

Door is a Jar

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Cover image by Betsy Jenifer

Nature and books belong to  
the eyes that see them.  
— Ralph Waldo Emerson

**Pete the Apostle, Saint of Fishermen**

Lily Gontard

Nonfiction

Since October, the scowling garden gnome and his friend, the Gray Owl, were living inside a clear Plexiglas case in a yard on the corner of Glenn and East Fifteenth. But, in the last forty-eight hours they have been liberated. The weather has turned fair, the rain ceased, and the promise of spring is near. The case is gone and the owl has been allowed some space. Gray Owl now sits a little distance from the ill-tempered small being, who clutches a silver fish almost as large as himself. Gray Owl has taken up roost in the flowerbed near the house. The gnome stands in place, clutching his fish, as he has all winter. His expression of discontent not changed at all.

## Ode to a Junked Car

Seth Jani

Poetry

The car rumbles, shakes a great, sad lion song from its mouth,  
Heeds no call to action.

Slothful in the summer heat

It lays dormant while the sun cooks its fluids. Brother! Your guttural voice  
entreats me,

Calls me to the province of lonely, rusted things, Leads me to work out each knot  
of corrosion Torqued and sealed in my heart.

Such sure satori

Laying in your hard, greasy soul.

Exemplary one,

Letting the breakdown enter your body,  
Refusing none of the mechanical sleep

Which to us is failure,

To you the natural peace of being.

If there is still a dream inside your tired engine

It is only of roads completely traveled.

If there is still desire speeding through your pipes It is only to roll the windows  
down

And let what happens happen.

Fearless, perfected one,

How gracious you are to the red paint

For disappearing.

How gracious to the tiny mouse

For taking refuge

In your enormous metal shade.

**i never left and never will**

J Mari

Poetry

he sits drooling dead flies onto puddles of stale blood  
and tells you drunk and bloated  
that there won't be any more poems  
or

sex or love and that you will end up  
living in the streets  
everyone you know murdered  
the women raped  
the books burned  
and

you'll be  
a quadruple amputee  
drunk and bloated he

puffs on his cigar.

He doesn't need  
to look at your face anymore.

He's been watching for a long time  
frothing at the mouth  
thinking  
painting landscapes and abstracts too  
planning to castrate you and your cats

starving  
for something from your table...

and when he talks you're three again  
pissing yourself in the dark.

## **PERFECTION**

J Mari

Poetry

A slightly sloping field  
With a bump here and there  
Bathed by a most  
gentle and discreet kinda dark.  
Because it's seven or  
Maybe 8  
The gates are locked  
There's no one inside.  
Under the earth  
Everything is satisfied  
Finally made perfect  
The nearby trailer park  
Is full of lights that scream  
And want to eat your eyes  
Like rotting animals.

**Ova**

David K. Slay

Fiction

Dr. Bradshaw shushes everyone, reminding them that the rats can easily be distracted, so they must remain perfectly quiet. He turns on a small red bulb hanging over a Plexiglas enclosure — the “mating arena” — and flicks off the overhead fluorescent lights. A white female in the enclosure has been showing the usual exploratory behavior, examining the space, sniffing the sawdust floor and occasionally rising on her haunches to sample the air above. Her blood-red eyes look black in the light.

While the students stand around the table, quietly waiting for their eyes to adjust to the inky-red light, Rita, Andy’s lab partner, slowly slides her hand behind him and tweaks his ass. It’s the kind of thing she’d do, and he likes her a lot, but sometimes she makes him nervous. Bradshaw takes a male rat from a container and places it in the arena. Everyone watches closely as the female begins a little dance, hopping around him, jumping toward him but then darting away. The male closely follows the female’s movements, and then tries to mount her. On the third attempt, while clutching her sides with his front legs, she crouches slightly and moves her tail aside. With his head and nose thrust upward in rigid concentration, he completes the act in about two seconds.

The next day in the lab, Andy lifts a female rat from a glass beaker and lets it and explore his hand and arm. In this stage of the experiment, her ovaries will be removed. Then, assuming she recovers, they will see what effect that may have on her mating behavior. Making a circle by touching his middle finger to his thumb, he suspends her by her front legs. The rat hangs patiently with head and front legs poking out above, pink nose and whiskers twitching. Using his other hand he gently strokes down the length of her body. She is smooth, warm, and soft. Her hind legs go limp.

“Syringe,” he whispers to Rita.

Rita handles the syringe needle-up and makes sure no air is in the fluid.

“Syringe,” she whispers, placing it in his fingers. She holds her breath.

Andy inserts the hypodermic into the rat’s abdomen and injects the antibiotic. His hands are steady. The rat doesn’t flinch.

“Good job!” Rita says, eyes big, exhaling. “I’m impressed!”

“Ether,” he says.

Rita opens a dark brown bottle of the anesthetic. Holding a cotton ball in tweezers, she carefully saturates it with drips of the fluid, and then drops it into a beaker. Andy places the rat in the beaker and covers it with a square piece of glass. They watch while it stands on its hind feet, stretching upward and pawing frantically at the slippery sides of the beaker.

"What I really liked about today," Rita says, "is how you used your hands." She takes a bite of a pickled egg and watches him as she chews. After they completed the lab work, Rita suggested getting a beer to celebrate.

"My hands?" Andy says.

"Yes. Like when you were handling that lab rat, stroking it, giving the shot, and your excellent work during the *oophorectomy*." A small piece of egg white pops out of her mouth on the *ooph* and they both laugh. She flicks it from her knee.

"My *hands*? I thought you were impressed by my *mind*, like when we study for exams."

"I *am* impressed by your intelligence," she says, "but with those hands you could be, like, a surgeon." She takes a long drink of beer. "And you went right to the ovaries—no one would know it was your first time."

She picks up one of the waxy-looking jalapeños that came with the egg, beer and pretzels, and bites off the end. She squeezes juice from it onto her half-eaten egg. They both watch as the drops sink into the dull yellow yolk. He takes a sip of beer and watches her finish the egg, fan her mouth, and wave her empty mug at the bartender for more beer.

"Paramedics!" she calls out, still fanning her mouth, "Fire in the hole!"

When the next pitcher arrives, she tops off his mug and refills hers.

"You know," she says, "I think you can tell more about people by their hands than by their brains." She takes a long drink of beer, wipes foam from her upper lip, and looks past him into the distance.

