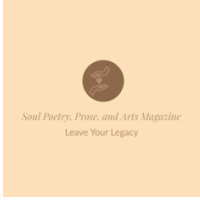




Soul Poetry, Prose & Arts Magazine
Volume 2 Issue 1 Spring 2026



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Cover Art: Catherine McGuire "I Made You a Kite"

Arvilla Fee
Founder, Editor

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Contributors, Readers, and Community:

Spring brings new life and hope. Blooms, buds, and birds abound; there's a certain sweetness in the air, bluer skies, and gentle rains. As we shake off our winter coats and cling to the promise of warmer days, may we all have hearts filled with gratitude, wonder and grace.

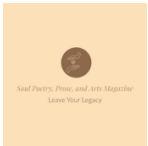
I am thrilled to have this issue filled with such glorious colors and vibrant words. Over 65 artists and authors from all over the world have contributed to this incredible collection. I would like to extend a warm welcome to our new writers and artists just starting their creative journeys—may you continue to be inspired!

I hope you all enjoy over 130 pages of gorgeous work. Take time to rest today. If you haven't been outside in a while—go! Close your eyes. Soak up some sun. Breathe fresh air. Be blessed today, and bless others.

“Art is the stored honey of the human soul.” – Theodore Dreiser

Yours truly,

Arvilla Fee
Founder, Editor
Soul Poetry, Prose & Arts Magazine



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A World Without Perfect by Vernon Allen

a world without perfect would be just fine
a world without perfect wouldn't need verse
the sun could rest its eyes
the moon could let its hair grow

no more right and wrong
neither noise nor hymn
all the tries would be over
everything could be



Vernon Allen Jr is a 20-year-old poet from Detroit Michigan. He has long had a passion for the written word and has only now ventured to release his work for publication.



Photo by Олег Мороз: Pexels.com

Haiku
by Vernon Allen

lyrical speech
throat is womb
newborn notes



Photo by Markus Winkler: Pexels.com

The Story, Told by Robert Beveridge

Sometimes it doesn't even take
a power outage, a frozen steak
dropped on your foot, the bugs'
migration from your bathroom
to the living room. Sometimes
it doesn't even take a stock market
crash, your favorite show
being cancelled, the barista
making an Americano when you ordered
a hot vanilla. Sometimes
it doesn't even take dinner
emerging charred from the oven,
the internet going out in the middle
of a raid, a train car uncoupled
that derails and crashes
into a housing development.

Sometimes all it takes
is the wrong word at the right time.



Robert Beveridge (he/him) makes noise (xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry on unceded Mingo land (Akron, OH). He published his first poem in a non-vanity/non-school publication in November 1988, and it's been all downhill since. Recent/upcoming appearances in Lit Shark, Saragun Springs, and Instant Noodles, among others.



Photo by Big Bag Films: Pexels.com

Missed Connections by Robert Beveridge

I meant to ask those lovely people
at the auto repair shop if they
could recommend a good florist.
Instead I tripped over a crack
in the pavement that didn't exist,
ended up with my head
in one of those old-timey
standing ashtrays, trying
to detect notes of forest floor
in the combined ashes
of two dozen Mavericks.

I meant to sit at the corner
of the bar at closing time, ask
the least drunk chap there
for a ride to the nearest
secluded copse. Instead
I sang karaoke versions
of She Walks Crooked
with a rhythm section
from somewhere that was
very much not Atlanta.

I meant to check off each bird
in the atlas as I caught it
with my binoculars. Instead
I found myself unable
to tell the difference
between a bullfinch
and a great tit, let alone
which one of them kept pace
with the front bumper
of the Thunderbird,
the cherry of a Marlboro
doing seventy-five
on a backwoods rural lane.



Photo by Yan Krukau: Pexels.com

Hedge Witch by Amrita Skye Blaine

Brewing tinctures
and salves
savoring the scent
ties me to sisters
way back herbalists,
wise women working
solitaire feared
or respected depending
on locale and the times

Who knows if they're true
I have flashes
of the burning times
devoted to my craft
sought after by the sick
hunted by the hidebound,
skin taut listening for danger
alive to the undertow



Amrita Skye Blaine develops themes of impermanence, disability, awakening, and the state of our world. In 2003, she received an MFA in Creative Writing from Antioch University, and in 2024, a PocketMFA in poetry. Two collections came out Spring 2025, every riven thing from Finishing Line Press, and strange grace—the ending season from Berkana Publications. She has been published in sixteen poetry anthologies in the U.S. and internationally, numerous literary magazines, and is a 2025 Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net Anthology nominee.



Photo by Letícia Higa: Pexels.com

the slog of living by Amrita Skye Blaine

How to be alive? Remember your death.

—Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

It isn't easy, this life
no matter what we've
been given

Maybe you were beaten,
unloved—
or cared for, given much
but never seen

lived in a war zone
either country or family—
all of it hurts

The hardest truth,
this living is short, whether
your span is a breath or
full measure of years

How to live best?
Cherish inexorable
unsparing death

the beat
of your tendered heart
Each, the chance
to be you



Artwork "Doyenne du Comice Pears" by Amrita Skye Blaine

One Way to Eat a Doyenne du Comice Pear by Amrita Skye Blaine

Every day I greet it
on the kitchen counter Feel
its blossom end with a soft
round thumb Has it
ripened? That day comes.
Hold the globe
gently savor sweet elixir rising
Slip a paring blade
beneath its skin—each peel
curls, pear nectar pouring
down my fingers—lick
the mere hint.
Halve the pear, again
remove the quarter cores
cube in bite-sized pieces
With my mother's sterling
oyster fork, I linger over each
small wedge, honey sweet
slipping down my chin
And then, so sad,
I pierce the final bite

Boots are Made for Walking
by Amrita Skye Blaine



Serving Up Spring
Lita Marie Bonciolini



Lita Marie Bonciolini is a writer, artist, and jewelry designer originally from South Dakota. She has been nominated for Best of the Net 2026 Anthology. Her poetry accompanied the Robert Indiana Exhibit at the McNay Art Museum, San Antonio; poetry included in two anthologies—Pandemic Puzzle Poems, and Yellow Flag Poems - Life in the Time of Covid-19. In Arts Alive San Antonio, and both poetry and art in editions of Soul Poetry, Prose & Art Magazine. Lita lives in San Antonio, Texas.



Photo by Anni Roenkae: Pexels.com

Reading an Article About the Origin of Memory in the Brain Triggers An Exchange of Emails with My Friend Ed, the Neurologist by jim bourey

Science people are explaining
how memory-making is a biological thing
in an article I only half understand
and probably won't recall tomorrow.

I can hear cars rushing by on I-75
as I sit next to a big window in the Best Western
on the north side of Valdosta. It's nice,
sun warms the glass and the good coffee

is free. It's free, until I remember
how much the room costs. But unused neurons
and idle synaptic plasticity will allow exorbitant
prices to fade from my brain by mid-December.

That's what I learned from the scientists.
Part of this article is about restoring memory
in Dementia and Alzheimer patients. Studying
all these connections, learning about firing

sparks in the temporal lobe and electrical action
that creates new neural ensembles (it starts to sound
musical here) in the hippocampus might prove
valuable—and help to repair hopeless losses.

Imagine inserting insanely fine wires
through a sick woman's skull, pushing a button
or two, sliding a gentle shock to a receptive
neuron, which activates a gathering (an ensemble)

of others and—Bingo—mom remembers the names
of all five of her children, their birthdays,
their childhoods of trying, their bad choices,
their fortunate marriages.

Of course that will be too late for my mom.
But I'll still appreciate it if I can see
some science come through like
an answer to unspoken prayers.



jim bourey is an old poet who lives in the Adirondacks in New York. He has two collections, Out There and Back Again (2023) and The Distance Between Us (2020) both from Cold River Press. He also collaborated with Linda Blaskey on Season of Harvest (2022 Pond Road Press) and with Jack Mackey, Isabelle Bohls, and Linda Blaskey on Our Various Selves (2025 Cold River Press). His chapbook, Silence, Interrupted (Broadkill Press) appeared in 2015. His work is also in many journals and anthologies. He was awarded a NY State Council on the Arts grant for 2026.



Photo by Peter Platou: Pexels.com

After the Flood by Ken e Bujold

What hill would have obligated ceding
my wings to an apterous underworld?
Unlike the dove, I found liberty
headier than any herring's bowl,
a swallow of the daily blessing.
Swimming from tree to tree, feathers untouched,
never knowing which way tomorrow might turn,
I'd live by my wits, finding fulfillment
in the windrows along the roughened roads
as far from the peace monger's airy castles
as the precarious winds could ferry me.



Ken e Bujold is a Canadian poet residing just outside of Toronto. He is the author of two collections: a private, limited edition, In the Key of Musica (2022), as well as The Landscape of Three Small Words (2024).



Photo by Adobe Firefly AI

Poached, with a Side of Toast by T.S. Carney

The diner had the greasy, staged tension of 2:00 AM: a couple shouting across a vacuum while everyone else leaned into their plates, observing as if the universe had hired them as extras in a performance neither requested nor understood. The coffee was burnt in a way that suggested intention. Even the waitress moved like she had memorized her indifference.

Outside, the carnage arranged itself with a precision that bordered on design. One car was folded into an accordion of steel only geometry could have conceived. The other rested upside-down—or under, its wheels spinning in a futile ritual, a metronome marking time no one intended to keep.

I watched from the window. It felt appropriate to let the scene introduce itself.

A man clutched his phone, knuckles whitening, as though he might summon salvation via the network of unseen insurance goddesses. He was “with Insurance,” but Insurance was a woman, corporeal, named Dolores, who had no real interest in miracles. I imagined her sighing, somewhere fluorescent, asking him to repeat his policy number while he stood among glass and consequence.

His grief was a desert. Perhaps he mourned internally. Perhaps he mourned the banana his wife had neglected to pack—a single, curved, sacred fruit. He did not search for the other driver; he romanced his wreckage, enchanted by the glitter of glass shards, each a tear unacknowledged. There is a kind of love reserved for objects once they are broken. They stop asking anything of you.

Inside, the argument at the counter reached its peak and collapsed without resolution. The man paid. The woman did not finish her toast. The waitress wiped the same spot twice, achieving nothing. I left a bill beneath my cup and stepped outside.

The air held that metallic quiet that follows impact, as though sound itself had been reprimanded.

Then there she was. The other driver.

She was elegant in that peculiar, distant way magazines commend only in captions: hollow-cheeked, perfectly angled, like a photograph saved for the back page, adjacent to perfume ads. Timing might have redirected this collision had her boyfriend called five minutes earlier, or perhaps never at all. Lives hinge on such small interruptions.

I approached, violating the unspoken etiquette of wrecked automobiles and human dignity.

The car, belly-up like a poached egg abandoned on a diner plate, exuded fluids that traced gravity’s patient devotion across the asphalt. Oil moved with a kind of purpose. Coolant shimmered. The scene was, unmistakably, poached, with a Side of Toast.

“Hello,” I said.

“Get away from me!” the driver shrieked, a jagged line cutting through the compressed air.

“Why?”

“Because I almost died.”

“Died?” The word passed my lips like an exotic fruit I could not resist tasting.

Across the debris, the man’s voice fragmented into a distant benediction: “You wonderful person!”

“I am wonderful,” I acknowledged, radiating the earnest femininity of someone already absolved, in my own mind, from consequence.

A small crowd gathered at the perimeter—not close enough to help, not far enough to be innocent. They stood with their hands in pockets, their faces arranged into concern. One woman filmed. Another shook her head as though the event confirmed something she had always suspected about the world.

I stepped closer to the overturned car. The tire continued its slow rotation. I reached out and stopped it with my hand. The silence that followed felt like an achievement.

“You shouldn’t touch that,” someone said.

“Why?” I asked, not looking back.

No one answered.

When the police arrived, the officer—a woman frayed at the seams but capable of imposing authority—hovered over her notebook. Each notation was a delicate incision into private thought, exposing the public facts: Car 1 swerved. Car 2 flipped. I am alone. The existential is eternal.

The ambulance came shortly after. The driver was placed onto a stretcher, her elegance rearranged into something more human, more temporary. Her hair lost its intention. Her face lost its angle. She cried openly now, which was less interesting but more correct.

The man with the phone approached the paramedics, still narrating his situation to Dolores, as if the event required documentation more than response.

I submitted my identity, my biography, my alibi, as if supplying a gallery label:

Name: Julie

Age: 43

Status: Divorced, yearning

Occupation: Art House Receptionist

Hobbies: Long, silent walks through gallery spaces

The officer handed me a crisp card. I reciprocated.

“Here’s my number,” I said. “In case I can help.”

“You’re helping already,” the officer replied, the thwack of the closing notebook reverberating like a gunshot in the quiet diner behind us.

I returned inside.

My coffee had cooled into something honest. I drank it anyway, aligning the bitterness with the chaos outside. The couple who had argued earlier were gone. The unfinished toast remained, now rigid, a monument to interruption.

Across the street, a tow truck arrived, lifting the “egg” away from the asphalt with a kind of mechanical reverence. The tires stopped spinning. The fluids settled. The geometry unraveled.

The woman continued to sob—messy, uncurated, human—but I had already retreated to my mind’s gallery, curating the scene with exacting detachment. I adjusted the lighting. I removed the unnecessary elements. I preserved the composition.

Destruction, when framed correctly, is the only art that never lies.

I paid my bill again, just in case.

Then I walked away, stepping over shards of amber glass, feeling irreproachably, iridescently right.



T.S. Carney works as a professional educator and writer based in the New York area. His work has appeared in or is forthcoming from Maudlin House, Your Impossible Voice, and Eunoia Review.



Photo by Nadin Sh: Pexels.com

Soup of the Day by CS Crowe

Steaming in stainless steel pots
in an empty corner of the deli
too many options for simpler times

The old man's heart beats in his ears
his doctor has been telling him
to watch his cholesterol for years
sugar and salt, butter and bread
there's a shelf full of salads to his left
but his hand passes over the veggie soup
for golden bubbles of lobster crab bisque

It is a cold and rainy day in April
soon, spring will return, then summer
the asphalt warm beneath the sun

A grocery cart abandoned just past
the line where the wheels lock up
a haggard man sits on the corner
with a soggy cardboard sign
the old man eats his soup in his car
a spoon held firm in shaking hands
too many options for simpler times



CS Crowe is three crows in a trench coat that gained sentience after eating a magic bean. He spends his days writing stories on a stolen laptop and trading human teeth for peanuts. A poet and storyteller from the Southeastern United States, he believes stories and poems are about the journey, not the destination, and he loves those stories that wander in the wilderness for forty years before finding their way to the promised land.



Photo by Roberto Vegas: Pexels.com

Fred, Half Dead, Beethoven in His Head by Holly Day

You can't talk to Beethoven
on a bus stop in Chicago
because you'll just get lost.

Lauded as a genius,
he can't give good directions
because he's dead.

Ask Fred about Beethoven
his hands waving wildly with excitement like
the vibrations coming up through his feet.
conducting symphonies in an empty room.

Fred will tell you how planets hum
give directions to angry flocks of pigeons
lecture on string theory
like harpsichords, and how Beethoven was more
of a transcriber than a composer.

I picture the two sitting together
lost in deep conversation.



Holly Day's writing has recently appeared in The NoSleep podcast, Talking River, and New Plains Review, and her published books include Music Theory for Dummies and Music Composition for Dummies. She currently teaches classes at The Loft Literary Center in Minnesota, Hugo House in Washington, and the Indiana Writers Center.



