



# PENSIVE

*A Global Journal of  
Spirituality & the Arts*

Issue 7

Founded in 2020, *Pensive: A Global Journal of Spirituality & the Arts* is published by the Center for Spirituality, Dialogue and Service (CSDS) at Northeastern University, a global research university in Boston, Massachusetts, USA with a campus network stretching from London to Vancouver.

*Pensive* publishes work that deepens the inward life; expresses a range of religious/spiritual/humanist experiences and perspectives; envisions a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world; advances dialogue across difference; and challenges structural oppression in all its forms.

*Pensive: A Global Journal  
of Spirituality & the Arts*

[pensivejournal@gmail.com](mailto:pensivejournal@gmail.com)

[www.pensivejournal.com](http://www.pensivejournal.com)

Center for Spirituality, Dialogue  
and Service  
203 Ell Hall  
Northeastern University  
346 Huntington Avenue  
Boston, MA 02115

617-373-2728

[csds@northeastern.edu](mailto:csds@northeastern.edu)

[clmp]



#### Editorial Board

Alexander Levering Kern

Ajla Mutevelic

Amber Stallworth

Ava Ackerman

Caitlin Vinton

Dao Ho

Diana Sanchez

Eva Mitskevitch

Eyerusalem Tekla

Gaby Murry

Kevin Zhang

Melissa Streifert

Ori Fienberg

Sharan Sekhon

Soo Laski

Suleyca Romano

Cover Art: *Holding Hands, They  
Sojourned Through the Night* by  
Steven Ostrowski

Exploring spirituality through the literary and visual arts is always a soul-touching endeavor. As we reviewed thousands of submissions from around the world, we observed, appreciated, and ultimately arranged the accepted pieces around seven core spiritual themes. As you read this issue from cover to cover, you will discover themes that often overlap and converse in surprising ways: ecology and the natural world, family and relationships, grief and loss, social justice and the quest for peace, varieties of religion and spirituality, the practice of mindfulness and contemplation, and at the end of it all, the possibility of joy and blessing and gratitude.

*Pensive* was born at a tumultuous time, in the year 2020. Our current issue was edited and designed by new student leadership but with the same emphasis on social justice. As we publish this work in the Fall of 2023, we look out again at a world in turmoil, with violent conflicts and power imbalances, collective trauma and retribution, crimes against humanity, and humanitarian disasters. From Russia and Ukraine to Israel and Palestine, from the Blue Nile clashes to the persecution of the Rohingya and Uyghurs and other crises across the globe and here at home, we stand with all those who call for cease-fires, the release of hostages, human rights for all, and a just and lasting peace.

As editors, we seek to build a community centered around justice, compassion, and kindness. Holding space for differing opinions, yet seeking truth and accuracy, we believe that naming and condemning violence against civilians - and thereby affirming the inherent dignity of all life on earth- helps foster an environment where we can uplift and learn from each other. From our places of privilege in university settings, we witness and grieve the disproportionate impact of violence on the most vulnerable communities: refugees, minorities, women and children, the desiccated earth.

As we showcase the extraordinary work of contributors from diverse backgrounds who speak from vastly different contexts, we invite you to learn together and find nourishment for your hearts and minds. We strive to create an extended interfaith community that catalyzes thought, action, and creative expression. We welcome all to share in our mission of *deepening the inward life; expressing a range of spiritual experiences; envisioning a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world; advancing dialogue across differences; and challenging structural oppression in all its forms.*

With this in mind, we hope you will enjoy Issue 7 of *Pensive* and share it widely with others. We are forever grateful and send love, hope, and strength to all those who make *Pensive* a space of justice, creativity, and liberation.



# Table of Contents

## Contents

Janet Powers	8	J. M. R. Harrison	35
Neal Donahue	9	Margaret Rozga	36
Celia Barbieri	10	Judy McAmis	38
Kristin Camitta Zimet	11	Sondra Olson	39
Anna Elkins	12	Judith Sornberger	47
Michael Rogner	13	Amanda Powell	48
Kenneth Arthur	14	Jennie Neighbors	49
Tharani Balachandran	15	Daniel Romo	50
Yuko Kyutoku	17	Devon Balwit	51
Elisabeth Hedrick	18	Abigail Myers	52
Rebecca Spears	24	Rose Jenny	56
Matthew Rivera	26	Lynn Carriker	57
Zachary Forrest y Salazar	28	Diana Woodcock	58
Madelaine Millar	30	Beth Brown Preston	60
Eva Skrande	31	Louis Faber	61
Elizabeth Smith	32	Jane Hertenstein	62
		Daniel Tobin	72
		Richard Schiffman	75
		Donna Harlan	76
		Matthew E. Henry (MEH)	77
		Tzivia Gover	78
		Wayne-Daniel Berard	80

Wally Swist	84	Sheri Anderson	128
Lesley-Anne Evans	86	Patrice Pinette	129
Susan Johnson	88	Galen Cortes	130
Marge Piercy	99	Contributor Bios	132
Kathleen M. Heideman	100		
Fran Markover	102		
V.P. Loggins	104		
Carolyn Chilton Casas	105		
Barry Peters	106		
Sarah Mills	107		
Elizabeth Bullmer	108		
Erin Wilson	110		
Thomas E. Strunk	112		
Robert Thurman	115		
Emma Bolden	116		
Eric Potter	117		
Daniel Rabuzzi	118		
Marina Carreira	119		
Evan Kenny	120		
Kim M. Baker	122		
Betsy Sholl	124		
Lenny Liane	126		

## Janet Powers

---

### *Already August*

Already it's turned August,  
the season of regret,  
for nights coming earlier  
and dawn newly delayed.  
Even Japanese beetles  
had their fling and moved on;  
all-hued butterflies hover  
over late summer blooms  
and locusts keen loudly  
from particular trees.

If you were to ask  
how old I am, I might  
answer "August" - still  
living life to the hilt  
but with a sense of  
time following me,  
waiting to tap me on  
the shoulder suddenly,  
with a fall or an illness,  
something not expected.

Yet cool morning dew  
wakens all my senses,  
demanding a long walk  
or a lazy kayak paddle  
on a not-too far lake.  
No wonder the whole world  
goes on holiday in August,  
hoping to prolong the green  
of spring and the warm sun  
of summer, wanting a last  
romp in the fields before  
gold leaves begin to fall  
and days grow shorter still.

## Neal Donahue

---

### *Dream of Immortality*

I watch the cherry strangled  
by a vine of bittersweet.

I watch the butternut's slow rot  
from within, a dying heart.

I watch the apples form  
a dot-to-dot when leaves are gone.

I watch all nature wither  
as the hangman snugs his knot.

All around me surely age  
as lines connect, draw taut.

Could I but watch unchanged the glow  
that autumn brings, then stop.



## Celia Barbieri

### *Fresh Grass*

On the seventh day of spring, I sit on the quad marveling  
aloud over the soft lawn  
and am told, with a laugh: We've had grass all winter.

Not like this! I insist,  
resisting the urge to dig up clumps, stow them in my hands,  
and steal them away

from these people who clearly don't understand  
that this grass is fresh,  
not fresh-cut but new all over and radiating a perfume

made sweeter because  
its subtle signature only exists without violence—  
each blade so tender

and lacking opacity; in sunlight it seems to glow from within.  
They can't see the importance  
of loving this silken grass which for all its youth

is unable to anticipate  
the red mower that will purr with pleasure as it rends  
and discards untidy tapers;

how it will leave their tops  
scarred and fill the air with  
that loudly fresh-cut scent.

## Kristin Camitta Zimet

### *All Hallows Eve*

Come on and ring my bell, and ring my bell  
again, the way you did, always, never mind  
what time of night. I know every costume  
of the flesh you wore, the muscled swimmer  
who would sweep me up, the shrunk old man  
shaking in wrinkled skin. I know you steady,  
mountain-solid, also cloud-transparent; both  
throb of double bass and pennywhistle riff;  
bonfire and blown ash. Often now you hum  
into my hair, breathe warm upon me when  
I least expect. Never mind the bell, come in  
and in. Between us there can never be a door.

## **Anna Elkins**

---

### *Then*

What if it works  
What if our words are incantations  
What if you promised  
What if the stones yield water  
What if I build a river  
What if you asked the galaxies to dance  
What if we turn to stars  
What if every shadow has been cast  
What if you became a table  
What if I invite invisible guests  
What if you are invisible  
What if we feed each other  
What if we eat our words  
What if we shape cosmos from chaos  
What if we devote our lives to this  
What if I love you

## **Michael Rogner**

---

### *Future Unknowable*

That city truck won't allow me to turn my bike before the bridge and I wonder if this is how pikas feel. Keep peddling small mountain-dwelling grass eater though you were born at the peak. Great tits are murdering other birds to eat their brains signaling high times for ecologists as the world joyfully disembowels itself. My grandmother would know how to fix this. She made peace lilies emerge from hospice. But she doesn't live anywhere anymore. I try to measure my future fear of future unknowable future things and though I feel a slight snap of energy which may only be a quiet palpitation what I really feel is that I miss sitting together quietly on your porch. The climate had no effect. You had a home filled with happy pictures of me. You had beautiful wooden floors hiding beneath shag carpet. You had bullets and love. Grow things your soft voice remembers. Make your yard the most elegant heirloom. I try to feed the birds but they come later each fall. Your hinges signaled to every brown sparrow it was time to feast. I will wait. I will think of the lovely walk under the bridge when you kept me from failing. I will think of you standing in moonlight in your tattered dress pointing to an owl.

## Kenneth Arthur

### *Love Heals*

*“Real isn’t how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It’s a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real.”*

– Margery Williams Bianco, *The Velveteen Rabbit*

Lingering on the periphery, I imagined myself to be a mysterious haze waiting to be dispersed in the breeze of wagging tongues. Transparent. Unnoticed. And so I turned and looked behind me when he peered in my direction. Wondered what could be so interesting. But I couldn’t detect the object of his attention. Until, that is, I turned again to find myself face to face with this man who possessed the magical ability to perceive the invisible. And I shimmied into existence. When he spoke, tender curiosity smoldering in every syllable, the vapor began to coalesce. And when he paused, patient in the sudden silence, his entire existence intent on what I might share of the truth of me, I knew I was real.

I held his hand in mine for the first time that evening.

Spring-fed brook flows  
defying winter and drought -  
this is who we are.

## Tharani Balachandran

### *In this house we don’t say I love you*

even though there are six words for *love* in Tamil.

Instead we say,  
சாப்பிட்டாயா  
We say, have you eaten?  
We say, I’ll make you a plate.  
We say, how’s the food.  
We say, you look thin.  
We say, you’ve gained weight.  
We say, how are your studies?  
We say, how is Amma?  
We say, do you have a boyfriend yet?

We say, சரி.

We say, *okay*.

We slice a plate of fruit.  
We double-bag leftovers for you..  
We slip 50 dollars in your back pocket.  
We drive you to the airport.  
We pack you a snack for the plane.  
Even though we know it might be years before we see you again.  
Even though we know we will never see you again  
we don’t say goodbye.

We say  
போயிட்டோ வாங்கோ.  
We say come back soon.  
We say  
போயிட்டோ வர்றன்.  
We say, I’ll come back soon.





THE BLUE NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

**Yuko Kyutoku**  
*The Blue New York Botanical  
Garden*



# Elisabeth Hedrick

## *Shelters*

*—on divorce, grief, and finding peace in the elements*

It surprises them, the nudity, but being naked is its own form of prayer. We brought the coffee and the chocolate granola over the rocky outcropping down to the lake, wind lapping ripples against the granite shore. I sipped the sacramental first, perfectly hot and dark taste of coffee and settled into the rock. The girls splashed in the shallows, delighting in the feeling of familiarity in this place that was totally strange yesterday, when we set up camp.

We sit for a minute, all of us in the clothes we slept in the night before, since I didn't want to go to the trouble of putting on our wet swimsuits. I feel desire rising in me and announce to the girls, "Mom is going to do something funny. Can you guess what it is?" They can't. I stand up and move a few steps over to the slight cover of small cedar and strip down. They laugh, wide-eyed with shock and Madeleine, my 7-year-old, looks around to see if anyone else can see. There's no one else here, though, for the moment, and I clamber over the algae-slippery rocks and dive inelegantly into the water, feeling the cool of the earth caressing all of my skin, everything that holds me in, held in the healing cool of this dammed up river. When I come up, Catherine, 5 years old, has already started stripping and steps nimbly over rocks to jump naked into my arms. I see the delight of water in her eyes and say, "It's the best, right?" I hold her skin to my skin and feel the water

passing between us as we float off into the deep together. Madeleine watches with her own delight, feeling too cold to brave the naked waters, watching the rocky hill for intruders into our bliss. I carry Catherine to the shallows and we stand naked, feeling the river drip off of us, the wind greeting wet skin. Before I'm totally dry, I jump back into my shorts and t-shirt and pour a cup of coffee. Catherine hops around the rocks pretending to be the naked creature that she is.

I think I should have brought something to read with them, some text to mark the sacredness of morning. In past years I would have had my Bible with me, would have read a psalm about the glories of God, the wonder of creation, would have prayed our awe and gratitude to the God who reveals himself (always a him) in scripture, and sat in silent comfort at knowing the right words, connecting so appropriately with the beauty that is here.

But today I sit in silence, not so much praying as wondering about prayer and casting my hurting spirit out over the surface of the waters, listening for an echo.

Today I am estranged from that tattered leather Bible, left at home on the dining room table where Catherine had set it aside to bring with her. She held it out to me, "Let's bring this so we can read some scary stories." I laughed and laughed at the truth of the assessment. But I also felt that estrangement, longed for the comfort the worn leather used to bring to me, the familiar, the sense of mystery but a mystery I could hold and read over and over, a mystery that held me back. The pages of that little Bible, given to me by my mother, are tattered with the marks of being read outdoors, as are the pages of my mother's Bible, spattered with rain drops and torn with wind on the pages I'd return to, sitting in the desert or in the woods, Psalm 139, Psalm 90. For many years my whole spirituality coalesced in those Psalms. It was a time when I didn't want to read the narrative of salvation anymore. The story of the people of Israel, Paul's letters, the gospels all felt so tied to Sunday school lessons, to proscriptive spirituality, hard to reclaim into my daily life without a great work of imagination that I hadn't the energy for. But these Psalms, this poetry of longing and wilderness and the certainty of death, praying for knowledge of my own temporality and an awareness of being known by this great mystery of being: "O Lord you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar."

And “Lord you have been our dwelling place from all generations, before the mountains were brought forth and before you formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. You turn man to dust, and say, return O Children of Men! For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night. You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning, in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.”

Yes, these ancient poems speak to something real, something that has not faded entirely for me. And the Bible itself, parts of it at least, I imagine, may return to me with the power of its revelation, the connection with mystery so profound that it has shaped Western culture and shifted our imaginary of the divine so that it can be hard for those of us raised under it to imagine the divine outside of it. But right now I don't carry a Bible, don't open a Bible because the Bible has been used to circumscribe who I am allowed to be, and the lines of this circumscription exclude the core of my being as a queer person. And I am unable and unwilling to detach myself from everything and everyone else it has been used to draw outside the circle. The use of a handful of verses, in the mouths of ones I care deeply about, to determine who I am allowed to love and used to connect the depths of my love and desire with a leprosy to be eradicated pushes me to push away the text in its entirety. At least for now. And for now, I have enough to explore, to try to attune myself to all the reality that is unnamed in the Bible, that is that beyond which all religious traditions seek after.

I get caught in the tension, wanting to share with the girls words they can hold onto, while feeling the words slipping as I try to hold on to them. While they're adrift in these waters, whether they know they're adrift or not, I won't toss them a rope I know to be frayed. I feel keenly that they are adrift, and fear they are adrift because of me. I am the one who left. I wake in the morning with the bite of guilt, the hurt I have caused gnawing at my heart, a physical aching before I open my eyes. I spend the morning sitting with this feeling, acknowledging it and trying to find myself in its shadow. I fractured the stability of their home, their family, their sense of safety in the unsafe world. We were driving out on this adventure, kayak on the roof and three ukeleles piled up on top of two days of food in the front seat, all three of us singing Taylor Swift with mouths wide open in the rushing wind of

wide open windows. I hear Madeleine saying something from the back seat and turn down the music. “I wish you still lived with Papa.” My heart closes and the wind keeps rushing in. “Are you feeling sad about that, honey?” She mutters her assent. I respond with the only truth I can tell her right now, “I'm feeling sad too.”

I was not being loved, I tell myself, again. I was in so much pain for every day of those ten years. When I felt what it felt like to be looked at with love, with desire, with curiosity about my person, something cracked in me. The walls that I had constructed around my heart in order to be ok with not feeling loved crumbled and I was exposed, a raw and beating heart needing to be protected, needing to be held. I didn't want to raise these girls in a shelter built on a lie, pretending that what we had was love when really it was a facade, a strong facade holding up the walls of our home, holding up a sense of security that this path was leading us where we needed to go, that we were doing what we were supposed to. I imagine him with me, as he was the few times that I could convince him to come camping. He'd likely be driving and I'd be singing, looking out the window, feeling the draft of stale annoyance wafting over from him, wondering what in the world I was doing that was so annoying. Was it the way I was singing? Was it something about how I looked? Was it something I had said? Was it stress from the work that piled up when he left it at home? It didn't feel like any of these things, it just felt like it was me, just my presence, just my being, was annoying, was inadequate to some unknown task. I'm sad about it too, I kept thinking. I'm sad about all of it.

We want to protect our children from the pain of living. We want to shelter them from the bone crushing pain of a family falling apart. I wanted to protect them with stories about God and verses they can memorize to feel that they are loved and protected and everything is going to be ok. I wanted to tell them, as I did the first time I told them about my parents' divorce, on another camping trip, that that happens to families sometimes but it's not going to happen to our family. But I'm having to teach them a much harder lesson, a lesson I've learned with my life—there is no shelter. All the shelters we construct are facades to keep out the elements that continue to swirl outside the walls. Our narratives about God and our prayers are built up to keep at bay the howling wind of uncertainty and unknowing that claws at all our theology. I don't want to raise them in a home to teach them that love doesn't fall apart only so that the walls can crumble the



day they leave for college and they realize we held it together just for them, that they were the mortar holding us together, keeping me from ever being loved as I needed. I'd rather they grow up in this wind, this heat, this rain: when families don't love each other well, they do fall apart. We fell apart. And now we're pitching a tent and hoping the wind and rain are not too strong, hoping against hail.

The storm last night proved to not be too strong; the red line on the radar snaked around us yet again. We spent the night dry, waking from time to time to the steady patter of drops on the rain fly, rolling off and dripping into the ground, the wind rustling the cedars overhead. And in its wake, the storm left us with a cool, cloud-covered morning, the girls delighted to be out in the open, waking in a rush of desire to see the lake again. So we're here with our granola and me with my coffee, wondering how I can pray with them, how I can inhabit this beauty with them and show them how it also inhabits some beyond, the beauty inside and beyond all beauty. While they play, I read Mary Oliver's "Morning Poem" aloud, and they draw near:

there is still  
somewhere deep within you  
a beast shouting that the earth  
is exactly what it wanted-

each pond with its blazing lilies  
is a prayer heard and answered  
lavishly,  
every morning,

whether or not  
you have ever dared to be happy  
whether or not  
you have ever dared to pray.

