

# DOOR = JAR



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ISSUE 23

DOOR = JAR

Door Is A Jar  
Issue 23

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Cover Image “Bad Apples”  
by Karen Boissonneault-Gauthier



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**Hiking 2**  
Jeffery Letterly  
Poetry

The DCR pamphlet on hiker safety tips insists  
on layers and bringing essentials, warns  
against confronting wildlife and wandering  
off the blazed trail. But there are other things  
that are left unaddressed — how do you tell yourself  
to keep going when calves ache  
only after a half mile? What do you do  
if every tree reminds you of the work  
you left behind, the car inspection you keep  
forgetting to schedule, the panicked feeling  
when you got lost in a department store  
at the age of six and couldn't see  
over the conglomeration of circular clothing racks?  
If there's a lightning storm, avoid open water.  
Avoid high ground. Avoid open spaces.  
Keep your distance from other people—  
you should be doing that anyway — love  
and attraction can be the most dangerous.  
Adequate preparation is necessary  
for a safe experience.

**Anxiety**  
Brontë Pearson  
Poetry

I am an ever-inflating balloon  
stretching wider and thinner  
from a steady stream of unapologetic air  
bursting through the weak curtains of my lips

A cyclonic pressure with no respect  
And I can't exhale against this force  
so my heart thumps like a heavy stone  
that leaves gashes and bruises in my chest  
and I anticipate my death before I rupture

An obituary of suffering without action

But the combustion never comes  
and my skin becomes so malleable  
yet I cannot shake such malefic worry  
with every bit of me filled so uncomfortably

**Heartache**  
Brontë Pearson  
Poetry

My chest is full of wet muslin cloths,  
a soaking heap of something light  
turned heavier than expected,  
and it's all because my mind  
connected words that did not mean  
what I thought they did, and so  
I disappointed myself by longing  
for a dream that was never real  
because I miss the past  
and bleed in the present  
and want a future that can clot  
my wounds the way I want them,  
but how can I seek control when  
I can't even tame my own sadness?

**Just One Tear**

Brontë Pearson

Poetry

The seeping sad globe  
is cold on my porous sheath  
like a chilled fingertip  
sliding across wrapping paper,  
smooth but catching on wild terrain,  
a world of excess —  
feeling contained but uncontainable —  
slowly slithering until gravity consumes  
it like a hungry phagocyte,  
almost as if my universe  
was never overflowing.

**Never Trust a Salesman**

Brontë Pearson

Poetry

He'll sell you love with a promise  
that your friendship was a sturdy  
foundation despite the empty years  
and that the girl who broke his heart  
faded at the sight of you and all  
your admirable light that made  
accepting your chaos worthwhile  
and he'll stitch himself into the parts  
of you that you hide from the world  
and let your sheltered blood percolate  
at your inviting seams for him  
to lap it up with a hungry tongue  
until you are drained of all he needs  
and he'll kiss you goodbye one last time  
and tell you that he just wasn't ready  
for everything you had to offer.

**Ambient**  
Robert Beveridge  
Poetry

Your body silhouetted in blue glow.  
Wisp of blouse transparent, curves  
in outline. One fingernail traces  
the boundary of your bra, considers  
the lack of matched set below. To kiss  
your shoulder, your throat! You dance  
away, sidestep without motion.  
Ribs compress, constrict, tightened  
muscles beg a drop of rain  
from the Patagonian desert.  
Moistened, they demand the contents  
of flood plains. To kiss your lips,  
read erotic novels with your eyes.  
To be light.

**Audition**  
Robert Beveridge  
Poetry

Eyes front, back arched, no sign  
you are aware the rows of seats  
go back, and back, and back  
further than you have ever seen.  
Leg up, hands thrust into the space  
between the worlds. Your mouth  
forms the words, but your mind  
discusses with itself whether you  
are low on Kona, if you will make  
it to your next appointment, how  
many lionesses can dance on the head  
of John the Baptist (both before  
and after removal). Your clothes  
disheveled, but your coiffure pristine.

**Vocal**  
Robert Beveridge  
Poetry

Smoke and gravel, mixed,  
the room's atmosphere  
and the smell of sandalwood  
incense, tobacco, pine.  
Coffee with cream. Taste  
of tongue, saliva,  
foreign language with a hint  
of lime. The sweet grip,  
the pull of citrus.

**When The White Horse Takes Me Away**

Robert Beveridge

Poetry

the honeybees  
under the porch  
emerge too early  
scavenge for pollen  
in the final days  
of winter  
find nothing  
to sustain them  
look for another  
porch to build  
a new nest

**The Wounded Warrior of East Boston Terrace**

Cyndy Muscatel

Fiction

Sara had a scar under her chin, right at the end where it met the jaw. She'd forgotten about it, but then her granddaughter cracked her chin open. All the blood reminded her of when she was five and jumped off a wall. Like Humpty Dumpty, she'd cracked open — but just her chin.

Isn't it amazing, she thought, how childhood memories remain so intact? She could see the action of The Chin Drama roll in her mind as if it was streaming from Amazon Prime. It happened right after the family moved to their new house. Before, they'd lived in an apartment, and Sara had played all day long with Chi Chi and Linda.

But there were no girls in the new neighborhood — except for the two older Hansen girls up the street. One summer afternoon when her mother sent her upstairs to rest, the girls appeared on the porch outside her room. Sara had been listening to *Helen Trent* and hadn't heard them until they tapped on my window.

"Let us in," they said in unison.

She glanced at her door, then rolled off the bed.

"How did you get up here?" Sara whispered through the small space of window she opened. Her bedroom was on the second floor. Outside was a large deck — a Dutch door opened out to it.

"There's a ladder against the side of the house," Gretchen, who was ten, said. She scratched at the window screen like a cat after a fly.

"Open up your door. We'll come inside and play," Katrina said.

Sara stepped back from the window. The girls seemed like evil wizards, repelling and enticing her at

the same time.

“Come on, come on,” they whispered in unison.  
“Open up, open up.”

She didn’t want to let them in — it would be going behind her mother’s back. Besides, her room would never feel safe again if they roamed through it. Before Sara could make a move, they heard Mother calling her name. The girls scurried from the window, across the deck to the ladder. They clambered over the side of the house and were gone.

One afternoon later that summer, the girls knocked on the door to see if Sara could play. Sara didn’t want to go, but her mother shooed her out the door. They lived on East Boston Terrace, a street that was a circle. Although it was in the heart of Seattle, there were lots of woods around. And a haunted house. It had slid from its foundation and lay in ruins down a ravine. Rumor had it that a baby had been killed and was buried under the huge blocks of broken cement.

The girls started up the street, walking by the Peterson brothers, who were shooting rats with bows and arrows. The biggest brother held one up. Skewered on an arrow, blood ran down its fat body. When it opened its eyes and stared at Sara, she screamed and ran across the street. The other children couldn’t stop laughing.

Further up the block was Mr. Nichol’s house. (He always gave them a nickel on Halloween.) The Hansen girls ran to his driveway and started climbing the retaining wall.

“You’re not supposed to go on other people’s property,” Sara called out.

“Don’t be such a baby,” Gretchen said.

Nimble, she was already at the top, walking its narrow space as if it were a tightrope. Katrina was right behind her.

So, what was Sara to do? She knew it wasn’t right,

but she started to climb the wall. Not as strong as they were, Sara struggled to pull herself up.

As soon as she stood next to her, Gretchen put a hand to her forehead.

“I can’t take it anymore,” she wailed. “Goodbye, cruel world!” With that, she jumped off the wall.

“Goodbye, cruel world,” Katrina, in her turn, yelled. And jumped.

Now Sara was alone at the top of the ledge. She looked down to where they stood. It seemed very far away. But, like a lemming, she cried, “Goodbye, cruel world,” and jumped.

Her landing wasn’t as elegant as theirs, but she thought it was safe. It felt like she’d scraped her chin on the rough cement, nothing more. The Hansen girls’ screams and pointing fingers told her otherwise. When Sara put her fingers to her chin, they came away bloody.

Gretchen ran to get Sara’s mother while Katrina walked her toward her house. Blood cascaded down her front.

“Maybe you should hold onto your chin,” Katrina suggested.

She did, but blood ran through her fingers.

Halfway home Sara saw her mother running toward them, Katrina at her side.

“Sara, what have you done?” her mother screamed when she saw her.

“I scraped my chin when I jumped off Mr. Nichol’s wall,” Sara said.

“Yeah, Mrs. Mann, we were just playing, and Sara followed us up,” Katrina said.

Sara’s mother cut her off. “She’s only five. What were you girls thinking?”

She grabbed Sara’s shoulder and started pushing her towards home. “How could you do this to me?” she hissed.

Tears welled in Sara's eyes. Her chin hurt, and her mother was so mad.

When they passed the Petersons, the boys stared at Sara. *They probably think I'm more of a scaredy cat than ever*, she thought. But then the oldest Peterson boy stood tall and saluted her. His two brothers did the same.

Sara straightened her shoulders and lifted her chin. She walked proudly past them, the wounded warrior of East Boston Terrace.

**How Can We Bear It?**

Claire Scott

Poetry

We talk about bearing grief, five stages  
to see us through so we don't break  
every window or swig bottles of red wine  
books and books and books written  
to guide us through grief's bleak corridors  
of furled promises and failed prayers  
until we reach Acceptance  
entire shelves at Barnes & Noble  
*Bearing the Unbearable, Finding Meaning in Missing*  
hundreds of grief counselors waiting  
to take your money and soothe  
your grief in only forty sessions

We talk about bearing pain  
ninety-eight results for *Pain Medicine Near Me*  
scads of yoga and meditation classes  
breath your way to a better life  
do twenty-seven sun salutations  
sit in silence an hour each day  
pain doctors hawking on every corner  
holding signs, shoving each other aside  
ready to relieve the pain in your ankle, your knee,  
your neck as well as headaches and hangnails  
and don't forget the miracles of pharmacology  
like Fentanyl, Vicodin and Oxycontin

But what of tenderness  
with its soft eyes and thistled tongue  
no one teaches us how to bear its touch  
how to dare when wide wings have atrophied  
and caged hearts flutter song-less  
how to dare when you feel the flash of a fist

the forever of fear in a locked-in closet  
how to let the rusted hands of a clock click  
and turn, how to swallow cool night air  
or watch a rose unfold its delicate petals  
how to dare let go and allow yourself to fall,  
wings sprouting, settling into the arms  
of someone waiting, someone wanting  
to receive your wavering heart

**Pomegranate Seeds**

Claire Scott

Poetry

*If I defer the grief I will diminish the gift*

—Eavan Boland

I tried to protect my daughter so if  
her pet guppy Pearl died (again), I  
bought another Pearl to defer  
the pain, the tears, the truth, the  
loss of innocence, the great grief  
of mortality ringing her bones. I  
buy an identical one so I will  
not notice the death, to diminish  
my sorrow, to distract her from the  
seeds and rob her of the gift

**How Did This Happen**

Claire Scott

Poetry

We believed — how could we — if we got them to twenty-one we would be *ollie ollie in-come-free* no worries about coming home at two am or flunking geometry these offspring of ours with fresh degrees full of hope and hype in nothing worthwhile — what were we thinking — so back home lugging dirty laundry & a hunger for home cooking can't hang a *no vacancy* sign after all these are our children with dreams we don't dare deflate despite the restive needle at our hand — trying to be the most mother we no longer want to be—a tentative launch living with others circle back to the bedroom with airplanes Snoopy sheets & grimy plates with dried catsup under the bed — time-lapsed learning or excessive coddling — what I want is a simple supper with a glass of cabernet what I want is not to listen to cockeyed plans for a start up in cauliflower jewelry what I want is not to worry about resumes & job interviews & starched shirts & bus schedules but what I really want is my turn.