Photo by Adrian Dascal: Pexels.com

The Weaver of Perugia by John J. DeDominicis

Marta sits behind
her wooden pedestal loom,
her petite body hidden behind
a labyrinth of crossbeams,
Her face, veiled by
A web of fabric.
Sinewy arms and veined hands
grasp the handles,
like a maestro conducting
the warp and weft of strings,
a crescendo
with a drum beat,
Back and forth,
Back and forth,
'fare la spola',
weaving the art of the Renaissance,
interlacing the medieval rainbow patterns,
threading the legacy of her ancestry,
where she sits,
at her wooden loom.



John J. DeDominicis writes poetry rooted in New England that explores continuity, place, and interior life.



Photo by Pixabay: Pexels.com

The Continuum of Being by John J. DeDominicis

I am from the breath of God
I am from the mud of Earth
and the depth of salty seas.
I am from the first crawling tetrapod,
I am from scattered star stuff,
I am from the dawn of DNA.
I am from a tangled ball of synapses,
from billions of bonded neurons
from thought, memory, and impulse.
All that I am has been borrowed
and when my body releases—
repays what it does not own—
It will return through the
cumulative momentum
that created me:
the breath of God
which gives me life
the mud of Earth
which sustains me
the depth of salty seas
where life began—
in the continuum of being



Photo by MART PRODUCTION: Pexels.com

Admission by Trish Delaney

“Write it down,” she kept insisting—
a relentless rubber-ball ricochet, fast-fire
from a toy gun—snapping
my head up and leaving me face to face
with her kids, perched happily
on the desk: blonde hair and Crest 3D
smiles, amused and amazed
to find me here again so soon,
taunting me to speak.

At their age, I loved pens:
paper, stickers for names, clipboards,
whiteboards, Connect Four games,
beading, pottery—the “art” of wood-staining a frame.
Now, inside this ward, I paint
by numbers: the girl’s Van Gogh *Sunflowers*,
still nailed to the wall—
sun-faded yellow,
bleeding little pots of black ink inside.

A cold silver clock ticks and ticks
through one whole wordless hour.
She says she’ll see me at 12:00 tomorrow.
I write that down instead.



Trish Delaney is a Dublin-based poet whose work has been published widely. She writes into memory and family history with a sharp, nostalgic edge, attentive to what’s said and what’s withheld.



Photo by Helena I: Pexels.com

The Queen of Invisible Kingdoms by Anju Devadas

My grandmother ruled
kingdoms that had no maps.

In the quiet hours
when rice boiled and shadows lengthened,
she stitched heavens together
with thread pulled from memory
angels perched on window bars,
demons hiding in the grain jars,
the devil bargaining in whispers
behind the smoke of the stove.

Sometimes
she wore God like a borrowed crown
and built an altar
out of thin air and stubborn belief.

We were asked to kneel there
children in the temple of make-believe
while her voice rose
like a village oracle
calling dawn before it arrived.

Prophecies spilled from her mouth
like seeds into dry soil,
waiting for rains
that never came.

Her childhood had been
a house without windows.
Her marriage
a corridor with locked doors.

So she invented palaces
rooms filled with velvet laughter,
corridors paved with gold,
a woman of substance
standing tall inside the mirror
of her own stories.

Under the bed, she said,
the earth guarded treasure:
rubies asleep in clay,
gold breathing in the dark,
necklaces curled like serpents
waiting for the chosen hand.

But the only kingdom she ruled
was the kitchen
a small republic of fire and lentils
where she aged beside the stove
instead of the attic
reserved for madwomen in stories.

When her other half vanished
into the arithmetic of death,
she began speaking
to the empty chairs.

Her words grew wings.
She called herself
messenger, prophet,
keeper of celestial accounts,
the oracle that greeted morning.

We listened
like villagers at a circus
amused, unsure,
certain the sky was not speaking through her.

But she never doubted
her invisible empire.

Time slowly loosened
the screws of her thoughts,
until reason rolled away
like marbles across a tiled floor.

And one day
she slipped out of the world quietly,
carrying her treasure maps
to the other side of silence.

She left believing
her stories were real
and that the rest of us
were the mad ones
lost outside the gates
of her shining, impossible kingdom.



Anju Devadas R D currently works as a Guest Faculty in the Department of English at Pondicherry University. A budding poet, her work has appeared in The Madras Courier, The Chakkar, LittCrit, Feminism In India, and other journals and magazines. Her creative and critical writing moves between the personal and the cultural, drawing on confessional and feminist traditions.



Photo by Alexis B. Pexels.com

I think of tenderness by Stacie Eirich

Today marks the start
of my 48th trip
around the sun. I begin
with things that are home
to me: reading poems, walking
outdoors, painting watercolors.

I see dog walkers,
bikers, fisherman. I hear
the tinny song
of an ice cream truck
ring out, bell-like
in the wind.

I paint brown branches,
green leaves,
blue sky,
blue-green waves.
Mix in yellow
for sunlight.

This scene pastoral,
bucolic and *easy, easy*
like Sunday morning.
I hear the song
as I write,
a fountain of notes playing.

I think of tenderness, of a sky
painted with watercolors,
blue-green-gold
trailing down my skin, staining
my fingers, possibility
brushing the page.

I think of tenderness,
of the colors
of nature, its light and darkness,
births and deaths, sun and storms.
Our laughter and tears,
our grief and joy.

I think of tenderness,
of an eggshell sky
fading to purple, day
falling into sleep, pink
and supple, soft and light
as feathers.

I think of tenderness, of your fingers
laced in mine, your breath
on my skin, the moon
silent and whole, its glow
silent, steadfast,
eternal.



Stacie Eirich is an author and mother of two living in Texas. Her book, Hope Like Sunlight (Bell Asteri Publishing, 2024), is a non-profit memoir with proceeds benefiting St. Jude Children's Research Hospital & Ronald McDonald House. In 2025 and 2026, her poems have been published in The Bluebird Word, Synkroniciti Magazine, The Amazine, Soul Poetry and The Poetry Lighthouse, among others. Her first traditionally published poetry collection, All That Sings, is forthcoming with Poetose Press in spring of 2027. www.stacieeirich.com



Photo by Mahesh Mohan: Pexels.com

Koi Pond by Stacie Eirich

Fins touching, gliding
 in sunlit ripples
 motion blooming

in vermilion, tangerine, lemon,
 spotted — jumping, dancing
 in figure eight, zig-zag patterns,

peace in the rushing, steady flow
 of them, mouths big open circles,
 tunneling, cavernous as they rise,

small, black glassy eyes
 seeking each other, sliding
 into darkness as they plunge,

over and over again, then
 emerging up
 into light, their breath

flexible as muscles opening, bodies
 powerful, surging, these bright beings.
 Smooth skin, rough, rigid gills, fins

slicing the blue-green abyss in quick,
 elegant knife-cuts. They stretch
 in dazzling arrays

of color, shimmer then
 disappear, an echoing dance
 in ripples, luminous luck-bringers.



Photo by Stacie Eirich

At the Neighborhood Pond, a Great Egret by Stacie Eirich

I watch the Great Egret's white wings,
flowing, graceful, he stalks the pond
in near stillness, stretching out his long neck
in dappled sunlight.

He stands regal, tall, patiently waiting, steadily moving
along the pond's edge. He strides in front of me,
swoops his neck down fast, thin beak scooping up,
clenching down on a fish.

He holds the fish aloft
only briefly, then gulps him down
in one undulating swallow, neck upturned.
His stance changes—he curls his neck, sits lower.

Then he takes to the air, wings unfolding—
he challenges another egret
who has come close
to the pond.

Their white wings clash in the sunlight
before the first flies into the blue,
taking to the skies and trees
and perhaps another pond near this one.

The newcomer does not stay but follows him,
the pond rippling along behind—
only the long grasses, leaves and twigs
in sight now, a pool of blue, green, rusty brown.

The breeze of a southern fall light
and slightly cool, a smell of sulphur
and exhaust in the air, coolness
slicing through, a hint of winter.

I look for signs of small fishes
in the semi-circles of ripples flowing
from the pond's fountain, but they
remain hidden, too stealthy for human eyes.

I think of motion and stillness, of light and shade,
of how the egret must have felt the fishes
movement and tracked his pattern
before moving to trap him.

How a creature's instinct depends
on different senses, a perfect chain of events.
How the earth keeps us all alive with its cycles
and creatures, how wide this blue sky is above us, above me.

How if we weren't here
all this would be trees, would be wild.
How many wings and fins, birds and fishes
and all manners of creatures — would there be?

I stop, watching wings, breathing deeply the air,
listening to the fountains roar in front of me,
the rumble and roll of engines and tires
on the roadway behind me.

In this small space of peace
set smack in the middle of a city
with its never-ending stretches
of pavement and concrete.

How I am part of this air both clean and unclean,
how I seek softness and wildness,
how when I watch the flow of the water, the wide wings,
I feel almost free, almost alright.

Almost hopeful, for this moment —
a step closer to wonder, to curiosity,
to something real, to something good,
to something pure.

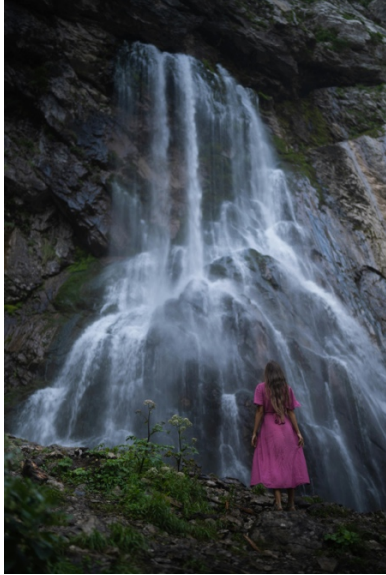


Photo by Dmitriy Piskarev: Pexels.com

Water by Osasere Ewansiha

This water is sweet,
it tricks my aching knees into forgiving me,
the cold numbs my throat, it hurts my tongue,
it blossoms in my chest, spreading like a spiderweb,
it rehydrates the heart that had shriveled like a sponge,
it shocks my mind into restarting with a sudden brisk plunge.

My sister is named water,
not this thing in my cup,
but the harkening of a hurricane as it tears the streets up,
she is the geyser (waiting for the chance to erupt).
If you ask Sister what her name means,
she'll gurgle *I am the thing that moves in the ravines*.
Sister seeps into every crack and crevice,
I find bitter relief in her roaring presence.



Osasere Ewansiha writes poetry and short stories and holds a MA in Literature and has been published in The Bayou Review and Yearling. She currently lives in Houston, Texas with her family and fantasies.



Photo by Suzy Hazelwood: Pexels.com

Dust Bowl by Dan Fitzgerald

The field is empty, barren, dry.
The promised spring rains
have never come.
Seeds once planted have fed the birds
or have been lost to passing winds
carrying them to distant rows.
A scarecrow stands stoic
in tattered clothes; no longer needed
to frighten marauding crows,
sparrows, or serpent-seeking hawks.
Its head hangs limply,
ashamed to lift its eyes
to see the dust gathering
beneath its abandoned, crucified body.



Dan Fitzgerald is a retired printer and an award winning poet. His work has appeared in many journals and anthologies. He has two Pushcart Award nomination and is the author of full length collection of poems, Weatherman (Kelsay Books) and a small collection "gatherings" also by Kelsay Books. He lives quietly in Pontiac, Illinois tending to home and garden.



Photo by Eve R: Pexels.com

Just Another Leaf by Nolcha Fox

I am a leaf bud that clings with my sisters
to branches that pulse with the sweet sap of spring.
We unfurl little sails to capture the hours and days.

I whisper small secrets that rustle and flutter.
You hear them as music, but can't understand
what my song really means.

I offer you shade until cool winds remind me
it's time to dress up in fall colors to welcome
the coming of winter, the end of my life.

I lose my grip, and I float down to kiss grass.
I'm just a leaf that you add to the pile.
You don't see my beauty, you just see a mess.



Nolcha Fox's poems have been curated in print and online journals. A best-selling author, her poetry books are available on Amazon and Dancing Girl Press. Nominated for Best of the Net and Pushcart Prize multiple times. Editor of Chewers by Masticadores and LatinosUSA.



Photo by Alan Retratos: Pexels.com

The Woman by Nolcha Fox

She is the woman on the balcony
leaning on the railing.

Midnight runs through her veins.
Clouds float through her hair.

Her gaze holds the buildings
in place until morning.

She looks without seeing.
She's been there forever.

Her longing has turned
into ashes and wine.



Photo by Yan Krukau: Pexels.com

Dandelion by Jacob Friesenhahn

We watch the seeds lift—

each a future
we cannot follow,

every filament
a small architecture
of flight,

a body made
to leave.

We send them
from the stem,
pretending
our wishes are light
enough to scatter
without cost.

We make a game of it,
as if the air
were not already full
of what we've lost.

Close your eyes
and blow.



Jacob Friesenhahn is the author of The Prayer of the Mantis (Kelsay Books, 2025). His poems have appeared in journals including Humana Obscura, San Antonio Review, Amethyst Review, and Soul Poetry, Prose & Arts Magazine. He teaches religious studies and philosophy in San Antonio.



Photo by Jacob Friesenhahn

Hana Matsuri by Jacob Friesenhahn

On Easter morning
sweet tea slides
down the body
of baby Buddha.

Warm, poured
from silver ladles
by hands
hovering above.

Smelling of sugar,
full and floral,
passed through a garden
before finding us.

The bronze statue
still cool
beneath the stream,
a small dark figure:
one hand raised,
one lowered.

His mouth almost open,
about to speak
or chuckle,
the long pour
beginning to tickle.

Let this be his baptism.
Let the sweetness cling,
run over his eyes,
his mouth,
his hands
still pointing—

Where is resurrection?
I want out
of the tomb.



Photo by Jacob Friesenhahn

April **by Jacob Friesenhahn**

The pecan tree was cut
back hard,
amputated—
left alone
to see if it would do anything
come spring.

Skinny green arms reach up
like the desperate legs
of an overturned insect.

Behind the tree
a herd of deer looks bored
grazing on wet grass
too easy to find today.

Past the field runs
a rugged tree line
of mesquite, huisache
and trash.

Above the tree line
a hotel.

Above the hotel
the soaring arch
of a highway overpass
not yet complete,
a concrete rainbow
ending nowhere.

Above even the bridge
a slow soft sky
dropping cool tears

upon a resurrected pecan
and the dark backs
of a dozen deer.



Photo by Kai Pilger: Pexels.com

San Miguel de Allende by Roger Funston

After a long soak in a hot spring, we sit under an umbrella, towels wrapped around our wet bathing suits. January-nary a shiver. La Gruta Restaurant and Spa, end of a wonderful vacation in San Miguel de Allende.

UNESCO World Heritage site, famous for its baroque and neo-classical Spanish colonial architecture. Buildings with earth-tone facades often with ornate stone carvings, heavy wooden doors, some from the 18th century. Intimate courtyards with elaborate fountains. Cobblestone streets make for a bumpy ride but slow traffic. Busy, narrow sidewalks with high curbs.

Parroquia de San Miguel Archangel, known for its gothic pink spires, built in 1578, later expanded. Spectacular altar centered by a crucified Christ, surrounded by ornate chandeliers. Walls adorned with statues of saints. A crown jewel glowing at night. Busy community gathering spot, Jardín Centro, across the way, in the heart of the bustling Zocalo.

Biblioteca Pública, bookstore, library, meeting hub, language classes, house tours, plays at Santa Ana Teatro. A room with overwhelming indigenous mural covering walls and ceiling. Sprawling, vibrant Mercado Ignacio Ramirez several blocks long. Smell of food cooking, fresh bread, local produce, textiles, talavera pottery, clothes, jewelry, honey, spices and so much more.

Mercado Sano, Saturday morning hangout for expats. I tell the Uber driver: "Vamos a ver los gringos." (We are going to see the gringos). She laughs.

