

## First Place Free Verse Category

Judge's Comment: I love the exuberance of this poem, its fresh imagery and wonderful sounds. Walt Whitman with crayons, "Deluxe Box" is both childlike and wise, reminding us of our common humanity.

### Deluxe Box

By Kathy Cotton, Anna, Illinois

Beneath this pale Caucasian skin—the skin  
of my mother's mother and father's father,  
beneath this unremarkable brown hair  
and behind these ordinary brown eyes that are the eyes  
of all my family, even the dog

beneath, behind, beyond this commonness, I am

the Deluxe Box of Crayons: one hundred twenty  
unblended colors scribbling, exotic names—  
Cerulean, Burnt Sienna, Mahogany, Maize, a crowd  
of immigrant pigments unwilling to melt in my melting pot.

This Deluxe Box holds Fuchsia to attract hummingbirds.  
Quaker gray for silent sitting. Outrageous Orange for  
stumbling over politics. In the company of Blue, I can  
match that patch of sky, her silk shirt, his denim jeans.  
See me here, Red as habanero; there—White as arctic ice.

Some believe I should defect from every hue but one,  
become a single color's citizen, wear its official seal.  
But, no! I am the Deluxe Box, dressing my heart in tie-dye,  
rainbows, confetti; waving on the hill of each moment  
its hand-made, one-of-a-kind flag. I am the Deluxe Box

whose skin is red and yellow, black and white.  
I am male and female, flower and beast, bright light  
and midnight. Come close, look inside. Watch me pull  
from my chameleon stash a deluxe handful of myself

perfectly matched to you.