

# **CROSSING BRIDGES**

by Felene M. Cayetano

(PW Excerpt 2014)

*For Fela and Fidel  
may you cross more bridges  
in less time*

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## **Other publications by Felene M. Cayetano**

*Evolution: Weaving in and out of Consciousness While the Truth is Somewhere in the Middle*  
(paperback and e-book editions)

*Belizean Nail Soup: A Collection of Short Stories* (e-book only)

## **Acknowledgements:**

**The Creator** – who breathed life into my

**Ancestors** – who struggled to hold their independence and secure a future for my

**Parents** – who through love brought me into this world to observe and record what

I have seen using the rhythm of my

**Grandparents** – who spoke to us in

**Garifuna** – the culture and language of our

**People** – who will one day collectively regain the consciousness needed to fulfill

the hopes of our

**Ancestors** – so we can manifest a more culturally reverent and prosperous reality for our

**Children**

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## **Preface**

Crossing Bridges is a continuation of my first book, Evolution, which is why I decided to start with a poem I wrote on my 26th birthday, two months before Evolution came off the presses. My poetic style is to take a snapshot of my emotions, so when I transcribe the poems from paper to computer or recently from phone to computer I make every effort not to change how the original is expressed. That said, you'll notice slight differences in the way time and dates are written, also, in Belize I employed the British spelling here and there. For most of the ten years within this book I was in Belize so the language, flavor and imagery are distinctly Garifuna, Belizean, Central American and Caribbean. The first few poems were written in my final semester of undergrad in Baltimore, four months later I relocated to New York for grad school, six months later I moved to Belize to live with my grandfather, one year after that I returned to New York to complete grad school, then another year later I returned to Belize after graduation, this move was followed by trips between these two lands that define my upbringing. I have many reasons for publishing this second collection of poetry. Chiefly, I want to capture ten dynamic years of my life and the resulting poetic expressions as I did in the first collection. Included is one background story of a poem as a hint of what the unedited version of this collection looked like. I made an editorial decision to omit a few others.

2004

### **Another Birthday Cry**

This birthday cry  
is not for opportunities unseized  
but for those I seized but didn't benefit from.  
This birthday cry  
is for the pimple on my cheek when I'm in a  
pin up my hair and go mood  
it's for the wrong shoes  
to match the wrong blouse  
it's for the years of looking  
into the mirror and not really seeing me  
until I saw myself out of his eyes  
it's for unfinished novels,  
half-typed short stories  
and the incompletes that speckle the  
egg shell of my herstory  
it's for my Evolution which is here  
but not quite – fetal.  
12:11 a.m. 9-9-04 self-explanatory

### **19 bullets**

19 bullets for a 14 year old.  
More bullets than his age  
on his knees he may have plead:  
My momma only has one child left,  
don't do this to her!  
More bullets than his age  
the boy woke up  
to help his mother with chores  
his reward was a bike ride  
outside  
one more child to bury  
no more left  
why didn't they listen  
when he said  
My momma



only has  
one child left!

Last year it was cancer  
uncontrollable  
this year it was bullets  
avoidable.

If only they had listened  
when on his knees he plead  
My momma only has one child left  
don't leave me by her doorstep dead!

2:00 p.m. 10-24-04 about a murder in L.A. that my mother just told me about

#### **4 Seasons**

Do you want to be the one  
who keeps me warm in the wintertime?  
Do you want to be the one  
who holds my hand in the springtime?  
Do you want to be the one  
who travels with me in the summertime?  
Do you want to be the one  
who listens when autumn leaves fall?  
Do you want to be with me at all?

12:56 a.m. 10-29-04 thoughts about you

#### **Your Scent**

Your scent followed me today  
reminding me of your  
exhales on my neck  
your sweet kisses on my lips  
and the warmth of you  
as we spoke on the phone  
while snow fell outside.  
Your scent followed me today  
and the day just started  
maybe you are thinking  
about me this morning  
whatever it is...

today will be a good day  
because you are with me.

8:14 a.m. 12-29-04 about a Haitian-Canadian poet.