Line up for homemade tortillas or gordidas, cooked onsite, with the fillings of your choice. Closest thing to Mexican fast food. Saturday tianguis (public market) with surrounding organic food tiendas. Best salsa in town. First of the season small chicken eggs from Rancho Vía Orgánica. Kept under the table, only brought out upon request because they are so small, but also delicious. Entertained by singers, everything from traditional Mexican ballads to 70s pop and opera.

Small tiendas everywhere, where the señoras sell eggs by the kilogram. Also drinks, fruit, bread, an assortment of snacks.

Waiting for lunch at La Gruta among the trees swaying in gentle breeze. Out of this world chicken pistachio mole. But we also enjoy sitting on orange stools at the food stall eating tortas and aqua frescas with the locals. Every time we stop by, I say to the owner "Hola mi amigo" and he says, "Hey buddy." Knows exactly which tortas and drinks we want.

Restaurants with stone walls covered in vines or roaring fire pit in the back. Outdoor dining under the stars, margarita in hand. Excellent service, fresh local ingredients beautifully presented. You could stay for hours. Have to ask for the check.

Magnet for expats, around 14,000. Norte Americanos drawn to this gem. Mild climate, lower cost of living. Blessing to some locals, curse to others. New huge haciendas exploding on the outskirts. Expats assimilating to various degrees, many stubbornly clustered with other expats, speaking very poor Spanish. The people working at tourist spots want to speak to me in English. I don't want to be like other gringos, so I resist, insist on replying in Spanish.

I want to be immersed
in this colorful culture
where friendliness
is widespread
and life moves a little slower.



Roger Funston came to poetry late in life. He writes about his life journey, his travels and his ancestors. Roger's work appears in Synkroniciti, Last Stanza Poetry and Alchemy Spoon.



Photo by Robert Clark: Pexels.com

Cards with Charon by David Lee Garrison

*Charon, the Greek mythological figure who ferries
the dead across the River Styx into Hades*

We hear the dip and drip
of Charon's pole as he ferries

the three of us to the house
of our host for men's bridge.

The boatman deals each of us
a hand, and we drink beer,

sort our cards, and reminisce.
We remember those dead

and gone from our group,
those who had to lay down

their cards and shuffle off.
They are not far away.

The winter night presses
against the windows,

streetlights flicker
in the wind, and we play on.



The poetry of David Lee Garrison, an emeritus Wright State University Professor, has been published widely, read by Garrison Keillor on The Writer's Almanac, and featured by Ted Kooser in American Life in Poetry. He won the Paul Laurence Dunbar Prize for Poetry in 2009 and was named Ohio Poet of the Year in 2014. His chapbook, Tailfins, will come out in November of 2026 from Finishing Line Press.



Photo by Sveta Moissejeva: Pexels.com

Accomplished by Janessa Graham

Trees before growing, never overwhelm the soil with requests, but in simplicity, silence, and warmth, they attain to the measure of their fullness.

Flowers before blossoming, never despise the day of small beginnings, but long-suffering proves true, making the end of a matter better than its beginning.

Day before dawning, never asks:
Am I good enough?, but with freeness
of speech, hymns the
sky.

Night before shining, never asks:
Do I have what it takes?, but inspired of
courage, lets its light shine before
men.

The sun before setting, never ruminates:
What if, what if?, but purely by virtue
of its nature, is
surpassing.

The moon before sleeping, never
struggles with insomnia, but trusting
in the circadian rhythm, always
finds its
rest.



Janessa Graham is a Christian poet and writer from New York. She holds a Master of Arts in psychology and works as an Advanced CASAC counselor helping people who cope with substance use/co-occurring mental health disorders with seeking treatment. As a result, her work focuses on spirituality, faith, instilling hope, spreading love, promoting empathy, facilitating compassion, and giving a voice to those who've been marginalized and devalued.



Photo by Faizi Ali: Pexels.com

She Teaches Me the Fruits of the Spirit by John Grey

She initiates me into
the sacred orchard of the unfamiliar.
“Try the rambutan,” she whispers,
but be careful of the spines.
“It tastes like a grape,” she says,
but even grapes carry their own parable.

She peels the golden-skinned abiu,
reveals flesh like light split in two.
“This one must be eaten immediately,” she says.
“Its sweetness is fleeting.”
My body is not designed for urgency.
But I obey with a deep bite.

Love, like fruit, ripens in its own time,
is offered with grace,
and placed upon the altar of my table.
Once accepting of their origin
I am ready to partake
of what is given to me.



John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in Midnight Mind, Trampoline and Flights. Latest books, Bittersweet, Subject Matters and Between Two Fires are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in Levitate, White Wall Review and Willow Review.



Photo by Amoria Made: Pexels.com

That Old Piano in the Corner by John Grey

They are dead to the world,
those 88 keys.
Between them all
they signify nothing.
Watch them sleep,
white, black,
side by side,
no desires, no destinies.

But go ahead, wake them
Upset their iron dreams.
Disrupt their cold rigidity.
Place your fingers lightly
on those 88 somnolent levers
and begin.

Let those keys rise up
from years of monotony,
with clear notes, chords,
like great souls released
from a graveyard of polished wood.

Send their too long dormant message
out across this vacuous world.
Have them know that, but for your song,
they are nothing but makeshift coasters.
Remember, music put itself in their hands.
But they have none.
You do.



Photo by Ylanite Koppens: Pexels.com

Strawberries by Robert Harlow

Giving you strawberries
late in the Spring
when they are at their best
in the northeast—

placing them on a book
on the nightstand beside your side
of the bed before you have woken
because love is the tale that begins

all over again each day
written with each touch
each look each word each thought
each breath each moment

if it's any good that is
and why not make it that way
because it's so much better
than everything else ever invented

that can be shared
except strawberries—
these ones that will be here
when you open your eyes



Robert Harlow finds himself snow-deep in the nether regions of New York State. His poems appear in Soul Poetry, Poetry Northwest, RHINO, and elsewhere. He is the author of Places Near and Far and W/Reckless Love. And he has a cat who ignores him. Except at mealtimes.



Photo by Mariya Muschard: Pexels.com

On the Other Hand by Robert Harlow

The latest ice age is finally over.
At least I think it is.
Early April in upstate New York
always has its surprises.

One of them shows up so often,
it seems that it must be a requirement.
So I shouldn't be surprised
when snow returns as a reminder

that one shouldn't believe Spring
has settled in. Brief snow squalls
often blizzard the landscape,
vanishing the earliest shoots

struggling to pretty up the garden.
Yes, forsythia has finally yellowed
along the drive. Red-wing blackbirds
dot the lawn. But don't look down

in the gulley because down there,
tightly packed against the base
of the giant, unbudded oak, you'll see snow,
a bit discolored, stubbornly holding on,

refusing (for a little while longer)
to give in—reminding me there are still
days to go before flung-open windows
will allow sweet-scented lilacs

to fill the house so I can inhale
the warming air and kiss the snow
goodbye.



Photo by Eva Bronzini: Pexels.com

Harvesting by Robert Harlow

Even though it's not time yet,
I think about, and see her
as she will be

gently moving the leaves aside,
to find the red hidden in green,
as she bends over tomatoes.

Lightly brushing off the garden soil,
she puts them in
a small, blue, plastic pail.

Each careful touch
a caress, praise,
a form of reassurance,

or just thank you.
When she has all she needs,
she'll straighten up, turn

towards me, then walk over,
showing me everything she holds
in the gift of her hands.



Photo by Adobe Firefly AI

The Rhetorical Lends an Ear by Colin James

Two young marrieds, binocular clad
evidently not birdwatchers,
patrol a room catatonic with plants
peering through and as green as
homage to the aspidistra.
They watch their neighbor's house.
An older man, retiree
is mowing his lawn unfashionably.
He wears a kilt of worsted wool
red plaid in yellow squares.
He visits every New Years
comes back still quite drunk
wanders around his property.
He could fill a rowboat with eccentricity,
occasionally lifting his kilt to water flora.
This summer's sunflowers will
grow a little less taller than once
was considered desirable.



Colin James has several chapbooks of poems, Dreams Of The Really Annoying from Writers Knight Press and A Thoroughness Not Deprived Of Absurdity from Pisces's Porch Press and book of poems, Resisting Probability, from Sagging Meniscus Press.



Photo by HOANG LONG: Pexels.com

High-Wire Apprentice by Nancy K. Jentsch

Last year I learned to weave
a basket, first wetting the wood
so it could be bent, always
making sure its finer face
would be in sight. The basket
grew higher, the rounded corners
my constant challenge—a tightrope
walk hoping for even tension.

This year perhaps I will try
to sew a poem, glean words
that shine with many meanings,
baste them in rows that feature
their finery. Lines seamed
to lines need at times
to navigate bends, find balance
on thread-thin ropes.



Nancy K. Jentsch's poetry has appeared recently or is forthcoming in Amethyst Review, Feed the Holy, Kentucky Monthly Magazine and Still: The Journal and her collection Between the Rows debuted in 2022 (Shanti Arts). A historic home in rural northern Kentucky and the three generations of family that live on adjoining properties there afford her a bounty of inspiration for her writing. More information is available on her website: <https://jentsch8.wixsite.com/my-site>.



Photo by Steward Masweneng: Pexels.com

Respite by Nancy K. Jentsch

Cross the creek with me
on what we call the Goat Bridge,
made and remade from scraps.

It still leads to a pasture
but the goats are long outnumbered
by hens and their guardian

roosters, crowing amidst
unharmonious odors. The trees,
walnuts mostly, grow with a mind

to increase the cool dampness
of this place year by year.
It's where I can linger despite

the day's sizzling conflicts, slow
my pulse before trudging, egg
basket in hand, to the coops.

From there, eggs issue some extra
cash, bubble when beaten
in my vintage Pyrex bowls,

make quiche and *Spätzle*—
our table's staples
in the age of tariffs.

Feed the Baby
by Susan Jero



Susan Jero is a photography enthusiast. She has long admired the beauty God put in the natural world and has often tried to capture that beauty in pictures. Only after her kids graduated has she been able to learn photography more deeply. Most of her photos are taken either in her back yard or on long hikes with her husband. Susan shoots with a Fujifilm X-T5.

Honeybee on Crocus
by Susan Jero



House Wren
by Susan Jero



Rainy Day Iris
by Susan Jero





Photo by Kseniya Budko: Pexels.com

We Rise by Mahathi Kadhirselman

We lay by the coast, water tickling our feet, like a mother's feathered touch. Seven years after school, seven years after a fairytale. Endings aren't always happy, but they are beautiful, stitched as they are with memories. We don't talk much, yet our silence speaks louder than words.

We'd once planned to be business partners in a flower shop, back in third grade. Our dreams were like the horizon—too far to chase, yet too beautiful to stop gazing at.

"Maybe growing up is just a long series of goodbyes," she says, her voice clear even against the cries of the wind.

It feels less like growing though, more like being pulled away from safe havens, childhood promises, the soft corners of life. We rise, dusting off the sand. Tomorrow we'll pay bills, work, and die in the middle of a thousand unfinished dreams.



Mahathi Kadhirselman is a student and budding writer who creates prose poetry rich in imagery and emotional resonance. Her work explores themes of resilience and beauty, offering readers a sense of connection and reflection.



Photo by Jeffry Surianto: Pexels.com

Moth Migration by Cecilia Kennedy

Looming shadows of moths covered the windows at night the last few weeks I was pregnant with you. To me, they were an omen. I'd just watched *The Mothman Prophecies*, and I was afraid I'd invited trouble into my house. As I saw it, the moths were a warning—and it wasn't a bridge over the Ohio River I needed to worry about. It was you. I worried that somehow you wouldn't survive.

And it almost happened that way, when you mysteriously bled and bled, born eight months, not nine, into my pregnancy. I don't know what you saw that day when they took you in an ambulance to the next hospital, but the doctors told me pieces of the story, with a far-away look in their eyes that tells me you may have flown away on moths' wings but were carried back down on the wings of angels.

#

You are three months away from graduating from college. You stand tall in the kitchen, your eyes bright and wide, but just a hint of a shrug in the shoulders has told me you're uncertain. Who wouldn't be? I am, too. But I've learned to trust along the way, and you will, too. You tell me about your research projects and plans—your worries about friends who may be turning on you, a running theme since kindergarten—your health and sensei's death. He was your first teacher outside of school, from whom you learned discipline, and he built a family of followers. You shined with every kata, progressing from belt to belt—and then, changing out your karate bag for a swim bag—and a passion for the butterfly. How I loved to watch you go, arms exchanged for wings to splash.

#

In my kitchen, you waver between what if it doesn't work out and I'll find my way. So do I. And then you tell me you had another horrible, sleepless night. A moth had followed you in on your swim bag, right at the front door of our house. I haven't seen moths since we'd moved, but somehow, one found you. My heart stops when you tell me this. The moth is back, but I want to change the story.

I tell you to look it up. What does it mean? What does the symbol of the moth signify? It means what all the animal signs and symbols mean on the internet: change, new direction—all positive. I'll take it.

You are on the brink of change, and the moth is at the door—literally at the threshold. I'm still here, waiting on the universe to tell me what to do next. I'll probably never feel settled, until you are, but my job is to settle into the uncertainty and learn to love it and all the gray spaces in between. I suspect that's how it'll be for you, too.

Those many nights ago, when the moths first appeared, they showed as white against the moonlight, beating their wings on the window, their shadows gray. You slipped in between them and held the door open. It's your time now; go ahead and let them in.



Cecilia Kennedy (she/her) taught Spanish and English composition and literature in Ohio for 20 years before moving to Washington state in 2016. She has two short-story collections: Twenty-Four-Hour Shift: Dark Tales from on and off the Clock (DarkWinter Press) and The Places We Haunt (Baxter House Editions).



Photo by Lorenzo Manera: Pexels.com

When We Talk About Our Mother by Laurie Kuntz

~for Robyne

All that sets us apart drifts,
kites in a gentle wind colliding,
and then the pull of the string,
blood and memories
join us like marrow in a bone--
There is no more anger
we come together,
and remember a woman
teaching us to be gentle
to be the thread that meets
the eye of a needle
to be the world we promised her,
to be the other name she gave us:
Sisters.



Laurie Kuntz is a four time Pushcart Prize nominee and two time Best of the Net Nominee. In 2024, she won a Pushcart Prize. She published seven books of poetry. Her latest book published in 2025 is Balance, published by Moonstone Arts Center. In 2026, her 8th book, Shelter In Place will be published by Shanti Arts Press. Her themes come from working with Southeast Asian refugees, living as an expatriate in Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Brazil, and raising a husband and son. Visit her at: <https://lauriekuntz.myportfolio.com/home-1>



Photo by Sjarhei Nester: Pexels.com

where the river keeps its promises by David Anson Lee

the river behind town
moves the way old music moves:
slow
patient
inevitable.

children skip stones
across its silver skin.

each stone writes a brief sentence
on the water
before disappearing.

my grandmother used to sit here
with a jar of iced tea
and stories folded into her voice.

she said rivers are honest things.

they never pretend to stay
yet somehow
they are always here.

i did not understand then.

but today
watching the current carry
a drifting leaf
beyond the bend,

i realize

some promises
are not about staying.

some promises
are simply about

continuing.



David Anson Lee is a physician, philosopher, and poet born on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. His poetry has appeared in journals including The Scarred Tree, Braided Way, Eunoia Review, Ink Sweat & Tears, Silver Birch Press, and The Orchards. He lives and writes in Texas.



Photo by Peter de Vink: Pexels.com

she brushes the soil from her palms
and studies the quiet garden.

