

VERSE WISCONSIN

FOUNDED BY LINDA ASCHBRENNER AS FREEVERSE 1998

FEATURES

IS HALF A POET BETTER THAN NONE?
BY CATHRYN COFELL

A NEWLY DISCOVERED POEM BY LORINE NIEDECKER—
“MARRIAGE”—ESSAY BY SARAH BUSSE

POETRY IN PRISON BY LAUREL BASTIAN

WENDY VARDAMAN INTERVIEWS
MARTÍN ESPADA

“To give is an act of grace. To accept an offering is an act of grace as well. The more we’re able to accept offerings from those whom we forget have something of great value to give, the closer to being whole, as individuals and artists and communities, we come.”

—LAUREL BASTIAN

POETRY BY Marilyn Annucci ✨ Sharon Auberle ✨ Daniel Bachhuber ✨ Danny P. Barbare ✨ Guy R. Beining ✨ Michael Belongie ✨ Jean Biegun ✨ David Blackey ✨ Sue Chenette ✨ Elizabeth Cleary ✨ Philip Dacey ✨ Alice D’Alessio ✨ Jim Davis ✨ Bruce Dethlefsen ✨ R. Virgil Ellis ✨ Fabu ✨ Bart Galle ✨ Kathie Giorgio ✨ Joey Goodall ✨ Alena Hairston ✨ Derrick Harriell ✨ Jerry Hauser ✨ Beth Ellen Jack ✨ Oritsegbemi Emmanuel Jakpa ✨ Nancy Jesse ✨ Joan Wiese Johannes ✨ Martha Kaplan ✨ Erin Keane ✨ Jane Kocmoud ✨ Robyn Kohlwey ✨ Michael Kriesel ✨ Jim Landwehr ✨ Jackie Langetieg ✨ Nick Lantz ✨ Elda Lepak ✨ MaryEllen Letarte ✨ Louis McKee ✨ Bruce McRae ✨ Julie L. Moore ✨ Richard W. Moyer ✨ Ralph Murre ✨ Christian Nagle ✨ Lorine Niedecker ✨ Robert Nordstrom ✨ Diana Randolph ✨ Joseph Reich ✨ Georgia Ressmeyer ✨ Harlan Richards ✨ Erik Richardson ✨ Richard Roe ✨ G. A. Scheinoha ✨ E.P. Schultz ✨ Thomas R. Smith ✨ Jeanie Tomasko ✨ Steve Tomasko ✨ Kohl Trimbell ✨ Erik Tschekunow ✨ Diane Unterweyer ✨ Caleb Whitney ✨ Marilyn Windau ✨ Lisa Zimmerman ✨

“We poets have to stop participating in our own marginalization, we have to stop internalizing this idea that poetry doesn’t matter. ...stop buying into the idea that poetry is irrelevant. The choice is ours.”

—MARTÍN ESPADA

“I have been a coward. I have cut myself in half and kept those two halves apart for most of my adult life, simply because my alter ego can’t help but write poetry.”

—CATHRYN COFELL

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WISCONSIN FELLOWSHIP OF POETS

One of the perks of being an editor is the chance to visit some assumptions you've long held as a poet. That happened here at *Verse Wisconsin*, as we started hearing that poems we accepted had been published on poets' personal blogs. At first, this took us aback. Neither of us blogs our own poetry. It sounded like a publication credit. We took the question to our advisors and board members. Conversation buzzed over email. We asked a few other editors around the web. More conversation. Like the question of simultaneous submissions (which we do NOT accept), this is an issue playing out right now at magazines everywhere.

It has become clear to us that different editorial models and approaches exist. The most conservative journals forbid previous publication, including at your own blog or website. On the other side of the continuum lies the rapidly emerging, evolving, blog/web/online world, where poems are linked, tagged, pasted, and spread—the more and faster, the better. Replication becomes a mark of success and a way to build readership and is akin to the older model of sharing poems with friends and family.

Finally, there are those of us finding our way to a middle path. It has been a challenge, and a welcome exercise, to figure out our stance on this issue. Our new policy: *Verse Wisconsin* will not accept any poem that has been previously published in a print or online magazine or journal. We will accept poems that have appeared on the poet's OWN blog or website (only), with an understanding that upon acceptance, the poet will remove the accepted poem from their own site for the duration of the *VW* issue, print or online, their poem appears in. After the issue is past, poets are free to publish the poem again on their blog, with a credit to *VW* listed and hopefully a link to the issue in our archives. We'll be happy to list websites and blogs in bios, as we currently do. The idea, as we see it, is to encourage traffic between our site and yours, to share readers and to build audience generally.

This editorial position differs from the position we take as poets, where we're both a little more conservative. Why would we differ as editors from what we believe as writers? The answer is complex, and has a lot to do with how we see *Verse Wisconsin*. As our mission states, we hope to serve the community of poets in Wisconsin, and further afield, and to bring the work of a diverse array of poets to the attention of a wider audience. Part of that diversity, it seems to us, means including poets who blog actively, as well as poets who eschew the whole idea. Finally, we recommend that you read all guidelines carefully, wherever you submit your work. When in doubt, query the editors before sending.

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Thanks to Marilyn Annucci, CJ Muchhala, and Jeanie and Steve Tomasko for volunteer proofreading help. Lingerin errors are, of course, the responsibility of *VW*'s editors.

Contact us: editors@versewisconsin.org.

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Printed by Thyse Printers, Inc., Madison, WI.

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Publisher & author links available online

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- Emery L. Campbell**, *This Gardener's Impossible Dream*, Multicultural Books, 2005
- Robin Chapman & Jeri McCormick** (Eds), *Love Over 60: an Anthology of Women's Poems*, Mayapple Press, 2010
- Sue Chenette**, *Slender Human Weight*, Guernica, 2009
- Sue Chenette**, *Solitude in Cloud and Sun*, Silver Maple Press, 2007
- Dan Chiasson**, *Where's The Moon, There's The Moon*, Alfred A. Knopf, 2010
- R. Virgil Ellis**, *Recess*, Woodhenge Press, 2009
- R. Virgil Ellis**, *Fuzzy Logic at Hartford High*, Woodhenge Press, 2010
- Fabu**, *Poems, Dreams and Roses*, 2009
- Ed Galing**, "Sunrise, Sunset," Peerless Press, 2010
- Ed Galing**, *Lower East Side Poems*, Alternating Current, 2008
- Brent Goodman**, *the brother swimming beneath me*, Black Lawrence Press, 2009
- Barbara L. Greenberg**, *Late Life Happiness*, Parallel Press, 2010
- Kenneth P. Gurney**, *Fluid Shape of an Empty Womb*, 2010
- Joan Wiese Johannes**, *Sensible Shoes*, New Dawn Unlimited, 2010
- Richard Kovac**, *Untitled*, PM Books, 2008
- Nick Lantz**, *We Don't Know We Don't Know*, Graywolf Press, 2010
- John Lehman**, *The Village Poet*, Zelda Wilde Publishing, 2010
- Gerald Locklin & Beth Wilson**, *Modest Aspirations*, Lummo Press, 2010
- Jack Phillips Lowe**, *Revolt at the Internet Café*, 2010
- Mokasiya**, *The Shaman's Dream*, 2010
- Ander Monson**, *Vanishing Point, Not a Memoir*, Graywolf Press, 2010
- Jamie Lynn Morris**, *From Odes to Ends*, lulu.com, 2010
- Jamie Lynn Morris**, *Ode to Naughtiness*, lulu.com, 2007
- Cristina M.R. Norcross**, *Unsung Love Songs*,

- Lulu Publishing, 2010
- Stephen Roger Powers**, *The Follower's Tale*, Salmon Poetry, 2009
- Nydia Rojas**, *Sealing Daylight*, Flutter Press, 2009
- Kay Sanders**, *That Red Dirt Road*, Parallel Press, 2010
- Robert Schuler**, *The Book of Jeweled Visions*, MWPB Books, 2010
- Matt Schumacher**, *The Fire Diaries*, Woodcraft of Oregon, 2010
- Richard Swanson**, *Not Quite Eden*, Fireweed Press, 2010
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- Ned Balbo**, *Something Must Happen*, Finishing Line Press 2009, **Two Reviews:** by Ross Losapio & by Lisa Vihos
- Mary Jo Balistreri**, *Joy in the Morning*, Bellowing Ark Press, 2008, **Two Reviews:** by Judith Barisonzi & by Barbara Crooker
- Barbara Cranford**, *This Blind Journey: New Poems*, Group Publishers, 2009 by Linda Aschbrenner
- Barbara Crooker**, *More*, C&R Press, 2010, by Susan Elbe
- Moira Egan**, *Bar Napkin Sonnets*, The Ledge Press, 2008, **Two Reviews:** by Barbara Crooker & by Richard Swanson
- Jim Johnson**, *Driving Gravel Roads*, Red Dragonfly Press, 2009 by Marie Loeffler
- Ellaraine Lockie**, *Stroking David's Leg*, Foot Hills Publishing, 2009 by Richard Swanson
- Tim Mayo**, *The Kingdom of Possibilities*, Mayapple Press, 2009 by Lisa Vihos
- Kay Sanders**, *That Red Dirt Road*, Parallel Press, 2010 by Lou Roach
- Peg Sherry**, *Life Lines from Extraordinary Abundance*, Holtz Creative Enterprises, 2008 by Lou Roach
- Thomas R. Smith**, *kinnickinnic*, Parallel Press, 2008, by B.J. Best
- Marine Robert Warden**, *Finding Beauty*, Bellowing Ark Press, 2009 by Lou Roach

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- John Elsberg** and **Eric Greinke**, *Catching the Light: 12 Haiku Sequences*, Červená Barva Press
- Eric Greinke**, *Kayak Lessons*, Free Books of Lowell, MI, 2009
- David Gross**, *Pilgrimage*, Finishing Line Press, 2009
- Kenneth P. Gurney**, *Greeting Card and other Poems*, 2008
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on the edge of heatstroke

For Tom on the Fourth of July

The fireworks you'll paint later,
burning pre-dawn studio hours:
we drive to the park with the
top down, nervous from a day
of thunder bombs and wolf packs,
kids vibrating with something,
anything to do, summer half
over already and our working
hours wasted, seducing feral
courtyard kittens, never to be
reclaimed. A week before
the prairies spill that apocalyptic
storm, we are playing Americana,
small town Independence Day
so intimate, promising all
Push-Up Pops and Feed Corn
Queens slung over the shoulders
of boys who hated us back home,
but here we are invisible, lit by
flaming pinwheels, a million
sparkling blooms catching your
eye: falling, fading, so many
cherry blossoms peeling the sky.

—ERIN KEANE, LOUISVILLE, KY

I remember the hot August Texas sun
setting fire to the edges of an earlier life
drill sergeant shouting strings
of commands to march us about
like militant marionettes
in step after endless step
some days warning flags rose like mercury
their message clear:
Do not expect recruits to march today.

I remember your anger cooking my skin
last night like too many others
age and change have worn me down
since that Texas summer
since last night
this is not enough, it's too much
like something by Tennessee Williams
I am still untrained and untrainable.
All your temper does is give me heatstroke.
I plunge my head in a glass of beer
to cool my tongue-scorched brain

My life is burning away in my hands
as I tell you this
the lengthening ash falls onto the table
if only the fire would jump and spread
to my strings and let me down
and let me drown the heat and smoke
in spilled cold beer. Warning flags rise:
If you pull my strings,
I'll walk.

—ERIK RICHARDSON, MILWAUKEE, WI

At the Edge of the Age of Print

A still-hidden village high atop a Smoky ridge took a name today, designed and lauded by a triumvirate: the local preacher, the town's one cop, and a housewife whose husband plows the road down to Pigeon Forge. Hear the result of a single session of sweet tea and scratch pads and a great county nod at the town forum, and if you dare, sing it like a note that signifies both belly and umbilical: Godsland.

What embattled omniscience they've made for themselves by the mere absence of an apostrophe, sending even the most pastoral community awry under the looking glasses of ancient forces, at the chins of an almighty mob who've waited out the age of print to play their games again. Soon there will be orgies and sacrifices, feasts fueled with moonshine, still-scoured, tapped after years of benightedness; soon everyone will be led to the edge of the ridge, pressed against walls of windows, where all the views are flashing and the wind clicks and buzzes.

—ERIK TSCHUNKUNOW, SHEBOYGAN, WI
visit VW Online for audio by this author

The Derivation of Summers As a Child

looking back on those summers all we did as children
was make model airplanes and battleships on front porches

looking back it appears without us even knowing it we were
probably getting addicted to the aroma and fumes of model glue

and kept on asking our mother if we could get another then some time
just after dusk in the deep darkness the sky would finally break open and it

would pour down into the brook of pachysandra hearing it suddenly and secretly
delicately gradually start to fill up to pick up pace and develop form and function

when it let up you could smell the scents of licorice from the forest
seeping through the windowsill of your laundry room and those deep

shag carpet bedrooms with desks and chests of drawers all filled up
with rubber cement aircraft carriers and fighter jets ready to take off.

—JOSEPH REICH, NORTH DARTMOUTH, MA

america

blah blah blah blah blah blah
blah blah blah blah blah blah

blah blah blah blah blah blah
blah blah blah blah blah blah

they're putting a pool
in across the street.

—JOSEPH REICH,
NORTH DARTMOUTH, MA

Redolence

When I smell ripe bananas, I remember
The trip with my brother to his son's wedding.
When old dance tunes on the radio play softly,
Our mother is dying again.

The trip with my brother to his son's wedding.
Pungent gifts from a lavender farm.
When old dance tunes on the radio play softly,
Sage for smudging tightens our throats.

Pungent gifts from a lavender farm.
One hundred and two degrees!
Sage for smudging tightens our throats.
We can hardly breathe.

One hundred and two degrees!
When I smell ripe bananas, I remember
We can hardly breathe
Our mother is dying again.

—JOAN WIESE JOHANNES, PORT EDWARDS, WI

Pewaukee Lake After a Ninety-Nine Degree Day

Leaves sizzle and curl
like worms in silver pails

waiting to be cast.
Dragonflies skim the water

like fickle bobbers.
Crappies dart and shimmer with fear

while couples stroll the beach,
pinkies hooked like bait.

—ROBYN KOHLWEY, GRAFTON, WI

He Didn't

He didn't see college or high school, but through
the eyes of his youngest son. Watchful, over a shoulder
and an Old Milwaukee, the algebra crooked his lip and
wrinkled a brow. He'd say, "Yeah, that looks right."
He'd sit with his back to the fire, eyes closed to the pain.
You push the pencil. I'll push the dirt. When it's all said
and done we'll be okay. His promise.

He didn't become an artist, but with his bare hands
the shrewd point of ploughshares sculpted
each spring the slit of creation,
his artistry conceived in the germination of regeneration
the solemn act of work and rework
this the silent show of faith—the winter's need
sown and gleaned by the will of his promise.

He didn't travel the world, the disconnection of borders,
but through the slice of five-strand barbed-wire;
honest talk covered the bottom strand scratch
and the patch to right the breach.
Neighbors, whoever their God, deserve respect,
and a phone call, simple words, a handshake
over the five-strand. A man's word, his promise.

He didn't get rich, but never a happier man made do.
Three boys and a girl, still gets loud a few times a year.
We all take the same walk, down around the apple tree.
Sneak a little dirt beneath our nails. Get back home.
Fight about having to do, like we used to. Someone forgets
to check for manure in their gloves. Charlie gets blamed,
but we all know it's Dad. Laughter, his promise.

He didn't. And. He didn't. And. He didn't. And. He didn't.
Yet, it was all we could do to keep up.

—E. P. SCHULTZ, SOLDIERS GROVE, WI

Homeowner Haiku #1

Ghost rose up from my
redwood deck: "What have you done?"
I brushed on more stain.

