



# a book of homes

a contemplative experiment

**Nikki Fragala Barnes, @bynikkibarnes, she / they**

– an interactive zoom presentation | Museum of Motherhood, 2022 –

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I am an experimental poet, also making conceptual books and participatory installations. My practice is centered on cultural objects, materiality and restorative history.

My research is at the intersection of critical making (process-based, generative work), embodied knowledge, and digital / new media studies in society.

Both my creative practice and my research are site-sensitive, emphasizing labor and consent, and critically reframing power and hierarchies.



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Nikki Fragala Barnes, MFA  
@bynikkibarnes

\*text is material

# contents

**i**

## **about**

isolation : community  
presence : absence

**01**

## **objects + material**

fabric + maps

## **language/s**

litanies  
depths

**02**

## **collisions**

questions

**03**

this collection of poems, on and off the  
page, engages

gentle and unsettling, with  
the fish-out-of-water's violence  
submerged and unearthed

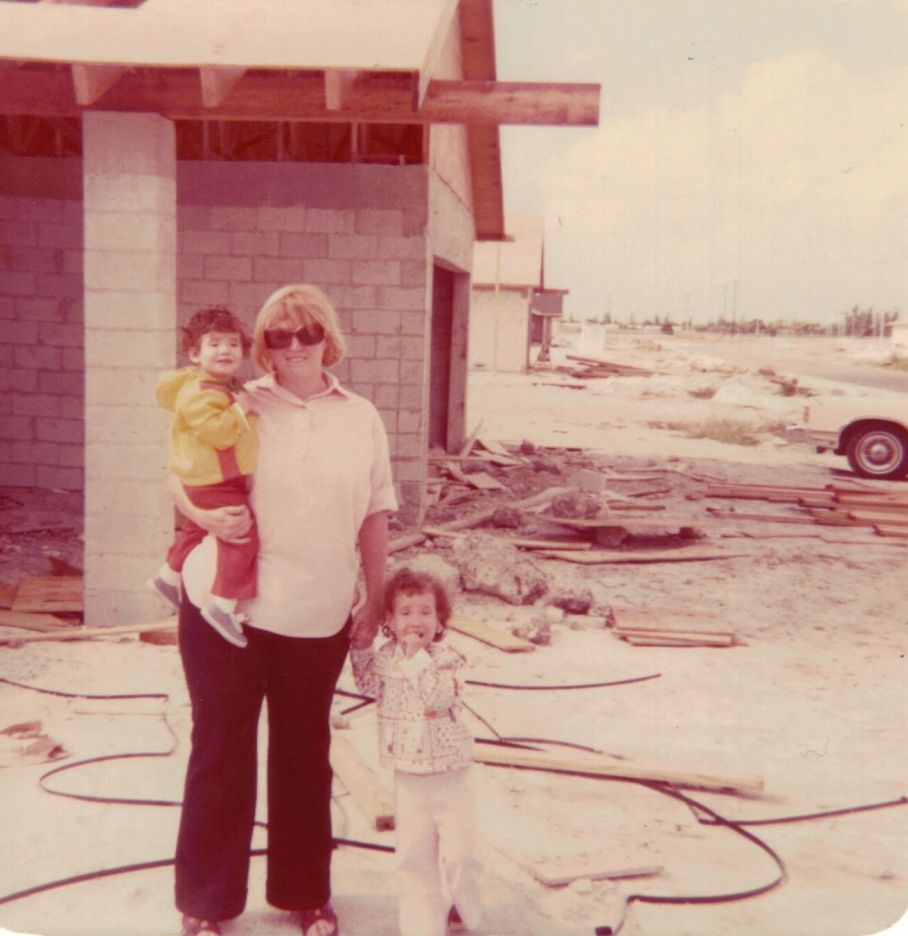
within the tensions of unrest and  
suffering

this digital chapbook, a mini-gallery  
un/contained

a global para-doxy-moronic  
isolation: we enter/ed together

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# about the work



a book of homes. nikki fragala barnes.

a  
map  
of  
interior  
space

cube / globe



# a contemplative experiment

This is a creative text, a visual cultural object, generated as a critical meditation on **m / others**: myself, my own, those in and out of my family, and those who mother that are not gendered female.

