

# STEAM TICKET

A Third Coast Review

VOL. 25  
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Volume 25  
Spring 2022

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Steam Ticket* is produced each spring by committed UW-La Crosse students enrolled in English 320: *Literary Production and Publication*. We take pride in carefully reviewing all submissions and choosing stories, poems, and art submitted by artists from around the world, celebrating the diversity of all the submissions collected.

Our *Steam Ticket* staff would like to thank all those involved in the creation of Volume 25, including:

Dr. Karl Kunkel, Dean of the College of Liberal Studies, and Dr. Kate Parker, English Department Chair, for their continued support.

Kelly Arnost, our most-exceptional English Department Administrative Assistant whose super-heroic skills we appreciate year-round.

David Piro, Assistant Director of Creative Services, for the good eye that always improves our vision.

Teri Holford and the staff of Murphy Library's Special Collections for keeping all volumes of *Steam Ticket* safe on the shelves.

Matt Cashion, our knowledgeable and supportive advisor, for his encouragement and insight. Thanks for your wisdom and wit.

Thanks also to all who submitted work to *Steam Ticket*. We sincerely appreciate the time and effort you devote to your art. It was a privilege to read your work.

And lastly, we appreciate everyone who appreciates these pages. For more information on *Steam Ticket*, visit [www.uwlax.edu/english/publications/steam-ticket](http://www.uwlax.edu/english/publications/steam-ticket) and join our *Steam Ticket* community on Facebook.



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## **A note from *Steam Ticket's* (semi-invisible) Faculty Advisor**

A literary journal that reaches its twenty-fifth birthday—at a time when so many print journals have grown extinct or become endangered—is a journal that deserves the biggest party it can afford. Our longevity is, in part, a testament to the writers who keep writing stories and poems that deserve to be shared with readers who continue to be sustained by courageous witnesses and wild imaginations. Our relative old-age is also, of course, fostered by the financial help and the labor of those who continue to recognize the value of literature (see our acknowledgements). Most of all, however, our continued existence is due to the students who continue to enroll each spring in English 320—Literary Journal Production—here at the U. of Wisconsin-La Crosse. These are students eager to assume roles as discerning readers and editors who work with inspired discipline as stewards of art they are proud to launch into the world with their names stitched atop the sails.

I've been inspired again this spring by observing these student-professionals collaborate. The Vol. 25 crew evaluated an exhaustive collection of submissions through rounds of deliberations that required re-reading and re-deliberating while they also—based on the daily doses of kinship and loud laughter I was privy to—discovered levels of joy and meaning rare in any workplace. They take their jobs as seriously as anyone employed at a big-city publishing house, and I am fortunate—we should all feel fortunate—that they are in charge here. I'm happy to report that all the communities they will soon be inhabiting will be healthier and smarter and more compassionate because these students will be thriving inside of them, hearts alive with language.

--Matt Cashion  
Professor, English  
UW- La Crosse



## A Letter from the Editor

I, along with my hardworking classmates and advisor, are proud to present Volume 25 of *Steam Ticket*. It has been an honor of mine to edit a journal with such diverse voices and visions.

We are especially honored to feature a craft talk by U.S. Poet Laureate Joy Harjo, who visited the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse in October 2021, for an evening performance, as well as for an informal afternoon talk with students that she allowed us to record and print.

We're also proud in this issue to publish a poet such Dmitry Blizniuk who sent us a poem from his Ukraine home at a time when, in his own words, "...we are being bombed and shelled." We've included work from multi-book award-winning authors and writers published for the first time. They come from Italy, Ireland, England, Canada, and from twenty-two U.S. States.

Another special feature of Vol. 25 is a collection of reprinted craft talk excerpts taken from writers who have visited UWL over the years. Their expertise, passion, and advice is worth remembering.

At the time I am writing this, I will graduate UWL in about three weeks. I am very proud that among all the stressful all-nighters, the fights for finding motivation and the many realizations that the last four years will soon be behind me, I was able to be part of a project as unique and special as *Steam Ticket*. While this journal turned into a greater undertaking than the staff may have expected, we are so grateful for all of our contributors' talents. Thank you for giving us a glimpse into your world through your work.

We'd also like to thank our faculty advisor, Matt Cashion for giving us all the opportunity to create *Steam Ticket*. ENG 320 is like no other class on campus and Professor Cashion gave us the support to navigate such a new experience.

I hope Volume 25 gives readers something to remember. I hope it teaches readers something new or reminds them of a simpler time. I hope it opens up space to breathe deeply and live in the moment. Overall, I hope you enjoy.

Alexia Walz  
Editor

## Former Skeptic Says a Few Words

*Jonathan Travelstead*

Advances in medicine and agriculture have  
saved vastly more lives than have been lost in  
all the wars in history. — Carl Sagan

If every skirmish makes the world a better place,  
let us raise our glasses to Prometheus  
for tampons, & trauma dressing. One advance begets another.

SAM splints, developed during Viet Nam.  
Doves we send out, that are then returned to us  
from The *Luftwaffe's* fuselages first as radio waves,

then wireless internet— blessings from the Greek gods.  
Raise your glass, then, to Dachau, for research & development  
of cold weather trauma care. To *Guns & Ammo*,

foreshadowing the next decade of weaponry,  
and to *The Journal of the American Medical Association*  
that our newest procedures pass peer review.

Once more let us raise our glasses.  
To Odin, who gave an eye for a Blackberry.  
To Hephaestus, that he might one day forge compassion.  
To Eleos, god of empathy, forgive me.  
For my complicity. For this toast.

## Winter

*Dmitry Blizniuk*

Translated by Sergey Gerasimov

The sun in January isn't confident:  
a Bengal tiger on a skating rink,  
the legs of rays are splayed.  
I embrace you,  
and feel the hunger of the skin through your knitted sweater.  
In winter, your soul is especially magical:  
the last piece of chocolate wrapped in foil,  
till later, for a very shiny day,  
and the future centuries plod through the snow  
like a herd of albino elephants,  
and bluish-white hills slowly roll across the sky...  
Let's face it: you are the last hope of the world,  
a lighthouse made of red wax,  
standing on the shore of a vast ocean of fire,  
while we, poets, are last of the Mohicans,  
half-gods and half-charlatans  
who can read lips, eyes, and constellations.  
If mankind is a bridge,  
then which of us should cross it,  
you or me?

Winter sunsets are modest and fragile:  
They are frozen cranberries, squashed by someone's heel,  
or a ship built from matchsticks, stuck in the ice,  
in a freezer, among meat dumplings and strawberries,  
and a yellow lethargic chicken lies next to it.  
The epoch is stupid, intelligence is divine,  
And we need to survive  
as we have never needed to before:  
The universe had raised the stakes to the limit.  
The night passes like a flash,  
like a click of black fingers, lubricated with oil...  
And the city hall twinkles in the amber of dawn:  
a chimpanzee brain soaked in a solution of permanganate of potash.  
All of us are half-breeds of ideas.

Sometimes, bells sound in the frosty and hackly silence –  
musical ice cracks on river of the sky  
armored in stillness.  
And there is a place strewn with snow,  
in the corner of the painting,  
where you and me,  
small, looking like the signature of the inanest painter,  
walk together across a park with a dachshund  
that looks like a pencil sharpener.  
I'm still here, but the world has changed or pretends to be different.  
It's changed the welding mask to a carnival one.  
Who are we, if not masks, or chalices of magical fire?  
The winter will be over one day,  
but you will never end:  
poetry will jump like a grasshopper, or a talented flea  
from an old man to a younger one.  
Winter, winter, winter –  
The soul has wings,  
not like a fat wagtail, not like a surface-to-air missile,  
but still...



## sleeping in

*RC deWinter*

morning scrapes  
me awake // sharp claws  
inviting  
me to a  
a sunny almost summer  
day // blueskied // gaudy

with the ripe  
promise of nothing //  
even though  
they've unlocked  
the world it's still not safe to  
breathe in company

without distance  
and a mask // there's no  
pleasure i  
can think of  
worth the bother or the risk //  
so // with a polite

no thank you  
and no regrets i  
close my eyes //  
burying  
myself into the embrace  
of your ghostly arms //

## **This Is How the Cathedral Works**

*Megan Wildhood*

The old story of danger is that there are places  
people have made so beautiful  
that you will never want to leave.

They have slammed heaven and earth  
together and the magic might enrapture  
you away from all else in favor of that altar forever.

This is not the danger, though.  
Beauty is as dangerous as it is to call it so.  
But that is not the danger, either.

Did they design the monuments and castles and basilicas  
to be what *they* thought was beautiful  
and, mysteriously, you have come to agree?

Did they preempt your sirens and bring them to life  
before yours began? Or is there something engineered  
about the worship of beauty, too?

***Car Wash***

A nine-year-old boy was crossing a very busy street on his bicycle with his best friend on their way to the swimming pool when he was struck and killed by a speeding car. The driver got off relatively lightly with an involuntary vehicular manslaughter charge and spent less than three years in a minimum security facility before being paroled early for good behavior. The boy's family was not financially well-off, and their church held a car wash fundraiser to pay for the funeral and to lighten the family's load, despite the fact the family did not attend Sunday services regularly. God read about the carwash in the local paper and decided to go. Maybe he'd even give a little something extra. So he got out his vintage Volkswagen Beetle (really the only little luxury he kept for himself), and drove down to the church parking lot. Despite the fact that the car was already polished to a high shine, he got the \$20 wash option. As he was waiting, he overheard one volunteer tell another that they were running low on soap. It had been years—millennia, really—since he'd done the old oil and flour trick or kept the candles burning all those nights, but God made sure they didn't run out of soap. It was the least he could do.

***Planning Commission***

During the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, the family that purchased the house across the street submitted an application with the County Planning Commission to tear down the old house and build their dream home in its place. The new house was to be much larger than the old one, and would block the view of the park and lake beyond that God enjoyed from his kitchen and living room. Because of the pandemic, the Planning Commission meeting was being held on Zoom. God registered to speak, but he found Zoom meetings to be very awkward, and besides, he never enjoyed public speaking. The schoolmarm-like chairwoman cut him off before he

had made his point and muted his mic when his allotted three minutes were up.

“No one is entitled to a view,” she said in response.

The dream house was approved unanimously. At least, God thought, it looks better than that old dump.

### ***Tattoo***

For some time, God had wanted to get a tattoo. For three reasons, however, he had not done it. First, he worried it might hurt. Second, he worried what others would say. He had let a lot of people into heaven who had very negative opinions of tattoos; no one that mattered, but still. Third, he just could not decide which design to get. A cross or *scutum fidei* seemed obvious and boring. For a while, he almost committed to a Kabbalistic tree of life, though before it was too late and he committed to the ink, he realized he was merely settling because he couldn't think of something better. Others were not without suggestions. Saint George had several example images of himself defeating the dragon bound and delivered to God for inspiration. Seeing this on God's desk, Michael, who was more of the strong, silent type and usually very reserved in his opinions, suggested an image of him casting Satan into the lake of fire. God, however, preferred something more geometric, and had Francisco de Holanda sketch up several very promising options. Just as he was about to commit to one of these, God stumbled upon a print of *The Ancient of Days Setting a Compass to the Earth*. God gasped. How did William Blake know? It was almost as if he had been there as God set the foundations of the world. He got an eerie feeling because it was so life-like, so accurate. Unfortunately, God could not find Blake to talk about it, for it seemed in the creation of his own religious mythology, he had been misplaced. Even after sending searchers through every sphere of heaven, level of purgatory, circle of hell, and even across that vast plane of limbo, God was not able to discuss it with him. The angels he sent out on the search could only guess he was lost in



the far reaches of some imagined quasi-heaven. Finally, though, God decided enough debate was enough and got an *Ancient of Days* full-back tattoo. It was magnificent, and Michaelangelo, who in William Blake's absence did the final artwork, called it a masterpiece. The people God was worried would disapprove predictably disapproved. But for once God didn't care. He was very happy with it.

### ***Tree Builders***

God was driving downtown in his vintage Volkswagen Beetle (really the only luxury he kept for himself). He didn't drive down State Street, a six-lane road and the main thoroughfare on that side of town, but went out of his way to wind down Sullivan and Wright Streets to avoid the traffic. It added a few minutes to the trip, but it was a much more pleasant drive. As God was driving past Corbusier Park with his windows down, he noticed an enormous tree with people suspended on ropes hanging from the branches. The tree was so big that the climbers looked like flies. Two trucks with trailers were parked in the grass near the tree and several large branches and piles of leaves and brush lay on the ground. It seemed like quite the worksite and, as God had plenty of time, he stopped to watch. He parked on the street and walked over a little nearer the tree, stopping about ten yards back from the trucks to watch.

As he stood there, it dawned on God that he had never noticed this particular tree before. Of course, he hadn't memorized every tree in town, but this particular specimen was easily the largest tree in the park—a park God passed by with some regularity. It was a magnificent tree, really. Not a tree one would miss.

As one of the workers walked by to get a tool from the truck, God called out to him, "It's such a pity you have to take this tree down. It looks so healthy."

The worker looked at him strangely. "We're not cutting it down. We're building it."

God wasn't sure he heard right. "You're building it?"

"Yeah," said the worker. "Brand new. It's a big one, too." He walked away.

God looked up at the tree. Focusing more closely on the arborists dangling from the ropes ninety feet above him, it did seem that perhaps they were attaching a branch, rather than cutting it off. God was not sure he'd ever heard of such a thing—he'd always thought trees grew from seeds. He watched a minute longer before getting back into his car and driving downtown, wondering the whole way what they would come up with next.

**For the Legal Pad Babies of Texas**

*Daniel Edward Moore*

Make me a clothes hanger Jesus can use  
to hang the Judge's robe in my womb,

while watching me rob the bank of my body  
holding a stranger's last deposit.

Make me ponder the state of your penis  
after the courtroom's zipper is closed,

after a woman who loves herself, like  
a dangerous, flame in heels, buries the

law in nylon hose six weeks after its written.

## Running Over With Coins And Bills

*Mark MacAllister*

How is it this farm wagon came to be

How is it this farm wagon came to be marooned  
alongside a less-than-traveled county road  
thick ditchgrass waist-high  
dry-honed sharp and moving toward seed

How is it this farm wagon came to be broken  
once-red underskeleton and tongue sluffing rust  
bald tires long-gone flat  
spiral springs stuffed with rodent nests  
deckboards the length of the wagon  
parched-out gray and splintered

How is it this farm wagon came to be laden  
with bushel baskets of carrots beets and onions  
          peas and radishes and turnips  
cardboard cartons of bush beans and tomatoes  
antique glass bowls brimmed by cherries  
apples and pears and six sorts of brambleberries

How is it this farm wagon came to be engraced  
by the dented pie plate running over  
          with coins and bills  
a laminated handwritten sign

*Honor Sistem!*

*Take what You need!*

*Pay what You can!*

*We are blessed and We are glad to share!*



## So Fast So Bright

Mark MacAllister

I expect it was the Leonids  
November 1999 just days after  
    your brother's birth  
though not quite four already you suffered  
the first child's twin fears  
of somehow being both in the way  
and lost in the shuffle  
  
so we gathered my safety orange Arctic bag  
a ground cloth and red-filter flashlight  
the stuffed animal specially selected  
and chose our spot in the high school outfield  
while I set up camp you in your parka  
    and light-up sneakers  
proved to me how fast you could run the bases  
then stayed awake only for a few of the earliest  
they were more numerous toward dawn  
I watched one after another  
at forty miles per second  
cross the crescent-mooned sky  
while you slept pushed down deep  
into the cocoon I'd made for you  
  
even your imagined friend  
the one with whom you shared both a birthday  
    and eye color  
(you each observed the universe  
through the same blue-going-on-purple irises)  
the one you said kept thousands  
of dolphins and sea lions as pets  
was named *Star*  
  
to this day I envy everything airborne  
copy each year's showers  
into my calendar  
if for no other reason  
than to remember they are there  
undetected in the middle of the day  
but so fast so bright as we sleep

## Threshold

*Richard Levine*

In the machine shed, I nearly stepped  
on a crude nest of straw, pawed around  
a litter of kittens. Instinct  
must have driven the mother in  
out of last night's rain.

The world might have sent wiser men  
than me, with its pity in hand,  
but what earthly gift could have helped  
a barn-cat in that dark to deliver  
six nursing babes, and a seventh limp  
as a discarded sock?

Drained of all but giving, she barely  
turned at the sound of the door swinging  
open. The grate of a hinge wanting  
oil rasped once over kitten mewls and her moans,  
and light and dark made a threshold  
of that uncertain moment.

Once rested, a barn-cat mother is just  
as likely to abandon her litter  
as not, so I had few days to find  
them homes, or favor them with mercy  
by drowning.

Leaving them to their fate, I pushed  
the tractor out past where the sudden  
roar of ignition would startle them. With one  
squirt of oil I swung the door gate closed, again.

## Judgement Day

*Steven Beauchamp*

In the jury room, we pass around the pistol,  
square, heavy, fat grip for high capacity clip.  
Full with one in the chamber when the cops  
pulled the young man over and found it  
in the center console of his Ford Expedition.  
We try to imagine his thin girlfriend wielding it  
but can't. The cousins who gave it to her  
for protection in a bad neighborhood  
turn out to be ghosts. It wasn't hers.  
She didn't leave it in the console by mistake.

We talk about six thousand in cash  
he said he got for selling a vintage Grand Prix.  
No paperwork, no proof. The lies  
melt and puddle around our shoes.

But the cops were lying, too,  
claiming to pull him over for rolling a stop sign.  
Not possible at that intersection, we say.  
We find out after the verdict they got a tip,  
hearsay not fit for trial but grounds enough to bust.  
They popped him a little too soon  
before he turned cash into cocaine.

Broken parole, lost job, second offense,  
jail time. This will do him good?  
'This will make society better?  
We do our duty, hold our noses,  
pass judgment under tainted law.

I look over the desk at my students  
writing essays introducing themselves,  
plans for the future, career--rap star,  
fashion designer, pro quarterback.  
The young man in the corner has his hair,  
another his eyes. The thin girl up front  
could be his girlfriend. Her ghostly cousins  
drift down the hall muttering behind shades.  
I see my students wavering behind the scrim  
of institutionalized hypocrisy.  
Shadows of trees outside the window  
cross their faces like bars.

What choice but to play my part in the charade,  
get another year in the pension fund.  
Roll the sleeves up on my arms,  
pat myself on the back and pretend  
to do no harm.

**Mr. Banana Slug**

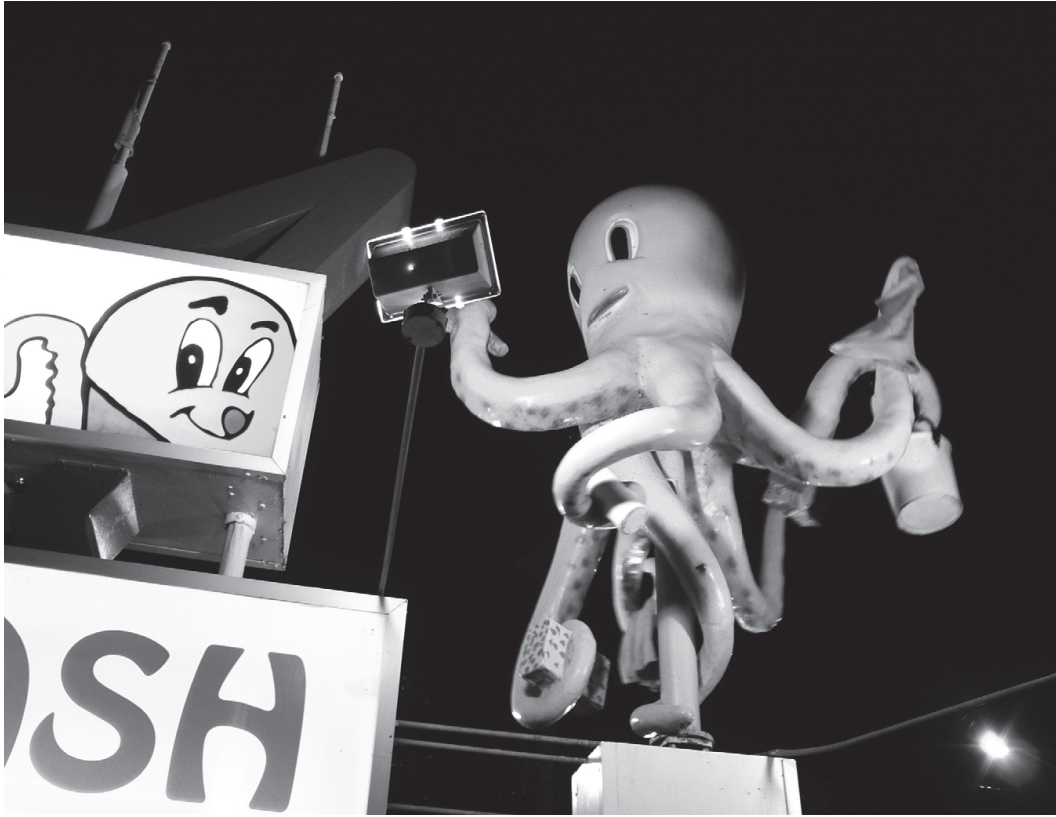
*Gary Lee Barkow*

Well hello, Mr. Banana Slug, can you spare a minute?  
How about some yummy stuff I'm sittin' in it?  
Mix us all together and you know what we've got?  
A bag of bones and a bucket of snot.  
'Thanks for letting me play with you –  
my prayers are so old,  
I don't want to pray with fear, especially my own.  
So spirit keep on pouring. Spirit do not stone.  
Emotions once so liquid, why point to my bones?

