



THE  
**Poets  
Project**  
AT CASA GRANDE

A COLORADO  
ANTHOLOGY



The Denver Foundation

***The Poets Project: A Colorado Anthology***

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# The Poets Project

AT CASA GRANDE

A COLORADO ANTHOLOGY



The Denver Foundation

# Introduction

As The Denver Foundation planned its move from Cherry Creek to Casa Grande, a historic building in Capitol Hill, we sought a theme to unite the spaces where our staff and the community will do our work together. We wanted the meeting rooms and gathering spaces to reflect a new era of The Denver Foundation, now physically rooted even closer to the communities we've served for nearly 100 years.

Our thoughts roamed across Colorado, exploring nature, mountains, trees, rivers, and animals. We considered neighborhoods and landmarks from across the sprawling seven-county Metro Denver region, where our work is concentrated: Red Rocks, Colfax Avenue, Chautauqua Park, and Five Points. We realized that we wanted to celebrate the people of Colorado. We considered naming rooms after underrepresented historical figures, civil rights freedom fighters, activists, and Indigenous leaders.

Ultimately we agreed that the neighborhood surrounding our new home provided the perfect theme. Built in 1929, Casa Grande is part of the Sherman/Grant Historic District, known for its stretches of distinctive Art Deco and Streamline Moderne buildings built for Denver's burgeoning middle class. On one of those stretches, known locally as "Poets Row," most of the buildings are named for literary giants including Mark Twain, Louisa May Alcott, Thomas Carlyle, and Emily Dickinson.

We elected to embrace the spirit of the district by naming rooms in Casa Grande for contemporary poets in Colorado. Our goal was to honor the legacy and living history of poetry in Colorado while celebrating poets who embody The Denver Foundation's vision of a creative and inclusive future. All of the buildings on Poets Row are named for white writers; we wanted the nine meeting spaces in Casa Grande to more authentically represent the diverse backgrounds and points of view of the poets, and people, of Colorado. We asked the community for help.

In April 2020, The Denver Foundation issued an open call for nominations to The Poets Project at Casa Grande. We received dozens of nominations for poets from across the state and read scores of their poems; each one provided a view into the experiences and insights, joys, and challenges of people who share our Colorado home. Volunteer members of a review committee made the final selections.

This collection is a sampling of work from the nine extraordinary poets that were chosen for The Poets Project at Casa Grande anthology: Frederick Bosco, Linda Hogan, Bobby LeFebre, Sheryl Luna, Jovan Mays, Adrian H Molina, Chris Ransick, Suzi Q. Smith, and Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer.

They are very different people who write very different poems, but they have many things in common. The first is excellence, as evidenced by the poems themselves as well as the stack of honors and awards that attach to their biographies. Among these artists are five Poet Laureates (Bosco, LeFebre, Mays, Ransick, and Wahtola Trommer), winners of the Colorado Book Award (Hogan and Ransick), and a Guggenheim Fellow (Hogan, again), and many others. Second, they share a deep engagement with their community, serving as teachers, mentors, advocates, organizers, and leaders as well as scribes. Though Bosco and Ransick have passed on, their impact is felt not just in the enduring power of their words but in their legacies as educators and visionaries.

These poets also share a symbiotic and multi-dimensional relationship with place: Their experiences and observations reconstitute as words and poems, which provide both reflection and record of the places they inhabit and share with others. Poets see the same places differently, in different lights at different times. The Denver that Thomas Ferril (Colorado's first laureate) wrote in and about in the 50s and 60s is very different from the one Bosco illuminates in "Ode to the City and County of Denver," which asks "If we can dream of a great city we can build it. But whose dream is it?" Every poem is a statement. This collection includes bold commentary on gentrification, mental illness, institutional racism, and police brutality against Black Americans — issues that The Denver Foundation works to address, using the tools of philanthropy.

There are also, of course, meditations on love, death, and, befitting a Colorado theme, mountains, rivers, and birds. Nature is a constant theme in these pages, a source and symbol not just of beauty but struggle, history, power, and hope for renewal and peace.

Each one of these poems was written to connect with you, the reader, to inspire reflection and maybe even a poem of your own. We hope you enjoy this collection, which is The Denver Foundation's gift to our new neighbors as well as the communities we've worked alongside for generations.

— *Laura Bond, Senior Communications Officer,  
The Denver Foundation*

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Each bird loves to hear himself sing.

– *Arapaho proverb*

Look to the green within the mountain cup  
Look to the prairie parched for water lack  
Look to the sun that pulls the oceans up  
Look to the cloud that gives the oceans back  
Look to your heart and may your wisdom grow  
To power of lightning and to peace of snow.

– *Excerpt from “Here is a Land Where Life is  
Written in Water,” Thomas Hornsby Ferril*

Stand up; we shall not be moved  
Unless we’re taking a route we have not pursued  
So if you’ve got a dream and a lot to do  
Put your hands up and I’ll copy you.

– *Excerpt from “Stand Up,” Flobots*

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# Contents

<b>Frederick Bosco</b> _____	<b>2</b>
Ode to the City and County of Denver	
Vow to the Moon	
<b>Linda Hogan</b> _____	<b>6</b>
Bones at the River	
The Current Vein of History	
What We Kept	
<b>Bobby LeFebre</b> _____	<b>14</b>
For Elijah	
Nothing Left	
<b>Sheryl Luna</b> _____	<b>18</b>
The Witness	
Prayer for This Clay Earth	
Secret Missionary for the Virgin Mary Off His Meds	
<b>Jovan Mays</b> _____	<b>24</b>
New Orleanian Funeral March	
<b>Adrian H Molina</b> _____	<b>28</b>
Facing History	
A Free Afternoon	
And Death	
<b>Chris Ransick</b> _____	<b>38</b>
Dream in the Tunnels of Telluride	
How to Feed a Writer	
Tom Ferril's Mandolin	
<b>Suzi Q. Smith</b> _____	<b>42</b>
How to Make Love	
The Laughing Barrel Must Have Been Cobalt Blue	
Introductions in Green	
<b>Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer</b> _____	<b>50</b>
Setting	
With Any Luck	
Watching My Friend Pretend Her Heart Isn't Breaking	
<b>Credits</b> _____	<b>54</b>
<b>About Casa Grande and The Denver Foundation</b> _____	<b>55</b>

# Frederick Bosco



Long-time Denver writer Frederick “Freddy” Bosco often wrote about the inner lives and aspirations of the city’s lost and infirm. A graduate of the University of Denver, Freddy was a former Poet Laureate of Denver, a talented writer, sketch artist, piano player, and, not least, a clever poet even on his sickbed. Able to find humor even in his lifelong struggles with various illnesses and addictions, he was also a strong man able to bend those trials into a life filled with friends, poetry books, and a pursuit of Peace Education with the Prem Rawat community in Denver.