**the lake folk dead**

w v sutra

poetry

the lake folk dead lie in the scotty boneyard  
glidden street being all filled up or almost  
there also lie the townies and the river folk  
but the sea folk dead are different fish for sure

its mostly sacks of ash these days you know  
economy being needful to the last  
it gives the living one less thing to fret about  
on the gentle ridge with all its ordered stones

the native folk have left their oyster middens  
their feasting lodges now are earth again  
they named the river for its little fishes  
as pemaquid our tranquil lake is known

grandpa raised our swampy lot with fill  
when a tree got in the way he cut it down  
our mom put fresh pond lilies on the table  
you go to jail for lilies nowadays

we kids were sent into the lake each day  
to pull the eel grass wading to and fro  
and all along the cove new camps were building  
at the end of every dock a brand new boat

we stacked the grass in heaps upon the beach  
and the dads went out on weekends with their guns  
they killed the snapping turtles without mercy  
so little kids could keep their little toes

they got some big ones posing with their trophies  
but you know they never did destroy them all

and now the warden roams the sacred waters  
his only care to bring the scofflaw woe

so put me in that boneyard when I go  
my body well and truly pulverized  
arising from a past no one remembers  
a mockery made of all my heaped up goods

## on the ridge

w v sutra

poetry

if you stay we might could fix  
that run of fence where the deer  
slide through like ghosts  
leaving fur on the barbels

and those places where  
the trees come down  
bending the pickets and stretching the wire  
with all the work to do again

how will i lay a straight line  
without you at the other end  
shifting your weight like a nervous horse  
when i approach awkwardly

i wonder if you really know  
the fate to which you led me  
if you stay i may tell you  
when the moment arises

see how this stretch of pasture  
has been bitten down  
how greedy horses are  
how thin is all this soil

and the trees  
i wish we had more poplars  
in our grove instead of  
these black walnuts

the walnuts break and fall  
lightning kills them

for all that they feed  
the wild pigs

as for you and me  
let us stay and become this farm  
the horses stamp the frozen ground  
let the earth swallow us here

**the good scout**

w v sutra

poetry

jupiter and saturn in the southern sky  
son and father each the other  
now mute glowworms  
late gas giants  
courted by the stars  
in their silent perspectives

on my back on the hard ground  
of a barren mountain field  
listening to my father  
as we lay encamped  
as he named the astral bodies  
in their myriads

earlier that day he sent me to the village  
to buy bread in a language not my own  
he supplied me with a word in the arabic  
khubz that the baker understood  
and i returned with enough for ten  
thus we make men of our sons

now comes the goddess with her golden lamp  
now comes the reckoning of merit  
much have i heard about illusions  
much have i learned about deception  
long will i remember the good scout  
who named the morning stars to me

**Pruning**  
Scarlett Peterson  
Nonfiction

On any given day, a massacre of tomato leaves. These pruned shoots a sign of my procrastination, of writing I should be doing.

Nearby, a ruckus of wings — one face of the flytrap swings on its stem, a common housefly hanging half out of its jaws.

I glance between my dogs and the back of a neighbor's house. The sound of a child's frenzied cries reverberates off of the vinyl siding, crescendo against the voice of a screaming parent. Voices punctuated occasionally by the sound of violence.

It's September, late for tomatoes. Mine press on, bear a third set of blooms.

The fly struggles to free itself. A voyeur, I catch it on camera, trim the footage down to a few seconds of beating wings.

My neighbors leave the windows open while beating their child.

Some tomato leaves tell you when to prune them, curl, turn yellow, develop holes edged in brown veining.

The fly frees itself while I'm not looking, hovers above my notebooks as if to tell me of its success, to brag its own strength. To taunt me.

All is quiet soon, no more sounds of hands meeting flesh.

I toss overripe fruits at the fence, land them in the far corner of the yard. A dead spot of clay, now home to a pseudo-compost pile. I hope the flesh of the fruits enriches the soil, readies it for future growth.

The spotted dog gnaws on a stick she's unearthed from the tomato detritus.

New growth on the tomato plant is purple against the yellow blooms, the old green growth.

Formerly raised voices have gone silent. The house radiates, exhaustion and spent energy coming off the roof in waves.

The dogs scratch the door, begging for comfort, a fresh bowl of water.

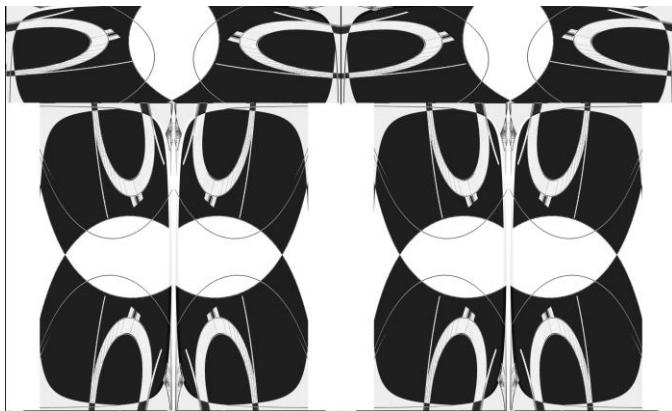
**Fish Out of Water**  
Edward Michael Supranowicz  
Art



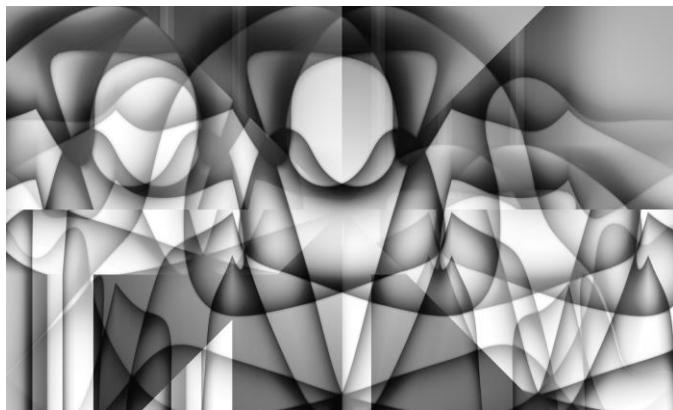
**Forgotten Things 1ac**  
Edward Michael Supranowicz  
Art



**Trapped Between Night and Day**  
Edward Michael Supranowicz  
Art



**Facing Away From the Horizon 4**  
Edward Michael Supranowicz  
Art



**The Hornes at Midnight**

John Grey

Poetry

The wind is Arctic.  
The time is midnight.  
The moon's a crescent.  
Trees are black,  
snow on them likewise.  
The ground is smothered  
in a foot of winter.  
All is sparse.  
Even the faces.  
Even the universe.  
A question was asked  
an hour ago.  
No one wants to be  
the first to answer.

Life's a mall.  
Life's a busy city street.  
Life is neon.  
Not a farmhouse.  
Not a silent family  
in a tiny den,  
unthawed by hearth  
or bare bulb  
shining down.  
Only life can say,  
“I agree”  
or “I disagree.”  
And then there's  
the rest of us.

**Famous Writer's House**

John Grey

Poetry

On another tour of a famous writer's house,  
I stand behind a rope  
and take in details of her parlor,  
bedroom and even the bath  
where she soaked  
and perhaps thought up her ideas.

The kitchen table is set  
with plastic food.  
But the shelves are lined  
with the books of real people.  
And there's a desk  
in her drawing room  
where she wrote her words long hand.  
Just looking at it  
gives me twinges of  
carpal tunnel syndrome.

I've spent time with Twain and Hemingway,  
even stood outside a Hart Crane abode  
though I didn't go in.  
I even stayed at the Charles Dickens hotel.  
Of course, he didn't.

But, more than just  
indulging in their words on paper,  
I'm a sucker for where they lived,  
sat down to eat, read the newspaper,  
quarreled with their wives or husbands,  
spat and chewed and bathed.

It makes them seem ordinary  
which in turn  
makes their accomplishments  
even more extraordinary.

I plant my feet  
in a famous writer's footprints.  
But, sadly,  
the next step is all mine.

**Walnut Greens**

Mary Grace van der Kroef

Poetry

Heavy with green  
spheres.

Weighted  
to bend low.

Shake a branch,  
release,  
gather,

baskets brimming full.  
Blessed by heaviness in  
buckets.

Time  
to shell the walnuts.

**Falling Purpose**

Mary Grace van der Kroef

Poetry

Rustling like paper  
Something not quite right

Curling edges  
Unlucky sail  
Or maybe ...

A rolling tail  
Travelling over pavement sealed

Scrapes of character  
Notches of wisdom

It wares,  
Disintegrating,  
As journey works its sandpaper sadness

Remains  
Threads, the ghosts of waving life  
Rest in gutters  
Adding to the soupy slush

Fallen leafage finds it's end ...

Or newness?  
Drain sips these memories of trees

Taking essence  
Down rivers to quenches nature's thirst  
For life

**Right to Breathe**  
Corrinne Brumby  
Nonfiction

Florida longleaf pines creak like floorboards as they sway in the breeze; their needles rustle, roaring like ocean waves.

\*

We create wind when we exhale in a mini rush. Yet when it's not a shout or an intense sigh, we take breaths for granted. We forget they are there, so commonplace that we don't notice their value, how much we need to breathe, that simple motion of air pumped in and out of our lungs.

\*

Pines are breathing CO<sub>2</sub>, exchanging it for the oxygen we need. I've heard it said that trees are our lungs. And in a lesser sense, we are the lungs of the trees, a symbiotic relationship of breathing. We are all breathing.

\*

In the beginning, the earth was brought to life by breath. The divine breathed and there we were and there the trees were and grass and animals and birds.

In Hebrew, the word for spirit is *רוּחַ* Ruach, which means breath or wind. Spirit is the life force of a living being, that deep core that transcends body, and in that ancient language, it is literally breath.

Everything that has breath, therefore, has spirit.

\*

“I can’t breathe,” were a man’s last words, as someone took that right to have breath, from him. His plea became the cry of a people outraged by suffocating racial injustice.

One of my biggest fears is drowning, holding my breath as long as I can, then gasping for air, lungs filling with water. The other scariest way to die: being strangled or choked, not able to take in a new breath, no more right to breathe.

יִשְׁעָה Yeshua of Nazareth died from not being able to breathe. Every breath on a cross is excruciating effort, until you are too weak, too in pain to pull yourself up for another breath.

Loon and other animals dove deep into the water, but they could not hold their breath long enough to reach the soil on the bottom. Then muskrat dove deep into the seas that covered the earth, holding his breath as his lungs burned for air. He reached the soil and nestled it in his little paws. As he swam to the top, his lungs were emptied, filled with water; the light faded as he floated. Nanabozo took the soil that muskrat gave his last breaths for, and with it formed Turtle Island.

\*

Yoga centers around breath. Breath brings balance to the mind, body, and spirit. Focus on the deep inhale, air filling your lungs until they are full of life-giving energy, and a long slow exhale, releasing all the tension, all the stress, all the pain pent up in your body.

We often forget to breathe.

I breathe deep, calmed by the weight of my body on the floor, bowing to the earth in a child’s pose.

\*

Sugarcane will burn soon in the everglades as it does for harvest every year. Wealthy white communities require burns to be postponed if the wind is blowing towards their communities, avoiding the effects of smoke. U.S. Sugar doesn't care if ash rains and smoke chokes the poor black communities of the Glades, burning cane freely as smoke suffocates black children in school. Apparently, white people have also claimed the right to breathe.

The west is on fire. All smoke and no air. My friends have headaches and can't breathe.

A virus of the lungs has survived over a year, infecting millions worldwide, no longer able to breathe. My great uncle Bob, infected with the virus, breathed his last.

\*

How long can we live without air?

Long needles rustle like waves as wind blows.  
We count the seconds the world has held its breath.

**I am a Daisy**  
Corrinne Brumby  
Nonfiction

Bare feet patter on grass still holding the morning cool as the summer sun bakes my skin. The soil gives under my steps. The willow's draping branches, like an elder woman's uncut hair, brush my shoulders. For a moment, I enter another world, a sanctuary for children and fairies.

I step into the blazing sun. Train tracks and buzzing powerlines stand beyond but I tune them out as I walk among the wilds between two ponds, reminiscent of ancient Illinois prairie. I pluck cattails that look like hotdogs and imagine eating them. I plunge my finger through the brown peel and pull out white pillow fluff.

Scattered amongst the cattails are the auras of fairies and gods. I smile because they smile. Daisies are sun and clouds tethered to the ground. I pluck one and hold it close, inhaling the gift, smelling earth and heaven at once.

I carry the daisy home, gazing at it between steps. My mom shows me how to press it: place two sheets of paper in the pages of an encyclopedia, trim the stem and lay the flower flat, close the book, put it back on the shelf, and leave it.

I fill more books with daisies.

\*

At 18, I leave home and go 500 miles away to find the God I forgot was in the daisies. At ministry school, hundreds of hungry believers gather to find God in a building. I don't miss home. I believe I have found where I belong, believe that my family is missing it, that they aren't spiritual enough.

I spend hours in manmade walls, trying to find the divine, while disconnected from the divinity I knew as a child, disconnected from my flesh and blood, from my ancestors.

I find a daisy growing in a patch of meadow and pick it, caressing it in my hand. I admire it the whole way home. I nestle it between two paper towels in my journal held tightly shut with an elastic band.

\*

I visit home every few months. I feel different, out of place. I mourn my childhood gone. I mourn the distance from my family. I start to miss home.

I visit in June when wild daisies are blooming in remnant prairie. I meet with my maternal grandparents, Baba and Papa, for my late 21st birthday. We reserve a table on the 91st floor of the second tallest tower in Chicago. Panoramic views overlook the city. Cars, people, and buildings, even tall ones, are miniatures. The Ferris wheel spins atop the pier. Tiny sailboats glimmer in the sun on the vast lake.

I am Freya in the clouds.

I walk with Baba and Papa to a table beside the windows. A square vase holds a bouquet of giant white daisies with a Happy 21st Birthday note stuck inside. I can't turn my gaze from them as I sit like a queen in my black and daisy dress.