—R. VIRGIL ELLIS, CAMBRIDGE, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

Travel Writing

Let's not think of the car with no brakes at all.
Or the Studebaker the color of the dawning
of a very bad day, followed across Utah
by the blue cloud of its oil habit.
Let's not think of its demise
in the cold of Colorado winter.
Let's not think of the crashes in the old red Saab.
And not about the silvery Saab's breakdowns
in Missouri or any of those in Wisconsin.
Not about pick-up trucks in ditches.
The Fourth-of-July Dakota incident.
Let's not think of the green-and-white Ford
in a California junkyard, parts of its engine
missing.
A motorcycle lying in the gravel of Ontario.
My Rozinante loaded on a truck
in the Michigan morning. Without ceremony.
We could also not think of the Illinois Tri-State
transmission trouble. The fast lane.
And, by all means, let's try not to think of hitting
anything
at seventy-five in the froggy-green Saturn
under the Hunter's Moon of the big western sky.
Let's not think of the mustard-colored Datsun.
Or vehicles built in England.
Let's not think of Florida.
Or Boston.
Oh, Jesus, let's not think of driving in Boston.

—RALPH MURRE, BAILEYS HARBOR, WI

Is Half a Poet Better Than None?

by Cathryn Cofell

At a recent speaking gig in my home city of Appleton, I was asked to come forward and share a truly challenging connection in my life: the connection with my own self. Or rather, my two selves, because I stood there—in front of 950 women (and a few brave men)—as two women. If you know me at all it's as the poet, Cathryn Cofell. But it's unlikely you know the other side of me: Cathy Mutschler: former Girl Scout CEO, current nonprofit exec. For that speaking engagement, it was the flip-flop: most of those women didn't even know Cathryn Cofell existed, were baffled by my suddenly hyphenated name on the program. The event was a "coming out" party of sorts for the poet, Cathryn Cofell.

When I say "coming out," I mean no disrespect to those of you who have come out about more controversial identity issues. You are strong men and women, and I admire you for your courage. Me? I have been a coward. I have cut myself in half and kept those two halves apart for most of my adult life, simply because my alter ego can't help but write poetry.

In a journal whose subscribers are primarily poets, I'm sure that sounds utterly ridiculous to you. However, on the rare occasion when I have confessed to a business associate that I'm a poet, I usually get a look that's a combination of fear and disbelief (you know, like I said I'd just climbed out of a UFO). Then, the "smile and head nod" otherwise reserved for people who think they actually did climb out of a UFO. Finally, the obligatory ask if they can read some, which seems perfectly polite and what a struggling writer would want—but not me, because I know most non-poets are expecting the poetry of greeting cards or chickadees. Not the stuff Cathryn Cofell normally writes: issues like infertility, suicide, the dark heart of love, abnormally-sized body parts. Issues that haunt, humor, anger, arouse her—in hopes of evoking from her readers a connection, a spark of that same emotion. Poems that *Cathy Mutschler's* customers, Girl Scout moms, bosses might find objectionable, off-putting, offensive.

As poets, we know the power of words. Forget atom bombs and machine guns; for me, a word is the most powerful weapon on earth. Sticks and stones can break your bones but names can never hurt you? Baloney! Ask yourself how often you've been seriously injured by a twig or a mineral deposit? Then think about how many times

you've been *crying-in-your-pillow-or-martini-destroyed* by the weight of words someone threw at you? This may be less blatantly obvious for men, but women know how verbal bullying works—how one word can start or end a war, a relationship, an innocent discussion about, say, health care—how one word can make you feel good or bad, skinny or fat, smart or stupid.

So, no way was Cathy Mutschler going to let Cathryn Cofell's arsenal of poems jeopardize her business relationships, her family's livelihood. And no way was Cathryn Cofell going to let her lack of an MFA, teaching credentials or 100% commitment to the craft add one more reason to the pile of reasons to be rejected.

So, no way was Cathy Mutschler going to let Cathryn Cofell's arsenal of poems jeopardize her business relationships, her family's livelihood. And no way was Cathryn Cofell going to let her lack of an MFA, teaching credentials or 100% commitment to the craft add one more reason to the pile of reasons to be rejected. I was Moses; I kept that Red Sea in me parted.

At first, it was easy. My two selves had nothing in common: one was driven, organized, a smooth-talker; the other creative, frenzied, a goofball. They didn't like each other one bit; they gladly kept their distance. Business was business: Fox Valley. Poetry was poetry: everywhere else. Détente.

But then, they both started climbing their respective ladders. Started craving more time. Showing up in all

the wrong places. Cathy would meet with a coworker and out would come poetry. Cathryn would go to a poetry event and volunteer to chair a government commission. The more successful each got, the uglier each got. The poet started doing readings in downtown Appleton! Typing resignation notices to quit the day job, to prove she could provide if she could write full-time. But that business woman made more money, was a better parent, was helping make her customers' lives better. She was more polite and dressed better too. She had just about the whole world on her side.

Cathy Mutschler had Cathryn Cofell in a choke hold and was not letting go. Cathryn tried writing about sweeter things – like the joy of gardening. Sometimes it worked, but most times, it went like this. Title: "Introduction to Gardening." First line: "I know dead when I see it."

Then Cathryn tried to use one of Cathy's favorite weapons against her— *The List*. Cathryn made an attempt to list all the reasons why being a poet was important. That poem turned into this:

Why I Will Fail as a Poet

I am addicted to black shoes. And purses. I need lots of purses. I need to open those purses and pull out matching wallets fat with bills and give those bills away to store clerks, cute waiters, a colorist who helps me look shiny and young, if I'm going to fail I will at least look shiny and young, like I have plenty time to succeed. I need to earn that keep. I am not a kept woman. I am more

than \$125 on an IRS Form-990. I need fame. Applause after every poem. I'm no symphony, I'm a Sex Pistol, a Violent Femme; give me groupies, a mosh pit, more than the same five bodies in the same cramped café. I need love (every day I fall in love, every day I lose my pen

to his body so full of trap doors). I need to find myself in the Caribbean. To lie on a blue chaise on that white sand against the dazzling blue and ooze cocoa butter (so spit-fire-Jalapeno-hot), not writing, not reading, just listening to the poetry of salsa, the slurp of margarita through a blue-

white straw. I need thighs the size of straws. Triceps that don't take flight when they reach for a book. I don't need another book of prize-winning poetry I don't have time to be in. I need time. I need time to stop. To prove the stopped clock of this 747 body wrong (so much of me on snooze control). I need very much to wake, to remember my dreams

but do not. There are so many people more hungry, more broken, more full of dreams and need who need me to be useful, but there is nothing useful about poetry except it's the one thing that makes me want, that makes me breathe deep, that releases the dying breath held so deep, hands held like ashtrays to catch the flickering embers. Because hands cupped this way can only hold so much.

(published in *Free Verse*, July 2007)

Talk about a plan that backfired! But a good poem is a hard thing to control. And it was true. That one want, poetry, was nothing compared to all that need.

So the poet went into hiding. Cathy poured every ounce into the career, climbed and climbed until she became the CEO of a Girl Scout council. At first, it was a dream job, everything Cathy imagined it could be: her girls were thriving; her council was thriving, which meant that I was thriving. Right?

Summer Turns Orange

Summer turns orange
Released from farmer's wagons
Gourds do back-flips

—LISA ZIMMERMAN, WOODRUFF, WI

Not so much. On the outside, Cathy was challenging girls to become women of courage, confidence and character—but on the inside, I was anything but. The more I tried to be only Cathy, only business, the more off-kilter I felt. The more phony.

That poem did remind me of all the reasons why I wanted to be a success in business. But it also reminded me that a life without poetry isn't much of a life. And ironically, Cathy began to realize that what separated her from the business-suited, brief-case bearing pack was that darn poet. She was the one with the confidence, the moxie, the non-traditional ideas. Although I loved the idea of the job, I didn't love me anymore. So I resigned, climbed back down that corporate ladder a notch and began the slow convergence of two women into one.

I am fortunate to have found a new position in the non-profit world that keeps my passion for business and community service fulfilled yet is supportive of the poet in me. My boss lets me miss occasional meetings for poetry and my coworkers even encouraged me to bring a poem about cookies in lieu of the real deal for the holiday cookie exchange. For now, I might not be as successful a writer as others who dedicate more time to it, but I am grateful for every sassy or sweet piece that's been published, and for that business-savvy that allows me to help strengthen the poetry organizations I adore.

I would be lying if I said the transformation was complete. I still worry that one of my donors might be offended by a poem I wrote about kissing or menstruation—even though I suspect many of them can relate. And I still worry that you will consider me less of a poet because my career consumes an awful lot of my time. But, I am now willing to risk you not liking a piece of me, in exchange for me liking my whole self: ONE organized, creative, goofy, driven, opinionated woman deeply connected to her two passions. ☀



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United Poets Laureate

by Marilyn L. Taylor

Picture this: a small flock of State Poets Laureate hanging out in the wilds of Kansas on the Ides of March! That's exactly the way Kansas Poet Laureate Caryn Merriam-Goldberg described it after inviting a group of us, all from the Midwest, to convene in Lawrence, KS, this past spring. The gathering took place for a three-fold reason: (1) to allow us to get to know one another, (2) to present a reading to a sizable audience of local enthusiasts, and (3) to bounce around our ideas on promoting the art of poetry in general, and the challenges of the Poet Laureateship in particular.

Our group was small but wonderfully eclectic; it included the aforementioned Caryn (official Energizer Bunny and Poet Laureate of Kansas), Mary Swander (Poet Laureate of Iowa), Walter Bergen (immediate past Poet Laureate of Missouri), as well as Denise Low and Jonathan Holden, both recent past Poets Laureate of Kansas. The synergy was almost palpable; these are delightful, brainy people, without an arrogant bone in their collective bodies. We agreed almost immediately, in fact, that we were destined to become the core group of a much larger laureate lollapalooza that's already in the works for next year. ...

Visit VWOnline for details about the next laureate gathering, which is open to the public, & Taylor's complete article about this dynamic new organization!

Making Your Poetry Event Memorable

by Cristina M. R. Norcross

In a world of endless entertainment options, unless you are a poetry lover or a writer yourself, attending a poetry reading can seem daunting and unapproachable. I am not suggesting that you have a big Ferris wheel going in the background or a ring toss game to bring in an audience, but there are some creative ways that poets can make their cultural events interesting and fun while highlighting the inspiring work of poetry itself.

Here are some tips for poets who are looking to change the literary scene, expose a broader spectrum of the population to poetry and help promote the works of fellow local poets. ...

Tips from Norcross, along with examples of some of her eye-catching promotional materials, are available at VWOnline!

Available at www.versewisconsin.org

Do I Dare to Tweet a Peach?

by Nick Lantz

Three Twitter Poems

May 16, 2009

What do you call the flinty
part of you that misses
winter? That knob of lack? That shirt
on the clothesline, filling
and emptying with air?

August 12, 2009

It isn't the crocodile's fault
that his teeth cross like fingers of a penitent's clasped
hands. Hunger was Augustine's sin too.

January 2, 2010

All the forest fires start
with some poor sap burning love letters
in an abandoned campsite, and for days
we read his regret in the sky.

—NICK LANTZ, MADISON, WI

The Project

In April 2009, I signed up for Twitter. Until then, I'd avoided the microblogging site because its project didn't particularly appeal to me. I already had Facebook to tell me what my friends in Portland and Tucson were eating for dinner, and Twitter's pared-down interface didn't seem to offer much I wasn't already getting. But my interest in Twitter was piqued when I found out that posts (or "tweets," as they're called) on the site are limited to 140 characters.

At the time, I'd been reading Agha Shahid Ali's ghazals, and also what he had to say about ghazals. Ghazals are, to simplify somewhat, poems of variable length composed of couplets connected by a repeated refrain. What attracted me to ghazals was that their couplets leap, without transition, from subject to subject, mood to mood. This is part of the genre's form....

Read the rest of Nick Lantz's article & more of his Twitter poems on versewisconsin.org!

Like this morning, crazy with wind

Or just the other day, the bad roads
Even that time, and maybe it was long ago
When we all danced in circles

Take last night, what you said
Take the fire in the ring of rock
Take sun and rain, finally
Pulling frost from earth. A garden

Like falling in and out and in, again
Since the beginning and until
We are very, very old and
Maybe falling in and out, even then

The seasons, I mean, the leaves
The greening and the turning to gold
The rush of it like the sea pulling
The ice and streams of high mountains

Think of that water in the Pacific
Or the rain in Spain if you prefer
Or the little cloud that you are, driven

Like this morning, crazy with wind

—RALPH MURRE, BAILEYS HARBOR, WI

Words Will Find Me

There is no wind that does not speak of you
—Anne Stubbe

Autumn comes and while I walk through stands
of blue stem grass waving above my head,
wind leaves its home, ruffles the trees,
spilling leaves on roadsides and streams.
Woods color like small fires and green drains
away like ditch water on dry days.
Asters and wild grapes spill purple in my
dreams, apples and pumpkins occupy
imaginary tables. Wind, some say, is an orphan,
angry at trees and us, ripping our doors open.
Others say wind's a paramour, intimate
and cozy, the lover of our length and breadth.
When wind speaks my language, I wander north
in colors and dreams, repeating your poems.

—RICHARD ROE, MIDDLETON, WI

*[Anne Stubbe was an early member of WFOP,
a past president, who encouraged a lot of poets.]*

Paying Attention

I'm not taking time to notice
the exact names
of the perennial flowers she purchased
I'm too preoccupied planting and tossing
the plastic, pointed labels in one pot
then stacking the empty black containers
and counting them
one hundred-sixty so far today
until the plastic tower topples over

scattering names of flowers
all over the ground, commanding attention

Cherry Parfait Rose, Meadow Sage
Prairie Mallow, Purple Showers Viola
Coral Bells, May Night Sage
Summer Nights Larkspur

On the pink notepad pulled from my back pocket
I jot down these names
How similar to collecting polished stones
from the mountain stream
Tucking treasures in pockets to bring home
Keepsakes to keep connected
to their source

—DIANA RANDOLPH, DRUMMOND, WI
visit VW Online for audio by this author

The Moon, It Beckons

Someone said the fields were blue
where the moon had gone to ground.
Someone with drink on their breath
said the fields outside of town
were whited over in early frost.
We few went out to hear the stars complain
about their order and their magnitude.
We passed a last cigarette around,
our talk punctuated by laughter,
our breaths like webbing in the moonset.
Someone said something that stopped us dead,
each of us lost in our own thoughts awhile.
Only then we heard the rippling creekwater
and the cry of the high night overhead.

—BRUCE McRAE, VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA

Two Horses

after James Wright

There was a roan racing beside the river
that night, coat aflame in red light,
and another standing—black-clad and shy
a shadow under cottonwoods.

I remember how they watched me
pull over and step out of the car,
with hope in their eyes
that my pockets weren't empty
and how they waited, patiently
as I stood there at the fence, dreaming
of riding one of them,
being that small girl again,
heart open and unafraid,
every part of her body engaged
as only children and animals can be.

We write to know what we're thinking
someone once said, but I don't know why
this poem came to me, now. Sometimes
there are things I'd rather not know.
It's enough that there was a sunset
in New Mexico one night,
and a woman standing by a river,
watching two horses,
caught, as always,
between shadow and light.

—SHARON AUBERLE, SISTER BAY, WI

The Hours

Name it the hour
you saw the hummingbird—
that quick green dart—
drink from the precise
line of holes the sapsucker drilled
into the birch tree.
Name it the hour you held a staring contest
with a cat-eyed snapping turtle, spoke your
soliloquy to a deer skull, dozed
in the fragrance of sweet fern.

Kneel close
to the bright red sundew.
See the glow of a dozen sunsets
in the tiny beads that lure
its dinner home.

It is not 10 in the morning.
It is not 6:45 in the evening.
It is the hour you do nothing
but sip cool mint tea, watch
night slip its fingers
into the evening sky.

—STEVE TOMASKO, MIDDLETON, WI

If I Get Someday

If I get someday
and I do
do get someday
and any number
of gorgeousing
gorgeousful days,
then I'll sing me a summer
time feast of dimension,
tend throbs of much blissing,
and I'll hold with it then
and stay round
round the march wheel
and play past the kenning
and say-o the good things
that should all be said.

—JEAN BIEGUN, TWO RIVERS, WI

Horizon of Feet

"I hate dancers. Well, I don't really hate them, but they're not musicians. They just count beats, oblivious to the music. They wouldn't know a theme if it bit them. They're arithmetician-athletes."

