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Protected: The Poets: Volume 9.4, Summer 2025



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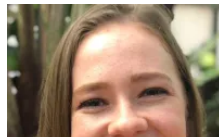
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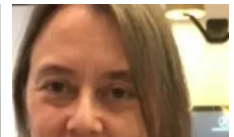
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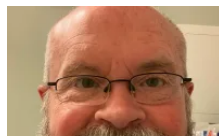
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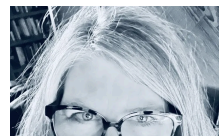
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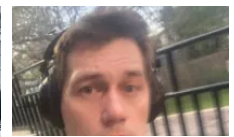
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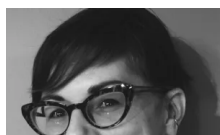
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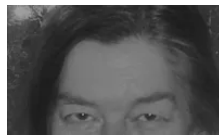
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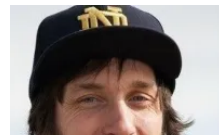
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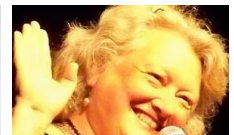
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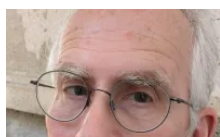
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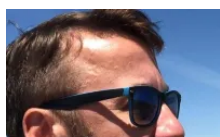
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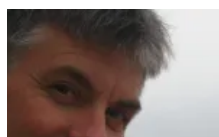
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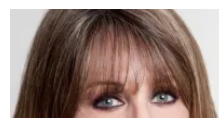
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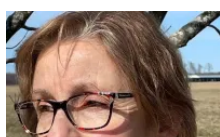
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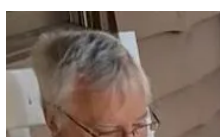
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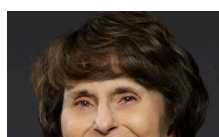
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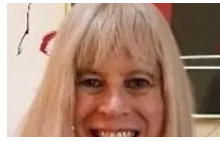
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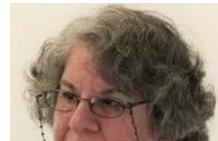
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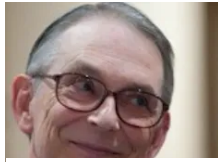
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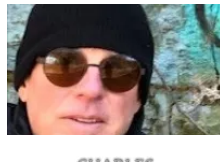
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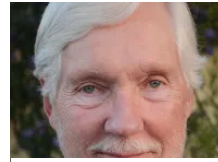
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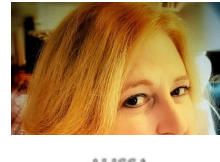
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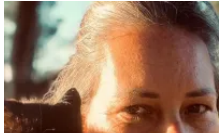
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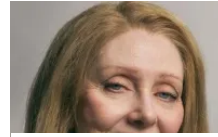
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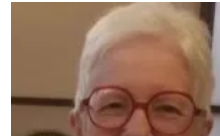
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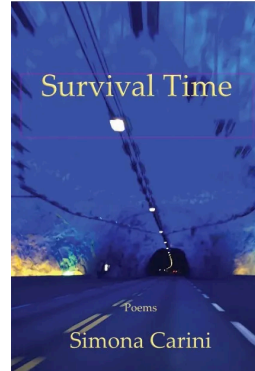
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by Simona Carini

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Simona Carini was born in Perugia, Italy. She writes poetry and nonfiction and has been published in various venues, in print and online. Her first poetry collection *Survival Time* was published by Sheila-Na-Gig Editions (2022). She lives in Northern California with her husband, loves to spend time outdoors, and works as an academic researcher. Her website is <https://simonacarini.com>

Light on the Trail

At the threshold of the redwood forest, I drop
that weighs me down, walk upright
eyes drawn upward to the trees' high branches,
downward to the trail, its coffee-colored surface
marbled with slippery roots requiring careful steps,
sideways scanning the understory for western trilliums.

Spotting one, I pause, bend: three white petals
like large butterflies resting on three heart-shaped leaves.

They will fade to pink, purple as they age, then fall,
leaving the leaves as testament, as promise
to bloom next spring, resurrect from the rhizome
running underground alongside redwood roots.
With a deep inhale of earthy air, I stand up:
a salute to the forest, the flower, the self.

Divestment

Ma-le'l Dunes North, Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge

Walking on oceanside dunes, we expect
our steps to sink, to wrench our feet
from the sand's clutch, make arduous progress
to where the beach bathed by waves is compact.

Grasses and flowers evolved to thrive
in barren soil, salt-carrying wind, sun-blanching fog.
A walk along the tideline shared only
with scurrying sanderlings and driftwood logs.

We climb the foredunes, turn all around
to savor the view: sage green ocean under low clouds,
beach, backdunes, and just past them, trees,
before our gaze reaches the bay.

We enter the shaded vaulted space
and resinous air of the forest,
floor embroidered with pale, lacy reindeer lichen,
dotted with bright red kinnikinnick berries.

When the vista opens again, hills of pale sand,
mountain-stable to the eye, yet in constant motion.
Standing still, we might hear it as a murmur.
Sand, paragon of poor habitat, yet the richness

around us, like a secret, like something we see
if we divest ourselves of expectations,
drop even our clothes, like St. Francis of Assisi,
renouncing all worldly goods.

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Editors' Choice Award Winner: Dia Calhoun



Dia Calhoun is the author of seven young adult novels, including two verse novels, *After the River the Sun* and *Eva of the Farm* (Atheneum, 2013, 2012). She has won the Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Children's Literature; published poems and essays in *The Nashville Review*; *The Writer's Chronicle*; *EcoTheo Review*; *Grist Journal*; and others. She is currently an assistant editor for *The Nashville Review*. She co-founded readergirlz, recipient of The National Book Foundation Innovations in Reading Prize, and taught at Seattle University, The Cornish College, and Stony Brook University. More at diacalhoun.com.

Edge of the River Perishing

When the only way across
the river is on the wings of extinct
butterflies, when heaven
on the far side is a field
of forced wheat rasping the Word
of the Holy Chemical god,
how do you move?

Like a hen with her head cut off
your vagus nerve staccatos
rage running
in the overwhelm
of what can you do
when everything needs saving?

Find a glass jar. Scrounge
the riverbank for survivors—
straggles of wire grass and bunch grass
to feed what you hunger
most to save.

Rockets scar the sky.
The moguls fleeing
for some far-away heaven.

In the left behind,
nurse a circle of earth
the breadth of your body.
Gather dung, worms, all the rot
you can splendor. Plant lavender.
And when it purples, spill gold

woodland skippers from the jar.
Let the butterflies dance,
let them drink the dazzle
of our heavenly bodies.

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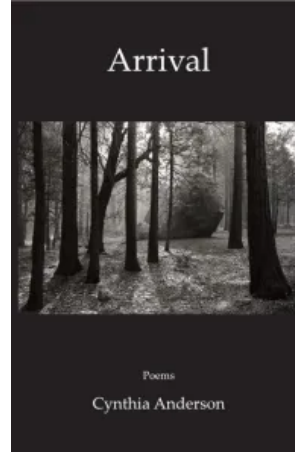
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Cynthia Anderson



Arrival

by Cynthia Anderson

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Cynthia Anderson has published 13 poetry collections, including *Arrival* (Sheila-Na-Gig Editions, 2023) and *Full Circle* (Cholla Needles Press, 2022). Her poems appear frequently in journals and

anthologies, and her work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. She has lived in California for over 40 years. www.cynthiaandersonpoet.com

Rarae Aves

I walk into a day that belongs to birds
 who watch me from crowns of trees,
 tops of rocks and power poles—
 with each swoop, they weave a net of air,
 a lattice to hold my attention, calling
 repeatedly—the jay's squawk echoes
 in my belly, then the trill of wren,
 the opera of mockingbird and thrasher,
 the soprano chips and calls
 of sparrows, bushtits, verdins—
 still they come, these precious birds
 who still exist, vibrating the hollow
 reed of my body, singing even
 while millions drop out of sight—

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Sarah Avento



Sarah Spaulding Avento is a recent graduate of the MFA program at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and was formerly an Editorial Assistant at *The Believer* and *LitHub*. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Tar River Poetry*, *Hare's Paw*, *New Limestone Review*, *Red Ogre Review*, and *Sheepshead Review*. She now lives back in her beloved Tennessee mountains and will never again take trees for granted.

Test Site

I.

parched
 mountains
 the shape of wind
 iron notes
 filling the air
 yellow
 distance between
 foot and refuge
 nightmaring
 shadows
 purpling to grey
 no road
 no land
 this yellow
 no such container
 for atomic
 breakdown
 sand dissolves
 in shoeprint
 nothing moves
 in the valley
 sun scorched
 waves and
 waves and
 waves

II.

trace the river's route
 in cerulean sky
 melting over
 volcanic scraps
 pacing shed canyon

sides walking
upside down
live in the glare
of thin atmosphere
getting thinner
lime green dust
uranium's kiss

III.

a desert must
eventually give way
not all is yet
dry deep pool
for canyon to mine
the granite curve
solitary spaces
everything pulling
back to an ocean

IV.

what fault
lines split
fight sun's howl
lingering
sand castles
build a new bank
you are a border
you are surrounded



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Grace Bauer



Grace Bauer has published six books of poems—most recently, *Unholy Heart: New & Selected Poems* (Backwaters Press). She also co-edited the anthology *Nasty Women Poets: An Unapologetic Anthology of Subversive Verse*. Her poems, essays, stories, and reviews have appeared in numerous anthologies and journals.

Birthday Ode

Old friend, much younger than I,
 but getting – as we all do if we're tough
 enough and lucky – older, though not necessarily
 wiser, as the saying goes, unless a growing
 appreciation for friends is a kind of wisdom—
 which, come to think of it, it surely must be,
 because what would we be without them—
 meaning you, meaning us—
 and several select others we both know—
 and I would second that emotion for many
 and add to the list of names and times
 we might recall as *the time of our lives*,
 which we have had and are always having,
 and so: Here's to you and the Big Five-Oh—
 a birthday I recall mostly because my present
 to myself that year was Paris—city of light,
 which is one of the things I wish you may
 continue to have—meaning illumination,
 meaning an absence of too much weighing down,
 meaning those candles on the cake you may
 wish upon – as in *once upon a time*—which I
 have always wondered about—the *upon* part—
 though for the *ever after* of this particular tale,
happily is another thing I wish for you, and more,
 old friend, adventures in the world, in words, in friends—
 which brings me back to my beginning. I recall
 one bright day on top of a mountain in the Blue Ridge
 we had climbed to stare out over more mountains,
 more sky—and how we stood there above and in
 the midst of all that blue and said nothing
 for a moment—and both of us women of words—
 that's another wish I'll wish for you: more moments
 to knock you speechless and, later, more poems
 in which you put those speechless moments into words:
 the *being alive twice* someone smart once said poems
 were like, the being (or feeling) more alive in the more

of life, which is another wish I wish for you, my young
old friend—meaning all the best, I hope it's plain,
(cue the chorus from the Velvet Underground): *sweet Jane*.