After a characteristically colorful sojourn in New York as a young man (think brief stints at everything from an elite accounting firm to a bullpen of fellow hungry writers grinding out a daily quota of stories for pulp magazines), Bosco returned to Denver. There his work — which was often centered on his haunts on Denver’s Capitol Hill and East Colfax as well as his gratitude for life, breath, and mindfulness — appeared in many places, including *The Denver Post*, *The Rocky Mountain News*, *Harper’s Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, *The Straight Creek Journal*, *Westword*, *Denver VOICE*, and most recently, *Life on Capitol Hill*. He also worked for many years at the CHARG Resource Center, which offers therapeutic and life-skills support to adults living with major mental illness. He also regularly explained mental illness and its challenges to classes of medical residents and nursing and social work students at the Anschutz Medical Campus. A member of two local writers’ groups, he generously offered his mentoring and editing assistance to others. Bosco died on December 19, 2018.



# Ode to The City and County of Denver

We go where the water is.  
We follow the flow,  
we go, we know on our search  
to be where we can sip  
and wash and water  
our crops. Beans and corn  
and wheat bloom beneath  
our feet as far as the eye  
can see. Once the buffalo  
owned all of this,  
thousands of years ago  
before tomahawk  
and bow and arrow  
reigned for a moment supreme.  
Guns and dollars  
succeeded gold and silver  
boom and bust again and again.  
Like oil, traded wildly  
up and down 17th Street  
where marble palaces  
trimmed with brass  
accepted the boots  
and polished brogans  
of brokers who leveraged  
capital for land and promises  
of gleaming futures.  
‘Twas ever thus:  
whispers on pillows  
erupted into wars  
as news of investments  
spread ferociously  
upending carts of commerce.  
Ghost buildings betrayed  
careful management  
while fiber optics  
sizzled crackling contracts  
on a global reach.

## Part Two:

Betimes, word spread  
that fresh air, plentiful jobs  
and legal weed were here,  
drawing freelance laborers  
to our high-plain desert.  
Where to stay? Why not  
erect wantonly luxurious  
mondo condo plywood palaces  
for all but po' folk?  
"Surplus people" in parlance  
of city planners, put hordes  
onto spaces seeking only  
shelter. "Gimme shelter?"  
Denver: the litmus test  
of existential reality.  
If we can dream of a great city  
we can build it. But  
whose dream is it?

## Vow to the Moon

It is clumps of dead lawn  
and granite tombs I seek:  
perfect peace, the kind we celebrate  
at funerals. Here, in my seventh decade  
I have grown tired, fatigued  
from breaking hearts and getting  
my own unwittingly broken.  
The challenge of breathing  
is passive; we do not breathe  
so much as we are being breathed  
tis said. No matter  
what oaths we make, we shatter them  
again and again, being as we are tailless monkeys  
with tales to tell.  
We build monuments on  
the foundations of yesterdays  
temples. Tomorrow we sleep  
but, please for now, let me pause  
a good long while, no demands  
or promises laid out, just serenity  
to accept the whole of life  
Including its finale.

# Linda Hogan

Linda Hogan (Chickasaw) Former Faculty at Indian Arts Institute, Writer in Residence for The Chickasaw Nation, and Professor Emerita from the University of Colorado, is an internationally recognized public reader, speaker, and writer of poetry, fiction, and essays. Her recent work includes *Dark. Sweet: New & Collected Poems* from Coffee House Press, which showcases her powerful growth as an indigenous writer, thinker, and environmentalist since the 1970s. *The Radiant Lives of Animals*, a book of essays that explore traditional indigenous knowledge, was published by Beacon Press in October 2020.

Hogan's main interests as both writer and scholar are environmental issues, indigenous spiritual traditions and culture, and Southeastern tribal histories. She has received numerous honors for her poetry, fiction, and essays, including the Colorado Book Award, an American Book Award, fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship and the Guggenheim Foundation. Hogan was inducted into the Chickasaw Nation Hall of Fame in 2007 for her contributions to indigenous literature. Her most recent awards include the 2015 Native Arts and Culture fellowship and the 2016 Thoreau Prize from PEN America.

Hogan lives in Idledale, Colorado. Her website is [lindahoganwriter.net](http://lindahoganwriter.net).

## Bones at the River

When the river changed course  
and washed land away,  
each bend grew sharper.

Water takes what it wants.  
Now, this time, it says, I will take  
earth from where your people  
are buried.

The river was once far from our graveyard  
but this Washita changed course,  
stole earth and carried it  
on the snaking back of its current  
and now it passes through  
the place my people are buried.

We are the those  
who came from the ones  
who survived, buried in that place  
after walking the death trail  
from Mississippi. *Missa Sipokna.*

We walked into this lost foreign place  
having no homes,  
no body of peace  
just the papers  
with signatures  
of those who made promises not held.

Now our bones are revealed like truth.  
We've taken up two  
from once invisible lives  
with lost names, lost horses,  
our lost relations  
who would have loved us.  
From some other place they do.

And I think what they feel in that force of water.  
We lived and traveled by water.  
It was our life. So I say to our bones, *Yes, go!*

# The Current Veins of History

are open  
as worlds and borders redefine  
themselves.

We wish for some new seed of vision  
so the world may grow if only for a moment  
silent, wordless, and fresh  
as a bare room with windows open.

Friend,  
even you I may never know,  
none of us alike,  
we are all in the same  
rushing current of life.  
each with our one-celled beginning  
primordial life opening  
to step out toward years of life  
with stories of those who birthed us,  
we hope flowing with love  
even with childhoods of hurt  
from being human,  
and for a time it seems all fine.

In this moment of stopping  
in the room safe with curtains billowing,  
for just this moment can't we touch one another  
and ask about our lives?

Even the earth knows these veins  
that run like rivers  
of sweet water into countries  
great one day, gone the next,  
or flowing into one  
another to create something new.

