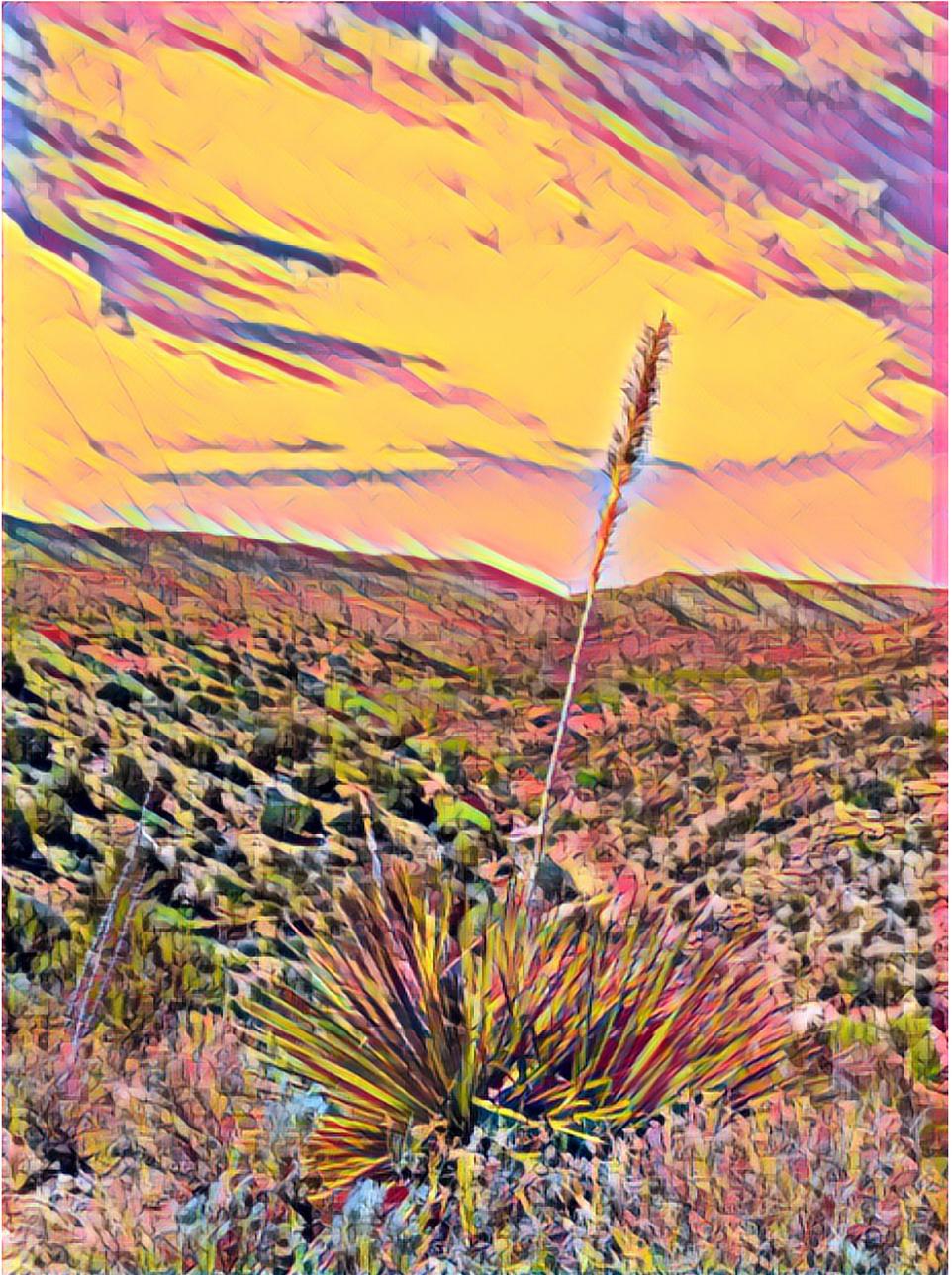


Colloquial

A Poetry Review



2017 Anthology

Issue 1

Colloquial

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Contents

Inside Outside	11
Dianne Olsen	
Original Artwork	12
Jim Zola	
Bird Feeder	13
Dianne Olsen	
Original Artwork	14
Jim Zola	
Jackson Street	15
Jessica Mehta	
Dawn and Death in Stratford	16
Jessica Mehta	
fair exchange	17
Jan Ball	
Original Artwork	18
Jim Zola	
after you left yesterday	19
Jan Ball	
Original Artwork	20
H. Griggs	
To the Girl at the 24-Hour Laundromat	21
Karen Weyant	
At the Local Fast Food Restaurant	22
Karen Weyant	
Rush	23
Clifford Browder	

Original Artwork	24
Parker Owens	
Signals	25
Clifford Browder	
Original Artwork	26
Isabella Ronchetti	
Anticipation	27
Diane Payne	
Original Artwork	28
H. Griggs	
so many old men drift...	29
M.O'Brien	
an honest life	30
M. O'Brien	
Dunkin Donuts	31
A. Nicole	
Original Artwork	32
S. Karapetyan	
Weather Forecasts in Rhode Island	33
A. Nicole	
Original Photography	34
Colloquial	
Little Things	35
G. Stidham	
Giving Pleasure	36
G. Stidham	

Bond	37
R. Rouff	
Original Artwork	38
H. Griggs	
Duke	39
R. Rouff	
Original Photography	40
Colloquial	
Ferrying Erin to Noble	41
J. Rodwan Jr.	
Do you own a gun?	42
J. Rodwan Jr.	
Original Photography	43
Colloquial	
The Way of the World	43
RaShell Smith Spears	
Original Photography	43
Colloquial	
The Blinding Sun	44
George Heid	
Deep Shiatsu	45
George Heid	
Original Photography	46
Melanie Faith	
Wondering	47
Jeffrey Zable	

Original Photography	48
Scott Simon	
Woman Working in the Field, 1943	49
Michelle McMillan	
Original Photography	50
Scott Simon	
The Kitchen Has Never Been My Favorite Place	51
Lori Levy	
Original Photography	52
Scott Simon	
The Look of Content	53
AJ Oxenford	
Springs in D.C.	54
AJ Oxenford	
Contributors	55

About Colloquial

Colloquial is a bi-weekly online poetry review for all walks of life, featuring poetry that exalts the ordinary and everyday. Our publication is enjoyed by everyone—academics and nonacademics alike. In addition to our bi-weekly online publication, we also publish an annual anthology, which includes all of our online publications from the year.

