



Sanctuary



City of Asylum Pittsburgh

*Sanctuary is the heartbeat of everything we do.
If you can maintain your joy, the oppressor hasn't squished
everything out of you. —Diane Samuels*

Book in hand, a young mom-to-be unlatches a gate and steps from her morning sidewalk into the hush of a snug urban garden.

As the sun sets, a silver-haired gent crosses West North Avenue, slips through a vestibule, and enters a welcoming cloud compounded of book-store scent, dinner-chat buzz, and muted pre-concert to-do.

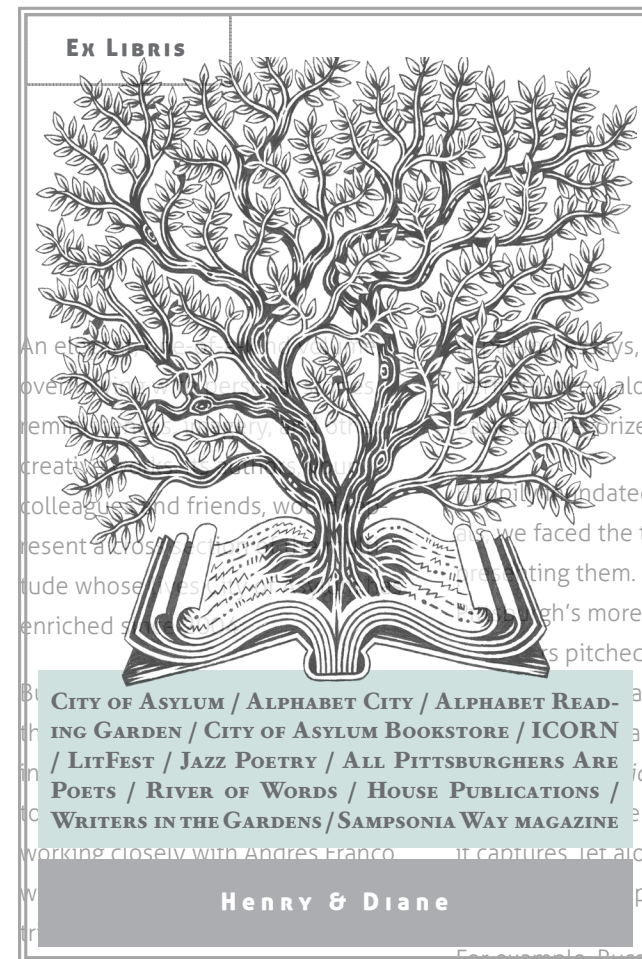
Late that night, an author, still healing from harsh treatment in a country far away, rests her back against her new home's door. She double-checks the lock, lights a candle, and bends to her keyboard, a fresh, outspoken chapter revolving in her mind.

Dear Diane and Henry,

Just three snapshots (among myriad possibilities) of the life-changing sanctuary you conceived, brought into the world, and nourished in this North Side neighborhood and in the hearts of those who cherish free expression around the world.

Last winter, City of Asylum Pittsburgh's board of directors quietly resolved to surprise you with a tribute to the genius, creativity, and generosity you've shared since you first imagined COA. But what gesture of gratitude could measure up to all you've accomplished?

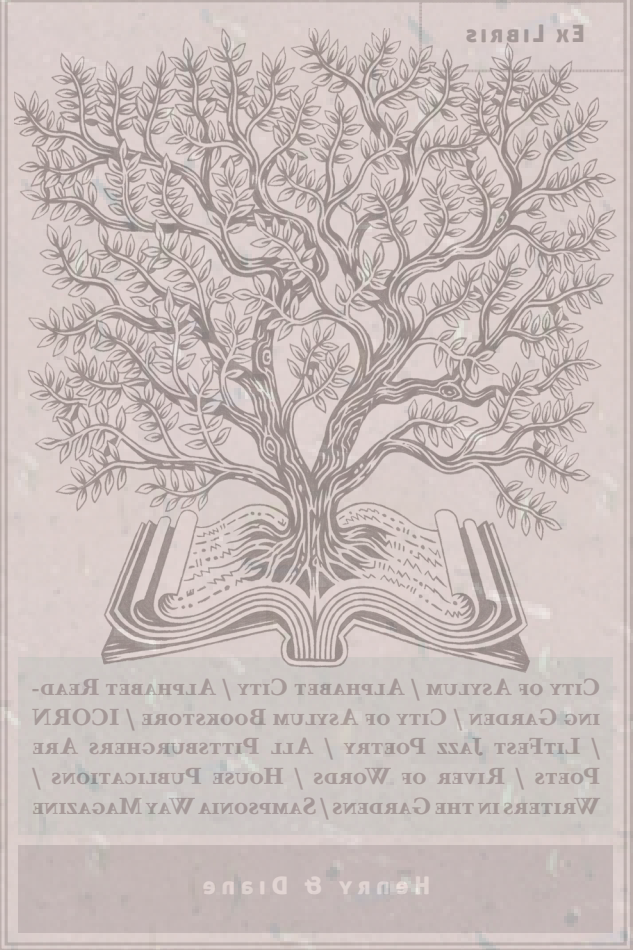
After a spirited debate, inspiration struck: Given COA's roots in literary freedom, why not create a work of art in the form of a book?



An etymology of the word "sanctuary," anecdotes, and over a dozen essays, along with works less remembered by the literary canon, are here. Creative and thoughtful, the book is a labor of love, one that was only made possible by the generosity of our colleagues and friends, who have helped us present a vision of the world we want to see. We are grateful to those who have enriched our lives and helped us shape and sustain this community. We hope it captures the spirit of the work we have done together. For example, Russell Banks submitted a letter (Page 3) that captures the flavor of COA's evolution. It relates how, in 1989, after *The Satanic Verses* was published, Salman Rushdie

We anticipated an outpouring of love and gratitude. But the sincerity, creativity, and humor of the responses blew us away. More than 40 people expressed their appreciation

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Writers in the Gardens / Sampson's Way Magazine
Poets / River of Words / House Publications /
/ Littlest Jazz Poetry / All Pittsburghers Are
the Garden / City of Asylum Bookstore / ICORN
City of Asylum / Alphabet City / Alphabet Read-

Henry & Diane

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After a spirited debate, inspiration struck: Given COA's roots in literary freedom, why not create a work of art in the form of a book?

An elegant, one-of-a-kind volume, overflowing with personal stories, reminiscences, imagery, and other creative works. Its authors, your colleagues and friends, would represent a cross section of the multitude whose lives City of Asylum has enriched since 2004.

But COA's impact is so widespread that we wondered whether keeping this project under wraps until tonight's gala would be possible. So, working closely with Andres Franco, we drafted a confidential call for tributes.

We anticipated an outpouring of love and gratitude. But the sincerity, creativity, and humor of the responses blew us away. More than 40 people expressed their appreciation

in poems, essays, anecdotes, and performances, along with works less easy to categorize.

Happily inundated with raw materials, we faced the task of shaping and presenting them. Luckily, two of Pittsburgh's more gifted graphic designers pitched in. Many months of collaboration and deliberation later, our team has completed this modern *liber amicorum*. We hope it can live up to the imaginative tributes it captures, let alone your community-stirring accomplishments.

For example, Russell Banks submitted a letter (Page 3) that captures the flavor of COA's evolution. It relates how, in 1989, after *The Satanic Verses* was published, Salman Rushdie

I realized that exiled writers, foreign languages, and literature could be a way to engage rather than divide, that access — not lack of interest — was the key barrier. —Henry Reese

became the target of a vengeful fatwa. He was forced into hiding.

At the time, Salman's fame and resources afforded him some measure of security. But most endangered writers, he knew, command neither fame nor resources. So, in 1993, he spearheaded the International Parliament of Writers. With IPW encouragement, several newly designated Cities of Asylum in Europe volunteered to shelter endangered, exiled authors.

You remember. Salman mentioned the movement when he surfaced in Pittsburgh for a 1997 speaking engagement. The idea captivated two listeners: a successful entrepreneur and an internationally recognized artist. Through Cities of Asylum in Europe, you eventually connected with Russell, who was working to expand the network into the United States.

City of Asylum Pittsburgh opened in 2004 with a unique, grassroots model, supported by individuals

and foundations rather than universities. (Notably, Henry, you channeled your personal assets into the nascent COA.) Also uniquely, your COA focused on helping exiled writers build stable lives in an established community, rather than on emergency relief and temporary waystations.

Today, COA Pittsburgh is a runaway success; every writer or artist we've hosted has created a full-scale work while in residence. And virtually all have gone on to find full-time employment in the U.S.

So far, you've helped make dreams of sanctuary a reality for more than a dozen creative exiles.

As a result, COA Pittsburgh has become the model for International Cities of Refuge worldwide.

At the same time, the neighborhood around Sampsonia Way has witnessed the blossoming of a "just community" anchored by Alphabet City, where more than 160 free programs each year link artists and the broader population. Once a neglected

Masonic Hall, Alphabet City is now an airy temple dedicated to freedom of creation — especially for those who might otherwise be denied a stage.

So far so good. But, not long ago, few of us would have cared to imagine the resurgence of repression overshadowing the 21st century. The global tide of attacks on literary figures has risen relentlessly.

So, as you page through this book, be aware that every image and word honors the spark of illumination you struck when you founded City of Asylum Pittsburgh, and remember that we'll keep striving to join your lights with our own in the years to come.

With affectionate respect,

Anne Billiet Lackner
Barbara Talerico
October 28, 2022

Huang Xiang
China, 2004

Horacio Castellanos-Moya
El Salvador, 2006

Khet Mar and Than Htay Maung
Burma, 2009

Israel Centeno and
Graciela Bonnet
Venezuela and Argentina, 2011

Yaghoub Yadali
Iran, 2013

Tuhin Das
Bangladesh, 2016

Osama Alomar
Syria, 2017

Rania Mamoun
Sudan, 2019

Mai Khoi
Vietnam, 2020

Aunel Arneth Kimbembe Makaya
Republic of Congo, 2021

Jorge Olivera Castillo
Cuba, 2021

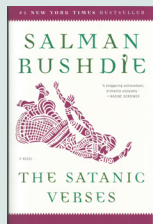
Anouar Rahmani
Algeria, 2022

In 1997, Henry and Diane attended a lecture in Pittsburgh by novelist Salman Rushdie about threats to writers. "We nudged each other," Samuels recalls. "Why not create a safe house for international authors in Pittsburgh?"

"Literature is a solitary art—writers are consequently weak and vulnerable to attack."

—Russell Banks

1997



The Satanic Verses, Salman Rushdie's 1988 novel, which led Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini of Iran to issue a fatwa against him.

Salman Rushdie, Huang Xiang, and Henry outside House Poem, Sampsonia Way, 2004.

2004



RUSSELL BANKS was the chairman of Cities of Refuge North America in 2004. He invited Henry and Diane to become part of an informal U.S. network identifying writers in danger and offering them a safe haven.

A Big Idea

May I compose this brief tribute to you in the form of a personal letter? I like thinking that over the years, since the creation of City of Asylum Pittsburgh, we have become friends, despite having been able to meet in person only rarely. I picture you today pretty much the way you were when we first met back in 2004 — Henry in his stylish bow tie and de bon goût jacket, Diane like a model sitting for a portrait by Modigliani, the two of you gracious and warm and welcoming to me personally and to the early evolution of the notion of a City of Asylum. You took the idea — half-implemented by then in only a couple of American cities, Las Vegas and Ithaca, New York — and ran with it. In no time, it seemed, Pittsburgh became the prototype for the whole project, the model that no other city could quite match, because no other city had at its center someone like you two.

