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FEATURES

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 BY MARGARET ROZGA**

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 CX DILLHUNT & DREW DILLHUNT**

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 MARK KRAUSHAAR**

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Maybe most of you know that women's collections of poetry, while they might see the light of day more easily than in the past, get reviewed less frequently when published, and, when reviewed, often by women, appear in less prominent/prestigious venues than men's books. If you haven't heard of *Vida*, an organization founded to support women's writing, you can learn about it at vidaweb.org. One of the most important contributions *Vida* has made for the last several years running is "The Count," which tracks statistics on male and female writers, reviewers, and books reviewed in high end publications. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the cards are stacked overwhelmingly in favor of men at these places—*The Atlantic Monthly*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *Poetry*, *Paris Review*, *The Nation*, etc. To hear some of their editors talk, you'd think women didn't write much at all, especially not literary criticism.

So here are some facts about VW's book reviews, which counter the idea that women don't review or write criticism. For issues 105-109 (April, 2011-July, 2012) we published 122 reviews (that's a lot of books reviewed, by the way). Of that total, 63—just over 50%—were books by women, which certainly bucks the trends documented by *Vida*. Maybe it takes women editors to publish reviews of women's books? Also counter to *Vida*'s trends is the split in VW between male/female among reviewers, who are overwhelmingly women. In a typical issue we publish 17-18 reviewers, only 2 or 3 of whom are men. We're delighted to publish reviews by women, but we're concerned about what that imbalance suggests and why it exists. Where are the male reviewers? It's not because our poetry community is more female. The balance of poets who submit and publish in VW hovers around 50/50. Is it because the men who write reviews—and there are plenty among our published poets who do—reach higher to publish them? Is it a compensation issue? At higher end venues, reviewers tend to get paid. At VW (and others like us), they do not. Is it the case that men don't review unless compensated? At *Rattle* (which, like VW, also pays reviewers one print copy and runs reviews online), there's a healthy mix of women/men reviewers and books reviewed, but it's a more prestigious venue than VW and, perhaps not coincidentally, has a male editor.

No one that we know of is keeping a comparable "count" of reviews about and by writers of color. Our own record on representing a wider diversity of authors is not what we would like it to be. Of those 122 reviews, 11 books were written by non-white authors. We'd very much like to include a broader range of reviews about and by African American, Latina/o, Native, and Asian American authors, and we welcome those reviews from all of you. Besides helping to create a more open, welcoming space for all poets, wider knowledge will, we believe, benefit all of us as artists and individuals.

We both review for VW and sometimes elsewhere. Besides providing a service to other poets, reviews help us think about a book and learn from it. Your work becomes a window into my work and into poetry. Books come to VW from poets and publishers around the U.S., not just in Wisconsin. You can review someone whose work you've followed for years or never heard of. We welcome reviews of "Books Received," as well as others. Publishers will often send a review copy if specifically requested. Writing reviews is one of the easiest ways to support other poets, while improving our own poetic craft. Creating a venue that other poets and publishers know as a reliable source of thoughtful criticism is also, we believe, one more way to raise the profile of Wisconsin's poets. We invite all of our readers and poets to review. We'd especially like to see more of the men we publish writing reviews, and we invite all of you to read and review a greater

diversity of authors. We're happy to suggest a book or author from our list, if you would like to review but don't know where to start.

Thanks to R. A. Davis and Greer DuBois for volunteer proofreading help. Lingering errors are, of course, the responsibility of VW's editors.

Contact us: 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**, *Scholia*, Arlen House, 2011
- Lisa Cihlar**, *The Insomniac'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_NGM_N Books 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

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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

- Grace Marie Grafton**, *Whimsy, Reticence & Laud: Unruly Sonnets*, Poetic Matrix Press, 2012, by Trena Machado
- Eric Greinke**, *Conversation Pieces, Selected Interviews*, Presa:S:Press, 2012, by Tim McLafferty
- Charles Portolano**, *All Eyes on US: A Trilogy of Poetry*, Rockford Writers Guild (RWG) Press, 2008, by Estella Lauter
- Charles Portolano**, *The little, lingering, white, lies we allow ourselves to live with*, As Is Arts Press, by Steven C. Levi
- Cecilia Rodríguez Milanés**, *Everyday Chica*, Long Leaf Press, 2010, by Lucia Cherciu
- Elizabeth Savage**, *Grammar*, Furniture Press, 2012, by Sherry Chandler
- Thomas R. Smith**, *Wisconsin Spring: Poems and an Essay*, Lost Music Press, 2011, by Estella Lauter
- Theresa Malphrus Welford** (ed.), *The Cento: A Collection of Collage Poems*, Red Hen Press, 2011, by Chloe Yelena Miller
- Scott Wiggerman & David Meischen** (eds.), *Wingbeats: Exercises & Practice In Poetry*, Dos Gatos Press, 2011, by R. A. Davis
- Review-Essay by Wendy Vardaman on books by:*
- Robin Chapman**, *the eelgrass meadow*, Tebot Bach, 2011
- Ching-In Chen**, *The Heart's Traffic, a novel in poems*, Arktoi Books, 2009
- Fabu**, *In Our Own Tongues*, University of Nairobi Press, 2011
- Nikky Finney**, *Head Off & Split*, Northwestern University Press, 2011
- Mathea Harvey**, *Of Lamb*, paintings by Amy Jean Porter, McSweeney's Books, 2011
- Karla Huston & Cathryn Cofell**, *Split Personality*, sunnyside press, 2012
- Amy King**, *I Want to Make You Safe*, Litmus Books, 2011
- Noelle Kocot**, *The Bigger World*, Wave Books, 2011
- Julie L. Moore**, *Slipping Out of Bloom*, 2010
- Jennifer Tamayo**, *Red Missed Aches! Read Missed Aches! Red Mistakes! Read Mistakes*, Switchback Books, 2011
- Lesley Wheeler**, *Heterotopia*, Barrow Street Press, 2010

Submission guidelines can be found at 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 May-August 2012

Publisher & author links available online

- Tiel Aisha Ansari**, *High Voltage Lines*, Barefoot Muse Press, 2012
- Charles Bane, Jr.**, *The Chapbook*, Curbside Splendor, 2011
- Catherine Barnett**, *The Game of Boxes*, Graywolf Press, 2012
- Ron Carlson**, *Room Service*, Red Hen Press, 2012
- Robert Cooperman**, *The Lily of the West*, Wind Publications, 2012
- Robert Cooperman**, *Little Timothy in Heaven*, March Street Press, 2011
- Paola Corso**, *Once I Was Told the Air Was Not For Breathing*, Parallel Press, 2012
- Alice D'Alessio**, *Conversations With Thoreau*, Parallel Press, 2012
- Nick Demske**, *Skeety Deety Deet*, Strange Cage, 2012
- Franki Elliott**, *Piano Rats*, Curbside Splendor, 2011
- Chris Emery**, *The Departure*, Salt, 2012
- Nausheen Eusuf**, *What Remains*, Longleaf Press, 2011
- Dana Gioia**, *Pity the Beautiful*, Graywolf Press, 2012
- Albert Goldbarth**, *Everyday People*, Graywolf Press, 2012
- Nathalie Handal**, *Poet in Andalucia*, University of Pittsburgh, 2012
- George Held**, *After Shakespeare: Selected Sonnets*, Červená Barva Press, 2011
- Karla Huston & Cathryn Cofell**, *Split Personality*, Sunnyside, 2012
- David W. Landrum**, *The Impossibility of Epithalamia*, White Violet Press, 2011
- W. F. Lantry**, *The Structure of Desire*, Little Red Tree Publishing, 2012
- Bradley Lastname**, *Insane in the Quatrain*, The Press of the 3rd Mind, 2011
- Carol Levin**, *Stunned by the Velocity*, Pecan Grove Press, 2012
- Micah Ling**, *Settlement*, Sunnyside, 2012
- Leslie Adrienne Miller**, *Y*, Graywolf Press, 2012
- Tom Montag**, *That Woman*, Red Kite Press, 2012
- James Pollock**, *Sailing to Babylon*, Able Muse Press, 2012
- D. A. Powell**, *Useless Landscape, or A Guide for Boys*, Graywolf Press, 2012
- Jo Sarzotti**, *Mother Desert*, Graywolf Press, 2012
- Noel Sloboda**, *Circle Straight Back*, Červená Barva Press, 2012
- Cynthia Spencer**, *In What Sequence Will My Parts Exit*, Plumberries Press, 2011
- Chelsea Tadeyeske**, *Healdragger*, Plumberries Press, 2012
- Jennifer Tamayo**, *Red Missed Aches*, Switchback Books, 2011
- Lisa Vihos**, *The Accidental Present*, Finishing Line Press, 2012
- Liu Xiaobo**, *June Fourth Elegies* (trans. Jeffrey Young), Graywolf Press, 2012
- Kevin Young**, *The Grey Album: On the Blackness of Blackness*, Graywolf Press, 2012
- Saadi Youssef**, *Nostalgia, My Enemy* (trans. Sinan Antoon and Peter Money), Graywolf Press, 2012

Community Inclusive: A Poetics to Move Us Forward

by Margaret Rozga

When I visited the Zora Neale Hurston Museum in Eatonville, Florida, several years ago, I could only imagine what Eatonville might have looked like shortly after the Civil War, at the time of its founding as the first African American town in the United States. For Harlem Renaissance writer and anthropologist Hurston, Eatonville was a “city of five lakes, three croquet courts, three hundred brown skins, three hundred good swimmers, plenty guavas, two schools, and no jail-house” (qtd. in Trubek). It was, according to writer Anne Trubek, a place where “black people lived unseen and unexamined by white people.”

Today Eatonville is less isolated. An exit from Interstate 4 put me right into the west central part of town. But I found at the eastern edge of the town what seemed to be a remnant of another era. On the east side of East Street, where Eatonville’s Kennedy Boulevard becomes Maitland, Florida’s Lake Avenue, there is a continuous low wall spanning the edge of the yards of the Maitland homes. You can see this wall on a close-up view in Google maps. It’s not an ugly wall as walls go. It’s not a tall prison wall topped by barbed or razor wire. When the wall was constructed and why, I could not discover. If the people of Eatonville and Maitland mutually concluded like the neighbor does in Robert Frost’s “Mending Wall,” that “good fences make good neighbors,” then my apologies to all. But for me, an outsider and a long-time civil rights activist, the voice of Frost’s narrator rang truer: “Something there is that does not love a wall.” Since the wall separates an African American town from its largely white neighbor, I had to wonder. It seems to symbolize exclusion and enforced separation.

Let me risk appropriating this symbol and transporting it in a minor key to the subject of this essay: the question of the lingering tendency to wall off “political” poetry from supposedly non-political, ego-centric poetry, and the lingering tendency to assume the latter is necessarily in a superior class to the former. In other words, if it’s political, can it be poetic? If it’s poetic, does it not have to shun the political? Are the two categories mutually exclusive?

First to consider definitions, what do we mean when we talk about the “political” in terms of literary content? And, of course, what is poetry?

Poetry rarely works within the terms of the narrowest definition of “political,” that is, the process of choosing one candidate for public office over another. More

applicable is the term’s reference to watershed public events and to policy matters, especially policy matters that affect the well-being of people and of the world generally. Policy gets formulated in abstract and legal terms, often dry, sometimes incomprehensible, generally removing any trace of image from the language so that we do not see. Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell, for example, advocated for the passage of a state law that required women seeking abortions to undergo a “transvaginal probe” without himself knowing what those terms signified. Other examples of political language that hide

reality abound: separate but equal; apartheid; incursion; correctional institution; no child left behind; defense of marriage; Senate Bill 10.

Insofar as poets are seers, we observe specifics in our lives, some of them the impact of poorly chosen policy, and we craft word images to express what we see. Of course, political commentary in prose can translate abstractions into concrete language and can give examples of individuals who are affected in particular ways by public policy. Sometimes it does so eloquently. To the extent it is eloquent, it is often called, yes, “poetic.”

Practicing poets work at their craft. Some develop the skill to take a step further the courtship of beautiful language and social concern. They are attuned to the music of language, the power of form, the way words look on a page, and they aim to marry the beauty and emotional power of language to their deepest and most profound concerns, including social, civic, or political concerns. Craft and compassion reinforce each other beautifully in Gwendolyn Brooks’ images of post-World War II segregated Chicago. Both craft and compassion are what make Lois Roma-Deeley’s signature poem “Apologizing for the Rain” a powerful expression of women trained to shoulder all the blame. Both craft and compassion make Yusef Komunyakaa’s “Facing It” with its depiction of reflections in the granite of the Vietnam Memorial so compelling in conveying the impact of the Vietnam War. Images that arise from the poet’s eye and heart attuned to political, social, and community concerns and shaped by the poet’s skillful hand have given us much excellent poetry.

Whether or not we intend our images and word music to affect a change in policy, the words become part of the experience of our audiences who are, we hope, somehow enriched, somehow empowered. At the heart of my poetic practice is the belief that we are more with poetry in our lives than we are without it. We are more with each other than we are isolated and alone.

The lonely poet working in isolation is an image ingrained in our culture. And it is true that because writing poetry requires concentration, it may be solitary. Many poets begin writing poems after the isolating experience of a failed romance. But all these factors do not mean that poetry must be focused on the isolated individual. Poets, like other people, have social networks and concerns: jobs,

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friends, family, civic issues, and histories. Poets can and do write about individual experiences. They can and do write about falling in and out of love, about the role of art, about facing old age and death. But if poetry, defined most simply, is the art of using language most resourcefully, then why limit poetry to a handful of subjects? Writing that taps into a wide array of the resources of language ought to be free, will free itself, to explore a wide array of topics. Poetry can be egocentric, but it need not be exclusively egocentric. The “I” may be neither the center of the poet’s world nor the center of the poetic

world. A poet may find inspiration in others and in action, as well as in solitary contemplation. Rather than be exclusively egocentric, poetry can be community inclusive.

People who share my views struggle to come up with a term that acknowledges a wider array of poetic interests and avoids the controversies set off by pairing the word “political” with the word “poetry.” The organizer at Woodland Pattern Book Center came up with the term “civic poetry” to use in the title of a workshop I led there. Split This Rock, a national poetry organization that sponsors a major poetry festival in Washington DC, identifies itself as an organization focused on “poetry of provocation and witness.” What these terms try to do is to reach beyond the narrow limits of the poetic tradition and practice we inherited from the first half of the twentieth century.

What we’ve inherited is a pervasive sense that the proper subject of poetry is poetry, that at some level and with some variation in the degree of subtlety and metaphorical approach, poetry is what poems should be talking about. George Orwell wrote in 1941 that writers from the 1890s onward focused on technique. T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Virginia Woolf “were far more interested in technical innovations than in any moral or meaning or political implication that their work might contain. The best of them all, James Joyce, was a technician and very little else, about as near to being a ‘pure’ artist as a writer can be.” These writers are still among the most frequently taught.

Wallace Stevens is another such twentieth century poet, an important one, cited in 1975 by critic Harold Bloom as “the best and most representative American poet of our time” (qtd. in “Wallace Stevens”). There is much to admire in Steven’s work, his descriptive skill, for example, and yet as poet Louise Bogan notes, his world is “strangely empty of human beings” (qtd. in “Wallace Stevens”). In fact, Stevens advanced the argument for an abstract, egocentric poetry. He wrote that “Life is not people and scene, but thought and feeling. The world is myself. Life is myself” (qtd. in “Wallace Stevens”).

Such a solipsistic world may be rendered skillfully, perhaps even beautifully, but it is not the world in which I live, and so its artifice fails to engage me. Though I admire Stevens’ precision, I want to apply such precision to a wider range of topics. Mine is a world of students and colleagues, movements for social justice and human beings reading, writing, making plans, making friends and sometimes enemies, making art, planning parties, planning protests, engaging with the natural world and questioning their role both in that world and in the social worlds of which they are a part. Such challenges and excitement deserve being represented with all the resources of the language and all the skill of the poet.

To build a wall around poetry, to build a wall around certain subjects deemed worthy of poetry is to erect an artificial barrier that at best raises questions. At worst constructing walls to protect a supposedly “pure” and exclusive poetry from being debased may be what has led to the marginalization of poetry, to the loss of audiences beyond the select few. Poetry sales leave much to be desired. According to Laura Moriarity of Small Press Distributors, most poetry titles “sell between 50 and 250 copies per year” (qtd. in Nichols). But a fuller depiction of the contemporary world, not the accountant’s bottom line, is my concern here.