At the word "beast" they feign terror and laugh, but they also listen, they also nod and stare out over the lake in silence. "She's right," Madeleine says. And I agree.

Before we head back over the granite mound to break camp, I stand up and draw near the edge of the lake, dark waters when you stare straight in but bright blue as you gaze out over the expanse. I tell them, let's take a moment of silence to offer gratitude for this beautiful space. Let's take deep breaths and ask to be aware of the Great Spirit in all this beauty. I don't know the words to share, but I can invite them into the silence with me. They stand with me for thirty seconds or so, and I hear Catherine's affected deep breathing and smile. Then they skitter off, back to splashing and looking for frogs, and I know they are still praying.

# Rebecca Spears

## *From Now On*

When I say son, I mean my brainy son  
and rarely think of the long nights

I held the infant of him while he cried and cried,  
or when I nursed him until I wept from pain.

When I say daughters, I see them both  
when the moon rises full and light

and barely recall anorexia or addiction,  
though those remain as background noise,

as shape and heft, and an anxious sadness  
that sometimes smudges the lines of my life.

These things, like breath and heartbeat, say you  
have lived. And that itself is a thing, not a concept,

but something I feel as I adjust the fine balance  
between the tragic and comic that assails

anyone who has been around, as I have.  
Or am I merely the handwringer who

senses life too much, when at the moment,  
what is there to mourn? The children are fine

now and the spring-green grass is tenderer  
nearer the trees, and brighter. The steam rises

from my rich compost of leaves and pine needles,  
stalks and peels, which will, next season, nudge

my garden herbs and vegetables to grow.  
I'll use them in the stew that feeds the family

next time the children and their children visit.  
At the table, we will salt and pepper the meal.

# Matthew Rivera

## *The Palimpsest*

I.

Mom thanked you for being a father figure.  
You wrung my neck in your shepherd's staff crook.  
Maybe there was some miscommunication.

Years later, you still wield that pastoral staff  
like Moses drowning evil, your parting word,  
a prophecy, whispered me:

"Your 'lifestyle' will never be normalized."

II.

Erasure is ligatures clipped, white  
out spilled across our years, you  
sanitizing your memory of me like  
deleting a browser history of  
something salacious.

III.

You lavished me generosities like parents  
upon their own child. But one day, the  
curtain rose revealing our masks:

I'd been playing the leading man in your fiction of me.

The *Obergefell* morning, and  
over coffee and toast,

you describe life in darker hues  
than the day before;

you in your bathrobes,  
the room resonates

with your verdict.

IV.

My pink eraser couldn't efface these verses—  
until Love came, began a written alchemy of  
healing over and between old lines,  
new verses scratched in and archived  
for a future time.



# Zachary Forrest y Salazar

## *Father, God*

I'm running this sad experiment  
where I wait for my father to call  
because he misses me. My friend,

who seems to live without darkness,  
tells me he played this game once  
and it ended when his father died.

How can I form the words of this prayer  
into a sound you will hear and answer?  
I want to show my father the house

I bought in Santa Barbara. He could visit,  
crack open a beer with me, just once,  
while we sat in silence with the F1 race.

Or maybe we talk, about Black lives,  
trans lives, non-binary lives, and how they  
matter to Father, God. He would listen,

*say of course they do* but really mean it.  
Maybe we could walk my neighborhood,  
visit the Old Mission and calmly discuss

colonization or guns or *Roe v. Wade*. I'd point  
out flowers. And when we've had  
a few moments and exhausted all

of our words, I will finally admit I miss him,  
constantly. Father, I know all things  
are possible, just not these things.

But will you reconsider? Surprise me?  
Make it all a funny joke:  
what you will and will not do.



**Madelaine Millar**  
*Trying to Make a Rubbing of the Infinite*

## Eva Skrande

### *When I am Dead Love*

When I am dead love,  
please take my soul to the beach and its waves  
whose blue and white language I always loved  
to hear. Take me to the boats at the marina  
so I can fill their sail-hearts with tulips.  
Let me watch, again, the cargo ships near the horizon  
which never seemed to be moving  
when I watched them from the shore  
as a child.  
Take me to a field where butterflies play on the shoulders  
of flowers, where we can lie on the grass  
and let doves bless our dreams  
till they, too, are free of anchors.  
Take me to a place where the shoes of sadness  
don't fit anybody. Let me see an earth  
where fires exist only to warm  
the hands of those who are cold.  
Let's go to the valleys of my childhood  
a kingdom where children play house—  
the smoke rising from pretend chimneys—  
where all you can hear are mothers  
calling the children to a sweet dinner  
of apples and honey.  
I will put on a beautiful gown  
made of evening's air,  
and we will dance in an orchard of red pianos  
to the prayers of children  
who learned only yesterday  
that it was possible to pray without opening their mouths.



## Elizabeth Smith

### *At the Fence*

Smoke billowed above dry grass. Strangers plopped chairs on our lawn as if the wildfire on the mountainside were a weekend game at the park. My parents were on a trip to California. I was thirteen. My older brother politely told the spectators to leave because the flames might raze our neighborhood. When more people arrived, my other brother sprayed them with the garden hose. The strangers finally left when the firefighters used the empty lot next door to access the rocky slopes. By nightfall our street was evacuated, so my brothers and I loaded the Suburban and drove to a relative's house further in town. As we descended the foothills, I stared out the rear window. The flames crisscrossed along the mountain like a snake devouring pines.

An ex-convict confessed he ignited the fire. He said he was desperate and preferred prison to an empty stomach. He also said he didn't want to hurt anyone.

When we returned, ash welcomed us home. Ash coated the table, the piano, the carpet. Ash rested on the roof. Ash had scorched pockmarks on the trampoline.

In our absence, the firefighters had barely kept back the flames. Uncomfortably close to our sooty metal fence, the fire had seared a border of burnt dirt.

\*\*\*

Today, fifteen years after the wildfire, I again live in my childhood home, this time in a suite above the garage. I chop a pungent onion as I prepare dinner. Meanwhile my daughter squeezes herself into the low pantry cupboard and embarks on a make-believe adventure.

But my mind rattles up fears. My former neighbor, a renter in an antique home, turned on the heat one fall morning and hopped in the shower, but the furnace exploded and she dashed out, shrieking and naked. A woman at church regretfully filed a restraining order against her violent son. My friend's mother decayed from brain cancer and died while we were in high school. And a struggling ex-convict ignited the mountain.

*One day, I think, the flames will not stop at my fence.*

\*\*\*

When the evacuation order was lifted, we made every effort to remove the evidence of the fire. My brothers and I wiped the ash from the furniture and vacuumed the carpet. After my parents' return, my mother placed tall airpurifiers throughout the house to lessen the smell. My father soon replaced the trampoline. Upon seeing the dirt behind the fence, he also made a donation to the fire department.

But the flames had left a scar upon the mountainside, which I could see from my bedroom window. In that gray, colorless autumn, a charred tree fell by the stream. When the winter thawed, in a seemingly meaningless moment, the ants visited. The following year, a little moss grew on the underside, and the frogs slept. After dozens, perhaps hundreds, of meaningless moments, that dead log hummed with life.

\*\*\*

“I home!” My daughter announces her return from Narnia as she pushes the stool toward me. She asks to dump the onions into the pot—but only after one or two bites, and I let her. “Hot!” She pants and points to her tongue.

As I pour the milk, I’m relieved that my present moment requires nothing of me but to smile and pass a cup to my daughter. This return to reality is my rickety metal fire escape down from the spiraling, tragic unknowns lurking somewhere in the future. She clutches the handles of her sippy cup with her tiny, strong hands, the adventurous unknowns from the world in the cupboard already gone from her mind. As we stand in our kitchen, I sense this meaningless moment together is, in fact, full of meaning.

I stir the onions that now hiss on the stove. My daughter downs the milk, soothing her tongue. We smile briefly at each other, two links in a fence surrounded by wild beauty, a fence that will one day face flames, a fence I pray will stretch further than I can see.

## **J. M. R. Harrison**

### *Permournation*

Grief is a wave function unquenched by time  
or platitudes: a better place, memories as comfort—  
absence barely eased by inscrutable afterlife signs.  
The soul the body left behind indomitable, and yet...

this dewdrop world is diminished and changed.  
If immortality is only remembrance of life’s gift  
by survivors, I want to shout your name, arrange  
to carve it on stones or stuff it in bottles set adrift.

I have earned these scars, body and psyche’s  
grief maps. Were I a tree, they would be evident—  
wound wood. Poems, art, all manner of surcease,  
forestall little: expected or not the waves wreck

those puny moats. Another surge sure to appear  
because *everything of beauty holds a tear*.

*Permournation (neologism): a transitory calm, with full knowledge the next wave of intense grief is inevitable but unpredictable; from perennial + mourning with a nod toward perturbation*

*Italicized words in final line are a quote from a friend’s father (personal communication)*

# Margaret Rozga

## *May His Memory Be a Blessing*

Robert Parris Moses (1935-2021)

A flurry of small birds  
at the height of the tallest pine:  
*teh teh teh tehteh*, like the insistent,  
swish of brush on surface of drum.

I do not know who drums, who drills  
the tree branch, who sings *techeh*,  
*techeh techeh*. I hardly hear myself  
and that may be a good thing.

Yesterday, July 25, 2021, Bob Moses died.  
Bob Moses, born in Harlem, educated at Harvard,  
civil rights worker in Mississippi, beaten  
by opponents of voting rights who failed

to deter him. He turned 1964 into Freedom Summer.

History, hard and soft as it is, details get  
smudged, erased, its lessons unlearned, untaught.  
He turned algebra into a civil rights project,  
won a MacArthur genius award which he deserved.

Each russet tassel on the prairie grass  
nods, keeping time in the soft breeze.  
I'm not describing the intricacy of tall  
blue stem well, and that is only a start.

Now he walks this prairie,  
he haunts the halls of Harvard,  
he practices philosophy in New York,  
he takes refuge from the draft in Tanzania,

he's in Mississippi, Freedom Summer's 50th  
anniversary, talking with Milwaukee teens  
who, since first hearing of his work, have hoped  
to meet Bob Moses. Time and distance deciduous.

Birds aloft in the updrafts, wings extended.  
When I ask students to write about themselves  
as rock or bird, most choose bird. *Freedom  
of course*, they say, the ability to rise,

to rise above what holds them back.  
Overhead a crane. Its song raucous  
in a way I won't try to render. In Mississippi  
I met Bob Moses before I met him.

He led. I joined the march.  
We have been there, and now  
we're here and we're every place  
we've tried to see beauty, tried to sing.

## Judy McAmis

### *Forked*

— *In honor of the antiquarian women preserving folklore songs of Ukraine.*

I am a woman forced to use a language made to fit into right angles with sharp edges,  
the language of a hostile landscape, a body contorted to fit four corners  
of a rectangular frame  
flattened, carved out, jagged, and burning, a landscape of mounds and hips no more.  
Even as my lips move the language cuts my rounded tongue  
a language unburdened by feeling. I am not alone. I am a vessel through which sounds  
move cutting at will a word adrift a Dadaist butchery lacking a linguistic heritage of my own or  
one so thoroughly stripped it is dispossessed.  
My tongue an enemy of the state forked it moves on one side flapping with dissent  
the other  
utters sounds an attempt to be heard a dialect forced upon the body a preordered tombstone  
epitaph included.  
This body is a languageless landscape, erasable, a body without a mother, a motherless tongue\*.  
Aren't we all motherless? Existing in hostile lands made barren whittled to sharp points  
by imperious politicians  
a woman's body a language existing on the periphery of something belonging to someone else.

*\*Motherless tongue - a term coined by Vicente L Rafael*

## Sondra Olson

### *Seven Ways To Navigate Grief*

1

Far out in space are moons and meteorites, supernovas, black holes and a sun that  
is slowly losing its light.

Here on earth, time passes, barely noticed. Only yesterday, I was stacking books  
and boxes, the contents of my life, for a change I was not ready to face. Divorce,  
death, seasons, hours, moving on, and I can hardly remember how fast all these  
days of future passed.

You cannot see time, only the change it creates. When I stepped barefoot over a  
few rocks in Itasca State Park, in Northern Minnesota, it was difficult imagining  
below my feet was the mighty Mississippi, a wandering ever widening body of  
water traveling two thousand three hundred and forty miles to the Gulf of Mexico.  
Surprised, discovering the river begins as a collection of rocks across a pool of  
water less than twelve inches deep.

To navigate grief you must travel through space, along rivers and watch the sun  
go down over your life. You must stack boxes and rearrange your thinking about  
things.



I once traveled hundreds of miles along the Mississippi's Great River Road with my husband and our young sons. I could not take my eyes off the river, its barely noticeable trickle of water and a few rocks, now a huge body of water unable to turn itself around.

I remember the pain of my marriage ending. How, afterwards, utterly meaningless and empty life became. How nothing, no moment, was ever the same. How some moments did repeat, giving the impression of permanence.

My young son returned home from school with a new word: palindrome, a word, phrases, numbers, or other sequence of units that may be read the same way in either direction. Like "madame" or "race car" can be read the same backwards or forward. Most things are reversible. But some things are not. Like rivers. Like loss. To navigate grief, you must learn a new language.

2

In grief, you see and feel everything differently. You do things to distract herself. You must make lists. Go for walks. Reflect, asking questions. Establishing new priorities.

What I will not forget:

- \* Summers on the lake
- \* Geese flying over the water, moving to winter havens south
- \* The sound of trains moving through town, seven miles from our house in the night
- \* How the windows rattled against the sound
- \* How quiet, how still, the green cerulean lights of the aurora borealis
- \* How I felt when my young son left to live with his father, 2000 miles in the other direction

At the end of each day, I pause, thinking how quickly the day has come and gone. How all days vanish as soon as they arise.

Each night, I watch, as the sun sinks below a line of trees and disappears in a muted sky. As time moves to become a million other changes taking place. My

marriage is over. Like an unaccountable god, time has moved on. Earlier, I took a walk, an unencumbered blue sky leading me down our road to a creek, its brilliant, blue water running between jagged edges of ice. Now, the light that was here only an hour ago, replaced by gusty winds promising a new storm.

No certainty anywhere, I reflect, as I watch snow swirling above my head, a feeling of both relief and disquiet, as I ponder the growing dark, climbing into bed with remembered thoughts and feelings finding their way into this space called present.

Could we have hung on further?

What if my dad had not died so suddenly? Would my marriage have lasted?

Was I a good mother?

What will happen now, for my three children?

My middle son wants to live with his father. Do you still love Dad? he asks after we have sold our home on the lake and moved to a rental in the next town.

3

Change is not easy to measure. If you took a photograph of yourself every day of your life, at eighty years, if you watched the twenty-nine thousand two hundred frames as a single film, at twenty frames per second, you would see that person who has become yourself in less than twenty-four minutes.

Our subjective sense of time as some irreducible bedrock of reality flowing through our lives is an illusion. When navigating grief, it helps to view everything through a proper lens.

When I traveled the Mississippi with my husband and children that one year, my life was like a series of photographs framed by the motion of the river. I could see – or thought I could – where it was going. Through sections of the highway, the river would disappear only to reappear, a different river. Changed. If only I had understood the elusive nature of the way we see. If only I had understood the subtle difference between looking at and seeing the way things really are. If only, as the car sped forward, I had glanced backward, I might have seen the flash, the

blur of my own life passing. But I didn't. The river drew me in, a subtle erroneous god guiding and pinpointing me to a future not yet visible or real.

All I will ever know, all I see now, are memories, fixed and flowing perceptions trying to find permanence and meaning in what is no longer here. That there is anything more is delusion. All we are given are sequences of moments, days and years in a magic show we call our life.

4

After you left, I noticed things I had not seen before. I made connections with memories, giving me comfort and hope.

Once, on a snowmobiling expedition, you retrieved a stained-glass window discovered in an abandoned farmhouse. For years, pieces of the glass, stored inside a suitcase on a shelf in the attic.

One year for my birthday, you reassembled the glass with lead came. Framed, it hung above the stair landing facing the lake. Each morning, as the sun struck the glass, elusive shapes, patterns and colors - lucent greens, amber and gold - danced against the walls. Through the seasons, those patterns and colors changed.

You said, light, like time, moves through the colored glass differently in winter, the low angle of sunrise creating an intense, unyielding light. Instead of a warmer softer glow of summer's sun, there is its harsh reflection from winter's landscape. The winter you left, each morning I watched sunlight dance through the stained glass and against the walls of the rooms we had shared.

If you try to photograph light through a stained-glass window, the photo will produce an image fixed on one single moment in time, whereas light from the sun moves through the stained glass in constant shifting waves of light and color as the sun moves and seasons change.

The last time I saw the stained-glass window of our home, was the year you left, and we sold the house. In the new house, it hung stationary against a wall. No light or color moved through the glass.

Recently, I saw the film *Empire of Light*, a powerful poignant story about human connection, and the magic of cinema.

The old projectionist shows the new young upstart his machinery in the projection room: *These are my babies, a pair of model 18 Kaylees, he says.*

The young upstart: *I had no idea they'd be so big.*

The old projectionist: *Well. That's just as it should be. You don't want people to know. They should just see a beam of light. But back here (in the projection room) it's belts, straps, pulleys, intermittents, sprockets. Complex machinery.*

The young upstart (looking at the equipment): *And what's this?*

The old projectionist: *That's the carbons... Spark between the carbons makes the light. And nothing happens without light.*

Young upstart: *Amazing.*

Old projectionist (lighting up his cigarette): *It is amazing. Because it's just static frames with darkness in between. But there's a little flaw in your optic nerve. So that if I run the film at twenty-four frames per second, you don't see the darkness.*

Young upstart: (surprised): *Wow.*

Old projectionist: *It's called the phi phenomenon. Viewing static images, rapidly in succession, creates an illusion of motion.*

(Old projectionist, pauses, then continues, adding): *An illusion of life*

5

Except for an occasional shooting star's trajectory across the night sky, the universe appears deceptively unchanging, eternal. Each passing moment or day rendering itself like the last. But it isn't the same moment. All moments, all days,

carry change, a lifetime of changes never undone. To navigate grief, you must ponder, get lost in appearances and illusions.

In the weeks and months I was alone with the children after you left, I thought how time and circumstance unravel differing perspectives of how things come together, how they fall away and disappear. In the late afternoons, I observed how acutely, for instance, daylight organizes and changes itself over the landscape. How the sun had ruled the whole sky without any relationship to me and I had not noticed. Depending on where I stood, its light took on a very different aspect. Looking away from the sun, I saw an unfettered world, still and placid, full of contrasting light and shadow. Leaves and trees, house and lake radiantly seeking my attention, yet asking and demanding nothing as though it didn't matter what I thought or did. Ready to absolve me of everything for which I was not prepared.

Looking into the sun directly, I saw differently, a luminance that made everything indistinguishable. A light that was blindingly discomforting, mercilessly pushing down from all directions as it reflected and refracted light before lowering itself into shadow and total darkness. And then silence.

