

In the ghetto there were many mountains

In the ghetto there were many mountains,
Rising high above the concrete streets;
Monoliths, too many to count,
Monuments to disillusion and defeat.
They taunted us with perpendicular slopes,
Some apparent,
Others invisible.
They wanted us to swallow hard
And abandon hope,
While cultivating a fear of heights
And an affinity for lower expectations.

The mountains stood tall among us.
They smirked.
They challenged.
They stood wide legged with folded arms.
They were impediments to safe passage.
They were the symbols that sprang from ignorance
And malicious intent.
They sought to make us impotent
And ineffective.
They dared us to have the audacity
To dream or think we had the capacity
For higher elevations,
Through education.
The mountains spoke to the delegations.
They spoke against freedom
To express potential.

The mountains had names.
They were Jermaine, Jennifer,
Robert and Lorraine.
The mountains had titles;
Parent, lover, employer, friend and stranger.
The mountains were concrete,
As mortality, time and finances.
They were abstract
As negativity, the system, sabotage and envy.

In the ghetto there were many mountains
That spawned cottage industries
Of self destruction and doubt.
There were no T-shirts, but slogans
Were emblazoned on the hearts
Of many self conscious citizens;
Slogans with the mountain
As a mantra were common place.
Slogans of dreams being sold and stolen
In the marketplace.
The folklore generated stories of wasted hope,
Stories of the so called arrogant ones
Who left the ghetto to climb alone;
They mocked those who could tell the difference
Between the hand and rope, to pull them up
And those that would hold them down.
These potential heroes
Were branded as cowards and fools.

But, some mountain climbers ignored the taunting.
They worked in earnest to learn the terrain

And gained strength and formed habits, so weak
Muscles became strong and they maintained
The desire to make it to the other side.
They wanted to plant a flag of triumph
And pose for pictures,
And tell their own mountain climbing stories.
They wanted to elaborate on the challenges, the
conquests,
To let us know they climbed, despite the fear;
They climbed despite well intentioned people and
systems,
Who both helped and harmed their progress;
They climbed because they had the climbing spirit,
They climbed because they had the climbing gear,
And were determined to scale the summit.

In the ghetto there were many mountains;
And for each Mt Everest,
There were spectators and casualties,
And spectators sometimes outnumbered the climbers.
But the climbers sacrificed and persevered.
They used the data on the difficulty
Of scaling each peak,
To press on.
Today they fulfill their mission.
They send word below
To people looking skyward,
Encouraging them to work hard
And to have faith;
For it can be done.

Reprinted from Leadership above the rim,
Copyright © 2001 Orlando Ceaser
OrlandoCeaser.com