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Writing Contest (Winning Piece)

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To Our Feet
Tali Valentine

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke of putting billions of God's children on their feet, right now.

So this is to your own feet, those that took you here. The base of your tread: bones, skin and shoes bearing distance between all you've seen – presently planted in this blip of midwestern America alongside other feet. Rubber shoe rivets carry remnants of the Indiana sleet we share, toes scrape sidewalk ice and paint smudges of mud leftover from home roads. This foreign mud creates ground we stand upon together.

I have seen work boots pushing carts collecting campus center trash, converse tapping tile floors to the beat of 3,600 seconds of a class period. Ballet flats waiting in a bathroom stall until the coast is clear to avoid being seen at the sinks with a tear streaked face. Meandering chacos passing others with acknowledgment smiles, determined Nikes rushing to greet a neighbor, and cautious bare-feet stepping into a bedroom to ask how it's all going.

We find ourselves running breathlessly towards *something*, perhaps justice, college degrees or ambiguous should-bes - restless because eternity has been set in our hearts and we know this isn't it. We startle at the momentum of starting pistols and peer at windy progress, wondering what to help build. As King pointed out, this "progress" has procured the possibility of eating breakfast in New York City and dinner in Paris.

Once I saw a homeless woman struggling to put on a pair of sneakers, so I helped if anything so she didn't fall over. She placed her hand on my shoulder, leveraging her body to squeeze into the shoe. Looking up for eye contact conducive to understanding, she asked me to call her Miss Lynn. Our resultant conversation ended with Miss Lynn exasperatedly singing the song, "Love Will Build a Bridge," the lyrics, "Let me show you what love means / Love can build a bridge / between you and me" echoed off the highway bridge above us.

King talked about the feet of a seventy-two year old woman called Sister Pollard who walked to work every day during the bus boycotts in Montgomery, Alabama. One day, a bus driver stopped and asked if she wanted a ride, because wasn't she tired? And she said that no, she didn't want a ride, and yes, her feet were tired, but her soul was rested. For Sister Pollard, it wasn't a locomotive distance to cross, but a heart distance.

What if the bridges to build aren't A to B or New York to Paris but from your shoes to the shoes next to you? Perhaps the genius of this place is recognizing that the most impressive feats of architecture are connections between sets of feet perched on the metal of two facing chairs.

May our progress build bridges constructed of listening ears which cross fear canyons, lifting those without bootstraps to pull. May we take off our shoes, for the place we are standing is sacred ground. (Acts 7:33). May we inhabit these mud smeared floors presently, positioning ourselves towards love that shouts that we cannot walk alone.