You didn't merely embrace Salman's and Wole's and my vision for the project — a network of cities, each providing a safe house and living stipend for a persecuted writer. You built it out, so that there was as much emphasis on the word City as on the word Asylum. You realized before anyone else that it was as necessary to provide a writer with a community as to provide him or her with a safe house and stipend. You understood that in fact it could not truly be a safe house unless it was surrounded and supported by an entire community.

Henry and Diane, you imagined and then created something that not even Salman, Wole or I dared imagine. To do it, you had to educate an entire city as to the need for such a project, and of course you had to find the funding for it — exhausting, thankless work. And where the city itself could not be an integral part of the City of Asylum community, you found a way to bring in a bookstore, a jazz program, readings, a restaurant, workshops. You facilitated the translation and publication of the resident writers' work. You built a community of the arts designed specifically to protect, embrace and encourage poets and writers who had been driven out of their homelands into exile, solitude, and silence — perhaps the worst kind of punishment for a poet or writer. By providing the poets and writers with a community, you gave them back their voice. For a poet or writer, there is no greater gift.

What's also clear is that you gave something of great value to the city of Pittsburgh itself. You understood that it could and should be reciprocal, that the presence of an exiled poet or writer could be a thing of great value to the citizenry, a profound enrichment of the literary and civic culture of the city. It's probably not a job you would want, but Pittsburgh should make you honorary mayor. Absent that, I hereby nominate you both to be named honorary mayor of Alphabet City.

With admiration, gratitude and affection, your friend,

Russell

Saturday, April 2, 2022

Stealing the Show

Those of us old enough to remember the raucous 1960s movie, “Easy Rider,” will also remember how Jack Nicholson, whom nobody had ever heard of previously, got onto the back of Peter Fonda’s motorcycle, stole the show, and rode off into stardom. And we don’t have to be quite that old to remember Frances McDormand stealing the show in “Fargo,” or Melissa McCarthy doing the same in “Bridesmaids.”

Now, I’m not saying that Henry Reese can ride a motorcycle like Nicholson (though he certainly can ‘handle the truth,’) nor that Diane Samuels can block an airplane lavatory entrance with her leg like McCarthy, or put on a convincing Minnesota accent like McDormand (though she can say the word “love” like Barry White). I **am** saying, however, loudly and unequivocally, that when it comes to providing writers from despotic regimes around the world with asylum in the United States, Henry and Diane absolutely stole **that** show, making their street in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a refuge like nowhere else.

While others, writers like myself, held a lot of meetings and talked a good game, Henry and Diane rolled up their sleeves, opened their home, and then tirelessly, generously, and without much fanfare, built something truly great around them.

I remember when I first met Henry and Diane in New York over a decade ago, they were simply buying books and curious about the idea, but when I met them again in Pittsburgh just last fall, they’d been seminal in opening up an entire bookstore dedicated to it, and in creating a half a dozen houses where international writers could live and work without fear.

I know that they have had a lot of help from the good people of Pittsburgh, but Henry and Diane are the lynchpins in what I’d like to call a ‘good grenade,’ with which they have blown up everyone’s expectations and created a lasting and beautiful legacy, not only for their city, but for the whole of the USA.

Congratulations to you both! You are my show stoppers.

Richard Wiley
March 20, 2022



RICHARD WILEY won the 1987 PEN/Faulkner Award for Best American Fiction for *Soldiers in Hiding*, his first novel. He has lived and taught in Korea, Japan, Kenya, and Nigeria, and is a prolific writer of novels and short stories. Richard joined the creative writing faculty at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, in 1986. It was there that he met Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka.

WOLE SOYINKA is a founding member and past president, International Parliament of Writers, and a co-founder of the Cities of Asylum movement. Originally from Nigeria, Wole is an acclaimed writer, playwright, critic, and activist. He became the first African to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986.

Soyinka told Wiley about his hope for an American city of asylum at dinner one night. “We laughed at the notion that Las Vegas could be the first,” said Wiley. “It was so counter-intuitive.” But with funding from a former colleague and the Mandalay Resort Group, City of Asylum began in the United States in 2000.



2006

Zhang Ling, Huang Xiang, Wole Soyinka, Richard Wiley, and Carol Harter in front of Huang Xiang’s House Poem on Sampsonia Way, 2006.

Wole reading at the Freedom to Create Gala at Alphabet City, 2021. Wole, imprisoned for his criticism of the Nigerian government, spent many years in exile in Europe and the United States.



Jazz Poetry began as a performative way for non-English-speaking Chinese poet Huang Xiang to “read” his work. “The” Oliver Lake graciously accepted an invitation to play in the very first Jazz Poetry concert, and he is still programming today.



*“Just
be
good.”*

—Oliver Lake



OLIVER LAKE is an alto saxophonist, a poet, a visual artist, and a true artistic polymath. He has developed a highly cadenced spoken-word style that takes on society's issues, big and small, with wit and irony.



2005

Oliver Lake performing with Claudio Cojaniz and Alessio Zoratto at Jazz Poetry, 2022.

The placard ceremony held annually during Jazz Poetry lifts up names on the PEN case list to acknowledge that freedom of expression is constantly under threat.

“Just be good” on the Jazz House facade comes from Lake’s childhood interaction with an old man who fastened colorfully painted safety pins to young boys’ collars. Oliver asked what he had to do to join the club, and the old man said, “Just be good.”

18 Years of Knowing This Couple

... one of the most creative couples I know.

Henry, with his steadfastness towards completion of each project, and Diane, with her consistent positivity, creativity and encouragement. And I don’t forget to mention Diane’s detailed works of art, all so inspiring and beautiful, she has inspired me to pay more attention to the details, in all aspects of my work.

I remember the phone call from Henry, asking me to participate in the first JazzPoetry Concert. Participating and watching the successful evolution that Henry and Diane implemented for City of Asylum. During that time, I realized how much Henry loved to create theatrical entrances for the musicians. Each year he would come with different modes of how the musicians would enter the stage. I entered from different houses in the alley of Sampsonia Way, thru the audience, from the balcony or any approach that avoided, just plainly walking on stage. I had to be ready to explore, so we did many different approaches to the stage. This was a way for Henry to improvise, just like one of the musicians.

Thanks to Henry & Diane for hosting some of the best after concert parties, that I have ever attended. Thanks to Henry and Diane for all the special commissions given to me thru out the history of COA... composition, art (The Jazz House), theater (“Stoop is a Verb” & “Home”), to name a few.

I am thankful for their support and our great friendship.

“from the alley of Sampsonia Way to City Of Asylum’s beautiful building,” quite a successful and unique journey, guided by this inspirational couple.

Thanks Henry & Diane continued success and
“Much Love,”

Oliver Lake

March 27, 2022

Bird

The secret is
not to be afraid, to
pour the salt, letting your wrist
be free—there is almost
never too much; it sits on top of the skin like a
little crystal casket. Under, the bird might
imagine another life, one in which it is grateful
for pleasing, can smell
itself cooking—the taste
of carrots, onions, potatoes stewed
in its own juice—and forget
the dreams of blood
coursing out of its throat like a river.

Toi Derricotte

(The Paris Review, 1992)

[Link to Toi reading her poem](#)

cityofasylum.org/henrydianebook



Toi is the author of the rallying cry, “Joy is an act of resistance,” featured prominently at City of Asylum’s Alphabet Reading Garden gate. An early City of Asylum board member, Toi has known Diane and Henry since the mid-90s, when she invited Diane to her graduate poetry class to discuss how she incorporated language into her art.



**“Joy is an
act of
resistance.”**

—Toi Derricotte



1995

The gate to the Alphabet Reading Garden, featuring Toi’s quote.

The logo of Cave Canem, founded in 1996 by poets Toi Derricotte and Cornelius Eady to remedy the underrepresentation and isolation of African-American poets in Master of Fine Arts programs and writing workshops across the United States.

Huang reading his poetry to members of Cave Canem;
Toi and Huang outside House Poem 2005.

TOI DERRICOTTE is the former chancellor of the Academy of American Poets and co-founder of Cave Canem (with Cornelius Eady) in 1996. Their organization won the 2016 National Book Foundation Literarian Award for Outstanding Service to the American Literary Community.

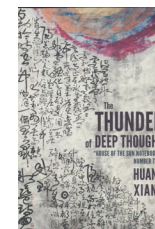


2005





Huang was so overcome by his new city and the freedom to write that he wanted to revive the ancient Chinese tradition of carving poems into the sides of mountains. Diane suggested the facade of his house as a canvas instead, and House Poem was born.



Huang painting his poetry on the facade of his new home, 2004.

Huang performing at Jazz Poetry in the New Hazlett Theater, an alternate venue for Jazz Poetry during inclement weather.

Huang flashing a smile made possible by his dentist, Dr. Owen Cantor.

Listening to the Mountains from Behind Bars

In the eyes

a single

bird

overhead

a puffy

cloud

on the lips

head
ffy

a drop of

water

lonely toes

split open

stone-chiseled

thoshts

a

cle

note

nobody hears

drips

drops

a simple moment

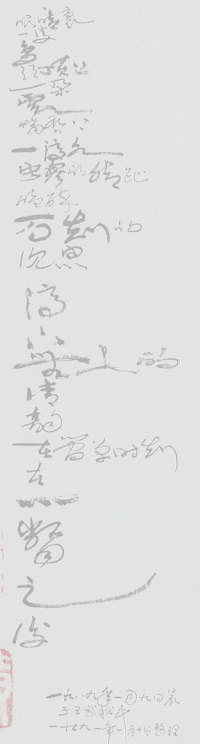
after

a

single

glance

Huang Xiang
Dawn in Wang Wu Prison
(January 10, 1991)



Diane

Born into a Hungarian family where heated arguments erupted over whether sliced cucumber salad would be better presented with or without paprika, I felt constantly bewildered...that is...until I met Diane.

I knew Diane would appear in my life someday: a Judaic Scheherazade, spinner of 1001 head-palming tales similar to my own. We share stories of zany family trips to NYC's noisy Orchard Street, the fossil of Yiddish imagination, negotiating great deals at Fine & Klein Leather, Izzy Fishgang wholesale, my grandma once blocking a Dr. Brown's delivery truck until the driver sold us a case of Cel-Ray to bring back to Pittsburgh. Diane understood because she was there, too.

More than a friend, she's my "spirit sister separated at birth" validating my memories with irony, humor and art. In our work, we both commit to perfection in tiny detail. I thank some God for reuniting us.

Henry

"Subversive" would not be the first word coming to mind if you viewed Diane, Henry and me at a restaurant, laughing and telling our crazy family stories...But, subversives we are! Me? I poke my finger in the eye of horrible authoritarian governments. I perform a tiny subversive action through comprehensive dental rehabilitation, fighting for the helpless in the face of methodical violence.

Years ago I was invited to an odd event in a narrow Northside back alley. That evening, COA's first writer-in exile, Huang Xiang, was "reading his house". Initially skeptical and reluctant, I found myself moved to tears. Henry thanked us all for coming. I introduced myself. "Hi Henry. I'm Owen. I'm a dentist." Henry didn't let me finish my sentence: "OH GOD! Teeth...the first thing our new poet asked for when he got off the plane".

2004

Unknown to me, the Chinese prison guards had brutally bashed out Huang Xiang's front teeth. Without front teeth, pronouncing articulated consonants is impossible. Every future glance in the mirror would remind him of inflicted horror. Thinking of this, I still cry inside.

One day, years later, our Chinese poet was jumping for joy, holding a mirror, smiling, dancing around my clinic, hugging and laughing. HX had perfect teeth. My reward—he and I had learned to love each other.

Owen Cantor

May 24, 2022



OWEN CANTOR, DDS, is a practicing dentist, freelance French horn player, student of distinguished educator Forrest Standley at CMU, and former artist lecturer, CMU College of Fine Arts.

