

It was the five of us loitering  
in my friend's back yard,  
which was less a yard  
and more of a concrete pit  
and a compost heap.

There was a view of a bank  
and a used car lot  
and smoke.

This was northeast Philadelphia,  
where I got an accent  
that I slip into when I go back there,  
and I rarely do.

We all knew  
about the Jardel gang –  
named after the nearby  
community recreation center  
where they played basketball.

I still remember being at the neighborhood carnival  
when there were gunshots  
and young men chanting its name.

But Jardel was where the courts were,  
and all of our flat, white asses, just wanted  
something to do that night.

This was back when I was 14  
and still walked around in a black trench coat  
despite Columbine.

While looking at mine,  
Jay remembered that he had just gotten  
a long black coat for his birthday,  
and his cousin, also had one inside,  
and Nicky dug his father's out of storage,  
and Lance, well, he just looked the part  
despite his dark windbreaker.

All five of us walking  
at one in the morning,  
like a mafia,  
with this attitude  
of absolute certainty,  
that to this day,  
I don't know  
if I was the only one  
who was terrified.

There was one light still lit  
over the half-court,  
and part of a chain-link net  
dangling off the hoop,  
and we played  
like we were dancing  
on hot coals.

Trench

coats

Jade Shames

Jade Shames is a writer. He grew up in Philadelphia with his musician father and actress mother. Later in life, he went to school at the University of Pittsburgh where he studied poetry and dramatic writing. He graduated. Then, he moved Los Angeles. He got a job at Skylight Books overseeing the poetry section. He made friends with many good people. At some point, he drank a Horchata and enjoyed it. Now, he has a full-length book of poetry coming out summer of 2010 from Writ Large Press called "Atoms for Peace". He currently lives with his girlfriend Kat, and their two cats.