One can become lost in the illusion of appearances. A child, I looked up at the night sky, and saw forever. Years later, far from home and older, I pondered those same stars, pinpointing the exact spot where I saw them before. Season to season, year after year, these stars moved across their hemispheres with quiet, reassurance, while my own life irrevocably changed.

6

To navigate grief, you must realize you are a part of a chaotic, discordant universe where everything has been coming together and falling apart for billions of years. Chaos: (the Greek word is "abyss") – In early Greek cosmology, the primeval emptiness of the universe before things came into being. Ovid saw the meaning of chaos as the original disordered and formless mass.

All things begin as possibility. Possibility leads to story. Over time, people's perceptions create new understandings, new versions of the same story.

In the first beginning, nearly 15,000,000,000 years ago, all matter was the same, in one place. Then, the universe exploded, matter expanding in all directions, eventually settling and clinging together to form galaxies. One galaxy formed was our sun's. It, too, exploded, flinging pieces of matter outward until the planets and Earth were born.

All this happened before life. Before anyone could see or be amazed or object. Or have the opportunity to write it down. Or take a photograph of it through a lens.

Back then, in the original story, there was no one anywhere who would know, instead of a seething suffusion of burnish chemicals later called Earth, there would, one day, be the green of oceans, lake, and rivers. No one to see the cooled Earth change into granite, limestone, and serpentine rock, that dried and scorched into desert. No one in those restless other years, to see a dark Earth stilled by the sun going down. No one to witness its moon rising or hovering in the cosmos.

In primordial space, there were no peoples, no lovers to inhabit and settle. No marriages and no one to file a divorce. And there was no one to blame because there was no one to measure or account for the worth of anyone or any story.

7

According to the second law of thermodynamics, everything in the universe is shifting, dissolving into another form or substance. All of what will one day be gone, has been coming together and falling apart for billions of years. The whole cycle, repeating. Nothing ever getting solved.

A wise woman friend from the Ojibway tribe, where I lived in Northern Minnesota, helped me understand the story of my marriage and its ending. In typical indigenous fashion, she began with her own story.

In the beginning, she said, two peoples found each other, fell in love, and built a home and life with three children by a lake in the northern regions of paradise.

For many years they were happy. One day, the beautiful soul of their togetherness became lost. They separated. The two they once were, no longer existed.

I smiled at my friend. Her story was too simple. Why? I asked. What happened?

Smiling back, my friend shrugged her shoulders. Change, she replied. It happens. Those two people. They each became their own new story.

## Judith Sornberger

### *Breaking Whitman into Prison*

My first week at the state pen, I dreamed I flew a helicopter into the Yard to rescue my students. Naïve I know. But barring that, couldn't I at least awaken parts of them that couldn't be penned?

At 28, I was in love beyond all measure with the written word, believed it could go anywhere and carry any cargo. Like your poems, Walt, breaking out of Victorian notions

of prosody and topic, barging through narrow margins, refusing to be confined by rules not of your making. Into that prison, where carrying in a pen was considered

sneaking in contraband, I'd bring *Leaves of Grass*, disguised as mere words everyone knows make nothing happen—your unlawful lines, music

that can't be silenced once it's broken into the mind, the heart, the soul. That night before class, I sat on the living room floor of my tiny apartment, sons sleeping in the next room,

drinking rotgut red and chanting *Song of Myself* into the air—your lines stretching to embrace the whole fucking world, tears escaping my eyes as I felt you near, knew we were lovers

beyond time and gender, beyond the personal, global, and interstellar. I couldn't wait for my students to meet you, for you to whisper in each ear: Never forget, you are *the journeywork of stars*.

## Amanda Powell

### *Ses Yok*

“No voice” scrawls a Turkish  
searcher on one standing half-wall  
in rubble, as three others turn away—  
lugging gurneys, water, thermoses of tea,  
jackhammers, shovels, rope, the little  
that rhymes with hope, as bleak  
eyes and stooped shoulders won’t—

whose sisters, cousins, mothers, beloveds  
went to bed in the nightly shower  
of last looks out to the garden, a late  
cardamom milk, good night, good  
night, and lie now voiceless, hours,  
then days gone. What earth  
can shrug our city down to.

The last time I heard my mother’s  
lilt, it was nothing, bare scraped  
breath, the hospice worker’s  
phone there in our old city held to her  
stilled ear—I don’t mean earthquake

and that are the same—but I could  
not get there to her across a pandemic  
continent I’d have dug away to find her.  
Still, “yes,” I know she sighed then.

Now a searcher’s eyes run  
with dust and thirst and still  
won’t cease. A raw call,  
unanswered. Gloved knuckles  
bleed at another stone.

## Jennie Neighbors

### *What Is Not a Gun*

hands in pockets, hands in the air, just hands, cigarettes, cell phones, candy, pencils, closed  
doors, couches, walls, raving, sleeping, standing, sitting, crying, breathing, begging, singing,  
hoodies, hoses, flowers, driving, parking, music, bodies, wallets, walking, talking, marching,  
nothing, toys, laughing, hot dogs, books, sneakers, backs, hair, bad days, good days, any days,  
fancy cars, crummy cars, bicycles, saying please, not looking, looking back, running

## Daniel Romo

---

### *Proclamation*

The baristas don't allow homeless people to use the restrooms at this coffeeshop because they leave a mess

behind, and I struggle with the notion of protocol vs. person, when to enforce the offensiveness of the

scent and when to divorce the stench from the descent. And in the movie I watched last night, the widower told

the pop star that having an image isn't having a life and I wondered if that should be printed in a flourishing font

towards the bottom of the coffee cup for all customers to read just before they toss them in the trash. I'm at a

point in my life where I want what's just to reign down like a steady precipitation in which everyone desires to

open their mouths to replace the sixty percent of their body that is water with a fresh flood of humanity and

new perspective. The employees give the bathroom code to those who pay for their goods and I only order a drink

here because I feel obligated because I spend so much time using their Wi-Fi. But my guilt doesn't prevent me

from walking out the door and yelling *1-3-4-6-8!* as if informing the world all are welcome.

## Devon Balwit

---

### *Bootstrapper*

*-after Flannery O'Connor*

How angry she is at each failed bid for salvation, hammering the *UP* button for an elevator that never arrives, no explanation of the mechanism more fruitful than flapping her arms in a storm gust, her weight insurmountable, like the pain of a palm over a flame, overcoming it not in her power, the stench of burning disgusting her even as she falls to her knees. She insists it's illness, her weeping an autonomic response, for she is no baby and God no mother's breast.

# Abigail Myers

## *Mycelium*

### I. Chicken of the Woods

The *Laetiporus* genus of wild mushrooms, widely known as “chicken of the woods,” contains a variety of mostly edible species and grows throughout the world, anywhere the rains fall upon the just and the unjust alike. Late last summer, out walking with my husband and my daughter, I spotted at least half a dozen of them in my still-new neighborhood, including one that would grow to the size of a basketball at the feet of a pair of oak trees in a front yard a few blocks away. It peaked, fanning out in candy-corn-like fronds, just before Hurricane Henri hit the island. I longed to cut it free from the earth, to try one of the recipes I’d read for it, but it was on someone’s lawn, and even if they were unlikely to know or care what they had, I wasn’t bold enough to roll up on someone’s actual property with a pocketknife and help myself to a mushroom. I wondered how these middle-aged Long Islanders would take to a nose-pierced, tattooed interloper from the city knocking on their door to inquire about their mushrooms; I crowed and took pictures, but that was all. Sure enough, the homeowners did nothing, and each day as I passed by, the gorgeous specimen faded from sherbert orange to a mottled beige, as the colonizer was itself colonized by ants and beetles.

They are everywhere once you start looking for them. Some neighbors, who made clear their allegiances to former President Trump and his local ally, former Congressman Lee Zeldin, with an assortment of yard signs and flags, had a chicken of the woods growing on one of their old oak trees, and I was deeply jealous, if only for that reason. How fortunate to be hosting such bounty that grows, so freely and unassisted, in one’s own backyard! Not until I harvested several pounds of oyster mushrooms from a dead tree on my own property later that year would I come to know the feeling for myself.

As recently as a year or two ago, I assumed that any wild mushrooms I spotted were toxic. While relatively few actually are, a large and common enough subset of that group is so harmful, causing liver or kidney damage that is in some cases impossible to reverse, that it’s still best to assume toxicity until a proper examination can prove otherwise. And while some mushrooms show themselves clearly, others disguise themselves. A deadly species performs a reasonable masquerade of a benign one; another retains its poison in its raw form, but yields it when cooked. One must be careful. There are old mushroom hunters and there are bold mushroom hunters, the saying goes, but there are no old, bold mushroom hunters.

### II. Mycelium

A plant has roots. A fungus has mycelium, which often looks like roots but operates as part of both a digestive and sexual reproductive system. Mycelia can produce fruit in a matter of days or a matter of years, depending on the species and the conditions; they can fruit once or dozens of times. All mushrooms—the colorful and the dull, the delicious and the decidedly unappetizing and the toxic—come from mycelia. They grow in darkness: the mycelium network conspires in the night to push forth the sex organs that will breathe spores onto the wind and across the ground. They will grow to the size of basketballs, in clusters of dozens or even hundreds—so robust, and yet an individual mushroom can be shattered by tugging it from the earth with just too much vigor.



A particular mycelium yields only one type of mushroom, as a daffodil bulb will only grow a daffodil or an apple seed will only yield an apple tree, and then only if you're lucky. The good news is that mycelia are often dense and vast, and when they exhaust themselves, they will be rejuvenated by fresh spores from the fungi they fruited and bloom again in another season or the next year. The bad news is... the same.

Not exactly so with people, of course. No one can tell what kind of people will spring from any particular soil. "Wildflowers don't care where they grow," so sang Dolly Parton, but no one, wild or flowering or otherwise, seems to care where they grow anymore. The East Texas congressional district currently represented by Congressman Louie Gohmert, a son of the district who among other things voted to overturn the 2020 Presidential election and suggested that the January 6th riot was staged by Democrats, is where my gentle, loving husband was raised. When we visit his family, we often pass through Jasper, Texas, where James Byrd Jr., born and raised in Jasper County, was brutally murdered in a senseless hate crime. Two of the three men who killed him also hailed from East Texas. And, speaking more broadly, the January 6th rioters came from all across the United States, at least some of them from families appalled by what their loved ones had become.

Like mycelia, we can make more of ourselves. We can collect the remnants of a previous generation, pull them together and soak them with rain, and push forth fresh fruit. We can, but should we? How do we make sure we produce the right kind of fruit? What do we do when our children, our parents, our siblings, our neighbors blossom into something unrecognizable and poisonous? What do we do when the ground in which we hoped to grow is tangled with the hyphae of a toxic species— which is to say all the ground there is? What then?

### III. Neighbors

"Who is my neighbor?" Jesus was famously asked, and his response became the Parable of the Good Samaritan. A careful reading of the parable reveals not merely that the Samaritan was good, but that his goodness trespassed borders of culture and religion. The priest and the Levite may have feared that the injured man was actually dead, since touching a corpse would ritually pollute them, as

would handling open wounds. And the Israelites and the Samaritans carried generations of enmity into their relations. Whether the Samaritan knew or suspected that the injured man was an Israelite (or whether he was at all), he performed the life-saving act of kindness, at great risk to himself. He did this while crossing lines that others would not— for reasons of piety or convenience, earnest or pretended, they would not, and the Samaritan did. "Who was the neighbor to him who fell among the robbers?" Jesus then asked, a rhetorical question if ever there was one.

My sense is that Jesus would have little patience if I asked if the family with the Trump flags is among my neighbors. Besides, he's already given his answer: the beautiful mushroom at the base of their old oak trees, the ones past which I walk my daughter, pushing her in the stroller or holding her small hand. *What then?* I ask Jesus, and he says, *This is the soil. The rain brings forth that which is delicious and that which is toxic, what will nourish and what will destroy.* Who is my neighbor? *If you're asking, you're missing the point.*

Yet Jesus cursed the fig tree, too, and warned of the seed that fell on bad soil. Be a neighbor, it would seem, but don't be a fool. There are disappointments and delusions aplenty, dangerous mushrooms growing from the same soil as the delicate and delicious ones. In the darkness, the darkness of underground, the darkness of night, mycelium grows, spreads, fruits. What grows in the darkness of our hearts? Love for neighbor, humanity, and family— or bitter dissatisfaction that turns to insurrection and murder?

We share the same soil, my neighbors and my family and I, and we all choose, unlike the mushrooms, what fruit we put forth. I will come back to their house at the end of the summer and look for chicken of the woods again. What grows in their hearts, I can't say. But the rain falls on both our houses alike. I can only offer the fruit that I grow in my own heart, and take care that it is not to be cursed or choked, that it nourishes and does not destroy.



## Rose Jenny

### *Our Happy Absolution*

This crystalline church refracts midday beams, scatters whole spectrums of color which meet in the open door of our almost empty confessional, teetering on the edge of the unknowable, where sits our misshapen frames resting within one another, melded into a bundle of eroded kneecaps and split sacrum; we are skeleton haystacks, our needle a ring held on your hand and mine, opening at the agate stone, carrying half a teaspoon of depressant powder that obstructs the promise written in your initials that even against guaranteed eternity, I chose you.



Lynn Carriker  
*Madonna*

## Diana Woodcock

### *I Would Do It All Again*

Some days I still feel it,  
as if I'm still swaying  
on that elephant's shoulders,  
refusing to come down. We are losing  
so much – so out of touch  
with each other, with all our  
non-human kin. I would do it  
all again – spend that year with  
refugees on the Thai-Cambodian border,  
bathing with a bucket of water,  
listening to the saddest stories,  
believing in the coming glories.

I would do it all again –  
go to the very end of the Earth,  
to her rooftop, and never stop  
telling the truth about Tibet  
under Chinese rule – all the abuse  
and ridicule, the cruel treatment  
the gentlest people in the world  
endure. I would do all again –  
choose literature as my weapon  
against evil and the devil,  
though not one written word  
can capture the splendor of a bird.

I would choose jazz and the blues  
over the daily barrage of late-  
breaking bad news. I would  
treat holiness with the utmost  
seriousness, and ascend with larks  
and swifts as if never again  
to descend to the ground.

I'd let the sound of their high-  
pitched screaming lift me up  
above the troposphere till I  
entered into their high ring  
of stratosphere. I would do it  
all again – yield to the heart-

breaking beauty of forest and field,  
receiving all their gifts as I busy  
myself with perceiving and praising  
all the days of my brief fleeting life,  
never fearing, never giving up the fight.

## Beth Brown Preston

### *The Crystal Room: Christmas Circa 1963*

Christmas 1963: a photographic postcard in black and white  
taken on the last Saturday in the month of December.  
Momma dressed us up in our bright red chinchilla snow suits.  
And Daddy snapped a picture of us standing close, gloved and booted,  
two sisters holding hands at the bottom of our driveway.  
We boarded the Pennsy at the Cheyney stop and rode into town  
to Philadelphia's gothic Thirtieth Street Station.  
Hailed a shining yellow cab uptown to Thirteenth and Juniper  
and the magnificent edifice that was the John Wanamaker department store.  
Momma's favorite purchases were Estee Lauder perfume  
and genuine silk Schiaparelli stockings.  
For my little sister Alice and me she would choose pale blue  
Evan Picone sweaters with matching tartan plaid pleated skirts,  
and black patent leather pumps we would polish with Vaseline  
every Sunday morning before wearing them to church.  
We dined on the ninth floor – the Crystal Room –  
where mountains of fancy baked goods filled transparent glass cases,  
and an all-white staff of waiters and waitresses served us from the menu  
without question or protest any meal we ordered.  
We sat always at the center table beneath the huge prism chandelier  
rainbow arcs reflecting in our water glasses.

We sat together at the center table tall and proud – the first colored  
to dine in that luxurious room. But secretly still I felt out of place.  
'Cause we were black and everyone else was white  
as if there had occurred some angry and purposeful  
omission of our kind.

## Louis Faber

### *Peace*

Today in odd places,  
at the most unexpected moments,  
a child will smile without reason,  
a young girl will laugh,  
the young boy will stroke  
the neck of a wandering cat,  
and in that place  
at that moment  
there will be a simple peace.  
Only the children will notice this,  
though it gives lie to those  
who deem peace impossible.  
A child knows that it is  
only preconceptions  
and attachments  
that blind adults  
to the peace that  
surrounds them.

## Jane Hertenstein

### *Little Norway, ND*

Thelma ran a rag over the church kitchen Formica counter while listening to Pastor Rolfson go on and on. He did that a lot. Rambled. Though, to be clear, Thelma let her mind wander just as much.

Yes, things were changing and not always for the better—was what Pastor Rolfson was saying. The beads of water from her rag rose up like tiny pearls only to dissipate into thin air. He was usually right, she told herself. At least in his mind. He was talking about an invasion.

To be fair, Thelma had seen the same thing on television—it's just that she couldn't be sure if it was the news or an election ad. It was hard to tell the difference—especially with this election cycle. Candidates whose names she forgot were saying the most outlandish things just to get noticed, is what she thought. But, more and more lately, she doubted herself. How did she know what was true or not, or, for that matter, real? She'd lived long enough on her little corner of the earth, on the grass-dry high plains, that it was possible the world had left her behind, which was fine with her.

Pastor Rolfson, a gangly, saw-tooth man, jerked the basket out of the commercial coffee maker the church had installed the year before. "Full again," he muttered, dumping the half-sodden filter full of used grounds. "Who keeps doing this?"

Well, Thelma knew, but wasn't going to say. Margaret Vogelsang had been saving them for her compost—except she kept forgetting to take them home after church fellowship hour. When Pastor talked about the invasion he didn't mean the aphids eating up the garden out her back door, Margaret once remarked to Thelma, he meant the hordes of migrants crossing the border, breaching the walls and river separating the nation from illegals. Standing there listening to Pastor Rolfson grumble and complain, Thelma knew that Christ would never try to keep people out.

Yet, she kept her thoughts to herself. It was all part of the give and take of a small rural community—one that was rapidly aging. She'd seen it over the past couple of years: the families moving away, the farmers who retired or, as was never openly discussed, ending their lives in an outbuilding on a back acre. We have to take care of each other, she thought, take the bad with the good. And, here, she was talking a bit to herself. Thelma wanted to strangle whoever went crazy with the label gun and labeled all the cupboards in the kitchen and in particular the person who pressed out the label "table wear" for the drawer holding the cutlery—as if it were a fashion statement. She slid it open to put away a serving spoon and noticed one of the knives, the one they used to cut the melons for the Fourth of July social, was gone.

Later, after Pastor had driven off in his Buick and she was about to turn out the lights, Thelma found the knife wrapped up in a plastic tablecloth in the back of a cabinet by the light switch. It was curious, but not unusual. The parishioners still left who helped out around the church were all getting forgetful or cutting corners, leaving little piles for others to clean up. She tucked the knife back into table wear and left.