The confessional and the ethereally poetic are scarcely the whole poetic community. If we take down the walls that keep us from seeing, identifying with, and connecting to other poetries, we will realize how extensive, even within the Anglo-American tradition,

that wider community is: from the heroic *Beowulf*, to Chaucer’s fallible nuns, priests, and other pilgrims on their Canterbury trek with all the baggage of their lives, to Shakespeare who made dramatic poetry out of history, to England’s traditions of poets laureate including John Dryden who wrote the political satire “Absalom and Achitophel” and Alfred Lord Tennyson who wrote “The Charge of the Light Brigade,” to the work of Walt Whitman, Langston Hughes, Wendell Berry, and Rita Dove, to the surge of public interest in poetry following the September 11th attacks in New York, to the outpouring of poems about the 2011 Wisconsin spring protests, so ably collected in *Verse Wisconsin’s* “Main Street” issue.

If it’s poetic, does it have to shun the political? If it’s political, can it be poetic? If it is ego-centered, does it get a bump up in poetic rank? These questions are a remnant of an earlier era, an outlived set of values and preferences.

Where in the world is poetry today? I’d like to see it everywhere. It’s already jumped the wall, and gone onto buses, into vending machines, onto the stage and into the streets. I see poetry moving beyond the exclusively ego-centric to become more community inclusive. Where it will go from here is the new question. As poets and as readers, we engage with this question every time we craft a poem and every time we choose one. As we think about and articulate reasons for our choices, we take the next steps towards a poetics in keeping with Wisconsin’s motto. Forward.



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See **wfop.org** for further information.

Autumn Meditation

Look at fear directly
and pity the little mouse
gnawing in your gut.

Now let him go
running
through your fingertips.

Hold him
on your lap,
like a little Buddha.

Be kind to yourself, he says.
Winter is approaching.

*

Observe the morning mist
lifting slowly
from the pewter lake
like an organza veil,

an eagle
foraging in the sky,
a frieze of wings
against azure.

In bird-silence,
and mosquito-silence,
watch the forest unfurl
her brilliant autumn dresses.

*

Where have you been?
says the creaky old poplar
leaning over the road.

It's been months
since I've seen you and your little dog
walking down this long black ribbon.

You used to walk
past me every day, watching
the clouds turn pink at dusk.

The birds are molting,
itchy for winter.
They leave feather gifts

in grassy tufts and brambles.
They grace my branches
less and less these days.

Prepare to shiver—
I will be here with you
all winter long.

Through blizzards
and ice storms,
I will stand strong.

My leaves are waving
in the sun, in the wind,
a thousand golden hands.

The smell of wood smoke
perfumes the air.
Welcome back to autumn,
welcome home.

—ELIZABETH TORNES, LAC DE FLAMBEAU, WI

A Town Where There Are No People

The path which sang home,
canary yellow in my ear,
spidery thin and opulent.

If I had been shakedown of wind,
the lust of frost
ghosts of the flesh
in the years between —

transform I so when I broke
into the town,
the sounds of wings ahead.

I looked to a sky smooth as ice.
Nobody to greet me. Okay,
the doors were all open, the tables
present and counted.

I counted myself weary
in the town square,
beside a fountain stained with shit.

Bowed my head,
and prayed,
don't leave.

Don't leave me
yet.

—CHING-IN CHEN, MILWAUKEE, WI

Insensate?

Who are we to say?
A Jesuit priest
du Chardin
was nearly unfrocked
for his belief that
all things, stones, plants, all
have consciousness.

I had an umbrella tree once:
big spreading leaves.
Little when I
got it, it
grew for me like
crazy, became
much taller
than I was.

It committed suicide.
For me.
Instead of me.

I took it with me
to a new place
a new love
a big white
magnificent
abode. Well.

I hated that place.
It was too white.
It was too clean.

The new love wasn't
working either.

I thought I'd
die
there. And
my umbrella tree
did die.

One by one
its great spreading leaves
turned brown,
dropped
off. I got
the message.
One day I sawed
it off at the dirt-line.
The next day I
moved out.

I still have the stick.
And I'm still
alive.

Downsizing

Our green factories have closed for the season.
We've laid off all the chlorophyll,
let the carotene take over, putting in one last shift
as the days shorten and chill. Supple once,
our walls and stems crinkle at the edges,
turn crisp and brown. We hang on
till November winds strip us from security,
whip us through the frosty air. Unemployed,
we assemble on the ground, a crunchy crowd of castoffs
waiting for the inevitable, for the ones who will
sweep us up, herd us into piles to be bagged,
shredded, vacuumed, or God forbid, even burned.
But we are expendable, and the trees
are already rebuilding, waiting out the winter
for a new generation, a company of greenhorns,
young upstarts who will restart production
and cast their shadows against the necessary sun.

—BRUCE NIEDT, CHERRY HILL, NJ

In the Beaten Rice Factory

Nobody knows we are here.
When you wound down the canary road, I saw
you arise from war.

no oracle but song
no message but fragment

A mother knows a son's bruised body.

over-ripe peach
dropping to
matted grass
slowly

your right eye
a place of rest
wind

a wren seeing the

your elbow
a mother
removing the soul
of the grain
one by one

after the promised shoulder
behind the door

down
the chute

—CHING-IN CHEN, MILWAUKEE, WI

—MARIE SHEPPARD WILLIAMS, MINNEAPOLIS, MN

The Birth

As it happened, the Lord was not born in a manger
in the middle of an empty field covered
with a light dusting of the purest whitest snow,
surrounded by angels and wise men
and a barn full of docile beasts of burden
with proud parents looking on,

but was actually born in a noisy, overcrowded stable
in the middle of a well-traveled desert
on the outskirts of town
just past the market
where hookers tried to con married men
out of their grocery money
for something they'd get at home anyway,
a group of muggers and thieves looking on, chaste for the day.

and so it came that the Lord Jesus Christ was not born
in a noisy stable, cattle lowing in His ears, chickens cackling underfoot,
drunk father passing out cigars to the assembled mass
of poker players he owed money to, mother knocked out on home brew
("Yes I know God said there'd be no pain but it ain't you lying here,
dammit, I really need something now") but was actually birthed underwater

in a clear glass hot tub in Soviet Russia, mother nude save a white cloth
draped across her forehead, proud father looking on
worriedly, watching Son burst from Mother
in a cloud of slow-moving blood, watching Son
bob to the water's surface and take His
first breath, His first scream, His first sip
of Mother's sparse colostreum-yellowed milk.

and so it came that the Lord Jesus Christ was not born
in the sterile confines of a twentieth-century first world hospital,
white-clad attendants looking on and monitoring every breath, every
heartbeat, every muscle spasm in and out of place, but instead was brought
screaming into the burnt-out remains of a South American battlefield,
streamers of blackened Spanish moss clinging to the dying pillars
of napalmed cypress and magnolia, Mother stumbling

running

falling,

Father pulling "Come on, come on, I can hear them they're still too close"
Mother "The baby is being born now I can't" scarlet and emerald parrots
pause cackling to flutter low over Couple huddled
in canopied low-hung branches
javelins snuffle out of underbrush tusks lowered towards oncoming soldiers
jaguar leaves rotting carcass of deer bloating thirty feet above the ground
to stand guard
over labor pains breath coming too fast soldiers stopping at clearing
to stand guns lowered at ease curious
offering K-rations and rifle clips to Parents in homage of the Son.

—HOLLY DAY, MINNEAPOLIS, MN

Fukushima

(before)
I spend the winter
picking my way
over iced surfaces
like a geisha
navigating cobbled Kyoto streets
on eight inch geta clogs
making her way to a rendezvous
with Spring

(after)
Fingerless Sedna broods below the Arctic ice
rolling with the slow slush ocean
Fukushima, now, and she has no fingers to give
and wouldn't if she had

Nu Kua, who weaves the fabric of the universe
has begun, Penelope-like, the slow unraveling

As Mother Kali's red road of a tongue
unfurls down her chin
On her necklace of skulls there is always
room for many more

The Old Women are tired of this

—TESS ROMEIS, CEDARBURG, WI

The Turtles of Doom

The turtles of doom
Are slowly crawling towards us.
The man with the sandals and robe
Keeps shouting and pointing,

But the crowd just nods,
And says, "Hell, that's a turtle,
I'll be long gone when it gets here."

A youngster points and says
"Daddy, can I keep him?"

The pipe smoking business suited scion
Of a nineteen fifties
Television perfect family
Replies,

"Yes, son, you can,
You sure can."

—JOE FARLEY, PHILADELPHIA, PA

Rope-Walk

Is it against the law to be
nomad? Bindle, bundle done up
with rope. I'll meet you behind
the used car lot. Billboards climb
the hill that sheep once roamed.
Financing Assistance. Feedlot.
No Guarantee On Birds. We'll walk
the trestle past the shelter.
A field for letting: circle of ropes
below the mansion (*Another Quality*
Home); rams at auction.
When the last is sold, a feast fit
for Gargantua, groaning
tables. How far can a gypsy travel
in five centuries? How far
to our *Sunset with a View*? Night-
fall, sound of traffic never
stops. Nomad no-man.
On the horizon, a caravan
headed for a corner hay-shed,
starred ceiling outside a ragged
cottage, roof bound in bog-
grass, corded down with ropes,
a stone at the end of each.
That one's at the end of his.
Last rope to a drowning man.

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

Flash Mob at Christmas

I daydream in this run-down mall—
greasy food court, failing stores,
shoppers—gobbling pizza, guzzling Arizona tea.

Those fragrant trees and little hands setting tinsel on each branch
adrift in years gone by—I drank Santa's beer,
ate pretzels and the carrots for the red nosed deer.

Listen! Someone's singing ALLELUIA! And there's another. ALLELUIA!
and another.
Who am I with tears in my eyes slipping into Christmas Carols.

Quiet—voices gone—singers turn to shopping in the mall.
Spritzed with Alleluia I buy a coffee, a cookie, and a gift for anyone at all.

—MARYELLEN LETARTE, LUNENBERG, MA

The Myth of Sisyphus

I'm a leaf blower and no matter how hard I blow
there's
always
one
m
r
o
e

—STEVEN D. STARK

random

she's random
your daughter

if I were you I'd sell her
I saw this ad: we buy your kids

why can't we love
our kids on purpose?

—ROSE MARY BOEHM, LIMA, PERU
visit VW Online for audio by this author

when you get old

old age
is a place
where
you will
go alone
a precursor
to death,
a long
white room
where
you sit
on a bench
wearing
a hospital gown.

it is cold
and no one
listens to you
when you say
you are
still alive

—JOE FARLEY,
PHILADELPHIA, PA

Want

3:59 am on the day after saying thanks
they shift feet in the rain, faces pressing
the cold pane, desiring what's just inside:
commodities shimmering with promise,
colored pictures now comfortingly real.

With a glance at watches and cells,
they tongue the donut crumbs, crumple cups,
paw the sacred ground, readying for the rush.
When the shaking clerk looses the door,
they are already moving.

The crowd surges past glass walls toward treasure
never before advertised in this box of boxes,
its shelves heavy with plastic toys and tools.
Sighing, exultant, it hurtles past electronics, home décor, footwear;
past doorbusters, manager's specials, sale blowouts,
past today's bargains, tomorrow's garage sales.

When in unison the wailing, insomniac mob turns its frenzied gaze
on the biggest bargains of any season, hands still cranberry-sticky
flutter almost reverently; eyes dulled by screen glare ignite.
Breath stills
as shoppers halt,
rapt as immigrants surveying their new home.

Heaped before them is universal health care. Social services.
Enough asphalt to fill every pothole in Detroit. Tax relief. Fair wages.
That golden retirement.
An end to war, hunger, fear. The Four Freedoms. It's all there,
limitless, requiring no rainchecks.

And passing around the goods to one another,
they murmur how strange, how right it feels to share,
how it lightens them,
is enough.

—JUDY LENT, SEATTLE, WA

On the First Snowfall

Coming across a snowflake ornament at Fleet Farm delights
me. In honor of winter, I choose to put the clear thick plastic
snowflake powered by sunlight on a slender aluminum pole
to slide down a hole I drilled into the deck railing. I hope the
flake, fading from green to blue to red to white, will glimmer for
passersby glancing through the black branches along the road.
For all the cold nights ahead, I am going to sit in my rocking chair
and look out my patio door, watching for changes in the light.

—JANE-MARIE BAHR, MENOMONIE, WI

The Law of Diminishing Expectations

We all want immortality,
But will settle for immorality,
And if we can't get that,
Well, maybe a new coat and hat.

—JOE FARLEY, PHILADELPHIA, PA

Half-Life

The earth swivels her hips
and tilts her head; falling
across it like a lock of hair, serpentine
the course of one river
named for a long-dead king.

This universe is winding down
and our sun is burning up, flaring
intense, short-lived releases of energy.
Radiation and charged particles spike,
solar winds spew out a continuous spray,
red, green and purple in the northern sky
like god's teenage showoff hickeys.

If there is a god; who knows?
Who knows the things that survive us,
the crack pipes and the bone china cups,
the poisoned seas and satellite junked sky
that will persist without us,
though our own bones might endure
an eon or two and then: pure oblivion.

Is it then pure matter or mirrored anti-matter
transforming all its mass into the perfect fuel,
some hungry and relentless silence,
overwhelmed by absolute blackness
that spreads like mercury across a palm
slipping downward toward new spaces
through fissures and gaps to seek equilibrium.

Facing the long winter with idle hands—
the cells minute planets in the space of me—
their literal slow, purposeful motions:
I shed my skins inside and out;
trace elements gather around, warming.

—A'YARA STEIN, CHESTERTON, IN

Meditation #7 – A Black Book Full of the Horrors

Whatever way you look at it/it is an ugly bridge/not just a passageway but
a link to the other side/foiled in its attempts by pragmatism/ since when
does the mind share the enthusiasm of a retail strip hung above the earth

Bookstores and pedestrians/a Ponte Vecchio displaced/give to me instead
a black book full of the horrors of this world/Polish professors murdered
in a German concentration camp/a requiem mass that cannot account

for the facts/I see where you do not/ the cafe, the bookstore, the antique
shop, my bones on sale as curiosity/the drop is but a vagueness later/
the metre specific and the acoustic never greater.

—GERALD BEIRNE, FREDERICTON, NEW BRUNSWICK, CANADA

OBS!

The Grocery Critic

Swirling around from the cache of freezer packaged food,
encountering a man determining the cost of items in a discount bin,
growled, “they’re mine.”

Continuing checking the price of cuisine selecting the wrong item for a coupon,
returning it back down the aisle, returning to check for the advertised product
selecting more packages.

Confronting a woman who asked, “do you know how they taste?”

Coupons not redeemed, not a reduction for sandwich spread, nor two primroses
for the price of one. Not one dollar off, no swallow of Greece.

—RICHARD KRESAL, GREEN LAKE, WI

Missing Children

I smile at the small boy with the large eyes and the dark hair
that lives in my refrigerator this week, make sure
the cardboard quart is turned so that
he’s staring out of the refrigerator
when I open the door

and not the plain back wall. His name is Timothy,
but I just call him Tab, because he looks like a Tab to me.
“It’s been nice having you here, Tab,” I say
as I shake the container. There is just about enough milk left
for one more day of coffee. “I hope you’ve enjoyed your stay.”

—HOLLY DAY, MINNEAPOLIS, MN

These I realize are not
the beautiful people checking out
all around me at OBS!

Nor, logically, am I.
K-Marts were new when I was a kid,
and it never crossed my mind
not to want molded plastic,
the Dacron clothing,
almost every Blue-Light Special.

Nobody I knew then
read *Consumer Report*.

In a country without K-Mart,
which probably, for a time, truly
didn’t want what K-Mart offers,

OBS! is the next best thing.
Turning bar-codes toward the scanner,
I wish we were the beautiful people.

Not necessarily with figures like eastern-bloc gymnasts
or Italian loafers,
or laser-guided haircuts,
but in line at OBS!

we have bellies like shot-putter have,
our mouths pucker and wrinkle from smoking.

Our kids cry a lot and some days
look like they eat only doughnuts.

Too many adults limp
or slouch, and most of us look at our feet.

Every election I vote against this.
I vote for eye contact at OBS!

against plastic overcoats
and brittle housewares.

But little changes: the kids still whine,
often, over candy

while we pack our shopping bags fast,
with heads down, under the weight of commerce
and a series, they say, of free trades.

—TOM LAVELLE, STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN

Murciélagos

Near La Selva,
orange bats skim low

to gaff with their hook-feet
live fish they like to eat.