Later that night, in Andy's one-room apartment, they stand just inside the door making out. A vintage floor lamp with a red shade infuses the room with a soft orange glow. After several long kisses, Rita loosens his belt, unzips his pants, and slides her hands down inside his shorts, squeezing a cheek in each palm. She pulls him tightly against her pelvis and slowly moves her hips. Andy gasps and buries his face in her neck and hair. Squeezing his eyes shut, he clutches her tightly and shudders. They stand still a moment, except for their close, heavy breathing. Andy straightens up and catches his breath, but has to hold on to her for balance.

"I'm really sorry. It's just...I got lightheaded."

She slips her hands from his pants and holds his arms. "Maybe I'm going a little too fast."

"No way. Well, maybe. I mean, I didn't know I could come so fast."

"Don't worry," she says, "there'll be more where that came from."

She unbuttons her shirt, takes it off and drops it to the floor. , She lifts her hair and waits for him to release the hooks of her bra. Her skin is hot against the backs of his fingers. She lets the bra slide from her arms and turns to face him. While he stares at her breasts, she takes his hands and guides them to gently squeeze her nipples.

"Such great hands," she mumbles.

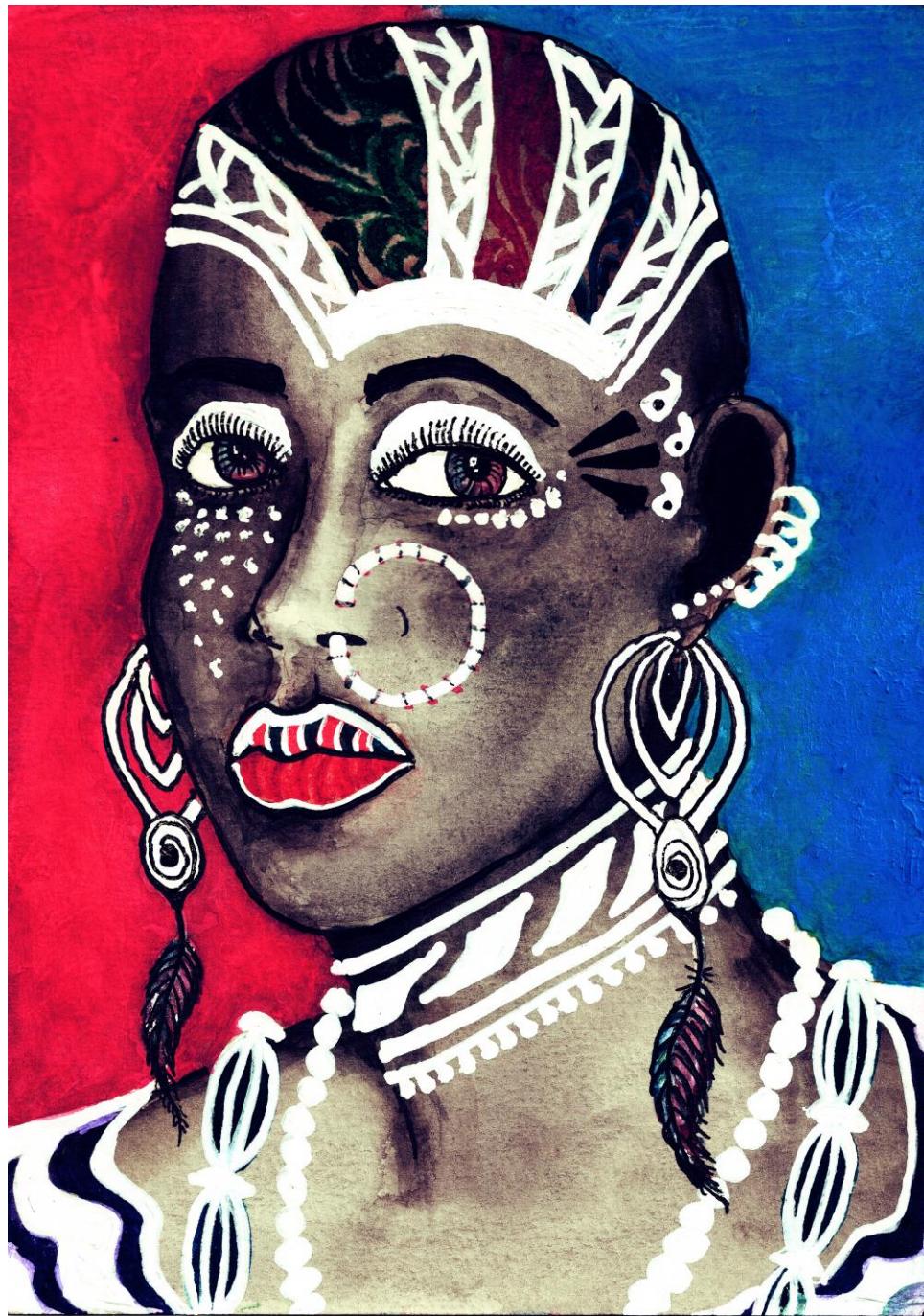
"But, what about..."

"I'm on the pill. Stop *thinking*."

**Direct Sales**  
Jennifer Davis  
Poetry

Social media is Times Square  
for the homebody, a vulgar blitz of  
housewares and weight-loss drinks,  
as tacky and odious to behold as  
a flashing neon sign with half its bulbs blown.  
Our *friends*, *connections*, and *followers*  
peddle their beer dips and bags and baskets  
and (invariably hideous) jewelry  
like we're a hard-won and expensively acquired  
collective of marketing leads.  
We're added against our will to *groups*  
that pose as slumber parties for 300+ guests,  
affecting a tone of sisterhood and inclusion with  
overzealously deployed exclamation points.  
We're *invited* to events that amount to little more than  
spam in our main feeds, pelted with guilt bombs  
and reminders to sign up/RSVP/buy some shit.  
We're held hostage in the name of *support*  
in a world where *friend* = *Target Demographic*.