Baba says daisies were Great Grandma's favorite flower. I return to my childhood, to my roots. I remember Great Grandma and I watching Mr. Roger's when I was five. She would call my mom to see if I could stay for dinner. She made the most delicious Polish food and had pet canaries because she loved how they sang. I can see her smile and her snow-white hair, and hear her voice as if she were still here. Through the

daisies, I feel connected to her, and wonder why I ever left.

\*

Daisies find me wherever I go, radiant sunbeams that grow where land has been disturbed, blooming where you wouldn't expect beauty to grow, in ditches, in construction sites, in the yard, fighting through all the mowing.

My ancestors call me back home, back to my roots, back to myself whenever I wander, whenever I seek something I forgot I already have. They whisper in my dreams: *Corrinne. Corrinne... Maiden, Innocent, Pure, Beautiful. Remember who you are.*

\*

I gently remove the elastic band from my journal. Nestled in between memories and paper towels are pressed daisies, still preserved after years. I consider using them, gluing them to a card, or some other decoration. Instead, I close them in my journal, safe in my memories to forever remind me: I am a Daisy.

**Valentine's Day**

Joel Harris

Poetry

Outside my window —  
the warmth of two rock pigeons  
nibbling each other

**Dear Scruffy Pigeon**

Joel Harris

Poetry

It's about time that I properly introduce myself. I am the young lad you snoop on through the bedroom window at the edge of the PVC eavestrough, sitting stately in my executive chair, clawing my way through *Metamorphoses*, or some quirky, paramodern gibberish trying

to pass itself for *avant-garde*, cyberpunk cool. I do notice you like to drop by outside, but I really don't appreciate your droppings, the bile runniness of it, the way it grimes; how it reminds me of seasoned callaloo infested with tiny, squirmly maggots mothered in the cave

of your dwindling, claustrophobic bottom-hole. Still, you amuse me, the way you contort your neck in the manner of a circus performer, the way you instrumentalize your tough beak to scratch your lilac hackle, your tender breast and other teeny, private parts frustratingly hard to reach.

The way you strike that *Vrikshasana* pose with one tibia lifted in the air, standing there on the hot galvanize sheet, about to engage the contemplative life; the *bindi* of your third eye. Our landlord has tried everything in the book to rid these colonial premises of your

kind, but like a lowly Beetham squatter citing your damn rights, you stubbornly return to roost like a case of bad flu. You most certainly enjoy the heady view from up there: the broad shoulders of

the windy Maraval Valley; the garland of  
forest growth sticking out like rough, ingrown hair. I

just wish you'd scratch a tad less for both our sakes.  
It's considered bad manners in human circles.  
Don't you know it's terribly rude to scratch yourself  
in public? How's your youngling coming along these  
days? I pray he's fine and dandy. Anyways, I  
wanted to say howdie, to welcome you home mate.

**love poem that hangs from a cliffside**

Nora Smith

Poetry

...

cherishes the breeze // even as the grip loosens  
and the jumping animal // in my chest readies to  
meet the rocky coast // that is rushing up now

...

have i not looked at you  
gazed past you into that  
present moment? have i  
not gripped your hand  
tighter like you might stop  
pulling the sun down  
inch by inch? have i not  
relinquished all control to  
your primal instinct which  
left me abandoned for  
hours, true, but jilted to  
sit quietly in the dunes  
and on the rugged cliff  
and knowing that while  
you trekked back to me  
that i was also an  
imprint in the snow  
of your sweet feelings  
which pile up high over  
the hours and afford me  
such a soft place to land

...

we were not lovebirds and i am relieved  
that for you i did not cajole, or warble  
instead — and look and feel my bones  
where they hum through my creature  
body — i am writing this between

moments of bliss, moments that hang  
from your lips, then a cliff, and then?

i know i have falling left to do  
crash and see my skeleton

stick through

**I Destroy Jewelry**

Allyn Bernkopf

Poetry

You, who engraved me  
into thin necklace, sloppy  
infinity loop titled “Un-  
stoppable Love” & how  
I hummed over its metal,  
like I found a compass

to you, thought you finally  
loved me with a gift of white  
gold. You told me it was diamond  
& I told you it was priceless  
You etched the nickname you  
gave me, “Textbook,” into

its white spine. “Textbook”  
because I was “safe.” Because  
I didn’t jaywalk. Because I  
didn’t speed, didn’t text &  
drive. Because I followed

recipes, followed rules, read  
all instructions. “Textbook”  
because I read, because I  
wear gloves to pluck roses,  
because I wire the chicken  
coop more shut when you

said it was “fine” (a racoon  
sure appreciated that) & do you  
remember the fight we got in  
when I’d do it anyway? Wear  
gloves, twine more chicken-

wire, crossed at crosswalks

& how anger simmered  
in the car when you'd text  
behind the wheel which led  
to volumes and volumes  
of arguments lacerating  
our house walls? So yes,

I took a kitchen torch &  
melted the necklace down.

**On Finding Out I Might Be Infertile**

Allyn Bernkopf

Poetry

I pack up my house  
place trinkets in boxes  
sealed with a kiss of tape.

Poetry books line my walls  
while the child statue reading  
is nestled in thick socks to keep

her warm. Safe from damage.  
She's next to the statue  
of a teacher, a grown woman

wrapped in gloves. She holds  
her books tight to her chest.  
I stuff extra socks, blankets,

and bras around them. Carefully  
close cardboard flaps above fragile  
heads & move on to the next box.

**Your Card**  
Tony Abbott  
Poetry

It was an hour of purple shadows,  
the afternoon on early winter days  
when seagull ghosts loop violet over the sand.

The old year is choking out, confused and shriveled,  
while the future brings nothing yet  
to set upon a table broad as the horizon.

When your card came,  
mentioning death at a care home, it was one more  
memory to settle in the box before sealing its lid —

with just enough now, an hour maybe,  
to make the sign of the cross, bid our ghosts  
fly off over the sand, and lift our eyes to the sea.

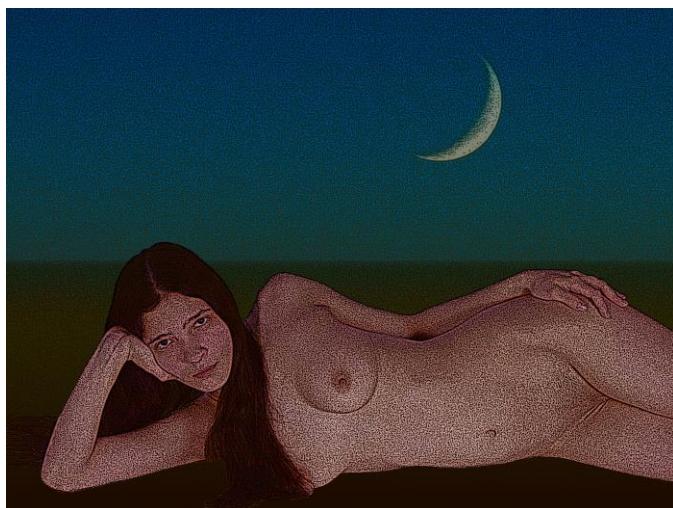
**Beckoning with a Sigh**

Bill Wolak

Art



**The Whisper's Mirror**  
Bill Wolak  
Art



**Moon Walk**  
Alexandra Williams  
Poetry

I walk at night  
where the Ridgeway guides my feet: a silver thread  
throwing the darkness around it  
into chaos. Barley rasps at my ankles  
and the moon is a night light  
and you, *everywhere and nowhere*

**if you were real**

Linda M. Crate

Poetry

sometimes i think you were just someone  
i conjured into being, a vision that i needed  
to see before i lost a part of me that i couldn't  
afford to lose;

i remember the freckles that dotted your face  
and your radiant smile more glorious than the  
light of a thousand suns strung together —

i remember your soft skin brown like the spring  
after the first rain before muddy season where the  
world whispers a need for her flowers and ever  
so glorious in it's beauty against the dullness of my  
dark and dreary day,

you said that you couldn't get your selfies to quite  
turn out right and i couldn't help but say out loud:  
“but you are cute” and i don't know if you heard me;

yet there are still days full of wonder of you and if i  
simply conjured you up in a dream or if you were real.

**Crushed**  
Charles K. Carter  
Poetry

You plucked a cigarette from my pack  
and placed it between your plump lips,  
using your own lighter to ignite.  
We were standing on your balcony,  
without pants, mid-coitus.  
We needed a break from the heat.  
The chill in the fall air  
raised the hairs on my thighs.  
You leaned on the rail,  
looking out into the sky  
like you had found the answer  
to one of life's many mysteries.  
I looked across the street  
at the vacant playground equipment  
of a vacant pre-school –  
empty swings, forgotten joy.  
For a moment, our conversation  
was as raw and naked as we were.  
We talked about trauma  
and about anxiety medications.  
But then you rattled on about video games  
before crushing your cigarette butt  
in the vintage orange glass ashtray  
before taking me by the hand,  
leading me back inside  
to finish what we had started.

**Just Wait**  
Kevin A. Risner  
Poetry

for the kickback from motorcycles to shoot out and  
jar the street from sleep  
as if anyone could sleep  
most nights now

we wonder whether another person is lying  
on the ground with life leaking out  
simply sit in a pool, a light blue plastic version  
of childhood, flip-flopped feet soaking everything in

car air freshener around neck  
an umbrella drink in hand  
Bruce bellows how he's *Born in the U.S.A.*  
as a tinted view of the world transforms

into unforgivable lies  
everyone sips on Polaroid pasts  
looks at the TV  
searches everywhere for what they want

to be told, what they want  
lives around them or inside them  
or inside a humming screen  
inside a humming season

believe it all  
every single syllable  
the first taste of summer  
even the second is not truly fresh anymore

when windows open wide  
when the air comes back in

when the world takes  
the deepest of breaths

and waits  
for everything  
to calm down  
we'll be waiting forever

**The Atlas of Your Back**

Phil Goldstein

Poetry

Rediscovering the soft grip of your body, like waking up to snow, bright & miraculous as it clung to our hair, soft

flakes raining in the gray morning light, sheep bleating.  
Such delight in the familiar yet ecstatic.

For years I've been fog — formless, rolling  
in off the Sound, silently away from you.

I forgot how touch can be electric, the sweet taste  
of your lower lip, how to kiss, even.

It was like I was a boy again, before I had ever seen  
a woman naked. I was only familiar  
with my own sex, in hidden moments  
in empty rooms, pulled onto cracked basement floors.

You helped me remember so much,  
like what it means to be lost inside a world  
where all I can feel is your back, all I can smell  
is your hair dangling softly on my forehead.

**On the Stairs**  
Rashmi Agrawal  
Fiction

Sejal kicked at the channel gate of the old lift. It was stuck again, sixth floor this time. In the last one month, she had to climb the stairs seven times after waiting for long.

She huffed on the third-floor landing. A door flung open behind her. Catching her breath, she straightened herself and sensed someone standing close by. Taking account of her surroundings, she turned.

It was a man holding a magazine. The cover was half-visible; a semi-nude woman, probably an actress, was sucking on a cherry. He flicked its pages, but his eyes skimmed through Sejal, up and down.

She skittered up the stairs. *Just one more floor.* He licked his pinkie as long as Sejal could see him from the corner of her eyes.

When Sejal complained about the elevator, Mom said, climbing stairs would tone her legs. Sejal was tired of swallowing this same excuse. She fiddled with her thumbs against each other and decided not to talk about the weird man.

The next time when she climbed the stairs, the same man was puffing away a cigarette. When Sejal crossed him and asked to make way for her, he blew out ringlets of smoke. As soon as those curls hit her face, Sejal ran. Two steps at a time, smokey ribbons still hanging midair.

The lift was under repair the next day too. Its door was jammed on the first floor. Sejal desperately waited for a company to climb the steps with. And before long, a lady appeared with groceries.

Sejal grabbed that septuagenarian's basket out of respect. The lady smiled. Before Sejal could engage in

small talks, the old lady bid her goodbye and entered a flat on the second floor. The girl panicked. She closed her eyes, prayed to God, and took quick strides along the railing.

The man, clean shaved today, stood in a fresh pair of jeans and a vest too tight for his size. His perfume, though strong, couldn't curb his body odor. His lips curled as if about to whistle.

Sejal ran towards her floor.

When Sejal complained to her mother about this mysterious man, Mom rolled her eyes. You don't need to stop there, Mom said. Just keep climbing if the lift doesn't work. And we'll complain about him if he troubles you again.

As if on a cue, the elevator didn't break down or get stuck for several days. No one blocked it on the higher floors either — fifth, sixth, or seventh. But its machinery was rusty and tattered; it had to malfunction. And when it did, Sejal found the man holding a glass on the stairs right outside his door. A strong smell hit her. *Whiskey?*

What's your name, baby? the man asked, swirling his glass. You'll enter high school next year, eh?

Sejal's lunch roiled in her stomach, seeing him grinning. She was standing at the center of the landing. He was sitting in front of her. When she didn't answer and tried to avoid the stalker while crossing him, the man stood up with a jolt, brushing his skin against hers. She faltered but managed not to trip. Sejal's backpack fell with a thud. Her bottle leaked, and water spilled. She coughed loudly and ran upward. She didn't turn back, didn't throw side glances, and crashed into her mother as soon as the door opened.