“because,” she says gently,
“after my husband died
i needed something

that remembered
how to turn
toward the light.”

the woman who teaches sunflowers about light by David Anson Lee

each spring
the woman next door kneels in the dirt
with the patience of rain.

she presses seeds into the soil
as if tucking children into sleep.

her hands smell of earth
and peppermint soap.

she never explains
why she plants so many sunflowers.

she only smiles
the way people do
when they have survived something.

by july
their tall yellow faces
turn slowly toward the sun

like a choir
learning the shape of praise.

bees wander through them
drowsy with pollen.

one evening i finally ask.

why sunflowers?



Photo by Santa Atte: Pexels.com

the orchard where my father still breathes by David Anson Lee

the orchard leans toward autumn
as if listening for a story
it once told the wind.

apples loosen from their stems
like quiet confessions
dropping into grass.

the air smells of earth
and the cinnamon breath of leaves
slowly becoming soil.

my father used to walk these rows
with a ladder on his shoulder
and a pocketknife that opened
like a second sunrise.

he would slice an apple
and hand me half:
its white flesh bright
as a small moon.

"taste that," he said once.
"that's what patience tastes like."

now the trees stand older,
their branches bent
like the backs of thoughtful men.

i pick one apple
warm from afternoon sun
and bite.

the sweetness is still there:
a quiet inheritance
passed from root
to hand
to mouth.

for a moment
the wind moves through the branches

and the orchard
breathes
his name.



the small, stubborn holiness of morning
by David Anson Lee

morning arrives quietly
like a letter slipped under the door.

light spreads across the kitchen table
where yesterday's worries
still sit in their chairs.

coffee rises in steam:
a small cloud of forgiveness.

outside
a sparrow argues with the wind
and wins.

the newspaper lies folded
full of its heavy stories,

yet the sun keeps rising anyway
as if hope were stubborn
as if joy were a habit of the sky.

i open the window.

somewhere a dog barks.
someone laughs.
a screen door closes.

the world,
despite everything,
begins again.

and this simple fact
feels like something

almost holy.



Photo by Finn: Unsplash.com

Seashells and Broken Bottles by DS Maolalai

it's always the people
we haven't seen lately
we talk about when you're around.
what we grew up with is most
of what we still have in common. people
we'd no longer recognize—
but who doesn't wonder, right? brian,
the elegant pothead. padraig,
the idiot drunk. the girls
we're no longer in love with.
the girl that you clearly still are.
you've been in paris and belgium
variously ten years or more. I've been married
three and in dublin. our conversation varies
but doesn't change,
much like the tide
on the scalloping sand
alongside the coast road
on the flat clontarf
waterfront, which moves seashells
and broken open bottles
around but doesn't ever replace them.



DS Maolalai has been described by one editor as "a cosmopolitan poet" and another as "prolific, bordering on incontinent". His work has been nominated fourteen times for BOTN, eleven for the Pushcart and once for the Forward Prize, and released in three collections; "Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden" (Encircle Press, 2016), "Sad Havoc Among the Birds" (Turas Press, 2019) and "Noble Rot" (Turas Press, 2022)



Photo by Kelly: Pexels.com

**If dreams are to be held
Then what of nightmares
by Bill Marable**

Vivid visions vanished by sudden reality
Sweat soaked sheets tangled, unkempt

Eyes searching frantically for familiar
Breathing nears natural normal

No sign of the demons that chased
me out of sleep's comfort
on a broken winged bird, cascading
down endless darkness

My Nightmare ain't no dream deferred
It is slumber snatched as suddenly as
wild fire withers wheat away



Bill Marable, is President of the Griot Collective of West Tennessee, a poetry workshop in his home town of Jackson, Tennessee. His poetry has appeared in the Skinny Poetry Journal, The Pierian Journal, Black Fire This Time Vol. 1., and most recently Merge Literary Magazine ISSUE #4, CELEBRATING BLACK MEN: Our Icons, Ancestors, Family Members and Mentors.

Fountain of Life
by Betsy Mars



*Betsy Mars is a prize-winning poet, photographer, and an editor at Gyroscope Review. Her poetry is widely available online and in print. Her photos have appeared in various journals, and one was selected as a prompt for the Rattle Ekphrastic Challenge. Betsy has two published chapbooks, *Alinea*, and *In the Muddle of the Night*, co-authored with Alan Walowitz. Additionally, through her publishing venture (Kingly Street Press) she created two anthologies, *Unsheathed: 24 Contemporary Poets Take Up the Knife and Floored*. A full-length book, *Rue Obscure*, is forthcoming from Sheila-Na-Gig Editions in mid-2026.*

Green Energy
by Betsy Mars



A Bright Spot
by Betsy Mars



New Beginnings
by Betsy Mars

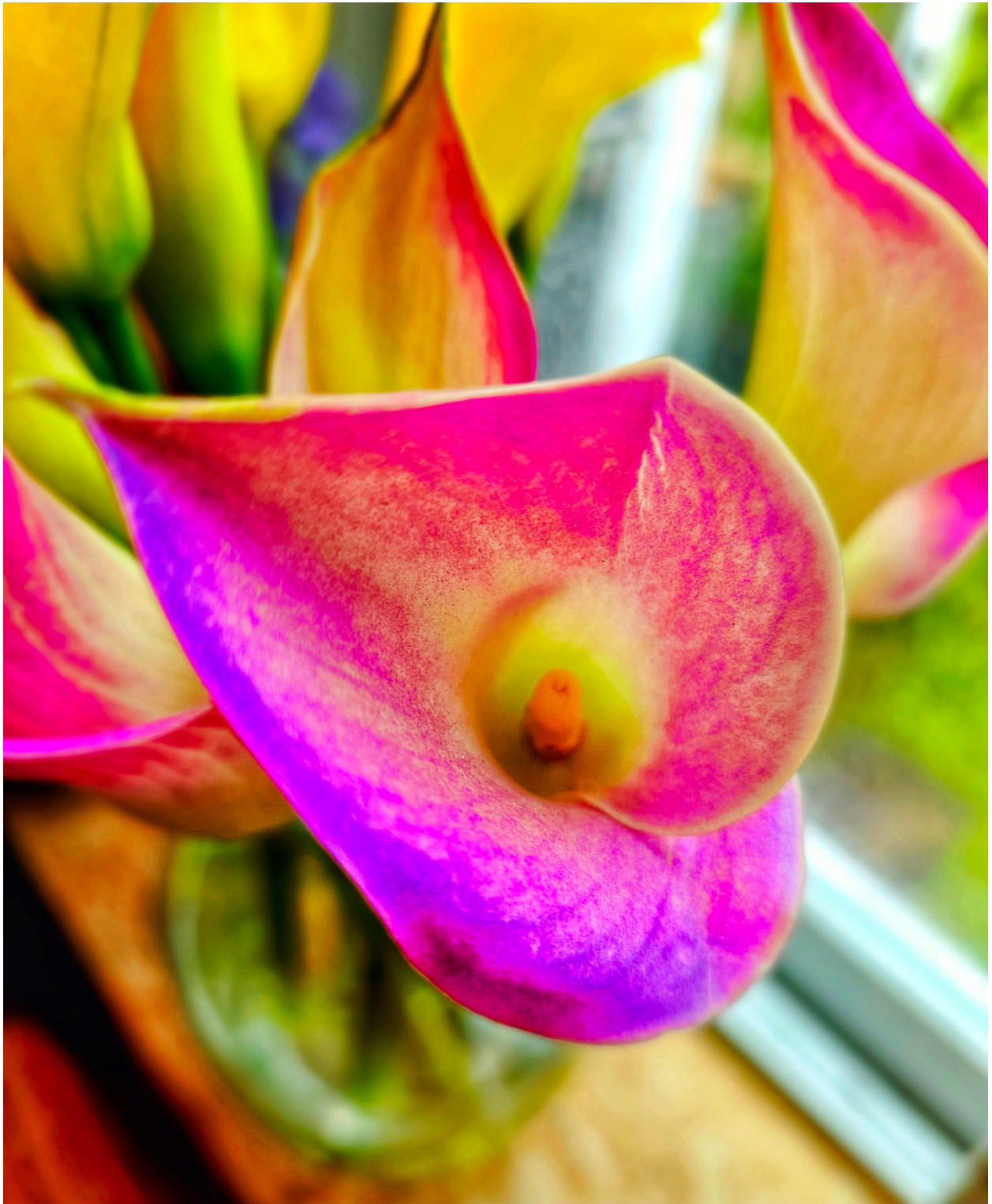




Photo by Sarah Hall: Pexels.com

The Root of All Blues by Aura Martin

Centos from *The Sentence: A Novel* by Louise Erdrich & *frank: sonnets* by Diane Seuss

The leather knuckles of milkweed were pushing from the earth. Dark hemlocks and pine were tipped with tiny tender green needles. Thoughts were barging around in my skull. I can't rest, can't get no relief from fragments of a life that come at me like pages in a flipbook. Who wants to be soft? I don't.

The sheltered blue door opened into a sweetgrass-smelling, scuffed-up eight-hundred-square-foot space filled with books. I've encountered the exoskeleton of a book I wrote or poem or word I passionately laid upon the page, the passion's gone, the word looms, ambered, hunched, uncanny, dead-eyed. My heart. Where's the melody to remedy the melody, the remedy to remedy the remedy?

There was a gliding shuffle. Her light-heeled, quiet step. The material she'd worn was always of the sort that made slight noises - silk or nylon jackets, quilted this time of year.

Hi, Mom.

Why, after all, be bothered by a ghost?

My mother. Age had broadened her face and nose, plumped up her cheeks, grayed her hair, and given her a general air of tolerance.

I've got a question, I said, once she'd settled in a chair.

Okay. *What's on your mind?*

Ghosts bring elegies and epitaphs, but also signs and wonders. What comes next? I want to know.

I was hungry and tired and alone. I floated I flew I fell to Earth. I crawled to the cold road pleading for help, humbled yet, queen? I was making a fatal mistake, that's the poem, but went through it anyway, that's the music. So what if I ended up dead or crazy.

Did you know the dead fall in love better than the living cuz nothing left to lose? The root of all blues, she said, her mouth full, a tear in her eye. But I had love. Always had.

Did I consume my life in bitter mouthfuls? For weeks on end I'm stuck in this prison made of paper and ink. Even the molecule I allowed myself to feel of our last goodbye made me scream. Literature is dangerous business, the entrapment of form in poetry, plot in fiction, can be claustrophobic to a person like me. Now and then I'm in the mood but then the mood doesn't bloom.

Sweetie, she whispered to me, leaning down, breath a perfume. Just live, just live, and I'll be there for you. If there are poems, let them come. Stained, tainted, human.



Aura Martin is a Missouri writer and is the author of the full-length poetry collection, Butterflies Over Flame (ELJ Editions), the chapbook, Those Embroidered Suns (Lazy Adventurer Publishing) and the micro-chapbook, Thumbprint Lizards (Maverick Duck Press). Aura's work has appeared in The Lumiere Review, Kissing Dynamite Poetry, perhappened mag, and elsewhere. In her free time, Aura likes to go on road trips, arrange flowers, and powerlift.



Photo courtesy of Claire Matturro

Wayne, My Brother, and Me by Claire Matturro

In the sepia tints of an old snapshot, my cousin Wayne holds worn leather reins as a saddled pony stands before my brother with his new Kodak Brownie. It's an old photograph, found decades later, in a box as Wayne's new widow sorts through his things. In it I am a small girl with pigtails, Wayne and my brother barely nine. We are probably shivering as bleak Alabama winter cuts through our meager coats, stinging our skin under rough corduroy.

bare from the season
gaunt trees offer no windbreak—
clouds like ghosts trounce sun

A wink of a smile crosses Wayne's round face while I stand calm as a child who trusts the comforts to come. Even the pony, known to bite, poses as if he understands the moment needs to last for us. After the snap of the camera, my brother feeds him crab apples taken from a barrel in the pump house.

roiling skies stampede
rain begins to batter us—
Wayne gives me his hat

After we shelter the pony in a pine plank barn, we race inside a red brick house where our grandmother gives us weak coffee splashed with homemade whisky to ward off cold and sniffles. We eat teacakes that smell like nutmeg and taste of butter. Our adults gather on the horsehide covered chairs and couch to murmur among themselves, glancing our way only often enough to keep us from sneaking more whisky and coffee.

Wayne, my brother, and I fall in a circle near the fireplace and play dominoes, tipsy from whiskey and our own company, fingers greasy with butter, our faces blushed with warmth and comfort.

Outside, sleet begins
a cold rattle of wet gray—
safe and warm we play

Decades later, we gather to offer Wayne's ashes to the pasture where the picture was taken, and my brother offers the eulogy, saying, "he was the closest thing to a brother I ever had."



A former appellate attorney, Claire Hamner Matturro penned some quirky legal thrillers published by HarperCollins and other novels published by Red Adept Publishing. Her poetry appears in Salvation South, SLANT, Lascaux Review, ONE ART, Eclectica Magazine, and others. She is an associate editor at Southern Literary Review and lives in Florida with her husband and their bossy black cat.



Photo by Diana: Pexels.com

Can I Wish on the First Ladybug by Catherine McGuire

Or the first apple blossom, its half-opened umbrella,
pink-washed ivory cup? First swelling iris bud,
the new shadows of leaves at dawn?

Stars are awesome, but distant beyond ken;
this new ladybug's red cap, still spotless
creeps along the bronzed edge
of the rose leaf—proof
that spring isn't teasing,
that snows didn't presage a new Ice Age.

Every year I'm less certain of spring,
of myself. I catch my wound-up waiting,
slowly release it; my wish
is for spring's unfurling
to be my own.



*Catherine McGuire is a retired art therapist, writer and artist with a deep concern for our planet's future. She spent ten years as therapist in secure facilities, until disabled by illness. She has five decades of published poetry, six poetry chapbooks, a full-length poetry book, *Elegy for the 21st Century* (FutureCycle Press), an SF novel, *Lifeline* and book of short stories, *The Dream Hunt and Other Tales* (Founders House Publishing). Find her at www.cathymcguire.com.*

I Made You a Kite
by Catherine McGuire



Nature Hums
by Catherine McGuire



Hope is a Bird
by Catherine McGuire



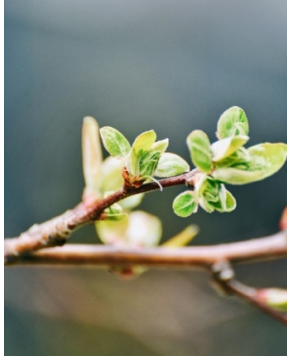


Photo by Anastasiya Ratsa: Pexels.com

When I Was New by Joan McNerney

When I was new
and the world was new.

So many roads to wander
under a cerulean sky.
Forbidden fruits to savor,
forbidden lips to taste.

Full of promise, flowers
budding on the vine.
Their perfume covering
my fingertips.

I hurried through each day
alive with my songs.
The moon rose just for me and
stars burned just for me

Every morning brought
sunshine to my window.
Another day filled with wonder
waiting at my doorstep.

Spring was greener then.
When I was new
and the world was new.



Joan McNerney's poetry is published worldwide in over forty countries in numerous literary magazines. Four Best of the Net nominations have been awarded to her. Her books The Muse in Miniature, Love Poems for Michael I & II, At Work and Light & Shadow are all available at amazon.com



Photo by Jay's Photography: Pexels.com

Dunworley by Marla Dial Moore

I had no connection to that place
(just a tourist, out for a drive)
but I see it now, as I did then—

across a span of years,
as though I had always known it:
This rocky cliff, those eroding spires
half-submerged, half-revealed
through salty spray, and between them
that wide smooth stretch of sand,
pristine as a promised hereafter.

Who can say how long I stood
wordless as you shouted and sang
your stories: Your triumphs
over land and stone,
your tumbling passions,
your tender sighs in the quiet
inlets lying hidden down below.