In an interview with *On Being's* Krista Tippet, Mary Oliver once said: "One thing I know, is that poetry, to be understood, must be clear. It mustn't be fancy." And this is what you will find here— work that is clear, of the highest quality, grounded in recognizable images and sensory details, and that moves and turns in such a way, that it will call on you, the reader, to read it over and over again.

Inside Outside

Dianne Olsen

Nothing works right.

Closet doors hang loose.

Tub leaks.

Kitchen floor is warped.

Freezer doesn't freeze.

Vacuum won't vacuum.

Outside this leaky, dusty, tilting barge

a wild thrush sings.

Inside her nest, everything works.

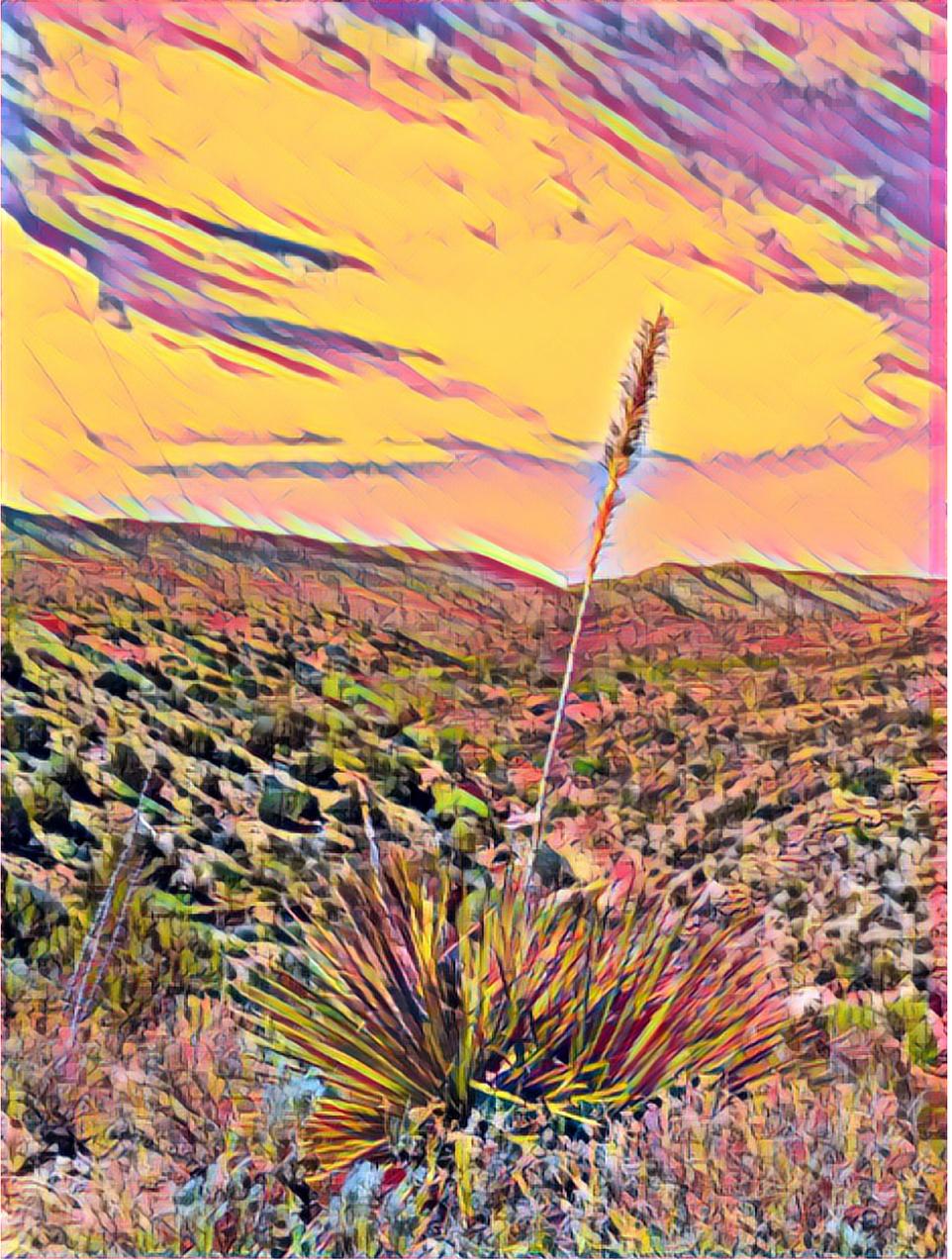


Original Artwork by Jim Zola

Bird Feeder

George Freek

I've watched ten thousand
nights come and go.
I no longer get out of bed.
I drink wine as the sky
weaves around me its shroud
of invisible thread.
The moon is an orange stain
that clouds my eyes.
Shadows like snakes
crawl through my brain.
I know almost nothing.
But I know that soon
I will be gone.
That much is plain.



Original Artwork by Jim Zola

Jackson Street

Jessica Mehta

Nothing we found fit, so we built
our first house from the weeds
up. Virgin land, gurgling with spiders
and an out of control apple tree—it dropped
fermented fruits on the earth, drunken
offerings for livestock
that hadn't roamed that farmland
for decades. Above the flood plains,
past the blackberry bushes,
it took months to close,
to get the permits, collect
yes stamps like A grades. Then,
on a frosted September day
that felt like winter, we asked blessings
of the land, permission from the gods
to Build. I wore that one sundress,
black with cutouts at the midriff,
and old cowboy boots. With burning sage
in one hand and a gathered skirt
in the other, I circled our small hill,
our Home,
muttering prayers in the chill
while you snapped photo
after photo from weathered Jackson Street.