Utilizing list forms as a tool ubiquitous to motherhood, these meditations are each compact and intense catalogs, grappling with tensions across generations of partial knowing. This experimental work centers the bodies of mothers and mothered by approaching these layered, living mysteries with reverence and compassion for their humanity. Functioning as a compilation of fragments, frustrations, memory and loss that seeks to reveal the intense supersaturation of multiples: healths, traumas, transformations. It is both lens and mirror.

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**gen 1:1**

MIRAMAR



# one. brooklyn and before.

unscripted

INT. *a heart*

DISSOLVE to

compounding questions: home undefined, unfound, solve  
for ex, for why, find one

how long is *long*, given: if home + family, then family =  
home, space and presence, they do not exist, approaching  
infinity or zero or both

calculus of a heart function:  $f(\text{heart})$

[a beat.]





numbered, left to right



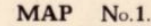
1. died june 2008
2. died july 2014
- 3.

# her mother never knew

1. 1941, not 1940, the eighteenth
2. married him seven months before,  
clicking shoes in city hall, so the US  
Army would pay for her to  
move with him, stationed
3. forgettable feast, simple dinner
4. stephanotis means crown, represents  
happiness in marriage, travel
5. mo(u)rning coat, god forbid a smile

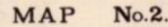


## HAPPENING WEEKLY



CITY OF NEW YORK

Sanitary Districts June 1, 1894.  
Made under the Direction of  
The Inoculation House Committee of 1893



OF  
CITY of NEW YORK  
Showing the Distribution of the Principal  
Nationalities by Sanitary Districts

*Note 2: The Nationalities shown are those making up two-thirds of the total population of any District by the Census of 1890. The relative densities of the Bonds constitutionally specified in any District show the proportion of the Nationalities designated making up the two-thirds in that District.*

1. italian island burrows
2. inside neighborhoods
3. city block worlds
4. Domenico, counted, extrapolated
5. keys, grids, names, histories, projections
6. square miles dense with vowels
7. onion, garlic, olive oil



specto, spectare



# what did they call you before I called you mom



10. JUN 70
9. drinking something without alcohol
8. because your father
7. long shadows, late
6. seven months before
5. laughing, carefree li(f)e
4. certain of the cage, you stopped asking to be released
3. ptsd hadn't been named
2. wish you'd escaped
1. did you even want to be there, at that house, in this photo