I stand here, listening still,
enmeshed in this selkie song.
No one teaches these rhythms
of moon-tide, of star-wind;
no one explains what courses
through me, near as my pulse
and beyond the far horizon.

This language was lost
to the trade-winds, exchanged
for empire, for exile. But here,
on this outcrop of sandstone
and shale, as sunlight dances
through foaming spray,
I hear your voices:

Tongues of silver flame
that burn but do not consume.



Marla Dial Moore is a recovering journalist and dog lover who lives in San Antonio, Texas with her hairy four-footed friend, Grady. Her work has appeared in Merion West, The Metaworker, The Quasar Review, Rat's Ass Review, When the River Speaks, the San Antonio Review and other publications.



Photo by Pascal Ingelrest: Pexels.com

A Fine Gift by W. Barrett Munn

From a trip to Europe, my brother
brought me a gift: Blackcurrant
throat lozenges in a gold-colored tin
hand made in Switzerland.

At Arlington, rows of white markers
roll and dip like forming breakers
in a sea's onslaught
of an impossible amount of death.
Standing like a lighthouse on rocks,
a chapel guards the entrance
to the sea of buried heroes. It's seen
every war since the nation's birth.
Old brick and timbers—A bell
tolls the long story.

I use the lozenges sparingly.
There won't be any more.
They taste like blackcurrant jam.
They taste like good times.



W. Barrett Munn is a graduate of The Institute of Children's Literature. His poetry has been selected for publication over 80 times in print journals and online, including in Awakenings Review, Soul Poetry, Prose and Arts Magazine, Sequoia Speaks, 5-7-5 Haiku, and many more. He lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma.



Photo by Sachith Hettigodage: Pexel.com

Trailing the Kite is a Tail by W. Barrett Munn

*old woman
with a new name:
government issue*

My wife wants a pair of moccasins for her birthday. She's part Cherokee, one sixteenth. Her name is on a First Family certificate that hangs on the wall in our bedroom, proof that her great grandmother, Still Stands Looking, later renamed Susie Still, walked the Trail of Tears.

*moccasin prints
along an unknown path—
casinos*

Her name is also on the Cherokee rolls for Indian Health visits, and like any decent Cherokee woman of 75, she doesn't let food go to waste; a buttered sweet roll won't last a minute near her.

*the last buffalo
driven off by the white man
in his van*

The moccasins I bought have sunflowers on the toes. Who knows if my Cherokee bride will like them. She's grown a little forgetful, and gets angry a lot more easily.

*tepees
where smoke slowly rises ...
twilight*



Photo by Lisa from Pexels: Pexels.com

Pushing Past the Pines by Dave Nash

My son smiles wide, slightly askance at three slim pine needles raised between his thumb and forefinger. I capture a cluster of photos on my iPhone. James is framed by a row of towering pines standing at attention as they have for perhaps a century. We are supposed to be at soccer practice. That practice had seemed so important when I was driving to the park with visions of him dribbling a ball, passing it to his newfound friends, and wearing himself out through endless whistle-driven drills. It wasn't the first time I thought about him going to soccer. My college roommate often said kids who don't play Little League baseball grow up maladjusted. He said so, referencing a roommate we shared freshman year, someone who drifted away and we never saw again, someone we wrote off as a self-centered user. I agreed with my roommate a little, but I thought soccer was better than baseball: less individualistic, more communal, socially aware.

His soccer practice goes on while we walk. It's held at a park in a tonier town than we live in. Through athletics, I had often climbed the social ladder a few rungs. That's how I met my roommate. I thought my son might do the same. By the time he was four, James couldn't wait for me to get home so he could run outside and kick the ball around the backyard, sometimes passing it back to me after a lot of prompting. My wife suggested we sign him up for a kiddie soccer club.

But whatever affinity James had for kicking a ball around our backyard vanished at the park. He grew frustrated, stopped listening, and was on the verge of an all-out tantrum. I didn't want to be that dad any more than I wanted James to be that kid.

So we are walking through the woods.

The soccer fields gave way to rolling acres of woods with well-worn hiking trails. I took him by the hand through the entrance, a wrought iron gate separating the shared parking lot from the mystery of the woods. It didn't take long before we entered the alley of pines that guarded the deeper delights of the woods. I had to stop to capture this moment with my phone.

The pines feel primeval. I feel as if we are stepping into Sherwood Forest, Robin Hood and Little John walking in the shadows. After the photo, we walk to a hillside clearing swaying with the long dry stems of wildflowers holding on through early fall. Below lies a ravine and on the other side South Mountain's cobalt ridge snakes along the horizon from those affluent suburbs of Millburn to the edge of Newark's crumbling concrete.

We are like two hobbits escaping their shire, standing in awe at the mountain's ridge, but James hasn't been initiated into the rites of Tolkien yet, so I wonder what his association is. Though he won't tell me, I know he's not just seeing trees and sky. Something shared between us compels us to keep going.

We hike into a hardwood forest. The kind I knew well from childhood hikes across the Northeast: New Jersey, the Adirondacks, Maine. In my mind I'm back at summer camp with my friends, my best adolescence days, romping through the forest, ascending one peak after another. Then as now we got out to come together. I'm reminded that I probably wouldn't have made it to college without summer camp, the bonds, the resilience, the idea that there's a bigger something out there.

James points at a trail map, ready to find out where the orange line crossed the dotted boundary. I try to get a few more pictures. Today we hike in South Mountain's shadow, tomorrow we summit Mount Katahdin...at least in my daydreams.

Instead of picking up new social connections or bagging peaks, my son scoops up a massive sycamore leaf. The leaf that looks like a broader silhouette of its iconic maple leaf cousin, was bronzed under the October sun. He plays by hiding his grinning face behind the tri-pointed leaves pretending I can't see him.

We've escaped passing and dribbling drills by walking through towering pines, fading fields, and amber leaves leading our imaginations to the whims of the woods. It's not until James asks for water that I realize we didn't go in with a plan or provision. We probably should turn around.

We are almost there, James, you can have a Twix in a minute. I spot the opening in the woods where our minivan is parked. James runs through the wrought iron gate straight to the passenger side. We arrive home exhausted, pine needles clinging to our clothes, our daydreams hanging on the branches.

Maybe neither my roommate nor I had it right. Maybe it's not the kids who skip Little League or kiddie soccer who need adjusting. Maybe it's the ones who never touch the needles, who never push past the understory in search of a fallen sycamore leaf, or who never trace their forefinger over a laminated trail map. The ones who never answer the call of the woods, who never escape the boundaries of a soccer field and will never foster memories that will root them like the pines.



Dave Nash writes stories about masculinity's complexities. His work appears in places like The South Florida Poetry Journal, Bulb Culture Collective, and The Hooghly Review. You can learn more at <https://davenashwrites.substack.com>.



Photo by ROMAN ODINTSOV: Pexels.com

Heart Locket by John Ollado

Heart locket, but inside,
mac n' cheese:

My brother says
fast food causes grease fires in his chest.
Now he puts good things in his heart
like. . .salad. And fortune cookies. Not the cookies,
just the fortune.

I was the golden child once upon a time,
but now it feels like my brain is fried.
My brother and his wife cook dinner every night.
I don't tell them I've eaten out by the time I come home,
but bless them; they've anointed my share of pasta
with fresh olive oil.



John Ollado is an emerging poet from Las Vegas, Nevada. A graduate from Nevada State University's Speech Therapy program, he works with the English as a Second Language classes in his library district by day. By night, he writes in the hopes of becoming a part of his district's shelves. His work has also appeared in Kindergarten Mag.



Photo by Nadezhda Moryak: Pexels.com

The Crystal Caverns of Plato's Allegory by John Ollado

Deep in the recesses of the valleys of your mind,
and deeper still past the dancing shadows,
water trickles from a stalactite—drip, drip.
In the pitch of the allegory lies a certain comfort
found amidst the blue glow of the deep-sea skates
and the sheen of crystals, smooth to the touch.

Even you can see your reflection through the crystals.
It is refracted, smeared, muddied
by the sleeping moss and the yawning dark,
until you are the shadow dancing on the walls.

Away from sunlight's reach, then.
In your hurt, you steal away, alone.
And when the puppet master pulls the strings on your shadow,
you run deeper—
deeper into the crystal caverns
until you are surrounded by your reflections,
twisted, and you run deeper still, shrieking,
haunted by your shadow,
until you twist your ankle and everywhere you look,
there you are on the ground, writhing.



Photo by cottonbro studio: Pexels.com

On the Verge by Charles A. Perrone

Should I go to sleep to honor
the goddesses of slumber
whose names I do not recall
but consider to be fair?

or

Should I fall asleep to recognize
the demons of dreams who weave
oneiric tapestries as crafty nightmares
or as full-fledged fantasy fulfillments?

or

Should I just go ahead and nod off
in consideration of the intellectual
nodes and modes of silent cognition
in active moments of live coaching?



Charles A. Perrone: Born in the Empire State, New York. Grew up in the Golden State, California. Last studied in the Lone Star State, Texas. Worked in the Sunshine State, Florida. Returned to the West Coast to enjoy retirement between the seashore and the redwoods. His published poetry spans the Americas and the oceans, as well as the Internet, having appeared in books and journals (print and digital) in USA, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, UK, and Australia. Three of his chapbooks were published by moriapoeetry and his whole volume is Designs: Blueprints of Floorplans of a Provisional Residence (cyberwit, 2022).

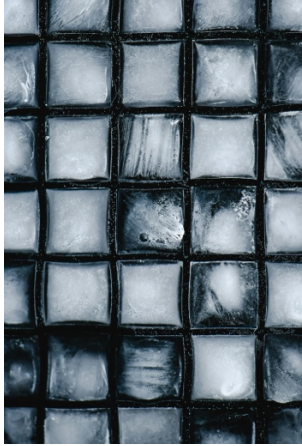


Photo by Eva Bronzini: Pexels.com

Ice Cube by Patricia Peterson

Remember what it was to be fresh from the faucet,
those first silvered hours, the messiness, the spilling over,
the spark of warmth next to cool metal.
So many urges. Such fun. Even after the great door
closed and the light went out there was still excitement —
affection in that long, dark time, even now,
sprung from the tray, waiting in a glass,
diminishing.



Patricia is an editor who works at being a student of the piano. She has been published in Poetry Ireland Review, Muse-Pie Press, Naugatuck River Review, New England Review, and Front Porch.



Photo by Dimitris Mourousiadis: Pexels.com

First Sight of the Aegean by Patricia Peterson

He was here. He must have seen beyond
the grey-blue mountains and mist
to where ten years ago and centuries before
ships headed out to Troy.

He must have seen that dark opening—
a shepherd's cave, the welcoming beaches
the meaty lure of it all?

Light, when it comes,
streams down to touch
the sea so tenderly
this time.



Amaryllis
by Linda Vigen Phillips

gifted
a homely
dormant bulb

settled on a sunny
windowsill

forgotten until
an explosion
of red trumpets

naked ladies
brazen, triumphant
swaggering

atop blushing
erect stem

oh, Greek nymph
they say you created
this flower
with your blood

for love of Alteo
the shepherd
not easily swayed

transfuse me
with your determined
persistence

the sparkle
of success



Linda Vigen Phillips is an award-winning author of two Young Adult verse novels, Crazy and Behind These Hands, and an adult poetry chapbook, Thoughts at Crossings. Her poems have appeared in numerous literary journals including The Texas Review, The California Quarterly, The Christian Century, and The Clay Jar and more. She and her husband live in Savannah, GA.



Photo by Pavel Danilyuk: Pexels.com

Twinning by Linda Vigen Phillips

blood when there should be none

you are just settling in when I
first hear from you, implanting yourselves
on the inside room
of motherhood

I imagine your divergent dialogue
let's call her, let's not
the message slips out
by God's declaration
and a doctor's confirmation

there it is, evidence of two

I cannot see the Yin and Yang
of you, spooning like puppies
duelers squaring off back-to-back

I cannot feel the power of attract
and repel, the polar red and blue
magnetic north and south
physics that will define you

I cannot guess tone or temperament
as first suckle will reveal, two peas
in a pod or two broken molds

Now I treasure the duality of opposites
constancy of complements, how
you balance each other
like two wings of a bird

twins when there might not have been one



Photo by David Clode: Unsplash.com

Tayabak by Noelle Grace O. Pico

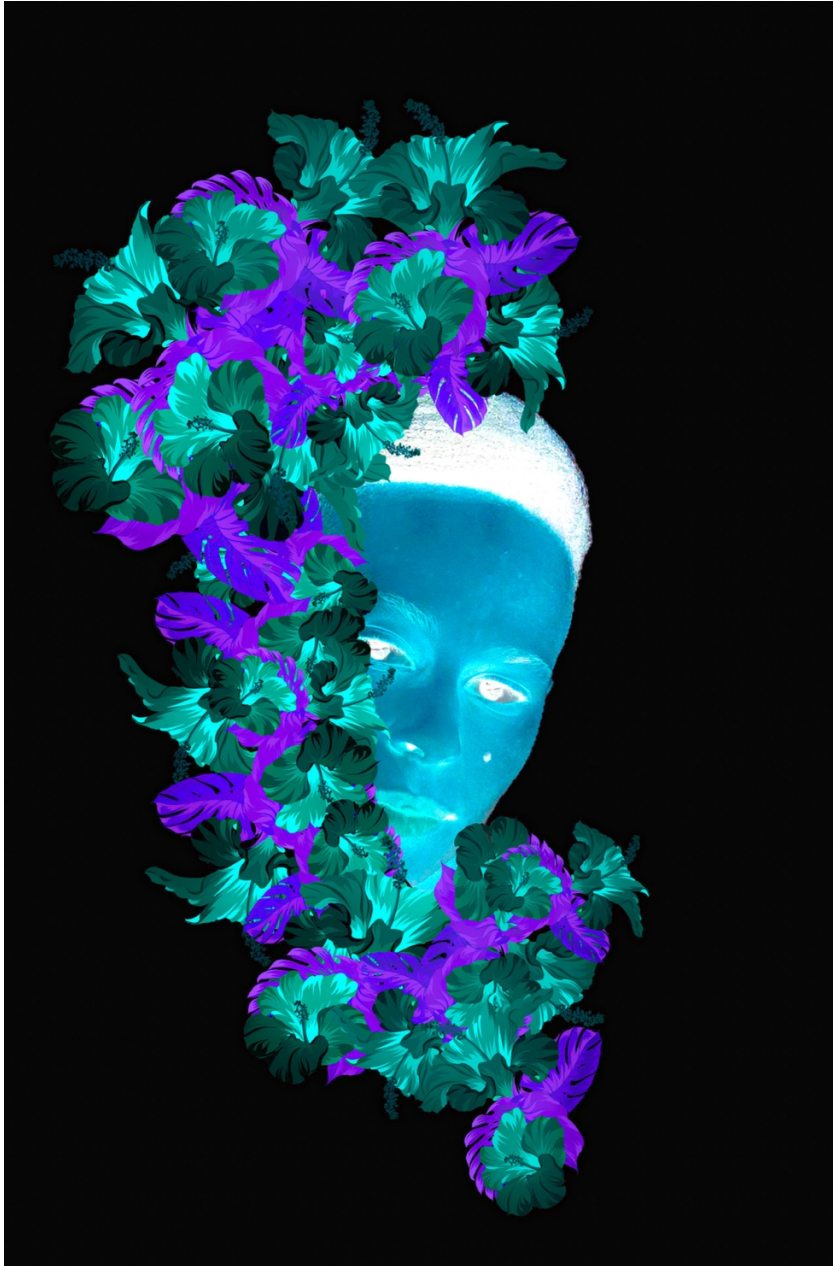
It is easy
to love a soft thing,
to take it apart piece
by piece; petals
spent carelessly until
all that is left is
a shivering core.