Dawn and Death in Stratford

Jessica Mehta

I never held a dying thing
until today. The pigeon
I scooped from the roadside, its neck
long and shattered. Whispering reassurances
to slow-blinking eyes, I cradled the broken

body in the park while life spiraled
to empty. Barely dawn, there wasn't

emergency vet services or anyone to watch
me carry the body in a split-open
Ziploc bag. Afraid to bash

his head in, worried I might miss, there was nothing
I could do but coo and usher
him to closed eyes, stillness—but I carried
his heat heavy in my palms

all the way to daylight.

fair exchange

Jan Ball

I probably should have let you pay
for lunch at the Thai restaurant in Chicago
today after we shared the spring rolls
then finished the mild lard nar
with broccoli you chose and my fiery
red curry with tofu; and still, neither
of us wanting to leave. We ordered
green tea ice cream laughing as we
must have laughed in twin childhood
when Mother permitted us to rearrange
the kitchen chairs into a house within
a house and we'd spend hours underneath
the towels we spread above the chairs
playing at adulthood with our dolls
and now you live on the fringes of the city,
work your 9-5 shift while I am leisured
on the Gold Coast so why shouldn't I pay
the measly sixteen dollars for both of us
for lunch, eight bus rides for you, but as
I lay my American Express card
on the table, you reach into your handbag
and extract another bag I see is full
of red tomatoes from your garden:
a fair exchange.



Original Artwork by Jim Zola

after you left yesterday

Jan Ball

I got the new tire for the Corolla at Costco; you were right; the seventy-eight dollars I paid last week did cover the cost of the tire as well as the tire rotation. While they were replacing it, I shopped and bought enough chicken salad to last a week for lunch and dinner plus a jar of six hundred vitamin D3 2000 iu capsules to counteract Chicago's depressive over-cast winter skies, haricot vert to sink a battleship but great in Portuguese green bean soup, or Romanian potato salad, a huge chunk of manchego cheese (What is the name of that recent book set in Spain where the main character makes his own cheese then tries to market it with the help of his lawyer friend, Julian, who he later perceives as his enemy?) and various paper products that will surely last us until January.

After the chicken salad for dinner, I had enough energy to drive to the poetry reading at the bookstore in Randolph Square without knives of pain in my new replacement knee. The highlight of the night was buying more cards: birthday, condolence, anniversary; it is June after all. Actually, it was good to hear the reader with the South African accent although since my hearing has declined, listening is not my forte'; yes, yes, I know that you are thinking, "Was it ever?"

This morning, only half awake, I watch a water skier weave in and out of the wake of a motor boat on Lake Michigan. BTW, don't forget Ginny's Memorial Service next weekend. Did you take Dead Wake with you or did I misplace it? If you took it, that's ok; I can finish it for book group when you get back. xxoo



Original Artwork by H. Griggs

To the Girl at the 24-Hour Laundromat

Karen Weyant

If you are here after midnight, you want more than just clean clothes. Yes, you are balancing a basket

against your right hip. Jeans, shirts, underwear spill over, a torn plastic rim digs into your skin. But, the truth is

you like the smell: cheap laundry soap and steam, oil and sweat from local machinists uniforms, even a faint scent

of fried foods that reminds you of your own job as a waitress. You fish through your pockets for quarters, tip money

because more people are leaving less these days, then search through the change machine in case someone has left

coins behind. No one here bothers you. No one wants to make trouble at this hour. Not the young woman

who folds children's clothes on the table or the man rubbing his two-day scruff of a beard while staring

at his clothes twirling in the dryer. Not even the kid who sports ear buds and hums while throwing shirts and pants

into a pile, not caring about wrinkles or untreated stains. In the lull around 2 a.m., when you are alone, you search

for what is left over: a lone sock tucked in a dusty corner, a pair of jeans just one size larger than what you usually wear, a Kurt Cobain T-shirt,

even a sweater, one that you slide over your head, swallowing you, until you almost believe you could become someone else.

At the Local Fast Food Restaurant

Karen Weyant

Cheap burgers and fries are not your first choice for a meal, but you forgot your lunch at home, and you don't want to wait in the college cafeteria line

where there will be students who want to ask you about missed assignments or explain why they haven't been in class for the last month.

So you pull into the lane, place an order to the crackled intercom voice who then directs you to pull to the first drive-through window.

It's here where you recognize her: blonde hair tucked under a cap with a loose strand stuck to her cheek, a streak of grease across her forehead,

a familiar comma-shaped scar near her right eye. She disappeared from your class three weeks before the end of the semester. When she hands you

your change, you want to say What happened? You got an A on that last paper. It's one you never had the chance to give back to her.

But you don't because then she asks you if you want ketchup or extra napkins, and you know in the end, even if she recognizes you, all she wants you to answer is No Thank You and then, move on.

Rush

Clifford Browder

Rush to the doctor, the dentist
Rush to catch a bus or a train
Rush to make a curtain
Rush here, rush there, rush.
We live in cities of rush
In the land of rush.
Rush: it churns my gut.

What to do?
Tranquilizers? Forget it.
Therapy? Good luck.
Yoga? Maybe, maybe not.

Meanwhile, the signals at the crossings:
Ten seconds
Nine eight seven six five
Rush!
All day, every day
Rush to doomsday, death.



Original Artwork by Parker Owens

Signals

Clifford Browder

The soft creaking
Of August corn growing
On a muggy night

The flame throat of a warbler

Darting and hovering
Over a shimmering pond
The crystalline wings of a dragonfly

Teeming in the yellow disks of sunflowers
Red ants.

Reading these signals
How can I deny
The fragile beauty of a moment
The vast yet subtle meaning
Of one small jot of life?



Original Artwork by Isabella Ronchetti

Anticipation

Diane Payne

1.

Schedule mammogram. Imagine appointment.

Radiologist: We need to do a biopsy.