With very long legs
and enormous feet

their pups
wait in sea caves

four months
before new wings

can hold them up,
four months

hanging around
upside down,

nothin' to do.
Eat it all, bones

head, tail,
fins, their parents

insist.
They know

that barking
with a full mouth

won't echo,
won't reveal

ripples barely
below the surface,

flash of scales
whipping fins

skittery school
of the colony's

next meal.
All night

while we read
promises

in field guides,
promises

in dreams, you
whir below patios,

skim over lulls,
enter our waking--

deja vú--don't
we know you?

*Murciélagos pescadores--
fishing bulldog bats.*

—PEGGY SHUMAKER, FAIRBANKS AK
visit VW Online for more by this author

Spirit of the Bat

Hair rush, low swoop--
so those of us

stuck here on earth
know--you must be gods.

Or friends of gods,
granted the chance

to push off into sky,
granted the chance

to hear so well
your own voice bounced

back to you
maps the night.

Each hinge
in your wing's

an act of creation.
Each insect

you snick out of air
a witness.

You transform
obstacles

into sounds,
then dodge them.

—PEGGY SHUMAKER,
FAIRBANKS, AK
*visit VW Online for more by this
author*

Pitch in the Pines

Blades switch
swerve green

lean left
sway silver

grass sweeps
rolls right

past pine
limbs lift

bump birch
tilt bisque

toss yellow
fall binds

wind finds
its pitch

—JEANNIE E. ROBERTS,
CHIPPEWA FALLS, WI

Blue River

The Daugava, on which Riga is sited,
Flows serenely through the singing city.
Thus that sweet but complicated city
Is, by that ancient river, bluely lighted.
The opera house, so grand, so prideful and
Beloved, presents symphonic masterpieces
Or otherwise entertains. In bits and pieces
The history of an often conquered land
Comes clear, or clearer: the Baltic barons; kings
Of Sweden; Soviet Russia's heavy hand.
They had to shake it off, that grasping hand.
A country with a cultural tradition of singing
Breaks free, the city to be itself, the river
To sail cross country on its one blue wing.

—KELLY CHERRY, HALIFAX, VA

At Louise

My sister found a Cecropia moth as if someone had placed origami in a tree.
The town featured a nuclear power plant, a small statue of Blackhawk,
corn and soybeans, and therefore Louise Quarry was full of the bodies
of local teenagers, bored and drunk, now sunk too deep to fish out.
Shade and limestone forbade the land its grass, but there was sand, hauled in
by whoever ran the place, and a tin waterslide attached with bolts to the quarry floor.
Up above, a line of houses teetered over the beach, backlit, hazy.
My grandparents lived in one of them. Because they might be looking,
I wore my pink elastic water shoes, I watched out for broken glass.
At Louise, the wonder of a giant silkmoth raising and lowering its wings
tasted differently than wonder did at home. In photos, the water is gray. Stringy,
shivering in our two-piece swimsuits, we are indistinguishable from the poor kids.

—ABBY GAMBREL, MADISON, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

Snow Angel Dream

Saw a fox sleeping
in a snow angel a child made
in the snow along a frozen river,
A fox sleeping in a child's snow angel
seemed like a good idea for a children's story book
with affectionate illustrations
Ending with the child inside asleep in her bed
and outside along the river in the moonlight
the fox sleeping in the snow angel she made.
O fox! what dreams did you have
in the snow angel's arms?
O child! did you dream you were a baby fox sleeping
curled against your warm mother
in her underground den in the dark?

—ANTLER, MILWAUKEE, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

Fishing, fish fries and dead-zones

Over the years, I've unintentionally killed
arms full of undersized bluegills and bass.

Those dead-zone times I'd wait too long
responding to a nibble, the hook sets
mortally deep in the moist sponge of throat.

Too small to keep, I lay them down, bleeding
from the gills, onto the surface of the lake
where they sink, slowly hammocking like falling leaves,

out of sight. On the back porch,
where I separate the keepers from their heads,
I can't help but stare, amazed at how many minutes

their mouths gape open then close,
open then close, cursing me, one last time,

one last time,

one last time.

—MIKE LANE, DELAFIELD, WI

Lost View

A rusty pole stretched between trees
Holds a sagging tire swing.
A crumbled red stone house
Hides half buried in the earth,
A blackened smoke house leans over.
Weeds and wild flowers fill the yard.
Silent voices ripple across the fallow fields.
The cracked headstone with faded print
A final summary of this natural process
Towards disappearance—
We tread quietly on rich residue.

—NANCY PETULLA, MERILL, WI

Making My Apology to the Doe

In Kindergarten, when told to draw the animal
you would most like to become, draw a deer.
With fat brown crayon on pulpy paper, fashion
four legs, a solemn face, innocent eyes.

Stare at the doe feeding twin fawns
who startles as you bike the back roads.
Her hooves clatter on asphalt as she runs
into underbrush.

Snow-shoe the fields and look for the heart shaped
hoof prints, the hollow hair, snow coated on her
dun brown back. Notice the oval beds, single track
trails, scat, dark drips of urine on snow.

One new moon November night, drive home
after a double shift. The deer appears, no white flag
or graceful dash, just brakes, skidding, the impact of hide
with fender, the flight over hood and roof.

Find the doe and kneel next to her, crumpled on the
road. Limbs once capable of nine foot
leaps now twist beneath as blood drips ditch ice
to lace. For months have bad dreams. All shadows take the
shape of doe running, or about to run.

—JENNA RINDO, PICKETT, WI

At the Peace Watch

We dodge Bible quotes
parading Main Street. Placards:
*It was Adam and Eve, not
Adam and Steve.* January's dark
as the inside of a beer-can,
cold taste of metal. We come inside
and leave the door ajar as welcome
to our world. How many chairs
does it take to form a circle?
We came in with the others; does
that make all of us guilty?
*Moral Majority waits outside.
Anti-War=Pro-Terror. Who cares
about Polar Bears?* I wish
to believe there is not one word
that can't transform to song.
Peace I ask of thee o river
flows through a boy's eyes
as he sings. Late January.
Only the nearer shoreline is ice.

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

Count me

among the half-
lives, freaks, crooked-
beaked birds, bushy-
tail trees, and my head
cheese of mountain boar
soused with cesium
137. It's heaven. Pray,
Father Plutonium, like
a Zeus snap-crackle-
pop overhead the high-
voltage lines that run
like reason, nowhere
to hide. Roll me hog-
wild. Whip my meter.
Make me lean, mean.

—ADAM HALBUR, LA CROSSE, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

Like Deer

after Jean Nordhaus

One winter I photographed
a family of five deer who were
so starved they came straight
to our deck for bird seed.

I'd see them moving slowly through
the trees, so I'd remove my shoes,
find the camera, step quietly
to the window where the light
was right that day, turn off the flash
and wait—not for great photos
through two panes of smudged glass,
but to pay enough attention, to know
the one who limped was healing,
to see the coyote looking on
and scare him away.

I wish we could see our own poor
as families whose lives are interrupted
by bad weather, whose bodies must
survive with pride. I want to say,
be gentle so their beauty thrives
comes out like deer to food
or a woman to love.

—ESTELLA LAUTER, FISH CREEK, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

Occupied Town

This evening, rumors. Or is it
the wind? Below your window, heavy
footfall in the dark. Latch
of door, click of safety, or shutter-
release. Snapshots with a flash.
In the distance drumbeat or simply
thunder. Someone shuts a shutter fast.
Rumors of moon-shot but
the moon is black. Not a formal,
synchronized step of shod feet, more
like storm coming, a single drip
magnified. A thousand drops will
muffle dust. On the TV,
All this for a crown. A dollar.
Millions. On the commons, sparks
into black sky. Fireworks?
The people have none
but words, their tongues. Lined up
covering their eyes. At least five
languages spoken here,
only one declared legitimate.
Pepper-spray as a food product.
Each language conceals
a word for brother. Rumors
on the wind.

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

O Say

*A lot of the policies that he's [Barack Obama] talking about necessitate
Americans taking personal responsibility, and that's not something
Americans are used to doing. —Annie Kisilewicz, undecided voter*

For days now, I've been haunted by a photo in our newspaper: a polar bear,
swimming north, looking for solid ice. She can swim 100 miles, tops,
before she tires and drowns, but the ice pack has receded 350 miles.
We pop into our SUVs to get a Slushie at the 7-11 a mile or so away.
We forget to recycle, want to drill in the Arctic, think wind and solar
power are expensive fantasies. Give us more oil! Give us fast
food soaked in grease, and plenty of it! Let's not think about future
generations. Let's build bigger houses and crank up the AC. Wave
the flag if someone thinks we should change. And, while we're at it,
let's make the seagull our new national bird; its call is just perfect:
mine mine mine mine mine

—BARBARA CROOKER, FOGELSVILLE, PA
visit VW Online for audio by this author

Heeding Signs

He stands beneath
the sign that crosses U out,
another pole with blank
face. Between two hands
he holds cardboard I do
not read, only his face,
eyes focused straight
ahead to what lies
behind me. He needs
a shave and I imagine
a bath. He neither smiles
nor frowns. While the light
is red, I look at his eyes.
He does not recognize
me. When the light
turns green, I start
forward again.
I heed the sign.
I do not turn back.

—RICK DINGES, LINCOLN, NE

Displacement

Perspective vanishes
in a quandary of house
that pretends to be
a neighborhood, some
huddled at hill's crest,
others a diminished
slack in cul-de-sacs,
all something more
than walls to those
inside who pull back
drapes just far enough
to peek out and see
an undiminished concrete
plateau merged with
mud puddles from over-
watered sod, no one
standing out in the open
to provide insight
to the size of what we see.

—RICK DINGES, LINCOLN, NE

Training Day

Every month, like a broken clock
Is correct twice a day,
It's time for training day at Stanley.
Laudable goal, progressive managing,
Making sure staff are
Up-to-the-minute in
Techniques, tactics, tradition.

I don't see it that way.
Bi-monthly, we all get locked down,
Confined to a concrete bunker
Sitting on round steel plates
At cold steel tables
In austere, sterile discomfort
While the staff have a paid day
Of virtual vacation.

Nevermind paying them less,
Just put them to work,
 Every day,
 Doing their jobs.

—HARLAN RICHARDS, STANLEY, WI

Scrambled Yolks

If Puss In Boots had played the fiddle, would
the cow have jumped over the hey, diddle diddle?

How the tongues will cackle, the tongues will
wag. As the great man falls, the small man brags.

Once again, says the little red hen, I'm on
my own with no one to help I must plant alone.

Jack will never be nimble or never be quick since
he lost his head in that tumble-down trick.

When the cupboard is bare no one will care
if the drunk on the street has no bone or no meat.

When three fine sisters came to town, one wore yellow,
one wore brown, one ate an apple and wore a blue gown.

—PEGGY AYLSWORTH, SANTA MONICA, CA

Cold March

Winter has had its heyday. Its long succession
of snows.
Its drop-dead blues and whites. Its nights.
Now, cracks emerge. It crumbles
and will fall.
Still iced-in
in the basement, we are bulbs:
Within us, some sad node turns
toward the light. Listen
to our skins: the thin, dry husks
rustle in their boxes, seem
to move. Half sheath and half
defeated animal, they grasp the vaguest notion,
something
green. Wherein a thought begins
to beat, almost
inaudibly: not
yet, not yet.

—ANNE SHAW, CHICAGO, IL

As You Read on a Beach in Greece

the swamp, furred green with algae, opens and closes
its mouth spits up white lotus flowers overstuffed

with flies from muck black-sticky as thought or philosophy perhaps
and a log packed tight with bullfrogs slick at the water's edge

above me the lisp of insects small things move in trees devour
and are devoured this is a kind of devotion

quite unlike our own and what kind of blindness is it
taking a rusty stumble through the undergrowth

how to make things go again with legs and body heat
my breath attracts mosquitoes and this unsettles me

you tell me there will still be opportunities for joy
in the aftermath the naught for which I have been asked to ask

—ANNE SHAW, CHICAGO IL

Tree Shadows

(A reaction to Antler's poem, "Winter River Sundown")

Tree shadows reach across the frozen river
like a father reaches for his prodigal son, like a mother
reaches for her daughter after a quarrel,
like a Jewish widow reaches to comfort Palestinian
parents who hold their injured child, a Samaritan
helps a Jew by the side of the road, a person
comforts a person, race unknown.

Once I noticed a goose wait by the side of his injured mate
from sunrise when I first passed them until sunset
when I passed them again. Tree shadows reach across
like a bird reaches for his mate.

Birds cross over rivers and trees. They see no borders. Birds cross over
oceans and land suturing a scarred and hurting world. On a bird map,
there is no South, Central or North America,
no North or South Ireland,
no Congo, no Serbia, no Timor, no kingdoms, no states,
just rivers and trees and shadows reaching across
to where borders are unknown.

—CAROLYN VARGO, MILWAUKEE, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

Veteran's Day

In the blaze orange of autumn
tall marsh grasses lie flattened.

Close here where deer will bed
I bend, sniff, search for other sign.

This safety where I too have sheltered
cast in the hollow of other lives.

Burst milkweed pods spill white
and burrs cling like unrecited prayers.

Hunter's air taunt now with expectation,
and cardinal, too, wearing Christmas red

for protection, as some crisp fear lingers
ever at the edge of boot steps and finite vision.

This earth will always vibrate with absent names
called in autumn and scented with gun shot.

In glacial kettles old grasses reseed each season:
where deer bed, some like wolves will wait.

—KIMBERLY BLAESER, BURLINGTON, WI

No need for trees

How we, as Americans,
have now grown
to hate the tree-huggers,
let's pull their arms
out of their sockets
for reaching deep
into our pockets;
who are they to get
in the way
of our growing greed.
"Go green," they chant.
"No, go away," we say;
Go take a long hike,
get some vitamin D,
go see a Fellini flick,
for nature is a nuisance,
standing in our way
of any real progress.
Need to do some good?

Go pick up all
the big gulp cups
along our highways,
and while you are at it
scrape up all those
dead critters that
litter our roads
making us go bump
in the dark night,
but don't you dare
stand in our way
of developing all
the God given land
we have on hand;
let us cut down to
the ground all the trees
that get in our way
of making money,
we can build machines
to clean our air and
make us our oxygen.

—CHARLES PORTOLANO, FOUNTAIN HILLS, AZ

At Wounded Knee

The bumblebee at wounded knee
Decants his nectar lazily
Yellow lines dance into black
And when we dream we hear the crack
And when we dream we see the flash
We shake from cold, we smell the ash
Our houses like the honeycomb
Dissolve when wintering creatures roam
Our houses like the buried bones
Rattle as the blizzard groans
In creature dreams our houses settle
Underground and lie quiet
The whip-poor-will heard at the hill
Calls to the friends and dancers still
The bull who rests at wounded knee
Tips nectar to the bumblebee
Menagerie at wounded knee
Sits shivered from the landed free.

—UCHE OGBUJI, BOULDER, CO
visit VW Online for audio by this author

Concealed Carry

concealed carry
schnapps
on the bus

*stops
and loads
and cocks*

off again
I'll cap
his ass

*and rubs his Glock
he pats the pistol
in his pants*

—MICHAEL KRIESEL, ANIWA, WI /
BRUCE DETHLEFSEN, WEST BEND, WI

On Fahaheel

It stands alone
Intersecting Fourth Ring Road
and Fahaheel Highway.

White, bones crawling up blue walls
whose shadows bow, ghosts of those
who were tortured there.

Three passengers and I
screech and buckle
in my hand-me-down Volvo
whose brakes sometimes work.

Wind, a sick madrigal, taunts,
schoolchildren have
for ten years.

Touch fence, touch fence
you die when you do.

She reaches
fingers to metal
a thousand oysters gasp at us
their mouths wide open, hoping for a thrill
the girl shrieks an aria.

—SUMMER QABAZARD, NORMAL, IL

A Constitutional Right to Emote

Surely melodrama's
deeper than mere tragedy,
for the latter dries up tears,
the former welcomes them with relish—
like bouffant frosting on a chocolate cake,
or bubblebath in hard water.
So, a despairing love affair
becomes a wet nurse,
a dying mother
a fond indulgence—
does that make us mere mortals unredeemable,
this changing of the elements of sanctification
into a dessert, like Cherries Jubilee?
Does holiness, a diabetic, hate sugar that much,
or are the holy ascetic aestheticians
dead wrong?
What's wrong with garden gnomes, Barry Manilow,
plastic pink flamingoes, and Elvis-on-Velvet?
O, Lady, your husband has died,
the old sod,
don't be afraid to keen, keen, keen.
Weep and wail like Niobe, all tears!
Mind not the frowns and knitted eyebrows,
condemning your performance. Chew the scenery!
No matter that a dried up mouse inside the wall
says it all. Go ahead and howl.
Howl! Howl!