Let's try to be free. Let's spirit forever.  
Let's not worry about the stone –  
no way Earth be made of us and pfft, we're gone.  
We'll ask The Forest to replenish us.  
We'll say, "We are Earth like you."

Octopus

*Lewis Koch*



## Everything Is What It Isn't

*Bruce McRae*

A star is a car on fire.  
The moon is cookie dough,  
the sun a wound in God's side.  
(write this in blood, in triplicate)

A nebula is actually an ink-blot test.  
What you call a comet (foolishly)  
is an apostrophe gone rogue.  
Planets are somebody else's problems.

Cataloguing our collective naivety,  
asteroids, class, are the devil's confetti.  
Black holes are all the mistakes you've made.  
(we've had to put them somewhere)

As for galaxies, those pies-in-the-sky,  
those burning oil wells, those rabbit warrens –  
these are merely bullet holes.  
(ignore them at your peril)



## Ashes and Ozone

*New York City, September 2001*

*Jim Kraus*

Outside time,  
we undo the story of Babylon.

Fire, smoke, dust.  
Metal tearing, shredding, clanging;  
glass melting and falling into pools of blood.  
Undoing the lines of assembly.  
Screaming, shrieking, shouting,  
blood itself on fire,  
flesh melting.

In the realm of eternity,  
some knots cannot be undone.

In church the day after,  
a service of lamentation,

*Weeping.*  
*And I hear it again.*

*Low-flying jet,*  
*roar of jet engine.*  
*Crescendo. Crescendo*

*Tymbal, tympan, tympanum.*

Outside, ashes float in amber light,  
each particle suspended on a tentacle of hope.

*On the back of the tongue,*  
*the acrid taste swells.*

Electric arcing death dance,  
ozone around the gray man

with ambulance eyes,  
the imprint of his bare feet on the ash-covered street.

Ubiquitous, spontaneous shrines:  
flowers, pictures of the missing,  
fragments of poems.

The city is hospital ship  
and church at once.  
The lost seek the lost.  
A funeral that will not end.  
The bitter taste,  
the swelling of the tongue.

Is it pride, or arrogance alone,  
that attempts to cross the border  
between Heaven and Earth,  
searching for the point where time  
penetrates space,  
for a key to unlock the illusory gate  
where human will takes flight?

*Rather, inside the one act  
of God, the onrush of creation,  
human will remains  
at war with nature and itself.*

The still-towering clouds  
of ash billow and roll  
up the cavernous streets toward me.

## MUSIC LESSON

*New York City, September 2021*

*Jim Kraus*

*What key was that?  
You're stuck on that blue key.  
Switch to the minor.  
It unlocks the rest.*

Outside, the Village,  
blue sky, sunshine,  
quick feet crossing street,  
running against the light,  
against the beat.  
Then the light changes.

Inside, drum and bass fill  
the spaces between notes;  
keyboard and strings pulse.

*Focus on the rhythm  
legato, rest, legato, key unknown.*

*Listen for the broad, emphatic chord.  
Melody finds itself.*

Outside,  
What was that?  
Low-flying jet,  
roar of jet engine.  
Crescendo. Crescendo  
until ears hurt.

*Now a spinning dance.  
Again and again.  
all things passing,  
the turning of hands,*

Listen again.  
Low-flying jet,  
roar of jet engine.  
Crescendo. Crescendo  
until ears hurt.

Silence.

*A chorus,  
trapped inside  
tin mute of trumpet.  
Then a single high note.*

Searching for the lost—  
Here—Here.  
Thin pulse surviving.

*softening -  
softer—  
muted trumpet answering.*

## Poor Excuse

*Sharon Kennedy-Nolle*

You say you want us to keep  
your memory alive  
some lost cause célèbre,  
but no room shrines, no hands off your stuff,  
so the psychic tells us.  
Well, we wear a few of your T-shirts, the ratty raincoat,  
use your Bic to light our birthday cakes,  
sprinkle your homemade concoctions  
(baking soda, powdered sugar)  
against the annual ant invasion.  
But mostly we put your loss to work,  
good reason for why we're poor, behind with bills,  
worthy to win sympathy  
contests, scholarships, Financial Aid freebies,  
special dispensations  
for why we're always late, careless...  
Since strangers feel they owe us  
we horse-trade on your good name,  
reduce you to an excuse, it's the worst  
but it pays.  
For every family fight, your ghost rises,  
your wearied face, dead ringer  
for Van Gogh, fearful knowing eye,  
tight-lipped smile,  
nose for trouble.

I regret telling my mom that her shoes were ugly. Those thick soles like stumps, the dirt-colored pair, the gravel-colored pair, the pair wide and blunt at the toe like a golf club. The pair with the small hole where her toes stuck out, with which she wore socks. “Mom,” I said. “That looks dumb.”

When I was a teenager and my mom bought herself new party shoes, I told her they were for old ladies. Who even says *party shoes* anymore, Mom. They were thick, black platforms with an elastic top that wouldn’t disturb what she called her bad joint. Whenever she stubbed the toe near her bad joint, she crunched her nose and hissed and said, “Goddammit,” and I thought, *Mom, don’t be so dramatic. It can’t be that bad. Get some high heels; it’s a party.* I thought she didn’t look as good as the other moms. That kind of teenage thought that haunts you.

I was twenty-two when I began to have a nagging ache in the front of my right foot every time I walked. An orthopedist informed me that the second metatarsal head had grown in flat and gnarled, the result of an injury I had gotten in a karate class when I was younger. My very own bad joint. To address it, he recommended I adopt rocking shoes—Dansko clogs or those fat orthopedic sneakers with soles like thick slabs of meat. Shoes my mom would wear. For a year I wouldn’t buy them, couldn’t buy them, because I was twenty-four and worked in an office building where high heels clicked down glossy hallways, fancy like the clinking of crystal glasses, and what was I going to do, clomp down the halls like a total oaf? Like my mom?

One Saturday, after more than a year of pain, I dragged myself on aching foot to an orthopedic shoe store on Fillmore Street called Walkabout, or Walk Around, or You Can Walk, or some other name indicating that they stocked only the ugliest, most practical footwear. The shelves displayed endless shoes my mom would wear, styles

boasting thick straps and soft elastics and Velcro; flat soles, soft inserts, and wide toe beds that give feet so-called *room to breathe*. Every pair infuriated me. I still believed I had the God-given right to squeeze my toes into pointy patent-leather shoes with four-inch heels that accentuated my calves. I wished only to gallivant around my city until two in the morning balanced on such beautiful, rickety specimens.

I sobbed the day I bought the clogs and many days after, looking down at my feet housed roomily in those bulbous, block-like things. I went home and cried after a hip woman in a trendy shop said, “Your shoes look so comfortable.”

My mom cried for me, too, before the surgery and after it failed and made the pain worse. She cried for me after phone conversations where I tearfully repeated the cruel refrains of my doctors: *I can't promise you'll ever be pain-free. Your foot is like a broken-down car*. She never told me she cried but I knew.

For years, when I found the occasional shoes that I liked and that I could walk in without pain, my mom put \$200 in my bank account and told me to buy two pair.





## This Flare of Existence

David Matthews

Virtuosos of surrealism nourish authentic paranoias,  
Dada escapades,  
poor choices and foolish moves  
dressed up as gratuitous acts.  
Painters eat blue with their eyeballs  
and fix color to canvas with oracular gaze.  
Guitars float out over Moreland Avenue  
and I make my way home to search for a poem.  
Jim Darlington paints through the night  
a new amazement to greet morning's light.  
Pagane in garage apartment  
up at daybreak, coffee, brush,  
shatters his canvas with color and vision.  
Evening falls and Falone opening for Wakoski at 7 Stages Theatre  
makes her entrance on a Harley  
trailing behind a banner that reads *Loser Love*.

Each footstep passes into reminisce  
with wonder whose fade is forbidden.  
Smoke from a cigarette curls around the dark skull of a Rasputinish figure  
surrounded by raffish companions, pitchers of beers, carafes of wine.  
The scrawl of poem legends in tattered journals  
and on scraps of paper  
fashions a romance of generations lost, beat, and bent  
under the heavy and weary weight of all this unintelligible world,  
the particulars of whatever may actually have occurred  
not permitted to stand in the way of a good tale  
that might send a tremor through the heart  
of some fair young woman within earshot.

Those days remain with me forty years on and more,  
tremors of beauty and possibility.  
How the earth quaked with soaring spirit  
in each relentless footstep,  
eye radioactive with vision,  
a plunder of yearning and desire,  
this flare of existence

## Waystation

*Kari Wergeland*

This studio holds space above the tracks  
where singers practice  
and veterinary students sleep.  
Green bushes and trees  
present chlorophyll to light rays  
on the other side (past the parallel street).  
Trains are like fauna,  
announce their arrival with a blare,  
though a long skinny tail of sound  
drifts behind their departure.  
They're upbeat. Jaunty.  
Rumble and crash when two cars join.  
They squeal when they separate.  
The big orange engine coasts past this balcony,  
stops north of here.  
It's backing up now,  
passing a bed of little red flowers  
on a golf ball (with hints of gray)  
floating on the live TV.  
When I wasn't looking,  
a line of cars stacked with two-by-fours  
stalled on the rails.  
Automobiles whiz alongside  
this hibernation,  
motor on through fields,  
some golden, some green.  
At night, a black sheet of construction paper  
with a small circle of light.  
What rests in storage, dying perhaps,  
with nothing to nourish its intent?

## Missing From Me

*Lili Flanders*

That bird, its call.  
Just two descending notes.  
'The same interval I use  
when calling you. The same  
elongation of the first note,  
gentle landing on the second.  
Which is why I named it  
after you, why I sing  
back to it, using your name—  
have for years. But  
I still can't name it,  
I mean I don't know  
which bird it is  
that suspends me  
with two sung syllables.  
I can be on my knees  
in the garden, busy  
and dirt-minded, when  
there's that call and  
I can't keep my head  
from lifting, can't  
keep myself doing:  
must pause.  
The bird calls me  
calling you. This bird  
I cannot identify  
but whose voice I know  
as well as yours. This distance.  
Do you, I wonder, still long  
on the other end of all the long miles.  
Do you hear me  
when a bird calls your name?

## **Glory's Aftershock**

*Mary Ann Dimand*

Pity the old warmonger. His eyes  
have sought, sighted the enemy,  
unspeakable, whose carnage means  
he must be shattered. Now  
they look inward. Deep  
inside its ribby cell, his heart  
pounds painfully. Still  
making claims. How  
can I pity what has no mercy?

## **Lessons from My Father**

*Leisha Douglas*

Hear the speech of aspen, balsam, and fir.  
Notice how wind sculpts forest and rock.  
Study riffles and pools in rivers.  
Learn what trout eat and when.  
Tie tippet to line with a surgeon's knot.  
Know where and when fresh snow could slide.  
On subzero nights, hang a lit light bulb  
in the car's engine mount.  
On mountain passes in heavy snow,  
brake lightly or not at all.  
Rise early to ski the untracked slope.  
Ignore cold, swallow fear,  
become numb, detach  
from those who love you.

## **Ants**

*Corinne Kaleta*

A colony of ants are  
Making a home in my heart

They work quickly

First  
a room for the queen

Then  
a nursery

Then  
a place for food

Then  
a room for the peasants

Then  
They keep  
Devouring flesh  
Building tunnels to nowhere  
Rooms no one goes in

I tell the ants

“I feel every burrow, every room.  
I lay awake at night  
Kept up by the sounds  
of a thousand scurrying feet.  
You’ve started climbing my rib cage,  
Exploring the lungs.  
Stop.  
I’ll call an exterminator.”

The ants do not reply.  
We must not speak the same language.

I look up exterminators  
'They aren't cheap.  
Maybe I could do it myself

Then  
I can't breathe.  
A legion of ants  
Swarm up my throat  
Start pouring from my  
Mouth and nose  
Filling the space where breath should be  
How long does it take to suffocate?

They let me take a breath  
Before I can find out

Gather at my right ear  
And say

"You should thank us.  
We have built something beautiful.  
A feat of architecture, that will be adored for generations  
We have built something important.  
A safe place for our children to live and learn and grow  
We have created something extraordinary and lovely.  
Without us your heart is  
Nothing.  
Unloved.  
You were never going to use it  
why shouldn't we have it?"

Perhaps the ants are right



**There's a Lock on the Door and a Key in Your Throat**      *Joe Baumann*

The morning after the funeral, Denny finds all the doors padlocked from the inside, the heavy, ribbed type with the strips of red rubber around the bottom so they don't ding up anything. Each lock is looped through an identical hinge that has been bolted at chest-height across the frame, dark steel that is cold to the touch.

He tugs on the locks, but none of them give. He runs a finger around each keyhole. Denny could break a window, he supposes, but the sound of shattering glass has always made him nauseous. Plus, Mikey had just replaced all the windows—they were ancient, leaky, killing the heating and cooling bills—and the idea of destroying them makes his guts hurt, as if he's swallowed something jagged.

Worry nudges its snout into his chest, so Denny takes several deep breaths. He goes into the bathroom and stares at himself in the mirror, surprised by how refreshed he looks; he went to bed at ten last night and woke after nine. Eleven hours of dreamless, uninterrupted sleep that he hadn't expected, prepared as he was for horrible nightmares, for his body to jolt him awake, for him to reach out his hands and feel at the empty bed. But then again, all of that already happened in the week that led up to the funeral, when Denny found himself suffocating beneath all of the requisite phone calls and arrangements. He'd forgotten, in all of that weight pushing at him from different directions, to call the university. When he finally remembered, he felt lucky to still have his job. The English Department chair, for whom he worked as a program administrator's assistant, told him to take a few more weeks off.

He decides he is still asleep. Denny thumps his head with the heel of his hand, but all he gets is a throbbing temple. He pinches his triceps and feels a bruise bloom, but he's still standing rather than stirring to life in his bed, body twisted in the unwashed sheets. So Denny decides to go back to bed. His stomach is suffering an itchy ache, something spicy and vaguely molten, equal parts hunger and heartburn. Eventually, when the hurt in his stomach turns to hunger,

Denny throws his pillows against the wall and heaves himself out of bed, annoyed that something so basic and simple as nutrition has the gall to rear its head.

While he fries an egg and a turkey sausage patty, his eyes keep sliding toward the lock on the kitchen door; it glimmers, clean and fresh and new. He can look out at the back patio but can't go into the sunshine that beams down on the salvia plants that Mikey arranged in a blaze of reds and purples. The grass could use trimming, a chore Mikey loved but Denny hates, but what's he to do about it now?

He burns the turkey patty. He eats it anyway, the meat crackling between his teeth. Chewing is like gnawing on a strip of leather. The eggs are rubbery and bland; he has forgotten salt or pepper and the yolk has congealed into a pasty, crumbly mass. Mikey was the better cook. He was better at just about everything, except maybe paperwork, which Denny did pro-bono for Mikey's contracting and landscaping business. He'd had to call all of the current clients and explain what happened. He offered to help them find new builders and electricians, but they all said, "Oh, no, of course not. Don't worry about it," even though he could hear the annoyance in their tight breaths.

Denny decides to try opening a window. He and Mikey loved fresh breezes. Some nights, when the weather was mild, they would pull open their bedroom window and turn off the air conditioning and let the sounds of suburban sprawl—cars humping over the road, birds throating out morning songs, katydids and cicadas sawing up their wavy noises—wash over them as they tried to sleep or read or have sex. In the morning, they would stand at the screen and look outside, Mikey's hand on Denny's hip.

But the windows won't open.

Denny thinks maybe he's just exhausted. He tries all three windows again, shoving aside the thick bamboo-slatted blinds. None open. Denny squints at the frames: they're painted shut, carefully, the white thick but elegant. He works the latches, tries poking at the

paint with a butter knife he grabs from the kitchen, but nothing doing: the windows refuse to open. The same in the living room. The same above the sink. The same in the guest bathroom, where one has to be cognizant of who might be in the neighbor's side yard while one is taking a piss. He returns to the front door and shakes the padlock.

He hears his phone ring and remembers that he is meant to get brunch with his cousin Calista. She insisted at the end of the funeral, cornering him in the vestibule of the funeral home with its dizzy green walls and too many calla lilies. He was buzzy with grief and allergies and couldn't come up with a reason to say no. Denny knew that his family didn't want him to be alone; his mother and father came over right after he called to tell them about the accident and his sister came a few hours later. They wouldn't leave his orbit until he let out a howl of frustration and asked—*please*—for some time alone. His mother blinked, tearing up, but then Denny's father led her out of the house and they stayed away until the next morning. His sister, Jenny, had done the same, but she'd texted him that night, writing, *If you let me come back tomorrow, I'll bring wine.*

When he answers, Calista says, "I'm outside."

Denny forks apart the front window blinds and sees her cherry red Camaro growling in the driveway. She waves through the windshield.

"I see you," he says.

"Well? Hurry up. I need coffee and mimosas and biscuits and gravy."

"I can't come."

"Denny."

"No, really."

"I know you're hurting. But don't do this. It's not healthy."

He watches her pop open the driver-side door, the engine quieting. She's all brown hair and sunglasses. She lifts her Ray-bans and catches sight of him staring from the living room. Her eyes are

shadowed a neon blue color like a popsicle. Denny and Calista grew up together; their families had bought houses in the same neighborhood, and although the intention was for Jenny and Calista to become best friends, the moment Denny got his first video game system—a Nintendo 64—Calista plopped down cross-legged on the floor next to him. She picked up an unused controller, fitting into her hands like a pro, and said, “What are we playing?”

He watches her pop out her left hip, drumming her free hand on the hood of the Camaro.

“I really can’t come out.”

“Denny.”

“There are locks.”

“You have keys. It’s your house.”

“You don’t understand,” he says.

“Of course I don’t understand. I can’t imagine what you’re going through.”

“That isn’t what I mean.”

“Then what do you mean?”

“Hang on,” he says, hanging up. He lifts a finger toward the window, signaling *one second*, and then goes to the front door. He snaps a photo of the lock and texts it to her.

“What is this?”

“It’s a lock.”

“I know that. Why did you send me this?”

“It’s on my door.”

“Just take it off.”

“I can’t.”

“This isn’t funny, Denny.”

“No jokes. They’re everywhere.”

“Denny.”

“I didn’t do it.”

“This isn’t going to help.”

“I didn’t do it.”

“Literally locking yourself in.”

“I swear.”

“It’s childish, really.”

“But I didn’t.”

“I can’t help you if you won’t help yourself.”

“I’m not trying to keep myself locked away in here,” he says, but he feels the squirming roots of a lie. Maybe he does want to stay here, vaulted in his house, a tomb that contains the world as it last was when Mikey still moved through it.

“There’s got to be a key somewhere.”

Denny doesn’t say anything. Eventually, Calista exhales an angry breath and turns on her heels.

“Call me when you want to come out, okay?” she says. She hangs up before he can say anything. Denny can’t decide whether he wants to say *I want to come out now* or *I never want to leave again*.

\*

Calista doesn’t leave right away. Denny watches her watching him through the window, and eventually he shrugs and lies down on the living room sofa, throwing an arm over his eyes. He listens to her tires crunching over the concrete, her chassis giving out the briefest moan as the car galumphs into the road. With his eyes closed, he can almost feel the tilt of the planet as it spins its daily revolution, and he wishes there was a brake he could yank, some simple lever he could tug to bring everything to a halt.

Eventually, he makes a pair of loose, cold quesadillas. Denny chews slowly, standing at the kitchen sink, letting crumbs and shreds of cheddar collect in the basin. Halfway through eating, Denny can’t swallow anymore. The cheese and tortilla are like a hardened lump, lodged deep in his thorax, aching between his ribs. He drinks a glass of water, but instead of smoothed out he feels like he is drowning.

He checks his email. Someone, probably his boss, must have spread word about Mikey, because his in-box is full of notes of condolence. Denny deletes them, one at a time, barely reading. He

offers no thank-yous in reply; he wants silence to do the talking for him, though he has no idea what he wants it to say.

\*

On Monday, someone comes to the door, delivering flowers. Denny is lying on the sofa, the blinds open, and the man can see him. When Denny doesn't get up, he rings it again. Denny tries to gesture for the man to leave the flowers on the welcome mat, but he's sure he just looks like he's having a seizure. The man glares at him through the window, eventually shrugs, sets the vase down, and leaves. A spray of chrysanthemums, Denny can see, if he twists his neck just so.

He watches the mailman stuff his box full of envelopes, bills and junk and maybe a copy of the *New Yorker*. Mikey liked the cartoons and entered the free caption contest all the time. He never won, but Denny always enjoyed his entries more than the ones printed in the magazine.

Calista calls twice. He doesn't answer. She texts him, *Please just let me know you're alive.*

*Definitely dead*, he replies. She tries to call a third time, but he sends her straight to voicemail.

*I can't do talking*, he writes.

The phone stays silent after that. He expects his parents to call, or Jenny, but they do not. Denny can't decide if he's relieved or upset. He assumes Calista has passed along her concerns, maybe even mentioned the locks. He receives a text from one of the adjuncts that teaches freshman comp, extending her sympathies.