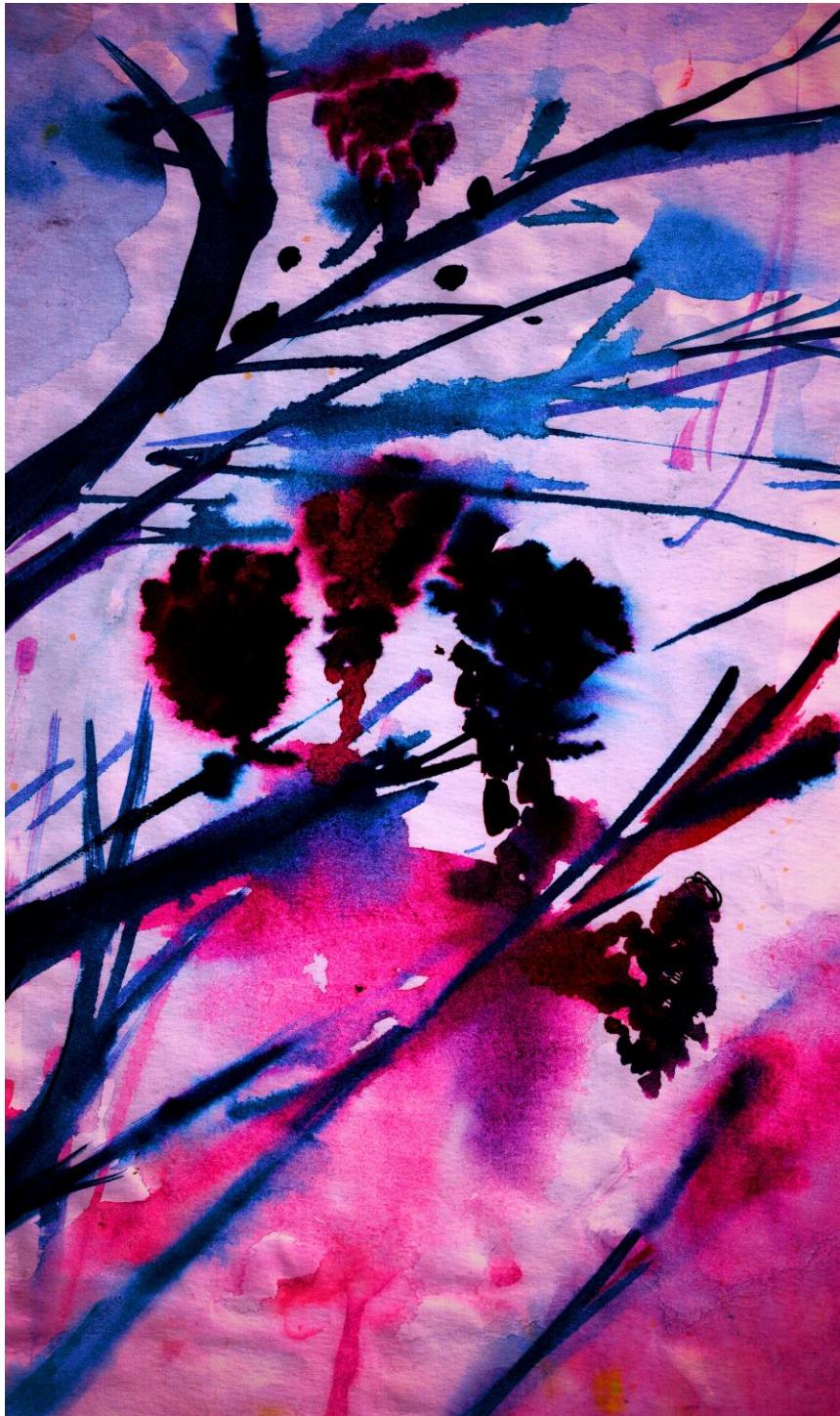
**Tradition**  
Betsy Jenifer  
Art



**Asphalt Jungle**  
Betsy Jenifer  
Art



**Grapevine**  
Betsy Jenifer  
Art



**Codependent**  
Ryan Shane Lopez  
Poetry

Because I begged, he gave me cash (though I didn't need it).  
Because I nagged, he gave me time (though begrudgingly).  
Because I coaxed, he gave me affection (though it wasn't love).  
Because I manipulated, he gave me commitment (though they said he was wrong for me).  
Because I talked back, he gave me bruises (though it was mostly my fault).  
Because I threatened, he gave me promises (though I knew they wouldn't last).  
Because I lied, he gave me a life (though time revealed the truth).  
Because I neglected, he gave me space (though I hoped he'd come back).  
Because I needed...  
Or was I just needy?  
But I did have needs. Freedom. Discovery. Maturity. Healing. Even struggle.  
Because I was forced out of dependency, I was forced to grow.  
I'm no longer needy. Now, I am needed.  
And because I'm needed, I'll give him all my love (and he'll give me all of his).  
Because I'm needed, I'll never let him go (and he'll never want me to).  
Because I'm needed, I'll be his everything (and he'll be mine).  
I don't need a man anymore.  
I have my little boy.

## My First Worst Year Ever

Nina Fosati

Nonfiction

It was cold; the sky was gray. The colors surrounding us were drab. The morning had barely begun, as the shadowed light hovered between dark and day. We waited for the school bus, me and the neighbor girl, Ruthanne. I was five. She was older. I'd walked to the end of my driveway and waited for her to join me. Then we'd crossed together to stand in the long toasted grass lining the side of the road. Behind us was an abandoned field. A muddy ditch, slowly filling with brush and weeds, served as moat and barrier.

In the dim half-light, three objects appeared. Their trajectories precisely timed to intersect directly in front of us. From the left, the school bus emerged from the trees and rattled toward us. From the right, a car rose over the top of the Thruway Bridge. The driver seeing Ruthanne and I, and the advancing bus, gunned the car. From the house, my brother opened the front door to yell something at me. Toby squirmed out the screen door and sprinted toward me. He was my Cocker Spaniel, a birthday gift recently given and long begged for. The puppy loped toward me, his droopy ears flapping. I screamed for Toby to stop, to go back.

Tires squealed, and his happy yips suddenly ended in a dreadful howl. My screams changed to cries. I tried to run across the road and was held back by Ruthanne. My father charged out of the house and yelled for me to stay there, to get on the bus. I struggled and raged against Ruthanne. "Let me go. I have to get to Toby." She was bigger and stronger than I was. She picked me up and shoved me into the bus. It pulled away. I pressed my face against the window, watching the chaos behind. My breath turned to frost on the chilled glass.

My father made the man in the car come to our house to apologize. He seemed like all the men in suits I knew: uncomfortable with children. He was embarrassed to admit to a child he had been driving too fast. He said, "The dog ran into the road right in front of me. I wasn't able to stop in time, do you understand?"

I stood there stone-faced. Angry. Thinking, you want me to say it's OK. You want me to say I forgive you. You never said you were sorry. You were wrong, and you are bad. You killed my dog.

