



The Writers Place
Yearbook
Volume 1

The Writers Place



What's your story?

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Frank Adams

On a January Night -

just before midnight
on a cold windy night -
raven and crow are on central park west
walking wing-to-wing and breast-to-breast
dressed in black from head to toe
shining like diamonds against the snow

heads tucked down
they caw and coo
unaware they are seen
by those who pass -
who stop to stare
at the rare exotic pair

john and yoko
yoko and john

Walter Bargaen

The Apostles

1. Dissolving

THE first afternoon and water is the red of an iron-stained sandstone. It swells and crashes in exhaustion, or jubilation, depending on the angle of light. Behind

us the forest is dense with red pine, alder, and willow.

It draws us away from the gulls drifting in hungry constellations, and farther out, the triangular sails

of schooners marking pages of wind. Legs buried in sand to protect from biting flies and mosquitoes, we wrap towels around our shoulders and stare at the straight

line that ties both ends of the bay together—water fused to sky. At this edge we are face to face with a country that ends in the Porcupine Mountains settling in mist.

Small waves drum at our feet. Their ankle high voices and thin white lips curl back from gulls circling a beached carp. They jab their beaks into the ribs

of dissolving waves. Amid the shards of beach glass and driftwood, and another slapped sting, we sift deeper into the sand.

2. The Terrible Details

IN the dirt parking lot crowded with day visitors,
their shiny tribes of Winnebagoes, pickup trucks
with boat trailers, car doors swung open and draped

with drying towels, the half-hour diesel rumble
of a waiting tour bus, bicycles chained to aspens
and for the fourth or fifth time, though none

of us agree, the family station wagon. I stand with
the man whose title is volumes larger than what
he does, and he laughs, garrulous, rotund,

red faced; it's an effort to hoist himself out
of the car and collect the park's fee. When I say
the cost of camping has doubled, he tells me it

has increased only a dollar in five years; when
I say the campground has doubled in size, he says,
no, it's the same. I shut up and pay, not because

I'm complaining and nothing will come of it,
but more, embarrassed by what I'm convinced is
still true, and confused, refuse to call it loss,

but wonder who paid only half the amount
and remembers a smaller, intimate space.

Holding hands, walking down to the beach past

birch leaning in and out of their own shadows,
how do I and this woman enter our separate
worlds and stay together: From the footbridge

we see a shimmering of wind touch and then
rise off the lagoon's amber water, almost
accounted for but headed far from our lives.

3. Jack's Not Here

GULLS gather to squawk, to fight for torn pieces of bread,
and then to complain for more. They watch closely
the angle of our bodies and hand's trajectory for any sign

of generosity. They circle over the waves and rewalk
the sand to find their oversights, and overcoming
their doubts waddle closer. The whole loaf consumed

by our profligate throwing, we leave their attention
behind and stroll the lake's winded edge. All of eleven
she races ahead, inventing a game; stick writing in

the sand the names of everyone important and distant,
and quickly remembered. She scratches a granular
side-slipping alphabet, and after each name, she runs,

as if she must catch sight of who it is. Twice I reach

her before she's finished with another cat, a parent,
or even a brother's name. The game is that she must

be done before I grab the stick and erase it with a swipe of
my foot. Sand splashes around her sprinting—
she's off, knowing who inherits the last word.

Tired of laughing and losing, I jog ahead, shirtless,
barefoot. I pass moats and towered castles already
the ruins of summer vacations; children flying

kites over the water; families weighing in on towels.
Last summer on this stretch of beach, I saw the back of
a man's head, his hair cut shorter, newly shaved, a face

I hardly recognized, yet knew. He was standing knee
deep in the lake throwing a ball. We each travelled
a thousand miles to arrive at these new sunburnt selves

that would fade and peel, and must soon be given back.
We smiled, exchanged our brief amazement, and parted,
embarrassed by our heartfelt emptiness. Today I reach

the iron-stained sandstone where the beach falters
and stumbles upward into cliffs, and this time he's not
here. I jog back to where my daughter is writing another

name, and dive into the cold incoming waves,
scattering the paddling gulls that will devour us

if we don't keep moving.

Vern Barnet

Ad Astra

L'amour che muove il sole e l'altre stelle.

*Speciosus forma prae filiis hominum diffusa est gratia
in labiis tuis; propterea benedixit te Deus in aeternum.*

In my frail frame immortal love doth dwell;
and in these lines with borrowed breath you live.
No skill can keep my body from death's spell;
what skill I have doth life forever give
to you and me conjoined in sounds that they
shall speak who never knew us, though they gaze
long through the window of this page, and say
with wonder how we loved, in our brute age.

And yet no words I write can e'er be true;
they all fumble, flunk, fall, deform, and fail
the infinite mystery that is you
and me, like calling minnow what is whale.

No lay can list to others what is ours
though yet these rimes might reach as far as stars.

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Bill Bauer

THE LAST DAYS OF THE EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION

And that was when the young priest,
the young priest just out of the seminary,
opened the parish gym on week nights
to keep us off the streets,
wanted us to box and wrestle
and play basketball,
cornered us one by one
demanding to know how many times
since our last confession
we spilled our holy seed,
promised us paradise if we held our fists
out of our pants long enough
to wait and sacrifice

And when
girls like Rosemary
from the convent school
poked against us
in the wild windy midnights,
their mothers in ragged gowns
hissing through cracks
in screen doors,
girls like Rosemary
who panted until their skin shook,
then stepped back

because the good sisters implored them
not to step down,
sent us home feverish
to wait for something better
and sacrifice
And when
the police stalked us
through glaring, dangerous streets
because we happened to be there,
Mexican, black, youngest in a family of ten,
and we searched alleys and trash bins
looking for booze or fistfights,
something to steal or break,
running from the young priest
who wanted to box and wrestle
and play basketball,
tell him how many times that week
we hungered for girls like Rosemary
with their scented hair and the warm place
we could feel through their skirts,
and when the flashing red eyes of patrol cars
turned a corner suddenly,
we hid under old Chevys,
ripped our shirts and our skin
rolling over fences
to escape being slammed against paddy wagons,
to escape being beaten into better boys,
willing and ready to sacrifice

And when
the ex football player, the ex marine,
the All-Christian athlete campaigning for city council,
came to our school to tell us of the vision
he had for our future and explain
how he once felt as we did, felt he knew everything,
but now he knew better, knew how we could create
a better world and be like our forefathers,
the founders of the Republic,
the great generals, the great frontiersmen,
who believed in God, hard work and cash,
in being second to none,
and so could we
if we'd only listen and obey,
and sacrifice

And just beyond those days
we woke one morning
in our sophomore year in college,
the last lambs of the nation of sheep,
to see the dream of our future
brighten under a banner headline
in the photograph of the rumpled carcass
of a helicopter gunship smoking human flesh
along a muddy road
in a place we never heard of, called
the Republic of South Vietnam

*Previously published in *Last Lambs: New and Selected Poems of Vietnam (Second Edition)*, BkMk Press, 2014.

Curtis Becker

My Companions

long ago stories
fodder of my childhood
float in the shadowy,
misty regions
of my mind;
the plot points
and characters
become remnants
of their former selves,
but they are a part of me,
always with me

these fragments of adventures
from my distant past
bring jumbled, fleeting emotions:
excitement
fear
dread
love
joy
wonder

forgotten characters
accompany me always;

each consciousness
swims in my soul:
faithful companions,
genuine friends
sharing all,
judging none

a sense of forgotten places
on the edge of my reality
I want to return;
I need to return;
I've been trying to return,
distant and ephemeral
just out of reach

Phyllis Becker

Community

It's sunny as we walk out the door.

I say thank you, house, for sheltering me through this storm,
but bye, bye, we've been so very close, too close.

The sun warms my face as we drive to the east side of town.

We hold hands, smiling, turning our heads to
get the full view of the world passing by, the green of early spring.

We drive into the parking lot of the community center, mask up.
And join the people flowing in; church ladies and men from next door,
a white lady pushing her husband in a wheelchair, a woman
speaking Spanish on her phone, a young man with long locks
dressed in scrubs, an older man with too large pants,
his shoes shuffling, we all slow our walk, give way to let him through.

Two brothers hold the door for us while keeping
their distance and everybody's eyes are smiling
and there are thank-yous, and how are yous,
and elbow bumps and praise the Lord.
And the workers are a sea of blue T-shirts and smiles
and I did not even mind being called ma'am.

One of the workers in blue says, right this way, ma'am.
And we all walk clockwise in a big circle from the sign-in,
to paperwork, to more hellos, and how are those grandkids?
And the voices murmur and rise with laughter. It sounded

like music, maybe beautiful black angels singing and blowing trumpets.

And even though we were walking, it felt like we were

all doing the bunny hop to the best of our abilities.

And now it's our turn, and we sit with the medic, a national guard

Sargent in camo, and he's smiling, too, and we roll up

our sleeves and get our shots. We complete the circle

in quiet waiting rooms with the others we had never met

who now feel like long-lost great friends.

James Bengier

Summer

We flew the gravel backroads
in borrowed minivans,
and fifth-hand pickup trucks.

Dust and summer,
hazy skies and time to kill,
we searched for anything
to make things add up to
a day well lived.

We crashed absent neighbors'
vacant swimming pools,
and we snuck stolen cigarettes
under bridges by brown water.

There were stolen kisses,
and long side glances,
late-night ice cream,
following endless revolutions
of the mostly deserted mall.

After, dark basement sessions
of cold pizza, two liters of soda,
and Sega Genesis tournaments
on the old tv with the failing color tube.

We had all the answers,
but we didn't know for a second
what we were doing.

As it turns out,
we might've won, because in hindsight,
all those long summer nights
culminated in so many days well lived.

Carl Bettis

Nothing, Really

Inspired by a poem by Guillem IX, early 12th century

I'll write a poem about nothing.
Not about Seinfeld nothing, not
about metaphysical Nothing,
not about age or loss or death,
just nothing.

I, like you, know nothing
of the concept of honor.
It's only a rumor, a legend
of some fabulous beast, extinct
if it ever existed.
So I sell myself, day by day,
for salty food and sweets
and liquor and a seat at the show.
Pretty much any show
that will shove time along, pull
death an hour closer.

I said I wouldn't write about death!
A lot goes through my head
and not much stays,
but that thought stays.
I hear it rattle every time I tilt my noggin,
along with an oddment of words

I have scant use for, like
scant, oddment and mandibular.
I'm a creature of habit, in the original
sense of creature, a creation.
What am I but a musty attic
full of old reflexes I can't discard?

That's what a ghost is, you know,
a habit that won't die.
Throw salt at the bastard,
like you would a slug.
Beer helps too. I've drowned
a ghost or two in my day.
Not that I'm all that haunted.
I probably should be,
but I've as much conscience as a cat
that dozes in a sunbeam,
surrounded by sticky feathers.

My sieve of a skull's a colander
I rinse my soul in. Every day
I'm born new
to put on the same clothes,
eat the same toast
and watch the same world flow by.
It's just as much fun as yesterday.

Those feathers around me,
they're probably from some buzzing fairy

or pestering angel. Those angels
will not shut up with their damned singing!
The fairies taste like honeysuckle.

Lilac, marigold, daylily,
birch, cedar, chickadee,
coffee, wine, housefly,
the grass I've only ever known
as sister to cement,
these I believe in. And ghosts. Sometimes in fairies
and God, but the way they won't
leave me alone
makes me think they're obsessive
tics of the brain, bad habits, irrelevant
to my life, like the word mandibular,
like death.

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Virginia Brackett

Excerpt from “Girl Murders,” a time travel mystery

Great, Gina thought. Now I’m feeling guilty for not having money, which wouldn’t be real money anyway, to give to a girl, who isn’t a real girl. She’s just trapped in a book like me. At least I hope I’m trapped in a book. Girls stuck in stories usually make it back home, whether with slippers, magic carpets, or the help of fairy godmothers. She looked at Lupina, who didn’t resemble any fairy godmother she’d ever read about.

“What are you thinking?” Lupina asked, reaching among what must have been some kind of fruit to squeeze one or two.

“Oh, nothing, just that...hey, wait a minute. I thought you said you could read my thoughts!”

Lupina shook her head. “Not unless you want to share them. You were holding them too tightly then. Besides, it’s not – what did you call it? Reading? Not like from a scroll or those things you call books. It’s just a way of knowing. Because I know myself, I can know you.”

“Like we’re related?” Gina questioned.

“Almost,” Lupina said. “But not the way you think. Not necessarily by blood. Although I guess that’s a possibility.” The last sentence she mumbled more to herself than to Gina.

“How then?” asked Gina. She wrinkled her nose as they walked toward a stack of fish.

“Through dreams. The one we call the Dream Spinner introduced you to me.”

“What’s a dream spinner?” Gina asked.

Lupina looked surprised. “You do not know of the Dream Spinner? She has eight arms, like the spider, and uses her arms to weave our dreams. You referred before, back there in your world, to dreams.”

“Well, yeah,” Gina responded, “but dreams come from our brain from ideas that we can’t actually think.” She tried to remember what she had read about psychology. “They’re secret thoughts that we don’t even know about until we sleep. They come out of our brain. It’s science.”

Lupina shook her head. “I don’t know of this thing that you call science.”

“Science is about what you can see. Or touch, or hear, or measure. You know, you observe it. It’s real. It isn’t something you can imagine.” This was getting complicated, Gina thought. How could she explain science? “Science lets us measure things. It tells us why things happen, like, I don’t know, why we hear thunder during a rainstorm.”

Lupina laughed softly. “The thunder is the displeasure of the gods.”

Gina shook her head. “No, it happens because of air. There’s a wave of super hot air that comes off lightning.” She felt confident now. The science project she had done last year was all about lightning.

Lupina nodded. “Of course. The hot air is Jupiter’s breath. He blows and the clouds collide.” They continued strolling past the busy vendors and their goods. Gina jumped twice to get out of the way of other shoppers.

“No,” Gina said. “The air is compressed. Compressed means the air is squished, pressed down really hard.” She smashed her hands together to try to demonstrate.

“I agree,” Lupina said. “It is caught between the clouds when they collide. This would cause that compression of which you speak, would it not?”

Gina sighed. She decided to get back to the original subject. “Anyway, dreams come from our brain.”

Lupina stopped to sniff a bunch of garlic that still had roots attached. “This does not sound right. Dreams are of our spirit, not our brain. I have seen that brain—they sell them, from animals of course, just down the street. They are too ugly to hold the beauty and the power of the dream.” She picked up the garlic and handed the boy minding the wagon a coin, which he dropped into his basket.

“Well, it’s not really the brains. They just hold the mind that has the thoughts.”

Lupina stopped and looked at Gina. “I have cut into many brains and nothing—no ‘mind’ ever leaped from them.”

Gina shook her head. “You can’t see the mind. That’s a just a word for our thoughts.”

“So this is not science,” Lupina said, “Because you cannot see it, you cannot touch it. You cannot measure it.” They moved to the next wagon that held some winter lettuce. Lupina spoke with the seller, haggling briefly over the price, and then handed over some coins, with a nod. The seller, a woman slightly older than Lupina, returned her nod. Gina noticed that she did not add the coins to the others in her basket, but instead slid them into her pocket.

Distracted momentarily, Gina opened her mouth, but then decided to give up on explaining science. She was anxious to get back to their original discussion. “So you dreamed about me?”

Lupina handed Gina the small basket that she had filled. She took the cloth off a larger basket. “I don’t think so,” she answered. “I didn’t dream *about* you. I dreamed...you.”

Gina stared at Lupina. “You mean you made me up.” She frowned and shook her head. “I don’t understand. But there’s a lot that I don’t understand right now.” She chewed her bottom lip, stopping while Lupina looked through some green stuff that might have been cabbage. She selected two heads and paid the young boy standing nearby. Again, Gina heard the coins make a soft thud sound as he dropped them in his money basket.

“Anyway,” Gina continued, “I don’t know how you could read—er, I mean—know my thoughts through dreams. I thought maybe it was intuition.”

Lupina moved on several steps to look through grapes, adding several bunches to her basket. Then she said, “I don’t know what this intuition is. Explain, please.” When she paid the woman this time, Gina noticed that the coins looked slightly different from those she had handed to the boy. They seemed larger and they weren’t shiny. The woman slipped them into a pocket, just as the first woman had done.

“Well,” she continued, as they left that wagon, “intuition is a way to know about things that nobody really tells you about. It’s something that mainly grown-up ladies have.”

“And is this intuition in the mind that you can’t see, which is in the brain?”

Gina shook her head and patted her stomach. “It’s in here. In your gut.”

“Does your Aunt Esther have any of this intuition?”

Gina nodded. “Yeah, she has lots. She says that the smallest mite of female intuition is worth more than a bucket of a man’s facts and figures.”

“Why?” Lupina asked.

Gina shrugged. “She always says that men don’t have the capacity to retain what they learn. They have short memories when it comes to how to handle their liquor, their women, and their guns – uh, weapons. So a woman’s gut feeling generally proves superior.” She stopped, then added, “There’s a saying that Aunt Esther likes. ‘The rooster crows, but the hen delivers the goods.’” She thought that would make Lupina smile, but she only looked thoughtful.

Lupina considered what Gina has said as they approached the edge of the market. After a moment, she asked, “And is this intuition what you call science?”

Gina cleared her throat. “No,” she had to admit, “it isn’t actually science, but I think it is related. Intuition is related to observation, I’m pretty sure. And it’s been shown to work over and over again. Just like a science experiment.”

“Well, then,” Lupina replied, “I think I choose this type of science. It comes from the gut. A lot happens in here.” She moved her free hand in a circle across her midsection. “Intake of food and output of babies. And it’s connected directly to the heart.” She nodded to the next seller as she exchanged coins for a large fish. When she placed it in the basket touching the vegetables, Gina wrinkled her nose. She’d never liked fish much.

Gina looked at Lupina skeptically as they walked out of the market. “Connected to the heart?”

“Oh, yes,” Lupina said. “Nervous feelings here,” she touched her heart, “bring butterfly tickles here.” She touched her stomach. “Warm feelings here,” she touched her chest again, “cause warmth everywhere.” Then her expression became more somber. “Fear here brings sick feelings, even fist knots, down here. Oh, yes. The heart directly connects to the gut.”

They walked together silently for a time, but Gina could tell that Lupina was still thinking about their conversation. Finally, she asked, “Do your science people ever think that the mind way of knowing might be in the heart?”