We're sitting, cooling off, after racquetball, and I've asked the principal flutist of the New York City Ballet Orchestra, Paul Dunkel, to solo in words, to talk about his work.

"Musicians are there to serve the music, not vice-versa, as with dancers. Think of us as the composer's lawyers, and our job's to put forward for our client the best possible case.

"But playing for dancers we're little more than drummers in a circus, just there to highlight with sound the dog whose trick it is to run and jump through a flaming hoop: drumroll, rimshot.

"Likewise, some composers think they're tailors, writing to order. They make the music fit the dancing. Four extra steps? Then add two bars. I call that music-as-Armani-suit.

"The truth is dancers and musicians live in two different worlds. They're like passengers and pilots on an airplane, and the conductor's the steward who talks to them both and connects the dots.

"But Balanchine combined those two worlds with ease. Russian-trained dancers learn music, and Mr. B. played both viola and piano, would get ideas at the keyboard for his choreography.

"My girlfriend used to dance, and when we go to dance performances we disagree on everything. She'll say the music's too slow, I'll say the dancers are too fast; I see

"with my ears, she hears with her eyes. Or I'll say a female dancer's too thin, and she'll say not. But one thing we agree on: in his heyday, Edward Vilella was just right; that is, hot.

"A guy's guy. Tough. I never heard Eddie whine. He boxed—and learned fast footwork in the ring. Was always revved, a Harley-Davidson. Just did his work; let his feet do the talking."

"Vilella could be one of Whitman's roughs," I say, and imagine the poet's ghost, eyes wide, front row, watching the dancer do his stuff while partnering Patricia McBride in *Rubies*.

"Walt leaned and loafed, didn't he? Like the faun. In fact, we're rehearsing *Afternoon* today. Setting the tempo's the catch. The dancers want one, the musicians want another. They'll win, we'll play.

"Speaking of time..." He stands to check the clock. "Those games were long. I'm late. And outta here." He waves, heads down the hall, then stops, turns back and adds a coda before he disappears:

"I'm titling my memoir *Dancing On My Head*. That sums up playing for dancers in the pit. Once, I didn't recognize a dancer who said she knew me. I told her, 'Let me see your feet.'"

—PHILIP DACEY, NEW YORK, NY

Absent-Minded

My watch often disappears and
I look for it in my Cocker Spaniel's mouth.
I look in my clothes closet and examine
the pockets of a dozen suit coats
and a dozen sports jackets before
finding it in a formal black shoe where
I apparently placed it while taking off my tuxedo
after the annual Woodmen's Ball at The Forest Club.
It's traumatic having to worry where everything is.
I figure that someday I'll have a heart attack
while looking for the studs to my formal shirt.

—RICHARD W. MOYER, BERWYN, PA

Food Contests

How many peas can you eat
off a knife without dropping one
in your lap, under the table,
bounced off and into your Great
Aunt Anna's mashed potatoes?

Silent proof, that.
Children should be seen
and not heard.
2 points, Ray.

Anyone Seen Sally?

Jane is a divorced single parent
raising two on Kraft and Oscar Mayer
See Jane Work.
Work Jane, Work!

Dick lives with his partner Tim
and he doesn't tell Mother
See Dick Run.
Run Dick, Run!

Puff contracted feline diabetes
from WalMart kitty chow made in China
See Puff Drink.
Drink Puff, Drink!

Spot got mauled in a dog fight
that won Father two hundred dollars
See Spot Bleed.
Bleed Spot, Bleed!

—JIM LANDWEHR, WAUKESHA, WI

Fifty Years Later

I want to gather my playmates, start with
“red light, green light” or
“seven steps around the house,”
then choose sides for
“capture the flag” setting boundaries as
Weston Avenue, George,
Clark, and Florence Streets.

*Stay out of loony Mr. Lyon's yard,
use the alleys
but don't raid any gardens—
we will be watched
and it's too light out yet.*

Finally we will gather on my front steps for
cherry Kool-Aid and graham crackers,
or a stalk of fresh rhubarb
with a Marathon wax paper sandwich bag
half full of white sugar,
daring one another not to make
the inevitable sour face.

—ELDA LEPAK, HENDERSONVILLE, NC

How many pancakes will beat
your older brother's record
of 18,
even though he was lying.
Did you really eat 21
and then spit up
on the way to school?
Syrup-slimed, grey-taupe glob
in front of Carmody's house.

Rematch on Saturday, John.

Loose-limbed kindergartener,
cousin Danny,
tight checked it
through the morning,
mouthing an oatmeal wad
til naptime,
when it rolled out,
and was thrown out
with napkin and milk carton,
after cookies.

No one contested his win.
No one wanted to.

—MARILYN WINDAU, SHEBOYGAN FALLS, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author & audio

How to Have a Perfect Marriage

Her husband was no worse than an umbrella: useful
in bad weather but ungainly
at cocktail parties.

Or he was her purse: useful for carrying things
but more than once forgotten
when she left the house.

She fell in love with post office police sketches, the minor league mascot
and his oversized foam mustache.
Alexander Hamilton's rumpled face, as she handed him over
to the Marshall's cashier, made her heart rattle
like a pill bottle full of baby teeth.

She tried not to think of her red-faced dentist
or his latexed finger probing her rotten molars.
When pale Mormon boys knocked
on the door, she tuned the radio to the farm report and turned up the volume.

(If she had asked her husband,
he would have said that he was their TV remote: able to take
orders though a few of his buttons
had fallen off from overuse.)

Some days she drove around the mall parking lot, hoping to rear end
a fireman or a tax attorney on his day off, but all she got
was strange looks from teenage girls
who were the human approximation of corn stalks: straight
and silky haired and interchangeable.

One rainy afternoon, her husband had been sleeping
on the couch before dinner, and when she woke him
an imprint of his face was left
in the deep nap of the cushion: the brow and jaw
wider, the expression sulky as a lemon tree in December.

And while someone washed his hands and shuffled
off to the table, she sat there and ran her hand over that face,
gently, until it was gone.

—NICK LANTZ, MADISON, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

Small in This House

She is small
in this house
holds no safe
way out
to make
them give
love finds
no cushion
for her salt
gorged knee
scraped falling
down getting up
looked for life
time keeps
no ones
score one
for the quiet
girl in the back
whose rain
drops silk
poems kiss
trees on
your lips

—ALENA HAIRSTON, OAKLAND, CA

The Cupboard

She wonders if it's wise
to examine it. Should she see
what it's made of after all.

She'd like it to be solid
hardwood, not veneer,
but suspects plywood –

those sheets of soft trees
pressed together hard
to form something rigid

yet breakable
not integral
but composite

synonym for cheap, second
cousin to plastic. That's
what she'd get for looking:

doubts and discontent.
Keep her distance – for now.
Keep that door closed.

—NANCY JESSE, MADISON, WI

Lorine Niedecker's "marriage": Discoveries

by Sarah Busse

marriage

Consider at the outset:
to be thin for thought
or thick cream blossomy

Ah your face—
but it's whether
you can keep me warm

Sweet Life, My Love,
he said, didn't you ever
know this delicacy?
the marrow blown out
of the bone?

All things are better
flavored with bacon
And be not afraid
to pour wine over cabbage

Ruskin found wild strawberries
and they were a consolation
poor man, whose diaries
are grey with instances
of Rose

—LORINE NIEDECKER,
FORT ATKINSON, WI

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textual differences. This one she gave not to a fellow poet, but to her step-daughter Julie Schoessow as a birthday gift. And the very last poem in this fourth book is "marriage," a curious conglomerate of stanzas we recognize.

What does this small poem tell us, with its charged title? (It was unusual for Lorine to title her works at all, and even more rare for such an autobiographical reference to be made.) Is it even fair, given the private nature of such a gift, to draw any larger conclusions about her poetics, her own reading of herself? As a fellow poet, I believe it is. Any time a writer sets her own poems into book form, even as a private gift, it is a charged act. And, given the difficulty she had getting her poems into publication at all during her lifetime, we may well suspect that Niedecker made these gift books as a record of what she wanted to find its way to the world eventually. There is evidence

Jenny Penberthy, in her comprehensive *Lorine Niedecker: Collected Works*, notes that in 1964, Lorine Niedecker made three small, handmade books. One she gave to her old friend, Louis Zukofsky, one to her publisher, Jonathan Williams, and one she gave to fellow poet Cid Corman. As Penberthy makes clear, all of these books were similar in their contents, but not identical. Niedecker had a habit of making various types of books for friends and family. She was having trouble getting her poems published to a broader audience, and we may imagine that making these poetry books took at least some of the internal pressure off.

Digging around in the archives at the Hoard Museum in Fort Atkinson earlier this year, I discovered a fourth handmade book from 1964, similar in size and shape to the others, but with many

that Lorine held some faint hope that at least one person in her husband Al's family would help steer Lorine's poetry into the world after Lorine's death. In Lisa Pater Faranda's *"Between Your House and Mine": The Letters of Lorine Niedecker to Cid Corman*, we find a letter dated March 7, 1968, in which she asks Corman for advice regarding copyright law. She ends with a postscript which states:

I can't vouch for Al staying interested in my literary work to the extent of selling it after I'm gone, and not certainly Al's children with possible exception of one.

A gift to Al's daughter Julie was not necessarily meant to be kept hidden away forever.

If we accept that we may view these books not just as personal gifts, but also as documents to be studied that may well yield insights, what then do we find here, with "marriage"? First of all, this poem places itself, by virtue of its title, next to Niedecker's more famous poem, "I married." This latter has often been cited as proof that Niedecker had serious doubts about her own marriage, that there were tensions in her late marriage to Al Millen which she perhaps could not or would not give voice to in real life, and could only vent into poetry. But what does she say here of marriage? Let us move point by point through the poem.

To start, she "considers" options: to be "thin for thought," and lead the ascetic life of a philosopher (which arguably she had been, for a number of years), or "thick cream blossomy," an evocative phrase that combines the largesse of the kitchen with the fecund outdoor world. She sets up as a choice to embrace the sensual, sensory world, or to turn away from it. This is a choice every writer faces to some degree. For many years, we know Niedecker purposely remained "thin for thought."

With the second stanza, a sudden interruption: "Ah your face—" but then the poem draws back from this attraction to consider "whether / you can keep me warm." We move from a momentary (perhaps surprising) flare of physical attraction to the longer term care and consideration involved in commitment.

In the third stanza, almost as response to the question in stanza two, we hear "his" voice. Note that in this version of the stanza (which has appeared elsewhere, as will be discussed below), Niedecker added, in line two, the words "he said," perhaps to make clear to the intended reader (Al Millen's daughter, after all) just who was speaking the words, whose was the gift? In this stanza, we see how the man she is considering enriches her life through sharing both knowledge and pleasure. This voice continues in the fourth stanza. We're still talking about food, but "All things are better / flavored with bacon" is also a philosophical position, set against the school of the "thin for thought." Pouring wine over cabbage has almost religious overtones, as a means of blessing even the humblest among us.

Finally, in the surprising fifth stanza, Niedecker shifts the focus

radically. She removes from the couple, and brings in John Ruskin, a Victorian philosopher/poet/critic she was familiar with from her wide reading. As is typical of her work, she focuses not on one of Ruskin's public or artistic efforts, but on a more private, side note, an anecdote: a moment in his diaries when he recorded suddenly coming across wild strawberries on an expedition which had otherwise turned up little. Wild strawberries: sweet, low to the ground, an unlooked-for gift amid disappointment. It is not difficult to see a parallel to her own discovery of late life love. The poem closes with one of Niedecker's nifty double entendres: Rose was the name of Ruskin's beloved. In this poem, it is also simply itself, a warm, soft color which makes the grey (color of boredom, color of age) of a life easier to bear. All in all, this poem travels from the tentative start of a relationship to the full pleasure and acknowledgment of what such a late love may give to us. It is a lovely, evocative poem.

***“marriage” raises questions
for me, as a poet and
reader. In the swamp and
flood of a life, can there be,
ever, one single definitive
version of a poem? Should
there be?***

Readers of Niedecker will recognize that although “marriage” has not been published before in this form, all of these stanzas have been published in various places, including the other three handmade books of 1964. The first, third and fourth stanzas are found always together, as the first poem in each of the three other handmade books. She published these three stanzas in 1965 in *Poetry* magazine, in a set of five poems. It was included in her 1969 collected, *T&G*. The second stanza is published alone, the second poem in the other three handmade books, and then in *North Central* (1968) as part of the loose sequence, “Traces of Living Things.” And the Ruskin stanza is a variant on a poem, “Wild Strawberries,” which is included as the last poem in each of the other handmade books, and then printed in *Origin* in July 1966. “Wild Strawberries” was never collected in book form until the 2002 *Collected*, edited by Penberthy.

One has to be careful about making big statements on the evidence of just one poem. Certainly, in creating this new poem, Niedecker seems to be acutely sensitive to her intended audience: in this case, to the grown daughter of her (new) husband.

A second example of this sort of sensitivity to audience may surface in 1966. In Jenny Penberthy's essay, “Writing Lake Superior” (published in *Radical Vernacular: Lorine Niedecker and the Poetics of Place*), writing on the generation and revision of Niedecker's long poem, “Lake Superior,” Penberthy includes a footnote:

[Niedecker's] 1966 Christmas card to the Neros includes an excerpt “from Circle Tour.” Strange that she should use “Circle Tour” when she had revised it in October. (78)

Why would a poet include an earlier version if there was a later revision already finished?

“Circle Tour,” an early version of what became “Lake Superior,” has been lost except for a brief excerpt. But apparently, it was written as one long, uninterrupted narrative of her trip with Al around Lake Superior. Later revisions chopped the poem into a numbered sequence and, in Penberthy's words, “obscure[d] the contemporary travelers” (71). Penberthy notes that even the title, “Circle Tour,” “lodge[s] the poem with the human circumnavigators” (71). It is not hard to imagine that perhaps Niedecker felt for a Christmas letter, the earlier draft would stand as a sort of “what we've been up to this year” update. Was it more appropriate to that particular audience of one than a later, choppier and abstracted version might be? Once again, here, as with “marriage,” we find Niedecker aware of and responsive to the intimacy of a gift relationship. She intended poems she sent to friends, and these handmade books, as gifts. Perhaps she was willing to present various versions of her poems in light of their recipients, and the context in which the poem was placed?

Whatever her reason or motivation, Niedecker seems to have been willing to reimagine her poems. As Rachel Blau DuPlessis writes in her essay, “Lorine Niedecker, the Anonymous: Gender, Class, Genre, and Resistances”:

In [Niedecker's] textual practices, she carried poems forward from volume to volume, presenting them repeatedly in different contexts, not always seeking newness, but multiple tellings...She also (though more rarely) offered different versions of some poems when she presented them in print form. These tactics are similar to multiple transmissions of an oral tradition, but play havoc with the print institution of copy text and the authorial ego-frame of “final intentions” in ways that do not (unfortunately) lead to clarity in her collected works. (Penberthy 119)

“marriage” raises questions for me, as a poet and reader. In the swamp and flood of a life, can there be, ever, one single definitive version of a poem? Should there be? Do poems write themselves linearly? What narratives do we construct as readers? And how are these questions clouded, if poet and/or reader take into account an intended audience? In a letter to Corman on May 3, 1967, Niedecker writes, “Poems are for one person to another, spoken thus, or read silently...” In the first place, “marriage” seems to have been intended for Julie, a gift. Now, as her readers, we become each that “one.” That such a characteristically brief, graceful poem may, like a pebble dropped into a pool, ripple out in many directions and for a distance, seems to me a good thing. It is a privilege to include it in the pages of *Verse Wisconsin* 

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An Amatory Birder's Guide to the Bower

It is the awful possibility of beauty's utility
that's crouched you low in the thicket of this jungle,
virile but dull lover.

Slip forward like a snake,
molting as you go the ambivalence you hold
towards foreign gardens.

Until you're nose-close.

At the mossy threshold of an exquisite room
no bigger than your head, trim and safe, made of rustic scraps—
twigs, grass, broken, monsoon-smoothed glass.