\*

With her late husband, now deceased for over a decade, Thelma's life was a series of routine events. On Tuesdays and Thursdays she volunteered at the hospital gift shop, taking arrangements up to the rooms. Wednesday was golf gatherings, many of her friends no longer played, but they still liked to get together and lunch at the course. Fridays Thelma came in to clean and organize the kitchen. She'd shop at the local Clip 'n Save for paper products and such to restock the church pantry. Sunday was her busiest day as that was reserved for church. A morning



service and then prayer and worship time in the evening. Always there was fellowship hour afterwards with coffee (decaf for the later service!). They used to have two services in the morning but the congregation no longer supported that; they could all easily fit into the sanctuary—especially as now the time was moved back. Last summer they ripped out the old pews and installed chairs with a little basket on the back for the hymnals. The chairs were much more comfortable. For now the pews were being stored in an old shed at the back of the property.

On the following Friday she got a message from Pastor asking if she was still at the church and, if so, would she mind letting a man into the shed to take a look at the pews. They'd been listed at Craigslist for months and now someone was interested. He directed her to call him if the man decided to move on the offer. About ten minutes into tossing old food and rearranging the double-door fridge, a shadow passed in front of the window and Thelma looked outside; there was the Craigslist guy. She took down the keys and went out back.

Times were: They never had to keep things locked up, but with the drug crisis on top of everything else, neighbor kids were breaking into sheds, garages, parked cars to steal. Crimes of opportunity is how the Sheriff described the last church break-in. Break-in—the old windows in the Fellowship Hall were loose and anyone could easily force them and climb in.

The shed was full of cobwebs and scattered with leaf debris forced in by the wind through cracks in the sideboards. The man inspected the pews stacked on top of each other. He explained that he worked with repurposed wood and that these were thick oak. Highly desirable. The church hadn't quite made the transition to online banking services and the gentleman didn't carry checks, so he would have to come back to finalize the deal. Before closing up, Thelma noticed the tablecloth from a few days ago now folded up and tucked into a little shelter made by the arrangement of pews. Or maybe this was another tablecloth. "*Table wear.*" She chuckled out loud to herself.

That evening she decided she'd sit in the front room without the TV on. The constant banter and "noise" from the set had begun to bother her. It wasn't that her hearing was bad or off, but that the stories were so depressing. Yes, she

understood if it bleeds it leads, but the world was an open wound these days with barrel bombing in Syria to refugees fleeing and drowning on the beaches in Turkey to Al Qaeda beheading journalists, it was all too much. So Thelma sat in her chair as the sun lowered and slanted in a sudden burst of brilliancy before subsiding into rose red, orange, and mauve. She didn't turn on the light, but instead watched darkness settle around her. In her lap was her Bible. When Earl was alive they'd read a passage from it at night and then say their prayers. For some reason, she'd gotten out of the habit. She already knew what was in there. The words were as familiar to her as the forever blowing wind on the plains. Whereas in the past they were a comfort, she now found them bewildering, somehow disconnected from a greater whole.

With her eyes closed, she saw a blonde-haired girl knocking on a door. She was of high school age with an infant daughter. One minute she was there and the next she was gone, leaving the child on the church steps to be raised by a childless minister and his wife. This troubling tableaux had followed her. Thelma may have memory issues, but this scene stayed with her. She knew what she knew. That despite being abandoned, she had been loved.

Back-to-School and Labor Day events kept the church kitchen busy. Once again there was watermelon galore. The church ladies tried to find space on the fridge shelves for all the leftover sliced watermelon and pitchers of untouched lemonade. It doesn't keep too well, Margaret commented and Thelma thought it was a shame that there wasn't an organization they could drop it off at. In the past the local Indian reservation had accepted donations, but lately the tribal leaders turned up their noses at handouts. So the women stuffed the fridge and turned out the lights.

Friday, when Thelma went to put the non-dairy creamer and soymilk the Pastor requested inside the door, she noticed that the refrigerator seemed less full. Someone had been eating the watermelon.

She could count on one hand the number of people with access to the key to the Fellowship Hall and she doubted it was old Joseph the maintenance man as he wouldn't eat fruit even if it ate him first. It didn't really matter as it wouldn't have

kept till the next Sunday, but it was a mystery that worried her. Thelma wondered if she was slipping a little.

A stray package of muffins left in the back of the little veggie drawer was way past its past-due date. She took it out and, because she was of a certain age, she thought a second before tossing it into the trash. Just like her adopted mother and grandmother, she asked, Is there still good in this? So she took it out back, broke it apart, and scattered the crumbs across the tall grass beyond the church property, near the shed. From inside came a scuffling.

The windows of the shed were sooty with grime, so there was no looking in. And, though, she suspected it was just an animal, possibly a prairie dog or those roly-poly wood chucks, she went and got the key hanging in the kitchen. No need the door was unlocked. Just before opening it, a thought entered her head: What if it's a snake?

She was afraid of snakes.

Inside it was dark, faint light seeped in from the unwashed windows. Once her eyes adjusted she saw that nothing seemed awry. Yet there was an odor, musky sharp and sweet. Sweat. Then she heard a baby cry.

Just a few nights after the Back-to-School picnic held under an awning in the church yard, as she was readying up alone as the sun sank slow and low over the open horizon she'd heard a baby. She wondered then if she was losing it or, if like an echo, she was having an audio memory. The old one so long ago, of her left on the church steps. If perhaps it was just her heart crying out to be seen and heard.

"It's okay," she said aloud to the dust-flecked semi-darkness.

After what felt like minutes a man emerged from a pocket of space between the stacked pews. He led out a small woman, shorter than Thelma, carrying a babe wrapped in a stripped hospital blanket.

"Oh, hello," Thelma said, just glad it wasn't a snake.

The couple reminded her in their complexion and coarse, dark hair of the Indians up the road, but by their clothes she could tell they were from somewhere else. "Hola," the man responded.

Thelma knew absolutely no Spanish (outside of what she saw printed on signs popping up in town), but as part of the welcoming committee, she smiled and motioned for them to follow her into the church kitchen. There she pulled out the soymilk and poured a glass for the woman. "Drink," Thelma directed her.

She brought out sandwich fixings and placed them on a table in the Fellowship Hall. She popped open a bag of chips recently bought and invited them to dump some on a paper plate. There was also a bag of unopened baby carrots that no one would ever eat, she brought that out. She squeezed some honey mustard on a plate and showed them how to dip the carrot into it, that it was good. Hesitantly they began to eat. Of course they could have had the whole fridge to themselves once she drove off; she just wanted them to know it was all okay.

But, what did she really know?

The Plains were full of hardship. Though families were scattered over miles, they helped each other in times of trouble. At least that was how it used to be. Growing up there had been no internet, no 24-hour cable TV, boredom just was—that and the rising of the sun and the glorious sunsets. That was why she didn't hesitate to help these strangers. She learned their names, Marta, Hector, and baby Lucia and that they were from Guatemala. They were coming up for the sugar beet harvest when Marta had her baby.

St. Luke Lutheran had been founded by Norwegian immigrants around the turn of the century—the last one, not this one. Those people had struggled to set down roots, clear the land, and lived through crop and bank failures. It was a tale oft-told, for sure. Still, she wondered if she should be doing this—*What*, exactly? She asked herself. You know, she heard Pastor Rolfson. According to him there was a right side and a wrong side. While eating, the man plugged in a charger for his phone, and Thelma recognized in her heart: They are just like us.

Still, she couldn't shake the idea that she was somehow breaking the law, so after a cup or two of lemonade and the last dregs of watermelon, she shooed them back into the shed. She needed to get home as a storm was predicted.

After a light supper of cheese and crackers (sometimes all she and Earl used to eat in the evening was a bowl of popcorn) she cleaned up a bit and sat in her chair. Again, the TV was off. Nevertheless, images filled her head. That lonely girl and her crying baby and knock-knock knocking—until Thelma realized it was thunder. The late afternoon sunlight had suddenly turned to evening, as the winds picked up outside. There was an evergreen in the yard and the spiky top twisted; the whole tree began to lean. The western sky was one huge wall cloud with undulations, like waves rolling in. She turned on the TV.

Something about a derecho. Spanish, she assumed. Was this news of what Pastor Rolfson warned her about—an invasion—or the weather? Tornados she knew, you take cover in a storm cellar or basement, huddle against a southwest wall, or take shelter in a bathroom, in the tub, cover your head and hang on. But what do you do during a derecho? She continued to watch both the TV and the window.

Flying tree debris scattered in the yard and road at the end of the driveway. Soon she saw the neighbor's trampoline pogo-skip down the street, followed by their wrought-iron patio furniture. The 10-foot evergreen snapped off at the base. All the while the wind whipped, making whistling sounds as it tried to get in the windows and whooshed around the corners of the house, drumming on the roof. Apprehensive, she did the opposite of hide, of everything she'd been taught; she hustled out of the house. If the world was going to end, she wanted to be on the side that helped people. If Jesus was coming back, to separate the sheep from the goats, she didn't want eternal damnation, though it was a bit blurry which was better: the sheep or the goat? They were a lot the same. Thelma hopped into her car and into the straight-line wind and slashing rain, she slow-drove to the church.

Once there she put her head down and pushed her way through the darkness to the shed. The event awning from the Back-to-School picnic was blown, long gone. Pulling on the door, it wrenched open and fairly flew off the hinges, making a loud bang. Surprisingly, the baby did not wail. She hurried the family out and into the church Fellowship Hall, where the lights did not work because the power

must be down. Thelma knew where they kept an emergency lantern and felt for it in a cupboard above the now-silent fridge.

She invited them to spread out in a corner of the hall their bundle of things from the shed and use the bathroom. The infant looked well enough, but Thelma picked up that they were afraid. Somehow Thelma conveyed to them she understood, meaning this would be their secret.

After the wind abated, she left the church as the family bedded down for the night.

On Sunday she arrived early to help set up for the post-service coffee hour—and to make sure all traces of the family were hidden. Margaret was already there. Quickly, Thelma scanned the hall. Everything was perfectly in place. Margaret was prepping the coffeemaker basket with grounds, two measured half-cup scoops. That way after church they'd only have to push the button. Cookies were on the counter ready to be laid out on platters. One package had already been opened. Sensing Margaret's eyes on her, Thelma apologized. "I was bonking a bit on Friday and needed a sugar lift."

"I thought as much," Margaret replied. Thelma sighed in relief. Thank God Margaret was batty. With her forgetfulness anything amiss would soon be out of mind.

That morning Pastor again railed from the pulpit about getting out the vote, to stand in the gap, to fight for what was important. It sort of felt like a sermon. A lot these days Pastor preached from a place of injury, almost like he'd been wronged, that the fate of religion, of Lutheranism, of mankind rested on him. He told his congregants not to hide their light under a bushel, but to be like the five wise virgins found in Matthew 25—with oil enough to meet the bridegroom, meaning the end of days. Indeed, this felt like the End Times.

While the coffee brewed and Thelma arranged the cookies on a platter she thought about how lucky she was. To be born in the United States, to not have to worry about food or housing. Yes, prices were going up, but she, like the virgins, had been ready and socked away something for a rainy day. Earl had a good pension and now it was hers. They really had been blessed.

She realized not everyone had had all the opportunities she'd experienced.

Yes, she'd been a foundling, abandoned soon after birth—but, still, she counted herself with the “haves” not the “have nots.” If only she could help those poor people get on their way. While she was thinking this Pastor came in and jerked the coffee basket out of the machine. He was still a bit riled up. “Marge, stop saving the grounds!”

Thelma slipped between him and Margaret. “The coffee only just finished, we were letting it drain before emptying.” She took the dripping basket out of his hands and set it in the sink. “All's ready for fellowship,” she announced.

If anything she shouldn't be here either. She'd been left, motherless, without a name or family. If her parents hadn't done the right thing and taken her in, well... They had. Did.

The few who stayed after church did not linger long. It was harvest time and, though, many had retired from farming, it was instinctual to get home—or maybe it was Sunday afternoon football that called. Either way the hall emptied out in record time.

Thelma took the damp grounds out back of the church to toss them into the compost. Then slinking behind the shed away from view of the church kitchen windows she opened the door and cleared her throat. “Hector, Marta?” Their blurry figures appeared like dust-mote ghosts. She pointed to her car, the gray sedan in the parking lot next to Pastor's Buick. “Here, aquí,” she said, handing them her car keys. “Vamos, go.”

For a second they eyed her, but finally nodded. “Gracias.”

Thelma returned to the kitchen lighter, as if this Sunday the words of Scripture resided inside of her, not blathering around her ears. She was an instrument of God's love, doing His work. It was a feeling more than an idea—much like the sunset at its apex, flaring and flashing forth. Caught in a moment of goodness. At the counter Thelma ran a rag over a spill while Pastor yanked the trash out of

the can. “Anything else to go out?” he asked. He seemed to have settled down. “No, all done,” she answered.

“What the—” His eyes darted. Through the window, she saw her gray car pull out of the parking lot, spraying gravel. “Someone is stealing—”

Quickly Pastor dropped the bag and leaped outside, his keys in hand, and ran for his Buick. Before Thelma could explain, he was in his car and backing up, soon down the road in pursuit.

The rest she got from patrol officers. Apparently Pastor had driven up alongside of the family and tried to force them off the road. The old country road was crowned, meaning higher in the middle with drainage ditches on both sides. The man, Hector, lost control of the sedan and ended up in the ditch, the car on its side, the passenger door bashed in. That's how the baby died.

At first Thelma visited the poor man in jail, like how in the Bible one is admonished to remember those in prison. And, she did remember until the first significant snow. In the late afternoon when in her house it was already dark, she turned on a light. The Bible on the end table beside her chair was rarely opened. Her eyes were bad and her head hurt. Mostly she liked to sit in contemplation, sometimes thinking of Pastor up for murder charges or that poor family sent back to Guatemala or just letting her mind travel back in time to that babe left all alone. Not alone she reminds herself. She knew what she knew: Love is always on the right side.



## Daniel Tobin

### From *This Broken Symmetry*

*There is only one fault: incapacity to feed upon light, for where capacity to do this has been lost all faults are possible....*

-Simone Weil

(Montségur)

High, high and sure, far above the poplars' spreading tips,  
at the very spur's end where its lowest stones still loom  
in sheer ascent, triangulate like an arrowhead, the chateau

holds its skull-eyed gaze heavenward: impregnable *puog*,  
secure *mons*, matter's outpost, where the pure ones, *cathari*,  
spirit's troubadours inside their virginal Altaforte, kept

the faith against the faithful, a consolation of the perfect,  
each an angel's genderless life trapped within the physical,  
bodies bereft of goodness like all things visible, like all

created things—corrupt wastage of an evil demi-god—  
the Eucharist just straw through the body's sieve, Christ  
a masquerade of flesh, and impure souls fated to return

from death to death through each vital dross condemned,  
unless on death's bed they shun all drink, all food, endure  
the wine's liberation from earth, the lost light's from wine.

So, from Innocent's decree the armies besieged them there  
in Languedoc, in Toulouse, as in Béziers and Carcassonne,  
the men and women equally, equally held in God's regard,

and marched them down from the safe hill, a late Masada,  
to the *prat del cremat*, cheering the screams as the flames  
licked flesh, stoked pyres blanching incense to the winds

where Rome scattered coins and Neanderthals camped—  
this "genius of Occitan" that set the belated Lady afire  
in her own flawlessness: *a swirl upon the stair, Audiart, Audiart....*

(String)

Not the village, south of Viana do Castello, not the blessing,  
but the whine of turbines in the factory's packed clatter-box—  
Alsthom, Langlois, Luchaire, Salmson, Gevelot, Renault...

So, she makes rounds to bring herself under: her "project"  
to know the workers' true estate at bobbin-furnace, belt,  
stamping press and mill, casts her lot by choice with those

destined by duress, yet amazed to see the women gossiping  
after work, "chattering" while she in "a cold fury" walks  
to the Seine, wondering if she were "condemned to this life"

could she resist "throwing herself in?" And rouge applied  
to her lips, rose to her cheeks, to coax managers to hire her:  
one "with his carved head, twisted, tormented, monastic"—

even whips succumb to affliction, the human humiliated.  
Consider as postulate a metaphor: all creation an open string,  
every note thrumming in relation on the scale, ratio, octave

by octave, playable because of the string: Love is the string,  
vehicle and tenor, affliction the far strut "where violence  
turns to suffering"—harm harmonized in privation of God.

But to have this condition plucked, plucked again and again,  
what note will be raised? "The resigned docility of the beast  
of burden: to be born to wait, receive, and carry out orders...

And always, one's need for the *external* signs of one's value."  
Cue the truth of force, inescapable, the Revolution doomed.  
Cue the Jacob's ladder of the freighter to Portugal and Spain.

(Processions)

Nascent silence. Above the sea, a full moon ripples its light  
in folds of waves, the same light settling like powdered silver  
on the village where women, candles in their hands, voices

lifting the ancient hymns, move in procession to the shore  
to bless the boats. *No céu desponta nova luz*—in the sky dawns  
new light? Something sadder, Simone believes, heart-rending,

for the village is “wretched,” and what is borne in upon her  
confirms what she has known: the red-hot iron, the mark  
of the slave, given to the afflicted, with the religion of slaves.

On her first day in her first factory in her year of factory work,  
she had arrived in a white blouse; the workers saw her hands,  
soft, as yet unscarred—a student who had failed her exams?—

not this professor with her “inborn awkwardness” offering  
herself to the machines, like a copper bobbin to the furnace,  
flames licking hands, arms, her unable to close the shutter:

unable, at one shop then another to meet the need for speed,  
to work without thought, like the cutter slicing her thumb,  
the mill that drives the metal shaving in her palm—slavery

“not in the circumstances, but carried by the work itself”—  
her upset at seeing the conveyor belt, its frantic procession  
under the pendulum, the human cognates at their given task...

All most unlike this living circle of women walking, singing  
round, round their husband’s boats, again, now, for centuries,  
a full moon, the sea below rippling light. This nascent silence.

## Richard Schiffman

---

### *Pigeon Religion*

Doves, the Bible names them.  
New Yorkers call them rats with wings.  
Jesus said God loved them.  
My mother said they spread disease.

God just said— spread. And so they did. And so they do.  
Multiply and subdue the earth, the Lord decreed.  
Though humans thought he was addressing them,  
pigeons know these words were meant for pigeons

who the Creator forged in his own resplendent image:  
grey-seeming, yet sporting rainbow ruffs  
revealing all the shades and shadings of Creation.  
Omnipresent, perched in every nook and corner.

Yet we scarcely notice these amiable avians  
as they wheel above our heads, or bob  
in conga lines on summer lawns, reaping  
what they did not sow, inheriting the earth.

## Donna Harlan

### *The Table*

*A reflection of Psalm 23:5*

My first memories are stashed in every cell (except my neocortex),  
locked, but leaking, seeping, showing up in attitudes and words,  
in patterns of thought and responses to light and dark,  
speaking out and staying silent.

Anyone who would remember them is gone,  
anyone who bathed me or brushed my hair gently  
or harshly, anyone who fed me or played with me  
or ignored me, anyone who was angry or kind or neglectful.

All gone, no retrieval possible,  
no security cameras or witnesses, but  
my cells tell me that I was loved.  
They tell me to love others.

All around I see unknowable memories  
of those whose hearts are full of debris,  
whose souls are flooded with dirty waters,  
whose minds are cramping in pain.

There is no restraining order that will block  
our skin from remembering violence,  
no holding cell to protect our cells,  
no expunging the past from memories never known.