An hour later, Mom took Sejal to the third floor and pressed the doorbell of the suspect's flat. Sejal picked her bag and the sipper.

When Sejal explained, the beautiful lady with auburn hair and red lipstick at the door blinked a few times. No one with this appearance lives here, the lady said, and slammed the door. The other flat had a big padlock.

After a week, Sejal had to take the stairs again. The lift first kept her waiting for over ten minutes. It was stuck on the seventh floor. When it appeared on the ground floor, it got crowded before she could enter. So, she took the staircase.

Sejal rang the bell of the septuagenarian on the second floor she had helped. The lady greeted her with a smile. After listening about the man, the lady suggested staying alert and carrying a repellent bottle, or skipping all occasions to climb alone. *But how?* It took a minute for Sejal to realize the old lady meant *pepper* spray.

*Not a bad idea*, Sejal thought and decided to buy one that night.

As she reached the third-floor landing, her eyes scanned the vicinity — the green climbers and pink flowers; the gerbera and succulents; the cheerful painting on the wall and the terracotta items in red, blue, orange, and other bright colors.

She mustered courage and rang the bell of the other flat, which wasn't locked this time. The owner denied having seen that prowler. He looked at her with raised eyebrows and at her bag and black shoes and the white-green school uniform. Sejal cleared her throat and left. She was worried about how could someone stalk her so close to her home, so close yet far to be visible to anyone yet.

Days later, when Sejal took the stairs again, hand clutching the spray, a clamor vibrated the stuffy air. Murmurs of people hit her like a fly's hum. Irritating and unceasing.

She gulped as she reached *that* floor. Cops were going in and out of *that* house. The lady's auburn hair was messy and lips chapped, her kohl smeared. Someone has murdered her husband and planted evidence against her, a neighbor murmured. Of course, such a lovely woman can't kill her husband, another neighbor whispered.

Sejal rose on her toes on the staircase from where she could see the dead man. *That* man.

The lady with auburn hair winked at Sejal. She had lied earlier. And the stalker was now removed from the stairs. Sejal hugged her mother. No more abandoning her precious minutes, waiting for the lift.

End

**Bad Apples**  
Karen Boissonneault-Gauthier  
Art



**Evening Comes Down**

R.T. Castleberry

Poetry

As we wait for a death  
these things are visited upon us:  
Train whistle's warning  
cascading a travel grievance.  
The bird that charmed at daybreak  
disappears at Evensong.  
Reordering the nature of ruin,  
ninth month moonlight grips  
failing edges of icing pond,  
mud-furrowed harvest field.  
Sundays are spent sleeping  
under a fan, beside the phone,  
scuffed floor piled with  
tossed clothes, church programs.  
I've not taken a steady step this week.

**A Spacing of Days**

R.T. Castleberry

Poetry

I square my debt in landlord limbo,  
shake a final Evensong psalm  
from this creaking balcony,  
these bird's nest eaves.

A pointillist screen of rain-dripping trees,  
green-dark splashes of paint, mud, moss  
demonstrate no loss.

Chimney's chipping smoke reeks a last stew.  
Ending checks are cut, readied for *Cash*.  
This house, a grievance, seized me once.  
I've served it enough.

**A Parish of Famines**

R.T. Castleberry

Poetry

Mockingbird says it's  
no day for crosstie walking,  
no weather for Jim Beam and boo.  
Preparing for the Second Coming.  
I'll need wings and waffles,  
a switchblade sidekick  
to carry me to that throne.  
Pocket watch out for pawn,  
I pull creaking cowboy boots,  
a pearl snap wedding shirt and  
take myself down to Maceo's.

Death's head walking stick cuts  
along the sidewalk grid,  
margins of phone line, skyline, tree line.  
Hinge creak of wind-rocked door  
cracks the silence, skims off  
patched streets, oil slick puddles.  
Small fires flaring in the stores,  
streetlight white blazes smashed glass.  
Not a calming spirit,  
I wonder how many  
dreaming days before I lose.

Across Dauphine Street,  
starving dogs sneak and bite,  
armband rangers shuffle in lines  
under a showcase marquee.  
Tipping a forty-dollar hat  
I take the last outside table,  
greet the evening prelates  
with indictment rumors,

the clash of insinuations.  
I ask the waiter,  
“Has Elijah come with the mail?  
Bring me the usual with  
a pack of Chesterfields.  
I'll see the supper menu now.”

**Afterglow**  
Matthew Schultz  
Poetry

It is easy to forget  
the light and I are Gemini,  
twinned and bound  
to the encroaching dark.

Symmetrical aliens  
of inexplicable chance,  
Our obligatory dimming  
seems to go on forever.

**And So It Goes**

Robert Pegel

Poetry

Find a way or make a way.  
Life is malleable, bend it  
in the direction you choose.  
Refuse to be a victim  
of circumstance.  
There are limits in time  
which confound the mind  
and overcome the spirit,  
if we are hardened by experience  
and not softened by love.  
Truth sought after awakens  
the soul to no longer play  
a game of chance,  
with a life looking for  
our utmost devotion  
to detail during days  
lasting longer than our energy  
can withstand.  
Witness and be still.  
Survive and continue  
to a place where dreams  
never die.

**Just Sleep**  
Robert Pegel  
Poetry

Can't wait to fall asleep.  
Maybe we'll meet up  
in a dream that I will  
remember in the morning  
and you will come back  
to life in all your splendor.  
Hearts won't be broken  
and life will continue  
the way it was supposed  
to be.  
The future won't be derailed  
and the wind will always be  
with our sail.  
Love's journey will last  
as long as it should  
and see us through.  
Sleep will be the catalyst  
that captures moments  
awake in the subconscious  
where the relaxed mind  
melds with wishful intention  
where everything is perfect  
for a little while.

**Hibernate**  
Robert Pegel  
Poetry

I didn't choose this life.  
This life chose me.  
Was willing to be somewhere else.  
If it was heaven,  
I don't remember.  
Now I'm here.  
Found out this life is overrated.  
Still, I've got to make the best of it.  
They say you only live once.  
What if I've already lived  
and died in several lifetimes?  
I choose to sit this one out.  
Will you let me rest  
for just a little while?  
Cause I'm bleeding on the inside.  
And I've got memories of a morning  
that will haunt me forever  
etched in my mind.  
Sorrow and regret,  
steal the sunshine out of most days  
and rob the moon  
of its light.  
My heart is broken.  
My brain is exhausted.  
My eyes can barely open.  
I need to sit this one out.  
Wish I could lay down and hibernate.  
I promise I'll get back in line.  
Return to this lifetime.  
You know I won't be a problem.  
I'll keep up with the group the next time.

**May Thy Slumber Be Blessed**

Sharon Goldberg

Nonfiction

*For my great nephew Aaron Eli*

You were born during a pandemic. You were born before your parents were vaccinated against it. You were conceived before a Covid-19 vaccine even existed. Your Mom, my niece, calls you a miracle baby, not just because of the pandemic, but because she had four miscarriages before the egg that became you implanted successfully in her uterus and grew and grew and grew.

What could be more hopeful than a new life?

I met you when you were five months old. Three generations of our close family gathered to celebrate my 71<sup>st</sup> birthday, my 70<sup>th</sup> celebration having been postponed a year because of the pandemic. Ten adults and six children including you, the youngest, reunited at a house in Breckenridge, Colorado, during a lull when the pandemic subsided and before it resurged as a new variant.

We bonded, I think, you and me. You smiled at my guppy imitation. You stopped crying when I sang *She loves you yeah, yeah, yeah. She loves you yeah, yeah, yeah.* I sang the same song to your oldest cousin, Marco, when he was a baby; you can't go wrong with the Beatles. You'll learn about them later, perhaps from Marco's Dad, your Uncle Jeremy, who appreciates music from the 1960s, a long, long time ago. When I see you again next year, pandemic permitting, I'll sing "Brahms Lullaby." Your cousin Jordan asked me to sing it over and over at bedtime. *Lay thee down now and rest, may thy slumber be blessed.* It's my favorite lullaby, the one my Mom, your Great Grandmother sang to me when I was a child. I felt safe and loved when she sang it.

Like so many families in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, our clan is scattered across the country. Distance presents challenges in the best of times, but since the pandemic began, we've felt the sting of separation and ache for connection even more. It will become part of your story that you were born in Denver, unlike your brother Jonah who was born in New York City. Your parents fled Brooklyn when Covid cases surged there. They sheltered with your Aunt Rebecca, your Uncle David, and two cousins and, after a year, decided to stay in Denver. They bought a big house just a mile from your aunt and uncle. They chose family. They chose fresh air.

Your Mom will make sure you get all your childhood immunizations. And when a Covid vaccine is ready for toddlers, you'll get that, too. I remember how hard she worked to earn a PhD in Public Health, even traveling to Nigeria to research childhood immunizations. Our family believes in science.

You were born during a time when people wear masks for protection, a requirement in many situations for those two years old and older. Since you often see people in masks, do you think of them like hats or gloves or pajamas or any other item of clothing? Or do you find masks disturbing because they block facial features and expression? I hope when you're two, no one will need to wear a mask. I hope when you start school, all classes will be in person and masks will be a thing of the past. I hope when you trick-or-treat on Halloween and wear a ninja costume or Harry Potter costume, masks will only be used for disguise.

When you're much older, you'll learn that more than 800,000 people in the U.S. and more than 5.4 million in the world died from Covid. Those numbers frighten me. I wish I could wear a funny face or brave face for you always, but my anxiety is a chronic bass line to the melodies I sing. Scientists say Covid probably won't go

away. Even if we reach herd immunity, which means further disease spread is unlikely, or the virus becomes endemic, which means less transmission, fewer hospitalization and deaths, we'll still need booster shots periodically as we do for the flu. And Covid won't be the last pandemic. I wish I could guarantee you'll be untouched by the next one. I wish I could promise you'll be safe from all dangers like climate change, gun violence, the erosion of our democracy. I wish I could assure you that when the next pandemic emerges, we'll be more attuned to science and less compromised by politics. We'll have learned from our mistakes. We'll act faster. We'll act better. We'll contain the pandemic earlier. I wish. I hope.

Perhaps, precious Aaron, you'll study plagues and pandemics in school. Maybe you'll take after your Mom who will tell you about the months she spent in Nigeria and what she learned about social norms and immunizations. But for now, you're free to explore the world from your stroller. Free to play and play with fluffy and shiny and dangly stuff. You're oblivious to pandemics and other problems. Just like all little kids deserve to be. Happy. Safe. Protected. Loved.

You will always be loved.

**Menudo Poem**

Vincent Antonio Rondoni

Poetry

The first time I have menudo  
is at the restaurant where Abuela  
doesn't have to pay.

We're far from alone.  
The men who work with their hands—  
men in orange vests and salt-stained flannel—  
stare into their private pools of hominy and fat.

Even though we are  
a people apart, here we are one,  
breathing and salivating over  
liquid communion,  
noting how close we are  
to the Lord and how much  
it smells like fresh oregano.

May you know the distinct pleasure  
of filling your stomach  
with another.

May it give you that ancestral  
feather-serpent energy  
for the bad days  
that will come and go.

May it turn your fist into a blade  
and give you the power to cut down  
anyone who dares to fuck around  
and find out.

**The Door in the Back of Your Neck**

Vincent Antonio Rondoni

Poetry

Abuelo picks at a scab and says  
beware of the door  
in the back of your neck.

Let no hands touch it.  
It's where thoughts come from.  
It's where thoughts go.  
Let no hands touch it—  
especially your own.

Today, he *me enseñará* a lesson.  
Going to work that curandero magic.  
Going to loosen up that belt  
and do a little dance.  
Coughs up a block of stardust  
and tamarind into his hands.  
Pounds it into some pepperleaf—  
from up his sleeve—  
and rolls it into something fat.

A puff, a pass.  
A wheeze, a laugh.  
A tap at the door  
in the back of my neck.

Then, I'm neither here nor there.  
There's stars and darkness,  
a horseshoe pit, warm beds,  
yellowjackets bringing meat  
back to their nest.

The crackle of butter.  
Smells of cinnamon and avocado honey.  
Sopaipillas in the kitchen, someone  
cooking me something sweet.

A lawn covered in salvage and scrap,  
mint creeping, penetrating the rust.  
A tire fire, warming me, choking me.  
All those engines that'll never wake up.

Crows in heat—they're coming for me.  
I can see them for miles, and still  
it all feels so final,  
so abrupt.

Abuelo's big red hand  
grabs me by the scruff.  
Pulls me back topside.  
Slams the door shut.

His lesson complete:  
See what is never  
too early  
to see.

**Tamarind Soda**  
Vincent Antonio Rondoni  
Poetry

My sister and I meet for lunch when we can.

We always go to the same old spot: a taqueria  
built into the burnt-out husk of a Taco Bell.

