out of your vocabulary. It hurts me that we're still fighting for this today.

BELTON: It hurts me to know that someone died for us to get our attention. But we have to educate ourselves because as a wise man once said, education is the passport for the future but tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today. Wrong is wrong, no matter who does it or say it.

DARREN: Thank you so much to Patrice. That was beautiful. It is very difficult to convey the emotions necessarily of words written by someone else and it's a beautiful poem put together and a powerful poem by Fizra, but peacefully read by Patrice. Thank you very much. Now going to move on to our winner. Hopefully Paul is online somewhere and I'm quite pleased and proud to be able to announce our winner, and hand over to Paul. Thank you.

PAUL PHOENIX: Well, thank you very much. I'm honoured to receive the good news that had won first place in the poetry competition. Well, I'm so tired of getting over the shock of it all. But before I start, I would like to give thanks. So my thanks to the Open University for this great opportunity, also my thanks to the Steacy Annly, who is also on the course, there as well and she was the one who pushed me to put it forward, but my thanks, before I say this poem.

My thanks goes also to the variety of women of African origin who raised me. It hurts me that a lot of issues are made about how much women suffer, not a lot as men but how much the women suffer then and now. And although these are just a few words, I just hope that this poem actually reflects a thank you. As for me I'm an ex-soldier, ex-professional soldier, nine years in the army, ex-choreographer and dancer, and ex-production engineer. So that's a bit of a mixed bag there, but enough about me.

More for the poem, it's called Daughter of Africa, like I said its words cannot express the amount of gratitude that we all feel to all women or daughters of Africa, so I'll start then. Daughter of Africa, in your eyes I see reflections of what kindness and beauty. In your smile, I feel the warmth our sun kissed land. In your laughter, I hear the joy of being. In your presence, I the comfort of belonging. In you, I see, I feel I know, I am.

DARREN: Thank you so much Paul. That was wonderful and for sharing your perspective beforehand that led you to the creation of such a wonderful poem.

PAUL PHOENIX: Thank you.

DARREN: Thank you very much that's wonderful. I really would like to thank everybody that's contributed to this competition this year and look forward to being able to put together the book and make that as widely available as possible. Thank you very much to everyone. Now I want to hand over to Sue Watkins from FASS who's going to say about a really exciting opportunity that that's come in. So, thank you very much.