Gina had no reply, and she knew that Lupina did not really require one. It was what Aunt Esther would call a rhetorical question. She said that some questions ask you to open your mind, not your mouth. Her thoughts returned to home. She decided that she had waited long enough.

Gregory Cenac

Uncle Johnny's Freckles

Five years old, looking,
At the freckles that covered his body
Every square inch of it,
According to my older sister Kay age six.

"I tell you, Gregory---they're everywhere.
I saw him naked in the bathroom
They're even on his..."
She runs off, squealing.

So I say to him,
"Uncle Johnny,
Why don't you get the doctor
To cut 'em off?"

Uncle Johnny laughs like he's thought of this before.
"Yes, indeed, boy
I could do that,
But then I'd just have scars
All over my body."
Thinking back
Those freckles were
Just about the best thing
About my Uncle Johnny

Malcolm Cook

The **D**ifference **E**ngine

The difference engine that's our brain
marks differences in every vein
wrinkle dimple glasses frame
compare and branch if not the same

identify rank sort explain
first time heard or old refrain
patterns on the windowpane
place your bets on drops of rain

take bookie's odds cash checks in vain
Denmark Iceland Holland Spain
healthy mind or stark insane
the neighbor's gaze they all pertain

you've only got yourself to blame
put it in your box of pain.

Maril Crabtree

Reset

And in those days, it came to pass
that the land itself looked
for a place to give birth
a place that speaks in rivered tongues
and mountained stone
unmined by restless hands
that busy themselves with digging,
shaping everything
to humanity's endless needs

looked for a place
outside the metropolis
where straw and stable could unmask
a second birth
a light rising unbidden
to cause us to cover ourselves
in the sackcloth of empty coal pits
in the ashes of forest remnants

and we would understand at last
the holy purpose of our limbs -
to reach out, not for grasping,
but for swaddling
one another in love.

Brian Daldorph

Antonio Sanchez-Day (July 21, 1974-March 5, 2021)

Before leaving the Dance Ground Cemetery on the Potawatomi reservation in Mayetta, Kansas, I put the flowers my daughter had given me for Antonio Sanchez-Day on his grave and said goodbye to my friend. As I walked back to my car, I looked around at the Kansas prairie in early spring, glad that Antonio was in a peaceful place at last. He'd been *taking on life*, as he'd say, for 46 years. He was tired of fighting all those demons within and without. March 2021: time for him to sleep.

I first met Antonio in 2013 at Douglas County Jail in Lawrence, Kansas, when he filed into the classroom at the tail end of a procession of orange jump-suited inmates. By that point, I'd been teaching my Creative Writing class at the jail for over a decade. Every Thursday afternoon, I'd watch as the classroom filled with inmates who took their places in the class circle. For some, writing class meant a welcome couple of hours out of their cells. However, a lot of inmates who joined the class came to like their two hours together in the classroom, writing, telling stories, sharing jokes. Hey, if it lifted weary spirits who were in a bad place, then that was a good thing, right? Might even be an opportunity to get some serious writing done.

At first, I didn't pick out Antonio from the rest of the inmates in the class. Some inmates come to class and make a big splash: they arrive with a poem or rap ready for us, happy to have an audience. They do their thing, and if it's good, they hear, *Hey, that's what's up*, and, *There it is. You got that, brother*.

But Antonio wasn't like that. Antonio--owl-faced and shaven-headed, with a distinctive tattoo, *Delores*, on his neck--was watchful. He'd sit back and listen to what everybody else had to say before sharing his work, most often a neatly-written page that he'd later tell me was written and rewritten in his cell until it was *exactly* right.

One of the first poems he read in class was "Penitentiary Protocol," written, he said, for this cocky young guy he'd met who was going to prison for the first time claiming that doing time was nothing much. Antonio wanted him to know that prison was menace and blood:

*When you arrive, read the sign: "Leave all hopes
And dreams behind." Forget all you have or had
In the free world, it no longer matters . . . Learn to like the sight
And smell of blood, it surrounds you. Prepare to witness
The evil men do.*

In 2013, when he first read that poem to us, Antonio was in Douglas County Jail waiting for his case to be heard. He knew that he'd have to go back to prison, and he began telling the class that he was going to do his prison time *differently*. He'd had enough time behind the walls.

Back in prison for two more years, he made monumental changes to his life, just as he'd told us he would. "Inactive" in gang business, he served his time working on his poetry, getting in touch with his Native American roots and religion, exploring the rich literature of Hispanic writers, and following the example of his main man, Jimmy Santiago Baca, himself a former convict, but now one of the major voices in American poetry. During this prison "bid" (as he'd call it), he had to deal with temporary blindness, a condition caused by his diabetes. If you want to know about fear, then try thinking of being blind in prison with how many enemies lurking? Fortunately, two emergency operations restored his sight.

I met Antonio again in 2015 when he was released and moved back to Lawrence. He was determined to carry on changing his life for the better. He wanted to work, if possible, though he had serious health issues, including diabetes and kidney and heart troubles. But mostly he wanted to write, and that's what he did. He wrote and wrote, working on a first book.

He also returned to the writing class circle in Douglas County Jail where he'd started his odyssey of self-recovery, but this time as an instructor, the only former inmate allowed back into the class. He'd sit in the circle again and tell inmates his story. How he'd been bullied at school as the only Native/Hispanic kid in his class. How he'd joined a gang which had seemed like family. How he'd gotten involved in a street fight and hurt someone "real bad": the judge had sentenced him to ten years, a tough sentence meant to show other gang members that they'd be harshly dealt with in Lawrence, Kansas.

I'd been teaching the class for almost 15 years when Antonio joined me as a co-instructor, but I couldn't reach the inmates in the same way Antonio could. "I've sat where you're sitting," he'd tell them. "If I can do it then anyone can. I'm just one bad decision away from being right back in trouble again." We listened to his poems and were drawn into the worlds he created, like the one about the man in the library who meets a former version of himself, or the one about how he and his friend stood back to back and fought against enemies gathered around like wolves, or the one about the best little dog ever, Chuey the chihuahua, Antonio's "wing-man."

In October 2019, I drove with Antonio down to Wichita where he was giving a presentation at the Kansas Authors Club convention. He stood in front of the audience looking like a million dollars in his smart blue suit and Paris Left Bank beret and told us about his writing, how it had saved him and how he woke every morning thanking his gods for this gift. After his presentation, a tall guy--upright, ex-military, it seemed--came up to talk to him, said he'd been a cop for thirty years and that what Antonio had been talking about--the trauma of violence--was happening on the other side of the line too, for ex-cops. Though they'd been on opposite sides of the law, they could respect each other.

In 2017, I interviewed Antonio for a book about the jail class. I asked him what he'd be doing in 10 years' time, would he still be writing? He said he definitely would be, he had so much more to write. He told me that he wanted to write more about his mother, Delores, who had been a huge influence on his life.

But what we didn't know then, but maybe should have seen, was that his time was running short. By that point, he was going in for dialysis three times a week, which deeply tired him each time. Then, there was the triple bypass surgery. In early 2021, Antonio had just gotten himself a dog

called Scooby to love, when there was more bad news from the hospital: he was on the verge of total liver failure and, if that happened, he'd only have weeks left to live. When I heard this, I couldn't help thinking that this fighter would come through. He'd been fighting demons all his life: surely he'd fight them off one more time.

On a Sunday morning in early March 2021, I saw a Facebook post, written by his aunt, that Anthony Sanchez-Day had died at KU Med in Kansas City. I checked around, willing it not to be true. But it was. Antonio Sanchez-Day RIP.

I drove to his funeral in Hoyt, Kansas, north of Topeka, at the Chapel Oaks Funeral Home, with two other jail class teachers; all of us had loved and respected our colleague and friend, Antonio Sanchez-Day. We met his family for the first time and saw how much he was loved, how much we were all grieving. After a short Catholic service, we formed a procession in our cars and drove on backroads through Indian Country to the cemetery. Antonio's ashes were buried next to his father's grave.

I think of Antonio during those last five or six years--out of prison, a free man, a respected man, a man who sat with judges and police chiefs on the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council and gave his advice, from the inside, about improving the criminal justice system. I think of the brilliant poems that illuminated experiences that most of us would never have, and yet they reached us all. I think of his magnificent first book of poetry, *Taking on Life*.

I grieve for my friend because there should have been so much more. I think of his spirit in that peaceful cemetery, and recall a few of the words he left behind for us:

Raindrops of sadness wash away the pain

help me forget as I dance in the rain . . .

* Previously published in *Coal City Review* 44 (2021).

Robert L. Dean, Jr.

Even Though the Whole World is Burning

Is that us, standing there with our hands
in our pockets, staring into the smoke
and mirrors of what we thought

was the future, until this very moment, when we
stepped into it and found
it already the past, a void of breath, devoid of any

soul living, and who, we wonder, snapped this photo,
and why is it so yellowed, ragged
around the edges, a torn corner mended with the cracked tape
of hope and madness,

and which are we, the wings of doves, the cryptic steps
of the tomb, or if this is
a decision we are in the process of making, how long
will it take, this referendum

for or against apocalypse, what if time is shorter than gone
tomorrow, here today,
what if there is no BREAK GLASS, no alarm lever nearby,

no safety in the matches we finger in our vestments
of secrecy,

what if the Little Match Girl saw no visions and simply
froze to death

in the night, in the street, hungry and unloved, do we pity the carcass
passing it by on New Year's Day, do we
recognize the scene as us carefully avoiding us, as responsibility
neglected,

resolutions unkempt, the spontaneous combustion of a life
we cannot explain, even if
our ashes could speak, look there, on the film, a flaw, or a
shooting star, only the

photographer can say, but he has vanished into
the possible impossibilities of this fiery,
shimmering, silver-backed
glass, and left us but a shadow of a confluence in a
shroud of smoldering dreams

*The title is from W. S. Merwin's *Rain Light*.

*The poem first appeared in Sheila-Na-Gig online, the June 2021 issue.

Richard Delaware

Summer Overgrowth and Discontent Abroad (Excerpt)

On a broad, green hillside above the tiny Swiss, railroad-hotel village of Kleine Scheidegg, in the mountain pass shadow of the imposing Eiger, Jungfrau, and Mönch peaks, for a couple of weeks since July 29, 1971, I'd been sleeping nights in a white pup tent brought by Mick from Solihull, outside Birmingham, England. Four days earlier we'd met on the ferry crossing the English Channel from Dover, England to Oostende, Belgium. As a shaggy-haired seventeen-year-old obsessed with model trains and awarded a tiny travel stipend, Mick's planned summer trek was to study small-gauge railroads in Switzerland. I instantly decided to journey with him there. I'd arrived in London not long before, abandoned the group I flew in with from the U.S., and hitchhiked to Dover. I was nineteen.

How on earth did I end up here?

Unsettled

I always recall in amazement that I hitchhiked through Europe in the late summer of 1971. At nineteen I had virtually no money, scant experience hitchhiking, no real plan, and spoke no other languages. In retrospect, a trip over 5,000 miles away to another continent seems ludicrous. At the time I was living in a rented room on Homestead Road a couple of blocks west of the Santa Clara University (SCU) campus, in Santa Clara, California, sharing the house with mostly other undergraduate students, including a female gymnast, a girl whose occupation I never knew, and later a drummer and a male Apache.

In early 1971, the second quarter of my second year at SCU, I still had not declared a major. It seemed to me my years in school to date had been a river carrying me along constrained within its banks. But now, in my second year of college, the river spread out into a delta, as though I'd reached an ocean, and gone was any sense of underlying direction.

In an effort to regain direction, by shaking myself up, I wrote to the SCU Study Abroad program to see whether I might be eligible to study in England. But I applied much too late; a February 2 letter told me all positions were filled.

I remained restive. Aimlessness didn't suit me. My broad interests (drawing, writing poetry, nascent theatre backstage work) were not coalescing. So, I decided not to enroll in quarter three; I dropped out. Tired of taking classes to no end and needing time to think, for the first time in fourteen years I would not be in school.

Journal, February 5:

I must leave this school and all school for a time. I have to rest my metabolism from the far too many stimuli here, rest and live and indulge in fanciful dreams, write many theories and stories, draw many doodles.

At first, I thought that “study abroad” path was closed. But, a girl I knew said she was joining a group planning a trip to Europe that summer. On impulse, in February, with her recommendation, I joined the so-called “Guild of St. Patrick Fathers” of Saratoga, CA, and received membership and flight forms from the priest who was organizing the trip. I needed to send him a deposit to secure my reservation, with the balance due before departure. By the end of the month, I sent him \$100 to reserve one seat on his flight to London that summer. I began to feel less aimless.

Over the next two and a half months, I pulled together the paperwork I needed. Some of the money I would have paid for quarter three enrollment I used to fund this impromptu summer “study abroad” trip. As details assembled one by one, my impulse to travel steadily grew into excitement.

On May 3, I sent a \$10.00 money order to the U.S. Passport Office in San Francisco.

May 6, I received a smallpox revaccination from the County of Santa Clara Health Department for \$1.00 cash.

On May 20, I paid \$5.20 to Paul Bacosa Studio, Photography, for a passport and ID card photo.

May 31, my SCU television studio work-study job finished for the academic year, yielding a last miniscule, but welcome, paycheck.

June 2, I received an International Student Identity Card, issued by The International Student Travel Conference.

The U.S. government issued my passport on June 10, due to expire after five years.

June 21, a brochure of “Customs Hints” arrived from the Region VIII Bureau of Customs in San Francisco, warning that airport inspections might take longer due to the new Nixon presidential policy to combat the smuggling of, among other narcotics (in the spelling of the time), “high-potency marihuana.”

This was also the second year of the military draft lottery that President Nixon had established by an Executive Order. The idea was that any man who chose to maintain 1-A status for the entire year and was not called up, would be permanently excused from mandatory military service. As the year began, I’d changed my status with the Selective Service Board from the standard student college II-S deferment to 1-A. That “Notice of Classification” had been mailed to me on May 4. My lottery number was 192. I could only wait, tracking the numbers rising upward each week, back at my local Phoenix, Arizona, board, until the year ended, that unsettling deadline ticking down in the back of my mind every day.

On July 8, I bought a round trip plane ticket, San Francisco to London, England, from Pan American airlines for \$355.00.

July 16, my Selective Service System "Permit for Registrant to Depart from the United States" arrived. I was authorized to remain absent until November 1.

One last poem I wrote just before leaving the country:

In longing strains of tremulous wheat,
Brave hair of the auburn brown ground,
In the grain-weaving breeze
I lay my limbs on a graceful branch
Of the laurel-boughed bay:
Wench-warm tree, stubbing stubborn
Black toes on the worm-muscled earth,
Tunes trembling through her lyre
With brindled hands, wide hood of limbs.

I leant ear near, heard hymns.

And having shook the wood-sprite soul
From rings of the hymnal wood,
I heaved off the husk, fell loose, aye, on
Wafting arms of willing-wench wheat
As fledgling down upon the seas,
All golden-rod rushes of passion
...and I wake, to tears, my thick heart
Heaving languorously to
The torn tones of the dream.

I stripped my rented room and stored my belongings in the basement of the Homestead house. On July 20, with a tightly rolled sleeping bag, and a black travel duffel, packing my father's 35 millimeter camera and hardly any clothes, I left the United States from San Francisco International Airport on a new wide-body Boeing 747, first flown commercially only the previous year. I also took along two paperback books by definitively American authors, offbeat and irreverent, appealing to my nineteen-year-old self: *Selected Poems of Ezra Pound*, and *Letters from the Earth*, by Mark Twain.

Pound wrote rich lines that I would frequently reread as I traveled, as in, for instance, this excerpt of "Portrait d'Une Femme" about the historical plight of bright women:

Great minds have sought you – lacking someone else.

You have been second always. Tragical?

No. You preferred it to the usual thing:

One dull man, dulling and uxorious,

One average mind – with one thought less, each year.

Twain's *Letters from the Earth* had only been published nine years earlier, over fifty years after he died, because his daughter had originally objected that it "presented a distorted view of her father's ideas and attitudes." For me, his witty, penetrating, adult humor snatched my attention in radical ways that had never occurred to me as a child reading about Tom Sawyer or Huck Finn. The title piece is a sequence of letters composed by the archangel Satan from Earth to his fellow angels in heaven commenting with unflinching honesty, and Twain humor, about the newly created world and a creature called Man. In the first letter, Satan writes:

The people are all insane, the other animals are all insane, the earth is insane, Nature itself is insane. Man is a marvelous curiosity. When he is at his very very best he is a sort of low grade nickel-plated angel; at his worst he is unspeakable, unimaginable, and first and last and all the time he is a sarcasm...

Twain follows those letters with "Papers of the Adam Family," and later a whole section on "The Damned Human Race," all of which resonated with my quirky sophomore sensibilities.

These books sounded the background theme music for the adventure ahead.

London, England

Eleven hours later the same day, after a flight of over 5,000 miles, I arrived in London at Heathrow Airport, a visa stamp in my passport allowing a visit to England of up to three months. After half a day, I remember blowing my nose and seeing on my handkerchief a thick black residue of the dense summer smog of London.

Maija Rhee Devine

Death By Sex, Death By Corona

We survived, haven't we, the forced sex pandemic
sex at gun points 70 times a week, the lowest
number among so many scholars' ways of counting.
238 of us, tears of shame, told our stories
six, now housemates in House of Sharing,
bit our lips to pulp when these happened:

Whores*!

K, "comfort woman" at 15, in two years, 7,280 sex acts
L, at 15, three years, 10,920 times
P, at 17, four years, 14,560 times
C, at 27, two years, 7,280 times
H, at 13, two years, 7,280 times
L, at 12, three years, 10,920 times

Lying bitches*!

At 90 through 104 now, who could've imagined
our faces turning blue again, this time, killing micro-machines
death dust blowing into our lungs any moment, deadlier
than guns, more sure-handed than our own hands
that tried to tear open our necks people now call
mooshoi mokseum, "iron necks."

Kill* yourselves*!

*Previously published in *Writing for Peace* 2020.

Greg Field

The Sea Is The Longest Breath

for Crystal

The sea is the longest breath ever taken.

Its vast green chest rises again
before it can completely fall—
forever pumped by wind and moon.

This sailboat's engine is like
the biggest heart that ever beat,
its rhythm so strong the bulkheads hum.