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Lisa Bellamy



Lisa Bellamy studied with Philip Schultz at The Writers Studio, where she teaches. She is the author of *The Northway*, a full-length collection, and *Nectar*, a chapbook, and has received two Pushcart Prizes and a Fugue Poetry Prize. She lives in New Jersey and the Adirondack Park, and is a development research officer for a national organization. www.lisabellamypoet.com

Everlasting Stew

Stir your heartiest stew. Stir bones you find in the meadow:
 bobcat bones, for courage; moles' for perseverance;
 fox bones, for cunning. Hunger awaits; wait, is hunger here,
 already—will we know famine? Stir toothwort, dandelion flowerets,
 for hope, health. Tiny carrots, for cheer. Snap beans for grit.
 Like North Country hermit John Rondeau, whose Everlasting Stew
 bubbled round-the-clock: waste nothing. Commit to the long haul.
 When drought replaces flood, can you cope, lug your bucket—
 toss muddy river water into the pot? Can you stir your stew?
 Toss your greed, crypto dreams; toss your anger;
 wishful thinking, nostalgia, into the stew pot. Know this:
 the old world has passed away. Refuse to starve: toss in sadness,
 stir your stew, your heartiest stew. Sadness sticks to the bones.

How to Stop Drinking

On a whim. No, not a whim—
 Drinking is your job:
 the Ministry of Drinking employs you.
 You have no intention to quit;
 what would you do with your body,
 speech, mind; your daily
 activities, to and fro?
 Wander walking sidewalks,
 looking in store windows,
 begging for spare change?
 On a dare. Your boyfriend dares you
 to stop drinking for two days.
 No, not a dare—you suspect
 manipulation. You are like a
 runaway dog, wagging your tail,
 refusing to be caught.
 He pitches an alcohol-free

beach trip, but you won't take the bribe.
The doctor warns you—no.
Your last appointment was five years ago,
no scrutiny for liver damage,
heart palpitations,
so-called mental health problems,
even as your whiskey craving
returns—you believed
you'd pushed it into a hole,
telling yourself like a fraudulent
asbestos abatement contractor,
you'd encapsulated the craving.
No. First Nyquil, for colds.
Then, Nyquil anytime, anywhere.
Later: beer, hard cider;
later still, finally whiskey.
You listen to pleas from family—no.
You hear, but do not listen.
To listen requires active
participation from Awareness Body,
who encourages words
to enter ears, journey
to the heart. Your hearing?
Ear-only. When someone asks,
How are you, you reply, *Fine*.
When they ask, *But how are you*,
really, you reply, *Really fine*.
But for the third time in a month,
you fall drunk downstairs.
You drop a Sake bottle
on your foot; break tiny bones,
refuse a doctor when
your boyfriend begs you visit.
When your boss asks,
Are you limping, you reply,
nope, bite your lip against pain.
Mornings, you wake in light,
but close your eyes, curse the sun.
Through prayer? Yes, maybe.
You go to AA meetings,
but still drink. You hear
you need a Higher Power,
a notion you find ridiculous.
You wait until your daughter
visits her father for the weekend;
shut the bedroom door,
although you're alone. You drop
to your knees, feeling
like a jackass, but say your prayer:
Please, stop the drinking,
to Whomever, to Sky, to Sun.
You feel nothing. Nothing happens.
That night you try to sleep,
but can't. Your dead paternal grandmother,
Mary Irene—the Mary you just
met twice; who survived farm failure,
husband's early death, poverty;
Mary your mother hated; Mary
who flourished in flowery California—

appears. Why do you smell roses? For your tenth birthday, she sent you a Japanese doll: silk kimono red for joy, white for peace; ten black wigs, each a new personality, new story. Imagination is beauty. You forgot this. Mary Irene lies next to you, touches her glowing finger to your forehead, throat. *Get on with it, she says. Live.*

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Marion Boyer



Marion Starling Boyer is a professor emerita of Communication and has published three full-length poetry collections and three chapbooks. Her book, *Ice Hours* (2023), won the University of Michigan's Wheelbarrow prize and was named "New and Noteworthy" by Poets & Writers. Her chapbook, *What Word for This*, won Grayson Books 2023 competition. Boyer lives in Twinsburg, Ohio, home of the annual world gathering of twins. She conducts workshops for Lit Cleveland. For more see www.marionstarlingboyer.com.

Rorschach

Darling, do you remember the man you married? Touch me, remind me who I am. – Stanley Kunitz

My mother, in her eighties, saw sheep in the spaces between ivy vines in her kitchen wallpaper.

Little cloud shapes with legs. Each time I'd visit she'd point them out. *Look, there's another.*

And I'd agree, delighting her.
Now, I see the heads of ruined lions

in our tiled bathroom floor. Broken muzzles, gaunt cheeks, ears like dried mushrooms form

from the confusion of grey swirls. These are not the Kenyan lions we once watched roar at dawn;

not the sated male swaggering from the kill, his belly swaying, face dripping gore.

Right beside our jeep a pair were in the brush, mating. I wonder, love, do you remember that?

On the floor, where two tiles meet, one lion's long nose cradles the jowls of another.

The two gaze vacantly at the wall. I'd point them out but these are not sheep and this room is private.



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Matthew Cariello



Matt Cariello's most recent book, *The Empty Field*, was published in 2022 by Red Moon Press. His first two collections of poems, *A Boat That Can Carry Two* and *Talk* were published by Bordighera Press. He's had stories, poems, haiku, and reviews published in *Bennington Review*, *Voices in Italian Americana*, *Poet Lore*, *Ovunque Siamo*, *Evening Street Review*, *Modern Haiku*, *Frogpond*, *The Heron's Nest*, *The Long Story*, *Indiana Review*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Italian Americana*, *Modern Poetry Quarterly Review*, *Typehouse*, and *The Journal*. He's currently a senior lecturer in the English department at the Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio.
<https://www.matthewmariello.com/>

Smoke

Every thing is known by the red thread of being.
The leaves sing spring, already bending

in the breeze that won't last, tempering
winter among the frozen roads home, expecting

the next season already, even while blooming.
What's beyond the first love, or lust, or false love,

remembered in winter's frame? That long
walk home in frozen stillness, tasting her lips,

the songs that played still playing – it hits you:
it never stopped starting, was always ending.

This is how Vincent left his life behind.
This is what I've been saying all along.

Imagine bees and blossoming wood smoke –
bees circling woodsmoke circling bees.

At the "Van Gogh in Arles" Exhibition, 1984

The crowds milled the labyrinth looking
for a sign or symbol of their decision to look.

And I wandered as if it were a revelation
which drew us together in a sense

of anticipation and helplessness.
See the imbrications of straw and grass

spun around the slenderest saffron twigs?
May those delicate broken branches bend

slowly to the ground beneath my weight, may
(the patchwork of corn and wheat, brush strokes

of a man in a hurry, a ruptured geometry,
stone walls punctuated with red dots (flowers?)

two low clouds fade left to right from white
to blue, so they never touch) may they lift me up.

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Rick Christiansen



Rick Christiansen is a former corporate executive, stand-up comedian, actor and director. His work can be found in *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *Oddball Magazine*, *Stone Poetry Journal*, *The Rye Whiskey Review*, *As It Ought to Be Magazine* and other publications. His first full length poetry volume, "BONE FRAGMENTS", was published this year by Spartan Press. He has recently been nominated for a Touchstone Award. He is the co-host of SpoFest, a member of The Writer's Place and a member of The St. Louis Writers Guild. He lives in Missouri near his fiancé Kim and his eight grandchildren.

His New Antlers

It started with a bump—
barely a bruise under his hair,
but by Tuesday,
a velvet crown was blooming from his skull
like something holy
and inconvenient.

Mom gasped when he walked into the kitchen
and knocked down the spice rack.
Cinnamon everywhere.
He tried to apologize,
but the antlers got there first—
took out the light fixture
and a ceiling tile.

By Thursday, he couldn't fit through doorways,
without turning sideways,
tilting like a boy trying to bow
with too much gravity.
I told him to stop it,
to cut them off
or think smaller thoughts.

"You're always doing this," I said.
"Making everything about you."
But I was the one who yelled
when the walls cracked.

He just blinked—
eyes rimmed red
like they'd been staring into snow for too long.

We tried putting him in hats.
Wide-brimmed things from the thrift store.
One with feathers that made him look

like a lost colonial ghost.
Another like a jungle explorer
who had gotten too close to some terrible god.

He slept on his side,
pillowed between chair cushions,
his antlers poking holes in the drywall.
Every morning,
I found tufts of plaster dust
in his hair,
like dandruff made of houses
we couldn't afford to fix.

I told myself it was just growing pains,
some weird hormonal thing.
But his silence grew
like a room added to the house
when no one was building.

It took me weeks to stop being angry.
Even longer to stop laughing
when he got stuck in the hallway,
antlers wedged
like some broken wishbone
we couldn't make a wish on.

But last night
I saw him curled up in the bathtub,
trying to hide
the velvet peeling away—
raw bone beneath,
the color of grief.

And I remembered:
The man at the door
with the badge and the clipboard—
his voice a flat tire on gravel.
We couldn't answer his questions.

The backpack that never came back
from his walk home from school that day.
He came home without words.
But the silence reeked of something taken.

How he stopped talking after that night
but started drawing forests
in the margins of his schoolbooks—
dense places
without people.

Now the house is full of cracks
and antler-shaped shadows.
We eat dinner in shifts.
Mom cries when no one is looking.
I've started sleeping in the living room
just to be near him.

And when I wake
to the scrape of horn on plaster,
I don't yell anymore.
Instead,
I open the window
a little wider.



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Kersten Christianson



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by Kersten Christianson

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Kersten Christianson derives inspiration from wild, wanderings, and road trips. She has authored *Curating the House of Nostalgia* (Sheila-Na-Gig, 2020), *What Caught Raven's Eye* (Petroglyph Press, 2018), and *Something Yet to Be Named* (Kelsay Books, 2017). Additionally, she is the poetry editor of the quarterly journal, *Alaska Women Speak*. Kersten lives in Sitka, Alaska where she keeps an eye on the tides, shops Old Harbor Books, and hoards

smooth ink pens.

