Stolen

my mother cries with
you two beautiful women
who lost sons by
sidewalk altars inside
this shrine of constant malice we
call the ghetto
i will never know this pain, you lost your creation, mold
of your soul broken

let your memories
phoenix wings lift
you above your
sea of hurt
Certain Words

I heard the story
We all did
I heard the story so many times
That certain words were stuck
In my mind for days
“Courageous”
“Brave”
“A true hero”
No one will ever hear the name
Zaevion Dobson
Without also thinking those words
But as a mother of a son
I can’t help but wonder if
That’s enough
So please know
That on the night it happened
I watched my son as he slept
I placed my hand on his chest
And I hoped for him to grow
To be the kind of man
That your son was.
Zaevion, Savior
Taylor Olson

I hear your name, everywhere I go—downtown streets, campus sidewalks, bright screen in my living room, that Starbucks on Kingston. They talked about you in church on Sunday—how brave you were, how incredible the sacrifice you made. The whole sermon called for more people to be like you. I wonder—did you know what would happen? When you made your choice? When you threw yourself over those three girls, did you know the people would be shouting your name in the streets? “Zaevion. Savior.”
“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

— President Obama’s speech for Zaevion Dobson, John 15:13

Brother, son,
growing man —
gave your
heart beat
to shield
metallic hate
which sprayed
from those,
who did
not know
the beauty
sown
from you.
Dear Zenobia,

When I was seven years old I broke my mother’s lamp. She heard the commotion and rushed in from the kitchen to see if I was safe. I was, but she wept. She told me the lamp was an heirloom; an anniversary gift from my dad’s parents. I didn’t know what an heirloom was, so she explained that it was a “one of one.” I collected as many of the porcelain pieces as I could fit in my sweaty palms and took them to my room. They stayed hidden by quilts during the day, but, under the covers of night, I meticulously glued those pieces back to the base of her lamp. It grew uglier with every addition. Nothing I did could revitalize the priceless symbol of the love in her life.

She discovered the monstrosity while cleaning under my bed one spring afternoon. She sat me down at the kitchen table and told me that some things cannot be fixed; cannot be replaced. The more you try, the more broken they become. You must lose the physical connection, but cherish the memory.

Nick Bendeck
The plaque they gave you
to replace him is cold.
Does not smile the way he did,
flickers with light from
the static television.

Your boy was no reflection.
Candlelight eyes,
he sparked.

He walked with
sermons in his blood.
Let God speak through
his laughter.

Most children his age
would have run.
He didn’t

They declare him a hero
for his death.
You remember the living hours
he spent burning hope
until the wick ran short.
Marina Waters

All The Way
I can only gloss over that photo.
You in hero’s maroon,
stone faced road dog.
Ready.

That ain’t my brother.
Nah, more like a
stranger you get in a picture frame,
someone else’s graduation.
I’ll be at yours,
Brother.

You were my Friday night superman.
I loved you
right there
on the heels of angels,
soaring down an emerald runway
forever.

That ain’t my kryptonite though,
Brother.

No.
I can’t
fathom
setting into
mahogany eyes
even
in glossy magazine print.

Sun streaming over
Alabama crimson like
bumpy leather on that
October game ball—the one
where you went all the way.

Then the look.
We’re gonna make it,
you’d say.

You did.

I’ll go all the way
one day,
Brother.

And look you
in the eyes.
Tom Gaetjens

What Lives On

*For Zaevion*

All his days come back in threes
we wake, freshly blinded, new
hole in the flag, another boy steps
emptyhanded, classroom to conflict.
Time can’t teach to float barefoot
above broken memory –
we walk.
Put your fingers to the wounds to
quiet you doubt:
some things, bullets
can’t take.
Ode to Silence
In Absolute Awe and Honor of Zae

By Carlee Clark

There’s a quiet that surrounds us in a moment of uncertainty.
A peaceful abundancy overflowing—a reminder of who we have been
In our past, as well as those who have been before us.

A gasp of air, a breath no longer taken for more than what it is:
An opportunity, a newfound hope of tomorrow.
A perseverance of living largely and loudly, even with no words.

Perspective makes all the difference in this moment of stillness.
An impact of a soul ripples the norm of a country,
Serves as a weapon of mass destruction--

Breaking barriers of race and gender,
A fight worth fighting through a life worth living.
Warriors find rest in tranquility.
Too Soon, Zaevion

A fifteen-year old should be
Dreaming about prom,
Whom to invite,

About football,
Number 24, sprinting
To the end line,

About classes
And colleges,
About anything.

But Zaevion Dobson
Hurled his strong
Young body

In the way of bullets.
His body was too human
To shatter metal.

His body proved
Strong enough to stop bullets
From killing three friends,

Young women who will
Embody his memory
Long as they live.

Maybe they will name
A son
Zaevion, and tell him,

“You are named for
a man who was not too young
to do the right thing. A hero.”

Yes, yes, we know,
teens will sigh.
President Obama invoked him,

The young man who
Sacrificed himself
Without doubt.

But I am thinking now of Mrs. Dobson,
His mother, who taught him
To think first

Of others,
Thinking of the ache,
The emptiness,

Her loved son
Shattered by cold metal
Fired from the hands

Of twenty-somethings:
“barrage of bullets”
“senseless shooting spree”—

As if there could be
A meaningful shooting
spree—

Zaevion is a beautiful name,
Now more beautiful,
His mother’s consolation.

A Tenth Grader,
He should have been
Studying biology

And playing ball.
He should have been
Home with family.

Aren’t I a mother too?
So I lay my heart on the page
For Mrs. Dobson.

I want to kill the bullet that
Killed your son, Zenobia.
Want to stop this madness.
Would I throw myself in the way?

I am a professor,

But Zae is my teacher now.

Marilyn Kallet