

POETS RESPOND TO PRINTS

January 7, 2016 at 6:00 p.m., Channing Peake Gallery, Santa Barbara, CA

Ron Alexander

Ron Alexander says writing saved his life. He has been published in *Arts & Understanding*, *Askew*, *Solo Novo*, and several anthologies. A film has been made of his poem *Zebra*, released this year and shown in various international LGBTQ film festivals including Hamburg and Sao Paolo, where it played this fall.

Asphalt Rose

Peering out the window, she is turning into sky,
doesn't want to see another rose.
Those sidewalk blooms show no respect
for her loss, can't make her whole.
Neighbors say she will see him in the by-and-by,
bring chicken and mac & cheese instead

of bringing back her boy. Instead
tell her to pray to God up in that empty sky.
They are—were—a family despite that man gone by-and-by.
But no more. It wasn't like this when she rose
today, the boy in bed, asleep, that wild hair—whole,
innocent in every respect.

Smart, he helped the littler ones on the block, had respect
in this neighborhood. Got those good grades instead
of hanging out at the Seven-Eleven like the whole
lot of his friends. She tells him—told—him, "The sky
is the limit for you." His face got rose-
red then. "You're on the road to college by-and-by."

All that promise gone now, by-and-by.
So how is a child brought up without respect?
She told that handcuffed thug, *I saw you. You rose
up out that car window, right there. Instead
of waving, you pulled a gun on my boy. The sky
is witness. How could you do that, take a person's whole*

*life in a second? Something wrong. You're not a whole
human being. You're missing something. By-and-by
you could have been someone, like my boy was, your name in the sky.
Who raised you with no respect
for human life, you had to take one instead?*
"Two shots," the crouching policeman told her, and when he rose,

he held her, her eyes fixed on that brilliant rose
blossoming on the asphalt, pillowing her boy's head, his whole
body still. She screamed at the policeman, "He ain't dead." Instead,
she was sure she saw him breathe. Though, to the Big By-and-By,
she knew he had flown. Death she must respect,
the crystal truth in that cloudless sky.

But respect life too. 'Cause someday, by-and-by,
what was whole, like glass will shatter instead,
like her only child, rose up to that godforsaken sky.



Looking Out by Don Zimmerman