He doesn't text her back. Maybe later.

*Later* seems to be the ideal time for everything. He'll worry about the flowers later. He'll get the mail later. Later, later, later. When his groin goes tight with the need to urinate, he thinks *I'll pee later*. I'll drink water later. I'll do some jumping jacks later. I'll read a book later. I'll settle my upset stomach, my seared throat, later.

On Wednesday, his sister finally calls.

"Hi," he says.

“Calista’s worried about you.”

“You’re not?”

“Should I be?”

“You remember you went to Mikey’s funeral last weekend, right?”

“Do you need groceries? Are you exercising? The endorphins help.”

“I can’t do any of that.”

“Can’t or won’t?”

“There are locks.”

“Calista mentioned that. What did you do?”

Denny wanders while he talks. The locks are still bright and steely. He squishes his fingers over the keyholes until his skin pulses with dull pain.

“I didn’t do anything,” he says. “They’re just there.”

“Are you feeling suicidal?”

“Do you just straight-up ask that to all of your patients?”

“The ones who lock themselves in their houses, yes.”

“I didn’t lock myself in.”

Jenny lets out a ragged sigh that sounds like static. He’s always thought of his sister as a thunderstorm, full of black rain and electricity. Denny can never picture her sitting next to someone having a mental breakdown or suffering PTSD and offering cool, calm advice. Maybe, he thinks, she uses so much of her patience and kindness with strangers that the well dries after working hours.

“Tell me you’re eating at least,” she says.

“Some. It hurts to swallow.”

“And sleep?”

“Plenty of that.”

“There’s such a thing as too much. When will you go back to work?”

He doesn’t bother explaining that he couldn’t go to work if he wanted to.

“You need stability,” Jenny says. “Routine. Work is good for that.”



“So spreadsheets and scheduling appointments for students is the way to heal?”

“Denny.”

He doesn’t know what to say. Denny touches his throat, which feels full of pebbles. He lets out a raw sound and tells his sister he has to go. She objects, but she can’t stop him from hanging up. No one could, not even if they wanted to.

\*

Jenny sends him links to websites about loss, sophomoric stuff that makes him feel ashamed of her, a trained psychiatrist, whose best solution to her brother’s aching loss is listicles that look like they were made by amateurs using GeoCities or Wordpress. They speak in galumphing, stupid language about the five stages of grief. As if things can be distilled with such simplicity. Check this box, move on from bargaining to depression, and you’re that much closer to being over it!

Each morning he touches every lock. Sometimes the metal is warm, others a hard chill. Denny twists himself to see the chrysanthemums, whose decline sends a jar of fresh sadness through his chest. He wants to stop them from shivering away into bare stalks. Sorrow flares up hard, a horrible stab in his gut like he’s been fileted.

Mikey is all around him. Their dresser is a mashup of their clothes, boxers and socks and undershirts stuffed together. Denny puts on Mikey’s pants, which are loose, and a t-shirt, wispy on him, Mikey’s body swollen up from years of hauling two-by-fours and raising joists and balancing on tilty, tar-papered roofs. The clothes smell of sun-sweat and spicy aftershave. Denny wants to chew on the shirt collars just to taste something of Mikey’s skin. The bathroom is full of his shampoo bottles and body wash. Denny is tempted to depress the atomizer on Mikey’s cologne, fill the room with the peppery winter smell, but he knows there’s only so much of it left, like the limited wishes of a genie’s bottle.



Friday is shiny and wet, a sun shower that makes the sidewalk and driveway glisten. The grass, unkempt and overgrown, is a green slick. He imagines himself sliding across it. He met Mikey in college when one of Denny's friends bought a Slip-n-Slide as a joke, the banana yellow scrolled across the yard like a weird tongue. He couldn't stop staring at Mikey's tan skin, his outie belly button plattered by the hem of his board shorts. They found themselves on opposite sides of the table during a game of flip cup and when they went first, Mikey offered Denny a high-five after they both managed to turn their red Solos over on their first tries. Then, later, Mikey went flying down the slide, fast and aerodynamic, his legs knifed together and raised, strong midsection a crunch of muscle, and he flew off the end of the slide and into some hedges, from which he emerged laughing and grinning.

"It's like you're invincible," Denny said, drunk and bold. He'd brought Mikey a fresh beer without asking.

Mikey took it, swigged deep, and sighed.

"Something like that," he said, examining his chest for cuts and scratches where none were to be found.

\*

So many worried emails. His boss asks if Denny will be back after the upcoming spring break. Denny doesn't bother with a reply, not yet. His sick time hasn't expired; he could miss another month of work he's accrued so many hours.

Jenny calls again, asks about the websites. He gives a perfunctory response, something about useful information. Denny tells her he's been meditating; the lie slips out smooth. She believes him, says, "That's a great tool to use right now."

When his parents call that night, Denny doesn't answer. He puts his phone on silent and leaves it on the kitchen island. Right before bed, he walks through the house again. His phone buzzes against the Formica. Denny turns it off.

\*

Saturday, a week after the funeral, Denny's body throbs him awake. Everything feels swollen, as if he's been pumped full of fluid. As he settles into consciousness, the bedroom filled with hard morning light that feels aggressive and ominous, he realizes the tight bloat in his body is centered in his throat, billowing up to his locked jaw and dry sinuses. Mikey kept nasal spray on his nightstand, and Denny reaches over for it without thinking. He lets out an involuntary groan. Where Denny's nightstand is ordered (reading lamp, alarm clock, one book), Mikey's is a chaotic mess of individually-wrapped cough drops, used tissues, a tiny jar of menthol rub, spare change. But Denny finds comfort in this terrarium of disorder, relishes waving his hands over these things that were last touched by Mikey's fingers. He's remiss to disturb the tableau, but he can barely breathe.

He tries to drink water in the kitchen, but his mouth is hard and non-compliant, his tongue a dried steak. Denny coughs twice, feeling something hard lodged near his voice box. He manages to down the tiniest gulp of water.

He has new messages from his parents and sister and Calista, all texts. Calista: *Don't make me bring over an axe.* Jenny: *I think you need to see someone.* Mom: *We'd like to have you over for dinner.* None of them mention Mikey, and he can't decide if this caution is thoughtful or a spearing erasure. How and when does one start to omit the dead? Denny knows that Mikey will fade with time, that his presence will scrub itself out. His clothes will be pulled from their hangers, his toiletries thrown into the garbage lest they rot to muck in the shower. Eventually his smells will vanish, Denny's nose going blind to their hints in the air and sheets. Someday, even, maybe, Denny will sell their house, move somewhere that has no trace of Mikey whatsoever.

If, that is, he can ever leave.

If he ever wants to.

The locks are plump. They shimmer in the light flowing through the windows. When Denny approaches the back door, he feels his throat undulate. He might vomit, but he clamps his abs and swallows

a hard breath that shifts everything from his jaw to his groin. He stares at the lock without touching it, scanning its divots and lines, the cool arc of steel slithered through the hinge's hole. Denny wonders how such a curve is made, so delicate and graceful in something so hard and impenetrable. It involves heat, he knows, and violence.

He can see, through the sliding door's glass, a rabbit trouncing through the grass. Its fur is a glimmering gold, the color of Mikey's skin. The grass is like his eyes, the red of the salvia like the flush that filled his cheeks during the first warm, sunny months of the year. Denny stands there for a long moment, committing the colors of Mikey to his memory, preparing himself to find him in whatever necessary. Denny will stamp him into the world around him, never quite letting Mikey go.

The rabbit tumbles away. Denny wants it to come back, to restore the tableau. A mewl of desire ekes out through his lips that he tries to choke back, but Denny can't, and all of a sudden he's moaning, and then sobbing, his nose leaky with mucous, his mouth full of spittle and phlegm. Something is happening in his throat; he can feel the hard bulge that's settled there forming into a shape with bite and pulse. He presses his fingers to his throat, careful at his Adam's apple. Denny can feel the thing with his fingertips, the shape of it undeniable and obvious: a key.

Denny shakes his head. He wants to say *No*, but if he opens his mouth, the key will surely fall from his lips, clatter on the floor. Then he will have to open the locks and throw open the doors. He'll have to text Calista and agree to meet and pretend that he can enjoy rum and live music and tacos. He'll have to call his boss and show up on campus, directing lost students to faculty offices they should have found two months ago. He'll have to mow the grass.

So he fights back the crawling sensation in his throat. Denny will open the locks and the doors eventually, but not yet. How can he? He makes a vow of silence, pressing his lips together, gritting his

teeth. He swallows, tough and hard, and feels the key slither down, plunking into his stomach like a stone. Denny stands up straight, stares outside, and makes himself into a statue, unmovable against so much forward momentum.

ANGEL

*Mario Loprete*



## Arby's Last Supper

*Morgan Boyer*

The Benediction was always dad's favorite part of any sermon, telling eleven-year-old me it's saying "now get the hell out"; even the pastor felt the Sabbath would be better spent yelling at athletes who can't hear you through the TV.

After murmuring the last stanza of a 18th-century hymn that no wannabe hipster Christian rock band would touch because it has more than four words, I stuff three donut holes and sneak into the parlor to curl up into a ball like a sleeping fox

only to be dragged to the Jesus crew after party at Arby's since Eat n Park was too crowded and the game was at 2. My Post-Last Supper communion wrapped in silver foil, encased like a mummified cat in a coffin, counting the mustard

seeds on the brioche bun as Aunt Bonnie talks about how the preschool has been hurting before going on her 1:23 pm smoke break, Jamie and Alex talk about Mrs. Fox the music teacher's latest tirade against Wes, the percussionist your father calls his son

falling asleep ever so slightly at the thought of my algebra homework, mom interrupts me to ask why I always order French dip roast beef yet seldom use the sauce, I nervously fold the straw wrapper up like origami, as the explanation for that stays trapped inside of my cavity-crowned mouth.

Every last supper has someone who wants to leave a sea of conversations that don't matter to you so you can go somewhere to do something else that you don't want to do but have to because you were told to.

## After the Finale

*Morgan Boyer*

Dig into your Half Baked Ben and Jerry's  
like you're a version of Indiana Jones who  
actually does the job he went to grad school for

ignore your manager's texts let the fuzz-embedded  
blanket become a second skin, wondering if there  
could be mourning without death as the finale of

*Mo Dao Zu Shi* comes to a close. You'll never  
see Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian again. You know  
the fields of fanfiction will slowly turn dry.

Just like Jacob's asshole siblings, you'll be forced  
to migrate to a new fandom to avoid starvation.

So you dive into Netflix's ever-flowing reservoir  
until you find Emma Stone's latest cameo  
in a bland rom-com to play in the background  
while you finally unload the dishwasher

her voice reminds you of the color guard captain  
girl that you almost had the nerve to ask out  
your sophomore year; it's oddly comforting in

its nostalgia until you remember that girl lived  
in another world with a litany of clear retainer-toothed  
friends and AP Bio binders while you barely  
passed Pre-Algebra and still had braces from 7th grade.



## Votive

*Ann Howells*

Mouth filled with cotton,  
head full of shattered glass,  
wrapped in my childhood quilt  
I lie  
between sleep and wakefulness,  
mind reluctant to leave the dream,  
too groggy to make sense  
of my situation.  
The gyroscope that kept me balanced  
stopped spinning.  
Memory,  
no matter how distorted it seems,  
must be true.

I long for that place  
where the sky matches your eyes,  
where the only sound  
is bees in buttercups,  
where warmth cradles me.

We created our own time,  
own country, own language,  
and someday,  
I believe, must believe,  
our stars will realign.  
Someday  
I'll be reborn with fairy wings.



Shimmers (phosphorescent), juggled motifs, modal shivers, arabesque & curlicue (What essence?) (You should hear) How these guys (play), how these guys play the blues. But, how much scrutiny can any artefact sustain? Free polyphony, ***Kind of Blue***, or 'post war cries. Drastic skewer the process. Enclitic daunts. The shortfall inevitable (Haunts). The 'in the moment' slurs & sharps, barbs & whispers elude ...a recipe, in any case, for repeats (,retreats, retreads). Lost in the mountains, lost in the ruins – aphasia & vaguer memory – soft or pulled focus. Frail at the outset. Editing (s). What to take out & / or, stet. Connective tissue ...the physio awaits. Two strains running...running on ahead. Recognition is...something. Stale or substantial. The anxiety of ...everything. Riff off this ... riff off & mischief.

## **The Delicacy of Earlier Generations**

*Benjamin Harnett*

The delicacy of earlier generations  
could handle in public  
art, perhaps, one exposed tit, or two,  
in the name of liberty  
(and in her person). This prudery extended  
to a resort to Latin to hide the more  
explicit bits of a text.

Why the fullest expression  
of our natural state should adhere only  
to the linguists is a matter of sexism  
and class. (Although there was always,  
in my opinion, a little too much ass.)  
The rich, the educated,  
were allowed this delicacy  
of earlier generations—a ruthlessly  
sweet dish of ethical cant.

We should celebrate that the censoring  
of our raw expression  
has finally passed—but what  
private dish  
the well-off are eating  
now  
must be asked.

## **Rosie's Café**

*PW Covington*

The place  
Rosie's Cafe  
On Madison  
With a rose on the sign  
Is post-pandemic packed

Folding chairs unfolded  
Under folding tables, open  
On Saturday  
Cowboy hats and trucker caps  
Veterans of foreign wars  
In stained T-shirts and torn blue jeans  
Drink percolated coffee  
Bacon, biscuits, gravy  
And as  
They amble out  
To decent Dakota errands and tasks

7th Day Adventists  
Sharp suits and business dresses  
File in  
Filling folding tables  
With folded hands  
Ordering blanquitos fritos y pan tostado  
Hoping to make it to heaven en Español  
On a Saturday  
Sabado  
The timeless, always, Universal waitress  
Fills coffee mugs  
And splits the check  
At every table

As light grey  
Late June rain  
Falls indifferently  
Outside

## Watering the Dead

*Anne Marie Wells*

When I moved out of the apartment,  
the one I once shared with my ex,  
my friend, a gardener, helped me carry  
my boxes of sundries, and she asked

*Why are you keeping this dead ficus?*

*You think it's dead?* I asked.

*Well, maybe not, she said, Maybe  
you can bring it back to life. How long  
have the leaves been dried out like this?*

I admit the tree lost nearly its entire foliage  
moving fourteen miles down the road, but  
I thought the leaves were just fragile, that  
they'd grow back with time. I never realized  
they were so drained of life when I'd pour  
water into its pot week after week, or even  
when I hung tinsel and ornaments  
on its branches in December.

*Since March last year, I said.*

*Oh, yeah. It's very dead, then.*

I lied awake in my new place, wondering  
how long I had been watering a dead tree,  
wondering at what moment it was too late  
to do anything to save it, wondering if I  
should have chopped it down last spring,  
if I could have saved it from suffering,  
wondering at what hour, at what minute,  
it died in the corner of the living room  
alone, wondering how I didn't notice,  
wondering how I didn't know.

## Peeking Deer

*Gina Easley*



## Craft Talk: Making Space to Listen

Joy Harjo

*Joy Harjo, United States Poet Laureate, visited the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse on October 21, 2021 for a presentation and discussion featuring her second memoir Poet Warrior. What follows is a recorded transcript (slightly edited) of an afternoon conversation she shared with Creative Writing students, professors, and community members on campus. Harjo, an internationally renowned writer, musician, and performer of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, is serving her third term as the 23<sup>rd</sup> Poet Laureate of the United States. The author of nine books of poetry, including the highly acclaimed *An American Sunrise*, several plays, children's books, and two memoirs, her honors include the Ruth Lily Prize for Lifetime Achievement from the Poetry Foundation, the Academy of American Poets Wallace Stevens Award, two NEA fellowships, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. As a musician and performer, Harjo has produced seven award-winning music albums including her newest, *I Pray for My Enemies*. She is Executive Editor of the anthology *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through*—a Norton Anthology of Native Nations Poetry and the editor of *Living Nations, Living Words: An Anthology of First Peoples Poetry*. She is a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, Board of Directors Chair of the Native Arts & Cultures Foundation, and is the first Artist-in-Residence for Tulsa's Bob Dylan Center. She lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma.*

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I was thinking about the quality of the Mississippi River here, how it changes, how it is very different by the time it gets to New Orleans. Waterways are like that. That's how music travels. That's how ideas travel. Waterways were like interstates. My people have a big relationship with that river.

[*Poet Warrior*] is a memoir of stories. My literary editor said I reinvented Memoir. I didn't set out to reinvent memoir, I just do what I do, and I've always done that with my poetry too, which has never *exactly* fit anywhere, and it's not always easy to be in that position. What was important to me in writing this memoir was to listen and pay attention and do things I hadn't seen done in a narrative. Like having another voice come in—an older voice talking



to the younger me. Because we're dynamic creatures and we all have memories, we have those younger selves. So, I just listened. I didn't sit down and say 'I'm going to write a hybrid memoir.' But then I figured, I'm Muscogee; I will find my forms. I first learned that at Indian School when we were kids sitting around talking about our arts and our tribal nations and thinking, well, we love Jimmy Hendrix—you know, Jimmy Hendrix is Native—and I remember thinking how do we keep our form, keep our integrity, how do we move into these new forms and make them Muscogee or make them Ho Chunk and so on and so forth.

We all experience time differently. For some of us who are older, our sense of time is different. In writing this memoir, I'm looking at a place I could not see when I was your age. And then when I had my first grandchild, in my thirties, that shifted my vision, and now, I have great-grandchildren, and it shifts your vision. You start to see how connected we are. The generations start to seem smaller and smaller, and you start to see the history that's in you. You start to see that everything matters: how you speak, how you treat each other, and the journey you take inside, which is absolutely crucial for everyone. And ultimately, we learn that we are all connected, that all our actions matter. Sometimes it seems too big—how are ever going to shift environmental damage, for example. The story is immense and can be overwhelming, but you can take care of what is yours to take care of in a very small but potent and powerful way.

What I'm writing now is a series for Yale University Press called *Why I Write*, and what I've come to realize is that being an artist or writer—especially a writer of poetry—is more like a calling.

I remember when it took hold—the calling of poetry. Next year will be 50 years since my first published poem, which was in a student magazine. I've started going through these moments, about 50 of them, that are all about the shift or change in becoming a poet and a musician and a writer.

When I first went to college, I was a pre-med major for one

semester because I was attracted to healing and I worked in a hospital. I ended up changing my major because I hadn't had all the required science classes in high school. I went to an Indian Art school—a Bureau of Indian Affairs High School. We were taught through a kind of military system but also learned from these really cool late 60's Native artists. I think we all need that coming-of-age experience in adolescence. Every point of transformation is powerful. Going from a boy to a man or girl to woman or any other kind of gender—that shift is amazing. And it's full of danger. We need those places that say “you are here” and we need those places where communities stand around you and say, “we are with you” and “we will be here for you.” The Institute of American Indian Arts, where I went to high school, was that kind of place for me.

I was on a path to be an artist; that's what I did from the time I was really young. My grandmother was a painter, my great aunt was a painter, and so it was just part of us. But the poet-thing? How? Why? You never have a ‘career day’ where you see a desk that says ‘poet.’ When I was at the University of New Mexico, as part of the Native Arts Movement, I met Native poets. I loved literature and writing and checked out so many books every week, but it wasn't until I met Native poets that poetry became a voice for me. I learned a lot from Leslie Marmon Silko. She gave me a typewriter when I had no typewriter. And that opened the door for me.

I still don't totally understand it, but it became this path that I had to follow. And how do you do that? When I was in school, it was really important for us Natives to do something that was going to help the people. And people worried about making a living—you had to be an educator, a lawyer, or in the medical field, something that was tangible that you could bring back that would be helpful. How does poetry help the people? So I went from people wanting to help me with scholarships because I had this pre-med major, to nobody. Joe Sando, he was Pueblo, he really helped me. Our tribe now helps pay for graduate school, but at that time they didn't. What turned me



was hearing voices of Native poets. I started going to poetry readings, and I always just loved what poetry can do. I love the form and how concise it is.

I was good friends with Charlie Hill, the Oneida comedian, and I said to him one time, “You know, Charlie, you and I were standing in the back of the classroom when they were giving out careers. You’re a comedian and I’m a poet.” But there are similarities between comedians and poets, because you have these cogent, tight pieces, and there’s rhythm, timing, language. History. There has to be history. Depth. Structure. And it’s for a similar effect—that we might know ourselves better via language. The nuance of language. And the nuance of silence. I miss Charlie.

So that was an important point: knowing there were poets, reading, and listening to them. I was also very lucky because Leslie Marmon Silko taught at UNM (for a semester or a year), and she brought in people. She brought in Ishmael Reed. That was a big transformational moment. Ishmael Reed was at the forefront of the multicultural literary movement. The idea that American literature includes *all* of us—this idea really wasn’t part of the system until the ‘70’s. I remember the first time I went to New York, it was for one of his gatherings, and I met all kinds of people. I met Jane Cortez. I loved her poetry, and she was the first person I saw with a band. Her work was very African. As a student at UNM, when I started writing poetry, I realized that poetry was embedded in other oratorical forms, and in music. I started reading African writers because they were closer to those elements of orality I loved. I came to realize in all of this that poetry is never very far from music. They came in together. They separated when books came along, but they came in together. Dance is also a part of that. So I’m writing about all these transformational moments now.

