

## I Do Not Know . . .

. . . a single human being  
on that Continental jet taking off  
from the runway at Newark Airport  
as I drive by, nor any of the people  
in the bus I just passed  
or in other cars driving south  
with me on the New Jersey Turnpike.

I cannot tell you the name  
of a single prisoner spending today  
on Rikers Island, nor of any  
patient undergoing surgery  
at Mt Sinai Medical Center.

Do not ask me to list even one  
of those who lost their lives  
when the Tsunami struck Sri Lanka  
in 2005, or who perished  
in the last century while attempting  
to reach the summit of Mt. McKinley.

I cannot name any of those  
who were disposed of at sea, not  
(therefore) sold in the slave market  
at Newport, Rhode Island,  
nor of a single Cherokee who  
disappeared on the trail of tears.

So if you are listening to this poem  
and if you, too, have a name  
that I may not know, perhaps,  
when the reading has come to an end  
you will whisper it in my ear,  
or (even better) write it on a paper slip,  
place it in my hand and, in this way,  
help me to remember—next time I am  
down by the sea listening to the waves—  
all the people I wish I could identify  
for you today, who are not  
adequately described when  
we speak names like “slave ship,”  
or “tsunami.”

Steve Bloom  
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