

## "Words' Worth" Poetry Readings

Poets at the Culture, Arts, and Parks Committee of the Seattle City Council.

### **Carolina Blues** By Marcel Parker

United States down south Carolina  
New Orleans, Louisiana, Mississippi  
Florence, Pamplico I've got the blues.

Speakeasies are calling an end to prohibition  
we're prohibiting sex, pulling knives to our throats  
marking signs step over step away step out  
through the tobacco fields, rat filled apartments  
I'm just trying to find my way home blues.

Living down home going uptown I watch  
working class girls toss back, the word beautiful  
with explanations of poverty, over priced beauty salons universities

Rena Belle stands at the grill of Uli's Quickburger  
for twelve hours a day from eight to eight flipping the bloody  
hey lady make it rare. Drops fists of cornmeal batter to the fryer  
empties baskets of hush puppies onto paper plates and the meeting  
of Rena Belle's breasts pools in a funnel of fish fry diner sweat.

Sundays the sweaty preacher man makes  
Southern Baptist redemption sweet like magnolia blossoms  
or pine needles after a thunder storm. Rena Belle's  
knees never touch church altars her life is the life of nicotine  
dust and work and more work to make babies  
so her babies can make babies giving birth to  
trailer parks, overturned oil drums, half empty whiskey flasks.  
And one of her babies gives birth to poverty  
and poverty gives birth to me with a sound  
like a tin crash head-ache in the deep south

Uncle Billy breeds hound dogs in the back  
of his boarded-up supped-up El Camino takes off for weeks  
fathering this new religion of loneliness Uncle Billy  
has washed his hands of children  
and potatoes and a wife named Fanny Jo.  
Who raises three generations  
of babies works three sets of jobs while  
Uncle Billy goes out back with hound dogs singing  
they worked me like a dog, pulp mill, paper mill blues  
And Fanny Jo at work, an' in the kitchen with the kids singing  
my baby's gone an left me laundry stone hard at workin' blues  
living down home going uptown department stores fast food restaurants  
I've been watching working class girls toss back the word beautiful

with a one two, a one two three  
decades of excuses exploding hot grease from the fryer  
in poverty shaped burn patterns

in rhythm to ovarian cancer, tobacco field melanoma, false  
teeth, stew beef soup stock, smoker skin, she says she's found  
Jesus at the end of a sawed off smokin' shot gun barrel,  
but these thin housecoat excuses are tearing me up  
I see you    and you are beautiful  
Growing babies as fast as butter beans, pulling barbecue  
from the bone spitting out apologies of poverty  
snapping babies in half, three-quarters in quarters  
slicing them lengthwise    now the babies are leaving

for credit card mini-vans high speed DSL internet connections  
in suburban houses, They're raising second  
generation confederates who don't know the taste  
of plastic porch swings, empty roads  
vinyl couches, or okra plants, but I know the church rising like thunder  
in empty pine fields hound dogs and shot guns  
callused hand dirty boot sweaty cap poor men these babies  
can't taste anything, their bodies have been turned off  
this debt of poverty is growing exponentially  
with mortgage payments, and down payments, and credit card bills  
we are burning up like  
bacon grease everything but the money is running out  
the money was never there in the first place  
So I'm going out back with Uncle Billy, Fanny Jo, and Rena Belle  
and together we're singing those sweet down home Carolina  
Oh, I've got the Blues.

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