Contingency Plan

There is not enough lightning in my bowl of paper fortunes to strike, kindle, blaze them into action. Consider all the cookies consumed over the years! I've planted these paper wishing stars throughout the house: between pages of books to mark favorite poems, in the kitchen utensil mug on the counter, among windowsill stones and bric-a-brac. They've landed in the toe of my sandal on windy days, surfaced in bathroom drawers, and in the console of my truck. I once taped those with particularly poignant messages in my journal, only to burn them up on a northern beach during a summer of healing. What is to be done with all these printed word fortunes, if not to see them true? So, I have gathered them in a hand-pottered dish of eggplant and teal, paper-weighted them down with an antique skeleton key, and bided my time, each day, looking to harness lightning to strike.

Take that chance * Luck is Coming * Get your mind set * You Will soon * will soon * will

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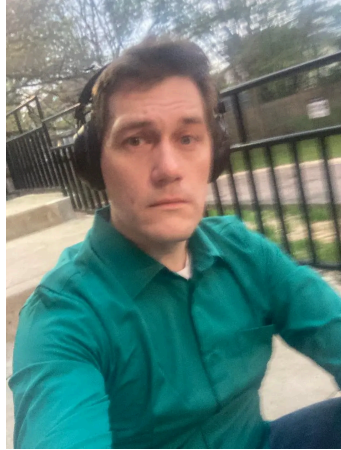
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Andrew Christoforakis



Andrew Christoforakis is a poet and cubicle-dweller based out of Naperville, IL. He studied economics at the University of Chicago before taking a hard left turn to creative writing. He has work published or forthcoming in *The Ekphrastic Review*, *West Trade Review*, *Ink Nest Poetry*, and *B O D Y*.

Auto-correct

My buddy texts me that he's at his daughter's *violence recital* and it takes me a moment to realize he means violin recital, but it's too late, my imagination's run off like an unleashed dog chasing a squirrel. The phrase endears me with its precision: this is how a body breaks things, be they boards or bricks or other bodies. Rows of children demonstrating their punches and kicks, their disciplined stances, dodging invisible bo staffs. Better here than on the football field, I think, colliding with others so hard their brains rattle an infinitesimal amount past the thin line between self-sufficiency and dependence, spoon and feeding tube. From the Latin *recitare* meaning "read aloud, repeat from memory", my young warriors, these kung-fu fighters are snapping their arms and legs to the beat, no sound save the displaced air and their battle cries. Why do we let them do this? Why do we let them do anything? Because there's virtue in the struggle, the long hours honing mind and muscles like razor blades.

To my friend this meant sheet music,
bow strings, flawless legatos.
But I can't help myself.
His daughter's body is the music,
her own proof of concept,
all the power contained
in one tiny, unshakeable fist.



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Jessica Cory



Jessica Cory is the editor of *Appalachian Journal: A Regional Studies Review*, published since 1972 at Appalachian State University. She holds a PhD in Native American, African American, and environmental literatures from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and is the editor of *Mountains Piled upon Mountains: Appalachian Nature Writing in the Anthropocene* (WVU Press, 2019) and the co-editor (with Laura Wright) of *Appalachian Ecocriticism and the Paradox of Place* (UGA Press, 2023). Her creative and scholarly writings have been published in the *North Carolina Literary Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Northern Appalachia Review*, and other fine publications.

My Father Loves Joni Mitchell

Her “weird jazz chords” he tried to replicate in vain;
Song to a Seagull, one of his favorite vinyls.
 Now, we feel *blue*, so *blue* as the nurse
 in blue vinyl gloves asks him to name
 as many words as possible that begin
 with the letter *b* & instead of blurting

big yellow taxi, he gapes at my mother,
 who bears no resemblance to Joni save their
 shared high cheekbones, the same protrusions
 etching my lined face. She shakes her short grey
 bob—slow, nothing like Joni’s long locks that sway
 as she sings *my old man, he’s a singer in the park*.

There is a park across the street from the cancer
 center, not the *born with the moon in Cancer*
 Joni croons of her daughter but the type comprised
 of cells & replications, like the reprises that arrive
 at song-end. My father receives radiation again & again,

the beats pulse through his skull *like the fiddle & the drum*,
 rhythms meant to beat back the black dots on the doctor’s
 grey screen. Their cadence, a *song to aging children come*. I hum
 a few bars, the *b* sounds begin blubbering my lips
 at the grim clip, *some come dark & strange like dying*. I am crying
 now in my car that is not a *big yellow taxi* but still makes known
that you don’t know what you’ve got ’til it’s gone.

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David Denny



David Denny's poems have recently appeared in *Chiron Review*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, and *I-70 Review*. His most recent books include *Angel of the Waters* and *Sometimes Only the Sad Songs Will Do*, both from Shanti Arts. He lives in California with his wife Jill and their Belgian Shepherd Ginny. More info: daviddenny.net.

According to the usual sources

of wisdom both ancient
and modern
there are gifts hidden
in the folds of our
sorrows.

I do not believe
in such beneficence tonight—

as if some young god
or perhaps just an ordinary
angel of mercy
were hovering nearby.

On the dark
landing
at the top
of the stairs
our sleeping dog
feels my hand
upon her shoulder:

in her half-sleep
she lifts her chin
and rolls her face
towards me
so as to lean
into my touch.

My life was wrecked
upon strange shoals:
someone said the rescue sirens
called to me
out of the mist.

If so
I never heard them.

I have painted
moonglow upon

the creek at night,
ripples along the shore
where the edge
of the water
loses itself
in the tall grass:

right there
where the cricket's
metallic legs
spark her calypso
rhythm,

where the cicada's
thorax shivers
her lamentation
and ours.

On the edge

of our field,
my dog Ginny
puts her nose
to a dead rat:

we stand over it
for a moment,

then move on—
we cross the field
by fits and starts
as Ginny stops
to pee and sniff
& scold the squirrels
in the tall pine branches.

One day
sooner than either
of us expects,
only one of us
will cross this field
on a sunny morning
such as this and

then not long after that
the field will stand empty
of us, the shadows
from the tall pines
walking alone
across the grass:

it's not hard to imagine
that one day
in the not too distant
future

another dog
& another human
will feel themselves
the luckiest beings
in the whole world
to have such a field
on such a morning
laid out before them,

& their veins
will pulse with

the same joy
that flows
through our veins
today.



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Margaret Dornaus



Margaret Dornaus holds an MFA in the translation of poetry from the University of Arkansas. Her own short-form and free verse poetry appears in numerous journals and anthologies, including: *Contemporary Haibun Online*, *I-70 Review*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *Silver Birch Press* and *One Art*. A Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee, she received a Haiku Society of America Merit Book Award in 2017 for her haibun and tanka prose collection, *Prayer for the Dead*. As founding editor of *Singing Moon Press*, she feels privileged to have published several short-form anthologies, including *Behind the Mask: Haiku in the Time of Covid-19*.

Lesson One: The First Word is Osiyo

When we're learning a new language, we're like a little kid.

— Cherokee Language Instructor Wade Blevins

It's difficult to learn the language of first speakers, he tells us. Harder if you don't carry the blood memory of a grandmother forming the words his grandmother sang to him. Words like wind (*unole*).

Like sun. Like moon. Hard if you don't carry the blood memory. Perhaps impossible to recreate the universe his ancestors knew. You, who know so little of their life, their world, their words.

Impossible to recreate their universe.
Or the trail his ancestors walked, singing
Hello! (Osiyo!) Mothers and grandmothers
holding on to small hands, pointing to rocks

and trees on the trail they walked, singing
Osiyo, siyo. Calling out each name
as they pass. As if meeting old friends
(*ginali*) they might never see again—

Siyo. Siyo. Calling out each name
so they might never forget how
to say grasshopper. Locust. Butterfly
(*ka ma ma, ka ma ma, ka ma ma*).

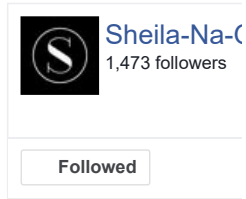
So they might never forget how

the eagle’s flight is a flight of survival.
How the cardinal’s song is a song
that will carry them through winter.

How the eagle’s flight is a flight of survival.
How his grandmother’s words (*unole, ginali, ka ma ma*) will carry him through winter.
How the first word will always be *Osiyo*.

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Will Falk



Will Falk is a poet, activist, and attorney. The natural world speaks and his work is how he listens. His law practice focuses on helping Native American communities protect their sacred lands. He is the author of *How Dams Fall* (Homebound Publications, 2019, creative nonfiction) and *When I Set the Sweetgrass Down* (Wayfarer Books, 2023, poetry). He is currently an MFA candidate in Western Colorado University's Graduate Program in Creative Writing, Poetry Concentration. You can follow his work at willfalk.org.

Before Rose Petals Become Doe's Milk

I watched my grandmother smile while
a thin doe ate her favorite rose bushes.
Thorns pierced the doe's tongue. She bled
drop by drop, a scarlet clock measuring her time left.

A thin doe ate her favorite rose bushes.
My grandmother knew what grandmothers know:
Drop by drop, a scarlet clock measures the time left
before rose petals become doe's milk.

My grandmother knew what grandmothers know:
Doe's milk becomes two speckled fawns.
Before rose petals become doe's milk,
mothers must navigate many thorns.

Doe's milk becomes two speckled fawns.
My grandmother grew children like does and roses
because mothers must navigate many thorns
with faith that children bloom in many forms.

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Molly Fisk



Molly Fisk is the author of *The More Difficult Beauty* and *Everything But the Kitchen Skunk*, among other titles. She edited *California Fire & Water, A Climate Crisis Anthology*, with an Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellowship, and has also received support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the California Arts Council, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. *Walking Wheel*, her next collection, is forthcoming from Red Hen Press.

Photo Credit: John Taber

Waving

Maybe I don't try hard enough.
 Maybe the ones I admire have skill
 beyond my grasp, their synapses
 firing faster, beating greater hearts.
 I am puny. I am restricted. Alas,

the self looking back at the self
 while missiles fire and hospitals explode
 around previous common suffering.
 Could there be anything useful to say?
 And someone to say it — anyone?

Everyone. Breathe in sorrow,
 exhale dignity, lovingkindness.
 To stop a missile, you stop the plane
 refueling, the burr of metal
 on metal to shape the housing,

you don't extrude or load, you pay
 the makers a living wage to make
 something else. It is rocket science.
 And simple, like the shape
 of the nurse's forearm blown above us,

a bird, a signal, the hand looks like
 it's waving. Those with money
 don't need more money, a seaport,
 they have plenty of shoes. The killing
 is made general, is made abstract

to blind us. In a poem, you earn
 your abstractions — the living human
 mind comprehends specifics. A breath.
 An arm. That bullet shape. Now
 we are located.