—MICHAEL BIEHL, SAN FRANCISCO, CA

ode to pie a la mode

for jack kerouac

15 ounces 9" pie crust	the american night a blanket
6 cups sliced apples	jazz leaping off pages
2/3 cup granulated sugar	buddha found under a tree
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon	san francisco america reborn
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg	a holy hiking pack
1 1/2 tablespoons corn starch	boots mingling mud
1 tablespoon unsalted butter	drunk again
a scoop of ice cream	allergic to cans of tuna

—WILLIAM WRIGHT HARRIS, KNOXVILLE, TN

The Poetess Balances

She's a carnivorous poet, a kind
Of dragonfly, but I don't mind. I mind

Mosquitoes and flies; am glad she eats
Those pests. I find her perfection complete,

Her eyes, and above all the sublime skill
By which out of nowhere she makes a kill,

Then like a burning blue helicopter,
More dazzling than any lepidopter-

A, she rests on a twig over water—
purling water. Former nymph she's its daughter.

The water plummets, but she is tranquil:
four glassine wings held out straight & still.

—MICHAEL BIEHL, SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Counting Calories

I finally ate my heart.
I ran too thin on a diet
of the clear juices of pulling inward.

I hoarded me and snacked
on the air of silence. I filled my belly
with empty calories on holidays,

when taking
seemed more appropriate
than giving. Taking is a form of giving.

Loneliness and abandonment
are great gifts.
They fatten the mind

with lit candles and processions, then cleanse
the palate as they shoulder roll across tongues
of prayer—little stuntmen, all aflame.

—MIKE LANE, DELAFIELD, WI

A CONVERSATION WITH FRANK X WALKER

CX Dillhunt & Drew Dillhunt

After Birth

"Killing that nigger gave me no more inner discomfort than our wives endure when they give birth to our children."

—Byron de la Beckwith

Like them, a man can conceive
an idea, an event, a moment so clearly
he can name it even before it breathes.

We both can carry a thing around inside
for only so long and no matter how small
it starts out, it can swell and get so heavy

our backs hurt and we can't find comfort
enough to sleep at night. All we can think
about is the relief that waits, at the end.

When it was finally time, it was painless.
It was the most natural thing I'd ever done.
I just closed my eyes and squeezed

then opened them and there he was,
just laying there still covered with blood,
(laughs) but already trying to crawl.

I must admit, like any proud parent
I was afraid at first, afraid he'd live,
afraid he'd die too soon.

Funny how life 'n death
is a whole lot of pushing and pulling,
holding and seeking breath;

a whole world turned upside down
until some body screams.

© Frank X Walker, *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers* (University of Georgia Press, forthcoming May 2013)



Frank X Walker is the author of six poetry collections, including *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers* (University of Georgia, forthcoming May 2013); *When Winter Come: the Ascension of York* (University Press of Kentucky, 2008); *Black Box* (Old Cove Press, 2005); *Buffalo Dance: the Journey of York* (University Press of Kentucky, 2003), which won the Lillian Smith Book Award in 2004; and *Affrilachia* (Old Cove Press, 2000). A 2005 recipient of the Lannan Literary Fellowship in Poetry, Walker is Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University of Kentucky and Director of African American & Africana Studies, and the editor of *PLUCK!*, the new *Journal of Affrilachian Art & Culture*.

DD: You've described poetry as an act of "conjuring." Reading your work, it's also clear that giving voice to historical figures—especially those who haven't been fully or fairly represented in official histories—requires the painstaking work of a historian.

How do you think about the interplay between your work as an objective historian and a visionary poet? Is there a place where research ends and conjuring begins?

FXW: I'm always honored when schools and colleges use my Historical Poetry as supplemental textbooks when studying history or when looking for texts that can be used across multiple disciplines, but I have no illusions about the fictitious nature of my work. No matter how effective the speaking voice or individual poem may come across it is its roots and references to actual history that give these kind of poems legitimacy. And at the same time, it is the poetry that

gives it its emotional strength. In my opinion it is only successful if together they provide for the reader a sense of authenticity. Once the historical poem hits the page its history and poetry must live in the same place at the same time and communicate in a credible way.

There is absolutely a place where the research ends and the conjuring begins. The research always comes first. The poet/researcher must first exhaust themselves with the details. They must become an expert on their subject before sitting down to write the poem. They must discover and know more about their subject than they ever plan to share in the overall narrative.

CXD: You add a choir of supporting voices to the existing historical record—York's hunting shirt and knife, the waters of the Columbia, and the bullet that ended Medgar Evers' life. This seems to be an essential part of what you've described as "reaffirming the power of literacy and the role of mythology and storytelling in the exploration of the truth."

Where do these voices come from? How do they work to help fill gaps in accepted historical narratives?

FXW: The idea of using multiple points of view to relate the story is old hat in fiction. When I began reading from the first York book and opened the floor for Q&A, I found that readers were already very interested in the voices that weren't included. They wanted to know what his wife thought and they wanted a closer look at Sacagawea. When I sat down to write the York sequel I sat down looking for all the missing voices I could imagine. Voices I believed I wanted to hear from and that I believed would enhance the narrative.

Readers seem to enjoy the human voices but they really love the personification of

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Frank X Walker

to the Wisconsin Book Festival, Madison, for these free events —

Reading & Discussion of Historical Poetry, Nov 10

Coal Black Voices: Film Screening, Nov 11

The Creative Side of Publishing (Panel), Nov 11

& with First Wave-UW: The Encyclopedia Show 2.0 & Performance Poetry and the Personal Narrative, Nov 9, & Passing the Mic, Nov 10

For complete information visit wisconsinbookfestival.org.

objects that were already present in the story, i.e., York's hatchet and his knife. It's a slight deviation from the proverbial fly on the wall. Now I simply apply my mother's saying that there are two sides to every story and then there's the truth. I am finding that if I increase the sides to the story in a credible way, readers feel like it's even closer to the truth.

DD: What is it that draws you to the particular historical figures you've chosen to conjure? How do experiences in your own life inform these choices? How important is it for a voice to come to you at a particular point in your life?

FXW: Now we're getting deeper into conjuring, because I really feel like it's a lot like dating in as much as the historical figures have to also choose. One of us could choose the other, but if we both choose each other you get something really special. I also think the poet has to be truly invested in the subject at an emotional level to really do it justice. I developed a personal stake in telling the York story because I was embarrassed that I had multiple degrees, considered myself well versed in Kentucky's African American history, found out York had lived in the same city I lived in and yet I had never heard of him. Part of my personal motivation was to eliminate my own ignorance and deal with that embarrassment.

I believe that because I was raised by women, have been blessed with six sisters, and survived multiple failed relationships, I actually lived the research material I needed to create most of the authentic sounding female voices in my historical poetry. I know that spending real time outdoors in the northwest and along the Lewis and Clark trail allowed me to finish the book when it was clear something was still missing. That missing element was the landscape. I say all of this to say that the journey that is the combination of the research and teasing out the poems and building them into a whole narrative is not something that only exist on the page.

A poet's real life will intersect with her work somewhere on the page and off the page in both unexpected and expected ways. The inner journey from the York narrative resulted in a buffalo tattoo and a chance to share the Nez Perce world with my teenage son and ultimately create a rite of passage for him. The Isaac Murphy inner journey resulted in a bicycle club called the Isaac Murphy Bicycle Club that rewards inner city kids who complete classes on bike safety, healthy eating, history with free bikes, helmets, locks

and organized opportunities to ride the local bike trail. I don't know what Medgar Evers has in store for me, but given that 2013 is the 50th anniversary of his assassination and JFK's as well as the March on Washington, I've got a feeling the activist in me is going to need an extra pair of shoes.

Historical conjuring takes longer than writing from personal experience. Given that there is no requirement that the next poem have a relationship with the previous one, I have a lot more freedom when writing from personal experience.

writing from personal experience. Given that there is no requirement that the next poem have a relationship with the previous one, I have a lot more freedom when writing from personal experience. The personal poems are often born out of inspiration and contact with other people and the real world, I don't have to stop writing one to work on the other. When I finished the Medgar Collection, I also had completed another manuscript of poems that will continue the *Black Box* and *Affrilachia* experience.

DD: You've described Byron de la Beckwith—Medgar Evers' assassin—as the hardest voice you've ever tried on. How was it possible for you to inhabit de la Beckwith? What can you tell us about that process?

FXW: It was the hardest for me, because I'd like to believe we were really far apart especially when you consider our values. I really wanted to get inside his head and understand what fueled his passion, why he hated who he hated as well as why he loved what he loved. Unfortunately and fortunately there is no limit of research material on hate speech, the KKK, white supremacy, and so many images and so much material available that provided his own words. One of the devices I used to get into that space was to type in hate speech on YouTube and listen to as much of it as I could stand.

CXD: You coined the term Affrilachia, now an official entry in the OED. At the end of your poem "Affrilachia," in the book of the same title, you write, "if you think / makin' 'shine from corn / is as hard as kentucky coal / imagine being / an Affrilachian / poet."

Here it is more than a decade since your collection *Affrilachia* was published. What's changed? What hasn't?

FXW: In the twelve years since *Affrilachia* I would say more people recognize, claim and use the word. I've lost count of how many colleges now consistently use the book in their

CXD: How does this historical conjuring compare to the writing process you employ when working from personal experience—as you do in *Black Box* and *Affrilachia*?

FXW: Historical conjuring takes longer than

Appalachian Studies courses, but because so many places and scholars are still discovering the word and slowly recognizing the need to speak about the region's true diversity it is still the best seller of all my books. What hasn't changed is the need to continue working against the pervasive negative stereotypes and caricatures associated with the region or the need to educate people about important Affrilachians like Nina Simone, August Wilson, Bill Withers, Angela Davis, Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni, James Brown and many others.



This is an excerpt from CX Dillhunt & Drew Dillhunt's interview with Frank X Walker. The full interview with video and photos is available at versewisconsin.org.

Sorority Meeting

Myrlie Evers speaks to Willie and Thelma de la Beckwith

My faith urges me to love you.
My stomach begs me to not.
All I know is that day
made us sisters, somehow. After long
nervous nights and trials on end
we are bound together

in this unholy sorority of misery.
I think about you every time I run
my hands across the echoes
in the hollows of my sheets.
They seem loudest just before I wake.
I open my eyes every morning

half expecting Medgar to be there,
then I think about you
and your eyes always snatch me back.
Your eyes won't let me forget.

We are sorority sisters now
with a gut wrenching country ballad
for a sweetheart song, tired funeral
and courtroom clothes for colors
and secrets we will take to our graves.

I was forced to sleep night after night
after night with a ghost.
You chose to sleep with a killer.

We all pledged our love,
crossed our hearts and swallowed oaths
before being initiated with a bullet.

© Frank X Walker, *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers* (University of Georgia Press, forthcoming May 2013)

Food For The Fox

the seed left for the birds
spilled on the snow brings
the night rabbits
which leads to a spill of blood
thus food for the fox
my hand to fox mouth
yet still I believe
I live in a snow-white world

—TESS ROMEIS, CEDARBURG, WI

Ghosts

We are what exists
between thoughts.

We are what didn't happen
because you missed the bus that day.

We are what you thought you saw
before you looked again.

We are what makes you turn around
when you think you're not alone.

We are what shifts behind the eyelids
between dreaming and waking.

We are what lies
just beyond the fog.

We are the sound not heard
the light not seen,
the thing not touched.

We are the whisper
behind the noise.

We are the creak in the wall,
but only when you think we're not.

We are the whistle in the graveyard.

We are not the wind
but the silence when it stops.

We move between glances,
just beyond the corner of the eye.

We move like smoke,
carried by currents of what you believe.

We try very hard
to stay out of your way.

And we are tired,
so very tired.

—BRUCE NIEDT, CHERRY HILL, NJ

Orchard Retrospect

I wandered my orchard
sampling unnamed autumn windfalls
biting carefully in my knowledge of worms,
and each taste brought a surprise:
Snow? Golden Russet? Winesap?

But no aging Eve clung to my side
urging me to eat,
only my black lab Baird behind me
sniffing fruit suspiciously,
frowning as I chewed,
a disapproving priest,
but I no longer had anything to confess.

—GARY JONES, SISTER BAY, WI

Time Passes All Understanding

How does one feel
when the ex-husband dies.
Does the past dissolve
with all the recriminations
that the divorce brought?
When he phoned that day
and called you sweetheart
did he mean it and if so
does this change the past?
What about all the crap
brought up by the lawyers,
the drinking, craziness,
even the adultery?
The phone conversations
of the past forty-five years
were polite segues to talk to
the son, who is now
over fifty. We have all aged,
and the past is withered
like stored angel hair
left in the Christmas box
and forgotten for years, then
brought out to be rejuvenated.
It's the new century plus twelve
and a new year; let's
let go of old angels and only count
the ones helping today. They
are saccharine enough for any
holiday and beyond. If sweetheart
calls again, it will be a miracle
and we've about run out of them
for this season.

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

The Extreme Double Cheeseburger

Partly Hidden

I wore a Lone Ranger mask,
which only covered the space

around my eyes. Everyone
knew it was me. And when

I spoke the listener was
doubly sure it was me.

because I had a distinctive
voice, slurring the harsh

consonants, masking my desires.

—HAL SIROWITZ, PHILADELPHIA, PA

Saturday in early January
calls for one with fried onions
and a smart slab of mesquite mustard
to be crushed into your mouth and
you sip on a thick chocolate shake,
ice cream like whipped clouds of ice
in front of the afternoon play-off game.

Your date sits next to you
nibbling at the goodness, his bright
white teeth raking through the lettuce
and cheese like pitchforks.

It's the season, remember when
your ex-husband would sit with the phone
on his lap, call his friend Rocky every time
there was a good play, screaming into
the receiver, DID YOU SEE THAT JACKASS,
THAT'S WHAT DALLAS GETS, HA!
Take a bite, suck the juices in at the sides
stare into the TV and remember when
passion hung in the air like smoke.

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

These are the days

These are the days of lack, the days
of the question mark and run-on sentences,
of thirst within the gentle rain,
of hunger in the full grown field.

These are the days where the noose stops the swallow,
of financial disasters and trillion dollar deficits,
purchase by plastic and picked up pennies —
— heads up for good luck and enough to pay a sales tax...

the angry days, the days of tantrums, tears
and runaways...of cars that break down, feet
that blister, legs that ache and backs that break.

These are the days of tears wept but not wiped,
nor stroked, nor gently kissed away,
of x-ray vision and the magnifying glass
with the magic glare to scorch your mate,
yes, your mate, her faults, your pain....

the days of unreturned phone calls, trolls
at your window in the middle of the night
—the bitter candy for the fallen child—
the invisible ones whose persistence will breathe
beneath blankets and stars on the park
bench blind to season.

These are the days I see the world
through your eyes, feel the pain
through your heart and I remember that breath,
that ultimate star...and you arched away
like a firefly, love. The rose starts
to blossom, love,
but I'm so very cold.

—CHRISTA GAHLMAN, MADISON, WI

Some Things I've Plucked

right out of thin air and other places,
too, I can tell you, like
the make and model
of that car that sped by;
I know there's no Ford Faberge,
but maybe you didn't,
and what mortal can resist
the luscious fruits of fabrication;
I didn't mean to say that I made
artisanal cheese in my bathtub
but when I consider the genuine curds
of scum, well, who wouldn't turn from the
dried up raisin of reality to the gorgeous
grapes in the vineyards of the unverifiable;
and that bit about collecting shrimp forks
from every country on the planet,
all I can say is truth is a hard nut,
a no-frills filbert sort of thing.
Some things are just so succulent to say.

—PAM LEWIS, MADISON, WI

Reliquary

Under the midnight aurora
in a northern flannel-sheeted bed,
beneath the weight and wild color
of a yarn-tied crazy quilt,
amid the whispers, tickles, and shushing
of brown-eyed, pony-tailed girl cousins,
I have slept with suicide.

With my bare feet swinging in time
to baking-powder-biscuit stories,
and men spitting watermelon seeds
the shape of my dime-store mood ring,
while truck-driving nomads lift amber bottles
in an everyday larger than Dick and Jane,
I have held danger's bruised moist hand.

On the spinning stools of small town diners
where hopeful adolescents
wear school colors like a cattle brand,
after February basketball chants
where platters of gold or just-cut french fries
pass among friends and Friday night foes,
I have eaten manna with military killers.