Not just a nest. A diorama of nature's intimate tunings.
Painted with chewed berries and charcoal. Ornamented
with feathers and shells, the cam of a lighter,
a frayed but blossoming telephone wire. A wonder, a shelter,
a boudoir fit for the finest hen. Assembled alone
and with loneliness's press

by a bird of plain plumage,
drab as you'll see in such an exotic place
with a pigeon's build and a voice no more melodic
than a novice on the piccolo.

If it's not twilight, the Bower's
not bowered yet, but off marauding the temples
of rival cocks. So don't hesitate to peep. Sly now
as Casanova's ghost, give a moan,
a low, lasting note of diagrammable seduction.
Peer into that cracked and grey glass eye
tacked to a wall, a bauble of fortune.

Art takes labor as lover.

—ERIK TSCHEKUNOW, SHEBOYGAN, WI

visit VW Online for audio by this author

Solitary We Go

No, it's not by two,
halting gait from foot surgery
my pace not hers.

As I continue this marsh trek,
the gap extends, puzzling
how each goes it alone.

—MICHAEL BELONGIE, BEAVER DAM, WI

Heaven songs

You have witnessed moments
when the red mouths of pomegranates
opened up their constellations of seeds
and ushered in a wind
gentle like the faint touch of a butterfly.
Just like this you are filling me with all of you,
doing to me what spring does
with the cherry trees.

—ORITSEGBEMI EMMANUEL JAKPA, WATERFORD, IRELAND

Letter to Lorine

Lorine your little
house
no wonder
you wrote
short

no more than tiny
paper
scraps
fit
pocket

house as Rock
rose—
rock
paper
scissors

floods of words
to pocket
trickles
scissors cut
paper

paper covered
Rock
paper won—
words rowed
out

—GEORGIA RESSMEYER, SHEBOYGAN, WI

After Surgery

These repairs are tricky
with a blowtorch and radiated heat
some chains slip out of gear. I repeat
ceremonial entrances and exits
on gurney wheels.

At home, I steer with hesitation,
deliberate each turn. Wonder if
I should back up, look in the mirror.
I move like a forklift.

I hold my breasts like headlights
to navigate our bed,
hope my assembled parts
remember what to do.

I imagine you receding
in the dark like a vehicle that struck
a curb, fled the accident or any pursuit.

Purple patterns like radial tires
follow my stomach up
labors with a rhythm to work,
to reach the puckered finish-line.

—BETH ELLEN JACK, HUNTINGTON BEACH, CA

How I Would Paint Love

We sit on the steps of the hospital;
it's three a.m. and no one else is in sight.
We joke about Yamaha Kawasaki, if it's a boy.
Stephanie if a girl. Our heads are close in concentration.
There is time between the flow of waters and
the hours to come of contractions.

A week before, the air at three a.m. was nowhere this peaceful;
we were in the apartment of an aging hooker wearing
a gold lame swimsuit. You were drunk to your short hairs,
and I took you home like you were a teenager
who had just been caught shoplifting.

The small red mark that still shows on your temple
is from the missile I made of my wedding ring,
which is back on my finger, on the hand you hold so tenderly.
This first small crack in our marriage—I knew even then
we wouldn't last, but tonight I was willing
to trade my tomorrows for one more day of you
sober and in love with me.

—JACKIE LANGETIEG, VERONA, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

In Retrospect

Chocolate Decadence with Vanilla Icing

He called them cream puff swans on chocolate seas
When first he wooed and wowed them to his bed.
Two cherry cheesecakes cheery, creamy—jeez,
His pecan tarts just gobbled all he said.
But culinary metaphors unique
As his should best be saved for special treats.
Like failed meringue that will not hold its peaks,
Two two-timed women seldom remain sweet.
Especially since these ladies were best friends
And always shared what ardent lovers said.
So once found out, he could not make amends
Since both his sweetie pies wished he was dead.
Then burning cognac of flambé did bode
That just desserts aren't served up a la mode.

—JOAN WIESE JOHANNES, PORT EDWARDS, WI

After a lifetime
of bitten tongues
and hickeyed necks
stealing bases
and running home
wet kissing
and dry humping
feeling up
and going down
getting laid
and getting screwed
coming
and going,
it's so nice
to just hold hands.

—KATHIE GORGIO, WAUKESHA, WI

Games of Love

What would I wear if I were sad? he asks.
Coming to breakfast for instance, with my loss still fresh?
You, gone, inexplicably, and the silence?

Another challenge. I didn't know
that lepidopterists played games.
No Nabokov, he—
a manic, willowy boy,
already bent from peering.
I'd been captivated
by his intensity
his green-moss eyes.

He quizzes me on genus and species;
we vacation with nets,
to fields and marshy places, ripe
and buzzing with concerts of black flies,
mosquitos, leopard frogs.

An important personage... he prompts,
crouching before the pulsing wings.
Monarch, I say triumphantly,
Danaus plexippus.
No! Viceroy, he crows, triumphant.
See the lateral black line?

Men with no passions leave me yawning,
but sometimes I'd prefer another bent—
Civil War relics, perhaps,
or medieval lute. Well, this for that.
I play for pay.
Oh, you're my Spicebush swallowtail
he murmurs at my ear

A Mourning cloak! I say.

—ALICE D'ALESSIO, MIDDLETON, WI
visit VW Online for audio by this author

Ouranos falls in love

so what if her waist-to-hip ratio is not the right number?
her inner balance outweighs her outer asymmetry
her heart is iron strong
and she is filled with passionate fire
her mass attracts me, gives me weight
her geography is majestic
and no map can capture all she really is

—ERIK RICHARDSON, MILWAUKEE, WI

About an Apple

I call home about an apple
and we are green together,
we are bold strokes of paint,
we are both black coffee.

Buttery croissants spiral into form,
symbolize what might be mistaken
in the foreground of the mild country
for a cornucopial moon,
swaddling nutrition, mineralizing,
browning slowly in stone ovens.

Thick claws click on stone tiles
as down the hallway comes pawing
a golden Irish bear —
he must smell the pastries.
Embraced in a big bear hug this beast
and I mold into a single enigma,
become one massive vagrant.

Espresso whistles, Barista calls,
the cafés are packed and Cézanne,
in his colorful language,
he says to me — See?

I take a seat beside the gentleman
in a tall top hat,
feather lapel tucked beneath a heavy
wool trench coat and I,
as I've grown accustomed,
insist that my pain
be chocolate dipped.

—JIM DAVIS, NORTHFIELD, IL

Poetry about Work from *VW Online*

visit versewisconsin.org for more
Work poems

Boxcars in Florida

Just seventeen, cockstrong,
Ready for anything, or so I thought.
'Til my aunt's boyfriend hired me to
Unload Florida boxcars.
I never knew, could never forget,
The longest days of my life,
The cruelest exhaustion in the world,
Collapsing in bed, barely able to
Stay awake through supper, while
That fat, middle-aged, cigar-smoking
Sicilian outworked me all day,
And danced all night.

—HARLAN RICHARDS, OREGON, WI

The Problem with School

My son's friend likes Shakespeare
but hates school. Emmett's a roughneck,
a red neck, a trampoline-jumping,
video-game-thumping player.
He's read *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.
Thinks they're cool. But damnéd
Ds adorn his report card
like spells on the breath of witches
or stubborn spots on a lady's hands.
So when their teacher assigns a paper
to discuss a book
the students have never read,
Emmett picks *Hamlet*.
"But you already read that,"
my son with his ethics in tow
and clever 4.0 says.
"I know," Emmett says, his brilliant
method burning through the mask
of his matter-of-fact madness.
"And she'd never believe it."

—JULIE L. MOORE, CEDARVILLE, OH

At the Class Reunion, I Catch a Glimpse of My Father

Rocks and dirt spraying like fireworks, Alvin says.
That was the first time I met your dad,
when he blasted out a new ditch on our farm.
I was still in grade school out in Catawba –
the early fifties. Bulldozers
were big and clumsy then,
built for roadwork. So he didn't hire one.
Instead they dug holes,
packed them full of fertilizer,
poured in diesel fuel, and set them
off with a stick of dynamite.
We always had dynamite on the farm
for stumps and clearing fields.
But your dad was the one
who knew to use that combination.
I was about ten. I thought
that was really something –
dirt and rocks exploding in the air.

—SUE CHENETTE, TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA

The Ritual of Supper

Tonight you are preparing baked chicken and potatoes,
boiled corn, cheap merlot.
I watch the way you fix your eyes on the butcher knife,
the séance of the seasonings.
If I've never told you, you always lay the salt down first,
then the pepper, then the special stuff.
We never talk as you're doing this,
I never ask about your day in a claustrophobic office,
you never wonder if I'd gotten off my ass.
This is just how it is
each evening I'm convinced we'll die this way.
After the potatoes are sliced,
everything goes into the oven,
you walk to the bedroom to fish tomorrow's outfit,
I follow you and finish a beer.
We start to talk as you're ironing,
about our nieces and nephews, weekend dinner plans.
We never mention the recent affair
or wet dream you had last night.
The walls know when the food is complete,
you pull things out, poke and prod, slice and taste.
As you prepare our plates you ask
do you need some more,
and each evening we age, stuff our faces,
point fingers at the folks next door.

—DERRICK HARRIELL, MILWAUKEE, WI

The Indexer

This rare bird must while being intelligent, levelheaded, patient, accurate, and analytical work at top speed to meet an almost impossible deadline.-- Chicago Manual of Style, 13th ed.

The last shall be first is not irrelevant, as she anticipates readers' questions, oblique entrances into text, references sought as pages blur between thumb and index finger, like trees on a highway when she worried destination as a child in her father's car. Streets and cities and names for melancholia – located, understood. A papyrus scroll might be unrolled for ages without chapters, or headings. To be lost is common, but not inevitable. Praise the printing press, its page and leaf and line numbers. Praise the system that allows order: not a concordance, but a cosmography; how the solitary indexer elides impediments, travels between alphabetical corridors in sublime contentment.

—MARILYN ANNUCCI, MADISON, WI

Lyle

Winter road salt specks my windshield with stars. Old Lyle wipes the glass with a rag, breathing on it here and there for moistening. This is the only full service station left in town. Lyle rubs harder to get the last streaks. "Is that any better?" Though the glass is now completely clear, Lyle smiles at me through stars.

—THOMAS R. SMITH, RIVER FALLS, WI

The Assumption

He walks on frozen water, a hooded figure navigating the snow-rutted ramp to the lake. Head bowed, shoulders hunched against the unforgiving wind, he grips a bucket in one gloved hand, metal box in the other.

His heavy boots crunch the snow-covered ice as he joins the circle of parka-covered forms kneeling around a black hole, huddling together like the homeless around a fire.

I watch, safe in my perch above the ramp, then continue taking photos of the lighthouse at dawn. Soon the fisherman crosses the ice once more, trudges over the snowy ruts, up the icy ramp toward his truck.

Cold hobby you've chosen,
I remark. Ma'am, he says
I do this for my living.

—JANE KOCMOUD, SHEBOYGAN, WI

The Five-Horse Purr of Sudden Traffic Death

A motorcycle fatality was my first call. Despite his face bruised purple, he looked a lot like my dad.

I was turning pretty green, (they kept assigning me busy work) especially the CPR part. I'd never seen it done "for real" before.

His damned eyeglasses brought it all home.

Anyway, we had two other fatalities that summer with the only consistency being the sound of our scene lights run off a Honda generator.

—CALEB WHITNEY, BAILEYS HARBOR, WI

Fish Fry and Beer

I walk into Brick's
through swinging doors,
sit at the bar and order the fish fry and a beer.
An old man asks the bartender
if "Always On My Mind" is on the jukebox.
She isn't sure.

He asks in a heavy Wisconsin accent,
nasal and weathered, like you.

You laughed
as your truck bumped up
and down 41
on the way to Shawano lake, two years ago,
a few weeks after you called
to tell me about your cancer.

You told me stories,
some new, some not,
as Willie Nelson's vocals
shook softly from the tapedeck,

about your uncle
who made prize violins,
about how you always felt
at home on a farm, though
you spent most of your life
working in that paper mill,
slowly losing your hearing,

about how you never
took driver's ed.
Then you stepped on the gas. Soda spilled
onto our Muskie-shaped cupholders
as we drove down a tickle-belly hill
and laughed some more.

Out on the lake
we broke six circles in the ice,
set up four tip-ups and a shanty.
The auger-made holes sparkled
like the lining inside old Folgers cans.

No fish flickered.
We took turns sipping weak coffee
from a Packers thermos and watched
the waxworms wriggle in the water.

You pricked your thumb on a hook and said,
"a cut like this won't kill me,
although, a bigger one probably would,"
a wink masking a frown.

Six months after you've gone,
I sit in our hometown bar,
the red-headed stranger singing
through the speakers:
little things I should have said and done
I just never took the time...

I turn to the old man,
hand him some quarters, and ask
if he'll play it again.

—JOEY GOODALL, BELLINGHAM, WA

Dad

You'd come in from work
every day smelling of Brut,
or sweat and hay.

Weekends you'd take me hiking
and laugh with me
as I stomped on puffball mushrooms
and romped around in leaves.

It wasn't always that way.
Like the time I called you a word
I heard in a movie
without knowing the meaning,

you snapped and hit my face.
By the time I was sixteen
we'd ceased to relate

except by blood.
Until one day when I went rummaging
through your records,
searching for The Stones,

found an unmarked cassette
and slid it in the deck.
My finger pressed the cold metal arrow
not knowing what to expect.

When from those 1970s speakers, I heard
a young you singing Hank Williams
broken-heartedly off-key.

—JOEY GOODALL, BELLINGHAM, WA

Green Peas

It wasn't the dreaded
rutabaga. It was the small
green pea. Forced to eat until the
plate was clean I found new homes
for those green globes—under napkins
on table legs, in plants, between floor
boards. Dad lived lean years—peas
and potatoes with a dash of
squirrel. My childhood
misery peased into
poetry.

—MARY ELLEN LETARTE, LUNENBURG, MA
visit VW Online for audio by this author

Fathers We Find

For Charles P. Ries

We're cleaning out Mom's garage,
dismantling the pyramid of junk
that used to cushion Dad's big fists.
We might be done by fall, Dave jokes
as we haul away a dead snow blower
and a couple of broken ladders in his pickup.
As a kid he used to ride all summer
with our uncle Dale, a long-haul trucker.

We fire up the grill when we get back.
Mom makes cheesy noodle stuff. Dave shows off
some chrome rims he bought for his '82 Mustang.
Neither of us had kids. I think about
a younger writer I've been helping lately.
Dave hands me a beer. We're lucky to have this,
having so much and nothing in common,
staring at the burgers as they briefly catch on fire.

—MIKE KRIESEL, ANIWA, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

Where My Father's Pants Go, He Goes

When I drape your pants
over an easy chair,
a key chain from Gene's
Gentlemen's Club falls
from one of the pockets.
Where did you get this?
How should I know?
The other night you rode
in a limousine with the men
from the assisted living wing
to see an exotic dancers' stage
and floor show, each of you
allowed to tuck a twenty
into the waistband of a young
thing's skimpy panties,
good heart medicine, it's
been said. I don't remember
that, you say, innocent
as pants draped over a chair.
They were naked, I tell you,
as the legs that put on your pants.
Well, I'll be damned, you say,
slipping the key chain
into your bedside stand.

—RICHARD ROE, MIDDLETON, WI

Birthday Card for Niece

Shopping for a card
A little on the simple side
But hopefully
Will open up and make one smile
If miles and miles away
In a pink-colored envelope
Addressed to a winter flower
A card a little late in the mailbox
For this blooming day.

—DANNY P. BARBARE, GREENVILLE, SC

As a Pallbearer at My Own Funeral

I can't contain my excitement at being there,
say I'm only skipping to keep in step,

nearly scuff the heel of my uncle's wingtip.
His neck hairs bristle with mechanical sorrow.

My canary yellow suit goes over
like a canary yellow suit at a funeral.

Mom and Dad hold hands as though I'd
never been born. The body is all wrong,

I want to tell them, jaws wired too tight
to let worms in and out, eyes pasted shut

as though the coroner wants me to walk
blind into the traffic of the afterworld.

