

# Crying Poem

by Jimmy Santiago Baca

For the longest time,  
 I haven't been able to cry.  
 Tears start to come while I'm watching a movie tears  
 starts to come,  
 swelling my whole body a tulip starting to open under moon,  
 then the petals of my eyelids  
 stiffen  
 and something in me braces  
 and I don't cry.  
 When we crashed into a telephone pole  
 my dad yelled me not to cry,  
 I was terrified, almost killed —  
 but don't cry,  
 he said.  
 I couldn't cry because men don't cry.  
 When the dog bit me on the leg I couldn't cry,  
 when Joey died I couldn't cry —  
 how cool it would feel  
 to have a tear slide down the corner of my eye  
 on my cheek,  
 to the curve of my lip,  
 where I could taste it —  
 but I don't cry.  
 Something blocks the paths, channels  
 under my skin.  
 Tear ducts are red cracked clay,  
 for thirty years,  
 drought famine'd,  
 since I was eight when I got a beating for crying.  
 My heart an open furnace oven door,  
 rage seething for tears to cool it down,  
 but coal hovelings men keep feeding it  
 don't cry don't cry don't cry.  
 I want to untie my hands like a tired boxer's gloves  
 and lay them down on the table, gripped in their tight  
 clench of defense,  
 and I want to grow new hands  
 open flowers,  
 moistened by my tears.  
 I love the color blue  
 color brown.

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**Jimmy Santiago Baca** was born in Santa Fe, NM. His awards include the national Endowment of Poetry Award, the Pushcart Prize, the American Book Award, the International Hispanic Heritage Award. Illiterate at 21 and facing 5-10 years in a maximum security prison, he became a self-taught writer with a passion for writing poetry. A trailer for a documentary based on his memoir, *A Place to Stand*, can be found at [aPlaceToStandMovie.com](http://aPlaceToStandMovie.com)

I'd love  
 to touch my chapped cheeks  
 and whisper in tears  
 my compassion.  
 But I've always had to stop it up in me, hold my breath back,  
     keep my mouth shut tight  
     so as not to cry.  
 Man, I cry,  
 and it's a lie I don't.  
 I embrace my brother and pray shoulder to shoulder.  
 I kneel and kiss earth,  
 and I cry — if only I could cry.  
 Don't translate my tears into thought,  
 I want to sob autumn tears on my window,  
 streaking the pane blurring the world.  
 I want to fill every hole in my heart with glimmering tear pools,  
 fill my kitchen sink with tears,  
 just thinking of me not crying all these years,  
 makes me want to cry,  
 but I been taught not to cry —  
 big people don't cry, people say,  
 ain't those alligator tears boy,  
 can't fool me with those tears —  
 bullshit!  
 Fooling no one but myself not crying  
     step aside —  
     I'm going to cry,  
     until my shirt is drenched,  
     and my hands shimmery wet  
     with tears,  
     running down my face on my arms,  
     my legs and breast,  
 and you have to look at me,  
 because I'm drowning your manly ways in my tears,  
     to get back my tears.  
     I'm crying until there isn't a single tear left  
     crying,  
     for what we been through not crying,  
     how we fooled ourselves thinking men don't cry.  
 I'm crying on the bus, in bed, at the dinner table, on the couch,  
 enough to float Noah's boat,  
 let out the robin of my heart,  
 bringing me back my own single shoot of greening  
 life again —  
 and you go fuck yourself  
 dry eyed days,  
 here I come,  
 giving you a Chicano monsoon season,  
 here comes this Chicano cry baby,  
 flooding prison walls,  
 my childrens' bedrooms,  
 splashing and tear slinging  
 tears up to my ankles,  
 planting rice and corn and beans  
 in fields glimmering with my tears,  
 and all you dry skinned nut-cracking ball whackers,

don't want to get your killer bone-breaking boots wet,  
step aside,  
because I'm bringing you rain.

Goodbyes were crying events —  
Goodbye to grandma, to my brother,  
friends, my neighborhood,  
teachers and other boys,  
and I never shed a tear,  
though I felt them coming up in me.  
I bit my teeth down hard to hold the tears back,  
lowered my face and thought about something else.  
I kept hearing voices in me,  
telling me not to cry, don't cry, don't cry!  
Boys don't cry,  
leave yourself open,  
become liable to get an ax in your heart by some non-crying fool,  
be a sissy,  
puto, you be hurting  
yourself if you cry.  
I hurt when I didn't cry,  
all those times when I didn't cry ashamed  
to in front of people,  
fearful others would think I'm not a man,  
fearful I'd be made fun of,  
whole groups of us heard tragic news  
and no one cries,  
because it ain't right —  
we need to weep —  
get up in the middle of the night,  
and cry, like a endurance's hips and stomach convulse during  
child birth, we need to give birth  
to that terrible convulsion of tears,  
weep for those we never wept for,  
let the legs shake and your arms embrace you  
in a junkie habit for tears,  
weep for the poor in prison  
taken from their families,  
the fieldworker's daughter  
eaten by cancer from pesticides,  
and weep,  
for all those homeless  
who couldn't meet mortgage payments,  
those sleeping under bridges,  
and the hopeless,  
cry our differences into a lake,  
where we can all cleanse our goodbyes and apathy,  
papas cry for their children,  
let children cry in my arms,  
men cry in my arms,  
endurance cry in my arms,  
let us all cry,  
after lovemaking and fighting,  
make cry a prayer,  
a language made of whimpers and sniffles and sobs,  
cry out loud, louder, cry baby, cry! Cry! Cry!