Our enemies are free to taunt and hate and anger,  
but ahead there lies a table in the presence of these enemies,  
enemies of our past that we can proclaim powerless today.

Join me at the table.

## Matthew E. Henry (MEH)

### *dispatches from the desk of Danel: the self-designated disciple and messianic anger-management translator*

Mark 11:17

didn't y'all even read  
the fucking manual?!  
all are welcome to sit  
at my Father's feet—to ask  
for advice—free of charge,  
you trifling, backroom dealing,  
hand in another's pocket,  
illegitimate bastards.

Matthew 22:18-21

why are you trying me?  
pass that over here fam.  
whose face do you see  
on this coin? exactly. so pay  
what the fuck you owe  
to the one who's owed  
and stop with the bullshit.

Luke 13:31-33

tell that worm-eaten despot  
he knows exactly where the fuck  
I Am, where I'll be tomorrow,  
and the day after. give his  
bitch-ass my whole itinerary  
and tell him—if he dares—  
to come and see about me.

# Tzivia Gover

## *Dramatis Personae*

“The Kabbalah teaches that all the characters of the Torah are within ourselves.”

-Miki Raver, *Listen to Her Voice: Women of the Hebrew Bible*

I am her. I am  
barren. I am  
famine. Laughing. Blessing. I am

promise and I am  
him leaving  
and tent and tent flap flapping. I am

dividing pigeon from dove. I am  
halving heifer and ram.  
I am calling and I am

constellating the heavens. I am  
each letter of the alphabet  
and I am what's missing. Wandering. I am

the voice commanding. I am  
all and nothing. I can't be pleased  
and I am acting as if I think I am

a nation ready to be born. I am  
cells dividing. Can't be stopped  
and I am breaking open. I am

taking. I am  
mountain. Saddle. Ass.  
And I wish I were altar.

And not trapped in tangle. I am  
not so much angel as martyr.  
And I am

all three days. I am  
not dead  
and I am

death by heartbreak. If true, I am  
heaven is a reach.  
but speaking to you. I am.

## Wayne-Daniel Berard

### *Harry Potter and the Need for Myth*

*"Myth is a story that's true on the inside."*

-Carl Jung

Hermann Hesse opens his first major novel with these words: "In the beginning was the myth." And he was right! Myth, that set of stories, characters, and symbols which deeply reveals ourselves to ourselves and to others, is where it all begins; it is foundational to human life, individually and communally, to our fulfillment, our relationships, and our institutions. Whatever the dominant or underpinning myths of a time period might be, everything else is composed of them, like the letters forming these words and sentences. To paraphrase one mythic text: Through myth all things are made and without it nothing that was made has been made.

Naturally enough, there is a relationship between myth and religion. Jung's famous assertion that myth is true on the *inside* applies here. Many, if not most, involved with a religion believe it to be true on the *outside* as well as in; for these adherents there *objectively* is no God but Allah, or Adonai their God is quite literally One, or Jesus Christ will return in real space and time to judge the quick and the dead. It is also the case that in more "progressive" faiths or branches of them, these elements may take on a more metaphoric or symbolic meaning; many of my Jewish or Christian companions on the journey do not hold to a

literal Adam and Eve, for instance, but see immense significance in the story of the Garden. In this sense, they are being more mythic than religious, (although further discussion often reveals an objective core at the center of their mythic open-endedness).

But then, at times it can so happen that a myth will have exhausted itself or otherwise run its course. In our own day, it seems that this has largely become the case with Greek and Roman mythology. There was time, not all that long ago, when, if I described someone as "rich as Croesus," everyone would nod. Whether they knew the particulars of the mythic reference – that Croesus was a legendarily opulent king of Lydia (*where?*) – was entirely beside the point. The myth superseded its own origins, taking on a life of its own that was, at the same time, ours. Today, should I ever mention Croesus, almost anyone would cock their head questioningly, perhaps asking, "*Jesus? Who?*"

But if I were to describe a controversial political figure as "He Who Must Not Be Named," nearly everyone gets the reference! And although only a few more might pick up an allusion to Othello and Desdemona, were I to say, "Your husband is a Dementor," nearly everyone would nod.

That the Harry Potter Saga qualifies as myth would seem beyond doubt; volumes upon volumes of scholarly books and dissertations testify to its checking any and all boxes that a Joseph Campbell, a Mircea Eliade, a Robert Johnson, or indeed Jung himself might require. Hero Myth, Quest Myth, Myth of Self-Sacrifice and Resurrection – it's all here in the pages and film scenes between Sorcerer's Stone and Deathly Hallows. But what truly speaks to its mythic appeal is the pervasiveness of the Potterverse in the interior landscape of our culture since its appearance in the late '90's. It has been much more than a phenomenon. For many, the Potterverse was and continues to be a revelation, one that is profusely, inspiringly "true on the inside," fulfilling myth's mission to reveal ourselves and others, while demanding nothing of us on the "outside," in return.

Harry Potter speaks to the psychic orphaning of generations of readers and viewers, relieves that abandonment by an assertion of specialness, and insists, as all myth does, on a reality just below the surface and beyond the ordinary where such specialness is the rule – though Hogwarts School is no Paradise Regained.

The same pettiness and spite that pervades Muggle life exists at Hogwarts, which is to its credit. Inside or out, myth must be a story that's real! Only then can it come to pervade nearly every aspect of real life, to become a common vocabulary, a symbolic shorthand, even for those who have never read one of its books or seen its films – and, in Jungian terms, to filter down as our day's contribution to the Collective Unconscious, ever evolving.

Jung is likewise credited with saying, "Myth, like nature, abhors a vacuum." When one's experience personally and collectively cries out for mythic meaning, myth of some sort will find its place into that vacuum – sometimes to our dismay. We see this now in threatening abundance as supremacism based on race, gender, or sexual expression, Christian nationalism and neo-fascism seeks to fill our mythic void. Campbell once wrote, "I don't have faith, I have experience." Today, Progressives, who have experience aplenty, may or may not have faith, but what is tragically, even dangerously so is that they have no myth, as well. And without myth, nothing can be made.

Facing off in defiance of all this in the arena of mythic truth stands a boy with a lightning bolt scar on his forehead, his red-headed, fearless-if-dense best friend, and the cleverest witch of her age – they and the mythic environment they inhabit, collectively known as The Potterverse.

Clearly, I'm an enthusiast. But everywhere I go in my Gryffindor scarf or owl-with-letter tee shirt, people, young but older as well, stop to talk. What house am I in? Who is my favorite character? Have I been to Orlando (the Mecca of this mythos)? It's like belonging to a vast international society, a universal unchurch!

And just in time, I might add. For our Culture Wars, which seem to be drawing to a rapid and decisive turning point, are in truth Wars of Myth. And for all its originator's personal prejudices, the Harry Potter Mythos remains our time's premier popular example of anti-fascist, anti-supremacy literature and film. The Death Eaters with their vicious commitment to "pure-bloodedness" fail; liberal democracy, as bumbling and blind as it can be, is saved. And compassion trumps hatred in the Potterverse: Even as they are locked in life-or-death battle, Harry urges Voldemort to seek out remorse. And the Boy Who Lived consciously

chooses not to become The Man Who Rules – he rejects the most powerful weapon in his world and accepts no office of power.

We can soon expect a spike in Potterness as a new seven-year, expansive retelling of the stories becomes HBO Max-reality. A new Potter attraction is opening in Tokyo, and word is that a film version of Broadway's *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* is in the offing. All this, as if responding to a Summoning Charm, occurring just before, during, and in the aftermath of our next national election.

Hermann Hesse was indeed right; in the beginning was the myth, and in the ending, as well. As we can see, when cultures clash, it is a drawn-out, draining, brutal affair; we fall back on our myths to propel and sustain us in ways only inner truths can.

Charles Williams (for all intents and purposes, CS Lewis' spiritual director) once commented on the failure of the Nazis of his day to win their war that "they didn't have the metaphysics for it."

Thanks largely to the Potterverse, we do.

## Wally Swist

### *Good Buddhism*

*-for William Ackerman*

We'd see you always seated  
next to your accompanist,  
Saturdays, late morning,  
in front of the music store  
at the bottom of Main Street  
in Brattleboro, but it was you,

wearing the fingerless gloves  
those winter days, how you made  
the notes bounce off the red brick  
buildings on either side of the street,  
with the purposeful and slow  
picking of your guitar strings.

I hadn't known then who you were,  
but recognized something in you  
just the same, as you looked up  
in your stocking cap, smiling  
at us walking past, at ease with  
playing in public anonymously.

Later, when I found out it was you  
who had founded Windham Hill,  
our seeing you all came together,  
especially when I discovered  
your *New England Roads* CD,  
which we now mediate with

every morning, I realized that  
it was you that we saw playing  
as the snow fell deliberately,  
by degrees, the same way  
in which you pluck your strings,  
delighting in the good Buddhism

of the moment and deepening  
what is that is resonant,  
lingering as snowflakes do  
and the notes you play  
in nourishing all those who  
become present enough to listen.



# Lesley-Anne Evans

## *Prayer for When We Run Out of Lettuce*

*Weep not, child...The ravening clouds shall not long be victorious...  
be patient, watch again another night...*

- Walt Whitman, "On the Beach at Night" (1871)

Our Parent, uncontainable by eight rubbermaid bins  
in my basement containing all I can't let go of,

holy are your pronouns. I will not run or abandon  
reason. Your kingdom is a weighted blanket

of breath, lifting and labouring. Your will  
is in roads bisected by mudslides, notwithstanding

phantom pains of separation— mothers from  
their children. Give us a bypass

to the inevitable, *something more immortal*  
*than stars*. And forgive us our heat dome of silence—

overcome by toxic air from forest fires that sweep  
through stolen land—so that we may still turn to you

as one town burns, yet another is preserved. Lead us not  
into produce aisles to panic-buy fresh tomatoes.

We know full well the shelf life of vegetables.  
Deliver us from ourselves, and media's melodramatic videos

of farmers leading doomed cattle through high water.  
Deconstruct every construct but Love, O' Love.

For yours is the glory held in Whitman's  
poetic line. Your amen, O' One, is the cosmos

birthing now and forever,  
our blue green salvation, world without end.

## Susan Johnson

### *How It Doesn't End: Essays From A Life Of Hiking*

#### 1. You Should Have A Cell Phone

My mother-in-law is concerned that I hike without a cell phone. That I, in fact, live all parts of my life without a cell phone. You should have a cellphone, she says. When I go for a hike, I bring a map, my car key, and a bottle of water. I study the map before leaving and consult it as I hike to compare the map to what it is I am seeing. When I reach the summit, I stop and look about. I try to identify the surrounding mountains, the direction I am facing, the birds buzzing the low brush. I do not take pictures of the view or of me looking at the view or sit and stare at a small screen. I do not listen to tunes with buds in my ears. Sometimes I sing. Especially if I am on a section of trail that looks like it might be popular with bears, I sing. I have seen ten bears this year hiking and that is more than enough.

Back home I also do not take a cellphone grocery shopping. Or to work. Or for a walk around the local pond. I am not sure why anyone would need a phone to do these things. What do people need to say that is so urgent or important that they must have a phone with them at all times?

When at work, I turn on my desktop and answer any emails. I have a desktop at work and a laptop at home and that, to me, is enough. I teach three classes in a row, check email between each, and once more at the end of the day. If students want to stay and talk to me after class, I stay and talk to them. If this means I will

arrive home a half hour later than usual, I arrive home half an hour later. I do not call my husband to tell him this. I arrive home when I arrive home.

My husband is a carpenter who makes his own hours so I never know when he will be coming home. And that inexactness is exactly fine with me. If he did call me throughout the day to tell me where he was and what he was doing, it would probably drive me crazy.

We still have a land line and when my mother-in-law calls we pick up every time. And we call her before leaving to visit, saying we'll be there in about two hours. And when we arrive about two hours later she is ready for us.

We sit and listen to her concerns, which are many because she is 90. I try to console her that my hiking without a cellphone should not be one of those concerns. I do not tell her about the ten bears I have seen hiking this summer or ask her how a cellphone would help me encounter fewer bears.

You got along fine without a cellphone when you were 58, I say to her. But she does not want my arguments. She wants me to be safe. And I want me to be safe. Which is why when I go hiking the next day I bring my eyes, my ears and my voice. I want to be looking out not down. I have surprised a mama bear and her two cubs already once this summer and I do not want to do that ever again.

#### 2. Chubby Little Dog

I started hiking when a friend had a chubby dog. She worked 9-5 so she and her dog got little exercise. Both friend and dog enjoyed hiking so on Saturday afternoons they would hike up Norwottuck Mountain in Amherst, Massachusetts. One Saturday, she asked me along and I've been hooked ever since.

The friend, and dog have since moved on but I continue to hike every Saturday afternoon. And Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons. Any day I can actually.

One afternoon, at the top of Norwottuck, a local college student was taking a survey on why people hike. I was there with my friend and her dog that day and we looked at each other. It could be for the light in the trees, how it is both calming and energizing exercising our legs and lungs. But really it's because she has chubby dog, we say.

I've thought a lot about "why I hike" since. Sometimes I think it's because some days I really don't like it. Most times I get tired and hot or cold and achy. That's when I know it's a good hike and I've really earned the view at the summit.

Sometimes I think it's because of the people I meet. The guy halfway up Mt. Greylock who asked if I was there to see the rare blue butterfly. The guy running toward me at the top of Greylock asking if I'd take a video. Sure, I said, and watched as he dashed over to his girlfriend, bent down on one knee, opened a black velvet box and how she pressed both palms to her cheeks—the international sign for yes.

Sometimes I think it's for the people I don't meet—the ones who cut the trail, who maintain it, who built the stone walls that run like sentences through the woods. And all the people who are doing something else that day so I have the trail to myself, mountain to myself—trees holding on to ledges, ledges holding on to trees.

Mostly it's for the scenes in my mind after. The ruffed grouse crouched mid-trail at the beginning of the hike and amazingly still there hours later when I return. The trail opening to a field full of light like solid becoming liquid. And at the summit how it opens up like liquid becoming air, so you can see not just across state lines but with a different state of mind. How what started as a walk for a chubby dog has become a completely different sort of exercise.

### 3. Reading Mountains

When I reach the top of a mountain and look across to the next, I want to climb that mountain too. It's the same when I finish reading a chapter; I want to move on to the next.

Standing on top of Mt Holyoke, I can see Mt Greylock to the west and Mt. Monadnock to the north. In a biography of Thoreau, the author says he walked from Concord MA to Mt. Monadnock in New Hampshire hiked up, and looked across to Mt. Greylock.

And then, because he was Thoreau, he hiked down Monadnock, walked all the way to Greylock in North Adams MA and hiked up that. Then down to Pittsfield.

Mountains, like books, mean different things to people. Some plots of land have more layers than plots in a novel. But both tell stories and offer different points of

view so we walk away changed, carrying our impressions with us.

When Melville lived and wrote in Pittsfield he could look up and see Greylock. Some think it was metaphorically his whale—a giant presence on the horizon that held his gaze. When Thoreau slept on top of Greylock he wrote that he woke surrounded by "an ocean of mist," as if he had washed up on a deserted island.

Last summer I hiked up Greylock ten times, on seven different trails, not out of some obsession, but to experience it myself, to "read" it like a novel you have heard about and what to turn the pages first hand.

Each trail has a different name and personality. Bellows Pipe is the trail Thoreau supposedly took, named for the wind that hustles down the mountain. The first two miles are gradual, then it hits you with a crazy-steep ascent. It's like a character that plods along, then suddenly accomplishes everything all at once.

Jones Nose is the opposite. I don't know who Jones is and I know even less about his nose, but this trail ascends steeply right away before leveling off, rolling over the whale's spine, like someone who rushes to get somewhere and then is content to amble on.

Each ends at the summit where you can now climb 89 steps to a glassed-in view. Looking north I see Stratton Mountain and after hiking up Stratton, I see Bromley and from the top of Bromley, I see Killington and at the top of Killington I stop to catch my breath.

This is a book I want to keep reading, not to see how it ends, but to see how it doesn't end.

### 4. Nature As Hospital

After I broke my leg mountain climbing, a search and rescue team carried me down on a stretcher, hoisting me high up into the trail's hemlock and spruce so I was surrounded by their needles and resin. I used to climb trees a lot when I was a kid, but I hadn't been up in their branches for years and I'd never ridden through a forest so I could reach out and touch the limbs if I'd wanted to, if my own limb hadn't been injured. It was a remarkable vantage point and one I will remember.

Especially because I would end up spending the next five days inside a medical center--the most time I can remember being continuously inside.

The day I was released, I happily wheeled myself out into the rain. It was only a parking lot, but I was outside!

Nature makes for a terrific hospital, using hospital in its original sense, a place that is hospitable, that welcomes and entertains.

Once I was able to walk around our local pond, I was welcomed by a great blue heron that landed so close I thought it was going to wrap me in its wings.

And I've been entertained by Cooper's hawks flying tree to tree over head as if leading me on with an invisible string, by a young fox that beat me in a staring contest, and by a big old porcupine that just wanted to amble along, thank you.

Nature makes for a terrific hospital in our current usage as well, a place that heals. A long wide river turns a slow bend two miles from our house and when my leg had mended enough, I walked down to its banks to look up at its shining between the cliffs it had carved out. And was still carving out as it flowed south to where its mouth was in constant conversation with the ocean.

After I fell mountain climbing, my world was reduced to the damp rock I sat on for three hours unable to move. Now I had this gleaming vista before me, in motion, motioning me on.

Though I am certainly grateful for the medical staff and my husband who tended me, it was getting outside that restored me. Stocked my shelves.

People ask if I will continue hiking given that hiking led to me breaking my leg. Of course, I say. What better way to mend a leg than take it outside, up a mountain side, to push the pain aside.

## 5. Winter Birds

It's easy to love birds in spring with their flutes and bright plumage, but I've come to admire birds in winter because, like us, they are here for the duration, no matter how gloomy it gets.

Winter birds may be drab, but they are there. Here. Outside my window right now a barred owl perches in an oak, its feathers streaked gray as the bark it leans into,

its eyes blinking and alert, its ears taking in every movement.

Hiking the Holyoke Range I pass a male downy woodpecker knocking on a hemlock just a foot away. He is black and white like many birds this time of year, but also has a red dab on the back of his head. It isn't much, but it provides some needed contrast to the brown on brown, as does his constant activity.

Further on I hear a raven before I see it, its deep croak resonating against the cliff. In college, I entered a live trap full of ravens. My task was to grab each, band its leg, and then measure the flight feathers to record the stage of molt, as glossy new feathers replaced the worn ones—part of the process of surviving the seasons.

Now my task is to just listen and look as one raven flies overhead. Wait, there's two conducting a call and response with me in the middle. They aren't exotic birds but they are essential as they remind me that though the woods seem barren in winter, they aren't. They are very much alive.

At the river two crows call out at a red-tailed hawk, all sitting in the same leafless tree under which water freezes and thaws, and mallards come and go. With so few birds around, they stand out not for their beauty, but for their community. We are all in this together they seem to say, sticking it out through the harsh cold.

