

# VERSE WISCONSIN

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## FEATURES

INTERVIEW WITH BRENDA CÁRDENAS

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 BY JOHN WALSER

*AT THE KITCHEN TABLE:*  
 SHOSHAUNA SHY TALKS TO  
 DOUGLAS GOETSCH

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WISCONSIN FELLOWSHIP OF POETS

Summer, more than any other season, celebrates community. Framed by Memorial and Labor Days, studded with picnics, swimming pools, parks, bikes and barbecues, we gather with friends, neighbors, family, formally and informally, through the long days and lingering twilights.

As women poets, we both engage in multiple communities through our families, neighborhoods, churches, schools, and various volunteer and professional activities. As Poets Laureate of Madison, we engage more formally with the idea and fact of community than most poets do; poets as a breed have a reputation for being solitary figures. Popular imagination has us off, dreaming in our towers and attics, or wandering solo along drowsy rivers, lost in reveries.

But in fact, while writing a poem may be a solitary act, poets depend on community in multiple ways. We need readers, editors, and fellow writers. We need supportive friends and family members who are willing to provide us that attic space, that corner of time on a Saturday morning. We need bookstores, coffee houses, bars, libraries and other public places to congregate, meeting old friends and new alike. Poems are not written in a vacuum.

In this issue we celebrate community. The online issue features brief essays by poets describing their various communities and community-oriented projects. The poems in the online issue are excerpted from our own most recent partnership: the 2013 *Wisconsin Poets' Calendar*, published by the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets, an organization that exists primarily to create community among poets across the state. And we like to imagine that the poems, both online and in the print version of *Verse Wisconsin*, form their own sort of community of voices, which will thread its way through your summer days.

This will be our last summer issue. Beginning in 2013, we will publish *Verse Wisconsin* only twice each year, in the fall and spring. This change will allow us to pay some attention to our press, Cowfeather, not to mention enjoy a few more summer evenings with our families and friends. As much as we're looking forward to publishing a few books each year, we will miss sending out this gift of verse and voice to you each midsummer. We hope that you find something here that you think is worth sharing with your community.

VERSE WISCONSIN appears tri-quarterly through 2012 and two times a year beginning in 2013. Please consider a subscription for your local library, high school, senior center, or other institution. Yes! I'd like to:

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Contact us: [editors@versewisconsin.org](mailto:editors@versewisconsin.org).

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## Books Received January-April 2012

Publisher & author links available online

- Karren LaLonde Alenier**, *On a Bed of Gardenias: Jane & Paul Bowles*, Kattywompus Press, 2012
- Stephen Anderson, Chris Austin, Paul Enea, Elliot O. Lipchik, Steve Pump**, *Portals and Piers*, Sunday Morning Press, 2012
- Mark Belair**, *Walk With Me*, Parallel Press, 2012
- David Blackey**, *Odessa*, 2011
- Vittorio Carlie**, *A Passion for Apathy*, The Press of the 3rd Mind, 2012
- Jim Chapson**, *Scholias*, Arlen House, 2011
- Lisa Cihlar**, *The Insomnia's House*, dancing girl press, 2011
- Brendan Constantine**, *Calamity Joe*, Red Hen Press, 2012
- Maryann Corbett**, *Breath Control*, David Robert Books, 2012
- Fabu**, *In Our Own Tongues*, University of Nairobi Press, 2011
- Adam Fell**, *I am Not a Pioneer*, H\_angm\_n Bks, 2011
- Eric Greinke**, *Conversation Pieces, Selected Interviews*, Presa:S:Press, 2012
- Barbara Gregorich**, *Jack and Larry*, Philbar Books [available through Amazon], 2012
- Ann Iverson**, *Art Lessons*, Holy Cow Press, 2012
- Lowell Jaeger**(ed.), *New Poets of the American West*, Many Voices Press, 2010
- Lowell Jaeger**, *Suddenly, Out of a Long Sleep*, Arctos Press, 2008
- Lowell Jaeger**, *We*, Main Street Rag, 2010
- Georgia Jones-Davis**, *Blue Poodle*, Finishing Line Press, 2012
- Athena Kildegaard**, *Bodies of Light*, Red Dragonfly, 2011
- Athena Kildegaard**, *Cloves & Honey*, Nodin Press, 2011
- Mark Kraushaar**, *The Uncertainty Principle* [Winner of the 2010 Anthony Hecht Poetry Prize], The Waywiser Press, 2011
- Mike Lane**, *They Can Keep the Cinderblock*, Exot Books, 2012
- W.F. Lantry**, *The Language of Birds*, Finishing Line Press, 2012
- Mokasiya**, *Climbing a Mesa, Poetry from Sedona*, rivertink.com, 2012
- Ron Riecki**, *She Took God: A Memoir in 34 Poems*, Gypsy Daughter ebook, 2012
- Margaret Rozga**, *Though I Haven't Been to Baghdad*, Benu Press, 2012
- Allegra Jostad Silberstein**, *Through Sun-glinting Particles*, Parallel Press, 2012
- Jeanine Stevens**, *Sailing on Milkweed*, Cherry Grove Collections, 2012
- Margo Taft Stever**, *The Hudson Line*, Main Street Rag, 2012
- Richard Taylor**, *Fading Into Bolivia*, Accents Press, 2011
- Scott Wiggerman & David Meischen** (ed), *Wingbeats: Exercises & Practice In Poetry*, Dos Gatos Press, 2011
- Gary Young**, *Bird of Paradise*, Parallel Press, 2011

## Unexpected Shiny Things

by Wisconsin Poet Laureate

Bruce Dethlefsen

Sixty-one

monday I crossed off cowboy  
tuesday fireman  
wednesday president  
thursday I couldn't find the list  
friday my own fishing show  
saturday catching for the cardinals  
sunday I took a nap  
sorry  
I had to  
the moons flew by too soon



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### Books Reviewed & Noted Online

- Mary Alexandra Agner**, *The Scientific Method*, Parallel Press, 2011, by Judith Barisonzi
- Georgia Ann Banks-Martin**, *Rhapsody for Lessons Learned or Remembered*, Plain View Press, 2010, by Moira Richards
- Mark Belair**, *Walk With Me*, Parallel Press, 2012, two reviews, by Timothy P. McLafferty and by Lisa Vihos
- Robin Chapman**, *The Eelgrass Meadow*, Tebot Bach, 2011, by Judith Barisonzi
- Maryann Corbett**, *Breath Control*, David Robert Books, 2012, by Judy Swann
- Tom C. Hunley**, *The Poetry Gymnasium: 94 Proven Exercises to Shape Your Best Verse*, McFarland & Co, 2012, by Carmen Germain
- David Wayne Landrum**, *The Impossibility of Epithalamia*, White Violet Press, 2011, by Sarah Busse
- Rebecca Lehmann**, *Between the Crackups*, Salt Publishing, 2011, by Morgan Harlow
- Quincy Lehr**, *Classics of English Progressive Rock*, Seven Towers, 2012, by Sarah Busse
- Keith O'Shaughnessy**, *Incommunicado*, Grolier Book Shop, 2011, two reviews, by Sarah Busse and by Claire Hughes
- Aline Soules**, *Meditation on Woman*, Anaphora Literary Press, 2012, by Carol Smallwood
- Jeanie Tomasko**, *Tricks of Light*, Parallel Press, 2011, by Hope McLeod

Submission guidelines can be found at [versewisconsin.org](http://www.versewisconsin.org). Please send us a review copy of your recently published book or chapbook! Join us on Facebook for announcements & news.

### 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

### Books Received September-December 2011

Publisher & author links available online

- Mary Alexandra Agner**, *The Scientific Method*, Parallel Press, 2011
- Rose Mary Boehm**, *Tangents*, Black Leaf, 2011
- Tina Chang**, *Of Gods & Strangers*, Four Way Books, 2011
- Robin Chapman**, *The Eelgrass Meadow*, Tebot Bach, 2011
- Jean Feraca**, *I Hear Voices, A Memoir of Love, Death, and the Radio*, Terrace Books (UW Press), 2011
- Rigoberto González**, *Black Blossoms*, Four Way Books, 2011
- Sarah Gorham**, *Bad Daughter*, Four Way Books, 2011
- Deborah Hauser**, *Ennu, From the Diagnostic and Statistical Field Guide of Feminine Disorders*, Finishing Line Press, 2011
- Bill Henderson** (Ed.), *2012 Pushcart Prize XXXVI, Best of the Small Presses*, Pushcart Press, 2011
- Tom C. Hunley**, *The Poetry Gymnasium: 94 Proven Exercises to Shape Your Best Verse*, McFarland & Co, 2012
- Jacqueline Jones LaMon**, *Last Seen* [Winner of the Felix Pollak Prize in Poetry], UW Press, 2011
- Claire Kageyama-Ramakrishnan**, *Bear, Diamonds and Crane*, Four Way Books, 2011
- Amit Majmudar**, *Heaven and Earth*, Story Line Press, 2011 [Winner of the Donald Justice Prize]
- Blair Matthews (Poetry) & Bruce Murray (Painting)**, *Echo*, Parallel Press, 2011
- Linda Back McKay**, *The Next Best Thing*, Nodin Press, 2011
- Rick McMonagle**, *Spencer Butte Meditations*, Mountains and Rivers Press, 2011
- Pepe Oulahan**, *It's Just Business* [Music CD], A Bare Bones Production, 2011
- Margot Peters**, *Lorine Niedecker, A Poet's Life*, UW Press, 2011
- Charles Portolano**, *All Eyes on US, A Trilogy of Poetry*, RWG Press, 2007
- Zara Raab**, *Swimming the Eel*, David Robert Books, 2011
- Edwin Romond**, *Alone with Love Songs*, Grayson Books, 2011
- Alison Stine**, *Wait* [Winner of The Brittingham Prize in Poetry], UW Press, 2011
- Sarah Stern**, *Another Word for Love*, Finishing Line Press, 2011
- Matthew Stolte & The People of the WI Protest**, *Don't Cut, WI Pro TestPO*, eMTeVisPub #6, 2011
- Jeanie Tomasko**, *Tricks of Light*, Parallel Press, 2011
- Elizabeth Tornes**, *Snowbound*, 2011
- Lisa Vihos**, *A Brief History of Mail*, Pebblebrook Press, 2011
- Johnathan Wells**, *Train Dance*, Four Way Books, 2011
- Cary Waterman**, *Book of Fire*, Nodin Press, 2011
- Greg Watson**, *What Music Remains*, Nodin Press, 2011
- Cynthia Zarin**, *The Ada Poems*, Alfred A. Knopf, 2010

## What Women Are Made Of

*There are many kinds of open*—Audre Lorde, *Coal*

We are all ventricles, spine, lungs, larynx, and gut.  
Clavicle and nape, what lies forked in an open palm;  
we are follicles and temples. We are ankles, arches,  
soles, spines. Pores and ribs, pelvis, and roots,  
and tongue. We are wishbone and gland and molar  
and lobe. We are hippocampus and exposed nerve  
and cornea. Areola, pigment, melanin, and nails.  
Varicose. Cellulite. Divining rod. Sinew and tissue,  
saliva and silt. We are blood and salt, clay and aquifer.  
We are breath and flame and stratosphere. Palimpsest  
and bibelot and Cloisonné fine lines. Marigold, hydrangea,  
and dimple. Nightlight, satellite, and stubble. We are  
pinnacle, plummet, dark circles, and dark matter.  
A constellation of freckles and specters and miracles  
and lashes. Both bent and erect, we are all give  
and give back. We are volta and girder. Make an incision  
in our nectary and Painted Ladies sail forth, riding the back  
of a warm wind, plumed with love and things like love.  
Crack us down to the marrow, and you may find us full  
of cicada husks and sand-dollars and salted maple-taffy  
weary of welding together our daydreams. All sweet tea,  
razor blades, carbon, and patchwork quilts of *Good God!*  
and *Lord Have Mercy!* Our hands remember how to turn  
the earth before we do. Our intestinal fortitude? Cumulonimbus  
streaked with saffron light. Our foundation? Not in our limbs  
or hips; this comes first as an amen, a hallelujah, a suckling,  
swaddled psalm sung at the cosmos' breast. You want to  
know what women are made of? Open me, open me,  
openopenopenopenopenopenopen wide and find out.

—BIANCA SPRIGGS, LEXINGTON, KY  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

## An Oshkosh Fourth of July

The family clan came over  
we put brats and burgers  
on the grill.  
The parade went right by my house  
with bands, flags and politicians.  
There were fireworks in the evening  
and really no need  
for the Norman Rockwell  
exhibit at the Paine.

—LEN TEWS, OSHKOSH, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

## Winslow Lane Neighbor

To the man who shot bottle rockets into my yard  
on the Saturday before the 4th of July:

Sir, I rounded the corner of my house  
in the soft cushion of the late garden night, bright stars overhead,  
trees framing yard from road, sky from ground, when the whoosh  
and fire of your bottle rocket shot through those trees  
and fell just yards from my feet. The sleepy calm of the  
closed-off watering and the perfume of the roses,  
the rhythmic sound of the few quiet bicyclists on the street  
beyond the garden, all yanked awake  
by that swift trajectory.

Neighbor, you aimed the rocket over your trees as if we,  
who live outside the boundaries of your small square,  
are your targets. Is your dark yard an empire?  
Are we your barbarians?

—MARTHA KAPLAN, MADISON, WI

## Recently

Faith in my friends wavers.  
They seem more like strangers.  
Some seem unworthy of my trust.  
My enemies seem to multiply.

Recently I began to look old and  
see zombies in all of my mirrors.  
I have begun to wear a Kevlar vest  
and pack a magnum when visitors come.

Recently my therapist answered her  
cell phone before our session was finished.  
Then put on her coat and walked out.  
Her action must be an illusion, I thought.

Recently, caring colleagues assured me  
that voices (I have been hearing) behind walls  
are not those of condemned souls.  
Or even of Big Foot.

In the future when I feel alone and  
confused, I will seek help from my  
friends by e-mail, cell phone, or land line.  
I may even travel to their homes for help.

I should go to my friends when pterodactyls,  
demons, pythons and hell-fire frighten me.  
Recently they asked me if I still saw such things.  
Recently I reassured them that I did.

—JERRY HAUSER, GREEN BAY, WI

## 4th of July

He's lighting the fireworks in  
an empty beer bottle.  
The fuse catches, he runs  
back to the house, back to us  
waiting to see which direction  
they'll shoot. It's a ritual, every year.  
The neighbors take their dog in.  
We tell him not to light them.  
He doesn't listen. He's shot  
his fire at the house, the yard,  
the tool shed and once or twice  
to the sky. This time  
it takes the bottle with it to the  
ground, breaks it open. Splashes  
a little fire and flips around  
like a fish on a rock where  
the river's run dry.  
It's the 4th of July.

—ISABEL SYLVAN, HAZLET, NJ

## After the Disagreements

Clean your gutters  
(even if you're gutterless).  
Climb the ladder (the (green) one in the garage)(way in the back) to a stagnant river of rain.  
Reach into the (bone-cold) (are bones cold?) mass of nature's knots (don't wear gloves) (they won't help (with seeds) at all) and unstop the freefall  
(funneled  
down  
to a  
spot  
of ground  
where you will drop  
and pool within the pooling pool of pine needles and pine needles  
acorns and oak leaves and whirligigs drowned and lazy  
beneath the thin iced skin of this tea of debris).  
Litter your yard with what you should have raked away on last week's tarp  
(And while you stand up there  
less angry now and high on the house  
nod to the flies and boxelder bugs who shingle your second story  
your bedroom and bath  
layering you warm  
during their stunned vigil in the late season sun  
go on  
while they watch over their already dead husks).

—CHUCK RYBAK, ONEIDA, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

## The Healing Side of Glass

At the gym I dip and curl  
and press and, yes,  
occasionally catch  
my reflection in storefront glass  
when I pass.  
Sometimes, though,  
when the glass absorbs the light  
just right, I see through myself  
to the other side  
where the naked mannequins stand,  
steel rods pushed up their ass,  
disjointed arms and legs  
awaiting physicians of fashion  
to heal their gestures of distress  
in dress of mood and mockery.  
Do not, like Alice,  
I tell myself then,  
look too deeply into the glass.  
Turn, adjust your focus to new light  
on the street, others beside you—  
find their pace,  
walk with them,  
smile, nod, invite their gaze,  
make your gesture their balm,  
not their malaise.

—ROBERT NORDSTROM, MUKWONAGO, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

## Bridge Club

During the big war,  
women in our village  
formed a bridge club,  
there being no formal entertainment,  
unless you count Ladies Aid  
or the Coop Guild,  
and the school Christmas program  
at the town hall.

They took turns being hostess,  
and everyone dressed to “go out.”  
Did their hair in pincurls and curlers,  
put on their best dresses, earrings,  
their good silk stockings,  
taking care to get the seams straight.  
Wore their high heels, applied lipstick.  
Sprayed perfume, did their nails.

Two tables were set up,  
the house slicked spick and span.  
Lunch served after cards was fancy,  
even with rationing.  
Shrimp salad, maybe,  
the toast cut in triangles,  
or chicken ala king in tiny pastry puffs.  
Desserts were edible art,  
frosted tarts, maraschino cherries,  
real whipped cream.

Every other Monday night  
we kids watched amazed  
as our ordinary mothers  
transformed themselves into ladies  
for bridge club.

—PEGGY TROJAN, BRULE, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

## The Collection

Across the street  
at the new hotel  
polished wingtips  
strut Art Deco carpeting,  
greeting fellow warriors  
with a raised cup  
of steaming brew.  
Gathering together  
in the corner booth,  
plump ham faces  
spritzed thinning hair  
High Street suits  
clever jokes and insults,  
the boys' club meets  
together each dawn  
snapping briefcases  
and contemplating empires.

—LIZ RHODEBECK, PEWAUKEE, WI

## Recall

At the gas pump a petitioner asks you  
to release your name. A familiar voice  
sings from someone else's ballpoint pen. Your vote

is neither raindrop, rubber stamp, razor blade.