2005

### **Reshuffle**

I move again  
and encounter things that were  
important to me way back when.  
Damn, I forgot about him  
that one with the gapped-tooth grin.

I move again and find  
the lost notes and scribbles  
that I thought were floating around Harlem  
from that one time when...

I move again and realize  
that some things weigh me down  
more than the usual  
Black woman's burden.

I move again and sneeze  
from the dust of books  
that I'd hoped to revisit  
after finding them again  
for the first time  
the last I reshuffled.

Reshuffled my priorities  
my different shelves  
my different selves.  
11:45 a.m. 1-1-05  
packing up to leave Baltimore

### **I didn't know**

I guess I really didn't know  
what was missing in my life  
until you came back into it.  
I guess I had forgotten  
the softness of your lips -  
I need to buy you lip moisturizer  
this winter also.

I guess I really didn't know  
you'd buried your feelings for me  
as I was doing the same.  
Maybe this time will be different  
maybe this time we will  
stand before each other unarmored.  
10:46 p.m. 1-19-05 a quick kiss with an x in nYc.

### **The other side of my walls**

Pain, pleasure, art  
all happen  
on the other side of my walls  
East meets West  
and both meet me  
equatorial sun baby.  
Cries, that I wonder  
if I should enquire about;  
laughs that bring back  
the taste of youth;  
art that eases their intrusion  
or rather my exclusion  
from the rooms next to mine.  
9:37a.m. 2-3-05 I think my roommate was crying last night.

### **Background - Inge's hands**

I met Inge, a radiant and lively 91-yr.-old Black American sculptress, through a mutual friend during my first month in New York for graduate school. We related immediately as literary-minded people, and we needed no bridges even though there are two generations between our ages. Inge has kept a diary since her teenage years and during my visits she would read some entries for me. She lived an interesting life, and I tried to capture a few of these moments in the poem. The title came from Bill Withers' song "Grandma's Hands." When I presented the birthday poem to Inge and her daughter they informed me that Ossie Davis had narrated a documentary about her about 45 years prior with the same title.

### **Inge's hands**

Inge's hands  
belonged to a shy girl  
who wrote of secret love  
and Sunday church ceremonies.

Inge's hands  
belonged to a liberated young woman

who sat to be immortalized  
by the artists of her time.

Inge's hands  
belonged to the confident woman in her prime  
who would become  
one of those artists  
a sculptress  
immortalizing her legendary contemporaries,  
Black American ancestors  
and her daughter's smile.

Inge's hands  
belong to a nonagenarian woman  
whose energy and presence  
belie the frailty of agedness  
the myth of grandma in her rocking chair  
sipping tea and no longer  
changing the world.  
11:20 a.m. 2-4-05  
Inge Hardison b. 2-3-1914 I'm glad we have reunited in this lifetime

### **White man come up wit all kin'a ting**

Grampa say:  
White man come up wit all kin'a ting.  
I say:  
Grampa di label say  
made in China.

But Grampa no di listen  
Ih di tink bou'  
di train an tall buildings  
Ih see when ih mi gawn  
da New Yawk.

Ih di tink bou'  
di house weh ih buil' inna 1947  
fuh ih wife  
an pickney  
weh soon come.

Ih di tink bou' how dis house  
weh ih now call "fowl coup"

witstan plenty hurricane and flood season  
but still di stan up.

Ih di wonda why white man  
come up wit all kin'a ting  
an people di chase afta it  
or try fuh tief it  
when befo it come  
everybody mek do.

10:25 a.m. 2-7-05

Grampa's awe-full statement (8/04) came to mind after easily assembling an Ikea bookshelf  
alone in my Brooklyn dorm.

### **Nayahuaha**

Finou niduheñu  
nayahauha luagu walamiselu,  
wafareinguau luei Yurumein.  
Finou niduheñu  
nayahuaha luagu sungu  
katei wuribati lidan ubou.

Finou niduheñu  
nayahuaha laduga  
mederebugutina kontara  
onweni Garifuna  
wani dimurei,  
waduguhani  
wagiya.

