

OUR BONES SING OF SALT

JT Stewart

**OUR BONES
SING OF SALT**

COLLECTED POEMS

AQUEDUCT PRESS | SEATTLE | 2026



Aqueduct Press

PO Box 95787

Seattle, Washington 98145-2787

www.aqueductpress.com

Copyright © 2026 by JT Stewart

All rights reserved

Library of Congress Control Number: 2026946926

ISBN: 978-1-61976-294-7

First edition, first printing, 2026

COVER & INTERIOR DESIGN: John D. Berry

COVER PHOTO: Dean Wong, courtesy Jack Straw Cultural Center

COVER IMAGE: Photograph of a textile from Kudhinda, A Design Project from Africa, located in Harare, Zimbabwe (www.kudhinda.co.zw). Much thanks to Sandra Muchenje of Kudhinda for permission to use an image of one of their beautiful textiles.

EDITORS: John D. Berry & Eileen Gunn

THE TYPEFACE is Beorcana, a calligraphically based serifless type with a lapidary appearance, designed by Carl Crossgrove.

Printed in the USA by Bookmobile

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

JT Stewart would like to thank John D. Berry & Eileen Gunn for compiling & editing this collection and shepherding it through the publishing process.

FOR THE LIBERATION OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT

CONTENTS

PROMISED LANDS (2009)

PROLOGUE

Holocaust · 5

I. MASKS/SECRETS

Ancestors · 9

Alien Dance Hall · 10

Horn Men · 11

History Lesson: Diaspora · 13

Questions for Our Time · 15

II. TESTIMONIALS

The Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus · 19

Say My Name · 21

Strange Fruit: II · 23

Fingers · 25

III. BLUES/TRANSFORMATIONS

Blue Note Belly Blues · 29

Promised Lands: Urban Style · 32

An Outsider Writes from New Orleans · 38

EPILOGUE

Words: From the End of My Wrist · 47

LOVE ON THE ROCKS – YET AGAIN (2012)

PROLOGUE

Ars Poetica: Scar Tissue · 51

I. HOME BASE/PASSAGES

One Summer · 55

Kiss Me/Change Me · 56

Left to My Own Devices · 58

Anniversary: Greetings · 59

The Winter Man · 60

Lesson · 62

Impromptu Blues · 63

Getting Up in the Morning Prayer · 65

Mama's Blues (Annelies's Song) · 67

II. HAPPY HOUR TALK

Happy Hour Talk: a Poem in 23 Parts · 73

III. RITUALS/OBSESSIONS

Battle of the Sexes: Court Case #0156700 · 77

The Trouble with Being a Poet · 78

One of These Days · 80

Tuesday's Poem · 83

Doing the Wild Thing · 85

Ritual · 88

What I Tell Myself in the Dark · 91

Deus ex Machina · 93

IV. OVER THE EDGE

Bird Watching Urban Style · 99

Changing the Seasons · 100

Scarecrow · 101

End Game · 108

Notes: For an Audition · 110

Love on the Rocks: A Post-Modern Fairy Tale of Sorts · 112

Sending Blood to Vienna · 117

EPILOGUE

Dragons' Teeth · 121

NOMMO (1972)

