

## Charlotte Watson Sherman

One of my first published poems was inspired by the murder by cop of Eleanor Bumpers. Decades later, I'm still pushing for a better world for our people. I want my writing to offer solace for our weary souls like the following women provide comfort for mine:

"Long Time Woman," essay by Niela Orr, *The Believer*, June 1, 2020.

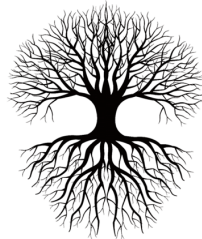
"Long Time Woman," song by Pam Grier.

"Black Women as/and the Living Archive," project by Tsedaye Makonnen

"Children of NAN: Mothership," film by Alisha B. Wormsley

"Daily Anti-Viral Messages," Iyanla Vanzant

"Walk Walk Walk," song by Rickie Byars



## Long Time Woman

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*A prose poem written as response to a mother who went to Minneapolis to answer the call of the murder of George Floyd.*

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*My name is Dionne Smith. I'm from Stockton, California. My son was murdered by two Stockton police and the sheriff. My son's name is James Rivera, 16 years old, unarmed. He was executed a day before his 17th birthday.*

**Interviewer:** Ms. Smith, what was it that brought you all the way from Stockton, California, here to Minneapolis, Minnesota?

When I heard the cry of Floyd, when he says, "Mama," and when I was watching the video, I had to watch it twice. And I said; I have to come because he had called for the mothers.

And the mothers shimmied into girdles and Spanx and the mothers fastened soft white brassieres and stroked stretch marks, battle scars from birthing their babies and the mothers slipped teeth into their mouth and the mothers glued eyelashes and the mothers combed hair and tugged wigs and feathered their edges and the mothers jumped to put on jeans and the mothers hummed and the mothers wailed and the mothers stuffed their fist inside their mouth and the mothers cried, "It's my child all over again."

And the mothers wiggle their hips and cha cha slide and the mothers Krumped and the mothers flailed their arms and the mothers shoes were tight as their resolve and the mothers tears the mothers tears turned

And the mothers poured out of call centers and the mothers filed out of high rises and the mothers left their shopping carts and cleaning supplies behind the masks and rubber gloves behind their wings and the mothers forgot he said she said and the mothers rolled shoulders and the mothers sucked teeth and the mothers sang a new song not quite the blues more like a war cry the mothers keening was more like the battle hymn of a destined republic

And the mothers poured out of tabernacles and the mothers streamed from mosques like bitter tears and the mothers clenched their teeth and the mothers loosened their jaw and the mothers abandoned tree pose and frog pose and jumped into Warrior II and the mothers jogged and the mothers double-dutched and the mothers picked up their paddleboards and stroked down the city's dying river away from the shrinking desert and swarming locusts the dialysis machines the chemotherapy drip and the mothers wore white and the mothers wore blue and the mothers bore the blood of their slaughtered lambs

And the mothers unfurled their canes and the mothers leaned on walkers and the mothers' bunions ached and they still

And the mothers' hearts were empty and full and the mothers were numb and the mothers were feverish and the mothers liked collard greens and cornbread and shrimp and grits and peppermint candies and the mothers were

And even the colorblind could see how much we love we love  
and the mothers the church mothers with their fans and  
the mothers with OnlyFans and the mothers say hold on  
they say hold on  
everything's gonna be all right

And the Magic City mothers and the chickenhead mothers  
and all this good pussy mothers and the beehive mothers and the  
savage mothers walk like they love somebody the mothers  
walk like somebody loves them too and the mothers  
walk with juju in their pocket and powdered glass and spit in cups  
heavy metal and red lipstick as war paint 'cause this a marathon and  
our mothers bodies the OG technology our mothers bodies the blueprint

And who fears Death?

The mothers got  
the mothers got roots to work  
the mothers got roots that work  
and the mothers called down the BLACK gods

These are holy ghosts marching  
shields up  
praise dancing  
ancient swag  
you can't touch this

And ain't we hot  
ain't the mothers  
so black so hot  
we on fire.