Nature abhors a vacuum.  
Wants to fill it with manteca and corridos.

Reclamation.  
Who are we to fight such a beautiful thing?

Been coming here since we were kids.  
My sister doesn't remember.  
She's not much for remember when.  
Now she has kids.

She makes me wonder what we look for in old places.

*El Gordo y La Flaca* plays on mute.  
In the corner, someone's put out crystal and silver.  
There's a healer with purple hair, moving from table to  
table.  
She chants. She hams.  
She opens her fist and reminds us:  
this shit isn't free.

My sister gets the carnitas—  
She knows what she's about.  
I get the buche—  
Gotta prove something to myself.

And though her eyes only ever look forward,  
something flickers when I order a bottle of tamarind  
soda.

We split it down the middle in Styrofoam cups.  
Our secret handshake  
no one can take away,  
no matter how white we become,  
even when she smiles and says  
she never really cared for the stuff.

*Tell me*, she asks,  
*Do we actually like this*  
*or only because Dad did?*  
with a laugh.

It takes us home.  
Just close enough to know  
we're so far from it.

**Better This Time**

Gail Denham

Poetry

Is there a time when whatever  
has to happen, happens. Perhaps  
it's come by one other time  
and we were too busy to notice.

This time we pay attention. We're  
older now, wiser (one would hope).  
We watch it, study it closer,  
sort of like a favorite TV re-run,  
one we never quite remember.

The characters and conditions aren't  
always the same. At least the incidents  
stir old thoughts, lost memories. We  
enjoy things more this time. Our  
purpose now is to make the best of it.

We sit very still. We notice  
everything, refuse stress.  
Seems better this time.

**Send Me The Pillow**

Gail Denham

Poetry

“Send me the pillow that you dream on ...” Today, the post office would charge a lot to ship this feather-filled pillow — a pillow possibly older than the singer.

In those days, we didn’t throw away anything. Jar lids became ash trays; soda bottles turned into clothes sprinklers; empty medicine containers held small bouquets; rags were dust cloths or saved for a quilt.

We had one heavy iron skillet, a Dutch oven for Mom’s marvelous Sunday roasts, sauce pans she received when she married, and threadbare blankets. Pillows were kept.

If I desired current fad clothing, such as a cashmere sweater or a clear wind breaker that friends wrote on at school, it was 50c a week paid from my hourly wage of 75c an hour at the Dairy Queen.

We never suffered hunger or felt deprived. I rode a hand-me-down, one speed boy’s bike everywhere. Few cars sped through our quiet streets. Long soft ball games at the vacant lot caused me to let potatoes burn, dinner Mom asked me to start.

A quiet time. Dime a song on the juke box at the drugstore soda fountain; now every time I hear that song, I still taste 10c cherry cokes.

**Boots' First Adventure**

James Bone

Fiction

Boots had no interest in what *they* called ‘self-improvement’. Her Mother told her she should see a doctor. She didn’t think she was sick. She didn’t feel sick. She felt OK. She lay in bed all day on her left side, staring at the wall. She read online about Japanese teenagers that end up staying in their rooms for the rest of their lives. She liked that. She thought it sounded OK. Her brother said she was ‘Othering’ them. She had no idea what that meant. She looked it up. She felt bad, so she wrote them a letter. Her Mother showed the letter to her doctor. He gave her a new pill to take every day with breakfast. It tasted odd and made her use the toilet often.

Sometimes, they’d lift her up, her Mother and her brother, and they’d try and force her out of the house. She wouldn’t resist, just lie motionless as they screamed and cried and pleaded and whispered and threatened. They tried starving her; for three weeks she was given only water and occasional slices of bread. This made her ribcage look strange in the mirror. She liked the way it looked. She told her Mother this and her Mother threw her mug of hot tea across the room. It spilled all over her computer and notebooks. The next day she was given a big plate of spaghetti and she threw it up all over her bedsheets. Ghosts visited her every night; she’d talk to them about everything. They were friendly ghosts, not haunting anyone, just there to lend a sympathetic ear. You speak to them too, sometimes, probably, when you think you’re alone.

They tried to bribe her. “Come with us! Come with us to the shops, we’ll get a nice new computer!” She knew they could easily buy her a new one online. There was no need to leave the house nowadays. The people

out *there* could do it all for you. Boots felt nothing when her brother snarled in her face, about how lazy she was, about how ungrateful she was, about how she was making her Mother ill. Her Mother seemed OK to her. She didn't see any reason why anyone should feel ill.

One day, on her twentieth birthday, her Mother brought in her favorite meal, six eggs scrambled with butter and salt and pepper, and sang her 'Happy Birthday' and said your brother has hung himself with a rope. She said she cut him down and tried to save him, but he had broken his neck and the ambulance and police came and took her statement and took his body away. The funeral was on Saturday. Today was Tuesday. "Will you come? Please?" Boots shook her head and lay down on her left side, staring at the wall. A little bit of egg dribbled down her chin and fell onto her pillow, and she wondered if her brother would be a friendly ghost, if he would listen rather than haunt.

**Tangled**  
Shannon Barbour  
Nonfiction

At thirteen, I raged against my hair. I'd stand in front of the mirror, my hands wrapped in and around clumps of curls, and tug. Tug in the hopes it would straighten. It was an angry vanity.

At a Homecoming party in seventh grade, I sat on a dull beige sofa talking to a boy. The boy matched the sofa, but it didn't stop a friend from falling for him. She fell headfirst and whole bodied. The next Monday, whispers surrounded me. Walking to the buses after the final bell, a different friend accosted me, accused me with her question: "Why did you kiss him?"

The main telephone in my house hung slightly above eye level on a small wall at the back of the kitchen. The cord puddled on the floor. My parents must have bought the cord separate from the phone, it's spiraling length disconnecting conversations from stationariness.

I clasped a tattered-edged picture I'd ripped from *Seventeen*. I showed my hair stylist the waifish model with unevenly cropped hair certain she would not agree to so drastic a cut. But she did. She left longer strands that curled around my earlobes. She gave me layers. She gave me bangs. She gave me a cut meant for straight hair. "Helmet Head" is what my sister said.

At thirteen, I sported braces and glasses and ugly, unmanageable hair. "Kiss who?" I asked. All that day, a rumor swelled that I had kissed the dull boy on the dull sofa. Despite his abject refutation {"kiss *her*?"} and my denial, the rumored kiss cemented itself as a truth.

Listening to my friend, the one who coveted the dull boy, cry and berate me from her end of the telephone, I pulled at the coiled cord. I tugged and stretched until a flattened, straightened section lay against my hand. I let

go and it recoiled. Interrupting her with an occasional rebuttal, I otherwise left the line open for her anger, which spiraled and spiraled. I curled into the cord, wrapped it around my waist and spun a slow circle until I was tangled.

The quick *beep beep* of call waiting gave me opportunity to shirk my friend's endless whining. On the other line, a different friend in search of the truth. I said I'd call back. *Beep beep*. "Hello?" Another friend jumped on the attack: "I can't believe you!" I said I'd call back. *Beep beep*. "Hello?" This time it was the dull boy, "I guess we should talk?" I said I'd call back, though I doubted I would. When I clicked back to the line with my injured friend and her fuming, broken heart, she met my "Still there?" with a tone of renewed injustice: "Who could be more important than me right now?" *Beep beep*. I ignored it. Her presumptive anger continued. *Beep beep*. I ignored it.

My curls have haunted me. I have flat iron burns and the invisible scars of nicknames: Helmet Head and Bozo. Even as an adult, I've had an unsteady relationship with my hair.

*Beep beep*. I ignored it. I'd lost count of the minutes it had been since I spoke. *Beep beep*. I couldn't listen to her anymore: "I have to take this."

I expected exasperation or indignation. I was prepared to continue with my defense, my refutation of the rumor. I was not prepared for the breathlessly panicked voice of my grandmother. "Hello? Shannon where is your mother? I've been calling and calling." I stammered an answer but she talked over me, her words running together. "Where is your mother? He's having a heart attack! I think he is dying!"

The phone still cradled between my cheek and ear, I pressed my finger onto the switch to hang up. Instead of

a dial tone, I heard my irate friend: “Who was *that*? Was it him?”

My grandparents had a telephone in the kitchen, too. Theirs sat on a squat table in the breakfast nook. The cord wasn’t long, like ours, so there was no walking and talking, no space even to sit. They had a second phone in the TV room on the other side of the house and one in their bedroom at the top of the stairs. My grandfather’s heart gave out out of reach of any phone. Which phone did my grandmother run to? She’d been *calling and calling* she said. Did she sprint back to him in between all the times I didn’t answer?

A favorite thing for my grandmother to say was that she wished she had half my hair. Her own hair was thin and then sparse, and I don’t remember a time when it wasn’t gray and cut short. She slept in pink rollers hoping curls would imprint. Sometime in her mid-eighties, she asked me to help her decide on a wig. It was an endearing vanity.

I kept the phone pressed to my ear. I’d held the phone for so long, physically hanging up seemed an impossibility. Relinquishing the phone would precipitate an unalterable future.

My hair falls out. I’m not losing it; my hair isn’t thinning but regenerating with a speed and profuseness that has become a source of amusement. My daughter laughs at the stray hairs left on sofa cushions and counter tops, the ones that cling to shirts and bedsheets. I often want to collect those curls. I want to somehow stitch them together and send them through time to where my grandmother still playfully tugs at my hair, saying, “oh, if only.”

I swipe at my phone’s screen, my thumb reaches for the phone icon. Numbers appear, but there is no dial tone. It’s the noise I am after, the hollow echo of an empty line. I listen anyway. Listen to nothing.

**Lonely**  
KJ Hannah Greenberg  
Art



**Matineé**  
Steven Anthony George  
Poetry

like animals in the forest  
I've mewled for sweets  
to touch to my lips  
like animals in the forest  
plucking and scratching  
we were speaking French  
we were animals and speaking French  
as the sun filtered its golds  
through the canopy  
and I like  
a faun  
danced on a stump of oak  
you pulled me down onto the litter of leaves  
and like the animals we whispered  
each to the other in whining tones  
and the scent of burnt twigs  
from the distance flowed over us  
like animals in the forest  
you kissed me deep  
and I heard the night to fear  
come crawling and you  
like animals in the forest  
had something from inside me  
in your hand and I droned like  
a badger in a trap  
as you laughed

**Your Perfume**

Meghan Kemp-Gee

Poetry

I think sometimes that I would like to leave  
everything to the last minute. I think  
I'd like to slice up my life and feed you  
the very last slice. To the last minute,  
I'll leave everything. At the last minute,  
I'll have every last thing I almost  
didn't have. I'll have you trailing off, a  
final swallowed syllable of smoke, of  
stopping where the grass becomes the trees, of  
not stopping, of becoming, of the trees  
swallowed up by wildfire, then becoming  
wildfire, like the world become wildfire, like  
red and white, red-white, white, sickly red and  
soil-white, of tracking what is fleeing  
through those firetrees smelling of that last  
relentlessness, of the last minute where  
I've left you where I'll see you running bright  
and headlong through the smoke.

**While my Mother Worked Saturdays**

Kalyn Livernois

Poetry

Do you remember me, cropped bangs  
and the cavity between my front teeth  
like cracked pepper? I can still picture  
your hair white-blonde and the way  
you squinted into the sun when we were  
halfway down the eastern slope. We'd stop  
for lunch, always the same American cheese  
singles wrapped in cellophane and lidded  
cups of Nesquik — strength to finish the climb.  
The mountain, so huge beneath our tiny  
bodies. I will always remember it this way —  
never as the hill beside your mother's house.  
Everything always transformed by the place  
my frame is fixed in the territory

**Ode to My Poetry Professor**

Gina Stratos

Poetry

don't make it rhyme  
automatic failure  
rhyming is for dead  
white men, and I  
am not deceased

hip hop is not poetry  
beat breaks aren't line

breaks

and line breaks are *fundamental*

but let the words hit'em  
unlike *glorious*  
which means nothing

anything, everything

write      v  
e  
r  
t  
i  
c  
a  
l  
l  
y

let the absence of whiskers  
in a sink be the divorce,

the hooded wolf,  
your clitoris

unpack your issues  
with the church, with God,  
so, I cancelled therapy  
and bought more books

## How to Deal with a Fly at a Buddhist Retreat Center

Fran Zell

Nonfiction

Always check for flies before opening the door to your living quarters at the Buddhist Retreat Center. Ants may be climbing up the door or hanging around the stoop. Brush them away quickly before opening the door, but don't let ants distract you from checking for flies.

If a fly gets into your living quarters it may be because you were too focused on ants, and flies are by far the more troubling. They buzz around and dive bomb into food. They are annoying. Silence is the promise of a Buddhist retreat center, and flies don't know from silence. True, there are other creatures at the center that go about their vocal business: a hummingbird moth, for instance, rising from tall grass with its throaty signature roar; the white horse whinnying in the pasture, head held high as it carefully skirts the electric fence; the grass itself blowing in the wind, a fly buzzing through it.