As we are silent in this moment, to be a friend,  
no weapon, not even arrows of words,  
just easy human waters together.  
Be like the animal that opens hardness  
and carries inside a pearl or a goddess  
that steps out to a new human accord.



# What We Kept

We had mountains  
and you took down the trees  
so that rain felled the mountains.

It was enchanted  
with the song of golden winds,  
the silk thread of river,  
pollen from medicine flowers  
you took, as if the whole world  
was the gold you wanted.

In the past, we gave you our labor.  
We gave you our store of food,  
even the mats where you slept for a year  
before we sent you away with burning arrows  
and your fat ran across earth.

You took the plants  
from our beautiful woods  
on your ships  
to lands already destroyed,  
and even more of you arrived  
to take our homes  
while we still lived inside them.

You took the birds  
from the rookeries of beautiful waters,  
feathers for hats from near the mangroves  
coats made from our animals,  
and all the time  
you lost so much, even taking,  
because you knew so little  
that a girl led the way  
to the fame of men,  
fed them, turned their canoes  
to safety.

The more you took,  
the more you lost.  
And you need us now  
the way  
you needed us then, our land  
and labor,  
and we give to you  
knowledge you don't hear,  
the new mind you can't accept,  
my bone and leaf soup.

But what I keep to myself,  
for myself, is the soul  
you can never have  
that belongs to this land,  
the magic haunting you  
still and always untaken,  
but you want,  
how you want,  
need.



# Bobby LeFebre



Bobby LeFebre is an award-winning writer, performer, and cultural worker fusing a non-traditional multi-hyphenated professional identity to imagine new realities, empower communities, advance arts and culture, and serve as an agent of provocation, transformation, equity, and social change. His work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Huffington Post*, *The Guardian*, *American Theater Magazine*, Poets.Org, and on National Public Radio. In 2019, LeFebre was named Colorado's eighth Poet Laureate, making him the youngest and first person of color to be appointed to the position in its 100-year history.

Holding a bachelor's degree in Psychology from the Metropolitan University of Denver and a master's degree in Art, Literature and Culture from the University of Denver, LeFebre is a Fellow of the National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures Leadership Institute, the National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures Advocacy Institute, and the Intercultural Leadership Institute. In 2020, LeFebre received a grant from the National Catalyst for Change — an initiative that supports Latinx artists working to radically imagine more racially just systems. Currently, LeFebre serves as an Advisory Council Member for the Latino Cultural Arts Center, a Board Member for the Clyfford Still Museum, a President's Cabinet Member for the Metropolitan State University of Denver, an Advisor for the Mayor of Denver's Institute of Equity and Reconciliation, and a member and previous co-chair of the Denver Commission on Cultural Affairs. His website is [bobbylefeb.com](http://bobbylefeb.com).

# For Elijah

1.

The violin is not a simple instrument.  
It is maple and spruce and more.  
70 pieces.  
A body.  
A soul.  
A neck.

2.

Elijah was not a simple man.  
He was Black and kind and more.  
Many pieces.  
A body.  
A soul.  
A neck.

3.

Carotid holds compress the arteries in the neck resulting in  
unconsciousness.

4.

Research shows violinists have faster cognitive processing speeds  
than the average person.  
Maybe this is why, in that moment, Elijah tried reason.  
Why he tried humanity.  
Why he tried compassion.  
Why he tried love.  
Why he tried apologizing.

5.

Maybe Elijah was trying to string his words into a bow.  
Maybe he thought he could slide that bow across the F-holes of the  
pigs' ears.  
Maybe he believed their hearts were capable of resounding music.  
Maybe he thought for a second  
that the pigs would do their job  
and police the crime of their gross imaginations.

# Nothing Left

And when there is nothing left to do but live  
let us retire the noise  
and build a home inside the stillness

Grab a wrench  
and unfasten the parts of you  
that have become mechanical;  
rest your weary limbs in the bed of anomaly

Outside,  
the machine is powering down  
You can hear the birds when the gears aren't grinding

When there is nothing left to do but live  
make a vacation of your body;  
each part explored, a stamp on your passport

Begin with your heart, maybe?  
Crawl inside and sightsee,  
ask difficult questions about who it is, and why

Outside,  
the machine is powering down  
You can hear yourself when the gears aren't grinding

When there is nothing left to do but live,  
simply show up;  
that has always been enough

And together in this sudden strangeness,  
radical imagination will run wild;  
tomorrow being built today



# Sheryl Luna



Sheryl Luna's *Magnificent Errors* received the 2020 Ernest Sandeen Poetry Prize and is forthcoming from University of Notre Dame Press in 2022. *Pity the Drowned Horses* (University of Notre Dame Press) received the Andres Montoya Poetry Prize and was a finalist for the National Poetry Series and the Colorado Book Award. *Seven* (3: A Taos Press) was also a finalist for the Colorado Book Award. Luna's poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Taos International Journal of Poetry and Art*, *Northwest Review*, *Georgia Review*, and *Huizache*. She has received fellowships from Yaddo, Ragdale, and the Anderson Center. She was the recipient of the Alfredo Cisneros Del Moral Foundation Award in 2008 and previously taught at the University of Colorado, Boulder and Metropolitan State University. She will be facilitating workshops at Lighthouse Writers Workshop in 2021.



# The Witness

Our mistakes crack open. Each leaf  
veined distinctly,

and we are star-made music makers,  
fingerprinted originality.

This is expansion: to stand as One with all.

The mountains a dense  
explosion of trees.

Night comes to us sexy,  
whispers to us about belief in light.

Words tumble from us. Honesty, a naked  
falling.

We linger in the source of gardens.

For two hundred thousand years,  
we have been deaf.

We forget meaning, our storylines  
repeat the rhythm of our breaking.

The soul is without weight in the end.

We must find the calm witness  
within that observes the self

quietly, the child laughing  
in a flurry of light.

# Prayer for this Clay Earth

Teach us the language of spilling out of ourselves.

Teach us the language of moon, rain beating on cheeks,  
divinity lighting our eyes. Teach us nothing

conceptual about fear, only how it concretely tightens  
 chests, trembles down arms. Teach us fiery music,

the silence of trees, currents of sky and water.

Teach us to rebuke the language of drowning,  
to hold close breath and pulse of the body—

Teach us healing above all, soothing the center  
of our being. Teach us dark

solitude without longing.

