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The Poets: Volume 10.1, Fall 2025



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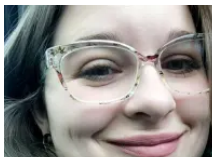
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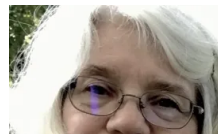
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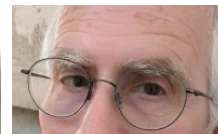
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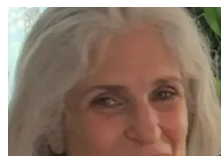
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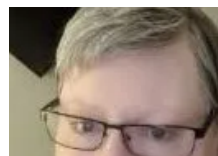
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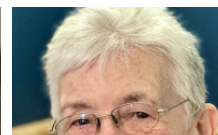
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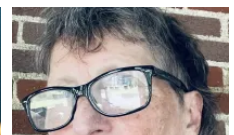
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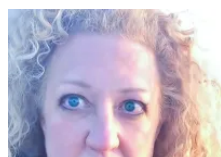
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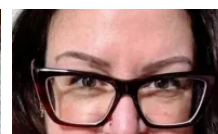
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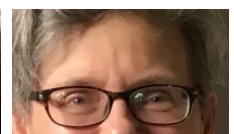
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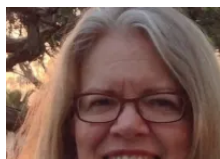
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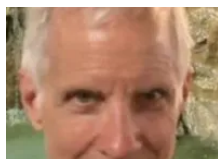
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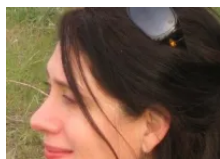
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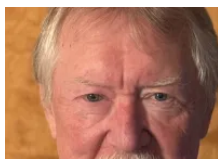
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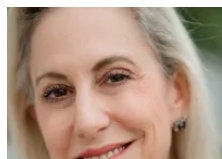
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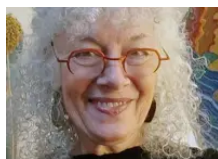
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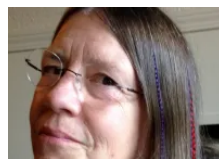
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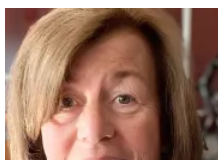
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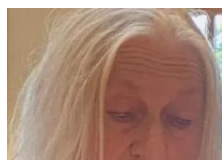
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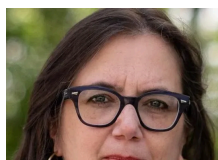
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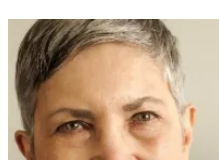
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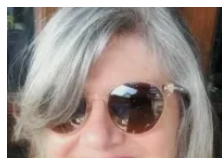
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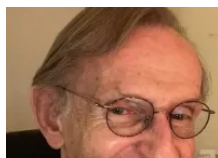
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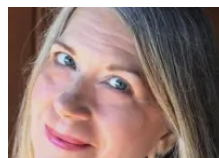
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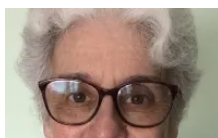
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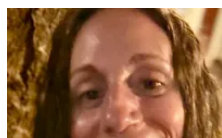
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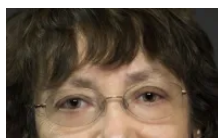
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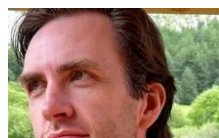
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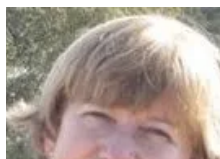
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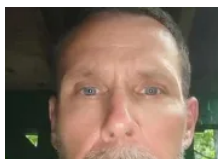
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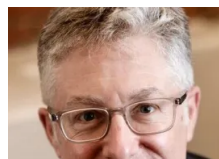
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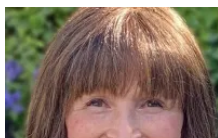
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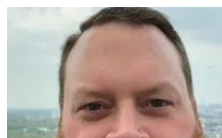
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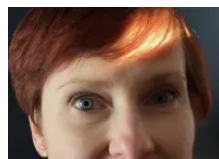
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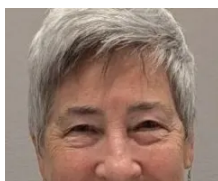
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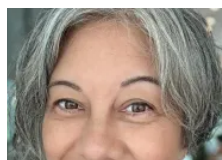
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Guest Curator: Gary Glauber



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Guest curator Gary
Glauber is a widely
published poet, fiction
writer, teacher, and
former music journalist.

He was awarded this year's Peter Heinegg Literary Award from Union College. He has five collections, *Small Consolations* (Aldrich Press), *Worth the Candle* (Five Oaks Press), *Rocky Landscape with Vagrants* (Cyberwit), *A Careful Contrition* (Shanti Arts Publishing) and most recently, *Inside Outrage* (Sheila-Na-Gig Editions), an Eric Hoffer Medal Provocateur finalist. He also has two chapbooks, *Memory Marries Desire* (Finishing Line Press) and *The Covalence of Equanimity* (SurVision Books), a winner of the 2019 James Tate International Poetry Prize.

Reading Words of a Troubled World

When Hayley Mitchell Haugen, Founder & Editor-in-Chief of Sheila-Na-Gig Online, first asked me to guest curate an upcoming issue, I didn't realize how much it would change my perspective on the submissions process. It was a rich and rewarding journey that wreaked emotional havoc: I was sad when delivering rejections and elated when sending a thumbs up. But it was worth it – no regrets. And I am pleased with the results.

George Franklin and Simona Carini were my predecessors, the two celebrated poets who had curated recent issues. Knowing the fine job they had done, I was inspired to try and do the same.

Seeing the process from the receiving end truly was eye-opening. Perhaps the hardest part was having to reject the good work of some writer colleagues for whom I have the highest regard. However, their specific pieces did not seem to jibe with the issue's developing zeitgeist.

What revealed itself as a truth early in the process was the way an issue develops a distinct personality. There also was an unspoken time pressure on decisions, considering that many were simultaneous submissions. Even with the relatively quick response turnaround, several poems were withdrawn for this very reason. That's the nature of the business.

Submissions were read in the same order in which they were sent, and a succession of tough decisions gave me new-found respect for those that go through this process issue after issue.

Author bios were not a factor. Most who submit to Sheila-Na-Gig have amazing credentials, but age, race, gender, politics, religion, location, and past prizes/nominations had no bearing on eventual decisions– the only thing that mattered were the poems themselves.

As guest curator, my guiding influences were what had gone before. My role was to respect and continue to find the kind of well-written narrative voices that have made this journal so popular and deeply respected. In the end, always trust your gut.

My point is that these are difficult times. Sheila-Na-Gig is not an activist publication, per se. However, there is no way to ignore the strife and division that marks our current national and global reality. There's a marked resurgence of hatred and fear. Dangerous and violent weather events affirm the reality of climate change. Educators battle smartphones and AI as attention spans shrink along with population growth. Horrible atrocities are reported from global wars daily. And an ever-aging population watches and tries to adapt to constant chaos and change. Welcome to our complicated now.

Popular wisdom states that troubled times produce more poems. We use the magic of language to try and make sense of our confusion and anger. While avoiding the blatantly political, subtle works can be wondrous, refreshing, analeptic. These poems were expressing the cultural temperature of this moment in time, via the thermometer of poetic expression.

Such chaotic times also breed nostalgia. Fall submissions included a wide array that looked inward, back to better days, focusing on family relationships, lovers, friends, passionate hobbies, inspirational teachers, favorite pets, exotic travels, and more. Several presented concerns regarding mortality, and the onset of dementia and other diseases that beset our weary bodies and minds.

The best of these offered nuance as well as narrative, and some were spectacular. Is poetry the answer to our long list of woes? I wish it were so. Poetry is not a panacea; rather, it's a step in the right direction.

A good poem might offer a refreshing surprise or innovative wordplay, a captivating or heartbreaking narrative, or even just the comfort of shared misery. Poetry is our coping mechanism, or at least one possible pathway toward whatever comes next.

What began to take shape as I whittled and winnowed was a collection of poems that resonated as right for these times, even if not always therapeutic. They are intelligent, often playful, occasionally confessional, constantly caring and skillful. My thanks and gratitude to all who submitted to this issue – including those whose works did not survive to the final cuts. Your fine works enriched my life as a poet, as a reader, and as a human being. I am changed for the better. As I continue to reread these Fall Issue pieces, a feeling of pride that any parent or teacher knows well colors my excitement.

I remain ever-grateful to Hayley Mitchell Haugen for giving me this opportunity, and for the tireless way she supports poets through the Sheila-Na-Gig community. Acting as a conduit for this issue of first-class poems was a privilege and honor. As James Marriot noted in his *UK Times* article earlier this year, “those grouches who claim poetry is “dead” will always be wrong. As long as human beings use language and experience feelings, poetry can never quite die.”

I am hopeful that you share my excitement and delight with the selected content. Please savor each poem carefully – and may some of these wondrous creations resonate and provide comfort and help in the best of ways during these very troubled times.

Tale from the Heart

“The anesthetizing influence of habit having ceased,
I would begin to have thoughts, and feelings, and they are
such sad things.” –Marcel Proust, from *Swann's Way*

It's impossible to sleep on the cardiac ward,
amid the relentless chaos of monitors buzzing and beeping.

This litany of sounds is offset for a time by my finding
a zen channel on the oversized remote, a soothing female voice

leading me on a guided meditation away from the reality
of this cacophony of electronic sounds anticipating crises,

the endless stream of nurses, doctors, aides, and supervisors checking, rechecking, bringing medications and verifying

that I am in fact the same me as my bracelet declares, re-emerged from my meditation into the small blue hospital room.

There is no privacy here, no sleep, no respite and no way to reach the flimsy curtains that might offer an illusion of privacy.

Instead, I am at the mercy of this strange noisy environment, and the fact that my new roommate is a talker and a moaner.

At perhaps three in the morning, he browbeats a P.A. who answers the assistance call into hearing his whole tale.

A procedure done a week prior that did not provide improvement; the unsettling feeling of getting winded after the slightest tasks.

This was my third time hearing it, small variations not improving the allure of the pensive narration.

This sent him to the local urgent care, who happily forwarded him to the hospital room where this older captain-of-industry could be better beeped, buzzed, and monitored, better apprised of why his ticker lacked oomph.

This had been his second major recent procedure. He wanted to know next steps, what options remained.

Said P.A. tried his level best to better explain the past procedures, along with what his current testing and observation might reveal.

This man wanted to know if the upbeat P.A. might be able to get him a list of the hospital's cardiologists, so that he could select a new successor from among them to deal with a very powerful man's sudden lack of power.

The P.A. asked him who his current cardiologist was. When told, he said that she was one of the very best.

"That's the problem," my roomie said. "She's always busy, never seems to have enough time for me, it seems."

"Get me that list, would ya?" He inquired again as to this P.A.'s name, as I watched him escape hastily, eyes rolling.

Next came a team to count the bills in this man's wallet, so that it could be stored in a safe. (It was \$177 dollars.)

He asked every nurse and attendant to get him that P.A., as he impatiently awaited that promised list.

When my roomie's secretary called the next morning, he instructed her to cancel and reschedule all meetings.

"I'm in the hospital," he told her, "but I'm getting out soon." The world of business waits for no man's fickle ticker.

Time is money, they say, and his voice conveyed the sense that he didn't have time for these beeping, buzzing things

keeping him from his corner office, where he ruled the world of entitlement he had built around him.

I tried not to hear any of it, but it was ambient noise along with a series of deeply disturbing moans and sighs.

For a night we were roommates, seeking a morning
of better times and mutual release back into society,

me with my little poems about shared humanity,
and the old capitalist whose groans punctuated

an already endless symphony of distress,
because like some disappointing summer hire,

his heart had turned unreliable, and he had no
answers for this, his own body's unexpected betrayal.

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Editor's Choice Award Winner: David Oliveira



David Oliveira has published three volumes of poetry—the most recent, *Still Life With Coffee* (Brandenburg Press). He is included in several noted anthologies, among them: *California Poetry: From the Gold Rush to the Present* (Santa Clara University); *The Gávea-Brown Book of Portuguese American Poetry* (Brown University, 2012); and *How Much Earth: The Fresno Poets* (Heyday Books), which he edited with Christopher Buckley and M.L. Williams. He lives and writes on the banks of the Mekong River, near Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Thong Vichheka Returns To Cambodia, November 1997

For Vic, for so long, his homeland existed as memories, stories, photos, a dictionary. This trip was his time to experience again those dear places held in sounds and smells and landscapes in the beloved country, longed for with each sun, kept in full breaths used to pace the lapsing days.

—————
The beautiful city was gone, replaced by husks that barely recalled what stood there before. His home, planned by his mother, now someone else's. His old school, deserted for years, a school again, though roof and walls in desperate need of repair. His family stupa at the family wat, commandeered for a new family's devotions. Generations of ashes discarded somewhere. And so it went, place after place around town. Yet, here he was—unthinkable just days ago—and where others might have felt sadness and dismay, he felt elation searching for family, friends. Finding one led to one more who led to one more; each one found making the party more delicious.

—————
Khmer people do not dwell in the past; their language speaks only in the present tense. Of course, their lives feel each nuance of fits in time, like everyone; and like everyone, their broken hearts wear scars from cracks chiseled into them by life's atrocities. But Khmer thinking insists: today is where we've come; what can we do with it? This seemingly evolved outlook does not make them better, just less stressed with the world's toxic temper. Like the rest of humankind, they've seen it before, and worse, and recently, and expect it again.

—————
As days passed, Vic traveled through boyhood memories,

time going too quickly to stop for reflection.
Everywhere he went he found people to talk to
in one of three languages. Stories from times past.
Stories from times present. But most of the stories
explained life in his new country and his good luck.
When time came to fly back, he stared out the window,
only he knows at what, as the plane lifted off
and the city collapsed into a smaller self,
then all at once vanished from sight, his grip loosened
on the emotional chain he held so tight for
twenty-five years, finally breaking into tears
over the few things still there and countless things not.

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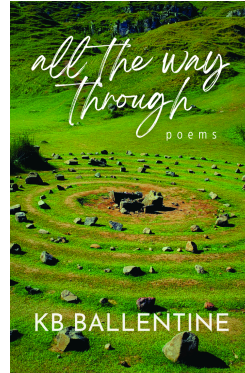
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KB Ballentine's latest collection *All the Way Through* is now available from Sheila-Na-Gig Editions. Current books can be found with Blue Light Press, Iris Press, Middle Creek Publishing, and Celtic Cat Publishing. Published in

North Dakota Quarterly, *Atlanta Review* and *Haight-Ashbury Literary Journal*, and others, her work also appears in anthologies including *Women Speak* (2023) and *The Strategic Poet* (2021). Learn more at www.kbballentine.com.

An Evening Full of Other Evenings

I forget to be here,
in this moment,
feeling my blood
and heart pump
as I breathe
the warm, heavy
evening.
I want to remember
my skin
as it is right now,
even with wrinkles
and freckles
and scars.
My webbed flesh
reminds me
of my grandmother's
arms, muscles
beginning to sag
and hurt as I shift,
trying not to get
wedged into one position
then unable to move.

But there's only one other option.

And I watch a deer
snuffle to the corner
of the yard where I scattered
corn and peaches. Two
nights ago she discovered
the hoard
then bucked and snorted
and gamboled before
springing away.
Later she brought a friend,
and they communed
in silent feast
as the moon bloomed

in the east, and a flight
of swallows raced the dusk.
Tonight she is alone
and wary. I know she is safe
even if she does not.
She finds some kernels
and nibbles sycamore leaves
in-between
before she slips through
the opening at the edge
of the woods and disappears.