Between this heart and that breath
a song drifts out over the sea.

It is the longest song ever sung.

It goes on for days,
passed on from hull to waves,
as we plunge and heave and roll
across the sea's nervous chest.

This song is for you.

Now you are the sea, the wind,
the moon and the song
that rises up to sting my eyes,
to coat my hair in salt.

Sing on past the time
the boat rests sluggish in its slip,
on softly to my ears at night
when I am alone,

into my dreams where we both
stand on deck before I awaken
and you turn to me to say,
the sea is the longest breath ever taken.

First appeared in *New Letters*

Victoria Garton

Waxing Gibbous Moon

What made you show your face
mid-afternoon
to blue chicory blooms
in an August of dying grasses?

In night's ill-fitting shoes,
you bulge like a blister
demanding attention.
Did you trek too far?

Man of pox-marked
onion skin
is that your crater
Copernicus?

Or are my glasses
tricksters?
That second self
a ghostly blur?

Waxing gibbous moon
you grow expectantly.
I know at my core
what featureless face
to welcome full term.

Greg Gildersleeve

Tuesday Night Writers Group

Rod is already there when I walk in,
The staunch defender of our table
At the back of our section reserved
For us and roped off with a yellow chain
By Ashley, the manager, who lets us call the space
Our own.

Levi joins us next, then Kara comes in person
For the first time. The young people talk of
A story I do not know, but I enjoy their energy.
Blair completes our gathering for the night,
Her face swollen from an unknown allergy.
She loans me her power cable when my battery
Weakens.

At seven we sprint,
Each consumed by our own worlds of fiction.
Some edit, some write. Cathy joins us midflight
From Zoom. Time passes too swiftly.
I am slurping the remains of my vodka drink.
Blair finishes the last of her chicken waffles.
Forty-five minutes later, we report our successes:
639 words, 900 words, three pages edited;
It's been a productive night.

Ashley reminds us of the time with her usual friendly refrain:
“I’m kicking you out.” We know we can linger and often do,
But the young people leave on time. I detour to the restroom,
Then wave to Rod, and it’s out into the night—
Another story to live until next week.

Diane Glancy

Beware of the Forest, My Dear

You thought the wolf would eat you
when you were a child.
You heard it howling at the moon.
You pulled the covers to your chin
and said it couldn't get you.
You didn't like the moon.
You thought it could open your window
and let the wolf in.
What long arms you have.
What big ears.
It was the woodcutter who heard your screams.
He rushed into the house and cut the wolf's belly and let the grandma out.
Now take your gunny sack full of these potatoes.
Start through the woods.
Don't wear a red cloak.
Don't talk to a wolf wearing
grandma's sleeping cap.
It has big sharp teeth to eat you all the better with.
Don't listen to your mother who tells you
to take a cake to grandma's house
on the other side of the dark and dangerous woods.
Be wary, my dear, of the hunger of the wolf.
Sleep with fear.
Pull the covers to your chin
and hope the woodcutter in the woods is near.

Believe the subtext of any wacky story you hear.

Take your ax with you wherever you go.

But know it is the wolf that dwells within.

Caryn Miriam-Goldberg

Crossing Over

At the edge of the yard somewhere in Lithuania,
she takes it all in: the white bark of the forest,
the dark vertical shadows, the tall field between here
and horizon. Wind rises from the banks
of trees and rushes everywhere, reminding her
to lift her chest, inhale sharply, remember.

Who will come after her, and then what?
Will the grasses part the same way in tomorrow's weather,
the leaves sing their breaking song, the air hold
the weight of the world evenly around each being?
Is she the first or the last to hear the ending world?

From years ahead, I wait for her to turn into the future.
When she does, her face catches the late light,
and she sees me, sitting cross-legged on a wooden floor
in Kansas. What is there to say from there to here
that would help? A cow walks through a parking lot,
a peacock screams, all of us far from oceans, wars,
the urgency of living in a world on the cusp of vanishing.

My great-grandmother doesn't know she will die
in that very spot facing away from soldiers and fire.
How most of this village will face the gun or the gas chamber,
quickly or slowly in the camps or holes in the ground,
little space to think the best, last thought.
The air she exhales falls off the earth, like the sun
tonight and every night. Her surviving children
will spread like water on hard ground that softens over time,
so far from her view at the edge of the yard.

All she knows is the cleansing light of the wind,
the moment her life balances before her,
the way love can shelter itself as a dark bird not-so-hidden
in the birches, ready to exhale from the leaves
that keep remaking themselves and the breath
from her body that will one day be my body.

*Poem previously published in *Mockingheart Review* and in my collection of poetry, *How Time Moves*.

Beth Gulley

The Obvious Child

I know it's Paul Simon
voicing over the top,
but it's the sounds
of the Brazilian drum circle Olodum
drumming in the background
that drive my heart rate,
push me forward,
run me through my workout.

Like watching *Central Station*
and catching a glimpse
of the red dirt floor
of a Protestant church
in the favelas,
I'm nostalgic
for the southern cone
in the time before
my dad died.

The song reminds me of the year
after Stroessner was deposed
and we were all so happy
the Berlin Wall came down,
and we walked up the brick street
to the flower market

oblivious to the tragedies
waiting in the future.

At the end of the song
people at the gym
think my face rolls
with sweat, but I can't stop
from crying. I want to go home.
You can't deny the obvious child.

*Previously published in Dragonfly 2021.

Jeremy Gulley

I Want Nairobi

The streets of Nairobi burst with life. The smell of sweat and backed up sewage mixed with smoked sausage, fresh vegetables, and sweet fried breads. Then there was the rain, coating the heat with a thin layer of freshness. But when it fell, the water stayed, turning the streets from jagged tarmac to running rivers. It was hard to tell where the sewage went, but it was in there somewhere.

I stepped my combat boot feet on to the street. My hotel room, the only one I'd found without exposed wires in the shower, and clean for the price, kept my wallet, phone, and what little of value I had so that, on me, I carried only 1000 schillings, my room key, and passport.

"You should go to the right," the woman at the hotel desk told me, "there is a mall around the corner."

"But I don't want the mall," I said, "I want Nairobi."

"But to the right is much safer," she said, "you should go that way."

"If I was a Kenyan," I said, "which way would you tell me to go?"

She paused.

"To the left?" I asked.

She nodded.

"Then I'm going left," I said.

"You'll get lost going that way," she said.

"Then I'll have a little adventure," I said. Her face seemed to say that a little adventure on a rainy Friday night in the middle of Nairobi was not a good idea.

I went left. My boots were immediately dirty and wet. They'd already seen the mud of middle Kenya, so they weren't afraid or intimidated. Dodging motorbikes, which seem to run on elastic tracks, was the hard part. But after a few near hits I got my feet under me, walking confidently as if I knew where I was going.

It took only two blocks before I heard what I expected. "Hey Mzungu," a voice called.

I turned and found the source. A group of young men sat around a makeshift store with Christmas lights strung over the top. A bag of leaves sat on a table and a bottle of vodka sat on the floor.

"Jambo," I called, walking toward them, "habari yenyu." They looked at me differently.

"He na nini?" I asked, pointing to the leaves.

The man behind the bag said something but I didn't catch it. Pretending I did, though, I smiled and nodded as if I were intimately familiar. The young man reached in the bag and handed me some. "Chew," he said.

I chewed. My mouth filled with an acrid tartness that at once felt refreshing and unfamiliar. The men smiled. "Good?" they asked.

I nodded.

Suddenly a man appeared beside me. He wore a green flat cap and had a beard that was a natural black on one side and an unnatural blond on the other. He had kind eyes and I felt as if I knew him already. "Would you buy some?" he asked.

"I don't know?" I said, "schilingi ngapi?"

"100," said the young man, "100 for a small bag. 300 for a bigger bag."

Thinking this man, perhaps, owned the shop and needed business, I asked him for two small bags. Two were put on the counter and the two toned bearded friend took them. I looked at him with surprise. "Are those for you?" I asked with a laugh.

He nodded.

"Where are mine?" I asked.

"You want some?" he asked, his face puzzled.

Apparently I bought the leaves for him.

I laughed. So did he. We understood.

"Are you new to the city?" he asked.

I nodded.

"Then I'll show you around," he said.

I nodded.

"Not without this first," said another man. He was sitting by the vodka bottle. He picked it up and handed it to my new friend. He took a long swig and handed it to me. I took a long drink as well, imagining waking up the next day without my pants and minus the rest of my 800 schilings. I was suddenly glad my hotel key did not have the hotel name on it.

I set the bottle down on the table and let the vodka do its job. Then my new friend took my arm and we walked away together into the open mouth of the Nairobi night.

The next day, I would tell the woman at the hotel that I did not get lost and she would respond by cleaning the mud from my boots.

Tina Hacker

Final Night

*When a child dies in Niger,
the family wraps him up
and allows the mother to sleep
with him all night.*

The curve of her arm
around the still bundle
forms the last smile
she can give him.
He is hers
during this time for sleeping,
a few hours for the months
he grew in her belly,
one night for the years
crouched beside him
as he played by the fire.
Her thighs remember
relief when he slid into life;
her breasts remember
calm as he took her milk.
She waits until dawn to weep
so her tears will be fresh
as they sink into the wrappings,
an offering of water
and salt to nourish him

on his next journey.

(Previously published: Mid-America Poetry Review 2007)

David L. Harrison

And Now We Know

Beneath our feet, beyond our sight,
below the roots where green grass grows,
there's more to dirt than we'd suppose.
In places black as blackest night,
creatures slither, wriggle, creep,
nurse their babies, snuggle, sleep –
'There's more to dirt than we'd suppose.

Quiet things in hidden holes
burrow down where secrets lie.
'There's more to dirt than meets the eye.
From centipedes to mousy voles
they come and go without a sound,
seek their safety underground.
'There's more to dirt than meets the eye.

Creatures large and small retreat
where boulders rest and tree roots drink.
'There's more to dirt than we might think.
So many lives beneath our feet,
so much to learn, so much to know –
And now we've learned a lot, although
there's more to dirt than we might think.

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Michael Harty

Night Shift, COVID Ward

It's seven once again, and once again
she boards the mercy ship: rejoins the crew
who navigate this sea of sickness, pain,
and loss; who struggle nightly to renew
their courage. She's called back to this perdition
where nothing ever ends – where even death
has come to seem just one more repetition,
a pausing of machine-assisted breath.
She knows all that, and still she comes to work.
In mask and gown she glides from bed to bed,
to comfort where she can, to light a spark
of hope within the stifling cloud of dread.
She searches for the words to cancel fear;
too often, she can only say, "I'm here".

*This poem received a "Laureate's Choice" award in the Maria Faust Sonnet Contest for 2021.

Dr. Marcia L. Hurlow

You Know His Favorite Color

The Green Man's favorite cloud
is the cumulus, roiling
as a maple in July though less
predictable—never returns
to form, no promise in morning
of rain or sun, a risk-maker.

The Green Man's favorite plant
is an oak. He startles to find one
standing whole on earth, unchanged
by flame, dispersed into air,
or planed and nailed for a coffin
hidden with its cargo under ground.

His favorite flavor is water,
its memories of rock, roots
and what the river gave it.
When he questions the cosmos
he waits for rain, tilts up
his head and drinks.

The Green Man's favorite insect
is the firefly. He loves their first rise
in waves, stars on the sea, their small

flash a prayer of invocation
and petition: bugs transformed
by their urge to continue.

Rick Kesler

For Mom and Dad on Their 50th Wedding Anniversary

There are many things that I've carried over from my childhood into adulthood. There's the sense of right and wrong, a belief that the right cause will win out in the end, the knowledge that puppies and parents are good things, a love and binding tie to the land and water that sustains us, the wholeness felt at a Thanksgiving gathering and the hope that my children will have pleasant memories of their youth. All these things and more Mom and Dad have passed onto me.

There is one thing though that my own family especially appreciates that I've brought with me from my youth. And that is a fondness for travel and vacations. Car vacations specifically. This is something that we do every year, and the seeds for these outings were planted by my parents. When I think back to my youth, these summer vacations, taken in a car, are always part of the pleasant memories. Every year we kids would look forward to the time when Mom and Dad would decide where we would go. Sometimes the trip would be a short one to sights in a neighboring state, and some notable years we would trek half way across the continent to see things that we had only read about. Wherever we went though, we went as a family, and the times were always special.

There were good times and maybe some not quite so good times on these trips, but the flow of years has washed the memories clean of anything but the endearing knowledge that all of these times were the best. Dad might have a slightly different view. The fabric of all my remembered serenity may have a few small tears in it for him. He may remember three kids in the back seat wanting to know how much farther we had to go, or arguing that he or she touched me or that they were on my side of the seat. Or he may remember the repeated words "I'm bored", or maybe kids always wanting to stop at unplanned attractions. (Alligator wrestlers, the house that defies gravity, this or that minor battlefield, whatever "scenic overlook" was around the next corner, and many more) These unplanned attractions took many forms, but they all shared the same quality of interfering with the day's planned itinerary. If one of these extra stops had ever been made, we all knew that we would never get in enough miles that day, reach our intended destination that night, arrive after all the motels were full, and probably get home from our trip after harvest had started. Dad might remember some of these things, but I doubt that they ever happened that way.

Mom was always the diplomat and counterbalance on the vacations. She kept the itinerary straight, read the maps, announced points of interest gleaned from brochures, and kept the peace. When one person wanted to see Wild Bill Hickok's grave, one person wanted to see the world's largest statue of a northern pike, and one person wanted to get just a little farther down the road, it was up to Mom to save the day. Usually, with a minimum of pouting on our part, she was able to put the pieces back together and find just the right solution. All of this was done with a delicate balancing of people's feelings and a careful weighing of everyone's wants and desires. Of course, Mom always

put her own feelings, wants and desires at the back of the list to everyone else's, and always behind the good and well being of the family.

The locations of these vacations were many and varied, near and far, high and low, and to a child, nothing but exciting. There wasn't one compass point that was safe from a carload of Kesler's descending on it wanting to wring from it all that was special. Some trips were educational, some were relaxing and some were explorations, but all were fun, fun, fun. On these trips, we learned about the power of water and time at Mammoth Cave and Niagara Falls. We learned about this country's most trying moments on the battlefields at Gettysburg, tasted chocolate delights in Hershey, PA, and saw history in the making at our nation's capital. We listened to a creek babble outside our motel in Gatlinburg, joked about stills hidden in the mist of the Great Smoky Mountains, and stared in awe at the majesty of the Grand Tetons.

A young boy's imagination ran wild at the home of the Little League World Series, and young girls learned how to bait hooks on lonely lakes in Minnesota. Nothing quite compares to the sound of water lapping at the shore while you go to sleep in a cabin with your socks on because of the cold. Nothing except the wonderfully mournful and singular call of the northern loon. The cabins may have been old, there may have been bats in the balconies and bugs on the porches, but the memories of these times are nothing but A-Number-One-O.K.

Outdoor theaters, indoor museums and underground marvels were all enjoyed on our vacations. First time experiences were shared on trips beside Lake Michigan to aquariums, observatories, ball games, and picnics. All of these added to the blended flavor of a metropolis, and formed the beginning of an enduring love for one of the great cities of the world - Chicago.

Some trips were grand schemes dreamed of, and then realized, by a young family to see natural wonders and scenic beauty. Long drives, done mostly in heroic proportions by Dad, were worth every mile to see simmering wastelands or to make snowballs on mountain tops in August. From the surreal Badlands to the endless forests of the Black Hills, from the "Oh Wow" of kids seeing the manmade greatness of Mt. Rushmore, to the silent watching in the evening mist of a passing deer, these experiences were all experienced together.

And then, there was where this family's odyssey of travel began. The destination of the honeymoon that was fifty years ago and maybe the grandest spot of all - Yellowstone. The first national park and the most lasting memory. Its wonders never cease and its beauty lasts forever. Old Faithful, mud pots, sulfur smells and bear jams. Wooden walkways on crusted earth baked and cracked by the seething cauldron just a slip away, and natural wonders too innumerable to list. These are some of the things that make up the memories of Yellowstone. Memories that help an adult still see with youthful eyes.

These memories have been steeped together to form a stew of past experiences. Experiences that have been simmered over the fire of time. The sights, the smells, the sounds of these trips are all blended together now by history. The history of a family that is yet unfolding. For no shared experience is static unto itself. A change, a flow, a metamorphosis is still taking place. What was started by the parents, was shared by the children, and is helping shape the grandchildren. The present time of one generation, was the future of another, and will be the past of the next. All touch each other. Flow. Continuum. Experiences shared pile one upon the other and form the humus that families are made of. These memories are just a small part of the foundation of a family that was started fifty years ago, and one that is still being built; reaching to the future.

Mom and Dad,

For all these memories and many more,

Happy Anniversary and Thanks,

J. Khan

Dad's Last ER Visit

Cortical atrophy, says the ER doc
meaning atoms and molecules

are missing

seasons, skies,
constellations are cratering
as his brain retreats
like a galaxy
into its own black hole
like a child into fitful sleep.

I watch

as each thought	gasps
and flops	like a fish
out of water	he mouths
the silent air	not for air
but for	words

Move closer, stray light flickers
in his eyes. Lips move towards a name
he called you when you were young
and the night sky shone bright
in a forever kind of way.
That was long ago.
That was then
& far away.

*Previously published in *The Strategic Poet: Honing the Craft*. Terrapin Books, 2021.

R.M. Kinder

Time

I can't look into my past, no straight shot
like a beam of light from and back to the beginning.
Frames appear, windows along the way,
a face or a path, a moment, a blank, an emotion.

Sometimes I cower at the sheer enormity of a planet
hanging in the sky, shadowed by a dead moon,
or thrusting, headed somewhere, dragging gravity along,
a home seeded, and every creature both a food source
and a hunger.

It is so shameful and cold and all we have
is too immense for the likes of us. I've loved
so many times, so many things,
been rewarded and ripped apart.

I'm one burning hope amongst billions
and my candle can't shine enough.
My voice is weak and timid,
afraid to attract attention.

Everything is a mystery, except my memories.
They are patches of wonder, peeping out here and there,
opening a time and saying, step back in,
live here a few moments.

Silvia Kofler

Tumbleweeds

She walks into the classroom and takes her seat in the front row. Today is family day and Isabella needs to talk about a favorite relative. Elsa, a girl with long red curls and a freckled face, is her best friend and sits next to her. Isabella listens intently as she describes her grandmother, or *Oma*, as she calls her.