Back home, your HD flat screen unplugs your heart:  
the plastic coasters, couch-hidden cushion change,  
your whole room falls into its sideways black door.

—BRENT GOODMAN, RHINELANDER, WI

## Ancestors

*For Lauren and Ben*

In my childhood the streams brought  
sacred beads  
that I hung on my chest  
like those calendars on the walls  
of my grandmother,  
a solitary midwife.  
My ancestors sang  
on the prairies where infinite lives.  
In my childhood my brothers died  
in the swollen belly of the night.  
In a mud bed  
I found the thread of all answers.  
Under my hands grew  
the glasses and plates  
of the constellations.  
My ancestors ran  
from one city to another  
with seeds and fish  
of terrestrial and natural Gods.  
They did not have the hours  
that the sun spends in the wings of cormorants.  
They did not have gold on their side.  
The wind planted their bones and flesh  
in hillsides of acahual and silence  
My ancestors walked from one side  
to the other side of the Earth,  
quietly  
with their mouths in the ruinous waters  
that rain leaves  
after dying in the leaves and the stones.  
I am the one who did not know the threat  
of the wheel and the metallic thirst of the spirit.  
I am the one who still fishes and eats  
from underground rivers.  
I am from a dark race  
the one that contemplated  
with fear and fury  
the colors of the martyrdom  
of otters and ceibas.  
I am the one who still walks the prairies  
inventing my self  
speaking the language of things.

--MOISÉS VILLAVICENCIO BARRAS, MADISON, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

what is art  
substance or spirit  
bronze marble wood gold  
paint laced with lapis lazuli  
gold leaf lakes of flowers  
berries and herbs  
rose madder  
simple paper made by hand  
and hand-carved words  
who knows  
the difference  
souls weighed  
in the balance  
who are you  
what are you  
awed by

--ROBERT SCHULER, MENOMONIE, WI  
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*

## Reasons in the Winter

*For Erik, Flavio and Gustavo Sosa Villavicencio*

I write so our blood speaks  
with the river that is this street  
here where no one knows about anyone  
so that from one corner of the night you consume me  
with the force of a drowning boat  
I write so the air breathes air  
I write so the moss on the path thinks about me  
so that the goose and that owl on prairies understand me  
I write when I am hungry  
when I am about to close the door of my soul  
I write so you write me  
so that you consider me one of yours  
of those who gather seeds and embrace flames  
as if nothing happened and only I happened  
I write so my sons one day know that I have another voice  
not the voice that tells them when to turn on and off their eyes  
*but rather the voice that you also recognize in the almond trees*  
and in the movement of the clouds  
Voice that was born to me many centuries ago  
with rattles and feathers  
I write so that you find yourselves before my words  
I write for those who don't write and laugh alone  
for those who love and walk among the dust  
I write, then, to name the things that we don't have  
to invent them  
for those who undo themselves of sorrow  
for those who strike us and make us prisoners  
for those that are below the water's roots  
I write so that together we are amazed  
I write for those who cannot see light and hold it in their hands  
like my sons do every morning  
I write so that with your laughter you disperse the rhythm, the song

--MOISÉS VILLAVICENCIO BARRAS, MADISON, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

## Justice League

A radioactive sonnet bites me like a spider.  
Since my name's not Peter Parker, I become a poet.  
Exclamation points of light dance above my head,  
a crown of birthday candles. No one sees them but  
my English teacher who becomes my mentor  
like Professor X. Before that fateful day in Junior Lit  
I wanted to draw comics—spent study halls perfecting  
Batman's triceps and Green Lantern's emerald power ring.  
One paper cut changed everything. I carry a mask in my pocket.  
When I look up at the sky, I don't see robins or planes  
or red streaks of cape. Now I see lavender whales  
sounding the stratosphere, weightless and hating us.  
The world's full of furious ghosts that need laughing at.  
By issue five I graduate, find others like myself:  
*Kid Limerick, Lyric Lass, Heroic Couplet.* Fridays we meet  
at the *Haiku A Go-Go*, where we vow to help humanity  
and dedicate ourselves to battling reality.

—MIKE KRIESEL, ANIWA, WI

## Throwing the Map Out the Window

If I wasn't so far  
down this road  
I'd do something else.  
Draw comic books, maybe—  
Superman unbound by gravity,  
Batman trailing darkness  
in his cape.  
But I'm fifty  
and holding a poem  
that won't blink,  
real as a peach stone,  
the window rolled down.

—MIKE KRIESEL, ANIWA, WI

## Two Poems from The Old Poet Says

Sometimes you  
get a slow

truck before  
you, sometimes

a fast one  
on your ass.

So it is  
with poetry.

\*

What -  
a fellow

can't get  
drunk

without  
getting

arrested?  
He can't

say something  
without

you insisting  
it's poetry?

—TOM MONTAG, FAIRWATER, WI

## Secret Identity

Wearing Batman's mask of flying mice, I whiz  
above the city like a lunar boomerang or satellite,  
my x-ray glasses blanketing sleepers in roentgens.  
Every block has secrets, basements stuffed full  
of Victorian porn or 1920s Halloween postcards.  
As I fly, night perches on my shoulder like the crow  
that used to be sewn on my sleeve in the navy.  
Summer wind snapping dress whites, my uniform  
masked me, closet Wiccan in Ronald Reagan's military,  
back when my magical will had training wheels,  
before I sold my comic book collection  
to buy time to practice spells by mail:  
pre-Internet Q&A workbooks from ads  
in the back of Fate magazine—ego-busting  
exercises: onionwise, my head unwraps  
like tissue paper, shedding selves and memories  
like leaves until the lava lamp behind my face  
hula dances in the mirror. Shaving's a bitch.  
During the day I'm a mild-mannered janitor  
at a rural elementary school who can't turn off  
his vision. That's the problem with enlightenment—  
you can't go back. Spells and spandex mix until  
it's all I can do to act normal, since everybody  
wears a mask except for Superman, and even he  
can't help me with this wiggly energy bleeding  
from my eyes, showing me everyone's secret identity:  
black holes floating in the air, or tiny blue tornadoes  
trapped in blenders where their heads should be.

—MIKE KRIESEL, ANIWA, WI

## Crazy Spaghetti House Benefit

A cacophony of voices rang out of control,  
children, slithered, wiggled, crawled on the floor,  
popping out at impromptu times  
when one had a plate of red spaghetti sauce in front of them.  
They moved among the feet, legs, chairs of patrons  
and wall to wall buffet tables.  
Children with big loose hair danced on the stage  
alone, with a partner, but always with free child grace.  
Sometimes one came crying out of the fold  
found its bird mother and then rushed back  
into the fray tossing their hands to the side  
darting past adults with full spaghetti plates  
and maybe a beer or two clenched tight  
against the race of little arms and legs.  
It was the Riverwest Co-op benefit at Falcon Hall,  
the 2nd oldest bowling alley in all of Wisconsin  
and a neighborhood gem. It was funny  
and hot with all the bodies sliding, breathing out and in,  
passing parmesan cheese on the sly,  
“Here take this, it’s good, I mean really good.”  
And then it was over no more red sauce, no more plates  
just plain noodles swimming in hot water  
the sound had died and with it the heat,  
it was time to leave but the memories  
and the camaraderie live on still  
in the not so distant last night  
and the laughs well they’re contagious.

—ANGIE TRUDELL VASQUEZ, MILWAUKEE, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

## Splash

*for Bob Bradbury*

Boys will chuck the heaviest rocks possible  
into the smallest streams. Boys live most  
in that ka-thunk, that knee-high splatter-splash.  
Boys live most in the splintery creak and release  
of dead tree at cliff’s edge, finally letting loose  
its century-hold and taking down its portion of sky  
with a worldly crash, down the long scree slope.  
Boys live most in the fuse of ashcan, cherry bomb,  
M-80 as they sputter and flare toward that satisfying  
gut punch sound, that flash, that flame, that  
acrid sulfur smell that has a boy’s name scrawled  
all over it. If no fire is available a boy will settle  
for jackknifing balloons, detonating puffballs  
in the woods, beheading wildflowers with  
a stripped willow whip-stick. Even at age 57,  
walking his aging dog down winter-gray sidewalk,  
a man will kick an ice clod ahead of him  
for a full block, and live a while more in that.

—DAVID GRAHAM, RIPON, WI

## A Brisk Ocean Breeze

slips under a beach umbrella,  
makes a swimmer shiver,  
cools the skin of a gray-haired man,  
blows a child’s rubber donkey  
a mile up the beach,  
knocks over Cokes in paper cups,  
throws sand in a small dog’s eyes,  
makes it impossible to read,  
scoops up straw hats and  
tosses them in the ocean.  
Flags dance.

—RICHARD MOYER, BERWYN, PA

## The Retreat

The poets are talking at the kitchen table.  
Hard rain jabs against the window,  
A break in the middle of their writing,  
and one, an ex-teacher, says she has lost the path  
and must find it. She says she feels like  
she’s lost in a forest, screaming “Listen to me.”  
Another, the man who meditates  
each morning says he has entered  
the forest and come out again knowing.  
He says he is working at changing his life.  
The last, an old woman, who has come in late,  
says she doesn’t remember  
when she wasn’t in the forest—  
though she’s not sure what “forest” they mean.  
She thinks of it, the darkness most of all,  
white pines’ menacing towers,  
scrambled branches of undergrowth.  
The others stare at her  
so she wonders if she got it right.  
The first says it’s not enough. She means  
what she’s been doing with her life. The man responds  
his life knots with ideas and plans  
except when he goes to the deep places, stone steps down  
to the underground waters. He tries to live there  
and fails mostly. The old woman, losing focus,  
has left the conversation.  
She has become again the small girl other children chased  
into a real forest and abandoned.  
She is listening to the wind and the rain  
feeling the spongy duff beneath her feet.  
Faces emerge in the trees, voices.  
She may never find her way home.

—PATRICIA FARGNOLI, WALPOLE, NH



## Living in the Future

*We are living in the future  
I'll tell you how I know  
I read it in the papers  
Fifteen years ago  
—John Prine*

The music of the spheres  
was always just wind  
flushing our ears when we ran,  
leaves whipping our faces

and bugs ricocheting  
harmlessly off our chests  
as the swimming hole  
grew larger and larger

in our splashy minds.  
We knew the future  
in our pliable bones.  
We sang its songs in our sleep.

Yet now that the future  
has arrived, it looks like  
the opened lakeside cabin  
in June, all the knick-knacks

exactly as we left them  
last fall, meek pillows on  
the couch, unanswered letter  
on the table by a novel

we still might read. Gray  
scent of must and mouse  
that no scrubbing will remove.  
Ashes in the fireplace

precisely where they were.  
In the future we move  
across the living room  
with mugs of fresh coffee,

newspaper in the other  
hand, arriving at the couch,  
settling down with great sighs.  
Sighs so powerful the children

and grandchildren almost  
hear, as they very nearly  
can make out our gray shapes  
flitting across the dust motes

in after-midnight quiet,  
books open on their laps,  
moths fluttering the screens.  
They're tired. It's late, and

they certainly don't believe  
in ghosts. So our vaguely  
shimmery gray forms must  
be a trick of tired eyes,

our long exhalations  
just the sound of a moth  
weak but frantic against  
the dark window screen.

—DAVID GRAHAM, RIPON, WI

## Pear Brandy

Gritty gourd, wine-soaked and bottled  
from birth to death and some afterlife of infused essence,

the nature of your growth is unpredictable,  
but oh those French

in green valleys forged with pubescent fruit  
and pullulating notions

lend words like aperitif, and Eau de Vie—  
what love to coax a pear to take the bottle's shape.

German cherries - kirshwasser, Slavic slivovitz for plums,  
nothing rolls from the tongue but the framboise,

a raspberry mash of bloodletting—  
how does one not swoon with the supernatural?

Yet precious pear, stocked in glass like an intricate ship,  
plump little treasure, you are cloistered in amber

destined for this life from conception; tasted through essence  
rarely bitten but hardly a frippery  
molded, mostly, to become a part of something

bigger than yourself, clearer than yourself. Smooth finish, vigor in spirit  
that burns with wishing. Oh, I am wishing.

—LAUREN GORDON, MADISON, WI

## Creamware and Old Oval

*Teapot collection in Norwich Museum, England*

Polished examples of antiquity,  
Spode, Wedgwood, Worcester, Derby, Chelsea, Bow,  
Once the preserve of the gentility,  
Democratised by commerce long ago.  
A potted history of the breakfast table  
Each with its neat, explanatory label.

Much decorated army, fused in fire,  
With chunky lids and handles deftly curved  
In Limehouse, Liverpool and Staffordshire,  
Quarried from earth to colonise the world,  
Surviving long-entombed colonial masters,  
In spite of clumsy, parlour maid induced disasters.

Such quantities of spouts! If these should pour  
Their fragrant contents simultaneously  
Like something out of Wonderland, the floor  
Would be transformed into a tannin sea.  
Museum staff and visitors might swim all day  
Through Lapsang Souchong, Orange Pekoe and Earl Grey.

—PETER WYTON, GLOUCESTER, ENGLAND

## Bellies

those mid-west garbage dumps  
those cheese seeping sluices  
that jelly drum, that thrum  
that velvet coat with bone button  
that bullshit excuse for emptiness  
those empty nests, those dry deserts  
those filled-to-brimming buckets  
those crustless sandwiches, those  
hollow armpits, those rumbling  
volcanoes with nowhere to go  
but up, those hula-hooping, belly-dancing,  
those undulating muscles.  
That pizza craver, guacamole dipper,  
fixer-upper, that spilled milk of magnesia  
sobber, that red wine, heart  
burning for you only you  
with the pot of gold waiting  
for the rainbow to swing  
its sweet belly arc my way.

—KARLA HUSTON, APPLETON, WI

## Woman in a Dream

Reader, tell me, are you, like I am, so in love  
with falling asleep that you could slip  
there on the hardest floor of the fastest rocking boat?

In love with that moment when arms and legs  
begin unfastening and lids pull you down until  
you know you are about to fall and the dark becomes  
the portrait of a woman whom you've never met?

Or are you heir to an inherent restlessness, unwilling  
to lose daylight? Like my hosts in Williamsburg, Virginia  
—so surprised by my desire to nap rather than take  
a tour around the island of Jamestown?

But, reader, it was raining, and just after lunch,  
and the room I slept in faced a lake, which raindrops  
dashed with their alphabet so soothingly.

And why do some of us tire so much more entirely  
than others, and especially when sightseeing?

Why last week, on a visit to Charlottesville,  
when my husband led me to the school playground  
where once he thought he was dying, was I ready  
to take a mid-morning nap on that grass?

And later, as the tour guide who led our group  
in its timed procession told us the mirrors  
on the walls of Monticello had never left the house,

meaning they had all reflected the face of Thomas Jefferson  
multiple times into these rooms, how come I could only  
think of the bed we'd just seen, designed in Paris, enclosed  
by three walls and a curtain?

Think: what if I could lie there nestled in an island of history,  
and for a moment not see these sights another person  
might have been waiting for all of her life?

—CHRISTINE POREBA, TALLAHASSEE, FL

to confuse my dog  
I sometimes bark  
like a dog

to confuse me  
my dog says  
stop it

—DAN NIELSEN, RACINE, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

## Appeal to the Dead Cat in the Road

Scourge me for I have cursed you for the sparrow  
whose head you took with a grab and snap,

then laughed to see you, smashed in the middle of the street,  
so stalk me in my dreams, dead cat; plague me

with your eyes dull as stagnant water. Try howling  
under my window, now, flat cat, or at the moon

or my face, my hands clapping seat and scam.  
I have admired your soft coat and paws, felt your coldness

to my outstretched palm. No wonder, I'm amused  
to find you pancaked to a suburban street, everything

from claw to gold/brown stripes—the same stiff package.  
And no one, not even those who trusted in your many lives

and let you out to prowl and prey,  
missed you, oh, cat-o-no more lives, oh, cat-o-stiff tail,

you've been brought to the level of pavement,  
and not even the street sweeper

or the fire department can save you  
from the scrape in which you've found yourself.

—KARLA HUSTON, APPLETON, WI

all the other sheriffs said  
put your hands up

but the new sheriff said  
reach for the sky

which all the crooks agreed  
was pretty damn poetic

—DAN NIELSEN, RACINE, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

### **On Their Third Date, When She Bends to Adjust Her Stocking Under the Table**

He can't stop thinking of silk  
tossed over the shower rod  
crossed at the ankle, mimicking  
the legs that fill them.

He thinks of the legs then,  
where they wander in the week,  
what they press up against:  
    an office chair  
    a nightclub stool  
    a movie seat  
    a church pew, third row from the front.

Maybe even his own legs, soon.

Yes, that is a good thought.  
Waking to soft legs against his  
coarse-haired legs. His ring finger  
pressed against the dimple  
of bone, thumb stroking  
    once,  
    twice,  
    the softmeat just before knee turns to thigh.

And then, in the bathroom, when hanging there,  
like serpent-shed skins, and turned  
    over and over  
in his callused palms,  
that length of dormant silk  
smelling faintly of tobacco-flower  
and baby powder and Castile,

he figures that could just about put the all  
in having it all. Says,

*Nothing in particular,*

when she asks what he's thinking about.

—BIANCA SPRIGGS, LEXINGTON, KY  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

### **Surveillance**

At a shopping center  
I am moving with the crowd

through an extra-wide revolving door  
I try to maintain neutral feelings toward it

Oh! I have just slammed my face into the  
heavy glass panel of that entrance  
I feel like a fool

*A watcher sees it and grins*

Later When I am at a super-service gas station  
I become confused trying to use a debit card to  
pay for gasoline that has just surged into my  
ravenous tank I feel stupid Even paralyzed

*Inside The cashier notes my grimace*

And at the mom-and-pop grocery store  
I stop to purchase some chocolate frosting-covered  
long johns in a glass case near the check-out counter.  
The clerk finishes packing the bag of another patron

I reach back to scratch (or soothe) an itch on my buttocks.  
The clerk glances at the screen mounted above  
then glances at me I stop the scratching

*and pretend that I was not But I have been caught*

And later I stop my vehicle at the apex of a  
high bridge above a river Then shut off the engine  
and drop the ignition keys into the cold ash tray  
I wait for some minutes But finally leave my vehicle  
and walk (not fast) to the steel bridge railing Where  
I allow myself to fall forward Then down

The cool night air caresses me.  
I feel exhilarated Finally free!