Owen provided crucial free dental care to Huang Xiang. The guards in a Chinese prison had smashed Huang's front teeth; Dr. Cantor replaced them, enabling Huang to resume his oral poetry readings.

**"Why not use
your house
as your
canvas?"**

—Diane's response to
Huang's wish to
carve his writing into
Pittsburgh's "mountains."



2004

Huang Xiang
"reading" his house
during Huang
Xiang Day, 2004.



1970

Agnes at the Touchstone Center for Crafts. Touchstone was founded in 1972 as the Pioneer Crafts Council. Its mission, to foster interest in the preservation of traditional crafts, expanded to include contemporary and experimental techniques in a variety of disciplines.



AGNES DODDS KINARD was a retired lawyer, businesswoman, and City of Asylum board member emerita since 2005. Agnes died peacefully at home, aged 99, in 2014.



A Pittsburgh historian and longtime civic activist, Agnes said, "City of Asylum—even more than the Pirates and the Steelers—makes Pittsburgh 'The City of Champions.' City of Asylum is truly one of Pittsburgh's most important historic landmarks."



Our Salute to You Both

Nearly a half-century ago, an extraordinarily talented young art student graduate from Carnegie Mellon University named Diane Samuels walked into our family. The connection began in 1970 when our late mother, Agnes Dodds Kinard, hired Diane as the first employee and as Education Director of what was then the Pioneer Crafts Council in the mountains of western Pennsylvania. That began a lifelong friendship between Agnes, our late step-father James P. Kinard, the three of us and Henry Reese, once he appeared in Diane's life. As the principal founder of PCC, now in its 50th year as the Touchstone Center for Crafts in Farmington Pa, our mother felt that hiring Diane was one of the best decisions she made in her 99 ½ years.

As the years progressed, Diane left PCC to begin her climb as a world-renowned artist. Along the line, she met Henry, a brilliant shy and charming businessman who loved her and her world of art. Although Henry may have suspected it and did not know it for sure, he received a thorough subtle vetting by Agnes who gave him a 100% favorable review. This outlook, of course, only grew more favorable with Agnes's constant admiration for Henry's vision and her astonishment at his considerable ability to make things happen. We all believe that Diane and Henry are the sweetest, most thoughtful and giving couple we know, a walking picture of a couple sublimely partnered. We also embrace them as leaders of the fiercest defenders of free speech and artistic expression on the planet.

Their contributions to the revitalization of Pittsburgh's Northside are truly monumental and inclusive of the community. Agnes was thrilled to be asked by Diane and Henry to be a founding board member of City of Asylum, a post from which she resigned when she was 96 or 97, saying she was too old, hard-of-hearing and too blind to help. Still, she was always in the background, talking with Diane and Henry, and trying to help support these two dynamic citizens accomplish even more.

In her autobiography, Agnes says Diane and Henry and their establishment of the City of Asylum—even more than the Pirates and the Steelers—make Pittsburgh "The City of Champions." About the 2004 dedication of the wooden house for Chinese poet Huang Xiang, she wrote: "Long may the banner yet wave—with honor to our city, our citizens, and our artists, and all those courageous writers who guard our freedom while risking arrest, incarceration, condemnation and expulsion. I feel privileged to have witnessed this inspiring historic event, truly the dedication of one of Pittsburgh's most important historic landmarks."

The artistic and literary legacy Diane and Henry built with the City of Asylum/Alphabet City is a gift to us all and continues to enrich every day. Thank you two from all of us!

Allan Dodds Frank, Michael Robert Frank and Marilyn Dodds Frank
April 1, 2022

Concerts

... often can become garish events ... of huge ensembles, special effects and would-be showmanship.

But Henry Reese and Diane Samuels obviously realize size does not mean soul.

The initial Jazz Poetry Day bespoke the heart of City of Asylum. At that point, Henry and Diane decided to celebrate the success of the group's first year by having a day of readings and music near City's first properties on Sampsonia Way.

I was a newspaper writer at the time, doing stories in a number of areas and also writing about jazz. I had done a piece about City of Asylum's inauguration and several smaller pieces about events Henry and Diane had put together. Word of the Jazz Poetry Day was intriguing as Henry told it to me, and then he said two words that made my eyes widen: Oliver Lake.

I had seen the creative, Avant Garde sax player twice and was familiar with his inventive recordings. If Oliver Lake is taking part in this, it will have to be worth seeing, I thought.

When I talked to Lake for a preview article, he said the cause of his participation was simple: "I really like what they are doing."

The Saturday afternoon event in the tight confines of Sampsonia was an energetic collection of ideas and music. Hundreds of believers in free thinking and human rights gathered for readings, poetry and music by Lake and others. Listeners arrived and departed constantly. Seating in plastic chairs fell into rows in a jazz-like way—with improvisation. I saw friends from the North Side I had not seen in years.

For me, that day symbolizes City of Asylum. But it is only a symbol. The work the group does goes far beyond.

Bob Karlovits

March 6, 2022



ROBERT KARLOVITS is a writer for the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review who covers jazz, history, and other issues. A trumpet enthusiast, Bob has reported on Jazz Poetry since the first concert in 2005.

Bob's 2007 Pittsburgh Tribune-Review story linked Oliver Lake with Jazz Poetry. His coverage lent welcome support to City of Asylum's early jazz programming.

Jennifer Clement reading from *Prayers for the Stolen* at the home of Henry and Diane in 2015.

The Center That Holds

I am an immigration lawyer and I have had the honor of working with City of Asylum since close to the beginning of this journey.

Every year, I send my clients a Pittsburgh-centric holiday greeting focusing their attention on something special about the center of my universe. Since meeting Henry and Diane, my letter brought City of Asylum to their attention as an extraordinary organization which is only made possible by the dedication of these extraordinary people.

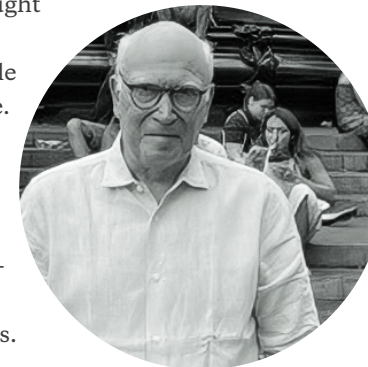
My wife and I have been invited to gatherings at their home. While we met and interacted with both writers and other City of Asylum supporters, we always felt and feel a strong personal connection to Henry and Diane, a feeling of being at the home of long time friends.

They have created something very special, a home for international writers and artists and Pittsburghers to celebrate freedom of expression.

Congratulations to them and to City of Asylum, may their success continue to inspire us all!!!

Robert Whitehill

March 29, 2022



ROBERT WHITEHILL, ESQ., is senior counsel at Fox Rothschild, LLP, where he specializes exclusively in immigration and nationality law. Bob's help has been key in assuring our writers' safe and secure passage to sanctuary at City of Asylum.



2005

2005

2006



"In protecting the stranger in our midst, we learn not only how to envision a better future, but how to create a better one."

—Henry Reese

Salon Readings began in Henry and Diane's home in 2006, always accompanied by food and wine and an opportunity for guests to mingle with the writer. The first event was for the launch of Horacio's novel, Senselessness. By 2016, over 70 salon-style readings had been held in their residence.

For ten years, Salon Readings in Henry and Diane's home encouraged community bonds, connecting artists to their audience.



HORACIO CASTELLANOS MOYA
(El Salvador) was City of Asylum's second writer in residence. In 2014 Chilean President Michelle Bachelet awarded Horacio the Iberoamerican Prize for Fiction, the most prestigious Latin-American literary award.



Dream Builders

Pittsburgh showed up unexpectedly in my life. Just three months before landing in that city, I didn't know what path my eventful life would put me on, or where destiny would lead me. At that time, I was in Frankfurt, Germany, and my visitor visa was about to expire. I could not return to El Salvador because my political enemies' hatred still burned hot.

I had applied to the City of Asylum program in the United States, and I soon began to exchange emails with someone named "Ralph" regarding the possibility of being accepted into the Pittsburgh program. His responses to my pleas were succinct and abrupt.

But soon my request was approved. I packed my two bags and took a plane to my new destination.

I arrived at midnight, on a delayed flight, to a city of which I knew nothing and in which I knew no one. It was early August 2006. Ralph and his wife, Diane, were waiting for me at the airport. "Welcome to Pittsburgh!" they said with great cheer.

And thus began a new stage of my life. That first breathtaking view of the city, after leaving the Fort Pitt Tunnel and driving onto the bridge of the same name, is still stamped in my memory: the lights of the tall buildings, the glamorous stadiums, the numerous bridges, and the reflection of the three rivers that meet there.

Ralph, of course, was Ralph Henry. When I remember that time, I am still surprised by the warmth of my reception; how quickly we became friends; the immense support they gave me; the generous way they opened the doors of a city, of a community, to me (the fondly remembered neighbors of the Mexican War Streets neighborhood); and of a house that became my home on Sampsonia Way, a house in which I wrote profusely, in the greatest comfort and with complete support.

How many guest writers, how many readings, how many long after-dinner conversations we shared with Henry and Diane in those years! They spoke enthusiastically of their plans to promote culture in the community, of the project that would later become Alphabet City. They are the kind of entrepreneurs who make dreams come true, a magnificent blend between the retired entrepreneur and the talented artist standing in solidarity with literature and their community.

I lived five years in Pittsburgh, five unforgettable years, five years that deeply marked my life and my writing. None of that would have been possible without Henry and Diane. My absolute gratitude and friendship will always be with them.

Horacio Castellanos Moya

April 2, 2022

Winged House was conceived as “*The Spiritual Wings*” in response to Wole’s text, etched into the glass of the house’s front door. Thaddeus said, “I drew about three lines on paper and ... the house is lifted up.”

Writers in the Gardens was created by longtime friend of City of Asylum and board member Sandy Kniess as a way to further connect the organization to its neighbors.

CITY OF ASYLUM

Henry and Diane protecting threatened writers showing us the way

house publications
jazz and poetry for all
Sampsonia Way

reclaiming the past
gathering community
Alphabet City

Sandy Kniess and David Solosko
March 2, 2022

Neighborhood Connections

I first met Henry Reese and Diane Samuels almost two decades ago when my husband and I moved into the historic Mexican War Streets District. Henry and Diane had recently started City of Asylum Pittsburgh, an organization I had become interested in prior to our move. Being invited to attend literary evenings in their home was a defining moment for both of us, as we realized how fortunate we were to have decided to move to this neighborhood.

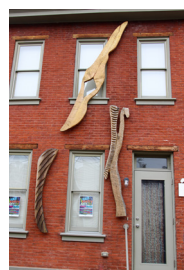
My efforts for their organization began when I expressed an interest in helping Henry and Diane strengthen their connection to the neighborhood. After being invited to join the board my primary contribution was to organize, in 2007, the first Writers-in-the-Gardens event, in which writers presented readings in our five public gardens.

The following year I arranged private garden sites and volunteer guides to begin an annual tradition that grew into a guided walking tour through our historic streets and alleys into secluded gardens belonging to neighborhood homeowners. WIG, as we came to call it, engaged Pittsburgh writers, using a variety of curators, including Gist Street Reading Series, Autumn House Press, and Peter Tractenberg, and enabled prose and poetry writers to present their works to small audiences in intimate settings.

WIG lasted nine years, but the wealth of experience and cultural exposure created a lasting bond between City of Asylum, our neighborhood, and residents of the many other communities of our city. With the creation of Alphabet City as a permanent performance space, with the expansion of the City of Asylum program, and, with the increase in the number of endangered writers living in our midst, the contribution that Henry and Diane have made has added vital energy to our community.