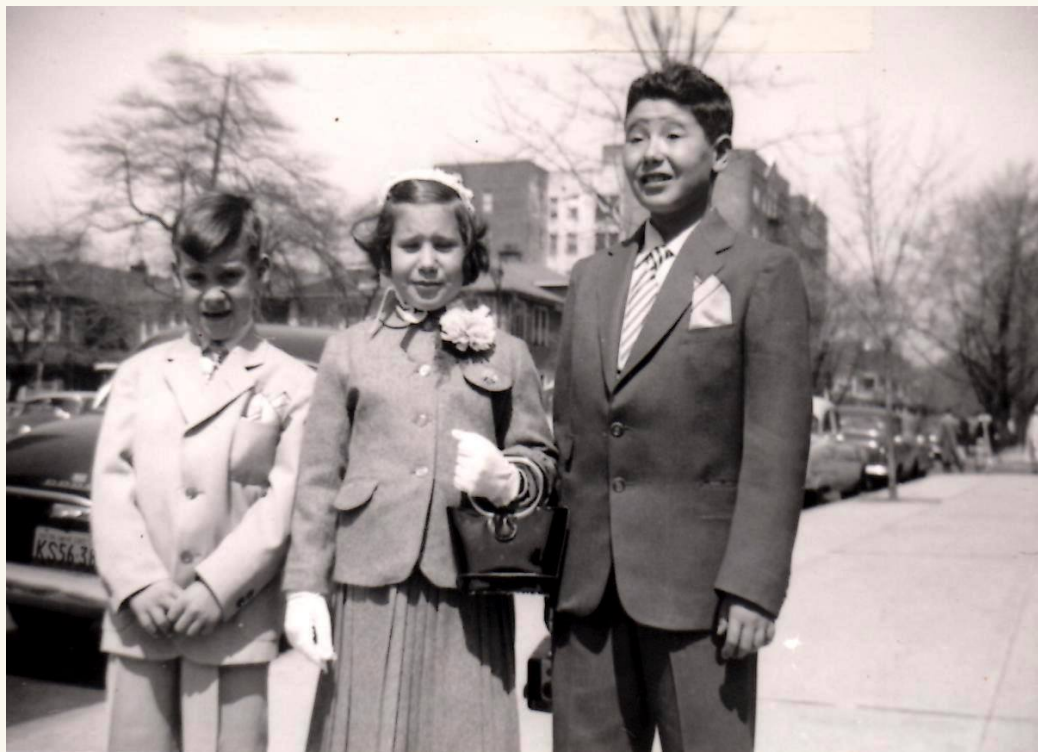
# not what I was expecting

1. when I first saw it, I thought  
this was you
2. red sauce cooking down





high holy days



# opposite of memory

from the label  
the appearance of this garment is  
unique unto itself

irregularities may be present and  
are design characteristics created  
from wash techniques,  
embellishments, and other  
treatments, to achieve a unique  
look that grows more apparent

caution: this garment is not  
colorfast colors may fade or bleed





# forty-three years

## *Powell-Fragala*



IDA LOUISE POWELL

Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Powell of Fairfax proudly announce the engagement of their daughter, Ida Louise, to Augustine M. Fragala Jr., son of Col. and Mrs. Augustine M. Fragala Sr., of North Springfield.

Miss Powell, a 1967 graduate of Fairfax High School, is presently completing her senior year at Clemson University in South Carolina. Mr. Fragala is a 1963 graduate of the Northern Virginia Community College. He is presently employed by the City of Fairfax Planning Commission. A January 30 wedding is planned.





THE CITY OF NEW YORK.  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH.

STATE OF NEW YORK.

No. of Certificate.

## CERTIFICATE AND RECORD OF BIRTH

1552

Name of Child *Agostino Fragala*

Sex	<i>male</i>	Father's Occupation	<i>Barber</i>
Color	<i>white</i>	Mother's Name	<i>Rosaria Fragala</i>
Date of Birth	<i>May 6<sup>th</sup> 1913</i>	Mother's Name before Marriage	<i>Rosaria La Porta</i>
Place of Birth Street and No.	<i>#244 Stagg St</i>	Mother's Residence	<i>#244 Stagg St</i>
Father's Name	<i>Domenico Fragala</i>	Mother's Birthplace	<i>Italy</i>
Father's Residence	<i>#244 Stagg St</i>	Mother's Age	<i>24 years</i>
Father's Birthplace	<i>Italy</i>	Number of previous Children	
Father's Age	<i>23 years</i>	How many living (in all)	<i>1</i>

I, the undersigned, do hereby certify that I attended professionally at the above birth and I am personally cognizant thereof; and that all the facts stated in said certificate and report of birth are true to the best of my knowledge, information and belief.

Signature *Anna Maria Galle (midwife)*  
 Residence *#118 Montrose Ave*  
 DATE OF REPORT *May 11<sup>th</sup> 1913*

May 16<sup>th</sup> 1913

CITY OF NEW YORK

BUREAU OF VITAL RECORDS

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

This is to certify that the following is a true and correct copy of the original as filed in the Department of Health. The Department of Health does not certify to the truth of the statements made therein, and is not responsible for the truth of the statements provided by law.

