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Comma

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Comma

That summer, I had a student who was obsessed with commas. I handed her essays back peppered with red marks, a comma splice here and there and pages and pages of run-ons. She was from Nigeria and survived one of the worst military regimes. When mortar and small arms fire rang out in the night, when her brother was beaten and conscripted, when they forced him to rape her, when they shot her after the rest of the men had their way, she pretended she was dead, and why, she asked, could she not continue her sentences with commas, extending them like her thoughts, like when she lay there for days with her dead parents until she was sure they had gone, she survived, the massacre of her village, her parents, her rape, without commas, she knew no other way to say this.

About Sean McLain Brown

Sean McLain Brown is a disabled Gulf War former Marine and a member of the Veteran's Writing Workshop led by renowned author Maxine Hong Kingston. He teaches writing at De Anza College. His poetry and fiction has appeared more than 50 publications including, the San Francisco Chronicle, EM, First Intensity, Fourteen Hills, Indiana Review, LUNA, Sentence, Paragraph, Transfer and others. His work is also featured in two anthologies: An Introduction to the Prose Poem (Firewheel Editions), and Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace (Koa Books).