On behalf of my husband, David Solosko, and our Mexican War Streets neighbors, I would like to express our enormous gratitude for everything that Henry Reese and Diane Samuels, and COA, have done for us all.

Sandra Kniess
March 2, 2022



“WIG events have created a lasting bond between City of Asylum and its neighborhood.”

—Sandy Kniess



2006

THADDEUS MOSLEY is a Pittsburgh artist. The recipient of numerous awards, he transforms wood into inventive abstract forms that source inspiration from the art of the African diaspora, jazz, and the European modernist avant-garde.

Winged House, featuring wood sculpture by Thaddeus and poetry by Wole.

Thaddeus with Henry Reese and Silvia Duarte.

Guests enjoying a Writers in the Gardens presentation in one of many Mexican War Streets locations.

2007

Mind Boggling

It was summertime, fourteen years ago, when we moved into our home on the Northside. Soon after, as we were wandering around, getting our bearings and exploring our neighborhood, we noticed colorful posters advertising an upcoming event called “Jazz Poetry”. It was to be free to the public, and held right around the corner, al fresco, on Sampsonia Way. How interesting, we thought.

We went, sat in the folding chairs, and so began our fourteen year (and counting) love affair with City of Asylum Pittsburgh, and being ceaselessly amazed at what it has evolved into. It just keeps getting better and better.

Alphabet City is a beautiful and fitting home for City of Asylum Pittsburgh, but we will always count ourselves fortunate to have experienced your incredible warmth and generosity during those early days and evenings when you opened your home, to friends and strangers alike, for meals, readings and concerts (the stage set up in your kitchen!!) and the afterevent conversations they inspired. Henry & Diane’s Salon. Who does that anymore?!

It is truly mind boggling what you both have done. The time and energy you must have put into zoning, construction, maintenance, staffing, fundraising, bank loans, neighborhood meetings, NIMBY headaches, logistics, visas, event scheduling, etc. etc. etc. All that and more, when you could have been relaxing and enjoying the fruits of success from your previous careers. And Diane, all the while you continued to produce exquisite and painstakingly detailed works of art!

It is almost impossible to find the words to properly thank you both for what you’ve done for our neighborhood and Pittsburgh, the gift that truly keeps on giving. But we can say this; we can imagine The Burgh without Primanti Brothers, without Heinz Ketchup, and without the Pens or Stillers (we’re obviously not from around here), but we cannot imagine it without City of Asylum.

With warmest affection,

Susan and Bill Steen

March 29, 2022

2008

HANK & DIANE

From Susan & Bill

(With apologies to John Mellencamp)

A little ditty 'bout Hank & Diane
Two American boomers living in the heartland
Hank, he was a businessman 'n all
Diane's an artist, and writes really small

Suckin' on Kelle Paca inside Beth Z's
Diane sitting on the banquette
Got his hands on her Khachapuri
“Hey, Diane, lets run off behind the shade tree
Dribble off those Dan Browns
Let me read what I please”

Saying “Oh yeah
Jazz goes on, long after the thrill of zoning is gone”
Saying “Oh yeah
Readings go on, long after the thrill of fund raising is gone”
They dine on

Hank he sits back, collects his thoughts for a moment
Straightens his bow tie, and does his best Huang Xiang
“Well then, there, Diane, we ought to run off to Helsinki”
Diane says
“Baby, you ain't missing Rushdie”
But Hank he says, yeah

“Oh yeah, Jazz goes on, long after the thrill of zoning is gone”
“Oh yeah”
He's saying “Readings go on, long after the thrill of fund raising is gone”

Oh, let it stream, let it grow
Let the Masons come and save my soul
Holdin' on to sixty as long as we can
Translations coming 'round real soon make us friends of PEN

“Oh yeah, Jazz goes on, long after the thrill of zoning is gone Oh yeah”

He's saying “Readings go on, long after the thrill of fund raising is gone”

A little ditty 'bout Hank & Diane
Two American boomers doin' the best they can



Two sides of a quilt made by Susan Steen depict the House Publications on Sampsonia Way and the national flags of the countries of the writers in residence.

Sampsonia Way magazine is a project of City of Asylum devoted to promoting literary freedom of expression and giving voice to persecuted writers. Writer in residence Khet Mar pushed for an online magazine that would allow writers still in their countries of origin to participate and to be heard.



"A digital magazine protects free speech without endangering the writers."

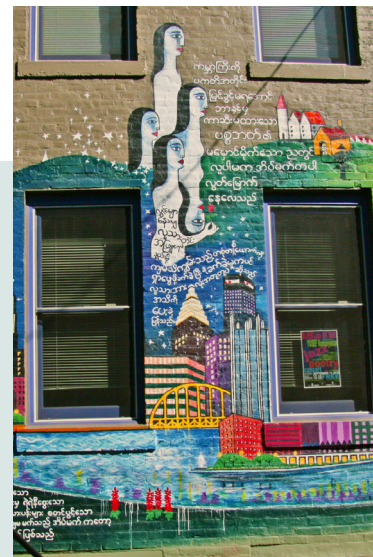
—Henry Reese

2009

SAMPSONIA WAY
AN ONLINE MAGAZINE FOR LITERATURE, FREE SPEECH & SOCIAL JUSTICE

THAN HTAY MAUNG After fleeing Burma and arriving in Pittsburgh, his wife, Khet, had a dream. She wrote out its text and her husband painted a mural entitled, "Irrawaddy River meets the Allegheny River," on what became Pittsburgh-Burma House.

Portrait of Henry and Diane



Than Htay Maung

April 2, 2022

Sampsonia Way logo. The magazine is a virtual sanctuary for those unable to find refuge at any of the ICORN Cities of Asylum.

The facade of Pittsburgh-Burma House, where Than and his wife Khet lived with their two boys from 2009 to 2012.



2009

Khet at her graduation with her mother, who said, "Dear daughter, your family and friends are unable to prevent you from being jailed, we are unable to stop military intelligence following you, do you really think in America you can get published?" Khet's response: "Mother, there exist different worlds."

Khet with sons Wathan and Linn at the Writers' Reunion at Alphabet City, 2019.



KHET MAR (Burma) was City of Asylum's third writer in residence. A journalist, novelist, fiction writer, and essayist, she was censored, arrested, and tortured for her pro-democracy activities. Khet was sentenced to 10 years in prison, although a new regime released her after one year.



Khet Mar came with young sons Wathan and Linn and visual artist husband Than Htay. A dissident journalist/essayist, she was featured in the 2018-2019 Carnegie International.

"Mother, there exist different worlds."

—Khet Mar to her mother, who asked, "Do you really think in America you can get published?"



Diane and Henry

Such stars you all are
Shining so bright in my sky

With your light, I can see my sky so immense
Sense of wonder and ecstasy

Nostalgic, weary,
Challenging and hopeful all from the sky
Glowing and dimming in turn
And yet, full of pep to charge ahead

Through your guidance
I can't let myself get lost midway
You indeed have led
And yet still leading

Khet Mar
March 28, 2022



2012

Henry and Khet at the 2019 COA Writers in Residence Reunion at Alphabet City, and Diane with Khet at a salon reading in the Samuels-Reese home.

City of Asylum

Wealth
without generosity
is an empty thing.
The days lengthen.
The light strengthens.
Let new friends
join us in our hours
letting fear
of distant war
lead
to our best deeds.
Thank you, Henry.
Thank you, Diane.
You model
the open arms
the generous hope
of America.

Michael Simms
July 26, 2022



The City of Asylum Tent on Sampsonia Way made performances more visible and accessible. It accommodated larger groups of guests and performers, reduced the impact on Henry and Diane's home, and, just by being outdoors, created a festive atmosphere.

"It just keeps getting better and better."

—Susan Steen

MICHAEL SIMMS has been active in politics and poetry for over 40 years. Michael founded Vox Populi, an online poetry forum, and Autumn House Press, a not-for-profit publisher.



Michael Simms was one of the poets featured at Writers in the Gardens in 2018.

A performance in the Sampsonia Way tent, which continues to be used even after City of Asylum's permanent home, Alphabet City, opened.

Found in Translation

Thirteen years ago, I lucked out: My friend Katherine Silver did not have time to translate a short excerpt written by then-unknown writer Yuri Herrera and asked if I was interested. The excerpt, from *Kingdom Cons*, was to be published in *Sampsonia Way*. It was thus that I met (electronically) Henry Reese, whose kindness, energy, generosity and enthusiasm seemed boundless. Since that time, Yuri's writing has been published widely and in many languages, and I have been fortunate enough to translate all five of his books. His writing has been the most impactful thing in my translation career, and I would never have had the opportunity to translate him without Henry and Diane and *Sampsonia Way*.

Two (and a bit) years ago I lucked out again: I was invited to come to Pittsburgh. I got to spend the night on *Sampsonia Way*, to speak and read at the City of Asylum bookstore and, joyfully, to have dinner with Henry and Diane. It is no exaggeration to say that they changed my life and I am forever grateful. (Oh, it was also the first time I had ever tried—or heard of—an oat milk latte, at a place called *Commonplace Coffee*. Albeit less transcendental, also a game-changer!)

With great affection and gratitude,

Lisa Dillman
March 9, 2022



LISA DILLMAN is a senior lecturer in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Emory University, and an acclaimed literary translator. She has translated over twenty-five novels by Latin American and Spanish writers.

2018

2009

2013

YAGHOUB YADALI (Iran) was City of Asylum's fifth writer in residence. His novel, *Rituals of Restlessness*, received the Hooshang Golshiri Literary Award. He was imprisoned by the Iranian cultural police for his novel's depiction of an adulterous affair.



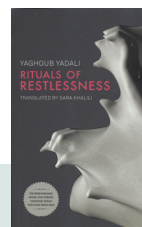
In Memoriam

*In Iran, Yaghoub Yadali had been a prize-winning author and television director before being imprisoned for his novel, published in English translation as *Rituals of Restlessness*. The book received the Hooshang Golshiri Literary Award, but afterward the Iranian cultural police realized he had run afoul of Iran's leadership for the depiction of an adulterous affair in this, his first novel, and sent him to prison.*

*After coming to Pittsburgh, Yaghoub was able to resume writing, and he completed a new novel, *The World*, published in 2016 in Farsi, but not yet translated.*

The fifth City of Asylum writer in residence, Yaghoub and his wife Akram Kabiri lived in House Poem from 2013 to 2015.

Yaghoub had many friends in Pittsburgh. All knew him as a gentle, kind, considerate and polite, very precise person. Those who got to know Yaghoub well also knew his subtle sense of humor. To our great sadness, Yaghoub died in February, 2022, at the age of 51.



Words affixed to Mexican War Streets houses, garages, and gates near Alphabet City and Sampsonia Way.

Israel, Diane, Carolina Arnal, and Gisela Romero outside Diane's home.

2014



River of Words began with Israel Centeno, who chose 100 words which held special meaning for Pittsburgh. The residents of the neighborhood were invited to adopt and host a "word in residence" for public display.



A River of Words

River of Words is a public artwork created by City of Asylum writer in residence Israel Centeno, in collaboration with Venezuelan visual artists Carolina Arnal and Gisela Romero. The project was commissioned by City of Asylum in partnership with the City of Pittsburgh's Office of Public Art and installed on houses in the Mexican War Streets Historic District. The project was completed during a two-week residency in July 2014.

Deborah Fallows wrote, "Centeno chose 100 words, which to him held some special meaning for Pittsburgh and his evolving experience there. Among them were all kinds of words: talent, thought, baseball, temperance, equation, horizon, ginger, nostalgia, fear, plenilunio, God." Arnal and Romero fabricated the words, and "... the residents of the neighborhood were invited to adopt and host a 'word in residence' and to display it for the public." The creative team "fabricated and affixed the words, from bold to lightly conspicuous, sometimes on a garden gate, by the front door, near a window."