*Unless someone watches that too*

—JERRY HAUSER, GREEN BAY, WI

## The Farm

So why the farm? With the  
dead chickens skewered in the trees (a la Dr. Sax),  
cats leaping from barn roofs to their suicides,  
dogs just dropped over dead on the grass,  
puppies without heads mewling at my feet,  
calves with no strength in their legs rolling down the hillside,  
opossums squashed under bales of hay,  
trees with apples rotting on the green green branches,  
gaping sores in the golden plum tree trunks.

Deputy:

“Christ! What do we get ‘im for?”

Sheriff:

“I dunno, but we gotta get ‘im for somethin’. ...  
Hey! You’re under arrest for having a weird farm!”

Deputy:

“But look, the house has no roof left,  
and he’s up there racing after the shingles  
blown by the wind his attic is bare  
his stairs are dark he ain’t got no home  
in this world anymore. He’s out on the ridge  
with a cliff on each side, he has to get across  
the gulch to where people are happy  
lazing in the sun beyond green trees at the water’s edge  
how can he get there he aint got no balance left?  
but all around him people are doing it  
they’re just boppin’ along across that gulch  
and joining the people on the beach with the balloons  
and picnics and girls in bikinis while he  
is slung across the wire impossible to hang on.”

Sheriff:

“I dunno, we gotta get the bastard for somethin’.”

—BOB PERSONS, MADISON, WI

## Coming Home

In places surrounded by mountains,  
I found silence, on Superior’s  
open waters, the wind  
and waves, turning a heavy coat  
inside out, watching a man beside me,  
a father or son with the same expression  
on his face, crossing the dark  
mine garage to find the office lights.

—JAN MINICH, WELLINGTON, UT

## wild

garden  
hanging from a cliff’s face  
rising out of shale and sand  
fans of ferns surrounding  
bouquets of trillium  
a wren spins in

—ROBERT SCHULER, MENOMONIE, WI

## Before East Towne Mall

Tractors once crossed the expanse  
between JC Penney and Sears.  
Before that humans and beasts  
in tandem tilled and harvested  
the land. And before that,  
natives profitably hunted here.

Some 100,000 years before,  
the great Laurentide Ice Sheet  
appeared at the Mall’s doorstep  
although shoppers were only  
a mammoth’s dream as the beasts  
trolled the tundra for sprigs of grass.

Wikipedia will tell you whatever  
you want to know before that. Or  
you can ask the few old-timers still  
hanging around about life before  
East Towne Mall put down nearly  
a million square feet of retail space

not to mention nicely paved concrete  
stalls for 5000 horseless carriages.

They’ll tell you life was better then,  
simpler, quieter, but that’s talking like  
the old men they are, not accounting  
for the briefs they bought cheap at Sears

or the shoes they got readymade  
at Penney’s. The Mall has been here  
more than 40 years, which is  
a long time for them to remember. Soon  
they’ll be gone. But any damned fool can see  
East Towne Mall is here to stay.

—DARRELL PETSKA, MIDDLETON, WI  
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*

## Blown

The place really isn't a cottage so much  
(despite the fancy scrollwork under the eaves  
and floral motif painted on the walls) as a  
tall Victorian rectangle stood on end with  
typical store front windows.

giant panes  
staring eyes flung  
wide open

Inside, glass and brass shelves where a  
careless elbow swipe in narrow aisles could  
erase a small fortune. Vases, wine flutes  
in varied shades of reds, blue, green with  
frosted etchings reflect the slant of late  
afternoon sun. Handcrafted crystal from  
Bohemia with edges so rag bond thin, a  
hasty exhale might shatter them.

one breath  
creates, another  
destroys

"A person shouldn't come in here unless  
they've got a lot of money to spend," the  
clerk attired in folk costume; embroidered  
vest and brocaded skirt whispers, deliberate  
aside meant to be heard.

an urge to  
run roughshod, bull  
versus china

Instead, the door only snickers closed,  
tourist dollars flutter elsewhere within  
this Midwestern ethnic enclave.

—G.A. SCHEINOH, EDEN, WI

## Mixed Array of Stars

She lowers herself into the grasses  
and demolishes entire cities;  
the sack of chocolate stars near her right hand  
turns quickly into towering Babylon  
as insects build roads over and around her.  
The great swath cut by her two-legged stride  
of death is smoothed over by the rough wind.  
Absorbed in their parallel world they pitch  
tents in her shadow. Little pioneers.  
By the time she rises they have built  
houses without roofs and floors made of grass.  
All around the world statues crumble.

—A'YARA STEIN, CHESTERTON, IN

## Watch for Fallen Rock

Cruising the scenic route in Grant County  
Grandpa said he would always love corn  
the vista, he meant, and not the food.  
The hills and waving tassels,  
tractors and blood red barns  
are the scenes that anchor his nerves.

I replied I felt the same toward trees.  
Green, I needed, in my life.  
There was silence a moment.  
He never plays the radio  
when he has passengers.  
"You will always love best  
where you lived as a child."

We passed by limestone bluffs  
Assembled from the carcasses  
of billions of sea creatures  
living in a geologic era  
far removed from this teal Ford Taurus.  
Battered yellow signs warn us  
"Watch for Fallen Rock"

When we get back to the farm  
I will hike the back forty  
to the double track that runs  
through remnant forest.

I inspect every promising stone  
for tiny invertebrates  
immortalized in ancient mud,  
scallop and miniature corals  
reveal themselves after  
brushing off the dust.

It's curious, these marine fossils  
in the middle of farm country  
like finding obsidian in boreal forest  
or a Yankee living south of Mason-Dixon.  
I am a fallen rock.

—KATHERINE MEAD, ST. LOUIS, MO

## **I Try Not to Mention**

how the nights are getting longer,  
afraid you'll think me  
an old woman grown tired of living  
but still too afraid to die.  
My memories are selective now  
and the future is somewhere  
I don't want to be. You'll understand,  
spreading my ashes among the islands,  
to feel apart is only the spring  
adrift in the hardwoods  
of falling backward into the water  
and surfacing like a fish  
for mayflies, an internment  
that facing the stars, faces you.

—JAN MINICH, WELLINGTON, UT

## **A sense of place after all**

When they come I'm ready  
iPod touch in hand  
chilled rosé in the fridge  
burgers on the grill  
It's summer and the world is a better  
place for it  
I happen upon a bird's nest  
in the dryer vent  
a few bird droppings and down  
a small space for a growing family  
I wonder what they thought  
of the whir  
the crackle and hum  
the rollicking rock of their nest  
dryer load after dryer load  
Every night I dream in French  
and in the morning  
can barely speak the words  
Spanish is for Spaniards I understand  
It's much warmer this year  
in this place one hundred miles north  
of Boston migrating birds have arrived  
and flung their spring fling  
spiders hang in slender threads  
from our ceiling and the rodents  
have found a home under the kitchen sink

—MARC SWAN, PORTLAND, ME

## **Landlocked**

I cursed the lack of water on our acres  
as a kid, and ached for Myrtle Beach  
or Ocean City, glistening shore and sea-salt.  
I longed for gulls—not plaza gulls that greased  
their gullets at the Great American—  
but flocks of white against a field of blue.  
My parents didn't care for water, though.  
We weren't vacationers. We were Makers.  
We were Doers. I dug a hole out back  
with pick and shovel, filled it from the hose  
and watched my sad reflection drain away  
before I even had a chance to kick  
my shoes off. I scoured the woods, straining my ear  
for hidden springs. I doused the fields. My mouth  
was dry. My hands were plagued by rivulets  
of sweat. In town a giant puddle held  
me thrall'd, riveted by swirls of rainbow oil.  
My palms began to tingle, as they do now  
on springtime trips to town, when, even though  
I've fathomed the Atlantic, touched the Thames,  
I have to stop the car so I can stand  
beside a rushing crick, amazed for days.

—AUSTIN MACRAE, FREEVILLE, NY

## **SOLD Rental Cottage**

Twenty years of memories  
rustling like bats in rafters.  
Ashes in a coffee can  
left by his widow last week

rustling like bats in rafters.  
How can we throw him out  
left by his widow last week  
in this place we also love?

How can we throw him out  
on our final family vacation  
in this place we also love?  
We all leave pieces of ourselves

on our final family vacation.  
Twenty years of memories;  
we all leave pieces of ourselves—  
ashes in a coffee can.

—JOAN WIESE JOHANNES, PORT EDWARDS, WI

Forever and an hour my headlights swallow  
figures not defined enough to wear “tree”  
sprouting from a darkness that is not quite nothing.

—JOHN SIBLEY WILLIAMS, PORTLAND, OR

WISDOM is planning:  
it’s stuffy, hide-bound, pompous,  
powerful; sometimes  
it’s wiser to leap before  
you look; and walk on water.

—ROBERT SONKOWSKY, NORTH OAKS, MN  
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*

## Summer School

Window open to honeysuckle,  
I sit in our garage my grandfather  
built when my father was born.  
Sunlight steams in the scent  
of rain on cement, warms  
the sour-sweet of wet peaches.  
Our neighbors are grilling  
peppers from their garden  
and speak Italian to their baby,  
who wears rubies dangling  
from her pierced ears.  
I like being out in this cool  
room with its covered barbecue  
and vinyl sea-horse tablecloth,  
waiting for Donna and Patty,  
my two best friends. It’s Sunday.  
My mother’s watching an old movie,  
my father’s at the tavern  
nursing a beer over a game,  
my aunts are upstairs ironing  
white blouses for tomorrow’s  
teaching, typing. I put the lined  
paper on the table, take the pencils  
I’ve filed to needlepoints, and place  
their gold bodies as paperweights.  
My friends will race up the alley  
on their bikes after fried chicken  
suppers, to do whatever the teacher  
tells them: mad libs,  
a story with a witch,  
a trivia quiz. We take turns  
as teacher. I face the windows  
of our tall house, a few of them open,  
all of them shiny and clean, and make up  
a series of questions to which  
I think I know the answers.

—NANCY TAKACS, WELLINGTON, UT

## Canoeing the Spanish: Postcard Never Sent

How quickly stillness comes.  
Breathing is even, loose.

The night holds no terrors,  
days, only regular sounds:

the paddle dip in water,  
a bird’s wings overhead.

So far, no rain and  
the bugs are bearable.

Last night, a full moon,  
a dream of dancing fish.

—RONNIE HESS, MADISON, WI

## Canoeing the Spanish: The Voyage Out

Filled the stuff sacks and plastic tubs,  
provisions, sleeping gear,  
clothes for two weeks.

Took the cheese from the fridge,  
the apple and ripe avocado.  
Cleared the tabletops.

Left two shirts and shorts on the chair,  
a bowl and fork. Please wash and  
don’t forget to water the plants.

Decided not to take the puzzle.  
Will have plenty to occupy my time.  
Carried the canoe up from the boathouse.  
Loaded it onto the van and drove off.

—RONNIE HESS, MADISON, WI

## Under the Bridge in the Morning

A fresh sun moves in,  
over the horizon.  
Tree tops highlighted in gold.  
Dark purple and cobalt rule the sky,  
orange and red light start filtering through leaves.  
Cobalt turns azure and the purple recedes.  
Dew glistens on tall grasses,  
a small bird chirps good morning to the world,  
a wave against smooth rocks responds.  
Hello.  
Alongshore a dog explores the detritus the water delivered,  
last night's souvenirs.  
Watching, a squirrel appears,  
wondering if its stash is safe.  
A turtle sunbathes opposite shore.  
Rustling sounds capture the dog's attention,  
it's her mother.  
In the brush under the old bridge,  
a woman climbs out of the box they live in.  
She goes down to the water's edge,  
the dog joins her,  
although the sun gives no comfort,  
it's time to catch breakfast.  
Staring into the water she reflects.

—DAVID L. HARRIS, STANLEY, WI

## Always return with an extra tree for Soyla Luz

whose parents named her *I am the light*,  
who'll shrug and smile if you ask about it,  
and who'll move to her garden to tuck this  
coveted limón into the algae-covered soil  
in a corner, behind banana leaves, enough  
sunlight coming through holes in the fence,  
the tree hidden enough from dogs and kids.  
Upstairs, her grandkids hoot and tackle  
each other like the wrestlers on TV,  
take turns being thrown over your shoulder  
and spun. Soyla laughs and stirs soup  
on the stove. What made you think  
your company was enough? They hand you  
a globe and you show them from where  
on the map you came and they all point  
there, too, to say that's where they will go.

—LISA KUNDRAT, MINNEAPOLIS, MN

## Facing the Day

Another clean page.  
She'd been working at this for years.  
She'd revised, crossed out, covered up,  
plucked out, glossed over, made up anew.  
Hers was an open book  
now paper thin from erasures,  
parchment sheet-like, oiled by hand,  
blemished with smears,  
poke-dented, wrinkled.  
All earned, all a process,  
all attempts at character restoration.  
She turned her face away from the mirror,  
closed the foundation bottle,  
readied herself for morning coffee  
with grandchildren.

—MARILYN ZELKE-WINDAU, SHEBOYGAN FALLS, WI

## A Controlled Burn

He touches his match to kindling laid at the baseboard  
and cocks back to watch through his face shield  
as the first timid tongues lick the crumbling wallboard.  
It's a practice fire,  
and he's in charge. We're both turned out in full gear,  
sucking oxygen from the tanks that ride us like rockets.  
I know this man,  
know that inside his Nomex suit  
his butt and shoulder muscles bunch and flex  
taut beneath brown skin  
as he hauls hose, wrestles the valves together.  
I've seen him lounging at the firehouse  
in ratty jeans, drinking coffee, ear tuned to the two-way's crackle,  
just waiting for the call to boot up, slide the pole,  
get rolling.  
Today, however, the danger is nil.  
His crew is here to torch this old house, drench it down,  
torch it again, over and over,  
till all that's left is to scrape up clunkers  
and soak the pile to stinking ash.  
He's invited me here – me and my camera.  
We stand together in this airless room.  
Inside the heavy, poreless suit, my body is damp,  
unable to breathe. Through my own smoky shield  
I catch his eye as we wait for that orange-gold flare  
to arc across the ceiling above our heads.

—MARY O'DELL, LOUISVILLE, KY  
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*



## Interstices

The creaking ceiling tells her the neighbor  
above her is walking across his floor,  
a quiet considerate man,  
but there's no insulation between them.

She is remembering, then, the months  
in the condo she used to own  
when the couple upstairs  
came in at midnight from the third shift

at the post office, and started drinking,  
then the fights, the shrieking voices,  
and the sound bodies make  
when they smack against walls,

how even in her own bed below them,  
she was not safe from her anger and terror,  
how even the police she called could  
only temporarily quiet them.

He'd leave, the woman would call him back  
until finally they left for somewhere else,  
leaving behind a sort of conditional peace.  
Our lives intrude on one another.

Now, in her living room,  
stalled between present and past,  
she writes about the boundaries of things.  
Beyond her window, the fog

that hid the opposite building  
begins to give in,  
and now there's a clear separation  
between ground and the gray sky.

—PATRICIA FARGNOLI, WALPOLE, NH

### Request for a Mass from an Innocent Fish (\*response to Michael Sharkey: "Eating Sin")

Fish, you lie on my plate free of sin  
any trespass was removed during the supremely  
fine job of cooking this cafe produced for you.  
Also, because your dying was not your decision  
a Mass is possible,  
but

Fish, for now I wish you to dwell in my stomach,  
rich with oil from Greek olives and the fragrance of thyme.  
When all that is left on this table is your skeleton,  
I will take one pin bone to Mass,  
and slip you into the communion wine.

My plan is to have you stick in the throat of that fisherman  
who treated you badly. You will have your revenge,  
I will request forgiveness  
and do ten Hail Mary's.

—JACKIE LANGETIEG, VERONA, WI

I do not want to make self-portraits  
I would prefer Bonnard's  
*L'amandier en fleurs*  
tiny lavender and golden crocuses  
rising out of leaves and sand  
shuddering in the wind  
the bloodroot ready to pop  
open their silky white petals  
in the blue windows of dawn  
the snowy woven golds  
of Baltimore Orioles

—ROBERT SCHULER, MENOMONIE, WI

Your preconceived notions make me laugh which, in  
turn, causes liquid to spill out of my mouth.

I live in  
a condo  
in Wisconsin;  
you think:  
rich,  
fat,  
snooty,  
cheese.

I am  
NONE  
of these things,  
perhaps a little  
chubby, but that  
is all.

I do not  
have expensive silver  
baubles or an upturned  
nose.

My condo is old  
and crumbling, and in fact,  
belongs to my mother.

Also,  
I am lactose-  
intolerant.

—JESSICA GLEASON, LAKE GENEVA, WI

## Ebonic Pleas

The air blackens  
only layers of sound.  
Pantera drowns out Lil John.  
But the human voice is unique,  
Even the smallest whisper can be heard.  
“If you gonna beat me, motha fucka, BEAT ME”....  
Even Killswitch Engage can’t drown these  
Ebonic pleas.  
Black rod iron bars  
cover every portal of home,  
Not to cage or confine  
(this time)  
but to protect me  
from this god-forsaken hood.  
I close my eyes  
wishing,  
those bars could shut out  
the human voice  
of  
despair.

—JAN AUBREY, MILWAUKEE, WI

## Food Circa 1954

The Aunt Jemima toaster cover smiled  
on the gold-speckled counter top,  
where Mom made pot roast  
for Aunt Edna and Uncle Lou.

Sunlight filtered through fruit-print curtains,  
like an X-ray of Pete’s Produce Market,  
while the twins and I played hide and seek,  
and I stayed inside the kitchen window seat  
with the vegetables until Donald threatened  
to put my turtle Trudy in the oven  
if I didn’t come out.

After pound cake with peaches, the radio  
played “No Other Love,”  
a tango for trombones  
that made my parents dance  
over the salt water taffy wrappers  
we kids had dropped on the floor.