Let me be
the vine, instead;
my crown of blue-jade hooks
bearing the weight of
relief. Where only
a patient hand
earns the tenderness
I choose
to tuck away.



Noelle Grace O. Pico is a writer, musician, and professional creative based in Pasig, Metro Manila. She views the poetic line as choreography, using cadence and sound to manage the emotional narrative in an act of dialogue. Noey—as most folks call her—shares poetry sketches, musings on a range of topics alongside photography, plus the antics of her overgrown-soot-sprite-of-a-cat, Jinx, on both Instagram & Threads @thenoeychu.

See Me See You
by Tammy Pieterse



Tammy is a South African visual artist, creative writer and photographer. Enthusiastic, passionate and opinionated, she uses each day to make sense of a world that often feels like it does not want to be understood. She's obsessed with sunsets, tattoos and metaphors. She daydreams more than most, and wouldn't have it any other way. So far, her poetry has been published in Blue Daisies, Sunday Morning at the River, decurated, Colortag Magazine, Eclipse Zine, Pile Press & Querencia Press, with artwork published in Talent Spark Magazine & Stuck in Notes to name a few. Instagram: @tammy.pieterse



Photo by Adobe Firefly AI

The Pearl by Cynthia Pitman

Were I to lie down
and rest my head
on the pastel grass
in the cool of the night—
stretch out my arms—
open my hands—

would dew drip-drop
into my palm,
curl into a pure pearl,
seep into my skin,
travel through my veins
to soften a vitriolic heart?

Would the world
begin anew
cure my hostility,
animosity—
allow me to luxuriate
in my own pearlescence?



Cynthia Pitman is the author of four poetry collections: The White Room, Blood Orange, Breathe, and Broken. Her work has been published in Soul Poetry, Prose, and Art Magazine, Amethyst Review, The Ekphrastic Review, Literary Yard, Heart of Flesh, Spirit Fire Review, Third Wednesday (One Sentence Poem finalist), Saw Palm: Florida Literature and Art (Pushcart Prize nominee), and other journals, and in Vita Brevis Press anthologies Pain and Renewal, Brought to Sight & Swept Away, Nothing Divine Dies, and What is All This Sweet Work?



Photo by Kulbir: Pexels.com

Coup by Kenneth Pobo

Under heaps of frozen snow,
an Easter lily
plans a coup against winter.

It's too soon for this revolt
to become visible—imperious
winter will be shown the door

of bright sun and warming days.
For weeks I've stood behind
the window watching winter

rough up clouds and make
the sky cry gray tears. A dreary
sameness seeps under

my skin, sneaks into my eyes.
An Easter lily demands
my rescue, joined by crocuses

and aconites. It's coming soon.
I faintly hear the Earth
beginning to rumble.



Kenneth Pobo (he/him) is the author of thirty-three chapbooks and fifteen full-length collections. Recent books include Bend of Quiet (Blue Light Press), At The Window, Silence (Fernwood Press) and It Gets Dark So Soon Now (Broken Tribe Press). His work has appeared in Asheville Poetry Review, North Dakota Quarterly, Amsterdam Quarterly, Nimrod, Mudfish, Hawaii Review, and elsewhere.



Photo by Charles Parker: Pexels.com

No Suitable Fit by Susan L. Pollet

Tight squeeze, loose fit
Unsuited, sticking out
Ill matched, out of place
Not belonging in any space

Outsider, misfit
Incompatible, different
Isolated, awkward
Outlier, even outcast
For a lifetime it can last

Excluded, incongruous
Eccentric, maverick
Nonconformist, oddball
Square peg in a round hole
You have heard them all

Yet for some that is exactly
how they need and want to be
No suitable fit, no other way
to be truly free

There should be room for everyone
to have their own way to see



Susan L. Pollet is a visual artist and author whose works have appeared in multiple art shows and literary publications. She studied at the New York Art Students League, has been a member since 2018, and resides in NYC.

Bunny Mischief
by Susan L. Pollet





Photo by cottonbro studio: Pexels.com

Forgetting by Estill Pollock

weak sunlight on the carpet, chalky stripes like ghosts
dissolving into geometries
paler still freemasonry shadows nod and wink

she remembers blood ties
and geography, but not in perfect order the names of flowers
blank, her mind a thinning thread

the envelope, addressed to no one
in particular, empty her signature with condolences to someone
she once knew, still folded on the table

there are flowers and there are birds
and recipes and old adventures, and there is anonymity
that keeps itself to itself

she sits in a hollow of sunlight and names
the ghosts stitches of breath, a servitude of zero
in the shapeless light



Estill Pollock was born in Kentucky, but has lived in England for many years. The pamphlet Metaphysical Graffiti was published in England by Highcliff Press in the 1990s, followed by Constructing the Human from Poetry Salzburg in 2001. Between 2005-2011 the book cycle Relic Environments Trilogy was published by Cinnamon Press (Wales). A collaboration with Broadstone Books in Kentucky provided the impetus for his recent poetry series, Cartographic Projections of a Sphere. With Mudlark, he has published the e-chapbook editions, And Then, Working Title and One Hundred Views of the Mountain.



Photo by Lloyd Douglas: Pexels.com

Sometimes, there's a fogbow by Vivian Faith Prescott

Once, I opened my eyes
and a dream slipped into
daylight beside me.

I sat in the morning
looking through the dream
at the bare alder trees,

at the shiver of waves on sea.
As the dream quieted down,
the island's ancient shape

returned out from the blue hues
and the neighbor's house
blinked awake.

Now what was that dream,
I thought, as it stretched
across the sea in front of me,

became a lull of wave,
a hush of spring, wind-falling
through my fingertips.

I tried my best to catch it,
to recall it, but I could not.
The dream rolled away

with a whorl of fog, and arched
like a fogbow across the strait,
linking island to island,
linking my mind to infinity.



Vivian Faith Prescott was born and raised in Wrangell, Kaachxana.áak'w, a small island in Southeastern Alaska. She writes and thrives at her fishcamp on the land of the Shtax'heen Kwáan. She's the author of fourteen books, including poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. She's also a co-founder and co-facilitator of two Alaskan writers' groups: Blue Canoe Writers and the Drumlin Poets.



Photo by Denniz Futralan: Pexels.com

Fishcamp Communion by Vivian Faith Prescott

Fishcamp is where we untangle stories
and where we drink in the rainforest morning

and sip dark, boat coffee, where we wipe rain
from plastic chairs and arrange them

to look out over the beach. We are primed
and story-ready now.

I've brought you here, friend or stranger,
to sit with my father and I and eat crispy

hooligan fish, bite their heads off,
eat the salty tail, then guts and all.

Next to the porch railing, my father
leans over the beach, holds up the hooligan,

lifting the fish up to the blue spring sky,
as if it's an offering to the rainforest gods,

and admires his fishwork, while the dogs
beside him drool. He regards the little fish—

the process: salt brine perfected,
the chopped alder, the hot fire, the fish

slow-smoked in the smokehouse. This taste
drifts out a story from his memory—

an old story rich with a net full of silver
smelt fish, a river breakup, slabs of glacier

ice floating past the net, past his children,
including me, with river-silt in our boots.

And every time we eat this fish, drink from
this glacier-fed river, we recall this holy act—

proclaim a family and island unbroken—
father, children, a river, a net, fish,

and for us, in this moment, time wafts
backward like smoke curling from
the smokehouse, drifting through the trees.



Photo by Zeeshaan Shabbir: Pexels.com

After the Parting by Prahi Rajput

there are not many things that match
the quiet ways of drifting
in specks—we note
the arrival, the collection,
the settlement, the scatter
and finally, the dispersal
we take stock
we mean livestock—
the origin, the collective,
the allotment, the segregation
and finally, the dissemination
blowing, pulling in a compelling manner of speaking,
pursuit as first bid
upon a queue, unwavering feet
to wavering hands, course of a command & misery cannot feel
in so many, we gotta systemize who should stand, who should somersault
to our area-wise distribution scheme, particles on our furniture,
Where is your place & where is the proof?



Prahi Rajput lives in Lucknow, India. Their work has appeared/is forthcoming in Muse India, The Chakkar, Voidspace Zine, t'ART, Gulmohur Quarterly, Blood+Honey, Don't Submit, and elsewhere. Their Instagram handle is: @theplatypussies



Photo by Michael C. Roberts

Beauty of the Sonoran Desert by Michael C. Roberts

The desert is often dismissed as plain, uninspiring, and lacking inherent beauty. Yet imaginative beauty can be found everywhere. Walks in the Sonoran Desert renew one's spirit, even fill with an awe for discovering and recording its natural beauty. My mind becomes open to the myriad curiosities in the desert. I disengage from the world, get away from demands and screens, and focus on the sounds, smells, and sights. In the early morning, I greet the sunrise and walk before the snakes emerge seeking the warming sun and basking on the rocks or twisting across the trail. Along the trail, I hear wind rustling bushes, percolating through cactus spines, and carrying earthy smells, a bit herbal and floral around foliage, and creosote around trees. Humbled by the vastness and ecological diversity, I appreciate the landscape features and plants, their details, patterns, and textures. The gnarly trees and desiccated cactus ribs provide intrigue along the trail.

The night has cooled the desert air, then the sun greets me with warmth, and the rays highlight statuesque cacti and weathered trees. Desert sunrises over mountains and across valley floors transform plants and clouds, saturating color, and accenting shadows across the terrain. As I turn to the rising sun, I mutter a "wow!" and make several shots hoping the intense light does not overwhelm the camera sensors as strongly as my eyes are affected by the direct aim.

I crouch to study a bird's nest in what appear to be soft clusters of white yellow needles on the teddy bear or jumping chollas and then photograph the spindly stalks and spines using the rising sun as backlight. A cactus wren flies from cholla to ground and back again making a nest. I learn quickly that these jumping chollas are not soft as cotton and do seem to jump to latch on with ferocity. This teddy bear cactus is not huggable, yet worthy of multiple images. Their beauty is best appreciated from longer distances and in a photograph.

I am intrigued by the gnarly trees and desiccated cactus skeletons. The internal networks of the various cacti are intricate frames, almost filigree, but sturdy woody bones. These bones bleach in the sun after decay and sloughing of the skin. Miniature cacti sprouting close-by assures continuity. The desert evokes the cycle of birth, mortality, rebirth, and new growth. I photograph trees and snags on my desert walks, standing in rugged resilience along the trail, in the washes, and on the mountain ridges. These wizened and twisted forms have been shaped by fluctuations in heat and cold, humidity and aridity, wind, wildfires, and lightning strikes. Beauty is in aging and seasoning. As a senior human, I appreciate the changing of nature over time.

We often attribute human characteristics to saguaros because of their stances and branches. The arms resemble a person waving against intruders, a parent holding a child, a group of family members coming home from the store with arms full

of parcels, athletes raising their arms in sports triumph, or drooping in despair. Saguaros have hands with fingers pointing to the sky, some maybe spiritually gesturing to praise a creator, another cluster raises a finger in insult.

The larger cacti often seem to watch me on the trail, I understand why they are titled "Sentinels of the Desert." When approached, their shadows appear to block the trail. I raise my camera to capture the feeling. A passing park ranger suggests that I should not anthropomorphize the saguaros... "because they don't like it." I walk a half mile down the trail before I get her joke. Still, I speak to each one with a formality their posture demands. I can leave a distressing thought with them and they unflinchingly accept. I am often lighter when I return to the trail head. Although saguaros have been present in this area for thousands of years, changes in patterns of heat, drought, and monsoon have affected their health and endurance. Saguaros can live for over a century, but climate change is harming their health and survival. I hope my photographs and those of others faithfully record their special place in the environment.

Flowers on cacti are often unexpected because they appear overnight and remain open only for a day. Saguaro flowers are white with yellow centers, prickly pear cactus present primrose-yellow blooms, barrel cactus flowers are pinkish, and jumping cholla blossoms may range from yellow to magenta colors. Some are bold assertions while some flowers appear to hide in the protection of the spiky cactus.

The desert inhabitants blend into their surroundings, the brown-grey coyotes and rabbits, the rock-patterned snakes, and the mottling of the sparrows, wrens, Gambel's Quail, and doves. The birds especially use their natural camouflage to meld with the background and are not intimidated by cactus needles. The tiny ground squirrels hightail across the trail while the roadrunner is often too swift for a photograph.

The intensity of the blue sky over the desert provides a contrast with the light and shadow on the ground. When clouds appear they often add drama to the desert forms and patterns through shadows undulating across the hillside. In the midday sun, shadows shorten and wash out the landscapes, so I turn to details closer to ground, such as flowers, fallen ribs, gnarly branches and trunks, and new growth.

The trails circle around mountain slopes and cross flat terrain interrupted by dry washes. I anticipate the mystery of what may be around a curve in the trail or at the top of a switchback. Many desert trails offer solitude and tranquility, but not all. I stay off trails where all-terrain vehicles or 4-wheelers race up and down the hills with dust in their wake. I occasionally encounter runners and walkers with earbuds listening to the news radio or downloaded music. They appear only focused on the dusty trail right in front of them, not hearing the sounds carried in the desert wind or from the birds. They may not see the beauty displayed around them. That is their experience. Voices sometimes carry across valleys, some hikers talk of ailments or relationships, others argue politics to pass the time.

I slow down to photograph along the path to see and hear nature more fully, experiencing more than just through a viewfinder. The desert evokes a reverence, recognizing the cultural value of saguaros by Native Americans and their ancestors. I am awed by the beauty of the Sonoran Desert.



Michael C. Roberts as a psychology professor published extensively in scientific journals and books. Now retired and seeking to be creative, he has placed numerous photographs in literary outlets such as Burningword, Soul Poetry, Prose & Art, FERAL, Cholla Needles, Cantos, and Right Hand Pointing, and written pieces in The Human Touch, Invisible City Literary Journal, A Story in 100 Words, Story Quilt, and Silly Goose. Inspired by Edgar Lee Masters, he has written a "Spoon River Redux" that likely will never be published, but writing it helped pass the time during the pandemic.

Jumping Cholla on the Ocotillo Trail
by Michael C. Roberts



Sunrise on the Desert Tortoise Trail
by Michael C. Roberts



Trail Directions Saguaro on the Apache Wash Loop Trail
by Michael C. Roberts





Photo by Ray Bilcliff: Pexels.com

Morning Meditation by Judith Rosner

I never tire of morning's view of the pond—
morrow light dances off the mist as it lifts.
The sepia-colored trees mirrored in the water,
like a polaroid picture come to life,
turn green as the sun rises.

Birds of all feather line up on the spit of land
now exposed in the pond—no rain in weeks—
as they carry out their morning ablutions.
A heron lifts a graceful neck to check the shore
as limpkins let loose their woeful wail.

I appreciate Monet's passion for painting
the many variations of his Giverny garden's
water lily strewn pond—my pond, too, sits
at the center of poems penned
as it speaks to me each morning.



Judith Rosner is the author of the poetry collection Paradigm Shift (Kelsay Books) and her work appears in a number of literary journals including HerWords, The City Key, The Jewish Literary Journal, The Naugatuck River Review, Soul Poetry, Prose and Arts, and in print and online anthologies. She holds a Ph.D. in Sociology and retired first from a career as college professor, and then from her firm The Rosner Group, a training and consulting company that specialized in leadership development and executive coaching. She and her husband split their time between Sarasota, Florida and New York City.



Photo by Mauro Morandini: Pexels.com

Swiss Missive **by Judith Rosner**

I spotted her—the edelweiss
of story and song poking out
stark white from between rocks
on the mountain's side high in the Alps.

Holding tight, rooted in the thin slice
of dirt between boulders
she conveyed hope, courage,
the need to stay strong

in our world of
raised fists
twisted truths
peace at bay.