Initially intended to be a temporary installation by the artists, the work became a permanent part of the fabric of the neighborhood when community participants asked to keep the words on their homes after the completion of the project. Concerned that affixing the words to the facades of homes in the historic district would run afoul of the historic guidelines, the city ordered their removal.

Fortunately, neighbor Glenn Olcerst intervened on behalf of the residents with a lawsuit based on First Amendment precedent and the city's own arcane and conflicting guidelines, and the words were allowed to remain, "where they continue to help create an identity for the community and to share that story with anyone who happens by."

The Shapes of Love

One day, our voice trembles and begins to suffer its death by suffocation,
It loses the earth and the sky,
The voices are stripped of body, of a place, at that moment when
The world becomes indifferent rears,

Rope,
Scaffold,
all the doors close,
Friends,
Agents

Institutions
Publishers

The diaspora fractures us
the blows, the prisons, the diseases,
dispossession and exclusion,
silence us

We go out in the open, naked
To a fatal tombstone

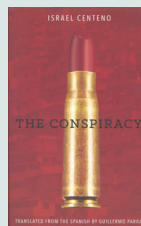
Less than a ghost, a transparent outcast
we are struck by the sentence

Then, when all has failed
a light bathes the void
and through a small window
restores our faith,
a radical love.

*To Henry Reese and Diane Samuels,
this modest exercise, in the name of all the
lives they have rescued from anomie.*

Israel Centeno

March 27, 2022



Published in 2002, *The Conspiracy* was interpreted by Hugo Chavez as a challenge to his party's myth of origin, resulting in Israel's exile from Venezuela.



Dreams and Memories

I have seen that reality and life are woven into each other in a perfect way, so much so that if for some unexpected reason that part is different, everything changes and becomes different.

I was in this street once, I can remember many details, it is true that it was a dream, but dreams can be as important as memories.

I was on this street once, many, many years ago and in a faraway place. Then, after days, nights, people, emotions, farewells, returns, the train of life running very fast, I felt how some people, very few, understood that life could change and that, thanks to their movements full of love and solidarity, thanks to good feelings, other people's lives could improve and even be saved from a cruel, unjust, or undeserved destiny.

That knowledge is the moving part of this story. To know that because of our love others will have better lives, to think that improving the lives of others is as valuable as improving ourselves, and maybe more, because the fact that someone else saves their reality thanks to us, can be more satisfying and bring us more joy than doing things just for ourselves.

The last time I lost my home, the last time I had to close the door and leave, because there was no more room for me, the door of another home opened for the love of friends I had not yet met. When, stunned after many days and nights without sleep, I stood before the house that for several years would be my home, I read on the wall a sentence in colored letters that said:

JUST BE GOOD

I think that sentence sums it all up.

Being good will lead us to continue the weaving of the universe to make it more beautiful, just like a piece of art by Diane Samuels.

Thank you for all that I have received and learned from you, Diane and Henry, my new friends who will never leave my thoughts or my memory, because I am now also what I learned from you.

Graciela Bonnet

March 26, 2022

GRACIELA BONNET (Argentina) The spouse of Israel Centeno, Graciela shared Jazz House with him. She has a degree in literature from the Central University of Venezuela. A poet, painter, and amateur cartoonist, she has occasionally participated in readings during Jazz Poetry.



ISRAEL CENTENO (Venezuela) was City of Asylum's fourth writer in residence. One of his country's most important literary figures of the past 50 years, he has won numerous awards, including the Federico García Lorca Award in Spain and the National Council of Culture Award in Venezuela.

2011



GLENN OLCERST, ESQ., is an attorney, photographer, stone artist, City of Asylum volunteer advocate, and neighbor whose First Amendment lawsuit gained City of Pittsburgh permission for the River of Words art installation to remain on people's homes.

Community Transformed

I became friends with Henry and Diane in the 1970's while we all lived in the same apartment building—way before the seeds for City of Asylum germinated, and while we were all living very different lives.

After Henry and Diane transplanted to Sampsonia Way, I introduced my wife Barbara Talerico to the first Jazz Poetry, which was held in front of their home on Sampsonia Way (and just a few blocks from our own). At that point in time, Barbara (now a City of Asylum board member) was immersed in promoting Mexican War Streets community development in her role as the neighborhood historical society's board president. We have seen in our own community how a neighborhood's self-image, its presentation to visitors, its marking of history and current experience, its residents' quality of life, interactions, and civic engagement have all been enhanced by City of Asylum. Henry and Diane's vision is one of the reasons why people not only want to visit our neighborhood, but live here as well.

Glenn Olcerst
May 20, 2022

2004

Houses on Sampsonia Way used by writers in residence. Left to right: House Poem (2004), Winged House (2006), Pittsburgh-Burma House (2009), Jazz House (2011), and Comma House (2016).

Left to right: the Bradberry Apartments, Alphabet City, the Garden Theater, and, under construction, the corner of Federal Street and North Avenue.

Poem by Venezuelan Rafael Cadenas, "Dialogue According To a Dictator," painted on a Sampsonia Way garage next to the City of Asylum tent.

City of Asylum's 80,000-sq.-ft. renovation of the Masonic Hall prompted the block's revitalization, including the adjacent Bradberry Apartments behind Alphabet City, the Garden Theater, and the entire corner of Federal Street and North Avenue.

"Henry and Diane's vision was responsible for transforming our neighborhood, both brick and mortar and as a destination."

—Glenn Olcerst



(UN) + (Smithsonian) + (Carnegie Hall) = COA

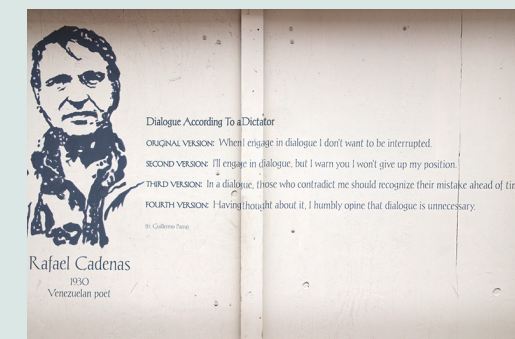
We are so very proud of both of you for what you have created. The City of Asylum is like having elements of the United Nations, the Smithsonian and Carnegie Hall suddenly appearing in our midst here on the Northside. Your mission is important to us. The spaces you created—Alphabet City, the Garden and Sampsonia Way—are also beautiful! Your vision and your stamina have done all that and provided us with a wonderful bookstore, great restaurants and an intimate concert hall for all types of performances and programs. Your work has fostered creativity in every way. We now live in the coolest part of town and we thank you.

We happily send you our gratitude and love,

Candace Cain and Fred Nene
March 28, 2022



2021



Love and Family

Diane and Henry, we “love” a lot of people, by which we mean: we like them a lot. But we love the two of you, like family.

From Sean:

Diane and Henry are the basis of my Pittsburgh origin story. When contemplating a big move from New York City with Jake, Diane, as I am sure she remembers, asked me: did I know the Whitman quote about New York? “Great place to go to market, but no place to farm.” as I recall. This coming from an artist of such depth and passion gave me genuine pause—from one who had done all her “farming” (the slow painstaking work of creating something from nothing) in Pittsburgh. Well, seven years ago, those words of Whitman still ring true. And now that I know so much more about her work and the place that she and Henry built together with the community in the North Side, my thoughts on farming and on markets are forever enlightened. And my whole life is better for knowing the two of them.

From Jake:

I remember meeting the two of you on the BAM bus, with Gerri. And how happy Gerri was to see the two of you, and how easily and immediately you extended friendship to me—and, later, to us. Little did I know how deep that friendship would go—and all because the two of you, all along the way, have shown through your actions and kindness that depth of friendship is: the thing. You drove all the way to (outside of) Boston to see me perform in *Kaddish*. I think of all the dinners we’ve enjoyed together, all of the invitations to your home, all of the shining people we’ve meet—and become friends with—because of you, the love of books you have helped to instill in Elliot, the joy of seeing you hold him, the joy of your joy seeing him eat dirt; Diane, it’s not kind to have favorites, so...what can I say? I would like to spend hours and days staring at your art, which moves us to no end; Henry, your mastery of puns (I can’t even try to make one here, although I know it would be well-placed), your love of Walt Whitman, your curiosity and generosity ... We now begin the campaign to #CloneDiane&Henry.

Jake Goodman and Sean Shepherd

March 31, 2022



JAKE GOODMAN, as executive director and board member of The Opportunity Fund, continues the vision of his late aunt, Gerri Kay. A community organizer, educator, and performer, Jake has taught and served as a scholar in residence across the United States and Israel. He’s co-creator of, and performer in *Kaddish*, an adaptation of Nobel Prize-winning Imre Kertész’s book, *Kaddish for an Unborn Child*.

A Global Evolution

Dear Henry and Diane, when we started ICORN, the International Cities of Refuge Network in 2006, City of Asylum Pittsburgh was already around since 2004. With the same roots in what the International Parliament of Writers invented in the 1990’s, we soon found together and realized persecuted writers and artists would be better helped when we share ideas, experiences, challenges and successes across the Atlantic. The ICORN annual meetings would never have been the same without your generous and inspiring visits, in particular when you Diane also joined and took so actively and creatively part.

Among the many highlights of our encounters, Amsterdam 2015 stands out; when we signed the membership agreement between COA Pittsburgh and ICORN. We had been close since long then, and the status for COA Pittsburgh as ICORN hub in the USA long in the making. Finally getting the chance to come to Pittsburgh myself in 2017 and experience the unique, I will say sensational, solidarity, creativity and hospitality unfold in real life, was a heartwarming experience that still energizes my work as director for ICORN.

It is not a secret that what the two of you have created in Pittsburgh waves far beyond the city, the state, the USA, I am a personal witness to the genuine inspiration you spread to all continents, across the globe. In the crazy, demanding and unforeseeable world of today, offering shelter to writers and artists at risk is more important than ever. I look forward immensely to continue working together with you and the amazingly strong and evolving organisation you are building around you.

All best, see you soon!

Helge Lunde

April 3, 2022



Diane holding Jake and Sean’s baby son, Elliot.

Jake with Carol Brown, former president and CEO of the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust.

ICORN’s Peter Ripken and Helge Lunde with Henry in Amsterdam signing the agreement between ICORN and Pittsburgh, 2015.

ICORN Board, 2018: Chris Gribble, chairman; Jasmina Rihar; Annika Strömberg, vice chair; Henry Andersen, Sabine Gimbrere, and Henry, members.



2014

2015

2015



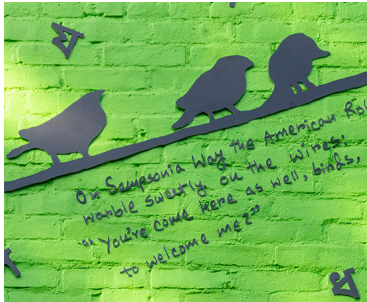
Henry, Mayor Bill Peduto, Helge Lunde, Silvia Duarte, and Diane at a gathering for the Sampsonia Way House and Wine Tour, 2015.

“Let us be the ones that make the change. Let us be the ones that are the welcomers.”
—Mayor Bill Peduto

City of Asylum is the U.S. headquarters for the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN), which called City of Asylum Pittsburgh “the model for the world.”



TUHIN DAS (Bangladesh) is City of Asylum’s sixth writer in residence. A poet, activist, political columnist, short story writer, and essayist, he was the target of fundamentalist militant groups who murdered secular writers and activists. Tuhin fled his home for the United States in 2016.