# Secret Missionary for the Virgin Mary Off His Meds

He writes of grenades, a universe exploding.

It's inexhaustible, the sky. Something about badness  
turns him on. Passion, a candle with two wicks.

He says to me, "keep burning."  
He often falls out of love,

handles language like a theologian, misses  
lilies. Late he insists fall's leaves aren't dead.

His knowledge flickers brown-bagged, like rows  
of luminaria candles at night. Seasonal  
Affective, he deals with feminine questions.

He argues without hearing his own voice.

Within an occasional dream, he hears language  
glide along the starched collars of men.

He will not let himself show sadness or joy.  
He forgets the late afternoon lake  
golden, geese calling out in droves.

No gang-banger, his past is a series of commitments,  
seventy-four-hour holds, Haldol and Seroquel.  
Now refusing meds,

he's found the weather quite bothersome.  
Wringing his hands to a fallen image of God,  
he has a hurried urgency to be uninvolved.

Like a man in solitary confinement  
in prison tossing shit to the guards,

he refuses to smile. Know-it-all criticisms of others  
make his days. He cannot let go atheism or disbelief.

Electroshock therapy has him grasping at a forgotten past.  
He walks lanky towards a loneliness he won't refuse.

And the aftermath of madness is calm.

He tries to forget the dread of monotony and expectation.

We, with the same steps, trod towards some understanding,  
some philosophy. All of us, keepers of secrets.



# Jovan Mays



Jovan Mays is the inaugural and emeritus Poet Laureate of Aurora, Colorado, a National Poetry Slam Champion, and a TED speaker. Mays has worked with well over one million students through poetry outreach in his program, Your Writing Counts. He is the author of three books: *Pride*, *The Great Box Escape*, and *This Is Your Song*. His work has been published by *The Pilgrimage*, *Button Poetry*, and *Write About Now*. He is a graduate of Chadron State College, where he played football, wrestled, and earned a degree in Secondary History Education. His website is [jovanmays.com](http://jovanmays.com).

# New Orleanian Funeral March

## *Dirge*

They say they carry their lost.  
A broken 2nd line of dormant trumpets.  
Baritone in their romp.

The ancestors applaud from below.  
Another grandchild coming home.  
But the lost never feel heard.

But the herd is always singing.  
Ahmaud. George. Breonna. Elijah.  
Trombone pickets and clarinet signs.

I want to say welcome back.  
But you ain't goin nowhere.  
The ground holds your progression.

And somewhere in that abyss  
of poached, they will find black  
tusks and carcasses and see

that all of our bones were the same.  
And you know us black folks don't  
ya. We will be out there with a song

hopeful like bees or should I  
say ants. We clearly march wingless.  
But that's where all that bass comes from.

That's where all that resilience was born.  
That's how we line up.  
It's hard having compassion.

But the tyranny of some will  
not steal the bellows oxygen.  
And we will sing like flames.

Sending our prayers in ore  
to blacksmiths in hopes  
for just a bit more armor.

And if it don't come,  
well, we will beat the ground  
till the cicadas are fluent in locust.

Till the trees look like a murmuration.  
They will remember you child. They  
will. You will be inscribed in djembe.

In conga stretched monarch hide.  
Etched in tectonics.  
With elephant carriage caskets

carrying  
you home.

### ***Spiritual***

Years from now  
They will find your weathered remains  
this music was beaten into your bones.

Clarinet columns,  
trombone throats,  
& a snare heart.

No one will care about indictments.  
only the sound the ground makes  
when something holy is stolen.

Never late – Always on time  
Call – in a half shake  
Response – on the downbeat

Could you hear em steppin fo ya?  
The whole city stopped like they had seen the sky erupt in your name.



Even the flowers came out to boogie.  
Dressed in your days best.  
Reminding us that you never left.

That they took the body  
but never your rhythm.  
Your cadence was our twist in the storm.

You will not be remembered as sundown.  
But forever sunny side up  
next to daybreaks fresh catch.

Explosive laughter in the wrong moments  
Still tomorrow's hope  
latched to knees under Mama's sundress.

And we will call you Is.  
Was, was never your name.  
Each step above you a key.

Striking the pipe organ  
in your stripped dust.  
Feel free to bop.

Let your jives jitter  
The way you did when you came in.  
And all these heads sway

trunks wave like a vein  
uprooting the grounds hallelujah.  
Tubas bump, hips pop,

smiles melt into your wave.  
Today you wrote the sheet music  
and we had no other choice...but to move.

# Adrian H Molina



Adrian H Molina, J.D., also known as Molina Speaks, is a master of ceremonies, artist, poet, and musician. His mission is to unite the human spirit through the radical imagination. Molina is the son of a Mexican immigrant father and a working-class Chicana mother from Wyoming. An honoree of the Lalo Delgado Poetry Festival, Molina's artistic legacy includes serving as Creative Director of Youth on Record during the establishment of its Youth Media Studio, being named a Westword Mastermind, and serving as Resident Artist and Future Builder during the statewide expansion of Warm Cookies of the Revolution. His Living Word Scroll (2015-2020) is housed within the Latino Cultural Art Center Collection and was on exhibit at History Colorado throughout 2020. Molina is the architect of an indigenous futurist space within Meow Wolf Denver, which pays homage to the Neo-Precolumbian and Meta-Realist art of Stevon Lucero. The Molina Room at Casa Grande is dedicated to his children, Izriah and Solana. His website is [molinaspeaks.com](http://molinaspeaks.com).

# Facing History

Rest your weight against mine  
into the arc of the universe,  
time's hand under the small of our backs,  
the earth's fingertips tracing our birth lines,  
the diameter of a jaguar sun,  
a Bengal tiger  
trailing a teardrop  
she could tear into.  
Begin to unravel, breathe, feel and yearn.  
Do not come undone.

Watch the cities wake, a patient stride,  
the conversations taking form.  
Watch the day moon rise from the east  
following our sun  
as though they share orbit.  
Watch the light change. Let it dance  
into your windows, the winds  
carrying your palm leaves,  
minutes becoming hours becoming days  
in and out of evening light.  
Let the stars fall upon your face  
becoming needles.

Pierce the nights like dreams  
you cannot escape. Imagine  
the cool sleep, the steady breeze  
awaiting the calm after the storm,  
unseasonably warm waters  
carrying the echoes of the future beings,  
ticking clocks past twelve,  
their open hands  
their lists of demands  
scribbled into the folds of our ears,  
the mountains trembling.