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Jean Biegun



Jean Biegun's poems have been published in numerous journals and anthologies. She has received two Pushcart nominations and written two poetry collections, *Hitchhikers to Eden* and *Edge Effects* (2022 and 2024, Kelsay Books). Recent work has appeared in *Ariel Chart*, *As It Ought to Be*, *Third Wednesday*, *The Scarred Tree: Poetry on Moral Injury*, *Ekstasis*, *Unbroken*, and *Thin Places and Sacred Spaces: A Poetry Anthology* (Amethyst Press). She is retired in California after a lifetime in the Midwest.

Conversion Factor

*Force = mass x acceleration, expressed in units called newtons

After you've run so many miles, you can multiply that total by 1.6093 to know your distance in kilometers. The conversion factor (X) is important.

So, when you slap your love (or get slapped by them) with say 2 newtons* of force, what might be the factor for measuring how long

that act will be remembered?

3.0281 perhaps, if $2F \times X$ = years until they're gone, you're gone?

In addition, if a red mark that creates an increase of 10 degrees in skin temperature is caused by so many newtons, can we say that

length of time = rise in heat x amount of lost love? And, finally, what might our formula for forgiveness be? Could a total

of 1200 scattered minutes in a musty confessional convert to healing 3 sq. in. of blue bruise? A drawer of journals, bins

of empty bottles, hot-line calls, therapist bills, lists of gut-cramping amends—could these add up to cool the hot wound

that traveled in one second through a billion+ cells and hid someplace deep?

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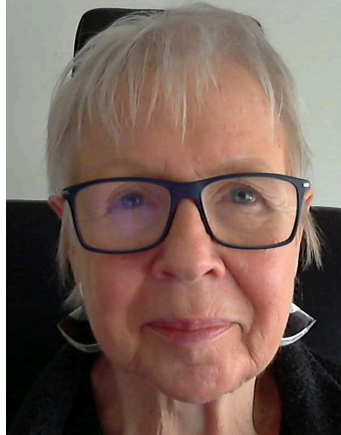
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Rose Mary Boehm



Rose Mary Boehm is a German-born British national living and writing in Lima, Peru, and author of two novels as well as eight poetry collections. Her poetry has been published (and rejected) widely in mostly US poetry reviews (online and print). She was several times nominated for a 'Pushcart' and 'Best of Net'. Her eighth book, *LIFE STUFF*, has been published by Kelsay Books (November 2023). A new chapbook is about to meet readers. <https://www.rose-mary-boehm-poet.com/>

Nostalgia for Times Lost

The honeysuckle that overwhelms the evening air,
and the walnut tree that tries to kill us with small missiles.
Gustavo, Donner, Laika and Maxi wagtail
any would-be burglars. Still, they do look large and fierce,
however much they smile and slobber.
The sudden, short, heavy, warm summer rains
bomb little holes in the yellow sand (shipped all the way
from Andalucía) that covers the entrance to the garden.

Petrichor; the weeping willow, her lowering branches
even more ponderous from the welcome downpour,
diamond droplets forming and falling from the feathery
fingers of the Spanish pine.

The wood-burning stoves glowing in the winter, warming
all walls, the outhouse decked to the ceiling with *leña*, firewood.
Skeletal fruit trees and vines, stripped of their fineries
but exalting in their nakedness, covered from head to toe
in the fine, white veils of an early frost.
Orion on the southern horizon, Cassiopeia almost overhead.
A *pot-au-feu* cooking gently, the bread rising in the oven.

The green hue surrounding most trees and branches,
just a hint of what is surely to come. The most daring of blossoms,
the ones that festoon the almond trees, are betting on sunshine
and warmth. The swifts are back, whooshing, chattering
and flirting. There is freshness in the air, hope,
and the secret knowledge of repeat and rebirth.
In our world death does not exist.

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Christopher Buckley



Christopher Buckley's *SPREZZATURA* is published by Lynx House Press, 2025. His work was selected for *Best American Poetry 2021* and he is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship in Poetry, two NEA grants, a Fulbright Award in Creative Writing, and four Pushcart Prizes. *One Sky to the Next*, was winner of the Longleaf Press book Prize for 2022. He has edited over a dozen critical collections and anthologies, most recently *NAMING THE LOST: THE FRESNO POETS—Interviews & Essays*.

To Good Pablo in Bad Times

The cypress are bent south, their shapes forced by the wind—
they grow old, and like me,
point to a poetics of emptiness in the sky. Nevertheless, sitting
in the lacy shade of pepper trees,
I think of you, *maestro*, and want to call you back from
the solar mists, the nitrate fields
of *Tarapaca*, from the winds blowing toward the empty rooms
of eternity. Step back from the
extravagance of the waves and tell me death means less than
the undertow dragging back
the tides, the sea winds singing for nothing in our blood.
Give us a *grito* for the resistance,
something to chase *politicos* over the cliff, give us some *coplas*
to repair the heartache, the stiffness
and fissures in the soul, a trail of shining foam, crusts of sunlight
to rebuke the *mentirosos* who
deny each human appeal. No one's fooled as we lose one comrade
after another, when every breeze
underestimates the sorrow of empty streets and houses, of the dying
civic roses. So now if I praise
my broken shoes, the two tomato plants I grow each spring,
if I wave a dishtowel as
the happy flag of whatever remains of our republic, help us keep
these few scraps of joy from
blowing away with the blue leaves each evening as the light goes
out along the shore, inside
of which the soul spins down and is lost like the kiss of salt in
spindrift dissolving over the sea.

Old School

*y ya ha pasado tanto tiempo
que ya tal vez no existe nada,
ni la pradera ni el ontoño*
—Neruda

I haven't the faintest idea where the linking verbs went,
the ones trailing the clouds
out the classroom windows? And that blank in which
the subject was supposed to be
written in the diagram on the board—I was the last to see
it was *You-Understood*.
I could identify the Lighthouse at Alexandria, the Temple
of Artemis, and the Mausoleum
at Halicarnassus in our text, but that was ancient history

even then, and nothing
that was going to save me from staying after school to clap
erasers, lost in thunderheads
of chalk dust ascending all around me and numbing the air. . . .
Sure, I could recite
my rhymes, my 2 potatoes versus 4, but was flummoxed
when it came to fractions,
numbers carried over, the quotient from the long division of
afternoon, the bell at 3:00
that released us to the playing field and sliding into home for
the immediate glory of the dust . . .
All during Arithmetic, not a hint from jays and mocking birds
who sassed back from
the scrub oaks and pepper trees when the nun turned her back,
and so set a bad example
for Schneider, Sozzi, Villa-Señor and myself in the back row
hoping to avoid detection
as we passed notes and baseball cards during a rainy-day session
when the collective cloudbank
of our breath fogged the windows like a plague out of Egypt.
Who could spell *transubstantiation*
anyway? And how in the world did St. Teresa of Avila levitate
by just skipping lunch
and dinner? And that was no more removed from the curriculum
than General Science in which
Antoine Lavoisier dismantled phlogiston in favor of oxygen, both
equally invisible, so more
to be taken on faith. No one explained the chemistry going on
inside leaves, the multiplication
tables of stars? How did our bones take hold given the trace
minerals scattered in space?
Will we return to an ossuary of light once our time was up
and the undetectable grit
of every quark had half-way settled down? Will we line up at arms'
distance and pledge allegiance
to the dark, sing creeds and anthems because of the fear of flames
reaching out for us?

The future? There wasn't going to be one if we didn't work out
set-theory equations and
drop our measly 2-bit allowances into the poor box for admission
to the company of saints.
The only problem I fully grasped was the holes in the bottoms
of my high-top P.F. Flyers
as I ran the bases or raced across the schoolyard forgetting
the order of angels, unable
to factor in even one unknown or solve with any certainty for
X hidden behind clouds
that never lost their way, or birds who, without ever pausing
to think, did not fly out
of order in the air. In my uniform shirt with silver stars pasted on
the collar for French, for Art,
I never imagined I'd greet my remaining days without believing
there was joy to be had
beyond the Corporal Works of Mercy. Overlooking the Pacific,
the question now is
how to conduct myself given the circumstantial evidence of dust,
unsure as I've ever been
what might reach past the scaffolding of our atoms racing out
on a galactic undertow
of time whenever I think I understand some small part of it. . . .

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Jeff Burt



Jeff Burt lives in Santa Cruz Country, California. He has previously contributed to Sheila-Na-Gig, Heartwood, Willows Wept Review, and others. He has a chapbook, A Filament Drawn so Thin, from Red Bird Chapbooks, and a book The Root Endures due out from Sheila-Na-Gig in fall 2025. More can be found at www.jeff-burt.com

The Difference Between Father and Son

It appeared your hand
exploded from the firecracker,
sparks for fingers,
flame and detonating light
emanating from your wrist.

The dark field lit,
your anonymous friends
stood in the flash
of momentary wonder,
fear on faces that etched
a memory against
a whitened tent
in a dusty desert
and you near a wall
whitewashed to cover graffiti.

Seconds later that instant glee
and grief transformed to relief
as your hand appeared
healthy and lithe
beyond the hem of the cuff
and you were whole again,
as much as we are whole
to begin with, the paper
of the poorly fused dud
still stuck to your thumb.

I wanted to kiss
each fingertip
seared but saved.
You stood ready
to light another.

Confusion

It was a Saturday and yet he was Sunday-dressed,
a plaid shirt buttoned at the collar
and a plain tie that flopped below his waist,

a tan sports jacket and khaki pants
with new charcoal tennis shoes poking out.
After I said it was the wrong day for church,

then told him confusion is common in dementia,
he said we would go anyway. It wouldn't hurt.
When I told him that no one else would be there

he said that was all right, maybe better that way,
we could listen better if no one talked.
He hadn't gotten dressed for nothing.

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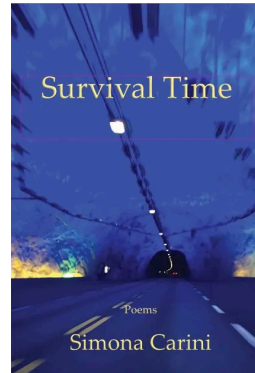
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Simona Carini



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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>

My Father's Breakfast

He liked to start on the trail early, before the August heat
smothered the forest smells. The soil parched,
our soles grating against stones, the leaves of holm oaks
baked and brittle. On his shoulder, a canvas bag
carrying ingredients to prepare *panzanella*.

The heel of a two-day-old loaf for him, two slices for me,
tomatoes from a villager's vegetable garden,
the smell of sun on their red-green skin,
basil leaves from my aunt's pot and a small Coca-Cola bottle
half-filled with an emulsion of olive oil and vinegar.

Conversation turned into a monologue as he eased
into storytelling, a small crack in his voice:
hiking to the same spot with his best friends
before the war, all young, all alive.

The area around the spring moist, the earth dark chocolate,
small tufts of grass like gemstones. Cold water streamed
thinly from the mouth of a pipe into a rock-bounded pool,
disappeared, absorbed by the thirsty ground. The air
crisp and cool, as if we'd stepped into a cave.

He lined up the ingredients on a flat stone, using the bag
as a mat, talked on, about how to wet the bread to soften it
without it falling apart. He turned each piece slowly
under the stream, crust facing the water, shook to drain it,
laid it back on the bag. There was no hurrying him.

He halved the tomatoes, brushed their cut surface on the bread
while squeezing to release the juice. A few slivers of basil,
a sprinkle of salt, a generous drizzle of the olive oil and vinegar:

each step measured. I wasn't allowed to comment or touch,
only listen and watch, my father's recipe for learning anything.

At his signal, I chopped the tomatoes, layered them
on my portion, then bit into the *panzanella*, the bread soft, spongy,
the smell of basil and vinegar tickling my nose, while he remarked,
head shaking, he didn't like tomatoes that much, only their juice.
The one food he ever prepared for me,
precious to him, didn't bring us closer.

Decades later, my mother dead, he injured, what I cooked
seemed hard for him to swallow. At every meal he reminded me
"For all her faults, your mother was an excellent cook."
I'd move to the sink, run hot water to wash the dishes,
scald my hands to feel a different pain,
save myself from falling into the chasm between us.

In a nightmare, I see myself acting the same way
with a beloved one. The smell of sun on tomato skin
makes me wish for an embrace of light to flood the forest.

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Alan Catlin



Alan Catlin has two recent full-length books of poetry published, *Landscape of the Exiled* (Dos Madres) and *Unattended* (Cyberwit). His book of short fiction featuring a cynical world weary wise guy bartender, *The Naked City* is being published by Anxiety Press, and his poetry collection, *Still Life with Apocalypse*, will be published by Sheila-Na-Gig Editions in 2026.

Catman

In high school
he expressed frustration
that in ten years
you were just
another face in
the yearbook
no one would
remember.

Wanted to do
something memorable
everyone would remember
like include his
beloved cat in
class photos.

As there were
no regulations
forbidding it and
his manner was
so humble and amusing
the principal relented
even going so far
as to include a photo
of herself with her cat
for the yearbook.

After graduation Catman
as he was now known as
played acoustic guitar
and sang original songs
at open mics and club

venues around the area.

Those who remembered
him from school said
he was Catman who played
guitar until, without
warning or explanation,
he offed himself which
always seemed to be
part of his long-range plan.

At the ten-year class
reunion kids got together
and recalled old friends
and where are they nows
eventually leading to
Catman, where's he at now.

One for the girls said she
Heard he killed himself and
The guy who asked after him
Asked, "Anyone remember
What his name was?"

No one did.

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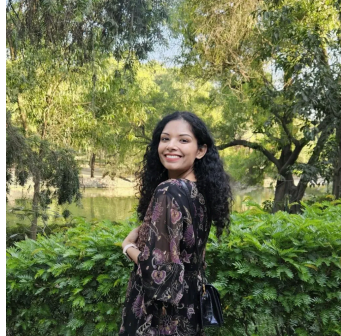
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Garima Chhikara



Garima Chhikara is a writer from Bangalore, India. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Forge Literary Magazine*, *Hobart*, *Lost Balloon*, *Sky Island Journal*, *La Piccioletta Barca*, *Halfway Down the Stairs*, among others. Find her at garimachhikara.com.

The Year of Snake — The Year of Krodhi

It was once the year of the Monkey,
now it is the year of the Snake,
The year of Krodhi Samvatsara —
The year that bites into our skin, our bones, deep within.
From it oozes the venom of pain, of karma,
of awakening, of memory—serving us right.
This year demands we question ourselves,
as it sees us walking blindfolded to the cries of war, poverty, narcissism.
The year of destruction — humanity, sensibilities, willpower —
with gunpowder and flarestrikes.
The year of words reaching us from decades,

The year I read Emily Dickinson:

*“A little Madness in the Spring
Is wholesome even for the King,
But God be with the Clown —
Who ponders this tremendous scene — ”*

The year of anarchy, of puppetry, of war —
a poisonous madness clutching the air,
drifting across every border.

The year you and I cannot separate ourselves
from those on the other side of the equator,
where the breath is also a gunpowder sting.

Like children,
I questioned what it means to be here, myself,
caught in the webs of adult words,
words of disarray, thrown at us like random pollen in the wind,
the self-probing, the blame
for failing to grasp the meaning.

The year we voted for inaction,

handing ropes to the manipulators,
the memory erasers.

The year we decided not to be political, socialist,
a philosopher—
The year we built machines, more powerful, more like us,
or so we thought—creations once unfathomable,
we kept rebuilding, unable to abandon them.

The year I read Picasso:

“Art is never finished, but abandoned.”

The year we let our narratives,
deliberate, planned
lies,
numb
the gutting cries through blasting fog,
ignorance, grief.

The year we let it all get lost amidst our own struggles and chaos,
the chaos that flows inside.
Everyone’s got their problems,
we whispered to the wind we shared with them, with no one, with ourselves.

Like the year before, and before,
and after, and after—
The year of hope, of compassion, of love.

The year calling for us to pause,
to listen to its sublime silence through the echoes
of all the conflicts and wars.