The black procession winds away behind me,
a heavy metal star's vision of heaven,

and I remember amusement parks, long
for cotton candy, The Big Wheel, nausea.

Graveside, I kill time smoking with a cousin.
The shadows of the living lean towards noon.

To my ex in tears I whisper, "I understand
it was your meatloaf finally sent him over."

She bawls until her eyes bulge, Pekingese.
If I had any guts I'd interrupt

the hymnal, break into a standards medley:
I'm Thru With Love; Look for the Silver Lining;

Embraceable You. But this is not a time
to swing. The diggers are ready to fill me in.

—CHRISTIAN NAGLE, TOKYO, JAPAN

Report

He died walking from his office
to the waiting town car, sent
to take him to the airport
to meet a potential client I can't
remember the name of now,
to sign an important deal.
I think the entire department came
to his wake. Remembering him
for his wacky sense of humor,
his skillful mentoring of the new staff,
his generosity. Always sharing
unused season tickets to the Yankees,
the Opera, Broadway shows.
Some wondered aloud how we'd all
manage without him.

There was no mention of his passing in
the Annual Shareholders Report.

—ELIZABETH CLEARY, HAMDEN, CT
visit VW Online for more by this author

Beachcomber

He tries to write this, add his contribution to letters not via the Great American Novel but by wrestling with that unwanted, mostly unloved illegitimate child of dubious parentage: the prose poem. Unfortunately neither poetry or prose freefalls from his pen, forever poised above the page. The cast iron laden with passengers jumbo jet won't fly, perhaps because he's tangled in navigational intent, grounded by global position, more so than any actual encroaching fog.

The rag bond runway will never be long or white enough, the ink all too real and black to afford actual lift off. Thoughts which should flutter overhead, maybe ride the breezes uneasily as gossamer gulls tumble instead, plummet soundlessly as driftwood washed up on a forgotten shore, somewhere far down the coast.

And those occasional pebbles that shimmer, catch the granite glint of his eye are less polished by a sloshing, frothy, hungry surf always gnawing with the teeth of high tide than a mere ouch! beneath anyone else's soul.

—G. A. SCHEINOH, EDEN, WI

Catch of the Day

Bakeries are
bakeries all over
the world. The one
in Kewaunee isn't
much different than
that in the Czech Village,
three hundred miles
due southwest.
Sykora's (there) has
a couple cheap,
half the population's
planted their butt
on them, plastic Laundromat
chairs. This combination
bakery/deli settles
for a picnic table
and benches, yet it's
all the same; some place
to eat kolaches, some place
to sit and watch
the planet
go by, even here
in the historic
district, if
a tourist trap
fishing town,
all fished out
but still trolling—
for dollars,
can have
a history,
other than
too many flies,
too few waves
and the always
present stench
of dead
trout.

—G. A. SCHEINOHAN, EDEN, WI

Odessa

My father promises me
that we'll leave our village
for Odessa
one day.
He says we'll
delight in
chocolate shoppes on
baroque squares
while stately carriages
clatter by on sun-drenched
cobblestones.
We'll stroll past
icon-laden
burnt-brown churches
topped by cerulean blue
onion-domes.
The harbor on the inland sea,
filled with tall-masted frigates,
will lure us
like the Sirens.
I will rise above the sails
and look back on distant fields
flowing with
wheat, sunflowers
and barley.
I still believe him.

—DAVID BLACKKEY, LA CROSSE, WI

Planetary Buzz 28.

the caretaker dozed
feeling the calm
electric light that
buzzed overhead.
in other rooms
the sound of canes
tapped along marble floors.
the dozing stopped
when flies lifted
dust near a burnt
biscuit that sat atop
a lacquered
edwardian desk.
outside, an autumn wind
swept leaves into
gutters & the neon
sign BOGardus FUNeral
PARlor just blinked the
first three letters
of each word.

—GUY R. BEINING, GREAT BARRINGTON, MA

Poetry in Prison

by Laurel Bastian

We offer to others, to our community, the best of ourselves. Experientially, what I have to offer to mine is a background in peace studies and mediation, a background in victim advocacy, and an MFA in poetry and a background teaching. Philosophically what I have to offer is the belief that the vast majority of people, given the space to be their best selves, will rise to that occasion (and the belief that the converse is also true). The combination of these experiences and beliefs is what drove me to run a creative writing class in a men's prison.

This essay is not about prisons or the individuals housed there. It is about a group of writers. I want to tell you everything that moves me about these writers, some of whom I have seen nearly every week

Visiting Privileges

I visit my daughter
for thirty minutes
every week
for seventeen weeks.
She sits across the steel table,
all ten earrings
gone.
Says she's fine,
didn't know women could snore.
Says she'll never eat bologna again,
ever.
She gets out for school,
otherwise draws. Today
she gives me a picture
of psychedelic rectangles, asks
for a long-sleeved t-shirt.
It's a cold spring, she says,
and remember,
we can only wear white.
She wants a picture of the cats
and more crayons.
Pens aren't allowed.
I have the pages she needed
from her algebra book, copied,
because she can't have a hard-covered book.
Slipping a poem in,
I slide these things across the table,
catch her hand
for a second
when the officers aren't looking.

—JEANIE TOMASKO, MIDDLETON, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

for the past two years. Because I know them as fellow creative minds and human beings, I want to tell you their full names and include their work, which always invigorates me and often stuns me with its insight. I want to include their experience of the class and of the writing life in their own words. But this is not possible. The prison does not allow full names to be used in conjunction with its programs and monitors material carefully. Much of that is understandable: seeing the men's full names and work would likely mean something very different to me or potentially you than it would to anyone who might have been

a victim of the crimes they're serving time for. Even writing about my own experience without naming the men, or the institution, is slightly risky, because I have not asked anyone for permission, and I am only able to continue doing what I do there with the prison's permission. And yet I, like most writers, do not want to run my words by censors, grateful though I may be that the administrators let me in. As a writer on the outside, I have the freedom to take that risk.

Part of me wishes to explain, for those not familiar with the prison population in the US or this state, a bit about the numbers of people in the system, the racial disparities, and the culture outside of prison (created by law-abiding and law-breaking citizens alike) that keeps the numbers inside high and the disparities wide. Part of me wishes to talk about the individuals—and there are many—who have worked for decades in social justice to improve the health of those who are behind bars, to support them in being healthier citizens after release, and to support their families. This is not my area of expertise and there are many organizations, websites, books, and personal stories that serve as important resources for this information. Yet there is no way of describing the group of writers themselves without giving a very brief background of the system they write in.

The United States currently has the highest reported rate of incarcerated people per capita of any country in the world. In January 2010, according to the PEW Center on the States, 23,112 people were serving time in Wisconsin state prisons. According to Department of Corrections statistics, for nonviolent offenses in Wisconsin, African Americans are imprisoned at thirty-seven times the rate of Whites and (according to UW-Madison's Dr. Pam Oliver) about 12% of black male Wisconsin residents in their twenties are currently incarcerated. Regardless of where any of us are on the political spectrum, these numbers (these numbers which stand for people and do not quantify how this impacts families, economies and communities) are deeply disturbing.

In an attempt to mitigate the negative impacts of incarceration, there are wonderful, volunteer-based programs that address inmate needs (with nonprofits like Madison's Community Connections). There are, however, many needs that are not met due to lack of funding. There are also needs that are not met because many of us in the electorate don't believe that people who have gotten caught in illegal, sometimes violent, acts deserve anything above the barest minimum, regardless of whether that means they'll return to our shared communities feeling less human, and with fewer internal resources, than when they left.

The weekly creative writing class I've taught for the past two years aimed to address the need for creative community and increased literacy. The class was, at one point, university affiliated (though it's not at the moment), and many people's energy went into its creation, from the then-PhD student who started the initiative five years ago, to all of the wonderful writers who have taken time to visit and even to co-teach, to the prison administration and officers who allow the group to meet. But most important in the creation of the class and its longevity is the energy of the hundreds of men who have brought

in their work and perspective. Some come only for a couple of weeks before being released or sent elsewhere. Two writers have been there every week since my first day. One of those writers is also a prolific musician and has been in prison longer than I've been alive. The other, a sterling poet, is serving a sentence twice as long as the age he was when he went in. Many of those who have come through the class have served a decade or more. But no matter the length of their stay, all are welcome to participate, whether they want to check it out for ten minutes, come every other week, or stay for the long haul.

Everyone is also welcome in terms of writing capacity and the genres they have experience in. Some of the men have never written creatively before, some struggle with literacy, some have been writers for most of their lives; some identify more as rappers, spoken word poets, musicians, or genre writers and some as "page" poets or fiction authors. The only creative censor in terms of the material that participants bring is this: we respect the class by bringing our best self and work to it, and if we have an "ism" in that work, or something else that a reader could find highly offensive, we'd better be ready to be challenged about the necessity of using it. The main exhortation is to stretch ourselves. To know our strengths and work outside of them. To surprise ourselves and others. We do.

As all writers know, we stretch ourselves most and write best when we're reading. So every week we focus on different writers and different writing styles. This has been a great exploration of what's out there for me as well, since two years of finding relevant but varied material for one class that doesn't take a break or get all new students keeps me on a continuous search. We've read literally hundreds of authors together. A sampler of those authors: Jean Toomer, Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Shakespeare, Hart Crane, Saul Williams, Jessica Care Moore, Willie Perdomo, Bashi, Lorca, Dickinson, the Beats, Imagists, Romantics, Confessionalists, and dozens of local and regional poets. We've taken a "world tour" where the men tell me what country they'd like to go to, I put together a brief history of the country, and we read some of that country's most celebrated authors. We have themed classes: fatherhood, death, love, the divine, sports, nature, hometowns, music. We tackle form poetry and make up forms of our own. Each week I give a writing prompt they can use as fodder for the next class's work, and in between classes many of the men share their work with their peers.

But the thing I appreciate most about the class and the writers is not actually the writing, which is widely varied and truly good. What I appreciate most is how they interact with each other, and with me. And perhaps this is where I am different from other creative writing instructors who teach in correctional facilities. In some ways, I could care less about craft. I care because they care; I care because it's another tool to go deeper into creativity. But more than the writing itself I value the opportunity for conversation and self-exploration that comes from their writing. On multiple occasions students have said the class is the one place they can be themselves and not put up a front. They can talk about what it means to be away from family and to have a hard history. They can talk about love and fear and favorite childhood foods and the downside of street life. They can talk about

responsibility. What they say is supported by their peers. At these points, I am irrelevant. I exist to hold the space they need to reach the places they're willing to go. And they are brave in this.

While I say I appreciate their interactions most, I have a responsibility to keep pieces of myself hidden while I am there. Besides the fact that I'm a woman in a male space and the fact that there's an unavoidable power differential (I, after all, can leave), I'm not supposed to become close with inmates. The administration sees any kind of personal sharing as "fraternization." I respect this boundary. I laugh a lot in class and get visibly sad too, but both of those are in response to their writing, not from sharing my own stories.

But most important in the creation of the class and its longevity is the energy of the hundreds of men who have brought in their work and perspective.

There has only been one time where I shared an emotional part of myself in the group. It was after a class where the phrase "keeping it real" was repeated a good deal, and I proposed that the key to being real and fearless in writing was not bravado but vulnerability. I encouraged them to bring something to the next class that challenged their comfort level, and I did as well. In reading my work during the next class, my voice broke and I found myself, for a split second, crying. I laughed and brushed it off, but the silence in the class was thick. After a beat, one man assured me it was OK, then another. One who'd attended for weeks but hadn't brought his own work said he had been afraid to read it, but seeing me put myself out there made him certain he could as well. We went on with the poetry. On our way out that night one of the students stayed behind for a moment. "I just want you to know," he said, "that we see you. We see who you are on the inside. We know you see us on the inside too."

And this is why we write in the first place, no matter where we're writing from. To witness each other. To witness the world we didn't know we were walking through together. To do this is a matter of survival. It is comforting and uncomfortable and funny and backbreaking labor. It is the most natural thing we do as artists. And that's who the men in this class are, whether you see their work in literary journals someday or whether the only people that see their poetry are their family members. They are artists because they need to be more than the number that hangs on the lanyard at their neck, and we need them to be more than this too. They are writers because they claim it for themselves, and they earn it.

As I want to offer the best of myself, so do the men in my class. To give is an act of grace. To accept an offering is an act of grace as well. The more we're able to accept offerings from those whom we forget have something of great value to give, the closer to being whole, as individuals and artists and communities, we come.



Knowing the Body

*You can only tell what you know, what you saw,
what you took part in, or were told*

—Billy Blackwell, Grand Portage Band,
Lake Superior Chippewa, on a radio program

I felt a jolt, heard crunching
metal, cracking plastic, something
muffled. But I did not see

a deer. I did not see its eyes,
whether they looked at me
or toward the woods.

I did not hear its hooves
skid across the pavement
as they were lifted into the air

or the long bones of the back
legs snap. I did not see the white tail
flop on the roadside like a shot bird.

I was probably miles away
when the deer was browsing
in the evening candles of the birch,

or loading my car in the morning
when it stepped between lakeside cedars
to give its long neck down to the water,

as I had seen another do
over the rim of my cup when I was camping.
We had struck a balance then,

watching and drinking,
returning to an earlier time
when we all drank from the same source.

There are moments like that,
held carefully, perfect as we can make them.
And there are accidents

that interrupt the dream we push
through days and nights.

I did not find a body,
and if I had, I knew no ritual, had no gift
to give, no tobacco to scatter,

no knife to use, no machete
like the one I once saw swinging
at the side of a Hmong woman

striding toward another road-kill deer
on a country road at dawn.

—BART GALLE, ST. PAUL, MN
visit VW Online for more by this author

Pine Street

Don't see ghosts, she warned me.
I see her everywhere: the sky
in a milky old photograph,
the iridescent membrane
lining a prayer: Mother of pearl
Tower of ivory
House of gold.

This is the Pine Street house,
the house before everything
changed. These walls collapsed,
a paper heart, what am I
trying to prove? The empress
packed her trunk with answers
no one ever found.

Pale light
complicates the clouds,
how it was, how it seemed,
circumstance
graced to myth and daughters.

I dream home here
—her youngest's only girl—
violet sills, parakeets,
wedding plates
so fragile our hands
shine through them like shadows.

—DIANE UNTERWEGER, NASHOTAH, WI

Partly Remembered

In the bright kitchen, sunlight
slants through windows with yellow
and orange decals pasted for privacy,
hiding the cherry tree the pear tree the
raspberry bushes and the garden peas.
The morning table is ready
with the everyday china and silver
set on the flowered plastic cloth;
a small bowl of jam or marmalade
holds its own silver spoon;
fresh milk is poured in the pewter
pitcher with its straw wrapped
handle and orange juice fills
a tall glass pitcher; fresh
bread is ready for the toaster.
In the corner the typewriter table
holds the heavy black Underwood.
A letter half-typed sits between the rollers,
each key marking an impression on the page.
Next to the Underwood, stands
an eight by ten portrait of my uncle
in his uniform looking out
from the cockpit of his airplane.
The newspaper is open on the table
to maps of Korea.

Grandma has been up for hours.

—MARTHA KAPLAN, MADISON, WI

Woodside in Autumn

acorns
plunk to the ground
asters
sway in the woods
grass
fades under foot
twigs
litter the path
ivy
twists round the bush
paper
yellows

When the woman closes the door she asks, “Will the iris return in time for my daughter’s graduation? The old man sleeps and cold grizzles the air.