Watch the ancestors dream, their maps  
of planets and constellations,  
their alignment,  
the symmetry of patterns  
weaving costumes upon the land,  
the dances, the prayers,  
the songs and syllables taking shape  
joining the clouds  
and our communion,  
the medicines in the plants,  
the memories in the waters,  
the paths and collisions,  
cultures unwinding,  
snakes and cosmic faces,  
the bonds of warfare,  
the agony and the falls,  
the long summers of sweat,  
pulsing tongues screaming,  
silent wishes,  
the relief encoded in survival walks.

Run.

Propel forward as the atoms split,  
each sun, an eclipse,  
as winged beings leap into flight,  
as salmon return to fight upstream,  
the poets take note,  
drums and syllables crashing,  
deflated balls and dreams pounding concrete,  
humanity chasing collapse.

Prepare to rebuild and remember,  
the ancients swaying,  
reaching for the promise of freedom,  
reaching, here on fire  
walking through pandemic portals,  
a falling sky  
holding us, daring to release us  
facing blood and history,  
gripping the backs of our necks  
an obsidian mirror,  
an injection of truth into cervical layers of spine,  
the curve within a long webbed set of fingers  
massaging the tissues of old,  
dazzlingly daring us to turn away and come forth,  
to leave the oceans of fear,  
to claim all that is ours  
the pulsing furies of justice,  
the abundant and redemptive earth  
resting beneath our bare feet.

It is time.

Erupt.

# And Death

Be not afraid of death.  
You will come with me to the gavel points  
time and time again, ill  
and in good spirits, tired  
and with the charge of a bull  
we will confront her.

Sleeping and walking,  
waking and dreaming, seeing  
the world through the eyes  
of a tired deer, wounded and beaten,  
tranquil and bequeathed to the great sleep,  
and then through the tenacity of a wasp,  
curious and testy, buzzing  
unforgiving, ever ready to strike  
for life  
and death,  
again and again  
coming and going and morphing,  
becoming small like a shell,  
a grain of sand  
sustaining life,  
and enormous, mammoth,  
a creature of the land  
devouring vast clouds of foliage  
that become us,  
then a cactus in the desert  
sustaining thirst,  
a morsel of sap in a Northeastern maple tree,  
the breath in the last song of the last sailor  
at sea,  
the last bullets from a raging soldier's clip,  
running,  
the beating heart of a motionless monk  
perched in the peaks  
of the Himalayas, steadily  
humming,

the salt upon the bottom of your lip,  
the sweat on my chest  
when we meet again, vapors of desire  
when we release  
the distance between us,  
your breast bone upon mine,  
time elapsing as we sleep,  
enveloped in the lack of space between us.  
The sky could fall upon us  
and take the day. In death  
we would dream  
together.

We would dream of wooden floors in converted  
empty Victorian attics,  
picking up dirty clothes on hotel room floors,  
silent phones, heaving,  
lungs contracting in airport terminals,  
running towards freedom,  
running from war, villages,  
the drone of helicopters abovehead,  
drones, grids, cables, wires, sneakers  
strung up into the power lines,  
initials carved into trees,  
cameras glaring down upon our streets,  
running,  
running for life, running again  
towards death, always running  
in motion,  
dancing with phantoms  
in caves and on theater stages,  
producing content  
to remember,  
drinking agave spirits to forget,  
wine for celebrations,  
beer to pass the time,  
moving like wild cats in the morning  
to keep the body alert,  
to keep the mind from escaping  
the madness of civilization,  
to keep the spirit thirsty

so it does not wander too far  
into the seventh dimension  
where there is no escape  
from the whirlwinds of oblivion.

We will observe death  
as no country escapes war, no generation  
evades misery, no people free to live  
without the threat of crimson killing machines  
paraded by kings.  
I have died for my people and will do so again.  
I have died a star,  
and for time,  
for bright lime dust and salmon orange combustions  
in the blackness of black space,  
for possibility.  
I have died for poverty,  
for wealth, for stupidity,  
for ideals  
and relief. I will die again  
and so shall you,  
tailspinning into the desert earth,  
a burning bush,  
floating off past the soft blues  
of our days  
into the fiery marigolds of our time.  
Here you will die, your smile  
recycled  
into a sunflower.  
You will wait for me  
through seasons and eons.  
And I will return, a hummingbird.  
I will find you, and stop when I come upon you  
suspended in air  
to sing you the songs again  
of Quetzalcoatl and Nezahualcoyotl.  
And I will fly away again  
remembering how tall you stood  
and the way you reached up so high  
towards the sun  
only to become



so big and bright and beautiful  
that you had no choice  
but to droop your neck down  
towards the earth,  
so you could smile  
at all the ghetto children  
running with the sun.

My love,  
I will always return  
to burn  
another moment with you.  
Fear not of death  
for we are dying as we speak  
so we can remember  
how to live again.

## A Free Afternoon

A pastel afternoon one calendar day, I  
stumbled and fell, laughing at my feet, I  
questioned. I  
asked the cumulous dreamscapes  
if they knew my name?  
I liked the thought  
that no one out there  
knew my identity this day, not the lines in the  
rocks or the circles  
of wildflowers minding me.

The lavender plants and  
sage and mountain parsley  
chasing sun shades  
watched me wandering  
without finding my mocha eyes or cinnamon bark  
strange or my movements shifty  
because of the way I  
wear my skin, or my name,  
and no one asked me why I  
was there or where I  
planned to go next, they just  
swayed with me  
curving winds.

Without identifying me or naming me or  
tracking my movements, the shapes  
in the sky spoke with me  
about transformation  
and we respired  
together accepting  
the way the light  
changed on the terrain below.  
It was all free form, an endless dirt path, a  
sage brushing Indian paint, a  
bristling grass hill rising,  
sloping, grading only the day's glow

slipping slowly into evening sun. It was time and I  
alone with the colors observing  
a free afternoon.

# Chris Ransick

Chris Ransick, Denver Poet Laureate 2006-2010, is the author of six books, including *Never Summer: Poems from Thin Air*, which won a Colorado Book Award for poetry in 2003, and a collection of short stories entitled *A Return to Emptiness*, a finalist for the 2005 Colorado Book Award in fiction.