The year with scales of anger
scrawls with urgency,
wraps us, only
to slip by, slowly,
as our eyes stay glued shut.

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Mark Danowsky



Mark Danowsky is Editor-in-Chief of *ONE ART: a journal of poetry* and Poetry Craft Essays Editor for *Cleaver Magazine*. He is the author of several short poetry books. His latest poetry collection is *Take Care* (Moon Tide Press, 2025).

Limerence

Newness ends
Though we defy and deny
Such nonsense

We want to believe
The good red Taylor speaks of
Might keep on keeping on

You've learned this lesson before—
Tout lasse, tout casse, tout passe
Nothing lasts, everything breaks, everything passes

Not this time you insist
To yourself in the dark
Spinning on sweet nothings

What could be so beautiful
As that which flames out
Like light from a long-gone star

This beating in your chest
These fluttering butterflies
Glorious ever-fleeting sip of ephemeral

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Robert L. Dean, Jr.



Robert L. Dean, Jr. is the author of *Pulp* (Finishing Line Press, 2022); *The Aerialist Will not be Performing*: ekphrastic poems and short fictions to the art of Steven Schroeder (Turning Plow Press, 2020); *At the Lake with Heisenberg* (Spartan Press, 2018); and the forthcoming Ekphrastic collaboration with Jason Baldinger titled “The Night Window.” A multiple Pushcart and Best of the Net nominee, his work has appeared in many literary journals. Dean has been a professional musician and worked at The Dallas Morning News. He is a member of The Writers Place and Kansas Authors Club. He lives in Kansas.

Pickpocket

Down the boulevard he glides, eyes shifting
here, there. Not as easy as it used to be.

No unbuttoned suit coat jackets. No loose
lapels, bulging pants pockets, oversize handbags

gaping. Slim, slick cell phones now, apps,
tap and pay. Nothing he can really get a grip on.

Till he sees you.

Wearing your heart, your emotions, your life
on your sleeve. He flexes two fingers, shakes off

decades of rust, jostles you slightly.
As if by accident.

As if simply time, passing.

And when you no longer remember
where you are going, you search yourself.

Hands fumbling
over shirt, jeans. Searching for

the who of you. The what of you.
That night or day or morning

when you told someone
you loved them.

That little boy face
a dog licked.

Or was it a cat, a hand?
Was it even you? What did the sky look like

when school let out for summer? Fifth grade, fourth grade,
sixth. What did it look like yesterday? This morning? You look up.

You see nothing. You feel neither joy nor sadness. Just
a lack. An absence. From a pawn shop window

your face stares back. Or what you seem to remember
as your face. Spread out around you,
your life.

Or a semblance thereof.
All for just two dollars.

And even that
slips away down the boulevard.

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Cheryl Denise



Cheryl Denise is a proud West Virginian Appalachian with strong Canadian roots. She lives in the hills near Philippi, in a timber frame home she built with her husband Mike Miller. She is author of the poetry books, *Fences* (2021), *What's in the Blood* (2012) and *I Saw God Dancing* (2005), all published by Cascadia Publishing House LLC. Cheryl's poems are included in *Porch Poems* (2023), a unique collaborative chapbook featuring four well-known WV poets published by Sheila-Na-Gig Editions.

Upon Being Asked, When You Talk to Yourself Who are You Talking To?

God, I say,
or the other side,
a familiar stranger
in that distant land from where I came.

Those conversations, prayers, watering my toes,
growing my body old and lovely.

My mother would think I'm doing too much yoga,
reading too many Rumi poems
which like newspaper horoscopes may hold truths,
but are dangerous she warned my teenage self
as I lingered on the back pages.

At church my mother swallows God four times a year.
When I was a child, she paid homage to him
while sewing Easter dresses, while hiding tomato plants
behind her red tea roses by the porch.

She's never spoken to me about such things.
I hope she talks to herself in her apartment,
I hope she knows.

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Morgan DePue



Morgan DePue is a neurodivergent Appalachian poet. She lives in Ashe County, NC, and teaches at Appalachian State University. She has published in *Pinesong Anthology*, *Salvation South*, *Women Speak Anthology*, and elsewhere. When not writing or teaching, she can be found wading in rivers, wandering hills, and cuddling her cats.

Aftermath: Or the fragmenting of time following a police shooting

It is January and time drifts
in scattered snowfall and sleet.
My partner says the panther
was a premonition of our neighbor's death
the black cat he'd reportedly seen simply
a message coded in the primal fear
of falling prey to something unseen.

It is December 2022 and time falls
soft like rain at dusk.
I am walking with a crocheted bag
full of cookie tins.
A white-haired neighbor offers me a ride
asks if my car broke down.
He's concerned because he's seen me walking
but never with my pocketbook.
I decline. These tins are for other neighbors.
One day I'll wish I'd given him a tin of cookies.

It is January 2024 and time moves
with the cold front and my street
is blocked by cops who refuse my right of passage.
The news gives more answers than they do.
I am told, three times, by the officer
fueled by his own ego and rage and fear
that he can call an ambulance
if I need medicine so bad.
Find another place to sleep besides your home.
"I've seen these things last for days."
Nothing can disturb the 3-D scanning equipment
currently mapping the crime scene.

It is Summer and time burns
in the furnace of the sun.
A white-haired man says "Hot today"
as I walk the road.

It is January and time freezes and thaws
ignoring thermodynamic laws.
A different officer will help me, along with two others.
Passed between three sets of hands

I'm guided home
long after dark.
The man who walks me home is firm but kind.

They do not want me to see
what I do not see
which is evidence
of how long he'd been left on the road.
I don't look left, only ahead,
though

the periphery...
Before my house two deer pause
watch us approaching.

It is Fall and time clashes in lightning fracturing.
A white-haired man smokes a cigarette
by his truck.
There is a pistol on his hip.

It is January and time drifts
in scattered snowfall and sleet.
My partner and I walk to retrieve my car
from the other side of the crime scene
the road, our road.
On the way, there is the place
the darkened grass gripping
what remains.
My partner leaves tobacco on a sheaf of weathered pine
sprinkles tea
for a safe journey.

Moments are numb,
fragmented,
consequential,
and insequential.

In 2024, I wish I'd given him a tin of cookies.

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Cathryn Essinger



Cathryn Essinger is the author of six books of poetry—most recently, *The Apricot and the Moon*, and *Wings, or Does the Caterpillar Dream of Flight?*, both from Dos Madres press. Her sixth book *Telling the Bees*, will be coming from your press sometime next year. My poems have appeared in Poetry, The New England Review, Rattle, Ecotone, Terrain.org, Southern Poetry Review, Calyx and other journals. My poems have been nominated for Pushcarts and “Best of the Net,” featured on The Writer’s Almanac, and reprinted in American Life in Poetry. I live in Troy, Ohio, where I raise Monarch butterflies.

Survivor

for Becky

The pine tree that I rescued
from a crack in the sidewalk

is now twenty feet tall.
We planted it in your yard

the summer you began chemo.
I want you to know

that last year it dropped
its first pine cones

and this year it hosts
a nest of robins.

Wherever you have gone,
we are still here, amazed

by the little peach trees
that grow from seeds

planted by an ambitious
generation of squirrels.

The iris did not bloom
this year, but the peonies,

those aging ladies in pink
negligees, were beautiful.

I have not trimmed the lilacs
as I promised, but I will

once the blossoms have fallen.
In the meantime, all I can say

is that we are doing our best
to live a life worth dying for.

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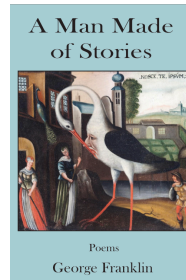
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George Franklin practices law in Miami. *Poetry & Pigeons: Short Essays on Writing* was published by SheilaNa-Gig Editions in January 2025. *A Man Made of Stories* is his fourth full-length poetry collection forthcoming soon from Sheila-Na-Gig Editions, 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!](#)

Someday

When our backs and legs are stiff in the morning and movement's
Awkward, a hobbling gait to the left and right, and our hands are
Swollen with the ache that comes from grasping and missing,
The right hand forgetting what the Psalmist called its "cunning,"
When we forget what we swore to remember, nights
When the room slipped away from us, lips pressed hard against
Lips, your skin's fabric beneath my hands' clumsy touch,
When I strain to recall the soap smell of your neck on the pillow,
Your back's warmth held against my chest beneath the covers,
Light cracking the shades, stubborn light—is this how
We'll clutch at the world, at each other, at whatever desire meant?
Mi amor, what was it we desired, what we still desire?
When I want to fall asleep, I'll pretend you're next to me.

The Same Conversation

For the last week, the moon's risen late,
Climbing over the shopping mall, the
Rooftops, old mango trees, the canal
Where the ducks are asleep and no breeze
Disturbs the water. Even at night,
It feels too hot to go for a walk.
The season's first hurricane just turned
North before it reached us. The rumble
Of air conditioning units is

All that I hear except for someone's
Television turned up too loud. It's
A commercial, an automobile
Coming to a quick stop, someone's voice
We can almost recognize. The dog
Sticks his nose deep in the grass, a smell
That he reads like a paragraph from
A Russian novel: *Prince Andrey ate*
Chicken by-products, corn, for breakfast.
Natasha squatted and peed for a
Long time by the stop sign. They were both
Unhappy with life in the suburbs.
You and I talk about politics,
Which these days is like talking about
The weather, something we are without
Power to change. We imagine life
In Colombia or Mexico
And consider how hard it would be
To move, how difficult to earn a
Living. Your sister and her wife are
Visiting Bogotá. They're worried
How they'll be treated at the airport
When they return, what kind of questions
They'll be asked. Now, everything seems wrong.
Last winter, the geese didn't fly south
In their long formations. They used to
Land on the roof sometimes, then fly off.
Now, it's people we know who're leaving.

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Jennifer Franklin



Jennifer Franklin has published three poetry collections, including *If Some God Shakes Your House* (Four Way Books, 2023), finalist for the Paterson Prize and Julie Suk Award. Poems from *A Fire In Her Brain* have been published in *American Poetry Review*, *The Bennington Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, and “poem-a-day” on poets.org. Her work has been commissioned by The Metropolitan Museum, and published in *The Paris Review*, *The Nation*, *Bedford Guide to Literature*, and Poetry Society of America’s “Poetry in Motion.” She won a Pushcart Prize, a NYFA grant, and CRCF Award. She teaches in Manhattanville’s MFA program, & her online workshops. Visit her online at jenniferfranklinpoet.com

Queen of Night, 3 am

I keep vigil with the seventy stems we pulled
from the dry ground at the tulip farm across the bridge.

Alone, I watch them open to the room, cast shadows
on my tables and desk—Lasting Love, Ruby Velvet,

Wild Blue Heart, *Triumph*, *Burning Flame*,
and the black-purple—*Queen of Night*. They know

my secrets—hold them in their wide cups. Every vase
and pitcher, full. No empty surfaces, no room to move

without the tulips watching. I cannot sleep while
they breathe beside me. Only the tulips know me

and what I was meant to do. What I have not done.
I will never be free from their watchful gaze. If I leave

the room, they will discuss me—all my failures and flaws.
All my shortcomings and sins. They see everything,

remind me how the learned men in their brick buildings
praised me before I was betrothed and babied. Before

I was bound and bullied, bowed, burdened, and burned.
Before, before, before. The tulips know the whole story.

They don’t need the details I told the strangers who ferried
my daughter and me through the traffic of the city. No,

I can hide nothing from them. They know the color
of my weakness, the shade of my pettiness. They know

which of them matches the texture of my jealousy. The tulips
have always known the tenor of my tender and terrible heart.

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Jennifer L. Freed



Jennifer L. Freed's recent poetry appears in *Atlanta Review*, *OneArt*, *Rust and Moth*, *Vox Populi*, and *What The House Knows*. Her collection *When Light Shifts*, exploring themes of identity, body, and care-giving, was a finalist for the 2022 Sheila Margaret Motton Book Prize and the 2025 Medal Provocateur, was short-listed for the 2025 Eric Hoffer Grand Prize, and was second place for the Eric Hoffer Legacy Prize. She teaches adult education programs from Massachusetts. Please visit Jfreed.weebly.com

Turns

These days, my mother asks me
to transcribe notes for her—
a graduation card to a grandchild,

condolences to the children
of her best friend.
More and more, gaps

punctuate her speech.
She doesn't know how often
her phrases repeat: *I'm sorry...I wish...*

I'm glad...I wish...I'm sorry...
I sit across from her at the low table
in front of her wheelchair, pen hovering.

Her eyes fade in and out of focus.
Shadows drift across her face.
I remember watching my daughters—

how their faces bloomed
when they searched, then found
the words they wanted

me to write for them, stories
they illustrated with scrawls
like my own when I was small,

when my mother
was the one with pen poised,
waiting.

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D. Dina Friedman



D. Dina Friedman's recent work includes a short-story collection, *Immigrants*, (Creators Press, 2023) and a poetry chapbook *Here in Sanctuary—Whirling* (Querencia Press, 2024). She is also the author of the chapbook *Wolf in the Suitcase* (Finishing Line Press) and two young adult novels: *Escaping Into the Night* (Simon and Schuster) and *Playing Dad's Song* (Farrar Straus Giroux). Dina has published widely in literary journals including *Rattle*, *Salamander*, *The Sun*, *Mass Poetry*, *Chautauqua Journal*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Cider Press Review*, *Lilith*, *Negative Capability* and *Rhino* and received six Pushcart Prize and two Best of the Net nominations.

IT DOESN'T MATTER

if the earth's axis is on a tilt, if the universe
is expanding—or not, if the Red Sox win
or you botch up the piano piece—and you will.
It doesn't matter if no one listens to you play,
or everyone does, and makes raspberries
even if they're pretending to play with the baby
who's also making raspberries. It doesn't matter

if your words jump off the page, worming
into people's hearts or die in a slow, ignored fade.
It doesn't matter if you die. We all will, sometime,
or if the dog is pawing at you when you're trying
to write a poem, or the cat pounces on the computer,
convinced he's the better poet. Isn't randomness

the name of the game, like Jackson Pollack
pretending he had a plan for where the paint landed.
It doesn't matter if there are no plans, or reasons.
Truly, there are no reasons for wars
regardless of who says, "he started it."
And it does matter that people die in wars

and on the streets. It does matter that an AR-15
can knock off dozens with one trigger pull
of an angry teen. It matters when the geraniums die,
even if that's part of the natural order of things.
It will matter to me when I die, and perhaps
to the people who love me, even if in the great scheme
of the universe, expanding or not, I'm just a speck
on the globe. Tilting.



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Karen George



Karen George is author of three poetry collections from Dos Madres Press: *Swim Your Way Back* (2014), *A Map and One Year* (2018), and *Where Wind Tastes Like Pears* (2021). She won Slippery Elm's 2022 Poetry Contest, and her short story collection, *How We Fracture*, which won the Rosemary Daniell Fiction Prize, is forthcoming from Minerva Rising Press in Spring 2023. Her work appears in *Adirondack Review*, *Atticus Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Indianapolis Review*, and *Poet Lore*. Her website is: <https://karenlgeorge.blogspot.com/>.

Playing For the Lost

A tall sinuous woman leans against a midnight-blue piano,
plays a violin tucked between chin and shoulder.

Lace sashays at her wrists and deep V-neck teal dress. Dark hair,
dramatic brows, eyes closed, half her face shadowed blue.

O, her body, the body of the piano with its blocky legs,
the hourglass violin, the wide-hipped vase and its mirror image

cast on the piano lid whelmed with late afternoon sun
and the ecstasy of Paganini's Caprice #5.

Voluptuous, veiled blue notes rise, fall, catch, amass
in the indigo vase, its glass pulsing with the plucked strings.

She pours herself out, tilts, elongates, creates space to cradle
joy, grief, wonder inextricably spliced. The air ambers, hums.