Screens pulsed with moths  
yearning for the Chinese lamp in the front window,  
and when company was gone and I lay in bed,  
I wondered if the next day my clothes  
would still smell so strong of peppers and onions.

—JOHN BOLINGER, CENTENNIAL, CO

## Supper

Lamb liver, fresh from slaughter.  
Technically, mutton. Three-year-old  
ewe who never nursed a lamb.

The death-man slipped her liver, sleek  
and warm, into the ziplock bag  
you held out like a beggar for alms.

A sacrifice. The barren ewe—no,  
not that either. Ewe who bleated for her  
lambs, but wouldn’t nurse;

licked their faces, and turned away,  
as today we turned our hearts.  
The death-man always tells our truths

too late. Mastitis: the ewe could not  
give milk. So she gave her liver, kidneys,  
heart into your open hands.

Tonight we’ll feast on our own fault.  
Lamb liver beautifully fresh,  
warm as if alive, sauteed with onion.

We’ll sip a blood-red Cabernet  
and offer brief thanks—all we can give,  
eating this day’s-end.

—TAYLOR GRAHAM, PLACERVILLE, CA  
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*

## Emptiness

There is emptiness, my uncle says,  
in the house where he lives.  
It grows in darkness, feeding on silence.  
Dreams of strange places,  
come home every night.  
Not only the house, the room,  
where he sleeps,  
breathes loneliness.  
The window looks to the field,  
like a solitary monk.  
And then the heart,  
that carries a train of memories,  
of those years, left behind.  
It is there, right there,  
where it pains the most.

—NABIN KUMAR CHHETRI, ABERDEEN, UK

## Empty Bottles

Outside the glass where the cars sit in the yard  
like old friends, sentinels of past wars, of  
making it home more times than not.  
Proud companions, they are honored to be left out  
in the shade, where it's not too hot anymore.  
Mice make themselves a nest in the glove compartments  
and under the seats where those bottles used to lay.  
Their spirits linger out there in the trees,  
behind the branches, just out of reach  
of the imagination: That symmetry found among  
the stars, their eternal mates.  
Children know of these things yet forget  
so easily when it's their turn to be strong,  
though it returns as they grow frail, when the  
wind speaks their names and sleep is forgotten.  
Out there is the soul of our nation, the  
Great Mystery in rhythm.  
It beats constant on through the dawn.  
Yes, there will be another life, another chance  
to go on with those dreams: The ones we face now  
and the ones of the past, and make change.  
But tonight they are kept inside, looking out  
from this side of the glass.

—TODD NORTON, APPLETON, WI

## A Kind Poem

She asked him, just this once, for  
a kind poem. Not the in-your-face jack-  
hammer rhythm 'n' rhyme that made  
her canary blue. He hadn't written

since the stroke; the lying-flat-  
in-hospital week. The canary  
was dead. He didn't want another,  
not a poem. Didn't want anything, he

said. Just this once, she asked,  
a kind poem. He stared into space,  
the kind beyond stars, black hole  
that swallows

rhyme and rhythm, canaries,  
cantaloupes sliced just ripe for him.  
He began to hum with words.  
Something like a nursery ditty. Ring

around the tadpole, pockets  
full of pie, four and twenty daisies  
never will die.... Well,  
he said, it's a kind of poem.

Isn't that  
what you wanted?  
Yes,  
she said.

—TAYLOR GRAHAM, PLACERVILLE, CA  
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*

## The full color of possibility

Why not a chrome yellow sun  
or lightning  
that rips the dark with silver,  
commanding rain?

Why not the Okavango  
in season?

Why not let the animals slosh  
into the lush vegetation

that complements the Monterey blue  
found by the viewer in the soft plaintive  
pallet of a painting?

Why not the pinked man  
to feed the blackbird flashing  
his red epaulet?

—RICHARD MERRILL, KENOSHA, WI

## Stranger # 37

Seeing your face  
throughout the years:  
the reflective stares  
in desperate times,  
always ragged and sleep deprived,  
murmuring something to yourself,  
over a cup of coffee  
and borrowed cigarettes.

No one else even wants to look your way  
when you ask for change,  
at least in all honesty,  
you just NEED a beer.  
Always knowing you're  
looking after you, when I can,  
that is, if time allows.

I pray for warmth  
when the rain is falling,  
under some simple roof, I search  
for a little smile from you,  
once in a while,  
to let me know things  
are okay.  
But then again,  
there are no mirrors  
for miles and miles.

—TODD NORTON, APPLETON, WI

## Nothing To Do With Horses

Forget the wind  
where it comes from  
if it sings or doesn't—  
windows down as the Silverado's  
engine continues sputtering  
in time with the rivers swift,  
which seems to pick up  
the thinner the river gets  
carving banks and potholes  
like hearts knifed  
into a wooden bridge,  
dug down deep  
should that love be forgotten—  
just forget it.  
It has nothing to do with horses.  
It has no canter or gait,  
no fetlock or hooves to end a film  
set for striding off into the sunset,  
which is why I'm sitting  
on this dead end stretch  
reading and rereading  
a letter you sent  
from several states away  
explaining to me  
nothing about mahogany bays  
or chestnut brown mares—  
your penmanship that curves  
nowhere near the curvature  
of manes or napes,  
broken horsechairs on a bow,  
stifles and flanks.  
I'm remembering how in grade school  
the Demel girl was bucked off  
and never survived the hit,  
my eyes a mess at the funeral  
never before having to look that close at  
death,  
how someone told me that her horse  
would have to be put down  
and how I understood  
and felt its *raison* was spent,  
much like your letters  
laying inside an unopened shoebox  
since the day you left. Your heart  
reminding me of the hallway eyes  
of horses that I have trouble watching

—ANDREW SCHILLING, MARSHFIELD, WI

## Drove My Parents Mad

I don't always know where I am,  
especially if it is snowing,  
especially if one shoe is on  
and the other shoe is off.

That shoe thing usually is a sign  
I am in my bed room,  
but sometimes not.

No telling what it means  
if there are geese honking  
through their overhead flight  
heading north  
compared to heading south.

I mean, I see it in hindsight:  
exactly where I've been.  
But I notice it is not always  
where I meant to be.

And sometimes I was there  
a little too early  
and sometimes  
a little too late.

And my mood swings  
always take me back to real swings  
on the playground  
in what, I fear, is some sort  
of teleportation trick  
I must have intrinsically  
because I have not yet figured out how it  
works.

The hardest thing is when the breath  
I am suppose to take is not the breath of air  
that is directly in front of me  
and then I scramble around,  
all bug-eyed and turning blue  
until I locate it, lest I steal  
someone else's air.

—K. P. GURNEY, ALBUQUERQUE, NM  
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*

## Some Afternoons When Nobody Was Fighting

my mother took out  
walnuts and chocolate  
chips. My sister and  
I plunged our fingers  
in flour and butter  
smoother than clay.  
Pale dough oozing  
between our fingers  
while the house filled  
with blond bars rising.  
Mother in her pink dress  
with black ballerinas  
circling its bottom  
turned on the Victrola,  
tucked her dress up into  
pink nylon bloomer pants,  
kicked her legs up in the  
air and my sister and I  
pranced thru the living  
room, a bracelet around  
her. She was our Pied  
Piper and we were  
the children of Hamlin,  
circling her as close as the  
dancers on her hem.

—LYN LIFSHIN, VIENNA, VA

## Northlawn

Surrounded by indigence  
from earliest memories  
my youth, blanketed  
me in ignorance.

The long brick buildings  
we called home, resembled  
Iroquois longhouses,  
outside of which  
juvenile past-times;  
ding-dong ditch, statue-maker  
and kick-the-can  
seemed inventions of our own.

A cruel nursery rhyme  
never committed to paper  
accompanied the ritual  
beheading of a dandelion.

Each moment captured  
with no thought of tomorrow.

Childhood survival proved  
an absurd presumption.

—CHRISTOPHER AUSTIN, MILWAUKEE, WI

## Thirteen

Nights, late August. Sultry, damp. Cicada's late shrieking  
in the woods that surround us. No glass  
on the cabin windows-canvas flaps hooked over nails.

From sixty years later, I bring it back.  
One night, something thumps down on my pillow.  
When I pull the light cord, nothing.

Another night, Susan sees a man's hand  
fumbling over the top of the canvas.  
A few cabins away, a girl screams.

The snake Mimi keeps in a shoebox on her steamer trunk--  
a small one --disappears. We never find it.  
In our bunks, before sleep, we hypnotize each other.

Even the days turn dangerous.  
Mimi cracks her head on a branch, twists her ankle.  
No-No, the dappled gray, my favorite, tromps on my foot.

The morning I wake up with hot skin, eyes stuck together  
they walk me to the infirmary and ring up the doctor  
who gives me a new drug--penicillin.

I break out in huge hives all over, itch like the devil,  
my temperature soars, my body drenched in sweat.  
It nearly kills me. I want that summer back.

*Camp Teela Wooket, Roxbury, VT 1950*

—PATRICIA FARGNOLI, WALPOLE, NH

## Everything Will Be Fine

Listening to talk shows in my neighbor's garage  
one of us rises to crush a can as  
light rolls under the door like dice and

Today all I have to do is un-slash my bike tires  
and grease the chain, call Mom Re:  
A note fastened to the mirror

How some muscled angels will  
swoop down and lower me gently  
onto the drainboard.

—JOE GUSZKOWSKI, MILWAUKEE, WI  
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*

## Adolescent

Jocks we were,  
Saturday afternoon in whites,  
smashing cricket balls around a park.

Parents checked the papers  
just to see our small print scores.  
We were headlines in their heads.

But then Ron's killed  
in some dumb rafting accident  
and Teddy buys a car,

a third hand Holden,  
and Brian gets a girl  
and spends his time at her house.

The rest of us discover beer  
and rings for ear and nose.  
Some even cut their bad teeth

on heavy metal music.  
Bob says, "I'm gay,"  
is never seen again.

So what's the park these days  
but bodies on shore,  
skid marks, sloppy kisses,

squashed beer cans,  
the blood from piercing,  
the drone of amplifiers

and closet doors swung wide.  
And what are parents  
but intimate terms with

other sections of the newspaper.  
And what's Saturday afternoon in whites  
but ghosts dressed for the occasion.

—JOHN GREY, JOHNSTON, RI

## Unarticulated Achdut: Lessons on a Mehadrin Bus

Had I grown up among sheitels,  
Rolling high my stockings,  
Davening in Bait Yaakov,  
Knowing the difference between fleisch and milch,  
And caring,  
Realizing “Ester and Gedalia” meant fasting,  
That babies are good,  
Pride is not,  
Maybe, I’d welcome you,  
On my bus.

*My bus,  
Where the likes of you,  
All bosom and thigh,  
Frighten me,  
Remake men’s minds.  
I wonder  
How many drugs and aborted  
Satin or trinkets captured  
Your prayers’ void.  
Yield that display  
By Haifa’s shipyards.  
Cover your hair.  
My, oh my.*

Oh, my mother abandoned me.  
To television and computers.  
We dressed the best  
We could  
Among the “white bread.”  
I leapt from Shabbot goy  
To ulpan morah,  
Though not in Lakewood.  
My kindling light, “kiruv,”  
Minus the word.  
Friends, neighbors, cousins,  
Peopled Shabbot with me.  
Where were you  
When strayed Jewish children  
Visited my sukkah?

*My sukkah over all of us,  
Includes imperfects  
Like myself.  
Dreaming, my neshemah laughs.  
So many dreary potato days,  
When so much soap,  
Over the stoop,  
Merely wets the walk.  
I cry Tehillim, failing to find Brachot.  
Your smile is summer’s heat,*

*Exclaiming “good morning,”  
To driver and passengers;  
Kiddush Hashem in single syllables.  
Sometimes I forget your knees,  
And learn.*

—DR. KJ HANNAH GREENBERG, JERUSALEM, ISRAEL

*Notes for “Unarticulated Achdut”:*

“Achdut” means “being in concert with.”  
“Bait Yaakov” is a type of girls’ school ordinarily attended  
by very orthodox young ladies.  
“Morah” means “teacher.”  
“Kiddush Hashem” means honoring G-d through actions.

## Mom’s Boys

Mornings, Mom lined up peanut butter toast  
on the kitchen counter, and my brothers and I  
filed by—docile and half asleep—like inmates  
in an asylum cafeteria. Beside the toast  
waited cold glasses of milk, hot chocolate maybe  
when arctic winds drifted streets closed, and schools  
shut down. Locked inside too close those days,  
we bickered and pushed till Mom exploded  
and stuck us with whole afternoons coaxing her  
back to good cheer. *Your father’s gonna hear  
about this*, she’d threaten through tears.

Dad roll-called us after work, bent us  
over his knee and whacked our sorry back sides  
with a yardstick till we cried. *Had enough*, he’d say,  
*had enough?* As if he could tempt us to beg  
for more. Mom faced us down triumphantly  
after that, commanding us at the supper table  
with smiles both warm and sly, dictating  
which of us would wash the dishes, which  
would dry. She’d tuck us in and kiss us  
as always, and listened close to what we’d pray.  
*It’s back to school tomorrow*, she’d say.

As usual, Dad was gone before first light. Mom  
lined peanut butter toast on the kitchen counter,  
and my brothers and I filed by. Schools  
were open and expecting us by the bus load.  
The skies burned a cruel blue. We shuffled off  
like we’d been shackled, after Mom tied our scarves  
and packed us out the door. Told us not to whine.  
*Yesterday was yours*, she’d say. *Today’s mine.*

—LOWELL JAEGER, BIGFORK, MT  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

## Bull-Headed

*Jerk 'em*, Dad said, when a bullhead  
tugged a bobber under and swam  
for deeper bottoms farther from shore.

*Look at 'em fight*, Dad said,  
as we heaved from muddy depths  
a black fish thrashing thin air.

Had to admire the frenzy; fish  
flip-flopping in the grass, Dad's  
hopping hot-foot pursuit, till  
he'd boot-stomped the fish stupid  
long enough to rip the barb from its jaw.  
Or the hook snapped in two like a brittle stick  
in the fish's clamped steel-trap smirk.

*Don't touch the bastard*, Dad said.  
We stood close, wincing when the bullhead's  
quick spines cut Dad's thumb to bleed.  
Had to admire the bastard's huff, gills  
gasping in the catch-bucket, his pearl blue  
light-blinded gaze staring back.

Admired him even worse, when Dad  
nailed him to a chunk of two-by-six  
—a twelve-penny spike through his brain —  
and still he twitched and refused  
to quit. Dad slit him, grabbed the hide  
with a pliers and stripped it. Axed

the bull's head clean from the rest  
of its connections. And still the gills  
opened a little and closed. Opened  
and closed. In a heap of entrails,  
a heart the size of a wart, determined  
it would not stopped beating.

—LOWELL JAEGER, BIGFORK, MT  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

Grocery store on Sims,  
Winter winds and slippery walks—  
Dad reaches to help

—ELMAE PASSINEAU, WAUSAU, WI

Flatware disappears  
Through the garbage disposal,  
Few dishes to do...

—ELMAE PASSINEAU, WAUSAU, WI

## A Speck

We're craning our necks, foreheads  
pressed against the glass, watching  
a glinting speck of shining wings  
shrink till it blinks out  
in the big blue sky. He'd climbed

inside the plane, our father, the heavy  
door swung shut. He'd kissed  
our mother and each of us  
goodbye. He'd waited beside us  
on the plastic seats, bought us  
each a coke, kept checking his watch.

And before that, he'd dropped  
eight quarters in a machine on a far wall  
of the terminal—flight insurance—  
one thousand dollar accidental death  
payout. A bundle of cash back then,  
enough to cover funeral expenses,  
he said, and a car payment or two.

Our mother wouldn't touch it.  
So he slipped the papers in her purse  
and clicked it shut with a snap.  
As loudspeakers called passengers to board.  
As the plane's great props stuttered,  
then caught, then roared.

—LOWELL JAEGER, BIGFORK, MT  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

Cookie sale at school—  
Fifteen thousand dollars' worth  
Bought by Jean Lang—why?

—ELMAE PASSINEAU, WAUSAU, WI

## Roaring Paunch River, Kentucky

Brother grinning  
an impish freckled jack lantern  
wants the kayak.

My blue canoe  
inexplicably smells  
of toast and grass.

White waves daze  
and force us towards a red X  
pulling us in.

Boat and oak collide,  
I drop to bedrock  
knocking and yo-yoing me.

A strange chorus of eggs  
beat at my elbows, hair.

Some fat side branch  
thumps my gut  
and it ends.

Ozone metal  
whips against my teeth  
sucking in  
squeezing a limb.

Brother laughs.

Did you know  
you look like  
a snapping turtle  
when you gasp for air?

—SUMMER QABAZARD, NORMAL, IL

**Baked Bikini**

She was lying on a tattered towel,  
 anointing her limbs with baby oil.  
 Slick shine blended with sweat,  
 roasting that pale pink body,  
 like a fresh rotisserie chicken,  
 rotating round and round.  
 Browning skin dripped beads of wet,  
 creating a slight sizzling sound,  
 as it slid off tender cooked parts  
 and onto dry, baked earth.

She never heard the sinister words,  
 skin cancer and melanoma.  
 She never gave a thought to,  
 freckles and deep-rooted wrinkles.  
 She never could have imagined,  
 an aging face so leathery,  
 a cow might mistake her,  
 for a two legged kissing cousin.  
 She was the glowing goddess,  
 of Elm Tree Avenue.

It was the mellow yellow sixties.  
 A blaring Beach Boy beat,  
 “Everybody’s gone surfing,”  
 echoed cool California lyrics,  
 from a small transistor radio.  
 No Big Kahuna or soaring swells,  
 surrounded small town Wisconsin.  
 That didn’t stop my sister,  
 who paid her daily toll by taking,  
 a tanning tour of duty.

Nothing could deter the willful teen,  
 from her bronzing ambition,  
 until the last bit of sun dissolved,  
 behind the next door neighbor’s garage;  
 not Whiffle batted balls,  
 or spattered Sparrow bombings,  
 not Frisbee free for alls,  
 or black flies poised,  
 to make a ten point landing,  
 on her slick strip of leg.