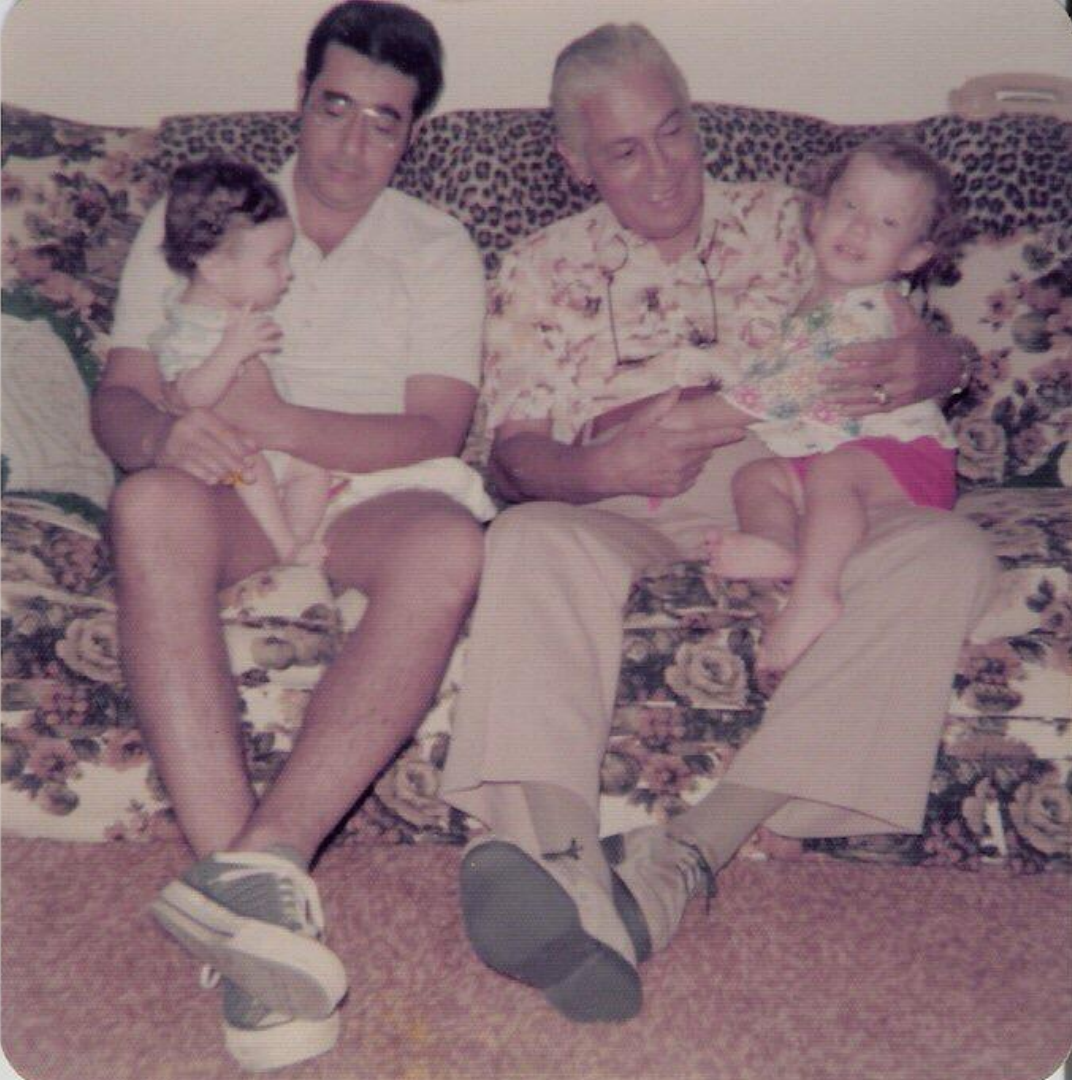
DO NOT ACCEPT THIS TRANSCRIPT UNLESS THE RAISED SEAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH IS AFFIXED.

THE REPRODUCTION OR ALTERATIONS ARE PROHIBITED BY LAW.

*James Mellon* City Registrar

the colonel

1. ancestor, antecedent, descendent
2. I thought his name was Augustine speaking with him in cemeteries
3. what else don't I know



two. miami.  
miramar.  
lakeland.