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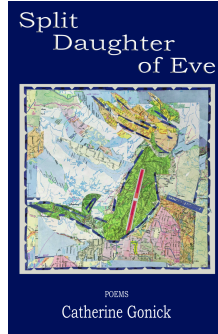
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Catherine Gonick



Split Daughter of Eve by Catherine Gonick

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Catherine Gonick published her debut collection of poetry, *Split Daughter of Eve*, with Sheila-Na-Gig Editions in 2025. She is a winner of the Ina Coolbrith Prize for Poetry and was a finalist in the Louisville Actors Theatre 10-Minute Play Contest. Her poems have appeared in *The Best American Poetry: Pick of the Week* and *Verse Daily*, in journals including *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, *Pedestal*, *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, *One Art*, *Of The Book*, *The Nu Review*, and *The New Verse News*, and in anthologies including *in plein air*; *Grabbed: Poets and Writers on Sexual Assault, Empowerment and Healing*; *Support Ukraine*; and *Rumors, Secrets & Lies: Poems About Pregnancy, Abortion, and Choice*. She lives in the Hudson Valley, where she works with her husband in a company that seeks to slow the rate of global warming.

Monster in the Ladies' Room

Listening to the uproar
over the very idea

you'd think
she had never been seen before

was a horror not even
imagined until now

that the shouters
lawfully barring the door

had never read
about her like

nor visited a museum
gazed at a statue

of Hermaphroditus
like the one at the Ashmolean.

A marble torso
of a naked woman with small

breasts and a small penis
who unites

two sexes
in one slim body

this once venerated
human figure

stands before the viewer
unscared

knowing she is sacred.

Alpha

On your evening walk, you wonder
when your dog might decide.

She whines, strains at her leash,
as if now is the time

to take back all she gave up
for kibble, a vet, a warm bed,

and, of course, your love. Are you
still worth her unthinking

devotion? The eons you took
to let her approach your fire?

Tonight might be the night
she remembers to ask

the moon what kind of wolf
becomes a dog, and gives you up

like a bone you tossed too far.

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Bunny Goodjohn



Bunny Goodjohn is published in both poetry and prose. Her poetry has appeared in a number of literary journals including *Press 53*, *The Texas Review*, *One Art Poetry*, *Kestrel* and *The Cortland Review*. Her poetry collection *Bone Song* (Briery Creek Press) was published in 2015. She has published two novels: *The Beginning Things* (Underground Voices) and *Sticklebacks and Snow Globes* (Permanent Press). www.bunnygoodjohn.com

TWO GOOD WOMEN

How quickly things changed that day.
The cat, one moment engrossed in grass,
the next turning broken somersaults
on the asphalt, the casualty of some driver's
inattention; and me, heading to the store,
fretting about tariffs and the stock market,
how I can never clear my left nostril, all erased
by this cat's frantic spinning in the road.

A car stops on the median, and in the time
it takes me to park, a woman is carrying
the tomcat to the trees. She's professional,
checking for a pulse, fingers at his throat.
He is long and grey, back legs twitching,
his mouth a mess of too many teeth,
his head a collapsed cake of blood.

"I've got a gun in the car," she says.
Under my palm, the cat's shoulder is warm,
and I cannot help but think how, on any other day,
he would so object to my invasion
of his wild space. By the time she's back,

he's dead and all afternoon, I am detoured
by the knowledge death will come for me.
Not hit in the head by a Ford Maverick, but likely
a slow death, captive in some nursing home,
an inane tv show buzzing in the background.


I'm praying the bored and jaded nurses
will have driven on and left just two good women
behind: one with her warm, wide hand on my shoulder,

her voice low, words unintelligible but kind;
the other heading to her car, gone to get her pistol.

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Kelle Groom



Kelle Groom is the author of four poetry collections, *Underwater City* (University Press of Florida), *Luckily, Five Kingdoms*, and *Spill* (Anhinga Press); a memoir, *I Wore the Ocean in the Shape of a Girl* (Simon & Schuster), a Barnes & Noble Discover selection and *New York Times* Book Review Editor's Choice; and most recently, *How to Live: A Memoir in Essays* (Tupelo Press). An NEA Fellow, Massachusetts Cultural Council Fellow, and recipient of two Florida Book Awards in poetry, Groom's work has appeared in *AGNI*, *American Poetry Review*, *Best American Poetry*, *The New Yorker*, *New York Times*, *Ploughshares*, and *Poetry*.

LIGHTNING STRIKE CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

Lightning strikes every afternoon in June
a hundred degrees
penny hail, tornado warnings
Smoke covered the Dixie Freeway

the field behind my office
struck, on fire for days,
hot spots keep popping up
fire line 35 feet from buildings,

ten feet deep down into the earth,
vegetation fuel cleared
The field a meadow a forest a swamp
preserved land, lightning

can hit the muck, go underground stay
for years burning
you'd never know until one day, POOF,
you're on fire.

At the jetty, a fisherman's lead
was hit by lightning
which travelled down
the metal rod, into the fisherman's temple,

down his face, torso, heading for his feet
which would have been
blown off which would have been the end
of him, but the fisherman

was wearing waders, and the charge reversed,
back up through his body
down his arm to his fingers looking for a way
out and blew two fingers off.

Firemen can make water wetter: add Dawn
dish detergent, more slippery
too, in case there's a fire that's hard to reach.
Now, when the trash

can blows away in the lightning
storm, I let it go,
let trash spill, attract alligators, I've seen
the map it can leave

on the side of a face,
burn became day descended
from fever, my town
was the Lightning Strike Capital of the World,

now it's Four Corners
west of Disney. Florida had 18,706,904
lightning strikes last year.
It's surprising

the whole state isn't on fire,
all of us electrocuted.
There is no safe place
outdoors, said Chris Vagasky,

lightning expert.
We're bright, frazzled,
tamping the ground
in our rubber shoes,

avoiding trees, headed for our cars,
our houses, staying away
from windows, shook
from the acoustic shock.

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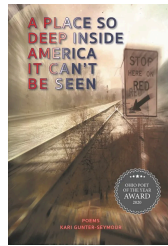
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Kari Gunter-Seymour



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Kari Gunter-Seymour (she/her) is the Poet Laureate of Ohio and the author of three award-winning collections of poetry, including *Dirt Songs* (EastOver Press 2024), winner of the IPPY Bronze and Feathered Quill Awards. She is the Executive Director of the Women of Appalachia Project and editor of its anthology series *Women Speak*. Her work has been featured in a variety of journals and the *American Book Review*, *Poem-a-Day*, *World Literature Today* and *The New York Times*. www.karigunterseymourpoet.com

Tonight The Light Bulb in My Head Pulled its Own Chain

I get it now. My sister didn't
spend years of our childhood

holding a sweaty hand across my mouth
when our mother wasn't looking
simply because siblings can be spiteful.

I was a pogo stick, a kettle drum,
a galloping horse pounding
the linoleum floor—

she a papery blossom
pirouetting the tip of a prickly cactus,
gouging herself again and again
with every attempt to keep up.

She tried Christianity, an ashram,
buried herself in books
and herbs, hoping for clues—

a map to unriddle minds,
interpret body language.

My ye-ha energy a nettle,
scratching, rashing,
signaling her adrenals to fire,

to shoot spikes of electric current
up and down her spine,

Tonight's sky is a painting,
its wounded undertones a reproach.

When we found her body there was no note,
no drama, no blame, as if
she simply no longer had the strength

to scratch out even one last
God-forsaken word.

As if Your Death is Not Enough

In the car, alone, trapped,
your specter slinks my spine—

hair-raising pangs, rapid-fire bolts
jabbing my headbone.

No amount of podcast or Tom Petty,
no *Sweet Jesus please* can hinder

your grip, my tongue tacky
as a morning-after drunk.

I try to spit you out in road rage—
gas pedal and middle finger,

your name a sharp prickle
tooth-scraping my lower lip.

A host of shuddersome
black birds crouch a mile

of metal fence, wings tucked,
heads bent. Winds sharp

as spiteful words
rend the last of the milkweed,

a desperate dance of ovules,
a cloister of too-late's and if-only's,

their shadows setting off
to some other place altogether.

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Madlynn Haber



Madlynn Haber is the author of *Seasons of Sorrow and Joy* (Metaphysical Fox Press, 2025). She lives in a cohousing community in Northampton, Massachusetts where she writes poetry and essays. Her work has been published in *Poetica Magazine*, *Buddhist Poetry Review*, *Eunoia Review*, *Months To Years*, *Medical Literary Messenger*, and many other journals. Online at www.madlynnwrites.com

A Mind Grown Old

Where do memories go
when they leave a mind
grown old and worn?

It is apparent as I tell her some news
that it is not landing anywhere,
not embedding itself for future reference.

A tearful gesture of grief fills her face,
she covers her eyes with her hands,
but I can tell that she will not remember
the sad news of an aunt's passing.
She will have to be told again and then again.
Each time grief will waft through
and depart along with the details.

She will remember the rings she wore
every day when she looks at her barren fingers.
Her gnarled hands remind her of her dead mother.

She will remember the past with embellishments
seeing herself at funerals she failed to attend.

She will use gimmicks and slogans to find
her way in the hallways. She will not recall
last week's luncheon or the names of her cousins,
though she will pretend that she does.

There will be no new memories while old ones repeat.
She will rehash arguments she had with her spouse
before he died, and recall a grandmother rescuing her
from being teased in the school yard. Old memories
transform when there is no one left to validate them.

She will ask who will come to her funeral now
that so many have died, and she will wonder,

yet again if the person in the coffin
can hear the words being spoken about her.

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Colleen S. Harris



Colleen S. Harris earned her MFA from Spalding University. Her poetry collections include *The Light Becomes Us* (Main Street Rag, 2025), *These Terrible Sacraments* (Doubleback 2019, Bellowing Ark, 2011), *The Kentucky Vein* (Punkin House, 2011), *God in My Throat: The Lilith Poems* (Bellowing Ark, 2009), and chapbooks *Toothache in the Bone* (boats against the current, forthcoming 2025), *Some Assembly Required* (Porkbelly, 2014), and *That Reckless Sound* (Porkbelly, 2014). Her poetry appears or is forthcoming in *Berkeley Poetry Review*, *The Louisville Review*, *Cider Press Review*, *Appalachian Heritage*, and more than 70 others. Find her at colleensharris.com and as 'warmaiden' on Bluesky/Instagram.

The Friendship of Older Women

for Robin

We are not the girls we were. We did not know
each other as girls, but we recognized each other
as women, always a few months of ruined savings
from you touring me through Montmartre,
from me dragging you to the Fontana di Trevi
to gape at Poseidon and throw in our coins.
You send a photo of yourself in good lighting
before your tall bronze mirror in a delicate lace bra,
pants three sizes smaller than last year, snow
in drifts beyond your window, a dreary Buffalo spring.
You ask how they look (and because we are women,
I know you mean the slacks and not your breasts).

I don't compliment you, yet. We are so much older
than we were, after all, and there are so many more
reasons to be thin, few of them good. I worry
we will not make it to France. Before I say
that this olive wide-leg twill fits against you
as though it knows you ache to believe yourself
a beauty, before I say clothes touching your body
so snugly is a language you will learn
like the 18th century French you read, so familiar
yet distant, too, before I can tell you how you look
in this new body, sister, *mia sorella di cuore*,
m'âme soeur, please tell me how you feel.

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Christina Hauck



Christina Hauck is a Pushcart nominated poet and Yaddo fellow. Her poems have appeared in many small journals, including *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Coal City Review*, *Collateral*, *Flint Hills Review*, and others. Her book manuscript, *Dying to Reach You*, was a finalist for the 2024 Barry Spacks Prize. Born and raised in Alameda County, California (Ohlone), Christina now lives on unceded land of the Kaw Indians in Lawrence, KS, with her wife, Margaret, and several smaller mammals. Christina's current project, tentatively titled "Bad Deeds," is a sequence of poems unpacking the legacies of white privilege/supremacy within her family history.

Playing Indian

i.

Martha and I hunch over,
walk slowly, place each

heel gently, snap
no twig, leave no trace,

sneak up on our prey—
Mrs. Smith's cat.

ii.

We were surrounded
by ghosts. They passed
through us, the air
trembled with words
we couldn't quite hear
or understand, something
they wanted to share
something we were
dying to know.

iii.

After lunch, we gather
acorns, shell & pound
them between two stones.
Pretend to cook. Actually
put the raw bitter meat
into our mouths.

iv.

Ohlone girls learned
from older women—
mothers, grandmothers,

aunts, big sisters—
when to harvest acorns,
how to dry and winnow,
then pound them to
flour and leech with
hot or cold water
sluicing bitterness out,
laughing and talking
in the shade of an oak.

v.

Our mothers stayed home,
talked on the phone,

drank coffee and smoked,
breathing great plumes

into the air. We would
spend our childhood trying

to decipher their meaning,
soon imitate them, dying

to be heard.

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Mary Hawley



Mary Hawley is a poet, fiction writer, and literary translator (Spanish to English). She is the author of a poetry collection, *Double Tongues* (Tía Chucha Press), and her poems have appeared in *Mudlark*, *Tipton Poetry Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *The Plentitudes Journal* (forthcoming) and other magazines and anthologies. Her short stories have been published in *Hypertext*, *Doubleback Review*, and elsewhere, and she has received an Illinois Literary Award in fiction. Her translations of poetry and prose have appeared in *The Common*, *TriQuarterly*, *La Picciolletta Barca* (forthcoming), and other journals. She lives in Evanston, Illinois.

Jet-Ski, Lake Superior

On that day when the waves rose around us
I knew there was no sympathy in them

but we didn't turn back—instead plunged ahead.
My daughter was driving, me clinging to her,

our eyes stung shut with every slap of wave.
The water, beautiful and indifferent: what if

God is like that, no sense of humor, only a force
pushing toward us, never hearing my little stories.

She gunned the engine over each foamy slope,
sliding into one channel and then another,

another. Seven miles of waves and she took each
one carefully, planning ahead. By September

the lake is even colder, we were too far from shore.
I have worried about this child, we have screamed

at each other, but that day the wind blew words
back into our mouths. There was a power in us,

stupid as it was to be out there. We should have
turned back when we first chugged out of

the harbor's mouth into the ominous waves,
past an eagle perched on a mooring post,

drenched in the spray, but we went anyway
and something changed, hasn't changed back.

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Richard Hedderman



Richard Hedderman is a poet and writer whose work has been published in dozens of journals and anthologies both in the U.S. and abroad. Publications include *The Stockholm Review of Literature*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Rattle*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Pinyon*, *Santa Fe Literary Review*, *Kestrel*, *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, and several anthologies including *In a Fine Frenzy: Poets Respond to Shakespeare* (University of Iowa Press). A multiple Pushcart Prize nominee, his most recent book of poems is *Choosing a Stone* (Finish Line Press). He lives in Milwaukee where he teaches creative writing at Mount Mary University.

TELL THE WIND

Tell the wind that television is a mirage in the wasteland
of the living room. Tell the wind it sounds like rain when I listen

to the evening news— a dense, tireless downpour. Tell the wind.
Tell the wind that the thistles have learned to divide into stars,

that the moon tugs stones into the shallows. Tell the wind.
Tell the wind that by dawn the rain will have stopped

counting the roads, that the grass already misses its long fingers.
Tell the wind that we worship in a temple, and it is a temple

of knives. Tell the wind. Tell the wind that in war, there are never
two sides— only one, and it is suffering. Tell the wind.

Tell the wind when the desert opens its salty mouth hawks rise
to comfort the dead and grieve the living. Tell the wind

that the exiles' flags burn in pure oxygen, that at night the birds
return to the leaves of the Bible. Tell the wind as it hunches

the backs of the hills with snow that the scarecrow remains lashed
to a snow fence with cords of blood. Tell the wind. Tell the wind

it shrouds the dead locomotives with gravel and rust. Tell the wind
that sparks are weeping from the welder's torch. Tell the wind.

Tell the wind you must taste the silt in the tiny river
of your own wrist. Tell the wind to hum to the barbed wire.