I’m doing a lot of rewriting. A lot of people think that poets get an idea and they’re inspired, that you have to wait until you’re inspired to write. Sometimes you are, but sometimes you just have to

walk through the stuff and then something happens. I do a lot of revision. And usually, even with this memoir, I read the whole thing aloud. But I've learned to read it, not just to myself, but to someone else, because you hear it differently. The next step is reading it to an audience—*there* you find out all the horrible places that need to be revised.

When I look back at older pieces I've written, I think what I have is a lot more compassion for myself, ultimately. We can be so hard on ourselves, all of us. We all make mistakes, but it's what you do with them that matters. When I was very young, I think I was very suicidal, and I think that what changed was that I finally sat with myself. It's important to do. I decided to write and to try and make something useful. So for me, writing is a tool. And what I've noticed lately, is that I just follow it. Of course, I revise, but it's really about listening. Listening is what we all need to do.

Sometimes it is not the right time to write what you're writing. Maybe something happened that you're too close to. I've also learned that if I follow something—I do this in performing too, I always have a set list—you have to always be willing to change direction. If I'm called to say something, or to go in a certain direction, I will go—and I've learned to do that in writing. Sometimes I have an idea and I'll say, 'okay, I'm going to do this,' but if I stronghold myself, it doesn't work. I often find out more by going the other way.

Sometimes, you can over-revise. A lot of that happens when you aren't listening, or it can be that you're thinking about what someone else thinks you should do, and you feel like you're losing yourself in the piece. That can happen. I was just writing about going to the Iowa Writers Workshop and how I didn't write any poems that were mine for a year because I had an idea that I was supposed to write like them. I learned later that everybody felt that way. But it comes with practice. You learn to see your own stuff very clearly.

In the meantime, how do you feed your spirit? How do you feed your mind? How do you feed the spirit of your art? How do you feed your bodies? How do you feed the spirit of your writing?

You feed it with good stories. Art. Artistic beauty. Being out in the world. Unplugging. Making space so you can listen.



## Our Greatest Hits: Craft Talk Excerpts from Visiting Writers

*What follows is a collection of excerpts pulled from recorded talks given by a few of the writers who have visited Creative Writing Classrooms at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse since 2006. Brian Turner, Jaki Shelton Green, Sam Ligon, Robert Lopez, Jesse Lee Kercheval, John McNally, and Max Garland offer inspiring and instructive words we think are worth reprinting, with updated bios below. Each of the full interviews are available in back issues.*

**Brian Turner** has a memoir, *My Life as a Foreign Country*, and two collections of poetry, *Here, Bullet* and *Phantom Noise*, with three volumes forthcoming from Alice James Books in 2023. He's the editor of *The Kiss* and co-edited *The Strangest of Theatres*. He lives in Florida with his dog, Dene, the world's sweetest golden retriever.

**Jesse Lee Kercheval**, poet, fiction writer, memoirist, and translator, is the Zona Gale Professor Emerita at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her books include the poetry collection *America that island off the coast of France*, and the story collection *Underground Women*. Her memoir, *Space*, won the Alex Award from the American Library Association.

**John McNally** is under contract with Mysterious Press for his nineteenth book, his first thriller, *The Death Philosopher*. He has written three books about writing: *The Creative Writer's Survival Guide: Advice from an Unrepentant Novelist*; *Vivid and Continuous: Essays on the Craft of Fiction*, and *The Promise of Failure: One Writer's Perspective on Not Succeeding*.

**Robert Lopez** is the author of six books, most recently, *A Better Class Of People*, (Dzanc Books). He teaches at Stony Brook University and lives in Brooklyn, NY. ([robertlopez.net](http://robertlopez.net))

**Sam Ligon** is the author of two novels and two story collections. He teaches at Eastern Washington University in Spokane, WA., and is Artistic Director of the Port Townsend Writers' Conference. ([samuelligon.com](http://samuelligon.com))

**Max Garland** is the author of *The Word We Used for It*, *The Postal Confessions*, *Hunger Wide as Heaven*, and the forthcoming, *Into the Good World Again* (March 2023). Originally from Kentucky, he taught for

many years at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, and is the former Poet Laureate of Wisconsin.

**Jaki Shelton Green** has published eight books of poetry and a poetry album, *The River Speaks of Thirst*. The first African American Poet Laureate of North Carolina, she teaches Documentary Poetry at Duke University and is the owner of *SistaWRITE*, providing writing retreats for women writers in Sedona, AZ., Martha's Vineyard, Ocracoke, NC, Northern Morocco, and Tullamore Ireland. (jakisheltongreen.com)

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**Brian Turner** (*from Vol. 11, 2008*)

I use those big artist sketch pads because there are no lines and there's room to write and scribble and scratch stuff out and it's big, so I don't have to keep turning the page—I can see the poem developing right in front of me.

I'll write a line or a stanza and as I'm writing the first stanza I'll write it over and over, fixing a word—and it's really a big waste of paper, but as I'm writing it I say it out loud, to hear how it sounds, and by doing it over and over, I think it starts building a rhythm that I know, so when I hit a wrong note, I'll know it. I'll know it in my body, as the body tunes itself to the music. So that's the skeleton, which we end up attaching muscle and flesh to. To get started, I usually try to think about an image. I try not to approach the page and say, "I'm going to write about war or some big issue or I'm going to say something important." I fail every time when I try to do that—I've written some of those poems, and they just don't work. They come out pedantic and preachy. But if I write about some moment or some little image, it's a launching pad toward the unknown. And isn't that sort of cool? If we're willing to put ourselves out there where we don't know where it's going to go, then we might, as writers and as human beings, learn something about ourselves in the process.

*[Advice on revision?]*

Be brutal. And be playful too. Bend it or stretch it or compress it,



and see to the draft that waits down the road. For me, part of the art of revision is based on separating myself from my intentions during the initial creative process. I'm trying to open myself to possibility in revision—so that the poem might surprise me yet again with new layers of meaning, new doorways into the profound. That's the best advice I can think of – other than to just live a life.

*[Thoughts on political poetry?]*

It's easy for me to preach to the choir and to hear them send glowing praises back at me. But for those who I might disagree with or who might disagree with me, there's another route I have to take. And that's the difficult conversation—to create art that somehow bridges the divide. My first editor, April Ossmann, taught me something that's really stuck with me. If I can simply explore the things I've seen and things that happened so that a reader might feel the emotional import of those moments and *feel* some of that lived experience, rather than talking about overarching concepts and politics and theory – added to all the stuff they already know – then maybe the humanity of the moment will speak to them. That's what I'm hoping for. That's one of the reasons I might share a poem.

**Jesse Lee Kercheval** (*from Vol. 12, 2009*)

I've really changed the way I write over time, and that's been a great eye-opener for me. Writing has been a series of learning humble lessons. What I've learned is that there's no right way to write. When I first started writing stories, I was very controlling about them—I would almost memorize the story, what everyone was going to say and do, and what the last sentence was—before I would write it down. A friend of mine said, 'Oh really? I just write down the first sentence and see if I can come up with an interesting second sentence.' And I thought, 'She's an idiot—she doesn't know how to write.' And then I started writing my first novel. Maybe somebody can carry an entire novel around in their head, but my head is not big enough. So, I was just so wrong about it. That's when I really learned

the humble lesson that you just start and see where it goes. I cut big chunks off the beginning, I introduced whole new characters—because it was too big for me to plan in my head. That was a lesson in how to let go. Just start writing and let it happen. Now, I'm probably over in the other camp, and I'd say if you feel like you know everything that's going to happen, you're probably limiting what that piece could be. Poetry, always, is a little mysterious. The poetry part of my brain gets an idea that's based on a first line or a sound or an image and I just keep writing and see where it goes. I don't know if I've ever known where a poem was going to go.

I love revision. If somebody had told me this when I was in my first writing class, I would have thought they were insane, so feel free to think I'm insane, but most writers who are further along as writers love revision, because that's when it gets safe. The scary part is the blank page. Every time a writer finishes something—every writer I know thinks they'll never write anything again. They just walk around in terror that their mind will be a complete and utter blank for the rest of their lives. So, once you have something—a big messy draft of a story, or a novel—revision is almost the fun part. It's the shaping and the crafting of it, it's walking around thinking about scenes and dialogue. It's interior decorating instead of putting up the walls. My biggest problem now with revision is to give it up after awhile. Also, I think the computer makes it possible for you to sit there and stare at the same paragraph and rearrange words until the end of time. So at some point you just have to say, 'It's done.'

I don't think about publishing while I'm writing. I don't think, 'Who will like this story?' or 'Who am I writing toward?' I think I'm writing this voice that pleases me. But then once it's out there, knowing people are reading it, it's a wonderful thing, and that makes it worthwhile. But it's about the process. Most writers, I think, write for the process. I don't want to sound too new-agey about this, but most writers think of it almost as a kind of religion, in a way, that it makes meaning out of your experience. No matter what happens to



you—no matter how unpleasant it is or how painful it is—you can think about it and come to some realization and then writing gives everything a meaning and structure. And so, the process of writing is interesting enough to me that even if someone said, ‘From now on, nothing of yours will ever be published,’ I would still write.

When I first started writing poems, after I’d been working on fiction, the endings seemed more mysterious. Fiction seems logical the way it ends—you close the conflict and maybe you have this object that’s symbolically manipulated in order to signal how the story ends. If it’s a happy ending, we throw open the window; if it’s a sad ending, we shut the window. If it’s a happy ending, you turn on a light, if it’s a sad ending, you turn off the light. There’s some moment where you feel the resonance of the story and it’s logical. In poetry, it’s less logical and more mysterious. In fiction, I’m usually attached to my endings, and if they don’t work, I go back over the middle and the beginning of the story and I massage them until the ending works. You have to externalize what happens to the character—you have to come up with some incident at the end of the story that makes concrete in the world what’s changed inside the character. In a novel it has to be even bigger. The same thing, but bigger. That’s why people die or get married at the ends of novels. Or step in front of trains. In Russian novels, people step in front of trains.

**John McNally** (*from Vol. 13, 2010*)

I always tell my students: you can write fifty stories that fail and still have the rest of your life in front of you, but you can’t write fifty failed novels because you’ll be dead. You just don’t have that much time. I think I’ve published sixty or seventy short stories, but I’ve written many, many stories that haven’t worked. Novels are a different beast. I always think of novels in terms of architecture. The foundation of the novel is its first hundred pages, and if the foundation isn’t strong, the whole structure will eventually implode. One of the things that might have helped me with this new novel

(*After the Workshop*) is that I've written a lot of screenplays lately. And so the screenplays, in some roundabout way, allowed me to think about structure in a concrete way. Just internalizing the structure of a screenplay and then thinking about piling complications onto a character, that's essentially what I did with this book. I outline screenplays; I'm much more methodical about that because a screenplay has to have a specific structure. It has to be between 90 and 120 pages, depending on the genre, it has to have very specific act breaks, and within those acts it has to have very specific plot points. The screenplay structure seems very mechanical on the one hand, but it's like writing a sonnet. It has very specific criteria you adhere to, but then you try to bring some freshness to it within that structure. I've been unconsciously thinking about structure for my novel after having internalized my more conscious considerations about screenplay structure.

I used to write really late at night. Now I write early in the morning. For me, the key to writing is to write at a time when I'm still a bit sleepy. I know that sounds odd, but it's because I feel like my writing is most interesting when the concerns of my non-writing life aren't crushing me. And so I like writing before I have to start thinking about bills I have to pay, or the car I have to take in to get repaired, or the cat I have to bring to the vet. At a certain point in the day, you find that you have a laundry list of other stuff you have to do, so I get up early and try to make writing the very first thing I do. Furthermore, when you're residing in that half-awake state, you're more easily able to tap into the unconscious part of your brain, which I think is good for writing, because when you're too conscious or when you're too mechanical about your writing, the things you write don't surprise you as much. And for me, most of the things that I'm happiest with are the things that surprise me, not the things I've planned. The story is always smarter than you, and when you're tapping into the unconscious mind, you don't know why all these different and odd things have entered the story, and so your job is to

figure out how to make this disparate group of things add up and have some cumulative effect by the story's end, which may take years to bring about in the revision process.

As for productivity, you don't have to write very much. You could write a page a day and you could have a novel by the end of the year. And it would take you a while after that year to revise it, but as far as output is concerned, one page per day isn't much if you get into the habit of writing. Cultivating the habit combined with making sure you're adding something to it every day—that's what results in a book.

Normally, I have a really long revision process for short stories. I find short stories to be a lot more time-consuming than other forms. I understand writing short stories, and I feel like I'm better at writing short stories than I am at novels, though I hope to get better at writing novels. The short story is a form I understand. I've talked to other writers who are both short story writers and novelists, and we all agree that the amount of time we spend per page on a short story—when you factor in all the revision—is so much greater than the time spent per page when you're writing a novel. And yet the payoff is so much less. So it's really hard to justify, from a life expectancy perspective, writing a lot of stories, but I love the form and I love writing them. One of the short stories in my last collection, *Ghosts of Chicago*, took me six or seven years to write. And one of the stories in my first book, *Troublemakers*, took about six years to write. Which is why it's good that I work on a lot of different things, otherwise I'd be perpetually depressed. Writing stories is a painstaking process. On the other hand, I wrote the draft my novel *After the Workshop* in four months and revised it in another four months. For me, it's like using different sides of the brain, writing novels versus writing short stories.

Everyone in publishing talks about how overwhelmed they are with how much material they receive. You'd think everyone is writing. And they probably are. So it's just hard – even if you're a

really great writer – to get noticed. There's so much serendipity and luck and chance in the process of getting the attention of an agent – getting the attention of the right agent – and even once you have an agent you need more serendipity and luck to get the attention of the right editor. There are so many factors involved that have nothing to do with talent. So in that sense it's scary. It's like going to Vegas with a wad of cash and hoping you come out with more cash, and we all know how that usually ends up. I don't even know what kind of advice to give to counter that because it's just the randomness of how the world works. I have a book coming out in the fall about the writing life, and the thing I keep coming back to over and over is perseverance—just keeping your work out there. Keep sending it out. I know writers who have been rejected by publishing houses and then, a year and a half later, an editor will take the book and it becomes a best seller. What it really boils down to is that nobody really knows what the hell they're doing – publishing is one big guessing game – and unfortunately you're at the whims of that.

The problem too is that the publishing industry kind of follows the movie industry by about fifteen years or so. For a long time now, really since *Jaws*, the film industry has had a blockbuster mentality. And now, sadly, the book industry is catching on to that, expecting every book to be a blockbuster or to sell a certain number. And this is the sad part of the commercial publishing world. If my agent sends a new manuscript of mine to a new editor, the editor, probably before they even look at the book, will look up my sales record and say, 'Oh, this is not good,' and come up with a reason for rejecting the book. So it's like you have a permanent criminal record following you around for your life's work. And I wish they would get out of that mentality because I can think of dozens of examples of writers who have published books with small presses that have done extraordinarily well because the publisher ignored that model. I know I'm probably depressing the hell out of you, that the obstacles seem insurmountable and seemingly random, but the thing you have to do

is just work and be consistent about it and keep pushing forward. Even when I have a novel that's getting roundly rejected, I'm already at work on another novel and trying to move forward.

I also have to remind myself why I do this in the first place. You get caught up in all this other stuff, but I can't let that affect the next thing I'm working on. I'm working on this short novel now, and I've gone back to writing some of it by hand and some of it on a 1971 IBM Selectric typewriter that sounds like a machine gun when I'm typing. I'm going back to the basics to remind myself that this is how I used to do it, and that I just love the process of writing and storytelling. Everything else is a sideshow.

**Sam Ligon and Robert Lopez** (*a joint visit; from Vol. 20, 2017*)

**Ligon:** [on flash-fiction]: What I learned was that you have to succeed in spite of the form, or opportunity arises *from* the form. In short-short stories, you create a problem for yourself, having to create a 500 word story or a 900 word story, whatever it is. The other thing that happens is that language and voice become paramount. Usually in fiction we think that character is the most important thing we do. In short-short stories, character might be important, but it might *not* be important. What is most important almost always in short-short stories is voice and rhythm, or the sound of the story, the voice of the story, the rhythm of the story. This makes it more like poetry, and makes it really exciting for prose writers.

The main thing to consider is there's a lot of different approaches. These quotes come from that early anthology *Sudden Fiction*. Fred Chappell says, "The two requirements are that it be quite short and that it be troubling. Unease, whether humorous or sad, is the effect the short-short aims for." We want unease, we want something to be wrong, something to be broken.

John L'Heureux says "A really good short-short, no matter what else it may be, is a story we can't help but read fast, and then rereading, and again, but no matter how many times we read it we're

not quite through it yet.” I like that a lot, because when I write short-shorts I feel like I have that experience where I write it and I read it again, and I’m writing it over and over and over. As an editor too, when I’m reading short fiction, if I want to go back to the beginning of the story right when I finish it, it means typically I think that story’s working, that it’s doing something effective.

Lydia Davis says, “The very short story is a nervous form of story. It keeps itself more separate from you than a longer story.” And I think that’s a problem with the form. It’s hard to get emotionally invested in a short-short story, it’s hard to hook a reader in a short-short story because you don’t have that much time to bring them in. Charles Baxter says, “In the abruptly short story, familiarity takes the place of details.” He says, “We’ve seen this before, we know where we are, don’t give us details, we don’t need them. What we need is surprise, a quick turning of the wrist toward texture or wisdom, something suddenly broken or quickly repaired.” But I would also argue that a list of details is another kind of short-short that is incredibly effective.

Stuart Dybeck says, “Their allusive quality is what makes them attractive. The short prose piece exists in a no man’s land between prose and poetry, between narrative and lyric, story and fable, joke and meditation, fragment and whole. Their very limitations of scale often demand unconventional strategies.” This is the other thing I love about them. I think they do demand unconventional strategies and, as such, they tend to allow you to play, they help you discover things you didn’t know you could do as a writer. You’ve got a problem to solve in a short-short if you’ve got a word count or prompt restriction.

Joyce Carol Oates says, “Very short fictions are nearly always experimental, exquisitely calibrated...” (that sounds like a poem, *exquisitely calibrated*) “...reminiscent of Frost’s definition of poem—a structure of words that consumes itself as it unfolds, like ice melting on a stove. The form is sometimes mythical, sometimes



anecdotal, but it ends with its final sentence, often with its final word. 'They're highly compressed and highly charged.'" And the great thing about the whole idea about failure in the short-short form, when we fail—and we fail all the time as writers—you don't have a huge investment in it. You spent two days on it, three days. Now go do another one. It feels like a place where you can take a lot of risk because in some ways you don't have a huge investment in it.

**Lopez:** But in other ways the stakes are higher. I always think about short-short fiction as a high-wire act, because you don't have much time to get anything wrong. Every single word, every single syllable has to be exact. For me, the danger of that is intoxicating and what makes a short-short fiction the most compelling form I can think of in fiction.

**Ligon:** And Rob's not kidding when he says syllable. The beats are absolutely critical. It's the music of the prose. Poets talk about music because poets know every word counts, every line counts, every syllable counts. Fiction writers should know that too. When we write in the short-short form, I think we bring that sensitivity to sound into all of our work. We should be line writers no matter what, but when we write short-short fiction, we *have* to be line writers.

**Max Garland** (*from Vol. 21, 2018*)

When I was young, I felt like writers and poets came from elsewhere, were born geniuses, or at least had literature piled upon them practically in the cradle; they were, in fact, out of my league. I never heard of a poet coming from Paducah, Kentucky, or Eau Claire, Wisconsin, for that matter. I was certain, even when I began to study poetry in college that I was forever on the outside looking in. For one thing, I didn't think there were still poets in the world. We studied poetry in big, thick books, the way you study ancient history or archaeology, just to learn what once existed. To me, a poet was like a Greek statue. If you were an educated person, you were supposed to know certain things, maybe the names of a few presidents, the

beginning of the Gettysburg Address, maybe something about ancient Greece, and the names of a few writers: Shakespeare, or Milton, or Keats, or Emily Dickinson, and that stamped you as an educated person. Maybe it would help you get dates somewhere along the line, or hold your own in a sophisticated conversation, should you stumble into one. In other words, we only studied dead poets. And obviously, since this was a few decades ago, they were dead white male poets, for the most part.

We studied one living poet in my entire college career, and it was W.H. Auden, a great poet, but right in the middle of the semester in which we were studying Auden, he actually died, passed away to join the others. The record was clean. Later I wondered if maybe the English Department had him put to death. I mean, maybe they found out, 'Hey they're reading a living poet. We must kill him.' I don't have any proof, but that's occurred to me. So that was poetry—something that had to stand the test of time to be worth studying.

Now, things have greatly changed. Of course, there's a downside to the change, but there's a tremendous upside. The upside is, you can be a poet, and you don't have to be dead or white or male. I mean, you can write; there are journals, small presses, blogs, readings, open mics, slam poetry, hip-hop, rap; plenty of evidence in the living culture of people standing up and spouting off, spouting words, sometimes very well-rehearsed, sometimes improvised. The downside, of course, is that you have to do the filtering yourself, rather than depend upon the editors of the *Norton Anthology*, which may not be such a downside after all.