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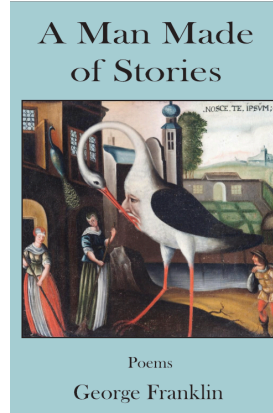
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George Franklin



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George Franklin practices law in Miami. *Poetry & Pigeons: Short Essays on Writing* was published by SheilaNa-Gig Editions in January 2025. *A Man Made of Stories* is his fourth full-length poetry

collection forthcoming soon from Sheila-Na-Gig Editions, complementing *Remote Cities* (2023) *Noise of the World* (2020) and *Traveling for No Good Reason* (winner of the Sheila-Na-Gig Editions manuscript competition in 2018). He has also authored the dual-language collection, *Among the Ruins / Entre las ruinas* (translated by Ximena Gómez and published by Katakana Editores, 2020), and a chapbook, *Travels of the Angel of Sorrow* (Blue Cedar Press, 2020). He is the co-translator, along with the author, of Ximena Gómez's *Último día / Last Day* and co-author with Gómez of *Conversaciones sobre agua / Conversations About Water* (Katakana Editores 2019 & 2023).

Check out all of George's SheilaNa-Gig Editions titles!

A Normal Life

I am who I am. It's probably too late
 To change or pretend to change. These backyard
 Shadows cast against a wooden fence
 Remind me of Sorolla, his paintings filled
 With light and foliage, an afternoon sliding
 Into evening. It's a good thing I don't
 Take history personally. Otherwise, I'd
 Find it cruel to lose a country at an age
 When friends die of heart attacks before I
 Learn they're sick. *When I say lose,*
I mean it's a country that doesn't feel like
Mine anymore. And those persistent ads
 From online gun shops—they make me think
 My neighbors are stocking up for some
 Climactic shootout with brown-skinned
 Gangs of *sicarios* or some other movie fantasy.
 Still, we wave to each other when I walk my dog
 And they walk theirs, and we say hello
 At the supermarket, realizing our shopping carts
 Contain the same flour, chicken, coffee, and fruit.
 I try not to imagine the excuses we'll use later
 To keep up the appearance of a normal life.
 Last year, I sat in the garden of Sorolla's
 House in Madrid, the light tinted by camellia

Blossoms, the shadows by dark green leaves.
 The dictatorship there lasted almost half
 A lifetime, thirty-six years if you're counting.
 In Barcelona, we saw the pastry shop
 Where Franco ate. I don't know which
 Pastries he chose—I hope not the same ones
 I did. We tell ourselves that politics is
 Unavoidable but untrustworthy. Only time
 Is a reliable ally. Dictators get old and
 Choke on their pastries. The understudies
 Who wait offstage grow impatient, their
 Lines already memorized. Young officers
 Preen their feathers in front of the mirror
 And think how tired they are of saluting.
 One aging senator tells an embarrassing
 Anecdote about another, one too many times.
 Meanwhile, the days, like senile relatives,
 Repeat the same stories, and we console
 Each other, impotently, so impotently,
 Telling those same repeated stories,
 painted shadows and camellia blossoms,
 Dark green foliage blocking the light.

A Man Made of Stories

Where to begin? The tips of his fingers, his toenails?
 Each could tell you about the war, about his family, the uncle
 Whose body was never found, the letter a woman wrote to him afterwards,
 Thinking her child might be his. No one sent her an answer, even
 To tell her he was probably dead. The palms of the hands: smooth but
 With lines a fortune teller could spend hours interpreting, the love line
 Filled with interruptions, infidelities—his own and those of others—
 The life line surrounded by lines of protection, good luck, an old age
 Without deprivation. The mound of Venus was large and fleshy.
 He was passionate, and women had desired him. There was a scar
 On his knee where he fell as a child and another on his forehead, half-
 Hidden by his hair, a war wound from a fight with neighboring kids,
 The armies on opposite sides of a fence. He'd climbed it and got a stick
 Thrust at his eye for his trouble. It just missed. As a teenager,
 He'd slouched in the park with friends at night, smoked marijuana
 And drank bad wine. The sticky taste still hides somewhere
 On the roof of his mouth. His tongue avoids it. His nose has changed
 As he's gotten older. Each office where he worked had a different smell,
 Desks where others had typed, left aspirin in the right-hand drawer. Their
 Bodies had molded the chair back. Oil from the hair of other men made
 Shiny the top edge of the chair. Had they fallen asleep when
 No one was looking, as he had? His nose remembered the astringent
 Smell of hair tonic and the smell of the disinfectant they used on
 The bathroom floors. (He never called it a restroom.) His ears
 Recalled a man coughing two stalls away, the toilet's flush, the water

At the sink. There was a small mole on his arm in the exact
Same spot where his father had such a mole. He spent his life afraid

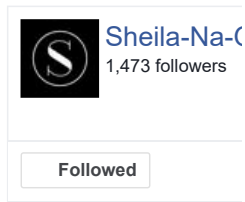
He would become his father, frustrated, impatient, disappointed in himself,
Eager for the approval of others. Luckily, his eyes were different. His father
Had blue eyes; his were brown. But their hair was similar, thinning as he aged.

Each pore of his skin seemed to him like a well, one that could swallow him
And from which he'd never climb out. He looked at himself in the mirror,

Examining that spot between his nostrils and his cheek. To him, it was an
Alien planet. Whiskers grew nearby. He shaved them, but each morning they
Returned, just to spite him. Each had a story of its own.

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Doug Fritock



After spending many years on the East Coast, Doug Fritock now lives with his family in Redondo Beach, California, but still pines away for snow. Previously a tobacco chemist, he has since given up the dark arts and now spends his days driving carpool, tending native plants, swinging kettlebells, and working on poems. His work has been published or is forthcoming in *Puerto del Sol*, *The Black Fork Review*, and *Sontag Mag*.

Backlog

By the time my father's
marker arrived
almost three months late,

its dates freshly etched,
its granite polished,
its weight encased
in a sarcophagus of foam,

I had already grown
accustomed
to his nameless
final resting place,

that anonymous patch of grass
on the outskirts
of Heritage Lawn,

shoehorned between
the Ross Family
and Will and Willa Willard,

and unencumbered
by any monument
other than a colony of clover
visited by curious bees.

And even though
it was just a bit of turf
on a hillside in Lomita,

perched above a Starbucks
with a peek-a-boo view
of the harbor,

I had to brush away

the tears when they
paved it over with stone.

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Christien Gholson



Christien Gholson is the author of several books of poetry, including *The Next World* (Shanti Arts), *Absence: Presence* (Shanti Arts) and *All the Beautiful Dead* (Bitter Oleander); along with a novel, *A Fish Trapped Inside the Wind* (Parthian Books). He is the recipient of a Pushcart Prize in poetry, with work appearing in *Ecotone*, *Permafrost*, *Flyway*, *Banyan Review*, *The Shore*, *Hotel Amerika*, *Tiger Moth Review*, and *The Sun*, among other journals. He lives in Oregon, works as a somatic-oriented mental health therapist at a clinic collective. <https://christiengholson.blogspot.com/>

Imagination

Imagination:

The ability to form mental images of things that are not present to the senses or not considered to be real.

1.
She doesn't look into his eyes,
focuses on his cardboard sign:
"Iraq Veteran – Homeless –
Please Help." "I'm so sorry,"
she says, gives him a dollar.
"I can't imagine what you've
been through." I imagine she
is confused, maybe sad, as she
moves across the parking lot,
so many on the streets, no one
to help, what else can she do?
I imagine her soul might one
day decide to strike out on its
own, towards the mountains,
in search of justice, parity, peace.

2.
I remember a Vietnam Vet who
lived in a nearby trailer, circled
by chain-link and razor-wire. He
sometimes sat on his front steps,
alone, always alone, fingers jab-
bing air, arguing with someone
or something I could not see.
What betrayal leads to the fear
of being touched, fear of all con-
tact? I imagine everyone had
betrayed him. I imagine, because
of this, he believed he had betray-
ed himself. I imagine he was
arguing with his soul, who was
constantly threatening to leave,
strike out for the mountains, and
never return.

3.
The Iraq Vet looks across the lot
at the mountains beyond. I im-
agine all our souls – mine, his,

and the soul of the woman who
gave him a dollar – have escaped,
are right now heading up there,
into cooler realms, among ferns,
moving fir shadow to fir shadow,
like resistance fighters, like guar-
dian angels, like thieves, stealing
eggs and sleeping in caves...



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Carol Lynn Stevenson Grellas



Carol Lynn Stevenson Grellas is a recent graduate of Vermont College of Fine Arts with an MFA in Writing program. Her latest collection, *Alice in Ruby Slippers*, was short-listed for the 2021 Eric Hoffer Grand Prize and awarded an honorable mention in the Poetry category. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in some of the following journals: *The Comstock Review*, *Redactions*, *Verse Daily*, and many more. She has served as editor-in-chief for both *The Orchards Poetry Journal* and *Tule Review*.

Open the Room, and Time Walks through the Door

—After a poem by Murial Rukeyser

Where are you now that the darkness has lifted,
and what remains if love doesn't live on?

When I was five, he saved a bird that fell
from its nest. Cradling his palm, he held it
close to his chest.

So this is love, I remember thinking. And I tell
him my secrets, though he doesn't reply.
I hear his presence from a faraway place.

I'm trying my best to embrace intention.
What is essential if love isn't the answer?

When I was nine, he took his life. I wore
a dress with peach taffeta bows. My grandmother
wept, but my mother was stoic. The family

mourned, and no one spoke. My aunt flicked
ashes from her lit cigarette, and a thousand
embers drifted in air. I watched my petticoat

sizzle and burn. She dropped her scotch
in an effort to save me, a veil of alcohol
soaking the chair.

Where are you now that the darkness has lifted,
and what remains if love doesn't live on?

I've saved my memories in one long breath—
they come and go with the mourning dove.

When her glass broke, it turned into shards;
sparkling blades that hollowed the floor—
like a symbol of sorrow that opened a door.

So this is grief, I remember thinking.
A broken heart is always broken.

If I vanish to dreams till daylight arrives,
is this hope, or is this forgetting?