In a crowded copper four-door
wearing swimsuit under cut-offs and cover-up,
singing radio oldies along Indiana's highways
on a pilgrimage to any infinity of sand,
driving desires aimless and older than the continent
under the water mirage of the ancient August sun,
I have flirted with the murdered.

Along the simmering sidewalks of Chicago nights
in close jealous crowds that jostle lovers,
weaving between street sleepers and dark-eyed panderers
amid the retractable leashes of urban dogs,
where jazz songs rise against honking traffic
and pencil-thin girls spill like light from doorways,
I have kissed smoke spent from mafia mouths.

Amid the photographic relics of gone bodies
on the darkening veneer of a beside stand,
in a digital world of light emitting diodes,
as age clocks its way toward another transformation
where barely remembered voices count iambic heroic death
and students twitter meaning in 144 characters or less,
I clutch delicate stories—old, never told.

—KIMBERLY BLAESER, BURLINGTON, WI

Boy in Pajamas

Boy in pajamas
hand on the mouse
jumps to the action
of the online world.

The collector of badges
powers up with coins and weapons
each level up provides more armor.

The believer in magic
wants you to conjure
and dispel everything,
just to experience the charm.
But your parental spells
are the only misdirection.

Like the Superman
on his top,
you try to be a hero
because he believes.
He believes so much so
that you try to collect powers
for a figmentary cache
to protect him.

But you are not superman
you are not an avatar.
Your weapons are
only what you already failed with.

—THOMAS CANNON, OSHKOSH, WI
visit VW Online for video by this author

More Juice

If she was a chair,
she would be on fire

& the people of the town
would marvel

at the flamed colors
of her face

& hide their ears
from the violent crackle

of her demands
to never be put out.

Juice, apple
enough to give sin

to the collapsing world,
Isabelle is not a chair

& with her palms
she rips the cup

out of my fingers.
The world

is put back together,
with the slightest sin.

—DARREN C. DEMAREE, COLUMBUS, OH

Advantages of Autism

Insists on zippers zipped, pant legs down
mittens on, hat over ears.
No “I want that” during toy commercials.
Peanut butter sandwich lunches are easy to make.
You get to learn sign language.
The cats get their exercise.
Darting brown eyes suddenly meeting yours.
every sound mimicked,
every correct flashcard given,
Every moment of imaginative play fills you with hope.
You learn that a hug is worth a thousand I love yous.
Gained patience from a screaming child
insisting on being held.
Peanut butter sandwich suppers are easy to make.
You may not get adored like other parents,
you may not hear the words “I love you,”
but you are the only safe haven when needed.
No cries when you leave.
A gradual sliding over to you when you get home.
Home therapy visits require you to clean the house.
He makes you take one day at a time
and enjoy the hell out of it.
Motivation to get involved in politics,
education laws, medical advancements.
Learning not to care what others think at the grocery store.
Compassion for others getting judged at grocery stores.
Aversions to slimy stuff.
Peanut butter sandwich snacks are easy to make.
Older siblings and cousins become a link
for they don’t know what is normal,
they only know family is for spending time together.

With my eyes always on him to watch for danger, for a sign,
I get to experience the moment, every moment,
the gift of not missing, of not forgetting,
beauty in the small.

—THOMAS CANNON, OSHKOSH, WI
visit VW Online for video by this author

A Beautiful Stranger

Today, looking out the back of our house,
I see a cat with the exact markings as Sylvia,
the fluffy, mostly white, ball who lives in our
bedroom. The stranger is somewhat thinner.

Later, from the window, Sylvia hisses at him,
the brother who was never there for her, or
the ghost of a feral cat she could have been.

—JOHN LEHMAN, CAMBRIDGE, WI
visit VW Online for video by this author

Reality Rides a Yellow School Bus

and as students move toward the back
they learn more, the flashing blue LED on the roof
a lodestar guiding wise guys
who offer exposes of Santa and Easter Bunny and Tooth Fairy
who provide vocabulary lessons in vulgarity
who introduce Gray’s intimate Anatomy
who explicate intricate reproductive rituals
who entertain with risqué jokes and bawdy ballads.

Hopeful mothers wave good-bye to innocence
blowing kisses in the wake of childhood
sending babies to the warm embrace of Miss Teach
with her American flag and happy-ever-after storybooks
her posters of kittens and puppies and springtime bloom
a cupboard of graham crackers and cartons of milk

mothers unaware that learning most profound occurs
not in the heart of a classroom
but in the bowels of Jonah’s bus
the laboratory of raw democracy
guppies swallowed one by one,
and spit out created equal.

—GARY JONES, SISTER BAY, WI

Food Court

Just a bunch of high school boys
well-behaved, talking about
noisy music, sports and girls
I suppose. It doesn’t seem to bother

them that they are all hyphenated -
Mexican- African- Asian- or Euro-Americans
There are no gated minds here, just some
dudes zeroing in on lunch.

Restless, not quite knowing
where their feet are, they wear
baggy pants and shirts, and baseball
caps on backwards, or sideways.

But somebody screwed their heads
on straight. Unaware of their place
in a new America, they clear
their plates. If they noticed me at all,

they probably think I am history -
an old Albino-Rhinoceros-American
the kind they learned about in biology class
that’s on the endangered species list.

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

The Nature of Man

Pelicans meet in parliament
on the rocks. A bird leaves the flock
to plane the surface-water's sky,
wing-spread firmament,
double bird to watching eyes.

Men arrive, heave
the advancing earth back into the Pleistocene lake
stone by stone by stone,
until a rock is lifted and thrown
at the pelicans, just to see.

—CHUCK RYBAK, ONEIDA, WI

The Winter of Two Hundred Turkeys

From my home-office window, I watch
my wild yet amiable neighbors scratch
and gobble in the depleted soybean field.

Not cuddly like kittens or colorful like goldfish,
wild turkeys offer a no-cost, no-maintenance,
free-range escape from computerized news.

These turkeys do not blow one another up
or mow one another down. They do not
plunder pension plans or lie to constituents.

If they absent-mindedly wander up my drive,
a tap on my garage door opener sends them
trotting back to their safer side of the street.

They settle their own territorial disputes
with a back-off flutter and ten-second chase.
Like the lilies of the field, they neither sow

nor reap, yet each spring, they strut and puff
in primitive seduction, requiring no pop-ups
or flashing sidebar icons to meet a mate.

Once nested, hatched and fledged
they resume their familiar scratch
and gobble, gobble and scratch.

—SUE DEKELVER, BRUSSELS, WI

Monday Morning in Kindergarten

Like reporters delivering the news, they
arrive bursting with stories
We start with journals, a holding place
for week-end adventures
Cedric is quiet today, makes a picture
of a man and a small boy
the man looks sad
the boy is crying

Who's in your picture I ask
my daddy Cedric answers
he's sad cause he's in prison
see the bars around him

And the boy . . .
that's me Cedric says
we went to see my daddy yesterday
I took my library book, he read to me
I want him to come home

—JANET LEAHY, NEW BERLIN, WI

Small Change

The silent cross-shaped mouth
receives my coins, the communion wafers
of the Salvation Army.
Do this in remembrance of me.

My daughter's milk money
becomes another's food and shelter.
Do not be anxious for tomorrow,
for tomorrow will care for itself.

The kettle is chained,
unattended,
easily ignored.
When you give alms, give in secret.

My pocket is empty;
I have nothing left for communion with
the blood-red abyss of the other army.
Do not kill.

Ten million dollars an hour,
to destroy another's food and shelter.
As much as possible,
live in peace with one another.

—NAOMI COCHRAN, HAYWARD, WI

Do It

Leander did not love Hero
and brave the roiling Hellespont
because he preferred
his own space.

Because Paris stole Helen,
Menelaus launched the ships of Greece,
sacked Troy, laid all
to waste.

In Which My Lover and I Win a Seat on the First Space Shuttle to Greet Life

The constellations outside swirled
an oil spill of color, and we came bearing
the signs of our race—a camera,
our faces: aged boats drifting on strings
from their docks. Those days
and nights we spent roped to the wall,
and tried to imagine an other with no
quality we'd ever known. We carried with us
the inheritance of every way to say hello—
each language, the sounds of all animals,
plates of carved image in rock. Even
chimpanzees greet each other with hugs,
but the question was whether we'd left
behind touch. *We said perhaps they smell like
sound. When you look at them, they taste the color
of a bubble being blown.* We wanted the approval
of a being who could not have conceived of us.
A show of fingers, you say? A hand?
Ask us to dance, and we'll do it again.
Please believe we have done incredible things,
and sometimes we even believe it ourselves.
The threads in our lungs stretch thousands
of miles, and in six months one man
could repopulate the earth. We have gauged
goodness and worth, and we have decided
we could not want to find those who did not want
to find us. In the ship, our bodies were carried apart
until we pushed from the walls toward each other
again. Years passed, but still we believed
in magnets. Still we had memories of kneeling,
scabbed with childhood, in piles of leaf litter
and searching for crickets. Of lying moistened
in the backs of cars and making splinters of our
bodies. There is a reason, we realized, that lovers
were chosen to see something that has nothing
of our world. We knew the glow that came before
ash, and ground. Many times we had not recognized
ourselves. Many times we had returned to earth
after having seen elsewhere.

—CHLOE BENJAMIN, MADISON, WI

Marvel did not urge his coy mistress
be coy still: he fathomed
that love runs
a fiery race.

Plunge into the water,
rush the rugged fortress
jump into the fire — lift love
to first place.

—BARBARA GREGORICH, CHICAGO, IL

When

Yesterday I was walking through fields
but today won't let me in though I disciple

and I can't smell and tonight's potatoes
with butter, salt, and pepper only aroma,

let's dance to "I Just Can't Get Enough,"
"That's Why I Love You So," "Bring It On

Home to Me," teach me to play the saw
and I'll instruct you on time management.

Morning ducks into her shell. Let's lie on
the beach and share headphones, let's get

two slices of pizza and two beers apiece
after your shift, shopping carts rattling in

the parking lot while the moon dreams a hot,
hot tangent of noon, breezy, can't control it.

—GREG WEISS, CLEVELAND HEIGHTS, OH
visit VW Online for more by this author

Checking in at the Lost Baggage Counter

I find the young girl's battered suitcases,
all matching, in a Black Watch plaid,
still packed with purple angora sweaters
and pleated wool skirts and the travel-weight
Olivetti typewriter and the paperback
History of Math and the art folios from Italy
and inchoate hopes: everything she owned
once. Last night's dream tutors the truth
of the writer's lot: we're reading our words
in an amphitheatre made of fallen logs
in a backwoods forest, at play among
the leaves and moss, full of happiness,
and the artists are painting backdrops.

—ROBIN CHAPMAN, MADISON, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

Midlife in Mexico ("Quintana Roo")

I was in a state.
A state I called
kin tahn a ru, kint anna rooh, kintana rue.
Akin in sound and spirit to
tan kangaroo, Winnie the Pooh,
an ocean view, antenna too.
My name for what I saw there
on license plates of Mexican "Bugs"
and other cars.
But then of Spanish, I didn't know much.

Years after Yucatan, Webster's wisdom pronounces
I wasn't in that state at all.
He tells me I was closer to: keen tah nahr oh-oh
"keen," not "kin" —no family?— and
not cute, like "ooh", but "Oh-Oh".

"kin tahn a rue," "keen-tahn-a-row-o"
Well, what does he know? So
maybe I was in a childish fantasy,
escaping from the recent reality
of becoming the oldest generation,
no longer having a parent.
It was Christmas — my first Christmas
without a mother — the mother
whose birthday was also on Christmas Day.
The first Christmas I had no family presence.

If I wanted a tan toy kangaroo
and my stuffed grey panda bear, a sandy beach,
some playful tunes, and tales of Winnie the Pooh,
at midlife in Mexico, why not?
Who would wish to stop me
if saying the sing-song makes me happy?
Kin Tanna Ru!
Kin Tanna Ru!
Kin Tanna Ru!

—ANN PENTON, GREEN VALLEY, AZ

At Schoolhouse Beach

Limestone layers carried far by glaciers,
tumbled, tossed, and broken up,
knocking together like geologic billiard balls,
polished for centuries by a surging inland sea
until steadfastly smooth and hand-perfect.

This is where you come in, love.

Wobble-stumbling to the water's edge,
our two-year-old daughter attempts to toss
one substantial stone after the other back into
that icy blue bay—the echoing clock and clack
of rock on rock, the occasional *kerplunk*.

Worrying she will crush a foot or her
brother's head, as he stands obliviously close,
absorbed in his own stony obsessions,
we yell our cautions into the weightless wind,
weighing something hefty
in our minds a moment
before letting it go.

—JEF LEISGANG, FORT ATKINSON, WI

Goodbye Mister Bop

When Chips left the Old School he wore its tie
and was carried out with his Wellingtons on.
But no way Mister Bop, the Burnt-Out Prof.
Things definitely ain't what they used to be.
Bop gets to retire on something like a 401(k);
but not yet, as St. Augustine put it, not quite yet;
I'm not ready for retired sainthood yet!
The syllogisms from which Aristotle deduced the valid
are not complete. In American institutions
we fail upward to glory, and I expect
to be the mad head of the English Department before
I wallop my last tennis ball to cardiac arrest,
or do my last imitation of Johnny Weissmuller.
"Thanotopsis" is *not* my favorite poem.

—E. M. SCHORB, MOORESVILLE, NC

History is important

The Liberty Grove Town Board
is finally thinking about cleaning up
the trash at the Val-A Motel.

Seems the local business community
fear contamination by Mr. Olsen's
collection of rare junk.

Every spring they leave encouraging notes
on his door, even offer him a dumpster
in which to keep his treasures.

But Mr. Olsen contends that his stuff has
historic value just like the rusty old truck
across the road by Gus Klenke's garage

placed there by the ladies of the Ellison Bay
Historical Society and decorated
each season with appropriate adornments

and with winter and snow coming,
Mr. Olsen says that his collection
will look almost as picturesque.

The ladies of the Historical Society are not amused.

—HANNE GAULT, ELLISON BAY, WI

my father's boxy girl

My father draws the buttons down the front
of the boxy jacket, then sketches the straight
skirt, his face puckered in concentration as if
he were threading a needle in poor light not
clutching a pencil at the fluorescent kitchen table.
Below the skirt he draws vertical lines for the calf
to ankle and shoes that look like horse's hooves
with a little strap over the instep. At five, I titter,
whether with the excitement of having my dad's
complete attention or derision at his boxy girl, so
he, always mercurial anyway, erupts like a faucet
with a broken washer, spraying saliva on me as he
shouts, "I'll never draw anything for you again since
you don't appreciate it," turning me into a blender
with the electricity of his anger, but that was long
ago. Today, I appraise myself before the beveled
mirror in the mahogany French armoire, my sturdy
shape twisting to and fro in the pencil-thin light
of early morning, opening and closing the metal
buttons of my blazer, smoothing my skirt before I
walk into another day, my father's boxy girl.

—JAN BALL, CHICAGO, IL

Christmas songs

The older children are still singing
in the piney choir loft, so we younger
ones wait shivering beside the heavy
door for the final deo gratias
in the smooth church foyer,
snow boots puddling on speckled
marble, our new snoods from Grandma
covering our little ears, one of the only
non-sock or underwear gifts under
the tree this year, and grade seven
begins "when blossoms flowered
'neath the snow" as we hear another
amen but this time accompanied by
the whoosh of a thousand elephants
exhaling and the far aisle door creaks
open for the first Christmas Catholic
already tapping the bottom of a Lucky
Strike package and just as Sister Modesta
is heading back to our class from where
she was peeking through the little glass
window at the finish of the mass, Mary
Ellen Pickens snickers and points
her skinny little finger at my twin and me
and then it seems that all the girls are
tittering about our new scarf-hats
from Grandma but grade seven is now
thumping down the choir stairs and Sister
Modesta is shushing us and lining us up
two-by-two like soldiers to climb the choir
stairs and sing our own Christmas songs.

—JAN BALL, CHICAGO, IL

Love Has To Do With Babies

She said xo and the old man
didn't know what that meant.
So, he ate the idea and did
not say a word. Later, he
kissed her and admitted it.
She left him. The old man

thought. This's what I get
for being honest? But deep
down he knew it had more to
do with how ugly he was. &
a lack of money and honesty.

Later that yr. she wrote to

him, Larry, thanks for being
so sweet and honest. I am
with a teen who lives in Auk-
land and he lies to me all
the time. We will speak our
vows before you receive this.