I  
was  
five





# campisi women

1. from the singular, campise
2. meaning bowman
3. likely jewish root
4. (*n.*) underground part of a plant
5. (*v.*) to dig out, plow up



# point nine repeating

eleven most beautiful equations,  
greek letters filling subscripts,  
parallel lines balance equal signs

fibrous space-time, yielding

my favorite though is one equals  
point nine repeating  
an infinite dance, the beauty of  
one and symmetry

yet not one  
expresses what derivation  
simplified until your breath and  
body brought me to myself





my mother's smile,  
my father's chin

1. a house that came with a pool table
2. and one bedroom we don't need
3. and awareness, unshakeable
4. not my home
5. sixteen deep





# her bath

1. blue glass
2. faucet flush to the wall
3. a pro at sixty-one
4. two weeks water returning
5. coffee, sugar, tupperware
6. this year I installed a sink built for a baby's bath

# nineteen ninety five

1. fifty years  
down
2. twenty  
four to  
go





# fear

1. your eyes, your eyes, your eyes
2. first christmas with a baby
3. pregnant again
4. not your father
5. xx years away from knowing
6. myth of safety
- 7.
8. Your eyes



# minus one

1. you were two  
years away  
from Caleb
2. that christmas  
I said yes
3. plus seven  
people
4. minus one



# christina

1. fire of sons
2. uneven
3. lists of empty shoes
4. greying charcoal  
bricks
5. so much smoke and  
cigarettes and  
expectations and  
disappointment
6. I couldn't breathe





crossed florida roads.





# counted

1. eyes and cheeks claiming birthright
2. cold winds – refuge
3. three of us – not three of them, plus us
4. sand stinging into May
5. in sickness and health can mean other people's
6. even then

# which ocoee

1. november second, nineteen twenty
2. women voting
3. Black blood and backlash
4. burned sundown town
5. four hundred ninety five souls become / down to one
6. equals fifty years with only whites



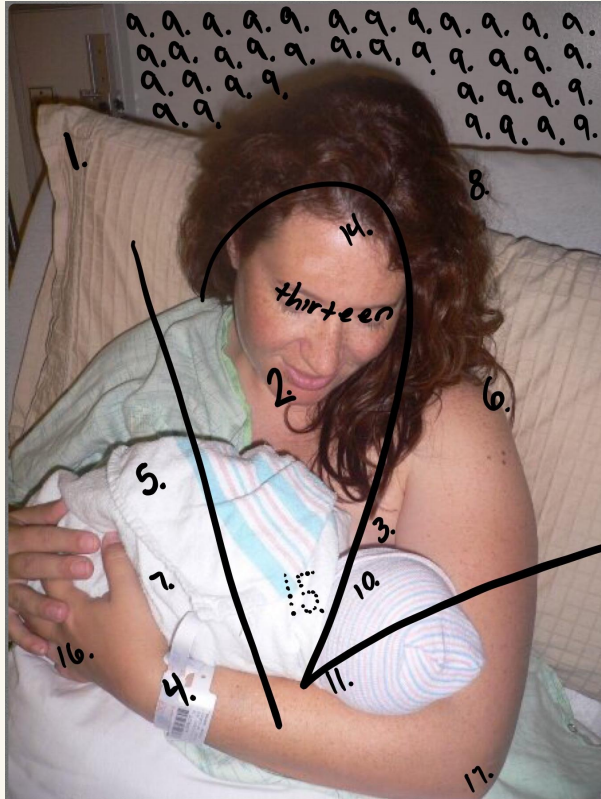
july 9th. 15 days left.



1. playing memory
2. this orphan, no angel
3. only I remember



# home body



first born





# lake house





# letters

you wrote me so many letters and I am afraid I can't find one. betrayed by paper and ink, which survives. I know what you would say, some practical advice about checking the tires and don't sweat the small stuff, but, dad, it's not small. I am overcome.

I am in this house where you were how did you live when your father did not. I do not know what to tell my children. how we waste time. I am and am not what you said.

What are some of your earliest memories about your birthplace and growing up?