Not bees buzzing over teased hair,  
 attracted to the candied confection,  
 sprayed so rigid, piled so high,  
 a small tornado couldn’t have,  
 knocked the wind out of it.  
 Linda was the type of girl,  
 who didn’t know the meaning of  
 “All things in moderation.”  
 Her new blue bikini, barely there,  
 was ready to rock and roll.

One more sun drenched day,  
 and the popular crowd,  
 well-bred and berry brown,  
 would see her at the pool party.  
 Her burning desire,  
 at charbroiled perfection,  
 created a baby oil bathing beauty,  
 with no visible tan lines,  
 My sister would be,  
 the toast of the town.

—WENDY SCHMIDT, APPLETON, WI

**Place to Go**

After the tornado I found Mama  
 All rolled up in her mattress, her hard mattress  
 The one Aunt Janie made her get because her old one was way too soft.  
 Nobody could’ve rolled that hard mattress up if they was trying to,  
 But she was all done up like a jellyroll.  
 I had to holler over to two guys on another slab to give me a hand  
 And we wrestled it open. Mama was all quiet.  
 I watched her breasts going up and down, so I knew she was alive.  
 She was pale in the face, but breathing all right.

There was nothing of Mama’s on that trailer slab. Only Mama  
 and her mattress, some odd scraps of kitchen stuff by her feet,  
 a toilet setting off to one side, upside-down.  
 Looked like other people’s junk to me I figured.  
 When Mama felt up to it, we’d go search a bit up the line.

Mama moaned a soft little kitten sound, not like her.  
 I went over and put my hand on her forehead  
 She opened up her eyes and saw it was me.  
 “Jerry?” she said. I said, “You all right?”  
 “No, gotta pee.”

I coulda laughed because of that toilet being there,  
 But it wasn’t all that funny. I was gonna say, “Hafta use the woods,”  
 But the woods wasn’t there any more, just sticks and spikes  
 All naked wood, with rags, that was probably somebody’s clothes,  
 And plastic bags flappin around.

Mama shifted and got to her feet before I could help her up.  
 “Just turn your head, Son,” she says to me.

I took her home. She’ll stay with us for a while, whether Beatrice likes it or not.  
 Gotta take care of Mama. I’ll keep her til we find her a place to go.  
 She says she wants to come right back, says, “It won’t hit the same place twice.”

God was kind to my mama. I’ll let her live where she wants.  
 I just hope she’s figured it out right.

—ESTER PRUDLO, MONTGOMERY, AL AND FITCHBURG, WI

Upon viewing Ulrike Palmbach’s *Cow*

What are you hiding,  
 white milk cow?  
 Drooldrips thread  
 from your closed, no-moo mouth.  
 Blinded by moonlight  
 no brown of eye shows.  
 Bulging, tucked up,  
 nose forward,  
 silent you are.  
 No ears echo your thoughts.  
 If poked, would you rip  
 your hand stitched seams  
 to cry out-  
 or just pockmark softly,  
 pressed for an answer.

—MARILYN ZELKE-WINDAU,  
 SHEBOYGAN FALLS, WI



## Song with Cormorants

It's 75° water, 75° air, it's fog.  
It's birds singing bubblegum.  
August & the garden  
's exhausted,  
filled with yellow tiger-  
swallowtails  
& gold-finches eating  
the echinacea they ride on. In  
Whole Foods, buckets of  
"antique" hydrangeas appear.  
We hang glass-glittered owls  
from every window. All  
night we hear their song.  
Each night the sunset is  
2 to 3 minutes earlier.  
Take a breath here  
for one little minute,  
and Mama Snowman  
with her weird twig hair  
peeps in the window,  
reminding me I'm weather,  
& it's time to move the goal  
posts to flames & safety pins.

—SUSAN FIRER, MILWAUKEE, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work by this  
author*

## Bird Control

Do the House Swallows in Terminal D  
of the Detroit Airport  
dream of the Driftless Area,  
burn with vigorously suppressed natural fires?

Does a south wind on the Goat prairie  
exist in the heart of a common bird,  
whose soul flits the Mississippi Flyway,  
scours some mesic floodplain?

I see them, restless against the glass,  
nesting in the PVC eaves. All I had to do was look up

listen to their chirruping; not territorial, not distressed,  
adapted to LCD fountains, comfortable in plastic  
sugar maple basewood oaks, hungry for hamburger  
in this private city of industry.

—LAUREN GORDON, MADISON, WI

Flocks of finches flit  
up, down, and AT my window;  
the latter splatter.

—ROBERT SONKOWSKY, NORTH OAKS, MN  
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*

## Messages from Birds

This is my heart  
back from the rain,  
naked as the grass  
I was born this way.

▣

The cold on my wing finds  
different songs singing.  
The warmth on my cheek,  
finds hatched ones breathing.

▣

Existence, and the thought  
to comeback around.  
A year's turn toward nature,  
and this is what I found.

▣

Wind, travel with me.

▣

This is where I go when  
it rains.

▣

Watch me restore the world.

—MATTHEW HAUGHTON,  
LEXINGTON, KY

## Ripples

I awake like a plucked flower  
and search the day for my stem.

▣

I'd like to say the world dances  
but in fact it's sitting  
satisfied and full  
all around me.

▣

Today I am a monster in the grass,  
growing fat on captured  
grasshoppers,  
searching for my stem,  
feeling the earth pulse back  
between my teeth.

▣

I tend to sing loudest for the wave  
that's bleeding back to sea.

▣

But in my daydream they all sing  
back at me  
in one voice,  
through a single row  
of clenched teeth.

▣

Then I wake again  
like a plucked flower,  
alone, stemless,  
seeds scattered all over this tiny  
tiny field.

—JOHN SIBLEY WILLIAMS,  
PORTLAND, OR

## While you were having your breakdown, I re-caulked the Jacuzzi

and afterward, went for a walk. I said hello to an old man with a walker, I wanted to say more but couldn't. I stopped to count, or look, or admire or just, I don't know, the green walnuts shining in the late-day sun. I didn't count them. I worked hard in the bathroom. I walked past people grilling; the last time you grilled was a month ago. It smelled like something I want you to do again.

All this color on  
the prairie now mid-September  
and I wish you

could hear the wind tonight. Last week there was only a fist of sumac, now the hillside bleeds with it, the compass plants' tall bodies bow yellow, and here and there a shock of aster, like a paintbrush waiting to take over. I needed something to do with my hands.

And you and I have  
always wanted a name for  
this, this color, this

entire early evening early fall prairie color. This before the sun goes down color. And tonight, I want a name for the way this prairie, this water garden, this cloud-quilt of goldenrod breaks my heart. I want the name for breaks-my-heart. I don't want this breaking to end. I don't want this walk to end, I don't want this evening to end until it finishes breaking me, until it gives me the name. I know this name will break my heart the way everything does in time: the way black will grow in the bathroom again on the perfectly white edge, the way fall always comes, the way you can't hold on to bright and shining things.

The edge isn't  
perfect but it'll do  
I want to say

to the runners and the dog-walkers and the couples talking,  
there is a way to hold on to your happiness. I want to say to the  
bathroom there is a way to stay white. I want to say to the

goldfinches  
there must be a way  
to stay yellow

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

## Crossword Sonnet Haiku Puzzle

1. (Across) &
2. (Down) I want \_\_\_\_
3. A way of saying *now*, or
4. Moon's light or, shoulder
5. Weightless, shining
6. It's \_\_\_\_\_,
7. Just after August
8. Late at night
9. Simply, *the*
10. (Sounds like) *weigh*
- (11. Across: Same as 9.)
12. Down somewhere inside ribs
13. The way the (12 Down)
14. Holds \_\_\_\_ and on

And in this pale light  
late September evening the  
way the heart holds on

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

## A Few Thoughts on an Old Equation

1. Before waking I dreamed of you, smiling, hair across your eyes. 2. You were naming the small towns along the coast, naming the saints, one by one. 3. Holy and un— 4. (Let x be years ago, let y be us.) 5. Years later I've learned that holiness is ordinary as the tongue saying *Saturday afternoon, San Luis Obispo*; and that memory is not history, but geometry. 6. (Ex: the angle of repose) 7. Or the angle of those sea lions draped across continents of stone. 8. Didn't we memorize a hundred fractions of light? Didn't we subtract something, somehow? 9. Somewhere someone said look at the moon. Count to 10. I will 2.

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

## I shall play unapologetically

I could just be going crazy. \_\_\_\_\_ (crazy person noises). It could also just be the planets. They paint the dome of the earth like clouds so you won't go crazy. They hang up \_\_\_\_\_ (noun, arcade décor) and blinking lights so you don't feel bad to be among your kind. And you can always win tickets. You can't take your tickets to the afterlife. They encourage you to paint portraits so you won't feel like just a little nothing adrift in the ultimate anti-playzone: the universe, aka your day. You push through the mesh enclosure until you're face to face with the portrait and then you say: "Hello. This is a condition." Your parent supervises from behind the crossword.

When I asked to write a poem about you, I felt \_\_\_\_\_ (feeling you get in a ball pit)

When you said ok it was all \_\_\_\_\_ (color) rocket. But the way you said it was \_\_\_\_\_ Sigh. Another toy chest (childhood Nintendo game long lost to the annals of time).

memory excursion. Another sweet nothing on the back of straight-to-DVD case. Another dead world. Another portrait of something destroyed. Another \_\_\_\_\_ (adjective) \_\_\_\_\_ (noun). What is the universe now to us but a playzone that can't pay the space rental fee? What is this sweet work with if thou kiss me not? As I collapse into colored balls I shall destroy. Whoa! \_\_\_\_\_ (exclamation)

Here we go! This town will burn upon atmospheric reentry. I shall the core of this town and rip it. Onto a DVD. Get your best underwear and dance. These are love poems to the world of direct-to-DVD. You were born to this condition. That's the best lie from your third eye. It's nurture, all nurture. We learned the calligraphy of the ball pit. \_\_\_\_\_ (exclamation). This condition is for the direct-to-DVD market in you.

—RUSSELL JAFFE, IOWA CITY, IA

## Chameleon

At the tip,  
cricket sticks.

For a moment  
legs lash,

thrash, the air.  
It's a fast,

sinewy ride,  
the last hurrah

before being  
hurled

into the jaws  
of death.

It's all technique.  
And this tongue's

got it: speed,  
reach, suction.

And now,  
for another kill.

But wait, what's  
this? An intruder

stalks your stand,  
asserts his will,

defies your turf!  
Angered, you change

into that noxious  
little number named

*Back-Off Black!*  
And once again,

you're boss of branch.  
Take a bow. You've

earned this tree.  
You're free

to take a shot, launch  
your lengthy tongue,

toward a cricket  
or mantis meal—

perhaps even,  
a locust lunch.

—JEANNIE E. ROBERTS, CHIPPEWA FALLS, WI

## Ci \_\_\_\_; or, They-who-must-not-be-named

*The word cicada ... stops me in my tracks. Sorry. I simply cannot continue.* —Billy Collins

It's been a good year  
for them. Those ci-  
gar-stub-shaped insects  
and their devilish red eyes.  
With their portly green bodies  
perched on trunks and limbs  
they puncture the air above the ci-  
ty with their electric trills.  
As usual it's the males  
who bellow from their ci-  
tadels at the top of a sy-  
camore or other tall tree.

The female responds to the sy-  
cophantic cry. They mate. She makes  
a precise slit at the base  
of a stem to deposit her eggs.

Later, the stem falls to the ground  
leaving behind a cica-  
trix of her act, a blemish to mark  
the spot. I've known people who  
thought those calls were not animate  
but simply electric wires buzzing  
in the summer heat. For some it's a sick-  
ening chorus. For me, the cries mark  
the season. Just one more insect  
doing what it needs to do—has done  
for millennia without help  
or hindrance from the likes of you or I  
or those who can't even pro-  
nounce their name.

—STEVE TOMASKO, MIDDLETON, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work & audio by this author*

## Praying Mantis

*Fish gotta swim and birds gotta fly; insects, it  
seems, gotta do one horrible thing after another.*  
—Annie Dillard

The horrible thing is not  
that she eats his head  
while he's mating with her.  
And it's not that he moves  
faster without his head.

Well, actually,  
that is the horrible thing.

—STEVE TOMASKO, MIDDLETON, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work & audio by this author*

## Black Flag Motel and Lounge *for Chuck Ketterhagen*

*Roaches check in but they don't check out*

They're roaches so they don't talk but  
using their pheromones and feelers  
they agree to no pets and pay up.  
What's really going on,  
this is a secret.  
Just let's say the lady roach  
feels weird and she's jumpy tonight.  
Just let's say the man roach takes the key and tells  
the desk clerk thanks and goodnight  
so the two new guests exit the office,  
take ten steps left and enter 4 C:  
not great, but okay.  
But whatever.  
Heaving the big suitcase on the second bed  
he flops backwards on the first, flips the tv to sports.  
Sports, talk, ad, ad, talk, movie, ad, talk, nothing,  
talk, travel, pets, movie, nothing,  
Knock it off, she says,  
and throws him a beer.  
She's unpacking his new shirt and flannel pants,  
and then her beige separates and a dozen  
little slippers, two robes.  
Well, long day and they're tired  
so they undress and turn in and soon enough  
he loves her up and starts to doze.  
She lies there.  
She's wide awake.  
She walks to the window:  
attar of french fry and sour milk and burnt buns.  
Moonlight carpets the parking lot.  
Smiling now she takes a long breath  
and climbs into bed, and in this way,  
throwing her left legs over his right,  
two roach souls enter the starry dark.

—MARK KRAUSHAAR, LAKE MILLS, WI

## Parthenogenesis

Female aphids have mostly dispensed  
with men. They mass together  
in their feminist world: mothers, daughters,  
sisters, aunts, all living without a guy.  
No first dates, no courtship.  
Just wham bam and thank themselves.  
They don't even lay eggs.  
There's a two-dollar word for begetting  
their own daughters directly.  
Inside their translucent green skin  
you can see their developing young.  
Out they come, perfect small renditions  
of mother. Their own daughters already  
growing inside. They're not the only  
ones who've gone male-less.  
Other bugs of course, a lizard here,  
a salamander there. Some fish.  
Even a bird or two.  
You can see where this is going.  
As I tell her this, my wife smiles.

—STEVE TOMASKO, MIDDLETON, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work & audio by this author*

## The Ant Tree

I heard the crack, glanced toward the lake  
in time to watch a forty-foot red pine  
topple forward in the wind.  
In an instant it lay finished, despite  
its green tufting of spring growth.  
No harm done, except to the tree  
and the plans of God-knows-how-many-  
thousand carpenter ants sent into  
immediate evacuation mode, Plan B,  
every which way, bearing in their jaws  
the pale gold seed of the next generation.  
I glimpsed among them one larger,  
reddish-winged, twice the others' size,  
fleeing. Later in the day I returned  
to inspect the riddled core, wrapped around  
by an inch of slightly more sound wood,  
a maze-like complexity in which now  
not a single ant could be detected.  
Until this morning a palace of  
darkness, intricately galleried as  
a Gothic cathedral, that trunk riven  
and snapped at the height of my forehead  
had become, for ants and humans alike,  
a loss to be cut, a ragged ruin  
under the uneasy scrutiny of the light.

—THOMAS R. SMITH, RIVER FALLS, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

## Participation poem guts/pet moth Glidy, may you bludgeon the dream of the poem always

My pet moth, amen. I had one. Glidy. Please write what you'd like to say to him, my teacher said when he died the week he was born. The last lines I wrote about him then in first grade were "I will love you forever." Polyphemous moth, a big one with milky bulbs like the eyes of the ready to die dead. Grandpa died. Your turn: I ask you under a bright lamp outside a strip mall bar about your better nights. You tell me your dreams are a rotoscope of clichés. To repeat is to kill, always, always, amen. There are birds in the parking lot of the Pizza Ranch I threw bottles at, but now my sobriety is the double fisted kind, the flightless afraid but beady-eyed kind. We watched them. Together we are warm beds we call graves. The sun invited the clouds over to tell bunk bed stories. Bla bla bla. Yakkity yak yak yak. Flutter, flutter, there, there. Please write what you said here: \_\_\_\_\_

(eulogy)

The funeral march is so awesome. I can lower my head and sway with it and no one can say otherwise. I don't know how many times I thought it at grandpa's funeral, how many times back when I reminded my brother about when the clouds were breaking, when the Are You Afraid of the Dark episode with the dream machine came on that scared him. Fear. Some. I count myself among those who turn away from beaches in favor of sandbox-side swimming pools. Never liked birds. You said I was a poet. But I am forever too bludgeony. What would you like to be? And would you believe the romance of an abandoned walkie talkie in the sand? And I was sleepy. And will you dance to the anthem of my manifesto? Write an apology for every oceanside star or useless streetlight, aggressively catch a bird, tie it to it. This is the way I held you. Curled over we played a kind of family van smooth jazz leaving the funeral. Then, Pow was a joke sound, but pwish pwish was the sound of Ninja Turtle figures punching with tremendous loft. Now I warn you with a mocking bird warble at anonymous pizza restaurants. Grandpa called me generational so I played on his computer and ate most of the food in his house, RIP, amen, amen. Now I have his sweaters. At night when the moths took to the streets we cut the heads off the birds and sent their guts forevermore down the streams of the gutters, amen. May we invade the dreams of our loved ones always.

—RUSSELL JAFFE, IOWA CITY, IA

## Morning, With Insects

Morning still wet behind the ears. Light  
just over the town's horizon. Finches  
somewhere. Sparse traffic.

And these tiny insects swarming up  
to mate and die. The ones to the east  
are back-lit by the early sun, bobbing

the one week or so of their adult lives,  
a loose cloud of gnat-sized creatures,  
like dust with wings,

this airborne agitation, strange  
and strangely formal  
columns moving up and down,

exchanging altitudes, brief collisions.