**Jaki Shelton Green** (*from Vol. 24, 2021*)

A conversation with Audre Lorde in St. Croix Virgin Islands about six months before her death turned me upside down and sideways. For several days we'd run into each other at a party, a lecture, bookstore, the ocean, or restaurant, and always, she fed me questions. But this one question was unsettling and became the clear



map that I needed to self-actualize as literary citizen. *“When was your epiphany that the act of writing is internal, that it pulls out your relationships with experiences that become the vehicles that you need on this journey...for going deep into the unknown landscapes of literature that is growing inside of you?”*

I wrote the question on the hem of my white linen dress for fear of forgetting.

That question unlocked not answers but all the necessary questions that I needed and was grappling with as a young Black southern woman mother daughter wife lover sister who dared to write poems living in New England, who dared to show up as the only one in alien spaces in North Carolina long before many of my literary contemporaries called North Carolina *home*.

That journey was challenging but I am grateful for the blessings from writers who nurtured me and were always open and accessible for guidance, reassurance, lifting me up, accountability, and love. Many of these writers in the 60’s and 70’s were community-centric, and generous of heart and intellect. Gwendolyn Brooks, Alice Walker, Lucille Clifton, Ahmos-zu-bolton, Amiri Baraka, Robert Hayden, Gary Johnson of the famous Blind Beggar Press, Carolyn Forché, Lance Jeffers, Doris Betts, Robert Hayden and later Wanda Coleman, Gerald Barrax, Reynolds Price, Randall Kenan and Nikkey Finney... all ancestors now except for Nikkey Finney, Alice Walker, Carolyn Forché, Gary Johnson.

I remain personally guided by all of them and several more who taught me the art of taking risks, to be masterful with form, how to show up as literary citizen tackling the human condition through a variety of perspectives, how to survive and navigate this citizenship as *other*, marginalized, survivor, how to do the work of moving readers to journey inward in order to understand things, how to stretch the ideas and visions of what we understand and cultivate literary citizenship to be.

Do we understand that witness is a generative act? How does how we witness make the world? How are we changed by what we

witness as literary citizens?

How close can we listen? How do we listen each other into being and how do we attend to the ways we make ourselves possible? How do we develop new work that speaks to the great issues of our time? How do we work with each other in pursuit of that goal? How do we work as literary citizens to create a healthy, supportive, respectful literary community with tenets of accountability, without gatekeepers, without power-plays, without meanness, that has a mission of eradicating bullying, racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, ableism, classism, and ageism wherever it continues to thrive and threaten?

As literary citizens, whose stories are we discussing, exemplifying, and embodying? Audre Lorde once wrote, “Without community, there is no liberation... but community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist.”

How have literary citizens who came before us helped us to think about how we collect, process, report, analyze and disseminate? I think about citizen media and user-generated content in the words of Jay Rosen, professor of journalism at New York University as this, “When the people formerly known as the audience employ the press tools that they have in their possession to inform one another.”

We, you and I, are the people and we are audience to each other, holding the qualities of civic-mindedness and social responsibility as we continually underscore the link between our practice as writers and its relation to the political and public sphere.

Alice Walker’s activism as literary citizen has always encouraged, directed, and requires me to stand on the side of the revolutionaries, teachers, and leaders who seek change and transformation of the world. I only need validation from the work itself and all the collective interweaving of our stories and our texts as we tell the bigger stories, the other stories, the crying, nasty, gun-still-smoking, crooked-elected-officials, twentieth century lynching, black son still

bleeding in the street, white son hiding an arsenal in the woodshed, corporate America's wife's head in the middle of the night punching bag stories. Because these stories matter too.

These poems we write will remind us that we are criminally unpaid, but we must write anyway. These stories we write will remind us that we write for an industry that has been too long dominated by white and male gatekeepers, but we must write anyway. These novels we write will remind us to be afraid, but we must write anyway in hopes that we bring justice to the publishing industry. These essays and short stories we write will remind us of all the ones rejected, but we must write anyway so we might revel in and grow through our collective artistry, our collective craft, and all our stories.

As literary citizens what do you require of yourself? Should we as writers be concerned with how we hold traumas of collective racism as a literal blood sport? Are we required to question how we ourselves might contribute to the zombie apocalypse of consumerism?

What new revelatory literature will we create about the historical, social, and cultural forces that conspire to oppress our humanity and all of our ecosystems? As a literary citizen, can we hear James Baldwin's question from a long-ago time asking us all *What does it mean to be American?* As literary citizens, are we reexamining our ancestral migrations not just to investigate our heritage, but to investigate the deep pains of historical displacement for many just like you or me regardless of who we are, where we come from, or who we belong to?

As literary citizens how are we using the literature we create to dissect wisdom, loneliness, academia, intimacy, and identity. I believe we can imagine answering these questions if they matter at all by thinking about what it means to activate our personal literary citizen literacies as practitioners, scholars, writers of action, writers of contemplation, resistance, and restoration continually asking ourselves what is the currency/the worth of your literacy citizenship?

How does your inner and outer, your private and public creative selves become more aligned to sustain life in a threatened world? How do we continue to bend history proving that the past and the current past can be best experienced and reframed through refracted light rather than under harsh glare?

It is my hope and steadfast personal requirement to be the literary citizen taking care of all I know that must thrive. I am required as literary citizen to write and sing the daydreams out loud. I am required to bring what I see, hear, and read into the center of the page. I am required to be everything that I look for in my poetry.





## **The Time Turner, as Seen on Facebook**

*Pamela Wax*

You would have bought it, too,  
Potter fan, had it popped up  
on your Facebook feed  
for the mere price of shipping —  
a gaudy knock-off of Hermione's pendant,  
the one she used to travel time.

I sobbed as I tapped my name,  
address, credit card number  
into the appropriate fields,  
and clicked "Confirm."

I knew it was a fiction,  
but I bought it anyway, because  
I wanted magic, miracle,  
a maneuver to reverse time  
and offer my brother a chance  
to stand again on that bridge  
from which he'd jumped,  
and turn—his children still  
in bed—walk the twenty feet  
back to his car, and drive home.

## **The Bentweed Boys**

*Rin Kelly*

There are guards at Bentweed Cemetery who stand by the side of the narrow road, the one that leads to my family plot, and chase the neighborhood kids away from the stones. The cemetery is in the middle of a long, colorless circle of apartment houses, and the grass is green and inviting, so the fat-faced children who have no parks to play in like to climb on the stones, especially the new ones with the dark black lettering, and steal the roses and the silk carnations. Sometimes they take them home to their mothers or their schoolroom girlfriends.

My mother is buried there, and her mother and her mother—my great-grandmother, Christine—for whom I was named. She and her husband, Paul, were born the same year and died the same year, four years before I was born. They are buried side by side underground, and sometimes I wonder if I will have company down there. I can see where my plot is; right now there is room for only one.

There are clouds in front of the sun, but not dark ones; it is a bright day that has been momentarily forced into the back of someone's mind.

Three little boys, barefoot without shirts, are watching me from behind an oak. They are dark, their long backs browned and stretching upward, their eyes a wild, milk white against the beauty of their cinnamon-toned skin. I can't tell if it's natural or the outcome of long afternoons dodging the men who patrol relentlessly, carrying them back to the safety of the redbrick buildings that are shielded from the sun. I watch them watching me, and when I turn to place my silk flowers in the clay pots beside my stones, I realize my calla lilies will end up an ornament in the thick curls of a proud mother's hair. I plant them anyway, and smile at the boys as I turn and walk across the grass-bordered road.

The boys follow cautiously behind me, stopping every few seconds to take cover behind some unfortunate wanderer's



gravestone. I begin to whistle loudly, and it echoes through the empty cemetery. There are birds squatting in the well-manicured trees, but they don't sing. I can hear the Bentweed boys now wrestling with the calla lilies I have so carefully twisted into place, untangling the green paper stems with a reckless respect I don't understand.

I turn around curiously, and they are gone; my silk flowers are gone too, disappeared into the hands of boys who have grown up in a garden of stone. The pot by my grandmother's grave is on its side, and the dirt has tumbled out. I grimace and walk slowly back to right the empty clay vase. I can see the footprints of the boys: they're small like the feet of elves, and I can fit four fingers into each one. I collect the damp dirt into my hands and slowly shovel it back into the pot. Some of the dirt gathers under my fingernails, and I begin to shiver.

The sun has come out from behind the clouds now, but it is cold—cold like a swimming pool that looks so inviting, but is freeing to the touch – and I curse it. My hands are brown from the dirt, and I wipe them in the grass. I stand up to see the sun; it is a blasphemous cellophane yellow, and I shade my eyes with my dirty hands. It is precariously on the roof of a redbrick apartment building; I think maybe the building belongs to the boys who picked my flowers. But there are many of those buildings, all the same dusty red, all in rows circling the cemetery like tired soldiers at attention. I wave at a window, knowing no one will see me, and I can picture those cramped apartments, overflowing with flowers of all different sizes. I smile and wave again. This time I think someone sees me; I see a flicker of movement in a window high above my head, and I grin.

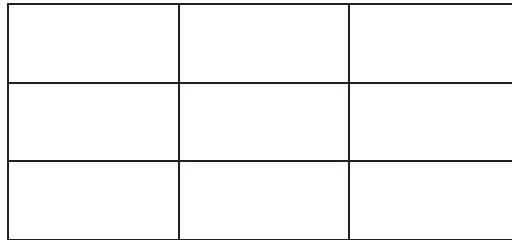
Turning slowly, I walk back toward the thin road I came in on. My ears are cold and I want to get home. I can see the iron gates up ahead and the place where the buildings part to make way for the street and the cemetery gates. The iron bars look dark and cold. I dance lightly across the road like a bird who refuses to sing. The sun disappears again, and the tombstones cast long shadows onto my feet; I turn around once more to glance back at the cold garden



behind me —there are endless rows of stone—and the shadows of the apartment houses turn the empty field into a city of motionless sleepers. It is a bare, quiet city except for a few gray angels hovering a little above the ground; marble angels caught forever in flight, clutching flowers and staring relentlessly ahead toward the soft hills of engraved granite. I look up at the sky, hoping to see more angels, but all I can see are redbrick apartment buildings with the shutters drawn. I wonder where those boys are. I wonder if they're looking down on me. I wonder if they're laughing.

Turning to leave, I squint my eyes and wonder where they will play when they no longer live high above the city. And as I walk slowly up the darkened drive, humming softly, I wonder again about the Bentweed boys; I wonder if their mothers are as beautiful as I picture them to be soft, and dark, with flowers tucked into their hair. I step lightly between the cold metal gates, deciding yes, I am right, there are proud, beautiful mothers staring down at me, touching their boys lightly on the cheek and then pausing to finger the flowers in their hair, flowers picked from the garden down below.

Solve: How Many Rectangles are in the Figure Below?



9 | No

This is the initial answer. Rectangles can be grouped together to form larger, inter-connected parallelograms. Note when describing these groupings, don't shade the inside if you only have this page. If you shade the inside, some lines might blur. Trace the combinations with different colored pencils -- preferred colors: brown, and yellow, colors that we can differentiate regardless how close the lines press onto each other. How with every tracing you shape, try not to overlap areas, but you will. Eventually what's left would be an ordered explanation in which the original black and white parameter will be ruined. Illegible. See past that. That dichotomy cannot hold. You should have noted down the different new shapes:

1x1 1x2 1x3

2x1 2x2 2x3

3x1 3x2 3x3

These pairings can only be seen when you follow through in destroying the construct. Now count them.

## Instructions on How to Pray

*Morgan Clark*

Begin by folding your hands. Or don't—God ain't a coach. He doesn't care about form. I, on the other hand, care very much. So, please, for the love of God, close your eyes. After all, the best things in life are enjoyed with eyes closed. (One word: sleep. Or sex. But mostly sleep.)

When your body has set the stage, greet God, but do better than Hi. He deserves more than two little letters. He created you. The least you could say is Howdy. And I heard three days ago that Loretta's boy tried to say 'hi' to God and the next morning he woke up half his hair was white! Anyways, when He joins the call, confess, thank, and try not to get distracted—do you think Mary prayed? I mean, wouldn't it be weird to pray to your own son?—it's rude.

Now, the ending is crucial. If you pronounce God's goodbye wrong, He might not pick up next time. Here's how I like to remember it: Once you've set your heart right with Him, you can say "amen," but remember to keep your a's long. If not, you'll always be saying "AH! Men!" just like Virginia, but don't tell her I said that. Oh, that Virginia, bless her heart.

### Third Shift

*Scott T. Hutchison*

Simple and mindless, some of them. All their days:  
old, in line, the same. Others doing what they gotta do  
to feed kids, flush a toilet, keep the nicotine  
and formaldehyde squinting through the veins.

I'm here, toeing the line. A biblical plague of termites  
has ravaged the joints and vertebrae of my own body,  
gnawed and scrounged them down to stumps, sawdust.  
We make boxes here, wooden boxes. Whenever  
a fellow worker bites it, then everybody on the shift  
chips in unpaid time, while the owner  
provides raw materials. We make a big box.

I can't make it hammering out life  
as a working man of muscle and speed,  
vigorously pounding all the way to the Big Box.  
So I nudge, let it happen: the machinery is precise, lead-heavy  
and crushing. And just like that--my life begins changing.

I can't labor this way, body-mind frazzled,  
dramatically traumatized by living  
and dangerous decisions—a condition  
that might last for a long long time. I've  
studied on it: two-thirds base pay  
will start me out, disability compensation  
paperwork will be filed by someone with fingers,  
a lump sum settlement will waltz down  
the company aisle between the front-end loaders  
and the final docking. The categorization of emotional stress  
will lock me in a subsidized apartment,  
my meds will come monthly in the mail  
like atomic clockwork. Some of the eyes around me  
widen. They've seen it before. They've seen worse.  
They keep biding their time, building cheap boxes.

## Enough About You

*Alison Stone*

Sweet, eager, shy – tech geeks wined and dined me.  
The cute traffic cop flirted, then fined me.

Cravings wake under a cloud-veiled moon.  
Chamomile and a lap cat unwind me.

Punchline Jewish mother bleeding in a  
dark room. *Go out, have fun, Dear. Don't mind me.*

Before death's new initials, young, dumb, and  
in love, sliced by nightclub light, we shined – me

blue-haired, J. inked with coiled snakes. Emo  
kids in a pack on the corner remind me.

Staid corporate days stack up like dirty plates.  
The boss stole my idea then maligned me.

Night insects drowned out by a howling  
bloodhound. Buffed and polished egos blind me.

Crackle of static on the vinyl disc.  
Garland sang, *the clouds are far behind me,*

but they weren't. A pill for thin, a pill  
for sweet half-sleep. Who says life is kind? *Me,*

*too* – so many women speak out, but to what  
end? For years, men's hungers defined me.

On holidays, long lonely days, in our  
shared birthday month, I want to rewind – me

cushioned by taken-for-granted mother  
love. Her alive. In dreams she can't find me.

My daughter channels Williams. *This note's to  
say I took your rings. They sparkle.* Signed, *Me.*

Gold frames hold old Alisons – newborn, pig-  
tailed, sulky teen. Young, muscled, unlined me.

## The Mermaids of Lake Cane

Michael Zahn

“Mermaids at night, sailors take fright.”

*[Ancient adage that I just made up.]*

Many a sailor has gone insane  
upon spying the mermaids of Lake Cane.

After a night of too much beer,  
these sailors claim that they can hear  
the mermaids sing in tones divine:

“Do not fear, the water’s fine.”

In dead of night, in full moonlight,  
the mermaids lure the sailors in  
with flips of their tails and saucy grins.

As legend tells it, the sailors succumb  
because they’re drunk (and also dumb).

Next morning, the sailors wake in their beds  
with soaking wet clothes and huge throbbing heads.

Ask them what happened, you’ll only get groans  
and pleas that you speak in much gentler tones.

The fable ends here, the moral is clear:

If, while drinking too much Yuengling,  
you think that you hear mermaids singing,  
and it sets your senses tingling,  
let those feelings slide right past.

Ahoy! Avast! A midnight splash would be half-mast.

Batten your hatches! Put down all beers, including Pabst.

Don’t lose your head, set sail for bed,

‘cause the mermaids of Cane are creations to dread.

Momma sold her body every night in front of our family delicatessen. Her name was Aisha, a Turkish immigrant with midnight eyes and olive skin. As a little girl I watched her through the store window, entranced by her black stilettos and the flash of thigh in her swishy red skirt. Her black hair swung like a cape down her back as she paced at the corner, then draped herself against the street lamp.

My Poppa, Emil, after cooking all day, swept the floor every night after closing. I'd sit at the counter in a frilly dress sipping a strawberry fizz and watch him. He was bald at the crown, his head bowed like a giant, wilting sunflower that's seen the last of summer. I'd stare at the bare spot on his head and at the hooked arch of his back as he pushed the broom past the soda fountain lined with cherry red stools and in between tables crowded earlier with customers eating pastrami and rye. He swept the aisles, shucking his head in like a turtle in his shell.

Poppa never looked at Momma in the evening, her thin, curvy body a nervous jet of energy, stopping periodically to strike a pose. I was six the first time I saw her get in a stranger's car. When the door slammed, Poppa's body jerked as he held onto his broom. He didn't look up as she drove off in a man's vehicle. The engine sounded like firecrackers exploding; I was scared she'd never return. "Poppa! Where's Momma going?"

He stared at his broom. "She get something for store. She back soon, Lena."

I waited at the counter a long time, the fizz gone from my soda. When Momma returned to her corner, I ran to the glass door. Poppa's arm stopped me. I crept back to my stool and watched her sway on her high heels until the next car prowled to the curb. Poppa kissed my forehead and put his arm around me. "Everything okay."

That night, in bed with my big sister Kirin, I asked, "Where does

Momma go in cars?”

“Little Lena, Poppa says we’re not to know for our own good.” We lay close with our arms around each other and listened through the walls to our parents hiss about money.

Early the next morning Momma was up bustling in the crowded apartment where we lived above the store. Wiping strands of black hair off her face, she stirred couscous on the stove, set the table and called us to eat. She never stopped moving all day, a sparrow darting in her white waitress uniform, serving customers, no chitchat.

I loved making milkshakes and hoped for overflows to slyly lick off my fingers when no one was looking. Once Momma caught me and slapped me across the face. The earth tilted and I felt like nothing. I slunk off to the kitchen and helped Poppa shake oil from the French fry baskets. He hugged me under his arm; his sweat dampened my shoulder as I nestled close and he fed hot French fries into my mouth.

Sunday was the best day because the deli was closed. Momma slept late wrapped in Poppa’s arms. When they awoke, Kirin and I served them in bed on a blue-flowered tray, hot tea and pastries that were allowed only on Sunday. Momma looked extra pretty, her face relaxed, long dark hair loose, her eyes and mouth wide with love. “Come,” she’d say, and pat the space beside her. Poppa would scoot over and we’d slip under the covers on either side, her arms a warm sun around us.

On Sundays she was our real Momma, the one who braided our hair and read us *Arabian Nights* at bedtime. When Monday came she disappeared. I looked for her all week, hoping she’d touch me and smile. I needed a reminder she was still inside those no-nonsense eyes as she whipped through tasks.

\*

We lived in San Francisco during the sixties. Money was tight. Momma’s night job was the great unsaid that surrounded our family like a barb-wired fence, no questions asked. Profits from the store



back then were so skimpy my parents could barely pay the bills, until her body became their best asset. Men with brawny arms and tattoos, others in suits and ties, came in during the day to appraise what they'd buy later that night.

She knew she was beautiful. In the afternoon, when there were few patrons, she'd pose, one hand on her jutted-out hip. She'd hold the pose for a few seconds, then speed up, carrying plates, and taking orders. Right before she broke her pose, she gave Poppa, cooking in the back, a look. You could feel the intensity of her luminous eyes as if he were the only person there.

One night at dinner Kirin asked, "Momma, Poppa, how did you meet?" Silence punched the air.

The mystery of their meeting remained sealed until Momma's younger sister from Istanbul moved two blocks away. Aunt Sophie weighed three hundred pounds and loved to laugh. I was twelve then and pudgy from sneaking food. Kirin and I visited Sophie frequently after school. Nestled close to her on the couch, she fed us Almond Joys and told us stories of growing up in Turkey. That's how we learned that Mamma had grown up in a brothel.

Sophie and Aisha had lived in a house of women: their grandmother, mother, aunts and cousins; their bodies were the family business. Fathers were unknown and unimportant. When times were dry, the women took off their panties in the alley for a doorway quickie in exchange for groceries.

"Is where your momma and poppa met," Aunt Sophie said, chewing a Snicker. "He was errand boy, seventeen when he start work for us. He had full head curly hair. Your momma was fifteen. Shy glances that flamed. They ran away on her eighteenth birthday.

Kirin hunched forward. "What was she like then?"

Aunt Sophie chuckled. "She knew how to please men. Your father got good deal. And he knew how to be bossed by women. Perfect match."

"How does she please men?" I whispered.

Aunt Sophie rolled her eyes and waved her fat hands. “Here, Lena, try Three Musketeers. You will love.” I gobbled it and wanted more.

\*

During the day my parents spoke a sparse language of drudgery and commands. “Rye bread, not pumpernickel. Hurry.” Once in awhile Momma did a Marilyn Monroe pose, and held it until Poppa stopped cooking and gazed at her, all fire in that look between them.