Me: Again? I was saving money for a bike.

Radiologist: You won't be riding a bike if you're not alive.

Me: You're a downer.

2.

Daughter attends wedding with boyfriend. See the Facebook posting from boyfriend's mother that daughter has caught bridal bouquet. Send text.

Me: That's an old wife's, wife's wise tale.

Delete text.

Me: That doesn't mean you will be next.

Delete text.

Next day.

Me: Did you bring bridal bouquet back with you?

Daughter: Left it on the gift table at wedding.

Me: Did you bring boyfriend back with you?

Delete text.

Sigh of relief.



Original Artwork by H. Griggs

so many old men drift...

M. O'Brien

as logs drift
down these oregon rivers
to camp alone
in small tents.

to escape cold rains they
wait beside the sinks
in the park bathroom,
avoid the mirror.

some want to talk
about their dog
or kids and grandkids
that they miss

or about a wife
who'd recently died.
but most cast
for salmon, silently,

pulled by water
floating their lines
graceful arcs
hoping

an honest life

M. O'Brien

I hike east along the Rogue
he heads west

looking too old for the cooler
and big pack strapped to his back.

His dun-colored dog behind
drags twine rope tied to its collar.

I step aside and say "You look
ready to catch some salmon."

"Ain't goin' to wet a line for four days,"
gap-toothed smile, hustling still.

I nod and then see them
bump up a steep section,

his jeans with a hole in the butt
him and his dog

to camp along the river
deep in the Oregon night.

Dunkin Donuts

A. Nicole

I was running late yesterday and stopped at the Dunkin
on Atwells Ave. instead of my usual spot.
You had fire-house red hair and a neck tattoo
of a peacock that reached down under your shirt.
Your name tag said "Stone" and I'm not
sure if that's your real name.
You float behind the front counter on
your toes like you are a dancer.
When you handed me my tea, you
laced your fingers between mine.
I dreamt about you last night and
would like to take you to dinner.
Anything you like:
Chinese, vegan, Italian, sushi.
You are a little taller than me, but
I have some shoes to help make up the difference.



Original Artwork by S. Karapetyan

Weather Forecasts in Rhode Island

A. Nicole

Fifty percent chance of rain
this hour, they said.

Fifty percent.

It's slinging golf balls
at my windshield
as I trek the 30 miles north
to work.

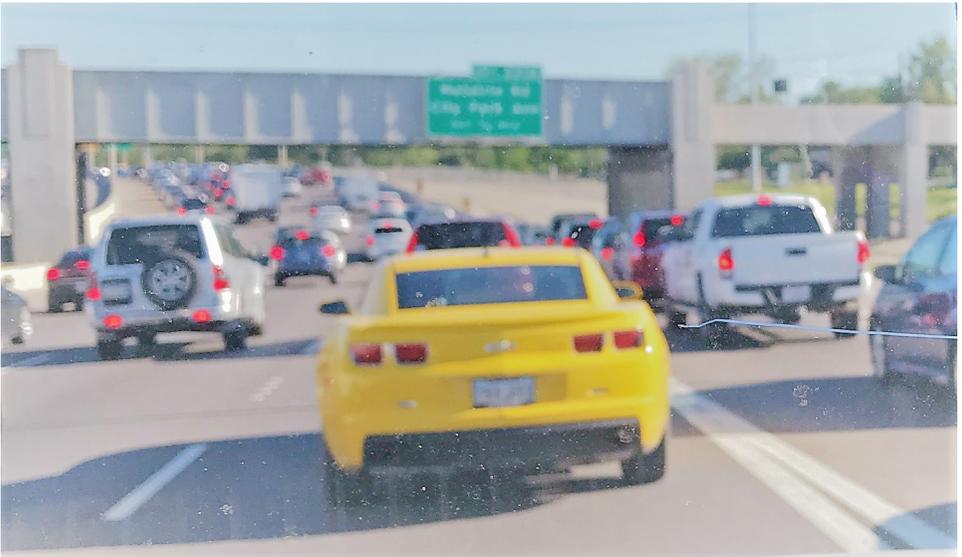
I can barely see two feet
in front of my bumper.

I scoff at the city police cruiser
hiding in a pocket
along the road
as we inch along.

I am wearing completely
inadequate footwear
to walk the 10 minutes
from my parking space
to my building.

My rain jacket hangs in a closet
at home saying:

"I told you so."



Original Photography by Colloquial

Little Things

G. Stidham

When you're married
and past sixty-five, you notice
little things. While driving over interstates
on a cross-country vacation, the heavy traffic
is dense, and driving I'm tense.
She leans over, places an almond chocolate
into my eager mouth.
And when I lean forward shoulder-
stretching, she automatically knows
where the itch is and starts to scratch my back.
She fixes breakfast in a truck-stop lot
on the propane stove, and serves
the paper plateful of omelet and sausage.
And she doesn't scratch back
when I lash out irritably.
These are the little things
I never noticed before
that matter now ever more.

Giving Pleasure

G. Stidham

If only giving pleasure
were always as easy
as dangling spaghetti
before my epileptic dog,
where his old and failing eyes
recognize the color and the dangle,
and he slurp sucks the pasta,
like sucking on a straw,
his dog smile unmistakable.

Bond

R. Rouff

Everyone hates housewives.
Their children don't listen.
Their husbands find them dull
as dishes. They start
taking tranquilizers to
soothe their nerves. Pretty
soon there's a "situation," a
confrontation. What
to do?

"Take her out to the
movies, let her buy a
pretty dress," said the
general practitioner, a
surrogate shrink.

This was my family's, or
rather, my parents'
predicament. I recall a
big event: following the
doctor's orders, my father
taking my mother to
see the latest James Bond in
Goldfinger.

Oddly enough,
the therapy worked
for a while. I re-
member them
cheerily talking over
the naughtiness of
the movie: the slick clothes
and cars, the double
entendres, the
casual mingling of sex
and death. All this mess
lightened up our house,
for a time.