ENTROPY

“The measure of a system's thermal energy that is unavailable for doing useful work.” —*Encyclopedia Britannica*

I flunked chemistry
junior year of high school—
a stain on my permanent

record, which left an indelible
blot to dog—or even
hound-me through

miserable decades of
failure to launch
a career in the field.

It could have been
all the daydreaming
I accomplished

that year, harder than
it sounds what with
Sister Thomas carrying

on endlessly about acids,
nucleotides,
the monatomic ion,

while perversely refuting
Planck's constant
and touting with

fiendish devotion the
practical applications
of the null hypothesis.

She yammered, I stared
out the classroom
window watching clouds

huddle in the flat sky
above the football field
where they'd part and run

patterns, rolling and
tumbling over one
another, then meet and

separate with astonishing
fluidity. And I would
augur in their vaporous

writhings a brilliant
future for myself
the way oracles

of old would divine
the outcome of battle
in the entrails of a hen.

I gazed languidly
at the sky and saw
for myself an astonishing

life ahead, where
I would at last
grasp the concept

of the free radical,
then fail stunningly
to great acclaim

then fail again
with lavish abandon.
So, I declined to learn

whatever I needed
to pass then made
myself scarce before

they could teach
me anything more
about cluster

compounds, noble
gas or weak acids—
about entropy.

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Gloria Heffernan



Gloria Heffernan's most recent full-length poetry collection is *Fused* (Shanti Arts Publishing). Her craft book, *Exploring Poetry of Presence* (Back Porch Productions) won the CNY Book Award for Nonfiction. She received the 2022 Naugatuck River Review Narrative Poetry Prize. Gloria is the author of the collections *Peregrinatio: Poems for Antarctica* (Kelsay Books), and *What the Gratitude List Said to the Bucket List*, (New York Quarterly Books). Her work has appeared in over 100 publications including *Poetry of Presence* (vol. 2).

Meditation on the Northern Lights

I saw the Northern Lights tonight,
pointing the way to Ojibwa country
where giveaways free the soul
of its earthly burdens,
and *miigwech* is the word
for thank you.

Halfway between Milwaukee
and Lac du Flambeau,
we pulled over to the shoulder of the road
to watch the lights rise up across the sky

waving in shimmering sheets
of iridescent green
like the wings of a million lunar moths
flying headlong into the stars.

I saw the Northern Lights tonight,
and when a mere thank you
simply wouldn't do.
I borrowed that word,
Miigwech,
as mysterious, as luminous
as those lights.

My pulse beats in time
with that cosmic ballet,
a gift too vast to be contained,
impossible to bear alone,
So I pass the memory on to you,
a giveaway of sorts,
unburdening my soul
from the weight
of an unshared story.

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Ken Holland



Greetings, I was fortunate enough to place first in *New Ohio Review's* 2021 poetry contest and was a 2024 finalist in two chapbook contests, including Moonstone Arts Center which will be publishing the chapbook in 2025. I've had work widely published in such journals as *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Rattle*, *Atlanta Review* and *Pedestal Magazine*. Three Pushcart nominations and inclusion in a number of anthologies. Poetry forthcoming in *California Quarterly* and *Tar River Poetry* among others. More at kenhollandpoet.com

Habana

I'm in the backseat of a '57 Chevy with a rebuilt Russian engine
in a city where lead-black pollution drifts like
lethal fog, as if Havana was nothing but a lung soaking in what's
cancerous, and when the halogen lights of the highway
kick in at dusk they illuminate sheets of exhaust vibrant and fibrous.
I listen to how deeply the city breathes. How it pounds
its chest in rhythm to the heart-stop beat of an Afro-Cuban jazz quintet
holding forth in the basement of *La Zorra y El Cuervo*,
while at street-level a dark-skinned Cuban in a modified tux
stands sentinel against those of us who've been bored
by Purgatory, where what we've glimpsed of Heaven is altogether
too bright. To be alive is nothing if not improvisation
and what I hear of a West African-inflected sax carries enough rapture
to satisfy any myth of a second coming.

In *Habana Vieja* Hemingway held court at *La Floridita* where he practiced
his shining abuse of alcohol. On a typical night, fifteen
daiquiris. Which illuminated for me the tight path between Havana
and his home in Idaho where he'd placed the barrel
of a shotgun to his head. You can't walk through his house in Havana
for they've left it exactly as it was the day he killed himself.
But you can look in through the windows. On the walls the heads and
throats of the African game he'd taken down. And the table
lined with liquor bottles standing as quietly and upright as a staff
of butlers, in unmoving discipline since 1960. The throat
of each taut with anticipation of one more drink. And for all
that happened in Idaho, here, at least, the walls and floors
are bloodless.

I can exhaust my sum knowledge of Spanish in a hundred and
forty seconds, and yet somehow I'm the one
to carry the conversation with most every taxi driver, half of them
asking me *Cual ciudad es mas hermosa? Nueva York*
o Habana? Habana, I tell them. Havana is more beautiful. And they smile.
Whatever the truth is, it has no place here. Poverty

is crushing but so is the beauty of this country. At the local market
I pay what amounts to thirty-five cents for a liter
of purified water and pocket the change as if hard earned, the stupid
satisfaction in exchanging a bank note for a bottle of water
and a splay of foreign coinage. *Estupido Americano*. I know this.
But that changes nothing. I'm making my way alone
through a country where English is as much an embargoed commodity
as technology. Where the stone fortresses overseeing

the city stand impregnable within the hours of a long gone century,
and now honeycombed with *turistas* who walk about
in their own quietude. More than history, it's the silence I've come for,
the small inner court with its broken-slatted benches
and assemblage of cottonwood trees. Where, for the first time in this city,
I can hear the soft wind lofting in from the harbor.
What I've left behind in New York is not something new but something
very old. The ritual of heartbreak. Its dance of exhaustion.
Its primitive chant.

And if I'm not quite singing, it's only that I've yet to hold the language
the way it wants to be held. Along the seawall that stands
barrier to the bay young people cross the *Malecon* to gather along its length.
The night holds on to its heat, the bay makes its run up against
the concrete and vaults over where it can, a flash of violence
before the calm. As I pass, everyone is talking, and the few who
are not, are talking to me. I understand what they are saying.
The careless pose of their bodies. The way their eyes touch
the distance, its dark lip of desire. I understand what it's like
when words will not do.

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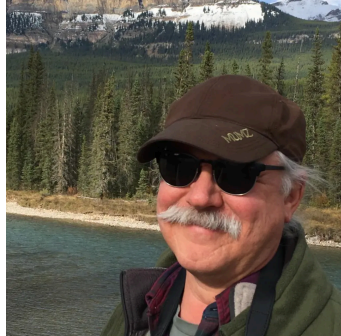
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Gene Hyde



Gene Hyde's poetry, essays, and photography have appeared in such publications as *Appalachian Journal*, *San Antonio Review*, *The Banyan Review*, *Jerry Jazz Musician*, *Raven's Perch*, *Valley Voices*, *Tiny Seed Literary Journal* and *Mountains Piled Upon Mountains: Appalachian Nature Writing in the Anthropocene*. He lives in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina with his partner and a scruffy little dog.

Watching a Titmouse Part the Red Sea in the Birdbath

Swallowtails rustle in the forsythia,
a tufted titmouse frolics in the
birdbath, his antics parting
the waves like Moses in a

Cecil B. DeMille epic. Seems like
DeMille's Red Sea was just
a wall of Jello, and I thought
about this each time I had

congealed salad at some family
function, uncles babbling about
minorities while aunts swapped
recipes. I parted the congealed

salad like Moses did, bits of
fruit cocktail suspended in
Jello like pharaoh's troops who
picked the wrong guy to follow.

The porch at my uncle's house
wasn't welcoming – hard wicker
chairs in the harsh Carolina sun,
fading in relevance as I grew

older and figured out what all
his Jesse Helms stickers meant.
I'd go to the porch to escape
the banter, the love entangled

with judgement, especially toward
the nephew with the bushy beard
and long hair, who wasn't scoring
any points in that regard, mind you.

The titmouse, sufficiently scrubbed,

flies off as I sit on my porch,
my dog napping in a comfortable
wicker chair while the trees slowly

recover from the storm, saplings
surviving in their own way, seeing
the hole in the canopy they are
eager to fill, or will one day, when

I'm gone and my nephew sits
here, watching the swallowtails,
hearing the wrens and robins,
maybe witnessing a titmouse
part the Red Sea in the birdbath.

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Jessica Jones



Jessica Jones (MA, University Montana) is on full-time faculty at Kent State University where she teaches creative writing, Native American Literature, and place-based composition. She comes from a long line of makers and musicians in Northern Appalachia. Her work has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies; her book *Bitterroot*, about living and teaching in on the Flathead Indian Reservation, can be found at Finishing Line Press.

KPAX News, Montana

2015

Six o'clock press was covered
by plain people on Channel 8:
one pregnant, the other homely,
*"Temps down to 40 below
a winter storm howling..."*

Nothing much else on their list—
frozen pipes in Helena,
so the capitol cafeteria was closed;
A school choir up in Lakeside
chastised for singing at a church.

The decades-long water dispute
over Salish Kootenai Dam;
Safe driver awards for Two Eagle High;
A map of the blizzard,
Alberta to Wyoming.

I didn't miss the broadcasts back east.
The sirens and commercials.
The strangers and fast speech.
Here, mountains determined everything
and human stories sounded small.

I turned down the volume, cradled the cat,
both of us listening to the wind—
louder than anything
a talking box could say
to such wildness.

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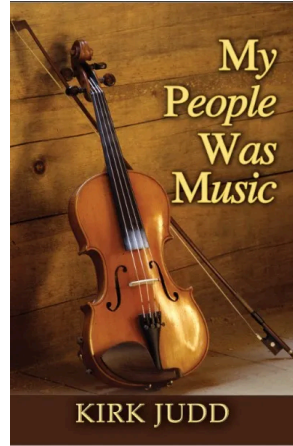
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Kirk Judd



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Kirk Judd has lived, worked, trout fished, and wandered around in West Virginia all of his life. Kirk was a member of the Appalachian Literary League, a founding member and former president of West Virginia Writers, Inc., and is a founding member of and creative writing instructor for Allegheny Echoes, Inc., dedicated to the support and preservation of WV cultural heritage arts. In addition to his two collections with Sheila-Na-Gig, Kirk is author of two other collections of poetry, *Field of Vision* (Aegina Press 1986) and *Tao Billy* (Trillium Press 1996), and a co-editor of the widely acclaimed anthology, *Wild, Sweet Notes – 50 Years of West Virginia Poetry 1950-1999*. Kirk is internationally known for his performance work combining poetry and old-time music, and he has performed poetry in Ireland and across West Virginia at fairs, concerts, and festivals for many years.

Better Listeners

The dead are better listeners
Or even the living
If they're not there

They will argue
But they are patient
They pay attention

Words have many meanings
We don't know what we know
Until we speak

Feel the weight of the word
Lift from our tongues
The spare outward push

Of air across our lips
And the words become real
Hanging iridescent

In that beautiful
Open space
In front of you

Until they hear –
Your long dead mother
Or Darwin, or John Muir

Charlie with his banjo
Steve from Junior High
Who died in a car crash

Or even your wife
Your golf buddies
That great poet you heard last week

When those words are heard
They change
They don't belong to just you anymore

They become something given
Not just something you said
Something you are – you were

You are changed
And all those riding with you
As you drive the back roads alone

Those listeners
Smile, and nod, and say
You're welcome

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Jen Karetnick



A 2024 National Poetry Series finalist, Jen Karetnick is the author of 13 collections of poetry, including *Inheritance with a High Error Rate* (January 2024), winner of the 2022 Cider Press Review Book Award and semi-finalist for the PSV 2025 North American Book Awards. Forthcoming books include *What Forges Us Steel: The Judge Judy Poems* (Alternating Current Press, 2025); *Domiciliary* (Sheila-Na-Gig Editions, 2026); and *Organ Language* (Lit Fox Books, 2026). The co-founder and managing editor of *SWWIM Every Day*, she has recent or forthcoming work in *Pleiades*, *Plume*, *Shenandoah*, *Sixth Finch*, *swamp pink*, *Verse Daily*, and elsewhere. See jkaretnick.com.

For Zoe and Remy

Note: The title and first line come from a survey performed by Marriott Resorts in advance of National Piña Colada Day.

36 Percent of Adults Count

a piña colada as their daily fruit intake
while on vacation and we were no different,
anchored off the coast of Cartagena

while on a tour of the Rosario Islands
to snorkel and drink from the mouth
of a bottle of diluted rum along with

the other guests as if none of us had ever
heard of disease. On each side of the boat,
boys balanced astride buttery plastic

kayaks as if on horseback. They cored
dethroned pineapples, sliced the flesh into
oozing golden rings to hook onto the top

of the rind after they frothed the cocktail
mixture into whitecaps. At home, I forego this
fruit, its microscopic spikes of calcium oxalate—

the same substance as kidney stones—
and mouth-burning bromelain combining
to ulcerate my tongue so completely it takes

days to heal. I leave it at the market with
the grapefruit and cranberries and grapes
that interfere with the medications reducing

cholesterol and lowering blood pressure
and breaking up clots. But we'd just explored
the abandoned Fort of San Fernando de Bocachica

on Tierrabomba, so sparsely populated
its best restaurant is a stand under a tree,
learning how the soldiers braided maps

into their hair and why the rising water
in the cistern foretold the advance of
foreign ships, in a heat so radiant the waves

chalked their bodies onto the flagstones,
humidity pulping the juice from ours.
Bobbing on the ocean with my newly
adult kids, all of us hoisting pineapples

to toast the day, I found those plump
little suns filled with so much cool
and cream and gold, nothing left could sting.

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J.I. Kleinberg



J.I. Kleinberg is an artist, poet, freelance writer, and three-time Pushcart nominee. Her poetry has appeared in print and online journals and anthologies worldwide. In addition to *Sleeping Lessons* (Milk & Cake Press, 2025), her chapbooks include *The Word for Standing Alone in a Field* (Bottlecap Press, 2023), *How to pronounce the wind* (Paper View Press, 2023), and *Desire's Authority* (Ravenna Press Triple Series No. 23, 2023). A full-length volume of visual poems, *She needs the river* (Poem Atlas) was published in 2024. She lives in Bellingham, Washington, USA, and on Instagram @jikleiberg.

Getting the news

Once, twice, many times removed
from the pain, I read the news

that has traveled from the place
where the bullet parted the boy's ribs

or the bomb tumbled from the drone
to crush a roof over sleeping infants.

A camera saw it, or a crouching girl,
who told her sister, who still had

one bar on her phone and texted
her cousin. Pixel by pixel the story

spread: reporter, radio, printing press,
paper rolled in its plastic bag

waiting for me as I begin my day,
consider the weather, listen for

the gasp of the coffee pot, safe here
in a northern city in a messy pageant

of a nation. I have lain awake wondering
how the catastrophe will look

when it arrives, whether I will cower
and comply or spew curses

or if I will scream or hide or run
to the rescue of someone else.

How will I know what to do when
the graffiti stains my wall, when

the name called is my own, and what can
all the news, all our history, do for us now?

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Tricia Knoll



Tricia Knoll lives in Vermont in tune with snow, heat domes, and maple syrup. Her work appears widely in journals and in nine collections, both full-length and chapbook. Books out in 2024 include *Wild Apples* (downsizing and moving 3,000 miles from Oregon to Vermont) and *The Unknown Daughter*, persona poems of voices reacting to the Tomb of the Unknown Daughter. Her 2018 collection *How I Learned to be White* received the Human Relations Indi Book Award for Motivational Poetry. Knoll is a Contributing Editor to the online journal *Verse Virtual*. Right now she's writing prose poems. Website: triciaknoll.com

Tristesse

Sadness sounds softer in its French synonym. Mélancolie more like unsung song. Whatever it is, I stuff it in a duffel bag over my left shoulder, filled with things like worn-out negligees, whale swizzle sticks, sand falling from beach-combing sandals, gel pens empty of green ink, my last dog's collar, and echoes of owl calls. When the minister said that at the bottom of despair is a soft pillow, maybe a silk pillow, that cushions free-fall, I envisioned splat. He meant plump it up. Hold onto your children fed or tucked in. Friends. Do whatever you can do so no one suffers in the cold. Maybe he meant hang out there, rest. Sleep on a blue pillow. Best never to stir the cocktail. Today I shovel paths through two feet of snow for my very small dogs who would otherwise be buried. They frolic when I toss light snow in the air. I straighten to ease my back. Fresh flakes wet my hair, eyelashes, tongue. A memory as a little girl in an Illinois blizzard. So cold the beauty. Pillow of snow.