INTRODUCTION · 125

TV Minstrel · 127

Soul Food · 128

Passin' · 129

Bus Trip · 130

Penny Thoughts · 131

Thursday Morning Anthem · 132

Hell · 133

Love · 134

Mind Process · 135

Homeland · 136

Revolutionary Trick · 138

Holy Ghost · 139

Lady Day · 140

Missing Person · 142

Lesson in Blackness · 144

Prayer · 146

UNCOLLECTED MATERIAL

New Colossus · 151

Black Madonna · 152

Snapshots of Home · 154

Invocation · 156

Journal Entry – Zimbabwe · 158

Rewind · 160

Maya · 161

Reading the Lines · 163

Crossroads · 164

Spirit Song · 165

Circling Back · 167

Raven · 168

Sistahs – How We Got Ovah ·	170
Reincarnation Blues ·	172
Note to Ursula K. Le Guin, From JT Stewart in Seattle ·	173
The Strength of a Poem Turns on a Word ·	176
Funky Hymn ·	177
Ceremony ·	179
Apartheid ·	188
Mirror Woman ·	189
Weaver ·	191
Cinderella Begins Her Memoir ·	192
The Novice Takes Notes for Going South ·	193
From JT Stewart (Planet Earth):	
Note to Charlie Burks ·	196
One Summer ·	197
Lesson ·	198
Love ·	199
Song ·	200
 After Words Eileen Gunn ·	205
 Notes & Comments ·	211
Citations ·	217
About the Author ·	219

OUR BONES SING OF SALT

PROMISED LANDS

*For Nancy Skinner Nordhoff,
Cottages at Hedgebrook*

PROLOGUE

HOLOCAUST

Poems are fused
from old angers

Charred leaves
ignite my brain

This forest
burns forever

I. MASKS/SECRETS

If it falls behind you,
pick it up.

ASANTE SAYING

NOTE: *from the Asante people of Ghana and their traditional
proverbs for the Sankofa bird: i.e. translation. What's done can be
undone.*

ANCESTORS

She drew her first basket
on its side she made a mask
w/ eyes and nose
on its top she made a mouth
slightly open
so it could eat
she thought

She invited some friends
to see the basket

Inside its curved belly
they saw
a flag w/ zebra marks
the curved teeth of a lion
gold elegant huge
rows of elephant tusks
a crocodile napping

They heard a spirit voice
calling all their names

They struggled to breathe
They tried to speak
They wanted to dance

for Nisi

ALIEN DANCE HALL

Here a glittered stocking shimmers
here a severed pair of eyes
jams the blues

Everywhere
desire flaps its tentlike arms

Legs slow drag in the pockmarked dust
embrace suns blackened by ancient storms
clawed birds scream
perform a rag a cakewalk a stomp
a tango

Observe
this needle wind delivers
imported fragrances of old blood
and fetal bones

Stay here if you wish
Settle here if you must

Remember while you can
somebody called
my ancestors cannibals

Dance with me
Dance with me

HORN MEN

hey
you ever wonder
how they survive
these quote unquote black
men jazz jiving they tenor
saxes
in the up-to-date badlands
of South Africa
Johannesburg to be
precise

some
say they be bad
they be up from the bush
long time out of the
bush these brothers be
watch they
pull music from spots
of leopards
from deep river beds
some say they music be
ancestor masks carved
from water trees

these bad brothers
what they know
be awesome
our essence
uh huh
what they make
be true as rain

see how they sweeten
this parched earth
welcome these brothers
hear them
move us into freedom

and beyond

for Kabby

HISTORY LESSON: DIASPORA

They love Africans in museum cases,
so they left much of African cultures intact.

EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE

“REMARKS ON NEGRITUDE”

First they stacked us
in the holds of their dark ships

Then they feasted on our mothers
our names our blood our shadows

They routed and captured our masks
our thrones our bronze carved doors

Now in museums we discover our masks
their ancient eyes track us

We shiver

Discrete signs announce our origins
other signs caution us Do not touch

Do not touch Alarms will sound

Something shakes our memory
we encounter our shadows

Something crosses and recrosses
the danger water

We recall Praise Songs
Our ancestors touch us

Our names come home

for Pam McClusky
Seattle Art Museum

QUESTIONS FOR OUR TIME

Who knows the language of bones
who holds the magic of juju
who can translate the bright
albedo of magnolias
this pale blossom no larger
than a white man's head
luminescent in the night air
no brighter
than a dream gone bad
severed and floating
in darker than dark
bayou waters

Who knows why these rivers
in Africa the Limpopo
in America the Mississippi
bloody themselves
Who hid the gelding knives

Who knows how to get home