When I was forty, I lost a child. I held it briefly,
though it had died. But oh, so many have
still survived; I fell to my knees and cried

and cried. Thank you. I said to whoever
is listening. Thank you for the honor
of being their mother.

So this is gratitude, I remember thinking,
with the struggle of living steeped in faith.

I'm trying my best to understand time.
I'm trying my best to be alone in this body,
and I know memory is the gift of remembering,

and I know remembering is the way to hope.
The sound of wings are a whistling echo,
and the mourning dove visits another who's died.

Where are you now that the darkness has lifted,
and what remains if love doesn't live on?



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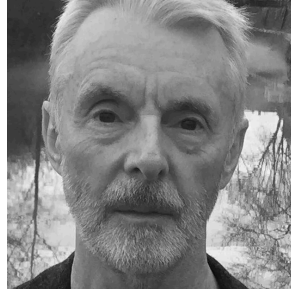
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Paul Ilechko



Paul Ilechko is a British American poet and occasional songwriter who lives with his partner in Lambertville, NJ. His work has appeared in many journals, including *The Bennington Review*, *The Night Heron Barks*, *Atlanta Review*, *Permafrost*, and *Pirene's Fountain*. His book *Fragmentation and Volta* was published in 2025 by Gnashing Teeth Publishing. His next book, *Post Moby*, is planned for 2026 publication by Sheila-Na-Gig.

Worst Thing

The worst thing that happened
to them was to lose a child
summer faded from view and leaves

fell from the oaks and sycamores
crowding the little churchyard
rain fell in a steady drizzle for days on end

he remembered the time so long ago
when he canoed on the Danube
how the heavy fog concealed the banks

the smell of smoke from farmers
who burned their fields in fall
at times there would be gunfire

in the distance and he was unsure
if it were celebratory or hostile
in his memory he saw his own reflection

in the stillness of deep water
and the face slowly changed
until it became the visage of the child

his wife peered over his shoulder
and said look — the moon is full
tonight and there are no clouds

and the moonlight spun molten silver
across the surface of the river
and the air became a kind of mesh

connecting light to its reflection
and that was the time they realized
the future might still be survived.



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Raphael Kosek



Raphael Kosek is the author of *American Mythology* (Brick Road Poetry Press) and two prize-winning chapbooks, *Harmless Encounters* (2022) and *Rough Grace* (2014). Her work received 4 Pushcart nominations and was featured on *The Writer's Almanac* and *Verse Daily*. She served as the 2019-2020 Dutchess County, NY Poet Laureate where she teaches at Dutchess Community College. www.raphaellosek.com

Baskets

In the grey of early morning
 nothing has yet happened.
 The day has not
 veered off the wrong way.
 No one has uttered
 a word to regret,
 or pulled a soft muscle
 against its willingness.
 The trees
 stand quiet in their cool shadows
 and the sun has not yet pried
 its yellow fingers
 through our windows. Coffee
 has not steamed caffeinated
 promise and we are only half committed
 to rising though we have opened our eyes
 into wakefulness where the clean slate
 of one more day looms
 to fill with more
 than we can ever carry in our baskets
 laden with small stones,
 wounded animals,
 and wild, delinquent hope.

Northern Lights

We look long and longingly
 up at all the cold stars
 nearly ashamed not to
 know their names,
 their distance—a fantasy.
 Just last week, our daughter
 saw the ocean in Maine
 glowing with bioluminescence
 and we too hoped
 for our own small taste
 of wonder. But the golden
 half-moon had gone down
 and the trees etched

in charcoal drowned
into the night
and there was no magenta

or green flaming into
the heavens, and the heavy
quiet filled us strangely
like a dinner without food
and we went home
as if blessed—back
to the small world we inhabit
with weighted bodies
somehow made lighter.



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Jerry Krajnak



All too rapidly approaching octogenarian status. Jerry Krajnak is a Vietnam veteran who later survived forty years in public school classrooms and earned degrees from UW Eau Claire, Wichita State, and Kansas University. He shares an old North Carolina mountain cabin with rescue animals and, when lucky, a grandchild or two. Recent work appears in numerous journals such as *Eclectica*, *The Great Smokies Review*, *Book of Matches*, and *I-70 Review*. A Pushcart nominee, he is shopping publishers for his first collection.

After My Senior Discount at Great Clips

Nature magazine in his hand,
my tender-hearted neighbor Erv
calls to me from his porch. *A million!*
he shouts. *Red-legged frogs in Oregon,*
all those deer and racoons right here.
Even goddamn alligators down South!

As I approach, he notes my puzzled look,
clarifies: *All killed by cars when they just need*
to get across the road. He continues on
about selfish people, always in a hurry,
highways built for them alone,
carving up God's work with concrete.
He shakes his head, answers his phone,
passes the magazine to me.

Just an hour ago, cosmetologist Bev
and I had paused our own conversation
while she turned on the razor to shave my neck.
I watched a young purple-haired stylist
remove the sheet from a woman in her chair,
walk to the register, pocket her tip,
disappear to the break room before the doorbell rang.

Which left just Bev and me and an old man cutting
the hair of a fragile, even older woman.
Makes me feel young, I told Bev when she shut off the razor.
That's Pete, she said. *He's eighty. We call him in*
when we're short-handed. I don't know her
but think he does. I bet no tip for him today.

Pete powdered the lady, lowered her chair,
helped her stand. She placed a quivering hand
on his arm, let him escort her all the way to her car.
The bell rang again when he returned, frowning,
Bitch his only word as he swept up her hair.

The word shocked Bev and me into silence.

I paged through his magazine while Erv talked.
Learned about bridges over freeways,
underpasses for migrating turtles and panthers,
ways for God's creatures to cross the road safely,
follow the instincts He gave them to migrate,
find food or a mate. That's when my daughter
shouted from home, *Dad, I'm late
and my damn car won't start!* I nodded to Erv
and headed across the drive, went inside
to toss her my keys, blow a kiss.

Finally get her old Honda running,
am washing its dents and between the rust spots
as Erv steps across the drive. Time for our walk.
I share my barbershop story with him.
He looks at me strangely, thinks he knows Pete
from Wildlife Fund committee work.
Doesn't sound like him at all.
He pulls out his phone, makes a call.

*Saddest damn thing, he says a bit later.
He remembers that woman. "Bitch" was not meant
for her, but her daughter who no longer will take her
for haircuts or shopping. Wants to put her away
in one of those places where someone else is in charge.*

Grumbling together, we head out,
decide on the path beside the creek,
needing to hear its song today.
We talk about Erv's magazine,
hear the distant rumble of the freeway,
imagine new tunnels for frogs and wild turkeys
and bridges built over Interstate 40
where bears and elk safely can cross in the night.
About places where children grow up safely,
where seniors thrive in their silver years.

I stumble over broken pavement,
but Erv has my back, stops my fall.
We curse the fractured infrastructure.
Then stop, reconsider our rash words,
turn silently toward our homes.



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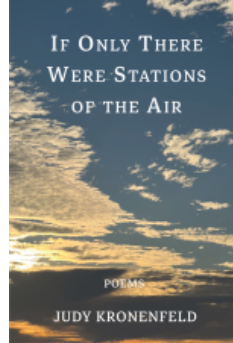
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Judy Kronenfeld



If Only There Were Stations of the Air
by Judy Kronenfeld

ISBN: 978-1-962405-01-0
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Judy Kronenfeld's sixth full-length book of poetry is *If Only There Were Stations of the Air* (Sheila-Na-Gig, 2024), and her third chapbook is *Oh Memory, You*

Unlocked Cabinet of Amazements (Bamboo Dart, 2024). Her poems have appeared in such journals as *Cider Press Review*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *New Ohio Review*, *One Art*, *Rattle*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review* and *Verdad*. Judy has also published criticism, including *King Lear and the Naked Truth* (Duke, 1998), short stories, and creative nonfiction. Her memoir-in-essays-and-poems, *Apartness*, is forthcoming in 2025 from Inlandia Books. She lives in Riverside, California, with her anthropologist husband.

Blue Journeys

He's drifting away from me now,
like someone in a skiff whose oars
doze in their locks.

I'm still rowing, rowing, trying to keep him
in sight, holding on to the particulars
of the voyage so I can send the answers

to his perpetual questions on the wind.
*Which child rebuilt their house? Which grandchild
started seventh grade? Or college?
What should I do now? What day is today?*

I watch him watching now—
staring out at water ruffled by the breaths of air,
at the slow progression of ducks ruffling
the ruffles, moiré pattern crosscut
by moiré pattern.

I wish him sun-glow and breeze-stir,
I wish him infinity in the glitter
of water-lights as his boat slides
across the water's mirror.

One of us rows, one drifts. Both of us
float towards the horizon we'll slip over. . .

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Mary Lanham



Mary Lanham is a queer writer, editor, and collage artist based in Minnesota. She is originally from the South; her accent is still around if you know where to look. Mary also hosts The Inspired Word podcast, exploring ways for anxious writers to turn the creative doom spiral back into a labyrinth path of discovery and connection. Her online home is inspiredword.com.

Remission

If fear has a smell, it's the sharp emptiness
of winter, more sensation than odor,
the tender and hidden parts of you suddenly aware
of their constant communion with the air,
the tiniest, maudlin agony of your heart-warm,
running snot crystalizing in your nostrils.

I still won't walk on frozen water,
not pond or lake or river,
not even after fifteen years in a place
where winter is so robustly inevitable
it leaves its familial fingerprints all over
the ripest summer evening.

Maybe the metaphor is just too obvious to risk,
that constant creaking waiting for the crack,
the drop, the plunging shock
at having been right all along,
this flow of calamity was under there all along,
and knowing so didn't save you from drowning.

For what's ice, if not a reminder
that where we stand is only real
under fleeting circumstances,
some specific but unquantifiable structure
of temperature and coincidence?
What is fear but impatience for the fall?

Once I prayed not to die in winter,
to survive long enough to smell something green.

And yet, and still:
an agonizing tenderness,
to feel my hidden self raked and rearranged
by the world, to see my breath blow
into frozen freefall—

now, if only for this moment,
something to be known and touched.

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James Long



James Long's poems have appeared in *Presence: A Journal of Catholic Poetry*, *Appalachian Review*, *Still: The Journal*, *Kestrel*, and are forthcoming in *Pirene's Fountain* and *I-70 Review*. A two-time winner of the West Virginia Writer's Inc. Annual Writing Contest, he recently finished his MFA in poetry at Spalding University. Long lives, works, and writes in Charleston, West Virginia.