I listened hard
to what she had to say.



Photo by Philipp Deus: Pexels.com

Flow **by Judith Rosner**

My lines run like a river,
ricochet off rocks,
carve a course
cobbled in language
tight with meaning.

I gather strength
as my stanzas swell,
slip over the edge,
then splash—showering
me with surprise.

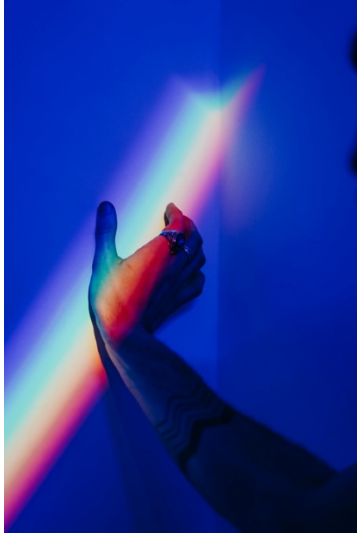


Photo by cottonbro studio: Pexels.com

Waves, Waves & Particles by Ed Ruzicka

If I could come to you uncut
I could speak to you
in our first language
the language of light
With all its teeming
prisms, motes,
sines and cosines.
But I would probably
Have to be dead again
to speak with
the mouth of a star.
At least you would
Catch what we have been
Trying to get at all along.



Ed Ruzicka's fifth full-length book of poetry, "The Invention of Dreams," will be available in stores by April. Ed's poems have appeared in the Atlanta Review, the Chicago Literary Review, Rattle, Canary and many others. His poems have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. Ed is president of the Poetry Society of Louisiana and lives under live oak branches in Baton Rouge, Louisiana with his wife, Renee.



Photo by Talal Hakim: Pexels.com

Tempos by Ed Ruzicka

Do you ever get right enough
while stepping through
ice-flamed dawns
on the long shore of indifference
Where seagulls argue for scraps
and shells, to match the rise
and fall of your inhalations
against bells and sighs of the tide?
When you bring your bright Adidas,
warm socks, down to the compass
of that shore, does your injured
stricken heart match its rhythm
To relentless waves that beat and shatter
Venus in the dark wreck of the sea?



Photo by John-Mark Smith: Pexels.com

About Rodin and Less by Ed Ruzicka

Though Shakespeare wrote one-hundred-fifty plus
sweet sonnets, the common mind remains
a dull, impatient thing that revels in its irks.
Ta-ta-taps the foot in line. Sets legs to spring and whir
Under tables with the sort of crazed oscillations
katydids drum up in the dark
whenever someone across the table
goes on and on about their this and that.
The brain keeps inside it
a hammer and a chisel
that chip away at the block of day
the way Rodin knew how
To chisel away so much
Leave so much more.



Photo by RDNE Stock project: Pexels.com

About My Mother by Linda Leedy Schneider

I visit my Mother
and feed her words from the old days:
"Yes, Daddy was good
and brought us all chocolate candy,
but he did always love you best.
You, Mother, in your flower-laden hats,
were the prettiest Mother at Sibley School.
No, your brain is fine. It's perfect.
You are healthy.
I am Linda. Remember?
Momma, I am not Lilac or Lily.
I am Linda.
I am Linda"



Linda Leedy Schneider, a psychotherapist in private practice and poetry mentor who was awarded The Contemporary American Poetry Prize by Chicago Poetry, has written six collections of poetry including Through My Window: Poetry of a Psychotherapist and edited two poetry anthologies, Poems From 84th Street and Mentor's Bouquet. Linda founded and leads The Manhattan Writing Workshop. She also teaches poetry workshops for The International Women's Writing Guild's Summer Conferences. Linda believes in the healing power of writing and reading poetry.



Photo by Pixabay: Pexels.com

The Psalm of Eternity by Nolo Segundo

I sing to that I AM,
Beyond time itself,
I sing to the Lord of All,
the Lord of All Worlds
The Lord of Light,
The Father of my soul.

Answer me, O Lord—
This burden of sleep
Lies heavy—I know
I am dreaming, a long
Long dream, but I can
Not rouse my soul. . .
It sleeps and sleeps
And I can but wait
And wait and wait. . .



Nolo Segundo, pen name of retired teacher [America, Japan, Taiwan, Cambodia] L.J. Carber, 78, became a published poet in his 8th decade in over 240 literary journals in 21 countries and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, thrice for Best of the Net. Cyberwit.net has published 3 collections in softcover: THE ENORMITY OF EXISTENCE; OF ETHER AND EARTH; and SOUL SONGS. These titles reflect an awareness gained over 50 years ago when he had an NDE whilst nearly drowning in a Vermont river: that he has—is—a consciousness predating birth and surviving death, what poets since Plato have called the soul.



Photo by Wesley Davi: Pexels.com

Some Are Not Meant For This World by Nolo Segundo

They cannot fit, they cannot go along,
And the reasons vary—pride, fear, or
Even love never tempered by time,
Illness of the heart or mind, or simply
Bad, bad luck: life throws them away
Until they throw life away....

She was one of the gentle ones,
The unlucky ones—a flower child
Who missed her time, an era she
Might have thrived in, free, alive,
Unencumbered by family ties....

If she had come of age in the 60's,
She might have lived into her 90's.
But lost and afraid in a cold world
Not of her making, with her bird-
Like heart breaking, she ate her
Last hoarded apple, then lay down
In the house abandoned of hope
To sleep and sleep and sleep until
She awakened safe in heaven's lap.



Photo by Sữ Minh: Pexels.com

After the Matinee by Marilyn B. Skinner

La Scene Café & Bar, Geary Street, San Francisco

The Noe Valley couple,
reliable season subscribers,
critique the director's choices
over estate chardonnay
while a busboy scoops lunchtime risotto
into a takeout container
for the homeless man by the entrance
and an elderly divorcee
in a black silk dress from the eighties
pulls herself onto the bar stool
to nurse her single Manhattan,
trusting one of the waitstaff
will walk her back afterward
to her sixth-floor studio condo
around the corner on Taylor.



Marilyn B. Skinner is a recovering academic. Poetry was a calling she first answered as an undergraduate. She was a founding member of the editorial board of Fragments, the student literary journal of Seattle University, where she was also an instructor in creative writing. After receiving her doctorate in Classics, she taught classical Greek and Latin and ancient social history at several colleges and universities. For many years her writing addressed a mainly scholarly audience. Since retiring from the academic world, she has returned to poetry.



Photo by Mihailo Jovicevic: Pexels.com

Aristeia by Marilyn B. Skinner

Trash talk for openers:

thin sibilants, staccato buzz
counterpoint a low warble
ascending to yowl.

On sunburnt patio bricks
the many-ringed rattler, erect,
engages a slick ginger tom,
destroyer of packrats. Impasse.

Snake remover descends,
a bored superhero,
his intervention disrespecting both.



Photo by Chris F: Pexels.com

Four Haiku by Joshua St. Claire

violet altostratus
the weeping willow
begins

*

rosa canina
cirrus clouds
are all that remain

*

cloud drama
just like that
the peonies slip away

*

at the speed
of the stratocumulus sky
toadflax

*



Joshua St. Claire is an accountant from a small town in Pennsylvania who works as a financial director for a non-profit. His haiku and related poetry have been published broadly including in Frogpond, Modern Haiku, The Heron's Nest, and Soul Poetry, Prose & Arts Magazine.



Photo by Ralph: Pexels.com

Spring is Dandelion Abundance by Sara Stegen

Dandelion-strewn fields
yellows set off against the green
dandelions often seem
the only flowers in our fields
they thrive in regularly mown
places in the sun
farmers ploughing and mowing
blue and green tractors
blossoms on trees
neon leaves
trees stepping out into the sun
thatched roofs dry out
the winter wet
spring is dandelions.



Sara Stegen is a Dutch poet and non-fiction author who writes about land, family, nature, and neurodivergence. Home is a boulder-clay ridge in the northern Netherlands where her bike shed contains 8 bicycles and where she is working on a memoir about apples and autism and her first poetry collection.



Photo by David Orsborne: Pexels.com

Spring allergies **by Sara Stegen**

Tulips, crocuses, snowdrops,
hyacinths, narcissi,
pollen-rich catkins on trees.
Spring is here,
bringing out my first sneeze.



Photo by Adobe Firefly AI

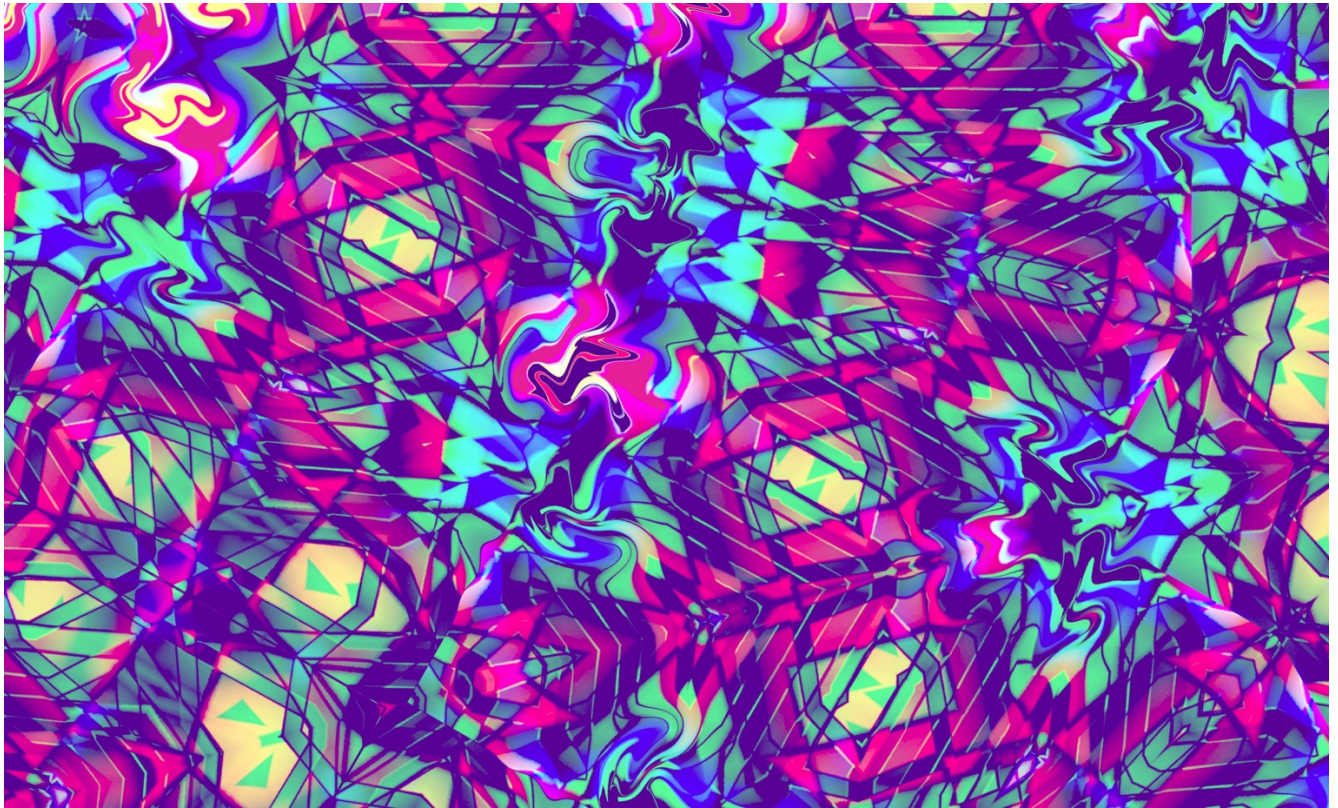
Sandwich by Ralph Skip Stevens

In that wrinkled trench coat
Lt. Columbo stands in the suspect's kitchen,
opens a jar of peanut butter.
His sergeant seems a bit confused.
Where does a peanut butter sandwich
fit into a murder investigation?
He says nothing, though, until Columbo
takes a box of raisins and starts
inserting them one by one.
The idea of raisins in peanut butter strains
the sergeant's credulity, but
Columbo has based a successful career
on the art of looking stupid
and has the usual cryptic answer.
I'm already won over by the trench coat,
the slurry of a New York accent,
but the sandwich alone would have done it.
The only cooking I ever saw my father do
was make a raisin-and-peanut-butter sandwich,
meticulously placing the tiny fruit
into its soft brown bed. I still see
the look of concentration as he did this,
humming "Won't you come home Bill Bailey" under his breath,
like Columbo, a man who never thought
that what he did
needed any explanation.



Retired from a career teaching college English, Ralph "Skip" Stevens lives in Ellsworth, Maine. He has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and is the author of the collections At Bunker Cove, Things Haven't Been the Same, Water under Snow, Somehow Balanced, and Settled for the Night. He is a regular contributor to the online journal Verse Virtual; his poems have appeared in a variety of publications and on the radio programs, The Writer's Almanac and Poems from Here. He can be contacted at thismansart@gmail.com or at 207.479.5843 or on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/ralph.stevens.146/>

Packages Sent to a Vacant Address
Edward Michael Supranowicz



Edward Michael Supranowicz is the grandson of Irish and Lithuanian/Ukrainian immigrants. He grew up on a small farm in Appalachia. He has a grad background in painting and printmaking. Some of his artwork has recently or will soon appear in Fish Food, Streetlight, Another Chicago Magazine, Door Is A Jar, The Phoenix, and The Harvard Advocate. Edward is also a published poet who has had over 700 poems published and been nominated for the Pushcart Prize multiple times.



Photo by Pixabay: Pexels.com

Spring Chorus by Mark Thompson

cloud sweat
mixes with Winter dust

petals emerge
on thin green stems

through loamy layers
of autumn debris

and a spring peeper
joins the chorus.



Mark Thompson is a former sales engineer—now amateur musician, an environmental sculptor and a very private poet until his poems were recently published in *Soul Poetry, Prose & Arts Magazine*. He was introduced to the mystery of poetry by Mrs. Johnson, English Literature in 1962. Currently, he is exploring collaborative writing to create a better poem.

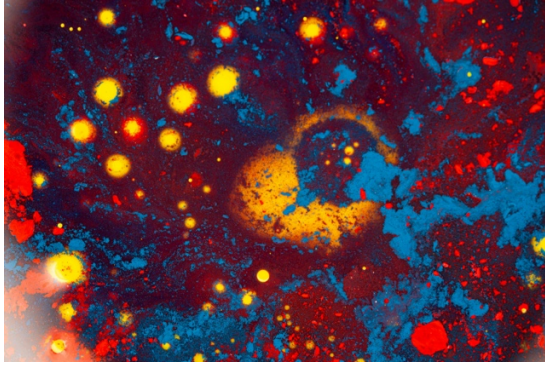


Photo by Merlin Lightpainting: Pexels.com

Understandable? Maybe not, but relatable nonetheless by Ken Tomaro

I feel like a shape, folded in half. With antlers and
streetlight eyes. My jaw melts away.

I am a seeing eye human. A harmonica in the wind. A
bee's antennae.

A vibrational hum flowing through my body. The
frequency by which I exist. The same frequency that led
up to the big bang. And then there I was.



Ken Tomaro is the self-proclaimed Poet Laureate of the Cleveland sewer system, whose work reflects everyday life with depression. His poetry has appeared in several online and print journals and explores the common themes we all experience. Sometimes blunt, often dark, but always grounded in reality.



Photo by Ivan Pergasi: Unsplash.com

Old Swing Set by Lorri Ventura

Ketchup-tinged fast food wrappers drift aimlessly
across the deserted playground,
skipping over gray mounds of snow
stubbornly representing the dregs of winter.