Me, I wanted a James
Bond attaché case for
Christmas. I wanted it
and got it. The sleek black

hand gun, complete with scope,
the red plastic bullets,
the 007 decoder. Discrete
and deadly, or so I
imagined. I never
wanted to be a Bond
girl. No profit in
that. Especially the supine,
dead, golden kind. I wanted
to be a very living
actor, unlike my
mother. A person who
makes things happen,
not lets them happen to
her.

There's one thing I can say
in my parents' favor: despite
their entrapment in benighted
times, they gave me the toys
I wanted, and then

ducked.



Original Artwork by H. Griggs

Duke

R. Rouff

Unlike the fuzzy yapping poodle next door, Duke the Boxer paid no attention to us kids. Crossing the backyard at odd intervals, he was a black shadow, oblivious to our presence. Purposeful, he had some place to go to (we never knew where) and a place to return to: the Miller's house four doors down.

All I noticed of Duke was that, as time went on, his boxy Boxer muzzle got gray and grayer. Until finally, he failed to cross our yard at intervals and we saw him no more.

Why do I remember Duke and don't remember the rest of the yapping neighborhood dogs? Duke didn't give a shit about us kids, and I respected him for that.



Original Photography by Colloquial

Ferrying Erin to Noble

J. Rodwan, Jr.

“Ferrying Erin to Noble”
sounds vaguely heroic –
certainly more grand
than “Driving a friend’s kid
to elementary school,” even if
that’s all it actually means.

Do you own a gun?

J. Rodwan, Jr.

“Do you own a gun?”
was the second most asked
question I heard from those
who learned I’d moved back
to Detroit.

It was easier to answer –
it took only one word –
but no less insulting
in its implications
than the most asked
question I heard
after moving back
to Detroit:

“Why?”



Original Photography by Colloquial

The Way of the World

RaShell Smith Spears

The olive-gray toad at the end of my driveway
lies crushed in an oversized medallion of intestines and bones

Tiny ants and black flies swoop in and out
to carry miniscule bits away to their villages and families

I wonder when that toad sat fat and happy
snapping his long tongue to ingest his insect meal

did he ever think that turnabout
was fair play?



Original Photography by Colloquial

The Blinding Sun

George Heid

Remember the boy in Peru,
high in the Andes,
who looked with marvel
at the sun
until it smote him?

In Machu Picchu
the blind one lived long
and told all who asked,
"It was worth it,
the miracle I saw that day.
It was worth it."

Deep Shiatsu

George Heid

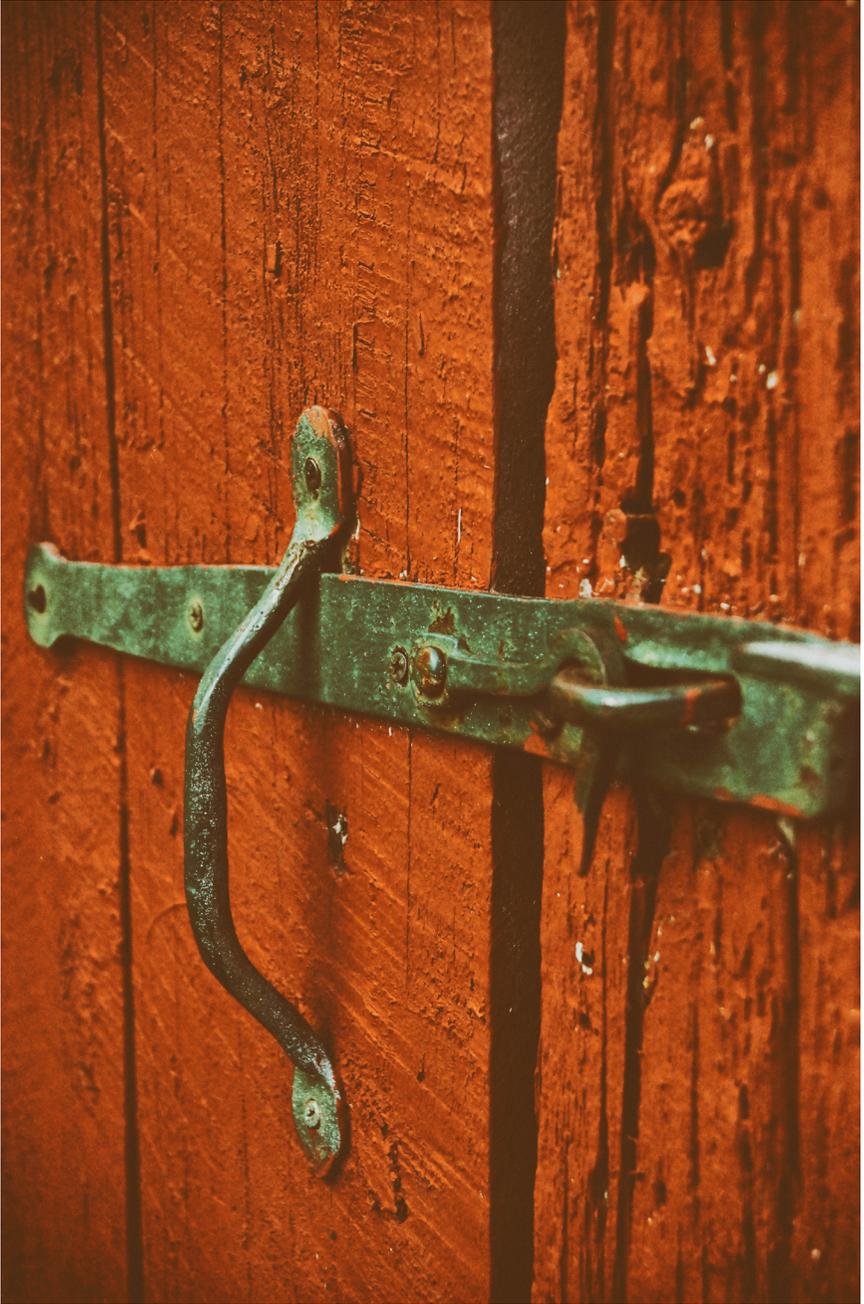
She applies
finger-pressure
to my aching back;

my muscles at first
resist the pain,
then relax

and let the pressure
penetrate,
dropping me deep

into a pain-free
dim-lit zone
ruled by the ancient

Japanese practice
she insinuatingly
applies to the present.