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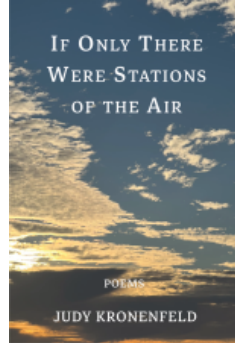
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Judy Kronenfeld



If Only There Were Stations of the Air
by Judy Kronenfeld

ISBN: 978-1-962405-01-0
\$16.00 (\$4.63 US Shipping)

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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*, was published in early 2025 by Inlandia Books. She lives in Riverside, California, with her anthropologist husband.

Inevitably Belated Consolation

How rapidly the nests of care disintegrate.
She disappeared from view, but now we know
our cousin's buried in an unmarked grave.

She fell into the cold arms of the state—
no parent, child, or spouse to whom to go.
How soon the nest of care disintegrates.

Although one nurse took pity on her state
in 16 friendless years with those who've blown
their minds, our cousin molds in an unmarked grave.

Does memory require a demarcated place?
A bench? A tree? At least a marker, flat, alone?
Can't be, since families disintegrate.

New guests may turn out those in labeled graves.
Some day we all will whirl with trees and stones—
although not buried in those unmarked places.

Yet we imagine markers freeze the fading—
as if all generations aren't overthrown.
Dear lost cousin—later or sooner care disintegrates.
Dust monuments kiss dust, *are* unmarked graves.

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Linda Laderman



Linda Laderman is a Michigan poet. Her poetry has appeared in, or is forthcoming from, numerous literary journals, including *Eclectica*, *The Westchester Review*, *Sheila-Na-Gig online*, *The MacGuffin*, *SWWIM*, *Action Spectacle*, *MER*, and *ONE ART*. She is a past recipient of Harbor Review's Jewish Women's Prize. Her micro-chapbook, *What I Didn't Know I Didn't Know*, can be found online at <https://www.harbor-review.com/what-i-didnt-know-i-didnt-know>. In past lives, she was a journalist and taught English at Owens Community College and Lourdes University in Ohio. For nearly a decade she was a docent at the Zekelman Holocaust Center near Detroit. More work and information at lindaladerman.com.

My husband loves to read his AARP magazine

with headlines that shout *do you know who's targeting you? 44 ways to enjoy life more, see, hear, and even taste things better*. I don't know about the syntax, but I am all for tasting things better. At 75, any bump in intensity is a good thing. Lately, I've been reading a lot about poets practicing Buddhism, impermanence and permanence, how it has taught them to be alone with themselves, to work and write in silence. I was doing silence pretty well until my husband asked if I wanted to go to Dairy Queen, then I succumbed to an Oreo cookie blizzard. I'd been looking for any excuse not to write. It wasn't happening. I've lost the mystery. I don't know what to write about. I didn't finish reading *Madame Bovary* in high school. At first, I thought I'd write about Circe, my favorite goddess, who turned Odysseus's crew into swine, and made her banishment to the island of Aeaea work like magic. I couldn't forget how she wrangled her cruel sisters, her mother and the minotaur, like a bad ass. At the very least, she deserves pages singing her praises. *O Circe* is as far as I got. My muse was as elusive as one of her incantations. A few days ago, I brought a poem to my poetry workshop that everyone praised. They said it showed restraint. They loved its fruity images. Workshop love is an omen that my poem will languish in poetry limbo for the duration of whatever time I have left on this earth, which according to AARP, could be much longer than expected—if only I can learn to recognize the warning signs of a scam and avoid being bilked out of my life savings by some good-looking fraudster. Last night, I took a cue from

Circe and allowed silence to cast its spell. When my phone broke the quiet, I knew just how to handle the call.

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Jennifer Lagier



Jennifer Lagier, M.A., M.L.I.S., PhD, lives a block from the stage where Bob Dylan and Joan Baez performed at the Monterey Folk Festival in 1963 and Jimi Hendrix torched his guitar in 1967. She served as Area Coordinator and an instructor with California Poets in the Schools, taught at Modesto Junior College, California State University, Monterey Bay, Hartnell College and Monterey Peninsula College. Jennifer has published twenty-four books and has work appearing in a variety of anthologies and literary magazines. A former editor for the *Homestead Review*, she now edits the *Monterey Poetry Review* and helps publicize Monterey Bay Poetry Consortium readings. Website: jlagier.net, Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/JenniferLagier/>

Clamming Expedition

We travel northwest by caravan.
Uncles and cousins pile into Sharkey's Ford Bronco,
my father's International Scout, head out before dawn.
Excitement builds as we cautiously navigate
Highway 4, along narrow Delta levees,
through thick tule fog.

We pass through Petaluma, Bodega Bay,
arrive at our destination,
Dillon Beach and Lawson's Landing.
Parking among sand dunes, we unload our gear.
Kids wear rubber boots, faded jeans, layers of sweatshirts,
stocking caps that make us appear like refugees
dumped ashore by Russian trawlers.

At the lowest of tides, we shoulder shovels,
and gunny sacks, plod around tide pools,
across slippery mud flats.
Retracting clam necks squirt from soggy sludge,
reveal buried colonies of mollusks.
We dig and dig, fight incoming water,
lay belly down in smelly muck,
use both hands to pry loose giant gapers.

At day's end, we peel off wet, sandy clothes,
use public restrooms to take quick, cold showers.
Dad treats us to a family-style dinner
at our favorite Basque restaurant in Occidental.
We sleep all the way home,
dream happily of our grandmother's
hearty red chowder.



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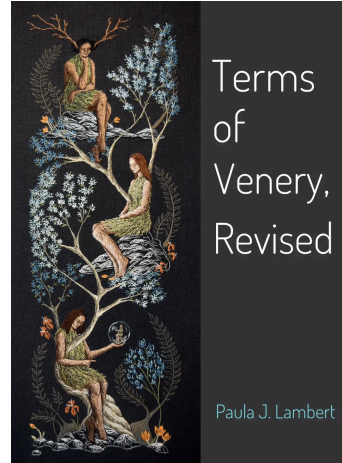
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Paula J. Lambert



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Paula J. Lambert has published four full-length poetry collections including *As If This Did Not Happen Every Day* (Sheila-Na-Gig Editions 2024) and six chapbooks including *Sinkhole* (Bottlecap Press 2025). Lambert is also a literary translator, small press publisher, and visual artist. Her work has been supported by the Ohio Arts Council, the Greater Columbus Arts Council, and the Virginia Center for Creative Arts. Her mentorship has been recognized by PEN America. A strong supporter of the intersection of poetry and science, she lives in Columbus with her husband, Dr. Michael Perkins, a philosopher and technologist. More at www.paulajlambert.com.

Hangdog

Baby, I've been here before... —Leonard Cohen

The last time I talked to my ex,
I asked him about the dog, and he said,
Didn't I tell you? The dog, it turned out,
who'd run beside the tractor a thousand times before
one day ran in front of it. *I killed her*, he said,
and the tone of his voice told me he'd never told anyone
and knew it goddamned well, that he'd buried the dog
and tried to forget what happened.
I hated he'd used me as a way to finally confess:
Bless me, please, for I have sinned, and I'd be damned
if forgiveness was going to come from me—
I was too much like the dog.

She'd come to us
a stray: skinny, groveling, a beagle/blue heeler mix
bearing the marks of training by a too-heavy hand.
We coaxed her and coaxed her and fed her till she finally gave in
and loved us, a healthy, beautiful, happy dog, we thought.
She ran away, and we found her months later
living with somebody else, living with a different name.
She came back to us but was never quite the same:
a hangdog kind of dog who knew she ought to be happy
but wasn't.

By then I was planning my own escape,

eyeing the tractor, too, and sure that sounds worse than it was
but I mean I wanted to die
because something was in me that wanted to live
a different life. I suffered my own sins for years
till I realized I'd done nothing wrong, leaving him,
till I realized I, too, could run free, run wild, could even make love
like a man, unburdened, unbridled, on top
of the goddamned world, and I enjoyed myself
for a while before settling down again, happy finally. Free.

I mean, what's loyalty, really—to a woman or a dog,
carefully trained or even carefully loved—
but an accident waiting to happen? I learned
I had something more sacred to offer a man than my body.
I understood, *hallelujah*, the divine nature
of what I'd once believed profane.

The Church teaches you love is something you save
for just one person. The Church, it seems, forgets how to love
the world. And I don't know what that dog believed—
I don't know, even, if she wanted to die, but I do know
sometimes you have to die to one world to learn how to live
in the next. And damn if that dog isn't the only thing
I'm sorry to have left behind. Damn if that dog didn't teach me
what it might look like to move on.

This Is Why the Patter of Rain

Red-winged blackbird, wings aflame
and dizzy with joy, asks us to see all that he sees:
sunrise, the intricate patterns of light and shadow
quivering through every bush and every tree
till nightfall—and rain! Slick, tasty,
making mud of the world.

Hear it? Patter, rush,
thunder? Even when it doesn't rain—dew?
How the air itself swells to visible sparkle?
Don't get him started on wind: breeze, gale,
the tingling it brings to the body.
How it holds us aloft.

Old crow, charred, grunts and barks
her affirmation: I've been saying this for years,
that light is a miracle, that rain to a parched mouth
is sweet as honey. That darkness is a gift—
every night sky offering a velvet tray of stars
we couldn't see sparkling in the day,
though they're there.

And snow, sometimes,
like a trillion stars falling at once, sending
the world into stunned, silent glee.
Old crow knows what the young and trilling
red-winged blackbird thinks he's just discovered.
Crow's been singing that song so many years
her voice is raw, reduced to a single, hoarse syllable:
Caw! Red-winged blackbird doesn't trust crow—
nor should he. Crow watches his nest
too carefully. Old crow, hungry crow—

noisy crow!

She scans the sky for hawk, heron, crane. Scans
the grass for fox, snake, weasel. Knows that hunger
is a kind of beauty—that she'd swallow the snow
and stars if she could, swallow the sun and shadows.
So would hawk, whose belly—soft, brown, speckled—
is fed by the very thing that bloodies his talons.

This is why the patter of rain washing us clean
cries in cracks of thunder, why the sun
sometimes burns. Why the morning dew
gently recalls what seeps from every wound.
The breeze whispers contrition and gales
beg for forgiveness—and the very wings
of a red-winged blackbird pulse with love
while they also flash their warning. Old crow
rides the wind like he does, like hawk does.
She feels herself dizzy with joy, like he does,
hawk does, like the sun and rain and shadow,
the stars and snow, heron, crane, fox, weasel,
and the tingling that hunger brings to the body.

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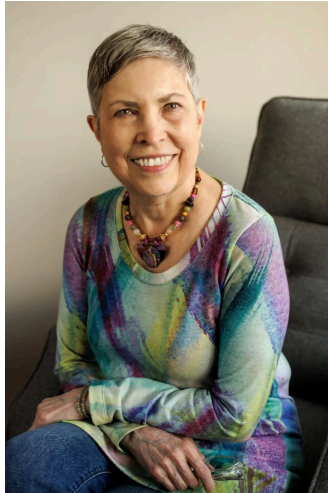
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Cora McCann Liderbach



Cora McCann Liderbach lives on the shores of Lake Erie in Lakewood, Ohio. Her poetry chapbook, *Throughline*, was published by Finishing Line Press in October 2024. Recent poems appear in *Quartet*; *Unbroken*; *Light Enters the Grove* and *The Ravens Perch*. She was a 2022 Best of the Net nominee.

Jurassic Barque

We track her changing shape—
 from glass to churn to chop—
 below our cliffside condo. What
swims beneath Lake Erie's surface
 bewitches my husband, who dreams
 of wrestling and releasing a huge
sturgeon. Their young are loosed
 into the Maumee River each year
 to migrate downstream to Erie.
I find the fish strange—unchanged
 from Jurassic times. They can
 live 150 years, grow to 20 feet.
Bony scutes armor their backs,
 bellies and sides; their barbels tickle
 riverbeds, their snouts snuffle
lake-muck for snails, worms
 and crayfish. I root for their safe
 passage; the prehistoric prowlers
siphon invasive zebra mussels,
 transport freshwater mussel
 larvae to battle algae blooms.
This lake feels like home to us—
 a fitting place to scatter ashes.
 I hope to rest in Erie's sediment;
my husband yearns for a sturgeon
 to vacuum up his ashes, roam
 our lake's benthic zone; leaving

more ashes to drift into roaring
Niagara; tumble her thunder
into Lake Ontario; float eastward
on the Saint Lawrence River; chill
for a spell in her estuary; then spill
into the ancient brine where life began.

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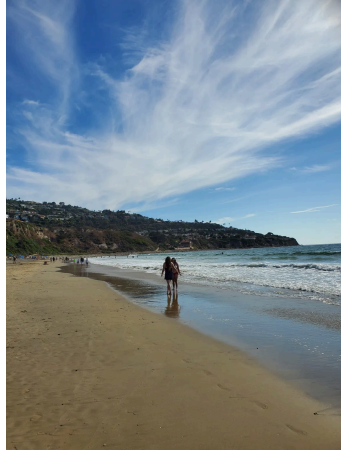
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Grace Lynn



Grace Lynn is an emerging queer painter who lives with a chronic illness and is working on her first collection of poetry. Her work explores the intersections between faith, the natural world, art and the body. In her spare time, Grace enjoys listening to Bob Dylan, reading suspense novels and exploring absurd angles of art history.

Womb Made of Wind

In tosses of wind, thrown waters wash
ashore in a jaundice-pink dawn
after midnights of rain. Droplets fall
down my swimsuit to my femurs stiff
as pebbles. I play on the sandy edges
of knowing their meaning. Sea breeze fogs
my goggles smudging the crests
into a mountain of mouths foaming
at the sky. I pinch the soft earth
between the hinges of my toes
as a gale whisks my hair out
of its braid, blonde crossing
in front of my face. I shut my eyes
to become a funnel
of pure feeling: gulls squawking, water rushing
to evacuate and fill in the space between
my feet, raw minerals filming
the tip of my nose, streaks of sun baking
my forehead. I am inside
the consequences of growing up and old.
Fifteen and desperate to walk both ways
in a single step. To be ten fierce fingers wrapping
my mother's thigh at a low tide. To individuate
a few paces away from her watch into someone
I do not yet know. When do we come to know
what the tender spine of us was made to be?
Stumbling on the shoreline, I grip my mother's hand
holding a bucket's handle. I dip my body
into the shallows to scoop up a starfish
and backbones of shell fragments. I let myself
drop with the rain into the lace-white waves.
What loss to make a problem out of living
or out of dying, solving for whatever we happen

to call whole. A goldfinch's belly makes
a little noise. I tilt my head back
against the solidity of my mother's sternum
and inhale for a moment
of eternity to saturate my lungs in the sweetest silence
I've ever known.
Pressing my hip into my mother,
I want to feast on our share
of not knowing what or why we are,
only that we were one body that suddenly cleaved
itself into two. On this shore, we become one
for a brief once more.
I follow the finches' yellow-ochre soar
like a dozen dandelions on fire.