This moment means the world to them,  
I guess. Given the sleep of the egg, the sluggish

weeks of larval appetite, and now this day,  
this coded flight over the wet lawn  
which might as well be love

for all the aftermath, and me with nothing  
better to watch

than insects spending everything  
to dance away oblivion,

and still just early morning here.

—MAX GARLAND, EAU CLAIRE, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

## The Crayfish

The crayfish scuttle backwards. I don't think  
they like the look of us, our big rubber feet,  
all this uproar of silt. Give them a shadow.  
Give them a mossy stone to wear like a hat.  
Claws to snatch a living with. They don't like  
this wading in of ours.

Give them a gull to fear like a god. A northern pike  
to pass over like somebody else's doom.  
There's no honor in death by fisherman's boot.  
Give them stealth and hindsight. A muddy version  
of a mermaid's tail.

They back-fling themselves from crevice to crevice,  
from the undersides of sodden branches  
curtained with algae, to the spaces between the frog-  
spawned rocks. Give them the fleeing river.  
Give them the guts to wear their skeletons  
on the outside. An honest grasp of the ghost  
of a chance. No use for us at all.

—MAX GARLAND, EAU CLAIRE, WI  
*visit VW Online for more work by this author*

## Low Life and Blood Relatives

*An ode to slugs*

Unseemly wet knob of flesh  
child's snot ball  
what part of Earth  
what *Mother*  
loves your facelessness?  
Oozing where you sit or sleep  
on seedlings, first buds  
a vengeance of protoplasm  
in my garden.

Mud-whale  
small as fingernails,  
slick mystery of scum  
*State your purpose.*

We live together  
but is respect due?  
You, sleazy low-down acrobat  
passionate to gum holes  
in my delicate-veined  
lettuce, crisp harmonious  
halves of leaf,  
unbroken peripheries  
complete, perfect,  
*except for you!*

*One squish, one flick of my thumb,  
you die.*

My crude neighbor,  
my low-life  
third eye,

Earth's balance,  
wholeness, too,  
is grounded  
in our strange  
difference.

Remind me,  
with your alien body  
of startling goo:

We are mud relatives.

We're family,  
me and you.

—LOUISA LOVERIDGE GALLAS,  
MILWAUKEE, WI

The man's seventy fourth year to Heaven, then he goes there. That's how I think of it, but don't ask what I mean when I say "Heaven." You know I know what I mean, but—. Everyone has a heaven somewhere in the back of his mind, maybe only some excellent nothingness. In my head, Heaven resembles Zurich. Cafes, a lake, a river through town, great trolleys. A swell train station where my big crowd of remembered dead greet recent arrivals. All afternoon snow falling on the street—so light you could sweep your walk with a straw broom. My head, my pockets fill up with paper scraps, scribbled names of remembered dead: my outrageous mother, my gentle father, the poets, children, trumpet players, presidents, all of them strolling the Bahnhofstrasse in this Heaven of my making. What am I doing here, my Irish father asks. I wonder. I wonder will he really be there when I set out to join him?

Today, as I put the finishing touches on these words, the hardest thing I have ever written, Chet Baker plays on the stereo in my home office; the White Sox have won eight straight games and are in first place; I am drinking white wine instead of whiskey; and I have too many stories to tell, too much gratitude to express.

I met Jim Hazard on the page before I met him in person: in 1988, as a college senior just accepted into UWM's grad program, I picked up the anthology *Gathering Place of the Waters: 30 Milwaukee Poets*. I wanted to see, even more clearly, who it was I was going to be studying with for—it turned out

## The Old Man Testifies

In the Church of His Throat, every name, every old word's a testament. Essie and Vince, his grand parents, the little poem Essie remembered for him, the old lamplighter of her baby days, the old man arriving at sundown with a tiny flame.

*And O! before you hurry by with ladder and with light;  
O Leerie, see a little child and nod to him to-night!*

O Leerie, that was a name she taught him, in the poem she taught him, one day at sundown. By God, that was something to learn, says the Old Man, breath, memory, and dark whiskey congregating in that sanctuary just up from his heart.

*(...and that's the thing, I know those voices – I talk to them, and I talk like them, sweet talkers who taught me my very first words, those old folks who named the colors for me, named the birds and weather, taught my own name to me, where do you think I learned to name a spiderweb or the rain? choo choo train and cherry tree? I hold to the voices that taught me to say sunfish first time in this life, to say walnut and bubble, Donald Duck, O Leerie, and heaven)*

## Poem at 76

My dead grow younger every year. I've grown older than any of them ever got to be, and tender hearted towards them as a grandfather.

They went their way, care free. I stayed here. When they visit they play under the catalpa. They look towards the house and ask each other who is that nice old man smiling at us from the upstairs window? Then they play under the big tree till it's time to go.

to be—the next decade and a half. Jim's poems in this collection moved me: songs of childhood, of walking home in the dark, of knocking back a shot glass of Pepsi, of fighters' names and cuts, of Whiting, Indiana; songs of home, songs of family, songs of a knowing but happy man. These were my introduction to the person I was to think of, at various times over the next almost 25 years, as my professor, my mentor, my champion, my friend.

In the early 1990s, a bunch of us headed over to a now-defunct pizza-joint bar that was across the street from UWM to talk about our writing and about what had happened in class that night. Jim, as usual, had shown up late to class, about fifteen minutes late this time, so we had already started talking. When Jim got there, nothing much changed.

He didn't take over the conversation. We all just talked, laughed, played. I don't remember who at the bar said it first, but someone said, "When I sit in Hazard's class, I think we are just blowing off time, but then we get here and I realize how much..." He didn't have to finish his sentence; we knew what he meant: an hour, a week, a year, a decade later, you understood what Jim Hazard was subtly showing you: the sacraments of teaching and learning, of living well: Listening, Humor and Love. You simply understood.

In the early 2000s Jim stood at the back of the room, arms folded, as I, after a long

absence from the program, took part in a departmental reading at a local bookstore. After I was done, as I walked back to my chair, still uncertain about what I was doing, about whether I was back on the right track, Jim gave me what I had always counted as equal to his laugh, as equal to the glimmer in his eye, as equal to his kindest words: that slow sort-of wink and nod that said to me, "I liked that. You did well. Everything is going to work out."

I have just re-read again Jim's poem "In the Bathtub with Erin, Listening to Billie Holiday." In it, his daughter, who has been studying his scars and listening to their stories ("dog bites, a burn, surgeon's/ knives, my own"), asks if they hurt. He replies, "A scar doesn't hurt."

And like the first time I read it, I feel the benediction given to his daughter and to us at the end, when he tells her and us about the pains we will necessarily feel: "Erin/looks herself over and can't find a single scar./ I put my finger on her navel where I saw her be/cut and bleed. Not the least trace of a scar there,/ on her or anyone. That tissue grows later on us/and if we are unlucky, no music at all will come of it."

At the end of his introduction to *Gathering Place of the Waters*, Jim wrote, "Frank O'Hara, Carl Sandburg, Emily Dickinson, David Etters—writers in their time and place—are great heroes for me. They almost feel part of the family—and I am happy to have lived with them."

You have left many, many people feeling the same way about you, Jim: happy and lucky to have lived with you, happy and lucky to have heard your music.

## John Walser Remembers James Hazard

## Her face lit up

but not from joy  
as she received her candle  
at the neighborhood vigil.

Another boy had come home  
in a box  
and this one  
from right down the block.

—ED WERSTEIN, MILWAUKEE, WI

## Chopped

Summer chops memories  
into salad greens, tossed  
and sprinkled with sour  
vinegar images, a tart  
tongue, words blended  
in air conditioner's  
quiet murmur at garden's  
edge, always a struggle  
between sun and shadow,  
running hot and cold,  
all these things constantly  
growing only to be chopped  
down with hoes and  
lawn mowers, maintaining  
that balance between past  
and present, stuffing  
the rest in garbage bags  
to be hauled away tomorrow.

—RICK DINGES, LINCOLN, NE

## Untangle My Tongue

1.

Matchstrike, pressed by darkness,  
this is what blesses, crimps you in.  
Insect clicks in the basement

or half-tone, cars through the tunnel  
where I contemplate the exigencies of rain:  
Each small scald of headlights, pavement glossed —

Bottle shirred by the mower,  
plastic bag shirred by wind.  
These cars are leaving me, always.

And I can no longer manage  
your gorgeous, unapproachable July—

2.

These cars are leaving me, always.  
In the rain, the stuttering birds.  
Reverberation, shatter

and the grey sky filled with light.  
The sky, pressing out on its cables.  
Cicadas whelm the trees

as the harbor opens like a new balloon.  
I begin to reckon cities. The skill of laundry  
on rooftops, skill of the cyclist

as she risks the bridge.  
Skill of the El on its trestle.  
I begin to reckon trains.

These tables of departure.  
There is nothing in my pockets  
or my hands.

—ANNE SHAW, CHICAGO, IL

## Expectations

Summer is over  
as short as it is long  
in the scheme of things,  
and as we walk the winding path  
toward the garden pond  
pausing to point out a dead branch  
to pluck a last blossom,  
we already have placed  
in memory sun-slanted colors  
transient odors;  
of what are we expectant:  
a stream of cool air  
which will lengthen into frost  
solacing silence instead  
of vivid human voices  
the crow on a tree-top  
who croaks like a wind-up toy  
in a Christmas pageant.

—RAY GREENBLATT, EXTON, PA



# At the Kitchen Table

## An Interview with Douglas Goetsch by Shoshauna Shy

### The Ripple in Your Day

I'd like to pull back the hair from your face  
and ask how you get through the ripple in your day,  
the one that comes unannounced  
like a feral animal sitting on the lawn  
facing your windows—you'd think  
you'd be used to it by now. It stays  
maybe a minute, maybe an hour,  
and doesn't go away until it does.  
Do you settle into your favorite chair  
with the universal remote, spend an hour  
in the shower, bury your head  
in crosswords, sleep in your clothes?  
Do you buy crap on eBay, Google  
people from your old school, picturing  
the days they're having in other towns?  
Does coffee deliver you, perhaps  
an early cocktail, a spoon and a half-  
gallon of cookie dough ice cream?  
Maybe you scream at Customer Service,  
or research how to make a bomb.  
Painkillers would be refreshingly direct.  
Are you one of those who can stare at themselves  
in the mirror and pronounce affirmations?  
Do you pray, or do you put on  
a certain song and sway empty-  
handed in the darkening room?

What is it that you do, do every day,  
that everybody does, even heroes on posters  
we hung in our childhood bedrooms—  
athletes, rock stars, Hollywood A-listers  
who, if they don't make it past the ripple  
in their day, end up in the papers,  
drunk in their driveways, wandering nameless  
in Orange County, found motionless  
on their made beds or in their bathrooms.  
Cloistered nuns, Henry Kissinger, people  
in the People's Republic of China—  
everybody's day, even their best day,  
has a ripple, when something reverses,  
dust motes float slowly upward  
and memories of old wounds  
trudge into the room like wet dogs.  
Have you come to believe the ripple is you?  
The ripple isn't you. How you  
get through it—that's not even you,  
it's just your life, your story, the story  
of us all, each inside our own day,  
and with you, though feeling so separate  
and holding on. Holding on.

— DOUGLAS GOETSCH, NEW YORK CITY, NY

Douglas Goetsch of New York City joined Shoshauna Shy for a conversation about his poem “The Ripple in Your Day.” Grab a cup of coffee, pull up a chair and listen in.

DOUG: I've been a writer of poetry for about 25 years. I got the bug as a young public school teacher in New York, while teaching a unit in poetry to 9th graders.

SHOSHAUNA: Could you tell us, Doug, what triggered the creation of this poem—was it an image, a piece of music, something you overheard in the cereal aisle?

DOUG: “The Ripple in Your Day” was triggered directly by Hollywood—something rare for me. Heath Ledger had just killed himself with drugs, and Owen Wilson, after a suicide attempt, was making a new comedy. Other than the fact that they are people who have what so many in our society want—fame, money, etc.—I knew little about them; though I was overcome at the time with a theory: their disasters stemmed from a small moment, a ripple, that happens to all of us. A difficult interlude shows up on our doorstep, daily, and how we navigate that ripple says more about us than just about anything.

SHOSHAUNA: So, what came first for you, was it the image of the half-gallon of ice-cream or perhaps the phrase “wandering nameless in Orange County..”? Or did the final line arrive and you felt compelled to write a poem that ended with it?

DOUG: This was one of those rare times when the first draft contained everything the final draft would need. I think I just began with that first image—“I'd like to pull back the hair from your face and ask...”—and ran with it. I knew I'd be getting to the self-destructing celebs, but something told me to start with quizzing the reader about how they get through their day. A bunch of things got rearranged later, though the wet dogs, the wandering in Orange County, and the ending all arrived right on time, and stayed in their places—though I did play around a lot with the wordings.

SHOSHAUNA: So, this brings me to my next question, and it's more personal, so you definitely don't need to answer it if you rather not. But what I'm wondering is where is the “truth” in this poem as far as it relates to your own personal experience? I believe that in every poem we write, there is something in it that

actually happened to us, even if it wasn't directly TO us that it happened, know what I'm saying? Like maybe it was your brother who came down to breakfast one morning when he was visiting you, and you realized that he had slept in his clothes, and you thought, “Hmmm, could that be a throwback to when he was seven and our house caught on fire...” or you saw a feral animal on your lawn one evening. Guess what I'm wondering is what's the “ripple in your day...” IF you want to answer that.

DOUG: Shoshauna, you're wise to put “truth” in quotes. Part of how we can damage ourselves is solidifying our identities as victims, bad people, whatever. I could run down the list of strategies in the poem and say which ones do and don't apply to me (i.e., cookie dough ice cream: no; yelling at customer service: check...), or I could tell you certain things happened in my childhood and how they carried through into adulthood. But part of what poetry does is it holds everything up to question, and in that flux of questioning is the chance at arriving at the truth without quotes. A poem is successful when it's a truer arrangement of details than any other way we could have reported them.

SHOSHAUNA: I like that. I've always felt that “what really happened” is subjective, and I'm all for changing my impression of “truth” for the sake of a poem. Let the journalist labor over some version of the facts!

It's interesting to me what feeds into the creation of a poem, and I thank you for sharing that. So, what is it about this particular poem that you are especially fond of, i.e., was there something about it specifically that made you want to give it the limelight right now?

DOUG: What makes me fond of “The Ripple in Your Day” is that it's somewhat of a singleton for me: a poem that advances a philosophical or psychological theory, but it also has the properties of a sermon; it's also a catalogue poem, which is how it gets down the page. It's a fairly public poem—some examples ripped, as they say, from the tabloid headlines—yet it felt strangely personal to write. When I do a reading, it's the piece that sends the audience into their own lives the most. Once in Oklahoma, when I got to the part about memories of old wounds trudging into the room like wet dogs, a woman in the back let out this exhausted moan. It was more eloquent than anything in the poem.

*This is an excerpt from Shoshauna Shy's interview with Douglas Goetsch. Read the full interview at [versewisconsin.org](http://versewisconsin.org). If you'd like to contact Doug to continue the conversation about his poem, you can reach him here: [Doug@janestreet.org](mailto:Doug@janestreet.org)*

# BRENDA CÁRDENAS

## On the Coast in Pedasí

Beached boats litter coves,  
sails sprawled like abandoned skirts  
of lovers asleep on the sand.  
The empty zocalo simmers  
in the sun like a fortune  
waiting to be whispered,  
Café Tiesto's shutters and doors  
anchored open to release  
its brick oven heat. Through  
a streaked windshield,  
you watch a woman sweep  
the dusty veranda,  
wipe tables spruced  
with buds drooping  
into an afternoon still  
as a breath held.  
If you exhale now, a tornado  
of bees  
will careen  
around the corner, swarm  
the plaza, blackening its sky.  
The woman will drift  
inside, gently latch shutters  
as the funnel cloud  
drones  
through town, busy  
with the work  
of finding home. Once the horizon  
has swallowed all of them,  
you will part your lips,  
release the locks,  
exit cover. Watch  
your step. Every migration  
bears its fallen,  
those that drop  
to the dirt.  
Across the plaza, the woman will push  
the door open  
hum as she sweeps.

*This is an excerpt from Wendy Vardaman's interview with Brenda Cárdenas, Milwaukee's most recent poet laureate. The full interview with video and photos is available at [versewisconsin.org](http://versewisconsin.org).*

WV: Do you see yourself as an academic poet, a community poet, or both?

BC: I don't mean to buck the question, but I try to resist such categories and divisions, so I'd say that I see myself as both in that I am a university professor, so I do work in the academy, and I am also an active member of several communities (both local and global). In addition, during different periods of my life, I spent a lot of time organizing community arts events, working for community arts and cultural organizations (I haven't always been an academic), and doing my part as a social-political activist.

Furthermore, as a reader, I do not privilege poetry that has been deemed "academic" by others, nor do I dismiss it. That term means different things to different people. Some see "academic" poetry as that which is especially difficult, obscure, and/or erudite, whereas others see "academic" poetry as that which is overly crafted and self-indulgent without depth, risk, or inventiveness—what Silliman has called the School of Quietude. So what is academic poetry? The same question applies to the term "community poet." For some people that term implies poetry that is accessible (which is another problematic term, especially when it means transparent), outwardly political, or that lives in the terrain of "spoken word." Yet, we know of many poets who write very profound, inventive poetry and who are quite committed to community. We might hear complex, nuanced spoken word from the voice of one poet and clichés that rely on the gratuitous manipulation of readers from the voice of another performance poet.

My work varies from quite accessible (perhaps to a fault), to deceptively simple (with more there than meets the eye upon a first read), to more demanding of the reader. It also varies from poems that lend themselves to oral performance (and have been called spoken word), to those which are so tied to the page that they lose meaning/nuance if the reader doesn't see them perform on the page. Some of my work is also translingual and so privileges a bilingual reader. Such a poem might be "difficult" in a very different way for a monolingual academic than it is for a bilingual reader who has never studied literature. I'm both an academic and a community poet. Community—and I do not take that term lightly—on multiple levels and in many incarnations is paramount to my essence as a human being. I also love learning. Why else would I have spent my life in college? Ultimately, as a person and poet, I want to grow and play an active role in my own and my community's (daily) transformation.

