In Elk Grove, rustling

red autumn leaves fall

a blue breeze blows gently and

the white bright morning sky appears

the sun slips south

thawing blades of grass spring to life

but a shadow moves to block the light.

two elderly Sikh men walk a quiet path

through their tree-lined neighborhood

For the last time.

Gurmej Atwal, now 78

looks at the single cloud hovering in the sky

listens to the crows caw on the telephone line

feels something amiss as he looks to

Surinder Singh, 65 who

hears the silence in the distance and

thinks about his family as

his gut sinks like a stone.

A black sedan screeches to a halt

beside the two frozen men

--Why don’t they run?--

A shotgun drops out of the window

And two blasts rip the air in half

These men

Fall

Limp arms on legs

Tangled now, tangled forever

Now collects into

Pools of suffering.

The car speeds away,

leaving one man to think

of his departed friend,

leaving one man to think

of his heaving breath,

leaving one man to ask

why?

Leaving suffering,

Which Buddha proclaimed

As a noble truth of existence

Tonight I walk against the winds of fear with

The sound of truth whispering in my ears

Whispering, death drives a black sedan

Whispering, any moment may be your last.

In this poem, “Sikh Mercy,” I convey a feeling of calm tranquility through the pleasant images of morning. The colors of red, white, and blue in the first verse connote The United States, which is the familiar setting for random acts of violence. Then, I foreshadow death and suffering using the “shadow moves to block the light.” Active voice present-tense verbs help the audience imagine the men’s thoughts and feelings. To create a dramatic shift, I create a new verse and abruptly begin with the image of the black sedan. I repeat “leaving” to emphasize the feeling of isolation for both the survivor and the surviving family members. Separating the question “why?” emphasizes the central theme of questioning these random acts of violence. In the last verse, the poem’s tone transitions to a bleak, hopeless, and pessimistic tone; this is exactly how I felt as I learned more about this violent act. The image of the wind suggests an omnipresent fear of death. Like the wind, death can be everywhere and nowhere. Finally, the motif of ‘whispering’ implies that the truth is difficult to hear and understand.