—DANIEL GALLIK, CHAGRIN FALLS, OH

Two Poems in the Voice of Jo Hopper

Office at Night

Two checks
beside a black typewriter
wait for the manager
to sign. My hands stuck
in the drawer,
I'm filing papers,

turned from the green cabinet
to look across the room
at him. Concentrating
on an invoice,
he doesn't notice me.

I want to go his desk,
where he is adding up
black numbers,
and let him
touch my breasts.

I want to pull down
the window shade,
so inside that room
we'll be a couple.

Four Lane Road

I'm really sick
of being out in the sticks
with this guy, a face
like carved granite,
his sleeves rolled up,
white undershirt, vest.
He only wears a tie
for church. All day long,
he sits in his deck chair
holding that mushy cigar
he never puts in his mouth,
while he waits for a Ford
pickup to pull in for gas.
Here on this county road,
the way it would be
with any man,
he demands I feed him.
I look out of the station window,
my apron on,
to call him to lunch.
I could yell all day.

—CAROLE STONE, VERONA, NJ

Born Josephine Nivison in 1883, Jo Hopper married Edward Hopper in 1924 when she was forty-one and he forty-two. Childless, they remained together for forty-three years until his death in 1967. An artist who studied at the New York School of Art, after their marriage she continued to paint, but went unrecognized, Edward Hopper's work overshadowing hers. Resentful of his artistic success and that his studio dwarfed hers, she nonetheless became her husband's collaborator and promoter. Eventually, she became his sole model. The title of each poem is the title of an Edward Hopper painting; the details are largely, though not entirely, based on the work.

Two Portraits of Adams County

Chet

Hands blacked by printer's ink
in white porcelain
like salamanders on sand,
white pumice soap
a bleached rock between them,
he whistled flexing the apples
of his arms, the crown of his head
shiny as any star.
Afraid to breathe,
afraid the rising, falling beat
of my heart might stir him,
I hid in the corner, watched the vocables
he had scraped together taken
by water and towel, the hard black
magic of the trade taken swiftly,
the hour of setting the alphabet
backwards lost in the easy
scan of the eye
over the dry
thick paper.

Pete

Today I step from a foggy stoop
and through the phantom walls
of grist mills gone twenty years,
the ghosts of farm boys shooting
hoops on the red storage shed,
peg-leg O'Brien and his Boston Braves
pillaging the piers of Milwaukee
for two pennants before heading south.
Wild ferns dampen my pants.
Morning glories obscure the stumps
of elders and oaks.
Feeling is not heartfelt, but sensual,
vision like unnoticed breathing,
sustaining and pure.
Rural life passes, a life the historians
now write did not exist but did not
because like spirit it is more
than existence, not the American dream
but the soil and river of our mythos,
a passing plain and painful.
Once, a significant man,
peg-legged O'Brien,
stood on his porch and swung
the ash of his limb at an errant ball,
his ears in the summer light,
like large questions on the sides of his face.
When the sun was behind them they'd turn
magenta like a boy's ears after
frostbite, or the petals of a rose.

—JEFF BURT, MOUNT HERMON, CA

Dear Diary

There are no freedoms
no other viewpoints
allowed within
the compound;
these blank pages
quickly filled with
barbed scrawl,
a hard covered
sketchbook stalag.
No guard towers
or concertina wire
required. If you're
lucky enough to
slip in, read,
then under the fence,
undetected
and escape, unscathed
by the brush against
this smudged
and stained despot,
her fingers blackened
from all the
reputations
she's strafed,
count yourself
among the
few, not
quite proud
survivors.

—G. A. SCHEINOH, EDEN, WI

Once in a while

Let the unlikely happen.

Let my neighbor become content to feed the birds and
that squirrel.

Let the chips fall where they usually don't
perhaps on my numbers for a change.

Let all the home team's hits fall fair
and all foul balls be caught by surprised children.

Let the moon rise full each night for a month
and sunsets linger for hours.

Let Christians be required to speak their deeds aloud
before receiving communion.
Let the leftover bread feed the hungry.

Let all soldiers return to hometowns
unchanged.

—ED WERSTEIN, MILWAUKEE, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

Eating a Danish Bagel

1

This is your world, but I love
being with you on *gaagaden* in Vejle,

the European windows winding
behind us as we share a Danish

bagel filled with shrimp and eggs
at *Cafe Egestrand*. With sunshine

for a week, the street is full
of people. Carved faces peer

from cornices with ancient
Viking eyes. A Muslim woman

looks for summer dresses
on an outdoor rack; two Swedes

sit behind us, speaking English,
and a reggae singer, probably

American, plays for change, and lets
a young Dane try out his guitar.

2

Politics should help us shape
the spaces where we come together.

Now, with the meaning gone,
the endless empty theater goes on.

We feel locked out, fear each other,
while the actors play their sad

and callous games. I cannot
watch my own country anymore.

3

At night, I rub your back, glad
you're here to touch and be with.

Sleep comes slowly; I dream
of helplessness. Awake, I see

the gold and purple light,
so new and hopeful, the colors

with a muted clarity I need
to make myself remember.

—NORMAN LEER, MADISON, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

Nose-Mc-Downs

We had three of them:
all plaid but different colors,
different lengths.
They were scratchy, fringed, well-worn.
Proper technique: tie around your neck,
and pull up over your nose
before going outside.

Where did these three winter wool
scarves come from?
Were they ever new?
Were they ever washed?
Did they nose-warm four families
of cousins before they became ours?
Did we ever think of buying new scarves?
Never! Not once!

We wore those three scarves winter
after winter, from age one to eighteen.
They were as much a part of our winters
as snowbanks, snowmen, frosted windows,
and runny noses.

—LINDA ASCHBRENNER, MARSHFIELD, WI

Windmill on the Farm

The farm where dad grew up
in Michigan's UP had no power lines
coming to the house.
Back in the 30s and 40s
the farm had a windmill.
It clanged and banged,
chirped and whirled,
as it pumped water
for the sauna.

The windmill also generated
electricity for the little radio.
When the windmill started turning,
we would run to the sauna
to watch cold, sparkly water
flow into vats. It was like
music playing—magic.

—MAVIS J. FLEGLE, ROTHSCHILD, WI

Night Barking

Village dogs bark, bully, bluster,
in the hot summer dark.
I know a huge muscular dog
will climb our TV antenna,
knock out the screen, leap
in our second floor bedroom.
I already see the dog's teeth and cry.
My older sisters can't sleep. Judy asks what's wrong.

I tell her about the dogs, the TV antenna.
She bravely gets out of bed,
pulls aside the curtain, and raises the shade.
From my bed I see her in baby-doll pajamas
scrutinizing faraway Rib Mountain,
then, our driveway under the window.

Judy turns to me.
It's okay. No dogs are loose.
I believe her. She is ten.
I close my eyes. We are safe.
We will *not* be murdered by dogs.
At least, not tonight.

—LINDA ASCHBRENNER, MARSHFIELD, WI

Coffee Time

3:30 on a rainy afternoon.
The smell of coffee perking.
The table set with cinnamon rolls,
sugar cubes, real cream.
Dad coming home from work,
all the kids from school.
Time to talk and unwind.
Memories from the coffeepot.

—MAVIS J. FLEGLE, ROTHSCHILD, WI

Maryland, NY

How did this hamlet get the same name
As a state? It's confusing: whenever I say
I'm going up to Maryland, people squint
And say "Up?" After all, Maryland is south
Or "down" from New York City, so I have to say
It's a hamlet upstate, near Oneonta,
And most New Yorkers have a vague idea
Where Oneonta is, somewhere in the middle
Of the state, somewhere around Cooperstown,
Somewhere the green hills roll and summer fields
Wave corn and milk cows graze and barns
Sag and cave in the broiling sun
And the withering economy, and now
Maryland, pop. 200, might lose
its post office, the heart of a hamlet
with no business district, no main street,
no traffic light, but with the name of a state.

—GEORGE HELD, NEW YORK, NY

Raising Windmills

She counts the timed red flickers
against a calculated swing
in the parsed-out fields where rolling
hills have ceased their rolling.

He watches the steel shadows
like spinning armies march and pulse;
the cattle hunch, the chicken scatter
in the hum-hum drumming.

So, they made a few extra bucks;
who can blame them in this hard-clay world,
a little extra help for the tired old farmer
with un-tillable land.

The company came unannounced
to do the deals. No one loses, they said;
they all shook hands. It was in the winter months,
no one saw them leaving.

Smart guys who tipped their chairs back
at the yellow kitchen tables, loosened their ties,
pencil marked the land here and there
down the road. It was an easy calculation.

It'll make clean, cheap power
for the folks far away as Chicago,
some left over for the locals. Good for you
good for the country, no one loses.

Now the farmers don't talk cows,
their wives don't share recipes.
They mostly lie awake nights counting
the once close neighbor's sky-blade rotations.

—MARY WEHNER, FOND DU LAC, WI
visit VW Online for audio by this author

On My Way to Slinger, Wisconsin

I see a white swan, up ahead, nestled
in green grass along the road, watching
each car drive by with a quick turn of its
neck. Closer, I see it is an empty plastic
bag for a kitchen wastepaper basket.
I will never forget that swan.

—JOHN LEHMAN, CAMBRIDGE, WI
visit VW Online for video by this author

Drought Breaks

Cattle stand, staring at the water,
willing it to rise and slake their thirst.
Wagtails flick their skirts,
skimming from bush to water and back again.
God's in his heaven and, the farmer hopes,
working out fair water allocations.

—JOE MASSINGHAM, CHISHOLM, ACT,
AUSTRALIA

Change Finds My Hometown

Not that I mind them being here, that's not it.
Just wanna know why they drive better cars
than mine. Somebody give 'em them cars,
why don't they give me one? I worked hard

all my life and nobody give me shit.
Why these Chinese get all the favors?
Not Chinese, Dad, my sister says, they're Hmong.
Mom chimes in from the kitchen: So much crime

we got now. Just read the papers. Can't
feel safe nowhere. Maybe these Hmong that come
over here aren't so bad, but their kids
are mean. They got gangs beatin' up

on kids who been born here. I'm listening
from the easy chair, pretending to watch TV.
My first visit home in years and I'm stumbling
to navigate the family. It's changed,

I say loud, can't deny it. What did you expect,
my sister says, the world is shifting and won't stop.
She's right. She's up close with Hmong enrollees
in her classroom and their families after school.

She's big-hearted to a fault. Wants us all
to get along. It's Mom and Pop I can't figure;
they used to walk evenings up and down the block
visiting neighbors till past dark. Now they're locked

in their own home. It's hard, my sister says.
You bet it's hard, Mom says and bites her lip.
Yeah, Dad says with a sigh. It's never been easy,
he says, never been easy for nobody.

—LOWELL JAEGER, BIGFORK, MT

The Sessions of Sweet Silent Thought

Of course you can go home again,
only when you get there
it's not home
anymore. A crushed paper cup
in the gutter, old woman in
an upstairs window
looking you over. It even smells
alien, like someone else's closet
or a friend's dog.
Grandmother is gone,
gone so long
they've named a street for her
and thus
entirely erased her breath
from this greening earth.
I remember
mainly my own memories
at this point, if I am lucky—
first taste of lemon ice cream,
time I threw my trike
through a winter window
just to see
glass splinter and gleam
like ice, and the sleety wind
rushing in.
But my brother still swears
it was he
tossed the trike, and I
was just told about it.
Could be, could be,
but I suppose
to be awake and alive
on a chill December morning
listening to doors
opening
and closing, hearing car engines
cough to life
and neighbors leaving for work
—to be awake still
and notice, yes, that is lucky enough.

—DAVID GRAHAM, RIPON, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

Rain for Rent

North of Brainerd we pass a building
that says “Rain for Rent,” nothing
but snow banks surrounding, no explanation.
Irrigation equipment comes to mind,
but also various reasonably priced
packages for theatrical rain:
Singin' in the Rain requires downpour
King Lear rains horizontally
and employs a wind machine.

Cemeteries include rainy options
in the price of burials. Novelists
rent drizzle for Noir inspiration,
and party packages
prove popular with lake house sets:
programmable confetti showers
for birthdays and anniversaries,
with concluding cloud bursts,
rainbows extra,
for sending the perseverant away.

Rain is transient and can't be sold.
Catch it in gauges, barrels, bowls
and it transforms immediately, losing
something essential and definitive;
rain exists through falling alone.
As the sun sinks toward Winter Solstice,
I sit in the back seat of a Jeep
whose plates read “Ever After,”
hands commandeering clouds,
seeding their silver linings,
precipitating summer and home.

—SANDRA J. LINDOW, MENOMONIE, WI

The Phrase

for Fay

As I'm once again, in the spirit of
“naked we come, naked we go,”
jettisoning something from my life—

old photos, a troublesome friend,
movies even—my daughter accuses me
of another “minimalist living frenzy,”

and I'm so happy to have the phrase
I proudly start telling my friends about it,
although, of course, without intending

to do so she has given me
a gravestone epitaph—“Here he lies
enjoying his final and best

minimalist living frenzy”—
and I know I'll never jettison
her phrase, will be holding tightly

onto only it at the very end
since language is always light,
sometimes even lighter than air,

like her phrase, which, as it rises, I grip,
frenzied and minimal,
in order to rise with it.

—PHILIP DACEY, MINNEAPOLIS, MN
visit VW Online for more by this author

Drift

Every six months,
I have to be biopsied for Thyroid cancer.
The doctors stick needles in my throat,
and so far, the results
have been borderline.

This winter there has been little snow.
The deer come into my yard,
and food is free and easy to have.
I know they are being shot,
but they seem weighty and lanky,
take up the frame of the photograph,
so that I cannot dispute their reality.

Many deer come; many muscles moving.
My dog gets excited.
I wonder how can I go on living,
the winter earth turning over
in its mind snow and rain,
when, like these deer, I seem bent
backward and forwards into nothing.
Yet I watch them turn hooves
like tapdancers,
take gently the sap and bark of trees,
loving the little green left on the February earth,
raising tails in joy.

—LINDA BENNINGHOFF, LLOYD HARBOR, NY

After we caught and arrested him for slashing tires
in the basement parking lot of a famous luxury hotel
we hauled him to the police station, slammed him
in a tiny cell to think about what he had been doing
then yanked him for an interview under glaring lights
where he told us he had not the slightest bit of remorse
that his actions were deliberate and fully explainable
since he was in the middle of trying to defile his soul
do something nasty so that in his next reincarnation
his imperfection would insure he got another chance
to reappear rather than being swept nirvana-like into
the fold of some eternal being, he taken with making
as many stops as he could wrench from the grand wheel
before he got swept into the center, we doing our best
to warn him that he could return as a termite, a raccoon
blind fish, whale, beetle, limping horse, mad dog, skunk
a terrifying range of eccentric options that pleased him
more than he ever imagined, then lowering his voice
he confessed that his greatest fear was to return as us
as people bent on doing good in the world, a bad path
since it would hurl him into the hub of bright oblivion.

—GLENN KLETKE, KANATA, ONTARIO, CANADA

Eating Rice With Thich Nhat Hanh

A sunny morning in mid-March.
I read *Fragrant Palm Leaves*
by Thich Nhat Hanh.

He describes how, as a young man,
he helped build a Buddhist monastery
while living in a Vietnamese forest,
loving the sounds of nature there, including a
monstrous rain storm, which heaved
trees to the ground and blasted the window
where he stood and watched with awe.

Later, he and I make eggs with rice
and soy sauce. We absorb the
peaceful quiet after the storm's
conflagration.

—MARY CUNNINGHAM, MADISON, WI

Guided Tour

Step gingerly.
The streets wear coats of glass.
Jagged pieces like ice. Powder like snow.
We speak here of the city of broken windows.
Build of wood decades ago in order to float away in a flood.
But when the flood never came, the frustrated citizens
opened their doors, broke their windows, deserted their houses.
New residents began to move in.
First sunlight, moonlight, starlight.
Then wind, rain and snow, eager to shelter themselves somewhere.
Next mosquitoes, houseflies, butterflies, dragonflies, anything that flies
including birds delighted to have food and shelter combined.
Mice came too, rats, raccoons, skunks and squirrels
happy to dwell in rooms that predators had vacated
dogs and cats running off with their owners.
Step gingerly.
You are the first human equivalent to return.
Notice collapsing walls, holes in roofs, crumbling foundations.
Time will soon disassemble and level the city, call up
beetles, worms, ants, centipedes and earwigs
underground citizens to witness
the spectacular heaven soon to fall upon them.