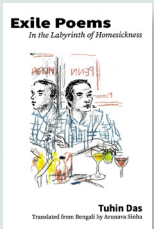
Comma House experiments with “concrete poetry,” writing poems in shapes related to the subject of the poem. The comma represents multiple themes related to the passage of time and the connecting of people.

Keeping You Waiting With a Comma

A row of pine trees standing in a poem.
Dangling dewdrops clutching the fingers
of their winter nurse, and December
from last year is still flowing.
Several rows of birds
making the world wait with a comma,
the mouth of some distant cave is opening now.



2016



Tuhin Das
August 15, 2022

Translation of Tuhin’s poem painted in the shape of a comma.

Tuhin is the author of eight poetry books. His full-length manuscript, *Exile Poems: In the Labyrinth of Home-sickness*, comprises sixty-five poems written at City of Asylum, focusing on his life as an exiled writer.

Alphabet Reading Garden

The artist-designed Alphabet Reading Garden is paved in custom-made bricks inscribed with handwritten characters in many languages. City of Asylum neighbors and visitors contributed the original calligraphy. There is a tree or planting for every letter of the alphabet. A haven for neighbors and supporters, the garden anchors the residential end of our Garden to Garden Art Trail, which continues past the House Publications on Sampsonia Way and ends at Alphabet City.



2016



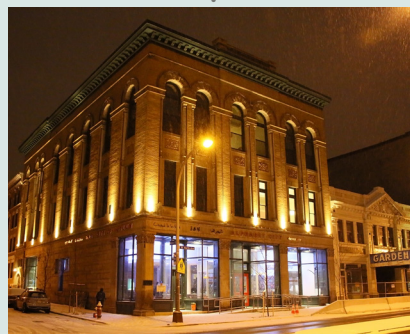
Alphabet City

City of Asylum converted a blighted Masonic Hall into a new headquarters and named it Alphabet City. Its opening in 2017 marked the launch of expanded yearlong programming: a vibrant public venue offering readings by international authors, public forums, live music, and eclectic community presentations. The structure contains a performance space, a bookstore, a restaurant, and eight apartments. Restoration of this block's anchor property spurred restoration and construction of adjacent buildings, reawakening a moribund corner.



"The values of being a guest in a home translated over to Alphabet City architecture, open space, performances, food, and books."

—Henry Reese



Ceramic tiles created by artist Laura Jean McLaughlin on a wall of the Alphabet Reading Garden.

Henry unlocks the front door of the Masonic Hall.

Barbara Talerico and fellow City of Asylum board members inspect the building's progress.

Diane and Henry, Gala Night 2016.

City of Asylum Bookstore

Opened with Alphabet City in 2017, City of Asylum Bookstore maintains a broad focus on international and translated literature. Its curation reflects City of Asylum's founding mission to create a just society and its commitment to showcasing marginalized voices from around the world in all genres. Cultivating a particular strength in literary fiction, poetry, children's literature, narrative nonfiction, and cookbooks, from world literature to poetry and novels, the bookstore is a favorite for those who love foreign works, offering multiple genres in languages other than English.



2017

Alphabet City has hosted more than 900 live performances on stage since opening in 2017.

Rolling book stacks move easily to accommodate larger audiences and events.

In 2016, Diane enlisted the help of family and friends in her garage to create the gold-accented ceiling tiles for Alphabet City.

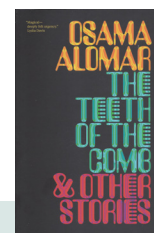
Alphabet City is so named because through words—used creatively and without fear—we share our best thoughts. The common thread among City of Asylum programs is a place where everyone has the opportunity to be without barriers of access, ideas, or expression.

"We stood up for free admission, which invites people from all walks, adding value to everyone's life and experience."

—Henry Reese



OSAMA ALOMAR (Syria) was City of Asylum's seventh writer in residence. One of the most well-respected Arabic poets writing today, and a prominent practitioner of the Arabic *al-qasida al-qasira jiddan*, or "very short story," Osama has been published in The New Yorker, The Literary Review, and more.



2017

Osama's manuscripts were destroyed in 2008 during the bombing in Syria. Escaping, he settled in Chicago and got a job driving a cab.

His translator, C.J. Collins, often accompanied him in the cab, and together they translated Osama's works from Arabic to English as he drove.

Osama can surprise you, picking up a guitar and singing any Leonard Cohen song ever written.

I Was Dreaming

I was dreaming of Freedom of expression since I was young, it was like a lost Paradise in Syria, I thought I will not practice it in my whole life, that was something really scary and devastating to me as a Free writer and Artist, but luckily I found this Paradise ... I Found my dream at City of Asylum.

Thank you Henry and Diane for supporting persecuted writers and Artists from Around the World, Thank you for your Devotion to Freedom of Expression.

Osama Alomar
March 22, 2022



STEPHAN CRUMP is a Grammy-nominated, Echo Award-winning bassist/composer, who has performed and recorded with a diverse range of musicians. He was raised in music and the arts by his Parisian mother, an amateur pianist, and his Memphian father, an architect, painter, and jazz drummer.

Stephan Crump
April 4, 2022

[Link to Stephan's musical tribute cityofasylum.org/henrydianebook](https://cityofasylum.org/henrydianebook)

The Rhythms of a Vision



Thumbscrew
March 20, 2022
[Link to Thumbscrew's musical tribute cityofasylum.org/henrydianebook](http://cityofasylum.org/henrydianebook)



THUMBSCREW is an avant-jazz collaboration of Mary Halvorson, Michael Formanek, and Tomas Fujiwara. They have been working together since roughly 2011. Thumbscrew has been in residence on Sampsonia Way four times, developing original compositions for their albums.

2015

Thumbscrew members
Tomas Fujiwara (drums); Michael Formanek (double bass); Mary Halvorson (guitar)

Hana Dharma

Hana Dharma is the title of my next musical collaboration with string composers. I would like to share a sneak preview of this music with you. Maybe Hana and Dharma mirror your transposed names. Ha Ha.

H&D; so many possibilities.
Sending love. p.a.

Hana Dharma
A path of miracles.
A road, inward.
A blossoming of spirit
within the garden of time
whence a limitless terrain unfolds.

A sound.
Giving resource to each desire
A touch.
Lending a spark of intuition.

This journey, bound in flesh
Weaving labyrinths, and
Sewing clues to eternal living,

This flower,
finding beauty in all frail souls,
opens a new door.

Enter, wounds to hide, thoughts to shed.
Center, what to measure, what to share.
Squeeze the breath,
and the losing of me-and-you begins.

Oneness of sun, of mind, portends
like no other shine.
How we will miss old self,
where revolving stars will hide.

Pheeroan akLaff
March 28, 2022
[Link to Pheeroan's musical tribute cityofasylum.org/henrydianebook](http://cityofasylum.org/henrydianebook)



PHEEROAN AKLAFF, born Paul Maddox, is an American jazz drummer who created the fusion ensemble Jump Up with Oliver Lake.

The Meaning Makers

We have known Henry and Diane for a short time. As a former book dealer, the City of Asylum bookstore drew us in immediately. When we moved here four years ago, we would visit the restaurant and the bookstore; we wondered what brought this extraordinary place to life and what did a city of asylum mean.

Two years ago we had dinner with Henry and Diane. What a joy! Henry's description of his extraordinary book collection let me know he was someone of a similar heart. His fascination with the possibilities of the use of language was exhilarating. We understood more as we learned of Diane's relationship to alphabets and art. This explained Alphabet City and explained some mysteries but opened new ones. Diane's complex and subtle art that involves paper and letters and writing allowed my mind to expand and begin to understand larger relationships of this wonderful couple. Through their business practice, art practice, event sculpturing practice, they knit a community together in a shared vision of an abiding respect for each individual and their capacity for life making, art making, meaning making. They recognize that we shape this world through communications and they choose to celebrate that fact, protecting life through shelter to engage in those art communication practices.

City of Asylum's Freedom to Create Gala with Wole Soyinka allowed our understanding of Henry and Diane to come alive: a collection of souls with a common cause of the protection of people to express their deepest thoughts and ideas, fears and love, without fear of persecution. A couple who could draw the brilliant Wole Soyinka amidst a busy schedule of his own during an ongoing Pandemic told us much about their meaning in the larger international sphere. They do not just celebrate, they provide capacity building to make these words and ideas come alive here in Pittsburgh, and throughout the world.

Philip and Jill Hackney
March 31, 2022



PHILIP HACKNEY, ESQ., is engaged in law reform, specifically principles for good governance in not-for-profit organizations. At the Internal Revenue Service Office of Chief Counsel in Washington, D.C., he worked with tax-exempt and governmental entities, and litigated exempt-organization tax status.



RAQUEL WINNICA YOUNG is a mezzo-soprano who performs Spanish and Latin-American Baroque music with Pittsburgh's Bell'Art Ensemble. She has been a finalist in the Vocal Art Song Discovery series, a two-time winner of the Pittsburgh Concert Society Major Artist Competition, and a finalist in the Friedrich and Virginia Schorr Memorial American Art Song and Oratorio Competition.

To Transcend the Ephemeral

We have no idea how Diane and Henry found us, but they invited the Bell'Art Ensemble to collaborate with six touring Dutch poets back in 2012, when our ensemble was barely a year old. Since that time, Lenny and I have had the good fortune of performing a half-dozen times at the various public spaces of COA's expanding footprint. We have always marveled at how many cultures cross paths through COA projects, and at how normal such a rich diversity of voices feels.

The essence of music and poetry is an ephemeral act; to paraphrase Eric Dolphy, "it's gone, in the air. You can never hear it again." But the gift that Diane and Henry gave to us is a connection of music to poetry that transcends the ephemeral moment because it fuses a commitment to the spoken word and the practice of the live performance of text and melody in a myriad of combinations. Most importantly, they never came across as administrators, but as ardent fans of music and poetry; their love and support of the work, their energy for the mission, was unpretentious, genuine, and infectious.

Raquel Winnica Young and Lenny Young
March 9, 2022

2012

During the COVID-19 pandemic, City of Asylum presented programs virtually on the Crowdcaster platform. After social-distancing rules eased the following year, live in-person events resumed, but remain popular on Crowdcaster.

Bell'Art Ensemble musicians Ashley Freeburn, violin; Raquel Winnica Young, mezzo-soprano; Lenny Young, oboe, in performance at Alphabet City, 2021.

A Thread of Light

When we came to Pittsburgh in 2019, as soon as she saw them, my two year old daughter, Layan, without anyone teaching her, began to call Henry “Baba” which means father, and Diane “Haboba” which means grandmother. Is there anything more honest than the expression of a child who does not know the price of standing up to dictatorship or the ban on freedom of expression, which are among the reasons that brought us here?

My daughter Raghad, who was ten years old, went with Diane, who saw her for the first time, to the Mayfly store without hesitation, but in complete safety, as if she was accompanied by my sister Arafa. Diane and Raghad have this something in common, their love for visual art.

With the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic and my depression, Diane was the bright light that helped me survive day after day in my inner darkness. Diane suggested that we communicate daily via video call to break the isolation due to the pandemic and to keep in touch, while at the same time moving the river of creativity. The suggestion was that I write a line, Raghad draws something, and Diane does a collage. This spontaneous proposal quickly turned into a creative project that lasted for 100 days straight and brought me back to writing, and even led me to write poetry and discover the poet in me.

During those 100 days, Diane and I talked about everything. Our relationship deepened and we became close friends. I wrote a poem in Arabic every day, and Diane made a collage every day.

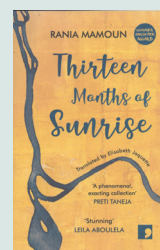
I would read to Diane the poems in Arabic first. Poetry, as we know, does not rely on words alone, and she sometimes commented on her feelings for the music of this or that poem. After I read in Arabic, I translated for her an improvised interpretation into English, and I rejoiced when Diane found meaning to dimensions that I did not think of while writing and when she found connections between poems and life in its various aspects. With her deep and sensitive comments, she brought poetry into my writing and vitality that infiltrated and revived my tired heart.