MEN

About a half mile from our farm in the bottomland,
before burnweed strands bobbed their shaman heads
over the creek, I could see Dean's rusted camper.
Its rounded top, and my desire to see inside
those cold-eye windows formed a vortex
I felt every time he left. I imagined I was his
kid brother, in early seventies dreams,
when hippies trickled here from cities, to begin
new lives, meditating on oriental rugs,
dancing in barns. We always had chickpeas softening
in the food co-op's ten-gallon tubs,
smells I can only name now
soaking my six-year-old skin as if I'd been born
from smoke through lavender arms.
Dean, the youngest, his curls blooming like early Dylan,
hoisted me on his shoulders when he came round,
swirling me dizzy, just like that globe
someone fished out of the trash. I'd spin it
to an island I loved touching on the literal
other side of the earth, a tiny place I called Tonga.
And when he stopped visiting, my mother
said that's where he went. Tonga. I quit
dreaming I'd live there then, certain
no land in this world could hold us both.



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Joshua McKinney



Joshua McKinney's fifth book of poetry, *Sad Animal* (2024), won the inaugural John Ridland Poetry Prize from Gunpowder Press. His work has appeared in such journals as *Boulevard*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Kenyon Review*, *New American Writing*, and many others. His other awards include The Dorothy Brunsman Poetry Prize, The Dickinson Prize, The Pavement Saw Chapbook Prize, and a Gertrude Stein Award for Innovative Writing. He is co-editor of the online ecopoetics zine, *Clade Song*.

Share

*Cuius est solum, eius est usque ad coelum et inferos.** –Latin proverb

The view from the air belongs to no one,
and near the rear of the plane, wedged against
the window by a corpulent stranger, I feel
the economy of class, its heavy stratum
pressing down. Below us, vast and unfenced,
the wind-plowed clouds lie open as a field,

white clods furrowed by the wing's wind-sheared
silver share. The eye does not repent
for what it sees as human, nor the numinous yield
earth's plot to tilling or to till. Unowned, the stolen world
reveals.

*Whoever's is the soil, it is theirs all the way to Heaven and all the way to Hell.

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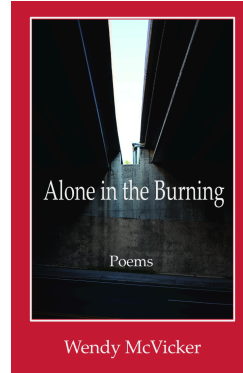
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Wendy McVicker



Alone in the Burning
by Wendy McVicker

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Wendy McVicker lives and writes in Athens, Ohio. Her most recent chapbook, released from Sheila-Na-Gig Editions in 2024, is *Alone in the Burning*.

Her poems can also be found, in

addition to *Sheila-Na-Gig online*, in *Women Speak* anthologies, *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, and *Gyroscope Review*.

Sage

on the sluggish
morning air startles, here
in our corner of Appalachia

where the woods are thick
and wet and green, scented
with honeysuckle and rain

We are miles and miles
from the bee-buzzing
California hills

where we wandered
among dry silver-
tongued plants, so close
to the sky

Along the ridge, a scar
of blackened earth
showed where flames
had charged through
the year before

Balanced between fire
and sea, salt
and ash, we breathed

sage and the deep
stillness of chaparral

Lizards, heartbeat
of the rocks, thrumming
in the sun



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Barbara Marie Minney (Copy)



Barbara Marie Minney, a native of West Virginia and a seventh-generation Appalachian, is a transgender woman, award-winning poet, speaker, teaching artist, guest reader/editor, and quiet activist. Her poetry and essays have been widely published and translated into Spanish. Barbara is the author of four poetry collections: *If There's No Heaven* (winner of the 2020 Poetry Is Life Book Award and an *Akron Beacon Journal* Best Northeast Ohio Book of 2020), the *Poetic Memoir Chapbook Challenge* (2021), *Dance Naked With God* (2023),

and *A Woman in Progress* (winner of the 2024 American Fiction Award for Poetry Chapbook and an Eric Hoffer DaVinci Eye Award finalist). Barbara is a retired attorney and lives in Tallmadge, Ohio, with her wife of over 43 years and a menagerie of stuffed animals Follow Barbara online at <https://www.barbaramarieminney.com>.

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Chasm of Silence

I've written about my father before.
He is like a specter,
appearing in the corners of my mind,
a dominant
and domineering force,

a question of conversation

with my counselors,
a shadow looming over
all that I do.

I see him in my face
in the mirror,
hear him in
the modulation of my voice
some of the things I say,
creeping into my mannerisms
like English ivy.

Some say he "fucked up my life,"
the germ of my dispiritedness and angst,
the anticipation of offing myself.

I'm not so sure.

I see him now,
eating his depression dessert
of coffee poured
over sugared saltines.

Hank's "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry"
wailing from the walls of daddy's
square shaped courage.

His death left
 an overwhelming stillness.
 Across the chasm
 of the silence
 I could finally hear
 the echo of his voice,
 how hard he worked
 to help me along in life,
 how much he loved me.

I just wish I had given more of that back.

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Elaine Mintzer



Elaine Mintzer has published most recently in *Anacapa Review* and *Sheila-Na-Gig*. Her work has been featured on Moontide Press poet-of-the-month page, *Cultural Weekly*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *Beloit Poetry Review*, *Panoplyzine*, *Slipstream Press*, *Silver Birch Press*, *Gyroscope Review*, *Last Call*, *Chinaski*, and *Lummo*. Elaine's first collection was *Natural Selections* (Bombshelter Press 2005).

The Yeti's Lament

They call me abominable,
but I'm not that bad—
just too hot.

Every year I snowshoe
to cooler latitudes.
Every day the foot I plant
in the permafrost sinks.
Soon alligators seeking new swamps
will snap at my heels.
Menopause was a piece of ice
compared to this.

Part of me wants to give up.
To embrace the last freeze
and sink below the polar cap.
I long for another ice age.
An eon of snows
too heavy to melt,
layer upon layer
that presses against itself,
against the earth,
moving downward.

And everything blue:
the sky, the sea, the cold, the ice.
Listen to the song
of glaciers calving.
The bellows and cracks
of offspring falling
again and again.
Rippling the seas.

Man, in This Twilight

—after Cecilia Woloch

And if time should take the god out of him—
the sinew, muscle, might
of bone and flash of tooth that first caught me

that afternoon under an oak tree
where we learned to worship one another—

I'd be left with the one I wanted,
his mortal shadow following
the contours of the earth we still share.



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Frank C. Modica



Frank C. Modica is a retired teacher who taught children with special needs for over 34 years. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Brussels Review*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *Macrame Literary Journal*, and *Unbroken*. Frank's first chapbook, "What We Harvest," nominated for an Eric Hoffer book award, was published in 2021 by Kelsay Books. His second chapbook, "Old Friends," was published in 2022, by Cyberwit Press.

Regrets

I waited years for my arms
and legs to stretch,
my muscles and sinews to bulk up
because I want to imitate
the tall, gangly athletes
who effortlessly dunked basketballs,
who lofted baseballs
over ball-field fences,
who hand-palmed doorways
as they loomed over me.

Only my poems grew;
the words and stanzas
sprouting like wildly
promiscuous weeds
from the pages
of my notebooks.

I'd like to say
it was enough,
but I'd be

lying.



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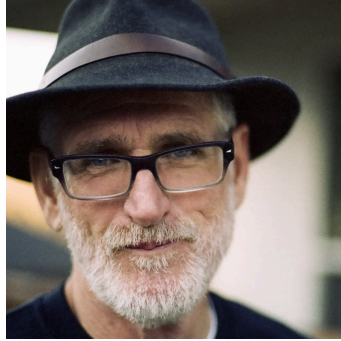
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Cecil Morris



Cecil Morris, a retired school teacher and Pushcart and Best of the Net nominee, has poems in *2River View*, *Common Ground Review*, *Hole in the Head Review*, and elsewhere. His collection of poems about teaching and school, *At Work in the Garden of Possibilities*, just came out from Main Street Rag.

Ode to the First Things I Was Thankful For

The slice of all day darkness beneath the bed,
 a retreat, a hideaway where no adult
 could come, the realm of dust, escaped matchbox cars,
 and missing marbles, there a small child's heaven,
 a sanctum sanctorum before I could read
 or knew such words, when Superman was only
 the magic action drawn between clouds of words,
 when Fortress of Solitude was a feeling
 and not an idea. And there, under the bed,
 the cold and seamless linoleum, its slip
 and slide, inside and under belly, the slick
 of it and its close and comforting silence,
 a hibernaculum from which I could watch
 a six-inch band of life, of feet and ankles,
 of shoes, coming and going, an ebb and flow,
 a tide, and me the hidden crab at the wall
 and safe, my cheek pressed on the linoleum
 attuned to vibrations moving through the house.
 And the box springs above me close, the texture
 of its fabric and its evenly spaced slats
 my fingers could leap across, could count and count,
 the number never changing, my first constants,
 the scents of me myself and dust and steelies
 and matchbox cars.

My Baby, Ode #10

My baby got no use for possessive pronouns,
 singular or plural, yours mine ours or theirs.
 She got no use for terms of endearment
 or sweet diminutives or anything
 whispered anywhere about her body
 to her body. My baby says speak up,
 says shout now, says let everyone hear
 a mighty adoration, a reverence.
 Be the cantor for this body, she says.

Sing to it and let it respond, let it sing
 the song of satisfaction, the song of joy,
 the song of peace be upon you and in you,
 the song of many happy returns. Sing
 and be sung to. My baby says don't be
 shy, says this is no place for blushing
 or embarrassment or hesitation,
 no place for reluctance or half measures.
 She says go all in or go home. She needs
 someone who will work, who will put muscle
 to words, who will sweat and build and weed
 and work algorithms to fruition.
 My baby got no use for lazy
 or selfish. She says I could be the one.

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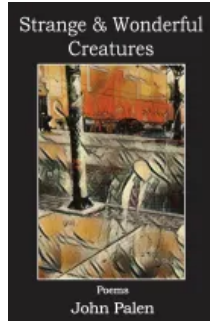
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John Palen



Strange & Wonderful Creatures
by John Palen

ISBN: 987-1-962405-13-1 — \$14.00 (\$4.00 US Shipping)

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John Palen's ninth book of poems, the chapbook *Strange and Wonderful Creatures*, came out in 2024 from Sheila-Na-Gig Editions. Once an after-school stock-boy in his father's

clothing store, Palen went on to work as a draftsman, newspaper reporter and editor, and journalism professor. He has been publishing poems in literary journals for more than five decades. In retirement, he lives on the Illinois Grand Prairie, where he writes, gardens, and walks every chance he gets.