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Tamara Madison



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by Tamara Madison

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Tamara Madison is the author of three full-length volumes of poetry, “Wild Domestic”, “Moraine” (both from Pearl Editions) and “Morpheus Dips His Oar” (Sheila-Na-Gig Editions), and two chapbooks. Her work has

appeared in the Writer’s Almanac, Sheila-Na-Gig, Worcester Review, and many other publications. Read more about Tamara at tamaramadisonpoetry.com.

Mammalia

Those months I would swim
while my child slept inside me,
suspended in the subterranean lake
of my body. I wondered
how the water sounded to her,
filtered through all that flesh
and fluid as we moved together
smoothly down the pool’s blue lane.
When I swam on my back,
with each stroke I watched the water
roll down my black-clad belly
and I thought of an orca moving
at the ocean’s surface, wet
with the rising, and full with new life;
I saw my daughter and me moving
through our own small sea
the way the whale mother and child
moved through theirs, water flowing
down my belly, water flowing down
her back, little mammals cradled
safe inside.

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Betsy Mars



Betsy Mars is a prize-winning poet, photographer, and an editor at *Gyroscope Review*. Her work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. Her poetry is widely available online and in print, most recently in *ONE ART*, *SWWIM*, and *Panoply*. She has two published chapbooks, *Alinea*, and *In the Muddle of the Night*, co-authored with Alan Walowitz. A full-length book, *Rue Obscure*, is forthcoming from Sheila-Na-Gig Editions in mid-2026.

Dirty Dishes

One day I will be one of those old people
whose dishes bear the trace of what
is left unwashed, unseen,
fingers no longer sensitive to the residual
grime, eyes failing, or lack of some kind
of vigilance, or perhaps indifference, because
what's it going to do, kill me?

And people won't want to come
around. They'll invite me out
sometimes, to restaurants
with their kitchen inspections
and Grade A placards in their windows,

or maybe they will bring paper plates
which (I will mutter) are bad
for the environment, not even
recyclable with their food
waste, and I will pretend

not to notice when they wash
my already-washed glasses
before drinking, as I sit
in my hydraulic stand-assist
chair, playing
with the controls, elevating myself
above the roiling sea of household threats.

But not just yet.

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Tim Mayo



Tim Mayo's poems and reviews have appeared in *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Barrow Street Journal*, *Narrative Magazine*, *Poetry International*, and *Salamander* among other places. His poems have received seven Pushcart Prize nominations. His second volume of poems, *Thesaurus of Separation* (Phoenicia Publishing, 2016) was a finalist for both the 2017 Montaigne Medal and the 2017 Eric Hoffer Book Award, and his chapbook *Notes to the Mental Hospital Timekeeper* also won an Honorable Mention for the 2020 Eric Hoffer Chapbook Award. He works at the Brattleboro Retreat, a mental institution, and is a founding member of the Brattleboro Literary Festival.

The Anthropology of Old Age

Recently, I've passed into a neighborhood,
where everyone knows their neighbor.
Wrinkles populate their faces like tribal scars,
although, for the most part, their eyes are bright
as ever. They're friendly and very talkative.

Still learning their language, I say little: I smile,
make an occasional, commiserative grimace, mime
all the expected gestures that come with words.

They, in turn, seem patient, attentive to my clucks
and shrugs, as if they know, in the end, validation
courses through my veins, accepting them as they
are, despite my hesitance to voice my thoughts.

Evening comes, the daily chatter ends,
and everyone retreats inside,
counting in silence the days that are left.

I am still learning their mating habits,
though progeny is no longer their purpose,
learning the attitudes towards their now-grown
young, and those little people with large eyes,
who curl into their laps like folded hands.

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Ann E. Michael



Ann E. Michael writes and gardens. She maintains a pretty-much weekly blog at www.annemichael.blog. Her most recent collection of poetry, *Abundance/Diminishment*, was published in 2024.

Approaching *Estación de Autobuses*, Murcia, Spain

From a vantage point slightly above
their heads, I watch old men in kurtas,
young men flaunting sleek fashions,
women in niqabs—a few—and harried
mothers dressed in lavender, pink, gray.
Some women let their long black
ponytails loose, others wear hijabs.

Halal stands, *teterías*, small shops
selling cosmetics, sunglasses, henna,
toothpaste, SIM cards, diapers, bread.
Families push through densely-peopled
streets, little boys in embroidered
taqiyah, their sisters in pink flip-flops,
awkward, scurrying to keep up.

How this bus makes any progress
through the throng—no sidewalks
in *el Albaicín*—I can't fathom.
Scarves swirl on racks, colorful
dancers in the urban wind-tunnel that
is *Calle Almenara*. Arabic and Spanish
billboards, posters, business signs—

mostly, the struggle of crowds that
keep the poorer parts of town so vital.
I long to walk the narrow street full
of low-rent entrepreneurs, taxi drivers,
women buying lamb and rice, everyone
sweating in summer's heat. Behind tinted
windows, in the air-conditioned bus,

Murcia swarms ceaselessly, without me.

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Anadika Mishra



My name is Anadika Mishra, a high schooler in the Bay Area, and writing has always been the way I make sense of what I feel. Through poems, often quiet and maybe a little sad, I try to give shape to emotions that don't always have names. Each piece I write is a small reflection of myself, a way to speak when I don't know how else to. Poetry lets me be heard, even in silence. I hope you find comfort in the poems that brought the same to me.

the dim house

i was born in a house
with dim lights.
not broken, just tired,
flickering like they were afraid
to be seen too clearly.

the walls were quiet,
and no one ever explained
what the silence meant.
so i learned not to ask
why the windows stayed shut,
why the air always felt
a little too still.

some rooms were colder than others.
some had locked doors
i was told not to open.
i listened.

i played on creaking floors,
and learned to step lightly,
to not disturb
whatever sadness slept
in the corners.

sometimes,
i'd press my face
to the dusty glass,
and wonder if other houses
felt warmer.

if they had music
or soft arms waiting
on the stairs.

but i never left.
never knew how.
i hung paintings of smiles
on peeling walls,
made beds with heavy blankets,
and told myself
this was comfort.

because when you grow up
in a dim house,
you forget what sunlight feels like.
you forget you were ever supposed to want it.

and i don't know if i'd recognize
the front door
if it opened.

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Penelope Moffet



Penelope Moffet lives in Southern California, where she writes, draws and strives to keep her 18-year-old cat happy. She has been writing poetry since she was a child. She's worked as a bread-slicer/packager in a bakery, cashier for a fast-food chicken joint, draperies manager at K-mart, print shop paste-up artist, freelance journalist, photographer, publicist for non-profit organizations, editor, legal secretary and dog-walker. Her most recent chapbook is *Cauldron of Hisses* (Arroyo Seco Press, 2022). Her poems appear in *Eclectica*, *Calyx*, *ONE ART* and other journals. A full-length collection of her poetry will be published by Sheila-Na-Gig Editions in 2026.

Red Door

I should not be
northbound on this
two-lane road
so late at night, after
lingering with friends
on ocean bluffs.
Mine is the only car
on Highway One
and the deer knows
I am out of place,
half-blind on the curves,
but she stops partway across,
lets me pass.

Miles later the skunk
I barely miss
writhes on asphalt
as I skid by,
wondering
if he's rabid,
or horny,
or claiming this small
piece of planet for his own,
his raised tail
a territorial
exclamation point.

Up a side road
I retrace the route
I took that afternoon
but it all looks different
in the dark. I park
where I might
have parked before,

walk through a gate
I don't remember,
pray there are no dogs
or shotguns here.

And there's the icy cabin,
unfamiliar in the fog,
known only by
its blood-red door.

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Gabrielle Myers



Gabrielle Myers is Sicilian American writer, professor, and former chef. Her memoir, *Hive-Mind*, details her time of love, awakening, and tragic loss on an organic farm. Her first and second poetry books, *Too Many Seeds* (2021) and *Break Self: Feed* (2024), are published by *Finishing Line Press*. Her third poetry book, *Points in the Network* (2025), and her fourth poetry book, *Go Forth: Lose Yourself into Life* (2026), are both forthcoming from *Finishing Line Press*. Her poetry has been published in the *Atlanta Review*, *Evergreen Review*, *Adirondack Review*, *San Francisco Public Press*, *Fourteen Hills*, *pacificREVIEW*, *Connecticut River Review*, *Catamaran*, *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *Sand Hills*, *Cathexis Northwest Press*, *Folio*, and *American Poetry Review*. Gabrielle is the Farm-to-Fork columnist for *Inside Sacramento* magazine: <https://insidesacramento.com/sacramento-dining/farm-to-fork/> Access links to her memoir, poetry books, farm-to-fork articles, published works, and interviews through her website: www.gabriellemyers.com

In the Al-Zahra Neighborhood in Gaza Strip, October 19, 2023

She walks through slim space between two buildings
Blown to large slabs of posts, shattered beams, rebar rods,
Bent window frames devoid of glass. As if parting broken concrete pieces
Of her neighborhood with her hands, walking through
Land mines with her feet, she makes her way closer
To the camera, wires and plumbing pipes poke her ankles.
Like a concrete iceberg, one building's rubble leans
Towards her gaunt torso, her head protected by her scarf's thin veil.
She once protected neighborhood children from bullies, drunk fathers, angry mothers.
Now in her vulnerability, she walks towards our end.
Sunlight enters like slivers through bomb smoke,
Calls her and us towards what we can make
From devastation's detritus, our war's residue
Haunting us to recreate each other.

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Jake Onyett



Jake Onyett is a U.S. Navy veteran who was born in Canada, raised in the United States, and currently lives in Italy. His poetry appears/will appear in *Abstract*, *Chiron Review*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *Two Thirds North* and elsewhere.

A Snag in the Plan for the End of the World

Not a terrible idea
to plan ahead for when the world ends.
To go about it incrementally – a few days procuring
pallets of canned goods, a few days pre-empting
survivor's guilt. Dividing the lot between bug-out bags,
go-bags, and your final destination. A couple handheld radios,
a folding shovel and kukri knives. Drawers full of
various types of batteries. Blue gel and honey bucket
dry toilets. Bulk vitamins and freeze-dried mint
chocolate chip ice cream. Compressed tabs of methenamine
and wax. Stacks of pondered lists of things to do
in the event of...

Saturation only way to be sure,
you are sure of it. But sometimes you fear becoming over-prepared,
and try to prepare for that contingency too. Nagging worry
that you'll step outside after it happens, into the barren ruins,
and be disappointed at what survived apart from you.
Each passerby giving head-nod greetings masked by dust-covered
faces that seem to mean more, considering.
You are one of us, we are we. The rush of being proven right.
Of having bribed, each month for ages, the only surviving doctor
on your diversified list. Of having an underground
bunker in your backyard, secured and brimming
with essentials. Of having moved years ago, away from
the east side of town and its shallow water table,
so you could dig in more optimally loamy soil. Of an
unmarked entrance and a steely reluctance to share supplies
with needy folks who congregate near your driveway
after having heard the rumors.

Maybe you need a break from this,
forever prepping for the end of everything but yourself.
Maybe today you'll venture to the Kemah boardwalk
and listen to seagulls impose themselves
over the din of the waves. Stubborn, like
two trains in constant collision on a single track.
Maybe you'll head home with fresh pompano from Rose's.
Maybe to hell with forever,
at least for today.



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Jennifer Phillips



Jennifer Phillips came across borders early in life and is now a bi-national lifelong poet living on Cape Cod, grateful for this Wampanoag ancestral territory. Phillips' work has appeared in over 100 journals and 2 chapbooks: *Sitting Safe In the Theatre of Electricity* (iblurb.com, 2020) and *A Song of Ascents* (Orchard Street Press, 2022), with a 3rd, *Sailing To the Edges* (forthcoming from Finishing Line Press.) Her collection is *Wrestling with the Angel*, (Wipf and Stock Pub., 2025) Phillips had two poems nominated Pushcart Prize in 2024.

Still Practicing My Scales

I am wringing the darkness out of my clothing
out of my bones, even out of my heart
to make room for hope.

Skating pond of sky,
calm grey wing over me
as if to say, "Just try. We all fall."

Earth does not shame us
when we offer our amends
but welcomes them as seeds. Only some will grow.

O neighbor, you are more
complicated, unpredictable.
Earth isn't holding grudges

just consequences for us all.
I'm studying how to mix the mortar,
hold the trowel, carry the hod,

how to lay the wall and tump it true.
Meanwhile it is snowing in May.
We left the courtyard of innocence long ago.

Now, I lay the mousetrapped victim out
gently on the lawn for the winter-thinned crows,
aiming for a modicum of balance

and my heart undefended on its half-shell.
I'm practicing happiness, learning its key signatures,
watching the baffled squirrels test the feeder

that their own weight closes, wishing them
a few fallen grains for their effort.
I'm a bumbler, too. I'm sorry. Here's what I scatter for you.



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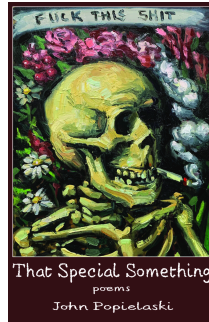
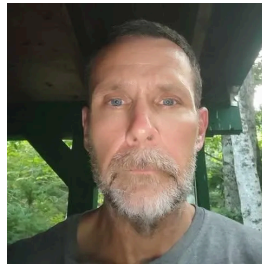
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John Popielaski



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by John Popielaski

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John Popielaski is the author of the poetry collection *That Special Something* from Sheila-Na-Gig Editions as well as *Attuning*, a novel forthcoming from Broken Tribe Press in December. His poems have recently appeared in such journals as *Canary*, *Common Ground Review*, and *Public School Poetry*.

Happiness

A piece of skin I've been attached to
for a long time fell off, and I wonder
if the stream I'm fording, or the one before it,
introduced a meddlesome bacterium
or cleansed the new wound free of charge.

O, big pond in the mountain,
O, majestic cirque,
and O, O, two-hole
outhouse in the campground down below,
you've made me deeply happy,
though in one sense I'm alone.

I bandage, hang my food bag,
lie down stiff now in the lean-to,
listen to a loon coo
as a float plane drones above us
like inevitable intelligence.
It used to be I couldn't sleep
with such exposure.

Come back to the sun again, I wake
and see a moose head through the mesh,
and I remember Chris McCandless,
that unfortunate adventurer who died
in an abandoned school bus in Alaska,
who declared that happiness
only counts when it is shared.
I like the sentiment but don't agree
exactly. Misery loves company
but gets along just fine without it.

I focus on the moose's eyes and nostrils,
and I think of Chris's grief
when finally he killed the moose
whose preparation was beyond him,
and, although this may sound strange
considering that I am thinking
of his grief, I feel that sharing
this expanse of moments with this moose
has got to count as happiness

because I have no gun, no food-
security concerns, and all there is
between us is the staring.

What I'd Like You to Remember of This Poem Is the Tapping

This morning in the online paper
was a poem, "Pond at Dusk,"
and a respectful commentary
on its parts and its concision,
its refusal to give in
to what I'll call the old romanticism.

For a week we rented someplace
with a nice view of the highest mountain
in the state, a view that could inspire
someone like myself to climb the mountain,
camp beside it for the night, and come back
to the rented place the following afternoon
to have a seat and several beers and stare
again across the pond at all that granite.

On the seventh day, we drove south
to a camp we own. No pond. No mountain view.
The road to it is narrow, and the rocks
embedded in the road or lying
on its surface, cast up by the heavens
and sighs of frosts and thaws,
are of the jostling kind.

The road is four-tenths of a mile
to the oxidizing lock and cable,
and my habit is to get out of the truck
and walk a tenth down and the tenth back up,
alerting frogs and toads, salamanders, snails, and slugs,
that something irresistible is on its way.
I drive on, stop beside the spruce
that blocked the road two years ago,
inspect the downside and the upside
of the second tenth, and so on.

On the seventh day, conditions dry,
I tapped four snails and moved them to the fern shade.
I admit I felt much better than I would have
had I driven roughshod down the road,
and this is where I think the commentator,
this is where I know my wife,
would say I'm being sentimental
and refusing to accept how death comes
and pretending I can save them all.

