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OPENING THE DOOR: A REMEMBRANCE (1994)

Program notes:

Opening the Door: A Remembrance was composed in memory of Galen Gibson, a college friend whose life was tragically cut short by a school shooting. After his death I looked for and failed to find a text which would best reflect his qualities. It was not until Galen's funeral service that his own poem presented itself to me, inserted into the center of the memorial program. Galen's text, with its imagery of opening doors and finding solace, was exactly what I had been looking for. The piece is not meant to be a requiem, and it was not my intention to dwell on Galen's death. Rather it is a remembrance of his life and his inimitable spirit, as reflected in his graceful poem.

Text:

The upstairs bunkbed,
Where the high thoughts
Trip over themselves,
That's where I start.
The thoughts are feverish
triangles
That are sparked in the stuffy
room.

I leave them behind.
The organized,
Boxy books,
On their rectangular shelves,
Box me in.
The old wool blanket,
Woven into warped
Woofing grids,
Then folded into scratchy cubes;
I leave them behind.

Downstairs and out the door.
It's cool there;
Nothing's in the hall.
But I go in.

It's as simple as that,
The little electric heaters
With their square-cage faces

And helical glowing coils,
Begin to steam me up,
So I leave, out the door.

The cracked asphalt
Is a welcome chaos,
As the chilled street
Supports my feet.

Already,
Among the random branches
Of the trees
The heat is being undone.

My feet labour, my legs work
To fade the white façade.
And the house's white angular
trim
Of clapboard and shingle,
Dwindles and fades.
The winds cool my head.

The hot sun moves,
From behind the clouds,
As I enter the graveyard,
The rows of granite,
Chiseled and aligned
Hurt to look at.

The trees behind
The graveyard provide,
Some shade
Behind origami fold leaves,
And solace
From the lines
Of the sun's merciless rays,
And a path,
Twisting and faded,
That leads to the sea.

Down to the sea,
On the rocky coast
Where listless ripples
Of cold blue
Kiss the shattered shards of
granite
And the spot that burns
Is chilled
And my thoughts
My doors
Are open again
To the sky.

by Galen Crotty Gibson
(used by permission of the Gibson
family)

Instrumentation: Unaccompanied SATB Chorus

Duration: 8 minutes

Premiere: May 1995, Bard College Vocal Ensemble, Megan Hastie, Director