

Calvert High Rise, 1969

R. Frederick Crider

I knew somebody who lived in there.

She was from my wife's hometown, her distant cousin.

She liked the pool up on the roof,
and had just been to Honolulu.

When I told her I had marched at her building
with demonstrators from C.O.R.E.

she appeared dumbfounded and said:

"Look, I work hard. I deserve to live where I want.

I thought the only reason you couldn't live here
was if you couldn't afford it."

Then I thought of the hecklers come to celebrate
the insidious ignorance of intolerance.

I knew somebody in that crowd.

He was from my hometown; a high school classmate.

When I yelled at him, he saw me. Incredulous,
he hollered back: "What are you doing in there?"

And with self-righteous indignation I quickly retorted:

"What are you doing over there?"

Afterwards, relieved the police had protected us,
I went home to my church-owned parsonage

far removed from flashing lights
and police dogs, and where my neighbors
blissfully mowed their lawns like
it was any ordinary summer.

Poems14.6.5 Form: Witness, Protest