Finou niduheñu  
ichiga fe nun!  
Ichigu fe luagu idati  
eheredaguda Garifuna.  
Ichigu fe luagu  
ka nadagimeibei  
gasu nadugubei  
lun hareidagu aguirau le.

1:39 p.m. 2-14-05 A prayer to my ancestors after thinking that they might not understand me or  
worse yet, might be offended by the English I speak to them.

2010

### **Analogous**

Birds...flight

Moon...night

Firefly...light

Eyes...sight

Leaves...Trees

Honey...bees

You...me

01/19/2010 01:16:56 p.m.

### **Let's pretend...**

Let's pretend that nothing has changed.

No destructive earthquake struck Port-Au-Prince.

No aftershocks shook them a few days later  
as if searching to bury hope itself.

My eyes are only sweating in my sleep

and I do not think constantly

about how empathy has turned to apathy

as a way to forget...

unfeel...

to withdraw from my memory bank

images of strange Haitian fruit

that might drive even Trujillo to sympathy.

Let's pretend that this is not a sign

of what's to come

and there's a good chance

this pillow will be dry tomorrow.

20 Jan twelve thirty-five a.m. twenty ten. About this year.

### **Because of love**

My mother risked her life

and had me

because of love.

Thirty-one years later

I had Fela

because of love.

It was a sunny day

in my hometown

when I married his father

because of love.  
Ordinarily the old me  
would've ran away  
because of love.  
But something about him  
is different than the rest  
or my judgment may be skewed  
because of love.  
He has this way  
of looking into my soul  
that makes me feel  
nakedly validated  
and I don't mind  
because of love.  
The newness of discomfort  
at this level of vulnerability  
is overcome  
because of love.  
Only time will tell  
the rewards ahead  
when the baseline is  
because of love.

8:54 a.m. Jan 20, 2010 Thought about this poem this morning before coming to work. Took a pause for the cause and typed it up.

Antonia G's reply to this poem:  
my path through love  
has been that of enlightening it  
inside out and in others, sacrificing for it  
fighting for it,  
crying for it,  
dying for it  
and being told at the end it was no longer one love...  
it was just my love...  
I was then rescued by real love...  
in the arms of African girls on the Equator,  
in the compassionate ears of a tracker in the north of Sweden,  
in the deep mysteries of white canvas  
and pages and on the strings of my guitar...  
I wonder why my love cannot find our love

and make it a beautiful his-her love  
in oneness as he is walking through the bits of its heart aches and joys  
and finally reflect a new loving path.  
I accused myself of never having learnt to love yet  
I am famous and respected for my deep love.  
I accused love and God of playing with my heart and soul,  
leaving me alone when it came to be together and stronger.  
I cried and still cry feeling half of woman  
since my love rejected me  
and felt like I could not manage my soul that yelled why why why  
was it that it felt so stripped apart  
and trashed away in the arms of who said would have cared.  
I wish to learn in my life love that never ends  
that stays next to me as a brilliant column of light and colour  
to shine with me in the name of our son or daughter and tell I do,  
yes, I do want to admit I am part of you as you are of me.  
Stopping the feeling  
love may be a mirage of a thirsty soul.

### **Because of love (exes)**

You were an investment  
in time and resources  
which I extended  
and expended liberally  
because of love.  
You would probably  
say the same thing  
[since we all  
reflect one-sidedly]  
that you gave me  
all of you  
because of love.  
There are parts of me  
sliced away  
like stolen youth  
that I rarely acknowledge missing  
and could not mourn then  
since I thought  
that's what people do  
because of love.  
You served me



with a 3-course meal  
and I bore the expense  
because of love.  
I shielded you from  
my vices  
and showered you  
with inked sentiments  
because of love.  
I see you in other people  
hear you again  
serenading me with  
Bill Withers  
and hope that  
although I hurt you  
if I called  
you would answer  
because of love.  
4:19 a.m. 29-Jan-2010 As is.