Original Photography by Melanie Faith

Wondering

Jeffrey Zable

I'm on my way out the door when the phone rings.

I run to the kitchen and immediately I hear a woman's voice saying, "Congratulations, you've just won a trip to Orlando, Florida and 75% of your hotel bill will be paid by 'such and such.' "

She continues to talk while at the same time I try to tell her that I don't want to go to Orlando, that I think she's the same one who called me a few months ago with the same deal and I said to take me off her list.

She finally stops talking for a moment at which point I ask her if she heard what I said. To which she responds

"Now here is one of our representatives to tell you more. . . and have a great trip!"

With this, I hang up the phone feeling angry, but as I head out the door I'm wondering if the weather is nice today in Orlando, unlike here in San Francisco where it's rainy and cold. . .

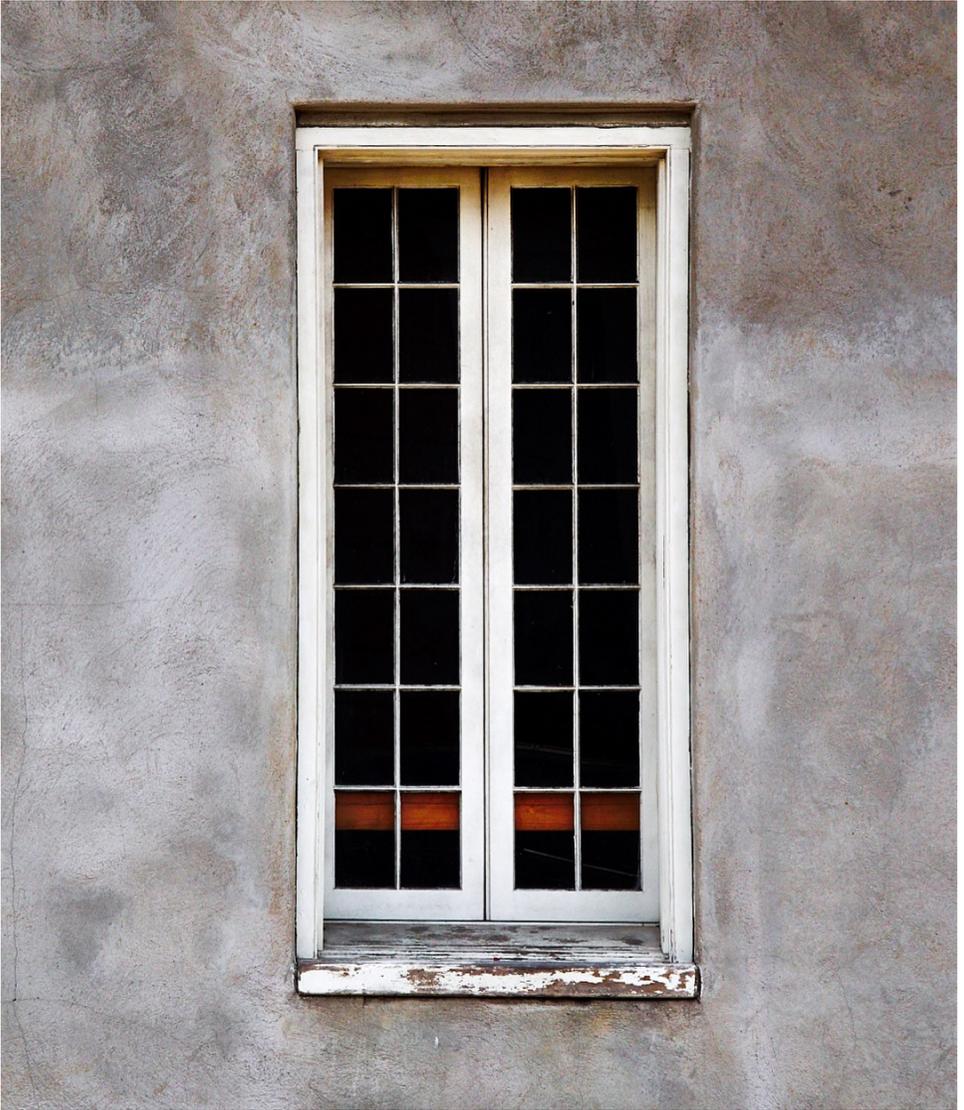


Original Photography by Scott Simon

Woman Working in the Field, 1943

Michelle McMillan

Each night she'd wash
the dust-crusting dress—
darkest red of dug-in heels—
hang it on the line to dry.
In the morning, pull it, still damp,
over her bones.