—MARY ELLEN LETARTE, LUNENBURG, MA
visit VW Online for audio by this author

Crying Lessons

you mark my words miss richards said
each one of you sometime this year
will run from this classroom in tears
some more than once I guarantee

sixth grade god hate her she was right

in january kathy hollered
holy crap my ass is bleeding
and when we laughed we knew no better
she fled the class into the hallway

in february fred called joan a whore
we heard the choking whimpers through the door

he does or doesn’t like me anymore
you’re way too fat too short to be my friend
the pimples the erection the divorce
his dad her mom ain’t coming home again

in march the wadded kleenex which she stored
to fill her bra inside her blouse popped out
lorraine was mortified she and the pop
corn stopped and dropped and rolled across the floor

one by each by everyone we all succumbed

stubbornly I made it to late april
I had the flu and knew I would throw up
linda sat in front of me her long blonde hair
from time to time would spill across my desk
I couldn’t help it and I thought it best
to vomit down the inside of my sweater
I felt better right away but fatally embarrassed
I made for the door my tears like april rain

with permission from miss richards I had cried
at her funeral decades later how I tried I tried

—BRUCE DETHLEFSEN, WESTFIELD, WI

The Blacker the Berry

and how I came to play, “Little Joe from Chicago”
Born in 1910
skin color is a something fierce
rules your life
transforms your destiny
if you let it
when you are the color of black satin.
It’s not just white folks,
black folks too.
It’s not just grown German men
who chased a little chile
through the neighborhood and hit me hard,
yelling curses at a “blackie.”
It was also my family members who whipped
the darker ones a mite bit harder.
Not just childhood
but adulthood too.
The Jazz pianist Hazel Scott
went further than me
cause she was beige while I was black satin.
Hollywood said beige was more becoming
on the big movie screen.
That pale woman
who played jazz piano some
yea, Marian McPartland
it wasn’t only talent, it was skin color too.
She went further than both of us darkies
cause she lived inside the color, white.
What did I do but change this skin thang
into Jazz. I put all that black satin
unnecessary suffering into my music.
you know the riff on top of the chord,
the feeling behind the melody.
“You’re the only woman that is a real musician,”
Agent Joe Glaser said to me. So I played a song for him
for telling the exaggerated truth.
I played a song, “Little Joe from Chicago.”
I know he was talking through his hat but
hey, compliments are rare for a black satin woman.
That’s all right cause the blacker the berry
the sweeter the m-u-s-i-c.
Can you hear the color of black satin
in my compositions?

—FABU, MADISON, WI

Irish Opera

They are all the same: sad
arias, rollicking fiddles,
non-sequitur dancers stamping

the boards, backs straight
as soldiers, the same missing smiles
on their faces. Mother’s a saint;

Da, a sinner – and some drink
has been taken here and there
in the action; action, if you call it that:

holding the hard mahogany bar
to the floor, a pint and a bold little rebel
at their fingertips. They sing for joy

of whiskey, their hatred of the Brits,
and the sad inevitability of a Judas
at every table. At every table

men hold up their glasses: *slainte*.
The curtain falls about now,
but no one notices. The story goes on

into the aisles, out onto the streets,
and long into parlors, into kitchens,
and into the damp Celtic night.

—LOUIS MCKEE, PHILADELPHIA, PA

Three-Quarter Time

(for Rose)

I dance with you
because I can
not say the words

we change the shape
the space between
we dancers make

close in our arms
our hearts a fist
or so apart

—BRUCE DETHLEFSEN, WESTFIELD, WI

Best Friend, Now an Acquaintance

At the Mexican border they confiscated
one switchblade but not the other,
which I gave to my childhood
blood brother. Eyes wide and lit
strangely, more pleased with the gift
than I wanted him to be,
he flicked it
open and shut
open and shut.

That's what I remember about
my childhood friend
my best friend then
three decades later
while listening to someone on the radio
bemoan the fate
of the land rover on Mars:
"Spirit's little belly may be resting on a rock,"
he says,
as Spirit's little wheels spin
and Mars's red eye blinks
open and shut
open and shut.

—ROBERT NORDSTROM, MUKWONAGO, WI

Seduction

I steel my will against her.
Clearly, she knows this.
Her fingertips graze
the back of my elbow.
Bending, her breasts
strain the black chalices
of her bra—the soft
crease wants fingers,
wants mouth, wants
rough, pink sandpaper.

Reaching, she bares
her navel—dark
whorl in a perfect pool
where I know I could
drop to my knees
and sink a kiss.
I'd throw away everything,
my wife of twenty-four years,
my son's trust.

Curled up
alone on the couch I cry
Tear this nail from my heart—
That night my brother
haunts my dreams.
I was a baby when his grisly death
harrowed my mother
into strangeness—
she came to me, quick silhouette
haloed by light from the hall
when she closed the door
stripped off her blouse
and buried her breasts in my face.

—DAN BACHHUBER, ST. PAUL, MN

A Good Thought

—for Joel Oppenheimer

My friend was in Bar Harbor,
his other place, and surprised
by our call, and hell, yeah,
we were only a few streets away
so we should come right over,
he would make us lunch,
or tea, at least—bring something harder
if you want it, he said,
he'd been off the stuff himself
for a long time, but not long
enough, so he didn't keep it
around because, although
he knew himself, he also knew who
he used to be, and wasn't sure
that wasn't who he still was,
so we left the bottles of Bushmill
in the car, the one we'd planned
to tap, and the one we wanted
to leave behind, but that wouldn't do,
so we stopped at a shop in town
and bought a big basket of wildflowers
which we said we thought
might brighten up his home, but
still, as beautiful as they were,
you couldn't drink them, could you? But
thanks, he said, for the good thought.

—LOUIS MCKEE, PHILADELPHIA, PA

My North Country Grandmother

Her rich and umber chicken dumpling broth.
Arrogant with chunks of wing, breast and drumstick.
All of them sulking on the kettle bottom as if
resenting the intrusions of that serious ladle.

And the high chime of her long-drop pendulum clock
in the front hall that she would wind every seven days.
The doilies on every table and the slip-covered rockers,
solemn and ponderous. All of them. Hers.

And she would cheer—YELL! SCREAM! from the bleachers
at those dirt field baseball games where giants named

Otis, Lester, Stinky and Russell spit, chewed, sweated,
cursed, erred, balked, fouled up, struck out and drew blood
with spikes and bat handles. And sometimes played
a few innings of real hardball up there in Langlade County.

When I was nine years old, I recollect so clearly
how she leaned forward and hugged my blond head
for many seconds with an awful urgency.
The trembling of her body, shot through with what
I now know was sadness and cancer. And while kissing
my father on his cheek, broke into sobbing
and begged us to stay over for that night
and even for another day.

And my father telling her that we could not.
Had to be at the seven a.m. factory in the morning.
And I needing to be on time for school.
Even now the remembrance of that night-journey
back from the North Woods and down the narrow road
to the rag-tag, smoke-stack and leaves-in-the-gutter city
still haunts me.

I never saw her again.
She died on the Saint Nick's Eve that followed.
I was quarantined with the measles
and could not journey up that gray cloud highway
to linger near her one last time.

Even now, years after, I am powerfully stirred
at her weeping through those final moments
while we prepared for departure from that place.
So that my father would clock his entry on time
into the hot and growling factory that next morning.

And the Franciscan nun
at my school would not mark me absent.

—JERRY HAUSER, GREEN BAY, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

Speak

God got my
mother's tongue
wrung it till
she spoke
the language
of salad
swallowed till
she couldn't
swallow
took her to
a lettuce patch
untied
her limbs and
teeth so she could
nibble sense
Sometimes now she
calls my name:
georgie
Shall I set the
table? Cut
tomatoes?
come and eat?
talk
to me
perch on my shoulder
mother
speak

—GEORGIA RESSMEYER, SHEBOYGAN, WI

My Grandmother's Skin

Red like a blooming petunia
her bruise would burst and grow into the same shape.
The open flesh would glisten with a thin layer
of fresh blood that stayed open for days it seemed.
It never dripped. It never dried.
Her skin was thin as rice paper,
tearing at the slightest touch,
and these purple and red wounds would appear,
and stay as if in season,
and color her arms like the flowerbeds outside.

—KOHL TRIMBELL, MADISON, WI

Wendy Vardaman Interviews

Martín Espada

Martín Espada has published seventeen books of poems, essays, translations, and edited volumes. His most recent collection of poetry, *The Republic of Poetry* (Norton, 2006), was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. *Imagine the Angels of Bread* (Norton, 1996) won an American Book Award and was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. Born in Brooklyn in 1957, Espada graduated from University of Wisconsin-Madison. Once a tenant lawyer, Espada is a professor in the Department of English at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Two books are forthcoming: *The Trouble Ball* (Norton, 2011), a book of poems, and *The Lover of a Subversive is Also a Subversive* (Michigan, 2010), a collection of essays. His awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship (2006). Espada read at UW-Madison in April, 2009. This interview was conducted via phone shortly afterward and transcribed from that conversation.

WV: What was it like for you to come from New York City to Wisconsin? Why Wisconsin?

ME: I didn't come directly from New York, so the culture shock wasn't as dramatic as you might think. I did some wandering before I arrived, and lived in various places before coming to Madison. I went to the University of Maryland for a year, from 1975 to 1976, dropped out for lack of funds even to pay in-state tuition, then worked at a variety of bizarre occupations to save enough money to pay my way to the next destination, where I would finish my education. And so, at the time, I had very little idea what I was going to do. I was drifting a little, but ultimately decided on Wisconsin for reasons that were completely goofy. I thought Wisconsin was where Oregon is. I had very little idea of the geography on the other side of the country, obviously. A high school teacher mentioned Madison as one of several schools where I might, number one, get a decent education, and, number two, be admitted in the first place. It should be mentioned here that I was not a great student, either in high school or in my first year of college at Maryland. I was a rather terrible student, in fact.

I had no sense at all of what was coming. I had never experienced anything like Wisconsin in terms of weather. I had no

money. When I finally got there, in the fall of 1977, I had saved enough money to pay for one semester, and was compelled to drop out after that semester, even though I had a very high Grade Point Average. I worked full-time for a year, which lowered the tuition to the point where I could afford it.

Madison, for me, was a fortuitous accident.

WV: So the political reputation wasn't a factor?

ME: The political reputation was not a factor at all. I had no idea what I was doing. I was twenty years old, and my work experience consisted of being a "porter" at Sears & Roebuck, i.e. a janitorial assistant; being a dishwasher and a cook at a pizza house; being a telephone solicitor; selling encyclopedias door-to-door; and washing cars for a Fiat factory showroom. I cobbled together enough money to move almost a thousand miles away and start over again.

WV: Did you write poetry as an undergrad?

ME: Yeah, I did. For quite some time, no one knew I was writing. I came out as a poet before I graduated. I started doing readings in the Madison community. The first reading I did was in 1979. Actually, it was not a reading of my work, but that of Nazim Hikmet, the great Turkish poet, at an event for Turkish solidarity, which then, as now, was needed. I got an appetite for reading and performing in public. I remember also, in the early 1980s, getting involved with the Central American solidarity movement, a natural outgrowth of the education I was getting on Latin America. I did a reading of Ernesto Cardenal's poems as part of a Central American solidarity event. From there, it was an easy progression to reading my own work.

The first reading I did of my own was at the Club de Wash, at the same bar where I was working as the bouncer. Naturally, since I was the bouncer, I immediately got all the attention I wanted, and didn't have any problem getting people to listen to me. I cut my teeth reading in places like that and

the Cardinal Bar, places where you had to learn certain tricks to make yourself heard.

WV: During the late 70s, Madison still had a sense of itself as politically radical. Did you find it that way?

ME: Yes. As I mentioned, when I came, I didn't know much of anything about the local political history, and, because I arrived with my own set of politics, I quickly gravitated to the political activism in Madison.

I wasn't a neophyte politically. I grew up in a very activist household. My father, Frank Espada, was a leader of the Puerto Rican community in New York during the 1960s, and I grew up with an ethos of resistance all around me. That's why it was so easy to integrate with the political activism of Madison. What was very much in evidence when I arrived was that this, indeed, had been a political battleground. You might remember that, at one time, there were actually chains up around certain parts of the campus for crowd control.

The counterculture was very much alive. One thing you saw everywhere you looked were alternative institutions. When I arrived, I encountered my first radical bookstore, which was Gilman Street Books. I encountered the Green Lantern Co-op. I encountered the Yellow Jersey Bicycle Co-op. There was a communal way of life for many of the students. We tend to forget how important that was. When we talk about these political values, we're not just talking about what you learned in a classroom, or what you heard at a demonstration. These were values people lived every day, with varying degrees of success, but there were co-ops everywhere, including communal living arrangements, with people acting out their principles.

WV: You've written many poems about work—your own & the work lives of others. A favorite of mine, "Who Burns for the Perfection of Paper," has as its subject the production of the legal pads that you later encountered as a law student. Could you talk about the importance of poetry about work?

ME: Poetry about work is very important. I've been deeply influenced by poets who wrote about work and the working class, but did so in a way that was very concrete and grounded. It's easy to write about something called *the working class* in the abstract, but that impulse tends to produce bad poetry. It's very different to write about working class people in terms of the work they do.

I didn't invent poetry of work as a genre. Look at Carl Sandburg or Sterling Brown. Brown wrote in the form of the work song. There is a sense out there that poets can write about everything but work. Why not write about work? Why not write about the things we do to occupy our time all day long? You can write about any kind of work, even if you work in an office and think it's the duller kind of occupation. You can still find something to say about it. You can write about power relationships, about human relationships, about what

Who Burns for the Perfection of Paper

At sixteen, I worked after high school hours at a printing plant that manufactured legal pads: Yellow paper stacked seven feet high and leaning as I slipped cardboard between the pages, then brushed red glue up and down the stack. No gloves: fingertips required for the perfection of paper, smoothing the exact rectangle. Sluggish by 9 PM, the hands would slide along suddenly sharp paper, and gather slits thinner than the crevices of the skin, hidden. Then the glue would sting, hands oozing till both palms burned at the punchlock.

Ten years later, in law school, I knew that every legal pad was glued with the sting of hidden cuts, that every open lawbook was a pair of hands upturned and burning.

from *City of Coughing and Dead Radiators*
(W.W. Norton, 1993) ©Martín Espada

you create. For me, my string of jobs that ranged from the bizarre to the dangerous was invaluable. In the process of doing these jobs—whether as a bouncer or as a grunt in a primate lab—I became invisible, but I never stopped observing my world, or writing down what I saw and heard.

The same would be true of "Who Burns for the Perfection of Paper," as a poem about working in a printing plant. You're only seen for what your hands can do. The rest of you is rendered invisible. Yet, in some ways, that's very helpful if you happen to be a writer. People will say and do anything in front of you. I remember when I worked in a gas station, soaked in gasoline, people would stand right next to me and light a cigarette. That's how invisible you are. But you still have eyes to see and ears to hear. You can write about things that matter. I didn't seek out jobs for the experience. When I took a job, I needed the job.

WV: Would you recommend a young poet to get an MFA and teach or to study something else and then do other work while writing?

ME: It depends. There are all kinds of work. If you find work that's rewarding, that involves a contribution to the community, that involves social justice, the poetry will grow from your experience. I would love to see more poet-lawyers.

My favorite poet-lawyer in the 20th century is Edgar Lee Masters. He was Clarence Darrow's law partner in Chicago, before *Spoon River Anthology* made him famous. I can tell, just by looking, that *Spoon River Anthology* was written by a lawyer: those are poems of advocacy, of testimony. That's a lawyer's way of seeing the world. Think of Charles Reznikoff, or Lawrence Joseph, a terrific contemporary poet who teaches law school.

What about poet doctors? Everyone thinks of William Carlos Williams, but let's not forget Rafael Campo, a doctor at Beth Israel Hospital in Boston who has written beautiful poems about the community he serves, his patients and their life-and-death struggles. He couldn't do that if he simply got an MFA and taught poetry to others who want an MFA.

It's possible to get an MFA and be a decent, passionate human being, but it's not the only way. There are other ways. I've met and been impressed by a whole variety of people who write poetry and do other things for a living. I did a reading once with a poet-mailman. Recently, I met a poet-firefighter. It's not just a matter of writing your autobiography. You see the world from a certain point of view because of the work you do and the community of which you are a part.

The system of MFAs has run into an economic snag: there are more and more credentialed people for fewer and fewer jobs. What is it for? Is it about community? There are lots of ways to find community. Poets, if nothing else, do tend to organize themselves. That's where the community is. It's all about organization. You don't need an MFA for that.

WV: Are there enough connections among different kinds of poets, e.g., those at universities, performance and spoken word artists, poets in prison, homeless poets? How do we build those connections?