—GLENN KLETKE, KANATA, ONTARIO, CANADA

Home

A feast of breasts:
the moon-ripe fruit of breast
upon breast
upon breast.

The fruited feast
of breast upon breast:
this fruitful time,
this happy season.

These fruited fields
of home.

—P. C. MOOREHEAD, NORTH LAKE, WI

Words

Realistic hardly stretches
any edges
standing far too close
to *status quo*.

That's not to say *compromise*
isn't called for
but cede only ground that
you can live without.

Hope for an adversary that respects
strength and *purpose*.

Then *grandiose* whittled down
to size
becomes a plan
for action,

a starting point
for peace.

—KAREN HALEY, WAUWATOSA, WI

Almost

When the car stumbled
onto that patch of ice, all I could think
to do was say *I'm so sorry*. And I said his name.

And I listened to what
he told me to do: *turn into it, don't hold the brake*—
we were both so calm, how could that be?

The dogs' heads sprung forward
and our baby whirred in her straps.
I saw the drop. I knew what was coming,

that inertia, the way the wheels paused
before denouement,
that long, terrible cartwheel.

—MOLLY SUTTON KIEFER, RED WING, MN
visit VW Online for more by this author

Gardener in Japan

When the black wave
clawed away our village,
I was in Tokyo, finishing some work
I thought would pay the bills.

To return took many days,
and even then
I could never go home.

I confess I have ceased to look for you,
but not to watch for you.
Somehow spring wedges up
between bits of waste and sand,
rolling bitter green over the tortured land.

I see, but cannot bear to watch it.
I watch for you.

And for the first time,
what plants I have salvaged
I don't know how to root, or where.

—JUDY LENT, SEATTLE, WA

Filling

I carved a piece of pumpkin pie.
It was so lustrous and gold—
I thought it was silence.
My knife cut
through the pie
so dense.
It held together,
as I placed a piece on my plate.

O silence,
you are that pie—
so dense,
so quiet,
so held together,
filling my plate
and leaving room
for no other.

—P.C. MOOREHEAD, NORTH LAKE, WI

At the Kitchen Table

Shoshauna Shy Talks with Mark Kraushaar

Lester and Helen

Maybe that's what God is: It just happens.
- Overheard in a hospital elevator

A man steps out to buy bread and arrives at the store
to find he's left his keys and his wallet
locked away in his room.
Maybe later he'll say, It just happens,
but for now he walks around downtown
and gets lost and spends the day
in a park where a young woman's chasing
her best friend's collie. Since Lester has a way
with animals he and Helen round up the collie
and talk dogs a little.
The leash broke, Helen says.
It's chilly, so Lester offers his coat.
They laugh and have coffee, and Lester
asks can he see her again. They go to the show,
hold hands, marry and have two sons, Bill and Jack.
And this is not magic.
Or no more than how we picture both
boys in knickers and place them in school.
Imagine the 30s.
Black, wide-fendered cars line the streets and the boys
wear caps and Jack carries his books in a green canvas bag.
Bill carries his with a strap.
In a few years Bill's
off to college where someone says,
One day I'll introduce you to Margaret.
Bill's shy – first he will, and then he won't.
And then he will.
So they meet and they order the cold plate, talk,
talk, talk: Bill loves science, Margaret loves books,
and they marry and forty years later they finally divorce.
Still, whatever they say and however events
come together and dates add up, this
is where my own life starts.
The truth is it couldn't have happened otherwise.
And that it just happened.

© Mark Kraushaar, *The Uncertainty Principle*, The Waywiser Press in 2011

Mark Kraushaar of Lake Mills, Wisconsin joined Shoshauna Shy for a conversation about his poem "Lester and Helen." Fix yourself a cup of tea, pull up a chair, and listen in.

MARK: I've worked briefly as a high school English teacher, a cab driver, a welder on the coal and grain barges of the Mississippi, and a pipe welder at Ingalls Shipbuilding. I am now an RN and work in Madison, which I've done since the mid-80s.

SHOSHAUNA: And I'd say that your current occupation feeds into "Lester and Helen" from your new book *The Uncertainty Principle* which won the Anthony Hecht Poetry Prize in 2010 and was published by The Waywiser Press in 2011. The poem

seems to be constructed on what I think of as a family legend—a tale savored and passed down from holiday table to table. Could you speak to what planted the seed of inspiration for this poem?

MARK: The truth is, I never met Lester and Helen. They were my father's parents, as I say in the poem, and were killed in a train wreck shortly after my parents were married. Actually, what inspired the poem was just how wildly unlikely, and yet strangely inevitable one's arrival on Earth seems to be. The phrase for God, "It just happens," seemed wonderfully plain, mysterious and apt all at once, and I did overhear this one day on an elevator in the hospital where I worked.

SHOSHAUNA: Yes, I believe your epigraph—something overheard—contributes nicely to this poem, presents another dimension to it, and the way you echo the epigraph in the final line clicks everything into place. The fact that the words overheard were in an elevator—and not just *any* elevator but a hospital elevator—really works well. That said, do you remember when you selected this epigraph—in other words, did you have the poem written already, or did the epigraph precede the writing?

MARK: "Lester and Helen" had been marinating for awhile when I heard this; it wasn't a poem that came very quickly, I remember. That phrase was a help in getting the poem moving again, and seemed the sort of mystical (but not very helpful) definition of God provided in the Old Testament – you know, "I am that I am." So, I thought wow, great!

And that the conversation with this bit of speculation in it took place in a hospital elevator gave it a lot of resonance—the three or four family members all looked a bit stricken, and were apparently trying to make some kind of sense of a health care mystery that was beyond understanding.

SHOSHAUNA: Well, the implication here is that you wouldn't have been born—and be who you are—if that collie's leash had stayed

intact or your grandfather didn't forget his wallet that morning. Both of these seemingly insignificant things contributed to your birth, and that's where "Lester and Helen" has universal appeal. In my case, my dad's former fiancée saw this blonde jitterbugging at a camp picnic, and told him, "There's the woman for you!" My father agreed, broke up with his fiancée, and dated the dancer instead who subsequently became my mom.

MARK: I bet there'd be a good poem to make out of the ex-fiancée's conversation with herself after that!

SHOSHAUNA: Well, please write it because I want to read that poem! But getting back to "Lester and Helen," I am wondering what more you might know about that "cold plate" which comprised the first meal your parents ever shared, at least in the poem. If it is factual, when and how did you learn about it? Then again, if it wasn't really a cold plate that they shared, perhaps you might explain why you chose to use it in this instance. I have to say it gives me a chill, especially when I get to that line "...forty years later they finally divorce."

MARK: I thought I wanted to create something, some image having to do with this scene that seemed as specific as it did mundane. What could be duller than the cold plate, maybe egg salad?

SHOSHAUNA: No, bologna on rye! Seriously, what strikes me about the last two lines is the juxtaposition of two separate concepts: one references an absolute precision; the other serendipity. Together, they make for an inexplicable magic that I didn't in any way anticipate. Is that the effect you were after?

MARK: I think they're both true, these separate concepts, I mean, that this and this and the other happened...but how we each arrive here beyond anything understood is what I was after. I mean, that we're kind of beached by the same wave as our family and friends seems simultaneously impossible and inevitable. I like that.

SHOSHAUNA: What a terrific image, Mark—getting beached! Maybe save that for your next poem, OK?



If you'd like to contact Mark Kraushaar to continue the conversation about this poem, you can reach him here: mjklakemills@frontier.com.

Contributors' Notes

Andler, former poet laureate of Milwaukee, is the author of *Selected Poems, Ever-Expanding Wilderness, Deathrattles vs. Comeries, and Exclamation Points ad Infinitum!* His work appears in the recent anthologies *Poets Against the War; Poetic Voices Without Borders 2; Best Gay Poetry 2008; Comeback Wolves: Welcoming the Wolf Home and Wilderness Blessings*. p. 13

Linda Aschbrenner lives in Marshfield and is presently lost in the 1950s as she works on a book of family memories with her two sisters, Elda Lepak and Mavis Flegle. p. 32

Peggy Aylsworth's poetry has appeared in *Beloit Poetry Journal, The MacGuffin, Ars Interpes* (Sweden), *Chiron Review, Rattle*, and is forthcoming in *Poetry Salzburg Review* and in numerous other literary journals throughout the U.S. and abroad. Recently, one of her poems was nominated by *The Medulla Review* for a Pushcart Prize. p. 16

Jane-Marie Bahr lives on the edge of a marsh in northwestern Wisconsin. When not reading books or writing poems, she tends to her late husband's perennial gardens. She has an MST degree from UW-Whitewater and taught high school English at Whitewater HS. p. 10

Jan Ball teaches ESL at DePaul University in Chicago. She was a nun for seven years in Milwaukee. Since then, she has married, raised a family, written a doctoral dissertation, and published her poems in multiple journals and magazines. A member of the Poetry Club of Chicago, her chapbook *Accompanying Spouse* is available from Finishing Line Press. p. 29

Gerard Beirne was born in Ireland and now lives in Canada. He is a past recipient of The Sunday Tribune/Hennessy New Irish Writer of the Year award. His collection of poetry *Digging My Own Grave* was published by Dedalus Press, Dublin. His collection *Games of Chance: A Gambler's Manual* is forthcoming from Oberon. He has published two novels; his short story "Sightings of Bono" was adapted for film featuring Bono. (www.gerardbeirne.com) p. 11

Chloe Benjamin is a graduate of the MFA program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Currently, she teaches in the English department at Edgewood College. She is at work on a novel. p. 27

Linda Benninghoff was most recently published in *Canary*, a journal of the environmental crisis and Poets and Artists. She has an MA in English with an emphasis on creative writing from Stony Brook. Her book, *Whose Cries Are Not Music*, was reviewed in *Verse Wisconsin*. p. 35

Michael Biehl's poetry has appeared in *Image: A Journal of the Arts and Religion, Callaloo, The Comstock Review, Snail Mail Review*, and a number of other magazines. Currently he is an instructor of English as a Second Language to foreign university students and business executives. p. 19

Kimberly Blaeser, a Professor in the English Department at UW-Milwaukee, teaches Creative Writing, Native American Literature, and American Nature Writing. Among her publications are three books of poetry: *Trailing You, Absentee Indians and Other Poems*, and *Apprenticed to Justice*, as well as the edited volume *Traces in Blood, Bone, and Stone: Contemporary Ojibwe Poetry*. p. 17, 24

Rose Mary Boehm is a German-born UK national who lives in Lima, Peru. All the native people in Peru would have come across the Behring Street at one moment during the Wisconsin Glaciation. And she married one of them. Her first poetry collection, *Tangents*, was published in 2011. p. 9

Jeff Burt was born and raised in Wisconsin in small towns, spent several years in Adams County, and graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. p. 30

With a bachelor's degree in English from UW-Stevens-Point, **Thomas Cannon** has been writing for many years while working as a special education teacher and living in Oshkosh. He has had poems published in *Literary Mary, Leaf Garden, The Poetry Explosion Newsletter*, and *Wisconsin Poets' Calendar*. His short stories have been widely published as well. p. 24, 25

Robin Chapman is author of seven books of poetry, most recently *the eelgrass meadow* (Tebot Bach). She is recipient of the 2010 Helen Howe Poetry Prize from Appalachia. Her poems have appeared recently in *Alaska Quarterly Review, Prairie Schooner*, and *Wilderness*. p. 28

Ching-In Chen is the author of *The Heart's Traffic* (Arktoi Books/Red Hen Press) and co-editor of *The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence Within Activist Communities* (South End Press). She is a Kundiman and Lambda Fellow, part of the Macondo and Voices of Our Nations Arts Foundation writing communities, and a past participant in Sharon Bridgforth's Theatrical Jazz Institute. p. 6, 7

Kelly Cherry's newest collection, *The Life and Death of Poetry*, will be published by L.S.U. Press in spring 2013. She is formerly Poet Laureate of the Commonwealth of Virginia and a member of the Electorate of Poets Corner at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. p. 12

Naomi Cochran lives in northern Wisconsin near Hayward. p. 26

Barbara Crooker's books are *Radiance*, which won the 2005 Word Press First Book competition and was a finalist for the 2006 Paterson Poetry Prize; *Line Dance*, (Word Press 2008), which won the 2009 Paterson Award for Literary Excellence; and *More* (C & R Press, 2010). She lives and writes in rural northeastern Pennsylvania, but has a fondness for Wisconsin writing, based on the excellence she found when she judged the Lorine Niedecker and the Posner awards. p. 15

Mary Cunningham lives in Madison with her husband, one daughter and that daughter's two dogs. Previously a computer programmer and analyst with a busy volunteer life, she now reads a lot, paints occasionally, keeps up friendships and writes poetry. p. 35

Philip Dacey is the author of eleven full-length books of poems, the latest *Mosquito Operas: New and Selected Short Poems* (Rain Mountain Press, 2010). His awards include three Pushcart Prizes, a Discovery Award from the New York YM-YWHA's Poetry Center, and various fellowships. The author of whole collections of poems about Gerard Manley Hopkins, Thomas Eakins, and New York City, Dacey recently returned to Minnesota (Minneapolis) after an eight-year post-retirement adventure in Manhattan. (philipdacey.com) p. 34

Holly Day is a housewife and mother of two. Her poetry has recently appeared in *The Oxford American, The Midwest Quarterly*, and *Slipstream*. Her book publications include *Music Composition for Dummies, Guitar-All-in-One for Dummies*, and *Music Theory for Dummies*, which has recently been translated into French, Dutch, Spanish, Russian, and Portuguese. p. 8, 11

After living in rural Brussels for 15 years, **Sue DeKaveler** firmly believes it's her perfect place for gardening, writing and just being. p. 26

Darren C. Demaree is living in Columbus, Ohio with his wife and children. He is the recipient of two Pushcart Prize nominations, and his first full collection, *As We Refer to Our Bodies*, will be released this winter by 8th House Publishing House. p. 24

Bruce Dethlefsen plays bass and sings in the musical (he hopes) duo Obvious Dog, the name taken from Wisconsin Poet Laureate Marilyn Taylor's description of a poem "beyond resuscitation." His most recent collection is *Unexpected Shiny Things* (Cowfeather Press, 2011). p. 19

CX Dillhunt is the assistant editor of *Hummingbird: Magazine of the Short Poem*; he's a tutor for elementary school writers workshops in Verona, and an American Red Cross volunteer at the Veterans Hospital. He was named a Commended Poet by the Wisconsin Poet Laureate Commission in 2010. pp. 20-21

Drew Dillhunt is author of the chapbook *3,068,518* (Mudlark, No. 39, 2010). His writing has appeared in *Eclectica, Jacket2, Tarpaulin Sky*, and *VOLT*. His manuscript, *Materials Science*, was selected as a finalist for the National Poetry Series. He's released two albums of songs, including one with the band Fighting Shy, and is a member of the Seattle art-music collaborative The Blank Department. pp. 20-21

Richard Dinges, Jr. has an MA in literary studies from University of Iowa and he 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. 15

Joseph Farley edited *Axe Factory* for 24 years. His books/chapbooks include *Suckers, For the Birds, Longing for the Mother Tongue*, and *Waltz of the Meatballs*. p. 8, 9, 10

Mavis J. Flegle enjoys gardening, Antique Club, writing, and jaunts around the Midwest with longtime friends. Her first chapbook, *Just Another Day*, came out in 2010. p. 32

Christa Gahlman was born and raised in rural Wisconsin with a great appreciation for the intimacy of the woods, wide landscapes, and textured fields. She is the mother of two incredible daughters and one amazing son. She now resides in the city of Madison, and writes...and writes. p. 23

Daniel Gallik has had poetry and short stories published by *Hawaii Review, Nimrod, Limestone* (Univ. of Kentucky), *The Hiram Poetry Review, Aura* (Univ. of Alabama), *Whiskey Island* (Cleveland State Univ), and various online journals. A novel, *A Story Of Dumb Fate*, is available at amazon.com. p. 29

Abby Gambrel's poems have appeared in *Cream City Review, Orion Magazine, Crab Creek Review, Georgetown Review* and elsewhere. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and received an MFA from University of California, Irvine 2008. p. 13

Hanne Gault has been published in the *Wisconsin Calendar, The Pulse*, and *Free Verse*. She won third prize in the Joanne Hirshfield poetry contest. p. 29

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 *Stutter Monk* (Flume Press), and an essay anthology co-edited with Kate Sontag: *After Confession: Poetry as Autobiography* (Graywolf Press). p. 34

Taylor Graham's ties to Wisconsin include a cousin in Wonewoc, 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. 9, 14, 15