**BFF...**

You are the keeper  
of my secrets  
and I have locked  
yours away  
in a safe  
near my own  
but not as accessible.  
Our friendship has  
withstood the tests of  
boyfriends, girlfriends, crushes  
and those who thought they were  
something more than  
just a one-week stand;  
it has withstood  
our alliances among  
race-conscious radicals  
who likely eyed our kinship  
with onerous suspicion;  
it has withstood our  
constant search  
for that peace

we have always sought  
but never found  
at the bottom of anything;  
it has withstood  
our moves from the streets  
where we came into consciousness  
to those we came out of the closet  
to those we came up from the shoe strings  
we once laced together and ran with;  
it has withstood those connections  
and disconnections that city life brings  
and if I could do it over again  
I would have taken more pics  
I would have captured  
Cafe Luna days and Canter's nights  
those big friendly eyes  
and the cynicism that linked us  
I would have captured your old smile  
that told the tale of the boy you were  
I would have captured your jeans collection  
I would have captured those things  
that as I write this realize  
I already have.

3:47 a.m. June 2, 2010 Reflecting on a 14-yr friendship. Thought about Joe twice yesterday. Writ  
on iPhone.

### **Wife**

I wish I had a wife  
who would cook for me  
and bathe the baby  
while I slept  
or did worldly things  
like work and socialize  
or sleep with the baby  
after long walks to nowhere.  
I wish I had a wife  
who could sing to the baby  
read to him  
and potty train him  
while I watch  
and cheer them on.

I wish I had a wife.

Oh, wait...

I am the wife.

5:23pm, July 27, 2010 on bus from Belize city. Second day of sleep marathon between Pop and Fela while I work and Mom cooks, etc.

2014

**Maybe I am**

Maybe I am strong  
if being so means  
bearing  
overcoming  
surviving  
if not thriving  
through difficult unforeseen circumstances.

Maybe I am a feminist  
if being so means  
independent  
fair-minded  
willing to sit  
stand  
walk  
speak up for gender equity;  
If being so means  
that I believe  
in my completeness  
have the doubled chromosome X  
and the mammary  
to bring action to whatever  
life necessitates.

Maybe

I

AM!

SO WHAT?!

4:51a January 26, 2014. Reflecting on recent conversations.

**Don't do it**

Don't embrace the hate  
the scorn  
the adjectives  
they smear on your face  
and hurl at your back  
when you are barely

out of earshot.  
Don't spend hours  
praying  
meditating  
fighting  
to become  
what you are not  
because you are a gift  
like every child  
handed to a mother  
after uncounted hours  
of expectation  
and effort  
aptly called labor  
you are the prize  
so be that!  
Shine!  
Be your mother's adjectives  
on the day you were handed to her  
so if she one day  
smears  
hurls  
hits you with those adjectives  
that pierce  
cut  
dismantle your fortress of dignity  
remind her that you are the same reward  
handed to her at the end of her toil  
then watch her become your mother again.

5:15a.m. January 26, 2014 poem for the gay young men in Belize who are under attack for being themselves.

### **Biggest smile**

There are mistakes that parents should not make  
and I hope that as I make them you forgive me  
perhaps one will be these words  
they will not hurt you but somehow affect him  
when he reaches the age that I share them  
or he finds them in a box  
with the five letters of your name  
he might compare

contrast and reflect  
wonder what else Mommy thought about you  
that she didn't about him  
he might look into his own box  
find that he has inspired more poems and be reassured  
that he is indeed my greatest creation  
the one who was my wonderment  
the one for whom I had the time  
to express those hopes fears and all else  
from the time he was a yolk sac seedling in my not so young womb.  
He will have read that  
you are the reason for my biggest smile  
you are the one whose very face melts me  
like none other who has inspired sincere words of love and adoration.  
I hope you forgive me for giving you more kisses than poems  
more songs and improvisational drum beats  
than words I was too busy to write down but thought  
during your milestones  
at 18 months  
when you learned that drumming on the door  
was more appreciated than crying  
at 22 months  
as you learned to say water in three languages  
at 24 months  
as you provided well-timed musical accompaniment  
on the bottom of a spent oats container  
while your brother serenaded me  
in the language of our ancestors  
to the tune you attempted to sing  
with your still forming speech.  
It is you whose face is now on the home screen of my phone  
that brings me the same grin  
as I travel far away from you both to  
check my balance  
reconnect with my selected family  
reconnect with me  
outside of the labels ascribed within my well scripted  
mature controlled stable slightly muted but still colorful life.  
It is your face with your own little smile  
that makes me say