WV: Becoming a poet, remaining a poet, are uphill battles with few external rewards for most of us. What are some of the challenges facing Latino/a poets in particular, and what can be done to promote and to support their work? Are there ways—aesthetically, for example—that the poetry establishment or poetry journals create barriers to Latino/a writers, and what can we do to change that?

BC: Although Latinos/as are the fastest growing population in the United States with some 48 million people, and some aspects of Latino/a cultures have made their way into U. S. popular culture—certain foods, music, holidays, words and expressions—the American versions are usually watered down facsimiles of the original, detached from their full contexts and easy for non-Latinos/as to consume without understanding their complexities. Worse, we need look no further than the severe anti-immigrant legislation that targets Latinos/as in Arizona or attacks on ethnic studies and the Dream Act, to see the right wing's malicious attempts to disenfranchise any Latinos/as except the wealthiest in the U. S., regardless of their legal status.

Latino/a writers are similarly often marginalized within the larger literary establishment. It was 2008 before a Latino poet, Juan Felipe Herrera, who had over 30 books published at the time, won the National Book Critics Circle Award. He has since also won the Guggenheim and was just named California's poet laureate—so deserved and well overdue. It is especially difficult for those who write in Spanish (even if their work is translated) or translingually, but even English-language Latina/o poets who might use allusions to non-Western myths, legends, literary texts, and histories, find that it is not uncommon for non-Latina/o readers to view the work as esoteric and inaccessible. A Spanish-language subtext (such as references to an idiomatic expression or the purposeful use of Spanish syntax) may very well exist beneath the English surface of a Latina/o poem, adding a layer of meaning or nuance to the poem and often resulting in witty word play, but this is lost on the non-Latina/o reader who does not wish to do the work necessary to read for such possibilities.

Some Latina/o poets are caught in an internal tug of war regarding when, how, and even whether to write about or refer, at least directly, to their cultures and ethnicities in their poems. For good reason, one might fear essentializing culture in this way and purposefully resist falling prey to auto-ethnography. We are all so much more than our ethnicities. At the same time, a poet doesn't want to be barred from incorporating cultural elements in her work. And then there are those who posit that one's world view is so affected by culture that no matter what a Latina/o writes about, she/he is writing a Latina/o poem. In my lifetime, I've seen more and more Latina/o poets break through these barriers and see their work published. This is partly due to their own persistence and partly due to the tireless efforts of Latino/a organizations, editors and presses.

One thing we can all do to support Latina/o poetry is to fight against the demolition of ethnic studies courses and programs in public schools, colleges and universities. Another is to apply equal reading practices to Latino/a literature that we would apply to any other literature. If one is willing to look up "foreign" words and literary, mythological, Biblical, and historical allusions when reading a poem by, say, T. S. Eliot or Ezra Pound, then she/he should be willing to do the same when reading the work of a Latina/o poet. We also need non-Latinas/os to review the books of Latina/o writers and vice-versa. This is something that Letras Latinas has encouraged in the *Latino Poetry Review*, an online publication

## Flexible Vitreous

(after Harvey K. Littleton's *Orange and Purple Implied Movement*, 1987)

I.

Bass's purple tones bend  
our knees, swing our hips  
low, but sax arches backs,  
rolls spines up yoga slow,  
twists our long necks  
toward orange trumpet blasts.  
Curls kink and spring  
tendrils loose, sweep the floor,  
spark the air. We lift  
our faces, all bliss and flame,  
in amethyst moans  
glistening hot and wet.  
Skim each other's skin, barely  
touch to swirl, clave keeps  
our feet from landing.

II.

Corazón cristal, por la vena cava,  
solamente salidas y regresos.  
En los canales, canoas de flores—  
aves del paraíso, lirios de agua.  
Y al dentro de la aurícula,  
las rutas de una cueva morada—  
cada viaje, cada descanso.

III.

Bella-  
donna-  
bottoms  
and hooka  
loops, crazy  
queen-of-hearts'  
dream crown,  
black lights,  
electric kool-  
aid looking  
glass. *Go*  
*ask Alice*  
*when*  
*you're*  
*ten feet*  
*tall.*

IV.

Fire bush peeks  
through purple fountain  
grass, hound's tongue licking  
a Siberian wallflower.  
Bee's bliss sage stings  
the cosmos orange,  
while wooly blue curls  
around lion's ear. Poppies open  
to the tease of coyote mint,  
seaside daisies bathed  
in ocean mist. Lupines stretch  
to catch butterfly weed,  
and under nightshade, dog  
violets rest in the glow  
of Chinese lanterns. If only.

V.

Blow the pipe like a pungi, whistling  
wet scales through its open mouth.  
Medusa's purple hair will squirm  
from the fire, rise in liquid twists  
to the pitch of your breath. Watch it  
writhe, dip into cool shadow. Quick,  
charm it back, trap her in glass.

## Catch and Release

I.

Turn over  
with the slap  
of the undertow,  
boat, your creaky bed.  
Wake  
lapping pier.  
A lake chain-  
links two countries  
anchors shore to shore.

One, a room  
black as an egg  
inside,  
ember at the center  
of your breast-bone.

The other  
white as an egg  
outside.  
Surface lures you  
to an isthmus.  
You'll cross  
towing a forest. Drift  
past the tangled lines.

II.

bucktail  
pitch and dance  
thrash and switch  
surface twitcher  
cast shimmy  
jerk and reel  
slip spot  
snag and tug  
reel, reel, reel  
heave

**Brenda Cárdenas** is the author of *Boomerang* (Bilingual Press, 2009) and *From the Tongues of Brick and Stone* (Momotombo Press, Institute for Latino/a Studies, 2005). Cárdenas' work has appeared widely, including *The Wind Shifts: The New Latino Poetry*, *RATTLE*, *Prairie Schooner*, and most recently in the journal *Pilgrimage*, and the anthology *Brute Neighbors: Urban Nature Poetry, Prose and Photography*. She was Milwaukee's Poet Laureate in 2010-11.

III.

Flush the gills with lake.  
Follow scales  
until they flicker,  
vanish  
swathed in the clot  
of thickening light,  
the motor's troll.

So many open vessels  
for one more breath  
toward the same shore,  
rock and weed  
at the brain's stem.

What cell will save us  
from the shimmer  
that flips the surface  
upside down?

Will our bellies bloom  
anemone and coral  
in the hands that wrestle us  
from hoop to hull,  
keep them so full  
of the catch  
that they measure  
and release,  
drag a net  
packed with nothing  
to the shore?

He clasps my hand, eyes  
Held, disregarding spouse, who  
Will be leaving soon

—ELMAE PASSINEAU, WAUSAU, WI

## Fugue in C# Minor

I watch my father's covers rise and fall as fists  
of wind knock oleander against the patio door.  
The sky darkens when suddenly,  
rain pelts the house like shrapnel.  
Blue light flickers from the TV, photos  
of dead soldiers flash on the "News Hour"  
one shot at a time.

His bony body, swaddled in a fleece blanket,  
sits in a beige arm chair,  
legs lifted to a pillowed coffee table.  
In his hand, an orange Popsicle hovers  
as a bomb flares across the screen.  
Sirens wail in the distance.

Dad's small voice asks for ice chips.  
How baffled he must be with the turn  
his life has taken, how the view  
keeps changing,  
one slide after another.

Trudging toward the kitchen, I think how each day  
is a fugue, how today the music is impossible  
like a cross burning. Point, counterpoint,  
complex polyphony, difficult key. No orange blossom scent  
or buttercup glaze on the hills, only tension, intensity.  
A C# minor day.

I turn off the news, listen to Bach on the stereo. We sit  
in silence. The monsoon quiets and my father closes  
his eyes. I try to untangle the voices in the fugue,  
each distinct, yet inseparable from the whole,  
none existing without the other.

—MARY JO BALISTRERI, WAUKESHA, WI

## Gaudi Flies in from Barcelona

From outside my mother's studio, I sit in a lawn chair  
and watch master cloud masons. Arabesques  
of entwined vines scroll down the frothy fantasy,  
capricious twists to the soaring cathedral of clouds.  
The entire concoction looks like a Gaudi creation,  
as if he has taken respite from stone  
to imagine a softer version of La Sagrada Família.

Inside at her easel, Mother moves the brush fast  
across paper soaked like rain, guides paint  
without controlling it. Time turns from amber to mauve.  
Slivers of shadow pierce fleeting white spires.  
Dogs with their feet in the air and flying fish  
freefall in feathers.

Like the train in Turner's *Rain, Steam and Speed*,  
her ethereal church is barely visible.  
Clouds carry the canvas.

—MARY JO BALISTRERI, WAUKESHA, WI

## Don't Guess, Count

The Fugue issues that  
proclamation every time,  
its tapestry woven with  
golden threads of voice,  
patterns offset with ingenuity,  
shimmering polyphony,  
the composer's favorite child  
So when it's your time  
to grab Theme Two  
and throw it into the mix,  
be sure you're wearing  
the right boots for marching  
Otherwise, you'll cause  
your colleagues to stumble,  
which can, in front of  
an educated audience,  
have consequences beyond  
the bruised egos of  
your fallen comrades

—KATRIN TALBOT, MADISON, WI

## Endoscopy

Stuff they give  
to empty you  
out,  
makes sleep  
tough,  
getting up  
to go, crapper  
to sack, and back  
and so  
forth, full  
of it, so full of  
it like tongue  
in cheek no  
body knows, it's like  
listening to a French guy  
tell a joke about long  
roads that have no  
turning  
in hell, the way  
those French guys  
squeak on, hamster  
wheel for Louis  
Rukeyser,  
straight man,  
flaneur dead pan  
art of the deal.  
Meanwhile  
mornings find me  
re - arranging  
appointments  
under the willow  
tree, green  
drapery  
with android  
phone and date  
finder, knowing  
they won't hold it  
against me: I call  
them deck chairs  
or friendly  
reminders  
there's this  
doc, wants  
to rifle a scope  
inside my  
world,  
plum full  
of possibilities,  
yet I never  
want to go  
without a sense of  
humor, or dumb hope  
for the little white  
butterflies ... it's like  
pissing on the quivering  
lip of the abyss, so  
cute the way  
they zip  
and scoot  
around green  
impossibility  
of peripatetic  
reticulation ;  
get them in  
the stomach too  
by and bye best  
of all nobody  
has ever seen  
one die.

—DENNIS MAHAGIN,  
KENNEWICK, WA  
*visit VW Online for audio by this  
author*

## An Economy of Characters

My parents subscribed  
to the local newspaper,  
gossip mainly, of interest  
only to one's neighbors, friends,  
people met on the rounds  
of one's daily life, a life I never  
wanted, would do anything to escape,  
and they would read the obituaries,  
recognizing old names, schoolmates,  
distant relatives, childhood chums  
passed out of their lives  
decades and decades before,  
and that was news,  
a record of one's life, unchanging,  
unceasing, unparalleled except  
in the way parallel lives approach  
the vanishing point and converge  
in a clipping, cut and stored in a drawer,  
never to be read again.

—DALE RITTERBUSCH, WAUKESHA, WI

## Tortoise and the Hare

It's difficult to figure who'll go first;  
mom, with her heart attack, pinched nerve and hip  
that wakes her in the night—the chemo drip  
still in her veins, or dad, his mass submersed

in slothfulness, who might conceivably  
sit in his chair and sink into a coma,  
unnoticed, till the dinnertime aroma  
would cease to wake him (unbelievably).

My mother swims ten laps a day, hell-bound  
to ride her bike at eighty-five. She walks  
and chatters constantly. Father seldom talks,  
embellishes dessert with cream. The ground

moans beneath his widening girth. My mom  
is trim and neat, her sewing room's in order;  
dad's office looks like he's a first class hoarder.  
The winning post waits like an atom bomb,

or unseen trophy in the 4th dimension.  
My father sitting on the couch, no stress,  
and mother cooking in her Sunday dress.  
I watch the finish line with apprehension.

—KAREN KELSAY, TORRANCE, CA

# Contributors' Notes

**Jan Aubrey** studied Fine Arts at UW Milwaukee and presently resides in Milwaukee's inner city. p. 18

**Christopher Austin** is a writer living, working, and writing in Milwaukee, where he lives with his wife, two children, and two Labrador Retrievers. p. 21

**Mary Jo Balistreri** (maryjobalistreripoet.com) has been published in *The Healing Muse*, *Crab Creek Review*, *The Tiger's Eye*, the poetry issue of *Passager*, *Verse Wisconsin*, and *Echoes* to mention a few. Her book, *Joy in the Morning* was published by Bellowing Ark Press in 2008. She has just finished a second manuscript. p. 36

**John Bolinger** is an essayist and baby boomer who was born, raised, and educated in Indiana. John taught high school English and French in northwest Indiana for more than 40 years. Although he retired to Colorado recently, John still summers in northern Wisconsin, a place that inspires his writing. p. 18

**Brenda Cárdenas** is the author of *Boomerang* (Bilingual Press, 2009) and *From the Tongues of Brick and Stone* (Momotombo Press, Institute for Latino/a Studies, 2005). Cárdenas' work has appeared widely, including *The Wind Shifts: The New Latino Poetry*, *RATTLE*, *Prairie Schooner*, and most recently in the journal *Pilgrimage*, and the anthology *Brute Neighbors: Urban Nature Poetry, Prose and Photography*. pp.34-5

**Nabin Kumar Chhetri** is a Nepalese poet and a member of Scottish PEN. He graduated with a degree of M. Litt in Novel from the University of Aberdeen. He has awards from Italy, Israel and Nepal for his poems. p. 18

**Richard Dinges, Jr.** has an MA in literary studies from University of Iowa and manages business systems at an insurance company. *Slant*, *Concho River Review*, *California Quarterly*, *Sunstone*, and *Miller's Pond* have most recently accepted his poems for their publications. p. 32

**Patricia Fargnoli** is a previous Poet Laureate of New Hampshire (2006-2009) and has published four books and two chapbooks. She's a retired psychotherapist and has had poems recently in *Harvard Review*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Poet Lore*, and *Poetry International*. p. 8, 17, 21

**Susan Firer** has recent work in *Visiting Dr. Williams: Poems Inspired by the Life and Work of William Carlos Williams* (University of Iowa Press) and *The Cento: A Collection of Collage Poems* (Red Hen Press). She is at work on a new manuscript called *Dear Baby Star, Dear Little Astronaut*. p. 25

**Louisa Loveridge Gallas**, a Milwaukee writer and counselor, has been a member of The Wisconsin Arts Board Artist in Residence Program. Recently her book *The Wizard's Dream*, was a 2011 Finalist for the Eric Hoffer Book Award. p. 30

**Max Garland** is the author of two books of poetry, *The Postal Confessions*, winner of the Juniper Prize for Poetry, and *Hunger Wide as Heaven*, which won the Cleveland State Poetry Center Open Competition. He has received an NEA Fellowship for Poetry, a Michener Fiction Fellowship, a Bush Literary Fellowship, and fellowships from the Wisconsin Arts Board in both poetry and fiction. p. 30

**Jessica Gleason** has lived in Wisconsin for the past 17 years. She works as an English Instructor at Gateway Technical College and an Assistant Professor at Colorado Technical University. The author of "Madison Murphy, Wisconsin Weirdo" is hard at work on her next installment of the Wisconsin Weirdos saga. p. 17

**Douglas Goetsch's** books of poetry include *The Job of Being Everybody* (Cleveland State, 2004), winner of the CSU Poetry Center Open Competition, *Nameless Boy* (forthcoming) and four chapbooks. He is a recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York Foundation for the Arts, a Pushcart Prize, the Donald Murray Prize, the Paumanok Prize, and numerous other honors. p. 33

**Brent Goodman** is the author of *Far From Sudden* (2012) and *The Brother Swimming Beneath Me* (2009), both from Black Lawrence Press. His work has appeared in *Diode*, *Poetry*, *Zone 3*, *No Tell Motel*, *Barn Owl Review*, and elsewhere. p. 5

**Lauren Gordon's** work has appeared in a variety of journals and magazines, including *Scapegoat Review*, *Southern Hum*, and *Web Del Sol*, and has been featured on Iowa National Public Radio. She has an MFA degree in Poetry from New England College, and a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Iowa. p. 9, 25

**David Graham** has taught writing and literature at Ripon College in Ripon, WI, since 1987. He is the author of six collections of poems, most recently *Slutter Monk* (Flume Press), and an essay anthology co-edited with Kate Sontag: *After Confession: Poetry as Autobiography* (Graywolf Press). p. 8, 9

**Taylor Graham's** ties to Wisconsin include a cousin in Wonnego, helping instruct at a search-and-rescue dog school in Osceola, and appearances in *Verse Wisconsin*. Otherwise, she lives in the California Sierra with a husband, a dog trained for SAR, an untrainable cat, and four sheep. p. 18, 19

**K. J. Hannah Greenberg** took her M.A. at U. Iowa, a Big Ten rival of U. Wisconsin. Years later, she's still playing with words. Her newest books are *A Bank Robber's Bad Luck with His Ex-Girlfriend* (Unbound CONTENT, Dec. 2011), a full-length collection of poetry, and *Don't Pet the Sweaty Things* (Bards and Sages Publishing, Mar. 2012), a compilation of seventy brief fictions. p. 22

**Ray Greenblatt's** poetry has been published in *The Art Times*, *East Hampton Star*, *Pennsylvania Seasons*, *Witness*. p. 32

**John Grey** has been published recently in *Talking River*, *Santa Fe Poetry Review* and *Caveat Lector* with work upcoming in *Clark Street Review*, *Poem*, and *Evansville Review*. p. 21

**Kenneth P. Gurney** lives in Albuquerque, NM, USA with his beloved Dianne. He edits the anthology *Adobe Walls* which contains the poetry of New Mexico. His latest book is *This is not Black & White*. To learn more visit <http://www.kpgurney.me/Poet/Welcome.html>. p. 20