Every day and with every poem a thread of light was woven inside me, and it was Diane who

weaved it, for she with her wisdom and her open heart like the vastness of the universe was able to contain me and add daily a new impetus to the river of writing that was calcified. And I can say if it wasn't for Diane, I wouldn't have written for 100 days straight, something that turned from communication between two neighbors into a friendship and a creative project that became a draft of my poetry book to be published next year here in America. It is my first book to be published here and my first book of poetry. Who else but Diane could have done this?

They have all my thanks, appreciation, and love.

Rania Mamoun
March 2022



“Diane was the bright light that helped me survive day after day in the inner darkness in which I was swimming.”

—Rania Mamoun



Using existing texts and handwriting as her literal and figurative raw material, Diane has created more than 20 works, writing out texts of entire novels in micro-handwriting. Site-specific artworks include *Luminous Manuscript* (Center for Jewish History, New York), *Lines of Sight* (Brown University), and *The Alphabet Garden*, (Grafeneck, Germany).

Diane in her studio alongside her 2018 creation, *Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare.

2018

Rania Mamoun (Sudan) is City of Asylum's eighth writer in residence. Her book of short stories, *Thirteen Months of Sunrise*, was published in English on the day of her arrival at City of Asylum.

Translator Elisabeth Jaquette won a 2017 PEN/Heim Translation Fund Grant for her translation from Arabic of Rania's 2009 book. It is possibly the first collection by a Sudanese woman to be fully translated into English.

Live Long and Prosper

When I first met both of you on my first trip to City Asylum with Oliver Lake I knew I had come across two people and a place that was their creation that was all about love and respect and hope. The two of you are a true inspiration for the rest of us.

May you live long and prosper as Spock our Vulcan friend often said.

Joe Fonda
March 3, 2022



JOE FONDA is an international jazz artist, composer, bassist, recording artist, interdisciplinary performer, producer, and educator. Joe has performed with the Joe Fonda Quartet at Alphabet City since 2019.



DUNYA MIKHAIL is the author of several books and the winner of numerous awards, including the UN Human Rights Award for Freedom of Writing. She works as an Arabic lecturer at Oakland University. Her *Feminine Sign* was chosen by The New York Public Library as one of the ten best poetry books of 2019.

Cubature for Artists

The driver who picked me up from the Pittsburgh International Airport, slowed down before entering the narrow street leading to City of Asylum where I was going to stay for several days before my poetry reading. He said, “This is a cubature for artists, are you one of them?” I said “Yes” and I wanted to add something like “but we are good people!”

The houses had turned into works of art painted by exiled writers who had stayed there gave the place a special sense of identity, of life in progress. What fascinated me even more is that special garden, not only because the residents had planted their favorite varieties, but people passing by had written their dreams on pieces of paper that were clipped to the fence.

Diane and Henry invited me to their home for dinner. There a treasure was revealed in front of my eyes! That was an exhibition of art by Diane herself. The paintings were long scrolls of books that Diane had admired, transcribed by hand into micro-scripts. She must have admired crazily to write them word by word in such tiny script in rolls, like magical carpets of times outside of our own times.

I am beyond grateful to Diane Samuels and Henry Reese for inviting me to City of Asylum, for opening their doors to writers in exile.

Dunya Mikhail

March 8, 2022

Dunya Mikhail speaking at Alphabet City as part of the Art of Translation series, 2019.

Sholeh Wolpé, accompanied by harpist Bridget Kibbey, performs her poem about a child in love with America on the stage of Alphabet City at City of Asylum’s Freedom to Create Gala, 2019.



SHOLEH WOLPÉ Born in Iran, Wolpé is an American poet, playwright, and literary translator who believes “people must engage via literature and the arts, not through politicians.” Wolpé won the 2010 Lois Roth Persian Translation Prize.

Diane and Henry

Diane holds out a bowl
of chocolate globes, tells me her favorite is the yellow. Take
that one, she says.

He reaches for her hand
and fists it like a ripe strawberry.

Henry tells me how he can never read a book on kindle. Diane nods and says
whoever dozes off first removes the other’s glasses and snaps off the light.

She does not say if she presses her nose
to his neck and breathes in deep.
Or if he lets his fingers fall
close to hers—that almost-touch
before deluge of dreams.

But I imagine it is so.

Truth is a mirror that fell from the sky and shattered to smithereens.
Pick up a piece, peer in and fool yourself that what you see is the whole.

Henry and Diane’s hands are smooth
and round. They hold shards up towards
the world, which is one towards the other.
It catches the sun and in that split second,
they become

illuminated.

Sholeh Wolpé

March 17, 2022

2019



Sue Bialostosky, Diane, Anne Lackner, Jamini Davies, and Vincent Lackner at City of Asylum’s Freedom to Create Gala at Alphabet City, 2019.

All Pittsburghers Are Poets: Pittsburgh has long been a home for poetry, so City of Asylum established the first Poet Laureate Program for Allegheny County with support from RAD. The program's categories are: City of Asylum Poet Laureate of Allegheny County, Youth Poet Laureate, Emerging Poet Laureate, and American Sign Language Poet Laureate.



In a ——— dream ——— of a ——— preferred — world

Taste this soil for death and
plumb her deep for life

—Wole Soyinka, "Dedication"

where we, the unwitting, are not so hell-bent on self-destruction and power and freedom are not at such great odds, I find myself standing before a house with wings—

to where might it transport me? There's a glass door, Soyinka's tale of survival by numbers ghosted on it as if on a passing cloud—I DESTROYED time—a trace

of it says—Now what have I got? says another. To the side is a gate with a white plastic word affixed to its slatted face—*chilero*—it's supposed

to spell—Guatemalan slang for *awesome*, but the o's gone missing. I unlatch the gate, float down a bare concrete corridor where I arrive at a small garden,

startling for its modesty, its sufficiency, its high texture over blossoms—here's the mulberry, the smoke tree, the oak leaf hydrangea, the tree I can't identify with its

marijuana-like leaves, the curious bamboo watching in the background, the brick-lined patch of grass in the middle that resembles a thought bubble. I pace

its outline, sensing in this brief but verdant surround the aura of both containment and contentment—I'm a happy yardbird!—unlike Soyinka and too many

truth-to-power warriors like him held in solitary lockdowns for months, years at a stretch—and to what end? To render their souls less human? Even the fox snared in a trap suffers

atop a grassy field, blue sky overhead, birdsong persisting. Soyinka survived by tackling numeric formulas in his head, transcribing them to squares of prison-issue toilet paper.

If he were captive here, in this cell-like garden, what might his obsession be? Counting leaves? Blades of grass? Clouds passing? Or as the seasons shift and life becomes death becomes life again

might he contemplate this cyclic *continuum*, reduce it to its primal shape—the circle—reincarnating that o gone missing from the broken word on the gate—*chilero*. O, how awesome is life!—



2020

Nigerian-American Danielle Obisie-Orlu, Youth Poet Laureate of Allegheny County. Her "Poem for the Expat" is a tribute to the sense of belonging and identity that immigrants struggle to find.

Danielle, with fellow Nigerian writer and winner of the 1986 Nobel Prize for Literature Wole Soyinka, at Alphabet City during the Freedom to Create Gala, 2021.

CELESTE GAINNEY was City of Asylum's inaugural poet laureate and the first woman to be admitted to the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees as a gaffer. She has spent many years working with light in film and architecture.

Thank you Henry and Diane for your vision, your leadership, and for providing loving asylum to so many writers, musicians and artists through the years—

With gratitude,

Celeste Gainney
March 29, 2022

2018

IDRA NOVEY'S fiction and poetry have been translated into a dozen languages, and she's written for *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *New York Magazine*, and *The Paris Review*. A finalist for the PEN America Poetry in Translation Prize in 2021, Idra teaches fiction at Princeton University.



Extraordinary Commitment

When Brazilian writer Marcia Tiburi began to receive death threats, I knew who to contact. I reached out to City of Asylum's directors and in a short time, she was safe in Pittsburgh. Several other programs in the United States with a mission to help writers in dire circumstances had all sorts of protocol regarding passports and deadlines and couldn't get around those stipulations to help Marcia when she really needed it. City of Asylum's directors had a vision that didn't get mired in bureaucracy, they have saved the lives of a remarkable number of authors from all over the world.

The City of Asylum bookstore is an inspiring extension of that mission, with its tremendous offering of literature in translation, and public events that celebrate authors and ideas from beyond this country and the English language. I had the great fortune to stay for a short time in one of the City of Asylum houses to work on a translation project. I was moved by the many languages and countries present in the artwork and books inside the house, the energy of which accompanied me as I slept and woke and wrote. I've never stayed in any residency like City of Asylum, and the events I've done for my own novels in their bookstore remain some of my favorite events of all time.

Thank you, Diane and Henry, for staying true to your vision and for the extraordinary duration of your commitment to writers in need of asylum, and for sharing the joys of world literature with so many readers in Pittsburgh and beyond.

Idra Novey
March 17, 2022

LitFest is a 10-day event that considers themes of migration, identity, and displacement with an emphasis on works in translation. It brings authors, translators, and artists together for bilingual readings, conversations about translation, and conversations on the intersection of translation and social justice topics.

"Examining the dearth of translators of color into English and questions of identity asks—who should be translating other people's voices?"

—Abby Lembersky



We Need You

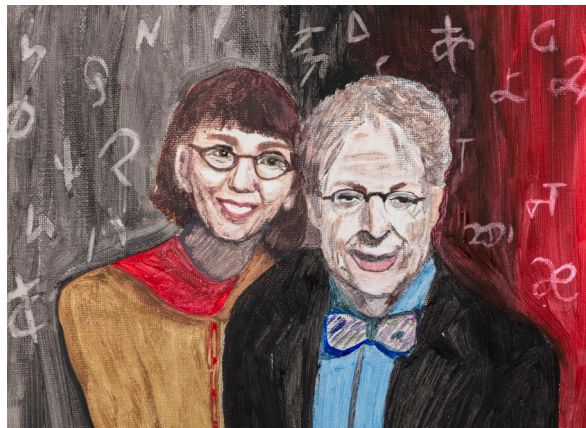


HUGO CRUZ is a Cuban-born, award-winning, internationally-renowned drummer, composer, and the leader of the group Caminos. He has performed all over the world, from the Pittsburgh International Jazz Festival to Fábrica de Artes in Havana, Highmark First Night Pittsburgh, Pittingkatok, City of Asylum, The Frick Museum, Musicalidades, Market Square, and Con Alma.



Hugo Cruz
March 20, 2022
[Link to Hugo's tribute](https://cityofasylum.org/henrydianebook)
cityofasylum.org/henrydianebook

Portrait of Diane and Henry



Sometimes called “The Lady Gaga of Vietnam,” Khoi rebelled against censorship and ran for a seat in Vietnam’s National Assembly. Her controversial campaign culminated in a 2016 meeting with Barack Obama.



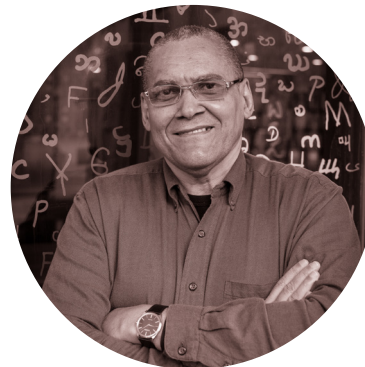
MAI KHOI (Vietnam) is City of Asylum’s ninth artist in residence, and our first resident musician. Khoi is an Artist Protection Fund Fellow who received the Vaclav Havel International Prize for Creative Dissent in 2018 and the Roosevelt Four Freedoms Award for Freedom of Speech in 2022. She has toured the U.S., Europe, Australia, and Taiwan.