Last October I took my mother-in-law to the Cape Cod canal bike trail. She liked getting out and seeing the kids on their scooters, but she really enjoyed the birds. There were only gulls and cormorants but that didn't matter. What did matter was they were there and she was there and the sun was shining as the birds flapped their wings, circling, like small boats adjusting their sails.

Back in her room she asked what that bird was out her window. That's a female cardinal, I said, not as colorful as the male, but she'll be out there all winter.

## 6. Dead Wood

In some businesses, the phrase "Dead Wood" is used to describe someone who is no longer productive. Or at least not as productive as they once were, not contributing to the company's bottom line. But I've come to think of Dead Wood not as use-less but as some of the most use-ful material around.

Walking in a forest on a gusty day I see a lot of dead wood—branches snapping off trees, trees snapping in two—and I think of how productive these trees are. Inside one fallen trunk, the sapwood is granular—already eaten by bacteria which have been eaten by insects which have been eaten by woodpeckers. One tree has so many holes drilled in it by a pileated it looks like a flute—for someone with giant hands.

The wind acts like giant invisible hands pushing at trees so they sway like ships' masts. Some topple over and will soon become homes to chipmunks and mice. They'll blossom with coral-colored fungus so they resemble a coral reef. Others will harbor beetles and ants, bears and bats, moss and lichen. All will contribute to the forest's bottom line as the rotting pulp becomes soil giving rise to a whole new generation of saplings.

And it's not just wind falls. Sitting on an old stump I'm aware of how trees age at a different rate than us. The stump may appear dead but its hundred year old root system is connected to neighboring trees which are connected to vast networks stretching for miles, for decades.

And it's not just woods. Canoeing, we paddle around downed trees whose branches provide shade for fish. The same log can be lunch for a beaver, a bridge for a mink, a bench for roosting ducks, and a platform for a hungry heron. As the tree rots it will feed mayflies that feed trout that feed the osprey circling above us.

Walking on a summer day I hear a strange squeaking noise and turn to see a baby raccoon making its way down a tree followed by its sibling close behind. Soon an adult fetches each and carries them back up into the hollow trunk of an old sugar maple I have walked past a hundred times assuming its productive days were over. Dead wood, indeed.

#### 7. Bears

"There are bears in those woods" a farmer once told me, "I wouldn't go in if I were you." So of course I went in—again and again.

Nothing plunks me into the present like a bear. It's both very real and surreal seeing such a large, powerful animal so close. My mind tends to stroll as much as my legs when I'm walking. I think about an incident from yesterday, plans for today, that I'm low on milk. Then bam. It all vanishes to be replaced by this enormous mammal.

Seeing a bear also makes me realize how little I know about the forests around me. I need marked trails to find my way, but bears make their own, following paths I can't see, living lives I'll never fully understand.

Once climbing Mt. Greylock I saw something romping in the trail ahead and suddenly realized it was a cub. It was both one the cutest and one of the scariest things I had ever seen. Its mother had to be near. It was so small. And between a mother bear and her young is not the wisest place to be. I picked up my pace and so did it, climbing a tree. I don't remember the rest of the hike, but when I think back to that day all I see is that cub.

And once at the top of Pico near Killington I was going to sit and rest where the trail opened to a field of wild flowers and blue sky. After hours of hiking in shaded woods it looked inviting. And was. To an enormous bear. It didn't linger and neither did I. I didn't get to enjoy the far off vista but I did enjoy a close up view of a mighty bruin with a button nose. It wasn't interested in me but I was very interested in it crossing in front of me, our lungs breathing the same air.

Sometimes I feel like Goldilocks. I don't sleep in bears' beds or eat their porridge, though I do stroll through their backyards and into their homes without knocking. But then I move on. I don't want to get caught napping.

#### 8. Wild Thing

Has this ever happened to you? You're walking on a trail and there's a deer off to the side and instead of leaping away it turns and starts walking toward you, taking its time but progressing nonetheless, step by step, looking right at you, titling its head the way deer do to assess shape and shadow, to take you in, this thing in the woods, their woods.

In the past I've written about deer parading up my driveway after a heavy snow storm. It seemed like a visitation from beyond because it's rare for me to see deer in my yard.

It's less rare for me to see deer when I'm hiking and more often than not those deer start walking toward me, as if to determine what I am. Friend? Foe? Neighbor? Intruder?

What is it the deer sees, perceives? Obviously it doesn't take me for a predator for no animal approaches a predator.



And though admittedly I am a little deer-like, being roughly the same height, with similar hair and eye color, I am no deer. I walk on two booted feet and dress in clothes of wool and cotton.

It's not just deer that do this. When I lived near Quabbin Reservoir, I would regularly come across moose in the woods. They too would stop and stare, and then step closer, angling their gangly heads.

*Just what are you? They seemed to ask. What are you doing here?*

Good questions.

When I hike I keep a mental note of all the critters I see and hear. That's a pileated woodpecker swishing by. That's a red squirrel recharging its batteries.

It's good to know whom I'm sharing the woods with; it's good to keep track. Animals need to know too, need to be vigilant about their surroundings. And just as there's people that bird watch, there are probably birds that people watch. Ungulates as well.

For many years humans have had uneasy relationships with wild animals. We cut down their forests; they eat our crops. But these deer encounters make me feel uneasy in a different way.

Though admittedly I find such attention pleasing—that I'm interesting enough for them to investigate makes me feel somehow special and singled out—it is also deeply unsettling and against what I consider the norms of nature. Deer should leap away. There's an invisible boundary between us I want us both to maintain.

When my cat runs toward me and hops in my lap, it's all good. She's tame. We sit together in a rocking chair, faces warmed by woodstove and sun. But out in the woods I want what's wild to stay wild.

#### 9. Erratics

When I was a kid, I'd find all sorts of tools in the woods. It always seemed strange. Why would a farmer leave behind a rake in the forest? It wasn't until I was older that I understood that tools I found in the woods had been left behind from when the land had been a field—that where I was standing had once been devoid of trees and could be again.

In the 1800s western Massachusetts was mostly fields. Forests had been cleared for pasture, turned into lumber and firewood. A neighbor once showed me a painting of her farm from that time. Instead of hills with mixed hardwoods, they were bald as a baby bird.

All this makes me want to know more about the people who farmed the land—and more about the land. What else is buried here that I can't see?

It also makes me realize that I'm part of this constantly changing landscape. The forest continues to grow as I stride through it and I am part of that growth. What is it that I'm leaving behind? Carbon? Plastic micro-beads?

In 1790, in South Hadley, Pliny Moody came across dinosaur prints while plowing a field. I can imagine him asking: Who left these behind? Some giant bird? Some think Moody used that dinosaur printed stone as a door step.

Once, walking around Quabbin Reservoir, I came upon a large smooth slab framed by flowers—in the middle of a grove of beech and birch. It looked like the front step of a farm house and probably was.

Quabbin is full of remnants of past lives before the towns were drowned and the forest took over. Actually it's really us who took over, damming Swift River to create the reservoir.

I think my favorite things to find while walking in the woods are erratics—the big boulders left behind when the glaciers retreated. They look like pre-historic eggs laid by one of Pliny Moody's imaginary birds. I love how they seem so out of place when actually they are solidly in place as trees figure out how to grow around them.

It's we with our changing ways who are the erratics.

#### 10. Fear

I was hiking in the woods one day when a large dark cloud passed over the sun rendering the woods full of shadows and foreboding. I had to remind myself not to be scared, that I loved this trail, and would not want to be anywhere else at that moment. Sure enough, soon the cloud passed and the sun pierced through, turning the beech trees into solid gold. Pure alchemy.

This got me thinking: why had I been so suddenly afraid? Why this idea of forests being foreboding places? Was it left over from childhood stories of Gretel and Little Red Riding Hood where woodlands were made to seem inherently dangerous, rather than inviting?

This also got me thinking that maybe there were truly dangerous things we were overlooking.

I'm not sure why but when I was a kid, quick sand was the most perilous thing. When I rode my bike in my neighborhood park in the Boston suburbs I knew to stay on the path because if I went off, I might plunge into a deadly pool of it, which I envisioned as an all consuming pit of cream of wheat. If that happened, I knew you were to stay very still because struggling Only Made It Worse! Needless to say there was no quick sand in that park.

There were trucks with vats of pesticides, however, that they sprayed into the park to kill mosquitos. I loved those trucks and would ride my bike as fast as I could to keep up with them, to immerse my lungs in that toxic cloud. They were a thrilling novelty and drove slowly enough so you could keep up, as if tempting us to try. I don't remember anyone warning me to stay away from them.

There weren't any dense forests in my hometown, either. They'd all been clear-cut for houses and malls. No one at the time found this alarming. Pavement was a positive thing—a sign of prosperity.

Now I know clear-cut forests have led to decimated populations of insects, amphibians, and song birds. Have led to an increase in floods and droughts. To truly terrifying consequences for our planet.

So the next time I'm in the woods, when it clouds up, instead of being fearful of the forest, I think I should be fearful **for** it.

## Marge Piercy

### *Why I dig holes for trees: a haibun*

Planting trees is a form of prayer: that they will outlast us. That they will thrive through nor'easters and hurricanes. That they will become green apartment houses where birds and squirrels live side by side. That they will they give shade to all and oxygen.

Trees I planted decades ago are twice the height of our house. When a storm breaks a tree, I mourn it like a friend. They cool the house when scorchers blast us. They fill my eyes with a simple calm. I never get tired of looking at them. They dance in the wind and bend and toss their tresses. They scatter their leaves, returning what they took in to the soil beneath. Beech, maple, oak, fir, pine, dogwood, crabapple, pear, apple, wild and sour cherry... they all give back to us with their silent love.

Green fills my eyes.  
My brain cools.  
I nibble a leaf.





**Kathleen M. Heideman**  
*Midewiwin Manitou with Horns, Arms Upraised, Encroachment by Moss and Lichens*



## Fran Markover

### *Notes on Survival from Grandfather Moishe*

Don't light holy day candles in front of window glass. If the glass has been shattered, break bread. If there's no bread and siblings are hungry, beckon the neighborly angels and if no angel rescues, conjure Jacob and his wrestlings. Let the Book of New Blossoms

help you cultivate a new name and if you're tired and no fisticuffs are left, tiptoe past the sleeping guards or hide wherever there's an empty barn or attic. If there's no shelter, come home to pages of the Old Testament, how slingshots and prayer books can be

catapults toward Goliaths unless the devotionals have been burned, then sink the ashes into the nearest river, wait for the moon to veil its face, stars embellishing the sky with bows and arrows, dragons and swans. Drown the felt stars sewn onto shirts and when you

approach the waters, man the strongest boat, the oars becoming wings and if the oars are missing, whisper the lost family names Clara and her boy Levi or Sam, the tailor. Invoke *Feigele*, my mother, my *little bird*, let her goodbye inspire flight— *Son, they'd*

*never harm an old lady*. Raise your arms for godsend and if there are no boats, no sculls, draw extra sweaters heart-ward, pray with your feet. See each tree in the forest as weeping temple, wolf tracks as taloned mandalas. And if my mandolin rests at your side, the

strings will pull you further from crystalline nights, their shards, the killings. The ring that graced my pocket is a touchstone circling your finger, reminder of a faith without hard edges. Let the sorrows leave quietly. They're sacks of potatoes. I'll envision you, grand-

daughter, after I'm gone, writing stories of golden apples, tiny stars concealed at their core. If your words are held hostage, hum songs from a land of witches and evil eyes, of firebirds, clawing. Twist the roseate shawl grandma knitted into a garland and keep on your

path. *Remember each blade of grass has its own angel saying grow, grow*. Follow these murmurings when frightened. Look to the daffodils, those cups of light, trust the sanctuary you've built inside of you that can never break.

## V.P. Loggins

### *Herod the King*

The only time I appeared in a play  
was when, age five, I played Herod  
in Bible School. They made me a crown  
of cardboard and tinfoil, stippled  
with stick-on stars. I sat like the king

on a chair for a throne, a cane for a scepter,  
a softball for an orb in hand, and reigned  
over the sanctuary. They found a stool  
for my feet, robed me in my father's coat,  
my mother's faux wrap of ermine.

And when my cue came, I had one line:  
*Show me the child.* Lights in the church  
flickered when I said it. Someone pounded  
thunder out of the Falstaff-belly of a kettledrum.  
When the show was over, I was returned

to being a boy, my hand in my father's hand,  
my power diminished like the uncertain  
lights of the church. Of course, I never held  
such power, never saw the child, since he  
escaped with his parents into Egypt. Still

I know now, being the boy behind the mask,  
had he been brought to me—not knowing then  
that hearts can turn to stone—I would not  
have out-Heroded Herod, as Hamlet says,  
but broken with character and loved him.

## Carolyn Chilton Casas

### *Accepting Love and Fear*

Our lives are tugs-of-war  
between love and fear.

We fear what we love  
will be taken from us,

but this duo is a married pair.  
So, how do I learn to rest

in the cupped, open hand  
of one and not resist

the tightly closed fist  
of the other?

Perhaps fear and love  
are but flipsides of existence.

Hello love, hello fear, help me  
consent to the perpetual tumble

of your ebb and flow, follow shards  
of broken shells left to guide me.

Let me allow for your presence  
the way the ocean allows itself

to be pushed by the moon's  
elemental pull to the shore.



## Barry Peters

### *Croissant*

Since it took me this long to realize  
*breakfast* means *break the fast*

and *twilight* exists because  
of *two lights* wedded in the west,

then may those other twins,  
dawn and dusk, be a binary

reminder that we are valeted  
every day by a vast ignorance

and that I should be de-  
lighted about the soggy sack

of cheesy bread passed  
through the drive-thru

by a man about my age  
beneath a crescent moon

baking in the warmth  
of another morning sun.

## Sarah Mills

### *Philocalist*

At any cost, I am a lover of beautiful, useless things:  
blanket lightning, cappuccino froth, the peach glow  
of a Himalayan salt lamp. I love hearing church bells,  
and even though I don't attend, I want there to be  
oversized stained-glass windows and long rows of quiet,  
orderly pews. I want to dine by candlelight so I can watch  
shadows pulsate on faces, to drink coffee from bone-white  
teacups, to eat chocolates garnished with dried rose petals  
and flaked salt, to hear crystal glasses sing when I slide  
my finger along their rims. I want to fill a silver goblet  
with red Chilean wine and let my face flush as I stare  
at all the books on my shelf—the ones I've never read—  
like I'm at the theater. I want to take a walk in the woods,  
see those forlorn branches sagging heavy with wet snow,  
to use words that sing like the wood thrush—*diaphanous*  
and *cacophony* and *sibilance*. I want to be a weeping salt lamp.  
Electric sparks beneath a blanket. The echoing hum of a glass.  
A snowflake, a lover, a glowing and beautiful and useless thing.

## Elizabeth Bullmer

### *Instructions for Midwinter Surrender*

Let the cat climb the window. Let her drag her wet  
pink nose across the glass in thin white streaks.

Let the fox squirrel steal pepitas from the red squirrel.  
Let the expired Christmas tree decompose on the porch.

Let snow. Let frigid. Let dust make itself seen.  
Let Isis spread her wings and Ganesha's thick dance.

Let god answer the prayers of others. Let others.  
Let inhale and exhale. Let lungs and liver. Let heart.

Let the piano remain unplayed. Let cello. Let violin.  
Let guitar in its ancient case. Let hand-drum and harp.

Let stray cat fur construct another cat in the crevice  
of the couch. Let the collection of wooden chopsticks.

Let books and books and books. Let words weave  
worlds away. Let manifest dreams. Let childhood

innocence—like unborn flowers fantasizing bees,  
like earthworms sung to sleep by deep mycelium.

Let it be easy. These rigid hands this clamped mouth,  
let them open as the sky's windblown throat

before rain. Let the air grow bloated, full  
as a belly before birthing. A birthday balloon.

Let joy. Let love with her carnival-glass eyes.  
Her confetti eruptions. Let loose. Let it free memory—

the iridescent sheath, distant and shiny before expiring,  
becoming the space we breathe in. The space we breathe out.

## Erin Wilson

### *Trust Brevity*

“the Lord broke the bread,  
the bread broke the Lord.”

-Paul Celan

In the morning,  
beneath the rubble  
of my destitution,  
I cling to these two words:  
trust brevity,  
as though to a bright, clear shard of ice  
surviving the calving  
of an iceberg.

I drink thin coffee.

Then, with a stone in my shoe,  
walk ten miles.

Autumn's crisp leaves  
cut the rot from me  
and create in me  
a new river soundscape.

I forget my forehead.

Then comes gliding  
beside me  
down along  
the river's current,  
the eagle of light,  
curving in tandem  
with the blackness.

It lands deftly  
upon a silver cedar snag,  
I've known for decades,  
arching out over the river.

We are still.

Light falls beyond  
through cedars,  
and also, emanates  
up from the river,  
onto the broad, brindled  
feathered chest.

Two no longer exist.

## Thomas E. Strunk

### *Walking with Thich Nhat Hanh*

The train ride to O'Hare airport teaches you that you should hurry, that there is not enough time for everything you must do. The two-hour ride on the Red Line from the far north side of the city to the Blue Line downtown and then out to the northwest side is a discipline in anxiety. There is a lot you have been assigned and at this rate you'll never get it done and then you will have to face the consequences of it all. While the traffic speeds around you on all sides down I-190, the el-train decides to come to a standstill. Do not misinterpret this as a time to relax or even admire your girlfriend, who sits next to you. You have not stopped to consider your breath. You have stopped so you can feel your heart pound as you fall further behind. This has all been designed for this purpose – the unexplained stops in the middle of the track, the circling on-ramps, the fire lane in each direction, the darkening tunnels. Someone drafted the plans, scooped out the earth, made it flat with concrete, laid the track, so you could arrive at this moment to navigate the maze of shuttles and terminals at the country's busiest airport.

You have come all this way to pick up the revered Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, an exile these many decades from his homeland Vietnam. Thay, as his students call him, was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by Dr. King. He has seen more than you want to in life and is nobody's fool, despite his calm demeanor and talk of compassion. He has traveled from Plum Village in France along with roughly a hundred monks, men and women.

You will meet them and escort them to their lodgings on the campus of Northwestern University in Evanston, north of Chicago. You will wait nervously outside the security for him and a hundred brown robed men and women, mostly of Asian descent. O'Hare is flooded with its usual stream of travelers bustling to their destinations, mindless, like you are, of all around them, single-minded in their hurried stride.

The monks arrive. You bow in greeting to them, to your respected teacher. Together you proceed to the baggage claim, as you wonder what it will mean for Buddhists to wait for baggage. How will they resist the impatience that is designed to come from the turning belts and conveyors? You will never learn because you are asked to check whether the buses are ready outside. So you hustle off eager to be hospitable and to find, yes, they are there.

You return inside to see a phalanx of Buddhist monks, Thay, and your girlfriend alongside him in the middle. They have gathered their bags and are now carrying them as they do walking meditation in O'Hare airport. You pause and watch them advance inevitably like a glacier down the mountainside. O'Hare airport will not rush them. The waiting bus drivers will not rush them. You see your girlfriend ask Thay a question. He stops walking. They all stop walking, and so do you. He responds. They all begin walking again, so you begin walking towards them again. To walk like this in a zendo is appropriate and necessary, breathing in as the heel touches the floor, breathing out as the heel lifts, step by step. Yet to walk like this in O'Hare airport is a revolution. A threat to all the machinery of modern life and capitalism. If we all walked like this, our society could not function at its frenetic pace.