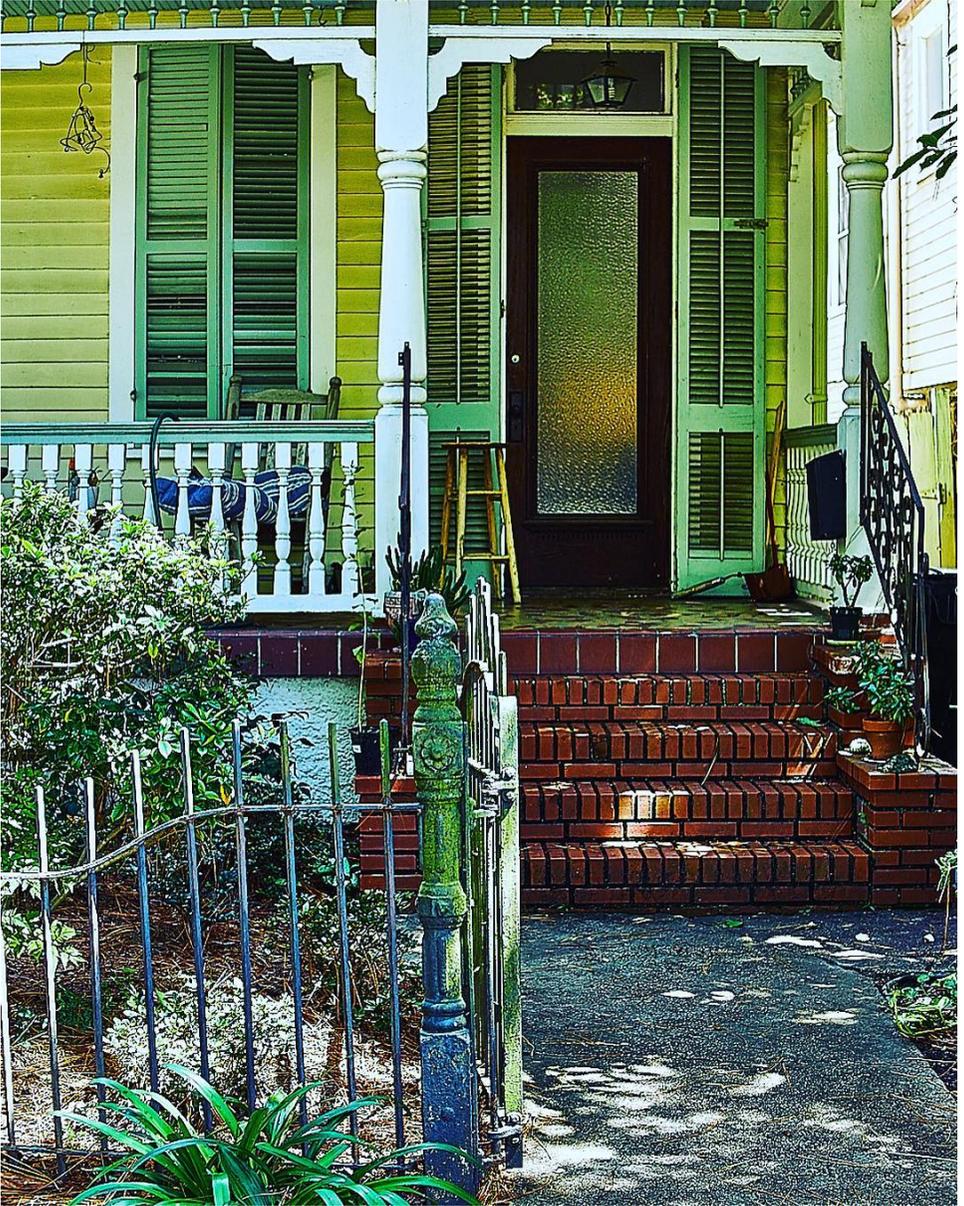
Original Photography by Scott Simon

The Kitchen Has Never Been My Favorite Place

Lori Levy

Usually,
I fight my feet when they drag me there;
tell them take me somewhere else,
I'm in the wrong room. Stuck. Fettered.
The only thing right is the window,
urging escape.
I didn't ask for these onions, don't want
to be standing here chopping and frying.
I'm not in love with wooden spoons
or ripe red tomatoes,
nor do I lust to massage ground beef—
my palms more dutiful than tender,
shaping meatballs.

But, lately,
I am followed: every slice, every stir.
A presence warms my back— delighted
when I turn to show off a carrot
I have peeled, a glass
I have washed.
I have a helper now who holds me happily
to my tasks. I slide along with my feet,
almost graceful these days
as my grandson cheers me on
from his playpen.



Original Photography by Scott Simon

The Look of Content

AJ Oxenford

It's ten twenty-nine on a Friday night
and we're wrapped together in a worn-out
blue afghan on the living room couch.

Our fat cat sleeps with her head on my lap
and her body on yours and we try
not to move so she won't come awake.

We've been binging on Netflix,
eating peanut butter on pretzels
in a house that we rent, on a couch

we make payments on. You kiss
my forehead—I'm half-asleep—
and ask if this is what I wanted:

weekend nights spent at home
in our pajamas, a small taco pizza
delivered to our door, served

on paper plates. I look to you
to see if you're serious, notice
the wonder in your eyes.

I've searched for this
contentment most of my life,
and you ask: would I change a thing?

"I always pictured us with a dog," I say,
but I think no way, Joey. No way.

Springs in D.C.

AJ Oxenford

We slipped off our shoes
and let the uncut grass
tickle our bare feet
as the cherry blossom trees
budded around us, you
with your cigarettes
and me with my poetry,
a bottle of wine to share.

We waited for the cherry
blossom trees, waiting for
their buds to bloom, to escape
and pinken the midnight sky.
They wept around us,
enveloping us in their sweetened
scent that I loved;
it gave you a headache
yet we stayed anyway.

Every spring I think of you,
on that ivory afghan
your grandmother made,
your legs spread open so
I could sit between while we
waited on the blooms.
I think of the night
you ripped your pants

and made me walk close
behind you all the way
to your apartment where
we stayed night after night,
where we were forced to grow
up and apart, long before we married
lesser versions of ourselves.

An envelope arrived today
like it does every spring.
No letter or return address. But I know
it came from the cherry blossom tree

in your back yard. Petals fell
to the table: wilted, ripped
but silky-pink and fragrant.

Contributors

Dianne Olsen is a freelance writer/poet and sometimes garden consultant living in the Berkshires with her husband and a cat. She is passionate about water quality and sustainable issues.

Jim Zola has worked in a warehouse, as a security guard, in a bookstore, as a teacher for Deaf children, as a toy designer for Fisher Price, and currently as a children's librarian. Published in many journals through the years, his publications include a chapbook – *The One Hundred Bones of Weather* (Blue Pitcher Press) – and a full length poetry collection – *What Glorious Possibilities* (Aldrich Press). He currently lives in Greensboro, NC.