The man stopped talking. He looked up at my dad and gave him that half-shrug, half what's-the- matter-with- your-kid look. He stood, adjusted the knot of his necktie, and gave himself a little shake. He faced my dad, his mouth flat and tight, mirroring my own. The message clear, "I give up. I tried, and your weird little daughter just stands there glaring at me."

I didn't know it at the time, but that was the beginning of my first Worst Year Ever.

**P.S. Note to self**  
Barbara Turney Wieland  
Poetry

Lastly and taking into due consideration  
therefore and for this reason  
in addition to and as a consequence of  
henceforth and to make haste to  
a foregone conclusion summarized  
succinctly for all and sundry to  
recognize the importance of procedures  
processed and placed in the appropriate trays  
at the appropriate time  
IN/OUT in triplicate and reiterated  
complacently and for the benefit of many  
all in all (expletives duly deleted, at this point)  
thus, if I may take a moment to (and not omit to)  
state the bloody obvious to most: Situations Vacant  
I have not the slightest notion what the afore-mentioned question was

NB: Disregard the above-mentioned annotation  
as subversive in the extreme and completely without object  
Error: as a means of seeking attention again  
Begging your pardon

To whom it may concern,

quite

Sincerely

BTW

**Claudine's Blues**  
Bridget Menasche  
Poetry

If I slide your pants back on  
and tug your shirt over your head  
will you walk out of my life

and into traffic  
please god walk into traffic  
you say my god

like you didn't meet me after church  
and I wasn't wracked by the same guilt  
come on down to my house you said

and we walked through lake reeds  
the drown of light off water  
the lintel of your door

If I return your chucks  
and your disgusting red sox cap  
will you shuffle out of my mind

do I have to let you dress  
me is that required for this magic  
this prayer you pulling my dress

back over my head  
you said the whole world was your house  
but you are a sad boy not a god

you said the highway was your stereo  
and the lake was your door  
so I'm walking out of it

not that I saw you with her  
but I saw you as you were

**Gospel**  
Bridget Menasche  
Poetry

Vocal cords lit up by night music, mom growls *lord*  
*have mercy* like she's about to crack glass and lord

*watch out, she's from Chicago* pools like cord  
from my dad's trumpet while the dog howls, lord

of the blues. Both of us a long way from home. Long pour  
for the dogs in all of us, throwing heads back, howling lord.

Spill one for monarchs, sun-tossed, storm-lost over  
Vegas' light. Lord, don't turn your nose up, lord,

turn up your cup and pour yourself over the floor.  
And tip another one for those with blues lording

us into night trumpet howls, into recording  
the same sights over and over: lords

of flies counting pupae in cotton-topped vials, scorers  
sorting life into little galaxies, scientists cursing *lord*

*almighty* when we don't mean it, when working  
on a problem that, like all, will never be solved. Lord,

give me more *something*. Give me an inordinate fondness  
for cells as strong as yours for beetles. Lord,

give me eyes like the Hubble, hands raw, raw  
data becoming a deep field filled with curses and lord

knows what else. Give me a taste for repetition, your  
taste for blood. Give me the life you didn't make, lord,

fill me like a fern furled and ready, give me words,  
give me the knife to cut up life on this earth and start the lord

forsaken task of sorting it not into boxes but the glorious  
trees we use, all connected without word or rule or lord.

**Vagrants of the Firmament**  
Joshua Rodriguez  
Fiction

I'm whisky drunk in the crisp winter German dusk, when the sky starts cracking and the lurid red of Hell starts burning through. When the sun starts to set, and goes oblong across the horizon, and then diffuses into the ether. There's plenty of room for the jagged stars and electric darkness to occupy, like vagrants of the firmament, and the moon is like a waning bare-bulb, barely able to keep the world lit. But I don't complain. It's better to be kept in the dark sometimes. Especially when the reality is so devastating.

Me clutching my bottle of Louisiana Highway Whisky, bought for seven euro, and the German rationale being that arbitrarily putting two American words together gives the name of the whisky some kind of American clout. I stumble down the street, struggling to light a cigarette, body stultified by the booze, but mind galvanized. Barely feeling the world as it turns and passes me by. Sometimes not feeling a thing is what feels the best.

I walk the back way from Patch Barracks to the train station. Passed the BMW dealership, up the hill, down the steps, and on that stretch of asphalt. Off the main road, where traffic is sporadic and people walk dogs with brightly lit colors, as if their pets just came from a rave. I walk passed the Vaihingen pool, deserted and frozen over in the wintertime. The sprawling grassy lawn where people lay out on blankets in the summer, trying to tan, young firm bodies and old corroded bodies spangling the expanse of grass.

The three pools, slide, and the diving boards are hard to see unless you squint. I'm always forgetting how much space there is until I see it empty. I see the kiosk that sells French fries and ice cream and beer, and none of the three ever taste so good as they do after a day of swimming. Vaihingen pool, where me and my friends jumped the fence to get in for free, because the few euro entry cost at the turnstile was too much of a drain on our funds at that time. And it gets me down thinking about when I would do whatever I could, and it made me feel alive and good, because it's not like that anymore, and it hasn't been for some time now.

There are trees hanging overhead. The leaves hang like stalactites, glistening in the moonlight from the frost that has collected on them. I walk past the bridge with the awning over it, past the lake where me and my lady would first sit a year ago, on the bench that's positioned on the bank, drinking beer and smoking cigarettes and staring out over the moon spattered surface of water and the ducks skimming across the top of it, cutting into our field of vision.

And eventually I walk out into the well-lit perimeter of life. Where there are houses, and the trees suddenly stop their sprawl, and everything is concrete and windows are lit a warm yellow. Street lights glow pale overhead like vagrants of the firmament. I walk past the Pullman hotel, right next to the train station where you can hear the trains sigh as they pull in and sigh as they pull out. Ranks of taxis parked outside the hotel, then a glass enclosure for people to wait for buses, and then the rows of bus stops. Stops for the 84, 86, 721, and the sequestered stops for the 81 and 82 a little down the way.

The Pullman hotel, where we go to call taxis after we have stayed out too late and the trains stop running, drunk or high or tripping on acid, sitting in the chairs and staring out the window in the lobby, delirious and dog tired, waiting for the taxi to pull up. Where we go to use the restroom because it's free, and then leave in a hurry because we're being chased out for not being guests. The Pullman hotel, where we went one evening, stoned and drunk over the summer, listening to shitty lounge music and drinking grossly overpriced six euro shots of Tequila Silver, salt shaker on the table, and the skins of lemons in a pile.