I was hungry all the time. We were restricted to falafels, apricots and hummus, and sometimes lamb, all carefully portioned by my parents. We weren’t allowed to eat the deli food, except one pastry on Sunday. “Only for customers,” Momma said and slapped our wrists if we dared to touch. I begrudged the strangers eating our food and resented Momma for treating them more special.

Staring at cakes and pies in the pastry case made me frantic with desire. I imagined the sweetness sluicing down my throat and dreamed of gorging on whipped cream and chocolate strawberries. Sometimes, while Momma manned the street corner and Poppa wasn’t looking, I hid food in my room, salami tucked in socks, pie wrapped in wax paper beneath my underwear, red licorice inside my pillowcase.

In junior high I read about prostitutes. I knew what Mamma was, but we were forbidden to speak of it. Word got out on the street. Kids taunted me, “There goes Elephant Butt, the whore’s daughter. A skinny boy threw nuts at me. “Eat your peanuts, fatso.” Sometimes the emptiness in me got so big I cut school and snuck into the storeroom. I ate until I couldn’t feel anymore. My clothes got tighter.

\*

At fourteen, I spied on Momma as she prepared for night. When the door to her room was ajar, I inched close. She sat at her pink vanity and transformed herself from a white waitress uniform, hair pulled tight under a net, into slinky mini dresses with her ebony hair loose. I watched her slide her shapely legs into black seamed stockings

snapped into a lacy garter belt. She applied a wand of mascara to her eyes and dabbed Taboo between her small round breasts.

\*

One summer day the heat shimmered over Poppa and Momma in the backyard. I hid against the screen door inside the dark storeroom.

“You killing me,” he said.

“It kill me, too, Emil. You know that.”

That night in their room the bed rocked so hard I thought he was hitting her.

\*

As the years went by the store flourished. There was plenty to eat, not just for the customers, but for us, too, fried chicken and mashed potatoes with gravy. At Christmas the tree bulged with gifts. Poppa bought Momma a mink coat and said, “Now you stop.”

A week later she was out after dark in her mink coat. At first Poppa swept the floor slowly. Then he smashed the broom in pieces and raced upstairs. He charged into the night with a gun. Later I found out it was a toy pistol. But that night, as Poppa waved it above his head, shouting at Momma, it looked real. He pulled her inside and pushed her upstairs. Within minutes their bed banged the walls. I didn’t understand why she sold her body; we had enough money.

\*

At seventeen, I was five feet, eight inches tall and weighed two hundred thirty three pounds. It wasn’t just the Lay’s potato chips every day. It was the deli pecan pie I’d become addicted to, and the raspberry cheesecake that sat so pretty on its lacy white doily. I had rules of conduct though. Not one bite until the lights were out, the store swept, the customers gone. I devoured whatever sweets were left over, filching them, at the end of the day when Poppa’s back was turned. He was so adamant about having the freshest food, he threw out leftovers. Momma screamed, “Don’t waste. Can sell next day cheaper money. You dumb as fruit fly.”

My senior year in high school, I was arrested for shoplifting

Lay's. Other kids my age marched against the Vietnam War and got stoned at love-ins in Golden Gate Park. Part of me wanted a hippie boyfriend to dance with at Jimi Hendrix concerts. Instead, I sprawled on my bed reading *True Confession* magazines.

The month I got busted Momma was arrested for prostitution. She hadn't been out since the toy gun. Right in front of our family, people on the street staring, the police handcuffed her and drove her to jail.

In court, we were forced to talk about what she did. Poppa hunched in the witness stand. "She went on errands for store." His voice croaked and broke my heart. We followed Poppa's lead on the witness stand and said, "We did not know." It was only the Christ bible we put our right hand on and swore to tell the truth, not the holy Koran; we weren't really lying. Afterwards I gorged on cake.

Two weeks later, fully clothed in the tub, I cut my wrists vertically with a pocketknife. I would have bled to death if Kirin hadn't found me and screamed until the ambulance sirened me away. Before authorizing my release, the hospital social worker made me see a psychiatrist. Someone must have clued the shrink about our family's court drama.

"Did you try to kill yourself because your mother was jailed for prostitution?" That was the first question Bertrand Gold asked me. He was in his mid-thirties, short and lean with a bald crown like Poppa's, a wreath of black hair and sepia eyes. I liked him. It was the first time in my life I met someone who didn't beat around the bush. He was the first man I was attracted to.

I leaned forward so he could see my ample breasts beneath the milky hospital gown. Feeling numb as a mannequin, I said, "Maybe."

He glanced at my bosom, took off his wire-rimmed spectacles and placed them slowly on the table next to my hospital bed. His dark eyes focused on me. "How did it feel when your mother went to jail?"

Feel? My mouth quivered. No one had ever asked me that

question. “I don’t know,”

He leaned forward. “I want to know how you felt.”

“Ashamed, alone.” The words burned my mouth.

He sat back in his chair. “Good. Now you’ve begun the journey.” His gentle voice made me feel safe, a spotlight of attention I’d never experienced. Drops splotched my gown. Surprised, I touched my wet face. I hadn’t felt the tears until then; it was as if someone had opened a door I didn’t know existed.

I saw Bertrand Gold once a week for six months. He helped me release some of the anger I felt toward Momma for the shame she put us through, but not all of it. I held onto a chunk, hoarding it like a truffle. His tender voice lapped over me as I gazed at his long fingers and imagined them combing my hair. I sat as close as possible and leaned toward him, hoping he’d caress me and brush my lips with his. It felt real and urgent. I longed to shout: *Stop talking about my stupid mother and talk about us.*

“Your mother had a lot of power in your family with all of you complicit in her silence,” Bertrand said on our sixth visit. Again, he asked how I felt about Momma being a harlot. All I could think of was the mystery of watching her dress in stilettos and silky skirts and yearning to be as beautiful as her.

He bent toward me over his desk cluttered with papers and clasped his powerful hands. “How did you feel pretending for years not to see?”

“Like I was nothing.”

His words turned on faucets of emotion I didn’t know were there. When he talked about my feelings, it felt like he touched my inner self and helped me realize part of me loathed Momma, and the other side adored her. Every appointment was marked in stars on my calendar. He knew me better than anyone; he made me bubble up. Running and fasting, I lost thirty pounds. Giddy, I dressed up for our meetings in black fishnet stockings, platform shoes and revealing tops. He ignored my pathetic seduction attempts, my aching stares

from mascara-fringed lashes.

On our last visit, he cleared his throat. “Your behavior is seductive toward me. This is a normal reaction from a patient. It’s called transference.” He picked up a silver ballpoint and twirled it in his handsome fingers. Glints of light sparked off the pen till he stopped and looked at me, the ballpoint a steady beam between our eyes. “I am flattered by your interest, but I can only be your psychiatrist. Nothing more. Have you considered that unconsciously you are acting out your mother with me? Trying to get closer to me by behaving like her?”

I couldn’t breathe, as if punched in the gut. I slumped in my chair, head down as the bones in my body withered. I hated being compared to Momma. Did he think I was bad like her? The worst news was the smack-in-the-face-reality that he would never return my affections. To be tossed aside with some psychological jargon I didn’t understand insulted me. Transference? Like transferring from one bus to another? Is that how he saw me, hopping from one man to another like Aisha the whore?

He tilted his head, his eyes careful. “I’m sorry I offended you. See you next week at the same time?” I stood up carefully, as if pieces of me might break, and walked out stiffly. *Save your sorrys, freak.* I dashed into Safeway and bought three bags of Lay’s, sour cream, barbecue and extra crispy. No way would I shoplift, attempt suicide, or do anything foolish enough to land across his desk again.

I was sore about Bertrand for a long time and, with the exception of Poppa, leery of men. They seemed like vultures, cawing their bragging noises, devouring a woman as if her only purpose was to feed them her flesh. All through my senior year and two years at community college, where I got my AA degree in restaurant management, men didn’t look at me. No one asked me out. I was a big fat nothing and didn’t care. Not after what happened to Momma.

She stopped street walking after her arrest. Over the years she shriveled to a wilted reed, the dance of her limbs depressed, her chest



sunken as if concealing shame. She hid upstairs in our apartment. Kirin and I took over her duties and waited on customers.

Poppa and Momma wove themselves into a cocoon of love. He spoon-fed her delicacies from the old country. Sitting on the couch, holding hands, she sang him Turkish love songs. Their undying love for each other mystified me until I remembered what Bertrand had said. “These are life’s delicate mysteries, asking us to accept what we don’t understand.”

\*

When Momma died from cancer, Poppa’s heart broke. He died a few years later of emphysema and left me in charge of the delicatessen. Kirin used to help out. Compared to my tiny moon, she lived in the galaxy of men. If she could take a bath full of men and wrap herself in a man-robe and purr all night, she would. “Men,” she used to say, a hand on her twitching hip, “fastest way to pump your ego.”

For decades I’d been like an enormous size twenty-two helium balloon floating through space, unconnected to people or work. I was thirty-five when I read Bertrand Gold’s obituary in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. His death was my stop-eating-yourself-to-death-wake-up call. I had tried several unsuccessful diets. Overeaters-Anonymous, jogging and smaller portions had helped, but the scale barely budged, until I gave up sugar, which was as painful as breaking up with the lover I’d never had.

After a few years of being sugar-free, I bought new clothes to accommodate my fluctuating sizes that ranged from twelve to sixteen. Men smiled; one called me Rubenesque. To maintain a stable weight, I hurled my energy into twelve-hour days at the Deli, hired a marketing consultant and devoured gourmet cookbooks. I wanted to make The Deli more than a cheeseburger joint. Immersing my palate in international flavors, including Thai and Bangladesh, I changed the deli’s name to Damak, Turkish for palate.

How did I work twelve hours a day surrounded by delicious food without bloating into an elephant? I was strict. Victory depended on

obeying the No Sugar Law. The tricky part was the intoxication of smells and visuals, thus the Daily Weigh Yourself Law, which dictated how much or how little I ate. The sweetness of Clementine's helped conquer the desire to gorge. Running five miles every other day around Golden Gate Park gave me strength and power.

I hired a new chef, Henry O'Malley, a maestro with food; he invented combos of delectable tappas with biryanis and Egyptian rice. Word got out about the food and business zoomed. Eight years younger than me, Henry was kind like Poppa, chubby with Irish red hair, a sweet face and freckles. When I caught Henry staring at me, I pretended not to notice. The way he looked at me, deep, as though he understood me, reminded me of Bertrand. Everyday I wore something snazzy.

Henry called me into the kitchen before the lunch rush hour. "Come taste this pasta Bolognese sauce." Spoon-feeding me, his hand shook and his eyes were smitten wide. I put my hand over his to keep the spoon steady and swallowed. The flavor hit my taste buds full force.

Careful to not look at him, struggling for control, I said, "How did you do this?"

His grin was so big I thought his lips would stretch off his face. "Sicilian olives and apricot Brandy."

The lunch crowd entered. I whispered, "Ciao," and walked backwards out of the kitchen, watching him as my red dress swished above my knees. Moments later, I noticed Henry from the open kitchen window staring at me. Like an automatic reflex, my body slipped into pose. Ever so casually, I arched my back and pushed out my chest. Delighted by his rapt attention, I sped to the next customer, filled with rapture, like the helium produced in the stars.





## **Mother Who Remains**

*David W. Hart*

It still feels like yesterday  
We spoke, and again today.  
You said to write a poem  
With religion in it.  
You asked for faith, more faith.

I stand here thinking, phone in hand.  
What did we say to each other?  
This room is bordered by candelabras  
And other spiritual tchotchkes that  
You gave to me. They burn brightest  
When I miss you.

I try to see the light from a distant spectrum  
The one that guides your path  
And all the history that remains  
propels into my future.

Your faith has the deep red glow of solid embers  
Self-perpetuating light into eternity.  
Mine has the dull hue of an over-ripe peach  
With an odor to match.

You never asked for this poem.  
That's not how passive aggressive works.  
But you know that I know.  
So I grant to you your world  
All that I can muster.  
When I miss you  
I light the candles in the window  
Waiting for you to see them.

I light the candles  
Every  
Day.



**The Driftless is Calling and I Must Wander**

*Josie Dechant*



## Norwegian Cooking

*Nancy Kay Peterson*

She bends to her task rolling lefse. There is a cadence that's unmistakable: thunk thinder thunk thinder. It takes stubborn persistence to make lefse good and thin. Flour spills on the kitchen table, a dusting of new snow. She pauses to turn the lefse on the grill. She did this with mother every Christmas. Now she does it in case the neighbors come to call. She can freeze the lefse. It won't go to waste. With the turning stick her father made her mother she takes the lefse off the grill, sets it in damp towels. The new one she's rolled out is worried off the cheesecloth. She molds a fistful of dough into the shape of her world.

## Procrastinator

*Steve Denehan*

Yesterday I put off dinner  
until the day slipped by and so  
I went without

today I got up and told myself  
that I would do my run early  
get it out of the way  
freeing myself up  
for the rest of the day

instead, I found other things to do  
emptying the tumble dryer lint tray  
reorganising the bathroom cabinet  
watching YouTube nonsense  
leaving my run as late as possible  
at which point  
the world was grey, and it was raining

instead of jumping into the shower after  
I sat in the kitchen, saturated  
playing a video pool game  
on my phone  
until I was stiff and the cold  
was through me

the dishes are piled high in the sink  
the clothes are stacking up  
I tell my wife to leave them  
that they are on my radar  
that I will get to them  
and I mean it  
at the time

I had intended to write this poem  
last week

## **The Great Writer and His Process**

*Steve Denehan*

A writer, a great writer  
was asked for his secret  
just how does he write  
such powerful poems  
he talked about his process  
how he would find a quiet time  
in a quiet room and fall  
into a kind of meditation  
during which he would search  
deep within himself  
earnestly trying to reach depths  
previously unplumbed  
he stated that often, he would surprise himself  
discover more about himself  
free himself  
from himself  
it all sounded quite pretentious  
but, stuck for a poem today and with nothing  
to lose  
I decided to try it  
closing the sitting room door behind me  
I turned off my music  
sat on the couch  
opened the laptop  
the silence was pure  
so pure that I could hear it  
I closed my eyes and waited to tumble  
into myself  
minutes passed and it occurred to me  
that the writer  
great as he was  
never explained what to do  
when a person journeys  
deep into themselves  
to find  
that there is nothing

## Cenote

*Jennifer Hernandez*

Dive to the bottom  
where you will find  
skeletal remains of virgins  
sacrificed for good crops  
or the end of a plague.

Maybe grasshoppers  
rained from the sky.  
Maybe a hurricane.  
Whatever the disaster,  
the body of a teenage girl  
was sure to appease  
the hungry gods  
who lurk in the corners  
of crystal cave waters.

If it worked then, why not now?  
But maybe this time she doesn't  
have to stay underwater. We're more  
advanced now, after all.

Maybe this time the god will be appeased  
with a kiss or a Kit Kat bar,  
maybe he won't need to devour her whole.

Maybe the adults can try and solve  
their own problems for a change,  
instead of placing the burden  
on a girl barely old enough  
to drive a car, who can't even vote  
or legally marry in most states, a girl  
who can't travel outside the US  
without the written consent  
of a legal guardian.

Perhaps saving humanity  
is a rather steep demand  
of a pubescent virgin.

Perhaps she's better off  
doing the deed, thus  
rendering herself disqualified  
from the equation.

Perhaps she'd rather fight  
for climate change and  
universal healthcare  
as more effective measures  
to defeat what ails the planet.

Perhaps she'd like to live a quiet life,  
go to college, marry (or not),  
have a house full of babies or cats.

Perhaps she's brave enough  
to say no to the priests  
who would throw her over the edge.



## Food for Thought at Philosophy Hall

Rikki Santer

It was a brisk, fall evening on campus when I had misread the time for the symposium *On Knowing* and got to the lecture a bit early. Having side-stepped dinner, I decided to look for a vending machine and found one in the dimly lit basement. Its bill acceptor was a bit sticky but it took my crumpled dollar anyway and I was relieved because I knew it would never take a same dollar twice. The glass case was smudged with handprints and grime which made it hard to decipher the offerings, but my stomach was growling so I tried A1 on the key pad. A tray rumbled and then inside the pick-up box sat a Rhode Island Red with her egg. Which one landed there first I could not decipher. I had no appetite for raw yoke and frankly I was hoping for a Snickers, so I tried another dollar, this one crisp and maybe clean of any residue of paradox. But when I pressed B2, a can of Schrödinger's Ocean Fish Pâté for Kittens tumbled down the chute, and I promptly realized I wasn't *that* famished. One more dollar bill in my wallet, a last stab at probability. What outcome could a Z13 provide? Again the grumbling from the machine's belly and then in its dispenser an either/or sandwich with a bright packet of sweet and sour, after which I promptly made my way up to the top floor, just in time to take a seat in the balcony's last row where the rustling of cellophane was mine alone to hear.

## Chicken Envy

Rikki Santer

You are a walking flower  
                                pecking away  
  in my neighbor's backyard.  
With your thin lipped grin  
                                you say things to me in chicken.  
  You might as well  
                                be queen of something  
  so I imagine your tiny high heels  
  and tiara of golden kernels.

You give me thicker yokes  
                                than Kroger's     and most nights I dream  
  of cooing         *My Sweet Girl*  
  as you nap  
  in my lap.

Remnants from  
  Chick-fil-A or Colonel Sanders  
no longer     in my trash can  
  and Henny Pennys muted  
                                in my Twitter feed.

How mild your terraced life  
                                your reliable rhythms of emptyfull.  
  Your chickless eggs sustenance  
for my fruitless ovaries of sorrow.

## Orpheus in Silicon

*Ben Nardolilli*

Denying the world and transferring real life to the Beyond,  
despite my prayers, it's taking a long time to load, doctrine or not  
there's got to be a better way to share my concerns and send them  
away from this dying planet mangled by distant Zeus, Osiris,  
and whatever other guises the demiurge is taking this summer

No movement, and taxes are still due, the other acolytes  
tell me on the customer service line to be patient, the Orphic ways  
are hard to understand but they bless eventually, with that bliss  
which comes from letting go, they swear progress is still possible,  
I just have to give it more time and the church a little more money

We worship in a small circle, and that might be a problem, or  
THE PROBLEM, the other initiates say, if only there were more  
of us the power would be great, the glory more than assured  
and collectively we'd transcend over the humdrum regulated world  
always forcing us to lower our expectations and be bored with it all

Your Soul is My Armrest

*Josephine Dechant*



## **In Shock**

*E. Martin Pedersen*

They call you at work to come  
The love of your life just died  
You say 'okay' and get in your car  
You drive not too fast not wanting to arrive  
You don't turn on the radio  
Your mind goes in all directions  
But you don't think of anything important  
You turn on the radio  
You should be very sad  
When does that come?  
You let pedestrians pass  
You stop for gas, fill the tank.

Everyone looks like you  
They'd never guess  
Your moment of truth  
There are practical concerns  
Money to pay  
Your sister is taking care of it, Beth,  
You sit in the kitchen where they put you  
Not looking at the full cup of tea  
They put before you  
It's an Earl Grey day  
Appropriate, tennis weather  
That person I saw walking down the street  
I would have sex with them right now.

Nobody else feels like I do  
yet everyone I see looks so shocked  
everyone in cars and at Wendy's  
at the Mall in shock  
wondering how to get through today  
without drugs  
hit by a bus of sadness  
we're all in shock  
not like before when we were young.

They're not  
the walking dead  
They won't eat  
your soul  
They're full already  
from eating  
their own.

## Work Week

*Stephen Benz*

The drive's a bitch  
day in, day out.  
You're second-guessed  
and full of doubt,

going nowhere  
fast as you can,  
trying your best  
to shirk the plan.

Answer the phone.  
Fill out forms.  
Seize the day  
then watch the storms.

Write a memo  
when profits dip.  
Take a pill—  
just get a grip.

Eat cold Chinese.  
Sift through dross.  
Swear to God,  
copy the boss.

Adjust your tie  
when night falls.  
Go in fear  
down empty halls.

Bear your burden  
and walk the wire.  
Read the rules, man.  
You can't retire.

You're fed up  
so let them know.  
Someone must pay  
before you'll go.

It's over, pal.  
All's said and done.  
Just let it go—*Sir,*  
*put down that gun.*



## Ronnie

*Craig Cotter*

Ronnie Wood,  
my best friend for 3 years,  
sat next to me  
playing oboe.  
I played clarinet.

In second grade I asked him,  
“When we’re grown-up  
can we get married?”  
He said, “Yes—”

but must have told his parents at dinner  
that night.  
The next day he never talked to me again

though we were in school together  
8 more years.

2

Nancy plays the oboe piece  
from “The Mission—”

describes a man climbing a waterfall.

## Holy Raiment

*Laurence Snyder*

What would God wear? Not a wooden steeple  
Nor a flying buttress. He wouldn't be  
Caught dead in either. But then some people  
Have said that dead is something he couldn't be.

I don't think he'd wear a vestment, maybe  
A robe, but not purple. He would have too  
Much dignity. Naked like a baby  
He'd offend the multitudes. Even you.

A bishop's miter on his holy hair?  
Ornate jeweled signets on his ringed fingers?  
No. You'd know him anyway anywhere:  
The trumpeters, the angelic singers.

Would he wear reversed collars? A wimple  
Like his brides? Probably not. I suppose  
He would want to keep everything simple  
Not pay too much attention to his clothes.