Jessica (Tyner) Mehta is a Cherokee poet with a long, fancy-sounding resume that includes a lot of books written, residencies won, and glittery awards. But, in her real life, she lives with her husband and ragdoll cat, Shanti, in a home built on an old piece of dairy farm land. She loves her 1983 Trans Am, grilled cheese from Indian street vendors, and proper British scones.

Jan Ball is excited that her first full length poetry book is being published by Finishing Line Press in August. It is autobiographical and includes poems from her Catholic childhood in Chicago, being a twin, the seven years she was a nun, her fifteen years in Australia where she had two children and taught ESL to Vietnamese Boat People and different experiences she's had in marriage, graduate education in Rochester, New York, travel, gardening and working out.

Karen J. Weyant's prose and poetry has appeared in *Briar Cliff Review*, *Chautauqua*, *Copper Nickel*, *District Lit*, *Harpur Palate*, *Storm Cellar*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, *River Styx*, and *Whiskey Island*. She is the author of *Wearing Heels in the Rust Belt* published by *Main Street Rag*. In her spare time, she explores the Rust Belt regions of Western New York and Northern Pennsylvania. Her website is www.karenjweyant.com.

H.Griggs was born in a corn field long, long ago. Currently residing in New Orleans, he continues to explore the possibilities of digital art.

Clifford Browder is a writer living in New York. He has published two biographies, two novels, and a selection of posts from his blog, "No Place for Normal: New York." He has never owned a car or a television, likes to hike, eats garlic to fend off vampires (so far it seems to be working).

Ashley Parker Owens is a writer, poet, and artist living in Richmond, Kentucky. She has an MFA in Creative Writing from Eastern Kentucky University, and an MFA in Visual Arts from Rutgers University.

Diane Payne is enduring too much time alone. So much time alone, she's wishing the cats and dogs could talk.

Isabella Ronchetti is a young artist and writer originally from San Francisco, California. She spent a few years studying in Florence Italy, and currently is living in Virginia. She enjoys spending her free time reading psychology books, swimming, and people-watching. Her writing and artwork have won awards and appeared in magazines such as FishFood Magazine, Glass Kite Anthology, The Sigh Press, and Canvas Literary Journal.

Important tasks for **Michael O'Brien** at 72 — keeping eyes and mind open, both important for writing poetry and living a rich life. also important — the craft of creating poems — demanding but rewarding. and then being brave in spite of rejections and other failures.

Aimee Nicole currently lives in Bristol, Rhode Island. She holds a BFA in Creative Writing from Roger Williams University and has been published by the Red Booth Review, Psychic Meatloaf, Petrichor Review, Dying Dahlia Review and Balloons Lit Journal, among others. On the weekends she enjoys antiquing and staring at her cat.

Born in Yerevan, Armenia, **Shushanik Karapetyan** is a psychotherapist by profession and an artist by avocation. She utilizes art as a therapeutic tool with her clients, and her profession as a source of inspiration for self reflection and expression.

Greg Stidham is a retired pediatric intensivist (ICU physician) currently living in Kingston, Ontario, with his wife Pam and their two founding “canine kids.” Greg’s passion for medicine had yielded in retirement to his other lifelong passion, literature and creative writing.

Ruth Rouff is a writer and educator who lives in Collingswood, NJ. Three of her enthusiasms are politics, noir, and baseball—even with the Phillies terrible as they are. Favorite living writer is Joy Williams. Her collection of poetry and creative nonfiction, *Pagan Heaven*, was published in 2016 by Bedazzled Ink. She has published in various literary journals.

John G. Rodwan, Jr. lives and writes in Detroit.

RaShell Smith-Spears grew up in Memphis, Tennessee, where she discovered reading was the best way to spend her time. Many books later, she read her way into a job in Jackson, Mississippi, and publication in several journals and anthologies including *Short Story*, *Black Magnolias*, *Mississippi Noir* and *Sycorax’s Daughters*.

George Heid is a retired English professor living in Manhattan, writing daily, often writing poems, but also writing translations, short fiction, and book reviews. Widely published, his work has received 10 Pushcart Prize nominations.

Jeffrey Zable is a teacher and conga drummer who plays Afro Cuban-folkloric music for dance classes and rumbas around the San Francisco Bay Area. His poetry, fiction, and non-fiction in literary magazines have been published for a long time, but that isn’t

what drives him. It's the writing itself, the ability to create and find out what he's made of that drives him to write consistently. He has ultimate respect for good writers and has found them on the best seller list as well as in the most obscure small press literary magazines.

Melanie Faith— writer, photographer, teacher, and auntie— collects books, quotes, and shoes and loves still-life photography and the Tiny-House movement. Her photographs have been featured on literary magazine covers and poetry books and won the Brain Mill Press Driftless Unsolicited Art Contest in 2017. See her photography portfolio at <https://www.melaniefaith.com/photography-1/>.

Michelle McMillan—Hollifield recently completed a writer's residency at Wild Acres in North Carolina and is an assistant editor at Edify Fiction. Her work has been included in or is forthcoming in *Boxcar Poetry Review*, *Jabberwock Review*, *PIF Magazine*, *Stirring*, *The Collagist*, *Whale Road Review*, and *Windhover* among others.

Scott Emile Simon is the founder of and primary blogger for *iHeartNola.com*, a New Orleans-focused lifestyle blog that was founded after Hurricane Katrina as a resource to expose the cool and eclectic happenings of the city. Scott is also a photographer specializing in editorial, street, as well as urban exploration photography. Scott can be found mainlining coffee in many cafes around town, really digs a fine cheeseburger, and has never feared the reaper.

Besides writing, **Lori Levy** enjoys reading, family, being in nature, and playing with her three young grandchildren. She lives with her family in Los Angeles, but "home" has also been Vermont and Israel. Her poems have appeared in numerous literary journals and anthologies in the U.S., England, and Israel.

AJ Oxenford lives in West Des Moines, Iowa, where she teaches at a local college; she also owns a business with her husband where they take down barns and make furniture. She loves the Iowa Hawkeyes, reading mystery novels, and cat naps (with her cats).