Chris was born and raised in New York and lived in Colorado, Montana, Wyoming, California, and Oregon, working variously as a newspaper reporter, editor, and professor, as well as teaching at Lighthouse Writers Workshop in Denver, where he was recognized with the Beacon Award for Teaching Excellence in 2013. He served as a member of PEN USA's Freedom to Write Committee and, closer to home, spent eight years serving on his local public library board. His stories and poems have been presented on television, radio, and stage, including collaborations with Wonderbound dance company.

Chris died on November 4, 2019. He gave his last reading on September 25, 2019 at Lighthouse Writers Workshop to a community that he truly loved. His determination to share this parting gift reflected who he was and what mattered most: the writing. Chris entered hospice immediately following and, in typical Chris style, continued writing to the end. His website is [chrisransick.com](http://chrisransick.com).

## Dream in the Tunnels of Telluride

Underground, you see the dangling  
roots of condominiums, legs of lynched men  
dripping silver back into the earth.  
Ore crushers pound incessantly, great  
piston strokes and impacts. This town  
is a drum beaten by demons. You knew  
upon entering that you would get lost  
and it soon comes true. Perhaps some day  
they'll display your skeleton, curled like a fetus,  
in a dusty museum case, bones  
in their final contortion. Still,  
you've come here to learn what mines  
can tell you. In the dark silent halls,  
dark water trickles over darker rock and  
dead men bang the walls with hammers  
of smoke, grimacing. They have no eyes.  
You start to sing to cheer yourself  
and a chorus joins in, basso profundo,  
tenors and baritones. A door appears  
in the stone, brass knob and scuffed pine.  
You could stand forever before such a portal  
trying to decide but it opens onto a tunnel  
as well lit as streets above. A fair woman  
smiles and runs her fingers among yours, says,  
What took you so long? She leads you  
up the underground lane, past heaps of  
rotting snow, past a man on a unicycle,  
past an old whorehouse that's a bakery now  
and an old bakery that's a boutique.  
You know you're still in some awful tunnel,  
hallucinating like a madman and nowhere near  
to waking. The ghosts have begun calling you  
by name. A hammer appears in your hand.

## How To Feed A Writer

Tempt the tongue with husky whispers the ears  
barely hear but the belly remembers.  
Place marinated steak on the embers.  
Disregard his impatience. Ignore tears  
borrowed from the protagonist, page eight.  
Serve first for thirst the chilled and peppered booze  
and let her stand beneath blue dragonflies  
as soft winds blow lindens and day grows late.  
Feed a writer everything delicious,  
nothing bitter as novels to finish,  
old poems to varnish, memoirs to banish.  
What they curse and scribe, be it auspicious  
or doomed or blamed on their big busy heads,  
will be but words when they lie in their beds.

## Tom Ferril's Mandolin

From these rooms, your notes would fall  
through summer nights, into back yards  
where old men leaned against a wall  
to talk, to sit in cool dusk playing cards.  
Sandburg strummed a guitar, going round  
a tune through which you weaved, the words  
and strings together shaping sound.  
I would have smiled to hear those songs  
from a nearby porch, verses crooned  
by two poets in their cups. Today I found a ring  
of flagstone under dirt while we cleared  
decades of weeds out back, wrongs  
grown tall by time and neglect. The rock shown red  
when rinsed with water and sun. Someone told how  
Dorothy Parker woke up in your daughter's bed  
hung over and in need of a poem. Now,  
the rooms have no beds. Hear swirls in the loft  
above the rounded desk at the window  
where you made books, an ancient craft.  
This house will never fall silent  
though the music grows ever more soft.

# Suzi Q. Smith

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Suzi Q. Smith is an award-winning artist, activist, and educator who lives in Denver, Colorado. She has been performing poetry throughout the United States for over a decade.

Performing across the U.S. for over a decade, she has shared stages with Nikki Giovanni, the late Gil Scott-Heron, and many more. Her poems have appeared in *Union Station Magazine*, *Suspect Press*, *La Palabra*, *Muzzle Magazine*, *Malpais Review*, *The Pedestal*, *The Los Angeles Journal*, *Denver Syntax*, *Word is Bond*, *The Peralta Press*, *Yellow Chair Review*, and in the anthologies *The Mutiny Info Reader*, *Diverse-City*, *His Rib: Anthology of Women*, and *In Our Own Words*. Her chapbook collection of poems, *Thirteen Descansos*, was published by Penmanship Books. She co-wrote the dramatic productions “How I Got Over: Journeys in Verse” and “Where We Are From: Freedom is a Constant Struggle.”

Smith has also worked extensively as an activist with civil rights organizations, victims advocate organizations, arts organizations, peace organizations, hospitals, prisons, and more. She was the founding Slammaster of Denver’s Slam Nuba, and she spent 12 years in the poetry slam arena as a coach, organizer, and performer. In addition, she has worked extensively with youth, serving as a Teaching Artist with Youth On Record, and as a coach of Denver Minor Disturbance Youth Poetry Slam, resulting in two international championships. Currently, she is at work on her next collection while she continues to teach creative writing. Smith is a recipient of The Denver Foundation’s Community Leadership Award. Her website is [suziqsmith.com](http://suziqsmith.com).



## Introductions in Green

I am going to die. Obviously.  
So are you. We don't know  
when. Or who will go first.  
I'd better tell you everything I think  
I know or remember while I am still  
alive.

These are my hieroglyphs.  
I hope you can use them. Some of them  
are recipes. Some of them are prescriptions.

Most are only moments  
I still have questions about  
or stones I wanted to squeeze  
before I skipped them  
into a deep lake.

Probably, this is the lake.  
And the stones. And my hands.  
The ripples on the surface of the water  
as the stones skitter across.  
The fish. The flies. Mosquitos.  
If there are ducks, this is them too.

Maybe in the future,  
you won't know what a duck is.

Maybe I should learn to draw  
a bird that flies and floats and stretches

its long neck into water while  
its body is perfectly still atop the depths.

Sometimes, when the sun hits just right,  
the green in their feathers looks like emeralds  
or spray painted metal, a treasure.  
It almost doesn't look real.

A treasure.

Do you believe the wild and  
precious imagination of God?  
I hope you imagine  
something beautiful for God  
in return.

You are precious, you know?  
You are alive for now.  
I do not know if this will still be true  
when you read this, but so am I.