I am amazing for bringing this little bundle of cuteness into the world  
and doing what it takes to make sure  
that the grins keep coming  
that even on those days  
when I want to sell everything  
and just drive for 24 hours to the homeland of my great-grandmother  
to write and sip coconut water in a hammock by the sea  
while you play in the sand nearby  
I make sure to reciprocate that grin.

3:24pm March 6, 2014 on a bus to Boston from NYC with snow as my scenery I smiled as I  
looked at Fidel's face smiling at me on my phone.

### **Who am I? (2014)**

I am not the framed papers  
on my parents' wall  
of diplomas and degrees  
I have attained.

I am not the monthly statements  
or pay stubs  
of monies earned  
but I will claim to be  
only the substance of lessons learned.

I am not the titles  
before or after my name  
the accessories on my body  
the clothes on my frame  
the house I rent  
the car I drive  
or the places I go  
but I will claim to be  
only the substance of my worst and best actions.

Those moments of regret  
in which I became what I scorned  
those moments of gratitude  
in which I was thankful for my own creation  
felt aligned with my life's purpose  
and dare I say  
transcendent.

12:13p.m. March 20, 2014. This morning SC was about to describe me to her students based on my academic credentials and I told her something similar to the first few lines.

## **Yams**

We have leapt out of the confines  
of mono-dimensional definitions  
even constrictions such as noun, verb, adjective.  
We are all.  
We are leaders  
we are artists  
we are messengers  
we are the interconnected energy  
of children playing ring-around-the-rosy  
attempting to heal ourselves through the art of healing  
attempting to reveal universal truth through the art of revealing  
attempting to forge new definitions of ourselves  
through a process called collective transcendence  
with all of the growing pains of puberty  
occasional pimples  
emotional ebbs and flows  
learning that what we thought we understood  
was only one side of the story  
and even expressing that narrative can be in a form  
that another was gifted  
yet it is gifted to us  
repackaged even better for us  
than the form we were entrusted  
whereby a sound is movement  
a word is a movie  
a photo is a musical note  
a multimedia tapestry  
quilted by loving hands  
with a singular message:  
We came from different roads  
our ancestors may have trod on different hinterlands  
our grandmothers may have washed in different rivers  
our grandfathers may have fought in different wars  
[perhaps on opposing sides]  
but we are here now  
and our very difference is our strength  
that we can somehow erase lines



or cross over them  
in order to audaciously create  
says that strength of a tree is in the root.

June 2014 Based on multiple correspondences it seems the collective is now making the word yam an adjective and I was inspired. SS also wrote a poetic email that described the different experiences/outlooks of yams that also influenced these thoughts.

## **Hold**

Hold  
Hold  
Hold on  
to you  
self-contained  
like the original  
parts of you.  
Hold on  
to that  
which you are  
accumulated  
experiences  
insights  
pieces of a complex  
puzzle  
that you know  
have mastered  
could complete  
almost blindfolded.

Hold on  
Hold  
Hold  
anchor you.

8:19a.m. Aug. 3, 2014. On a bus from Pan to Belize City. Thinking about all of the things I've let go when I chose to hold on to me.

## **Nine by four**

Survived for this time  
to experience my reality  
of maternal and spiritual  
prosperity.

Built colorful sturdy walls

impervious to vipers and vapors  
kinda like bullet-proof  
security.

Created and manifested life  
kept the best parts  
kinda like an editor  
severity.

Decided at times hastily  
jumped looked crashed recovered  
picked up all pieces  
humility.