“*Oma* lives in an apartment close to our house and I visit her often, especially if *Mama* and *Papa* work late, or go to the theatre on weekends. I like to watch cartoons with *Oma*. She is really fun and always fixes my favorite cheese dumplings. That is why I love my *Oma*,” says Elsa.

After listening to Elsa, Isabella wonders why she doesn’t have a grandma like most girls in her class.

“What happened to grandma?” Isabella asks her mother after returning home from school that afternoon. “Why don’t I have an *Oma* like Elsa?”

“She died in childbirth” her mom replies?

“What does that mean?”

“It means that she had complications when she gave birth to your father and died,” her mother explains.

“But, why?” Isabella probes because she never received a specific explanation. “What complications? What is childbirth? You told me that the stork brings babies.”

“You are too young to understand. I will tell you when you are older,” her mother replies in a tone of voice that discourages Isabella from asking again.

Many years later Isabella remembers her friend Elsa and family day. Isabella’s favorite subject had always been geography, and she still remembers studying the world map while Miss Meyer pointed at far away dots on the colorful map.

“Here is Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay,” Miss Meyer had explained and Isabella thought to herself: I wonder what it’s like there? Even though she had never visited the city that inspired one of her favorite childhood movies, *Das Haus in Montevideo*, as a young adult she had drifted from one place to the next searching for the right place on the map.

Sitting on the deck of her second cousin’s home, a tumbling weed like her who established roots on a different continent, Isabella asks about her father’s mother. “She was only fifteen when your father was born. She had the baby blues and jumped out the window of her fourth story apartment,” Elfie replies.

Isabella hears the skeleton fall behind her mind’s closet door, its bones shattering like glass.

Nancy Krieg

my ego

lives in a jar by the door
steeped in ancient holy water
deaf until the cap is unscrewed
and I have need
to summon arrogant powers.
I need him when I'm playing
supervisor at work.
he helps me play guitar
every morning during coffee.
and most important of all
he bounces on my shoulder in rhythm while I play drums with the jazz band.

I never wanted to contain him, really
but he kept trying to run my life.
nearly drove me crazy
trying to keep up
with his unreasonable demands
taking himself so seriously
he wanted to run the whole show.

my soul was taking imagination rides
only to return
not knowing where she had been.
I never denied her the trips.
I was concerned, however, she would not find her way back home.

down at AAA detective agency
you can get an overnight spy
for 59.95. great buy for a spy
and I did.

I couldn't keep my intellect
from following them
he watched her and the spy
all through the night.
my intellect trailed like a fox
recorded notes like a cub reporter,
sending the read to me at city desk
before they returned.
consequently, I never paid another 59.95.

my imagination is elated.
no more midnight interrogations ending
in tears and embrace of sorrow.
my intellect is happy with his job.
they take some wild trips together!
Me? I write down everything
that happens to them
and call it poetry.

now, my ego and I have a new hobby.

Marianne Kunkel

Wonder

Just two months ago, I faced
twenty undergraduates sitting elbow to elbow.
I'd broken words into syllables on the white board
as if language were Legos to snap apart and not
wet sand you slice a finger through only to watch it fuse
back together. *Social distancing* wasn't yet a term
we all knew; school hallways still bustled, toilet paper
three rows deep still slouched on store shelves,
and a frail grandparent could nuzzle
her new grandchild, cheeks blending.
That day, I asked my students to write a poem
that included a question, telling them the heart of art
is wonder. But now, sheltered-in-place at home
with my jade-eyed four-year-old, I'm overwhelmed
by his questions: *Can I see friends today?*
The bug you said is going around—is it a fly?
Why's Daddy leaving with a black mask on?
My husband folds an old, black bandana,
loops rubber bands around the sides for earholes,
and our child flings it behind a chair. *Too scary!* he says,
and later his preschool workbook
teaches the exclamation point, that stroke
of confidence that looks like a big steel post,
dug up and dripping mud. I like the surety
of a period, how calm I sound lately when I say

The macaroni and cheese is ready.

And The sickness will end,

probably in summer or fall.

Who would've thought that a pandemic
could turn me off of questions, possibly for good,
yet here I am at the end of a poem, and suddenly
for the first time in many long weeks, I want
to ask, is fear a shared night sky and we humans
isolated stars?

This was a featured poem for the online programming of Mid-Continent Public Library and The Story Center's online programming for National Poetry Month on April 15, 2020.

Pat Lawson

Being, Nothingness, and Housework

Every day there is housework to be done. And from doing housework questions arise about methods, providing illustrations of existence preceding essence: What product to use in the solving of problems—e.g. dust, lint, mineral deposits. Whether to approach it from a green perspective with non-toxic cleaning agents such as vinegar and salt or to become, at least momentarily, happy and oblivious, as women used to be in cleaning-product commercials, and get out the Lime Away. How to diagnose. How to proceed. Whether to begin upstairs or down. Whether to pick up dirty clothes or kick them under the bed. Whether to remove the cat that died under the bed—and when and how—or allow it to become desiccated. (Homer Barron in “A Rose for Emily” comes to mind, though one wonders about his degree of desiccation since mention is made of the mattress he had become “inextricable from” and after whose decease the townspeople cleaned up with lime rather than Lime Away). Should one refuse to take even small steps so as not to prevent something from coming into bloom that wants to bloom but wait instead until the room is ready for a complete overhaul?

And should one go for a minimal, decluttered look—no more perfume bottles on the window sill, no forced forsythia, no beaded necklaces, amber bracelets, or rhinestone chokers hanging about the room on hooks, no portraits of loved ones (baby, dog, cat as kitten), no more stuff of life at all in fact, dead or alive, but in the bedroom only the basic bed, dresser without mirror, and perhaps a single green plant to suggest possibility. Perhaps a snake plant, for its allusive richness. Or perhaps an allusion-free plant like a philodendron.

Should one clean to music? Should one be in the moment or transcend it? Should one pause to reflect on the importance of material things? Suppose Desdemona had not dropped her handkerchief nor Iago felt compelled to pick up after her. Macbeth sees a dagger before him, but suppose he had seen a harpsichord. On the other hand, one might pause to reflect on the spiritual poverty stuff contributes to (see any number of religious treatises from The *Book of Job* to the Buddha's "Four Noble Truths" to the writings of C.S. Lewis).

And how thorough a cleaning? Is cleanliness next to godliness or is it closer to sterility or does it depend on the amount of bleach? Should one let oneself become distracted? Pause to stare out the window? Answer the phone? Attend a funeral? Ah, a funeral! Should one keep to a schedule or be spontaneous, e.g., it's spring, so let us coax the plants back to life with water, and let us put away gray and bring forth green and the bubbling fountain, toss out the cat carcass, and let the canary out of the basement? So many questions. So many roads diverging into yellow (or other) woods. And does one dare to eat a peach, knowing that one must decide whether to discard or plant the pit? There are no rules here. As Sartre said, probably thinking of cleaning up the house after another bout of *nausée*, "My acts cause values to spring up like partridges."

*Previously published in *The Same*.

Barbara Loots

When I Become Transparent

When I become transparent,
I shall be a glass,
or prism, or a water bead
upon a vein of grass.

When I become transparent,
I shall be the sky,
or a single facet
in an insect's eye.

When I become transparent,
the universe will be
a little less invisible
through my transparency.

Marlana Marts

Pollux 11

“And what does Mr. Valentino do?”

She thought about telling them the truth. About being honest, for once, about her husband. Why wouldn't she? It wasn't shameful, what he did for a living. In fact, quite the opposite. He was a hero by most accounts.

And yet, if she told them, they would no longer see her. Polly Valentino, the newest global account executive at the hottest ad agency in Orlando, would cease to exist. She wouldn't be known for her revolutionary work for Pfizer, or Guinness, or Chanel. She'd just be the newest hire at Winters/Wallace, who was married to a goddamn national treasure.

It was only her first week, capped off this Friday night by the agency's annual post-holiday Holiday Party. A standard affair: the young creatives and analytics nerds would get over-served and drunk, while the partners (all middle-aged white men) looked on fondly, sipping their microbrews. Polly looked at her Old Fashioned, swirled it a bit and then answered Wallace's question, “He's a pilot.”

“Oh, wow. That's pretty neat. That's got great perks, huh? Free airfare pretty much anywhere?” asked Winters.

She smiled weakly. Keep up the facade? It would come out eventually. “No, not that kind of pilot. He works for NASA.”

“Oh, double wow. So he's a test pilot?”

“Kind of, yeah. It's...why he's not here tonight. He's got runs tomorrow morning.” In truth, Tom never came to these things, and he didn't have runs tomorrow. But once people found out what he did, what he really did, all eyes and conversation focused on him. He hated it. To his credit, he always had tried to get conversation focused back on her, but it was impossible. He was an astronaut, after all.

But twenty years ago, those same people would have clucked their tongues and looked away. She knew it, and he knew it; they both carried chips on their shoulders. Back then, on a night just like this, he would have been slumped over in some drug den, strung out, veins blown, the needle limp in his neck. No one knew about those times. Recovering junkies weren't supposed to be heroes. And heroes didn't shoot up in back alleys.

“How was the party?” Tom asked, running his hand over his dark, freshly shorn hair. “The usual. The children get drunk off of the good stuff. Everyone wanted to know

where you were. I don't know why people think it's weird to show up without a spouse.” She kicked off her heels, peeled off her skirt. “What did you do tonight?”

“Oh, you know. Just hung out. Watched part of Hang ‘Em High.” “Would have preferred doing that.”

“Well, duh. It’s an excellent film. But just remember, when you judge those kids, you were that age once. You took advantage of the open bar as much as anyone, if I remember correctly.” His blue eyes sparkled in the dim bedroom light.

“Don’t give me that,” her smile wide. “Besides, you have no idea what I got up to when I was that age. You were off God knows where, stalling out F-16s, pretending you were Tom Cruise.”

“Top Gun was the Navy, dear.”

She dropped her oversized, fake pearls on the dresser. “Did I smell pizza when I came in?”

“Maybe.”

“I’m pretty sure, Major, that pepperoni is NOT part of the ‘I’m going to space in a few weeks’ diet,” she teased.

“I can’t possibly eat any more kale.” He let loose a huge yawn.

“Weigh in is soon. You gotta fit in that suit. You know, the one that’s specific to you, worth millions of dollars of taxpayer money?”

“Screw the suit. As long as I fit in the Pollux capsule, that’s what matters.”

She slid into bed next to him. “Maybe we fatten you up so you can’t go,” she whispered.

“I have to go. This is what I do. You know that.” He pulled her close and could smell the rye on her breath.

“I do. I wouldn’t keep you from going up. You’d kill me.” She sighed. “Are you excited?”

“Yeah, I think so. Getting shot up in a glorified tin can isn’t anyone’s idea of a good time, but you know, science. Someone’s got to do it.”

She poked him in the arm playfully. “You better get excited. You better get serious. It’s SPACE. No fucking around.” She brushed her hair back from her eyes and straightened her T- shirt. “Have you thought about what you want to do for your L-NOE?”

“I wish you wouldn’t call it that. Somehow implies I’m not coming back.”

“Sorry. It’s what the other wives call it. And it is true. It IS your Last Night On Earth.” “Not forever.”

“Of course not. If, god forbid, you don’t come back, I will stowaway on the next mission, find you up there and kick your ass.”

He laughed. “This is why I have to come back. I can’t be having my ass kicked in space in front of the other astronauts.” He wrapped his long arms around her. “I dunno, Pol. There’s not much I CAN do the night before. I’ve got to be strapped in before dawn.”

“Morning flight?”

“Early afternoon, and they like to make sure I’m nice and uncomfortable for as long as possible.”

“Ah. Have they picked a day? Since I’m new, I probably can’t take the week off.” “Your guess is as good as mine. You know how it is. Weather, the director’s mood,

whether I’ve got a mosquito bite, Mercury in retrograde... Any number of things factor in.” “Sure, sure. But usually you go up on Tuesdays. So, you know, if you have any sway,

maybe push for that, would you?”

“I’ll get right on that. I’ll tell NASA they need to schedule this launch for THAT DAY. I’m sure they’re fine with that, flight plan be damned.”

“Appreciate it.” She rolled over and snuggled down in the covers, cheekily. He turned off the lamp. He waited until he heard her soft snore before he left the room.

It was 3AM before Tom crept into bed with his wife. He never slept more than a few hours at a time. He never had, not since his days on the streets. It was a habit that he’d never broken. Even the Air Force couldn’t do it. But whereas it had been a source of great concern to the base doctors, it had never been a problem for him, always turning up for his briefings and combat missions clear-eyed and eager.

Even now, years later, when his forty years should be wearing on him, he had the energy and drive of a new recruit. He had to, he told himself. There was so much that could go wrong; he had to be sharp and focused on the flight at hand. Like his father once told him, “You take your eye off the ball for one second...” Too bad his father did just that and drove his pickup into a tree with the 11 year old Tom next to him. He brushed away the thought.

He stared up at the ceiling, once in bed, watching the fan blades circle above him. He wondered if it was time to revisit turning the spare room into another bedroom, so that he wouldn’t run the risk of waking Polly in the night. Only a few months ago, there had been talk of turning it into a nursery.

He rolled over and Polly sighed contentedly. He didn’t want to think about what that room was supposed to have been. But his mind would not be quiet, would not be still. Six months ago, they had called off what he could only feel was a quest for a child. That quest started five years ago, when both of them finally felt their lives had stabilized. He’d been clean for over 10 years, they had a little savings. Her career trajectory smoothed out and he’d been promoted to Major. But after a year spent fruitlessly trying on their own, and months of tests for both of them in small white rooms, he was told in the starkest of terms: “Major Valentino, it’s not your wife. It’s...you. You’re incapable of having children.” His own anatomy had betrayed him.

And then the search for donors began. And the drugs that made Polly cranky, the procedures that made her feel like a science experiment. The failed inseminations. The rabbit hole of more drastic measures they tumbled down, until after three failed IVF cycles and an early miscarriage, they had to

concede that they'd done everything they could. They mourned what might have been and would never be. They threw away the calendars they had clung to like talismans. Polly turned 39, Christmas came and went. And the room down the hall, the one that had once spelled promise, echoed empty.

Lindsey Martin-Bowen

It's never like the movies—
for my father

this dying: no background chords
rising to a crescendo,
no *adagio* of strings.
You watch these ants, instead,
trickle across peonies.
'They disappear. And you
can't keep your grip

on that granite wall of reason
but slip downstream
into some wild current
till you run aground.
There, you search
for the deserted place, a Holy Land,
where Elijah met God.

Even if you're hiking
the Appalachian Trail, up
Standing Indian Mountain,
you watch vultures circle
in and out of clouds festering
into some murky, yellow soup.
And when lightning hits,
Father Davis says Hail Marys—
and there, on the horizon,
you see Wovoka whirl
in his dance of ghosts.

Originally published in *I-70 Review* (2004), then in my collections *Standing on the Edge of the World* (Woodley Press/Washburn U 2008) and *Inside Virgil's Garage* (Chatter House Press 2013)

Polly Alice McCann

Boötes

There are gaps here I can't account for.
Paper ones on the floor under the
kitchen table spilled out of the hole punch
stuck to the soles of my shoes—kids
are playing with guns for fun
shoot 'til you're the last one standing.
Why would this game work?
What about the game where
we add one then one more again.

I take my son outside to look
at the stars. So much ink
and so little paper. Like the words
in student essays from the college, inscribed
from the dust of Congo— Iraq— Ghetto,
so many wars hum on the radio as I drive
over the Buck O'Neal bridge—like so many
grackles on the roof of the flower shop
they flutter over Broadway
aimed under a tuffeted sky—
like punched out holes
as black as the dark between stars.

Dark, where I just want some light.
Sure, stars still shine on my back
porch and they have something to say.
Boötes broods there— a strange cowboy
with his dogs behind him— he doesn't recognize
his mother because she has turned into a bear.

If there is one thing I want, it is
for my children to recognize me.
I want them to plow a new land
in whose gaps they plant little
seeds of expectation.

I am a mother bear who lost
her dark stripes, only the white
are now visible—like the whites
of my eyes hidden behind
lids of pots and pans and supper plates
and the hairs under my chinny chin
chin aren't enough to hold me

here when the wolf has blown
away my dark words—my pages
empty of their ink.

Why did we never go out to see
the summer stars? Only Boötes
his walk with his hounds
our picnics always winter ones
in the deep plum colored cold.

But what if I took that sweet flesh back,
the dark back of my name,
the indifferent scars, those cold black skies
and poured them
into this bottle, would I have
enough ink to tell this story over?

If you break the heart of a poet
she'll write a poem about it.

If you mistreat a poet, a whole book
might need to be written

But if you steal the love of a poet
and crush it under your boots—
take the poets words and tear
the weft out of them, turn the poet
against herself until she ties
a gag over her mouth and forgets
her own name...

Then and only then you too
will be judged by the stars
not because poems were lost
or never written, but because
a poet was lost and so
too the stars.

When she returns, who will
be able to bear the words
she will have to say. There
will be constellations...

Bruce McClain

REMNANT

I ran with the wind when I was a lad,
Hence, now I am old -
My feet fleet no more.

In my decline, memories I have had,
But I am grateful for my years, three score.

Nearby my rocker, my slippers neatly stay,
My wrinkled robe hangs
Like an old soldier.

The clock breaks its silence, another day
My body scent is of an aging odor.

Though my strength dwindles, my will continues.
My steps are short and my legs do quiver.

I'll make my way down to the Avenues-yes
to eye the drift of human endeavor.

What is left of me – a blur – a hoary head?
The more I diminish – I dance with the dead.

John Moessner

Titian's A Monk with a Book

He sits in the brown light,
fingers wrapped around a fat book

like one would hold a blunter thing,
some tool for smashing earth for umber

pigment. A labor of the mind, the gilded
boards and pages are used to mine the loam

of the brain's layers, the dry parchment
scraping the hours, searching for what,

we cannot know. God, sexual deviance,
a reason for all this silence?

Maybe he's chasing the nagging shade
that's been situated for years in his periphery,

some parable about a shrewd manager,
or the mystery of three becoming one.

The darkness of umber depends on the mix
of minerals in the soil, neither animal

nor vegetal, but other, a thing you need
to get your hands dirty to find.