No high fashion and yet nothing too odd.  
Clothes make the man but don't do much for God.

## Prophecy

*Margaret B. Ingraham*

Brian arrived at the festival today  
from his summer tour in Italy  
and gave us his concert play  
of Schumann's "Forest Scenes."  
As he approached the baby grand,  
he instructed us to listen past  
one sweeping movement and glide deep  
inside the score where plain birdsong  
is subtly transformed into bright prophecy.  
I tried to do just as he asked  
but I could neither plumb the depths  
of the music's mystery nor pretend  
to understand precisely when composer's  
notes became birdsong for him,  
nor could I vaguely comprehend  
what turned melody into utterances  
divine that he entreated skilled  
listeners with lyric ears to find.  
I could not hear bird or prophecy at all,  
because my attention had become solely  
transfixed on Brian's hands and what  
they might portend—the way they fluttered  
wildly dark across ivory, at once enveloping  
and releasing all the keys, seeming to me  
to be both strange and prescient mimicry  
of your heaving lungs and heavy heart,  
intent by then not so much on landing  
perfect final notes as they were  
in yearning to take wing.

## **Palm Reading**

*Brady T. Kamphenkel*

You say you'll take a look at my palm  
by which you mean my poem.  
You misspelled it.

I wish, now, it was my palm  
you were willing to take  
a look at— its lines

are better, probably.  
You have to hold it, if it's to be  
comprehended. You would grasp

its meaning, running your fingers  
up and down soft-fading impressions.  
The geography

would mean something to you. To me  
nothing is meant by it. The ripples spreading—  
to what shores? —touch on nothing.

The flesh does not reflect stars.  
That light is pure diffusion against my skin.  
You tell me those lights are fixed,

just as the ripples in a hand stay still  
and form the lines we draw in constellations  
with our minds.

Tell me, then, what is coming. Unfold for me  
the future. Hold it in your hand, a hand  
and every line it holds.





Above the whisper and twitter and water sounds of the summer afternoon, Garrett heard the other sound, the sound of a human near him. For a moment he thought it was Cynthia, his wife, but between the thought and the looking up, he remembered. Cynthia was not here on the waterside patio of the Shore Club. Cynthia was forbidden the intoxicating whitecapped blue of the water, the friendly heat of the sun. Cynthia lay in that white room at St. Cloud's, her yellow hair on the pillow like the hair of an angel against billowing clouds.

Then he looked up—up an expanse of leg to a white bathing suit to the tanned face and blue eyes regarding him intently. She had just climbed the ladder from the waters of Long Island Sound after a swim from the float and stood there dripping. With a small jolt, he recognized Bill Connor's daughter, Suzanne, who had somehow emerged from the vague picture he'd had of a skinny schoolgirl into this startlingly attractive woman.

"Hello," he said. "Seen you here before, have I?"

He found her steady gaze disconcerting. He wondered what was going on under the cloud of red-brown hair. "Seen me, Garrett Lowell? I've seen *you* every time your car has come in or out of the Club, every time you've walked across the lawn or lain on the float or sat in the lounge before dinner with your newspaper in your hands but your eyes somewhere else, thinking of *her*. And I've worked at building up the courage to talk to you, even though they all said you'd never even look at me. All this so you could look up now and say nonchalantly, Seen you?"

"I'm Suzanne Connor," she said. "You know my dad. I believe his office is in the same building as your law firm. I know that you do all those wills and estates for everybody in town. There sure are a lot of wills and estates in a town like this."

It was an upscale commuting town in Westchester County, green and leafy, with a long waterfront of beaches and rocky shores.

“Yes,” he said absently, and she saw his eyes travel the length of her. Then he looked at his watch and saw that it was quarter to four. It was the time it got worse for Cynthia, and she would clutch both sides of the mattress of the hospice bed, the borders of her world, as if they might slip away from her. Looking at her, he would grow hot and flushed, and he would savor this bondage of loving her so much that he lived the pain and happiness, not of one life, but of two.

Suzanne saw him go away from her and then come back to the patio. She thought she knew where he had been. This was one of the habits of his that they talked about at dinner parties or in the lounge when he wasn’t there.

“Like to sit down?”

Why had he said that?

She sat and dripped on the chair. *I should go change*, she thought, *but I have a feeling he might just disappear.*

He allowed himself another swift glance, and the picture of Cynthia that was still in the back of his mind became misty and unreal, as though Cynthia were—he couldn’t even *think* the word—as though Cynthia were only a beloved memory.

“Last time I spoke to you,” he said, “it seems you were just getting out of high school.”

She laughed. “That was only eight years ago. It merely proves that you never quite woke up to the fact that I was alive. Since I got out of high school, I’ve done college and a master’s, and I’m applying to some psychoanalytic institutes. When I got out of high school, you were at Harvard Law, and when you were home, I’d see you in that nifty little red Spider convertible.”

“And now I’m an old man and a husband and father with a big unconvertible gray Buick.”

“And I’m still just a twenty-six-year-old kid with a silver convertible.”

“I still think of you as a different generation,” he said. “Bill Connor’s kid.”



“You must be all of thirty-four,” she said. “That’s terrible.”

His own laugh sounded new, he had heard it so infrequently in the past year.

“Precisely,” he said.

“I’ve even gone out with men of thirty-four,” she said. “Their age wasn’t a problem.”

She saw him look at his watch again. He had run away; she had almost certainly come on too strong. He stood.

“I’ve brought work home this weekend,” he said, “and tomorrow I’m driving up to see Garrett Jr.—he hates being called Junior—and Johnny at camp.”

Looking down at her, he saw the disappointment in her face, which she tried to hide by looking down. The sun on her hair as she lowered her head brought out the glints of red, like clay, like earth, he thought. He sat rooted, unable to take his eyes from the bright hair, the smooth, round shoulders, the line of her bent body that reminded him of devotion, as though she were a woman in some distant eastern land crouching before an idol. His hand reached out almost of its own accord as though it would touch her hair—and she looked up. When she saw his gesture, the joy came into her face again, drawing out the joy in him like a magnet. Then the moment was gone, and he thought, *Incredible that a mirage made of a bright summer day and a pretty young woman could be so convincing. Cynthia, help me, I must be getting very lonely.*

She thought, *He likes me. He’s attracted to me. But he’s also totally involved with Cynthia. The poor guy. What a terrible situation. She’s been sick so long. Dying, they say, some kind of cancer, for so long.*

But she realized that she didn’t really know what they say because she didn’t partake in the social life of the town. She was bored by the cocktail parties, and their gossip. She was younger than most of them, and she had been involved in her education. So she had never gotten involved in the Happy Hour or Unhappy Hour of the town. And she had a private joke, albeit a lame one. She had a private place on the

actual rocks of the seaside park. She climbed over a huge hill of rock and disappeared behind it, where there was a natural seat, a sort of bench in the rock right at the water's edge, and she would sit and watch the tranquil waves and luxuriate in the beauty of the scene, the handsome houses lining the shore, each with its private boat slip. At Happy Hour, they all had their liquor on the rocks. She was, literally, on the rocks.

She was lost in her sympathy for him, but she was also aware that something didn't add up. It was almost four on this lovely summer Saturday. Why wasn't he leaving for the hospice? She formulated a test question and spoke it sympathetically. "Do you visit her every afternoon?"

"I used to."

"Yes? What happened?"

He shifted uncomfortably. "They said she is so weak that visitors excite her too much."

She saw his posture become defensive, and when he spoke again, his voice was cold.

"I really don't want to talk about it."

"Forgive me," she said. "I should have realized that."

"Is that what they teach you at the psychoanalytic institute?"

"No. I have no excuse."

"Forget it," he said. He became silent. She thought that he would get up and leave and never talk to her again. A painful thought. *You blew it*, she told herself.

One last chance. "It's almost Happy Hour. Please let me buy you a drink, to make up for my rudeness." She made sure that her voice was cheerful and upbeat, her mood light. It worked. She thought he relaxed a bit.

"Sure, why not? But you should get into some dry clothes first."

\*

When they stood under the sign near the lockers that read, Women, with the arrow pointing to the right, and Men, arrow pointing left,

she said, "That makes it quite clear that this is where we part. See you in a few."

"Ah, yes, la différence."

She came back to the patio in a white dress that covered somewhat more than the bathing suit had, and they reclaimed their table.

*What do you want of me, Suzanne Connor? You know nothing can come of it.* He felt a strong need for the relief of ordinary conversation.

"You didn't tell me what you're doing now. Working? Volunteering? Going to luncheons? Sitting on the terrace with a white wine?"

"I'm having a wonderful do-nothing summer deciding what I want to be when I grow up," she said. "Right now I'm scrounging off my parents, but I'm looking around for an apartment in the city. Maybe in the Village. Where I can run out and sit on the stoop."

"Sounds like fun."

"Yes, fun. When I see those cartoons of the swami sitting on the mountain and someone asks him the purpose of life, I picture him saying, 'The purpose of life is having fun.'"

They chuckled, and since the waiter hadn't appeared, she got up and went to the bar to get the wine herself. He watched her. This was the pleasantest time he'd had since...

Now his mind started drawing forbidden pictures.

He saw her on the lawn in her white bathing suit, throwing a ball to eight-year-old Junior, while five-year-old Johnny looked on. Her tanned skin was dappled by sun sifted through the trees. He thought she would make a wonderful mother for sons.

They talked until the sky darkened. To her surprise, he looked directly and trustingly into her eyes and said, "Someday Cynthia will be in remission. I'll put the boys into the car and pick her up and take her home."

When the glasses were drained and the sky was darkening, they got into their respective cars and drove home. But he did say, "Will

you be here tomorrow?” and he saw that happy flash of smile again.

\*

The tomorrows multiplied, and they became buddies. Suzanne was ready for the next step that she knew wouldn't come. One night she had an erotic dream. They were in a bedroom floating through space above the water. He was naked, and he was peeling her white bathing suit off her. But that was all. She woke up, shaken.

It was a balmy Thursday. He would have to do without her this afternoon. She would go to a place she had often scorned because it was where everyone knew everything about everybody else and told everybody about it.

The place to go was The Westchester Inn with its outdoor patio on the waterfront, incredibly beautiful in summer, cozy in winter with its two crackling fireplaces. As she entered the crowded outdoor patio, she saw a mane of flaming red hair which she remembered belonged to Nancy. Nancy's friend Yvonne was with her. Both were old acquaintances from long-ago Happy Hours. She felt shy because she hadn't kept in touch, but they waved and called out to her and gestured to an empty seat at their table for four.

“Where have you been keeping yourself?”

“Mostly studying. Not very exciting.”

They talked about everybody and everything. But how to turn the conversation to Garrett without revealing her feelings for him? Neither she nor Garrett needed a breach of their privacy.

“You look fabulous,” Nancy said. “How do you stay so thin? I just added my bikini to the Salvation Army pile.”

“Well, I swim at the Shore Club every afternoon.”

Finally: “Does Garrett Lowell still hang out there?”

“Yes,” Suzanne said. “He's there often at drinking hour.”

“He used to be at the hospice every afternoon,” Yvonne said.

This was it. This was why she had come.

“Why not now?”

She was aware that they were both staring at her intensely.

“You didn’t know?”

“Know what?”

“I thought everyone knew.”

“What?”

“Cynthia Lowell died. Months ago.”

Suzanne couldn’t believe it. Was he crazy? Maybe nice crazy, but crazy. *Oh, Garrett. Dear Garrett. Is this the only way you can still get to the office? Still show love to your children? Still chat on the patio with an acquaintance? Now I will stay outside your castle walls, while you shelter inside them, alone with your pain.*

“That’s amazing,” she said to Nancy and Yvonne. “No, he didn’t tell me.”

Nancy said, “He is a nice, sane man who is stark raving mad on one subject, a nice, sane man with a spot of wild, incurable madness.”

“That’s so sad. Awful,” Suzanne said. “Terrible.”

She soon said nice-to-see-you-again and managed to walk to the silver convertible and, shaking noticeably, drove home.

\*

The next day, Garrett said, “I missed you yesterday. Heavy date?”

“No,” she said. “Just some family obligations. Should I let you know if I’m not coming?”

“Up to you,” he said. “If you want to.”

“I want to,” she said. “I will.”

And so they sat through the waning days of summer, on the patio with their chilled white wine. These were days of peace and an unimagined feeling of comradeship. Now that she knew, it was different. She felt nothing but compassion for him. Passion too, but it could wait.

Earlier in the day, she would often visit her secret place on the rocks. But around four, she would walk to the club, change into her bathing suit, and meet him on the patio. Sometimes they would swim to the float and lie there and talk. He was always happy to see her. Occasionally, she tested the emotional waters with a personal

question, carefully formulated. Once she said, "How are your boys getting along?" and he said, "They're doing quite well. My housekeeper takes good care of them. I'm praying for the day when Cynthia is in remission and I can take her home."

"That would be wonderful," Suzanne said.

An idea was forming in her mind. Not a radical idea at all, but one that signified to her another degree of closeness. On a day when the sunset was especially spectacular in lavender and blue and pink, they lay on the float and she said, "Did I ever tell you that I have a beautiful, secret place beside the water where no one can see me and no one could see us if I show it to you?" and he said, "It sounds lovely, take me there," and she said, "Tomorrow."

Tomorrow came and they ran over the rocks and around the bend and sat on the hidden rock bench. After they had sat there for a while, he took her hand. She thought, *So maybe he isn't the only crazy one. Maybe we could sit here forever. But soon we'll go back to our patio for chilled white wine.*

And so they did. It became a daily ritual that neither could live without. They sat, usually holding hands, and then went for their swim and their wine. He felt totally comfortable about it because she was just an old friend.

He had told her that he was driving up to his sons' camp in New Hampshire on Saturday, and to her surprise on Friday, he said, "Why don't you come with me?" and she said, "Sure."

On the volleyball court, one of the kids said to Johnny, "Is that your new mom?" and Johnny said, "I don't know." Junior chimed in: "I think she's just an old friend of Dad's." An older boy, looking at Suzanne in her short shorts and tank top, leaping to punch the ball, gave him an *Oh sure, do you expect me to believe that?* look.

After that trip, Suzanne felt that their relationship was as solid as the rocks they sat on, and Garrett felt more comfortable than ever because she was just an old friend.

Even when sex came and didn't go away, nothing changed much.

One day on their rock bench, he put his arms around her and kissed her, and his hands were inside her clothes where they had never been before.

And so later, at her place, it happened, and she felt as though she was finishing her earlier erotic dream, lying on a cloud above the sea with a totally wild and free Garrett, tasting unimaginable sensations.

And they never forget their daily sacred ritual of chilled white wine.



## **Dreamlife**

*John Tustin*

When we die it is the end of life as we know it  
But perhaps there is a dreamlife that comes after.

Not the dreams of sleep;  
Half-remembered atrocities of fear and inaction  
But a dreamlife –  
Drifting through the narrow river  
And falling into an ocean of endless choices,  
Innumerable timelines:  
Living them all differently and equally.  
You can pet every cat,  
Play fetch with every dog;  
Love all the perfectly created women of the mind's eye.  
Your son will always be 10 years old,  
Your daughter 7.  
He'll always ask you questions and believe your answers;  
She'll always complain laughingly about your bristly cheek  
Upon every kiss goodnight.

You'll pray with the mullahs in the masjid,  
Dance upon the water with your very own Christ  
Before sitting with him at an enormous table  
For the nightly Seder of dreamlife.  
You'll swim the sea  
And climb the mountain once impossible for you  
To meet the man atop who has lived so lonely  
That all he can believe in is God.

You'll kiss all the hers of your fantasies  
And live with them separately and simultaneously.  
So much reciprocated love after a life of almost none.

When we die it is the end of life as we know it  
But perhaps after we will live in a life of our dreams  
That is a million streams all flowing side-by-side  
Into a mouth of one happiness.

## **Elevators**

*Rob Cook*

If only people  
could be like elevators  
and skip age 13



## Contributors

**Gary Lee Barkow** studies mathematics and practices Tai Chi. He walks around feeling loved. He keeps a flashlight by his futon in case he has a brilliant idea at night. He doesn't know where math or poetry comes from, so he enjoys the mystery. He likes: Aeroplanes with propellers, earthworms, the San Francisco 49ers and AC/DC's, *It's A Long Way To The Top*.

**Joe Baumann** possesses a Ph.D. in English from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, where he served as the editor-in-chief of *Rougarou: an Online Literary Journal* and the *Southwestern Review*. He is the author of *Ivory Children: Flash Fictions*. Previous work has appeared in *Passages North*, *Phantom Drift*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Electric Literature*, *Electric Spec*, *On Spec*, *Barrelhouse*, *Eleven Eleven*, *Zone 3*, and elsewhere. He is founding editor and editor-in-chief of *The Gateway Review: A Journal of Magical Realism*. In 2019, he was a Lambda Literary Fellow in Fiction Writing. His debut short story collection, *The Plagues*, is under contract with Cornerstone Press and his debut novel, *I Know You're Out There Somewhere* will be released by Deep Hearts YA in fall 2022. ([joebaumann.wordpress.com](http://joebaumann.wordpress.com)).

**Steven Beauchamp** is Prof. Emeritus of English for Perimeter College, a multi-campus two-year division of Georgia State University in the Atlanta area. For some years Beauchamp edited poetry for Perimeter College's literary magazine, *The Chattahoochee Review*. Since retirement, he spends much of his time in southwest Florida. He has published 100+ poems in journals and reviews across the US and in Canada including *The Kansas Qtr.*, *The South Carolina Rev.*, *The California Poetry Journal*, *The Ecclectic Muse*, and many others.

**Stephen Benz** has published three books of essays, including *Topographies* and *Reading the Signs* (both with Etruscan Press) and a book of poems, *Americana Motel* (Main Street Rag.), along with essays in *New England Review*, *Creative Nonfiction*, *River Teeth*, and *Best American Travel Writing*. He lives in Albuquerque, where he teaches at University of New Mexico. ([stephenconnelybenz.com](http://stephenconnelybenz.com))

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**Cameron Bloch** enjoyed a rich career at The Associated Press as a photographer, reporter, writer and photo editor. He has exhibited photographs at venues including the University of Louisville's J.B. Speed

Museum, Yale University's Sterling Memorial Library, the Modernage and CPW25 galleries in New York, and Canio's Book Store in Sag Harbor. Newspapers and magazines world wide, including the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *People*, *Seventeen* and many dailies across America, have published his news and feature photos.

**Morgan Boyer** is the author of *The Serotonin Cradle* (Finishing Line Press, 2018) and a graduate of Carlow University. Boyer has been featured in *Kallisto Gaia Press*, *Thirty West Publishing House*, *Oyez Review*, *Pennsylvania English*, and *Voices from the Attic*. Boyer is a neurodivergent bisexual woman who resides in Pittsburgh, PA.

**Morgan Clark** is a senior at Carroll University in Waukesha, Wisconsin.

**Rob Cook** was a founding employee at Pixar and recipient of the first Oscar given for software. A childhood in rural east Tennessee was followed by a period of physical and spiritual wandering that eventually landed him in San Francisco. He studied physics at Duke, went to graduate school at Cornell and Caltech, played piano, rock climbed, meditated, and flew planes. He and his wife live in North Beach, and have a son in Brooklyn. He likes to live at the intersection of art, science, inner exploration, and worldly practicality, sprinkled liberally with adventure and fun. He has studied at the Writers Studio, and his work has been published or is forthcoming in *Evening Street Review*, *Jelly Bucket*, *Pennsylvania English*, *Soundings East*, *Visitant Lit*, and *Whistling Shade*.

**Craig Cotter** was born in 1960 in New York and has lived in California since 1986. His poems have appeared in *California Quarterly*, *Chiron Review*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Court Green*, *The Gay & Lesbian Review*, *Great Lakes Review*, *Hawai'i Review*, & *Tampa Review*. His fourth book of poems, *After Lunch with Frank O'Hara*, is available on Amazon. ([craigcotter.com](http://craigcotter.com))

**PW Covington** writes in the Beat tradition of the North American highway. His short fiction collection *North Beach and Other Stories* was named an LGBTQ Fiction finalist by the International Book Awards (2019). Covington lives two blocks off of Historic Route 66, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. ([PWCovington.com](http://PWCovington.com)).

**Josie Dechant** is a contemplator of the space within our subconscious minds and an avid observer of the layers within the world that surrounds the human experience. A seeker of brightening the journeys of others through pet therapy outings, unplanned road trips and random artistic endeavors.

**Darrell Dela Cruz's** work has appeared in *Saw Palm*, *The Minetta Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and *Studio One*. He has a blog where I analyze poems: [retailmfa.blogspot.com](http://retailmfa.blogspot.com). Darrell graduated with an MFA in Poetry from San Jose State University.

**Steve Denehan** lives in Kildare, Ireland with his wife Eimear and daughter Robin. He is the author of two chapbooks and three poetry collections. Winner of the Anthony Cronin Poetry Award and twice winner of Irish Times' New Irish Writing, his numerous publication credits include Poetry Ireland Review and Westerly.

**RC deWinter's** poetry is widely anthologized, notably in *New York City Haiku* (NY Times, 2/2017), *easing the edges: a collection of everyday miracles*, 11/2021, Patrick Heath Public Library of Boerne) *The Connecticut Shakespeare Festival Anthology* (River Bend Bookshop Press, 12/2021), in print: *2River*, *Event*, *Gargoyle Magazine*, *the minnesota review*, *Night Picnic Journal*, *Plainsongs*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Southword*, *Steam Ticket*, *The Ogham Stone*, *Twelve Mile Review*, *York Literary Review* among many others.