Mothered the girl me  
nocturnal she of old  
regressing into slow sheepdom  
conformity.

Fathered the boy me  
channeled aggression into productivity  
lion taming at best  
maturity.

Danced between multiple realities  
choosing between two eyes  
kinda like self-quarantining  
polarity.

Noted my internal dialogues  
found one voice muffled  
freed her in time  
fidelity.

Changed direction within movements  
toward a higher ground  
kinda like self-centering  
agility.

5:33a.m. Sep. 9, 2014. Aug. 16 started poem. Reflecting on my 35th year in this life.

## Haikus

One is not such a  
lonely number in my eyes  
except in mourning.

Two years ago I  
decided to be mature  
start acting my age.

Three of my dearest  
friends enjoy life on the edge  
sometimes I join them.

Four children and work  
I do wonder if I can  
be like her.

Five things I know now  
include diligence, vices,  
and self-acceptance.

Six weeks I spent there  
my first time in Honduras  
my granny's birthplace.

Seven in total  
me the youngest of them all  
quite unencumbered.

Eight years now since I  
last visited your grave to  
cry for your life lost.

Nine is my number  
to me it means close to whole  
enough but not stuffed.

Ten daughters – he has  
the players curse they say – but  
each is a blessing.

Eleven he is  
with his feral new white teeth  
and distinct forehead.

Twelve was when he had  
his first growth spurt to my height  
now he bends for hugs.

Thirteen is when she  
ended her life heedlessly  
innocence shattered.

Fourteen years and six  
months I breathed on foreign soil  
before returning.

Fifteen days each month  
I suffered like it was some  
karmic destiny.

Sixteen was when I  
accepted my otherness/  
commenced hiding it.

Seventeen I was  
you one month shy of nineteen  
literary nerds.

Eighteen finally  
I went to New York City  
bit the big apple.

Nineteen and carefree  
what an empty shell I was  
waiting for Hotep.

Twenty was my age  
when I learned to include love  
in my recipes.

## **Seremein! Thank You!**

I appreciate that you took the time to read the product of my experiences. Now tell me and a friend what you thought of this collection. [felene@felene.com](mailto:felene@felene.com) is the best address to reach me.

## About Felene M. Cayetano

Felene M. Cayetano was born in Belize City in 1978. She is a librarian, publisher, poet and mother. Her migration from Belize to Los Angeles at the age of 9 was a key factor that led her to writing poetry in primary school before easing into writing short stories. This love of writing was balanced by a love of reading which gave her the vocabulary to describe her experiences and an appreciation for libraries. Naturally, she pursued and attained a Bachelor's degree in English from the University of Baltimore then a Master's degree in Information and Library Science from Pratt Institute School of Information and Library Science.

In 2004, Felene self-published a poetry collection entitled, *Evolution: Weaving in and out of Consciousness While the Truth is Somewhere in the Middle*. Evolution poetically documents her coming-of-age in America from the age of fifteen to twenty-five years old. The poems reflect her experiences in love, interest in her Garifuna heritage, and ability to vividly convey her emotional landscape. She has shared her poetry at venues in Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Baltimore, New York City, Brooklyn, Dangriga (Belize), Belize City and Paramaribo (Suriname).

Felene has held the position of Librarian at the National Heritage Library (NHL) in Belmopan since August 2007 where she is responsible for collecting, conserving, preserving and providing access to the documentary output of the nation. Her major professional accomplishments include creating cataloging standards for the various sub-collections at NHL, initiating an annual program to honor a locally renowned author and organizing quarterly poetry readings at the library.

She is a founding member of the Belizean Writers Guild and currently serves on the boards of directors of the Belize Book Industry Association (BBIA) and Belize Copyright Licensing Agency (BECLA). In her free time she updates her website, reads, travels, and makes an effort to learn from her children and elders. In 2013, she published two e-books, *Evolution* and *Belizean Nail Soup: A Collection of Short Stories*.

Felene resides between Belmopan and Los Angeles, while maintaining strong links to New York and Baltimore.