Here Is the Sand

Boats on the Beach at Étretat

Claude Monet, 1885, Art Institute of Chicago

Here is the sand
that gets into socks and shoes,
crotch and bedding, restless sleep

the sea's green turbulence
breaking white and racing up
where boats tilt on their keels at the tide line

the fish market building
with its scavenged, variegated pale bricks
and boarded-up windows

the *caloges*
those old unseaworthy hulks
roofed with tarred planks for storage

the gleam of a cold rain on everything
and your mother dying, long ago,
when you were seventeen.

Boys Shooting Baskets

In a schoolyard corner
two practice hoops,
three young boys
with two basketballs
on a fall afternoon.
They make it up on the fly,

this intricate, looping
 dance of balls plucked a
 from the air, open
 hoops found, shots
 taken. The rims are way
 too high for them
 and mostly they miss,

but when one
 sinks a bank shot
 or swishes, the others
 say “Hey” or “Nice one,”
 the way they hear
 older, bigger boys
 talk it up on the court.

Someday they will
 be those boys,
 be pushed
 to win. Today they
 just shoot baskets,
 leave each other room
 to take the shots.

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Charles Rammelkamp



Charles Rammelkamp is Prose Editor for BrickHouse Books in Baltimore. His poetry collection, *A Magician Among the Spirits*, poems about Harry Houdini, is a 2022 Blue Light Press Poetry winner. A collection of poems and flash called *See What I Mean?* was recently published by Kelsay Books, and another collection of persona poems and dramatic monologues involving burlesque stars, *The Trapeze of Your Flesh*, was just published by BlazeVOX Books.

Badge or Bridge?

I wasn't sure if we were talking about Ichabod Crane or Stephen Crane, hoping I wouldn't be asked my opinion, but it turned out it was Hart Crane, and somehow I felt on top of the discussion, remembering the Rip Van Winkle section of *The Bridge*, a tale originally told by Washington Irving, who also wrote "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," which couldn't just be a coincidence. Nothing about *The Red Badge of Courage*, the Civil War.

Stephen Crane, dead at 28, tuberculosis, Black Forest, Germany; Hart Crane, dead at 32, suicide, Gulf of Mexico; Ichabod – "without glory" in Hebrew – disappeared after his encounter with the headless horseman.

So when the professor inevitably called on me in class, I started blathering about Pocahontas, Crane's symbol of the American continent, the American land, "Powhatan's Daughter," across the "Van Winkle," "River" and "Indiana" sections of *The Bridge*, Nature giving way to exploitation, the rape of the land. Pocahontas a Virgin Mary figure, then casually mentioned Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring*, the title taken from "The Dance" section of Crane's poem.

Finally the bell rang, class over, nobody sure if I was an idiot or onto something, but after class Becky Douglas asked me if we could study together in the library. Score!

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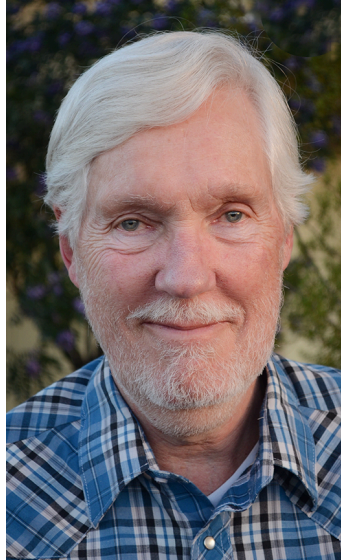
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Skip Renker



F.W. “Skip” Renker’s poems have appeared in *Awakenings Review*, *Leaping Clear*, *Presence*, and many other publications, as well as the *Atlanta Review*, *Passages North*, and *Amethyst Review* anthologies. He has a Pushcart nomination. His books are *Sifting the Visible* (Mayapple Press), *Bearing the Cast* (Saint Julian Press), and *A Patient Hunger* (Atmosphere Press). Skip has an MFA from Seattle Pacific University. He lives with his wife, Julia Fogarty, in the beautiful lakefront town of Petoskey, Michigan.’s poems have appeared in *Awakenings Review*, *Leaping Clear*, *Presence*, and many other publications, as well as the *Atlanta Review*, *Passages North*, and *Amethyst Review* anthologies. He has a Pushcart nomination. His books are *Sifting the Visible* (Mayapple Press), *Bearing the Cast* (Saint Julian Press), and *A Patient Hunger* (Atmosphere Press). Skip has an MFA from Seattle Pacific University. He lives with his wife, Julia Fogarty, in the beautiful lakefront town of Petoskey, Michigan.

Waiting Room

“When” is the word in hospital waiting rooms, even in the dreams of men and women who slump down in their chairs, softly snoring. High-mounted television sets tune to the Weather Channel, or HGTV, where house rehabilitators show us that anything can be salvaged, made over, except maybe ourselves or the person we are waiting for.

We wonder when the room’s door will swing open; the orderlies or nurses wear masks or mask-like faces, call out a name, beckon, sometimes place a hand on the small of a back, lightly, as if propelling could ever be gentle. “When” becomes “Now,” this slow-guided journey down the brightly-lit hallway while the body floods with anxiety.

There are pictures on the walls of the waiting room, lakes and landscapes intended to soothe, though at night they hang in the dark with no one to look their way or ignore them. They await the incoming light of the morning,

when new people arrive, navigate toward
empty chairs, pull out cellphones, pray,
doze, gaze into space, and the room
once again becomes a womb
for anguish, grief, or good fortune.

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Alissa Sammarco



Alissa Sammarco writes and practices law in Cincinnati, Ohio. She uses sharp imagery which is drawn from the oceans and forests where she has lived to capture moments in verse. Her poems make monuments of our lives with family, lovers, children and friends. They have appeared in *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *Black Moon Magazine*, *Quiet Diamonds*, *The Main Street Rag*, *Stone Canoe*, *VIA: Voices in Italian Americana*, *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, *Evening Street Review*, *Change Seven* and elsewhere. She is the author of 4 chapbooks, *Beyond the Dawn*, *I See Them Now*, *Moon Landing Day*, and *Cupcake Day*.

www.AlissaSammarco.com.

On The Sacred Farm

I planted seeds to grow
giant sunflowers with faces
turned toward the sun,
brown eyes framed with yellow,
host to honeybees and gold finch
in autumn when their heads
are heavy with promise.

I planted seeds to send
tendrils across the garden,
where squash blossoms kiss
under broad leaves that shelter
their pregnant bellies boasting
zucchini and pumpkin and cucumber.

I poured water on newborn heads,
breathed in deep the smell
of scalp and fingers and toes
and fat baby belly rising
and falling softly in sleep.

Oh, how I wished to feel
dark earth between my toes
and the sound of laughter that
rises as I walk, stepping with
constant rhythmic vibrations,
symbiotic and sympathetic.

It must be a trick of the senses
that makes me believe that I grew anything.
The smell of the earth is buried as deep
as the smell of my newborn's head

and the rhythm of his breathing
tucked into the crook of my arm.

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Lisa López Smith



Lisa López Smith is a shepherd and mother making her home in central Mexico. When not wrangling kids or rescue dogs or goats, you can probably find her working on her next novel. Her poems and essays have been published in over fifty literary journals and nominated for Best of the Net, Best New Poets, and the Pushcart prize. Her first chapbook was published by Grayson Books in 2021 and her full length collection is forthcoming from Nightwood Editions.

The first rain

Friends,
 medicine makers,
 backyard alchemists,
 anyone midwifing
 a bit of hope into
 the world—it's been a steady
 decline into dry season madness:
 but listen, sister sun witch leans
 towards June and the rainy-day
 sorceress— clouds singing
 of possibility: cheering
 cicadas chanting, drops dance
 through the sky—
 the soil awakening
 like arms stretching
 slowly Sunday morning,
 or a cat, yoga-like,
 these months of sun
 have stiffened our joints,
 our fingers cracked and open,
 until at last,
 rain.
 The earth speaks,
 words of musty wild
 imagination again,
 the first wildflowers' heartbeats,
 surrender, surround
 all the good, the true, the beautiful:
 it's in the shout
 of the prickly pear, luscious,
 sprouting like fingers
 on the hand of a nopal,
 it's in the lavender, oily and generous,
 each stone and each fragment building
 a wider circle, a longer table;
 each new seed of requisite

contentedness,
each blossom turning its face to the sun,
the shadows fall behind.

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Michael Dwayne Smith



Michael Dwayne Smith haunts many literary houses, including *Bending Genres*, *The Cortland Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Third Wednesday*, *Heavy Feather Review*, *Book of Matches*, *Monkeybicycle*, and *Chiron Review*. Two new poetry collections are forthcoming: *Shaking Music from the Angry Air* (Sheila-Na-Gig Editions) and *Roadside Epiphanies Resurrection* (Whiskey City Press). He's a recipient of the Hinderaker Poetry Prize, the Polonsky Prize for fiction, and several Pushcart Prize/Best of the Net nominations. He lives near a Mojave Desert ghost town with his family, rescued horses, and Calamity the California Calico cat.

What Arrives in the Dark

As a young boy, gazing at the reservoir and the stars from out a backseat car window, close to midnight, floating on air atop Arrow Highway east, and it's funny, that feeling, in concert

with a tinny radio station Mom had playing, her singing along, tire treads syncopated with road, a feeling bigger, more at ease, a tight fit with the universe, an understanding too full, richer

than I could say or scribble then. The blankets of home. Older, it was rain that fell at my sister's funeral. The near-dying in that New Orleans hotel room. And what about those waving, sunlit

fields you feel when you realize: *Holy crap*, this really is love! Or blues that send you driving for no reason to Santa Fe, after she gives you up for good. When I was ten years old, wondering

at Auriga in a car window on nights returning from Grandma's house, sometimes I asked why Mom was never in a hurry to get back to Dad. Of course, the truth would burn soon enough.

Of course, we're flying through the dark with nothing but ghost light from dead gods to guide us. Of course, I'm crying, in love, out of answers, longing for a safe road home— floating on air.

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Nancy Sobanik



Nancy Sobanik (her/she) has work pending in *MacQueen's Quinterly* and curated in *Synkroniciti Art Journal*, *Anti-Heroic Chic*, *One Art*, *Triggerfish Critical Review*, *Sparks of Calliope*– Best of The Net Nominee 2023 and Pushcart Nomination 2024, *Verse-Virtual*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, and various anthologies. She was awarded second and third place in the Maine Postmark Poetry Contest 2023 and 2024, and is working on her debut collection. Visit at Nancy Sobanik on Facebook and nancysobanik.bsky.social

Recipe for Summiting the Southwest Ridge Trail

Wherever you look, collect trees,
then let them collect you.
Beech pocked with bark blight,
white pines made stout
lifting limbs against wind.

