

INSIDE INVISIBLE WALLS

1

sometimes i walk again along those city streets  
i say each name aloud as i cross at the intersection  
    glendale    lelie    fullerton    sturtevant  
i went too far home is fullerton corner of lawton  
big brick building ap't B-6 overlooking the alley  
garbage in the alley rats badmen danger  
every block of my city is cut in half by an alley

i am walking home from mcculloch elementary school  
    mcculloch ghetto elementary school  
but in those days i didn't know i lived in the ghetto  
to me it was the old neighborhood where i was born  
where i belonged the dexter-davison section of the  
    jewish part of my city  
15 minutes by bus + ½ hour walk from virginia park

2

i remember virginia park placename for a street  
    that ended at a gateway  
a visitor from the outside would pass through an arch  
to penetrate the walls of a garden courtyard  
stately elms cast shadows on the road & walkways  
of the boulevard that led to the core of the ghetto  
my grandma & grandpa owned a big white 2-family house  
on virginia park near the business corner at 12th st

3

& i remember 12th st asphalt mainline of the old  
    neighborhood  
divided by streetcar tracks & the babble of tongues  
    yiddish    english    russian    german  
but hebrew was sacred for dialogue with the Lord  
skull-capped old men like grandpa wore long white  
    beards

& prayed twice a day in storefront synagogues  
the 12th st butcher shop was filled with sawdust  
chicken feathers & pushy women  
my turn next my next she budged ahead in line  
bloodstains smeared across the butcher's white apron  
like big block letters stamped on the meat

at the next corner i crossed the streetcar tracks  
to avoid the stench from the fresh fish market  
& the sight of dying carp that attempted to swim  
within glass walls of captivity  
a customer in the market points a finger to the tank  
i'll take that fat carp there bone please & fillet  
the fishmonger leers at the victim who squirms in a  
slimy net

murder on 12th st it must have been the purple gang  
protecting jewish business from the bite of the mafia  
our dapper hoodlums looked like doctors with bulging  
black satchels  
as they made the morning rounds along 12th st  
after the weekly shakedown the gang met for lunch  
compliments of the boss at boeskys restaurant

my friend rosella's uncle owned the delicatessen  
that served the best hot corned beef in the city  
my city detroit could have been any american city  
chicago new york cincinnati boston  
each had its own boeskys restaurant deep in the heart  
of the old neighborhood  
near where 12th st crossed at virginia park

4

i think everyone has heard of 12th st & virginia park  
the detroit riots the riots of '67 erupted there  
started in a tavern at the bottom of the ghetto  
a fistfight spread into fire ghetto buildings went  
up in smoke

stores were looted & slums exploded the riots  
lasted until the troopers came

the faces inside my ghetto were different by '67  
soul food was sold in the kosher butcher shop  
the synagogue wore the sign of islam & an empty fish  
tank wore a sign For Rent  
the elms along virginia park were bare from dutch  
disease  
but grandma & grandpa were shaded by willows out at  
clover hill cemetery  
boeskys restaurant had moved to southfield

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yet nothing really changes within my city of memory  
invisible walls are fireproof & i sometimes see a  
child  
walking home from mcculloch ghetto elementary school  
past broken windows empty stores burnt-out houses  
& the child repeats the names imprinted on city signs  
glendale leslie fullerton sturtevant  
go back kid you went too far daydreaming right  
past your building  
home is a 2nd floor apartment overlooking an alley  
2740 fullerton i'll never forget your number