

# Oak Ridge, 1961

*"The enemy is looking for  
information. Guard your talk."*

*"What you see here,  
What you do here,*

*What you hear here,  
When you leave here,  
Let it stay here."*

—World War II-era billboards, Oak Ridge, TN

past the watchmen  
of Elza Gate

who searched us  
for missing intelligence  
from morning till night  
the rest of our lives.  
We guarded our talk.

"The History Bowl is not  
for girls like you," your teacher  
in junior high school said,  
not hiding his contempt,  
knowing you had top grades,  
knowing you had secrets  
that could not be declaimed.

In those growing-up years,  
we learned that silence,  
not science, scientia,  
is a slow death.

Sister,  
the pen and the tongue  
can be weapons.

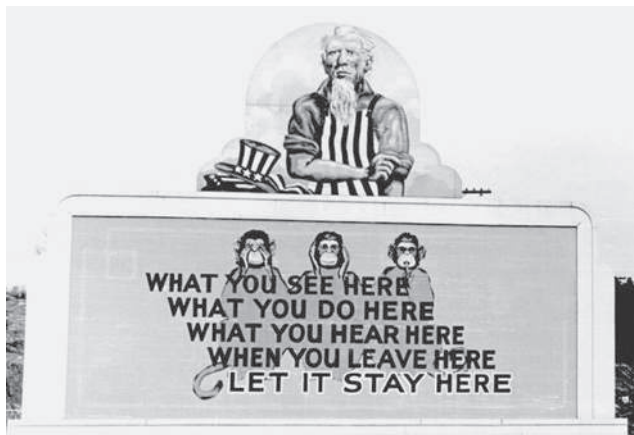
Let us write  
and tell it true.

Who, us?

Yes, us.

We will sing  
as we work.

—Rachel Jennings



1943 Oak Ridge Wise Monkeys billboard encouraging secrecy amongst workers during the World War II Manhattan Project. (Department of Energy archives/Ed Westcott photo)

So still  
and wholly night  
when you were born,  
the oldest of us,  
tiny harbinger  
of our blossoming  
nuclear family.

Sister, the night  
you were born, fog rose  
from the Clinch River—  
spongy yellow  
birthday cake  
to fill your mouth,  
muffle your squalls.  
Silence equaled security  
even as you crowned  
in our mother's canal.

Sister,  
what would blind us  
what would deafen us  
what would silence us  
(was done to us)  
our parents took from that place  
and carried home  
with their flowers, gifts, and you

## Two Women and a Child

The card I send my friend shows  
Mary, Joseph, the baby Jesus.  
Printed inside: the Magnificat.  
God fills the hungry, the Virgin says.  
Empty, the rich must walk.

In the New Year,  
the mail carrier delivers  
a post card stamped  
the last day of December.  
A reproduction—  
*Two Women and a Child*  
by Diego Rivera.  
Dark-skinned, black-braided,

they sit on the ground  
in plain skirts  
like a Giotto painting  
or not. They are silent.  
One cradles a sleeping  
infant. A small arm  
flops behind her waist.  
Each woman faces the other,  
looks at the other.  
The blue hills, angels  
on the horizon,  
sing hosannas.

—Rachel Jennings



Two Women & A Child, 1926 by Diego Rivera

### BIO

Rachel Jennings is a San Antonio educator and poet. Currently, she is working on a chapbook, *Cancer Hat*, which explores through poetry the inner journey of cancer patients.