*This poem was first published in *Lake Effect* Volume 25, Spring 2021.

Annie Klier Newcomer

The #9

Some memories breeze in and stay
like unexpected guests still in the kitchen
at 2 a.m. My new spouse disapproves,
demands I get rid of them,
then slips upstairs.

I usher the group to the front porch,
and say good-bye. As I fix a drink,
one returns, rocks back and forth
on the swing, snuggles up with the cat
who easily attaches to any lap.

I join them and now can't
go back inside, at least not
while I remain fixated
on the #9, which always was
my deceased husband's favorite.

First Published in *Interpretations*, Columbia Art League

Lynn Norton

Accidental Astronauts

After eons of mute obedience circling a celestial warden,
Earth began to speak, sing. Clever creatures emerged from her womb,
launched their voices on waves of energy into mechanical ears.

Wispy cacophony at first, nascent voices grew stronger with each dawn.

Misbehaving waves escaped a prison of gravity, lanced through her embryonic shell, spoke to nearby stars. They listened politely. Did not respond.

Who's on first? You throw the ball to first base. Then who gets it?

Naturally. Naturally. Now you've got it. I throw the ball to Naturally.

You don't! You throw it to Who! Naturally.

Earth shouted into the void. Gibberish to all but her children.

Visions suddenly appeared, self-portraits. Towering spires broadcast
dancing beauty, ugliness, mischief onto glassy screens.

Hi-ya kids, hi-ya hi-ya. Lucy, you've got some 'splaining to do.

It's Howdy Doody time. One of these days Alice—pow! Straight to the moon. You bet your life. Come on down, you could be queen for a day.

Pallor yields to rainbow hues. Loquacious satellites cast messages

Into the cosmos, like notes in bottles forever adrift on endless seas.

Colorful renderings of beings marooned on an island in the Orion arm.

The Minnow would be lost. To boldly go where no man has gone before.

I'm coming to join you, Elizabeth. Bazinga! The truth Is out there.

Oh my God, they killed Kenny. Who loves ya, baby? Winter is coming!

Ones and zeros, language of choice for Earth's children, stream into the universe from personal megaphones. Accidental astronauts, hurtling through space until the end of time. Proof of life? Death? Immortality?

Stay tuned for previews of next week's exciting episode.

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Steve Paul

In Search of Evan S. Connell, the Consummate “Writer’s Writer”

Excerpted from Steve Paul’s Literary Alchemist: The Writing Life of Evan S. Connell (University of Missouri Press, 2021)

In 2018, five years after Evan S. Connell’s death, I traveled to Santa Fe, New Mexico, as part of my quest to know his life better. It was early autumn. Before leaving the city on a Saturday morning, I had a decision to make. Turn left out of the motel parking lot and head straight to the airport in Albuquerque or turn right and make another attempt to find Connell’s final resting place. His ashes had been laid near a tree.

I could’ve gone either way, I told myself. What would this really accomplish? What would I get out of it? Researching and writing a biography of a deliberately elusive subject was a risky project to begin with. What difference would it make if I skipped this—what?—wild ash chase? Then again, reporting a life means turning over every stone, tracing every thread that might lead to a mote of meaning. Robert Caro’s great advice, learned as an investigative reporter before becoming one of our supreme biographers, was “turn every page.” Sure, I could save the task for another trip. But why not here and now? The silly, scolding things we do to our inner selves in a decisive moment.

So, in a split second, propelled by a sense that I would regret it if I left that part of this journey on the table, I turned right. And soon I was heading up Canyon Road to try again.

Two days earlier, I had passed through the tourist-choked street, lined with art galleries and restaurants, on the way to a couple of possible memorial spots. But I never located a tree that looked like the one in a picture Janet Zimmermann had sent me. This was where she had poured his ashes. Her directions were unclear. I drove on a bit longer and eventually gave up and turned around. Later, I realized that I should’ve driven just a little farther.

So, after a breakfast burrito at Café Pasqual’s, I set out again on a crisp and bright weekend morning. It was one of those early fall days Connell himself might have been thinking about when he wrote to his writer friend Max Steele of the “big big sky of great cumulus.” The drive took little more than five minutes. I got out at a parking lot—maybe the one mentioned by Janet—but again, saw nothing like the tree I thought I was looking for. Oh, well, I was prepared just to offer a generic gesture: *Peace, Evan. I’ll try to do you right.*

Throughout this excursion, I could appreciate the empathy with which Jean Cantú, Connell’s tax accountant, regarded his last wish, which was to be connected to the land: “I think he was so enthralled with that whole thing, how old this land is, how much has gone on in this area, how many different kinds of people, that combination. I think he fell hook, line, and sinker, and wanted eventually to be part of that landscape. My husband said the dirt got in his blood, and that’s it. That’s all it takes.”

I got back in the car and within a few seconds spotted a turnout at the edge of the dirt road that I’d missed earlier. Right next to it and down a slight incline stood a pine tree that may or may not have

resembled the one in the photo. I walked over and took a couple of steps into the brush- and branch-covered slope. At the base of the tree was a patch of light-colored dirt that just might have once held the layer of dust and bones I saw in Janet Zimmermann's picture. Or not. I have no idea. Nevertheless, surely by now the ashes would have washed away.

Still, as everyone knows, life is all about the journey not the destination. And, at the least, this pilgrimage gave me something important. A sense of the finality—dust to dust—of a man who ventured through the physical and intellectual worlds on his own terms. From Connell: “As Horace wrote, we’re dust and shadow. *Pulvis et umbra sumus*.” And as Connell also wrote, some artists are like onions, layer upon layer of membranes: “If you continue peeling in hopes of catching him you end up with nothing in your hand.”ⁱ Such is the writer’s dilemma.

I had spent the previous few days talking with people who knew him, loved him, and made him happy in those protected moments when he let others into his space. Connell’s anonymity in death is unsurprising. That’s certainly how he had wanted it. But it doesn’t change the breadth and depth of the work he left behind, a collection of ordered intelligence in words that as often as not are breathtaking. This is what we expect of writers and the literature they leave behind.

In 2001, seven decades after discovering the inspirational adventures of Richard Halliburton and twenty years after remembering him in an essay in *A Long Desire*, Connell returned again to the spirit with which his “astonishing journeys” amounted to an unparalleled existence. Connell recognized that Halliburton’s writing often left something to be desired, but that hardly mattered: “His name is not apt to be mentioned alongside Melville, James, Faulkner, Hemingway. . . . Still, if there are thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird, there must be several ways of measuring the value of a writer.”

Connell’s detractors point to his inconsistencies in style and substance, his willful disregard for convention, his self-involved and aimless meditations. Well, right there are three ways of measuring his value, and, in my mind, each can be massaged into a positive attribute. I was taken aback while reading Mark Oppenheimer’s generally praiseworthy essay on Connell for *The Believer*, that bastion of literary irony, by his dismissal of the late 1970s essays of *A Long Desire* and *The White Lantern*. Some readers—Lewis Lapham, for one—count these armchair excursions into history as among Connell’s most memorable works. Oppenheimer could only manage a swipe at Connell and his penchant for research—never, he wrote, had anyone read so many books about so little. There’s a whiff of anti-intellectual pomposity in that.

Yet reading, as we know, is a matter of taste. The ever-shifting “canon” of American literature is no longer the museum of white male creation. We can still celebrate, debate, and/or reexamine Melville and Hemingway, but we also make room for James Baldwin and Toni Morrison. Don DeLillo will surely last, alongside Joan Didion, and, in our current generation of writers, Colson Whitehead.

But any discussion of the most memorable and long-lasting American literature must reckon with Evan S. Connell—the Bridge novels, *Son of the Morning Star*, *Notes from a Bottle Found on the Beach at Carmel*, *Points for a Compass Rose*, and some of the best of his short stories and essays. He cast a wise eye over the span of human history and the troubles of American life. He transmuted it all into entertainments, screeds, indelible portraits, and boundless insights into our existence.

I've been a reader all of my life, sometimes focused but more often a free-ranging, undisciplined explorer. Call it loitering through books and life, as Connell might have put it. And these last few years of journeying through Connell's territory has both widened my horizons and deepened my appreciation for his contributions. His example of living with the quaint mania of writing and of choosing to work above all else in life may not present the ideal template for an aspiring author today. But his commitment, principles, and arduous dedication remain inspiring. His mission to write in order to know himself, perhaps to drive away his personal anxieties and to swim in the shadow stream, is not uncommon. But the products of his alchemical efforts certainly are.

Connell's portraits of filial rebellion (hello, Douglas Bridge, my friend) certainly resonate for me. And I can identify with his penchant for the "long desire," the soul-burning, quixotic obsession for the new, the hidden, the unattainable. I regret I never had the chance to tell Connell—I spoke with him once only briefly on the phone—that I was intimately familiar with his first boyhood home. A good friend owned the wood-framed colonial on 66th Street for many years. It was the site of frequent gatherings, and I'm sure we spoke about Connell from time to time because we were writers and critics and book readers. At the time, generally in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, I knew little of his life, or his work for that matter, except the slight details that most Kansas City literati might have known. Now, of course, I know a bit more.

As Connell's centenary approaches (2024), we'll have an opportunity to bring more fresh light on him and his contributions to American literature. Perhaps that will spark new interest among readers, critics, and scholars. Connell may only have written for himself but it cannot be denied that he also wrote for the ages.

William Powell Patterson

A Penny for our Walks

We would love being nickeled and dimed
on our morning walk to downtown and back,
but it's generally pennies we find,
sparkling new pennies, copper in the low light
or those scratched and scraped, now turned black
from skidding between asphalt and wheels.
It's the silver that catches the eye,
often the fool's gold of a bottle cap or foil
bright in the street or pale moon light,
although the bending over can pan in
nickels and dimes or, what, a quarter?
Eleven cents a day, more on a weekender,
revelers searching for keys and spilling the legal tender.
There's better prospecting in the summer streams of
Grand and Main, plucking five pounds per annum
of coins, more dimes than nickels, quarters rare.
Joy in the search, the reach for a quick find,
the riches of an exclamation with value beyond profit;
A penny for our walks, the thoughts of a penny at dawn.

Shawn Pavey

Horoscopes

Sunday

If skies are clear today, shine. If clouds greet you, think of sunlight. If neither apply, run. Run for your life. A mysterious stranger may run with you. May chase you. Out run them. Or don't. They will remain mysterious and strange.

Monday

If today is a work day, don't. Or do. It's your life. You know what you need. Watch out for that mysterious stranger.

Tuesday

Today is more than tacos. Today is settling into a grind. Today calls for tequila and salt. Salt from tears is acceptable. Remember that crying is hard to do over tacos. Hope for mystery. Hope for strangers. Think about prayer.

Wednesday

The end appears closer. Make plans now. Leave an extra place setting at the table. Mysterious strangers know all about Wednesdays. They will be there. They may bring a concertina. They may not have the good sense not to play it.

Thursday

You are still here. That's good, believe me. You've survived this far and days get even shorter from here. Learn to stare into darkness. Mysteries and strangers live beyond what you allow yourself to see. Remember that night is long. Hold yourself close.

Friday

Hang on. Now is when your time is most valuable. Every week needs a Friday and this one is yours.
Did you make your plans, leave a place at the table? Nobody listens to oracles anymore.
Omniscience is a burden. Bourbon reminds you of itself the next day.

Saturday

There are leaves to rake. Or there are lawns to mow. The car needs a wash, but that's not important.
Wear comfortable clothes. Dress for the weather. There is always weather. Think about how
glorious it would be to write fortune cookie messages on those little slips of paper. That could be
your career. Give the people what they want. Lies are so much easier to swallow with pastry and tea.

*This poem appeared previously in the Summer 2021 issue of *The Chiron Review*.

John Peterson

A HISTORY, 1896, AND THE KINGFISHER

Autumn, the ninth year, they sold the cabin,
the plow horse, the shorthorn cow, and with thirty dollars
flatboated as far as Mary Decker Shoals.

Eleven Point valley ejected them,
down its carbonate ridges seep-stained black,
graveyard of bryozoan, brachiopod, coral, and crinoid,
its ribbed hills gorged with dogwood and oak.

The river pulled, supple and quick-gaited,
scoured by floods. A rain beat them like fists.
She looked up and saw her husband gaping, drowning upright,
as bottoms he didn't farm, timber he wasn't milling,
limestone he couldn't crush into breath floated away.

Near Greer Spring the rain quit, the mountain echoed
in one blue lobelia blossoming on the bank.
A kingfisher shook the air with an industrial rattle,
perched on a bone-white sycamore—its soul was undivided.
Below, a chub darting over silt cast a cinnamon billow.

"Kingfisher," she said, "this here's a tough row—
take care of it." Her husband said, "The hell. Just take it."

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Kevin Rabas

simply put: some sketches

I mistakenly send you two / Christmas cards, and you say, / ok, I'll count the second one / as a revision.

He did not know / if he had covid / or not. He stayed in, / masked up, / was alone again.

He quarantined for two and a half days, but didn't get it, didn't have it, but then he made it a habit, staying away.

When he returned from quarantine, he bought a dog.

There was an answer to every question. But sometimes centuries would pass in between.

It was in the text. You just had to read it slowly enough to know.

David Ray

The Compassion of Walt Whitman

Walt never got to watch the *Nature*
Channel or *Discovery* or even *History*.

So how the devil did he know
what the world was like far down
below the foam, including forests
at the bottom of the sea, as if
he had bright lighting for his close-
ups of each species? He wrote
like a journalist familiar with green
gardens on the sea floor, with dancing
leafy lettuce and lichens on the coral.

You might think that Walt had strolled
for hours amidst sluggish creatures,
then surfaced like a whale and told about
his friends disporting at every depth,
and even much-feared sharks and sting rays
and brilliant electric fish with toxic fins
he treasured as his friends, for the poet
Whitman was a secret pacifist although
he deeply loved Abe Lincoln who,
passing in his open carriage once,
tipped his black stovepipe hat to Walt.

However can you explain his visions?

Did he simply prefer the bottom of the sea
to battlefields and tents with bloody earthen
floors? Had he tired of reading to the wounded
and wrapping bandages that became
their shrouds, and did it not make him sad
to bestow a final kiss upon each boy who died?

Judy Ray

One Summer

“And seeing the snail, which everywhere doth roam,
Carrying his own house still, still is at home,
Follow (for he is easy paced) this snail,
Be thine own Palace, or the world’s thy gaol.”

—John Donne

I told my family in England I was going on holiday,
driving southwest to the county of Devon.
I told a friend along the way that we were
just passing through, had better get on before dark.

I told my daughter, romping in the Volkswagen van,
that we’d see the moor and climb a tor in the morning.
I told only myself that we had nowhere to go,
just this borrowed van or a borrowed bed.

I told the mechanic, while rain soaked us cold,
that we could not leave the van overnight, we needed
to sleep in it. I told my daughter that even in the rain
we had puzzles to do and books to read.

I told a friendly camper about driving the van
through five countries on the Continent.
I told myself that Dartmoor’s prison
on the windswept moor looked even lonelier than legend.

I told my daughter that we would look for wild
ponies and rings of ancient stones.

I told my daughter to watch out for bright green
bogs that would pull off her shoes.

I told an employment agent that I'd come back
when I had an address, not just a van on the road.

I told myself this was a respite.

I told myself the rain would stop.

My daughter told me that a pony looked at her at dawn
through the window—she saw its mealy nose up close.

My daughter told me we could wash
in the cold stream and give the van a drink too.

My daughter told me she liked picnics
and rolling on the springy heath.

We told each other we were lucky snails,
snortling along in our home on wheels.

*from *To Fly Without Wings* (Helicon Nine Editions)

Trish Reeves

A COUPLE OF FEET OUT OF TRUE

So the chapel needs more dirt, in the language
of the soil mechanic. And then tie rods to hold
the right wall, and then one might request
Michelangelo. But he is on a horse to Bologna,
and years ahead of him lie the years
as subversive, not submissive, to a pope,
though who could see this when looking upwards,
the ceiling so far from view that only
the painter knew half the figures
too small, and the commissioned Christ nowhere
to be seen among the beauty of the flesh of so many
naked bodies, and Sibyls, the Persian Sibyl robed
in softest emerald, God titanic in lavender, and Old Testament
prophets who never dreamed their dreams might come true—
a boy-god brighter than the rabbis and whose father
never touched the boy's mother,
but to lead her on a donkey, Mother
an updated Leda
surrounded by wings
once assigned to swans.

* Originally published in October 2021 in the *Leon Literary Review*.

Judith Towse Roberts

DAUGHTERS

What can I say
to you, my daughters,
that would keep
your lilac scent from fading,
your paper sails from tearing,
your glass wings from being broken?
You must hide in my skirts
until the winds have passed over,
the waves have melted the stones,
the angry sun has cooled in the shadows.
Then you may walk over white river beds,
and spin your webs of copper threads.
You may spend your kisses to buy
the silver flowers you picked.
Finally, when the rains are thieves
that steal my face gray,
I shall die before you,
as my mother did when she had daughters
so you will see,
it does not hurt.

“Daughters” first appeared in Soundings Literary Magazine and then was published in my book
CRYSANTHEMUMS I FIRST THOUGHT SWEET.

Marjorie Saiser

The Lake in the Dark with the Geese and the Star

*But the dark embraces everything:
shapes and shadows, creatures and me*

Rainer Maria Rilke

If the dark embraces everything,
it embraces us,
having come to the lake to see
the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn.
It embraces us, standing in our parkas,
my mittens stuffed into my pocket like
an old argument.
Half-moon overhead: odd white button.
The family beyond us down the shore, the father
talking about their telescope, the mom
telling the kids to stop running.
The dark embraces the geese, unseen,
noisy on their sandbar, talking talking talking,
sheltered from what hunts them, and
the dark embraces also the silent paw,
the teeth of the coyote.
Saturn and Jupiter make one star
for an hour only,
something new out of being close.
The time is now, your beard
a small shine in moonlight.

I reach for your hand
because I believe in the two.
And in each one, separate.