ME: I think many more bridges need to be built. All too often, poets are sheltered and insular. I'm one of those poets who builds bridges and crosses bridges. I find myself participating in a dialogue with many communities of poets. I'm often dismayed at how segregated the poetry community is, even now. One of the things that has to change is the segregation of Latino poets. We are still largely invisible in the landscape of American poetry. I'm always amazed when I look at the table of contents of a reputable literary journal and don't see a single Spanish surname. I mean *not one*. How is that possible? There are approximately 50 million Latinos in the US, and yet their expression of themselves in the form of poetry is almost completely invisible. Where is it? Why is it that no Latino poet has won a Pulitzer or a National Book Award?

To a large extent, this schism exists because there's a perception in society as a whole that Latinos are not literary people, that Latinos don't read and don't write. If we don't read or write, then no one is under any obligation to read us. It's very easy for students to pass through English Departments and MFA programs without reading a single Latino poet. Why is that?

We have to ask these questions, and they have to be answered.

WV: You've also been very interested in poetry activism, and I wonder where are some of the areas that poets' service might be most needed?

ME: There are so many things that poets can do to serve the community. It's a very broad question. First of all, poets should go where poetry is not supposed to go, where poetry, allegedly, would not be well-received at all. Think of prison as the classic example: You would think that poetry wouldn't be welcome at a place where the literacy level is so low. Yet the opposite is true. The most energetic, enthusiastic audiences for poetry are in prison. There are more poets per capita in the prison system than in the academic system. They have a lot of time on their hands, but they also have an urgent need to define themselves, to explain themselves, to present themselves to the world.

Poets should go into such places—into the prisons, the nursing homes, migrant labor camps, factories, wherever programs have been set up to make it possible for poets to offer what they have. I'm not advocating that poets wander in off the street; there has to be a system in place. But there are more and more such programs. A generation ago it was not as easy for a poet to visit a prison as it is today.

WV: You speak of having a mission as a poet to make the "invisible visible," and that mission drives both the form and the content of your work—from your focus on certain people and situations, to your poetic accessibility, to your craft and use of literary elements like dialog, setting and narration. Have you always had that mission? Do you ever write outside of it?

ME: Well, there is a sense of mission in my work, but I think it's important to articulate that mission without becoming a missionary. First of all, no one's going to listen. Secondly, it doesn't make for very good poetry. It's important to strike that balance. There's a mission, a sense of purpose, but that has to be balanced with a sense of the aesthetic, the image, the music in poetry.

Do I ever write outside the mission? Of course. And yet, because of the way I see the

world, that perspective is present in almost every poem. Not all my poems are political, but they're all coming from the same point of view, which is unique to me. I've written, as you know, a number of very personal, very intimate narratives. It's easy to see that I'm influenced by Neruda or influenced by Whitman. It might not be as easy to see that I'm influenced by a poet like Sharon Olds, who is so brave and willing to risk everything. I find that really admirable, and I aspire to write the same way, especially when it comes to my own personal experience. So, yes, there is a mission, but it comes out of a broader context.

WV: It's a serious mission, many of your poems are political, and it seems to me that there's a stereotype that political poems aren't funny. But a lot of your work is extremely funny—I'm thinking of poems like "Thanksgiving," "Advice to a Young Poet," and "Revolutionary Spanish Lesson," and I wonder if you could talk a bit about your use of humor and how you see that relating to your work.

ME: Well, humor can be a political tool. It relaxes your audience. It lowers defenses against ideas that might otherwise be resisted. You can use humor subversively to smuggle ideas that might otherwise be refused at the border. At the same time, I write the way I do because I find the world to be a very strange and funny place. I don't think you can impose that on a subject. You can't impose that on a poem. It has to be organic.

WV: You've spoken about a working-class aesthetic—can you talk about what might characterize that aesthetic in terms of form or content?

ME: Primarily, it has to do with content. I don't argue that there's a working-class form. I'll leave that to others. You can talk about Blues, I suppose, as a working-class form, or hip-hop, but I'm interested in a working class perspective.

Class influences the way you perceive the world; not just your work, but everything. We have to begin with that. That's what I mean when I talk about a working-class aesthetic. It goes beyond poetry. When I participate in a conversation or debate in the academic world, I'm very conscious of the fact that I don't come from the same class background as most of the people taking part in that dialog or debate. Latino writers

There are so many things that poets can do to serve the community. ...First of all, poets should go where poetry allegedly, would not be well-received or received at all.

as a rule tend to come from a working-class background, whereas most Anglo writers come from a middle- or upper-class background, which accounts for some of the friction, some of the difficulties in communicating.

WV: You have been critical of those poets who you say "don't have anything to say."

ME: Yeah, because I get bored. There's a lot of boring poetry out there. Am I right? Have you been bored by any poetry lately?

[laughter and agreement]

Too often poets let themselves off the hook because they justify the indifference with which their work is received.

WV: Is it that the subjects are inherently boring, or the way the poets are approaching them?

ME: It's the approach. You can write about almost anything. Pablo Neruda wrote four books of odes. If you look at those books, you'll see he wrote about almost anything: he wrote an ode to an artichoke, he wrote an ode to a tomato, he wrote an ode to a bicycle, he wrote an ode to a cat, he wrote an ode to his suit, he wrote an ode to a chestnut, he wrote an ode to boy holding a hare, he wrote an ode to a bricklayer, he wrote an ode to a laboratory technician, he wrote an ode to his cranium. He could write about anything. But what makes his work different is that, first of all, there's a passionate appreciation for being alive. Secondly, there is a deep compassion for

The Republic of Poetry for Chile

In the republic of poetry,
a train full of poets
rolls south in the rain
as plum trees rock
and horses kick the air,
and village bands
parade down the aisle
with trumpets, with bowler hats,
followed by the president
of the republic,
shaking every hand.

In the republic of poetry,
monks print verses about the night
on boxes of monastery chocolate,
kitchens in restaurants
use odes for recipes
from eel to artichoke,
and poets eat for free.

In the republic of poetry,
poets read to the baboons
at the zoo, and all the primates,
poets and baboons alike, scream for joy.

In the republic of poetry,
poets rent a helicopter
to bombard the national palace
with poems on bookmarks,
and everyone in the courtyard
rushes to grab a poem
fluttering from the sky,
blinded by weeping.

In the republic of poetry,
the guard at the airport
will not allow you to leave the country
until you declaim a poem for her
and she says *Ah! Beautiful.*

from *The Republic of Poetry* (W.W.
Norton, 2006) ©Martín Espada

human beings in his orbit. He never forgets,
for example, the labor that went into the
everyday objects.

When I refer to poets who don't have
anything to say, I mean poets who aren't
trying to communicate in the first place.
There is no subject. It really isn't about

anything. It's a matter of concrete language,
of the willingness to speak to an audience.

The English poet Adrian Mitchell famously
said, *Most people ignore most poetry
because most poetry ignores most people.* It
makes sense, doesn't it?

WV: So if we talk about how poets can help
make poetry more relevant to non-poets, is it
by taking more of an interest?

ME: Take more of an interest in people.
Take more of an interest in the world
around you. Take more risks. There's great
safety in obscurity, in not communicating,
in language for the sake of language. Ed
Hirsch, in *How to Read a Poem*, which is
a very good book, writes about the Turkish
poet Nazim Hikmet, a prison poet, who is
openly and unabashedly emotional. Hirsch
says that, by contrast, "we live in a cool
age," that most contemporary poets are
terrified of openly expressing emotion. It's
too risky, on a personal level and on an
aesthetic level. Too many poets are afraid of
the great accusation: sentimentality.

WV: I'd like to know more about what you
think makes a good political poem—is a good
political poem fundamentally different from
any other good poem?

ME: A good political poem shares many
of the same qualities with a good poem
that isn't political. I believe in poems that
are grounded in the image, in the senses.
I believe in poems that are grounded in
strong diction. I believe in poems that
are grounded in music, in the ear. There's
common ground between poetry that
is political and poetry that isn't. What's
different is the substance; there's also an
urgency, an immediacy to the best political
poems that is difficult to find in poems that
aren't political. It comes from that sense of
shared humanity, a sense of suffering and
resistance. It's not just about condemnation.
It's also about celebration, about praise.
It can be a portrait of an individual that
reflects the dignity of that human being. It
could be that simple. In that sense, I think
it's important to define political poetry as
broadly as possible, without defining it too
broadly. There are people who are writing
political poetry who don't know it, or who
would violently object to defining it as such
because that would make it "bad poetry."

WV: You've talked about the importance of

having "faith in poetry"—do you ever have
difficulties with believing in poetry and its
significance?

ME: Anyone who looks at the world
realistically has to have a crisis of faith.
Whatever belief system you have will be
tested by the realities of the world. That just
means you're paying attention.

When I say "faith," however, I'm not talking
about something with magical properties.
I'm not talking about something Romantic.
I'm talking about the fact that poetry has a
profound and yet intangible impact on the
world. Critics of political poetry make this
mistake all too often: if you can't measure
exactly what a political poem does, then it
fails, or so the conventional wisdom goes.

This is not to say that an anti-war poem can't
have an immediate impact. A year or so ago,
I was teaching Wilfred Owen, the great poet
of World War I, who wrote very powerful
and prophetic poems about his experiences
in that war, and was killed a week prior to
the Armistice. One of my students wrote a
paper in response to Owen, where he said,
"I was thinking about joining the army,
but after reading Owen, I'm not going to
do it." How many times do you think that
happens? If it happened in my class, you'd
better believe it's happening somewhere
else at the same time. There are young
people looking at this economic crisis and
weighing their options. When they read a
poet like Wilfred Owen or the poets of the
Vietnam War, who I also teach, and they
say "wait a minute, what was I thinking?"
then they have the opportunity to exempt
themselves from the economic draft that's
produced our modern army. Did we save
a life? Was this young person saved? Who
knows? The point is that poetry matters.

We poets have to stop participating in
our own marginalization. We have to stop
internalizing this idea that poetry doesn't
matter. We have to stop with all of these
expressions of false modesty. We have to
stop buying into the idea that poetry is
irrelevant. The choice is ours. 

*This is an excerpt from Wendy
Vardaman's interview with Martín
Espada. Read the full interview at
versewisconsin.org, where you will also
find extended content about Espada.*

Contributors' Notes

Marilyn Annucci is the author of *Luck* (Parallel Press). See *Umbrella Journal* and Tupelo Press's April Poetry Project for recent poems. Marilyn came to Wisconsin from Boston for a summer in 1988 (that "summer" lasted five years), and she returned in 1997. She is an associate professor in the Department of Languages and Literatures at the UW-Whitewater. p.21

Sharon Auberle has returned to her Midwestern roots after years of living in the Southwest, and she's very happy to be residing full time in Door County. Besides poetry, photography and paper arts are her passions. Samples may be found on her website, Mimi's Golightly Café. She is the author of two recent books: *Saturday Nights at the Crystal Ball* and *Crow Ink*. p. 11

Daniel Bachhuber is a Montessori elementary teacher in the St. Paul Public Schools. He has published poetry in the *Iowa Review*, *Poetry East*, *The Southern Poetry Review*, *The Christian Science Monitor* and many others, as well as a book, *Mozart's Carriage*, from New Rivers Press, 2003. He also writes educational articles for Montessori periodicals. p. 31

Danny P. Barbare would like to travel to Wisconsin, never having traveled much out of the South, but loves where he lives. p. 23

Laurel Bastian is the current recipient of the Halls Emerging Artist Fellowship, and her work can be found in *Margie*, *Cream City Review*, *Nimrod*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Anderbo* and other journals. She runs a creative writing program in a men's correctional facility near Madison, Wisconsin. pp. 26-27

Guy R. Beining has had six poetry books and 25 chapbooks published over the years, and appeared in seven anthologies. He is in the *Contemporary Authors Autobiography* series, Vol. 30, 1998 (Gale Research). He is also in the *Dictionary of the Avant Gardes*, 2nd Ed., 2000. Recent publications include *chain*, *epiphany*, *perspective* (Germany), *New Orleans Review*, *The New Review of Literature*. p. 25

Michael Belongie's collection, *Now Is All We Have*, came out in February 2010 as a beautiful handbound edition. Proceeds from that collection will support the environmental work of Holy Wisdom Monastery in Madison, just certified as the highest-rated LEED building in the United States. p. 17

Jean Biegun writes poems for Woodland Dunes Nature Center in Two Rivers. A retirement transplant from Chicago, she doesn't miss the Big City "C's": cars, concrete, crowds, consumerism, and crime. Kayaking a silent river is her preferred action scene. p. 11

David Blackey is a mostly retired lawyer, whose legal career was devoted to pursuing the rights of individuals against corporations and governments. He began writing poetry in 2006 and was recently published in *Steam Ticket*. The 2011 *Wisconsin Poets' Calendar* will include one of his poems. p. 25

Sarah Busse is a co-editor of *Verse Wisconsin*. Her chapbook, *Given These Magics*, is out from Finishing Line Press in 2010. pp. 15-16

Sue Chenette is a poet and classical pianist who grew up in Phillips, Wisconsin and has made her home in Toronto since 1972. Her poems have appeared widely. She is the author of three chapbooks: *A Transport of Grief*, *Solitude in Cloud and Sun* and *The Time Between Us*, which won the Canadian Poetry Association's Shaunt Basmajian Award in 2001. Her full-length collection *Slender Human Weight* was launched by Guernica Editions in December 2009. p. 20

Elizabeth Cleary (Eli) lives in Connecticut and works for a global IT firm. Her poetry has been published in numerous journals, including *Off the Coast*, and in an upcoming edition of *Vermont Literary Review*. An avid gardener, Eli loves to watch robins, Wisconsin's state bird, industriously negotiate her lawn early in the morning while she drinks that last cup of coffee before starting for work. p. 24

Cathryn Cofell is the author of five chapbooks, most recently *Kamikaze*

(Parallel Press, 2008). Her latest project is a CD called *Lip*, poems set to the music of Obvious Dog. Her poetry can be found in places like *MARGIE*, *Oranges & Sardines*, *NY Quarterly* and *Wisconsin People & Ideas*, where she was selected for the 2008 John Lehman Poetry Award. She is currently on the Advisory Board of *Verse Wisconsin*. Visit her at www.cathryncofell.com pp.7-8

Philip Dacey is the author of ten full-length books of poems, the latest *Vertebrae Rosaries: 50 Sonnets* (Red Dragonfly Press, 2009). His awards include three Pushcart Prizes, a Discovery Award from the New York YM-YWHA's Poetry Center, and various fellowships. His website is www.philipdacey.com. Over the years, he has given readings of his work in many places/schools in Wisconsin, most recently at the Great Lakes Writers Festival at Lakeland College. He lived for 35 years across the border in Minnesota. p. 12

Alice D'Alessio is the author of the biography: *Uncommon Sense; the Biography of Marshall Erdman*. Her poetry book *A Blessing of Trees* was winner of the 2004 Posner Award from the Council for Wisconsin Writers, and her 2009 book, *Days We Are Given*, was first place winner in the Earth's Daughters chapbook contest. She is contributing editor to *Woodlands and Prairies Magazine*. p. 19

Jim Davis is an international professional football player who spent every summer of his youth in Green Lake, WI. He is a graduate of Knox College and currently studying poetry through Yale University. His first collection is forthcoming from Mi-te Press. p. 19

Bruce Dethlefsen is one half of the musical duo, Obvious Dog. Bruce has just finished his six-year stint as secretary of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets. p. 29, 30

R. Virgil (Ron) Ellis lives near Cambridge, Wisconsin, where he and his wife are busy restoring fifty acres of wetland and savanna. He is an Emeritus Professor who taught writing, literature and media at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. For an exploration of his work, see www.poetrvellis.com. p. 6

Martín Espada has published seventeen books of poems, essays, translations, and edited volumes. His most recent collection of poetry, *The Republic of Poetry* (Norton, 2006), was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. Two books are forthcoming: *The Trouble Ball* (Norton, 2011), a book of poems, and *The Lover of a Subversive is Also a Subversive* (Michigan, 2010), a collection of essays. His awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship (2006). pp. 33-36

Fabu is Madison's third Poet Laureate. She has a new publication, *Poems, Dreams and Roses* (2009). *In Our Own Tongues* will be published by the University of Nairobi Press in 2010 and *African American Life in Haiku* will be published by Parallel Press in 2011. Her website is www.artistfabu.com. p. 30

