

TAKE HEART

A Conversation in Poetry

*Edited & Introduced by Wesley McNair,
Maine Poet Laureate*

Richard Blanco of Bethel read his poem “One Today” at the second inauguration of President Obama. Here, he explores the connections between his hands and the hands of his father.

My Father, My Hands

by Richard Blanco

My father gave me these hands, fingers
inch-wide and muscular like his, the same
folds of skin like squinted eyes looking
back at me whenever I wash my hands
in the kitchen sink and remember him
washing garden dirt off his, or helping
my mother dry the dishes every night.

These are his fingernails—square, flat—
ten small mirrors I look into and see him
signing my report card, or mixing batter
for our pancakes on Sunday mornings.
His same whorls of hair near my wrists,
magnetic lines that pull me back to him
tying my shoelaces, pointing at words
as I learned to read, and years later:
greasy hands teaching me to change
the oil in my car, immaculate hands
showing me how to tie my necktie.

These are his knuckles—rising, falling
like hills between my veins—his veins,
his pulse at my wrist under the watch
he left for me ticking since his death,
alive when I hold another man’s hand
and remember mine around his thumb
through the carnival at Tamiami Park,
how he lifted me up on his shoulders,
his hands wrapped around my ankles
keeping me steady above the world, still.

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