Mai Khoi
March 31, 2022

Infuriated by President Obama’s advice to “just be patient,” Khoi created “Bad Activist,” her emotionally-charged fusion of free jazz and ethnic Vietnamese music—her most political, yet personal, song lyrics ever.

“Just
be
patient!”

—Barack Obama



JORGE OLIVERA CASTILLO (Cuba) is City of Asylum’s eleventh writer in residence. Jorge is a poet, journalist, and songwriter, and fought in the Angolan Civil War. Imprisoned in Cuba, his books banned, Jorge was awarded a two-year fellowship to Harvard. Harassment resumed upon his return to Cuba until the government offered him exile, enabling his return to the US in 2016.

The Perpetuity of Light

While winter trickles between
the bare branches
of trees that treasure
the mystery of the seasons
I listen to the sound of a light
that picked space and time to pieces.

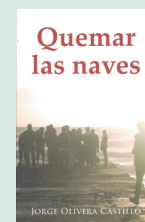
It is the radiant echo of humility
the aesthetic explosion of an idea shaped by
the handbook of virtue
and the tools of the soul.

There is every reason to say
that darkness is a utopia
in these domains where love blossoms
along with the will to give out unstained
and undamaged dreams

The perpetuity of dawn is not a metaphor
trapped in the stillness of a verse
but rather a tangible reality
stretching over Sampsonia Way and its surroundings.

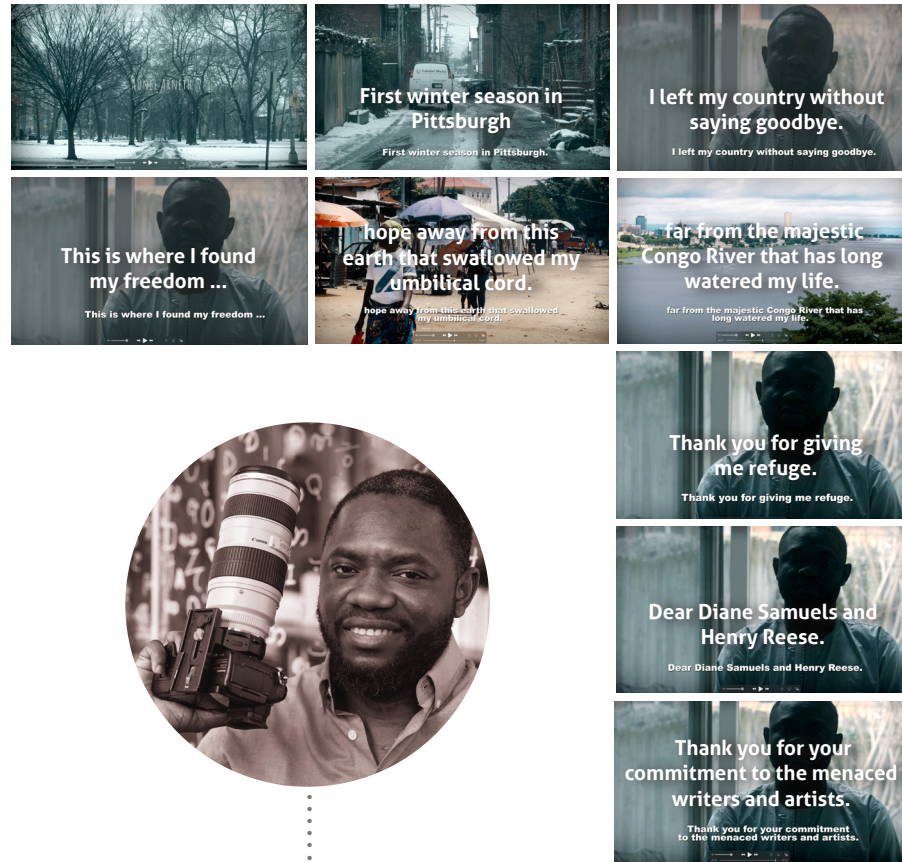
Henry and Diane are responsible for so much light.

Jorge Olivera Castillo
May 23, 2022



Jorge is married to Nancy Alfaya Hernandez, a Cuban human rights and women’s rights activist. Together they occupy Jazz House on Sampsonia Way. Published in 2015, *Quemar las naves* (*Burn the Ships*) is Jorge’s comprehensive and urgent collection of poems.

Where I Found My Freedom



AUNEL ARNETH (Republic of Congo) was City of Asylum's tenth artist in residence. He is a pro-democracy activist, reporter, director, and documentary film producer. Aunel directed *Keep Quiet or Die*, a film about the crimes committed by Congolese armed forces on civilians during a 2015 referendum vote.

2021

Aunel holds a Master's degree in filmmaking and began his professional career at MNTV and Africa24, before creating Cinema for Peace and Democracy, a film production company based in Dakar and funded by The National Endowment for Democracy.

Anouar holds a License in Public Law and a Master's in state and institutional law from Morsli Abdallah University. During the 2019 Algerian Revolution, he composed a new model for the Algerian constitution.

Aunel Arneth
March 26, 2022

Sidewalk: A Manifest of Love for Diane and Henry

In the beginning I was walking on the sidewalk
You were there looking at me
Looking for me
Something inside me was attracting something inside you
It made us spin in sun rings
I felt a glow of a dim spiritual lights in you
And as if I were a gel being
I wanted to integrate in you
My bag in my hand and tennis racket
Your eyes on mine, your skin shine
This damn love...I really want it
You confessed, I flied
And every pleasure inside me turned into a stubborn star
So near, damn far
I couldn't understand the distances between us
You were there for me every time I needed you
I hug you
But I need you even closer
And This universe was not enough for us
so we created a new universe. Bigger
oh baby, how can I offer you a new planet
and put your name above
if I live my life a million times
I will never be satisfied by your one life love
I will keep on repeating every thing I lived with you
Your laughter your voice
The way you chew food and the sound of your toes
I will never get enough of you
Your presence, your breath
And the skin underneath
Because all the alphabets of the world cannot explain how much I love you
So here it is a whole alphabet city
To immortalize you

Anouar Rahmani
March 31, 2022

ANOUAR RAHMANI (Algeria) is City of Asylum's twelfth writer in residence, and was the first person to publicly demand same-sex marriage in Algeria. The author of four novels in Arabic, including *What God is Hiding from Us*, he was sentenced to one year in prison and fined after his arrival in Pittsburgh for his article, "God is Free."

2022

Arts, Freedom, and Courage

We met Diane Samuels and Henry Reese almost by accident, back in 2014. Planning a reporting trip to the Midwest, we sent an email to our friends at ArtPlace America asking if they knew places or people we shouldn't miss in Pittsburgh. Almost immediately, Jamie Bennett and Javier Torres fired back an email saying "You HAVE to see the City of Asylum folks."

We could feel the urgency in their message. And these many years later, after the world's attention turned on August 12, 2022, to the Amphitheater Stage in Chautauqua where Henry was preparing to interview Salman Rushdie, we know that the example and message of City of Asylum are more urgent and crucial than ever.

In the years between 2014 and 2022, we have felt grateful for the way Diane and Henry have welcomed us in, and led us through their vision of the City of Asylum on Sampsonia Way. They introduced us to generations of the world's exiled writers and artists and included us to take part in the growing community they created as a gift to Pittsburgh and the wider world. In the years since that first fortunate meeting, we've thought about what makes Diane and Henry so admirable and important in the lives of their city and their friends.

They exemplify openness. The entire idea of City of Asylum is to connect rather than separate—to include and diversify and expand. Diane and Henry build this into every part of their personal and community lives.

They demonstrate the power of the arts. Scores of individual artists from the world have had their lives changed by their experience in Pittsburgh. Diane and Henry have helped those artists enrich Pittsburgh's culture at the same time.

They understand the importance of place, and of gathering places. They have enlivened a part of Pittsburgh that needed it. They have provided the physical structures that help social communities thrive—as they will again, in these post-pandemic years. And they personify what generosity means.

2014

As the whole world now knows, they also personify courage on every level, principle, a profound commitment to the ideals of freedom of expression, and a determination to speak. Their example and practice have never been more important than now.

We send our thanks and congratulations to them, our gratitude for having come into their force-field, and our encouragement that they continue in their vital work. Diane and Henry are civic heroes of our time, and of the years to come.

James and Deborah Fallows

August 2022



JAMES FALLOWS is a writer, journalist, national correspondent for The Atlantic, former editor of U.S. News & World Report, and was President Jimmy Carter's chief speechwriter.

DEBORAH FALLOWS is a linguist, writer, PhD in theoretical linguistics, a fellow at the New America Foundation, and was assistant dean in languages and linguistics at Georgetown University.



*"City of Asylum
is a physical
manifestation
of the universal
value of free
expression."*

—George Packer

From 2012 to 2017, the Fallows flew their single-engine plane across America to visit small towns. This journey was the basis of their 2018 book, *Our Towns*. They describe how citizens addressed and resolved communal issues, in stark contrast to the bitter paralysis of national politics.

Henry and Diane's home, nestled among the five House Publications on Sampsonia Way.

Diane's design for the Alphabet City exterior metal railing includes the word "Welcome" in several languages, including Bengali (above), Cyrillic, Japanese, Greek, and Arabic.

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27	Mikhail, Dunya
11	Moya, Horacio Castellanos
19	Nene, Fred
29	Novey, Idra
19	Olcerst, Glenn
31	Rahmani, Anouar
12	Solosko, David
20	Shepherd, Sean
16	Simms, Michael
13	Steen, Bill
13	Steen, Susan
24	Thumbscrew
10	Whitehill, Robert
4	Wiley, Richard
27	Wolpé, Sholeh
7	Xiang, Huang
17	Yadali, Yaghoub
25	Young, Raquel Winnica
25	Young, Lenny

Red indicates asylum residents

CITY OF ASYLUM STAFF

Executive Director: **Andres Franco**
Senior Producer: **Alexis Jabour**
Director of Programs: **Abby Lembersky**

SANCTUARY DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

Design: **Laurel Shoemaker**, Radial Design Lab
Design Consultation: **Terry Irwin**
Editorial Support: **George Heidekat**, Heidekat Writing Services
Design Production: **Virginia Brodie**, Graphic-Ability
Translation of Horacio Castellano Moya Submission: **Global Wordsmiths**
Ex Libris Illustration: **Valerie Lueth**, Tugboat Printshop
Photography: **Steve Adams**; **Nancie Battaglia** (Russell Banks photo); **Tom Little**; **Glenn Olcerst**; **Renee Rosensteel**
Box, Cover, and Handmade Paper: **Katy DeMent**, The Paper Lady

About the Box and Cover Paper: *The clamshell box and book cover papers contain fragments of COA marketing materials and seeds from Barbara Talerico’s garden; if planted, this book would sprout and grow—a metaphor for Henry and Diane’s enduring vision of creative freedom. Debossed on the clamshell box is an alphabet Diane created from characters that COA writers hand-lettered in their parent languages.*
About the Ex Libris Bookplate: *Illustration inspired by the black locust tree that grows in front of Henry and Diane's home on Sampsonia Way.*
Text Paper: Neenah Classic Crest, Eggshell Digital 100 lb. text
Printing: Copies At Carson, Canon imagePRESS C180
Typefaces: Galaxie Copernicus (by Chester Jenkins and Kris Sowersby); Aller (by Dalton Maag); Corundum (by Joshua Darden)

Exile Book
Civitas de Asilo
CITY of ASYLUM
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