

# *Paula Panzarella*

## **Desert Rose**

I saw my first desert in California.  
I camped in Death Valley in '74 on the Summer Solstice.  
Vast, beautiful, quiet intensity,  
    Taproots plunged deep into the sand,  
There's nothing barren within the ecological balance  
    As long as you know where to look,  
    How to look.

Pale and subtle, the range of colors overwhelm  
And I decide that yes, this is where I want to be,  
    Within this deep, wide place filled with life  
That hides from the casual observer.

If I have a child, her name will be Sahara Mojave.  
Dispel the myth of bone-dry death deserts!  
They're nothing like that.  
    I know.  
    I've been in a few of them.

I once submitted a poem, and signed it "Sahara Mojave"  
    And it wasn't printed.  
I once wrote a short story with her as a character  
    And it never quite got finished.  
Such a fine name, with such an empowering image,  
    There's nothing wrong with my borrowing it back a bit.

But now, since the war, I think of deserts drenched in blood.  
The open space filled with corpses  
    And the quiet intensity shattered by bombshells.  
Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Desert Death, Desert Destruction,  
    Desert Despair, Desert Dismemberment.  
If I have a child, I'll have to find her another name.

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**Paula Panzarella** is a resident of New Haven, Connecticut, and a performance poet, freelance writer and social justice activist whose writings have appeared in many literary journals and newspapers. Paula is the editor of *Poems on the Road to Peace: A Collective Tribute to Dr. King*, published by the Yale Peabody Museum, and the creator/director of *Outcry for Justice: Poetry in the Struggle for Freedom of Sacco and Vanzetti*, a nine-person performance piece of poetry, music, history and commentary about the two Italian labor leaders and anarchists who were executed by the State of Massachusetts in 1927.