Eventually I get to my train platform, and wait until my train pulls in, and I board with a drunken gait.

Ugg boots at the bottom of the stairs mean she's waiting for me. That the S3 didn't carry me home fast enough. That there's trouble waiting in my bed. And in the morning, we'll both be hungover and forget the magnitude of the imminent dispute. Mostly forget, anyway. Because the ghost of it will hang over me. The specter of late night turmoil always follows me. It's like a curse that way. So I go into the office instead of the bedroom for a few hours. The guitars and computer sitting there lifeless, but there's still an enigmatic life there.

I drink whiskey and write words and step out onto the balcony to smoke cigarettes and hope that when she says she's falling out of love with me, it means that she's tapping into something more profound. But I know that's bullshit. The only thing more profound than love is death, and we're all tapping into that, some of us quicker than others.

On the balcony, my feet are freezing from the stinging concrete tiles, everything is covered in snow. It looks like the ash covering Pompeii. Everything frozen and nothing changing. Lifeless and still. That's the curse of living in this stasis—you're comfortable until you're not. Eventually, you just wish that the tectonics would shift a little.

**I put her back under my floor**

Bryanna Licciardi

Poetry

Because it wasn't the strangest thing,  
finding a dead girl beneath my kitchen.  
Because her smallness discomfited me.  
She was no bigger than my cat  
though my cat is admittedly big.  
Because the museum man wanted  
22 thousand dollars. Because even  
the funeral parlor wouldn't take her  
for less than 7.  
Because her coffin had a little window.  
Because when I looked inside,  
after a rag and Windex,  
there was nothing but dust, bone, hair,  
all soft and matted together.  
Because I wanted someone to talk to  
while I did the dishes.  
Because I guessed her hair  
would've been wavy, like mine,  
or that she laughed at serious things,  
hated, too, sharing her food.  
Because I never got along with children.  
Because my cat was already jealous,  
and my plate was much too heavy,  
and the ground is where  
we go to pray, which I assume means  
it would make her  
a better home.

Forty  
Tiffany Jimenez  
Nonfiction

His face is suddenly different. Forever forty, even through my prescription lenses, his face is suddenly sixteen years older. I am not sure what day it happened, though I can easily rule out his birthday.

Some days, his voice matches his aged face. The high notes crack and I can see the glossy sheen of his eyes, and it's as if I'm seeing him more clearly now. I make a mental note to not be so sensitive, not to lash out when my mother says *something*.

"I love my family." He says this often and though he never held back affection before, these statements linger in the air like they're trying hard to mean more. "I'm going to live," he adds.

When my father came to after having his colon removed, my mother hung her head above his as she hurriedly asked, "*What did they say about the mass in your throat?*" Her voice, finding strength in the onset of tears, marked no difference in her age. Her body (which had changed noticeably into the folds of her own mother's body, square and downward) showed her for who she was.

"Mom, what are you doing, how can he know about the mass? He's been in surgery for over ten hours!"

She stood there above my father, who struggled to lift himself past her. I watched him search for a doctor. I flitted towards the hospital bed, trying my best to push my mother out of the way without causing my dad pain. His pain, it seemed, had been rooted solely in the quarrels I had with my mother. Before the surgery, his only request was that we get along. As I kissed him, he whispered, "Be nice, my pretty little girl."

"Dad, the doctor will explain later. They found something in your throat, but they don't think it's malignant."

"What did the doctor say?" My mother's face was swollen with lack of understanding. I had memorized the doctor's words for this very moment. I was prepared to know more than my mom. I ignored her.

"We love you, Dad." I leaned in and kissed his chest. He was holding his eyes closed with his needle-riddled hand. I strained a stare at my mother, hoping to transmit all of my pleas for her to stop talking. She did.

Weeks came and went and we found out that the mass was indeed benign; that the colon cancer had not spread, that a tiny dot on my father's spine and lung were just too tiny to biopsy. We would have to wait for them to grow. This was hard to understand.

When these weeks passed, I made a pact to myself. Do not be angry. Be strong. They'll break if you are less than you seem.

I catch myself staring at photos. Not of my dad. Not of my mom. I stare too long at photos of myself. Mapping out lines I didn't notice before. Seeing where each begins, where they might end. I catch myself asking my partner to mark the changes, but he waves me off immediately.

“You haven’t changed since I’ve met you,” he says. Five years ago, I still saw my father as a forty-year old, wiping his wet hands on a towel, staring to his left with the darkest of sunglasses on, our SUV behind him, shining in the sun.

It was so clean.

**Remembrance**  
Gene Hines  
Fiction

The palace is a crumbled pile now, but the walls are still standing. No roof, no glass in the windows, no doors. The winds whistle through as the rains and snows fall in. It is surrounded by weeds and mud. The dirt road leading five miles from the highway, the highway that goes to Kwidzyn, is overgrown too.

This was the palace of the von Fichtel family. Napoleon lived here for two months and had a mistress with him. The Countess Clothilde von Fichtel does not approve of the mistress, but what to you say to an emperor? She only grudgingly forgives her ancestors for permitting such a thing.

There is a plaque embedded in the top of a stone post where the gates of the palace once stood. It says; *In Memory of the Countess von Fichtel, her daughter, the Lady Cynthia, and Her Servants.*

Today, as every day, the Countess Clothilde eats her breakfast, imaginary food served by servants who don't exist in the great dining room of the Palace which isn't there (the dining room where Napoleon his mistress once ate), rain pouring in through the roofless palace (or not.)

When the Countess Clothilde von Fichtel sleeps in her roofless and empty bedroom, on a bed that isn't there either, she remembers things. Mostly she remembers the Russians who came in 1945 and burned the palace down. All but the brick walls, with remnants of plaster still clinging to them; after they raped her and her daughter and her female servants numerous times, and murdered them all.

“Gott rette mich!” she cried.

But nobody saved her.

“Fasciste dog!” the Russian soldiers yelled as they raped her.

She could hear the cries too of her daughter, thirteen years old, and all the female servants. The Count Alfred von Fichtel was away, fighting the Americans in Italy. The male servants had run away when they knew the Russians were coming. The women stayed, at least most of them, because they didn't believe the Russians would harm them. Because they were not attractive and they could not reckon with the vengeful brutality of the soldiers.

