

A reflection on the process.

I was delighted when the Loveland Poet Laureate approached me with the opportunity to contribute a poem to The Red Shawl collection, a written response to the visual art show *Vote: A Centennial Celebration* in honor of women's suffrage.

At first glance of the (then anonymous) artwork with which I had been paired ("Release"), I thought: what have I gotten myself into? What can I do with this? The art was intriguing, but my poetry grows from deep, personal, emotional encounters. This dimensional collage did not speak to me at first.

But then I tried to listen, to really listen to what I saw. I read about suffrage. About the red shawl. I thought about the red tent. About the women who birthed not only me but my mother and her mother and her mother, and our voice. I thought I remembered that Wyoming had been a leader in giving women the right to vote—when they were yet a territory. When I looked into this, I found an article on the Wyoming Historical site titled "Right Choice, Wrong Reason." Representative Bright—note the name—defended the right of women to vote because "his wife was as good as any man and better than convicts and idiots." The wrong reason: the hope of attracting more women to the state: at the time the ratio was one woman for every six men. The poor women.

Then I found myself, who had always had the right to vote, to reproduce—or not—to own my own, going to a deeper understanding, seeing the levels of barbed wire caging, the face which we so often conflate with the self. Then all of these voices spilled from me.

Yours better than convicts and idiots,

--E.A.L.