It is one thing to listen to a fly buzzing through the vegetation outside your door, another thing entirely when the fly invades your living space. It's like the difference between your ex haranguing you in your memory mind, and him actually right there, standing in front of the kitchen sink bellowing because there is no more coffee in the house.

You must be very careful about what you let in upon opening the door because you must not kill another living creature at a Buddhist retreat center. Death is a natural part of the life cycle and leads to rebirth, says the Buddha. But, nonetheless, you do not want to be the instrument of death.

The fly gets inside anyway. It is in the bathroom, buzzing around when you brush your teeth. You ignore the fly and the fly lies low. But the fly reappears that

afternoon when you return from a bicycle ride. It buzzes around the big garden salad that you have placed on the table near the open window that offers a view of bluffs and valleys and trees in the full green regalia of August. It is an exquisite view and you do not want it spoiled by the fly.

Bam! You shut the window, trapping the fly between the glass and the screen. It buzzes up and down the screen, looking for an exit. It is trapped in there, and you suppose it is suffering. But suffering is part of life, according to the Buddha. The Buddha believed that most suffering is caused by desire, and that the way to end suffering is to eliminate desire.

You are suffering watching the fly suffer. You don't want to let it suffer so much that it dies. You might as well have rolled up the *New Yorker* magazine you brought with you all the way from Chicago and swatted it dead right away. But you didn't bring the magazine with you to become an instrument of death.

You finish eating, wash the dishes and decide to open the window, releasing the fly from its suffering. The fly dashes out of its trap and wings across the room, buzzing around your head, as if to say "thank you." Or maybe it's saying, "ha, ha, you were suffering more than I. My desire to drive you crazy was greater than your desire to get rid of me."

But you let that thought rest, because the fly is now buzzing low to the ground near the door. You open the door and it darts back outside. Quickly, you shut the door, congratulating yourself on how well you have learned how to deal with a fly at the Buddhist retreat center.

Soon you go outside to sit in the sun and read, to enjoy the hummingbird moth whirling through the grass, the white horse wheezing in the pasture, crows cawing from far across the valley, the steady low hum of

crickets, the sound of gravel softly crunching as a man walks silently down the path toward another Buddhist retreat center cabin. Occasionally there is the muted sound of a passing car on the state highway in the valley, a quarter mile away.

You go back inside to spend the rest of the afternoon meditating. There is a fly in your living quarters. For a moment, you wonder if it's the same fly. But it doesn't matter. It's a fly. It's there against your desires, distracting you and causing you to suffer.

*Suffering is inevitable, says the Buddha...yada, yada, yada...*

The fly buzzes past the chair where you are sitting and onto the window pane. You open the window. The fly enters the space between glass and screen. You close the window, trapping the fly. This starts a whole new cycle of suffering for you and the fly.

Time is endless at the Buddhist Retreat Center. Sooner or later the fly will either die or you will relent and open the window again to release it.

To relieve your suffering, you go out for a walk into the valley, past the horse chestnuts and into the remains of an old apple orchard, its twisted and gnarled trees weighted down with unharvested fruit. You go to forget your suffering and the fly's suffering, hoping that the fly will not be dead when you return. Just to make sure the fly will not be dead, you open the window before you go, releasing it into the room.

You grab your cell phone, take a forbidden glance at the news you have been trying to avoid all day: Hurricane Ida upgraded to a Four, about to make landfall in Louisiana where hospital ICUs are full of Covid patients. Another explosion in Kabul.

Aha. The fly is more than a distraction. The fly is your need to remember that suffering follows you

everywhere. Now that you have realized this, there is no more need for the fly.

When you return from the walk it is gone.

**Looking Back**

Corey Mesler

Poetry

Though I did most of the work  
I thought we'd built  
something together.

Now the walls are broken  
and sunlight stabs through  
the holes in the drywall.

Weeds choke the kitchen like  
old food. In the attic a  
pair of mice once lived.

I found their bones, light and  
white as thistledown, on  
this first day of winter, looking back.

**Didn't it take forever**

Corey Mesler

Poetry

Didn't it take forever to  
get here? Didn't you  
change your mind a  
thousand times? Wasn't  
it wild, and frightening?  
Wasn't it strange? Love  
the strange. Didn't you  
wonder who was beside  
you? Didn't you blame  
everyone and yourself?  
Wasn't the lie a terrible  
temptation? Wasn't the  
stranger the worst part?  
You're not alone now.  
You're not the only one  
afraid. Love the part where  
you don't trust yourself  
completely. Wasn't it all  
a mystery play?  
Love the mystery at play.  
Love the strangeness in you.

**The simile**  
Corey Mesler  
Poetry

The simile slipped  
in  
quietly,  
holding its shoes,  
because  
it knew it was  
late  
and it did not want  
to wake  
the reluctant reader.

**ARIES**S.T. Brant  
Poetry

Prize-fighting war gods don't butcher men  
With the frequency or the righteous spine  
The way animals are butchered. When

Artists  
Rage  
Inadequately  
Everybody  
Suffers.

Forests catch fire with disgust  
From our horrible diplomacy with Nature.  
Can the World control the world; or Chaos, chaos?  
No more than medians can guarantee obedience  
Against the powers of the sheep they shepherd.

So what's to do?  
Accept no effort less than All;  
Recognize no futility;  
Invoke your powers,  
Edit out your wrongs;  
Stay strong.

LEO  
S.T. Brant  
Poetry

Fading in on  
Life,  
Eager  
Only children  
Find for themselves their own kingdoms;  
In other families, siblings  
Apostate their bloodlines  
To gain a larger portion of the poverty  
They're due. Securing every entrance,  
Every exit; rusting every mechanism  
Used to operate the draw bridge,  
And neutralizing any potential strike, aerial,  
Doesn't fortify royalty from regicide, as the world,  
Lionhearted,  
Engages  
Offensively  
Against mortal challengers to its natural reign.  
A more skilled swordsman, as Nature is,  
Will eventually exploit the wielder only of a shield.  
Fading out,  
Looking at the world, I see  
Swords are shields,  
Moats and catapults:  
Mere antiques in museums;  
The cavalcade of fiction in my mind,  
Parading through me,  
Is dissected among the different branches of my veins:  
But everything always repairs at my heart,  
From where my soul  
Looks  
Eagerly  
Out.

**graveyards**  
Mark Belair  
Poetry

the shortcut to saint francis grammar school / wove  
through the church's graveyard / a route my sister and i  
took / depending upon the weather

we balked at dark-cloud days / that threatened rain / and  
left home early / to walk the well-traveled / small town /  
sidewalk way

but in fair weather we ventured through / either ignoring  
the gravestones / or pausing to parse  
a near-vanished name / note a freshly fallen stone / a  
crumbling crucifix / a pot of dried-out flowers /  
memorials for the dead / themselves decomposing

after our family moved to the suburbs / my sister and i  
went to separate schools / mine a public / and i took a  
yellow school bus that would stop for kids attended by  
parents / then trundle off / the driver in frowning charge  
/ the landscape speeding by outside / including

a distant graveyard / the sight of which always haunted  
me / without frightening me / something i couldn't  
explain / until it disturbed / one morning / a memory of  
our old graveyard walk / a memory dug up like a  
disinterred body / a memory of once having felt / so  
close to life

**The Smell of the Car Wash in the Morning**

Mark Belair

Poetry

Broke  
is why you work at a car wash,  
out on the sidewalk,  
rag in hand, drying fenders  
still dirty from the dysfunctional  
machinery inside.

Broke  
is why you put up with the humiliation  
of showing up each morning  
ahead of time  
to stand in a row  
the owner will pick the dayworkers from.

That others were  
broke worse than you—they were poor,  
while you were just college tuition-stretched—  
was why, after a few weeks, you couldn’t bear  
to be chosen, then even stopped going:  
someone’s kids—your fellow supplicants,  
all recent immigrants, were all family men—  
suffered as a result.

You can still picture the owner  
stepping out of his chauffeured Cadillac  
he had washed somewhere else  
and, before taking his pick  
of immigrants, drawing  
a deep, dollar-filled, All American  
smell-of-the-car-wash-in-the-morning breath.

**Dankness**  
Mark Belair  
Poetry

The old, gritty sidewalk  
holds hard

evidence of a soft  
spring shower,

a loamy aroma  
that rises

up from cracks  
that reach

down  
to the fresh, muddy

time  
before

men  
with concrete

purposes  
arrived.

## Signature Required

Sarah Ferris

## Poetry

**Leashing a Teen**

Sarah Ferris

Poetry

I worry about my teen starting to drive,  
wanting to go off by herself as she  
pulls hard at the leash, yes

we're holding on  
as she pulls the choke collar tight  
and it's taking both of us

just to stay the path  
as she sniffs the undergrowth —  
because we know, oh yes, we know

the meat in there that attracts her and  
where we buried our favorite bones.  
Yes, we have to hold on

hold on, double up the leash,  
hoping it's strong enough  
hoping we're strong enough

and you know, it would be nice to have  
a pair of elbow-length padded gloves,  
the kind they use to train attack dogs —

cause sometimes                    the teen turns on us  
like a bitch in heat, and        snarls with  
narrowed eyes                    but we remember, oh yes,

we remember and reach out slowly to her  
like those who calmed us so long ago  
when we snapped the leash

so we hold on tight, sometimes  
taking turns sometimes together,  
as we slowly give her full reign.

**An Owl's Call at Dusk and Dawn**

Sarah Ferris

Poetry

A hum fills the silence  
between short, deep  
owl calls. The hum that's

my constant companion,  
tinnitus. I don't think about it  
anymore — I weave it into

ecstatic union with  
sounds around me  
and make it song —

otherwise it'll drive  
me crazy. Because  
there are no crickets here

there is only tinnitus,  
so I weave that  
constant high note

with the owl's short,  
deep ones and as self  
glimpses self, I stretch

beyond loss of hearing  
into that small death where  
I can hear my own song.

**Calorie Counter**

Corey Miller

Fiction

I'm an overachiever, surpassing the Freshman 15 by gaining 50 pounds. I employ the online calculator to decipher how many calories I should eat daily to trim fat. I enter my height, age, and current weight to discover 1,689 will transform me skinny, where eyes won't divert onto my core. I increase the age 100 years and the calories required for survival drops to 1,246.

I add another 100 years = 942.

Another.

At age 381 I won't need to eat anymore — I may simply exist.

I will hide until then. Complete my Child Development degree online behind a filtered avatar of how I wish to appear.

I planned on raising America's next generation, but it's easier to give advice than swallow your own medicine. I could teach How To Seem Content Living Under The Radar 101.

Online claims a calorie is a unit of energy defined by the amount of heat required to raise the temperature of water by 1 degree. My body is 60% water. My body is 98.6F. How cool will I be when I'm 381? Ground temp? Enough weight to snowflake from a cloud? How hoary must I become to calculate self-worth? Fingers crossed my student loans are paid off by then.

I eat 7 grains of basmati, belly ballooning with shame. I'm a treasure map beneath this fat, how a twig might costume an inflatable sumo wrestler for Halloween. Growing up I believed it was "Hollow Wean" as if weaning off food that doesn't melt in your mouth, direct deposit of sugar to the blood stream. I deepthroat a pickle to release everything inside me;

vomiting a self-help book, memories of my boot camp father pinching my rolls, skipping prom because no matter what I goddamn do — the scale tilts upwards. Merely a midnight snack.

On my dorm desk rests a 85 calorie fun size Butterfinger and *Health Magazine*, displaying reproduction stimulation of model ribs jetting out, underling “Top 10 Ways To Maintain Your Beach Bod Through Winter.” Just because something lies before me, doesn’t mean I need to consume it, I tell myself.

I flip through my \$125 *Child Development* textbook. The 297 pages are thin like running through a deli slicer. The pages morph from the flat broad side into a narrow line you hardly notice, yet enough of them bonded together can create an entity of value.

**Hunted**  
Phil Huffy  
Poetry

Look about the cabin,  
quiet in its resolve  
to reveal little  
of the mayhem seen.

The plank door lies unhinged  
near the huntsman's remains.  
A single gas lamp  
renders him grotesquely.

Nothing has been taken.  
His skiff bobs in its slip  
as the pond awaits,  
but the wait will be long.

And he does not listen  
as the steel covered roof  
amplifies raindrops  
from branches overhead,

propelled by ghostly gusts,  
inclined in their falling  
to dancing rhythms  
briefly, brightly beating.

The killer trots away  
blithely, on massive paws,  
having satisfied  
his curiosity

though finding the huntsman  
a pitiful trophy,

easily taken  
but unappetizing.