You have come face to face with the others now. Stop and tell Thay the buses are ready and waiting. You turn alongside them and walk to the buses in silence, as the gears of the airport slow around you. Even the belts of the baggage claim spin more mindful of their burdens. Outside a baggage handler slowly and gently places a bag onto the loading cart, breathes in, and then reaches for another bag. The bus driver exhales when he sees you striding towards him.

There are two school buses. Thay and the elders will ride on the first; you will ride on the second with the younger monks, your contemporaries. You all board and take your seats. The bus driver pulls out and a joyful pandemonium takes over the bus. Cameras come out, laughter bounces around the walls of the school bus. Youthful smiles burst open in the darkness of the Chicago summer night.



You arrive at Northwestern and help unload the bags, feeling a cathartic force welling up inside you and lifting you into a time and space you never want to leave. Yet the monks have all filed into the dorms and night, pacing on, has left you and your girlfriend standing alone on the shore of a wide lake with the world spreading far beyond in every direction.

You must turn for the train.



**Robert Thurman**  
*Inner Workings*



## Emma Bolden

---

### *Midlife with Magicada*

In the room of my girlhood I turned and turned. Every  
where and way was a door. Another.  
Only later could I see the curse of it.

The iron of my own feet thudding  
from threshold to threshold.

There's no way I could explain to her, the girl  
I was, how simply stopping became a victory.

How standing in your own stillness after every aching  
entry feels more like a welcome than any  
arms opened by the fever of someone else's dream.

You see it was always and never so easy. A histamine  
reaction, the stench of sulfur stuck  
to a landscape and its trees. Even should I suffer  
to pretend myself a mother of ghosts in a world  
pale as memory, floating. My body flushed.

And now that hush I hated  
shores up against my chest a symphony, a silence  
I love for being mine because so few things have  
been, so little of light and morning and bedsheets,  
the tremors fear threads though my spine.

To live long means to live alone, and to live alone  
means to live as one. As whole. As all  
evening the long lawn shook from the cicadas  
the ever and more of their song. Their want.

Their way of showing that to lie dormant doesn't always  
mean dying. That sometimes dying means waking  
again and with a new throat full of song.

## Eric Potter

---

### *Sunday Morning After the Symphony*

Beethoven's problem having been resolved,  
I return to my own, less heroic  
perhaps, but no less pressing.

Moist air muffles the woodpecker's drumming,  
sodden leaves mute my movements,  
only the steady drip of rain-wet leaves.

All the good advice in the world does nothing  
to change how anyone feels,  
though I still keep searching for sign,

droppings that glisten like brown pearls  
fresh scrapes in the damp earth  
rubs gleaming in the gray like raw flame.

Music is never a matter of convention,  
expectations raised and fulfilled,  
but something in the blood and on the brain.

Mud makes trails easier to follow,  
deep grooves of habit linking our desires,  
as always our need exposes us.

Not every spot will yield the desired  
result, so we end up trusting  
to luck, if such a thing exists.

A cloud smudge on the pond's dull mirror,  
sere grass seething,  
the edge of the marsh irresolute.

## Daniel Rabuzzi

### *On the Bus*

Sometimes the entrance is choked.

Sometimes the a/c is out and it is nearly 100 degrees and, oh my god, the humidity.  
Sometimes you can walk faster than this thing, and someone really ought to do something about that.  
But so what?

Four times hourly, every day of the year, I can glimpse a preview of heaven, hear the fore-echoes of what might be or is to come. A rough and ragged paradise, which is how I know it is real, not one of the shinier versions on show. **Who says heaven won't be noisy or throw a few elbows?**

Just when I am most tired, foot-weary, burdened, schlepping a tote's worth of worries, needing restoration or at least a vision of regrowth, I am gifted a voyage on the bus.

Yeah sure, sometimes the chariot is delayed, like for real, its eyed wings must be plowing the air some place else, maybe somewhere over Queens or The Bronx while I wait here on the Lower East Side, who knows, that's life, deal with it.

Yet once embraced, the vision sings the body electric, on sore feet, with walkers, in wheelchairs.

A rambunctious heaven, it will sing along with reggaeton and hip-hop, exhalations of grace. It will speak in every voice and with every accent, often right in your ear.

"I need to fill my grandmother's prescription..."

"Best stop for you is at A and Thirteenth..."

"Let me help you with those packages..."

"Please take my seat..."

"A miracle: the Knicks won last night!"

"I love you, mija, home in ten..."

It will be every kind of food described and debated, and eaten, one seat away.

It is a rolling commonwealth, a congregation in the MTA's pews: heaven is hectic and hits potholes;  
it's human.

*Selah.*

## Marina Carreira

### *Exulansis*

See that white butterfly right there, that one, pieris rapae perched on the rose bush to pray before gliding over gladiolas?

I want to tell you that's my Avó come to visit, remind me that life is suffering and skirmish and strolls through a garden

girdled with beauty. I want to convince you that the dead come back to watch our back, keep us from stepping in shit twice. With a flick

of its wings, these bug-ghosts save us every day from ourselves. Don't you know? Oh, forget it. Forget my wild beliefs and tenuous truths.

My sweet pups sleep on the couch, two cuddled together in a bundle of fur, the youngest flat on the floor, tongue out like red carpet.

These things you know, you see, you understand.

## Evan Kenny

### *Snowflakes, in the Wind*

Lying atop this ancient canyon  
of hexagonal lava columns  
I can't help but to stare  
Not down below, but up above  
at stellar dendritic snow crystals  
drifting, delicately through the air

Stricken first by uniqueness  
incomprehensible detail  
held within each, intricate perfection  
Now noticing the breeze  
fitting them to its wants  
as if to my own life, they are a reflection

In the same way that one falls  
among many, distinct yet connected  
of some synergistic flowing composition  
We are all entangled pieces  
dancing alone, and as a collective  
amidst a galactic musical rendition

Just as they alight  
from sky to ground, I too continue  
towards an inescapable conclusion  
Fully subjected to Earth  
with Her many winds of change  
control or choice merely a delusion

Each crystal sees not  
nor could hope to fathom  
the Forces that send it along its path  
Much as I too am shifted  
propelled during my life's journey  
wondering what ushers God's wrath

The energies that guide  
these snowflakes and I  
are housed beyond our conception  
Perhaps then, it is simple  
trust, let go, surrender  
may the Divine, dictate my direction

## Kim M. Baker

### *Uncommon Angels*

They play chess in the park, smoke and quote poetry, castigate a thief,  
harangue the passersby who ignore the pigeons, steal the change  
that falls from your pocket, give it to the homeless man on the bench next to you.

They frame your favorite paintings, then, at night, fall off the museum walls  
so ballerinas and books and lovers with come-hither looks  
can take flight into your dreams heavy with indecision and regret.

They inhabit the rasp of the cashier at the diner,  
hair askew, nails chewed, as she spews news of oil spills and floods  
just after your wrath at coffee dribbling down your blouse.

They create the late-day office project you resent, spook your computer,  
delay you long enough to put you safely an hour behind  
the car crash on your route home that takes a drunk and five others.

They lock themselves inside car keys playing hide and seek in your house  
already threaded with the detritus of a too-busy life, your mind too full  
of worry to find the key ring, so you curse your purse, when the phone rings:

*It's a boy!*  
*It's a girl!*  
*It's not malignant.*  
*We want to publish your poem.*  
*We want to hire you.*  
*We want to take you out to dinner.*  
*It's me. Can I come home?*  
*It's me. Wanna talk?*  
*It's me. I love you.*

They show up in bruised fruit, cracks in your favorite vase, lost dogs.  
And when they know your brokenness,  
they cut the unspeakables from your heart,  
and leave in its place a flutter of butterflies  
that murmur for the rest of your life.

# Betsy Sholl

## *The Blessings*

We'd shake our heads each time we passed  
that fellow driving the car we sold cheap  
because of a bad something or other  
that only took his son a wrench tap to fix.

We'd wave and laugh. You could think  
we were fools, duped, wronged, but  
maybe the blessings were just flying  
in somebody else's direction that day.

You wouldn't want bluebirds to become  
ordinary, would you? Or to forget that  
daffodils are banging earth's soggy roof  
all February before they break through.

Is it just me, or do you also walk around  
sometimes feeling like a jailbird inside  
your own head? Say, you're carrying a bucket  
so full you walk stiff legged to the garden,

afraid of sloshing it all out before  
you arrive, while maybe the whole point is  
to spill, to leave holes in all our containers.  
Who knows what creatures the weeds are feeding?

I watched a program about the Black church  
and saw it was a big mistake to film people  
worshipping. The camera is a very small god.  
We close our eyes for a reason when we pray.

Also, because I can't remember numbers,  
I use a word at the ATM. What does  
six million mean, if not Jacob, Sarah, Anne,  
Sophie, Pavel, John...? I don't want to forget

what Dante knew seven hundred years ago,  
when the angel guarding Purgatory's gate  
told the poet his instructions are to err  
in opening up, not in keeping shut.



## Lenny Liane

### *Blessing The Face*

*a morning ritual*

Begin below the hairline  
and bless every crease  
as each one carries more  
amusement and wisdom  
than you'll ever remember.

Move your eyebrows up  
and down. Recall all  
your facial expressions  
for surprise and anger  
before letting them go.

Blink your eyes as if  
the first shaft of sunlight  
astonishes you. Feign awe  
when your lashes flutter  
as though a finch's wings.

Wiggle your nose: be a wild  
rabbit sniffing for a whiff  
of cabbage and carrots,  
lettuce, begonias, beets  
and sweet strawberries.

Praise your two cheeks  
when they blush, pink  
as Simplicity, Bewitched  
and Pleasure roses. Pucker  
your lips and blow kisses

to this natural world.  
Your lips will cling  
to laughter whenever  
they widen into smiles.  
Let your chin be itself

in its innocence. Feel  
grace and gilded sunlight,  
luminous and appealing,  
flow over and bless you  
as you face the new day.

# Sheri Anderson

---

## *Joy Comes*

*But joy, where is it? What does it look like, smell like—  
bergamot, lemons, honey, roses, musk?*

*-from 'Life Lessons' by Patricia Spears Jones*

Our bodies keep count, the tick marks  
of survival and the high-fives of joy,  
the milky mixture of laughter and tears,

its earthy terrain full of laugh lines  
and worry lines, scars and wrinkles,  
freckles and dry itchy patches of skin,  
insistent love handles, the dents and dimples of years.  
Joy over time can look like this.

Or in an instant it can look like  
a hot cup of tea with honey and lemon  
or maybe bergamot tea, Earl Gray,  
that steaming scent of pleasure in a well-used mug.  
Joy, in a moment, can smell like that.

It doesn't matter that it doesn't stay forever,  
that it's crashed through with sadness or difficulties.  
It only matters that joy comes and when it visits,  
we sit with it.

# Patrice Pinette

---

## *Equanimity*

You say writing these poems  
is a waste of time, a mind-game:  
what's another word for balance,  
presence, or cool, calm and collected?  
A crossword challenge for a mind idle  
enough to play cards instead.  
But you don't hear them coming—  
out of the ground, shaken down  
from high branches, falling to earth  
like seeds, rising up: the words  
arriving. Roots, feathers and rivers,  
bitter and sweet, tasted, wild  
berries on the precipice you cling to.  
Single notes and lines of melodies,  
come looking for us looking for them  
to arrange and rearrange, lift up  
and set down, to choreograph  
the storied sounds and shapes  
side by side—to resonate in the middle  
of trouble, before or after, as the cello  
made to sing upon the rubble...  
What if no one listens? What if  
the dark tones and light, rhythms,  
beat and lyrics go unheard by anyone  
but crows, or the last ones standing,  
the sleepless mother, or the vast dust  
cloud at the center of our galaxy  
astronomers say would taste  
of raspberries and smell like rum?  
Why not play mind games, puzzles  
and heartstrings with all the intensity  
we have and look out, after all,  
with equanimity, upon the teeming  
and tired, blossoming and exploding,  
words coming out of the blue, white,  
black, red, gold and green.





**Galen Cortes**  
*Paradise Lost*



## Contributor Bios

**Sheri Flowers Anderson** has had poems and short stories previously published in small magazines or online magazines such as *Voices International*, *Everyday Poets* and *Sixfold*, as well as in a few local anthologies. She is also the author of a poetry collection entitled *House and Home*, which was the recent winner of the Naomi Long Madgett Poetry Award, 2023, published by Broadside Lotus Press. She currently lives and writes in San Antonio, Texas.

**Kenneth Arthur** is a queer minister who resides in Kalamazoo, MI. Besides dabbling in poetry, he is the author of *Out of the Ashes: Constructive Theology for Those Burned Out on Christianity*. In addition to a few poems published in journals, he has independently published four short collections of poetry. For more info, visit his website at [www.timidpoet.com](http://www.timidpoet.com).

**Kim M. Baker** when she isn't writing poetry about big hair and Elvis, Kim works to end violence against women and end hunger. A poet, playwright, photographer, and NPR essayist, Kim specializes in ekphrastic poetry inspired by art. Kim's chapbook, *Under the Influence: Musings about Poems and Paintings*, is available from Finishing Line Press and from Amazon. She is proud to be part of Cape Cod's Words in the Wild project, a perfect union of poetry and nature.

**Tharani Balachandran** is a first-generation Canadian lawyer, tea enthusiast, reader of books, lover of gossip and writer of poems who lives on the traditional territory of the Lekwungen speaking peoples in Victoria, British Columbia. Her work has been featured in numerous publications including *The Racket*, *Fine Lines*, *Quail Bell Magazine*, and *Anti-Heroin Chic*.

Teacher **Devon Balwit** walks in all weather. Her most recent collections are *We Are Procession*, *Seismograph* (Nixes Mate Books, 2017), *Dog-Walking in the Shadow of Pyongyang* (Nixes Mate Books, 2021) and *Spirit Spout* (Nixes Mate Books, 2023). For more, visit: [pelapdx.wixsite.com/devonbalwitpoet](http://pelapdx.wixsite.com/devonbalwitpoet)

**Celia Barbieri** is an Illinois native with a passion for language, nature, and food. They are currently pursuing a BFA in Creative Writing at Truman State University in Missouri. In their spare time, they wander the midwestern wilds and devour all sorts of media.

**Emma Bolden** is the author of a memoir, *The Tiger and the Cage* (Soft Skull), and the poetry collections *House Is an Enigma*, *medi(t)ations*, and *Maleficae*. Her work has appeared in such journals as the *Mississippi Review*, *The Rumpus*, *StoryQuarterly*, *Prairie Schooner*, *New Madrid*, *TriQuarterly*, *Shenandoah*, and *the Greensboro Review*. The recipient of an NEA Fellowship, she is an editor of *Screen Door Review*.

**Beth Brown Preston** is a poet and novelist with two collections of poetry from the Broadside Lotus Press and two chapbooks of poetry. She is a graduate of Bryn Mawr College and the MFA Writing Program at Goddard College. She has been a CBS Fellow in Writing at the University of Pennsylvania, and a Bread Loaf Scholar. Also, she was recipient of a scholarship at the Hudson Valley Writers Center. Her work has been published in numerous literary and scholarly journals. She is an African American woman writer who resides in a small town outside of Philadelphia.

**Elizabeth Rae Bullmer** has been writing poetry since the age of seven. She received her B.A. in Theatre and English, with an emphasis in Creative Writing, from Alma College and has competed nationally as a performance poet, placing ninth at the 2004 individual World Poetry Slam. She has been teaching and facilitating writing workshops for more than twenty years, for elementary students through adult writers. Her most recent chapbook is *Rhubarb Pie Without Berries* (Celery City, 2022).

**Marina Carreira** (she/they) is a queer Luso-American poet artist from Newark, NJ. She is the author of *Tanto Tanto* (Cavankerry Press, 2022) and *Save the Bathwater* (Get Fresh Books, 2018). She has exhibited her art at the Newark

Museum, Morris Museum, ArtFront Galleries, West Orange Arts Council, Monmouth University Center for the Arts, among others. Find her on Instagram at @savethebathewater.

**Lynn Carriker** is a former end-of-life care nurse and elementary school teacher. Her paintings and poems are fed by the inspiration she finds in her everyday life and the stillness she finds in prayer.

**Carolyn Chilton Casas** is a Reiki master and teacher who loves to write about nature, mindfulness, and ways to heal. Her articles and poems have appeared in *Braided Way*, *Energy*, *Odyssey*, *Grateful Living*, *Reiki News Magazine*, and in other publications. You can read more of Carolyn's work on Facebook, on Instagram @mindfulpoet\_, or in her first collection of poems titled *Our Shared Breath*.

**Galen G. Cortes** is a Filipino Redemptorist Missionary (Cebu-Province) Philippines. He is currently assigned as a Formator. He is an amateur painter who loves to accompany people through art appreciation, therapy, and spirituality.

**Neal Donahue** was born in Maine but grew up on Long Island. His college education in Oklahoma was subsidized by the Navy and he majored in English. After serving five years as a submarine officer, he taught elementary school in Massachusetts and Vermont, incorporating poetry into his curriculum. Neal has had a number of poems published in small journals. He loves nature and writing poetry.

**Anna Elkins** is a poet and painter. She earned a BA in art and English, an MFA in poetry, and a Fulbright Fellowship to write art-inspired poetry in Germany. She has written, painted, and taught on six continents, exhibiting paintings and publishing books along the way—including her latest poetry collection, *Hope of Stones*, which won an Oregon Book Award. After many travels, Anna now enjoys living in a small town on a big river with her husband, Jared. [annaelkins.com](http://annaelkins.com)

**Lesley-Anne Evans**, an Irish-Canadian poet, writes from Feeny Wood, a contemplative woodland retreat in Kelowna, B.C., on the traditional unceded territory of the Syilx Okanagan Nation. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Antigone Review*, *Letters Journal*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Contemporary Verse 2*, *The Catholic Poetry Room*, *Soul-Lit*, and other periodicals. Lesley-Anne's

debut poetry collection, *Mute Swan, Poems for Maria Queen of the World*, was published by The St. Thomas Poetry Series (Toronto) in 2021.

**Louis Faber** is a poet living in Florida. His work has appeared widely in the U.S., Europe and Asia and has previously appeared in *Constellations*, *Alchemy Spoon* (U.K.), *Arena Magazine* (Australia), *Dreich*, *Atlanta Review*, *The Poet* (U.K.), *Glimpse*, *Defenestration*, *New Feathers Anthology*, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, *North of Oxford*, *Rattle*, *Pearl*, *Midstream*, *European Judaism*, *The South Carolina Review*, and *Worcester Review*, among many others, and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. He lives with his wife and cat (who claims to be his editor) in Port Saint Lucie, Florida.

**Zachary Forrest y Salazar** is a software engineer out of Santa Barbara, California. "I studied poetry in my undergrad under Marcus Cafagña and Michael Burns at Missouri State University. After being in software for 20 years, I've realized that writing is what I love and I'm going to pursue it."