So many of our beloveds  
have not survived.  
Still: we are here,  
brave enough to have  
beloveds.

Sometimes I close  
like a fist and that, too,  
is love.

I exist. Therefore, I deserve to be loved.

I am learning to stop  
apologizing for declaring my own  
deservedness for love.

Everything alive needs love.  
Even the things with thorns.  
Even the thorns.  
Even the blood dripping  
from fingertips into the soil.  
Yes, even the finger.  
Yes, even the soil.  
The worms, dancing in the dark of it.

## How to Make Love

If you want someone to know that you love them, go to the local butcher. Buy the best whole chicken they have, organs and all. Go to the market with the best produce and buy a few onions, yellow enough to make you hungry, a few shallots maybe two hands full. A heavy box of kosher salt. A pound of carrots so orange they sing, a stalk of celery crisp as winter. A quart of heavy cream thick as a cow's shoulder. A bottle of brandy or cognac, depending on what you like. A bundle of bay leaves, fresh if you can find them. A pound of butter. You should already have several cloves of garlic on hand at home, we are talking about love after all, but it might be wise to add a few more to your basket if you feel like it's time.

Now we all have our own methods, but I feel like it's best to sing on your way home, and while you're preparing the ingredients. I prefer Anita Baker and Donny Hathaway for this part, and, of course, Stevie Wonder, but do you. Chop the yellow onions while you sing. Crying may also occur. Best to leave the onions in irregular pieces, let your love know that you chopped them yourself. Cut the carrots into fat coins, then again in half if you feel like it. Wash the celery down to its base, all between the ribs where the dirt likes to hide. I hope I didn't have to tell you to wash everything else: your onions, your carrots, your hands.

I like a heavy knife for all this chopping, but work with what you got. You don't need good knives to love somebody, but it helps. What you do need is a stockpot big enough to hold a whole chicken and all these vegetables, plus some water. You should have a cast iron skillet too, but it's alright if you ain't that grown yet. Best to rinse the pot, it probably has some dust or grease on it from sitting on top of the fridge or under the sink, or where ever you pull it out from. Now, on low heat, pour a little olive oil and let it warm. After about half a song, add your chopped vegetables to the pot and let them spend some time together under a lid. When they start to feel a little soft, stir them with a wooden spoon. I hope you have a wooden spoon.

As for the chicken, if you haven't worked with a whole chicken before, the organs are probably inside it. You'll need to reach in between its legs and pull them out. This might sound nasty, and it might even be nasty, but it's got to be done and if you can't handle a little nasty, you might not be ready to fall in this type of love yet. Set the organs aside, we'll do something with them in a little while. Don't let the juices spill onto the counter, put them on a plate or in some type of container. Cover them and put them in the fridge, I'll tell you another time how to make pâté.

Now that your chicken is ready for cooking – you washed it, didn't you? We talked about this. Wash everything. Pray however you pray. I give thanks for all my food (especially if something had to die). I thank my food, the land it grew on, the people who raised it, who slaughtered or harvested it. You ever think about how many hands and lives are involved on your plate? That's a lot of thank-yous. Thank the chicken while you wash its body, while you go all between its legs and pull its organs out, thank it when you put it in the pot on top of the semi-soft vegetables, stirred by a wooden spoon. Let the chicken sit on top of the onions, the carrots, the celery on low heat and under a lid. Let the steam help them get together and fall in proper love for the length of two or three Nina Simone songs, checking in between.

Now, of course, we need to add water. Nothing good can grow without water. Some folks will tell you to use filtered water, which is good if you got it, but if we come to the kitchen with clean hands and a pure heart, we can make the best out of what we have and tap water will do just fine. Add enough water for the chicken to be cooked entirely, enough to let it rise to the top. Now you'll want to add a couple of bay leaves, or more if you like (here is where we must listen to our own blood), a half palm of kosher salt, depending on the size of your hands.

Let all of this roll into a soft boil, then bring the heat back down to low and walk away for an hour or so. This is a good time to do laundry, but probably not to read because it is too easy to get lost inside a book and forget to take the chicken out. When the chicken is cooked (and I mean falling-off-the-bone cooked, not a shade of pink nowhere), bring it onto a plate and let it cool. It might fall apart in this process, don't panic. We're about to take it apart anyway, so go ahead and bring it out in pieces if you got to.

Keep the broth on low low very low heat. When the chicken is cool enough for you to touch without cussing, pull the skin off the meat and the meat off the bones. Put the meat aside (in a container, then into the fridge) and add the skin and bones back into the pot. We're gonna let these bones cook slow for a long time, all night, so you can go ahead and read now if you want to and come back to this tomorrow.

When you wake up, your whole house should smell like somebody loves you. There might be a layer of gel and fat on the top of your broth. You're welcome. Now you'll strain the broth into another pot. With the bones and skin and bay leaves and vegetables boiled lifeless all looking at each other in the strainer, you have compost that wants to spend time in your soil. We don't believe in wasting anything in this kitchen. Add this mixture to your compost bucket if you got one, or go ahead and start one in an old coffee can. Keep your broth on the stove, bring it back to a low boil and add some rice. You washed it, right? I know I didn't tell you to buy rice but you should already have some – if you don't even have rice, I don't know if you should be trying to cook love dishes just yet. Let the rice cook itself soft as you like it, and add the chicken from yesterday back into the pot and let it get warm.

Now I know this sounds easy, chicken and rice soup. But if you do all this for your intended and they don't fall in love? You deserve better. And at least now you know how to cook.

## The Laughing Barrel Must Have Been Cobalt Blue

Under the shadow of a headline  
looking too much like our children,  
we tucked and folded and gathered  
ourselves and each other into the  
skirt of my grandmother's dining room  
tablecloth, all of us lamenting and  
listing the labors and losses, the  
table spilling over with stories of  
the times the police were called  
or not called but came, the last  
jobs or second interviews, the neighbor  
or grocery store clerk, the child  
at school and/or their mother and/or  
their father and/or the teacher and

the table, listening, dipped in the  
center near to snapping under the  
burden until my grandmother  
emerged from the kitchen, apron  
speckled "but here is the thing,  
the real thing," her pointed finger  
stern and scolding us into silence,

"would any of you ever want to be  
anything other than what you are?"

and we sat  
stunned, staring at ourselves  
until we began to laugh

and we laughed  
we laughed into each other's shoulders,  
we laughed into howling, howled  
into howling until the moon herself  
walked into the room  
staggering, crook'd finger in the air,  
laughed her round face into our laughter,  
howling a perfect mirror  
our moon eyes spilling throaty and harmonious  
looking and laughing and loving our rich and  
delicious lives too perfect, too precious,  
and we ate to music we ate without muting  
our tears rolling into our open mouths.

# Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer



Southwest Colorado poet Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer has been writing and sharing a poem a day since 2006. Her poetry has appeared in *O Magazine*, on *A Prairie Home Companion* and *PBS News Hour*, in *Rattle.com* and Ted Kooser's *American Life in Poetry*, and on river rocks she leaves around town. She has 13 poetry collections, most recently *Hush*, winner of the Halcyon Prize for poems of human ecology, and *Naked for Tea*, a finalist for the Able Muse book award. She teaches and performs poetry for mindfulness retreats, women's retreats, scientists, Camp Coca Cola, Deepak Chopra, hospice, The Embodiment Conference, and more. She is a co-host for *Emerging Form* (a podcast on creative process), co-founder of Secret Agents of Change (a group dedicated to surreptitious kindnesses), co-host of *Stubborn Blessing* (an online poetry reading series), and co-director of Telluride's Talking Gourds Poetry Club. She's included in the acclaimed anthology, *Poetry of Presence*, served as San Miguel County's first poet laureate, and was appointed Western Slope Poet Laureate (2015-2017). Favorite themes in her poems include parenting, gardening, the natural world, love, thriving/failure, and daily life. Her website is [wordwoman.com](http://wordwoman.com).



## Setting

In every conversation  
there is a table made of listening.  
Sometimes the tables are beautiful,  
solid, clean—the kind  
that can support anything  
you put on them.  
Sometimes, they're like  
the tv dinner trays  
of my childhood—  
a little rickety, but they'll do  
if what's put on them is light.  
Sometimes they're so cluttered  
that whatever's placed on their surface  
is almost immediately lost.  
Let tonight's table have a small vase of flowers  
and a candle perhaps, nothing else.  
May it be small enough we might  
see each other's eyes, might notice  
every nuance of breath. Whomever  
I am most nervous to invite,  
may I invite them. And though  
the tea is just a metaphor,  
may I offer. May they accept.

## With Any Luck

Meet me in summer  
in Colorado when the Rockies  
are softened by fields

of blue lupine  
and the creeks run clear  
with the memory of snow.

With any luck,  
we'll get lost until  
we, too, begin to bloom,

until whatever is cold in us  
melts and races away  
with a bright and bubbling laugh.

There are days we forget  
how to make a fist,  
how to speak any language

but praise. Meet me  
in summer when the old  
high trails are open—

what else might we find  
behind the crumbling  
mines—some share

of ourselves we've yet  
to have met—something  
so spacious we never

dreamt it would fit  
inside our skin. With any luck,  
it will follow us home.

## Watching My Friend Pretend Her Heart Isn't Breaking

On Earth, just a teaspoon of neutron star  
would weigh six billion tons. Six billion tons  
equals the collective weight of every animal  
on earth. Including the insects. Times three.

Six billion tons sounds impossible  
until I consider how it is to swallow grief —  
just a teaspoon and one might as well have consumed  
a neutron star. How dense it is,  
how it carries inside it the memory of collapse.  
How difficult it is to move then.  
How impossible to believe that anything  
could lift that weight.

There are many reasons to treat each other  
with great tenderness. One is  
the sheer miracle that we are here together  
on a planet surrounded by dying stars.  
One is that we cannot see what  
anyone else has swallowed.

# Credits

## **Frederick Bosco**

“Ode to the City and County of Denver” originally appeared in *Life on Capitol Hill*.

## **Sheryl Luna**

“Prayer for this Clay Earth” appeared in *Denver VOICE*.

“The Witness” appeared in *America*.

“Secret Missionary for the Virgin Mary Off His Meds” appeared in *Huizache*.

## **Chris Ransick**

“Dream in the Tunnels of Telluride” originally appeared in *Asleep Beneath the Hill of Dreams* (Conundrum Press 2019).

“How to Feed a Writer” originally appeared in *mummer prisoner scavenger thief* (Conundrum Press/Bower House 2019).

“Tom Ferril’s Mandolin” originally appeared in *Lost Songs & Last Chances: Poems* (Ghost Road Press 2006).

## **Suzi Q. Smith**

“How to Make Love,” “Introductions in Green,” and “The Laughing Barrel Must Have Been Cobalt Blue” to appear in *Poems for the End of the World* (Finishing Line Press 2021).

## **Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer**

“Setting” originally appeared in *One Art*.

“Watching My Friend Pretend Her Heart Isn’t Breaking” originally appeared in *Braided Way*.

“With Any Luck” originally appeared in *Hush* (Middle Creek Publishing, 2020).



The Denver Foundation

## About The Denver Foundation

The Denver Foundation is a community foundation that inspires people and mobilizes resources to improve life in Metro Denver. In 2020, the Foundation and its donors awarded \$110 million in grants. The Denver Foundation has three roles: stewarding an endowment to meet current and future needs for Metro Denver, working with community leaders to address the core challenges that face the community and managing more than 1,000 charitable funds on behalf of individuals, families and businesses.

To learn more about The Denver Foundation, visit [denverfoundation.org](http://denverfoundation.org).

## About The Poets Project at Casa Grande

In September of 2018, The Denver Foundation purchased Casa Grande, a historic building in the Capitol Hill neighborhood. The building was constructed in 1929 and is a contributing structure to the Sherman/Grant Historic District, a cluster of art deco, international, and moderne-styled buildings including Poets Row.

Located at 1009 Grant Street, the building's central location is accessible to The Denver Foundation's diverse communities and partners. The location is near major bus lines, includes dedicated visitor parking, and has a high walkability score.

The building was converted from residential apartments to a commercial building in 2007. The Denver Foundation's renovation of Casa Grande included a complete overhaul of the building's mechanical, electric, and plumbing infrastructure, the installation of an elevator to enhance accessibility, and an upgrade of its energy efficiency, water flow, and lighting design.



## The Denver Foundation

The mission of The Denver Foundation is to inspire people and mobilize resources to strengthen our community. We envision a Metro Denver that is racially equitable in its leadership, prosperity, and culture.

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