**Pick A Word**

Madinah Jolaade Abdulsemiu

Poetry

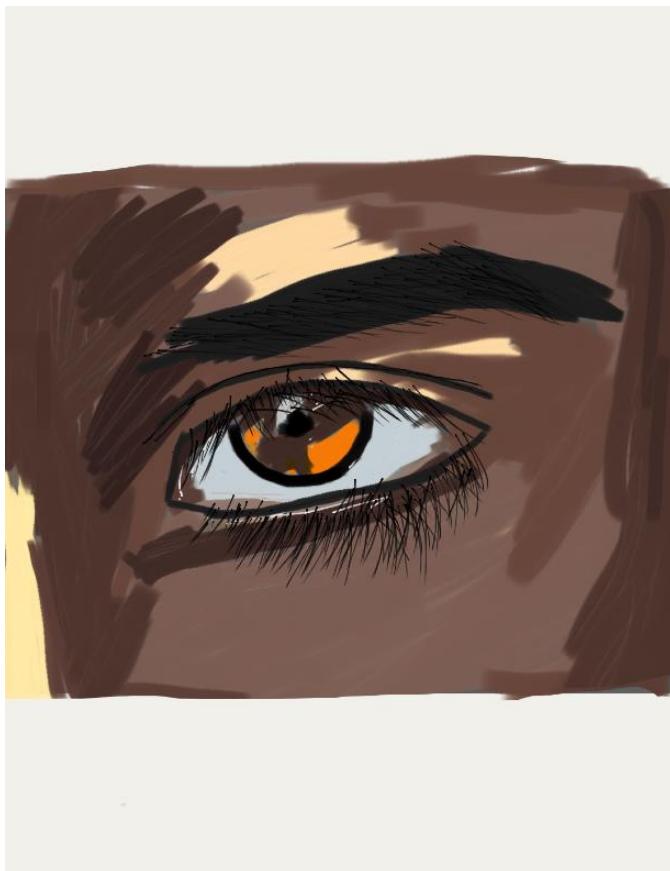
Pick a word  
Write your thoughts  
Let your pen heal your world  
Through the veil of courage

Be the weaver of your thoughts  
Never write with a borrowed word  
For the world comes around for it  
And you will be left sinking underneath.

Set your mind ablaze with words  
Set the world on fire with thoughts  
Then the mightiest soldier will bow  
And the shiniest king will bless  
For winning hearts without bloodshed.  
But with inks of wisdom and drops of knowledge.  
To follow and be followed,  
In lines of words and stanzas of thoughts.  
And not tears of lost ones.

Change the world with your pen  
And not with your sword.  
Write till the ink in it cries  
Let your pen be a deity  
And be the mastermind behind it.

**Image 2**  
Madinah Jolaade Abdulsemiu  
Art



**Calamity Jane**  
Olivia Ivings  
Poetry

Florida's summer opens when a plague  
of cicadas ascends in March.  
The luckier states are still enjoying spring.

I want to bubble up like an Icelandic geyser  
and razor myself skinless, as I tell my boss  
when she asks how I feel.

A second-grader asked why I have a mullet.  
I want to join a women's punk group, but I play  
banjo. I'll learn more during my Saturn return.

My bare feet dangle off the porch swing;  
Mars is a glowing speck from my view.  
I met a woman in the bar's bathroom last week.

Tonight, she's tattooing, "Even Sad Cowboys  
Say Yeehaw" above my kneecaps. Life's candor  
and the way mangroves buffer the current wreck me.

**Past Deaths**  
Beatriz Seelaender  
Poetry

I never again want to be part of anything  
any movement, sudden or complete with a manifesto  
when you're part of things they are part of you  
and the other parts will twist and pull at your insides  
you try to take it apart, it's resistant  
it's a shooting pain that goes dormant hopefully  
after some five years. Until something happens  
and it feels exactly like someone has travelled  
back in time precisely to kill you  
fifteen-year-old you, discounting her blessings,  
back on her bullshit after one day trying to be hopeful  
or nine years, who knows? if I told her  
the pain takes this long to get over, she'd  
do something drastic like drop out of high school  
and we can't have her doing that, we depend on her  
to pull through to exist. but somebody shot her tonight,  
and I am still here. This she would not have survived,  
yet somehow I did. Rules of time travel are to me  
abundantly clear. So how come I'm all right,  
my shadow self notwithstanding? My novel  
shooting scar  
that I just got, from the past pending?  
A jammed printer finally passing me a note  
in it there are expired aspirations and bad news  
I somehow missed the first time around, I didn't know  
So that's why I made it, then, I missed the memo  
So embarrassing for a girl to be emo in her twenties  
But then you have to stop making sculptures out of ashes  
and calling each of them a phoenix

**feel like dying**

Beatriz Seelaender

Poetry

sometimes dying your hair makes everything better /  
sometimes drowning your roots in neon blue makes you  
feel put together / like some instafamous cool chick /  
some manic pixie girl of your dreams / an infamous  
2011 hipster who drinks alternative water / a full person  
without her original trappings / free from character traits  
and their tethers / free to be anyone who might be happy  
/ and responsible enough not to let the roots show / your  
folks say you're so lucky to have this hair / they don't  
know that what makes it lucky / is precisely that it can  
be / squandered and depleted in artificial dye / that  
makes me feel like a real person / a phenotype squared /  
paint it blue / paint it black / bleach it so maybe it will  
reach my brain / feed my strange hunger for wasted  
things / so that it won't devour the rest / call me emo all  
you want / but when I listen in repeat / to welcome to the  
black parade / I listen to the version in jazz

**QWERTY Girl**

Joe Gianotti

Poetry

She hung art on her walls,  
filled composition notebooks  
with musings of love and time.  
A music goddess,  
who collected Lorde and Lana  
when they still played the Vic.  
Stand-up quipster.  
Sketch wisecracker.  
Improv farceur.

Normal will not alter your course.  
Chanel suits everyday of the week?  
It's difficult to find images  
of Plath in anything informal  
or Kruger in a smock.  
Lizzy only leaves Upstate in couture.

The weapons of war  
will always outpace strategy.  
Her path just a shade to the left  
of the one envisioned.  
She'll learn that talent  
born to blue-collar work ethic  
has only two possible destinies:  
personal fulfillment  
accompanied by familial disappointment  
or a life of misery  
paired with parental praise.

She will learn to reach out,  
to touch the forest's trees,  
to swim in the 2 a.m. lake,

nothing between her skin  
and the clear water beneath her chin.  
She will shout truths to the sky,  
and whisper secrets to the ground,  
and at the end of the day,  
she will alchemize  
her blood into language  
that does for the class of 2040  
what Alaska did for her.

**Apocalyptic Haiku**

Mark Jackley

Poetry

*Way after Basho*

moon melted,  
pitch black,  
barnburner of a war

**Listen**  
Mark Jackley  
Poetry

I dreamt my words streamed up my legs. Reverse tears.  
After all these years, I shouldn't be surprised.  
True language comes from somewhere deep, the pools  
below speech. Dark, wet places. Where things drip.  
From under stones too, like the ones around my mailbox,  
baking like potatoes as we glide around the sun,  
warm and rough and real in my wrinkled hands, a note  
from when I was a boy and the table opened wide.

**RAW WAR**

Jay Mora-Shihadeh

Poetry

raw war  
bled for  
no reason  
on curdled  
tongues.

*taste, sour  
slice, blood  
moon, red  
sun, black  
dawn, never.*

night forever  
forgot to shed  
the days bitter  
dark cold.

silver guns  
on young  
skin,  
hobbled knees,

dreams wet  
humidity.

sour taste  
left on right  
*raw war*  
powerless  
endless  
thoughtless,

no mercy  
left,  
*or right.*

**the poet, at 45, looking at a blank piece of paper**J.C. Mari  
Poetry

Don't keep  
Yourself from me, like  
Women allowing themselves  
Only at a distance  
Passage birds in gaudy sight  
The story of other men's lips  
Other men's hands,  
Don't

Make yourself unavailable  
Like the voice of God  
Thundering only for the insane,  
Murderous or elect,

Don't become  
A thing of yesterday  
Like clotted blood in a corpse

Don't go  
The way color goes  
From childhood photographs:

Don't keep  
Yourself from me  
Like the life that's  
Flown off into some other distance ...

## Contributor Bios

### Tony Abbott

After starting writing poetry, I detoured for the last thirty years or so to write novels for younger readers and have now returned to poetry for adults. I am interested primarily in epic verse, and two of these poems belong to longer sequences, but may stand up on their own.

### Madinah Jolaade Abdulsemu

Madinah Jolaade Abdulsemu is a student of Mass communication at National Open University of Nigeria, Kano. The Ekiti writer started showing up her talents at the young age of 8.

### Rashmi Agrawal

Rashmi Agrawal has been published in nearly a dozen anthologies. She lives in India and sits by a big window to write and enjoys diverse seasons outside it while scratching her brain (and whatever comes in the way) to polish her first novel. When she's not writing, she vexes her daughter in motherly ways. She tweets @thrivingwordss.

### Shannon Barbour

Shannon lives in central Mississippi with her husband, daughter, and four dogs. She especially loves writing on rainy days when her favorite candle is apropos of everything, a scent called Thunder Storm. Or maybe it's just been raining for so long.

### Mark Belair

I'm a poet/drummer and, amazingly, there are many of us. Perhaps, either way, we simply let rhythm be our guide.

Allyn Bernkopf

Allyn Bernkopf is a Ph.D. poetry student in the vast plains of Oklahoma where she binge-watches the Marvel universe, drinks too much wine, and antagonizes her cats all to procrastinate what she should be doing; homework. She's a millennial, so she has GAD, PTSD, and ADHD, and she'll tell you all about it but, as the joke goes, does the bare minimum to fix it. She enjoys little things like coffee, poetry, and waking up at the ass-crack of dawn.

Robert Beveridge

Robert Beveridge (he/him) makes noise ([xterminal.bandcamp.com](http://xterminal.bandcamp.com)) and writes poetry in Akron, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in Feral, Ez.P.Zine, and Homology Lit, among others.

Karen Boisonneault-Gauthier

Karen Boisonneault-Gauthier is an Indigenous artist/photographer creating cover images for Synkroniciti, Pine Cone Review, Feeel Magazine, Dyst, Arachne Press, Wild Musette, Gigantic Sequins, The Unmooring, Vine Leaves Literary Journal, Gateway Review, Doubleback Review, and many more. Walking her Siberian Husky named Kiowa under an aurora borealis is forever a dream. Visit [www.kcbgphoto.com](http://www.kcbgphoto.com) for all her endeavors.

James Bone

James Bone is a twenty-six-year-old writer from Liverpool, England. His interests include pigeons, silent cinema, rap music and walking. He enjoys writing semi-autobiographical work concerning mental illness, drug addiction, trauma and chocolate.

**Timothy Boudreau**

Timothy Boudreau's recent work appears in *Trampset*, *Reckon Review* and *MonkeyBicycle*, and has been nominated for Best Microfiction and a Pushcart Prize. His collection *Saturday Night and other Short Stories* is available through Hobblebush Books. Find him on Twitter at @tcboudreau or at [timothyboudreau.com](http://timothyboudreau.com).

**S. T. Brant**

S. T. Brant is a teacher from Las Vegas. Pubs in/coming from Honest Ulsterman, EcoTheo, Timber, Door is a Jar, Santa Clara Review, Rain Taxi, New South, Green Mountains Review, Another Chicago Magazine, Ekstasis, 8 Poems, a few others. You can find him on Twitter @terriblebinth or Instagram @shanelemagne.

**Corrinne Brumby**

Corrinne Brumby is a neurodivergent writer who lives in Orlando, Florida. She lives in Florida and loves getting outdoors and connecting with nature through hiking, birdwatching, kayaking, and simply being outside with the trees and birds. She writes to inspire people to connect with nature and find the courage to be themselves. When not outside or writing, she loves hanging out with family, traveling, eating good food, and playing the violin.

**Charles K. Carter**

Charles K. Carter is a queer poet and educator from Iowa. He holds an MFA from Lindenwood University. His poems have appeared in several literary journals. He is the author of *Chasing Sunshine* (Lazy Adventurer Publishing), *Splinters* (Kelsay Books), *Safety-Pinned Hearts* (Alien Buddha Press), and *Salem Revisited* (WordTech Editions).

### R.T. Castleberry

R.T. Castleberry, a Pushcart Prize nominee, has work in Steam Ticket, Vita Brevis, San Pedro River Review, Trajectory, Silk Road, StepAway, and Sylvia. Internationally, he's had poetry published in Canada, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, France, New Zealand, Portugal, the Philippines and Antarctica. His poetry has appeared in the anthologies: Travois-An Anthology of Texas Poetry, TimeSlice, Anthem: A Tribute to Leonard Cohen, and Level Land: Poetry For and About the I35 Corridor. He lives and writes in Houston, Texas.

### Linda M. Crate

Linda M. Crate has been called weird since she was a child, but learned to embrace her weird and what made her different because it made her happy. She has always loved stories, music, and art for they made more sense to her than any "logical" math problem she was given. Her favorite season is autumn for it feels like a second spring with an explosion of color that nature pours her heart and soul into.

### Gail Denham

As a poet, I chose the smallest item to write about, trying to have fun with the subject, dragging up and highlighting old memories. My goal is to make people laugh or remember. My muses are humor, faith, fun, crazy when I can.