The centerpiece of the derelict park
is a rust-ridden swing set.
Its heyday past, still it stands, overlooked by children
who favor colorful, universal design play yards.

Splintered seats sway temptingly in the breeze,
while creaking chains and galvanized steel monkey bars
struggle to gleam in the sunlight.
The old swing set beckons, unnoticed.

Emboldened by the absence of foot traffic,
crocuses cluster at the slide's base
and around tubular poles,
spring's earliest bounty beautifying the area.

Bordering the broken down swings,
a half-collapsed chain-link fence hosts
an impressively overgrown forsythia
as it generously spreads its blossomed branches.

As the March sun warms a dented slide,
the tired-looking swing set appears
to stand taller,
basking in memories of seasons
serenaded by young laughter.



Lorri Ventura is a retired special education administrator living in Massachusetts. Her debut collection of poetry, Shifting the Mind's Eye, was published in 2024



Photo by @stasideepglam: Unsplash.com

Pond by Alex Rainey Ward

buildings the colors of
plum and autumn leaves
in the lake the city upside-down
i walk beneath the rain-beaded trees and
cold drops shiver down my back
i wish i could speak the language of
bats and dusk and eaves
the language of caravels and
faded flowers
speak a language of despair
like a sharpened tool that
seeks the vein in this
coal mine
a prose that bites its own pelt,
like a dog mad with fleas
bedizened staggering city
along the river and about to
fall in
the night's full of traps and
pitfalls i've set
for myself
ha ha, a black pond
deep as God's eye



Alex Rainey Ward is a poet, novelist and songwriter. He began writing poetry in 1974 when he won an Arbor Day contest. Poetry is his first love then astronomy then dogs. He divides his time between Minneapolis and elsewhere..



Photo by Ulf Schade: Pexels.com

Sepia by Alex Rainey Ward

there was a railroad track leading off towards emptiness
towards the unprecedented
no train ran it
weeds were growing up tall through the ties
that were bleeding beading iridescent oil
obligatory broken glass, the shards transfigured into holy relics
there was a smell of bread, like a promise, like a rising
a smell of bread that floods my memory now and I'm safe
within the breadsmell.
It was before i had an age, or a self
i was new, like a rain pond
my arms could have been butterfly wings and my feet
hooves for all i knew.
How long does it take for a thing to become a "sepia" memory?
A memory as redolent as Ohio childhood river town memories,
grandma Alabama memories?
i think of graveyards, small ones in Alabama
where my ancestors are stirring
they affirm that in death the body becomes one
with the yearning that follows the tracks and
you feel Jesus smiling on you,
becomes one with the rising, the smell of
bread flooding, they affirm that death is a
lucid state, a rare bird that doesn't
fly away.



Photo by Valentina Bondarenko: Pexels.com

Fire Pit Lit by Diane Webster

Abandoned fire pit lit
by morning sun only
as mist rises like smoke
from the lake lapping
at the shore with flames
curling around logs
as stars disappear
in embers extinguished
in the night sky
when ashes remain
like mist lazing
on the lake's veneer.



Diane Webster's work has appeared in North Dakota Quarterly, New English Review, Studio One and other literary magazines. Five micro-chaps have been published by Origami Poetry Press. Diane has been nominated once for Best of the Net and three times for a Pushcart. She was a featured writer in Macrame Literary Journal and WestWard Quarterly. Her website is: www.dianewebster.com

Dreaming
by Renee Williams



Renee Williams received a Master of Arts and Sciences in English from Ohio University in 1991 and retired from teaching at Hocking College in 2019. Her poetry has been published in One Art, The New Verse News, Impspired, Amethyst Review, Silver Birch Press, Red Eft Review, Panoply, Highland Park Poetry, Impostor, Sein and Werden, Bards, Pudding, The Rye Whiskey Review, The Lothlorien Poetry Journal, Of Rust and Glass, Verse-Virtual, and The Muleskinner's Journal, among others. Her photography can be seen on billboards, promotional materials and calendars for the Corolla Wild Horse Fund. Her work has been published by Moss Piglet, Anti-Heroic Chic and New Feathers, as well.

Dune Time
by Renee Williams



Surf Days
by Renee Williams



Who are You Looking At?
by Renee Williams





Photo by Ron Lach: Pexels.com

What Was by Melisa Wrex

Memories can be reeled to the surface by the unlikeliest of baits. For Sarah, today, it was the sulfurous smell of a freshly struck match. From the earliest age, she recalled that the only thing more satisfying than the flame flaring in response to a perfect swipe across the striker, was her father's soft praise. "Atta girl!" he'd mumble through his lips, clutching an unfiltered cigarette.

When she got older, she was certain those Chesterfields would be his demise. Then, she thought it would be the gin. Ultimately it was neither. He relished both until the end, telling anybody who would listen that he died doing what he loved and it wasn't what he loved that did him in.

A Derivative of What Was

can the age recall that sulfurous smell of flame
a girl
until the end



Melisa Wrex writes from the Adirondack Park of upstate New York where she lives with her husband and a variety of woodland creatures. She dabbles in poetry and picture book manuscripts, but her most prolific genre is corporate e-mail.



Photo by Adobe Firefly AI

The Busy Daughter by Huina Zheng

Her makeup was flawless. A navy suit, sharply cut. A Hermès scarf knotted with executive ease.

Her watch caught the light like a blade.

During the five minutes I explained the funeral procedures, her phone buzzed three times.

“Send the contract over.”

“Make them wait until I get there.”

“Activate the backup plan.”

Then she looked up, lashes casting a thin, decisive shadow.

“He abandoned my mother and me the day I was born.”

I kept my professional expression, not letting my eyebrows move.

This was no place for judgment.



Huina Zheng holds an M.A. with Distinction in English Studies and works as a college essay coach. Her creative work has been published in Baltimore Review, Variant Literature, Midway Journal, and other literary journals. She has received multiple honors, including nominations for the Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net, Best Small Fictions, and Best Microfiction. She lives in Guangzhou, China, with her family.



Photo by Arvilla Fee



Robert Harlow

Author Profile: Robert Harlow

1) How would you describe yourself and/or your work in three sentences or less?

Mostly grateful that poems seem to find me and almost always when I have no idea they are about to arrive and make me transcribe them. That is, I never sit down and try to write a poem. Some of them work without my altering them, while others are a bit feisty, and some just decide to give up on me, so I let them.

2) Who has been your biggest supporter and/or inspiration?

My wife, the ceramic artist Nancy Henry. She made me say this, by the way. Seriously, she has a non-poet's eye that tells me whether a poem works or not. Since so many of my poems are about or for her, she is my inspiration. Also, Don Johnson, my first poetry workshop teacher. We have been friends for about fifty years, and his is the voice I always hear when writing. I think I always try to please him by cutting words, lines, stanzas, etc. His ruthlessness makes me a better writer.

3) Where is your favorite place to write?

I have never had a set place where I work at writing. For the past few years I have been more comfortable writing on my laptop, usually sitting in a recliner in the living room. Since I always handwrite first, I only use the laptop for revising. Never wrote a poem from start to finish on a computer. Don't use a smartphone, so that's not in the mix. Old school—pen and a notebook first.

4) If you look back at your writing, when you first began creating, in what ways would you say you have grown or changed?

Learning how to effectively revise has been the most important aspect for me. And trusting that longer poems can still retain qualities that shorter lyric poems have. Fusing the two but making them seamless is the hardest part. I'm still working on that, hoping to succeed someday.

5) If you could choose any place in the world to write for one day, where would you go?

The bedroom of the house where I was raised and lived in until I graduated from college. We lived on a quiet street in a small town in Massachusetts. Although I never wrote a poem there, I remember sitting on the floor, at night, looking out the window to watch snow fall through a nearby streetlight. One late summer night I saw a barefooted woman in a nightgown pass beneath the streetlight. She was the aunt of a friend who lived down the street. I went out to ask her if she was alright. We sat on the front porch of my house and talked for an hour or so and then she went back home to a troubled marriage. There's a poem there but I haven't written it yet. Maybe never will.

6) What advice would you give someone just starting a career as a writer?

Read as much and as often as you can. Poetry as well as fiction. Keep a handbook of grammar and usage near at hand. When I taught at the University at Albany, I offered what I call a writer's Helpful Advice—Read, Listen, Observe, and Write." The letters spell out H. A. R. L. O. W. Which, coincidentally, happens to be the name of someone I greatly admire, especially when I look in the mirror. Which I do often, by the way.

7) Are there any funny stories you'd like to share about your writing career?

The funniest thing that has ever happened to me is becoming a poet. Although I cherish the writing of poetry, I don't take myself seriously and almost always get a chuckle or two after finishing a poem whether it's a serious one or not. I think it's an expression of delight from realizing that what comes out of my head actually is a poem. I'm always amazed when a poem pops out. Creativity is a wonderful gift. Or maybe I just need to go into therapy. Nah, poetry is therapy enough. And a whole lot cheaper.



David Anson Lee

Author Profile: David Anson Lee

1) How would you describe yourself and/or your work in three sentences or less?

I am a physician, philosopher, and poet who writes at the intersection of memory, mortality, and everyday grace. My work seeks quiet moments where ordinary life reveals something enduring beneath it. I try to write poems that feel both intimate and widely human: rooted in image, voice, and emotional clarity.

2) Who has been your biggest supporter and/or inspiration?

My earliest inspirations came from family stories and the resilience I witnessed growing up. In my writing life, I have been especially encouraged by mentors, patients whose lives carry unexpected wisdom, and fellow writers who reminded me that attention itself is a form of care. Much of my inspiration still comes from listening closely to people and places.

3) Where is your favorite place to write?

I tend to write in quiet, early morning spaces: often at a desk near a window where light changes slowly. I also find that travel, hospital call rooms, and waiting spaces carry their own unexpected clarity. I've learned that writing doesn't require perfect conditions, only attention and a moment of stillness.

4) If you look back at your writing when you first began creating, in what ways would you say you have grown or changed?

Earlier writing often tried to explain too much; over time, I've learned to trust silence, image, and suggestion. I now focus more on restraint: allowing emotion to emerge through detail rather than declaration. The work has become less about answering and more about noticing.

5) If you could choose any place in the world to write for one day, where would you go?

I would choose a place where landscape and memory overlap: somewhere like the high plains at dusk or a quiet coastal edge where wind shapes everything slowly. I am drawn to places that feel both ancient and unfinished, where time feels visible in the land itself.

6) What advice would you give to anyone just starting a career as a writer?

Write honestly, even when it feels uncertain or imperfect. Pay attention to small details: what is said, what is left unsaid, what is almost missed. Read widely, but ultimately trust your own voice to develop through patience and repetition rather than urgency.

7) Are there any funny stories you'd like to share about your artistic journey?

Early on, I once left a poem I was revising in a hospital coat pocket, only to find it later folded and stained with coffee after a long shift. I kept it anyway. It became a reminder that writing often arrives in the middle of life, not outside it. Some of my best lines have been written on scraps of paper that were never meant to survive.



Author & Artist Profile: Catherine McGuire

1. How would you describe yourself and/or your work in three sentences or less?

Creativity has been my lifeline, my constant healing process and my guide to the important things in life. I strive to interweave my writing and my art with my social conscience and my spiritual journey. In a fragmented time, I tried to find the links between what I do and where I've ended up, and maybe my process of interweaving can be helpful to others.

2. Who has been your biggest supporter and/or inspiration?

Hard to pick one person, because my life has been a long journey over 70 years and cross country from the East Coast where I was born to the West Coast where I've lived more than half my life...I have been a part of many groups for various lengths of time and so I've had many who have supported and encouraged me. As someone who loves a variety of creative outlets, I remember very often getting the feedback "well if you studied more about X, you could be really good at it" from the people who had specialized, and who wanted to encourage me in various arts and crafts, like miniature making, and quilting, and painting, and in the writing between science fiction and poetry and nonfiction technical writing—even TV scriptwriting! But I always seemed to want the wide variety, I always jump to the next art or craft, so I'm a generalist, and I wouldn't call myself an expert at any of it. For inspiration, again I would say wide variety depending on which art or craft I was immersed in at the time. I've been impressed by the formalist poetry of Marilyn Hacker and Gertrude Schnackenberg, but T.S. Eliot as poet has been a guiding light, and I even paid \$120 to quote a little bit of his four quartets in my science fiction novel *Lifeline* (that's probably more money than I

made in royalties on the book). I grew up reading Mark Twain and wanted to imitate his tongue-in-cheek style. There are so many others that I know I'm forgetting right now!

3. Where is your favorite place to write or create your art?

That one is easy—I love writing outside in my garden, where I can feel hidden away because I can't see any neighbors. Making art is a little more tricky because I usually need a table though I have used the cover of the hot tub from time to time, just to be able to be outside and still make art. When I was younger, I really enjoyed having a portable painting kit, and I would go to various parks and make watercolors. And as photographer, I loved field trips where I could capture new and different images.

4. If you look back at your writing or art when you first began creating, in what ways would you say you have grown or changed?

I would say that since we write what we know, and in my 70 years I have learned so much, my writing now reflects a wider scope and so many more threads are interwoven. I suppose my focus is different now, as I see the horizon and know there's an exit door, and that much of what I'm looking at in the room right now will outlive me. My priorities shift, and what I write about is more about summation and hopefully advice to those after me. Though my artwork is still very spontaneous, I noticed there are images of travelers on a road whose end is out of sight.

5. If you could choose any place in the world to write, draw or paint for one day, where would you go?

It feels impossible to choose just one spot! I have always wanted to go to the Tuscan hills of Italy, because they say the light is unique, and the history just seeps into your bones. But at the same time I would love to go to Ireland, where my roots are, and paint and write about the landscape of my ancestors. I was only there once on my honeymoon, and it just would not do to drag my new husband around to the graveyards and ancestral homesteads, though he did have to put up with a lot of cousins.

6. What advice would you give to anyone just starting a career as a writer or artist?

On one level, that is difficult, because opportunities for sharing our creativity have shifted abruptly in recent years, and I am not at all well-versed in how one gets work out into the world. For example there's all those opportunities with podcast, websites, online groups...And those things have also made major impacts on the "storefront opportunities"—the in-person poetry readings, the actual gallery shows...Yet on another level there are things about creative careers that don't change, which is that you really need to focus on your unique expression. Every time I go to a large bookstore like Powells, I have this anxious feeling that there are already too many books so why would mine be needed? And then when I get into writing, I see that it's different, and I am the only one who can write this. Just as there are billions of flowers in the world and yet your encounter with one single flower can be delightful, memorable and certainly worthwhile, so an individual poem or painting has value, and our job is to do the writing. As TS Eliot once wrote, "For us, there is only the trying, the rest is not our business" (Four Quartets).

7. Are there any funny stories you'd like to share about your artistic journey?

Just as I started my writing career, meaning finally sending poems out to magazines at age 18, I met Isaac Asimov at a Star Trek convention, and he was the first to tell me I should follow my desire to write, and just keep writing. He was invited to sit at the autograph table and asked if I could sit behind him to the side so we could keep chatting. One little boy came up to me with his autograph book, having just gotten signatures from Scotty, Sulu, Chekov, Uhuru, and he pushed his book towards me. I shook my head to say, "I'm not a writer," and he looked so disappointed that I just took the book and signed it, joking that one of these days it might actually be worth something. :-)

On the art side, I remember the first time I had an artist book accepted into a show across the country in Massachusetts, and they sent photographs of them handling the book with white gloves, not letting people touch it and treating it like a precious jewel. I was both amused and a little embarrassed because the book had been created in my damp unfinished basement, with absolutely no white gloves or fancy treatment! I appreciated their respect, but I didn't feel that I was an important enough artist to be treated with white gloves. :-)



Photo by Arvilla Fee

THE END