**Joe Guskowski** grew up in Wauwatosa, WI and has since re-located to Chicago for school. p. 21

**David L. Harris** has always enjoyed reading and writing, and uses these now as a means of escape. p. 16

**Matthew Haughton** is the author of the chapbook, *Bee-coursing Box* (Accents Publishing). His poetry has appeared in a myriad of journals including *Appalachian Journal*, *Now & Then*, *Still*, *Stirring*, *The Meadowland Review*, and *The James Dickey Review*. p. 25

**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. 4, 11

**James Hazard** grew up in Indiana and the South Side of Chicago. Moved to Wisconsin in '63 and was a much-beloved and respected fixture in the literary community. p. 31

**Ronnie Hess's** poetry has appeared in several publications, including *Alimentum*, *Arbor Vitae*, and *Wisconsin People & Ideas*. She is the author of a chapbook, *Whole Cloth: A Poem Cycle* (Little Eagle Press, 2009), and a culinary travel guide, *Eat Smart in France*. p. 15

**Karla Huston** is the author of six chapbooks of poetry, most recently, *An Inventory of Lost Things* (Centennial Press, 2009). A broadside is forthcoming from *Page 5*. Her poems, reviews and interviews have been published widely. Her poem "Theory of Lipstick," originally published in *Verse Wisconsin* #101, was awarded a Pushcart Prize. p. 10

As founding editor of Many Voices Press, **Lowell Jaeger**, who grew up in Wisconsin, compiled *Poems Across the Big Sky*, an anthology of Montana poets, and *New Poets of the American West*, an anthology of poets from Western states. Recent collections are *Suddenly Out of a Long Sleep* (Arcos Press, 2009) and *WE*, (Main Street Rag Press, 2010). The recipient of fellowships from the NEA and the Montana Arts Council, and winner of the Grolier Poetry Peace Prize, Jaeger was awarded the Montana Governor's Humanities Award for his work in promoting thoughtful civic discourse. p. 22, 23

**Russell Jaffe** attended Beloit College in Wisconsin and he loves the state very much (especially Woodland Pattern in Milwaukee, maybe the best poetry bookstore of all time). It is easily accessible from Iowa City, where he currently lives. He teaches at Kirkwood Community College and edits the small poetry press, *Strange Cage* ([strangeage.org](http://strangeage.org)). p. 27, 29

**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. 14

**Martha Kaplan** lives in Madison, Wisconsin where sometimes cranes fly over her house. She has published with *Branch Redd Review*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Hummingbird*, *Verse Wisconsin*, and *Möbius*, *The Poetry Magazine*, as well as the WFOP calendar. p. 4

**Karen Kelsay** is the editor of *Victorian Violet Press*, an online poetry magazine. She also manages White Violet Press, a chapbook company that publishes formalist poetry. Some of her work can be seen at *The Hypertexts*, *The Raintown Review*, *Mezzo Cammin*, *The New Formalist*, *Grey Sparrow*, *String Poet*, and *Whale Sound*. p. 37

**Mark Kraushaar's** work has appeared in the *Hudson Review*, *Ploughshares*, and *Alaska Review*, as well as *Best American Poetry*. His collection, *Falling Brick Kills Local Man* was published in 2009 by the University of Wisconsin Press as winner of the Felix Pollak Prize. His most recent book, *The Uncertainty Principle*, won the Anthony Hecht Prize and was published by Waywiser Press in 2010. p. 28

**Michael Kriesel's** poems have appeared widely. He's written reviews for *Small Press Review* and *Library Journal*, and has won the WFOP Muse Prize, the Lorine Niedecker Award, and the *Wisconsin People and Ideas* John Lehman Poetry Prize. Books include *Chasing Saturday Night* (Marsh River Editions), and *Feeding My Heart To The Wind and Moths Mail The House* (sunnysidepress). p. 7

**Lisa Kundrat** received her MFA in poetry from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She misses spending time at the arboretum, Helen C. White Hall, Edenfred, Glass Nickel Pizza, Avol's Books and Memorial Library. She currently lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota. p. 16

**Jackie Langetieg** has three books, *White Shoulders* (Cross+Roads Press), *Just What in Hell is a Stage of Grief*, and *Confetti in a Silent City* (Ghost Horse Press). A fourth book, *A Terrible Tenderness* awaits publication. She lives in Verona, WI, with two black cats and her son, Eric. p. 17

**Lyn Lifshin** has published over 120 books and edited 4 anthologies. Most recently: *All the Poets Who Have Touched Me, Living and Dead; All True: Especially the Lies*; and forthcoming from *New York Quarterly Books: A Girl Goes Into the Woods*. [www.lynlifshin.com](http://www.lynlifshin.com) p. 20

**Austin MacRae's** poetry has appeared most recently in *32 Poems*, *Atlanta Review*, and *Stone Canoe*. He is a past finalist for the Morton Marr Poetry Prize and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. He teaches English at Tompkins Cortland Community College in Dryden, NY. p. 14

**Dennis Mahagin's** work appears in *Exquisite Corpse*, *PANK*, *3 A.M.*, *42opus*, *Stirring*, *Juked*, *Night Train*, *The Nervous Breakdown*, and many other literary venues. A chapbook of his poems, entitled "Fare" is forthcoming in 2011 from Redneck Press in conjunction with the website, *Fried Chicken and Coffee* (<http://www.friedchickenandcoffee.com>). p. 37

**Katherine Mead** grew up in central Wisconsin, studied Geography at the University of Minnesota, and currently lives in St. Louis, MO. p. 13

**Richard Merrill** does not submit. Much. He has wandered around the edge of the poetry pool self-teaching for years now. He desperately wants in but his truck driving gig stands in the way currently. His work has appeared in *Story Garden*, *Nighttrain*, and *Blue Collar Review*. He lives in Kenosha with his wife Melissa and a Brussels Griffon. p. 19

**Jan Minich** lives in Wellington, Utah, and also spends time on Superior's Apostle Islands each year. A former Western and American Literature and Creative Writing Professor, as well as Director of Wilderness Studies at the College of Eastern Utah/Utah State U, he is an emeritus professor, and has three poetry collections. p. 12, 14

Middlewestern poet and essayist **Tom Montag** has lived in Fairwater, Wisconsin, since 1976 and is recently the author of *Curluw: Home*, *Kissing Poetry's Sister*, *The Idea of the Local*, and *The Big Book of Ben Zen*. p. 7

**Richard Moyer** is 81 years old, and happy to be alive and able to write and appreciate poetry. p. 8

**Dan Nielsen** is a life-long resident of Racine, WI. His work has appeared in Susan Firer's *Express Milwaukee* Column, and *Wisconsin Review*, as well as *Exquisite Corpse*, *Colorado North Review*, *North Coast Review*, and *Contemporary Foreign Literature*, among others. p. 10, 11

**Robert Nordstrom** is a poet, free-lance writer and school bus driver living in Mukwonago, Wisconsin. His most recent and worthy accomplishment is teaching a second grader that it's probably best she not lick the seat in front of her. p. 5

**Todd Norton** is a Native American poet who lives and works in Appleton, Wisconsin. p. 19

**Mary O'Dell's** knowledge of Wisconsin consists merely of her best friend's husband's dentist, who lives somewhere there, and whom they visited there some years ago. But it does sound like a lovely, clean place to live. p. 16

**Elmae Passineau** has published two chapbooks, *On Edge and Beloved Somebodies*. She is currently a thinker, reader, friend, helper, feminist, and writer. p. 23, 36

**Bob Persons** has lived in Wisconsin almost all of his 72 years, writing poems, stories, and opinion pieces for 50+ years. He's been published in *Blue Fifth Review*, *Voices International*, *Tangent*, *Kaleidoscope*, and elsewhere. p. 12

**Darrell Petska** is a Middleton, Wisconsin writer and free-lance editor in the field of adult education. He worked previously as senior editor for the UW-Madison College of Engineering. p. 12

**Christine Poreba**, a native New Yorker, has a favorite cozy t-shirt from University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, where her uncle Stanley, whom she once visited in Milwaukee, went to school. She teaches English as a Second Language and is an Associate Poetry Editor for *Apalachee Review*. Recent work appears in *The Southern Review*, *Alimentum*, and *The Sun*. p. 10

**Ester Hauser Laurence Prudlo** is a UW alumna and the author of three children's books. She taught creative writing courses for UW Ex and MATC. A retired counselor, she and husband Tony spend summers in Fitchburg and winters in Montgomery, AL. p. 24

**Summer Qabazard** is a poet who grew up in Kuwait and now lives in Normal, Illinois where she is a Ph.D student at Illinois State University. Her poem "All Hands Bury the Dead" appears in *The University of Missouri-St. Louis's* literary magazine, *LitMag*. She likes Wisconsin cheese. p. 23

**Liz Rhodebeck** is a poet and freelance writer from Pewaukee, where she is active in the local arts community. She is co-editor of the project, "One Vision: A Fusion of Art and Poetry in Lake Country." She has recently published her third chapbook, *What I Learned in Kansas* from Port Yonder Press. See her website at [www.waterwriter.com](http://www.waterwriter.com). p. 5

**Dale Ritterbusch** is the author of two collections of poetry, *Lessons Learned* and *Far From the Temple of Heaven*. He is a professor of English in the Department of Languages and Literatures at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. p. 37

**Jeannie E. Roberts** won first place in the Green Bay Symphony Orchestra's Music Alive statewide poetry contest. Her public readings include Weidner Center for the Performing Arts, Wisconsin Public Radio and other venues. A lifelong visual artist, she is also the author and illustrator of *Let's Make Faces!*, a children's book ([www.RhymeTheRoostBooks.com](http://www.RhymeTheRoostBooks.com)). p. 27

**Chuck Rybak** is currently an Assistant Professor of English and Humanistic Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. His full-length collection, *Tongue and Groove*, was released in 2007 by Main Street Rag. Poems of his have appeared in *The Cincinnati Review*, *Pebble Lake Review*, *War, Literature & the Arts*, *The Ledger*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Versé Wisconsin*, and other journals. p. 5

**Andrew Schilling** is 28 years old and currently hanging around Marshfield, WI, working construction. p. 20

**G. A. Scheinoha** thought about becoming a private detective, later, a bounty hunter. He never imagined he'd follow in his father's tracks; a series of blue collar jobs. Where their lives differed was instead of marriage and family, he wrote a million words over thirty years, some of which have recently appeared in *Avocet*, *Bellowing Ark*, *Bracelet Charm*, *Echoes*, *Floyd County Moonshine* and *Versé Wisconsin*. p. 13

**Wendy Schmidt** is a Wisconsin native who has written short stories and poems for the last 10 years. Her poetry and short stories have been published in *Strange*, *Weird and Wonderful*, *Daily Flash*, *2012, Three Line Poetry*, *Tainted Tea*, *Fear and Trembling*, and *Versé Wisconsin*. p. 24

**Robert Schuler** has been write for fifty years. His fifteenth collection of poems, *The Book of Jeweled Visions*, has recently been published by Tom Montag's MWPH Books, PO Box 8, Fairwater, WI 53931. Price: \$12.50 plus \$1.50 postage. p. 6, 12, 17

**Anne Shaw's** collections of poetry include *Undertow*, winner of the Lexi Rudnitsky Poetry Prize, and *Shatter & Thrust*, forthcoming from Persea Books in 2013. Work of hers has also appeared, or is forthcoming, in *Harvard Review*, *New American Writing*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Indiana Review*, and *Hotel Amerika*. Her website is [www.anneshaw.org](http://www.anneshaw.org). p. 32

**Shoshauna Shy** is a member of the Prairie Fire Poetry Quartet. In May 2004, she founded Poetry Jumps Off the Shelf. Her poems have been published in numerous journals and magazines. Her collection titled *What the Postcard Didn't Say* won an Outstanding Achievement Award from the Wisconsin Library Association in 2008. p. 33

**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 collections are *Kinnickinnic* (Parallel Press), and *The Foot of the Rainbow*, available from Red Dragonfly Press. He posts blogs and poems on his web site at [www.thomassmithpoet.com](http://www.thomassmithpoet.com). p. 29

**Robert Sonkowsky's** first love was his second-grade teacher, Miss Malarkey, in Appleton, WI. She had him write poems from her spelling-word-lists and read them aloud to the class. This launched his career as a poet and an actor. His next book of poetry will be called *Waverly Songs*. He is a Professor Emeritus of Classics, Speech & Theater, and Chronobiology. p. 15, 25

Affrilachian Poet and Cave Canem Fellow, **Bianca Spriggs**, is a doctoral student at the University of Kentucky. She holds degrees from Transylvania University and the University of Wisconsin. Named as one of the Top 30 Performance Poets by TheRoot.com, Bianca is a Pushcart Prize nominee, and a recipient of multiple Artist Enrichment Grants and an Arts Meets Activism Grant from the Kentucky Foundation for Women. p. 4, 11

**N. A'Yara Stein** was a finalist in the 2011 National Poetry Series for her manuscript, *Saudade*. She is a grant recipient of the Michigan Art Council and the Arkansas Arts Council, among other honors. She's recently published in *The Mayo Review*, *Ping Pong: The Journal of the Henry Miller Library*, *The Delinquent* (UK), among others. She lives near Chicago with her sons. p. 13

**Marc Swan** lives on Munjoy Hill in Portland Maine. His work has been published in *Exquisite Corpse*, *Rattle*, *Slipstream*, and *Westerly*, among others. *Simple Distraction*, a collection of his poems from 1989 to 2009, was published in fall 2009 by tall-lighthouse in London England. p. 14

**Isabel Sylvan** lives along the Raritan Bay where she writes both poetry and fiction. Her work has appeared in numerous small presses throughout the past twenty years. Currently, she is the editor of *Poetry Breakfast*, a daily online poetry journal. p. 4

**Nancy Takacs's** third book of poetry Juniper was recently published by Limberlost Press: [limberlostpress.com](http://limberlostpress.com). She is the recent recipient of the first-place poetry award in the Utah Arts Council's Original Writing Contest and the 2010 Kay Saunders Memorial Award in the WFOP Triad Contest. p. 15

Australian-born **Katrin Talbot** is a violist, photographer, and poet, whose poetry has appeared in a number of journals and anthologies, and a finalist in 2009 for four national poetry prizes—one of which awarded enough prize money to fund a Dairy Queen run. Katrin's photo essay of Schubert's

Winterreise was published as a coffee table book and CD by the University of Wisconsin Press. p. 36

After **Len Tews'** retirement as a biology professor at UW-O, he took up the writing of poetry. He lived in Seattle for fifteen years but has now returned to Oshkosh where he is participating in the poetry scene in his home state. He has several chapbooks. p. 4

**Jeanie Tomasko** is the author of *Sharp as Want* (Little Eagle Press) a poetry / artworks collaboration with Sharon Auberle, and *Tricks of Light* (Parallel Press). She lives in Middleton where she and her husband grow garlic, eat garlic, give away lots of garlic and are in an exquisitely pungent poetry group called *Garlic*. Her chapbook, *The Collect of the Day*, is forthcoming from Centennial Press. p. 26

By his own unofficial count, **Steve Tomasko** has written approximately 5,236.5 bios of himself, which is pretty good considering he's only been published twice. However, he's fast running out of unique things to say and who reads these bios anyway? If you're really curious about Steve, buy him a root beer sometime and ask him what kind of tree he pictures himself as. p. 28, 29

**Peggy Trojan**, retired to the north Wisconsin woods with her husband. Published her first poem at seventy-seven. Member of WFOP. Published in *Dust and Fire*, Wilda Morris Challenge, WFOP calendars, *Talking Stick*, *Echoes*, *Finnish American Reporter*, and most recently, in *Migrations*, *Poetry and Prose for Life's Transitions*. p. 5

**Angie Trudell Vasquez** has been the featured poet of the *Latina Monologues* for the last three years and has had several poems published. Her book, *The Force Your Face Carries*, published under her own label sold out: the second edition is available online at [www.artnighbooks.com](http://www.artnighbooks.com) and through Milwaukee's Woodland Pattern Book Center. p. 8

**Moisés Villavicencio Barras**. Mexican poet, fiction writer and co-founder of *Cantera Verde* a magazine which has been one of the most significant literary publications in Mexico for the last twenty years. His first book of poetry *May among Voices* was published 2001. He was the recipient of two Writing fellowships through the National Commission for the Arts in Mexico (1993-1994 and 1996-1997). His second book of poetry, *Light of All Times* (bilingual edition), will be published in 2012. p. 6

**John Walser** holds a doctorate in English from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and is an associate professor at Marian University in Fond du Lac. He is a founding member of the Foot of the Lake Poetry Collective. ([www.lakepoets.com](http://www.lakepoets.com)) He has lived most of his adult life in the upper Midwest, where he has loved the fruits and flowers that grow in our backyards. p. 31

**Ed Werstein**, Milwaukee, spent 22 years in manufacturing and union activity before his muse awoke and dragged herself out of bed. His sympathies lie with poor and working people. He advocates for peace and against corporate power. His poetry has appeared in *Versé Wisconsin*, *Blue Collar Review*, *Mobius Magazine* and a few other publications. p. 32

**John Sibley Williams** is the author of six chapbooks, winner of the HEART Poetry Award, and finalist for the Pushcart and Rumi Poetry Prizes. He has been widely published and has an MFA in Creative Writing and MA in Book Publishing. He spent portions of each childhood summer divided between families in Wisconsin and Iowa. p. 15, 25

**Peter Wyton** is a page and performance poet resident in Gloucester, a cathedral city in the west of England. If you want to know more, try [www.myspace.com/peterwytonpoet](http://www.myspace.com/peterwytonpoet). He has no connection to Wisconsin, but now that he's heard about Oconomowoc, he'd like to visit. p. 9

Born in Illinois, **Marilyn Zelke-Windau** lives in Sheboygan Falls, WI. She was nurtured by Chicago neighborhoods, Big Bend farms, raspberry patches in Fremont, blue gills from Green Lake, and books in Madison. She recently retired from teaching art to elementary school children in Oostburg, WI. Her poems have appeared in *Echoes*, *Fox Cry Review*, *Red Cedar Review*, *Seems*, *Stoneboat*, *Versé Wisconsin*, *Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets Calendar* and online at Your Daily Poem. p. 16, 24

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