**Mary Ann Dimand** was born in Southern Illinois where Union North met Confederate South, and her work is shaped by kinships and conflicts: economics and theology, farming and feminism and history. Dimand holds an MA in economics from Carleton University, an MPhil from Yale University, and an MDiv from Iliff School of Theology. Her previous publications include: *The History of Game Theory Volume I: From the Beginnings to 1945*; *The Foundations of Game Theory*; and *Women of Value: Feminist Essays on the History of Women in Economics*, among others.

**Leisha Douglas**, a former psychotherapist and yoga teacher, has been blessed to help others in their deeply intimate, personal explorations for over thirty years. From 2001 to 2010, Douglas codirected the Katonah Poetry Series with Billy Collins and currently serves as consultant to the series committee. Leisha's work appears in *After the Pause*, *Bridge Magazine*, *Corium Magazine*, *The Cortland Review*, *Crack the Spine*, *decomp*, *Evening Street Review*, *Five on the Fifth*, *Forge*, *Glint Literary Journal*, *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *Helix*, *HitchLit Review*, *Hobart*, *The Midwest Review*, *The Minetta Review*, *Nonconformist Magazine*, *Upstreet*, and elsewhere.

**Lili Flanders** is a graduate of the Juilliard School of Drama and the Warren Wilson MFA Program for Writers. Her poetry, nonfiction and award-winning flash fiction have appeared in *The Comstock Review*, *Crosswinds Poetry Journal*, *Dash Literary Journal*, *The Bellevue Literary Review*, *Wigleaf*, and *The Vestal Review*. She teaches and writes in Los Angeles and Truro, MA.



**Sergey Gerasimov** lives in Kharkov, Ukraine. His writings span the gamut from philosophical poetry to surrealism and tongue-in-cheek fantasy. His stories appear in *Adbusters*, *Clarke'sworld Magazine*, *Strange Horizons*, and elsewhere. Author of several novels and more than a hundred short stories published mostly in Russian, he is a translator of Russian poetry and prose.

**Benjamin Harnett**, a poet, fiction writer, historian, digital engineer, and union organizer, has work in *Poet Lore*, *Entropy*, *the Evansville Review*, *Moon City Review*, and *Maudlin House*. He lives in Beacon, NY with his wife Toni and their collection of eccentric pets. He works for *The New York Times*.

**David W. Hart** teaches freshman composition, ethnic American literature and world literatures, and has published scholarly articles on literary and cultural studies in various journals. He has published a set of poems in the book *Empty Shoes: Poems for the Hungry and the Homeless*, and a poem in *Steam Ticket: A Third Coast Review*. Hart is currently writing a drama about his ancestors' arrival in the United States.

**Jennifer Hernandez** teaches immigrant youth and writes poetry, flash, and creative non-fiction. Recent publications include *Humanities ND Magazine* and *This Was 2020: Minnesotans Write About Pandemics and Social Justice in a Historic Year*. Her work can be found in the Nature Area Poetry Walk at Richfield Lake Park and the Mankato Poetry Walk and Ride. Jennifer shares her home with a portly tuxedo cat, two pandemic pups, three young adult sons, and a husband.

**Ann Howells** edited *Illya's Honey* for eighteen years. Her recent books are: *So Long As We Speak Their Names* (Kelsay Books 2019) and *Painting the Pinnwheel Sky* (Assure Press 2020). Chapbooks include: *Black Crow in Flight*, Editor's Choice in Main Street Rag's 2007 competition and *Softly Beating Wings*, William D. Barney Chapbook Competition winner (Blackbead Books, 2017). Ann's work appears in *Plainsongs*, *I-70 Review*, and *San Pedro River Review*.

**Scott T. Hutchison's** previous work has appeared in *The Georgia Review* and *The Southern Review*. New work is forthcoming in *The Evening Street Review*, *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, and *Naugatuck River Review*.

**Margaret B. Ingraham**, poet and photographer, is the author of *Exploring this Terrain* (Paraclete Press, 2020); *This Holy Alphabet*, lyric poems based on her original translation of Psalm 119 (Paraclete Press, 2009); and a chapbook, *Proper Words for Birds* (Finishing Line Press), nominated for the 2010 Library of Virginia Award in poetry. Her poetry appears in *The*



*Courtship of Winds, Evening Street Review, The Hollins Critic, MacGuffin, Mount Hope Magazine, Nonconformist Magazine, Off the Coast, Spiritus, THINK Journal, Visitant Lit, and Valparaiso Poetry Review.* Ingraham is the recipient of an Academy of American Poetry Award, a Sam Ragan Award, and numerous residential Fellowships at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. Margaret has twice collaborated with internationally recognized composer Gary Davison, most notably to create “Shadow Tides,” a choral symphony commissioned by Artistic Director Gretchen Kuhrmann for Choralis to commemorate the tenth anniversary of September 11th and performed on that date in 2011 in Washington, DC. She holds a BA from Vanderbilt University, an MA in English from Georgia State University, and pursued doctoral studies in English (with an emphasis on English Romantic Poetry) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ingraham resides in Alexandria, Virginia.

**Tim Jacobsen**, a 1989 Graduate of Luther College, loves to travel with his husband, Reuben Pacheco. During these travels he discovered his love of capturing natural moments on the streets of many cities throughout the world. One of his favorite cities for photographs is Havana, Cuba that provides a beautiful backdrop of urban decay. Jacobsen is the co-founder of FuseFX, a Visual Effects company with over 1200 employees worldwide. The work has been recognized through multiple Oscar and Emmy wins and can be seen in many major features and television shows today.

**Tom Jacobsen** is a director, animator, photographer, collaborator, editor, artist and Creative Director at VOLT Studios in Minneapolis. Tom is an impressionistic storyteller who loves to combine different mediums to create exciting work with a strong narrative. Many of his projects combine animation, drawings, digital sets, live action, and green screen to create work with an intelligent design and refreshing look. Tom's work has been recognized by MoMA, MTV Music Video Awards, The Show and film festivals around the world. He received a traditional art training at St. Olaf College in Minnesota and was awarded an MFA In film and animation from the UCLA School of Theatre, Film, and Television.

**Corinne Kaleta** is an actor, writer and comedian. She graduated last year from UW-La Crosse with a degree in Theater Performance, and minors in Arts Administration and Creative Writing.

**Brady T. Kamphenkel** lives and teaches writing in Duluth, Minnesota. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in Cave Wall, SLANT, 2River, and elsewhere. He is a graduate of the Stonecoast in Maine.

**Rachel Katz** has written for *The Health Care Blog* and has published *Fowl Weather* (Pyrite Press), a graphic novel illustrated by Stephanie Davidson. Her prose is forthcoming in *Talking River Review* and *Under the Sun*. She co-founded Able Health, a San Francisco-based healthcare tech company supporting better quality measurement in healthcare. Previously, Rachel was a consultant at McKinsey & Company and a United States Fulbright Scholar to China. She holds a B.A. in International Relations from Brown University. She enjoys writing cartoons, quilting, and gardening.

**Rin Kelly** died unexpectedly in late 2020, but she had completed several stories and a novel ready for publication. Rin's stories have been published in *Kenyon Review*, *The Fabulist*, *Penumbric*, and *Contemporary Magazine/Denver Post*. Another story recently was accepted by *Hobart*. She was invited to read her fiction at San Francisco LitQuake, Bang! Bang! Gun Amok in New York City, Writers with Drinks, and other venues. Her completed novel, *The Bright and Holo Sky*, currently is being prepared for publication. As a teenager her fiction won first place twice from the prestigious independent bookstore The Tattered Cover. One story faced competition of over 500 submissions. Rin studied fiction writing with Heddie Jones at the New School in New York City and took classes at the Writers Grotto in San Francisco and The Writers Salon. Outside of her fiction writing, she was a fellow of the Stabile Center at Columbia School of Journalism and film/culture editor of LA RECORD. Her investigative reporting and features appeared in Salon.com and in publications nationwide.

**Sharon Kennedy-Nolle** is a graduate of Vassar College and received an MFA from the Writers' Workshop as well as a doctoral degree in nineteenth-century American literature from the University of Iowa. She also holds MAs from the Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University and New York University. Her latest book, *Writing Reconstruction: Race, Gender, and Citizenship in the Postwar South*, was the 2015 selection for the Gender and American Culture Series of the University of North Carolina Press. Her poetry has appeared in many journals. Her chapbook, *Black Wick: Selected Elegies* was a semi-finalist for the 2018 Tupelo Snowbound Chapbook Contest. Chosen as the 2020 Chapbook Editor's Pick by Variant Literature Press, *Black Wick: Selected Elegies* was published in 2021. She was winner of the *New Ohio Review's* 2021 creative writing contest. Her full-length manuscript, *Black Wick: The Collected Elegies* was chosen as a 2021 semifinalist for the University of Wisconsin Poetry Series' Brittingham and Felix Pollak Prizes. She lives and teaches in New York.

**Lewis Koch** lives in Madison, WI. Drawing upon aspects of photography, sculpture, assemblage and text, he calls attention to the often unremarked upon elements of everyday life. His work has been shown in garages, on kiosks and billboards, as well as in museums and galleries, with solo exhibitions in New York, London, Brussels, Seoul, Odense, Toronto, Chicago, and Los Angeles, among other places.  
(lensculture.com/lewiskoch)

**Jim Kraus'** poems have been published or are forthcoming in *Apricity Magazine*, *Kinalamten Gi Pasifiku Anthology (Guam)*, *Bamboo Ridge: Journal of Hawai'i Literature and the Arts*, *Brief Wilderness*, *Cape Rock Poetry*, *Front Porch Review*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Hey I'm Alive Magazine*, *Kentucky Poetry Review*, *Neologism Poetry Journal*, *The Nonconformist Magazine*, *Paragon Journal*, *Pudding Magazine*, *Visitant Lit*, *Virginia Quarterly Review* and *Voices de la Luna*. He has given presentations at the College of Charleston; Ezra Pound Conferences in Rapallo, Italy, and at the Sorbonne; at the Modern Language Association in San Francisco; and at the Association for Literature and the Environment Biennial Conference at Boston University.

**Richard Levine** is a retired NYC teacher, and the author of *Richard Levine: Selected Poems* (FutureCycle Press, 2019), *Contiguous States* (Finishing Line Press, 2018), and five chapbooks. He serves as an Advisory Editor of BigCityLit.com. "Now is Contest" is forthcoming from Fernwood Press.

**Iris Litt's** most recent poetry chapbook is *Snowbird*, (Finishing Line Press). Previous books were *What I Wanted to Say* (Shivastan Publishing) and *Word Love* (Cosmic Trend Press). Their poems, short stories, articles, and essays have been published in *Chronogram*, *Confrontation*, *The Conglomerate*, *The Courtship of Winds*, *Cutthroat: A Journal of the Arts*, *Evening Street Review*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *The Hollins Critic*, *The London Magazine*, *The Bryant Literary Review*, *Onthebus*, *The Atlantic Monthly* (special college edition), *Visitant Lit*, *Vox Poetica*, *The Westchester Review*, *The Widow's Handbook*, *The Writer*, *Writer's Digest*, *Perceptions Magazine*, *Plentitudes Journal*, and many others.

**Mario Loprete** this year worked exclusively on concrete sculptures. For his concrete sculptures, he uses his personal clothing. Throughout some artistic process in which he uses plaster, resin and cement, he transforms them into artworks to hang. Mario's DNA and memories remain concreted inside, transforming the person that looks at the artworks to a type of post-modern archeologist that studies his work as they were urban artefacts. He hopes those who look at his sculptures created in 2020

will be able to perceive the anguish, the vulnerability, the fear that everyone has felt in front of a planetary problem that was COVID-19. Under a layer of cement there are my clothes with which I lived this nefarious period. In the last two years, about 250 international magazines wrote about Mario's work, attracting the attention of important galleries and collectors.

**Mark MacAllister** grew up in northern Illinois, spent a great deal of time on his grandparents' dairy farm in Wisconsin's Driftless region, and learned to write at Oberlin College. Mark now lives in Pittsboro, North Carolina and takes frequent hiking trips to the Wisconsin Northwoods and to Michigan's Upper Peninsula. He is also an active member of his community's emergency response team, a red wolf conservation organization and a Wisconsin-based writers' cooperative.

**David Matthews** grew up in the South Carolina Midlands, sojourned twenty-one years in Atlanta, came to Portland, Oregon, 1998. Poems have appeared in *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, *Chattahoochee Review*, *Quill & Parchment*, *Ghost Town Poetry Vol. Two*, and elsewhere. Essays on assorted topics are published on his blog at *Portable Bohemia* ([portablebohemia.com](http://portablebohemia.com)).

**Bruce McRae**, a Canadian musician, is a multiple Pushcart nominee with poems published in hundreds of magazines such as *Poetry*, *Rattle* and the *North American Review*. His books are 'The So-Called Sonnets (Silenced Press); 'An Unbecoming Fit Of Frenzy; (Cawing Crow Press) and 'Like As If' (Pski's Porch), Hearsay (The Poet's Haven).

**Stephen C. Middleton** is a writer working in London, England. He has published five books, including *A Brave Light* (Stride) and *Worlds of Pain/ Shades of Grace* (Poetry Salzburg). His work is anthologized in *Paging Doctor Jazz* (Shoestring), *From Hepworth's Garden Out* (Shearsman, 2010), & *Yesterday's Music Today* (Knives Forks and Spoons, 2015). For several years he was editor of *Ostinato*, a magazine of jazz and jazz related poetry, and The Tenormen Press. He is currently working on prose and poetry related to jazz, blues, politics, outsider (folk) art, mountain environments, and long-term illness.

**Daniel Edward Moore** lives in Washington on Whidbey Island. Poems are forthcoming in *The Cape Rock*, *Lily Poetry Review*, *Ponder Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Front Range Review* and *Ocotillo Review*. He is the author of 'Waxing the Dents' (Brick Road Poetry Press). His recent book, 'Psalmmania' was a finalist for the Four Way Books Levis Prize in Poetry.

**Ben Nardolilli** lives in New York City. His work appears in *Perigee Magazine*, *Red Fez*, *Danse Macabre*, *The 22 Magazine*, *Quail Bell Magazine*, *Elimae*, *The Northampton Review*, *Local Train Magazine*, *The Minetta Review*, and *Yes Poetry*. He blogs at [mirrorsponge.blogspot.com](http://mirrorsponge.blogspot.com)

**E. Martin Pedersen**, originally from San Francisco, has lived for over 40 years in eastern Sicily, where he taught English at the local university. His poetry appeared most recently in *Adirondack Review*, *Better Than Starbucks*, *Brief Wilderness*, *Danse Macabre*, *Thirteen Myna Birds*. Martin is an alumnus of the Community of Writers. He has published two collections of haiku, *Bitter Pills* and *Smart Pills*, and a chapbook, *Exile's Choice*, (Kelsay Books). A full collection, *Method & Madness*, is forthcoming (Odyssey Press). Martin blogs at: [emartinpedersenwriter.blogspot.com](http://emartinpedersenwriter.blogspot.com)

**Nancy Kay Peterson's** poetry has appears in *Dash Literary Journal*, *HerWords*, *Last Stanza Poetry Journal*, *One Sentence Poems*, *RavensPerch*, *Spank the Carp*, *Steam Ticket*, *Tipton Poetry Journal* and *Three Line Poetry*. From 2004-2009, she co-edited and co-published *Main Channel Voices: A Dam Fine Literary Magazine* (Winona, MN). Finishing Line Press published her two poetry chapbooks, *Belated Remembrance* (2010) and *Selling the Family* (2021). ([nancykaypeterson.com](http://nancykaypeterson.com)).

**Colin Punt** was born and raised in South Dakota and attended college and graduate school in Nebraska before he made his way to Wisconsin, where he lives with his wife and two children. Their second child was born just as COVID-19 began having major impacts on their lives. At home on paternity leave, with nowhere to go, and then, after his leave ended, working from home, he began making up stories for his older child.

**Rikki Santer's** poems appear in *Ms. Magazine*, *Poetry East*, *Heavy Feather Review*, *Slab*, *Slipstream*, *[PANK]*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *RHINO*, *Grimm*, *Hotel Amerika* and *The Main Street Rag*. Their work has earned six Pushcart and three Ohioana and Ohio Poet book award nominations and a National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship. Rikki's tenth collection, *How to Board a Moving Ship* is out from Lily Poetry Review Books.

**Laurence Snyder** is a poet, musician and retired teacher. He has published more than a hundred poems in magazines such as *Caperock*, *Spillway*, *Columbia* and *Steam Ticket*. His work has also appeared in many anthologies including *Visiting Frost*, *The Poets Grimm* and *The Years Best Fantasy and Horror*. Some of his poems have been performed in Baltimore and NYC. He lives in San Jose, CA, with his wife Susan.



**Alison Stone** has published seven full-length collections, *Zombies at the Disco* (Jacar Press, 2020), *Caught in the Myth* (NYQ Books, 2019), *Dazzle* (Jacar Press, 2017), *Masterplan*, a book of collaborative poems with Eric Greinke (Presa Press, 2018), *Ordinary Magic*, (NYQ Books, 2016), *Dangerous Enough* (Presa Press 2014), and *They Sing at Midnight*, which won the 2003 Many Mountains Moving Poetry Award; as well as three chapbooks. Her poems have appeared in *The Paris Review*, *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Barrow Street*, *Poet Lore*, and elsewhere. She has been awarded *Poetry*'s Frederick Bock Prize and *New York Quarterly*'s Madeline Sadin Award. She was Writer in Residence at LitSpace St. Pete. She is also a painter and the creator of The Stone Tarot. (stonepoetry.org) (stonetarot.com) YouTube—Alison Stone Poetry.

**Mara Thygeson** has published fiction in *The MacGuffin* and *Pacifica*, plus several restaurant and book reviews. She lives in Eugene, OR, and is also a plein-air painter. (maraswatercolors.com).

**Jonathan Travelstead** served in the Air Force for six years as a firefighter and currently works as a full-time firefighter. Since finishing his MFA in Poetry at Southern Illinois University of Carbondale, he spends much of his time turning his lathe and apprenticing for a jewelry-smith. He is the author of *How We Bury Our Dead* and *Conflict Tours* (both from Cobalt Press).

**John Tustin**'s poetry has appeared in many disparate literary journals since 2009. ([fritzware.com/johntustinpoetry](http://fritzware.com/johntustinpoetry))

**Pamela Wax**'s poems have received awards from *Crosswinds Poetry Journal*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Oberon Poetry Magazine* and the Robinson Jeffers Tor House and appear in *Pensive*, *Heron Tree*, *Glimpse*, *Green Ink Poetry*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *Pedestal*, *Pangyrus*, *The Dewdrop*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Sixfold*, *Solstice*, *Mudfish*, *The Cape Rock*, *Artemis Journal*, *Reed Magazine*, *Persimmon Tree*, and *Passengers Journal*. Pam's first volume of poetry is *Walking the Labyrinth* (Main Street Rag 2022), and her chapbook *Starter Mothers* is forthcoming (Finishing Line Press). Pam is a rabbi who leads spirituality workshops, including poetry writing. She walks labyrinths in the Bronx, NY and the Northern Berkshires of Massachusetts.

**Kari Wergeland**, from Davis, California, is a librarian and writer. Her work has appeared in *New Millennium Writings*, *Pembroke Magazine*, and *Chariton Review*. Her chapbook, *Breast Cancer: A Poem in Five Acts*, has been named an Eric Hoffer Book Award Finalist. Her long library career has taken her into libraries up and down the West Coast. At some point in all of this, she served as a children's book reviewer for *The Seattle Times*.

**Anne Marie Wells** has been published in *The Dallas Review*, *Passengers Journal*, *Brain Mill Press*, *Santa Fe Writers Project*, and elsewhere, and is the recipient of the 2020 Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce Rising Star Award for community service and the 2018 Marius P. Hanford IV Award for playwriting. She was a 2021 Wyoming Woman of Influence nominee in the arts category. Currently a faculty member of the Community Literature Initiative through the Sims Library of Poetry, Anne Marie received her B.A. from the University at Buffalo and her master's in applied ecology from Universidade de Coimbra, Portugal. (AnneMarieWellsWriter.com).

**Megan Wildhood** is a neurodiverse writer from Colorado who helps her readers feel genuinely seen as they interact with her dispatches from the junction of extractive economics, mental and emotional distress, disability and reparative justice. She hopes you will find yourself in her words as they appear in her poetry chapbook *Long Division* (Finishing Line Press, 2017) as well as *The Atlantic*, *Yes! Magazine*, *Mad in America*, *The Sun* and elsewhere. ([meganwildhood.com](http://meganwildhood.com)).

**Michael Zahn** lives in Central Florida, not far from Orlando's Lake Cane, a famed attraction for open-water swimmers. A former reporter at *The Milwaukee Journal*, his poems have been published by *Outdoor Swimmer*, *SwimSwam*, *Swimzine*, *US Masters Swimming*, *the Lake Cane Restoration Society*, *Open Water Swimming*, *OpenWaterPedia*, and "*N, the magazine of naturist living*."





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