**Tzivia Gover's** most recent book, *Dreaming on the Page: Tap into Your Midnight Mind to Supercharge Your Writing*, combines writing, spirituality, and dreamwork. Her poems have been published in dozens of journals and anthologies including *The Mom Egg Review*, *The Naugatuck River Review*, and *Lilith Magazine*. She shares her poetry and reflections as she reimagines the life of the biblical matriarch Sarah in her Substack newsletter, "The Life of H" <https://tziviagover.substack.com>

**Donna Harlan** has published one poetry chapbook, and her works have been featured in several publications. She is a reader for Unlimited Literature and Ariel's Dream. She resides in Jonesborough, Tennessee with her husband.

**J.M.R. Harrison** has created and led workshops in fear, faith, poetry, play, and creativity. She studied poetry at the independent Writers' Center in Bethesda, MD for over a dozen years and is a 2016 graduate from the low residency MFA program of the Naslund-Mann School of Graduate Writing in Louisville, KY. Her poems have been published in *Antietam Review*, *Penwood Review*, *Spillway Magazine*, and featured in *Fluent Magazine*.



**Elisabeth Hedrick** is a native of El Paso, TX, but she now lives in San Antonio, where she explores the city and surrounding hill country with her partner and blended family. Elisabeth earned a doctorate in English Literature from Saint Louis University and has published academic essays on war literature, trauma, and teaching. Currently, her writing explores intersections between spirituality and sexuality, nature and gender, and risk and mothering. Her creative nonfiction essay “Pilgrim, Mother” was a finalist in Talking Writing’s Writing and Faith contest. She has also published in *Lucia journal* and *Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine*.

**Kathleen M. Heideman** is the author of *Psalms of the Early Anthropocene* (Winter Cabin Books), and a past contributor to *Arcadia*, *Passages North*, *South Dakota Review*, *Steam Ticket*, *Stoneboat*, and other journals and anthologies. Heideman has completed artist residencies with the National Park Service, watersheds, scientific research stations, private foundations, and the National Science Foundation’s Antarctic Artists & Writers Program. Drawn to wild and threatened places, she works to defend them. Curious woman.

**Matthew E. Henry (MEH)** is the author of multiple collections, including the *Colored page* (Sundress Publications, 2022) and *The Third Renunciation* (NYQ Books, 2023). MEH’s poetry appears in *Pensive*, *Anglican Theological Review*, *Bending Genres*, *Fare Forward*, *The Florida Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Relief Journal*, *Saint Katherine Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Solstice*, *Spiritus*, and *The Windhover* among others. MEH’s an educator who received his MFA yet continued to spend money he didn’t have completing an MA in theology and a PhD in education. He writes about education, race, religion, and burning oppressive systems to the ground at [www.MEHPoeting.com](http://www.MEHPoeting.com).

**Jane Hertenstein** is the author of over 90 published stories both macro and micro: fiction, creative non-fiction, and blurred genre. In addition she has published a YA novel, *Beyond Paradise* and a non-fiction project, *Orphan Girl: The Memoir of a Chicago Bag Lady*, which garnered national reviews. Jane is the recipient of a grant from the Illinois Arts Council. Her writing has been featured in the New York Times. She teaches a workshop on Flash Memoir and can be found blogging at <http://memoirouswrite.blogspot.com/>

**Rose Jenny** is a trans writer/performer based in Florida. Her work has been published in *Santa Fe Writers Project Quarterly*, *The Athena Review*, *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, and *Thread Literary Inquiry*. In the fall, she will be pursuing her MFA in Creative Writing at University of Miami.

**Susan Johnson’s** poems have recently appeared in *The Meadow*, *Dash*, *Front Range Review*, *Aji*, and *Trampoline*. She lives in South Hadley, MA and is in the Walking Hall Of Fame.

**Evan Kenny** is a nontraditional student newly arriving at Northeastern bringing a wealth of life experiences to draw insight from. After serving in the Navy, living in Japan, backpacking through several continents, and working in wildland fire and mountain rescue, he can often relate and share wisdom or kindness with anyone he meets. Keeping a focus on mindfulness and intention, he plans to complete this new academic journey and pursue research towards environmental and plastics solutions as a biochemical engineer.

**Yuko Kyutoku** was born in Aichi in Japan. She graduated from SUNY Purchase with a BFA in Painting, Drawing, and Printmaking and New York University with an MA in Art therapy.

**Lenny Lianne** is the author of five poetry books, most recently *Sunshine Has Its Limits*. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from George Mason University. She lives in Arizona with her husband and their dog.

**V. P. Loggins** is the author of *The Wild Severance* (2021), winner of the Bright Hill Press Poetry Book Competition, *The Green Cup* (2017), winner of the Cider Press Review Editors’ Book Prize, *The Fourth Paradise* (Main Street Rag 2010), *Heaven Changes* (Pudding House 2007), and two books on Shakespeare. His poems are in *The Baltimore Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Poetry East*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Tampa Review* and others. See [www.vploggins.com](http://www.vploggins.com).

**Fran Markover’s** poems have been published in many journals including *Rattle*, *Calyx*, *Earth’s Daughters*, *Terrain.org*, *Common Ground*, *Karamu*, *Able Muse*. She has a chapbook, *History’s Trail* (Finishing Line Press). Her book *Grandfather’s*

Mandolin was a finalist for the Henry Morgenthau III First Poetry Book Prize and a winner for poetry book (religious) from the American BookFest. Awards include a Pushcart Prize nomination, poetry residencies at the Saltonstall Foundation, an Anna Davidson Poetry Award, and a Miriam Chaikin award for her poems.

**Judy McAmis** is a poet, yoga instructor, and nomad. She is a native New Englander who loves music, nature, travel, and her animals. She is a graduate of the Stonecoast MFA program at the University of Southern Maine with a concentration in Poetry. Her work leans towards the dark often engaging with the world through a lens of what cannot always be seen and the role of the female in these spaces.

**Madelaine Millar** was born and raised in Missoula, Montana, and spent five years in Boston, Massachusetts studying journalism. She rediscovered her love of visual art during the pandemic, and began to identify her unique voice when an overlapping bad breakup, unexpected move, major job change, and serious surgical procedure made for a deeply strange 2022. Her abstract work vomits up, and then attempts to make sense of, the complexity, specificity, and internal contradictions of the emotions she experiences. She is living on the road full-time, and working as an artist and freelance writer. More of her work can be found at [soupinthewoods.com](http://soupinthewoods.com) or at @soup.in.the.woods.art on Instagram.

**Sarah Mills** is a freelance writer and editor. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *SoFloPoJo*, *Beaver Magazine*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Third Wednesday*, *Miniskirt Magazine*, *Rogue Agent*, *Ballast*, *San Antonio Review*, *Philadelphia Stories*, and elsewhere. You can visit her at [sarahmillswrites.com](http://sarahmillswrites.com)

**Abigail Myers** writes poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction on Long Island, New York. Her essays have appeared in *Phoebe* and *Variant Literature* and are forthcoming from *The Other Journal*. Her poetry has previously appeared in *Amethyst Review*, as well as *Full Mood Mag*, *Sylvia*, and *Roi Fainéant*. Her microfiction recently appeared in *Milk Candy Review* and *Heart Balm*. Keep up with her at [abigailmyers.com](http://abigailmyers.com) and @abigailmyers.

**Jennie Neighbors** has two books, a play about the Abu Ghraib torture scandal (*But They, Um*, published by Spuyten Duyvil Press) and a book of poems

examining the liminal in language (*Between the Twilight and the Sky*, Parlor Press). She is an English teacher, a practitioner of Zen, and a cancer survivor. She lives in South Carolina by way of Phoenix, Seattle, and Boulder.

**Steven Ostrowski** is a widely-published writer, painter and songwriter. His novel, *The Highway of Spirit and Bone*, was published in 2023 by Lefora Publications and has been called "...a literary road trip for the ages." His poetry chapbook, *Persons of Interest*, won the 2021 Wolfson Chapbook Prize and was published in 2022. Steven and his son Ben coauthored a full-length collaboration called *Penultimate Human Constellation*, published in 2018 by Tolsun Books. Steven's newest book of poems, *Life Field*, will be published in early 2024. He is Professor Emeritus at Central Connecticut State University.

**Barry Peters** lives in Durham, NC. He teaches in Raleigh. Publications include *Best New Poets*, *Image*, *New Ohio Review*, *Poetry East*, and *The Southern Review*.

**Marge Piercy** has published twenty poetry collections, most recently, *On The Way Out*, *Turn Off The Light* (Knopf, September 30, 2020); seventeen novels including *SEX WARS*. PM Press reissued *Vida*, *Dance The Eagle To Sleep*; they brought out short stories *The Cost Of Lunch*, *Etc* and *My Body, My Life* (essays, poems). She has read at over 500 venues here and abroad.

**Patrice Pinette** is inspired by alchemy between the arts in her own practice and in collaboration with other artists, writers and musicians. She facilitates NH Humanities Connections programs and teaches in Antioch New England's Waldorf Education program. Patrice received an MFA in Writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts, and her poems have appeared in *Writing the Land*, *Poets Touchstone*, *The Inflectionist Review*, *Allegro Poetry Magazine*, *The Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review*, *Adanna Literary Journal*, *Poetica Magazine*, *Evening Street Review*, *Snapdragon: A Journal of Art and Healing*, and elsewhere.

**Eric Potter** is a professor of English at Grove City College (PA) where he teaches courses in poetry and American literature. His poems have appeared in such journals as *32 Poems*, *First Things*, *The Christian Century*, *Spiritus*, and *Presence*. He has published two chapbooks and a full-length collection, *Things Not Seen* (2015).

**Amanda W. Powell** (she/her) has published in journals including *Agni*, *Borderlands*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Ploughshares*, and *Sinister Wisdom*, anthologies like *This Assignment is So Gay!*, plus her chapbook *Prowler* (Finishing Line). Spending considerable time in the 17th century, she translates Baroque women writers of love poetry to women, plus contemporary queer Latin American fiction. She teaches Spanish/ Latin American poetry, helps rouse the best rabble, maintains fervent if forgetful belief in the great whomsoever, and lives in Eugene, OR, with her folk-musician-scholar female-warrior true love and their wee dog, Kinnikinnik.

**Janet M. Powers**, Professor Emerita, Gettysburg College, taught South Asian literature and civilization, women's studies and peace studies for 49 years. She has published in many small journals, including *Chaleur*, *Earth's Daughters*, *The Poeming Pigeon* and *The Gyroscope Review*. Her chapbook, *Difficult to Subdue as the Wind*, appeared in 2009. This old lady still writes poetry despite, or because of, our sorry world.

**Daniel A. Rabuzzi** (he/his) has had two novels, five short stories, 30 poems, and nearly 50 essays / articles published [www.danielarabuzzi.com](http://www.danielarabuzzi.com). He lived eight years in Norway, Germany and France. He has degrees in the study of folklore & mythology and European history. He lives in New York City with his artistic partner & spouse, the woodcarver Deborah A. Mills [www.deborahmillswoodcarving.com](http://www.deborahmillswoodcarving.com), and the requisite cat.

**Matthew Rivera** is a historian, teacher, and poet. His interests include the intersection of society and collective memory, religion, the natural world, and LGBT identity and experience. He resides in Arizona.

**Michael Rogner** is a restoration ecologist, self-taught poet, and husband battling stage IV cancer. His work appears or is forthcoming in *Willow Springs*, *Minnesota Review*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Barrow Street*, *Moon City Review*, and elsewhere.

**Daniel Romo** is the author of *Bum Knees and Grieving Sunsets* (FlowerSong Press 2023), *Moonlighting as an Avalanche* (Tebot Bach 2021), *Apologies in Reverse* (FutureCycle Press 2019), and other books. His writing and photography can be found in *The Los Angeles Review*, *Yemassee*, *Hotel Amerika*, and elsewhere.

He received an MFA from Queens University of Charlotte, and he lives, teaches, and rides his bikes in Long Beach, CA. More at [danieljromo.com](http://danieljromo.com).

**Margaret Rozga** served as the 2019-2020 Wisconsin Poet Laureate and the 2021 inaugural artist/scholar in residence at the UW Milwaukee at Waukesha Field Station where she offered workshops and drafted a series of prairie poems. The poem included here, "May His Memory Be a Blessing" is from that series of prairie poems. Her fifth book is *Holding My Selves Together: New and Selected Poems* (Cornerstone Press 2021).

**Richard Schiffman** is an environmental reporter, poet, and author of two biographies based in New York City. His poems have appeared on the BBC and on NPR as well as in the *Alaska Quarterly*, *the New Ohio Review*, *the Christian Science Monitor*, *the New York Times*, *Writer's Almanac*, *This American Life in Poetry*, *Verse Daily* and other publications. His first poetry collection *What the Dust Doesn't Know* was published in 2017 by Salmon Poetry.

**Betsy Sholl's** 10th volume of poetry is *As If a Song Could Save You*, (University of Wisconsin, 2022). She teaches in the MFA in Writing program of Vermont College and lives in Portland, Maine.

**Eva Skrande** came to the United States from Cuba. Her publications include *My Mother's Cuba* (River City Publishing Poetry Series) and *Bone Argot* (Spuyten Duyvil). Her poems have appeared in *AGNI*, *The Iowa Review*, *Smartish Pace*, *the American Poetry Review*, among others.

**Elizabeth Smith** is a freelance editor and writer with a bachelor's degree in English from Brigham Young University. She recently co-founded a literary site with a name quite similar to the title of this journal, where you can find more of her writing: [thepensieve.site](http://thepensieve.site). She currently lives in Utah with her husband and two daughters.

**Sondra Olson** began exploring lyrically driven nonfiction prose in a workshop of northern Minnesota and Canadian writers. Her essays have been published in *Clockhouse*, *the Lindenwood Review*, *Creative, Nonfiction*, *Under the Gum Tree*,

and the anthology *Twenty/Twenty*, a collection of essays written during the pandemic.

**Judith Sornberger's** poetry collections are: *Angel Chimes: Poems of Advent and Christmas* (Shanti Arts), *I Call to You from Time* (Wipf & Stock), *Practicing the World* (CavanKerry), and *Open Heart* (Calyx Books)—and six chapbooks. Her prose memoir *The Accidental Pilgrim: Finding God and His Mother in Tuscany* is from Shanti Arts. She is a professor emerita of Mansfield University of Pennsylvania where she taught in the English Department and founded the Women's Studies Program. She lives on the side of a mountain outside Wellsboro, Pennsylvania, among bobcats, bears, and deer. Her website address is: [judithsornberger.net](http://judithsornberger.net)

**Rebecca A. Spears**, author of *Brook the Divide* (Unsolicited Press, 2020) and *The Bright Obvious* (Finishing Line Press, 2009), has her poems, essays, and reviews included in *TriQuarterly*, *Calyx*, *Crazyhorse*, *Barrow Street*, *Verse Daily*, *Ars Medica*, *Field Notes*, and other journals and anthologies. She has received awards from the Taos Writers Workshop, Vermont Studio Center, and Dairy Hollow House. *Brook the Divide* was shortlisted for Best First Book of Poetry (Texas Institute of Letters).

**Thomas E. Strunk** grew up in Minisink Hills, Pennsylvania on the Delaware River. His chapbook *Transfigurations* is forthcoming with Main Street Rag (2023). His literary work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Clerestory*, *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, *Northern Appalachia Review* and *East Fork Journal* among others. He lives with his wife and twin daughters in Northside, Cincinnati, where he teaches classical literature and history. Thomas is currently enrolled in the MA/MFA program at Wilkes University.

**Wally Swist's** books include *Huang Po and the Dimensions of Love* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2012), selected by Yusef Komunyakaa for the 2011 Crab Orchard Open Poetry Competition, *A Bird Who Seems to Know Me: Poems Regarding Birds and Nature*, winner of the 2018 Ex Ophidia Poetry Prize, *Evanescence: Selected Poems* (2020) and *Taking Residence* (2021), with Shanti Arts. His recent poetry and translations have appeared in *Asymptote*, *Chicago*

*Quarterly Review*, *Hunger Mountain: Vermont College of Fine Arts Journal*, *The Montreal Review*, *Poetry London*, *Scoundrel Time*, and *The Seventh Quarry Poetry Magazine* (Wales).

**Robert R. Thurman** is an artist and poet from East Tennessee. His work has appeared in *The Harvard Advocate*, *Lana Turner: A Journal of Poetry and Opinion*, *F- Stop Magazine*, and *Columbia Journal*.

**Daniel Tobin** is the author of nine books of poems, including *From Nothing*, winner of the Julia Ward Howe Award, *The Stone in the Air*, his suite of versions from the German of Paul Celan, and most recently *Blood Labors*, named one of the Best Poetry Books of the Year for 2018 by the New York Times and The Washington Independent Review of Books. His poetry has won many awards, among them the Massachusetts Book Award and fellowships from the NEA and the Guggenheim Foundation. His most recent work is *On Serious Earth: Poetry and Transcendence*. A trilogy of book-length poems, *The Mansions*, will appear in 2023.

**Wayne-Daniel Berard**, PhD, is an educator, poet, writer, shaman, sage, and Gryffindor. An adoptee and former Franciscan seminarian, his adoption search led to the discovery and embrace of his Jewishness. Wayne-Daniel is a Peace Chaplain, an interfaith clergy person, and former college chaplain. His latest books of poetry include the full-length *Art of Enlightenment* and a chapbook *Little Ghosts on Castle Floors*, poems informed by the Potterverse both with Kelsay Books, and a chapbook *How Air Is* with Alien Buddha Press. His hybrid memoir, *The Last Essene*, is slated for publication in fall of 2023 by Unsolicited Press. He is co-host of a monthly live poetry event, *Pour Me A Poem*. Wayne-Daniel lives in Mansfield, MA with his wife, The Lovely Christine, and their two cats, Harry and Albus.

**Erin Wilson's** poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *B O D Y*, *Vallum Magazine*, *Tar River Poetry*, *The Shore*, *Verse Daily*, and *Valparaiso Poetry Review*. Her first collection is *At Home with Disquiet*; her second, *Blue*, is about depression, grief, and the transformative power of art. She lives in a small town on Robinson-Huron Treaty Territory in Northern Ontario, Canada, the traditional lands of the Anishinawbek.

**Diana Woodcock** has authored seven chapbooks and six poetry collections, most recently *Heaven Underfoot* (winner of the 2022 Codhill Press Pauline Uchmanowicz Poetry Award), *Holy Sparks* (2020 Paraclete Press Poetry Award finalist), and *Facing Aridity* (2020 Prism Prize for Climate Literature finalist). A three-time Pushcart Prize nominee and Best of the Net nominee, she received the 2011 Vernice Quebodeaux Pathways Poetry Prize for Women for her debut collection, *Swaying on the Elephant's Shoulders*. Currently teaching at VCUarts Qatar, she holds a PhD in Creative Writing from Lancaster University, where her research was an inquiry into the role of poetry in the search for an environmental ethic.

**Kristin Camitta Zimet**, the author of *Take in My Arms the Dark*, has poems in journals and anthologies around the world. Her newest manuscript gives voice to characters in Torah.