

Winning Poems in 2020 CFCP, Inc., Annual Contest

7. California, Third Place

Ahjumawi Springs

The boom of distant guns wakes me.
I rise in the gray dawn,
watch a line of white pelicans
climb the morning sky.
The guns fall silent,
a choir of geese offers
my coffee cantata.

Families of the Achumawi
camped here in the time of
spawning suckers,
when the great marsh provided everything:
fish, tules for boats and baskets,
ducks for the deft hunter
and on shore, the harvest of acorns.

Then the Whites came, diked and drained
the marshes, slaughtered the ducks,
hunted the people for slaves or bounty.
In the camps, fever and despair,
no one to bury the small
bundled bodies.

Still, herons stalk the shallows,
basalt-block fish weirs
gird the air-clear springs.
And when the fish, pulled
by their ancient blood-tide
swarm into the traps,
a small band gathers
to spear, cook, and feast.

Robert Coats
Berkeley, CA