“Oh Gott barmherzig!” Adelinde screamed.

“Jesus!” screamed Hilda.

“Bitte nicht!” screamed Ilsa.

Viktoria could only cry.

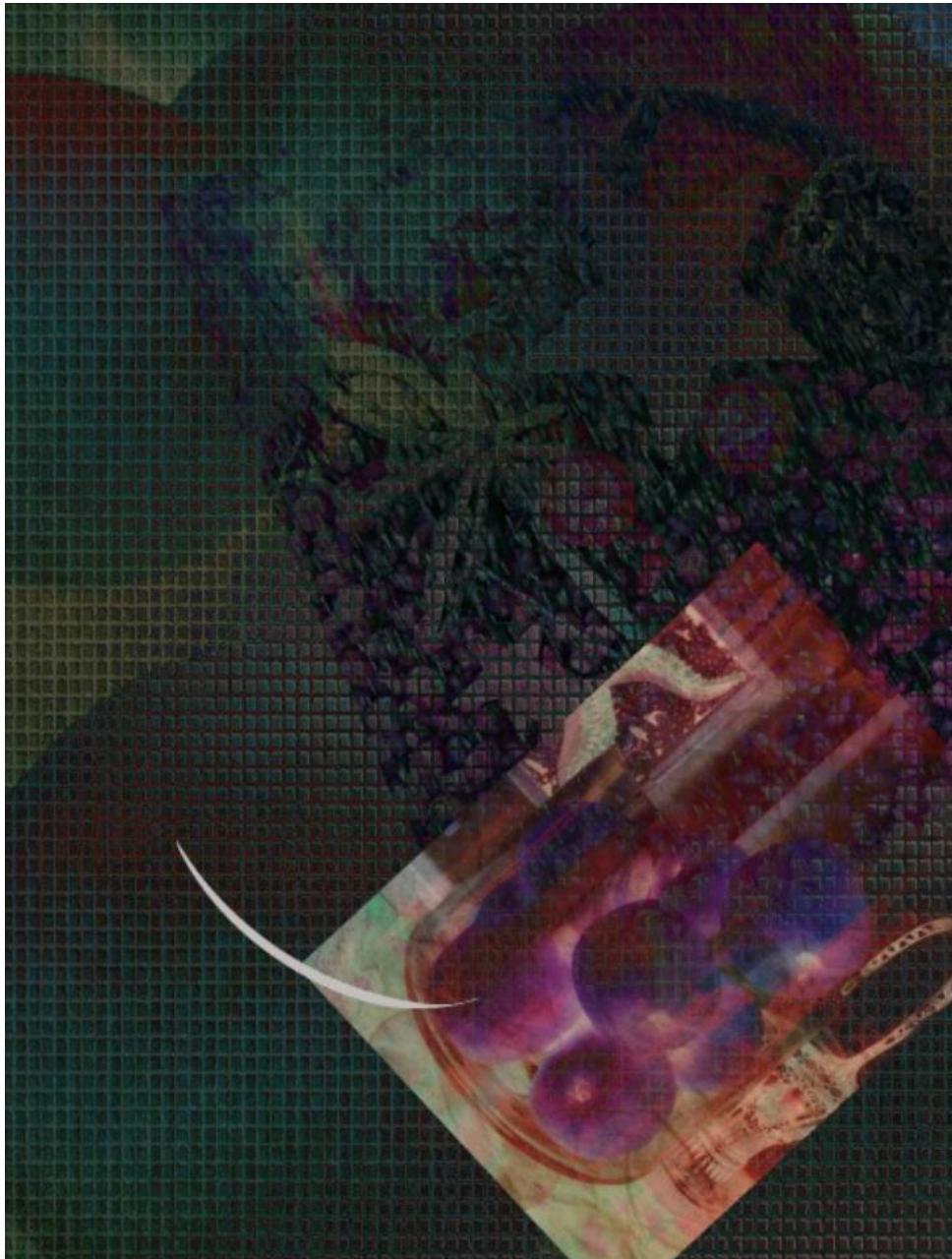
The countess's daughter, whose name was Cynthia, remained silent.

After the murders, the soldiers became busy with the theft of the beautiful things in the Palace von Fichtel and nearly forgot about the countess herself. But one remembered and he stabbed her to death.

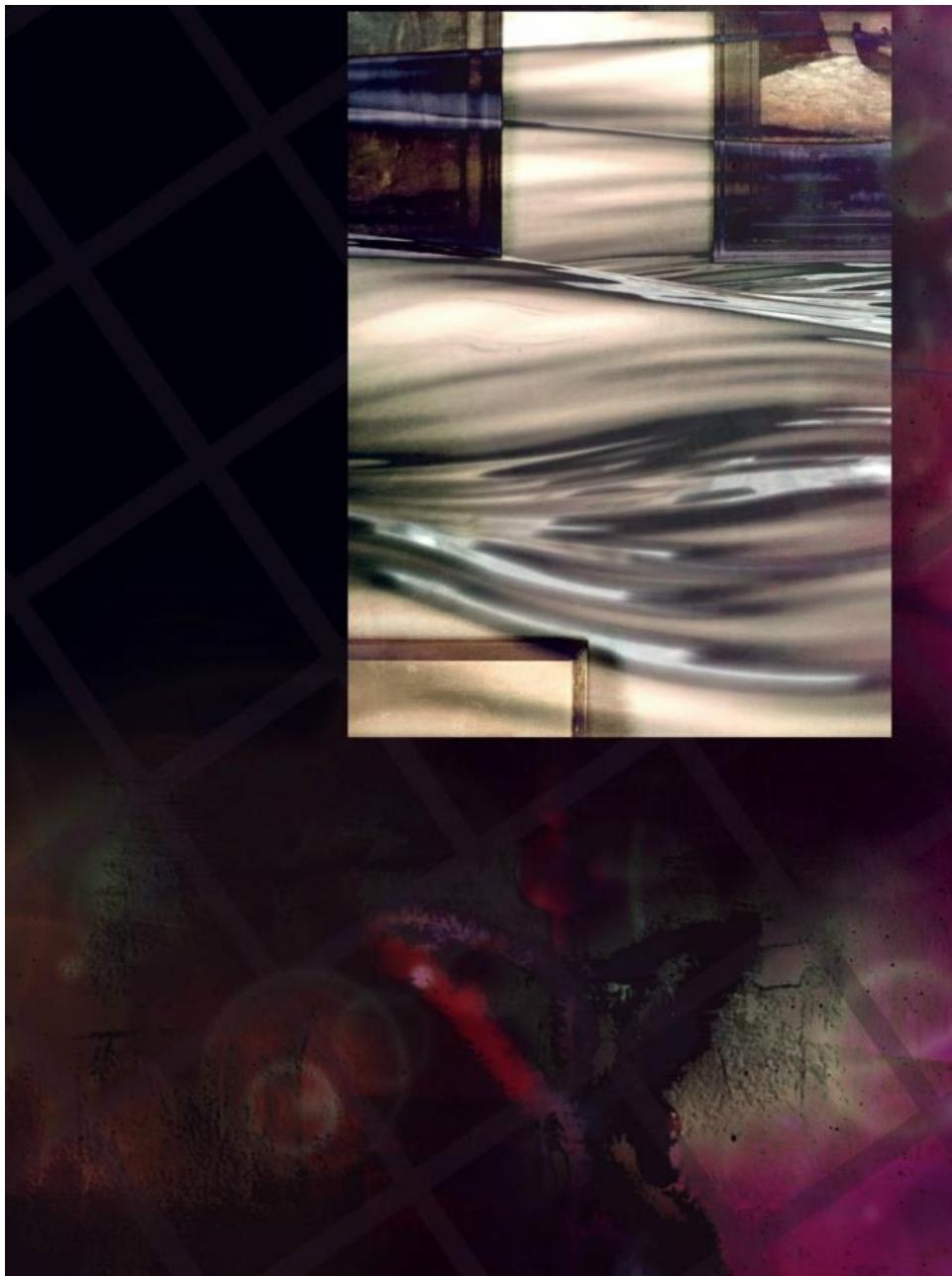
In the misting rain, drizzling from the roofless and floorless second story, the Countess plays a piano. She is a good musician, all the von Fichtels were