Spot glacial erratics
scraped from bedrock, shaggy
bearded with rock tripe lichen.

March feet high from the reach
of roots and rocks.
Release calf burn and sweat,
the feathersong of your breath.

Traverse the open ridge,
unwrap green saddles
whom cloud riders straddle
and cast their shadows.

Blink at the the blue iris
of Moose Pond, glistening
in the watch of the mountain.

Stir the alchemy of alpine grasses
who wave emerald and gold shoots
at passing boots.

Watch Damselflies herd no-see-ums
around alpine bilberry.

If only we could teach them
to darn the blue screen above,
slashed by the invisible
sickle of greenhouse gases.

Thrill to the sight of the fire tower,
whose ancient rungs beckon
the boldest sky climbers.

Crest the bald summit, capped
with daypacks, dogs,
their people.

Gravity speeds descent.
Sit awhile, tip your ears
and imagine you hear
the silent chimes of harebells,
the crackle burst
of orange hawkweed.

Smuggle mountain memory
in your marrow.
Leave no trace,
only the vibration
of your soft tread humming
in the stones.



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Claudia M. Stanek



Claudia M. Stanek's work has been turned into a libretto, has been part of an art exhibition, and has been translated into Polish. Her poems have been published in her chapbooks *Beneath Occluded Shine* and *Language You Refuse to Learn* as well as in *Susurrus*, *The Windhover*, *Cutleaf*, *Ekstasis*, *Solum*, and *Book of Matches*, among others. She holds an MFA from Bennington College. Claudia resides in East Tennessee.

Irrelevant

The days are long for Wisdom
 who sits in her stiff chair
 after breakfast, placed there
 by her dressers and feeders,
 her useless hands set in her lap,
 a call button pinned to her
 chest. Inside, her heart pounds
 a little too slowly, irregular,
 like the loves she had
 when she could still turn
 the pages of *The Tempest*
 though she preferred more bawdy
 Chaucer to Shakespeare.
 The day aide who cleans her
 in her private shame
 heard of Canterbury on TV
 when the Queen died,
some priest from there?
 but has no time for reading.

Wisdom can't not hear the TV
 blare through the days
 though her ears aren't
 what's aged her. She wishes
 someone would shut
 the noise off, that she could
 smolder in her hard-won
 irrelevance until the night carer
 comes to change her—
 as if something could change
 in the nursing home—
 to put her to bed, all while
 calling her *Honey*, maybe
 handling Wisdom's bruised
 useless limbs a little more
 gently for once, maybe

even listening to Wisdom
 when she asks the aide if he likes
 Poe. And when he answers
*no, there's nothing to like
 about being poor...*
 lights out, door shut.

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Daniel Thomas



Daniel Thomas's third book, *River of Light*, is forthcoming from Shanti Arts. His previous books are *Leaving the Base Camp at Dawn* and *Deep Pockets*. He has published poems in many journals, including *Southern Poetry Review*, *Nimrod*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Belmont Story Review*, *Amethyst Review*, *Atlanta Review*, and others. More info at danielthomaspoetry.com

POURING HONEY

Like a slow-motion wave,
it gently turns over
on itself, crawls towards
the lip, then crests and drifts
downward, the slow unfolding
of its fall. It quietly drapes itself
over the strawberries and yogurt,
like a blanket drawn across
a sleeping child, and when
I turn the jar to curb
its flow, it makes a long,
delicious curve back
onto itself, skirting
the lip, like a girl in a swing
who relishes the pause
at the very top, before
floating back down.
Can I live like this?
To hold the undeserved
blessings of a thousand blossoms,
pocket the peak of their quick
beauty, their gleaned light,
then open myself with the passing
years, slowly unfolding
from within, to coat
my ragged world and the ones
I love with every last
sweetness.

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Anastasia Vassos



The poems of Anastasia Vassos have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net, and Best New Poets. She is the author of *Nostos* and *Nike Adjusting Her Sandal*. Her work has been widely anthologized online and in print journals. Her poems about the Greek-American diaspora have been translated into Greek. She is a reader for Lily Poetry Review, speaks three languages, and lives in Boston.

Belief in Magic

Golden Shovel based on two lines from "Belief in Magic" by Dean Young

It rained last night. My husband rose & closed windows while I twisted in our sheets, thunder unhinging sleep. Believe it—my aging blusters forth. I name it reality. How I try to hold onto those days of energy. Is my lipstick on straight? Yes, approximately. Do the waves of crimson break? When I was 65 I thought I was invincible. Now at 74, most of my life gone, a bigger %age of time trying to look, well, sexy. Listen, I know I'll live to be 100. As if

I could stop him grieving my dying—tough job. My beloved, who is all I ever wanted. I picture my body sailing hell's five rivers—those made of map & rain—conduits that are quick. For now, my heart—how it pounds full. The days cycle through me—I am an open window of stasis & desire. My body holds both rib & sky.

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Cheryl Weber



Cheryl Weber, retired, is an active member of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute through the University of Illinois, Urbana. In 2018, she rediscovered writing poetry through a class on Writing and Performing poetry. Since then, she has won numerous awards through the Illinois State Poetry Society, as well as taking fourth place in the national Blackberry Peach Spoken Word Competition. Cheryl is a regular at open mic performances throughout Champaign/Urbana area and is a member of the Quints poetry writing group. She resides in Mahomet, Illinois.

Gone Fishing

Near the road, half-way to the creek, an oak tree limb goes fishing. Only thing missing is the floppy hat with jigs and spinners pinned on, cargo shorts with too many crazy pockets.

But the bobbers are there. Plenty of them. A dozen or so hang from the branch like Christmas ornaments carefully strung on a balsam bough. Wagglers bobbers,

cork boppers, slipped bobbers, fixed bobbers, yellow and red, red and white, some bright green, some orange and green. The fishing lines are there too—entangled, caught between freshly

sprouted oak leaves that have pushed past the snarled mess, the knotted threads. All the bad casts from past fishing expeditions now belong to the tree, waiting to be sorted out,

waiting maybe to try again. We had a hard conversation this morning about what's been said and not been said. About the behind years and the ahead years, the tangled fishing lines

from unfinished arguments and unspoken differences intertwined, interwoven within 44 years and counting. We own up to all the bad casts caught in the tree limb, the rods, the reels, the

hooks and figure it is okay to say we will try again—try again to do better. To let the thumb off the spool,

let the lure splash into the water, and wait patiently on the shore by the peaceful creek under oak tree shade.

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Sherrell Wigal



a chapbook by Susanna Connelly Holstein, Cheryl Denise, Kirk Judd & Sherrell Runnion Wigal

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Sherrell Runnion Wigal was born, raised and still lives in West Virginia. She writes from her rock-based road roots, with an eye and ear to women and a heart honed to the spirituality in life. To read Sherrell's poetry is to walk into a

place we cannot always predict but is also somehow familiar. Her poems have appeared in many regional publications, and she is co-author of *Porch Poems* from Sheila-Na-Gig Editions.

Six Months After Death Has Visited

The calendar says March 23rd
the light at midday is a little brighter,
though the sky is still overcast.

I watch gilded vows in flowering forsythia
impose elation into this day.

I look at my grandson who holds
the loss of his infant, know he
has become more human
than most of us can muster.

On my kitchen counter
I view a pot of pink hyacinths
a surprise gift, and I am staggered
that I wish to see it bloom next year.

I notice my alter still holds
our September grief,
I open afternoon curtains,
add the potted plant,
lift budding devotions into this day.

Sometimes in Spring

For Susan

There are days
too magnificent for words.
Trees sacred in full blossom.

Brilliant skies writing
ancient languages across the ethers.

There are those nights
too delicate even for intimacy.
Dark soil waiting for touch.
Supple heavens singing
ancestral songs in starlight.

In the first blue light of dawn
there are friends
who silently unfurl
their thin luna wings,
rise beyond all our imaginations.

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Melody Wilson



Melody Wilson is a pushcart nominated poet whose poems appear in *Catamaran*, *Watershed*, *VerseDaily*, *West Trade Review*, *Emerson Review*, *Crab Creek Review*, and elsewhere and her manuscript *Madre Dura* was a finalist for the *Catamaran Prize* and the *Louisville Review National Poetry Prize*. She received her MFA from Pacific University. Find more of her work at melodywilson.com.

All Mothers Are Mythologies

feathery fables with tongues.
Some glide on glassy ponds,

a cygnet beneath each wing.
Others deposit one blue egg

on its father's feet and migrate
away. Mine was a condor,

subsisted on carrion. I didn't know
she teetered between brilliant

and extinct until she hoisted me
to my grandmother's casket,

insisted, *kiss her goodbye*.
I couldn't yet measure

the distances of death,
but tasted the grief gurgling

in my mother's unbeautiful throat.
Even the shade of a wingspan like that

is fleeting. It's best to swallow whole
whatever comes from her mouth.

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Ellen Wright



ELLEN WRIGHT is the author of the poetry collection, *Family Portrait with Oilwell* (2023, Kelsay Books), and the chapbook, *In Transit* (2007, Main Street Rag). She has recent work in *The Louisville Review*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Willows Wept Review* and *The Fourth River*, among others. Her master's degree in comparative literature is from New York University. Born and raised in the greater Boston area, she makes her home in Brooklyn and her living as a musician.

RESURRECTION ANXIETY

In my zeal to evade
the bracing virtue of cold
by swaddling myself
in scarves and hoodies,
by squinting my eyes
shut against sleet,
and hunching my shoulders
against winter wind's wallop,

I have reduced myself to nothing
but the reason why,
this year, spring
has been cancelled.
Here at the organ where
manufacturing alleluias is my job,
penalty-winter can't touch me.
Ritual has taught me how

to be stoic. Secretly
scoffing *what Resurrection*
insulates me against my
performance of the Good News,
protects me from potted lilies
and painted eggs festooning
the day when Easter skids in
on a sheet of ice and grime.

But the music.
The sheer effort
of purveying joy
before we all shiver forth from
the church's stage-lit glow
not thinking some buried sprout's purple
could burst its own umbrage
at climate's cold shoulder

and poke the curl of its tongue
out from exile—what if

it should shine, in spite of itself,
 a flicker of defiance
 at the punishment we have
 all been avoiding? Should I
 admit a glance? Could my throat
 grudge a harrumph of sistership?

What would be the chance
 of further reprisal
 for joining the faithful
 in the clamor their hymns?
 For celebrating relief from
 the blame I never
 really conceded to suffer?

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