Barbara Gregorich's most recent titles are *Sound Proof*, an adult mystery set at a Midwest music festival, and *Jack and Larry*, the free-verse nonfiction story of Jack Graney and his bull terrier, Larry. She is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin and resides in Wisconsin part of every month. p. 27

For his first book of poems, *Poor Manners* (Ahadada Books, 2009), **Adam Halbur** was chosen the 2010 resident poet of The Frost Place, the Robert Frost homestead in Franconia, New Hampshire. His work has also appeared in the anthology *Never Before: Poems about First Experiences* (Four Way Books, 2005) as well as in various journals. p. 14

Karen Haley has lived in Wisconsin most of her adult life, and raised five children here. p. 36

William Wright Harris's poetry has appeared in six countries in such literary journals as *The Cannon's Mouth, Ascent Aspirations*, and *Write On!!!* He's a student at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, where he's been lucky enough to study poetry in workshop settings with such poets as Jesse Janeshek, Marilyn Kallet, Arthur Smith, and Marcel Brouwers. p. 19

George Held, a seven-time Pushcart nominee, publishes widely online and in print, and Garrison Keillor has featured his work on NPR. Held's most recent books, both 2011, are *After Shakespeare: Selected Sonnets* (www.cervenabarvapress.com) and a children's book, *Neighbors* (www.filsingerco.com), illustrated by Jong Un Kim. p. 32

As founding editor of Many Voices Press, **Lowell Jaeger** compiled *Poems Across the Big Sky*, an anthology of Montana poets, and *New Poets of the American West*, an anthology of poets from 11 Western states. His most recent poetry collections are *Suddenly Out of a Long Sleep* (Arcos Press, 2009) and *WE*, (Main Street Rag Press, 2010). He is the recipient of fellowships from the NEA and the Montana Arts Council and winner of the Grolier Poetry Peace Prize. Most recently Jaeger was awarded the Montana Governor's Humanities Award for his work in promoting thoughtful civic discourse. p. 33

Poet **Gary Jones** lives with his wife of many years on Wisconsin's Door Peninsula where he enjoys reading, gardening, and silent sports. His verse has appeared most recently in *Rosebud, Pearl, Verse Wisconsin, Knock, Peninsula Pulse*, and *Clutching at Straus*. Jones, who is an award-winning poet, teaches poetry writing workshops for both high school students and adults. p. 22, 25

Glenn Kletke's poems appear in the recent edition of *ARC (Poet vs. Poet)* and *In Fine Form*, a guide to structured poetry. He has won several poetry and prose contests. Glenn is a member of the Field Stone poets, and a sampling of his work can be found in their recent collection, *Whistle for a Jellyfish*, published by Bookland Press. p. 35

Mark Kraushaar is an RN in Madison. His work has appeared in the *Hudson Review, Ploughshares, Alaska Review, Gettysburg Review*, as well as *Best American Poetry*, and the website Poetry Daily. He is a recipient of Poetry Northwest's Richard Hugo Award. His two collections are *The Uncertainty Principle* (2012, Waywiser Press), and *Falling Brick Kills Local Man*, (Felix Pollak Prize, UW-Press, 2009). p. 37

Richard Kresal worked in Hotel/Casino revenue audit and lives in the Town of Green Lake, WI. p. 11

Michael Kriesel's poems have appeared in *North American Review, The Progressive and Rattle*. He's written reviews for *Small Press Review and Library Journal*, and has won the WFOP Muse Prize, the Lorine Niedecker Award from the Council for Wisconsin Writers, and the *Wisconsin People & Ideas* John Lehman Poetry Prize. Books include *Chasing Saturday Night* (Marsh River Editions); *Feeding My Heart To The Wind and Moths Mail The House* (sunnyoutside press). p. 19

Mike Lane has lived in Delafield, Wisconsin, for almost 40 years, with his wife Kathy. Mike's poems have appeared previously at *Soundzine, Third Wednesday, Echoes* and *Poetry Super Highway*. His first chapbook of poetry, *They Can Keep The Cinder Block*, was launched by Exot Books in March 2012. p. 13, 19

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. 22, 23

Estella Lauter is Professor Emerita at UW-Oshkosh and lives in the Door Peninsula. Her first chapbook, *Pressing a Life Together By Hand* (2007) appeared in the New Women's Voices series from Finishing Line Press, and was nominated for two Pushcart prizes. *The Essential Rudder: North Channel Poems* was released by FLP in 2008. Her poem "Gaza, January 2009" tied for first prize in the 2009 Barbara Mandigo Kelly Peace Poetry Contest; it appears on www.wagingpeace.org. p. 14

Tom Lavelle, a native of Pittsburgh, lived in Milwaukee between 1981 and 83. Since then he's visited sporadically. He lives today in Stockholm, where he teaches and writes as he has done since 1992. It's not colder than Wisconsin, but darker. p. 11

Janet Leahy gleams some of her poems from her experience as a teacher in Milwaukee. She is on the board of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets. Her poems appear in various journals and on *Your Daily Poem*. p. 26

Norman Leer is Professor Emeritus of English at Roosevelt University, Chicago. He has published a critical study of Ford Madox Ford, a chapbook and two books of his own poems (*I Dream My Father in a Song*, and *Second Lining*, Mellen Poetry Press, 1992 and 1997), as well as poems and articles in several journals. In 1990, he received the Illinois Significant Poet's Award from State Laureate Gwendolyn Brooks. He and his wife Grethe live in Madison. p. 31

John Lehman is the founder of *Rosebud* magazine and the poetry editor of *Wisconsin People & Ideas*. p. 25, 33

Jef Leisgang's poems have previously appeared in *Verse Wisconsin*, *Free Lunch*, *Plainsongs*, *Flint Hills Review*, *Steam Ticker*, *Wisconsin Review*, and elsewhere. In addition to the poem featured here, he hopes to publish a children's book he wrote about the unique geology of Schoolhouse Beach on Washington Island in Door County, one of his family's favorite destinations for many years now. p. 28

A visit to a cousin in Madison, though pleasant, wasn't enough to connect **Judy Lent**, a Seattle editor and writer, to the land. The Wisconsin Uprising, however, a hopeful sign of a receding tide of complacency, has permanently imbedded Wisconsin's people in her heart. p. 10, 36

MaryEllen Letarte's father was born in Pepin, WI. He matriculated at the University of Wisconsin until WWII. Her sister Christine graduated from Marquette University and lived most of her adult life in Wisconsin. MaryEllen lives and writes in Lunenburg, MA, where she developed, and now directs, the Louise Bogan Chapter of the Massachusetts State Poetry Society. p. 9

Pam Lewis is a psychologist, recently retired from UW-Madison, where she worked for 13 years. She lives in Madison, and likes to compare and contrast things like crossword puzzles and poetry. p. 23

Recently **Sandra J. Lindow** fell down a woodchuck hole (only one foot thanks to yoga) while trying to murder box elder bugs with insecticidal soap. She lives in Menominee, Wisconsin, where she writes, edits, and teaches part-time at University of Wisconsin-Stout. p. 34

K.R. (Joe) Massingham was born in the UK but has lived the second half of his life in Australia. Major employment has been as a Navy officer, university student from first degree to PhD, tutor, lecturer and Master of Wright College, University of New England, NSW. He retired early because of cancer and heart problems and now spends time waiting to see medical practitioners, writing poetry and prose and smelling the roses. He has had work published in Australia, Eire, India, Nepal, NZ, UK, and USA. p. 33

P. C. Moorehead moved to Wisconsin from California's Silicon Valley. She appreciates the beauty and quiet of the woods and the inspirational environment which they provide for her writing and reflection. p. 36

Bruce W. Niedt is a "beneficent bureaucrat" from southern NJ whose poetry has appeared in *Writer's Digest*, *Writers' Journal*, *The Lyric*, *Mad Poets Review*, and many others. His awards include the ByLine Short Fiction and Poetry Award, first prize for poetry at the Philadelphia Writers Conference, and a Pushcart Prize nomination. His latest chapbook is *Breathing Out* from Finishing Line Press. p. 7, 22

Uche Ogbuji is an immigrant from Nigeria who studied at Milwaukee School of Engineering, married a girl, Lori, from Twin Lakes, and settled with her in Boulder, Colorado where they now raise four children. Uche is a computer engineer and entrepreneur whose abiding passion is poetry. His poems have appeared in sundry journals, and he is editor at *Kin Poetry Journal* and *The Nervous Breakdown*... p. 18

Ann M. Penton, Green Valley AZ (& recently WI) is connecting with the AZ writing community including the renowned U of A Poetry Center. She was invited to submit and read a poem at Saguaro National Park for the BioBlitz, a species-counting event sponsored at one park annually by National Geographic and the National Park Service. p. 28

Nancy Petulla lives in a 150-year-old farm house. She began writing poetry at age 65. She works to envision with words life, aging and death. She is a retired minister to the elderly, ill and dying. Her poems have been published in *Free Verse*, *Verse Wisconsin*, and in the 2013 Wisconsin Poets' *Calendar*. p. 13

Charles Portolano started writing poetry 16 years ago to celebrate the birth of his daring, darling, daughter Valerie and preserve the memories. Valerie was born with many obstacles to overcome giving him much to write about. Valerie is doing great now; she is quite the young writer. He has a new collection of poetry out, *The little, lingering, white, lies we allow ourselves to live with*. p. 17

Summer Qabazard is a poet who grew up in Kuwait and now lives in Normal, Illinois where she is a PhD 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. 18

Harlan Richards came late to his penchant for waxing poetic, beginning on his 56th birthday in 2010. Since then, he has had poems accepted or published in *Samsara*, *Italian-American*, *Love's Choice*, *Alimentum*, and other venues. You can read more of his poems, along with political essays, at betweenbars.org/blogs/637. p. 16

Jenna Rindo's work has recently appeared in *Crab Orchard Review* and is forthcoming in *Calyx*, *Crab Creek Review*, and *Blood and Thunder: Musings on the Art of Medicine*. She lives in rural Wisconsin with her family, and small flocks of Shetland sheep and Rhode Island Red hens. She teaches English to Hmong, Kurdish, Vietnamese and Spanish students. p. 14

Jeannie E. Roberts won first place in the Green Bay Symphony Orchestra's Music Alive statewide poetry contest. Her work has appeared in the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets' *Museletter*, Wisconsin Poets' *Calendar*, *Verse Wisconsin* and elsewhere. A lifelong visual artist, she is also the author and illustrator of *Let's Make Faces!*, a children's book (www.RhymeTheRoostBooks.com). p. 12

Tess Romeis is a Wisconsin native who tends to hover over, and ferret about, the Lake Michigan shoreline. She is a proud member of the Stone Kettle Poets. p. 8, 22

Margaret (Peggy) Rozga has published two books of poetry, the award-winning volume about Milwaukee's fair housing marches, *Two Hundred Nights and One Day* and a collection responding to her Army Reservist son's deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, *Though I Haven't Been to Baghdad*. Inspired by her small garden, she is currently completing work on a new manuscript, *Justice Freedom Herbs*. pp. 4-5

Chuck Rybak lives in Wisconsin and is currently an Assistant Professor of English and Humanistic Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. He is the author of two chapbooks, *Nickel and Diming My Way Through and Liketown*. 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 Ledge*; *Southern Poetry Review*; *Verse Wisconsin*; and other journals. p. 26

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 *Verse Wisconsin*. p. 31

E. M. Schorb's work has appeared in *The American Scholar*, *The Sewanee Review*, *Southwest Review*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *The Yale Review*, *The Chicago Review*, *The Iowa Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, *The Antioch Review*, *Stand and Agenda* (England), *The Notre Dame Review*, and *New York Quarterly*, among others. p. 28

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. p. 16

Peggy Shumaker is Alaska State Writer Laureate for 2010-2012. These poems are from *Toucan Nest* (Red Hen Press, 2013). Her lyrical memoir is *Just Breathe Normally* (U. of Nebraska Press). Shumaker is Professor Emerita at University of Alaska Fairbanks and teaches in the Rainier Writing Workshop at PLU. She edits Boreal Books, publishing literature and fine art from Alaska, and the Alaska Literary Series at University of Alaska Press. Please visit her website at www.peggyshumaker.com. p. 12

Shoshaua 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 including *The Seattle Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *The Briar Cliff Review*, *Rattle*, *Rosebud* and *Poetry Northwest*. Her collection titled *What the Postcard Didn't Say* won an Outstanding Achievement Award from the Wisconsin Library Association in 2008. p. 37

Hal Sirowitz's closest connection to Wisconsin was getting accepted into the University of Wisconsin at Madison Doctoral Program in Literature. But he went to a local university to become a public school teacher. He's the author of 4 poetry books. p. 23

Steven D. Stark is the author of four books and has written frequently for a variety of publications including the *NY Times* and *Atlantic Monthly*. He recently won the Clapboard House short story contest. p. 9

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. 10

Carole Stone, Professor of English Emerita, Montclair State University, has published seven chapbooks and three books of poetry, *Lime and Salt*, Carriage House Press, *Traveling with the Dead*, Backwaters Press, and *American Rhapsody*, CavanKerry Press. Her work in journals includes, *Chebea*, *Nimrod*, *The Beloit Poetry Review* and *Southern Poetry Review*. She is a recipient of fellowships from The NJ State Council on the Arts and residencies at Hawthornden Castle International Retreat for Writers in Scotland and Chateau de Lavigny in Switzerland. p. 30

Molly Sutton Kiefer's chapbook *The Recent History of Middle Sand Lake* won the 2010 Astounding Beauty Ruffian Press Poetry Award. Her work has appeared in *Harpur Palate*, *Berkeley Poetry Review*, *you are here*, *Gulf Stream*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Wicked Alice*, and *Permafrost*, among others. She received her MFA from the University of Minnesota, serves as poetry editor to *Midway Journal*, and curates *Balancing the Tide: Motherhood and the Arts | An Interview Project*. She currently lives in Red Wing with her husband and daughter, where she is at work on a manuscript on (in)fertility. More can be found at mollysuttonkiefer.com. p. 36

After **Len Tews'** retirement as a biology professor at UW-Oshkosh, 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. 25

Elizabeth Tornes' chapbook *Snowbound* won First Prize in the WFOP 2012 Chapbook Contest. Her poems have appeared in *The New Republic*, *American Poetry Review*, *Ploughshares*, and elsewhere. She lives in Lac du Flambeau, WI and has also published a book of Ojibwe oral histories, *Memories of Lac du Flambeau Elders* (UW Press, 2004). p. 6

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. 31

Carolyn Vargo is a Regional Vice President for WFOP, a substitute teacher in West Allis - West Milwaukee, a retired teacher from Milwaukee Public Schools, an organizer of readings at People's Book Cooperative, a member of the Urban Echo Poets at the Urban Ecology Center, a bird watcher, and a grandmother. p. 17

Frank X Walker is the author of six poetry collections, including *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers* (University of Georgia, forthcoming May 2013); *When Winter Come: the Ascension of York* (University Press of Kentucky, 2008); *Black Box* (Old Cove Press, 2005); *Buffalo Dance: the Journey of York* (University Press of Kentucky, 2003), which won the Lillian Smith Book Award in 2004; and *Affrilachia* (Old Cove Press, 2000). A 2005 recipient of the Lannan Literary Fellowship in Poetry, Walker is Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University of Kentucky and Director of African American & Africana Studies, and the editor of *PLUCK!*, the new *Journal of Affrilachian Art & Culture*. pp. 20-21

Mary Wehner is the author of *...or the opposite*, a letterpress chapbook by Red Hydra Press, which also published her broadsides "The Chinese Painting" and "Broken Shells at Dusk." Her work has appeared in *Red River Review*, *The Writer Magazine*, *Verse Wisconsin*, *Southern Indiana Review*, *Wisconsin Trails*, *qarstiluni* and other publications. She is a founding member of Foot of the Lake Poetry Collective and is a board member of the Council for Wisconsin Writers. p. 33

Greg Weiss is the founding editor of *Intentional Walk*, the only literary journal devoted to sports poetry (www.intentionalwalkreview.com). His work has recently appeared in *Boston Review* and *Southeast Review*. p. 27

Ed Werstein 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 *Verse Wisconsin*, *Blue Collar Review*, *Mobius Magazine* and a few other publications. p. 31

Marie Sheppard Williams' mentor for poetry is Thomas R. Smith, a WI poet and essayist. She has had poems published in *The Sun*, *Poetry East*, Ted Kooser's newspaper column, and another issue of *Verse Wisconsin*. She has published seven story collections, and has won the Pushcart Prize twice. p. 7



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