Lauren Scharhag

Women Alone

After the divorce, we moved to an apartment
on the other side of town. I loved our new home.
Even at five, I understood the difference
between a peaceful home and a home
where abuse dwells. My mother's relief
was palpable. Our next-door neighbor
was an old woman named Dahlie.
Dahlie had Parkinson's. She didn't seem
to have any children or grandchildren. No one
ever came to visit her. Her husband was ex-Air Force
who flew TWA, so he was always gone.
Dahlie was a painter, her walls covered
in pastoral scenes that were exotic to this city kid:
Maud Lewis barns and sheep, windmills,
snowy fields. Her house smelled like coffee
and turpentine. Her easel stood in the corner
of the kitchen, table heaped with tubes of paint,
sketch pads and pencils. For my sixth birthday,
Mom made me a coconut cake decorated with
jellybeans. She had me take a piece to Dahlie.
Dahlie invited me to sit with her while she ate it,
exclaiming over the rainbow colors on white,
pouring me a glass of lemonade. I remember how
the fork trembled in her hand, flakes of coconut
drifting down onto the placemat. She gripped

her brushes in a tight fist. Her paintings shrank
from broad canvases down to postcards. I don't know
if she was ever in a show or if she sold even a single piece.
I used to feel sorry for her, but now I understand
how precious solitude can be for women. That
was the year my mother laughed. For Easter,
she and Dahlie painted eggs together and hid them
in the yard. They shouted *Warmer! Colder!*
as my brother and I searched. Now I understand how,
for the ill, independence matters. You grasp it in your fist
to stop yourself from shaking. You step outside
the world. You invite the exotic into your kitchen.
You eat cake and eggs and summon serenity
with a brushstroke.

* This poem was previously published in Levitate Magazine.

Mark Scheel

THE FARM BOY AND THE CITY

An excerpt from the novel *The Potter's Wheel*

The year is 1967. Mel Steadman, a Midwestern farm youth recovering from a severe head injury, becomes dissatisfied living at home and hops a bus to California, intending to reside with a friend of a friend. He is waylaid en route, losing most of his money, and arrives in downtown LA in the middle of the night.

Mel stepped down off the coach onto the hard concrete dock and pushed along with the crowd toward the waiting area. It was twelve thirty-five in the morning. They'd finally made LA. He thought about claiming his bag, but decided to leave it checked until the time came to transfer for Hollywood. His body felt all crammed together. He tried to stretch his arm and back muscles some while waiting in line at the ticket counter, but that didn't help much. His teeth were coated and his face itched. No way I'm doing this again, he thought. Next time I hope to heavens I can fly.

The guy working the counter had a bad case of acne, and he kept digging at it with his fingers while he answered questions and checked bus schedules. His hair was slicked back and the oil on his forehead made the red bumps shine like tiny apples. There was a fat yellow pimple just above his left eyebrow, and he kept passing over it to get at a bump up beside his left temple. While Mel was waiting in line, he took bets with himself as to whether the guy would snag that pimple before Mel got up to the counter. He didn't.

"I'm supposed to transfer to Greyhound," Mel said, resting both arms on top of the counter.
"Where's the station?"

"Down a block that way," the agent replied as he fingered the tip of his chin.

"When does the next bus go?"

"Where?"

"Uh...Hollywood."

"One-thirty."

Mel thought a minute. He didn't really want to bust in on Mendenhall at two in the morning, not knowing the guy and all. He didn't really want to hit Hollywood at two in the morning with no place to go either. Still, there was no place to go here. He had sixteen dollars left, none of which he wanted to squander on a hotel room, but he was pretty beat.

"Is there a later bus?" he asked.

"Sure. Three-fifteen, five-fifteen, seven-fifteen, eight o'clock." Now the guy was into something on the back of his neck, squeezing gingerly.

"Are there any cheap hotels around here?"

"Yeah. Several. There's the Astor just up a block and over a couple doors."

"What does it cost for a night?"

"About two-fifty."

"There's nothing cheaper?"

"Not that you'd want—unless you like bedbugs."

"No way, man. I see what you mean. Well...thanks." Mel looked around the waiting area. The seats all looked hard and the light was harsh. Maybe they wouldn't let you sleep here anyway. The guy back of the counter must have read Mel's thoughts; he leaned toward him and lowered his voice.

"Look, buddy," he said. "You wanna catch a few winks and save your change? There's an all-night movie house just down the street. That way, down Main. It's warm and dry and quiet. Nobody bothers you. Costs fifty cents. I'm not recommending it, you understand. I'm just saying it's there."

"Yeah. I understand. Thanks. Thanks a lot."

As Mel started to turn around, the guy plowed over that pimple, dragging yellow pus down onto his eyebrow. Mel hadn't missed his bet by much. He walked back to the loading zone and pushed out through the door, thinking about his bag, but deciding to leave it checked. The bus he'd come in on had pulled away, and the docks were all empty now. He followed along the passageway the buses took to exit and came out in the middle of Sixth Street.

It was dark and quiet, the sidewalk empty, but he could hear noise coming up from Main Street. There was a thick ceiling of smog, dirty and gray, about the height of the corner streetlights. It seemed to compress everything underneath, squeeze everything in on itself. He crossed over Sixth and started walking toward Main. He could look back across the street in through the big window of the depot where he'd been. Another bus had arrived and a new bunch of passengers had begun filing in from the docks. To his left was the solid wall of a building and in the light near the corner he could see fine soot like black snow between the bricks. The noise got louder. He rounded the corner. And stopped. Started on, then stopped again. There it all was in front of him, everything—the city, at night...and the people. And he was right on the edge of some kind of scene he'd never walked into before. He had to just stand for a minute—and look.

Everywhere things were moving—people, cars, motorcycles—all moving around past the iron grating and lights, the cracked glass, the peeled paint, the gray and red stone storefronts. A guy on a motorcycle came off a stoplight, jerked up his front wheel and held it for half a block. Tires

squealed, taillights flashed. Everywhere things were moving.

Most of the shops—pawnshops, cafes, an arcade—looked closed, but the signs on the bars were all lit. And the marquee down at the movie theater. And all down the street the smog hung overhead, pressing in everything together. A figure came staggering toward him, some man, lurching from side to side. As he went past he tangled a foot in a newspaper and crashed into a light pole behind Mel. The man backed off, swore, then started on, half falling into the darkness of Sixth Street.

There were beer cans in the gutter, and broken bottles, and the concrete was stained with grease. In a doorway ahead, a couple shops down, two black streetwalkers were sizing up the action. They folded their arms and leaned out to look, then the closest one tapped the heel of her boot. They were both chewing gum, and their breasts and thighs poked up tight against their short satin dresses.

Mel began walking again, toward the movie theater. And as he passed the streetwalkers one called out, "Hey, sugartime. What's yo' rush?" She had a stuck-up tilt to her chin. Her hoop earrings sparkled.

"Who's rushing?" he answered back and shrugged his shoulders. He kept on walking.

"Hey you! Goodlookin'!" she called after him. "You wanna have some fun tonight?"

"Sure," he called back, "but I'm broke."

"Wha'cha mean, broke?" she scolded. "Wha'cha come to town fo' then? Broke! Broke, my ass."

Across the street a sailor was sitting on the curb vomiting into the gutter. Suddenly a man—he looked Indian—burst out of a bar up ahead on a dead run. Then out came the bartender waving a night stick and screaming something in Spanish, his white apron flapping like a flag. The Indian cut out into traffic as the bartender let fly the club. It ricocheted off the opposite curb, not missing the

sailor by very much, and spun high in the air end over end. The Indian disappeared around the corner.

Mel passed another bar on down the way, just before he came to the theater. The door was open and the jukebox was blaring the sounds of Frank Sinatra. He paused for a second to peek inside, but he couldn't see much of anything. It was too dark. It looked like mostly men packed around the bar and along a row of tables. Some guy pushed past him going in and called back over his shoulder, "Don't be bashful, sweets. The natives are *very* friendly," as he sailed on into the shadows.

The theater was playing a double feature: *The Killer Bees* and *To the Shores of Hell*. Mel bought a ticket and went in. He popped into the head the first thing. It was pretty dilapidated, all cracked tile and stained porcelain. Above the urinal was a sign which read:

WARNING. THIS RESTROOM UNDER POLICE
SURVEILLANCE. LOTTERING, SOLICITING,
HOMOSEXUAL ACTS, MASTURBATION, ANY AND
ALL DEFACING OF PROPERTY ARE UNLAWFUL
AND EXPRESSLY FORBIDDEN. VIOLATORS
WILL BE PROSECUTED.
THE MANAGEMENT

Mel took a leak, feeling like he was on *Candid Camera*, then washed his hands and face and went out. When his eyes had adjusted to the dark, he could see most of the audience were bums sleeping.

He took a seat and watched a little of the movie just out of habit (he'd never gone to a movie to sleep before). Some soldiers were running along a rice paddy. There was lots of machine-gun fire. He slid down in his seat and shut his eyes. And let the sounds on the screen slowly drift away.

Mary Silwance

The Grammar of Animacy

1.

Verbs populate

Indigenous languages.

Everything

animate sovereign

English is a language of nouns.

Most every thing

regarded as

inanimate unsovereign

to be acted upon

by a shallow

pool of

verbs

Indigenous

children were abducted

from their families

incarcerated

in boarding schools

beaten bleached baptized

into white names raped

to match the white

Jesus they were

to worship

their hair cut like Samson's

their mouths scoured

when they wept

in their native tongues

the gibberish of savages

needing salvation

I have been to churches

where they spoke

in tongues

eyes closed

pale faces

beatific

It was the Indigenous

come to possess

the descendants of

boarding school teachers

for their pious work

choking children

beatific

2.

I spoke in tongues

one religious fall

on the heels

of a sinful summer

though he could not
interpret my utterings
gibberish
if you listened
long enough
the pastor vetted
my glossolalia

in the land of brown Jesus
during an ancient century
invaders severed
my people's Indigenous
tongue

their language rough
dungarees
that scoured our soft bodies
stiff boots that blistered
our mouths until

their pious gibberish
became our glossolalia

eventually
I ran out
of faith
left piety
on the side

of the road

When language possesses you

what happens to animacy?

what happens to sovereignty?

3.

When.

**

As an immigrant from a colonized country I am removed from understanding myself as an Indigenous person. This poem navigates the forces that collude to serve empire and how my people's story intersects with the persistent horrors of colonization.

Robert Stewart

How I Broke My Glasses

I was reading “Body and Soul,” a poem by B.H. Fairchild, alone in my office on a Saturday morning in October, and in my imagination was reading the poem to my students, about a sandlot baseball game among men in Depression Oklahoma, in which a kid, only 15 years old, stands in that day to make the sides even. Who the kid is, exactly, doesn’t matter here. When I finished, my eyes leapt back up into the poem about a dozen lines, so I could have another run at that ending. This time, I read aloud, clearly and with care, to an auditorium filled with imaginary students, in which I was bringing to them a story worthy of the idea of a university and transformation into adults.

So why, the poem asks, did those men pitch five times to that kid, who each time sent a homer high over their heads? Why, oh, why, the poem repeats, not just throw around the kid, walk him? My voice enunciated the dilemma of those men, who wanted nothing more than to stride home after the game and take their wives up into their arms and dance across the kitchen’s linoleum. I read this story to the packed hall and its imaginary audience, and revealed the depth and reason of why, *yes, why*, they pitched to him. And lost, which is a moment secured in the Depression, itself, and the war, and the idea of being a man, says the poem: reasons that remain, for now, with me and the hundreds of students lucky enough to have attended the lecture I so much wanted to give that day and never have.

My voice seemed to sputter a bit, there in the office, to discover, again, the man on the team with his half-orphaned children and worthless Dodge, who stared into the bottomless well of home plate, as the kid’s fifth homer left the field, knowing, as I know each time for the seemingly first time

I read that poem, that he and I have just encountered, as the poem says, “the vast gap between talent and genius.”

By then, I was standing, an effort to compose myself in the ceiling lights of the empty office building, and no match for the harsh light of that Oklahoma Sunday, which caused me to pause and pull on my work gloves and grip each word of the poem’s final lines, articulating even the identity of that boy—“the blond / and blue-eyed bringer of truth”—because I was going now from memory and could no longer see the transformed faces of the entire student body, listening, as I was listening, because my eyes had become blurred and weakened, and I could do nothing, then, but fumble with my glasses and throw them at the wall, and grab hold of the final phrase of the poem, which I had by heart and still have, and lift it up among the ovations filling that room.

—From *I-70 Review* summer/fall 2021

Janet Sunderland

Excerpt: From *Ocean to Desert, A Spiritual Memoir*

A passing wind-fit bobbed the colored bulbs on palm tree fronds; strings of lights decorated the general store. A snowman with a lighted top hat sat in a yard, a trio of angels in another. The towering fir in the middle of the town square, inconspicuous most days other than being tall, erupted in a blaze of multi-colored glory one evening as I drove past. The abrupt illumination drew me off the road to park and stare. A poem rattled in my head: fat geckos wearing silver bells and dragonflies sporting red wings. It needed work. Misty rain shimmered in the lights.

When I was a kid in Kansas, wearing jeans, long johns, overshoes and mittens, and digging trails through drifts to the barn, Christmas cards came from Aunt Doris in Florida. She'd say she was decorating her tree while wearing shorts. Seemed odd and hardly Christmassy, but I remembered her as I wore shorts, trimming the tree at Puakea.

Mom arrived and resumed her usual winter life, including doing the laundry. I dawdled, vacuumed the pool, puttered with Mom, and helped her fold clothes.

"How's church? Is Lavern still alive?" Dad and Mom had moved into town a few years before Dad died. Lavern's husband, Virgil, was a friend of Dad's. They bowled together, served as elders at church, and died within months of each other.

"Oh, my yes. Ruthie picks her up every Sunday before she comes by for me," Mom said. "Young Virg and Marilyn sometimes. They live a couple houses down, you know. Young Virg would never graduate to his dead father's Virgil. She told me a story about kids coming up to her and measuring their growing heights against her 4'11" frame, which somehow evolved into a story about the preacher. Not the same preacher I'd argued with in my adolescent years. The current preacher was young. A friend to Mom. I nodded, said nothing.

Throughout my youth, I argued with church preachers and Sunday School teachers. "Jesus got angry," I'd say. But his anger was justified, they said. I was simply angry. That part was true. I spent years fighting with Mom. After I married, I fought with my husband. Maybe the residue of my father dying so young, but still. In Germany, after a fight, I ran through the woods bordering the housing compound, pounded myself into the path, salty sweat and salty tears dripping off my chin. Panting, I collapsed on a fallen tree trunk, head down, hands braced on my knees, grasping at air. I'd fought with someone for almost as long as I could remember, and had kept on fighting, angry at life. I lifted my head. Green-speckled sunbeams arrowed through the canopy. My life; my mother's life. I imagined her as a woman my age who lived with the death of both her first husband and her first-born, and a writer trapped in housework. The vision shocked me. She'd had none of my advantages. I had the women's movement and modern psychology. I'd found a way to stretch into possibilities she'd never known. Head down, ashamed of my rage, I forgave my mother for being my mother and picked up responsibility for my own life.

After I left my marriage and Germany for college and Kansas, I often drove to the farm for weekends in the old brown Chevy Dad bought me. Mom and I spent hours talking stories. One day

I asked, “Why did Dad and I argue so much when I was a kid?” She glanced up from mending a shirt collar. “I suspect you looked too much like John Sunderland,” she said. An old story: my father and my dad dated her at the same time, and they’d disliked each other. After my father died, Mom and Dad met again and married.

Now we folded clothes and talked family and church.

A notice appeared in the newspaper for the First Annual Poetry Festival at Kalani Honua, the retreat center where I’d applied for a residency. Jeanne encouraged me. “It’s in the jungle so take bug spray, but you’ll like it. Mom can do the laundry.” She drove me into Waimea to catch the Hilo bus.

Traveling down the windward side of the island, I held my journal in my lap and wrote one line: “We so seldom know each other—and inside families we know each other even less—or perhaps we know each other so well, the role we play within the core group remains the same; we slide into the same patterns, and it takes an effort to be ourselves.”

I could be me for a weekend.

The landscape outside the bus window filled with lush, rainy-side vegetation. Volunteer sugar cane grew in abandoned fields; small, banana-tree shaded towns stretched for a quick glance; a whiff of ripe fruit drifted in the open window. Tantalizing roads branched from the main highway, and sign pointed to towns or beaches with unpronounceable names: Honokāa, Laupahoehoe, Kolekole. Learning Spanish in Mexico taught me to listen to the music of a language, and while I could hear the sea in Hawaiian, the multi-syllable vowels eluded me. The land became deeper, covered in vegetation. Overhanging trees shaded the road, so unlike the wide and open spaces of North Kohala.

As we entered Hilo, the city engulfed us in car fumes, noise, and flowering bushes. A crowd of people surged in front of us at a stoplight. I left the bus at Prince Kuhio Plaza and searched for the Kalani Honua van. At the front fender of a blue van, a man held a hand-lettered sign: KALANI HONUA.

“I’m Janet,” I said. “Am I riding with you?” He nodded. “Climb in.”

The highway wound south through Pahoa, a small town of head shops and health food stores. The driver picked up boxed supplies and turned onto the Red Road, tunneled by overhanging, gnarled trees belonging only to myth. Leaves shadowed into black, and tantalizing glimpses of sun-drenched white-topped waves peeked between the trunks on ocean side. Turning off the road, the driver bumped up a lane past a field where horses grazed and stopped in front of a low, screened building. “That’s the office. Go in there to register,” he said. Four women sat around a picnic table, threading white flowers into leis. I retrieved my key and walked past a swimming pool to find the room: a single bed, screened windows with no glass, and resident geckos.

That evening, the festival, dedicated to the Beat poets, opened with *West Coast Beat and Beyond*, a film paean to Jack Kerouac, with Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, and Gregory Corso reminiscing about Kerouac and reading poetry. In the film, Jan Kerouac read a passage from her mother’s

memoir about how she'd tried to leave Jack but he sat on his desk and the movers moved him with the desk. It was supposed to be funny. People laughed.

It's never easy to leave an outlaw.

Alarie Tennille

Paper Clips Gone Bad

Lights out in the office,
the paper clips ease
themselves loose.
Let go of the paperwork.
Grab a cab uptown
to a jazz club, where
a mean trombone
vibrates up and down
and around their spines,
plays reveille to lust.
Music moves them to tears
and heavy drinking.
Some slip into back rooms, alleys,
or endless reminiscing.
Some are never heard from again.

Before the sober sun
can nag, they stagger
back to work. Try to find
the same cube, same desk,
same report. A few lie
unconscious on the floor.
Tonight they'll do it all again.
We put up with it,
because a paperclip

that goes straight
is no use at all.