cultivated people. Not an actual piano of course, the Russians destroyed the real one and it is now shattered in the rubble. She sits on a pile of broken things, stretches out her arms and moves them along the keyboard that only she can see to play music that only she can hear.

**Untitled 1**  
Ana Prundaru  
Art



**Untitled 2**  
Ana Prundaru  
Art



**Untitled 3**  
Ana Prundaru  
Art



**Cast Your Vision**  
M. Nicole R. Wildhood  
Fiction

He had lived here all 12 years of his life but now the neighborhood was nearly unrecognizable. It had gone blurry before, more than once; especially the last time. His mom had given him time to say a final goodbye to the basketball hoop at the end of his driveway, the old, green fire hydrant that looked moldy, the spruce tree. In four hours, his mom said, he wouldn't be able to see any of this — or anything else.

She was right. They came home from the operation and he didn't see the driveway; he only felt the car stop. His mother instructed him to wait until he felt her hand on his shoulder before attempting to get out of the car on his own. He didn't see the door handle or the seatbelt buckle, much less the driveway and flinched when he stubbed his fingers on the window. The warm pressure of his mother's fingers guided him slowly to the ground out of the car and, with tapping or pushing, steered him around the only place he knew.

He didn't see his sister's green-and-white-striped hula hoop in its usual spot: a branch in Ricky's oak just above Darcie's reach or the sectioned, hollow-plastic jump rope — the kind that not only welt, but pinch your shins when you don't get out of its way — that Devin and Jane had strung between their bedroom windows over the street so that they could zipline messages in a black bean can. Someone had had to drill the holes at the top into so they could thread a hair ribbon through it to hang on the line. He didn't see which sprinkler was making the annoyed-mom scolding sound before glopping water more on the roiling asphalt than anyone's lawn. He didn't see Kevin, but heard him ask his mom why Jared was wearing sunglasses in the middle of winter. He heard a *shhhh* several voices strong but didn't think his mother would tell him the truth if he asked who was staring at him. He didn't see the streetlight that flickered at all hours but he knew its buzz: they must be passing the end of Jenny and Stevie's yard. He wondered if the light's cover was still askew from the bike accident that got him under a full-face scanner at the hospital. His mom called it a 'brain reader,' which was different than a mind reader because machines don't interpret, they only report.

If it weren't for the familiarity of the thud on the actual sidewalk, or the streetlight's rhapsody in short circuitry, the whoosh of Devin to Jane or vice versa, even Kevin's quiet question, he wouldn't recognize the place at all. It's still the neighborhood, his mom said. Now in retinoblastoma-free and hopefully soon not so sonically odd form.

**The Tug of War**  
Chanel Brenner  
Poetry

Having dinner with another couple  
who also lost a child, I watch  
their two-year-old bounce  
on her mother's lap,  
grab the mother's face and pull her hair  
while she looks at the menu.

The child is the same age Desmond was  
the night Riley died.  
The same age Desmond was  
when he asked,  
*If you had another baby  
would it be Riley?*

When the mother says she'll stick with water,  
I ask if she's pregnant.  
She nods her head,  
but doesn't smile.

*I've been crying, she says.  
I know I should be happy  
and I am, but I'm scared too.*

I know what she means.  
Eleven years ago, when we found out  
I was pregnant with Riley,  
we rushed out and bought a crib  
that same day.

Now, if I were pregnant again,  
I don't know what I'd do—  
  
hope pulling one way, grief the other—  
joy the rope in my hands, raw and burning.

## **God Surveys the Ohio Valley**

John Stupp

Poetry

Here  
His love was industrial  
His coal trains  
forever beating the rails in Conway  
His rolling mills  
His stamping plants  
and here  
no one noticed  
the noise  
of His metal on metal fixation  
or His shift whistles  
until they were gone  
or His coal shovels  
or His pay phones  
or His telephone operators  
spread like candy  
along the Ohio River  
where each town asked  
for grass  
and dandelions  
and flowers  
and sunlight  
on the way to Pittsburgh  
and the calls went unanswered  
that's what most people remember  
His spitting sky  
His dusty sacred heart  
this paradise like a stump dug up

## Contributors

Chanel Brenner: Chanel Brenner is the author of *Vanilla Milk*: a memoir told in poems, (Silver Birch Press, 2014), which was a finalist for the 2016 Independent Book Awards and honorable mention in the 2014 Eric Hoffer awards. Her poems have appeared in *New Ohio Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Rattle*, *Muzzle Magazine*, and others. Her poem, "July 28th, 2012" won first prize in *The Write Place At the Write Time's* contest, judged by Ellen Bass. In 2014, she was nominated for a Best of the Net award and a Pushcart Prize.