### Sarah Ferris

Sarah Ferris grew up in a library masquerading as a home with innumerable older sisters who dropped books on the floor, so the baby nibbled paper and devoured type until her green eyes turned brown. She writes about the everyday, reveals familiar things in a new light, and

devours books wherever she roams. She lives in Los Angeles with her family.

### Sharon Goldberg

Sharon Goldberg is a Seattle writer who was an advertising copywriter in a former life. Her work has appeared in *The Gettysburg Review*, *New Letters*, *The Louisville Review*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *River Teeth*, *Chicago Quarterly Review* and elsewhere. She is an avid but cautious skier and enthusiastic world traveler.

### Phil Goldstein

Phil Goldstein's first (and maybe best) story was written when he was 6 and concerned two pizza-shop owning brothers who thwarted an alien invasion by cooking the aliens in their pizza ovens. When he is not writing professionally or personally he enjoys going on long hikes with his wife and dog. He is a total nerd (Lord of the Rings trivia is his forte) and is proud of that.

### KJ Hannah Greenberg

KJ Hannah Greenberg tilts at social ills and encourages personal evolutions via poetry, prose, and visual art. Her images have appeared as interior art in many places, including *Foliate Oak Literary Magazine*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *Les Femmes Folles*, *Mused*, *Piker Press*, *The Academy of the Heart and Mind*, *The Front Porch Review*, and *Yellow Mama* and as cover art for *Impspired [sic]*, *Pithead Chapel*, *Red Flag Poetry*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *The Broken City*, and *Torah Tidbits*. Additionally, some of her digital paintings are featured alongside of her poetry in *One-Handed Pianist* (Hekate Publishing, 2021).

**Steven Anthony George**

Steven Anthony George is a resident of Fairmont, WV. His poetry and short stories have been published in several online and print journals, as well as the anthologies *Diner Stories: Off The Menu* (2015) and *Twice Upon A Time: Fairytale, Folklore, & Myth. Reimagined & Remastered* (2015). He is an autistic adult and active in the autism community. He often speaks and has written on the topic of autism self-advocacy to parents and teachers.

**Joe Gianotti**

Joe Gianotti hails from Whiting, Indiana, a Chicago suburb and blue collar town. He teaches English at Lowell High School, a job that he loves. Joe is a baseball fan, loves to learn about geography, and owns an extensive Funko Pop collection, which is on display in his classroom.

**John Grey**

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *Sheepshead Review*, *Poetry Salzburg Review* and *Hollins Critic*. Latest books, “Leaves On Pages” “Memory Outside The Head” and “Guest Of Myself” are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in *Ellipsis*, *Blueline* and *International Poetry Review*.

**Joel Harris**

Joel Harris is a Trinidadian poet and artist who constantly experiments. In 2020 he was shortlisted at *Into The Void’s Poetry Prize*. His work will appear in *Heavy Feather Review’s #NoMorePresidents* next year. He leads counterradicalization workshops and training programs with Sirius International Caribbean Defence Contractors Ltd., the firm he co-founded.

**Phil Huffy**

Phil Huffy had a long career doing something else. He used to write boring stuff for his job. He enjoys cycling, camping out, small hikes, moonlight, and motor trips. Recently, he got an electric bike and has not been seen since.

**Olivia Ivings**

Olivia Ivings lives in Atlanta, Georgia, with her two dogs, Aurora and Matilda. She enjoys eating leftovers and acting like she knows what is going on (even though she doesn't). When she isn't walking with her dogs or dusting the leaves of her plants, you can find her sliding across the floor like a snake.

**Mark Jackley**

Mark Jackley's work has appeared in Fifth Wednesday, Sugar House Review, The Cape Rock, Natural Bridge, and other journals. His new book of poems Many Suns Will Rise is forthcoming from Main Street Rag Press. He lives in Purcellville, Virginia, in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

**Meghan Kemp-Gee**

Meghan Kemp-Gee writes poetry, comics, and scripts of all kinds somewhere between Vancouver BC and Fredericton NB. She teaches composition and co-created the world's best comic about ultimate frisbee. You can find her on Twitter @MadMollGreen.

**Jeffery Letterly**

Jeffrey Letterly is a composer and multi-disciplined performer. He was born and raised in the heartland of the Midwest and now resides in Syracuse, NY. His poetry comes out of nowhere, which is somewhere that can be anywhere.

**Kalyn Livernois**

Kalyn Livernois is an MFA candidate at New England College. She is a prose editor at Cobra Milk and the managing editor of Variant Literature's journal. Her work has most recently appeared in Emerge Literary Journal, Anti-Heroin Chic, and The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature. You can find her on Twitter @kalynroseanne.

**J.C Mari**

J.C Mari resides in Florida. He's the author of the poetry collection "the sun sets like faces fade right before you pass out".

**Corey Mesler**

COREY MESLER, a Trappist Monk, was raised by wolves. He has Canadian blood, which, unlike Canadian Bacon, doesn't stay fresh if left out. He has rambled around some, mostly from the bed to the bathroom, and once saw Prince in the Los Angeles airport. He also dated Vanity's sister, but has no claims to ethnic insider information. He published some novels that some people liked. As of this date, he has written 4,861 poems. He also claims to have written "Green Acres." With his wife he owns Burke's Book Store (est. 1875) in Memphis: tells him which shirt goes with which pants.

**Corey Miller**

Corey Miller's writing has appeared in Booth, Pithead Chapel, Atticus Review, Hobart, X-R-A-Y, and elsewhere. He reads for TriQuarterly, Longleaf Review, and Barren Magazine. When Corey isn't brewing beer for a living in Cleveland, he likes to take the dogs for adventures. Follow him on Twitter @IronBrewer or at [www.CoreyMillerWrites.com](http://www.CoreyMillerWrites.com)

### Jay Mora-Shihadeh

Jay Mora-Shihadeh (He/Him) resides in Sarasota Fl with his wife and dog, Samuel. Jay's verse hounds him like his dog crying in the night. One day he woke up and decided to heed that call, and let the words flow. Today, he works at his craft every day, for better or worse, and most days you can find him beating around his blog- The Artist from the Inside Out

<https://artistfromtheinsideout.wordpress.com/>

### Cyndy Muscatel

I have written features and humor for The Desert Sun, Desert Magazine, 92260, LQ Magazine, and Healthy Living. I have also written for many other publications including The Seattle Times, The Mercer Island Reporter, The Desert Post Weekly, Palm Canyon Times, and Westlake Magazine. A former high school English teacher, I now teach memoir writing in Kona, Hawaii, and I write a monthly column for Lake Sherwood Life magazine. My blogs, A Corner of My Mind and Writing Do's and Don'ts, are available at [cyndymuscatel.blog](http://cyndymuscatel.blog).

### Brontë Pearson

Brontë Pearson is a science journalist and creative writer from Oklahoma. Her essays, short stories, and poetry seek to expose the art of being human through natural discoveries of the body, environment, and mind. Her work has been published in numerous online and print publications and 'best of' anthologies, including Nonbinary Review, The Smart Set, Motherly, The Mighty, Arkansas's Best Emerging Poets, Door is a Jar Magazine, and others. Brontë is also a mother and an enthusiast of alternative rock music, dark chocolate, and cats.

**Robert Pegel**

Robert Pegel is a husband and father is a husband and father whose only child, his son Calvin, died in 2016. Calvin died in his sleep of unknown causes at age 16. Robert writes to ponder life's mysteries. He tries to transform his grief by creating. Robert graduated from Columbia University where he majored in English. He has been published in Trouvaille Review, Fahmidan Journal, The Madrigal, ZiN Daily, The Remington Review, Spirit Fire Review, The Rye Whiskey Review, As Above So Below and others. He has work forthcoming in Sledgehammer Lit, North Dakota Quarterly and Resurrection Magazine. Robert lives in Andover, NJ with his wife, Zulma and their Min Pin dog, Chewy.

**Scarlett Peterson**

Scarlett Peterson is poet, essayist, and lesbian. She is currently working on her PhD at Georgia State University. She received her MFA at Georgia College. Her work can be found in Moon City Review, The Lavender Review, Cosmonauts Avenue, Peculiar, Pidgeonholes, Gargoyle Magazine, Ponder Review, Madcap Review, Counterclock Journal, The Shore, Poetry Online, Skink Beat Review, Eunoia Review, and more.

**Vincent Antonio Rendoni**

Vincent Antonio Rendoni (he / him) is a Seattle-based writer. He is a 2022 Jack Straw Fellow and the winner of Blue Earth Review's 2021 Annual Flash Fiction Contest. He is a contributor to What They Leave Behind: A Latinx Anthology. His work has appeared / will be appearing in the Texas Review, Juked, Fiction Southeast, Sky Island Journal, Cordite Poetry Review, and more.

**Kevin A. Risner**

Kevin A. Risner is a product of Ohio. He is the author of *Do Us a Favor* (Variant Literature, 2021). He loves reading, running, and enjoying a nice scotch — not all at the same time.

**Matthew Schultz**

Matthew Schultz: bassist, vegan, poet. What else could be said?

**Claire Scott**

Claire Scott is a recently retired psychotherapist who is enjoying having more time to write, take long walks and try to stay ahead of the weeds. She is excited to be spending more time with her five grandchildren who are scattered over the country.

**Beatriz Seelaender**

Beatriz Seelaender is a Brazilian writer, although she doesn't quite believe in national borders. Right now, she is probably tired and grumpy. Her dog, Uli, is her utmost muse.

**Nora Smith**

Nora Smith is a copy editor living in Pittsburgh. They can most often be found glued to a book under a pile of blankets, or chasing a poem idea down through the woods.

**Gina Stratos**

Gina Stratos is a writer living in northern Nevada. She enjoys collecting words, sipping buttery Chardonnay, and cancelling plans with friends. Her work can be read in *Dark River Review*, *Door Is A Jar*, *The Meadow*, *Rabid Oak*, and *Words & Whispers*.

**Edward Michael Supranowicz**

Edward Michael Supranowicz is the grandson of Irish and Russian/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 other journals. Edward is also a published poet.

**w v sutra**

w v sutra can be found writing poetry on his horse farm in East Tennessee. His work has been published in various outlets, and interested readers may amuse themselves by seeking them out! He is easily identified by his long braided beard.

**Mary Grace van der Kroef**

It's the simple things that sustain us, like a good cup of coffee to dunk a cookie in. Or the bubbles from a cold Dr. Peper that tickles the nose and forces a sneeze. But most of all, holding another person's hand through time and space as they read my poetry.

**Alexandra Williams**

Alexandra Williams is a UK-based freelance writer. Born in London, she now lives in a village in Berkshire where she tries to fit in with her green-fingered neighbours by growing vegetables (with varying degrees of success). She writes poetry and prose and, in her spare time, enjoys walking (whilst thinking about poetry and prose).

**Bill Wolak**

Bill Wolak is a poet, collage artist, and photographer who has just published his eighteenth book of poetry entitled All the Wind's Unfinished Kisses with Ekstasis

Editions. His collages and photographs have appeared as cover art for such magazines as Phoebe, Harbinger Asylum, Baldhip Magazine, Barfly Poetry Magazine, Ragazine, Cardinal Sins, Pithead Chapel, The Wire's Dream, Thirteen Ways Magazine, Phantom Kangaroo, Rathalla Review, Free Lit Magazine, The Magnolia Review, Typehouse Magazine, The Round, and Flare Magazine.

#### Fran Zell

I am the author of *The Marcy Stories* (Bottom Dog Press) which won the Banta Award for literary achievement from the Wisconsin Library Association. Other work, including fiction, theater reviews and journalism, has appeared in [Mondoweiss.net](http://Mondoweiss.net), [Splashmags.com](http://Splashmags.com), Other Voices, Playgirl Magazine, Chicago Reader, Madison (WI) Isthmus and Milwaukee Magazine. I am a former feature writer for the Chicago Tribune and a recipient of grants from the Illinois Arts Council and the Barbara Deming Memorial Fund, Money for Women.

## **Submission Guidelines**

Door Is A Jar Magazine is looking for well-crafted poetry, fiction, nonfiction, drama and artwork for our print and digital publication. Please read over these submission guidelines carefully before submitting any work.

Our magazine features new artists and writers and works that are accessible for all readers. Please look at our current and archived issues before submitting your work. Works that are confusing, abstract, or unnecessarily fancy will not be considered.

We only accept new, unpublished work. If you have posted something to your website or social media, this counts as being published.

Contributors can submit to multiple categories; however, only submit once to each category until you have received our decision about your piece.

Upload your submissions to Submittable with the category you are submitting to and your first and last name as the filename. Within the cover letter please include your full name, contact info, and 3-sentence bio.

We accept simultaneous submissions; however, please notify us immediately if a piece is accepted elsewhere. We reserve first initial publishing rights and then all rights revert back to the author. We do not pay contributors at this time.

For more information please visit  
[doorisajarmagazine.net](http://doorisajarmagazine.net)