First published in *I-70 Review*

William Trowbridge

ROBIN FOOL

AND HIS DISCONSOLATE MEN

The snag arose right away: the rich
had troops and portcullises, making it
very risky to rob them. And the poor
were supposed to *receive* the swag, not

surrender it. So Fool decided they'd
rob the not-so-rich. However, rob them
enough and they become poor. Give
enough to the poor and, after a while,

they become the rich—a dispiriting treadmill.
Alan-a-Dale, the men's minstrel, tried to
make up a song about it but couldn't think
of a good lyric. Little John grew morose,

and Friar Tuck doubled his windy prayers.
Fool suggested they get into forest crafts:
whittled whistles and bowls, leaf pillows,
boar-tusk pipe bowls, rabbits' feet.

"Bowls and pillows, bowls and pillows,"
sang Alan-a-Dale, then faltered. Fool
suggested they could use a catchy slogan.
"Shop here or we kill you," offered Little John.

They considered, “Don’t settle for that
crappy town stuff when you can buy
from the Merry Men.” “Too long,” muttered
Will Scarlet. “And not all of us are men,”

chimed in Maid Marion. “How about,
‘You wanna buy this?’” Fool suggested.
Though no one saluted when they ran it
up the flagpole, the progeny of King John

and his pal the Sheriff of Nottingham
later weaponized the concept, deploying
the first ad agency, which allowed them
to rob pretty much everybody.

*The poem was published in the latest edition of *Rattle*.

Maryfrances Wagner

Because I Never Learned Calculus

I count and multiply everything. I know
numbers, their sound reliability,
their results. I count when I brush,
thirty for each quad, each hundred I walk—
steps to the corner, steps to the mailbox,
steps to the car in the lot. I count grapes
and olives, minutes before rinsing,
seconds before rebooting, 613
pomegranate seeds. I count coins
and cookies, socks and pencils,
hands in the air, faces in the crowd,
words and stitches, hours, months and years.

I cut bread into right angles and quarters,
quilt fabric into rectangles, triangles, trapezoids.
I add fourths and thirds to my batter, double
and divide my recipes, add sums in my checkbook,
calculate unknowns. I count pinches, tads and dabs,
a bit and some, *about so* and *not quite there*. I can make
graphs, enter numbers on spreadsheets.
I can't read the code of formulas, can't figure
slopes or velocity, and I solve for x
in circuitous ways, too many steps,
and no proofs. I will never arrive
at an optimal profit, and a differential

for me is a gear. Change has always been hard
to accept, and I've never understood limits,
but eventually I arrive at what I need.

Paddock Review 2019

Andrea Warren

How to Interview a Historic Building

When I interview people in my work as a writer, I soak up the stories they share about their lives. This is what brings history alive. I've always wished for a way to interview historic buildings because they could tell stories from such a different perspective, having seen it all and heard it all. My dream interview would be St. Paul's Cathedral in London, a place rich with history—and therefore, with stories.

I have learned that those with the most to say can be wary of interviewers. Sometimes employing a little charm can help them warm up. So I would begin by complimenting St. Paul's on how wonderful it looks for a building that opened in 1708. I would reference its great architect, Christopher Wren, who was also an astronomer and mathematician, as is evidenced in many of its design elements. I'd mention its magnificent dome and its massive booming bells that can be heard for miles.

"You're the prize jewel in a city rich in architectural beauty," I'd say. "No wonder so many notables have been baptized, married, and had their funerals here."

Flattered but still reserved, St. Paul's might ask me what I like best about it. "I have two favorites," I would reply earnestly, mentioning first the Crypt, where many of England's war heroes are buried, along with famous painters and poets. (Writers and composers are at nearby Westminster Abbey). Other notables, like Florence Nightingale and Lawrence of Arabia, are here, too. It's altogether quite a congenial place.

Starting to thaw a bit, St. Paul's might wonder aloud about my second favorite, and I would single out the American Memorial Chapel, located behind the High Altar and dedicated to the 28,000 Americans who died defending England in World War II.

"And speaking of that war," I would tell St. Paul's, "I am awed by Londoners' resolve that you, their national treasure, would not be destroyed during the Blitz when so much of the city burned. Volunteer firefighters, both men and women, were stationed at all times on your roof. When bombs exploded, starting fires, they were right there to put them out, a number of them sacrificing their lives."

St. Paul's would nod, remembering.

"The British love you very much," I would say.

St. Paul's would pause, clear its throat, and then reply, "Let me tell you some of my stories."

*Written for the NonfictionMinute.org. This is the accompanying photograph.



Michael Allyn Wells

Slipped Out of Her Jeans

Do not think the sky is blue in jeans on its own
account. Hold up in the atmosphere whispering
away clouds—

these are extremes that push back the rain.
These are the litmus test that decides the
political fortunes of agro-business.

Someone is micro-managing the rain.

There have been conspiracy theories to debunk.
Who has the time? So any theories;

I'm still working the JFK thing over in my head;
the grassy knoll, book depository. The rumor
Jack Ruby didn't care for movies and never
looked good in a tie.

Hanging on to things s a problem. Right now
I haven't the room to hold some of the new suppositions
in my thought long enough to even weigh in
on the merits or demerits, fact or fancy.

The sky has slipped out of her jeans and into flannels.
Big fluffy stuff, change is coming under suspicion.

Nothing. is ever just as simple as coincidence.

First Appeared in Liquid Imagination

Phyllis Galley Westover

Updates

At Sutherland's check-out counter with my can of stain,
The clerk enters my cell number.
It does not pull up the rewards plan you set up years ago.
"Got another number?"
"Try 816-926-0866."
The computer screen pulls it all up:
Your name
Your email
Our old phone
Our old address.
"Want to update the phone?"
"It's all changed. Yes."
Quickly, the cursor backspaces over history, love, and
You are gone again.

At my new address
Spring's silent Forget-Me-Nots nod in my heart.
I want to shout,
"Look, Babel! The Bradford Pear's in bloom!"

Janice Yocum

TICK TOCK (For Paul)

What does it matter that you
didn't have the chance to travel?
I take you anyway to Rome, Lucerne, and Paris.
Your spirit embedded in your wristwatch
ticking away time you never had,
travels you never experienced.

I see the Swiss Alps for you, with you--
The Sistine Chapel, Michaelangelo's Statue of David.
I smell the honeysuckle air along the village walls of Assisi,
trudge the cobblestones of Les Champs Elysees,
gaze at the Mona Lisa,
see your face in woven wall tapestries.
I let your light shine on me
through the stained glass of past ages
and fall on my knees in gratitude
that you were my little brother;
toe-headed, high cheek-boned,
and smarter than you ever realized.

I cross airport security lines and ignore commands to STOP
my search for the wristwatch misplaced during baggage check,
to again cradle the ticking bit of metal
that holds the remembrance of you locked safely inside,

for you were
my little brother.

Martin Zehr

Rules for Ad Hoc Living

Don't step in open sewers
unless, of course, they're closed.

Keep your secrets secret
until everybody knows.

Do only what you have to
until you must do more.

Don't aspire to be normal
Being sane is such a chore.

Keep your feet between the lines,
your mouth from running wild,
always drink your whiskey straight
unless you like it mild.

Follow the advice of sages,
unless you disagree.

The wisdom of the ages
has thus far escaped me.

If you want to live the good life
unencumbered by blind fear,

I'm afraid that I must warn you
you should not be living here.

If you want to get the most from life
before you join the dead,

know the most important rule of all,
forget all that I've said.

Biographical Notes

Frank Adams is a Lambda Fellow in Poetry. His poems have appeared in *Chelsea Street Magazine*, *Down-go Sun*, *Glitterwolf*, *Iris*, *Poems for All*, *Poets Against War*, *The Q Review* and *Vox Poetica*. He is the author of *Mother Speaks Her Name* and *Love Remembered* both published by Wild Ocean Press. In addition, his poems have appeared in anthologies: *Between: New Gay Poetry*, *Kansas City Metropolitan Verse* and *Grist*. He previously trained as an actor under the direction of Lee Strasberg.

Walter Bargan has published 25 books of poetry including: *My Other Mother's Red Mercedes* (Lamar University Press, 2018), *Until Next Time* (Singing Bone Press, 2019), *Pole Dancing in the Night Club of God* (Red Mountain Press, 2020), and *You Wounded Miracle*, (Liliom Verlag, 2021). He was appointed the first poet laureate of Missouri (2008-2009).

Rev Vern Barnet, DMn, was weekly "Faith and Beliefs" columnist for The Kansas City Star (1994-2012), developmental editor for memoirs of Alvin Brooks, *Binding Us Together* (2021), and an editor of the 740-page *Essential Guide to Religious Traditions and Spirituality for Health Care Providers* (2013). His *Thanks for Noticing: The Interpretation of Desire* (2015), 154 sonnets (with copious glosses about the world's religions) awaits a second edition. His articles, poems, and reviews have appeared in many journals. A seminary professor, he has been honored by Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, interfaith, professional, and civic organizations.

Bill Bauer's most recent works include, *Indictments: Poems In Four Counts* (Terrace Street Press, 2021) and *The Dragon Box* (Coal City Press, 2018). His book, *Last Lambs: New and Selected Poems of Vietnam (Second Edition)* (BkMk Press, 2014), was an Eric Hoffer Legacy Award Finalist. Bill is a Vietnam War veteran and the founder of Media/Professional Insurance, a firm dedicated to defending the First Amendment rights of the media that was sold in 1992. A Kansas City native and the father of two children, he lives on the island of Maui with his wife, Kathy.

Curtis Becker is a writer, teacher, and editor living in Topeka, KS. With an MA in English, Becker teaches at Holton Middle School in Holton, KS. His poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction have appeared in anthologies and magazines. His book, *He Watched and Took Note*, released in 2018 from Kellogg Press.

Phyllis Becker is the coordinator of the Riverfront Reading series in Kansas City, Missouri. She has a book, *How I Came to Love Jazz and other Poems* (2008, Helicon Nine, Editions). Her poems have also been set to jazz on the compact disc, *Poetry of Love*, produced by jazz vocalist, Angela Hagenbach. She has a book forthcoming from Scapegoat Press in 2022.

James Benger has written a bunch of stuff. Some of it has even been published in print and on the interwebs. So far there are three chapbooks, four splits, and two full-lengths. He is the resident slacker on the Board of Directors of the Writers Place, and is the most truant member of the Riverfront Readings Committee. He is also the admin of an online poetry workshop called 365 Poems in 365 Days. He lives in Kansas City with his wife and children.

Carl Bettis is a software engineer and writer. His works have appeared in a number of publications, including *Thorny Locust*, *Daily Science Fiction*, and *I-70 Review*, as well as a handful of anthologies. Carl

is a part of Riverfront Readings, which has been producing readings of poetry and literary fiction in the Kansas City area for over 30 years. His Twitter handle is @caracabe.

Virginia Brackett's 15 books have been cited by the New York Public Library; the Pennsylvania School Librarians Association; Tristate Books of Note; the American Library Association, Amelia Bloomer Project; and *Booklist* (Editor's Choice, Reference Sources, 2008). She has published dozens of articles, blog entries and stories for children and adults, and her electronic books include *Angela and the Gray Mare* (children) and *Girl Murders*, a time-travel mystery. Her picture book was among ten finalists in the 2019 [William Penn Early Childhood Picture Book Challenge](#), and her most recent book is a memoir focusing on her father's death in the Korean Conflict and its effect on her family, *In the Company of Patriots* (Sunbury Press). (<https://www.virginiabrackett.com>).

Kansas City poet **Greg Cenac** is the author of *Beyond the Thorned Holly*, a collection of poems and short stories highlighted in the December, Best of 2017, Kirkus Review. Greg resides north of the river in Weatherby Lake with his Border Collie, Suki. He and Suki enjoy early morning walks together in the Missouri woods.

Malcolm Cook, raised in NY & MA, now resides in KC MO where he entered the poetry scene in 2019, publishing '[What Grit and Dust Upon My Face](#)' and reading at 'Celebration of William Stafford: Creating a Poetic Life', 'Improv Jazz and Poetry', 'The Speakeasy Presents', and 'Lawrence Annual Poetry Fair'. His verse, often lyrical and imagistic, occasionally beatnik-esque, has appeared or is forthcoming in [eighth st. publishing guild's](#) 2020 [anthology](#), in [365 Days: Volume 3](#), [Curating Home - A Kansas City Poetry Anthology](#), and 2021 issues of [Chiron Review](#), [I-70 Review](#) and [Voices from the Writers Place](#) audiobook.

Maril Crabtree grew up in Memphis and New Orleans but calls the Midwest home. Her poetry, short stories, and essays have appeared in numerous journals including *The DMQ Review*, *Literary Mama*, *Main Street Rag*, *Canyon Voices*, *I-70 Review*, *Third Wednesday*, and *Poet's Market*. Her most recent collection is *Fireflies in the Gathering Dark* (Kelsay Press).

Brian Daldorph teaches at the University of Kansas and Douglas County Jail. He edits *Coal City Review*. His most recent books are: *Kansas Poems* (Meadowlark Books, 2021), and *Words Is a Powerful Thing: Two Decades of Teaching Creative Writing at Douglas County Jail* (University of Kansas P, 2021).

Robert L. Dean, Jr. is the author of *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 a forthcoming chapbook, *Pulp*, with Finishing Line Press. A multiple *Best of the Net* nominee and a *Pushcart* nominee, his work has appeared in many publications. Dean is event coordinator for *Epistrophy: An Afternoon of Poetry and Improvised Music*, held annually in Wichita, Kansas. He has been a professional musician and worked at The Dallas Morning News. He lives Augusta, Kansas.

Richard Delaware has taught university mathematics over forty years, the last two decades including a writing-intensive history of mathematics course, out of which many of his students have won writing contests or been published in student journals. He's recently begun writing memoir and literary creative nonfiction, already appearing five times in the *Journal of Humanistic Mathematics*. His goal is to write artfully and publish as widely as possible.

Maija Rhee Devine authored an autobiographical novel, *The Voices of Heaven*. It won four book awards, including AAUW/Kansas City's Thorp Menn Literary Excellence Award. Her TEDx Talk about the book: <http://youtu.be/GFD-6JFLF5A>. Her works have appeared in *The Kenyon Review*, *North American Review*, her chapbook, *Long Walks on Short Days*, and anthologies, including *When the Virus Came Calling: COVID-19 Strikes America* (Golden Foothills Press, CA, 2020) and *Abrazos: Letters from the Self to World the World*, (www.writingforpeace.org, 2021). Her works-in-progress depict the lives of 'comfort women' of World War II. She is a lecture in the University Washington's Osher Program.

Greg Field is a writer, artist, and musician living in Independence, Missouri with his wife, poet Maryfrances Wagner. He plays drums with the improvisational jazz band, River Cow Orchestra. His poems have appeared in many journals and anthologies to include *New Letters* and *Chiron Review*. His new book, from Woodley Press, is *Uncertainties*. He is a co-editor of the *I-70 Review*.

Victoria Garton's manuscript, *Pout of Tangerine Tango* will be published by *Finishing Line Press* mid-2022. She recently read for Riverfront Poetry Series and has work accepted or in *River City Poetry*, *I-70 Review*, *Thorny Locust*, *Gasconade Review*, *Quarterly West*, and *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review*. Her book *Kisses in the Raw Night* was published by BkMk Press, U.M.K.C.

Greg Gildersleeve is assistant professor of English at the University of Arkansas Grantham. His writing interests are diverse. He has published a comic book, *GOLD DUST* (2005), a novella, *FALSE ALARM* (2015), two Young Adult novels, *THE POWER CLUB* (2017) and *THE SECRET CLUB* (2020), and a graphic novel, *THE BITTER ANGELS* (2021). His academic writing has appeared in *THE TEACHING PROFESSOR* and *FACULTY FOCUS*. He won Johnson County Community College's Publication Award while teaching there. He served on the Board of Directors of The Writers Place, including as secretary.

Diane Glancy is #1255 of the First Families of the Cherokee Nation. She is professor emerita at Macalester College. Currently she teaches in the low residency MFA program at Carlow University. Glancy's latest books, *Island of the Innocent: A Consideration of the Book of Job*, and *A Line of Driftwood, the Ada Blackjack Story*, were published by Turtle Point Press 2020 and 2021. A book of nonfiction, *Home Is the Road, Driving the Wilderness, Shaping the Spirit*, is forthcoming in 2022 from Broadleaf Books. Glancy lives in Texas and Kansas. Her other books and awards are on her website, www.dianeglancy.com.

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Ph.D., the 2009-13 Kansas Poet Laureate is the author of 24 books, including *How Time Moves: New & Selected Poems*; *Miriam's Well*, a novel; *Needle in the Bone*, a non-fiction book on the Holocaust; *The Sky Begins At Your Feet: A Memoir on Cancer, Community, and Coming Home to the Body*. Founder of Transformative Language Arts, she leads writing workshops widely, coaches people on writing and right livelihood, and consults on creativity. Her new podcast is [Tell Me Your Truest Story](http://TellMeYourTruestStory.com). Find out more about her at CarynMirriamGoldberg.com, YourRightLivelihood.com, and Bravevoice.com.

Beth Gulley is a Kansas poet who likes to get lost in the woods. She has also been known to jump from moving buses in Paraguay, visit the breeding ground for Giant Chinese Salamanders, and run more than fifty miles at a time. She recently published two collections of poetry, *The Sticky Note Alphabet* and *Dragon Eggs*. She is a member of the Kansas Authors Club and the Riverfront Reading

Committee. She also serves on the Writers Place board. When she is not writing, teaching at JCCC, or volunteering, she likes to hang out with her cat.

Jeremy Gulley has been called many things: writer, sheep poacher, teacher, liar, aquanaut, and Kevin to name a few. There is some truth to all of these.

Tina Hacker is happy to announce the publication of her book, *GOLEMS*, by Kelsay Books. The poems are based on the golem character from Jewish folklore who is mankind's helper. Tina has authored two previous collections of poetry: *Listening to Night Whistles* and *Cutting it*. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize four times.