Maybe. Maybe. All I know is that
the snails I left were moist enough
in dappled light and that the hummingbird
who levitates before me
like an iridescent cross
remembers me as no impediment
to the suspended nectars here.

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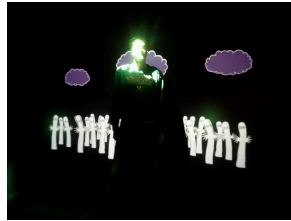
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Ron Riecki



Ron Riecki has been awarded a 2014 Michigan Notable Book, 2015 The Best Small Fictions, 2016 Shenandoah Fiction Prize, 2016 IPPY Award, 2019 Red Rock Film Fest Award, 2019 Best of the Net finalist, 2019 Très Court International Film Festival Audience Award and Grand Prix, 2020 Dracula Film Festival Vladutz Trophy, 2020 Rhysling Anthology inclusion, and 2022 Pushcart Prize. Right now, Riecki's listening to Chet Baker's "It Never Entered My Mind."

"I don't want to remember"

—Amelia Rosselli,

"[There's Something Like Pain in the Room]"

I drive home after work

and I work
in trauma,
although that
sounds strange,
as if the work
is trauma, as if
I'm drowning
in trauma, when
I love to help
and help to love,
or try to,
if that makes sense,
if anything does,
and the drive is long,
the sky dusted
with nighttime,
and my mind
strays, mindless,
the car self-driving,
because we all live
in the future
now, and I'm part-
time, but all jobs
are full-time,
feel as if all you do
is work
to afford
to pay for the gas
that gets you
to work,
and my mind
goes to loss,
funerals of loss,
graveyards of loss,
memories of loss,
the thick absence
of the passenger seat
where someone I loved
is a hurricane away,
no, two, or, no, three,
how loss tears
everything to shreds
and leaves you in a fog,

and, God, I

SCREAM!

before I know I'm doing it,
and then the silence,
a sky-blue silence,
and I drive,
calm down,
and drive,
and the trees are so
beautiful
with their hints
of newborn
moonlight.

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Theresa Rogers



Theresa Rogers is a Vancouver-based poet and teacher who spends part of her year in Wellfleet, Massachusetts. Her poems have appeared in the *English Bay Review*, *Uppagus*, *Cape Cod Poetry Review*, *Cape Cod Times* poetry page, *Cathexis Northwest*, *San Diego Reader* and *Vancouver City Poems* (second prize, emerging poets). Her chapbook is forthcoming from Kelsay Books. She received an MFA in poetry from Antioch, LA and serves on the board of poetry in Canada and as poetry editor for *Cape Cod Review*. theresarogerspoet.com

Ode to the Tri-state area

I want to write/a check in the express lane – Kevin Young

I want to swing under a branch
of that liberty apple tree
swim through blue-green algae
and snap back at turtles
I want to collect bullfrogs to mate
in giant dill pickle jars
before freeing the tadpoles
and glinting fireflies too
I want to make toys of wooden
spools and rubber-bands
in my stepfather's workshop
and play in the deep woods
with boys before they learn
to lunge all sweat and tongue
I want to Hula-hoop in the driveway
with my best friend and fill up
our bike tires and ride to Caldor's
to pocket gum and lip gloss
I want a mirror vanity for my room
Scotch tape poetry on the walls
climb up the rusted water tower
to scan life beyond this town
I want to drink from a fat white
coffee mug rich with Coffee mate
take the Metro line to the city and learn
to drive to Jones Beach in the Chevy
and away from the house where I still
smell the honeysuckle from my window

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Seth Rosenbloom



Seth Rosenbloom is a poet and a consultant to companies on leadership. His poems have recently appeared in *Poetry Northwest*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Orange Blossom Review* and other publications. His work has been nominated for Best of the Net and been a finalist for the Tom Howard/Margaret Reid Poetry Prize. Seth was born in Washington, D.C. and he lives in Seattle.

Multiple Choice

Three months after my father died,
I was in Kane Hall to take the LSAT

and in the statements of
Whereas and Therefore, I felt

the motions of his mind.
His confidence in logic, and belief that

when he gave consideration either to
(a) the client
(b) the firm
(c) the law
(d) himself

he must conclude,
despite inference or implication, that

there is one, and only one answer:
(e) none of the above.

Barely five minutes into the test,
its muscularity of reasoning

ruled out any desires I had
beyond completing the correct oval

on the machine-readable form.
His death, my finishing college, applying to law school—

all these things happened years ago,
back when people used to say *committed*,

instead of *died* by
suicide.

And back when I used to wonder if
I'd do any of the things he had done so well.

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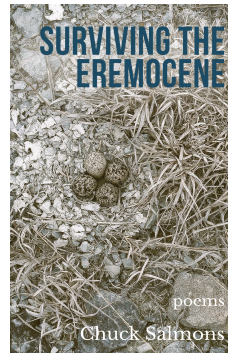
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Chuck Salmons



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Chuck Salmons has served as a leader for the Ohio Poetry Association for more than a decade. His poems have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, including *Chiron Review*, *The Fib Review*, *Evening Street Review*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *Pudding Magazine*, and *I Thought I Heard a Cardinal Sing: Ohio's Appalachian Voices*. He has published three poetry collections: *Stargazer Suite* (11thour Press), *Patch Job* (NightBallet Press), and *The Grace of Gazing Inward: Poems in Response to the Art of Alice Carpenter* (Dos Madres Press). Chuck received a 2018 Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award for poetry, and he performs with the poetry trio Concrete Wink. Find him at chucksalmons.com

How Not to Spell *Cello*

In our family the only instruments that mattered were guitars and drums, maybe a banjo plucked with perfection by Dr. Ralph Stanley on my grandfather's AM radio every Sunday after service at Hillock Baptist Church. Finer stringed instruments were expensive things that other kids learned to play—kids whose parents worked for banks and accounting firms. Who could afford dance lessons and ski club memberships or listened to Händel, Bach, and Brahms. Kids raised Catholic or maybe Episcopalian, their sermons steeped in the beauty of Latin chants and not hellfire, damnation. They walked out of stone cathedrals with stained-glass windows feeling purified. We walked out of our chaste, white church afraid even to ask real questions, the ones our school teachers wanted to answer but refrained for fear of retribution by parents who saw education as a sanitized means to an end where their children grab a diploma and head either to recruitment office or steel mill. My parents played Elvis, the Stones, Skynyrd. No piccolos or violas in their tunes. No cellos either, with or without an *h*. When I stepped off the stage during fifth grade spelling bee at Stockbridge Elementary, I knew Adam Fisher would be the last student standing. He would receive his trophy and a handshake from the school principal, and walk off the stage, into the arms of his parents well dressed and quietly smiling

as if they had been moved by yet another
performance by the Columbus Symphony Orchestra.

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Elaine Sorrentino



Elaine Sorrentino, author of *Belly Dancing in a Brown Sweatsuit* (Kelsay Books, 2025) has been published in journals such as *Minerva Rising*, *Willawaw Journal*, *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, *Gyroscope Review*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Quartet Journal*, *ONE ART: a journal of poetry*, *Cool Beans Lit*, and *Haikuniverse*. She lives in Massachusetts, holds a journalism degree from Suffolk University, and is facilitator of the Duxbury Poetry Circle.

Blessings From the Char

After flames licked the walls,
danced up the stairs
in a fiery tango of devastation,

engulfed their vacant beds,
a grateful community wrapped
them in a shawl of compassion.

Memories and milestones,
teddy bears and Timberlands
obliterated by the winter blaze

that spared the donation shed,
where, for years, they collected
essentials to help those in crisis.

When fate turned the tables,
past recipients of rice, diapers, boots
placed their own feet in these scorched shoes,

surrendering hard-earned greenbacks
to ensure their benefactors had food
in their bellies, clothing on their backs,

and a place to throw their bones down.
This family never expected anything in return,
more than happy to help a neighbor.

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Christopher Stolle



Christopher Stolle has been writing for more than 30 years. His work has been published by Indiana University Press, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, "Tipton Poetry Journal," "Flying Island," "Last Stanza Poetry Journal," "The Alembic," "Sheepshead Review," and "Plath Poetry Project," among others. He lives in Richmond, Indiana, the home of recorded jazz.

Ubi sunt qui ante nos fuerunt?

Where are those who were before us?
They're from the dirt and the stars.
We're tangled with their roots.
They're from the bones and the flames.
We're weighted with their regrets.

Where are those who come after us?
They're from the seas and the belly buttons.
We're intertwined with their genes.
They're from the blood and the mirrors.
We're overrun with their aspirations.

Where are those who live among us?
They're from the spies and the raptors.
We're entrenched with their idolatry.
They're from the scars and the graves.
We're bound with their pretensions.

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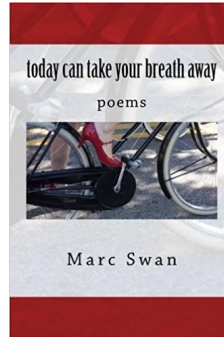
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Marc Swan lives in coastal Maine. Poems recently published or forthcoming in *Gargoyle*, *Chiron Review*, *Sandy River Review*, *Crannóg*, among others. His fifth collection, *all it would take*, was published in 2020 by tall-lighthouse (UK).

The Silent Generation

After the war to end all wars
didn't, there was a second world war
and our country entered it reluctantly
after Pearl Harbor. My father, who never
talked of that war, to me at least, worked
in a plant that made flight simulators
where paint particles entered his lungs.

He was not drafted, but four brothers were
and today in this time of political upheaval
with wars on many fronts I think of that time
and what his brothers thought as they went off
to Europe, the Pacific, points far from home
in a small town in upstate New York.

Was there anger, resentment, uncertainty
or acceptance of that is how things were
and staying alive for an unknown amount
of time in less than exotic locales was the focus?

When they returned home damaged
in unspoken ways, did they talk with my father
of the battles, the deaths, the injuries,
the fear of dying that kept their eyes wide
at night or did they hold it inside and weep
those tears in quiet places as they became
what is now called The Silent Generation.

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Erika Takacs



Erika Takacs is an Episcopal priest, teacher, musician, and poet originally from Wilmington, Delaware. Her writing has been published in *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, *Earth & Altar*, *The Christian Century*, *Braided Way*, and as a part of the North Carolina Poetry Society's *Poetry in Plain Sight*. Outside of her work and her family, her three great loves are the music of J.S. Bach, books, and baseball. She currently resides in North Carolina, where she and her husband serve at the pleasure of their very spoiled beagle.

A Prayer for My Enemies

Simply, that you will know a morning like this—
sunlight brushing your cheek, the birds riotous
for reasons no scientist can explain
but that sound just like joy. Someone in bed
beside you—a lover or a toddler
or a beagle, their mussed hair or sticky
fingers or thumping, happy-dream tail coaxing
some quiet corner of your heart to bloom.
That you'll stretch, and wonder at the regular
ecstasy of it; roll over, and want
for nothing. That you will sleep and rise
without fear, no longer frantically trying
to claw fruit from the bud—as if your hands
did not already hold so much beauty.

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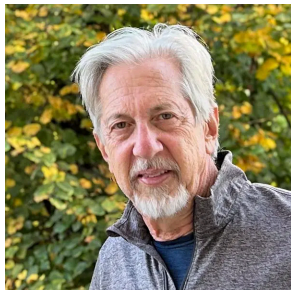
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Daniel Thomas



Daniel Thomas's poetry book, *River of Light*, is forthcoming from Shanti Arts. His previous book, *Leaving the Base Camp at Dawn*, was published by Cherry Groves Collections in 2022. His first collection, *Deep Pockets*, was published by St. Julian Press in 2018. He has published poems in many journals, including *Southern Poetry Review*, *Nimrod*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Amethyst Review*, *Vita Poetica*, *Atlanta Review*, and others. More info at danielthomaspotry.com

VISIONS OF ANGELS

Consider that our sun is just one of perhaps 100 billion or more stars in our galactic home, and that our galaxy is just one of potentially 200 billion in the observable universe alone. — BBC Sky at Night, March 18, 2024

Angels once filled our imaginations. They crammed
the nooks and corners of soaring El Grecos, shoulder
to shoulder with elongated bodies and Expressionist faces.

And Rembrandt found one—a beautiful woman-like
creature—whispering in St. Matthew's ear,
as he stared off, pen in hand.

Rodin carved a naked angel with huge
stone wings that fills the dreams of a naked,
sleeping woman. Like St. Matthew, she does not know

the angel's nearness, though its wrapped wings
collapse the space around her—and maybe this
the very angel that terrified young Rilke.

Where are they now, these angels? Are they
hidden in the day, numberless as the stars
above us? Do they feather the baroque depths

of time and space, fill the empty flowering mysteries,
spread their wings through galaxies that whirl
in logarithmic spirals like vacant mollusk shells?

Though they are all presence and no substance,
do they mingle among us, envy our sensuous
mortality? Have we entertained them unaware?

Or are they like a stirring wind, a rushing sound
that turns the world to silence, a whisper
in your ear, your shoulder plumed with certainty?

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Eileen Trauth



Eileen Trauth is a poet, playwright, and author. She has published several nonfiction books and an award-winning play, *iDream*. Her poetry appears in *Ordinary Time* (Kelsay Books) as well as in venues such as *Braided Way*, *Common Threads*, *Loch Raven Review*, *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, *Persimmon Tree*, *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, *Pink Panther Magazine*, *Sheila-Na-Gig online*, and several anthologies including *Conversations*, *For A Better World*, and *Within Us*. Eileen is a member of the Greater Cincinnati Writers League, the Ohio Poetry Association, and Fourth Friday International Poetry Group. She lives with her spouse, Kathy DrieHaus, in Cincinnati, Ohio.
www.eileentrauth.com.

27 June 2025

How many years have you been married?
The old lady asked across the counter,
kind eyes twinkling at my celebration cupcakes.
Forty-eight, twenty-one and ten.

We joined together less than a decade
after bloody Stonewall riots said *enough*,
four years after psychiatrists admitted
we were healthy after all.

We sealed our commitment
with a piece of paper,
first chance we had, proclaimed
it mattered that we pledged
our troth in public.

Then came the day the judges
ruled we had a right
to walk with pride
down any state's aisle.

Our anniversaries arrive like drips
of lifesaving liquid pumped
into parched veins, nurture us –
for now at least – until justice,
like the provisional IV pole, rolls away.

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Patricia Aya Williams



Patricia Aya Williams is a Red Wheelbarrow Poetry Prize recipient and author of the mini-chap, *Haiku for Parents*. Her poems have appeared in several journals, including *Santa Clara Review*, *The Good Life Review*, *Dunes Review*, *Jackdaw Review*, and *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, and she has work forthcoming in *Whale Road Review*, *Caesura*, and *Cathexis Northwest Press*. Her poetry and photography was featured as part of Front Porch Gallery's 2024 exhibit, *Journey of Life Through Vision and Verse*. She lives in San Diego with her husband, Christopher, their dog, Binxy, and two houseplants, Isabella Yuki and Mimi Lise.

Somebody asks me if the bride is my daughter,

and I say *I wish*
because the bride is beautiful,
charming, and wouldn't we all want a
daughter like that. Her hair,
effortless pixie, color of a rare black
fawn, her eyes a more
gregarious shade of
hazel than mine. Her arms
invite me in for a hug, and what is that scent...
jasmine? Sweet pea? I don't
know her, my husband's colleague's daughter, but I would
like to. It won't happen. My husband and I,
merely part of the scenery, the scene,
numbered and noted, catered to with
only the most exquisite organic hors d'oeuvres and a
pamplermousse wedding cake, which I have decided I am
quite fond of. We
resemble each other, she and I.
She could be my daughter, looks more like me
than her own mother.
Uncanny. I don't have a daughter. I have a daughter and a son,
vanished. My husband's children. They
want nothing to do with us,
"X" us out of their lives. Who knows why? I was
young once, cagey and righteous. Now I seal my secrets in
Ziploc bags, transparent and perishable.

NEXT