Jennifer Davis: Jen Davis lives, loves, and peddles her wordly wares in Northern Kentucky. She has poetry published or forthcoming in *Door is a Jar Magazine*, *Whale Road Review*, *Peacock Journal*, *Licking River Review*, *Eclectica Magazine*, and several others. She also does a little acting and most recently popped up in John Cariani's "Love/Sick" in Ft. Thomas, KY. As a freelancer Jen is churning out copy and relocating poorly placed commas like the Two Men and a Truck of punctuation. On the creative side she's actively seeking shelter for her unpublished works and trying to figure out how to turn them into a cohesive collection.

Nina Fosati: Nina Fosati is an artist by inclination and a typographer by training. She is a collector of images and likes introducing friends to her favorites. Depending on your point of view, Pinterest has been either a godsend or an enabler for her fixation.

Lily Gontard: Lily Gontard chooses to write and live in a sub-Arctic landscape that is literally covered in ice and snow six months of the year. But, there is cross country skiing and hockey, so it's not that bad, and it gives her a lot of naturally northern gothic material to work with. Her first non-fiction book *Beyond Mile Zero: The Vanishing Alaska Highway Lodge Community* will be launched by catapult in fine bookstores across North America in Spring 2017.

Gene Hines: Gene Hines was a student in Germany, a Marine in Vietnam, a preacher in South Carolina, a missionary in Japan, a lawyer in North Carolina, and is now a writer in Tennessee. One of his stories was nominated for a Pushcart Prize and he was awarded the James Patrick Prize for Fiction by the Exiles Literary Group. He attended the Borderlands Press Writers' Boot Camp. You may contact him at [bcdejkllmms@gmail.com](mailto:bcdejkllmms@gmail.com).

Seth Jani: Seth Jani grew up in the wilds of Maine and after years of crisscrossing the country he now resides in Seattle, WA. He believes life is a certain channel, death a change of frequency, and has a penchant for pet rabbits and medieval history. Visit him at [www.sethjani.com](http://www.sethjani.com).

Betsy Jenifer: Betsy Jenifer is a seventeen year old from south India.

Tiffany Jimenez: Tiffany Jimenez is from the San Francisco Bay Area. She earned her BA in Creative Writing from UC Santa Cruz, and her MFA from Saint Mary's College of California. Other than being an ardent supporter of the imagination and the art of storytelling, she writes a lot, laughs a lot, startles easily, and loves potatoes.

Bryanna Licciardi: Bryanna Licciardi has received her MFA in poetry and is currently pursuing a PhD in Literacy Studies. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee, and has had work appear in such journals as Poetry Quarterly, BlazeVOX, 491 Magazine, Dos Passos, Adirondack Review, and Cleaver Magazine. Please visit [www.bryannallicciardi.com](http://www.bryannallicciardi.com) for more about her.

Ryan Shane Lopez: Ryan is a high school English teacher in Texas. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Music and a certificate of creative writing from The Attic Institute in Portland, OR.

Bridget Menasche: I'm a graduate student in the Molecular, Cell, and Developmental Biology department at the University of Colorado at Boulder. I love all bacteria that don't live on my kitchen counters; painting dead things; and writing poems while driving. My work can also be found in Fiddleblack, PANK magazine, the Adroit Journal, and Parcel.

Ana Prundaru: Ana Prundaru lives in Zurich, where she works as a translator and writer. Recent work appears in Hot Metal Bridge, Journal of Compressed Creative Arts, Gargoyle, Diagram and Hermeneutic Chaos. Her latest chapbook is Unstable Tales (Dancing Girl Press, 2016).

Joshua Rodriguez: I'm from San Diego, California, and I spent a year living in Mexico and crossing the border regularly. My tenure in Mexico has greatly informed my perspective. I have an affinity for the rich and visceral nature of American literature. I spend as much time as possible writing, but sometimes I find it difficult to allocate the time between school and work. I'm currently working on a slew of stories about my experience as an expatriate here because I have a unique perspective: I live in Germany, but work on an American base, so I have one foot in the door per se. These stories are more snapshots or sketches than anything. The writers who had the biggest influence on my style are James Baldwin, Kurt Vonnegut, Jack Kerouac, Nick Flynn and Irvine Welsh.

David K. Slay: I'm a new "older" writer. After retiring from a career as a psychologist, I completed two years of short story writing workshops, primarily within the UCLA Extension Writers' Program. It was a non-academic, self-directed crash course in how to write short stories, and I was fortunate to encounter a series of excellent teachers and fellow aspiring writers from all walks of life. I'm interested in writing and publishing literary short fiction that sparks self-awareness within the reader, something he or she hadn't quite realized before, or

that reveals something true about human nature. I'm pleased to say I recently had a short story published in the 6th annual issue of Gold Man Review, and another just out in the on-line Flumes Literary Journal.

John Stupp: John Stupp is the author of Advice from the Bed of a Friend by Main Street Rag. His poem "Goat Island" was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2016. His new book Pawleys Island will be published in 2017 by Finishing Line Press. Recent poetry has appeared or will appear in The Greensboro Review, Poet Lore, The American Poetry Journal, Into the Void (Ireland) and Slipstream. He lives near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Barbara Turney: Barbara Turney Wieland is an artist/painter who always described herself as a 'frustrated writer who paints instead'. She finally found the courage and inspiration to start gathering the words that have been flying around in her head and started writing in 2015. Satisfied, she can now say that she has also begun to be published too. She is currently stuffing poems and stories into a back drawer to see if they mate. BTW works as an English /Art teacher, lives in Switzerland with her family but hails from the UK and Australia.

M. Nicole R. Wildwood: In addition to blogging at <http://mnicolerwildwood.com>, I write on the back of napkins, in the margins of textbooks and on the undersides of bunkbeds at hostels when I'm traveling alone around Europe and need to stay sane. My current fixation is finding/choosing/uncovering a stronger sense of calling and I'm studying everything from German to essential oils to functional medicine to do so. I've been a saxophone player and a registered scuba diver for over half my life, though I've not done as much as I'd like of either since moving from Colorado to Seattle ten years ago. When I'm not writing, which is woefully more often than I'd like, I'm researching, cycling and dreaming up ways to reawaken my little part of the world.