David L. Harrison's 88 books for young people and 14 for classroom teachers are widely recognized. His work has been anthologized in 200+ books; translated into twelve languages; presented on television, radio, stage, and video stream; sandblasted in the sidewalk at Phoenix's main library; and painted on a bookmobile in Colorado. Two of David's books of poetry have represented Missouri at the National Book Fair in Washington, D.C. In 2016, The Society of Midland Authors chose his book of poetry, *Now You See Them, Now You Don't*, for its Children's Nonfiction Literary Award. He received the first Laura Ingalls Wilder Children's Literature Medal in 2020. For his 2021 title, *The Dirt Book, Poems About Animals that Live Beneath Our Feet*, Harrison was one of six poets selected by the NYC Public Library System as the year's best books of children's poetry. Other winners were from the U.S., Chili, Argentina, and Haiti. National Council for Teachers of English has five times chosen his work for its, "Most Notable Books of Poetry for Children." He has two degrees in science, two honorary doctorate degrees in letters, and David Harrison Elementary School in Missouri is named for him.

Michael Harty is a (mostly) retired psychoanalyst who lives in Prairie Village, Kansas. His poems have appeared in New Letters, I-70 Review, Coal City Review, and elsewhere, and his sonnets have received awards in several competitions including the Maria Faust Sonnet Contest and the Rattle Magazine Ekphrastic Contest. His chapbook "The Statue Game" appeared in 2014, and a second chapbook, "Real Country", is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press.

Marcia L. Hurlow is the author of six collections of poetry, a full-length collection, *Anomie*, which won the Edges Prize at WordTech, and five chapbooks, including *Green Man in Suburbia*, from which the sample poem is taken. More than 400 of her individual poems have appeared in literary magazines, including Poetry, Chicago Review, Poetry Northwest, Zone 3, Poetry South, Cold Mountain, Louisville Review, Nimrod and River Styx, among others. Her MFA in creative writing is from Vermont and her Ph.D. in rhetoric and applied linguistics is from Ohio State. A two-time winner of the Al Smith Fellowship for Poetry, she is co-editor-in-chief of Kansas City Voices and vice president of Whispering Prairie Press.

My name is **Rick Kesler** and I am recently retired after a rewarding 42 year career. Now it's time for me to have a little fun and express myself. My goal is to enjoy writing and get my stories out there. And even if I'm the only one that sees or appreciates them, if I have fun with my writing I've succeeded. I hope that you enjoy these memories from shared family experiences for my parents 50th wedding anniversary.

J. Khan lives and writes in the Kansas City area. His chapbook "Speech in an Age of Certainty" is available at Finishing Line Press (www.finishinglinepress.com).

R. M. Kinder is a Missouri writer, educator, and editor. She is the author of two novels, *The Universe Playing Strings* and *An Absolute Gentleman*; three award-winning collections of short fiction, *Sweet Angel Band*, *A Near-Perfect Gift*, and *A Common Person and Other Stories*; and co-author of a dual media biography *Old Time Fiddling: Hal Sappington, Missouri Fiddler*. Her fiction, non-fiction, and poetry have appeared in *Missouri Life*, *Cottonwood*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *New Letters*, *Descant*, and other publications.

Silvia Kofler is a widely published poet, translator, and educator who has read her work in many places like the Yale Club and Poets House in New York City, and at Schokoladen in Berlin, Germany. Her book *Gambol the World: Eine Weltanschauung*, by Spartan Press, has been translated into Portuguese by Carlos Ramos and has been published as a bilingual edition from Ghost Editions, in Portugal. She is a member of Riverfront Readings, and editor/publisher of Thorny Locust magazine (thornysubmissions@gmail.com).

Nancy Krieg lives and works in Kansas City, MO where creativity is cherished. She is employed as a job coach for developmentally disabled adults. She has played drums in jazz clubs, mandolin with bluegrass and Celtic bands and percussion with singer/guitarists. All of these musical pursuits require careful listening which naturally translated into writing poetry at one point in time. She is the author of *Cool Shades of Eventide* from Spartan Press.

Marianne Kunkel is the author of *Hillary, Made Up* (Stephen F. Austin State University Press) and *The Laughing Game* (Finishing Line Press), as well as poems that have appeared in *The Missouri Review*, *The Notre Dame Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Rattle*, and elsewhere. She is an Assistant Professor of English at Johnson County Community College. She holds an MFA in poetry from the University of Florida and a Ph.D. in English from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She is the editor-in-chief of [Kansas City Voices](#) and [Kansas City Voices Youth](#) and chair of [The Writers Place's](#) Youth Committee.

Pat Lawson taught English at Kansas City Kansas Community College until retirement and now volunteers in a community garden and small orchard in Kansas City, Kansas. She serves on the Riverfront Readings Committee and the Program Committee at The Writers Place. Her stories appear in *Why We Love Our Cats and Dogs* (co-authored with Philip Miller, Unholy Day Press,) and in *Odd Ducks*, BkMk Press, 2020, and her poems in *The Little Book of Me*, Spartan Press, 2021.

Barbara Loots has published poems for fifty years in literary journals, online magazines, textbooks, and anthologies. Her collections are *Road Trip* (2014), *Windshift* (2018), and *The Beekeeper and other love poems* (2020), all published by Kelsay Books. She retired from Hallmark Cards in 2008, and now volunteers as a docent at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City. She resides in historic Hyde Park with her husband, Bill Dickinson, and Bob the Cat. More at barbaraloots.com

Marlana Marts is originally from Kansas City, Missouri. She is a fiction writer focusing on strong world-building and character-driven stories. She works across multiple genres, including science fiction, fantasy, speculative and contemporary fiction. She is a lifelong storyteller, with her first

stories created in grade school for Barbie and a unicorn named Moondancer. Her work has been awarded first and third place category winners (First Chapter of a Novel) with the Kansas Author's Club in 2016 and 2021, respectively. She currently lives in Shawnee, Kansas with her husband Robert, their feisty Brussels Griffon puppy, Sam, and Seamus, a needy shamrock.

Pushcart and Pulitzer-prize nominee **Lindsey Martin-Bowen's** fourth book, *Where Water Meets the Rock* (39 West Press 2017) contains a poem named an Honorable Mention in *Writer's Digest's* 85th Contest. Her third, *CROSSING KANSAS with Jim Morrison* won the KAC 2017 "Looks Like a Million." Her poems have run in *New Letters*, *I-70 Review*, *Thorny Locust*, *Flint Hills Review*, *Coal City Review*, *Porter Gulch Review*, *Silver Birch Press*, *Ekephrastic Review*, *Phantom Drift*, *Rockhurst Review*, and other lit mags. She holds an MA and *Juris Doctor* and teaches Criminal Justice and writing classes at Blue Mountain Community College. Poetry is her way of singing.

Polly Alice McCann, poet, artist, says that poetry saved her life. She began writing after a night sleeping under desert stars with only a book for a pillow. Her work explores faith, loss, and the search for the true heartland: "I will not forget," she writes. "I am woman, all things began in me." Her first books, "Kinlight," and "Puss 'N Boötes" published in 2019, 2020. She has been published internationally in *Naugatuck River Review*, *Arc 24* and elsewhere. She credits her narrative free verse style from studying under poets Julia Kasdorf and Ron Koertge, and her degree from Hamline University MFAC. She is the founder of Ketchupedia Poetry Radio and the managing editor of Flying Ketchup Press.

Bruce McClain's passion for etching and pen & ink drawings are gifts he hones each day of his life. Presently, he is completing his book, *Aging Gathers No Dust*, his love song to the Aged. After graduating from high school, he received a scholarship from the Phoenix School of Design in New York City. He left NYC to accept an opportunity to join the animation team of Ralph Bakshi Productions in Los Angeles. His works have been described as "Living Portraits." He now resides in Blue Springs, Missouri.

John Moessner works as a legal writer for an immigration law firm in Kansas City. He received his MFA from the University of Missouri-Kansas City. You can find his work in *American Poetry Journal*, *Commonweal*, *New Letters*, *North American Review*, and *Poet Lore*.

Annie Klier Newcomer resides in Prairie Village, Kansas with her husband of forty-one years and their Aussiedoodle. *Comets- Relationships That Wander*, published by Finishing Line Press, comprise poems that reflect her own literary wandering since her brother, Dr. John Klier's unexpected death. When she isn't writing she is working on chess puzzles with her After-School chess students and volunteering her time with community writing projects.

Lynn Norton has been Commercial Sculptor of original patterns for ornaments, toys and collectibles. As a sculptor, I've become intimately familiar with tools that give shape to my vision. Pen and tablet have recently been added to my toolbox alongside chisel and rasp. To my delight, the creative process of writing revealed itself to be markedly similar to that of sculpting. Develop a compelling concept. Make preliminary sketches. Render raw materials until they emerge as enduring images.

Steve Paul is a longtime journalist, book critic, and arts writer who lives in Kansas City. In addition to his Connell biography, he's the author of *Hemingway at Eighteen* (2017) and editor of *Kansas City Noir* (2012), an anthology of contemporary short fiction. His poetry appears occasionally in a variety of publications, and he writes regularly for KC Studio magazine. He's currently at work on a biography of the poet William Stafford.

William (Bill) Patterson lives with his wife, Paige, in midtown Kansas City near Metropolitan Community College. They walk to his work downtown most mornings through the Power and Light District. He is retired from the Army and the University of Missouri. Bill works currently for the federal government. Poetry writing started in high school but became serious in the last five years through participation in The Writers Place events.

Shawn Pavey is the author of *Talking to Shadows* (Main Street Rag Press, 2008), *Nobody Steals the Towels From a Motel 6* (Spartan Press, 2015), and *Survival Tips for the Pending Apocalypse* (2019, Spartan Press) - which was 1st runner up for the 2020 Thorpe Menn Literary Excellence Award – and *Even If We Did, So What!?* (2021, OAC Books). He co-founded *The Main Street Rag Literary Journal* and served as an Associate Editor. His infrequently updated blog is at www.shawnpavey.com.

John Peterson has worked as a social worker, a mud-logger on oil rigs, a small-town newspaper editor, a bigger-town reporter, magazine writer and photographer, a corporate marketing writer, and currently as a freelance copywriter. His poetry and fiction have been published in small journals, including *Poet & Critic*, *New Letters*, *The Wapsipinicon Almanac*, *I-70 Review*, and the anthology, *Voices on the Landscape*. He lives with his wife and a tribe of rescued cats in Kansas City, MO.

Past Poet Laureate of Kansas (2017-2019) **Kevin Rabas** teaches at Emporia State University, where he leads the poetry and playwriting tracks. He has fourteen books, including *Lisa's Flying Electric Piano*, a Kansas Notable Book and Nelson Poetry Book Award winner.

David Ray is author of 26 books, including *Burnt Offerings* (Whirlybird Press, 2019).. Previous poetry books include *Hemingway: A Desperate Life*, *Music of Time: Selected and New Poems*, *One Thousand Years: Poems About the Holocaust*. *The Endless Search* is a memoir. He is Professor Emeritus from the University of Missouri-Kansas City and former editor of *New Letters*. He now lives in Tucson, Arizona.

Judy Ray's books include *From Place to Place: Personal Essays* (Whirlybird Press) and *To Fly Without Wings: Poems* (Helicon Nine Editions). Originally from England, she has lived in many other parts of the world, and during the years in Kansas City she was associate editor of *New Letters* and then the first executive director of The Writers Place. She now lives in Tucson, Arizona.

Trish Reeves's first book, *Returning the Question*, won the Cleveland State Poetry Center Prize. She's been awarded fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, Yaddo, Keck (Sarah Lawrence College), and Kansas Arts. Her second book, *In the Knees of the Gods*, was from BkMk Press; her most recent, *God, Maybe*, from Scattering Skies Press. Reeves received an MFA from Warren Wilson College, and was Professor of English and Creative Writing for 21 years at Haskell Indian Nations University, in Lawrence, KS. Currently she leads Changing Lives Through Literature for Johnson County Corrections, and is a Humanities Kansas Scholar.

Judith Towse Roberts is an area writer, teacher of creative writing, and poet. Judith graduated from The University of Missouri at Kansas City with a B.A. in English Language and Literature and went on to receive her M.A. in English/Education, as well as a second Masters in Counseling/Psychology. The Mid-America Press has published her book of poetry entitled, *Chrysanthemums I once Thought Sweet*, which was a finalist in the Thorpe Menn competition, published student books of creative writing which have won awards for excellence both statewide and nationally, and her works have appeared in many literary magazines as well as *Chicken Soup for the Mother's Soul*. Judith retired from Avila University where she taught composition and finished a career of 40 years of teaching in both public and private schools. She has conducted workshops throughout the State and is currently conducting creative writing workshops in the inner city for at-risk students with The Writers Place as coordinator of a program called "In Our Own Words."

Marjorie Saiser's *Losing the Ring in the River* (University of New Mexico Press, 2013) won the Willa Award for Poetry. Marge's most recent book, *The Tracks the Whales Make* (University of Nebraska Press, 2021), deals with all the ways love goes right and love goes wrong. Well, maybe not all the ways . . .

Lauren Scharhag (she/her) is an associate editor for *GLEAM: Journal of the Cadrador*, and the author of thirteen books, including *Requiem for a Robot Dog* (Cajun Mutt Press) and *Languages, First and Last* (Cyberwit Press). Her work has appeared in over 150 literary venues around the world. Recent honors include the Seamus Burns Creative Writing Prize and multiple Best of the Net and Pushcart Prize nominations. To learn more about her work, visit: www.laurenscharhag.blogspot.com

Mark Scheel grew up in east-Kansas farm country. Prior to writing full time, he served overseas with the American Red Cross, taught at Emporia State University and was a public library information specialist. He co-authored the book *Of Youth and the River: the Mississippi Adventure of Raymond Kurtz, Sr.* and his collection of stories and poems, *A Backward View*, was awarded the 1998 J. Donald Coffin Memorial Book Award from the Kansas Authors Club. More recent works include the fiction collection *And Eve Said Yes: Seven Stories and a Novella*, the poetry collection *Star Chaser*, and the novel *The Potter's Wheel*.

Originally from Egypt, **Mary Silwance** lives in Kansas City. Mary provides workshops on writing and serves on the editorial team of *Kansas City Voices* as well as on the Johnson County library Writing Contest Committee. While her poetry and essays appear in numerous publications, Mary explores ecology from the intersection of justice and spirituality in workshops and at <http://tonicwild.blogspot.com/>. Mary is a recent attendee of the Bread Loaf Environmental Writers Conference.

Robert Stewart's latest books include *Working Class* (poems, Stephen F. Austin State University 2018) and *The Narrow Gate: Writing, Art & Values* (essays, Serving House Books 2014). He is winner of a National Magazine Award for nonfiction editing (2008) and lives in Prairie Village, Kansas.

Janet Sunderland is an actor, writer, teacher, editor, and spiritual counselor/healer, practicing the hands-on technique, Human Lomi. She earned a B.F.A. at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas, majoring in fine arts and theatre, an M.F.A. in the Great Books Program of St. John's College, and an M.Div. from Sophia Divinity School. She is a published writer, both in poetry and

memoir, and holds a Screen Actors Guild membership. She has been interested in and has read the work of Carl Jung for many years.

Alarie Tennille was a pioneer coed at the University of Virginia, where she earned her degree in English, Phi Beta Kappa key, and black belt in Feminism. She serves on the Emeritus Board and Programming Committee of the Writers Place. Her newest poetry collection, *Three A.M. at the Museum*, is available at Amazon.

William Trowbridge's ninth poetry collection, *Call Me Fool*, will be published by Red Hen Press in November, 2022. He is a faculty mentor in the University of Nebraska-Omaha Low-residency MFA in Writing Program and was Poet Laureate of Missouri from 2012 to 2016. For more information, see his website at williamtrowbridge.net.

Maryfrances Wagner's newest books are *The Silence of Red Glass* and *The Immigrants' New Camera*. She co-edits *I-70 Review*, serves on The Writers Place board, was 2020 Missouri Individual Artist of the Year, and is Missouri Poet Laureate 2021-2023. Poems have appeared in *New Letters*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Laurel Review*, *American Journal of Poetry*, *Poetry East*, *Voices in Italian Americana*, *Main Street Rag*, *Rattle*, *Unsettling America: An Anthology of Contemporary Multicultural Poetry*, et. al. For more information, check her website: <http://maryfranceswagnerwriter.fieldinfoserv.com/>

Andrea Warren's career has encompassed teaching, reporting, magazine writing, and editorial work. For the past two decades she has merged her passion for children and education with her love of history and story to write nonfiction history for young readers. In each book she features a brave, resilient young person living through a historically significant event. Her many book honors have included the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, the Thorpe Menn Award, the William Allen White Award, the Robert F Sibert Honor Award, and numerous "best book" designations. This piece was written for young readers to inspire their own writing.

Michael Allyn Wells (he/him/his) is a poet who is an alumnus of the Spring 2017 Writer to Writer mentoring program of the Association of Writers and Writers Programs. He makes his home in Kansas City, Missouri with his wife and three rescue dogs. While he was born and raised in Missouri, he has a special place in his heart for San Francisco Giants baseball team. He takes his coffee black and prefers his wine white. His poem, Tienanmen Mother, was featured by the Independent Chinese PEN Center. His work has also appeared in a variety of print and online publications including, Boston Literary Magazine Anthologies Vol. 1 and Vol. 2, Montucky Review, Remington Review, Nude Bruce Review, and Liquid Imagination. Michael's work ranges from humor, to political, and the sublime. His poem "Lost & Found" appears in the Fall edition of 34 Orchard.

Phyllis Galley Westover's writing has appeared in magazines, newspapers and three anthologies. She received *Boulevard's Short Fiction Award* and was a finalist for the Iowa Award in Literary Nonfiction. Her children's book, *Sold to the Highest Bidder*, is available on Amazon. Two documentary films she wrote appeared on public television.

Janice E. Yocum has her Masters in teaching with an emphasis in creative writing. Her poems and articles have appeared in *I-70 Review* and *Teacher* magazine among others. However, as a writing instructor her forte is in building student self-esteem and emotional well-being through writing.

Dozens of her students have participated in readings and placed in local, state and national contests as well as being published in state and national anthologies. She remarks, "Once a child has experienced the satisfaction and healing writing can bring, they have a life skill that can serve them well."

Martin Zehr is a neuropsychologist with the Marion Bloch Neuroscience Institute of Saint Luke's Hospital in Kansas City, Missouri. His novel, "The Desplazados," was called by the Kirkus Reviews, "A story of reawakening and self-acceptance, well worth the trip."