Bart Galle is a medical educator and visual artist. His chapbook, *Everything is True at Once*, will be published by Passager Press in summer 2010. He is a 2008-2009 Loft Mentor Series Winner in Poetry and the winner of the 2008 Passager Poetry Contest and the Fall 2009 Hollingsworth Prize from White Pelican Review. His poems have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and Best New Poets 2009. He was awarded a 2010 Minnesota State Arts Board grant in poetry. p. 28

Kathie Giorgio's stories have been widely published in literary magazines and anthologized in *Papier Mache Press*, *Main St. Rag*, *Edition Bibliotekos*, and in an online and audio anthology by Susurrus Press. Her work has been nominated for the Million Writer Award and for the Best of the Net anthology. She is the director and founder of AllWriters' Workplace & Workshop, a creative writing studio. Her novel, *The Home For Wayward Clocks*, is forthcoming. p. 18

Joey Goodall grew up in a small town 20 miles west of Green Bay, went to college at UW-Madison, stayed there for another year, then moved 2000

miles west of Green Bay to Bellingham, WA for a job, where he enjoyed the mountains and the rain for a year, but is headed back to the Midwest (St. Paul, MN) in the fall. p. 22

Alena Hairston received her MFA from Brown University. A 2004 Poetry Fellowship recipient from the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, a 2006 finalist for the Rona Jaffe Foundation Writer's Award, and a 2007-09 Cave Canem Fellow, she's an English Instructor at Solano College in Fairfield, CA. *The Logan Topographies* was a Selected Winner for Bear Star Press' Dorothy Brunsmann Poetry Award. The collection won Persea Books' Lexi Rudnitsky Memorial Prize for Poetry. p. 14

Derrick Harriell received an MFA in Creative Writing from Chicago State University and is currently a dissertator in English at the UW-Milwaukee where he teaches creative writing. His poems have appeared in various journals, including *The Cream City Review*, *Reverie*, and *Lamplighter Review* and are forthcoming in *Main Street Rag*. He is a poetry editor for *The Cream City Review*. His first collection of poems, *Cotton*, is scheduled for publication (Willow Books- Aquarius Press) in the Fall of 2010. p. 20

Jerry Hauser has published 17 chapbooks in recent years and has published many more poems in journals of poetry and literature over a 25-year period. Currently, he is finishing a book of poems under the title of *A Stir of Seasons*. p. 32

Beth Ellen Jack belongs to multiple writing groups, including the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets. Her poems have appeared in multiple venues, including *Echoes*, *The Writer's Journal*, and *The Writer*, and she is proud to announce she will be included in the 2011 WFOP calendar. p. 18

Oritsegbemi Emmanuel Jakpa was born in Warri, Nigeria, and currently lives in Ireland. He studied at the University of Lagos and the University of Iowa. He obtained an MA from Waterford Institute of Technology. His poetry has been published widely. He has been nominated for Pushcart Prizes three times, and he received the Year's Pierce Loughran Scholar Award in 2008. p. 17

Nancy Jesse taught English at Madison West High School before retiring in 2005. She grew up on a dairy farm in Barron County, moving to Madison in 1968 to attend the University of Wisconsin. She has published both prose and poetry and presently lives in Madison with her husband Paul. p. 14

Joan Wiese Johannes was born near Horicon Marsh. Her poems have been widely published and won numerous awards. Her chapbook *Sensible Shoes* was the 2009 winner of the John and Miriam Morris Memorial Chapbook Contest sponsored by the Alabama Poetry Society. She lives in Port Edwards with her poet husband, Jeffrey. p. 5, 18

Martha Kaplan grew up in Seattle, has lived in Minneapolis, Houston and Chicago, and now lives in Madison. Her poetry is influenced by the vicissitudes of landscape, natural and human, and the impact of one on the other. She has published with *Branch Redd Review*, *Möbius*, *The Poetry Magazine*, and *Hummingbird*, and has poetry forthcoming in *Blue Unicorn*. p. 29

Erin Keane has strained her eyes to see Wisconsin from the Michigan side of the great lake. In high school, she visited Milwaukee on a school trip and learned how warm and delicious Miller beer can smell during the brewing phase. She lives and writes in Louisville, where she directs the InKY Reading Series. She is the author of two collections of poetry, *The Gravity Soundtrack* and *Death-Defying Acts*. p. 4

Jane E. Kocmoud has lived in Wisconsin for almost forty years, first as an elementary school teacher in West Allis, and then as a grandmother, international traveler, volunteer, photographer, and poet in Sheboygan, where her son and his family live. p. 21

Robyn Kohlwey is a current resident of Grafton, Wisconsin, and recently graduated from Carroll University in Waukesha, Wisconsin. Her work has recently appeared in *Arbor Vitae*, *Antihills V* and *Nerve Cowboy*. p. 5

Michael Kriesel has won both the WFOP Muse Prize and the Lorine Niedecker Award from the Council for Wisconsin Writers. Books include *Chasing Saturday Night* (Marsh River Editions); *Feeding My Heart To The Wind* and *Moths Mail The House* (sunnyoutside press); and *Soul Noir* (Platonic 3way Press). He'll be the featured poet for the 2010 Great Lakes Writers Festival at Lakeland College and has work forthcoming in *North American Review*, *Rattle*, *Antioch Review*, *Crab Creek Review* and *Alaska Quarterly*. p. 23

Jim Landwehr was born and raised in St. Paul, MN, and now lives and works in Waukesha as a Geographic Information Systems Analyst. Jim writes creative non-fiction, memoir, and poetry and is currently enrolled in the All Writers writing workshop (www.allwriters.org). p. 13

Jackie Langetieg was a runner-up in the 2003 and 2004 *Wisconsin Academy Review* poetry contest and served as co-editor with Alice D'Alessio of the 2004 WFOP Calendar. She received the 1999 Excellence in Poetry Award from the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters and the 1999 Jade Ring for poetry. Her chapbooks are *White Shoulders* (Cross+Roads Press 2000), *Just What in Hell is a Stage of Grief* and *Confetti in a Silent City*. p. 18

Nick Lantz is the author of two books of poetry, *We Don't Know We Don't Know* and *The Lightning That Strikes the Neighbors' House*. He was a Jay C. and Ruth Halls Poetry Fellow at the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing, and he is the 2010-2011 Emerging Writer Lecturer at Gettysburg College. p. 9, 14

Elda Lepak spent most of her life in Wisconsin. After retiring, she moved to the warmer climate of North Carolina where she spends her time writing with a weekly poetry group and perfecting her photography in a mentored camera club. Her work has appeared in *Free Verse*, *The Main Street Rag*, *Wolf Tales*, and two anthologies, *Empty Shoes* and *Look Both Ways*. p. 13

MaryEllen Letarte has roots in Wisconsin that still tug at her. Her dad was born in Pepin, and matriculated at the University of Wisconsin. She occasionally teaches poetry to children in after-school programs and to adults enrolled in ALFA-Adult Learning in the Fitchburg Area. p. 23, 29

Louis McKee has had poems recently in *APR*, *5 AM*, *Pearl*, *Rattle*, *Paterson Poetry Review*, *Chiron Review*, *Nerve Cowboy*. *Near Occasions of Sin*, a selected poems, was published by Cynic Press, and Adastr Press has issued *Marginalia*, a collection of his translations of medieval monastic poems from the Old Irish. A resident of Philadelphia, he spent a short time in Milwaukee, in grad school at Marquette. p. 30, 31

Bruce McRae is a poet/musician with hundreds of publications around the world. His first book, *The So-Called Sonnets*, is appearing in the fall via Silenced Press. For more poems and music, his website is <http://www.bpmcrae.com>. p. 11

Julie L. Moore is the author of *Slipping Out of Bloom* (WordTech Editions) and the chapbook, *Election Day* (Finishing Line Press). Moore is a Pushcart Prize nominee and recipient of the Rosine Offen Memorial Award from the Free Lunch Arts Alliance in Illinois, the Janet B. McCabe Poetry Prize from *Ruminant*, and the Judson Jerome Poetry Scholarship from the Antioch Writers' Workshop. Learn more about her work at www.julielmoore.com. p. 20

Richard W. Moyer is 79 years old. He obtained his AB in English at Harvard College in 1953, an MH from University of Richmond in 1976, and an MA in English from Temple University in 2000. His poems are widely published, and he has one chapbook and one book of selected poems to his credit. p. 12

Ralph Murre is a recovering Wisconsin farm boy who has taken to poetry instead of plowing, since the pay rate is about the same, and the females

involved tend to be human rather than Holstein. His books to date are *Crude Red Boat* (Cross+Roads Press) and *Psalms* (Little Eagle Press). He also admits to occasional blogging at the Arem Arvinson Log. p. 6, 10

Christian Nagle has published poetry, essays, translations, interviews and prose fiction in *Esquire*, *The Paris Review*, *Southwest Review*, *Partisan Review*, *New England Review*, *Kyoto Journal*, *Quick Fiction*, and many other magazines. His first collection of poems, *Flightbook*, will be published by Salmon Poetry (Ireland) in English and Japanese. One of his best friends, poet Christopher Bakken, is from Madison. p. 24

Lorine Niedecker (1903-1970) grew up on Blackhawk Island, just outside Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin. Except for brief stays in New York, Madison, and Milwaukee, she lived her entire life on the banks of the Koshkonong River. Her reputation as a poet has grown steadily in the years since her death. p. 15

Cristina M. R. Norcross is a freelance writer and poet living in Oconomowoc, WI with her husband and their two sons. She is the author of *Land & Sea: Poetry Inspired by Art*, *The Red Drum* and *Unsung Love Songs*. Visit her website at www.FirkinFiction.com. p. 9

Robert Nordstrom is a poet, free lance writer, and school bus driver living in Mukwonago, Wisconsin. He used to think that the nine-month school year was instituted to give teachers and students a break. Now he understands that it's actually for the mental health of the bus drivers. p. 31

Diana Randolph attended Northland College in Ashland, Wisconsin, and now resides in Drummond. She's been a professional artist for thirty years and teaches continuing education art classes in her community and at the School of the Arts at Rhinelander. Visit www.dianarandolph.com. p. 10

Joseph Reich is a social worker therapist who works out in the state of Massachusetts, a displaced New Yorker who misses most of all the Thai food, Shanghai Joe's in Chinatown, the fresh smoothies on Houston Street, and bagels and bialys of The Lower East Side. He has a wife and son, and when they all get a bit older, he hopes to take them back to play, to pray, to contemplate in the parks and playgrounds of NYC. p. 5

Georgia Ressmeyer has twice won grants in creative writing from the Wisconsin Arts Board, and is the author of two short novels. Her poetry has appeared widely in journals and magazines. Her chapbook, *Today I Threw My Watch Away*, is out from Finishing Line Press in 2010. p. 17, 32

Harlan Richards grew up on the west side of Madison, and earned his BS in business administration from UW-Platteville. He has written nonfiction and fiction, and is now learning to write poetry. He has work forthcoming in *Love's Chance*. He is currently a guest of the Wisconsin Department of Corrections. p. 20

Erik Richardson is a schoolteacher and freelance writer in Milwaukee. Recent work has appeared in *Arbor Vitae*, *Sein und Werden*, and *Wisconsin People & Ideas* (forthcoming). He won the 2009 Gahagan Prize in Poetry and publishes a modest poetry journal for young people: *Signs & Wonders*. p. 4, 19

Richard Roe, a retired Legislative Analyst and Editor, began writing poetry in his mid-30s and has kept at it ever since. A preacher's kid who has lived in Ohio and New Jersey, he has a background in history and economics. His most recent book is *Knots of Sweet Longing*. His work has appeared recently in three anthologies: *Writing by Ear: An Anthology of Writing About Music*, *Jukebox Junction USA*, and *River Poems*. p. 10, 23

G. A. Scheinoha dislikes bio notes precisely because they are pretentious. Maybe this comes from a grounded Wisconsin background. Or just his view: the writer isn't as important as the poem. Still, if you must have his curriculum vitae, recent bylines include *Avocet*, *Conceit*, *Echoes*, *Fox Cry Review* and *Wisconsin Poets' Calendar 2010*. p. 24, 25

E.P. Schultz lives in the Driftless area of southwestern Wisconsin. His work

has appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, *Chronogram*, *Rosebud*, and *Inkwell Magazine*, among others, and he is the recipient of a 2010 Contributing Editor's Pushcart Nomination. He is the founding president of The Driftless Writing Center. p. 6

Thomas R. Smith lives in River Falls, Wisconsin, and is a Master Track instructor in poetry at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis. His most recent collection is *Kinnickinnic* (Parallel Press), and a new book, *The Foot of the Rainbow*, is now available from Red Dragonfly Press. He posts blogs and poems on his web site at www.thomasrsmithpoet.com. p. 21

Marilyn L. Taylor is serving as the Poet Laureate of Wisconsin for 2009 and 2010, and enjoying every minute of it. Her award-winning poems have appeared in dozens of anthologies and journals, including *Poetry*, *The American Scholar*, *Measure*, *Valparaiso Review*, and *The Formalist*. Her sixth and latest collection, titled *Going Wrong*, was published by Parallel Press in July of 2009. She is also a Contributing Editor for *The Writer* magazine, where her articles on poetic craft appear bimonthly. p. 9

Jeanie Tomasko is a home health nurse who loves to write, take walks, and birdwatch, and she thinks everything is prettier in Fall. She is the author of a forthcoming chapbook, *Tricks of Light* (Parallel Press, 2011). p. 26

Steve Tomasko lives in Middleton with his wife, Jeanie, 3 kids, 2 cats, some uninvited fleas and probably a few more life forms he doesn't know about unless he peeks in the corners and under the couch. p. 11

Kohl Trimbell recently graduated from UW-Madison with an English Degree. Currently, she is working full-time at a non-profit organization and is soon hoping to go back to graduate school for Creative Writing. "My Grandmother's Skin" is her first published poem. p. 32

Erik Tschekunow is an assistant professor of English at Silver Lake College in Manitowoc, WI, and resides in Sheboygan. He holds an MFA from Emerson College in Boston, MA. His poems have most recently appeared in *Tar River Poetry* and *Arsenic Lobster*. p. 4, 17

Diane Unterweger's poems have appeared in *Free Verse*, *Luna Creciente*, and UWM's Eat Local/Read Local program. She is currently working on a series of poems about Houdini. p. 28

Wendy Vardaman, author of *Obstructed View* (Fireweed Press 2009), is a co-editor of *Verse Wisconsin*. Visit wendyvardaman.com. pp. 33-36

Caleb Whitney is a father, husband, self-employed landscape gardener, fire instructor, and assistant fire chief. p. 21

Marilyn Windau was nurtured on Big Bend farms, in raspberry patches in Fremont, by blue gills from Green Lake and through books in Madison. Graduating from UW-Madison, she married a civil engineer from Wauwatosa and raised three daughters in Appleton and Sheboygan Falls. She teaches art to elementary school children in Oostburg. p. 13

Lisa Zimmerman is an antiques dealer, book collector, and poet. She lives and writes in the Northwoods. Founding member of the five-year-old Eagle River Writers Group, Lisa was first published in *Free Verse*. p. 8

MISSION STATEMENT

Verse Wisconsin publishes poetry and serves the community of poets in Wisconsin and beyond. In fulfilling our mission we:

- showcase the excellence and diversity of poetry rooted in or related to Wisconsin
- connect Wisconsin's poets to each other and to the larger literary world
- foster critical conversations about poetry
- build and invigorate the audience for poetry



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Nick Lantz's Twitter Poetry Project

Cristina M.R. Norcross,
 "Making Your Poetry Event Memorable"

Marilyn L. Taylor on the First
 United Poets Laureate Conference

"bending the retina's mirror to the world's beat:
 new books by younger Wisconsin poets,"
 Review-Essay by Wendy Vardaman

plus book reviews, Wisconsin poetry news,
 & audio by print & online contributors

Online Poetry by

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VW Online will
 accept poems, visual poetry,
 & video poetry, Sept 1-Oct 30,
 on a new theme for the Winter
 issue (January 2011).

online features at versewisconsin.org