I WAS born in Brooklyn, NY. We lived at 18 ARIAN PLACE. I had lots of FRIENDS. We didn't have a television for a long time. I used to walk up to the Avenue and watch television in the window of a TV store (long before they had Best Buy). I would watch Howdy Doody. My Mother (your great grandmother) would call the store MANAGER & ASK "Is my son up there watching TV from outside?" or "he'd say"

JAMES 6



## James, age 6

1. he drew himself, co-created
2. scratching wax
3. all face and feet
4. sharing my green eyes
5. bent low, bangs brushing elbows

living arrows





# gravity

fourth force, changing  
with mass / space /  
time / words / weight

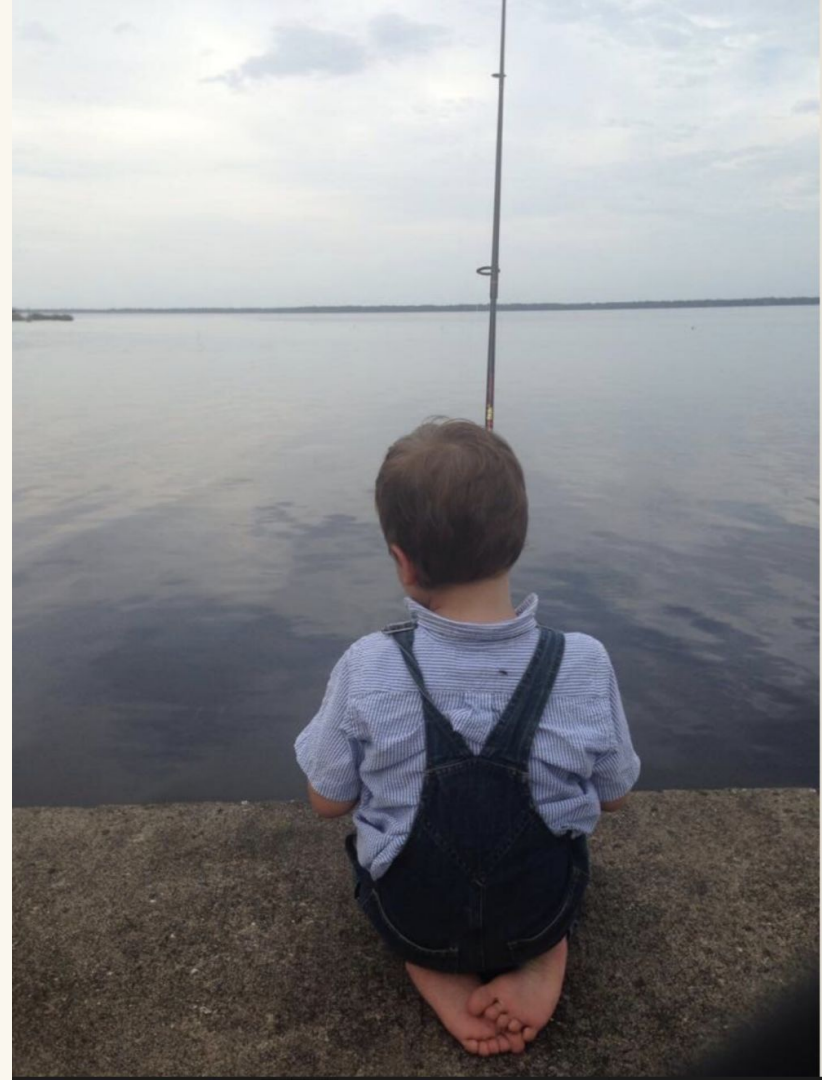
heavy witness, waking,  
perpetual, atomic

at the center of the  
universe is a dim black  
hole sleeping



**thank  
you**

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@bynikkibarnes



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Email [nf.barnes@ucf.edu](mailto:nf.barnes@ucf.edu)

Creative Writing / Poetry Instructor  
Texts and Technology  
University of Central Florida

DEAI Fellow, Rollins Museum of Art

New work forthcoming this summer:

- \* Society of Textual Scholarship
- \* Electronic Literature Organization
- \* 8th World Conference on Women's Studies



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Nikki Fragala Barnes



nikki fragala barnes

# slide deck template

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